



## Mission for Natural Heritage (M4N)

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Supporting the implementation of Target 2 of the Global Biodiversity Framework and the Nature Restoration Regulation in the Mediterranean*

Version 31/01/25

#### Key messages

- 1 Emphasise the precautionary principle to halt further degradation.** Conservation must take precedence to prevent further loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems. This principle aligns with the EU NRR's non-deterioration clause.
- 2 Prioritize passive restoration in marine environments.** Reducing pressures such as overfishing and pollution and addressing the root causes of degradation will allow most ecosystems to recover naturally. Active restoration should only be pursued when other approaches prove insufficient, as it is often less cost-effective, overestimated in its effectiveness and scalability and limited by knowledge gaps. Prioritizing passive restoration is both a pragmatic and ecologically sound approach.
- 3 Promote Nature-based Solutions (NbS).** NbS should be at the heart of restoration strategies: they are cost-effective, respect ecological processes and minimize human intervention.
- 4 Increase public awareness to build support.** This is particularly important for communities whose livelihoods might be impacted, ensuring they see restoration as an opportunity rather than a threat.
- 5 Unlock the potential of innovative funding mechanisms.** Payments for ecosystem services, carbon credits, conservation contracts and debt restructuring, among others, can help mobilize adequate funding for restoration projects.
- 6 Align restoration plans with climate mitigation and adaptation goals.** Restoring wetlands, seagrass meadows and other coastal and marine habitats provides critical ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, flood regulation and disaster risk reduction, contributing to both biodiversity and climate resilience.
- 7 Foster collaborative governance to overcome institutional and stakeholder fragmentation.** Multi-level governance that engages local, regional and national actors is essential to build trust and align stakeholders. Strengthening sub-national and local capacity is urgently needed, as many authorities and stakeholders lack the resources and expertise required to implement restoration projects effectively.



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## 1. Objectives of the document

The **Mission for Natural Heritage (M4N)** is a collaborative initiative co-funded by the **Interreg Euro MED programme** that involves an [extensive community of partners and associates and 13 Thematic Projects](#), with additional projects set to be integrated as the initiative advances. The M4N aims to promote the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of Mediterranean biodiversity through integrated and cross-border actions.

**By leveraging multi-stakeholders partnerships across multiple sectors**, including regional and local governance, community engagement and scientific expertise, the M4N seeks to address complex environmental challenges that threaten the region's ecosystems to safeguard natural heritage while enhancing social and economic well-being.

The initiative aims at helping the stakeholders in the region towards meeting the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). In this regard, the **Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Projects** play a central role in the Mission as a **source of practices, knowledge and solutions**, to which the governance projects serve as amplifiers.

The purpose of this document is to share a unified stance on the **accomplishment of Target 2 of the GBF**—restore 30% of all degraded ecosystems by 2030— and, particularly, the recently adopted **EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR)**<sup>1</sup>, with a focus on its implications for the Mediterranean coastal and marine ecosystems. It also intends to be supportive of other policy documents that may be developed within the Thematic Projects regarding this topic.

The NRR entered into force in August 2024, being the **first legally binding instrument at an international level that specifically addresses ecosystem restoration**. As a regulation<sup>2</sup>, it has a binding nature across all Member States, applying directly and immediately without needing to be transposed into national law. At the EU level, the regulation mandates the restoration of **at least 20% of the EU's land and sea by 2030**, aiming to restore **all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050** (Article 1). In parallel, **Member States must achieve national targets**, which require the restoration of 30% of all habitats that are not in good condition by 2030, with a priority focus on Natura 2000 sites. This requirement escalates to 60% by 2040 and 90% by 2050 (Articles 4 and 5). Member States are required to submit **draft National Restoration Plans** to the Commission **by September 2026**, detailing how they intend to deliver on the targets. Following the Commission's assessment, the final versions of the plans are to be finalised a year later.

To effectively bridge the ambition of high-level policy with on-the-ground action, this document provides **actionable recommendations for the implementation of both Target 2 of the GBF and the NRR** in Mediterranean coastal areas, leveraging best practices and solutions from the Community's projects and highlighting the unique role that subnational and regional communities and stakeholders play as enablers of context-specific approaches. Ultimately, it serves as a **call to action for urgent and ambitious efforts** to bring the implementation of Target 2 of GBF and the NRR

<sup>1</sup> [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1991 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2024 on nature restoration and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2022/869](#). Official Journal of the European Union, 24 June 2024.

<sup>2</sup> The NRR is often informally referred to as Nature Restoration Law for communicative purposes, to convey its importance and impact (like the EU Climate Law, which is also formally a regulation).



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to life in the Mediterranean region, recognizing that the restoration of nature is a cornerstone in addressing the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution.

