

How to fund the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N)

European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)



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Interreg

Interreg is a name used for the interregional cooperation programme of the EU Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027 (Goal 2: **European Territorial Cooperation**). European Territorial Cooperation (here referred to as Interreg) is the EU's instrument to support cooperation across regions and countries in and outside the EU. It supports cross-border mobility and efforts to develop environmental protection.

Interreg provides opportunities for funding biodiversity conservation across borders and regions. As biodiversity and ecosystems naturally cross regional and national borders, and therefore require coordinated action, this funding is an important direct support to the EU's biodiversity goals.

Interreg directs a share of the European Regional Development Fund (**ERDF**) funding to cross border cooperation between regions (Interreg A), transnational cooperation involving regions from different Member States (Interreg B) and interregional cooperation including all Member States (Interreg C), as well as outermost regions' cooperation (Interreg D). It also includes funds for cooperation under the Instrument for Pre-Accession (**IPA III**), and funds for cooperation under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (**NDICI**).

Almost €10 billion have been allocated to the programme for the 2021-2027 period, which are shared between almost 100 programmes in and outside the EU. For the nature and biodiversity strand, almost €548 million have been planned, as well as €107 million for protection, restoration and use of Natura 2000 sites [1]. The European territorial cooperation goal funding is allocated to regions primarily on the basis of the populations affected.

[1] <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/funds/interreg/21-27>

Assessment of Interreg

Who can apply for Interreg funding*?

- ✓ Governmental agencies
- ✓ Public law bodies (bodies governed by public law)
- ✓ NGO or civil society organisations
- ✓ SMEs and large enterprises
- ✓ Research organisations

* Eligibility criteria depend on each Interreg programme and must therefore be checked beforehand.

What types of support does Interreg provide?

Interreg can support

- Trans-national or transboundary cooperation
- Research linked to species conservation and monitoring
- One-off restoration measures
- Establishing and implementing Natura 2000 management actions (also outside sites)
- Promoting sustainable tourism, cultural heritage and local products and improving cooperation among regional and local administrations and site management
- Supporting the governance systems and capacities of cross-border or trans-national public institutions and key actors implementing ecological connectivity
- Running costs and regular administrative costs

Interreg cannot support

- Regional or national projects that have no cross-border, trans-national or transboundary dimension
- Longer term management and restoration actions on the ground (funding is often more focussed on the collaboration and planning rather than actual restoration actions)

Opportunities for funding measures for the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N) through Interreg

This section assesses the opportunities for funding the types of measures needed to build the Trans-European Nature Network through Interreg. The rules for what can be funded and what cannot correspond to the rules of the funds contributing to the Interreg budget – ERDF, IPAIII, NDICI. The table below matches the different types of costs with the available sources of funding. The full list of types of costs is in the Annex to this factsheet.

Interreg objectives correspond best to funding network planning and preparatory activities for site and corridor designation and protection, as well as capacity building and knowledge exchange, but the fund can provide opportunities to cover all costs associated with ecological networks. It cannot provide long-term support for site management and governance. Compensation, land purchase, and management costs are generally not considered a priority for Interreg funding.

Types of measures eligible for Interreg funding		ERDF Article 5*
Network planning costs	Administrative	✓
	Spatial planning	✓
	Biogeographical network planning	
	Monitoring and reporting of the protected area network	
Protected area establishment costs	Site/corridor designation and management planning	✓
	Administrative	✓
	Remaining knowledge gaps and research needs	✓
	One-off establishment actions	✓ **
	Compensation	✗
	Land purchase	✗
Management costs	Site (cluster) administration	✓
	Compliance checking and enforcement	
	Monitoring and reporting	
	Maintenance and ongoing restoration measures for species and habitats	
	Additional green infrastructure measures (outside protected areas)	
	PA infrastructure maintenance	
Communication and awareness raising costs	Natura 2000-related communication and awareness raising measures, education and visitor access	✓
	Best practice exchange	

* The rules for what Interreg programmes can and cannot fund correspond to the rules of the funds contributing to the Interreg budget – ERDF, IPAIII, NDICI. This table only covers the ERDF part as that is the predominant contributor to Interreg projects.

** All participating countries must benefit from such investments, otherwise they are not eligible.

What TEN-N activities can the Interreg programme fund?

Interreg funding is relevant for your project if it contributes to:

