



Questions and Answers: EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - Bringing nature back into our lives

Brussels, 20 May 2020

1. What is the new 2030 Biodiversity Strategy?

The new 2030 Biodiversity Strategy is a comprehensive, systemic and ambitious long-term plan for protecting nature and reversing the degradation of ecosystems. It is a key pillar of the European Green Deal and of EU leadership on international action for global public goods and sustainable development goals.

With an objective to put Europe's biodiversity to recovery by 2030, the Strategy sets out new ways to implement existing legislation more effectively, new commitments, measures, targets and governance mechanisms. These include:

- Transforming **at least 30% of Europe's lands and seas into effectively managed protected areas**. The goal is to build upon existing Natura 2000 areas, complementing them with nationally protected areas, while ensuring strict protection for areas of very high biodiversity and climate value.
- Restoring degraded ecosystems across the EU that are in a poor state, as well as reducing pressures on biodiversity. The Strategy proposes a **far-reaching EU Nature Restoration Plan** that includes: Subject to an impact assessment, developing a proposal for a new legal framework for nature restoration, with binding targets to restore damaged ecosystems, including the most-carbon-rich ones; Improving the conservation status or trend of at least 30% of EU protected habitats and species that are not in a favourable status; Restoring at least 25,000 km of rivers to be free-flowing; Halting and reversing the decline in farmland birds and insects, particularly pollinators; Reducing the overall use of and risk from chemical pesticides, and reducing the use of the more hazardous/dangerous ones by 50%; Manage at least 25% of agricultural land under organic farming, and significantly enhance the uptake of agro-ecological practices; Reducing the losses of nutrients from fertilisers by at least 50% and fertiliser use by at least 20%; Planting at least 3 billion trees, in full respect of ecological principles and protecting the remaining primary and old-growth forests; Eliminating bycatch of protected species or reducing it to a level that allows full species recovery and does not threaten their conservation status.
- Enabling **transformational change**. The Strategy sets in motion a new process to improve biodiversity governance, ensuring Member States integrate the commitments of the strategy into national policies. A Biodiversity Knowledge Centre and a Biodiversity Partnership will support better implementation of biodiversity research and innovation in Europe. The Strategy seeks to stimulate tax systems and pricing to better reflect real environmental costs, including the cost of biodiversity loss, and that biodiversity is truly integrated into public and business decision-making.

2. Why is biodiversity important?

Biodiversity - the variety of life on Earth, including plants, animals, fungi, micro-organisms, and the habitats in which they live - and ecosystems that living species form, provide us with food, materials, medicines, recreation, health and wellbeing. They clean the water, pollinate the crops, purify the air, absorb vast quantities of carbon, regulate the climate, keep soils fertile, provide us with medicine, and deliver many of the basic building blocks for industry.

Damaged ecosystems are more fragile, and have a limited capacity to deal with extreme events and new diseases. Well-balanced ecosystems, by contrast, protect us against unforeseen disasters and, when we use them in a sustainable manner, they offer many of the best solutions to urgent challenges.

Losing biodiversity is:

- a **climate** issue – destroying and damaging ecosystems and soils speeds up global warming while nature restoration mitigates climate change;
- a **business** issue – natural capital provides essential resources for industry and agriculture;
- a **security** and **safety** issue – loss of natural resources, especially in developing countries, can lead to conflicts and increases everywhere vulnerability to natural disasters;

- a **food security** issue – plants, animals including pollinators and soil organisms play a vital role in our food system;
- a **health** issue – the destruction of nature increases the risk and reduces our resilience to diseases. Nature also has a beneficial effect on peoples' mental health and welfare;
- an **equity** issue – loss of biodiversity hurts the poorest most of all, making inequalities worse;
- an **intergenerational** issue – we are robbing our descendants of the basis for a fulfilled life.

3. How will the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy boost Europe's recovery after the coronavirus crisis?

The European Green Deal, including this Biodiversity Strategy, is Europe's growth strategy and will drive the recovery from the crisis. It will bring economic benefits and will help strengthen our resilience to future crises. The three key economic sectors – agriculture, construction and food and drink – are all highly dependent on nature and they generate more than EUR 7 trillion. Benefits of the EU Natura 2000 nature protection network are valued at between EUR 200-300 billion per year.

