



Biodiversity investments under Cohesion Policy – a smart contribution to reach EU 2020 objectives

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Biodiversity is the diversity of living organisms and their ecosystems. This diversity is essential to keep our ecosystems running and to provide us with ecosystem services (clean water, air, climate stability etc.) and raw materials (food, fibre). However, decreases of diversity and the degradation of natural capital stock are happening without an understanding of the loss of its value. Under business as usual, it is estimated that by 2050 the loss of biological diversity will cost the world 7% of global GDP.

The upcoming EU Budget provides new opportunities to invest in natural capital and thus contribute to the achievement of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by 2020. But for this, Cohesion Policy has to start investing significantly into biodiversity and ecosystems. Otherwise several of the needed investments will fail to take place.

Cohesion Policy should invest in biodiversity to:

1. Achieve carbon savings at low cost: large scale ecosystem conservation and restoration is a cost-effective alternative to reach climate change goals. For example restoration (e.g. re-wetting) helps degraded peatland to retain the huge amount of carbon its stores and even to become significant carbon sinks. Restoring peatland is a major carbon storage opportunity, but failure to protect Europe's peat bogs in Germany, Ireland, Poland, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom would result in the release of carbon dioxide equivalent to that produced by an additional 40 million cars on Europe's roads. Similarly, converting arable land to grassland (e.g. to widen a floodplain) or to forest increases carbon storage.

→ **Example:** a restoration of 30 000 ha of peatland in Trebetal, Germany has resulted in up to 300 000 t CO₂ emissions reductions per year with average cost of 4-12 €/t CO₂. On average, the abatement cost for the gas industry project is 40€/t CO₂, for coal-gas fuelled switch 70 €/t CO₂, and for CCS 70-120 €/t CO₂.

2. Lessen the impacts of climate induced disasters: restored ecosystems can help reduce the negative effects of climate induced natural disasters. For example widened, reopened floodplains can store more floodwater and thus increase flood security of adjacent settlements. Similarly, restoring forests and other natural vegetation in mountains will soak up heavy rainfall and thus prevent quick flooding of rivers downstream and landslides. Restoring green spaces in or near cities can lessen the negative effects of heat waves. Natural risk prevention and mitigation is in most cases cheaper than technological solutions.

→ **Example:** the cost-benefit analysis of increasing flood security at the Scheldt River, Belgium, has showed that an intelligent combination of ecosystem-based and technical measures delivers highest flood-security at lowest cost. Authorities will invest in restoring 5000 ha of wetlands.

3. Create jobs – restoring degraded ecosystems creates local jobs which, by their very nature, can't be outsourced. The restoration of large scale ecosystems requires work and creates jobs similar as in the

“normal” construction sector. Rehabilitated landscapes and protected areas are a source of tourism and local product development. A new study supports the estimate that investing the necessary 6 billion EUR annually into the Natura 2000 network alone could create 180,000 jobs, without counting wider employment effects in sectors depending on healthy ecosystems.

→ **Example:** in North Rhine-Westphalia, regional level river restoration was linked to the re-integration of long term unemployment of people into the job market. The project aimed to achieve the objectives of the Water Framework Directive and provided some 100 job places over the duration of 10 years. Local and regional medium-sized businesses profited by renting out building machinery, selling building materials and construction planning and execution.

4. Provide valuable ecosystem services: ecosystem services created by all N2000 sites in the Netherlands are estimated to deliver benefits amounting to €4.5 billion/year (or 4,000 EUR/ha/year), while the government only spends an estimated 315.4 million EUR/year on the network. The benefits arise in particular through recreation and tourism, but also wider ecosystem services, such as carbon storage or water purification. Cohesion Policy investing in Natura 2000 areas could help create such benefits also in the less developed parts of Europe contributing to local economic development and human well-being.

→ **Example:** restoration of 2,236 km² of floodplains along the Lower Danube (Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) has been mapped and would cost €50 million. The flood protection, water purification and tourism benefits would reach €112 million.

5. Protect coastal cities vulnerable to climate change – Sedimentation in coastal areas is critical to allow them to protect themselves against rising sea levels. Restoring coastal wetlands that will ‘collect sediments’ and the river systems that deposit sediment from ongoing erosion can help to adapt to climate change.

→ **Example:** in Liguria, 15 km of the coast is subject to erosion threatening the coastal city of Ventimiglia. This occurs due to the natural sediment delivery of the River Roja that was stopped by the construction of dams at the turn of the 20th century. Structural Funds were used to create a natural-like coastal defence system and to move Roja sediments to the estuary again. This has been more efficient and durable than the earlier used engineering solutions.

Main policy objectives for which Cohesion Policy investment is necessary:

- halt the deterioration in the status of all species and habitats covered by EU nature legislation (as a minimum), and achieve a significant and measurable improvement in their status so that, by 2020, compared to current assessments: (i) 100% more habitat assessments and 50% more species assessments under the Habitats Directive and (ii) 50% more species assessments under the Birds Directive show an improved conservation status (Biodiversity Strategy, Target 1)
- Restore at least 15 % of degraded ecosystems in Europe and establish Europe’s Green Infrastructure (Biodiversity Strategy, Target 2)
- Achieve 'good status' of all aquatic ecosystems and, with regard to their water needs, terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands meet by 2015 (Goal of the Water Framework Directive. Good status means good chemical, biological and morphological status.)

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