



EUROCITIES statement on the EU biodiversity strategy and a post-2020 framework

August 2019



Our messages

1. A post-2020-framework should include SMART results-oriented targets that are quantifiable and clearly define how the overall objectives of the Strategy are to be achieved.
2. The renewed strategy should improve the implementation of existing legislation by strengthening enforcement mechanisms and ensuring frequent stocktaking to achieve progress towards key objectives.
3. The European Commission should mainstream biodiversity into existing legislation and ensure it is an integral part of the 2050 climate vision.
4. A post-2020 framework should improve coordination between different levels of government and non-state actors so that the full potential of their actions may be harnessed.
5. The European Commission should simplify the application process for funding and improve targeted guidance for cities on access to funding.
6. Europe should maximise its potential to utilise trade agreements as a means to promote higher environmental standards by including the ratification of key biodiversity-related legislation as a condition of future trade agreements
7. Europe should lead in aligning a post-2020 EU and global biodiversity framework with other UN environmental legislation to facilitate the achievement of overall biodiversity objectives

Introduction

Cities have a leading role in reaching the EU and global biodiversity goals from integrating biodiversity into urban planning, to assessing and reporting on the status of biodiversity on the ground, to raising awareness of the vital role nature plays in our daily lives. The EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 has made measurable progress in providing protection for some of the most valuable and vulnerable European biodiversity, notably through the extension of the Natura 2000 network that now covers 18% of Europe's land area and almost 9.5% of its seas. However, evidence suggests that the overall targets to be achieved by 2020 will not be met. Globally, biodiversity is in strong continuous decline driven by land-use change, climate change, unsustainable growth and habitat fragmentation. It is at the city level that most of these challenges present themselves. We need rapid and coordinated action from all stakeholders to protect and enhance biodiversity as an effective means of addressing global climate, social, economic and health challenges to reverse these trends and ensure a positive biodiversity outcome.

An urgent need for a post-2020 biodiversity strategy

EUROCITIES welcomes the evaluation of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 and calls on the European Commission to urgently develop a strategy for a post-2020 framework. This evaluation should form the basis for ambitious post-2020 policy commitments for the EU and also feed into the discussions for a global post-2020 framework.

The EU post-2020 biodiversity strategy should:

- **include SMART targets**

While the current strategy includes some broad time-bound targets for halting biodiversity in Europe, the majority of these targets are poorly defined and incoherent in how they are intended to contribute to the achievement of EU and broader global biodiversity objectives. EUROCITIES recommends a post-2020 EU biodiversity strategy that includes results-orientated SMART targets (specific, measurable, ambitious, realistic and time-limited), that clearly define how the overall objectives of the strategy are to be achieved. The renewed targets should be developed and prioritised according to impact, prioritising the main drivers of biodiversity and habitat loss (namely land-use change). They should draw a clear line between the current status of biodiversity and a well-defined vision for 2030, setting the EU on a path to a reinforced and quantifiable vision for 2050. The added value of such targets would be to focus the attention of other relevant stakeholders and help gain momentum and commitment for these targets.

- **improve implementation of existing legislation and strengthen enforcement mechanisms**

The 2020 targets under the current strategy are unlikely to be achieved without considerable improvements to implementation and enforcement. The post-2020 framework should ensure that gaps in the current monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) mechanisms are urgently addressed to ensure robust and effective implementation. EUROCITIES proposes this be accompanied by more frequent stocktaking to ensure progress towards key objectives and facilitate flexibility to react appropriately to recommendations from the science community. Cities must be explicitly mentioned and included in the monitoring and reporting commitments of a post-2020 EU framework, recognising and encouraging their role in reaching EU biodiversity goals.

- **address harmful policies by mainstreaming biodiversity into all sectoral policies**

The *Action Plan for nature, people and the economy* highlighted the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity into other policies, notably the common agricultural policy, the cohesion policy, the common fisheries policy, the research and innovation policy, and forestry policies. While some progress has been made in achieving this, a lack of coherency in the aims of these and broader non-environmental policies remains a major barrier to halting the decline of biodiversity loss, and ultimately seeing its restoration and enhancement. EUROCITIES calls for the urgent mainstreaming of biodiversity throughout all sectoral policies as an economically efficient and socially beneficial means of addressing a growing number of man-made challenges. Increasing awareness, building capacity, and improving integration of green infrastructure into EU and national frameworks, is vital to reconnecting critical Natura 2000 sites and other nature areas to restore and maintain urban and rural ecosystems.

The EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 recognises the fundamental link between biodiversity and climate change, noting that *biodiversity loss is the most critical global environmental threat alongside climate change*. Despite this recognition, there has been limited effort to develop synergies between policies for biodiversity and climate change on the local, national, EU or global levels. EUROCITIES requests that biodiversity is considered in the vision for carbon neutrality and as an integral part of the EU 2050 climate vision currently being developed. Highlighting the role of biodiversity and nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation at this scale could help facilitate greater coherency between climate and biodiversity policies at lower levels and across the sectors.

- **improve coordination between different levels of government and non-state actors**

The European Commission's mid-term review highlights the importance of strong partnerships, and the full engagement and effort of key stakeholders in achieving the 2020 biodiversity objectives. The re-launch of the EU Business and Biodiversity Platform and the creation of the Green City Tool indicate some progress; however, action remains poorly coordinated and the full potential of these networks unharnessed. Cities, business and civil society have proven to be extremely engaged in protecting nature, as evidenced by the unprecedented response to the public consultation on the Birds and Habitats Directives. EUROCIITIES proposes a system for collecting tangible voluntary commitments from all levels of government and stakeholders, similar in structure and aim as that introduced under the UNFCCC. Such a tool, if harnessed and integrated with the Global Climate Action portal, would lead to greater coherency between these linked policies, as well as helping to build momentum towards more ambitious national and global targets for nature. We note, however, the broader architecture that must accompany such a system, and in particular the need for a robust monitoring and reporting mechanism to ensure credibility of pledges and track progress towards EU and global biodiversity objectives.

- **simplify and raise awareness of the application process for biodiversity-related funding**

A lack of knowledge and capacity in some local and national administrations to source or deal with complex procedures related to funding has resulted in the limited employment of some biodiversity-related funds. EUROCIITIES recommends the simplification of the funding application process and the development of a mechanism to track biodiversity-related funding to improve targeted information and guidance for cities and national governments. This information should be easily and readily available for cities through a dedicated platform, such as the Green City Tool.

Evidence shows that some funding within the agriculture and forestry sectors, for example, is not coherent with the aims of the EU biodiversity strategy nor broader global biodiversity objectives. EUROCIITIES asks for the assessment of environmentally harmful subsidies throughout EU funding programmes to better guide the EU budget towards sustainable development. This would help ensure policies are coherent and compliant with the broader objectives of the UN SDGs and the Paris Agreement, as well as ensuring progress towards the EU biodiversity objectives and global (renewed) Aichi Biodiversity Targets (ABT), and ultimately help cities to maintain not only the biodiversity within the city, but also the city surroundings.

Europe as a leader in the global biodiversity framework

As preparations begin for a global post-2020 biodiversity framework with the aim of developing post-2020 global targets and a 2050 global vision for biodiversity, the EU must show clear leadership:

- **maximise the use of trade agreements as a vehicle to promote higher environmental standards**

The EU has significant influence over global trade and should maximise the potential to use trade agreements as a vehicle to promote the adoption of higher environmental standards in the production of goods. Last year, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling to make the ratification of the Paris Agreement a condition for future trade agreements; such a provision could be included for key biodiversity legislation as a means to encourage wider implementation of its objectives.

- **align and integrate post-2020 EU biodiversity strategy and post-2020 global biodiversity framework with other UN environmental legislation**

The EU must demonstrate leadership in pushing for the better alignment and integration of the post-2020 EU and global biodiversity framework with other such environmental legislation. Integrating and aligning the legislation at the EU and global level will help lead to better coordinated and coherent policies at lower levels of government, and the achievement of the overall biodiversity objectives. Any delay in doing so risks diminishing EU influence in global efforts to conserve biodiversity.