Sustainable Development Goals

Romania has set up its national framework for delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and achieving the 17 SDGs, including policy and institutional prerequisites. The country supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the highest political level, as demonstrated by a joint statement issued in 2016 by both houses of Parliament highlighting the need for sustainable development to be at the core of public policy. Before that, in 2015, the country established the Subcommittee for Sustainable Development within the lower house of Parliament.

Romania developed in 2017–2018, through a multistakeholder comprehensive consultation process, a new strategy on sustainable development – the National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Romania 2030 (SDS 2030) – aligning the national context to the 2030 Agenda and serving as the strategic framework for ensuring the coherence of sectoral policies for the successful implementation of the SDGs. The Action Plan for implementation of the new Strategy is in the drafting process and expected to be finalized by mid-2022.

SDS 2030 was developed with the idea that it should be understood by all; its length and simplicity reflect that. However, the Strategy does not contain information on mechanisms to achieve SDGs and targets, and a vision of the dynamics of their achievement. Financial resources for implementation of SDS 2030 are yet to be identified and ensured. Regular reporting mechanisms on implementation of SDS 2030, including data collection and coordination across the subnational levels, remain to be established. Also, the principles of SDS 2030 are not yet reflected throughout the policy framework.

The main institutional framework for sustainable development is established in Romania. In 2017, the Department for Sustainable Development was created within the Prime Minister’s Office and, in 2019, the Government established the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development, consisting of members of the Government and chaired by the Prime Minister. SDS 2030 provides the framework for creating other bodies and structures, thereby enabling the involvement of all key stakeholders in future decision-making on sustainable development.

In 2018, Romania issued its Voluntary National Review of implementation of the SDGs, focusing on SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17. Based on the SDGs Index and Dashboards 2019, Romania was well positioned at 42nd of 162 countries.

The National Institute of Statistics is working on updating the existing Sustainable Development Indicators system, which was developed based on the previous National Strategy for Sustainable Development. It maintains a publicly available database, “Sustainable Development Indicators in Romania (SDIR)”, in Romanian and English. The database includes indicators pursuant to the objectives and actions established by the National Strategy for Sustainable Development for 2013, 2020 and 2030. Romania is also reporting on SDG global indicators to Eurostat, which regularly monitors progress towards the SDGs in a European Union (EU) context.

Romania promotes SDGs through formal and non-formal education and training. Since 2016, students from the general education path are familiarized with the SDGs, sometimes during classes but mostly during tutoring hours and extra-curricular activities. The ministry in charge of education has a dedicated space on its website on education for sustainable development (ESD) and the SDGs, containing awareness-raising information and national and international documents and resources on ESD and sustainable development.
Figure 1: Institutional framework for implementation of SDS 2030

Source: Department for Sustainable Development within the Prime Minister’s Office, 2020.

Recommended measures:

- Support the Department for Sustainable Development to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development.
- Develop and implement policies in green sectors, favouring employment in research and development on environmental protection in order to achieve SDG targets 8.4 and 12.2.
- Establish a relevant national indicator for reporting on SDG global indicator 12.6.1 to measure progress towards companies adopting sustainable practices and integrating sustainability information into their reporting cycle.
- Ensure the collection of data for SDG global indicators 15.7.1, 15.c.1 and 11.4.1 in support of ending poaching and trafficking of protected species and of protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage.
- Develop a roadmap to reduce the impact of air pollution on human health and the environment through a special focus on air quality and a substantial reduction in the number of deaths and diseases caused by air pollution in order to achieve SDG targets 3.9 and 11.6.
- Improve monitoring of SDG global indicator 3.9.2 on the estimated mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene.
- Introduce a comprehensive landfill tax, with a transitional period to announce and negotiate this intention to the public and for economic sectors to be able to make necessary arrangements, with a view to supporting the country's efforts directed towards fulfilling SDG 12.
- Ensure that data on expenditures related to biodiversity, forests and ecosystems conservation are collected in order to report on the SDG global indicator 15.a.1 (b) and to use them for decision-making processes related to these topics.

Note: The sections entitled “Recommended measures” represent an abridged version of selected recommendations from the Environmental Performance Review report and are provided for information purposes only. Please consult the text of the report for the full text of recommendations as adopted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Environmental Policy.
Legal, policy and institutional framework

In Romania, the Government has a limited law-making mandate that includes government decisions (GDs) as implementing acts, regular ordinances during parliamentary recesses and government emergency ordinances (GEOs) in emergency situations. While organic laws regulating areas of high importance cannot be amended by ordinary laws, the latter can be amended by GEOs, which are passed without public consultation.

Romania is party to the Aarhus Convention and Law No./uni00A0 52/2003 on transparency of decision-making in public administration, with subsequent amendments, grants to its citizens participation in decision-making in environmental matters, thereby contributing to developing a sustainable future through promotion of environmental justice.

The environmental legal framework is prone to frequent changes because of the need to harmonize it with the ever-growing EU environmental legislation and as a consequence of overusing emergency procedures through GEOs. Environment-related emergency procedures account for a large part of law-making in Romania, thus not respecting citizens’ right to participate in decision-making on environmental matters. The substance regulated by environment-related GEOs does not reflect urgency and their validity is not limited to overcoming an urgent issue. This in turn negatively affects legal certainty, the coherence of legislation and the stability of the environmental legal framework.

Maintaining a simple and understandable legislative framework could greatly contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the environmental legislation. Key environmental legal acts in Romania have passed through numerous amendments during the last two decades, creating a patchwork of laws, GEOs, and other legal acts, making the environmental legal framework unnecessarily complicated and lacking in clarity and coherence. The country recognized the need for simplifying legislation through the Strategy for Better Regulation 2014–2020 but, as at December 2019, tangible results are not evident.

Romania introduced the regulatory impact assessment (RIA) instrument in 2005; however, the country’s challenge is to enhance the use and quality of RIA, including using it at early stages of legal drafting to ensure a results-oriented legal framework. The use of RIA can address many shortcomings of the environmental legal framework, ensuring that implementation of regulatory acts could be financed, that they are not overlapping or contradictory with other existing legislation and that public consultation processes contribute to the quality of legislation. The environmental dimension of RIA could contribute to achieving the SDGs.

Policy documents rarely contain measurable indicators and precise targets. Their implementation lacks monitoring and reporting and typically an analysis of their impact is not carried out, thus weakening the policy framework, and diminishing its usefulness, putting in jeopardy further policy planning based on results and evidence, especially in terms of aligning the policy framework with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The central part of the institutional framework for environmental protection is rather unstable in terms of leadership, scope of responsibilities and prioritized subsectors. In the period between 2012 and 2020, the ministry in charge of the environment changed its composition eight times.

The Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests maintains efficient interlinkage with institutions subordinated to it or under its authority. Strict division of responsibilities among different ministries or sectors is noticeable throughout both the legal and policy frameworks.
Recommended measures:

- Ensure that legal acts on environmental matters are adopted in accordance with Aarhus Convention provisions.
- Ensure that regulatory impact assessment is broadly applied to environment-related regulations.
- Consider revisiting and codifying environmental legislation.
- Ensure the continuity and coherence of environmental policy planning.

