

2021

UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews

Selected findings on biodiversity
and protected areas from
reviews conducted in the period
2012–2020





Working virtually on the 2nd EPR of Morocco - © UNECE EPR Team



Olga Algayerova presents the Third Environmental Performance Review of Uzbekistan - © UNECE EPR Team



CEP-26 adopted the Recommendations of the 3rd EPR of Romania
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UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews

With the overall objective of achieving a high level of environmental protection in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region, key objectives of the UNECE Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme are to:

- Assist countries in improving their management of the environment and associated environmental performance by making concrete recommendations for better policy design and implementation
- Help in integrating environmental policies into sector-specific economic policies, such as agricultural, energy, transport and health policies
- Promote greater accountability to the public
- Contribute to the achievement and monitoring of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Promote the exchange of information among countries on policies and experiences
- Strengthen cooperation with the international community
- Promote coherence of environmental and sustainable development policies at the national level and across the region
- Assist member States in the implementation of EPR recommendations

Over the past 25 years, EPRs have resulted in:

- Improved policy and legal frameworks and better integration of environmental concerns into sectoral policies
- Stronger institutions for environmental management and protection
- Enhanced environmental monitoring and information systems
- Improved financial resources for environmental protection and greening the economy
- Strengthened public participation
- Increased international cooperation

Since 2017, the EPR Programme has assisted reviewed countries in the implementation of the recommendations of their reviews through peer-learning workshops aimed at sharing good practices. Since 2018, the Programme has implemented a United Nations Development Account project under which five countries of South-Eastern Europe prepare policy packages to put into practice some of their third-cycle review recommendations related to SDGs.

The third cycle of reviews

Two EPR cycles have already taken place. The third cycle of reviews commenced in 2012 and is still ongoing. An additional thematic angle on SDGs has been added to all reviews conducted since 2017. The key topics for the third cycle are:

- Environmental governance and financing in a green economy context
- Countries' cooperation with the international community
- Environmental mainstreaming in priority sectors

Why this calendar?

This calendar covers the findings on selected topics supporting the achievement of SDG targets related to biodiversity and protected areas from third-cycle reviews – the Republic of Moldova (2013), Montenegro (2014), Serbia (2014), Georgia (2015), Belarus (2015), Tajikistan (2016), Bulgaria (2016), Albania (2017), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2017), Kazakhstan (2019), North Macedonia (2019), Uzbekistan (2019) and Romania (2020) – and the reviews of Morocco (2013) and Mongolia (2017) – and additional updated information provided by countries.

By disseminating the results of the reviews in the form of a calendar for the upcoming year, UNECE aims to draw attention to the findings of the reviews and encourage the implementation of the review recommendations in 2021 and beyond.

For a comprehensive picture of the findings and recommendations of individual reviews, the full texts of the EPR publications should be consulted.

Printed copies of EPR publications may be obtained from the United Nations Department of Public Information (<https://shop.un.org/>). The reviews are also available online (www.unece.org/env/epr/).

Acknowledgements

UNECE is grateful to all countries that have hosted EPRs for their trust, hard work and close cooperation with the international expert teams in the process of preparing the reviews.

UNECE would also like to express its deep appreciation to the Governments of Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland and to the European Union for their support by providing funds for the reviews covered in this calendar.

Sincere thanks go to the Governments of the following countries and to the following organizations that provided experts to the international expert teams that prepared the reviews featured in this calendar: Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Environment Programme, the Joint Environment Unit of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Health Organization, the European Environment Agency and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

UNECE also takes this opportunity to express its warm appreciation to Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland and Uzbekistan for having provided their experts to the UNECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, which undertook expert assessment of the reviews covered in this calendar.

Last but not least, deep appreciation is due to the United Nations country teams in the reviewed countries for their great support to international expert teams on the ground.

This calendar was prepared with support from Mr. Zbigniew Niewiadomski, expert on biodiversity, and Mr. Ulysse Robach, UNECE intern.

Natural habitats and biodiversity conservation

SDG targets 15.1 and 15.5; Aichi Biodiversity Targets 5, 11 and 12

Biodiversity loss, through degradation of natural habitats and extinction of threatened species, is the biggest challenge and requires urgent action. EPRs assessed countries' efforts to conserve threatened species (especially those on National Red Lists) and restore ecosystems and habitats.

Albania has exceeded Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 (conserving at least 17% of terrestrial and inland water by 2020), with 17.1% of its total territory being designated terrestrial protected areas. Albania joined two other EPR countries (Mongolia and Tajikistan) in achieving Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, and is creating two new national parks. In 2016–2019, Montenegro identified, with EU support (€2.4 million), potential sites suitable for the Natura 2000 network. In Romania, the protected area coverage of the key biodiversity areas increased over 2010–2019 from 65% to 76% in terrestrial ecosystems. Kazakhstan has effectively implemented the ecological network concept, including the designation of four legally protected ecological corridors, encompassing almost 3.3 million ha, increasing the protected area coverage from 8.9% to 10.1% of the country's territory, and plans to further extend its protected area network. Belarus increased the share of specially protected natural areas in its total land area from 7.7% in 2009 to 8.7% in 2015, and is developing national legislation aimed at conserving and maintaining landscape diversity value. Since 2013, Bosnia and Herzegovina has designated 23 new protected areas and plans to further extend its network. Bulgaria is among the European Union countries with the highest territorial share of Natura 2000 sites (34.4% vs. 18% average), encompassing over 4 million ha.

