



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

AUSTRIA'S BENEFICIAL SUPPORT FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN MOLDOVA

Key messages

A decade of support by [Austria's Development Agency](#) led to the establishment of a national park in Moldova's internationally important Lower Dniester wetland in 2022. This outcome is thanks to Austria's long-term commitment, its work through local partners, and its delivery of several projects on water, biodiversity and climate change adaptation to benefit local communities.

Keywords

[Environment and climate](#) | [Partnerships](#) | [Locally led development](#)

Key partner

[Austria](#)

Challenge

The Lower Dniester is the most biodiverse wetland of international importance in Moldova, supporting 200 species of birds, 83 species of fish and 1 000 species of plants. This wetland was recognised in 2003 as a wetland of international importance under the [Ramsar Convention](#), an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international co-operation for the conservation of wetlands. Despite this, the site has suffered from intensive hydroelectric construction, as well as decreased precipitation and rising average annual air temperatures. All these factors have led to a decline in river flow, negatively affecting many fish, other aquatic species, and birds, with increased erosion impacting the entire ecosystem.

Approach

[Moldova](#) has been a priority country for Austrian development co-operation since 2004. Austria's Development Agency (ADA) has been supporting the establishment of a protected area in the Lower Dniester Ramsar Site for over a decade with a total contribution of 1.5 million EUR. It has combined the objectives of developing social infrastructure, such as improved water supply and sewerage systems in rural areas, while conserving the wetland's natural and cultural heritage. Its successful approach has involved the following:

- **Actions at both local and national levels:** ADA worked with two local NGOs (the Ecological Society "[Biotica](#)" and the public association "[EcoContact](#)") while also collaborating with the Moldovan Ministry of Environment.
- **Building local awareness of the ecosystems' value:** in working with and through a range of local partners, ADA helped build local awareness of the importance of maintaining healthy ecosystems and services in the region to ensure both sustainability and livelihoods.
- **Supporting local capacity development:** the local partners provide institutional capacity development to local authorities, helping them to understand the importance of preserving this ecosystem, and to develop the legislative package to set up the protected area.
- **Including small-scale interventions that directly benefit the local population:** these are an integral part of ADA's support through its funding of Biotica's "[Ecosystem-based adaptation, climate-resilience measures and institutional development in the Lower Dniester](#)" project, and include [sustainable water management](#), biodiversity conservation, ecotourism and [climate change resilience and adaptation](#).
- **Supporting Moldova's National Adaptation Plan process at the national level:** this ensures that a system and capacity for medium- to long-term adaptation to climate change planning and budgeting are in place to complement local sustainable water management and adaptation.

Results

- **The declaration of a [protected area](#) in the Lower Dniester Ramsar Site (LDRS) in May 2022.** ADA's actions in Moldova have helped mobilise local and national decision makers to set up a national park to protect the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems supporting diverse landscapes and natural complexes, native plant species and animals of national and international importance. The park is intended for scientific, recreational, economic, cultural, and educational use.
- **Biodiversity protection in a context of political conflict.** The park covers several localities in the districts of Ștefan Vodă and Căușeni, as well as four localities on the left bank of the Dniester River in the Transnistrian region. The complex governance in the region makes it all the more remarkable and important that such a protected area was able to be established.
- **Community benefits.** The support to local projects has led to equitable and affordable access to water supply systems, benefiting more than 7 000 people from vulnerable groups in the area, while also building local capacity for climate adaptation, nature conservation and management.
- **Climate mitigation.** A cost-based evaluation of the ecosystem enabled the implementation of preservation, mitigation and adaptation measures, including rehabilitation and reforestation of priority areas.
- **A new project between ADA and Biotica has been signed for 2023-2027,** with a budget of 1.7 million EUR. The objective of this project is to increase effectiveness of protected areas in reducing biodiversity loss and achieving conservation outcomes through innovative governance models and sustainable management practices.

Lessons learnt

Several wider lessons can be learnt from Austria's engagement with Moldova to create the Lower Dniester National Park:

- **Implementing small-scale actions can add up to large results over a decade of engagement.** ADA's support to communities and local public authorities to improve service delivery, raise awareness of healthy ecosystems and their services, and link ecosystems to adaptation and disaster risk reduction, all helped gain local approval, and, in turn, national support for the creation of the park.
- **Work on the ground is essential for biodiversity protection.** ADA worked with local NGOs in establishing the protected area. This approach proved key for raising awareness and mobilising local actors and decision makers, helping them understand the value of protecting the area and the potential for alternative livelihoods and green jobs (e.g., through ecotourism).
- **Building country ownership is key.** Doing so helps to avoid the deprioritisation or derailing of a project or programme. This commitment ensured that the national park was declared a few weeks after Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine.
- **It is possible to build consensus across borders.** ADA's approach involved co-operation with and support from environmental authorities in the Transnistrian region, demonstrating that while natural resources can be a source of conflict, their protection can be an entry point for dialogue.

Further information

Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Moldova (2022), *Parcul național "Nistrul de Jos" – vis realizat după 20 de ani (Lower Dniester National Park - a dream come true after 20 years)*, www.mediu.gov.md/ro/content/3853.

Austrian Development Agency (2021), *Framework Strategy of the Austrian Development Cooperation with the EU Eastern Partner Countries: The Republic of Armenia, Georgia, The Republic of Moldova*, Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Directorate General for Development Cooperation, Vienna, www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Publikationen/Landesstrategien/Framework_Strategy_ArmGeoMol.pdf

Austrian Development Agency (2021), *ODA profile 2021 MOLDOVA*, ADA, Vienna,

Lower Dniester National Park (2021), *The Lower Dniester: Beautiful landscapes and natural monuments*, Nistrul de Jos (Lower Dniester) website, <https://lower-dniester.org>.

Biotica Ecological Society, *Guardians of Moldovan Nature: Enforcing the Rights of the Communities on Both Banks of the Dniester*, www.bioticamoldova.org/project/1.

OECD resources

OECD (2023), *A Decade of Development Finance for Biodiversity, 2011-2020*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e6c182aa-en>.

To learn more about Austria's development co-operation see:

OECD (2020), *OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Austria 2020*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/03b626d5-en>.

OECD, "Austria", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bd516a04-en>.

Find more *In Practice* examples from Austria here: <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/?submodel=in+practice&tag-key+partner=austria#search>.

Last updated: 21-11-2023