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ENV 398
AGRI 258
FIN 424
PESTICIDE 21
PHYTOSAN 22
RECH 293
EDUC 223
JEUN 58
CONSOM 130
FORETS 33
RELEX 516

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Progress in the implementation of the EU Pollinators Initiative

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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
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Progress in the implementation of the EU Pollinators Initiative

1. INTRODUCTION: THE EU POLLINATORS INITIATIVE

In recent decades, European wild-insect pollinators such as bees, butterflies, hoverflies and moths have dramatically declined in occurrence and diversity in Europe. Many species are also on the verge of extinction. According to the European Red List¹, around 1 in 3 bee and butterfly species has a declining population, while around 1 in 10 are threatened with extinction.

The loss of wild pollinators is a serious cause for concern. This is because around 80% of crop and wild-flowering plant species in the EU depend, at least in part, on animal pollination. Without pollinators, many plant species would decline and eventually disappear. This would threaten the survival of nature, human wellbeing and the economy. Around EUR 3.7 billion of the EU's annual agricultural output is directly dependent on insect pollinators². However, available estimates do not account for the animal pollination of wild plants, nor do they account for the contribution made by pollinators to nutrition security and human health.

In June 2018, the Commission adopted the EU pollinators initiative³ ('the Initiative'). The Initiative is the first-ever EU framework to tackle the decline of wild pollinators⁴. It has been strongly supported across stakeholder groups⁵.

The Initiative set long-term objectives for 2030 which dealt with generating actionable knowledge about the problem, tackling the problem's main known causes, fostering stakeholder collaboration and engaging society at large. To set the EU on the right path, the Initiative outlined 10 actions and 31 sub-actions to be implemented in the short-to-medium term.

The actions supported an integrated approach to the problem and the more effective use of existing tools and policies. This primarily focused on better integration of pollinator-conservation objectives across various sectoral EU policies, including environment and health policies (in particular the Birds and Habitats Directives and EU legislation on pesticides), the common agricultural policy (CAP), cohesion policy and research-and-innovation policy.

The European Parliament⁶ and the Council⁷ both welcomed the Initiative, highlighted the importance of pollinators and called for effective measures to tackle their decline. On 9 July 2020, the European Court of Auditors published a special report⁸ on EU actions to protect wild pollinators ('the ECA report'). The ECA report identified gaps in key EU policies addressing the main threats to wild pollinators, and recommended that the Commission assesses the need to add specific measures to address threats currently not considered in the Initiative. The ECA report also point to the need to, better integrate actions to protect wild pollinators in the EU biodiversity conservation and agricultural policies and improve the protection of wild pollinators in the

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/redlist>

² European Union, European Environment Agency, (2021), 'Accounting for ecosystems and their services in the European Union (INCA)', *Publications Office of the European Union*, Luxembourg, (in press).

³ COM(2018) 395 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0395>.

⁴ Pollinators in Europe are primarily insects, including wild bees, hoverflies, butterflies and moths.

⁵ https://www.acceptance.ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/pollinators/documents/EU_pollinators_summary_public_consultation.pdf

⁶ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0104_EN.html

⁷ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12948-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

⁸ Special Report 15/2020, <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=54200>.

pesticides risk assessment process. Council conclusions of 17 December 2020⁹ welcomed the ECA’s recommendations, and acknowledged the urgency to strengthen the EU action framework for pollinators.

On 20 May 2020, the Commission adopted the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030¹⁰ and the farm-to-fork strategy¹¹, both of which are flagship initiatives under the European Green Deal. These strategies will boost actions to reverse the decline of pollinators through commitments and targets for nature protection and the EU nature-restoration plan. Together with the new EU strategy on adaptation to climate change¹², and strengthened ambition on both climate neutrality and zero pollution, these strategies will help to tackle the main threats to wild pollinators such as land-use change, intensive agricultural management and pesticide use, environmental pollution, invasive alien species (IAS) and climate change.

This report assesses progress in the implementation of all the Initiative’s actions. It is based on many sources, including the results of policy evaluations, EU reports and publications and specific studies. It also takes into account the institutional feedback received from the European Parliament, the Council and the European Court of Auditors.

2. 10 ACTIONS - SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

2.1. Action 1: Support monitoring and assessment

The current knowledge clearly demonstrates an alarming decline in wild pollinators that warrants strong action. However, there are still significant data and information gaps on the state of pollinators, the causes of their decline and its consequences for nature and human wellbeing.

In June 2019, the Commission mandated a group of pollinator experts to develop a proposal for a field-based EU pollinator-monitoring scheme that would provide robust information on the status of – and trends in – pollinator populations in the Member States (action 1A). To ensure involvement of and timely inputs from Member States in this process, the Commission consulted the national environmental and agricultural authorities, including through dedicated workshops. The experts’ proposal¹³, published in January 2021, provides a comprehensive methodology for the monitoring scheme and a set of policy indicators. As a next step, the Commission will work closely with Member States on fine-tuning and operationalising the proposal and capacity building to implement the scheme on the ground.