Table 1: Completed Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) procedures for plans and programmes at national level, 2013–2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Strategic documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>National Strategy for Waste Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>National Plan for Development of Hydrographic Basins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>National Programme for Rural Development 2014–2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>National Plan for Transition for Combustion Plants under the provisions of Directive 2010/75/EU on industrial emissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Operational Programme for Big Infrastructure 2014–2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Regional Operational Programme 2014–2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>General Master Plan for Transport 2014–2030 (not yet adopted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Operational Programme for Fishery and Maritime Business 2014–2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>National Strategy regarding Climate Change and Economic Growth Based on Low Carbon Emissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Strategy for Territorial Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>National Plan for Waste Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: No SEA procedures were completed during 2012.

BOX 1: “SCREAMING TREES” – USE OF SOLAR-POWERED SMARTPHONES AGAINST ILLEGAL DEFORESTATION IN ROMANIA

The Romanian NGO Association Agent Green was founded in 2009. In 2017, it started the project “Screaming trees” in Covasna County to prevent illegal logging. The technical innovation of the project is based on smartphones mounted on the top of the trees, where they receive sunlight so are charged during the whole year through the solar panels. The package also includes signal boosters, amplifiers and antennae to capture as much of the signal as possible.

The system is giving trees a voice. By measuring volume, motor rotations and sound duration, the device detects chainsaws and then sends a notification, screaming for help. There is a live feed from installed Tweeting Trees devices at [http://screamingtrees.co/](http://screamingtrees.co/). It enables the viewer to follow the measured data of volume, motor beats per minute (BPM) and sound duration. If volume and BPM reach the level of a running chainsaw, with a sound duration of at least 60 seconds, there is a parameter match and the device immediately sends a warning signal to Agent Green volunteers.
Regulatory and compliance assurance mechanisms

Since 2012, the country made progress in its regulatory and compliance assurance mechanisms. Changes have been introduced to permitting and licensing to align the national system with EU legislation. The competent authorities have been reorganized, notably with the removal of the regional level in the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), and new legislation was introduced for integrated environmental permits. Nonetheless, many of the more technical aspects of permitting and licensing persist from the early 2000s.

Integrated environmental permitting has been successfully revised and the regulated community has evolved greatly since 2012. However, permitting of some major polluters continues to pose a challenge, notably in terms of urban wastewater and large coal combustion plants.

Implementation remains the main challenge in environmental protection, Romania being among the EU Member States with the highest number of environmental infringements, including for the authorization of projects without the necessary assessments and permits. However, all six infringement cases brought by the European Commission regarding impact assessment have since been closed.

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) legislation has been successfully revised to bring about a more integrated approach; the necessary guidelines continue to be issued. However, the introduction of legislation that waives environmental protection laws for projects of national importance sets a bad precedent for regional infrastructure and other large projects. EIA practice, and permitting, in relation to mining and forestry projects is of greatest concern to civil society.

Environmental authorities are able to provide effective tools, such as the Forest Inspector initiative. Generally, arrangements for public participation in decision-making on environmental matters and access to environmental information are inadequate; access to justice in environmental matters has proven to be an important avenue for addressing failures. Public complaints are not routed efficiently. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) report that public participation in permitting and EIA is constrained, as is public access to relevant information in relation to permitting and inspection, EIA and forest management planning.

Emission, ambient quality and product standards are being strengthened by the continuing alignment with EU and ISO standards. The move away from national to international standards is not accompanied by the translation and availability of standards in Romanian.

Not enough efforts are made to encourage the uptake of the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), environmental management systems and, especially, eco-labelling and sustainability reporting. The environmental liability regime remains at an early stage of development. ISO 14001 proved to be of interest but the number of certificates has recently declined, while EMAS has failed to attract companies. Eco-labelling has also failed to take off. The picture regarding sustainability reporting is unclear, with transnational corporations showing most interest. Sustainability reporting does not place sufficient emphasis on environmental and anti-corruption matters.

The frequency of inspection has declined since 2012, but there is evidence of more severe sanctions being sought and applied in several areas. Numerous authorities cooperate and coordinate their compliance activities to increase effectiveness. The inspections by local authorities of construction and demolition waste is weak, though action is being taken to fill the current legal gaps.
The availability of legal expertise across the environmental authorities is uneven, as is the capacity of prosecutors and courts to address cases brought by the environmental authorities. Despite some progress, few prosecutors are experienced in environmental law and the legal profession has insufficient expertise in environmental crime. Sanctions risk being blocked pending appeal, which allows damaging behaviour to continue. Sanctions, particularly fines imposed on legal entities, may also be too low to be dissuasive in some sectors. Illegal logging is a concern of the public and the true situation is disputed.

The changes in institutional arrangements have been beneficial. The regional level in NEPA was removed without having caused difficulties and the Forest Guard has been established, constituting an important addition. However, the Forest Guard is not strong enough to respond to public concern about illegal logging and wildlife crimes. The National Environmental Guard (NEG) is a key, well-organized actor. Technical Review Committees provide a valuable mechanism for coordination.

Figure 2: Licensed radioactive sources, 2012–2019, number

Note: * to 30 October 2019.

Recommended measures:

- Review and amend, if necessary, all legislation on measures deemed necessary for the implementation of projects of national importance.
- Review staffing levels to understand whether the number of staff is adequate to undertake the identified regulatory and compliance assurance tasks.
- Ensure that public participation arrangements are made available and review how public complaints are handled.
- Amend the legal regime on contraventions to limit the use of injunctions to suspend sanctions.
- Collaborate with commerce and industry in promoting voluntary instruments that foster sustainable practices in companies.
Greening the economy and financing environmental protection

Economic-incentive mechanisms for greening the economy are used in the main areas of concern such as air and water pollution and waste generation. The tax rates, however, are low and do not necessarily provide incentives for the reduction of negative externalities. In energy taxes, excise duties are applied to all energy products used for transport and heating, including electricity, coal and natural gas. Excise duty rates are at least at the EU minimum rates although a small “diesel differential” remains.

The economic incentive mechanisms already in place require further action to promote efficient use of natural resources. While economic incentive mechanisms, such as taxes, subsidies and tradable permits, are in place, Romania still faces challenges in achieving its environmental goals, in particular in water and waste management and air quality protection. Hence, further actions on environmental taxation are justified due to the considerable potential for increasing revenue from environmental taxes.

The country levies user charges for water abstraction and royalties for the extraction of minerals, oil and gas. In the area of municipal utility services, while tariffs are set in order to ensure cost recovery, waste and water companies still face operational difficulties. The infrastructure is obsolete and requires funds for maintenance and upgrading, and available funds are not easily mobilized and absorbed, which seems to reveal low capacity within responsible authorities. Although a national regulator has been in place for more than a decade, the regulatory framework does not include proper benchmarking and appropriate performance incentives. This applies also to waste management.

The potential benefits from public–private partnerships (PPPs) in the provision of municipal utility services and the financing of the associated infrastructure remain to be fully explored. In the energy sector, electricity tariffs have approached cost-reflective levels and cross-subsidies from business entities to households have been reduced. Government capacity in negotiation of and monitoring PPP contracts is limited.

Environmental expenditures are financed mainly from earmarked revenue from environmental taxes and charges on motor vehicles and from the sale of EU Emissions Trading System certificates. Most of the electricity market is now liberalized. The role of renewable energy sources in total electricity supply has been promoted with a system of feed-in tariffs. Efforts are ongoing to improve energy efficiency with government subsidies.

