

Western Balkans Six Forest Landscape Restoration Plan

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List of abbreviations:

ADA – Austrian Development Agency
AF – Adaptation Fund
AFD – Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)
BDTF – Biodiversity Task Force
CAPEX – Capital expenditure
CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity
CSOs – Civil society organisations
DRR – Disaster risk reduction
EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIA – Environmental impact assessment
EIB – European Investment Bank
EU – European Union
FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAO TCP – FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme
FLII – Forest Landscape Integrity Index
FLR – Forest landscape restoration
GAWB – Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GCF – Green Climate Fund
GEF – Global Environment Facility
IFAD – International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPA – Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPARD – Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development
IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature
KM-GBF – Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
LCA – Landscape character assessment
LDN – Land degradation neutrality
LEADER – Links between actions for the development of the rural economy
MRV – Monitoring, reporting, verification
NbS – Nature-based Solutions
NbS CoP – NbS Community of Practice
NBSAP – Domestic-level biodiversity strategies and action plans
NDVI – Normalized difference vegetation index
NPP – Net primary production
OECM – Other effective area-based conservation measures
OPEX – Operating expenditure
PES – Payment for ecosystem services
RBMP – River basin management plan
RCC – Regional Cooperation Council
REAWG SFM – Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management
ROAR – Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report
RWG GAWB - Regional Working Group on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
SDC – Swiss Agency for Development
SDG – Sustainable development goal
SEA – Strategic environmental assessment
TAIEX – Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
TG-BC – Thematic Group for Biodiversity Conservation
TG-ER – Thematic Group for Ecosystem Restoration
UNCCD - United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WB6 – Western Balkans Six
WB6 FLRP – WB6 Forest Landscape Restoration Plan
WBIF – Western Balkans Investment Framework
WFD – Water Framework Directive

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1. Executive summary

The Western Balkans Six Forest Landscape Restoration Plan (WB6 FLRP) provides a common regional framework for the restoration of forest and forest-related landscapes in the region. The plan was developed in response to shared challenges faced by Western Balkans Six (WB6): loss of landscape functionality and identity, degradation of forest ecosystems, habitat fragmentation, soil erosion, increasingly pronounced droughts, floods and wildfires, pressures from uncoordinated land use, weakening ecological connectivity and limited coordination between sectors and jurisdictions. These processes affect not only the condition of forests, but also soil stability, water regimes, biodiversity, resilience of local communities, and the long-term safety and resilience of landscapes.

The WB6 FLRP is based on an understanding of forest landscape restoration (FLR) as a broad landscape-based, spatial-planning and development-governance process, rather than as a sectoral afforestation programme. Within this framework, forests are not viewed in isolation, but as part of a wider landscape mosaic in which natural and semi-natural elements, watercourses, agricultural land, rural and peri-urban areas, protected areas, infrastructure corridors and local communities are functionally connected. For this reason, the restoration of forest landscapes is directed towards improving landscape functionality, connectivity, resilience and character, whilst linking the objectives of nature conservation, forestry, land and water management, climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction (DRR), spatial planning, public investment and sustainable spatial development at different spatial levels.

The WB6 FLRP is directly linked to the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) and its Action 39, which entails the completion of the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report (ROAR), the preparation of the regional WB6 FLRP, and the start of restoration activities in 2028. This report is the key spatial basis of the plan, as it identifies priority landscapes and restoration zones, particularly in functionally connected and landscapes shared among jurisdictions, where ecological processes, risks and restoration needs extend across individual administrative and jurisdictional boundaries. On this basis, the plan provides a strategic and operational framework for moving from general political commitments to concrete, measurable and finance-ready interventions in space.

The analysis of the global, European and regional policy framework shows that FLR has a strong foothold in policies related to biodiversity, climate action, land and soil resilience, water management, forests, green infrastructure and DRR. These frameworks increasingly position landscape restoration as a measurable, cross-sectoral and investment-relevant process, rather than as an isolated environmental protection intervention. For the WB6 region, this means that restoration should be spatially targeted, based on clear indicators, linked with existing policies, and supported by stable financing and monitoring mechanisms.

The analysis of policies in the WB6 shows that significant sectoral foundations for FLR are already in place. Spatial development documents recognise pressures on space and the importance of landscape quality; forestry policies recognise degraded stands, erosion, wildfires and the protective functions of forests; biodiversity policies recognise protected areas, ecological networks and corridors; while climate, water, land and DRR policies increasingly emphasise risks related to droughts, floods, erosion, wildfires and degradation. However, these elements are not sufficiently connected within a single landscape framework. The main challenges remain fragmented governance, weak operational coordination, insufficient institutionalisation of landscape characterisation, underdeveloped monitoring of actual ecological and spatial outcomes, unstable financing, limited local ownership of the restoration process, and the absence of practical regional mechanisms for joint implementation.

The WB6 FLRP responds to these challenges through five strategic goals. The first goal establishes the capacities and enabling conditions for FLR based on landscape character, including a common methodology for landscape characterisation and sensitivity assessment. The second goal directs restoration towards resilient, connected and climate-adaptive forest and forest-related landscapes, including degraded forests, riparian zones, wetlands, floodplains, erosion-prone and drought-affected landscapes, ecological corridors and landscapes exposed to wildfire risk. The third goal develops more stable and diversified FLR financing by combining domestic public resources, EU and international instruments, climate and biodiversity finance, private sector participation, and market-based mechanisms. The fourth goal strengthens regional coordination, joint project preparation, data exchange, methodological compatibility, and flexible forms of cooperation in landscapes shared among jurisdictions. The fifth goal ensures the participation of local communities,

landowners, land users, civil society, academia and the private sector through local FLR platforms, long-term stewardship arrangements, and fair benefit-sharing.

The monitoring framework of the plan links each strategic goal with measurable indicators, baselines, targets and sources of verification. Particular attention is given to the use of landscape characterisation and sensitivity assessment, improvement of the integrity and connectivity of priority landscapes, monitoring of land condition through land degradation neutrality (LDN) indicators, the volume and diversity of mobilised financing, the functionality of the regional coordination mechanism, and the establishment of local participation and stewardship mechanisms.

The WB6 FLRP connects existing sectoral policies and instruments within a common framework for the restoration of forest and forest-related landscapes. Its role is not to replace domestic-level strategies, plans and programmes, but to connect them more effectively through a landscape-based approach, common landscape criteria, measurable targets, priority areas, more stable financing and coordinated implementation. In this way, the plan lays the foundation for FLR in the WB6 to be implemented not as a series of isolated projects, but as a long-term process that links nature conservation, forestry, spatial planning, water and land management, DRR, local development, and the strengthening of regional resilience.

2. Introduction

The Western Balkans Six (WB6), in the context of this document referring to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, is an area of significant natural, cultural and development potential. Although this potential is embedded in different spatial, ecological and socio-economic contexts, the WB6 share a number of **common challenges and risks** related to the conservation and development of landscapes, forests and biodiversity, and to strengthening climate resilience. This applies both to landscapes within individual WB6 and to spatially and functionally connected landscapes of broader regional importance. Forest and forest-related landscapes play an important role in biodiversity conservation, soil and water protection, climate change mitigation, DRR, and the preservation of the quality of life of local communities. At the same time, these landscapes are increasingly exposed to pressures arising from land-use change, habitat fragmentation, land degradation, fires, droughts, floods, uncoordinated use of natural resources, and insufficiently connected sectoral planning. As a result, their stability, functionality, identity and character are being undermined.

In this context, the restoration of forest landscapes cannot be viewed only as a technical matter of afforestation or improving forest condition. It requires a **broader landscape approach**, in which forests are understood as part of complex spatial-ecological and socio-economic systems. Such systems include natural and semi-natural habitats, watercourses, agricultural land, settlements, areas along infrastructure corridors, protected areas, and the everyday living spaces of local communities. Therefore, restoration planning must be based on an understanding of the natural and cultural specificities of landscape character, ecological functions, spatial relationships, existing pressures, and development opportunities.

This document is based on the position that FLR in the WB6 region should be directed not only towards the restoration of degraded forests, but also towards improving the structure, connectivity and functionality of forests and forest-related elements within the wider landscape mosaic. Such an approach implies that restoration is not planned as a set of individual interventions, but as a **spatially directed process** linking the objectives of nature conservation, forestry, land and water management, climate adaptation, DRR and spatial development. In this sense, landscape planning and spatial planning are not additional or secondary elements of this process, but rather the framework through which different sectoral objectives can be spatially connected, harmonised and translated into concrete measures.

The particular importance of a regional approach stems from the fact that many ecological processes and risks are transboundary. Mountain systems, river basins, forest complexes, ecological corridors, areas of high biodiversity and zones of pronounced climate vulnerability often extend across administrative and jurisdictional boundaries. For this reason, successful FLR requires the establishment of a common framework that enables a shared methodological approach, data comparability, harmonisation of priorities, coordination of measures and monitoring results at the regional level, while fully respecting the domestic-level circumstances, institutional responsibilities and local needs.

The WB6 FLRP is a direct deliverable under the GAWB, adopted at the Sofia Summit in 2020. Specifically, it responds to **Action 39 of the GAWB Action Plan 2025–2030** (revised in October 2025), under Pillar 5 - Protection of Nature and Biodiversity. Action 39 mandates the completion of the ROAR, the development of the WB6 FLRP, and the commencement of FLR implementation activities in 2028, with annual progress reporting to the Biodiversity Task Force (BDTF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The ROAR serves as a prerequisite spatial deliverable under the same action, providing grounds for the landscape character-based assessment that enables the identification of priority restoration landscapes and opportunity zones. The WB6 FLRP and Action 39 are not stand-alone actions, rather they are naturally connected to a number of different actions across the GAWB Action Plan. Within Pillar 5, the WB6 FLRP is linked to:

- **Action 36 - Develop and implement a coordinated WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan**, which provides the strategic umbrella for the WB6 FLRP as a sectoral instrument within the Biodiversity Strategic Plan, operationalising its forest-specific biodiversity targets.
- **Action 37- Update nature conservation strategies and plans in WB6 to align with Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) targets**, creating the domestic policy entry points into which WB6 FLRP restoration objectives and Nature-based Solutions (NbS) provisions must

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

be integrated during ongoing revision cycles of domestic-level biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAP).

- **Action 38 - Develop and implement nature restoration plans in each WB6, aligned with the EU Nature Restoration Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2024/1991) and the KM-GBF**, which are structurally complementary to the WB6 FLRP, thus providing a regional approach that covers forest landscapes shared among jurisdictions and enables the coherent development of each WB6 Nature Restoration Plan while avoiding duplication.
- **Action 40 - Advancing Biodiversity Monitoring and Information Systems in the WB6**, supplying the Data and Monitoring Pillar of the WB6 FLRP's own monitoring framework, meaning that WB6 FLRP relies on Action 40 for data collection, indicator alignment, and regional reporting.
- **Action 41 - Strengthen regional ecological connectivity in the WB6 through coordinated planning, designation of nature protected sites and implementation of green infrastructure, in line with the Natura 2000 Network**; this shares the same spatial logic, since the restored forest landscapes under Action 39 contribute directly to green corridors and connectivity priorities identified under Action 41.

The WB6 FLRP is also linked with actions across pillars:

Pillar 1: Decarbonisation and Climate Resilience

- **Action 3 - Strengthen Regional Climate Resilience through the development and implementation of WB6 Climate Adaptation Strategy**, which explicitly includes NbS and ecosystem-based approaches as climate resilience measures. The WB6 FLRP operationalises these specifically for forest landscapes, making it a primary delivery instrument for Action 3's NbS component. These two actions require close coordination.

Pillar 3: Depollution of Air, Water and Soil

- **Action 26b - By 2030, WB6 commit to implement actions aimed at reaching good status for all water bodies**, which is directly supported by the WB6 FLRP, since river basin management plans (RBMP) required under this action might share the same spatial unit (river basins) as the WB6 FLRP's inter-jurisdictional priority area defined through ROAR, and riparian and watershed restoration under the WB6 FLRP directly contributes to achieving good water status under the Water Framework Directive (WFD).
- **Action 28 - By 2029, integrate soil protection in other policy areas, improve knowledge exchange utilising Western Balkans Soil Partnership**, which is directly reflected in the WB6 FLRP's Activity 2.4 Restore soil functions and reduce erosion, landslide, and slope instability risks. Both actions call for the integration of soil objectives into forestry and spatial planning instruments.

Pillar 4: Sustainable Agriculture

- **Action 33 - By 2026, step up efforts for sustainable development of rural areas through LEADER**, which is directly linked with the WB6 FLRP's Goal 5 (involving local communities, green jobs creation, local stewardship, rural livelihoods) that shares identical territorial logic with community-led local development model under the Links between actions for the development of the rural economy (LEADER) programme, as they both target rural depopulation and local economic resilience in mountain and forest landscapes.
- **Action 35 - Agrobiodiversity & Close-to-Nature Forest Management** shares implementation ground with the WB6 FLRP: these principles are among the core FLR measures, and the Agro Biodiversity Hub provides data relevant to forest-agriculture mosaic restoration.

The WB6 FLRP aims to translate the political commitment of the Sofia Declaration into a **common regional, strategic planning and operational implementation framework**. The document connects global and European policies relevant to landscape restoration with the policies and planning documents of the WB6, identifies common challenges and opportunities, and defines the vision, mission, strategic goals, measurable targets and indicators, and basic mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and financing. Its intention is **not to replace existing domestic-level policies or planning instruments**, but to connect them through a common landscape and ecosystem approach, enable greater comparability and coordination of activities in the region, and support their alignment with relevant European and international commitments.

In this sense, the plan guides future FLR activities in the region, laying the foundations for their gradual implementation. It enables the identification of priority landscapes, the development of common criteria and relevant indicators for landscape issues, the strengthening of institutional cooperation, the involvement of

relevant stakeholders, and the securing of more stable financing mechanisms. In doing so, it prevents FLR from remaining limited to individual and spatially isolated projects, instead becoming part of a long-term, coordinated, spatially and landscape-based process of strengthening the resilience of the WB6.

3. Forest landscape restoration in the Western Balkans Six

3.1 FLR as a landscape-based restoration concept

FLR is an integrated approach to restoring the ecological functionality, landscape character and socio-economic benefits of landscapes. It goes beyond traditional afforestation and sector-based measures aimed only at improving forest condition. Its main value lies in the fact that it does not treat forests as isolated areas, but as constitutive parts of a wider landscape mosaic, where natural and semi-natural habitats, agricultural land, watercourses, settlements, infrastructure corridors, protected areas and the everyday spaces of local communities interact. In this sense, **FLR is simultaneously an ecological, spatial, social and governance process.**

In this document, FLR is understood through the combined meaning of its three main elements: *forest*, *landscape* and *restoration*. The term **forest** does not refer only to forests as a taxation, legal or administrative category, but to forest habitats, forest ecosystems and their ecological, protective, climate-related, productive and social functions within the wider landscape. It includes different development stages, structural forms and degrees of conservation of forest vegetation, including vital, degraded, fragmented, coppice, successional and protective forms, as well as areas with potential to restore forest and forest-related functions.

The term **landscape** refers to an area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors. In this document, landscape is also understood as an analytical and planning framework for considering ecological processes, social interests and governance decisions in space. The term **restoration** does not imply a simple return to a former or assumed “natural” state. It refers to a long-term and adaptive process of restoring ecological functionality, improving ecosystem services, strengthening landscape resilience, and increasing the capacity of landscapes to provide ecological, social and economic benefits over time, through interventions adapted to the local context and institutional conditions.

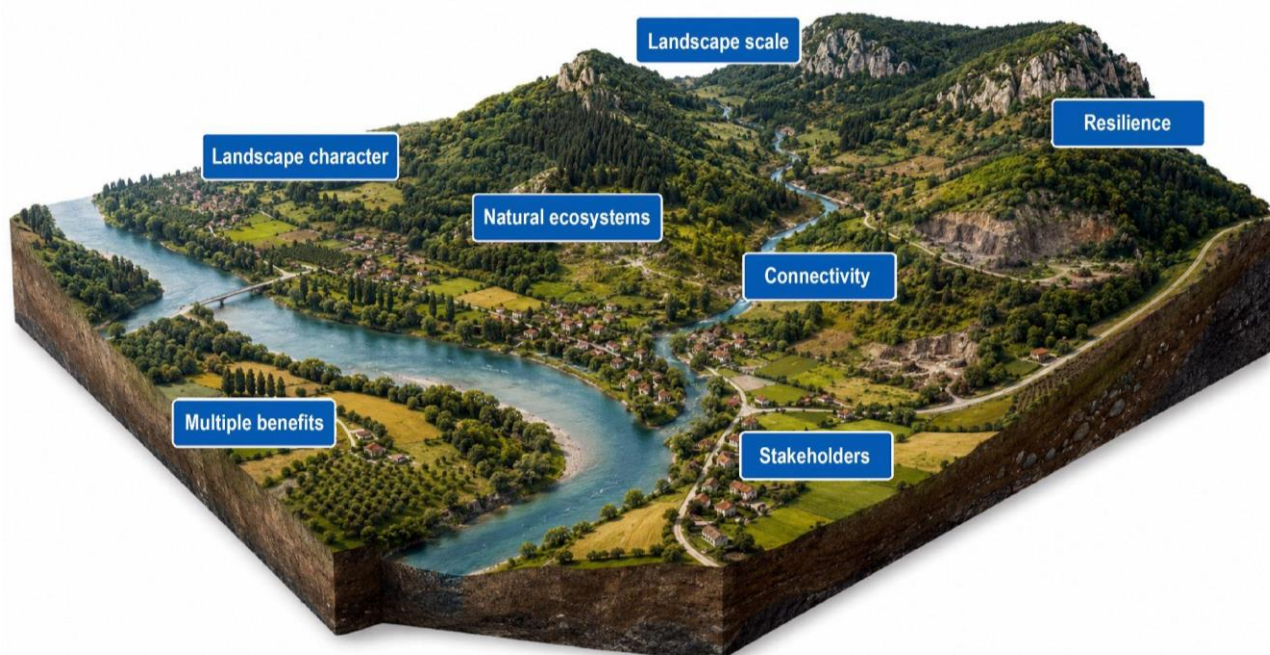


Figure 1. Forest Landscape Restoration as a landscape-based restoration approach

Unlike approaches mainly focused on increasing forest cover, FLR starts from the questions of which landscape functions need to be restored, which benefits restoration should provide, and for whom. In this framework, forest restoration is not an end in itself, but a means of improving ecological stability and resilience, habitat connectivity, soil and water quality, climate resilience, DRR and the long-term sustainability of local communities. **FLR should therefore be understood as a process of restoring landscape functionality and resilience, rather than as a sectoral afforestation programme or an exercise in increasing forest cover.**

Such an approach requires action at the landscape level, rather than only at the level of individual plots, forest stands or administrative units. Landscapes planned for restoration are often structurally and functionally complex: some areas may be forested, others agricultural, degraded or shaped by different forms of human activity. Their ecological functionality often depends on the relationships between these elements, not only on the condition of a single land-cover type. **FLR therefore requires an understanding of landscape structure and character, spatial relationships, existing pressures, restoration potential, and possible conflicts between different land users.**

In this sense, FLR is primarily a framework for informed and participatory decision-making on the restoration of landscape functionality, not a predefined set of measures. It does not assume that there is one optimal solution that can be applied to all landscapes. On the contrary, FLR recognises that landscapes include competing interests, limited resources and different legitimate objectives. Its role is not to remove these differences, but to support informed and negotiated decisions on restoring landscape functions in line with landscape character. FLR therefore does not aim to create an ideal or fixed landscape condition, but to improve the functioning of existing landscapes under contemporary ecological, social, economic and institutional conditions.

Multifunctionality is central to the professional basis of FLR. A single intervention, if well located, can contribute to habitat restoration, erosion control, water retention, ecological corridors, microclimate regulation, protection of settlements and infrastructure, conservation of cultural landscape values and new opportunities for local development. For this reason, **FLR should not be seen as an enlarged forestry intervention, but as an integrated process of managing change in the landscape, linking forestry, nature conservation, spatial planning, water management, climate adaptation, and the needs of local communities.**

3.2 European landscape framework: Landscape Convention, landscape character and FLR planning

In the European context, FLR has a specific meaning. The global concept of FLR emerged as a response to forest degradation, the loss of ecological functionality in landscapes and the need to link restoration with human well-being. Europe, however, has a particular legal, planning and cultural framework for understanding landscape, primarily through the *Council of Europe Landscape Convention*, originally adopted in Florence in 2000 as the *European Landscape Convention* (widely ratified across Europe). Its importance lies in the fact that it does not link landscape only to exceptional or specially protected areas, but establishes it as a framework for the protection, management and planning of the entire landscape territory. Landscape is understood as part of people's everyday living environment and as a space where natural processes, cultural values and development decisions meet.

This understanding also changes the way FLR is interpreted in Europe. If landscape is understood as the entire territory, the restoration of forest landscapes cannot be limited to protected areas, large forest complexes or isolated degraded sites. It must also include ordinary, everyday, peri-urban, rural, agroforestry, riverine, infrastructure-related and degraded landscapes, where development pressures, ecological fragmentation and the need for restoration often overlap. **FLR is thus interpreted within the wider framework of landscape protection, management and planning.**

Recent developments in the European landscape discourse further confirm the relevance of this framework. Landscape is increasingly linked to climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, public health, participation and integrated spatial governance. It is no longer understood only as an object of protection or aesthetic evaluation, but also as an operational framework for guiding spatial change. This makes the European landscape framework particularly relevant for contemporary restoration approaches, including FLR.

Within this framework, **landscape character becomes one of the key foundations for FLR planning.** It helps identify the spatial, ecological, cultural and visual features of each landscape, as well as its sensitivity, capacity for change, and restoration potential. FLR cannot be the same in mountain forest landscapes, riverine and riparian landscapes, agricultural and agroforestry mosaics, peri-urban areas or degraded infrastructure zones. Each of these landscapes has a different structure, different functions, different pressures and different restoration opportunities.

For this reason, **landscape character assessment (LCA) and a related landscape planning strategy provide an important professional basis for FLR.** Their value is not only descriptive. Based on the assessed character, it becomes possible to determine the condition, sensitivity and functional relationships in space, where restoration is most needed, what should be restored and how interventions should be spatially and

functionally arranged. **Landscape character provides a basis for decisions on where, what and how to restore.** In this way, FLR becomes a planning process that links ecological objectives with spatial identity, development needs and long-term landscape resilience.

This understanding is important because landscape restoration cannot be separated from spatial development. In the European planning context, restoration is not only a technical intervention in space. It is part of a broader process of aligning nature conservation, land use, forestry, settlement development, infrastructure, agriculture and water management. FLR in Europe should therefore be linked with spatial planning, landscape planning, nature conservation, forestry planning and all other sectoral policies that shape the use of land and space.

3.3 FLR relevance for the Western Balkans Six

The WB6 is a region where high natural landscape value is accompanied by strong degradation pressures and limited capacities for integrated spatial management. This makes FLR particularly relevant as an instrument for long-term restoration and sustainable management of natural resources.

A landscape-based understanding of FLR is especially important for the WB6. Forest and forest-related landscapes in the region are highly diverse. They include mountain systems, river basins, rural and agroforestry mosaics, riparian and floodplain areas, protected areas and areas of high biodiversity, as well as landscapes exposed to strong development and climate pressures. Many of these landscapes are inter-jurisdictional in character, making them important for regional ecological connectivity, stability and resilience.

Meanwhile, the region is exposed to processes that directly affect the condition of forests and related landscapes. Land-use change, habitat fragmentation, land degradation, erosion, increasingly frequent and intense forest fires, longer drought periods, extreme rainfall and flooding, pressure on water resources, rural abandonment and peri-urban expansion create complex and interlinked patterns of landscape degradation. These processes can rarely be addressed through sectoral measures alone. They require a spatial understanding of the relationships between forests, agriculture, water, settlements, infrastructure and protected areas.

One of the main challenges in the region is the mismatch between the ecological connectivity of landscapes and fragmented institutional frameworks for management. Ecological processes operate across administrative boundaries, while planning, financing and natural resource management are usually organised through sectoral responsibilities and territorially separate decision-making systems. For this reason, FLR in the WB6 needs a regional dimension, while remaining flexible enough to respond to different domestic-level and local circumstances.

The WB6 approach should not establish a single restoration model to be applied uniformly across each of the six and all landscape types. Its value lies in providing a shared framework, a common planning logic, comparable criteria and the possibility of coordination, while fully respecting differences between specific landscapes. **The WB6 needs a common FLR framework, but not a uniform restoration model.** Such an approach can support regional cooperation, inter-jurisdictional ecological connectivity and alignment with European policies, while respecting domestic-level priorities, institutional capacities and the specific character of individual landscapes.

This framework is also important for approximation to European policies that promote nature restoration, green infrastructure, climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use. At the same time, it can support the development of institutional and technical capacities for planning, implementing, financing and monitoring FLR activities at different levels of governance. FLR in the WB6 region should help ensure that restoration is not treated as a set of isolated projects, but as part of a long-term process of landscape management, linking nature conservation, forestry, spatial planning, climate adaptation, DRR and local development.

The particular value of FLR in the region lies in its ability to integrate restoration into existing land-use patterns, rather than treating it as an activity separate from development processes. Restoration does not automatically mean excluding agriculture, settlements, infrastructure or other land functions. It means aligning them more effectively with ecological processes and the long-term resilience of landscapes. In this approach, forests, agroforestry systems, shelterbelts, riparian vegetation, wetlands, meadows, pastures and other nature-based elements function as components of green infrastructure that contribute to the functionality and resilience of the wider landscape mosaic.

3.4 Principles for a WB6 landscape-based FLR approach

The WB6 approach to FLR should be based on professional principles that link ecosystem restoration, spatial and landscape planning, nature conservation, forestry and sustainable natural resource management. These principles are not the methodology for preparing this document, but instead provide a framework for understanding how FLR should be planned and implemented in the region.

- **Landscape scale.** FLR should be planned at the level of functional spatial units, such as river basins, mountain systems, forest complexes, ecological corridors, and rural and peri-urban mosaics, rather than only within administrative boundaries. This makes it possible to direct restoration to places where it can make the strongest contribution to the functionality of the wider landscape, while taking account of landscape character and spatial relationships.
- **Landscape character and sensitivity.** Restoration measures should be adapted to the landscape type, its character, structure, condition, identity, ecological and visual sensitivity, and capacity for change. This means that the same measures should not be applied everywhere. Interventions should be shaped in relation to the spatial, ecological and character-related features of each landscape.
- **Landscape ecology principles.** FLR should be based on the relationship between landscape structure, function, character and change. Landscapes are not made up only of individual areas, but of mosaic systems of linear and non-linear elements forming different matrix patterns. Their spatial arrangement affects species movement, water, material and energy flows, and the ways space is used. FLR should help reduce fragmentation, strengthen connectivity and restore ecological flows through the landscape.
- **Ecological connectivity and green infrastructure.** Restoration of forests and forest-related elements should strengthen links between existing forest complexes, riparian zones, wetlands, agroforestry elements, protected areas and other natural or semi-natural habitats. In this way, FLR can become a mechanism for developing functional green infrastructure at regional, domestic-level and local levels.
- **Multifunctionality.** FLR should simultaneously contribute to biodiversity, ecosystem services, soil stability, water quality and regimes, climate resilience, reduced risk of fires, droughts, floods and erosion, and the quality of life of local communities. This links FLR with broader sustainable development objectives and long-term territorial resilience.
- **Integration with spatial and sectoral planning.** FLR cannot be effective if it remains outside spatial planning, forestry planning, nature conservation, water management, agriculture, climate adaptation and DRR. Restoration objectives should be integrated into existing planning and management instruments, and these instruments should also become better connected. It is particularly important that restoration objectives are recognised in spatial, forestry, water management and sectoral planning documents at different levels of governance.
- **Participation and adaptive management.** FLR requires the involvement of institutions, professional organisations, local governments, public enterprises, local communities, landowners and land users, civil society organisations (CSO) and other relevant actors. At the same time, landscape restoration has to be monitored, evaluated and adapted to changes in space, climate conditions, institutional capacities and community needs.

The various sectors and professions operating in the same landscape view it from different perspectives. Landscape planning helps connect objectives and measures spatially; forestry contributes knowledge of forest structure, dynamics and management; nature conservation focuses on species, habitats and ecological processes; land and water management addresses soil functions and hydrological relationships; climate policies and risk assessments introduce the perspective of adaptation and resilience; economics assesses feasibility; and stakeholder involvement supports legitimacy and practical implementation. **None of these perspectives is sufficient on its own, and each is needed if FLR is to be evidence-based, feasible and sustainable over the long term.**

For this reason, **sectoral contributions should not be treated as competing, but as layers of the same spatial and governance decision.** The aim is not to confirm or protect the role of any single sector, but to improve the functionality of the landscape as a shared space of ecological processes, development needs and social interests.

FLR may include different types of intervention, depending on land use, existing land cover, degree of degradation, and restoration objectives. FLR is not defined by a single type of intervention, but by the

contribution that an intervention makes to restoring landscape functionality. These interventions may include natural forest regeneration, assisted restoration, afforestation, rehabilitation and silvicultural measures in degraded forests, agroforestry, shelterbelts, riparian vegetation restoration, protective forests, wetland restoration or the strengthening of ecological corridors. An indicative overview of possible categories of FLR interventions in forest and forest-related landscapes is provided in Table 1. The table is not a closed classification. It is intended as a working overview of the relationship between landscape context, existing land cover, intervention type and expected restoration function.

Table 1. Indicative categories of FLR interventions in forest and forest-related landscapes

Land-use context	Land cover / landscape structure	General FLR option	Description
Forest land and areas intended for the conservation or restoration of forest functions	Areas with insufficient forest vegetation	Afforestation and establishment of forest vegetation	Establishing forest vegetation where forest cover is absent or greatly reduced to restore protective, ecological, climate-related, productive and other forest functions.
Forest land and formerly forested or afforested areas	Areas suitable for natural or assisted regeneration	Natural and assisted forest regeneration	Supporting natural succession and regeneration where ecological conditions and seed sources allow, with targeted measures such as enrichment planting, protection from grazing or fire prevention where needed.
Existing forests, forest plantations and degraded forest structures	Degraded, unstable, fragmented or low-vitality forest stands	Silvicultural, rehabilitation and adaptive forest management measures	Improving existing forests through thinning, coppice conversion, stand enrichment, fire and grazing protection, and other measures that improve structure, stability, vitality and ecological functionality.
Agricultural land and actively used rural mosaics	Agricultural mosaics with potential for woody elements	Agroforestry, shelterbelts and field-edge vegetation	Establishing and managing woody vegetation in agricultural landscapes to support production, soil fertility, microclimate regulation, water retention and ecological connectivity.
Abandoned or extensively used agricultural land	Meadows, pastures, shrub formations and successional vegetation	Mosaic restoration of open habitats and woody vegetation	Managing abandoned or extensively used land through a balanced combination of grassland, pasture, shrub and woody elements, with benefits for biodiversity, soil stability and adaptive land use.
Protective zones, steep slopes, riparian areas, erosion-prone areas and buffers	Land with strong protective, hydrological or anti-erosion functions	Protective vegetation and forests with protective functions	Establishing and improving woody and forest vegetation on slopes, along watercourses, in erosion and flood-prone areas and in buffer zones to stabilise soil, regulate water regimes and protect settlements and infrastructure.
Fragmented habitats, ecological corridors and green infrastructure networks	Disconnected forest, riparian, wetland, grassland and agroforestry elements	Strengthening ecological connectivity and green infrastructure	Restoring ecological links between forest and forest-related habitats through corridors, stepping-stone elements, riparian vegetation, shelterbelts and other green infrastructure elements.

The value of an individual intervention does not depend only on its technical success, but on its contribution to the functionality, connectivity and resilience of the landscape as a whole. FLR options should therefore not be selected only according to land type or form of degradation, but according to the role that a measure can play in achieving restoration objectives at the landscape level.

In this way, the WB6 landscape-based FLR approach links ecosystem restoration principles with practical needs for planning, management and spatial development. It allows the global concept of FLR to be adapted to the European and regional context, drawing on landscape character, landscape ecology, green infrastructure,

participatory governance and long-term resilience. **The WB6 landscape-based FLR approach should connect restoration, planning, governance and long-term landscape resilience.**

4. Methodology

The **WB6 FLRP** was developed between January and June 2026 through a combined methodological approach based on document analysis and stakeholder consultation.

The **document analysis** covered relevant global, EU, regional and domestic-level policy instruments across the WB6. At the global level, the Rio Conventions, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, served as the overarching policy framework. Their objectives, targets, implementation arrangements, monitoring requirements and reporting mechanisms were reviewed in relation to their relevance for FLR. The Paris Agreement, the KM-GBF and the LDN framework were considered the main operational frameworks under the three Rio Conventions.

At the EU level, the analysis was primarily based on the European Landscape Convention, the Nature Restoration Regulation, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy, together with other relevant regulatory and policy acts related to climate adaptation, forests, biodiversity, soil, water and DRR. The regional policy framework was set by the Sofia Declaration and the GAWB.

The domestic-level analysis included spatial plans, forestry strategies and programmes, biodiversity strategies and action plans, climate adaptation plans and programmes, DRR policies, soil-related instruments and water management frameworks.¹ These documents were analysed in terms of their objectives, targets, identified problems and opportunities, financing provisions and implementation mechanisms relevant to FLR.

The **spatial planning dimension of the plan builds on the ROAR**, developed as a prerequisite deliverable under GAWB Action 39. The ROAR provides the landscape character-based assessment that supports the identification of priority restoration landscapes and opportunity zones. Its approach focuses on landscapes shared among jurisdictions within the WB6, where ecological processes, forest systems, river basins, mountain areas and climate-related vulnerabilities extend beyond single administrative or sectoral planning systems. For this reason, the spatial focus of the WB6 FLRP follows the inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas identified in ROAR.

Priority forest landscapes for restoration were identified through the integration of multiple spatial datasets, grouped by three main criteria: ecological criteria (including existing forest cover and forest cover change, habitat fragmentation, and the presence of protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value), climate resilience criteria (including wildfire risk, torrential flood risk, and landslide susceptibility), and social criteria (including land-use change and anthropogenic pressures on forests).

Forest condition was assessed based on forest cover, forest loss, and forest degradation levels using satellite data from publicly available global datasets, i.e. Forest Loss and the Forest Landscape Integrity Index (FLII). These datasets were individually overlaid with spatial information on protected areas, areas important for the conservation of key species (large carnivores) and habitats, flood-prone areas, landslide-prone areas, and areas susceptible to wildfires.

The overlap analysis provided information on locations where FLR is needed due to degraded forest conditions: a) within biodiversity-important areas, b) in flood-risk zones, c) in landslide-prone areas, and d) in areas affected by wildfire risk. As a result, a total of 725,913 ha was identified as a priority for FLR within the inter-jurisdictional zone, which is defined as a 50 km wide zone extending along the inter-jurisdictional lines across the WB6.

The **stakeholder engagement** process started in January 2026, in parallel with the document analysis, and included both online and in-person consultations. The first stage consisted of White Paper consultative meetings held in January and February with members of the BDTF and its Thematic Groups for Biodiversity Conservation (TG-BC) and Ecosystem Restoration (TG-ER).

In March 2026, representatives of governmental institutions and public enterprises responsible for biodiversity conservation, forestry, spatial planning, agriculture, natural resource management and DRR from all WB6 were engaged through online and in-person consultations on the White Paper. Based on these inputs and the findings of the document analysis, a preliminary structure of the plan was developed during March and April. This included the problem and opportunity analysis, regional vision and mission, and a set of strategic goals.

¹ The complete list of analysed documents is provided in Annex C.

The preliminary structure was then consulted with stakeholders from the **NbS Community of Practice (NbS CoP)**, a regional network of professionals, researchers, community representatives and CSOs focused on NbS across the WB6. Following this stage, the draft WB6 FLRP was prepared, presented to the members of the BDTF in Tirana, and shared with stakeholders for a validation round of consultations in May 2026. Additional consultation was carried out with a network of more than 170 CSOs across the WB6.

The consultation period was concluded on 5 June 2026, with more than 120 direct participants providing inputs to the WB6 FLRP.

Limitations

The main limitation was the **short timeframe** for preparing a regional forest landscape restoration plan of this scope and complexity. A more comprehensive process would normally require a longer analytical and consultation period, particularly given the diversity of policy systems, institutional arrangements, planning traditions and ecological conditions across the WB6.

The ROAR was developed in parallel to the development of the WB6 FLRP. This was a limitation for the WB6 FLRP, since the revised GAWB Action Plan envisaged that WB6 FLRP should be informed by the ROAR findings. The ROAR was originally planned to be developed prior to the WB6 FLRP and was designed to identify priority forest landscapes for restoration and provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of forest landscapes across the region, including biodiversity aspects, land use, areas prone to disasters, as well as policy aspect (international commitments and gaps in relevant legislation) and financial estimations. Changed timing of the ROAR development was due to external factors; however, as a result, the WB6 FLRP could not benefit from the ROAR findings during its initial development stages, but rather during the final stages of the process. Additionally, policy analyses and financial estimations were undertaken as part of the WB6 FLRP development process, while the ROAR focused primarily on the identification and spatial analysis of priority restoration areas.

A further limitation concerns **stakeholder participation**. Although the consultation process included a broad range of institutions, public enterprises, expert organisations, academic institutions, civil society representatives and regional networks, not all relevant domestic-level institutions were able to participate. The consultative process would have benefited from stronger involvement of the actors from spatial planning, financial and private sectors.

Finally, the concept of **landscape**, as defined by the European Landscape Convention, is not yet consistently recognised or operationalised in the spatial planning, forestry and nature protection systems across the WB6 jurisdictions. This created some differences in interpretation during the consultation process, particularly in relation to landscape character, landscape sensitivity and landscape-scale planning in FLR.

5. Global and EU FLR Framework Analysis

FLR is shaped by a broad international and European policy framework that links ecosystem recovery with climate action, biodiversity conservation, LDN, water management, DRR and sustainable development. This chapter reviews the main global and EU instruments relevant to the WB6 FLRP, focusing on their implications for restoration objectives, implementation mechanisms, financing opportunities and monitoring requirements.

The analysis does not treat FLR as a separate policy field, but as an integrated approach that can connect existing commitments across sectors and scales. At the global level, FLR is supported by the Rio Conventions, post-2015 operational frameworks, the 2030 Agenda and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. At the EU level, it is framed through landscape, biodiversity, forestry, climate, soil, water and disaster risk policies, with increasingly strong links to measurable targets, monitoring systems and financing mechanisms.

For the WB6 FLRP, the relevance of these frameworks is primarily practical. They provide the basis for defining restoration priorities, aligning them with international and EU policy expectations, structuring measurable targets and indicators, and identifying implementation and financing pathways that can be adapted to the policy systems of WB6.

