



EUSALP EU STRATEGY FOR THE ALPINE REGION
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ACTION GROUP 7

Developing ecological connectivity across the Alpine region

WORK PLAN

2026-2028

"Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished."
Lao Tzu

Executive Summary

Action 7 is focusing on improving ecological connectivity across the Alpine region through **practical and stakeholder-oriented activities**. Key actions include promoting ecological connectivity and preventing further fragmentation at different geographical levels, particularly in relation to infrastructure, urban development, and land use.

Activities related to the ecological connectivity are targeting **three main stakeholder groups**: large infrastructure operators, territorial and regional actors through interregional exchanges with other MRS, and youth through participatory and mobility-based learning approaches (e.g. cooperation with the Yoalin initiative).

Nature restoration will be supported through the development and updating of a restoration measures database, in cooperation with the Alpine Biodiversity Board, and its dissemination to relevant stakeholders. Additional emphasis will be placed on urban areas, promoting green and blue infrastructure as tools for biodiversity, well-being, and connectivity.

Close cooperation with **ALPARC** and the **Alpine Convention** (Alpine biodiversity board) will strengthen coordination among protected areas and initiatives, notably through the identification and communication of key ecological corridors ("last corridors"), highlighting the need to go beyond protected areas and address neighbouring, urban and unprotected territories.

1. Focus and Scope of the Action Group

Action 7 focuses on developing ecological connectivity to conserve, improve and restore biodiversity, strengthening ecosystem services, and setting up a comprehensive macro-regional scheme by developing blue and green infrastructure at both macro-regional and cross-border level.

The Alpine region hosts numerous protected areas varying strongly in size and protection status, but increasing land use for transport, settlements, tourism, and large events is causing habitat fragmentation and threatening biodiversity. This fragmentation disrupts ecological processes and risks creating a divide between protected areas and intensively used surrounding territories.

Ecological corridors connecting the Alps with the surrounding lowlands and other European (mountain) regions—essential for wildlife migration—are increasingly compromised by roads, motorways and urban development. Reduced ecological connectivity limits species movement, weakens ecosystem resilience, and hinders adaptation to climate change.

Maintaining and restoring ecological connectivity is essential for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem health. The action aligns with the European Commission priority “Sustaining our quality of life: Food security, water and nature”, relevant EU and national ecological strategies, and the objectives of the Alpine Convention. Synergies will be pursued through cooperation with the Alpine Biodiversity Board.

2. Key Tangible Achievements 2023-2025

AG7 promoted Green Infrastructure (GI) as a foundation for the well-being of present and future generations in the Alpine Region. In the 2023–2025 Work Plan, AG7 addressed GI and ecological connectivity as cross-cutting elements affecting multiple ecosystems (wetlands, forests, farmland, urban areas) and sectors (agriculture, forestry, energy, water). Attention was given to blue and green infrastructure as enablers of ecological connectivity and biodiversity conservation.

At technical level some of the main achievements are:

- Incubator for two project proposals on peatlands and rivers, identified as priority ecosystems for connectivity and habitat and ecosystem services provision.
- Implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation through dialogue with DG Environment and DG REGIO, creating a **Nature Restoration Project database**, a systematic mapping of over 150 EU-funded projects, mainly focused on rivers and forests. It was launched to collect best practices, support national restoration plans and position the Alps as a model region for ecological transition. A **Dedicated factsheet on Nature Restoration in the Alpine Region** was also produced.
- AG7 implemented three consecutive editions of **GI Goes Business Award (2021–2024)** to support and award integration of green infrastructure in business in the Alpine macro-region. Implementation was based on cooperation among EUSALP presidencies and regional partners.
- Workshop **“Ecological connectivity in the Alpine region: strategic tools and pathways for implementation”** (Annual Forum 2025). The aim is to emphasize the importance of integrating ecological connectivity into spatial planning. Through concrete implementation examples, the main challenges faced on different scales, and the success factors are illustrated.
- AG7 contributed to several high-level events (speaker/panelist):
 - a. *Water as a resource conference* (Scul, 2023)
 - b. *Alpine convention biodiversity conference* (Kranjska Gora, 2024)
 - c. *Alpine Ecological Networks: Integrating Connectivity into Spatial Planning* (Oberurgl, 2024)
 - d. *Lessons learnt from LIFE and opportunities to capitalize on its contribution for the transformation of the Alps into a model region for a sustainable future* (Rome, 2025)
 - e. *Ecological connectivity as an indispensable element of green infrastructure* (Izola, 2025)

