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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE  
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**Standing Committee**

41<sup>st</sup> meeting  
Strasbourg, 29 November – 3 December 2021

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**Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention  
for the period to 2030**

**FIFTH DRAFT**

**Following three meetings of the Working Group  
and associated online consultations**

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## A. About the Bern Convention

The Council of Europe's Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (1979), or Bern Convention, is a binding international legal instrument covering most of the natural heritage of the European continent and extending to some States of Africa. It is the only regional Convention of its kind in the world, and was the first to protect both species and habitats.

The Convention promotes strong political commitment through implementation mechanisms in which all citizens are represented by politicians, NGOs, civil society organisations and scientists, collaborating to make decisions for the conservation of biodiversity. The central aim is the conservation of Europe's wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats, including vulnerable and migratory species.

The 51 Contracting Parties (including four African States and the European Union) commit to:

- promote national conservation policies;
- consider the environmental impact of planning and development;
- promote education and information on conservation;
- share practice and expertise on biodiversity management;
- harmonise legislation on biodiversity protection; and
- coordinate environmental research.

Policy tools and standards evolved under the Convention include:

- guidance documents and Codes of Conduct;
- conservation strategies;
- action plans for threatened species;
- a pan-European network of protected areas (the Emerald Network);
- specific Resolutions and Recommendations adopted by the Parties;
- monitoring mechanisms, including implementation reports and a transparent "case file" system open to engagement by NGOs.

The Bern Convention is guided by the core values of the Council of Europe, hence its overarching aim is entwined with the promotion and protection of human rights and

democracy. Through the protection of natural heritage, the Convention safeguards basic human rights, including rights to life, health, food, livelihood, water, housing and culture. By engaging multiple sectors of society in nature conservation and accepting complaints from concerned citizens, it also strengthens democratic participation.

In 1994 a joint international symposium affirmed in the Monaco Declaration that the Council of Europe has a fundamental role to play in the implementation at regional level of the principles and obligations adopted at global level, and that the objectives of the Bern Convention are largely in line with the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Agenda 21<sup>1</sup>.

In 2009, on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Convention, the Standing Committee adopted a "Declaration on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Europe: 2010 and beyond"<sup>2</sup>, which reaffirmed the critical role played by the Bern Convention in facilitating the coordinated implementation of global biodiversity obligations in Europe, including relevant parts of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Migratory Species and related agreements and the Ramsar Convention; recognised the role of the Bern Convention in promoting coherence in biodiversity policies across the Pan-European region and the African countries involved; and urged Parties to use the Convention as a fundamental instrument for implementing the global post-2010 biodiversity targets.

[In 2021 the Standing Committee agreed a statement of Vision for the Convention for the period to 2030, affirming that the Parties expect in this period to see that:

*By 2030, declines in biodiversity are halted, leading to recovery of wildlife and habitats, improving the lives of people and contributing to the health of the planet.]*

## B. The purpose of the Strategic Plan

This Plan provides a guiding framework for the programmes and activities that are needed to achieve the Vision. It does not itself detail those activities, but it explains why they are needed, indicates the main lines of action, and defines the overall levels of ambition required in key areas. It is a practical tool for mobilising support, driving progress and assessing results.

The core of the Plan is a set of agreed goals and [12] targets to be achieved by 2030. Indicators and means of measuring the achievement of these are also defined. Assessment of progress should be a continuing process in each year of the Plan's life, enabling adjustments to be made where necessary to ensure the targets are met.

The Plan also serves as a communication tool, demonstrating the Bern Convention's relationship to Council of Europe priorities and its contribution to other international agendas on conservation and sustainable development. It provides an important formal basis for productive synergies with these.

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe (1994). Monaco Declaration on the role of the Bern Convention in the implementation of worldwide international instruments for the protection of biodiversity. Adopted by the Intergovernmental Symposium on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Bern Convention, Monaco, 26-28 September 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Standing Committee of the Bern Convention (2009). Declaration on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Europe: 2010 and beyond. Adopted by the Standing Committee at its 29<sup>th</sup> meeting, Bern, 23-26 November 2009.

