

Effective Ecosystem and Biodiversity Preservation

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024



Indicator

Policy Efforts and Commitment to Preserving Ecosystems and Protecting Biodiversity

Question

How committed is the government to preserving ecosystems and protecting biodiversity?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = The government is clearly committed to protecting ecosystems and biodiversity.
- 8-6 = The government is largely committed to protecting ecosystems and biodiversity.
- 5-3 = The government is only somewhat committed to protecting ecosystems and biodiversity.
- 2-1 = The government is not at all committed to protecting ecosystems and biodiversity.

Canada

Score 10

Canada has an extensive park and wilderness system at both the federal and provincial levels, as well as many local and regional land and marine parks, some of which are very large or protect key habitats and fisheries.

In the wake of the UN Brundtland Commission in the late 1980s, the Chretien government made efforts in the early 1990s to establish and expand protected areas, national parks, and marine conservation areas to safeguard key ecosystems and habitats, aiming to meet UN goals in this area. During this time, Canada also enacted legislation such as the Species at Risk Act (SARA) to protect and recover species at risk. This includes the identification of critical habitats and the development of recovery plans (Shepherd et al. 2022).

Canada has developed biodiversity strategies and action plans, such as the 2030 National Biodiversity Strategy and the Canadian Biodiversity Action Plan (2022), to guide conservation efforts and address threats to biodiversity.

Canada is also a party to many international agreements and conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and has made commitments to global biodiversity targets associated with these agreements.

Investments in scientific research and monitoring help assess the state of biodiversity, identify threats and inform evidence-based conservation policies.

The government supports stewardship programs and partnerships that engage communities, private landowners, and organizations in biodiversity conservation

efforts. Many of these plans involve working with provincial and local governments; they also recognize the importance of Indigenous knowledge and stewardship in many areas of the country, including the Arctic. The Canadian government collaborates with Indigenous and territorial governments to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge into conservation initiatives.

Citation:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/biodiversity/national-biodiversity-strategy.html>

Shepherd, Robert P., Diane Simsovic, and Allan Latourelle. 2022. "Managing Canada's National Parks: Integrating Sustainability, Protection and Enjoyment." In *Policy Success in Canada: Cases, Lessons, Challenges*, eds. Evert Lindquist, Michael Howlett, Grace Skogstad, Geneviève Tellier, and Paul t' Hart. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192897046.003.0023>

Finland

Score 9

With approximately 48,000 animal and plant species, constituting around 30% of Europe's described species, Finland is home to significant biodiversity. Despite the growth in the bear population, it remains a "near threatened" species due to hunting restrictions. The country's diverse ecosystems – including vast forests, freshwater resources and extensive coastline – contribute to its rich biodiversity (State Treasury 2023).

A periodic assessment in 2019 revealed that 11.9% of evaluated species were threatened, with birds, reptiles and amphibians having the highest proportions of threatened species. Forest changes, such as the reduction of old-growth forests and large trees, forest management practices, and insufficient deadwood, pose a significant threat to species. Open habitat overgrowth and climate change – particularly affecting fell areas – are also concerns.

Finland is developing a new National Biodiversity Strategy and a corresponding action plan extending to 2030. This initiative considers domestic goals and aligns with the objectives outlined in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the recent EU Biodiversity Strategy (State Treasury, 2023).

The overarching aim of this strategy is to bolster biodiversity protection and facilitate the rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems. Additionally, methodologies for measuring the impact of human actions will be developed. The strategy and action plan will be closely aligned with international and EU objectives.

The need for a new biodiversity strategy arises from the ongoing decline in the biodiversity of Finland's natural environments, with the rate of decline accelerating, particularly in the case of threatened species. The strategy aims to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and seeks to reverse the trend by promoting recovery by 2035.

The previous National Action Plan for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity (2013 – 2020) aimed to halt biodiversity loss in Finland by 2020.

Emphasizing the economic and cultural values of biodiversity, the plan integrated environmental considerations into all societal sectors, engaged new stakeholders in nature conservation efforts, and underscored decision-making based on sound scientific knowledge (Ministry of the Environment n.d.).

The plan also acknowledged Finland's global responsibility for natural environments, incorporated traditional knowledge from the Sámi people, and considered international and EU objectives. Successful aspects included communication and training, international cooperation, and monitoring. However, despite numerous completed measures, only a fraction resulted in clear improvements, often due to insufficient clarity or ambition. Effective measures involved cooperation, independent implementation, self-funding and efficient information production. The most impactful themes were communication, financial steering, legislation, zoning and land use, and habitat restoration and management.

Finland's forests are its most valuable natural resource. The overall annual growth rate of trees in these forests exceeds the total timber harvest, a result of institutionalized protections. Despite these efforts, attempts to halt the ongoing decline in biodiversity have proved insufficient, even though the government has created networks of protected areas.

The environment and natural resources are among the responsibilities of 13 centers for economic development, transport and the environment. The Ministry of Employment and the Economy supervises the general administrative work of these centers.

Recent research suggests that in environmental matters where economic factors play a key role, there is a trend toward restricting citizens' rights to be informed about and influence decisions.

Citation:

Ministry of the Environment. n.d. "Finland's Biodiversity Policy." <https://ym.fi/en/national-biodiversity-policy>

State Treasury. 2023. "Biodiversity in Finland." <https://www.treasuryfinland.fi/investor-relations/sustainability-and-finnish-government-bonds/biodiversity-in-finland/>

Lyytimäki, J. 2007. "Environmental Protection in Finland." <http://finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=160041>

Sweden

Score 9

Preserving ecosystems and protecting biodiversity are national environmental targets. These goals are included in the generational target and several of the 16 environmental targets, which cover areas such as wetlands, mountains, forests, oceans, plant and animal life, acidification, and overfertilization. In 2014, the Riksdag accepted a proposition for a Swedish strategy for biological diversity and ecosystem services. This strategy focuses on protecting land and oceans, safeguarding threatened plant and animal species, maintaining genetic diversity,

considering nature and cultural environments, and enhancing cooperation with the business sector (Prop 2013/14:141).

One of the measures in the proposal is to implement regional action plans for green infrastructure, a step already taken by all of Sweden's county boards in collaboration with relevant agencies. The purpose of these action plans is to provide a basis of knowledge, planning, and priorities to achieve the environmental targets (Naturvårdsverket, 2023a).

Further, Sweden is implementing the EU strategy for biodiversity 2030, which aims to legally protect at least 30% of the EU's land areas and 30% of the oceans. The EU voted in favor of making nature restoration legally binding in 2023. However, nine out of twelve Swedish EU parliamentarians voted against it.

Sweden has approximately 4,000 Natura 2000 areas, totaling around 7 million hectares, some of which are nature reserves or national parks. Natura 2000 is an EU network of valuable nature areas deemed worthy of protection by the EU. Sweden signed the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1993, and in 2023 the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency [Naturvårdsverket] proposed a national strategy and action plan connected to CBD.

The proposed national strategy and action plan concerning CBD is formulated according to the EU strategy on biodiversity. It is comprehensive and includes one overarching target and three strategic themes consisting of 21 measure areas with specific targets and main indicators. The strategy and action plan have been produced through a collaboration that involves the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, the Swedish Forest Agency, the Swedish Board of Agriculture, the Swedish Energy Agency, the Swedish Transport Administration, the Sami parliament, the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, and other stakeholders.

The strategy and action plan will be assessed against the CBD, and the updated strategy and action plan will be presented before COP16, along with national targets and main indicators for each target. The national results will be reported according to templates by 28 February 2026 and 30 June 2029 to provide a basis for future COP meetings. Sweden also reports to the EU, and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency suggests that evaluation processes should be synchronized as much as possible. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency concludes that further measures are needed to fully meet the CBD, such as developing even more concrete measures and indicators for evaluation. The proposed strategy and action plan were presented to the government in November 2023, and there is no information on whether it will be accepted or legally binding (Naturvårdsverket, 2023b).

Citation:

Naturvårdsverket. 2023a. "Regionala handlingsplaner." <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/amnesomraden/mark-och-vattenanvandning/gron-infrastruktur/regionala-handlingsplaner/>

Naturvårdsverket. 2023b. Förslag till nationell strategi och handlingsplan avseende konventionen. om biologisk mångfald: Redovisning av regeringsuppdrag. Skrivelse 2023-11-02. Naturvårdsverket, Stockholm.

