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# Farmland abandonment in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

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13th International LANDNET Workshop  
Skopje, North Macedonia  
25-27 May 2022

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## Outline

- Questions of definition
- Scale and recognition
- Causes and drivers
- Policy responses





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## Farmland abandonment as a wicked policy problem

- 'A class of social system problems that are ill formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing'. Churchman 1967
- Agricultural land which is **no longer farmed, for economic, social or other reasons**, and which is not used in the crop rotation system which means that no agricultural use is intended. Pointereau et al 2008:20
- Connects to debates on what type of food production systems, on how best to preserve biodiversity, how to manage scarce water supplies, how can ecosystems adapt to deal with climate change as well as social questions such as urban crowding and the problem of the left behind areas



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## Scale and Recognition

- Longstanding and ongoing process – In Europe, 120m hectares abandoned since 1990. (Levers et al 2018)
- Pointereau et al (2008) measured FLA as **the loss of Utilized Agricultural Area** between Farm Structural Surveys. Poland, France and Spain total UAA loss of 3.3 million hectares, 2% of UAA lost in France, 4% in Poland and 8% in Spain.
- Between 2008-10, the Hungarian authorities identified approximately 890,000 hectares of land which was no longer worked or was no longer suitable for agricultural activity and ineligible for direct payments (European Court of Auditors 2012)
- Estimates that 11% of EU Utilised Agricultural Area at risk of abandonment between 2015-2030.



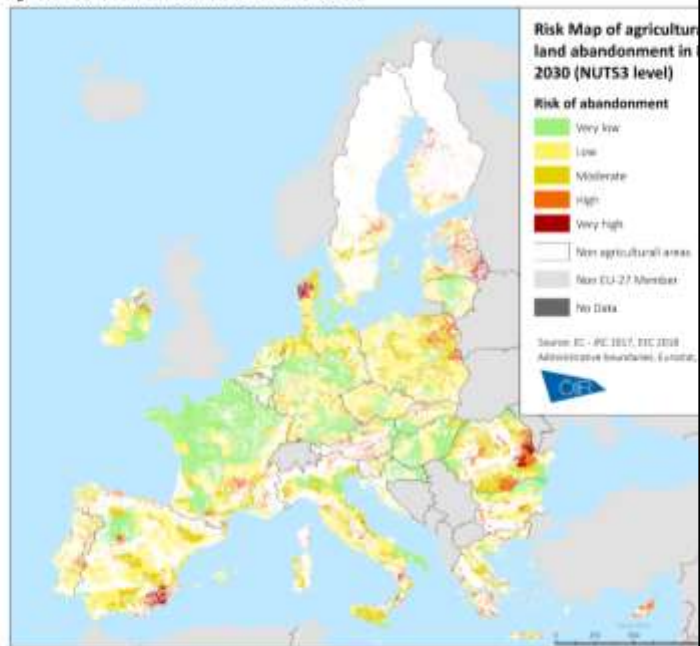
## Groups of drivers

**Table 6: Groups of drivers and main aspects of land abandonment**

| Group of drivers        | Main features   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Bio-physical factors    | Soil, climate, topography   |
| Market-related factors  | Market integration/access; value chain organization; food demand and food quality needs; recognition of public goods                                  |
| Agricultural structures | Size of farms (and farm plots); specialization of farming; property rights/ownership structure; extension services; role of commons                   |
| Policy impact           | CAP, including implementation strategy and operation; other relevant EU policy (SF, regional, social, environmental ...); regional and local policies |
| Institutional framework | Sector organization and representation; regional development institutions; public-private cooperation; local decision patterns                        |
| Regional context        | Local integration and demand; demographic trends; labour market and pluriactivity; tourism type and relevance; local identity and perception          |

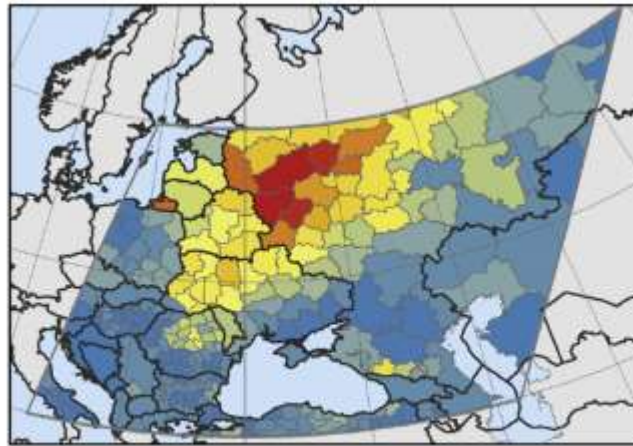
Source: Consortium, 2020.

**Figure 7: Risk of land abandonment in EU27 at NUTS-3 level**





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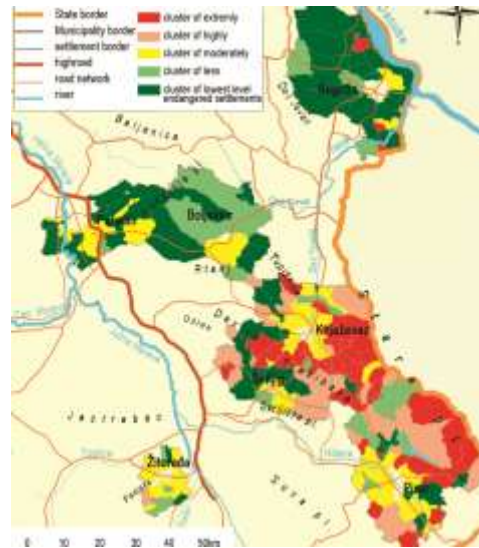
Study region  
Country boundaries



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Исследования, мониторинг, развитие  
ландшафтов и экосистем  
горных территорий





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## Key Findings of European Parliament report 2020

- 30% of agricultural land at moderate risk of becoming abandoned. By 2030, effective land abandonment might be 5 million hectares or 2.9% of the UAA.
- FLA is a 'local phenomenon' with complex set of drivers. However, management issues and structural adaptation are the key driving processes.
- The environmental impact of FLA can be both harmful and beneficial. Current CAP policy tools can help, but their effectiveness varies by farm type and production group.
- Things will probably get worse because of climate change, globalisation and health crises.
- Policy tools – focus on improving farming conditions, adapt support to those areas with 'natural constraints', forestry and environmental measures and finally, work out how best to support rural communities.



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## What it does not mention.

1. No mention of how land markets contribute, (lots of mentions of markets, especially labour market, globalisation of markets and integration of producers into markets).
2. No mention of land consolidation or land banks.
3. No mention of incomplete land reforms or out of date cadastres
4. No mention of missing or unknown owners.
5. Land fragmentation not considered



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## Next steps then?

- In addressing farmland abandonment, critical to show how land questions are central to effective management. Connect to the local monitors.
- Land tenure questions support structural adaptation e.g. facilitate land succession, support small farm improvement, allow for crop relocation and ecosystem regeneration.
- Connect land abandonment to food security debates, biodiversity protection, water management and climate change.
- Find a fair balance between public goods and the legitimate expectations of the rural population. Social consequences of farmland abandonment should not be the costs of environmental gains.
- Introduce credible place based alternatives, require proper consultation, back up with trustworthy institutions and thereby, ensure a just transition.



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## Thank you for your attention!

Contact us  
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