

Green Infrastructure (GI)

Green Infrastructure (GI) is essential for Europe as it contributes to environmental sustainability, climate resilience, public health and well-being, economic prosperity, and sustainable urban development. The European Union has defined Green Infrastructure (GI) as “a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services, while also enhancing biodiversity.” Ecosystem services include purifying water, improving air quality, providing space for recreation and helping to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The GI network integrates green (land) and blue (water) spaces and improves the quality of the environment, the connectivity of natural areas, and the health and the quality of life of citizens.

As a large network of protected areas, the Natura 2000 network is the backbone of GI in the EU (Source: https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/green-infrastructure_en). GI ensures the connectivity of this network of protected areas. For this reason, and because of its many other ecosystem services, it should also be considered and implemented in North Macedonia and Albania.



euRONATUR



Funded by: This project was funded by the German Federal Environment Ministry's Advisory Assistance Program (AAP) for environmental protection in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and other countries neighboring the European Union. It was supervised by the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and the German Environment Agency.

Strengthening Green Infrastructure in North Macedonia and Albania

Skopje, 2024



Project info

The project "Enhancing Connectivity Along the Balkan Green Belt" aimed to develop and secure the Balkan Green Belt and its ecological connectivity, extending beyond protected areas. It specifically targeted Albania and North Macedonia, seeking to enhance the knowledge of decision-makers in both countries. The project identified gaps in the national legal frameworks related to GI and provided training courses to build capacity in relevant ministries and local authorities. Notably, in North Macedonia, a new law on spatial planning was introduced, incorporating the concept of GI for the first time.

Recommendations to decision-makers in the relevant ministries and subordinate authorities were formulated for the national level, including specific recommendations for North-Macedonia, and for the cross-border pilot regions Jablanica-Shebenik.

While focusing on Albania and North Macedonia and one pilot region, the project's recommendations are also applicable to neighboring countries with similar GI development stages and to other cross-border regions.

Recommendations to improve the implementation of GI in Albania and North Macedonia on a national level

- **Legislative Integration:** Incorporate GI into national legislation and relevant spatial planning documents.
- **Law enforcement:** Implement existing laws that support the development of GI.
- **Capacity Building:** Enhance the knowledge and strengthen the capacities of relevant ministries and subordinate authorities to effectively implement and monitor existing GI legislation.
- **Strategic planning:** Develop national GI strategies that prioritize areas with high biodiversity and a significant risk of habitat fragmentation, ensuring a systematic and coordinated approach to GI implementation.
- **Build on existing networks:** Use existing national ecological networks and potential Natura 2000 sites as a foundation for the further development of GI and national strategies.
- **Integration in infrastructure projects:** Whenever there is an investment in gray infrastructure, implement existing legislation on compensation measures in favour of GI.
- **Education:** Assess the need for the creation of additional education in spatial planning, in consultation with the relevant institutions and organizations.

Specific recommendations to improve the implementation of GI in North Macedonia:

- **Timely adoption of legislation:** Adopt the new Law on Spatial Planning in North Macedonia as soon as possible, along with its necessary by-laws.
- **Synchronization between different levels:** Synchronize planning documents on local level in North Macedonia with the existing legislation.

Recommendations for transboundary cooperation in the pilot region Jablanica-Shebenik:

- **Transboundary coordination body:** Establish a transboundary coordinating body on GI comprised of a core group of stakeholders for the pilot region.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Engage all relevant stakeholders throughout the planning process to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and ownership of GI initiatives goals.
- **Shared vision:** Develop a shared vision for the implementation of GI that emphasizes sustainable development and biodiversity conservation.
- **GIS mapping:** Elaborate a common GIS map of the pilot area, to facilitate precise planning of GI.
- **Joint Action Plan:** Formulate a joint action plan detailing specific tasks for the implementation of the joint vision.
- **Financing mechanism:** Establish a financing mechanism to support the implementation of the GI plan.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Monitor the effectiveness of the action plan.