

Open Regional Fund for South-East Europe – Biodiversity

The challenge

South-East Europe is exceptionally rich in biodiversity and hosts a variety of ecosystems, ranging from Mediterranean coastal zones across river, forest and steppe areas to alpine high mountains. A variety of flora and fauna occurring is endemic in the Western Balkans. There is also an above-average abundance of agrobiodiversity.

Nevertheless, the importance of the species and ecosystem diversity and the genetic diversity at regional, national and local levels is insufficiently covered and therefore not adequately protected and properly integrated into development plans. Accession to the European Union (EU) is a common goal for countries of South-East Europe region. The implementation of the complex and inter-sectoral European environmental law in particular puts cooperation countries in front of great challenges. The core elements of European environmental law with respect to biodiversity are the Birds Directive and the Fauna-Flora-Habitat Directive as well as the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 which was adopted in 2011. Since the initial situation is quite comparable, the candidate countries can learn from the experiences of Croatia as the youngest member of the EU. Although the countries of South-East Europe can already demonstrate visible first successes in the creation of political and legal frameworks to maintain their biodiversity, the implementation remains inadequate at the operational level. There are significant deficits in the implementation of EU directives, e.g. in the area of protected area designation and management but also in the execution of other

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Lead executing agency	Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
Duration	2015 – 2018
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regulatory instruments, as for example the application of and compliance with environmental impact assessments as well as the collection and use of biodiversity-related data. Consequently, there are substantial shortcomings in the integration of biodiversity related issues in relevant decision-making processes for the formulation of policies, strategies or investment plans. After all, climate change increasingly threatens biological resources.

Goal

Increased regional cooperation in South-East Europe is contributing to the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020.

Our approach

The project Open Regional Fund Biodiversity (ORF BD) is designed to support conflict-sensitive planning and implementation, and opportunities for the involvement of civil



society are identified and supported. ORF BD promotes regional cooperation of biodiversity-related organisations - in particular the environment ministries and environmental agencies as well as the ministries that deal with or impact on biodiversity and ecosystems, including forestry and agriculture, the municipal administrations, academic institutions and research institutes as well as non-governmental environmental organisations. This is done through the implementation of regional sub-projects involving at least organisations from three countries. ORF BD cooperates closely with existing regional initiatives and networks and supports partnership formation to achieve intended effects and increase sustainability.

Impact – achievements to date

- 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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