



 **Generational Renewal
in the Agricultural Sector
and Young Farmers**

CAP Evaluation Insights
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Additional information about the activities of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP is available on the Internet through the Europa server [<https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/support/evaluation>].



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List of acronyms

AIR	Annual Implementation Reports
AWU	annual work unit
CMEF	Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
FA	focus area
FADN	Farm Accountancy Data Network
DG AGRI	European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
PMEF	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
RD	rural development
RDP	Rural Development Programme

European Union country codes listed in accordance with the official protocol

Member State	Country codes	Member State	Country codes	Member State	Country codes	Member State	Country codes
Belgium	(BE)	Greece	(EL)	Lithuania	(LT)	Portugal	(PT)
Bulgaria	(BG)	Spain	(ES)	Luxembourg	(LU)	Romania	(RO)
Czechia	(CZ)	France	(FR)	Hungary	(HU)	Slovenia	(SI)
Denmark	(DK)	Croatia	(HR)	Malta	(MT)	Slovakia	(SK)
Germany	(DE)	Italy	(IT)	Netherlands	(NL)	Finland	(FI)
Estonia	(EE)	Cyprus	(CY)	Austria	(AT)	Sweden	(SE)
Ireland	(IE)	Latvia	(LV)	Poland	(PL)		



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Questions and suggestions regarding the content of the publication can be addressed to the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP at evaluation@eucapnetwork.eu.



Introduction

This publication is part of the new [CAP Evaluation Insights](#) series of publications ¹. It focuses on findings identified and insights into the evaluation methods and data used by the Member States' CAP evaluations in relation to generational renewal in the agricultural sector and young farmers.

Generational renewal (GR) is a prerequisite for European farming systems to remain resilient and competitive in the medium and long term. Although different trends are observed across Member States, the ageing of Europe's farmers is a common challenge ². A report by the European Court of Auditors ³ noted that Pillar I and Pillar II of the 2014-2020 CAP programming period aimed to address generational renewal from different angles and concluded, in connection to young farmers, that they should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal. In this regard, further steps have been taken towards this direction in the 2023-2027 CAP programming period, specifically through Specific Objective 7 which focuses on "attracting and sustaining young farmers and new farmers and facilitating sustainable business development in rural areas". A Good Practice Workshop was organised by the European Evaluation Helpdesk of the CAP on '[Assessing generational renewal in CAP Strategic Plans](#)' in March 2024. The report ⁴ from the workshop provides additional food for thought for the reader wishing to go deeper into the topic.

This publication is based on the work carried out by the EU CAP Network, with the support of the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (Evaluation Helpdesk), which identifies evaluations carried out by Member States in relation to the CAP. These evaluations comprise the CAP evaluation database ⁵ which serves multiple

purposes, including allowing for the identification of common findings on related topics and good evaluation practices that can be recommended for use by others. Relevant evaluations from this database are published on the [EU CAP Network website](#).

This publication provides a review of the evaluation findings in the CAP evaluation database related to generational renewal in the agricultural sector and (or) start-up (and other) support to young farmers. It assembles the available relevant empirical research, groups findings with a similar focus and draws conclusions on the trends observed. It also puts forward ideas on how to overcome common challenges confronted while undertaking these evaluations based on a sample of evaluations that have undergone in-depth appraisals by experts in the field. Thus, the publication aims to encourage the reader to further explore the reviewed evaluations. It should serve both as a for the reader looking for examples of findings from the evaluations carried out by the Member States and as an inspiration for future evaluations by sharing good evaluation practices.

[Chapter 1](#) provides an overview of the extent to which these evaluations have been carried out by the Member States, as well as an explanation of the type of evaluations. [Chapter 2](#) provides examples of the findings from these evaluations, together with a brief analysis, which includes evidence of the overall relevance and effectiveness of the rural development policy (especially start-up support to young farmers) in fostering agricultural generational renewal. Finally, [Chapter 3](#) considers some of the common challenges that the evaluations faced and puts forward recommendations for how these can be overcome.

¹ European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3, *CAP Evaluation Expert Insights: Biodiversity*, 2023, European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3, *CAP Evaluation Expert Insights: LEADER*, 2024; European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3, *CAP Evaluation Insights: Climate Change*, 2024, https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/search_en?f%5B0%5D=focus%3A2&f%5B1%5D=type%3A163.

² European Commission, *Evaluation of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas*, 2021, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cmef/rural-areas/impact-common-agricultural-policy-generational-renewal-local-development-and-jobs-rural-areas_en.

³ European Court of Auditors, *EU support to young farmers should be better targeted to foster effective generational renewal*, 2021, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/young-farmers-10-2017/en/>.

⁴ European Commission – Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development – Unit A.3, *Assessing generational renewal in CAP Strategic Plans. Report of the Good Practice Workshop 14-15 March 2024. Zagreb, Croatia, 2024*, https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/assessing-generational-renewal-cap-strategic-plans_en#section-resources.

⁵ The CAP evaluation database of the Evaluation Helpdesk consists of CAP-related evaluations carried out by Member States since the previous CAP programming period (2014-2020).



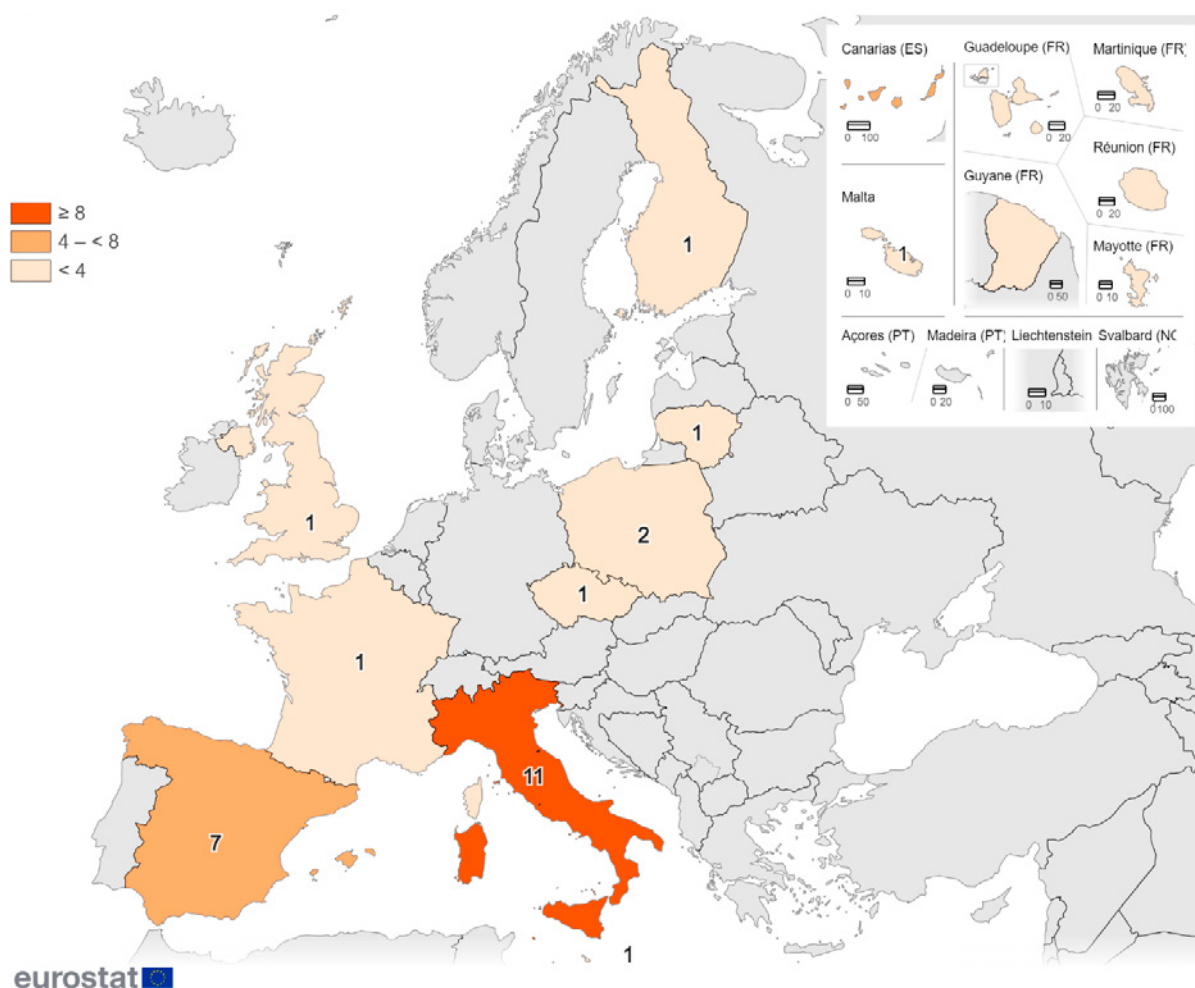
1. Where do we stand?

From the over 600 evaluations included in the CAP evaluation database of the Evaluation Helpdesk, [26 evaluations carried out by Member States and the UK](#) have been identified as relevant in relation to the CAP and generational renewal/young farmers (see [Annex I](#) for an overview of these, as well as links to the publications of the evaluations). These evaluation reports, published between 2021 and 2023 and thus covering the 2014-2020 CAP programming period, are referred to in this publication as the 'CAP generational renewal evaluations'. Although the evaluations available in the CAP evaluation database represent the lion's share of the available Member State evaluations of the CAP, this cannot be considered an exhaustive list and other evaluations on this topic might also be available but not yet identified by the Evaluation Helpdesk.

