



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**Commission for  
Citizenship, Governance,  
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**CIVEX**

# **Localising the green agenda in the Eastern Partnership**



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# List of Abbreviations

AF- Adaptation Fund  
CBD- Convention on Biological Diversity  
COP-26- 26<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties  
CO<sub>2</sub>- Carbon dioxide  
CoM – Covent of Mayors  
CTC- Covenant Territorial Coordinators  
CS- Covenant Supporters  
CNC- Covenant National Coordinators  
EBRD- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development  
EU- European Union  
EU-Gaia- EU green agriculture initiative in Armenia  
EaP- Eastern Partnership  
EIB- European Investment Bank  
E5P- Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership  
FUAs- Functional urban areas  
GEF- Global Environment Facility  
GCF- Green Climate Fund  
GHG- Greenhouse gases  
GCAPs- Green City Action Plans  
GDP- Gross Domestic Product  
ICLEI- Local Governments for Sustainability  
KfW- Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau  
LED- Light Emitting Diode  
NDCs- Nationally Determined Contributions  
ODS- Ozone Depleting Substance  
POPs- Persistent organic pollutants  
SECAPs- Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans  
SEFFs- Sustainable Energy Financing Facilities  
SDSN- Sustainable Development Network Solution  
SDGs- sustainable Development Goals  
SME- Small and Medium Enterprises  
SWD- Joint Staff Working Document  
TEN-T- The Trans-European Transport Network  
UN- United Nations  
UNDP- United Nations Development Program  
WRI- World Resources Institute

# 1.State of Play

## 1.1 Background

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was created in 2009 with the aim of strengthening institutional, economic and political relations between the European Union (EU) and the six EaP countries, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Since then, the geopolitical agenda has changed several times and recently – rather drastically.

The partnership with the 6 EaP countries has originally focused on priorities other than the environment, ranging from supporting the democratisation processes and strengthening the rule of law to addressing visa issues, enhancing trade and market access. However, as these priorities started being addressed, including through bilateral Partnership Agreements and Association Agreements, the scope of cooperation broadened.

Energy and infrastructures have often dominated the negotiation process. Most EaP countries have been striving towards energy efficiency, while attempting to loosen the ties with the Russian Federation as their main energy supplier. Unlike most of the EaP countries, Azerbaijan is the only one with high oil and gas extraction, which makes it fully independent from other countries when it comes to energy sources.

Among the other priority areas of cooperation, EU and EaP have identified the need to support innovation of obsolete infrastructures and, in specific cases, reconstruction from the different conflicts that have taken place within the region. It is worth noting that the Partnership Agreements signed with the six EaP countries, in a way or another, already integrated some environmental elements. These generally included biodiversity protection, agriculture and forest management, but did not fail to touch upon other important matters, such as pollution reduction, waste management, safe water etc. Promotion of favourable conditions for the bilateral trade relations and investments in specific areas, encompassing indirectly related to the environment fields such as export of food products, was also generally considered. Furthermore, energy related matters made part of the overall agenda while climate change often went unnoticed.

With time, it became evident that the Partnership countries are not as homogeneous as they were initially thought to be, and that their differences in terms of needs and aspirations, played a role. Nevertheless, cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Partnership has been growing and the identified priorities have been increasingly permeated by the growing need to address environmental

issues, especially through integration of environmental concerns into various sectors of economic and social life.

## 1.2 Greening the Policy Agenda

In 2017, the Eastern Partnership Summit endorsed 20 deliverables for 2020. These deliverables were clearly mostly oriented towards economic development, governance and social targets, see Table 1. It was at this time, though, that an early integration of “green” elements into economic sectors started to be explicitly mentioned in policy statements. It is important to note that back in 2017 the EU Green Deal had not been issued yet. One of its targets specifically linked energy sector to the climate crisis, namely: ‘Enhance energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.’

During those years, awareness of the key environmental issues had been steadily increasing among decision-makers and, coherently, international processes and agreements developed recommendations and approaches to integrate environmental concerns into national, regional and local policy processes. The EU has always been at the forefront in these negotiations and provided support to their development and implementation. Similarly, the EaP countries supported and adopted a number of global policy objectives and instruments, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change and the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

*Table 1: EaP’s 20 deliverables for 2020*

### **Cross-cutting deliverables**

- Higher level engagement with civil society organisations
- Increase gender equality and non-discrimination
- Strengthen strategic communication, support plurality and independence of media

### **Stronger economy**

- Improve investment and business environment, unlock SMEs' growth potential
- Address gaps in access to finance and financial infrastructure
- Create new job opportunities at the local and regional level
- Harmonise digital markets
- Support intra-regional trade among partner countries and the EU

### **Stronger governance**

- Strengthen the rule of law and anti-corruption mechanisms
- Support the implementation of key judicial reforms
- Support implementation of public administration reform
- Stronger security cooperation

### **Stronger connectivity**

- Extend the TEN-T core networks, transport
- Increase energy supply security
- Enhance energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Support the environment and adaptation to climate change

### **Stronger society**

- Progress with visa liberalisation dialogues and mobility partnerships



- Strengthen investment in young people’s skills, entrepreneurship and employability
- Establish an EaP European school
- Integrate EaP and EU research, innovation systems and programmes

Increasingly, “green” recommendations have started to appear in policy statements at the national level in the EaP countries, for instance, when referring to addressing climate change through greening the sectors of energy, including energy efficiency and renewable energy; or to developing sustainable transport, green infrastructures and sustainable cities, etc. This process has also been facilitated for the EaP countries as they have been involved in and benefitted from their participation in various global and regional policy mechanisms, targeting sustainability, green transition and investments (e.g., EBRD, Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, UNDP, etc.).

The Commission’s Communication presenting the European Green Deal was issued in December 2019. It is developed around 8 elements, see Table 2, which clearly and explicitly highlight critical relations and positive v/s negative implications each sector has with the environment.

*Table 2: European Green Deal Elements*

1. Increasing the EU’s Climate ambition for 2030 and 2050
2. Supplying clean, affordable and secure energy
3. Mobilising industry for a clean and circular economy
4. Building and renovating in an energy resource efficient way
5. Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility
6. From “Farm to Fork”: a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system
7. Preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity
8. A zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment

The adoption of the EU Green Deal for the six EaP countries could be seen as a turning point for policy making, as well as an indication that the Green Deal was to become a guide to transforming the economy and making it more sustainable. The Green Deal also became a new approach to design and implementation of cooperation projects/initiatives with the EaP, according to which environment components should always be integrated, notwithstanding the target sector and the issues addressed. ‘Greening a sector’ becomes officially a synonym of reducing its impact on the environment, making it more resilient to changes and, at the same time, contributing to sustainability and to improving human life. Finally, the Green Deal has the open ambition to go beyond the EU borders and become a driver to support neighbouring countries to address climate change and biodiversity loss. The Green Deal can also become the framework to mobilise the EU expertise and financial resources to support neighbours and partners towards a more sustainable path.

## 1.3 The Green Deal objectives and the renewed EaP agenda

The Eastern European Partnership, which tends to mirror EU's flagship strategies, also adopted the European Green Deal. Thanks to this Deal, the green transition became high in the EU-EaP negotiation agenda. The importance of greening the economic sectors is also visible in the Agenda of the Eastern Partnership Post 2020 and the following document Joint Staff Working Document (SWD), Recovery, resilience and reform: Post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities, which supplemented the March 2020 paper in the light of changed circumstances due to the pandemic, without fundamentally amending the priorities, however.

*Table 3: EaP Post 2020 priorities*

<p><b>i) Together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies</b>            Trade and economic integration            Investment and access to finance            Enhanced transport interconnectivity            Investing in people and knowledge societies</p>	<p>Biodiversity and economy's natural assets base            Strengthening energy security and nuclear safety            Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility</p>
<p><b>ii) Together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security</b>            Judicial Reform            Accountable, transparent and efficient public administration            Tackling fraud, corruption and economic crime            Combating organised crime and strengthening security            Cyber resilience and cybercrime</p>	<p><b>iv) Together for a resilient digital transformation</b>            Digital infrastructure            e-Governance            Digital economy and innovation            Cyber resilience – Cybersecurity</p>
<p><b>iii) Together towards environmental and climate resilience</b>            Benefits for people's health and wellbeing            Circular economy, climate neutrality and green growth</p>	<p><b>v) Together for resilient, fair and inclusive societies.</b>            Civil Society and youth participation            Independent media and fact-based information            Democracy            Protection of human rights and promotion of gender equality            Mobility            Health resilience</p>

The resulting **Economic and Investment Plan** mobilises €2.3 billion from the EU budget in grants, blending and guarantees, to the post-pandemic recovery and to sustainably transform the economies of the Eastern Partnership to make them more resilient and integrated. In addition, the plan could leverage up to €17 billion in public and private investments, which are considered essential to achieve the objectives set. All this highlights the great importance attached to this strategy by both the EU and the EaP.

