EU4ENVIRONMENT "Ecosystems Services and Livelihoods"
Progress Review Meeting

Summary Record

Date: 20 November 2025

Format: Online (Zoom)

Languages: English with simultaneous interpretation into Armenian, Romanian, and Ukrainian

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About EU4Environment

Since 2018, the "European Union for Environment" (EU4Environment) Action has helped the Eastern Partnership countries preserve their natural capital and increase people's environmental well-being, by supporting environment-related action, demonstrating and unlocking opportunities for greener growth, and setting mechanisms to better manage environmental risks and impacts. The programme was funded by the European Union and principally implemented over the 2019-2024 period by OECD, UNECE, UNEP, UNIDO and the World Bank. Over 2025-2026 period, the World Bank will finalise the implementation of programme's Result 4 area.

The meeting documents are available on the webpage:
https://www.eu4environment.org/events/eu4environment-progress-review-meeting/.

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Summary Record

The EU4Environment Progress Review was held on 20 November 2025 online. Organised within the framework of the World Bank-executed component of the Programme the meeting aimed to take stock of the progress and achievements, facilitate peer learning and reflect on the national ownership and sustainability of the Programme results as it concludes in 2026. The meeting brought together representatives from the European Commission, government representatives from the partner countries, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), academia and the World Bank as the meeting's organizer. Participants reviewed progress across Eastern Partnership countries, highlighting achievements in biodiversity conservation, community engagement, and illegal logging prevention, while acknowledging challenges and expressing commitment to continue knowledge exchange and regional cooperation. The participants also discussed communication activities, scaling up results, relevant policy developments, and the importance of continued collaboration. It was agreed to hold further progress review meetings; the number and timing were not specified. Based on the nine-month program timeline, one additional review meeting is likely, with the date to be confirmed. Meeting documentation is available electronically *[insert link]*.

Item 1. Opening Remarks

In her opening remarks, Angela Bularga, Program Manager, Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST), European Commission, thanked participants and emphasised the importance of joint engagement in nature protection. She noted the European Union and the World Bank's decade-long cooperation with partner countries and welcomed renewed efforts to achieve program goals. Angela Bularga highlighted the need to coordinate with other partners and EU-supported initiatives, including the newly launched EU4GreenRecovery East, which aligns closely with activities implemented by the World Bank. She underscored that effective delivery depends on strong country ownership and expressed interest in hearing updates on policy implementation across partner countries.

Representing the World Bank, Gayane Minasyan, Practice Manager, Environment, underscored the strong EU–World Bank partnership behind one of the largest technical assistance programs executed by the World Bank in the Eastern Partnership countries. Since the February 2024 review, the Programme has advanced policy frameworks, practical guidelines, and capacity building, fostering regional cooperation and community engagement that is generating opportunities such as eco-tourism. Acknowledging challenges, particularly in Ukraine, she affirmed the commitment to continued knowledge exchange and regional cooperation to maximize impact. Looking ahead, she emphasised scaling up results and leveraging analytical outputs to inform larger investment operations. She highlighted investment operations— RESILAND: Armenia Resilient Landscapes and Moldova Restoring Ecosystems for Marine Pollution Prevention—which build on EU4Environment, and a recently launched PROGREEN-supported technical assistance activity in Ukraine, all aimed at driving landscape restoration, climate resilience, and low-carbon development. She closed by stressing lasting capacity, innovation, and continued collaboration toward EU alignment.

Item 2. EU4Environment in the Eastern Partnership Countries: Progress, Achievements and Next Steps

In this session the World Bank country program coordinators presented the progress and key achievements under EU4Environment Programme. These interventions were followed by a Q&A session. The following messages were conveyed by the speakers:

- **Armenia:** Oksana Kovalenko, EU4Environment Programme Coordinator, presented Armenia's progress and achievements across the four Programme components, highlighting the completion of activities under the biodiversity and legal/deforestation-free timber trade components. These efforts produced: recommendations for a National Action Plan to develop the Emerald Network; guidelines for preparing Emerald management plans; management plans for two pilot sites; recommendations for reviewing the Emerald Network in Armenia; and recommendations for sustainable forest management and the introduction of innovative timber-trade control technology in Armenia. Activities scheduled for completion by August 31, 2026, include developing an Ecotourism Management Plan Template Tool for Armenia; preparing eight pilot ecotourism development packages for eight communities; and delivering a comprehensive report titled "Assessment of Ecosystem Services and Financing Mechanisms in Armenia, with Recommendations for Investment and Financing Opportunities."

