



POLICY BRIEF

Ensuring Generational Renewal in the CAP under the NRPP Governance Framework:

Access to Land Network's Priorities for Reform

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Executive Summary

The Access to Land Network (A2L) is a coalition of 15 organisations operating across seven EU Member States, United Kingdom and Ukraine, collectively representing one of Europe's most experienced civil society networks working on innovative mechanisms to secure access to land for agroecological production. Access to land network welcomes the EU Generational Renewal strategy but identifies land as a critical and insufficiently addressed structural barrier to generational renewal.

Comparative analysis across ten European countries (France, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Romania, Czechia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Ukraine) highlights a convergence of challenges. Farm succession is increasingly uncertain with fewer than half of farms in most countries having identified successors. Across all regions, access to land is increasingly determined by capitalised bidding and investment dynamics. High land prices, financialisation, and speculative investment—driven by competing land uses and hectare-based subsidies—are visible manifestations of this mechanism and contribute to land concentration. Weak or fragmented land governance, insecure leasing arrangements, and short-term contracts prevent land from being allocated according to farming activity and long-term stewardship, further undermining generational renewal. These dynamics translate into demographic outcomes: low entry rates, rural youth out-migration, low female participation, and declining interest in farm succession.

The post-2027 CAP reform introduces a major governance shift: agricultural policy will be implemented through National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs), granting Member States greater discretion in defining priorities, allocating budgets and setting performance indicators. This increased national responsibility makes it essential that structural land access barriers are explicitly addressed within generational renewal strategies.

In response, A2L calls for a strategic reorientation of EU agricultural policy—from land-based subsidies toward support linked to farming activity and labour engagement (people and ecology together). This approach explicitly recognises diverse pathways into farming, including farm successors, new entrants, and non-farming rural newcomers. Central recommendations include strengthening land governance and monitoring through a European Observatory of farmland; scaling up farm incubators as instruments for progressive farm succession; improving Commission oversight of

National and Regional Partnership Plans through performance-based monitoring of land access and generational renewal outcomes; revising capping and degressivity thresholds to avoid reinforcing land concentration and redirect support payments toward agroecological transition and finally reinforcing the EU definition of “active farmer” to ensure CAP support reaches those genuinely engaged in farming.



A European network of grassroots organisations
securing land for agroecological farming.
Learn more: www.accesstoland.eu.

Land Bank

1. Biodynamic Land Trust
2. Soil Association (Land Trust)
3. Real Farming Trust
4. De Landgenoten
5. Terre-en-vue
6. Terre de Liens
7. BioBoden
8. Kulturland eG
9. Danmarks Økologiske Jordbrugsfond
10. Nadace Pro Pödu
11. ALPA

Network

1. Xarxa per a la Conservació de la Natura - XCN
2. Netzwerk Flächensicherung

School

1. Rurbans

Farmers Union

1. Eco Rurals

Research Institute

1. Shared Assets
2. Die Agronauten
3. ADRI



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Introduction

The Access to Land Network (A2L) is a coalition of 15 organizations operating across seven EU Member States, United Kingdom and Ukraine, collectively representing one of Europe's most experienced civil society networks working on innovative mechanisms to secure access to land for agroecological production. Collectively, our members own or directly secure nearly 25,000 hectares of farmland for long-term agroecological use. Beyond this, they influence an additional 60,000 hectares through land stewardship agreements, advisory roles, and partnerships with public and private landowners.

Based on the grounded experience of our members, particularly on land banks and cooperative leasing mechanisms, the A2L network has identified **four main entry barriers at ensuring generational renewal** and proposes concrete, actionable proposals. Based on the overall synthesis of comparative findings across 10 European countries in France, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Romania, Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria and Ukraine (Access to Land Network, 2025)ⁱ we found that:

