

Advocating for mountains in the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Insights from Mountain Biodiversity Day and earlier events organized as part of the discussions around the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework process

Elevating the importance of mountains and their unique biodiversity in global agendas was the focus for several events organized by UNEP and partners at the margins of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Two mountain policy briefs were presented and discussed with several CBD focal points from mountain countries at the first and second Open-ended Working Groups on the Post-2020 GBF and to inform policy-making with the latest scientific findings on mountain biodiversity.

On 13th January 2021, an online “**Mountain Biodiversity Day**” hosted by the outgoing French Presidency of the Alpine Convention and the French Presidency of the European Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP)¹, brought together scientists, decision-makers, protected area managers, the UN, NGO’s and the public to share perspectives from world mountain regions. Presentations showcased the uniqueness of mountain ecosystems worldwide, their importance for human society, and the threats facing mountain ecosystems and local communities. A key objective of the event was to understand whether global policies adequately reflect mountain biodiversity. In a **Post-2020 segment**, panelists² discussed a) the **main challenges mountain regions face in protecting their unique biodiversity** and b) the **necessary steps to strengthen the role of mountains in the Post-2020 GBF**.

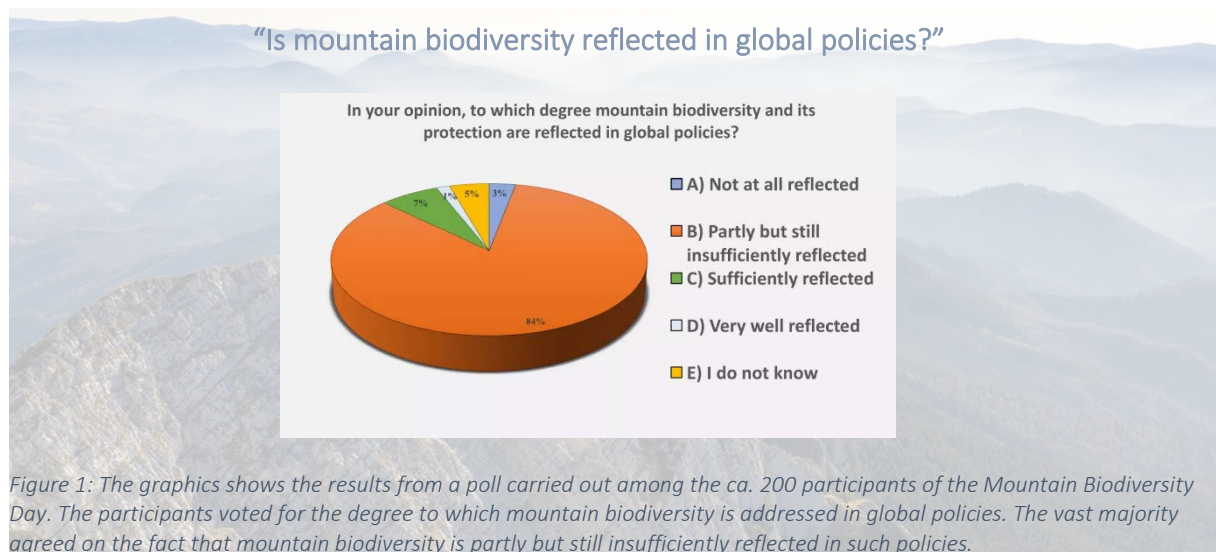


Figure 1: The graphics shows the results from a poll carried out among the ca. 200 participants of the Mountain Biodiversity Day. The participants voted for the degree to which mountain biodiversity is addressed in global policies. The vast majority agreed on the fact that mountain biodiversity is partly but still insufficiently reflected in such policies.

¹ The organization of the event was jointly coordinated by the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention and the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, the Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

² Panelists included CBD focal points from mountain countries and Ministry representatives.

The one-day event offered a platform for discussions among experts and representatives from mountain regions all over the world and provided an opportunity to join forces towards accelerating action. This document summarizes key messages and perspectives gathered during the Mountain Biodiversity Day and previous events on the significance of mountain biodiversity for reaching the Post-2020 GBF's goals and targets and achieving the CBD's 2050 vision of "Living in harmony with nature." With these messages, the document addresses mountain stakeholders, from mountain countries, CBD focal points, and thematic working groups of Conventions targeting mountain regions such as the Carpathian³ and Alpine⁴ Conventions, to scientific networks and the general public interested in mountain protection.

Common insights on potential and challenges for biodiversity protection in world mountain regions

Worldwide, mountain regions offer home to a large number of people. Mountain regions' extreme climatic conditions prove nature and humans' adaptability in developing unique strategies to live under extreme circumstances. Mountains harbor biological and cultural diversity, and provide a large number of important ecosystem services to humanity, e.g., by providing fresh water to about half of the human population.