- **Georgia:** Nino Inasaridze, EU4Environment Activity Coordinator in Georgia, reported on achievements in Georgia, highlighting the completion of activities under the biodiversity and legal/deforestation-free timber trade components. Key outputs include guidelines for managing forest areas within Emerald sites, a capacity-building program through which nearly 100 participants benefited from workshops, and analytical work assessing the feasibility of introducing sustainable forest management (SFM) certification in Georgia. Activities scheduled for completion by August 31, 2026, include developing ecotourism management plans for eight forestry districts and delivering a comprehensive report titled "Financing Natural Resource Management in Georgia: Ecosystem Service Valuation, NDC Needs, and Strategic Investment Opportunities."

- **Moldova:** Aurel Lozan, EU4Environment Activity Coordinator in Moldova, presented progress and achievements across the four program components in Moldova, highlighting completed activities under the biodiversity and legal/deforestation-free timber trade components. Key outputs include: recommendations for a National Emerald Roadmap; an analytical report, "Status of Emerald Species and Habitats in Moldova: A Legal and Institutional Framework Assessment"; guidelines for preparing Emerald management plans; management plans for three pilot sites; a report identifying high-value conservation forests; a pilot forest-product web platform; a report on sustainable forest management and legal timber trade in the Republic of Moldova; and recommendations for the National Forest Extension and Rehabilitation Program. Activities scheduled for completion by August 31, 2026 include: improving forest management planning and silvo-pastoral management planning systems to help selected communities gain more benefits and sustain ecosystem services (covering 1,000 ha); supporting nature restoration and enhancing community benefits in the central hilly plateau (Codii region) by formalizing at least 500 ha of natural/spontaneous vegetation on community-owned land; and delivering the report "Moldova Nature Restoration Potential Analysis," which will support future investments and programmatic pathways for ecological recovery. The role of the

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EU4Environment Programme in aligning Moldova's legislation with EU standards and engaging local communities in sustainable management practices was emphasised.

- **Ukraine:** Olga Gorodnytska, EU4Environment Activity Coordinator in Ukraine, presented Ukraine's progress under the EU4Environment Programme, highlighting achievements in biodiversity, community engagement, and forest sector analysis despite challenging circumstances. She outlined activities nearing completion, including guidelines for Emerald Network management plans; guidelines for assessing anthropogenic and military impacts on Emerald sites and strategies for their restoration; three pilot management plans; a capacity-building program with nine workshops; and an analytical report on climate finance and carbon-pricing opportunities in Ukraine's forestry sector. Activities scheduled for completion by August 31, 2026, include a study to strengthen the competitiveness of Ukraine's woodworking industry; support for targeted communities to build practical natural resource management (NRM) skills by developing tools such as guidelines and site-specific plans to foster green job creation and economic development; and a comprehensive report titled "Financing Ukraine's Natural Capital: Ecosystem Valuation, EU-Aligned Policy Recommendations, and Investment Pathways," providing actionable recommendations. Gratitude was expressed to national counterparts for their cooperation, engagement, and contributions.

- **Regional activities:** Oksana Kovalenko outlined regional activities across four program components, emphasizing their cross-cutting design, complementarity with country-level work, and the value of regional cooperation and knowledge exchange with EU and EaP countries.
  Completed deliverables include:
  o Analytical reports and self-assessment workshops on readiness for biogeographical seminars (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine).
  o Summary paper: "Emerald Network Progress and Prospects in the Eastern Partnership: National Roadmaps, Action Plans, and Pathways to 2030."
  o Online training course on the Emerald Network.
  o Regional workshop: "Enhancing Biodiversity Protection in the Eastern Partnership Countries: Learning from EU Best Practices" (28 April 2025, Bratislava).
  o Reports: "Sustainable Forest Management and Legal Timber Trade in Armenia, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova," and "Impact assessment of the European Union Deforestation Regulation on Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine."
  o Regional workshop on Wood Tracking Systems and EU Deforestation Regulation compliance (23–24 October 2025, Yerevan).
  Deliverables due by August 31, 2026, include:
  o Dissemination of lessons on community engagement in NRM (report and EU-based regional knowledge exchange workshop).
  o Regional knowledge-sharing workshop on forest and NRM financing schemes and policies to promote regional and international collaboration.