Data from the future EU pollinator-monitoring scheme will be critical to: (i) develop and implement effective conservation actions; (ii) map priority areas for deployment of these actions; and (iii) evaluate the impacts of these actions. These data will also underpin the European Red List by enabling robust assessment of the conservation status of pollinator species in the long term. In December 2018, the Commission began work on the European Red List of hoverflies¹⁴

⁹ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14168-2020-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁰ COM(2020) 380 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0380>.

¹¹ COM(2020) 381 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0381>.

¹² COM(2021)82 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2021:82:FIN>.

¹³ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC122225>

¹⁴ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/European+Red+List+of+Hoverflies>

(action 1B), which is expected to be finalised in June 2022. In April 2021, the Commission began work on the European Red List of moths¹⁵.

Protected areas are especially vital for the conservation of pollinators. In June 2020, the European Environment Agency and its European Topic Centre on Biological Diversity published a report that assessed the importance of Annex I habitat types under the Habitats Directive for pollinators¹⁶. This made it possible to assess the conservation status of protected pollinator habitats based on reporting by Member States¹⁷ (action 1C). The latest EEA *State of Nature* report shows that the status of pollinators is a cause for serious concern^{18,19}.

The Commission has also worked to fill data and information gaps on the pressures facing pollinator species, namely the degradation of habitats and use of pesticides. The Commission is currently piloting a field-based monitoring scheme for biodiversity in agricultural landscapes²⁰ and preparing the LUCAS²¹ grassland module as part of the 2022 LUCAS survey, following a successful pilot in 2018. The Commission is also piloting an innovative scheme that uses honeybees for monitoring of pesticides in the environment²² (action 1D). The pilot will be followed by the full implementation of the scheme in 2022, supported by the European Parliament's preparatory action²³.

In October 2020, the Commission published the results of the EU-wide ecosystem assessment²⁴ (action 1E). The analysis used currently available data and information on pollinators and their habitats to assess the condition of animal-pollination services in the EU. The results showed that 50% of the land cultivated with pollinator-dependent crops faces a pollination deficit. One of the best ways to address this pollination deficit would be through ecosystem restoration, supported by agricultural policy.

The Commission also developed a pollination 'account'²⁵ (action 1E), which shows that the economic value of pollinating insects to crop production in the EU is around EUR 3.7 billion per year²⁶. The account can be used to assess how declines in pollinator populations affect agricultural production, and agricultural imports and exports²⁷.

¹⁵ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/European+Red+List+of+Moths>

¹⁶ <https://www.eionet.europa.eu/etcs/etc-bd/products/etc-bd-reports/etc-bd-technical-paper-1-2020-report-for-a-list-of-annex-i-habitat-types-important-for-pollinators>

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/rep_habitats

¹⁸ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020>

¹⁹ https://tableau.discomap.eea.europa.eu/t/Natureonline/views/SONpollinators/Storypollinators?%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Adisplay_count=n&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Aorigin=viz_share_link&%3AshowVizHome=n&%3Aembed=y

²⁰ European Monitoring of Biodiversity in Agricultural Landscapes (EMBAL), <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Data+and+information>.

²¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lucas>

²² Insignia project, <https://www.insignia-bee.eu>.

²³ For more information about preparatory actions of the European Parliament please visit: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/640130/EPRS_ATA\(2019\)640130_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/640130/EPRS_ATA(2019)640130_EN.pdf).

²⁴ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC120383>

²⁵ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC117072>

²⁶ European Union, European Environment Agency, (2021), 'Accounting for ecosystems and their services in the European Union (INCA)', *Publications Office of the European Union*, Luxembourg, (in press).

²⁷ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC120571>

2.2. Action 2: Support research and innovation

The Commission has continued to support basic and applied research on pollinators through the EU's research-and-innovation framework programme, in order to fill in the knowledge gaps and support more effective and result-driven conservation actions²⁸ (action 2A).

Following the adoption of the Initiative, the Commission included a dedicated topic on pollinators in the Horizon 2020 work programme for 2018-2020. This topic aims to develop tools, guidelines and methodologies to better mitigate the causes and consequences of the decline in wild pollinators²⁹. This research is expected to start in September 2021. Under the BiodivERsA³⁰ framework, pollinator-relevant projects have been undertaken that aim to improve our understanding of the interaction between different drivers of pollinator decline³¹ and modelling of scenarios for pollinator biodiversity and the pollination ecosystem service³². Furthermore, excellence in pollinator research has been supported through individual grants and fellowships under the European Research Council³³ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions³⁴. These grants and fellowships have been given to outstanding researchers studying the inherent ecological link between pollinators and plants, and the importance of this link for ecosystem functioning and food production³⁵.

Knowledge generated through research will be important for decision making. Within the EKLIPSE framework³⁶, a project assessed current knowledge on how pesticides and fertilisers affect pollinator-conservation measures in farmland to support guidance on best practices³⁷. In addition, the European innovation partnership³⁸ for agriculture has supported bottom-up interactive innovation on pollinator-friendly farmland management³⁹ (action 2B).

The Commission aims to strengthen its support for pollinator research in the next framework programme, Horizon Europe. This is reflected in the programme's first strategic plan⁴⁰ and the proposal for Horizon Europe's first work programme (2021/2022)⁴¹ (action 2C). A number of proposed topics in Horizon Europe aim to support: (i) the development of tools for research on pollinators (for example tools for integrative taxonomy including DNA barcoding and machine learning); (ii) expert capacity building and networking; and (iii) large-scale transition towards the pollinator-friendly management of cultural and agricultural landscapes. Furthermore, the draft

²⁸ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Research+and+innovation>

²⁹ SC5-32-2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/sc5-32-2020>.