These incredibly rich regions are threatened by **drivers of global change**. These are ranging from climate change and its impacts on species and their habitats, to rapid **urban sprawl** and infrastructure development linked with soil consumption and soil sealing, to **unsustainable sports and tourism in mountains** or activities such as illegal logging or hunting. Mountain areas are also a source of valuable **resources**; in some of them **mining activities** are affecting mountain ecosystems negatively.

Climate change affects mountain ecosystems disproportionately, compared to other ecosystems. The effects include unprecedented loss of glacial cover and derived freshwater; upward shifts of species and complete ecosystems resulting in dramatic changes in ecosystem composition and often leading to biodiversity loss; and shifting precipitation patterns resulting in extreme weather events like droughts and floods, triggering soil erosion and landslides in many areas. Climatic changes and their impacts must be included in spatial planning to account for changes in water availability, security, effective protected areas, etc.

The **intensification of tourism** is another highly relevant factor which efforts to protect mountain ecosystems cannot ignore. Intense winter sports, summer activities, and pollution are the main factors putting mountain ecosystems and their wildlife under constant pressure. At the same time, sustainable tourism can be an important source of income for local communities.

While threatened by the aforementioned pressures, mountain regions have a high potential to provide solutions: offering possibilities for ecosystem-based adaptations, storing genetic diversity, and harboring traditional (medical) knowledge and spaces for agrobiodiversity. These solutions can support sustainable and inclusive development by mountain populations, contribute to global food security, reduce disaster vulnerability, and protect biodiversity.

Effective protection of mountain biodiversity requires **spatial planning** that speaks to these manifold challenges by considering all parts of landscapes, from protected areas to rural areas, cities, and agricultural lands, and recognizes upland-lowland interactions. Such planning must increase **ecological**

³ <http://www.carpathianconvention.org/>

⁴ <https://www.alpconv.org/en/>

connectivity and reduce landscape fragmentation, to allow species freedom of movement and address biodiversity protection in an integrative manner. From a structural perspective, the diversity of actors needs to be considered to create multifunctional frameworks across national and administrative borders.

Cooperation is pivotal for mountain biodiversity protection, and joint efforts on different levels are needed to create long-lasting and effective positive impacts on mountain biodiversity. Legally binding global and regional frameworks, as well as interregional coordination mechanisms such as the Alpine and the Carpathian Conventions, can support successful cooperation between mountain countries. Suitable financing schemes will also be of high relevance to monitor mountain biodiversity scientifically and implement means for its protection.

How can the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework ensure the protection of mountain biodiversity?

Mountain regions all over the world face similar challenges in their efforts to protect mountain biodiversity. The Post-2020 GBF addresses these challenges in its goals and targets. Indicators to monitor progress toward achieving these goals and targets will be adopted in the related monitoring framework.

The **Post-2020 GBF is an important tool for international governance on biodiversity** that can **enable trans-sectoral approaches**, given the urgency of halting and reversing biodiversity loss.

The protection of mountain biodiversity is key to achieving a number of goals and targets of the Post-2020 GBF, e.g., by hosting a high number of the world's most important sites for biodiversity (e.g. Key Biodiversity Areas), providing freshwater, and offering opportunities for disaster risk reduction. The **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) of the UN, especially 15.4, also address the protection of mountain ecosystems directly: "By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development." The importance of mountains and the need for their protection is further addressed in SDGs relating to "water and sanitation." Integrating and mainstreaming mountain biodiversity protection in various sectors will be essential. Therefore, the CBD's decisions on health, invasive alien species, climate change, biodiversity, capacity building, and monitoring are all highly relevant for mountains, and it is necessary to integrate mountain biodiversity into related discussions.

Another tool is the **CBD's Programme of Work on Mountain Biological Diversity**, which is still valid, but requires revision and consequent implementation to support mountain countries in their protection efforts. Furthermore, the **Alpine and Carpathian Conventions' biodiversity-related declarations** and decision are important instruments to help countries progress toward the CBD's biodiversity goals and targets. In this respect, the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC)⁵ between the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions and the CBD can guide the way for effective mountain biodiversity protection in the Alpine and Carpathian region and beyond.

The Carpathian Convention, equipped with its Article 4 on Conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity, the Protocol on Biodiversity and the Protocol on Sustainable Forest

⁵ Currently the Carpathian Convention, the Alpine Convention, and the CBD are preparing a **trilateral MoC** in the light of the new biodiversity framework, which will be a useful **instrument for enhancing synergies and initiating common activities** for the implementation of the Post-2020 GBF in specific areas of cooperation. As the MoC calls for institutional cooperation between the Conventions' Secretariats, exchange of information and experience, and further collaboration on the implementation of the Conventions, it provides a well-suited framework for undertaking joint actions in addressing biodiversity issues.