The country has benefited from foreign financial assistance, with the EU having a leading role since 2007. Still, low institutional capacity and infrastructure development have hindered the country’s fund absorption capacity. The country is at risk of forgoing amounts of money for the next funding period.

Green jobs and green markets have increased; some challenges to their development remain. Companies consider that product market regulations are too cumbersome with administrative procedures being long and complicated. Also, Romania still has low (green) innovation and knowledge indicators.
Policies favouring circular economy initiatives and better recycling and waste management practices, for instance, are useful in decreasing material consumption while increasing resource productivity. However, expenditures on research and development (R&D) in environmental protection remain low, reaching only 0.004 per cent of government expenditures in environmental protection. This necessary condition for green technological change is not met. The country lags behind the EU in R&D and a number of indices of innovation and connectedness.

Table 2: Environmental tax revenues, 2012–2018, million lei

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax category</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>10 268.80</td>
<td>11 262.30</td>
<td>14 148.50</td>
<td>15 740.10</td>
<td>16 498.30</td>
<td>15 407.10</td>
<td>17 420.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>1 567.70</td>
<td>1 757.30</td>
<td>1 748.70</td>
<td>1 791.50</td>
<td>1 799.70</td>
<td>1 179.80</td>
<td>1 307.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>22.40</td>
<td>22.80</td>
<td>19.90</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>21.40</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>23.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>35.90</td>
<td>26.20</td>
<td>24.60</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>25.60</td>
<td>20.70</td>
<td>20.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11 894.80</td>
<td>13 068.60</td>
<td>15 941.70</td>
<td>17 568.10</td>
<td>18 345.00</td>
<td>16 631.60</td>
<td>18 771.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3: Government expenditures on environmental protection, 2012–2018, million lei

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3 571.2</td>
<td>2 905.4</td>
<td>3 132.5</td>
<td>4 507.5</td>
<td>5 520.7</td>
<td>4 310.4</td>
<td>7 180.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>176.5</td>
<td>138.6</td>
<td>106.0</td>
<td>226.1</td>
<td>610.7</td>
<td>685.2</td>
<td>1 181.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>1 494.6</td>
<td>673.3</td>
<td>869.8</td>
<td>852.2</td>
<td>1 179.4</td>
<td>866.7</td>
<td>1 303.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste</td>
<td>1 784.7</td>
<td>1 977.7</td>
<td>2 041.1</td>
<td>3 189.0</td>
<td>2 042.9</td>
<td>2 289.3</td>
<td>2 334.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil and underground water</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise and vibrations</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural resources and biodiversity</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>111.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other domains</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>106.9</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>1 642.0</td>
<td>350.9</td>
<td>2 186.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Recommended measures:

- Revise the existing economic incentive mechanisms and regularly implement impact assessment analyses of the existing economic incentive mechanisms.
- Ensure that national guidelines for green public procurement and the National Plan for Green Public Procurement are developed and disseminated, and their implementation is monitored.
- Ensure fiscal and legislative stability, increase the support and promotion of resource efficiency measures and promote public-private partnerships.
- Provide more incentives for research and development in green sectors.
- Enhance institutional coordination and administrative capacity.
Environmental monitoring and information

The National Air Quality Monitoring Network has somewhat improved, with an increase in the number of stations and the replacement of instruments during periodic maintenance activities for monitoring and calibration equipment. At the same time, the number of technically outdated and obsolete monitoring stations remains substantial. Gaps remain concerning the appropriate number and type of air quality sampling points. The country is faced with a systemic failure to comply with the EU obligations to monitor air quality.

Overdependence on funding from international projects has resulted in the fluctuation and decline of monitoring capacity and infrastructure overall. Government attempts to have effective implementation of the programme that covers activities for the development and optimization of the National Air Quality Monitoring Network are severely impeded by the overall insufficient human, technical and financial capacity to ensure comprehensive monitoring of air quality.

The environmental radioactivity network lacks financial and human resources to maintain and upgrade the existing equipment. The wear on the equipment has become visible, for which permanent maintenance cannot be assured in an adequate manner. The lack of sufficient personnel capable of operating the equipment can affect prompt response in an emergency situation, as well as timely response to current activities.

The National Reference Laboratory for Air Quality and the National Reference Radioactivity Laboratory operated by NEPA both face challenges related to insufficient funding and staff to ensure adequate servicing, updating, and calibrating of the monitoring and calibration equipment. In the past seven years, the equipment of laboratories has not been changed, while the staff capacity has been reduced.

A noise monitoring system remains to be put in place, as do noise action plans and noise maps, although local environmental laboratories assess noise by measurements for the State of the Environment Report.

Romania started working on a biodiversity monitoring system through two projects run to support the country’s reporting under the EU Habitats and the EU Birds Directives. However, a system for biodiversity monitoring has not yet been established in practice. Some wild species and habitats are included in programmes and research projects undertaken by universities, museums, research institutes and some NGOs. Relevant authorities have carried out some monitoring of flora and fauna and bird populations in known locations as a basis for understanding where challenges may occur.

The National Forest Inventory does not represent a census of all trees in Romania. The Government pledged financial and logistical resources for the third cycle of the National Forest Inventory and a budget allocation for the purchase of satellite maps to further develop the work of the satellite traceability system.

All environmental statistics produced by the National Institute of Statistics are made publicly available online on the Institute’s website in both English and Romanian. However, the Environmental Accounts Publication is not available free of charge and online statistical data are not easily accessible via links provided on the website. These two impediments hinder open access to the environmental data. Moreover, time series data are not regularly updated.
Although Romanian public authorities must share spatial data free of charge between public administrations, the lack of resources, knowledge and collaboration have delayed implementation. Access to air quality data and the generation of air quality monitoring reports via a web interface are complicated and not user friendly.

Romania’s efforts regarding the implementation of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles has seen some results. Nonetheless, the country does not have a mechanism in place for data collection on the number of CSR or sustainability reports published by companies.

The current level of environmental reporting by Romanian-listed companies is low. In fact, some enterprises do not submit information to LEPAs. The information and data reported in corporate environmental reports are generally incomplete and largely irrelevant for users.

Photo 1: Air quality monitoring network

Recommended measures:

• Ensure appropriate resources for regular maintenance and servicing of the National Air Quality Monitoring Network.

• Ensure that operators and relevant governmental officials dealing with environmental monitoring and information undergo regular training.

• Ensure stable and adequate funding of forest monitoring activities and set up and implement a monitoring system for biodiversity and the conservation status of natural habitats and wild species.

• Develop a noise monitoring system.

• Ensure financial and human resources and capacity for the National Reference Laboratory for Air Quality and the National Reference Radioactivity Laboratory.

• Encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices.

• Strengthen the compliance of enterprises with their environmental self-monitoring and reporting obligations.

• Ensure that environmental data are regularly updated and freely and easily accessible online.
Environmental democracy

Access to information on environmental matters improved with the development by NEPA of the Integrated Environmental Information System as a tool to enhance the availability and accessibility of information online. The Integrated Environmental Information System has not been expanded, modernized and further developed due to lack of adequate resources. Not all information therein is accessible online free of charge to the public, thereby hindering timely access to pertinent environmental information, on both the state of the environment and environment-related matters.

