

# IRENA Indicator Fact Sheet

## IRENA 04 – Area under nature protection

### Indicator Definition

Proportion of Natura 2000<sup>1</sup> sites covered by Natura 2000 habitats that depend on a continuation of extensive farming practices.

### Indicator links:

Input Indicator Links:

IRENA 13 – Cropping and livestock patterns

IRENA 15 - Intensification/extensification (D)

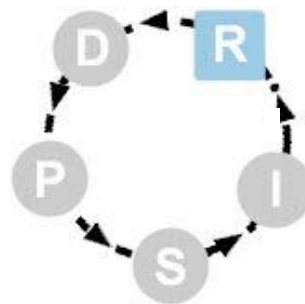
IRENA 26 - High Nature Value farmland (P)

IRENA 33 - Impact on habitats and biodiversity (I)

### Output Indicator Links:

IRENA 01 – Area under agri-environment support

IRENA 33 - Impact on habitats and biodiversity (I)



### Key message<sup>2</sup>

1. Across the EU-15 targeted agricultural Natura habitat types<sup>3</sup> represent about 18% of the terrestrial part of the Natura 2000 network. This means that 15-20% of the EU-15 Natura 2000 area depends on a continuation of extensive farming practices, such as for example hay-making or extensive sheep grazing.
2. The share of Habitats Directive Annex I targeted agricultural habitats within Natura 2000 sites ranges from 0 to 82% for 381 administrative regions of the EU-15.
3. The highest proportion of targeted agricultural habitats relying on extensive farming practice is found in Portugal, Denmark, Italy and Sweden, where it exceeds 20% of their Natura 2000 land area.

<sup>1</sup> IRENA 4 relies on data from sites proposed by Member States under the Habitats Directive. For the purpose of this indicator these sites are referred to as “Natura 2000 sites”. See the introduction for further clarification.

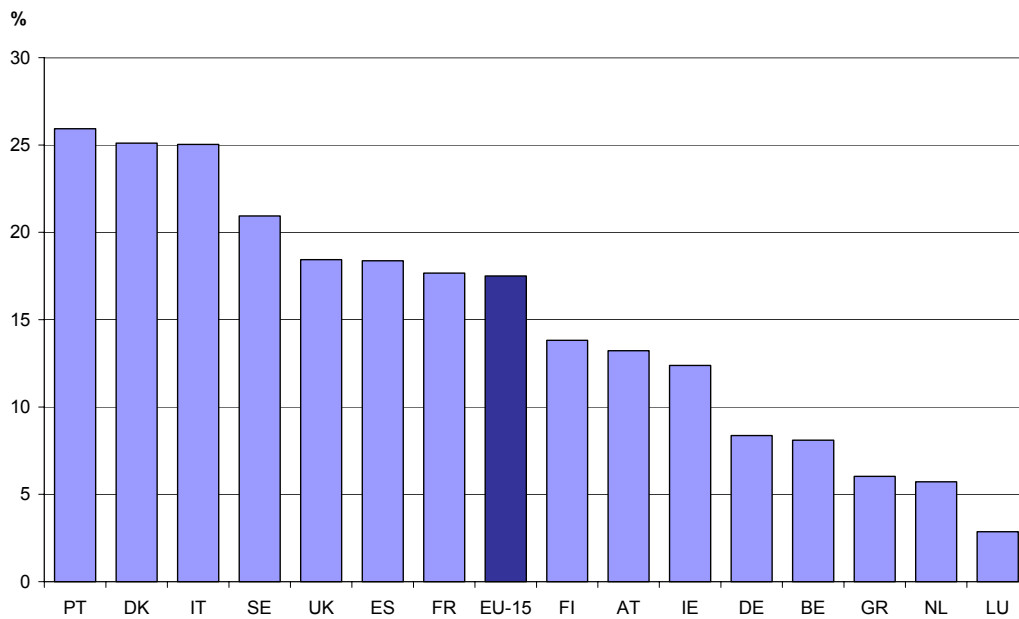
<sup>2</sup> The process of proposing sites is not yet completed and the key messages are therefore based on a snapshot of data from March 2005 at Member State level and July 2004 at regional level.

<sup>3</sup> The targeted agricultural habitat types are for the purpose of this indicator defined as the habitats in the Habitats Directive Annex I that depend on a continuation of extensive farming practices. See also Table 4.1.