- ✓ **Network planning and site and corridor designation and protection**
 - ✓ Identification of conservation and restoration needs
 - ✓ Planning and mapping new sites and establishment actions
 - ✓ Establishing common species monitoring methodologies
 - ✓ Drawing up joint or coordinated species action plans and strategies
 - ✓ Stakeholder dialogue and engagement, exchange of knowledge
- ✓ **Restoration and maintenance of habitats and species in protected area(s)**
 - ✓ Stakeholder dialogue and management planning
- ✓ **Creation of new connecting landscape elements and corridors**
 - ✓ Assessment and monitoring of barriers
 - ✓ Definition of restoration methodologies and concepts for habitat corridors based on habitat and species dynamics
 - ✓ Stakeholder dialogue and exchange of experiences
- ✓ **Maintenance and management of the area in a sustainable way by defining and implementing targeted conservation measures**
 - ✓ Establishing common management, assessment and monitoring objectives and activities
- ✓ **Financial and technical support to the development of the network**
 - ✓ Economic valuation of Natura 2000
 - ✓ Promotion of sustainable tourism, cultural heritage and local products
 - ✓ Action plans for nature-based coordination and territorial development
 - ✓ Mediation conflict with stakeholders (e.g. between different economic and conservation interests)
 - ✓ Awareness raising
 - ✓ Stakeholder training and capacity building, dialogue and engagement
 - ✓ Improving cooperation among regional, local administrations and site management

Interreg can also to a certain extent fund these costs during the period of the project (these costs are not so often covered by EU funding):

✓ **Administrative costs:**

- ✓ Staff costs
- ✓ Office and administrative costs
- ✓ Travel and accommodation costs
- ✓ External expertise and service costs
- ✓ Equipment costs
- ✓ Costs for infrastructure and works – only to a very limited extent

Interreg does not usually fund:

Administrative costs:

- ✗ Land purchase
- ✗ Compensation of landowners
- ✗ Large physical establishment actions – defragmentation, infrastructure, restoration
- ✗ Improving connectivity and population status (e.g. fauna passages, reintroduction)
- ✗ Implementing restoration actions (e.g. wetlands rewetting)
- ✗ Restoring ecological corridors (e.g. by removing barriers from river habitats)
- ✗ Implementing habitat management actions

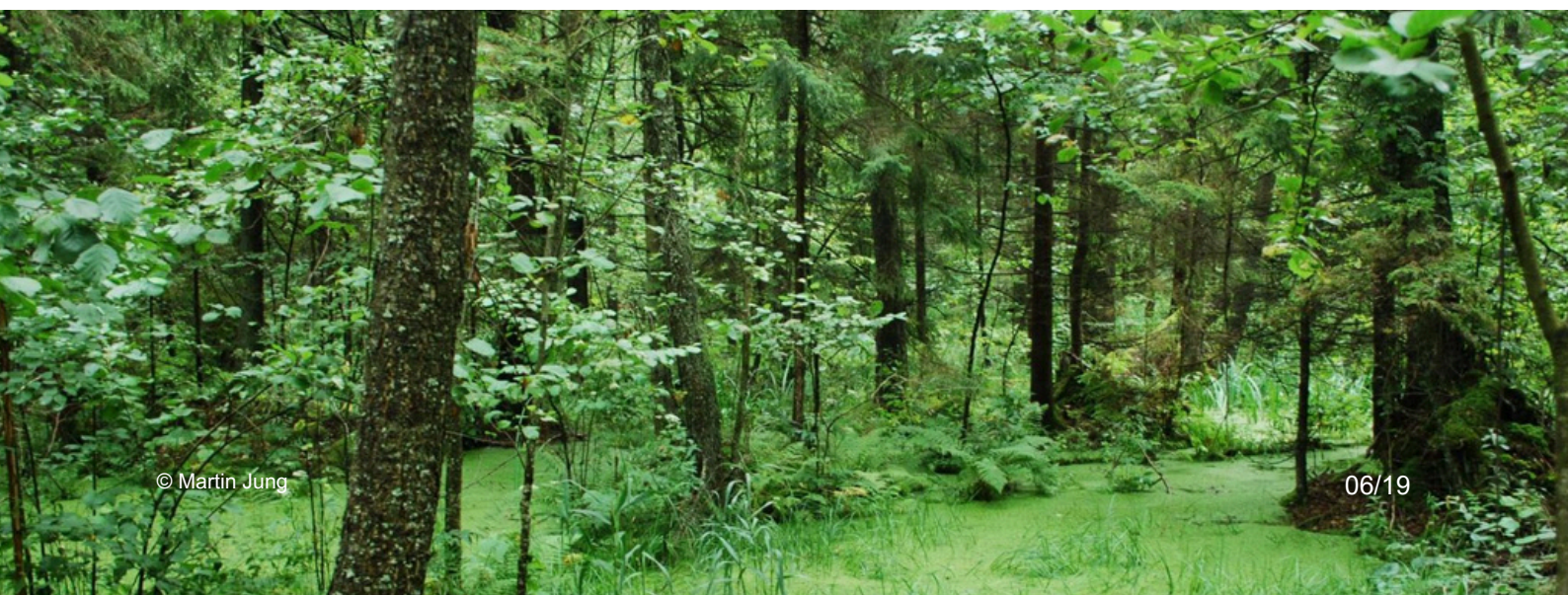


Important considerations for TEN-N

Sources: European Commission (2020), European Commission (2022), EPRS (2023), IEEP and Milieu (2013) – for full references see the useful resources section of this factsheet.

