

CLIMATE CHANGE & ENERGY:



20 ANI 
ÎN ROMÂNIA

ADVANCING A JUST AND NATURE-POSITIVE TRANSITION





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Climate change is not a distant threat, it is reshaping Romania's landscapes, communities, and economy right now. Over the past two decades, WWF-Romania has been part of the effort to understand this reality and to respond to it with ambition, rigour, and a deep commitment to both people and nature. This report reflects that journey.



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Our work on climate and energy has gained significant momentum over the past decade, not by coincidence, but because the accelerating pace of change has made it impossible to treat climate action as a long-term aspiration. It is an immediate necessity. And yet, necessity alone is not enough. From the outset, we have been guided by a core conviction: that a credible energy transition must be just, inclusive, and nature positive. Reducing emissions while

destroying ecosystems or leaving vulnerable communities behind is not a solution, it is a displacement of harm. This belief has shaped every dimension of our approach, from advocating for nature-smart renewable energy planning, to piloting Romania's first local action plan on energy poverty, to protecting free-flowing rivers from short-sighted hydropower developments.

We chose to act at the intersection of science, policy, and practice because it is where durable change is made. Progress has not always been linear. There have been challenges, such as policies that moved too slowly, plans revised before they could take root. But there have

also been real victories: rivers protected, communities heard, young people empowered to shape the urban environments they will inherit, and vulnerable households brought closer to the centre of national energy policy.

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Looking ahead, our priorities are clear: financial systems aligned with climate and nature goals, planning frameworks that treat biodiversity as a non-negotiable condition, and an energy transition where no community is left to navigate alone. The scale of the challenge requires not only better policies, but stronger coalitions across sectors, across regions, and across generations.



Orieta Hulea
CEO, WWF Romania



This report is both a record and a commitment. It documents what we have done, acknowledges where gaps remain, and sets the direction for what must come next. We are grateful to all our partners, funders, institutional allies, and critical voices who have made this work possible. The transition to a climate-neutral and resilient Romania will be built together.



WWF-ROMANIA'S WORK ON CLIMATE AND ENERGY

WWF-Romania's work on climate and energy has gained significant momentum over the past 5–10 years. This section therefore reflects a shorter but rapidly evolving trajectory, shaped by accelerating climate risks, geopolitical and energy crisis, EU policy frameworks, and growing national engagement on the topic.

