



**BeeLife**  
European Beekeeping Coordination

**2023**

**ACTIVITY REPORT**

## Foreword

Jumping from the frying pan into the fire. This could be a good summary of 2023, in which, politically wise, we observed an abandoning of the Green Deal's ambitions and a weakening of the commitments of mainly conservative and neoliberal politicians. The hope one could feel in previous years became despair amongst civil society and farmers. The former experienced how their time, intelligence and efforts invested in policy procedures fell on deaf ears, while the latter, squeezed from low prices provoked by unfair trade agreements, channelled their anger against any measure, rendering them more climate resilient and less dependent.

In previous years, one could see dialogue, policies based on science and data, and the construction of virtuous measures assisting farmers and consumers in transitioning towards sustainable solutions. In contrast, we are now experiencing a quest against the planet, nature, and healthy food production. 2023 brought us a watering down of the Nature Restoration Law, therefore forgetting the concept of ecological intensification and agroecology, the application of nature-based solutions to agriculture. Policymakers, the industrial farming lobby and the agrifood industry backtracked on the Sustainable Use of Pesticide Regulation and based all hope of pesticide alternatives on new GMOs. And, when we thought things could not go worse, the Commission stepped back on its ambitions of implementing good farming practices such as crop rotation or maintenance of permanent pastures and landscape features as prerequisites to get public funding from CAP.

In addition, we observed how the Ukraine war was the perfect excuse to import agricultural products at irrisory low prices, contributing to drowning EU farmers of all sectors. Beekeepers selling in bulk face bankruptcy due to the cost increase and production loss following colony losses, which are still high. Honey packers also do not buy their honey, for they have the stock covered with "questionable" honey imports.

The 2023 brought some positive advances, with the revision of the EU Pollinator Initiative, which pushes further for promoting these essential animals for the planet's fertility. Surprisingly, pollinators are able to motivate positive thinking and introduce common sense in decision-making, but the policymakers do not link this with the need to reduce the pressure of stressors affecting them (e.g., intensive agricultural model, pesticide or fertiliser use, etc.).

On the positive side, European agencies improved their engagement by improving the risk assessment of chemicals potentially affecting them, with ECHA and EFSA publishing new methodologies for risk assessment of biocides and pesticides, respectively. Besides, much investment was dedicated to pollination ecology, economy, or ecotoxicology, with important projects advancing (e.g., EU Pollinator Hub, Insignia, PoshBee or B-Good) or calls being launched (at least 6 new calls for pollinator-related projects).

BeeLife continued promoting systemic change and dialogue, fostering a European environment of respect and fact-based decision-making. Beekeepers continue providing a service to society by constantly observing environmental quality. These observations and data, merged with those of scientists, provide a compelling weight of knowledge supporting the need to change our doing. However, what is the use of being more knowledgeable and having better data if policymakers get blinder and blinder?

**Noa Simon Delso**  
**Scientific Director - BeeLife**

# Introduction



**BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination** is an umbrella non-governmental organisation composed of beekeeper associations across Europe. It conducts political advocacy activities at the European level to improve policies impacting bees, pollinators and biodiversity, and through those planet's fertility and our own well-being. From its origins in the early 2010s, it has been guided by the principle that 'bees (and beekeepers) serve as the canary in the gold mine, sounding the alarm that something is wrong in the environment'. In 2023, BeeLife was composed of 25 beekeeping associations from around Europe, all joining together to strive for better environmental conditions for pollinators and thus nature and beekeeping to thrive.

## Member beekeeping associations



BeeLife strives to be a solution-oriented organisation, actively generating solutions for the pollution and environmental challenges provoking decay in pollinator health and threatening ecosystems. Its role in EU-funded projects has been growing since the mid-2010s, and in 2023, BeeLife was the leading partner in the development of the EU Pollinator Hub. This unique online platform integrates and centralises data related to pollinator health.

BeeLife represents the interests of beekeepers to halt and reverse the pollinator decline and improve the environmental conditions on which their own cultural and economic activities depend. Its values of cooperation, sustainability and the protection of pollinators and general biodiversity drive its work to reduce intensive pesticide use and other unsustainable European practices that threaten bee and pollinator health.

