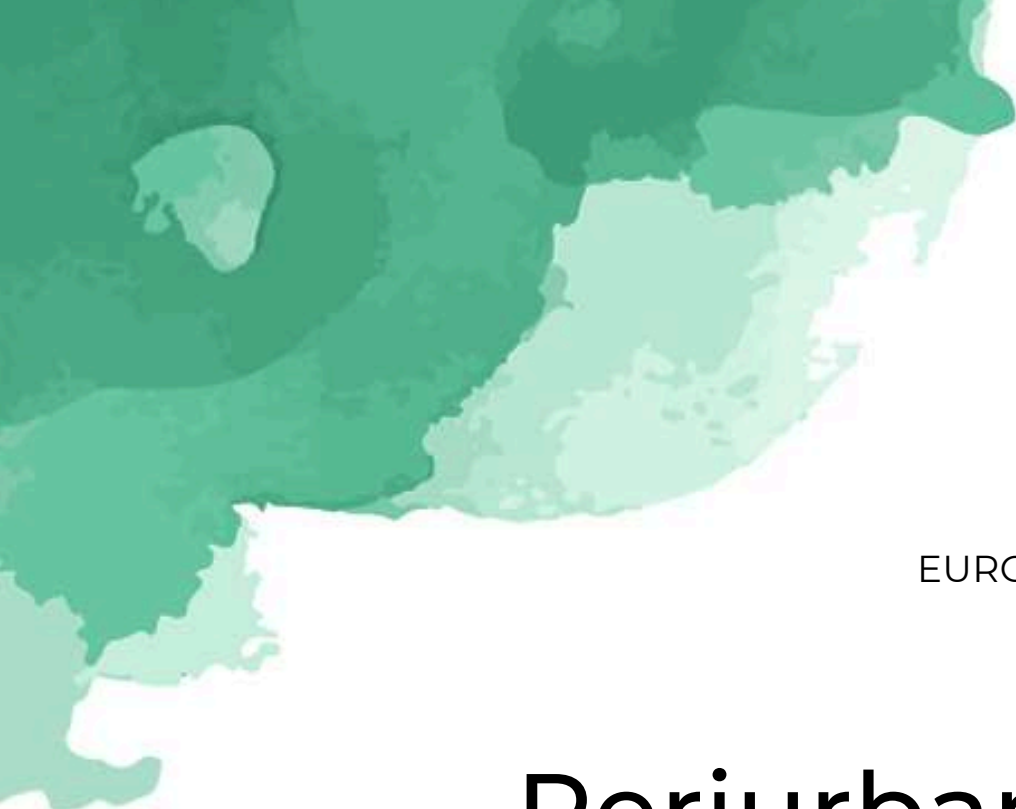




EUROPARC Position Paper
September 2026

Periurban Parks: Their place in European Policies

Recommendations for the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework
to ensure **Periurban Parks** can fulfill their essential role in
enhancing biodiversity and protecting the health of European
citizens.





Periurban Parks stand out as wilder, more biodiverse, and significantly larger than typical urban parks. They provide a wide range of benefits, including space for recreation, cleaner air, temperature regulation, fresh water, healthy food and vital habitats for biodiversity. Supporting these spaces, means supporting the health of European citizens and the planet.

EUROPARC Periurban Parks Working Group

Periurban Parks: Nature for Resilient Cities

Today, around three quarters - close to 340 million people - of the EU population lives in cities and other urban areas¹.

Living in a city can offer clear advantages: better job opportunities, numerous higher education programmes, and varied cultural experiences. However, urbanisation over the past five decades has often locally led to heavier traffic, higher temperatures, more noise, and air pollution. These factors can take a toll on both physical and mental well-being.

In this context, the EUROPARC Federation (EF) emphasises that **Protected Areas, particularly those on the outskirts of cities, play a crucial role in offering inclusive approaches, especially Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to urban challenges.**

Urban Green Infrastructure (GI) and more precisely Periurban Parks (PPs) are essential for climate resilience, biodiversity restoration, and the well-being of Europe's citizens. However, funding remains inadequate, fragmented, and difficult to access.

