**Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians**

CC/COP8/DOC/2

# CARPATHIAN CONVENTION PROGRESS REPORT

## 2024-2026

## for the Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CC COP8)

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

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

1. Since its adoption at the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) in 2023, the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework (CBF) has become a cornerstone of regional cooperation on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the Carpathian region. As the first regional instrument developed to support implementation of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), the CBF has significantly strengthened the position of the Carpathian Convention as a leading regional governance mechanism contributing to global biodiversity objectives. During the reporting period, the Secretariat, Parties and partners focused on promoting the CBF internationally, facilitating its integration into national processes and developing practical mechanisms for its implementation.

   A major achievement was the recognition of the CBF within processes of the Convention on Biological Diversity, where it was highlighted as an innovative example of regional implementation of global biodiversity commitments. The Framework has been promoted through cooperation with the CBD Secretariat, the Alpine Convention and various international mountain initiatives, contributing to increased visibility of the Carpathian region within global biodiversity and mountain governance discussions.

   To support implementation of the CBF at the national level, the Secretariat developed guidance materials to assist Parties in integrating CBF objectives and actions into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs): Guidance Document for Streamlining the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework into NBSAPs, including its Annex I: Comprehensive table with comprehensive example policy measures and actions relevant for the Carpathians. This process aims to strengthen alignment between the Carpathian Convention and the KMGBF, promote coordinated implementation, improve the use of available resources, and ensure that relevant actions under biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements are reflected in national planning processes.

   To operationalise the CBF, the Secretariat coordinated the development of the **Carpathian Biodiversity Framework Implementation Plan 2027–2035.** Building on the CBF Annex adopted at COP7 as a rolling framework for biodiversity-related actions under the Convention, the Implementation Plan translates the CBF's strategic objectives into concrete targets, actions, timelines. Developed through consultations with the Carpathian Convention Parties and key partners, the Implementation Plan serves as an official implementation document under the Convention. It is intended to guide coordinated regional action on biodiversity conservation, support implementation of relevant projects, the CARPATHIAN LIFE project and other future initiatives and strengthen delivery of the Convention's biodiversity objectives across the Carpathian region. CBF Implementation Plan was adopted by the First Extraordinary Conference of the Parties to the Carpathian Convention in February 2026.

   One of the most significant developments during the reporting period was the preparation of the **CARPATHIAN LIFE Strategic Nature Project** as the primary implementation mechanism for the CBF. Through extensive consultations with the European Commission, CINEA and stakeholders from all seven Carpathian countries, the Secretariat coordinated the initial preparation of a transnational project proposal, as well as the

development of **Carpathian Biodiversity Framework Implementation Plan 2027–2035**, translating the CBF objectives into concrete actions, targets and timelines and providing an operational framework for coordinated implementation across the region. Subsequently, and with the support and endorsement of the Parties, the further development and coordination of the project proposal were entrusted to Eurac Research, which assumed the role of coordinating beneficiary. This arrangement was necessary due to the Secretariat's inability, under the LIFE Programme rules and the UNEP institutional framework, to participate as a funded project partner or coordinating beneficiary. In September 2025, a concept note for the CARPATHIAN LIFE project was submitted with an indicative budget of EUR 50 million, a planned implementation period of nine years (2027–2035), and a consortium of 42 partners. The project aimed to support biodiversity conservation, ecological connectivity, forest restoration, sustainable land management, climate adaptation, education and capacity building throughout the Carpathian region. The full project proposal was subsequently submitted in March 2026.

Although the proposal was ultimately not selected for funding under the LIFE Strategic Nature Projects targeted call, the evaluation recognized its strong strategic relevance, and the unprecedented level of cooperation achieved among the seven Carpathian countries. The process resulted in the establishment of the first comprehensive transnational partnership and implementation plan for the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, generating a substantial portfolio of jointly developed priorities and actions that remain available for future funding opportunities and collaborative initiatives. The Secretariat, together with the Parties and project partners, is currently reflecting on the evaluation results and exploring potential next steps to further advance implementation of the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and its Implementation Plan and potential resubmission of the project proposal.

***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**

In accordance with the COP7 Ministerial Declaration on the impact of war in Ukraine on the environment and the Set of measures - support to Ukraine within the Carpathian Convention, the Secretariat continued to prioritize assistance to the Ukrainian Carpathians throughout the reporting period. Activities focused on biodiversity conservation, environmental recovery, institutional strengthening, regional cooperation and mobilization of international financing, as well as project development.

1. During the reporting period, the Secretariat, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine and relevant partners significantly advanced its support for the sustainable recovery of the Ukrainian Carpathians through project development, strategic partnerships and international cooperation. A major milestone was the successful preparation, submission and approval of the full GEF project proposal Enhanced Protected Areas Network for Biodiversity Conservation and Development in Ukraine, which subsequently received GEF CEO endorsement, which was developed in close cooperation with the Ministry and partners in Ukraine, such as Institute of Ecology of the Carpathians of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Green Dossier, and other key stakeholders. The Secretariat will serve as a co-executing agency together with the Ministry, with the inception phase expected to commence at the end of 2026-beginning of 2027. The Secretariat also supported the project proposals of other strategic initiatives, including the GEF-funded project Integrating Biodiversity Conservation into Upstream Planning of Linear Transport Infrastructure in Ukraine.
2. The Secretariat advanced cooperation with **UNIDO** by signing a signing of an UN-to-UN Agreement, aimed at contributing to the implementation of the UNIDO project Green Industrial Recovery through Municipality-Based Development in Ukraine in the Carpathian region. Furthermore, the Secretariat made progress in implementing the project in cooperation with UNIDO by co-organizing several Ukraine-focused sessions at the 8th Forum Carpaticum 2025 Conference (8th Forum Carpaticum); participating in the project's Steering Committee; identifying capacity building, twinning and pilot project activities in Hungary, Slovakia and Italy; initiating and advancing collaborations with implementing partners in Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary and Italy;

and developing concrete collaborative actions in liaison with the **Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions** secretariats in the framework of the project **Environmental Sound Management of Plastic Waste in the Carpathian Mountains**, which include a preliminary assessment of plastic pollution in the Carpathian region and a pilot project in Rakhiv, Ukraine.

As part of the pilot project activities, the following trainings and tour were conducted:

- A training focused on project development and management and collaboration between Ukrainian and Slovak municipalities, which took place 17-18 September 2026 in Košice, Slovakia, for representatives of Ukrainian municipalities, organised by Špirála, Roma Environmental Sustainability & Development Initiative (RESDI), with support from Eurac Research and the Carpathian Convention Secretariat.
- A study tour focused on waste management and collaboration with Hungarian partners, which took place 5-9 October 2026 in Miskolc and Budapest, Hungary, organised by the Hungarian Association of Environmental Enterprises (HAEE), and involved building partnerships with the International Solid Waste Association.
- A training focused on pastoralism, waste management, project development and collaboration with Italian partners, which took place 9-11 November 2026 in Bolzano, Italy, organised by Eurac Research, and resulted in an agreement between municipalities of Rakhiv and Terlano to develop a cooperation agreement.

Based on the results of the trainings, recommendations and guidelines will be developed by the partners and shared with the Convention Parties.

The Secretariat maintained close coordination with the UNIDO project team to make provisions to ensure implementation of all activities in 2026 and leverage the strategic partnership through future joint activities in light of the upcoming presidency of Ukraine.

3. Throughout the reporting period, the Secretariat strengthened Ukraine's participation in the work of the Carpathian Convention and expanded international cooperation in support of the Ukrainian Carpathians. It facilitated and supported the active engagement of Ukrainian officials, experts, researchers and stakeholders in Convention processes, including Working Group meetings, the Eighth GEF Assembly and other international cooperation activities, while also supporting meaningful participation in the 8th Forum Carpaticum, and Involving Ukrainian partners and experts into the development of agenda, which strengthened with and whiting Ukrainian partners. The Secretariat co-organized three Ukraine-focused sessions during Forum Carpaticum. Additionally, the role of Ukrainian scientists within the Science for the Carpathians (S4C) network was further strengthened, including their participation in S4C governance, collaborative projects and capacity-building activities for early-career researchers.

4. The Secretariat further expanded its network of partnerships supporting Ukraine's green recovery through active participation in high-level international events, including the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2026, the First Stakeholders' Forum of the Green Recovery Platform for Ukraine, where it co-organized a panel on biodiversity and nature with the UNEP Ukraine Office and WWF-Ukraine, and the high-level International Environmental Forum "Environment for Ukraine," organized by the Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine with the support of UNDP Ukraine. The Secretariat also strengthened cooperation with the scientific community by supporting the International Award Corona Carpatica as a co-founding partner and participating in scientific exchanges on the conservation and sustainable use of the Ukrainian Carpathians.

5. In consultation with the Ministry of Economy and Environment of Ukraine, the Secretariat is preparing the Ukrainian Carpathians Nature Recovery Dialogue, a high-level multi-stakeholder event to be held during COP8. The Dialogue will bring together Parties, other States, UN agencies, international organizations and development partners to strengthen coordination, mobilize support and advance the implementation of the Set of Measures – Support to Ukraine within the Carpathian Convention and the related Ministerial Declaration.

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

1. Efforts to establish and promote a regional **Carpathian Day** continued throughout the reporting period, building on the concept developed following COP7. The Secretariat collaborated with educational institutions, protected areas, scientists and civil society organisations to raise awareness of the unique natural and cultural heritage of the Carpathian region and to strengthen public recognition of the Carpathian Convention. Key achievements included the development and dissemination of the Carpathian Day concept, the establishment of a dedicated online platform for registering and promoting events, and the organisation of consultations among interested partners across the region. As a result, Carpathian Day activities have been organised in several countries in 2024, 2025 and 2026, including Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

   The Secretariat was invited to participate and provided welcome remarks for two online Carpathian Day celebrations in Ukraine. The Secretariat provided welcome remarks at the online conference "European Integration of Ukraine: common interests and problems of Carpathian farmers" hosted and organized by ICO Information Center "Green Dossier," which marked an official celebration of the Carpathian Day 2024 in Ukraine. The Secretariat was also invited by the National Ecological Centre of Ukraine (NECU) to provide welcome remarks at the International Carpathian School autumn session on 25 September 2025. This Carpathian Day 2025 event was organized by the NECU within the project “Shifting towards Ecotourism in Protected Areas through Heritage Interpretation”, and co-financed by the governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia through the Visegrad Grants of the International Visegrad Fund.

   Building on these efforts, the **2026 Carpathian Day theme**, “Carpathian Pastoralism: Where Nature and Culture Meet,” was announced, highlighting the important links between biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage and traditional pastoral practices in the Carpathians. In partnership with Špirála and EcoEdu Natura, educational materials to support Carpathian Day activities and beyond were developed, including a pastoralism factsheet with activity ideas and a lesson plan for identifying symbols, colors, and values that connect with local Carpathian stories and traditions. These materials have been translated into various Carpathian languages as well. Stakeholders throughout the region were invited to contribute events and activities through the dedicated webpage.

2. Particular progress was achieved in **Romania**, where governmental and non-governmental partners, supported by the Secretariat, advocated for the establishment of **26 September as the official Carpathian Mountains Day**. Following discussions with the Romanian UNESCO Parliamentary Commission, the proposal entered the national legislative process, being approved by the Senate of the Romanian Parliament and is pending approval by the Chamber of Deputies.

   Overall, this initiative aims to strengthen recognition of the Carpathians as a shared natural and cultural heritage and support long-term efforts to raise awareness of sustainable mountain development.