³⁰ Horizon 2020 ERA-NET COFUND scheme for promoting pan-European research on biodiversity and ecosystem services, <https://www.biodiversa.org>.

³¹ VOODOO project, <https://www.biodiversa.org/1777/download>.

³² OBServ project, <https://www.biodiversa.org/1635/download>.

³³ DrivenByPollinators <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/819374>.

³⁴ For example, DEF POLL <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/798954>.

³⁵ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Horizon+2020>

³⁶ EKLIPSE is a mechanism for supporting better decisions on the environment based on best available knowledge, <https://www.eclipse-mechanism.eu>.

³⁷ https://www.eclipse-mechanism.eu/pollinators_request

³⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/european-innovation-partnership-agricultural>

³⁹ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Bottom-up+innovation>

⁴⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/research/pdf/horizon-europe/ec_rtd_orientations-towards-the-strategic-planning.pdf

⁴¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/horizon-europe/commissions-proposal-horizon-europe_en#the-commissions-proposal-for-horizon-europe

proposal for a European partnership on biodiversity⁴² aims to support monitoring schemes for biodiversity. This support will also be of vital importance for implementing the EU pollinator-monitoring scheme.

2.3. Action 3: Facilitate knowledge sharing and access to data

Generating actionable knowledge requires filling in known gaps in data, as pursued under actions 1 and 2. However, it also requires better use of existing data and information.

On 20 May 2020, the Commission launched the EU pollinator-information hive⁴³, an information hub on pollinators in the EU (action 3A). This online platform facilitates information sharing on the decline of pollinators and what is being done across the EU to reverse this decline, including through collaborative stakeholder initiatives. The pollinator-information hive is open to key actors, such as public authorities, scientists, the nature conservation sector, civil society activists, land managers (in particular farmers and foresters), beekeepers, the public and businesses. The hive allows these actors to: (i) exchange best practices on efforts to protect and conserve wild pollinators; (ii) find guidance on actions to protect and conserve wild pollinators; and (iii) find partners for these actions.

The EU pollinator-monitoring scheme and other *in situ* monitoring initiatives developed under action 1 will provide invaluable data for assessing the state of pollinator populations and the drivers of their decline. The Commission and the European Environment Agency are currently exploring options to integrate the information generated by the schemes into the Biodiversity Information System for Europe⁴⁴.

Making available existing data on land use is especially important for effective pollinator-conservation actions. The Commission is working with Member States to address the exchange of, sharing, access to, and use of interoperable, non-personal, spatial data available in the CAP's Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS)⁴⁵. The IACS contains potentially valuable information on pollinators and pollination services such as the spatial distribution and location of crops, farming practices or CAP measures. The efforts to harmonise and publish these data for reuse are undertaken as part of the INSPIRE Directive⁴⁶ (action 3B). In 2019, the Commission launched a pilot to test the Directive's data-sharing provisions and explore how the Directive can be used to help organise and implement data sharing across different EU policy domains, including IACS.

2.4. Action 4: Conserve endangered pollinator species and habitats

Reversing pollinator decline starts with safeguarding the most threatened pollinator species and habitats, such as those protected under the Habitats Directive or included on the European Red

⁴² European Partnership under Horizon Europe, 'Rescuing Biodiversity to Safeguard Life on Earth', https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/funding/documents/european_partnership_for_rescuing_biodiversity_to_safeguard_life_on_earth.pdf.

⁴³ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/EU+Pollinator+Information+Hive>

⁴⁴ <https://biodiversity.europa.eu/>

⁴⁵ The IACS is an administrative system for establishing and controlling the eligibility of the aid or support under the CAP, set up and operated by each Member State. More information at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/financing-cap/financial-assurance/managing-payments_en.

⁴⁶ Directive 2007/2/EC establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE), <https://inspire.ec.europa.eu>.

List. Priority funding and effective action plans are needed to improve the conservation status of those species and habitats.

Through the action plan for nature, people and the economy⁴⁷, the Commission has improved implementation of the Habitats Directive by better addressing one of the key threats to pollinators: the loss of habitats. In particular, the Commission developed EU habitat action plans for two habitat types of great importance for pollinators: semi-natural dry grasslands and European dry heaths. Both of these habitat types are protected by the Habitats Directive (action 4 A). In July 2020, the Commission launched a tender to develop three species action plans to conserve the most threatened pollinator species in the EU⁴⁸.

The LIFE programme's support for pollinator conservation has been significantly strengthened since 2018. Several ongoing LIFE projects have pollinator conservation as an explicit objective. These ongoing projects focus on habitat restoration, improving knowledge, and raising awareness to improve the conservation status of threatened butterfly species. Other ongoing projects focus on the promotion of agricultural practices that benefit pollinators or insects more generally⁴⁹.

