

## 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee

CC/CCIC15  
15.01.2025

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### PROGRESS REPORT

#### for the 15<sup>th</sup> Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee by the Secretariat based on activities since the 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties and the Programme of Work of the Carpathian Convention 2024-2026<sup>1</sup>

*Relevant documents mentioned in the Progress Report are available on the CC website under BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS<sup>2</sup>*

*Please note that chapters/COP Decisions that have not demonstrated substantial progress or updates in the implementation are not included in this report.*

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### DECISION COP7/1 Implementation of the Carpathian Convention

#### ***Activity: Implement the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and the accompanying Carpathian Vision 2050***

The [Carpathian Biodiversity Framework](#) (CBF), adopted by the CC COP7 as the first regional instrument supporting the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), was received very well and recognized at the Carpathian level and the global level by various stakeholders and partners, including by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Detailed information on the activities undertaken to implement and promote the CBF can be found in the chapter *DECISION COP7/6: Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*.

#### ***Activity: Implement the [Ministerial Declaration of the Carpathian Commitments on the impact of war in Ukraine on the environment and the need for cooperation and assistance](#)***

Further to the adopted [Set of measures - support to Ukraine within the Carpathian Convention](#), the Secretariat has been working on various activities to support Ukraine, including project development.

1. The Secretariat, together with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources of Ukraine, is currently working on a project proposal to enhance biodiversity conservation through a strengthened protected areas network and the sustainable management of key forest ecosystems while increasing resilience to climate change and creating opportunities for sustainable development in the region in the Ukrainian Carpathians. This project's objectives and expected results are also aligned with the relevant articles and protocols of the Carpathian Convention. The project concept note has been submitted to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for review.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.carpathianconvention.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CC\\_COP7\\_Programme-of-Work.pdf](http://www.carpathianconvention.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/CC_COP7_Programme-of-Work.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/2024/09/26/15th-ccic/>

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2. Participation of Ukraine in the LIFE Transnational Carpathian SNaP project offers a great opportunity for Ukraine to further alignment with the EU acquis on environment, as well as a chance for enhancing capacity building in applying for LIFE project and other EU finding opportunities. More information about the LIFE project is in the chapter *DECISION COP7/6 Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*.
3. The Secretariat supported several other project proposals relevant for Ukraine, including the project “Integrating Biodiversity Conservation into Upstream Planning of Linear Transport Infrastructure in Ukraine” that was submitted to GEF as well as the project “Mapping and COnservation status of Natural FOrests and Habitats in UkrAine, LIFE CONFORHUA” that was recently submitted to LIFE Programme.
4. Furthermore, the Science for the Carpathians (S4C) and its members, together with the Secretariat, have been supporting Ukrainian scientists, particularly through integrating them in S4C processes and organization of sessions at various events.
5. The Secretariat collaborated with UNIDO to integrate Carpathian inputs into the project “Green industrial recovery through municipality-based development in Ukraine”, to be supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development – BMZ in coordination with the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine. The Secretariat is planning to work in close collaboration with UNIDO and with the respective Carpathian Convention parties, partners and stakeholders in 2025-2026 in order to support implementation of the project Output “Green recovery and sustainable local development in rural municipalities of the Ukrainian Carpathian promoted through partnerships and transfer of best practices”, taking into account Carpathian Convention priorities and activities and COP7 Decisions.

### **Activity: Promote a regional Carpathian Day celebration**

1. The Secretariat has collaborated with education for sustainable development experts and protected area representatives from Romania to establish a “Carpathian Day” throughout the region for further promotion of the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians and the Carpathian Convention activities at various levels. Such activities associated with the collaboration include:
  - a. The Secretariat prepared and shared with the Parties the [Carpathian Day Concept Brief](#), which presents the background, objectives and a suggested roadmap for future Carpathian Day operationalization, including the establishment of an informal, voluntary Carpathian Day committee to coordinate Carpathian Day efforts throughout the region.
  - b. An informal Carpathian Day consultation meeting was organized in June 2024, where several Slovak partners expressed interest in organizing Carpathian Day activities in 2025.

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- c. The Secretariat created and launched a [Carpathian Day webpage](#) and facilitated event registrations on this platform, collecting information from planned Carpathian Day events in Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine.
- d. Presentations on Carpathian Day and Youth at the Top were made by the Andrea Kurta from the Piatra Craiului National Park during the 15<sup>th</sup> Working Group Biodiversity meeting in June with the aim to inspire more Carpathian Day-related action.

### ***Activity: General implementation of the Carpathian Convention***

1. On 18 June 2024, a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and UNEP's presence in Vienna took place, marking two decades of fostering international cooperation and driving sustainable development across the Carpathians, Western Balkans, and mountain regions globally. The event, kindly hosted by Austria's Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology, brought together long-standing colleagues and partners to celebrate joint achievements and reaffirm a commitment to protecting our planet's invaluable ecosystems.

Kicking off with a 5-minute teaser video showcasing regional impressions, the event was introduced and moderated by Harald Egerer, head of the UNEP Vienna Office. Ms. Elfriede-Anna More, Director of International Climate, Environment, and Energy Affairs at Austria's Ministry of Climate Action, delivered a welcome address, praising UNEP's work and emphasizing the Ministry's commitment to mountain sustainability.

UNEP Vienna Office teams, operating in the Carpathians, Western Balkans, and globally, presented their inputs. One standout achievement is the development of the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, elevating the Carpathian region to the global stage. In the Western Balkans, the establishment of over 12 new protected areas, including Shar Mountain National Park, exemplifies effective regional cooperation. Additionally, the 2018-established Pollution Platform has become an umbrella for numerous pollution-related projects, addressing air pollution, soil contamination, and environmental monitoring.

Arnold Kreilhuber, Regional Director of the UNEP's Europe Office, delivered a laudatory speech, emphasizing the UNEP Vienna Office's pivotal role in environmental governance. "The Vienna Office's mountain focal point role is now very much enshrined within UNEP, significantly expanding partnerships through global fora and bringing us closer to the needs of member states," said Mr. Kreilhuber. Mr. Kreilhuber highlighted the Carpathian Convention's 20 partnerships and 30 projects to protect the region's biodiversity, the establishment of critical protected areas in the Western Balkans, and the championing of sustainable mountain development globally. This work promotes cooperation from the Himalayas to the Andes, underscoring UNEP's role as a leader in environmental governance and conservation.

Invited guests, including representatives from the Carpathian Convention Presidency, Alpine Convention, and the Scientific Network for the Caucasus Mountain Region, offered toasts.

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Through our work in the Carpathian Convention, the Western Balkans, and sustainable mountain development globally, UNEP has demonstrated that regional cooperation and dedicated environmental governance can yield remarkable progress in preserving our planet's natural heritage. Thanks to all the dedicated individuals, organizations, and governments who have worked tirelessly to further mountain sustainable development and environmental protection.

2. The Secretariat was informed about the idea of establishing a transboundary natural park "Carpathian Peace Natural Park" between Romania and Ukraine with the observance of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Carpathian Convention and the applicable national legal frameworks. The park will aim to protect and preserve biodiversity, landscape, and cultural heritage offering the possibility to carry out scientific research, recreation and tourism activities. Furthermore, it should strengthen and improve bilateral relations between these two states and its communities, which will provide a platform for a better and common management regarding the natural resources along the Carpathians, such as water, biomass, soil resources. The exact area for the park is yet to be decided. The Parties and the Secretariat have been invited to support the process and consultation on this matter. In addition, the Secretariat was requested to sign a memorandum of cooperation with the initiators of this idea, namely the Green Agenda and Geoconcept to support the process.

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### DECISION COP7/2 Cooperation with regional and local authorities and all relevant stakeholders

***Activity: Support implementation of relevant projects, including the Central Mountains, which encourage cooperation and involvement of regional stakeholders and promote awareness raising***

The Secretariat has been actively supporting the implementation of the project "[\*Central Mountains: From the Alps to the Carpathians – strengthening governance models for sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe\*](#)" (Interreg Central Europe Programme) and its ongoing activities. One of the main current project activities is developing the *Joint Strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe*. Earlier this year, the Secretariat shared the [\*Report of the Joint Strategy\*](#) with a broader group of Carpathian Convention stakeholders, which was developed with a specific focus on participatory governance and was prepared by Eurac Research, Italy as a product of collaborative efforts among all the project partners and the stakeholders' networks.