The presentations were followed by a Q&A session and a discussion. Fisseha Tessema Abissa, Sr. Natural Resource Management Specialist, EU4Environemnt Task Team Leader, World Bank, emphasised the importance of feedback from the countries on the presented work, which was owned and implemented by them.

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Karen Khachatrian, Chief Specialist, Department of Specially Protected Natural Areas and Biodiversity Policy, Ministry of Environment of Armenia, confirmed that the presented achievements align with the Ministry's records.

Gayane Minasyan stressed the importance of periodic progress reviews that focus on real outcomes on the ground, as well as the need to identify practical steps to amplify impact and ensure the durability of results.

Igor Buksha, Head of the Inventory, Monitoring, Certification and Forest Management Planning Department at the Ukrainian Research Institute of Forestry and Forest Melioration, acknowledged the value of regional cooperation showcased in the presentation. He asked whether the Programme would offer recommendations on monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) systems to enable transparent, quantifiable carbon accounting that would support access to voluntary or compliance carbon markets—an essential requirement for operationalizing climate and carbon finance. Responding, Fisseha Tessema Abissa clarified that the work proceeds at two levels: in-depth, country-level engagement and regional-level knowledge sharing and assessments. He noted that the MRV issues raised extend beyond the current scope and underscored the World Bank's comparative advantage in scaling successful approaches through larger investment operations. In this context, he highlighted that realizing Article 6 opportunities would require a third, investment-focused level of intervention.

Turning to scope and country engagement, Angela Bularga emphasised that finance-related activities under this Programme are intentionally limited to the forestry sector, with broader MRV and climate policy dimensions addressed through other initiatives such as EU4ClimateResilience. She also noted that no new bilateral activities will be initiated in Georgia; current work reflects the completion of previously scheduled activities as engagement is reduced given the present context.

Vitalie Dragan, Head of the Directorate for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Policies, underscored the Programmes's European focus and the value of results achieved to date. He noted the Ministry is consolidating and clarifying the regulatory framework while strengthening institutional and technical capacities to expand implementation and improve efficiency in protected areas, particularly within the Emerald Network. The Programme updates the knowledge base and builds training for students and practitioners and has produced a roadmap for transitioning to the Emerald Network in line with EU habitat directives. The Ministry's team is prioritizing long-term protection of natural heritage by identifying priority species and habitats, addressing key threats, and preparing to apply EU nature restoration regulations. Dragan added that the program is fostering a more participatory approach to forestry management, enhancing community engagement and transparency.

Item 3. Guided Discussion with National Counterparts: Leveraging EU4Environment Results in National Policies and Practices

During this session, the participants were invited to share experiences and plans for utilizing EU4Environment outcomes through answering the following questions:

1. How have the EU4Environment outputs (guidelines, recommendations, management plans) influenced environmental policy agenda in Armenia and Georgia so far? What are

the main opportunities and challenges in integrating these outputs into national legislation and policy frameworks?

2. How do you see the role of EU4Environment in supporting Moldova and Ukraine's alignment with EU standards and EU accession?

3. To what extent have the outputs of the EU4Environment Programme reached the intended end beneficiaries—such as foresters, protected area managers, and local communities? What steps could be taken during the remaining months of Programme implementation to further facilitate and amplify the benefits for these target audiences?

4. How can cross-country collaboration be further strengthened to address common challenges? Are there specific topics where deeper regional cooperation is needed (e.g., carbon markets, biodiversity monitoring, protected area management)?

Karen Khachatrian noted that the guidelines for developing management plans were applied to define pilot sites for which Emerald site management plans will be prepared. Certain elements have also informed a draft law on protected areas. He added that while some components were incorporated into new protected areas legislation, it has not yet been adopted.