## Fields of action



BeeLife works in three pillars: Scientific Review, Advocacy, Project Planning, and Execution. The following section presents the conducted activities in 2023 regarding a diverse set of active dossiers related to the protection of bees and pollinators in Europe, including:

- The Common Agricultural Policy,
- The European Citizens' Initiative Save Bees and Farmers,
- New Genomic Techniques (NGTs),
- Pesticide Regulation,
- The EU Pollinator Initiative,
- The Nature Restoration Law.

It also recounts the main activities in the following EU-funded Projects:

- iPOL-ERA,
- The EU Pollinator Hub,
- B-THENET, and
- BeSafeBeeHoney.

The report concludes with other activities on public relations, events, general communications, and fundraising.

# Activities

## The Common Agricultural Policy

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a set of regulations and laws managing subsidies implemented by the European Union (EU) member states to support farmers and ensure food security and safety. It aims to provide a stable and sustainable food supply while promoting rural development, protecting the environment, and supporting farmers and rural communities. The CAP is one of the EU's oldest and most significant policies, accounting for a substantial portion of the EU budget. Over the years, it has undergone several reforms to address changing agricultural practices, environmental concerns, and societal needs.

Given its significant impact on the configurations of European agriculture and its effects on landscapes, bees, pollinators, biodiversity, and beekeeping activities, BeeLife has years of experience following the developments of the CAP. In 2023, its main activities surrounding the CAP have focused on the participation and representation of the environmental interests of its members in the Civil Dialogue Groups (CDGs) organised by the European Commission's Directorate General on Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI). CDGs cover the following subjects:

- Animal products: Honey and beekeeping products, cattle management, etc.
- Arable crops
- CAP
- Environment and climate change
- Direct payments and greening



## Save Bees and Farmers

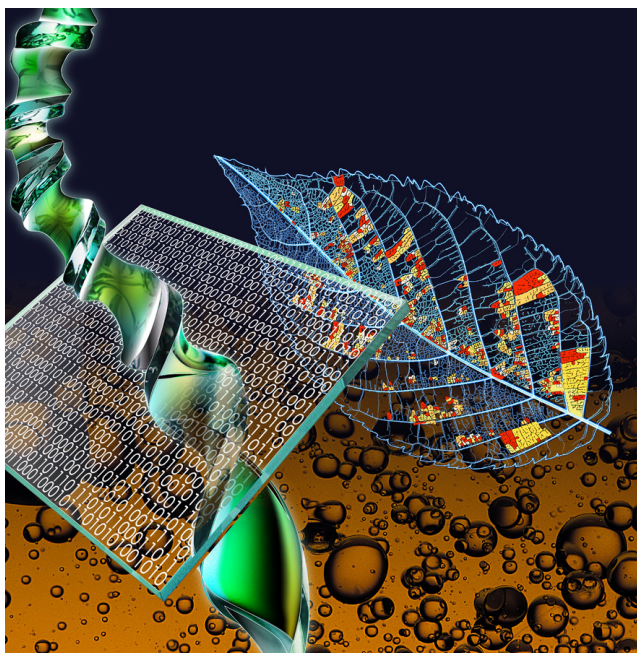
The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Save Bees and Farmers is a campaign that aims to address the decline in bee and pollinator populations in Europe by reducing the use of pesticides and accompanying farmers in the agroecological transition. The initiative calls for the phase-out of synthetic pesticides by 2035, the promotion of measures to recover biodiversity, in which agriculture becomes a vector of biodiversity recovery, and the support for farmers in the necessary transition towards agroecology. A coalition of environmental and beekeeping associations, along with over 200 supporters across Europe, launched the campaign in 2021 and has gained significant traction across Europe, with over 1,1 million signatures collected by 2023.

BeeLife is a member of the ECI team, providing scientific expertise, advocacy support, and mobilisation of its member associations across Europe. BeeLife has been involved in the campaign's organisation, contributing to drafting the initiative's text and promoting it among its members and the wider public. BeeLife has also provided scientific expertise on the impacts of pesticides on bee and pollinator populations and the benefits of alternative pest management methods.