Prop 2013/14:141, En svensk strategi för biologisk mångfald och ekosystemtjänster. <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/d11a7625086a4c3cb09fcf6322687aba/en-svensk-strategi-for-biologisk-mangfald-och-ekosystemtjanster-prop-201314141/>

United Kingdom

Score 9

A biodiversity action plan was published in 1993 in response to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity agreed upon in Rio de Janeiro. This plan focused on domestic actions but also included a section on the UK's overseas responsibilities. Biodiversity management has since become a devolved competence, with central government responsible for England. Natural England, created by an act of Parliament in 2006 and employing 2,000 staff, is a non-departmental executive agency with the remit “to help conserve, enhance, and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.” A 25-year environment plan was produced in 2018, followed by the 2021 Environment Act, which imposes a duty on all public authorities to tailor policies to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The 2021 Act was strongly praised by Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, who stated, “In years to come, we might well look back on November 2021 as a turning point in our relationship with nature.”

Equivalent bodies exist for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, with coordination and work on UK-wide challenges assured by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). The JNCC serves as the statutory adviser to the government and devolved administrations on UK and international nature conservation. Its work aims to maintain and enrich biological diversity, conserve geological features, and sustain natural systems. In May 2023, the JNCC launched a strategy document titled “Together for Nature - 2023 – 2030,” outlining plans for a science-based approach to biodiversity and “to integrate the value of nature into decision-making by mainstreaming nature recovery into social and economic policy areas.”

Following the 25-year environment plan, a list of targets was published in February 2023 under the heading “thriving plants and wildlife.” These targets include reversing the loss of marine biodiversity and, where practicable, restoring it; protecting more sites; fostering the sustainability of key species; and ensuring seafloor habitats are productive and extensive enough to support healthy, sustainable ecosystems. On land, targets include boosting protected sites, recovering threatened, iconic, or economically important species of animals, plants, and fungi, and preventing human-induced extinction or loss of known threatened species where possible. Additionally, there are goals to increase woodland and create or restore 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network. Central government and devolved administrations provide guidance on biodiversity duties and required actions.

An example of local action translating these goals into practice is the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, a prosperous area of West London. Despite its dense population, the borough aims to protect biodiversity and support the movement of species as part of a Nature Recovery Network. It plans to enhance the management of sites important for nature conservation and make “biodiversity net gain” an integral part of its planning process.

Citation:

<https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/ccb9f624-7121-4c32-aefa-e0579d7eaaa1/together-for-nature.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan/25-year-environment-plan-our-targets-at-a-glance>

<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/environment/ecology-biodiversity-and-nature-conservation/biodiversity-kensington-and-chelsea>

Germany

Score 8

In March 2023, Germany introduced the Federal Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity (Aktionsprogramm Natürlicher Klimaschutz, ANK), previously mentioned in P 17. Of the ten fields of action to protect the climate and biodiversity, five specifically target the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, each with its own action plan that details measures and goals. For each measure, the ANK outlines its aim and purpose and the plans the government has made to achieve it (BMUV, 2023).

The first three fields focus on the protection of intact peatlands, the water balance of rivers, lakes, and floodplains, and seas and coasts. Protection of intact peatlands includes the implementation of the federal state target agreement on climate change mitigation through peat soil conservation and the National Peatland Protection Strategy from 2022. While marine and coastal ecosystems are a field of action, the measures mainly focus on protecting and restoring plant ecosystems to ensure carbon sequestration. The topic of overfishing is not addressed.

The fourth and fifth fields describe measures planned to protect wilderness and protected areas and conserve forest ecosystems, which can sequester large quantities of greenhouse gases and are crucial for biodiversity conservation. With measures for protected areas and forests, Germany aims to expand the covered areas, following the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (BMUV, 2023). These measures do not include policies to prevent poaching or the trafficking of protected flora and fauna species.

To date, the Federal Action Plan is not subject to concrete monitoring efforts. However, the government aims to develop and implement a biodiversity monitoring plan to identify and quantify the effects of the Action Plan on biodiversity

conservation in Germany. Additionally, the plan includes measures to monitor individual ecosystems, such as water balance analyses and soil quality monitoring (BMUV, 2023a).

The restoration of degraded soils and the goal of ensuring sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices are not included in the Action Plan. However, the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) published the Organic Farming Strategy 2030 (Bio-Strategie 2030) in 2023. The main goal of this strategy is to achieve 30% organic farming by 2030, based on the premise that organic farming is more resource-efficient, environmentally friendly, and sustainable compared to conventional agricultural practices. This contributes to biodiversity conservation, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and increased autonomy by requiring less fossil energy.

With 30 individual measures allocated to six fields of action, the Organic Farming Strategy includes extensive measures such as promoting biological and genetic diversity in the agricultural landscape, crops, and livestock. According to the BMEL, interim and final evaluations will be published in 2026 and 2030, using the implementation status of the measures as indicators. Additionally, the ministry will continuously monitor and report on the implementation (BMEL, 2023b).

Both the Organic Farming Strategy and the Federal Action Plan outline comprehensive policies for their respective goals. However, while the respective ministries formulate the plans and strategies and the government aims to commit to these measures and reach the determined goals, they are not legally binding.

To mitigate issues arising from policy delegation, the Federal Action Plan intends to foster close cooperation between the federal government and the states. For example, in peat soil conservation, a permanent federal-state committee will be established to monitor and coordinate implementation, addressing regional issues. Additionally, the federal government plans to create voluntary alliances with states, municipalities, and private forest owners to implement a logging ban in old-growth forests.

Beyond the Organic Farming Strategy and the Federal Action Plan, multiple policies and programs support ecosystem and biodiversity protection. Since 2007, Germany has had the National Strategy for Biodiversity (Nationale Strategie zur Biologischen Vielfalt), which includes around 330 goals and 430 measures concerning biodiversity (BMUV, 2023b). Moreover, the Federal Nature Conservation Act (Bundesnaturschutzgesetz, BNatSchG) includes regulations on the protection of wild fauna and flora (Article 37ff.) as well as on marine nature conservation (Article 56ff.).

However, in 2019, the indicator for species diversity and landscape quality by the German Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt) reached only 75.3%, falling short of the target value of 100% for 2030. This highlights a considerable need for development in biodiversity (Umweltbundesamt, 2023). Another indicator for the

success of ecosystem preservation policies in Germany is the Ocean Health Index (OHI), which scored Germany with 88 points out of 100 for 2020, placing the country above the global average of 72 points. The two main issues identified by the index are clean water and fisheries, the latter not being included in the Federal Action Plan (Ocean Health Index, 2020).

Citation:

BMEL. 2023. "Bio-Strategie 2030, Nationale Strategie für 30 Prozent ökologische Land- und Lebensmittelwirtschaft bis 2030." https://www.bmel.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Broschueren/bio-strategie-2030.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=7

BMEL. 2023. "Boosting Organic Farming: Developing the 2030 Organic Farming Strategy." <https://www.bmel.de/EN/topics/farming/organic-farming/strategy-future-organic-farming.html>

BMUV. 2023. "Federal Action Plan on Nature-based Solutions for Climate and Biodiversity." https://www.bmuv.de/fileadmin/Daten_BMU/Pool/Broschueren/ank_publication_en_bf.pdf

BMUV. 2023. "Nationale Strategie zur Biologischen Vielfalt." <https://www.bmuv.de/themen/naturschutz/allgemeines/-/strategien/nationale-strategie>

Ocean Health Index. 2020. "Global Ocean Health Index Scores." <https://ohi-science.org/ohi-global/scores>

Umweltbundesamt. 2023. "Indicator: Species Diversity and Landscape Quality." <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/data/environmental-indicators/indicator-species-diversity-landscape-quality#at-a-glance>

Lithuania

Score 8

The government is largely committed to protecting ecosystems and biodiversity. The Ministry of Environment is responsible for overseeing the preservation of biodiversity and preventing its loss, including efforts to increase the pace of afforestation, which are closely monitored by environmental NGOs (Lithuanian Ministry of Environment, 2024). The policy of biodiversity protection is coordinated by the Ministry's group of environmental protection policy. The Department of Environmental Protection, under the Ministry of Environment, is responsible for implementing biodiversity protection policy.

According to Lithuanian authorities, protected territories make up 17.64% of the country's territory, with 13% falling under the Natura 2000 program and 1% designated as reserves (Lithuanian Ministry of Environment 2024). The area covered by forests increased slightly over the last decade to a total of 2,064.6 thousand hectares in 2022, or 33.8% of the country's territory. In the Environmental Performance Index, Lithuania ranked 31st among 180 countries in 2022 – an improvement from 35th place in 2020. It was ranked particularly well in the area of biodiversity, in which it placed 13th, but fared significantly worse in the areas of ecosystem services (112th) and fisheries (107th).

In 1992, Lithuania signed the Convention on Biological Diversity, which was ratified by the Seimas in 1995. It also participates in other international agreements on topics such as the protection of migrating species and the regulation of whale hunting. Additionally, Lithuania has been part of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which was established by states to enhance interactions between policymakers and scientists in support of

biodiversity, ecosystem services, conservation, long-term human well-being and sustainable development. Lithuania also participates in the implementation of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030.

