

8TH EAP THEMATIC PRIORITY OBJECTIVE

Biodiversity and ecosystems



5 Biodiversity and ecosystems

Protecting and restoring terrestrial and marine biodiversity and ecosystems

Society and the economy depend on a healthy biodiversity. The EU [biodiversity strategy for 2030](#) ⁽¹⁾, launched in 2020, aims to put Europe's biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, climate and the planet. The [8th Environment Action Programme](#) (EAP) ⁽²⁾ builds on the Biodiversity Strategy and aims to protect, preserve and restore Europe's biodiversity by 2030 and beyond.

To capture progress towards key objectives of biodiversity conservation and restoration, the European Commission's [8th EAP monitoring framework](#) ⁽³⁾ selected four indicators and corresponding targets to be met by 2030:






- An indicator on the EU common bird index, to keep track of whether the decline of the population of common birds will reverse by 2030.
- Two indicators on designated terrestrial and marine protected areas to monitor whether overall coverage of protected areas will reach at least 30% of the EU's land and sea area by 2030.
- An indicator on EU forest connectivity to monitor whether the degree of forest connectivity will increase, with a view to creating and integrating ecological corridors and increasing climate change resilience.

The indicator assessment results are summarised further below. In summary, it seems unlikely that any of the four biodiversity and ecosystem-related monitoring targets selected for this priority objective will be reached by 2030. A common reason for this across the indicators is the high pressure on land and sea use from socio-economic sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and urbanisation. If the 2030 targets are to be met, Member States will need to make significant additional efforts to improve implementation, introduce new measures to restore biodiversity and further mainstream biodiversity into policies such as the common [agricultural](#) ⁽⁴⁾ and [fisheries](#) ⁽⁵⁾ policies. Furthermore, the time lag between implementation of measures and the final outcomes of improved biodiversity should be taken into account. The dashboard that tracks progress under the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 points to a similar set of conclusions ⁽⁶⁾.

The methodology used to determine the prospects of meeting the 2030 targets is described in Annex 2. It is also explained in the following key:

Methodology key

Will the objective be met by 2030?

	It is very likely	i.e. it answers 'yes' with a high degree of confidence to the question
	It is likely but uncertain	i.e. it answers 'maybe yes' to the question
	It is unlikely but uncertain	i.e. it answers 'maybe no'
	It is very unlikely	i.e. it answers 'no' with a high degree confidence
	It is unclear	i.e. the prospects cannot be determined (e.g., insufficient data/evidence, no correlation between indicator and selected objective)