- Interreg is about strengthening collaboration between local and regional authorities within countries and across borders, including information and experience sharing.
- Interreg is an important EU fund for meeting the goals of TEN-N, even though it is one of the smaller areas of the EU budget. Interreg has funded at least 190 projects involving Natura 2000 sites since 2000. In the 2024-2020 period, €163 million were dedicated for the protection, restoration and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites (representing a total of €280 million, with a share of €200 million of EU funding).
- Interreg projects involving Natura 2000 sites are not just about conserving biodiversity but also about its integration into wider socio-economic development objectives at the local or regional level, which is often especially important for ecological connectivity measures.
- Interreg projects are usually multidisciplinary and involve a wide range of different socio-economic sectors and stakeholders.
- Interreg can fund cooperation with accession countries and other neighbouring countries in Europe. A legal instrument enables public authorities of different Member States to team up and deliver joint services, without this requiring a prior international agreement to be signed and ratified by national parliaments [2]
- Many projects link up Natura 2000 site management and local sustainable tourism development initiatives to help promote economic development in keeping with the protected area objectives.
- Many projects integrate their actions with other initiatives in the region, such as national initiatives or other EU funded projects.

[2] The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Member States must agree to the participation of potential members in their respective countries.



Strengths for TEN-N

- Interreg has played a major role in establishing many integrated cross-border management plans for Natura 2000 sites; it has been key in promoting the coherence and connectivity of the Natura 2000 network and encouraging species conservation across frontiers.
- Interreg can fund projects focusing on the conservation or restoration of a particular species or habitat and/or individual Natura 2000 site or clusters of sites. More recent projects support investments in Natura 2000 following the Prioritised Action Frameworks (PAFs).
- Projects can work across a whole transboundary mountain range or river basin. For example, there are projects relevant to ecological connectivity in the Alps, the Carpathians and the Danube. Through the Green Belt Initiative, Interreg funding has benefited connectivity across the continent.
- Interreg D directs funding to outermost regions' cooperation – areas which are often overlooked but which are crucial for biodiversity. Includes the Canaries, Azores, and Madeira, with their Natura 2000 networks.
- Interreg projects can link Natura 2000 site management with local sustainable tourism development initiatives.
- Interreg helps link biodiversity protection with wider socio-economic issues by promoting cross-border and cross-sectoral exchange of experiences and practices.
- Available to a wide range of beneficiaries, including regional authorities and SMEs. Interreg projects can be led by research institutes, conservation NGOs, agricultural and hunting bodies.
- Co-funding rates are high and are usually up to 80%.
- Member States must offer Interreg funding opportunities for small projects. Projects with a total budget below €100 000 may have simplified and more flexible funding arrangements if the managing authority specifies this.

Limitations for TEN-N

- Complex and resource-intensive coordination and administration of multi-country programmes and projects. Smaller beneficiaries such as NGOs may struggle with the administrative burden and finding prefinancing for their activities before the first project payment.
- Works well for collaboration and strategic and practical planning and communication actions, but not for funding the actual actions, such as removal of dams or habitat restoration. It may be difficult to work together with sectors such as transport on a specific problem if they do not have dedicated funding to match the Interreg funding going to the nature conservation partners, and it may be difficult to get Interreg money earmarked to that sector.
- Not appropriate for funding very large and/or expensive restoration actions such as river barrier removal. There is a cap on the amount of ERDF funding per project. Project budgets tend to be under €2 million, but some regions fund projects of €4 to 5 million.
- Insufficient use of Interreg project results: public authorities may fail to adopt or implement the developed plans and strategies. There is often insufficient political backing for the results.
- Projects must rely on governments and public authorities to act on the plans, findings or recommendations with other funding sources.
- Projects often have weak complementarity with other structural and investment fund programmes, which is a barrier to finding other sources of funding to implement the results.
- In the 2014-2020 period, stakeholders raised the issue that the resources available for the programme do not match the scale of the challenges it has to address.

How do Interreg programmes and calls work?

Interreg managing authorities allocate budgets through open calls for project proposals. For each call, the authority publishes the terms of reference, which set out the specific criteria being looked for (corresponding to the priorities of the programme), and an opening and closing date for the call. Outside of these dates it is not possible to apply for funding. Applications must generally be submitted online. The programme's Monitoring Committee decides which projects to approve. Documents for the clarification and complain procedure should be available.

Example of an Interreg funding programme for the period 2021 to 2027

Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027 (Interreg B transnational programme)

The **Danube Transnational Programme** in 2021-2027 is targeting support to transnational ecological connectivity. Within the greener, low-carbon Danube Region priority, objective 2.4 (**'Protecting and preserving the biodiversity in ecological corridors and eco-regions'**) aims to support solutions for transnational ecological corridors and actions enhancing cooperation of transboundary ecological regions. These include water habitats and wetlands along major transnational rivers. **More than €16 million** are available to support this objective.

