

# REPORT SUMMARY: Task 4.1c

## The effectiveness of policies promoting sustainable permanent grassland across five European countries (representing five biogeographic regions)



**SUPER-G**  
SUSTAINABLE PERMANENT GRASSLAND

### PURPOSE AND AIMS

The report details the findings of task 4.1c of the Horizon 2020 SUPER-G project, which investigates the maintenance and sustainable management of permanent grassland (PG) in Europe, and sets out to (i) increase understanding of the importance and functioning of PG; (ii) benchmark PG performance across Europe; (iii) develop integrated approaches for sustainable PG management; and (iv) develop tools and policy mechanisms inclusive of stakeholder and citizen priorities.

The purpose of this report was to:

- i. Identify and map (describe) the most relevant policies that impact PG management across five European biogeographic regions (Atlantic, Continental/Pannonian, Alpine, Boreal and Mediterranean)
- ii. Understand their policy logic; and
- iii. Evaluate their effectiveness; in order to
- iv. Provide an empirical assessment and recommendations for further research that will lead to policy improvements in relation to PG management and delivery of ecosystem services (ES).

### RATIONALE

In developed agricultural systems, an increasingly common policy approach is the provision of agricultural subsidies for goods and services beyond the production of marketable food and fibre (Mattison and Norris, 2005). This is often complemented by the existence of environmental policies that aim to protect environments, species and habitats, balancing production with conservation. Existing policies across Europe have contributed to improved opportunity for sustainable land management decisions in some contexts, but have often also been criticised for their complexity, or inadequacy in delivering expected changes. Consequently, we can learn much from differences across Europe through a deeper understanding of the policy logics in place and their outcomes and impacts on PG management and ES. It is through this evidence base that we are able to reflect on past successes and failures with the aim of improving policy (Erjavec, 2018).

### METHODS AND ANALYSIS

To accomplish this, an interdisciplinary, cross-national team from the UK, Switzerland, Spain, Czech Republic, and Sweden reviewed over 50 in-depth policy instruments. With direction from expert stakeholders and a review of the policy landscape, we identified the most relevant policy instruments influencing PGs.



The mapping of each country's policy mix was guided inter-alia by a 'cascade framework' to illustrate the entry points, intermediary actors, mechanisms and pathways through which policies deliver their intended effects on PGs. This entailed an in-depth analysis of publicly available government sources documenting the aims, objectives, targets, monitoring systems, outputs and outcomes of each policy instrument.

In total, 24 policies were mapped using 50 different criteria, with 15 of the policies unique to the case study countries. This resulted in an extensive excel database of over 3400 unique cells containing rich qualitative data.

The excel data were coded in a consistent manner across the country teams so that they could be compared, synthesized, and used to identify patterns in the policy mix and logic of intervention. For instance, across Europe, the dominant policy logic uses regulations and incentives to influence farmer adoption of desired landscape compositions. This directly influences, but does not guarantee, the range of ecosystem services (ES), including water quality and quantity regulation, soil protection, carbon storage, nutrient cycling, food production, spiritual and cultural value, and recreational spaces that are possible from the landscape.

To complement the policy mapping, stakeholders assessed the perceived effectiveness of the policy mix in each country. This evaluation included over 50 interviews with key stakeholders across Europe representing government, academia, farmers, and special interests, and covered perceptions of democracy, legitimacy, relevance, efficiency and impact in relation to the effectiveness of policies relevant to the management of PG.

## FINDINGS

The policy environment in Europe is extremely complex, and evaluating a policy mix addressing a specific land use as a whole is difficult. In the case of this review, we found that there were **few policies that directly target PG**, and as such decisions made about their management are affected by a broad range of other policies affecting agriculture, landscape, environmental change, conservation and production. We have identified the **central role of EU CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) Pillar I and II (and the key agricultural and environmental policy in Switzerland)** in shaping the economic, social and environmental context in which PGs are managed. This is supplemented by **other policies at the EU level including Habitats Directive, Nitrates Directive and Climate Change policies**, which stakeholders identified as the most important EU policy influences on PG management.

In relation to better understanding policy logics across the case study countries, we found that many of the policies, targeting PG management, use incentives and regulations and justify their existence by claiming benefits towards specific ES. However, our mapping data shows there is often a **gap between policy rationale to improve particular ES (e.g. improved climate regulation through carbon storage, or improved species diversity) and actual measures used to ensure that policy objectives are met**. This is not surprising since policy outcomes at the level of actor behaviour, such as changes in landscape management, understood through number of sign-ups to a particular management scheme, tend to be easier to measure than policy impacts like the ES that flow from the landscape (Caviglia-Harris et al., 2003).

At the same time, we discovered a **lack of policies targeting consumer demand for PG ecosystem services and only a few designed to drive sustainable PG management by directly promoting the value of PGs with beneficiaries**. Perhaps the general lack of (and lack of prominence of) such policies is because they are often difficult to implement and are seen as indirect (and potentially inefficient in the short term) modes of achieving given policy outcomes. Although we recognise that this review did not include informal and voluntary policies, and therefore more research is needed into the type of consumer focus taken within these, we view that there is potentially a missed policy opportunity to design and implement more consumer-led policy around ES delivery. The increased flexibility that member states will have in the CAP reform 2021 could potentially address this additional policy focus. However, this is unlikely to occur without intervention in the policy development cycle.

Our findings reveal **generally positive perceptions of grassland policy effectiveness across Europe**, with special interest groups being the least positive and governments the most. However, as we have found a wide variety of interests represented in PG management, where stakeholder group agendas do not align, despite their shared environment of the PG landscape, conflicts can also occur. As such a **disparate mix of groups and messages emerge around policy and best management practices**. The net result of this may be that decision-makers embrace the simplest messages and solutions, particularly where they fit current economic and political models and ideals. Often the primary rhetoric denotes that without subsidies for farmers, farms and their social networks and supply chains will disappear along with the grasslands that provide essential ES such as carbon storage, unique biodiversity, landscape aesthetics and associated cultural heritage. We suggest that unless stakeholders that represent **broader societal interests can (better) access the structures, opportunities and resources to work through conflicts, as well as to bridge competing legislative requirements**, policies will continue to reflect the interests of landowners and land managers.

The in-depth country case studies reveal striking similarities, as well as differences between countries and stakeholder groups, which are illustrative of the problems, challenges, and barriers confronting policy effectiveness.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We conclude this report by offering insights and policy implications. In particular, we suggest that the following four points are taken into consideration to improve the PG policy landscape:

- 1) Reduce complexity and administrative burden to make policies more understandable and accessible.
- 2) Require and better facilitate stakeholder involvement when developing strategic plans and assessing policy.
- 3) Encourage consideration of trade-offs between PG management and ES delivery, by designing policies to explicitly target the interaction between landscape structures and ES (or target them in parallel).
- 4) Encourage a balance of policy logic, between targeting farmers with regulation or subsidies to manage the landscape, and targeting consumer demand for ES (through information) and the value of ES (such as direct payments for regulating and cultural services).

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