The **Recovery, resilience and reform: post-2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities** has identified five priorities (see *Table 3*) and the **Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership** presents top 10 targets for 2025 (see *Table 4*). In addition to this, for each of the six countries, the Economic and Investment Plan has further identified several Flagship Initiatives (see *Table 5*).

*Table 4: Top Ten Targets for 2025*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1. Investing in competitive and innovative economies</b><br/>500 000 SMEs supported</p> <p><b>2. Investing in sustainable and smart connectivity</b><br/>3 000 km of priority roads and railways built or upgraded</p> <p><b>3. Investing in people and knowledge societies</b><br/>70 000 individual mobility opportunities for students and staff, researchers, young people and youth workers</p> <p><b>4. Investing in sustainable energy</b><br/>250 000 households reduce energy consumption by at least 20%</p> <p><b>5. Investing in environment &amp; climate</b><br/>Another 3 million people gain access to safe water services, quality monitored and improved in 300 cities</p> <p><b>6. Investing in the rule of law</b><br/>All high-level officials declare their economic assets and these declarations are verified</p> | <p><b>7. Investing in security and cyber resilience</b><br/>A strengthened framework in place for identifying and addressing hybrid threats; strengthened partners' capacities to increase cyber resilience and tackle cyber-crime, including through fully implementing the Council of Europe Budapest Convention on cyber crime</p> <p><b>8. Investing in inclusive, gender equal and diverse societies, and strategic communication</b><br/>2 500 local Civil Society organisations, 120 independent media outlets and 2 000 journalists supported</p> <p><b>9. Investing in digital transformation</b><br/>80% of households have affordable access to high-speed internet</p> <p><b>10. Investing in health resilience</b><br/>850 000 health workers vaccinated and benefit from improved therapeutics, equipment and working conditions</p> |
|---|--|

Table 5: Overview of the Flagship Initiatives in the Economic and Investment Plan

Top Ten Targets for 2025	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
<b>1. Investing in competitive and innovative economies</b>	<b>Flagship 1:</b> Supporting an innovative and competitive economy: direct support to 30 000 SMEs	<b>Flagship 3:</b> Supporting an innovative and competitive economy – direct support to 25 000 SMEs	<b>Flagship 1:</b> Supporting an innovative and competitive economy – direct support to 20 000 SMEs	<b>Flagship 3:</b> Economic Recovery – Supporting 80 000 SMEs to reap the full benefits of the DCFTA	<b>Flagship 1:</b> Supporting an innovative and competitive economy – direct support to 50 000 Moldovan SMEs	<b>Flagship 1:</b> Supporting an innovative and competitive economy – direct support to 100 000 SMEs
<b>2. Investing in sustainable and smart connectivity</b>	<b>Flagship 2:</b> Boosting connectivity & socio-economic development: the North-South Corridor	<b>Flagship 1:</b> Green connectivity: supporting the green port of Baku; <b>Flagship 2:</b> Digital connectivity: supporting the digital transport corridor	<b>Flagship 2:</b> Improving transport connectivity and facilitating EU-Belarus trade	<b>Flagship 1:</b> Black Sea Connectivity – Deploying a submarine electricity cable and fibre optic cable; <b>Flagship 2:</b> Transport across the Black Sea – Improving physical connections between Georgia and the EU	<b>Flagship 2:</b> Boosting EU-Moldova trade - construction of an Inland Freight Terminal in Chisinau; <b>Flagship 4:</b> Improving connectivity – anchoring Moldova in the Trans-European Network for Transport	<b>Flagship 3:</b> Improving connectivity by upgrading border crossing points
<b>3. Investing in people and knowledge societies</b>					<b>Flagship 5:</b> Investing in Moldova's human capital and preventing “brain drain” – modernisation of school infrastructure and implementation of the National Education Strategy	

4. Investing in sustainable energy	<b>Flagship 5:</b> Investing in a green Yerevan: energy efficiency and green buses		<b>Flagship 4:</b> Supporting a green Belarus – energy efficiency, waste management and infrastructure		<b>Flagship 3:</b> Increasing energy efficiency – expanding the refurbishment of district heating systems in residential buildings (condominiums) in Chisinau and Balti	<b>Flagship 5:</b> Increasing energy efficiency – and support for renewable hydrogen
5. Investing in environment & climate	<b>Flagship 4:</b> Building resilience of the Southern regions	<b>Flagship 5:</b> Smarter and greener cities				
6. Investing in the rule of law			<b>Flagship 5:</b> Investing in a democratic, transparent and accountable Belarus			
7. Investing in security and cyber resilience						
8. Investing in inclusive, gender equal and diverse societies, and strategic communication		<b>Flagship 4:</b> Innovative Rural Development				<b>Flagship 2:</b> Economic transition for rural areas – assistance to more than 10 000 small farms
9. Investing in digital transformation	<b>Flagship 3:</b> Investing in digital transformation, innovation, science and technology		<b>Flagship 3:</b> Boosting innovation and the digital transformation	<b>Flagship 4:</b> Digital Connectivity for Citizens – Developing high-speed broadband infrastructure for 1,000 rural settlements		<b>Flagship 4:</b> Boosting the digital transformation – modernising public IT infrastructure

<b>10. Investing in health resilience</b>				<b>Flagship 5:</b> Improved Air Quality – Helping over 1 million people in Tbilisi breathe cleaner air		
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## 1.4 Coherence between post-COP26 and SDGs' agenda and the EaP country-specific flagship initiatives

Scaling the Paris Agreement and the SDGs agenda was the key objective of the recent COP-26 in Glasgow, which was concluded with the following four action points:

1. Secure global net zero by mid-century and limit global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees
2. Adapt to protect communities and natural habitats
3. Mobilise finance
4. Work together to deliver

As of 2021, the EaP countries have been updating their NDCs towards improving their domestic targets and better align them with the global agendas. Several countries have been working on their goals in this respect and benefitted from the external assistance in their elaboration (e.g., by initiatives such as EU4Climate or by the UN agencies). Yet, critical voices (from the EU Eastern members) emerged that the outcomes of COP26 did not sufficiently reflect the real capacities of the EaP and Eastern European countries to address the issues. In this context, less wealthy countries may struggle with the need to compromise their industrial growth against the necessary resource efficiency, imposed by the necessity to curb emissions. This is particularly visible in the area of energy, which is characterised by a high dependence on the supply from Russia and by a large predominance of high-carbon sources such as coal, oil and gas. The transition of the industry towards greener energy and new resource efficiency management models is challenging, requires significant investments and may not yield expected benefits immediately. In addition, despite many efforts, public awareness of climate issues in the EaP countries remains limited, therefore, the green transition may require intensified efforts in this area.

Against this backdrop, the flagship initiatives identified in the **Economic and Investment Plan** offer investments opportunities for greening the energy sector, including diversification of energy sources. Four countries of the EaP have clearly dedicated flagship initiatives for clean energy (Armenia, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine), while the other two did not focus on those (Azerbaijan, Georgia). *Greening* the energy sector is a key approach for the EaP countries to meet the climate targets, since all the NDCs identified the energy sector as the main responsible for GHG emissions.

As addressed above, climate issues are very high in the EU agenda: they represent a key element of the Green Deal and have played a key role in the negotiations

with the EaP since the early 2000s. Some Partnership Agreements that preceded the establishment of the EaP previously mentioned climate as a key issue to be addressed. With the recent developments in the global climate process, for instance with the entry into force of the Paris Agreement in 2016 and the specific requirement of identifying national action plans within the NDC process, cooperation on climate change has become more streamlined, transparent and effective.