The CAP generational renewal evaluations have been selected based on the evaluations' stated objectives, as well as the findings related to generational renewal and/or young farmers. Additionally, evaluations where generational renewal or young farmers were indirectly stated as the focus of the evaluation are also included. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the main features of these evaluations.

The 26 evaluations have been conducted in eight Member States and the UK. Most of the evaluations identified are found in Member States with regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), namely Italy (11 evaluations) and Spain (seven). The remaining eight evaluations were conducted in France, Malta, Poland, Finland, Czechia, Lithuania and the UK ([Figure 1](#))⁶.

Figure 1. Generational renewal-related evaluations by Member States and the UK published between 2021 and 2023⁷



Source: CAP evaluation database (2024), EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024), based on © EuroGeographics © UN-FAO © TurkstatCartography: Eurostat - IMAGE, 10/2024.

⁶ Among the sources available in the CAP evaluation database, no generational renewal-related evaluations were identified in the following Member States: BE, EL, PT, BG, LU, RO, HU, SI, DK, HR, MT, SK, DE, NL, EE, CY, AT, SE, IE and LV. However, such evaluations may exist, although not identified by the Evaluation Helpdesk.

⁷ As noted above, this refers to the evaluations identified as relevant from the CAP evaluation database and cannot be considered an exhaustive list.

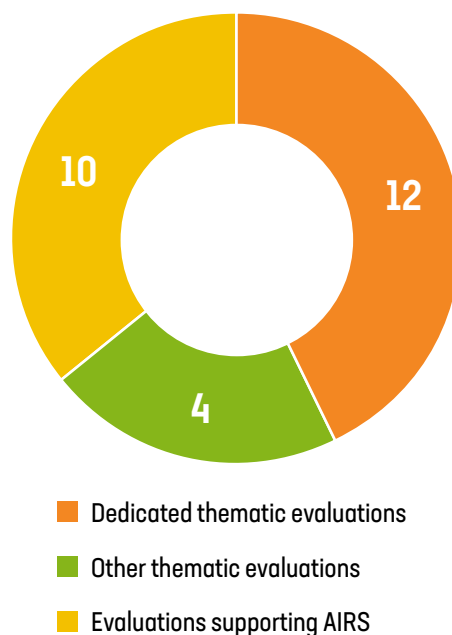


The rural development (RD) policy framework for the 2014-2020 programming period had six policy priorities⁸ and evaluations were often designed to align with them. In some cases, the purpose of certain evaluations was to assess the RD priorities separately, in others, multiple priorities were assessed at the same time. Among the generational renewal evaluations, the relevant findings were mostly identified from those with a specific focus on RD Priority 2 'Enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions and promoting innovative farm technologies and sustainable management of forests' (12 evaluations)⁹ with generational renewal in the agricultural sector a specific area of focus under this priority. This was followed by evaluations designed to address multiple RD priorities (11 evaluations)¹⁰. In addition, there were relevant findings identified in evaluations designed to address RD Priority 6 'Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas' (two evaluations)¹¹ and evaluations that address the RDP governance and delivery mechanisms (one evaluation)¹².

The most relevant evaluations for this publication are the impact¹³ and result-oriented¹⁴ evaluations. In fact, only two of the evaluations considered are not from one of these categories but are instead process¹⁵ evaluations.

Out of the 26 evaluations, 12 are dedicated thematic evaluations, meaning that they specifically assessed the CAP impacts, results or progress in relation to generational renewal and (or) start-up support to young farmers. In addition, four thematic evaluations assessed start-up support to young farmers, although this was not the main or only focus of the evaluation. Finally, the remaining ten evaluations cover multiple or all RDP aspects, including the ones related to generational renewal and young farmers, although the focus of these evaluations is on progress in implementing interventions rather than on their effects on generational renewal. These evaluation reports were mostly aimed at supporting the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) which contain information on the implementation of all RDP interventions (including start-up support to young farmers) (Figure 2). Details on the evaluations pertaining to the three categories are available in the introduction to Annex I.

Figure 2. Focus of generational renewal-related evaluations



Source: CAP evaluation database (2024), EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024).

The evaluations have also been grouped according to the types of findings identified, which are further discussed in Chapter 2. It must be noted that an evaluation can contain findings falling into several different categories. Where this is the case, it is included in all the relevant categories. Hence the total number of evaluations in Figure 3 exceeds 26.

As shown in Figure 3, 12 contains findings related to generational renewal, the attraction of new farmers to the agricultural sector and (or) the effectiveness of start-up support in overcoming barriers to enter the agricultural sector. Many evaluations (14) assess the extent to which young farmers are undergoing training or participating in information activities and hence strengthening their knowledge and 13 evaluations contain findings related to the territorial distribution of start-up support to young farmers, as well as its impacts on employment at farm or territorial level. Finally, at least six evaluations contain findings on how the support to young farmers contributes to the competitiveness of farms and five discuss the development and sustainability of new farms over time.

⁸ The rural development policy priorities for the 2014-2020 CAP policy framework are: 1) Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas; 2) Enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions and promoting innovative farm technologies and sustainable management of forests; 3) Promoting food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture; 4) Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry; 5) Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors; and 6) Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas. Source: Article 5, Regulation (EU) 1305/2013, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1305/oj>.

⁹ An example of this category is Ref. 23.

¹⁰ An example of this category is the study conducted by France (Ref. 10).

¹¹ An example of this category is Ref. 6.

¹² Ref. 9.

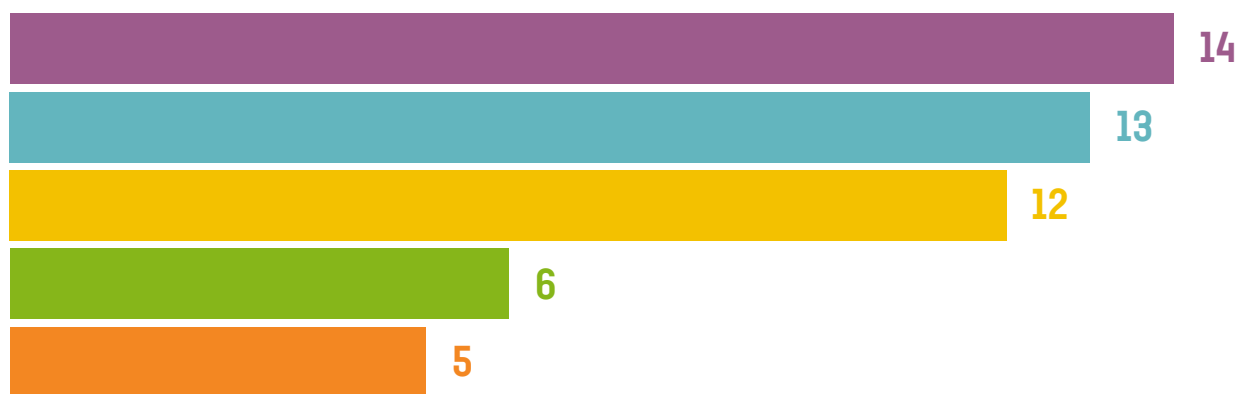
¹³ Evaluation that captures the higher-level effect (impacts) of a programme/intervention against a baseline situation (with or without a counterfactual approach).

¹⁴ Evaluation that captures achievements of results by beneficiaries in relation to targets planned but does not necessarily capture effects against a baseline situation.

¹⁵ Evaluation that assesses how a programme/intervention is implemented (e.g. governance, delivery system, communication, technical assistance and networks).



Figure 3. Classification of evaluations grouped according to the types of findings identified



- Needs related to training and participation of young farmers in training activities
- Employment effects and territorial distribution of start-up support
- Effects on generational renewal, overcoming of barriers to enter the agricultural sector and attraction of new farmers
- Effects on competitiveness at farm level of young farmers
- Development and sustainability of new farms over time

Source: CAP evaluation database (2024), EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024).



2. What has been found?

Before presenting the evaluation findings, the wider policy context has to be considered. Young farmers are seen as one of the major driving forces for the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and viability of rural areas. However, in the EU-27 between 2010 and 2020, the share of farm managers under 35 years of age¹⁶ decreased from 7.5 % to 6.5 %¹⁷, representing less than 600 000 farm managers out of more than nine million (in 2020). The situation however varies across Member States. Even though the overall number of farm managers of all ages decreased between 2010 and 2020 in all EU countries (except Czechia), nine Member States saw an increase in the number of young farm managers¹⁸ (Czechia, Belgium, Ireland, Croatia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and Sweden). Furthermore, in ten other Member States¹⁹, the decline in farm managers under 35 years of age was slower compared to the decline in total number of farm managers. At the same time, eight Member States²⁰ were facing a decline in both the number and share of young farm managers, as the number of farmers below 35 years of age was decreasing faster than the total number of farmers.

In this context, it is clear that generational renewal in the EU agriculture sector remains a challenge, despite many years of CAP support in this field. This raises questions about the many different factors affecting the entry of young and new farmers to the agricultural sector and the relevance and effectiveness of the EU and national policies aimed at fostering agricultural generational renewal. An overview of the evaluation findings available in the CAP evaluation database shows that these questions have been addressed by evaluations at both EU, Member State and regional level, albeit to varying extent and level of detail. Based on the review of findings in the 26 evaluation studies, this chapter outlines the main findings from these evaluations in relation to attracting young people to farming activities and fostering generational renewal in the agricultural sector.

