

Distinguished Vice-President of ECOSOC,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

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It is my great pleasure to present some selected key findings on SDG 15 from *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*, which was launched on 7 July, last Thursday.

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The world's forest area continues to shrink, but at a slightly slower rate than in previous decades. The proportion of forests fell from 31.9% of total land area in 2000 to 31.2% in 2020, representing a net loss of almost 100 million hectares. Agricultural expansion is driving almost 90% of global deforestation, including 49.6% from expansion for cropland and 38.5% for livestock grazing.

Asia, Europe and Northern America showed an overall increase in forest area from 2000 to 2020 due to afforestation, landscape restoration and the natural expansion of forests. In contrast, significant losses were observed in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, mostly due to the conversion of forests into agricultural land.

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The risk of species extinction is increasing at a rate unprecedented in human history. The Red List Index, which measures the overall extinction risk of species in selected taxonomic groups, reveals a deterioration of 9.2% between 2000 and 2022. Globally, around 40,000 species are documented to be at risk of extinction over the coming decades. At the regional level, Asian and small island developing states suffer from more severe risk and faster deterioration than the global average. To conserve and sustainably use biodiversity, key actions are urgently needed, including reversing the net loss of habitat, transforming land management and transitioning to sustainable agriculture.

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Safeguarding key biodiversity areas through the establishment of protected areas or other effective area-based conservation measures is helping prevent the rapid loss of biodiversity. Globally, the mean percentage coverage of key biodiversity areas by protected areas increased from over one quarter in 2000 to nearly one half in 2021. Despite this encouraging trend, coverage is uneven. Four regions, including Northern Africa and Western Asia, Central and Southern Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, and Oceania still have mean coverage of less than 35% across marine, terrestrial, freshwater and mountain key biodiversity areas.

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The number of countries incorporating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national accounting and reporting systems is steadily trending upwards. However, the progress is still too slow. By January 2022, 37% of countries assessed are on track to achieve or exceed their national targets of biodiversity; 58% have made progress towards their targets but at an insufficient rate. Building back better from COVID-19 is an opportunity to integrate biodiversity considerations into economic recovery measures to build a more sustainable future – while reducing the risk of future pandemics. However, to date, biodiversity has been a largely neglected area in recovery spending.

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For more information, please visit our website for the full report.

Thank you very much.