5.1 Global policy framework for FLR

5.1.1 Rio Conventions

The three Rio Conventions provide the global foundation for linking FLR with climate change, biodiversity conservation and land degradation. Although they differ in mandate and implementation logic, they share an integrated understanding of ecosystems, land, water, forests and local development, making them directly relevant for landscape-scale restoration.

The *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) establishes the basis for treating forests and other ecosystems as part of the climate system and as sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases. It requires parties to promote the conservation and enhancement of sinks and reservoirs, such as biomass and forests, and to prepare domestic-level programmes that include mitigation and adaptation measures. For FLR, this creates a policy basis for restoration interventions that combine carbon sequestration, ecosystem adaptation, water regulation, soil protection and reduced vulnerability to climate-related risks. It also supports the use of measurable sink-related indicators and reporting arrangements that can link restoration outcomes to domestic-level climate commitments.

The CBD provides the biodiversity basis for FLR. Its objectives (conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits) support restoration approaches that enhance ecological integrity while maintaining benefits for local communities. The CBD explicitly recognises rehabilitation and restoration of degraded ecosystems as part of *in situ* conservation and requires domestic-level biodiversity strategies, plans or programmes, as well as reporting on measures taken and their effectiveness. For the WB6 FLRP, this supports embedding restoration goals and indicators into domestic-level planning processes and positioning restoration as a measurable contribution to biodiversity commitments.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is particularly relevant for degraded land, drought resilience, soil protection and sustainable land management. It promotes long-term integrated strategies for the rehabilitation, conservation and sustainable management of land and water resources, with strong emphasis on local participation and domestic-level Action Programmes. Its LDN logic is directly applicable to FLR as it combines prevention, sustainable management and restoration of degraded land. For the WB6, the UNCCD is also relevant through its regional implementation logic for Central and Eastern Europe, where land degradation, drought, erosion, wildfire risk and institutional capacity gaps are important restoration concerns.

Across the Rio Conventions, financing is linked to the delivery of agreed global environmental benefits, domestic-level implementation capacity and measurable outcomes. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) remains a key shared mechanism, while the broader financing logic encourages additional resources, incremental-cost reasoning, co-financing, grants and concessional support. **For the WB6 FLRP, this means that restoration measures should be designed as multi-benefit interventions that are technically mature, monitorable and able to combine climate, biodiversity, land-resilience and local development benefits.** This is especially important for preparing fundable restoration pipelines that can connect international support

with domestic budgets, local delivery actors and long-term stewardship.

Implications for FLR: The Rio Conventions provide the global policy basis for linking WB6 FLR priorities with climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity recovery, LDN, drought resilience and local participation. They also support a financing logic in which restoration is framed as a measurable, multi-benefit investment, rather than a narrow ecological intervention.

5.1.2 Operational frameworks under the Rio Conventions

The post-2015 operational frameworks translate the broad mandates of the Rio Conventions into more concrete targets, implementation cycles and monitoring expectations. For FLR, the most relevant are the *Paris Agreement*, the *KM-GBF* and the LDN target-setting framework.

The *Paris Agreement* provides the main climate-policy pathway for linking FLR with domestic-level determined contributions, long-term mitigation, adaptation and transparency requirements. Its relevance lies in the recognition of the need to conserve and enhance sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases, including forests, and in the long-term aim of balancing anthropogenic emissions with removals by sinks in the second half of the 21st century. Through domestic-level determined contributions and the enhanced transparency framework, the Paris Agreement creates a structure within which restoration measures can be reported as contributions to mitigation and adaptation. It also strengthens the case for climate-finance readiness, provided that restoration actions have clear baselines, measurable outcomes and credible monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) arrangements.

The *KM-GBF* gives FLR clear biodiversity benchmarks to 2030 and 2050. It emphasises ecosystem integrity, connectivity and resilience and makes restoration ambition measurable through Target 2, which calls for at least 30 per cent of degraded terrestrial, inland water, marine and coastal ecosystems to be under effective restoration by 2030. Its monitoring framework and headline indicators provide a useful reference for structuring FLR targets, milestones and performance tracking. For the WB6 FLRP, this is important because it helps translate broad restoration ambition into measurable targets and supports alignment with biodiversity reporting and resource mobilisation expectations.

The LDN framework provides a practical implementation hierarchy for FLR: avoiding degradation, reducing degradation where it cannot be fully avoided, and reversing degradation where it has already occurred. Its core indicators, land cover, land productivity and soil organic carbon, offer an established basis for assessing LDN status and monitoring land-condition outcomes. In WB6 that participated in the UNCCD LDN Target Setting Programme, domestic-level established voluntary LDN targets should be used as important spatial and policy anchors for identifying priority restoration zones and aligning FLR interventions with already agreed domestic-level commitments. For WB6 FLRP, this framework is particularly useful for prioritising degraded areas, combining preventive and restorative measures, and demonstrating results in relation to soil function, productivity, vegetation cover and landscape resilience.

Together, these operational frameworks strengthen the investment logic of FLR. They encourage alignment with domestic-level implementation cycles, measurable indicators, safeguards, transparency and accounting systems that avoid double counting. They also support combining public finance, international grants, concessional finance and, where appropriate, private or blended finance around restoration portfolios that deliver climate, biodiversity and land-resilience benefits.

Implications for FLR: These frameworks support a WB6 FLRP that is target-oriented, monitorable and aligned with domestic-level implementation cycles. They provide a basis for defining 2030 milestones, structuring restoration portfolios through avoid–reduce–reverse logic, and preparing investment-ready measures with credible safeguards and reporting.

5.1.3 UN umbrella frameworks

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an overarching policy frame of sustainable development goals (SDG) that link ecosystem restoration with sustainable development, poverty reduction, food security, water, climate action and biodiversity. For FLR, the most direct reference is SDG Goal 15 – Life on Land, particularly its Target 15.3, which commits Parties to combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world by 2030. Target 15.b is also relevant as it calls for the mobilisation of significant resources from all sources to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives for conservation and reforestation. Also highly relevant is SDG 13 – Climate Action, which corresponds with the climate resilience dimension of the WB6 FLRP. Its Target 13.1 calls for

strengthening adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards, Target 13.2 for integrating climate measures into domestic-level policies and planning, and Target 13.3 for building institutional capacity for climate adaptation. All of these aspects are directly delivered through the WB6 FLRP by embedding ecosystem-based approaches into forestry, spatial planning, and DRR frameworks across WB6. Further, SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation strengthens this frame through its Targets 6.5 and 6.6. Target 6.5 calls for integrated water resources management at all levels including through inter-jurisdictional cooperation, directly reflected in the WB6 FLRP's basin-scale restoration of river landscapes shared among jurisdictions. Target 6.6 mandates the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems (mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers and lakes) which the FLRP operationalises through watershed, riparian, and floodplain restoration interventions. Finally, SDG 17 anchors the governance and financing logic: Target 17.9 supports capacity-building in developing economies, Target 17.14 calls for enhanced policy coherence across sectors, and Target 17.16 promotes multi-stakeholder partnerships with diversified financing. For the WB6 FLRP, the Agenda supports integration of restoration priorities into domestic and local planning, budgeting and reporting cycles, rather than treating restoration as a project-based activity.

The *United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration* (2021–2030) reinforces this implementation logic by framing restoration as a global mobilisation effort to prevent, halt and reverse ecosystem degradation. It does not create a single funding mechanism, but instead strengthens the delivery environment through guidance, partnerships, capacity building, monitoring support and coordination with the Rio Conventions. Its value for the WB6 FLRP lies in supporting restoration as a programme of coordinated action involving public institutions, local communities, land managers, expert organisations and financing partners.

In financing terms, these umbrella frameworks support a shift from isolated project funding towards programme-based restoration, incentive realignment and investment readiness. They encourage public budgets, international support, payments for ecosystem services, blended finance and other instruments to be linked to measurable outcomes, safeguards and long-term management responsibilities.

Implications for FLR: The 2030 Agenda and the UN Decade position the WB6 FLRP within a recognised global delivery horizon to 2030. **They support integration of FLR into planning, budgeting and reporting systems, and reinforce the need to design restoration as a coordinated, finance-ready and accountable programme.**

5.2 EU policy framework for landscape-based restoration

The EU policy framework provides the main reference point for translating global FLR principles into planning, implementation and monitoring systems relevant to the WB6. Unlike the global framework, which establishes broad commitments and targets, the EU framework offers an operational policy environment. It links landscape, biodiversity, forests, climate, soil, water and DRR through legal obligations, strategic policy objectives, planning procedures, funding mechanisms and reporting systems.

For the WB6 FLRP, the EU framework is important for two reasons. First, it provides a policy approximation context for WB6, especially where restoration, NbS, green infrastructure, climate adaptation and biodiversity objectives are increasingly aligned with EU expectations. Second, it offers a practical implementation logic: restoration should be embedded in planning procedures, designed at landscape and catchment scale, linked to measurable targets and supported by monitoring, reporting and financing mechanisms.

The main value of the EU framework for FLR is that it connects restoration ambition with planning procedures, sectoral delivery systems and measurable accountability. This is particularly relevant for the WB6 FLRP, which needs to translate broad restoration principles into implementable priorities across different policy systems, land-use contexts and governance arrangements.

5.2.1 Landscape character and landscape quality objectives in planning

The framework of landscape character and landscape quality objectives provides the spatial and procedural basis for FLR, supported by green infrastructure, strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and environmental impact assessment (EIA) as planning and assessment tools. It links landscape character, landscape quality objectives, ecological connectivity, green infrastructure and environmental assessment into a common planning logic. For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster is particularly important because it helps define restoration not only as ecological repair, but as a spatially grounded process that improves landscape structure, functionality and resilience.

The *European Landscape Convention* establishes the most explicit landscape-based foundation. It recognises

landscape as an area perceived by people, whose character results from the action and interaction of natural and human factors, and applies to all landscapes, including urban, peri-urban, rural, everyday, outstanding, and degraded landscapes. This is directly relevant for FLR because it treats landscape as a continuous territorial framework rather than a set of isolated protected areas. The Convention requires landscape to be recognised by law, integrated into spatial planning and relevant sectoral policies, and addressed through identification, assessment and the definition of landscape quality objectives. Its emphasis on public participation and multi-level governance also supports the FLR principle that restoration must be socially grounded and linked to local values, knowledge and expectations.

The *EU Green Infrastructure Strategy* translates this landscape logic into a network-based planning approach. It frames green infrastructure as a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas designed to deliver ecosystem services, strengthen ecological connectivity and enhance ecosystem functionality. For FLR, this is highly relevant because forests, riparian corridors, wetlands, agricultural mosaics, protected areas and urban green spaces can be understood as parts of a wider functional network. The Strategy does not create binding restoration targets, but instead provides a strong spatial planning framework for identifying core areas, corridors and multifunctional landscapes, and for integrating restoration priorities into spatial plans, river basin plans, Natura 2000 management, urban development and climate adaptation strategies.

The *SEA Directive* provides an upstream procedural entry point for FLR. It requires environmental assessment of plans and programmes likely to have significant effects on the environment, including those related to spatial planning, land use, agriculture, forestry, water management, transport, energy and regional development. Its relevance lies in the fact that it operates at the level where development patterns, land-use priorities and sectoral strategies are defined. Through assessment of alternatives, cumulative effects, landscape, biodiversity, soil, water, climate and human health, SEA can be used to embed FLR priorities into plans before individual projects are approved. For the WB6 FLRP, this supports the integration of restoration, green infrastructure and ecological connectivity into spatial and sectoral planning processes.

The *EIA Directive* operates at the project level, providing a safeguard mechanism for FLR outcomes. It requires assessment of projects likely to have significant environmental effects, including effects on biodiversity, land and soil, water, climate, landscape and cultural heritage. The 2014 amendment strengthened attention to climate change, biodiversity, disaster risks, resource efficiency and ecosystem resilience. For FLR, the Directive is important because it can help prevent project pipelines from undermining restoration priorities through fragmentation, loss of connectivity, degradation of habitats or damage to landscape character. It also supports mitigation and, where relevant, compensation measures that can be aligned with broader restoration and green infrastructure objectives.

Together, these instruments create a strong landscape-planning basis for FLR. The European Landscape Convention provides the conceptual and participatory foundation; the Green Infrastructure Strategy provides the network and multifunctionality logic; and SEA/EIA provide procedural mechanisms for integrating and safeguarding restoration objectives in plans, programmes and projects. **For the WB6 FLRP, this means that FLR priorities should be embedded upstream in spatial and sectoral planning, while project-level decisions should be assessed against their effects on landscape character, ecological connectivity and long-term restoration outcomes.**

Implications for FLR: This cluster supports the WB6 FLRP by framing restoration through landscape character, landscape quality objectives and planning-integrated procedures. It provides the basis for using landscape character, green infrastructure networks, SEA and EIA to identify restoration priorities, reduce fragmentation risks, strengthen connectivity and align sectoral investments with landscape-scale resilience.

5.2.2 Forest policy and sustainable forest management

The EU forest policy framework positions forests as multifunctional socio-ecological systems that are central to biodiversity conservation, climate mitigation and adaptation, rural livelihoods, risk reduction and the bioeconomy. For FLR, its relevance lies in the fact that restoration is not limited to strictly protected or highly degraded areas, but is also linked to the way forest landscapes are managed, regenerated, diversified and connected over time.

The *New EU Forest Strategy for 2030* provides the main strategic framework for this approach. It is closely linked to the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the climate-neutrality objective. Although it is not a binding legal instrument in the same way as a directive or regulation, it sets a clear policy direction for protecting, restoring and sustainably managing forests across the EU. It promotes strict protection

of remaining primary and old-growth forests, restoration of degraded forest ecosystems, closer-to-nature forestry, structural diversity, natural regeneration where appropriate, and climate-resilient forest management.

For FLR, the Strategy is important because it treats forests as parts of wider landscapes rather than isolated stands. It recognises their role in ecological connectivity, carbon storage, soil protection, water regulation, biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation. It also links forest restoration with rural development and landowner engagement, which is particularly relevant for WB6 where forest ownership, management capacities and rural socio-economic conditions vary considerably.

The Strategy also introduces a delivery and financing logic relevant to FLR. It supports the use of public and private payment schemes for ecosystem services, carbon farming and blended finance, where these can reward restoration-oriented and resilience-enhancing forest management. This is important for moving beyond one-off planting or rehabilitation projects towards longer-term restoration portfolios that include stewardship, monitoring and adaptive management. At the same time, the Strategy reinforces the need for improved forest information systems, indicators and monitoring, including the use of digital tools and Earth observation.

Implications for FLR: The EU forest policy framework supports positioning FLR as a practical route for resilience-focused sustainable forest management. For the WB6 FLRP, this means that forest restoration should combine ecological recovery, climate adaptation, biodiversity value, rural development and measurable long-term management outcomes.

5.2.3 Climate policy, natural sinks and land-sector accounting

The EU climate policy framework provides the basis for treating FLR as a measurable contribution to climate mitigation and adaptation. Its main relevance is not that it prescribes landscape restoration directly, but that it creates binding climate objectives, accounting rules and reporting expectations that increase the policy value of land-based mitigation, natural sinks and climate-resilient land management.

The *European Climate Law* (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119) establishes the legally binding objective of EU climate neutrality by 2050 and an interim target of at least a 55 per cent net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. It is domestic-wide in scope and does not introduce a specific landscape planning framework. However, it recognises the importance of natural sinks, adaptation capacity, biodiversity co-benefits, and NbS. For FLR, this creates a climate-policy justification for restoration measures that enhance carbon sequestration, reduce vulnerability to climate risks and strengthen ecosystem resilience.

The *Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry Regulation* (Regulation (EU) 2018/841) provides the more direct accounting framework for land-based climate action. It requires emissions and removals from land use, land-use change and forestry to be accounted for through defined land categories, including forests, cropland, grassland, wetlands and settlements. This makes forest management, soil carbon conservation, wetland restoration and land-use change directly relevant to climate performance. For FLR, the Regulation is important because it translates restoration-relevant land management into measurable removals by sinks and avoided emissions.

The climate framework also strengthens the financing logic for FLR. Restoration measures that can demonstrate carbon sequestration, avoided emissions, adaptation benefits and robust monitoring are more likely to be structured as performance-based or climate-aligned investments. However, climate accounting alone is not sufficient to guide spatial prioritisation. **For the WB6 FLRP, climate-related restoration measures need to be combined with landscape character, biodiversity, soil, water and connectivity criteria, so that carbon outcomes do not become disconnected from wider ecosystem functionality.**

Implications for FLR: This cluster supports the WB6 FLRP by framing FLR as a measurable contribution to mitigation through natural sinks and removals, and to adaptation through ecosystem resilience. It also indicates that climate-oriented restoration must be spatially prioritised through complementary landscape, biodiversity, soil and water frameworks.

5.2.4 Biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration

The EU biodiversity and restoration framework provides the strongest legal and policy basis for FLR within the European context. It combines conservation safeguards, ecological network logic, strategic biodiversity targets and, most recently, binding restoration obligations. For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster is essential because it links restoration with ecological integrity, habitat condition, species needs, connectivity, monitoring and domestic-level restoration planning.

The *Habitats Directive* (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and the *Birds Directive* (Directive 2009/147/EC) form the legal foundation of EU nature conservation policy. Together, they establish the Natura 2000 network and require EU Member States to maintain or restore habitats and species of Community interest to favourable conservation status. Their relevance for FLR lies not only in protected area management, but also in the wider ecological logic they introduce: site integrity, prevention of deterioration, species protection, habitat connectivity and biogeographical coherence. The Habitats Directive is particularly important through Article 6, which requires appropriate assessment of plans or projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites. This creates a strong safeguard mechanism that can prevent restoration priorities from being undermined by incompatible development or land-use decisions.

The *EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030* provides the strategic policy framework for reversing biodiversity loss and placing ecosystems on a recovery pathway by 2050. It sets major 2030 ambitions, including protecting at least 30 per cent of EU land and sea, placing at least 10 per cent under strict protection, protecting primary and old-growth forests, restoring degraded ecosystems, restoring free-flowing rivers, reducing pesticide use and nutrient losses, and planting three billion trees. For FLR, the Strategy is important because it connects biodiversity recovery with climate adaptation, natural capital, ecosystem services, sustainable land use and the wider European Green Deal agenda. It also prepared the ground for a binding restoration regime.

The Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats is a binding international legal instrument adopted under the Council of Europe in Bern in 1979 (entering into force in 1982). Its core objectives are to conserve wild flora, fauna, and natural habitats, and particularly species and ecosystems requiring multilateral cooperation. The Convention promotes cooperation between signatories, and gives special attention to endangered and migratory species. All WB6 have ratified or acceded to the Convention. Its relevance to the WB6 FLRP is direct: restoring native forest ecosystems, riparian zones, and ecological corridors under the WB6 FLRP supports the conservation status of strictly protected species listed in the Convention's Appendices II and III, while the inter-jurisdictional logic of the WB6 FLRP mirrors the Convention's own emphasis on transboundary cooperation for species and habitat conservation.

The *Nature Restoration Regulation* is the central EU instrument for operationalising restoration. It establishes a legally binding framework for restoring degraded ecosystems across the EU, with the objective of supporting biodiversity recovery, climate resilience, climate neutrality and wider societal benefits. It requires restoration measures to be put in place on at least 20 per cent of EU land and sea areas by 2030, and across all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. Its scope extends beyond protected areas and includes forests, agricultural land, wetlands and peatlands, rivers, urban ecosystems, marine areas and other degraded ecosystems.

For the WB6 FLRP, the Nature Restoration Regulation is particularly important because it introduces a planning and implementation model that is directly relevant to restoration at landscape scale. EU Member States are required to prepare domestic-level restoration plans, identify degraded ecosystems, define restoration measures, set measurable targets and establish monitoring systems. This creates a policy logic that can inform the WB6 FLRP even where WB6 are not yet directly bound by EU restoration obligations. It supports the preparation of restoration portfolios that are spatially explicit, target-based, monitored and linked to cross-sector governance.

The Law also reinforces the multi-benefit logic of FLR. Restoration is linked not only to biodiversity, but also to carbon sequestration, flood and drought mitigation, soil health, pollination, food security, climate adaptation and human well-being. **This is highly relevant for the WB6 FLRP because it supports restoration measures that combine ecological recovery with resilience, risk reduction and socio-economic benefits, rather than treating biodiversity restoration as a narrow conservation task.**

From an implementation perspective, this cluster strengthens the accountability of restoration. Conservation status reporting, Natura 2000 safeguards, biodiversity indicators and the monitoring requirements of the Nature Restoration Regulation provide a basis for defining baselines, measurable targets, milestones and reporting systems. For WB6, these instruments also provide an important reference for approximation with EU biodiversity and restoration policy, especially in relation to protected area management, ecological networks, degraded ecosystems and cross-sector delivery.

Implications for FLR: This cluster provides the core biodiversity and restoration basis for the WB6 FLRP. It supports the use of ecological integrity, habitat condition, connectivity, protected area safeguards and measurable restoration targets as key elements of FLR planning, while the Nature Restoration Regulation offers the most direct model for structuring restoration portfolios, governance arrangements and monitoring obligations.

5.2.5 Soil, drought and land resilience

The EU soil and land resilience framework is directly relevant for FLR because soil condition is one of the main foundations of ecosystem recovery, climate adaptation, drought resilience and long-term landscape functionality. This cluster links soil health with LDN, soil organic carbon, erosion control, sustainable land management, biodiversity recovery and the reduction of land take. For the WB6 FLRP, it provides a basis for treating soil not only as a sectoral resource, but as a core indicator of restoration performance.

The *EU Soil Strategy for 2030* sets a long-term vision for all EU soils to be healthy and resilient by 2050, with important interim ambitions by 2030. It explicitly links soil health with climate neutrality, climate adaptation, biodiversity, food security, water regulation and human well-being. The Strategy promotes combating desertification, restoring degraded land and achieving LDN, while also addressing soil organic carbon, erosion, sealing, contamination and soil biodiversity. It supports sustainable land management practices, including agroecology, agroforestry, protection of soil carbon and peatland restoration, and encourages the use of NbS and the land take hierarchy.

The *Soil Monitoring Law* (Directive (EU) 2025/2360) strengthens this logic by establishing a more harmonised framework for monitoring and assessing soil health across the EU. Its relevance for FLR lies in the emphasis on common indicators, regular monitoring, improved comparability of soil data and stronger links between soil condition, land management and resilience. Although it does not focus specifically on FLR, it supports restoration planning by ensuring that soil organic carbon, soil biodiversity, erosion, contamination, land take and wider soil functions are visible in policy and monitoring systems.

For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster is important because many restoration priorities are likely to be linked to erosion-prone land, drought-affected areas, degraded forest and agricultural mosaics, river catchments and areas with declining soil functions. **Soil indicators, especially soil organic carbon, erosion risk, land cover change and land productivity, should therefore be treated as core components of FLR monitoring and prioritisation.** This also supports a stronger link between FLR, LDN, climate adaptation, and sustainable rural land management.

Implications for FLR: This cluster supports the integration of soil health, drought resilience and LDN into the WB6 FLRP. It provides the basis for using soil organic carbon, erosion, land productivity, land cover and land take indicators to prioritise interventions, monitor restoration outcomes, and support adaptive management.

5.2.6 Water and flood risk management

The EU water and flood risk framework provides a basin-scale planning and monitoring basis for FLR. It is highly relevant because many restoration measures depend on the functional relationships between forests, agricultural land, riparian zones, wetlands, floodplains, erosion processes and water bodies. For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster considers river basins and catchments as operational landscapes for restoration, especially where interventions can improve hydrological regulation, reduce flood and drought risks, reconnect river corridors, and enhance natural retention.

The *Water Framework Directive* (WFD) establishes an integrated framework for protecting and improving the status of surface waters, groundwater and water-dependent terrestrial ecosystems. Its river basin approach is directly aligned with landscape-scale restoration because it treats water systems as functional hydrological units rather than administrative boundaries. The Directive requires river basin management planning, programmes of measures and systematic monitoring of ecological and chemical status. For FLR, this creates an operational entry point for restoration measures that improve riparian structure, wetlands, river connectivity, erosion control, water retention and the ecological condition of water bodies.

The *Floods Directive* complements this by establishing a framework for assessing and managing flood risks. It requires flood hazard and risk mapping and flood risk management plans, with attention to prevention, protection and preparedness. Its relevance for FLR lies in the recognition that land use, floodplain condition, upstream retention and landscape structure influence flood risk. Restoration measures such as reconnecting floodplains, improving riparian vegetation, restoring wetlands, increasing natural water retention and reducing erosion in upstream catchments can therefore contribute to both ecosystem recovery and risk reduction.

Together, these directives provide one of the clearest spatial frameworks for FLR implementation, because river basins naturally connect ecological, hydrological and land-use processes across jurisdictions and sectors. **For the WB6 FLRP, basin-scale planning is especially important where restoration needs to address**

rivers, catchments, flood-prone areas, drought-sensitive landscapes and degraded riparian systems in the inter-jurisdictional zone.

Implications for FLR: This cluster supports the WB6 FLRP by providing a river basin and catchment-scale framework for restoration. It enables FLR measures to be linked with water status improvement, wetland and riparian restoration, natural water retention, erosion control, flood risk reduction, and cross-jurisdictional coordination.

5.2.7 Civil protection and disaster risk reduction

The EU civil protection and DRR framework is relevant for FLR because restoration can contribute to prevention, preparedness and territorial resilience, particularly in landscapes exposed to wildfire, floods, drought, erosion and other climate-related hazards. Unlike biodiversity, water or soil policies, this framework does not create direct restoration obligations or spatial restoration targets. Its value lies in strengthening the risk-informed planning context in which restoration can be understood as a preventive and resilience-building measure.

The *Union Civil Protection Mechanism* provides the main EU framework for cooperation on disaster prevention, preparedness and response. Its amended framework places stronger emphasis on risk assessment, risk management capability assessment, preparedness planning, operational coordination, shared response capacities and knowledge support. EU Member States are required to report summaries of relevant aspects of domestic-level risk assessments and risk management capability assessments, including key and inter-jurisdictional risks. For FLR, this creates an entry point for linking land-based restoration with wider risk reduction priorities.

From the perspective of the WB6 FLRP, this is particularly relevant for forest and rural landscapes where degradation increases exposure to wildfire, erosion, flash floods, drought impacts and loss of ecosystem buffering capacity. Restoration measures such as improving forest structure and diversity, restoring riparian vegetation, reducing erosion, increasing natural water retention and strengthening ecological connectivity can support risk reduction when they are planned as part of broader territorial resilience strategies.

The framework is also important because many relevant risks in the WB6 are inter-jurisdictional or shared across functional landscapes and river basins. **For the WB6 FLRP, DRR provides a practical argument for treating restoration as preventive infrastructure, not only as ecological recovery.** This strengthens the case for linking FLR with civil protection, climate adaptation, water management, forestry, spatial planning and local preparedness systems.

Implications for FLR: This cluster supports the WB6 FLRP by framing restoration as part of prevention and resilience-building in landscapes exposed to wildfire, flood, drought and erosion risks. It also reinforces the need for cross-jurisdictional coordination, risk-informed prioritisation and links between FLR measures and disaster risk management systems.

5.3 Cross-cutting implications for the WB6 FLRP

The global and EU framework confirms that FLR cannot be treated as a single-sector intervention. It is positioned at the intersection of landscape planning, forest policy, biodiversity conservation, climate action, soil and land resilience, water management and DRR. Across these policy fields, restoration is increasingly linked to measurable targets, monitoring systems, financing logic and cross-sector implementation.

For the WB6 FLRP, this has two main implications. First, restoration priorities should be defined through a landscape-based approach that connects ecological condition, land degradation, climate exposure, water regulation, risk reduction and socio-economic needs. Second, FLR implementation should be embedded in existing planning and policy systems, rather than developed as a parallel or isolated framework.

The reviewed frameworks also show a gradual shift from general environmental commitments towards more operational restoration logic. The Rio Conventions and post-2015 global frameworks provide the broad policy basis for climate, biodiversity and land-degradation commitments. EU instruments go further by linking these commitments with legal safeguards, planning procedures, sectoral policy directions, measurable targets and reporting obligations. This is particularly visible in the Nature Restoration Regulation, accounting of land use, land-use change and forestry sectors, river basin planning, soil monitoring and environmental assessment procedures.

The key message for the WB6 FLRP is that restoration should be designed as a measurable, cross-sector

and landscape-scale programme, supported by planning instruments, monitoring systems and financing pathways. This provides the basis for translating global and EU policy expectations into a practical regional framework that can be adapted to the policy systems of WB6 and the implementation capacities of WB6 jurisdictions. Table 2 summarises this logic by policy cluster, following the analytical structure used in the WB6 policy framework review.

Table 2. Cross-cutting implications of the global and EU policy frameworks for the WB6 FLRP

Policy cluster	Main global and EU framework logic	Implications for the WB6 FLRP
Landscape character and landscape quality objectives in planning	Landscape is treated as a spatial and public-interest framework, supported by LCA, landscape quality objectives, green infrastructure networks, SEA and EIA procedures.	Use landscape character and landscape quality objectives as the spatial basis for identifying FLR priorities, while using green infrastructure, SEA and EIA to embed restoration into spatial and sectoral plans and safeguard outcomes at project level.
Forestry and sustainable forest management	Forests are framed as multifunctional socio-ecological systems that support biodiversity, climate regulation, soil and water protection, rural livelihoods and risk reduction.	Position FLR as an operational route for resilience-focused sustainable forest management, combining ecological recovery, closer-to-nature approaches, forest connectivity, ecosystem services and long-term stewardship.
Climate change mitigation and adaptation	Climate frameworks link land use, forests and ecosystems with natural sinks, removals, adaptation capacity, resilience and reporting under climate commitments.	Treat FLR as a measurable contribution to mitigation and adaptation, while ensuring that carbon-related objectives are integrated with biodiversity, soil, water, landscape character and connectivity criteria.
Biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration	Biodiversity policy combines protected-area safeguards, ecological network logic, restoration targets and domestic-level restoration planning, with increasing emphasis on ecosystem condition and connectivity.	Use ecological integrity, habitat condition, connectivity, protected-area safeguards and restoration targets as key elements for defining FLR goals, milestones, indicators and governance arrangements.
Soil, drought and land degradation	Soil and land frameworks link restoration with LDN, soil organic carbon, erosion control, drought resilience, land productivity and harmonised monitoring.	Integrate soil health and land degradation indicators into FLR prioritisation and monitoring, especially soil organic carbon, erosion risk, land cover change, land productivity and drought-sensitive landscapes.
Water management and flood risk reduction	Water and flood policies use river basins and catchments as functional planning units, linking ecological status, flood risk, wetlands, riparian systems and natural water retention.	Use basin-scale planning to connect FLR with riparian and wetland restoration, river connectivity, erosion control, natural retention, flood risk reduction and cross-jurisdictional coordination.
Civil protection and DRR	Disaster risk frameworks strengthen prevention, preparedness, risk assessment and inter-jurisdictional coordination for hazards such as wildfire, floods, drought and erosion.	Frame FLR as part of territorial resilience and preventive infrastructure, linking restoration measures with risk-informed planning, civil protection, climate adaptation and local preparedness systems.

Overall, these clusters provide the analytical structure for assessing how far WB6 policy frameworks already support FLR and where important gaps remain. They also define the main policy lenses used in the following chapter: whether existing planning, forestry, climate, biodiversity, soil, water and disaster risk frameworks in the WB6 provide sufficient foundations for restoration, or whether additional coordination, targeting, financing and monitoring mechanisms are needed.

5.4. Financing logic of the global and EU frameworks

Overview of the global and EU policy frameworks reveals not only a set of obligations relevant to FLR, but also a broadly convergent financing logic that helps clarify how restoration should be framed as an investment, how domestic and international roles are typically balanced, and which enabling conditions strongly shape access to finance. This section synthesises that logic and identifies its main implications for the WB6 FLRP.

5.4.1. The global financing logic

Across the three Rio Conventions and their operational frameworks, international environmental finance is strongly shaped by the principle of incremental cost: domestic public resources are generally expected to cover the baseline functions of governance, land management, and implementation, while international grants and concessional resources help finance the additional costs associated with globally beneficial environmental outcomes. This logic is most clearly institutionalised through the GEF, which serves as a financial mechanism for the CBD, UNCCD and UNFCCC. Other climate-finance mechanisms, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Adaptation Fund (AF), apply related but not identical criteria centred on climate rationale, impact, readiness, and results. In practice, operationalising this logic may require substantial domestic co-financing, which can be challenging for fiscally constrained administrations and can make baseline readiness an important condition for effective access to finance.

The post-2015 operational frameworks reinforce this financing logic in two ways. First, the Paris Agreement, KM-GBF, and LDN framework all strengthen the role of measurable outcomes, credible indicators, and reporting systems, making MRV a practical financing condition rather than a purely administrative task. Second, Agenda 2030 and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration encourage the integration of restoration into regular planning, budgeting, and development frameworks, while also reinforcing the importance of incentive reform and the progressive removal of policy and fiscal drivers that undermine restoration outcomes.

These frameworks do not provide open-ended allocations. In practice, access to finance is competitive and depends on ownership, institutional readiness, project quality, safeguards, and the capacity to demonstrate credible environmental and social results. For the WB6, this means that restoration finance must be approached not only as resource mobilisation, but also as a question of institutional preparation and delivery credibility.

5.4.2. EU financing logic

The EU framework adds a distinct layer of financing logic that is especially relevant to the WB6 in the context of accession. For EU Member States, the Nature Restoration Regulation establishes binding restoration targets, requires domestic-level restoration plans, and introduces systematic monitoring and reporting, thereby creating a more programmatic and investment-oriented framework for restoration delivery. For the WB6, the Regulation is not directly binding at this stage, but it is highly relevant as a benchmark for future approximation, a signal of the direction of the *acquis*, and an indicator of the type of restoration planning and evidence base that EU-aligned investment frameworks are increasingly likely to expect. However, the negotiation and adoption of the Regulation in the EU also illustrate that restoration targets are not only a technical matter, but also require early alignment across sectors such as forestry, water management, and agriculture, well before formal legal approximation takes place.

More broadly, the EU financing logic is shaped by horizontal principles that extend beyond a single legal instrument: the “do no significant harm” approach, the alignment of financial flows with low-emission and climate-resilient development, and the gradual reform of harmful subsidies and incentives. Taken together, these elements create a mainstreaming architecture in which **restoration is more likely to be financed when it is embedded in planning systems, sectoral programmes, and multi-year investment frameworks rather than treated as an isolated project.**

For WB6, accession therefore functions as an indirect but important financing driver. Progressive approximation with the environmental *acquis* generates investment needs that are increasingly reflected in Chapter 27 alignment priorities, in project preparation requirements, and in the strategic positioning of projects for Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III and related EU support. In this context, investments in spatial prioritisation, interoperable monitoring systems, restoration governance, and project preparation capacity should be treated not as secondary technical costs, but as core readiness investments that increase both accession-related credibility and access to restoration finance. Alongside the *acquis*-based framework, the Forest Europe process remains a useful complementary platform for policy alignment, exchange of practice, and confidence-building with EU and bilateral partners.

Implications for the FLR: Taken together, the global and EU frameworks suggest five main implications for the financing strategy of the WB6 FLRP.

1. **Structure FLR as a multi-benefit investment pipeline.** Restoration portfolios should be designed so that biodiversity, climate, land-degradation, water-management, and resilience outcomes can be demonstrated through a coherent intervention logic and a shared results framework, allowing different financing windows to be approached without duplicating project design effort.

2. **Treat MRV and project preparation as prior readiness investments.** Spatial prioritisation, harmonised indicators, interoperable monitoring systems, safeguards, and bankable technical documentation are not ancillary tasks; they are enabling investments that condition access to competitive global and EU-linked finance. This also suggests the need for early engagement of finance ministries so that these readiness-related components are fiscally recognised as enabling investments rather than secondary technical costs.
3. **Anchor the financing architecture in domestic ownership and programme budgeting.** International support is most likely to be effective when it complements, rather than substitutes domestic fiscal commitment, and when restoration is progressively embedded in public planning and expenditure frameworks instead of relying only on stand-alone projects. This points to the need for a gradual shift from fragmented sectoral budget structures towards results-based programme budgeting, together with better alignment of agricultural and energy incentives with landscape restoration objectives.
4. **Use the regional dimension as a financing asset while mitigating operational asymmetries.** Because the WB6 FLRP covers landscapes, river basins, and ecological corridors shared across jurisdictions, it can support financing propositions that are more difficult to develop at the jurisdiction level alone, including regional IPA instruments and selected multi-lateral project concepts under international environmental finance, provided that common priorities, governance arrangements, and indicators are in place. However, translating this potential into bankable pipelines requires effective multi-jurisdiction coordination mechanisms capable of addressing differences in institutional capacity, implementation timing, and data systems across WB6.
5. A cross-cutting implication is that **restoration finance should be designed with participation, fair distribution of benefits, and institutional accountability in mind.** The credibility of a financing strategy depends not only on technical and economic readiness, but also on whether the proposed interventions are socially grounded, safeguard-aware, and capable of generating durable public value.

6. Western Balkans Six policy framework analysis

6.1 Scope and analytical approach

The analysis of the WB6 policy framework examines the extent to which the existing strategic, planning and programming documents of the WB6 provide a basis for the development and implementation of FLR in the region. **The premise is that FLR cannot be based on the forestry sector alone**, but requires the connection of several policy areas that directly shape the condition, functions and future resilience of forest and forest-related landscapes.

The analysis therefore covers **seven thematic clusters** of particular relevance for FLR:

- 1) landscape character and landscape quality objectives in planning;
- 2) forestry and sustainable forest management;
- 3) climate action and adaptation;
- 4) biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration;
- 5) soil, drought and land resilience;
- 6) water and flood risk management; and
- 7) civil protection and disaster risk governance.

These clusters are not treated as separate sectors in a narrow sense. They are used as entry points through which existing documents recognise elements relevant to landscape restoration, ecological connectivity, climate resilience, soil and water protection, biodiversity conservation and risk management.

The analysis does not aim to present each document separately or to repeat domestic-level policies by each WB6. Its purpose is to identify common patterns, existing policy foundations and key gaps relevant to the preparation and implementation of the WB6 FLRP. Particular attention is given to whether the documents recognise degradation and restoration at the landscape level, whether spatial and institutional mechanisms for prioritisation are in place, whether measures are linked to monitoring and financing, and the extent to which sectoral policies can be connected within **a common framework for the long-term restoration of forest landscape functionality**.

In this sense, this chapter is not a review of domestic-level policy frameworks, but an interpretation of their relevance for FLR. It shows where elements already exist that can support the development of a regional landscape approach, and where structural constraints remain. These include misalignment of institutional responsibilities and weak operational coordination, insufficiently operationalised restoration objectives, a weak link between monitoring and decision-making, limited financial mechanisms and insufficient connection between spatial, forestry, climate, biodiversity, land, water and disaster risk governance policies.

