From global commitments to regional action – biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration in the Western Balkans

Policy framework

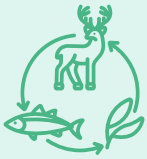
The Western Balkans is recognised as one of Europe's richest biodiversity regions, supporting unique species, valuable habitats and diverse ecosystems that underpin human well-being, climate resilience and sustainable development. However, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, climate change, and increasing pressures on natural resources continue to threaten the region's natural capital.

This brochure presents the key international, European Union and regional policy frameworks that guide biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration in the Western Balkans. It explains how global commitments are translated into EU policies and further reflected in regional initiatives under the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, including the Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 and the Western Balkans Six Forest Landscape Restoration Plan.

The information within aims to provide decision-makers, practitioners and stakeholders with a concise guide to the policy landscape, while highlighting the synergies between biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, climate action and sustainable development across the Western Balkans.

International Frameworks

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)



The CBD is the principal international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. Recognising that healthy ecosystems support human well-being, climate resilience and sustainable development, the CBD promotes action to conserve species, habitats and ecosystem functions, restore degraded ecosystems, reduce pressures on biodiversity, and integrate biodiversity considerations across sectors and policies.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF)

Adopted under the CBD, the KMGBF serves as a global roadmap to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, and place nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and the planet.

Key biodiversity and ecosystem conservation targets include:

- conserving at least **30% of terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine areas** through effectively managed and ecologically representative protected and conserved areas (Target 3);
- restoring at least **30% of degraded terrestrial, inland water and marine ecosystems**, to strengthen ecosystem functionality and resilience (Target 2);
- reducing threats to biodiversity and preventing the loss of species, through actions such as improving habitat conservation and restoration (Targets 4 and 6);
- ensuring the sustainable management of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and other production sectors while maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services (Target 10);
- enhancing **ecological connectivity** and the integrity of natural ecosystems to support species populations and ecosystem health;

» increasing the contribution of nature to climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster-risk reduction through **Nature-based Solutions** and ecosystem restoration (Target 8);
» mobilising substantially increased financial resources for biodiversity conservation and restoration (Target 19).

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Provides the global framework that guides international efforts to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts, serving as the foundation for cooperation among countries on climate action.

The Paris Agreement

Adopted under the UNFCCC, this agreement aims to limit the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, while strengthening resilience and aligning financial flows with low-emission, climate-resilient development. Healthy ecosystems are increasingly recognised as essential climate solutions because they store carbon, reduce climate risks, and strengthen resilience.

Key action areas include:

» reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing carbon sinks,
» strengthening climate change adaptation and resilience,
» promoting Nature-based Solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation,
» supporting ecosystem-based adaptation in vulnerable communities,
» mobilising climate finance and strengthening international cooperation.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Promotes sustainable land management and ecosystem restoration, supporting the achievement of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).

Key action areas include:

- preventing and reducing land degradation,
- restoring degraded land, forests, grasslands and wetlands,
- achieving LDN by balancing degradation and restoration,
- improving drought resilience and sustainable water management,
- strengthening sustainable land-use planning and governance.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)

Provides the international framework for reducing disaster risks and building resilience. Nature-based Solutions and ecosystem restoration contribute directly to reducing hazards such as floods, droughts, wildfires and landslides.

Key priorities include:

- understanding disaster risk through improved data, monitoring and assessment,
- strengthening disaster-risk governance and institutional coordination,
- investing in disaster-risk reduction and resilient infrastructure,
- restoring and managing ecosystems to reduce exposure and vulnerability,
- enhancing preparedness, recovery and "Build Back Better" approaches following disasters.

Tara Canyon, Montenegro
© iStock: Erika Parfenova

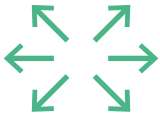
European Union Biodiversity Protection and Ecosystem Restoration Framework

In recent years, the European Union has moved to recognise environmental resilience, including ecosystem conservation and restoration, as an essential part of its sustainability agenda.

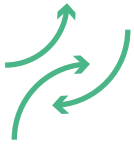
The European Green Deal, adopted in 2019, established a roadmap towards climate neutrality, resource efficiency and a healthy environment, emphasising that healthy ecosystems are crucial for economic resilience, food and water security, climate adaptation and the well-being of citizens.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is considered a core element of this framework and outlines the Union's key biodiversity objectives.

