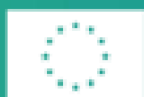


Choose nature.



Unlocking pathways
to a resilient economy
for people and the planet.

NetworkNature Annual Event Report
16th September 2025



Funded by
the European Union



UK Research
and Innovation

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Executive summary

The **NetworkNature Annual Event 2025**, held in Brussels, brought together policymakers, businesses, researchers, and civil society under the theme *Choose Nature*, calling for **decisive action to integrate biodiversity and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) across Europe's economy and governance**. In the context of the [EU Nature Restoration Regulation](#) and the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), the event highlighted that restoring and partnering with nature is not only an environmental imperative but a foundation of economic resilience and collective wellbeing. This event positioned NbS as core to building a nature-positive economy, an economy that regenerates ecosystems while supporting prosperity, social equity, and resilience.

The programme was structured around four thematic sessions, each examining a key dimension of Europe's transition toward a nature-positive economy:

The opening session, ***Choose to Work with and for Nature***, explored how restoring ecosystems can strengthen competitiveness, social well-being, and climate resilience. Speakers stressed that nature is not a “nice-to-have” but a strategic, economic, and moral necessity. Examples included national restoration planning in the Czech Republic, where cross-sector collaboration is embedding ecological restoration in policy, and private initiatives demonstrating the business case for nature-based solutions.

The second session, ***Choose to Trust Nature and People***, focused on recognising humanity's deep dependencies on ecosystems and the importance of co-creating solutions with communities. NbS, combining technological innovation with Indigenous and local knowledge, were presented as tools for climate adaptation, food and water security, and social inclusion. The discussions emphasised that lasting change depends on trust, participation, and the integration of diverse forms of knowledge. This echoed findings from the IPBES

Values Assessment, showing that transformative change requires recognising and integrating multiple value systems, knowledge traditions, and lived experiences.

In ***Choose to Invest in Nature***, the third session turned to finance, highlighting growing awareness among public and private actors that biodiversity loss poses material risks. Financial institutions are beginning to recognise that investing in nature is both a matter of responsibility and of financial prudence. Innovative mechanisms, such as nature and biodiversity credits and public–private partnerships, were presented as ways to mobilise resources at scale and channel them toward tangible restoration outcomes. Speakers also acknowledged the need for safeguards and clear standards to ensure that emerging finance mechanisms deliver real, measurable biodiversity benefits and avoid greenwashing.

The closing session, ***Choose to Partner with Nature***, examined how collaboration can turn policy ambition into practice. Businesses, cooperatives, and research projects shared experiences of building trust and developing joint solutions, from landscape restoration and hydropower cooperation to community-owned food systems. The panel discussions underscored the importance of inclusive dialogue, shared standards, and transparency to achieve systemic change.

Throughout the day, speakers and participants converged on a clear message: the evidence, tools, and community for transformative change already exist. What is needed now is **policy coherence, long-term investment**, and **collective leadership** to scale what works.

The event concluded with reflections from the European Commission and IUCN, reaffirming that even in times of uncertainty, Europe's commitment to nature remains a source of unity, innovation, and hope. By choosing to work with and for nature, Europe chooses a future that is more resilient, just, and regenerative.

Moving forward, NetworkNature will continue to convene partners to align policy, investment, business practice, and community action toward this shared ambition.

Introduction

Objectives and themes

“Transformative change is urgent because there is a closing window of opportunity to avoid further biodiversity loss and prevent triggering the potentially irreversible decline and projected collapse of key ecosystem functions. Delaying action to achieve global sustainability is costly compared with the benefits of taking action now”

This statement opens the summary for policymakers of the [IPBES Assessment report on Transformative Change](#), warning us about the risks of failing to address biodiversity loss with the urgency the situation demands.

At the same time, the EU policy landscape increasingly emphasises competitiveness and economic resilience. Rather than viewing these priorities as competing with environmental ambition, the event explored how restoring nature can strengthen competitiveness, reduce climate risk, support innovation, and improve long-term economic stability.

This seemingly divergent context invites us to reflect on the opportunities and challenges of addressing these questions together. Organised by [NetworkNature](#) in collaboration with [Brussels Environment](#), this year’s **NetworkNature Annual Event 2025 “Choose Nature”** explored different means to align biodiversity and economy in times of urgency, building on the concept of NbS.

We heard from a broad range of stakeholders, from the public and private sectors, examined diverse ideas, exchanged knowledge, explored initiatives and shared case studies that link nature with

climate, economy, innovation, finance, business and wellbeing. Through pitches and discussions, we delved into pathways toward a nature-positive economy: an economy in which value creation is aligned with ecosystem regeneration, social wellbeing, and resilience. The event also encouraged stakeholders to engage with and adopt these approaches.

The event was structured around four thematic sessions, moderated throughout by Faridah Ibrahim (IUCN): **Choose to Work with and for Nature, Choose to Trust Nature and People, Choose to Invest in Nature, and Choose to Partner with Nature**. Together, these sessions explored how economic resilience, social well-being, and ecological restoration can be advanced through collaboration, innovation, and a shared commitment to a nature-positive economy.

In parallel to the main event, the **exhibition *Why Choose Nature? / Why do we care?*** invited different stakeholders to explore the diverse reasons why working with nature is essential and why you should care about it.

Curated through an open call, this exhibition compiled around 100 reasons and a variety of resources, experiences and types of knowledges, all highlighting how nature-based solutions can encourage and build on a wide range of perspectives in relation to nature. This concept was inspired by the [IPBES Values Assessment report](#) on integrating diverse values of nature into decision-making and contributed to a meaningful exchange during the event. This open call was launched by NetworkNature in collaboration with the [Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences SLU](#) (Florence Damiens) and counts on the support of Brussels Environment.

Finally, during the event, [NetworkNature officially launched](#) the **[NbS Business Forum](#)**, which was marked by a lively, engaging exchange with the community. Three members, **Connecting Nature Enterprises Platform**, **Dulra**, and **Qulcurate**, showcased their innovative work and offered an inspiring glimpse into how businesses are already driving nature-positive change and being supported.

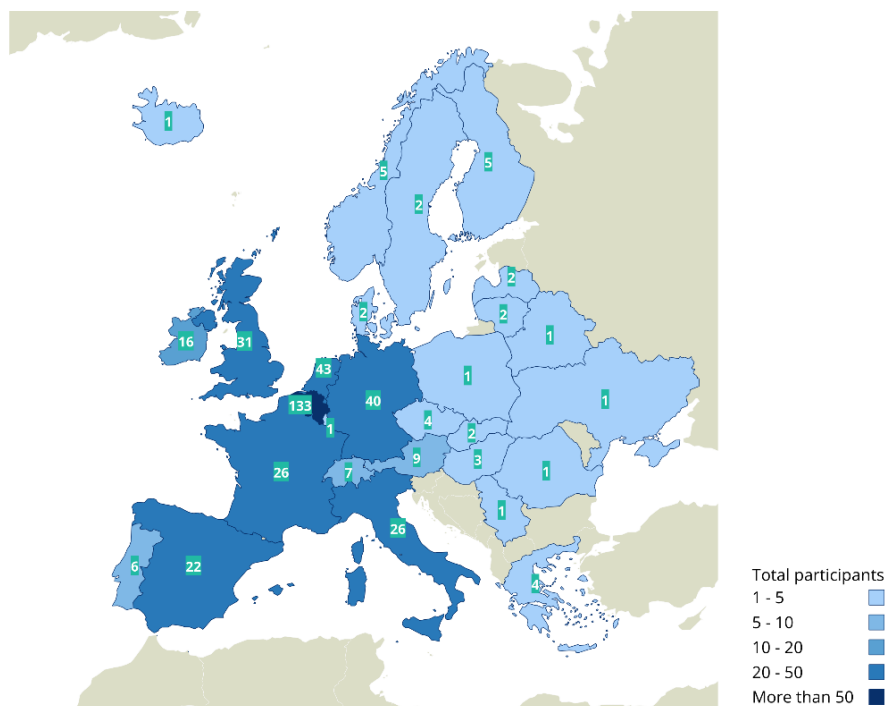
The Forum's mission is to accelerate the uptake and scaling of NbS by fostering partnerships, highlighting opportunities for nature financing, sharing insights from research, and providing training on the business dimensions of NbS.

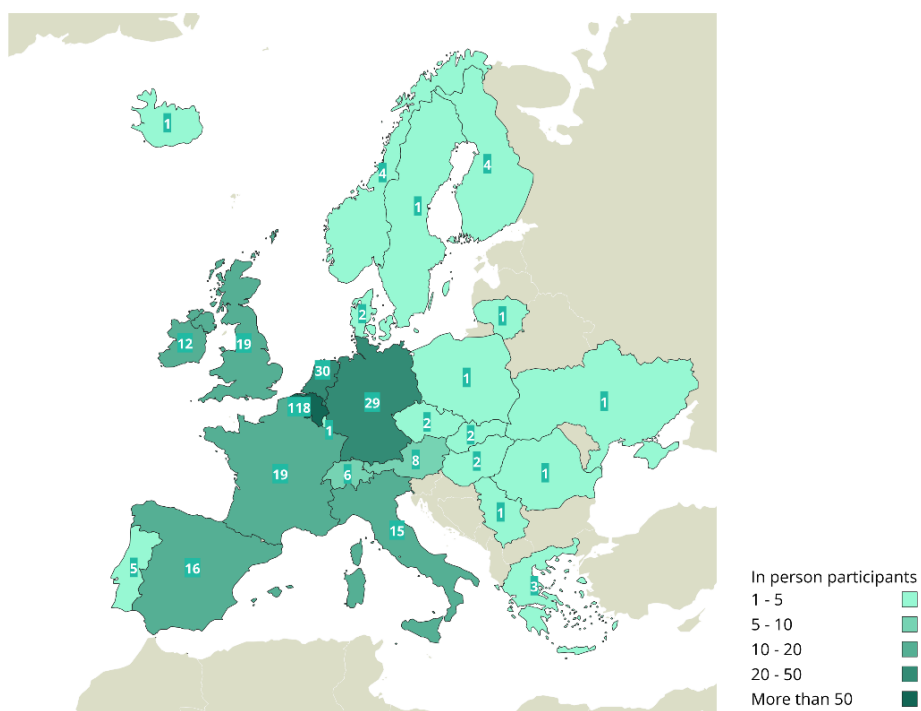
Participation

This year's NetworkNature Annual Event gathered more than 445 participants, both in-person (320) and online (125), from across the globe.

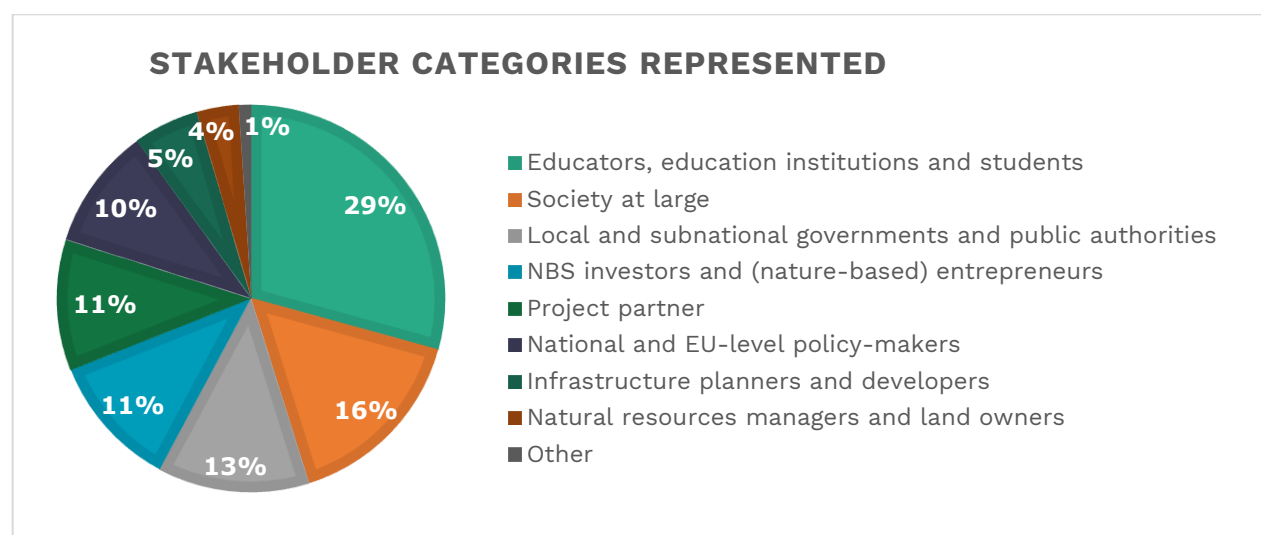
34 countries were represented in varying degrees, with Western Europe being the main region represented.