BeeLife has been involved in the ECI Save Bees and Farmers campaign, helping raise awareness of pesticide use and its impact on bee and pollinator populations. The campaign has brought the issue to the forefront of public and political discourse, increasing pressure on policymakers to take action. In 2023, both campaigning and advocacy efforts continued. The organising members of the ECI participated in a hearing in the EU Parliament, representing over a million voices of citizens who signed the initiative. Members also held dialogues with the European Commission and met with the EU Environment Commissioner, Virginijus Sinkevicius. The Commission published an official response to the ECI in April 2023.



## New Genomic Techniques



Advancements in genetic engineering have allowed for more targeted modifications in the genome, leading to the development of a new generation of GMOs produced from New Genomic Techniques or NGTs. The term NGT is preferred by the industry and used by the European Commission, but civil society groups prefer the terms new GMOs or hidden GMOs for accuracy and transparency.

It's worth noting that the industry also uses terms such as "new breeding techniques" (NBT) or "precision breeding" to describe this technology. However, scientists have expressed concerns about the misleading nature of these claims.

Although hailed by industry and the European Commission as a promising route towards increased sustainability, because they could potentially create opportunities to introduce, for instance, drought-resistant or pest-resistant varieties faster in the market, NGTs still provoke severe doubts among the scientific community and environmental organisations. Concerns over NGTs originate, among other circumstances, because the industry is mainly using this technology to further generate herbicide-tolerant varieties. This will increasingly make farmers dependent on herbicides and will not improve the pollution of our food and environment.

In response to the concerns surrounding NGTs and the European Commission's proposal to deregulate their use partially yet substantially, BeeLife has conducted several activities. In 2023, the team initiated a scientific-technical dossier, which served as the basis of the advocacy work, and drafted two scientific articles. First is an independent article with scientific and political arguments on the status of NGTs and their risks to pollinators. A legal analysis article also argues that the deregulation of NGTs clashes with legal commitments and fundamental European legislation.

BeeLife also conducted advocacy activities with the European Parliament, the European Commission and Member States. Some of these activities were conducted with other environmental organisations, including Greenpeace and Save the Bees and Farmers Coalition members.

In a framework of political debate based on diverging scientific arguments and analyses performed by European and national safety agencies, the work will continue in 2024.

# Pesticide Regulation

## Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (SUR)

The Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (SUR) bill was introduced in June 2022 with ambitious goals in line with general sustainability goals in Europe, framed within the Green Deal. The bill included binding targets for pesticide reduction and crop-specific rules for Integrated Pest Management (IPM). BeeLife has dedicated years to campaigning and advocating for solid measures for pesticide use reduction and the proper implementation of IPM to tackle the ecological and public health issues linked to intensive pesticide use. Indeed, field studies using bees as biomonitoring tools do not show a positive picture.

Collaborations with other environmental organisations and standalone efforts have been dedicated to advocating for an ambitious and well-funded SUR. 2023 saw a slow yet steady decline of support from Members of the European Parliament regarding the SUR. BeeLife and its members have joined efforts with partner organisations, including BirdLife Europe and Central Asia, Corporate Europe Observatory, Eco Hvar Croatia, Ecologistas en Acción, Friends of the Earth Europe, GLOBAL 2000, Friends of the Earth Austria, IFOAM Organics Europe, Nature et Progrès, PAN Europe, and PAN Germany.

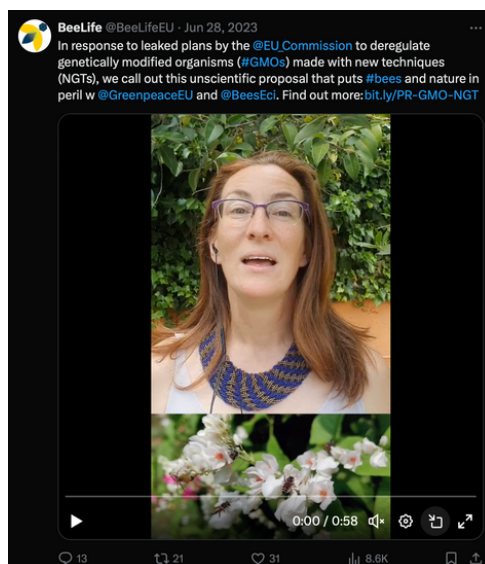
BeeLife advocated through its network and campaigned against scrapping vital elements in the SUR bill to prevent political developments from maintaining a status quo of environmental pollution provoked by intensive pesticide use. BeeLife created press releases, targeted social media campaigns, customisable letters, promotional material, and video productions to support its direct advocacy activities.