## 2. Nature restoration in Mediterranean coastal and marine areas

- **Importance of nature restoration and conservation in the context of climate change**

**The Mediterranean is a biodiversity hotspot.** Its coastal and marine areas are among the most ecologically important globally, hosting over 17,000 marine species, with approximately 20-30% being endemic (the highest rate of endemism globally)<sup>3</sup>. However, they are seriously threatened by a combination of **anthropogenic pressures**, such as urbanisation, pollution, unsustainable tourism and overfishing, and the **impacts of climate change**. These pressures have led to the degradation of key coastal and marine habitats, including wetlands, seagrass meadows, coral reefs and dunes, all of which are essential for the region's biodiversity, carbon sequestration and coastal protection<sup>4</sup>. These stresses not only jeopardise the region's natural heritage but also undermine its social and economic resilience, particularly for coastal communities dependent on ecosystem services.

Restoring these ecosystems is vital for enhancing their ability to **provide critical services** as well as **well-being to the people**, and can significantly **contribute to the region's climate mitigation and adaptation strategies**. For example, seagrass meadows are not only home to a wealth of marine life but also act as carbon sinks, helping mitigate the effects of climate change, and coastal wetlands, such as salt marshes and lagoons, serve as buffers against storm surges and flooding, while also providing vital habitat for migratory birds and fish species<sup>5</sup>.

However, while restoration efforts are essential, **greater emphasis must also be placed on proactive conservation** and preventive measures, to halt further degradation of ecosystems and safeguard biodiversity before it is lost.

- **Significance of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation for Mediterranean ecosystem recovery**

At the Mediterranean level, the **Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP)**, one of the Regional Seas Programme coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and supported by the legally binding **Barcelona Convention**, is the cooperative framework to address environmental and sustainability challenges in the region. Its framework for action is provided by the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD), a regional policy framework to support States in implementing the 2030 Agenda in the Mediterranean. While nature restoration in coastal and marine areas is addressed in the Barcelona Convention through the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Protocol and the Specially Protected Areas for Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) Protocol, **only a few actions are proposed under the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean Region (Post-2020 SAP BIO)**.

In this sense, **the EU NRR can unlock significant potential for Mediterranean coastal and marine recovery and for the implementation of Target 2 of the GBF**. By setting clear, binding targets for habitat restoration, this regulation offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the environmental, social and economic challenges that threaten the region's ecosystems.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan and Plan Bleu (2020). [State of the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean](#).

<sup>4</sup> MedECC (2024). [Summary for Policymakers. Climate and Environmental Coastal Risks in the Mediterranean](#). <sup>5</sup> World Resources Institute (2019). [The Ocean as a Solution to Climate Change: Five Opportunities for Action](#).



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Additionally, **the regulation recognizes the importance of public participation and stakeholder engagement** in the planning and implementation of restoration measures (Article 15, on the content of National Restoration Plans). Local communities and stakeholders are uniquely positioned to implement and scale restoration actions, ensuring that they are context-specific and relevant.

The Mediterranean region's restoration efforts are not only essential for preserving its biodiversity but are also central to the **region's climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies**. The EU Nature Restoration Regulation offers a critical policy framework to catalyse such actions, ensuring that the Mediterranean can overcome current challenges and thrive in the face of a changing climate.

In the Mediterranean region, efforts are underway to **co-create alternative pathways for environmental protection and sustainable development**. [The MED2050 report](#), published in January 2025 by Plan Bleu, is a collaborative six-year foresight exercise involving many experts from different Mediterranean countries and disciplines. It provides political decision-makers with a clearer picture of the challenges facing the Mediterranean, and also raises awareness among the general public, particularly the younger generations. Through six different scenarios, MED2050 proposes a set of no-regrets recommendations or measures for moving towards sustainable development, emphasising the importance of solutions based on cooperation at different levels. In the face of growing challenges, this report provides a solid basis for **concerted regional action**.

- **Call for urgent and ambitious action across the region**

**The NRR is a historic opportunity to turn the tide and provide a clear and actionable roadmap for restoring nature in the Mediterranean.** However, successful implementation will require a concerted, cross-border effort that transcends national boundaries and engages all relevant stakeholders, from local communities and NGOs to governments and the private sector. The Mediterranean's complex ecological and socio-economic context demands an integrated, context-specific approach to restoration, ensuring that local knowledge, needs and capacities are at the forefront of restoration actions.

As a regulation of the EU, the NRR only applies to half of the Mediterranean, making it **essential for non-EU countries to adopt similar steps for ecosystem restoration**. These efforts must align with **other international frameworks, such as the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Barcelona Convention**, which are applicable across the region. Stressing policy synergies and maximizing collaboration across frameworks is crucial, particularly given the limited resources available for restoration initiatives.

On another hand, it cannot be ignored that **war, conflicts and political instability**, particularly in southern Mediterranean countries, pose a direct threat to ecosystems, amplify ecological vulnerabilities and undermine conservation efforts in the region.

- **Vision for a resilient and thriving Mediterranean coastal and marine environment**

Restoring coastal and marine ecosystems is not only an environmental imperative but also an **economic opportunity**. Healthy ecosystems underpin economies by providing essential services such as carbon sequestration, water purification and disaster risk reduction, while fostering green growth and job creation. **Biodiversity loss poses systemic risks to global financial stability**, disrupting supply chains, increasing climate vulnerability and undermining resilience. Governments and financial institutions must **integrate nature conservation into economic and financial frameworks**, and redirect harmful subsidies from activities like overfishing and fossil fuels. By embedding biodiversity



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considerations into economic decision-making, nations can build resilient, regenerative economies that safeguard ecosystems and ensure prosperity for future generations.