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**Figure 4.1** The relative area of Natura 2000 sites covered by 33 targeted agricultural habitats of Annex I that depend on a continuation of extensive farming practices (Snapshot March 2005).

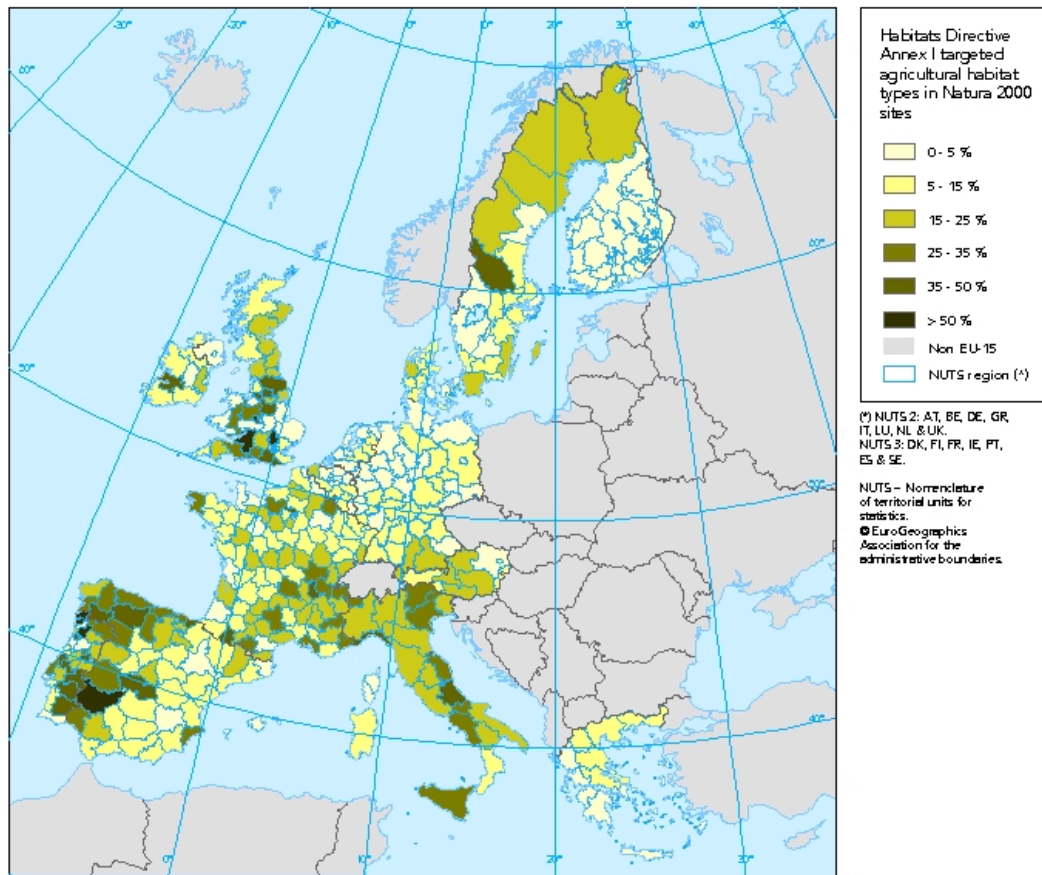


**Source:** Reporting of Member States in the framework of the Habitats Directive (92/42/EEC)

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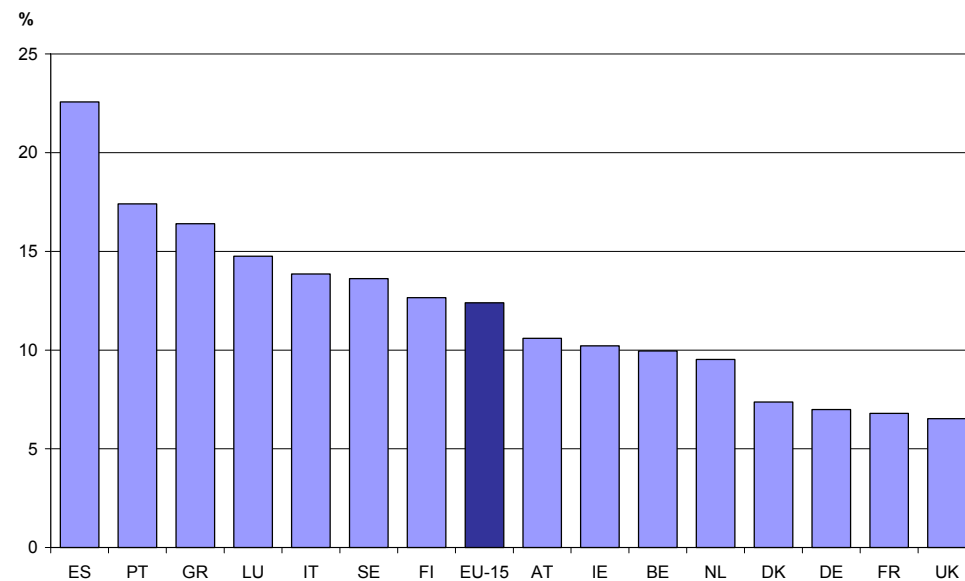
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**Figure 4.2** Share of targeted agricultural habitat types (Annex I habitats dependent on extensive farming practices) within Natura 2000 sites (Snapshot July 2004).



