

PETI Fact-finding visit to Romania

15 - 18 May 2023

On the management and protection of the brown bear population and illegal logging in Romania

General introduction: Romania

Romania¹ is located at the crossroads of Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe. It borders Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Ukraine, Moldova and the Black Sea. It joined the EU on 1 January 2007 and is currently in the process of joining the Schengen area. Romania has committed itself to joining the euro once it fulfils the necessary conditions.²



Source: Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

Romania has an area of 238,391 km², characterised by approximately equal shares of mountains, hills and plateaus and planes. Around one third of the territory is covered by forest, while almost two thirds are used for agricultural purposes. The wide areas of forests along the Carpathian Mountains which are the largest unfragmented forest areas in Europe, provide a valuable habitat for numerous species, including large carnivores such as brown bears, of which Romania has the largest populations of any EU country.³

¹ http://country.eiu.com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/FileHandler.ashx?issue_id=83210991&mode=pdf (report generated May 4 2023)

² https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/country-profiles/romania_en

³ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/regional_platforms_Romania.htm



Area:	391 sq km
Population:	19 million
Currency:	Romanian Leu (RON)
Capital:	Bucharest
Language:	Romanian
Legal system:	Semi-presidential republic
President/Head of state:	Klaus Iohannis (re-elected in 2019)
Prime minister/Head of government:	Nicolae Ciuca

Source: EIU

Romania is a semi-presidential republic. Both the government and the president hold executive functions. The Romanian President is directly elected on a five-year mandate, for maximum two terms. The Senate (the Upper House) has 136 seats and the Chamber of Deputies (the Lower House) 330. Both chambers are directly elected for four-year terms.

The country is divided into 41 counties and the municipality of Bucharest. Each county is administered by a county council, responsible for local affairs, and a prefect who is responsible for administering national affairs at county level. According to Article 3(3) of the Constitution, Romania's territory is divided into Communes, Towns and Counties - the big towns are declared municipalities through a specific law. Counties are the administrative-territorial units at the intermediate level, while Communes, Towns and Municipalities (Cities) form the local administrative level. The Municipality of Bucharest (the capital), holds both municipality and county competences. The local level comprises 2,861 Communes, 217 Towns and 103 municipalities (cities).

Illegal logging

Petitions

Petitions 1248/2019, 0408/2020, 0722/2020 and 1056/2021 raise concerns about increasing illegal logging, deforestation and specific cases of practices in breach of EU environmental legislation in Romania. The petitioners are calling for a stronger protection of these forests and criticise Romanian authorities for lacking in their efforts to stop the illegal logging phenomenon. The petitions also raise concern about attacks on environmental activists.

In its response, the European Commission has expressed its deep concern about the illegal logging phenomenon in Romania and its intention to continue to monitor the implementation and enforcement of EU environmental legislation in relation to forestry activities in Romania very closely. It will not hesitate to take further steps when appropriate and emphasised that the Romanian authorities should strengthen their efforts to tackle this issue as soon as possible. In February 2020, the Commission opened an infringement procedure⁴ in this regard.

⁴ INFR(2020)2033.



General issues

Illegal logging is the harvesting of timber in contravention of the laws and regulations of the country of harvest. It is a global problem with significant negative economic, environmental and social impact. Illegal logging:

- results in the loss of revenues and other benefits;
- is associated with deforestation, climate change and loss of biodiversity;
- is linked to conflicts over land and resources, the disempowerment of local and indigenous communities, corruption, and armed conflicts.

Illegal activities also undermine the efforts of responsible operators by making cheaper, but illegal timber and timber products available.⁵ Cases of violence and murder against whistle-blowers and foresters are surging.

Illegal logging and related timber trade is a major driver of deforestation and forest degradation. Its impacts on the environment are widely acknowledged, but it is also associated with various social and economic consequences. Illegal logging leads to forest degradation (which is responsible for about 20% of global CO₂ emissions), undermines sustainable forest management, contributes to desertification, soil erosion, global warming and flooding, and can result in the **extinction of large mammals and specific habitats**. From the economic perspective, illegal logging deprives local and responsible communities of their livelihood. Corruption and fraud are the main underlying factors of deforestation and contribute to poor law enforcement, weak rule of law and impairment of access to justice, as well as criminal activities.