- **Farm succession is critical across Europe.** Farmers are aging rapidly, while entry and succession remain structurally constrained. In most countries, fewer than half of farms have identified successors. While Germany (36%), France (25%), and the UK (45.4%) show partial succession security, Eastern countries like Romania, Czechia, and Bulgaria report widespread uncertainty. Flanders sits in between: 57% of farmers aged more than 55 years have potential successors. Low entry prospects and limited economic viability of farming contribute to youth migration (Bulgaria, Romania), lack of heir interest (Bulgaria, France), and weak inter-generational continuity. As an illustration, during the period 1989-2020, 164 villages in Bulgaria disappearedⁱⁱ. The consolidation process allocates nearby land to already capitalised holdings, forcing smaller farms to operate at higher costs and reinforcing structural exclusion. In contrast, Ukraine still maintains a relatively younger farming population, offering a different starting pointⁱⁱⁱ.
- **Increased investment and price pressures in farmland.** Across Member States, access to land is increasingly determined by investment capacity and expected returns. High land prices reflect this competition but are not its sole driver. The financialisation of agricultural land transforms land from a productive resource into an investment asset, prioritising the most capitalised bidders over farming activity. As a result, land is allocated to operators able to match investment returns rather than to those able to farm it, excluding most new and small-scale farmers from both ownership and tenancy, leading to persistent concentration of land ownership independently of price cycles. Land grabbing and speculation are visible in France, Romania, and Bulgaria, while in Flanders, companies like Colruyt and investors have significantly expanded their holdings. This trend risks shifting farming from family-based to corporate wage-labour models, reducing autonomy of farmers and salaried workers and threatening food sovereignty.
- **Challenges in Agricultural Land governance frameworks.** Leasing dominance (Czech Republic, Ukraine) and short-term contracts (Romania, Flanders) prevent allocation of land according to long-term farming activity.

Weak land governance, fragmented ownership, or outdated regulation compound the problem. For instance, in France, praised for its land regulation system, at least 10% of French farms have the look of a firm. This represents 28% of employment and 30 % of Gross Standard Production (GSP) in agricultural sector^{iv}. Where policies exist, they often favor larger or conventional farms over smaller agroecological entrants. Denmark is often mentioned in European debates about land value taxation, as it is one of the few countries that applies a recurring tax on the value of land alone ("Grundskyld"). At first glance, this appears close to the long-standing proposal for a land value tax inspired by Henry George. In practice, however, the Danish system functions quite differently and provides only limited support for improving access to land for new entrants and ecological farmers^v. Positive examples include Poland's tenant pre-emption rights, France's transfer support, Germany's regional start-up aids, and Flanders' land mobility program. EU-level tools (CAP redistributive payments, eco-schemes, Green Deal strategies) could reinforce these but require stronger land governance to avoid reinforcing inequalities. Together, these governance failures allow land markets to operate primarily as capital allocation mechanisms rather than tools for organising agricultural activity.

- **Because farm income from agroecological production remains weakly remunerated, agroecological farms remain underrepresented.** CAP eco-schemes and top-ups exist, but most countries report limited or fragmented use. Organic and agroecological farms remain underrepresented (e.g. only 1.6% of UAA in Flanders). Access to land network call for stronger alignment of subsidies with environmentally respectful agricultural production.

The post-2027 reform of the EU budget and the Common Agricultural Policy introduce a significant governance shift. Agricultural policy will now be implemented through National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) under a unified funding architecture replacing the historical two-pillar structure. Member States are granted increased discretion in defining generational renewal strategies, allocating budgets and setting performance indicators. This nationalization of CAP governance increases flexibility but also raises the stakes: unless structural land access barriers are explicitly addressed within NRPPs, generational renewal risks being reduced to short-term income support rather than structural reform. Ensuring that land governance is central to NRPP design and monitoring is therefore essential to influence how land is allocated between farming actors, not only the level of income support.

A2L Key Recommendations to sustain Farmers Renewal:

To overcome the entry barriers described above, we call on the European Commission, in partnership with Member States under the NRPP framework, to pursue the following objectives:

- The reorientation from area-based subsidies toward a people-centered framework, with explicit recognition of new entrants producing agroecologically.
- The reinforcement of education, capacity-building, and other soft policy instruments, while systematically linking all interventions to broader objectives of sustainability and governance.