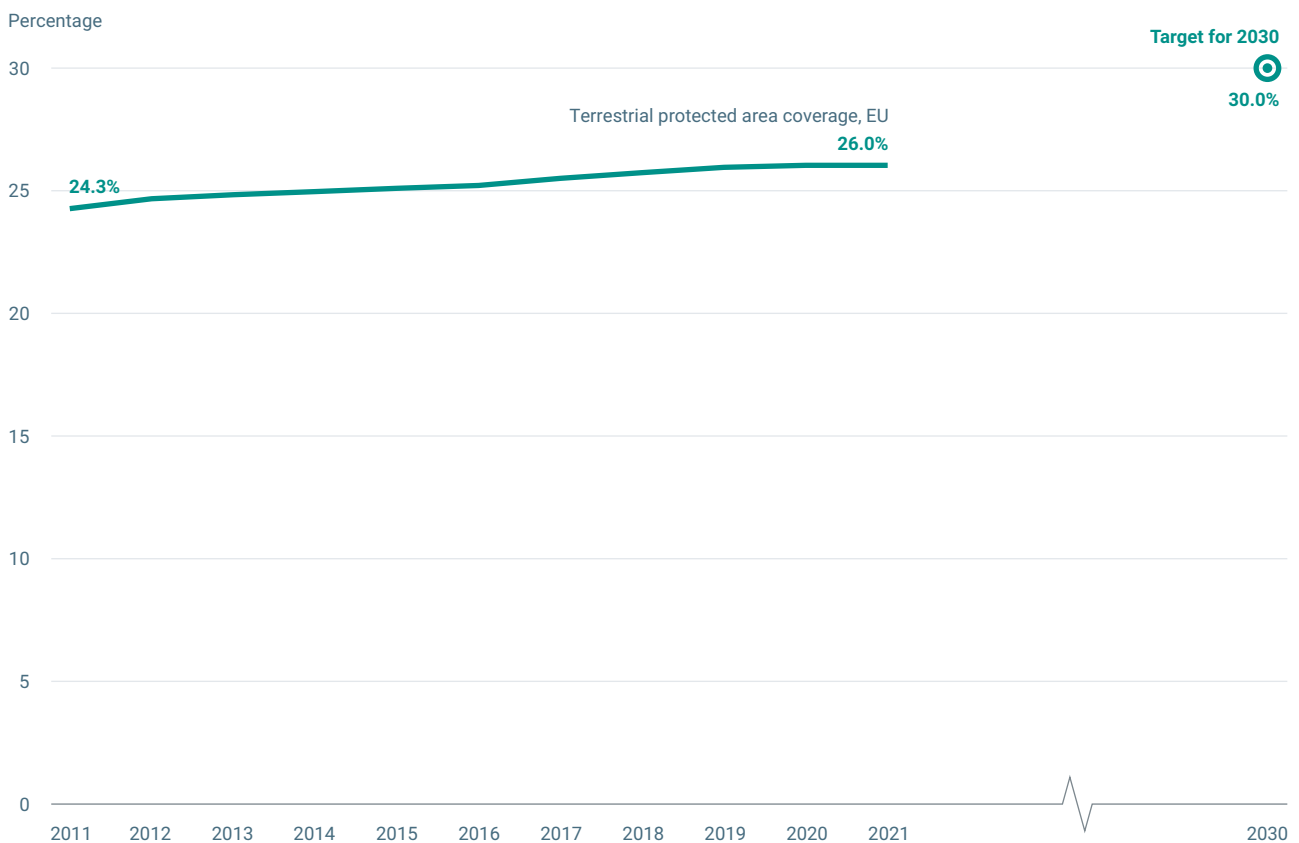
Designated terrestrial protected areas:

Will at least 30% of the EU's land be legally designated as terrestrial protected areas by 2030?



Unlikely but uncertain. The pace of progress has been slow over the past 10 years and will have to more than double to reach the 2030 target. Pledges for additional designations submitted by Member States in 2023 will determine the prospects of achieving the target.

Figure 5.1 Terrestrial protected area coverage, EU



Source: EEA/EuroGeographics.

Relevance and policy target

- Terrestrial protected areas benefit species, ecosystems and the environment overall, and contribute to human health and wellbeing. Protected areas provide economic and employment opportunities and have significant cultural value.
- The EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 sets the target of legally protecting and effectively managing a minimum of 30% of EU land.

Indicator past trend (2011-2021): increase ↑

Latest value (2021): 26%

- Over the 2011-2021 period, protected EU land increased from 24.3% to 26%. This was mainly driven by designations to fulfil the Natura 2000 network requirements – a network of protected areas designated under the EU [birds](#) (7) and [habitats](#) (8) directives – and to a lesser extent by complementary national designations (9).
- Overall slow progress reflects the high pressure on land use from agriculture, transport, urban development, and increasing competition for land for producing renewable energy and biofuels.

2030 outlook

- It is unlikely but uncertain that the 2030 target will be met.
- The annual expansion rate will need to more than double compared to that of the past 10 years if the target is to be met by 2030. Member States are in the process of submitting pledges to designate new protected areas (10) during 2023. These pledges will provide new insights into the prospects of achieving the 2030 target.
- The designation of protected areas is not in itself a guarantee of biodiversity protection. It will be important to manage the sites effectively and in a way that ensures spatial and functional connectivity between them.



For more references and additional information, including at country level, see the [full indicator version](#).