Periurban Parks stand out as wilder, more biodiverse, and significantly larger than typical urban parks. This is why they provide a wide range of benefits, including **cleaner air, temperature regulation, fresh water, healthy food and vital habitats for biodiversity.**

Additionally, Periurban Parks offer citizens green spaces for **leisure, education, health promotion, and outdoor activities** in a natural setting (services that are often lacking in densely built cities). In essence, they act as the heart, soul, and lungs of urban life.

“*In essence, Periurban Parks act as the heart, soul and lungs of urban life.*”

1. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. An EU Agenda for Cities: Driving Growth and Prosperity {SWD(2025) 389 final}. [Link](#)



Periurban Parks are essential to urban resilience and sustainability, fulfilling key roles such as:

- **Safeguarding natural processes** that provide vital ecosystem services, like climate regulation, natural hazard mitigation, habitat provision, and carbon sequestration, while supporting sustainable agroecological systems.
- **Protecting natural and cultural heritage for future generations**, including eco-agricultural landscapes that preserve traditional farming, biodiversity, and cultural identity.
- **Addressing social needs by offering accessible natural spaces** for recreation and outdoor sports, education, health maintenance and recovery, and research.
- **Meeting cities' functional demands** by providing large, open areas for essential activities like outdoor recreation and sports.
- **Acting as secure, frontline spaces during climate emergencies and urban crises**, providing support for flood relief, earthquake response, fire management, and climate refuge functions.

To ensure Periurban Parks can fulfil their vital roles, the EUROPARC Federation welcomes the European Commission to:

1

Consider the **development of a focused strategy** for safeguarding and enhancing ecologically significant green spaces near urban areas.

2

Set up **dedicated funding mechanisms** for nature conservation and restoration to support the effective, long-term management of Periurban Parks as part of the Trans-European Nature Network and green and blue infrastructure.

This would guarantee the role of Periurban Parks and secure their long-lasting protection, improvement of their management and the essential services they deliver.

Periurban Parks play a key role in multiple European policies that aim to halt the loss of biodiversity and put biodiversity on the path to recovery by 2030. These are outlined on the following pages.

1. Biodiversity

a. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework



Bee highway, Parco Nord Milano © Esther Bossink, EUROPARC Federation

Many commitments under the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 **directly support Periurban Parks, by recognising their role as biodiversity hotspots and Natura 2000 sites.** These commitments cover restoring ecosystems, advancing urban and periurban actions like pollinator protection and Urban Greening Plans, and strengthening governance to enhance nature restoration and climate resilience.