## C. Context

This is the first Strategic Plan to be adopted for the Bern Convention as a whole. Over the Convention's 40-plus years of existence it has been supported by a range of guiding frameworks and strategic instruments on particular issue areas. Given the growing importance of its role and the need for escalated efforts in response to the global environmental crisis, and drawing on the experiences and lessons from the past four decades, the Parties have committed to a new level of ambition for the period to 2030, with a clear Vision and a focused set of action priorities.

Wildlife and natural habitats are vital for all life. They underpin human food, water and energy security, health and well-being, and they are critical to the regulation of climatic cycles and the quality of our air, water and soil. Biodiversity however is in serious decline. Changes in land and sea use, overexploitation, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species have made ecosystem collapse one of the biggest threats facing humanity in the next decade. According to the latest global assessments, goals for conserving nature and achieving sustainable use cannot be met by current trajectories, and they may only be achieved through changes at a “transformative” scale, across economic, social, political and technological fields<sup>3</sup>.

The challenge is therefore stark. Cause for hope and optimism however can be found in progressive forms of international cooperation, public support, and policies backed by sound science. The Bern Convention specialises in these, and it continues to be well placed to offer an achievable agenda for the region it covers<sup>4</sup> and a model for the wider world. Its mechanisms for international cooperation, stable frameworks of norms and standards, effective and adaptive mechanisms for monitoring, assessment and accountability, and its tradition of governments, civil society and businesses working together, all offer a positive foundation for the future.

This foundation now needs to be translated into more intensified and effective action “on the ground” if current trends are to be reversed. The costs of inaction will be more severe than anything seen to date, and will far outweigh the costs of implementing the actions required.

The Strategic Plan has been developed in harmony with related strategies at other scales, and it makes an explicit and vital pan-European contribution to (among others) the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and efforts for synergy among biodiversity-related Multilateral Environmental Agreements in general.

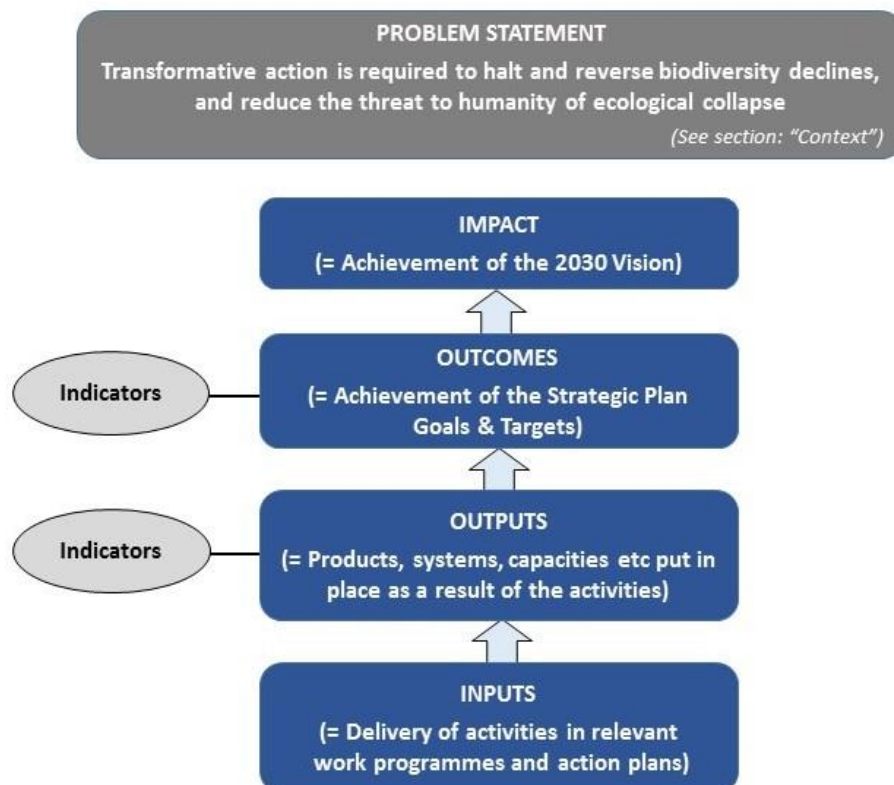
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<sup>3</sup> IPBES (2019). Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

<sup>4</sup> The Convention covers almost the entire European continent and several African States.