Several laws regulate the protection of wildlife, plants and various species in Lithuania. The most recent National Protection of Environment strategy was adopted in 2015. In the same year, an action plan for the protection of landscape and biodiversity for 2015 – 2020 was introduced. This plan provided concrete policy measures and procedures for their implementation, along with specific target indicators and monitoring and reporting mechanisms. However, there is no information on the Ministry of Environment's website regarding a new strategy or action plan for ecosystem and biodiversity protection policies beyond 2020 that are aligned with the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030.

Citation:

Lithuanian Ministry of Environment. "Protection of biodiversity (in Lithuanian)." <https://am.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys-1/gamtos-apsauga/biologines-ivairoves-apsauga-1/>

Environmental Performance Index 2022. "Lithuania – Country Scorecard." <https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2022/country/ltu>

New Zealand

Score 8

New Zealand's government demonstrates a commitment to preserving ecosystems and protecting biodiversity through various policies, initiatives and conservation efforts. The government has biodiversity strategies, such as the Biodiversity Action Plan, aimed at conserving native species, habitats and ecosystems. Laws and regulations – such as the Wildlife Act, the Conservation Act and the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management – provide legal frameworks for protecting biodiversity, managing natural resources and preventing the spread of invasive species. Various government agencies – including the Department of Conservation, the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Ministry for the Environment – are tasked with implementing these strategies and frameworks, as well as monitoring and reporting progress.

The government's efforts extend to various aspects of ecosystem and biodiversity protection, including reforestation (e.g., the One Billion Trees program), marine and coastal ecosystems (e.g., marine protected areas), sustainable fisheries management practices, and the restoration of wetlands and riparian areas. Considerable work has also been undertaken toward eradicating *Mycoplasma bovis* (MPI 2023).

Despite these efforts, challenges continue to threaten ecosystems and biodiversity. One particularly troublesome issue is the contamination of rivers and lakes with agricultural runoff. For example, a 2023 study by the Ministry for the Environment declared 45% of New Zealand's entire river length to be "unswimmable" due to the risk of bacterial infection (Neilson 2023). Additionally, extensive floods throughout

2023 revealed the dangers associated with pine forest plantation slash being washed into rivers and seas, posing threats to animal and human health.

Although often considered a global leader in pest eradication (Corlett 2022), New Zealand struggles with invasive animal and plant species, many of which reduce biodiversity by outcompeting native species for resources (Macinnis-Ng and McIntosh 2021). Another challenge is how to incorporate Māori ecological knowledge – rooted in a distinct understanding of human-nature relationships – into resource management and conservation efforts (McAllister et al. 2023).

Citation:

Corlett, E. 2022. “New Zealand leads world in island pest eradication, study finds.” *The Guardian*, August 17. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/17/new-zealand-leads-world-in-island-pest-eradication-study-finds>

McAllister, T. et al. 2023. “Indigenous knowledge offers solutions, but its use must be based on meaningful collaboration with Indigenous communities.” *The Conversation*, March 31. <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-knowledge-offers-solutions-but-its-use-must-be-based-on-meaningful-collaboration-with-indigenous-communities-201670>

Macinnis-Ng, C. and McIntosh, A. 2021. “Many New Zealand species are already at risk because of predators and habitat loss. Climate change makes things worse.” *The Conversation*, March 23. <https://theconversation.com/many-new-zealand-species-are-already-at-risk-because-of-predators-and-habitat-loss-climate-change-makes-things-worse-156650>

MPI. 2023. “Ministry of Primary Industry.” <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/biosecurity/mycoplasma-bovis/mycoplasma-bovis-in-new-zealand/m-bovis-eradication-phases/>

Neilson, M. 2023. “NZ’s lakes and rivers in ‘appalling’ state, new Govt report paints bleak picture as scientist accuses Labour of broken promises.” *New Zealand Herald*, April 12. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/nzs-lakes-and-rivers-in-appalling-state-new-govt-report-paints-bleak-picture-as-scientist-accuses-labour-of-broken-promises/44QARUJS45DLPNAXAKN4HPPKAY/>

Slovenia

Score 8

Since the turn of the century, Slovenia has comprehensively regulated the environmental sector through legislation. The Law on Nature Conservation, passed in 1999 and amended several times, outlines measures for conserving biodiversity and protecting natural values. This includes managing gene banks, which consist of controlled or bred populations or parts of animals and plants – such as seeds, gametes, and other biological material – to conserve species or their gene pools.

A significant aspect of the law is the establishment of the Natura 2000 area, which accounts for about 37% of Slovenia’s territory. Within Slovenia’s less than 21,000 km², more than 10% of all Natura 2000 EU species can be found. Natura 2000 sites are present in almost every Slovenian municipality (204 out of 212), and nearly 6% of the population lives within these sites. Additionally, 70% of Natura 2000 sites are forests, and just over 20% are agricultural areas.

The Natura 2000 Management Program (2015–2020) was developed in 2015. The National Environmental Protection Program, covering measures up to 2008, has been

updated, with the latest program extending to 2030. The Animal Protection Act, initially passed by the National Assembly in 1999, was amended in 2023. Both Natura 2000 and the Animal Welfare Act were central issues in major farmers' protests in the spring of 2023. Farmers demanded that new environmental requirements not exceed the actual potential of agriculture and called for a reduction in Natura 2000 areas.

Slovenia's primary organization for nature conservation is the Institute for Nature Conservation, founded in 1999. It has seven regional units, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the entire country.

Despite the extensive legal framework and activities of the main conservation organization, results have been mixed. In the biodiversity and habitat category of the Environmental Performance Index, Slovenia ranks 12th out of nearly 200 countries, with a score of 84.50 on a 100-point scale. Some indicators show very good results; for example, Slovenia ranks first among more than 40 countries for the protection of terrestrial biomes. However, other results are less favorable. In the Biodiversity Habitat Index, Slovenia is ranked 104th, and in the Species Habitat Index, it is ranked 94th, showing significant deterioration over the last ten years.

Citation:

Natura 2000. 2024. "Natura 2000 in Slovenia." <https://natura2000.gov.si/en/natura-2000/natura-2000-in-slovenia/>

Environmental Performance Index. 2024. "<https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2022/component/spi>"

G. C., La. Da., and B.R. 2023. "Predsednik sindikata kmetov Medved: Ko kmet protestira, država že krvavi." RTVSLO <https://www.rtvlo.si/slovenija/predsednik-sindikata-kmetov-medved-ko-kmet-protestira-drzava-ze-krvavi/666065>

Spain

Score 8

In December 2022, the government approved the Strategic Plan for Natural Heritage and Biodiversity through 2030 (Royal Decree Law 1057/2022, de 27 de diciembre), developing and updating the main guidelines established by Law 42/2007. The strategic plan provides a framework for promoting the protection and conservation of terrestrial and marine biodiversity, as well as the restoration and recovery of ecosystems. The RRP includes two packages of direct support for investments in ecosystem and biodiversity preservation, with an initial estimated budget through 2025 of €1.6 billion.

The plan aligns with other national strategies, such as the Spain Circular Strategy 2030, EU legislation, and international commitments. The overall strategy is broken down into individual action plans, including Knowledge on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity, Nature Protection and Conservation, and Ecosystem Restoration, targeting ecosystems in the air, water, and land.

According to the decree, evaluation reports should align, as far as possible, with the deadlines for national sexennial reports sent to the European Commission under the Nature Directives. An interim monitoring and evaluation report is expected in the first half of 2026. Although specific steps to expand and improve the indicators are not mentioned, the law allows for amendments to ensure the plan's content remains appropriate for achieving national objectives. A review of the State Council for Natural Heritage and Biodiversity will be conducted before 2024.

One specific development of this plan is the Strategy for Biodiversity and Science (2023–2027), which outlines actions to enhance scientific contributions to policymaking on this topic.

While the central government intends to improve cooperation with the autonomous communities, conflicts sometimes arise. For instance, in spring 2023, the Andalusian government planned to reclassify some lands in Doñana Park to favor agricultural water use. This conflict was eventually resolved through an agreement between the central and regional governments.

Citation:

Ministry of Science. 2022. "Strategy of Biodiversity and Science 2023-2027."

<https://fundacion-biodiversidad.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ESTRATEGIA-DE-BIODIVERSIDAD-Y-CIENCIA-2023-2027.pdf>

Australia

Score 7

The government's rhetoric and action show a strong commitment to preserving ecosystems, but long-term economic and population pressures have negatively impacted biodiversity.

Australia is home to an enormous variety of animal and plant species. However, according to the recent State of the Environment report, over the past two centuries, the country has experienced high rates of species extinction as a result of introduced species and habitat loss (Commonwealth of Australia 2021). The pressures on biodiversity have increased in recent years, such that the number of threatened species has grown by 8% since 2016.

