

The Role of International Policy

Rigorous policy is vital to delivering on our enduring freshwater protection aims. In recent years, several international and regional policies have helped provide a roadmap for durable freshwater protection across Southeast Europe. While national laws such as water legislation, nature protection legislation, land use legislation and Action Plans, and special laws protecting rivers, are increasingly emerging to support global objectives.

International policy:

- The most important is the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), which contains vital goals to help restore and protect nature. The 196 signatory countries have committed to “ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration and effectively conserved and managed.” The fact that inland water is specifically mentioned is vital to river protection and restoration everywhere.
- [The Ramsar Convention](#) is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- The [UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals](#), also known as the Bonn Convention, is an international agreement that aims to conserve migratory species throughout their ranges.

EU policy:

- Through the [European Green Deal](#), the EU has developed a package of environmental policy initiatives. Among them is the [Biodiversity Strategy](#), which already committed the 27 Member States to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030. The EU Biodiversity Strategy spells out other protection and restoration targets, including freshwater. As an outcome of this strategy, the European Commission has also proposed a new [Nature Restoration Law](#), which will be the first European-wide law to set legally binding targets to restore nature. A key aspect of the proposal is the commitment to restore 25,000 km of rivers. If adopted by the Parliament and the Council, this would be an incredible milestone for freshwater policy.
- The [Water Framework Directive](#) sets out rules to halt deterioration in the status of EU water bodies and achieve good status for Europe’s rivers, lakes and groundwater. It applies to inland, transitional and coastal surface waters as well as groundwaters.
- [Natura 2000](#) is a network of core breeding and resting sites for rare and threatened species, and some rare natural habitat types which are protected in their own right. The aim of the network is to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, listed under both the [Birds Directive](#) and [the Habitats Directive](#). Member States must ensure that the sites are managed in a sustainable manner, both ecologically and economically.
- The [EU Floods Directive](#) aims to establish a framework for the assessment and management of flood risks to reduce the negative consequences of flooding on human health, economic activities, the environment and cultural heritage in the European Union.

Other regional policies:

- [The Bern Convention / Emerald Network](#) is an ecological network made up of Areas of Special Conservation Interest, which requires specific protection measures to ensure the long-term

survival of the species and habitats in the adoptee countries. Its implementation was launched by the Council of Europe.

- The [Green Agenda for Western Balkans](#) is a New Growth Strategy for the Western Balkans in line with the European Green Deal. Aspects of the agenda that are relevant to river protection include depolluting water and the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems.
- **Species-specific regulations** that support river protection in the Western Balkans include the Eel Regulation and the Pan-European Sturgeon Action Plan.
- The [UNESCO World Heritage Sites](#), the [UNESCO Man and the Biosphere \(MAB\) Programme](#), and the Rights of Rivers Declaration also play a role in supporting river protection across the Western Balkans.