Several countries made considerable progress towards reaching SDG target 15.5. Albania and the Republic of Moldova updated their National Red Lists, and North Macedonia adopted its first National Red List. Albania, Bulgaria, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia adopted species conservation action plans, aimed at preserving several red-listed species. In Kazakhstan, the populations of many rare and threatened animal species increased thanks to anti-poaching measures and species conservation programmes implemented in cooperation with scientific institutions and environmental NGOs, and with the international community's support.

The lack of data, nature inventories and wildlife censuses at the national level is a recurrent problem, requiring urgent elaboration of national species conservation programmes and action plans. In Mongolia, the discontinuation of research after 2010 prevented proper assessment of the status of populations of threatened species, even though many indigenous species were threatened. In Uzbekistan, 46 animal species and 16 plant species are threatened with extinction. The absence of a National Red List in Romania complicates assessment of threatened species' status and the effects of country performance, despite an apparent decrease in the extinction rate of red-listed species.

Tajikistan

Iskanderkul mountain lake,
habitat of snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*)



December

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01 / January

February

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Sustainable management of forests

SDG target 15.2; Aichi Biodiversity Target 5

Sustainable forest management is essential for climate change mitigation, economic development and preservation of valuable habitats. Halting forest ecosystem destruction and increasing afforestation is necessary for sustainable development. EPRs assessed national efforts to implement sustainable forest management schemes, concluding that many countries have made good progress towards achieving SDG target 15.2.

Kazakhstan and Romania stand out in their progress towards sustainable forest management. Kazakhstan has achieved SDG target 15.2, protecting and sustainably managing all forests while also halting deforestation and conducting ecosystem regeneration activities. Romania has tripled its forest area under independently verified certification. In Bulgaria, the share of forest area under long-term forest management plans increased to 97.39% in 2020, and the forest area under independently verified forest management certification schemes increased over eight years from 303,580 to 1,483,380 ha in 2018.

Work on a national forestry inventory was recently launched in Albania, where reforestation efforts significantly intensified, including approving a new strategy on forests in 2019, adopting a new Law on Forests in 2020, and establishing the new National Forest Agency. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where 53% of the total land area is covered by forests, the proportion of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)*-certified forest is rapidly increasing, strategic documents on forestry development were adopted and the preparation of sustainable forest management plans and fire management systems is a top priority. North Macedonia increased the surface of its territory covered by forests, is implementing the 2006 Strategy for Sustainable Development of Forestry, and has in place forest management plans for 92% of its forest area. In Uzbekistan, all forests are well protected and sustainably managed due to previous efforts to halt deforestation and intensive afforestation work. In Serbia, 100% of public forests managed by the public enterprises Srbijašume and Vojvodinašume (834,439 ha and 128,789 ha respectively) are already FSC-certified.

Having adopted its new Forest Code in 2020, including forest stand categorization based on functional assessment (protected, protective, recreational and utilized forests categories), Georgia is developing subsidiary legislation and working on endorsing sustainable forest management criteria and indicators. Montenegro's Forest and Forestry Development Strategy for 2014–2023 prioritises biodiversity protection and its National Forest Policy promotes sustainable harvesting, multiple use and protecting forests ecosystems and water zones. Mongolia set ambitious targets to increase the area of closed forests from 7.85% of its territory to 9% by 2030 and is working to mitigate desertification through sustainable forest management and to establish national standards for forest certification. Morocco is implementing several policies, including its national programme for 2015–2024 prioritizing fighting fires and the conservation and rehabilitation of forest ecosystems, the "Forests of Morocco 2020–2030" strategy, aimed at halting deforestation and rehabilitating forest areas, and a national strategy aimed at rehabilitating 200,000 ha of endemic argan forests. Tajikistan's forest cover is estimated at only 2.9% of the total territory.

* FSC certification is considered the "gold standard" for wood harvested from forests managed in a responsible, socially beneficial, environmentally conscious and economically viable manner.

Serbia

National Park Kopaonik



January

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02 / February

March

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Mitigating poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna

SDG targets 15.7 and 15.c

Mitigating poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna is critical for the preservation of biodiversity. EPRs found that progress remains to be seen in most countries to achieve SDG targets 15.7 and 15.c.

Kazakhstan shows encouraging progress towards the achievement of targets 15.7 and 15.c, with poaching reported to be constantly declining due to effective law enforcement and annual hunting quotas set at a very reasonable level, allowing for an increase in wildlife populations. Illegal hunting contributed to the decline in populations of some 69% of game mammal species and 56% of rare and threatened protected mammal species occurring in Uzbekistan. To mitigate poaching, the country established quotas for the procurement of wild species of animals. Since 2014, Albania tackles poaching by imposing a hunting ban, which was extended until 2022. Bosnia and Herzegovina intensified the monitoring of illegal activities through better cooperation with local communities and the police, and by establishing hunting associations. North Macedonia has yet to set up a national biodiversity monitoring system and National Red Lists of threatened species to enable the assessment of the scale of poaching and the illegal trade in protected species and decisions on appropriate hunting quotas. In Romania, on average, 146 cases of poaching in Natura 2000 sites are reported annually and electric fishing, one of the most dangerous poaching methods, occurs along the Danube River. Illegal fishing in the Republic of Moldova continuously increased in 2011–2017 (by over 72%). Tajikistan published the second edition of the Red Book in 2015 that included more species as a result of several methodological corrections. In the country, an indefinite number of wild animals are poached for meat or as trophies; however no data on poaching and illegal trophy hunting or illegal fishing are publicly available.

Poaching and wildlife trafficking remain serious issues in many countries, requiring urgent actions to ensure the conservation of protected species. Improving data collection and research is the first step in shedding light on illegal activities and closely following the evolution of species populations. Laws to effectively safeguard protected species should be enforced.

Kazakhstan

Saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*)



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https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_775

