While there is currently no EU-level strategy on desertification and land degradation as such, there is a range of policy strategies and instruments which can be relevant to combating desertification, notably the EU Soil Thematic Strategy, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as well as forest, water, biodiversity, climate change and cohesion policies. Support is also provided by research and the EU’s funding instrument for the environment and climate action (LIFE) programmes.

Desertification and land degradation are current and growing threats in the EU. While land degradation is affecting all EU countries, the risk of desertification is increasing and exacerbated by climate change, in particular in Southern Europe and in areas bordering the Black sea in Bulgaria and Romania. 13 EU Member States (including Italy) declared themselves as affected by desertification under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and are therefore bound to prepare national action plans.

EU funding programmes provide opportunities for Regions to invest in measures to adapt to climate change and prevent desertification. For instance, the European Regional Development Fund co-financed a project in Apulia to monitor desertification processes. Under the CAP’s second pillar support is available for farming practices which enhance soil quality for changing to more resistant and less water-intensive crops, and more resilient farming systems such as agro-forestry, as well as for preventing land abandonment and depopulation in rural areas.

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3 E.g. the definition of Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) aims to prevent soil degradation, while desertification is addressed in the Rural Development Programmes of some affected regions.
4 E.g. the EU Forest Strategy COM(2013) 659 foster the implementation of National Action Programmes against desertification by providing data on forest and soil protection.
5 E.g. the Commission proposal COM(2018) 337 for a Regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse for agricultural irrigation can help EU regions affected by water scarcity and droughts.
6 E.g. the Communication on an EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 (COM(2011) 244) and the Communication on Green Infrastructure (COM/2013/0249).
7 E.g. the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (COM (2013) 216) and mitigation policies like the Regulation (EU) 2018/841 on Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry have an impact on the mitigation and adaptation to desertification.
8 E.g. some Member States tackle desertification in their European Regional Development Fund operational programmes.
9 Several 7th Framework Programme and Horizon 2020 projects address desertification directly or indirectly.
10 Various LIFE projects on desertification and adaptation to climate change are being implemented.