

IUCN Regional Conservation Forum for Europe, North and Central Asia

30 September -
3 October 2024

Report



B R U
G G E

VISIT BRUGES
CONVENTION
BUREAU



Flanders
State of the Art

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1 Foreword

The IUCN Regional Conservation Forum for Europe, North and Central Asia 2024, was a momentous gathering at a pivotal time for the planet's future. Convened in the historic city of Bruges, a UNESCO World Heritage site, 30 September – 3 October 2024, this Forum brought together over 400 participants including IUCN Members, Commissions, representatives from governments, NGOs, youth and the private sector, as well as experts, scientists, partners and donors, to discuss the key global development trends, challenges and potential solutions, and map priorities for IUCN in regions in the run up to the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025.

The Forum served as a platform to address the interconnected global crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, and social justice, demonstrating that collaboration across generations, sectors, and regions is essential for driving transformational change. A shared commitment to sustainability was underpinning the event, with the Forum adhering to specific environmental guidelines to minimise its impact while supporting the local community - a testament to Bruges' dedication to sustainable practices.

For the first time, the Forum sponsored the participation of six young conservation leaders and introduced a dedicated Youth Oasis space, fostering intergenerational dialogue and inspiring innovative collaborations. This emphasis on youth leadership reflects the growing recognition that the conservation movement must embrace the energy, vision, and voices of young generations to succeed.

Over three days, participants engaged in 58 Thematic Sessions, plenary discussions, and a dynamic Forum

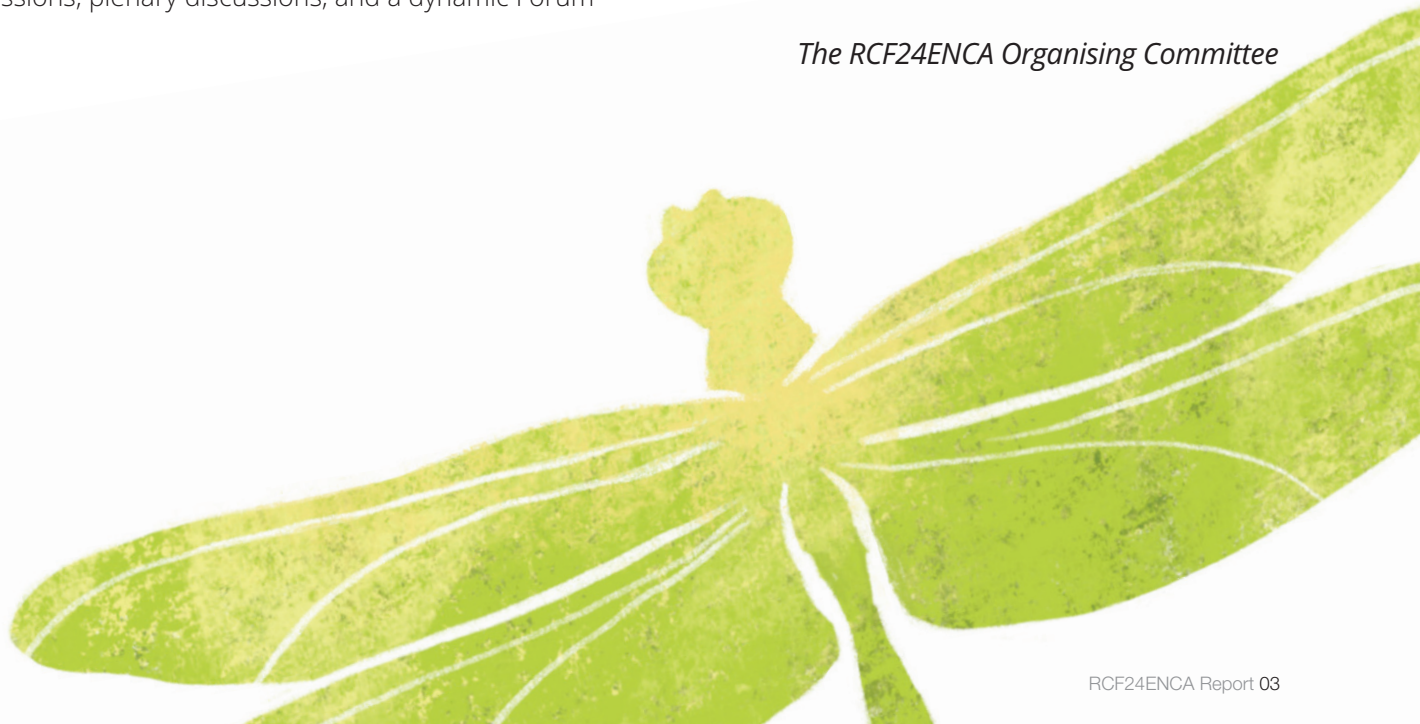
Fair. Together, they explored pathways to scale up conservation action, integrate equity into natural resource governance, transition to Nature-positive economies, and leverage disruptive innovation for biodiversity protection. These discussions contributed significantly to the development of IUCN's 20-year Strategic Vision, together with the intersessional IUCN Programme for the next four years (2026–2029), which will guide global conservation efforts in the years to come. The Forum also celebrated milestones, including the 20th anniversary of the IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECARO).

As we reflect on the achievements of this Forum, we are reminded of the strength and unity of the IUCN community. By working together - informed by science and data, guided by traditional knowledge, and empowered by innovation - we can shape a future where people and the planet thrive in harmony.

We are grateful to the warm welcome and fruitful collaboration to the Government of Flanders, the City of Bruges, the IUCN Belgian Focal Point, and local partners that have made this Forum such a success, not only content-wise but also when it comes to social events and nature excursions.

