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POLICY REPORT
**YOUTH AND WOMEN EMPLOYMENT IN SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN:
Gaps, Prospects, Opportunities**



PARTNERS



POLICY REPORT

YOUTH AND WOMEN EMPLOYMENT IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: Gaps, Prospects, Opportunities

CLUSTER POLICY REPORT ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN THE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: state and near-future prospects

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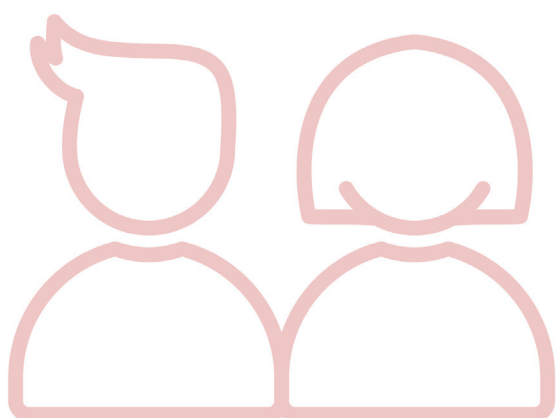
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATAE	Tunisian Association of Environmental Agriculture
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CIHEAM	International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
EUMed	Euro-Mediterranean
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FNAAC	National Framework Agreement for Seasonal Workers in Agricultural Campaigns
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
SSE	Social and Solidarity Economy
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustainable agriculture concerns a broad array of behaviours, practices, regulatory frameworks and public and private initiatives that concern a variety of actors and stages of the food production, distribution and consumption cycle. In the Mediterranean, sustainable practices are linked to **climate adaptation, organic farming** practices and **crop diversification**, recovery and protection of **traditional farming** practices, or **small-scale agricultural projects** combined with **responsible distribution and consumption circuits** (Aguilera et al., 2020; Alcon et al., 2020; Harmanny & Malek, 2019). However, important demographic, socioeconomic, technological and environmental differences exist between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, across the whole region there is a **growing focus on promoting small-scale farming, empowering rural communities and improving value chains** to increase competitiveness and sustainable practices.¹

This report provides an overview of sustainable agriculture in the Mediterranean, with a regional perspective on the labour insertion of youth and women in this sector. The study focuses on the main features of the labour market and employment policies, as well as future prospects and a proposed action plan that addresses, from existing policy frameworks, the conjunctural and structural changes needed to correct the challenges faced by the sector in this field.² According to these, the future prospects for youth and women employability in sustainable agriculture are connected to the capacity of regulatory frameworks to address bureaucratic barriers, to take advantage of migration opportunities, to the expansion of the social and solidarity economy, and to the success of care redistribution policies. To make progress on these three axes, the study proposes an action plan based on the five dimensions (spatial, economic, social, environmental and institutional) that the EU Economic and Social Council proposed in 2020 to promote inclusive economic development and social cohesion. In this regard, nine complementary pathways are identified that build on existing regulatory frameworks to advance the creation of enabling environments and which must be implemented in a coordinated manner at local, national and regional level.

Key recommendations are the adoption of a **holistic vision** that addresses the totality of food systems from the rural development paradigm, as well as the improvement of **basic services and**

¹ The ENI-CBC programme, led by the European Union (EU) and the Sardinia Region, together with other initiatives like SwitchMed, funded by the EU and implemented by UNIDO and UNEP/MAP, are examples of these efforts.

² This report includes academic research, reports from stakeholders in the sector at national and regional level, and semi-structured interviews with several of them: the interest, attention and follow-up of the associations Terra! (Italy), Via Campesina Europa, ATAE (Tunisia) and Jornaleras de Huelva en Lucha are gratefully acknowledged.



working conditions for young people and women. In addition, special emphasis is placed on **access to land and finance**, as well as on the **alignment and coordination of existing policies** at regional level to prioritise **social inclusion**. Finally, investment in **research, knowledge and technology** generation and **learning exchange**, as well as **networking of sustainable and solidarity-based initiatives**, is essential throughout all stages of the action plan.

INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Library, the term “sustainable agriculture” (U.S. Code Title 7, Section 3103) defines “an integrated system of plant and animal production practices with a site-specific application that, in the long run

- Satisfy human food and fibre needs
- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends
- Make the most efficient use of non-renewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls
- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole”

The United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) places sustainable agriculture within the broader framework of **food systems**, defined as “the full range of actors and their interrelated value-added activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the wider economic, social and natural environments in which they are embedded.”

As the rural development paradigm points out, agriculture is a multifunctional sector in that it has functions other than food production and produces non-market benefits and local collective goods such as ecological services (Morgan et al., 2010). These include environmental protection, landscape management, food security or the preservation of ecological biodiversity, as well as other goods and services related to training, education, energy, tourism or gastronomy. Accordingly, in the Mediterranean area, the agricultural sector is critical to the socioeconomic and cultural fabric, as well as to the maintenance of the territory. The Mediterranean model in this sector is characterised by a mix of state, market and family, with a scarcity of public services, and the centrality of the family, and of women in particular, in the provision of care for the elderly and children (Nori & Farinella, 2020; Naldini, 2003).

Against this background, women and youth maintain an ambivalent position in the sector, which is, for a variety of reasons, heavily influenced by informality (Sutherland, 2023; Nori & Farinella, 2020; Seghirate, 2017). On the one hand, women’s care and work roles are under-represented in a sector where the production of the family unit is often only quantified considering the head of the family. Likewise, this family structure and the policies that support it lead to a significant gap in access to the sector between young people who come from farming families and those who do not. This trend coexists with a growing disaffection for agricultural work and rural life among young people, which finds an important exception among those who migrate for economic reasons, for whom the agricultural sector

is a gateway to the temporary or permanent labour market, often in precarious situations linked to the informal or seasonal nature of the labour supply (Corrado et al., 2016). However, there are important structural differences between the northern and southern shores (Nori, 2022).

From an agro-ecological point of view, only 14% of the land in the region is suitable for agricultural production, with an average of 34.4% in the EU Northern Mediterranean countries and only 5% in the southern and eastern rim countries (Nori, 2018). In this regard, a major **challenge for communities living in rural areas of the Southern Mediterranean regions is to access productive land resources** for agriculture to provide food, income and employment for a rapidly growing population. The situation is quite the opposite on the **Euro-Mediterranean (EUMed) flanks, where low fertility rates and rural population decline pose serious problems** related to demographic ageing, lack of agricultural labour and generational replacement (Nori, 2018). This gap is compounded by other important differences related to the **structure of enterprises** – small family farms coexist with a natural resource- and labour-intensive agro-industrial sector –, the availability of **water resources** and irrigation systems, **crop diversity**, the use of **technology** or the extent of **rural-urban gaps**.

In such circumstances, the agricultural industry has lost ground in the Mediterranean. Countries do not produce enough food for their own consumption and are forced to **rely on international trade and imports, especially cereals**, to ensure food security (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020). This is also related to **low land productivity, water efficiency and food waste** in some parts of the area (Zafeirakou et al., 2022). Thus, Mediterranean countries account for one third of the world's cereal (wheat) imports for only 7% of the world's population. Even so, again the differences between North and South are apparent, since the Mediterranean countries of the EU present an agricultural balance due to smallholder family farming and small-scale crop production (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020).

In this respect, both climate concerns and the depletion of water and soil, together with precarious self-employment and paid employment in the sector and a shift towards responsible consumption patterns, have triggered a search for sustainable alternatives for food production and consumption that reinforce food security while mitigating the ecological impacts of agricultural activity and improving workers' livelihoods (Piñeiro et al., 2020). This report aims to provide an overview of sustainable agriculture in the Mediterranean, with a regional perspective on the labour insertion of youth and women in this sector, with a focus on the main features of the labour market and employment policies, as well as future prospects and a proposal for an action plan that addresses, from existing policy frameworks, the conjunctural and structural changes needed to correct the challenges faced by the sector in this field.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Sustainable agriculture concerns a broad array of behaviours, practices, regulatory frameworks and public and private initiatives that concern a variety of actors and stages of the food production, distribution and consumption cycle. Accordingly, sustainability encompasses environmental, socioeconomic, political, cultural and demographic dimensions. In the Mediterranean, sustainable practices are linked to **climate adaptation** – such as water management techniques, drought-resistant crops and agroforestry practices –, **organic farming** practices and **crop diversification**, recovery and protection of **traditional farming** practices, or **small-scale agricultural projects** combined with **responsible distribution and consumption circuits**.³