The complexity of regulating against illegal logging lies in the fact that illegal practices can occur at any stage in the timber supply chain, including during harvesting, transportation, processing, manufacturing, exporting, importing, and selling. This complexity increases the risk of illegality along the supply chain. This makes compliance with relevant laws more challenging and requires greater scrutiny from all stakeholders.

⁵ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/illegal-logging_en

Applicable legislation

The EU's policy to fight illegal logging and associated trade was defined back in 2003 with **the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade Action Plan (FLEGT AP⁶)**. However, the key regions and countries targeted in the Action Plan are Central Africa, Tropical South America and Southeast Asia. The Action Plan covers both supply and demand side measures to address illegal logging. The FLEGT AP defines EU's policy to combat illegal logging and associated trade. It gave rise to **the FLEGT Regulation⁷** and the **European Union Timber Regulation (EUTR⁸)**. These two regulatory instruments combine demand and supply-side measures intended to promote transnational forest governance and, thereby, improve logging practices.

The FLEGT Regulation (2005) focuses on supply-side measures and includes Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) with timber-producing countries outside the EU. The EUTR (2010, in force 2013) was adopted to prohibit the placing of illegally harvested timber or timber products on the internal market and to establish a due diligence obligation for operators when first placing these products on the internal market. FLEGT VPAs are voluntary in nature, but they create binding obligations once they are ratified.

The EUTR was adopted to create a level playing field by setting equal legality requirements that apply to both domestically harvested timber and timber products imported from all countries. The EUTR is being implemented in each Member State through national laws and enforced by the national authorities. Member States are to adopt effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties to sanction infringements of the requirements of the EUTR.

EUTR will be repealed by the **Regulation on deforestation-free products⁹**. In 2021, the Commission proposed a new regulation to curb the issue of deforestation. The current EU legislative framework focuses solely on tackling illegal logging, without addressing deforestation directly. As such, the new proposal includes rules regarding products placed and exported from the Union market, including a benchmarking system to assess the risk of deforestation and forest degradation in countries importing products to the EU market.¹⁰ The procedure is ongoing within the ENVI Committee, and is now awaiting the EU Council's 1st reading position¹¹.

The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030¹² recalls the importance of properly defining, mapping, monitoring, and strictly protecting all of the EU's remaining primary and old-growth forests. In March 2023, the Commission adopted guidelines in these matters¹³. As Romania is one of the Member States with an important area of old-growth forests, the Commission has engaged in discussions with the Romanian authorities on the necessity to identify and strictly protect these areas.

⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52003DC0251>

⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1584107319512&uri=CELEX:02005R2173-20200101>

⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32010R0995>

⁹ <https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/regulation-deforestation-free-pro>
<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e75f251c-4c11-11ec-91ac-01aa75ed71a1#>

⁹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/deforestation-regulation/product-details/20220128CDT09089ducts_en
 and <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e75f251c-4c11-11ec-91ac-01aa75ed71a1>

¹⁰ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/deforestation-regulation/product-details/20220128CDT09089>

¹¹ [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2021/0366\(COD\)&l=en](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2021/0366(COD)&l=en)

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu/eu-biodiversity-strategy-2030_en

¹³ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/guidelines-defining-mapping-monitoring-and-strictly-protecting-eu-primary-and-old-growth-forests_en

Situation in Romania

The vast majority of deforestation and illegal logging occurs in the tropical forests of the Amazon basin, Central Africa and Southeast Asia. However, the illegal logging issue is not confined to these regions. Illegal logging is also an issue in some EU countries such as Romania. In 2020, the wood-based industries within the EU-27, as measured by gross value added, amounted to EUR 139 billion or 7.1% of the total manufacturing industry, and employed 3.1 million people¹⁴. However, the importance of the problem within the EU itself is considerable and can no longer be overlooked. In recent years, Romania has been very often in the spotlight for issues related to deforestation, and has been subject to noticeable petitions. Illegal logging in Romania is putting the last virgin forests in Europe under threat, fuelled by foreign corporate money and driven by corruption and organised crime.