The biggest challenge in access to information is the discrepancy between the large amount of information provided on the website of the ministry in charge of the environment and the actual need of the public for specific environmental data on emissions into air and discharges into water, and the forest management plans of the state and private operators, which are not readily available.

There has been no major change in the organization of public participation in decision-making on environmental matters, with the exception of the new Law on EIA, requiring the public authorities to put the public interest above any request for confidentiality, thereby facilitating access to the information necessary for meaningful public participation, provided that the legal provisions for public participation are implemented effectively.

Overall, the procedures for public participation in decision-making on strategic planning and legislation are well established with public authorities making draft documents available on their websites (mostly for 10 days only, which is the minimum prescribed by law), enabling the public to submit comments. Regular training courses on meaningful public participation in decision-making on environmental matters for civil servants of public authorities at the central and local levels are yet to be established.

There have been no major changes to access to justice in environmental matters since 2012. The new Law on EIA has provisions on access to justice, enabling the public concerned to challenge, on procedural or substantive grounds, a decision or an omission of the competent public authority that is subject to public participation, including an approval for development, in line with the provisions of the Law on Administrative Litigation.

The enforcement of court rulings in environmental matters is lagging behind. Many court cases in environmental matters are filed by NGOs, mostly challenging the non-provision of requested environmental information by public authorities and state enterprises, many of which have been decided in favour of NGOs. Enforcing compliance with a court decision remains a challenge.

Environmental cases in the courts usually last two to three years. They drain the financial and time resources of NGOs. Often, environmental NGOs cannot afford to file cases in court or to continue challenging a court decision following an appeal, as their financial resources become exhausted.

The ministry in charge of the environment elaborated a Strategy for the implementation of the provisions of Decision VI/8h regarding Romania’s compliance with the requirements of the Aarhus Convention, including addressing normative, strategic and organizational issues, thereby showing the country’s commitment to improve its compliance.
Recommended measures:

• Take the necessary and administrative practical measures to ensure that public officials respond to the public’s requests for information on environmental matters.

• Promote and support the establishment of integrated information systems on environmental matters in all areas of activity.

• Continue to implement the “Strategy for the implementation of the provisions of Decision VI/8h regarding Romania’s compliance with the requirements of the Aarhus Convention”.

• Develop and promote an online training module for access to information on environmental matters.

• Consider establishing effective mechanisms for the involvement of environmental stakeholders in decision-making on the use of funds of the Environment Fund.

• Enable the provision of adequate information and training to civil servants on meaningful public participation in decision-making on environmental matters.

• Revise and adapt the existing procedures for public participation in decision-making to ensure effective public participation in times of pandemics.

• Consider enabling the provision of legal aid for environmental NGOs and exempt court fees for NGOs challenging decisions, acts or omissions by public authorities and state enterprises regarding environmental matters.

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BOX 2: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC IN FIGHTING ILLEGAL LOGGING

In December 2016, the then Ministry of Environment launched a new online platform, Forest Inspector, a groundbreaking approach by the Government to involve the public in addressing illegal logging and to create a unique form of public access to key forest information. Forest Inspector allowed users to view ongoing and historical data about all timber transportation in Romania, including whether a logging truck is registered, the type and quantity of logs it is transporting and the exact GPS coordinates where the logs were loaded onto the truck. Previously, in 2014, the Government established a mandatory digital tracking system for trucks transporting wood (Integrated National Information System for Tracking Wood (SUMAL)) and set up a hotline that citizens could call to check whether logging trucks seen on Romania’s roads were officially registered (resulting in some 25 per cent of all calls made since 2014 identifying illegal trucks). In July 2016, Forest Inspector (Inspectorul Pădurii), a mobile app based on a geographical information system, was created and linked to the digital tracking system SUMAL, increasing considerably the efficiency of identifying trucks transporting illegal logs, which also led to a 30 per cent increase in the number of trucks registering official transport documents.

The online platform and mobile app gained popularity, being accessed by approximately one million users. However, a year after the launch, the then Ministry of Water and Forests invoked some irregularities in the contract for the development of the app and in the timber tracking system SUMAL, resulting in the discontinuation of regular updating of the mobile app with information from SUMAL. In August 2019, the Bucharest Tribunal ruled that the then Ministry of Water and Forests had to pay 440,070 lei (almost €100,000 as per exchange rate in August 2019) to the developer of the app after it had been blocked. As at January 2020, the website was not accessible due to works to upgrade it, including to implement the originally planned feature of linking transport documents and harvesting permits, a critical element needed to prevent the laundering of illegally cut timber.
Education for sustainable development

A comprehensive strategy dedicated entirely to environmental education (EE) and/or ESD, accompanied by a plan of concrete actions, as well as a monitoring mechanism to regularly measure progress in implementation, are still lacking in the country. SDS 2030 includes a dedicated section on ESD and several related national targets, the achievement of which require taking practical action on ESD.

EE and, to some extent, ESD are integrated into the formal education system mainly through the optional curriculum, civic education and extra-curricular activities, as well as in several subjects of the compulsory curriculum, including at the initiative of individual teachers and responding to rising interest among students on issues such as climate change, plastic pollution, human rights, global warming, overpopulation and renewable energies. A systematic approach to developing, promoting and implementing EE and/or ESD in the national education system is lacking.

EE and/or ESD is not integrated into the compulsory education of future teachers or in-service training of working teachers. Targeted research to advance the development of EE and/or ESD best adapted to Romania's education system needs is not yet being conducted. Units dealing with EE and/or ESD are yet to be established in relevant public authorities at all levels.

Public authorities in charge of education and of the environment are carrying out many activities to promote environmental protection and sustainable development, and, to some extent, EE and ESD. Environmental NGOs are leading in non-formal and informal EE and ESD. Many of these activities are conducted through national and international projects. Several national strategies and programmes mention issues related to environmental protection and sustainable development, and, in a few cases, refer explicitly to EE and ESD.

The development and implementation of EE and ESD in formal, non-formal and informal education at all levels requires adequate financial resources allocated systematically to relevant public authorities and research and education institutions. The Eco-schools programme in Romania has nearly 300 enrolled educational institutions as at December 2019 and is a good approach to promoting EE and ESD.

Photos 2 and 3: Manual “learning to recycle packaging” for grades III and IV
Recommended measures:

- Develop a national action plan with short-, medium- and long-term actions to support the implementation of national and international strategies related to ESD.

- Establish compulsory subjects on environmental protection in lower secondary education and introduce a compulsory course on ecology for upper secondary students.

- Encourage pedagogical institutions and universities to establish departments on environmental education and ESD.

- Make available adequate financial resources for enabling environmental education and ESD at all levels.

**BOX 3: INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF BUCHAREST ENGAGING IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The International School of Bucharest (www.isb.ro/) promotes EE and ESD in its curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. In 2016, the school introduced a course on Environmental System and Societies which has become very popular with students and was followed by 57 students in the 2019–2020 school year, constituting approximately half of all students in years 12 and 13. In addition, the school has a compulsory course for students of its upper secondary levels on human rights, offered by Amnesty International.* Students learn through ESD learning approaches such as critical thinking, research-based studies, open discussion and project-based activities.