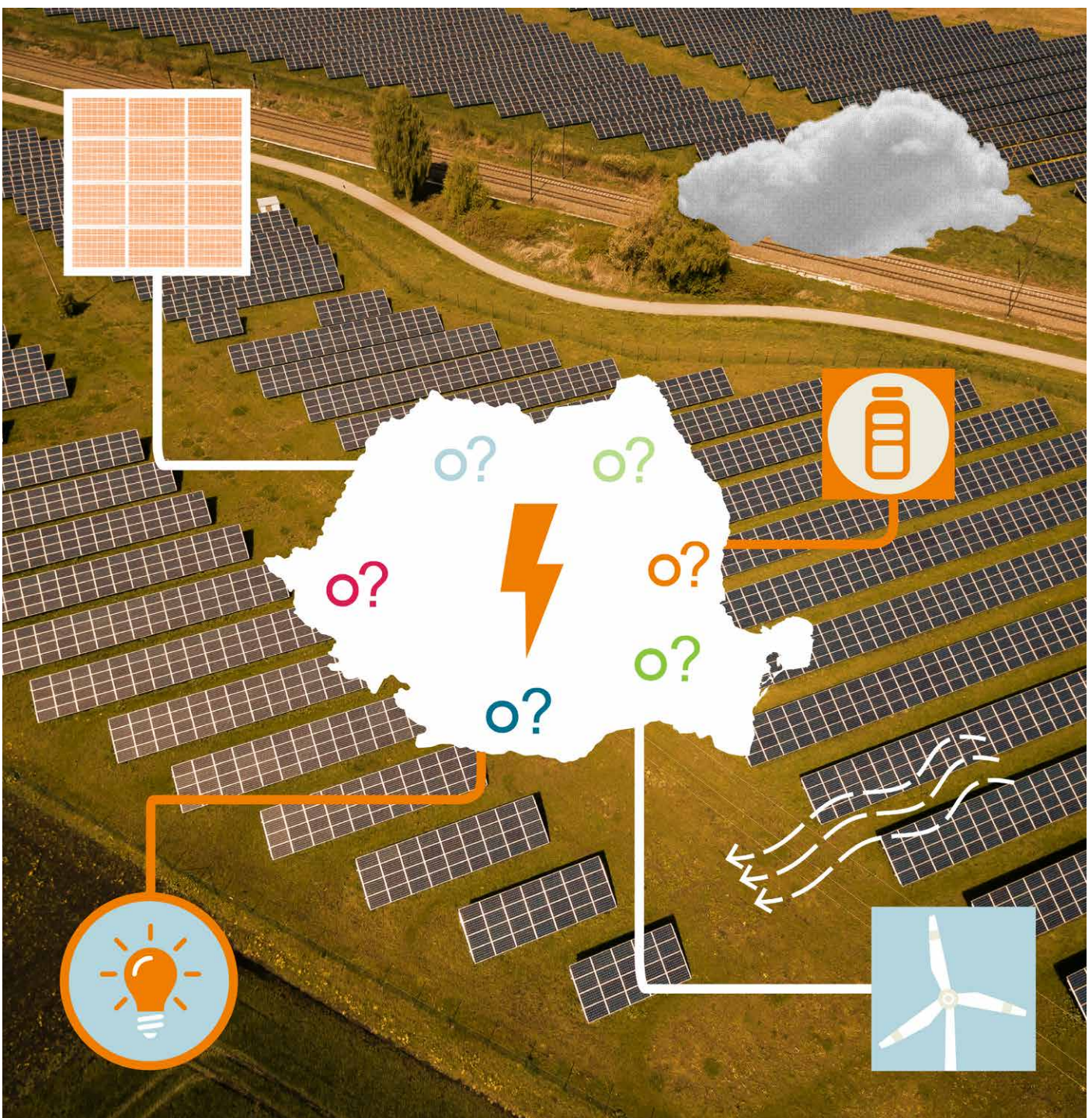
Romania is undergoing a transition toward a low-carbon economy, driven by EU climate targets and increasing pressure due to climate change. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and growing strain on natural resources highlight the urgency of taking action, while the energy system remains in transition from fossil fuels to cleaner alternatives.

At the same time, structural challenges persist. Limited institutional capacity, insufficient coordination, and gaps in data and planning frameworks slow down progress. Cities, responsible for around 75% of energy consumption, play a key role, yet many still lack robust climate strategies and monitoring systems.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Romania must therefore balance multiple priorities: improving energy efficiency while, tackling energy poverty, accelerating renewable energy, reducing emissions, and ensuring that the transition does not come at the expense of biodiversity and local communities. At the same time, climate change increasingly affects public health and economic stability, requiring integrated responses across sectors. Without careful planning, short-term energy solutions risk creating long-term environmental damage.

In this context, making integrated, nature-positive approaches is essential and WWF-Romania acts as a catalyst for a just and nature-positive transition, connecting science, policy, and real-world solutions. By combining technical expertise with on-the-ground action, WWF helps shift the transition from commitments to practical, scalable, and socially inclusive solutions.



WWF'S ROLE IN THIS JOURNEY



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WWF-Romania plays a strategic role in shaping Romania's climate and energy transition, ensuring that it delivers not only emission reductions, but also benefits for nature, communities, and long-term economic resilience.

Acting at the intersection of science and innovation, policy, finance, and local implementation, WWF helps steer the transition toward solutions that are both nature-positive and socially inclusive, while anticipating future risks and opportunities.