As per above, important differences can be identified between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Countries like **Spain, Italy and France employ modern technologies and intensive agricultural practices, which coexist with small-scale and family farming structures**. They are major exporters of agricultural products and have well-established value chains. These countries have spearheaded sustainable agriculture initiatives such as precision farming, the use of renewable energies, and innovative irrigation systems. They have also invested heavily in research and development, fostering innovation in sustainable agriculture. Meanwhile, countries such as **Cyprus, Jordan, Tunisia and Palestine have diverse agricultural landscapes and face unique challenges, such as water scarcity, limited access to resources and lack of basic services and decent work opportunities in rural areas**. At the national and regional level, there is a **growing focus on promoting small-scale farming, empowering rural communities and improving value chains** to increase competitiveness and sustainable practices. Nevertheless, as a representative of the Tunisian Association of Environmental Agriculture (ATAE) points out, although progressive soil degradation and increasing water scarcity urgently require the implementation of sustainable practices, the lack of state incentives for green practices in Southern Mediterranean countries makes it difficult to implement them on a large scale.

³ Further information available at the Consolidated Technical Sector Report produced by the ENI-CBC Cluster Project summarising the relevant features of the four sectors analysed in seven target countries: https://www.enicbcmcd.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/CLUSTER_Output%203.2%20-%20Consolidated%20Technical%20Sector%20Report.pdf

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY FRAMEWORKS IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

In order to understand the main trends in youth employment in sustainable agriculture in the Mediterranean, it is important to take into account some of the most relevant demographic features of the sector in its broadest dimension. Here, the North-South divergences already mentioned are manifested in the coexistence of the following factors:

In the North, an ageing and rural landowning population, increasing mechanisation of agricultural practices, and a growing detachment of the young population both in the agricultural sector and in rural ecosystems. According to representatives of the Italian association of sustainable agriculture Terra!, “the return of young people to agriculture is a fiction that oscillates between the optimistic and the blatantly false.” In this regard, they point out that generational turnover in the agricultural sector is not at a standstill but actually negative as the agroindustry sector advances, throwing family and small-scale production out of the market. In the meantime, they warn, youth occupy a smaller percentage of the total number of farms than it did 10 years ago while public commitment to generational change in agriculture falls far short of what is needed: resources are too scarce, bureaucracy slows down their distribution, and the economic environment is not conducive to investment.

These dynamics have led to a significant growth in wage and seasonal work, most of which is taken up by young migrants from other countries in the European Community and the Mediterranean basin. Today, more than one third of the officially employed agricultural labour force in Greece, Spain and Italy is of foreign origin (Corrado et al., 2016; Kasimis et al., 2010).

In the South, the high rates of (not in education, employment or training) NEET among youth, together with the lack of access to basic services, land tenure, financial support or decent job opportunities in rural settings, hinder the capacity of youth and women to join or start sustainable agricultural projects.

Against this background, the structural North-South income gap that characterises the Mediterranean region is another relevant factor to consider the intersection between migration, youth and agriculture. The conditions of labour demand in the European agricultural sector generate little competition with the local population and are an entry point to the European labour market. However, the precariousness

and seasonality of work, together with difficulties in accessing finance and land, pose significant entry barriers to more stable, sustainable and decent work on both sides of the basin. Labour in EUMed agriculture is thus characterised **by circular mobility strategies, where workers move between production areas according to seasonal peaks in labour demand**, while returning home when demand is low. The skills, opportunities and rights of labour from different regions depend on the different legislative and political arrangements between countries of origin and the EU or member states. In this respect, Southern European countries are characterised by the highest in-work poverty in the EU and vulnerable employment, with negative consequences for inclusive and sustainable development (Nori & Farinella, 2020; Corrado et al., 2016).