**Source:** Reporting of Member States in the framework of the Habitats Directive (92/42/EEC)

**Figure 4.3** Proportion of Member States' terrestrial surface covered by Natura 2000 sites (Snapshot March 2005)



**Source:** Reporting of Member States in the framework of the Habitats Directive (92/42/EEC)

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### Results and assessment

#### Introduction

Traditional agricultural practices have shaped the landscape and habitat types of Europe over centuries and many of the semi-natural habitat types in Europe are dependent on the continuation of appropriate farm management. The polarization of extensive farming systems into either intensive high-input farm management or abandonment is threatening many semi-natural habitat types and their biodiversity (Ostermann, 1998).

The EU Habitats Directive is concerned with the protection of natural habitats, fauna and flora and the creation of a network of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). In July 2004 it contained 16,184 sites. This network together with the network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) under the Birds Directive makes up the Natura 2000 network.

The Habitats Directive includes lists of species (Annex II) and habitats (Annex I) for which the Member States shall propose Sites of Community Importance (pSCIs). The criteria for selection of pSCIs are given in Annex III of the Directive. The European Commission establishes in agreement with each Member State a list of proposed Sites of Community Importance. The Member States then have up to six years to designate the proposed sites as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The Alpine list and the Macaronesian list of sites have been adopted so far. Data are not yet available on the number of SACs under these two lists and this indicator focuses on pSCIs and SCIs as a proxy for the SACs. Virtually all SCIs will become SACs in the near future. The same analysis may be carried out for SACs when these have been designated.

This indicator only deals with EU-15 countries and only with terrestrial parts of sites proposed under the Habitats Directive. At present the new EU Member States are providing proposals to the Commission on SPAs and pSCIs but a formal evaluation of the proposals is not scheduled until sometime in 2005 and information has therefore not yet been entered in the Natura 2000 database.

Figure 4.3 shows the current proportion of Member States' terrestrial surface covered by pSCIs and SCIs. For the purpose of this indicator the pSCIs and SCIs are referred to as Natura 2000 sites. The Mediterranean countries (ES, PT, GR, IT), two Scandinavian countries (SE and FI) and LU have a higher proportion of their territory covered by Natura 2000 sites than the EU-15 average.

Extensive and intensive agricultural habitat types can be found inside many Natura 2000 sites. Agricultural land use can continue inside the sites as long as no damaging activities are exerted on Annex I habitat types or Annex II species. Member States have to ensure the favourable conservation status of the species and habitats mentioned in the Directive. Thus, they also have to ensure that agricultural practices (or the lack of) do not deteriorate the quality of the Natura 2000 sites.

#### Policy relevance and context

The political context of this indicator is the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). Annexed to the Directive are lists of habitats (198) and species (704) that are of Community interest and for which conservation areas need to be proposed. The Natura 2000 sites include different types of European ecosystems. Some sites are in coastal areas, or in open marine waters, some contain lakes or are riverine, and many include forest and farmland.