## D. How change will happen: the assumptions

Expressing a desired set of results does not, in itself, map the route to be taken to achieve them. Strategic plans sometimes address this through a “theory of change”, which summarises the way in which defined actions will lead to the intended outcome. An overview of this for the Bern Convention is illustrated in the simplified diagram below:



The expectation of change is based on the following further assumptions:

- Parties will maintain their commitment to the legal obligations defined for them by the Convention.
- Parties are free to exercise their discretion as to the manner in which they contribute to the objectives in this Plan according to their own national circumstances and capabilities, providing that the objectives are achieved.
- Achievement of the Strategic Plan's overall goals will result from a combination of efforts made within national jurisdictions (at multiple levels of governance), at transboundary/international level, by non-Party stakeholders and contributors, and in synergy/complementarity with other relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements and related international processes.
- Biodiversity outcomes cannot be achieved by the "biodiversity sector" alone, and achievement of the Plan's goals will require this agenda to be "mainstreamed" into other policy sectors and across society as a whole.
- International standards defined under the Convention play an important role in fostering a minimum common level of attainment necessary to achieve the goals in this Plan.
- Formal reflection of the objectives of this Plan in policies at transnational, national and local levels is important for catalysing requisite practical actions and allocation of resources.
- Implementation of this Plan will conform to principles of inclusivity, equity (socioeconomic, intergenerational, gender), participation, human rights and democratic accountability. These are important in their own right but are also vital for maintaining public confidence and support.
- Public opinion and political will are two sides of the same coin; hence communication and outreach efforts to the widest audiences in support of the 2030 Vision and the goals of this Plan are an essential part of its implementation.
- Changes in public behaviour can be led by example and by education, but incentives (including economic incentives) also play an important role, and should be considered among the tools that countries may wish to consider in promoting the implementation of this Plan.
- All technical processes operated through the mechanisms of the Convention in support of the implementation of this Plan will be evidence-led and based on appropriate scientific and technical knowledge, making good use of the Bern Convention's Groups of Experts and other qualified networks as appropriate.

## E. Goals and targets

➤ **GOAL 1: The area, connectivity, integrity and resilience of natural and semi-natural ecosystems is increased, with at least 30% of the land and sea area under protection.**

*Target 1.1:* Restoration and rehabilitation of natural ecosystems is increased, leading to an overall increase in area, connectivity, integrity and resilience of the habitat types specified in national targets to be set by each country.

*Target 1.2:* Coverage of natural ecosystems by the Emerald Network<sup>5</sup> meets the sufficiency targets set for 2030 in the post-2020 Work Plan for the Network<sup>6</sup>.

*Target 1.3:* All sites included in the Emerald Network are subject to formal protection or other effective conservation measures, and their species and habitats are being maintained at or progressing towards a favourable conservation status<sup>7</sup>.

➤ **GOAL 2: The conservation status of threatened species is improved, abundance of native species has increased, and human-induced extinctions have been halted.**

*Target 2.1:* Threatened and vulnerable species are at or are recovering towards a favourable conservation status<sup>8</sup>.

*Target 2.2:* Anthropogenic pressures impacting on wild species of fauna and flora<sup>9</sup> are reduced to levels that are not detrimental to the conservation of those species, through targeted measures enacted in legislation, policy and/or management.

<sup>5</sup> The Emerald Network is an ecological network made up of Areas of Special Conservation Interest and designed to ensure, on a common basis shared by all European countries, the long-term survival of internationally important species of wild fauna and flora and their habitats. Launched in 1989, it is considered to be one of the main tools for Contracting Parties to comply at national level with their obligations under the Bern Convention.

<sup>6</sup> [TO ADD reference to the Work Plan once a final version of it is available].

<sup>7</sup> In line with the EU Directive on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, the conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as "favourable" when its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable. Favourable conservation status of the species is further defined in the Directive, and (in an expanded way) in Article I(1) of the Convention on Migratory Species.

<sup>8</sup> The conservation status of a species will be taken as "favourable" when: population dynamics data indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its ecosystems; its range of distribution is neither currently being reduced, nor is likely to be reduced, on a long-term basis; there is, and will be in the foreseeable future, sufficient habitat to maintain the population of the species on a long-term basis; and the distribution and abundance of the species approach historic coverage and levels to the extent that potentially suitable ecosystems exist, and to the extent consistent with wise wildlife management. (This definition is adapted from Article I(1) of the Convention on Migratory Species, which aligns with the definition in the EU Directive on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, but is used here in preference because it adds additional elements to those of the Directive and is applicable beyond the EU).