At policy level the main achievements are:

- AG7 participated in Cross-cutting priority Water Management contributing to integrated and sustainable management of water resources and biodiversity, and supported the elaboration of the **Joint input paper on water management transition**.
- AG7 co-organized the **International Conference on Biodiversity** in Milano supported by the Life IP Gestire 2020 Project "Crossroads Biodiversity: from a LIFE Integrated Project to a pan-Alpine biodiversity agenda". Representatives of the Alpine Biodiversity Board of the Alpine Convention and Action Groups 6 and 7 discussed together with representatives of the regions the prospects for biodiversity conservation and protection. Together, they also delivered the Crossroads Biodiversity Message (2023).
- AG7 co-organised an **International workshop on nature restoration in the Alpine region** together with the Alpine Convention (2024)
- AG7 contributed to the public consultation of the DG ENVI regarding the implementation of the Nature restoration regulation implementation. It suggested to include the **cross-border component** in National restoration plans.
- AG7 delivered to the EB **policy recommendations** on the topic of ecological connectivity

At youth inclusion level the main achievements are:

- Representatives of the EUSALP Youth Council participated in AG7 meetings.
- Representative of YC was a jury member at GI goes business award.

3. Priorities 2026-2028

Promoting ecological connectivity and avoiding further fragmentation at different geographical levels across the Alpine region

The topic will address three different stakeholder clusters and related focuses:

- Large infrastructure operators
- Territorial connectivity challenges (interregional conference)
- Youth (learning by moving – a joint effort with Yoalin initiative, youth mobility – connectivity – understanding and presenting the Alpine connectivity and biodiversity challenges)

Restoration of natural resources

Nature restoration is one of the main tools to protect/improve biodiversity in the Alps. The database that was developed within AG7 (in cooperation with Alpine Biodiversity Board) will be updated and presented to different stakeholders (for EU members – reference to the Nature restoration regulation, Alpine convention, Convention on Biological diversity, etc.). Another focus of AG7 will be (peri)urban areas as a place of wellbeing and livelihood both for humans and several important ecosystems (green and blue infrastructure).

Strengthening the coordination of networks/protected areas (e.g. Natura 2000) and initiatives within and outside the Alps

AG7 will work in close cooperation with ALPARC and Alpine convention (ABB) on selection and presentation of the 'last corridors' that represent a unique chance to prevent the Alps from being an isolated ecological island in the middle of Europe. The main aim is to highlight the need to go beyond protected areas and EUSALP territory as well while addressing urban and neighbouring territories.

Common development of a trans-sectoral strategic landscape vision

This is a topic where AG7 expresses the willingness to contribute if there will be a political consensus related to the spatial planning and territorial development of the Alps as this is a transversal topic that goes beyond ecological positions, mandate and competences of AG7. From the AG7 perspective there is knowledge and expertise already developed and available, and it could be used and integrated when and where appropriate.