Finally, we would like to thank all participants, especially IUCN Members and Commission experts, for joining us in Bruges and contributing to the engaging discussions. Your contributions will help shape the IUCN 20-year Strategic Vision and 2026–2029 Programme, and set the direction for IUCN's work in the region ahead of 2025 IUCN. Thank you for joining us on this important journey.

The RCF24ENCA Organising Committee



2 Key takeaways



Intergenerational dialogue, (sub) regional collaboration, and coordinated delivery on international agreements such as the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework are pivotal for transformative change.



Current economic models have proven unsustainable. A shift to economies that work with nature emerged as a cornerstone for aligning growth with ecosystem health, emphasising natural capital accounting, circular economies, and ecosystem valuation.



Transitioning to biodiversity-positive food systems is essential for addressing the growing food demand without exacerbating biodiversity loss or climate pressures. Practices like agroecology and regenerative agriculture offer scalable solutions.



To address the climate challenge deep emission cuts across all sectors, culminating in the phase-out of fossil fuels, need to be coupled with the large-scale deployment of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for climate change mitigation and adaptation.



Inclusive funding mechanisms, private sector engagement, and integration of biodiversity into large-scale infrastructure projects are key to mainstreaming conservation priorities. Regional initiatives pool resources and achieve shared environmental objectives, across borders.



Proactive measures to restore degraded ecosystems are vital for reversing biodiversity loss and mitigating climate impacts. Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and Earth observation tools are unlocking new potential for restoration monitoring, decision-making, and scaling action, though capacity building remains critical to fully harness these tools.



IUCN's tools and knowledge products, such as the Global Standard for NbS, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, and the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas are effective in driving scalable conservation efforts. Using these tools across multiple levels - local, regional, and global - can ensure alignment with international frameworks and foster impactful action.



Youth leadership and meaningful civic participation are essential for sustained impact. Mentorship programs, youth-led research, and inclusive platforms can help address intergenerational power imbalances and foster equitable decision-making.



**IUCN Regional
Conservation Forum**
Europe, North and
Central Asia
Bruges 2024

3 About the Forum

Every four years, in the lead-up to the IUCN World Conservation Congress, the IUCN Regional Conservation Fora provide a unique platform for IUCN Members and wider community to exchange ideas, network, and contribute to the global conservation agenda. These events enable the IUCN constituency—including Members, Commissions, National Committees, and the Secretariat—to align regional priorities and ensure they are integrated into the planning for the IUCN Congress.

The IUCN Regional Conservation Forum for Europe, North, and Central Asia (RCF24ENCA) took place in Bruges, Belgium, from 30 September to 3 October 2024, bringing together:

- IUCN Member organisations from the region (State Members, government agencies, Subnational authorities, NGOs)
- Experts and scientists from IUCN Commissions
- Young conservationists
- IUCN staff
- Representatives from the private sector, partners, donors, and foundations.

Designed to meet the highest standards of sustainability, diversity, and inclusion, the RCF24ENCA drew inspiration from diverse ideas, knowledge tools, and practices shared by IUCN and its partners. It fostered network-building, reinforcing existing partnerships and creating new opportunities for collaboration across the two regions. The Forum also played a key role in shaping regional priorities and ensuring their integration into IUCN's draft strategic vision and programme.

As a joint initiative by the Government of Flanders, the City of Bruges, the IUCN Belgian Focal Point, and local partners, RCF24ENCA took place against the backdrop of the triple planetary crisis - climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, which continue to accelerate ecosystem degradation and threaten global stability. Urgent transformational change is needed to halt and reverse nature's decline, aligning conservation efforts with broader socioeconomic and climate resilience strategies. Through its discussions, RCF24ENCA reinforced the importance of systemic shifts in policy, financing, and governance to build a sustainable and resilient future for both people and nature.



"Our strength lies in our diversity and unified vision. Together, we stand ready to protect, conserve, and restore our world. As we face today's conservation challenges, let us remember that nature conservation is vital – not just for combating climate change but for addressing broader challenges facing humanity."

**Razan Al Mubarak,
IUCN President**

GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIONS DIALOGUE

The Forum opened with the Global Transformations Dialogue that explored key global development trends at the intersection of socio-ecological systems and planetary boundaries. Five global leaders discussed the major challenges facing these systems and how Nature-based Solutions can address them.



“At this critical time for the planet’s future, transformational change is urgently needed, and it is our responsibility to be part of the change. Through bringing science and traditional knowledge to the table, working with people across different sectors, and taking conservation action on the ground, change is possible. The Union is stronger than ever, and by standing together, united as the voice for nature, we can drive this change and shape a world where people and planet can thrive as one.”

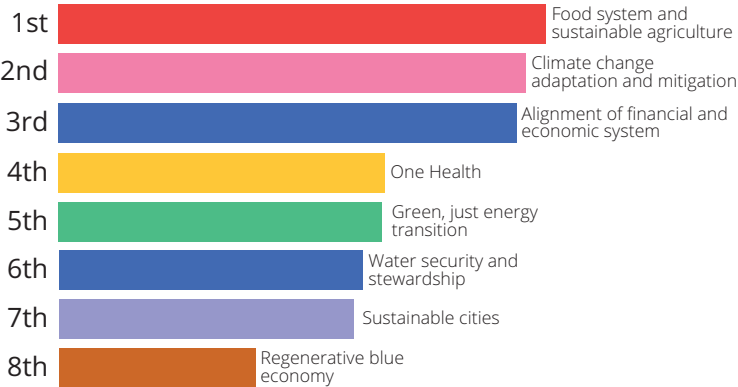
**Dr Grethel Aguilar,
IUCN Director General**



Boris Erg, IUCN European Regional Director; Mirela Kumbaro, Albanian Minister of Tourism and Environment; Dr Musonda Mumba, General Secretary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; Dr Grethel Aguilar, IUCN Director General and Diana Garlytska, Chair of the IUCN Youth Advisory Committee. Atte Jääskeläinen, President of Sitra joined the panel online
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The results below reflect participants’ perspectives on the key transformational areas needed to drive change in Europe, North, and Central Asia. The rankings highlight priority actions for conservation, policy shifts, and sustainable development, offering insights into where efforts should be focused to create meaningful impact across the regions.

