

Seminar on

Ensuring the Right to Stay for Young Farmers and Rural Youth

Background Briefing

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1. Introduction

The **‘right to stay’** refers to the ability of young people to remain in, return to, or settle in rural areas by choice, enjoying access to decent work opportunities, education, services, housing and social life. It is based on the understanding that rural territories should offer young people real opportunities to build fulfilling lives, making mobility (outmigration) a matter of choice, not a necessity¹.

This concept is particularly relevant given the severe demographic decline affecting rural regions across the EU². Between 2015 and 2022, more than 90% of predominantly rural regions experienced negative natural population change, and around one third also recorded negative net migration, with more people leaving than new residents settling in.

The right to stay is closely linked to the challenge of generational renewal, particularly in agriculture. The sector is characterised by a pronounced ageing trend: the average age of farmers reached 57 in 2020; less than 12% of farm managers were under 40, while 33% of them were over 65³. These dynamics threaten the continuity of farming, the vitality of rural communities and long-term food security, especially in regions already affected by depopulation.

Gender inequalities further intersect with generational renewal. Women remain underrepresented in farm management, particularly among younger age groups, reflecting persistent barriers related to access to land, family traditions and social perceptions of farming. Overall, women manage only 32% of farms in the EU, and women under the age of 40 account for just 2.5% of the overall farming population, highlighting a persistent gender gap in the renewal of the agricultural sector⁴.

Recognising these challenges, generational renewal has become a political priority for the European Commission. The [Strategy for Generational Renewal in Agriculture](#), published on 21 October 2025, aims to attract young and new farmers by addressing key structural barriers such as access to land and finance, skills and knowledge transfer, pension schemes, and the attractiveness of rural life. A central instrument of the Strategy is the **Starter Pack for Young Farmers**, a comprehensive package combining setting-up aid, investment support, financial instruments and advisory services to facilitate farm entry and establishment.

The Strategy calls on **Member States (MS) to establish national generational renewal strategies** to be included in the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) by 2028 and sets an aspirational target of doubling the share of young and new farmers in the EU,

¹ Policy briefing “[The right to stay, the right to move: Young people’s views on the future of im/mobility in rural areas](#)”, EURYO, 2025

² [Agriculture Statistics on Family Farming in the EU](#), Eurostat 2025

³ [Strategy on Generational Renewal in Agriculture](#), European Commission, 2025

⁴ EC Analytical Brief N°10: [Young farmers in EU agriculture](#), 2025

reaching 24% by 2040. To achieve this objective, the Commission encourages MS to invest at least 6% of agricultural spending in generational renewal.

This background document provides an overview of the topics that will be addressed during the [EU CAP Network Seminar Ensuring the Right to Stay for Young Farmers and Rural Youth](#) (11 March 2026 in Brussels). The Seminar will aim to engage CAP stakeholders in discussing specific topics addressed in the EU Strategy for Generational Renewal, facilitating reflection, and exchanging on how to translate such topics into concrete national actions to be included in Member States' generational renewal strategies.

This document serves as a reference for the discussion. It provides an overview of some key topics related to the right to stay: Access to land, Intergenerational succession, Building skills and innovation capacity, Making rural life a real option, and Youth as co-designers of policy. The document highlights how the EU Strategy plans to address each issue and offers links to relevant resources produced by the EU CAP Network that serve as further useful reference.

2. Access to land and access to credit

The EU Strategy identifies access to land as a core bottleneck to generational renewal, requiring structural reforms beyond agricultural support alone.

Market pressure

The problem of access to land has intensified due to rising land prices, shrinking availability of land and accelerating structural concentration (larger farms taking over land from smaller operations). Young entrants without inherited land are particularly disadvantaged as access to land - either by purchasing or renting it – becomes increasingly difficult and leasing - dominant in many Member States - tends to rely on short-term or insecure contracts that discourage long-term investment and farm establishment.

In addition, land speculation and a lack of transparency of land markets limit entry opportunities and slow down generational renewal⁵.