In particular, the Access to Land network recommends the EU Commission:

1. **The operationalization of the European Land Observatory on farmland and a dedicated budget for its implementation.** This observatory should identify who (natural person, farmer or non-farmer) effectively controls and accesses land and under which allocation mechanism. This policy tool should guide land market regulation towards farming with the prioritization of new agroecological entrants and avoid speculative markets operating. We insist on the creation of a task force involving EU institutions (DG AGRI, DG ENVI),

peasant farmers' unions, civil society organizations, rural development agencies, municipalities and local authorities, to guide the work of the Observatory. This task force could undertake policy research and issue regular flagship reports on major trends concerning European farmland to inform land policy reform and innovation.

2. **Earmarked funding support for Farm Incubators.** Farm incubators offer a pragmatic solution to the main challenge of farm succession. By providing supported access to land and productive assets, they provide access to land outside competitive bidding mechanisms for new entrants and enable ageing farmers to progressively disengage while transmitting knowledge and skills. Farm incubators help shield farmland from speculative pressures and facilitate continuity of agricultural use. The French model of agricultural incubators (ETA) demonstrates the effectiveness of structured support for generational change: in 2023 alone, over 300 founders took advantage of this protected framework, with a success rate of 95% in long-term business management (five years after the end of the trial) underscoring the high sustainability of the model. As such, they address both demographic renewal and structural land access constraints. A2L members are working with local authorities in France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, United Kingdom, Czechia and Romania (municipality, counties and regions) and civil society movements to support rural resilience and develop concrete initiatives to enhance farm transfers such as farm incubators. They support local authorities with adapting and offering them tools such as a handbook but also facilitation services for multi-stakeholder's dialogues to build territorial planning strategies on farmland.
3. **Given the increased discretion granted to Member States under the NRPP framework, the European Commission must ensure that National and Regional Partnership Plans address structural barriers to land access through a systemic approach.** These upcoming plans post-27 should rely more on structural aspects such as land access, gender equity, social innovation, and agroecological transition. The European Commission could monitor NRPPs through a performance framework, with clear intervention logics linked to EU-level objectives for generational renewal and quantified targets. Mandatory reporting could be established for a set of strategic indicators: land access, farm entry rates, distribution of operational land between farm types, environmental outcomes. To ensure effectiveness, the Commission could request plan amendments where performance is persistently off track and link a share of NRPP funding to performance milestones. In the meantime, the Commission could promote the implementation of concrete tools in the NRPPs such as a list of criteria as the one developed by the German farmers union (AbL) to prioritize access to land leases to agroecological farmers.
4. **To review thresholds for capping and degressivity of direct payments to ensure that hectare-based support does not inadvertently incentivise land concentration.** This requires assessing whether current payment structures disproportionately benefit large landholders and strengthen the competitive advantage of capitalised holdings in land acquisition, thereby constraining access for small-scale farmers and new entrants. Capping and degressivity of direct payments combined with redistributive mechanisms, could help align income support with generational renewal and a more balanced distribution of agricultural land.
5. **About the beneficiaries of CAP subsidies (to be completed by the report on CAP beneficiaries^{vi}): Strengthening the content of the EU framework definition the "active farmer "** in the MFF proposal and under a harmonised framework that includes a common list of negative features excluding individuals who are currently benefiting from CAP subsidies despite not being

engaged in farming activities and whose income derives primarily from agriculture work rather than asset ownership. Under this framework, the status of active farmer would be limited to natural people. An exception should be made for the collective farms or entities, if farm workers effectively manage the production tools and assets of their farms - including strategic and operational decision-making, related to land, farm buildings, machinery, animals. The monitoring of such criteria appears feasible as it exists already global measures to identify ultimate beneficial owners of companies in the context of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing.

