Regional Action Plan

of Romania

Activity 1.3

1.Introduction

1.1 General information of the Partner

PROJECT	Danube Wood(s) Route
PARTNER ORGANISATION CONCERNED	WWF- RO
COUNTRY	Romania
NUTS2	București-Ilfov (RO32)
CONTACT PERSON	Alexandra Verdes
E-MAIL ADDRESS	[Alexandra Verdes](#)

1.2 Overall and specific objectives of the Action Plan

The Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route Regional Action Plan of Romania (RAP) is a critical component of the broader Danube Wood(s) project, aligning with the strategic framework established by the Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategy. The overarching goal of the project is to ensure the sustainable use of the Danube region's forest resources while integrating wood-related cultural heritage into sustainable tourism and rural development. The RAP translates the common transnational strategy into concrete actions tailored to the specific natural, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics of Romania.

The Regional analysis in the Romanian RAP focuses on the two pilot areas: Transylvanian Highlands and Maramureș, both regions of outstanding natural and cultural significance. The analysis identifies practical measures aimed at the protection and sustainable utilisation of forest resources, preservation of wood-based cultural heritage, and the promotion of eco-tourism and crafts-based entrepreneurship. These measures not only address environmental and economic concerns but also enhance social cohesion and foster regional development.

A key objective of the RAP is to facilitate consensus among regional stakeholders on targeted measures that support the broader goals of the Danube Wood(s) Route project. This includes the identification, conservation, and promotion of sites of cultural and natural value, strengthening their visibility and integrating them into structured, sustainable tourism offerings. By doing so, the RAP advances the overarching aim of protecting and enhancing the sustainable use of forest resources in the Danube region.

The strategic framework of the RAP is firmly rooted in the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route Strategy and promotes the development of sustainable tourism infrastructure and services, including eco-lodges, wood heritage centres, and thematic trails. These components not only celebrate Romania's rich wood-related cultural traditions but also create new economic opportunities for local communities through eco-tourism and the promotion of traditional wood industries. Furthermore, the RAP fosters conservation efforts such as safeguarding historical wooden architecture and enhancing biodiversity, ensuring the long-term integrity of forest ecosystems.

The RAP plays a crucial role in empowering local and regional actors through capacity-building activities. These include training sessions, stakeholder workshops, and the establishment of networks for knowledge exchange, which strengthen the operational capabilities necessary for the successful implementation and management of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route at the regional level.

Innovation and sustainability objectives are integrated into the RAP by promoting responsible forest management practices, sustainable forestry certification, and the advancement of entrepreneurship in wood-based industries. Supporting the development of eco-friendly furniture, bio-based materials, and traditional craftsmanship not only broadens the economic base but also reinforces the sustainable use of forest resources.

Education and public engagement are central pillars of the RAP's implementation. Integrating wood heritage and sustainable forest management topics into educational curricula and vocational training ensures that future generations understand and appreciate the value of forest-related cultural assets. In parallel, public awareness campaigns, community workshops, and the use of digital platforms further promote cultural and ecological awareness among broader audiences.

Overall, the Romanian Regional Action Plan is an essential tool for translating the strategic vision of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route into concrete, region-specific actions. By focusing on conservation, sustainable forestry, wood-based eco-tourism, innovation, and education, the RAP establishes a foundation for a sustainable and inclusive future for Romania's forest-based cultural heritage. Through active stakeholder collaboration, the promotion of innovative tourism models, and increased cultural and environmental awareness, the RAP contributes significantly to the overall objective of the Danube Wood(s) Route initiative: ensuring the sustainable and long-term valorisation of the region's unique forest-related natural and cultural assets.

2. Regional Analysis

The regional analysis of the RAP was carried out in order to find out what are the main challenges of of the Transylvanian Highlands and Maramureș in Romania identifying the opportunities that can be taken up by actions elaborated later in Section 4.

2.1 Natural and cultural assets

Romania is home to some of Europe's most ecologically valuable and culturally rich forest landscapes. The country holds the largest share of remaining primary and old-growth forests in the EU and features an exceptionally diverse natural environment, ranging from Carpathian mountain woodlands to lowland floodplain forests. Romania's forests provide essential ecosystem services: regulating (carbon sequestration, climate moderation), provisioning (timber, non-timber products), cultural (recreation, identity), and supporting (soil formation, biodiversity support).

Over 29% of Romania's territory is covered by forests, comprising approximately 7 million hectares. Despite being below the EU average in forest cover, the country plays a disproportionately large role in maintaining Europe's forest biodiversity, as it is the only EU Member State covering five biogeographical regions. These forests support iconic wildlife such as bears, wolves, lynxes, and

diverse bird and invertebrate species, many of which rely on the continuity of structurally complex habitats.

Romania's forestry tradition is rooted in a silvicultural model that has emphasized close-to-nature practices for over a century. This includes long rotation cycles (100–180 years), natural regeneration, high shares of native broadleaf species like European beech and oaks, and minimal intervention zones. Such practices ensure that Romanian forests not only sustain biodiversity but also provide high-quality timber suitable for long-lived wood products. These forests are a living testament to ecological resilience, cultural continuity, and economic potential.

Culturally, forests in Romania hold deep significance. In regions like Transylvania and Maramureș, forests have shaped local identities, economies, and spiritual life for centuries. Wood is an integral part of vernacular architecture, from the carved gates and wooden churches of Maramureș—many of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites—to the traditional Saxon fortified churches and woodpastures of Transylvania. In these landscapes, wood is not merely a resource—it is a cultural symbol and a canvas for craftsmanship.

Wood-based traditions, such as pollarding ("ciolpani") and coppicing, historically ensured a balance between use and regeneration. Although many of these practices declined after mid-20th-century modernization, they remain ecologically relevant and symbolically potent. Remarkable trees, including centuries-old oaks and pine groves near Saxon settlements, continue to stand as biocultural monuments.

The presence of ecotones, ancient trees, and traditional management systems like woodpastures contribute to exceptional biodiversity. Moreover, the region supports a vibrant intangible heritage: festivals, woodcarving, religious rituals, and forest-related oral traditions.

However, Romania's forest ecosystems and cultural landscapes are under pressure. Fragmented forest ownership, illegal logging, and weak enforcement have contributed to forest degradation in parts of the country. Urbanization, rural depopulation, and the erosion of traditional knowledge also threaten the intergenerational transfer of forest-related practices and identities.

To counteract these trends, Romania's National Forest Strategy 2030 emphasizes multifunctional forest management, biodiversity conservation, and increased resilience against climate change. It also highlights the importance of community engagement and ecotourism development linked to forest-based heritage. Initiatives such as the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route align perfectly with these goals, offering a strategic platform to integrate forest conservation with sustainable tourism, rural development, and cultural revitalization.

In summary, Romania's natural and cultural forest assets are invaluable not only to the country but to Europe at large. Safeguarding and valorising these resources through integrated policies, inclusive governance, and sustainable forest-based tourism is key to unlocking their full ecological, economic, and societal potential.

2.2 Social and economic conditions in the region

Romania's regional development exhibits strong contrasts between urban centres and rural areas, with substantial disparities in income, infrastructure, education, and access to services. While metropolitan areas such as Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca have witnessed notable economic growth in the past decade, rural and mountainous regions — including those targeted in the Danube Wood(s)

Cultural Route (such as Transylvanian Highlands and Maramureș) — continue to face challenges related to low income levels, demographic decline, and limited employment opportunities.

According to national statistical data, Romania's GDP per capita reached 76% of the EU average in 2023. However, this average masks significant intra-regional inequalities. Bucharest exceeds the EU average by over 150%, while many rural counties in the North-East and South-West remain under 50%. Maramureș and parts of southern Transylvania rank among the lowest in GDP per capita and highest in relative poverty, with a large share of the population relying on subsistence agriculture, informal forestry work, and seasonal employment abroad.