On the one hand, the development of NDCs has forced governments to identify gaps and priorities to be addressed and has supported the process of streamlining different funds and contributions towards the real national priorities, promoting synergies and avoiding duplications. For instance, the priority areas defined by the EaP countries in their flagship initiatives largely focus on the needs to invest into greening diverse types of infrastructure. At the same time, the other funding mechanisms (e.g. GCF, GEF, AF) seem to be more devoted to dealing with environment and natural resource management, including such sectoral focus as agriculture, forestry and water management. In addition to this, the process that needs to be put in place at national level to develop an NDC has revealed to be key not only to identify and guide funding priorities but also in raising awareness of the different issues related to climate change.

Some progress can also be observed in the EaP countries concerning the SDGs. Several countries integrated national sustainable development goals into their national level frameworks and strategies. Governments have already started working on improving relevant legislation. For instance, in Armenia the government put an emphasis on the development of the comprehensive Armenia Transformation Strategy 2020-2050 and over 30 sectoral strategies in support of the implementation of SDGs. The flagship initiatives identified in the Economic and Investment Plan for the EaP countries will possibly fill in the gaps and provide a necessary contribution to achieving the respective goals.

The EaP countries score “high” and “very high” in the UN Human Development Index; however, many areas still show room for improvement. This particularly concerns democratic governance, rule of law, socio-economic development and post-conflict recovery. The analysis of the flagship initiatives identified in the Post-2020 EaP Agenda shows the attempts to fulfil those gaps. Notably, the Economic and Investment Plan promotes investments in socio-economic development in all the EaP countries, especially through support to SMEs and creation of green jobs. The direct emphasis on democracy and rule of law is clearly put and pursued with a dedicated flagship initiative in Belarus. When everything is considered, little seems to be devoted directly to address environmental issues.



The Eastern Partnership Index monitors EaP countries' *approximation* to the EU legal system (Acquis Communautaire).<sup>1</sup> The Index focuses on democracy and good governance, policy convergence and sustainable development, and includes data on environment, climate, energy and other themes of relevance to the green agenda. This Index provides an interesting indication of thematic policy development at national and regional level. This general indication, however, cannot be considered sufficient to draw a comprehensive picture of the level of implementation of the green agenda at national and local level nor to identify existing gaps. To do so, a deeper analysis of specific cases, recognizing the specificity of each territory and their social dimensions, and the identification of failures and success stories, could be helpful.

As previously discussed, areas related to social issues and democracy have been central to the EU-EaP negotiations since the beginning. It is noteworthy that while the Green Deal does not directly address social issues, one could argue that its implementation would contribute to achieving social targets, even if indirectly. For instance, improving transport infrastructure and broadband connectivity will enable a greater mobility of citizens and bring benefits to businesses including by facilitating a wider access to larger markets (at a national or transnational scale). In turn, such development helps to secure opportunities for people living in the EaP countries and their access to information, and by doing so, indirectly contribute to improving democracy, generating incomes and accessing services that were previously beyond their reach.

Unfortunately, only in two countries (Azerbaijan and Ukraine) some attention is paid to supporting development of their respective rural areas. As for a significant effort dedicated to the environment and biodiversity, it still remains somewhat missing in the flagship initiatives in all countries.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>



## **2. Analysis: Level of ambition / progress / engagement regarding the green plan in the renewed EaP agenda**

### **2.1 Overview of the achievements of the 2020 process**

In assessing the level of implementation of the 20 Deliverables for 2020 (see Tab 1), the Joint Staff Working Document<sup>2</sup> showed good progress, specifically in areas relating to “stronger economy”, such as support for SMEs and creation of sustaining jobs. Progress on social issues relates mostly to people-to-people contacts, supporting academic and youth mobility through Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020. Important achievements are also reported in the field of connectivity, energy efficiency and nature protection, as well as in the governance sector, for instance, increased access to public services. The document also states that challenges remain in some fields and that climate mitigation and environment need to be addressed further.

Some of the greener achievements corresponding to the 20 Deliverables for 2020, worth mentioning are the following:

- The EU4Business, the EU initiative supporting SMEs in the EaP countries to realise their full potential and boost economic growth, has been instrumental to finance some “green” success stories including reducing the barriers in access to markets; for example, supporting eco-friendly production or sustainability integration with production, support of training in planning, brand development, legal standards for online sales, packaging distribution etc. The Green Deal recognises the importance of supporting SMEs to facilitate the achievement of the deal itself.
- The Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for the implementation and development of a Europe-wide network of railway lines, roads, inland waterways, maritime shipping routes, ports, airports and railroad terminals, offers a great deal of opportunities to be “greener”. The achievements within this theme also contribute to the *Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility* element of the Green Deal. Green achievements have been mentioned in respect to three countries, namely Belarus, Ukraine and

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<sup>2</sup> SWD 2021 Annex 3, available at

[https://www.eas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd\\_2021\\_186\\_f1\\_joint\\_staff\\_working\\_paper\\_en\\_v2\\_p1\\_1356457\\_0.pdf](https://www.eas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_186_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1356457_0.pdf)

Moldova, that support a process to develop multimodal transport and low-carbon transport systems in the border regions.

- A field where several achievements have been recorded is climate change mitigation: energy efficiency, renewable and GHG reduction. Here, the support provided by the EU4Climate helped countries develop clear strategies and commit to ambitious reduction targets within their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Moldova and Georgia, especially, submitted more ambitious updated NDCs. Belarus through EU4Climate is being supported by the UNDP to facilitate access to the Green Climate Fund.
- The Covenant of Mayors was also key to involving a large number of local authorities (almost 450) to cutting CO2 emissions. Moreover, the Covenant of Mayors East (CoM East) has been dedicated to introducing the EU climate and energy initiative to the EaP countries. It supports local authorities in the green transition of energy policies, improving supply security and contributions to climate mitigation and adaptation. The signatory municipalities committed to reduce CO2 emissions by at least 30% until 2030. The achievement of those goals is supported with key strategic instruments such as the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs), networking, capacity building and monitoring activities.

Greening the energy sector is now one of the key priorities globally, EU and EaP including. Energy is normally considered the prime responsible for GHG emissions, hence greening this sector has positive implications on national mitigation strategies. In line with this, the energy sector is often highly relevant for achieving countries' NDCs targets.

The key initiative in support of this sector is the Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P), which provided over €164 million throughout 40 projects from various donors, and leveraging almost €1.2 billion investments. Project distribution varies widely from 1 (Azerbaijan) to 26 (Ukraine). Themes are also several, including energy efficiency in public buildings, heating rehabilitation, solid waste and city transports.

Other initiatives for energy efficiency include the High-Level Energy Efficiency Initiative (Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine), supported by the Energy Efficiency Fund for residential buildings. A success story is recorded in Ukraine where heating of residential buildings was estimated to account for around 50% of all energy losses. The Energy Efficiency Fund, launched in 2019 by the Ukrainian government and the EU, facilitated energy efficiency renovations and modernisation of the housing sector, leading to a cleaner environment and

reduced emissions. The fund subsidised about 70% of the costs of the building renovations and installation of individual improved heating systems.

Among worthwhile EaP countries' achievements in this direction, the following legal acts may be brought to light: Ukraine's Law "On the principles of monitoring, reporting and verification of greenhouse gas emissions", adopted in 2019, and Georgia's laws on energy efficiency and on energy performance of buildings.

Developing green cities is also a key theme of the Green Deal and of the EaP as a whole. A success story is that of energy efficient and smart street lighting in Moldova, where modernisation with LED lamps and smart monitoring in the cities of Cantemir and Ocnița improved the lives of about 12,000 citizens. The new system allowed for reduced running costs and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, as well as contributed to safer streets.

Increasing energy supply security, which focuses on reducing the dependency from foreign oil, considers the use of gas as an intermediary step to decarbonisation. Some achievements have been recorded in this area through infrastructural developments, e.g. the Southern Gas Corridor and the Ungheni-Chisinau pipeline. While this area of work can be contributing to greening the economy, it should be noted that formally energy security is not so highly recognised in the Green Deal.

Direct support to the environment and adaptation to climate change is also a theme where progress has been made.

Proven development is achieved with water related issues, in enabling modern water policy to be applicable at a river basin level over 500,000 km<sup>2</sup>. During this period, Armenia, Belarus and Moldova adopted four river basin plans, reaching over 30 million people. In addition, water data portals are now introduced in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In Georgia notably, the National Environmental Agency can now conduct state-of-the-art water analysis to advance water quality and protection of river basins.

The Black Sea, a key environmental hotspot in the region, received funds for large-scale field surveys and litter mapping. Georgia and Ukraine also designed their national marine strategies in line with EU law.