Furthermore, in 2017–2018, the school successfully launched a campaign, “ISB Go Green”, which continued in 2019–2020, promoting ESD for students. In 2019–2020, the campaign focused on a range of issues, from agriculture to zero emissions in transport. Students engage in projects to plant trees, develop greener options for the canteen and analyse their own footprint. These issues are addressed during the standard lessons of the school’s curriculum, tutoring time, school assemblies and other extra-curricular activities.

The school has been part of the Eco-schools network since 2015 and has an ECO Committee, with whose help it regularly organizes various EE and ESD activities, including students’ human rights projects, arts from waste (e.g. a mosaic made of bottle caps during art lessons), the Global Perspective research assignments, a paperless day in school, the collection of plastic, and donations of books and presents to less fortunate communities. Moreover, the school initiated an online petition, “Stop dumping waste around our school”, that garnered 24,550 signatures and resulted in the involvement of local authorities and police officers who fined the landowners neighbouring the school, which is located in the outskirts of Bucharest. * www.amnesty.org/en/latest/education/2018/11/human-rights-friendly-schools-course/.

*Photo 4: “Picurici’s superheroes” online contest to promote clean waters, in which over 900 students from 170 schools took part*

*Photo credit: Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests*
Implementation of international agreements and commitments

Romania is party to most global and regional multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Romania is not party to the Convention for the Control and Management of Ships’ Ballast Water and Sediments, nor to the 2009 Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships.

Romania has ratified the most recent multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Despite Romania’s accelerated alignment to EU requirements and international environmental obligations, the level of implementation of MEAs remains low and enforcement assessments are not a common practice. Information about the implementation of policies related to MEAs, their results, achievements and impacts is very scarce.

NGOs are never included in the Romanian delegations to MEAs’ meetings of the parties or conferences of the parties; neither are they involved in the preparation of the country’s position for international meetings. However, NGOs are sometimes involved in the preparation of national reports or in projects related to the implementation of MEAs.

As at December 2019, Romania has used one third of the European structural and investment funds (ESIF), totalling €30.84 billion, available to it. The country must guarantee an average contribution of around 15 per cent of the total in order to spend the remaining two thirds by 31 December 2023.

The Interministerial Committee for the Coordination of the Integration of Environmental Protection into Sectoral Policies and Strategies at the National Level enhanced its activity in 2011, when it was given responsibilities for coordination of sustainable development in Romania. It has been working thus far in a role to support sustainable development.

The Department for Sustainable Development was created in 2017 within the Prime Minister’s Office, causing uncertainty as to the roles of the ministry in charge of the environment and the Interministerial Committee in the management of sustainable development and green economy. Consequently, work on commitments on green economy has stopped.

Romania is a country particularly and severely affected by desertification. The agri-environmental incentive package of the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 did not produce the expected results. The instrument chosen was not the most adequate tool to reduce the factors that contribute to desertification. The country has not set land degradation neutrality targets to halt the current trend that Romania faces with regard to desertification.

Romania is party to the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (Carpathian Convention) and has ratified its five protocols and accepted the amendment on climate change. As at October 2020, only one staff member in the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests is in charge of coordinating implementation activities under the Convention and its protocols, which makes it difficult to organize all activities in an adequate and timely manner in line with the full potential of the country, given the large area of the Carpathians located in Romania.
Recommended measures:

- Improve the content of national reports and increase efforts to fulfil Romania’s reporting obligations under multilateral environmental agreements.
- Adopt the necessary measures to accelerate the use of the European structural and investment funds.
- Revitalize the Interministerial Committee for the Coordination of the Integration of Environmental Protection into Sectoral Policies and Strategies at the National Level.
- Identify responsible units or departments to engage in the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme.
- Set land degradation neutrality targets.
- Enhance institutional coordination and administrative capacity for the implementation of the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians.

**BOX 4: COOPERATION ON PREVENTION OF INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS IN THE DANUBE DELTA**

The project on hazard and crisis management in the Danube Delta (www.unece.org/env/teia/ap/ddp.html) was developed under the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, involving the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. The project was carried out between 2010 and 2015 within the Assistance Programme of the Convention and funded, inter alia, by the Advisory Assistance Programme of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment (www.umweltbundesamt.de/en/topics/sustainability-strategies-international/cooperation-eeca-centraleastern-european-states/project-database-advisory-assistance-programme/accident-prevention-crisis-management-in-the-danube). Its main objective was to enhance and, if possible, harmonize the countries’ mechanisms for hazard and crisis management through improved cooperation. The countries received expertise from Czechia, Germany and the Netherlands. During the implementation of the project, Romania started as a beneficiary country and then also provided technical assistance to the other two countries. The outputs of the project were: A hazard map for the Danube Delta; A comparative analysis for the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine; Safety Guidelines and Good Industry Practices for Oil Terminals; Draft Joint Contingency Plan for the Danube Delta region for the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine.

The project included inspections in a simulated risk environment of the oil terminals of the three countries. Representatives of Romania involved in the project reported that the visits to the ports of Galaţi (Romania), Giurgiuleşti (Republic of Moldova) and Odessa (Ukraine) allowed experts to use specific checklists for inspecting plants handling hazardous substances and to improve them. Furthermore, the site visits provided the possibility for technical experts from the three countries to work together on an inspection in a simulated risk environment. Working together allowed experts from the three countries to highlight differences in good practices, share information and experience and create working relations between different authorities and operators. In addition, the project was useful for raising public awareness of prevention, preparedness and response measures for hazardous activities among the local population. The Safety Guidelines and Good Practices for Oil Terminals developed within the project were recommended for use by all ECE member States by the Convention’s Conference of the Parties in 2014. Another aspect of the project was the signature of a trilateral declaration of intention. Romania and the Republic of Moldova have completed internal procedures towards the signature.
Climate change

Romania is able to achieve and maintain the EU reduction targets, even if the higher economic growth scenarios come about. This is due to the rapid and substantial decrease in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the period 1989–1995 resulting from the rapid closure of many unprofitable manufacturing industries after the transition to a market economy. As an EU Member State, the country is required to achieve the EU targets to reduce GHG emissions by 20 per cent in 2020 and at least 40 per cent in 2030, compared with 1990.

Romania has established a policy framework for addressing climate change, including the National Strategy on Climate Change and Economic Growth Based on Low Carbon Emissions for the period 2016–2030 and the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy on Climate Change and Economic Growth Based on Low Carbon Emissions for the period 2016–2020. However, the country has yet to publish reports on the implementation of the sectoral and cross-sectoral actions based on indicators identified for each action to help monitor progress in implementation.

Romania set the renewable energy production target for 2030 at 30.7 per cent, to be achieved through diversifying and balancing the energy production mix. The policy documents guiding the country action towards attainment of this target include the National Energy Strategy 2019–2030, with a perspective of 2050, and the draft Integrated National Plan on Energy and Climate Change 2021–2030.

The Government has established the legal basis for support schemes designed to improve the energy performance of buildings by co-financing. The low energy efficiency of residential and commercial buildings is largely due to the lack or insufficient level of thermal insulation in most buildings. The Strategy for mobilizing investments in the renovation of residential and commercial buildings existing at national level, both public and private, sets ambitious objectives concerning the energy efficiency of buildings, which is expected to provide large economic, social and environmental benefits.