Countries represented located outside the scope of this map were Canada, Colombia, Georgia, Israel, Kenya, Pakistan and Taiwan

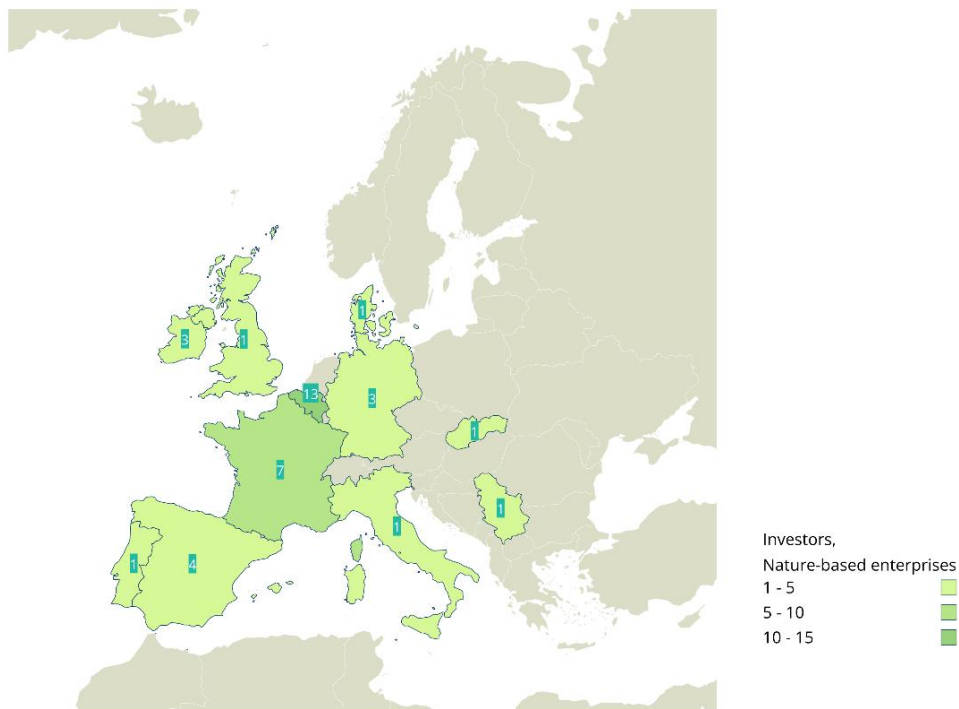




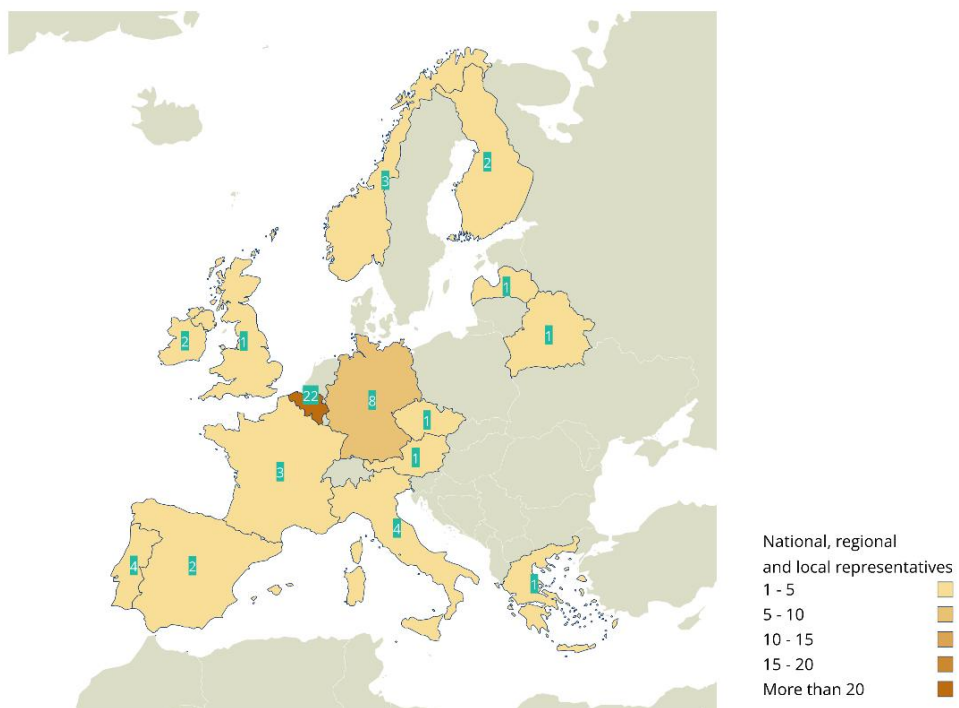
The event brought together various stakeholder categories, from researchers and civil society to European, national and local policymakers, and nature-based entrepreneurs.

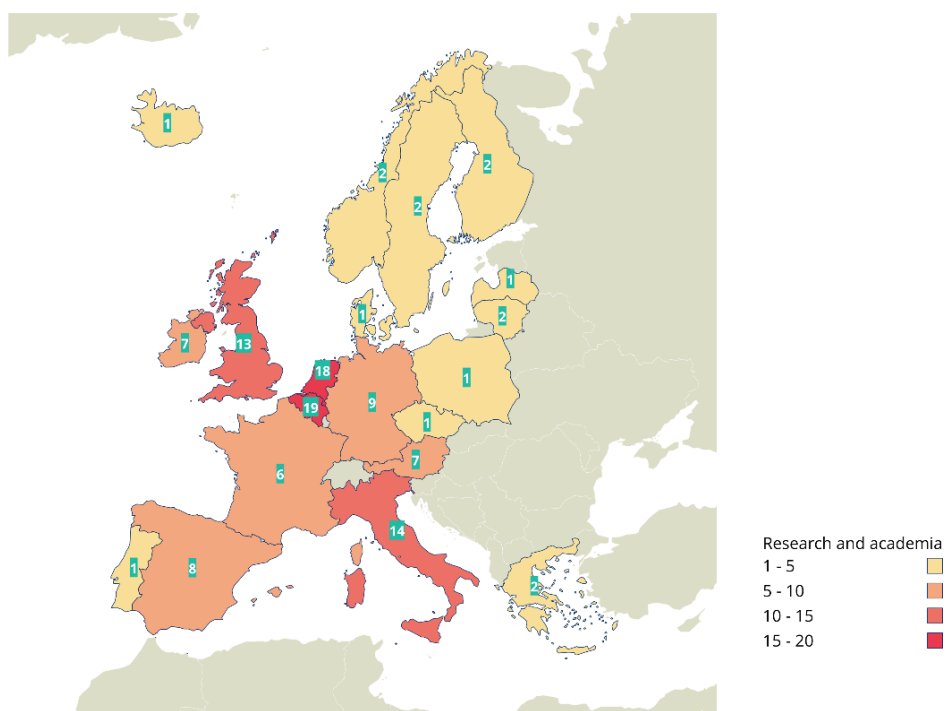


The following graphs show the distribution of selected stakeholder categories.

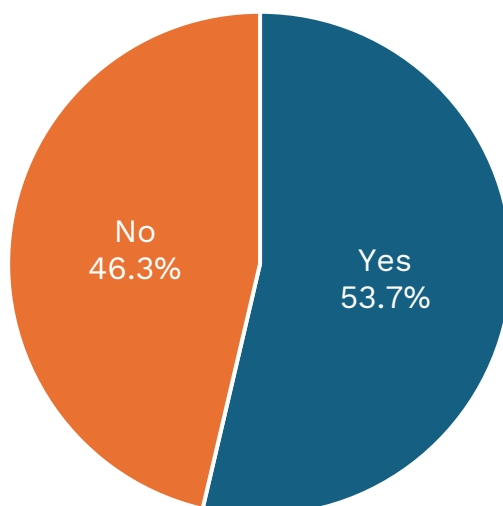


At the event, 25 EU Commission representatives were present, who are not included in this map showing the distribution of national, regional, and local authorities and policymakers.





Participants representing EU-funded projects



More than half of the attendees were representing one or more EU-funded projects, with about 110 projects present.

List of represented projects:

A-Track	eklipsE	LIFE Programme NCP	RESTORESEAS
AIM-NBS	eNaBIS	Life Costadapta	REWRITE
ALBATROSS	Environmental	Life Guguy	R4C
AMBER	EU Business &	Life Saladares	SARCC
ARCADIA	EU Cities Mission and	Life for Rivers	SELINA
BioAgora	European Biodiversity	LandShift	Seamphoni
BIOFIN-EU	FairNature	MERLIN	Sleeping Beauty
BioReStorm	GoGreen Next	MED-IREN	Smarter
Biodiversa+	GoGreen Routes	MountResilience	Soilguard & Safeguard
Biodiversa+ Sunloop	GoNaturePositive	NATALIE	Soil Health
Bio Services	Gov4All	NATURE-DEMO	SONATA
Buffer+	GREENINCITIES	NATURELAB	SpongeBoost
CARDIMED	GREENHANCEnbt	NATURANCE	SPADES
CircHive	Green Infra	Nature-3B	Taskforce 06
CLEVER Cities	Horizon SpongeBoost	NatureScapes	TRANS-lighthouses
ClimaGen	I4N	NBRACER	Transformative
COEVOLVERS	IN-HABIT	NBS EduWorld	UNP+
Commit2Green	In Best Soil	NBSINFRA	UNPplus
Connecting Nature	Innovative Fund NCP	NetworkNature+	UPSURGE
CONEXUS	INTERFACE	Nice	Urban ReLeaf
CoolSchools	INTERLACE	NovelEco	URBiNAT
Craft2Bio	Invest4Nature	Nourish	URBREATH
DALIA	JUSTNature	NURISH	VARIOUS on NBS
D4RUNOFF	LIFE Elia-RTE	OR	WaterGRID
DesirMED	LIFE Green Link	Progireg	WaterLANDS
DuneFront	LIFE Inagua	RE-Adapt	WildE
EcoAdvance	LIFE Nieblas	ReGreenation	
EduWorld	LIFE Pinzón	REST-COAST	



Credits: Kassia Rudd

Event exhibition:

Why Choose Nature? / Why Do We Care?

The *IPBES Values Assessment Report* highlighted the crucial importance of recognising diverse worldviews and embracing multiple values in shaping more sustainable and equitable futures. This exhibition responded to this call by gathering diverse voices, experiences, and insights that challenged us to rethink our relationship with the natural environment – and to showcase the many ways we can act for nature.

At a moment when the EU's political priorities focus on competitiveness and economic resilience, and as this year's NetworkNature event underscores nature's role in building a resilient economy, this exhibition enlarged the conversation, inviting reflection

on the diverse - and sometimes divergent - motivations to choose nature as a shared priority.

At its heart, the exhibition revealed the extraordinary potential of **NbS**. Though often framed primarily in utilitarian terms, these solutions have the potential to embody a much broader spectrum of values and worldviews. Deeply rooted in local knowledge systems and cultural perspectives, they offer community-led responses to today's societal challenges. The challenges themselves are, in turn, shaped and defined through different lenses, incorporating the diverse worldviews and values that guide how societies engage with nature.

Why Choose Nature? / Why Do We Care? Brought together a range of contributions from individuals and organisations across research, national, regional and local public bodies, land and sea management, businesses and finance, the arts, and civil society. Each submission offered a unique reason why working with nature matters. Together, they explored the core motivations fostering commitment to nature and driving transformative change, ranging from critical data to guiding emotions, from childhood memories to collective momentum, from economic profit to social justice, from worrisome prospects to quests for beauty.

Through visual media, stories, key research results, artistic expressions, and local experiences, the exhibition showcases the multiple ways people care for, depend on, and act for and with nature.

This exhibition was developed by NetworkNature in collaboration with Florence Damiens from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and with support from Brussels Environment.



Credits: Naomi Blumlein

Welcome Keynote Speech

The event opened with a poetic and thought-provoking address by [Luis Amalia](#), who invited the audience to reflect on the shared essence of art and nature and on why choosing nature is ultimately about choosing life itself.

He began by drawing a parallel between the two:

"Art and nature have things in common: they are both generally seen like an accessory for the happy days, and they are always the first thing to be dropped in troubled times."

Challenging this perception, he asked: *"Why choose nature? Why choose art? Why do I care?"* Answering:

"Because they make our souls grow. You might have forgotten, but we are emotional beings. We need to feed our souls — or we'll die."

He described art and nature as nourishment, essential to our existence:

"Art and nature are like food and feeding ourselves. We need them in order to exist."

Further, he called for a reimagination of how both should be integrated into our institutions and collective life, not as decorative additions, but as drivers of real transformation:

"Art and artists should be part of our organisations, not as an accessory, but as a way to drive transformation. In the same way, nature is claiming its space. We can hire nature to be in our teams... it cannot be considered an accessory. It should be pivotal and have a real space on the table, not as a flower pot in the hall."

He illustrated the point by asking the audience why Venice matters. The answers offered from the floor — the tourism it attracts, the engineering behind its foundations, the income it generates — were, he suggested, beside the point. Venice matters because of something that resists measurement, and the same is true of art and of nature:

"We don't really know what happens when we experience art. We just feel passion. And we cannot measure it. [...] It is not enough to value things by the benefits they generate."

Both Venice and nature, he noted, are at risk of disappearing.

Looking ahead to the day's discussions, he connected emotion and action, reminding participants that reason alone is not enough to change the world:

"It may take a bigger, more intense passion in the opposite direction, passion for nature and people, passion for living together and

coexisting in a fair and biodiverse world. Passion is the one antidote to destruction, extraction, exclusion, inequality and depression."

He closed by returning to the question he had opened with:

"Both arts and nature are capable of generating intense passions."

And then answering it:

"Why choose nature? Why do we care? Because nature is important. Because nature transforms us, awakens our senses, ignites our imagination, and anchors our hopes for a better future. It gives depth and sense to our lives. So — choose nature."

This keynote set the tone for the day, underscoring that choosing nature is not merely technical or strategic, but deeply cultural, emotional, and relational.



Credits: Kassia Rudd

Choose to Work for and with nature.

“In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.”

Baba Dioum, 1968

Nature as the foundation for resilience and wellbeing.

Nature plays a vital and multifaceted role in supporting human health, climate stability, water and food security, and protection against natural disasters. These interconnected benefits form the backbone of a thriving, resilient society and economy. However, economic strategies often overlook humanity's dependencies on biodiversity, undervaluing its contributions and viewing nature primarily as a source of raw materials. By shifting toward a more holistic understanding of nature as a key partner in long-term resilience and wellbeing, we can avoid costly disruptions, safeguard ecosystem functions, and unlock sustainable opportunities for both industries and communities.

