

WHAT PROGRESS LOOKS LIKE

ALBANIA, GREECE AND NORTH MACEDONIA

(PRESPA LAKES) – TRANSBOUNDARY

COOPERATION (SDG TARGET 6.5)

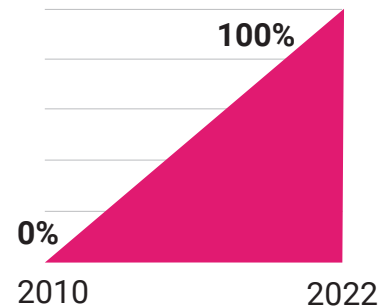


Progress indicator: SDG 6.5.2 Proportion of transboundary river and lake basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation

Level of impact: Transboundary river and lake basin, Prespa Lakes (330 km² land area and 24,100 people), shared by Albania, Greece and North Macedonia

Result: Operationalization of the 2010 International Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area, including through the adoption of a road map for implementing the agreement over a two-year period.

Progress 2010–2022:



SITUATION

Water is the most vital element for the health and biodiversity of the transboundary Prespa Lakes basin, which covers an area of 330 km² and is home to circa 24,100 people. The two main lakes forming the basin, Great and Lesser Prespa, are the highest tectonic lakes in the Balkans (with an elevation of 853 m) and are shared between Albania, Greece and North Macedonia.

The lakes and surrounding area are of significant geological and biological importance both nationally and internationally, as the region provides a habitat for rare species of flora and fauna and offers refuge for migratory birds threatened by extinction. More than 260 bird species – over half of all European bird species – are present in the region.

Covering three countries, the area is rich in cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. Agriculture is an important

activity in the region, with small-scale traditional farming increasingly being replaced by intensive cultivation systems and food processing industries. Forestry activities are carried out in the mountainous regions, and fishing is a key activity within the lakes. Tourism also represents an important sector for development.

Across all three countries the basin faces several sustainability challenges, including overuse, pollution, eutrophication and biodiversity loss, all worsened by climate change.

PROGRESS MADE

As a transboundary basin, the successful protection and management of the freshwater resources and valuable ecosystems present in the Prespa Lakes requires cross-border collaboration to ensure that both ecological and human needs are met.



In 2000, the countries adopted the Declaration on the Creation of the Prespa Park and the Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Lakes and their Surroundings.

The work progressed further in 2010, with the adoption of the Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area, which established the first transboundary protected area in the Balkans. The Agreement was signed by the environment ministers of Albania, Greece and North Macedonia, and the EU Commissioner for the Environment. However, apart from the adoption of the Agreement and the designation of the Ohrid-Prespa Transboundary Reserve between Albania and North Macedonia as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2014, a period of less intensive state cooperation in the Wider Prespa Area followed. The Prespa Park Agreement did not enter into force until May 2019. Nevertheless, local actors, including civil society organizations and municipalities, kept transboundary cooperation alive during these years.

The 2010 Agreement committed the countries to establish permanent structures for collaboration, including the Prespa Park Management Committee (PPMC) and the Working Group on Water Management (WGWM). Due to

the COVID-19 crisis and national elections, the process of establishing the Management Committee was slow, which in turn slowed down formal interstate cooperation

In June 2021, the process was reinvigorated through an online meeting between the three ministers and the high-level representative of the European Commission, under the initiative of the Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy. The meeting reconfirmed the need to address conservation and sustainable management, the degradation of water quality and quantity, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, EU integration, implementation of international conventions and standards, and participatory and inclusive management.

In June 2022, a major milestone was achieved through the first meetings of the PPMC and the WGWM in Pyli, Greece, which brought together European Commission representatives, the environment ministries from the three states, local authorities, environmental civil society organizations, and protected area authorities. In January 2023, the second meeting of WGWM resulted in a road map for implementing joint priorities for water management, while the second regular meeting of the PPMC agreed on the "Strategic Action Plan for the Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park.

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

- Sustained efforts by local civil society organizations and municipalities
- Ratification and eventual entry into force of 2010 Agreement by the three countries
- Solid commitment by the three countries to work together towards a shared interest
- Broad participation, including by the political leadership, and multi-level stakeholder dialogue

LEARN MORE

- [Society for the Protection of the Prespa](#)
- [Snapshot on Prespa from the International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network](#)
- [National country reports on SDG indicator 6.5.2](#)
- [Overall progress on SDG 6 in Albania](#)
- [Overall progress on SDG 6 in Greece](#)
- [Overall progress on SDG 6 in North Macedonia](#)