

Open Regional Fund for South-East Europe – Implementation of Biodiversity Agreements

The challenge

South-East Europe is exceptionally rich in terms of biodiversity and is home to a large number of ecosystems that range from Mediterranean coastal zones and river, forest and steppe areas, right through to mountainous Alpine regions. Many of the animal and plant species that are found here are endemic – meaning that they are unique to this region. As a consequence, the plants and animals that have been identified in the Western Balkans so far have a crucial role to play in the preservation of biodiversity. However, protection of natural resources is inadequate. Biodiversity aspects are rarely taken into account when focal points of development are specified and development plans are drawn up – despite the fact that biological diversity provides foods, helps to maintain air and water quality, and is also of great socio-cultural and economic value (in the form of local products and tourism potential, for example)

Biodiversity is under serious threat in rural areas and in mountainous, forest and coastal areas in particular. This is largely due to inappropriate land use, sprawl and invasive building, the construction of infrastructure, excessive demands on soils, the intensification or abandoning of agriculture, and climate change. There are many national borders in South-East Europe that run through ecosystems and regions of high ecological value. The consequence of this is the necessity and also the opportunity to protect and use these common resources sustainably by means of cross-border regional cooperation.

The countries in the region share the goal of EU accession. However, adaptation to the EU's complex environmental legislation is a major challenge. In the context of biodiversity, this means that South-East European countries have to implement the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive and the EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy. All the countries in the Western Balkans have also undertaken to protect biodiversity within the framework of the international Convention on Biological Diversity.

Project name	Open Regional Fund for South East Europe - Implementation of Biodiversity Agreements
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Countries	Accession countries in South-East Europe
Lead executing agency	Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
Duration	2015 - 2021
Budget	6 million Euros

Goal

Regional cooperation between Western Balkan states is strengthened with regard to fulfilling international and, in particular, EU-relevant obligations concerning the preservation of biodiversity.

Our approach

The Open Regional Fund for South-East Europe – Biodiversity supports regional projects that aim to implement the EU Biodiversity Strategy by means of intensified regional cooperation. The project plans and implements these measures jointly with partners from South-East Europe. As well as cooperating with the relevant state bodies responsible for nature conservation, biodiversity and environmental management, the project works with the authorities responsible for tourism, agriculture, forestry, energy and finance, and with civil-society organisations and relevant networks in the region. In addition, the project fosters networking and partnerships with regional and bilateral GIZ projects and with international organisations and initiatives.



Left to right:
Bosnian lily; traditional livestock farming.

Results

These contacts help to ensure greater efficiency and better coordination of the measures that are implemented; they support the implementation of new strategies to anchor the biodiversity concept at political and institutional levels.

The project involves all of the cooperation countries in South-East Europe in achieving progress in the following main measures:

- **Information management and reporting:** As part of this measure, the project is strengthening the partners in implementing reporting that is in conformity with the Biodiversity Convention and other EU requirements (for example, with regard to the Natura 2000 network).
- **Assessing and evaluating ecosystem services:** This measure aims to determine and disseminate the benefit of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the context of development planning in certain target sectors (such as tourism and agriculture) with the goal of improving future decision-making processes.
- **NGO platform for conserving biodiversity:** The networking of civil-society organisations that work on the issue of biodiversity is to be improved by this measure. The project also assists organisations with defining the orientation of regional awareness campaigns.
- **Cross-border ecosystem management:** As part of this measure, cross-border cooperation for the conservation and joint use of natural resources in the Sharr/Sar Planina/Korab-Koritnik region (Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania) is being strengthened.
- **Biodiversity Task Force:** This measure supports the Biodiversity Task Force, an international advisory body of the regional working group on the environment, in its task of promoting the biodiversity conservation as an issue within the EU integration process.
- Regional biodiversity task force within the Regional Council of Cooperation led Regional Working Group on Environment initiated
- Regional Network of qualified biodiversity-relevant Civil-Society Organisations (BioNET) established
- Networking of biodiversity experts in the region including support of emerging nature conservation network (BalkaNatureNet)
- Baseline assessments of biodiversity information management and reporting (BIMR) in all SEE countries developed underpinning regional guidelines for improved systems including gender aspects
- Series of training on concept of ecosystem services assessment and valuation to increase capacities of resource persons from governmental and non-governmental organisations
- Regional pilot ecosystem service case studies in cross-border areas designed and launched
- Parliamentary groups and committees in the region connected to raise awareness and knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services
- Promotion of inclusion of biodiversity aspects in regional relevant sector policy processes and initiatives (e.g. tourism, renewable energy, forestry, agrobiodiversity)
- Launching support for implementation of Joint Vision of the biodiversity hotspot in the Sharr Mountain Transboundary Ecosystem Area at local, national and regional level
- Formalized cooperation partnerships with international biodiversity-relevant organisations to address jointly regional priorities for sustainable results
- Strengthening regional knowledge and capacity to respond to CBD and EU relevant biodiversity targets, instruments and processes (e.g. compliance with Aichi-Targets, Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services)

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