

# Position Paper

Committee of the Regions (CoR)

## Generational Renewal in Agriculture: A Structural Challenge for Malta

On behalf of the Maltese  
delegation in the  
NAT Commission



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## Introduction

Generational renewal in agriculture has become one of the most pressing policy challenges across the European Union. For Malta, however, this issue extends far beyond demographics. It represents a structural, territorial, and sustainability challenge, closely linked to land governance, climate vulnerability, market conditions, and the long-term viability of agricultural activity.

The Maltese Delegation within the European Committee of the Regions has followed closely the development of the Opinion on Generational Renewal in Agriculture, building its position through consultations with key national stakeholders. These include the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA), particularly through its EU Internal and External Communication function, as well as MAYA – Malta Youth in Agriculture Foundation, which brings forward the realities faced by young and aspiring farmers.

Malta's agricultural system is characterised by micro-scale holdings, fragmentation, and strong pressures arising from insularity and limited natural resources. These conditions require tailored policy responses that differ significantly from those designed for larger continental systems.

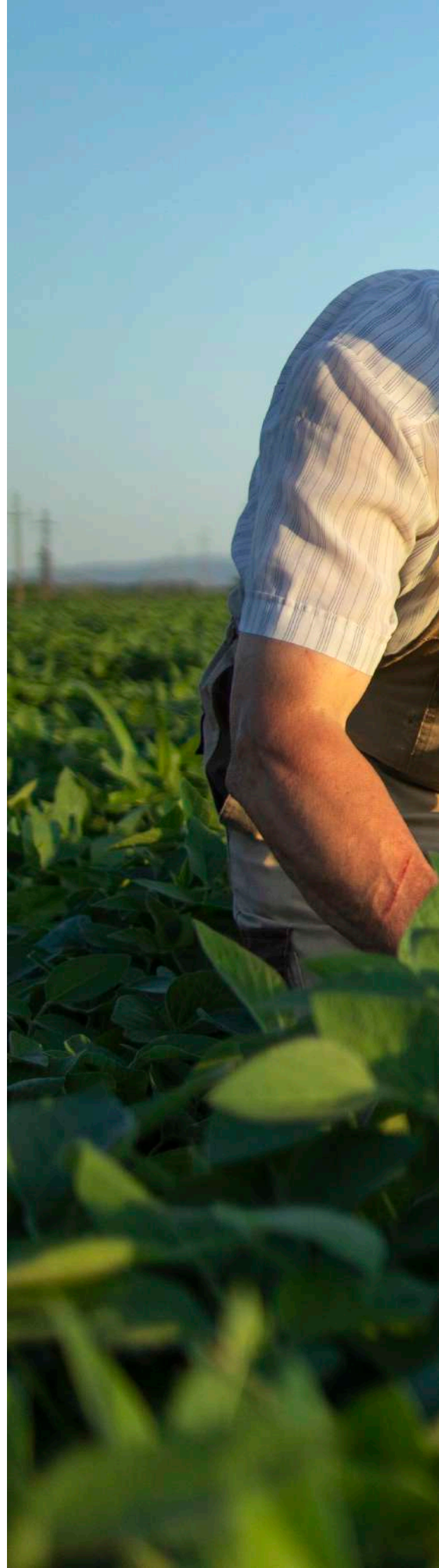
## Structural Barriers to Entry

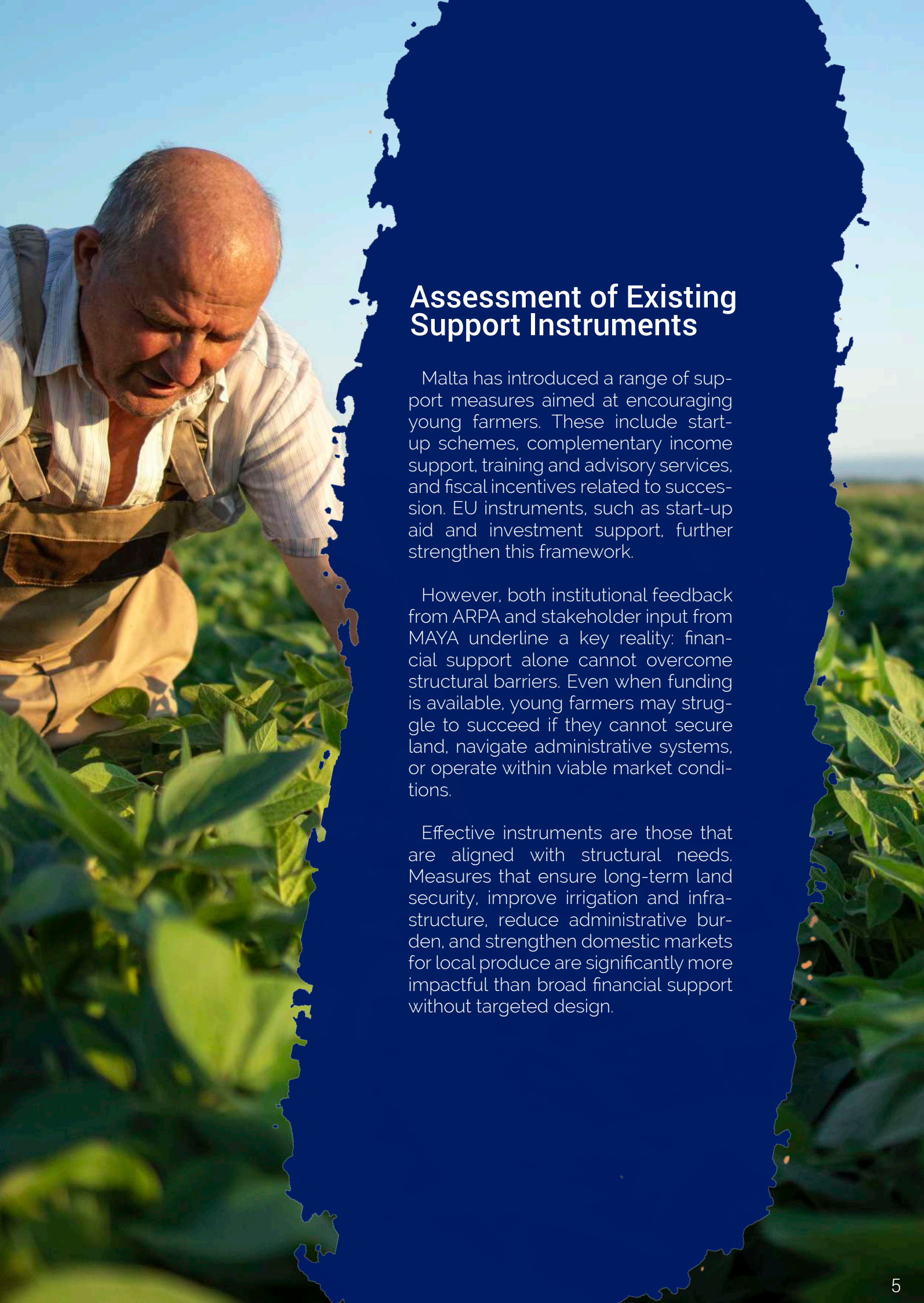
At the heart of the challenge lies access to land. For young people seeking to enter agriculture in Malta, the primary obstacle is not a lack of ambition or even access to finance, but the ability to secure agricultural land under stable, long-term conditions.

Fragmented land holdings, short-term leases, and high land prices—often driven by speculative pressures—create a system where long-term planning becomes extremely difficult. Limited land mobility, largely due to an ageing farming population, further exacerbates the problem.

National data confirms that the sector is dominated by older farmers, with only a small proportion of young entrants. At the same time, administrative hurdles related to permits, land regularisation, and compliance requirements create additional barriers that delay or discourage new activity.