In the period 2012–2017, GHG emissions from transport increased by around 17.9 per cent, mainly because of the road transport subsector, which is responsible for 96 per cent of the GHG emissions of the transport sector. Compared with emissions in the base year 1989, GHG emissions from transport in 2017 had increased by over 61.5 per cent. The car fleet is relatively old and is expected to grow in the future with rising incomes. The infrastructure in urban areas is insufficient to absorb this growth, which leads to congestion, parking problems and severe air pollution. The 2016 General Transport Masterplan includes measures to slow the growth of transport emissions.

Flood protection infrastructure and water management organization lack sufficient investments to be adequately prepared for challenges linked to climate change. Climate change is expected to have a major impact on water resources and management in Romania. An increase in the frequency and magnitude of floods, including flash floods and extreme droughts, especially in the south-east, is predicted. An increase in extreme droughts caused by climate change has a big influence on the application of irrigation, which has largely declined after the transition to a market economy.

No mitigation measures are taken to decrease GHG emissions by improving the current low productivity levels in agriculture. The impact of climate change on agriculture in Romania varies depending on geographical location, but the overall effect is negative as a result of increased flooding, more frequent and longer droughts and increased soil erosion.
Figure 3: GHG emissions trend per sector, 1989–2017, Gg CO₂-eq.


Note: LULUCF includes net CO₂, CH₄, and N₂O.

Figure 4: GHG emissions excluding LULUCF, 2017, percentage


**Recommended measures:**

- Consider replacing older coal- and gas-fired power plants and consider enhancing the share of energy from renewable sources.
- Create incentives to stimulate more economic use of energy sources.
- Stimulate the demand for low emission vehicles and the move of transportation to low emission modes.
- Assess and address the impacts of extreme weather events on the industrial and mining sectors.
Air protection

The concentration of air pollutants, assessed on the basis of available data for the period 2009–2018, shows a descending trend, although some issues of concern remain, such as particulate matter (PM) and NO₂ concentrations above the annual limit values in some cities. Residential stationary combustion is a key emission source for all major pollutants, accounting for a dominant proportion of national emissions of PM, carbon monoxide, cadmium, zinc, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), dioxins and furans.

The air quality monitoring network requires optimization. Despite the number of air quality monitoring stations (148) and their spatial distribution throughout the country, Romania is under the procedure of infringement of EU law regarding gaps in air quality monitoring. The number of air quality zones and agglomerations defined in Romania (54 in total) is demanding in terms of requirements for air quality monitoring, especially considering the high maintenance costs of the monitoring equipment.

Air quality data need improvement. During the period 2009–2018, more than half of the 148 stations did not produce sufficient data during the whole period. Data sets have gaps; complete data sets are available for only 49 per cent of stations for SO₂, 74 per cent for O₃, 30 per cent for NOₓ, 32 per cent for PM₁₀ and 21 per cent for PM₂.₅. Data reported to the European Environment Agency (EEA) lack time coverage and therefore do not provide a reliable description of the situation, especially those data acquired by laboratory analysis (contents of heavy metals and PAHs in PM) and data from outdated and poorly maintained stations throughout the monitoring network. There is only one accredited laboratory in Romania for air quality assessment – the National Reference Laboratory for Air Quality located in NEPA, in Bucharest.

Romania regularly reports to the EU and the Air Convention on its air quality and emissions of pollutants into the air and makes publicly available on NEPA’s website the summaries of analysis of the large volume of data produced. At the same time, Romania stopped reporting to the Convention’s monitoring and evaluation programme (EMEP) in 2014, although three stations in the network are still marked as “EMEP stations” for monitoring of transboundary impacts.

Reducing the health impact of air pollution is of paramount importance for Romania, where it is estimated that 26,490 premature deaths annually are due to exposure to high concentrations of PM, NO₂ and O₃. The major impact (23,400 premature deaths) derives from exposure to high concentrations of PM₂.₅. Of the 148 air quality monitoring stations, only three have automatic analysers for PM₂.₅. Romania is implementing various projects that contribute to the reduction of air pollution, but the effects of those activities and their cumulative impact on pollution reduction are not analysed, compiled and reported. The number of rural background stations and of automatic stations monitoring PM₂.₅ is insufficient to assess the impact of air pollution on ecosystems and human health. Large industries are not required to monitor air quality and report results to NEPA.

Establishing a functional strategic framework for the improvement of air quality is a priority for the country. A national policy with measures to reduce PM concentrations throughout the country and a national air pollution control programme are yet to be developed. Public health policy does not elaborate on this issue either. Only Bucharest, where roughly 10 per cent of the total population of the country is concentrated, was requested to develop an air quality plan with measures to reduce PM₂.₅ concentrations. The Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests issued a methodology for the elaboration of air quality plans, short-term action plans and plans for maintaining air quality.
Information on air quality provided to citizens by the state administration is incomplete, lacking the necessary interpretation of monitoring results, indices and emissions inventories, advice to the general public in the event of bad air quality and guidance on the use of the air quality database. The portal www.calitateaer.ro stores raw data on air quality, but these data are not easily accessible and not relevant to the general public unless accompanied by suitable analysis and explanations.

Figure 5: Emission trends for the main air pollutants, 2008–2018, kt


BOX 5: PROGRAMME CASA VERDE

Programme Casa Verde was initiated in 2010, providing financial assistance for the installation of solar collectors, heat pumps or biomass heating systems in residential and public buildings. The amount of the subsidy depended on the type of heating system and was up to 6,000 lei (€1,430) for solar collectors, up to 8,000 lei (€1,900) for heat pumps and up to 6,000 lei (€1,430) for biomass heating systems. In the first year, some 200 households benefited from the Programme. The Programme was renewed in 2011 with 6,987 individual and 60 corporate beneficiaries.

It continued in the following years, attracting more participants. During 2013–2014, it was available only for public buildings, but was later relaunched to include residential buildings. In 2016, Programme Casa Verde Plus added to the renewable energy solutions financed through investments in increased energy efficiency, thermal insulation, LED lighting, green roofs and ecological materials. In 2019, the Programme financed the installation of photovoltaic panels on residential buildings, aimed at individuals who want to become electricity producers. In September 2019, funds were ensured for 33,000 households who will be in a position to negotiate with the electricity companies about the price of the electricity they can provide to the network. The budget allocated to Programme Casa Verde in 2019 was 656 million lei (€138 million).

Recommended measures:

- Revise the classification of the types of stations within the air quality monitoring network in accordance with their locations and impacts monitored.
- Ensure the calibration of instruments for air quality monitoring, in line with the EU Air Quality Directive.
- Adopt a comprehensive strategic framework for the improvement of air quality.
- Raise public awareness on the negative impact of air pollution on human health and the environment.
Water management

Romania has made progress in water management. Romania regularly updates water-relevant legislation based on EU developments. At the policy level, a water strategy bringing all aspects of water management together is lacking. Water demand has decreased and then remained stable due to industrial modernization and household water consumption metering. Ongoing investments in water infrastructure developments do not cover expansion of water supply and sewerage networks, nor the renovation of dams. A dialogue involving all governmental and non-governmental stakeholder groups is yet to be established.