The *Report of the Joint Strategy* outlines the analytical framework for assisting community-based initiatives in strengthening cross-border participatory governance processes. The inputs presented in the Report were drawn from previous experiences and contributions from local communities, youth and stakeholders that are engaged in sustainable development of cross-border mountain regions in the Alps and the Carpathians,

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The Secretariat consulted on the *Report of the Joint Strategy* with the Alpine Convention. This Report and the process towards the development of the final Joint Strategy for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe was presented by Eurac Research at the 15th meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on 17-18 June 2024 in Vienna, Austria.

The Carpathian Convention stakeholders are invited to carefully consult the document, share it through their channels and provide general feedback, which would be then considered in the final document. This current project deliverable is an open task that will be implemented and further updated throughout the project's duration to achieve its final version only towards the end of the project by integrating additional and necessary contributions, expected also from the Carpathian Convention relevant bodies.

More information about the Central Mountains project and the Secretariat's support is presented in the chapter *DECISION COP7/15 Sustainable tourism*.

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## DECISION COP7/3 Cooperation with the European Union

### ***Activity: Support closer cooperation with the European Union, its instruments, and programmes***

1. The Secretariat has been actively involved in supporting numerous projects seeking EU funding, either by collaborating with partners on project development or by providing general support to initiatives relevant to the Carpathian region, including:
    - a. "BioLine - Restoration of BIOdiversity and connectivity for ecological management of powerLINE corridors in Danube – Carpathian region" (project supported also by some of the Parties) (Interreg Danube Region Programme),
    - b. "Harmon2 – Addressing the capacity building needs for mainstreaming biodiversity in the transport sector of the Danube region" (Interreg Danube Region Programme),
    - c. "Utilising the potential of Aarhus Convention in facilitating effective participation and inclusion of Roma communities in the EU green transition" (European Climate Initiative/EUKI),
    - d. "LYCO Project: Institutional Strengthening and Policy Facilitation for Lynx lynx carpathicus Conservation" (EU LIFE Programme),
    - e. "Mapping and CONservation status of Natural FORests and Habitats in UkrAine, LIFE CONFORHUA" (EU LIFE Programme).
  2. The Secretariat has made significant efforts in consulting with EU institutions and developing the project proposal for the LIFE Strategic Nature Project for the Carpathians. More information about this process is in the chapter *DECISION COP7/6 Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*.
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### DECISION COP7/4 Cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme

#### ***Activity: Activities related to cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme***

1. The Secretariat has continued participating in meetings of the UNEP Focal Points for Multilateral Environmental Agreements, which further promotes the Carpathian Convention, its objectives, and ongoing activities, while exploring potential opportunities for future cooperation in light of the respective mandates of the Convention and UNEP's objective to strengthen programmatic cooperation.
2. The Secretariat actively promoted the Carpathian Convention and its activities during the Bern III Conference organized by UNEP in January 2024 in Bern, Switzerland. More information about this topic is in the chapter *DECISION COP7/6 Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*.
3. From October 23rd to 25th, 2023, UNEP, in collaboration with the Secretariat, Eurac Research and the UN GLOMOS programme (Center for Global Mountain Safeguard Research), organized the first "Mountain Innovation Fair" in Bolzano/Bozen as part of the "Promoting Innovations for Sustainable Development in Mountain Areas" (PRIMA) project. More than 65 stakeholders from southern and eastern Africa, the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Carpathians and the Alps took part to exchange ideas about concrete innovative approaches to sustainable mountain development. The participants came from over 20 different countries and mostly work in social enterprises, civil society organizations, SMEs and start-ups. The thematic focus was on topics related to water management, reducing climate risks, agriculture, renewable energy and tourism.

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### DECISION COP7/5 Cooperation with other conventions and international bodies

#### ***Activity: Activities related to cooperation with other conventions and international bodies***

1. The Secretariat has been in regular contact with the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention and its relevant bodies, including the Alpine Biodiversity Board, seeking further opportunities for cooperation and joint activities. The representatives of both Secretariats were invited to and present in most of the meetings for each Convention.
2. The Secretariat, as well as the Chair of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity (WG Biodiversity) – Czech Republic were invited to participate in the Alpine Biodiversity Conference, held on 12-14 June 2024 in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia and provide inputs to the conference with a focus on the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and WG Biodiversity's ongoing activities and experiences. More information on the cooperation and exchange with the Alpine Convention regarding regional approaches for supporting the implementation of the KMGBF is in the chapter *DECISION COP7/6 Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*.

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3. The Secretariat was consulted regarding the preliminary Programme of the Italian Presidency of the Alpine Convention 2025-2026 and mandate of the Alpine Biodiversity Board, and has been invited to strengthen cooperation during this period of time.
  4. Building on the process that promotes interregional exchange for sustainable mountain development under the global programme "Adaptation at Altitude – Taking Action in the Mountains," and following meetings between the Andean Mountain Initiative (IAM) and the Carpathian and Alpine Conventions (during the 14th CCIC meeting in June 2023), efforts continue to foster collaborative learning. These initiatives aim to support the IAM in its journey toward establishing a legal framework for cooperation in the Andes, focused on sustainable mountain development. A publication summarizing this process, titled [Mountains Connect Brief: Experience Exchange between the Andes, Alps, and Carpathians – Exploring Mountain Governance Paths for Climate-Resilient Development](#), is now available.
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## DECISION COP7/6 Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

### ***Activity: Promoting the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and the accompanying Carpathian Vision 2050***

The Parties, under the leadership of the Serbian Presidency and the Chair of the WG Biodiversity – Czech Republic, with support of the Secretariat, have been monitoring and supporting the process of ensuring a strong recognition of the role of the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework (CBF) as a model for regionally implementing the KMGBF.

Directly following its adoption, the CBF was incorporated on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) [website](#), presenting the relationships between the relevant KMGBF targets, Carpathian Convention activities and CBF components, as outlined in the CBF annex. Furthermore, the Carpathian Convention's efforts for supporting the KMGBF and CBD implementation were recognized within the official documents of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation – 4 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SBI-4), Nairobi, Kenya for 21–29 May 2024, especially the [SBI-4 document on cooperation with other conventions and organizations](#), (CBD/SBI/4/10), which included a direct reference to CBF under paragraph 3 of the SBI-4 Recommendations for the CBD COP16 ("Notes that the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework adopted by the Conference of the Parties of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians at its seventh meeting could serve as a model for aligning regional with global biodiversity commitments and actions;"). The final text of the mentioned SBI-4 Recommendations for the CBD COP16 will be finalized at the upcoming SBI-5 scheduled on 16–18 October 2024 in Cali, Colombia.

Further references to the Carpathian Convention in the SBI-4 document on cooperation with other conventions and organizations include:

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- Formal recognition of the KMGBF: “Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention): decision 7/6 adopted by the Conference of the Parties at its seventh meeting (2023)” (see page 3);
- Coordination of strategies with KMGBF: “Under the Carpathian Convention, the Conference of the Parties adopted the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and requested Parties to use it to contribute to the achievement of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (decision 7/6)” (see para 18 on page 5);
- Implementation of other elements of decision 15/13: “Towards the objectives of decision 15/13, the Secretariat has continued to maintain cooperation agreements with many partners and has recently [...] signed a triparty Memorandum on Cooperation with the Secretariats of the Alpine and the Carpathian Conventions (2023) [...]” (see page 12-13).

In addition to this, the CBD Secretariat requested submission of an INF document (CBD/COP/16/INF/23) to be officially included into the CBD COP16 documentation presenting the CBF as a regional instrument for enhancing the implementation of the KMGBF and mainstreaming biodiversity conservation. In addition to this, the CBD Secretariat issued an official note on [Cooperation with other conventions and international organizations \(CBD/COP/16/10\)](#), which includes references to the Carpathian Convention, its CBF and the above-mentioned INF Document.

To further strengthen KMGBF implementation efforts, the CBD, the Alpine Convention, and the Carpathian Convention renewed the [trilateral Memorandum of Cooperation](#) in light of the new KMGBF to guide the way for effective mountain biodiversity protection in the Alpine and Carpathian regions and support experience and knowledge sharing with other mountain regions of the world.

A direct result of this strong partnership has been the successful promotion of regional approaches to KMGBF implementation in other mountain regions, especially in the Alpine region, as the Alpine Convention is currently developing a regional instrument following the CBF’s pioneering. The CBF was presented at the Alpine Biodiversity Conference, held 12 - 14 June 2024 in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia. Discussion and exchange with the Alpine Convention continues with the aim to identify common activities and further strengthen cooperation on mutually relevant topics.

The Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention continues to promote a regional approach to implementing the KMGBF, further strengthening both global and regional processes and fostering synergies. For instance, the Carpathian Convention supports the exchange of knowledge and experience with other mountain regions of the world, particularly the Andes. Within this process, the CBF and its regional approach towards the implementation of the KMGBF has been one of the main topics of cooperation.

The CBF was promoted at the [Bern III Conference on Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions for the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal GBF](#), 23-25 January 2024 in Bern, Switzerland, which aimed to contribute to the efficient and effective implementation of the KMGBF. The primary objectives of the conference were to:



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- Identify opportunities to strengthen cooperation and collaboration among Parties to the MEAs in implementing the KMGBF at all appropriate levels.
- Make recommendations on further steps that could be taken in order to strengthen cooperation and collaboration while recognizing the respective roles and mandates of all concerned.
- Share practical experiences of cooperation and collaboration in implementing MEAs that could be scaled up in appropriate circumstances.

The conference organizers opened a call for submission of case studies presenting examples of good collaborative practices at the national, regional, and global levels, as well as secretariat-level examples of cooperation in the implementation of biodiversity-related conventions (see the [full list of submitted case studies](#)). The Secretariat submitted the CBF as a case study, which was prominently presented at the Bern III Conference, as a tangible example demonstrating the real-world impact and scalability of cooperative efforts in biodiversity conservation.

The Carpathian Convention was represented at the Bern III Conference by its Secretariat, sharing relevant experiences from the Carpathian Convention, which were received with great interest by the meeting participants. The [final report of the Bern III Conference](#), as well as the updated Cross-mapping paper "[Key entry points for cooperation and collaboration among multilateral environmental agreements](#)," developed by UNEP-WCMC and DaRT Team, reference the Carpathian Convention and its CBF.

### ***Activity: Developing guidance materials for streamlining the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework into NBSAPs***

The Carpathian Convention Secretariat actively supports the Parties in implementing the CBF at the national level by integrating the Framework's objectives and policy actions into national strategies and existing reporting mechanisms, such as National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

Since NBSAPs shall be revised in light of the new KMGBF, such a process will help ensure more streamlined and harmonized implementation of both the Carpathian Convention and CBD by:

- Avoiding isolated approaches and maximising limited financial and human resources (CC/COP7/6 paragraph 2);
- Furthering the alignment, scaling and implementation of the KMGBF at the regional and national levels (CBD/COP/DEC/15/4 Annex paragraph 7q);
- Including relevant actions for implementing other biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements in their revised NBSAPs (CBD/COP15/DEC/15/16 paragraph 23);
- Uplifting the Carpathian Convention as an exemplary model for effectively adapting and implementing global and European policies, building upon the momentum of being the first region in the world to apply the KMGBF at the subregional level (the CBF).

Towards these aims, the Carpathian Convention Secretariat created [a Guidance Document for streamlining the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework into NBSAPs](#) and [Annex I: Table with example policy actions relevant for the Carpathians for more information on the process](#) in close consultation with both the Carpathian Convention and the CBD Focal Points, ensuring a collaborative and informed approach. The

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overarching goal of the guidance document is to prompt Carpathian countries to consider the unique environmental and sustainable development objectives within the Carpathian region as they formulate their national targets and indicators, policy measures and means of implementation. In close consultation with both the Carpathian Convention and the CBD Focal Points, ensuring a collaborative and informed approach.

Drawing from the CBD's NBSAP template, the guidance document provides a suggested series of steps for integrating the CBF into the process for revising national targets in light of the KMGBF:

1. Preliminarily assess existing national biodiversity goals and targets in the NBSAP and other national biodiversity policies against the KMGBF and CBF;
2. Identify and engage relevant sectors, government agencies, and stakeholder groups, including those engaged in Carpathian networks, to assess the alignment of national biodiversity targets with the CBF;
3. Revise and update national targets with relevant policy measures and actions from the CBF, determine indicators and identify implementing groups;
4. Consider using the CBD's NBSAP Template for Submitting Updated National Targets.

A series of suggested sub-steps, including recommended networks and strategic documents to consider, are provided for each of the four steps. Additionally, a compilation of example policy measures and actions derived from the CBF, its annex and Carpathian Convention Protocols are included in the guidance document's Annex I.

The Carpathian Convention Secretariat and the Chair of the Carpathian Convention WG Biodiversity – Czech Republic have closely collaborated to elicit consultations on the CBF-NBSAP process and strengthen synergies between the Carpathian Convention and the CBD Parties.

### **Activity: LIFE Carpathian Strategic Nature Project – Project idea as a unique opportunity for the Carpathians**

The Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, mandated by the Parties to facilitate the CBF implementation process, consulted the [European Commission DG Environment](#) and the [European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency](#) (CINEA) and identified a possible source of long-term, large-scale funding for jointly implementing the CBF through the EU LIFE mechanism – LIFE Strategic Nature Project (LIFE SNaP). According to the programme requirements, SNaPs should support implementation of the plan/strategy/action plan on a large territorial scale, meaning regional, multi-regional, national or transnational; thus, the CBF fits this requirement.

In this regard, some activities planned in the Carpathian region as envisioned in the CBF and those possibly inscribed into a respective Party's NBSAP (as per the point above) can financially be supported by the EU under a transnational LIFE SNaP, jointly implemented by the Parties.

Importantly, the possible LIFE co-funding would be particularly important for transboundary and transnational activities, which for different formal and/or legal reasons, are not usually financed from the national/in-country funding sources of the involved Parties.

It should be noted that not a single transnational LIFE SNaP has been implemented so far. Therefore, the first ever joint application for a transnational LIFE SNaP submitted by several Parties resolved to act together should be convincing and relevant for the LIFE Programme. Additionally, it has the potential to

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significantly enhance the common identity of the Carpathian region and offer valuable resources to address the deficiencies in the Carpathian area that arise from the absence of EU-level instruments (such as the Interreg Alpine Space Programme accessible for all countries of the Alpine macro-region).

Securing funding through the EU LIFE Programme, particularly under the SNaP mechanism, provides substantial financial resources critical for long-term conservation projects. The LIFE SNaP's budget, ranging from 15 to 50 million EUR over 5 to 10 years, far exceeds the scope of traditional LIFE projects or typical project supporting the Carpathian Convention activities, enabling the implementation of large-scale, impactful initiatives.

When deciding on the thematic focus of the joint transnational Carpathian SNaP, it should be considered that the application is expected to contribute to EU objectives for the protection, maintenance and restoration of natural capital, particularly under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

CINEA suggested that the LIFE SNaP for the Carpathians should focus the proposed joint project on the nature and biodiversity aspects, including mainstreaming them into other policies. Therefore, the joint SNaP proposal should include activities corresponding to the priorities of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 [simultaneously also to the relevant CBF Strategic Objectives (SO)], including:

- extension of the network of protected areas (CBF SO1)
- enhancing the protected area network coherence by setting up ecological corridors (CBF SO1)
- implementation of EU nature restoration targets for species and habitats (CBF SO1)
- ecosystem restoration (CBF SO1)
- enhanced protection of the primary and old-growth forests (CBF SO2)
- improving the health and resilience of managed forests (CBF SO2)
- bringing nature back to agricultural land (CBF SO1 + SO5)

CBF SO8 (Cooperation with Ukraine) can also be duly considered under the above activities.

Regarding the potential project consortium, it should include the national authorities competent for nature and biodiversity from each Member State involved in the project implementation, or at least provide clear commitment letters from such authorities. In addition, LIFE SNaP requires active involvement of key stakeholders in the implementation of the project. The EU Member States and Ukraine are fully eligible as partners of the project consortium, while Serbia can participate as a third country (subject to specific conditions of eligibility).

Overall, the LIFE SNaP project is strategically crucial for the Carpathian Convention as it provides the necessary financial, collaborative, and strategic framework to address the region's unique environmental challenges. By leveraging EU support, fostering transnational cooperation, and mainstreaming biodiversity into broader policy frameworks, the project supports the Carpathian Convention region in achieving its conservation goals and contribute to global biodiversity targets.

The planned SNaP will not only align with the national biodiversity goals of the seven involved European countries and foster the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 but also contribute significantly to the achievement of the EU's broader environmental objectives and global biodiversity targets, with a particular focus on the transboundary aspect presenting a significant added-value to the LIFE programme objective.