The findings of this chapter provide a professional basis for the later synthesis of common policy patterns, the definition of strategic goals, the selection of indicators, the identification of institutional roles and the assessment of financing needs. In other words, the policy framework analysis shows what existing systems in the WB region already enable, what remains insufficiently developed, and what forms of regional coordination are needed for FLR in the WB6 to become an applicable, measurable and long-term sustainable process. The full list of the analysed policies is provided in Annex C.

6.2 Landscape character and landscape quality objectives in planning

The analysis of spatial planning documents shows that landscape is recognised to varying degrees in the WB6 as a public interest, a development resource, a cultural value and a framework for maintaining the quality of life. This provides an important basis for FLR, as it allows the restoration of forest and forest-related landscapes to be understood not only as a sectoral measure, but as part of a wider process of managing spatial development, ecological functions and landscape quality. However, in most documents this link is still not sufficiently developed as an operational landscape approach to landscape restoration.

Planning documents identify, relatively clearly, the main spatial pressures directly relevant to FLR. These include the fragmentation of natural and semi-natural habitats, infrastructure barriers, natural resource extraction, soil and water degradation, illegal and unplanned construction, urbanisation pressures, climate and disaster risks, and cumulative effects of land-use change over time. This diagnosis provides an important basis for defining future priority restoration areas. However, these problems are most often addressed through the logic of control, restriction or damage prevention, while **active landscape restoration remains far less developed**.

The main implementation gap is that planning systems rarely translate identified pressures into structured restoration programmes. Documents often recognise the need to conserve natural and cultural values, protect sensitive areas or improve ecological connectivity. They less often define where restoration should take place, which types of intervention should be prioritised, in what sequence they should be implemented, who is responsible for delivery, and how long-term maintenance of results should be secured. As a result, activities that can be interpreted as restoration often remain linked to individual projects, without cumulative effects at the landscape level.

A specific issue is the limited institutionalisation of landscape characterisation. Although landscape character and landscape quality objectives can provide a key basis for directing restoration, this approach is not yet consistently embedded in the planning systems of the region. In many cases, domestic-level guidelines, harmonised terminology, requirements for landscape character studies at appropriate levels, standardised methodology and adequate geospatial data are still missing. Without such an institutional framework, **landscape characterisation remains mainly an expert practice rather than a stable planning instrument.**

Similarly, territorial zoning of areas important for restoration is generally not sufficiently binding. Landscape sensitivity maps, areas important for improving ecosystem services, degraded areas and potential restoration zones appear occasionally in planning and technical documents, but are rarely formalised as a binding layer for selecting priorities and guiding the type of intervention. This limits the possibility of planning FLR on the basis of clearly defined landscape character types, functional units, connectivity objectives, degradation hotspots, and zones with restoration potential.

Meanwhile, there are important opportunities to strengthen FLR through existing planning instruments. The hierarchy of planning documents, the connection between strategic, regional and local planning, and the link between plans, conditions, permits and development control can provide an important channel for integrating restoration objectives into the existing system. Spatial plans for special purpose areas may be particularly important, as they allow complex spatial, ecological and infrastructure-related conflicts to be addressed through integrated packages of measures at the level of functional territorial units.

Green infrastructure stands out in this context as one of the most practical frameworks for connecting planning and restoration. It refers not only to individual green spaces, but to a functional system that connects forests, riparian vegetation, shelterbelts, wetlands, agroforestry elements, ecological corridors and other nature-based structures within the landscape. Through such a system, it is possible to spatially articulate the objectives of ecological connectivity, multifunctionality, climate adaptation, risk reduction and the improvement of ecosystem services. This allows restoration to be linked with urban and peri-urban pressures, the conservation of rural mosaics, the connection of protected areas and the restoration of degraded spaces, without the need to create a completely parallel governance system.

There is also significant potential to differentiate restoration measures according to landscape character types. In the most sensitive natural areas, priorities may include the conservation of ecological processes, rehabilitation of damaged habitats and strengthening of connectivity. In rural landscapes, the focus may be on maintaining character through land-use patterns, agroforestry elements, shelterbelts and restoration of degraded land. In peri-urban areas, priorities may include the restoration of degraded spaces, strengthening green infrastructure, and mitigation of development pressures. Such differentiation allows FLR to move beyond a uniform set of measures and become a planning response adapted to the character, condition and capacity of a specific landscape.

The success of this approach, however, depends on stronger monitoring, financing and governance responsibility. Existing systems often monitor land-use change, protection status or basic development indicators, but less frequently measure landscape restoration outcomes such as functionality, ecological resilience, ecosystem services and social benefits. Monitoring results are also rarely linked directly to the revision of priorities, reallocation of funds or adjustment of measures. Without a mechanism for learning and adjustment, restoration remains difficult to manage and weakly measurable.

For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster shows that existing planning frameworks already contain important elements upon which FLR can be built: recognition of spatial pressures, planning hierarchy, the possibility of defining special spatial regimes, the concept of green infrastructure, and growing awareness of the importance of landscape character. At the same time, the key challenge remains **the shift away from a protective and regulatory planning logic towards a restorative planning logic.** This means translating landscape character, landscape quality objectives, sensitivity, connectivity and degraded areas into clear spatial priorities, measures, responsibilities, financial mechanisms and a system for monitoring results.

6.3 Forestry and sustainable forest management

Forestry policies and programming documents in the WB6 are among the most important foundations for the development of FLR. In most, strategic documents, planning instruments and professional practices already recognise the key problems affecting forest ecosystems: stand degradation, coppice forest dominance, soil erosion, fire pressure, illegal logging, weak vitality of some forest complexes, and the need to improve the public-benefit functions of forests. This diagnosis shows that the forestry sector already provides a substantial part of the professional basis for the restoration of forest and forest-related landscapes.

However, **forest restoration is still most often considered within the sectoral framework of forestry**. Measures such as afforestation, conversion of degraded coppice forests, rehabilitation of damaged stands, fire protection and improvement of the protective functions of forests are often well recognised, but are not always linked to broader spatial and landscape objectives. As a result, forestry interventions may improve the condition of individual stands or forest areas, while their contribution to ecological connectivity, watershed stability, risk reduction, green infrastructure and restoration of landscape functionality remains insufficiently operationalised.

One of the most significant structural challenges for FLR is the prevalence of **small and dispersed private forest holdings**, often combined with unresolved or only partly regulated property and land-use rights. A large number of small parcels owned by different landowners makes it difficult to plan and coordinate measures at the landscape level. Interventions requiring spatial continuity, such as the conversion of degraded forests, restoration of shelterbelts, rehabilitation of erosion-prone areas or establishment of ecological corridors, become organisationally complex, financially demanding and difficult to implement without additional coordination mechanisms, incentives and long-term maintenance arrangements.

Illegal activities in forests, especially illegal logging, are another important challenge. In some parts of the region, documents indicate that illegal logging is extensive and has a significant impact on forest ecosystem degradation, loss of revenues, weakening of trust in institutions and difficulties in implementing sustainable forest management. Illegal logging is not only a forestry or inspection issue. It directly weakens the possibility of planning FLR as a long-term process, as it undermines institutional control, increases pressure on degraded forest structures and reduces the effects of public investment in restoration.

In some WB6, additional constraints are caused by areas contaminated by landmines and other residual security risks from past conflicts. Such areas limit access to forest complexes and make regular management, monitoring, fire protection and restoration measures more difficult. Thus, in parts of the WB6, FLR is not shaped only by ecological and forestry factors, but also by wider post-conflict and security legacies that affect the practical feasibility of restoration.

The institutional framework for forestry differs across the WB6. In some cases, relatively stable planning systems, public enterprises, inventories and funds can support restoration measures. In others, legal gaps, misalignment of institutional responsibilities, limited control capacities and insufficiently developed coordination mechanisms between central and local levels remain evident. Decentralisation of forest management, where present, may create space for greater local responsibility, but only when accompanied by stronger technical, administrative and financial capacities at the local level.

An important positive foundation for FLR is the existence of financial and institutional mechanisms aimed at improving forests and their public-benefit functions. Funds, fees and related instruments may provide a basis for future financing models for FLR. Their potential, however, depends on whether they remain focused on individual forestry measures or develop towards spatially targeted financing of interventions that simultaneously contribute to forests, soil, water, biodiversity, climate resilience and risk reduction.

Technological modernisation of forest management systems is also an important development. The use of geographic information systems, domestic-level forest inventories, information systems and remote sensing enables more precise monitoring of forest resources and better risk assessment. These tools can be highly relevant for FLR if they are used not only for recording forest resources, but also for identifying degraded areas, assessing ecological connectivity, monitoring fire, erosion and drought stress, and defining priority landscapes for restoration.

The European integration process also opens opportunities to improve the forestry policy framework. Alignment with nature conservation policies, climate adaptation, biodiversity, Natura 2000/Emerald logic and principles of sustainable natural resource management can help connect forestry more effectively with other sectors. For FLR, it is particularly important that forests are not seen only through their productive and

protective functions, but also as part of wider green infrastructure, understood as a functional system linking forest complexes, riparian zones, shelterbelts, ecological corridors and other nature-based landscape elements.

For the WB6 FLRP, the forestry sector is both a strong foundation and an area where change is needed. Existing documents already recognise many measures directly relevant to FLR: restoration of degraded stands, erosion control, improvement of protective forest functions, reduction of fire risk, monitoring and sustainable forest management. **The key challenge is to ensure that forestry measures do not remain sectoral activities limited to forest areas**, but are connected with landscape character, ecological connectivity, spatial planning, water regimes, climate risks and local development. In this way, forestry can become one of the central pillars of FLR, but only within a wider, landscape-based and cross-sectoral coordinated framework.

6.4 Climate action and adaptation

Climate policies in the WB6 increasingly recognise forests, soil, water, biodiversity and rural landscapes as systems exposed to climate risks and that are important for reducing the impacts of those risks. In this sense, FLR can be viewed as a practical mechanism for implementing climate adaptation, especially where the restoration of forest and forest-related landscapes contributes to reducing the risks of floods, fires, droughts, erosion, landslides and land degradation.

In the analysed documents, climate change is generally recognised as a cross-sectoral challenge, but its integration into specific policies on land use, forestry, water, agriculture and nature conservation differs between WB6. In some cases, clear legal and strategic frameworks for climate adaptation exist, while in others adaptation objectives are present more as a general direction than as an operational system of measures. For FLR, it is particularly important that climate adaptation does not remain at the level of sectoral vulnerability assessments, but is **translated into spatially defined priorities for landscape restoration**.

One of the main challenges is weak operational coordination of climate action between sectors and levels of governance. Although inter-ministerial working groups or coordination bodies are often established in the region, their actual operational role remains limited. Weak horizontal coordination between sectors, insufficient connection between central and local levels, overlapping responsibilities and frequent institutional changes make it difficult to implement long-term adaptation measures. This is particularly relevant for FLR, as landscape restoration requires multi-year planning, stable financing, coordination between different land users and a clear designation of responsibilities.

A further limitation is the weakness of data, monitoring and reporting systems. In much of the region, climate adaptation monitoring still relies more on administrative indicators, such as adopted documents, completed trainings or prepared plans, than on **actual ecological and spatial outcomes**. For FLR, however, the key indicators are those that can show whether the resilience of forests and landscapes is increasing, whether erosion is being reduced, whether water retention is improving, whether habitat connectivity is being strengthened and whether interventions are actually reducing exposure to climate risks. Without clear baselines, spatial priorities and measurable objectives, climate measures remain difficult to compare and manage.

Financial instability is another important risk. Many climate adaptation and ecosystem restoration activities still depend on international donors, project cycles and external financing. Such a model may be useful for launching pilot activities, but it is not sufficient for long-term landscape restoration. FLR requires more stable domestic budgets, the combination of public and international funds, and financial instruments that can support the maintenance of measures over time, not only their initial implementation.

From a technical perspective, one challenge is the continued dominance of traditional infrastructure solutions over NbS. In areas such as flood protection, erosion control and water management, grey infrastructure often has priority in planning and financing. Such solutions may be necessary in certain situations, but if they are not combined with natural water retention, vegetation restoration, soil stabilisation and ecological connectivity, they do not contribute sufficiently to long-term landscape resilience. FLR can therefore help shift climate adaptation from reactive protection towards preventive and spatially based risk management.

Particular attention should also be given to the risk of landscape simplification through inadequate afforestation measures. If restoration is reduced to planting one or only a small number of species, without considering habitat conditions, landscape character, natural vegetation, water regimes and future climate conditions, newly established systems may become vulnerable to pests, diseases, fire and drought stress. Climate-relevant FLR therefore has to be based on diversity, local context, appropriate species selection, natural regeneration where possible, and adaptive management.

At the same time, climate policies create important opportunities for the development of FLR. Alignment with the European climate framework, obligations under international agreements and the growing importance of adaptation create political and institutional space for including FLR in domestic-level and regional priorities. Forests and landscapes can be linked to objectives related to emission reduction, carbon sinks, DRR, water and soil protection, biodiversity conservation and the resilience of local communities.

An important existing foundation is the development of digital systems, Geographic Information System (GIS) tools, remote sensing, hazard maps and forest inventories. These instruments can help identify climate risks and restoration potential spatially, rather than only through sectoral assessments. Mapping areas exposed to fire, erosion, drought, floods or vegetation degradation can enable more precise targeting of FLR measures and link climate adaptation with specific landscapes, river basins and ecological corridors.

FLR can also have particular value in protecting strategic resources and infrastructure. Restoration of forests and vegetation in river basins can contribute to reducing flash floods, erosion, sedimentation of reservoirs, soil loss and drought stress. In this way, FLR is linked to energy security, water security, agricultural production, and protection of settlements and the reduction of economic damage caused by extreme events. FLR is therefore not only an additional environmental measure, but **part of a wider system of climate security and territorial resilience**.

The regional and inter-jurisdictional dimension of climate adaptation is particularly important for the WB6. Fires, droughts, floods, pest outbreaks, changes in hydrological regimes and species migration appear across different jurisdictions in the region. FLR can therefore provide a framework for joint risk assessments, data exchange, coordination of measures in river basins and mountain systems, and the development of inter-jurisdictional ecological corridors. Such a landscape-based approach is particularly important in areas where uncoordinated interventions in one of the WB6 may reduce restoration effects or increase risks in another.

For the WB6 FLRP, the climate cluster shows that the existing policy framework already provides strong reasons for landscape restoration: adaptation, risk reduction, protection of water and soil, increased forest resilience and strengthened carbon sinks. The **key challenge is to translate these objectives into spatially targeted and measurable FLR interventions**. This requires clearer links between climate policies, landscape character, priority restoration areas, monitoring of real ecological outcomes and stable financial mechanisms for long-term implementation.

6.5 Biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration

Policy frameworks in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem restoration in the WB6 show a high level of strategic commitment to nature conservation, the protection of species and habitats, the development of ecological networks and alignment with international and European obligations. Domestic-level biodiversity strategies, action plans, legal instruments and documents related to protected areas provide an important foundation for FLR, especially because forest and forest-related landscapes play a key role in habitat conservation, ecological connectivity and ecosystem resilience.

However, there is **a significant gap between strategic commitments and practical implementation**. In much of the region, the legislative and strategic framework is more developed than the capacity to implement it. Limited institutional and professional resources, divided and insufficiently aligned responsibilities between nature conservation, forestry, agriculture and spatial planning, weak coordination between domestic and local levels, and inconsistent enforcement reduce the effects of existing policies. As a result, biodiversity strategies often remain an important but insufficiently operational starting point for concrete restoration measures.

Limited data and monitoring systems are a further problem. In many cases, biodiversity inventories, habitat maps and data on ecosystem condition are incomplete, not regularly updated or not connected within integrated information systems. Underdeveloped biodiversity indicators and weak field monitoring make it difficult to assess trends, identify priority restoration areas and evaluate policy effects. For FLR, this is particularly important because landscape restoration must be based on spatially precise information on habitats, species, fragmentation, degradation and ecological links.

Although the need to integrate biodiversity into other sectors is often recognised in policy documents, this integration remains uneven in practice. The strongest pressures come from infrastructure, energy, mineral extraction, tourism, urbanisation and land-use change. If impact assessments, spatial planning and sectoral policies do not consistently ensure the avoidance, mitigation and compensation of negative impacts, development pressures may further fragment habitats and reduce the restoration capacity of landscapes.

Forest ecosystems have a particular place in this cluster. They are at the same time carriers of biodiversity, important carbon sinks, regulators of water regimes and a basis for ecological connectivity across much of the region. However, degraded forests, illegal logging, weak implementation of sustainable forest management, insufficient support for private owners and limited application of certification and other standards reduce their capacity to contribute to long-term landscape resilience. FLR therefore needs to develop as a link between forestry measures, ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation.

One of the most important foundations for FLR is provided by protected areas, ecological corridors, wider ecological networks and green infrastructure. The documents recognise the need to expand and improve protected area networks, identify priority habitats and species, develop corridors and connect fragmented habitats. These elements form the spatial infrastructure for restoration, but only if they are not treated in isolation. For FLR, it is essential that **protected areas are connected with wider landscapes through a green infrastructure system** that includes degraded forests, river corridors, agroforestry mosaics, wetlands, riparian vegetation and other nature-based elements.

In this context, there is significant potential to move from conservation at individual sites towards integrated ecosystem and landscape management. Bioregional approaches, spatial planning based on ecological units, GIS mapping, habitat inventories and the organisation of measures around river basins, mountain systems and protected landscape units can help define restoration priorities more clearly and spatially consistently. This allows biodiversity measures to be linked with the restoration of landscape functionality, rather than only with the protection of individual sites.

Existing legal and policy instruments also provide a number of opportunities for FLR. EIA and SEA procedures can be used to reduce development pressures and direct compensation or restoration measures. Domestic-level biodiversity strategies and action plans can define long-term conservation and restoration objectives. Mechanisms for restoring ecosystems damaged by development activities, if sufficiently precise and enforceable, can become an important instrument for linking nature conservation and landscape restoration.

Financing remains a key challenge. Biodiversity measures and ecosystem restoration often depend on international projects, donor support and limited public budgets. This creates a risk that activities are implemented in a disconnected and short-term manner, without a stable system for maintenance and monitoring. At the same time, there are opportunities to develop new financing models, including payments for ecosystem services, sustainable tourism, certification, compensation mechanisms and private sector involvement in the restoration and management of natural values.

Regional and inter-jurisdictional cooperation is particularly important for biodiversity and FLR. Many ecosystems, habitats, migration routes and ecological corridors are transboundary. Inter-jurisdictional protected areas, biosphere reserves, regional corridors, joint monitoring and data exchange can contribute to better connectivity and stronger restoration effects at the level of wider landscapes. This is particularly important for mountain systems, river basins and forest complexes of shared ecological importance for the region.

For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster shows that biodiversity policies already contain important foundations for restoration: protected areas, ecological networks, habitats, species, corridors, monitoring and alignment with European standards. The **key challenge is to connect these elements with spatial planning, forestry, water, soil, climate adaptation and green infrastructure within a common landscape framework**. FLR can help ensure that biodiversity is not treated only as an object of protection, but as an active basis for restoring the functionality, connectivity and resilience of landscapes.

6.6 Soil, drought and land resilience

Policies related to soil, drought and land resilience in the WB6 show that land degradation, climate risks, forest condition and water management are strongly interconnected. Most analysed documents recognise erosion, fires, ecosystem degradation, small and dispersed land ownership, pressure on water resources and drought risks as processes that directly affect landscape functionality. This provides an important basis for FLR, as the restoration of forest and forest-related landscapes can contribute to soil stabilisation, improved water-retention capacity, reduced erosion and stronger drought resilience.

However, the principles of soil restoration and drought resilience are not equally operationalised across the region. Even when the causes and consequences of degradation are clearly recognised, they are **rarely translated into binding programmes** that define where soil function restoration measures should be implemented, which activities are priorities, the sequence in which they should be carried out, who is

responsible, and how long-term maintenance of effects is ensured. As a result, policies often remain at the level of diagnosis, risk assessment or recommendation, while the link with concrete restoration interventions is less developed.

Misalignment of institutional responsibilities and normative frameworks is a significant risk for the implementation of measures at the landscape level. Responsibilities for soil, forests, water, agriculture and nature conservation are often distributed between several sectors and levels of government. This makes integrated planning and implementation more difficult, particularly for measures that need to connect forests, agricultural land, water regimes and degraded or drought-prone landscapes. Some documents point specifically to weak plan implementation and the absence of an integrated land management policy, increasing the risk that measures remain disconnected and short-term.

Monitoring and evaluation are also often partial and sectoral. Drought-related plans include relevant monitoring elements, such as hydrometeorological and agrometeorological parameters, bulletins, remote sensing of vegetation, and vegetation indices. However, documents addressing land degradation often indicate the absence of an integrated indicator system for measuring the condition of terrestrial ecosystems and restoration outcomes. The lack of operational spatial monitoring aligned with European standards weakens the comparability of baselines and progress.

The territorial logic of interventions exists in some documents, but is not always translated into binding practice. Some documents use geomorphological units, sensitivity maps, erosion, fire and drought maps, or other thematic mapping to identify priority areas. Drought management plans introduce a hazard–exposure–vulnerability logic and use remote sensing, normalised difference vegetation index (NDVI), vegetation health index and related indicators to monitor vegetation cover. These tools can be highly useful for FLR, but their effect remains limited if they are not linked to binding zoning, financing of measures, maintenance agreements and mechanisms for working with private landowners.

Financial risks further reduce the effectiveness of measures. In some WB6, a reactive approach still prevails, with action taken only after damage from drought, erosion, fires or floods has already occurred. Legally required instruments and plans are often not implemented in full because of insufficient financial resources. Small and dispersed land ownership, especially as a result of inheritance, is an additional structural problem, as it makes landscape-level management more difficult and increases the transaction costs of implementing soil function restoration measures.

At the same time, there are important foundations for the development of FLR. Strategic documents in the region increasingly recognise the links between land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change. Action plans on land degradation often consider cause-and-effect relationships through river basins, steep slopes, karst systems, deforestation and inappropriate land use. Drought management plans link drought conditions with vegetation and ecosystem condition and propose measures that can directly support FLR: afforestation, increasing soil organic matter, restoration of wetlands and floodplains, and development of green infrastructure.

Some WB6 also have more developed operational tools that can support spatially precise restoration planning. Mapping of erosion, fire and drought risks, early warning systems, remote sensing, vegetation indices, forest inventories and existing databases can help identify priority intervention zones. If linked with clear objectives, indicators and monitoring of effects, these tools can enable **a shift from risk assessment towards active management of landscape resilience**.

Digital infrastructure and alignment with European standards provide an additional opportunity. Digital registers of agricultural land, forest resources and other spatial resources can become a basis for targeting measures, conditioning incentives and monitoring effects. For FLR, however, it is crucial that these systems are interoperable and allow soil, forests, water, vegetation, risks and landscapes to be considered together, rather than remaining closed within sectoral databases.

Inter-jurisdictional cooperation is particularly important in this cluster. Land degradation, drought, erosion, fires and changes in water regimes often occur at the level of wider river basins and mountain systems across jurisdictions. Joint vulnerability mapping, data exchange, connection of protected areas and ecological corridors, and coordination of measures in inter-jurisdictional basins can support continuous restoration of soil functions at the landscape level.

For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster shows that **soil and drought cannot be treated as separate technical issues, but as part of wider landscape functionality**. Existing documents already recognise the risks and provide

important tools, but the key challenge remains their operationalisation through spatially defined priorities, measurable indicators, stable financing and binding implementation mechanisms. FLR can connect soil protection, drought management, forestry, water, biodiversity and climate adaptation within a common framework for strengthening landscape resilience.

6.7 Water and flood risk management

Water and flood risk management policies in the WB6 provide an important framework for FLR, as the condition of forests, soil, watercourses and river basins directly affects erosion, torrential processes, water retention, water quality and the exposure of settlements and infrastructure to risk. The analysed documents clearly recognise that climate change, land-use change, degradation of vegetation cover and pressure on water resources increase landscape vulnerability and require a more integrated approach to water management.

One of the main challenges is the misalignment of institutional responsibilities and weak operational coordination. Water, forests, agricultural land, spatial development and nature conservation are often managed by a large number of institutions and levels of government. This makes horizontal and vertical coordination more difficult, especially in relation to river basins, torrents, riparian zones and areas at high flood risk. In practice, this reduces the possibility of linking flood protection measures with forest restoration, soil stabilisation, natural water retention and spatial management.

The regulatory and planning framework differs across the region. Some WB6 have relatively developed systems aligned with European water policies, while others face legal gaps, insufficiently developed planning documents or weak implementation of existing regulations. Even where the legal framework is formally in place, its operational application often remains uneven. For FLR, it is particularly important that **water management objectives do not remain limited to infrastructure protection and river regulation**, but are linked to basin functionality and the restoration of natural and semi-natural landscape elements.

A significant problem is the lack of up-to-date and interoperable data. In parts of the region, geocoded habitat maps, torrent cadastres, updated erosion maps, reliable groundwater data and integrated water information systems are missing. In some cases, hydrometeorological monitoring is insufficiently developed or does not provide regular data collection and exchange. Without reliable spatial data, it is difficult to determine priorities for basin restoration, soil stabilisation, increased water retention or reduced torrential risk.

Economic and infrastructure challenges further limit the implementation of integrated measures. Existing water tariffs and fees are often insufficient even for regular system maintenance, let alone for long-term investment in the restoration of natural basin functions. Infrastructure is in many cases old, insufficiently maintained and affected by high water losses. Low levels of wastewater treatment further affect the quality of aquatic ecosystems and riparian habitats. Under such conditions, resources are often directed towards urgent and technical interventions, while preventive and nature-based measures remain less well financed.

Climate change increases the importance of this cluster. Projections point to more frequent extreme hydrological events, including flash floods, prolonged droughts, extreme rainfall and changes in mean river flows. Loss of forest cover, inappropriate use of steep slopes, erosion and unplanned construction in flood-prone areas directly reduce the natural water-retention capacity of landscapes and increase risks for people, infrastructure and agricultural land. In this context, FLR can support **a shift from reactive damage control towards preventive risk management at the basin level**.

Illegal and uncontrolled activities in water and riparian areas represent an additional risk. Illegal gravel and sand extraction, unplanned construction in risk zones, logging in river basins and degradation of riparian vegetation disturb natural river dynamics, increase erosion and reduce the capacity of landscapes to buffer extreme events. These pressures show that water management cannot be separated from spatial planning, land-use control, forestry and nature conservation.

At the same time, there are important opportunities to develop FLR through water and flood risk management policies. The documents increasingly recognise NbS, natural water retention, restoration of floodplains, basin stabilisation and the development of green infrastructure as a functional system linking forests, riparian vegetation, floodplains, wetlands, shelterbelts and ecological corridors. Restoration of riparian vegetation, afforestation of degraded slopes, conversion of degraded forests, shelterbelts and wetland restoration can contribute to flood risk reduction, improved water quality, biodiversity conservation and stronger climate resilience.

Alignment with European water policies provides an additional foundation. The WFD and Floods Directive introduce the logic of basin-level management, risk assessment, water management plans and integration of protection measures into wider planning processes. This logic is compatible with FLR, as it allows restoration to be understood not as an isolated intervention, but as part of basin management, risk reduction and the improvement of the ecological status of water bodies and riparian landscapes.

Technological development also creates space for more precise planning. Water information systems, GIS technologies, satellite observation, vegetation indices and spatial risk modelling can help identify flood zones, erosion-prone areas, degraded basins and areas suitable for natural water retention. If these tools are connected with spatial planning, forestry data and biodiversity information, they can become an important basis for targeting FLR measures in landscapes where they can have the greatest effect.

Inter-jurisdictional cooperation is particularly important for water systems in the WB6. River basins, torrents, groundwater and flood risks often extend beyond the boundaries of individual WB6. International river basin commissions, data exchange, joint risk mapping and coordination of measures in inter-jurisdictional basins can help make FLR part of a wider regional system for water and risk management. Such a landscape-based approach is particularly important where upstream interventions directly affect risks, water quality and the ecological condition of downstream areas.

For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster shows that water and flood risk management provide one of the most direct pathways for operationalising FLR. Restoration of forests, riparian zones, wetlands, floodplains and protective vegetation can contribute simultaneously to water security, erosion reduction, flood mitigation, biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation. The key challenge is to ensure that these measures are **not treated as an addition to traditional infrastructure, but as an integral part of basin planning, spatial development and long-term risk management.**

6.8 Civil protection and disaster risk governance

Civil protection and disaster risk governance policies in the WB6 provide an important additional framework for FLR, particularly because climate-related and natural hazards are closely linked to the condition of forests, soil, watercourses, slopes and wider landscapes. The analysed documents generally recognise prevention, risk reduction, preparedness, early warning and coordination as key elements of disaster risk management. This creates a relevant entry point for FLR, as the restoration of forest and forest-related landscapes can contribute to reducing flood, erosion, fire, drought and landslide risks before damaging events occur.

However, **the connection between disaster risk governance and landscape restoration is still insufficiently developed.** Most documents address prevention primarily through institutional strengthening, early warning systems, emergency preparedness, equipment, response capacity and protective infrastructure. These elements are necessary, but they do not in themselves ensure that forest restoration, soil stabilisation, riparian rehabilitation, slope vegetation or natural water retention become part of regular prevention practice. For this reason, **FLR measures need to be clearly included in action plans, investment programmes and local implementation mechanisms.**

A further challenge concerns monitoring and evidence. Risk registers, hazard assessments, databases and information systems are increasingly emphasised, but they are rarely connected with indicators that measure the ecological and spatial effects of prevention. Indicators related to soil stability, erosion processes, riparian condition, vegetation structure, fire risk, drought buffering and natural water retention are still weakly linked to disaster risk management. This makes it difficult to demonstrate the preventive contribution of FLR within existing reporting systems.

Governance fragmentation is another important constraint. Disaster risk management depends on coordination between civil protection, water management, forestry, agriculture, spatial planning, nature conservation, local governments and emergency services. In practice, responsibilities are often distributed across sectors and administrative levels, while municipal capacities for implementation and maintenance remain limited. This is particularly relevant for FLR since landscape restoration requires multi-year planning, stable financing, land-user cooperation and long-term maintenance.

The institutional logic of disaster risk management can also favour short-term and visible interventions, especially after damaging events. Emergency response, recovery and direct protection works often receive more attention than preventive measures whose benefits are visible only over a longer period. For FLR, this represents a risk if restoration is treated only as an environmental measure, rather than as part of prevention, risk reduction and territorial resilience.

At the same time, the existing disaster risk governance framework provides important opportunities for FLR. Risk and threat assessments, protection and rescue plans, domestic-level and sectoral action plans, reporting cycles and developing risk information systems can support the integration of landscape risk layers and land-condition indicators. These instruments can help identify areas where restoration of forests, riparian vegetation, degraded slopes and other nature-based structures can reduce exposure to natural hazards.

Several policy instruments across the region already provide relevant entry points for this type of integration. These include climate adaptation frameworks, disaster risk management programmes, DRR strategies, crisis management arrangements, municipal planning responsibilities and information systems. If connected with FLR objectives, these instruments can help translate restoration measures into practical prevention actions, especially in areas exposed to floods, erosion, fires, droughts and landslides.

The regional dimension is also important. Floods, fires, droughts, erosion processes, landslides and other hazards often extend across jurisdictions. Disaster risk governance therefore provides a basis for cooperation in river basins, mountain areas and other functional landscapes shared among jurisdictions. Joint assessments, data exchange and coordinated prevention measures can strengthen the role of FLR in reducing risks that cannot be effectively managed within individual administrative boundaries alone.

For the WB6 FLRP, this cluster shows that civil protection and disaster risk governance can support the preventive role of landscape restoration. The **key challenge is to connect FLR measures with risk assessments, protection and rescue planning, local implementation capacities, investment programming and monitoring systems**. In this way, FLR can contribute to reducing future losses and strengthening the resilience of forest and forest-related landscapes.

6.9 Implications for the WB6 FLRP

The policy framework analysis shows that the WB6 already contain a significant number of elements relevant to FLR. These elements are present in spatial planning, forestry policies, climate adaptation, biodiversity protection, soil and land management, water management, flood risk management and disaster risk governance. The analysed documents recognise forest and land degradation, habitat fragmentation, climate risks, erosion, fires, floods, droughts, biodiversity loss, the need for green infrastructure and the importance of ecological connectivity. This shows that **FLR does not start from an empty policy space, but from existing sectoral foundations that need to be better connected**.

At the same time, **these elements are usually not brought together within a common landscape framework**. Forest restoration is mainly addressed through forestry measures, biodiversity through the protection of species, habitats and protected areas, water management through river basins and flood risk, land management through degradation and erosion, climate adaptation through sectoral vulnerability and risk assessments, and disaster risk governance through prevention, preparedness and response systems. Although all these policies are relevant to FLR, their mutual connection remains limited. As a result, their combined potential to restore landscape functionality, reduce risks and strengthen long-term resilience is not fully realised.

For the WB6 FLRP, this means that its primary role should **not be to replace existing domestic-level policies, but to connect them through a common restoration logic at the landscape level**. The plan should help translate existing sectoral objectives into **spatially clear, measurable and coordinated restoration priorities**. This implies the identification of priority landscapes for restoration, linking measures with landscape character and sensitivity, developing common criteria and indicators relevant for landscape issues, strengthening monitoring of ecological and spatial outcomes, and establishing mechanisms for adjusting measures over time.

Table 3. Relevance of the WB6 policy framework for FLR by thematic cluster

Thematic cluster	Enabling conditions and existing foundations	Implementation gaps and risks	Relevance for the WB6 FLRP
Landscape character and landscape quality	Planning documents recognise spatial pressures, land-use conflicts, sensitive areas, green infrastructure and the importance of landscape quality. Planning hierarchy and	Landscape restoration is weakly operationalised. Landscape characterisation is not sufficiently institutionalised, while priority restoration zones, maintenance obligations, financing and	The WB6 FLRP should connect landscape character, landscape quality objectives, sensitivity and degraded areas with clear spatial priorities,

objectives in planning	existing instruments can direct restoration through spatial plans.	outcome monitoring are rarely clearly defined.	measures and restoration indicators.
Forestry and sustainable forest management	Forestry policies recognise forest degradation, coppice forests, erosion, fires, protective forest functions and the need for sustainable forest management. Inventories, GIS tools, professional institutions and some financing mechanisms provide an important foundation.	Restoration often remains within the forestry sector. Small and dispersed private forest holdings, illegal logging, weak control capacities, residual security risks and weak links with spatial planning limit FLR implementation at the landscape level.	The WB6 FLRP should translate forestry measures into a wider landscape framework linking forests with soil, water, biodiversity, climate resilience and green infrastructure.
Climate action and adaptation	Climate policies increasingly recognise forests, soil, water and biodiversity as key systems for adaptation, risk reduction and strengthened carbon sinks. GIS tools, hazard maps, monitoring systems and regional climate frameworks are developing.	Climate adaptation is often implemented sectorally and through projects. Spatially defined priorities, stable financing, measurable ecological outcomes and stronger links between climate objectives and restoration interventions are still insufficient.	The WB6 FLRP should position landscape restoration as a practical mechanism for climate adaptation, especially for reducing risks from fires, droughts, floods, erosion and land degradation.
Biodiversity and ecosystem restoration	Biodiversity policies recognise protected areas, ecological networks, habitats, species, corridors, green infrastructure and ecosystem restoration. Alignment with European and international frameworks provides an important legal and professional foundation.	Implementation is limited by weak capacities, divided and insufficiently aligned responsibilities, lack of up-to-date data, weak monitoring and insufficient integration of biodiversity into development sectors.	The WB6 FLRP should connect biodiversity conservation with the restoration of landscape functionality, ecological connectivity, green infrastructure, forestry measures, spatial planning and long-term monitoring.
Soil, drought and land resilience	Documents recognise links between land degradation, drought, erosion, fires, forests, water and climate change. Tools such as sensitivity maps, indicators, remote sensing, vegetation indices and early warning systems are already present in parts of the region.	Measures often remain at the level of risk assessment or recommendations. Binding restoration programmes, integrated monitoring, stable financing, maintenance agreements and mechanisms for working with small and dispersed land ownership are lacking.	The WB6 FLRP should direct restoration towards soil stabilisation, improved water-retention capacity, erosion reduction and stronger landscape resilience to drought and degradation.
Water and flood risk management	Water policies recognise river basins, flood risks, erosion, natural water retention, riparian zones, wetlands, green infrastructure and NbS. The European water framework and inter-jurisdictional basins provide a basis for coordination.	Management is affected by misaligned institutional responsibilities and weak operational coordination. Data are often outdated or not interoperable, infrastructure is insufficiently maintained, and nature-based measures remain less well financed than traditional technical solutions.	The WB6 FLRP should connect restoration of forests, riparian vegetation, floodplains and protective zones with basin management, flood risk reduction and water security.
Civil protection and disaster risk governance	Disaster risk governance policies recognise prevention, preparedness, early warning, risk assessment, coordination, protection and rescue planning, and the development of risk information systems. These instruments provide entry points for linking FLR with prevention and local risk reduction.	The connection between disaster risk governance and landscape restoration is still weak. Prevention is often focused on institutional capacity, emergency preparedness, equipment and protective infrastructure, while restoration measures, ecological indicators, local implementation	The WB6 FLRP should connect restoration measures with risk assessments, protection and rescue planning, local implementation mechanisms, investment programming and monitoring systems, especially in landscapes

		capacities and long-term maintenance are less developed.	exposed to floods, erosion, fires, droughts and landslides.
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These cluster-based findings provide the basis for identifying the main cross-cutting challenges and opportunities that inform the strategic goals, targets and implementation logic of the WB6 FLRP.

7. Western Balkans Six cross-cutting policy synthesis

7.1 From thematic policy clusters to cross-cutting regional patterns

The policy framework analysis presented in the previous chapter shows that the WB6 already have a relatively broad policy basis for FLR. Relevant elements are found across spatial planning procedures and instruments, forestry, climate adaptation, biodiversity and ecosystem restoration, soil and land resilience, water and flood risk management, and disaster risk governance. These policy fields recognise many of the pressures that directly affect forest and forest-related landscapes, including degradation of forest ecosystems, habitat fragmentation, soil erosion, drought, flood and fire risks, loss of biodiversity, pressure on water resources and the weakening of landscape functionality.

However, **the main regional issue is not simply whether these themes are recognised in policy documents, but whether they are connected in a way that can support restoration at the landscape level.** Across the region, FLR-relevant elements are still largely distributed across separate sectoral frameworks. Forestry policies address forest degradation and management measures; biodiversity policies focus on protected areas, habitats and species; water policies are structured around basins, flood risks and water management; climate policies address adaptation and resilience; while disaster risk governance is often organised around prevention, preparedness, emergency response and recovery. Each of these fields provides an important entry point for FLR, but their combined potential remains only partly used.

Taken together, the thematic findings point to several regional patterns that are relevant for the strategic orientation of the WB6 FLRP. They show where the WB6 already have favourable conditions for FLR, where implementation risks are most likely to appear, and where a common regional approach can add value.

