

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As the Birds and Habitats Directives face a Stress Test, scientific evidence supports stronger implementation

As the European Commission conducts its 2026 stress test of the Birds and Habitats Directives, a [new white paper](#) produced by Biodiversa+ and its BiodivRestore Knowledge Hub finds that these cornerstone pieces of EU biodiversity legislation remain fit for purpose. The evidence reviewed suggests that the main opportunities for simplification lie in improving implementation, strengthening legal certainty and reducing avoidable administrative burdens, rather than revising the core legal framework.

Key messages

- The Birds and Habitats Directives remain fit for purpose.
- Natura 2000 generates benefits that substantially exceed implementation costs.
- The main barriers to success relate to implementation rather than shortcomings in the legislation itself.
- Improving implementation, policy coherence and legal certainty offers greater benefits than weakening environmental safeguards.

Drawing on a review of scientific evidence and policy evaluations, the paper finds that the main challenges lie in implementation rather than in the objectives or architecture of the Directives. Key priorities include strengthening funding, governance, monitoring, administrative capacity, policy coherence and legal certainty.

The white paper highlights the significant benefits generated by the Natura 2000 network, which covers approximately 18% of the EU's terrestrial territory. **Ecosystem services provided by the network are estimated to generate between €200 and €300 billion annually, compared with management and restoration costs of around €10.2 billion per year.**

At the same time, biodiversity decline remains a major concern. The evidence reviewed shows that 81% of protected habitats remain in poor or bad conservation status, and 36% continue to deteriorate. The white paper identifies implementation gaps—including insufficient funding, uneven administrative capacity, incomplete monitoring systems and limited transboundary coordination—as major barriers to achieving conservation objectives.

The paper also underlines that the **Birds and Habitats Directives provide much of the legal, ecological and technical foundation for implementing the EU Nature Restoration Regulation.** In this context, the ongoing stress test offers an opportunity to improve implementation, strengthen legal certainty and enhance policy coherence while supporting ambitious National Restoration Plans across Europe.

The findings also come at a time when public support for nature conservation remains exceptionally strong across Europe. Recent [Eurobarometer](#) results show that Europeans overwhelmingly recognise the importance of protected areas for safeguarding biodiversity, protecting endangered species and supporting wider societal benefits, including clean air, clean water and resilient economies.

Read the White Paper:

<https://www.biodiversa.eu/2026/06/22/white-paper-safeguarding-europes-biodiversity-legislation/>

For further information:

Julie de Bouville, julie.debouville@fondationbiodiversite.fr