***General Implementation of the Carpathian Convention***

1. The reporting period also witnessed a continued strengthening of the Convention’s institutional framework, regional visibility and stakeholder engagement. In 2024, the Secretariat celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its establishment and UNEP’s presence in Vienna, highlighting two decades of cooperation for sustainable mountain development and biodiversity conservation in the Carpathians and beyond. The anniversary provided an opportunity to showcase achievements, strengthen partnerships and reaffirm commitment to the implementation of the Convention.

2. The Secretariat was informed about an initiative to establish the **Carpathian Peace Natural Park**, a proposed transboundary protected area between Romania and Ukraine aimed at conserving biodiversity, landscapes and cultural heritage while promoting research, recreation and sustainable tourism. The Secretariat and Parties were invited to support consultations on the initiative, and a memorandum of cooperation with the initiators, Green Agenda and Geoconcept, was proposed. As of **July 2026**, no substantive progress or significant updates on the development of the initiative have been reported.

3. The Secretariat continued to facilitate cooperation among Parties, Working Groups, expert networks, scientific institutions, protected areas and international partners, thereby reinforcing the role of the Convention as the primary regional platform for addressing common environmental and sustainable development challenges in the Carpathian Mountains. The cumulative achievements of the reporting period demonstrate substantial progress in implementing COP7 decisions and provide a strong foundation for future activities leading towards COP8 and the long-term objectives of the Carpathian Vision 2050.

## 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**

During the reporting period, the Secretariat continued to strengthen cooperation with regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, research institutions, protected areas and other stakeholders as a key prerequisite for implementing the Carpathian Convention and achieving its sustainable development objectives. Particular emphasis was placed on promoting participatory governance approaches, enhancing stakeholder engagement and supporting initiatives that foster cross-border and transnational cooperation throughout the Carpathian region.

1. A major contribution in this regard was the Secretariat's involvement in the **Interreg Central Europe** project **Central Mountains: From the Alps to the Carpathians – Strengthening Governance Models for Sustainable Development of Mountain Areas in Central Europe,** which was made possible thanks to the cooperation with the Rzeszów County (project Lead Partner), the Association of the Carpathian Euroregion (project partner) and the Ecopsychology Society (external partner). The project provided an important platform for exchanging experiences between the Alpine and Carpathian, as well as other mountain regions and for testing innovative governance solutions for mountain areas. Throughout the implementation period, the Secretariat supported consultations with Carpathian stakeholders and ensured that project outputs reflected the needs and priorities of the Carpathian Convention.

   In 2024, the Secretariat contributed to the development of the **Joint Strategy for Community-Led Sustainable Development of Mountain Areas in Central Europe**, which promotes participatory governance and stronger involvement of local communities, youth and stakeholders in decision-making processes related to mountain development. The draft strategy was presented and discussed within the framework of the Carpathian Convention, including at the Working Group on Biodiversity meeting, and stakeholders were invited to provide comments and recommendations. As a result, in addition to the following Joint Strategy, available is the **Final Refinement of the Joint Strategy** which includes a summary for policymakers.

   As the project entered its final phase in 2025, a number of pilot actions and governance tools were further developed and consulted within the Carpathian Convention framework. These included the design and testing of a new cooperation model for the **Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (**more information about the developments related to the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform can be found in DECISION COP7/15

Sustainable tourism), improved mechanisms for cooperation among civil society organisations, approaches for strengthening cross-border functional areas, and stakeholder engagement instruments aimed at supporting regional development and territorial cooperation.

The Secretariat also supported the development and review of several practical governance tools, including the **Alpine-Carpathian Toolbox for Participation in Central European Mountain Areas**, which provides methods and approaches for engaging youth, civil society organisations and local stakeholders in decision-making processes. The Toolbox promotes inclusive governance and offers practical guidance that can support future implementation of the Convention at national, regional and local levels.

Another important outcome of the Central Mountains project was the development of a framework to strengthen cooperation among civil society organisations in the Carpathian region. In this context, cooperation with the **Carpathian Civil Society Platform**, supported by the Carpathian Foundation-Hungary, was intensified, recognising the Platform's role in promoting stakeholder participation, social cohesion and cross-border collaboration among local and regional actors. Discussions were initiated on opportunities for closer cooperation between the Platform and the Secretariat in support of future Convention activities, particularly in a form of a Memorandum of Cooperation.

Furthermore, the Secretariat disseminated further outputs of the Central Mountains project: **Policy recommendations on transnational and cross-border cooperation in mountain regions** and a **Comparative analysis of compliance mechanisms under the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions**. The findings highlight the absence of a dedicated compliance mechanism under the Carpathian Convention and propose options for strengthening implementation review processes. The topic has been proposed for discussion at the 17th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee (CCIC) as part of preparations for COP8.

Overall, the reporting period demonstrated the growing importance of participatory governance, stakeholder engagement and cross-sectoral cooperation for implementing the Carpathian Convention. Through its support to the Central Mountains project and related initiatives, the Secretariat contributed to strengthening cooperation mechanisms, enhancing stakeholder ownership and promoting inclusive approaches to sustainable mountain development across the Carpathian region.

## DECISION COP7/3 Cooperation with the European Union

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

1. During the reporting period, the Secretariat continued to strengthen cooperation with the European Union and actively supported the participation of Carpathian stakeholders in relevant EU funding programmes and policy initiatives. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying financial mechanisms capable of supporting the implementation of the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework (CBF), fostering transnational cooperation, and promoting biodiversity mainstreaming across sectors relevant to the Carpathian Convention.

2. The most significant achievement under this Decision was the development of the CARPATHIAN LIFE Strategic Nature Project. For more information, refer to the **DECISION COP7/1 Implementation of the Carpathian Convention/Activity: Implement the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and the accompanying Carpathian Vision 2050** (page 2).

3. Beyond the CARPATHIAN LIFE initiative, the Secretariat supported the development and implementation of numerous EU-funded projects relevant to the Carpathian region. These projects addressed biodiversity conservation, ecological connectivity, sustainable transport planning, forest conservation, climate adaptation,

environmental governance and social inclusion – more information about concert projects' implementation can be found in specific thematic chapters of the Progress Report.

Several initiatives supported by the Secretariat were successfully selected for funding, including:

- Harmon2 – Addressing the capacity building needs for mainstreaming biodiversity in the transport sector of the Danube region (Interreg Danube Region Programme).
- Empowering Roma Communities in the Green Deal (European Climate Initiative/EUKI).
- Carpathian–Sudeten Transboundary Climate Assessment (CaSuT) (Copernicus Climate Change Service).
- CLImate mitigation through CONnecting old-growth FORESTS (CLICONForests) (EUKI).
- RESTORA - Understanding Resilient Ecosystems across Scales TO inform terrestrial RestorAtion targets (Horizon Europe).
- LIFE LARCA – Protecting grey wolves and brown bear in European landscape: Concrete actions for lasting coexistence and ecological resilience (EU LIFE Programme).

At the same time, several project proposals supported during the reporting period were not selected for funding, including BioLine, LYCO, and LIFE CONFORHUA. Nevertheless, the experience gained through these initiatives contributed to improving project development capacities and fostering stronger cooperation among stakeholders throughout the region.

## DECISION COP7/4 Cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme

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

Throughout the reporting period, cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) continued primarily through the work of the Secretariat, which operates under the UNEP framework. The Secretariat actively participated in UNEP coordination mechanisms and meetings involving Multilateral Environmental Agreements, contributing to enhanced visibility of the Carpathian Convention and identifying opportunities for programmatic cooperation. Through these engagements, the Convention continued to promote its experiences in regional environmental governance, biodiversity conservation and sustainable mountain development.

1. The Secretariat contributed to interregional exchange and cooperation under UNEP-supported mountain programmes, particularly through the Adaptation at Altitude initiative, global mountain governance dialogues and activities under the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, including the Multi-Country Flagship on Ecosystem Restoration in Mountain Regions.

   Cooperation with UNEP also included support for the participation of Carpathian representatives in global policy processes. Notably, the Secretariat facilitated Carpathian participation in the UNEA-7 associated event **Vanishing Ice and Snow: Global Impacts and Regional Solutions for Resilient Mountains** (Nairobi, December 2025), ensuring that experiences and perspectives from the Carpathian region were represented in international discussions on mountain resilience and climate change.

2. Cooperation with UNEP was also strengthened in relation to support for Ukraine. The Secretariat maintained close coordination with relevant UNEP offices and initiatives addressing environmental recovery and sustainable development in Ukraine. This included participation in stakeholder dialogues, promotion of recovery initiatives in the Ukrainian Carpathians, and collaboration on activities supporting biodiversity conservation and green recovery.

3. In the context of the preparation of the CARPATHIAN LIFE Strategic Nature Project, consultations were undertaken with UNEP legal and administrative services regarding the potential participation of the Secretariat in EU-funded projects. While institutional limitations prevented the Secretariat from participating as a funded beneficiary, these discussions shall support identifying possible modalities for future engagement in large-scale international initiatives.

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

***Activity:* Activities related to cooperation with other conventions and international bodies, including exchanging on regional mountain governance and interregional cooperation**

During the reporting period, the Secretariat continued to strengthen cooperation with international conventions, mountain governance frameworks and relevant organizations in order to promote the objectives of the Carpathian Convention, enhance knowledge exchange and foster synergies in the implementation of global biodiversity, climate and sustainable development commitments.

1. Cooperation with the Alpine Convention continued to be one of the most important strategic partnerships of the Carpathian Convention. Throughout the reporting period, both Secretariats maintained regular exchanges and actively participated in each other's relevant meetings and events, including biodiversity, forest and mountain governance processes. This mutual engagement facilitated the exchange of experiences, strengthened coordination on shared priorities, and promoted joint approaches to biodiversity conservation, ecological connectivity, sustainable mountain development and implementation of global biodiversity commitments. Building on the MoC between the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention, the partnership further contributed to promoting regional approaches to implementing the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and strengthening the voice of mountain regions in international environmental processes.

2. The Secretariat supported UNEP in facilitating Carpathian participation in key mountain biodiversity events linked to the **CBD SBSTTA-27** process in 2025. The Carpathian region was represented by **Serbia**, as the Presidency of the Carpathian Convention, at the **Virtual Mountain Country Roundtable**, and by the **Czech Republic**, as Chair of the Working Group on Biodiversity, at the side event "**Mountains at the Heart of the Climate–Biodiversity Nexus: Strategic Ecosystems for Advancing Global Frameworks**" in Panama City. These events highlighted the contribution of mountain ecosystems to achieving the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) and promoted the integration of mountain biodiversity considerations into national and international biodiversity and climate policy processes.

3. The Secretariat continued to support interregional cooperation through the **Mountains Connect** initiative, coordinated by UNEP under the Adaptation at Altitude, programme. At the **Second Mountains Connect Interregional Workshop**, held in Bhutan in April 2026, representatives of major mountain regions, including the Alps, Andes, Caucasus, East Africa, Hindu Kush Himalaya and Carpathians, exchanged experiences and good practices on regional mountain governance, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. The Secretariat facilitated the participation of Serbia, representing both the Carpathian region and the Presidency of the Carpathian Convention, thereby ensuring that Carpathian experiences and priorities contributed to global discussions on sustainable mountain development and strengthening cooperation among the world's mountain regions.

4. The Special Envoy of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic on Mountains visited the Secretariat in July 2026 to promote the Second Global Mountain Summit Bishkek+25, scheduled to take place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan,

from 21 to 23 October 2027. During the visit, the Carpathian Convention was invited to participate substantively in the Summit by showcasing its successful intergovernmental platform for regional cooperation and highlighting its key achievements since the First Global Mountain Summit in 2002. The 2002 Summit provided significant political momentum for the establishment of the Carpathian Convention and laid the foundation for its ongoing efforts toward sustainable development in mountain regions.