NbS can offer long-lasting, cost-saving and adaptive solutions to existing challenges by recognising the diverse values of nature. Leveraging the power of nature can ensure a resilient economy that benefits both people and nature.

This session explored how aligning economic activity with ecological integrity can drive a more resilient and equitable future.

Presentations

This session examined how aligning economic systems with ecological processes can support competitiveness, equity, and resilience.

Speakers examined the growing recognition that nature underpins the economy, highlighting both the risks of inaction and the opportunities of integrating biodiversity into business and policy. Discussions reflected on the shift from nature as a passive resource to a productive partner in innovation and value creation, showing how regenerative models and systemic change can redefine prosperity within planetary boundaries.



Credits: Kassia Rudd

It is urgent, vital for the health of the Planet and Humanity

Sebastian Villasante

IPBES Transformative Change Assessment Report

Associate Professor of Economics and Director of the EqualSea Lab at the University of Santiago Compostela. Lead Coordinator of the IPBES Global Assessment of Transformative Change, Co-Chair of the PECS Programme on Ocean Equity for Sustainable Futures, and co-author of the Global Tipping Points Report.

The IPBES Transformative Change Assessment makes clear that transformative change is urgent, necessary, and possible, something that is already happening in different parts around the world. Such a change is vital to the health of both Humanity and the Planet. To achieve it, society must go beyond surface-level solutions and address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, including disconnection from and domination over nature, concentration of power and wealth, and the prioritisation of short-term, individual, and material gains. This requires a profound shift in values, structures, regulations, and social norms, reshaping how society behaves and organises itself.

The assessment highlights that truly transformative initiatives must be guided by certain key principles: equity and justice, pluralism and inclusion, respectful and reciprocal relationships between humans and nature, and adaptive learning and action. Five complementary strategies were identified to drive transformative change: reconceiving and regenerating values and relationships with nature, driving systemic change in sectors most responsible for biodiversity loss, transforming economic systems to support both equity and nature, building governance systems that are more adaptive and inclusive, and shifting societal views and values to embrace the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

The evidence shows that both small- and large-scale initiatives, when driven by diverse actors, can generate transformative change. Importantly, collaboration across actors and sectors significantly increases the potential for success, leading not only to ecological benefits but also to improvements in human well-being, both socially and economically. Another critical factor is imagination and creativity. History demonstrates that human progress has been driven by collective imagination, science, and creativity, and the assessment confirms that initiatives with clear, explicit visions of transformative change achieve better outcomes. Such visions are especially powerful when they are collaborative and address multiple direct and indirect drivers, such as climate change and pollution, while simultaneously advancing multiple purposes, including global sustainability, equity, and quality of life.

Finally, the assessment identifies four essential conditions to truly achieve transformative change: address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, incorporate principled strategies and actions, recognise that change can emerge at both small and large scales, and ensure that everyone plays a role, as all individuals and communities can influence transformative change within their spheres.

Further readings:

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17099400>

To coexist with the living

Nathalie Le Meur

Ville de Grenoble

Project Manager for Grenoble City Doughnut, in the framework of Grenoble 2040 with a background in Business, Communication and Climate Awareness.

Grenoble, located in southeastern France and surrounded by the Alps, is home to more than 150,000 inhabitants. The city faces environmental pressures such as biodiversity loss, air pollution, and increasingly frequent heat waves, issues that are closely tied to social concerns, including inequality, public health, and quality of life.

Grenoble's municipal council launched the Grenoble 2040 initiative, designed to ensure that children born in 2022 will celebrate their 18th birthday in a city and a world that is ecologically safe and socially just. The initiative was guided by three core principles. Linking social and environmental issues, which can no longer be treated separately. Connecting local and global scales of responsibility, acknowledging Grenoble's role both as a city administrator and a political stakeholder in global sustainability. Reconciling reason and emotion to create new narratives of hope grounded in scientific evidence.

To provide a framework for action, Grenoble chose to adopt Doughnut Economics, a model that balances the planetary boundaries with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The model's "doughnut" represents the ecological ceiling and social foundation that must be respected: every person's basic needs should be met without exceeding Earth's environmental limits.

In practice, this began with a "data portrait of place", to measure progress against sustainability thresholds and then the use of an environmental and social analysis grid, based on local political targets, and assesses both qualitative and quantitative impacts. Therefore, it not only provides an overview of strengths and areas for improvement but also serves as a tool for budget allocation and strategic decision-making.

Strategies were developed to guide the concrete actions. Such strategies are, for once, the biodiversity strategy, which focuses on preserving natural and urban spaces, reintegrating ecological processes and supporting wildlife through targeted green-space management and monitoring. The vegetation strategy aims to preserve plant heritage and reconnect residents with nature by expanding green spaces, de-sealing soils, planting trees, and

improving water infiltration. These efforts make greenery a central element of municipal development projects.

Additionally, the municipality recognises that the perspective on nature needs to change. To achieve this, the city uses clear and engaging visuals to create safe spaces for debate and discussion with citizens, such as an infographic on biodiversity loss and a poster highlighting the environmental and social challenges facing mountain ecosystems. Further, they organise exhibitions, workshops, and events to raise public awareness, promote participatory greening, and build knowledge about other living beings. Grenoble also adopted a Declaration of Animal Rights, affirming that all living beings, sharing a common origin, possess natural rights that must be respected.

For Grenoble, the path to sustainability lies not only in data and governance but also in cultivating a collective imagination, emotional connection, and shared responsibility for the living world.

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To tackle the systemic causes of nature loss

Siobhan McQuaid

Invest4Nature project (Trinity College Dublin)

She is an Associate Director of Innovation in the Centre for Social Innovation in Trinity Business School, Trinity College Dublin and the Principal Investigator of GoNaturePositive! She is also the co-founder and director of Horizon Nua, a not-for-profit foundation accelerating just transition towards a nature-positive economy and manager of the Connecting Nature Enterprise Platform.

Biodiversity loss stems from systemic failures in current economic systems. These systems degrade ecosystems through harmful production and consumption patterns. The proposed solution is a nature-positive economy, by explicitly aiming to restore ecosystems to full health while ensuring social well-being.

This approach is not about shrinking economies but transforming them, shifting activities from destructive to regenerative ones such as

agroecology and sustainable tourism. Historical transitions in industries like energy and transport show that such large-scale changes are achievable.

Evidence gathered from 46 projects underlines the urgency of transition. Three imperatives stand out:

Dependency: all sectors of the economy rely on ecosystem services, whether directly (agriculture, fisheries) or indirectly (manufacturing, services).

Risk: financial systems are deeply exposed. JRC research published in 2025 found that 75% of bank loans, extended to more than three million companies, go to businesses dependent on at least one ecosystem service.

Opportunity: The World Economic Forum estimates that nature transitions could generate \$10 trillion in annual business opportunities and create 395 million jobs.

European research strengthens the case by demonstrating the environmental, social, and health benefits of investing in NbS, which justify greater public investment. Financially, investment in ecosystems reduces risks, lowers costs in insurance and disaster management, and enhances resilience. Importantly, the cost of inaction is consistently higher than the cost of restoration.

However, significant gaps persist. The lack of detailed data on the types of jobs created or lost, impacts on productivity, costs, and competitiveness. Having a limited understanding of business cases for SMEs and larger companies. As well as emerging but underdeveloped instruments like nature credits.

Looking forward, scaling alternative not-for-profit models could combine community restoration with ecological recovery, offering new pathways to a sustainable, just, and resilient economic future.

Further readings:

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<https://networknature.eu/networknature/resource/policy-imperatives-competitive-and-resilient-nature-positive-economy>

Don't repeat the same mistake

Edoardo Carlucci

International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Policy advisor, specialising in sustainable finance within the Economic, Law and Policy programme at the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). His work particularly focuses on financing solutions for nature-based infrastructure (NBI) with the Nature-Based Infrastructure Global Resource Centre.

Globally, society spends vastly more on subsidies that accelerate environmental harm than on protecting nature. Fossil fuels alone receive 1.1 to 1.7 trillion dollars in direct subsidies, while biodiversity conservation struggles to secure even \$100 billion. This imbalance essentially pays for destruction while underfunding solutions.

Harmful subsidies exacerbate ecological damage in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, strain public budgets, distort markets, entrench inequalities, and hinder green innovation by protecting inefficient industries.

There is an opportunity to repurpose this public money toward social and environmental goals. The Global Biodiversity Framework has already committed to reducing harmful subsidies by \$500 billion a year while expanding positive incentives. Examples show the economic and social benefits of investing in nature. In the Netherlands, dunes bring higher tourism income than dikes; in Greece, restored rivers generate nearly triple the social benefits of engineered flood defences; in Burkina Faso, land restoration yields up to \$1 billion in agricultural productivity.

Reforming subsidies creates a “triple win”: cutting subsidies that drive climate change and biodiversity loss, scaling up NbS and

sustainable alternatives, and unlocking private investment by levelling the playing field

However, reform requires action on two levels. International cooperation, while slower, can provide standards, legal frameworks, and first-mover alliances that shape global markets. Nationally, reforms tend to move faster and can generate momentum for international adoption.

A clear strategic framework is essential. This involves quantifying subsidies (which is still lacking in places like the EU), assessing their impacts, coordinating reforms across government, phasing out subsidies with optimal timing, providing social and business support during transitions, and actively redirecting funds to sustainable investments. Strong governance is needed to ensure transparency and accountability.

Policy recommendations include: Conducting independent national assessments and audits of harmful subsidies. Establishing first-mover government clubs to lead international action. Align agricultural subsidy reform with national food system transformation strategies.

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It is needed and feasible

José María Rey Benayas

University Alcalá de Henares and FIRE Foundation

Professor of Ecology at the University of Alcalá with research focusing on biodiversity restoration, ecosystem services in agricultural landscapes and forest regeneration. He created and leads the FIRE – International Foundation for Ecosystem Restoration.

Nature-based approaches in farmland are both necessary and feasible because industrial agriculture is the human economic activity causing the most environmental damage. Addressing this footprint is urgent, especially considering that approximately one-third of all food produced is lost or wasted. Scientific evidence indicates that it is possible to produce more food using less land. In Europe, momentum exists for an agroecological transition, further supported by EU strategies such as Farm to Fork, Biodiversity 2030, and the Nature Restoration Regulation.

Two complementary frameworks illustrate how this transition can be implemented in practice, supported by extensive field evidence, systematic reviews, and demonstration projects. The agricultural rewilding concept is a complementary approach combining land sharing, in the form of extensive farming, and land sparing, through precision and ecologically intensified farming on one hand and at least 20% of separated rewilded land on the other.

The woodland islets and hedgerows in agricultural seas framework describes how their use can not only accelerate natural regeneration, but also provide habitats, and deliver multiple ecosystem services such as pest regulation, erosion control, and water retention. For example, planting hedgerows can triple the establishment rate of slow-growing species like Holm oaks compared with unplanted field strips.

These strategic revegetation efforts can leverage existing linear elements in the landscape, such as creeks, rivers, roads, field boundaries, and sidewalks, to connect restored habitats with the agricultural matrix. Demonstration projects act as living labs combining agroecological and forest restoration, biodiversity conservation, scientific monitoring, agritourism, and education. The agroecological practices are diverse and range from crop and fallow rotation, alternative tillage methods that optimise water, sediment, and nutrient retention, to permanent soil organic cover and grazing integration. Additional interventions include artificial and natural ponds for amphibians, bird perches to encourage seed dispersal and natural regeneration, and bat hotels. These actions create multifunctional landscapes where production, biodiversity, and ecosystem services coexist.

Meta-analyses indicate that hedgerows significantly enhance biodiversity, while their effects on ecosystem services vary depending on local conditions. They also contribute to food and fibre production. Economic analyses show that agroecological transition can generate measurable financial benefits, making it both environmentally and economically advantageous.

Agricultural rewilding is practical even on relatively small estates of a few hundred hectares. By combining land sharing and separation strategies, it restores key ecological processes in a feasible and flexible way. Overall, the approach demonstrates that with proper planning and targeted interventions, farmland can simultaneously support food production, biodiversity, ecosystem services, and long-term sustainability.

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To reverse historical and ongoing injustices

Sander Jacobs

Instituut voor Natuur- en Bosonderzoek (INBO)

Senior researcher for the research group Nature & Society at INBO (Institute for Nature and Forest) in Brussels, coordinator of the programme on Urban Nature. As an ecologist and ecological economist, he teaches human and political ecology at Ghent

University and contributed to several IPBES assessments, including the one on the diverse values of nature.

Human-driven destruction of nature continues at a pace far exceeding recovery efforts. Vulnerable communities, both globally and locally, are the hardest hit, despite bearing the least responsibility for environmental harm. This injustice stems from structural issues: the disconnection from and domination over nature and people, the concentration of wealth and power, and the pursuit of short-term profit. These causes are not only recognised by scientists but also formally acknowledged by governments worldwide.

Although nature is perceived differently depending on worldviews, cultural and ethical values, what unites them is that everyone, in their own way, cares about nature. This shared care provides a powerful foundation for collective action.

Despite decades of valuable conservation and restoration work, with real tangible positive impact, biodiversity continues to decline. To succeed, we must combine traditional ecological goals (restoring ecosystems, protecting species, enhancing ecosystem services) with new social goals: addressing inequality, redistribution of power and wealth and restore our connection to nature.

Knowledge is already sufficient; capacities exist among policymakers, scientists, and institutions, and those with influence have a moral obligation to use it responsibly. The IPBES Transformative Change Assessment offers a roadmap, providing both scientific grounding and political legitimacy for action.