The Commission has continued to promote applications for LIFE projects on invertebrates, including pollinating insects. In June 2020, the Commission organised a webinar⁵⁰ to discuss how to increase the LIFE programme's support for the conservation of invertebrates, with a view to encouraging more applications in this area in the future. The Commission also presented a final study of 20 LIFE projects on invertebrates, which included recommendations for future projects⁵¹.

The ECA report raised concern about the lack of LIFE projects on pollinator species that are not protected by EU law under the Habitats Directive. In the LIFE multiannual work programme 2021-2024, the Commission will propose to increase the EU co-funding rate for the most threatened species according to the European Red List. This will help promote project actions for pollinator species that are not legally protected, but still face a high risk of extinction.

Action plans for pollinator species and habitats require comprehensive and widely disseminated knowledge on conservation measures and conservation management. The Natura 2000 network plays an important role in addressing the loss of pollinator habitats. During 2018 and 2019, the Commission and Member States supported knowledge exchange on management measures and approaches to conserve pollinators^{52,53,54} through the Natura 2000 biogeographic process⁵⁵ (action 4B). In November 2019, the Commission organised a dedicated workshop to identify the

⁴⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/action_plan

⁴⁸ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Action+plans>

⁴⁹ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/LIFE+programme>

⁵⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/webinar-life-stepping-save-bugs>

⁵¹ https://ec.europa.eu/easme/sites/easme-site/files/life_and_invertebrates-_summary_report-final-layout.pdf

⁵² https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/events/continental_annonian_steppic_and_black_sea_regions_seminar_en.htm

⁵³ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/events/atlantic_biogeographical_chalk_grasslands.htm

⁵⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/platform/events/eurasian_grassland_conference.htm

⁵⁵ For more information on the Natura 2000 biogeographical process, please visit:

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/seminars_en.htm.

best management measures and approaches for pollinator conservation across Natura 2000 sites⁵⁶.

An important way to better integrate pollinator-conservation objectives into the management of the Natura 2000 network is by including priority measures for key pollinator habitats in Member States' prioritised action frameworks (PAFs)⁵⁷. The ECA report recommended that the Commission verify that PAFs include requirements to protect wild pollinators and assess the relevant measures proposed by Member States. The Commission: (i) called on Member States to ensure that such requirements are included in PAFs; (ii) started assessing the PAFs in 2018 and provided comments to encourage the inclusion of requirements for wild pollinators; (iii) and will continue to do so during 2021 for the remaining PAFs (action 4C).

The nature-protection objectives set out in the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 such as enlargement of legally protected areas to 30% of the land, the effective management of these areas and the strict protection of at least a third of those areas will, if fully implemented, greatly benefit pollinators. Strict protection would especially benefit pollinators dependent on old-growth forest habitats, such as hoverflies.

2.5. Action 5: Improve pollinator habitats on and around farmland

In 2019, the Commission launched a study to assess the potential of the CAP 2014-2020 to conserve wild pollinators. The report⁵⁸ published in November 2020 reviews the CAP measures that may support or hinder conservation. It illustrates the implementation of these measures through case studies in six Member States. The study also identifies key lessons learnt. Based on this study, the Commission drew up guidelines for managing authorities, farmers and their advisers on how to increase the effectiveness of CAP measures for pollinators⁵⁹ (action 5A).

In 2019, the Commission launched a study to broadly examine actions on pollinators taken in all Member States⁶⁰, including efforts in agricultural areas (action 5 B). The assessment showed that a number of Member States use targeted measures to protect pollinators under the CAP. However, it is evident that such efforts need to be significantly scaled up across the whole EU.

In February 2020, the Commission organised a large stakeholder conference⁶¹ to share and complement the findings of the above-mentioned Commission's studies, and discuss how to better integrate pollinator-conservation objectives into the CAP strategic plans 2021-2027 (action 5C).

The Commission proposal for the future CAP⁶² includes a number of instruments and features that Member States can use in their strategic plans to improve biodiversity in agricultural areas. Three factors will be critical in helping to fight the decline of pollinator species: (i) the new 'green architecture' built on enhanced conditionality; (ii) eco-schemes and environmental management commitments and (iii) the obligatory higher environmental ambition. These three

⁵⁶ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Natura+2000+workshop+Nov+2019>

⁵⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/financing/index_en.htm

⁵⁸ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Agriculture>

⁵⁹ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Farmers>

⁶⁰ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Actions+in+my+country>

⁶¹ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Stakeholder+conference+Feb+2020>

⁶² https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/future-cap_en

factors will also support the other targets of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 that are essential to support pollinator-friendly farming landscapes:

- at least 10% of agricultural area under high-diversity landscape features;
- a 50% reduction in the risk and use of chemical pesticides;
- a 50% reduction in the use of more hazardous pesticides;
- at least 25% of agricultural land under organic farming management;
- significantly increased uptake of agro-ecological practices.

Furthermore, in its recommendations to Member States as regards their strategic plan for the CAP⁶³, the Commission also addresses the specific objectives of protecting biodiversity, enhancing ecosystem services, and preserving habitats and landscapes. Recommendations on these objectives are expected to help foster the conservation of wild pollinators on farmland.