The forestry sector and traditional wood-based industries remain vital to many rural economies, especially in mountainous and hilly regions. In these areas, forest resources serve not only as sources of fuelwood and construction material but also as cultural and economic backbones for small-scale woodworking, crafts, and local identity. However, these economic activities are vulnerable due to limited processing capacities, outdated infrastructure, and shrinking access to skilled labour.

Rural depopulation, migration of the youth, and aging populations exacerbate the socio-economic challenges. Many young people leave for urban centres or abroad due to the lack of viable education and career opportunities locally. The average age of skilled forest workers and woodcraft artisans is rising, with limited vocational training available to maintain generational continuity.

Education indicators also show persistent disparities. In certain rural counties, including Maramureș and Harghita, early school leaving rates remain significantly above the national average. At the same time, digital illiteracy and limited internet access continue to hinder access to modern educational and economic tools in isolated rural areas.

Despite these challenges, the regions also present important opportunities. The growing interest in sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, and local craftsmanship can offer new development pathways. Traditional woodworking skills, rural architecture, and historic landscapes — especially those recognized as UNESCO sites — attract cultural tourism, which, if strategically developed, can stimulate job creation and heritage preservation.

Local initiatives in Maramureș and Transylvania that promote ecotourism, short forest-based value chains, and craft markets demonstrate the potential for diversification and revitalization. To fully harness this potential, integrated approaches are needed: investments in rural infrastructure, support for small producers and artisans, and education programmes that link heritage preservation with economic opportunity.

In conclusion, while Romania's rural regions face serious socio-economic challenges, they also hold significant assets — cultural, environmental, and human — that can be leveraged for inclusive and sustainable development through the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route framework.

A. European and International Regulatory Context

The regulatory and policy frameworks at international and European levels provide a supportive legal foundation for enhancing access to forest resources, promoting value-added wood processing, and safeguarding traditional wood-based cultural heritage in Romania.

At the **international level**, Romania is a party to the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**, which underlines the importance of conserving biological diversity, promoting the sustainable use of its components, and ensuring fair and equitable benefit-sharing. The CBD explicitly acknowledges the role of local and indigenous communities in preserving biodiversity and recognizes their customary and traditional practices. The **Nagoya Protocol**, ratified through the European Union, reinforces this by requiring prior informed consent and the involvement of communities in decisions concerning traditional knowledge and genetic resources.

Romania is also committed to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** and the **Paris Agreement**, which highlight the critical role of forests in climate regulation and the need to curb deforestation. These global commitments influence national policy, encouraging climate-resilient forest management and linking local wood resource use to global climate objectives.

At the **European Union level**, the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** and **the EU Forest Strategy for 2030** define the strategic direction for Member States. These include:
- Legally protecting at least 30% of EU land, including all remaining old-growth and primary forests;
- Promoting inclusive approaches that involve rural communities, indigenous knowledge holders, and local authorities;
- Encouraging sustainable forest bioeconomy models through the use of long-lived wood products and close-to-nature forestry;
- Reinforcing the cultural and social links between biodiversity protection, human rights, education, and local development.

Regulatory instruments such as the **EU Taxonomy Regulation**, **LULUCF Regulation**, and the **EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)** also carry implications for access to forest resources and for local entrepreneurship. These instruments promote biodiversity-friendly practices, traceability, and sustainability in forest use and product markets.

Additionally, the **EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)** provides a macro-regional framework that supports cross-border cooperation in key areas such as sustainable tourism (Priority Area 3) and biodiversity conservation (Priority Area 6). Romania's leadership in initiating the EUSDR reinforces the country's commitment to sustainable and inclusive development in the Danube area.

Lastly, the **Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Programme**, **UNESCO frameworks**, and the **UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (2018)** all emphasize the importance of preserving cultural landscapes and traditional practices linked to forest use. These instruments support the development of local economies through heritage-based tourism, cultural valorization, and access to forest resources grounded in equity and sustainability.

Together, these legal and strategic frameworks highlight the importance of ensuring community access to wood, protecting traditional woodcraft, and integrating cultural and environmental priorities into Romania's forest-based development model.

B. National Regulatory Framework for Forest Access and Rural Development

At the national level, Romania's Constitution establishes key rights relevant to sustainable forest-based development, including access to culture, environmental protection, and economic freedom. These constitutional provisions support the protection and promotion of cultural heritage and ensure lawful access to natural resources, including forests.

The **Forest Code (Law No. 331/2024)** and the **National Forest Strategy 2030** form the core legal framework governing access to wood resources and forest-dependent communities. However, notable misalignments exist between the two. While the Forest Code is the higher-ranking law, it has yet to fully integrate the strategic goals outlined in the National Forest Strategy, particularly in supporting value-added wood processing and inclusive access for local entrepreneurs.

A positive step is the Forest Code's introduction of categories such as "**communities critically dependent on forests**" and "forest dependent communities". The National Forest Strategy adopts a broader, community-oriented approach, aiming to:
- Facilitate local access to forest resources for economic development,
- Increase the forestry sector's contribution to rural economies by 10% by 2030,
- Support local wood processing industries and cultural valorization.

The concept of **superior wood valorization**—defined as producing long-lived wood products with high socio-economic value—is legally recognized but inconsistently implemented. Although mechanisms for favoring local processors through timber auctions exist (e.g., socioeconomic contribution criteria, processed wood scoring), practical enforcement is limited.

The "**Moți Law**" remains a unique provision, granting residents in the Apuseni Mountains annual access to processed wood for traditional craftsmanship. However, its scope is narrow, and broader frameworks for enabling small-scale wood processing are underdeveloped.

In terms of economic policy, Romania's application of **EU state aid regulations** is critical. While the Forest Code references state aid mechanisms, regulatory clarity and institutional coordination (e.g., with the Competition Council) are still evolving. Nevertheless, frameworks such as the **General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)** and de **minimis aid schemes** provide viable pathways for supporting SMEs and traditional artisans involved in forest-based production and heritage preservation.

In conclusion, Romania's legal and policy landscape provides important starting points for enabling community access to forest resources and encouraging value-added, culturally grounded wood processing. However, targeted legal refinements and inter-institutional coordination are needed to align the Forest Code with strategic objectives and to unlock the full potential of forest-based rural economies.

2.3 Woodworking in Romania

Woodworking has played a foundational role in Romania's rural economy and cultural development for centuries. Owing to the country's extensive forest cover—particularly in the Carpathian Mountains, Apuseni, and Subcarpathian regions—wood has historically been the most accessible and versatile material for construction, domestic use, tools, furniture, and religious artifacts.

By the Middle Ages, woodworking had evolved from household necessity into a diversified network of trades, ranging from carpentry, joinery, and coopering to wheelwrighting and fine woodcarving. Many Transylvanian and Maramureș villages became renowned centres of craftsmanship. The tradition of carved wooden gates, intricate church interiors, and regionally specific furniture design are enduring hallmarks of this heritage, with some wood churches in Maramureș designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

In the pre-industrial era, woodworking was closely tied to seasonal forest work and agricultural cycles. Craftsmen often relied on family-based cottage industries, producing goods for local markets and distant fairs. Certain professions, such as coopers and cartwrights, held particular importance due to their integration with the agrarian economy and transport systems. Regional specialisation emerged—such as shingle making in mountainous areas or spoon and spindle carving in the Apuseni region.

Despite its cultural importance, woodworking underwent a period of decline during Romania's industrialization and post-communist transition. State collectivization disrupted traditional production networks, while mass-produced materials replaced handmade wooden goods. After 1990, many small workshops closed due to lack of capital, competition from imports, and aging artisan populations.