The growing scale of deforestation by illegal logging is well-known to politicians and environmental activists in Romania, but also across the EU. Illegal logging in Romania is a long-standing issue that is reported to have increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic period. While almost half of the total amount of timber (8.8 million cubic metres of timber per year) logged between 2008 and 2014 would allegedly be illegally harvested, data from Romania's National Forestry Inventory reported 20.6 million cubic metres logged each year in excess of the allowances in approved forest management plans. Illegal logging and deforestation would have also resulted in a few murder cases and violence against activists.¹⁵

Romania is recognised for sheltering two-thirds of Europe's last remaining virgin forests and largest populations of large carnivores such as bears. However, these natural resources have been threatened for more than a decade by the preponderance of illegal logging in the country, which is stimulated by foreign companies. According to a study by the Romanian government, (which only focused on a limited set of illegal harvesting methods) an estimated volume of 80 million m³ of timber was cut illegally in Romania between 1990 and 2011. This represents 24% of the total volume of wood cut during this period – worth at least € 5 billion. Another study based on a more detailed approach revealed that 8.8 million m³ of timber was cut illegally each year between 2008 and 2014, equivalent to 49% of the timber cut during this period. None of these studies took into account all sorts of illegal logging, suggesting a wider magnitude of the issue.¹⁶

One of the major players in the Romanian timber industry is the Austrian timber and wood processing company named Holzindustrie Schweighofer (Schweighofer) that processes around 40% of the country's total annual softwood production, of which an important share of illegal wood. This company has long been involved in questionable practices of all kinds, including openly accepting illegal wood, offering bonuses for suppliers of illicit timber, and putting pressure on Romanian's government to refrain for policy reforms that could hinder its activities. The Romanian Ministry of the Environment conducted an investigation into Schweighofer's Sebes and Radauti mills in 2015. Due to the seriousness of these findings, the Ministry handed the case to prosecutors in Romania's organised crimes division.

Following protests across the country against illegal logging, new revisions to the country's Forest Code were made, including tighter controls against illegal logging. In early 2016, Romania's President Klaus Iohannis also signed a bill that makes illegal logging of more than one hectare a threat to national security. The New Forest Code was based on an inclusive approach that would involve, by way of implementing regulations, civil society and all stakeholders in an attempt to strengthen forest protection and sustainability.

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Wood_products_-_production_and_trade#Wood_based_industries.

¹⁵ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700009/IPOL_STU\(2021\)700009_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/700009/IPOL_STU(2021)700009_EN.pdf)

¹⁶ Ibid.

Another issue is to track illegal logging. Monitoring systems such as satellite-based Earth Observation (EO) are increasingly being used to quantify forest loss. At the international level, a few initiatives were developed, which can show any type of forest removal from natural or anthropogenic causes. These initiatives include Global Forest Watch¹⁷ launched by the World Resources Institute (WRI), which, since 2000, provides a yearly global map of forest gain and loss. The EU has already been relying on satellite imagery (EU SatCen) and geospatial information to retrieve data on forests and thereby attempt to track illegal logging. Since 2014, the Romanian government has started to lay the groundwork to take advantage of satellite images to fight illegal cutting and curb losses. However, the GPS data records proved insufficient to curtail legislation breaches because truck drivers would use fake GPS loading points. Instead, “The Forest Inspector” was developed (“Inspectorul Padurii”). This is a geographic information system that can ingest radar and high resolution satellite images from Sentinel 1 & 2, Landsat, OpenStreet and Google Maps. Forest Inspector also uses the SUMAL database which was developed with the support of WWF. SUMAL is a best-practice system for tracing wood supply that includes a central database and a hotline people can call to report or verify the legality of wood shipments. It is mandatory for forest administrators and for all operators and traders who harvest, store, process, market or carry out import-export operations with wood or wood materials. Despite these tools, illegal logging in Romania is said to have increased significantly in the last years, bringing into question the appropriateness of these instruments. In fact, these initiatives are not necessarily focused on illegal logging and are not all suited to detect forest change in every landscape, especially when very small degradation are involved.

