

Support for implementing the 3 Billion Trees Pledge

Challenges and barriers



STRITIH
Sustainable Development

Introduction

- ▶ The EU has committed to ensure the planting of, at least, **3 billion additional trees in the EU by 2030** from 2020. This pledge was included in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030.
- ▶ Conditions:
 - ▶ Additionality – not existing forest or emerging from legal obligations
 - ▶ Should benefit biodiversity and climate objectives
 - ▶ Native tree species unless the need to adapt to climate change
 - ▶ Trees should not be cut in the near future (ca. 3 decades)
- ▶ Planted trees are registered on a dedicated EU register/counter

General information about the project

- ▶ Supporting the EC and stakeholders to achieve the objectives of the pledge
- ▶ Milieu lead, with 2 partners: Ecologic and Stritih
- ▶ Timeline: 3 years - September 2022 - September 2025, extension until March 2026 (to organise a conference)
- ▶ Four tasks:
 - ▶ A: Overview of existing tree planting pledges (done)
 - ▶ B: A series of events (workshops, webinars, conferences) – on-going
 - ▶ C: Provide – financing guide
 - ▶ **D: Analyse the main challenges and barriers hindering tree planting or the Pledge**

Methodology for the Challenges report

► Six steps

- Preliminary desk research to identify the most common challenges
- Survey, for common use in Tasks A and D, with two questions on challenges and barriers
- Follow-up interviews: a total of 35 interviews, from 13 countries
- Workshops, webinars and conferences to gather additional feedback
- Complementary desk research
- Compiling the report, several rounds of comments

Three billion additional trees by 2030 - Publications Office of the EU

Typology of challenges

- ▶ Legal framework and regulatory compliance
- ▶ Alignment with national and regional conservation objectives
- ▶ Land needs and land use conflicts
- ▶ Compliance with ecological conditions
- ▶ Funding constraints
- ▶ Political support, stakeholder cooperation, and communication

Funding

- ▶ No funding sources dedicated exclusively to tree planting
- ▶ Problems with acquiring and managing the funding - administrative constraints and lack of knowledge
- ▶ Challenges with covering all types of costs
- ▶ Problems with sustainability of funding
- ▶ **Recommendations**
 - ▶ Create funding streams dedicated to tree planting
 - ▶ Support all types of costs including long-term care and management
 - ▶ Promote tree planting in CAP and in state aid programmes
 - ▶ Use innovative funding sources such as carbon credits and PES, crowdfunding

Legal framework and regulatory compliance

- ▶ Permitting requirements for tree planting in some MS: complex, involving numerous regulatory frameworks, leading to delays and uncertainty.
- ▶ In some MS, (re)classification of land is needed to plant trees, which involves complex procedures and discourages farmers (land not longer classified as agricultural)
- ▶ Unregistered land hinders identification of land owners who might consider tree planting.
- ▶ The EU ETS, the EU Carbon Removal and Carbon Farming Regulation:
 - ▶ national laws grant ownership of credits to land owners or investors but not to tree planting organisations to reinvest in tree planting.
 - ▶ Incompatibility of National Carbon registers and rules
- ▶ Legislation with long-term tree felling ban prevents initiatives within 3BT Pledge.
- ▶ Recommendations:
 - ▶ Simplify regulatory permitting requirements, and introduce flexibility rules for tree planting in land that is not classified as forest
 - ▶ Promote carbon certification schemes which recognise the role of tree-planting organisations
 - ▶ EU Registry established to harmonise and ensure high level of transparency for certified carbon removals.