Nevertheless, woodworking remains an active, though underutilized, sector in rural Romania. There are over 7,000 microenterprises in wood processing and furniture making, primarily located in forest-rich counties like Suceava, Maramureș, Harghita, and Mureș. Many small sawmills, carpentry shops, and joinery workshops continue to operate with traditional methods, though few have access to modern machinery or structured business development support.

One of the main obstacles to revitalizing woodworking is the fragmentation of supply chains and limited innovation. Traditional craftsmen often lack market access, branding capacity, and integration into tourism or heritage circuits.

Nonetheless, interest in traditional crafts and sustainable wood products is growing. Recent years have seen renewed attention to handcrafted design, eco-conscious furniture, and artisan woodwork, particularly in areas connected to tourism. Initiatives combining woodworking with cultural heritage education, design innovation, and ecotourism (e.g. "wood trails," workshops, or maker hubs) show potential to reconnect forest-based skills with economic opportunity.

The Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route presents a valuable opportunity to revitalise Romania's woodworking heritage by promoting traditional skills, fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer, and linking artisans to regional tourism and sustainable forest management models. With coordinated support, Romania's woodworking tradition could become a dynamic driver of local economies and a living expression of forest-linked cultural identity.

2.4 Summary of the regional assessment

Romania's forest ecosystems play a central role in maintaining biodiversity, climate resilience, and the cultural identity of rural regions. With approximately 7 million hectares of forests—representing 29.5% of the national territory—Romania holds one of the richest and most diverse forest landscapes in the European Union. These include primary and old-growth forests, close-to-nature managed production forests, and cultural woodlands shaped by traditional land-use practices.

Forests in Romania provide a wide array of ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, watershed protection, erosion control, timber, non-timber forest products, recreational opportunities, and cultural values. They serve as habitats for a full trophic pyramid of species, including large carnivores such as bears, wolves, and lynxes, as well as many endemic and rare flora and fauna species. Around 65% of Romanian forests are designated for special protection functions, and many are part of the Natura 2000 network.

Despite this ecological richness, the integrity of Romania's forests faces increasing threats. Illegal logging, climate-induced stress (droughts, storms, pest outbreaks), fragmentation of ownership, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms remain serious concerns. Forest degradation is exacerbated by wildlife overpopulation in certain areas, especially ungulates, which hinder natural regeneration and threaten biodiversity.

A significant share of Romanian forests—especially those located on communal and private lands—are managed under rigid silvicultural rules that prioritize strict technical standards over local adaptability. While this system ensures high ecological performance, it has also led to tensions with small forest owners and rural communities due to limited decision-making autonomy and high compliance costs.

In socio-economic terms, forest-rich regions such as Maramureș and the Transylvanian Highlands remain economically vulnerable. The local economy relies heavily on low-value primary processing, fuelwood harvesting, and seasonal employment. Infrastructure deficiencies, such as poor road access and limited digital connectivity, hinder forest product valorisation and access to markets. Additionally, depopulation, aging populations, and the outmigration of youth pose long-term challenges for the forestry labour force and the transmission of traditional knowledge.

Romania's forest sector continues to be a major source of employment in rural areas, especially through logging, small sawmills, and artisanal woodworking. However, labour shortages, low wages, and limited investment in mechanisation and skills training threaten its future. While forestry remains a backbone of the rural economy, greater diversification, innovation, and support are required to improve resilience and sustainability.

From a societal perspective, the relationship between people and forests has become increasingly fragmented. As traditional forest-based lifestyles decline, younger generations have less direct connection with forest ecosystems and the cultural practices associated with them. Environmental education, nature-based tourism, and community forestry initiatives are needed to rebuild these connections and cultivate stewardship.

The integration of the "One Health" approach—linking human, animal, and environmental well-being—is particularly relevant in Romanian forest policy. Forests support both ecological stability and public health, especially in the face of emerging climate and biodiversity crises. Strengthening environmental awareness and integrating forest education into curricula can help reconnect society with nature and support long-term sustainability.

In conclusion, Romania's regional forested landscapes possess extraordinary ecological and cultural assets, but they require targeted interventions to secure their future. Strengthening rural infrastructure, supporting community-based forest management, investing in forest education, and fostering cross-sector collaboration are key pillars for aligning environmental, economic, and social goals. Through coordinated action and inclusive governance, Romania can ensure that its forests remain resilient, productive, and valued by future generations.

2.5. Challenges and Opportunities

The following chapter summarises the challenges and opportunities identified in the Romanian Regional Analysis.

Forest Resilience Against Climate and Ecological Threats

Romania's forests display some of the highest levels of biodiversity and ecological integrity in Europe, largely due to long-standing close-to-nature forestry practices, natural regeneration, native species diversity, long rotations, and multifunctional management. However, climate change, extreme weather events, pests, and invasive species still represent increasing threats, which require adaptive, science-based forest management approaches. Ensuring resilience will depend on maintaining diverse structural mosaics, promoting genetic conservation through locally adapted natural regeneration, and preserving ecological connectivity across landscapes.

The continuous presence of all developmental stages within forest landscapes provides Romania with an advantage in mitigating ecological risks. Nevertheless, new challenges — such as intensified drought, windthrow events, insect outbreaks, and invasive pathogens — demand investment in monitoring, innovation, and adaptive management to maintain forest health and resilience.

Adapting Forestry to Economic and Environmental Challenges

Romania's forestry sector is deeply rooted in the principle of high-quality timber production through long rotations and close-to-nature practices. However, market pressures, the dominance of primary processing industries, and an over-reliance on stumpage sales reduce the economic potential of superior wood assortments. Poor infrastructure, insufficient sorting facilities, and limited investments in modern harvesting technologies hinder superior valorization of high-quality wood, undermining the long-term economic viability of sustainable management.

Moreover, the administrative fragmentation of forest ownership and chaotic restitution processes have created a complex ownership landscape, weakening the ability to implement coherent, long-term forest planning. Despite a highly competitive primary processing sector, value-added wood processing remains underdeveloped, limiting Romania's potential to fully benefit from its superior timber resources.

Forest owners face increasing financial pressure due to the high cost of implementing stricter silvicultural standards, without receiving sufficient compensation or support mechanisms. Without appropriate financial incentives, there is growing pressure to relax these standards, risking a shift away from close-to-nature forestry.

Tourism Based on the Cultural and Industrial Heritage of Wood

Romania's rich cultural heritage—reflected in its wooden churches, traditional gates, carpentry crafts, and wood-based architecture—provides significant potential for tourism development. However, these traditions are at risk due to generational knowledge loss, declining interest among younger generations, and a lack of coordinated promotion.

There is a strong opportunity to create cultural routes, craft-based workshops, thematic festivals, and digital experiences (e.g., virtual tours, 3D modelling) that showcase Romania's wooden heritage. By connecting ecotourism, cultural tourism, and sustainable wood use, these initiatives can create valuable income streams for local communities while raising awareness of forest and wood-based cultural values. Success will depend on partnerships between the tourism sector, craft industries, education providers, and regional authorities.

Challenges and Solutions in the Social Context

The erosion of traditional links between society and forests, combined with rural depopulation, poses significant challenges for sustainable forest management. Urbanisation, ageing populations,

and outward migration have led to labor shortages in forestry and wood processing sectors. Rural communities often lack adequate infrastructure, limiting access to markets and investment opportunities.

Solutions must include strengthening rural employment, improving infrastructure, and creating incentives for young professionals to enter forestry and wood-based industries. Community-based management models and participatory governance can reconnect people to forest landscapes, foster ownership, and increase public support for forest conservation.

Simultaneously, public awareness campaigns and environmental education are needed to restore the cultural and emotional connection between society and forests. Innovative economic instruments—such as payments for ecosystem services, carbon markets, and cascading use of wood products—can provide long-term financial sustainability for forest management and conservation efforts.