WWF CONTRIBUTES BY:

- advocating for ambitious, science-based climate and energy policies aligned with EU targets and long-term sustainability goals
- integrating biodiversity considerations into energy planning and infrastructure decisions
- bringing field-tested solutions and pilot-area results into national and European policy processes
- supporting both mitigation (reducing emissions) and adaptation (strengthening the resilience of communities and ecosystems)
- mobilising stakeholders and facilitating dialogue between authorities, communities, experts, and the private sector to co-create solutions and reduce conflicts
- supporting participatory processes and public engagement, ensuring that local voices and practical realities inform decision-making and implementation

By connecting policy ambition with practical solutions and emerging priorities, such as risk-informed planning and inclusive governance, WWF helps move Romania's transition from short-term responses to systemic, future-ready transformation.



HOW WE ACT



WWF ROMANIA ADVANCES CLIMATE AND ENERGY SOLUTIONS BY:

1 DRIVING POLICY CHANGE
Engaging in key national processes (e.g., NECP, National Social Climate Plan Energy and Biodiversity strategies and action plans, recovery plans) to promote integrated cross-sectoral planning, and ambitious, evidence-based policies.

2 PROMOTING RENEWABLE ENERGY WITH LOW ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
Supporting spatial planning and safeguards that accelerate solar and wind deployment while avoiding biodiversity loss and conflicts.

3 TACKLING ENERGY POVERTY AND ENABLING JUST TRANSITION
Advocating for inclusive policies and funding mechanisms for vulnerable households, particularly those relying on firewood for heating, while promoting accessible energy efficiency solutions.



4 ADVANCING BETTER SOLUTIONS FOR THE HYDROPOWER SECTOR

Promoting modernization of existing infrastructure and low impact storage as a cost-effective and more sustainable alternative to new developments in sensitive areas.

5 ENABLING GREENER CITIES & EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE

Supporting cities with their monitoring and reporting tools, while also promoting participatory processes that actively involve citizens of all ages and turn their inputs into implementable urban solutions.

6 MOBILISING STAKEHOLDERS AND ENABLING LOCAL ACTION

Supporting public consultations, civic engagement, and collaboration platforms that allow communities to influence decisions affecting their environment and energy future.

7 BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND ALLIANCES

Working with local and national authorities, academia, the energy sector, and civil society to align interests and deliver systemic change.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS



1 YOUTH-DRIVEN CLIMATE ACTION IN 12 CITIES ACROSS ROMANIA

Empowering young people to shape local climate solutions

1.A INITIAL CONTEXT

A few years ago, youth engagement in climate action in Romania was limited and often fragmented. While awareness of climate change was growing, opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making were scarce. Local climate policies were often developed without direct input from young people, despite their long-term stake in these decisions.

At the same time, Romanian cities were facing environmental challenges, including air pollution, unsustainable mobility, and lack of green infrastructure, while connections between citizens, especially youth, and local authorities remained weak.

1.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania addressed this gap by combining education, empowerment and civic engagement through initiatives such as LIFE ASAP and Climate Heroes.

› The approach focused on:

- Youth education and capacity building through developing climate literacy and civic skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement.
- Supporting young people to move from awareness to action, connecting youth ideas with real policy processes strengthening cities' capacity to plan, report, and implement climate action.



1.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

As a result, hundreds of young people across Romania have been actively engaged in climate action.

› Key results include:

- Over 250 high school students involved in climate discussions in 2025 alone.
- More than 400 young people participating in workshops and proposing solutions for greener cities to local authorities.
- Increased recognition of youth as key stakeholders in urban climate planning.
- Beyond participation, young people have initiated concrete actions, from promoting sustainable mobility to raising awareness and influencing local decision-making. Their efforts also gained international recognition, including awards in regional competitions.

1.D NEXT STEPS

WWF aims to scale this model to more cities and deepen collaboration between youth, schools, and local authorities.