Rank transformational areas to promote change in Europe, north and Central Asia



INTRODUCING RCF24ENCA THEMES

The day continued with the introduction to the Forum Themes by the keynote speakers and transitioned into specialised workshops and technical sessions. These were designed to explore targeted themes delivered by IUCN Members and partners as interactive spaces for sharing insights and showcasing initiatives. The second and third days were dedicated to IUCN Members and Commissions, focusing on Preparations for the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025 and discussions on the Motions process, draft IUCN 20-year Strategic Vision and 2026–2029 Programme, and regional priorities.



“Restoration is key because we have degraded the biosphere. The Nature Restoration Law, approved by a narrow margin, highlights this seriousness. Oversimplifying ecosystems in agriculture and forestry has proven ineffective. Restoration restores ecosystem services by changing our practices and finding common ground. We need both public and private funding to support these efforts.”

**Humberto Delgado Rosa,
Director for Nature Capital, DG Environment**



Alberto Arroyo Schnell, IUCN European Region Head of Programme and Policy; Penélope Gómez, Advisor on Sustainable Environmental Development of Malaga Municipality; Jurgen Tack, Secretary General at European Landowners' Organization; Humberto Delgado Rosa, Director for Natural Capital, DG Environment; Jochen Gebauer, Director-General for Nature Conservation, Sustainable Use of Natural Resources and Nature-Based Climate Action of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) and Madhu Rao, Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas
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The results below showcase participants' views on the most catalytic roles for driving effective change in Europe, North and Central Asia. The rankings provide insight into the key levers for impact, highlighting the diverse approaches needed to advance conservation efforts in the region.

Rank each catalytic role to achieve effective change in Europe, north and Central Asia





RCF24ENCA participants
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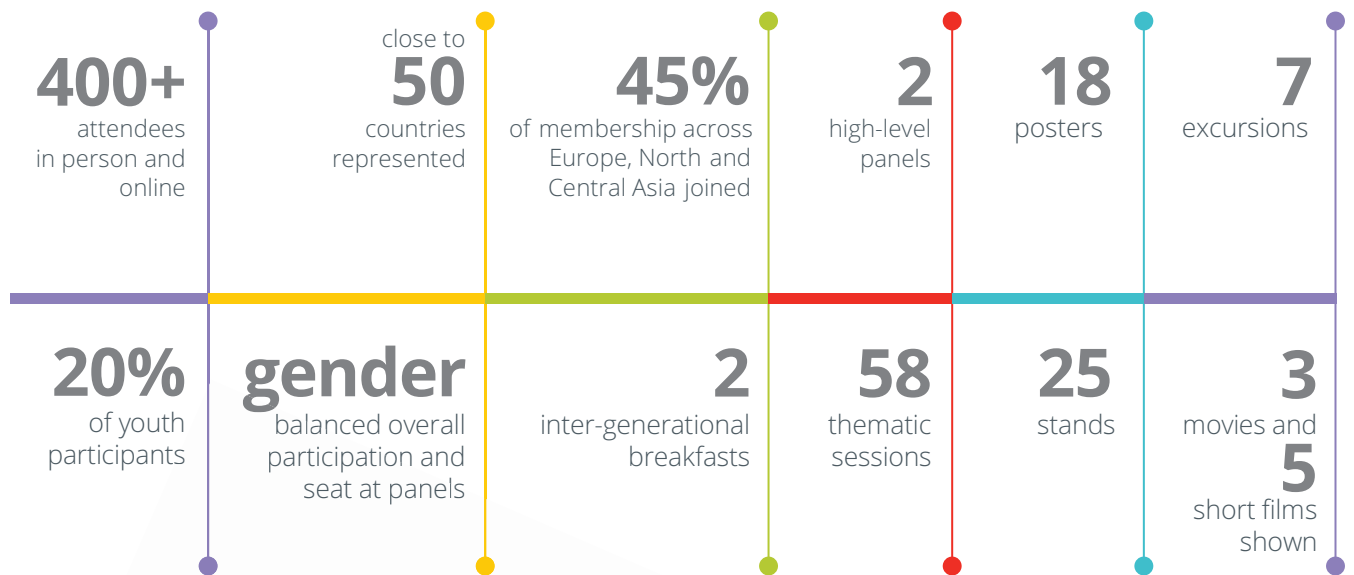
On the final day, participants joined one of seven excursions organised by IUCN Members in Belgium and local partners, offering a hands-on experience of conservation in action.



"These past three days have achieved a lot, from exchanging best practices to gearing up for the IUCN World Conservation Congress and beyond, from working together across Europe, North and Central Asia to shape IUCN's future to setting a benchmark for a green and sustainable Forum and discovering the beauty of nature in Flanders."

Hilde Eggermont,
IUCN Vice President and Director General of the
Research Institute for Nature and Forest

4 Forum in numbers



"I am deeply inspired by the commitment of our Members, experts, and partners from across Europe, North, and Central Asia. Together, we laid a strong foundation for the future of conservation in our region, and we are driving forward an ambitious, united vision for an impactful IUCN in the region."

