

## In harmony with nature? The EU risks missing its biodiversity targets (again)

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The European Union likes to portray itself as a “leading player in global biodiversity efforts and negotiations” ([European Environment Agency](#), EEA). However, after [falling far short of its 2020 biodiversity targets](#), the EU now risks to fall short of its 2030 biodiversity targets. Its leadership will be challenged at the sixteenth meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity Conference of the Parties (COP16) from October 21 to November 1, 2024 in Cali, Colombia, where countries will gather to assess progress in implementing the 2022 [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (“the framework”).

The framework includes a target to protect 30% of the world's land and seas by 2030 (the “30x30” target), and has been dubbed the “Paris agreement for nature,” a “historic deal to reverse biodiversity loss.” The EU has pledged to implement policies to stop its contribution to the [sixth mass extinction](#), in which humans are causing a decline in biodiversity that threatens the future of humanity itself. **However, less than half of the EU’s member states have submitted [new national biodiversity strategies and action plans](#) (NBSAPs) to implement the commitments they made under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Key EU countries also do not support international biodiversity efforts sufficiently through their [financial contributions towards an agreed 20 billion dollar](#) commitment by 2025.**

**Špela Bandelj Ruiz, Greenpeace Central & Eastern Europe Biodiversity Campaigner, said:** *“No more empty promises without action - the newly elected EU leaders and Commission have to pass laws that protect vital ecosystems, guarantee clean water and provide healthy food. - The EU must prioritise tackling the climate and ecological crises and ensure a just transition for local communities and their economic well-being.*

*“During UN Biodiversity COP16, representatives of the European Commission will be in the spotlight. The whole world will be watching how they deliver on their existing global commitments, but also if they lead the way towards implementing the targets at home, accompanied by adequate funding.”*

**This media briefing will look at the selected commitments made by the EU in the Global Biodiversity Framework, compare commitments with actions, and analyse the EU's failure to meet its commitments since the signing of the framework.**

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### **Commitment is measured by action, not promises**

While the EU excels at [setting ambitious targets](#), [it has failed to meet them](#) to halt dramatic biodiversity loss at home.

[The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) is Europe's key strategy to achieve global targets, including the “30x30” target. Progress in implementing the strategy should also provide an overview of EU policy alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. [In the communication on the mid-term review of the 8th Environment Action Programme](#), the European Commission stated that the 2030 climate and environmental targets are still within reach. However, the European Environment Agency said in its November 2023 [“Monitoring report on progress towards the 8th EAP objectives”](#) that key biodiversity and ecosystem targets are unlikely to be met on time.

The EU is not on course to achieve its 2030 biodiversity targets for the following reasons:

1. [There is high pressure on land and sea use arising from socio-economic sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and urbanisation.](#)
2. [Legally binding instruments are too few.](#)
3. [There are no robust measures to compel EU Member States to act.](#)
4. [Existing but limited legislation has too many exemptions to achieve its objectives.](#)

President Ursula von der Leyen’s new political programme for her second term at the helm of the European Commission does not include meaningful plans to address these issues.

### **Biodiversity loss in the EU**

According to the [European Environment Agency](#) (EEA):

- Only 15% of habitats are well protected, an overwhelming 81% have poor (45%) or bad (36%) conservation status at EU level.

- 9% of habitats with unfavourable conservation status show deteriorating trends: grasslands, dunes, bogs, mires and fens continue to decline.
- 35% of species with unfavourable conservation status are also declining. Pollinators such as bees are vital to food security, but are in decline, with some [bee species even threatened with extinction](#).

Restoration of ecosystems and improved management of these systems, including the mitigation of [pressures on nature](#) from intensive agriculture, pollution, unsustainable forestry, and [climate change](#), would ensure a range of benefits from healthy nature. These benefits would extend from human health to food security and climate change resilience.

## Europe is falling short on protected area targets

Only [eight of the 27 EU member states](#) have submitted protected area pledges. The vast majority of current pledges propose minimal increases in protected areas, not all areas counted effectively protect nature, and no country has plans which would protect 30% of its land area by 2030.

From a global perspective, the most concerning issue for the EU's international standing would be a failure to meet the “30x30” target in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which calls for the effective protection of at least 30% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030.