3.1. Key Activities 2026-2028

Main topics	Key activities
Promoting ecological connectivity and avoiding further fragmentation at different geographical levels across the Alpine Region	Building (ecological) 'bridges' Mapping, selection and dissemination of experiences, approaches and examples of functional ecological connectivity in large infrastructure (rail, road, urban areas, energy grid...). Interregional eco-connectivity conference Interregional conference co-organised by EUSALP and Danube with cooperation of other MRS, territorial organisations and conventions.
Strengthening the coordination of networks/protected areas and initiatives within and outside the Alps	Last corridors Selection of 1-2 corridors while including and going beyond Alpine protected areas. It is essential to sustain biodiversity in the future both for EUSALP and its neighbouring territories. AG7 will highlight the need to work on this cross-regional dimension on concrete examples. It will support ALPARC (Alpine Network of Protected Areas) to address also non-protected areas and lowlands as potential bottlenecks.
Promoting ecological connectivity and avoiding further fragmentation at different geographical levels across the Alpine Region	Moved by nature AG7 will join forces with the Yoalin initiative (youth discovering the Alps with sustainable travel). AG7 topics will be integrated in the travel of youth exploring the Alps. The idea is to upgrade the travel of youth with a mission related to the connectivity of ecosystems. The activity integrates all AG7 topics and builds on personal experiences of youth that are both explorers and ambassadors of the topic. In addition to the Eusalp Youth Council other youth initiatives will be included.
Restoration of natural resources	RePeat project An event focused on peatlands as a very important but also rather neglected ecosystem. Implementation partly relies on the success of the ASP Repeat-it! project that was incubated within the AG7. Urbagreen Urban and peri-urban areas are important both for wellbeing of inhabitants and also as ecosystems. Blue and green infrastructure and nature-based solutions can support ecological connectivity challenges and nature restoration. The topic will be addressed in the form of a workshop/webinar. Restoration database Upgrade of an existing database (follow up after AG7 database implementation 2024-2025) with support of stakeholders (Alpine biodiversity board, etc.) that was very appreciated by the stakeholders. The database is a good starting point for restoration measures of countries and regions planned in the EUSALP territory. It will be promoted in and around the Alps.

3.2. Missions

AG7's contribution to the EUSALP Missions will be defined based on the Missions approved by the General Assembly, starting from 2026, and according to the availability and competences of its members.

4. Communication

AG7 mainly communicates with stakeholder groups and institutions rather than single stakeholders. The main hub of tools for communication is EUSALP with the dedicated website and social media. AG7 aims to work independently in its dedicated subsection of the EUSALP website to guarantee time and resource efficiency. Social media will be used accordingly.

If, and when, awareness raising campaign will be needed, other tools more appropriate for the general public will be used.

AG7 co-leader (PRC) will supervise the communication of activities. Both Co-Leaders participated in capacity-building and training initiatives organized by the EUSALP Secretariat on communication. Furthermore, AG7 members use their institutional social channels to disseminate news on AG7 activities.

4.1. Dissemination and Communication Activities

EUSALP website and social media channels
AG7 took part in the communication activities promoted by TSS communication officer and YC. AG7 has no own social media channels and no financial resources for that, in this sense the EUSALP website and social media became the main tools to disseminate results and news and the same could be for the next three years considering a better usage. Around 4-5 updates per year will be published by AG7 on the EUSALP website:
• Results of AG7 activities • Announcement of events • Success stories / Best practices • Requests for input
External dissemination (Interreg ASP and/or external communication channels)
AG7 members use their own communication channels to disseminate results and activities of the Action Group and more in general about EUSALP main events.
A video presenting AG7 and its topics will be published in collaboration with the EUSALP Secretariat.
Dissemination of results to policymakers
The ecological connectivity conference as well as the Nature Restoration Conference will be the main events for transferring results to the political level. The conferences will be organized with the cooperation of other AGs, ABB, and YC.
AG7 will enhance the collaboration with other MSR to promote common perspective and suggestions for the policy level.
Success Stories
Success Stories will be collected in short pillows (text and graphics) to create a storytelling of the three years workplan with the help of EUSALP Secretariat.

4.2. Events and Research

AG7 will organize/ co-organize the following key events during the work plan period:

EVENTS

2026 – Thematic workshop during the EUSALP Annual Forum

2027 – Interregional conference on ecological connectivity to be co-organized with Danube MRS and other STK.

2027 – Thematic workshop during the EUSALP Annual Forum

2028 – Conference on nature restoration (cooperation with AC foreseen)

2028 – Thematic workshop during EUSALP Annual Forum

PUBLICATION and RESEARCH

- Large Infrastructure Success Stories and good practices

- Updated database on NR

Collaboration with the Alpine Convention (Alpine Biodiversity Board), ASP (Alpine Space Programme) projects REPEAT-IT! (if funded) and AlpsLlife (endorsed in the past mandate), other MRS (starting from Danubian) and networks (AlpPlan).

