

Down to Earth Thematic Report Year 2

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Down to Earth

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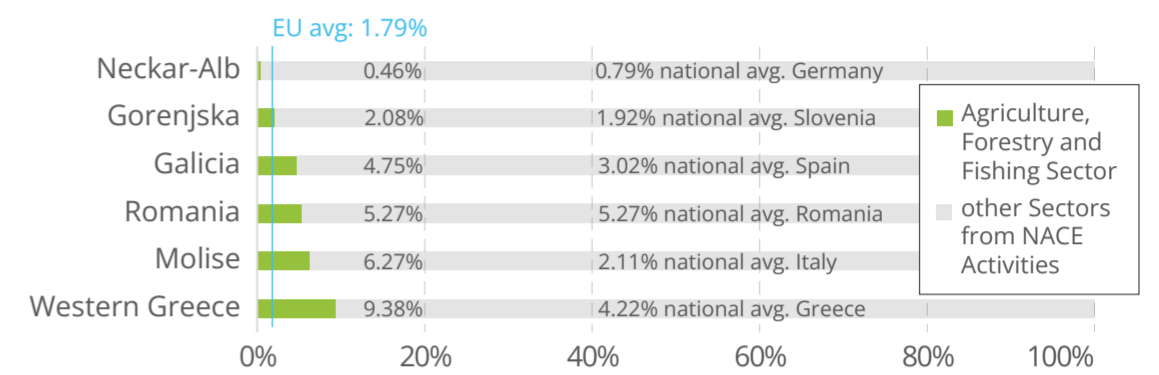
ISOCARP INSTITUTE
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Rural resilience relies on generational renewal and new entrants

The consequences of climate change present a shared, escalating challenge throughout all of Europe. Yet rural regions affected by depopulation and land abandonment are particularly vulnerable to its effects.

With rural communities seeing their populations age and decrease, and the relatively limited size of the agriculture sector, **retaining population and promoting the installation of newcomers** appear as essential measures to foster rural development and prevent further abandonment of rural lands. Promoting **environmentally sustainable practices** in agriculture and land management is crucial for mitigating environmental degradation and enhancing risk prevention.

Gross Value Added at Basic Prices by Region (y2021)
Share of the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Sector



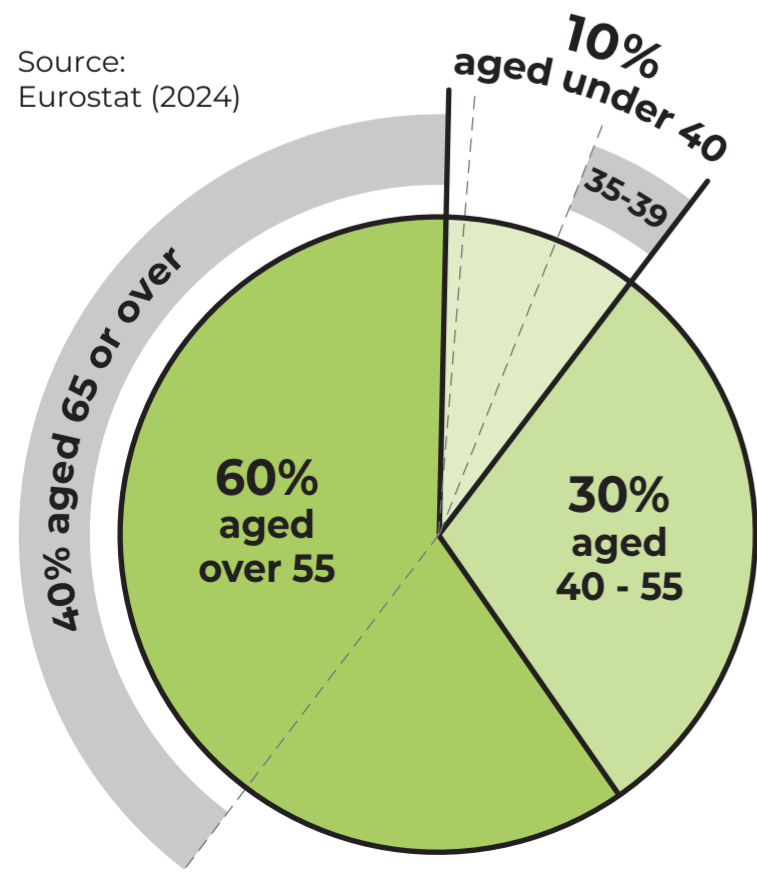
In this sense, recognizing both the **critical role new generations can play** in the development of resilient rural areas, and the importance of sustainability measures, the European Union has implemented a series of strategies to address climatic challenges and generational renewal. Among these, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023-27 includes key initiatives, specifically through Specific Objective 7 which focuses on **“attracting and sustaining young farmers and new farmers and facilitating sustainable business development in rural areas.”** These instruments, together with others at the national and regional level, have been analysed and contrasted with our analysis from rural areas in Down to Earth regions in Greece, Romania, Italy, Spain, Slovenia and Germany.