The ECA report recommended that the Commission verify that Member States include in their strategic plans, whenever necessary, management practices that have a significant and positive effect on wild pollinators. The choice and design of interventions and management practices proposed by Member States should be based on the analysis of their environmental situation. This analysis should lead Member States to identify needs – including pollinator conservation if relevant for a given territory – to be addressed by the strategic plans. The Commission will assess whether the proposed interventions and management practices efficiently contribute to the CAP specific objectives and specific needs identified by Member States.

Under action 1, the Commission has continued its work to develop a CAP indicator on wild pollinators, with a view to including this indicator in the performance and monitoring framework once it is operational. Full finalisation of this indicator depends on the implementation of the EU pollinator-monitoring scheme in the Member States.

2.6. Action 6: Improve pollinator habitats in urban areas and the wider landscape

In 2019, the Commission collected best practices and developed guidelines for pollinator-friendly cities (action 6A). The guidelines⁶⁴, published in January 2020, provide good examples and recommendations to policymakers, decision-makers, spatial planners, project developers, and land-use managers in towns and cities on how to create a favourable urban environment for pollinators.

In October 2020, the Commission produced a dedicated action plan on the sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions⁶⁵ as part of the urban agenda for the EU⁶⁶. Actions on green infrastructure and biodiversity under this plan will support a pollinator-friendly urban environment. The actions for pollinators will be further boosted through the new biodiversity strategy's 'green city accord' initiative⁶⁷ and urban greening plans⁶⁸.

⁶³ COM(2020)846 final.

⁶⁴ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Cities>

⁶⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/sul-nbs_finalactionplan_2018.pdf

⁶⁶ The urban agenda is a partnership of cities, Member States, the European Commission and stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations or businesses.

⁶⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/topics/urban-environment/green-city-accord_en

⁶⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1590574123338&uri=CELEX:52020DC0380>

The Commission also integrated pollinator-relevant criteria into the application forms and guidance notes for both the European Green Capital⁶⁹ and European Green Leaf awards⁷⁰, within the ‘nature and biodiversity’ indicator area (action 6A).

In addition, to facilitate more effective pollinator actions, the Commission has developed an approach to mapping the suitability of urban areas to support pollinators⁷¹. Several cities have used the approach to understand how urban green spaces can be managed to increase pollinator populations. The Commission will widely promote this tool among city authorities.

Conservation actions for pollinators – in urban areas or in the wider landscape – can benefit from EU cohesion-policy funding, according to the priorities included in national and regional operational programmes⁷². In partnership with the European Committee of the Regions, the Commission organised a stakeholder conference⁷³ in February 2020. The purpose of the conference was to increase awareness of these opportunities among: (i) managing authorities; (ii) regional and local authorities; and (iii) stakeholders (action 6B). The conference highlighted a number of projects to conserve pollinators across the EU, funded primarily through the European territorial cooperation (Interreg) programmes⁷⁴. Projects for pollinators have also been supported through other programmes under the European Regional Development Fund, as well as under the Cohesion Fund and the European Social Fund.⁷⁵

The Commission has promoted landscape-level actions that maintain, connect and restore pollinator habitats through its guidance on EU-level green infrastructure⁷⁶ and on the integration of ecosystems and their services into decision-making⁷⁷ (action 6C).

2.7. Action 7: Reduce the impacts of pesticide use on pollinators

In 2018, the Commission discussed with Member States the possibility of integrating specific targets and measures for pollinators into the revised Member State national action plans (NAPs) under the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive⁷⁸ (action 7A). The second Commission progress report⁷⁹ on the implementation of the Directive had no particular focus on pollinators. However, the Commission requested a study to assess the level of integration of targets and/or measures on pollinator conservation in the NAPs. The final report from this study was published in November 2020, showing a low level of integration. Member States must make more efforts to strengthen the provisions for pollinating insects in the NAPs.

Through the EU biodiversity and farm-to-fork strategies, the Commission committed to take action to reduce the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% and the use of more hazardous pesticides by 50% by 2030. To this aim, the Commission will revise the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive enhancing its provisions on integrated pest management (IPM), as

⁶⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital>

⁷⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/europeangreenleaf>

⁷¹ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC115375>

⁷² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding

⁷³ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Stakeholder+conference+Feb+2020>

⁷⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/

⁷⁵ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Regions>

⁷⁶ SWD(2019) 193 final.

⁷⁷ SWD(2019) 305 final.

⁷⁸ Directive 2009/128/EC.

⁷⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/plant/docs/pesticides_sud_report-act_2020_en.pdf

well as promote greater use of safe alternatives to protect harvests from pests and diseases, in particular through the CAP strategic plans. These measures will benefit biodiversity in general, and pollinating insects in particular.

The Commission has worked to ensure that protection of pollinators is also taken into account in the plant protection product authorisation as required by the EU legislation on placing of the market of plant protection products⁸⁰. The Commission has worked with Member States to ensure their endorsement and implementation of the guidance document for assessing the potential risk posed by plant protection products to bees (*Apis mellifera*, *Bombus spp.* and solitary bees)⁸¹, following its adoption by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in 2013 (action 7B). However, since 2013, a clear majority of Member States has consistently objected to endorsing the parts of the EFSA guidance document related to chronic toxicity for bees. The Commission therefore proposed, at the end of 2018, to implement as a first step the parts of the guidance document for which there was sufficient support (i.e. the parts related to the acute risks to honeybees).