5. Building on the adoption of the **CMS Concerted Action for the Eurasian Lynx** at CMS COP14 in 2024, the Secretariat, in cooperation with the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group, initiated the development of **a Joint Conservation Strategy for the autochthonous Carpathian lynx** (*Lynx lynx carpathicus*). The strategy is being prepared under the auspices of the Carpathian Convention, the Bern Convention and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and aims to establish a coordinated framework for the long-term conservation of the Carpathian lynx population. An international Expert Group comprising specialists from the Carpathian countries was convened in 2026 and tasked with drafting the strategy through a series of thematic workshops and consultations. The draft strategy is currently undergoing a final review by the relevant expert, including the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity, and governing bodies of the three conventions before being submitted for consideration by the Carpathian Convention COP8, the Bern Convention Standing Committee and CMS governing and expert bodies. For information, the Range-wide Strategy for the Rescue and Conservation of the Balkan Lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) 2026–2035, which is also a part of the CMS Concerted Action for the Eurasian Lynx, was developed and subsequently endorsed by the CMS COP15.

   Through these activities, the Secretariat continued to position the Carpathian Convention as an important regional platform for mountain governance, facilitating cooperation across conventions, regions and sectors while contributing to the implementation of global biodiversity and sustainable development objectives.

6. The Secretariat has developed cooperation with the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS) Secretariat, which aims to protect human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and waste, achieving the following progress:

   - Conclusion of the Internal Cooperation Agreement to collaborate on the implementation of the project Environmental Sound Management of Plastic Waste in the Carpathian Mountains, including the following objectives 1) Conducting a preliminary assessment of the status of plastic pollution in the Carpathian region and 2) Implementing a pilot activity for the prevention and minimization of plastic waste in the Ukrainian Carpathians.
   - Identification of implementation partners and pilot area in Rakhiv, Ukraine and initiating project activities, in close liaison with the BRS Secretariat and establishment of synergies with UNIDO in the framework of the joint project “Green industrial recovery through municipality-based development in Ukraine.
   - Agreement on a Strategic Cooperation Framework as an alternative to the MOC and formulation of a draft Programme of Collaborative Work 2026–2027.

7. Upon invitation from the Mountain Partnership, the Secretariat actively participated in the 7th Global Meeting of the Mountain Partnership in Andorra and presented Carpathian Convention and its achievements and activities in the field of biodiversity and pastoralism at the Plenary Panel: Mountains beyond borders – ecosystem protection, restoration and sustainable management. The meeting concluded with The Andorra Declaration - Elevating Mountain Action beyond 2030.

8. The Secretariat initiated discussions with the Permanent Secretariat of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe. This World Heritage Site encompasses 19 member states, including 5 within the Carpathian Convention member states. Building on this engagement, the Secretariat is fostering collaboration with the Permanent Secretariat of the UNESCO Beech Forests on potential joint initiatives such as the CARPATHIAN LIFE activities.

## DECISION COP7/6 Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

***Activity:* Implementing the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and the accompanying Carpathian Vision 2050**

The Carpathian Convention has actively contributed to the implementation of KMGBF through enhanced cooperation with biodiversity-related conventions and international organizations,), promoting synergies among multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), and supporting coordination between global, regional and national biodiversity processes.

1. The overarching framework for these efforts is the renewed **Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention**, signed in 2023. The MoC explicitly aims to enhance cooperation for the implementation of the KMGBF in the Alpine and Carpathian regions, strengthen exchange with other mountain regions worldwide, and support biodiversity mainstreaming, ecological connectivity, protected areas, ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation, nature-based solutions and sustainable mountain development. The MoC recognizes the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions as regional mechanisms for translating the KMGBF into coordinated regional action and fostering cooperation among Parties, stakeholders and mountain regions.

   The Carpathian Convention's contribution is firmly anchored in **Decision COP7/6 on the Implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, adopted at the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) in 2023. Through this decision, the Parties recognized the Carpathian Convention as a regional mechanism for implementing the CBD and the KMGBF in the Carpathian region and welcomed the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework (CBF) as the key instrument for regional implementation. Decision COP7/6 further invited Parties to integrate relevant Carpathian Convention priorities into revised National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), welcomed the renewed trilateral Memorandum of Cooperation with the CBD and Alpine Convention, encouraged stronger promotion of mountain biodiversity within CBD processes, and called for enhanced cooperation and synergies among biodiversity-related conventions and other relevant international processes.

2. **Regional implementation of the KMGBF through the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework**

   The CBF represents the **first regional framework in the world specifically developed to support implementation of the KMGBF at the subregional level**. It translates global biodiversity goals and targets into a regional mountain context, providing a coordinated framework or biodiversity conservation and sustainable development across the seven Carpathian countries. The CBF aligns Carpathian Convention activities and priorities with relevant KMGBF targets and serves as a practical mechanism for regional biodiversity governance. Through Decision COP7/6, the Conference of the Parties requested Contracting Parties to use the CBF as a key tool for implementing the Carpathian Convention and its Protocols while contributing to the achievement of the KMGBF through joint and synergistic actions involving all relevant actors and stakeholders. Since its adoption, the CBF has become a cornerstone of regional cooperation in the Carpathians and an internationally recognized example of how regional agreements can contribute to implementation of global biodiversity commitments.

3. **Recognition by the Convention on Biological Diversity and promotion as a model for other regions**

Following its adoption, the CBF was incorporated into CBD processes and presented on the CBD website as a regional instrument supporting implementation of the KMGBF.

The Carpathian Convention, under the leadership of the Serbian Presidency and the Chair of the Working Group on Biodiversity (Czech Republic), worked closely with the CBD Secretariat to ensure recognition of the Framework within global biodiversity processes. As a result:

- The efforts of the Carpathian Convention to support implementation of the KMGBF were recognized in official documentation of the fourth meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI-4).
- The SBI-4 recommendations for COP16 noted that the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework "could serve as a model for aligning regional with global biodiversity commitments and actions".
- The SBI-4 document on cooperation with other conventions and organizations formally referenced the Carpathian Convention's adoption of the CBF and recognized its role in coordinating regional implementation of the KMGBF.
- The CBD Secretariat included the CBF in official COP16 documentation through information document CBD/COP/16/INF/23 and further referenced the Framework in document CBD/COP/16/10 on cooperation with conventions and international organizations.

These developments demonstrate how regional implementation mechanisms can strengthen delivery of the KMGBF while enhancing synergies between biodiversity-related conventions and regional governance frameworks.

## 4. Promoting regional approaches to biodiversity implementation in mountain regions

The trilateral cooperation between the CBD, the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention has become an effective platform for promoting regional approaches to biodiversity governance beyond the Carpathian region. Building upon the experience of the CBF, the Carpathian Convention has actively promoted the concept of regional biodiversity implementation frameworks among other mountain regions. A notable example is the ongoing cooperation with the Alpine Convention, which has drawn on the Carpathian experience while developing its own regional biodiversity instrument, currently advancing through the development of the **Alpine Biodiversity Action Plan**.

Since the adoption of the CBF, exchanges between the Alpine Biodiversity Board and the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity have continued with the aim of identifying common activities and further strengthening cooperation on biodiversity conservation, ecological connectivity and ecosystem restoration.

The Carpathian Convention also promotes knowledge exchange with other mountain regions globally, particularly the Andes, where discussions have focused on the value of regional approaches to implementing the KMGBF and the lessons learned from the development of the CBF.

## 5. Contribution to the Bern Process and cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions

The Carpathian Convention has actively contributed to international efforts to strengthen cooperation among biodiversity-related conventions through participation in the Bern Process. The Carpathian Biodiversity Framework was submitted and presented as a case study during the **Bern III Conference on Cooperation among the Biodiversity-related Conventions for the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, held in Bern, Switzerland, in January 2024. The CBF was highlighted as a practical example of how regional cooperation mechanisms can support implementation of the KMGBF while strengthening collaboration among biodiversity-related conventions and institutions. The experience of the Carpathian Convention attracted considerable interest from conference participants and contributed to discussions on scaling up cooperative approaches across regions and sectors.

The final report of the Bern III Conference and the updated cross-mapping paper on cooperation among multilateral environmental agreements subsequently referenced both the Carpathian Convention and the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework as examples of effective collaboration and implementation support.

Specific information on supporting and operationalizing the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework can be found under the DECISION COP7/1 Implementation of the Carpathian Convention, Activity: Implement the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and the accompanying Carpathian Vision 2050 (page 1).

**6.** At the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP17) in Yerevan, the Armenian Presidency, in partnership with UNEP, launched the **Yerevan Platform on Mountains and Related Freshwater Ecosystems**, a new global initiative aimed at advancing the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of mountain regions and connected freshwater systems. During the launch, Czechia highlighted the Carpathian Convention as a successful example of regional cooperation that translates global biodiversity commitments into coordinated action, drawing on over two decades of cross-border collaboration among seven countries. The Convention was presented as a model for regional cooperation, cross-sectoral integration and the use of existing regional mechanisms to support implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. COP8 of the Carpathian Convention is expected to explore opportunities for future cooperation and contributions to the emerging Yerevan Platform.

## DECISION COP7/7 Cooperation with Eurac Research

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

1. Eurac Research continued to provide scientific support and technical assistance to the Carpathian Convention through its Vienna Representing Office, in cooperation with Bolzano-based research institutes and administrative departments. The cooperation builds on the Memorandum of Cooperation between UNEP Vienna-SCC and Eurac Research, whose renewed work plan was signed during the Mountain Innovation Fair 2023, held on 24 October 2023 in Bolzano, Italy. Eurac Research also supported the development of the CARPATHIAN LIFE project proposal and was endorsed by the Parties to take the coordination role within the project. Further information is provided under chapter DECISION COP7/1 Implementation of the Carpathian Convention.

2. The Secretariat supported Eurac Research in organising a replication workshop under the **EU Horizon IMPETUS Project**, held on 27 March 2025 in Hostětín, Czech Republic. The project promoted the implementation of European climate commitments through concrete adaptation actions, including in mountain regions. The Secretariat facilitated communication with Czech counterparts and contributed to the identification of relevant stakeholders. The workshop, co-organised by Centre Veronica Hostětín and Eurac Research, focused on climate risks affecting the agricultural sector in the Zlín region, selected as a replication site due to its similarities with the Valle dei Laghi demonstration area in Northern Italy. The activity supported knowledge exchange, strengthened stakeholder engagement, and contributed to local capacities for climate risk assessment and adaptation planning.

3. Under the Central Mountains Project, Eurac Research, with the support of the Secretariat, organised the workshop **From pilot to policy: Ensuring Sustainability through Governance Structures in Central Europe. In dialogue with the Carpathian and Alpine Conventions** on 16 December 2025 at the Vienna International Centre. The workshop focused on the role of legal frameworks in strengthening implementation and stakeholder engagement, while promoting the uptake of project outputs. The policy dialogue during the workshop covered governance mechanisms within the Carpathian and Alpine Conventions, including compliance mechanisms, bodies, and progress reports, with discussions and recommendations on improving these mechanisms.

4. In order to capitalize on the past EU project Centralparks - Building management capacities of Carpathian protected areas for the integration and harmonization of biodiversity protection and local socio-economic development, Eurac Research developed the project **ENTURE-CE - Enhancing Environmental Education and Sustainable Tourism for Natural Areas Resilience in Central Europe** (Interreg Central Europe). The project was successfully approved under the EU Central Europe Programme. ENTURE project aims to safeguard Central Europe's environment by reinforcing cross-border cooperation in environmental education and visitor management. Its objective is to reduce fragmentation, align management standards, and strengthen ecological resilience and shared stewardship across protected areas The Secretariat, as associated project partner, supports the project's capitalisation objectives by facilitating access to existing tools, knowledge, and best practices on natural heritage management, ecological connectivity, and community engagement. This, together with the leadership of Eurac Research and the involvement of the Polish partner Ekopsychology Association, ensures continuity with earlier investments and strengthens the project's methodological foundation. The project builds on outputs from the Centralparks project, indicating a deliberate capitalisation strategy to avoid duplicating work and to scale proven approaches in the Carpathians.