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Upon the recommendation of the 15th meeting of the Carpathian Convention WG Biodiversity on 17-18 June 2024 in Vienna, Austria, and with a positive response from the Focal Points, the Secretariat, in cooperation with Blue! advancing european projects (consultancy company), submitted the Technical Assistance Project Preparation (TA-PP) for the LIFE Carpathian Strategic Nature Project (SNaP) with an outstanding support by the Parties, where the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Hungary and Serbia provided very strong letters of supports and become Associated Partners in the project consortium (except Hungary and Serbia). The results of the evaluation of the proposal should be known in November 2024.

If approved, the TA-PP will support the development of the concept note and full project proposal for the very first transnational LIFE SNaP for the Carpathians. The submission of the full proposal for the transnational LIFE Carpathian Strategic Nature Project is foreseen for autumn 2025.

The transnational SNaP will include actions aimed at capacity building and exchanging best practices and knowledge and relates to concrete impactful conservation measures in close cooperation with relevant stakeholders. It will also leverage the existing governance structures and consultation mechanisms of the Carpathian Convention to mainstream nature and biodiversity into other sectoral policies of the involved countries. With due consideration of the national Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000, the specific actions and their scope (including timeline and budget) will be defined during the TA-PP process through in-depth consultations with the Ministries of the involved countries and relevant stakeholders, that shall result in the development and formal adoption of the 'CBF Action Plan' under the Carpathian Convention.

In order to carefully plan the implementation of common targets and activities perceived as attainable and feasible within the lifetime/duration period of the Carpathian SNaP implementation, the 'CBF Action Plan' will be developed, which will then be formally approved by the CCIC in 2025. The 'CBF Action Plan' will serve as a reference document outlining activities to be implemented within the Carpathian SNaP implementation period.

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## DECISION COP7/7 Cooperation with Eurac Research

### Activity: *Activities related to the cooperation with Eurac Research*

1. Eurac Research, through the Vienna Representing Office and in cooperation with Bolzano Research Institutes and Administrative Departments, continued providing scientific support capacities and assistance to the Carpathian Convention, also through the development and execution of projects focused on the implementation of the Convention. During the Mountain Innovation Fair 2023 on 24 October 2023 in Bolzano, Italy, Eurac Research and the Secretariat signed the renewed work plan annexed to the Memorandum of Cooperation between UNEP Vienna-SCC and Eurac Research.
2. The Secretariat is assisting Eurac Research in organizing a replication workshop in Hostětín, Czech Republic, as part of the EU Horizon IMPETUS Project. The event is planned to take place on 27 March 2025. The project aims to demonstrate how European-level climate commitments can be implemented through concrete actions, particularly focusing on adaptation measures under the EU Green Deal. Several demonstration sites have been established across Europe, including one

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focused on mountain regions. This particular demo site is led by Eurac Research and is based in the wine-producing area of Valle dei Laghi, Northern Italy.

The Secretariat has been tasked with facilitating communication with Czech counterparts and identifying potential stakeholders for the workshop, fully financed by Eurac Research. The goal is to support knowledge exchange and disseminate the project's results.

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### DECISION COP7/8 Strengthening science-policy-practice interface and cooperation with scientific networks

#### ***Activity: Activities related to strengthening the science-policy-practice interface and cooperation with scientific networks***

1. The Secretariat continued its efforts in strengthening the science-practice-policy interface and pursuing closer collaboration with the Science for the Carpathians (S4C) network. Notably, Tamara Mitrofanenko of the Carpathian Convention Secretariat team has played an active role in overseeing S4C activities in close cooperation with the Executive Committee of the network, including increasing active participation in S4C; maintaining links between S4C members' relevant projects and initiatives and the Convention's activities and networks; and elaborating on the [S4C recommendations to the WG Biodiversity](#).
2. Building upon the successful experience of collaborating on the S4C Interdisciplinary Winter School 2022 and upon the active participation of the Secretariat in the Student Conference on Conservation Science (SCCS) 2023, organized by the Hungarian Research Network Centre for Ecological Research (HUN-REN CER) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Secretariat actively participated in SCCS 2024 (10 - 14 September in Balatonvilagos, Hungary,) and presented the Carpathian Convention and its biodiversity-related activities as well as its collaboration with S4C, with the aim to enhance awareness among young and early career researchers about the Carpathian Convention and involve young and early career biodiversity researchers in Carpathian Convention implementation.
3. Building upon its participation in the SCCS 2023 and collaborations established at Forum Carpaticum 2023, the Secretariat facilitated cooperation between HUN-REN CER, Jagiellonian University and Leuphana University on a project "Promoting Biodiversity through Transdisciplinary Learning Interventions in the Carpathians (ProBioTIC)," led by Leuphana University. The project has received support from the German Environmental Foundation (DBU) and was launched at SCCS 2024 on September 11.
4. It aims to address sustainable consumption and production and their links to biodiversity and education for sustainable development (ESD) in the Carpathian region. The project addresses several COP7 decisions (DECISION COP7/8.4, 8.7, 8.8.) and aims to contribute to maintaining and protecting the biodiversity of the Carpathian region through promoting educational activities. It

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includes strengthening participation of young and early career scientists in providing evidence-based recommendations to the Carpathian Convention. Thus, the project's outcomes will be relevant to WG Biodiversity, Working Group on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (WG SARD) and the Carpathian ESD Expert Network.

5. The Secretariat successfully completed implementing the project “Strengthening the ESD network in the Carpathian Convention via a science-policy-practice interface,” funded by the German Federal Environment Ministry’s Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP), in collaboration with the S4C. The project supported the 7<sup>th</sup> Forum Carpaticum and a special session on Ukraine, the active participation of S4C experts at COP7, and the advancement of the Carpathian ESD Expert Network, including the elaboration of the vision and objectives of the Carpathian ESD Expert Network.
6. Coordinated and co-authored by the Secretariat with S4C members, the chapter “Science-policy-practice collaborations towards sustainable development in the Carpathian Region,” was published in August 2024 in the Elsevier “Safeguarding Mountain Social-Ecological Systems: A Global Challenge. Building Transformative Resilience in Mountain Regions Worldwide.”<sup>3</sup>
7. The Secretariat facilitated the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding for the Cooperation between the S4C and the Scientific Network for the Caucasus Mountain Region (SNC-mt). More specifically, it facilitated the representation of the SNC-mt at the meeting of the WG Biodiversity, which further strengthened exchange between the SNC-mt and the S4C.
8. Following the successful collaborations with the S4C on the 7th Forum Carpaticum conference, “Carpathian Futures – Critical Transitions,” which took place on 25-29 September 2023 at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, the Secretariat:
  - a. strengthened collaboration between the S4C and the UNESCO Chair on Higher Education for Sustainable Development at Leuphana University Lüneburg;
  - b. coordinated collection of key messages and policy recommendations from S4C, which provided the basis for evidence-based policy recommendations to the COP7 and WG Biodiversity;
  - c. took an active role in organizing and coordinating the follow-up S4C meeting, hosted by HESRC at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, on 9-10 May 2024. The meeting included discussions about the restructuring of the S4C network, including introducing Working Groups, organizing the 8<sup>th</sup> Forum Carpaticum and collaborating on joint projects;
  - d. concluded a [Memorandum of Cooperation between the Secretariat and the lead organizer of the 7<sup>th</sup> Forum Carpaticum, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland](#), with the aim to further strengthen collaboration with the S4C.
9. The Secretariat will continue playing an active role in co-organizing the 8<sup>th</sup> Forum Carpaticum, which will take place in Bratislava, Slovakia on 9-11 September 2025, and will address a broad range of relevant topics, with a sub-focus on addressing marginalized groups and regions.

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<sup>3</sup> The publication can be requested for access.

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10. Given many relevant scientific events planned for September 2025, including the [European Landscape Ecology Congress](#) to be held in Bratislava, Slovakia on 2-5 September; Forum Carpathicum to be held in Bratislava, Slovakia on 9-11 September; SCCS 2025 to be held in Hungary; [International Mountain Conference](#) to be held in Innsbruck, Austria on 14-18 September; and the [Multifunctional Farming Conference](#) to be held in Rzeszów Poland on 16-18 September; the Secretariat coordinated a meeting with the Carpathian experts who are organizing these events to be aware of each other and create synergies.
11. The Secretariat supported the process and successful defense of the master's thesis, "[Fuzzy Maps for Wicked Problems: An Inclusive Systems Approach to Improving Biodiversity Outcomes in the Carpathian Region](#)," developed by Elena Fischer from the Secretariat team, with inputs by relevant experts and partners.