The programme funds:

- ✓ Efforts to improve, restore, manage and monitor ecological connectivity along transnationally relevant ecological corridors, including examination of the potential of green and blue infrastructure developments and solutions for effective defragmentation.
- ✓ Actions in revitalisation and rehabilitation of water habitats along major transnational river (systems), exploring the potentials of restoration and reconnection of floodplains and wetlands.
- ✓ Establishing institutionalised management and cooperation network(s) of 'Danubian' transboundary ecological regions, harmonised management strategies and solutions, conservation and preservation techniques, toolkits, etc. ensuring sustainable use of natural resources.
- ✓ Increasing the resilience of habitats and ecosystems of transboundary ecological regions and their ability to adapt to climate change impacts by development of eco-friendly land use systems, landscape management and soil protection and restoration measures.
- ✓ Solutions in prevention and control of invasive alien species and management of their priority pathways.
- ✓ Development and implementation of transnational monitoring, conservation and restoration and management plans for endangered umbrella species of the Danube Region.

It does not fund:

- ✗ Projects which do not demonstrate that cooperation is needed at a transnational level to address the specific biodiversity challenge of the Danube Region, as well as not properly targeting a transnationally relevant geographic area (ecological corridor, transboundary ecological region).
- ✗ Projects with a pre-dominant focus on infrastructure.
- ✗ Projects to develop technical solutions (e.g. monitoring tools) without ensuring its application by the target users and the improvement of institutional capacities within the project.
- ✗ Projects with a pre-dominant focus on research and data collection activities without translating their outcomes within the project time into applied solutions or policy strategies or plans.
- ✗ Projects exploring the potential of floodplain restoration and reconnection are out of scope if their focus is on flood protection or on water quality issues (but issues can be addressed through other objectives such as nature conservation).

It addresses:

- ✓ National, regional public authorities and organisations responsible for environmental and nature protection issues, agriculture (farming, forestry, fishery).
- ✓ Spatial planners.
- ✓ Infrastructure and (public) service providers (water management, transport, hydropower).
- ✓ Interest groups including NGOs (e.g. international organisations, environmental organisations, voluntary associations, etc.).
- ✓ Research institutions, universities, education/training centres and schools.

Source: Interreg Danube Region (2024): What we finance: Green - Priority 2: A greener, low-carbon Danube Region. <https://interreg-danube.eu/what-we-finance#2>



Examples of Interreg funding benefiting ecological connectivity and protected area networks

A series of Interreg Danube Transnational Programme projects have developed ecological connectivity plans, research, and information for the Danube and Carpathian region. The projects were coordinated and shared and built on each other's results and experiences.

SAVEGREEN Safeguarding the Functionality of Transnationally Important Ecological Corridors in the Danube Basin Interreg Danube Transnational Programme

Who and when: 2020 to 2022. Lead partner WWF Central and Eastern Europe with public authorities in Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, as well as NGOs, private companies, and research institutions.

Where: The project had 8 pilot areas in the Alpine-Carpathian corridor, the Western Carpathians (Czech Republic, Slovakia), cross-border areas of Hungary and Slovakia, Mureş Valley in Romania, Zakarpattia region in Ukraine and the Rila-Verila-Kraishte corridor in Bulgaria.

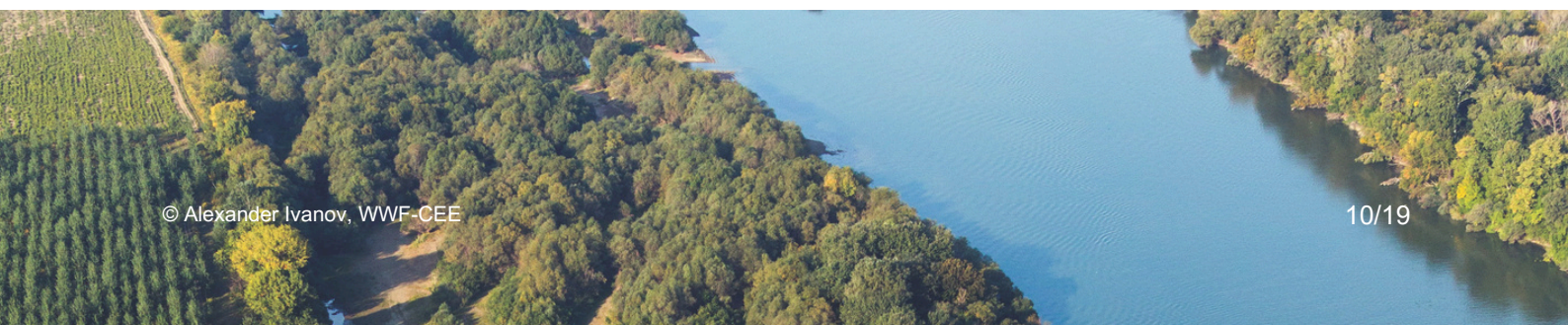
Aim and results: The project aimed to demonstrate ways of designing appropriate mitigation measures and maintaining or improving the functionality of ecological corridors through integrated planning. The project goals were to: increase knowledge and experience among relevant authorities and key stakeholders; improve cross-sectoral practices relevant to green infrastructure for integrated mitigation measures, implementation and monitoring; and strengthen international and national governance frameworks.