As described in [Chapter 1](#), the 26 evaluations differ in scope, objectives, assumptions and limitations. Moreover, they covered different geographical areas, types of effects and evaluation periods, and reflected different study contexts. These differences are not reflected when summarising the findings. Hence, while this chapter provides the types of findings identified, these are presented without acknowledging most of the underlying assumptions or considering the context in which these findings were identified. Nonetheless, the presentation of findings from the evaluations shows the variety of topics addressed and aims to encourage the reader to explore the reviewed evaluations further. Although the evaluations available in the CAP evaluation database focused on the different types of effects of start-up and other²¹ support to young farmers and the assessment of impacts, these were not the main or only focus of these evaluations.

This chapter aims to highlight the main effects that provide evidence on the overall relevance and effectiveness of the rural development policy (especially start-up support for young farmers) in fostering agricultural generational renewal. The findings identified are presented below, grouped into six themes associated with the start-up support to young farmers, i.e. a) its effects in relation to agricultural generational renewal; b) effectiveness and relevance of the support in overcoming barriers to enter the agricultural sector; c) effects on the competitiveness at farm level; d) evaluation findings related to training and information activities offered to young farmers; e) effects on employment and territorial development; and f) long-term sustainability of farms obtaining start-up support.

2.1. The effects of start-up support on agricultural generational renewal

During the previous CAP programming period, the only quantitative indicator suitable for assessment of the effectiveness of the rural development policy in terms of agricultural generational renewal was the common impact indicator C.23 (age structure of farm holders). However, to provide quantitative evidence on the net effects of the start-up and other support to young farmers, the overall evolution in the age composition of farm managers would have to be considered. This evidence has not been available in the evaluations. Instead of assessing the net effects of the support, which is a challenge in itself (see [Chapter 3](#)), evaluators combine different – often qualitative or simpler quantitative – approaches

and offer insights into: the scope of start-up support (beneficiaries of the start-up support as a share of the total number of farms); average age or age composition of the beneficiaries of the start-up support, types of start-ups (take-overs versus new start-ups); or the age gap between the young farmer and their predecessor (in the case of take-overs). While these are relevant indirect measures of agricultural generational renewal, few of the evaluations available in the CAP evaluation database focused on impacts. Many of the evaluations assessed progress in implementing interventions and looked at changes at the farm level, but not at changes in the age structure of farm managers.

¹⁶ It should be said that in the context of CAP farmers are considered young until they reach 41 years of age, however, the statistical breakdown in Eurostat for the age group up to 40 years of age is available only from 2016.

¹⁷ Context Indicator 23: age structure of farm managers. Source: <https://agridata.ec.europa.eu/extensions/IndicatorsSectorial/AgeStructureFarmManagers.html>.

¹⁸ E.g. under 35 years of age.

¹⁹ AT, BG, DK, DE, EE, FR, IT, LT, MT, NL.

²⁰ CY, FI, GR, HU, LV, PL, RO, ES.

²¹ The other support to young farmers could include investments in agricultural holdings (code 4.1 in RDPs of 2014-2020 programming period), investments in creation and development of non-agricultural activities (code 6.4) and other support under the RDP measures with or without selection criteria prioritizing young farmers. Some Member States or their regions support agricultural start-ups through the 'Youth Packages' – support schemes that allow activation of other RDP measures while applying for start-up support. Many dedicated thematic evaluations referred to in [Chapter 1](#) of this publication included analysis of other RDP support received by the beneficiaries of the start-up support, however the purpose and motivation behind such analysis was rarely explained.



The evaluations reviewed analyse indirect measures of agricultural generational renewal and show mixed results with regard to the effects of start-up support on the overall age structure of farm managers. The Lithuanian evaluation (Ref. 22) found that start-up support contributed to mitigating the overall decrease in the number of agricultural holdings. It concluded that in the absence of start-up support to young farmers, the total number of agricultural holdings in Lithuania would have been 1.41% lower. It also showed that between 2015 to 2021, the share of young farmers among all agricultural holding owners increased (from 11% in 2015 to 12% in 2021). An evaluation from Lazio, Italy (Ref. 19) used contextual data to infer the policy impact on generational renewal. It showed that in ten years (from 2010 to 2020), the share of farm owners under the age of 40 as a proportion of the total number of farm owners had slightly increased (+0.8 percentage points), compared to a decline at national level (-0.7 percentage points). Evaluators in Sicily, Italy (Ref. 15), emphasised that the 'Youth Package' funded through the RDP favoured a generational leap in farm management, which accelerated the process taking place without the support from the RDP. An evaluation from Madrid, Spain (Ref. 3), concluded that support granted affects 1.76% of the holdings in the autonomous community of Madrid, a percentage that may contribute in some way to the improved competitiveness of the agricultural sector but given its low representativeness it cannot reverse the trend. The evaluation recommended increasing the financial allocation for start-up support to reach more potential beneficiaries and have a greater impact.

On the other hand, a Scottish study (Ref. 26) found that start-up support did not lead to a change in the overall composition of the farming sector, as less than 1% of the total number of Scottish agricultural holdings benefited from the support. Three evaluations (Ref. 21, 11, 1) provided results from the implementation of start-up

support by listing the number of young farmers that had benefited from it and compared this number with the total number of farms. In Emilia-Romagna, Italy, start-ups involving young farmers accounted for 2.9% of the total number of agricultural holdings registered in 2020. In Veneto, Italy, beneficiaries of start-up support represented 1.14% of the regional farms surveyed in 2010, and in Czechia, beneficiaries of start-up support represented 3.9% of all agricultural firms. However, this information does not in itself allow conclusions to be drawn with regard to impacts on generational renewal from the support.

According to four evaluations²², start-up support has mostly benefited the lower age cohorts of young farmers. In the cases where the provision of the support entailed the take-over of an existing farm, two evaluations (from Veneto, Italy (Ref. 11), and from Poland (Ref. 24)) have shown that the support contributed to a significant age reduction between the young new entrant and the previous owner. In Poland (Ref. 24) 70% of beneficiaries of start-up support replaced a person more than 25 years older than them in the management of the farm.

The effectiveness of the evaluated RDPs appears greater in supporting young farmers with prior links to the agricultural sector or taking over existing farms, rather than in supporting new entrants to the sector. At least five evaluations available in the CAP evaluation database looked at the effectiveness of the policy in relation to the types of start-ups supported. The evaluators in Malta (Ref. 23), Sicily (Ref. 15), Madrid (Ref. 3) and Scotland (Ref. 26) concluded that the RDPs had been more effective in supporting young farmers taking over already existing farms or having prior links with the agricultural sector. However, the evaluation from Veneto, Italy (Ref. 11), shows that the RDP has been slightly more effective in supporting those establishing new farms.

2.2. Effectiveness of start-up support in overcoming barriers to enter the agricultural sector

An important aspect in assessing the relevance and effectiveness of start-up (and other) support to young farmers are barriers to entering the agricultural sector and the effectiveness of the support in overcoming these barriers. Based on the evaluation commissioned by DG AGRI²³ in 2019, access to land, capital and knowledge are widely recognised as the main factors influencing generational renewal and competitiveness of newly established farms. This is also supported by the evidence presented in the evaluations that Member States have carried out. An important question in assessing the relevance and effectiveness of start-up (and other) support to young farmers is the extent to which the available support contributes to overcoming the barriers they face in entering the agricultural sector.

The evaluations confirmed that access to land, as well as lack of knowledge and skills, were the main barriers to entering the agricultural sector. Five evaluations (Ref. 23, 6, 26, 19, 17) discuss at length the barrier that limited access to land constitutes for young farmers. The Maltese and Catalan evaluations also highlight

that a lack of knowledge and skills is an impediment among young farmers. The Catalan evaluators also refer to the complexity of the cross-cutting regulations (e.g. industry permits, environmental licences, building permits, etc.) as an important obstacle to starting up farming.

Farmers setting up a new farm have greater and different needs compared to farmers taking over an existing farm. At least three evaluations (Ref. 23, 19, 26) emphasised this. The findings of these evaluations show that young farmers, who do not take over an existing farm and have no roots in agriculture face more difficulties in accessing land and have different needs in terms of knowledge and training. On the other hand, they are also more satisfied with the content of obligatory training offered as part of the CAP support package.

The availability of start-up support can be the determining factor in taking the decision to take over or set up a farm. Out of seven evaluations that addressed the question of the barriers, at least four emphasised the importance of the availability of start-up support for

²² Two Italian (Ref. 11, 19), one Spanish (Ref. 3) and one Maltese (Ref. 23).

²³ European Commission: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Micha, E., Mantino, F., Dwyer, J., Schuh, B. et al., *Evaluation of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas - Final report*, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2762/364362>.



a soon-to-be farmer in making the decision to start an agricultural business. The French evaluation (Ref. 10) concluded that start-up support was an effective way to enable the establishment of young farmers and that some of them would not have started their activity without the support. The Maltese evaluation (Ref. 23) revealed that 71% of the survey respondents²⁴ indicated that they would not have started the farming business without the availability of start-up support. In Andalusia, Spain (Ref. 7), the evaluation revealed that the amounts of start-up support paid to beneficiaries were assessed positively and that this support was essential for 35.5% of the beneficiaries who affirmed that they would not have been able to start farming independently. Evaluators from Lazio, Italy (Ref. 19), found that the start-up grant was the main determining factor in the decision to set up a farm in more than 25% of cases and particularly for young people who moved into farming. The grant was found to be a financial aid suitable for overcoming certain barriers to entry, such as the difficulty to access credit which was identified as one of the most important obstacles.

However, in most evaluations, the findings predominantly concern the barriers to entering the agricultural sector rather than the relevance and effectiveness of the support in overcoming these barriers.