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### **DECISION COP7/9 Conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity Article 4 of the Carpathian Convention**

The [15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity](#) took place on 17-18 June 2024 in Vienna, Austria, addressing most of the relevant aspects related to implementing the COP7 Decisions. More information about the 15<sup>th</sup> WG Biodiversity meeting can be found in the [Meeting Final Agenda](#) and the [Meeting Report](#).

#### ***Activity: Further implementation of the Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity, including through relevant projects.***

1. Following the WG Biodiversity's recommendations, the Secretariat issued a notification on reestablishing the Large Carnivores Expert Group, which is expected to support the WG Biodiversity in enhancing cooperation on large carnivore conservation and management in the Carpathian region.

In this regard, the Parties were requested to confirm or appoint representatives to the Carpathian Convention Large Carnivores Expert Group (LC Expert Group), based on their availability and expertise. Observers were also invited to express their interest in joining the LC Expert Group. These representatives will actively support the consultation process on large carnivore conservation and management within the Carpathian Convention (implementation of the [Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity](#)), particularly in relation to the LECA project on supporting the coexistence and conservation of Carpathian large carnivores. At this stage, the project mainly focuses on developing thematic guidance on monitoring harmonization, poaching investigation, and conflict prevention. Furthermore, the LC Experts will contribute to the development of a Joint Strategy for conserving the native lynx population in the Carpathian Mountains (the Carpathian Lynx Strategy). For more information about these

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initiatives, please refer to the WG Biodiversity meeting report. So far, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary have confirmed their representatives to the LC Expert Group.

2. The Secretariat has actively supported the implementation of the LECA project, which focuses on supporting the coexistence and conservation of Carpathian large carnivores, and other recent activities, notably the organization of the first joint conference of the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions on large carnivore management and the development of thematic guidance on monitoring, poaching investigation, and conflict prevention.
  - a. The Joint Conference of the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions for exchanging practices on large carnivore management was held on 6-8 March 2024 in Brdo, Slovenia. It was organized by the Slovenian Forest Service with the support of the Slovenian Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning, the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic, and the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions' Secretariats.

Given the variation in the status of large carnivore populations, monitoring methods, habitat spatial characteristics, and human interactions across regions and countries, the conference aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of large carnivore populations in the Alps and Carpathian Mountains. It also aimed to exchange experiences and highlight differences in management practices at regional and national levels, as well as share examples of good practices and discuss joint challenges.

Representatives from 13 countries participated, exchanging experiences and solutions implemented in their respective countries. The conference provided a unique opportunity for policy experts to establish closer cooperation in this field. The conference fostered improved cooperation between neighbouring regions, contributing to better understanding and more effective conservation and management of large carnivores and associated societal challenges at the pan-European level.

A detailed [report from the joint Conference of Alpine and Carpathian Conventions for exchange of practices on management of large carnivores](#), and was circulated broadly to relevant stakeholders.

- b. In close cooperation with the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic and Mendel University in Brno, the Secretariat supported the development and initial consultation of the draft thematic guidance on monitoring, poaching investigation, and conflict prevention. The initial draft contains a proposed structure and a brief description of the guidance, organized into three thematic pillars that align with the specific objectives of the Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians. These approaches will be validated through pilot and reference activities. The draft, along with results from activities focused on individual species of large carnivores in four cross-border pilot areas and two reference areas, will



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form the foundation for developing the final guidelines, covering the following thematic pillars:

- Monitoring harmonization
- Conflict prevention
- Poaching prevention

The initial draft was circulated to the WG Biodiversity, presented, and discussed during the 15th WG Biodiversity meeting.

The next draft of the thematic guidelines will be prepared and circulated again for consultation with the WG Biodiversity, and more specifically with the reestablished Large Carnivores Expert Group for further input and comments. Additionally, the draft guidelines will be supplemented with scientific studies, technical reports, and outputs from other projects aimed at harmonizing the monitoring of large animals, evaluating demographic parameters, and addressing human-carnivore conflicts and poaching investigations.

3. At the 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP14) of the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), held in February 2024, significant decisions were made regarding the Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) and the critically endangered Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*). [The Eurasian lynx was listed in Appendix II, while the Balkan lynx was included in Appendix I of the Convention.](#) Additionally, a [Concerted Action Plan was adopted for the Eurasian lynx.](#)

The UNEP Vienna Programme Office – Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, in collaboration with the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group, supported the development of these proposals. The submission was made by the Macedonian Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, in partnership with the ministries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Uzbekistan. The proposals received overwhelmingly positive feedback from all member and range countries, with notable support from the EU and several international conservation organizations.

This initiative provided a unique opportunity for national authorities, scientists, and conservation organizations to collaborate at both national and international levels. The process allowed for a thorough review of the species' current status and facilitated discussions on potential conservation pathways. The outcomes are expected to enhance awareness of the conservation status of both the species and subspecies across their range, contribute to the goals outlined in national nature protection strategies, and align with the objectives of the Carpathian Convention, the KMGBF, the CBD, and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Furthermore, the initiative holds potential to attract additional funding for future conservation efforts and strengthen transboundary cooperation among neighboring range countries.

Building on the momentum generated by the Concerted Action for the Eurasian lynx, the Secretariat, along with the Chair of the WG Biodiversity, the Lynx Institute, and the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group, initiated discussions to develop a joint conservation strategy for the native lynx population in the Carpathian Mountains (the Carpathian Lynx Strategy). This strategy, to be

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elaborated in close collaboration with the Carpathian countries, will be developed under the auspices of the CMS, the Bern Convention, and the Carpathian Convention/WG Biodiversity.

The concept for the Carpathian Lynx Strategy, along with a proposed work plan and next steps, was presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the WG Biodiversity. The meeting concluded with the WG Biodiversity recommending the development of the strategy and inviting feedback on a discussion paper circulated prior to the meeting. Additionally, the WG Biodiversity recommended the re-establishment of the Large Carnivores Expert Group to support ongoing efforts related to large carnivores, including the development of thematic guidance under the LECA project and the Carpathian Lynx Strategy.

Finally, the WG Biodiversity stressed the importance of enhancing synergies and strengthening cooperation with other conventions, particularly the CBD, the Alpine Convention, the CMS, and the Bern Convention, especially in relation to large carnivore conservation in the Carpathian region.

4. The Secretariat has been actively supporting the implementation of the [NaturaConnect](#) project on building a resilient ecological network of conserved areas across Europe for nature and people. In recent project activities, the Secretariat facilitated contributions from the Carpathian stakeholders to the project's study, "Review and Synthesis of Best Practices in Governance and Land-use Policies to Implement TEN-N." This study, currently being finalized, highlights the Danube-Carpathian region as one of six case study areas. It presents a comprehensive analysis of how protected areas and related ecological corridors are governed and financed at both national and transnational levels. Additionally, the Review outlines the challenges that limit TEN-N implementation and suggests interventions to address these issues. The study will be made available soon and the Secretariat will share it with the Carpathian Convention bodies, including through the Convention website.

NaturaConnect's workshop was organized during 15<sup>th</sup> WG Biodiversity meeting with the aim of discussing crucial topics on safeguarding the region's ecological integrity. The main purpose of the workshop was to introduce the participants to the current activities of NaturaConnect and gain their feedback on the Connectivity Guidelines, Systematic Conservation Planning, and the methodology for the integration of blue and green infrastructure in the Danube-Carpathian region. Detailed information about the workshop, including links to the presentation pdfs, participant feedback results are available in the [NaturaConnect Workshop Report](#).

Furthermore, the following recent deliverables of NaturaConnect are available for review and consideration:

- [Science brief for policy and decision-makers on exploring scenarios for the expansion of the Trans-European Nature Network \(TEN-N\)](#)
- [Report on network problem formulations, targets and preferences, including guidance and data on targets and optimal TEN-N design criteria](#). This includes methods and data of quantitative and qualitative targets for species, habitats and their services as well as

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objective functions, constraints and design criteria for maximizing coherence, adequacy and resilience of conservation networks.