› Future efforts will focus on:

- supporting the implementation of youth-led solutions
- integrating youth participation into formal climate policies
- expanding education programs to reach more students and teachers,
- strengthening long-term networks of young climate leaders.



2 THE FIRST LOCAL ACTION PLAN ON ENERGY POVERTY PILOTED IN MARAMUREȘ

Addressing energy vulnerability through local, data-driven solutions

2.A INITIAL CONTEXT

Energy poverty was poorly understood, particularly in rural areas. The specific dimension of energy poverty linked to firewood-based heating, a common practice in many rural households, was largely absent from public policies. The dominant approach relied almost exclusively on income-based criteria, failing to capture the complex realities of vulnerable households. As a result, many households experiencing severe forms of energy poverty were overlooked.

In particular, households relying on firewood for heating were largely excluded from support mechanisms, limiting the effectiveness of public interventions in addressing real needs on the ground.



2.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania partnered with local authorities in Lăpuș (Maramureș) to develop and pilot the first local action plan on heating and energy poverty reduction, designed to be replicated by other municipalities.

➤ Key actions included:

- integrating local data and realities to better identify vulnerable households, particularly those dependent on firewood.
- connecting local insights with national policy discussions, informing key frameworks such as the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), Long Term Strategy of Romania (LTS) and the National Social Climate Fund (NSCP).
- expanding eligibility criteria beyond income to include housing conditions and heating sources.
- advocating for recognition of firewood-dependent households as a priority group for support programmes.



2.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED



The pilot contributed to a significant policy shift.

Today, individual households relying on firewood for heating are included among the priority beneficiaries of the Social Climate Fund by the Ministry of Investments and European Projects. This funding instrument, with an estimated allocation of approximately €6 billion for Romania, represents a major opportunity to support the energy transition of vulnerable households.

This development marks a significant shift toward a multidimensional understanding of energy poverty and its integration into national public policies. It also reflects the impact of WWF's pilot area work and advocacy.

2.D NEXT STEPS

The priority is to ensure effective implementation of the Social Climate Fund and relevant instruments, translating policy commitments into tangible improvements for vulnerable households.

› Building on the Lăpuș pilot, WWF will focus on:

- effectively and equitably integrating lessons from local pilots into national policies and implementation frameworks
- ensuring fair, transparent, **and effective target targeting support**, especially for households currently underserved by existing criteria, supporting other municipalities to replicate and adapt the model, creating a network of locally grounded solutions
- strengthening institutional capacity at local level, so authorities can design, implement, and monitor energy poverty measures effectively
- continuing to advocate for policies that reflect real household needs and bridge the gap between legislation and practice



3 ROMANIA SHIFTED AWAY FROM HARMFUL MICRO-HYDROPOWER TOWARD MORE NATURE-POSITIVE ENERGY SOLUTIONS

Protecting rivers while advancing sustainable energy alternatives

3.A INITIAL CONTEXT

Around 2013, Romania experienced a surge in micro-hydropower developments, driven by a green certificate subsidy scheme. Many projects targeted free-flowing mountain rivers, many of which were ecologically valuable and largely untouched. These hydropower projects were often overlapped with high-biodiversity areas, threatening fragile ecosystems and river landscapes.

Environmental considerations were frequently overlooked, and decision-making processes lacked transparency and strong public participation, leading to habitat degradation and irreversible damage to river ecosystems.