Land use dynamics

Broader land-use dynamics continue to reduce the pool of land available for agriculture. Urbanisation remains the main driver of farmland conversion in nearly half of EU regions, where cropland and grassland areas continue to decline under the effect of expanding settlement areas (despite stable agricultural output).

As competition from non-agricultural uses intensifies, land scarcity leads to higher prices and reduced access, further limiting opportunities for young and new farmers⁶.

⁵ [Study on competition for land use and sustainable farming](#), European Commission, 2025

⁶ Thematic briefing "[Land use and land take](#)", European Environmental Agency, 2025

The Thematic Group on [Gen Z: Leading Generational Renewal in Farming](#) recommended improving access to land and reducing entry barriers for young farmers by: strengthening land transparency and mobility; adapting CAP eligibility and financial instruments to support non-owners; and promoting land matching, long-term leasing and alternative land access models.

The EU Strategy for Generational Renewal and access to land

Flagship initiatives include: the establishment of a **European Land Observatory** to increase transparency, monitor land markets, support farm succession and prevent speculation, as well as national land policies to address access barriers, prevent speculative acquisitions, and align with EU objectives for generational renewal to be covered in scope of the European Semester.

Voluntary measures at Member State level include actions to improve access to land for young farmers and new entrants, including **land mobility services**, **alternative ownership** and **business transfer models**, and **public land banks**. These measures aim to promote lease stability, facilitate gradual or collective ownership transitions, reduce land transaction costs for small farms, and address financial and administrative barriers to farm viability.

Under other EU policies, the EU Strategy foresees land market assessments for generational renewal, including studies on the financing mechanisms for farmland and the evolution of land prices in relation to socio-environmental factors. This should allow better understanding of land-related barriers to entry into farming.

In addition to access to land, access to finance and credit has also been identified in the [stakeholder consultation](#) as one of the main barriers to generational renewal.

Financing land acquisition

Access to finance continues to be a significant obstacle for young farmers. Starting up or taking over a farm involves substantial upfront costs, and many young farmers face difficulties in obtaining customised financial products - especially long-term loans of more than 12 years - because of insufficient collateral or limited credit history. In the EU-27, young farmers faced a financing gap of EUR 14.1 billion, accounting for 22% of the sector's total shortfall. This gap increased by 11% from 2017 to 2022, highlighting that young farmers are struggling more than ever to access the credit they need to start their businesses and ensure long-term viability.

Investment in innovation and modern technologies

Those who do manage to secure financing often face high interest rates and significant debt, which makes it difficult for them to invest in agricultural innovations. In 2023, young farmers recorded a liabilities-to-assets ratio exceeding 20%, compared with 8% among farmers aged over 65. This greater financial burden makes it harder for younger farmers to consolidate their businesses and to invest in long-term improvements such as soil-health, agro-ecological practices, carbon sequestration or new machinery that makes farmers' work more ergonomic and efficient.

The EU Strategy for Generational Renewal and access to credit

Flagship initiatives proposed under the new CAP include an increased investment support rate of up to 85% and option for Member States to set minimum spending levels or higher EU co-financing rates for young farmers. The proposal for the future CAP also proposes tripled maximum level of the CAP support (Gross Grant Equivalent) for setting up of young farmers when the support is provided through financial instruments (from EUR 100.000 to EUR 300.000), enabling much higher loan volume per project and/or significant lowering of the interest-rate payments.

Voluntary measures at Member State level include actions to enhance credit access through promotional banks, by developing schemes that improve access to credit for farmers.

Under other EU policies, the EU Strategy proposes dedicating European Investment Bank (EIB) lending envelopes for agriculture and bioeconomy, including financing dedicated to young farmers. It also proposes facilitating access to finance through guarantee and equity products developed with the European Investment Fund (EIF), the EIB or other implementing partners, enabling farm purchase and the scaling-up of innovative technology.

3. Intergenerational farm succession

Intergenerational succession, understood as the transfer of ownership and managerial control of farm business assets from one generation to the next, **is a core mechanism of generational renewal in European agriculture**. Effective succession is essential to ensure the continuity of agricultural activity, the preservation of accumulated farm-specific knowledge, and the long-term economic viability of rural areas.