A significant step forward has been taken apropos environmental assessments almost everywhere throughout the EaP: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine updated their laws on environmental assessment of strategies, plans and investment projects while Armenia is in the process of doing so.

In this very field, support to SMEs has been an important part of the assistance provided. An assessment of the status of resource efficiency and clean production has been carried out on the basis of approximately 80 pilot enterprises, with the double objective of achieving savings and grasping green opportunities. Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine integrated its outcomes into their SME development strategies; the latter two went further and introduced the assessment findings into their respective public procurement policies and action plans.

Through collaboration with the European Environment Agency, environmental data from all the six countries are available online via an Internet-Based Tracking Tool.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the EaP countries identified their Emerald Network sites and approved 80% of them.

The overview of the achievements recorded for the 20 Deliverables for 2020 demonstrates significant efforts being devoted to greening the policy agenda, in line with the elements of the green deal. A large emphasis has been placed on addressing the elements of climate change and energy, harnessing synergies between these sectors. An efficient approach to developing synergies and effectiveness of funds, is that of streamlining priorities and interventions through the NDC process. In this case, donors can develop initiatives and cooperation on the basis of needs and pledges that a recipient country has made as part of the Paris Agreement. Clearly, a strategic approach to supporting this process would be to provide technical assistance in the development of NDCs.

Some interesting work has been initiated apropos transport and smart cities. We now know that these two themes, extremely relevant in the EaP countries, have grown in relevance in the post 2020. A few important umbrella networks emerged globally, encompassing the EaP countries' cities as well, with an objective to channel support and funding towards green transition. These are for instance facilitated by the Covenant of Mayors, ICLEI, the World Resources Institute (WRI), and Sustainable Development Network Solution (SDSN), among others. Among the important players we should also mention international financing institutions, such as for instance, the EBRD. Under the umbrella of the platform "EBRD Green Cities", it has managed to involve several cities across the EaP and enabled them to connect to a global mechanism of exchange of practices.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data>

The core activities of the CoM East include capacity building to strengthen several groups such as the Covenant National Coordinators (CNC), Covenant Territorial Coordinators (CTC), Covenant Supporters (CS) and signatories. A country helpdesk is also normally available to provide technical and administrative assistance. Apart from this, communication, know-how exchange, monitoring and networking are the key areas where EaP countries benefit from the CoM East. By these means, local authorities are supported in developing SECAPs.

An important part of the activities are also demonstration projects. Two calls were launched (in 2014 and 2018), for EaP countries to submit project proposals. As a result, 31 projects were granted support: 17 in Ukraine, 5 in Belarus, 4 in Moldova, 3 in Armenia and 1 in Georgia. The projects were especially focused on retrofitting buildings, LED street lighting, heating systems, waste management and solar energy. Once and again, the same priorities are being addressed also through this programme. To date, in most of these projects significant progress has been achieved, which is well documented on the dedicated website. The CoM platform, in addition, offers a dedicated section where municipalities can propose their planned projects.

Moreover, the Mayors Adapt (Urban Adaptation Support Tool) is available for the EaP countries. In 2017, the implementation of the initiative was fully integrated into the CoM and intended to support mitigation of climate change effects. The main focus was on adaptation in the cities and creation of new opportunities to strengthen their socio-economic resilience. The initiative was connected to the Climate Adapt, a large international platform supported by the European Commission and the European Environment Agency and the European Topic Centre on Climate Change Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation. A rich database, expert support and capacity-building actions are intended to facilitate the effective mitigation and adaptation in the EaP cities. The SECAP template, thematic workshops, benchmarks of excellence, risk and vulnerability assessments, baseline emissions inventory, local energy days and thematic discussion groups are the key elements to help in the implementation of the strategies.

Similarly, the support provided to SMEs is of particular importance. In this regard, synergies with the need to tackle pollution and support cleaner productions seem to have been developed. Investing into SMEs is a key approach to support social and economic issues at a national and even at a local level. Indeed, "greening" SMEs is a relevant objective and is totally in line with the Green Deal; this area of work should continue and be furthermore strengthened. However, it should be clear that the impact that this work can have on addressing the causes of pollution is limited, and it is important that this work to reduce pollution be further deepened and mainstreamed within the relevant sectors.

Chemicals from agriculture and industries, poor and inefficient waste management should be addressed directly through stronger policies, more effective interventions and a sound monitoring programme.

On the other hand, it needs to be noted how the engagement on more ecosystem-based priorities of the Green Deal such as biodiversity, ecosystem restoration, sustainable agriculture, forestry and food systems, seem much less ambitious compared to most of the other themes. The main exceptions to this could be the work done on improving river basin management processes and the identification of the emerald network.

Indirectly, several other activities contribute to the aim of conserving natural resources and habitats, nonetheless, a more balanced approach should be developed between greening sectors and protecting the environment both as the two elements are interconnected and since the latter one may become an even more urgent priority. Looking at the National Reports to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the EaP countries have identified several priorities related to loss of habitats and biodiversity, including in relation to unsustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices. In some cases, the countries have put in place some policy instruments to address them, including with EU support, but these areas seem to be less developed compared to others. Similar to the approach taken on climate change with the NDCs, a good approach to ensure more balanced support between different areas could be that of using national outcomes of the CBD process as a basis for cooperation on biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration and sustainable land use practices.

The EU is also committed to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which highlights the importance of environmental management to prevent and manage the disasters. Several EaP countries are highly prone to disaster occurrence, with the most notable example of the earthquake in Armenia (1988), which resulted in thousands of casualties and critically affected the economy. Furthermore, sustainable forest and water management are crucial to prevent major disasters in other countries of the EaP.

Finally, and stressing the importance that the EU attaches to addressing climate change, it should be important that at least the work on environment and agriculture takes adaptation into consideration. In this case, the NDCs could represent a guide to support the identification of priorities but *with a grain of salt* as often adaptation is not so well represented in NDCs.



## 2.2 The Post-2020

When looking at the Green Deal priorities and the EaP post-2020 process, there are different ways to estimate the level of integration between the two and the level of ambition shown by the commitments. One possible approach would be to look at how explicit the references to the Green Deal elements are and how high the targets have been set.

The one “green” priority in the EaP post-2020 is ‘Together for environmental and climate resilience’: a policy objective which explicitly aims at improving access to clean water, reducing air pollution, addressing matters related to the circular economy, focusing on climate neutrality and green growth, biodiversity and the economy’s natural assets base, strengthening energy security and nuclear safety, as well as making a shift to sustainable and smart mobility. The narrative and the specifications within this priority highlight quite well a series of interesting goals and activities that should be achieved/completed.

Work directly in support to biodiversity and economy’s natural asset base is also foreseen for the post 2020 in the **Joint Staff Working Paper**. This ranges from fighting water scarcity to supporting the Emerald Network: improve forest management, forest law enforcement and restore ecosystems.

An additional reference to the environment is also present in the description of other priorities. These include work under circular economy which will promote agro-ecological practices to preserve marine and terrestrial ecosystems by reducing the use of chemical pesticides, veterinary medicines and fertilizers; improving environmental governance; support of the transition towards sustainable food systems in line with the Farm to Fork strategy, using nature-based solutions; facilitating the gradual application of EU taxonomy and more systematic use of environmental assessments.

The “green” references are explicit and the list of themes addressed is quite comprehensive. The economic sectors explicitly mentioned are energy and transport; however, considering the reference to circular economy, climate policies and air pollution, several other sectors will have to be included. The challenges that EaP countries face in view of climate are interconnected, thus addressing them is a simultaneous effort within several sectors. Moreover, the trade-offs between rapid economic development and resource savings may be challenging the national transition trajectories.

Looking at the detailed description of this specific priority, a long list of other elements is available. Just to mention a few elements, it is worth mentioning that the work also foresees support of implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions and transition towards sustainable food systems in line with the Farm to Fork strategy. One of its main intentions is to scale up climate and green financing targeting municipal infrastructure, sustainable urban transport, energy sector and SMEs including in the area of climate adaptation. The programme will try to strengthen the EU product and eco-innovation policies, including producer responsibility and measures to reduce single-use plastic; and support improved waste management and increase recycling.

This makes the work within this priority extremely ambitious. The areas listed are all relevant and the approaches - well identified.