The project produced:

- Standardised methodology for monitoring structural and functional connectivity including an application toolbox for fieldwork & analysis
- Local cross-sectoral operational plans for each pilot area, including preparatory actions for their implementation
- A capacity building program for authorities and training events for public authorities and key players on integrating ecological corridors into SEA, EIA, etc.
- A Joint Declaration on ecological connectivity in the Danube-Carpathian region

Funding: Interreg (ERDF) contribution €2 279 469 (85% of total budget).

Source: Interreg Danube Transnational Programme approved projects. <https://dtp.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/savegreen>



ConnectGREEN Restoring and managing ecological corridors in mountains as the green infrastructure in the Danube basin

Interreg Danube Transnational Programme

Who and when: 2018 to 2021. The partnership consisted of public authorities including protected area administrations, scientific organisations, spatial planning institutions and NGOs from Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia, with complementary competencies in the field of nature conservation, spatial planning, research, and sustainable development. The project was led by WWF Romania.

Where: The pilot areas were: 1. Piatra Craiului National Park (Romania); 2. Apuseni-SW Carpathians (Romania)/ National Park Djerdap (Serbia); 3. Western Carpathians (Czech Republic - Slovakia) and 4. Bükk National Park (Hungary)/ Cerová vrchovina Protected Landscape Area (Slovakia).

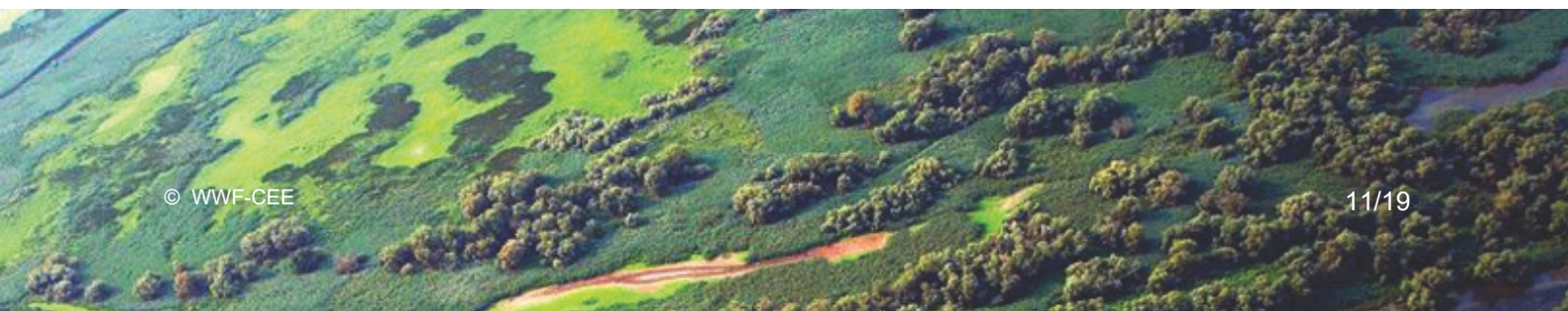
Aim and results: The project aimed to:

- Develop innovative solutions and guidance to identify ecological corridors and connectivity gaps in a harmonized way across the Carpathian ecoregion to maintain long-term, cross-border wildlife movement, associated ecosystem services and a high level of biodiversity in the region.
- Engage protected area and Natura 2000 site managers, conservationists, spatial planners and other key stakeholders in an integrated approach for strengthening the capacity for identifying and managing ecological corridors.
- Reconcile nature conservation and spatial planning and development in ecological corridors and Natura 2000 sites by identifying and implementing strategic directions and instruments and practices.

The main project outputs were the methodology on the identification of ecological corridors for large carnivores and the map with the ecological network for large carnivores across the Carpathians and various reports on ecological corridors and spatial planning (status, gap analysis, instruments in spatial planning, and recommendations).

Funding: Overall budget: €2 462 923. ERDF contribution: €1 920 592. IPA contribution: €172 892.

Sources: Interreg Danube Transnational Programme approved projects. www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/connectgreen
Project brochure https://www.interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/approved_project_public/0001/40/f9b95de0c7e4f7b7888071887e6e4b5507c74c24.pdf



TRANSGREEN - Integrated Transport and Green Infrastructure Planning in the Danube-Carpathian Region for the Benefit of People and Nature

Who and when: 2017-2019. Led by WWF with nine associated partners in Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine.

Where: There was joint field work in four pilot areas: Kysuce–Beskydy (CZ-SK), Arad–Deva (RO), Tirgu Mures-Iasi (RO), and Miskolc-Kosice-Uzhgorod (HU, SK, UA).