Biodiversity management in Australia involves governments, landholders, Indigenous communities, NGOs, industry, and volunteers. Government at local, state/territory and national levels implement a wide range of policies designed to tackle threats to biodiversity, including the management of protected areas, measures to limit threats to delicate ecosystems and to promote their long-term recovery. Indigenous communities have played a critical role over many generations in environmental management. However, colonization and mismanagement of the environment have fed off each other, and existing approaches to ecological management continue to marginalize Indigenous people in a way that undermines

them and the knowledge and participation they can bring to the tasks of environmental management.

Strengthening biodiversity is critically important in and of itself, but it also matters in significant ways for human welfare (Barraclough et al. 2023). For example, high-quality nutrition, food security and food prices depend on biodiversity that is being undermined by climate change and urban sprawl. Australia's biodiversity has also been an important resource in the making of medicines. Coral reefs are especially important in this respect, so the rapid degradation of the Great Barrier Reef has critical implications for disease prevention. Healthy biodiverse ecosystems also play a critical role in water management. They purify water and help to prevent flooding. However, drought and deforestation have reduced water availability, with implications for the future reliability of water supplies for agriculture and for consumption in Australia's growing cities.

Citation:

Commonwealth of Australia. 2021. Australia: State of the Environment. Australian Government Department of Climate Change, the Environment and Water. <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au>

Barraclough, K., Carey, M., Winkel, K.D., Humphries, E., Ah Shay, B., Chao Foong, Y. 2023. "Why Losing Australia's Biodiversity Matters for Human Health: Insights from the Latest States of the Environment Assessment." The Medical Journal of Australia. <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2023/218/8/why-losing-australias-biodiversity-matters-human-health-insights-latest-state>

Belgium

Score 7

Home to an impressive array of over 55,000 species, Belgium faces substantial hurdles in biodiversity conservation. A significant proportion of species are at risk, including 35% of freshwater fish species, 28% of bird species, 23% of vascular plant species, and 21% of mammal species (OECD 2021). This situation underscores the urgent need for effective conservation strategies.

Nature conservation in Belgium is predominantly a regional responsibility (OECD 2021, 31). Belgium's commitment to biodiversity conservation is demonstrated through its participation in the European Union's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. This binding strategy, part of the European Green Deal, contains specific actions and commitments aimed at protecting nature and reversing ecosystem degradation.

The strategy is comprehensive, targeting various ecosystems in the air, water, and on land. It includes measures for restoring degraded ecosystems, particularly those with the most potential to capture and store carbon and mitigate the impact of natural disasters. The strategy also facilitates necessary transformative change by unlocking funding for biodiversity, initiating a strengthened governance framework, and enhancing knowledge, financing, and investments.

Progress monitoring for the strategy's implementation is conducted through two online tools: an online actions tracker and a targets dashboard. These tools provide

real-time information on the state of implementation and display progress toward the quantified biodiversity targets set by the strategy, both at the EU level and in the member states.

Belgium's national biodiversity strategy was approved in 2006 for a ten-year period and was updated and extended until 2020. However, as criticized by Natagora, a nature protection association, no extension of the plan has been voted on since then.

The Natura 2000 network, a network of nature protection areas implemented by the European Union, covers only 12.7% of Belgium's territory, a proportion lower than the EU average of 18.6%. This lower proportion could be partially attributed to the density of inhabited areas in Belgium.

Belgium's overall performance in biodiversity protection is relatively good according to the global Ocean Health Index (OHI). Belgium excels particularly in the "Habitats" dimension, scoring higher than neighboring countries such as the Netherlands, France, and Germany. While its performance in the "Species Protection" dimension is slightly lower, it still surpasses these neighboring countries.

Citation:

▪ Pollution locale (wallonie.be) : <https://sol.environnement.wallonie.be/home/sols/autres-menaces/pollution-locale.html>

▪ Etat de l'environnement wallon (wallonie.be) : <http://etat.environnement.wallonie.be/home.html>

▪ Infographies – État de l'environnement wallon (wallonie.be) : <http://etat.environnement.wallonie.be/home/Infographies.html>

Villas quatre façades, zones commerciales... coup de frein wallon à l'étalement urbain – Le Soir : <https://www.lesoir.be/505371/article/2023-04-04/villas-quatre-facades-zones-commerciales-coup-de-frein-wallon-letalement-urbain>

<https://omgeving.vlaanderen.be/nl/biodiversiteit>

Bodem | Vlaanderen.be : <https://www.vlaanderen.be/natuur-milieu-en-klimaat/bodem>

▪ Afval | Vlaanderen.be : <https://www.vlaanderen.be/natuur-milieu-en-klimaat/afval>

Akkoord over betonstop: Vlaamse regering raakt niet aan vergoeding grondeigenaars | De Standaard: https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20201209_95652773

'Als bouwshift lukt, zal het niet dankzij beleid zijn' | De Standaard: https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20230804_97288861

Waarom lukte een akkoord over stikstof nu wel? | De Standaard : https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20231114_96303789

Denmark

Score 7

The issue of biodiversity has recently gained importance in policy debates and is now attracting increased attention.

Denmark has a biodiversity strategy based on its participation in the EU biodiversity strategy. According to this strategy, member countries commit to protecting 30% of their territory (land and sea) as protected areas. A third of this area should be strictly protected in order to sustain bird and insect life (Environmental Agency 2023).

The Environmental Agency is responsible for implementing and monitoring progress on the quality of ecosystems and biodiversity. One potential concern regarding the

success of the strategy is that Danish municipalities are partly responsible for its implementation. Since the municipalities are independent political entities, there is a risk that the strategy will be implemented differently across the territory. Additionally, the quality of monitoring can vary depending on the municipality. In cases where implementation has been lacking and control is lax, the state intervenes. Such interventions are typically based on cases brought to the attention of the city council.

Citation:

Environmental Agency. 2023. "Hvordan bevares biodiversitet?" <https://mst.dk/erhverv/rig-natur/naturen-i-danmark/biodiversitet/hvordan-bevares-biodiversitet>

Estonia

Score 7

Estonia has a rich biological diversity, and is home to a wide variety of wildlife species. The government's commitment to preserving ecosystems and protecting biodiversity is outlined in the Estonian Green Transition Action Plan 2023 – 2025. This action plan focuses on three areas: reducing negative environmental impacts, shaping a modern high-quality living environment, and contributing to the development of competitive and environmentally responsible entrepreneurship. According to the plan, with EU support, at least €2 billion will be channeled into these activities in the coming years as measures contributing to the green reforms.

When comparing proposed measures, Estonia performs above average in most areas. However, Estonia has one of the worst five-year averages for the percentage of forest cover lost compared to the reference year 2000, indicating that the removal of tree cover over a given period is one of the highest. Similarly, the five-year moving average of the percentage of gross loss of grassland area shows that the total area of grassland lost has been very high in Estonia.

Forest management has become a politically salient issue due to the intersection of economic, environmental, cultural and international factors. On the one hand, the abundance of forests –Estonia ranks sixth in Europe in this measure – contributes to the country's clean air and has made Estonians strongly connected to forests. On the other hand, forestry and the timber industry are important export items for the Estonian economy. Therefore, it is important to improve forest management and adopt an appropriate national forest development plan.

Japan

Score 7

Japan is committed to implementing comprehensive policies that preserve biodiversity. By 2020, it managed to exceed the Aichi Biodiversity Target, preserving 20.5% of land and 13.3% of sea territory. The Kishida cabinet has declared its commitment to protecting 30% of land and oceans by 2030 – stipulated

during the Conference of the Parties to the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal in December 2022.

In April 2022, the Ministry of the Environment issued the 30by30 Roadmap. The document contains numerical indicators, for example, certification of a minimum of 100 “other effective area-based conservation measures” (OECM) sites by the end of 2023 and doubling the area of marine parks in national parks by the end of 2030. The 30by30 Alliance for Biodiversity, a platform composed of public and private-sector organizations, was created to promote biodiversity goals. An important part of this initiative is the restoration of traditional ecosystems, such as Satoyama – landscapes that combine farmlands, irrigation, forests and wetlands.

While Japan has put much emphasis on meeting biodiversity standards, it still has to reconcile biodiversity goals with some major infrastructure projects. Public works, while less important than in the 1990s, still play a significant role in maintaining employment in rural and economically less developed regions. Critics have likened it to a concretization of the Japanese landscape, which has more to do with politics than public needs. The construction of a maglev train linking Tokyo and Osaka – which already has one of the fastest bullet train connections in the world – was delayed due to concerns over its impact on the ecosystem in Shizuoka Prefecture.