In July 2019, a qualified majority of Member States agreed to a draft Commission regulation amending the uniform principles for evaluating and authorising plant protection products. This amendment to the uniform principles was necessary to implement the parts of the guidance document on acute toxicity to honeybees. However, in October 2019, the European Parliament objected⁸² to this draft Regulation and called on the Commission to present a new draft Regulation covering also chronic toxicity and larval toxicity for honeybees and acute toxicity for bumblebees. Therefore, the Commission could not proceed further with the partial implementation of the guidance document.

In March 2019, the Commission mandated EFSA⁸³ to review the guidance document in light of new scientific knowledge that had emerged since 2013. The Commission wanted to produce guidance with the most up-to-date methodologies for conducting risk assessments for both managed and wild bees. The review is ongoing⁸⁴ and is expected to conclude in 2021. The Commission will seek endorsement of the complete guidance document thereafter⁸⁵.

The ECA report called on the Commission to: (i) broaden the risk assessment safeguards to a representative range of wild pollinator species, (ii) prepare with Member States a work plan for the development of test methods in that regard, and (iii) define specific protection goals for wild pollinators. The Commission is addressing these recommendations by strengthening the environmental risk assessment of plant protection products as indicated in the previous paragraph and committed to under the EU farm-to-fork strategy.

The use of, restrictions and bans of plant protection products with neonicotinoid active substances have garnered strong attention in recent years due to their high toxicity to bees⁸⁶. On 29 May 2018, the Commission adopted implementing regulations amending the approval

⁸⁰ Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009.

⁸¹ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/3295>

⁸² https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2019-0149_EN.html

⁸³ European Food Safety Authority.

⁸⁴ https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/event/Bee_Guidance_review.pdf

⁸⁵ In this regard, the Commission will take into account recommendations of the European Court of Auditors (Special Report 15/2020), <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=54200>.

⁸⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides/approval_active_substances/approval_renewal/neonicotinoids_en

conditions for neonicotinoids imidacloprid⁸⁷, clothianidin⁸⁸ and thiamethoxam⁸⁹ to ban all outdoor uses of the three substances (action 7C). In the light of these restrictions, the applicants for the renewal of approval of clothianidin, thiamethoxam and imidacloprid withdrew their applications. Consequently, the approval of these substances expired on 31 January 2019, 30 April 2019 and 1 December 2020, respectively.

The ECA report and the European Parliament's resolution of 18 December 2019⁹⁰ called on the Commission to ensure that emergency authorisations regarding the use of neonicotinoids are duly justified. Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 allows Member States to grant emergency authorisations for plant protection products not authorised on their territory, for a limited period and a limited and controlled use, where a danger cannot be contained by any other reasonable means. Following the ban of outdoor uses of the three neonicotinoids and the expiry of their approvals, several Member States have repeatedly granted emergency authorisations for their use.

The Commission mandated EFSA in 2018 to verify whether emergency authorisations granted repeatedly on certain crops were justified and took action to prevent unjustified emergency authorisations (for Romania⁹¹ and Lithuania⁹²) in 2020. In October 2020, the Commission sent a second mandate to EFSA to assess by September 2021 whether certain emergency authorisations for the use of these substances in sugar beet fulfil the conditions set out in the Regulation. Based on the outcome of this mandate, the Commission may take further action. To further increase transparency, notifications of emergency authorisations by Member States are published in the EU pesticides database⁹³.

2.8. Action 8: Reduce the impacts of IAS on pollinators

In January 2020, the Commission published guidance on managing IAS to protect wild pollinators⁹⁴ (action 8A). The guidance is addressed primarily to: (i) bodies responsible for managing IAS or engaged in relevant policy-making; and (ii) European residents seeking to monitor and/or prevent the introduction and spread of such species. The guidance covers the most relevant measures to detect, control and eradicate some of the IAS that are most harmful to native wild pollinators in Europe. These IAS harmful to wild pollinators include the giant resin bee, the Asian hornet, or plants such as the common rhododendron and goldenrods. The Asian hornet is listed as IAS of Union concern under the Regulation on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species⁹⁵. In 2019, the Commission developed guidelines on IAS native to a part of the EU, in order to raise awareness of the

⁸⁷ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/783 of 29 May 2018 amending Implementing Regulation (EU) No 540/2011 as regards the conditions of approval of the active substance imidacloprid, OJ L 132, 30.5.2018, p. 31.

⁸⁸ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/784 of 29 May 2018 amending Implementing Regulation (EU) No 540/2011 as regards the conditions of approval of the active substance clothianidin, OJ L 132, 30.5.2018, p. 35.

⁸⁹ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/785 of 29 May 2018 amending Implementing Regulation (EU) No 540/2011 as regards the conditions of approval of the active substance thiamethoxam, OJ L 132, 30.5.2018, p. 40.

⁹⁰ 2019/2803(RSP), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0104_EN.html.

⁹¹ OJ L 33, 5.2.2020, p. 16.

⁹² OJ L 33, 5.2.2020, p. 19.