Although the EU appears to be close to meeting land protection targets - with protected areas reaching 26% in 2021 - progress has been very slow since 2011. To reach 30% by 2030, the annual rate of protected area growth would have to more than double compared to the rate of the last ten years. This is particularly worrying given that a significant proportion of protected areas in the EU are effectively protected only on paper.

The situation is even worse for the target of legally protecting at least 30% of the EU's marine area by 2030. In 2021, the EU will have 12.1% marine protected areas. While this is significantly higher than in 2012, when 5.9% of marine areas were protected, it is far from 30%.

Not only does the EU fall short in terms of numbers of protected areas, but current protected areas are [not always managed effectively](#) to reduce biodiversity loss. This is exemplified by generous exemptions (including compensation schemes) in, for example, the [Habitats Directive](#), which allows protection to be suspended for specific harmful activities or for general reasons related to the prevention of "serious damage, in particular to crops, livestock (...)" or "other imperative reasons of overriding public interest".

## Europe is making limited progress in restoring nature

In light of the increasing biodiversity crisis, avoiding further degradation of nature and restoring it is absolutely essential, especially knowing that [81% of the EU's protected ecosystems are in either a 'poor' or 'bad' condition](#). Restoring degraded nature makes ecosystems more resilient.

[The Nature Restoration Law](#) has a key role in enabling the EU to meet its obligations and commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The regulation sets binding targets for the restoration of degraded ecosystems, in particular those with the greatest potential to store carbon, and for disaster prevention and mitigation. It commits EU member states to put measures in place to restore at least 20% of all the EU's terrestrial and marine areas by 2030. By 2050, such measures should be implemented for all ecosystems that need restoration. Other important goals are: requirements to put in place restoration measures to protect key habitats and species, increase urban green space and tree cover, restore the connectivity of rivers and the natural functions of floodplains, reverse the decline of pollinating insects and restore peatlands in agricultural areas.

However, [the final text of the Nature Restoration Law is far from ideal](#). The law contains various exceptions and derogations, and instead of obliging countries to achieve specific results, it weakly stipulates that any measures need only "aim" to prevent "significant deterioration."

## Europe needs to do much more on finance

The European Commission estimates that [an additional investment of EUR 77 billion per year is necessary to achieve the EU's environmental objectives](#), and it is uncertain if the investment gap will be covered by 2030.

The vast majority of EU countries have not yet paid their fair share of an agreed [USD 20 billion per year for international biodiversity efforts](#). Environmentally harmful subsidies are still rampant in the EU and it is time to live up to the commitments on phasing out all environmentally harmful subsidies.

What is more, the EU is still allowing investments in the destruction of nature and has taken no regulatory action to address the role of investments in nature destruction or climate change. On the global level every year, nearly [USD 7 trillion is funnelled into activities that harm nature](#), a figure that likely underestimates the full impact. That means that financial institutions and governments spend 350 times more to destroy nature than they have pledged to support the global south in restoring it. Banks have spent [20 times more financing fossil fuels and industrial agriculture](#) in the Global South than financing climate action.

## Industrial agriculture remains a major driver of biodiversity loss in the EU

In the EU, intensive industrial agriculture is [the largest driver of biodiversity loss](#) due to factors such as land-use change, pollution, and reduction of landscape diversity. The agriculture sector is responsible for [94% of ammonia pollution](#) in the EU, which contributes to air pollution, and the vast majority of which

comes from livestock farming. Aside from ammonia emissions to the air, the EU's Joint Research Centre found that the livestock sector is also responsible for [80% of EU nitrogen emissions to water](#). Soil health is also under pressure, as the European Commission estimates that [60% to 70% of soils in Europe are already unhealthy](#). Widespread reliance on pesticide use [is contributing to the declines](#) in the population of among others, insects, pollinators, birds and aquatic organisms.

Despite all this, there has been very little progress in addressing the impacts of the industrial food and farming system in the EU, which continues to be funded by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In addition, there has been significant backsliding on key legislation. Over the past year, amidst protests by farmers, the EU abandoned plans to [reduce pesticide use](#) and [improve animal welfare](#), and has [dismantled environmental requirements](#) within the Common Agricultural Policy. The EU has also [failed to adopt any major policies](#) under its "Farm-to-fork" strategy for sustainable food.