Associations like Via Campesina also warn of barriers and challenges related to learning processes. The lack of recognition of volunteering experiences and of follow-up mechanisms to verify the suitability of agricultural environments for learning objectives, as well as the scarcity of pedagogical resources on entrepreneurship and the situations of precariousness and, at times, professional and personal abuse that can occur in these environments, make it difficult for many young people and, particularly, for women in this group, to carry out satisfactory experiences in this field.⁴

In view of the above, a paradoxical situation arises in the Mediterranean, where the demand for labour in the North and the surplus of labour in the South are often addressed through ad hoc, partial and often precarious administrative solutions that do not take into account all the dimensions that a more sustainable development of the sector would require. In this respect, the discussion on sustainable agricultural development cannot be decoupled from the broader notion of rural development but also from the promotion of decent work. Accordingly, the inclusion of youth in sustainable agriculture goes beyond direct employment policies. Indirectly, **the promotion of rural development frameworks and social and solidarity economy initiatives, as well as investment in more resource-efficient agricultural practices and in research and development of innovative and sustainable technologies and practices, are of the utmost importance**. In this sense, an array of complementary – and sometimes overlapping or contradictory – policies is implemented across different dimensions (local, national and regional) that contribute to shaping youth employment in the sustainable agriculture sector in the Mediterranean:

- **Seasonal work campaigns:** These public policies establish exceptional regular work and mobility pathways to cover labour shortages in certain periods of the year. Northern Mediterranean countries have implemented different employment frameworks that allow, on an ad hoc basis and sometimes with low levels of transparency, the seasonal migration of workers in fruit or vegetable picking. In Spain, these practices are regulated through the so-

⁴ For more information, consult the following report: <https://viacampesina.org/en/navigating-dreams-precarity-working-and-learning-conditions-of-young-agricultural-workers-interns-and-volunteers-across-europe/>

called *contratación en origen* and a system of quotas known as *Régimen General* and the FNAAC (National Framework Agreement for Seasonal Workers in the Agricultural Campaigns). In Italy they are implemented through the *caporalato* systems, landless cooperatives and employment agencies. The features of both frameworks indicate significant degrees of collusion between various actors in the agricultural sector, as well as the complacency of a legal and political framework that provides an enabling environment for grey practices at the expense of migrant workers that have come under increasing scrutiny in recent years (Corrado et al., 2016).

- **Incentive and subsidy measures for youth self-employment:** At local, national and regional level, there are a number of measures that seek to favour the conditions for young people to access the agricultural market (subsidies, tax deductions or mentorship programmes). Some of these measures also include state or EU support for access to funding for the implementation of sustainable projects and the promotion of measures against rural depopulation (Piñeiro et al., 2020).
- **Measures to support climate adaptation and sustainable practices:** From the new (Common Agriculture Policy) CAP to cohesion policy frameworks, i regional development funds and other local national frameworks, there are programmes aimed at encouraging more sustainable practices on existing farms. These include energy efficiency, the recovery or implementation of more water-efficient irrigation systems, the use of fertilisers or the introduction of crop diversification and fallow practices for soil regeneration. Young people, who are more aware of this type of practice, are in a relatively advantageous position to benefit from this support.
- **Identification and protection of sustainable practices:** Within the framework of policies of collective responsibility for sustainable and healthy food systems, policies for the recognition of organic production models (including designations of origin, protected geographical indications and other quality labels) are a model for the protection of production, distribution and consumption systems with high barriers to compete with the intensive agro-industrial model that is still the majority in the agricultural sector. In this way, the aim is to favour the viability of projects that are anchored in territorial development and that are innovative in their relationship with the environment and with people's health.
- **Land access programmes:** Limited access to finance and land remains a major challenge for youth and women in sustainable agriculture. Improving access to credit, land tenure security and the development of alternative financing mechanisms can improve employment prospects. In Spain in 2021, the Focus Group on Access to Land identified barriers to access to the means of production and, specifically, to agricultural land for youth and indicated some recommendations to address this structural shortcoming of the system.