Another aspect is financial incentives for forest owners. Compensations for forest-environmental and climate services and forest conservation and for maintenance of afforested land are currently eligible under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD¹⁸). Romania allocated almost € 177 million for those types of support to be co-financed under its Rural Development Programme during 2014-2020. The Commission proposal for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2020 also includes such interventions. The decision to introduce those interventions in the upcoming CAP strategic plans lies with the Member States, following the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.

Infringement procedure INFR 2020(2033)

Due to the issue of illegal logging, the Commission launched an infringement procedure in 2020, under Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) against Romania for breaches of EU environmental law in relation to forestry activities. In its letter of formal notice of February 2020¹⁹ and the subsequent reasoned opinion of July 2020²⁰, the Commission urged Romania to properly implement the EU Timber Regulation²¹, which forbids producing and placing on the EU market products made from illegally harvested logs. The Romanian authorities had been unable to effectively check the operators and apply appropriate sanctions.

Inconsistencies in the national legislation did not allow Romanian authorities to check large amounts of illegally harvested timber. In addition, the Commission found that the Romanian authorities managed forests, including by authorising logging, without evaluating beforehand the impacts on protected habitats as required under the **Habitats Directive**²² and **Strategic Environmental Assessment Directives**²³. Furthermore, there were shortcomings in the access of the public to environmental information in the forest

¹⁷ <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/>

¹⁸ https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/european-agricultural-fund-rural-development-eafrd_en

¹⁹ INFR (2020)2023 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/EN/INF_20_202

²⁰ INFR(2020)2033 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/inf_20_1212

²¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32010R0995>

²² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A31992L0043>

²³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32001L0042>

management plans. The Commission also found that protected forest habitats had been lost within protected Natura 2000 sites in breach of the Habitats and Birds Directives²⁴.

Following the above-mentioned reasoned opinion, Romania undertook a number of commitments, notably: (i) to make the timber tracking system (SUMAL) fully operational and complete the revision of the legislation on forestry sanctions; (ii) amend the relevant legislation in order to assess the environmental impacts of forest management plans and revise the ones already adopted in order to bring them in line with EU legislation; and (iii) complete the initiated process of providing access to the public to environmental information as regards the forest management plans. However, even though some progress has been made, Romania has not delivered on all the above commitments. Despite the entry into force of the new version of the timber tracking system, it is still not fully operational since some of its key tools are missing. The legislation regarding the assessment of the environmental impacts of forest management plans has been adopted recently (November 2021), but the revision of the ongoing forest management plans still needs to be completed. In addition, Romania needs to remedy the damage to protected forest habitats or habitats of protected forest species in Natura 2000 sites, to which they have not yet committed.

Criminal activity

The Commission has expressed particular concern on the violent incidents in this context, which the petitioners have raised, resulting in attacks on journalists and environmental activists by illegal loggers. However, the EU has no competence to investigate or prosecute criminal matters, such as attacks or murders in the Member States, and does not enjoy any general right of intervention in individual criminal, civil or administrative cases before national courts or other national authorities in the Member States. It is the responsibility of the Romanian authorities to fight illegal logging, enforce national law and protect environmental defenders. The Commission has recently adopted a proposal for a new Directive to crack down on environmental crime²⁵, which provides for an obligation to protect whistleblowers and 'environmental defenders' (Article 13). The proposal is currently being processed within the EP, awaiting Parliament's position in 1st reading²⁶.

²⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32009L0147>

²⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021PC0851>

²⁶ [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2021/0422\(COD\)&l=en](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2021/0422(COD)&l=en)

Brown Bears

Petitions

The Committee on Petitions has received a number of petitions both in support and against the protection of the brown bear. The fact-finding visit concerns petitions 1188/2019, 1214/2019, 0685/2020, 0534/2020 and 0410/2022. Some of the petitions criticise the Romanian authorities' management of the brown bear populations and express concern about safety of property of citizens due to brown bear attacks. Other petitioners argue for a stronger protection of the species. In its petition response, the European Commission closely follows the situation of the brown bear in Romania. It concludes that appropriate measures in accordance with EU legislation and policy are available to deal with the issues raised by the petitioners, but that it is for Member States to decide on specific actions, adapted to the national context. In addition, the Commission already supports Member States in various ways in dealing with large carnivore conflict and damage.



Applicable legislation

Within the European Union, including Romania, the brown bear's legal protection is granted through the following legal binding instruments:

- The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats 19.IX.1979, also known as **The Bern Convention**;
- **Habitats Directive** 92/43/EEC;
- National laws of EU Member States.

The Bern Convention includes the brown bear in Appendix II, which lists all strictly protected fauna species. According to the Convention Chapter III, Article 6, it is prohibited to deliberately capture, kill or disturb these species or their refuge areas/habitat.

The EU Habitats Directive Annex II includes all species that require the designation of special areas for their conservation. All Member States, including Romania, include the brown bear in this Annex, with some

exceptions. The brown bear is included in Annex IV, which includes all species that are in need of strict protection, with no exceptions. The Commission has no plans to propose removing the brown bear as a strictly protected species from Annex IV. According to Article 12 of the Habitats Directive, which regulates fauna protection, it is prohibited to deliberately capture, kill or disturb species listed in Annex IV, as well as their refuge areas/habitat. Nevertheless, Member States may derogate from the provisions of this article as long as the conditions of Article 16 are fulfilled. Among the reasons for which such a derogation is possible is the interest of public health and public safety and the prevention of serious damage to crops and livestock or other types of property. Article 16(2) of the Habitats Directive requires them to submit to the Commission every two years a report on the derogations applied.

It is the competence of the Romanian authorities to decide about issuing derogations from Article 12 of the Habitats Directive. The latest report that Romania submitted shows that, in 2016, 552 bears were subject to capture or killing under the derogation.

The basis for the EU's policy on large carnivores is the concept of coexistence between large carnivores and people, sharing the same multifunctional landscapes.

Situation in Romania

After a period of intensive persecution, great habitat loss and fragmentation, the brown bear became locally extinct in many European areas. Its range is currently very restricted. Romania is the country hosting the largest population of brown bears. As of 2018, the brown bear population of Romania was deemed vulnerable (Red List assessment), but data on its conservation status was not available.

According to the latest report submitted by Romania under the Habitats Directive covering the period 2013-2018²⁷, it is in favourable conservation status both in the Alpine and Continental biogeographical regions. The National Bear Action Plan²⁸ that Romania drafted in 2018 indicates a population range of 6,050 to 6,640 individuals in 2016. However, these estimates are not fully reliable given that they are based on data reported by hunting units, which are then processed to eliminate double or triple counts. Thus, they may overestimate the real population. Monitoring using genetic samples, which would deliver better data, is one of the actions of the Action Plan but it still has to take place. New estimates by Romania's Ministry of the Environment puts the number of bears in the country at approximately 7,500 to 8,000.

From 2016 to 2021, Romania recorded 154 bear attacks, which resulted in 14 deaths and 158 injuries, the ministry said. However, experts have warned that the actual number of bears roaming the area remains unknown, saying the country uses an outdated method for counting the species. In 2021, Romania said it would conduct a census of its protected brown bears using the DNA method for the first time. So far, only 1,200 of about 18,000 samples have been collected, and initial results are not expected for several years.