Flagship initiatives under this strategy include:

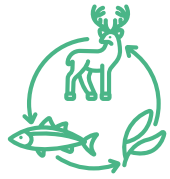


expanding of protected areas to **30%** **of EU land and seas**



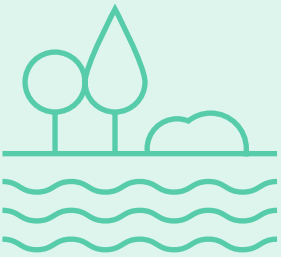
improving ecological connectivity

restoring at least **20%** **of degraded ecosystems by 2030**



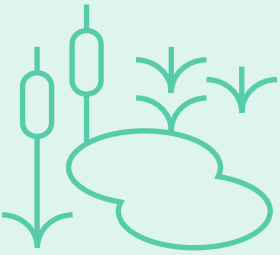
strengthening biodiversity integration across sectors including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, infrastructure and land-use planning.

Highlights from the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – later reflected in the **EU Nature Restoration Regulation**



Rivers
Restoring at least 25,000 km of rivers in the EU to free-flowing rivers.

Forests
Planting 3 billion additional trees following strict ecological and biodiversity principles.



Wetlands & Peatlands
Restoring and rewetting drained peatlands, particularly those used for agriculture or extraction.

Urban Spaces
Ensuring no net loss of green urban space by 2030, a steady increase thereafter, and a minimum of 10% tree canopy cover in European cities, towns, and suburbs.

Pollinators
Legally binding obligations to reverse the decline of bee, butterfly, and other pollinator populations by 2030, supported by regular monitoring.

EU Nature Restoration Regulation

National Restoration Plans

Birds and Habitats Directives

Natura 2000 network

The adoption of the **EU Nature Restoration Regulation** marks a significant legislative development in this regard, introducing legally binding restoration targets with defined timelines for the first time at the European Union level, with the objective of restoring at least 20% of EU land and sea areas by 2030 and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. Member States are required to develop their first **National Restoration Plans** by September 2027, identifying restoration priorities, implementation measures, stakeholder engagement, monitoring approaches and financing needs to secure clear pathways for implementation and contribution to the Regulation's overall provisions.

The Nature Restoration Regulation complements, rather than replaces, the existing EU nature *acquis*, with the **Birds Directive** and **Habitats Directive** at the core of Europe's environmental legislative framework. Together, these directives establish the Natura 2000 network, the EU's coordinated network of protected areas designed to protect and conserve the Union's most valuable habitats and species. While the **Natura 2000 network** remains the foundation of European nature conservation, the EU Nature Restoration Regulation adds concrete timelines for improving conditions of habitats and species, and for broader landscape-scale restoration tasks.

EU Forest Strategy for 2030

European Water Resilience Strategy and **Water Framework Directive**

Marine Strategy Framework Directive

Common Agricultural Policy

EU Deforestation Regulation

This EU biodiversity framework is further supported by complementary initiatives across forests, soils, water, oceans, and environmental governance. Examples include the **EU Forest Strategy for 2030**, the **European Water Resilience Strategy**, the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive**, the **Water Framework Directive** and the **Common Agricultural Policy**, which provide a basis for more coordinated and coherent action across sectors and ecosystems in Europe. The **EU Deforestation Regulation** further expands these efforts by introducing due diligence requirements to ensure that relevant commodities placed on the EU market are not linked to deforestation or forest degradation elsewhere in the world.

The transition towards a more integrated approach to nature provides opportunities to connect biodiversity objectives with wider economic and development priorities, including sustainable agriculture, forestry, water management, spatial planning and investments. To meet the ambitions of the EU's environmental framework, strengthening pathways for implementation will become increasingly important in the near future.

This includes recognising the value of healthy ecosystems for socio-economic actors, and facilitating collaboration between authorities, stakeholders, and citizens to ensure environmental considerations are effectively and consistently integrated into sectoral approaches, practices, and priorities across Europe.

Green Agenda for the Western Balkans – Pillar 5: Protection of Nature and Biodiversity

The **Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB)** translates global and EU commitments into regional action. Its Pillar 5: Protection of Nature and Biodiversity, focuses on expanding protected areas and improving their management effectiveness, restoring degraded terrestrial, freshwater, forest and marine ecosystems, strengthening ecological connectivity, enhancing biodiversity monitoring, and integrating Nature-based Solutions into development planning.