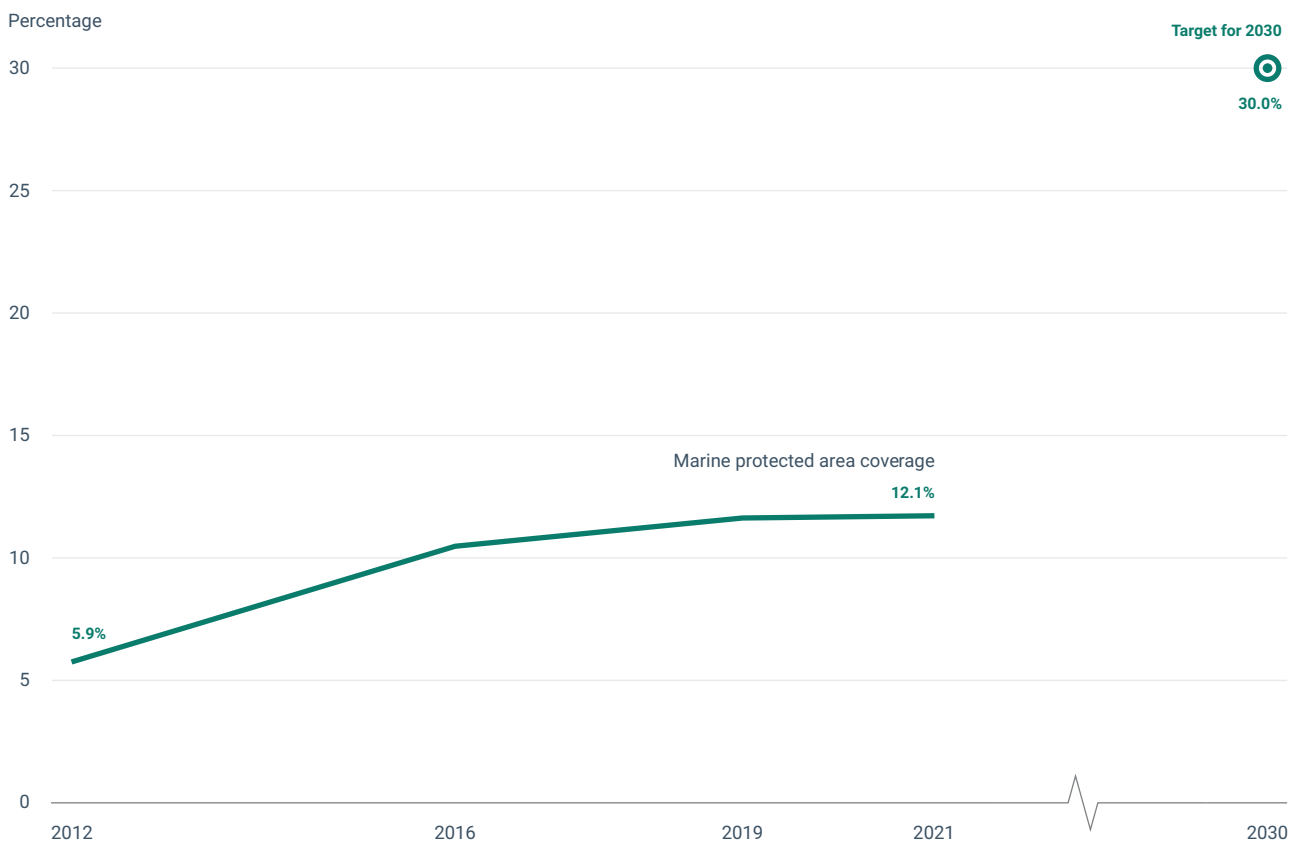
Designated marine protected areas:

Will at least 30% of the EU's sea areas be legally designated as marine protected areas by 2030?



Unlikely but uncertain. Despite fast progress over the years, the pace will have to increase by almost 30% to reach the 2030 target. Pledges for additional designations submitted by Member States in 2023 will determine the prospects of achieving the target.

Figure 5.2 Marine protected area coverage, EU



Source: EEA/HELCOM Secretariat/OSPAR Commission.