Land availability and land use conflicts

In brief:

- ▶ Physical room exists at the scale of current natural succession on abandoned or marginal land
- ▶ Binding constraints: recognition in cadastres and spatial plans ; space in dense urban spaces on both city and in (densely populated) Member States
- ▶ Competition for land between forestry and nature conservation, agriculture, urban development, and infrastructure
- ▶ Restrictions on afforestation of agricultural land
- ▶ High prices of land
- ▶ In urban areas, often regulatory obstacles such as adequate parking space, archeological constraints
- ▶ Trees still often seen as a nuisance (e.g. obstructing the view, damaging footpaths)

Where land conflicts bite

- ▶ Densely populated Member States: high land values and plan rules raise costs
 - ▶ Belgium and The Netherlands: competition with agricultural parcels concentrate supply;
 - ▶ Denmark: high prices and unwilling sellers create reliance on national funds for purchases
- ▶ Urban and peri-urban areas: boundary disputes in e.g. Spain, unclear ownership of land in e.g. Bulgaria
- ▶ Grid and PV compete for space with afforestation and non-forest habitat protection
- ▶ Permitting is slow and complex near cities
 - ▶ Zoning gatekeepers: France requires SAFER review for purchases above 3HA
- ▶ Natural succession - spurred by land abandonment - helps in parts of Spain and Italy, e.g. Lazio reports strong natural gains

Agroforestry and urban forestry

- ▶ Agroforestry today: about 9 percent of utilised agricultural area, mostly silvopastoral in the Mediterranean
- ▶ Barriers: high upfront costs, weak incentives and markets, regulatory lock-in to forest status, knowledge gaps
 - ▶ Illustrative policies: in Slovakia tight conversion approvals and fees; in contrast, Romania has set up a grant for green belts
- ▶ Urban forestry delivers high adaptation value per tree: cooling, reduced energy demand, health co-benefits
- ▶ Constraints: parking rules, archaeological designations, tight historic spaces in centres, local nuisance concerns
- ▶ Opportunities: municipalities taking the lead, community co-ownership, pocket forests

Recommendation

To summarise the barriers

- ▶ In general a growing public interest in afforestation and in some MS strong availability of land due to agricultural land abandonment;
- ▶ Competing interests block process in scarce land areas (urban and agriculture)
- ▶ These barriers are expressed through regulations and land valuation
- ▶ Recommendations
 - ▶ Promote agroforestry (including in CAP) which can create win-win solutions
 - ▶ Better collaboration among stakeholders to solve land-use conflicts
 - ▶ Participatory approach to land use planning

Compliance with ecological conditions

- ▶ „Planting the right tree in the right place for the right purpose”:
 - ▶ A central principle of the pledge
 - ▶ Quality matters as much as quantity
 - ▶ Ensures ecological integrity, biodiversity gains and lasting climate benefits
- ▶ Pledge condition “**prioritization of native tree species unless the need to adapt to climate change**” - native preferred; limited use of non-natives for climate resilience
 - ▶ Climate change demands resilient species; identifying those fit for present and future conditions is challenging (e.g. Slovakia, Germany - bark beetle invasions)
 - ▶ Non-native, even invasive, species sometimes chosen for aesthetic appeal - small scale yet, but raises concerns about long-term ecological impacts
 - ▶ Balancing ecological goals with economic interests remains difficult in productive forestry (e.g. Finland adds deciduous species to mixed forests)
 - ▶ Ongoing challenges: selecting suitable species, and ensuring quality and availability of natives

Compliance with ecological conditions

► Recommendations

- **Apply EU Guidelines:** Use the Commission Guidelines on biodiversity-friendly afforestation, reforestation, and tree planting (2023) as a common reference framework
- **Adopt an ecosystem approach:** Focus on whole ecosystems and promote ecological connectivity (e.g. Slovakia's approach)
- **Engage forestry expertise:** Involve forestry experts in planning and implementation (e.g. Spain, where forest engineers design planting projects)
- **Strengthen native species supply:** Develop a nursery network to expand research, production, and collaboration, ensuring sufficient and high-quality native seedlings
- **Improve governance:** Enhance communication and cooperation among stakeholders across different policy levels
- **Raise public awareness:** Highlight the multiple benefits of trees, including biodiversity support and climate adaptation

Thank you! Questions?