Boris Erg,
IUCN European Regional Director

5 Themes

The programme and discussions at the RCF24ENCA revolved around five central themes - Sustainable growth, Low-impact food systems, The climate challenge, Conservation outcomes, and Nature restoration - each aimed at catalysing transformative approaches to conservation. These themes were interconnected with five cross-cutting pathways designed to support transformative action: Civic spaces, Generative artificial intelligence and Technology, Next generation leadership, Innovative tools and standards, and Securing investments in nature.

By structuring discussions around these themes and pathways, RCF24ENCA defined a framework to address today's urgent environmental challenges and to guide IUCN's future conservation priorities. Each session aimed to deliver insights, recommendations, and actionable steps to address these focus areas, paving the way for a collaborative and inclusive approach to conservation in Europe, North and Central Asia.



"Conversations emphasised the importance of IUCN's evidence-based role and the need to ensure a range of actors, from youth, local communities and Indigenous peoples to the private sector, are part of conservation work."

Divija Jata,
Coordinator of the Belgian Biodiversity Platform,
IUCN Belgian Focal Point

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH: WORKING WITH NATURE

Sustainability lies at the core of all development patterns. Existing approaches to growth have proven inefficient and highly detrimental to natural resources. These are not only environmental targets; they have a strong social and economic angle. Approaches like the circular economy or the use of natural capital will be crucial in this transition.

The discussions and evidence presented in Bruges delivered a clear message: economic growth and ecosystem health are inseparable. A sustainable economy is one that works in harmony with nature, placing it at the core of decision-making. This concept was explored from multiple perspectives across several Forum sessions, highlighting the vital need to integrate ecological considerations into economic frameworks.

When dealing with ecosystems, the issue of accounting has been raised and discussed widely, with the words Natural Capital resonating in several presentations. The availability of ecosystem accounts through natural capital accounting is essential to integrate the flow and value of ecosystem services into accounting. This is considered to generate, to some extent, an impact on policy and therefore worth studying and exploring further. In addition, emerging Earth Observations come into play supporting the ecosystems accounts efforts as well as the Global Biodiversity Framework headline indicators.

In this context, Nature-based Solutions were introduced and discussed as approaches that can contribute to countries' Gross National Product. In fact, by addressing societal challenges such as climate change and avoiding the damages that such challenges could lead to, Nature-based Solutions can secure long-term economic saving and earning capacity.

This was particularly discussed in the context of the agriculture sector where Nature-based Solutions can lead to a triple-win for people, the planet and the economy. Agriculture per se is a sector that is strongly relying on natural and climatic features and is subject to different pressures (growing demands for food) and structural crises (climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution). As such, agriculture represents both a threat and an opportunity for biodiversity. Shifting from traditional farming practices to those that are more conscious of the role of nature and biodiversity can help reduce the pressures and increase the opportunities for biodiversity, while enhancing the resilience of the sector, aligned with the concept of a sustainable economy that works with nature.

The need to explore innovative financial mechanisms was also discussed, in particular in the context of World Heritage and the importance it has for nature conservation.

LOW-IMPACT FOOD SYSTEMS: A NEEDED BALANCE

Biodiversity-positive food systems ensure food security and nutrition for everyone, everywhere, in a manner that supports economic, social, and environmental well-being for current and future generations. Identifying new and innovative tools, approaches and best practices are key to achieving sustainable food systems.

The adoption of sustainable agricultural practices was identified as essential in achieving low-impact food systems. The highlighted key practices include agroecology, nature-inclusive agriculture, regenerative agriculture, biodynamic agriculture, and organic farming. Nature-based Solutions were identified as essential in attaining a "triple win" for people, the planet, and the economy. IUCN tools, particularly the global standard for Nature-based Solutions, were highlighted as effective in implementing these practices while ensuring that objectives of food production, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience can be simultaneously reached. Nonetheless, both the food and agricultural systems were identified to face unprecedented challenges, fuelled by long-term and structural crises, such as the triple planetary crisis, pressures related to a growing demand for food and agricultural products and an unprecedented unstable geopolitical scene.

THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE

Climate change ranks amongst the biggest challenges our planet faces today and it cannot be tackled in isolation from the biodiversity crisis. Biodiversity and the ecosystem services it underpins are essential to both climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Designing climate-smart policies and solutions requires cooperation and coordination across multiple sectors.

Biodiversity loss and climate change have been recognised as inextricably linked. The sessions offered a valuable opportunity to reflect on this intricate relationship, exploring different ways in which biodiversity conservation can contribute to climate action and vice versa. Discussions also focused on the future of leadership when addressing the climate-biodiversity nexus, emphasizing the need for integrated, forward-thinking approaches to address both crises simultaneously.

Several thematic sessions offered concrete examples of how biodiversity conservation can directly contribute to climate action. These covered a wide range of issues, for instance, genetic diversity could serve as a meaningful indicator for the adaptation and resilience of species to climate change in future species assessments. Peatland restoration was discussed for its significant potential for climate mitigation and adaptation, while mining was recognised as a critical area where biodiversity considerations could support a sustainable energy transition. Nature-based Solutions were highlighted as a key approach to aligning climate solutions and biodiversity conservation with broader societal goals, including sustainable agriculture.

Intergenerational dialogue and collaboration further emerged as essential components of a future-oriented and integrated approach to biodiversity conservation and climate action. Platforms that encourage diverse perspectives and foster shared accountability can help to drive the transformative change necessary to effectively address both crises. Another critical theme that emerged from the thematic sessions was enhanced coordination in advancing on the objectives of the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Paris Agreement.