- **Measures to support the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE):** The social and solidarity economy refers to enterprises and organisations (cooperatives, social mutuals, associations, foundations and social enterprises) that produce goods, services and knowledge that address the needs of the community they serve, with the aim of achieving specific social and environmental objectives and fostering solidarity. However, the diversity of regulatory frameworks and definitions of the initiatives that fall into this category has led to a growing interest of national and supranational institutions in the EU and the Mediterranean to regulate and foster the development of the sector. Currently, the EU has launched a series of regional consultations and dialogues to implement a European social economy plan launched in 2021.⁵
- **Rural development programmes:** There are a variety of programmes aimed at improving access to services and also socio-cultural relations in rural areas with the objective of promoting social cohesion and the well-being of groups of the population with significant burdens and poor prospects for integration into the labour market, such as women and young people. These measures range from the improvement of transport and communication infrastructures or basic services such as health and education to employment integration programmes or policies for the participation of women in the public sphere.

⁵ For more information, consult the following report: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24986&langId=en>

EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS IN THE SECTOR

Labour market analyses and estimations in agriculture are hampered by the blurred boundaries of what sustainable agriculture is in different countries, as well as by factors such as high levels of informality and the underestimation of the contribution of family members to the sustainability of family businesses and rural development (especially women and young people) (Sutherland, 2023). In this regard, it is important to note that **care work is not only highly feminised and precarious, but also essentially invisible despite its essential role throughout the Mediterranean area** (Seghirate, 2017; Naldini, 2003). Current academic studies are dominated by analyses of the evolution of (local) niches and by the discussion of governance options for scaling up their impact, rather than actual regime change at the structural level (Melchior & Newgig, 2021). Thus, while a number of local case studies show the potential for small-scale changes that could be transferable to other regions and higher levels of governance, in general it seems that more integrative and comparative work, and perhaps greater coherence in conceptual approaches, would benefit this currently fragmented field. Together with these, consultations with young entrepreneurs and workers individuals and associations bring forward **three cross-cutting axes** that seem decisive in determining the capacity of Mediterranean countries to include young people and women in sustainable agriculture:

Harnessing opportunities for human mobility

The proletarianisation of agricultural work, the demographic challenges of the sector and the socioeconomic environmental challenges facing food systems in the Mediterranean area suggest that the evolution of employment in the sector will be closely linked to the design of policies that favour the leveraging of migration opportunities. Firstly, several studies indicate that the migrant community is an asset in mitigating trends of rural depopulation suffered by numerous territories in the EU (Nori & Farinella, 2020; Nori & Triandafyllidou, 2019). Secondly, as migration is recognised as a climate change adaptation strategy, its success will depend on the existing regulatory frameworks allowing for safe, dignified and regular human mobility that goes beyond the limitations of the current ones. Finally, knowledge of cultivation and irrigation practices in arid or semi-arid territories can be key to the introduction of adaptive solutions in territories where climate change is increasing temperatures or the succession of extreme precipitation and other episodes. In any case, employment policies based on wage competitiveness, seasonality and ad hoc hiring in the agro-industrial sector have been shown to significantly compromise not only the human rights of the people who work, but also the environmental sustainability of this model and its impact on rural development.

Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy

Although the SSE has different definitions and approaches, its environmental sensitivity, the general interest and the common good are intrinsic to this model of community-centred production and consumption. There are numerous initiatives at different levels that promote an alternative way of approaching the production, distribution and consumption of food and agricultural goods. However, their impact and visibility are sometimes limited by the lack of access to resources, capacities and important spaces such as agricultural land but also markets. In this respect, the process of promoting and regulating the SSE through dialogue with actors in the sector is an important opportunity to elevate and expand successful projects to territories where they are not yet so anchored.

Redistribution of care work

As pointed out by Via Campesina Europe, “agriculture is a highly gendered and racialised sector, which inevitably shapes the experiences of young workers.” In a survey among youth about their work and apprenticeship conditions, respondents highlighted that the roles and tasks assigned to men and women are still marked by stereotypes. There is increasing awareness among scholars and policy-makers about the role of women in Mediterranean farming systems and in rural development, but also growing concerns about the undervaluation of the contribution of such work to the sustainability of the sector, especially in small family farming. In this respect, researchers and practitioners point not only to the support of agricultural tasks, but also to the almost total assumption of tasks related to the care of children and the elderly, as well as to other core tasks related to the maintenance of the family economy. Furthermore, the progressive incorporation of women into the labour market, particularly in the northern rim of the Mediterranean, has opened up a space for the incorporation of migrant women in these care tasks. In this respect, the reinforcement of the public services system, together with measures to reduce the precariousness of feminised care work and long-term measures to promote changes in attitudes regarding the distribution of care at the domestic and professional levels, could open up avenues for decent work, for the well-being of marginalised parts of the population and, once again, for the labour insertion of young people and women in promising sustainable agriculture projects.