### DRONES WITHIN THE SUR

What you may have heard...	What it is in fact...
Not a real aerial spraying – no need of derogation	Aerial spraying – Ban should stay the rule
Small and precise	Bigger than expected, not so precise and sometimes high risk of drift.
Less pesticides	Depending on the material and the crop may require added terrestrial spraying sessions to be effective
Easy to use	Creating more dependence for the farmers as you need a special licence
"Swarm spraying" like a game – photo montage	Small helicopter used for spraying

www.bee-life.eu





## Scientific-Regulatory work: OECD - Test *Osmia* to be standardised

In an ever-constructive philosophy to enable tools for improved chemical risk assessment, Noa Simon, Scientific Director at BeeLife, joined APITOX independent researchers in the submission of a new OECD test guideline for the estimation of chronic toxicity of *Osmia* bees (a solitary bee species) to pesticides. These researchers have been perfecting and ring-testing the protocol for some years, and the methodology is ready to become an international standard, so countries globally can include the test in their Environmental Risk Assessment of chemicals.

### Scientific work:

- Study about the **abuse of emergency authorisations of pesticides**

BeeLife members communicated abuse at the national level of the emergency authorisation of banned uses of pesticides. Following this, a report analysing the situation and the legal background was published (Bee emergency call) in collaboration with our member ROMAPIS, and partner NGOs PAN-Europe and Client Earth. However, we were curious about the situation in different EU Member States, so we teamed up with the researchers at the University of Torino to evaluate the situation. The publication will see the light in 2024, and we hope to raise awareness about this source of risk within the scientific community.

- Study about a **regulatory analysis** for the inclusion of insect pollinators in **pesticide** authorisation

With the assistance of our stagiaire, Charlotte Ehrmann, we analysed the legislation and the necessary modifications in the regulatory texts in case insect pollinators need to be integrated into the pesticide authorisation framework. Hopefully, the publication will be published in 2024.

Interactions with institutions:

- EFSA Stakeholder Forum

BeeLife actively collaborates with EFSA to bring the field observations of beekeepers into the safety risk assessment regulatory process. This is done following various pathways, via the EFSA Stakeholder Forum, which meets on several occasions, the last being 9-10 Nov 2023 in Brussels. Additionally, the work and exchanges within the EU Bee Partnership continued in 2023, where the stakeholders experienced and contributed to the EU Pollinator Hub development (see later).

Furthermore, in 2023 EFSA's expert group proposed a new version of the Bee Guidance Document, the pesticide risk assessment (RA) methodology performed within the Environmental RA framework of pesticide authorisations. BeeLife and other stakeholders participated in several consultations and info sessions organised until its accomplishment. The EU member states defined in 2022 the level of safety, namely setting as acceptable that pesticide exposure affects up to 10% of colonies exposed to them. The ball goes back into the roof of EU member states, who will need to change three Regulations for the new methodology of RA of pesticides on bees to be enforced.

- ECHA - Biocides. In 2023, the ECHA also developed a RA methodology for biocides on bees and insect pollinators. BeeLife followed the development, although less intensive than what was done for EFSA. All in all, European agencies EFSA and ECHA collaborate to promote a coherent approach in the RA of chemicals, and EFSA had their methodology more advanced.

## Nature Restoration Law

In the summer of 2022, the Commission submitted its Nature Restoration Law (NRL) proposal to ensure that the damage done to European nature is repaired and that nature is restored. Since then, members of Parliament representing European citizens and EU member states have been working and debating the proposal.