Throughout these sessions, IUCN's tools, knowledge products, and convening power were repeatedly recognised for their contribution in fostering strong partnerships across diverse stakeholders, sectors, and societies. These were seen as instrumental for a unified approach to nature-positive and climate smart solutions. Further elements discussed for transformative action on climate change and biodiversity conservation included innovative finance mechanisms, supporting impactful work on the ground, cohesive policies addressing both crises, and enhanced coordination between international agreements.



CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

Conservation outcomes remain at the centre of our effort to curb the tide of biodiversity loss. The Global Biodiversity Framework and EU Biodiversity Strategy set ambitious goals which require bold decisions and concerted action at all levels. Examples of successful policies and activities on the ground are essentially important to keep momentum and boost ambition.

Conservation outcomes are central for the global efforts to address biodiversity loss, serving as a key focus at the IUCN Regional Conservation Forum in Brugges. These discussions reflected the urgency of achieving the goals set by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the EU Biodiversity Strategy, which require decisive action and cooperation at all levels. The sessions offered a platform to examine both the barriers to progress and the opportunities to scale up successful initiatives.

One recurring theme was the pressure biodiversity faces from human activities such as agriculture, infrastructure development, and resource extraction. Combined with the escalating impacts of climate change, these pressures create a complex landscape for conservation. Several sessions pointed to the need for transformative approaches to align development and environmental goals. For instance, sustainable agricultural approaches like agroecology and regenerative farming were showcased as pathways to not only mitigate biodiversity loss but also enhance climate resilience and economic viability.

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) were also a cross-cutting topic of the discussions, offering practical tools to achieve conservation outcomes while addressing societal challenges. Case studies from various sectors demonstrated how NbS can drive progress toward biodiversity conservation, food security, and climate adaptation simultaneously. The potential of these solutions remains underutilised, with participants identifying capacity-building gaps and the need for greater integration into policy frameworks.

Collaboration was another element that came across the different sessions. Regional efforts highlighted the value of cross-border cooperation in addressing shared environmental challenges. Discussions highlighted the importance of involving diverse stakeholders (i.e. governments, private sector, and local communities) early in the planning and implementation of conservation initiatives. Such inclusive approaches were recognized as crucial to building momentum and ensuring the sustainability of conservation outcomes.

Across these sessions, the need for innovation was a consistent issue. Advances in tools such as genetic diversity indicators, artificial intelligence, and natural capital accounting were acknowledged as transformative for monitoring and decision-making, while it was recognized that realizing their full potential will require sustained investment and training.

NATURE RESTORATION

Nature restoration implies taking proactive measures to restore and conserve ecosystems that have been degraded or destroyed. Apart from providing multiple environmental benefits, it has great potential for developing new tools and technologies, resource mobilisation, community engagement and private sector involvement.

Sessions were highly interactive, with engaged and knowledgeable audiences that fostered rich, collaborative discussions, enhancing learning for all involved. Many sessions emphasized the value of regional and cross-border collaboration, especially in areas like biodiversity and ecosystem management in the Western Balkans and the Alpine region, demonstrating the impact of coordinated conservation efforts. Technological innovations, particularly AI and Earth Observation, emerged as transformative tools for conservation, supporting tasks like monitoring, decision-making, and ecosystem accounting. However, limited expertise in applying these technologies pointed to a need for capacity building to fully leverage their potential.

Sustainable funding and political support were seen as essential to advancing conservation goals, with discussions on the role of EU funding, private sector contributions, and high-level political engagement to strengthen regional efforts. Practical applications of Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) in agriculture showcased how sustainable practices can meet biodiversity, climate resilience, and food security goals simultaneously. Some sessions, like those on Natural Capital Accounting, revealed gaps in hands-on expertise, underscoring the importance of capacity building to drive policy impact effectively.

Finally, insights from long-term conservation initiatives, such as peatland restoration, were shared to inspire future action, offering practical lessons and strategic engagement approaches to enhance broader conservation outcomes.



6 Transformational Pathways



"To be transformed means that change has already occurred, but not all change leads us forward. We must ask ourselves: are we good ancestors? The choices we make today will shape the next 300 years. It's time we guide transformation toward a future that sustains and nurtures our planet."

**Dr Musonda Mumba,
Secretary of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands**

CIVIC SPACES

How can we ensure civic engagement is promoted to help transformation happen?

To ensure civic engagement drives transformative change in conservation, the sessions highlighted the importance of clear standards, inclusive financing, early involvement of stakeholders, and amplifying local voices on global platforms.

Setting enforceable environmental limits, such as in the resource use in mining, allows communities to within areas w rts, ensure that projects align with local priorities and are equitable.

Early stakeholder involvement, particularly in regional collaborations like the Biodiversity Task Force in the Western Balkans, fosters shared responsibility and local support, increasing project success. Elevating local perspectives in global forums, like the World Heritage Convention or UN climate and biodiversity conferences, empowers communities and strengthens coordinated global responses to environmental challenges.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Can we anticipate and guide the development of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GIA) so that it helps us achieve necessary societal transformation and safeguard natural resources? What are the potential challenges and opportunities associated with its implementation?

GIA and other technologies hold significant promise to support conservation efforts and societal transformation. Discussions highlighted how GAI can help to process

large datasets into actionable insights for conservation measures, though further development is needed to realise its full potential. An example of this involved lions at Zoo Berlin, where AI learned to interpret behavioural patterns through movement data and camera images, which could be valuable to understand their behaviours in in-situ contexts.

GIA provides supportive tool for transformation and decision-making in nature conservation, such as monitoring and identifying priority areas through modelling. Remote sensing and data science can also be useful for Natural Capital Accounting. To further explore their potential, ways to link datasets, further resources, and collaboration across disciplines are needed. GIA tools are currently being developed used to support nature restoration in the Alpine region. Additionally, technology can support gathering experts input on specific topics within nature conservation, as has been presented on synthetic biology, illustrating its broader applicability in nature conservation.