5. Eurac Research is supporting the Secretariat in the implementation of the UNIDO project Green Industrial Recovery through Municipality-Based Development in Ukraine. Through participation in the project Steering Committee and cooperation with local stakeholders, efforts are undertaken to guarantee a knowledge transfer with the Alpine area, supporting green recovery in Carpathian municipalities in Ukraine. Further information is provided under chapter DECISION COP7/1 Implementation of the Carpathian Convention.

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

***Activity:* Activities related to strengthening the cooperation and involvement of the Science for the Carpathians network in Convention activities**

The Secretariat played an active role in strengthening the Science for the Carpathians (S4C) network and its contribution to the Carpathian Convention, resulting in the following actions:

1. The Scientific Steering Committee membership of the S4C network was updated, and the Secretariat is well represented in the S4C Steering Committee by Tamara Mitrofanenko and Eleonora Musco. The S4C and its new website are featured on the Carpathian Convention website.

2. S4C members actively participated in WG meetings on Sustainable Forest Management, Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism, as well as in the meetings of the Carpathian Education for Sustainable Development Expert Network (CESDSEN).

3. The Secretariat played an active role in co-organising the 8th Forum Carpaticum, entitled "Taking stock and building partnership for sustainable development of the mountain and rural areas," which took place in Bratislava, Slovakia on 9-11 September 2025. The Secretariat was represented in the Scientific Board of the Forum, actively contributing to its programme. Furthermore, the Secretariat increased co-operation with Ukrainian partners and experts for development of agenda, and concepts of the sessions and co-organised the sessions on Carpathian pastoralism, education for sustainable development and supporting and discussing the principles of the green recovery of Ukraine, as well as the side events on fostering collaboration to meet the needs of communities in the Ukrainian Carpathians and the Carpathian Fair, , as well as the discussion on countering the nature's destructive projects.

4. The Secretariat facilitated follow-up discussions at the 8th Forum Carpaticum within the S4C network, including on S4C network development, recommendations to the Carpathian Convention and updating the

S4C Research Agenda. Following previous CCIC recommendations, a representative of the Secretariat, Tamara Mitrofanenko, has been nominated to the S4C Executive Board.

5. The Secretariat closely cooperated with the S4C on updating the **S4C Research Agenda 2030**, based on the results and recommendations of the 8th Forum Carpaticum. The revision involves revising existing chapters and including additional chapters, e.g. vulnerable groups and pastoralism, mapping the Carpathians and socio-ecological legal dynamics. The updated Research Agenda is expected to be finalized in time for COP8.

6. Following discussions at the 8th Forum Carpaticum, a research paper has been developed by the S4C members, submitted to and accepted by the Mountain Research and Development journal: Melnykovych, M., Mitrofanenko, T., Nijnik, M., Brnkalakova, S., Csabay, J., De Bortoli, I., Kholiavchuk, D., Keeton, W.S., Kluvankova, T., Matei, E., Martino, S., Sarkki, S., Škovira, R., Soloviy. I., Waeber, P.O. and Zawiejska, J. 2026. Navigating uncertainties for changing mountains in a time of polycrisis: Strengthening the Carpathian mountain agenda. Mountain Research and Development.

7. The S4C elected the new Chair (Bogdan Mihai, University of Bucharest, Romania) and Co-chair (Dariia Kholiavchuk, Chernivtsi National University, Ukraine) and agreed that the 9th Forum Carpaticum will take place in the fall of 2027 in Romania.

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

1. The Secretariat continued its active participation in the Student Conference on Conservation Science (SCCS), held annually in Balatonvilagos, Hungary and organised by the Hungarian Research Network Centre for Ecological Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The researchers attending SCCS 2025 were encouraged to provide recommendations for CBF implementation, strengthening the involvement of young and early career biodiversity researchers in Carpathian Convention implementation. Recommendations were received from young researchers on linking biodiversity with: agriculture, climate change, forestry, tourism, transport and infrastructure, education and public awareness and provided to CCIC. The SCCS 2026 integrated a Carpathian Day celebration, with presentations from the Secretariat and S4C on pastoralism and climate change in the Carpathian region.

2. In the framework of the project **Promoting Biodiversity through Transdisciplinary Learning Interventions in the Carpathians** (ProBioTIC), S4C partner Jagiellonian University and Leuphana University developed and implemented university courses focused on the Carpathian region, which the Secretariat actively advocated for and participated in. The partners built on their 2025 achievements and courses focused on the Carpathian region in 2026. The ProBioTIC project, led by Leuphana University and supported by the German Environmental Foundation (DBU), concluded in the Summer 2026. Its outcomes proved relevant for both education for sustainable development and science-policy collaborations, strengthening awareness among young and early career scientists about the Convention and their contribution to addressing complex challenges in the Carpathian region.

3. Following the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation with Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Slovakia and Roma Environmental Sustainability & Development Initiative – RESDI, which took place upon consultation with the Parties during the 8th Forum Carpaticum, the Secretariat followed up on its collaboration with the partners on addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in the Carpathian Region, by organizing a meeting with the representative of OSCE in June 2026 to discuss potential establishment of an Aarhus Centre for Roma in the Carpathian region.

4. The Secretariat actively participated in the International Mountain Conference (IMC), held in Innsbruck, Austria from 14-18 September 2025. The Secretariat:

- co-organised the workshop: "The science-policy interface for regional mountain governance," led by the Alpine Convention Secretariat. At the workshop, the Secretariat presented the Carpathian Convention and its science-policy activities and close collaboration with the S4C, and represented the Scientific Network for the Caucasus Mountain Region in line with established collaboration with the network;
- co-organised the workshop: "Innovative Approaches for Mountain Resilience," led by the UN GLOMOS programme (Center for Global Mountain Safeguard Research) and provided opening remarks;
- co-organised a session on "Safeguarding Pastoralism in Mountain Regions: through education, awareness raising and cross-sectoral collaborations," led by the Carpathian Convention Secretariat (see DECISION COP7/12 Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development - Article 7 of the Carpathian Convention for more information);
- liaised with representatives of the Network for European Mountain Research and the UNIMONT Centre of the University of Milan to develop relevant collaborations;
- collaborated with other Carpathian Convention partners participating in the IMC and identifying researchers from the Carpathian region who are new to our networks and promoting the Carpathian Convention and S4C.

5. The Secretariat collaborated with the organisers of the Multifunctional Farming Conference, held in Rzeszów, Poland from 16–18 September, following an invitation to contribute to the event. The Conference addressed topics highly relevant to the sustainable development of the Carpathian region, and the Secretariat aimed to gather valuable recommendations from the Conference and collaborative discussions with the organisers to support the implementation of the Carpathian Convention.

## DECISION COP7/9 Conservation and sustainable use of biological and landscape diversity

### Article 4 of the Carpathian Convention

***<u>Activity:</u> Implementation of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity Work Plan and Mandate 2024–2026***

1. During the reporting period, implementation of Article 4 of the Carpathian Convention was guided by the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework (CBF), the Work Plan of the Working Group on Biodiversity (2024–2026), and the Parties' commitment to strengthening biodiversity conservation, ecological connectivity and ecosystem restoration throughout the Carpathian region.

   The Working Group on Biodiversity remained the principal platform for coordinating implementation of biodiversity-related COP7 decisions. The 15th and 16th meetings of the Working Group reviewed progress in implementing the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, provided guidance on regional biodiversity priorities and facilitated cooperation among Parties, protected areas, experts, scientific institutions and international partners. Particular emphasis was placed on supporting implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the regional level and identifying concrete actions to be implemented through future projects, including the CARPATHIAN LIFE initiative.

   The **15th and 16th Meetings of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity** were held on 17–18 June 2024 in Vienna, Austria, and 13–14 May 2025 in Veselí nad Moravou, Czech Republic, respectively. The meetings served as the main platform for reviewing progress in the implementation of COP7 decisions,

advancing the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, and coordinating biodiversity-related activities under the Convention. Detailed information is available in the respective **Meeting Agendas**[1] and **Meeting Reports**[2]**.**

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

1. The conservation of large carnivores and maintenance of ecological connectivity remained one of the most visible and mature areas of regional cooperation under the Convention. Following recommendations of the Working Group on Biodiversity, the **Large Carnivores Expert Group** was re-established to support implementation of the Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity and to strengthen technical cooperation among the Carpathian countries. Representatives from the majority of Carpathian countries were nominated to the Expert Group, providing a renewed platform for coordinated action and exchange of expertise.

2. **Revision of the International Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians**

   During the reporting period, the Secretariat coordinated the revision of the **International Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians**, originally adopted by COP6 in 2020. The revision process was initiated to reflect the substantial knowledge, experience and practical results generated through recent regional initiatives, particularly the **LECA**, **NaturaConnect** and **ForestConnect** projects, as well as emerging policy developments under the Carpathian Convention. The objective was to strengthen and further specify the existing Strategic Objectives while maintaining the overall structure and strategic vision of the original Action Plan.

   The revision process was carried out through consultations with the Working Group on Biodiversity**,** the Large Carnivores Expert Group**,** and project partners, ensuring broad stakeholder participation and incorporation of the latest scientific and technical knowledge. Particular attention was given to integrating the outcomes of the LECA project, including thematic guidance documents on monitoring harmonisation, conflict prevention and poaching investigation, as well as aligning the Action Plan with the developing **Carpathian Lynx Strategy**. Additional updates included the incorporation of recommendations and tools developed under NaturaConnect and ForestConnect, removal of actions already completed through previous projects, and refinement of measures related to ecological connectivity and biodiversity information systems.

   By mid-2026, the revision process resulted in a substantially updated second edition of the Action Plan for the period 2027–2035, providing a more operational and up-to-date framework for regional cooperation on large carnivore conservation and ecological connectivity. Following consultations with relevant experts, the revised Action Plan is expected to be finalised by the Working Group on Biodiversity and submitted to the 17th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee and subsequently to COP8 for consideration and adoption. The revised document is intended to serve as a key strategic framework guiding future cooperation, conservation actions and project development in the Carpathian region.

3. **Development of the Strategy for the Conservation of the Lynx**

   Building on the adoption of the **CMS Concerted Action for the Eurasian Lynx** at CMS COP14 in 2024 and the subsequent recommendations of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity and Large

[1] 15th WG Biodiversity Meeting Final Agenda; 16th WG Biodiversity Meeting Final Agenda

[2] 15th WG Biodiversity Meeting Report; 16th WG Biodiversity Meeting Report

Carnivores Expert Group, the Secretariat initiated, together with the **IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group**, the development of a **Strategy for the Conservation of the Lynx (*Lynx lynx carpathicus*) in the Carpathians 2027–2036**. The process is being carried out under the joint auspices of the **Carpathian Convention, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and the Bern Convention**, with the objective of establishing a coordinated, science-based framework for the long-term conservation and management of the autochthonous Carpathian lynx population across its entire range.

To support the process, an international **Expert Group** composed of specialists from the Carpathian countries and relevant partner organisations was established in early 2026. Between February and May 2026, the Expert Group participated in a series of thematic online workshops and consultations facilitated by the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group and the Secretariat. The work was supported by the latest scientific assessments and followed internationally recognised species conservation planning methodologies.