The synthesis points to a clear regional conclusion: **FLR should not be treated as an additional environmental protection activity or as a forestry measure alone. Its value lies in its capacity to bring a spatial planning perspective together with forest management, biodiversity conservation, soil and water protection, climate adaptation, DRR and local development within a shared territorial framework.** This means moving beyond narrowly sectoral and often reactive approaches towards a landscape-based model of action that connects restoration, prevention and long-term resilience.

7.2 Cross-cutting challenges for FLR in the Western Balkans Six

(i) Fragmented governance, limited capacities and weak cross-sectoral coordination

Across the region, **a recurring difficulty is the coordination of institutions, sectors and levels of governance around shared restoration priorities.** The policies relevant to FLR involve several ministries, agencies, public enterprises, planning institutions, water authorities, civil protection structures, protected area managers and local governments. This breadth of actors is expected, given the cross-sectoral nature of FLR. The challenge arises when responsibilities are not sufficiently connected, coordination bodies have limited operational influence, and measures remain tied to separate planning and budgeting cycles. In such circumstances, regular conflicts that arise between forestry, agriculture, infrastructure, and urban development priorities hinder restoration efforts, since there are no adequate planning instruments for coordinated resolution of land-use conflicts. Spatial planning often does not adequately integrate environmental considerations or restoration needs. This leads to continued degradation or restoration being reversed by competing land uses, especially where cadastral inaccuracies, land-tenure disputes, legal conversion barriers, and mixed rights over the same parcels prevent micro-location implementation. Under such conditions, restoration measures may be formally recognised but remain difficult to implement in a coordinated way.

This challenge is particularly important because landscape restoration requires spatial continuity, long-term maintenance and cooperation between different land users and institutions. Restoration of degraded forests, riparian zones, degraded and erosion-prone slopes, floodplains, ecological corridors or agroforestry mosaics cannot be delivered through isolated actions. It requires coordination between spatial planning, forestry,

agriculture, water management, nature conservation, DRR and local development. In many parts of the WB6, these links are still weak or not sufficiently operationalised. Institutions often lack technical expertise, human resources, and operational capacity to design and implement FLR at scale. Even where policies exist, implementation is weak due to insufficient training, coordination, and operational tools. This creates a gap between planning and actual delivery on the ground, made more complex by uneven levels of readiness across WB6 and the lack of structured peer learning, twinning, and implementation support systems.

Without integrated governance, FLR risks remaining project-based rather than systemic action, especially when the same landscape unit is subject to different legal mandates (for example, forestry and biodiversity protection), mixed ownership regimes (public or private land), and no territorial conflict-resolution mechanisms at the site level.

(ii) Weak integration of FLR into domestic-level policies and planning frameworks

A second cross-cutting challenge is **the weak translation of policy commitments into spatially defined restoration priorities**. Many strategic documents recognise degradation, climate risks, erosion, drought, flood exposure, habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss. However, they often do not define clearly where restoration should take place, which landscapes should be prioritised, which types of measures should be applied, who should be responsible, how financing should be secured, and how the results should be maintained over time. As a result, restoration-related activities may remain dispersed, project-based and difficult to scale up.

This is closely linked with the limited institutionalisation of landscape character as a planning and management framework. Landscape characterisation and landscape sensitivity assessment can provide a common basis for identifying priority areas, defining restoration opportunity zones and adapting measures to the condition, values and capacity of different landscapes. Yet across the WB6, these approaches are not equally developed or consistently embedded in planning systems. In some cases, relevant methodological elements exist; in others, they remain absent or are applied only through individual expert studies. **Without a common minimum framework, it is difficult to establish comparable baselines, regional priorities and measurable restoration targets.**

(iii) Weak MRV systems and lack of reliable, harmonised, and shared data across WB6

A further challenge is the gap between monitoring, data and decision-making. Across several policy fields, data systems, inventories, hazard maps, risk assessments, remote sensing tools and reporting mechanisms are developing. However, monitoring is often still focused on administrative outputs rather than on ecological and spatial outcomes. There is no harmonised system for tracking restoration progress, ecosystem services, or climate/DRR benefits. It is easier to report that a plan has been adopted, a training delivered or a project completed than to demonstrate that landscape functionality has improved, erosion has decreased, water retention has increased, habitat connectivity has been strengthened or vulnerability to fire, drought and flood risks has been reduced. Monitoring is fragmented across institutions and often not linked to decision-making. This limits accountability, learning, and the ability to scale successful approaches, particularly because MRV results are rarely translated into budget revisions, legal updates, replanning, or new prioritisation cycles.

Furthermore, the availability and usability of data relevant for FLR planning remain a critical constraint. Both stakeholder consultations and policy analysis (biodiversity, spatial planning, DRR and forestry strategies) consistently point to datasets that are incomplete, inconsistent, and often not officially validated, especially for protected areas and their exact boundaries and protection status. Data-sharing between institutions is limited, databases are rarely interoperable, and some key datasets are not publicly accessible. Outdated boundaries of protected areas, weak metadata, missing update cycles, and unclear institutional responsibility for validation further undermine their reliability, limiting evidence-based prioritisation, coordinated planning, and effective monitoring of FLR interventions. **This weak link between monitoring, data as evidence-base for decision making, and adjustment of policy measures limits the possibility of adaptive management.**

(iv) Insufficient and unstable financing for FLR interventions

Financing represents another structural constraint. Much of the work relevant to FLR in the region still depends on donor projects, international programmes and short-term funding cycles. These sources are important, especially for piloting approaches, developing methodologies and preparing investment pipelines. However, they cannot replace stable domestic financing, long-term maintenance arrangements and mechanisms that link investment with priority landscapes and measurable restoration outcomes. **Without more predictable and**

diversified financing, FLR risks remaining a sequence of isolated projects rather than a long-term regional process.

(v) Limited stakeholder engagement and local ownership

Ownership, land tenure and local stewardship also create important implementation risks. Fragmented private forest holdings, unresolved or complex land-use rights, rural depopulation, limited incentives for land users and weak participation of local communities can all reduce the feasibility and durability of restoration measures. FLR interventions may be technically sound, but if they are not locally accepted, if land users do not see practical benefits, or if maintenance responsibilities are unclear, their long-term effects will remain uncertain. This is especially relevant in landscapes where restoration, production, conservation, infrastructure development and local livelihoods overlap.

(vi) Under-recognition and limited application of NbS and FLR

Another cross-cutting issue is that NbS are still not fully understood or operationalised across sectors (particularly in DRR and urban and rural planning) and NbS is insufficiently used as an instrument of preventive risk reduction and improving environmental conditions. Disaster risk governance in the region increasingly recognises prevention, preparedness, early warning, risk assessment and coordination. However, prevention is still often understood mainly through institutional capacity, emergency preparedness, equipment, response systems and protective infrastructure. The stakeholder inputs also highlight limited trust in NbS-only approaches, for example in torrents and settlements, where grey infrastructure is perceived as necessary and more reliable. Traditional grey infrastructure approaches are thus often prioritised over NbS. These elements are necessary, but do not automatically make forest restoration, soil stabilisation, riparian rehabilitation, slope vegetation, natural water retention or green infrastructure part of regular prevention practice. **FLR and NbS therefore need to be more clearly connected with risk assessments, protection and rescue planning, local implementation mechanisms, investment programming and monitoring systems.**

(vii) Lack of a shared regional framework and coordination mechanisms

Finally, many of the most important restoration challenges in the WB6 are inter-jurisdictional. River basins, mountain systems, ecological corridors, forest complexes, fire-prone landscapes, drought-affected areas and flood risks often extend across jurisdictions. Although there is political commitment to regional cooperation, practical coordination mechanisms remain underdeveloped. Regional cooperation is still more often organised around projects or general policy dialogue than around joint restoration targets, shared indicators and coordinated implementation in priority landscapes. There is no unified platform for joint planning, prioritisation, or monitoring of intra-regional restoration. This limits the effectiveness of FLR in shared landscapes such as river basins and mountain ranges, while the absence of regional stewardship mechanism and flexible bilateral/sub-regional cooperation formats limits progress in politically and institutionally heterogeneous contexts. **In such a context, restoration measures often remain isolated among jurisdictions, even where ecological processes and climate risks are shared.**

7.3 Cross-cutting opportunities and enabling conditions for regional FLR

Despite these challenges, the policy framework of the WB6 provides several important foundations for FLR.

(i) Existing sectoral strategies and policy frameworks at the domestic level recognise landscape degradation and restoration needs

The first opportunity is that most relevant sectors already recognise problems directly linked to landscape degradation and restoration. Spatial planning documents identify land-use conflicts, sensitive areas and spatial pressures. Forestry policies recognise degraded stands, coppice forests, soil erosion, fire risks and the protective functions of forests. Climate policies clearly link forests, soil, water and biodiversity with adaptation and resilience. Biodiversity policies recognise protected areas, ecological networks, habitats, corridors and ecosystem restoration. Soil, drought and water-related policies identify erosion, degradation, drought risks, water retention and basin-level management. Disaster risk governance provides an entry point for linking restoration with prevention and territorial resilience. Taken together these policies and their instruments provide a solid foundation upon which the FLR approach can be applied to complement and reinforce existing planning, rather than introducing new or parallel policies or implementation structures.

This means that **the WB6 FLRP does not need to create a completely new policy field. Its role should be to connect existing sectoral foundations through a common restoration logic at the landscape level.** Building on this foundation has two practical advantages. First, FLR objectives, principles and NbS can be

integrated into existing forestry, biodiversity, climate, DRR, soil, water and spatial planning instruments to avoid the duplication of institutional and planning arrangements. Second, the timing is favourable: several WB6 are currently revising their nature protection legislation, NBSAPs, forestry strategies, climate mitigation and adaptation plans, and spatial planning frameworks. These ongoing revisions create immediate entry points to embed FLR into domestic-level policies as they are being updated. However, the most important precondition is to integrate FLR into spatial planning frameworks. In this way, the WB6 FLRP can help translate already recognised objectives into spatially clear priorities, shared criteria, measurable indicators and coordinated implementation mechanisms. In this sense, FLR should act as a bridge between existing policies rather than as a parallel system.

(ii) Strong political alignment with EU accession process and the GAWB

A second enabling condition is the European and regional policy context, within the EU integration of the WB. Alignment with EU environmental, climate, water, biodiversity and spatial planning principles creates a strong incentive to improve policy coherence. The GAWB, EU accession processes and broader international commitments create a favourable framework for positioning FLR as part of climate adaptation, biodiversity recovery, sustainable forest management, DRR and territorial development. This wider policy environment can support harmonisation of methods, indicators and reporting approaches, while still allowing each of the WB6 to adapt implementation to its own institutional and ecological context. It also enables alignment of FLR with EU funding, reporting, and compliance frameworks, while ongoing *acquis* approximation, Nature Restoration Regulation alignment, green budgeting reforms, carbon-related financing mechanisms and accession requirements can accelerate legal mainstreaming and implementation readiness.

(iii) Growing recognition of NbS under the planning frameworks in the Western Balkans Six

Stakeholders across the region increasingly recognise NbS as cost-effective and multifunctional measures for climate adaptation and DRR, even though some are still inclined to dominantly rely on grey infrastructure. Because NbS can be applied to a wide range of ecosystems and landscapes, the WB6 FLRP focuses specifically on their use in projects that restore degraded forest landscapes, where NbS are deployed at the landscape scale and integrated with broader restoration objectives in line with the IUCN Global Standard for NbS. This creates momentum for shifting from grey infrastructure to NbS at the landscape level, and positions FLR as a regional opportunity to combine NbS with engineering solutions in interventions for torrent control, slope stabilisation, and flood-risk management. Spatial planning systems offer an opportunity for this shift. Although planning frameworks differ across the region, they all provide instruments through which restoration priorities can be embedded in territorial development. Planning hierarchies, spatial plans, land-use regulation, special purpose area plans, EIA and SEA procedures and public investment appraisal processes can all become channels for integrating FLR and NbS into decision-making through spatial planning. This is particularly important because restoration requires spatial prioritisation, long-term maintenance and the coordination of measures across land-use categories. **Green infrastructure and NbS provide a practical framework for FLR integration into existing spatial planning frameworks.** They make it possible to connect forests, riparian vegetation, wetlands, floodplains, shelterbelts, agroforestry systems, ecological corridors and degraded areas into a functional network. Through a landscape approach in spatial planning, restoration can support several objectives at the same time: ecological connectivity, biodiversity conservation, soil and water protection, climate adaptation, flood and fire risk reduction, and the improvement of ecosystem services. This is particularly relevant for the WB6, where forest and forest-related landscapes often have multiple ecological, protective, productive and cultural functions.

(iv) Availability of technical knowledge and international methodologies

The region also has increasing technical capacity that can support more precise FLR planning. GIS tools, remote sensing, forest inventories, vegetation indices, hazard and risk maps, erosion mapping, drought monitoring, water information systems, geospatial databases and biodiversity datasets can help identify priority landscapes and track restoration outcomes. These tools and datasets are already present in parts of the region, although they are not yet sufficiently interoperable or systematically linked to decision-making. If connected through a common monitoring framework, they can provide the evidence base needed for prioritisation, reporting and adaptive management.

There are well-developed methodologies, tools, and guidance for FLR planning and implementation produced by IUCN, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other relevant organisations and institutions. These can be applied directly or adapted to the regional context, thereby supporting faster implementation. The regional presence and active work of international organisations further support

knowledge transfer, while existing domestic good practices, including floodplain hydrology restoration, habitat connectivity pilots and inter-jurisdictional species restoration projects, provide immediately scalable implementation models.

High mountain ecosystems in inter-jurisdictional massifs represent both priority restoration zones and active arenas of practical conservation work. In the Sharr Mountains, the ongoing development of forest management plans within Sharr Mountain IUCN Category II Park and the active Regional Balkan Lynx Recovery Initiative provide operational foundations for landscape-scale restoration that integrates forest quality, erosion risk, and large carnivore habitat requirements. In the Albanian Alps, the programme for assisted migration of rare and endemic forest species to higher altitudes, combined with transboundary Natura 2000 identification work and the regional LIFE project for brown bear conservation, demonstrate that species-led regional cooperation is already functioning as a practical entry point for broader ecosystem restoration. These initiatives confirm that tailored methodological approaches are not only needed but already being developed on the ground.

(v) Availability of international and EU funding instruments

Significant funding opportunities exist through EU IPA, LIFE, Horizon Europe, and climate/biodiversity finance mechanisms, while development finance institutions – including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB), and the World Bank, alongside the emerging Western Balkans Green Bond Standard and regional sustainable finance taxonomy, create an expanding architecture for blended finance approaches relevant to FLR. These instruments can support both pilot actions and large-scale restoration programmes. The regional dimension of the WB6 FLRP increases competitiveness for such funding, while the pre-accession assistance instrument IPA CBC, domestic eco-funds (e.g. Eko-fond in Montenegro or Environmental Protection Fund in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), BIOFIN, LIFE pilots, and micro-location demonstration sites create realistic entry points for phased financing and project pipeline development, provided that WB6 progressively strengthen institutional absorption capacity.

(vi) Established regional platforms and cooperation networks

Finally, the WB6 already have regional platforms and cooperation structures that can support FLR without creating heavy new institutions. Existing regional mechanisms, professional networks, thematic working groups, biodiversity and forestry platforms, civil society networks and expert communities can be used for coordination, peer learning, data exchange, methodology harmonisation and joint project preparation. This is especially important because **FLR requires practical cooperation, not only formal coordination**. The BDTF WB and its thematic groups (TG-BC and TG-ER), Parks Dinarides, BioNet Western Balkans, Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Sustainable Forest Management (REAWG SFM), and Drin River Basin Flood Risk Management Initiative are established regional platforms and cooperation networks that already facilitate dialogue and coordination on ecosystem restoration, sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, intra-regional flood and DRR, and climate adaptation across the region. These platforms bring together public institutions, civil society, protected area managers, and international partners around shared technical agendas, policy alignment, and inter-jurisdictional implementation, which are precisely the actors and sectors central to FLR. They have developed internal capacities and can serve as direct entry points for FLR governance and knowledge exchange, reducing the need to create entirely new regional structures. Building on experiences of these existing networks and processes can facilitate the stewardship, coordination, and technical support for WB6 FLRP implementation.

The BDTF WB is the primary intergovernmental advisory body on biodiversity governance for the WB6. With the TG-ER, which is directly relevant to the WB6 FLRP, the BDTF is the central institutional backbone for FLR stewardship and regional coordination.

Parks Dinarides connects over 100 protected areas across the Dinaric Arc (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), facilitating intra-regional cooperation on biodiversity conservation and ecosystem management in one of Europe's most ecologically significant mountain systems. The network provides a governance model for FLR implementation in priority forest and highland landscapes.

BioNet Western Balkans is a regional network of recognised environmental CSOs from WB6, engaged in biodiversity policy advocacy, public awareness, and participation in intergovernmental processes, including the BDTF WB. For FLR this is an already established civil society engagement infrastructure that can be used for inclusive planning, local outreach, and community ownership across the region.

REAWG SFM is a domestic-level technical working group covering WB6, active since 2022 under the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative's Rural Development framework, focusing on climate-adaptive forest management, forest biodiversity integration, and policy alignment. This provides a direct technical dialogue platform for mainstreaming FLR into domestic-level forestry strategies and legislation.

Drin River Basin Flood Risk Management Initiative covers the Drin River Basin shared by Albania, Kosovo*, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. In 2025, it produced the first-ever regional Flood Risk Management Strategy and Action Plan based on NbS, including riparian afforestation and watershed restoration. This platform is the advanced operational model for NbS-based inter-jurisdictional DRR and control that can be directly applicable to FLR implementation in river landscapes shared among jurisdictions.

(vii) Rich natural capital and high potential for intra-regional ecosystem restoration

Although forest landscapes in the WB region are under intensive pressures from agricultural activities, development of infrastructure projects or industrial areas, tourism and urbanisation, **the region of the WB6 is Europe's biodiversity and ecological value hot spot**. This creates strong incentives for joint inter-jurisdictional efforts to achieve ecological and climate benefits through FLR. The mountain protective belts, forest landscapes within the protected areas, degraded floodplain forests, erosion hotspots, fire-prone zones, abandoned and active agricultural transition zones, and forest-pasture ecotones in particular have high leverage potential. Stakeholders identified shared river basins, mountain systems, and ecological corridors as key opportunities for joint action. These shared landscapes (e.g. Drina River, Sava River, Accursed Mountains, Sharr Mountains, etc.) provide natural entry points for regional cooperation. FLR can deliver visible benefits across the region, strengthening both political cooperation and nature protection joint efforts, especially through river-basin pilots, mountain protective belts, protected-area corridors, and joint DRR landscapes that can serve as flagship implementation pilots.

(viii) Opportunity to increase stakeholder ownership and link FLR with green jobs and rural development

The consultation process revealed strong readiness among institutions, experts, civil society, and local practitioners to move beyond consultation and actively shape and implement FLR on the ground. Stakeholders showed particular interest in priority-setting, site selection, and tailoring restoration approaches to specific landscape conditions. Many expressed willingness to contribute through inter-jurisdictional pilot actions, data sharing, co-developing site-specific restoration plans, and participating in monitoring and evaluation. Civil society and academia see their role in participatory monitoring, awareness raising, and knowledge exchange through regional networks, while public institutions emphasise coordination through existing platforms such as BDTF and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). This creates a credible basis for meaningful stakeholder involvement across the full cycle, from co-design and co-implementation to long-term local stewardship.

Local ownership can be further strengthened by linking FLR to rural development. Evidence from comparable contexts suggests that FLR can contribute to employment, sustainable livelihoods, and revitalisation of rural areas, provided it is accompanied by supportive governance, equitable land tenure arrangements, and local market development, making these outcomes opportunities to be actively designed for rather than automatic co-benefits. In the WB6 context, restoration service value chains can generate structured, sustained local economic activity. In the WB6 context, a restoration service value chain, as an economic activity generated by the process of restoration itself, includes the full sequence of goods and services needed to plan, implement, and maintain FLR: native seed collection and nursery production, planting and reforestation works, erosion control and torrent regulation, post-restoration monitoring, maintenance of restored areas, and technical consultancy. Each step creates employment and income opportunities for local workers, enterprises, and communities, particularly in rural and mountain areas of the WB6 that suffer from severe depopulation.

Additional economic value derives from the DRR functions of restored forest landscapes. Restored forests and riparian zones reduce flood peaks, stabilise slopes, prevent erosion, retain soil moisture, and lower wildfire risk, which is translated into avoided economic losses for municipalities, farmers, infrastructure managers, and insurers. When properly valued, these functions reframe FLR as a public investment with measurable fiscal returns rather than an environmental cost.

Building the FLR interventions on these opportunities increases its political and social attractiveness beyond environmental objectives. Linking restoration with economic benefits strengthens long-term support and

implementation feasibility, especially when connected to local stewardship, restoration service value chains, risk-reduction economies, sustainable tourism, and landscape identity in rural and mountain areas.

7.4 Strategic directions emerging from the synthesis

The regional patterns identified above point to a clear strategic orientation: **FLR in the WB6 needs to become a landscape-based process that connects planning, implementation, financing, monitoring and local stewardship.** Several directions follow from this.

First, FLR in the WB6 requires a common landscape-based planning framework. Restoration priorities should not be defined only by administrative boundaries, sectoral mandates or isolated project opportunities. **They should be based on landscape character and landscape sensitivity as a territorial and functional framework for identifying priority areas, defining appropriate restoration measures and coordinating action across sectors and landscapes.** A shared methodological framework for landscape characterisation and sensitivity assessment would therefore provide one of the main enabling conditions for coordinated FLR.

Second, restoration should be directed towards the functionality, connectivity and resilience of forest and forest-related landscapes. **The objective is not only to increase forest cover or implement individual measures, but to restore ecological processes and landscape functions.** This includes degraded native forests, high-value habitats, riparian zones, floodplains, wetlands, upper catchments, erosion-prone slopes, forest-agricultural mosaics and ecological corridors. In this way, FLR can simultaneously support biodiversity, water regulation, soil stability, climate adaptation and DRR.

Third, **FLR should be positioned as part of preventive risk reduction.** In the WB6, many risks that affect people, infrastructure and local economies are directly linked to the condition of landscapes. Degraded vegetation cover, unstable slopes, damaged riparian zones, reduced water retention, degraded or poorly connected forest areas and inappropriate land use can increase exposure to floods, fires, erosion, droughts and landslides. FLR can therefore contribute to reducing future losses if it is integrated into risk assessments, protection and rescue planning, water and basin management, spatial planning and investment programming.

Fourth, **implementation requires more stable, diversified and outcome-oriented financing.** Project funding will remain important, but it should be complemented by domestic public finance, environmental and forestry funds, EU and international instruments, private sector participation and locally relevant incentive mechanisms. Financing should support not only the initial implementation of restoration measures, but also maintenance, monitoring, stakeholder engagement and adaptive management.

Fifth, **regional cooperation should be practical, flexible and linked to shared landscapes and risks.** Not all FLR activities require the same level of regional coordination. However, joint action is necessary where river basins, mountain systems, ecological corridors, fire risks, droughts, floods or restoration opportunities extend across jurisdictions. The most effective approach is likely to be a coordination model that uses existing platforms, supports compatible methodologies and enables joint project preparation, monitoring and learning.

Finally, **FLR must be locally grounded.** Restoration will not be sustainable if local communities, landowners, land users, civil society, protected area managers, forestry authorities, water agencies, local governments and the private sector are involved only formally or at a late stage. **Local participation, benefit-sharing and stewardship arrangements are not secondary elements of FLR. They are conditions for long-term implementation, maintenance and social legitimacy.**

Taken together, these strategic directions show that **the WB6 FLRP should function as an integrative framework.** Its purpose is to connect existing policies, strengthen spatial prioritisation, improve monitoring, mobilise financing, support regional cooperation and ensure that restoration becomes a practical, measurable and long-term contribution to the resilience of forest and forest-related landscapes in the WB6.

8. Vision and mission of the WB6 FLRP

The regional vision and mission of the WB6 FLRP emerge from a convergence of sectoral frameworks that, taken together, point towards a shared spatial logic for the WB6. A landscape approach grounded in the landscape character provides the overarching narrative: a shift away from landscape planning systems primarily focused on controlling development towards planning approaches that systematically restore and enhance landscape character, functionality, and quality, while generating multiple co-benefits including biodiversity, health, recreation, and local development. Forestry, one of the FLR cornerstones, reframes forest management from a predominantly production-oriented and administratively fragmented sector towards the governance of multifunctional socio-ecological systems that simultaneously serve biodiversity conservation, soil and water protection, climate resilience, DRR, and rural community wellbeing. The nature and biodiversity protection sector grounds FLR in domestic and regional level regulatory instruments, with strong alignment with international biodiversity frameworks that set binding restoration targets and habitat connectivity objectives. Climate adaptation sets the direction of the WB6 FLRP towards resilient, low-carbon societies aligned with the Paris Agreement and the EU climate acquis, with FLR as a core ecosystem-based climate adaptation measure. Water management and soil protection call for integrated, basin-scale governance that links upstream forest restoration directly to downstream flood, drought, and erosion risk reduction. Civil protection and DRR frameworks position FLR explicitly as a prevention investment, treating catchment restoration, riparian rehabilitation, and fire-resilient landscape mosaics as risk-reduction measures. The WB6 FLRP has to be built on a strong financial framework that sets nature as a development asset, not as a budgetary burden. To enable this, restoration financing must transition from fragmented donor dependency towards predictable, multi-year, and territorially coordinated domestic and international mechanisms. Together, these frameworks form the foundation upon which a coherent shared vision and mission for FLR across WB6 is built.

Shared regional vision by 2050

By 2050, forests and forest-related landscapes in the WB6 are resilient, multifunctional systems that strengthen the region's capacity to respond to climate, economic, and societal challenges while providing vital ecosystem services, conserving biodiversity, regulating water and soil resources, reducing disaster risks, preserving natural and cultural values and landscape identity, and contributing to well-being of local communities and sustainable spatial development.

Shared regional mission by 2030

By 2030, the WB6 move from fragmented, sectoral and largely reactive responses to climate and environmental pressures, to integrated, landscape-based and preventive action that places forest and forest-related landscapes at the centre of regional resilience.

This shift is built on a shared territorial logic: landscape character is used as the common framework for planning and management, and forest and forest-related landscapes are recognised and managed as multifunctional ecosystems that deliver benefits for both people and nature. Sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation are planned and implemented together, so that ecological values, productive functions and landscape qualities reinforce one another rather than compete.

Building on this common approach, WB6 strengthen inter-jurisdictional cooperation and embed landscape- and ecosystem-based principles in their domestic forestry, biodiversity, climate, water and spatial planning instruments. This direct linkage advances the GAWB and aligns domestic action with EU accession requirements and the WB6 commitments under the Rio Conventions and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Cooperation extends beyond public authorities. Experts, local communities, land users, the private sector and civil society take part in shaping, implementing and monitoring restoration measures, which strengthens the evidence base, builds public legitimacy, and increases the capacity to deliver on the ground.

Underpinning all of the above, the region transitions towards sustainable, predictable and diversified financing for FLR that combines public budgets, EU instruments, international climate and biodiversity finance, and private investment. As a result, restoration is funded as a long-term shared regional priority and not as a series of isolated projects.

9. Strategic goals and measurable targets

Based on the document analysis and stakeholder inputs, five strategic goals of the WB6 FLRP were developed to respond to most pressing challenges and build on the identified opportunities in the region:

GOAL 1: Build capacities and enabling conditions for landscape-based FLR

The goal is focussed on establishing the planning, regulatory, institutional, data, and technical preconditions needed to ensure FLR is implemented in a coordinated and spatially differentiated way across the WB6.

GOAL 2: Restore resilient, connected, and climate-adaptive forest- and forest-related landscapes

The goal is to increase resiliency of forest landscapes by securing FLR interventions that improve ecological functionality, biodiversity, connectivity, soil and water regulation, climate resilience, and DRR in priority forest- and forest-related landscapes.

GOAL 3: Secure resilient and diversified funding for FLR

The goal is to shift restoration from fragmented, short-term and donor-dependent financing towards a more stable FLR financing model that combines domestic public finance, international support, private investment, and locally relevant incentive mechanisms.

GOAL 4: Strengthen regional cooperation and coordinated FLR implementation

The goal strengthens regional cooperation in FLR initiatives preparation, implementation, knowledge exchange, monitoring and data gathering in a coherent and coordinated manner, while allowing flexible implementation models adapted to different political, institutional, and territorial contexts in the WB6.

GOAL 5: Ensure inclusive participation, local stewardship, and fair benefit-sharing in FLR in the WB6

This goal ensures that the WB6 FLRP is socially legitimate and locally grounded by involving communities, landowners, land users, civil society, academia, and the private sector in planning, implementation, monitoring, and benefit-sharing.

GOAL 1: Build capacities and enabling conditions for landscape-based FLR

Create the planning, regulatory, institutional, data, and technical conditions needed to guide FLR in a coordinated and spatially differentiated way across the WB6.

Indicator for Goal 1: Landscape characterisation, including sensitivity assessment, is used as a common basis for defining FLR priorities in spatial planning documents and for supporting cross-sectoral coordination.

Baseline (2026): A common methodological framework for landscape characterisation and landscape sensitivity assessment to support FLR planning has not yet been established across the WB6. Some WB6 have already developed partial methodological elements or applied comparable approaches, while others have not yet introduced them in a systematic way.

As a result, landscape characterisation and sensitivity assessment are not yet consistently used across the region to identify FLR priorities, restoration opportunity zones, priority landscapes or planning measures.

Target (2030): By 2030, the common methodological framework for landscape characterisation and landscape sensitivity assessment is developed, formally recognised, and applied in at least one ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR area to identify FLR priorities, restoration opportunity zones or planning measures.

One of the basic preconditions for the implementation of FLR in the WB6 is that restoration is not treated only as a set of individual measures, but as a planning-oriented process that starts from the recognition and valuation of landscape character. Previous analyses show that FLR still does not have a sufficiently clear position in regulations, planning documents and decision-making procedures. There is also no common methodological approach for identifying landscape character types and assessing their condition, functionality and sensitivity, which is a precondition for determining the areas where restoration is most needed or can deliver the greatest

effects. As a result, there is a risk that FLR will remain at the level of a general strategic commitment, without clear criteria for selecting priorities, defining restoration zones and linking restoration with decisions on land use and public investment.

This goal therefore introduces landscape character as a common conceptual and methodological framework that guides FLR. Such an approach enables restoration priorities to be based on the values and potentials of specific landscapes, including the risk of further degradation, climate vulnerability, ecological connectivity, natural and cultural values, as well as local and regional development needs. At the same time, the goal emphasises the need to embed FLR more clearly into domestic strategies, legislative framework, sectoral policies, spatial planning instruments, SEA/EIA procedures and public investment appraisal. It is particularly important that FLR receives a recognisable legal and planning mandate, including links with territorial development, nature protection and forestry policies, as well as with the upcoming NBSAP revision cycles. Through targeted training, technical support, exchange of experience and awareness raising, the goal further strengthens the capacities needed for this approach to be applied in practice, rather than remaining only a methodological recommendation.

Table 4. Activities planned for achievement of Goal 1

Activity	Responsible actors	Timeline
1.1. Development of a common landscape character-based approach for identifying landscape character types, assessing their condition, functionality, values and sensitivity, and using this assessment to define FLR priorities and restoration opportunity zones. <i>Through this activity, a common methodological guidance is established in the WB6 to ensure that FLR priorities and restoration opportunity zones are not defined ad hoc, but on the basis of a shared assessment of landscape character, condition, functionality and sensitivity across the WB6. This will enable that shared forest landscapes between two or more WB6 are recognised, assessed, and prioritised using the same methodology, regardless of individual jurisdictions and domestic-level legislative and sectoral specificities.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027: Scoping and stocktake – Review of existing landscape characterisation approaches in the WB6; assessment of their methodological scope, applicability and harmonisation needs; mapping of available spatial datasets; establishment of a technical working group under the regional coordination body.</i> <i>2028: Methodological adaptation, harmonisation and testing – Existing LCA approaches adapted and harmonised for the WB6 FLR context; draft common methodological guidance prepared; methodology tested in at least one ROAR-identified FLR priority area; technical peer review completed by relevant academic and professional institutions.</i> <i>2029–2030: Validation and adoption – Methodology submitted for recognition through the relevant regional coordination framework; applied in selected priority landscapes across the WB6, including at least one inter-jurisdictional landscape; first restoration opportunity zones identified on the basis of the common landscape character-based approach.</i>	Regional coordination body; Ministries and competent public authorities responsible for spatial planning, environment, forestry and agriculture, DRR and nature conservation agencies; academic, research and professional institutions	2027: Scoping & stocktake 2028: Methodology development 2029–2030: Validation & adoption
1.2. Using landscape character as a territorial framework for linking FLR with spatial planning, land-use management, forestry, agriculture, water management, infrastructure planning, and nature conservation. <i>Under this activity, the common methodological guidance developed under Activity 1.1 is applied at the level of each WB6 and used to establish landscape character as a common territorial reference for</i>	Ministries and competent public authorities responsible for spatial planning, finance, environment, forestry, agriculture, water management,	2027–2028: Entry point mapping 2029–2030; Pilot integration

<i>linking FLR with spatial planning instruments and other strategic and development documents related to agriculture, forestry, tourism, infrastructure, water management and nature conservation. In this way, restoration priorities can be better reflected in planning, land-use and investment decisions. In practice, this means that FLR objectives and LCA should be integrated into spatial planning instruments and other strategic and development documents affecting priority landscapes identified through the common framework.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027–2028: Entry point mapping – Identification of ongoing and upcoming planning, policy and programming cycles in each WB6, including spatial planning instruments, forestry strategies, NBSAPs, RBMPs and relevant infrastructure, agriculture and rural development documents; Identification of practical entry points for integrating landscape character and FLR approaches; review of institutional responsibilities and planning procedures relevant for integrating landscape character values and related FLR priorities into land-use, restoration and investment decisions.</i> <i>2029–2030: Pilot integration – Landscape character and FLR objectives integrated into at least one relevant planning or sectoral policy instrument per WB6, where feasible; pilot FLR priority zones reflected in selected domestic spatial planning or land-use management documents; initial lessons documented on the role of landscape character in aligning restoration priorities, land-use planning and sectoral investment decisions.</i> <i>2031–2032: Systematic embedding – Landscape character progressively used as a common territorial reference in revised strategic, spatial and sectoral planning documents affecting ROAR-identified priority landscapes across the WB6; landscape character values and related FLR priorities reflected in land-use, infrastructure, forestry, agriculture, water management and nature conservation planning; improved alignment between restoration objectives, planning instruments and investment programming.</i>	infrastructure and nature conservation; local governments; academic, research and professional institutions	2031–2032: Systematic embedding
1.3. Integrating FLR principles, biodiversity safeguards, and climate resilience requirements into domestic strategies, legal frameworks, sector policies, spatial planning systems, and relevant implementation instruments. <i>The priority activities involve: (i) adopting a new legal provision in spatial planning regulation to ground FLR in planning practice and creating an enforceable FLR mandate; and (ii) incorporating WB6 FLRP activities into nature, biodiversity and forestry policies, primarily through ongoing and upcoming NBSAP revision cycles. This moves FLR from a strategic aspiration to an obligation at the domestic level.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2029: Policy audit and entry points – Systematic review of domestic legal, policy and planning frameworks to identify relevant entry points for integrating FLR principles, landscape character values, biodiversity safeguards and climate resilience requirements, including NBSAP revisions, forestry policy updates, spatial planning regulations and climate adaptation instruments; priority entry points ranked by timeline, legal relevance and institutional feasibility.</i> <i>2030–2031: Integration in sectoral policies – FLR objectives, biodiversity safeguards and NbS provisions incorporated into revised NBSAPs, forestry strategies and relevant sectoral policy documents in WB6 where revision cycles are ongoing; model legal provision for</i>	Ministries responsible for spatial planning, environment, forestry, finance, and agriculture; legal and policy units (parliamentary bodies and legislative drafting offices); relevant sector agencies	Milestones: 2028–2029: Policy audit & entry points 2030–2031: Integration in sectoral policies 2032–2033: Legal grounding

<i>strengthening the FLR mandate in spatial planning regulation drafted and consulted with relevant institutions.</i> <i>2032–2033: Legal and planning grounding – At least one domestic spatial planning regulation amended or supplemented to establish a clearer FLR mandate and recognise landscape character as a relevant planning basis for restoration; FLR principles, landscape character considerations and climate resilience requirements integrated into relevant climate adaptation, biodiversity, forestry and spatial planning instruments across the WB6, where feasible.</i>		
1.4. Including FLR priorities in SEA/EIA procedures, infrastructure planning, public investment appraisal, and other planning and assessment tools. <i>The purpose of this activity is to ensure that restoration needs and FLR priorities are considered early enough in assessment and approval processes, so that major plans, projects and public investments do not create new degradation risks or miss opportunities to improve landscape resilience. Each of the WB6 jurisdictions is responsible for amending their planning and assessment tools in line with internal legislation.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2030: Screening and guidance – FLR priority landscapes reviewed in relation to ongoing and planned SEA/EIA procedures, infrastructure plans and major public investment projects; guidance prepared on how to include landscape character, landscape sensitivity, connectivity and FLR priorities in SEA scoping and EIA screening; relevant ministries and planning authorities consulted on the use of FLR considerations in public investment appraisal.</i> <i>2030–2032: Procedural integration – SEA/EIA screening and scoping criteria updated to include FLR, landscape character and connectivity considerations in selected WB6 jurisdictions; FLR-related benefits included in selected cost-benefit analysis and public investment appraisal procedures; initial application tested through selected infrastructure, spatial planning or public investment cases affecting priority landscapes.</i> <i>2032–2034: Wider application – FLR priorities increasingly reflected in infrastructure planning, SEA/EIA procedures and public investment appraisal across the WB6, where feasible; landscape character and restoration opportunity zones used to assess degradation risks, resilience benefits and mitigation options; progress reviewed through the relevant regional coordination process.</i>	Ministries and agencies responsible for environment (SEA/EIA sectors), spatial planning, infrastructure, finance and public investment; donor coordination units; planning authorities; public investment units	2028–2030: Screening & guidance 2030–2032: Procedural integration 2032–2033: Full embedding
1.5. Establishing practical mechanisms for addressing land-use conflicts and trade-offs between restoration, production, conservation, infrastructure development, and local development needs. <i>The purpose of this activity is to ensure that FLR is feasible in landscapes with competing land-use interests by providing practical ways to balance restoration objectives with production, conservation, infrastructure and local development needs. This activity includes: (1) developing and applying methodological and planning tools to identify and map existing and potential land-use conflicts and trade-offs between FLR, forestry, agriculture, nature conservation, infrastructure, tourism, water management and local development; (2) identifying priority conflict zones for FLR interventions and assessing land-use scenarios, expected impacts, compatibility criteria and measures for avoiding additional pressures on landscapes; and (3) establishing institutional and participatory</i>	Domestic and local level planning authorities, land management agencies, cadastral agencies and land registry offices, forestry authorities, protected area authorities, water agencies, local governments, local FLR platforms for each of the shared priority forest landscapes under restoration	2030–2031: Conflict mapping 2032–2033: Institutional mechanisms established 2034–2035: Operationalisation

arrangements, including intersectoral working groups, local FLR platforms, consultations with land users and mediation processes, where needed, to support negotiated solutions for priority FLR areas identified through ROAR and subsequent FLR planning. <i>Milestones:</i> 2029–2031: <i>Conflict mapping – Land-use conflict zones identified in ROAR-identified priority FLR areas, using outputs from Activities 1.1 and 1.2, including landscape character, sensitivity and FLR priority areas; typology of common conflict and trade-off situations prepared, including ownership and land-use issues, sectoral mandate overlaps and competing pressures from production, conservation, infrastructure and local development; relevant land administration, planning and sector authorities consulted.</i> 2032–2033: <i>Planning and governance mechanisms – Intersectoral working groups and local FLR platforms established in selected ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas; land-use scenario assessment approach prepared and tested in selected conflict zones; consultation and mediation procedures drafted to support negotiated solutions between restoration, production, conservation and local development interests.</i> 2034–2035: <i>Operational application – Conflict and trade-off mechanisms applied in selected shared priority landscapes under active restoration; negotiated land-use solutions documented and reflected in spatial planning, land-use management or restoration planning processes; lessons used to support adaptive management under Goal 2.</i>		
1.6. Strengthening institutional, technical, and stakeholder capacities through targeted training, peer learning, technical assistance, knowledge exchange, and awareness raising <i>The purpose of this activity is to ensure that institutions, experts and relevant stakeholders have the knowledge, skills and practical support needed to apply the landscape-based FLR approach in planning, policy and implementation practice. This activity is strongly linked to Activity 4.5. Facilitating practical cooperation between public institutions, protected area managers, forestry authorities, water agencies, local governments, academic institutions, civil society, and other relevant actors; and Activity 4.6. Using existing regional platforms and peer learning to exchange tested approaches, implementation lessons, data, and technical guidance. In practice, this activity entails coordinated capacity needs assessments, specific training curricula development tailored for different types of actors (spatial planners, protected areas managers, water land and forest managing authorities, local grassroot organisations and CSOs, local authorities...).</i> <i>Milestones:</i> 2027–2029: <i>Building the foundation – Training curricula on LCA and FLR principles developed and piloted; at least one inter-jurisdictional peer learning exchange conducted; targeted technical assistance packages initiated with support from relevant regional and international mechanisms.</i> 2030–2034: <i>Scaling – Training expanded to relevant institutions, professional organisations and selected university programmes in forestry, landscape architecture and spatial planning; a regional community of practice established; regular knowledge exchange events organised through existing regional cooperation platforms.</i> 2035–2050: <i>Institutionalisation – Regional training institutions, universities and professional organisations increasingly take over the</i>	Regional coordination body, FLR coordination secretariat, domestic-level focal institutions, academic and training institutions, vocational and professional training institutions (forestry schools, landscape architecture faculties, civil engineering departments), professional associations, CSOs, international partners and development agencies	2027-2029: Building the foundation 2030-2034: Scaling 2035-2050: Institutionalisation

<i>delivery of FLR-related training and technical support; peer learning becomes a regular mechanism for exchanging tested approaches and implementation lessons; capacity development results reflected in monitoring, reporting and adaptive management processes.</i>		
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GOAL 2: Restore resilient, connected, and climate-adaptive forest- and forest-related landscapes

Implement FLR interventions that improve ecological functionality, biodiversity, connectivity, soil and water regulation, climate resilience, and DRR in priority forest- and forest-related landscapes.