NEXT GENERATION LEADERSHIP

How will we ensure the input from the new generation is adequately considered in decision making?

Youth is increasingly recognized as powerful advocates for transformative change in nature and climate action. Nevertheless, despite efforts from decision-makers, organizations and other stakeholders to promote youth inclusion in decision-making, young participants often report these initiatives as ineffective or tokenistic.

In response, several RCF sessions explored opportunities and strategies to advance the new generation leadership in decision-making processes.

Discussions highlighted the need to address inter-generational power imbalances between powerholders and the younger generation impacted by their choices. In that sense, the necessity of continuous intergenerational dialogue and collaboration was put in the spotlight, with mentorship programs cited as an effective example of how to foster strong partnerships between senior leaders and young professionals.

Youth also advocate for the establishment of effective platforms – such as youth councils or working groups – that allow young leaders to contribute directly to policy discussions and decisions, moving beyond advisory roles. Facilitating youth-led research and policy development was seen as critical to ensure young people's contributions are evidence-based and impactful.

Besides, the sessions called for greater recognition of the diversity within youth populations, stressing the importance of North-South solidarity and collaboration for building a stronger, more unified movement for youth leadership.

INNOVATIVE TOOLS AND STANDARDS

How will the IUCN tools support the implementation of future actions, not only in relation to the knowledge they generate but also in related communication, decision making, awareness raising, and other societal activities?

For more than 75 years, IUCN has been leading conservation efforts globally through its science-based standards and tools. At the Regional Conservation Forum in Bruges, several sessions highlighted how this wide array of knowledge products can guide future actions. Discussions looked both at the temporal (2026-2029) and geographical (national, regional, international) scale within which these tools can be drivers of change.

An example of IUCN supporting the implementation of conservation measures at the national level was showcased through the work in the UK to develop high integrity carbon standards for peatland restoration. Furthermore, a common approach to national Red Lists was also mentioned.

At the regional level, examples such as the Biodiversity Task Force in the Western Balkans underscored how IUCN helps facilitating knowledge exchanges, enhances communication, and promotes collaboration across sectors and regions. It was also suggested to use some of the more transversal tools, such as the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions, to enhance policy coherence. By working at the regional level, the tool could help identify synergies between existing processes and international treaties.

IUCN tools were also thought of as ways to gather communities of practice, raise awareness amongst the wider public, share lessons learned, build stakeholders' capacity, and overall increase the effectiveness of conservation efforts.

In the upcoming 4-year period, it was suggested to take a transversal approach in nature conservation and work on multiple levels, using IUCN tools as a leverage between national and macroregional context.

SECURING INVESTMENTS IN NATURE

What actions are needed to help secure the investments necessary to achieve the targets?

Securing necessary investments to achieve targets requires improving long-term funding mechanisms, streamlining administrative processes, and ensuring continuous project monitoring for sustainability. Collaboration with private sectors and mainstreaming biodiversity into large infrastructure projects were highlighted as pivotal for integrating conservation priorities into broader investment plans. In the Western Balkans, regional projects were identified as crucial to enhance cross-border collaboration, foster cooperation, and pool resources in the region to address shared ecosystems and environmental challenges. With the support of IUCN to implement such regional projects, more sustainable outcomes could be achieved.



"It was wonderful to see so many IUCN Members and experts gathered to prepare for the IUCN Congress in Abu Dhabi next year. Our vibrant IUCN community was working at its best to find ways to tackle the great nature conservation challenges we face on this beautiful planet we all share."

Chris Mahon,
Co-Chair, IUCN Interregional Committee for Europe,
North and Central Asia (ICENCA)

7 Youth engagement

Youth engagement was a cornerstone of the RCF24ENCA, reflecting IUCN's commitment to empowering the next generation of conservation leaders. Designed in partnership with the IUCN Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), the Forum provided a platform to spotlight the work of young conservationists while fostering intergenerational dialogue and knowledge transfer.

For the first time, the Forum sponsored the participation of six young conservation leaders from across the regions. This volunteer cohort played an integral role in shaping and delivering the Forum's youth engagement programme, which aimed to enhance their skills, amplify their contributions, and strengthen their connections within the conservation community.

The Forum's youth engagement programme was strategically aligned with the Next Generation Leadership Pathway, a key focus area emphasising the promotion of an inclusive, diverse, and sustainable future. Supporting youth leadership goes beyond generational transition; it embodies a set of values and principles that empower young professionals to fully participate in conservation decision-making processes.

Young professionals attending the Forum had access to a wide range of opportunities, including:

- Capacity-building sessions designed to enhance their technical and leadership skills;
- Intergenerational breakfast meetings with senior conservation leaders;
- Networking with experts from across Europe, North, and Central Asia;
- Youth Oasis, a dedicated area for young professionals to collaborate and share ideas;
- Insights into opportunities for active participation in IUCN's work through its Commissions; and
- Cultural activities and conservation field trips.

On the road to the IUCN Congress 2025 in Abu Dhabi, youth inclusion remains a powerful driving force. The Forum reinforced the principles outlined in the IUCN Youth Strategy, which underscores the importance of mainstreaming youth engagement across all aspects of IUCN's work. By ensuring that young professionals co-design and lead initiatives, the Union is building a future where their voices are central to conservation governance and action.



"The future is now, and the next generation is already here, bringing new ways of thinking and learning. We must adapt, rethink our systems, and ensure young people are included in decision-making to prepare them for leadership."

Diana Garlytska,
Chair, IUCN Youth Advisory Committee



"I hope that one day, intergenerational processes will be the norm. The more we work together between generations, the stronger we will be."

