

Nearly 30 years after the Convention to Combat Desertification, what's the state of the problem today, globally and in EU?

Today, the problem of desertification and drought is still with us, although, it must be said, great efforts are being made all over the world. According to the Restoration Barometer report published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 14 million hectares of degraded landscapes - an area the size of Greece - have been restored in 18 countries, thanks to investments of \$26 billion.¹ But much remains to be done.

The latest UN report² estimates that at least 100 million hectares of healthy, productive land will be degraded every year between 2015 and 2019, affecting global food and water security and directly affecting the lives of 1.3 billion people.

In Europe, the world is witnessing an increase in extreme weather events such as heat waves and historic forest fires, particularly in Spain and Greece. Land degradation contributes to, and is exacerbated by, these climate changes and events.

Greece and Portugal signed the Convention in 1994 and established National Teams to Combat Desertification and delivered action plans as well in the early '00s. Romania also joined in 1998. Have you been monitoring the implementation of the measures proposed in the action plan of these countries? How are these countries faring?

Greece ratified the Convention in May 1997 and submitted its Action Plan in 2001. As with all countries that have signed the Convention, the UNCCD provides support and monitors the implementation of each Action Plan, and Greece is no exception. Greece's most recent report dates from 2022³ and describes restoration and rehabilitation activities aimed at, among other things, improving cultivated land and wetlands and increasing soil fertility and carbon stocks.

Portugal acceded to the Convention in January 1996 and submitted its Action Plan report in 1999. Its latest report on the implementation of the country's action plan also dates from 2022.⁴ For example, the report states that Portugal is currently carrying out pilot studies, funded by an international partnership, to implement climate change adaptation measures that integrate

desertification control, and that these pilot studies are expected to produce results by the end of 2024.

Finally, Romania, which ratified the Convention in August 1998 and submitted its action plan in 2000, provided its latest implementation report in 2018.⁵ The report shows that afforestation of degraded land in Romania has increased from 100 ha/year in 2000 to around 1,500 ha/year in 2014.

In Greece, 23 years after the action plan, although it is a state law, the plan has not been implemented despite the recent formation of the third National Committee to Combat Desertification. Is the UN aware of this? What is the recommendation to the Greek government?

Greece does not participate in the Land Degradation Neutrality Initiative and therefore has no target setting programme. Nevertheless, Greece remains fully committed to the 2030 Agenda. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are integrated into all its major binding policy plans. Compact strategies are being launched, policies are being developed and institutional reforms are being designed to accelerate the full implementation of the SDGs.

Moreover it was mentioned in the Greek Parliament by the minister of Agriculture back in 2021 that the Greek State forgo the payment of the yearly convention fee to participate in the Desertification Convention of UN. Has the Greek State been up to date with the payment today?

Greece is not up to date with its core contribution payments.

What is the case in Portugal and in Romania accordingly?

Portugal is sending their contribution to the core budget regularly. But Romania is a bit behind.

Ahead of the 30th anniversary of the Convention, what is the message you would like to give to the audience about the problem of Desertification? Are we -citizens as well as governments- doing enough to address the issue?

The droughts, wildfires and heatwaves we are currently witnessing around the world are symptoms of an increasingly severe and interdependent climate and nature crisis. Land is at the heart of both crises, and we urgently need to halt land degradation and restore at least 1 billion hectares to meet global land targets by 2030. As always, no country is immune to natural disasters, so we must work together now to build long-term resilience.