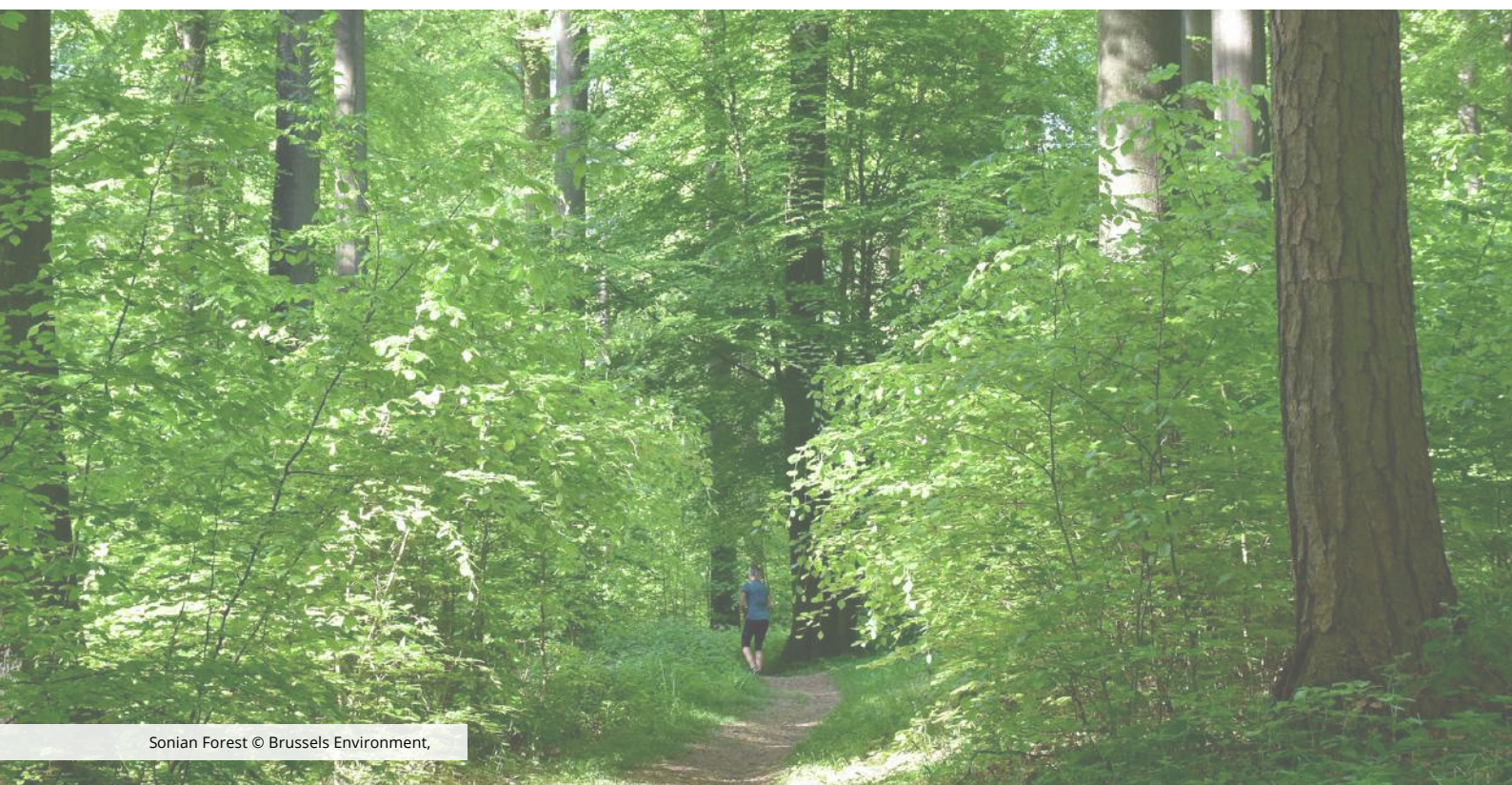
The Target 12 “Enhance Green Spaces and Urban Planning for Human Well-Being and Biodiversity” of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity calls for a significant increase in the area, quality and connectivity of and access to green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas. Periurban Parks should be recognised in this context as green and blue spaces that can help to achieve this target and that provide benefits for people and biodiversity.

b. EU Nature Restoration Regulation

The Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) sets out recommendations to support Periurban Parks in achieving multiple environmental goals. These include increasing urban green space across the country by 2031, with a focus on integrating green spaces into buildings and infrastructure. The NRR also aims to remove artificial barriers to restore river connectivity and floodplain functions, enhancing natural water systems. Additionally, it seeks to boost pollinator diversity and reverse their decline by 2030, with continuous monitoring to track progress. Beyond urban areas, the Regulation prioritises restoring biodiversity in agricultural and forest ecosystems. Another key objective is to support the planting of 3 billion additional trees in the EU by 2030 through restoration initiatives. Together, these measures aim to create a more sustainable and ecologically balanced environment.

c. EU Forest Strategy

There are many different kinds of Periurban Parks. For those Periurban Parks that have forests, forested or reforested spaces, closer-to-nature forest management² is recommended to be applied.



2. The closer-to-nature forest management approach is a key principle outlined in the EU Forest Strategy for 2030. This approach ensures that forests remain healthy, diverse, and resilient for future generations while contributing to the EU's climate and sustainability goals

2. EU Green Infrastructure Strategy and Nature-Based Thinking

The EU Green Infrastructure Strategy (2013) encourages green and blue infrastructure and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to protect biodiversity and enhance ecosystem services. NbS are central to many Periurban Parks projects. Thus, **Nature-Based Thinking (NBT)** is proposed as a framework recognising humanity's deep connection with nature, promoting cross-sectoral collaboration to integrate NbS into infrastructure and drive systemic change.