2.3. The effects of start-up support on the competitiveness of farms

Start-up support has been found to contribute to an increased competitiveness of farms in at least six evaluations. As the start-up support to young farmers in the 2014-2020 programming period was part of EU's CAP Priority 2 (farm viability and competitiveness), evaluations often provide insights into the effects of start-up support on the viability and competitiveness of farms.

For example, a Polish evaluation (Ref. 25) assessed the net effects of start-up support on the gross value added, farm income, management profit, production value and the Kleinhans' Competitiveness Index and found that start-up support had significant positive impacts for the beneficiary farms on all the indicators. Four other evaluations presented qualitative evidence supporting the positive impact of start-up support, as well as of other RDP support received by young farmers linked to farms' competitiveness. In Malta (Ref. 23), around 86% of the respondents (beneficiaries of start-up support) indicated that thanks to the start-up support, their competitiveness was expected to increase and 40% of the beneficiaries expected their profits to increase between 10-25%. In Campania, Italy (Ref. 17), the young people interviewed stated that they were 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied with the start-up and other support of the RDP based on the initial results achieved in terms of competitiveness, sustainability

Insufficient budget for start-up support and lack of relevant targets (e.g. total share of agricultural land to be managed by young farmers/new entrants) were identified as areas for improvement to increase the effectiveness of start-up support in contributing to agricultural generational renewal. Evaluators in Lazio, Italy (Ref. 19), recommended improving the monitoring system to enable the distinction between take-overs and new enterprises, allowing the specificities of the two types of start-ups to be considered when organising calls for applications in relation to needs related to training, access to credit and land, etc. The Scottish evaluation (Ref. 26) recommended setting a target for a total proportion of farmland to be managed by new entrants and ensuring adequate budgets for interventions to attract young farmers or new entrants. The latter recommendation was mirrored in the Maltese evaluation (Ref. 23) which stated that the support is not deemed to be sufficient to support new entrants in acquiring the land as the cost of land exceeds the support available.

However, the Scottish evaluation (Ref. 26) stated that a budget increase might not be enough to achieve significant improvement in terms of generational renewal as the support fails to address structural constraints, such as the availability of land or profitability of agricultural activities.

and diversification of income sources. An evaluation from Andalusia, Spain (Ref. 7), found that 80% of the young beneficiaries of RDP support stated that the start-up and other support received had positively influenced the marketing of their products, 72% found that it had favoured diversification and 90% that it had increased their competitiveness on the market.

An important aspect of farm competitiveness is the ability to export to other countries. However, the evaluations rarely touch upon this aspect of competitiveness and assess it only in a qualitative manner (e.g. evaluations in Malta (Ref. 23) and the Italian Lazio region (Ref. 19) analysed distribution channels used by young farmers, including EU and non-EU markets). In connection to this topic, it is worth noting a case study of the [Horizon project from Greece](#)²⁵ which attempts to provide evidence on the links between the young farmer schemes and the export of their produce. The case study concludes that start-up support improves farm competitiveness through improved productivity and that the relationship between export volume and productivity is inextricable where, on the one hand, the more productive farms serve export markets and, on the other hand, the openness to export markets increases the productivity levels of the farms.

²⁴ Telephone survey with beneficiaries of the start-up support.

²⁵ Staboulis, C., Natos, D., Gkatsikos, A., Tsakiridou, E., Mattas, K., Bojar, W., Baranowski, P., Krzyszczak, J., Rivero, O.P., Roldán, Á.O. *Assessing the Role of the Young Farmer Scheme in the Export Orientation of Greek Agriculture*. 2022, 14, 3287, Sustainability, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14063287>.



2.4. Evaluation findings in terms of training and information activities offered to young farmers

Start-up support to young farmers has an important goal of facilitating the entry of adequately skilled farmers into the agricultural sector, as indicated by Focus Area (FA) 2B of the EU's 2014-2020 Rural Development Policy²⁶. Evaluations indicate that Member States often apply eligibility or selection criteria related to the qualifications of the beneficiaries of start-up support. Applicants who do not have the necessary qualifications for agricultural activities are often required to complete basic training to receive support or final payment. In addition, they are often offered other training available through RDP measures aimed at knowledge transfer and advisory services. At least 13 of the 26 evaluations analysed the qualifications of the applicants for start-up support and their participation in obligatory and wider training activities, together with a variety of other aspects related to the training of young farmers.

Evaluations show high participation of beneficiaries of start-up support in obligatory basic training and other training to improve their technical skills. Three evaluations documented the significant share of beneficiaries of start-up support that had to either undergo obligatory basic training to benefit from the start-up support (Ref. 23, 14) or benefited from other RDP funded training to improve their technical skills (Ref. 19). On the other hand, an evaluation from Catalonia, Spain (Ref. 6), revealed a positive trend in terms of qualifications of the young farmers applying for start-up support. The share of applicants who have the necessary skills to access the start-up support had increased from 12% in 2009 to 30% in 2019.

Young farmers in general constitute a high share of the beneficiaries of training activities and advisory services. In Aragon, Spain (Ref. 8) young people (under 40 years of age) made up more than half (56%) of the total number of those who received advice and 32% of the participants in training activities under measure M1.1.1 (training for farmers and agricultural workers). In the Balearic Islands, Spain (Ref. 4), 33% of the trainees were young people under 40 years of age. In Czechia (Ref. 1), 36% of those participating in information activities were under 40 years of age and the share of young people participating in educational activities was even higher at 42%. Evaluators in Czechia concluded that the contribution of the RDP in supporting young people active in agriculture is very significant, as this supports not only the increase of knowledge and skills of less experienced people but also the ongoing increase of the average level of knowledge and skills in this sector. An evaluation in Sardinia, Italy (Ref. 20), highlighted the interest of beneficiaries of start-up support in various training activities, with more than half of those interviewed attending training activities on various topics of interest. However, the Scottish evaluation, UK (Ref. 26), found that only 51% of the surveyed young and new farmers found it easy to access training and information to improve practical farming skills.

An Andalusian evaluation, Spain (Ref. 7), revealed that the beneficiaries of start-up support perceived that they had improved their farms by applying the knowledge gained through the training activities, especially in matters related to climate change, natural resources and the competitiveness of their farms.

High demand among young farmers to attend specialised training courses or advisory services was found in at least five evaluations, (Ref. 7, 3, 23 and Ref. 19, 13). However, in Marche, Italy (Ref. 18), it was noted that the demand for optional training and advice in the 2014-2020 programming period was very low or absent despite the opportunity offered in the 'Youth Package' (in contrast to the 2007-2013 programming period, where 80% of beneficiaries had made use of it thanks also to a specific bonus). A Spanish evaluation from Madrid (Ref. 3) emphasised the need of young farmers who set up farms to be accompanied, monitored and tutored by professional agricultural organisations to help them with the processing of permits, the opening of wells, community irrigation, etc. The evaluation from Marche, Italy (Ref. 18), also emphasised the importance of training activities in building social networks of young farmers from a professional point of view and the different needs of the two types of start-ups (takeovers and new farms) in terms of training.

In Lazio, Italy (Ref. 19), the training offered related to environmentally friendly farming methods and practices were found to be the most useful **training topics**, such as precision farming techniques and irrigation efficiency. The evaluation also emphasised the need for newcomers to the agricultural sector to be assisted during the process of setting up the farm and the need for specialised training courses depending on the previous experience or training already acquired. The Maltese evaluation (Ref. 23) identified the most relevant topics of tailor-made courses for young farmers to be related to marketing, IT and digitalisation at the end phase of the supply chain and the overall management of the farm. It also pointed out the importance of making sure training sessions were scheduled to be convenient to farmers and to use appropriate learning methods (less theoretical, more practical).

An evaluation from Veneto, Italy (Ref. 11), indicated the **number and duration of the training courses per farm**. Young people who have recently started in farming, thanks to the implementation of the 'Youth Package', participated extensively in training courses (1.6 courses/farm for an average of about 80 hours per year), in particular, those related to business management (40.6%) and safety at work (31.3%). They also expressed a high degree of satisfaction both in terms of the topics proposed and the quality of the training received.

²⁶ Article 5, Regulation (EU) 1305/2013 <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1305/oj>.



2.5. The effects of start-up support on territorial development and employment

From a policy point of view, start-up support to young farmers is seen not only as a tool to contribute to generational renewal and increase competitiveness and viability of farms, but also as a tool to revitalise rural areas. To achieve this, some Member States and regions apply dedicated selection criteria to direct start-up support for young farmers to mountainous or most disadvantaged areas.

With or without dedicated selection criteria ²⁷, **start-up support has, at least on some occasions, contributed to rejuvenating the agriculture sector in disadvantaged or mountainous areas.** Most of the evaluations with findings on the territorial distribution of start-up support come from Italian regions. For example, an evaluation from Emilia-Romagna (Ref. 21) concluded that the selection criteria favoured the setting up of young people in mountain areas (38.6% of beneficiaries) and in disadvantaged areas, both mountain and non-mountain areas (46.4% of the beneficiaries), whereas in Lazio (Ref. 13) it was concluded that start-up support has concentrated precisely where there was the greatest need to overcome fragile and traditional models of agriculture. In Sardinia (Ref. 14), most farm start-ups were in rural areas with development problems. The Campania (Ref. 21) and Calabria (Ref. 16) evaluations reached similar conclusions: the selection criteria directed support mainly to enterprises run by young people and operating in mountain areas or areas with other constraints. Finally, an evaluation from Madrid, Spain (Ref. 3), found that 35% of start-ups were in areas with natural mountain limitations.