At national and EU levels, public policies must recognise the strategic role of Romania's close-to-nature forestry model in achieving climate neutrality, biodiversity goals, and rural development. This will require dedicated funding mechanisms, coherent forest policies, investment in research, infrastructure, and administrative capacity to sustain responsible forestry practices while ensuring economic viability for forest owners and managers.

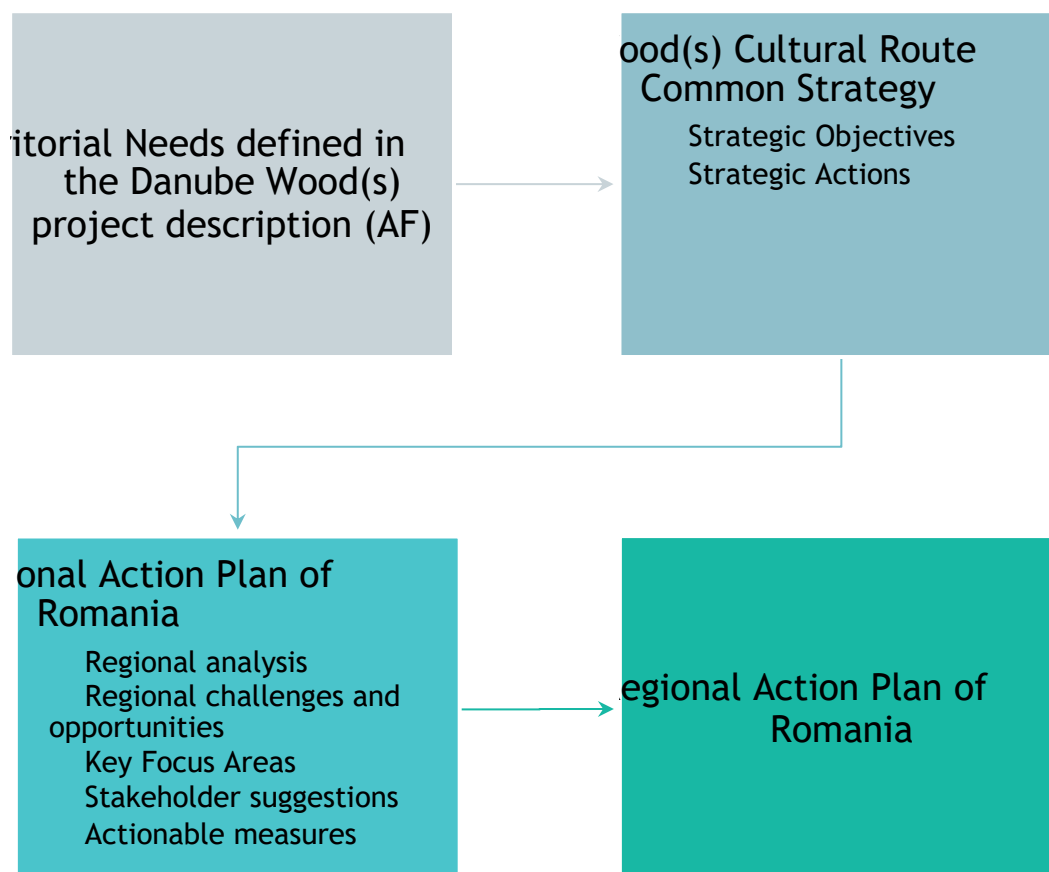*6. Figure: Identified challenges and opportunities*

Identified challenges and opportunities – Romania

No.	Challenges	Opportunities
1	Climate change causing prolonged droughts, late frosts, and increased pest outbreaks in Carpathian forests.	Strengthen close-to-nature forestry practices to improve resilience.
2	Biodiversity loss due to illegal harvesting.	Enhance biodiversity monitoring through remote sensing and citizen science.
3	Invasive species such as Ailanthus and late blight fungus affecting forest regeneration.	Launch invasive species control programs involving local communities.
4	Low public trust in forest governance and limited participation in policy-making.	Promote participatory forest governance platforms at regional level.
5	Outdated wood processing infrastructure in many rural areas.	Upgrade rural wood-processing and drying facilities with EU funds.
6	High dependence on firewood for heating, with limited access to	Support energy transition programs using efficient wood biomass systems.

	alternative energy.	
7	Aging workforce in forestry and lack of vocational training for young professionals.	Develop forestry apprenticeships and rural employment schemes.
8	Disconnection between youth and traditional forestry and woodworking culture.	Integrate traditional forest knowledge into school and museum programs.
9	Migration and depopulation of forest-dependent communities.	Promote rural revitalization through forest-based tourism and crafts.
10	Inadequate compensation for private forest owners managing protective forests.	Establish compensation schemes for ecosystem services provided by private forests.
11	Overlapping land-use pressures (urbanization, agriculture, infrastructure).	Integrate multifunctional forest landscapes into spatial planning.
12	Underutilized ecosystem services in forest economic models.	Introduce payments for ecosystem services and carbon credits.
13	Fragmented forest administration hindering integrated management.	Support forest cooperatives and community forestry initiatives.
14	Lack of incentives for innovation in small-scale wood-based enterprises.	Create business incubators for local wood product innovation.
15	Reactive rather than adaptive forest management under climate pressure.	Adopt climate-adaptive silvicultural guidelines and early-warning systems.
16	Public undervaluation of biodiversity and non-timber forest products.	Promote forest-based wellness tourism and wild product branding.
17	Forest education and awareness are insufficient in public curricula.	Include forest topics in climate and biodiversity education.
18	Tourism pressure on heritage forest sites without proper visitor infrastructure.	Develop ecotourism infrastructure respecting cultural and ecological values.
19	Limited financing tools for sustainable forestry outside state-run programs.	Create green finance instruments supporting forest ecosystem services.

3. Strategic framework

The Danube Wood(s) RAPs have a well-defined methodological approach with the following stages:

8. Figure: Development of the Regional Action Plan

To be clear on the basis of actionable measures, the following table explains the connection of objectives between the objectives Danube Wood(s) project, the Danube Wood(s) Route Strategy, and the RAP. The RAP Key Focus Areas have to be in line with Strategic Actions and Objectives. Actionable measures are grouped under the RAP Key Focus Areas.

Standard, pre-defined Key Focus Areas of the RAP:

- Actions to conserve forest areas and wood-based cultural heritage - supporting sustainable forest management, supporting efforts to reduce illegal logging, initiating an approach to providing dedicated European funds for forests, promoting traditional wood-related crafts

- Developing the local bioeconomy and tourism - supporting a legislative framework to ensure local communities' access to forest resources, promoting forms of superior valorization of wood resources, supporting superior wood processing, promote local crafts

- Educational and Awareness Campaigns — Increasing local and stakeholder awareness about the importance of sustainable forest management and wood-based heritage.

New arrangement of RAP Key Focus Areas corresponding to the regional challenges:

- **Promote sustainable forest management - Promote sustainable forestry practice developing a set of measures necessary to mitigate the risks identified in the Centralized Risk Assessment at the National Level CNRA, promoting a legislative framework to ensure the efficiency of efforts to reduce illegal logging, promoting a European payment system dedicated to forests.**

- **Support the growth of a bio-economy** - by engaging in legislative projects that regulate the utilization of wood belonging to state forests. The involvement aims to direct valuable wood to those who can better process this resource, especially local craftsmen and producers

- **Maintenance and development cultural Heritage Related to Wood - raising awareness of the importance of a cultural route among stakeholders and supporting efforts aimed at preserving existing cultural heritage**

- **Education and Awareness for Sustainable Forestry and Wood Heritage** – Strengthening public and professional knowledge of sustainable forest management and wood culture through targeted educational programs, community involvement, cross-sector collaboration, and accessible knowledge-sharing platforms.

