A POLICY BRIEF ON BIODIVERSITY IN

ROMANIA

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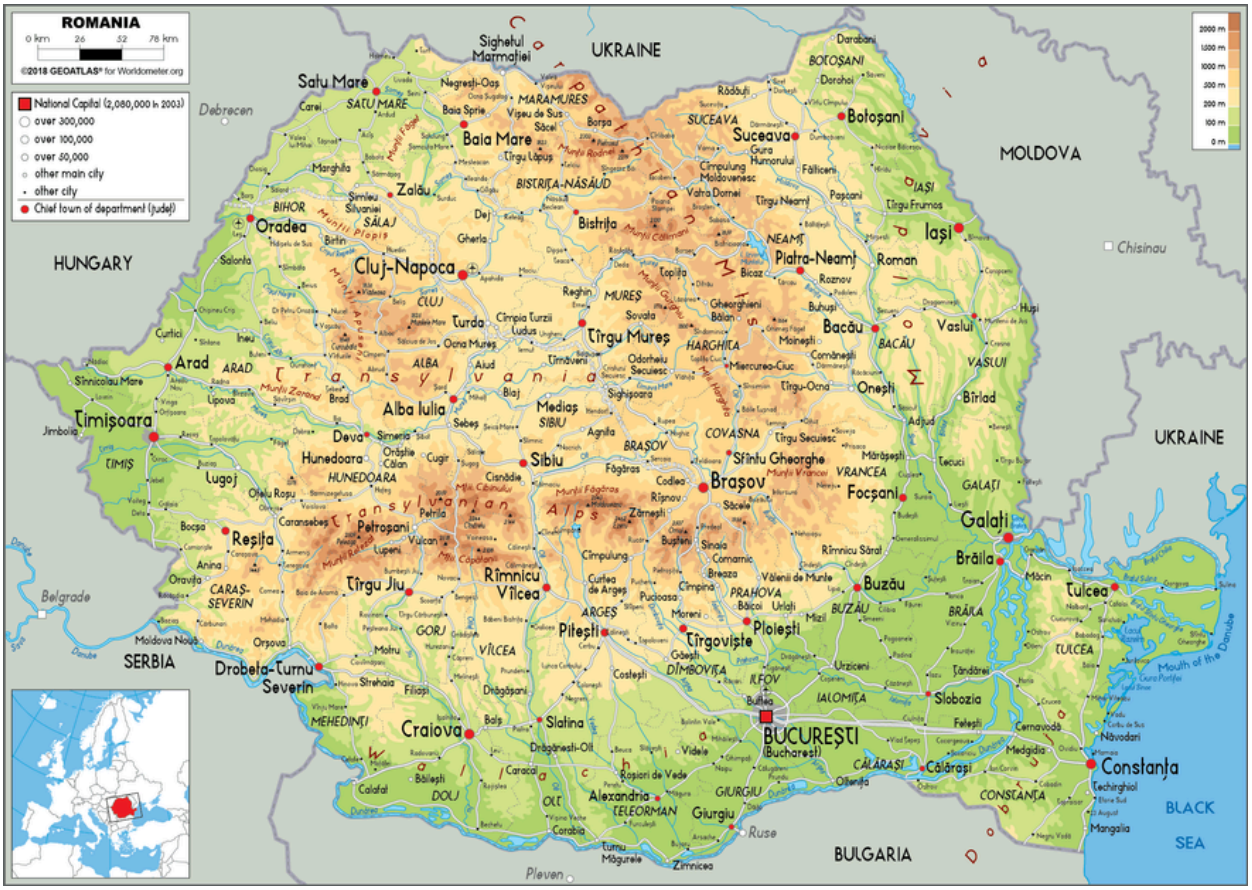

https://www.worldometers.info/maps/romania-map/

GENERAL INFO

INTRODUCTION

Romania is the 12th biggest country of Europe, located in Eastern Europe. Its landscapes are very diverse and dominated by the Carpathian Mountains. Historically, it is marked mainly by the nation's succession to the EU in 2007 and the downfall of communism. Today Romania excells in agriculture, industry, services and tourism. Romania is also one of the most biodiverse countries of Europe, home to many endangered species and largely covered in protected areas.

RAW FACTS

Geographical size: 238 398 km2 [1]

Population: 19 064 409 (2024) [1]
Life expectancy at birth: 77 years [2]
Net migration: -28,466 [2]
Population growth (annual): 0.1% [2]

GDP per capita of €30 000 → below the EU average (€37 600) [2]
GDP growth (annual): 0.8% [2]
Currency: Romanian Leu [1]

Over 4000 traditional products; one of them reaching tables of Swiss, British or Greeks: The Topoloveni jam.