<sup>9</sup> Including in particular (though not limited only to) habitat loss and degradation, including loss of connectivity; illegal killing, taking and trade; unsustainable use; toxins and pollution, including micropollutants; barriers to migration, disturbance, light pollution, invasive alien species; and climate change.

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➤ **GOAL 3: Nature’s contributions to people are valued, maintained and enhanced.**

*Target 3.1:* A thriving natural environment benefits people’s livelihoods, food and water security, community resilience, well-being and quality of life.

*Target 3.2:* Conservation of nature contributes to measures relating to human rights, democracy, landscape, cultural heritage, health and major hazards.

*Target 3.3:* Nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches contribute widely to the mitigation of the causes of climate change and the adaptation to its effects.

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➤ **GOAL 4: Sufficient resources are available and are used efficiently to achieve all goals and targets in this Plan.**

*Target 4.1:* The goals and targets in the Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention are achieved through a multi-governance, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approach, in productive partnership with civil society, the scientific community, the private sector and other stakeholders, and in synergy with other relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements and related international processes.

*Target 4.2:* The necessary resources and capacity, including scientific and technical cooperation, are available to achieve all the goals and targets in the Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention.

*Target 4.3:* Bern Convention mechanisms including Action Plans, Strategies, Codes of Conduct, Groups of Experts, the Emerald Network, Case Files, On the Spot Appraisals and the European Diploma are widely known and supported, and are used effectively to enhance the implementation of the Convention’s Strategic Plan.

*Target 4.4:* Specific recommendations arising from individual Case Files are followed up and acted upon; and cases are resolved and closed within a reasonable timeframe.

## **F. Monitoring and evaluation**

A monitoring and evaluation regime is essential for reviewing progress and assessing whether the Strategic Plan is achieving what it set out to do. Although the processes for this are detailed [elsewhere], the whole regime should be regarded as an integral part of the Plan.

Results at interim stages will inform a process of learning and adaptive management, to keep the Plan “on course” for the achievement of its targets and goals.



The aim is to make as much use as possible of information from existing processes in the Bern Convention and in other related biodiversity monitoring systems, mindful that reporting can involve significant work for Parties and that no unnecessary burdens should be created.

The alignment of the goals and targets in this Plan with the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) allows a close correspondence to be made with the Monitoring Framework for the GBF and the indicators defined there<sup>10</sup>. This in turn reflects connections with the work of the Biodiversity Indicators Partnership and with indicators used for monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Duplication across these processes has thus been avoided.

Although there is no mandatory system of national implementation reporting for the Bern Convention (apart from the narrow issue of exceptions under Article 9), information from four-yearly “general reports” submitted by Parties will make a contribution to the monitoring and evaluation regime for the Strategic Plan, together with: reporting under Resolution No.8 (2012) on the conservation status of species and habitats targeted by the Emerald Network; the “Scoreboard” for assessing progress in combating illegal killing, taking and trade of wild birds; thematic reporting in response to questionnaires organised through the Convention’s Groups of Experts; and the legal analysis reviews in selected Contracting Party countries commissioned from time to time by the Standing Committee. Programmes of Work and Action Plans adopted under the Convention may have their own indicators and reporting processes, and these will feed in as appropriate.

Indicators that will (to varying degrees<sup>11</sup>) track progress towards the individual targets in the Plan are listed below. Some of these are available for use from the outset; others will require development/refining before being fully operable. Emphasis has been given to those which play a role in monitoring the corresponding targets in the GBF, those which lend themselves to updating during the time period covered by the Strategic Plan, those which have been or are likely to be agreed through a scientific or intergovernmental process, and those which have an identified body that can be responsible for operating the indicator on a day-to-day basis.

Indicators and reports need to be able not only to generate data, but to provide pertinent “storylines” on the success or otherwise of the Plan in securing genuinely strategic outcomes and real impacts for wildlife and habitats.

Further detail on the individual indicators is provided in the [accompanying Monitoring & Evaluation Guide].

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<sup>10</sup> [To add a cross-reference to the final version of the GBF Monitoring Framework once it is adopted].