Rati Gelashvili, Forest Policy Department, Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, explained that policy development and planning take several years, so there has not been sufficient time to reflect project outputs in legislation. However, all guidelines are being used at the management stage of Emerald sites, and data reports are informing updates to the Standard Data Forms (SDF), which is ongoing. All prepared documents are used as recommendations and best practices in planning, but are not yet reflected in law, as legislative integration is time-consuming.

Vitalie Dragan recognized the role of European Union support and the broader multi-stakeholder contributions that enable alignment with national policy documents and EU requirements, ensuring coherence with EU standards and momentum on the ecological agenda. He noted that some elements were technically complex and that continued coordination with EU initiatives will be important for sustaining progress.

Maryna Bogush, Senior Officer, International Cooperation, Science and Public Relations, State Forest Resources Agency of Ukraine, emphasised that cooperation under EU4Environment has been invaluable for strengthening forest management and policy development through knowledge sharing—for example, assistance in preparing for the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and analytical support on climate finance to facilitate access to international funding. She underscored the programme's value in supporting development of the Emerald Network and highlighted the need to scale up on-site training, pilot initiatives for community leaders, and training-of-trainers to broaden outreach.

Roman Romanik, Deputy Director, Department of Protected Areas and Biodiversity, Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine (MEEA), noted that the Programme is already yielding results. As a candidate country, Ukraine must align its national legislation with EU requirements; there are gaps that need to be addressed. The MEEA is exploring potential approaches to incorporate developed Emerald Network management plan guidelines into current policy frameworks, pending the development of dedicated Emerald Network legislation. He

highlighted the importance of the seminars on the Emerald Network which were conducted in Ukraine for strengthening stakeholder capacities. He added that Ukraine's Biodiversity Strategy has been developed, but further measures are required for implementation, and additional support will be necessary.

Item 4. Communication and Visibility

The EU4Environment Communications Coordinator at the World Bank presented an overview of the communication activities, highlighting the use of digital channels, social media, and newsletters to disseminate results. She outlines the development of various communication materials, including the programme's country flyers, country profiles showcasing tangible results, the flyers on the Emerald Network, social media materials with infographics, feature stories illustrating the connection between nature protection and development of sustainable economic activities in rural areas, and two videos on the Emerald Network and Areas of Special Conservation Interest (ASCIs) Criteria. She also acknowledged a productive collaboration with EU Neighbours and World Bank channels. The team is working closely with the Ministries of Environment in Armenia and Moldova on promoting their work through public service announcements. In Armenia, the billboard will be developed in line with COP17 and in Moldova, the billboard will be produced in relation with the afforestation programme. The efforts are also done in raising awareness of the programme through the World Bank channels, including the creation of a dedicated landing page on the WB website, developing internal stories featuring EU4Environment, and closer collaboration with other departments tackling environmental topics.

Angela Bularga provided feedback on the presentation, noting the diverse range of communications products and welcoming the collaboration with EU Neighbours East as a strong channel to convey key messages about work in the Eastern Partnership countries. She encouraged the team to engage EU Delegations more closely, keeping them informed and involved throughout. She also acknowledged the value of several information materials published by national ministries and she encouraged further efforts in this direction. DG ENEST stands ready to help shape communications products upstream. The idea of producing billboards was considered interesting and more information about its practical use was welcomed.

Angela Bularga commended the work in Armenia ahead of COP17 and encouraged closer cooperation with UNEP, with whom the EC already cooperates. Regarding Ukraine, she acknowledged delays with the start of activities caused by Russia's war of aggression but highlighted the inspiring progress done on the Emerald Network and identified opportunities the Programme can communicate now. She recommended sharing selected products with other partners, including LIFE partners in Ukraine and Moldova. She concluded by thanking the team for the variety of communications products and encouraging deeper upstream collaboration.

Item 5. EU4Environment: Ensuring Sustainability and Scaling up of the Programme Results

Angela Bularga opened by noting that the Programme was designed from the outset to scale from technical cooperation into investment, which is why one World Bank component is dedicated to investment. She highlighted a major afforestation effort underway in Moldova, supported by the European Investment Bank and the French Development Agency, driven by political will and Moldova's EU integration path. While there is currently no dedicated follow-up under the World Bank component—most follow-up is done under the EU4GreenRecoveryEast Programme— work

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through forestry and biodiversity instruments will continue. It is important to understand what the needs are and what can be done.