ECONOMY

MAIN ECONOMIC PILLARS:
- agriculture (cereals, sugar beets, potatoes), logging, export of raw materials (coal, oil, gas, uranium), diverse & competitive industry (vehicle parts, construction, petroleum refining) [5]

HIGH INFLATION:
- rapidly increasing wages, decreased economic growth, Ukraine war, political turbulences, higher taxes, spending pressure (education, health and social protection, public pensions) from aging population [6]
- tight monetary policy needs to stay in place to buffer high inflation [7]

BIODIVERSITY

GENERAL:
- 23.4% of Romania's terrestrial area and 21.4% of Romania's marine waters is designated as protected areas [1]
- natural and semi-natural ecosystems cover approximately 47% of Romania's territory [2]
- presence of the full range of European forest fauna [2]; most biogeographically diverse country of the EU [2]
- less than 10% remains of some type of grassland and shallow marsh ecosystems because of conversion to cropland and pastures [2]
- trend of desertification on 20% of the arable land [2]

ROMANIA'S DANUBE DELTA BIOSPHERE RESERVE [2]
- bogs produce rich topsoil and provide unique habitat for different species [2]
- caves provide an invaluable record of quaternary geology [2]
- Black Sea offers a variety of conditions for harnessing assorted resources [2]

MILESTONES

HISTORY: [1]
- 1947 End of monarchy; formation of Socialist republic of Romania
- 1965 Turn away from SU with election of Nicolae Ceausescus
- 1989 End of Ceausescus' dictatorship; development to democracy and market economy
- 2004 admission to NATO
- 2007 member of European Union

POLITICAL SYSTEM: [2]
- representative parliamentary democracy
- and democratic and social constitutional state

POLITICAL SITUATION: [3,4]
- 2024: Annulled presidential elections: allegations of foreign interference (Russia)
- 2025: Run-off election: Pro-European Nicusor Dan 54% (vs. radical right-wing populist George Simion 46%) →splitted society

GEOGRAPHY

- 39% arable land, (but ⅔ of Romania suitable for agriculture), 28% forest, 21% pastures, 12% other [8]
- almost entirely mountains, hills and plains: Carpathian Mountains, Danube delta, Black Sea shore, lots of rivers and lakes [9]
- geographical diversity hosts great biodiversity (flora + fauna) [9]

BIGGEST CHALLENGES

POLITICAL SITUATION:
- right wing populism, political divide, corruption, discrimination of minorities and hate speech [10]

BARRIERS TO INNOVATION:
- excessive bureaucracy, weak human capital [11]

COMMUNIST-TOTALITARIAN LEGACY:
- transition to market-economy and democracy caused deep systemic changes and lead Romania to focus on its succession to the EU and they neglected relationships with other countries outside the EU [11]

CONSUMPTION

INTRODUCTION

Traditional products represent an important component of the Romanian culture, of the Romanian identity.From plum brandy (țuica) and sugar-free plum jam (magiun) to handwoven textiles and woodworking, these products reflect the deep connection between people and landscape. Despite over 4,000 traditional products registered nationally, only a small fraction reach large-scale markets or receive international recognition. Economic hardship, aging populations, weak infrastructure, and regulatory challenges threaten the survival of these traditions.However, the growing interest in sustainable, local, and authentic foods across Europe offers new opportunities. This fact sheet outlines the current situation of traditional product production and consumption in the Romanian Carpathians, highlights key challenges, showcases best practices—particularly from Transylvania—and presents policy recommendations for strengthening this sector.

SITUATION & CHALLENGES

REGULATORY & INSTITUTIONAL

- Complicated bureaucracy and high taxation deter small producers (e.g., ţuica licensing is costly).[2]
- Weak enforcement of labeling laws allows misuse of "traditional" terms, reducing consumer trust.[1]
- Lack of government-led strategic promotion or certification assistance [1]

. ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

- Most traditional producers are smallholders or aging rural families with limited capital.
- EU funding mechanisms (e.g., SAPARD, CAP) are underutilized due to poor institutional support and weak advisory networks.
- Market domination by industrial producers marginalizes authentic small-scale makers.[2]

