

Article – What's behind the decline in bees and other pollinators? (infographic)



Bees in Europe

In Europe, pollinators are mainly bees and hoverflies, but also butterflies, moths, some beetles and wasps. The domesticated western honeybee is the best-known species and is managed by beekeepers for honey production and other products. Europe also counts about 2,000 wild species.

The threat of pollinator extinction

The topic has attracted public attention, as bees and other insect pollinators are essential for our ecosystems and biodiversity. Fewer pollinators mean many plant species could decline or even disappear along with the organisms that directly or indirectly depend on them. In addition, the decline in numbers and diversity of pollinator populations affects food security with potential losses in agricultural yields.

To tackle the issue and complement efforts at EU and national levels, the European Commission presented in 2018 the [EU Pollinators Initiative](#), the first comprehensive initiative at EU level, focusing on wild pollinating insects. Its aim is to improve knowledge about the decline, tackle the causes and raise awareness of the issue.

On 3 December, Parliament's [environment committee](#) adopted a [resolution](#) on the initiative, asking for more targeted measures to protect wild pollinators. MEPs advocate further reduction of the use of pesticides and more funds for research.

Why are pollinators declining?

Currently, there is no scientific data giving the full picture, but there is evidence of a considerable decline in pollinators, due primarily to human activities. Bees and butterflies are the species for which the best data is available, demonstrating that [one out of ten bee and butterfly species](#) is threatened with extinction in Europe.

The decline does not have one single cause, but threats include land-use changes for agriculture or urbanisation, which result in the loss and degradation of natural habitats. In addition intensive agriculture leads to homogenous landscapes and the disappearance of diverse flora, reducing food and nesting resources.

Pesticides and other pollutants can also affect pollinators directly (insecticides and fungicides) and indirectly (herbicides), which is why Parliament is highlighting the need to reduce the use of pesticides.

Particularly dangerous for honeybees are invasive alien species such as the yellow-legged hornet (*Vespa velutina*) and diseases such as parasites. Another factor is the changing climate with rising temperatures and extreme weather events.