Slow transition of farm ownership

In many Member States, older farmers retain ownership and operational control of their holdings well beyond retirement age. This tendency often comes from concerns about pension adequacy, financial security, and uncertainty regarding income prospects after transfer, as well as strong emotional attachment to the farm. In addition, the absence of an identified successor – either within or outside the family – frequently results in postponed or incomplete transfer processes.

Regulatory and institutional frameworks

In several Member States, inheritance and taxation systems, land tenure rules and complex administrative procedures can unintentionally discourage timely farm transfer.

Where intergenerational transfer takes place, it is often financially and administratively demanding. Successors frequently need to compensate co-heirs, assume existing liabilities or finance investments at the moment of transfer, while facing limited access to credit and high capital requirements⁷. These constraints are exacerbated by income volatility and rising land and asset values.

The Thematic Group on [Gen Z: Leading Generational Renewal in Farming](#) recognised that delayed intergenerational succession remains a key structural obstacle to generational renewal. Members stressed the need for targeted measures to facilitate farm transfer, notably through improved land mobility services, tailored financial support and advisory tools to support planned and gradual handover between generations.

⁷ Report: [Survey on financial needs and access to finance of EU agricultural enterprises](#), Fi-compass, 2023

The EU Strategy for Generational Renewal and intergenerational farm succession

Flagship initiatives foreseen by the Strategy include:

- Linking direct payments to farmers' pension age under the post-2027 CAP to encourage succession.
- Integrating the European Semester into relevant aspects on generational renewal on succession, embedding pension, retirement, and farm transfer reforms into national policy frameworks will facilitate timely succession, land mobility, and income security for retiring farmers.

Voluntary actions at MS level include:

- Ensuring adequate pension coverage for older farmers and farm workers
- Adopting tax, inheritance and land-transfer measures to facilitate intergenerational farm succession
- Strengthening inclusive social security and access to affordable social services, particularly to address gender gaps and support vulnerable groups.

Voluntary actions for stakeholders include joint work by farmers' organisations, advisory services and rural networks to support intergenerational cooperation and provide training on farm succession and handover.

Actions proposed under other EU policies include:

- Improving knowledge on tax and farm succession through analysis of inheritance and gift tax regimes, drawing on evidence from the European Land Observatory
- Promoting exchanges with Member States on linking direct payments to pension age and improving farmers' access to social security to support smoother generational renewal.

4. Building skills & innovation capacity

Strengthening skills and innovation capacity is essential to improving the resilience, sustainability and overall attractiveness of EU agriculture.

Adapting to change

Rapid technological change, evolving consumer expectations and growing societal demands related to sustainability, animal welfare and food traceability require continuous upskilling and reskilling of farmers.

Digital tools, smart farming and precision agriculture can reduce physical labour, improve resource efficiency and profitability, and contribute to better working conditions and work–life balance⁸.

The importance of skills

Recent farm level evidence confirms that **skills – particularly specialised digital training – are decisive for innovation uptake**. A [2025 Joint Research Centre \(JRC\) survey](#) shows that farmers who received targeted digital training adopted 60–71% more crop-specific digital technologies, underlining the central role of education and training in enabling innovation and sustainability transitions.

Beyond farming, young people in rural areas face broader structural barriers in accessing education, lifelong learning and digital skills compared to urban peers, with long-term implications for innovation capacity and demographic resilience in rural areas.

The EU CAP Network Thematic Group (TG) on [Rural Youth Employment: the Voice of Rural Youth](#) has echoed these findings, highlighting persistent barriers faced by rural youth in access to quality education, training and employment, and the need for skills development, tailored support and improved access to services to foster sustainable rural jobs and generational renewal.

In parallel, the TG on [Nurturing Skills for a Thriving and Sustainable Agricultural Sector](#) underlined that targeted upskilling and reskilling – particularly in digital, entrepreneurial and sustainability related competences – are essential to support young farmers’ integration into innovation processes and strengthen rural resilience.

