

MANDATE OF THE
**Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry
Working Group**
FOR THE PERIOD **2023-2024**
(BETWEEN THE XVII AND XVIII MEETINGS OF THE ALPINE
CONFERENCE)

1. Introductory remarks

Importance of the issues selected and relevance of the proposed way to tackle them

Agriculture and forestry sectors in the Alps are a priority focus for Alpine territories in the phase of ecological transition, with reference to the economy and the socio-cultural and ecological balances of the areas concerned. At the end of June 2021 the European Commission presented the Rural Action Plan, a program with a long-term horizon (by 2040) aiming to promote sustainable, cohesive and integrated development in rural areas (https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en#aivisionforruralareastowards2040).

The aim is to exploit the new opportunities offered by the EU's green and digital transition and the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying ways to improve the quality of life in rural areas, achieve balanced territorial development and stimulate economic growth. Among the various sectors of intervention identified, there are agricultural and forestry activities, considered key to increasing the resilience of local communities, the preservation of natural resources, and the fight against climate change. Another aspect considered is the need to develop the diversification of economic activities in these areas, particularly by supporting tourism and local agri-food and forest-wood chains.

The Plan incorporates concepts contained in the Biodiversity (https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_en) and Farm to Fork (https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en) Strategies, urging actions and interventions that are very important for mountain areas. Several EU and national policies already provide support to Alpine areas, contributing to their balanced, equitable, green and innovative development. Among these, the common agricultural policy (CAP) and cohesion policy will be essential to support and implement strategic action plans for Alpine territories. In the next years it will be necessary to sustain and develop alpine agriculture and forestry, linking them to different aspects (food and fodder, biomass, non-wood forest products, ecosystem services, rural and sport tourism), in order to strengthen the primary economy and encouraging ecological transition, the stabilization of the agricultural and forestry

workforce locally present, and the interconnections with all the other economic and social components.

2. Objectives

Description of the objectives to be achieved until the XVIII Alpine Conference

Obj. 1 – Define the future role of mountain agriculture in sustainable food systems, considering also livestock that, on one hand is connected to the rich and specific biodiversity, landscape quality and cultural heritages (“alpage”), while, on the other hand can be a pressure and it is subject to climate risks.

Obj. 2 - Understand new opportunities for mountain territories in terms of: agricultural and forestry productions and management approaches that favour or are already in line with ecological transition and circular economies; sustainable agricultural and forestry productions that allow to recover abandoned areas; initiation and development of Alpine districts.

Obj. 3 - Understand which physical (e.g. climate change), social (e.g. abandonment, loss of knowledge) or demographic (e.g. depopulation, ageing) risks threaten mountain agriculture and forestry and related actions to be implemented.

Obj. 4 – Evaluate the introduction of technical (e.g. low-impact management techniques) and technological innovations (e.g. smart farming/forestry and precision farming/forestry) in small and medium sized farms and forest activities targeting a good balance of innovations and traditional practices, an efficient use of inputs and favouring reduction of greenhouse gases emissions or increase in GHG sink.

3. Planned Outputs

Description of the planned outputs, with reference to the objectives

Among the main activities to be carried out, the Working Group expects to develop themes of various kinds in support of mountain territories: indications on possible policies (objective 1), on possible paths for socio-territorial development (objectives 2 and 3), paths of technical and infrastructural development (objective 4).

In reference to Obj. 1:

- Identify potentials and limits to the development of mountain agriculture and forestry and the possible policies;

In reference to Obj. 2 and 3:

- Identify new projects and best practices targeting circular economies;
- Quantify the surfaces that could be subject to crop recovery in Alpine areas and identify possible destinations for these areas (crops/livestock/agroforestry) in line with ecological transition and circular economies, and considering sustainability;
- Identify local projects aimed at reducing the depopulation of Alpine areas and the lack of generational change;

- Identify and promote new projects for the integration of foreign communities seeking new employment opportunities in the Alpine primary sector.

In reference to Obj. 4:

- Identify (also through the analysis of projects and farms cases) the most suitable forms to facilitate the adoption of smart techniques/technologies in Alpine areas.

So, the outputs the group would like to achieve consist of:

- Identification of the agricultural and forestry production processes and related supply chains mostly compatible with ecological transition; identification of potential circular economies in mountain agriculture and forestry;
- Quantification of the agricultural areas cultivated up to the 1950s-60s and of the dynamics of abandonment and identification of the administrative/collective processes necessary for their recovery for productive purposes;
- Evaluation of the agriculture/forestry generational turnover ensured by the local/national population; evaluation of the potential agriculture and forestry employment opportunities for foreign communities entering the Alpine regions (considering also capacity building);
- Evaluation of the use of smart technologies in small and medium sized agriculture and forestry activities, targeting innovation while respecting tradition;
- Assessment of the degree of development of district economies and identification of useful actions for their strengthening.

