

Biodiversity Factsheet for Local Authorities

According to the Convention on Biological Diversity, 'biodiversity' means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, among other things, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Local Authorities and Biodiversity

Biodiversity and the related ecosystem services provide us with food, raw material, oxygen, clean drinking water, fertile soil, protection from natural disasters and pollination. They also provide us with health and aesthetic benefits and reasonable job and investment opportunities. Only in the EU, approximately 14,6 million jobs are dependent on these services¹, whereas the benefit flow from Natura 2000 areas, the EU's conservation network, is estimated to be 200-300 billion EUR annually derived from tourism and additional economic activities².

However, these 'free' assets of nature are highly endangered: 25% of European species face extinction, most of our ecosystems labelled as degraded, whereas 30% of EU's area is highly or moderately fragmented due to grey infrastructure sprawl.³ With the inaction of not addressing the loss of biodiversity and their services we potentially face the cost of 50 billion EUR/year in the EU⁴.

It is easy to see therefore that every stakeholder should act in favour of biodiversity and in favour of us before it is too late. Within these actions, local authorities are key stakeholders to shape the future of the environment once they really see its very nature. Biodiversity is key for life at local levels, as well: in cities, biodiversity can supply us with cleaner air and mitigation of extreme weather as well as recreational areas, while in villages inhabitants directly work with nature and live from it.

The European Union's Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 – the Relevancy for Local Authorities

Acknowledging the fact that biodiversity loss is one of the key environmental challenges of the EU, the European Union adopted a new strategy to put an end of losing biological diversity. The strategy consists of six main targets with relevant actions that call for implementation at local level, as well.

TARGET 1 – Fully implement the Birds and Habitats Directives **The first target focuses on the adequate implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and the improvement of the fundament of the EU's nature protection, the Natura 2000 network.**

As many local authorities are somehow involved in Natura 2000 via the sites' management or spatial planning, this target can be quite relevant to them. The target prescribes that **by 2020 100% more habitat and 50% more species assessments under the Habitats and Bird Directives show an improved**

¹ FEEM. The Social Dimension of Biodiversity Policy. 2011.

² European Commission Staff Working Paper on Financing Natura 2000.

³ The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020

⁴ The costs of not implementing the environmental acquis - Final report ENV.G.1/FRA/2006/0073.

conservation status. To achieve this, the strategy calls for integration of protection and management requirements into major land and water policies, the promotion of experience exchange and good practice and the enhanced cooperation with the main stakeholders.

TARGET 2 – Maintain and restore ecosystems and their services
The second target focuses on the restoration of degraded ecosystems and their valuable services by 2020 through assessing their status, building a Green Infrastructure Strategy and ensuring no net loss of biodiversity.

By 2020, 15% of degraded ecosystems should be restored and green infrastructure should be established. Local authorities can have a major role in the working out of a strategic framework by 2014, which maps and assesses the status of ecosystems and sets priorities for their and their services' restoration at EU, national and sub-national level. Besides, local authorities as key stakeholders in spatial planning, will have a major say in the successful implementation of the forming Green Infrastructure Strategy, which will ensure the proper functioning of ecosystems through providing a bridge over the highly fragmented landscape. Ensuring no net loss of biodiversity will also be largely dependent on the active work of local level since new investments have to be undergone by so-called biodiversity-proofing that ensures no detrimental impacts on the environment are done without proper compensation or offsetting.

TARGET 3 – Increase the contribution of agriculture and forestry to biodiversity

The third target aims to integrate biodiversity conservation into agriculture and forestry policies by encouraging forest and landowners to adopt sustainable management.

Local authorities – potential forest or landowners as well as the direct contact for farmers and foresters – can ensure that stakeholders deliver biodiversity targets by sustainable management also directly benefitting from these measures through the agri-environmental payments and the EU Rural Development Programme. Furthermore, the Rural Development Strategies will entail quantified biodiversity targets to be achieved at regional and local level, as well.

TARGET 5 – Combat Invasive Alien Species
Invasive Alien Species (IAS) establish themselves outside their natural ranges and can cause chief economic and environmental problems estimated at a 12.5 billion EUR every year. These species have to be controlled or eradicated.

To act on behalf of natural ecosystems and hinder the spread of IAS, an early-warning system establishment and rapid response mechanism will be essential - at local level, as well, where these species can cause in fact the largest damage.

In order to aid the implementation of the Strategy, the European Commission will work out jointly with the Member States and other stakeholders the Common Implementation Framework that will specify the further steps.

The factsheet is supported by the European Commission, however it does not necessary reflect its position or opinion.



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