Investing in nature also means investing in local jobs and business opportunities, such as nature restoration, organic agriculture, and in green and blue infrastructure. The investment needs of the Natura 2000 nature protection network are expected to support as many as 500,000 additional jobs. Organic farming provides 10-20% more jobs per hectare than conventional farms. Greening the cities offers many innovative job opportunities, from designers and city planners, to urban farmers and botanists.

Conversely, if we continue down the business as usual path of ecosystem destruction, the continued degradation of our natural capital will considerably limit business opportunities and socio-economic development potential. The economic and social costs of inaction on environmental and climate issues would be huge, leading to frequent severe weather events and natural disasters as well as reducing the average EU GDP by up to 2% and by even more in some parts of the EU.* The world lost an estimated EUR 3.5-18.5 trillion per year in ecosystem services from 1997 to 2011, owing to land-cover change, and an estimated EUR 5.5-10.5 trillion per year from land degradation. Biodiversity loss results also in reduced crop yields and fish catches and the loss of potential new sources of medicine.

4. How serious is the problem of biodiversity loss?

As a result of unsustainable human activities, the global population of wild species has fallen by 60% over the last 40 years. About 1 million species are at the risk of extinction within decades. The main drivers of this loss are the conversion of natural habitats into agricultural land and the expansion of urban areas. Other causes include the overexploitation of natural resources (such as overfishing and destructive farming practices), climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species.

5. Is there a link between biodiversity loss and spread of diseases?

It is becoming clear that resilience of our society to the risks for outbreaks of zoonotic diseases with pandemic potential is weakened by demographic and economic factors. They put pressure on ecosystems leading to unsustainable exploitation of nature, including deforestation and illegal or poorly regulated wildlife trade.

If we want a healthy society, we need healthy ecosystems. We need enough space for wild animals and we need to have them in sufficient numbers. That way they act as a buffer against diseases that have no place among humans and help prevent pandemic outbreaks.

Global wildlife trade as well as poorly controlled "wet" animal markets in which fish, domestic and wild animals are sold are also an important risk factor for disease spread.

6. How does the Biodiversity Strategy support efforts to fight climate change?

Biodiversity loss and climate change are interdependent. Climate change is the third biggest driver of biodiversity loss and this loss of biodiversity has a negative effect on the climate at the same time. Instead of storing carbon in soils and biomass, damaged ecosystems release it back into the atmosphere. Deforestation increases the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which alters the climate and leads to further biodiversity loss.

Nature based solutions such as protecting biodiversity and restoring ecosystems are an excellent means of countering the effects of climate change and a very cost-effective use of resources. Restoring forests, soils and wetlands and creating green spaces in cities are essential to achieve the climate change mitigation needed by 2030.

The Nature Restoration Plan, a core element of the Biodiversity Strategy, will help reverse the decline of many terrestrial and marine species and habitats and restore them to a healthy condition.

7. How will this transformative change be financed?

The Strategy will require significant investments. At least EUR 20 billion/year should be unlocked for spending on nature, in particular to restore ecosystems, invest in the Natura 2000 network, and in green and blue infrastructure across EU Member States. This will require mobilising private and public funding at national and EU level, including through a range of different programmes in the next long-term EU budget. Moreover, as nature restoration will make a major contribution to climate objectives, a significant proportion of the 25% of the EU budget dedicated to climate action will be invested on biodiversity and nature-based solutions.

Under InvestEU, a dedicated natural-capital and circular-economy initiative will be established to mobilise at least EUR 10 billion over the next 10 years, based on public/private blended finance. Nature and biodiversity is also a priority for the European Green Deal Investment Plan. To help unlock the investment needed, the EU must provide long-term certainty for investors and help embed sustainability in the financial system. The EU sustainable finance taxonomy will help guide investment towards a green recovery and the deployment of nature-based solutions.

8. What will be EU's position in the international negotiations on the post-2020 biodiversity framework?

The Commission's new Biodiversity Strategy outlines the commitments the EU could take at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2021. With this strategy, the Commission proposes to the Council that the EU calls for the following elements to be included:

- Overarching long-term goals for biodiversity in line with the United Nation vision of "living in harmony with nature" by 2050. The ambition should be that by 2050 all of the world's ecosystems are restored, resilient, and adequately protected. The world should commit to the net-gain principle to give nature back more than it takes. The world should commit to no human-induced extinction of species, at minimum where avoidable;
- Ambitious global 2030 targets in line with the EU commitments proposed in the new Biodiversity Strategy;
- Improved means of implementation in areas such as finance, capacity, research, know-how and technology;
- A far stronger implementation, monitoring and review process;
- A fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources linked to biodiversity

9. How will this Strategy help us tackle the global biodiversity challenge?

Although tackling biodiversity loss in Europe is essential for sustainable development, most major biodiversity hotspots are outside Europe.