9. Figure: Strategic framework of the Romanian Regional Action Plan (RAP)

Strategic Objectives	Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategic Actions	RAP Key Focus Area
Key Territorial need: Valorising cultural heritage related to wood through stakeholder engagement and knowledge-sharing *Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategy Objective:* Protect and restore biodiversity and/or natural resources.	1. **Strengthen Forest Governance - Enforce** anti-deforestation policies and improve forest law compliance by aligning national and regional forest governance with EU regulations, including the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. 2. Promote Sustainable Forestry Practices - Support the adoption of FSC certified sustainable forest management systems in the region. 3. Financial framework for assuring biodiversity payments (regional/national level) - Promote innovative financial tools and support mechanisms, compensatory payments, and "fair transition" schemes for forest-dependent communities. These mechanisms aim to reward sustainable land stewardship and support equitable economic alternatives to unsustainable exploitation 4. Enhancing and accessibility to forest resources - focus mainly to local enterprises	Promote the **sustainable** forest management

Strategic Objectives	Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategic Actions		RAP Key Focus Area
	by raising awareness within target groups or/and stakeholders for the importance of regional value chains and regional added value		
Key Territorial need: Support the growth of bio-economy rooted in sustainable forestry practices and high value-added wood-based on local industry *Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategy Objective:* Develop sustainable Forest – Based Economy.	5. Enhance market access for "regional" timber products - Build upon the basis of regional forest resources by supporting short "regional" and cross border value chains, influence the national policies which regulate access to forest resources and promote certified wood products at stakeholder groups. 6. Encourage Local Entrepreneurship - Develop training and funding programs for local entrepreneurs in the forest, timber industry and regional value chains targets of the project. Training should involve operators and stakeholders with regard to European, national and regional regulations		**Support the growth of a bio-economy**
Key Territorial need: Developing new ecotourism structures and services to drive sustainable regional growth *Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategy Objective:* Valorize Cultural Heritage Related to Wood.	7. Promote Traditional Craftsmanship - Support artisans and craftspeople through workshops, events, and micro grants 8. Establish strong regional networks among key stakeholders - The groups could include craftsmen, tourism stakeholders, education, cultural institutions, other relevant stakeholders, such as hubs, living labs, and competence centres		Maintenance and development cultural Heritage Related to Wood
Key Territorial need: Leverage the natural and cultural heritage of the Danube region, particularly focused on wood and forests, to drive sustainable tourism initiatives that support local communities, enhance their economies, and protect the region's environment. *Danube Wood Cultural*	9. Creation of the Cultural Route - Design and implement the Danube Wood Cultural Route, focusing on mapping key heritage sites, identifying important cultural and natural landmarks, and creating well-defined itineraries that showcase the uniqueness of the region. These itineraries should offer diverse experiences, ranging from historical woodcraft villages to ancient forests and key cultural monuments. Additionally, the creation of a clear and compelling brand identity will help distinguish the route as a premier sustainable tourism destination		Develop Sustainable Tourism

Strategic Objectives	Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategic Actions	RAP Key Focus Area
Route Strategy Objective: Develop Sustainable Tourism	10. **Capacity Building for Tourism Stakeholders -** This includes training Programs for Local Stakeholders. To ensure that the benefits of tourism are widely shared, training and capacity-building programs will be provided for local guides, hospitality providers, and tourism entrepreneurs. These programs will focus on a range of topics, including product development, online marketing, heritage interpretation, and visitor management. Local operators will be encouraged to embrace green technologies and sustainable practices in their businesses, helping to create a tourism industry that supports both local communities and environmental conservation	
Key Territorial need: Enhancing the visibility of Danube forests and their cultural heritage. *Danube Wood Cultural Route Strategy Objective:* Raise awareness and build community engagement.	11. **Educational Campaigns -** Develop and implement awareness-raising campaigns tailored to schools, local communities, and the general public. These campaigns will cover topics such as forest ecology, biodiversity, sustainable forestry, and the cultural heritage of wood. Materials will be adapted to different age groups and include interactive and multilingual formats to ensure accessibility across the Danube region	**Education and Awareness for Sustainable Forestry and Wood Heritage**

4. Actionable measures

For Romania, actionable measures are the strategic actions selected as part of the local action plan.

4.1 Action 1- **Strengthen Forest Governance** – Enforce anti-deforestation policies and improve forest law compliance by aligning national and regional forest governance with EU regulations, including the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and the EU Biodiversity Strategy

4.1.1 Relevance of the measure

Anti-deforestation policy contributes significantly to achieving the objective of protecting biodiversity. This policy can be achieved through the correct implementation of the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

At national level, a set of measures is needed to update the legislation on the SUMAL timber traceability program, with the new challenges of illegal timber harvesting.precipitation inland. Floodplain forests play a key role in the biotic pump „transporting water" from the river by rain.

The achievement of this objective contributes to the preservation of the forest landscape in the area of the cultural route (and not only) and to ensuring an honest commercial environment for the raw material obtained from the forest.

4.1.2 Nature of the action

This action aims to analyse together with stakeholders the current situation of the legislation and to develop a set of measures necessary to improve the current legislative framework.

These measures will be supported within the working groups organized by the authority to modify the current legislative framework.

4.1.3 Stakeholders involved

This action requires the involvement of stakeholders from both the logging and processing sectors.

To understand the challenges faced by wood artisans, consultations with them in the priority areas for the project will be necessary.The coordination and facilitation of the action will be led by the WWF Romania.

4.1.4 Timeframe

■ Preparation: 2 month (logistics, outreach,)

■ Implementation: 1 month (workshops participation)

4.1.5 Indicative costs

The following costs are estimated for one workshop:

- Venue rental and logistics: 800 EUR

- Outreach and communication: 500 EUR

Total estimated cost: 1300 EUR

4.1.6 Output and result indicators

- Number of workshops/forums participation: 1

- Number of stakeholders involved : 15

4.2 Action 2 - Promote Sustainable Forestry Practices - Support the adoption of FSC certified sustainable forest management systems in the region.

4.2.1 Relevance of the measure

FSC certification is one of the main forms of maintaining, highlighting and promoting sustainable forest management.

FSC certification presents a series of advantages promoting the involvement of interested parties in the management act but also the compliance with sustainability standards that include national legislation.

At the national level, a series of risks regarding timber harvesting have been identified and in order to avoid the marketing of illegally harvested timber, it is necessary to establish risk mitigation measures to support timber operators.

4.2.2 Nature of the action

The objective is to establish a set of measures to assist operators in the timber sector, in order to mitigate the existing risks, nationally, for illegal timber harvesting.

4.2.3 Stakeholders involved

This objective is achieved by involving forestry stakeholders, environmental NGOs, timber authorities and auditors in FSC certification.

The facilitator will be WWF Romania..

4.2.4 Timeframe

- Preparation: 3 months (danalysis of identified risks, creation of debate material).

- Implementation: 2 months (Centralization of information, development of support material for operators).

4.2.5 Indicative costs

- Workshop : 2,000 EUR

- Development of support material: 2000

- Online promotion of results: 1000

Total estimated cost: 5,000 EUR

4.2.6 Output and result indicators

- Number of participants: 25

- Online platform informed : 100 - operators

4.3 Financial framework for assuring biodiversity payments (regional/national level)

Promote innovative financial tools and support mechanisms, including Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), compensatory payments, and "fair transition" schemes for forest-dependent communities. These mechanisms aim to reward sustainable land stewardship and support equitable economic alternatives to unsustainable exploitation.