Barriers faced by young farmers

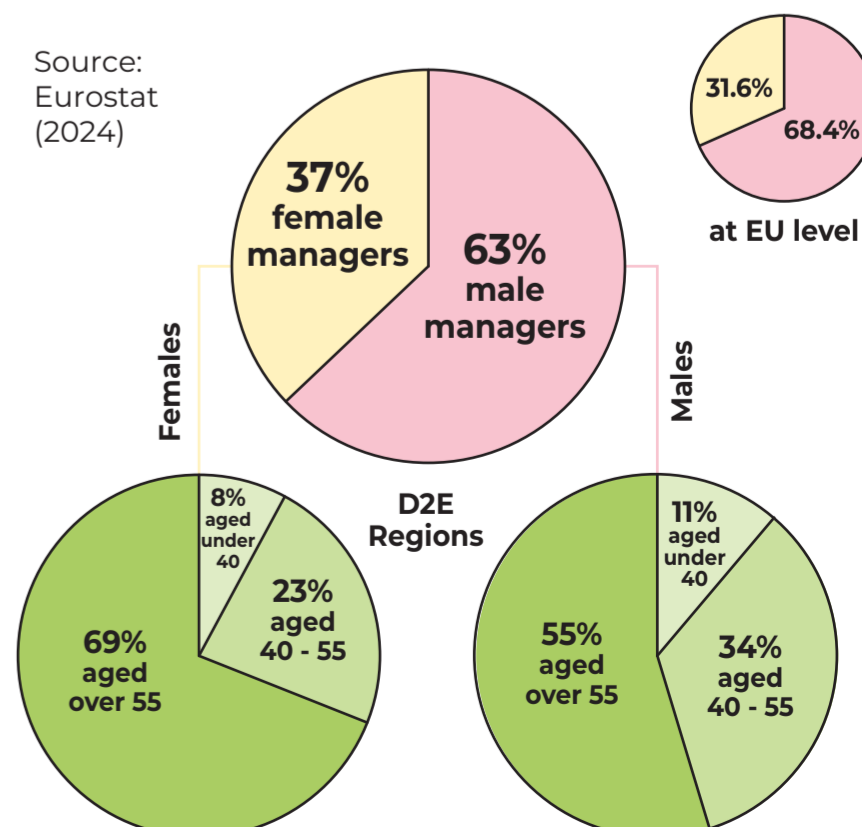
Young farmers and new entrants can play a crucial role in driving the green and digital transitions needed to address climate change related challenges, helping build more resilient rural areas. And yet, the youth encounters several factors that hinder both their installation and permanence in the agricultural sector.

| Farm Size and Consolidation | Renewal of Family Farms | Access to Finance | Training Levels | Inadequate Infrastructure | Limited Access to Advanced Technologies |
|--|--|---|--|--|---|
| | | | | | |
| Agricultural production is becoming increasingly concentrated in fewer, larger farms, which entail bigger costs. | With farming still predominantly a family activity, lack of generational renewal can result in land abandonment. | Difficulties in accessing credit and financing make investing in agriculture difficult for the youth. | Gaps in training and technical skills needed to manage modern and sustainable farms. | Lack of adequate rural infrastructure and access to public services. | Advanced technologies allow for innovation in the sector, while improving productivity and competitiveness. |

Our analysis: demographics of the agricultural sector in Down to Earth regions



Our analysis of rural communities in the Down to Earth regions (year 2020) has revealed that **the majority of farm managers are aged 55 or over**, with around 40% being over 65. In contrast, **managers under 40 account for almost 10% of the total**, with 40% of this group aged between 35 and 39. These trends are even more pronounced among female farm managers, with 69% of them older than 55 years, and only 8% younger than 40. Female managers represent around 37% of all farm managers in the Down to Earth regions – a proportion significantly higher than the EU average for the same year. These demographic patterns underline the **need to address generational renewal to ensure the sustainability of rural communities.**