Young and new farmers in the most marginalised areas have also contributed to increasing employment opportunities in these areas. In Lazio, Italy (Ref. 19), it was found that investments have a positive effect in terms of labour, particularly in the most disadvantaged and marginal areas of the region: farms in these areas have, in total,

increased their workforce by about 153 annual work units (AWU), 61% of the total increase in the region. In Andalusia, Spain (Ref. 7), it was found that 73.7% of the beneficiaries had their personnel needs covered by people residing in their region.

Start up support often contributes to increased employment at farm level. Evaluations in Poland (Ref. 25) and Andalusia, Spain (Ref. 7), assessed the net effects of start up support on employment at farm level and have found that in both cases it had increased. In Andalusia, 2 050 young farmers ²⁸ facilitated the creation of more than 7 000 AWUs of new jobs. Similar conclusions came from Sardinia, Italy (Ref. 20). Evaluations in Malta (Ref. 23) and Lazio, Italy (Ref. 19), reported the share of young beneficiaries who increased their labour force by 38% and 43%, respectively.

The evaluations mostly refer to the total number of new jobs directly created on the farms. In fewer cases, these numbers are compared to the total employment in the agricultural sector to illustrate the scale of the effect. An evaluation from Madrid, Spain (Ref. 3), concluded that start-up support for young farmers has led to the creation of 18.75 AWUs, which represented 0.32 % of employment in the sector in 2020.

While the 26 evaluations focus on the direct employment effects of start-up support, a case study from a [Horizon project carried out in Greece](#) ²⁹ examined both direct and indirect effects on employment at the regional (NUTS 2) level through an input-output model. It concluded that for rural Greece, the indirect jobs created in rural economies due to start-up support for young farmers equated to 20% of the number of new entrants (beneficiaries). The results of the study thus confirmed that the young farmers' scheme is a useful tool to create more jobs for regional, agriculturally oriented economies.

2.6. Development and sustainability of new farms over time

Only two evaluations investigated the long-term effects of start-up support and the development of young farmers' farms over a longer time period. Evaluators in Castile and León, Spain (Ref. 2), found an increasing trend in the total land area of holdings benefiting from investment support and start-up support and a pronounced increase in the economic size of the holdings, with 60% of the holdings showing an increase of more than 5%. The evaluation confirmed that the support received enabled the farms not only to increase their area and economic size, but also productivity, profitability, number of crops cultivated at the farm and other factors related to competitiveness. In Andalusia, Spain (Ref. 7), it was also found that the beneficiaries who remain active increased their area over the years. It was also observed that the beneficiaries had diversified their production through the introduction of different crops. The same evaluation also analysed the views of beneficiaries on the main risks of continuing their agricultural activities. The results reveal that economic factors stand out, such as the profitability of the farm, production costs and income level. There are also external factors that influence the permanence of newly established young

farmers and can lead to security and stability: access to the market (93.5%), labour (93.1%), training (93.1%) and the size of the farm (89.2%), the latter being key to making investments profitable.

As for the long-term effects of the start-up support and the sustainability of the results achieved over time, an evaluation from the Balearic Islands, Spain (Ref. 5), analysed the **permanence of young farmers (beneficiaries of the start-up support) in the agricultural sector.** Evaluators concluded that almost half (46%) of the young people who received start-up support during the 2007-2013 programming period remained in the agricultural sector as farm owners. Evaluators surveyed young people who are no longer farm owners and found that 15% are still working in the agricultural sector as employees, while 85% are working in another sector (mostly tourism, activities related to mechanics, construction and transport and in the agri-food industry). The evaluators highlighted three differences between the farmers who remained in agriculture as farm owners and those who ceased: a) the share of farm owners who were engaged in part-time farming

²⁷ Only few evaluation reports clearly report on the selection criteria applied to start-up support for young farmers.

²⁸ Beneficiaries of the start-up support with the implementation of the business start-up project finished at the time of evaluation.

²⁹ Gkatsikos, A., Natos, D., Stouboulis, C., Mattas, K., Tsagris, M., Polymeros, A. *An Impact Assessment of the Young Farmers Scheme Policy on Regional Growth in Greece*, 2022, 14, 2882, Sustainability, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052882>.



was much higher (39%) among those who ceased compared to those who remained (8%); b) those who left the agricultural activity had to a higher extent a lack of family ties in agriculture (18% compared to 8%); and c) the utilised agricultural area clearly appeared as a differentiating factor when it came to remaining in the sector i.e. those who remained in farming (46%) had larger farms - more than 50 hectares (ha), while the farms of those who left (53%) were mostly much smaller - less than 5 ha.

Finally, an evaluation from Marche, Italy ([Ref. 18](#)), found that the **'survival rate' of the beneficiaries of the 2007-2013 'Youth Package'** was extremely high with 185 companies (over 98%) still active at the time of the evaluation (in 2021). Evaluators concluded that the high survival rate of the beneficiaries has demonstrated that the Youth Package instrument was an appreciated and effective tool in promoting generational change aimed at supporting sustainable, quality and lasting investments. Similarly, an evaluation from Madrid, Spain ([Ref. 3](#)), revealed that 84% of the beneficiaries of start-up support from the 2007-2013 programming period) were still active at the time of the evaluation (in 2021).



3. What were the evaluation challenges and what can we learn from this?

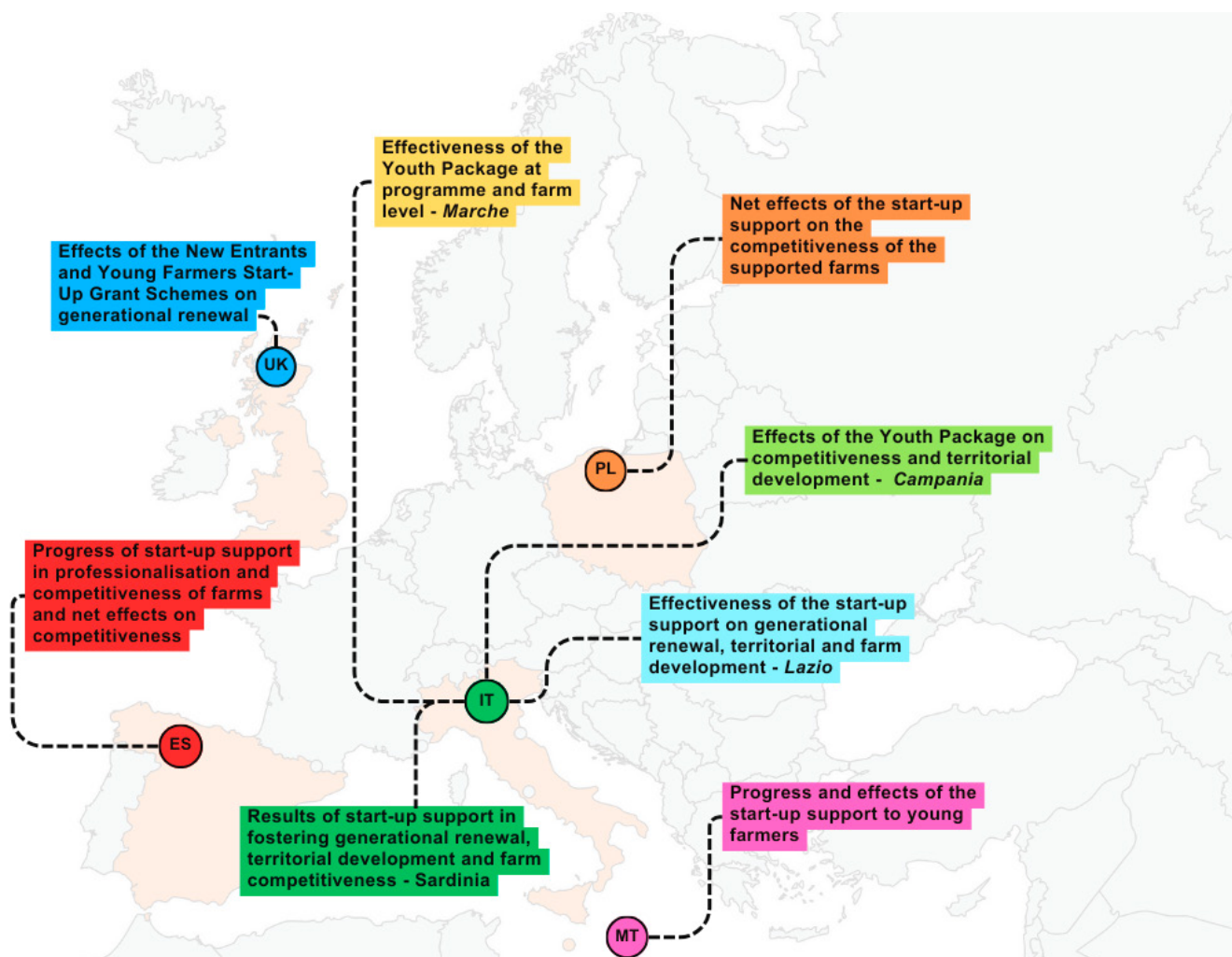
This chapter aims to provide Managing Authorities and evaluators with practical guidance when tackling evaluations related to young farmers and generational renewal in the agricultural sector by outlining evaluation challenges and best practices.

Out of the 26 evaluations considered in this publication, and whose findings have been discussed in the previous chapter, eight evaluations were appraised by experts in the field, focusing on the

evaluation framework, data and methods³⁰ (Figure 4). More details on the appraised evaluations are available in the introduction to Annex I.

The eight evaluations appraised come from four Member States and the UK. Two are national level evaluations (from Malta and Poland) and six are at the regional level (from Andalusia in Spain, Scotland in the United Kingdom and four Italian regions - Campania, Lazio, Marche and Sardinia).