Indicator 2.1 for Goal 2: Improved integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity of priority forest and forest-related landscapes.

Baseline (2019): The baseline is informed by the ROAR assessment and the latest publicly available FLII dataset, which provides a 2019 reference for forest integrity and connectivity.

Target (2032): By 2032, at least one ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR area demonstrates measurable improvement in forest landscape integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity compared with the ROAR/FLII baseline, based on complementary GIS, remote-sensing and/or field monitoring evidence from implemented FLR interventions.

Target (2050): By 2050, all ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas demonstrate measurable improvement in forest landscape integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity compared with the ROAR/FLII baseline, based on complementary GIS, remote-sensing and/or field monitoring evidence from implemented FLR interventions.

Indicator 2.2 for Goal 2: Improvement in land and soil condition in FLR intervention areas, measured against LDN core indicators.

Baseline (2026): Baseline LDN status is established for ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas, using land cover, land productivity dynamics and soil organic carbon stocks. Where available, existing UNCCD domestic-level reporting data and domestic LDN baselines should be used as the primary reference.

Target (2032): By 2032, ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas show no further deterioration in LDN status compared with the 2026 baseline, and a measurable reduction in the area classified as degraded within treated intervention areas.

Target (2050): By 2050, treated priority areas show a sustained positive trend in LDN status, expressed as a net reduction in degraded land area and/or an increase in land classified as non-degraded compared with the 2026 baseline.

One of the key challenges for FLR in the WB6 is that many forest and forest-related landscapes are simultaneously exposed to multiple pressures: habitat degradation and fragmentation, illegal logging, overgrazing, droughts, floods, fires, soil erosion, invasive alien species, mining impacts, unsustainable infrastructure development, and other pressures, which are further intensified by climate change. Previous analyses indicate that restoration of these landscapes is often considered through individual sectoral measures, while their connectivity, functionality, role in risk reduction and contribution to climate resilience are not always treated as part of a single restoration approach. As a result, there is a risk that interventions remain spatially dispersed, insufficiently connected and focused only on individual problems, instead of restoring the functionality of the integral structure of landscape character, which simultaneously supports biodiversity, the water regime, soil stability, DRR and the long-term resilience of local communities.

This goal therefore directs FLR towards the restoration of native forest ecosystems, degraded high-conservation-value habitats, riparian zones, wetlands, floodplains, upper catchments and other priority areas identified through an LCA. Particular emphasis is placed on improving ecological connectivity and reducing fragmentation across forest mosaics, river basins, mountain systems, and inter-jurisdictional natural-ecological

systems and networks. At the same time, the goal links restoration with measures for restoring soil functions, increasing soil water retention capacity, reducing erosion, landslides and slope instability, strengthening drought resilience and reducing fire risk. Through the application of NbS, climate-adaptive land management, mixed and site-adapted forest structures, as well as the development of pilot interventions in high-risk, inter-jurisdictional FLR priority areas, the goal creates a basis for directing FLR towards specific landscapes where it can deliver multiple ecological, climate and social benefits.

Table 5. Activities planned for achievement of Goal 2

Activity	Responsible actors	Timeline
2.1. Restoring native forest ecosystems and degraded high-conservation-value habitats, including riparian zones and other priority areas identified through LCA. <i>The purpose of this activity is to direct restoration interventions towards priority ecosystems, habitats, and landscapes where recovery can strengthen landscape character, biodiversity value, and ecological functionality. Priority areas are identified through ROAR and the LCA under Activities 1.1 and 1.2, with particular emphasis on native forest ecosystems and degraded high-conservation-value habitats. This activity includes identifying affected species and habitats, mapping of degradation drivers, including anthropogenic factors, invasive alien species, hazards etc., as well as implementing restoration interventions and changing traditional practices in forest management.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027–2029: Prioritisation and preparation - Restoration programmes and initiatives reviewed, developed and aligned with the WB6 FLRP; priority ecosystems, habitats and landscapes selected using ROAR and LCA outputs from Activities 1.1 and 1.2; baseline research conducted for each priority site to assess degradation drivers and affected species and habitats to enable design of adequate restoration measures, which will improve ecological integrity of forest habitats.</i> <i>2028–2032: Pilot restoration - First site-adapted restoration interventions implemented in selected ROAR-identified priority FLR areas; measures can include, but are not limited to species-specific restoration measures, eradicating invasive alien species, recovering vegetation cover, restoring soil health and functions, reforestation with locally-adapted native species, assisted natural regeneration, riparian vegetation restoration, etc.; pilot monitoring launched with relevant institutions, protected area managers, CSOs and local communities.</i> <i>2032–2040: Scale-up and adaptive management - Restoration expanded to additional ROAR-identified priority FLR areas, based on pilot results and domestic programme cycles; adaptive management applied using monitoring evidence; measures to prevent further degradation of riparian forests, native forests and other high-conservation-value habitats integrated into restoration planning.</i> <i>2040–2050: Long-term stewardship - Maintenance and stewardship arrangements established for restored areas; restoration measures adjusted in response to climate-related changes and monitoring results; long-term results reflected in domestic forestry, biodiversity and FLR implementation programmes.</i>	Ministries responsible for environment, spatial planning, forestry, agriculture, water management, infrastructure and nature conservation; local governments; protected area managers, public forest management companies, DRR agencies and civil protection directorates, CSOs, academic and professional institutions, private landowners	2028–2029: Priority Forest Landscapes nomination 2029–2032: Piloting 2032–2040: Scaling 2040–2050: Consolidation
2.2. Improving ecological connectivity and reducing fragmentation across forest mosaics, river basins, mountain systems, and inter-jurisdictional ecological networks.	Ministries responsible for environment, spatial planning, forestry,	2028–2030: Mapping & prioritisation

<i>This activity aims to strengthen ecological connectivity in landscapes shared among jurisdictions and support species movement and ecological processes across areas that are functionally linked but often managed through separate administrative or sectoral systems. In practice, this entails: (1) coordinated inter-jurisdictional prioritisation of shared landscapes by responsible authorities in neighbouring jurisdictions to align restoration priorities, harmonise protected area management and support joint pilot interventions in shared ecological corridors; (2) spatial identification of fragmented forest patches, habitat gaps and movement barriers across prioritised shared landscapes, using the LCA framework developed under Activity 1.1 and the ROAR priority areas to identify where connectivity is most disrupted and where restoration of linking elements would provide the greatest ecological benefit; (3) restoration of structural components that reconnect fragmented landscapes, such as riparian forest corridors along rivers and streams, degraded habitat patches within ecological corridors, and other linking elements that support functional species movement; and (4) reduction of fragmentation pressures that cut through or weaken ecological networks, including infrastructure barriers, habitat conversion and other land-use changes, through mitigation measures such as wildlife crossings, passage structures and the integration of connectivity objectives into spatial plans and EIA/SEA procedures under Activity 1.4.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2030: Mapping and prioritisation - Inter-jurisdictional prioritisation initiated for shared forest mosaics, river basins, mountain systems and ecological corridors; connectivity gaps, fragmented forest patches, habitat discontinuities and movement barriers mapped in ROAR-identified priority FLR areas; priority locations identified for restoring linking elements and reducing fragmentation pressures, using the landscape character-based framework under Activity 1.1 and ROAR outputs.</i> <i>2030–2035: Pilot connectivity restoration - Structural connectivity elements restored in selected ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR area, including riparian forest corridors, degraded habitat patches and stepping-stone habitats; fragmentation mitigation measures tested in selected locations, including wildlife crossings, passage structures and restoration of ecological corridors; connectivity objectives reflected in selected spatial planning, SEA/EIA and infrastructure planning processes.</i> <i>2035–2050: Wider application and adaptive management - Restoration of ecological networks expanded to additional ROAR-identified priority FLR areas; species movement indicators and landscape connectivity metrics used to guide adaptive management; lessons from pilot landscapes integrated into future restoration, protected area management and spatial planning processes.</i>	agriculture, water management, infrastructure, roads and transport, energy and nature conservation; local governments; protected area managers, academic and professional institutions, CSOs, private landowners	2030–2035: Pilot restoration 2035–2050: Systematic scale-up
<i>2.3. Support protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM) where they contribute to FLR objectives, ecological connectivity, and long-term landscape resilience.</i> <i>This activity uses protected areas and OECMs as anchors for FLR where they can support connectivity, ecosystem recovery and the resilience of wider landscapes. This is a long-term activity that entails coordinated planning and implementation for each priority forest landscape under restoration: (1) aligning protected area management plans with WB6 FLRP priorities so that forest management, habitat restoration and species recovery measures within and around protected areas contribute to broader landscape</i>	Ministries of environment, forestry and spatial planning; protected area managers; nature conservation agencies; local self-governments; cadastral and land registry agencies; forestry enterprises; academic and expert institutions;	2028–2030: Gap Auditing 2030–2035: Policy Piloting 2035–2040: Full Alignment

<i>restoration objectives identified through ROAR and LCA, and are consistent with the character of the wider landscape; (2) identifying and addressing restoration gaps in and around protected areas, including degraded buffer zones, fragmented habitats along protected area boundaries and unprotected connecting corridors between protected sites, where FLR interventions such as native habitat restoration, assisted natural regeneration, invasive alien species management and riparian habitat restoration may be prioritised; (3) supporting the identification, recognition and management of OECMs, such as community forests, sustainably managed private woodlands and other areas under conservation-compatible governance, where they deliver effective long-term conservation outcomes outside formally protected areas; and (4) preventing degradation within and adjacent to protected areas by integrating conservation and restoration objectives into spatial planning instruments, SEA/EIA screening procedures and infrastructure planning under Activity 1.4 so that restoration gains within protected landscapes are not undermined by incompatible land uses in surrounding areas.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2030: Review and gap identification - Protected area management plans reviewed in relation to ROAR-identified priority FLR areas, LCA results and WB6 FLR priorities; restoration gaps identified within and around protected areas, including degraded buffer zones, fragmented boundary habitats and unprotected connecting corridors; priority protected areas and surrounding landscapes selected for FLR-related management improvements.</i> <i>2030–2035: Management planning and OECM pilots - FLR objectives, habitat restoration measures and connectivity priorities integrated into selected protected area management plans and related spatial planning instruments; pilot identification of potential OECMs initiated in selected WB6 jurisdictions, including community forests, sustainably managed private woodlands and other conservation-compatible areas; measures prepared to reduce degradation risks within and adjacent to priority protected areas.</i> <i>2035–2040: Wider application - Protected area management increasingly aligned with WB6 FLR priorities in landscapes under active restoration; OECM recognition and management approaches further developed in WB6 jurisdictions willing to adopt them; lessons from protected areas and OECM pilots used to support ecological connectivity, long-term conservation outcomes and landscape resilience.</i>	CSOs and local communities	
2.4. Restoring soil functions and reducing soil erosion, landslide and slope instability risks through site-adapted FLR approach and measures. <i>This activity is directly linked to GAWB Action 28, and it aims to restore soil functions, improve soil stability, reduce soil erosion and the risks of landslides and slope instability, and improve water retention capacity in degraded, erosion-prone and climate-vulnerable landscapes, particularly in mountain and hilly systems, upper catchments and areas affected by deforestation, fires, floods and droughts. In practice, this entails: (1) identification and prioritisation of soil erosion hotspots and slope instability zones through updated soil erosion databases and maps, terrain and catchment analysis, in order to target sites where soil degradation and risk exposure are most severe and where restoration would deliver the greatest risk-reduction benefits; (2) implementation of site-adapted FLR measures, including vegetation cover restoration,</i>	Ministries of forestry, environment, agriculture, water management and spatial planning, local self-governments, forestry enterprises, protected area managers, land management and erosion control agencies, civil protection and DRR directorates, infrastructure (road and rail) authorities, CSOs;	2028–2030: Hotspot Mapping 2030–2035: Pilot Restoration 2035–2050: Systematic Scaling

<i>assisted natural regeneration, agroforestry, reforestation and, where ecologically appropriate, afforestation with native and climate-adapted species on bare and degraded slopes, selected on the basis of local soil type, slope, climate exposure, land-use context and land tenure conditions, and consistent with landscape character; (3) torrent and erosion control works combining biological measures with hybrid grey-green engineering solutions, such as check dams and slope stabilisation structures, where NbS alone are insufficient; and (4) integration of soil restoration outcomes into LDN monitoring and domestic-level reporting, using land cover, land productivity and soil organic carbon sub-indicators to document and verify improvements in land condition in targeted restoration areas and to demonstrate how FLR interventions contribute to each WB6 UNCCD-related obligations and, where relevant, domestic-level voluntary LDN targets. FLR does not entail the afforestation of natural or semi-natural non-forest ecosystems, including grasslands, karst landscapes, heathlands, wetlands and natural or semi-natural pastures. Any intervention involving afforestation, tree planting or the recovery of woody vegetation must be subject to prior expert ecological assessment in order to prevent the conversion, degradation or loss of the original ecological values of these habitats.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2030: Hotspot mapping and prioritisation - Soil erosion hotspots identified in ROAR-identified priority FLR areas using established scientific erosion assessment methods and EU-recognised approaches; landslide-prone areas and slope instability zones identified; priority degraded slopes, torrential catchments and catchment zones with degraded vegetation cover selected for FLR interventions; ecological safeguards defined for interventions involving afforestation or tree planting.</i> <i>2030–2035: Pilot soil and slope restoration - Site-adapted FLR measures implemented in selected priority landscapes; torrent and erosion control measures tested where needed; FLR soil objectives reflected in selected DRR plans, RBMPs and land management instruments.</i> <i>2035–2050: Wider application and monitoring - Soil function restoration expanded to priority degraded slopes, upper catchments and riparian zones; long-term monitoring of soil erosion, vegetation recovery and land condition established; results used to support LDN-related monitoring and reporting under the UNCCD and adaptive management.</i>	academic institutions and local landowners	
2.5. Restore watersheds, wetlands, riparian buffers, floodplains, and upper catchments to improve water retention, reduce flood and erosion risks, and strengthen climate resilience. <i>The purpose of this activity is to restore the water-regulating functions of key landscape elements that are critical for flood mitigation, erosion control, water retention, climate adaptation and overall landscape functionality, while ensuring that restoration measures are consistent with landscape character. In practice, this entails: (1) coordinated inter-jurisdictional prioritisation of shared river basins by water management, forestry and environment authorities in neighbouring jurisdictions, particularly in the Drina, Sava and Drin River systems, and alignment of restoration interventions with RBMPs so that upstream measures contribute to downstream flood risk reduction across jurisdictions; (2) restoration of upper catchment landscapes and vegetation cover</i>	Ministries of water management, environment, forestry, agriculture and spatial planning, water agencies and river basin authorities; meteorological and hydrological institutes and agencies; protected area managers, forestry enterprises, local self-governments, CSOs, DRR and civil protection authorities, academic and	2028–2032: Mapping & Piloting 2032–2040: Systemic Management 2040–2050: Adaptive Monitoring

<i>through site-adapted measures, including assisted natural regeneration, reforestation, agroforestry and, where ecologically appropriate, afforestation with native and climate-adapted species on degraded slopes, in order to slow runoff, increase infiltration and improve natural water regulation; (3) rehabilitation of riparian buffers and floodplain forests through restoration of native riparian vegetation and, where feasible, restoration of natural floodplain inundation regimes in order to support bank stabilisation, sediment retention and flood attenuation functions; (4) restoration of wetlands and floodplain connectivity to recover natural water storage capacity, buffer extreme rainfall events and sustain baseflows during drought periods; and (5) integration of watershed restoration into DRR planning and water management frameworks so that restored catchments are recognised as natural infrastructure in flood risk assessments and public investment appraisal, alongside grey engineering solutions.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2032: Watershed prioritisation and planning - Priority watersheds, wetlands, riparian buffers, floodplains and upper catchments identified within ROAR priority FLR areas; river basins shared by two or more jurisdictions selected for coordinated restoration planning, including areas affected by floods, erosion, drought, wildfires and post-fire degradation; restoration priorities aligned with selected RBMPs, flood risk management plans and DRR planning instruments.</i> <i>2032–2040: Pilot watershed and floodplain restoration - Site-adapted restoration measures implemented in selected upper catchments, riparian zones, wetlands and floodplains; pilot interventions tested in at least one river basin shared by two or more jurisdictions or ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR area; effects on water retention, flood attenuation, erosion reduction and post-fire catchment recovery included in monitoring.</i> <i>2040–2050: Wider application and long-term management - Watershed, wetland, riparian and floodplain restoration expanded to additional priority landscapes; restored areas maintained through water management, DRR and FLR implementation programmes; long-term monitoring of water retention, flood risk reduction, erosion control and landscape resilience established.</i>	professional institutions, local landowners and land users	
2.6. Increase drought resilience through restored vegetation cover, climate-adaptive land management, site-adapted forest species, and mixed forest structures. <i>This activity aims to reduce the vulnerability of forest and forest-related landscapes to drought by improving vegetation structure, species suitability, soil moisture retention and climate-adaptive land management, while ensuring that interventions support ecological functionality and remain compatible with the spatial identity of the wider landscape. In practice, this entails: (1) assessment of drought vulnerability in priority landscapes shared among jurisdictions using climate projections, land productivity dynamics, soil moisture and vegetation condition data, and landscape sensitivity assessments in order to identify forest stands and land-use zones most exposed to increasing drought frequency, soil moisture loss and vegetation decline; (2) conversion of drought-vulnerable monocultures and even-aged stands towards mixed, multi-layered and structurally diverse forest stands through selective interventions, such as thinning, gap planting with drought-tolerant native species and gradual adjustment of species composition to increase the capacity of forest ecosystems to withstand and recover from prolonged dry periods; (3) use of site-adapted and climate-</i>	Ministries of forestry, environment, agriculture and spatial planning, forestry enterprises, meteorological and hydrological institutes and agencies, protected area managers, seed and nursery enterprises (public and private), climate adaptation authorities, local self-governments, academic and research institutions, CSOs, private forest owners and land users	2029–2032: Vulnerability assessment & pilot 2032–2040: Systematic conversion 2040–2050: Monitoring & adaptation

<i>resilient native tree species in reforestation and, where ecologically appropriate, afforestation interventions, drawing on domestic and regional knowledge of species performance under projected climate conditions, including provenance selection or assisted migration only where justified by expert ecological assessment; and (4) integration of drought resilience criteria into forest management plans and spatial planning instruments under Activity 1.3, ensuring that climate-adaptive silviculture and land management practices are embedded in domestic policy and planning frameworks that govern forest management across the WB6 region, rather than remaining limited to individual restoration projects.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2029–2032: Vulnerability assessment and pilots - Drought-vulnerable forest stands and land-use zones identified in ROAR priority FLR areas; pilot interventions tested in selected high-risk stands, including species composition adjustment, thinning and gap planting with site-adapted native species; guidance prepared on the use of climate-resilient native species and planting material.</i> <i>2032–2040: Stand improvement and climate-adaptive management - Mixed and structurally diverse forest stands promoted in selected drought-vulnerable zones; drought resilience criteria reflected in selected forest management plans and relevant spatial planning instruments; lessons from pilot interventions used to guide wider application across priority landscapes.</i> <i>2040–2050: Monitoring and adaptation - Long-term monitoring of vegetation condition, land productivity and species survival established in treated areas; forest management measures adjusted in response to monitoring results and updated climate information; results used to support adaptive management and future restoration planning.</i>		
2.7. Apply NbS within FLR interventions where they can contribute to flood regulation, erosion control, wildfire risk reduction, slope stabilisation, water retention, biodiversity loss and recovery of ecosystem functions. <i>This activity uses NbS as practical FLR measures within wider green infrastructure networks, where natural processes can improve ecological integrity of forest ecosystems and reduce causes of degradation, while remaining appropriate to local ecological, geophysical and landscape conditions. In practice, this entails: (1) identifying concrete intervention sites within each ROAR-identified priority FLR area, using available data for specific locations, including domestic and local level data; (2) conducting a comprehensive baseline research to define NbS intervention types and design measures appropriate to each intervention site, based on the dominant risk profile and by applying the IUCN Global Standard on Nature-based Solutions™; (3) developing and carrying out appropriate monitoring and evaluation plans for each NbS intervention to enable measurement of project success, timely identification of implementation issues, and the prompt application of appropriate corrective measures to maximise project impact (4) piloting and documenting NbS performance at site-level demonstration locations in ROAR-identified priority FLR areas in order to build an evidence base, strengthen institutional confidence and support the integration of NbS into disaster risk reduction planning, water management frameworks and public investment appraisal under Activity 1.4; and (4) scaling proven NbS approaches and green infrastructure elements through the regional peer-learning mechanism under Activity 4.6, enabling tested models</i>	Ministries of environment, forestry, water management, agriculture, finance, spatial planning and civil protection; DRR authorities; water agencies; forestry enterprises; protected area managers; infrastructure/road and rail authorities; local self-governments; academic and professional institutions; CSOs and local communities	2028–2032: Piloting & evidence base 2032–2038: Integration & scaling 2038–2045: Institutionalisation

<i>from one jurisdiction to be adapted and replicated across the WB6 region.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2032: Piloting and evidence base - Site-level NbS demonstration projects implemented in selected ROAR-identified priority FLR areas; performance and implementation lessons documented.</i> <i>2032–2038: Integration and scaling - Tested NbS approaches reflected in selected DRR plans, RBMPs and public investment appraisal procedures under Activity 1.4; tested models adapted and replicated in additional priority landscapes through regional peer learning; technical guidance prepared for wider application of NbS within FLR interventions.</i> <i>2038–2045: Wider uptake and monitoring - NbS increasingly used as part of FLR implementation in priority landscapes; monitoring of NbS performance included in relevant domestic-level and regional monitoring frameworks; results used to support adaptive management, risk reduction planning and future FLR investment preparation.</i>		
2.8. Restore and manage fire-resilient forest and landscape mosaics in disaster-prone areas, especially where climate change is increasing exposure to wildfire and degradation risks. <i>This activity reduces wildfire and degradation risks by shaping forest and landscape mosaics that are more resilient to climate-driven disturbances, while maintaining ecological functionality and the specific values of the wider landscape. In practice, this entails: (1) mapping and prioritising wildfire-prone landscapes using ROAR-identified priority FLR areas, LCA, climate projections, drought exposure data and historical fire incidence data to identify areas where increasing drought, land abandonment, degraded forest structure and fuel accumulation are creating elevated wildfire exposure; (2) restoring structurally diverse, mixed-species forest mosaics and improving degraded forest stands through selective management, assisted natural regeneration, reforestation with native and climate-adapted species, and the reduction of excessive fuel continuity where ecologically appropriate, while avoiding the conversion of valuable natural and semi-natural open habitats; (3) designing landscape-scale firebreak networks that integrate restored vegetation buffers, managed open land patches and access infrastructure, planned jointly with civil protection, forestry and wildfire management authorities to ensure operational compatibility with prevention and suppression systems; and (4) embedding post-fire restoration protocols into domestic DRR and forestry planning instruments under Activity 1.3 so that landscapes degraded by wildfire are systematically assessed and restored where intervention is needed, preventing permanent forest cover loss, inappropriate land-use conversion and erosion processes that commonly follow fire events in steep terrain.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2029: Wildfire risk mapping - Wildfire-prone landscapes identified using ROAR outputs, LCA results, historical fire records, land-cover change data and climate exposure information; priority zones selected for fire-resilient mosaic restoration; initial coordination established with forestry, civil protection and wildfire management authorities.</i>	Ministries of forestry, environment, agriculture and civil protection; wildfire and disaster risk management authorities, forestry enterprises, meteorological and hydrological institutes and agencies, protected area managers, local self-governments, CSOs, water and land management agencies, academic and professional institutions, local landowners and land users	2028–2029: Risk mapping 2029–2035: Pilot mosaic restoration 2035–2050: Systematic management

<i>2029–2035: Pilot mosaic restoration - Fire-resilient forest and landscape mosaic measures tested in selected high-risk landscapes, including inter-jurisdictional areas where relevant; species composition and forest structure improved in selected degraded stands; firebreak restoration, fuel continuity reduction and post-fire restoration measures reflected in selected wildfire prevention and forestry planning instruments.</i> <i>2035–2050: Wider application and adaptive management - Fire-resilient mosaic approaches expanded to additional wildfire-prone priority landscapes; long-term management adjusted in response to monitoring results and changing fire-weather patterns; lessons integrated into future FLR, forestry and DRR planning.</i>		
2.9. Develop and scale FLR pilot interventions in landscapes under high degradation risk within inter-jurisdictional zone, including project pipelines and investment-ready documentation. <i>This activity supports the transition from planning to implementation by preparing, testing and scaling FLR interventions in landscapes where risks, restoration needs and ecological functions are shared across jurisdictions. In practice, this entails: (1) selection of pilot sites within ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas, further refined through LCA, focusing on landscapes where ecological risks, such as habitat fragmentation, floods, soil erosion and wildfires, extend across jurisdictions and where there is readiness for coordinated implementation by at least two jurisdictions; (2) preparation of investment-ready project documentation for each selected pilot landscape, in line with Activities 3.3 and 4.4, including feasibility studies, spatial analyses, ecological baselines, technical restoration designs, cost estimates, financing structures and monitoring frameworks, developed in a format suitable for the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD), IPA, WBIF, GCF, GEF and other relevant international financing instruments; (3) testing and documenting pilot interventions at site-level demonstration locations within priority landscapes to generate field evidence on restoration performance, cost-effectiveness, institutional delivery capacity and local ownership, and to support future scaling of restoration programmes; and (4) scaling proven FLR pilots into wider landscape programmes through the regional coordination mechanism under Activity 4.4, translating documented pilot outcomes into replicable and domestically embedded restoration programmes supported by multi-source financing.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2029–2031: Pilot landscape selection - High-risk sites selected from ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas and refined using LCA results and risk information, including fragmentation, floods, soil erosion and wildfire exposure; initial list of FLR pilot projects prepared for selected inter-jurisdictional landscapes; key institutions, local partners and possible funding sources identified.</i> <i>2031–2034: Project preparation and pilot testing - Feasibility studies, ecological baselines, technical designs, cost estimates and monitoring frameworks prepared for selected pilot landscapes; project documentation prepared in a format suitable for IPARD, IPA, WBIF, GCF, GEF and other relevant financing instruments; site-level pilot interventions tested and documented in selected priority landscapes.</i> <i>2034–2040: Scaling into programmes - Successful pilot interventions used as a basis for wider landscape restoration</i>	Ministries of environment, forestry, spatial planning, water management and finance, rural development agencies and IPARD managing authorities, local self-governments, cadastral and land registry agencies, CSOs, protected area managers, forestry enterprises, regional cooperation platforms, development agencies, IUCN, financial institutions, academic and professional institutions, and local stakeholders	2029–2033: Mapping & piloting 2033–2040: Scaling 2040–2050: Long-term stewardship

<i>programmes; financing and delivery options prepared for selected WB6 jurisdictions; lessons from pilot landscapes used to improve future FLR project preparation, domestic programmes and regional cooperation.</i>		
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GOAL 3: Secure resilient and diversified funding for FLR

Shift from fragmented, short-term and donor-dependent financing towards a more stable FLR financing model that combines domestic public finance, international support, private investment, and locally relevant incentive mechanisms.

Indicator for Goal 3: Volume and source diversity of funding mobilised for FLR interventions in identified inter-jurisdictional priority landscapes. Baseline (2026): 0 EUR (to be confirmed through a verification exercise following the identification of ROAR priority FLR areas). Target (2030): Total volume ≥ 25M EUR, with documented contributions from at least two of the three funding source categories. Target (2050): All inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas identified through ROAR and cross-referenced with LCA have restoration interventions that are either completed, under implementation, or have secured committed financing from a formally agreed multi-source structure - with documented contributions from all three funding source categories across the overall portfolio.

The WB6 currently lack a stable and predictable financial architecture dedicated to FLR. Existing financing for FLR-like interventions is overwhelmingly **dependent on short-term donor cycles**, with **marginal integration into domestic public budgets**, **weak absorption capacity** for available international instruments across WB6, and **negligible private sector participation**. These weaknesses are further compounded in inter-jurisdictional landscapes, where effective financing requires coordinated action among WB6 at different levels of institutional readiness and absorption capacity. This goal addresses the FLR financing bottleneck by developing and progressively harmonising the institutional, regulatory, and technical conditions across the WB6 - reducing asymmetries in readiness and absorption capacity, and thereby strengthening the collective capacity for coordinated action in shared landscapes. The primary focus is on mobilising diversified and resilient financing for the inter-jurisdictional priority zones identified through the ROAR and further refined through LCA by combining domestic eco-funds and green budget frameworks, EU pre-accession and investment instruments, international climate and biodiversity finance, market-based mechanisms such as payment for ecosystem services (PES), carbon-related financing mechanisms and blended finance, as well as post-accession EU financing instruments, including Cohesion Policy funds, when WB6 become eligible. The enabling conditions and financing instruments developed under this goal constitute a systemic foundation that will equally support the implementation of broader restoration interventions across the WB6.

Because many of these conditions depend on systemic public finance and fiscal reforms led by actors beyond the core constituency of the WB6 FLRP—notably ministries of finance, parliaments, and fiscal and regulatory agencies—the **milestones defined for the activities below are deliberately indicative and conditional**: they indicate the intended direction and sequencing of progress rather than firm commitments, and their pace will depend on broader reform dynamics and on each WB6 institutional readiness.

Table 6. Activities planned for achievement of Goal 3

Activity	Responsible actors	Timeline
3.1. Operationalising eco-funds or equivalent financing mechanisms with clear FLR mandates and landscape allocation criteria. <i>This activity establishes a stable institutional platform for receiving, managing, and combining domestic and international restoration finance,</i>	Ministries of finance, environment and forestry; governing bodies of eco-funds and	2027–2028: Scoping & mandate

<i>addressing a key gap in the current framework. By giving eco-funds or equivalent mechanisms an explicit FLR mandate and links to revenue streams such as forest-related fees and water charges, it also creates a vehicle for financing the long-term maintenance costs upon which restoration durability depends.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027-2028: Review of existing eco-funds and equivalent mechanisms across WB6; identification of those able to host an explicit FLR mandate and territorial allocation criteria.</i> <i>2029-2030: At least one eco-fund or equivalent mechanism operating with an FLR mandate and links to relevant revenue streams.</i> <i>2031-2050: Eco-funds progressively channel domestic and international resources to restoration, including long-term maintenance (operating expenditure; OPEX).</i>	equivalent financing mechanisms; water management authorities; local self-governments	2029–2030: Operationalisation 2031–2050: Continuous operation
3.2. Embedding FLR in programme budgeting, green budget frameworks, and relevant domestic public finance instruments. <i>This activity moves restoration from dispersed budget lines towards a recognised, multi-year programme objective with defined outcome indicators, making FLR expenditure more visible, predictable, and easier to justify. Anchoring restoration in programme and green budgeting strengthens domestic ownership and provides the budgetary basis for sustaining maintenance and monitoring costs beyond the establishment phase.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027-2028: Identification of programme- and green-budgeting reform cycles offering windows to embed FLR as a recognised budget objective.</i> <i>2029-2031: FLR reflected as a distinct programme objective with outcome indicators in at least one WB6 budget framework.</i> <i>2032-2035: FLR progressively embedded in programme and green budgeting across WB6, providing a predictable domestic budgetary financing.</i>	Ministries of finance; ministries of environment, forestry and agriculture; programme and green budgeting units; parliaments (budget adoption); supreme audit institutions and statistical offices	2027–2028: Entry-point mapping 2029–2031: Pilot integration 2032–2035: Systematic embedding
3.3. Mobilising IPA, IPARD, WBIF, GCF, GEF, LDN fund and other international resources by strengthening absorption capacity and preparing bankable FLR project pipelines. <i>This activity converts available international resources into contracted and disbursed finance by addressing the binding constraint on FLR funding in the region — not the availability of instruments, but the institutional absorption capacity and the supply of mature, bankable projects needed to access them. It strengthens the capacity to manage complex funding procedures, improves inter-sectoral coordination, and develops a pipeline of project concepts with complete technical documentation.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027-2029: Assessment of absorption bottlenecks; targeted technical assistance to strengthen capacity to access IPA, IPARD, WBIF, GCF, GEF and similar instruments.</i> <i>2029-2032: First pipeline of bankable, investment-ready FLR project concepts prepared, linked to Activities 2.9 and 4.4.</i> <i>2033-2050: Pipelines and absorption capacity expanded progressively, enabling larger-scale and blended finance as readiness matures.</i>	Domestic-level IPA coordination structures; ministries of environment, forestry and finance; rural development agencies (IPARD); FLR Coordination Secretariat; local self-governments; protected area managers; development agencies; project-preparation and technical consulting organisations	2027–2029: Capacity & readiness 2029–2032: Pipeline development 2033–2050: Continuous mobilisation

3.4. Piloting and scaling up PES, blended finance, carbon-related mechanisms, and other instruments where they can support restoration outcomes and local benefits. <i>This activity supports the phased piloting and gradual scaling of innovative and market-based instruments—PES, blended finance, and carbon-related mechanisms—where they can generate restoration outcomes alongside tangible local benefits. Because they depend on prior legal, institutional, and methodological foundations, these are realistically medium-term instruments whose enabling conditions must be developed in parallel.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027-2030: Assessment of legal, institutional and methodological prerequisites; identification of feasible pilot contexts.</i> <i>2030-2035: First market-based or blended instruments piloted in selected priority landscapes, with documented local benefits.</i> <i>2035-2050: Proven instruments scaled where enabling conditions allow, complementing public finance.</i>	Ministries of environment, forestry, agriculture and finance; eco-funds and equivalent financing mechanisms; private sector; water utilities, tourism and energy sector actors (as ecosystem-service beneficiaries); river basin authorities; development banks; local self-governments; CSOs and local communities; academic and research institutions; chambers of commerce	2027–2030: Enabling groundwork 2030–2035: Piloting 2035–2050: Scaling
3.5. Reviewing subsidies and fiscal incentives that may undermine restoration objectives, and redirect available fiscal space towards FLR-supporting investments. <i>This activity identifies fiscal incentives that work against restoration—such as low timber pricing, support for economically intensive land uses, or weak disincentives for land conversion—and progressively redirects the available fiscal space towards measures that support FLR. More than a regulatory adjustment, subsidy reform is treated here as a tangible source of restoration financing that aligns public expenditure with landscape restoration objectives.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027-2030: Identification of subsidies and fiscal incentives working against restoration; assessment of fiscal space that could be redirected.</i> <i>2031-2035: Gradual redirection of identified fiscal space towards FLR-supporting measures, through legislative and regulatory adjustment where feasible.</i>	Ministries of finance, forestry, agriculture and environment; fiscal and regulatory agencies; agricultural payment agencies; energy sector regulators; parliaments (for legislative amendments)	2027–2030: Review & diagnosis 2031–2035: Progressive realignment
3.6. Enabling private sector participation and co-financing in FLR through regulatory incentives, reduced transaction costs, owner organisation, and frameworks linking restoration to corporate sustainability and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting. <i>This activity addresses the structural barriers that limit private investment in restoration—fragmented landholdings, unresolved property rights, high upfront costs, and weak owner organisation—through regulatory incentives, risk-reduction instruments, and support for organising private forest owners and landholders. It also includes gradual development of standardised frameworks that allow private actors to co-finance</i>	Ministries of environment, forestry, agriculture and finance; cadastral and land registry agencies; private forest owner associations; private sector;	2027–2029: Barrier diagnosis & incentives 2030–2032: Owner organisation & frameworks

restoration and account for it within their sustainability and ESG reporting, linking verified restoration outcomes to corporate carbon-neutrality and sustainability commitments. <i>Milestones:</i> 2027-2029: Assessment of structural barriers (tenure, fragmentation, transaction costs); design of regulatory incentives and risk-reduction instruments. 2030-2032: Support for organising private forest owners; initial standardised frameworks linking restoration to corporate sustainability and ESG reporting. 2033-2050: Frameworks refined and broadened to position private actors as co-investors as confidence and markets mature.	advisory and extension services; local self-governments; commercial financial institutions and development banks (de-risking and guarantees); chambers of commerce	2033–2050: Continuous improvement
3.7. Tracking FLR-related expenditures by funding source, allocation mechanism, territorial targeting, leverage effects, and absorption of available international resources. <i>This activity establishes an expenditure-tracking system that makes restoration financing visible, measurable, and comparable across the region. Drawing on green-budgeting approaches and emerging practice in nature-related financial reporting, it tracks financing by source, allocation mechanism, territorial targeting, leverage of private and development finance, and absorption of international resources. This continuous activity underpins the financial monitoring framework throughout implementation of the WB6 FLRP.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> 2027-2029: Design of a regionally comparable FLR expenditure-tracking approach, drawing on green-budgeting and nature-related financial reporting practice. 2030-2035: Tracking applied across WB6 providing the evidentiary basis for the Goal 3 indicator (volume and source diversity). 2035-2050: Expenditure tracking sustained and integrated into the financial monitoring framework, informing adjustment of priorities and budgets.	Ministries of finance and environment; statistical offices; supreme audit institutions; local self-governments; WB6 FLR regional coordination mechanism; FLR Coordination Secretariat; BDTF WB reporting structures; IUCN	2027–2029: System design 2030–2035: Roll-out 2035–2050: Continuous tracking

GOAL 4: Strengthen regional cooperation and coordinated FLR implementation

Support regional cooperation where it adds practical value, while allowing flexible implementation models adapted to different political, institutional, and territorial contexts in the WB6.