To ensure a fair and sustainable transition in forest-dependent regions, dedicated financial mechanisms should be integrated into national and EU-level frameworks (notably the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework). Key measures include:

- **Promote the payments for Ecosystem Services (PES)** and **compensatory schemes** for forest owners and managers facing restrictions due to conservation or climate goals.

- **"Fair transition" support** for forest-dependent communities, ensuring economic alternatives to unsustainable exploitation.

- **Performance-based funding**, linking financial support to measurable outcomes in biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainability.

- **Support integration of forest needs early in EU/national budget planning**, recognizing forests as strategic for ecological and economic resilience.

- **Promote the implementation of "beneficiary pays" principle**, requiring users of ecosystem services to contribute to their maintenance.

- **Support for innovation and institutional capacity**, enabling sustainable forest management and the development of a forest-based circular bioeconomy.

4.4　Enhancing and accessibility to forest resources:

Focus mainly on local enterprises by raising awareness within target groups or/and stakeholders for the importance of regional value chains and regional added value.

To strengthen regional value chains and ensure sustainable local development, access to forest resources must be made more equitable and strategically guided. Key measures include:

- **Promoting the principles to prioritizing local enterprises** in public timber auctions by introducing awarding criteria beyond price, such as contribution to local socio-economic development through value-added wood processing.

- **Raising awareness among stakeholders** on the benefits of regional value chains and local timber valorization.

- **Promoting the elaborating of National Catalogue of Industrial Roundwood Assortments** to standardize sorting and promote high-value uses of quality wood.

- **Encouraging cascading use of wood**, promoting processing into durable products with embedded economic value.

- **Green public procurement** that favors durable, high-value wood products and enforces sustainability criteria for forest biomass.

4.5 Enhance market access for "regional" timber products - Build upon the basis of regional forest resources by supporting short "regional" and cross border value chains, influence the national policies which regulate access to forest resources and promote certified wood products at stakeholder groups.

To support the viability of sustainable forest management and promote certified wood, targeted action is needed to strengthen regional and cross-border timber value chains. Key measures include:

- **Promoting regional and certified timber products** through stakeholder engagement, public awareness campaigns, and integration into national procurement and branding policies.

- **Supporting short and cross-border value chains**, emphasizing the added value of timber processed locally and sustainably, while maintaining long-term forest resilience.

- **Advocating policy reform** to influence national regulations on forest resource access— ensuring they favor sustainable harvesting standards and economic fairness for forest owners using close-to-nature practices.

- **Encouraging forest owner associations**, especially for smallholders, to improve forest governance, scale market access, and ensure traceability and compliance with certification

standards.

4.6 Encourage Local Entrepreneurship - Develop training and funding programs for local entrepreneurs in the forest, timber industry and regional value chains targets of the project. Training should involve operators and stakeholders with regard to European, national and regional regulations

To foster sustainable economic development and support resilient communities, targeted programs should be created for local entrepreneurs in forestry, timber, and regional value chains. Key measures include:

- **Develop training programs** focused on EU and national regulations, due diligence systems (DDS), and deforestation-free requirements—emphasizing risk mitigation in wood traceability.

- **Support capacity building** for community members to understand and adopt sustainable, high-value bio-based business models aligned with forest conservation.

- **Assess local needs and opportunities** through stakeholder engagement in pilot areas, identifying viable forest-based entrepreneurship paths rooted in regional context.

- **Promote Nature-based Solutions (NbS)** by training community actors on sustainable forest management and NbS benefits, enabling them to develop locally driven conservation-compatible enterprises.

4.7 Promote Traditional Craftsmanship - Support artisans and craftspeople through workshops, events, and micro grants

Description:

This action aims to preserve and revitalise traditional woodworking skills and craftsmanship in the pilot regions of Transylvanian Highlands and Maramureș. By supporting local artisans—wood sculptors, carpenters, furniture makers, instrument builders, and decorative woodworkers—the action contributes to sustaining intangible cultural heritage while promoting local identity and rural economic resilience.

Activities may include identifying active and inactive craftspeople, organising local or cross-border workshops for skill exchange, holding public demonstrations during festivals or events, and supporting artisans with small-scale micro grants or material support (e.g. tools, raw material, marketing). The action complements non-formal education efforts and aims to reconnect younger generations with local craftsmanship traditions.

This action also aligns with national cultural policy objectives and supports the strategic positioning of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route as a space where living heritage is celebrated and transmitted.

Main Stakeholders Involved:

- Local artisans and craftspeople (including informal or retired practitioners)

- Artisan associations or cooperatives (e.g., Meșterii Populari din Maramureș)

- Local action groups (GAL-uri)

- Cultural centres, museums, and folk art schools

- Municipalities and local councils

- Romanian Peasant Museum, Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania (potential knowledge partners)

- Smart Development Center (PP12) – for event coordination and communication

- Ministry of Culture / county cultural directorates

- Local NGOs or initiatives promoting craft tourism

Output Indicators:

- Number of traditional artisans identified and mapped

- Number of local or cross-border workshops organised (min. 2)

- Number of micro grants awarded (target: 5–10)

- Number of public events with craft demonstrations (min. 3)

Result Indicators:

- Increased visibility and networking opportunities for local craftspeople

- At least 3 young people involved in heritage craft learning experiences

- Improved community engagement with traditional wood heritage

- Strengthened role of crafts in local cultural tourism products

4.8 Establish strong regional networks among key stakeholders - The groups could include craftsmen, tourism stakeholders, education, cultural institutions, other relevant stakeholders, such as hubs, living labs, and competence centres

Description:

This action supports the creation and consolidation of stakeholder networks within the Romanian pilot regions to enhance collaboration across sectors related to forests, culture, tourism, and education. The aim is to build a coordinated, multi-actor ecosystem that can sustain the goals of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route over time—beyond individual projects or institutions.

The regional networks may take the form of thematic working groups, hubs, or living labs, bringing together artisans, tourism professionals, educators, cultural operators, nature interpreters, local governments, NGOs, and innovation centres. These groups will share knowledge, co-design activities, and jointly develop ideas for education, promotion, funding, and local development.

Regular meetings, co-creation sessions, and joint events will help foster trust, reduce fragmentation, and improve visibility and capacity among participants. The networks will also serve as platforms for feedback, monitoring, and mobilisation around key Route priorities.

Main Stakeholders Involved:

- Artisans and craft cooperatives

- Cultural institutions and museums

- Local and regional tourism operators and DMOs

- Educational institutions (e.g., schools, folk art schools, local colleges)

- Forest administrators and environmental educators

- Local and county authorities

- NGOs and civil society organisations

- Innovation hubs, living labs, and competence centres

- Smart Development Center (PP12) – for facilitation and coordination

Output Indicators:

- Number of stakeholder groups or networks established (target: 2)

- Number of stakeholders participating in network meetings (min. 20)

- Number of meetings, co-design sessions, or forums held (min. 3)

- Number of joint initiatives or project ideas generated

Result Indicators:

- Increased cooperation and knowledge exchange among regional actors

- More coordinated and strategic approach to Route implementation in the region

- Strengthened identity and shared vision around the Route's values

- At least one regional stakeholder group sustained beyond the project period

4.9 Creation of the Cultural Route - Design and implement the Danube Wood Cultural Route, focusing on mapping key heritage sites, identifying important cultural and natural landmarks, and creating well-defined itineraries that showcase the uniqueness of the region. These itineraries should offer diverse experiences, ranging from historical woodcraft villages to ancient forests and key cultural monuments. Additionally, the creation of a clear and compelling brand identity will help distinguish the route as a premier sustainable tourism destination

Description:

This action represents a cornerstone of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route initiative, focusing on the design, structuring, and branding of the route in the Romanian pilot regions. It includes identifying and mapping the most relevant heritage sites, natural landmarks, and living traditions related to wood culture and forest landscapes.