Figure 4. Distribution across Member States and the UK of the evaluations that were appraised and the specific topics treated in the evaluation



Source: CAP evaluation database (2024), EU CAP Network supported by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for the CAP (2024).

The eight evaluations appraised were all dedicated thematic evaluations, focusing exclusively on the topic of generational renewal and (or) start-up support to young farmers. The appraisals have identified common evaluation challenges in determining the effects of the support to young farmers and highlighted best practices for addressing them.

The good practices, challenges and corresponding recommendations on evaluating the effects of the start-up and other support to young farmers are discussed below in relation to the main phases of an evaluation process (structuring, data collection, data analysis and reporting).

³⁰ Every year the Evaluation Helpdesk and DG AGRI select up to 30 evaluations to undergo an in-depth appraisal. Each year, a number of priority topics/themes are identified and evaluations for these topics are prioritised. Appraisals are normally prioritised for impact evaluations carried out over a recent period. Geographical balance among Member States is sought among the appraisals carried out. The appraisals identify challenges confronted by evaluators, as well as good practices on how these challenges have been overcome.



3.1. Common challenges during the structuring phase of an evaluation

Three main challenges related to the structuring phase of an evaluation focused on generational renewal and young farmers were identified from the evaluations appraised:

1. Defining the scope of an evaluation in terms of evaluation criteria, types of interventions and types of generational renewal to be assessed.
2. Identification and presentation of an intervention logic in the context of a wide variety of goals associated with the start-up (and other) support to young farmers and lack of quantitative targets.
3. Development of a consistent evaluation framework linking the elements of the intervention logic with the elements of the evaluation framework, especially the definition of judgement criteria/factors of success and relevant indicators.

These challenges are common in the structuring phase of many evaluations regardless of the topic being evaluated. The challenges are explained in more detail in the following sub-sections followed by the recommendations to Member States and evaluators on how to approach these challenges.

3.1.1. Defining the scope of an evaluation in terms of evaluation criteria, types of interventions and types of generational renewal to be assessed

Member States and their regions support young farmers in different ways (start-up and other support) and for different reasons. The most important questions to be addressed while planning an evaluation of generational renewal are a) what support measures are to be part of the assessment, and b) what types of generational renewal to consider (agricultural generational renewal, non-agricultural generational renewal).

In addition, it is important to consider the different evaluation criteria and go beyond assessing effectiveness in terms of outputs and results achieved, but also address the issue of relevance and effectiveness of the start-up (and other) support to young farmers in overcoming the barriers (e.g. the functioning of the land market) of entering the agricultural sector and the role of other factors and EU/national policies in fostering generational renewal. Two of the appraised evaluations addressed these aspects Malta (Ref. 23) and Scotland (Ref. 26).

What support measures to assess? For all evaluations appraised, the focus was on the start-up support to young farmers, however, there were cases of separate start-up support schemes for young farmers and new entrants (Scotland) or support to young farmers offered as part of the 'Youth Package' (e.g. in Lazio, Italy). Seven

out of eight appraised evaluations (all except Scotland) analysed how active the beneficiaries of start-up support were in accessing other support schemes (in cases where the support was offered as the Youth Package, evaluators analysed both activation of the measures inside and outside the package). Although the aspect of other support to young farmers is addressed by most evaluations, the reports did elaborate more clearly on the purpose of such analysis and how the other support received by the young farmers contributed to the achievement of generational renewal and other goals associated with support to young farmers.

Member States and evaluators have several choices to make when defining the scope of the evaluations related to young farmers and generational renewal:

- a) Focus on start-up support only.
- b) Focus on start-up support and other measures included in the Youth Package or (in case of no support package) on measures prioritising young farmers via eligibility or selection criteria.
- c) Focus on all measures and analyse all support received by the beneficiaries of start-up support including not only measures from points a and b, but also measures that do not have eligibility or selection criteria prioritising young farmers, including the distribution of support between the young and other beneficiaries³¹.

Case c) would allow for a more comprehensive evaluation of the support to young farmers, but it would go far beyond support for generational renewal as different support measures have different primary goals. In other words, supporting young farmers through different support schemes would strengthen the beneficiary farms and would require an analysis of the wider effects of the support.

What type of generational renewal to consider? Start-up and other support to young farmers leads to agricultural generational renewal. It could be achieved by keeping young people in the agricultural sector and rural areas who have family or other ties with the sector, or by attracting new (young) farmers. Non-agricultural generational renewal can be defined³² as encouraging young people to live and work in rural areas (even if they are not engaged in farming) where rural communities are stable or growing in population and where there is a sufficient range of rural businesses and employment opportunities for young people to sustain them. Among the eight appraised evaluations there were no evaluations focusing on non-agricultural generational renewal. Among the 26 evaluations available in the CAP evaluation database with findings related to generational renewal and young farmers, there are examples focusing not only on young farmers but also on other young people living in rural areas an evaluation from Catalonia, Spain (Ref. 6). An assessment of non-agricultural generational renewal would require widening the scope of the types of interventions to be assessed.

³¹ Such approach would include all young farmers, not only those who benefited from the start-up support.

³² See, for example, European Commission: Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Micha, E., Mantino, F., Dwyer, J., Schuh, B. et al., *Evaluation of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas - Final report*, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2762/364362>.



3.1.2. Identification and presentation of an intervention logic in the context of a wide variety of objectives, and linking the intervention logic to an evaluation framework

The numerous objectives associated with support provided to young farmers present a challenge for developing a coherent intervention logic. The appraised evaluations show that evaluators consider different effects of start-up (and other) support to young farmers, such as generational renewal, overcoming barriers to enter the agricultural sector, competitiveness at farm level and territorial development or employment. However, the appraised evaluation reports rarely present an intervention logic in a clear and consistent way. It is important for an evaluator to reconstruct the intervention logic by clearly stating the main objectives, related selection criteria and quantitative targets and to refer to the elements of the intervention logic while developing the evaluation framework (especially judgement criteria/factors of success and the indicators).

The appraised evaluations show that quantitative targets are rare in terms of impacts related to generational renewal or the competitiveness of the supported farms. In such a context it is important for the evaluator to operationalise these effects by explaining, for example, what will be considered as generational renewal or improved competitiveness and at what level (farm or territorial), what indicators for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries will be used to justify the effects of support and how the indirect or unexpected effects of start-up (and other) support to young farmers will be assessed. Besides the intended effects which can be measured against quantitative targets or in a qualitative manner, assessment of indirect effects is also a challenge. A case study of the Horizon project in Greece³³ provides an interesting example of assessing the indirect effects of start-up support on young farmers in terms of employment and regional growth.

The selection criteria for start-up support play an important role in influencing the effects of the support. Some of the intended effects stem from the selection criteria Member States and regions apply selection criteria related to the location of the farm to direct start-up support and agricultural businesses to specific territories³⁴. In this case, the inclusion of the selection criteria can be considered for the intervention logic. Analysis of the selection criteria and how effective they are in directing support to the desired farms/projects could be one of the evaluation questions to be addressed while assessing start-up support.

The difficulty in defining intervention logics may also lead to challenges in elaborating well-defined evaluation frameworks. In fact, few of the appraised evaluation reports included more elaborated evaluation frameworks, containing clear evaluation questions, and the corresponding judgement criteria/factors of success, indicators and data sources. However, the evaluations from Andalusia, Spain (Ref. 7), or Lazio, Italy (Ref. 19), are good examples containing well elaborated judgement criteria. Evaluation frameworks are important as they guide the data collection and presentation of evaluation findings. Identification of relevant factors of success and indicators, including their quantification for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is extremely challenging, but not defining clearly these risks leads to a problematic data collection process and presentation of findings.

3.1.3. Recommendations for the structuring phase of an evaluation on generational renewal/young farmers

To deal with the challenges of the structuring phase of an evaluation, the following recommendations are suggested for Member States and evaluators:

Evaluation scope:

1. Decide and demarcate clearly whether an evaluation will limit itself to assessing solely the effects of start-up support in relation to agricultural generational renewal or whether the evaluation will assess different effects of start-up and other support received by young farmers.
2. Decide whether the evaluation should consider non-agricultural generational renewal based on the time and resources available for the evaluation.
3. Besides evaluating the progress and effectiveness of the support in terms of generational renewal, consider other evaluation criteria the relevance of the support in overcoming barriers to entering the agricultural sector and other policies in fostering generational renewal.

Intervention logic and targets:

4. Identify and clearly present the intervention logic underlying the study, including different goals associated with the start-up (and other) support to young farmers (e.g. agricultural generational renewal, competitiveness of the farm, territorial development) and available quantitative targets. In cases where no quantitative targets exist, clearly define the expected direction of change. Use common and other indicators of different types (context, impact, result/target and output).
5. Link goals and quantitative targets of the interventions with other important elements of the intervention logic (e.g. selection criteria).
6. To facilitate the comparison and aggregation of evaluation findings on agricultural generational renewal, consider answering at least the following questions:
 - a) What was the number of young farmers supported (in absolute terms and as a share of the total number of farms/farms managed by young farmers)?
 - b) What was the average age of the beneficiaries of start-up support and the distribution of the beneficiaries between the age groups (e.g. <25, between 25 and 35, between 36 and 40 years of age) and how does the distribution of beneficiaries between age groups compare with the distribution of all farms managed by young farmers?
 - c) What is the distribution of the beneficiaries between the different types of start-ups (take-overs and new start-ups) and sectors (e.g. livestock farms)? Where relevant, elaborate on the attractiveness and suitability of specific territories for the type of farming activity chosen by the young farmers.