The Top Ten Targets for 2025 identified in the **Economic and Investment Plan** should reflect the priority areas within which results will be tangible. Two of the targets explicitly refer to the environmental issues, namely investing in sustainable energy which aims at reducing household's energy consumption by at least 20%, and investing in environment & climate with a goal of providing access to safe water services to 3 million people, thus improving and monitoring water quality in 300 cities.

In addition to this ambitious programme, there are several other initiatives that have been put in place that will contribute to the delivery of the Green Deal priorities. Among these we believe worth mentioning is the Green Cities programme of EBRD. Most of the EaP cities involved in this programme, as stated above, are still at the level of programming and defining their respective Green City Action programmes, in spite of that, the priorities identified (source <https://www.ebrdgreencities.com/>) seem to be all in line with the Green Deal elements.

If we look at the flagship initiatives, which should represent -in a way- a sort of an updated pact between the EU and the six EaP countries in a form of longer-term commitments to greener and more sustainable societies, some reflections can be made.

The Flagship Initiatives identify large areas of work and should be seen as drivers, they indicate directions and resources but specific objectives and activities still need to be developed. In some instances, these Initiatives build upon some success stories or take advantage from projects in the pipeline; in other instances, they initiate new areas of cooperation. As such, they should be seen as large areas of intervention in which adjustments shall still be possible as the identification

process develops further. At present, little is known about specific projects to be funded in support of the specific flagship initiatives in each of the countries.

It should be also worth highlighting that, speaking with some national stakeholders, the impression is that the present set of Flagship Initiatives is more the result of a policy prioritisation process than a consultative approach. Clearly, as the identification process develops further to identify specific objectives and detailed activities, some sort of participatory process should be put in place in the countries and locally. It is not clearly visible in what way stakeholders have been contributing to the identification of the relevant priorities or if there has been some sort of coordination with what is being funded through other instruments (such as for instance the GCF, GEF and AF). In addition to this, there is a clear lack of activities in the areas of adaptation, including on agriculture, and on environment and natural resource management.

Through preliminary analysis of the present set of Flagship Initiatives, it is visible that among the prioritized area of investment, prevalent in all the EaP countries, is the support to green jobs' creation and SMEs. Each country set up ambitious targets in this respect - from 20 000 (Belarus) to 100 000 (Ukraine) SMEs will be supported. Moreover, investments will be prioritized in the energy, transport and digital sectors. Other areas of the priority investments vary significantly by country. It is worth mentioning that agriculture and rural areas are only covered by Flagship initiatives in Azerbaijan and Ukraine. Armenia and Belarus put a special emphasis on Research and Innovation (R&I). The latter has also a more specific flagship initiative dedicated to democratisation and transparency. Climate action is less a standalone flagship but embedded into several other flagships.

There are interesting references to environmental conservation and agriculture activities in the narrative part of the renewed agenda, not adequately reflected in the Flagship Initiatives. The exceptions are just a few:

- An Initiative in Armenia will support building resilience in the southern region, an area where chronic underdevelopment and a deteriorating environment are closely linked together. The initiative identifies a few priority areas which include agriculture but does not include ecosystem restoration and adaptation.
- In addition to these, a Flagship Initiatives will support rural development and economic transition in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine. However, the initiative in Azerbaijan is more focused on supporting economic development such as facilitating access to credit for small and medium-sized farms, the Georgian project deals with digital connectivity of rural

areas, and the Initiative in Ukraine is again in support of an economic transition.

These Initiatives seem to indicate a possibility to link environmental protection actions, adaptation, natural resources management and ecosystem restoration to sustainable local development. It is crucial that as the identification process develops further to identify specific objectives and detailed activities, increased attention be given to supporting these interlinkages. In addition, rural development projects should consider supporting sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices, policies and practices to reduce the use of chemicals as well as adaptation measures. This is especially critical as agriculture sectors are among the major contributors to the GHG emissions.

As the countries and the EU devise a mechanism to develop detailed proposals and action plans to put the Flagship Initiatives into full implementation mode, it would be good to find ways to involve local stakeholders, including local governments, municipalities, rural communities, etc. to support the process. It is also important to involve not only the large cities that have been more active in the existing initiatives, but also smaller municipalities and rural regions as they have a potential to contribute to a more cohesive implementation of the Green Deal. Furthermore, enhancing urban-rural linkages and functional urban areas could be beneficial.

Another possible approach to assess the integration of Green Deal elements can be that of identifying the improvements to national policy that have been triggered by the Green Deal. In several cases it is difficult to identify a real cause-effect relation between -for instance- the Green Deal and a new environmental law, also as there are so many different global processes that influence governments and civil society. Even so, it can be assumed that the Green Deal has been one of the processes that created a momentum which stimulated and sustained dialogue, increased awareness over environmental issues, catalysed ideas and actions.

It should be pointed out, however, that the Green Deal also builds on past achievements in the EU-EaP relations, one of which can be seen in the energy sector. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine developed new laws and action plans that identified measures to increase effectiveness, improve competitiveness, set energy savings targets, reduce emission, reduce dependency from other countries, etc. These laws are forward looking and lay good basis for a green future. It is realistic to assume that the identification of these laws and of the Green Deal, have grown together and influenced each other.

Recently energy dependency has become a pressing priority for several countries. Progress has been made in some case with connecting Moldova and Ukraine to the EU electricity grid. At the same time, the war in Ukraine dramatically challenged the current situation of the energy supply in the EU and in the EaP regions. With the exception of Azerbaijan, all other EaP countries have been heavily dependent on the supply from Russia and had limited capacity to purchase energy from elsewhere. This is especially important with a view on the rising energy costs and a range of sectors that are dependent on it. The limited access to cheap energy sources may adversely impact the economic development of the countries, but it can also be an opportunity for investing into new profitable avenues.

## **2.3 Other partner Organizations and Initiatives**

In addition to EU funding, relevant investment opportunities are available from other donors and lenders to fulfil the NDCs commitments, e.g., World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), European Investment Bank (EIB), Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), Global Environment Facility (GEF), Adaptation Fund (AF) or the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Most EaP countries are actively seeking those and increasingly participating in projects at national and transnational scales.

The **Green Cities** is a programme of EBRD perfectly in line with the priorities of the European Green Deal. Through funds from different donors, the programme supports local governments and stakeholders developing better and more sustainable cities, improving citizens' lives. The activities address local environmental challenges, support policy development and catalyses investments to facilitate transition towards sustainable infrastructure. The programme spans across central Europe to Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the southern and eastern Mediterranean region.

The Green Cities programme is based upon three main components: Green City Action Plans (GCAPs) that assess and prioritise environmental challenges and identify action plans detailing policy interventions and infrastructure investments; Sustainable infrastructure investment that facilitate and stimulate public and private green investments also aimed to improve the city's adaptation and resilience to climate shocks (e.g. water and wastewater, urban transport, district energy, energy efficiency in buildings, solid waste, etc.); and Capacity-building to support city administrators and local stakeholders implement the programme and monitor progress.

The Green Cities programme should be considered of utmost significance for the implementation of the European Green Deal in the EaP countries as in this region cities present some of the most important environmental challenges affecting the population at large. These countries have witnessed an important process of urbanisation, cities have often grown rapidly and without proper planning, services and utilities have often not kept pace with the speed of immigration from the rural areas and the quality of life has been significantly affected. Old and obsolete infrastructures, aged and environmentally harmful means of public transport, congested and unregulated traffic, are common features in many cities in the EaP region.

The Green Cities programme also covers several elements of the European Green Deal such as making transport sustainable for all, renovating buildings for greener lifestyles, contributing to reducing GHG emissions and to climate change adaptation.

