



Desertification & Land Degradation in the European Union

Challenges and opportunities for action

6 December, 13:15-14:30

Benelux-EIB pavilion (with lunch buffet)

Context

Desertification is a form of land degradation in drylands. The term is usually used to describe anthropogenic and climate-related processes leading to problems affecting dry areas, such as diminished food production, soil infertility, decreases in the land's natural resilience, and reduced water quality. Projections on climate change in Europe show that the risk of desertification is increasing. Hot semi-deserts already exist in southern Europe, where the climate is transforming from temperate to dry. This phenomenon is extending northwards. The long period of high temperatures and low rainfall in Europe in the summer of 2018 reminded us of the pressing importance of this problem.

Sustainable Development Goal 15 of the 2030 Agenda aims to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”. SDG 15.3 target aims at achieving Land Degradation Neutrality by 2030: sustainable land management and forest and landscape restoration should counterbalance land degradation. Achieving this target could help to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Desertification is a consequence, but also a cause of climate change: higher temperatures, droughts and other severe weather events increase land degradation. Land is then susceptible to erosion, including from flash floods. In turn, desertification has a negative effect on climate change: soil degradation emits greenhouse gases, and degraded soils have a lower capacity to retain carbon.

Thirteen EU Member States¹, not only in the Mediterranean region, but also in Central, Eastern and Northern Europe, have declared under the UNCCD² that they are affected by desertification. Desertification is a cross cutting challenge for many EU policy areas such as climate, environment, agriculture, research and cohesion. EU institutions can play a major role in supporting action to combat land degradation and desertification.



Objectives

Raise awareness on the threats from desertification and land degradation in the EU.

Highlight how effectively the risk of desertification in the EU is addressed.

Discuss possible financing options and business cases to increase investments to combat desertification and land degradation in the EU.

Master of Ceremony

Monica SCATASTA, Head of Environmental, Climate and Social Policy Division (EIB)

Setting the scene

Mélanie WEYNANTS, Scientific Officer (JRC), Scientific evidence and trends of desertification and land degradation in the EU from the World Atlas of Desertification (WAD3).

Keynotes

Phil WYNN OWEN, Member of the Court of Auditors (ECA) & **Ramona BORTNOWSCHI**, Head of Task (ECA), ECA audit on desertification in the EU.

Jonathan TAYLOR, Vice President (EIB), Mobilizing investment to combat desertification and land degradation in the EU.

¹Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

²United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