Up until 2016, in Romania, large carnivores were managed as protected game species with quotas based on a derogation system under the Directive. In 2016, hunting of the brown bear and the wolf was prohibited leading to a lively debate nationally about the role of hunting activities in population management. The national Action Plan for Conservation of the Brown Bear in Romania by the Romanian Ministry of the Environment re-established hunting as a management method in 2018, but it is yet to be fully implemented. The killing of hundreds of so-called "nuisance bears" has been allowed under a system of waivers. Debates on methods for the accurate estimation of population are continuing.²⁹

²⁷ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/state-of-nature-in-the-eu/article-17-national-summary-dashboards/conservation-status-and-trends>

²⁸ http://www.mmediu.ro/app/webroot/uploads/files/2018-04-17_Anexa%20Plan%20de%20ac%C8%9Biune%20urs%20martie%202018_MINISTERUL%20MEDIULUI.pdf

²⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/regional_platforms_Romania.htm

In April 2023, Euractiv³⁰ reported that Romania aims to triple bear culls to address 'overpopulation'. This has been criticised by environmental groups. The proposal would also mean that hunters, in addition to "specialised technical personnel", would be allowed to shoot the animals. Environment Minister Barna Tanczos has defended the proposal "because too many people died, because we paid too much money in compensations, because the attacks are on the rise, and because it is our duty to protect human life". She also stated that the "extraction" would be done under strict guidelines and monitoring.

Conflicts related to human activities

Given the significant large carnivore populations, encounters between humans and large carnivores, especially bears, are not new to Romania. Damages of crops, livestock as well as attacks on humans occur. In general, human-bear conflicts are very diverse and are mainly connected with the bear's opportunistic foraging and consumption of food. Several factors affect the risk of human-bear conflict and probably the most important one is the access to anthropogenic food.

Nevertheless, direct physical human injuries are not the most common cause of human-bear conflict across Europe. Bears are large, opportunistic carnivores with a wide range of biological needs during their life cycle, which may bring them into conflict with humans. Some of these needs are in direct conflict with human interests (e.g. property loss due to livestock depredation or attacks on humans), some others threaten bears (e.g. habitat fragmentation and den disturbance), and some are mutually problematic (e.g. traffic accidents). Instead, livestock depredation by brown bears is by far the most frequent type of conflict scenario in Europe.

In summary, the findings of scientific research into the conflict scenarios related to depredations of large carnivores, including bears, can be classified in three main groups: a) carnivore management, lethal or non-lethal (via translocation or keeping in captivity); b) livestock management, e.g. prevention measures; and c) measures related to the social dimensions of the problem, e.g. compensations, environmental education. In general, lethal management of brown bears has no effect, little effect and even counter-expected effects in minimising the livestock of brown bears or the depredation of beehives. Instead, managing livestock and beehives is the best method to reduce conflict between human activities and bears.³¹ The Commission has elaborated a document on defining, preventing and reacting to problematic bear behaviour.³² This document stresses that while lethal removal can be an effective solution to deal with certain individuals in the short term, it must be combined with other measures to prevent the development of new problem bears.

Most countries pay damage compensation to affected individuals, either from the state budget or from funds contributed by interest groups, mostly by hunters. The rough economic cost in Europe per year (based on reported compensation only and excluding mitigation measures) is in the magnitude of €2.5 M to €3.0 M. Compensation schemes exist in Romania, but have been criticised for involving a high level bureaucracy and long waiting times. Schemes to prevent damage have been funded through individual projects but are not available everywhere. Large carnivores have the potential to attract tourists and hunters bringing economic benefits, but certain forms of tourism and hunting practices have also been criticised for their conservation and human impacts.³³

The **EU Common Agricultural Policy**, through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) can - if Member States choose to do so in their Rural Development Programmes (RDP) - support effective protection measures that help eliminate or reduce the risk of damage from large carnivores. Such

³⁰ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/romania-aims-to-triple-bear-culls-to-address-overpopulation/>

³¹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596844/IPOL_STU\(2018\)596844_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596844/IPOL_STU(2018)596844_EN.pdf)

³² see https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/pdf/pa_bear_problem%20bear%20pilot%20action%202015.pdf

³³ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/regional_platforms_Romania.htm

protective measures can include the installation of electrified fences, the training of shepherds in best practices with regard to environments populated by wild animals, the purchase of guard dogs, the construction of shelters for shepherds staying near herds, as well as studies to analyse methods of extensive animal rearing in the presence of carnivores. Support can also be directed to the maintenance of protective fences and/or guard dogs, if such maintenance is done regularly and leads to recurring costs, as well as to compensate costs of the work of shepherds. To date, Romania has not included any of the measures available through EAFRD to prevent large carnivore damage in its national RDP, but the Managing Authority in charge of the implementation of the RDP has the possibility to amend this latter in view of introducing such measures if deemed appropriate and relevant.