This pillar also supports alignment with the EU environmental *acquis*, including the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the Nature Restoration Regulation, and the Natura 2000 network as established under the Birds and Habitats Directives.

Key objectives include:

expanding and effectively managing protected areas

restoring degraded ecosystems at scale

improving ecological connectivity through green infrastructure and protected area networks

promoting Nature-based Solutions for climate adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction

strengthening harmonised biodiversity monitoring, data collection and evidence-based decision-making

integrating biodiversity considerations into economic planning, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, and tourism

For the Western Balkan Six (WB6), alignment with **Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate Change)** of the EU *acquis* is a key accession requirement.

Key priorities include:

- **transposing EU nature and biodiversity legislation into relevant law on domestic level,**
- **strengthening protected area management and ecological networks,**
- **implementing ecosystem restoration measures,**
- **improving biodiversity monitoring and reporting systems,**
- **integrating environmental considerations into sectoral policies and investment planning.**

Pillar 5 of the GAWB fosters regional ambitions of **conserving 30% of land, inland waters and seas, restoring at least 30% of degraded ecosystems,** improving the conservation status of threatened species, increasing ecosystem resilience, and strengthening regional cooperation on nature conservation and ecosystem management.

The core elements of Pillar 5 are the Western Balkan Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 and Western Balkan Six Forest Landscape Restoration Plan 2030. These provide a shared regional framework for biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, sustainable use of natural resources, and refer to supporting instruments and cross-cutting considerations.

The approach of these frameworks is not to establish a single model to be applied uniformly across WB6 and all landscape types. Instead, their value lies in providing a shared framework, a common planning logic, comparable criteria and the possibility of coordination, while fully respecting the differences between domestic levels, ecosystems and landscapes.

Western Balkans Six Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030

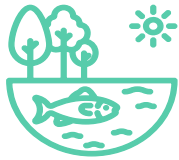
The ambition of the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 (BSP 2030)* is clear: the region must conserve its most important sites, ecosystems, and species, and transform the way key sectors operate by establishing strong enabling conditions that make implementation possible and sustainable. The WB6 BSP 2030 provides a structured framework built around five strategic goals, outlined below, which together address the key dimensions of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in the WB6.

* BSP 2030 was prepared by IUCN, with the engagement of the Biodiversity Task Force for the Western Balkans and its Thematic Groups on Ecosystem Restoration and Biodiversity Conservation, as part of the Greening the Western Balkans project, financially supported by International Partnerships Austria.

Goal 1

Ensure effective, equitable and representative area-based conservation

Ensure that by 2030, at least 30% of terrestrial and marine areas in the WB6 are effectively conserved, with at least 10% under strict protection, prioritising areas of high biodiversity value and those critical for ecosystem functions and climate resilience.



Goal 2

Restore and enhance ecosystem integrity and resilience

By 2030, initiate large-scale ecosystem restoration across the WB6, ensuring that at least 20% of degraded terrestrial, inland water, marine, and coastal ecosystems undergo effective restoration, in line with opportunity assessments at the domestic and regional levels.

Goal 3
Halt species loss and strengthen conservation of threatened species

Prevent species extinctions, support recovery of threatened species, and improve the conservation status and trend of at least 30% of those currently at risk.

Black-headed yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava feldegg*)
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Goal 4
Integrate biodiversity into sectors and policies

Ensure that biodiversity considerations are fully integrated into WB6 policies, planning, and decision-making across key sectors, including agriculture, forestry, energy, water management, spatial planning, and infrastructure.

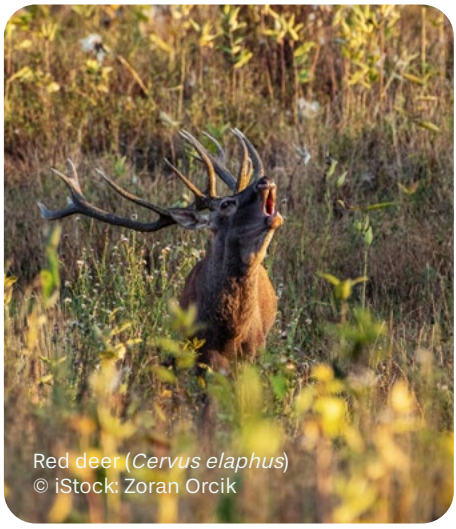
Goal 5
Advance biodiversity action through knowledge, governance, and finance

Strengthen biodiversity governance, data systems, knowledge sharing, and financial resources at all levels of governance to enable inclusive, effective, and accountable implementation and reporting.