Indicator for goal 4: Establishment and functionality of the WB6 FLR regional coordination mechanism. Baseline (2026): There is no coordination mechanism for FLR in the inter-jurisdictional areas of the WB6. Target (2027): A WB6 FLR regional coordination mechanism is operational, with all six jurisdictions participating in at least two joint planning or review cycles per year by the end of 2027.
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Many of the most critical restoration challenges in the WB6 are inherently inter-jurisdictional, including shared river basins, mountain systems, ecological corridors, and disaster risks such as floods, fires, and erosion. At the same time, both stakeholder consultations and policy analysis have indicated **fragmented governance, weak cross-sectoral coordination, and the absence of a pragmatic regional implementation framework** as key barriers to effective WB6 FLRP delivery. Existing cooperation is often project-based, uneven, and not sufficiently linked to long-term planning, financing, or monitoring systems. In addition, differences in institutional capacities, legal frameworks, and political contexts across WB6 require flexible, variable-geometry cooperation models, rather than uniform approaches. This goal responds directly to these challenges by establishing a light and practical implementation mechanism, in which coordination and delivery design is

operational, feasible, and low in institutional burden. It builds on existing regional platforms (such as RCC structures and BDTF), avoids creating new permanent bodies, and relies on flexible cooperation formats adapted to specific landscape and governance contexts. At the same time, it is practical in that it focuses on enabling implementation: supporting joint project preparation, improving access to financing, facilitating data exchange, and strengthening peer learning and technical cooperation among institutions. By addressing gaps related to the lack of regional stewardship, limited coordination across jurisdictions, weak project pipeline development, and insufficient knowledge exchange, this goal enables more coherent and scalable FLR implementation while respecting domestic-level specificities. This goal also underlines linkages between the WB6 FLRP as Action 39 of the GAWB Action Plan, and other pillars and actions across the Green Agenda with which there is a structural link; regional coordination should ensure that these actions are planned and implemented in the coordinated manner.

Table 7. Activities planned for achievement of Goal 4

Activity	Responsible actors	Timeline
4.1. Establishing a flexible WB6 FLRP coordination mechanism, built on existing regional coordination and cooperation structures, to support joint planning, exchange of experience, and follow-up on regional priorities. <i>This activity establishes the operational coordination structure of the WB6 FLRP implementation mechanism, based on existing regional platforms (RCC, RWG GAWB, BDTF IUCN) rather than creating new permanent institutions. The mechanism functions through flexible thematic and landscape-based cooperation formats, supports joint planning, monitoring, financing coordination, and knowledge exchange, and connects the regional coordination level with local FLR platforms and implementation actors across shared restoration landscapes.</i> <i>Milestone: WB6 FLRP coordination mechanism established</i>	RCC; RWG GAWB; BDTF WB; IUCN; FLR Coordination Secretariat; ministries of environment, forestry, spatial planning and finance; regional thematic working groups and relevant domestic-level institutions	2027
4.2. Promoting bilateral, sub-regional, and inter-jurisdictional cooperation formats where shared landscapes, river basins, mountain systems, ecological corridors, or common risks require coordinated action. <i>This activity operationalises the inter-jurisdictional coordination role of the FLR Political/Policy Pillar and Tier 1 regional governance structures by supporting flexible cooperation formats adapted to shared landscapes and common risks. It enables coordinated planning, pilot implementation, data exchange, and financing preparation in river basins, mountain systems, ecological corridors, and other priority restoration landscapes where ecosystem processes and climate risks extend across jurisdictions. This is an activity with continuous implementation, with initial cooperation formats established by 2029.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2029: Mapping and initial cooperation formats; identification and agreement of 3–5 priority inter-jurisdictional bilateral/sub-regional cooperation formats based on ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas; initial cooperation protocols drafted (minimum: shared data exchange, joint monitoring, aligned restoration planning); building on the Drin River Basin model and Parks Dinarides network.</i> <i>2030–2035: Formalisation and piloting; bilateral or sub-regional cooperation agreements signed for at least three priority landscapes shared among jurisdictions; first joint restoration pilots co-financed through IPA CBC or WBIF; joint steering committees operational at the landscape level.</i>	RCC; RWG GAWB; BDTF WB; IUCN; ministries of environment, forestry, foreign affairs, water management and spatial planning; protected area managers; river basin authorities; local self-governments; forestry enterprises; regional cooperation networks; academic and expert institutions	2028–2029: Mapping and initial cooperation formats 2030–2035: Formalisation and piloting 2036–2050: Continuous management

<i>2036–2050: Continuous management; bilateral and sub-regional cooperation embedded as a standard governance model for all ROAR-identified priority FLR areas; annual joint review cycles sustained through FLR Coordination Secretariat support.</i>		
4.3. Harmonising methodologies where feasible, while prioritising the compatibility of approaches rather than full standardisation across all WB6. <i>This activity supports the development of compatible FLR methodologies across the WB6, including a shared landscape character-based framework for identifying landscape types, assessing their condition, functionality, values, and sensitivity, and defining restoration priorities and opportunity zones, as well as shared methodological frameworks for NbS and PES. Linked to Activity 1.1., it also supports development of a regional monitoring framework with shared indicators for landscape character sensitivity, ecosystem functionality, restoration progress, biodiversity, climate resilience, and DRR. The activity further improves compatibility of data collection systems, GIS tools, remote-sensing methods, and data-sharing arrangements so that FLR planning and monitoring can rely on comparable evidence across jurisdictions. It strengthens the Data and Monitoring Pillar by improving comparability of datasets, indicators, and assessment approaches while allowing adaptation to domestic institutional and ecological contexts. The activity also supports long-term data exchange, joint monitoring, peer learning, and knowledge sharing necessary for coordinated FLR planning and reporting.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2032: Framework development and harmonisation; inventory of existing monitoring frameworks, data systems, GIS tools, and remote sensing approaches across WB6; identification of comparability gaps and priority harmonisation needs; draft common LCA framework (linked to Activity 1.1); draft shared indicators for ecosystem functionality, restoration progress, biodiversity, climate resilience, and DRR; tested against one pilot shared landscape per indicator set; common methodological guidance formally adopted by BDTF/RCC; integrated into domestic monitoring systems in at least four WB6; Data and Monitoring Pillar of the coordination hub populated.</i> <i>2032 - 2050: Continuous improvement; biennial review and update cycles tied to GAWB Action Plan review cycles; new data streams (Earth observation, AI-assisted mapping) integrated as they become available.</i>	IUCN; FLR Coordination Secretariat; RCC; RWG GAWB; BDTF WB; ministries of environment, forestry and spatial planning; environmental protection and forestry agencies; spatial planning institutes; geodetic and geospatial mapping authorities and agencies; meteorological and hydrological institutes and agencies; statistical offices; academic and research institutions; GIS and biodiversity experts	2028–2032 Framework development and harmonisation 2032-2050: Continuous improvement and updates
4.4. Supporting joint preparation of inter-jurisdictional landscape restoration initiatives, including technical documentation for investment-ready projects. <i>This activity supports the preparation of joint FLR initiatives in landscapes shared among jurisdictions through feasibility studies, technical designs, spatial analyses, and investment-ready project documentation. It is closely linked with Goal 2 and Goal 3 activities on financing mechanisms, project pipeline development, PES models, and integration of FLR into domestic financing frameworks. By developing coordinated project concepts across jurisdictions, the activity strengthens regional cooperation, enables alignment of restoration priorities and financing strategies, and supports the Financing Pillar in accessing IPA, WBIF, GCF, GEF, and other funding sources. It also helps translate strategic FLR priorities into operational and scalable implementation projects. This activity requires longer timelines, especially as joint inter-jurisdictional</i>	RCC; IUCN; FLR Coordination Secretariat; ministries of environment, forestry, spatial planning, water management and finance; development agencies; IPA coordination structures at the domestic level; eco-funds; protected area managers; river basin authorities; local self-governments; financial institutions; academic and expert institutions; project	2028–2033: Preparation and piloting 2033-2050: Continuous scaling

<i>initiatives additionally require coordination across ministries, financing systems, spatial planning frameworks, and monitoring approaches. In 2028–2030 priority landscapes shared among jurisdictions should be identified and technical documentation prepared. Between 2030 and 2033 financing alignment, pilot implementation, and scaling preparation should take place, while continued implementation and investment cycles need to be planned beyond 2033.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2033: Preparation and piloting; first FLR projects are prepared and the pilot portfolio is developed.</i> <i>2033–2050: Continuous scaling; systematic 3–4 year project development cycles sustained; project pipeline maintained by the FLR Coordination Secretariat.</i>	development and technical consulting organisations	
4.5. Facilitating practical cooperation between public institutions, protected area managers, forestry authorities, water agencies, local governments, academic institutions, CSOs, and other relevant actors. <i>This activity is closely linked to Goal 5, and it supports operational cooperation between institutions and stakeholders directly involved in FLR planning, financing, implementation, monitoring, and stewardship. In line with stakeholder inputs and the implementation mechanism, “practical cooperation” means moving beyond formal coordination towards joint work on landscapes shared among jurisdictions through data exchange, joint project preparation, spatial planning alignment, pilot implementation, peer learning, and coordinated monitoring. In practice, this cooperation is implemented through the FLR Coordination Hub and Local FLR Platforms, where ministries, agencies, municipalities, protected area managers, academia, CSOs, landowners, and other actors jointly plan and coordinate restoration actions. The activity directly addresses fragmented governance, weak inter-sectoral coordination, and disconnected implementation systems. Initial structures and cooperation formats should be established during 2028–2030, but continuous coordination, joint implementation, monitoring, and adaptive management are needed throughout the full implementation period and beyond 2030.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2030: Cooperation platform design and rollout; governance frameworks for Local FLR Platforms developed for priority shared landscapes nominated by the WB6 in Activity 2.1; Local FLR Platforms established in all ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas; cooperation formats between Local FLR and regional coordination tier (FLR Coordination Hub) established; first joint monitoring cycles initiated.</i> <i>2030–2050: Active implementation phase; Local FLR Platforms drive co-design of restoration measures; joint monitoring and adaptive management; benefit-sharing arrangements formalised where applicable.</i>	RCC; IUCN; FLR Coordination Secretariat and Local FLR Platforms; ministries of environment, forestry, spatial planning, water management and agriculture; protected area managers; forestry enterprises; environmental and water agencies; local self-governments; chambers of commerce and local economic development agencies; academic and research institutions; CSOs; private landowners and land users	2028–2030: Cooperation platform design and rollout 2030–2050: Active implementation phase
4.6. Using existing regional platforms and peer learning to exchange tested approaches, implementation lessons, data, and technical guidance. <i>This activity supports continuous exchange of implementation experience, methodologies, monitoring approaches, and technical knowledge through existing regional cooperation platforms such as RCC, BDTF, RWG GAWB, Parks Dinarides, BioNet, REAWG SFM,</i>	RCC; RWG GAWB; BDTF WB; IUCN; FLR Coordination Secretariat; Parks Dinarides; BioNet; NbS CoP; ministries of environment, forestry, finance, and spatial	2028–2035: Active learning cycle established 2035–2050: Self-

<i>NbS CoP and other relevant platforms. In line with stakeholder recommendations, it avoids creating parallel structures and instead strengthens peer learning, institutional capacity, data exchange, and dissemination of tested FLR approaches across the WB6, supporting coordinated implementation and adaptive management. In practice, this can be operationalised through annual WB6 FLR forums, thematic workshops, peer-review exchanges, joint field visits to pilot landscapes, shared GIS and monitoring platforms, technical working groups, online knowledge repositories, and regular exchange of implementation lessons and monitoring results through the FLR Coordination Hub and Data and Monitoring Pillar. Since the methodologies, monitoring systems, financing models, and restoration practices will continue evolving during implementation, peer learning and technical exchange must function as a permanent support mechanism rather than a one-time activity. Initial operationalisation through forums, technical working groups, and shared platforms can begin in 2028, while continuous exchange, adaptive learning, and dissemination of implementation lessons should continue throughout and beyond the first WB6 FLRP implementation cycle.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2035: Active learning cycle established; shared GIS and monitoring platform (FLR Coordination Hub) launched; knowledge repository seeded with ROAR data, methodology guidance, and first pilot results. Biennial peer-review exchanges and joint field visits to pilot landscapes institutionalised; WB6 FLR knowledge products disseminated through regional networks.</i> <i>2035–2050: Self-sustaining knowledge system; WB6 academic and professional institutions contributing to and leading knowledge exchange independently; FLR Coordination Hub upgraded to an interoperable open-access data and knowledge platform; linkage with EU Copernicus, European Environment Agency, and IUCN global knowledge platforms established.</i>	planning; environmental and forestry agencies; academic and research institutions; CSOs and regional expert networks	sustaining knowledge system
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GOAL 5: Ensure inclusive participation, local stewardship, and fair benefit-sharing in FLR in the WB6

Make FLR socially legitimate and locally grounded by involving communities, landowners, land users, civil society, academia, and the private sector in planning, implementation, monitoring, and benefit-sharing.

Indicator for Goal 5: Priority FLR landscapes with formal and operational multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms. Baseline (2026): The ROAR has identified priority inter-jurisdictional forest landscapes for restoration; there are no multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms established. Target (2030): By 2030, in at least 90% of FLR priority landscapes: 1) a local community participation mechanism is established, 2) relevant local stakeholders from all five categories have been formally engaged in co-designing restoration interventions, and 3) FLR is in at least Stage 2, with co-design processes documented and stewardship agreements in place. Target (2050): By 2050, in at least 60% of FLR priority landscapes: 1) a local community participation mechanism is established and operational, 2) relevant local stakeholders from all five categories have been formally engaged in site governance, evaluation, and adaptive management, and 3) the FLR is in at least Stage 2, with co-design processes documented and stewardship agreements in place.
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In the WB6, stakeholder consultations consistently highlight that **restoration efforts often suffer from late-stage, procedural participation and weak local ownership, which undermines long-term sustainability**

and acceptance of interventions. Policy analysis also points to limited integration of local knowledge, insufficient engagement of landowners and land users, and lack of clear benefit-sharing mechanisms, particularly in landscapes with complex ownership structures and competing land uses. As a result, restoration measures risk being perceived as externally driven, with limited incentives for those directly managing the land.

This goal responds to these challenges by embedding participation, stewardship, and benefit-sharing as core components of FLR implementation. It addresses the identified gaps related to limited stakeholder engagement, weak social legitimacy of interventions, and absence of long-term stewardship arrangements, while also contributing to resolving land-use conflicts through inclusive planning processes. By ensuring that communities, civil society, and local actors are involved from the earliest stages, and that they can access tangible benefits (such as income opportunities, ecosystem services, and improved livelihoods), this goal strengthens the social and economic foundations of FLR. In doing so, it enables restoration to move beyond project-based interventions towards locally grounded, co-designed, and durable landscape management practices.

A local participation mechanism is established for each of the priority inter-jurisdictional forest landscapes identified in ROAR to capture and respond to specificities of each landscape. This is necessary because the WB6 priority shared forest landscapes vary significantly, each with a different mix of public forest enterprises, private landowners, local communities, and protected area managers and conflict lines. A single regional or domestic-level participation body cannot represent these site-specific dynamics. Governance must be grounded at the landscape level, where the actual trade-offs between restoration, land use, and livelihoods occur.

Table 8. Activities planned for achievement of Goal 5

Activity	Responsible actors	Timeline
5.1. Developing local FLR Platforms as multi-layered and multi-stakeholder participation mechanisms for each identified landscape shared among jurisdictions that will ensure that all relevant actors are effectively engaged in FLR planning, monitoring and implementation from the early stages, especially in priority restoration landscapes. <i>Locally tailored local FLR platforms as participation mechanisms need to be established and operational for each of the identified priority forest landscapes in ROAR, within the specific local contexts. This means that the formal and informal arrangements between local stakeholders and domestic-level stakeholders will vary from landscape to landscape. The FLR Coordination Secretariat takes the lead on this activity to gather relevant actors and initiate the establishment of the mechanism. This activity is implemented through the Local Level Pillar and Community and Research Pillar of the FLR Coordination Hub.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027-2028: Design and mapping; FLR Coordination Secretariat leads development of a common platform governance template that is adaptable to different landscape contexts; stakeholder mapping completed for all ROAR-identified priority FLR areas; institutional anchors identified per landscape.</i> <i>2029-2030: Local FLR Platforms established in the highest-priority landscapes: first meetings held in at least three of the highest-priority landscapes (those with active Goal 2 pilots starting 2028); governance structure, representation rules and working procedures agreed within each Platform.</i> <i>2030-2032: Full rollout: Platforms established and operational in all remaining ROAR-identified priority FLR areas.</i>	Ministries of environment, spatial planning, forestry; local self-governments and their associations; protected area managers; forestry enterprises; water management agencies; land registry and cadastral agencies; private companies; CSOs and grassroot organisations with emphasis on women's and youth organisations; FLR Coordination Secretariat, BioNet WB	2027-2028: Design and mapping 2029-2030: Local FLR platforms established 2030-2032: Full rollout

5.2. Supporting community-based restoration initiatives and local stewardship through accessible financing, technical support, and locally understandable planning procedures. <i>This activity delivers community stewardship as the operational foundation of long-term FLR implementation, working through the Local Level Pillar, the Financing Pillar, and the Community and Research Pillar of the FLR Coordination Hub. In each ROAR-identified priority FLR area, local FLR platforms serve as the single integrated stewardship instrument, with differentiated entry points for local communities, municipalities, protected area managers, private forest owners, landowners, CSOs, the private sector, and women and youth. The activity directly responds to the documented failure of restoration interventions in the WB6 to secure lasting local acceptance caused by late-stage participation, absence of visible economic benefits, and unclear maintenance responsibilities. Local FLR platforms should channel accessible financing directly to communities, landowners, and land users. Stewardship agreements formalise maintenance responsibilities and benefit entitlements for communities maintaining ecosystem services. Technical support is provided in locally understandable formats, co-designed with communities rather than for them.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028-2030: Local stewardship operational in all priority landscapes; local FLR platforms active in all ROAR-identified priority FLR areas; at least one stewardship agreement signed per landscape; first community-based restoration initiatives underway with accessible financing secured.</i> <i>2030-2040: Stewardship system self-sustaining and domestically financed; community stewardship arrangements maintained and renewed across all priority landscapes; financing for stewardship activities embedded in domestic eco-fund mandates and public forestry budgets; restoration service value chain recognised in domestic rural development instruments; stewardship outcomes systematically reported through the Data and Monitoring Pillar.</i>	Local self-governments; protected area managers; forestry enterprises; ministries of finance, environment, forestry; academic and research institutions; rural development agencies and IPARD managing authorities; local landowners and private forest owners; private companies; CSOs; FLR Coordination Secretariat	2028-2030: Local stewardship operational 2030-2040: Sustainable stewardship systems
5.3. Ensuring that benefits from restoration are fairly distributed, including through PES-type arrangements, revenue-sharing models, and incentives for landowners, land users, and communities that maintain ecosystem services. <i>Benefit-sharing instruments, such as PES, still need to be developed and embedded in the policy and legal framework of the WB6, many of which have started with PES mainstreaming. This activity involves policy and regulatory work at the domestic level by the line ministries, early adoption and piloting PES by local self-governments, protected area managers, forestry enterprises, and active engagement of private landowners and community organisations. This activity is implemented through Policy/Political Pillar (Tier 1), Financing, Local Level Pillar and Community and Research Pillar of the FLR Coordination Hub.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028-2030: Ecosystem service valuation pilots; domestic legal frameworks reviewed for PES accommodation.</i> <i>2030-2033: First PES/revenue-sharing pilots; PES scheme governance and payment mechanisms designed; first pilot agreements signed between service providers (landowners/communities) and consumers (water utilities, municipalities,</i>	Ministries of environment, finance, forestry; Treasury/Tax Administrations; local self-governments and their associations; protected area managers; forestry enterprises; private sector; CSOs and community grassroots organisations; academic community	2028-2030: Ecosystem service valuation pilots 2030-2033: First PES/revenue-sharing pilots 2033-2038: Systemic instrument development 2038-2050: Scaling and self-sustaining operation

<i>insurers...); revenue-sharing models piloted within protected area management frameworks.</i> <i>2033–2038: Systemic instrument development; policy and legal amendments to embed PES in domestic environmental and forestry law; eco-fund mandates expanded to include PES disbursement; regional PES registry established under the FLR Coordination Hub.</i> <i>2038–2050: Scaling and self-sustaining operation; PES instruments operational in all WB6; private sector buyers engaged systematically; regular valuation updates feeding adaptive benefit-sharing arrangements.</i>		
5.4. Promoting green jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and rural development linked to restoration, sustainable forest management, agroforestry, water retention, soil conservation, and nature-based tourism where appropriate. <i>Rural depopulation is severe across WB6 mountain and forest landscapes, and green jobs linked to FLR must be explicitly framed as rural revitalisation instruments to attract political support and local ownership. The agriculture, tourism, and economy sectors should be involved in this activity. This activity will differ from landscape to landscape to respond to locally specific contexts and the requirements of every jurisdiction involved. Activities may involve promotion of local startups or social enterprises, specially dedicated capacity development programmes for various needs (such as local drone operation training, native seed collection and nursery production, etc.), planting and reforestation works, erosion control and torrent regulation, post-restoration monitoring, maintenance of restored areas, and technical consultancy. Strengthening awareness, education, and practical capacity-building on FLR should be a primary activity, especially for local communities, municipalities, private forest owners, land managers, and young professionals.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2028–2030: Mapping and framing; green job opportunity mapping by forest landscape type; FLR restoration service value chain analysis completed (e.g. seed collection, nursery, planting, maintenance, monitoring, eco-tourism...); pilot vocational training curricula drafted; first communications linking FLR to rural revitalisation launched.</i> <i>2030–2035: Piloting and market development; local enterprises and social cooperatives in restoration services supported through development agency instruments; nature-based tourism pilots in restored priority forest landscapes initiated; green job pathways piloted in at least two of the WB6 with formal vocational training integration.</i> <i>2035–2050: Systemic scaling (3-year update cycles), restoration service sector recognised in domestic employment and rural development strategies; FLR green job metrics included in GAWB reporting; circular rural economy models (seed-to-maintenance value chains) replicated across all WB6 priority landscapes.</i>	Ministries of forestry, agriculture, rural development, economy, labour and employment, environment, spatial planning; local self-governments; development agencies; domestic-level vocational education and training institutions; chambers of commerce; private sector; IUCN, BioNet WB, NbS CoP, CSOs	2028–2030: Mapping and framing 2030–2035: Piloting and market development 2035–2050: Systemic scaling (3-year update cycles)
5.5. Supporting cooperation with universities, research institutions, and professional organisations to connect FLR implementation with education, applied research, and long-term knowledge development. <i>This activity builds the knowledge infrastructure that makes FLR implementation evidence-based, adaptive, and self-sustaining over the long term. It operates through the Community and Research</i>	Universities and research institutions; ministries responsible for science and higher education, forestry, environment, agriculture; forestry enterprises; protected area	2027–2030: Co-design and early integration 2030–2040: Scaling applied

<i>Pillar of the FLR Coordination Hub, connecting academic and professional institutions directly with field implementation actors (forestry enterprises, protected area managers, water agencies, and Local FLR Platforms) so that research is co-produced with practitioners and responds to real operational knowledge gaps. Priority research areas include species provenance and climate-adaptive planting material, NbS performance monitoring, ecosystem service valuation for PES design, social acceptance of restoration interventions, and LCA methodology. FLR principles should be integrated into university curricula in forest engineering, landscape architecture, and environmental management across WB6, while applied MSc and PhD programmes should be directed at ROAR-identified priority FLR areas. The activity feeds research findings directly into methodology updates under Activity 4.3 and adaptive management under Goal 2, closing the loop between knowledge generation and implementation adjustment. Regional FLR field schools and joint WB6 academic–practitioner publication series strengthen peer learning and build a shared evidence base, progressively reducing dependency on international facilitation.</i> <i>Milestones:</i> <i>2027–2030: Co-design and early integration; co-develop a WB6 FLR research agenda with universities, IUCN, BDTF TG-BC/TG-ER and practitioners; launch first applied research projects in ROAR priority FLR areas; integrate introductory FLR modules into forestry, landscape, spatial planning, and environment curricula; establish basic cooperation protocols between universities, Local FLR Platforms and the FLR Coordination Hub’s Community and Research Pillar.</i> <i>2030–2040: Scaling applied research and teaching; expand FLR-focused MSc/PhD topics and joint academic–practitioner projects; institutionalise FLR content in core curricula and professional training; set up regular WB6 FLR field schools and methodological workshops; systematically channel research results into methodology harmonisation (Activity 4.3) and adaptive management under Goal 2.</i> <i>2040–2050: Self-sustaining regional knowledge system; universities and professional organisations in WB6 independently sustain FLR research, teaching and technical guidance; WB6 institutions regularly contribute to European and global FLR knowledge platforms; evidence from long-term monitoring and research continuously informs revisions of FLR indicators, targets and implementation practices.</i>	managers; water agencies, IUCN, BDTF TG-BC and TG-ER; NbS CoP, CSOs	research and teaching 2040–2050: Self-sustaining regional knowledge system
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10. Monitoring Framework

The monitoring framework of the WB6 FLRP enables tracking the progress towards achieving the plan's five strategic goals. It translates restoration commitments into measurable, time-bound indicators that can be realistically monitored, documented and assessed across the WB jurisdictions, within the existing data availability limitations and already implemented monitoring and reporting frameworks. Each strategic goal is linked to indicators, defined with a clear baseline, target, reporting frequency, and verification of source, method of measurement. The framework is designed to function across jurisdictions while remaining compatible with existing reporting obligations under the UNCCD, KM-GBF, and EU accession requirements, enabling WB6 to use a single evidence base for both WB6 FLRP and international reporting cycles.

Table 9. WB6 FLRP monitoring framework

Goals	Indicator focus	Indicator
Goal 1 - Build capacities and enabling conditions for landscape-based FLR	Landscape characterisation and sensitivity assessment	Landscape characterisation and sensitivity assessment are used as a common basis for defining FLR priorities and supporting cross-sectoral coordination.
Goal 2 - Restore resilient, connected, and climate-adaptive forest- and forest-related landscapes	Landscape integrity, functionality and connectivity	Improved integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity of priority forest and forest-related landscapes.
	Land and soil condition	Improved land and soil condition in FLR intervention areas, measured against LDN core indicators.
Goal 3 - Secure resilient and diversified funding for FLR	Volume and diversity of FLR funding	Volume and source diversity of funding mobilised for FLR interventions in identified inter-jurisdictional priority landscapes.
Goal 4 - Strengthen regional cooperation and coordinated FLR implementation	Regional coordination mechanism	Establishment and functionality of the WB6 FLR regional coordination mechanism.
Goal 5 - Ensure inclusive participation, local stewardship, and fair benefit-sharing in FLR in the WB6	Local participation and stewardship mechanisms	Priority FLR landscapes with formal and operational multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms.

GOAL 1: Build capacities and enabling conditions for landscape-based FLR

Indicator 1: Landscape characterisation, including sensitivity assessment, is used as a common basis for defining FLR priorities in spatial planning documents and for supporting cross-sectoral coordination.

Definition

This indicator measures the degree to which landscape characterisation, including landscape sensitivity assessment, is established and used as a common basis for landscape-based FLR planning in the WB6. It covers the full process from the preparation of a minimum common methodological framework, through pilot application and formal recognition, to its application in spatial planning documents and FLR priority-setting.

For the purpose of this indicator, landscape characterisation refers to the identification and description of landscape character types or comparable landscape units, including their key natural, ecological, cultural, land-use and visual-spatial features. Sensitivity assessment refers to the evaluation of the extent to which these landscape units are vulnerable to degradation, climate-related pressures, land-use change, fragmentation, erosion, drought, fire, flood risk or other pressures relevant for FLR.

The indicator does not measure only whether a technical study has been prepared. It assesses whether the methodological basis for landscape characterisation and sensitivity assessment has been developed, tested in selected priority or inter-jurisdictional landscapes, formally recognised through an appropriate rulebook, guideline, technical instruction or equivalent document, and applied as an input for defining FLR priorities, restoration opportunity zones, planning measures and cross-sectoral coordination.

A jurisdiction is considered to contribute to the achievement of this indicator when there is documented evidence that:

- i. landscape character types or comparable landscape units have been identified;
- ii. their condition, values, pressures and sensitivity have been assessed; and
- iii. the results are used, or are formally required to be used, in relevant spatial, sectoral or cross-sectoral planning processes for identifying FLR priorities.

Table 10. WB6 FLRP monitoring framework: Indicator 1 of Goal 1

Parameter	Value
Baseline (2026)	A common methodological framework for landscape characterisation and landscape sensitivity assessment to support FLR planning has not yet been established across the WB6. Some WB6 have developed partial methodological elements or applied comparable approaches, while others have not yet introduced them in a systematic way. As a result, landscape characterisation and sensitivity assessment are not consistently used across the region to identify FLR priorities, restoration opportunity zones, priority landscapes or planning measures.
Target (2030)	By 2030, the common methodological framework for landscape characterisation and landscape sensitivity assessment is developed, formally recognised, and applied in at least one ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR area to identify FLR priorities, restoration opportunity zones or planning measures.
Frequency of reporting	Biennial (with interim milestone review focused on methodology development and pilot application)
Disaggregation	Not applicable at the WB6 level; progress may be tracked by implementation phase.
Source of Verification	Methodological study/guidelines; formal adoption document; pilot application report
Methods of measurement	Review of official documents and pilot outputs to verify whether the methodology has been prepared, formally recognised and applied in at least one ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR area for identifying FLR priorities, restoration opportunity zones or planning measures.

GOAL 2: Restore resilient, connected, and climate-adaptive forest and forest-related landscapes

Indicator 2.1: Improved integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity of priority forest and forest-related landscapes

Definition

This indicator measures whether priority forest and forest-related landscapes show measurable improvement in integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity compared with the baseline used in the ROAR assessment. It builds on the FLII as the main reference for assessing forest integrity and connectivity, including forest extent, anthropogenic pressures, edge effects and changes in forest connectivity caused by forest loss.

The indicator also captures improvements in forest-related landscapes where FLR interventions contribute to ecological functionality and connectivity, including degraded native forests, high-value habitats, riparian zones, wetlands, floodplains, ecological corridors and forest-agricultural mosaics.

Improvement is demonstrated when monitoring evidence shows positive change in one or more agreed parameters related to landscape integrity, ecosystem function or connectivity in selected ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR area where FLR interventions have been implemented.

Table 11. WB6 FLRP monitoring framework: Indicator 2.1 of Goal 2

Parameter	Value
Baseline (2019)	The baseline is informed by the ROAR assessment and the latest publicly available FLII dataset, which provides a 2019 reference for forest integrity and connectivity.
Target (2032)	By 2032, at least one ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR area demonstrates measurable improvement in forest landscape integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity compared with the ROAR/FLII baseline, based on complementary GIS, remote-sensing and/or field monitoring evidence from implemented FLR interventions.
Target (2050)	By 2050, all ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas demonstrate measurable improvement in forest landscape integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity compared with the ROAR/FLII baseline, based on complementary GIS, remote-sensing and/or field monitoring evidence from implemented FLR interventions.
Frequency of reporting	Biennial, with mid-term review in 2030 and final assessment in 2032.
Disaggregation	By priority FLR area, where applicable.
Source of Verification	FLII baseline; GIS, remote-sensing and field monitoring data on forest integrity, fragmentation, connectivity and restored ecosystem functions; FLR intervention reports; restoration project documentation for ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas.
Methods of measurement	Comparison of the FLII reference layer with updated GIS, remote-sensing and/or field monitoring evidence to verify measurable improvement in forest landscape integrity, ecological functionality and connectivity in selected ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional priority FLR areas.

Indicator 2.2: Improvement in land and soil condition in FLR intervention areas, measured against LDN core indicators

Definition

This indicator measures whether FLR interventions, including afforestation, reforestation, agroforestry, vegetation cover restoration and other site-adapted measures in erosion-prone, degraded and climate-vulnerable landscapes result in measurable improvement in land and soil condition in priority forest restoration landscapes. The indicator is aligned with the three LDN core indicators reported by WB6 under the UNCCD: (a) land cover, tracking positive conversion from bare or degraded land to vegetated cover; (b) land productivity dynamics, tracking the recovery of net primary production (NPP) in restored areas through remote sensing; and (c) soil organic carbon stocks, tracking improvements in carbon as a proxy for restored soil health and function.

The indicator does not measure restoration effort alone. It assesses whether implemented FLR measures generate verifiable change in at least one of the three LDN core indicators in the targeted landscape unit, using the same methodological logic applied in UNCCD domestic-level reporting and ensuring comparability between FLR monitoring and domestic-level LDN commitments.

Where feasible, a counterfactual or reference-area approach should be applied to support attribution of observed changes to FLR interventions and to distinguish intervention-driven improvements from background variability or climate-related fluctuations in land productivity and land cover. It is also recognised that measurable improvements in soil organic carbon stocks operate over longer timescales than land cover or land productivity changes. Early reporting periods should therefore prioritise land cover and land productivity dynamics as leading indicators, while soil organic carbon trends should be interpreted over the full project horizon.

A landscape unit is considered to contribute to the achievement of this indicator where there is documented evidence that:

- i. a targeted FLR intervention has been implemented;
- ii. the post-intervention assessment shows no further deterioration and, where measurable, improvement in the composite LDN status of the same unit, based on the combined interpretation of land cover, land productivity and soil organic carbon stocks, applying the One Out, All Out principle used for SDG Indicator 15.3.1;
- iii. the assessment uses data sources compatible with UNCCD domestic-level reporting, including domestic-level LDN reporting data, land-cover datasets, remotely sensed productivity datasets and soil organic carbon datasets, supplemented where possible by domestic soil monitoring and field verification.

Table 12. WB6 FLRP monitoring framework: Indicator 2.2 of Goal 2

Parameter	Value
Baseline (2026)	Baseline LDN status is established for ROAR-identified priority FLR areas, using land cover, land productivity dynamics and soil organic carbon stocks. Where available, existing UNCCD domestic-level reporting data and domestic LDN baselines should be used as the primary reference.
Target (2032)	By 2032, ROAR-identified priority FLR areas with implemented FLR interventions show no further deterioration in LDN status compared with the 2026 baseline, and a measurable reduction in the area classified as degraded within treated intervention areas.
Target (2050)	By 2050, treated priority landscapes show a sustained positive trend in LDN status, expressed as a net reduction in degraded land area and/or an increase in land classified as non-degraded compared with the 2026 baseline.
Frequency of reporting	Biennial, aligned where possible with UNCCD domestic-level reporting cycles and the WB6 FLR monitoring cycle.
Disaggregation	By WB6; by priority landscape; by administrative unit; and, where data permits, by land use category.
Source of Verification	Primary reference sources include UNCCD domestic-level reports, SDG Indicator 15.3.1 datasets submitted to the UN Statistics Division, CORINE Land Cover (CLC) or equivalent land-cover datasets, remotely sensed productivity datasets, including MODIS/Landsat-derived NPP or NDVI products, and SoilGrids or equivalent soil organic carbon datasets. Secondary and supplementary sources may include domestic LDN voluntary target documentation submitted to

	UNCCD, Activity 2.4 intervention monitoring reports, field verification records, domestic soil monitoring data, ESA CCI Land Cover datasets, and complementary land, water and forest cover datasets produced and presented by the Joint Research Centre-European Commission.
Methods of measurement	Pre- and post-intervention comparison of LDN status within each relevant landscape unit. Contribution to the indicator is recorded where treated areas show no further deterioration in LDN status and, where measurable, a reduction in the area classified as degraded compared with the baseline. Results are aggregated by priority landscape and cross-referenced with UNCCD domestic-level reporting where available. Where improvements are documented within treated areas, but concurrent degradation is observed elsewhere within the same landscape unit, both trends should be reported transparently, with the net LDN status calculated for the landscape unit as a whole. A minimum intervention area threshold, to be agreed with WB6 during the baseline year, should be applied to ensure that changes are statistically detectable at the landscape-unit level using available remote-sensing datasets.

GOAL 3: Secure resilient and diversified funding for the WB6 FLRP

Indicator 3: Volume and source diversity of funding mobilised for FLR interventions in identified inter-jurisdictional priority landscapes

Definition

Total financial volume (EUR) mobilised for FLR interventions in inter-jurisdictional priority forest and forest-like landscapes identified through the ROAR and LCA, disaggregated by funding source category. Funding is classified into three categories: (i) domestic public finance (budget lines, eco-funds, or equivalent instruments); (ii) international grants and concessional finance (IPA, WBIF, GEF, GCF, and equivalents); (iii) private capital and market-based mechanisms (PES, carbon-related mechanisms, blended finance).