*Table 6: Overview of EaP cities participating in the Green Cities programme (source <https://www.ebrdgreencities.com/>)*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Cities involved</b> Supporting country	<b>GCAP Main Elements</b> (*GCAP still under development)
<b>Armenia</b>  2 cities with at least 100 000 inhabitants	Gyumiri (2018)	Improve environmental quality Revitalise the urban landscape Improve public transport network Thermal modernisation of residential buildings Rehabilitation of the water supply system
	Yerevan (2016) Government of Czech Republic	Improving air-quality policy and monitoring Establishing a ‘Green City Awareness Centre’ Implementing a new bus network model Upgrading electric public transport and developing road infrastructure Introducing energy management in municipal institutions Investment in renewable energy
<b>Azerbaijan</b>  5 cities with at least 100 000 inhabitants	Ganja (2020)	*

Belarus 3 cities with at least 100 000 inhabitants	Minsk (2018) Government of Sweden	*
	Pinsk (2019)	*
<b>Georgia</b> 2 cities with at least 100 000 inhabitants	Batumi (2018)	* Healthy environment (e.g. transport, energy, industry, land use, waste and water) Tourism
	Tbilisi (2016) Government of Czech Republic	Renewing the bus fleet Promoting use of renewable energy in buildings Improving solid waste collection Introducing new green spaces
<b>Moldova</b> 1 city with at least 100 000 inhabitants	Balti (2019) Government of Sweden	* Clean urban electric transport Revitalise environmental and urban landscape
	Chisinau (2018) Government of Austria	* Energy efficiency, transport, water and wastewater, industry and waste management Rejuvenate urban landscape
<b>Ukraine</b> 36 cities with at least 100 000 inhabitants	Dnipro (2021)	* Public transportation system Improving air quality
	Kharkiv (2021)	*
	Khemelnytskyi (2019)	*
	Kryvyi Rih (2019)	*
	Kyiv (2019)	*
	Lviv (2019) Government of Czech Republic	Improving waste and wastewater management and water supply Improving energy efficiency in buildings Improving public transport Improving land use

	Mariupol (2019)	*
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In line with the importance of the Green Cities programme for the EaP countries, quite a few cities are participating in the programme (see also *Table 6*). With the exception of Ukraine, which participates with as many as seven cities, most of the other countries have at least two cities within the programme. It is worth highlighting that these countries have very few cities with at least 100 000 inhabitants, which represents one of the eligibility criteria to access the programme.

On the other hand, it should be further noted that with very few exceptions (as also shown in *Table 6*) most of the cities have adhered to the programme quite late in the process. According to the Green Cities website, out of the 16 cities in the EaP countries, only three have finalised their Green City Action Plan and have started implementation. All the others are at some stage of development. Once again, also for this programme the situation in Ukraine is posing additional challenges to implementation (most notably, in besieged Mariupol a large part of the city has been destroyed by the military operations).

A brief analysis of the state of play of the EaP countries with the **Green Climate Fund** (see also *Table 7*), among other matters demonstrated the following:

- Despite its GDP is lower than other countries receiving funds from the GDF (e.g. Cuba, Bahrain and Botswana), Ukraine is not eligible for support from the GCF. The country has renewed its NDC and is searching for funds from different sources, including from private investors, for implementation. Clearly the on-going war has put the whole process on hold and there is no information on when it will be resumed.
- Belarus has not nominated a National Designated Authority or Focal Point to the GCF, which is an essential step to unlock the funds. Until recently, Belarus was being supported by UNDP through the EU4Climate but in 2021 the project was put on hold with no information on when it could be resumed. Belarus has also benefitted from GEF-funded projects.
- Armenia, Georgia and Moldova have applied to the GCF for funds and at present the three of them share two multiple country projects: one on green cities and one, co-financed by EBRD and GCF, to deliver climate finance to the private sector at scale through Partner Financial Institutions.



- Armenia receives support for a national project on forest resilience, adaptation, mitigation and rural growth. Armenia also participates in another Multiple Country project to promote the uptake of low-carbon technologies in the industrial sector.
- In addition to the funds for the Multiple Country projects, Georgia receives funds for two national projects. One focuses on adaptation and aims to develop a robust climate information and early warning system to improve the management of the increasing change-related risks including landslides, mudflows, erosion, avalanches, floods, drought, and strong winds. The other aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by enhancing carbon sequestration through the introduction of sustainable forest management in three Georgian regions. This includes tackling the pressures of deforestation and the high demand for fuelwood.
- In addition to the funds for projects, the four countries eligible for GCF support, also receive readiness funds. The readiness facility (see also *Table 7*) aims to enhance the capacity of national institutions and stakeholders to efficiently engage with GCF. Dedicated readiness funding may also assist countries in undertaking adaptation planning and developing strategic frameworks to build their programming with GCF.

*Table 7: Overview of the assistance received by the Green Climate Fund*

	<b>National Projects</b>	<b>Multiple Country</b>	<b>Number of Readiness activities</b>	<b>Total financing (\$)</b>
<b>Armenia</b>	- Forest resilience of Armenia, enhancing adaptation and rural green growth via mitigation	- High Impact Programme for the Corporate Sector - Green Cities Facility - GCF-EBRD SEFF Co-financing Programme	4	Projects 116.8 M  Readiness 4.2 M
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	-	-	4	Readiness 3.8 M
<b>Belarus</b>	No national Designated Authority or Focal Point to the GCF nominated			
<b>Georgia</b>	- Enabling Implementation of Forest Sector Reform in Georgia to Reduce GHG Emissions from Forest Degradation - Scaling-up Multi-Hazard Early Warning System	- Green Cities Facility - GCF-EBRD SEFF Co-financing Programme	5	Projects 101.9 M  Readiness 0.912 M

	and the Use of Climate Information in Georgia			
<b>Moldova</b>	-	- Green Cities Facility - GCF-EBRD SEFF Co-financing Programme	3	Projects 32.8 M  Readiness 3.3 M
<b>Ukraine</b>	Not eligible to Green Climate Funds			

The overview of the state of play with the GCF shows significant engagement of some countries in addressing climate priorities. The Multiple Country projects reflect the needs for greening cities but also for involving the private sectors, which are also priorities reflected in the EU-EaP negotiations and part of the Green Deal. It is meaningful to understand how the national projects highlight the importance these countries give to adaptation, forest management and environmental protection. As per the subnational levels, it is worth noting how local governments have embarked on GCF projects. Most visibly, quite relevant number of cities have been involved in Green Cities projects, as also part of the EBRD programme.

Apart from the GCF, some of the countries are eligible for and benefit from participation in two main international climate and environment funding instruments: the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)** and the **Adaptation Fund (AF)**.

Ukraine has been a recipient of the GEF funding in several sectors. 16 projects have been approved and were at different implementation status (including one cancelled) before the war started. Among others, these projects targeted the following areas: green hydrogen support, innovative clean tech solutions for low-carbon economy and climate action, low and no-emission electric mobility, bioenergy value chains, sustainable livestock management and others. The country has not been a beneficiary of the AF.

Armenia has been benefitting from both financial instruments, with some 20 projects submitted to the GEF and 2 projects implemented under the AF. The GEF projects were particularly focused on transition towards electric mobility, sustainable land management, land degradation and biodiversity. One of the projects has been implemented in a collaboration with other neighbouring countries that belong to the EaP, e.g., the “Regional Demonstration Project for Coordinated Management of ODS and POPs Disposal in Ukraine, Belarus,

Kazakhstan and Armenia”. With the support from the AF, Armenia implemented 2 projects, with a local and land focus: “Strengthening land-based adaptation capacity in communities adjacent to protected areas in Armenia” and “Artik city closed stonepit wastes and flood management pilot project”.

Belarus has also benefitted from the above mentioned GEF multi-country project as well as 11 others. The areas targeted included, amongst others, forestry, energy efficiency, wind power, electric mobility. There are no AF funded projects in Belarus.

In Azerbaijan 12 GEF projects were proposed in such areas as climate, biodiversity, chemical waste management, land degradation, flood risk and forest resources management. No AF project was granted.

The efforts of Georgia in acquisition of the GEF funding were concentrated on biodiversity, forest biomass, protected areas, agriculture, land degradation and low carbon solutions in the city context. 2 AF projects in Georgia concerned dairy sector modernisation as well as flood disaster risk reduction and management.

In Moldova a significant effort was devoted to implementing GEF with 18 projects. The projects targeted a number of areas, such as protected areas, improving energy efficiency, rural development, land degradation, green cities, agricultural competitiveness, and clean technology innovation for businesses and start-ups. One project is currently implemented in collaboration with the AF, which is dedicated to building climate resilience of the agricultural sector, ensuring its productivity, ensuring food security and reducing poverty.

Visibly, several funding instruments in the EaP countries have a proven experience in delivering projects in areas, which overlap with the Green Deal. It is noteworthy that with the growing project portfolio of the key funds concerned (including of other donors), some overlaps are probably unavoidable, especially since these projects increasingly become sub-national in scope and address local environmental emergencies. This means that donors, stakeholders and other facilitating entities need to pay specific attention to the coordination mechanisms in order to ensure synergies and avoid duplications, which may become a complicated task due to the fact that these projects also contribute to achieving national targets such as those in NDCs and SDGs. Thematic, or we can say “framework”, programmes involving different actors (e.g., Green Cities, EU4Climate, E5P, etc.) represent a good option to ensure local, national and regional coordination, monitoring of progress and identification of best practices. Here again the role of the NDCs both as a process and as a priority setting document should be emphasized.