### 3. Implementation challenges of Target 2 of the GBF and the NRR

Implementing these restoration frameworks presents singular multi-level challenges across local, regional and national scales. These challenges arise from the ambitious nature of the targets, the need for alignment across diverse stakeholders and the complexity of restoration actions. This section examines the obstacles that may hinder effective implementation, offering insights as to how to address them.

- 1. Resistance from certain sectors and key stakeholders**, such as farmers, small-scale fisheries, agricultural communities and industrial investors, poses a significant challenge. Divergent priorities and regulatory frameworks can create tensions and conflicts, potentially delaying or obstructing restoration efforts. Effective and inclusive engagement of key actors early in the process helps to build trust, foster commitment and align priorities, ensuring that diverse perspectives are integrated into the planning and implementation phases.
- 2. The lack of awareness and acceptance of the general public** must also be taken into account. Citizens may resist or fail to support restoration actions if they do not have a clear understanding of their objectives and benefits, or if these actions are perceived as conflicting with their immediate interests and livelihoods. **Disinformation and misinformation** further exacerbate this, as well as **insufficient outreach**, so public engagement initiatives alongside clear communication strategies will help achieve broad support for restoration activities.
- 3.** Restoration actions require adequate **institutional and technical capacity**, particularly at the local level. Many local authorities and other stakeholders may lack the resources or expertise needed to design, manage and monitor restoration projects effectively, so capacity building through targeted training programmes can play a transformative role in addressing this issue. Such programmes not only enhance technical knowledge but also improve communication and participatory skills, enabling local actors to collaborate more effectively with diverse stakeholders.
- 4. Tight deadlines for implementation** could hinder the effective rollout of the NRR, since they place considerable pressure on Member States, particularly those with limited administrative or technical capacity. Meeting the deadlines of the regulation requires substantial preparatory work, including complex assessments, the development of restoration plans, stakeholder engagement processes and the mobilization of adequate financial resources. Local and regional authorities, which play a critical role in translating policy into action, may face constraints in aligning restoration actions with the mandated schedule.
- 5. Governance and institutional gaps** could impede the progress of restoration efforts. With a lack of clear governance structures and potential **overlapping responsibilities at both national and local levels**, decision-making can become delayed and fragmented. Streamlining governance processes and ensuring clear, coordinated leadership will be critical to overcoming these hurdles.



6. **Tenure and ownership issues** add another layer of complexity. In many areas, unclear land ownership as well as jurisdictional ambiguities over marine areas makes it difficult to assign responsibility for restoration actions. This can lead to conflicts over who is accountable for ensuring the success of these projects. Ensuring transparency in ownership will be necessary to facilitate restoration processes.
7. **Legislative and financial constraints** are also significant barriers to implementation. Complex legal frameworks and limited access to funding make it harder to secure the resources needed for successful restoration. Without innovative financing mechanisms and regulatory clarity, many proposed projects could stall before they even begin. It will be important to explore new funding sources and simplify the legislative landscape to ensure that restoration projects can proceed without delays.
8. **Data and knowledge gaps** can hinder the ability to make informed decisions regarding restoration efforts, **particularly outside protected areas** or on the Southern Mediterranean shore. Many restoration initiatives lack sufficient data and monitoring systems, making it difficult to track progress and adjust strategies as needed. Strengthening data collection efforts and improving monitoring frameworks will be essential to ensure that restoration actions are based on solid evidence.
9. **Long-term sustainability of restored ecosystems.** While initial restoration efforts may receive funding, ensuring that these ecosystems remain viable once the funding runs out is a significant challenge. Without sustainable models for ongoing management and monitoring, the success of restoration projects could be undermined. Long-term financial and institutional support will be necessary to maintain the benefits of restoration beyond the initial phase.
10. **The impacts of climate change, urbanisation and water restrictions** can hinder the success of restoration efforts. Adapting restoration strategies to address these challenges, particularly in coastal and riverine areas, will be critical to ensuring resilience in the face of changing environmental conditions.

#### 4. Recommendations for the implementation of Target 2 of the GBF and the NRR

##### Cross-Cutting Recommendation across all governance levels

**Conservation must take precedence to prevent further loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems.** This emphasis on the precautionary principle aligns with the EU NRR's non-deterioration clause. **In marine environments, passive restoration should be prioritised,** tackling the root causes of degradation and reducing pressures from economic activities in the sea. This must be a priority in National Restoration Plans. While active restoration can play a role in specific cases, its limitations must be acknowledged. **Active restoration is not always the most cost-effective option and should only be pursued when other approaches prove insufficient.** Additionally, we may be overestimating the potential effectiveness and scalability of active restoration, as significant knowledge gaps remain about whether it is possible to fully restore a complex, functional ecosystem. Careful consideration must also be given to the associated risks of active restoration projects, including the potential for greenwashing, where actions appear restorative but lack genuine ecological benefits. Prioritizing passive restoration is both a **pragmatic** and **ecologically sound** approach to ensuring **long-term recovery.**