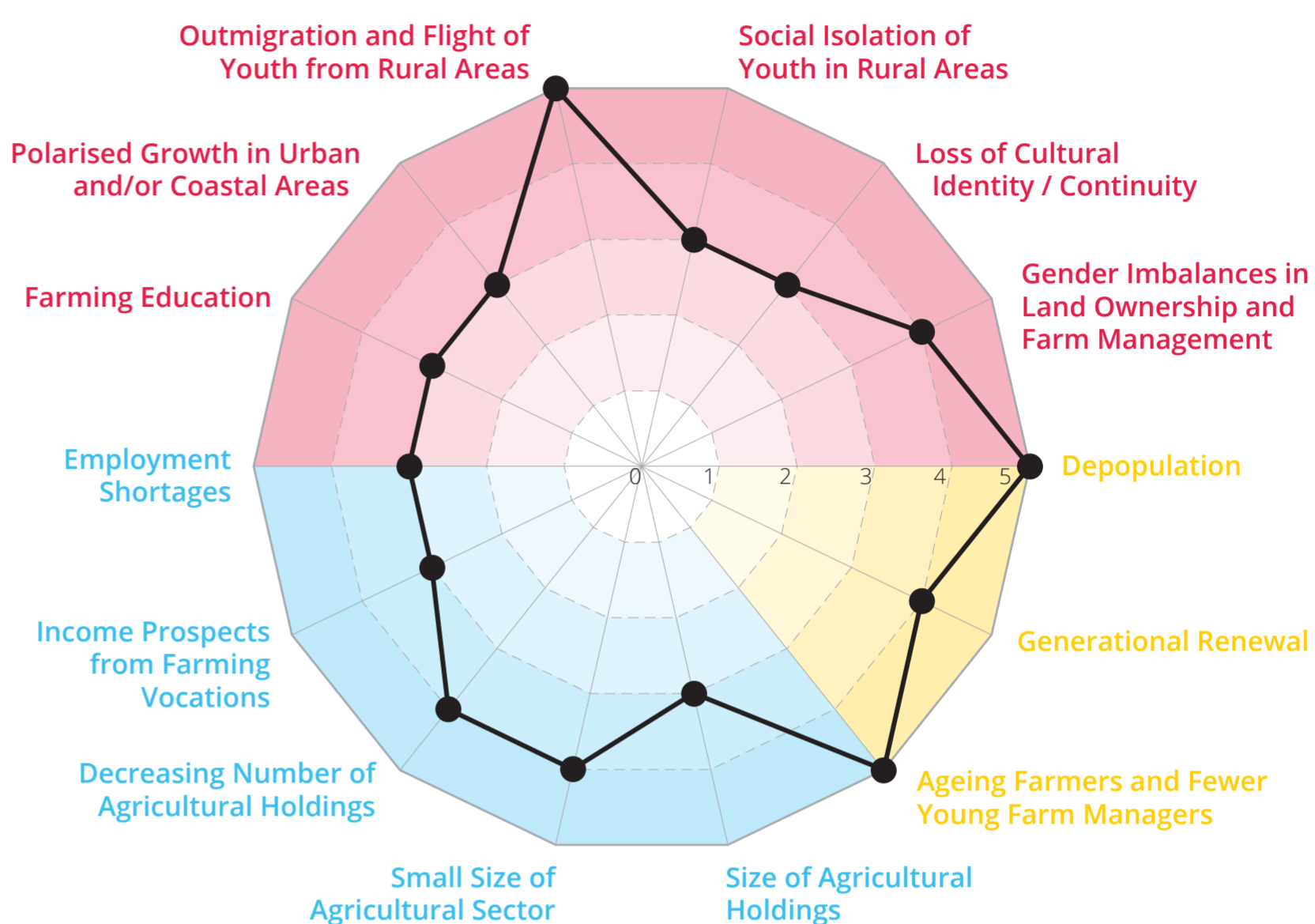


Our analysis: most common barriers faced by young farmers in Down to Earth regions

Identifying barriers that hinder the incorporation and permanence of young generations in agriculture is a key step to address and promote generational renewal. Despite structural variations in the socio-economic conditions, size and geographical features of the Down to Earth regions, **cross-cutting barriers** have been identified as common between them.

The radar graph displays some of the most common barriers as identified by our partner regions, following economic, demographic and socio-cultural factors.

- ECONOMIC FACTORS
- DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS
- SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS
- INTENSITY OF OBSERVATION
- 1 AMOUNT OF REGIONS



Recommendations and proposals for improvement

Having identified common challenges encountered by young farmers across Europe's agricultural sector, we propose a series of recommendations that consider the need for both **context specific and cross-cutting solutions**. Ensuring long-term sustainability and generational renewal in the sector requires **integrated instruments at local, regional and national level that holistically address financial, educational, infrastructural and social factors**.

- Facilitating **long-term access to land** and developing policies that **prevent land concentration** turn agriculture into a more accessible field of work for the youth. Additionally, **public-private partnerships** can serve as a valuable tool to revitalize abandoned land.
- Financial support programmes**, such as low-interest loans and subsidies, can help mitigate high upfront costs for farm installations and modernisation.
- Continuous **training and mentoring programmes** will help young farmers gain the necessary knowledge to run modern, resilient, and competitive rural enterprises. **Cooperative (and advisory) local networks** can also facilitate knowledge exchange.
- Promoting gender equality and social inclusion** through targeted programmes is essential for the sector to become more diverse and welcoming.
- Investments in rural infrastructure and services** foster the sector's development while preventing the isolation of rural communities. **Strengthening links with urban areas** can also have positive impacts on consumption patterns and, consequently, local economies.
- Multifunctional agriculture and other **innovative models can help diversify income** and strengthen new farmers' resilience. **Farm testing programmes** can be a powerful way to provide prospective farmers hands-on experience to facilitate their long-term success.
- The **use of advanced agricultural technologies** can help not only to enhance farm efficiency but also to increase innovation and reduce environmental impacts.
- Strengthening the role of local authorities** is crucial for the development of **effective, context-specific instruments that address local needs**.