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive requests Member States to perform appropriate management schemes to ensure the favourable conservation status of the species and habitats in Annex I and II. All the habitats of Annex I are described in the Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats (European Commission, 2003). The manual and a study by Ostermann (1998) are used to link Annex I habitat types to agricultural management practices. Moreover, comments from Member States during the review process of the indicator were also useful for an evaluation of the relevant habitats. The 33 habitat types of Annex I identified as threatened by either abandonment of extensive farming practices or by intensification of agricultural activities are listed in Table 4.1. Their existence will thus depend

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on the continuation of appropriate extensive agricultural management, such as haymaking or grazing. This means that there may be a need to adapt or encourage agricultural activities to maintain Natura 2000 sites. The indicator provides information on where extensive farming practices are most needed in order to ensure the favourable conservation status of targeted habitats and species.

This indicator should also be seen in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), in particular its rural development part (Council Regulation – 1257/1999). Relevant policy measures under the rural development policy include agri-environment schemes and compensatory allowances for less favoured areas, including “areas with environmental restrictions”. The share of agricultural land enrolled in agri-environment measures in total utilised agricultural area (UAA) has increased from approximately 21% in 1998 to 25% in 2002 (see IRENA 1 – Area under agri-environment support). There is no information, however, on the share of proposed Natura 2000 sites that is covered by relevant agri-environment schemes. Furthermore, additional monitoring of the impact of agri-environment schemes on biodiversity needs to be carried out (Kleijn and Sutherland, 2003).

Another important source of funding in Natura 2000 sites is currently the LIFE-nature programme. LIFE-Nature co-finances projects exclusively linked to the Bird and Habitats Directive and aims at conserving natural habitats and wild flora and fauna. Concerning agriculture the LIFE funded projects are mainly demonstration projects and may include actions such as site restoration, investments and design of sustainable management practices. About €60 million per year are available for LIFE-Nature projects.

### Agri-Environmental Context

The indicator shows the importance of extensive farming practices for nature protection. The 33 habitat types from Annex I of the Habitats Directive that depend on a continuation of extensive farming practices are listed in Table 4.1. These habitats are typically open semi-natural habitats such as grasslands, or species rich hay and *Molinia* meadows, or heaths and fens. Without management these habitat types will lose most of their typical species composition via the invasion of shrubs and tree species (Ostermann, 1998).

General economic and technological trends require farms to increase production efficiency and cut labour costs. This often leads to cessation of traditional farming practices and/or agricultural intensification. So, the challenge in these farmland areas is to provide economic incentives and advice to landholders for a continuation of wildlife friendly farming practices. This can be achieved through agri-environment schemes, rural development and other measures including LIFE-Nature projects. One possible planning tool for finding an appropriate combination of measures are the required site management plans that have to be established by Member States for each Natura 2000 area.

LIFE-Nature funds have played an important role as a catalyst for the establishment of site management plans. Site management agreements have to be drawn up in consultation with landholders and stakeholders. Their purpose is to outline the farming practices favourable to nature conservation or to suggest modifications of existing practices to be more compatible with Natura 2000 objectives.

LIFE-Nature funds have been used to support and carry out innovative projects providing best practices and demonstration projects of agricultural management techniques compatible with nature conservation. Some projects focus on the restoration of degraded Natura 2000 sites and on possibilities for maintaining the sites through continued agri-environment measures. Other projects provide solutions for the coexistence of farmers and wildlife, e.g. those projects involving large carnivores like bears and wolves. LIFE-funded projects have supported the implementation of targeted agri-environment schemes. Some projects have proposed the fine tuning of existing schemes, while others have designed and proposed entirely new measures, such as local set-aside payments for wetland buffer areas, working in co-operation with farmers and agricultural authorities. Several of the projects initiated through LIFE-Nature funds are continuing today as part of regional or national rural development programmes (European Commission, 2003).

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**Table 4.1** List of 33 targeted habitat types of Annex I of the Habitats Directive that are dependent on a continuation of extensive agricultural practices. (Adapted from Ostermann, 1998)