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### **A. Actionable recommendations at the regional level (Mediterranean region)**

**For Mediterranean decision-makers** (European Union, Barcelona Convention, UNEP/MAP contracting parties and Regional Activity Centres, Union for the Mediterranean...):

1. **Engage more with sub-national and local policymakers**, who often lack capacity, understanding and awareness. Regions and cities cannot be seen or treated as the last mile of decision; multi-level forums are needed to develop inclusive strategies and regulations.
2. **Strengthen and harmonize regional data-sharing platforms** for ecosystem services assessment and restoration monitoring, essential to prioritise areas for restoration, especially through [Plan Bleu's Mediterranean Observatory on Environment and Sustainable Development](#) and its cartographic tool, [MapX](#), which is a component of the [UNEP/MAP Knowledge Management Platform \(KMAP\)](#).
3. **Establish a regional best practices repository** to facilitate the exchange of successful restoration models.
4. **Agree on a set of common guidelines for the Mediterranean bioregion** to harmonize restoration efforts across countries and areas.
5. **Advocate for prioritizing conservation and the non-deterioration principle** across the Mediterranean region.
6. **Emphasise the importance of cross-border restoration** to address shared ecological challenges and mitigate the impacts of war, conflicts and political instability.

**For Mediterranean civil society** (NGOs, academia, and citizens):

1. **Promote region-wide knowledge-sharing platforms**, such as geoportals, to disseminate data and lessons learned (e.g., Wetland4Change).
2. **Encourage citizen science programmes across Mediterranean countries** to involve the public in monitoring biodiversity and ecosystem health, creating opportunities for engagement and fostering ownership.
3. **Build capacity among academic institutions to provide region-specific scientific data on ecosystems**, such as seagrass habitats and carbon sequestration.
4. **Support dissemination of technical knowledge and capacity building** targeting all layers of governance, specifically the sub-national scale.
5. **Support governance processes** to ensure coordination of the restoration actions at a Mediterranean-wide scale.
6. **Provide up-to-date information and scientific knowledge** to inform the design and planning of actions.

### **B. Actionable recommendations at the national level (Mediterranean countries)**

**For national decision-makers:**



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1. **Define minimum areas and prioritize restoration in those areas based on detailed assessments of habitat conditions, biodiversity contributions and ecosystem services**, ensuring that resources are allocated to areas with the greatest potential impact.
2. **Promote restoration interventions that take into account land-sea interactions**, in order to strengthen connectivity among different habitats and ecosystems.
3. **Develop and implement contractual frameworks to clarify responsibilities and align incentives for restoration efforts**, ensuring all relevant stakeholders understand their roles and can work together effectively. Environmental contracts, such as local stewardship and wetland contracts to safeguard habitats, offer effective models for restoration by involving local actors and aligning incentives with conservation goals.
4. **Foster collaborative governance by engaging key stakeholders early in the decision-making process**. Fostering strong, collaborative processes among stakeholders can significantly enhance the effectiveness of restoration actions. This should be coupled with cross-sectoral collaboration that builds synergies among different sectors, enabling more cohesive and efficient restoration efforts.
5. **Local and regional needs must be taken into account**. Restoration strategies should be tailored to the specific ecological, socio-economic and climatic conditions of each region. A one-size-fits-all approach will not be effective; instead, localised strategies will be necessary to address the unique challenges faced by different areas. This applies particularly to island ecosystems, where national governments should leverage their potential as testbeds for sustainable solutions, considering the unique challenges they face such as limited resources and higher vulnerability to climate change.
6. **Participatory processes must be prioritised**, allowing communities to identify and develop restoration measures. Offering incentives, including financial and logistical support, can motivate and facilitate this involvement. Moreover, this should clearly identify that the public participation undertaken also meets the requirements of Directive 2001/42/EC in line with the provisions of Art. 14 par. 20 of the NRR.
7. **Encourage sustainable agricultural and fishing practices**. Aligning economic activities with nature conservation objectives should create a more supportive environment for restoration initiatives, ensuring that ecosystems and livelihoods thrive together. Co-benefits for the environment, local community economies and climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives must be recognised. The private sector must be involved in a broad sense, because of its ability to mobilise resources, boost innovation and influence land use and economic practices.
8. **Identify, introduce and specify innovative financial mechanisms, such as special taxes or payments for ecosystem services** (like carbon credits for farmers), that national governments intend to develop to secure sustainable funding pathways.
9. **Put in place, harmonize and enhance reliable monitoring systems** (Article 4 & 5) to monitor the condition of (trend) habitats and the quality of (and trend) habitats for species in areas being restored. This should include assessment of the effectiveness of restoration activities and track progress, while aligning with broader climate adaptation and biodiversity goals.





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10. **Promote pilot projects** that engage local communities and businesses to demonstrate the feasibility of restoration actions, providing models for upscaling restoration initiatives.