Citation:
Ministry of the Environment. 2022. “Japan’s 30by30 Roadmap.”
<https://policies.env.go.jp/nature/biodiversity/30by30alliance/documents/3030emap.pdf>

Tokonami, Koichi. 2022. “JR Tokai, Shizuoka leader still at odds over maglev line plan.” The Asahi Shimbun, September 14. <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14718670>

Latvia

Score 7

Latvia boasts a diverse ecosystem, including forests, grasslands, coastal areas, and peatlands. In the Environmental Performance Index 2022, Latvia is ranked first for terrestrial and marine protected areas. However, for the species protection index, Latvia is ranked 33rd, and for the biodiversity habitat index, it is ranked 69th (EPI, 2022).

Regarding tree cover loss, wetland cover loss, and grassland loss, Latvia is expected to improve its performance. The country is ranked 148th for tree cover loss, 114th for grassland loss, and 56th for wetland loss, largely due to the significance of the agriculture and timber industries in Latvia. Extensive agriculture and timber industry interests often compete with most habitats and species. Therefore, education and awareness of conservation farming and timber methods are essential in Latvia.

Additionally, pesticide use in agriculture is decreasing. Latvia is ranked 21st in the Environmental Performance Index 2022. The national policy paper, “The White Paper of Environmental Policy 2021 – 2027,” also sets goals for biodiversity protection.

Governance of territories with special protection status, such as Natura 2000 sites, nature parks, nature reserves, biosphere reserves, protected landscape areas, natural monuments, and protected marine areas, is entrusted to the Nature Protection Agency. To preserve these areas, medium-term conservation plans – typically spanning 7 to 15 years – aim to balance economic interests and sustainability. As a rule, the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development approves these conservation plans. Once approved, the plans are binding at both central and local levels of governance. However, implementing these conservation plans requires more financial and human resources.

At the same time, to help preserve biodiversity, the country has imposed a few restrictions, often limiting the rights of property owners. Therefore, the government offers monetary compensation for these restrictions. However, the compensation amount does not cover the economic losses property owners incur due to environmental regulations, leading to a lack of motivation to preserve nature. In 2022 and 2023, Latvia continued its efforts in ecosystem mapping to identify the status of ecosystems based on data.

Citation:

Wolf, M. J., Emerson, J. W., Esty, D. C., de Sherbinin, A., Wendling, Z. A., et al. 2022. 2022 Environmental Performance Index. New Haven, CT: Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy. <https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2022/component/epi>

Ministru kabinets. 2022. Vides politikas pamatnostādnes 2021.–2027. Gadam. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/335137-par-vides-politikas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-gadam>

Dabas aizsardzības pārvalde. 2023. “Bioloģiskās daudzveidības pārskati.” <https://www.daba.gov.lv/lv/biologiskas-daudzveidibas-parskati>

OECD. 2019. Environmental Performance Reviews: Latvia 2019. OECD. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/75cddf7a-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/75cddf7a-en>

Norway

Score 7

Norwegian governments have presented several action plans for biodiversity, most recently in 2015. The Natural Diversity Act, introduced in 2009, is a crucial cornerstone for biodiversity work and ecosystem protection and is legally binding. The act has been evaluated multiple times, with conclusions indicating that it has not caused the deterioration of ecosystems but has not significantly improved them either.

The Kunming-Montreal framework establishes a 30% target for preservation areas. The former target of 15% preservation by 2020 was not reached until two years later, in 2022. With the 2023 CBD agreement, there has been an increased focus on nature protection, but Norway is still far from the goal of protecting 30% of representative areas, currently at 17.4%. While the 30% target is challenging, processes are underway to preserve an additional 600 square kilometers of “valuable nature,” representing a diverse set of nature types in addition to marine areas and forests, which have separate preservation targets. So far, this has resulted in the creation of one new preservation area of 70 square kilometers.

Norway has 24 environmental and climate goals, three of which explicitly target “well-functioning ecosystems,” while another three focus on polar regions and Svalbard. There are action plans for a variety of ecosystems, species, and geographical areas. The Norwegian Environmental Agency (NEA) monitors 22 indicators for “well-functioning ecosystems” and 14 additional indicators for the polar regions.

The Kunming-Montreal framework requires parties to present new and updated action plans in 2024. The Norwegian government is planning a White Paper for 2024, based on an extensive process with input from stakeholders. The NEA is also working on establishing systems for ecosystem accounting based on the UN SEEA, with a first version envisioned to appear in 2026.

Responsibility for implementing biodiversity preservation is shared between municipalities, which have primary responsibility for area planning, and national agencies, with the NEA being central among them. Norway’s tradition of local autonomy and its more than 350 municipalities – half of which have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants – challenge the effective implementation of harmonized and universal standards for environmental protection. The regulatory framework is occasionally conflicting, and this, coupled with lacking or low-quality datasets for local conditions, results in a fragmented structure where public administrative processes can yield widely different results in various geographical locations. This problem is not specific to Norway. Methodologies for ecosystem accounting are under development, and implementing a common global standard will necessarily take time. While improvements are expected over time, evaluations from a decade and a half of specific legislation for biodiversity and ecosystems suggest that Norway’s fragmented politico-administrative system may not be sufficiently equipped to ensure very high-quality preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Citation:

Klima – og miljødepartementet. 2023. “Det globale Kunming-Montreal-rammeverket for naturmangfold (Naturavtalen).” <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/klima-og-miljo/naturmangfold/innsiktsartikler-naturmangfold/det-globale-kunming-montreal-rammeverket-for-naturmangfold-naturavtalen/id2987476/>

Ministry of Climate and Environment. 2015. “Nature for Life – Norway’s National Biodiversity Action Plan.” White Paper no. 14 (2015-2016). <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/meld.-st.-14-20152016/id2468099/?ch=1>

Ministry of the Environment. 2009. Nature Diversity Act. Act of 19 June 2009 No.100 Relating to the Management of Biological, Geological and Landscape Diversity. <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/nature-diversity-act/id570549/>

Miljødirektoratet [Norwegian Environment Agency]. n.d. “Norges 82 miljøindikatorer.” <https://miljostatus.miljodirektoratet.no/miljomal/miljoindikatorer->

Miljødirektoratet [Norwegian Environment Agency]. n.d. “Naturregnskap.” <https://www.miljodirektoratet.no/ansvarsomrader/overvaking-arealplanlegging/naturregnskap/>

Riksrevisjonen. 2018. “Undersøkelse av miljømyndighetenes etterlevelse av naturmangfoldloven.” <https://www.riksrevisjonen.no/rapporter-mappe/no-2018-2019/undersokelse-av-miljomyndighetenes-etterlevelse-av-naturmangfoldloven>

Portugal

Score 7

In response to the complex challenge of preserving and protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, the Portuguese government initiated and funded a comprehensive biodiversity study titled “Biodiversity 2030: A New Agenda for Conservation in the Context of Climate Change.” Conducted between 2020 and 2022, this study represents a pivotal step in understanding the country’s biodiversity landscape. It revealed significant weaknesses that impede Portugal’s ability to achieve the goals outlined in the National Strategy for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity 2030, especially in the context of the European Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

The study identified several challenges, including a lack of effective intersectorial and interministerial coordination, difficulties in accessing relevant data, chronic underfunding of public conservation policies, and limited involvement of the private sector in biodiversity financing (Araújo et al., 2022). These issues underscore the need for concerted efforts to address systemic shortcomings and enhance the overall effectiveness of environmental policies in safeguarding ecosystems and biodiversity.

While several biogeographical areas in Portugal, other EU member states, and the Alps region showcase commendable conservation efforts, challenges persist in certain regions. Some areas in Portugal face unfavorable conditions, indicating a lack of progress in the specific field under analysis.

Citation:

EEA Report No 10/2020. State of nature in the EU Results from reporting under the nature directives 2013-2018. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020>

Araújo, M.B., Antunes, S., Gonçalves, E.J., Oliveira, R., Santos, S., and Sousa Pinto, I. 2022. Biodiversidade 2030: Nova agenda para a conservação em contexto de alterações climáticas. Lisboa: Universidade de Évora & Fundo Ambiental, Ministério do Ambiente e da Ação Climática. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/iq6d3easnr77cdn/Biodiversidade%202030%20-%20Vol%201.pdf?dl=0>

Switzerland

Score 7

The Swiss government has established a strategy to safeguard ecosystem vitality and prevent biodiversity loss. This strategy includes goals and a framework to achieve these objectives. The strategy is binding to some extent, as it is based on existing legal frameworks and mandates from federal and cantonal authorities (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012).

The strategy has been operationalized through individual action plans targeting specific ecosystems in the air, water and on land. These include pilot projects that ensure the implementation of complex and demanding measures. Examples include initiatives to support sustainable use of moors to mitigate climate change and to

enhance biodiversity and landscape qualities in urban areas (Aktionsplan des Bundesrates, 2017).