The work will be organised as a series of workshops, organised at easy to reach locations, and/or online to ensure greater participation by stakeholders, facilitated and coordinated by the Working Group.

4. Work plan

Outline of the foreseen timetable (meetings and other activities, main milestones scheduled)

Given the fact that the Alpine area is not homogeneous with respect to the problems highlighted above (some countries are more advanced in the introduction of technological innovations, others are very strong in the promotion of local products, others still have major problems related to abandonment, etc.), a new modus operandi is proposed for the Working Group activities, through the organisation of thematic one-day workshops.

During the single thematic workshops, the aspects that most influence the identified themes will be analysed, so as to allow the Working Group Members to collect sufficient elements to draw up a report on the existing state and on the prospects that can be identified in each Country and in the Alpine Convention area for each of the themes.

Each Delegation and Observer will be asked to identify at least two speakers (one for the agricultural sector and one for the forestry sector) who will present cases of good practice and examples of activities and projects and/or will be invited to round tables.

Depending on the level of relevance of the topic of the different events for each individual Country, the organisation of the specific event will be entrusted to one or more Delegations and Observers, under the supervision and coordination of the Working Group Chair.

After each workshop, the Delegation responsible for its organization will take care of the drafting of the part of the final report relating to the topics investigated during the thematic workshop. The final output will be a report edited by the different Delegations involved in the organization of the workshops that will collect the outcomes and results emerged during the thematic workshops. The Chair of the Group will coordinate the elaboration of the report, while its contents will be under the responsibility of all the Delegations and Observers.

Regular meetings of the Group will continue to be held in order to coordinate the activities and to maintain the focus on the topics and the objectives of interest through the individual events. During the term of this Mandate, it is recommended that at least the first meeting and another meeting will be organised in person. If the Group prefers, the remaining meetings may be held on-line, also to allow for the wider participation possible.

The topics to be addressed and deepened during the Mandate period will reflect the objectives selected by the Group. The themes of the thematic workshops will be agreed and assigned to the Delegations and Observers at the latest during the first meeting of the Working Group.

Tentative work plan (to be adjusted)

February 2023 – 1st WG meeting

June 2023 – 2nd WG meeting

Mid-October 2023 – 1st thematic workshop *“Depopulation and abandonment of Alpine areas: role and opportunities offered by the agri-food and forestry economy”* (Tentative topic/title; with reference to objectives 2 and 3)

January 2024 – 3rd WG meeting

Mid-February 2024 – 2nd thematic workshop *“New forms of circular economy in the mountains: examples and good practices in Alpine areas” and sub-theme “Smart farming and forestry in mountain regions”* (Tentative topic/title; with reference to objectives 4)

April 2024 – 4th WG meeting

April 2024/June 2024 - draft report

May 2024 – 3rd thematic workshop *“Livestock and carbon farming, pastoralism, agroforestry and multifunctional activities in the mountains for the sustainability of the alpine environment”* (Tentative topic/title; with reference to objectives 1)

July 2024/September 2024 - finalisation of the report, elaboration of new Mandate and final approval of the results of the Working Group.

5. Cooperation

Description of the planned cooperation with other Alpine Convention bodies and further relevant partners and processes, and the expected benefits

The Working Group will cooperate with bodies, groups and initiatives within the Alpine Convention, in particular with the Alpine Climate Board, the Alpine Biodiversity Board and will cover a set of topics recalled by the Action programme for a Green economy in the Alpine Region (GEAP).

It is also planned to establish contacts and cooperation with EUSALP, especially with Action Group 6, which deals with agri-food and forestry issues and the potential involvement of thematic projects of the Alpine Space Programme.

6. Communication

Description of the communication goals, targets and respective planned measures

Presentation of terms of reference and results during discussions with other platforms and partners.

Advertisement of the workshops coordinated between the WG and the local organisers. Publicising the Group's events and main activities through the support of the Permanent Secretariat.

7. Link to the Multi-Annual Work Programme 2023-2030 of the Alpine Conference

Description of how the proposed objectives and activities shall contribute to some or all of the priority areas of the MAP 2023-2030 (biodiversity and ecosystems / climate action / quality of life / interlinkages, synergies, and trade-offs of the aforementioned areas)

The objectives of the Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry WG mandate were identified according to the priority areas and qualitative objectives of the MAP. The Working Group will contribute directly to priority 1 "Conserving and valuing Alpine biodiversity and ecosystems", priority 3 "Enabling a good quality of life for the people in the Alps" as well as to priority 2 "Taking ambitious climate action" through the objectives that relate to the work of the Alpine Climate Board and the Action Programme for a Green Economy in the Alpine Region (GEAP).

8. Chair

The Chair will be held by Italy.