#### **For national civil society** (NGOs, academia, and citizens):

1. **Provide useful scientific data to inform and assess restoration efforts, track progress and evaluate impact.** There is a significant gap of scientific knowledge related to the marine environment that needs to be filled.
2. **Conduct policy analysis to identify existing gaps in restoration frameworks,** such as those for specific ecosystems like seagrass and to develop clear guidelines to address these gaps.
3. **Conduct awareness campaigns and targeted outreach to youth** to build support for restoration goals, exploring ways to communicate more effectively and leveraging local media and social networks to amplify messages and reach broader audiences.
4. **Foster partnerships between NGOs and academia** to design participatory processes and develop localised restoration strategies.

#### **C. Actionable recommendations at the Mediterranean sub-national level**

##### **For sub-national decision-makers:**

1. **Engage local and regional stakeholders throughout all phases of restoration planning.** Their active involvement brings valuable traditional knowledge and localised insights. By engaging communities throughout every phase of restoration, potential conflicts can be managed proactively, while simultaneously raising public awareness and promoting a shared sense of collective responsibility for ecosystem health.
2. **Invest in capacity building for local policymakers** to strengthen their knowledge and navigate the policy complexities, engage stakeholders meaningfully and pave the way for successful actions.
3. **Clarify regulations** for your communities to foster understanding and commitment to conservation and restoration goals.
4. **Build trust through transparent communication and participatory processes** with local actors, such as farmers, landowners and businesses.

##### **For sub-national civil society** (NGOs, academia, and citizens):

1. **Encourage the use of citizen science initiatives** to engage communities in monitoring biodiversity and ecosystem health (e.g., FLOUCA, SCARCE).
2. **Promote educational programmes to foster long-term commitment to the protection of nature** among future generations.



3. **Advocate for inclusive stakeholder engagement**, amplifying the voices of marginalised groups in decision-making processes. Restoration projects must engage communities by clearly communicating the importance of ecosystem recovery.
4. **Demonstrate restoration benefits through pilot projects** and participatory research to build public confidence and mobilize community support.

### BEST PRACTICES AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FROM M4N PROJECTS

The M4N emerges as a key interlocutor and offers a reliable platform to turn these recommendations into action. Through its innovative projects, the Mission not only **studies, tests and transfers best practices and solutions for ecosystem restoration**, but also **fosters cooperation among stakeholders**. Its 13 Thematic Projects create dynamic, multisectoral environments that bring together academia, NGOs, public administrations, SMEs and other actors. They also operate at multiple levels, from local and subnational to national and regional.

Beyond this, the Mission contributes directly to restoration efforts as a **source of funding opportunities, replicable pilot cases and the dissemination of knowledge via open platforms** such as the Interreg Euro-MED Academy and Library. By facilitating cross-sectoral and multilevel collaboration, the Mission is uniquely positioned to support stakeholders in overcoming barriers and scaling impactful actions.

A number of best practices and innovative solutions are outlined below, drawing from M4N projects:

Nature-based Solutions (NbS)
NbS are pivotal for sustainable restoration efforts, particularly in vulnerable ecosystems such as wetlands, coastal areas and riverine environments, and they offer a sustainable pathway to mitigate the impacts of climate change and enhance ecosystem resilience. Governments and investors should promote and invest in NbS that follow strict criteria, including a clear understanding of good and bad practices. Investments must be planned on a solid scientific basis and in close consultation with civil society under strict monitoring of their net benefits to the environment and communities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ IUCN <a href="#">Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions</a>.</li> <li>→ PAP/RAC <a href="#">“Guidelines on NbS for adaptation to climate change in different coastal typologies of the Mediterranean”</a>.</li> <li>→ The Interreg Euro-MED <a href="#">Wetland4Change</a> project provides a replicable framework through their innovative protocol for assessing carbon sequestration and flood regulation in wetlands. This project includes specific management practices and guidelines for</li> </ul>



monitoring the impacts of these practices on climate change mitigation and flood prevention. The protocol equips authorities with tools to prioritize wetland restoration for both adaptation and mitigation of climate change impacts.

- The Interreg Euro-MED [ARTEMIS](#) project develops and implements innovative restoration protocols and integrating ecosystem service values into financial and policy frameworks, to restore and conserve seagrass meadows in the Mediterranean region. Through four transnational pilot projects, all stages of restoration, from transplantation in degraded areas to the enhancement of protected ones are covered, establishing a baseline for ecosystem service enhancements.
- The Interreg Euro-MED [MPA4Change](#) project enhances the role of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and restoration as nature based solutions for climate change adaptation. Building on previous projects and in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy objectives, the project's action plan for Mediterranean MPAs ensures their long-term sustainability and capacity.
- The Interreg Euro-MED [LocAll4Flood](#) project is developing an integrated and bottom-up governance model to manage flash floods and reduce their risks by combining actions of prevention, adaptation and mitigation. Among other actions, the project has compiled a catalogue of NbS to reduce flash floods impacts through wetland, dune, marine, river or forest restoration.

### Reliable indicators of impact, clear metrics and performance standards

Crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of restoration measures, track progress, ensure accountability and adapt strategies when needed.

- The [STAR \(Species Threat Abatement and Recovery\) metric](#)
- The IUCN [Red List of Ecosystems](#)
- Monitoring frameworks for Key Biodiversity Areas.