| Habitat code | Annex I habitat type threatened by either abandonment of extensive agricultural practices or by intensification of pastoral activities. |
|--------------|---|
| 1330         | Atlantic salt meadows   |
| 1340         | Inland salt meadows   |
| 1530         | Pannonic salt steppes and salt marshes  |
| 2340         | Pannonic inland dunes   |
| 4030         | European dry heaths   |
| 4060         | Alpine and boreal heaths  |
| 4070         | Bushes with <i>Pinus mugo</i> and <i>Rhododendron hirsutum</i>  |
| 5130         | <i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands   |
| 6110         | Rupicolous calcareous or basophilic grasslands of the <i>Alyso-Section albi</i>   |
| 6140         | Siliceous Pyrenean <i>festuca eskia</i> grasslands  |
| 6160         | Oro-Iberian <i>festuca indigesta</i> grasslands   |
| 6170         | Alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands  |
| 6180         | Macaronesian mesophile grasslands   |
| 6210         | Semi natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates   |
| 6220         | Pseudo steppe with grasses and annuals of the Thero-Brachypodieta   |
| 6230         | Species rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submontane areas in continental Europe).           |
| 6240         | Sub-continental steppic grasslands  |
| 6250         | Pannonic steppes  |
| 6260         | Pannonic sand steppes   |
| 6270         | Fennoscandian lowland species rich dry to mesic grassland   |
| 6310         | Dehesas with evergreen <i>Quercus</i> spp.  |
| 6410         | <i>Molinia</i> meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils ( <i>Molinion caeruleae</i> )                                    |
| 6420         | Mediterranean tall humid grassland of the <i>Molinio- Holoschoenion</i>   |
| 6440         | Alluvial meadows of river valleys of the <i>Cnidion dubii</i>   |
| 6450         | Northern boreal alluvial meadows  |
| 6510         | Lowland hay meadows ( <i>Alopecurus pratensis</i> , <i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i> )  |
| 6520         | Mountain hay meadows  |
| 6530         | Fennoscandian wooded meadows  |
| 7140         | Transition mires and quaking bogs   |
| 7230         | Alkaline fens   |
| 8240         | Limestone pavements   |
| 9070         | Fennoscandian wooded pastures   |
| 9260         | <i>Castanea sativa</i> woods  |

### Assessment

This indicator is based on data from 16,184 proposed sites under the Habitats Directive, which cover a total of 39.8 million hectares or 12% of the terrestrial EU-15 land territory. It provides a consistent data set across the EU-15.

The proportion of targeted agricultural habitat types within Natura 2000 sites varies among the Member States as shown in Figure 4.1. In July 2004 Portugal had the highest proportion of Annex I agricultural habitats per area of Natura 2000 sites. The process of proposing new sites for Natura 2000 is still ongoing and Figure 4.1 may change by the next update of the Natura 2000 database. Although Figure 4.1 should only be seen as a snapshot of the current situation it still gives an indication of the distribution across Europe of habitats that require extensive farming practices.

The share of targeted agricultural habitats ranges from 0 to 82 % for the 381 administrative regions of the EU-15. The distribution at national level is shown in Figure 4.1, and the average across EU-15 is 18%. Figure 4.2 shows that only a few NUTS areas have more than 50% share of targeted agricultural habitats within their Natura 2000 sites. In particular the UK,

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the western part of the Iberian peninsula, most of Italy, the southeast of France as well as the northern part of Scandinavia have high proportions of Annex I habitat types in their Natura 2000 sites. These are areas where high proportions of extensive agricultural habitat types are protected under the Habitats Directive. In order to maintain a favourable conservation status of these Natura 2000 sites, extensive farming practices such as grazing and haymaking will be important management tools.

In the UK one administrative region (UKK1 – Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and N. Somerset) has 82% of the total area of Natura 2000 sites covered by Annex I agricultural habitat types (Figure 4.2). In this case the majority (97%) is made up of only one Annex I habitat type; the “semi natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates”. The same habitat type also makes up a large proportion (55%) of the sites in the region UKK2 (Dorset and Somerset). In the south (UKJ2 – Surrey and Sussex, UKJ3 – Hampshire) and north of England (UKE4 – W. Yorkshire, UKE2 – N. Yorkshire) the habitat type European Dry Heath is the most dominant of the targeted habitat types and it covers between 80 and 98 % of the sites in the mentioned NUTS regions. Heathland areas in particular require extensive grazing with sheep.

The northern parts of Sweden and Finland have very large pSCI areas. The overall proportion of annex I targeted habitat types for the northern most NUTS areas lies between 15-25% and thus close to the EU average of 17%. In absolute figures, however, these NUTS areas really host huge areas of the targeted habitat types of more than 1.5 million hectares in total. Most of this represents alpine and boreal heaths covering almost 900 000 hectares.