⁹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides/eu-pesticides-database/ppp/pppeas/screen/home>

⁹⁴ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/IAS+Managers>

⁹⁵ Regulation (EU) 1143/2014.

potential negative impacts such species could have outside their native range. Among other species, these guidelines addressed managed honey bee and bumblebee subspecies⁹⁶.

The LIFE programme has supported projects involving habitat restoration following the spread of IAS. Several projects aimed at building awareness, or at surveying and controlling IAS that negatively impact the native flora on which pollinators depend, such as common rhododendron, pampa grass and Himalayan balsam.⁹⁷

The commitment under the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 to reduce the number of Red List species threatened by IAS by 50%, will also help to further mitigate negative impacts on pollinators.

The Commission integrated strong recommendations to use native plant and pollinator species, and to strictly avoid alien species and IAS, into a set of guidance documents for pollinator conservation. These documents were targeted at the public, local authorities, and a wide range of business sectors, including the agricultural, forestry, landscape architecture, and building sectors⁹⁸ (action 8B).

2.9. Action 9: Encourage the business sector and citizens to act

In August 2018, the Commission undertook an initial examination of business activities on pollinator conservation through the EU's Business@Biodiversity platform⁹⁹. After this, the Commission contracted the development of specific guidance documents¹⁰⁰ for 11 business sectors: agriculture; agri-food and beverage; forestry; horticulture; apiculture; retail; landscape architecture; building; mining; energy; and tourism (action 9A). These guidance documents further examined good business practices. The Commission continues to promote these guides and encourage businesses to implement the result-driven actions for pollinator conservation. In addition, the Commission continues to encourage businesses to assess and integrate into their decision-making their impacts and dependencies on biodiversity¹⁰¹, including through LIFE projects supporting pollinator-friendly carbon farming.

The Commission has also continued to encourage the public to act for pollinator conservation, through public campaigns¹⁰², communication activities, educational material¹⁰³ and guidance¹⁰⁴ (action 9C). The Commission's online pollinator-information hive¹⁰⁵ is a key platform for this. Developed under action 3A, the pollinator-information hive facilitates access to information and engages the public and other stakeholders. The communication approach towards the public aims at highlighting the diversity of pollinators and their importance for humanity, encouraging everybody to take action to protect them. Pollinators are one of the most popular nature topics among Europeans, and they are very easy to communicate about. For this reason, the

⁹⁶ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/IAS+Managers>

⁹⁷ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/LIFE+programme>

⁹⁸ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Get+involved>

⁹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/biodiversity/business/news/news-84_en.htm

¹⁰⁰ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Businesses>

¹⁰¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/biodiversity/business>

¹⁰² <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=23462237>

¹⁰³ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Educational+materials>

¹⁰⁴ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Citizens>

¹⁰⁵ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/EU+Pollinator+Information+Hive>

Commission uses pollinators as a vehicle to communicate EU action on the broader issues of biodiversity and the environment under the European Green Deal.

The Commission supports the role of the public in generating knowledge for policy action. In July 2020, it published a report on best practices in citizen science for environmental monitoring¹⁰⁶, which includes citizen science on pollinators (butterfly monitoring). Through the implementation of the European Parliament's pilot project ABLE¹⁰⁷, the Commission fostered the launch of the European butterfly-monitoring scheme in 10 Member States. Citizen science is also set to be an integral component of the future EU pollinator-monitoring scheme, and the scheme for environmental monitoring of pesticide use through honeybees, developed under action 1. Through the STING project¹⁰⁸, the Commission will broaden public engagement activities on pollinators in 2021, particularly in the context of food security.

The European Solidarity Corps (action 9C) supports projects involving young people in various solidarity-related fields, including in the area of environmental and nature protection. Several ongoing projects address pollinators. Some focus on information and awareness-raising activities such as the Wild Bee Pollinator Conservation project or the Solidarity Bees project. Another example – the ecosystem-support project – helps to create favourable habitats for wild pollinators and other insects¹⁰⁹.

Erasmus+ has funded projects aiming to raise awareness amongst pupils, providing them with an opportunity to learn about pollinators. This has involved engaging pupils in activities such as monitoring pollinators in the field, which has allowed young people to learn about the habitat requirements of pollinators and the threats they face¹¹⁰.

The Commission supports citizens in their role as consumers. Consumption choices can substantially affect wild pollinators. The EU Ecolabel¹¹¹ is one of the tools that can mitigate the negative impacts of consumer choices, for example with regard to gardening products that affect pollinators (action 9B). The Commission is currently focusing on maximising the success of the current ecolabel product portfolio, rather than developing new EU ecolabel criteria. It has just started to revise the EU Ecolabel criteria for 'growing media, soil improvers and mulch', and will ensure that the revised criteria address the need to conserve pollinators. For example, the criteria could include safeguards to ensure that soil used for potted plants and gardening products is not sourced from pollinator habitats, or that mineral extraction does not cause the degradation of pollinator habitats. In the food sector, the LIFE food & biodiversity project studied insect protection in food standards and labels, and produced a guide for quality managers, product managers, and procurement managers¹¹².

¹⁰⁶ SWD(2020) 149 final.