European beekeepers, as sentinels of the environmental quality via the observation of their colonies, could not find a more needed law. They are not only experiencing unsustainable winter colony losses year after year, but are also losing production capacity due to flower depletion and weather events. The field situation is catastrophic, for beekeepers, but also wild pollinators. Coherently, science is showing similar worrying trends for the wild fauna. Despite the efforts, insect populations continue to decline, and  $\frac{1}{3}$  are threatened, putting pollination of crops and wild flora at risk, threatening food security, biodiversity maintenance and soil vegetal coverage as mentioned in the **IPBES report** dedicated to pollination.

BeeLife followed this dossier as pollinators are an inherent part of the Law, and the Law aims to affect landscape richness and composition. That is why BeeLife published articles, prepared letters for MEP and supported the joint campaign with other environmental NGOs.

# Projects

## IPoL-ERA

The IPoL-ERA project aimed at creating a roadmap towards integrating insect pollinators into a systems-based approach to pesticide RA. From the current framework in which the risk of one pesticide use is evaluated in one animal species, the roadmap envisages the steps to be followed until integration of pesticide RA considering many coexisting pesticides in their biological (i.e., considering landscape, weather, etc.) and socio-economic context (i.e., considering the needs of several stakeholders). BeeLife, being an expert in the European regulatory process, stakeholder integration and having a holistic perspective of pesticide authorisation, contributed to the regulatory and multi-actor analyses, co-defining and completing the roadmap strategy and action plan.

## EU Pollinator Hub

The EU Pollinator Hub is a new milestone in improving conditions for pollinators and all relevant European stakeholders. It features an online collective approach to sharing harmonised and standardised data on pollinators to monitor their health and target actions to protect them.

The EU Pollinator Hub is a unique online platform that integrates and centralises data related to pollinators, bees, beekeeping, and other relevant data for the agricultural sector. It is the first online tool to empower a vast community of stakeholders gathering and requiring data related to pollinator health.

BeeLife develops the EU Pollinator Hub in collaboration with ZIP Solutions - a Slovenian SME specialised in digital solutions related to bees and beekeeping-, Visualife -an Austrian data quality management expert- and CRA-Wallonie - Belgian agronomical research centre- dealing with data standardisation, validation, processing and visualisation.

The EU Pollinator Hub has passed through several phases of development. Initially, The Bee Hub was created as a Proof of Concept. The Bee Hub introduced a Big Data approach to improve our understanding of European pollinator diversity and threats. It made its first public launch in 2019. This was the first step in developing a platform aiming to include any relevant data linked to pollinators, especially bees. This work was completed within The Internet of Bees Project (IoBee).

The Proof of Concept continued to be developed into a prototype-building phase: the EU Bee Partnership Prototype Platform. It was finalised during the first semester of 2020 with the support of the European Food Safety Authority. The prototype expanded its data sources, enriching the collaborative nature of the platform for a better future for pollinators.

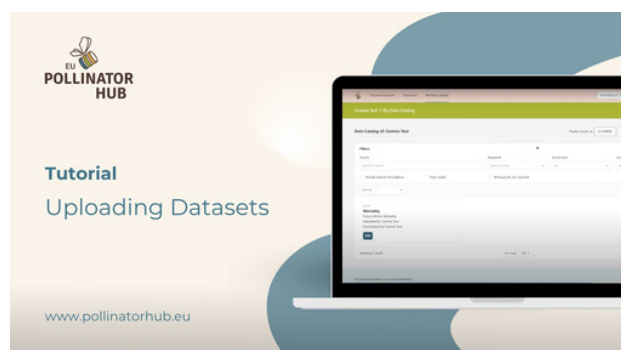
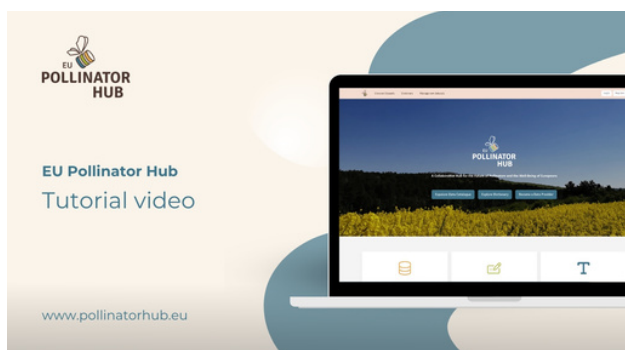
Currently, the EU Pollinator Hub is in the third stage of development, bringing the platform to an operational and publicly accessible state in 2024.