5. Work Plan Outputs and Results

5.1. Monitoring Indicators

Project/Activities

Name	Pillar	Action	Topic	Goal	Activities	Start Date	End Date	Funding source
Building (ecological) 'bridges'	3	AG7	Promoting functional ecological connectivity and avoiding further fragmentation at different geographical levels across the Alpine Region	Facilitate knowledge transfer and success stories/projects among large infrastructure operators (road and rail, energy grid, urban areas ...)	Mapping, selection and dissemination of experiences, approaches and examples	2026	2028	4Support EUSALP
Interregional eco-connectivity conference	3	AG7	Promoting ecological connectivity and avoiding further fragmentation at different geographical levels across the Alpine Region	To safeguard ecological integrity, it is essential to address the issues of ecological connectivity and nature restoration—both within the EUSALP region and in collaboration with neighbouring territories.	Interregional conference	2027	2027	4Support EUSALP + co-organisers
Last corridors	3	AG7	Strengthening the coordination of networks/protected areas and initiatives within and outside the Alps	To safeguard Alpine ecological integrity, it is essential to address the issues of ecological connectivity and nature restoration—both within the EUSALP region and in collaboration with neighbouring	Selection of 1-2 corridors as potential bottlenecks.	2026	2028	ALPARC, in kind contributions
Moved by nature	3	AG7	Promoting ecological connectivity and avoiding further fragmentation at different geographical levels across the Alpine Region	Awareness rising and sensibilisation among youth on the topic of ecological connectivity, nature restoration and the Alps as a unique and connected ecosystem.	Yoalin youth travellers exploring Alpine natural challenges	2026	2028	Yoalin (Erasmus), 4Support EUSALP
RePeat project	3	AG7	Restoration of natural resources	Restoration of peatlands in the EUSALP	An event focused on peatlands	2028	2028	ASP

Urbagreen	3	AG7	Restoration of natural resources	To showcase the benefits of (re)introduction of ecosystems in urban areas both for humans and nature	Workshop/ webinar	2026	2028	4Support EUSALP
Restoration database	3	AG7	Restoration of natural resources	Map, evaluate and disseminate restoration practices	Upgrade of an existing database	2026	2028	In kind contributions, 4Support EUSALP

Indicators

Action	Object	Indicators Category	Type of Unit	Unit	Target
AG7: To develop ecological connectivity in the whole Strategy territory	Building (ecological) 'bridges'	a) Studies, surveys, mapping, data collection b) Good practices/Case studies c) Knowledge networks/ Think tanks / d) Observatories e) Thematic workshops/conferences"	N° of good practices/Cases	Good practices/ Examples	10,00
AG7: To develop ecological connectivity in the whole Strategy territory	Interregional eco-connectivity conference	a) Events, Forums; b) Newsletters, Social Media campaigns, Storytelling; c) Dedicated Website	N° of events and activities	Events	1,00
AG7: To develop ecological connectivity in the whole Strategy territory	Last corridors	a) Concept tested (i.e. Smart villages, Smart Buildings, Smart Regions) b) Test areas/pilot activities	N° of locations of activities	Pilot area	1,00
AG7: To develop ecological connectivity in the whole Strategy territory	Moved by nature	a) Training programmes & activities b) Mentoring/peer exchanges c) Skills workshops/Labs d) Mobility, exchanges, Study tours e) Application of new business models and methodologies f) Innovation transfers g) Toolkits/tools	N° of activities, workshops, exchanges, labs	Yoalin implementation	1,00
AG7: To develop ecological connectivity in the	RePeat	a) Studies, surveys, mapping, data collection b) Good practices/Case studies c) Knowledge networks/ Think tanks / d) Observatories e) Thematic workshops/conferences"	N° of workshops/conferences	Conference	1,00

whole Strategy territory					
AG7: To develop ecological connectivity in the whole Strategy territory	Urbagreen	a) Events, Forums; b) Newsletters, Social Media campaigns, Storytelling; c) Dedicated Website	N° of events and activities	Activities	1,00
AG7: To develop ecological connectivity in the whole Strategy territory	Restoration database	a) Information/knowledge platform b) Digital exchange platform c) Structure for information/knowledge sharing	Status of implementation of the platform	Database	1,00

5.2. Work Plan Outputs

Project/Activity	Expected Output
Building (ecological) 'bridges'	A compilation of examples/practices/experiences
Interregional eco-connectivity conference	A joint MRS (EUSALP + Danube) organised conference
Last corridors	Awareness raising campaign
Moved by nature	Yoalin joint project implementation
RePeat	Peatlands conference
Urbagreen	Workshop