³³ Gkatsikos, A., Natos, D., Stabouli, C., Mattas, K., Tsagris, M., Polymeros, A. *An Impact Assessment of the Young Farmers Scheme Policy on Regional Growth in Greece*, 2022, 14, 2882, Sustainability, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052882>.

³⁴ E.g. mountainous or disadvantaged territories.



- d) In the case of takeovers, what was the age difference between the previous and the new farm owner?
- e) What are the main barriers (differentiated by the type of start-up, i.e. new start-ups versus takeovers) to enter the agricultural sector and how relevant and effective have the support schemes been in overcoming these barriers?
- f) What is the 'survival rate' of the start-ups created by young farmers during previous programming periods and how do these farms develop over time (e.g. after the five year commitment period)?

Evaluation framework:

7. Clearly link elements of an evaluation framework (e.g. judgement criteria/factors of success and indicators) with the elements of the intervention logic (goals/intended effects, selection criteria, indicators and quantitative targets). Explain the rationale behind every factor of success and associated indicator. Keep the number of indicators associated with each factor of success manageable.

3.2. Common challenges related to data, methodology and reporting of evaluation findings

Several of the challenges and recommendations related to evaluation data and the methodological framework are common to many evaluations regardless of the topics evaluated: difficulties in obtaining data on non-beneficiaries, availability of appropriate counterfactuals, testing for selection bias, solving attribution issues and assessing net effects of the support. In the context of generational renewal/young farmers, the challenges may be overcome through specific techniques as elaborated below. The challenges are briefly discussed together with the examples of good practices from the appraised evaluations and other recommendations on how to address them.

3.2.1. Assessment of the net effects of start-up support, availability of relevant counterfactuals and data on non-beneficiaries

Answering the question of what would have happened in the absence of the intervention and what is the net effect of an intervention is a challenge in every evaluation.

The assessment of the impact on agricultural generational renewal is mainly qualitative or based on simple quantitative data (e.g. comparison of the number of the beneficiaries of start-up support with the total number of farms and the analysis of contextual trends, such as changes in the share of young farmers among all farm managers etc.). When generational renewal was assessed in qualitative terms different approaches were taken. For example, rather than looking at the increase in the number of young farm managers at national or regional level, the evaluations assessed the expected improvements in terms of competitiveness at farm level imposed by the entry of younger, better educated, more innovation-inclined farm managers.

None of the appraised evaluations included a comparison of the number of beneficiaries of the start-up support with the number of young farmers registered in the country over the same time. Such an approach could give a quantitative indication of the relevance of the start-up support in attracting (new) young farm managers to the agricultural sector.

For the assessment of **impacts on farm competitiveness**, two out of eight appraised evaluations applied more advanced quantitative approaches that included matching and other quasi-experimental approaches, such as difference-in-difference³⁵. These evaluations tend to come from countries or regions with bigger sample sizes of the **Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN)** or equivalent data sources. Sufficient sample sizes and availability of panel data are the main prerequisites for constructing target (beneficiaries) and control (non-beneficiaries) groups in quantitative evaluation approaches. Both the Polish and the Andalusian (Spain) examples of the quasi-experimental approaches in assessing the net effects of the start-up support were focused on the competitiveness at farm level. The appraised evaluations provide no examples of quantitative approaches to assess the effects of the start-up support on the number or share of young farmers.

Obtaining data on non-beneficiaries is always difficult for evaluators. While the application of quasi-experimental methods is the 'gold standard' for an assessment of net effects, there are other ways to obtain data on non-beneficiaries, through focus groups, case studies or questionnaire surveys. As for the focus groups, an evaluation from Malta (Ref. 23) provides an interesting example where evaluators have organised two focus groups: one with the beneficiaries of the start-up support and one with young farmers who did not receive start-up support. Results of these focus groups are presented in a structured way (table) and allow a comparison of the views of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries on selected topics. In an Italian evaluation from the region of Campania (Ref. 17), the non-beneficiary group was constructed from the beneficiaries of start-up support who did not receive investment support for farm modernisation (under measure 4.1). However, such approaches enable assessment of the effects of investment support rather than start-up support. Evaluations with no data on non-beneficiaries should include a justification of such an approach as attribution analysis and identification of deadweight effects without the data on non-beneficiaries is questionable.

In addition, some of the effects of the support in the appraised evaluations were clearly attributed to the **selection criteria** effects on territorial development or innovations at farm level. In such cases it would be beneficial to analyse the **'creaming effect'**³⁶ of the selection criteria and how the selection criteria with the elements of positive discrimination³⁷ affected **accessibility to start-up support**,

³⁵ Evaluations in Poland (Ref. 25) and Andalusia, Spain (Ref. 7).

³⁶ Targeting young farmers and farms that are more likely to achieve better results.

³⁷ E.g. favouring young female farmers or young farmers in specific territories (e.g. mountainous or disadvantaged).



the non-beneficiaries (or unsuccessful applicants) and the overall effects of start-up support.

Applying counterfactual approaches allows for more robust findings, but they often pose a challenge to evaluators. In cases where counterfactual approaches are applied, a good practice would be to include more details in the evaluation reports on the process and challenges of undertaking the counterfactual evaluation to facilitate the accumulation of knowledge, learning and improvement of data sources. The details that are of general interest to Member States and evaluators relate to the availability of data for the construction of target and control groups (e.g. total number of farms in FADN sample, number of farms managed by young farmers, number of beneficiaries on non-beneficiaries of the start-up and other support, number of farms for which panel data are available, etc.). They also relate to the selection of independent variables³⁸, the outcomes of different matching techniques, the limitations of the results obtained and the recommended improvements to facilitate the application of more advanced quantitative methods for the assessment of net effects.

In cases where counterfactual approaches are not applied, it would be useful to report whether evaluators explored an option to apply quasi-experimental approaches and what was the outcome (e.g. insufficient sample sizes to construct target and control groups, lack of data on non-beneficiaries, etc.).

3.2.2. Capturing actual and long-term effects of start-up (and other) support to young farmers

The timing of the evaluation affects the choice of data sources and these sources affect the ability to objectively assess actual rather than intended effects. Evaluations that are conducted during the implementation of the interventions cannot answer questions about the long-term effects of start-up support on the development of the farm. This was emphasised by the Spanish evaluation from the region of Andalusia (Ref. 7) where evaluators concluded that at the starting point of the activity, farms are characterised by high investments (higher expenses) that have not yet been reflected in an increase of their income (low productivity).

For the application of quasi-experimental approaches that allow for capturing the actual and net effects of the support, it is important to conduct an evaluation several years after the implementation of the business development plan is completed. Evaluations based on the surveys of beneficiaries during the implementation of the business development plans might be subjective and focused on intended rather than the actual effects. Results of such evaluations should be taken with caution, especially when assessing impacts.

Evaluations from the Marche region in Italy (Ref. 18) and Andalusia in Spain (Ref. 7) provide examples of assessing the survival rates of the beneficiaries of the 2007-2013 CAP programming period. High survival rates of the beneficiaries over the long term are a useful proxy for the assessment of the long-term effects of start-up support.

3.2.3. Clear and structured presentation of evaluation findings

Presentation of data without the proper contextual information and the relevant framing makes the main take-away messages from the evaluation diffused and difficult to interpret. The evaluations are typically rich in different types and levels of data as the implementation of start-up and other support to young farmers is expected to generate different effects on generational renewal, competitiveness, employment and territorial development, and the attraction of a better qualified generation of young farmers. Also, evaluations often focus on analysing the results of the implementation of interventions rather than the effects. With a high number of different aspects and indicators analysed, the presentation of evaluation findings becomes too complex and the main messages are not easy to distinguish.

More attention should be paid to the presentation of evaluation findings in a structured way (e.g. tables) to facilitate the comparison of beneficiaries with non-beneficiaries or with all the farms in the region or country. The use of relevant regional, national or EU level benchmarks is especially important in cases where assessment of net effects is not possible. Such benchmarks facilitate the understanding of the scope of the intervention(s), characteristics of beneficiaries and the gross effects of start-up support.

3.2.4. Recommendations for the data, methodology and reporting

To deal with the challenges related to data collection, data analysis and reporting, Member States and evaluators can use the following recommendations.

Assessment of net effects:

1. Investigate the possibilities of applying more advanced quantitative methods (e.g. matching, quasi-experimental) to obtain data on non-beneficiaries and to net out the effects of support. Report the results of such investigation and the relevant recommendations in the evaluation reports irrespective of the actual application of the quasi-experimental methods to facilitate the accumulation of knowledge and improvement of the data sets for future evaluations. This is especially relevant for countries and regions with higher numbers³⁹ of beneficiaries of start-up support.
2. In cases of qualitative evaluations, apply appropriate methods to obtain data and views of non-beneficiaries. Organise focus groups, interviews or surveys of non-beneficiaries (or unsuccessful applicants) to obtain a more balanced picture of the relevance or effectiveness of the start-up support.
3. In cases of no data on non-beneficiaries, compare the beneficiary data with appropriate regional, national or EU level benchmarks to highlight the similarities or differences of the beneficiaries compared to all farms. Indicate, what is the scope of start-up support compared to the number of all farms in the region or country.

³⁸ Independent indicators (variables) are indicators used for construction of comparable target and control groups. Dependant indicators are indicators used for assessment of impacts.

³⁹ Several hundreds or thousands.



4. Pay more attention to the identification of the cause-effect relationships and the net effects of the support. Critically assess the effects of selection criteria, including the 'creaming effect' and the effect of positive discrimination on the accessibility and other effects of the support.
5. Be transparent about the limitations of the methodological approach, report the data gaps encountered during the evaluation and include recommendations to improve monitoring and evaluation of the effects of the start-up and other support to young farmers on generational renewal, competitiveness and territorial development.

