

The challenge of land abandonment after 2020 and options for mitigating measures



See the full study

Around 30% (or 56 million ha) of agricultural areas in the EU as a whole are under at least a moderate risk of land abandonment and in almost half of EU Member States this percentage reaches 50% of agricultural areas. Effective agricultural land abandonment in the EU-27 might total 5 million ha by 2030, or 2,9 % of the current EU-27 Utilised Agricultural Area (173 million ha).

Main observations

Remote areas, mountains, islands, coastal and sparsely populated areas are particularly affected by the phenomenon.

The study

This study examines the phenomenon of land abandonment, its consequences and mitigation options. It provides an overview of the possible future evolution of land abandonment in the EU by 2030, its historical evolution and current state of play.

The prevalence of low and high risk of land abandonment for arable land, permanent crops and pastures is not particularly dependant on the type of land cover, but rather on the geography. In contrast, heterogeneous agricultural areas are affected by high risk scenarios, irrespective of their location or geography.

The complex patterns of drivers of land abandonment reveal an interrelated web of bio-physical, farming, structural, market, regional, institutional, and policy factors. Despite the wide array of factors, management issues and structural adaptation are the key driving forces of the phenomenon. Land abandonment has specific environmental implications which might threaten the future of semi-natural habitats, the quality of high nature value farmland and linkages of NATURA 2000 sites and highly appreciated cultural landscapes. At the same time, under specific conditions and in certain phases of the abandonment process, beneficial outcomes concerning biodiversity and habitat preservation can be observed.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) interventions have varied effects on the process and the extent of land abandonment. Policies that provide income support and enable the proliferation of social and environmental public goods yield positive effects. Negative effects can be observed in areas where CAP measures unintentionally increase competition between regions, adversely affect land-use patterns, or fall short of achieving environmental and biodiversity goals.

The current land abandonment trends will also be affected by three major external factors on which stakeholders have little influence but which will have a significant impact on land use change: climate change, globalisation of markets and major health crises.



Conclusions and policy recommendations

Policy tools to alleviate the effects of these external factors and impact the other drivers of land abandonment include:

- The improvement of farming conditions (education and training programmes higher financial security, lower threshold for supporting small farms, new investment sources and easier access to land).



Access this note

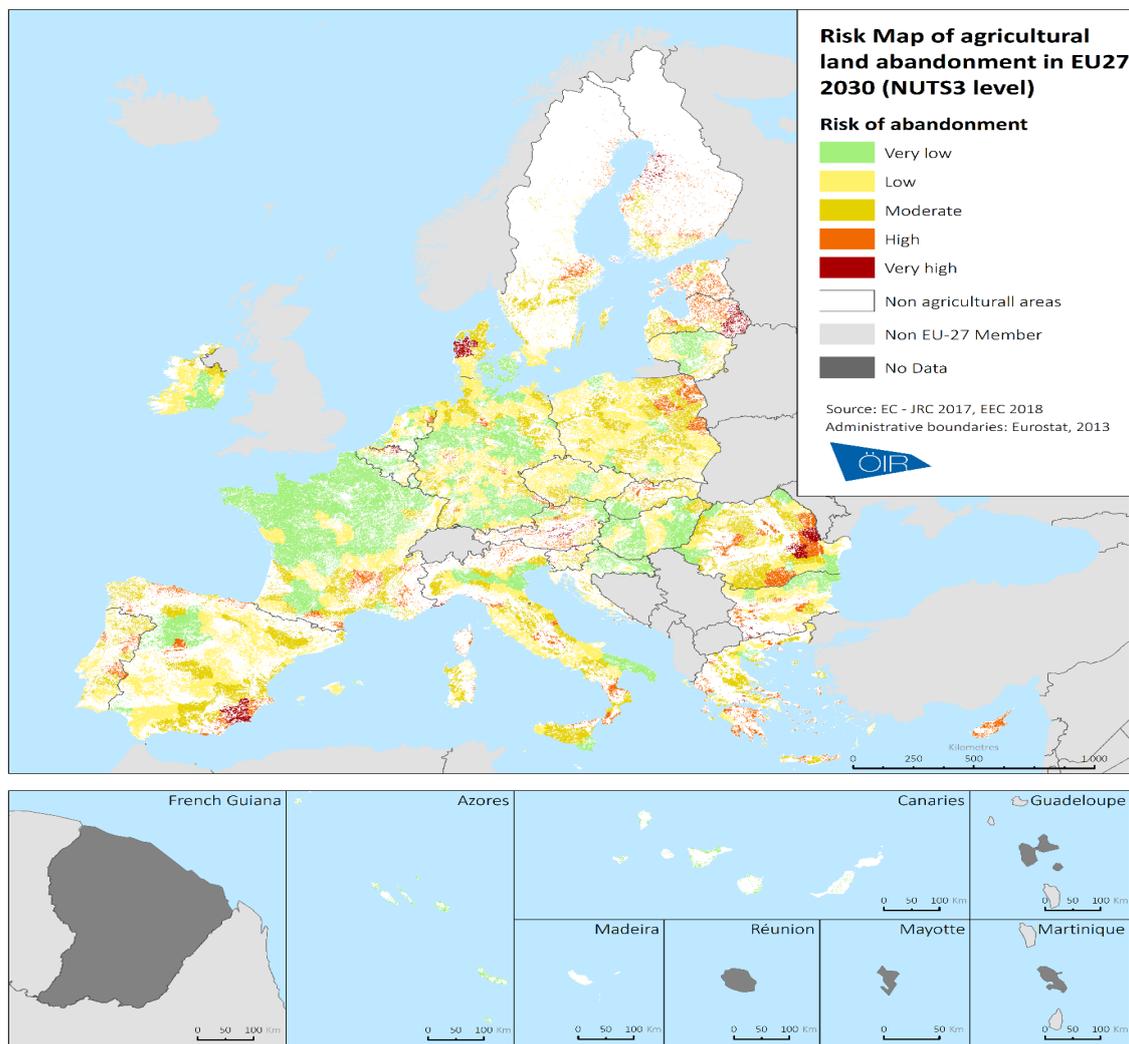
- Support to areas with natural constraints (ANC) and measures better tailored to address the risk of land abandonment.
- Forestry and environmental measures adjusted to the different vulnerabilities in different regions to mitigate the negative environmental effects of land abandonment.
- Rural services of general interest (SGIs) and investment in rural infrastructure used in synergy

with the different European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF) and land use and regional development policies.

Key areas for EU action

1. Improvement of farming conditions.
2. Support to areas with natural constraints.
3. Forestry and environmental measures adjusted to the different vulnerabilities in different regions.
4. Rural services of general interest (SGIs) and investment in rural infrastructure.

Risk of land abandonment in EU27 at NUTS-3 level



Source: Consortium, 2020, based on Perpiña Castillo et al., 2018.

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Publication: January 2021. © Image on page 1 used under the licence from Adobe Stock

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