The EU Strategy for Generational Renewal and skills & innovation

Flagship Initiatives

The Strategy highlights the potential of programmes such as [Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs](#) to help young and new farmers acquire business skills, confidence and professional networks. The programme already offers the opportunity to work with experienced entrepreneurs in more than 40 countries and the European Commission aims to strengthen outreach and accessibility in rural areas.

The **Women in Farming Platform** (launch: 8 March 2026) seeks to attract more women into agriculture by promoting equal opportunities, mentoring and peer exchange, recognising women’s central role in the future of farming and rural development. These actions are complemented by the ‘Farmers of the Future’ best practices pack, to be disseminated to

⁸ [Digitalising the EU agricultural sector](#), European Commission, 2026

EU agricultural schools, which showcases practical examples of modern and innovative farming approaches.

The EU Strategy aligns with the actions proposed under the [CAP 2028–2034](#), notably to strengthen **Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) and advisory services** to support intergenerational collaboration. It also aims to integrate tailored training for young farmers, including mentoring before and after farm set-up, on topics including land access; business planning; technical, legal and sustainability aspects, with a focus on innovative solutions to support generational renewal.

[Horizon Europe](#) can support generational renewal by funding research and innovation tailored to young generations and engaging young farmers in innovation and advisory processes.

Voluntary actions at Member State level include:

- Measures to promote innovation in agri-food skills by prioritising agriculture and generational renewal in [Smart Specialisation Strategies](#)
- Engaging agri-food actors in the [Pact for Skills](#)
- Using instruments such as the [Talent Platform](#), [Erasmus+ Centres of Vocational Excellence](#) and flexible, digitally enabled training formats adapted to part-time farming and diversification needs
- In parallel, strengthened support for young farmers' organisations and the targeted use of the [ALMA \(Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve\)](#) initiative for rural NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) can enhance access to skills, mobility and work-based learning in agriculture, contributing to rural employment, more effective AKIS and generational renewal.

As a **voluntary action for stakeholders**, peer learning is proposed to strengthen young and new farmers' business and leadership skills.

5. Making rural life a real option

Many young people are reluctant to remain in or return to rural areas where income opportunities, service provision and quality of life lag behind urban standards.

Eurostat data⁹ confirm a sustained process of rural depopulation and ageing in the EU: between 2015 and 2020, predominantly rural regions experienced an average population decline of 0.1% per year, with sharper decreases among younger and working-age groups, while the population aged 65 and over increased more rapidly than in urban areas.

⁹ [Predominantly rural regions experience depopulation](#), Eurostat, 2023

These trends are largely driven by the out-migration of younger people for education and employment.

Certain structural factors reinforce these demographic trends. Limited access to transport, healthcare, childcare, education opportunities, housing and digital connectivity, together with the demanding nature of farm work, reduce the attractiveness of rural life.

The EU CAP Network’s publication on the [Assessment of Generational Renewal Strategies across Member States](#) confirms these barriers and identifies effective approaches to improving rural attractiveness. These include integrated rural service hubs, smart village and digital initiatives, rural housing and mobility schemes, and community-based projects that strengthen social inclusion and cultural life.

The assessment also highlights that young women are disproportionately affected by gaps in care services and succession opportunities, making **gender-sensitive measures** essential for inclusive generational renewal.

Overall, **the evidence shows that generational renewal in agriculture is closely linked to the capacity of rural areas to retain rural youth more broadly, including those not engaged in farming**. What is needed is a coordinated effort to guarantee attractive living conditions, quality services and diverse socio-economic opportunities to all (young) rural residents.

This is consistent with the findings of the TGs on [Rural Youth Employment: the Voice of Rural Youth](#) and on [Valuing Farmers’ Wider Contributions to Society](#), both of which underline that generational renewal in farming and the vitality of rural communities depend on the broader capacity of rural areas to retain young people – farmers and non-farmers alike – through services, employment opportunities and a vibrant social and cultural life.

The EU Strategy for Generational Renewal and making rural life an attractive option

Flagship initiatives include:

- The introduction of farm relief services under the [CAP proposal 2028-2034](#) to support farmers during short-term absences for health, family, or training reasons;
- Establishing a Rural Youth Ambassadors programme to empower young people to advocate for agriculture and rural life and contribute to policy discussions across Europe.