In May 2026, a preliminary draft Strategy was completed and circulated for consultation among the Parties to the Carpathian Convention, as well as within the CMS and Bern Convention frameworks. The consultation process aims to ensure that the final document reflects national priorities, scientific knowledge and practical management considerations across the region. Following the review process, the Strategy is expected to be finalised by the Working Group on Biodiversity and submitted to the 17th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention Implementation Committee and subsequently to CC COP8 for consideration and adoption. Once adopted, the Strategy will provide the principal framework for coordinated conservation action, monitoring, research and management of the Carpathian lynx population over the period 2027–2036.

4. **LECA project implementation**

The Secretariat actively supported implementation of the **LECA project: Supporting the coexistence and conservation of Carpathian Large CArnivores**, which was operating between April 2023 and March 2026. Through this project, experts from the region collaborated on improving approaches to monitoring, conflict prevention, poaching investigations and coexistence with large carnivores. The project produced practical guidance documents and facilitated exchanges of experiences among countries facing similar conservation and management challenges.

One of the key highlights of the LECA project was the **Joint Conference of the Alpine and Carpathian Conventions on Large Carnivore Management**, held on 6–8 March 2024 in Brdo, Slovenia. Supported by the Secretariat and organized within the framework of the LECA project, the conference brought together representatives and experts from 13 countries across the Alpine and Carpathian regions to exchange experiences and good practices on large carnivore conservation and management. The event significantly strengthened cooperation between the two mountain regions and contributed to the development of common approaches on monitoring, conflict prevention and species management. The outcomes and recommendations of the conference have been documented in the **Report from the Joint Conference of Alpine and Carpathian Conventions for Exchange of Practices on Management of Large Carnivores**, which serves as an important reference for ongoing and future cooperation in this field.

The Secretariat closely cooperated with the **Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic**, as Chair of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity, and **Mendel University in Brno**, as the project Lead Partner, in supporting the implementation of the LECA project. This included facilitating consultations with the Carpathian Convention Large Carnivores Expert Group, WG Biodiversity and relevant bodies of the Alpine Convention, broadening stakeholder involvement, and providing expert inputs and recommendations throughout the project implementation. Through these activities, the Secretariat helped ensure that project results reflected regional priorities, responded to the needs of the Carpathian countries, and contributed to the implementation and future update of the **International Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity**, as well as other biodiversity-related initiatives under the Carpathian Convention.

LECA project building on the needs and objectives of the International Action Plan on conservation of large carnivores and ensuring ecological connectivity in the Carpathians, directly helped in advancing concrete actions needed for better addressing the conservation and sustainable management of the large carnivores in the region.

An important outcome of the LECA project was the development of three **Thematic Guidances** addressing key challenges for large carnivore conservation and management in the region: **monitoring harmonisation**, **conflict prevention**, and **poaching investigation**. Throughout the project, the Secretariat together with the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic coordinated consultations on these guidance documents with the Working Group on Biodiversity and the Large Carnivores Expert Group, ensuring broad expert participation and input from the Carpathian countries. The Guidances were developed as practical tools to support more coordinated approaches to large carnivore conservation across the region and are intended to be incorporated as annexes to the revised International Action Plan on the Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians, to be considered at COP8. Together, these documents represent a significant technical contribution to strengthening regional cooperation, harmonising conservation practices and supporting the long-term implementation of the Carpathian Convention's objectives on biodiversity and ecological connectivity.

5. **NaturaConnect project implementation**

The Secretariat actively supported the implementation of the NaturaConnect- Designing a resilient and coherent Trans-European Network for Nature and People project, which aimed to contribute to the development of a coherent Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N) and strengthen ecological connectivity across Europe. Throughout the project, the Secretariat facilitated the involvement of Carpathian stakeholders, promoted exchanges between the project consortium and the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Biodiversity, and ensured that the specific needs and experiences of the Carpathian region were reflected in the project's outputs. Through consultations, workshops and expert discussions, the project contributed to improved understanding of ecological connectivity challenges and opportunities in the Carpathians, particularly in relation to large carnivore conservation, protected areas and ecosystem restoration.

A key deliverable of NaturaConnect was the development of guidance, analytical tools and policy recommendations to support the identification and planning of additional (strictly) protected areas, ecological connectivity, and restoration sites, including their governance across Europe, according to the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. The project produced practical outputs on connectivity planning, financing mechanisms, governance approaches and stakeholder engagement, many of which are directly relevant to implementing the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and strengthening ecological connectivity in the region. The Secretariat helped disseminate these results among Convention Parties and stakeholders and promoted their use as a basis for future biodiversity conservation, restoration and spatial planning activities in the Carpathians.

NaturaConnect has contributed to the revision of the International Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity, with a particular focus on objectives related to ecological connectivity and stakeholder engagement. The project has generated a range of relevant outputs and deliverables that will support the implementation of the revised Action Plan.

Some of the main relevant NaturaConnect deliverable include:

- Policy brief for the Carpathian Convention - Building the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N) in the Carpathian Region

- Learning Platform with a few modules elaborated on TEN-N, stakeholder engagement and Nature Future Frameworks - a capacity building hub of the NaturaConnect project.
- 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 Trans-European Network of Natural Protected and Connected Areas.
- Review and Synthesis of Best Practices in Governance and Land-use Policies to Implement TEN-N highlights the Danube–Carpathian region as one of six case study areas.
- A series of factsheets has been published to support the development of the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N), offering a comprehensive overview of public and private funding opportunities for protected areas and ecological connectivity across Europe.
- Guidelines for connectivity conservation and planning in Europe with supporting web-based inventory and databases
- Science brief for policy and decision-makers on exploring scenarios for the expansion of the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N)
- Policy support tools for TEN-N implementation
- Report on network problem formulations, targets and preferences, including guidance and data on targets and optimal TEN-N design criteria.

6. **ForestConnect project implementation**

The Secretariat actively supported the implementation of the ForestConnect: Towards a Climate-smart Forest Connectivity for Large Carnivores in the Balkan-Carpathian-Dinaric Region project, led by WWF Bulgaria under the Interreg Danube Region Programme. It contributed to the development, communication and uptake of key project outputs, including the Strategic Action Plan on Climate-Smart Forest Connectivity and CCIBIS tools, while facilitating knowledge exchange through the Convention's Working Groups. The project supports the implementation of the International Action Plan on Conservation of Large Carnivores and Ensuring Ecological Connectivity in the Carpathians and advances the objectives of the Carpathian Convention. For more information on the project and relevant activities under the Carpathian Convention framework, see DECISION COP7/13 Sustainable Forest Management.

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

1. During the reporting period, the Carpathian Network of Protected Areas (CNPA) continued to play an important role in strengthening cooperation among protected areas and promoting awareness of the natural values of the Carpathian region. A key highlight was the implementation of the Youth at the Top initiative, held on 18–19 July 2025, which focused on the theme “Alpine Flowers and Pollinator Insects.” The programme engaged youth from across the region in educational and outdoor activities, fostering greater awareness of biodiversity conservation and the ecological importance of Carpathian protected areas.

2. At the institutional level, CNPA continued efforts to strengthen its governance and visibility. Under the leadership of Mircea Verghelet, Director of Piatra Craiului National Park and Chair of the CNPA, work was initiated on the development of a new CNPA website aimed at improving communication, outreach and cooperation among network members. The Secretariat closely cooperated with the CNPA Chair in facilitating consultations and supporting the involvement of protected areas in regional processes, including preparations related to the proposed CARPATHIAN LIFE project.

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

1. A longstanding and highly valued activity of the **Carpathian Wetland Initiative (CWI)** has been the annual **International Course on River and Wetland Restoration**, organized by the Ministry of the Environment of the

Czech Republic and its partners. The training serves as a practical capacity-building platform for experts, practitioners, researchers and public authorities working on wetland conservation and restoration. During the reporting period, the fifth and sixth edition of the course was held in the **Elbe River basin wetland systems in the Czech Republic, in October 2024 and 2025**, providing participants with hands-on experience and knowledge exchange on river and wetland restoration, climate adaptation and nature-based solutions. Building on its success, a further international training course focusing on **wetland restoration in the context of climate change** is being prepared for 2026, continuing the Initiative's contribution to strengthening regional expertise and cooperation on wetland management and restoration. The upcoming training course will take place from 4 to 9 October 2026 in the Třeboň Protected Landscape Area and Šumava National Park, Czech Republic. The programme combines lectures, field visits and discussions, providing participants with practical knowledge on wetland restoration and its role in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

2. A key priority of the CWI is supporting wetland restoration and ecological connectivity projects, including cooperation with Wetlands International on the Reconnecting the Latorica River Floodplain Landscape in a Transboundary Context project involving Slovakia and Ukraine. The initiative aims to restore and reconnect approximately 38,000 hectares of floodplain ecosystems, strengthen biodiversity, enhance climate resilience and develop a shared transboundary vision for the management and restoration of the Latorica floodplain.

3. The CWI continued to provide regular updates on the implementation of its priorities and activities, including progress achieved under its annual work programme, the presentation of the 2025 Annual Report, and the adoption of its Work Plan for 2026.

***Other activities***

The Secretariat actively contributed to the European Conference for Biodiversity Monitoring (BioMonWeek 2026), held in France in May 2026. The conference is a major European platform that brings together experts from science, policy, and business to strengthen biodiversity monitoring, foster transnational cooperation, and promote coordinated action across sectors and scales.

As the inaugural edition of a planned biannual event, BioMonWeek aims to build a shared understanding and culture of biodiversity monitoring in Europe while supporting knowledge exchange and tangible action to address the global biodiversity crisis.

The Secretariat was invited to contribute to two key sessions. During the keynote and panel discussion entitled "**From Local to European: Harmonising Biodiversity Monitoring at Different Scales,**" the Secretariat presented regional approaches developed under the Carpathian Convention, with a particular focus on large carnivore conservation.

In addition, the Secretariat delivered a presentation in a policy session on the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework, highlighting how the Global Biodiversity Framework is translated into a regional context. This demonstrated the important role of regional cooperation in bridging global commitments and practical implementation on the ground.

Participation in the conference provided a valuable opportunity to exchange expertise, strengthen partnerships, and position the Carpathian Convention within the broader European biodiversity monitoring community.

Overall, the Carpathian Convention received strong visibility and recognition, particularly for its work on the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework.

## DECISION COP7/11 Sustainable and integrated water/river basin management

**Article 6 of the Carpathian Convention**

1. Recent discussions within the Carpathian Convention framework, as well as the recommendation by the Science for the Carpathians (S4C) have highlighted water management, river restoration and wetland conservation as emerging priorities for future cooperation in the region. Particular attention has been drawn to the challenges faced by vulnerable mountain environments and communities, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that integrates river and wetland restoration, sustainable water management, climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation and ecosystem resilience. S4C has also expressed its willingness to support this process and stressed the importance of building on relevant regional and international frameworks. These developments point to the growing recognition that water should be addressed more prominently as a cross-cutting theme under the Carpathian Convention, providing a stronger basis for coordinated action across sectors and countries in the region.

2. The Secretariat was invited to present the Carpathian Convention at the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme's Online Seminar Series on 17 September 2025. The session, entitled "Cooperation and Participation for Preserving Mountains and Glaciers: Focus on Europe and North America," highlighted the Carpathians and the Convention as a prominent example of an effective cooperation mechanism for a mountain region. The discussion highlighted growing water-related challenges in mountain regions and pointed to the absence of a dedicated instrument within the Convention to comprehensively address water as a cross-cutting issue. Opportunities for further exchange and cooperation with the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme will be explored.