<sup>11</sup> (Indicators are only ever designed to be an “indication”, they do not purport to provide a comprehensive assessment).

Target	Indicator(s)	Availability for use ; and principal custodian
<b><i>GOAL 1: The area, connectivity, integrity and resilience of natural ecosystems is increased.</i></b>		
1.1 Restoration and rehabilitation of natural ecosystems is increased, leading to an overall increase in area, connectivity, integrity and resilience of the habitat types specified in national targets to be set by each country.	[To be added]	[To be added]
1.2 Coverage of natural ecosystems by the Emerald Network meets the sufficiency targets set for 2030 in the post-2020 Work Plan for the Network.	[To be added]	[To be added]
1.3 All sites included in the Emerald Network are subject to formal protection or other effective conservation measures, and are being maintained at or progressing towards a favourable conservation status.	[To be added]	[To be added]
<b><i>GOAL 2: The number of species that are threatened is reduced, and the abundance of native species has increased.</i></b>		
2.1 Threatened and vulnerable species are at or are recovering towards a favourable conservation status.	[To be added]	[To be added]
2.2 Anthropogenic pressures impacting on wild species of fauna and flora <sup>12</sup> are reduced to levels that are not detrimental to the conservation of those species, through targeted measures enacted in legislation, policy and/or management.	[To be added]	[To be added]
<b><i>GOAL 3: Nature's contributions to people are valued, maintained and enhanced.</i></b>		
3.1 A thriving natural environment benefits people's livelihoods, food and water security, community resilience, well-being and quality of life.	[To be added]	[To be added]
3.2 Conservation of nature contributes to measures relating to human rights, democracy, landscape, cultural heritage, health and major hazards.	[To be added]	[To be added]
3.3 Nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches contribute widely to the mitigation of the causes of climate change and the adaptation to its effects.	[To be added]	[To be added]
<b><i>GOAL 4: Sufficient resources are available to achieve all goals and targets in this Plan.</i></b>		
4.1 The goals and targets in the Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention are achieved through a multi-governance, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approach, in productive partnership with civil society, the scientific community, the private sector and other stakeholders, and in synergy with other relevant Multilateral	[To be added]	[To be added]

<sup>12</sup> Including in particular (though not limited only to) habitat loss and degradation, including loss of connectivity; illegal killing, taking and trade; unsustainable use; toxins and pollution, including micropollutants; barriers to migration, disturbance, light pollution, invasive alien species; and climate change.

Environmental Agreements and related international processes.		
4.2 The necessary resources and capacity, including scientific and technical cooperation, are available to achieve all the goals and targets in the Strategic Plan for the Bern Convention.	[To be added]	[To be added]
4.3 Bern Convention mechanisms including Action Plans, Strategies, Codes of Conduct, Groups of Experts, the Emerald Network, Case Files, On the Spot Appraisals and the European Diploma are widely known and supported, and are used effectively to enhance the implementation of the Convention's Strategic Plan.	[To be added]	[To be added]
4.4 Specific recommendations arising from individual Case Files are followed up and acted upon; and cases are resolved and closed within a reasonable timeframe.	[To be added]	[To be added]

## G. Ownership and responsibilities for implementation

At international level, the Strategic Plan guides the overall direction of work by the institutions of the Convention, including the Standing Committee, Bureau, Secretariat and Groups of Experts, supported by partnerships with other organisations and programmes including other Conventions and NGOs. The Standing Committee has overall responsibility for ensuring that the Plan as a whole is delivered.

At a practical day-to-day level however, this delivery will fall to a variety of other operational contexts. In relation to Contracting Party governments this will in all cases involve national-level action; but often will also involve action within different tiers of local government, as well as cooperation between governments in bilateral or regional arrangements, for example in the European Union.

It is vital that implementation of the Plan is not left only to the Ministries or agencies that have lead responsibility for nature conservation. To succeed, the agenda here must be “mainstreamed” across all areas of sectoral responsibility, including for example agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, transport, infrastructure planning, water resources management, industry, urban development, climate change and finance. Nature conservation departments will have an important role in promoting understanding of the issues and coherent action across these sectors, but leadership and authority on this is expected to come from the highest levels of government.

In relation to the “habitat area and connectivity increase” Target 1.1, each Party is expected to set a target for this at national level that will be defined according to the particular scale of opportunity available in the country.