Relevance and policy target

- Marine protected areas (MPAs) play a key role in maintaining biodiversity and conserving coastal and marine ecosystems. They also provide significant economic and societal benefits and support local livelihoods.
- The EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 set the target that, by 2030, at least 30% of the EU sea area should be legally protected and well managed.

Indicator past trend (2012-2021): increase ↑

Latest value (2021): 12.1%

- Over the last decade, the total area covered by MPAs in the EU has increased substantially – from 5.9% in 2012 to 12.1% in 2021. This increase is mainly due to the expansion of the Natura 2000 network – a network of protected areas designated under the EU birds and habitats directives – while complementary national designations have also contributed ⁽¹⁾.

2030 outlook

- It is unlikely but uncertain that the 2030 target will be met.
- The starting point is low and the annual rate of increase will need to increase by almost 30% compared to that observed over the past nine years in order to meet the target. The ongoing submissions of Member State pledges in 2023 for additional protected areas will provide further insights into the prospects of reaching the 2030 target ⁽²⁾.
- Designation of new MPAs alone will not guarantee conservation of the EU's marine ecosystems. It will be equally important to define these areas based on sound scientific analysis, ensuring ecological representativity, coherence and connectivity and that all MPAs are well managed.



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Common birds:

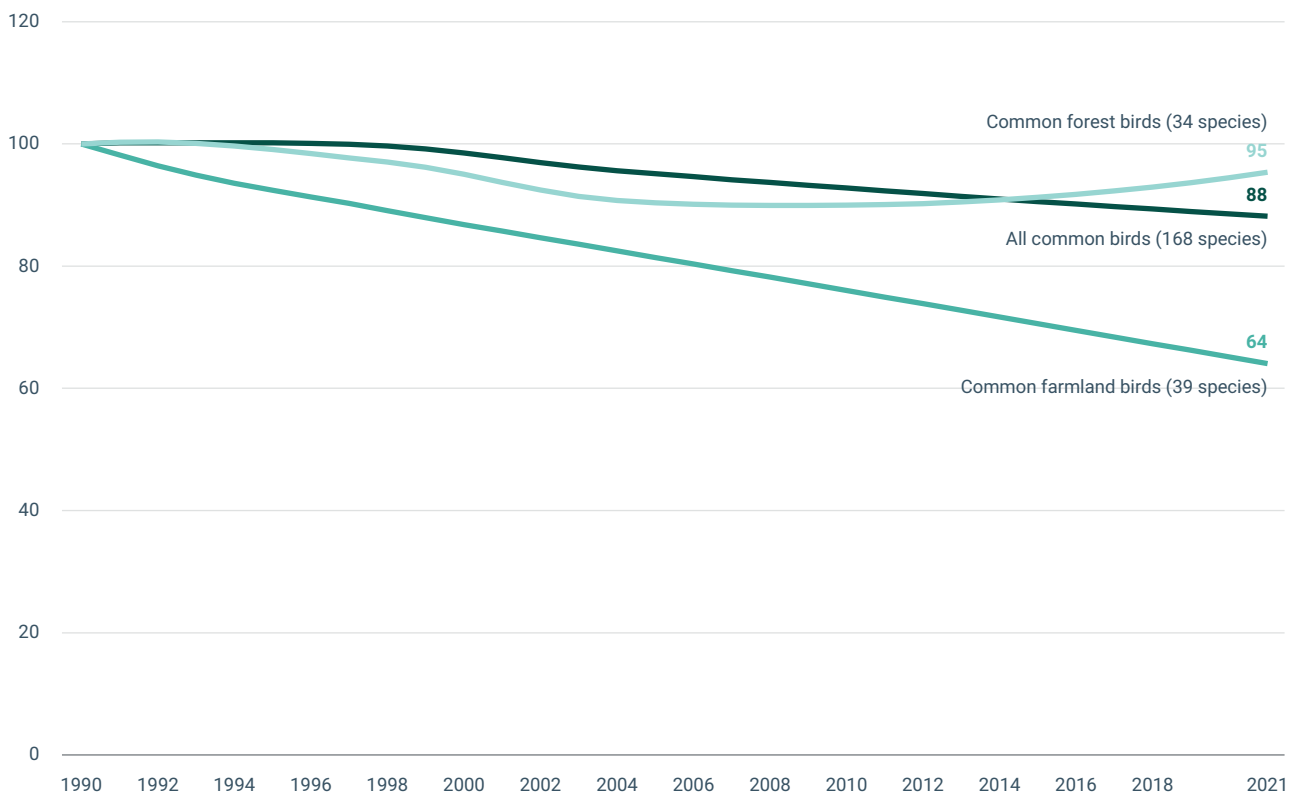
Will the decline in the population of common birds reverse by 2030?