Western Balkan Six Forest Landscape Restoration Plan

The WB6 Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) Plan* offers a regional framework for restoring degraded forest landscapes, rebuilding ecosystem integrity, strengthening climate resilience, and enhancing ecosystem services to improve human well-being and secure nature resilience. It identifies priority sites for restoration through a comprehensive Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report (ROAR) and sets measurable targets for biodiversity gains and ecosystem resilience.

* FLR Plan was prepared by IUCN, with the engagement of the Biodiversity Task Force for the Western Balkans and its Thematic Groups on Ecosystem Restoration and Biodiversity Conservation, as part of the ADAPT 2.0: Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in the Western Balkans project supported by Sweden.



Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*)
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The WB6 FLR plan cannot be based on the forestry sector alone, but requires the connection of several areas that directly shape the condition, functions and future resilience of forest and forest-related landscapes:

- **landscape character and landscape quality objectives in planning,**
- **forestry and sustainable forest management,**
- **climate action and adaptation,**
- **biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration,**
- **soil, drought and land resilience,**
- **water and flood risk management, and**
- **civil protection and disaster risk governance.**

The shared mission for the Western Balkans by 2030 is to shift away from fragmented, sectoral and largely reactive responses to climate and environmental pressures, toward integrated, landscape-based and preventive action that places forest and forest-related landscapes at the core of regional resilience.

Goal 1

Build capacities and enabling conditions for landscape-based FLR

Establish the planning, regulatory, institutional, data, and technical preconditions needed to ensure FLR is implemented in a coordinated and spatially differentiated way across the Western Balkans.

Goal 2

Restore resilient, connected, and climate-adaptive forest- and forest-related landscapes

Increase resiliency of forest landscapes by securing FLR interventions that improve ecological functionality, biodiversity, connectivity, soil and water regulation, climate resilience, and DRR in priority forest- and forest-related landscapes.

Goal 3

Secure resilient and diversified funding for FLR

Shift restoration away from fragmented, short-term, and donor-dependent financing toward a more stable FLR financing model that combines domestic public finance, international support, private investment, and locally relevant incentive mechanisms.

Goal 4

Strengthen regional cooperation and coordinated FLR implementation

Boost regional cooperation in preparing and implementing FLR initiatives, knowledge exchange, monitoring and data gathering in a coherent and coordinated manner, while allowing flexible implementation models adapted to the different political, institutional, and territorial contexts in the WB6.

Goal 5

Ensure inclusive participation, local stewardship, and fair benefit-sharing in FLR in the Western Balkans

Ensure that the WB6 FLR is socially legitimate and locally grounded by involving communities, landowners, land users, civil society, academia, and the private sector in planning, implementation, monitoring, and benefit-sharing.

Synergies between international, EU and Western Balkan frameworks

Shared 30x30 conservation ambition (target aiming to protect and effectively manage at least 30% of the world's land, inland waters, and coastal and marine areas by 2030) under the KMGBF, EU Biodiversity Strategy and WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030.

Common focus on ecosystem restoration, ecological connectivity and Nature-based Solutions.

Strengthened biodiversity monitoring, reporting and governance systems compatible with EU accession requirements and reporting under the Rio conventions and other global frameworks.

Integration of biodiversity considerations into agriculture, forestry, water management, infrastructure, and energy planning.

Alignment of regional restoration planning with the EU Nature Restoration Regulation.

Improved climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction through restored and resilient ecosystems.

Regional cooperation under the GAWB accelerates implementation of global and EU biodiversity commitments.

Together, these frameworks create a coherent pathway from global biodiversity commitments toward EU policy requirements and concrete regional action in the Western Balkans, supporting both nature recovery and EU integration.

Sutjeska National Park, Bosnia and Herzegovina
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Federal Ministry
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BfN Federal Agency for Nature Conservation

Umwelt Bundesamt