Assessment of actual and long-term effects:

6. Consider the timing of an evaluation to allow sufficient time for the investment to generate the results, especially in terms of the competitiveness of the farms. If it is too soon for an impact assessment of the beneficiaries of the current programming period, use data of the beneficiaries of the previous programming period. These kinds of data are essential for the assessment of sustainability and development of the farms over a longer time.
7. Make a clear distinction between the intended and actual results and subjective and objective data sources.

Presentation of evaluation findings:

8. Analyse the development of interventions (start-up and other support to young farmers and generational renewal) over time and compare interventions and their achievements of the current programming period with previous ones.
9. Structure the presentation of evaluation findings following the elements of the evaluation framework (not only evaluation criteria or questions, but also factors of success and associated indicators).
10. Use summary tables to compare the values of relevant indicators between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of all farms managed by young farmers, if indicator values for non-beneficiaries are not available or too costly to obtain within the time and budget available.
11. Clearly present the baseline, target and actual (achieved) values of relevant indicators and factors of success. Compare the achieved values with relevant regional, national or EU level benchmarks. When referring to common indicators (CMEF/PMEF), use approved codes together with their titles (e.g. C.23 – Age structure of farm holders).



Conclusions

From over 600 evaluations in the CAP evaluation database, only 26 evaluations published between 2021 and 2023 contain findings related to generational renewal and support to young farmers. However, less than half (12 out of 26) of these evaluations are thematic evaluations focusing specifically on start-up and other support to young farmers and CAP impacts in relation to generational renewal. These thematic evaluations were conducted in only four Member States (Italy, Malta, Poland and Spain) and the UK. Besides, only one regional level evaluation (from Catalonia in Spain) touches upon the topic of non-agricultural generational renewal. This leads to the conclusion that only a limited effort has been made so far to analyse generational renewal and the effectiveness of start-up support to young farmers, both at Member State and regional level.

The 26 evaluations of relevance, available in the CAP evaluation database, mainly focused on the implementation and achievements of start-up support to young farmers rather than on the impacts of the RDPs on agricultural and non-agricultural generational renewal. Evaluations present many interesting insights about the short-term developments at farm level. However, insights into the overall effects of start-up support on the composition of the agricultural sector (e.g. age structure of farm management) are limited. In addition, evaluations mainly assess the effectiveness criterion while other evaluation criteria, especially the relevance of the support in attracting new farm owners and overcoming barriers to enter the agricultural sector, were assessed to a lesser extent.

Based on the 26 evaluations, this publication found mixed results from the implementation of start-up support on the overall age composition of farm managers. From the four evaluations that assessed the topic, the effectiveness of the RDPs was greater in supporting young farmers with prior links with the agricultural sector or taking over existing farms rather than new entrants to the sector. Access to land, as well as lack of knowledge and skills, were found to be the main barriers to entering the agricultural sector and the availability of start-up support can be the determining factor for taking the decision to take over or set up a farm. A further insight is that young farmers in general constitute a large share of the beneficiaries of training activities and advisory services, showing their drive to improve their skills and knowledge.

Insufficient budget for start-up support and lack of relevant targets (e.g. total share of agricultural land to be managed by young farmers/new entrants) were identified as areas for improvement to increase the effectiveness of start-up support in contributing to agricultural generational renewal. At the same time, start-up support has been found to contribute to increased competitiveness of farms in at least six evaluations and the same measure has, at least on some occasions, also contributed to rejuvenating the agricultural sector in disadvantaged or mountainous areas.

The in-depth appraisals of the selected eight evaluations suggest that assessing the impacts of RDPs in relation to generational renewal is very challenging. This is due both to the limited number of beneficiaries of start-up support compared to the total number of farms and the lack of quantitative targets, both in terms of generational renewal and other intended effects of start-up support to young farmers. Only two evaluations attempted to quantify the net effects of start-up support in terms of the competitiveness of the farms. Difficulties in reconstructing the intervention logic and establishing a consistent evaluation framework are another challenge in evaluating the relevance, effectiveness and impacts of start-up and other support to young farmers. Besides, the assessment of indirect and long-term effects of start-up (and other) support to young farmers, not only at farm level but also at the wider sectoral level, remains among the aspects that received limited attention based on the available evaluations.

Generational renewal is one of the Specific Objectives of the CAP for the 2023-2027 programming period. Given the so far limited number of CAP evaluations dealing with generational renewal and young farmers, the topic warrants further investigation at Member State level. To overcome the evaluation challenges identified, future thematic evaluations of generational renewal and start-up support to young and new farmers could benefit from the good practice examples and recommendations presented in [Chapter 3](#) which correspond to the different phases of an evaluation process (structuring, data collection, data analysis and reporting).



Annex I: List of Member State evaluations related to generational renewal analysed in this paper and available in the CAP evaluation database

The below Member State evaluations are the ones identified from the CAP evaluation database as relevant to generational renewal and analysed in this publication. For ease of reading, only the reference number, rather than the full study reference, is included.

For dedicated thematic evaluations (as discussed in [Chapter 1](#)), see reference numbers 3, 5, 6, 7, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25 and 26. For other thematic evaluations, see reference numbers 4, 9, 10 and 22. For evaluations supporting AIRs, see reference numbers 1, 2, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 21. For evaluations that were appraised (as discussed in [Chapter 3](#)), see reference numbers 6, 7, 17, 18, 19, 23, 25 and 26.

Reference number	Member State	Year of publication	Title (English version)	Author	Publisher
1	CZ	2022	Interim spring evaluation report 2021	Naviga 4 s.r.o. a Naviga Advisory and Evaluation s.r.o.	Ministry of Agriculture
2	ES	2021	Castilla y Leon 2021 interim evaluation report	Red2Red	Managing Authority of the programme
3	ES	2023	Evaluation report of the operation 6.1.1 Support for the incorporation of young farmers	CSM Servicios Profesionales, S.L.U.	Independent evaluator
4	ES	2022	Mid-term evaluation on the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men in the Balearic islands	Red2Red	Red2Red
5	ES	2022	Retaining young farmers in the agricultural sector through installation support	Red2Red	Red2Red
6	ES	2022	Rural youth and 2014-2022 Catalunya RDP	Regio Plus Consulting	Department of Climate Action, Food and Rural Agenda of the Generalitat de Catalunya
7	ES	2022	Support for young farmers in Andalusia's Rural Development Programme 2014-2022	Directorate-General for European Funds	Directorate-General for European Funds
8	ES	2021	The 2021 ongoing evaluation report of the Aragon Rural Development Programme	Regio Plus Consulting	Department of Agriculture, Livestock and Environment of the Government of Aragon
9	FI	2021	Assessment and development of selection criteria for structural advancements in Finnish agriculture	Anna-Maija Heikkilä	Luonnonvarakeskus
10	FR	2021	Impact Evaluation Assessment on the competitiveness of agricultural operations	Oréade-Brèche	Normandy region



Reference number	Member State	Year of publication	Title (English version)	Author	Publisher
11	IT	2021	2020 annual evaluation report of the Veneto region	Agriconsulting	Veneto region
12	IT	2021	2021 annual evaluation report of the Campania region	Lattanzio KIBS S.p.A.	Lattanzio KIBS S.p.A.
13	IT	2021	2021 interim evaluation report of the Lazio region	Cogea	Cogea
14	IT	2021	2021 annual evaluation report of the Sardegna region	RTI ISRI-Intellera-Interforum-Primaidea	RTI ISRI-Intellera-Interforum-Primaidea
15	IT	2022	2021 annual evaluation report of the Sicily region	RTI ISRI-AGT	RTI ISRI-AGT
16	IT	2022	Calabria Annual Evaluation Report 2022	ISRI-Sinapsys	ISRI-Sinapsys
17	IT	2021	Generational renewal dynamics in Campania's rural families	Lattanzio KIBS S.p.A.	Lattanzio KIBS S.p.A.
18	IT	2021	Generational renewal in the Marche Region: evaluation results on support for the first set up	Lattanzio KIBS S.p.A.	Lattanzio KIBS S.p.A.
19	IT	2023	Thematic report on helping young farmers set up	COGEA	Lazio Managing Authority
20	IT	2022	Thematic report: support for the start-up of Sardinian young farmers	RTI ISRI-Intellera-Interforum-Primaidea	RTI ISRI-Intellera-Interforum-Primaidea
21	IT	2022	Updated interim report for the 2014-2020 period	Agriconsulting	Agriconsulting
22	LT	2022	Evaluation of the impact of enhancing farm viability and competitiveness and promoting innovative farm technologies	BGI Consulting	Ministry of Agriculture
23	MT	2021	Thematic Evaluation on Young Farmers	E-Cubed Consultants, EMCS Ltd, and Adi Associates	Managing Authority
24	PL	2023	Assessment of the effects of the implementation of Measure 6.1. 'Young Farmers Premiums'	mgr Marcin Adamski	Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics - National Research Institute
25	PL	2021	Net impact of support implemented under the young farmer premium sub-measure	Instytut Ekonomiki Rolnictwa i Gospodarki Żywnościowej - PiB	Instytut Ekonomiki Rolnictwa i Gospodarki Żywnościowej - PiB
26	UK	2022	New entrants and young farmers start-up grant schemes	Scottish Government	Scottish Government



Annex II: Additional references

European Commission, *Evaluation of the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas*, 2021. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cmef/rural-areas/impact-common-agricultural-policy-generational-renewal-local-development-and-jobs-rural-areas_en.

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