Unlikely but uncertain. There has been a steady decline and there is uncertainty over the timing and effect of upcoming EU restoration measures.

Figure 5.3 Common bird index, EU

Population index (1990=100)



Source: European Bird Census Council/EEA.

Relevance and policy target

- Common birds are sensitive to environmental pressures. Their population numbers can reflect changes in ecosystems and other animal and plant populations, making them good indicators of biodiversity and environment health.
- The EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 aims to put biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030.

Indicator past trend (1990-2021): decrease ↓

Latest value (2021): 88 (1990=100)

- The common birds index shows a 12% decline in the 1990-2021 period. The decline in common farmland birds over the same period was much more pronounced at 36%, while the common forest bird index decreased by 5%.
- The decline is mainly caused by intensive agricultural management and land-use change ⁽¹³⁾. Other factors that have adverse effects on the recovery of common bird populations include climate change ⁽¹⁴⁾ and increasing competition for land for producing renewable energy and biofuels ⁽¹⁵⁾⁽¹⁶⁾⁽¹⁷⁾.

2030 outlook

- It is unlikely but uncertain that the decline in the population of common birds can be reversed by 2030. The decline is steady and the form and timing of restoration measures as well as when impact could be achieved remain uncertain.
- To ensure the recovery of common birds, Member States will need to strengthen the implementation of existing biodiversity conservation and restoration policies and design new ones. EU policies such as the common agricultural policy need to include more effective and ambitious measures to halt biodiversity loss ⁽¹⁸⁾.



For more references and additional information see the full indicator version.