Fisseha Tessema Abissa made a presentation on ensuring sustainability and scaling up of the Programme's results, explaining that his approach as Task Team Leader was to multiply EU4Environment's impacts by translating technical outputs into investments to avoid "shelf" reports. He highlighted the RESILAND: Armenia Sustainable Landscapes Project, built on EU4Environment, along with two related activities that amplify its impact. Moldova remains a strong case: one investment operation is approved, another is in the pipeline, and a third—targeting US$50 million and focused on afforestation and forest carbon—is being actively advanced and complements a large EIB-led afforestation program. In Ukraine, a new PROGREEN technical assistance activity has been launched, leveraging climate finance, carbon outcomes, and value chains, with work underway to develop an investment project to sustain results. He also noted the regional Eco Connect project (approved for Moldova and Ukraine)) that aims to support the transition from the Emerald Network to Natura 2000. Discussions on potential projects in Georgia and Azerbaijan are ongoing.

Angela Bularga concluded by welcoming the breadth of follow-up initiatives that underpin sustainability and scale, urging complementarity with EU-funded regional and bilateral activities as well as through programs such as Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme. She added that, under EU4ClimateResilience, complementary instruments such as green bonds (with OECD leading) and water investment work are progressing, and that natural capital protection is relatively well covered—with the expectation that it will result not only in financing by IFIs but also from the private capital and community level finance and action.

Item 6. Update on Relevant Policy Developments in the EU

Angela Bularga provided an update on recent relevant EU policy developments. She noted that sectoral policies are considered under regular Programme implementation, with the team periodically coordinating with DG Environment. From DG ENEST's perspective, a key development is the adoption of the Black Sea Strategy in late May, which builds on the 2007 Black Sea Synergy and the extensive environment-related work carried out under it. The new Strategy aims to bring various policies together and add a security dimension in light of the region's specific context. It is organised around three pillars—security; growth and connectivity; and preparedness in environment, climate, and civil protection. A continuing priority is engagement with local communities, especially coastal ones, to enhance resilience. Ongoing discussions with UNDP focus on strengthening environmental monitoring of the Black Sea and introducing measures that bolster community resilience.

Angela Bularga also highlighted the Commission's adoption of the annual enlargement package, which offers comprehensive assessments, recommendations, and reform roadmaps for candidate countries—most notably Ukraine and Moldova. She emphasised the instruments designed to facilitate reforms and deeper integration: the €1.9 billion Moldova Growth Plan and the €50 billion Ukraine Facility. Ukraine, despite Russia's war of aggression, remains strongly committed to EU accession and has completed the screening process. The country has met conditions to open several clusters—fundamentals, external relations, and the internal market—though further effort is needed in climate and environment. The report acknowledges progress on timber certification and draft legislation to align with the EUDR, while noting that alignment of

nature protection legislation is still at an early stage and requires stronger stakeholder engagement across agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.

Turning to Moldova, significant advancement was reported. Moldova has completed the screening process and met conditions to open multiple clusters. The country is continuing to implement its national afforestation program, and it should sustain efforts to identify nature protection sites, with further support expected from the World Bank and the LIFE project. The reform of Moldsilva remains important and should proceed.

Regarding Georgia, it was noted that the European Council had already concluded that Georgia's accession process is de facto on hold. Developments since then suggest challenges such as deviation from democratic standards and the rule of law. In the nature protection sector, past efforts have enabled partial alignment with EU legislation.

Item 7. Wrap up and closure

Angela Bularga thanked the team for sharing progress and emphasised the value of these events for accountability, peer exchange, and learning. She noted she had learned new insights and expressed interest in hearing more from partners in the countries, including CSOs, through bilateral follow-ups to keep the process smooth. She reaffirmed the strong focus on outcomes and results, expecting an effective conclusion of the program next year with tangible impact. Angela welcomed evidence that the program has helped countries improve legislation and work with communities and reiterated that nature protection remains a key EU policy priority with continued support.

Fisseha Tessema Abissa thanked the European Commission for support throughout implementation and extended appreciation to colleagues across government, CSOs, and academia in each country. He proposed another progress review, encouraged broader CSO participation to enrich future discussions, and underscored that the session was highly useful.