- [Learning Platform with a few modules elaborated on TEN-N, stakeholder engagement and Nature Future Frameworks](#) - a capacity building hub of the NaturaConnect project. It includes training modules created by project partners that help to improve professional capacity to design and implement the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N).
  - [NaturaConnect Stakeholder Community](#) - an initiative that brings together the perspectives and ideas of a diverse community of people involved in the design of a plan for a TEN-N of Natural Protected and Connected Areas.
  - For regular updates about the NaturaConnect project it is recommended to subscribe for the project [newsletter](#).
5. The Secretariat co-organized a joint stand with ICPDR and WWF Central and Eastern Europe (WWF CEE) at the EUSDR Annual Forum 2024 in Vienna on 20-21 June 2024, highlighting the importance of biodiversity and ecological connectivity in the Danube-Carpathian region and promoting the "Joint Declaration on Achieving functional biodiversity in the Danube-Carpathian Region by mainstreaming ecological connectivity". The declaration was jointly developed under the EU Interreg Danube Transnational Programme SaveGREEN project, and it was endorsed by the Carpathian Convention, ICPDR, and EUSDR PA4, PA5, and PA6 in July 2022. Projects like the EU Horizon Europe NaturaConnect and the Interreg Danube Region ForestConnect were also promoted within the joint stand.

### ***Activity: Revise the Working Group on Biodiversity Work Plan 2021–2023***

1. The WG Biodiversity revised its [Work Plan 2024- 2026](#), which is now available for consideration by the CCIC.
2. In close consultation with the Chair of the WG Biodiversity – Czech Republic, the Secretariat is preparing to organize the next WG Biodiversity meeting, which should take place in Spring 2025, and could be organized back-to-back with the meeting of the Large Carnivores Expert Group. The meeting agenda, to be in line with WG Biodiversity [Work Plan 2024- 2026](#) will be consulted with the WG Biodiversity members in due course, together with the meeting dates.

### ***Activity: Support work and better governance of the Carpathian Network of the Protected Areas***

The Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) continues initiatives to raise awareness about the ecological importance of Carpathian protected areas and to foster youth engagement in environmental stewardship through the "Youth at the Top" program. This year's edition, held on 18-19 July, focused on the theme "Alpine Flowers and Pollinator Insects."

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### ***Activity: Support work and better governance of the Carpathian Wetland Initiative***

During the 15<sup>th</sup> WG Biodiversity meeting, the Carpathian Wetland Initiative presented its priorities for 2024, which include:

- Integrating wetlands and their services and benefits into the work of the Carpathian Convention, its Protocols, bodies, thematic WGs, CNPA, implementation of the CBF;
- Supporting the „sponges“ projects in the region in cooperation with Wetlands International and projects on ecological connectivity in the Carpathians, and cooperating on project development;
- Cooperating on designating new Ramsar Sites in the region + within network of RSs managers;
- Networking with other partners and EUSDR PA6;
- Sharing ideas and experience on restoration planning and nature-based solutions;
- Providing trainings and capacity building activities;
- Cooperating with European Coalition of RRI, new Danube Wild Islands RRI, and other partners;
- Implementing the new structure for operations and governance as an association, reviewing the Terms of Reference, and fundraising.

The Carpathian Wetland Initiative will organize a 5-day international course in the Czech Republic's Elbe River Basin wetlands from 7-11 October 2024. This course, based on good practices from previous national and international training events, aims to promote understanding, communication, and cooperation among various sectors such as land use, nature conservation, water resource management, agriculture, and forestry. It targets experts, scientists, biologists, project managers, technicians, foresters, farmers, and personnel in state administration responsible for protecting nature and sustainably using natural resources associated with wetlands and shallow water bodies.

### ***Activity: Support the approval of the “BioLine project on restoration of biodiversity and connectivity for ecological management of powerline corridors in Danube – Carpathian region”***

The Secretariat supported the preparation of the “BioLine project on restoration of biodiversity and connectivity for ecological management of powerline corridors in Danube – Carpathian region”, submitted to the Interreg Danube Region Programme. The project aims to restore biodiversity and ecological connectivity in powerline corridors in the Danube-Carpathian region. Led by SOS/BirdLife Slovakia, the project involves 22 partners across seven countries and focuses on innovative ecological management of powerline corridors to support safe energy distribution while enhancing natural habitats and migration pathways. The BioLine project emphasizes the significance of the Convention’s work on enhancing connectivity and aims to link its efforts with the CBF, the Ecosystem Restoration Decade, and other restoration initiatives. A joint meeting between the WGs Biodiversity and Energy is planned to further these goals and potentially provide an endorsement by the Carpathian Convention for their guidance documents for ecological corridor management.

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### DECISION COP7/12 Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Article 7 of the Carpathian Convention

***Activity: Support activities related to supporting, promoting and protecting the traditional pastoral practices in the Carpathians***

1. Following up on the signed [Memorandum of Cooperation with the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists \(IYRP 2026\) Coalition](#), the Secretariat engaged in active exchange and collaboration with IYRP 2026 and its designated contact points. As one of the initial steps, the Secretariat [compiled an information brief on the Carpathian Convention and its activities related to Pastoralism](#) for the IYRP 2026 Europe website. The Secretariat collaborated with IYRP 2026 on a number of events related to pastoralism, which are reflected below.
2. The Secretariat organized an introductory online meeting “Towards Carpathian Pastoralism nomination under the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity” on 21 February 2024. The overall objective of the meeting was to follow up on COP7/12 Decisions related to prioritizing Carpathian pastoralism and collaborating with IYRP 2026:
  - a. The meeting highlighted the experience of Romania with respect to the national process for inscribing the [“Transhumance - the seasonal droving of livestock”](#) file to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity.
  - b. It furthermore served to discuss possibilities for extending the Transhumance file under the UNESCO ICH and other options to promote Carpathian pastoralism under UNESCO.
  - c. As a follow-up to the meeting, the Secretariat maintained close dialogue with the National Focal Points for UNESCO 2003 Convention from Romania and Poland to develop an overview of the governmental experts from the Carpathian countries engaged in the process.
3. The Secretariat co-organized a hybrid event “Empowering Pastoralist Women in Mountain Areas: Navigating Environmental and Gender Challenges” on Consultation Day under the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) on 12 March 2024. The event was co-organized with the NGO Committee on the Status of Women Vienna and other partners with the support of Eurac Research and active participation of IYRP 2026, and aimed at amplifying rural women’s and girls’ voices and experiences from different rural mountainous regions.
4. The Secretariat provided feedback to the organizers of the [Multifunctional Farming Conference](#) on the conference concept note and shared preliminary information about the conference with relevant networks, including IYRP 2026 and S4C. Additionally, experts in biodiversity, pastoralism and traditional ecological knowledge from Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are engaged in the scientific committee of the conference.
5. In close collaboration with, and upon invitation from, the Romanian government, the Secretariat took part in the online “Working meeting – Extension of the multinational file „Transhumance – the seasonal droving of livestock,” which took place on 5 July 2024. The Secretariat, together with the

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National Focal Points for the UNESCO 2003 Convention from Romania, facilitated a follow-up online meeting with participants from the Carpathian countries to discuss collaborations and activity coordination.

- a. While several Carpathian Convention parties (Poland, Slovakia, Serbia) decided to join the extension of the Transhumance file, strong interest was expressed in exploring collaboration towards a potential submission of a Carpathian Pastoralism file to UNESCO ICH in the future.
  - b. As a follow-up to this meeting, the Secretariat took part in the online meeting on 30 September 2024 and an in-person meeting on 24-25 October 2024, held in Bucharest, Romania.
  - c. At the meeting in Bucharest, the Secretariat facilitated a discussion focused on Carpathian pastoralism, in close collaboration with the Romanian organizers, where participants recommended preparation and submission of a joint file "Safeguarding Carpathian Pastoralism" by Carpathian Convention parties to the 3rd list of UNESCO ICH "Register of good safeguarding practices".
6. Based on the needs and gaps related to Carpathian pastoralism and the important links between pastoralism, biodiversity and education in the Carpathian region, the Secretariat, in consultation with experts, decided to focus on these links and Carpathian pastoralism for a submitted project proposal. This proposed project, "[Linking biodiversity, pastoralism and cultural heritage through education for sustainable development \(ESD\) in the Carpathian Region](#)" is a follow-up to the successfully completed project "Strengthening the ESD network in the Carpathian Convention via a science-policy-practice interface." The draft project application was submitted to the German Federal Environment Ministry's Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP).
7. The Secretariat engaged in dialogue with the ICOMOS team on their project, "ICOMOS World Heritage Transhumance Initiative: Defining a thematic approach towards sustaining transhumance cultural landscapes in a changing environment," which seeks to bring together international experts on transhumance, material cultural heritage and living landscapes to eventually increase the representation of transhumance-related cultural landscapes and sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Secretariat informed the Parties, WG SARD and Carpathian pastoralism experts about the initiative, and is liaising with the UNESCO ICH National Focal Point from Romania on the subject. Considering the respective COP7 Decisions on pastoralism, exchanging experience with the ICOMOS project team might yield synergies and mutual benefits with our efforts in the Carpathians.