The route will be developed as a set of thematic and geographical itineraries that reflect both ecological and cultural diversity—ranging from traditional woodworking villages and forest-related rituals to biodiversity hotspots, historic buildings, and craftspeople's workshops. These itineraries will be co-developed with local actors and aligned with existing tourism infrastructure and sustainability standards.

A clear, unified brand identity for the Route will be created to ensure visibility, coherence, and distinction in the tourism market. This will include a logo, design guidelines, signage elements, and storytelling tools that help visitors understand and appreciate the values of the Route. The cultural route will ultimately serve as a backbone for integrating many of the other actions—education, crafts, conservation, and community engagement—into a recognisable, structured experience.

Main Stakeholders Involved:

- WWF Romania (coordination and strategic content)

- Smart Development Center (PP12) – for branding, route design, and interpretation

- Local and county-level tourism authorities

- Destination management organisations (DMOs) and regional tourism networks

- Municipalities and local heritage custodians

- Forest administrators and biodiversity experts

- Artisans, museum curators, and cultural institutions

- Local communities and site managers

Output Indicators:

- Number of heritage and natural sites mapped and documented (target: 15–20)

- Number of thematic itineraries created (target: 3–5)

- Route design guidelines and interpretation package developed

- Route visual identity package finalised (logo, signage, templates)

Result Indicators:

- Establishment of a coherent and recognisable Cultural Route brand

- Increased regional and international visibility of Route locations

- Strengthened connections between cultural and natural heritage assets

- Integration of Route into regional tourism strategies and offerings

4.10 Capacity Building for Tourism Stakeholders - This includes training Programs for Local Stakeholders. To ensure that the benefits of tourism are widely shared, training and capacity-building programs will be provided for local guides, hospitality providers, and tourism entrepreneurs. These programs will focus on a range of topics, including product development, online marketing, heritage interpretation, and visitor management. Local operators will be encouraged to embrace green technologies and sustainable practices in their businesses, helping to create a tourism industry that supports both local communities and environmental conservation

Description:

This action supports the professional development of local actors involved in tourism across the Romanian pilot regions, ensuring that the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route becomes a high-quality, community-based, and environmentally responsible tourism product. The initiative will provide training and mentoring to a range of stakeholders—including local guides, guesthouse owners, crafts-based entrepreneurs, and cultural organisers.

Training programs will focus on practical topics such as sustainable tourism product development, online visibility and digital marketing, heritage interpretation techniques, visitor flow management, and hospitality standards. Special attention will be paid to environmental sustainability, encouraging participants to adopt green technologies, circular practices, and climate-sensitive services.

The programs will be tailored to local capacities and co-developed with tourism professionals, training providers, and cultural experts. Where possible, training will be linked to regional or national certification systems to ensure recognition and career development.

Main Stakeholders Involved:

- Local tourism operators and service providers

- Guesthouse and eco-lodge owners

- Nature and cultural guides

- Artisans and experience-based entrepreneurs

- Local action groups (GALs) and DMOs

- Regional tourism authorities

- Trainers, facilitators, and tourism schools

- Smart Development Center (PP12) – for training materials and outreach

- NGOs and private sector actors promoting green innovation

Output Indicators:

- Number of training sessions organised (target: 4–6)

- Number of local stakeholders trained (target: 30+)

- Number of training modules or toolkits developed (min. 3)

- Number of trainees who report increased skills or capacity

Result Indicators:

- Strengthened professionalism and sustainability of local tourism services

- Enhanced visitor experience across the Route's destinations

- Increased adoption of eco-friendly practices by rural tourism operators

- Greater inclusion of local communities in the Route's tourism value chain

4.11 Educational Campaigns - Develop and implement awareness-raising campaigns tailored to schools, local communities, and the general public. These campaigns will cover topics such as forest ecology, biodiversity, sustainable forestry, and the cultural heritage of wood. Materials will be adapted to

Description:

This action aims to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of forests, biodiversity, and wood-related cultural heritage through targeted educational campaigns. These campaigns will engage schools, local communities, and the general public using accessible, engaging, and age-appropriate formats.

Topics will include forest ecology, species protection, sustainable forestry practices, climate resilience, traditional uses of wood, and the values promoted by the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route. Campaigns will be adapted to a variety of contexts—from classrooms and local festivals to digital platforms and exhibitions.

The materials developed will be interactive and multilingual, including printed guides, games, videos, and digital tools to ensure inclusivity across different audience groups and regions. By linking local knowledge with broader sustainability goals, the campaigns will support long-term awareness and behavioural change.

Main Stakeholders Involved:

- Schools and educational authorities (primary, secondary, and vocational)

- Teachers, environmental educators, and heritage interpreters

- Local authorities and community centres

- Environmental NGOs and forest education specialists

- Media partners (for local and regional dissemination)

- Cultural institutions and museums

- Smart Development Center (PP12) – for educational content design and communication

- Local youth associations and volunteer networks

Output Indicators:

- Number of awareness campaigns developed and implemented (target: 3)

- Number of educational materials created (e.g., leaflets, videos, games – min. 5 types)

- Number of schools and community groups involved (min. 10)

- Number of public events or outreach actions conducted (min. 4)

Result Indicators:

- Improved public knowledge on forest and wood-related heritage topics

- Increased engagement of young people and educators in Route-related activities

- Strengthened visibility of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route in local discourse

- Foundations laid for future educational programmes and partnerships

5. Implementation plan and monitoring system

5.1 Monitoring framework

To ensure the effectiveness of sustainable forest management and cultural heritage protection, it is essential to develop a comprehensive monitoring system. Appropriate indicators and metrics help objectively assess the progress and efficiency of Actionable measures.

5.2 Evaluation plan

To ensure the effectiveness of actions, a well-developed evaluation plan is essential, enabling the regular review and fine-tuning of outcomes:

- Prepare annual reports on the progress of strategic objectives.

- Hold regular consultations with stakeholders to evaluate results and determine necessary adjustments.

- Involve independent experts to ensure the credibility of evaluations.

- Conduct impact assessments to analyse long-term sustainability and economic effects.

5.3 Action indicators

The table below shows the measurable indicators for the implementation of the actions:

Measure (number)	Indicator		How (method)	Who (PP or other acronym)
	Measurement unit	Value		
Action 1	Number of workshops and forums held	2	A 10-15-page summary on each workshop.	
Action 1	Number of participants at events	30	Record of participants.	
Action 1	Number of guided tours conducted	2	Organise guided tours with the help of stakeholders (i.e. Natural Parks). A 5-10-page summary on each guided tour.	
Actions 1	Number of traditional agricultural techniques demonstrated	2	Demonstrate the techniques at the workshops to participants and write a 5-page document on the two techniques.	

Action 1	Number of villages involved in orchard preservation efforts	1	Support a village in initiating the plantation and nurturing of 10 native/local trees (fruit bearing or wild). Document the type of trees, and the technique of the plantation (5 pages).	
Action 2	Number of woodworking heritage sites documented	15	Document regional wood-related industries, and key locations of traditional craftsmanship. (20 pages total)	
Action 2	Number of traditional woodcraft professions showcased	5	Workshops/guided tours should introduce woodworking professionals who keep traditions alive. Involve 5 professionals during the guided tours and workshops.	
Action 2	Number of participants in guided tours and workshops	100	Invite schools and other local communities to the events. Make a record of participants.	
Action 2	Online platform reach	500	Besides the project website, use social media platforms and the disseminative capabilities of the stakeholders involved, to promote the platform. Make a record of website visitors.	

13. Figure: Indicators for the implementation of actions

6. Potential Funding Opportunities

The implementation of the Danube Wood(s) Regional Action Plan in Romania requires diversified and sustained funding tailored to the specific ecological, cultural, and socio-economic realities of Romania's forest regions. Forests and wood-based cultural heritage contribute significantly to climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation, sustainable rural development, and the preservation of traditional skills. However, these contributions remain underfinanced under current EU and national funding frameworks.