**UNDP** plays an influential role in guiding and supporting sustainable development of the six EaP countries, including on environmental protection and the green agenda, and formulates development programs and plans according to the specific conditions of a concerned country.

In Armenia, UNDP supports circular economy in the Mets Parni community using briquettes which provide low-cost fuel for households without cutting more trees. Moreover, in the context of climate change, UNDP Armenia launched de-risking and scaling-up investments in energy-efficient building in agriculture; in addition, the EU green agriculture initiative in Armenia (EU-Gaia) is being implemented by UNDP.

In Azerbaijan, UNDP is implementing an EU4Climate funded project accelerating structural transformation through more effective governance systems. More specifically, the Project responds to the Regional Program's objective of achieving the integration of low emissions and climate resilience goals into development policies and plans through regional initiatives that promote economic diversification and green growth.

In Belarus, in addition to the EU4CLIMATE project to support policy development, UNDP has established the environmental awareness project on civic engagement in environmental monitoring and improving environmental management at the local level.<sup>4</sup> The project aims at effective and inclusive environmental management at local level, monitoring of environmental risks, exchange of environmental information, especially in the field of ambient air quality. The project prioritizes the development of environmental monitoring, building the capacity of civil society for environmental decision-making and developing "green schools".

In Georgia, the awareness survey of climate change could be partially presented by the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC – Caucasus) which conducted the project funded under the EU4Climate programme.

That is the first-ever research on climate change perceptions, knowledge and behaviour that covers all social groups of the Georgian society. The data was collected by face-to-face interviews with 1 100 respondents in urban and rural settlements across the country in August and September 2020.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Civic engagement in environmental monitoring and improving environmental management at the local level | UNDP in Belarus at <https://www.by.undp.org/content/belarus/en/home/projects/ecomonitoring.html>

<sup>5</sup> See What Georgians know about climate change. 2020 | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org) at <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/what-georgians-know-about-climate-change-2020#:~:text=Key%20findings%3A,the%20consequences%20of%20climate%20change.>

*Key climate change awareness findings in Georgia:*

- *97.6% of respondents have heard about climate change.*
- *91.35% think that climate change is real and poses threats to humanity.*
- *25.9% of Georgia's population believe that international organizations will be able to manage the consequences of climate change.*
- *The majority of respondents think that climate change is more important than international terrorism and armed conflicts (57.9%).*
- *36.19% believe they can do nothing to tackle climate change (among them, women: 41.4% men: 30.1%).*
- *Global warming and draughts (96.11%), disasters (92.84%), melting glaciers and warming ocean (91.83%) are considered as negative effects of climate change.*
- *86.7% of Georgia's population are aware that energy efficiency measures can reduce their monthly expenses, and 7.9% believe that energy efficiency measures do not affect their monthly expenses.*

UNDP works with the municipalities of Tbilisi, Batumi, and others to introduce effective plastic waste separation practices and promote sustainability.<sup>6</sup> A behavioural experiment proves that residents of Georgia's two largest cities, Tbilisi and Batumi, would welcome recycling if better municipal infrastructure and services were in place. The experiment, initiated by the United Nations Development Programme's Accelerator Laboratory in Georgia, studied household waste behaviour to see what measures would stimulate people to separate their waste and how municipalities could support the process.

The final experiment proved that proper infrastructure and public awareness can have a noticeable impact on waste management practices. The experiment also showed that the use of transparent containers allows people to see what is in their garbage cans. The quality of the materials collected can be improved.

Furthermore, experiments have shown that clearly branded waste collection trucks can help overcome the perception that collected plastic waste will end up in landfills.

The experimental inquiry on awareness-raising proved that more educational activities are needed to strengthen citizens' recycling habits.

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<sup>6</sup> See Are Georgian cities ready to introduce recycling? | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org) at <https://www.undp.org/georgia/press-releases/are-georgian-cities-ready-introduce-recycling>

In Moldova, in addition of EU4climate program, UNDP finished the project “Promotion of climate change and disaster risk reduction solution in the water and civil protection sectors for enhanced rural resilience”. The project supported the implementation of climate-smart water management solutions for agriculture, flood management and fire prevention and expansion of community-based rescue/firefighting teams in selected rural communities of Republic of Moldova with the purpose of reducing the exposure and vulnerability of rural communities to climate change and disaster risks.<sup>7</sup>

Awareness campaigns on disaster risk prevention measures were conducted in 5 regions of the Republic of Moldova, reflective undershirts, leaflets, calendars and other informational materials were distributed to raise awareness of the local population about fire events and other climate-induced disasters.

100,000 euros were raised from the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and 3.2 million Moldovan lei from local public authorities for the construction of 4 local fire stations to provide high-quality rescue and firefighting services to at least 65 communities, covering a population of about 60,000.

Furthermore, UNDP is currently implementing “Advancing Moldova’s National Climate Change Adaptation Planning (phase 2)” project to support the Government of Moldova in advancing the second cycle of its iterative national adaptation planning process. The project’s objectives are: addressing the barriers to prioritisation of national investments in Climate Change Adaptation and increasing the availability of human and financial capacity for the implementation of the priority actions identified during the NAP-1, as well as those that will emerge under this NAP-2 initiative.

The war in Ukraine is devastating communities and threatening the lives of millions. The UNDP has announced its new support programme to meet the needs of millions of people in Ukraine over the next two years. The new UNDP programme is informed by early socio-economic assessments and is built around three pillars:

- 1. supporting the Government-led crisis response and public service delivery,*
- 2. leveraging Ukraine’s human capital, economic capacities and natural resources to meet immediate humanitarian needs and strengthen resilience, social and economic recovery, and*
- 3. strengthening institutions and civil society to maintain the social fabric,*

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<sup>7</sup> See Promotion of climate change and disaster risk reduction solution in the water and civil protection sectors for enhanced rural resilience | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org) at <https://www.undp.org/moldova/projects/closed-promotion-climate-change-and-disaster-risk-reduction-solution-water-and-civil-protection-sectors-enhanced-rural-resilience>

*uphold human rights and ensure inclusion, protection and empowerment of all people.*

UNDP focuses particularly on the most vulnerable and on ensuring women and girls' equitable access to basic needs and livelihood support; including skills development, business support, and helping to build women's access to finance, networks and markets. Addressing the increased vulnerability of women to violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, is a priority. UNDP is also engaging local institutions and civil society in the response efforts at community level. It is worth highlighting that, despite the extremely hard situation and the pressing humanitarian and reconstruction priorities, one of the pillars makes reference to the importance of natural resources.

Another interesting initiative is the **Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P)**. Established in 2009 during the Swedish EU Presidency, this multi-million multi-donor fund aims to encourage municipal investments in energy efficiency and environmental projects in the EaP. The fund started originally in Ukraine (2014), still the country the higher number of projects, and that now includes all of the six EaP countries.

The grants support the development and implementation of municipal projects in different sectors with the overall aim to reduce energy use, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. The activities funded also include policy dialogues and regulatory reforms. There is a list of eligible sectors which are: district heating, energy efficiency in public buildings (schools, kindergartens, hospitals), energy saving measures in residential housing, renewable energy (including biomass), street lighting, water and wastewater treatment, solid waste management, urban transport. It should be highlighted that, in a way or another, all these sectors are in line with the international green agenda and meet the priorities of the EU Green Deal.

The E5P is a co-financer and its funds are often used as an incentive for municipal clients to take loans provided by Implementing Agencies. The projects identified address the energy sector but also other extremely relevant issues such as waste management, water and wastewater treatment, urban transport. The E5P tends to achieve CO2 savings, electricity savings, energy efficiency, green electricity production and other strictly energy-related benefits. In addition, in several cases the projects support other benefits such as cleaner urban air, cleaner wastewater effluents, pollution reduction, improved public health.

The several contributors of the E5P take part in the governing body, which approves grant allocations to projects and decides on the fund's overall strategy and guidelines. The recipient countries participate in the Steering Group of the

Partnership together with the Implementing Agencies. The Steering Group develop projects and make project proposals for approval by the Assembly. The EBRD acts as the fund manager of E5P providing administrative support to manage the fund on behalf of all the stakeholders.