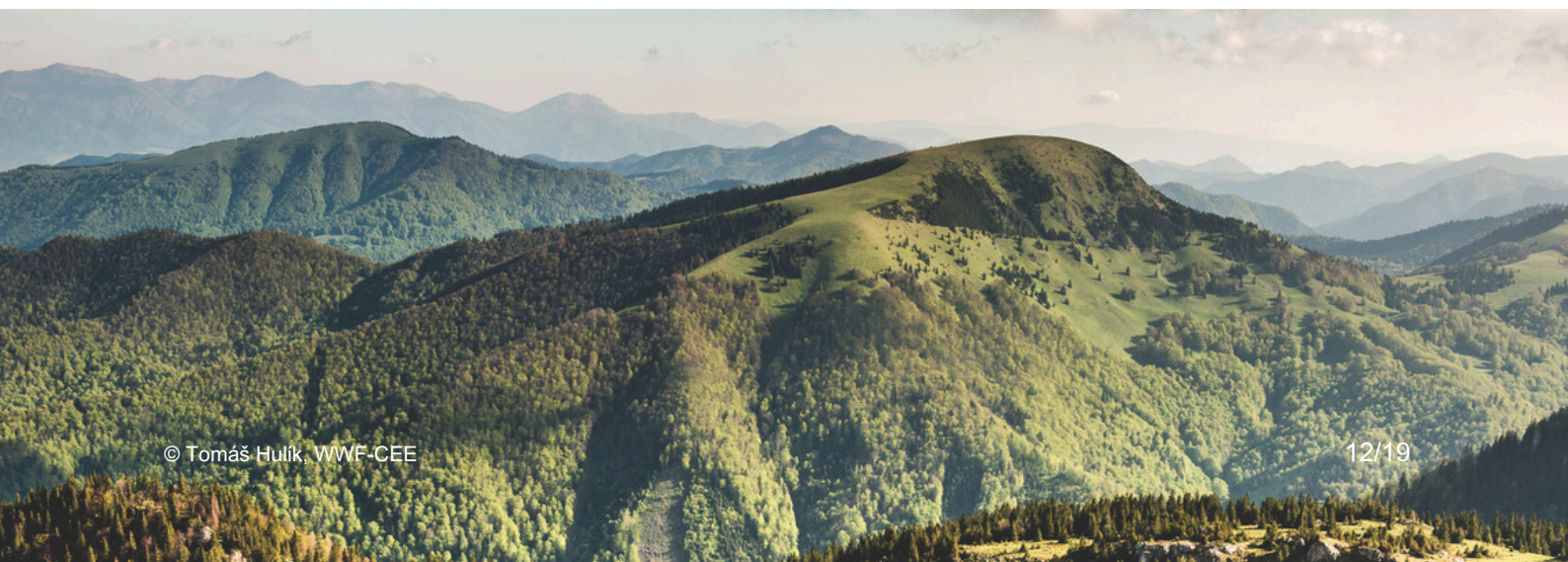
Aim and results: Aimed to contribute to safer and environmentally friendly road and rail networks in mountainous regions of the Danube Basin with a special focus on the Carpathian Mountains: by improving planning frameworks and developing concrete environmentally friendly and safe road and rail transport solutions considering elements of green infrastructure, in particular ecological corridors. The project involved data collection, scientifically-sound tools, capacity building, stakeholder engagement and policy work.

The project developed methodologies for monitoring collisions and road-kills, in-depth analyses and 'Catalogues of Measures' for each pilot area. These are to be pushed forward as unified guidelines or policies in all involved Carpathian countries as part of the implementation of the Carpathian Convention.

The project published 'Guidelines for Wildlife and Traffic in the Carpathians' which is a practical tool that supports planning of sustainable infrastructure with minimum effect on ecological corridors and wildlife.

Funding: Total budget of €2.48 million, of which €2.1 million from Interreg (ERDF).

Sources: Interreg Danube Transnational Programme approved projects. <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/transgreen>
Natura 2000 award in 2020: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/natura-2000-award/winners/2020-winner-cross-border-cooperation-award_en



Examples of Interreg projects that have supported protected area networks and the establishment of new protected areas

Interreg projects run by DANUBEPARKS – Danube Network of Protected Areas

2007-2012 South East Europe, 2014-2020 Interreg V-B Danube (Interreg B transnational cooperation), Interreg Danube Transnational Programme.

DANUBEPARKS was formed in 2007 to help transnational collaboration and involve all protected areas administrators in tackling common challenges and finding joint solutions. Interreg projects run by DANUBEPARKS have involved 14 partners focusing on 16 protected areas in 9 countries (Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The following Interreg projects have supported DANUBEPARKS' work since 2009:

Development and Implementation of Transnational Strategies for the Conservation of the Natural Heritage at the Danube River (2009-2012)

Results: Established the network as a long-term platform for knowledge and experience transfer. Collaboration to systematically tackle common challenges for the first time on a Danube-wide scale, promoting intense exchange of experience, elaborating transnational strategies and implementing demonstrative pilot projects. Established Danube-wide monitoring systems.

DANUBEPARKS STEP 2.0 - Anchoring the Danube River Network of Protected Areas as Platform for Preservation of Danube Natural Heritage (2012-2014)

Results: Developed programmes for protection of Black Poplar and White-tailed Eagle as flagship species, preservation and restoration of natural river dynamics, improvement of nature tourism and environmental education offers, and organisational development.