To unlock the full potential of forest-based solutions and ensure long-term sustainability, Romania must proactively engage with both existing EU instruments and emerging opportunities under the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The country also needs to design targeted national schemes to channel support toward multifunctional forestry, wood-based innovation, and forest-linked cultural infrastructure.

EU-Level Funding Opportunities

6.1. A Dedicated EU Forest Financing Mechanism (proposed):
Romania supports the call for a dedicated EU funding stream for forests, placing sustainable forest management and forest-based bioeconomy on par with agriculture, energy, and climate investment frameworks. Such a mechanism should reward ecosystem service delivery, climate resilience, and biodiversity preservation.

6.2. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP):
Under Pillar II – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), forestry measures remain essential. Romania can further exploit these by supporting:

- Afforestation and reforestation with native species;

- Forest-environment and climate services;

- Forest resilience and fire prevention;

- Support for small forest owners and forest cooperatives.

6.3. LIFE Programme:
The LIFE programme offers direct funding for forest biodiversity conservation, Natura 2000 site management, and ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change. Romanian NGOs and local authorities can use LIFE to fund demonstration projects tied to cultural forest landscapes, sustainable tourism, and habitat restoration.

6.4. Horizon Europe & European Innovation Council:
Support is available for research, innovation, and pilot actions in areas such as:

- Traditional knowledge and green crafts;

- Bio-based materials and circular wood-based economies;

- Ecosystem services valuation and forest governance models.

6.5. Interreg & EU Cohesion Policy Instruments:
Cross-border and regional programmes (e.g., Interreg Danube, Interreg Europe) offer support for transnational cooperation in cultural heritage, eco-tourism, and climate adaptation in forest regions. These can directly reinforce actions under the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route.

6.6. EU Missions and Green Deal-related Instruments:
 The EU Mission for Adaptation to Climate Change and the New European Bauhaus provide pathways for funding nature-based solutions, forest-related architecture, and cultural heritage valorisation.

National and Regional Funding Opportunities

6.7. National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and Just Transition Fund:
 Romania's green and digital priorities under the NRRP can be leveraged for:

● Forest digitisation and monitoring systems;

● Training and infrastructure for sustainable wood-based tourism;

● Forest-based bioeconomy hubs and SME support.

6.8. Environmental Fund & National Forestry Fund:
 Existing Romanian mechanisms such as the Environmental Fund can be used for:

● Ecological restoration of degraded forests;

● Urban-rural forest connectivity;

● Climate adaptation in high-risk forest zones.

6.9. Public-Private Partnerships and Green Finance Tools:
 Romania should explore new mechanisms such as:

● Payments for ecosystem services (PES);

● Carbon credits linked to afforestation and conservation;

● Social impact bonds for forest-based community development.

6.10. Local Development and Tourism Grants:
 County councils and local governments in Maramureș and Transylvanian Highlands can mobilize local development grants, tourism taxes, or public-private agreements to support the conservation of wooden churches, traditional workshops, and cultural tourism trails.

a) Strategic Recommendations

To ensure financing coherence and long-term impact, the following actions are proposed:

● Advocate for dedicated forest support under the EU MFF 2028–2034;

● Mainstream forest priorities across CAP, LIFE, and cohesion policy instruments;

● Develop a national framework for compensating ecosystem services provided by forests;

● Facilitate access to EU funding for small stakeholders through capacity-building;

● Align funding calls with the goals of the Danube Wood(s) Cultural Route.

Through coordinated efforts between public authorities, civil society, and the private sector, Romania can ensure that its forests and cultural landscapes are no longer underfunded but strategically empowered to contribute to Europe's green future.

7. Conclusion

- Summary of key points

- Future directions and recommendations

7.1 Addressing Regulatory Gaps to Support Local Access to Forest Resources and Value-Added Processing

The effective integration of forests into regional development strategies—particularly through the Cultural Wood Route—requires closing several persistent regulatory and policy gaps. These relate to legal clarity, funding instruments, and institutional coordination. The following actions are proposed to strengthen access to forest resources for local communities, entrepreneurs, and cultural stakeholders:

A. Promote High-Value Timber Processing and Define Access for Forest-Dependent Communities

To maximize the economic and environmental benefits of Romania's forest resources, two interlinked legal measures are necessary:

- **Promoting high-value timber processing**: The Timber Sales Regulation should incorporate clear criteria that prioritize value-added timber use chains. Timber should be directed toward long-lasting, high-end products that generate substantial local economic value. This approach aligns with cascading utilization principles—ensuring that wood is processed progressively into products with the longest lifespan and highest socio-economic return. It supports reduced harvesting pressure, encourages nature-based forestry, and incentivizes the production of high-value timber assortments.
- **Recognizing forest-dependent communities**: Romania should develop specific legal procedures for identifying and designating "forest-dependent communities." These procedures must be complemented by a dedicated regulatory framework to facilitate their fair access to forest resources. Such access should support traditional livelihoods, cultural practices, and sustainable wood use—especially in rural and mountainous areas—while respecting conservation objectives.

These measures lay the groundwork for a sustainable, inclusive forest-based bioeconomy that integrates traditional knowledge, economic resilience, and biodiversity protection.

B. Improve Regulatory Coherence and Policy Alignment

There is a pressing need to harmonize sectoral and inter-sectoral policies related to forestry, rural development, cultural heritage, and tourism. This includes:

- Revising outdated secondary legislation to align with the 2024 Forest Code and the National Forest Strategy 2030,
- Introducing tailored provisions for small-scale processors and woodcraft artisans,
- Embedding access and benefit-sharing principles—drawn from international biodiversity conventions—into national forest governance.

C. Enhance Access to Resources for Local Producers and Cultural Actors

To empower traditional artisans, SMEs, and local entrepreneurs involved in wood-based value chains, the following mechanisms are recommended:

- Design public procurement and auction criteria that reward local socio-economic contributions and advanced processing levels,
- Enable direct wood access rights where appropriate (e.g., building on the Moți Law model),
- Develop support schemes for raw material access and initial processing infrastructure for rural producers.

D. Mobilize Financial Instruments and Incentives

Romania should leverage EU funding mechanisms under the *General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)* and *de minimis aid* frameworks to support rural woodcraft, sustainable forestry, and cultural tourism. This entails:

- Promoting simplified and pre-approved aid schemes for SMEs in the forestry and cultural sectors,
- Advocating for EU-level dedicated funding for forest-based development, comparable to agricultural support under CAP,
- Exploring the establishment of an EU labeling scheme for wood-based products tied to cultural identity and sustainable sourcing.

E. Foster Integrated Territorial Strategies

To ensure alignment across sectors, any initiatives linked to forests—whether ecological, cultural, or economic—should be developed through participatory and integrated strategies. These strategies should:

- Involve both local authorities and national stakeholders in cross-sector planning,
- Link forest conservation, education, cultural promotion, and tourism into a cohesive development model,
- Build synergies with EU Biodiversity and Forest Strategies 2030, and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

F. Promote Knowledge Sharing and Transparency

Access to forest resources must be accompanied by open access to science-based information, technical guidance, and support platforms for communities and entrepreneurs. National institutions should:

- Disseminate tools and training on sustainable forest use, bioeconomy practices, and forest-related heritage valorization,

- Encourage data-driven policymaking and open consultations on forestry-related reforms.

These policy directions provide the foundation for strengthening Romania's position within the Danube Wood Cultural Route. They ensure that local actors—particularly in rural and mountainous areas—are not only protected, but actively supported in transforming forest resources into resilient, culturally rich, and sustainable development opportunities.