The strategy and policies are comprehensive, addressing various facets of biodiversity and ecosystem protection. They include the creation of ecological infrastructure, prevention of genetic impoverishment, and building ex situ collections for endangered species and genetic resources (Aktionsplan des Bundesrates, 2017). Additionally, there is a focus on sector-specific strengthening of biodiversity in education and against illegal wildlife trade (Aktionsplan des Bundesrates, 2017).

Existing policies support the strategic efforts focusing on the protection of ecosystem vitality. The strategy is integrated into all environmentally relevant activities pursued by the federal, cantonal and municipal governments, as well as by private entities. The legal foundations on which these policies are based have proven effective, although they may require periodic adjustments to align with the strategy's evolving needs (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012).

The Swiss government monitors biodiversity changes through a coherent system involving various existing programs. Important data sources include Biodiversity and Landscape Monitoring Switzerland, the National Forest Inventory, and others. New selected key metrics are defined as indicators, and the system ensures international comparability of data (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012). Regular reports are prepared to assess progress, and a midterm report was planned for 2017 to adjust implementation strategies as needed (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012).

The Federal Office for the Environment (BAFU) oversees the implementation of the biodiversity strategy. Implementation is carried out by responsible federal departments, with the involvement of cantonal agencies and, where applicable, the private sector. These bodies are required to report periodically on the state of implementation, ensuring effective execution of government policies. The strategy emphasizes a shared responsibility for biodiversity conservation among federal, cantonal and municipal governments, as well as civil society (Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz, 2012).

However, beyond programmatic strategies, concrete measures are difficult to adopt in a country in which both conventional agriculture and the chemical industry are strong. In 2021, for instance, the Swiss population rejected two initiatives related to pesticides and biodiversity: the Pesticide Initiative and the Drinking Water Initiative. Arguments against the initiatives included the prospects of weakening domestic food production, increasing dependency on food imports and reducing farmers' incomes (Finger 2021).

Citation:

Bundesrat, S. 2012. "Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz." www.bafu.admin.ch/ud-1060-d

Aktionsplan des Bundesrates. 2017. Aktionsplan Strategie Biodiversität Schweiz. Bern.

Bundesamt für Umwelt (BAFU) eds.. 2023. Wirkung des Aktionsplans Biodiversität AP. SBS. Bern. 2023. 50 S.

Finger, R. 2021. "No Pesticide-Free Switzerland." *Nature Plants* 7: 1324-1325. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41477-021-01009-6>

United States

Score 7

Preserving ecosystems and protecting diversity are duties shared by federal, state, and local entities. The level of commitment varies between federal administrations, as well as among different state and local administrations.

Nonetheless, broad legal structural forces influence the operations of these agencies. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 requires federal agencies to assess the environmental impacts of their actions and decisions, taking into account ecosystems, biodiversity, and environmental health. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 protects endangered species and aids in their recovery, including the protection and nurturing of their natural habitats. The act is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Both the USFWS and NMFS carry out a variety of conservation activities. For instance, the USFWS manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, a network of public lands dedicated to wildlife conservation.

The National Park Service, under the Department of the Interior, is a major federal agency managing over 85 million acres (350,000 square kilometers – roughly the equivalent of Germany's entire territory) of federal lands dedicated to protected parks supporting the natural environment, ecosystems, and biodiversity. Within the Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Forest Service, a separate agency, manages over 150 national forests covering nearly 200 million acres (800,000 square kilometers – equivalent to the combined territory of the United Kingdom and Ukraine).

The federal government also sponsors conservationists in state and local government and in the private sector through initiatives like the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a nationally competitive grant program that provides funding to support natural ecosystems benefiting wider communities.

The Biden administration invested \$44 million to address critical ecosystem resilience, restoration, and environmental planning needs for the National Parks Service in 2023.

Austria

Score 6

Recent Austrian governments have been committed to protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, though their track record is mixed. In some areas, such as the adjusted emissions growth rate for nitrous oxides and grassland loss, Austria ranks in the middle among European and/or OECD countries. The status of Austrian forests has been relatively stable, with forested territory even growing slightly in recent years. This growth is supported by the fact that a significant portion of forests in Austria is privately owned (82%, a score only exceeded by Portugal).

However, regarding several other indicators, Austria has performed conspicuously poorly. This is particularly true for the use of pesticides banned EU-wide. According to figures by Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe published in 2023, Austria had the largest “emergency admissions” of banned pesticides among all EU member states. Between 2019 and 2022, Austria issued no fewer than 20 such admissions.

The situation is not better in the area of species protection. Recent figures from the European Environment Agency show that 83% of all species in Austria were not in good condition, placing Austria second to last in the EU.

Since joining the Austrian federal government in 2020, the Greens have driven several significant changes. In late 2022, Green federal environmental minister Leonore Gewessler launched a new biodiversity strategy, as foreshadowed in the ÖVP-Green coalition agreement. By 2023, 30% of the country’s territory should be designated as specifically protected areas, including the expansion of national parks and other highly protected zones. Additionally, by 2023, the “red list” of endangered species in Austria should be reduced by 30%, a goal to be achieved through measures like limiting pesticide use. Finally, 35% of Austria’s agriculture should be converted to organic farming by the same year.

The government’s biodiversity strategy has been sharply criticized by many experts, including members of the Austrian Biodiversity Council. While the existence of a Federal Ministry for the Environment in 2020 was seen as the only fully convincing aspect of the ÖVP-Green government’s environmental and biodiversity policies, most other features were considered problematic.

The creation of a Biodiversity Fund (with €80 million by 2026) was welcomed, but experts argue that the volume should be expanded to €1 billion. Additionally, the environmental protection budgets for the states were deemed inadequate. For example, in 2021, the state of Lower Austria had an environmental policy budget of just €15 million, compared to €450 million for road construction and maintenance.

The most pressing issue was the ongoing rate of land sealing, currently at 11.3 hectares per day. Experts insist this must be radically reduced to 2.5 hectares by 2025 and just 1 hectare by 2030.

Lastly, Austria's performance in implementing international agreements, such as the EU's Natura-2000 goals, has been conspicuously poor. A particular problem identified is the complex division of competencies between the federation and the states.

Citation:

<https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2020/component/grl>

<https://www.global2000.at/publikationen/report-banned-pesticides>

https://www.meinbezirk.at/c-lokales/oesterreich-belegt-vorletzten-platz-beim-artenschutz_a5358076

<https://kurier.at/politik/inland/artenschutz-neu-viel-mehr-bio-landwirtschaft-etwas-mehr-schutzzonen/402256209>

<https://science.apa.at/power-search/13989497262453436291>

<https://science.apa.at/power-search/804385466566097238>

Czechia

Score 6

The Ministry for the Environment produced Czechia's first biodiversity strategy in 2005, shortly after the country's accession to the European Union. This strategy included objectives and indicators for monitoring results but did not allocate specific tasks. An updated strategy for 2016–2025, published in 2016, lamented the low public awareness of biodiversity issues, particularly as the overall situation continued to deteriorate, largely due to agriculture and transport activities. This indicated that the issue could not be addressed by the Ministry of the Environment alone. The Nature Conservation Agency for Czechia (Agentura ochrany přírody a krajiny ČR, AOPK ČR), established in 2015, actively monitors the country's biodiversity and administers various categories of protected territories, including 24 protected landscape areas under the IUCN category and about 8,000 other types of protected areas under IUCN Ia, III, and IV. These protected areas cover 16% of the country's area.

Results have been unimpressive. Czechia scores poorly by international standards on indicators for both forest and grassland loss, and high pesticide use in agriculture poses a significant threat to wildlife, especially bird species, which have received the most public attention. While some habitats have shown improvements, overall, these efforts have not aligned with the EU biodiversity strategy for the period 2014–2020. Eighty percent of protected habitats and 70% of listed species were judged to have an “unfavorable-bad” status.

Czechia is now confronted by EU legislation requiring the formulation of a National Plan for the Renewal of Nature by 2026. This plan aims not only to protect but also to renew environments, including agricultural land and methods, with an expansion of protected landscapes to cover 20% of the surface area. This effort should involve

participation from multiple ministries and public agencies, alongside NGOs. Although this has not been a major area for EU funding, one project, with a €12.2 million subsidy, will assess the needs of protected areas and develop an effective system for their coordination and management. The outline of a comprehensive policy, based on a full assessment of needs, has yet to be formulated.

Citation:

<https://soilwater.eu/funders/life-ipn2k-revisited-zvany-jedna-priroda/>

<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/project/LIFE17-IPE-CZ-000005/integrated-life-project-for-the-natura-2000-network-in-the-czech-republic>

France

Score 6

France has a long-standing commitment to biodiversity preservation and restoration. It is the EU country with the largest area of protected terrestrial and marine territory in the EU. Some of its national parks have existed since the first half of the 20th century.