Management, is mandated to safeguard the region's biological and landscape diversity. The Convention, aided by its eleven strategic partnerships (including with the CBD and the Alpine Convention) and broad network of stakeholders, is well-positioned to address the pressing environmental challenges the region is facing and make a valuable contribution to the Post-2020 GBF and its implementation. The Convention addresses various thematic sectors relevant for sustainable development of the region, however, biodiversity should be considered the key underpinning element upon which all other sectors depend. Therefore, the Convention can be considered as a great model for mainstreaming biodiversity into other sectors. The Post-2020 GBF and its ongoing process was reflected in the priorities and decisions adopted at the **6th Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention - COP6** (25 November 2020), including developing the **Carpathian Commitments** for the implementation of the Post-2020 GBF.

Biodiversity is also one of the main focuses of the Alpine Convention. The topic is reflected in Article 2 of the Framework Convention as well as, primarily, in the Protocol on Nature protection and landscape conservation. Beyond this, provisions relevant for biodiversity and ecosystems can also be found in other sectoral Protocols, such as, for example, the Protocol on Mountain farming, The Protocol on Mountain forests or the Protocol on Soil Conservation. Moreover, one of the six main priorities of the Convention's Multiannual Programme 2017 – 2022 was "Conserving and valuing biodiversity and landscape". In addition, the Alps can also count on an active Network of Alpine Protected Areas (ALPARC). In recent years, much attention has been dedicated by the Alpine Convention to biodiversity and ecosystems. Firstly, in 2019, an Alpine Biodiversity Board was established with the aim of elaborating a system of priorities and objectives for joint action, including in the field of ecological connectivity. Furthermore, the French Presidency of the Alpine Convention 2019 – 2020 chose biodiversity as one of its priorities and undertook several initiatives on the topic, including the organization of the Mountain Biodiversity day; these initiatives and the intensive cooperation of Contracting Parties and Observers on the topic resulted in the approval at the XVI Alpine Conference of the "Declaration on the Protection of Mountain Biodiversity and its Promotion at International Level".

The Alpine and Carpathian Conventions and their involvement in the Post-2020 process have the potential to strengthen the global biodiversity movement by serving as role models for other regions, especially mountain regions, with similar characteristics, problems, and challenges. Furthermore, they are positive examples of centering biodiversity in other sectors.

The active engagement of diverse stakeholders from the mountain sector (state authorities, political stakeholders, local communities, scientists, etc.) will be key for mobilizing support to stimulate ambitious negotiations on the Post-2020 GBF effective for safeguarding mountain biodiversity. Constituting coalitions to effectively promote the cause of mountain biodiversity, e.g., [HAC for Nature](#), will promote the adoption of ambitious targets on biodiversity protection globally. A "mountain variation" of this coalition would be desirable.

In conclusion, for achieving the Post-2020 GBF goals and targets, it will be key to **acknowledge the crucial role of mountains and their biodiversity**, by a) developing **goals or targets that reflect mountains and their biodiversity sufficiently**, e.g., by dedicatedly mentioning threatened ecosystems, including mountains; b) integrating **indicators** into the monitoring framework of the GBF that are **effective for safeguarding mountain biodiversity**; and c) indicating additional sectors for which mountains are especially relevant, e.g., the protection of endemic species, water and food security, and the protection of important sites for biodiversity.

The relevance of such indicators to monitor and assess success towards protecting mountain biodiversity has been mentioned in earlier meetings and discussions. A briefing document on indicators considered effective to safeguard mountain biodiversity, developed by UNEP in collaboration with the

Mountain Research Initiative, the Global Mountain Biodiversity Assessment, and GRID-Arendal, will be relevant to upcoming technical discussions during SBSTTA-24.

The Post-2020 GBF and its future implementation offer an exceptional opportunity for improving synergies and reinforcing biodiversity-related conventions, multilateral environmental agreements, and processes to halt biodiversity loss and restore ecosystems. As an international treaty on environmental protection and sustainable development, and one of only two international agreements specifically dedicated to a mountain region worldwide, the Carpathian and Alpine Conventions can play a substantial role in translating and supporting the global biodiversity targets at the regional level and becoming an important regional instrument for their implementation.

Resources and further information

[Documentation of the Mountain Biodiversity Day, 13th January 2021](#)

UNEP Policy brief on mountains: [Elevating Mountains in the Post-2020: Global Biodiversity Framework](#)

UNEP Policy brief 2.0 on mountains: [Elevating Mountains in the Post-2020: Global Biodiversity Framework 2.0](#)

[Declaration of the XVI Alpine Conference on the Protection of Mountain Biodiversity and its Promotion at International Level](#)

[Carpathian Convention and its role and contribution to the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework - draft assumptions by the Secretariat](#)