The impact of discharges not connected to the sewerage network, pollution from agricultural activities, and the population’s limited access to water supply and sanitation systems in rural areas are issues of concern for the country. The main water stress in the Black Sea area is pollution from households due to unmanaged urban sprawl and illegal construction along the coast. The level of connection to sewage treatment plants leads to the conclusion that the targets for the implementation of the EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive will be difficult to achieve, particularly in rural areas.

The proportion of the population connected to water supply systems increased from 60.23 per cent in 2012 to 69.20 per cent in 2018. At the current pace of growth of coverage with piped water services, Romania will be able to achieve universal access only between 2040 and 2050.

The proportion of the population using safely managed drinking water services increased from 81.89 per cent in 2010 to 81.99 per cent in 2020, an increase of 0.1 per cent in the last decade. By maintaining this pace, only 82.07 per cent of the population would be using safely managed drinking water services in 2030.

The proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services increased from 62.36 per cent in 2010 to 83.14 per cent in 2020, an increase of 33.3 per cent in a decade. Romania would be able to reach 100 per cent by 2030 by keeping up this rate of progress.

In 2018, the proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flows safely treated was 56.71 per cent. In 2020, 83.70 per cent of bodies of water in Romania were of good ambient water quality, of which 93.20 of rivers, 44.40 per cent of groundwater bodies and 66.70 per cent of open water bodies were of good ambient water quality.

A new institutional framework in which municipalities delegated water supply and sanitation services to new public regional operating companies allowed the replacement of municipal operators by regional public operators and large private operators. At governmental level, in 2019, the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests became responsible for drafting water-related legislation and coordinating water-related concerns.

Romania scored 77 per cent on implementation of integrated water resources management in 2020. This low rate is due to the lack of investment (on management instruments and financing the score was 44 per cent) and the lack of data on gender-specific objectives at subnational levels and gender-specific objectives and plans at transboundary level (on institutions and participation the score was 65 per cent). However, Romania reported 100 per cent of transboundary water bodies as having an operational arrangement for water cooperation.
In 2016, 99.86 per cent of drinking water analyses were compliant for microbiological parameters in the drinking water supply zones that supply more than 1,000 m$^3$/day or more than 5,000 inhabitants. However, no in-depth analysis was carried out assessing whether all the EU Drinking Water Directive’s requirements are fulfilled. The estimated mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene was 0.36 deaths per 100,000 Romanian population in 2016. The EU average was 0.3 deaths per 100,000 population in the same year.

Figure 6: Ecological status or potential of surface water bodies in Romania, percentage


BOX 6: EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE REGION

Romania contributes to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. The Strategy aims to leverage international cross-cutting issues, bridge intersectoral policies under a unitary approach at regional level and bring public stakeholders closer to the official governmental channels, promoting bottom-up initiatives on the political agenda. Sustainability is the core principle of the Strategy, and hence, regional questions such as enhancement of environmental management are also highlighted. Romania chairs three priority areas: Inland waterways, Culture and tourism, and Environmental risks. Each year, the incumbent presidency of the Strategy organizes an annual forum to discuss recent macroregional issues. At the end of June 2019, the event was organized by Romania, with the country thus benefiting from special media attention as it was holding both the EU Council Presidency and the Strategy Presidency.

The Strategy works based on the “3 NO principles”, i.e. no dedicated funding, no new legislation and no new organizations. However, the project promoters can form consortia and clusters and access a large variety of funds available at the regional, national and transnational levels. For example, Romania successfully attracted projects aiming to ameliorate navigation along the Lower Danube, as well as projects funded by the Danube Transnational Programme, such as Art Nouveau, Connect Green and Danube Floodplain, aiming to valorize the natural and cultural heritage of the region or restore the connectivity of the Danube River with the Danube Floodplain, to mitigate the flood risks and restore some of the river ecosystem services.

Recommended measures:

- Develop and adopt a comprehensive water management strategy, addressing all water-relevant issues, including gender mainstreaming, in a long-term approach.
- Invest in water infrastructure and review the requirements in technical normative documents on industrial wastewater discharges.
- Review, adopt and implement the strategy for the management of sewage sludge considering new trends in this area.
Waste and chemicals management

Romania has managed to introduce many of the principles of the modern waste management system, despite the challenging additional tasks for the Government, municipalities, companies and individuals linked with the evolving character of the EU environmental legislation and policy. Principles of prioritization of waste generation prevention and its reuse or recovery from disposal are anchored in the legal system, though its sound implementation remains to be addressed.

The waste management and chemicals sector gained access to an advanced environmental policy and legal framework, smoothing the path towards sustainable development. To achieve its commitments at the international level, the country endorsed efficient policies at the municipal level. Low performance in the management of some waste streams (e.g. biodegradable waste, construction and demolition waste, and energy sector waste) is attributed to the regulations not covering the whole life cycle of waste, the lack of standards for end-of-waste status and the lack of quality standards for products from waste (e.g. compost). Enabling and facilitating provisions (e.g. a list of waste codes referring to biodegradable waste) are also missing from the regulations.

There is some overlap in the institutional framework for municipal waste management. Responsibilities for licensing waste management operations are split between the LEPAs, which issue the environmental permits, and the National Romanian Regulator for Public Services, which licenses operators of waste collection and disposal services in the municipal sector. Local administration staff are not yet fully prepared to manage the waste management agenda soundly.

To modernize the municipal waste management system, Romania has been gradually introducing solid waste integrated management systems (SWIMS), which had a positive effect in increasing the coverage of urban and rural areas with waste collection services. By 2019, up to 20 systems were fully functional and successfully operated. Remaining municipalities outsource sanitation services, which results in longer transportation distances and higher costs. Despite this effort, rates of separate collection and recycling in the municipal sector are low.

The development of waste management systems is hindered by several factors, including a shortage of specific legal, policy and technical standards. The country did not introduce the key element of an integrated waste management system, i.e. a waste disposal tax applicable to all wastes disposed of in landfills. Operators of waste management facilities for other than municipal waste are not motivated to invest in new waste management technologies or outsource waste management services via progressive and specialized waste management companies. Similarly, industries are not incentivized to invest in new technologies and operations that would result in lower quantities of waste or more environmentally friendly materials and operations.

The trend of waste generated per capita is decreasing, which results more from economic patterns than the effect of policy measures. Romania has not moved closer to the target on the amount generated and on hazardous waste treated, because it did not establish motivating financial schemes and a landfill tax. Management of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the country does not have focused institutional support.

Current levels of waste collection service tariffs for citizens appear to be sustainable as they are affordable, mainly thanks to EU funding of the necessary infrastructure. However, citizens do not bear all the costs of the municipal solid waste (MSW) management system, thereby jeopardising the infrastructure refurbishment, replacement, renewal and extension. Citizens’ direct participation in and active contribution to the development of a sustainable waste management system is a precondition of their sense of its ownership.
The closure of hundreds of non-compliant landfills and their replacement with compliant installations is a key achievement of Romania and a prerequisite for improvement of water quality, its management and other environmental assets. Nevertheless, many of these sites have not yet been rehabilitated according to the EU Landfill Directive.

Management of contaminated sites made progress in terms of policymaking. A strategy is in place and the first results include the investigation and inventory of the contaminated sites and potentially contaminated sites. Because the early privatization contracts did not reflect on the emerging environmental standards in the 1990s, the present owners are responsible for contamination that does not originate from their activities. Investment needs for waste management infrastructure and rehabilitation of contaminated sites are addressed through the collection of a landfill tax and bank guarantees.