In the south western corner of the Iberian Peninsula the agricultural habitat types within the Natura 2000 sites are dominated by a mosaic of dry open habitats composed of dehesas, pseudo-steppe, dry heath, and chestnut woods (*Castanea sativa*). Dehesas make up the largest proportion of area covered by these habitats. Many of these very biodiversity rich habitats depend on extensive grazing and occasional arable cultivation. Dehesas, for example, would be invaded by Cistus scrub and lose their vitality and diversity and be exposed to much higher fire risks without appropriate management.

The northern part of Portugal also has a couple of NUTS areas with more than 50% targeted agricultural habitats (see Figure 4.2). Again the European dry heath habitat type is dominant with more than 90% cover in Natura 2000 sites in all three NUTS regions and a total area of 58.000 ha.

Figure 4.2 also shows relatively high proportions of annex I agriculture habitats within Natura 2000 sites in the southeast of France and most of Italy. Natura 2000 sites located in the upper part of the Rhone valley and the Saone River in France have high proportions of the habitat types Lowland hay meadows and Molinia meadows (totalling more than 11 000 hectares). These habitat types can be threatened by abandonment of haymaking or abandonment of extensive grazing.

Natura 2000 sites in the Apennines in the central and southern NUTS areas of Italy have a high proportion of semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies (habitat type 6210) and pseudo-steppe (habitat type 6220). Also Sicily shows a high proportion (76%) of Natura 2000 sites covered by pseudo steppe giving a total of 76 000 hectares. Nearly all these habitats have been created through extensive grazing with cattle, sheep and goats.

The aim of the European Union to protect and conserve certain targeted habitat types of Annex I implies that for 33 Annex I habitat types, extensive farming practices should be introduced or maintained. The habitat types that stand out are the alpine and boreal heaths (4060), the European dry heaths (4030), dehesas (6310), pseudo steppe (6220) and semi-natural dry grasslands (6210). A few wet habitat types such as the lowland hay meadows (6510) and the Molinia meadows (6410) are also affected. It should be stressed that the geographical distribution of the targeted agricultural habitat types varies considerably across Europe and therefore the appropriate farming practices may also vary.

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### References

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### Data

The core data are extracted from the Habitats Directive component of the Natura 2000 database managed by the European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity (ETC/NPB).  
The GIS department of the European Environment Agency produced the final map.  
The IRENA04 data sheet is located at EEA (IRENA04.xls).

### Meta data

#### Technical information

1. Data source: The data source is the Habitats Directive component of the Natura 2000 database managed by the European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity. Eurostat provided the NUTS polygons and area data.
2. Description of data:  
Data for the indicator is provided at NUTS 2 and 3 level (NUTS version 7) according to standard IRENA reporting format. Some Member States lack data for certain NUTS and these are therefore reported at a higher NUTS level. Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Italy (IT), Luxembourg (LU), Netherlands (NL) and the United Kingdom (UK) are reported at NUTS 2. Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), France (FR), Ireland (IE), Portugal (PT), Spain (ES) are reported on NUTS 3.  
For each NUTS data are given on:  
- Total area (ha) of Annex I Habitat types threatened by abandonment of agricultural practise within a Natura 2000 site and accumulated for all sites in a NUTS region.



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- Total area (ha) of Natura 2000 site within an administrative NUTS region.

3. Geographical coverage: EU-15
4. Temporal coverage: The indicator is based on the most recent data received from Member States between 1997 and 2004. There is no protocol established for regular update of the Standard Data Form and updated data or corrections are submitted by Member States on an ad hoc basis. The process of proposing sites under the Habitats Directive is still ongoing and further updates to the database are expected.
5. Methodology and frequency of data collection: Geo-referenced information on the extent and distribution of targeted agricultural habitat types at a European level is not available. Instead we use data on geographical parameters and biological characteristics for each Natura 2000 sites, based on those reported by Member States in the Standard Data Form for Natura 2000. Protection of Annex I habitat types is one of the main objectives of the Habitats Directive and these habitat types are therefore highly prioritized in the Standard Data Form. As a consequence very detailed information is requested from the Member States under Section 3 of the Standard Data Form (Ecological information on the Annex I habitat types). For each of the Annex I habitat types present in a Natura 2000 site, information is required on the % cover in the site; conservation status, representativity, relative surface at national level and global assessment.