These structural constraints are compounded by wider economic and environmental pressures. Income instability, competition from imported products, rising input costs, and increasing climate stress—particularly water scarcity—combine to create a challenging environment for new entrants. In this context, generational renewal is constrained primarily by systemic fragility rather than by a lack of interest.





## Assessment of Existing Support Instruments

Malta has introduced a range of support measures aimed at encouraging young farmers. These include start-up schemes, complementary income support, training and advisory services, and fiscal incentives related to succession. EU instruments, such as start-up aid and investment support, further strengthen this framework.

However, both institutional feedback from ARPA and stakeholder input from MAYA underline a key reality: financial support alone cannot overcome structural barriers. Even when funding is available, young farmers may struggle to succeed if they cannot secure land, navigate administrative systems, or operate within viable market conditions.

Effective instruments are those that are aligned with structural needs. Measures that ensure long-term land security, improve irrigation and infrastructure, reduce administrative burden, and strengthen domestic markets for local produce are significantly more impactful than broad financial support without targeted design.

## Priorities for the CAP Post-2027

The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy post-2027 presents an important opportunity to address these challenges. For Malta, flexibility and subsidiarity are essential. A one-size-fits-all approach cannot adequately reflect the realities of small, fragmented, and resource-constrained agricultural systems.

Ensuring fair treatment of small and fragmented holdings is equally important. Area-based payment systems must be adapted to avoid disadvantaging micro-scale farms. At the same time, stronger income stabilisation tools are required to complement investment support and ensure long-term economic viability.

A central principle emerging from both ARPA and stakeholder input is the need to link generational renewal funding to structural reform. Without improvements in land governance, administrative efficiency, and land mobility, financial support risks being ineffective.

Proportionality must also remain a guiding principle. As highlighted by ARPA, imposing excessive regulatory burdens on small holdings—particularly those under 10 hectares—would be counterproductive and risk discouraging participation.

## Land Governance and Farm Transfer

Land governance is a critical pillar of generational renewal. Malta requires a more predictable and secure legal framework governing agricultural land use and transfer.

Long-term leases must be enforceable, and intergenerational transfer procedures should be simplified to facilitate smoother transitions. At the same time, measures are needed to pre-

vent further land fragmentation and to ensure that agricultural land is used for its intended purpose.

Legal certainty is essential. Without it, young farmers cannot plan long-term investments or build sustainable agricultural businesses.



## Supporting Retiring Farmers and Enabling Transition

Generational renewal cannot take place without addressing the needs of retiring farmers. As emphasised by ARPA, policies that remove income support from elderly farmers risk destabilising the sector and accelerating land abandonment.