The waste coding system and statistical data collection and reporting to the central, EU and international levels have been put into practice, with occasional delays in data delivery. Waste reporting schemes and obligations are not fulfilled consistently, lacking integration into a system enabling the cross-checking of data. This practice results in inconsistency or gaps in waste management data, for example, on construction and demolition waste.

Figure 7: Waste collected separately by sanitation operators, 2018, tons

Source: NEPA, 2019.

Recommended measures:

- Complete and implement waste-related regulations that undergo regulatory impact assessment.
- Encourage the remaining counties and Bucharest to implement and operate solid waste integrated management systems.
- Introduce a comprehensive landfill tax.
- Elaborate and implement programmes to remediate contamination caused by the State prior to the privatization of enterprises.
- Progressively adjust the waste collection tariff for citizens within a medium-term horizon.
- Entrust the National Institute of Statistics and the National Environmental Protection Agency to ensure that waste management data are collected.
Biodiversity and protected areas

Romania has a rich biodiversity and a high proportion of intact natural ecosystems. Almost half of the country’s land area is covered with natural and semi-natural ecosystems. The high density of large carnivores and the extensive forests covering the Carpathian Mountains are the best-known aspects of the biodiversity richness. Romania possesses the largest areas of virgin forests in the EU, undisturbed by human activities. It is remarkable that the country has been able to preserve this unique ecosystem, which is one of the last remaining virgin forests in Europe.

Currently, 23.4 per cent of the total territory of the country is under the protected area system. The EU Habitats and Birds Directives are fully transposed in Romania. Establishing new protected areas and expanding the boundaries of existing protected areas, including by designating 606 sites under the Natura 2000 network, are in the pipeline.

Despite the positive trends, biodiversity in Romania is threatened by overgrazing, expanded urbanization, desertification, overexploitation of natural resources, illegal logging, and the impacts of climate change and extreme events. Moreover, financing for biodiversity conservation remains at a low level, at about 0.03 per cent of total governmental environmental expenditures.

The national Red Lists are yet to be developed due to differing views within the Romanian academic community. NBSAP proposes the implementation of measures to improve ecological connectivity. Several projects have been implemented in that regard to maintain species migration corridors and thus improve connectivity in protected areas. The inventory and monitoring of species and habitats to support decision-making on measures for effective maintenance and improvement of species conservation is carried out individually by protected areas, but there is no national-level monitoring system.

The protected area management system is comprehensive and unique. Over 1,600 natural protected areas are managed by different institutions, including the National Agency for Natural Protected Areas (NANPA), Romsilva, the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Administration (DDBRA), local councils and private legal entities. Before NANPA was established in 2016, 40 per cent of all designated protected areas did not have any park administration; hence, no management activities were implemented on those sites. However, due to the limited capacity of NANPA, not all planned measures are being implemented.

Not all protected areas have management plans. Some management plans are not approved in sufficient time to ensure the implementation of measures and carry out monitoring and assessment, making it hard to assess the impact of economic activities on the state of protected areas. Funding for the implementation of the management plans started in 2016 with support from the Ministry of European Funds.

Virgin and quasi-virgin forests are strictly protected and included in the National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-virgin Forests established as an instrument to identify, register and protect the valuable forest. As at May 2019, an area of 29,060 ha is officially included in the Catalogue and further identification and mapping of virgin forests are ongoing. Some adjacent forests have been identified as virgin and quasi-virgin but are not included in the national catalogue. There is no official confirmation and documentation of illegal logging in the core zone of national parks.
The country does not compile data on total expenditures related to biodiversity, forests and ecosystems conservation and is not in a position to report on the revenue generated and finance mobilized from biodiversity-relevant economic instruments. Most of the funding to implement biodiversity conservation and conduct research monitoring comes from external sources.

Map 1: Protected areas

Recommended measures:

- Develop a methodology for the designation of ecological corridors.
- Develop a dedicated budget for the management of protected areas.
- Ensure that, within Romania, logging is and remains strictly prohibited within the World Heritage property “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forest of the Carpathian and Other Regions of Europe”.

Source: NANPA, 2019.
Successes in 2012–2020 and priorities for the future

The 10 most significant actions Romania has taken to improve its environmental performance are:¹

- Established policy and institutional frameworks for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- Revised the regulatory and compliance mechanisms and institutions, including integrated environmental permitting and the EIA legal framework;
- Launched the Forest Inspector initiative to involve the public in addressing illegal logging;
- Developed the Integrated Environmental Information System;
- Ratified the most recent multilateral environmental agreements;
- Established a policy framework for addressing climate change;
- Established the legal basis for support schemes to improve the energy performance of buildings;
- Made progress in water management and in providing access to safely managed sanitation services for its population;
- Closed hundreds of non-compliant landfills and replaced them with compliant installations;
- Introduced principles of the modern waste management system and modernized the municipal waste management system.

¹ No ranking is implied.
The 10 most important environmental priorities for Romania in the next 5–8 years are:

1. Streamlining and stabilizing the environmental legal and policy frameworks, and monitoring and reporting on their implementation;
2. Ensuring adequate on-the-ground implementation of environmental protection, and of monitoring and reporting on the state of the environment;
3. Enhancing open access to environmental information, guaranteeing effective public participation in decision-making on environmental matters and advancing education for sustainable development in practice;
4. Improving air quality and raising public awareness of the negative impact of air pollution;
5. Upgrading the strategic management of water resources;
6. Expanding solid waste integrated management systems;
7. Boosting action to address climate change and biodiversity loss;
8. Greening the economy, including by working with the private sector and extending green public procurement;
9. Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy and society;
10. Intensifying the implementation of its international commitments.

2 No ranking is implied.
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Great White Pelican (Pelecanus onocrotalus) Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, Mircea Verghele
View from Inele village, Domogled–Valea Cernei National Park, Eugen Crețu, Romsilva, Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests
Mountain Pasqueflower (Pulsatilla montana), “Mestecănișul de la Reci” Natural Reserve, Mircea Verghele
Line view of mountain from Piatra Craiului National Park, Mircea Verghele
Traditional architecture decorated house, Letea, Romania, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Administration, Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests

Note: Where several pictures from different authors appear on a page, the top one is referred to as (a), the second as (b), etc.
The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Environmental Performance Review Programme assesses progress made by individual countries in reconciling their economic and social development with environmental protection, as well as in meeting international commitments on environment and sustainable development.

This third EPR of Romania takes stock of progress made by the country in the management of its environment since its second review in 2012 and assesses the implementation of the recommendations of the previous EPR. The review covers legal and policy frameworks and compliance assurance mechanisms. It also focuses on greening the economy, environmental monitoring, public participation and education for sustainable development. It includes a substantive analysis of the country’s participation in and commitments to international agreements, as well as its climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. Furthermore, the EPR addresses issues of specific importance to Romania related to air protection, water management, waste and chemicals management and biodiversity and protected areas. Finally, the review includes in all chapters an assessment of relevant targets of the Agenda 2030 as well as recommendations related to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Highlights of the third Environmental Performance Review of Romania draw attention to the key findings of the review to inform and guide policymakers and representatives of civil society, as well as the international community, in their efforts to improve environmental management and to further promote sustainable development in Romania.

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