### Long-term monitoring systems

They are essential to provide ongoing data and feedback on the status and impact of restoration actions, and to ensure that these actions remain responsive to changing environmental and socio-economic conditions while facilitating adaptive management (by identifying emerging trends) and enabling timely adjustments to strategies.

- The IMAP Indicator of Land Change, developed under the UNEP/MAP, to monitor shifts in land cover can help evaluate the success of restoration actions and identify areas requiring further intervention. All contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention are obliged to comply with this.
- The Interreg Euro-MED [MedSeaRise](#) project, with case studies in the Mediterranean region, exemplifies the importance of continuous ecosystem monitoring. This project not only



estimates the uncertainty of future ecosystem conditions, but also demonstrates the impacts of sea-level rise hazard, over anthropic activities and ecosystems.

- The Interreg Euro-MED [FRED](#) project, with six pilot cases across the Mediterranean, focuses on monitoring and preventing wildfires, addressing critical challenges in terrestrial restoration. By developing a communication platform that integrates a fire index map, the project enables stakeholders to coordinate responses effectively, even in areas inaccessible to vehicles.
- The Interreg Euro-MED [TREASURE](#) project tests and experiments new techniques for the remediation of degraded and polluted port areas environmental quality in and around Mediterranean ports. Moreover, it elaborates an integrated monitoring approach to environmental quality assessment, tested at a transnational level, resulting in an Impact Evaluation and Hazard Management matrix.

### Governance tools

To ensure governance aspects for equitable and effective conservation are taken into account.

- The [IUCN Natural Resources Governance Framework](#)
- The [IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas](#) serves as a global standard for recognizing well-managed protected areas that achieve positive results for biodiversity and communities.
- The Interreg Euro-MED [GreenList4MMPAs](#) project explores how to apply the [IUCN Green List Standard](#), a global benchmark for protected area management quality, to the Mediterranean’s unique context. By helping Marine Protected Areas assess and improve their quality, the project strengthens the fair and effective conservation of the Mediterranean’s rich marine life and promotes successful conservation in the region.
- The Interreg Euro-MED [COASTRUST](#) project demonstrates the effectiveness of stewardship agreements as a governance tool. These agreements foster collaboration by engaging local actors in coastal restoration. By aligning incentives with conservation goals, stewardship agreements enhance the sustainability of restoration actions and ensure shared responsibility among stakeholders.
- The Interreg Euro-MED [MPA4Change](#) project sets the target of supporting the integration of climate change adaptation strategies and the improvement of the management effectiveness of 100 MPAs by 2030 in the Mediterranean region, contributing in reaching the nature conservation objectives set for 2030 both at international level by the Convention on Biological Diversity and at EU level by the European Green Deal and Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

### Knowledge-sharing platforms

Such platforms, including focus groups and communities of practice, foster collaboration and disseminate valuable lessons from successful projects. They are especially crucial for facilitating



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knowledge transfer between countries in the Mediterranean, bridging gaps between northern and southern nations, as envisioned by the Barcelona Convention. Highlighting examples of success of impactful restoration projects can inspire replication and mobilise support.

- The [Interreg Europe Library](#)
- The [Society for Ecological Restoration database](#)
- The IUCN [PANORAMA platform](#)
- The [Network Nature](#) project
- The Euro-MED [Wetland4Change](#) project exemplifies this through the development of a wetland knowledge base. This geoportal will allow users to visualize the ecosystem services provided by wetlands, such as carbon sequestration and biodiversity maintenance, through interactive infographics and maps.
- The [CitiesWithNature](#) and [RegionsWithNature](#) platforms facilitate the measurement of progress toward the Global Biodiversity Framework targets at local and regional government levels, spanning over 70 countries and involving more than 350 cities and regions. They serve as hubs for sharing experiences, tools and strategies for implementing restoration and conservation actions.

### **Innovative evaluation methods for ecosystem services**

To attract investments in restoration and demonstrate its tangible benefits.



- The [Tessa toolkit](#) (Toolkit for Ecosystem Service Site-based Assessment) is an example of a user-friendly method for evaluating and comparing ecosystem services across different land-use scenarios, such as water regulation, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity.
- The SCARCE project applies multi-criteria indicators and provides a visual representation of ecosystem services in restored areas, showcasing benefits to local communities and highlighting trade-offs.
- The FLOUCA project demonstrates the economic and ecological value of effective MPA management by highlighting the spillover effect on fisheries. Well-managed MPAs increase fish biomass within their boundaries, leading to greater fish abundance and improved catches in adjacent areas.
- In Lebanon, the Marine and Coastal Resources programme (Institute of the Environment at the University of Balamand, MCR-IOE-UOB) is in the process of developing a novel initiative that will explore the [cultivation of Mediterranean bath sponges on artificial reefs and in MPAs](#). This practice is to economically support small-scale, traditional fisher folks and to enhance ecosystem services like carbon storage and water filtration, creating a sustainable model that links economic activities with the benefits of restoration and of nature based solutions.
- In the Balearic Islands, the [Marilles Foundation](#) has conducted evaluations of the socioeconomic benefits of marine conservation in the Levante Reserve. Their findings demonstrate how well-managed marine protected areas can deliver significant returns in terms of biodiversity, tourism and local livelihoods, underscoring the financial viability of investing in marine restoration.