An FLR intervention qualifies if it: (i) has a defined implementation area within a ROAR-identified inter-jurisdictional zone; (ii) is demonstrably aligned with the restoration objectives defined under the WB6 FLRP; and (iii) has either documented expenditure or a formally agreed financing structure with committed contributions from identified sources.

Table 13. WB6 FLRP monitoring framework: Indicator 3 of Goal 3

Parameter	Value
Baseline (2026)	0 EUR (to be confirmed through a verification exercise following the completion of ROAR priority zone verification, which will establish whether any ongoing FLR-like interventions in inter-jurisdictional region already meet the qualification criteria)
Target (2030)	Total volume ≥ 25M EUR, with documented contributions from at least two of the three funding source categories. Target 2050 - All inter-jurisdictional priority forest and forest-like landscapes identified through ROAR and LCA have restoration interventions that are either completed or under implementation, with documented contributions from all three funding source categories across the portfolio. The initial financial needs assessment indicates an order of magnitude of approximately €1.5 to €2.1 billion needed to restore all priority areas. This figure represents an initial, strategic-level estimate and a likely upper bound to be refined through cross-referencing with the subsequent regional LCA.
Frequency of reporting	Biennial, with the first report due in 2030.
Disaggregation	By funding source category; by inter-jurisdictional zone as identified by ROAR; by implementation status (expenditure incurred vs. committed funding in pipeline).
Source of Verification	IPA/WBIF/GEF/GCF project registries; eco-fund annual reports; signed co-financing and grant agreements; project financing documentation submitted to the FLR Coordination Secretariat; self-reporting through BDTF WB progress reporting cycle, aggregated and verified by IUCN.

Methods of measurement	Financial volume is calculated as the sum of: (i) expenditure incurred during the reporting period, and (ii) committed funding under formally agreed project financing structures with identified contributing sources. Data are aggregated by funding source category, inter-jurisdictional zone, and implementation status (expenditure incurred vs. committed funding in pipeline). Source diversity is measured as documented participation of at least two of the three funding source categories in the total volume for the 2030 target, and all three categories across the overall portfolio for the 2050 target. The financial volume corresponding to the 2030 target should be understood as an early-stage institutional milestone aimed at anchoring a functioning, diversified financing framework. The initial financial needs assessment based on total area in need for restoration mapped through ROAR indicates an order of magnitude of approximately €1.5 to €2.1 billion for restoration of all priority landscapes shared among jurisdictions up to 2050, which need to be refined through cross-referencing with the subsequent LCA.
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GOAL 4: Strengthen regional cooperation and coordinated FLR implementation

Indicator 4: Establishment and functionality of a WB6 FLR regional coordination mechanism

Definition

This indicator measures both the establishment of the WB6 FLRP coordination and implementation mechanism, and whether the mechanism is functional and inclusive. The establishment of the mechanism is a prerequisite for FLR implementation in inter-jurisdictional areas in the WB6. However, the mechanism itself does not guarantee that coordination will be effective and that WB6 FLRP will be implemented. Participation of all six jurisdictions in regular annual joint planning and semi-annual review cycles is the meaningful test of operationality, directly addressing the problem of underdeveloped coordination mechanisms.

Table 14. WB6 FLRP monitoring framework: Indicator 4 of Goal 4

Parameter	Value
Baseline (2026)	The coordination mechanism for FLR in the inter-jurisdictional areas of the WB6 does not exist.
Target (2027)	A WB6 FLR regional coordination mechanism is operational, with all six jurisdictions participating in at least two joint planning or review cycles per year by the end of 2027.
Frequency of reporting	Semi-annual
Disaggregation	Not applicable.
Source of Verification	Annual reports to BDTF/IUCN as required under GAWB Action 39; minutes and participant lists from coordination mechanism meetings.
Methods of measurement	

GOAL 5: To ensure inclusive participation, local stewardship, and fair benefit-sharing in WB6 FLR

Indicator 5.1: Percentage of priority FLR landscapes with formally established and operational multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms (with documented representation of communities, land users, CSOs, private sector, and public authorities).

Definition

The indicator measures the percentage of priority FLR landscapes (identified in ROAR) with formally established and operationally functioning multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms, confirming documented representation of local communities, land users, CSOs, private sector, and public authorities. The indicator captures whether governance at the landscape level is genuinely inclusive (and not merely nominal) by requiring both a formal mandate and evidence of active functioning through co-design, decisions, or

stewardship agreements for each of the forest landscapes in inter-jurisdictional zone. This is critical because, while local engagement, ownership and stewardship is crucial for FLR, participation across the WB6 is documented as formal rather than substantive, most decisions regarding natural resources are top-down with communities and land users consistently excluded from planning and co-design of most projects affecting that local community, which weakens local ownership and long-term restoration sustainability. It also provides the governance foundation for fair benefit-sharing and directly supports compliance with CBD Article 10(d) and EU Nature Restoration Regulation obligations.

Table 15. WB6 FLRP monitoring framework: Indicator 5 of Goal 5

Parameter	Value
Baseline (2026)	The ROAR has identified priority forest landscapes for restoration in inter-jurisdictional zone, without multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms established.
Target (2030)	By 2030, in at least 90% of FLR priority landscapes: 1) local community participation mechanism is established, 2) relevant local stakeholders from all five categories have been formally engaged in co-designing restoration interventions, and 3) FLR is in at least Stage 2, with co-design processes documented and stewardship agreements in place.
Target (2050)	By 2050, in at least 60% of FLR priority landscapes: 1) local community participation mechanism is established and operational, 2) relevant local stakeholders from all five categories have been formally engaged in site governance, evaluation, and adaptive management, and 3) the FLR is in Stage 3, with co-design processes documented and stewardship agreements in place
Frequency of reporting	Annual
Disaggregation	<i>1. By priority FLR landscape (identified in ROAR):</i> Each priority landscape identified in the ROAR is tracked individually, enabling landscape-specific progress reporting rather than aggregate regional averages that can mask uneven implementation. For each landscape, the disaggregated record should capture jurisdiction(s) involved and the current stage of FLR governance development. <i>2. By diversity and composition of local stakeholders involved:</i> For each forest landscape shared among jurisdictions, the local mechanism's membership is recorded individually and assessed against the five required stakeholder categories: (i) local communities, (ii) land users, (ii) CSOs, (iv) private sector, and (v) public authorities. This identifies which stakeholder categories are systematically absent across landscapes and jurisdictions, enabling targeted corrective action. Within the community and CSO categories, representation of women, youth, and vulnerable groups is recorded as a sub-dimension to prevent their invisibility within broader participation counts. <i>3. By stage of FLR governance and participation:</i> Aligned with the indicator's two targets (2030 and 2050), each landscape mechanism is classified by the stage of community engagement it has reached: Stage 1: No mechanism established (2026) Stage 2: Mechanism formally established; membership documented across all five categories of local stakeholders (2030) Stage 3: Community and land users engaged in site governance, evaluation, and adaptive management with documented ongoing stewardship (2050)
Source of Verification	Annual self-reporting by WB6 jurisdictions through BDTF WB; BioNet WB and REAWG SFM records; stewardship agreements. Annual self-reporting by WB6 jurisdictions through the BDTF WB progress reporting cycle, cross-referenced with BioNet WB CSO network records; FLR governance documents and meeting minutes from landscape platforms.
Methods of measurement	Percentage calculated against total ROAR-identified priority FLR areas. A landscape qualifies when: (i) a formal governance document (terms of reference or equivalent) confirms membership across all five required local stakeholder categories, and (ii) operationality is

evidenced by minutes, decisions, or co-designed measures from at least two documented activities per year.

11. Assessment of financing needs and identification of financial instruments and mechanisms to support implementation

11.1. Financing needs assessment

11.1.1. Scope and basis of the estimate

This section provides an initial estimate of the financing required to implement FLR measures across **more than 50 priority areas** identified through the ROAR within the WB6 inter-jurisdictional zone, covering a total area of approximately **725,000 hectares**. In the context of the WB6 FLRP, this estimate should be regarded as a first approximation that will be systematically cross-referenced with, and refined by, a subsequent regional LCA as outlined in Activity 1.1 (see also Annex B). Because the model applies estimated restoration costs across the full set of ROAR-identified priority FLR areas - prior to the landscape characterisation that will clarify which specific zones require active FLR interventions and at what functional intensity – the resulting aggregate figure should be interpreted as an **upper bound of regional financing needs rather than a definitive requirement**.

The estimate is inherently strategic in nature: it establishes the order of magnitude of funding requirements to serve as a baseline for regional programming, political alignment and resource mobilisation. It does not function as an operational, project-level budget, as actual implementation costs will depend on site-specific biophysical and socio-economic conditions determined during the detailed technical design of individual interventions. Future refinement therefore proceeds on two levels: regionally, as the LCA narrows and differentiates the areas requiring active FLR measures, and locally, as project-level design establishes actual costs of individual interventions.

The financial needs are derived using the comprehensive methodology detailed in Annex A. It applies a **regional weighted average cost per hectare**, which is constructed from: 1) estimated measure-specific unit costs; 2) the assumed spatial distribution of the total restoration area across three distinct landscape archetypes; and 3) institutional overhead encompassing technical project design, monitoring, inclusive governance, community engagement, and project contingency. To reflect the inherent uncertainty of long-term, strategic-level planning, the results are presented across three scenarios: **conservative**, **central**, and **high-cost**, rather than as a single baseline figure.

The estimate is expressed in **constant prices**:² it represents the financial volume needed to execute the full restoration portfolio under present-day economic conditions, as a current-cost snapshot. To ensure comparability across the WB6 over an implementation horizon extending to 2050, the model deliberately avoids discounting future cash flows to net present value and does not forecast long-term inflationary, wage, and exchange-rate dynamics. These figures therefore provide a stable baseline for macro-financial programming to be re-based as local unit costs evolve and site-specific data become available.

11.1.2. Estimated financing needs

Applying the financial methodology to the approximately 725,000 hectares across more than 50 ROAR-identified priority FLR areas, the total financing requirement for the restoration of these forest and forest-like landscapes is estimated to range **between €1.48 billion under the conservative scenario and €2.14 billion under the central planning scenario** (see Table 16). The corresponding fully loaded cost per hectare—incorporating institutional, governance, and monitoring overhead—ranges from approximately €2,050 to €2,955 across these two scenarios. The central scenario, at approximately €2.14 billion, serves as the primary planning baseline and reference for long-term financial programming to 2050.

The high-cost scenario raises the total to €3.38 billion, representing a fully loaded unit cost of around €4,660 per hectare, and should be interpreted as the absolute upper bound of the strategic cost range rather than an expected operational outcome. Namely, it assumes that the most cost-intensive conditions—severe terrain inaccessibility, high reliance on external or specialised labour, the highest unit-cost intervention mix, and the full institutional and climate-risk mark-up—apply uniformly across the entire restoration portfolio. Because

² The unit cost estimates underpinning this assessment use a 2023–2025 reference period, which is taken as the price level base for the total cost estimate.

such extreme conditions are highly unlikely to manifest across all priority areas, this multi-billion euro figure represents a worst-case provisioning baseline, rather than a realistic planning assumption.

Table 16. Estimated financing needs for restoration of the priority areas identified by ROAR

Indicator	Conservative	Central	High-cost
Regional weighted average cost per hectare (ha)	€ 1,780/ha	€ 2,515/ha	€ 3,725/ha
Institutional overhead	15%	17.5%	25%
Effective cost per hectare	€ 2,050/ha	€ 2,955/ha	€ 4,660/ha
Total estimated financing need	€ 1,484.1 M	€ 2,142.5 M	€ 3,375.8 M
Average annual effort — 20-year cycle	€ 74.2 M/yr	€ 107.1 M/yr	€ 168.8 M/yr

As noted above, the variance between scenarios is driven primarily by operational assumptions—such as terrain accessibility, local labour availability, and the share of cost-intensive measures in the intervention mix—rather than by the assumed distribution of the restoration area across landscape archetypes. As documented in Annex A, the latter affects the aggregate estimated financial volume by no more than approximately five per cent, indicating that the landscape archetype assumption is not a primary source of uncertainty in the overall estimate.

In practical terms, restoring the shared priority forest and forest-like landscapes will require a highly coordinated multi-jurisdictional **financing effort in the order of €1.5 to over €2 billion over the full implementation horizon up to 2050**, taking the conservative-to-central range as the working baseline. While the precise expenditure will ultimately depend on the exact areas confirmed as requiring active FLR measures through the subsequent LCA and on site-specific conditions established at the project level, this strategic estimate establishes a credible planning range. It provides the baseline from which coordinated regional financing strategies can be structured, financial instruments identified, and multi-year implementation phases designed.

11.1.3. The estimate in the Western Balkans Six context

To be meaningful for strategic planning, these figures must be contextualised within the regional macro-fiscal landscape. Distributed over a twenty-year implementation cycle, consistent with the plan's vision to 2050, the conservative-to-central range corresponds to an **average annual financing requirement of approximately €74 to €107 million**. Expressed in constant prices, these annualised figures represent real, average annual funding targets rather than nominal budget projections for any specific future fiscal year. This is a sizable financial undertaking in absolute terms. In macroeconomic terms, however, it remains a modest share of the regional economy, with an annual financial requirement in the range of 0.04-0.06% of the current combined gross domestic product of the WB6.

Mobilising resources at this scale will be challenging, but can be within reach, provided that the preconditions for efficiently attracting and absorbing all available sources of finance are met, including the pre-accession assistance, green investment windows, and international climate and biodiversity finance streams available to the region over the implementation horizon. However, external sources alone will not suffice; meeting this scale of need also requires a stronger mobilisation of domestic sources, including both public finance and private sector participation. This reinforces an important finding of this plan: the primary bottleneck for FLR financing in the WB6 is not the absolute availability of global or regional resources, but rather domestic institutional absorption capacity and the supply of investment-ready, high-quality project pipelines necessary to access them. Realising this potential depends on operationalising the enabling conditions, cross-jurisdictional coordination mechanisms, and project preparatory pipelines set out under Goals 2, 3 and 4.

This estimate also clarifies the relationship between the aggregate financing need and the quantifiable target established under Goal 3. **The Goal 3 target, i.e. mobilising at least €25 million by 2030**, with contributions from at least two of the three main funding-source categories, **should be understood as an early-stage institutional milestone** aimed at anchoring a functioning, diversified financing framework, rather than as a measure of the total requirement, as this represents roughly just one per cent of the central estimate. Against a preliminary baseline of effectively zero committed, multi-source financial flows for FLR in shared landscapes in 2026, the financing needs of €1.5-2.1 billion outlines the scale of resource mobilisation that the full restoration portfolio implies. This requirement is intended to be met progressively through a strategically

blended combination of domestic public finance, international development support, and private or market-based mechanisms over the entire implementation period up to 2050.

11.1.4. Restoration benefits in perspective

Although the aggregate financing requirement set out above is considerable in absolute terms, it is most probably outweighed by the long-term returns that landscape restoration usually generates. These funding needs must therefore be evaluated against the body of international evidence regarding the socioeconomic returns on landscape restoration.³ For instance, a widely cited cost-benefit analysis by the World Resources Institute indicated a return ratio of 7:1 to 30:1, meaning that every euro invested in restoring degraded landscapes generates between seven and thirty euros in economic benefits through enhanced ecosystem services, productivity gains, and avoided climate-induced damages (Ding et al., 2017). Furthermore, at the scale of the global Bonn Challenge, economic models estimate net benefits of between USD 0.7 and 9 trillion from the restoration of 350 million hectares of degraded forest landscapes, depending on the applied social discount rate (Verdone & Seidl, 2017).

These substantial returns could also materialise through several specific ecological and economic channels within the shared forest and forest-like landscapes of the WB6. The most important pathways include enhanced carbon sequestration and climate mitigation; optimised hydrological regulation, specifically through reduced peak flood flows and sediment retention that protect downstream public infrastructure and hydropower generation; robust soil stabilisation and erosion control; agroforestry synergies that stabilise agricultural yields; and comprehensive biodiversity and habitat recovery. Crucially, these interventions stimulate green job creation in economically marginalised rural areas, potentially providing a vital economic impulse in WB6 heavily impacted by depopulation. Because many of these outcomes constitute public goods that accrue to society over multi-decadal horizons rather than generating immediate financial returns to private investors, public and concessional finance must play a foundational role in the regional restoration strategy.

It is important to note that these ratios represent global averages that vary considerably depending on local ecological, economic, and institutional contexts. They are presented here to contextualise the WB6 FLR financing needs within the established international evidence base, rather than as a definitive forecast of region-specific returns, which would require a dedicated, site-level cost-benefit analysis for the priority landscapes. Nevertheless, even under the conservative lower-bound assumptions of the internationally documented range, the long-term economic dividends of the FLR portfolio would significantly exceed the gross financing needs outlined in section 11.1.2. The deployment of resources detailed in this section should therefore be understood as a strategic investment yielding structural economic, ecological, and social returns, rather than as a fiscal cost without a counterpart.

11.1.5. Scope, caveats and refinement

Given the strategic nature of this financial estimate, several operational boundaries and caveats must be made explicit to ensure the correct interpretation of the aggregated figures. First, the estimate strictly encompasses all the inter-jurisdictional areas identified through the ROAR process, directly aligning with the spatial scope of this plan. Consequently, it does not represent the aggregate cost of comprehensive FLR across the entire WB6, nor does it quantify total restoration needs within individual WB6, which extend well beyond the shared priority areas addressed herein.

Second, the estimate primarily reflects the **upfront investment costs** (capital expenditure; CAPEX) associated with establishing restoration interventions and securing their early-stage maintenance. While this includes initial multi-year care, project design, long-term monitoring, inclusive governance, and a standard contingency allowance, it does not internalise the permanent, long-term operational and maintenance expenditure (OPEX) required to sustain ecological outcomes through to 2050. As outlined in Annex A and under Goal 3, securing durable, recurring financing for these multi-decadal operational costs remains a distinct strategic task, which must be systematically addressed through domestic eco-funds, programme budgeting, and other sustained financing mechanisms.

Third, as established in preceding sections, the model is expressed strictly in constant prices and does not incorporate the time value of money or long-term inflationary adjustments. These structural boundaries do not

³ Key sources: Ding, H., Faruqi, S., Altamirano, J. C., Vergara, W., & Verdone, M. (2017). Roots of prosperity: The economics and finance of restoring land; Verdone, M., & Seidl, A. (2017). Time, space, place, and the Bonn Challenge global forest restoration target. *Restoration Ecology*, 25(6), 903-911; UNEP & FAO. (2021). *Becoming #GenerationRestoration: Ecosystem restoration for people, nature and climate*.

diminish the strategic utility of the estimate; rather, they define the precise conditions under which the data must be operationalised. Namely, the figures provide a robust, transparent, and reproducible financial baseline. This baseline serves as the foundation for the regional financing strategy, guides the selection and sequencing of the financial instruments detailed in Section 11.2, and frames the targeted resource-mobilisation effort under Goal 3, and should be re-based as regional LCA, updated local unit costs and site-specific details emerge.

11.2. Financial instruments for the implementation of the WB6 FLRP

11.2.1. Approach and rationale

The identification of financial instruments for the WB6 FLRP moves beyond a simplistic, one-to-one mapping of funding sources to individual strategic goals. Landscape restoration finance operates within a **sequenced and blended architecture**; individual instruments frequently support multiple strategic goals, while the realisation of any single goal typically relies on a combination of financial mechanisms with differing functions, time horizons, and access criteria. Consequently, the approach deployed herein aligns instruments to strategic goals based on four analytical dimensions: thematic alignment with selected activity; financial accessibility and approval lead times; demonstrated operational track record within the WB6; and strategic multiplier value, defined as the capacity of an instrument to unlock co-financing or de-risk subsequent capital deployments.

This financing logic is operationalised through a structured, phased implementation horizon. **An enabling and positioning phase** (2027–2029) prioritises grant-based facilities and technical assistance to establish the prerequisite methodological, legal, and institutional conditions upon which large-scale investment depends. A subsequent **investment-readiness and piloting phase** (2029–2032) tests innovative financing mechanisms within specific priority landscapes, generating the empirical evidence required to de-risk larger operations. Finally, a **scale-up and blending phase** (2032 and beyond) mobilises institutional investment and blended finance instruments on the basis of verified ecological results and matured regional absorption capacity. This phased approach directly mirrors the three-stage investment framework for FLR developed by FAO and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD, comprising readiness investment, implementation investment, and sustained financing, which has been adopted by landmark multi-lateral initiatives such as The Restoration Initiative. The instruments identified below should therefore be conceptualised within this dynamic sequencing logic rather than as static allocations.

A critical, structural caveat applies across all strategic dimensions and links back to the foundational problem analysis of the WB6 FLRP, which identified unstable and fragmented funding as a core horizontal bottleneck. The binding constraint on FLR financing in the WB6 is not merely the absolute availability of financial instruments, but rather the limited domestic institutional absorption capacity required to access, programme, and deploy them effectively. Accordingly, instruments directly designed to remedy this capacity gap, such as Twinning opportunities within the EU framework, alongside the GCF Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme, are treated here as foundational rather than ancillary support mechanisms.

Finally, certain international institutional actors operate less as goal-specific instruments and more as systemic enablers within the regional financing architecture. The European Union, through its Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood and the other EU Delegations, provides the overarching policy and programming framework within which most other development partners anchor their financial engagement; its relevance is therefore cross-cutting across all five strategic goals. In parallel, FAO and IUCN play pivotal roles as accredited international delivery partners and technical advisors, translating regional restoration priorities into financeable, high-quality proposals tailored to the stringent requirements of major multilateral climate and biodiversity funds.

Table 17. Primary financial instruments by strategic goal and lead implementation phase

WB6 FLRP strategic goal	Primary instruments	Lead phase
1- Enabling conditions	TAIEX / Twinning; IPA III Window 3; ADA bilateral grants; GCF Readiness; FAO TCP	Enabling (2027–2029)
2 -Restoring landscapes	World Bank (IPF, PROGREEN, GFDRR); GCF Funding Proposals; AF; GEF (BD/LD, FOLUR); LDN Fund; FAO; EIB; EBRD	Piloting → Scale-up (2029+)
3 - Diversified financing	IPARD III Measure 11; WBIF; AFD Policy-Based Loans; GCF Readiness / GEF; EIB (green bonds)	All phases

4 - Regional cooperation	Regional IPA / WBIF; ADA; German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development / International Climate Initiative and GIZ (Regional Climate Partnership); GEF inter-jurisdictional; AF regional window	Enabling → Piloting
5 - Participation & benefit-sharing	IFAD (ASAP, lending); GEF Small Grants; IKI Small Grants; AF locally-led windows; SDC/SECO; ADA	Piloting → Scale-up

Note: The table presents the primary instrument fit per goal; many instruments also carry cross-cutting relevance, and lead phases are indicative rather than exclusive.

11.2.2. Building enabling conditions (Goal 1)

The financing architecture required for Goal 1 is predominantly grant-based and technical in nature, given that these interventions target the methodological, legal, and institutional foundations of FLR rather than direct capital investment. This focus responds directly to the horizontal bottlenecks of fragmented governance, weak monitoring systems, and limited institutional readiness that historically constrain the region's access to external finance. The most structurally aligned instruments for this phase are the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (**TAIEX**) and **Twinning**, which are highly effective for institutional capacity building, procedural alignment, and the regulatory reforms required for activities such as SEA and EIA harmonisation, spatial-planning integration, and the establishment of an enforceable legal mandate for FLR under Activity 1.3. These mechanisms are complemented by **IPA III Window 3** (Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity), which serves as the primary thematic window of the EU's pre-accession instrument. It can comprehensively support regional policy development, programming, project preparation, and institutional building through targeted grants and technical assistance, leveraging established regional entry points, such as EU4Green and the EU for the Green Agenda in Serbia initiative.

Among bilateral development partners, the **Austrian Development Agency (ADA)** is strategically well positioned to support this foundational phase. ADA is already actively engaged in financing and executing several of the core regional building blocks on which Goal 1 depends - including biodiversity governance, environmental monitoring, and Green Agenda programming through the Greening the Western Balkans institutional framework and its co-financing of EU4Green. This track record positions ADA as a credible continuity partner for follow-on regional programming and institutional anchoring.

Where interventions concern data infrastructure, MRV frameworks, and overall programming readiness, the **GCF Readiness and Preparatory Support Programme** represents a critical asset. This window offers accessible, non-repayable grant finance of up to USD 1 million per year to strengthen domestic-level designated authorities, develop regional concept notes, and build long-term environmental monitoring capacity. In parallel, **FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme (FAO TCP)** plays a vital complementary role by financing the methodological foundations for domestic-level forest inventories and monitoring systems, directly building upon its ongoing technical support for the domestic-level Forest Inventory in Montenegro and forest monitoring frameworks in Kosovo*.

11.2.3. Restoring forest landscapes (Goal 2)

Goal 2 constitutes the capital-intensive core of the plan, and its financing strategy accordingly progresses from pilot and preparatory support towards large-scale public and multilateral climate finance. This sequence reflects a regional context in which restoration at a landscape scale cannot be sustained through fragmented, short-term project finance alone. Instead, it demands robust project pipelines, precise territorial targeting, and matured institutional implementation capacity.

At the large-scale investment end, the **World Bank** is among the few institutions positioned to support sovereign restoration operations of significant volume, particularly where FLR is structurally framed not only as an environmental objective but as a mechanism for economic resilience, DRR, and long-term public asset investment. Its recently launched project, entitled Montenegro Forests for Shared Prosperity, strategically integrates forest governance, wildfire prevention, bioeconomy value-chain development, and climate resilience, and provides a direct and contemporary regional baseline. Furthermore, the World Bank's work on NbS through the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery closely aligns with the disaster-mitigation dimension of this goal's activities.

The **GCF** occupies a similarly critical strategic position for climate-framed, large-scale restoration. The **FOREST Invest** project in Serbia, implemented by the FAO with a total valuation of USD 84 million, serves as a regional proof-of-concept. It demonstrates that forestry and landscape-level interventions in the WB6 can successfully meet the Fund's stringent investment criteria when structured around verified climate resilience,

clear impact in the Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use sector, and transparent implementation arrangements. Given its rigorous accreditation requirements, the GCF is best operationalised as a major medium-term scaling option rather than an immediate-entry funding source.

For the adaptation-oriented and water-centric measures within this goal, particularly watershed restoration, riparian ecosystem recovery, and soil erosion control, the **AF** is one of the most targeted multilateral options. The AF offers a dedicated regional funding window of up to USD 30 million and carries a strong regional precedent through its support of the inter-jurisdictional Drin River Basin project; its primary value lies in financing specialised, transboundary adaptation, and DRR interventions rather than anchoring the macro-financing architecture as a whole. Concurrently, the **GEF** offers a complementary medium-term financing track for interventions structured around biodiversity conservation, LDN, and integrated landscape management. This can be effectively accessed through the GEF's Biodiversity and Land Degradation Focal Areas, the Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Integrated Program, and specialised transboundary funding windows that match the shared-landscape logic of Activities 2.2 and 2.5. However, due to the GEF's extended project preparation cycle, regional engagement pipelines must be initiated at an early stage.

The **LDN Fund** provides a specialised, market-based reference point for the land-restoration measures under Activity 2.4. Developed through the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD and managed by Mirova⁴, it was structured as a layered blended-finance vehicle with anchor participation from the EIB and **Agence Française de Développement (AFD)**, alongside public and philanthropic risk-mitigation support including Luxembourg and GEF-linked technical-assistance arrangements. The fund uses concessional and catalytic public capital to help mobilise private institutional investment into financially viable sustainable land management, agroforestry, and sustainable forestry enterprises through long-term debt and equity instruments with ten-to-fifteen-year maturities. Its relevance to this plan is twofold. First, it is closely aligned with the LDN framework, which tracks land degradation through three core indicators: land cover, land productivity, and soil organic carbon. Second, it illustrates how non-sovereign, return-seeking capital can be mobilised in support of land-restoration objectives, complementing sovereign lending by institutions such as the World Bank and EIB. Because the original fund reached final close in 2021 and was designed primarily for private investments in developing-economy markets, it is best viewed as a **proof of concept** and structuring precedent **rather than a currently open funding window for the WB6**.

Throughout the execution of this goal, **FAO** and **IUCN** fulfil critical technical advisory roles, utilising their institutional accreditation to translate regional restoration priorities into investment-ready proposals tailored for major multilateral climate funds. In parallel, **EIB** and **EBRD** become highly relevant partners where FLR measures can be structurally integrated into broader sovereign lending frameworks for water resilience, flood management, or municipal infrastructure investments, rather than being financed as stand-alone forestry projects. Within this architecture, Activity 2.9 serves as the critical operational hinge between the physical restoration targets and the financing dimensions of the plan. The empirical evidence and pilot data generated under this activity represent the prerequisite for de-risking investments, establishing proof-of-concept, and successfully accessing large-scale blended finance and multilateral capital deployments.

11.2.4. Securing diversified financing (Goal 3)

Goal 3 is distinctive in that it seeks not only to mobilise immediate financial flows but to structurally reshape the financing architecture upon which long-term FLR depends. Its rationale is inherently structural: within the WB6, restoration finance remains deeply fragmented, heavily donor-dependent, and insufficiently integrated into domestic public financial management. Accordingly, the primary focus is to transition FLR from isolated, project-based interventions towards a predictable, diversified, and resilient funding model. This transition is driven by targeted fiscal and budgetary reforms, enhanced institutional absorption capacity, structured project pipeline development, and the gradual operationalisation of blended and market-based mechanisms, rather than the immediate mobilisation of large-scale capital alone.

The EU's **IPARD III** framework, specifically Measure 11 (Establishment and protection of forests), represents a critical, dedicated instrument for financing agroforestry and forestry interventions on private and municipal rural lands, directly addressing the plan's emphasis on private sector engagement. However, the significantly delayed implementation of this measure across several WB6, owing to protracted bottlenecks in the entrustment of budget implementation tasks and domestic agency accreditation, illustrates that access to

⁴ Mirova is a private sector investment management firm dedicated to sustainable investment and an affiliate of Natixis Investment Managers. It was selected by the UNCCD to structure, capitalize and independently manage the LDN Fund, and acts as the Fund's management company.

finance is primarily constrained by administrative and technical capacity rather than nominal instrument availability. In the short term, the targeted deployment of the EU's TAIEX instrument to systematically unblock these institutional and regulatory procedures represents one of the most practical and immediate strategic actions available under this goal.

For the structural fiscal and budgetary reforms at the core of this goal, i.e. namely, the institutionalisation of green budget tagging within programme budgeting systems under Activity 3.2 and the comprehensive reform of environmentally harmful subsidies under Activity 3.5 - the policy-based lending operations of the **AFD** are particularly well suited. This is strongly demonstrated by the AFD's successful regional precedents, including its technical assistance programme on green budgeting and climate-informed public investment in Albania, alongside its joint sovereign support with the **World Bank** for Serbia's macro-fiscal climate roadmap. Furthermore, the **Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF)** serves as a vital later-stage blending platform capable of pooling international financial institution loans and EU grants for mature, large-scale FLR portfolios. However, effective access to the WBIF remains strictly contingent upon the prior development of credible, cross-sectoral project pipelines and robust regional coordination mechanisms under Activity 3.3.

As the implementation advances towards green public investments and innovative market structures, the **EIB** will become increasingly relevant, particularly in aligning regional issuers with the emerging Western Balkans Green Bond Standard. Concurrently, the strengthening of regional absorption capacity and project preparation under Activity 3.3 is directly supported by the **GCF Readiness Programme** and the **GEF's institutional capacity building windows**, both of which mandate rigorous MRV compliance and financeable programme design. Conversely, the market-based mechanisms referenced under Activity 3.4, including **PES** and **carbon-related mechanisms**, remain constrained by uneven legal, institutional, and methodological groundwork across the WB6. Realistically, these instruments should be treated as long-term objectives, requiring substantial regulatory preparation during the initial phases before becoming fully operational later in the implementation period.

11.2.5. Strengthening regional cooperation (Goal 4)

The financing required to operationalise Goal 4 is predominantly grant-based and non-investment in nature, focusing systematically on inter-jurisdictional coordination, joint project preparatory facilities, and regional knowledge exchange rather than direct capital deployment. This targeted funding structure responds directly to the historical bottlenecks of fragmented environmental governance and institutional silos that have long constrained cohesive regional action across the WB6. Multilateral and regional **IPA programmes** represent the most structurally aligned funding mechanisms to support the regional coordination platform and joint pipeline preparation envisaged under Activities 4.1 and 4.4. Crucially, the intra-regional architecture of this plan may strengthen its competitiveness for EU allocations, where a regional dimension is often an advantage. Over the longer-term horizon, as these regional pipelines mature into large-scale investment portfolios, they can be progressively transitioned onto the **WBIF** blending platform.

In terms of bilateral and regional partnership delivery, the **ADA** remains an operationally proximate and highly credible partner. ADA is already deeply embedded within the regional cooperation architecture, providing foundational support to the RCC, RWG GAWB, and BDTF, the exact institutional pillars upon which the proposed FLR coordination mechanism is designed to build. In parallel, the **Western Balkans-Germany Climate Partnership**, established under the Berlin Process and executed through **GIZ**, is well suited to facilitate the high-level regional policy dialogue, inter-ministerial alignment, and project pipeline facilitation functions mandated by this goal.

Where cross-jurisdiction cooperation directly addresses shared river basins, ecological corridors, and contiguous inter-jurisdictional landscapes, the **GEF** transboundary programming windows and the **AF's** regional facility provide the most effective thematic financing tracks. The successful implementation of the inter-jurisdictional Drin River Basin initiative serves as the clearest regional precedent for this approach. Throughout this process, **FAO** and **IUCN** will continue to fulfil their core mandates as key methodological, convening, and advisory partners. Their technical leadership is vital for ensuring that regional cooperation remains firmly anchored in harmonised FLR standards, data compatibility across the WB6, and the shared MRV data architectures developed under Goal 1.

11.2.6. Inclusive participation and benefit-sharing (Goal 5)

Goal 5 requires targeted, community-facing financial instruments and decentralised rural development facilities that directly connect FLR with local livelihoods, ecosystem stewardship, and long-term stakeholder

participation. Its importance is simultaneously social and operational: within the WB6 priority landscapes, the multi-decadal durability of restoration outcomes depends predominantly on whether local communities, private smallholders, and other primary land users have credible economic incentives and practical technical support to actively engage in long-term maintenance. The **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** represents the most structurally aligned multilateral partner for the forest–farm interface, sustainable agroforestry, and smallholder engagement. This is illustrated by the IFAD-financed GORA project in Montenegro, which strategically links climate resilience in vulnerable mountain ecosystems with inclusive rural development and community livelihood diversification.

Smaller-scale, community-based pilots and participatory restoration activities are a natural fit for the **GEF Small Grants Programme** and the **IKI Small Grants facility**. Both mechanisms are effective at financing localised demonstration activities, civil society engagement, and grassroots environmental stewardship within selected priority landscapes. Concurrently, the AF's dedicated funding windows for **Locally Led Adaptation** provide direct funding tracks where FLR measures yield immediate, verifiable resilience benefits for vulnerable rural populations.

Conversely, the formal benefit-sharing mechanisms and **PES** structures envisaged under Activity 5.3 should be approached as later-stage financial instruments rather than immediate funding channels. Much like the market-based mechanisms under Goal 3, their operationalisation is strictly contingent upon prior legal, institutional, and methodological groundwork, including robust frameworks for land tenure rights, standardised ecosystem valuation methodologies, and transparent protocols for revenue collection and redistribution.

Finally, the green-jobs and rural-revitalisation focus of Activity 5.4 aligns closely with the locally grounded, socio-economic development frameworks of the **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)**, **Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)** and **ADA**. In parallel, joint regional research, development, and eco-innovation can be comprehensively financed through the **Horizon Europe** programme, in which the WB6 participate as associated partners, and through the specialised technical networks and thematic commissions convened by **FAO** and **IUCN**.

11.2.7. Synthesis

Taken together, the financial instrument landscape available for the implementation of the WB6 FLRP is neither uniform nor static. It is comparatively more accessible at the foundational enabling end, where technical assistance, climate readiness facilities, and grant-based instruments can be mobilised relatively rapidly to strengthen institutional capacity, build inter-jurisdictional pipelines, and improve programming readiness. Conversely, the architecture becomes progressively more demanding towards the scale-up end, where large-scale capital investments are strictly contingent upon demonstrated results, credible monitoring frameworks, and mature project preparation. The central strategic implication is that the chronological sequence of engagement matters as much as the selection of the instruments themselves: the early, well-targeted deployment of enabling finance directly determines whether larger investment instruments can subsequently be accessed at all, especially within a regional context where institutional absorption capacity, inter-sectoral coordination, and investment-ready pipeline development remain uneven.

A structural feature inherent to FLR finance reinforces this sequencing logic and merits explicit recognition. International donor finance typically operates on rigid three- to five-year funding cycles, whereas FLR requires sustained technical and financial inputs over significantly longer horizons. In the contemporary environmental finance literature, ten years is increasingly considered the absolute minimum credible period required to achieve durable restoration results. Despite this, long-term, multi-phase donor support remains the structural exception rather than the operational rule.

This temporal misalignment carries two profound policy implications for the WB6 FLRP. First, it strengthens the strategic case for a progressive transition towards programme budgeting, enhanced domestic institutional ownership, and more diversified multi-year financing frameworks under Goal 3, given that isolated donor cycles alone cannot sustain ecological and socio-economic outcomes that mature over decades. Second, it underscores why the financial estimates within the financing needs assessment must be dynamically distributed across implementation phases and medium-term budget cycles rather than presented solely as static, cumulative totals, as more detailed site-level data become available. The overarching conclusion is therefore not that any single financial instrument should be preferred over others, but that the structural effectiveness of the regional financing architecture depends entirely on how these instruments are strategically sequenced,

blended, and institutionally absorbed over time. This integrated logic underpins both the quantitative assessment of financing needs and the recommended multi-year phasing of the implementation plan.

12. Implementation mechanisms and institutional roles, including stakeholder participation models and opportunities for regional cooperation

Outlined in Annex C.

13. List of Annexes

Annex A. Methodology for the WB6 FLRP Financial Needs Assessment

Annex B. Indicative cost of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)

Annex C: Implementation mechanisms and institutional roles, including stakeholder participation models and opportunities for regional cooperation

Annex A. Methodology for the WB6 FLRP Financial Needs Assessment

This annex provides the methodological basis for the financial needs assessment presented in Section 11. It sets out the unit cost estimates used for indicative costing, the landscape archetype framework applied for regional-level extrapolation, the calculation of weighted average costs, and the minimum input data required from the Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report (ROAR).

All estimates presented in this annex are intended for strategic planning, programming dialogue, and donor engagement. They are not a substitute for site-level feasibility assessment, technical design, procurement planning, or engineering cost estimation.