In 2020, the French Biodiversity Agency was created. Its task is to coordinate policy efforts regarding the protection of the environment. It is also supposed to collect primary data and engage in further research in the area of biodiversity. Finally, its experts are tasked with supporting policymaking, while also providing support to the managers of protected spaces and other societal actors. It is too early to evaluate this new agency's performance, but it has been furnished with significant financial and human resources, resulting mostly from the reorganization of preexisting agencies and services.

Compared to other OECD countries, France does extremely well with respect to protecting terrestrial biomes and marine areas. The situation is much more complicated with regard to the use of sustainable pesticides. This is due to the difficulty of reorienting the agricultural sector toward more sustainable modes of production. Similarly, species protection is also comparatively weak in France. The enduring political influence of agricultural producers is clearly a brake to progress in this area, despite the periodic determination shown by members of the French executive.

Greece

Score 6

During the 2010s, Greece lagged behind other OECD countries in reducing emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxides and performed poorly on species protection and biodiversity habitat indices (Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy 2019a, 2019b, 2019c and 2019d). Over the last decade, the country has also experienced significant loss of forests, grasslands, and wetlands (Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy 2019e, 2019f and 2019g). Many of Greece's wetlands have been drained (Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy 2019g).

Despite these challenges, the Greek government is committed to preserving ecosystems and biodiversity. The national strategy for 2014–2029 aims to safeguard ecosystem vitality and prevent biodiversity loss, with 13 national goals and 39 specific targets (Convention on Biological Diversity 2023).

Despite bureaucratic hurdles, Greece has also established the Natura 2000 network, which includes 241 SCI-SACs and 202 SPAs, covering 27.2% of the land and 6.1% of territorial waters (Biodiversity Information System for Europe 2023).

The biodiversity strategy and the corresponding action plan have been put forward by the Ministry of Energy and Environment, which monitors their implementation (Ministry of Energy and Environment 2014). Policy implementation, however, may be delegated to the public administrations of Greece's 13 self-governed regions. Nonetheless, the central government is entitled to – and frequently does – intervene at lower political levels if effective implementation is endangered.

Citation:

Biodiversity Information System for Europe. 2023. "Greece – Biodiversity Strategy." <https://biodiversity.europa.eu/countries/greece/eu-biodiversity-strategy>

Convention on Biological Diversity. 2023. "Country Profiles – Greece." [https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile/?country=gr#:~:text=Adopted%20in%202014%20as%20a,years%20\(2014%2D2029\)](https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile/?country=gr#:~:text=Adopted%20in%202014%20as%20a,years%20(2014%2D2029))

Ministry of Energy and Environment. 2014. "National Biodiversity and Action Plan." <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/gr/gr-nbsap-01-en.pdf>

Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy. 2019a. "Environmental Performance Index (EPI): Adjusted Emissions Growth Rate for Sulfur Dioxide (SDA)." <https://epi.yale.edu/downloads>

Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy. 2019. "Environmental Performance Index (EPI): Adjusted Emissions Growth Rate for Nitrous Oxides (NHA)." <https://epi.yale.edu/downloads>

Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy. 2019c. "Environmental Performance Index (EPI): Species Protection Index (SPI)." <https://epi.yale.edu/downloads>

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Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy. 2019. "Environmental Performance Index (EPI): Grassland Loss (GRL)." <https://epi.yale.edu/downloads>

Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy. 2019. "Environmental Performance Index (EPI): Wetland Loss (WTL)." <https://epi.yale.edu/downloads>

Italy

Score 6

Italy is one of the most biologically diverse countries in Europe, but the situation is critical for many species and habitats. According to ISPRA, 54% of flora, 53% of terrestrial fauna, 22% of marine species, and 89% of terrestrial habitats are in an

unfavorable conservation status. A third of marine habitats have an “unknown” conservation status. The management of invasive alien species is also a significant concern, with 35% of these species not yet subject to control measures.

Italy’s specific geomorphological characteristics make its territory inherently fragile. Without special attention to managing the territory, transportation infrastructure, and buildings, biodiversity can be directly harmed. Biodiversity issues are problematic in many EU member states as well.

The new National Biodiversity Strategy, adopted in 2023, builds on the experience of the previous strategy (2014-2020), which only partially achieved its objectives. The new strategy is detailed in its objectives and targets but depends on various policy actors and stakeholders. While the governance of the strategy is inclusive, it lacks a clear chain of accountability. Strong policy coordination is needed to avoid loose implementation, as recommended by the National Committee for the Natural Capital 2022 report.

Citation:

Ministero dell’Ambiente - Comitato per il Capitale Naturale. 2023. Quinto Rapporto sullo Stato del Capitale Naturale in Italia. https://www.mase.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio/allegati/CapitaleNaturale/V_Rapporto_CN.pdf

Ministero dell’Ambiente. 2023. “Strategia Nazionale per la Biodiversità 20.” https://www.mase.gov.it/sites/default/files/archivio/allegati/biodiversita/2_snb_2030_marzo_23.pdf

- ISPRA. 2021. “Rapporto sulla direttiva biodiversità.” https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/files2021/pubblicazioni/rapporti/rapporto-349_2021_direttive_natura_def.pdf

Netherlands

Score 6

Ecosystem and biodiversity issues have long vexed Dutch politicians. Successive cabinets have failed to provide clear direction, leaving farmers and provinces uncertain about nitrogen policy. This uncertainty fuels ongoing debates over its efficacy and necessity.

The Rutte IV cabinet elevated this issue to a top political priority by appointing a dedicated minister for nature and nitrogen. The government aimed to accelerate policy plans beyond the pace of normal legislative procedures. Originally, the Nature Protection Act targeted reducing the expanse of nitrogen-sensitive Natura 2000 areas that exceeded critical deposition values (KDWs), so that the total proportion of protected territory no longer exceeding these values would reach 40% by 2025, 50% by 2030 and 74% by 2035. However, the Rutte IV coalition agreement advanced the 74% target to 2030.

Using politically and scientifically contested models created by the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), maps identified high-KDW areas requiring urgent action. Farmers, organized through protest movements like Agraractie and the Farmers Defense Force, viewed this as a direct threat to their

livelihoods. They contested RIVM models used as the scientific basis for government policy, demanding that real-world nitrogen measurements be conducted around suspected peak emitters. This culminated in massive nationwide protests in summer 2022. By October 2022, the agriculture minister resigned amidst government crisis, intense lobbying, and distrust between his department and fragmented agricultural organizations.

In November 2022, the nitrogen issue expanded beyond agriculture and nature policy, with stringent nitrogen testing mandated for all licensing decisions, a decision affirmed by the Council of State's Porthos ruling. This affected new housing, construction, infrastructure projects and the energy transition. By February 2023, new calculations incorporating transport and industrial nitrogen emissions revealed that without technological fixes, large-scale buyouts, strong reductions in cattle farming or even land ownership reforms, no viable exit strategy under current rules existed, posing a serious threat to economic activity.

In March 2023, a cabinet compromise put the nitrogen policy on hold. The newly influential Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB), spawned from the stalemate, dominated provincial elections, winning 16 out of 75 seats in the Senate, which is indirectly elected through the provincial councils. The Christian Democrats (CDA), former advocates for farmers, were marginalized. The CDA, as a coalition partner, sought to renegotiate the 2030 nitrogen reduction goal in provincial negotiations with BBB, aiming for a 2035 deadline.

Central to the political struggle is a “science war” over defining the critical deposition value and its application in national, provincial and local policies. The principal bone of contention is whether the uncertainty bandwidths around calculations and modeling, derived from a mix of lab experiments, field observations and expert judgments, are too large for far-reaching policy decisions, especially decisions that would undermine many farms' business models. Farmers and the agro-industry argue that policy decisions based on precautionary principles and academic advice were undermining their livelihoods, and lacked practical understanding. They contended that strict interpretations of these principles were neglect farming realities and harming economic viability.

Scientists conceded that without real-time measurements, the critical deposition values were not ideal standards to use for local licensing decisions. Political priorities are now shifting toward balancing the burdens of stringent nitrogen policy imposed on farmers and citizen demands for new housing developments. This has sparked debates on relaxing nitrogen standards and reassessing the significance of Natura 2000 areas.

Following the November 2023 elections, in which right-wing and extreme-right parties (PVV, BBB, NSC) dominated, new coalition negotiations were expected to reflect this altered political landscape.

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NRC, Meeus. 2022. "De bedrijven van Quote 500-families die het boerenprotest aanwakkeren." June 17.

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Slovakia

Score 6

Within the Slovak Envirostrategy 2030, biodiversity protection will be enhanced, and measures will be implemented to prevent the degradation of species and habitats (Envirostrategy, 2019: 60). Protected areas and degrees of protection will be reviewed and simplified by 2024 (Greener Slovakia, 2020: 46).