ACTION PLAN: RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND INTER-TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

Recent studies on sustainable agriculture at global level have been concerned with the multitude of dimensions that foster or impede agricultural transformations and their connection and embeddedness in broader societal contexts (Melchior & Newig, 2021; Aguilera et al., 2020; Gurney et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2010). Concrete leverage points for governing agricultural transitions towards sustainability include public funding of sustainable agriculture, reform of counterproductive incentive systems such as the EU's (PAC), fostering institutions for knowledge exchange and learning as well as knowledge co-production, collaborative governance mechanisms, educational programmes on sustainable agriculture, rural development policies, and local or alternative food governance networks. Private governance through agribusiness has not yet changed the rules of the game, but neither have any of the other initiatives (Melchior and Newig, 2021).

At the plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in September 2020, the opinion “An integrated approach for the EU’s rural areas, with special emphasis on vulnerable regions”⁶ was adopted. It stresses the need for action in five dimensions. In the **spatial dimension**, by promoting balanced development that rationalises flows between the rural and urban poles of each territory. In the **economic sphere**, by encouraging decentralisation and diversification to promote a rebalancing of incomes. In the **social sphere**, by guaranteeing access to essential services such as education, health, transport and culture. In the **environmental sphere**, by supporting agro-ecology and defending biodiversity. Finally, at the **institutional level**, by creating an accompanying ecosystem that facilitates progress in the other dimensions. Taking these dimensions into account, employment policies and other local, national and supranational regulations with an impact on the inclusion of young people and women must combine short-term responses with other structural initiatives that holistically address the different dimensions that make sustainable agriculture an essential element for social cohesion, food security and the equitable and sustainable development of territories. In this respect, an action plan is proposed to create favourable conditions in terms of the three axes mentioned in the previous section.

⁶ <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/integrated-approach-eus-rural-areas-particular-emphasis-vulnerable-regions-own-initiative-opinion>

Spatial dimension

Inclusion: a holistic approach addressing production and consumption

The depletion of essential goods such as water and soils are only the most visible part of the climate vulnerability to which the Mediterranean area is exposed. This goes far beyond the gains of agricultural production and affects all citizens and, in general, biodiversity in this region. In this sense, regional policies must not only aim to generate a production model that is less dependent on imports of basic goods, more diversified and more resilient. It is also a question of reviewing consumption and distribution patterns and behaviour, as well as energy efficiency and the use of fertilisers and other environmentally aggressive practices that are currently widespread in the sector. Here, the empowerment of citizens and education in models that put the common good first is vital at all stages of life and in all sectors of the population. Introducing the human rights framework in the process of transition to a more sustainable model is essential to ensure that all regulatory frameworks, consultation mechanisms and social dialogue processes are implemented with due regard for the dignity of all people and guaranteeing access to these basic goods that are currently threatened by climate change and unsustainable practices.

Environmental dimension

Proximity: fostering territorial solutions

Despite the proliferation of alarmist narratives about migration flows, evidence shows that populations in rural environments exposed to climate change often prefer to remain in their territories (Gurney et al., 2021). This evidence reinforces the argument that long-term rural development policies focused on structural change in the relationship between communities and territories can contribute not only to the employability of young people, but also to greater social cohesion and to alleviating some of the economic, environmental and public health pressures exerted by the current urbanisation process in the Mediterranean. In this regard, it is important to approach sustainable agriculture from a broader perspective that encompasses the processes of production, distribution, consumption and socio-cultural relations that are articulated around food systems. The permanence of rural populations in their territories, as long as it is the result of a personal choice within a broad framework of possibilities, also contributes to the care of soils, landscapes, the agroforestry sector and the revitalisation of the territories through practices favourable to endogenous development.

Economic dimension

Access: land tenure and finance

One of the most clearly identified barriers is access to finance and the structure of agricultural ownership. High barriers to access for young people are a major contributor to the perceived lack of opportunities and

low attractiveness of the sector.⁷ The revival and promotion of ethical and solidarity-based financing initiatives, as well as forms of ownership and use of the commons, is a relevant opportunity in this regard.