5.3. Action Group Results

Project/Activity	Expected Result
Building (ecological) 'bridges'	Improved knowledge of large infrastructure stakeholders on the topics of green bridges and other ecological connectivity solutions.
Interregional eco-connectivity conference	EUSALP in cooperation with AC is seen as a driver and the hub of the ecological connectivity topic in EU and MRS. Several stakeholders have gained knowledge and understand the need to address the topic on cross regional and transnational level.
Last corridors	General public understands the need to safeguard not only protected areas but ecological corridors as well.

Moved by nature	Youth participating in the initiative are well informed about nature in the Alps and become ambassadors of the topic.
RePeat	Peatlands are recognised as an important ecosystem within and outside the Alps.
Urbagreen	Spatial planners and nature protection services benefit from working together in (peri)urban areas.

6. Action Group's Organisation and Targets

6.1. Composition and Organisation

Action Group Leader/Co-Leaders	
AG7 has two Co-Leaders: Miro Kristan, Soča valley development centre Annalisa Cevasco, Anci Liguria (Association of municipalities)	
Number of Appointed Members	
AG7 has 53 members.	
Represented Countries	Represented Institutions
☒ Austria ☒ France ☒ Germany ☒ Italy ☐ Liechtenstein ☒ Slovenia ☒ Switzerland	Burgenland Regional Chamber of Commerce; Umweltbundesamt; Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt, Energie, Mobilität, Innovation und Technologie; Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft; Landwirtschaftskammer Salzburg; Salzburger Institut für Raumordnung und Wohnen; Commissariat à l'Aménagement, au Développement et à la Protection du Massif des Alpes; CIPRA France ; Direction de la Biodiversité et de la Mer; Direction régionale de l'Environnement, de l'Aménagement et du Logement; Alpine Network of Protected Areas (ALPARC); International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA International); Grenoble Alpes Métropole; Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection; Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry; Bundesamt für Naturschutz; Ministry of Food, Rural Affairs and Consumer Protection of Baden-Württemberg; Edmund Mach Foundation; Anci Liguria; Italian Ministry for the Environment; EURAC; CREA; Liguria Region; ARPAL Liguria; IUCN CEM; Piedmont Region; Italian Ministry for Agriculture; Ministry of Natural resources and Spatial planning Slovenia; Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food in Slovenia; Posoški razvojni center, Biosphere reserve (CH), International Scientific Committee on Research in the Alps
Observers	
Observers: DG Regio, APS JS, TSS, CIPRA International, Alpine Convention	

Organisation of Work

AG7 organizes 2-3 meetings per year (at least one onsite) to discuss common activities and workplan implementation. The Co-Leaders of AG7 are responsible for the coordination and organization of the activities of the Action Group. At the moment no topic caretakers are foreseen from AG members.

Co-Leaders cooperate on a consensus principle and share tasks according to the competences, availability and experiences.

AG7 members commit themselves to contribute to the activities of the Action Group. To fulfill the workplan, the members actively participate in the discussion and help in the implementation of activities.

6.2. Involvement of the Stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement is a crucial element for the success of the workplan starting with the AG7 members. Collaboration with various actors and the integration of different expertise such as regional and local authorities, farmers' associations, or experts in large infrastructures are fundamental to reaching the goal of thinking of "last corridors". The idea is to involve them in horizontal integration of common topics and issues, like "last corridors". That is the concrete challenge for the future of biodiversity, ecological connectivity and restoration of nature.

Types of involvement:

Local communities, local and regional authorities, NGOs, researchers, private sectors, youngsters– sharing knowledge and experience on protection and management of natural habitats, creating synergies, identifying common perspectives. Consultation can take place through thematic workshops, networking, and interviews. AG7 gives a special focus on youth via Yoalin initiative if it works out.

6.3. The Role of the Youth Council

A member of the Youth Council is invited to all AG meetings and is given to role of a messenger for the other YC members.

Yoalin initiative gives an opportunity to the YC members to join and become ambassadors of the AG7 topic while travelling and exploring.