The EU Pollinator Hub is an online tool for all matters related to pollinator data. It is building a vast community of data providers and users during its development and future operation. The main goal of the EU Pollinator Hub is not only to develop an online platform but to boost all stakeholders in pollinator health to join together and unleash the power of their data by sharing and operating their datasets with the vast library available in the Hub. The platform aims to be a valuable and effective data-gathering and sharing tool in which beekeepers, monitoring device producers, naturalists and research centres reach new levels of cooperation.

Creating a community for pollinator data requires trust-building. Trust in the platform that facilitates this work but also trust in partners. This is why, throughout all development stages of the platform, consortium partners led by BeeLife, along with the EU Bee Partnership, organise workshops and meetings. These events are bringing data providers and users from various sectors together. The hub aims to create a vast and diverse community surrounding pollinator data and health.



EU  
**POLLINATOR  
HUB**



## EU Pollinator Hub Online Training Sessions

In addition to primary development efforts, BeeLife and its partners held four online training sessions that covered various of the working functionalities of the platform.

- Session 1: Using the Translation Tool in the EU Pollinator Hub
- Session 2: Uploading Datasets to the EU Pollinator Hub
- Session 3: Using Data in the EU Pollinator Hub
- Session 4: Making the Most of My Data in the EU Pollinator Hub



**BeeLife**  
European Beekeeping Coordination

**EU POLLINATOR HUB  
ONLINE TRAINING SESSION  
USING THE DICTIONARY IN  
THE EU POLLINATOR HUB**

**TIME**  
2-3:30PM  
(CET, Brussels time)

**DATE**  
September 21

**FREE REGISTRATION**  
Online (via Zoom)

Learn more about the developing platform the EU Pollinator Hub and its dictionary tool, creating a vast database for all pollinator-related matters including beekeeping terminology, land use, and more!

**REGISTER HERE:** <https://bit.ly/registeronlinetraining>

## B-THENET

The B-THENET Thematic Network aims at disseminating good beekeeping practices throughout Europe, sharing knowledge ready to be put into practice while fostering innovation and digitalisation. It implements a multi-actor (MA) approach in which BeeLife is in charge of stakeholder engagement to increase the sustainability of the EU beekeeping sector. The project started in September 2022 and will run for 4 years.

BeeLife's role in the B-THENET is to screen European and national projects for ready-to-apply practices and innovations. In 2023, a thorough analysis was performed, identifying European research projects aiming to improve bee health and the quality of beekeeping products. More than 103 million Euros have been spent since 2006, from which over 28 million Euros rendered exploitable results targeted to beekeepers, queen breeders, farmers, citizens, laboratories specialised in food products, researchers, veterinarians and farm advisors, national control authorities and decision-makers, and NGOs.

Three events were organised in 2023, one around the problem of honey fraud (see below Event on the World Bee Day) and the other around the accessibility of veterinary products to beekeepers, mainly for varroa control. One was done in July in Bucharest, in collaboration with ROMAPIS, and more than 50 participants followed the debate. The second was performed during the EU Pollinator Week, in November, titled "Availability of VMPs for use in beekeeping in the EU", and brought together European-level stakeholders. The field situation of beekeepers is often tricky, as very few products exist for varroa control, many already showing resistance.

## BeSafeBeeHoney

BeSafeBeeHoney, is a COST Action that brings together distinct expertise – chemistry, biology, ecology, veterinary, beekeeping, agrarian engineering, nutrition, economy, and policy to deliver breakthrough scientific developments to honey bee health and beekeeping products. A new network has been established to support and improve honeybee colonies. It will bring together beekeeping stakeholders from around the world to collaborate on innovative solutions in the following areas:

- The nutritional and medicinal properties of honey and other bee products
- The impact of abiotic stressors and environmental contaminants on bee colonies, using hive products as indicators
- The diseases and biotic stressors that pose a threat to honeybee colonies
- The role of honeybees as pollinators in agriculture and the consequences of lost colonies for agrarian ecosystems
- Policy research and market analysis related to beekeeping activities.