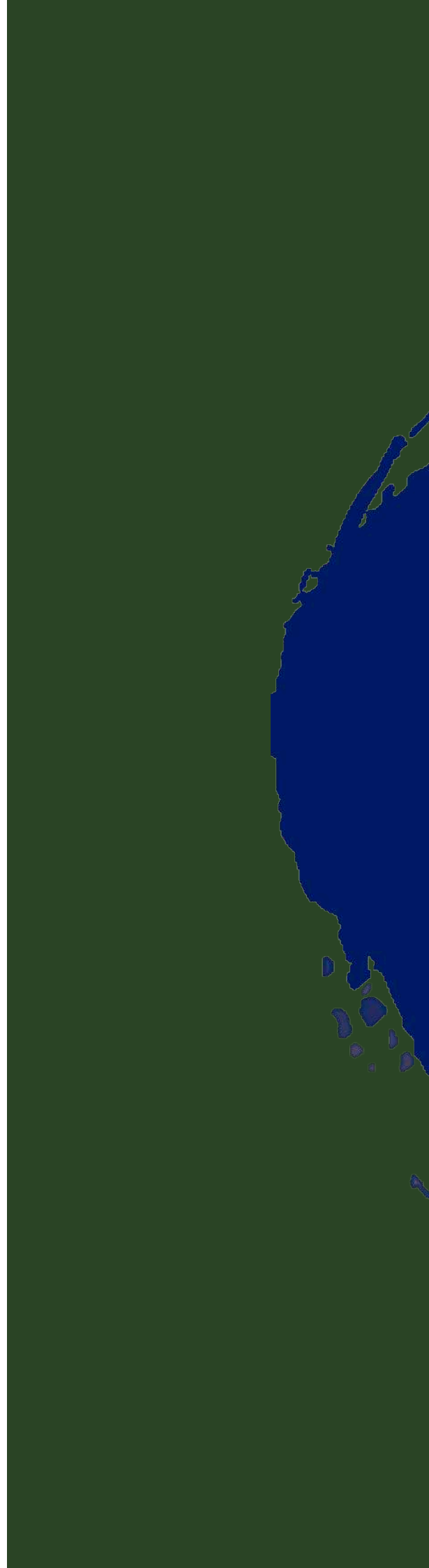
Instead, transition mechanisms should provide security and flexibility. Phased retirement schemes, co-farming arrangements, and structured advisory services can support gradual handovers between generations. Encouraging early and planned transfer of farms can further enhance land mobility while ensuring continuity of agricultural activity.

## Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability of New Entrants

Attracting young farmers is only part of the solution. Ensuring their long-term sustainability is equally important.

Young farmers require stable land tenure, reliable irrigation systems, and access to climate adaptation tools. Reducing administrative burdens is essential, as is ensuring viable and predictable income conditions. Access to housing and strong digital connectivity also contribute to making rural life more sustainable and attractive.

Without these enabling conditions, generational renewal efforts risk being short-lived.





## Role of Local and Regional Authorities

Local and regional authorities play a central role in supporting generational renewal. Their responsibilities extend to land-use planning, protection of agricultural land from speculative pressures, coordination of infrastructure and water systems, and support for local markets.

In Malta's context, where spatial planning and agricultural sustainability are closely interconnected, their role is particularly significant. As also highlighted by ARPA, effective generational renewal requires strong multi-level governance and coordination across sectors.

### Gender Equality and Participation of Young Women

Increasing the participation of young women in agriculture is essential for building a more inclusive and resilient sector.

This requires ensuring equal access to land and finance, recognising women in ownership and management structures, and providing access to childcare and rural support services. Leadership and entrepreneurship programmes can further empower women to engage in agriculture and contribute to innovation within the sector.

Addressing cultural and institutional barriers remains a key component of this effort.

## Cooperatives and Market Organisation

In a fragmented agricultural system such as Malta's, cooperatives and producer organisations play a crucial role.

They improve market access, reduce input costs, enable shared infrastructure, and strengthen bargaining power. Strengthening these structures is essential to enhance competitiveness and ensure income stability, particularly for young and small-scale farmers.

## Conclusion

Generational renewal in Malta cannot be achieved through isolated measures or financial incentives alone. It requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that addresses structural challenges across land governance, market organisation, infrastructure, and administrative systems.

The Maltese Delegation therefore calls for a shift in policy focus—from demographic targets to systemic reform. EU agricultural policy must recognise the realities of small island states, ensure flexibility in implementation, and integrate economic, environmental, and territorial dimensions.

The contributions of ARPA and MAYA clearly demonstrate that young people are willing to engage in agriculture. The challenge now lies in creating the conditions that allow them not only to enter the sector, but to remain, thrive, and contribute to a sustainable and resilient future for Malta's agriculture.

## Acknowledgements

The Maltese National Delegation within the European Committee of the Regions expresses its appreciation to the Agriculture and Rural Payments Agency (ARPA) and MAYA – Malta Youth in Agriculture Foundation for their valuable contributions to this position paper.

Their input, as key national stakeholders, has ensured that this document reflects both institutional expertise and the perspectives of young farmers in Malta.





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