No common protocol exists for collecting the data, and different approaches have therefore been adopted by Member States in filling out the standard data form. Some Member States use vegetation maps or surveys, whereas others may have used more intensive field studies when filling out the form. In addition, different habitat types may need different assessment techniques. The forms are submitted by the Member States as access database file in a Natura 2000 software format. The data are then incorporated into the central Natura 2000 database managed by the ETC/NPB. No data exists on the spatial distribution of the Annex I habitat types within the Natura 2000 sites. For sites covering more than one NUTS region it is therefore not possible to show the correct distribution of the habitat types within the different NUTS. Instead we assume that a habitat type is present in all NUTS covered by the site, and that its distribution among the NUTS is given in the same proportion as the distribution of the site among the NUTS. So for a Natura 2000 site with several habitat types, all types are assumed to be present in all the NUTS areas covered by the site.

6. Methodology of data manipulation: For each NUTS area: total hectares of Annex I agricultural habitat types inside the Natura 2000 site / total area of the Natura 2000 site (ha).

### Quality information

7. Strength and weakness (at data level): The Natura 2000 database is checked by the ETC/NPB for consistency, such as for example geographical coordinates; percentages adding up to 100% and conformity of habitats. The data for the map are extracted from the database based on information by NUTS regions.

Some Member States however have not indicated NUTS regions for all their sites totalling 381 026 ha that we cannot allocate to a NUTS region. This means that the map in Figure 4.2 is slightly underestimated for some NUTS. In addition there are a few double entries where sites have been assigned as belonging to both marine and terrestrial site lists or they are located partly in a neighbouring country.

For the Figure 4.3 the total area of sites were extracted from the database not considering NUTS regions. This figure is therefore more correct than the area of sites used for the map. All in all however, the total error in cover of sites per country is 0.98% and the data source is considered of a strong quality for this indicator.

8. Reliability, accuracy, robustness, uncertainty (at data level):
9. Overall scoring (give 1 to 3 points: 1=no major problems, 3=major reservations):

Relevancy: 1

Accuracy: 2

Comparability over time: 2

Comparability over space: 2

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**Table 4.2** Data table on extent of Annex I targeted agricultural habitats and of broad agricultural habitat types in EU-15 Member States

| Member State | Total terrestrial area of pSCIs and SCIs (ha) | Area of Annex I agricultural habitat types in pSCIs and SCIs (ha) | % of Annex I agricultural habitat types in pSCIs and SCIs (Figure 4.1) |
|--------------|---|---|--|
| PT           | 1601235                                       | 415415  | 26   |
| DK           | 317696  | 79789   | 25   |
| IT           | 4175072                                       | 1045237   | 25   |
| SE           | 5652319                                       | 1183850   | 21   |
| UK           | 1597290                                       | 294670  | 18   |
| ES           | 11393065                                      | 2092937   | 18   |
| FR           | 3729544                                       | 659003  | 18   |
| EU-15        | 39748837                                      | 6956547   | 18   |
| FI           | 4279054                                       | 591656  | 14   |
| AT           | 888393  | 117501  | 13   |
| IE           | 717450  | 88829   | 12   |
| DE           | 2495647                                       | 208811  | 8  |
| BE           | 303968  | 24632   | 8  |
| GR           | 2164296                                       | 130515  | 6  |
| NL           | 395497  | 22606   | 6  |
| LU           | 38311   | 1099  | 3  |

**Table 4.3** Proportion of MS terrestrial surface covered by pSCIs and SCIs

| Member State | Member State Area (km <sup>2</sup> ) | Total Terrestrial area of pSCIs and SCIs (ha) | Proportion of MS terrestrial surface covered by pSCIs and SCIs (Figure 4.3) |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| ES           | 504782                               | 11393065                                      | 23  |
| PT           | 91990                                | 1601235                                       | 17  |
| GR           | 131940                               | 2164296                                       | 16  |
| LU           | 2597                                 | 38311   | 15  |
| IT           | 301333                               | 4175072                                       | 14  |
| SE           | 414864                               | 5652319                                       | 14  |
| FI           | 338145                               | 4279054                                       | 13  |
| EU-15        | 3205980                              | 39748837                                      | 12  |
| AT           | 83859                                | 888393  | 11  |
| IE           | 70280                                | 717450  | 10  |
| BE           | 30528                                | 303968  | 10  |
| NL           | 41526                                | 395497  | 10  |
| DK           | 43093                                | 317696  | 7   |
| DE           | 357031                               | 2495647                                       | 7   |
| FR           | 549192                               | 3729544                                       | 7   |
| UK           | 244820                               | 1597290                                       | 7   |