Implementing this requires moving beyond the idea of “managing” nature or communities, toward a paradigm of care.

One practical exercise proposed is to engage directly in conversations with both those suffering from injustices (“victims”) and those contributing to them (“perpetrators”). Such dialogue reveals that everyone cares about nature, and it makes inequalities and injustices impossible to ignore.

Scaling this practice into institutions, projects, and companies can embed care into governance, science, and business models. Programs like *Fair Nature* and *Go Nature Positive* already apply this approach by connecting diverse groups to co-create solutions. Ultimately, repairing our relationship with nature depends on repairing relationships among people.

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Panel Discussion

Guest Panellist:

Elsa Coslado

Brussels Environment, Brussels-Capital Region

Head of the territorial strategy department at the Brussels Regional Administration of the Environment. She holds a PhD in urban Geography, having a background in urbanism, environment and data management.

Brussels Environment is pursuing a green infrastructure policy framework to ensure equal distribution of green spaces, especially for vulnerable citizens. The agency manages 126 parks, 130 hectares of nature reserves, and 158 hectares of forest reserves. Despite this, Brussels ranks only 18th among European cities for greenness; more progress is needed.

The aim is to move beyond neutral impacts toward regenerative urban projects and a nature-positive economy, even in small-scale local initiatives. Nature can create jobs and improve the quality of life for new residents.

There is a persistent tension between housing and green space, which requires open, frank conversations to resolve conflicts. Further, administrations should evaluate the cost-benefits of NbS in procurement and tenders, as is being actively done in Brussels.

Key Messages

Equitable Urban Green Infrastructure

Urban planning must go beyond neutrality toward regeneration, ensuring equal access to green spaces and integrating NbS that create jobs and improve well-being. Systematic evaluation of NbS in procurement and tenders is essential to mainstream their adoption.

Balancing Urban Development and Green Space

The tension between housing needs and green infrastructure remains a core urban challenge. Transparent, participatory dialogue is needed to reconcile competing land-use priorities and design cities that are both liveable and ecologically resilient.

Frameworks for Systems Thinking

Transversal models such as *Doughnut Economics* help simplify complexity by linking social well-being and environmental limits, enabling administrations to align policies across sectors. Political commitment and internal champions are key to embedding such frameworks in local governance.

Transformative Change through Shared Values

Transformative environmental policy begins with shared motivations and collective care for people and nature. Asking “What do we care about?” provides common ground for collaboration between policymakers, businesses, and communities, turning local initiatives into scalable networks for change.

Social, Not Ecological, Barriers to Restoration

Ecosystem restoration is limited less by ecological knowledge than by funding gaps, conflicting interests, low prioritisation, and a lack of political will. Overcoming these requires early education, professional capacity building, adequate funding, and reform of harmful subsidies.

Mainstreaming NbS

Despite proven ecological and economic benefits, NbS often remain secondary to grey infrastructure. Embedding NbS into policy frameworks, strategies, and public procurement criteria can shift investment priorities. Demonstration projects and reliable performance data are needed to strengthen confidence among investors and insurers.

Technology and Environmental Trade-offs

Digital tools, such as AI, can support data-driven environmental management but also incur significant energy and resource costs. Policymakers should address these trade-offs while recognising that the main obstacles to nature-positive action are institutional and political, not informational.

Choose to Trust nature and people

Recognising social and economic dependencies on nature.

As Europe sets out a path to long-term prosperity through high-tech innovation, there's a growing understanding that sustainable success depends on aligning technological progress with ecological and social wellbeing. Embracing an integrated approach, one that values both nature and people, can lead to more resilient and inclusive outcomes. NbS offer a powerful, innovative response to today's complex challenges.

By blending high- and low-tech innovation with Indigenous and local knowledge, as well as insights from ecological and social sciences, NbS create holistic, adaptable solutions that strengthen biodiversity, enhance water and food security, improve human health, and promote climate and social equity.

This session explored how trusting both natural processes and collective human action can generate effective solutions to today's environmental and social challenges.

Presentations

Speakers presented how restoration, NbS, and community engagement can work together to address climate and biodiversity crises. Drawing on science, local knowledge, and collaboration, speakers illustrated how empowering people and ecosystems alike leads to sustainable, adaptive responses that strengthen both ecological and social wellbeing.

We depend on it

Lisa Biber-Freudenberger

IPBES Nexus Assessment Report

Works at the Center for Development Research, University of Bonn doing research in Ecology, Biogeography and Geostatistics. She is also the lead-author of chapter II of the IPBES Assessment Report on the Interlinkages Among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health.

The IPBES Nexus Assessment aims to assess the interconnection of biodiversity, water, food, health, and climate, and to what extent acting on any one of these in isolation risks undermining the others. It examines past and current trends, models future trajectories under different scenarios, tests response options that may yield co-benefits, and proposes governance and policy pathways to manage trade-offs and harness synergies.

Examining past and current trends and interactions reveals that biodiversity underpins all the other nexus elements; however, it is declining in every region of the world due to a combination of direct and indirect drivers, which cascade down through the other elements.

Further, current societal, economic, and policy decisions continue to prioritise short-term gains and largely ignore nexus interactions. For example, GDP growth has been driving many direct drivers of biodiversity loss, which then negatively affects most nexus elements.

Analysing the interactions illustrates that biodiversity increases generally have positive impacts on others, while food increases, as done in the past, often harm biodiversity and water availability.

Looking ahead, the assessment uses scenario analysis to explore possible pathways. Continuation of current trends leads to substantial negative outcomes for all nexus elements. Pathways that prioritise a single dimension, such as “conservation first,” “climate first,” or “food first,” also result in trade-offs and ultimately negative outcomes. By contrast, more balanced approaches show significantly better prospects, supporting progress not only on the nexus itself but also on most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The most damaging scenario is one of unchecked overexploitation of nature, which undermines all other objectives.

The assessment also reviews response options, many of which provide co-benefits across sectors. Rewilding, for example, offers strong ecological and climate benefits, though it can create some trade-offs in food production. Integrated landscape and seascape approaches, on the other hand, tend to generate positive outcomes across all elements. Hence, implementing such measures in bundles, rather than in isolation, can multiply positive impacts and help deliver on international targets.

Ultimately, recognising these interconnections is only the first step. Transformative change will require coordination across policy areas, strategic action, and while small-scale implementations provide testing grounds, scaling up is essential for long-term resilience and progress on global goals.

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Water needs nature from source to sea

Joachim Maes

DG ENV European Commission

Works at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Environment, where he focuses on water policy and its role in supporting ecological resilience and sustainable resource management. With a background in environmental science and extensive experience in biodiversity and ecosystem services, he works to integrate nature-based approaches into EU water policy and planning.

The European Commission published a new Water Resilience Strategy, framed as Europe's "wake-up call" on water. It highlights the escalating pressures on Europe's water systems caused by disrupting the natural water cycle, pollution, and climate change, which intensifies extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and water scarcity. The strategy is based on the principle that restoring and protecting the water cycle is crucial to securing sustainable water supplies.

It focuses on the supply through NbS and the demand by improving efficiency in households, industries, and agriculture. Central to this is the view that "nature is our water bank" and that landscapes and ecosystems must be restored and healthy to function like sponges, absorbing and retaining water.

Policy action will advance along two main streams. First, prioritising enforcement of existing EU water laws, including the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, with greater emphasis on compliance, water quality thresholds, and improved monitoring of scarcity, droughts, and floods. These requirements will also be integrated into national restoration plans, and the Marine Strategy Directive is scheduled for revision this year.

Second, the strategy sets out new measures. These include a "sponge facility," designed as an online hub and community of practice to

scale up land-based water retention, promote sponge cities, and support water-retentive farming practices. Technical solutions and NbS can be combined, provided they fit into sustainable approaches. Financing will be secured, with the cohesion policy revised to prioritise water resilience. The European Investment Bank will dedicate loans, and discussions will take place with the industry on investment and a roadmap for nature credits.

The presentation concluded with a call to action, urging policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to consult the strategy, join the Sponge Facility, and integrate water resilience into their decision-making.

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People have solutions!

Cédric Sounard

Assemblée Citoyenne pour le Climat | Brussels-Capital Region

A citizen taking part in the Climate Citizen Assembly of Brussels.

The Brussels Citizens' Climate Assembly, launched as a local response to global environmental challenges, demonstrates how

citizens can collectively identify solutions and provide advice to governments.

The assembly proceeds through cycles, each focused on a theme: housing, food, and most recently, the sharing economy. In the food cycle, three main areas of action were identified: reducing meat consumption and diversifying protein sources, tackling food waste, and prioritising seasonal and local foods. Recommendations included introducing smaller meat portions in public institutions, mandating vegetarian days, fostering partnerships between caterers and associations to limit waste, and encouraging consumption of regional produce even during winter. Evidence highlighted that dietary shifts could free up vast areas of land for restoration and that 20 % of food is wasted annually after reaching supermarkets, underscoring the urgency of systemic change.

The citizens' assembly operates by bringing participants together to learn, debate, and co-create solutions. Between 65 and 100 residents of Brussels are randomly selected to participate, receiving expert input before engaging in six to eight sessions of debate and co-creation. Their recommendations are drafted collectively, with additional committees chosen by lottery: one to determine future themes and another to monitor implementation and represent the assembly externally.

The impact extends beyond policymaking. Alongside 300+ direct participants and partners, thousands of people have been engaged, and outreach through social media has reached more than three million views, generating awareness and dialogue far beyond the formal process. Nevertheless, the continuation of the assembly depends on securing public funding to ensure its permanence.

The initiative illustrates the potential of citizen deliberation to complement political decision-making. By embedding learning, debate, and co-creation, assemblies can deliver practical recommendations while fostering broader cultural change toward sustainable food systems and climate action.

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A good life for all

Sonja Gantolier

JUST Nature | Hochschule Weihenstephan-Triesdorf

Prof. Dr. Sonja Gantolier at the University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan-Triesdorf and former project lead of the Horizon 2020 project JUSTNature - the activation of NbS for a just low carbon transition.

Choosing nature is essential for securing a good life for both humans and non-human species. Commonly used preference-based

approaches determine the importance of nature to people by quantifying the use and non-use values of nature, emphasising the preferences of consumers and producers. This often puts trust in the metaphor of the invisible hand and the concept of free markets. However, that often avoids questions of justice and power.

An alternative perspective re-emphasises the importance of politics and entitlement approaches, focusing on a diversity of values beyond economic use. This includes both fundamental and eudaimonic values, which reflect the needs of people and other species. It is about focusing on the needs, both human and non-human, as a basis for shaping our understanding of what is just.

This is about collaboratively activating. NbS and ecosystem services should not be reduced to maximising single functions or even bundles of co-benefits. Instead, they must be guided by the broader aim of providing a good life and addressing both social and ecological needs.

Strategic planning must therefore focus on what should be and not only on existing inequalities. This requires creating shared visions, defining actions, and setting implementation pathways. Socio-ecological profiles, such as those developed in Bolzano, provide heat maps of injustices across urban areas to guide the identification of where nature-based interventions are most needed. Yet, data alone is insufficient, as involving people in defining what is just and identifying suitable solutions is critical. A [toolkit](#) to support such participatory processes is being developed.

Entrepreneurship also needs to be redefined. Entrepreneurs are not only private businesses but all actors, including administrations and citizens, who take responsibility for managing risks and driving collective endeavours. This perspective was applied in Munich, where networks were created to advance green space planning.

A new nature-positive built environment illustrates this approach in practice. In Vienna, a model of cooperative competition enables public administrations to establish clear quality standards for open

and green spaces, while multiple actors compete within these criteria. This has produced innovative outcomes, such as the creation of a wild city centre in a densely populated area, demonstrating how collaboration and competition can work together to drive ambitious urban transformation.

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Nature is our future

Sue Miller

STOP Ecocide International

Head of Global Networks at STOP Ecocide International, works on the recognition of ecocide being an international crime.

Nature is the foundation of human existence, providing air, water, food, and the ecosystems that sustain life. Yet current demands are placing ecosystems under unmanageable pressure, threatening both human survival and that of countless other species. Existing treaties and regulatory frameworks are fragmented, geographically limited, and lack effective enforcement, making them inadequate for addressing today's challenges. To fill these gaps, efforts are advancing to establish ecocide, severe damage to nature, as an international crime.

Ecocide law would hold key decision-makers personally criminally liable for the most serious environmental destruction. Unlike fines or civil lawsuits that corporations often treat as business costs, criminal accountability creates real deterrence, incentivising sustainable practices and shifting societal norms by making such levels of harm unacceptable. The proposed definition of ecocide, crafted by international legal experts under the Stop Ecocide Foundation, covers unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts. It was designed for insertion into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, alongside genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression, acknowledging that environmental devastation can cause comparable suffering.

Momentum for ecocide law is growing rapidly. Since the definition was launched in 2021, Belgium has incorporated it into domestic law, while legislatures in Brazil, Peru, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Italy, Scotland, and the Netherlands are considering similar bills. The EU's Revised Environmental Crimes Directive now requires member states to transpose offences comparable to ecocide into their legal systems by May 2026. In parallel, the Council of Europe adopted a convention in early 2025 establishing a framework for prosecuting crimes equivalent to ecocide. At the international level, advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, and the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea have reinforced states' responsibilities for environmental

protection. At the ICC, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Samoa, supported by the Democratic Republic of Congo, formally proposed adding ecocide as an international crime in 2024, with growing support from other countries.

The upcoming IUCN Congress will vote on a motion to endorse ecocide law, a step that could significantly accelerate its adoption. Legal change is typically slow, but progress on ecocide has been strikingly fast. If fully realised, ecocide law would provide a foundational and transformational layer of protection for nature and future generations.