Abi Gardner,
Forum youth volunteer and founder of the UK branch
of the Global Youth Biodiversity Network

8 Sustainability



"As the host city for this year's IUCN Regional Conservation Forum, Bruges acknowledges the vital importance of sustainability. We are honoured to welcome this esteemed event to our city, particularly at the BMCC, our brand-new conference centre that proudly carries the Green Key Label. This recognition highlights our deep commitment to sustainable and responsible practices, values that are embedded across all our policies and that are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals."

**Dirk De fauw,
Mayor of Bruges**

Bruges, with its picturesque downtown, historic architecture, and strong commitment to sustainability, provides an ideal setting for environmentally conscious conferences. As Bruges has emerged as a hub for sustainable events, the RCF24ENCA adhered to specific sustainability guidelines to minimise its environmental impact, aligning with the city's commitment to sustainable practices. These guidelines have ensured that the event supports both the environment and the local community.

VENUE SELECTION AND MANAGEMENT

Choosing the right venue is crucial for hosting a sustainable conference. Bruges offers a range of eco-friendly venues such as the BMCC, Concertgebouw Brugge, and Brouwerij De Halve Maan. These venues are equipped with energy-efficient systems, including green roofs, solar panels, and heat pumps. For example, the BMCC, Forum's venue, has a green roof that buffers rainwater, purifies air, and regulates indoor temperatures. It also generates green energy for charging electric vehicles and produces honey from rooftop hives.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

To achieve a low-waste event, we implemented waste reduction strategies by using recyclable materials, setting up marked recycling stations, and providing compost bins for organic waste. Partnering with caterers that follow a zero-waste policy and ensuring any production waste is composted has further supported these efforts. Tracking waste production helped in striving for a more sustainable and circular approach.

TRANSPORTATION

Reducing the carbon footprint associated with travel is essential. Attendees were encouraged to use public transport, bicycles, or to walk. Bruges boasts an efficient public transportation network and most hotels and conference venues are within walking distance of the train station. Providing walking maps of Bruges promotes exploration by foot, which is both healthy and eco-friendly. For those traveling to workshops or events outside the city, cycling is a popular option, given Bruges' flat terrain and proximity to nature reserves. Bikes could be rented from various locations, including De Ketting (located in the city centre), Blue Bike Brugge (available at Bruges train station) or B-EASY Bike Rental (provides eco-friendly, easy-to-use bikes that can be delivered).

WATER CONSUMPTION

Efforts were made to prioritise by choosing venues and accommodations with low-flow fixtures and linen reuse programs. Water refill stations were provided to reduce the use of bottled water, promoting a "bring your own bottle" mentality among attendees.

ACCOMMODATION

Partnering with accommodations that are committed to sustainability is critical. We worked with hotels that have sustainability certifications, such as the Green Key label, which signifies adherence to environmental standards including energy-saving measures, water conservation and waste reduction. Choosing local accommodations not only reduces travel distances but also supports the local economy.

CATERING

The Forum prioritised sustainable catering options by selecting services that provide organic, locally sourced, and seasonal food. The emphasis was placed on vegetarian and vegan dishes to minimise environmental impact. Initiatives like using coffee grounds to grow mushrooms, a practice embraced by local businesses such as Kopje Zwam, highlight the circular economy in action. All catering supplies were reusable, compostable, or recyclable, avoiding single-use plastics. Efforts to minimise food waste included donating surplus food to local charities and initiatives such as Poverello.

MATERIALS AND PRINTING

Digital tools will be used for event programmes, schedules, and communication to minimise paper use. If necessary, printing was done on recycled paper using eco-friendly inks, with a preference for double-sided printing and limiting the number of copies. Our merchandise, including pins and tote bags, is designed with sustainability in mind. The pins are made from 3mm MDF, sourced from recycled wood fibres and certified by FSC Mixed Credit standards. A full-colour print, applied on recycled paper and bonded to wood, offered an eco-friendly yet stylish option. The production process prioritised environmental responsibility, using solar-powered green electricity for laser engraving. The pin and butterfly clasp were made from stainless steel, free from nickel and lead, ensuring safety and sustainability. The tote bag is crafted from durable 180g/m² organic cotton and made in the EU, offering an eco-friendly option for everyday use.

LOCAL PURCHASING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Sourcing goods and services locally not only supports the local economy but also reduces the carbon footprint associated with transportation. Collaborating with local suppliers and showcasing local, seasonal produce was taken as a priority. Involvement with community initiatives, such as the Bruges Food Lab, and supporting projects like Foodwinners and The Food Squad, which aim to reduce food waste and promote sustainable food distribution, further embedded the Forum within the local community. By engaging with local charities and cultural exchanges, the Forum contributed positively to the community of Bruges.

AWARENESS AND COMMUNICATION

Clear communication about the event's sustainability initiatives was provided to all participants, encouraging adherence to these guidelines and promoting a culture of environmental stewardship.

LOCAL VEGAN AND ORGANIC RESTAURANTS

To further support sustainable dining, participants were encouraged to explore a selection of vegan and organic restaurants in Bruges:

De Bron

A vegetarian and vegan restaurant offering daily organic and fresh meals.

That's Toast

Known for its vegan-friendly brunch options made from locally sourced ingredients.

Réliva

A fine dining experience offering organic and vegetarian dishes, with an emphasis on seasonal and local produce.

Books & Brunch

Offers a cosy atmosphere with a variety of vegan and vegetarian options, all made with organic ingredients.



"Belgium is a founding Member and State Member of IUCN, and there are now 22 Belgian Members. And that 'we' is a robust coalition, driven by the IUCN Belgian Focal Point. Together with those partners we bring nature right into the heart of the city; that is why we wholeheartedly support the organisation of this Forum in Bruges." Goedele Van der Spiegel, Director General of the Flemish Agency for Nature and Forests.