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### DECISION COP7/13 Sustainable Forest Management Article 7 of the Carpathian Convention

***Activity: Implementation of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management - Work Plan 2023 – 2026***

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In consultation with the Chair of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management (WG Forest) – Slovakia, the Secretariat is preparing to organize the next WG Forest meeting, which should take place in Spring 2025. The meeting agenda, to be in line with the [WG Forest Work Plan 2023 – 2026](#) is currently under discussion and will be consulted with the WG Forest members in due course, together with the meeting dates.

### ***Activity: Consideration of the Assessment of climate change risks and adaptation options for the Carpathian forests and their ecosystem services and implementation of recommendations***

After the endorsement of the [Assessment of climate change risks and adaptation options for the Carpathian forest ecosystems and their services](#) by the COP7, the Secretariat has been working on improving the format and layout of the publication. The final version should be available soon.

### ***Activity: Support development and implementation of ForestConnect project on climate-smart forest connectivity for large carnivores in the Balkan-Carpathian-Dinaric region***

The Secretariat supported the preparation of the recently approved ForestConnect project on climate-smart forest connectivity for large carnivores in the Balkan-Carpathian-Dinaric region under the Interreg Danube Programme. The project, led by WWF Bulgaria, aims to establish climate-smart forest connectivity for large carnivores such as brown bears, wolves, and Eurasian lynxes in the Balkan-Carpathian-Dinaric region. The project addresses the significant challenges posed by habitat fragmentation, climate-induced changes, and human-wildlife conflicts. By developing transnational monitoring tools and technologies, the project seeks to improve the heterogeneity, connectivity, and climate resilience of forest habitats and develop guidelines for protected areas managers. Additionally, it aligns with the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and emphasizes the importance of large carnivores as umbrella species, whose health reflects the overall condition of forest ecosystems.

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## **DECISION COP7/14 Sustainable transport and infrastructure, industry, and energy Article 8 of the Carpathian Convention, Article 10 of the Carpathian Convention**

### ***Activity: Activities related to sustainable transport and infrastructure, industry, and energy***

The Secretariat was invited to take part in the IENE International Conference Prague 2024 “Biodiversity in the headlight of future transport,” held on 9-13 September 2024 and, specifically, in the session: “Enhancing international collaboration between transport infrastructure and ecology to meet urgent challenges.” The session aimed to explore new ways for enhancing intersectoral and international collaboration among transportation and ecological organizations.

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### DECISION COP7/15 Sustainable tourism Article 9 of the Carpathian Convention

***Activity: Support the cooperation and activities within the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform/  
Support implementation of relevant projects, including the CentralMountains***

1. The Secretariat has been actively supporting the implementation of the project “Central Mountains: From the Alps to the Carpathians – strengthening governance models for sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe” (Interreg Central Europe Programme) and contributing to its ongoing activities related to tourism in the Carpathians.

In this respect, the Secretariat supported the development of the [Action Plan for sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians](#) by providing relevant expertise and inputs to make ensure the alignment of the Action Plan with the relevant provisions of the Carpathian Convention.

The Central Mountains project seeks to empower mountainous communities to make sustainable development decisions. The Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism in the Carpathians, a strategic element of this project, aims to reduce tourism's environmental footprint, preserve cultural heritage, and enhance local welfare through collaboration and participatory governance. Aligned with the Carpathian Convention's goals, the action plan supports sustainable development and environmental protection in the region, contributing to the Carpathian Vision 2050 of harmonious living with nature, as outlined in the CBF.

The Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians shall serve as a comprehensive framework for the entire Carpathian region and can be implemented across the entire Carpathian region, thus contributing to the overarching goal of sustainable tourism development. However, in alignment with the Central Mountains (CM) project, it incorporates specific objectives and actions that were established within the CM project framework. These include pilot actions designed to test and demonstrate sustainable tourism practices to be undertaken, for example, by the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform.

This Action Plan serves as a concrete step towards the realization of the strategic visions laid out in the Alpine-Carpathian [Joint Strategy Report for community-led sustainable development of mountain areas in Central Europe](#), as well as the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism of the Carpathian Convention. It not only addresses the specific needs and challenges of the Carpathian region but also contributes to broader goals of sustainable mountain development in Central Europe. In addition to aligning with the Tourism Protocol and the broader strategic frameworks, the Action Plan acknowledges and stands by previous documents endorsed by the Convention, including the Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians and the Strategy for Local Sustainable Tourism Development Based on Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Carpathians (Centralparks).



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With its main goal to “strengthen and improve governance models in the Carpathian mountain areas of Central Europe, particularly focusing on sustainable tourism fueled by local community engagement and cross-border cooperation”, the Action Plan outlines 3 Strategic Objectives:

- a. Institutional Cooperation in the Carpathians: strengthen cross-border and transnational structures for collaboration to address shared challenges in sustainable tourism development. This involves building effective partnerships among local, regional, and national stakeholders and ensuring that governance models are participatory, involving youth and encompassing multiple levels and sectors.
- b. Green Carpathians: ensure the conservation and sustainable management of the Carpathian natural heritage. This objective aims to protect the biodiversity and natural landscapes of the Carpathians, ensuring they continue to be a cornerstone of the region's tourism appeal.
- c. Integrated development and competitiveness in the Carpathians: this objective aims to synergize the competitiveness and social cohesion of the Carpathian region as a distinguished destination for sustainable tourism. By fusing the development of high-quality, sustainable tourism products and offerings with the promotion of social cohesion and economic well-being, this initiative seeks to leverage the unique natural and cultural assets of the Carpathians to enhance local economies, preserve cultural heritage, and foster inclusive development that benefits all community members.

The Secretariat shared the Action Plan with the WG Tourism, inviting their reviews and feedback on the document. To strengthen the Action Plan, which shall revitalize activities within the Carpathian Convention WG Tourism, the Secretariat would like to further promote and integrate it in the Carpathian Convention and its bodies, including the Conference of the Parties.

2. The Secretariat has been supporting the ongoing implementation of the pilot action within the Central Mountains project that is focused on improving cooperation systems in the centres in Poland and Romania of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform.

This pilot action emerges as a pivotal initiative under the Central Mountains (CM) Work Package 2 (WP2). The main challenges in enhancing the collaborative mechanisms of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) are centered around the need for a more cohesive and comprehensive transnational cooperation structure. Despite the CSTP's potential, its current state reveals significant gaps, particularly in the connectivity between its various components and the lack of a clear, unified direction. To address these challenges, it is essential to redefine CSTP's objectives and establish a well-structured cooperation system that aligns with the commitment levels of its participants and partners. This entails drafting a program for the CSTP's institutionalization and professionalization, which includes exploring viable operation financing models. It's also crucial to accurately identify CSTP's clientele and tailor services to meet their specific demands.

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Expected results from the pilot action:

- Development and adoption of a comprehensive Work Programme for the CSTP, which now includes initiatives for the creation and promotion of a common Carpathian brand, aimed at enhancing the region's identity and appeal as a sustainable tourism destination.
- Incorporation of the Set of Indicators for measuring the positive and negative effects of tourism in the Carpathians into the CSTP's operational framework, ensuring that sustainable tourism development aligns with Article 24 of the Tourism Protocol of the Carpathian Convention. This will enable informed decision-making and continuous improvement in tourism practices based on empirical evidence.
- Reinforcement of national committees within CSTC Poland, CSTC Romania and CSTC Slovakia to include expert groups focused on brand development and impact measurement, ensuring a multidisciplinary approach to tackling these new objectives.
- Enhancement of existing platforms for cooperation and thematic exchange among stakeholders, with specific forums or working groups dedicated to the development of the Carpathian brand and the application of the tourism impact indicators. This will facilitate targeted discussions and collaborative efforts in these areas.
- Promotion of initiatives that engage new actors in the activities of the Carpathian Convention, with a particular focus on integrating these new tasks related to branding and impact measurement. This will broaden the scope of engagement and bring fresh perspectives to the initiatives.
- Establishment of a coherent and authoritative endorsement by relevant bodies for the new dimensions of the CSTP's activities, ensuring that efforts to develop a common Carpathian brand and utilize impact indicators are recognized and supported at both the regional and international levels.