In addition, **under the current and future CAP**, support is foreseen for:

- Promote an integrated approach to rural areas in the national and regional partnership plans
- Business diversification

- Community-led local development through [LEADER/CLLD](#), with a strong focus on youth and women's participation.

Under other EU policies, coordinated action would support the attractiveness of rural areas across multiple policy domains – including education and training, connectivity, energy communities, the bioeconomy and youth engagement – through the updated [EU Rural Action Plan](#). Social farming would be promoted by encouraging volunteering in care and social farms via the [European Solidarity Corps](#) and supporting Member States in developing accessible social and care services in rural areas.

Voluntary measures at Member State level could aim to strengthen local and regional food systems by supporting short supply chains, direct sales, food innovation, and stronger urban rural linkages, creating new opportunities for young and new farmers.

6. Youth as co-designers of policy

Youth organisations play a key role in rural areas by fostering community, cultural identity and a sense of belonging among young people, strengthening social cohesion, well-being and their willingness to remain in or return to rural areas¹⁰. They also act as important advocates for youth participation in decision-making, helping to address the under-representation of young people in local, regional and national governance by providing training, dialogue and representative platforms that enable young people to contribute to policies affecting rural development, agriculture, education and employment¹¹.

Young farmers' organisations at Member State level contribute to representing the interests of young farmers and to strengthening their participation in agricultural and rural policymaking. When involved in consultation processes, structured dialogue and CAP governance mechanisms, these organisations can act as intermediaries between young farmers and public authorities and help ensure that policies better reflect their needs. Through peer networks and civic engagement, they may also support social inclusion, skills development and more youth responsive agricultural and rural policies. -responsive agricultural and rural policies.

At the EU level, organisations representing young farmers and rural youth – such as the [European Council of Young Farmers \(CEJA\)](#) and [Rural Youth Europe \(RYE\)](#) - play a recognised role in channelling young people's voices into EU policymaking.

¹⁰ Report "[The future of youth in rural areas: responsibilities of local and regional authorities](#)", Council of Europe, 2022

¹¹ "[Rural youth participation in policymaking](#)", Rural Pact, 2024

These organisations contribute evidence-based input to EU initiatives on generational renewal, participate in structured dialogues with the European Commission, and advocate for policies addressing key barriers faced by young farmers, including access to land, finance, skills and fair living conditions in rural areas.

The European Commission has established **structured mechanisms for youth engagement**, notably through [Youth Policy Dialogues](#), to integrate young people's perspectives throughout policy design and implementation. The [first](#) policy dialogue (11 December 2024) enabled young participants to engage with the Commissioner for Agriculture and Food, Christophe Hansen, on the future of the sector and related policies, contributing to the preparation of the [Vision for Agriculture](#). Building on this exchange, a [second dialogue](#) (7 May 2025) focused on the needs, aspirations and barriers faced by young people entering or remaining in farming, feeding directly into the Commission's work on the Strategy for Generational Renewal in Agriculture.

The EU Strategy for Generational Renewal and youth involvement in policy design

The Strategy recognises rural youth and young farmers as essential interlocutors in the design, implementation and monitoring of the policies that affect them, placing their active participation at the centre of efforts to enable lasting generational renewal in European agriculture.

Commissioner for Agriculture and Food Christophe Hansen will continue the Youth Policy Dialogues on a regular basis throughout his mandate, enabling ongoing exchange of views, sharing of experiences and informed debate, while ensuring that diverse young voices from across the EU are equally heard.

At the national level, Member States are encouraged to:

- Involve young farmer representatives in CAP monitoring committees, creating an institutional space for young voices in decision-making and strengthening accountability in the delivery of commitments on generational renewal. Steer funding and programmes towards supporting young farmers' organisations, ensuring their voices are heard.

Disclaimer

This document has been developed as part of the work carried out by the CAP Implementation Contact Point under the EU CAP Network to support the activities of the Seminar [Ensuring the Right to Stay of Young Farmers and Rural Youth](#). The information and views set out in this document do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.



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