The Slovak government has prepared the Concept of Nature Protection until 2030, which includes measurable indicators. The main goals of this concept are:

Improving efficiency in the protection and management of protected areas,
Preventing the deterioration of species and habitats, and restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems by 2030,
Creating legal, institutional, and management conditions for landscape protection, ensuring stability and connectivity in the landscape, resilience of the natural environment to climate change, and the sustainable use of natural resources,
Enhancing the effectiveness of nature and landscape protection by supporting research, education, communication, and data systems in the fields of nature protection, biodiversity, and landscape. This includes ensuring support for the active involvement of relevant groups in the protection and management of protected areas. The financial aspect of this plan involves a mix of EU funds, the Slovak budget, and stakeholder participation. Partial goals are planned for fulfillment by 2025 or 2030 (CNP, 2019). However, following the change of government, the concept (CNP, 2019) has been politicized, particularly the national park reform prepared by the previous OLaNO-led coalition aimed at sustainable tourism development.

Zoning plans for national parks are particularly contentious. For example, Environment Minister Tomáš Taraba (SNS) criticized the zoning plans, stating that

they deprived national parks of income, leading to an annual loss of €24 million (Pravda, 2023). He also rejected the plan to create Podunajsko National Park in southwest Slovakia near Bratislava and along the Danube River, arguing that it took over the most fertile agricultural land.

Citation:

Envirostrategy 2030. 2019. Greener Slovakia. <https://www.minzp.sk/iep/strategicke-materialy/envirostrategia-2030.html>

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Hungary

Score 5

Hungary ranks in the mid-tier among OECD countries on many biodiversity-related issues. However, it places last in the Biodiversity Habitat Index, with an extremely low score of 2.47 (30th out of 30). In contrast, Hungary scores an ideal 10 on the Terrestrial Biome Protection Index. Thus, the picture of Hungary’s biodiversity is very mixed.

A National Biodiversity Monitoring System (NBMS) has existed since 1998. In 2015, Hungary adopted its second National Strategy for the Conservation of Biodiversity, setting a comprehensive framework for action. In 2023, the third National Strategy was adopted. In the absence of a ministry for the environment, the Ministry of Agriculture is the leading agency for implementing this strategy.

Several ministries are involved, and the Prime Minister’s Office oversees their coordination. Further down the hierarchy, regulatory agencies and institutions like the directorates of national parks, along with several NGOs, participate. Subnational administrative units in the counties and other territorial units were not initially involved. Environment and nature regulatory enforcement was later transferred as part of the state territorial administration reform from sectoral agencies (nature conservation agencies) to the 19 county government offices and 197 district offices. This transfer led to a dispersion of human resources and knowledge but improved the implementation power by utilizing all layers of state administration. Kovács and Eszter-Pataki (2021: 45) qualify the outcome negatively: “Ineffective government agencies today rubber-stamp decisions and deflect attention from otherwise valid environmental considerations, leading to a reduction in environmental standards and management, and the degradation of conservation areas.” NGO stakeholders, an essential pillar in biodiversity policy governance that were initially involved in programming and implementation, are currently challenged by the Lex NGO if they

receive foreign funding, and additionally by erratic financing patterns, as funding from European funds was cut due Hungary's democratic governance backsliding. Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is foreseen for most projects, especially concerning Natura 2000, but in practice, the overall regulatory impact assessment (RIA) system in Hungary, including EIAs, is weak. Overall, the protected area, which has been stable over the years, should be enlarged. Strategically, biodiversity policies are mainstreamed, but often they do not find their way into sectoral policies.

Citation:

Kovács, K., and G. Eszter-Pataki. 2021. "The Dismantling of Environmentalism in Hungary." *Politics and the Environment in Eastern Europe*: 25-51.

National Strategy for the Conservation of Biodiversity. 2023. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/hu/hu-nbsap-v3-hu.pdf>

Ireland

Score 5

Ireland has exceeded six of the seven biospherical boundaries (CO2 emissions, material and ecological footprints, land use change and phosphorus and nitrogen) (Murphy 2023), leading to significant adverse impacts on nature and biodiversity. The Biodiversity Intactness Index ranks Ireland in the bottom 10% globally (Natural History Museum, 2020). A key driving factor is habitat loss, as Ireland – similar to the UK – spent two centuries converting land to pasture to support increased livestock numbers (CSO 2015). National agriculture policy accelerated increases in cattle and sheep in the 1970s, with cattle levels now at record highs. Agriculture occupies 67% of the territory, and Ireland has the second lowest level of terrestrial protected area in the EU at 13.9%, less than half the 30% target by 2030 (EEA, 2023). Other drivers of biodiversity loss include invasive species, pollution, and climate change. Consequently, natural habitats are virtually nonexistent in Ireland, and many semi-natural habitats continue to be impacted by human activities.

In 2019, the national parliament voted to declare both a national Climate and Biodiversity Emergency, and in 2023, the Citizen's Assembly and the Children and Young People's Assemblies urged the state to take decisive and urgent action. The 2017–2021 biodiversity plan was critiqued for its lack of SMART targets and KPIs. The new plan (2024) aims to address this with clear implementable actions and a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, with an audit role for the National Biodiversity Forum. The new Biodiversity Action Plan has been on a statutory footing since 2023, with binding goals. However, existing policies and practices in other areas, including agriculture, may inhibit action without a systemic approach.

Citation:

Government of Ireland. 2022. Public Consultation on Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2027. Government of Ireland.

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Israel

Score 4

Israel has ratified various international treaties regarding the preservation of biodiversity. In 1995, it ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity, which provides guidelines for preserving biodiversity. Two government bodies are responsible for implementing the policy on this issue: the Ministry of Environmental Protection, and the Authority for Nature and Parks.

In 2010, specific goals and measures were established for each signatory country to the treaty, requiring each country to report on its progress. The 2020 report found that Israel's progress was insufficient in 14 out of 19 goals. Moreover, no measures were set for two goals: fundraising for promoting biodiversity and the rehabilitation of ecological systems. The goal of developing a strategic plan was reported under the status of "no progress" (State Comptroller Report, 2022). The ministry publishes monitoring reports as part of its commitment to the OECD. According to the OECD, Israel is ranked last in preserving open areas and allocating sea reserves to maintain biodiversity.

In 2020, the Planning Administration presented guidelines for preserving marine ecosystems. Additionally, Israel ratified the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean Treaty, which addresses the preservation of coastal and marine areas of the Mediterranean, and prevention of pollution. Following this ratification, Israel enacted several laws to protect the sea, including the Order for Prevention of Oil Pollution of Sea Water (1980), Prohibition of Sea Pollution (1983) and Prohibition of Sea Pollution from Terrestrial Sources (1988).

The treaty also included several protocols for the protection of various species and biodiversity in the Mediterranean, as well as the prevention of oil and waste pollution. Israel did not ratify these protocols.

Israel has ratified several other treaties, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, among others.

According to a report by the state comptroller, the 2010 biodiversity preservation plan did not include specific operational activities. There were also no measurable

goals, deadlines or sources of funding. Moreover, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, which designed the program, did not introduce it to the cabinet, so it did not receive the formal status of a cabinet decision. Consequently, its recommendations are not binding.

Lastly, according to the plan, a professional committee should be established to develop standards and measures. However, the established committee has never met.

Citation:

State Comptroller. 2022. "The Ministry of Environment: Protection of biodiversity." <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/sites/DigitalLibrary/Documents/2022/2022.5/2022.5-211-Migvan-Biology-Taktzir.pdf>

Poland

Score 4

Poland's post-2004 approach to nature preservation combined efforts to protect the Białowieża Forest with a focus on addressing environmental challenges in industrialized Upper Silesia. The EU's Biodiversity Strategy and related directives have guided Poland's biodiversity norms, which are further outlined in the 2030 National Environmental Policy. The policy aims to achieve increased forest cover, sustainable forest management and other ecological goals by 2030. Poland exceeds EU averages with regard to land and marine protection, with 39.6% of the country's land territory and 21.87% of its marine waters designated as protected areas. However, national parks account for only 1.1% of this total, ranking Poland 26th in Europe on this measure.

The Chief Inspectorate for Environmental Protection monitors key areas including bird habitat and forests. Efforts are underway to update marine water monitoring programs and synchronize activities related to environmental directives. Authorities at different levels oversee compliance with environmental protection regulations, with powers to conduct examinations and take legal action in case of violations (Euroaktiv 2023).

Poland faces challenges in balancing conservation efforts with industrial and agricultural needs, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of its environmental policies. Environmental issues include forest overexploitation (especially after 1989), unsustainable agricultural practices, overfishing and river biodiversity problems.

Citation:

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/eu-court-orders-poland-to-change-its-forest-rules/>

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