¹⁰⁷ <https://butterfly-monitoring.net/able>

¹⁰⁸ STING (Science and Technology for Pollinating Insects) is a project implemented by the Commission's Joint Research Centre, https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/adopted_jrc_2019-20_wp_europa_v2.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Education+and+youth>

¹¹⁰ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Education+and+youth>

¹¹¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/>

¹¹² <https://www.business-biodiversity.eu/en/publications/easy-guide--insect-protection>

2.10. Action 10: Promote pollinator strategies and collaboration at all levels

The Commission encourages national, regional and local authorities to develop pollinator strategies. To facilitate this process, the Commission has produced templates¹¹³ for such strategies, which can be tailored to specific territorial needs (action 10A).

In addition to *ad hoc* events and workshops, the Commission has facilitated stakeholder collaboration on conserving pollinators through the European innovation partnership for agriculture¹¹⁴, the Interreg programmes¹¹⁵, and the EU's urban agenda¹¹⁶ (action 10B). Interreg programmes were especially helpful in fostering collaboration through joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different Member States. The Commission has also continued facilitating connections between national, local and subnational governments and their counterparts elsewhere in the EU. Local operational groups^{117,118} for the innovative, pollinator-friendly management of farms were set up through the European innovation partnership for agriculture.

In October 2020, under the EU's environment partnership programme for accession¹¹⁹, an online regional workshop¹²⁰ on IAS and the EU pollinators initiative was organised for participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Turkey (action 10C). The workshop was supported through the instrument for pre-accession, and one of its aims was to promote the exchange of experiences on setting strategic objectives and putting in place actions to address the decline of pollinators in the EU and contribute to global conservation efforts.

In its work beyond the EU, the Commission has also included specific support for the objectives of both the EU pollinators initiative and the 2018-2030 action plan for the second international pollinator initiative (action 10C). For example, the Commission has supported the 2019 EU-FAO project that has facilitated implementation of multilateral agreements by countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific¹²¹. This project seeks to promote ecosystem-based agricultural practices, including the preservation of natural habitats for wild pollinators and the mitigation of risks posed by pesticides. A global seminar on strengthening and enforcing pesticide regulations to protect pollinators will be organised for pesticide regulatory authorities, so they can build their capacity to develop and enforce pesticide regulations that protect pollinators¹²².

In November 2018, the EU joined the 'coalition of the willing on pollinators'¹²³ during the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (action 10D).

¹¹³ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Public+authorities>

¹¹⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/european-innovation-partnership-agricultural>

¹¹⁵ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/Regions>

¹¹⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/sul-nbs_finalactionplan_2018.pdf

¹¹⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/protecting-farmland-pollinators>

¹¹⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/pasture-pollinators>

¹¹⁹ <https://eppanetwork.eu/project>

¹²⁰ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/International+action>

¹²¹ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/eu-provides-extra-eu9-million-support-faos-work-promoting-nature-friendly-agricultural_en

¹²² <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/EUPKH/International+action>

¹²³ <https://promotepollinators.org/about/history>

Since then, the Commission has supported the objectives of the coalition by sharing knowledge and experience on the implementation of EU actions on pollinators with other countries.

As part of the preparation and implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework¹²⁴, the EU is rallying its international partners towards greater conservation of pollinators and appreciation of the ecosystem services they deliver.

3. CONCLUSION

This review has shown that a significant progress has been made in the implementation of the Initiative's actions. The Initiative has provided an overarching framework for EU actions on pollinators across sectoral policies. Actions to develop key policy enablers have been successfully launched and substantially progressed. These policy enablers include schemes to monitor pollinator species and the drivers of their decline. A pollinator-information system and tailored research initiatives should further support the initiative.

Overall, the Initiative remains a valid policy tool that allows the EU, Member States and stakeholders to tackle the decline of pollinators. However, there remain significant challenges in tackling the drivers of decline. Efforts will need to be stepped up, particularly to address the loss of habitats in farming landscapes and the impacts of pesticides. Other challenges that remain include tackling threats to pollinators that are not addressed directly by the Initiative, such as climate change and environmental pollutants other than pesticides.

Progress towards reaching the Initiative's long-term objectives will be substantially strengthened by the EU biodiversity strategy, the EU farm-to-fork strategy and the EU zero pollution action plan, in particular through the commitments to expand protected areas and restore ecosystems. Furthermore, promoting agro-ecological approaches such as organic agriculture, restoring high-diversity landscape features on farmland and reducing the impacts of pesticides and other environmental pollutants harmful to pollinators are of vital importance.

The Commission will work closely with Member States in the next stage of the implementation of the Initiative. The Commission therefore welcomes the Council conclusions¹²⁵ on the ECA report, in particular on the need to ensure an adequate use of resources, set up an EU-wide governance and monitoring framework on pollinators and better integrate pollinator needs into the CAP and pesticide-legislation framework.

In the second half of 2021, the Commission will launch consultation activities to collect views and more comprehensive evidence, insights and experience from stakeholders and the general public on the implementation of the existing framework. These suggestions will be an important indication on how to improve this framework and identify further measures that would be needed to fully implement the Initiative's long-term objectives.

The Commission will then revise the Initiative, taking into account the feedback received so far from other institutions and stakeholders as well as the results of the consultations.

¹²⁴ <https://www.cbd.int/conferences/post2020>

¹²⁵ <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14168-2020-INIT/en/pdf>