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We cannot stop the tide - but we can open the door and let nature lead.

Vona Méléder

REWRITE | Nantes Université

As a Professor in Marine Biology at Nantes University, she studies micro-algae in relation to their biology and ecophysiology. She is the project lead of the Horizon-Europe project Rewrite for rewilding and restoration of intertidal sediment ecosystems for carbon sequestration, climate adaptation and biodiversity support.

Rising sea levels are putting coastal ecosystems, such as mudflats, salt marshes, seagrass beds and mangroves, under mounting pressure, squeezed between advancing seas and the walls built to defend human settlements. Each year, these ecosystems shrink, eroding not only biodiversity but also the cultural and natural heritage they sustain. The conventional response has been to raise

dykes, yet these structures are often inadequate and at times even dangerous. Storm Xynthia in 2010 illustrated this failure. It killed 59 people across Western Europe, 47 of them in France, where a storm surge arriving at high tide breached coastal defences and left water trapped behind the dykes, 29 people died in La Faute-sur-Mer alone. Direct losses in France exceeded €2.5 billion. Such disasters show that grey infrastructure alone cannot deliver long-term resilience.

A different path lies in allowing natural processes to shape adaptation. Letting water flow in and out, giving space back to the sea, and working with ecological, geological, and social processes can transform sea-level rise into an opportunity. This means reimagining coastlines not as static barriers but as dynamic systems where land can become seascape again. In Denmark, Gyldensteen Strand provides a powerful example. A large stretch of reclaimed farmland was bought by a private foundation, and in 2014 the old sea dykes were breached to let the water return, recreating a coastal lagoon alongside a new freshwater lake. The removal of the dyke became a communal event that symbolised a shift in perspective. The restored landscape now hosts richer biodiversity, no longer releases the carbon that drained farmland had been emitting, preserves cultural references, and engages people directly through education, tourism, and community involvement. It draws more than 60,000 visitors a year, and social networks dedicated to coastal restoration continue to grow, showing how ecological projects can also strengthen the social fabric.

To expand such successes requires collaboration, flexible governance, long-term funding, and knowledge sharing. Above all, it requires trust in nature, not only as a source of ecological resilience but also as a foundation for societal and cultural renewal. Local pilots can demonstrate what is possible, yet their impact will remain limited unless they are connected to a broader European vision that links initiatives across scales.

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Panel Discussion

Guest Panellist:

Christian Holtzleitner

DG CLIMA | European Commission

Head of Unit for Land Economy and Carbon Removals at the European Commission, DG Climate Action.

Achieving a climate-neutral economy in Europe by 2050 will depend heavily on aligning climate action with biodiversity protection and building a resilient bioeconomy. As fossil carbon is phased out, Europe will still need carbon sources, which must come from renewable, biogenic cycles that can be reused. This requires rethinking value chains in forestry and agriculture to store more carbon while simultaneously enhancing biodiversity.

Sustainable products play a central role in this transition. Biomaterials such as wood, hemp, and other plant-based resources are increasingly important for construction and other industries. If bioenergy continues to be part of the energy mix, incinerated biowaste must be paired with carbon capture and storage to prevent releasing emissions back into the atmosphere. Peatlands provide a strong example of integrated benefits. When rewetted, they deliver major climate and biodiversity gains, while paludiculture allows for the production of biomass that can serve as a sustainable building material.

For these shifts to happen, farmers and foresters must see clear business opportunities in investing in NbS. Creating such incentives is the focus of the European Commission's DG for Climate Action, which is developing a certification framework for carbon removals and carbon farming. This framework aims to generate reliable markets that reward practices such as peatland rewetting or diversified agroforestry systems, ensuring land managers receive both recognition and sufficient profit for climate-positive and biodiversity-friendly actions.

Despite current political challenges, interest in these initiatives remains strong. The certification framework is designed with an explicit awareness of co-benefits beyond carbon, including water management and biodiversity conservation. Only by integrating these dimensions can policies deliver durable solutions, showing citizens that climate neutrality and ecosystem resilience are achievable together.

Key Messages

Bridging the Disconnect Between People and Nature

Many people remain detached from ecological interdependencies, leading to siloed decision-making and resistance to change. Direct experience, local involvement, and better communication are essential for reconnecting society with the benefits of nature.

Law and Governance as Drivers of Change

Ecocide law demonstrates how international legal frameworks can reshape incentives. Even before its adoption at the global level, the concept has begun to change behaviour among states, businesses, and investors. Legal innovation can accelerate cultural and economic transformation.

Local Action Needs Global Vision and Solidarity

Successful water management shows that local projects can inspire change, but they require networking, higher-level strategy, and

solidarity between regions that can or cannot provide space for nature. Without coordination, efforts remain fragmented.

Capacity and Implementation Gaps

Substantial funding exists but often goes unused: of the roughly €11 billion set aside for NbS under EU structural funds in the previous budget cycle, only about half was spent, because small administrations find these projects harder to deliver than grey alternatives. Closing this gap requires training, support, and simplified frameworks.

Trust as the Connecting Thread

Trusting nature, trusting people, and trusting long processes are all part of the challenge. Building this trust requires participation, transparency, and demonstrating that both the journey and the outcome of change deliver real benefits.

Choose to Invest in nature

Financing change through existing and new opportunities

NbS play an essential role in tackling multiple challenges, including climate change, pollution and the vital need to transition to a nature-positive economy. However, there remains a significant gap between the funding currently available for NbS and the amount required to meet EU and global goals. Investing in nature provides a range of opportunities to increase the resilience of operations, supply chains and landscapes while delivering multiple benefits. Done well and with robust safeguards, investing in nature can reduce risks, contribute to a fairer society, and help meet regulatory requirements. By fully integrating the value of these benefits in decision-making, their full investment potential becomes clear. The challenge is to develop ‘bankable’ NbS, and to ensure the policy, regulation and insurance measures are in place to scale implementation up and out.

This session explored the reasons to increase investments in nature, to shift existing investments away from activities that harm nature, and towards NbS, and why safeguards are so essential to ensure that social and environmental rights are advanced and protected, and that investments result in multiple benefits.

Presentations

Speakers presented innovative finance models, from public investment frameworks to private-market incentives, while questioning how to ensure these mechanisms serve ecological goals rather than financial abstraction. The discussion underscored the importance of trust, regulation, and accountability in mobilising capital for genuine restoration, calling for finance systems that recognise nature not only as an externality but as essential capital.

It is a strategic asset for Europe's resilience and competitiveness

Hadrien Michel

DG ENV European Commission

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Nature is a strategic asset for Europe's resilience and competitiveness, providing both productive and protective functions that sustain the economy and society. Ecosystems deliver goods and services that can be traded and have indirect benefits, such as mitigating climate change and reducing the impact of natural disasters. The European Central Bank has found that around three-quarters of euro-area companies are highly dependent on at least one ecosystem service, highlighting the deep reliance of the economy on natural capital. This makes investing in the restoration and maintenance of healthy ecosystems a logical and strategic choice for long-term stability and competitiveness.

Nature credits are conceived as tradeable units designed to reward actions that have measurable, positive impacts on nature. These credits would recognise and incentivise the work of landowners,

farmers, and foresters who act as stewards of the land, restoring or maintaining the ecosystem functions and services. For such a system to function credibly, however, its foundation must be a rigorous, science-based methodology that can quantify restoration outcomes and their durability over time. This scientific credibility is essential if nature credits are to become a reliable financial tool capable of attracting investor confidence.

On the supply side, those who restore ecosystems could receive additional revenue streams from nature credits while also safeguarding the natural resources on which their livelihoods depend. There are also reputational advantages, as demonstrating tangible contributions to sustainability enhances public and market trust.

On the demand side, nature credits could appeal to companies and investors seeking to strengthen their environmental credentials and to respond to sustainability reporting requirements such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). For many businesses, purchasing credits could serve both defensive purposes, improving reputation and helping demonstrate action under such frameworks, and forward-looking ones, including reducing exposure to environmental risks that could disrupt production or raise financial costs.

To explore and develop this concept, the European Commission launched its Roadmap towards Nature Credits in July 2025. Over the next two years, the initiative will assess how nature credits could be structured, measured, and integrated into financial and policy frameworks. The process includes establishing an expert group bringing together specialists in economics, risk assessment, and ecological metrics, as well as commissioning a new analytical study on market design. The Commission is also supporting ongoing pilot projects in Member States such as Estonia and France, with further pilots emerging in Spain and Germany to gather practical insights.

By the end of this exploratory phase, the Commission aims to determine whether there is a need and an opportunity for a European legislative or enabling framework to support the creation of a nature

credit market. The broader aim is to test whether environmental stewardship can be paired with economic incentives, so that investment in nature becomes a viable business model rather than relying on public funding alone.

Nature has the *superpower* to arrive at effective local solutions

Mark Van Nieuwstadt

BIOFIN-EU | Naturalis Biodiversity Center

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Biodiversity embodies the “superpowers” of nature, evolved through diversity, variety, and adaptation. These powers are expressed in countless local solutions that sustain life on Earth, from the strength of ecosystems to the invisible complexity of living soil, where vast microbial and fungal communities work together to provide essential benefits. Yet, while nature operates through integrated, adaptive systems, current economic and financial structures often work against these natural processes, causing ecological degradation, increasing disaster risks, and leading to growing economic losses.

There is a big gap between mainstream finance and nature-based or nature-positive solutions. Mainstream finance, encompassing banks and large investment institutions, relies on standardisation, scalability, and short-term returns, while NbS are typically small-scale, locally tailored, and require long-term, adaptive management. Bridging this divide is critical to enable private finance to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity restoration and conservation.

Experience from the BIOFIN–EU initiative at Naturalis Biodiversity Center suggests that data alone cannot close this gap. While financial data, metrics, and reporting frameworks are necessary to attract

investors, governance structures and trust between stakeholders are equally vital. For that, regional Bio-Fin facilitators or intermediaries come in, which are independent entities that have the knowledge and skills to provide services to both.

Based on the results of the Waters of LIFE project, such intermediaries could provide a range of coordination, financial, and accountability services, relying on solid policies, data, and science-based methods. The goal of BIOFIN-EU is to develop a replicable blueprint for such intermediaries across Europe, enabling systemic change in how private finance interacts with biodiversity.

Ultimately, the message is that society must stop fighting against nature's processes and instead learn to harness and cooperate with them. By investing in the superpowers of nature and embedding them in financial systems, we can align economic resilience with ecological integrity and secure sustainable prosperity for the future.

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To enhance the insurance value of nature and transition towards a nature-positive economy

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Invest4Nature GoNaturePositive! Aarhus Universite

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Transitioning towards a nature-positive economy requires recognising nature as both a source of value and a form of insurance for society, business, and the environment. Current economic systems largely ignore the essential benefits that ecosystems provide, from clean water to climate regulation, and instead rely on extractive, nature-negative activities. Shifting to an economy that regenerates nature means ensuring that the overall result of economic activity is an absolute increase in natural capital and biodiversity, aligned with the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the IPBES transformative change framework.

Nature's insurance value can be understood through two complementary dimensions: protection *of* nature and protection *by* nature. Restoring ecosystems strengthens their capacity to adapt to climate shocks and maintain biodiversity, while healthy ecosystems provide direct protection for society through flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, and pollution control. They also enhance social resilience, offering communities recreation, mental well-being, and long-term security.

Aarhus Municipality in Denmark has adopted an ambitious landscape-scale restoration plan. Agriculture currently occupies 55% of the municipality's land, but this will be reduced to around 32%, with the reclaimed land converted to natural areas through afforestation, wetland restoration, and the re-establishment of natural hydrology. Focusing on one of the eleven designated sites, approximately 2,300 hectares are being re-natured, including around 1,000 hectares of former farmland converted through afforestation, wetland restoration, and the re-establishment of natural hydrology. Across all eleven projects combined, the aim is to protect biodiversity, safeguard 40% of the municipality's drinking water resource, and improve surface water quality, while slowing water flows to reduce flood risk and increase carbon storage.

The project illustrates how large-scale restoration enhances both ecological and social resilience. It also provides strong welfare-economic returns: over a 50-year period, every euro invested yields

an estimated 4.4 euros in benefits, accounting for capital and operational costs as well as quantifiable ecosystem services.

In conclusion, regenerating and conserving places of high ecological and social value strengthens welfare. Furthermore, it drives systemic change in agriculture, one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss. In the Danish context, it supports the Danish Green Tripartite Agreement, which seeks to transition 15% of intensive farmland out of production. Investing in nature restoration, therefore, strengthens both environmental and economic security, proving that protecting and expanding natural capital is a rational and necessary step toward a nature-positive economy.

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Nature is central to responsible investment

Natacha Boric

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Nature is at the core of responsible investment because it underpins the stability of the global economy, the functioning of societies, and human well-being. Yet, despite this dependence, the world is in the midst of a biodiversity crisis: Since 1970, monitored wildlife populations have declined on average by 73%. The Global Biodiversity Framework aims to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and reverse it by 2050, but achieving this will require an estimated additional US\$4.1 trillion in cumulative investment in nature-based solutions by 2050 (UNEP). Current funding levels fall far short of this target, and harmful financial flows that degrade ecosystems continue to outweigh positive investments.

In response, a growing number of financial institutions are integrating biodiversity considerations into their practices. The Finance for Biodiversity Pledge has been signed by 200 institutions managing a combined 23 trillion euros in assets. Signatories commit to sharing knowledge, engaging with companies, assessing biodiversity impacts, setting measurable targets, and reporting publicly on progress.