### Citizen science

An effective way to engage the public, fostering a sense of ownership and participation in restoration. Such projects also enhance awareness and understanding of environmental challenges, empowering individuals and communities to become active stewards of nature.

- In Spain, the [“Observadores del Mar”](#) initiative exemplifies the impact of citizen science on marine conservation. Campaigns like “Spot the Alien Fish” and “Spot the Jellyfish” encourage collaboration between scientists, fishers and citizens to monitor the presence of invasive species and track jellyfish populations.
- In Lebanon, the [MCR-IOE-UOB](#) is harnessing citizen science to identify non-indigenous species (NIS) entering the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal through its FLOUCA catch/effort fisheries monitoring system in coordination with all stakeholders with an emphasis on fisher cooperatives. This cooperative project engages fishers in monitoring NIS while offering opportunities to diversify their income streams by targeting and landing those species.



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## 5. Additional Resources

- [Building Resilient Coastal Communities through Nature-based Solutions and Empowerment Tools](#). Eklipse (2024)
- [Guidance and recommendations for ambitious nature restoration plans](#). Institute for European Environmental Policy (2024)



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## ANNEX I. Nature restoration in the context of the global triple crises

The global triple crises (climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution) are the **interconnected environmental challenges** that threaten the stability of our planet and the well-being of future generations. These crises are not isolated phenomena but rather are deeply intertwined, each exacerbating the others, leading to a vicious cycle of environmental degradation. The symptoms of this triple crisis are evident across ecosystems, economies and communities, manifesting in a range of impacts that undermine natural systems and human societies alike.

Rising global temperatures, extreme weather events and shifting weather patterns are all clear symptoms of **climate change**. The increased frequency and intensity of heatwaves, floods, droughts and wildfires are causing widespread disruption to ecosystems, agriculture, water resources and human health. Coastal areas, in particular, are facing the threat of both rising sea levels and more frequent storms, putting communities and biodiversity at risk.

The accelerating **decline of biodiversity** is another symptom of the triple crisis. Species extinction rates are increasing, with many ecosystems losing key species that play critical roles in maintaining ecological balance. Habitat destruction, overexploitation, invasive species and climate change are driving this rapid biodiversity loss, undermining ecosystem services such as pollination, water purification and carbon sequestration, which are essential for human survival and well-being.

Air pollution is the cause of respiratory diseases and other health issues for millions of people worldwide and remains the leading environmental cause of premature death, with the vast majority of the Mediterranean population exposed to hazardous levels of air pollution.

**Pollution**, whether in the form of plastic waste, petrochemical activities, air pollution, industrial emissions, noise or light pollution, is widespread and pervasive. The pollution crisis is intricately connected to both the climate and biodiversity crises. Pollutants are contaminating land, water, and air, harming both the natural environment and human health. Oceans are suffocating under plastic waste while agricultural runoff is leading to the eutrophication of water bodies, threatening marine life. Air pollution is the cause of respiratory diseases and other health issues for millions of people worldwide and remains the leading environmental cause of premature death, with the vast majority of the Mediterranean population exposed to hazardous levels of air pollution. Noise and light pollution can disrupt wildlife behavior, migration patterns, reproduction and critical ecological processes, particularly in marine and coastal environments.

Addressing the global triple crises requires an **integrated solution** that simultaneously tackles all three issues, recognizing their interdependencies. Nature-based Solutions offer a powerful approach to this challenge. By restoring degraded ecosystems and implementing sustainable land and water management practices, we can mitigate climate change, reverse biodiversity loss and reduce pollution. For example, restoring wetlands can help absorb carbon, improve water quality by filtering pollutants and provide critical habitat for wildlife. Protecting and expanding forests can sequester carbon, prevent soil erosion and reduce the risk of flooding, while also supporting biodiversity.

Nature restoration through **coordinated international action** is an opportunity to tackle the global triple crisis and build resilience to future environmental shocks. Despite the broad acknowledgement of the urgency, progress remains far too slow. Advancing nature restoration, reducing pollution and decarbonizing our economies require **supportive legislation** that redirects financial resources towards these objectives and enforces stricter regulations to combat environmental damage.





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## ANNEX 2. Key objectives of the Nature Restoration Regulation and links with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation in the EU requires urgent action: according to the European Environmental Agency, 81% of habitats in Europe are in poor or bad condition<sup>5</sup>. On a positive note, the European Commission has reported that every euro invested into nature restoration adds €4 to €38 in benefits<sup>6</sup>.

In this regard, the **Nature Restoration Regulation**, which entered into force in August 2024, is the **first binding legislation for the restoration of ecosystems throughout the EU**, setting targets for Member States to restore degraded ecosystems. As a regulation of the EU, it has a binding nature across all Member States, applying directly and immediately without needing to be transposed into national law. The NRR is a product of the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**, one of the pillars of the **European Green Deal**, so it aligns with the EU's overall goal to transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral and biodiversity-rich economy by 2050.