The EU is committed to lead by example on environmental preservation and sustainable use of natural resources not only within its borders, but also outside. It is also determined to capitalise on international partnerships to promote the biodiversity agenda, as part of the European Green Deal and to accompany the transition in developing countries. This Strategy lays down a decisive political framework to tackle the challenges ahead.

In terms of development cooperation, it lays down how we will engage in greater cooperation with partner countries and offer increased financing for biodiversity-friendly actions, as well as the phasing out of subsidies that can be harmful for nature. On trade, the Commission will deploy measures to ensure that its trade policies 'do no harm' to biodiversity. The EU is also promoting the role of non-state actors and indigenous groups in this process, which is essential to ensure all stakeholders are involved and the transition to a more sustainable development path also benefits the most vulnerable groups.

10. What does the Strategy mean for:

- Agricultural land?

The Biodiversity Strategy, together with the Farm to Fork Strategy published at the same time, includes commitments to reverse the decline of pollinator insects. The Commission proposes that 10% of agricultural land should consist of 'high-diversity landscape features', for instance in the form of hedges or flower strips, and the environmental impacts of the agricultural sector should be significantly reduced by 2030. The progress towards the target will be under constant review, and adjustment if needed, to mitigate against undue impact on biodiversity, food security and farmers' competitiveness. A quarter of agricultural land should be under organic farming management by 2030, and the use and risk from pesticides should be reduced by 50%, as well as the use of the more hazardous/dangerous pesticides.

- Forests?

A major drive is foreseen to protect and restore EU forests, including primary and old growth forests.

An objective of reaching 3 billion additional trees in the EU by 2030, i.e. doubling the current trend, is also included. The aim is to increase the area of forest coverage in the EU, the resilience of forests and their role in reverting biodiversity loss, mitigating climate change and helping us adapt to it.

- Soil?

The Strategy sets a commitment to restore degraded soils, update the EU Soil Thematic Strategy, and achieve EU and international commitments on land degradation neutrality. The Zero Pollution Action Plan for air, water and soil, to be adopted by the Commission in 2021, will address in particular soil contamination prevention and remediation.

- Marine ecosystems?

The Strategy aims to strengthen the protection of marine ecosystems and to restore them to achieve "good environmental status", including through the expansion of protected areas and the establishment of strictly protected areas for habitats and fish stocks recovery. It stresses the need for an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities at sea. This means addressing the overexploitation of fishing stocks to or under, Maximum Sustainable Yield levels (i.e. a level that will allow a healthy future for the fish stock's biomass); eliminating bycatch, or at least reducing it to non-dangerous levels, in order to protect sea mammals, turtles and birds, especially those that are threatened with extinction or in bad status; and tackling practices that damage the seabed.

- Freshwater ecosystems?

The implementation and enforcement of the EU's legal framework on water and nature will be stepped up. In support of this, at least 25,000 km of rivers will be restored to a free-flowing state through the removal of barriers and the restoration of floodplains.

- Cities and local governments?

The promotion of healthy ecosystems, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions should be systematically integrated into urban planning, including in the design of buildings, public spaces and infrastructure, working with the Covenant of Mayors to build a movement towards nature and biodiversity actions and strategies under a new 'Green City Accord'.

- Pollution?

Pollution is a major driver of biodiversity loss. The strategy calls for the elimination of pollution from nitrogen and phosphorus flows from fertilisers by 2030. Fertilizer use should be reduced by at least 20% by 2030. To achieve, this, the Commission shall present a Zero Pollution Action Plan for Air, Water and Soil in 2021, an Integrated Nutrient Management Action Plan in 2022, and an EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability.

- The spread of invasive alien species?

A commitment to significantly limit the introduction of invasive alien species, with the aim of decreasing the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species by 50% is made in the strategy. To achieve this, a new implementation drive for the Invasive Alien Species Regulation is foreseen, focusing on the prevention of new introductions and the management of established invasive alien species.

* <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8219>

QANDA/20/886

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