Support: balancing trade-offs between incentives and outcomes

Sustainable policies should seek to adopt an integrated approach that addresses both short-term priorities such as profitability, while simultaneously working towards long-term environmental outcomes. In this regard, the most vulnerable farming systems may suffer from productivity losses in the short-term that would prevent them from transitioning to sustainable practices.

Social dimension

Redistribution: restructuring public services and care work

Correcting inequalities and promoting inclusion in the sustainable agriculture sector implies assessing and reviewing the evolution of the sector according to dimensions that go beyond the purely productive. To a large extent, the sustainability of the sector depends on the distribution of work and care at household and local level, with a heavy burden on women in terms of childcare and care for the elderly. Women and migrants, especially young people, are subjected to spirals of precariousness that include domestic work, accompanying people, lack of access to land or even to their own income, and to situations of domestic violence against which they are often unprotected. Promoting rural development plans that take all these circumstances into account and proactively seek to reverse them is central to this action plan.

Regularisation

Fair and decent work is a pre-condition for people's access to basic rights, needs and services, as well as to their contribution to their societies and communities. Providing regular, safe and sustainable migration pathways in the Mediterranean will also help address the demographic imbalances that are accelerating urban depopulation and that may widen rural-urban gaps in the coming years. This includes facilitating training exchanges between the two shores of the Mediterranean that expand the chances of young people and women on both shores to launch or join sustainable, caring, responsible and prosperous professional projects.

Institutional dimension

Knowledge: investment in accessible knowledge, technology and innovation

Investment in training, research and development is essential. However, an additional effort is needed to correct the inequalities in access to knowledge and technologies that increase productivity and

⁷ For more information, consult the position by Via Campesina Europe: <https://www.eurovia.org/publications/ecvc-youth-articulations-position-document-on-the-reform-of-the-common-agricultural-policy/>

sustainable development and which are much more prevalent in the countries on the northern shores of the Mediterranean. In addition to increasing the development gap that already exists in the Mediterranean basin, the exclusion of the southern populations from this pillar would be a lost opportunity to take advantage of knowledge and experience that could be key in the fight against climate change.

Cooperation: enhancing local knowledge recovery and exchange

One of the main characteristics of sustainable agriculture and climate change adaptation and mitigation has to do with the responsible use of territorial solutions. The localised nature of many sustainable agriculture initiatives and the diffuse regulatory framework in which some of them are embedded – especially those that promote the social and solidarity economy – make it difficult to expand and nurture the local knowledge and capacities that are generated in them. Hence, it is necessary to identify, analyse and link initiatives in different parts of the Mediterranean that face the effects of climate change by promoting sustainable models with relative success. The exchange of practices and cooperation between public and private actors and citizen groups operating in this sector is key to its efficient and equitable articulation and expansion.

Regulation: optimising existing regulatory frameworks

Although many national and regional strategies and policies recognise the importance of favouring youth employment in sustainable development, greater vertical and horizontal coordination of the different governance frameworks would be necessary to promote the necessary structural changes. Young farmers' associations such as Terra! and Via Campesina point out that, although generational renewal is one of the 10 strategic objectives of the CAP – although the resources allocated are lower than those allocated to most of the other objectives – bureaucratic demands and the requirements of employment and land ownership compromise its effectiveness. Accordingly, the CAP should review, correct and expand the instruments available to support youth and women's employment in sustainable agriculture, including resource allocation, incentives, vocational training, and access to land and credit. In addition, the **European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)**, including the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**, can provide further financial and technical support to promote rural development, job creation and sustainable farming practices. Other programmes such as the **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)**, the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**, the **European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)**, the **EU Gender Equality Strategy** or the **European Green Pact** should align not only their objectives, but also their access and social dialogue mechanisms and instruments for action at all levels. Beyond EU frameworks, projects and programmes that bring together key actors in the development of agriculture in the Mediterranean, such as the **International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM)** or **Plan Bleu**, should systematically and fluidly dialogue with the New European Agenda for the Mediterranean. The creation of an observatory that oversees policy coherence across these frameworks may be an effective channel to connect local initiatives and stakeholders with regional objectives.

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