SOCIAL & DEMOGRAPHIC

- Transhumance (seasonal pastoralism) faces extinction due to lack of skilled successors, farmer hostility, and damage to crops along migration routes.[3]

MARKET ACCESS & TRUST

- Very few products reach supermarket shelves or export markets.[1]
- Consumers are often deceived by false labels or low-quality imitations of traditional goods.[1]
- Lack of visibility in national and EU markets contributes to rural poverty and stagnation.[1]

STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS

STRENGTHEN LOCAL IDENTITY & PROMOTION

- Use digital marketing, rural festivals, and media campaigns to showcase traditional goods.
- Introduce local/regional quality labels that certify authenticity (e.g., "Traditional from Buzău").
- Partner with tourism to boost agro-rural experiences tied to food and crafts.

MODERNIZE WITH RESPECT FOR TRADITION

- Offer microcredit and grants for small producers to upgrade facilities and meet hygiene standards.
- Invest in packaging, logistics, and branding to expand beyond local markets.
- Promote traceability systems for traditional products to ensure quality and consumer trust.

BEST PRACTICE SOLUTIONS

MAGIUNUL DE TOPOLOVENI

- Romania's Only (PGI) certified traditional product
- Symbol of Romania's potential in the high-value traditional food sector.
- Available in foreign markets including Switzerland, the UK, and Greece.
- Demonstrates the potential of combining heritage, quality, and marketing.

ASOCIAŢIA PRODUCĂTORILOR DE PRODUSE TRADIŢIONALE ŞI ECOLOGICE DIN MARAMUREŞ

- Promotes traditional food, textiles, woodcraft, and dairy from the Maramureș region.
- Emphasizes ecological, slow-food values and preservation of mountain culture.
- Marketing & Visibility: Organize participation in fairs, expos, and tourism circuits.
- Offer workshops on business planning, EU funding access, and digital marketing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a national certification support center to help producers apply for PGI, PDO, TSG labels
- Design targeted CAP-style subsidies for certified traditional goods (like France/Italy)
- Create regional wholesale hubs, e-shops, and tourist partnerships
- Tighten labeling laws and inspections, offer consumer education on real vs. fake goods
- Expand rural advisory centers (e.g., ANCA) to offer tech, marketing, and EU funding guidance
- Invest in promotion at EU/international trade fairs and bilateral branding agreements

AGRICULTURE

INTRODUCTION

Biodiversity conservation is closely related to agriculture. Romania is known for its biodiversity rich meadows, which are maintained through traditional farming practices. Through the succession to the EU in 2007, Romania has subscribed itself to various EU frameworks on agriculture, rural development and nature conservation. However, these don't always refelct the specific local conditions that are at hand in Romania, due to its unique situation, where nature and agriculture have been in harmony for a long time and where agriculture still plays a dominant role today.

SITUATION & CHALLENGES

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP)

- promotion of intensive agriculture through subsidies and direct payments [1]
- increased use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers [1]
- adoption of monoculture practices [1]
- expansion of agricultural land , alteration of traditional landscapes [1]

→ degradation and loss of natural habitats; impact on species diversity and ecosystem integrity; habitat fragmentation and loss of native flora and fauna [1]

ILLEGAL LOGGING IN FORESTS

- largest area of survival of primary and old growth forests in EU endangered [2]
- due to administrative issues only a very small part is strictly protected) [2]

VANISHING BIODIVERSITY IN HAY MEADOWS

- some of the richest and most botanically diverse hay meadows in Europe [4]
- due to artificial fertilisers, humans and horses being replaced by machines [5]
- due to high cost of workers, since unpaid young people in families leave for the cities [5]

STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS

FARMERS

- farmers play a key role in biodiversity conservation through sustainable agriculture practices [3]
- simultaneously biodiversity improves agricultural productivity by providing safe, sustainable conditions, nutritious and affordable foodstuffs [3]
- traditionally cultivated hay methods examplarily can be richer in wildlife than meadows managed as nature reserves [5]

EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

- sets ambitious goals, provides frameworks and subsidies for a transition and encouragement towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly agriculture practices [1]
- further connectivity of Natura 2000 sites; Romania has (next to Spain, Slovakia, Bulgaria) highest functional connectivity values [6]

APPROACHES:

- farm size influences effectiveness of ecological restoration strategies: Small to medium-sized farms can benefit from reduced pesticides; Large farms are harmed [7]