Financial institutions are increasingly recognising their exposure to nature-related risks and therefore the need to act to address and mitigate them. These risks are both physical and transitional. Physical risks include floods, droughts, wildfires, ecosystem collapse, and the decline of key natural resources. Transition risks, on the other hand, stem from policy shifts, market changes, and technological advances in response to sustainability imperatives. Reputational risks also play a role, as institutions increasingly recognise the business costs of being associated with environmental harm.

This highlights a fundamental truth: nature does not merely support the economy; the economy is embedded within nature. Natural systems provide the provisioning, regulating, supporting, and cultural services that make all economic activity possible. Without these life-supporting systems, economic stability and human welfare cannot be sustained.

In this context, the Finance for Biodiversity Foundation has developed a “Finance for Nature Positive” model, offering guidance to financial

institutions that wish to move beyond risk management and actively contribute to the goals of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

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Is lack of private investment the real issue preventing us from addressing the biodiversity crisis?

Frédéric Hache

Green Finance Observatory

Director and co-founder of the Green Finance Observatory, a think tank that researches the financialisation of environmental policies, while also serving as a lecturer in sustainable finance at Sciences Po Paris.

The claim that addressing the biodiversity crisis depends primarily on closing a massive funding gap through private capital and biodiversity credit markets is seen as strongly debatable and politically biased by the Green Finance Observatory. This starts with the estimated \$700 billion annual shortfall, which could be closed entirely through public means by redirecting a fraction of the \$1.7 trillion, according to the UN, in annual subsidies currently supporting environmentally harmful activities. This would require no tax increases or added public debt, only a political choice to prioritise nature over destructive subsidies.

If governments nonetheless choose to rely on private capital, the most direct and effective approach would be through environmental

regulation that limits destructive practices and shifts investment patterns based on the new profit expectations. Regulatory or fiscal incentives could also reorient financial flows more efficiently than building complex new financial markets around biodiversity credits. Therefore, creating a market for tradable biodiversity credits would arguably be the least effective option for addressing biodiversity loss.

The financialisation of conservation policies risks weakening them by introducing a profitability requirement. The concern is that biodiversity credits will primarily serve as offsetting tools when there is no other business case at scale. The European Commission's roadmap for nature credits already states that they would come after offsets, which would legitimise offsetting, despite scientific consensus that biodiversity offsetting is rarely even possible, given the gaps in current scientific knowledge. Restoration science is still in its early stages, and biodiversity cannot be reduced to a few tradable assets; decades of offsetting practices have yielded poor ecological results.

Beyond ineffectiveness, biodiversity offsetting and trading schemes carry serious social and political risks. They can lead to land grabbing and human rights violations, particularly in the Global South, while transferring control over natural assets from governments to financial markets. Such a shift risks subjugating ecological priorities to profit motives and undermining democratic accountability. As he put it, 'more bats do not compensate for fewer flamingos'; different species and ecosystems are not interchangeable commodities.

The persistence of these market-based solutions reflects political caution rather than ecological ambition. Like carbon markets before them, biodiversity credit schemes may offer the illusion of progress while entrenching vested interests and delaying necessary regulation. They align with short-term economic competitiveness rather than long-term planetary stability, protecting industries that continue to profit from environmental harm.

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To rethink health and wellbeing

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Investing in nature presents an opportunity to rethink the wellbeing model and redesign business models centred on health, resilience, and prevention. Growing evidence shows that direct contact with nature, especially forests, has significant therapeutic and preventive effects on mental health. This is particularly relevant given the alarming rise in mental health issues among young people aged 10 to 18 across Europe. Although much of the data originates from Western and Northwestern Europe, these trends and their implications are global.

At the same time, Europe possesses vast potential in its forests, green spaces, and natural reserves, in rural, urban, and peri-urban

settings, which could be better integrated into healthcare systems. More than 5,000 scientific studies have already confirmed the physical and psychological benefits of spending time in forests. Doctors and medical centres are increasingly developing therapy protocols and “immersion paths” using nature to support mental health, forming new partnerships between the health and environmental sectors. However, while the scientific literature is extensive, large-scale quantitative data and systematic economic evaluation remain limited.

The Forest for Youth project, part of the Interreg North-West Europe programme, aims to address this gap. Led by Brussels Environment in partnership with organisations from Germany, France, Belgium, and Ireland, the project is developing large-scale demonstration sites that integrate forest-based therapy into mental health care. Over the course of four years, eight pilot sites involving 400 adolescents will measure and compare outcomes between nature-based and conventional therapies. The goal is to generate robust, quantitative evidence on the effectiveness of forest immersion for youth mental health and to evaluate its long-term economic value.

Once sufficient data are collected, the next step will be to assess the economic return of nature-based interventions. By demonstrating measurable benefits, the project aims to engage the financial sector, including insurance companies and social security institutions, to explore new models of investment in nature-based health solutions. This could pave the way for innovative business and risk models in which investing in nature becomes a proactive health strategy rather than a reactive cost.

Future initiatives are already in preparation, including pilots in Belgium, Luxembourg, Barcelona, and potentially France. These will test scalable frameworks for integrating nature into healthcare financing. This approach demonstrates that investing in nature can serve not only ecological or climate objectives but also public health and economic resilience.

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Panel Discussion

Guest Panellist:

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GLS Bank | Global Alliance for Banking on Values

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Founded on cooperative principles, value-based banking demonstrates that finance can serve ecological and social goals directly. By investing exclusively in renewable energy, organic agriculture, affordable housing, education, and health, while excluding fossil fuels and other harmful sectors, this model demonstrates how financial institutions can channel capital toward sustainability rather than contributing to biodiversity loss. Yet the broader financial system continues to fund unsustainable practices because environmental and social externalities remain absent from accounting and balance sheets. Integrating these costs into financial reporting would create structural incentives to invest in biodiversity and nature restoration rather than depletion.

Long-term stability also depends on transforming how banks assess risk. Current regulatory frameworks encourage short-term financial

horizons, with evaluations typically limited to one year, thereby overlooking the systemic and intergenerational risks posed by biodiversity loss and climate change. Embedding long-term ecological risk management into financial regulation and decision-making is therefore essential to align financial markets with environmental limits. This shift would turn sustainability from a voluntary commitment into a core component of prudent banking and sound economic governance.

Key Messages

Integrate true costs:

Biodiversity and climate externalities must be reflected in accounting and financial reporting to align profit incentives with sustainability.

Shift subsidies and regulations:

A prominent argument held that redirecting harmful subsidies and strengthening regulation would be faster and cheaper than new biodiversity credit markets, though others saw public and private finance as complementary.

Finance's role was contested:

Some argued regulation must lead and finance would simply adapt, with no role beyond compliance; others saw finance as an active complement, steering capital, managing long-term risk, and operating under eco-conditionality

Long-term risk management:

Financial systems must extend risk horizons to reflect the real temporal scale of biodiversity and climate risks.

Re-regulation and ownership reform:

Re-establish state oversight, redesign ownership structures (e.g., employee or cooperative models), and ensure finance serves societal and ecological goals.

Eco-conditionality in finance:

Tie lending and investment conditions to measurable sustainability performance, using incentives and disincentives.

Cultural transformation:

Foster a shift in values by learning from Indigenous worldviews, which view humans as part of nature, alongside technical and policy reforms.

Democratic accountability:

Strengthen participatory governance (e.g. Climate Citizen Assemblies), curb corporate lobbying, and ensure policymaking prioritises public ecological interests.

Caution regarding market mechanisms:

While concepts such as nature credits are seen by some as promising tools worth developing, others cautioned that increased monetisation of nature could bring speculation, offsetting abuses, and inequitable outcomes, particularly in the Global South.

Collaborative systemic change:

Governments, financial institutions, and civil society must act iteratively and coherently to transition towards a nature-positive economy.

Choose to Partner with nature.

Creating new businesses with and for nature

Achieving meaningful and lasting transformative change requires placing nature at the heart of all business models and decision-making processes, both in those who are actively managing nature and in those who can transform their supply chains. There is an urgent need to both transform existing industries and companies and create and scale up SMEs working in harmony with biodiversity. By doing so, we can promote the creation of skilled and high-quality jobs, while ensuring social equity and sustainability.

NbS have great potential to drive this change. By prioritising ecological restoration, conservation, protection and sustainable management of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems, these solutions foster cross-sector and interdisciplinary collaboration. They can also mobilise diverse financing streams, ranging from public investment to private capital, accelerating innovation and impactful action for both people and the planet.

This session highlighted how collaboration across governments, businesses, civil society, and local communities can turn shared ambition into tangible outcomes for people and nature.

Presentations

Presentations and discussions revealed both the promise and complexity of partnership, showing how practical cooperation, knowledge exchange, and inclusive participation can overcome mistrust and deliver meaningful restoration and innovation. Together, they emphasised that a nature-positive future depends on shared responsibility, mutual learning, and coordinated action across all sectors of society.

There is no business without nature

Sharon Brooks

UNEP - WCMC

Head of Nature Economy at UNEP WCMC, supporting businesses, financial institutions and governments to drive action for a nature positive future, while being the Coordinating Lead Author of the IPBES Business and Biodiversity Assessment.

The transition to a nature-positive economy is increasingly seen as essential for long-term business resilience. Companies depend on healthy ecosystems that provide food, water, raw materials, and climate stability. As environmental degradation accelerates, its economic impacts, including disrupted supply chains, infrastructure losses, and market instability, are becoming material risks.

Expectations from investors, consumers, and regulators are also rising, with frameworks such as the Task Force on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) pushing firms to assess and report their dependencies on nature.

Evidence linking ecosystem decline to economic disruption is growing. Research by TNFD and the University of Oxford shows clear connections between environmental degradation and losses from floods, droughts, and other shocks. Yet many businesses still fail to trace these costs back to nature loss, masking the true financial

implications. Making these links visible is critical for aligning financial systems with ecological realities.

To support this, UNEP-WCMC, the Finance Initiative, and Global Canopy have developed ENCORE (Exploring Natural Capital Opportunities, Risks and Exposure), a tool that helps organisations identify how their activities rely on and affect ecosystem services. ENCORE maps dependencies along value chains, guiding companies in pinpointing material risks and opportunities. It provides a knowledge base for embedding nature into risk management and strategic planning.

While more companies are committing to biodiversity goals, most remain in early assessment stages. Limited data, metrics, and cross-departmental coordination constrain progress, and nature considerations are rarely mainstreamed in procurement or finance. Capacity-building and leadership engagement are therefore essential.

UNEP-WCMC's Proteus Partners initiative supports businesses in integrating data and knowledge, fostering peer-to-peer and cross-sector dialogue. The EU-funded ATRAC project helps companies work with spatial data and metrics. Both initiatives aim to integrate ecological understanding into all business functions.

The forthcoming IPBES Business and Biodiversity Assessment will consolidate research on corporate impacts and dependencies, examine measurement approaches, and propose pathways for business action. It will also highlight the role of regulation in creating an enabling environment for systemic change toward a truly nature-positive economy.

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It is the right moment

Barbora Chmelova

Czech Ministry of the Environment

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Plan. Also affiliated with AMO Klima (Association for International Affairs) as a researcher, in a non-staff capacity.

Nature restoration has become a defining opportunity for Europe to transform its economies and societies, not merely an environmental obligation. The Nature Restoration Regulation provides the first legal framework requiring all EU member states to restore degraded ecosystems, halt biodiversity loss, and strengthen climate resilience. It represents both a major administrative challenge and a once-in-a-generation chance to reshape how societies interact with nature.

In the Czech Republic, the preparation of the National Restoration Plan demonstrates this dual challenge. More than 200 experts from government, academia, civil society, and business are working together to design an inclusive approach to restoration. This process has shown that effective restoration is not just a technical or ecological task but a cross-sectoral one requiring sociologists, economists, financiers, youth groups, and local communities. By encouraging participation and ownership, restoration efforts can connect citizens to nature, empower underrepresented groups, and make environmental recovery more tangible and accessible.

Under the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), Czech companies have started to disclose environmental data, revealing growing awareness of biodiversity-related topics, particularly in agriculture, forestry, and mining. However, biodiversity still receives limited attention, and nearly none have explicitly aligned their strategies with the Nature Restoration Regulation. While many companies express willingness to act, they often lack effective tools and accessible information. This results in inaction or in the implementation of symbolic measures with limited impact, reflecting a gap between ambition and implementation.

To bridge this gap, the Czech government has engaged businesses directly in the development of its restoration plan. This collaboration led to the creation of a Biodiversity and Business Forum, where banks, insurers, and industry representatives explore how to integrate ecosystem health into financial decision-making. These sectors are

particularly motivated by risk management, recognising that around 75% of their assets depend on biodiversity and ecosystem services. However, challenges remain, particularly the lack of reliable environmental data, limited data-sharing among institutions, and the absence of tested models showing how restoration investments can generate economic returns.

To address these barriers, new initiatives are underway. A LIFE project has been proposed to enhance business engagement in restoration, while the BioAgora project under the Biodiversa+ platform aims to strengthen the science-policy interface and support stakeholder collaboration. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to ensure that restoration planning translates into real-world change and scalable solutions.

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Work with what you love!

Martina Brophy

GoNaturePositive! Horizon Nua

EU project manager with Horizon Nua and works across Horizon Europe projects on NbS and nature-based entrepreneurship, such as Invest4Nature and NbS EduWorld.

Nature-based enterprises are emerging as key drivers of the transition to a nature-positive economy. These businesses work *with* and *for* nature to address global challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change, and environmental degradation, while creating value for both society and the economy. They combine ecological and social goals with economic viability, demonstrating that business success can align with planetary health.