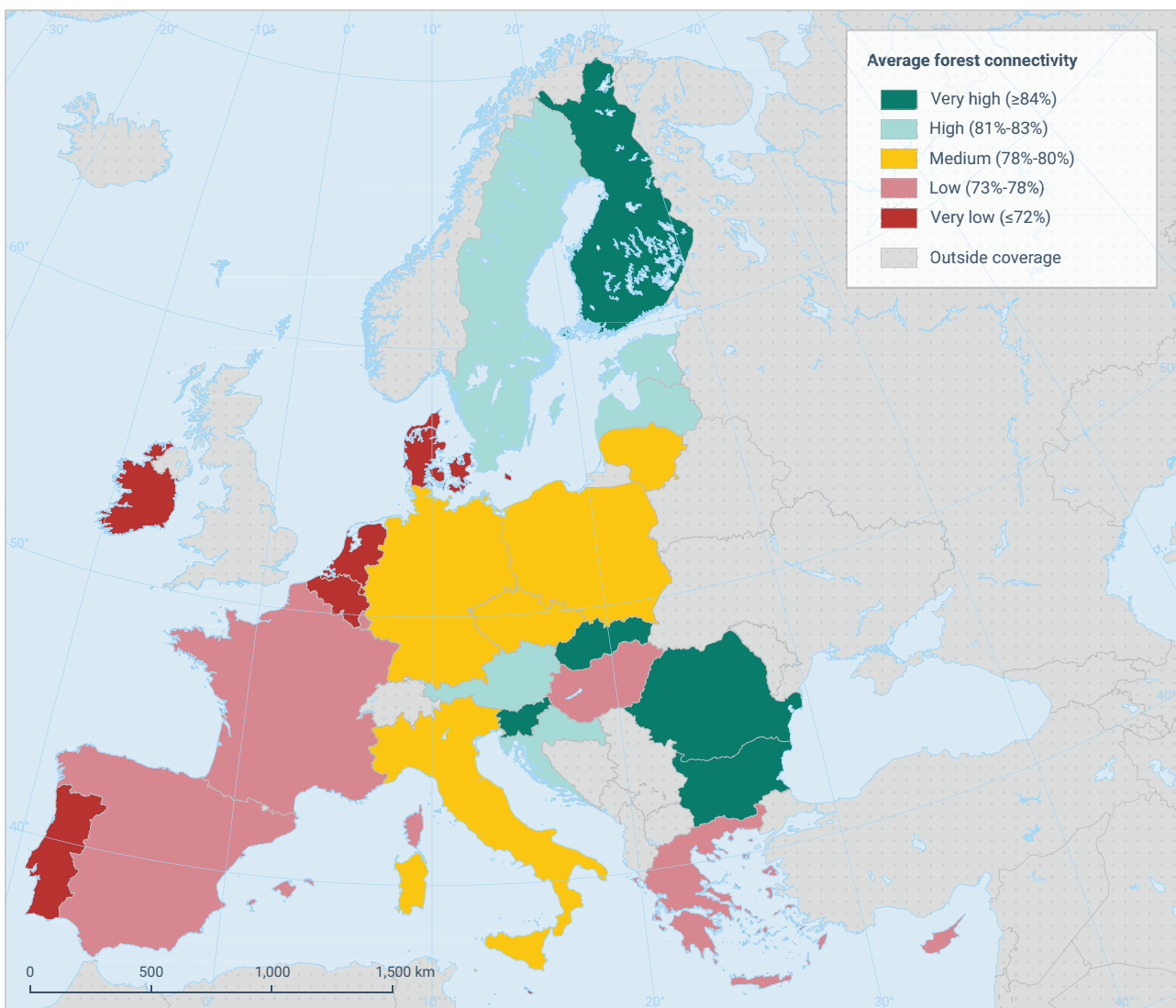
Forest connectivity:

Will the degree of connectivity in forest ecosystems increase in the coming years?



Unlikely but uncertain. The positive effects of the EU forest and biodiversity strategies on forest connectivity will take a long time to bear fruit, while actions to break forest connectivity can have immediate effects.

Map 5.1 Forest connectivity in the EU Member States



Reference data: © EuroGeographics, © FAO (UN), © TurkStat Source: European Commission – Eurostat/GISCO

Source: EEA, (methodology: Joint Research Centre).

Relevance and policy target

- Increasing the connectivity of forested landscapes is a key measure towards improving biodiversity and the ecological functions of forests ⁽¹⁹⁾. The EU [forest strategy for 2030](#) ⁽²⁰⁾ and biodiversity strategy for 2030, which include the pledge to plant at least 3 billion additional trees by 2030, promote forest connectivity ⁽²¹⁾.

Indicator past trend (2000-2018): stable (trend inferred by forest fragmentation data) → **Latest value on forest connectivity (2018):** 79%

- In 2018, the EU average forest connectivity was 79%. The indicator is available only for that year. A methodologically correlated forest fragmentation analysis shows, nevertheless, that forest fragmentation had not changed since 2000 and from this it is concluded that forest connectivity has not improved over that period.
- Historically, forests have become fragmented because of conversion to cropland and pastures, urbanisation and infrastructure developments ⁽²²⁾⁽²³⁾.

2030 outlook

- It is unlikely but uncertain that forest connectivity will improve in the EU by 2030 ⁽²⁴⁾.
- The positive effects of the EU forest and biodiversity strategies on forest connectivity, such as promoting afforestation, reforestation and restoring forest ecosystems, will most likely only become visible after 2030 because of the time lag between actions in the field and improved connectivity. On the other hand, actions to break forest connectivity, such as deforestation, can have immediate effects.



For more references and additional information, including at country level, see the [full indicator version](#).

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