DANUBEparksCONNECTED - Bridging the Danube Protected Areas towards a Danube Habitat Corridor (2017-2019)

Results: initiated the DANUBE HABITAT CORRIDOR campaign to counteract fragmentation. Implemented best practice examples for ecological connectivity in all elements (through other EU funded projects): DANUBE FREE SKY (air element), WILDIsland (water element), Dry Habitat Corridor and Forest Corridor (land element). The Danube Habitat Corridor Guiding Principles compile experiences from the project focuses and define follow-up actions. The result is an overarching guiding document for future activities concerning ecological connectivity.

Funding:

2009-2012 = Interreg funding €2.7 million

2012-2014 = Interreg funding €2.2 million

2017-2019 = Interreg funding for 85% of total budget (ERDF €2 487 762 IPA €134 838)

Two Interreg projects in the Adriatic coast region are contributing to the mapping of possible new protected areas and ecological networks:

BEST - Addressing joint Agro-and Aqua-Biodiversity pressures Enhancing SuSTainable Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 INTERREG V-A Greece - Italy

Who and when: 2019 to 2023. Led by Ionian Islands Regional Authority.

Relevant results:

- Species distribution maps and shapefiles.
- Map of the reproductive habitats, of the habitats of trophic relief and of those of wintering and/or estivation present, on a scale of 1:2.000 and 1:10.000 georeferenced and compatible with the territorial environmental information system of the Puglia Region
- Land use map about reproductive habitats, habitats of trophic importance and wintering sites
- Identification of 15 biotope sites classified as "hot-spots" of biodiversity that could constitute a network of natural and semi-natural areas for the implementation of actions of connection and restoration of the ecological network, remediation, planning, development and promotion.

Funding: Interreg (ERDF) €4 573 000 (85% of total budget)

Source: <https://keep.eu/projects/26842/Addressing-joint-Agro-and-A-EN/>

POSEIDONE - Promotion of Green and Blue Infrastructure Dedicated to a New Environment Programme 2021 - 2027 Interreg VI-A Italy-Slovenia

Who and when: 2023 to 2025. Led by Eastern Veneto Development Agency (GAL Venezia Orientale). In the functional area of the northern Adriatic Sea from the city of Chioggia (Italy) to the Slovenian coast.

Expected results: Cross-border strategy for the identification and creation of new protected areas, with a cross-border vision, methods and criteria to identify measures against the loss of biodiversity and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Funding: Interreg (ERDF) €500 451 (80% of total budget)

Source: <https://keep.eu/projects/27687/Promotion-of-green-and-blue-EN/>

Many Interreg projects have benefited protected areas and ecological connectivity. Examples can be found in the Interreg projects database at <https://keep.eu/> (see useful resources section of this factsheet).

More examples of Interreg projects that have benefited protected area networks and ecological connectivity:

D2C - DaRe to Connect - Supporting Danube Region's Ecological Connectivity by Linking Natura 2000 Areas along the Green Belt - Interreg Danube Transnational Programme

Who and when: 2018 to 2021. Led by Bavarian branch of BUND, Friends of the Earth Germany, BUND Project Office Green Belt.

Aim and results: Implementation of the EU Danube Strategy by further transnational development of the connectivity of the Green Belt as backbone of EU Green infrastructure by maintaining and enhancing ecosystems and their services. Produced a user-friendly online GIS tool for local and regional stakeholders in the D2C Pilot regions and beyond. It identifies natural features and potential ecological corridors at the local and regional level along the European Green Belt with specific focus on the project area.

Funding: Interreg 85% of total budget (ERDF: €1 684 032. IPA: €89 624).

Sources: https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/d2c,D2C_GIS_TOOL

The Green and Blue Rhine Alliance project - Interreg V-A Germany – the Netherlands (Interreg A cross border 2014-2020)

Who and when: 2017 to 2020. Led by the NGO Ark Nature in the Netherlands and involving 10 partners.

Aim and results: The project aimed to strengthen transboundary ecological connections along the Rhine across the Netherlands and Germany. The project has contributed to improving cross-border ecological connections to improve otter and fish migration.

Funding: Interreg funding €1.8 million (51% of budget) and co-funding by the regional authorities competent for implementing Natura 2000 policy in the region on both sides of the border.

PlanToConnect - Mainstreaming Ecological Connectivity in Spatial Planning Systems of the Alpine Space - Interreg Alpine Space

Who and when: 2022-2025. Partners in Slovenia, Italy, Austria, France, Germany. Led by Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia.

Aim: The aim is to identify the key cross-border areas for planning of ecological connectivity and to facilitate the upgrade of spatial planning systems and territorial policies to preserve or re-establish them. Cooperate with stakeholders in pilot areas to develop and test an Alpine spatial planning strategy for ecological connectivity, and a capacity-building package for its implementation.

Who and when: 2022-2025. Partners in SI, IT, AT, FR, DE. Led by Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia.

Funding: Total budget: €2.461.927, ERDF €1.846.446.

Source: <https://www.alpine-space.eu/project/plantoconnect/>



Annex II: What are the financial costs associated with the TEN-N?