BEST PRACTICE SOLUTIONS

FUNDATIA ADEPT

- biodiversity conservatoin and rural development NGO [8]
- giving High Value Farmed Landscapes of Transilvania and their communities economic future and relevance [8]
- creating long-term incentives for traditional management, in form of grants or commercial incentives [8]
- co-creation of policies [8]
- promotion of Natura 2000 integration [8]

SOIL AND SOUL

- regenerative farming project to restore degraded soil [10]
- train young farmers on first regenerative farm in Romania [10]

→ either stay as employees or open up own regenerative farm and get support with monitoring and consultancy [10]

- goal to build up network of regenerative farms throughout the country [10]

ALPA BIOREGIONAL REGENERATION

- pilot agroecological farm for meadow conservation [11]
- build network to promote regenerative agriculture [11]
- valuation of small-scale farming businesses [11]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Developing holistic approaches, including agricultural productivity and biodiversity conservation as well as social, economic and ecological factors [1]
- Supporting, empowering and maintaining traditional agriculture practices [5,8]
- nuanced farm size / scale dependent approach is necessary for effective agri-environmental policies design [7]
- Investing in further connections of Natura 2000 sites [6]
- Encouraging, facilitating, and supporting organic agricultural production and ecotourism activities [9]
- Providing tax facilities to landowners who implement environmental protection measures and land use practices [9]
- Encouraging and supporting the development of agritourism [9]
- more ambitious targets for maintaining biodiversity and avoid illegal forestation from Romania as a country [2]

ESD

INTRODUCTION

According to **UNESCO** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), "Education for Sustainable Development develops and strengthens the capacity of individuals, groups, communities, organizations and countries to **make judgements and choices in favour of sustainable development**. It can promote a **shift in people's mind-sets** and in so doing enable them to make our world safer, healthier and more prosperous, thereby **improving the quality of life**. Education for sustainable development can provide **critical reflection and greater awareness and empowerment** so that new visions and concepts can be explored, and new methods and tools developed" [1]

SITUATION & CHALLENGES

GENERAL SITUATION

- SDG 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" [2]

→ in EU comparison, Romania stands as a low performer

ESD IN SCHOOLS

- students mostly influenced by schools and family [3]
- educational activities dependent on school curricula and teacher's training, beliefs, and attitudes [3]
- biggest impact: field activities [3]
- challenges: prevailing theoretical character, little time resources, no support form state [3]

ESD IN HEIS

- some universities signed the University Charter for Sustainable Development (Copernicus Charter) [1]
- challenges: involve ESD skills in professor training curriculum,, change mentality, difference between private and public universities [1]

ESD IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SECTOR

- policies: influenced by environmental issues, available resources and type of decision-making processes [2]
- evolvement in favour of the citizens and for the sake of economic growth and social welfare [2]
- challenges: continuous development of skills and knowledge of employees [2]

ESD IN ECO-TOURISM

- Assets: UNESCO-listed areas, several national parks and geomorphological diversity → great for eco- and geo-tourism models [4]
- Under-utilized ecotourism potential (poor local cooperation, weak infrastructure within and around protected areas, limited promotional efforts, undertrained staff, ...), governance constraints and resource pressure on parks [4]

BEST PRACTICE SOLUTIONS

- Romanian Teachers' Field Activities: Geography and early childhood teachers report that excursions and nature-based community projects have the greatest ESD impact [3]
- ESD in Public Administration: Pilot training programs targeting Romanian public servants show increased openness to LLL when content relates directly to their digital work context and job security concerns [2]
- NGO and EU Project Engagement: EU-funded initiatives and partnerships with NGOs (e.g., environmental campaigns, afforestation drives) significantly boost ESD participation in schools [3]
- HEI-led biodiversity monitoring projects in Romanian protected areas, involving students and local community members [1]

STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS

EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

- field-based learning [3]
- teacher training in ESD [3]
- lifelong learning for citizens [2]
- transdisciplinary learning approaches [1]

ECOTOOURISM INTERVENTIONS

→ National Ecotourism Development Strategy (2019–2029) [5]

- promotion of local products, educational initiatives
- eco-certification (based on GSTC and European standards) managed by the Asociația de Ecoturism din România (AER)

SYSTEMIC APPROACHES

- embedding ESD in policy: aligning educational reforms with SDG 4 to enhance coherence [2]
- cross-sectional collaboration: universities, NGOs, and public institutions co-develop curricula [2]
- digital tool sfor engagement (e.g. ICT) [2]