BeeLife is part of this network and collaborates by proposing data models for common literature research and data gathering and proposes activities that profit from the vast international network created by this action.

# Public relations & events

In addition to its different dossiers, BeeLife organised various events, actively participated in different forums relevant to public relations, and engaged with valuable partners.

## The EU Pollinator Week 2023

In collaboration with Members of European Parliament (MEPs) Martin Hojsik, Benoit Biteau, Anja Hazekamp, Nicolae Ștefănuță, and Hannes Heide, BeeLife organised the EU Pollinator Week this year. The hybrid event took place in Brussels and online. It featured three days of intense discussions with sessions ranging from high-level political and scientific conferences to sessions on the beekeeping sector's challenges.

The European Pollinator Week has been taking place annually at the European Parliament since 2012. This event brings together representatives from various institutions and sectors related to pollinators and beekeeping, including farmers, NGOs, and scientists. They aim to discuss challenges related to pollinators and beekeeping and propose recommendations for policymakers. The event also helps raise awareness and keep pollinator health and beekeeping on the European agenda.

At the eleventh edition of the European Pollinator Week, BeeLife and co-organisers emphasised the need for coherent policies to ensure a healthy future for both food security and biodiversity. The discussions addressed various issues such as the use of pesticides, New Genomic Techniques (NGTs), agroecology, the Nature Restoration Law, as well as beekeeping products labelling and traceability.

The conference also highlighted the gaps and overlooked elements in European policies and strategies to safeguard pollinators. These regulations are often controversial, as with issues related to bees and pollinators.

# Time to **bee** coherent for a buzzing future

**EU Pollinator Week 2023 28-30 November**  
**#EUPollinators**



# Beekeeping: An Agricultural Sector Under Threat - Event at the European Parliament

On May 23, 2023, a conference titled "Beekeeping: An agricultural sector under threat" was hosted by MEPs Juozas Olekas (S&D, Lithuania) and Franc Bogovič (EPP, Slovenia) in partnership with BeeLife, The honey Group of Copa-Cogeca and the EPFA to mark World Bee Day, which takes place on the 20th of May each year. This event was held during a busy week in the political arena, with key legislative texts such as the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (SUR) being discussed and the Natural Restoration Law (NRL) being voted on. The conference counted on the support of the B-THENET project and summoned several stakeholders around honey fraud, namely decision-makers and control authorities, beekeepers, honey conditioners, consumer organisations and NGOs. The conference raised the issue that European beekeepers face unfair competition in the international market, leading to unrealistic prices due to the commercialisation of dubious products.

## Participation in fora

BeeLife actively participated in key European and international fora related to the health of pollinators providing presentations or scientific lectures. These events included:

- Apimondia Chile
- University of Bologna GTI (IT)
- Catholic University of Louvain Course Toxicology (BE)
- Honey Bee Watch Seminar
- University of Burgos (ES)

Presentations and discussions were also organised by invitation of several BeeLife members:

- The Federation of Irish Beekeepers Associations (FIBKA) Summer School
- ROMAPIS, activity within their project AGROAPIS (Romania)
- CARI Focus Sessions (Belgium)
- Coordinadora Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos (COAG) Annual meeting (Spain)

Finally, BeeLife organised two online info sessions for members as a crash course on the latest developments across the European political landscape in relation to the protection of pollinators.



## Fundraising

As a non-profit organisation, BeeLife actively engages in fundraising and donation agreements with the private sector within Corporate Responsibility Activities and accepts donations from associations and individuals. These donations help continue and improve its activities to protect pollinators. Donations are accepted while securing the complete independence that BeeLife requires to work to fulfil its mission to improve environmental conditions for pollinators to thrive and secure properly functioning ecosystems in the future.

In 2023, BeeLife received donations and other support from:

- Valmont Cosmetics
- Lorella Tamberi Canal
- Chimiver

BeeLife is also a nonprofit partner of 1% for the Planet, a global organisation leading a network of businesses, nonprofits and individuals working together for a healthy planet. BeeLife is also a nonprofit partner of Benevity.





# Contact us



Phone Number  
**+32 (0) 486 973 920**



Email Address  
**info@bee-life.eu**