6. **Within the discretion granted to Member States under NRPPs, define at national level the positive elements of “active farmer who engages in the agroecological transition.** This approach would complement the common definition of ‘active farmer’, which ensures uniformity and fairness of access to basic CAP payments, by introducing a specific category of ‘agroecological farmer’. A recent A2L report^{vii} shows the example in Wallonia (Belgium) which introduced a state aid aimed at supporting the adoption by farmers of an agroecological action plan, justifying the choice of a consistent set of eco-schemes and/or agri-environmental measures under the CAP. This ensures public support rewards labour-intensive production rather than scale of land control.
7. **To offer tailored and incentive subsidies for women entering farming.** Conducted collectively over two years, the French project “*Dégenrons l’installation en agriculture*” (translated by *Let’s remove the gender barriers to setting up in agriculture*) takes stock of the obstacle course that setting up in agriculture can be for women. It is by overcoming these obstacles that we can act and counter them with relevant levers. Take a look at [this guide](#) and the corresponding [feedback booklet](#) (in French) to discover initiatives corresponding to each stage of the process.
8. **To use a more inclusive approach beyond the narrow “young farmer” focus.** For this, we propose a broader framing of “new farmers”: we distinguish definitions between new entrants, non-farming rural newcomers, and farm successors, and we demand that CAP address all these three groups. These categories face different forms of exclusion within current land allocation mechanisms. Proposal^{viii}: **rural newcomers** are individuals or groups relocating to rural areas, often from urban contexts, who contribute to generational renewal by bringing rural revitalisation through economic, social, and cultural activities, without necessarily engaging in agricultural production. **New entrants into farming** are individuals who establish a professional activity in agriculture or integrate into an existing farm, irrespective of their previous links to the sector, and may do so at any stage of their working lives, whether as full-time, part-time, or salaried farmers. By contrast, **farm successors** are individuals who assume the management of a family farm through a typically gradual and complex transfer process, and they play a central role in generational renewal by ensuring the continuity of existing agricultural holdings.

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FIAN – ASSOCIATION FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR AGROECOLOGY



THE FRENCH FEDERATION OF THE FARM INCUBATORS



The French Association to contribute to improving the governance of land, water, and natural resources (AGTER)



Association pour l'Amélioration de la Gouvernance de la Terre, de l'Eau et des Ressources Naturelles

References:

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- ⁱ Reader about Generational Renewal in Farming – Comparative Findings: <https://www.accesstoland.eu/news/generational-renewal-in-farming-comparative-findings-across-countries>
- ⁱⁱ More about the Land Access situation in Bulgaria: <https://www.accesstoland.eu/news/access-to-land-in-bulgaria-liberalisation-concentration-and-the-future-of-farmland>
- ⁱⁱⁱ More about the Land Situation in Ukraine: <https://www.accesstoland.eu/news/new-policy-brief-on-protecting-the-right-to-land-in-ukraine>
- ^{iv} From Purseigle, Nguyen et Blanc (coord.), Le nouveau capitalisme agricole, Presse de Sciences-Po, 2017. <https://www.pressesdesciencespo.fr/fr/book/?GCOI=27246100509220>
- ^v More about the Danish Land Tax system : <https://www.accesstoland.eu/news/the-danish-land-tax-system-what-it-means-for-access-to-land>
- ^{vi} A position paper is under finalization from A2L and its partners (AGTER and the French Federation of the Natural Spaces Conservatories) to detail the importance of a Land Observatory to identify and control the ultimate beneficiaries at national and EU levels of farm units for CAP subsidies. The paper will highlight which information already exists in European Member States, how data collection and dissemination should be improved and which regulation should be implemented.
- ^{vii} Legal advice on a gradual reform of the CAP 'active farmer' - Towards a strong argumentation for the CAP reform (period 2028 – 2034) _October 2025_ by Germain Haumont and Gregoire Ryelandt from deprevernet collective (law firm based in Brussels) for A2L: <https://www.accesstoland.eu/news/who-should-receive-cap-payments-a-new-legal-analysis-on-the-future-of-the-active-farmer-definition>
- ^{viii} Proposal of definitions based on the [Ruralization H2020 project - D5.4 Technical report: Comparative analysis on rural newcomers, new entrants into farming and farm succession](#)

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