Nature-based enterprises take many forms. Some examples include Helix Pflanzen in Germany, a mid-1980s plant nursery run by a father-and-son team that has become a leading supplier of green walls, green roofs and mobile green living rooms; the Sonian Wood Coop in Brussels, which keeps the transformation of wood from the Sonian Forest local and circular at every stage of the supply chain; and a second-generation seaweed farming business in Donegal, Ireland, built around seaweed as an environmentally sustainable crop. Though typically small, these enterprises are growing rapidly in number and influence, driven by strong market demand for sustainable solutions. Though typically small in size, they are growing rapidly in number and influence, driven by strong market demand for sustainable solutions. Their hybrid model, pursuing both economic and non-economic goals, balances purpose and profit.

These businesses operate across multiple dimensions of sustainability, contributing simultaneously to the environment, society, and the economy. Their role is particularly relevant in light of findings that more than half of global GDP is moderately or highly dependent on nature, according to PwC's 2023 report. The World Economic Forum estimates that investing in nature could unlock 10 trillion USD in annual business opportunities and create nearly 400 million jobs by 2030. Nature-based enterprises exemplify how these opportunities can be realised in practice by embedding nature-positive and circular principles into core business activities.

To strengthen this growing sector, Horizon Nua established the *Connecting Nature Enterprise Platform*, a digital community designed to raise awareness, support collaboration, and build capacity among entrepreneurs, researchers, and policymakers. The platform hosts thirteen communities of practice, covering areas such as green buildings, regenerative agriculture, urban landscapes, and ocean farming, enabling peer learning and the exchange of practical tools and experience. By connecting actors across sectors, it helps overcome fragmentation and fosters the scaling of innovative business models grounded in natural processes.

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For climate resilient solutions that benefit business and society

Kerry Waylen

MERLIN The James Hutton Institute

Senior researcher in the Social, Economic and Geographical Sciences (SEGS) department at the James Hutton Institute, and Deputy Director of the International Land Use Study Centre (ILUSC). She is involved in the MERLIN project.

Scaling up ecosystem restoration across Europe depends not only on technical expertise but also on building trust and cooperation with sectors that have not traditionally engaged with nature restoration. The MERLIN Project, funded under Horizon Europe, focuses on

mainstreaming catchment restoration by working directly with land managers, local authorities, businesses, and other stakeholders to restore rivers, floodplains, and peatlands. The vision is not to return landscapes to a fully wild state but to make them healthy, functional, and capable of supporting both people and nature.

One of the project's most significant lessons has been that the social dimension of restoration is as important as the physical work.

Partnerships with non-traditional actors, such as insurance companies, hydropower operators, and the agriculture sector, have proven essential to achieving systemic change. To facilitate this, MERLIN established six communities of practice that brought together professionals from sectors like peat extraction, inland navigation, and hydropower to discuss restoration for the first time. These dialogues often began from a point of unfamiliarity or scepticism, requiring patience, evidence, and trust-building.

The hydropower sector illustrates both the challenges and the progress possible through this approach. MERLIN worked with 21 organisations across Europe to create a shared strategy for removing or mitigating river barriers. The process was slow and complex, with some companies initially supportive later withdrawing their endorsement. Common objections included questions of responsibility, costs, and competitiveness. Many companies argued that they did not build the existing dams and therefore should not bear the cost of their removal. Others contended that barrier removal was a public responsibility or that maintaining barriers provided local benefits such as flood control.

Despite this resistance, progress is possible when regulation and cooperation align. In Sweden, for example, a formal warning from the European Commission in 2016 over non-compliance with the Water Framework Directive led to collective action. Hydropower companies joined forces with the national agency to establish a shared fund for river restoration. This cooperation has since evolved into a proactive, long-term commitment that goes beyond legal requirements. Similarly, in Germany, the Munich drinking water company partnered

with farmers to improve water quality through sustainable practices. What began as compliance-driven cooperation grew into a profitable model once farmers saw that better environmental management produced higher-value products.

These examples show that legal frameworks, when combined with partnership-based approaches, can trigger positive behavioural change and unlock shared value across sectors. However, many companies still view restoration as a cost rather than an investment, and resistance remains widespread. Ensuring fairness, recognising early movers, and supporting collaborative solutions are key to bringing more businesses on board. Traditional policy instruments, clear rules, regulations, and standards, continue to be indispensable tools for driving this transformation.

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Nature is the solution

Michaël van Cutsem

BeeOdiversity

CEO and founder of BeeOdiversity, which designs and implements innovative strategies and projects for companies and public entities to restore biodiversity and reduce industrial and agricultural pollution.

Nature itself can provide the data and insight needed to drive restoration and sustainable decision-making. Innovative approaches such as those developed by BeeOdiversity demonstrate how living systems can act as natural monitoring tools, offering detailed environmental information at scale. Using bees as “bioindicators,” it is possible to collect and analyse pollen from wide areas, each hive covers roughly 700 hectares, to detect pollution, measure biodiversity, and identify ecological stress factors. This nature-based data allows industries and public authorities to better understand their environmental impact and take coordinated action.

Projects using this approach have shown measurable success. In French vineyards, the monitoring of pesticide residues through bee-collected pollen enabled targeted interventions that reduced the number of detected pesticides from more than 25 to fewer than seven within three years, while increasing local plant diversity by 400%. In Belgium, lead pollution levels forty times higher than EU limits were detected. In South Africa, data gathered from a large agricultural catchment area supported a restoration project that removed invasive trees, improved soil and biodiversity quality, and increased agricultural productivity. These results show how working with nature as an analytical partner can deliver both ecological and economic benefits.

BeeOdiversity's digital platform now integrates data from over 150,000 hectares, supported by an estimated ten million bees. The growing "Nature Tech" sector is expanding access to such tools, using biological and environmental data to inform sustainability strategies. These technologies are becoming key enablers of evidence-based decision-making for businesses and governments, helping them to link biodiversity health with operational resilience and regulatory compliance.

Many companies are willing to invest in data collection and monitoring but hesitate when it comes to concrete restoration or biodiversity-positive action. Unlike carbon, where financial incentives are clearly structured through emission reductions and credit markets, biodiversity lacks comparable mechanisms. As a result, the return on investment is harder to quantify. The next step, therefore, is building financial and policy incentives that make biodiversity restoration as attractive and accessible as climate action.

To change the way we do business

Laura Rubio

La Osa Cooperativea

Council member of the cooperative supermarket La Osa Cooperative, and she directs the National coordination of Fair Businesses.

La Osa Cooperative in Madrid demonstrates how community-led food systems can deliver environmental, social, and economic benefits simultaneously. Built on the principles of agroecology, cooperation, and transparency, the initiative challenges the conventional supermarket model by linking responsible consumption directly to biodiversity protection, fair pricing, and social participation.

The cooperative is grounded in three claims, speaking to health, biodiversity, and economic justice. A US dietary intervention study found that one week of organic eating reduced pesticide levels in the

body by 95%, and a meta-analysis of organic farming found 30% more plant species and up to 50% more beneficial fauna, enhancing resilience to drought, fires, and pests. The economics can favour both ends of the chain: farmers in Spain can earn up to 6.5 times more per kilo for produce sold through a cooperative, while the model is designed to keep organic produce affordable for consumers. Against a national picture in which half of all fruits and vegetables still contain pesticide residues, La Osa offers a concrete alternative, prioritising organic and locally sourced food, cutting packaging, and strengthening ties with small producers.

La Osa's supermarket follows a self-managed model inspired by successful international cooperatives such as La Louve in Paris and Park Slope Food Coop in New York. Members act as owners, participants, and consumers: they finance the cooperative, take part in decision-making, and work three hours every four weeks to support operations. This participatory structure lowers costs and ensures fair prices while fostering a strong sense of shared responsibility and community engagement.

By 2024, the cooperative had 1,400 members, 709 of whom were active, with a turnover of €1.08 million—an 8% annual increase. Almost 75% of its 3,000 listed products are organic, sourced from around 100 suppliers. Collaboration with foundations and small businesses has enabled La Osa to test circular economy practices such as reusable packaging and container-return systems. This localised, low-impact supply chain supports rural livelihoods while reducing food miles and waste.

Beyond its environmental performance, La Osa's model also tries to redefine governance and ownership in the food economy. Decisions are made collectively, balancing professional expertise with democratic approval by the membership. This inclusive approach builds capacity and accountability, ensuring that the cooperative remains both socially rooted and economically viable.

While the project acknowledges ongoing challenges, like balancing customer expectations with full ecological alignment, it offers a

replicable blueprint for other cities seeking sustainable and community-driven food systems. By combining ethical sourcing, participatory governance, and financial transparency, La Osa exemplifies how food retail can become a driver of ecological restoration, health, and social cohesion.

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Panel Discussion

Guest panellists:

Egbert Roozen

European Landscape Contractors Association

Secretary General at the European Landscape Contractors Association, setting the proactive agenda on the benefits of greenery in urban areas.

The European landscape sector emphasised that the Nature Restoration Regulation marks a pivotal shift in how Europe integrates nature into urban planning and infrastructure. To achieve lasting impact, ecological design must begin at the earliest planning stages, well before construction, so that green infrastructure and ecosystem services are embedded alongside transport, housing, and energy systems. Landscape professionals and urban green experts should be systematically involved from the start, ensuring that restoration projects are technically sound, maintainable, and deliver long-term benefits. Strengthening professional capacity is also key: establishing EU-wide vocational standards and centres of excellence for green professions would help align skills, quality, and maintenance standards across member states, ensuring that implementation matches the Regulation's ambition.

Karin Müller

ASHOKA and Bioregional Weaving Labs Collective

Programme and operations manager in ASHOKA Netherlands. She is an experienced co-founder and executive director with a demonstrated history of working in social and cultural entrepreneurship.

ASHOKA is part of the Bioregional Weaving Labs Collective.

Small and medium-sized enterprises play a crucial role in advancing nature-positive transformation because they are closely connected to communities and local ecosystems. Their scale and proximity allow them to detect emerging problems early and test innovative, place-based solutions. Through collaborative frameworks such as Ashoka's Bioregional Weaving Labs, these smaller actors can link with larger institutions, investors, and policymakers to create collective impact. The concept of the "weaver", an intermediary who connects and coordinates across scales, is central to making this work. Supporting such connecting roles through policy and funding mechanisms can

bridge the gap between grassroots innovation and systemic change, helping to scale local restoration and regenerative business models across European landscapes.

Key Messages

Implementation depends on inclusion and early integration.

Urban green professionals, landscape gardeners, and local practitioners must be involved from the planning phase of projects to ensure NbS are effective, durable, and well-maintained.

Vocational training and capacity building are essential.

Establish EU-wide standards and training networks for landscape and green-sector professionals to ensure consistent quality and scale-up of restoration efforts.

Empower small and social enterprises as catalysts of change.

SMEs and community innovators act as connectors between citizens, business, and policy. Support “weaving” roles and local hubs that enable collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Create a clear and stable enabling environment for business.

Provide regulatory clarity, financial tools, and trust-based partnerships to encourage investment in nature. Promote public-private partnerships and pilot projects that demonstrate tangible economic and social benefits.

The role of data was contested.

Some argued that data and frameworks are no longer the bottleneck and that the missing piece is a clear return on investment; others named unreliable data, and low willingness to share it, as among the main barriers to business engagement.

Make tools and metrics usable beyond data-rich contexts.

Develop common EU indicators for evaluating NbS and restoration effectiveness, ensuring tools are accessible across regions — including the Global South, where effectiveness data is markedly scarcer.

Recognise restoration as a social and economic process.

Beyond ecological metrics, policies should consider the social innovation, mediation, and community engagement that underpin successful restoration. Invest in long-term facilitation and trust-building capacities.

Shift the definition of economic success.

Redefine prosperity to include natural capital, ecosystem health, and social well-being—moving beyond GDP and short-term profit as sole measures of progress.

Support knowledge transfer and communication.

Fund education, awareness, and communication initiatives to help citizens and businesses understand that alternative, cooperative, and nature-positive business models are viable and beneficial.

Maintain ambition and policy coherence.

Ensure that the streamlining of EU green policies does not dilute ambition. Use existing standards, such as the IUCN Global Standard for NbS, as a foundation for alignment across Member States.

Bridge scales and sectors through dialogue.

Facilitate structured interaction between SMEs, large corporations, policymakers, and researchers—such as through bioregional labs, stakeholder fora, and public dialogues—to ensure coordinated action for a nature-positive Europe.

Conclusions

Across all sessions, the event demonstrated that working with and for nature is not a peripheral ambition but a central pathway to achieving economic resilience, social equity, and ecological regeneration. Europe's long-term prosperity depends on recognising nature as essential capital, one that sustains production, wellbeing, and stability. Transformative change requires political courage, structural reform, and new models of partnership. It also requires trust: in natural processes, in local actors, and in the capacity of societies to innovate collectively. Together, the four sessions reflected an evolving consensus: policy frameworks must move from incremental adjustments to systemic alignment among nature, the economy, and community.

Integrating biodiversity into economic systems is fundamental to resilience. Speakers showed that biodiversity loss stems from systemic failures in how economies produce and consume, and that shifting from destructive to regenerative models is achievable, as transitions in energy and transport demonstrate. The evidence pointed consistently in one direction: the cost of inaction exceeds the cost of restoration. Yet public money continues to flow the other way, and the barriers proved to be social rather than ecological — funding gaps, conflicting interests, and a lack of political will.

Trusting natural processes and empowering communities can generate adaptive solutions to shared challenges. Restoration projects, from rewetting peatlands to giving space back to the sea, can transform risk into opportunity. Examples like Denmark's lagoon restoration and the Czech Republic's participatory restoration planning illustrated how ecological renewal strengthens social resilience and local economies. Small-scale pilots can test approaches, but scaling them up demands flexible governance, long-term funding, and trust in both nature's regenerative capacity and people's ability to act collectively.