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR POLICYMAKERS

- develop and implement a national strategy for ESD (co-created with teachers and stakeholders to ensure relevance)
- ensure digital infrastructure and training are embedded in public administration

FOR EDUCATORS AND INSTITUTIONS

- increase field-based activities and cross-disciplinary content in all levels of education
- incentivise teacher participation in sustainability-related lifelong learning
- incorporate biodiversity education across disciplines and encourage student-led, transdisciplinary research and conservation actions

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGOS

- expand community-driven biodiversity education projects in partnership with schools and municipalities
- use digital media and informal education to reach youth and marginalized populations

FOR ECOTOURISM

- Improve Tourism Infrastructure & Land-Use Planning (roads, trails, public transport, ...)
- Strengthen Skills & Human Capital (provide online and in-person professional training for guides, guesthouse owners, and destination managers)

SPI

INTRODUCTION

Currently, we are facing rapid biodiversity loss due to a lack of action, even though we have necessary scientific insight, resulting in a so-called **"knowing-doing gap"**. [1] To close this gap, direct science-society interaction between scientists and stakeholders like policy makers are needed, to result in targeted, well-thought out actions. The boundary between scientists and actors in the policy process can be defined as a **science-policy interface (SPI)**. They can be places and occasions for knowledge brokering, exchange or argumentation, and SPIs can cover a range of institutional structures, even informal relationships. [2]

SITUATION & CHALLENGES

GENERAL SPI DIFFICULTIES, ALSO OBSERVED IN ROMANIA

- framing and addressing in broader policy context (incompatibility of specialised research projects and broad answers or tailored knowledge that policy makers need) [1]
- ensuring interactions and mutual understanding (expectations at the start diverge significantly, causing misunderstandings) [1]
- enhancing and maintaining interfacing expertise (SPIs are resource intensive ⇒ key challenge: encourage potential actors to invest time and effort) [1]
- integrating SPIs with different projects and partners [1] → lack of flow of information between projects (EU wide) [3]
- problem of silo thinking → need to link different policy sectors for biodiversity to be implemented in all of them (not just environmental ministries) [2]

SPECIFIC ROMANIAN STRESSORS ON SPIS

- limited importance of the Ministry of the Environment, Water and Forests [4]
- limited capacity for enforcement and resources [4]
- lack of coordination among different levels [4]
- lack of interest and motivation from policy makers for some environmental topics (e.g. soil) [5]

STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS

GENERAL

- well structured networks enhances efficiency: effective communication, collaboration and resource sharing → reduces redundancy and promotes inclusivity [3]

→ European level: role of data platforms and research infrastructure could be further strengthened in the network

- trust-building very important [2]
- measures for compatibility of projects and policy: websites, more explicit formulations of research, targeted exchange [1]
- ensure mutual understanding during starting phase + remain open during process to reflexively handle complex problems [1]
- SPIs can't just be considered an add-on, must be led (or supported) by experts from the early stages on [1]

CONCEPT OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

- as a way to pique policy-makers interest [6]
- in many analysed cases considered beneficial to help with framing win-win situations or facilitating integration of different policy objectives
- emphasises multi-functionality of measures

BEST PRACTICE SOLUTIONS

IMPLEMENTATION OF WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE [2]

- as preparation for EU ascension → EU Water Framework Directive into Romanian national legislation (two phases)

1. PHASE 2000 - 2006:

- top down: responsibility given to Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests and National Water Authority and 2 research institutes
- but weak connectivity and coordination among SPI components
- resulted in lack of effective outputs

2. PHASE AFTER 2009:

- identified need for multi-level architecture and involvement of different scientific disciplines + non scientific expertise
- through interactions and workshops
- helped SPI by enhancing synergies and resolving conflicts

RECOMMENDATIONS

PARTNERSHIPS AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE WITH OTHER SPIS AND PROJECTS THROUGH DATA BASES

- facilitates transfer of existing knowledge (lesser drain on capacities), "standing on the shoulders of giants", gives SPIs a broader context to belong in

INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS IN SPI PROCESSES

- helps with trust-building in institutions and encourages actors to want to invest time and resources into SPI + brings attention to issues not in focus of policy-makers
- SPI effectiveness depends on involvement of actors

INVOLVEMENT OF MORE DIVERSE MINISTRIES

- to combat silo-thinking and counteract limited influence of Ministry of the Environment, Water and Forests

USE OF CONCEPTS LIKE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

- to combine different advantages for different ministries/stakeholder groups → combats lack of attention for more subtle environmental issues

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