Parties may find it valuable on a voluntary basis to set other national targets and milestones, which express (in a quantified way where possible) the specific contribution the country will make to each of the targets in the Strategic Plan. Parties are invited to communicate the details of any such targets to the Secretariat, including arrangements for monitoring progress and the

results of such monitoring, so that this may contribute to a collated overview of progress overall. National strategies and action plans are likely to be helpful tools to use.

The Strategic Plan is applicable throughout the area covered by the Convention, and Non-Party governments are invited to implement it in the same way as described above for Parties. Those wishing to accede to the Convention in particular will be given every encouragement in this regard.

While governments have the formal accountability for achieving the Convention's aims, implementation in practice occurs through a combination of efforts by them and by many other stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations, scientific institutions, private sector interests and concerned citizens of all ages. The Strategic Plan is "owned" by all of these together - they all have an important role to play, and success depends on their combined contributions. Particular efforts should be made to communicate the importance of this to Indigenous peoples and local communities and to young people, to recognise their needs and support their participation.

The [Monitoring & Evaluation Guide which accompanies this Plan] (see Section [F] above) details particular lead responsibilities in relation to individual indicators for the listed targets. Other stakeholders who are in any way contributing to the achievement of these targets are also invited to provide information as systematically as possible on the specific progress made, so that a more complete monitoring overview can be maintained.

## **H. Relationship to action plans and other instruments for implementation**

[To be added]

## **I. Promoting awareness and use of the Plan**

The Strategic Plan is an important part of, and added stimulus for, communication and outreach activities in the ambit of the Bern Convention. This means that it is a key vehicle for expressing the importance of wildlife and natural habitats in the area covered by the Convention, and also that the action priorities it defines need to be promoted to all who may affect the outcomes, whether by direct delivery or by shaping the climate of public and political opinion in support of the goals.

Specific activities to generate media coverage, raise awareness of the existence and value of the Plan and promote its practical uptake and use, will be detailed in [separate communication and outreach plans]. These will be tailored to differentiated target audiences, including "political", "technical", "educational" and "popular" segments. Summary illustrated "brochure"-style publications and social media output will be developed in support of this where possible.

Central efforts of this kind will meet part of the need. National and NGO communication and outreach efforts are indispensable also, however, for translating the Plan into different

operating contexts and reaching more specifically-defined audience groups, including local communities.

## J. Capacity and resources

This Strategic Plan helps to guide the mobilisation and effective deployment of adequate resources at a variety of levels within and between countries, to address each of the listed targets, to undertake the requisite monitoring and evaluation, and to promote awareness and use of the Plan. “Resources” in this sense includes not only finance but also institutional and human capacity, information and knowledge.

Current levels of funding for biodiversity conservation are insufficient and need to be increased. This includes international and domestic funding from public, private and other sources. Details of measures for enhancing the necessary flows to achieve the goals and targets in the Strategic Plan, including assistance for low and middle income countries and countries with economies in transition, are given in the separate [Resource Mobilisation Plan for the Bern Convention]. Parties are encouraged also to specify their own national plans.

Financial resourcing in this context does not only involve the generation of new funds, but also enhanced effectiveness and efficiency of resource use, “in kind” support, and the reduction or redirection of spending that harms the environment. Policy choices that reduce pressures on biodiversity will reduce the costs of protecting and restoring it.

Institutional and human capacity can be strengthened by various forms of support by, and for, government and non-government actors at all levels, including enhancing understanding about biodiversity conservation in non-biodiversity sectors. Guidance documents, manuals, training programmes and events, advice mechanisms (including On the Spot Appraisals) and other tools may all have a role to play. Cooperative partnerships are important for enabling institutions and networks to support each other.

Knowledge and information are resources too, and sharing, critical review and lesson-learning are important forms of capacity. The Bern Convention promotes an open and collaborative approach to the development of research (including “citizen science”), education, innovation, information technology, monitoring, documentation and community-based knowledge to this end.

[END]

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**Further information** about the Bern Convention and the Strategic Plan is available from the Convention Secretariat, Council of Europe, Avenue de l'Europe F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France. Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 20 00. Email: [Bern.Convention@coe.int](mailto:Bern.Convention@coe.int) . Web: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention>.