3. The RESTORIVER project, funded under the Interreg Danube Region Programme, brings together 15 partners from eight countries to restore riversides and riparian areas along the Danube and its tributaries through climate-resilient natural water retention measures (NWRM). The project aims to increase the climate adaptation capacity of riverine landscapes and reduce the risks of floods, droughts and heatwaves by linking water management, climate adaptation and nature conservation policies with practical restoration actions. Through pilot interventions, stakeholder engagement, capacity building and policy development, RESTORIVER promotes the wider uptake of nature-based solutions (NbS) across the Danube Region. The project is particularly relevant for the Carpathian region, as several partner countries, namely Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine, are Parties to the Carpathian Convention. The Secretariat has been in regular contact with project partners and has followed the development of the project's policy recommendations relevant to the Convention. These activities also provide opportunities to strengthen synergies with the existing river basin level cooperation, including the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and its Priority Area 4 and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River.

   The RESTORIVER project aims, among others, to support the implementation of the Carpathian Convention by promoting NbS and NWRM as key tools for biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable land and water management across the Carpathian region. Its policy recommendations call for updating the Convention to align with current European and global policy frameworks, explicitly integrating NbS/NWRM concepts, strengthening ecosystem restoration approaches in water, agriculture, forestry and land-use management, introducing biodiversity targets and monitoring mechanisms, and establishing procedures to balance the interests of different stakeholder groups through adaptive and evidence-based governance. These recommendations aim to enhance the Convention's role in fostering coordinated, climate-resilient and biodiversity-friendly development in the Carpathians.

## DECISION COP7/12 Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development

## Article 7 of the Carpathian Convention

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

1. The Secretariat continued active exchange and collaboration with the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists Coalition (IYRP 2026) through its designated contact points and respective working groups, whose representatives participated in the WG Biodiversity, WG Sustainable Tourism and the 8th Forum Carpaticum. The Carpathian Convention is represented on the IYRP 2026 Europe website.

   Upon invitation from IYRP, the Secretariat disseminated information among the pastoralism experts and practitioners about the IYRP Global Gathering: Young Pastoralists and New Technologies, which took place on 7–11 April 2026 in Madrid, Spain, with the aim to support participation of pastoralists from the Carpathian region in the event. The Secretariat actively participated, liaised with pastoralists from Hungary and Czechia who took part in the Gathering and supported finalization of the **<u>Global Declaration of Young Pastoralists</u>** and reflection of inputs from Carpathian country participants therein.

2. The Secretariat continued implementing the project **<u>Linking biodiversity, pastoralism and cultural heritage through education for sustainable development (ESD) in the Carpathian Region</u>** initiated in December 2024 and funded by the German Federal Environment Ministry's Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP). The project activities contribute to: 1) facilitating institutional alignment within and between the Carpathian Convention and other international frameworks for linking biodiversity and pastoralism; 2) Support in the inscription process of Carpathian pastoralism – related practices to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists; 3) Strengthening transnational cooperation and knowledge exchange as well as 4) Strengthening awareness, education and training resources for linking biodiversity and pastoralism.

3. As part of the project activities, the Secretariat initiated building a network of relevant experts and practitioners to collect knowledge about the relevance of pastoralism to various areas of work of the Convention (e.g. biodiversity, forest management, tourism, cultural heritage, etc.).

4. The Secretariat organised the session, "Safeguarding Carpathian Pastoralism" at the 8th Forum Carpaticum, in which speakers from Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and Eurac Research presented their work and offered recommendations to the Convention. The Secretariat also facilitated that one of the Forum keynotes was focused on transhumance, raising awareness about the importance of this topic for the region.

5. As a result of this exchange, the Secretariat was invited by the Comenius University team to co-author a chapter on Carpathian pastoralism in a book: "Barriers and opportunities to inclusion and participation of vulnerable groups in the EU Green Deal," envisioned to be published by Routledge (TBC), to highlight the vulnerable status of herders and shepherds in the Carpathian region.

6. The Secretariat organised and led the session "Safeguarding Pastoralism in Mountain Regions: through education, awareness raising and cross-sectoral collaborations," at the International Mountain Conference (IMC) in collaboration with Eurac Research, IYRP 2026, Euromontana, and the Scientific Network for the Caucasus Mountain Regions. The session served to exchange experiences and build collaborations beyond the Carpathian region and Convention networks. The Secretariat also attended other relevant IMC sessions, such as "Mountain Transhumance under social-ecological transformations," to integrate knowledge and establish collaborations with experts in the field of pastoralism.

7. To leverage the expertise of the broader academic community in the Carpathian countries—particularly in relation to the Carpathian Convention's work on sustainable agriculture and rural development—the Secretariat liaised with the organisers of the Multifunctional Farming Conference, held on 16-18 September 2025 in Rzeszow, Poland, and Carpathian pastoralism experts participating in the conference. Through this

collaboration, the Secretariat facilitated the integration of inputs and recommendations into the conference's Manifesto. Entitled **Traditional farming for better future: The Rzeszów Manifesto,** the manifesto been made publicly available as a petition by the organisers.

8. The Secretariat integrated a session on the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists and its relevance for the Carpathians into the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, which took place on 10-11 March 2026 in Rzeszów, Poland, in order to facilitate dialogue on Carpathian Pastoralism and synergies with tourism in the Carpathian region.

9. The Secretariat strengthened collaborations with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Mountain Partnership to promote Carpathian pastoralism at the global level.

   The Secretariat highlighted the importance of synergies between pastoralism, biodiversity and bioeconomy at the plenary session and side-events of the 7th Global Meeting of the Mountain Partnership: Mountains for the Future: Responsible Tourism, Thriving Communities, which took place in Andorra on 26–28 March 2026.

   Upon invitation from the FAO Mountain Partnership team, the Secretariat presented Carpathian Convention and its activities in the field of Pastoralism at the IPROMO 2026 course Mountain rangelands and pastoralists: knowledge, climate resilience and biodiversity preservation, took place in Ormea, Italy, in July 2026. IPROMO is a two-week course on sustainable mountain development organized annually by the Mountain Partnership Secretariat.

   Upon invitation from the FAO Mountain Partnership, the Secretariat submitted a case study "Safeguarding Pastoralism in the Carpathian Region – Efforts by the Carpathian Convention Secretariat, its Parties and Partners," to be included into a new publication to be released by the Mountain Partnership on International Mountain Day 2026.

10. The Secretariat continued dialogue and coordination with Eurac Research, Euromontana and the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA), aimed at joint action to support safeguarding pastoralism and transhumance and address the needs of herders and shepherds in the Carpathian region and beyond. Among other issues the partners considered which guidance could be provided to the Parties to facilitate support for practitioners using traditional agricultural practices via EU Common Agricultural Policy. In light of these efforts, the Secretariat encouraged participation of Carpathian actors in the XIV European Mountain Convention, which resulted in the Sallanches Declaration "Securing the future of extensive livestock farming and pastoralism in mountain areas".

11. Following on fruitful collaboration and exchange with Euromontana in the framework of the LIFE ShepForBio Project, including active participation in the third online discussion forum,Shepherding Futures: Training, Innovation, and Rural Revival, which took place on 4 December 2025 virtually, the Secretariat facilitated the invitation of Hungarian pastoralism experts and practitioners to provide a keynote at the Third International Conference: Pastoral Landscapes 2026.

12. The Secretariat supported the project Green and inclusive agricultural policy – steps towards implemented by the Information Center "Green Dossier" (Ukraine) during 2024, which focused on legislative adaptation, stakeholder coordination, and promoting sustainable agriculture, highlighting the importance of information exchange, international cooperation, and preserving traditional farming practices to enhance tourism, local culture, and innovative agrarian policies in the Carpathians.

***Activity: Supporting the Inscription of Carpathian Pastoralism to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Humanity***

1. The Secretariat actively supported the development of the multinational extension of the file "Transhumance - the seasonal droving of livestock," submitted to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) List of Humanity in March 2025. The process was coordinated by Romania, and the extension included four additional Carpathian Convention Parties: Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine. It is expected that the extension will be officially accepted at the 21st session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which will take place on 30 November – 5 December 2026 in Xiamen, China. The Carpathian region and the role of the Carpathian Convention are referenced throughout the file. Notably, the file includes a subsection on Carpathian collaboration within the Safeguarding Measures, stating, "Since four of the newly joining State Parties are members of the Carpathian Convention, and this extension has received strong support from its Secretariat, hosted by UNEP, the Convention's programs, projects, strategies, and expert groups will continue to provide valuable synergies. This will help Carpathian countries involved in the extension develop shared, cross-sectoral solutions and foster collaboration". Due to these developments, the Carpathian countries already hold a strong position in developing safeguarding measures that integrate natural and cultural heritage entities and address needs of the stakeholders at the national and regional level, reinforced by the guidance provided by the Carpathian Convention Secretariat.

   As the Czech Republic and Hungary could not join the multinational extension of the Transhumance file, the Secretariat continued its dialogue with experts and Parties regarding developing a joint nomination file, "Safeguarding Carpathian Pastoralism" to be submitted to the third list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage: Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. Based on the feedback received to-date, further developments towards this end will depend on the results of the upcoming 21st session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage as well as the outputs and outcomes of the project Linking biodiversity, pastoralism and cultural heritage through education for sustainable development (ESD) in the Carpathian Region. The next steps in the process involve: identifying a coordinating party to lead the nomination while fostering further collaboration among Carpathian country institutions involved in safeguarding mobile pastoralism and jointly developing a clear roadmap outlining the key steps and priorities of the initiative outlining the required actions and the importance of identifying and documenting relevant activities to be reflected in the forthcoming UNESCO nomination. .

   More information on activities undertaken to further promote Carpathian pastoralism can be found in the chapter DECISION COP7/16 Cultural Heritage and traditional knowledge - Article 11 of the Carpathian Convention.

## 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***

1. During the 2024–2026 reporting period, the implementation of Article 7 of the Carpathian Convention was guided by relevant outcomes of COP7, the mandate of the Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management, the Work Plan on Sustainable Forest Management (2023–2026), and the commitment of the Carpathian Convention Parties to advance forest conservation in the Carpathian region. The Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management remains the key platform for coordinating and discussing forest-related issues in the Carpathian region and for coordinating the implementation of forest-related COP7 decisions.

   The **10th Meeting of the Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management** took place on 28–29 April 2025 in Bratislava, Slovakia. It was organised by the Secretariat in cooperation with Slovakia – the Chair of the Working Group. Key discussions focused on the **Inventory of Virgin Forests**, the **criteria and indicators for**

**identifying quasi-virgin forests**, and the final Assessment of climate change risks and impacts on Carpathian forests and their ecosystem services.

The meeting also highlighted synergies with EU policies, including the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the EU Forest Strategy for 2030, and the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, underlining their importance for aligning national efforts with regional and European objectives. Support for the Ukrainian Carpathians was also discussed, as well as challenges in the Ukrainian Carpathians related to the construction of wind-power plants. Additionally, Ukraine called for the establishment of a dedicated forest-support programme.

The Working Group reviewed progress in the implementation of COP7 decisions and exchanged information on relevant forest-conservation developments in the region. Detailed information is available in the respective **Meeting Final Agenda** and the **Meeting Report.** The published meeting information confirms that the agenda covered forest inventories and assessments, EU frameworks, support for Ukraine, and cooperation with relevant initiatives and networks.

The follow-up technical meeting of the Carpathian Convention Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management is tentatively planned for late 2026, in an online format, if feasible. The meeting is expected to present the work plan between the Carpathian Convention and the European Environment Agency (EEA) for 2027-2029, provide updates on the Carpathian Convention Information System on Biodiversity (CCIBIS), and advance discussions on expanding the Inventory of Virgin Forests in the Carpathians with the EEA.