However, ongoing rampant habitat encroachment in natural areas, such as deforestation and illegal logging, is putting bears (and large carnivores in general) increasingly closer to humans and increases the risk of encounter, attacks and conflicts. In such scenarios, the full protection, conservation and promotion of natural areas (less humanised, less encroached) is urgently needed for conservation reasons and to make them less prone to conflict scenarios.

Coexistence

The Commission has been actively supporting Member States and stakeholders to design and put in place suitable solutions, so that the conservation of large carnivores species and the interests and needs of the people can be reconciled. One good example of this is the **EU Platform on coexistence between people and large carnivores**³⁴, which - with the Commission's support - brings together different interest groups at EU level to promote ways and means to minimise, and, where possible, find solutions to conflicts between human interests and the presence of large carnivores.

Inspired by the above-mentioned platform, regional platforms, with local stakeholders coming together to discuss problems and look for potential solutions for conflicts, have been established. One of them was set up in the Romanian Harghita County in relation to coexistence with the brown bear³⁵. Since its inception in 2018, **Hargitha regional platform** members have succeeded in agreeing on a range of joint actions. These include measures related to research on the bear population, communication and damage management³⁶. The most recent joint workshop of the Harghita County regional platform and the EU platform in November 2019 approved a statement, calling on the Romanian Ministries of Environment and of Agriculture: (1) To operationalise decision-making on intervention for damage-causing bears; (2) to give more autonomy to the local level to make rapid and effective decisions; (3) to allow key stakeholders to participate in decision-making and in the implementation of the National Bear Action Plan; and (4) to support the active involvement of game managers in managing large carnivore species and conflicts, and to reconsider the role of hunting as a management tool in Romania³⁷.

Another example of EU efforts to improve coexistence is the revision of the **EU Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas for the period 2014–2020**³⁸, which was adopted in November 2018. This revision has increased the maximum aid for investments in preventive measures to up to 100% if the investment is to prevent damage caused by protected animals like the brown bear. Compensation for both direct and indirect damage by protected animals may also be granted up to 100%.

³⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/coexistence_platform.htm

³⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/regional_platforms_Romania.htm

³⁶ See e.g. https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/pdf/5_Report_Platform_training_and_communication.pdf

³⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/carnivores/pdf/191119Harghita_workshopstatement.pdf

³⁸ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02014XC0701\(01\)-20181109&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02014XC0701(01)-20181109&from=EN)

Moreover, several EU-funded pilot projects have been deployed to assess the best management practices and improve coexistence. One of those is the **Life for Bear**³⁹. This project, implemented in Romania, aims at enhancing knowledge of the brown bear population through research on different topics (e.g. a socio-economic analysis of stakeholders' attitudes towards the brown bear population in Romania; an analysis of human-bear conflicts at national level and in the Brasov-Prahova Valley; and research on the quality of the brown bear habitat in Romania). In addition, a team of 'bear conflict' specialists has been established and problematic bears have been relocated in the project area. Finally, a set of forest management measures as well as sheepfold, field, bee and farm protection techniques that are favourable for brown bears have been established and measures to improve awareness among local stakeholders and the general public have been implemented.

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This document is available on the internet at: www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses

Print ISBN 978-92-848-0606-5 | doi: 10.2861/05803 | QA-04-23-500-EN-C
PDF ISBN 978-92-848-0605-8 | doi: 10.2861/567391 | QA-04-23-500-EN-N