3. Climate Change

The **EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change**, updated in 2021, and the European Council's recognition of climate change as an "existential threat," along with the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, stress the urgent need for action on climate change and biodiversity.

Periurban areas under urban pressure face rising **climate risks like extreme weather and heatwaves, intensifying socio-ecological fragility and public health issues**. Urban and periurban areas are increasingly exposed to climate-related risks, including extreme weather events and heatwaves, which exacerbate socio-ecological vulnerabilities and public health challenges. In this context, Periurban Parks constitute essential Green Infrastructure, enhancing urban sustainability, climate adaptation, and resilience.



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4. Health and Sports

Periurban Parks give urban residents rare access to nature, which **boosts physical and mental health** for individuals and society. A communication from the European Commission in 2024 highlights the positive role urban planning can play in other policy areas, as well as that of nature and clean environment - for both mental and physical health. This also referred to the nature's contribution to the EU Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health (DG Health and Food Safety). Already in 2008, the EU physical activity guidelines state that “many types of self-organised physical activity, such as walking, cycling, sailing or rowing, become more rewarding if carried out in a nice natural environment”. Based on this view, nature preservation becomes important not only to protect landscape, wildlife, forests or plants but also to provide space and attractive occasions for human physical activity”. In this context, Periurban Parks also help **reduce nature-deficit disorder** (a condition caused by lack of nature exposure), especially among children. Periurban Parks encourage **daily outdoor exercise**, combating health risks related to sedentary lifestyles. Their **biodiverse soils** strengthen immune systems, and they can even support organic farming, promoting healthier diets.

5. Environmental Awareness

Periurban parks under excessive use pressure may experience reduced ecosystem service quality and habitat degradation, driven by unsustainable outdoor recreational practices. In line of the key goal of the Green Deal “Plan to restore nature and work towards zero pollution to ensure a healthy environment for future generations”, Periurban Parks need strengthening environmental awareness among visitors and promoting low-impact outdoor activities, alongside trail adaptation and staff training to reduce conflicts and encourage responsible use. While research and digital tools, including carefully applied artificial intelligence (AI), can support visitor engagement and management, effective conservation ultimately depends on stronger protection measures, increased funding, and adequate staffing to balance outdoor recreational use with ecosystem preservation.

Recommendations for the next EU budget

Given the above, the EUROPARC Federation sets out the following recommendations for the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework to ensure Periurban Parks can fulfill their essential role in enhancing biodiversity and protecting the health of European citizens. Adequate funding (e.g. project funding for GI) is essential for Periurban Parks, as critical Green Infrastructure, to secure the financial resources needed for both their development and long-term upkeep, thereby ensuring compliance with the Nature Restoration Regulation.

We recommend:

- **Earmark funds for nature restoration and conservation** and allocate a defined share to Urban Green Infrastructure under sustainable development objectives.
- **Embed city-level Green Infrastructure strategies to rural development funds** and linked programmes, and integrate them into the urban planning frameworks.
- **Unify funding streams across EU programmes** to reduce fragmentation and support both practical and educational measures.
- **Secure funding for both the implementation and long-term upkeep** of Green Infrastructure projects e.g. fund the first 25 years of GI maintenance within project budgets as flat-rate overhead costs, exempt from certification, detailed calculation, and ongoing reporting, to avoid excessive administrative costs and prolonged project timelines.
- **Simplify access to funding** through lower thresholds for smaller cities, introducing pre-financing, and creating risk-sharing funds to attract private investments.
- **Promote innovative financing** (e.g. flexible climate funds, tax incentives, green bonds, public private partnerships etc.)
- **Embed Green Infrastructure financing** in national restoration plans, carbon markets, and biodiversity funds.
- **Strengthen expertise** through training, technical support, and knowledge-sharing hubs.
- **Invest in data tools and Decision Support Systems** to enhance Green Infrastructure planning, monitoring, and impact assessment.



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About EUROPARC Federation

The EUROPARC Federation is the largest European network of Protected Areas professionals with more than 400 members from 40 countries. Our members are directly or indirectly managing thousands of National and Regional Parks, Marine Protected Areas, Natura 2000 sites. We are working on different levels to improve the management of Protected Areas in Europe to the benefit of nature and people.

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