The methodology has been developed for a regional planning context in which the Western Balkans Six (WB6) Forest Landscape Restoration Plan (FLRP) requires an initial estimate of financial needs before all site-specific technical, spatial, and institutional parameters are fully available. For that reason, the framework applies literature-informed unit cost ranges, expert judgement adapted to WB6 conditions, and a scenario-based extrapolation model, with the landscape archetype distribution serving as an interim spatial proxy in the absence of a harmonised Landscape Character Assessment (LCA). Because the framework applies restoration costs across the full set of ROAR-identified priority areas, the resulting figures should be read as indicative planning ranges and as a likely upper bound—to be refined through cross-referencing with the following LCA (Annex B)—rather than as precise implementation budgets.

A.1 FLR intervention typology and unit cost estimates

Table A.1 presents the unit cost ranges used in the model. These ranges reflect a synthesis of international Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) literature and selected European restoration costing references (e.g., *ForestNavigator*, 2024; *Verhoeven et al.*, 2024; *EC NRL Impact Assessment*, 2022; *Brancalion et al.*, 2019; *Trillion Trees/Bodin et al.*, 2021; *Unique 2019*, etc.), and expert interpretation of likely WB6 implementation conditions. Cost items include direct intervention costs and the early maintenance requirements typically needed to establish restoration measures, while broader programme-level costs are addressed separately in Section A.3.

Table A.1. Unit cost parameters by FLR measure

FLR measure	Unit cost range (EUR)	Cost items considered	WB6 context note
Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR)	400-1,200/ha	Protective fencing installation and maintenance; invasive species and weed removal; fire-risk management; monitoring and corrective interventions in years 1-3	Applicable where seed sources and sufficient ecological recovery potential remain. Grazing control and local engagement are often important enabling conditions.

Enrichment planting	1,500-3,000/ha	Site preparation and gap marking; container seedlings; internal logistics and manual planting; individual protection; maintenance and gap-filling in years 1-3	Particularly relevant where partial forest structure remains, but species composition or resilience requires improvement. Terrain accessibility can materially affect costs.
Full planting on bare or heavily degraded land	3,500-6,000/ha	Site preparation and terracing; seedling stock; manual transport and planting; fencing and fire-clearance lines; maintenance and replacement planting in years 1-3	Used where natural regeneration is unlikely to be sufficient. Costs may rise in steep, remote, or erosion-prone terrain.
Bioengineering with planting	5,000-12,000+/ha	Engineering and geotechnical survey; natural-material structures; manual transport and slope work; pioneer planting and stabilisation; emergency maintenance in years 1-3	Appropriate mainly in active erosion, torrent, or landslide locations where ecological restoration and slope stabilisation need to be combined.
Riparian forest corridor restoration	2,000-4,500/ha	Ecological mapping; invasive species removal; hydrophilic seedlings; planting on wet terrain; temporary protection works; intensive early maintenance	Particularly relevant in degraded river corridors and floodplain edges with high ecological and cross-jurisdictional relevance.
Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM)	2,500-7,000/ha*	Hydrological analysis; siting of small retention structures; contour trenching or equivalent earthworks; biological stabilisation; sediment clearance and maintenance in years 1-2	Relevant where upper catchment restoration, erosion control, and water regulation functions are closely linked. Local material availability can significantly influence cost structure.
Silvopastoral systems	1,200-2,200/ha pasture	Tree protection; planting of shade or fodder species; zonal fencing; temporary compensation or incentive support	Uptake is likely to depend on compensation design, tenure clarity, and the willingness of land users to accept short-term land-use adjustments.
Agrosilvo-pastoral systems (alley cropping and related models)	1,800-3,200/ha cropland	Row planting of woody species; mechanisation adjustments; early irrigation where needed; farmer transition support	Likely to require piloting and adaptation to fragmented holdings, local production systems, and consent conditions.
Windbreaks	2,500-4,500/linear km	Planting material and installation; soil preparation; early maintenance; landholder coordination costs	Most relevant in exposed agricultural mosaics and erosion-prone production landscapes.
Design, GIS (Geographic Information System) and engineering	approximately 4-5% of the total budget	Spatial analysis and mapping; technical design; hydrological or forestry design inputs; geodetic surveys, where needed	Should be treated as a core preparatory cost rather than an optional technical add-on.
Monitoring (drone, satellite and field verification)	approximately 8-9% of the total budget	Vegetation and survival monitoring; remote sensing; field verification; donor and programme reporting systems	Should be planned as a continuing budget line across implementation and early maintenance phases.
Community engagement and transition support	approximately 5-6% of the total budget	Participatory planning; compensation or transition support; tenure facilitation; local implementation support	Important for reducing implementation risk, especially where grazing pressure, fragmented holdings, or weak local ownership may affect restoration durability.

Climate-risk contingency	approximately 5% of the total budget	Drought-related replacement; flood or fire damage repair; seasonal inaccessibility costs	Recommended as a planning allowance, particularly for higher-risk landscapes and multi-year implementation periods.
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* The NWRM unit cost is expressed here as a hectare-equivalent planning proxy linked to the catchment influence area used in the regional model, rather than only to the direct footprint of structures. This assumption should be refined where ROAR outputs or subsequent technical design allow more precise spatial attribution. The figures in Table A.1 should be understood as planning ranges rather than fixed reference prices. Actual costs will vary by accessibility, labour conditions, site preparation needs, procurement arrangements, land tenure complexity, and the intensity of follow-up maintenance required in the establishment phase.

A.2 Landscape archetype framework and weighted cost logic

Because a fully operational and harmonised landscape character dataset is not yet available across all WB6 at the level required for cost modelling, the methodology applies a simplified regional archetype framework as a planning proxy. This does not replace the need for future detailed LCA (see Annex B). Rather, it provides an interim structure for translating restoration area estimates into differentiated cost ranges that better reflect likely variation across mountain, mosaic, and riparian landscapes.

The archetype distribution used in the model is therefore an explicit methodological assumption informed by geographic structure, land-use patterns and expert interpretation of the cross-jurisdiction areas likely to be prioritised for restoration through the WB6 FLRP. It should be reviewed once ROAR and subsequent research outputs provide a firmer spatial basis for refinement.

Table A.2. Landscape archetype classification, indicative distribution, and assumed measure mix

Archetype	Assumed share	Basis for assumption	Typical WB6 landscapes	Assumed measure mix
A - High-altitude forest massif	55%	Mountain ranges and massifs form a large share of ecologically significant cross-jurisdictional landscapes in the WB6, often with substantial forest cover and a higher presence of public land or protected areas.	Accursed Mountains, Sharr Mountain, Durmitor Mountain and similar mountain systems	ANR 70%; enrichment planting 20%; full planting 8%; bioengineering 2%
B - Hilly agricultural mosaic	30%	Lower belts and foothill zones often combine woodland patches, pasture, cropland, and scattered settlements, creating mixed restoration needs and more complex tenure patterns.	Drina corridor, Lim Valley, foothill mosaics and similar mixed-use landscapes	ANR 40%; agroforestry systems 30%; riparian restoration 15%; other measures 15%
C - Degraded river basin and riparian zone	15%	Riparian corridors and upper catchment hotspots occupy a smaller share of total area but can require more intensive interventions due to erosion, hydrological degradation, and flood-related pressures.	White Drin, Vjosa tributaries, Neretva tributaries and similar zones	Riparian restoration 35%; NWRM 30%; bioengineering 10%; ANR 25%

Applying blended unit costs to the measure mix assumed for each archetype, and then weighting these by the indicative archetype distribution above, yields a **regional weighted average cost per hectare (RWACH)**. In this document, RWACH is used as the main strategic planning metric for extrapolating total implementation costs for the total restoration area identified in ROAR.

The formula is:

$$RWACH = \sum (\text{archetype share} \times \text{blended cost})$$

Table A.3. RWACH calculation by scenario

Scenario	Archetype A (EUR/ha)	Archetype B (EUR/ha)	Archetype C (EUR/ha)	RWACP (EUR/ha)
Conservative	1,600	1,800	2,400	≈ 1,800
Central (planning reference)	2,200	2,600	3,500	≈ 2,500
High-cost	3,200	3,800	5,500	≈ 3,600

The central planning estimate of approximately 2,500 EUR/ha reflects the fact that the largest assumed landscape category is dominated by lower-cost restoration pathways such as assisted natural regeneration and enrichment planting rather than full planting. This is methodologically important because it avoids the distortion that would arise from applying uniform full-planting assumptions to all restoration areas.

A.3 Extrapolation formula, markups, and scenario presentation

Based on ROAR estimation of the total area recommended for restoration, the aggregate financial requirement can be estimated using the RWACH and a limited set of programme-level markups. For clarity, this methodology distinguishes between: (i) direct and early-maintenance intervention costs reflected in the unit costs above; and (ii) programme-level additions related to design, coordination, monitoring, and contingency. These programme-level additions are included through markups to ensure transparency and avoid double-counting.

The extrapolation formula is:

$$\text{Total estimated cost} = \text{ROAR restoration area (ha)} \times \text{RWACH} \times (1 + \text{markup})$$

A markup of 15-20% is used for technical design, inter-jurisdictional coordination, and regional monitoring, reflecting programme-level transaction and management costs that are typical of multi-jurisdiction restoration planning and implementation frameworks. A further 5% climate-risk contingency may be included where planning assumptions need to account for drought, fire, flood damage, or seasonal disruption during implementation. These markups are included to improve transparency in strategic costing and to reduce the risk of understating broader implementation requirements.

For planning purposes, financial needs are presented in three scenarios. This scenario structure is intended to provide a credible planning range rather than a single deterministic figure.

Table A.4. Three-scenario presentation

Scenario	RWACH applied	Markup	Description
Conservative	≈ 1,800 EUR/ha	15%	Lower-bound unit costs. Assumes relatively favourable operational conditions - good terrain accessibility, available local labour, and active community participation with low transaction costs.
Central	≈ 2,500 EUR/ha	17.5%	Mid-point unit costs. Assumes mixed, typical conditions across the diverse priority landscapes - a realistic combination of accessible and difficult terrain, partial reliance on local labour, and moderate transaction and subsidy costs. Serves as the primary planning reference.
High-cost	≈ 3,600 EUR/ha	25%	Upper-bound unit costs. Assumes the most demanding operational conditions - extreme terrain inaccessibility, labour hired from urban centres, and significant agroforestry subsidy requirements.

A.4 Sensitivity analysis and interpretation

The central assumption—the indicative 55-30-15 archetype distribution—is the parameter most likely to warrant review once the archetype shares can be verified against actual landscape data. This verification is precisely what the future LCA is intended to provide: by characterising the priority landscapes spatially, the LCA would replace the assumed distribution with evidence-based archetype shares, intersecting ROAR's data

on where restoration is needed with LCA's spatial data. To test whether the assumed distribution materially distorts the model in the interim, the methodology applies a limited sensitivity check using central unit cost values.

Table A.5. Sensitivity of RWACH to alternative archetype distributions

Distribution (A / B / C)	Basis	RWACH (EUR/ha)	Deviation from baseline
55 / 30 / 15	Baseline assumption used for estimation	2,515	/
65 / 25 / 10	Higher share of protected or publicly-owned high-altitude forest landscapes	2,430	-3.4%
45 / 40 / 15	Greater weight of hilly mosaic landscapes with agricultural abandonment and mixed tenure	2,555	+1.6%
50 / 25 / 25	Greater weight of riparian and catchment hotspots in the restoration portfolio	2,625	+4.4%

Limited variation across these alternative scenarios suggests that archetype distribution is not the dominant source of uncertainty in the model. Within the tested range, total restoration area and the choice of unit cost bounds are more significant drivers of the final estimate than the precise regional split across archetypes.

A further interpretative point is that the unit cost assumptions in this model include a three-year establishment and maintenance logic for most hectare-based measures. The resulting total cost estimate, therefore, represents a cumulative implementation requirement rather than an annual financial need. For budgeting purposes, any total estimate derived from this model would need to be phased across multi-year programming periods in line with implementation sequencing, procurement capacity, and the design of domestic-level and external financing windows.

A.5 ROAR input requirements

The model is designed to function with minimal inputs from ROAR. This is intentional, as the WB6 FLRP and the ROAR are being developed in parallel, since more detailed spatial data were not yet available during the preparation of the WB6 FLRP and the financial needs assessment. At the same time, WB6 do not yet have fully standardised datasets on landscapes and their characteristics that could support a more spatially differentiated regional costing approach.

For that reason, the model uses the total number of hectares recommended for restoration and the number of priority restoration areas identified through ROAR as its minimum inputs. When additional data become available, the model can be refined further through differentiated costing for accessibility, land tenure, slope class, restoration intensity, and locally specific implementation conditions. The present version should therefore be understood as a modular framework that can be progressively improved rather than as a closed methodology.

A.6 Methodological limitations

Several limitations should be read together with the cost estimates presented in this document.

- The model is designed for strategic regional planning and does not replace site-level technical assessment.
- Unit cost ranges are literature-informed and expert-adapted; they are not derived from a harmonised WB6 project cost database.
- The archetype distribution is a planning assumption pending refinement through LCA.
- Locally specific procurement conditions, institutional capacities, labour cost differences, and administrative bottlenecks are not modelled separately at this stage.
- The model estimates financial needs, but does not in itself assess affordability, absorptive capacity, or the sequencing constraints that may affect annual disbursement realities.

These limitations do not invalidate the use of the model for the WB6 FLRP. Rather, they define the level at which the methodology is appropriate: regional programming, strategic costing, donor dialogue, and initial financial architecture design.

Annex B. Indicative cost of Landscape Character Assessment

The financing needs assessment presented in Section 11.1, alongside the modelling detailed in Annex A, rests on a simplified regional shared landscape archetype. This hypothetical distribution of the total restoration area across three distinct landscape types (high-altitude forest massif, hilly agricultural mosaic, and degraded river basin) serves as a useful methodological planning proxy. As outlined in Annex A, this proxy approach was adopted because a fully operational and harmonised landscape character dataset is not yet available across the WB6 at the level of granularity required for more precise spatial cost modelling. While the sensitivity analysis in Annex A indicates that the archetype distribution assumption is most likely not the main source of uncertainty in the model, it does not eliminate the operational need for a robust, spatially explicit characterisation of the region's landscapes.

The first step towards transitioning from a strategic baseline to a more precise, spatially grounded assessment of Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) financing is the systematic application of **Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)** across the region. LCA is more than a mere costing input; it constitutes the methodological foundation mandated under **Goal 1 (Activity 1.1)**, which establishes a unified, landscape-based approach for identifying landscape character types, evaluating their condition, functionality, and socio-environmental sensitivity, and defining restoration priorities and opportunity zones. Conducting a comprehensive LCA will allow the interim archetype assumptions to be gradually replaced by a spatially explicit evidence base, including a harmonised database, maps and guidelines for identified landscape character types. This spatial clarity will allow the Regional Weighted Average Cost per Hectare (RWACH) to be recalculated against verified biophysical areas rather than hypothetical shares. In this framework, the LCA simultaneously sharpens the accuracy of the financial needs assessment and delivers the permanent spatial-planning foundation that the long-term execution of the Western Balkans Six (WB6) Forest Landscape Restoration Plan (FLRP) demands.

LCA can be carried out at three complementary, nested levels of detail (see Table B1), each serving a distinct landscape planning and financial programming purpose. A **WB6-level assessment** provides the overarching regional macro-overview and establishes the shared methodological framework; a **regional-level assessment** delineates and differentiates specific landscapes by character, vulnerability, and restoration potential within functional inter-jurisdiction areas; and a **local-level assessment** provides the detailed characterisation necessary to define concrete intervention zones and compile investment-ready project documentation. These three tiers operate as a cohesive, nested matrix rather than alternative options: the macro-regional overview provides the structural boundaries for sub-regional planning, which in turn anchors and contextualises local characterisation within the selected priority landscapes. The indicative costs and structural components of each operational level are presented in Table B1.

Table B.1. Indicative cost of LCA by level of detail

LCA level, scale and coverage	Indicative total cost	What it includes	What it provides
WB6 level Scale: approx. 1:250,000, with selected outputs at 1:100,000 where data allow Coverage: entire WB6 region, selected WB6, or parts of major natural systems with a total area exceeding 50,000 km ²	€100,000 – 300,000	- Common methodological framework for the WB6 region - Harmonisation of regional spatial data - GIS analysis of key landscape, physiographic and ecological patterns - Identification of broad landscape character types and FLR priority areas - Methodological guidelines for lower-level planning and landscape-based FLR planning	- Shared basis for recognising regional and inter-jurisdictional FLR priorities - Comparison of landscape patterns, pressures and restoration opportunities across the WB6 - Support for a common landscape-based approach to regional cooperation and EU alignment - Framework for more detailed regional, domestic-level and local assessments

Regional level Scale: approx. 1:50,000–100,000 Coverage: 5,000–10,000 km ²	€70,000 – 180,000	- Analytical basis for landscape differentiation by character, sensitivity and restoration potential - Harmonisation and GIS analysis of regional spatial data - Identification of landscape character types and priority areas for FLR and green infrastructure - Synthesis mapping for regional spatial planning and cross-sector coordination - Guidelines for applying results in regional and lower-level planning documents	- Links WB6 priorities with regional spatial planning and sectoral decision-making - Translates landscape character into planning, forestry, water, biodiversity and climate frameworks - Supports identification of pilot areas, restoration corridors and priority investment zones - Provides a basis for managing landscape change across wider functional areas
Local level Scale: approx. 1:20,000–50,000 Coverage: usually up to around 1,000 km ²	€50,000 – 150,000	- Detailed landscape characterisation for local and special-purpose planning areas - Field verification of character, degradation and restoration potential - GIS analysis of land use, hydrology, erosion and spatial constraints - Identification of concrete FLR intervention zones and planning conditions - Maps and recommendations for technical and investment documentation	- Connects landscape character with concrete FLR interventions and planning conditions - Adapts restoration measures to local character, sensitivity and land-use context - Particularly relevant for protected areas, river basins, degraded landscapes and special-purpose areas - Supports technical documentation, local action plans and investment-ready FLR projects

While the ranges in Table B.1 apply to a single assessment at each level, an indicative estimate of the total LCA investment required in the WB6 FLRP context can be derived by applying them to the area that landscape characterisation would need to cover. For this purpose, the relevant reference is not the priority restoration area used in the financial needs assessment (Section 11.1), but the **total area of degraded forest identified through ROAR – approximately 1,015,562 hectares** (about 10,156 km²) – since characterisation should cover the full degraded forest stock from which restoration priorities are subsequently drawn, rather than only the areas already prioritised.

Applying the per-area cost structure implied by Table B.1 across the three nested levels gives the indicative totals below. A single WB6-level overview is treated as a fixed regional assessment, while the regional and local levels are scaled to the degraded forest area using unit costs derived from the coverage ranges in Table B.1. At full coverage of the degraded forest area, the total indicative cost of landscape characterisation is therefore in the order of **€0.7–2.2 million**, equivalent to roughly €0.7–2.2 per hectare characterised.

Table B.2. Indicative total cost of LCA for the WB6 degraded forest area

LCA level	Basis	Indicative cost
WB6-level overview	Single region-wide assessment	€100,000 – 300,000
Regional level	10,156 km ² at €7–36 /km ²	€70,000 – 370,000
Local level	10,156 km ² at €50–150 /km ²	€510,000 – 1,520,000
Total (full coverage)	All levels across the degraded forest area	€0.7 – 2.2 million

When evaluated in direct conjunction with the financial modelling in Annex A, this annex underlines that investment in comprehensive landscape characterisation must be conceptualised not as an additional or ancillary cost, but as a prerequisite for two foundational outcomes upon which the entire plan depends: a more accurate, spatially grounded financing estimate, and the common landscape-based planning architecture set out under Goal 1. Sequencing LCA early within the implementation timeline, i.e. initiating the process with the WB6-level overview and systematically progressing to regional and local assessments within priority landscapes, will allow the strategic financing figures in Section 11.1 to be dynamically refined and updated as verified, empirical landscape data replace the interim archetype proxy baseline.

Annex C: Implementation mechanisms and institutional roles, including stakeholder participation models and opportunities for regional cooperation

Overview and background analysis

The proposed implementation mechanism for the Western Balkans Six (WB6) Forest Landscape Restoration Plan (FLRP) is built on findings of stakeholder consultation process and policy landscape analysis results. Given the fact that the majority of stakeholders were representatives of ministries and various institutions that will be involved directly in FLR implementation, the stakeholder inputs had a dominant role in the design of the proposed implementation mechanism.

Stakeholders across the WB6 expressed deep concern about **fragmented governance and weak inter-sectoral coordination**. Conflicts between priorities of different sectors (forestry, nature protection, agriculture, and spatial planning ministries) were repeatedly highlighted as a challenge for FLR implementation in the WB6. Next, **unreliable and non-harmonised data systems**, with a lack of legal recognition of "forest landscape restoration" as a concept in the domestic legislation, was also identified as a fundamental implementation barrier.

On financing, the overriding concern was the near-total dependence on external donors and the absence of long-term, programmatic domestic funding mechanisms. Stakeholders also broadly agreed the **2030 deadline is unrealistic for full implementation**, recommending instead that the period to 2030 be used strategically for prioritisation, formal recognition of existing micro-level pilot projects, and preparation of bankable project pipelines.

The most consistent recommendations were:

- embed FLR into new and revised domestic legislation and domestic-level biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) rather than keeping it solely at the strategy level;
- build on existing regional cooperation structures (Biodiversity Task Force (BDTF), Landscape Fire Management Network in the Western Balkans (LFM network), Parks Dinarides and similar) rather than creating parallel mechanisms;
- ensure genuine participatory planning from the earliest stages involving local communities, private forest owners, and municipalities; and
- strengthen human resource and institutional capacity, which stakeholders identified as the most critically under-resourced dimension of implementation.

Policy analysis informed the implementation mechanism design with similar findings regarding barriers for implementation.

The dominant multi-sectoral challenge found is **legal and institutional fragmentation between sectors managing the same landscapes**. For example, in Kosovo*, the Policy and Strategy Paper on Forestry Development explicitly describes Forest Law to be in conflict with multiple other laws and administrative instructions, resulting in jurisdiction overlaps and only partial implementation, with *"ineffective coordination and cooperation between related institutions"* as one of the main drivers of forest degradation. NBSAP of North Macedonia similarly flags *"insufficient inter-institutional cooperation with regard to natural resources use, and overlapping responsibilities between relevant ministries, especially in the domain of inspection supervision"* as a key challenge, with forests and biodiversity divided between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy operating under different legal mandates.

At the **inter-jurisdictional level**, the policy documents reveal a monumental hurdle in the **absence of formal mechanisms for coordinated restoration planning across shared ecosystems**. For example, NBSAP of North Macedonia states *"strengthening cooperation and data exchange with other WB6"* and *"designation of transboundary protected areas"* as priority actions that remain largely unachieved. Across jurisdictions, inter-jurisdictional coordination is framed either as a future aspiration or a technical recommendation, rather than an operational mechanism embedded in existing institutional practice.

A structural gap present across all analysed jurisdictions is the **lack of integration of biodiversity and restoration objectives into sectoral policies** in agriculture, development and spatial planning, water management, fiscal planning and infrastructure. The NBSAP of North Macedonia, for example, identifies this

as a foundational priority: *"integration of issues of biological diversity conservation in the relevant sectoral strategies and plans"* that has not yet been systematically achieved, noting that development policies *"often fail to recognise the values of biological diversity"* and sometimes cause direct damage to ecosystems. Forestry Development Strategy of Serbia similarly calls for *"permanent dialogue of the representatives of forestry, wood industry and other stakeholders, and representatives of environmental protection"* as a goal, indicating this coordination is weak in practice, while Forestry Strategy of Albania identifies the need for *"interdepartmental structures"* for integrated territorial planning as a reform still pending.

Based on these findings, the proposed Implementation Mechanism is structured across three tiers: **Tier 1 as a Regional Coordination Body, Tier 2 as functional FLR Coordination Hub with four functional pillars coordinated through an IUCN-hosted secretariat, and Tier 3 as Inter-Sectoral Linkages embedded in domestic-level legal, planning, and financing instruments.**

The proposed three-tier implementation mechanism addresses each identified barrier directly and structurally.

Legal and institutional fragmentation between jurisdictions managing the same landscapes and shared ecosystems is addressed by embedding the Tier 1 - a regional coordination body within the RCC, Regional Working Group on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (RWG GAWB) and BDTF, as already existing regional bodies with political legitimacy. The legal anchor for this is the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, which creates a binding harmonisation obligation for all WB6 under Chapter 27 of the EU accession process. This is the external compliance driver that provides political motivation for inter-jurisdictional cooperation that domestic policy frameworks have so far failed to generate on their own. Additionally, inter-jurisdictional coordinated action is ensured through Tier 2, the FLR Coordination Hub, with the FLR Political/Policy Pillar, that is explicitly assigned with a dual role: *"inter-sectoral and inter-jurisdictional coordination"*. The Political/Policy Pillar brings together ministries of environment with other FLR significant ministries from all WB6 jurisdictions, meaning that inter-jurisdictional discussions happen at the ministerial level, not just at technical or project level.

Fragmented governance and weak inter-sectoral coordination are addressed primarily through the Tier 2 FLR Coordination Hub that is established **not as a new governance body, but rather as an extended function of the BDTF and Regional Working Group on Environment**. The FLR Coordination Hub should align with the role and mandate of the Regional Working Group on Environment and follow the timeline and work and reporting dynamic of the BDTF to review the reports on FLR Plan implementation, nominate and endorse joint FLR inter-jurisdictional projects and provide political and policy coherence across the region.

Unreliable and non-harmonised data systems barrier is addressed through the Data and Monitoring Pillar of Tier 2 - FLR Coordination Hub. This pillar has a dual role, first ensuring development and implementation of shared monitoring and reporting framework on biodiversity and ecosystems in forest landscapes, and second securing that the monitoring and data gathering can support the monitoring and evaluation of the FLR Plan implementation. The main participants of this pillar come from domestic-level actors that regularly monitor the state of the environment and ecosystems, and manage the databases: agencies and institutes of environmental protection, biodiversity, forestry, spatial planning, meteorological agencies, disaster management and statistical offices. At the inter-jurisdictional level, Tier 1 assigns the BDTF and RWG GAWB the function of setting shared indicators across WB6, and reviewing reports on their achievement.

The majority of stakeholders identified the unpredictable FLR financing which is dominantly reliant on external donor funding, and the unrealistic 2030 deadline as barriers for full implementation of the FLR. The Financing Pillar responds to this, as it embeds FLR in domestic programme budgets and eco-fund mandates, breaking donor dependency at source. It is dedicated to coordinating and supporting WB6 in project development, building the bankable pipeline that has been the primary bottleneck for accessing IPA, Green Climate Fund (GCF), and Global Environment Facility (GEF) resources. The phased financing logic (prioritisation pilots to 2028, scale-up to 2030, maintenance beyond 2030) is embedded in Tier 3 requirements, with domestic co-financing instruments required before external funding is accessed. RCC Donor Coordination Meetings align inter-jurisdictional donor flows, while Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) and blended finance pilots generate long-term revenue independent of project cycles.

Lack of integration of biodiversity and restoration objectives into sectoral policies in agriculture, development and spatial planning, water management, fiscal planning and infrastructure is addressed in Tier 2 - FLR Coordination Hub and the Policy/Political Pillar, which brings the sectors most relevant for FLR to the same table (environment, forestry, spatial planning, finance and water management, agriculture and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) as needed). Tier 2 envisages inter-sectoral coordination and FLR mainstreaming at the domestic level, including the vertical coordination between local and domestic level actors. The main activities will include NBSAP integration, new legal provision for an enforceable FLR mandate, and spatial planning integration, which directly addresses the documented gap between FLR objectives and operational domestic-level policy instruments. The Policy/Political Pillar cuts across the silo problem by subordinating all sector mandates to a single legally superior planning instrument within spatial planning. The mechanism further requires a formal inter-ministerial MoU designating FLR as a shared multi-sector mandate, not owned by any single ministry, as the minimum institutional prerequisite for domestic implementation.

The **feasibility risk here is timing**. Legislative reform processes in the WB6 typically take 2–5 years from drafting to adoption. Given that FLRP implementation is planned to begin in 2028, legal mainstreaming is unlikely to be completed in all six jurisdictions before the first implementation cycle begins. The mechanism therefore needs a transitional arrangement (potentially a ministerial decision or administrative instruction) that creates an operational FLR mandate for the 2028–2030 period while longer-term legal reform proceeds. This is reflected in timelines for individual activities within Goal 1 (mainly, but also in other goals).

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONALITY OF THE PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM

Tier 1 — Regional Strategic Governance

The RCC is designated as the formal owner of the Green Agenda action-plan implementation process, with the RWG GAWB and its BDTF providing strategic validation, receiving annual progress reports and validating structural decisions. IUCN's mandate is explicitly scoped to coordination within Pillar 5 of the Green Agenda. The anchor policy instruments are the Sofia Declaration (2020) and the EU Nature Restoration Regulation as a binding harmonisation obligation for all WB6 under Chapter 27.

Tier 2 — FLR Coordination Hub

The Hub is structured around three pillars:

- (i) **Political/Policy Pillar** for inter-sectoral and inter-jurisdictional coordination, led by ministries of environment, forestry, finance, and spatial planning, with the spatial planning ministries designated as the primary institutional anchor, because all sector strategies are legally required to align with spatial plans across the WB6;
- (ii) **Financing Pillar** has the role of securing stable financing and building a bankable project pipeline, involving the private sector, financial institutions, donors, development organisations, and ministries of finance.
- (iii) **Data and Monitoring Pillar** is responsible for consistent monitoring and evaluation of FLRP implementation, involving domestic environmental protection, forestry, spatial planning, and disaster management agencies.

The Political/Policy Pillar of the FLR Coordination Hub involves ministries from other sectors that are crucial for successful FLR implementation: ministries of environment (represented in BDTF) with ministries of forestry, spatial planning and finance from all WB6. Ministries of agriculture, water management, and DRR/civil protection should be involved in FLR Plan activities as needed, depending on the concrete activity. The ministries of spatial planning are a necessary participant in the FLR Coordination Hub, as all sectoral strategies and legislation across the region (from forest management plans to energy strategies) are legally required to align with spatial plans. This places spatial planning at the unique position of an arena in which inter-sectoral priorities can be aligned and conflicts resolved. Ministries of forestry are another necessary participant in the FLR Coordination Hub, since all restoration interventions in identified shared priority areas within the ROAR will be planned and implemented within the forest landscapes, under the forestry policy and legislation. Ministries of finance are a mandatory participant in the FLR Coordination Hub, as analysis has showed that restoration and FLR-similar projects and programmes in the region need strong and predictable grounding in domestic-level budgets, eco-funds and similar financial instruments, as these are currently overly reliant on external donor funding. Other important ministries, including those for agriculture, water

management, DRR, climate adaptation (when not under the same institutional body with environment, spatial planning, forestry or finance) need to be consulted and engaged as needed for concrete FLR interventions.

The realistic implementation of the WB6 FLR Plan depends on the success of FLR mainstreaming in the domestic-level policies and legal framework. The Political/Policy Pillar ensures political will and endorsement of various FLRP activities that will incorporate FLR into the NBSAP revision cycle, introduce a new legal provision creating an enforceable FLR mandate (either in the nature protection or spatial planning legislation), integrate FLR objectives into spatial planning policies and frameworks, establish a WB6 shared monitoring framework, set up a regional system for financing shared pilot projects, etc. A critical **domestic-level prerequisite is a formal inter-ministerial MoU designating FLR as a shared multi-sector mandate**, signed among line ministries of spatial planning, environment, forestry, finance, agriculture, water management and DRR.

The Financing Pillar connects all three implementation tiers. At the local level, it channels financing to community stewardship agreements, PES pilots, and green job schemes through domestic eco-funds with landscape-specific allocation criteria. At the domestic level, it works with ministries of finance to embed FLR in programme budgets, green budgeting frameworks, and co-financing instruments required to unlock IPA and GCF resources. At the regional level, it aligns with RCC Donor Coordination Meetings and IPA/WBIF programming cycles. Its critical internal function is dedicated project development and preparation of investment-ready documentation that converts ROAR restoration priorities into bankable projects for European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB), GCF, and private sector instruments.

The Data and Monitoring Pillar functions as the evidence infrastructure of the entire implementation mechanism, operating across all three tiers. **At the local level**, it collects site-specific restoration data from landscape platforms, protected area managers, forestry enterprises, and civil protection agencies, feeding into domestic databases. **At the domestic level**, its core participants (environmental protection agencies, forestry agencies, spatial planning agencies, and disaster management agencies, etc.) consolidate and validate data through existing institutional reporting systems, directly addressing the documented fragmentation of monitoring across sectors identified in the background analysis: biodiversity monitoring disconnected from forestry data, DRR risk inventories held by civil protection agencies outside environmental databases, and spatial planning datasets incompatible with ecosystem monitoring systems. **At the regional level**, the Pillar operates as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN's) technical instrument for fulfilling its Pillar 5 coordinator role under the GAWB governance framework. It produces the annual FLRP progress component that IUCN submits to RCC for integration into the Annual Green Agenda Implementation Report, ensuring the FLRP monitoring cycle is explicitly synchronised with the GAWB reporting timeline coordinated by RCC with all regional coordinators. Shared indicators validated through the RWG GAWB and BDTF WB provide the common measurement framework that makes WB6 reporting comparable and unifiable into a single regional picture.

The Pillar must include an explicit adaptive management feedback loop: monitoring outputs are formally required to feed back into Tier 1 annual reviews and Tier 3 budget revisions. Without this, monitoring remains a reporting function decoupled from governance.

The FLR Coordination Secretariat coordinates the work of all three pillars, and connects them with regional and local level tiers.

Tier 3: Local FLR platforms

All participation should flow through **local FLR platforms, tailored to local specificities**. This should remain the **single core participation instrument**. Stakeholders strongly preferred early co-design local stewardship agreements, and a single practical local governance mechanism rather than multiple parallel models. In practice, this means that, in the example of the shared landscapes Tara-Drina, Accursed Mountains–Sharr, Skadar Lake, Iron Gates, local level FLR platforms should be designated to address the local specificities of each shared forest landscape. This design decision is well-grounded in the restoration opportunity landscape identified in the ROAR and responds to the stakeholder-identified priority of river-basin and mountain-system pilots.

In each of the priority shared landscapes, identified in ROAR, local FLR platforms provide integrated participation and stewardship framework and entry points for:

- local communities,
- municipalities,
- protected area managers,
- private forest owners,
- landowners and land users,
- CSOs and academia,
- local grassroots organisations,
- private sector (agriculture, tourism, forestry, infrastructure, etc),
- women, youth, vulnerable groups.

Tier 3 is strongly focused on local communities, local economies, specific conditions of ecosystems, specific habitats and species in the selected shared landscape. The link with Tiers 1 and 2 is provided through the work of the FLR Coordination Secretariat.

To be operational, local FLR platforms should include two distinct pillars:

(i) Local-level Pillar for on-site implementation, involving public enterprises, protected area managers, local self-governments, and private land- and forest-owner associations;

(ii) Community and Research Pillar designed to ensure knowledge, transparency, and community involvement, involving academia, civil society, and an NbS Community of Practice.

FLR Coordination Secretariat

The FLR Coordination Secretariat is the operational unit, connecting and coordinating actions of all actors in three tiers and monitoring the progress of the WB6 FLRP. It is hosted by IUCN, as a designated coordinator for the GAWB Pillar 5.

WB6 Forest Landscape Restoration Plan

Implementation Mechanism

TIER 1 · REGIONAL STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE			
RCC	RWG GAWB	BDTF WB	IUCN
Formal owner of GAWB Action Plan process Broader inter-pillar coordination	Strategic validation of WB6 FLR Plan Annual ministerial conference	Technical advisory body within RWG GAWB Shared indicators · Progress report review	Pillar 5 coordinator Nature & Biodiversity Roadmap

↕ Strategic validation · Annual Progress Report

TIER 2 · FLR COORDINATION HUB					
FLR COORDINATION SECRETARIAT · Hosted by IUCN					
Coordinates all pillars · Monitors FLRP progress					
Reporting flow: Local Platforms → Secretariat → BDTF → RWG GAWB → Annual GAWB Report (RCC)					
POLITICAL / POLICY PILLAR		FINANCING PILLAR		DATA & MONITORING PILLAR	
Lead anchor: Ministry of Spatial Planning Core: Ministries of Environment · Forestry · Spatial Planning · Finance As needed: Agriculture · Water Management · DRR / Civil Protection Role: Inter-sectoral & inter-jurisdictional coordination · FLR mainstreaming in legislation & policy Key output: inter-ministerial MoU designating FLR as shared multi-sector mandate		Ministries of Finance · Eco-funds · Private sector · Financial institutions Project pipeline development → RCC Donor Coordination → IPA / WBIF programming → EBRD / EIB / GCF / GEF		Environmental protection agencies · Forestry agencies · Spatial planning agencies · DRR · Statistical offices Two-layer monitoring architecture Adaptive management feedback loop → Annual GAWB Report via RCC	
DOMESTIC-LEVEL MAINSTREAMING (each of six jurisdictions) — coordinated through the Political / Policy Pillar					
INTER-MINISTERIAL MoU	LEGAL PROVISION	NBSAP INTEGRATION	SPATIAL PLANNING INTEGRATION	DRR RISK MAPS	ECO-FUND MANDATE
Shared FLR mandate signed among line ministries of spatial planning, environment, forestry, finance, agriculture, water management & DRR	Enforceable FLR mandate (nature protection / spatial planning laws)	FLR integration into the BSAP revision cycle	FLR objectives embedded into spatial planning policies and frameworks	Forest fire · Flood · Landslide inventories → domestic spatial plans	FLR-specific mandate · Landscape allocation criteria · Domestic co-financing

↕ Implementation guidance · Site data · Community stewardship

TIER 3 · LOCAL FLR PLATFORMS	
Per priority shared landscape	
LOCAL GOVERNANCE PILLAR	COMMUNITY & RESEARCH PILLAR
Local self-governments & their associations Protected area managers Public enterprises managing forests Private land- and forest-owner associations Role: On-site implementation · Stewardship Agreements	Local communities · Municipalities · CSOs · Academia Women · Youth · Vulnerable groups NbS Community of Practice · BioNet → Aligned with RCC NGO Forum → Aligned with RCC Local Governance Forum Role: Knowledge · Transparency · Community co-design and ownership

↕ Policy anchors provide binding obligations and strategic frameworks for all tiers

POLICY ANCHORS · Legal & strategic foundations			
GREEN AGENDA FOR WB	EU NATURE RESTORATION REGULATION	KUNMING-MONTREAL GBF	NBSAP REVISION CYCLES
Sofia Declaration 2020	Binding harmonisation	Target 2: 30% restoration by 2030	NDCs · LDN targets

GAWB Action Plan 2025–2030 Action 39 · Pillar 5	obligation Chapter 27 EU accession acquis 30%→60%→90% restoration targets	CBD Article 10(d) Local community empowerment	UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030
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