To achieve meaningful progress on fulfilling the biodiversity targets, the EU must tackle the distribution of subsidies under CAP, most of which support industrial agricultural practices, which have a destructive impact on the environment and climate.

The recent [Strategic Dialogue on Agriculture](#) produced a set of recommendations to dramatically improve the EU agri-food sector, which EU leaders must now act upon. The Strategic Dialogue process saw all major actors in the agriculture and food sectors negotiate for seven months, including farming lobby groups, food companies, retailers, biotech companies, environmental and consumer organisations. Among the most important conclusions of the Strategic Dialogue, all stakeholders called for the set up of a Nature Restoration Fund and a Temporary Just Transition Fund as well as substantially increase, on an annual basis, of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) environmental payments to encourage farmers to do more to protect nature and transition to more sustainable farming practices. Additionally, the Strategic Dialogue urged the EU to tackle the impact of industrial livestock production, especially in areas of high livestock concentration, and called on member states to adopt demand-side policies to reduce the consumption of animal proteins and increase that of plant-based sources.

### **Ambitious and rapid implementation now critical**

The EU and national governments must close the gap between their stated commitments and their actions. The last UN biodiversity COP resulted in a positive and ambitious multilateral agreement that needs to be translated into concrete implementation on all fronts, such as rights-based protection, restoration and fair finance. In addition, EU leaders need to step up their ambition to strengthen and enforce existing legislation and adopt new measures to implement the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 without further delay. Soft policies, guidelines and recommendations must be replaced by binding targets. EU member states should act against land and sea use change, including through conservation and restoration.

## **Climate and environmental crises are linked and must be solved together**

The EU and national governments must make significant progress in protecting and restoring nature. This also means recognising that the ongoing climate crisis is interlinked with the loss of nature - they are driven by the same unsustainable systems and share some common solutions. Therefore, the policy response to these crises must be similarly integrated. This is directly related to the synergies between the UN biodiversity COP and the UNFCCC process, including because there is a risk that UNFCCC COP29 in Azerbaijan will end up with a carbon market deal that is bad for the climate and biodiversity.

## **Finance is key to success**

Governments of all the developed countries - meaning all the EU member states as well - must deliver on their commitment to provide USD 20 billion by 2025 to finance nature protection and restoration in the Global South. In the Global Biodiversity Framework, governments committed to provide USD 20 billion by 2025 and every year thereafter, aiming for at least USD 30 billion per year by 2030, but they are far behind. The EU must prioritise the identification and elimination of environmentally harmful subsidies and regulate financial flows in order to respect the biodiversity and climate commitments it has made. We call on ministers from EU countries to use the UN biodiversity COP16 as a platform to speak out on the need for all parties to regulate financial flows and to publicly support immediate action at EU level to ensure that their own financial institutions no longer contribute to ecosystem destruction.

### **Recommendations**

1. The EU and national political leaders must now strengthen and enforce existing legislation and adopt new measures to properly implement the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 without further delay.
2. Policy responses to the biodiversity and climate crises must be integrated.
3. Governments of the EU member states must meet their commitment to provide USD 20 billion by 2025 to finance nature protection and restoration in the Global South, and must integrate climate and biodiversity in decision-making at all levels, including through aligning finance flows with their international commitments to tackle climate change and protect biodiversity .

## Spokespeople before and during the UN Biodiversity COP16:

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- **Jannes Stoppel**, Greenpeace Germany, Political Advisor, [jannes.stoppel@greenpeace.org](mailto:jannes.stoppel@greenpeace.org), +491718880764, attending the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16). *Languages: English, German.*
- **Anna Ogniewska**, Greenpeace Central & Eastern Europe, Policy Advisor, [anna.ogniewska@greenpeace.org](mailto:anna.ogniewska@greenpeace.org), +48506124689, attending the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16). *Languages: English, Polish.*

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### Additional resources:

- [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#).
- [The Campaign for nature calculated](#) how much the individual countries have to pay for biodiversity - and looked at how much they actually do pay.
- [Submitted NBSAPs since COP15](#) and [CBD clearing house mechanism](#).
- [UN Biodiversity COP 2024: Which governments are fulfilling their pledges to protect nature?](#) A new tool tracks governments' progress on delivering their commitments to the global biodiversity framework.
- [CBD in a nutshell by Global Youth Biodiversity Network](#).