Finance was identified as both a driver and a barrier to transformation. Participants agreed that nature is a strategic asset for Europe's resilience, yet its value remains undervalued in financial systems. Public funding, subsidy reform, and clear regulation were identified as faster, more equitable levers than untested biodiversity markets. The consensus pointed toward blended finance, accountability frameworks, and transparent incentives that align profitability with restoration.

The final session showcased partnerships between government, business, and civil society. Tools such as ENCORE and initiatives like the Proteus Partnership showed progress in data, accountability, and corporate engagement, though the gap between knowledge and implementation remains significant: policy must still enable businesses to internalise environmental costs and mainstream biodiversity in decision-making. Examples such as the MERLIN project's work with hydropower companies and Ashoka's bioregional weaving labs demonstrated the value of neutral facilitation and cross-sector alliances. A nature-positive Europe will require shared standards, professional training, participatory governance, and a culture of cooperation.

Closing the day, moderator Faridah Ibrahim (IUCN) drew out five threads: that things which appear not to fit together often do; that complexity must be cut through to reach the audiences that matter; that the room remained undecided on whether data and knowledge are sufficient; that trusting nature is more demanding than it first appears; and that this is a wicked problem — there is no silver bullet, only the work.

Final remarks

In his closing remarks, **Humberto Delgado Rosa** (Director for Natural Capital at the European Commission, DG Environment) addressed the mood of the moment directly. Environmental policy, he observed, moves in cycles and counter-cycles, because policymaking reflects competing interests, worldviews and identities rather than scientific evidence alone. To those fearing that the current emphasis on simplification and competitiveness marks a retreat, his advice was: *"Keep cool, because it is totally normal."* When he joined DG Environment under the Juncker Commission, the financial crisis meant the word "environment" did not appear among the ten priorities; five years later, the priority was the European Green Deal. The importance of nature-based solutions will not disappear, he argued, because EU law, the Green Deal's remaining implementation, continuing public support and economic logic all sustain it.

His central practical advice concerned language. Restoration, he stressed, is more a social question than a scientific one. For many stakeholders, the word "nature" itself raises suspicion, rooted in generations of experience of producing food *against* what was felt to be hostile nature — a view he considers mistaken, but one that is real and must be worked with. The near-failure of the Nature Restoration Regulation illustrated the cost of ignoring it. His recommendation was pragmatism: listen first, understand the language and the problems of others, then ask what ecosystem service they want back, which is what restoration means in practice. In some cases, he suggested, it is better not to use the word "restoration" at all; those who dislike it often respond to sustainable agriculture, regenerative agriculture, or the nature-positive economy.

On nature credits, he took an explicit position, acknowledging that not everyone in the room would share it. Part of the underlying problem, he argued, is that the economy does not account for the value of nature in the right form. To the concern that credits amount

to selling nature to capitalism, he responded that nature is already being sold at zero value, and selling it at the right value would be an improvement. The aim is not offsetting but compensating those who take the right approaches, and on that basis he sees considerable potential.

He was candid about the political context. Some actors have no interest in reaching consensus and little time should be spent on them. But most people will move if they feel trusted, recognised in their identity and their interests, and engaged in dialogue conducted in listening mode. The task, he concluded, is to find that convergence around the common good: restoring the ecosystem services we can all agree have been lost, whether protection from floods and fires, agricultural productivity, or fish stocks.

Building on this message, **Boris Erg** (Director of IUCN European Office) reaffirmed the urgency of addressing biodiversity loss and the higher cost of inaction. The discussions and case studies shared throughout the day demonstrated that NbS work and that scaling them up is both possible and necessary. The growing NetworkNature community was recognised for its diversity, openness, and capacity to bring together public, private, academic, and civil society actors under a shared vision. Continued collaboration will be essential to advance new themes such as biodiversity finance, nature credits, and private-sector engagement - complex, sometimes uncomfortable topics, but necessary to address. In challenging times, politically, economically, and environmentally, whichever crossroads we face, choosing nature remains the right direction.

Annex I: Agenda

The full agenda of the NetworkNature Annual Event 2025, held on 16 September 2025 in Brussels, is reproduced on the following pages.

Choose nature.

Unlocking pathways
to a resilient economy
for people and the planet.

Relevant information

When?

Tuesday, 16th of September 2025

Registration opens at **08h30**

The event runs from **09h00 to 16h45**.

The launch of the **NbS Bussiness forum**

will take place from **16h45 to 17h30**.

After the event, drinks will be served at Parckfarm
(a 9-minute walk from the venue) until **19h00**.

Where?

Bruxelles Environnement building

Near Tour & Taxis

Avenue du port 86C / 3000

Havenlaan 86C/3000

1000 Brussel

[Link to Google Maps](#)

[“How to get there” Map](#)

Lunch and coffee breaks

Coffee/tea breaks, and lunch will be provided.

Lunch and coffee breaks will be served by Groot Eiland
and will be vegetarian, with vegan options, organic, local and
seasonal. There will be an adapted lunch for those who informed
about it on the registration form.

Know more about [Groot Eiland](#).

Pictures and videos

Please note that pictures will be taken during the event. We might
use these pictures in future reports.

Dress code

No specific dress code is required for the event.

We encourage you to take a raincoat, [this is Brussels!](#)

Not registered yet?

[Registrations available here.](#)

Agenda

Registration

08h30 09h00	Registration
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Introduction

09h05 09h15	Welcome keynote speech	Charles Karangwa, IUCN
09h15 09h30	Introduction to the event	Faridah Ibrahim IUCN

Choose to Work for and with nature.

Nature as the foundation for resilience and wellbeing.

Nature plays a vital and multifaceted role in supporting human health, climate stability, water and food security, and protection against natural disasters. These interconnected benefits form the backbone of a thriving, resilient economy and society. However, economic strategies often overlook our dependencies on biodiversity and undervalue its contributions, viewing nature primarily as a source of raw materials. By shifting toward a more holistic understanding of nature as a key partner in long-term resilience and wellbeing, we can avoid costly disruptions, safeguard ecosystem functions, and unlock sustainable opportunities for both industries and communities.

Nature-based solutions offer long-lasting, cost-saving and adaptive solutions to existing challenges by recognising the diverse values of nature. Leveraging the power of nature can ensure a resilient economy that benefits both people and nature.

09h30 6 Short presentations 10h20 Choose to Work with and for nature

<i>It is urgent, vital for the health of the planet and humanity</i>	Sebastian Villasante IPBES Transformative Change Assessment Report
<i>To coexist with the living</i>	Nathalie Le Meur Ville de Grenoble
<i>To tackle the systemic causes of nature loss</i>	Siobhan McQuaid Invest4Nature representing NbS Task Force 3 Finance and Business Models
<i>Don't repeat the same mistake</i>	Edoardo Carlucci International Institute for Sus- tainable Development (IISD)
<i>It is needed and feasible</i>	José María Rey Benayas Universidad de Alcalá de Henares
<i>To reverse historical and ongoing injustices</i>	Sander Jacobs Instituut voor Natuur- en Bosonderzoek (INBO)

10h20 Short panel + Q&A 10h45 Beyond simplification

	Sebastian Villasante IPBES Transformative Change Assessment Report
	Nathalie Le Meur Ville de Grenoble
	Edoardo Carlucci International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
	José María Rey Benayas Universidad de Alcalá de Henares
Guest panelist	Elsa Coslado Brussels Environment, Brussels-Capital Region

10h45 11h10 Coffee break

Choose to Trust nature and people .

Recognising social and economic dependencies on nature.

As Europe sets out a path to long-term prosperity through high-tech innovation, there's a growing understanding that sustainable success depends on aligning technological progress with ecological and social wellbeing. Embracing an integrated approach —one that values both nature and people— can lead to more resilient and inclusive outcomes. Nature-based solutions (NbS) offer a powerful, innovative response to today's complex challenges.

By blending high- and low-tech innovation with Indigenous and local knowledge, as well as insights from ecological and social sciences, **Nature-based Solutions create holistic, adaptable solutions that strengthen biodiversity, enhance water and food security, improve human health, and promote climate and social equity. This session aims to trigger a wider recognition of the capacity of people and nature together to tackle current challenges.**

11h10 6 Short presentations 12h00 Choose to Trust nature and people

We depend on it

Lisa Biber-Freudenberger
IPBES Nexus Assessment Report

Water needs nature from source to sea

Joachim Maes
**DG ENV
European Commission**

People have solutions!

Cédric Sounard
**Assemblée Citoyenne pour le
Climat | Brussels-Capital Region**

A good life for all

Sonja Gantioler
**JUSTNature | Hochschule
Weihenstephan-Triesdorf**

Nature is our future

Sue Miller
STOP Ecocide International

*We cannot stop the tide - but we can
open the door, and let nature lead.*

Vona Méléder
REWRITE | Nantes Université

12h00 Short panel + Q&A 12h25 Recognising dependencies

Lisa Biber-Freudenberger
IPBES Nexus Assessment Report

Joachim Maes
DG ENV | European Commission

Sue Miller
STOP Ecocide Now

Vona Méléder
REWRITE | Nantes Université

Guest Christian Holzleitner
panelist **DG CLIMA | European Commission**

12h25 12h30 Menti session

Choose to Invest in nature.

Financing change through existing and new opportunities

NbS play an essential role in tackling multiple challenges, including climate change, pollution and the vital need to transition to a nature positive economy.

However, there remains a huge gap between the funding currently available for NbS and the amount that is required to meet EU and global goals. Investing in nature provides a range of opportunities to increase resilience of operations, supply chains and landscapes while delivering multiple benefits. Done well, and with robust safeguards, investing in nature can reduce risks, contribute to a fairer society and help respond to regulatory requirements. By fully integrating the value of these benefits in decision making, their full investment potential becomes clear. The challenge is to develop 'bankable' NbS, and to ensure the policy, regulation and insurance measures are in place to scale implementation up and out.

This session explores the reasons to make new investments in nature, to shift existing investments away from activities that harm nature and towards NbS, why safeguards are so important to make sure that social and environmental rights are advanced and protected and that investments result in multiple benefits.

12h30 6 Short presentations 13h20 Choose to Invest in nature

It is a strategic asset for Europe's resilience and competitiveness

Hadrien Michel
DG ENV European Commission

The value of nature has the superpower to arrive at effective local solutions

Mark Van Nieuwstadt
BIOFIN-EU
Naturalis Biodiversity Center

To enhance the insurance value of nature and transition towards a nature-positive economy

Marianne Zandersen
Invest4Nature
GoNaturePositive!
Aarhus Universitet

It is central to responsible investment

Natacha Boric
Finance for Biodiversity
Foundation

Is lack of private investment the real issue preventing us from addressing the biodiversity crisis?

Frédéric Hache
Green Finance Observatory

To rethink health and wellbeing

Étienne Aulotte
Brussels Environment,
Brussels-Capital Region

13h20 Short panel + Q&A 13h45 Changing finances

Hadrien Michel
DG ENV, European Commission

Marianne Zandersen
Invest4Nature GoNaturePositive!
Aarhus Universitet

Natacha Boric
Finance for Biodiversity

Frédéric Hache
Green Finance Observatory

Guest panelist Theresa Pleye
GLS Bank | Global Alliance for Banking on Values

13h45 Lunch break 15h10

Choose to Partner with nature.

Creating new businesses with and for nature

Achieving meaningful and lasting transformative change requires placing nature at the heart of all business models and decision-making processes, both in those who are actively managing nature and in those who can transform their supply chains. There is an urgent need to both transform existing industries and companies and create and scale-up SMEs working in harmony with biodiversity. By doing so we can promote the creation of skilled and high-quality jobs, while ensuring social equity and sustainability.

Nature-based Solutions have a great potential to drive this change. By prioritising ecological restoration, conservation, protection and sustainable management of terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems, these solutions foster cross sector and interdisciplinary collaboration. They can also mobilise diverse financing streams, ranging from public investment to private capital – accelerating innovation and impactful action for both people and planet.

15h10 6 Short presentations 16h00 Choose to Partner with nature

There is no business without nature

Sharon Brooks
UNEP - WCMC

It is the right moment

Barbora Chmelova
Czech Ministry of the Environment

Work with what you love!

Isobel Fletcher
**GoNaturePositive!
Horizon Nua**

*For climate resilient solutions
that benefit business and society*

Kerry Waylen
**MERLIN
The James Hutton Institute**

Nature is the solution

Michaël van Cutsem
BeeOdiversity

To change the way we do businesses

Laura Rubio
La Osa Cooperativa

16h00 Short panel + Q&A 16h25 Businesses for nature and people

Sharon Brooks
UNEP - WCMC

Barbora Chmelova
Czech Ministry of the Environment

Kerry Waylen
**MERLIN
The James Hutton Institute**

Laura Rubio
La Osa Cooperativa

Guest Egbert Roozen
panelist **European Landscape Contractors Association**

Karin Müller
Ashoka & Bioregional Weaving Labs Collective

NbS Business Forum

During this final break, we will host an informal and interactive showcase of SMEs, Nature-based Enterprises, start-ups, and organisations working on or with the business side of Nature-based Solutions.

The NbS Business Forum envisions building a thriving business ecosystem where NbS is a mainstream strategic and operational approach, empowering businesses to deliver for people and nature.

Final words

16h25 16h30	Closing words by the moderator	Faridah Ibrahim IUCN
16h30 16h40	Final words	Humberto Delgado Rosa, DG ENV, European Commission
16h40 16h45	Closing words	Boris Erg, IUCN Euro

Launch of the NbS Business Forum

16h45 17h20	Coffee break and NbS Business Forum
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Outdoor drinks

17h30 19h00	Parckfarm
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