Targets include a combination of collective EU-wide commitments and specific national responsibilities. At the EU level, the regulation mandates the restoration of **at least 20% of the EU's land and sea by 2030**, aiming to restore **all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050** (Article 1). In parallel, Member States must achieve **national targets**, which require the restoration of **30% of all habitats that are not in good condition by 2030**, with a priority focus on Natura 2000 sites. This requirement escalates to **60% by 2040** and **90% by 2050**, although certain flexibilities are allowed to accommodate national circumstances (Articles 4 and 5). For the coherence of EU policies and for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness of the regulation, the Nature Restoration Regulation incorporates a **non-deterioration clause** which mandates that Member States put in place measures to ensure that areas covered by habitat types falling within the scope of the Regulation do not significantly deteriorate. Exemptions to this clause are permitted, in areas outside Natura 2000 sites, if they are related to activities deemed of **overriding public interest**, such as renewable energy projects and national defence.

The regulation also addresses urban environments, stipulating that there must be no net loss of **urban green areas** and **tree canopy** by December 2030, with a requirement for an increasing trend in these areas thereafter (Article 8). Additionally, the NRR sets a target to **restore at least 25,000 kilometres of rivers** to free-flowing status by 2030, a crucial step for improving aquatic ecosystems (Article 9).

By 2030, the decline of **pollinator populations** (Article 10) must be reversed through habitat restoration, with continuous improvements aimed at reaching satisfactory levels. In **agricultural ecosystems** (Article 11), the NRR calls for an upward trend in at least two biodiversity indicators. The restoration of organic soils used in agriculture is emphasised, with targets set at 30% by 2030, 40% by 2040 and 50% by 2050, prioritising rewetting efforts. In **forest ecosystems** (Article 12), Member States are required to achieve increasing trends in the Common Forest Index in at least six forest indicators, until they reach satisfactory levels. The regulation also includes a **major tree-planting initiative**, aiming to plant **3 billion trees by 2030** across the EU (Article 13).

<sup>5</sup> European Environment Agency. (2021). *Conservation status of habitats under the EU Habitats Directive*. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/indicators/conservation-status-of-habitats-under>

<sup>6</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Environment. (2022). *Restoring nature: for the benefit of people, nature and the climate*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/439286>.



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Satisfactory levels for key indicators must be established in the **National Restoration Plans**, using the latest scientific evidence. These plans must be comprehensive and quantify restoration areas using maps, detail specific measures, address climate change impacts, outline public participation processes and specify financing needs. The plans must also demonstrate alignment with broader climate and environmental policies, fostering synergies across sectors (Articles 14 and 15). By **September 2026**, Member States will have to submit to the Commission their **draft National Restoration Plans** to implement these commitments and show how they will deliver on the targets. These drafts will be assessed by the Commission, and by **September 2027, final versions of these national plans should be approved** (Articles 16 and 17). From that moment, there will be a **revision of the plans by June 2032**, and subsequently at least **once every ten years** (Article 19). If progress is deemed insufficient by the Commission, Member States will have to include supplementary measures.

**Monitoring and reporting mechanisms** (Articles 20 and 21) are critical components of the regulation. Member States are required to begin monitoring relevant habitat types and indicators from the moment the regulation enters into force. They must continue to track progress and submit detailed reports every six years, with the first report due in June 2031.

As a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the EU develops a regional **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)**, and so the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 effectively functions as the EU's regional response to the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)**, aligning the bloc with broader global biodiversity goals. The strategic focus of the 4 Thematic Working Groups of the governance project Dialogue 4 Nature (D4N) is framed to address specific targets of the GBF.

But even with the Global Biodiversity Framework adopted, the overall lack of action is concerning. Biodiversity is declining rapidly, and ecosystems are under threat. It is essential to establish a transparent system of reporting and monitoring to ensure accountability. Protected areas need better management, also through better transboundary cooperation for high-value sites, and ensure the conservation of habitats outside of protected areas, while further expanding protected areas.



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### ANNEX 3. Potential synergies with existing policy and legislative frameworks

*The implementation of Target 2 of the GBF and the Nature Restoration Regulation must align with current conservation, climate and biodiversity strategies.*

*For example, embedding restoration objectives into **Protected Areas** regulations will ensure that restoration efforts contribute directly to conservation goals. Similarly, incorporating the NRR into **Marine Spatial Planning** (MSP) and **National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans** (NBSAP) will enhance biodiversity management at the national and regional levels. National Restoration Plans should also be aligned with **National Energy and Climate Plans** (NECPs) and the **EU's Nationally Determined Contribution** (NDCs) under the **Paris Agreement**, reinforcing environmental and climate goals.*

*Ensuring stakeholder engagement synergy between Natura 2000 sites and NRR initiatives will foster stronger community involvement, while integrating restoration practices into subnational monitoring and governance structures will provide clear metrics for progress. Furthermore, by integrating the NRR into **spatial and urban planning** processes and **green infrastructure strategies**, local and urban resilience can be bolstered. This alignment should be supported by **dedicated funding**, such as earmarking a percentage of structural funds for restoration initiatives, or ensuring that NRR goals are included in EU funding programmes.*