The E5P can be seen as one of the key instruments for the implementation of the Green Deal in the EaP countries. It has the advantages of being available to local administrations and being instrumental to access other funds ensuring preliminary investments and capacity. However, there is the impression that it is a resource intensive process and that procedures could be simplified.



### 3. Conclusions

- Over the years the priorities of the EaP have evolved, with an attempt to accommodate the changing international debates and local circumstances. Currently, there is a visible focus on accelerating green transition, while adopting the directions promoted by the EU Green Deal, the Paris Agreement, and the UN SDGs agenda. The EaP countries have shown a true interest in the Green Deal, which is often considered as part of the wider national efforts towards adopting the national green agendas aligned with the international commitments, especially through the NDCs and SDGs.
- The level of ambition shown in the implementation of initiatives that contribute to achieving the objectives of the Green Deal is substantial, there is generally a strong coherence between the priorities identified in official documents and the projects funded by different donors. This is also supported by the fact that partner organizations (e.g. UNDP, EBRD, etc.) have been supporting activities in line with the green agenda.
- The COVID-19 pandemic followed by Russia's war in Ukraine have imposed drastic changes in the implementation of activities. Not only projects have been suspended, but also activities in support to policy development and to the identification of strategies and programmes are being heavily delayed. This should be seen as a key issue as greening the economy of EaP countries have a strong relevance to the livelihood, resilience and sustainability of their citizens.
- When the war ends, it is important that a post war strategy be put in place that foresees the green elements. The reconstruction activities to be implemented, both in terms of infrastructures and of communities, should integrate the appropriate environmental elements. The Green Deal should continue to be the overall inspiration framework to contribute to building resilient and sustainable economies. Greening the approaches for restoring infrastructures as well as the energy and transport systems is a key element. Nevertheless, the importance of supporting rural communities, promoting resilient and sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries, as well as protecting the environment and restoring ecosystems should not be neglected. The economy and the cultural identity of the people of these countries go very much beyond their urban areas.

- There are both similarities and divergences between the EaP countries in terms of their national strategic lines and the upcoming challenges. However, all of the Green Deal areas of intervention can be found in the strategies at the national level of the EaP countries, with energy being the dominant focus. Locally, cities have been working on their local strategies which - to a good extent – tend to mirror the Green Deal priorities.
- Most EaP countries are still impacted by the former Soviet Union’s legacy. In many cases they are still dependent on Russia, mostly as their main energy supplier, but also for commercial activities. In line with the Green Deal, some countries are striving towards diversification of energy sources and the development of greener energy. Achieving the Green Deal energy objectives have become more relevant and urgent due to the ongoing war affecting energy supply present and future agreements.
- Aside from the energy, strengthening electric connectivity, and greening transport and infrastructure sectors are considered to be crucial areas for investments, at national level by Governments and the EU. Other priority areas, which are also considered relevant to these countries, such as agriculture, biodiversity, social and economic cohesion seem to be normally brought forward more by local stakeholders and seem to receive secondary attention when it comes to new funding programmes.
- The EaP countries are supported at national and local level by a variety of donors and partner organizations, such as for instance GCF, GEF, EBRD, UNDP and AF. This creates some challenges in ensuring synergies and avoiding duplications in terms of the funding delivery and monitoring the progress towards the objectives set. The analysis carried out, however, shows a general convergence of intentions and actions towards supporting a green transition.
- Both sectoral and holistic approaches to implementing the Green Deal priorities are visible in the national strategies. The flagship initiatives and projects target either individual sectors (e.g., energy, agriculture, transport) or act across sectors in a more holistic way (e.g. circular economy, green cities). This mix of modes of intervention provides good results as they reflect the real priorities and the structure of society. On the other hand, there has often been the impression that the selection of the Flagship Initiatives has somehow followed a top-down approach. It would be important that, as the detailed identification process proceeds, it sees the participation of local stakeholders.

- In some of the countries (e.g., Armenia, Georgia) the administrative capacities for green transition seem to be well in place, with public sector motivated and able to deliver on the expected roles. In some others (e.g., Belarus, Moldova), this is still troublesome, given the insufficient number of personnel, lack the necessary training, knowledge and skills to deal with the complexity of green challenges.
- The challenge for uptake of the green investments, in some cases, includes the lack of well-established green market as local companies consider the green transition risky. Relevant financial instruments are needed to reduce risks and fulfil the existing gaps.



## 4. Recommendations

- Increase communication and visibility activities in the EaP countries to raise awareness of the different elements of the “green transition” and of benefits they will bring. Most of the objectives set by the Green Deal can better be achieved with the full participation and buy-in of the population.
- Adopting green strategies and supporting a green transition is of utter importance in view of the forthcoming process of reconstruction. A green approach to rebuilding infrastructures and communities after the conflict will be healthier and more sustainable in the long term. It is vital that local Governments and stakeholders take clear and strong stands to ensure that the Green Deal remains a guide for reconstruction and future development activities.
- Explore in more depth the overlaps and synergies between the different funding mechanisms targeting the green transition in the EaP countries. Support those countries that presently have no access to specific funds or funding in neglected areas important for the green transition, such as Ukraine and Belarus for the GCF.
- Strengthen thematic or “framework” programmes involving different actors (e.g., Green Cities, EU4Climate, E5P, EU4Business, etc.) to ensure local, national and regional coordination of activities, monitoring of progress and effectiveness, as well as support the identification and sharing of best practices. Procedures and decision-making processes should be made accessible and fast-track procedures for specific cases should be identified. Bottlenecks for implementation at local levels, e.g., lack of support or capacity from the central levels, should be identified and addressed.
- Ensure that, among the different initiatives and donors, a balance between greening the productive sectors and biodiversity activities (e.g., restoring ecosystems, supporting sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries, etc.) is maintained. Similarly, a balance between climate mitigation measures and actions to support adaptation and resilience should be fostered. Because of their relevance to rural communities and decentralized areas, it is important that local governments and stakeholders take clear and strong stands to guarantee that such a balance is prioritised.

- Make sure that, as the Flagship Initiatives are further developed, projects and activities are identified locally with the involvement of local stakeholders. As far as possible, the implementation of the Initiatives at local level should also include sectors such as agriculture, forestry, ecosystem restoration, etc., support adaptation and resilience, also in line with the narrative of the Joint Staff Working Paper.
- Participatory processes to further develop the Flagship Initiatives should also involve smaller municipalities and rural regions as they have a potential to contribute to a more cohesive implementation of the Green Deal. Furthermore, enhancing urban-rural linkages and functional urban areas (FUAs) could be beneficial and contributing to several priorities. Measures to support rural communities should be fine-tuned to reflect local realities. Outcomes of awareness surveys could be instrumental to identify functional approaches to support local green transition.
- The importance of identifying national priorities following global processes, such as through the NDCs, should be emphasized. These processes are normally based on scientific information and broad consultations at different levels, have relevant awareness implications and build common understanding of issues. Programmes supporting these processes, such as the EU4Climate and similar, should be strengthened. Moreover, the engagement of the EU targeted expertise and infrastructure (e.g., the Joint Research Centres, EU Earth Observation Programme Copernicus) could be beneficial to advance the data-informed green transitions.
- It is crucial that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are put in place to allow for reviewing supporting activities and progress for the implementation of the Green Deal in the EaP countries. As the Green Deal priority areas of intervention tend to create synergies and overlaps with various interventions (including non-EU donors and agencies), it would be helpful to establish suitable mechanisms to report on the progress with relevant bodies. This way it will be also possible to better evaluate EU's and Green Deal contributions to achieving the national / global climate and SDGs targets.
- Facilitate networking between the EaP countries to support learning about the Green Deal, financial mechanisms and stimulate exchange of good practices. Networks should especially see the participation of local stakeholders and actors. Specific activities can be identified to involve new communities and support them develop projects and funding proposals. For instance, CoR could be involved into facilitation of the know-how

exchange between the interested cities and regions through using its existing facilities such as the European Week of Regions.

- Support SMEs in their efforts to adopt green strategies and processes. More effort is needed to create an enabling environment for the private sector and facilitate investments in the areas of the Green Deal, accelerate the speed of digital transformation, and identify supportive measures to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, from the challenges posed by the war, including in relation to energy, trade and supply chain.





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