The creation and management of a coherent TEN-N in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 requires the following actions from the national and regional authorities:

- **Designate the relevant areas as protected**, in order to contribute to the 30% protected areas and the 10% strict protection targets.
- **Restore the relevant areas to contribute to the 20% restoration target of EU's land and sea by 2030**, in order to improve the habitat condition and delivery of ecosystem services.
- **Create new connecting landscape elements** to physically or functionally connect existing elements.
- **Maintain and manage the protected areas in a sustainable way by defining and implementing targeted conservation measures**, which may allow various types of low-impact land uses.
- **Financial and technical support** to the development of the network.

Meeting these objectives involves the following costs:

Network Planning Costs

One time or recurring costs associated with planning for or updating a comprehensive and well-connected network of protected areas.

- **Spatial mapping and planning**: mapping and modelling to identify priority areas (GIS mapping of habitat and species occurrences, land use, mapping of barriers and corridors), site identification information, IT infrastructure, training and capacity building.
- **Habitat and species surveys**: surveys to map habitat condition and species distribution, identify restoration priority areas and potential habitat recreation areas.
- **Biogeographical network planning**: exchange and joint planning (e.g. meetings, travel to neighbouring countries, information sharing).
- **Administrative**: staff, overheads, training, as part of the network planning exercise.
- **Stakeholder engagement**: costs associated with organising meetings with landowners and other potentially affected stakeholders.
- **Monitoring and reporting of the protected area network**

Protected Area Establishment Costs

One-time or recurring costs associated with planning for placement, levels of protection and designation of additional protected areas and corridors.

- **Site/corridor designation and management planning**: definition of sites (habitat surveys, precise boundary definition, land parcel data, species and habitat data), designation, legal protection, management planning, impact assessment and permit issuing.
- **Administrative**: staff and salaries, trainings, overheads or office acquisitions, planning and coordination with other management teams in cross-border protected areas.
- **Remaining knowledge gaps and research needs**: additional surveys and research, engaging external expertise, modelling of ecological changes under climate scenarios, social impacts, capacity building.

- **One-off establishment actions: time and tools (incl. machinery) for:**
- **Defragmentation measures:** removing roads, river barriers, building green bridges.
- **Infrastructure:** Water management infrastructure, fire management infrastructure, construction of infrastructure necessary for management and visitors.
- **Landscape restoration:** e.g., fencing, removing or moving dykes, engineering works, earth moving, removing non-native trees, replanting, recreating floodplains.
- **Creation of corridors and connectivity/defragmentation features:** infrastructure or restoration actions e.g., green bridges, creation of green infrastructure features along water courses or transport networks for biodiversity.
- **Compensation:** establishment of alternative income-generating activities, short-term compensation, stewardship contracts with landowners.
- **Land purchase:** e.g. buy outs, land swaps.

Management Costs

Fixed and variable, recurring annual or one-off costs of site management and day-to-day activities.

- **Site (-cluster) administration:** staff and salaries, trainings, overheads, coordination with other management teams in cross-border protected areas, renewal of stewardship contracts with landowners.
- **Compliance checking and enforcement:** equipment, data, staff.
- **Impact assessment and permits:** assessments of development projects, control and issue of permits or licenses for activities or developments.
- **Surveillance, monitoring and reporting:** at scale of site and surroundings e.g. corridors. Species and habitat monitoring. Surveillance of invasive species, animal and plant diseases or pests, etc. Wildfire surveillance.
- **Maintenance and ongoing restoration measures for species and habitats,** incl. tools and machinery.
- **Additional green infrastructure measures outside the protected area:** maintenance and ongoing restoration measures for species and habitats in corridors, buffer zones, stepping-stone habitat patches etc.
- **Protected area infrastructure maintenance:** access (roads, paths), visitor facilities – observation hides, visitor centres, parking and other facilities, wildfire prevention and management.

Communication and Awareness Raising Costs

- **Protected area-related communication and awareness raising measures, education and visitor access:** general communication and awareness-raising measures, education, access to visitors, etc.
- **Best practice exchange** between protected area managers and between land managers of ecological corridors.

Annex III: Useful resources

See also the factsheet on the EU cohesion policy funds: European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund for resources related to the cohesion funds as a whole.

Resources

- European Commission data portal for Interreg fund: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/funds/interreg/21-27>
- Database of Interreg projects, programmes and partnerships: <https://keep.eu/>
- Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-learning-platform>. Offers information on regional development policies via thematic publications, online and onsite events. Offers free services to policymakers looking for tailored advice on their policy challenges: direct communication with a team of experts, peer-to-peer exchange visits, peer review service, sharing of experiences.
- Public consultation on future of Interreg in EU funding (MFF) post 2027 <https://www.interregeurope.eu/news-and-events/news/survey-report-about-interreg-europes-future>. Survey of views on the future of interregional cooperation post 2027 held in summer of 2024.

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Regulations

- Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1059>
- Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1060>

How to fund the Trans-European Nature Network (TEN-N)

European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)

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