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

1. Following its endorsement by COP7, the Secretariat supported the further refinement and publication of the **Assessment of Climate Change Risks and Adaptation Options for Carpathian Forest Ecosystems and their Services** in close cooperation with co-authors. Significant improvements were made to the structure, layout and overall accessibility of the publication to enhance its value as a policy and technical reference document. Beyond supporting its finalization, the Secretariat actively promoted the Assessment and its findings through relevant meetings, consultations and project development processes. The Assessment and its key recommendations have increasingly informed discussions and activities under the Carpathian Convention, particularly in the fields of forest management, climate adaptation, ecosystem restoration, ecological connectivity and the preparation of biodiversity and forest-related projects, thereby strengthening the science-policy interface and supporting evidence-based decision-making across the region.

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

1. The Secretariat actively supported the implementation of the ForestConnect, which focused on strengthening ecological connectivity and climate resilience of forest ecosystems across the Carpathian, Dinaric and Balkan mountain regions. The Secretariat facilitated consultations with the National focal Points to the Convention, Working Groups on Biodiversity, Sustainable Forest Management and Climate Change, as well as the Large Carnivores Expert Group, ensuring that project outputs were aligned with the priorities and objectives of the Carpathian Convention and reflected the perspectives of a broad range of stakeholders.

A key achievement of the project was the finalization of the **Strategic Action Plan for Climate-Smart Forest Connectivity with Adaptation Actions and Climate Resilience-Enhancing Forest Management Practices for Protected Areas**. The Strategic Action Plan provides 17 practical recommendations for improving ecological corridors and habitat connectivity for large carnivores in the context of climate change, habitat fragmentation and increasing human pressures. It represents an important strategic resource for the implementation of the Carpathian Biodiversity Framework and related conservation objectives. The Strategic Action Plan was developed by experts from the Carinthia University of Applied Sciences – UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Management of Conservation Areas, in cooperation with project partners from seven Eastern and Southeastern European countries, with contributions from the Secretariat.

The project further developed a set of practical guidance documents, including **Guidelines on the Management of Transnational Mosaic Habitats along Forest Corridors** and **Guidelines on Preserving Ecosystems and Related Services in Eco-Connectivity Areas for the Benefit of Large Carnivores and Local People**. These outputs promote integrated, landscape-scale approaches to connectivity conservation, combining biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services and sustainable land use considerations, and provide recommendations for policymakers, protected area managers and conservation practitioners.

Therefore, the main relevant ForestConnect deliverables include:

- Strategic Action Plan for strengthening climate-resilient ecological connectivity and transboundary conservation of large carnivores across the Carpathian, Balkan and Dinaric regions.
- Shared Balkan–Carpathian–Dinaric GIS database, online viewer and Digital Twin Model, integrated into the Carpathian Countries Integrated Biodiversity Information System (CCIBIS) to support evidence-based conservation planning and decision-making, in a process of finalization
- Guidelines for the management of transnational mosaic habitats to improve habitat connectivity and climate adaptation across the project area.
- Guidelines on preserving ecosystems for large carnivores, providing practical recommendations for protected area and forest managers.
- Pilot actions demonstrating ecosystem restoration and connectivity measures, including restoration of wood pastures and meadows, and planting of native trees and vegetation.
- Transnational capacity-building and knowledge exchange activities, including workshops, meetings and conferences, strengthening cooperation among 23 project partners and associated strategic partners from seven countries.
- Open-source geospatial tools and datasets made accessible through the CCIBIS Data Catalogue and Geoportal to support continued use by policymakers, protected area managers, researchers and NGOs.

Through its active engagement in the ForestConnect project, the Secretariat contributed to the development of the Strategic Action Plan on climate-resilient forest management and ecological connectivity, coordinated the project's Awareness and Communication Working Group, supported communication, outreach and awareness-raising activities by disseminating project results through the Secretariat's website, social media channels and Convention Working Groups, and contributed to the integration of ForestConnect data and tools into CCIBIS. These efforts help ensure that the project's outputs support the implementation of the Carpathian Convention, strengthen cooperation across the Carpathian, Balkan and Dinaric regions, and provide practical tools for improving ecological connectivity and climate-smart forest management.

***Other activities***

Towards the implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management, the LIFE endemic PANALP Project (2020-2027) continued with numerous cross-border activities. The PANALP project is co-managed by Slovak (BROZ-Conservation Association and State Nature Conservancy) and Hungarian co-partners (Pilisi Parkerdő Zrt. and Duna-Ipoly National Park Directorate) and operates in the transition zone between the Alps

and the Carpathians (including 17 Natura 2000 sites in Slovakia and key karst forest areas in the Pilis Mountains and Buda Hills in Hungary as Natura 2000 sites, respectively). The PANALP LIFE project is a bilateral initiative that demonstrates the practical implementation of Articles 9 (restoration of natural forest ecosystems), 10 (conservation of endangered species ) and 11 (sustainable forest management and game regulation) of the Convention's Forest Protocol in the vulnerable karst areas of the Carpathian-Alpine transition zone, with a particular focus on climate-adaptive forest structure transformation and the conservation of endemic species as *Linum dolomiticum, Ferula sadleriana, Vincetoxicum pannonicum and Crambe tataria*. In addition, continuous efforts to control invasive alien species (e.g. *Alianthus altissima*) have received special attention in the operational areas of all Hungarian state-owned forestry companies, which will continue to pose a huge challenge in the future due to the negative effects of current climate change.

## DECISION COP7/15 Sustainable tourism

### Article 9 of the Carpathian Convention

***Activity:* Implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism**

1. During the reporting period, implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism focused on strengthening sustainable tourism governance, enhancing regional cooperation, supporting sustainable tourism destinations, and promoting tourism models that contribute to biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage preservation and local development. Particular attention was given to revitalising the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism (WG Tourism) and strengthening the role and future operation of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) as the principal cooperation mechanism for tourism stakeholders in the region.

   A major milestone was the convening of the **11th Meeting of the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, held on 10–12 March 2026 in Rzeszów, Poland**, which represented the first meeting of the Working Group since 2021. The meeting provided an important platform for reviewing progress in implementing the Tourism Protocol, exchanging experiences among Parties and stakeholders, identifying future priorities and discussing the contribution of sustainable tourism to the broader objectives of the Carpathian Convention. Detailed information is available in the respective **Meeting Agenda** and **Meeting Report.**

   The Working Group identified several strategic priorities for future cooperation under the Convention. Among the most important was the development of a **network of Carpathian ecotourism destinations**, building on successful experiences from Romania and other countries. Such a network could contribute to nature conservation, support local communities and strengthen cooperation with protected areas while promoting the Carpathians as a sustainable tourism destination.

   Participants also highlighted the importance of developing and promoting **trans-Carpathian long-distance trails, cycling routes and cultural routes**, recognising their potential to strengthen regional identity, improve sustainable mobility and enhance cooperation among countries and stakeholders. The need for dedicated cooperation among trail managers, tourism organisations and protected areas was acknowledged as a priority for future action.

   Another emerging priority concerned the relationship between **tourism and pastoralism**. Within the framework of the **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026**, the Working Group explored opportunities to use sustainable tourism as a tool for supporting traditional pastoral systems, cultural landscapes and local products, while ensuring that tourism development does not negatively affect traditional livelihoods or lead to the commodification of pastoral heritage

Building on the discussions held in Rzeszów, the Secretariat prepared a set of **Policy Recommendations of the 11th Meeting of the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism,** which identify priority actions for the future implementation of the Tourism Protocol. The recommendations call, inter alia, for strengthening the CSTP, developing a Carpathian network of ecotourism destinations, advancing trans-Carpathian routes and cultural trails, improving stakeholder participation, promoting pastoral and cultural heritage as assets for sustainable tourism, strengthening cooperation with protected areas, and mobilising financial resources for sustainable tourism initiatives. The recommendations provide an important strategic contribution to the preparations for COP8 and are expected to guide future work under the Tourism Protocol.

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

1. A major achievement during the reporting period was the advancement of the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Platform (CSTP) through the **Central Mountains project**. One of the project's flagship activities was the design and testing of a new cooperation model for the CSTP, aimed at strengthening regional governance, stakeholder engagement and the practical implementation of the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism. The Secretariat actively supported this process by facilitating consultations with the CSTP Centres, national tourism stakeholders, the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism and project partners, ensuring consistency with the objectives of the Carpathian Convention.

   The project resulted in the development of a coherent framework consisting of the **Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Carpathians,** the **CSTP Work Plan**, and a **proposed mechanism for Cross-Border Thematic Working Teams.** Together, these documents provide a practical roadmap for strengthening CSTP cooperation and implementing sustainable tourism actions across the region. The framework focuses on four common priorities identified by the CSTP Centres and stakeholders: **ecotourism destinations, long-distance trails, local gastronomy, and sustainability standards**. These thematic pillars are intended to facilitate the development of joint initiatives, strengthen cooperation among countries, and promote a more coordinated approach to sustainable tourism development in the Carpathians.

   An important innovation of the proposed CSTP cooperation model is its emphasis on flexible, action-oriented governance. Under the proposed structure, thematic cross-border working teams would bring together experts, practitioners, tourism organisations, local authorities and protected area managers to develop and implement joint initiatives. The Working Group on Sustainable Tourism would provide strategic oversight and ensure alignment with the objectives of the Tourism Protocol, while national tourism structures would contribute expertise, priorities and implementation support. This approach seeks to move beyond project-based cooperation towards a more permanent and results-oriented regional tourism network.

   A key milestone in this process was the Interregional CSTP Pilot Action Meeting, held in Poiana Brașov, Romania, in July 2025, which brought together CSTP Centres, project partners and tourism stakeholders to discuss the future governance and operational structure of the Platform. The meeting contributed to building a common understanding of the role of CSTP as the principal mechanism for transnational tourism cooperation in the Carpathians.

2. Furthermore, in October 2025, the Secretariat signed a **Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Economy, Digitalization, Entrepreneurship and Tourism of Romania**, formally recognising the Carpathian Sustainable Tourism Centre Brașov as part of the CSTP network and strengthening Romania's role in supporting sustainable tourism initiatives in the region.

The outcomes of the Central Mountains project and the discussions held during the 11th Meeting of the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism in March 2026 provided an important basis for the preparation of the Policy Recommendations of the WG Tourism, which identify future priorities for sustainable tourism cooperation in the Carpathians. These include strengthening CSTP governance, establishing a network of Carpathian ecotourism destinations, developing trans-Carpathian trails and cultural routes, enhancing stakeholder participation, and improving access to funding opportunities. Collectively, these efforts have positioned the CSTP as a key instrument for promoting a more coordinated, resilient and sustainable tourism model in the Carpathian region.

## DECISION COP7/16 Cultural Heritage and traditional knowledge

### Article 11 of the Carpathian Convention

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

1. Upon invitation from the Romanian and Slovak UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage focal points, the Secretariat participated in the seminar Mapping Carpathian Intangibles: From Vampires to Traditional Agroecological Knowledge of Romanian Pastoral Communities, presented by Dr. Ioana Baskerville of the Romanian Academy – Iasi Branch and hosted by the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences on 18 February 2025 in Bratislava, Slovakia. The Secretariat also circulated the invitation among relevant networks, resulting in several Carpathian pastoralism experts joining the seminar online.

2. The Secretariat continued collaborating with the ICOMOS team working on the project ICOMOS World Heritage Transhumance Initiative: Defining a Thematic Approach Towards Sustaining Transhumance Cultural Landscapes in a Changing Environment, which aims to enhance the representation of transhumance-related cultural landscapes and sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

   As part of this cooperation, the Secretariat actively participated in the expert conference Transhumance Landscapes of Global Importance, held on 23–24 June 2025 in Baku, Azerbaijan. The Secretariat sought feedback from Carpathian experts on the draft **Conference Declaration**, maintained close coordination with Dr. Ioana Baskerville—Romania's national focal point for the UNESCO 2003 Convention—and ensured that expert input from the Carpathian region was reflected in the final Conference Declaration.