The Secretariat will support the process of implementing the pilot action and consult with relevant Convention's bodies as needed.

3. The Secretariat has started consulting with the State Agency for Tourism Development of Ukraine, which expressed interest in becoming a CSTP Center for Ukraine, as well as a member of the Carpathian Convention WG Tourism. Follow up and consultation at the governmental level are currently underway.

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### DECISION COP7/16 Cultural Heritage and traditional knowledge Article 11 of the Carpathian Convention

***Activity: Support activities promoting and protecting the richness of the cultural and natural heritage of the Carpathian Region, including traditional pastoral practices in the Carpathians***

Information relevant for promoting and protecting traditional pastoral practices in the Carpathians is included in the chapter *DECISION COP7/12 Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development*.

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### **DECISION COP7/17 Environmental assessment/information system, monitoring and early warning Article 12 of the Carpathian Convention**

#### ***Activity: Cooperation between the Carpathian Convention, the EEA and EU funded projects on the implementation of the Carpathian Convention***

1. The Secretariat aims to continue closely cooperating with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and its European Topic Centers on providing support for the Carpathian Convention's activities, including operations focused on forests, climate change adaptation, biodiversity, and ecological connectivity, as well as on the integration of common information systems. Recently, the Secretariat and EEA updated the work plan 2023-2024 that guides the cooperation activities.
2. The Secretariat was invited to take part in the EEA Eionet Expert Workshop on adaptation knowledge platforms on 8 -9 October 2024 in Copenhagen. The current state and future plans of national level adaptation knowledge platforms and the potential collaboration with the EEA were discussed during the workshop. A session was dedicated to transnational adaptation knowledge platforms, which play a role in multi-level governance in Europe, for example, in informing cross-border adaptation.
3. Thanks to the support of the EU Horizon Europe NaturaConnect and the Interreg Danube Region ForestConnect projects, the Carpathian Integrated Biodiversity Information System (CCIBIS) has been and will be further improved.
4. The Secretariat liaised with the EEA (Umweltbundesamt) to request an update on the project "Creation of the standard European database Corine Land Cover (CLC) of the Carpathian region for an area of 27,000 km<sup>2</sup>", aimed at providing a dataset for mapping the Carpathian area of Ukraine. The data should soon be available, to be published on a website of the EEA and of the Regional Eastern Europe Fire Monitoring Center (REEFMC) in Ukraine, as well as potentially on the website of the Ministry of Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources.

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### **DECISION COP7/18 Climate Change Article 12bis of the Carpathian Convention**

Information relevant for climate change activities in the Carpathians is included in the chapter *DECISION COP7/13 Sustainable Forest Management*.

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### **DECISION COP7/19 Awareness raising, education and public participation Article 13 of the Carpathian Convention**

***Activity: Support the Carpathian Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Expert Network as a cross-sectoral network of diverse actors***

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1. The Secretariat, in collaboration with S4C, successfully completed the implementation and [full report](#) of the project “[Strengthening the ESD network in the Carpathian Convention via science-policy-practice interface](#),” which has been funded by the German Federal Environment Ministry’s Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP).
  - a. Following the recognition of the Carpathian ESD Expert Network by the Carpathian Convention COP7, an online relaunching event of the Carpathian ESD Expert Network took place on 11 December 2023. The event was meant to relaunch the network after its official welcome by the COP7; invite final participatory inputs to the Carpathian ESD vision, mission and strategic priorities for 2024-2026; and make final decisions on the Carpathian ESD webpage, drafted by the Carpathian Convention Secretariat.
  - b. Based on the event’s discussions, the Carpathian ESD experts and Secretariat prepared a report outlining the vision, mission, objectives and strategic priorities and recommended activities relevant for scientific and practice-based networks in the Carpathian countries.
  - c. As a follow-up to the ESD session and workshop at the 7<sup>th</sup> Forum Carpaticum, cooperation was strengthened with the UNESCO Chair on Higher Education for Sustainable Development at Leuphana University Lüneburg.

2. The Carpathian [ESD Expert Network webpage](#) was developed by the Secretariat based on inputs and feedback from the Carpathian ESD community and was launched in January 2024. The webpage includes a participatory resource sharing component and links to Carpathian ESD Seminars and Carpathian Day webpages.

A database of Carpathian ESD experts is maintained by the Carpathian Convention Secretariat for internal use, to facilitate continuity and integration of the interested experts. Confirmed nominations for Carpathian ESD national focal points have been received from Romania and Slovakia. Collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Czech Republic has been established through the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD (UNECE SC ESD). Collaboration with Serbian experts is expected to strengthen via envisioned co-organization of the Carpathian ESD Expert Seminar in Serbia in 2025.

3. Upon request by young Carpathian ESD experts from Romania, the Secretariat provided a presentation to the Young and Early Career Geographers Working Group on Geography and Sustainability (YECG-GeoSus): a working group organized by the International Geographical Union - Young and Early Career Geographers Task Force. The online presentation and discussion were held on 5 February 2024.
4. ESD topics were integrated into the meeting of the WG SARD, which took place in Vatra Dornei, Romania on 26-27 April 2023, to highlight and strengthen links between the different sustainable development fields addressed by the Carpathian Convention that were relevant for the WG SARD, including cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, sustainable landscape management, and education and learning activities.
5. Collaboration with the UNECE SC ESD was strengthened through various activities conducted by the Secretariat:
  - a. Dialogue was strengthened with the Chair of the UNECE SC ESD, a governmental and scientific ESD expert from the Republic of Cyprus, Dr. Aravella Zachariou. Dr. Zachariou agreed to provide support to the Carpathian ESD Expert Network for 2023-2025 via

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Špirála - the Slovak Network of Environmental Education Providers. This support aims to strengthen collaboration between the Carpathian ESD Experts and UNECE SC ESD and integrate Cyprus' expertise in ESD for the Carpathian region.

- b. The Secretariat took an active part in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> "Capacity-building workshops for facilitating national reporting on implementing the new implementation framework of the UNECE Strategy for ESD (2021–2030) along the four priority strands" by providing inputs from the Carpathian Convention and Carpathian ESD Expert Network and sharing best practices from Carpathian ESD experts with the workshop organizers.
  - c. The Carpathian ESD Expert Network was recognized as a member of the UNECE SC ESD and is represented by the Carpathian Convention Secretariat and Špirála - the Slovak Network of Environmental Education Providers.
6. An online Carpathian ESD Expert Network meeting was held in April to introduce UNECE ESD processes and discuss how Carpathian ESD network members' activities could contribute to the implementation of the UNECE ESD Strategy, including how relevant initiatives and achievements can be integrated into the Strategy's national reports.

The Carpathian ESD Expert Network's vision and outlook were presented at the UNECE SC ESD meeting, which took place on 29 - 31 May 2024 in Geneva., Switzerland. Presentations and best practices were submitted by Carpathian ESD experts from Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania and Ukraine, which were shared during one of the meeting's workshops.

7. The Secretariat actively participated in the Youth, Entrepreneurship and ESD Forum in Cyprus on 27-28 June 2024 in collaboration with Špirála. Thanks to the funds provided by Cyprus, Špirála supported participation of the Slovak youth delegate, two nominated PhD students and teachers from Poland, an entrepreneurship education expert from Poland, and a Carpathian Convention expert and PhD student from Ukraine. The Secretariat actively supported the participation of the Carpathian ESD experts and liaised with other experts and officials from the Carpathian countries who attended the Forum.
8. The Secretariat got in touch with the UNESCO ESD-Net coordinator to discuss potential collaboration. Thanks to the active engagement of the Carpathian Convention Focal Points and ESD experts from Romania and Czech Republic, the Carpathian Convention has been mentioned in the respective submissions of national UNESCO ESD-net initiatives. UNESCO ESD-Net colleagues would welcome submissions from other Carpathian Countries.
9. The Secretariat collaborated with Špirála to organize an educational festival "Steps Forward - New Approaches to ESD in the Carpathians and Beyond" in Košice, Slovakia on 12-14 November 2024. The festival will be an important event for fostering Carpathian ESD knowledge exchange and networking and bridging the Carpathian ESD Seminars. It will feature presentations and interactive workshops focused on useful educational practices following the European reference framework, GreenComp. This framework defines the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for individuals to contribute to sustainability.
10. The Secretariat pursued discussions with the Serbian Presidency of the Convention about organization of the 3rd Carpathian ESD Seminar in Serbia in 2025.