**Goedele Van der Spiegel,
Director General of the Flemish Agency for
Nature and Forests**

9 Communications and outreach

Website with 10 subpages to introduce the Forum, speakers, Thems and Pathways, offer useful information for participants and allow up-to-date session details via 53 created parallel thematic sessions, reaching 40,150+ views over eight months.

Three pieces of content for the **IUCN website** – opening [press release](#), closing [news](#) and [photo story](#)

IUCN Regional Conservation Forum paves the way for innovative conservation across Europe, North and Central Asia

Bruges, Belgium, 30 September 2024 – The IUCN Regional Conservation Forum (RCF) for Europe, North, and Central Asia opened today in Bruges, Belgium. The event brings together over 400 participants, including representatives from governments, NGOs and the private sector, as well as experts, scientists, partners and donors, to discuss the region's priorities in the run up to the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025.



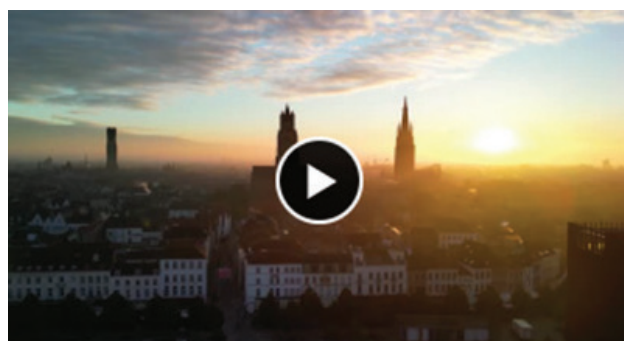
IUCN Regional Conservation Forum for Europe, North and Central Asia contributes to a shared vision for the future of conservation

As the IUCN Regional Conservation Forum for Europe, North and Central Asia comes to a close, Members and experts look forward to the IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2025 and shaping ambitious conservation progress in the coming years.



Seven **email updates** prepared and disseminated, robust presence on **social media** with over 250 posts across channels reachable via the official hashtag **#RCF24ENCA**.

Photo gallery published <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjBLhui> and two videos produced for the social media ([Aftermovie](#))



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@IUCN_ECARO
@Biodiversity_be



@iucn-european-regional-office
@iucn-eastern-europe-and-central-asia
@belgian-biodiversity-platform



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10 On the way to Abu Dhabi



The world stands at a critical juncture. Decades of conservation efforts have not achieved the systemic changes needed, as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and global health crises are compounded by growing political and socio-economic instability. These challenges threaten the planet's life-support systems, upon which humanity's survival depends. Immediate, transformative action across every sector of society is essential.

The [IUCN Congress 2025](#) in Abu Dhabi is a pivotal opportunity to address these urgent crises. With only five years remaining until the 2030 targets set by the Paris Agreement, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework, the IUCN Congress will elevate ambition, accelerate action, and scale up solutions for a sustainable, equitable future.

Stay informed about this largest gathering of nature conservation experts, leaders and decision-makers in the world – follow the [#IUCNcongress](#) hashtag on social media and subscribe to an IUCN World Conservation Congress [newsletter](#).

"I really appreciated how the RCF sessions were organized, striking a great balance between thematic exchanges and networking opportunities, especially during the extended lunch and coffee breaks. Interpersonal communication and networking are essential!"

Aliya Ibraimova,
Public Foundation CAMP Alatoo, Kyrgyzstan

"The event was well-organised, offering a variety of sessions that provided valuable insights into regional conservation priorities and strategies. The diversity of speakers and the inclusion of interactive workshops created an excellent platform for knowledge exchange and networking, making the forum enriching."

Zachary Borg,
Environment Protection Officer | Biodiversity & Water,
Environment & Resources Authority, Malta

"Reflecting on the success of the Vjosa Wild River National Park case study presentation, it is recommended that future Regional Conservation Forums place an increased emphasis on practical case studies. Real-world examples that illustrate both challenges and successes prove to be highly effective in demonstrating complex conservation issues and potential solutions."

Zana Vokopola,
Urban Research Institute, Albania

"If I had to summarise the experience in just one sentence I would say, as stated by Mrs Musonda Mumba: 'I am, because we are'; the challenges that we, as IUCN [...] are facing and we will face can be successfully addressed only if everyone is connected and coordinated to the others and if IUCN and members will act in a synergic approach."

Corrado Teofili,
National Federation of Parks and Natural Reserves,
Italy

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Acknowledgements

IUCN Regional Conservation Forum Europe, North and Central Asia Bruges 2024

A heartfelt thank you to the incredible teams whose dedication and hard work made this event possible. From planning to execution, their attention to detail and commitment to excellence ensured that every aspect ran smoothly, creating an unforgettable experience for all. Their passion, creativity, and teamwork have been the driving force behind the Forum's success!



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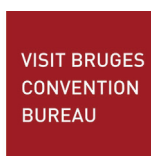
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Vera Ameels, Flemish Heritage Agency

Local partners

We thank our Belgian IUCN Members and local partners who helped shape the programme.

Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO)*
Bos+
European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE)*
European Landowners (ELO)*
Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment*
Flanders Heritage Agency
Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO)*
Jane Goodall Institute Belgium (JGI Belgium)
Natuurpunt*
International Association for Falconry (IFA)*
Pairi Daiza Foundation*
Regionaal Landschap Kempen en Maasland (RLKM)*
Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO)*
VisitFlanders
Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ)
WWF Belgium*
Zoo Antwerp (KMDA)*

(*) IUCN Members



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