   The discussions at the conference underscored the important role the Carpathian Convention can play in bridging various international frameworks, particularly those focused on the protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage. The Convention also offers a valuable platform for addressing cross-sectoral challenges, such as integrating cultural and natural heritage. Strengthening this role and fostering strategic partnerships, such as UNESCO conventions, can help raise the profile of the Carpathian region while deepening understanding of its cultural landscapes as dynamic socio-ecological systems.

3. The Secretariat organised a side-event "Carpathian Fair" at the 8th Forum Carpaticum to showcase and exchange ideas, cultural heritage practices and local products and initiatives from the Carpathian region. As a result, more than 8 various initiatives and communities promoted their traditional products, projects, initiatives and informational materials in a dedicated space at the event venue, which was visited by the participants of the Forum Carpaticum.

4. The Secretariat, in close collaboration with Dr. Ioana Baskerville, participated in the virtual session of the meeting Transhumance as Part of Humanity's Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Driving Force for the Future?, which took place in Marseille, France on 21–23 April 2026. The meeting addressed the implementation of the international safeguarding plan of the multinational extension of the Transhumance file. The meeting resulted in the creation of thematic working groups through dedicated roundtable discussions on the following themes: transmission and education; transhumance and common lands; transhumance in the face of new social, economic and environmental challenges; local breeds and products; co-governance of pastoral landscapes and cultural mediation. The meeting participants also called for regular international conferences on the topic of transhumance, agreed on the establishment of the International Steering Committee, as foreseen in both the original international safeguarding plan of the "Transhumance – the seasonal droving of livestock" file and the multinational extension of the file, and proposed an international webinar celebrating the International Day of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists of the UN, which took place on 17 October 2026.

   More information on activities undertaken to further promote and protect traditional Carpathian pastoral practices can be found in the chapter DECISION COP7/12 Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development.

## 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 at continuing close cooperation with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and its European Topic Centres in supporting the Carpathian Convention's activities. This includes work on forests, climate change adaptation, biodiversity, ecological connectivity, and the integration of common information systems. The Secretariat met several times with colleagues from the EEA Environment Department to discuss ongoing collaboration and the renewal of the Work Plan under the Partnership Agreement between the Carpathian Convention and the EEA. It was agreed to plan a Work Plan for the years 2027-2029, also aligning with the Presidency periods. Key topics addressed in the upcoming Work Plan include strengthening cooperation on biodiversity, forest monitoring, climate change adaptation, and data integration. Key priorities include supporting the operationalisation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation in the Carpathians, harmonising criteria and data on virgin, quasi-virgin and old-growth forests, enhancing regional forest and biodiversity information systems, and improving interoperability with EEA platforms such as FISE, BISE and Climate-ADAPT. The Work Plan also aims to promote the Carpathian region as a pilot area for transnational restoration implementation, while increasing the visibility of Carpathian knowledge, assessments and policy recommendations at the European level.

2. Thanks to the support of the EU Horizon Europe NaturaConnect and Interreg Danube Region ForestConnect projects, the Secretariat continued to enhance the **Carpathian Integrated Biodiversity Information System (CCIBIS).** Key progress included a comprehensive assessment of the platform, a major technical upgrade to improve security, functionality and long-term performance, the validation and publication of biodiversity datasets, and the development and testing of an integrated online map viewer, thereby strengthening CCIBIS as a regional platform for biodiversity information and decision-making.

3. The Secretariat liaised with the EEA and the Austrian Environment Agency on the project Creation of the standard European database Corine Land Cover of the Carpathian region for an area of 27,000 km2, aimed at providing a dataset for mapping the Carpathian area of Ukraine. The results of the project and data were also presented at the 8th Forum Carpaticum and are now published under the EEA website.

## DECISION COP7/19 Awareness raising, education and public participation

### Article 13 of the Carpathian Convention

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

1. In light of their long-term fruitful collaboration in the field of education and awareness-raising, the Secretariat and Špirála—Network of Environmental Education Providers in Slovakia developed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC). The MoC reflects Špirála's work in co-coordinating the Carpathian Education for Sustainable Development Expert Network (CESDEN) alongside the Secretariat, and aims to continue strengthening education and awareness raising and implementation of education as a tool for achieving sustainable development in the Carpathian region through close collaboration on coordinating CESDEN activities.

   Within this framework of coordinating CESDEN activities, the Secretariat organised an online meeting of the CESDEN on 30 January 2025 in cooperation with Boglárka Kurka Ivanegova, representing Špirála. The meeting focused on involving youth, facilitating further knowledge exchange, and discussing future plans for 2025.

   Based on the ESD session organized at the 8th Forum Carpaticum, the Secretariat facilitated collection of recommendations for policy, practice and research relevant to the CESDEN, which have been translated by Špirála into a **Carpathian ESD Roadmap**: a coherent set of actionable measures that could be implemented within the mandate of the Carpathian Convention and in accordance with the vision, mission, and priorities of the Carpathian ESD Expert Network. The Roadmap has been circulated among the CESDEN and updated based on comments received.

2. In coordinating CESDEN activities, the Secretariat and Špirála aimed to fulfil Carpathian ESD goals in synergy with the broader UNECE Strategy for ESD. As a result, the Secretariat and Špirála sought to broadly disseminate the Whole-Institution Approach, which integrates sustainability across all dimensions of an educational institution's life, to the Carpathian region and CESDEN.

   The Secretariat closely collaborated with Špirála to facilitate the presentation of the Whole Institutional Approach Toolkit. An online workshop was organized for CESDEN members on 18 November 2025 to initially introduce and test the toolkit, which was followed by the regional Whole Institutional Approach Toolkit Testing Conference, organized by Špirála on 5 February 2026 in Polná, Czechia. This conference was done in close collaboration with the Montessori School Polná, Czechia, SME and the GDO Association, VyHUB Network of sustainability actors in the Vysočina region, and in cooperation with the CESDEN and UNECE Steering Committee on ESD. Several CESDEN members participated in the Conference.

   Upon invitation by the Republic of Cyprus, the Secretariat actively participated and facilitated participation of Carpathian Convention Parties and CESDEN members in the European Conference, Whole Institution Approach & Education for Sustainable Development: From Policy Vision to Educational Transformation, held in Nicosia, Cyprus on 7–8 May 2026. The event was a flagship event under the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the

EU. The Secretariat collaborated with Špirála and the Presidency of Serbia on highlighting the Carpathian region and Carpathian Convention during panel discussions and side events.

3. The Secretariat strengthened engagement with the UNECE and facilitated partnerships with CESDEN members and the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD.

   The Secretariat represented CESDEN at the 20th Meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD, held from 28–30 May 2025 in Geneva, Switzerland as well as at the 21st meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD, held from 20 - 22 May 2026 in Geneva, Switzerland. At the 20th Meeting, upon invitation by the Chair of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD - Cyprus, the Secretariat participated in a panel discussion marking the 20th anniversary of the UNECE ESD Strategy. During the panel, the Secretariat emphasised the relevance of the UNECE ESD framework within the context of the Carpathian Convention, highlighted the Convention's role in implementing the Strategy, and expressed appreciation for the support provided by the Republic of Cyprus to CESDEN's activities. Additionally, the Secretariat delivered two presentations in close collaboration with Boglárka Kurka Ivanegova: (1) "Update on CESDEN's activities" under Agenda item 10 "Recent activities promoting education for sustainable development in other international forums and strengthening synergies with other organisations and processes" and (2) "Reflections on the outcomes of the UNECE Forum on ESD: Empowering Youth for Sustainable Futures relevant for the Carpathian Region," with inputs from Carpathian participants, under Agenda item 8 "Implementation update: fourth priority strand on "Entrepreneurship, employment, innovation and education for sustainable development." At the 21st meeting, the Secretariat provided an update on behalf of the CESDEN under Agenda item 9: Recent activities promoting education for sustainable development in other international forums and strengthening synergies.

   In light of the European Conference on Educational Research 2025, which took place on 8–12 September 2025 in Belgrade, Serbia, the Secretariat facilitated a meeting between the Serbian Presidency and Dr. Aravella Zachariou, the Chair of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD on behalf of Cyprus, with the aim to strengthen collaboration between Serbia and the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD.

4. The Secretariat provided a support letter for the project Empowering Roma Communities in the Green Deal, led by the Comenius University, which has been funded by the European Climate Initiative (EUKI) and joined the Advisory Board of the project. The project aims to support the participation of marginalized Roma communities from Hungary and Slovakia in Central Europe's green transition via research and bottom-up sustainable social innovation, including via establishing an Aarhus Platform for Roma communities.

   In order to support discussions towards establishing an Aarhus Platform or Aarhus centre for Roma communities, the Secretariat facilitated a meeting between the representatives of the Comenius University, Roma Environmental Sustainability & Development Initiative and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), overseeing the network of the Aarhus Centres, in June 2026, which resulted in expression of mutual interest to develop synergies and collaborations.

5. The Secretariat organised a session on ESD at the 8th Forum Carpaticum, where experts from Poland, Romania and Czech Republic, and Leuphana University Lüneburg presented. The latter presented the developed university courses and the results of students' projects focused on the Carpathian region, as part of the ProBioTIC project (see more details under the chapter DECISION COP7/8 Strengthening science-policy-practice interface and cooperation with scientific networks).

6. The Secretariat actively participated in educational activities of the ProBioTIC project, providing inputs on the Carpathian Convention as well as providing feedback to students' presentations, with the aim of strengthening participation of youth, students and early career scientists in the Carpathian Convention.

- A group of students from Poland (Jagiellonian University) developed educational materials on Carpathian meadows and were invited to integrate their results into the CESDEN webpage.
- A group of students from Germany (Leuphana University) worked on a webpage on citizen science, with feedback from the Secretariat, to provide recommendations and potentially integrate the resulting content into the CESDEN webpage.

7. Building on the activities and interest generated by the ProBioTIC project, the International Carpathian School, and initiatives of other CESDEN partners, the Secretariat invited the participation of youth, students and early-career researchers in Carpathian Convention processes and facilitated the integration of their presentations and recommendations into relevant meetings. The recommendations developed by early-career researchers were presented to the Carpathian Convention bodies, including the CCIC and the Working Group on Sustainable Tourism, with the objective of fostering sustained and meaningful youth participation in the implementation of the Convention.

8. Upon invitation of UNESCO, the Secretariat presented the Convention and its activities related to education and awareness-raising at the UNESCO ESD for 2030 Global Network (ESD-NET) Europe-North America Regional Workshop, held on 20-23 January 2026 in Bucharest, Romania. On the occasion of the Workshop, the Secretariat, in close coordination with and with support from the Focal Point on behalf of Romania, held a joint meeting at the Ministry of Education of Romania, in order to present Convention activities and consider potential synergies and inter-ministerial collaboration in the field of education and awareness-raising.

9. In collaboration with the Serbian Presidency and with Špirála, and in coordination with the UNECE Steering Committee ESD, its Cyprus Chair and UNESCO, the 3rd Carpathian ESD Seminar took place in Belgrade, Serbia on 28-29 September 2026. The Seminar created space for dialogue between the Carpathian expert community and Serbian stakeholders, with particular attention to inter-ministerial cooperation, development of the CESDEN network, the Carpathian ESD Roadmap towards 2030, and the links between ESD and pastoralism. Academic experts, NGO representatives, protected area educators, government experts, local teachers, and other educators across the Carpathian region came together to network, provide feedback on the Carpathian ESD Roadmap, and exchange experiences related to pastoralism and its links to ESD. The Seminar also constituted as a Carpathian Day celebration in Serbia, as pastoralism was a central theme of the Seminar with a dedicated session on shared challenges and solutions and a field visit to a Serbian pastoral community.