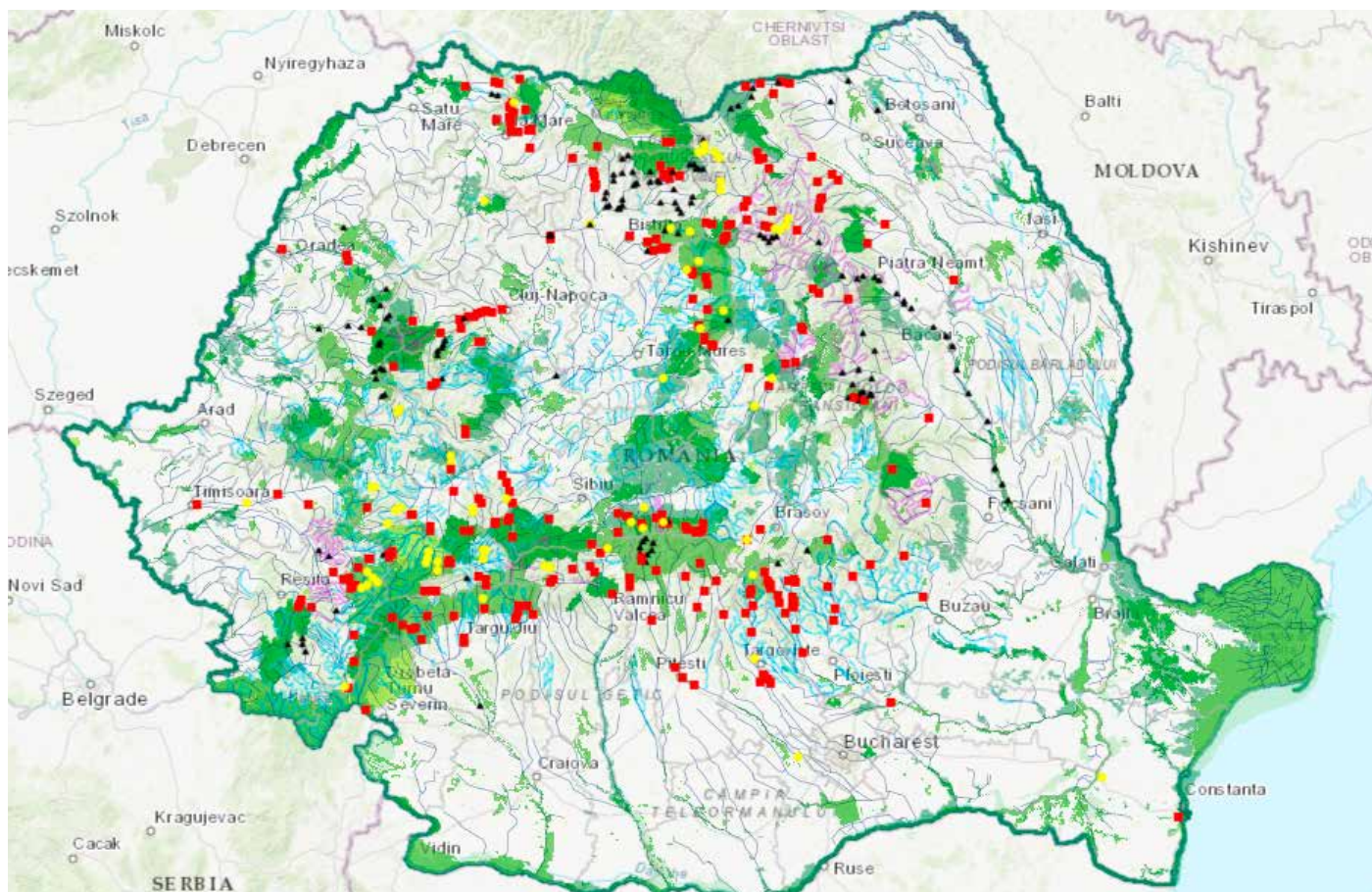


3.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania increased advocacy and awareness efforts as part of the “Rivers of Romania: The Last Chance” campaign, highlighting issues such as biodiversity loss, overlook of risks and cumulative impacts, as well as the poor planning.

Key actions included:

- Developing The Romanian rivers and the hydropower impact Map (2013, updated in 2017, and in 2025, providing a visual tool for advocacy.
- Building coalitions across stakeholders including local communities, fishermen, rafting companies, environmental experts, activists and other NGOs.
- Mobilizing public support (over 15,000 signatures)
- Engaging in policy and advocacy processes
- Promoting alternative energy solutions with lower environmental impact, such as retrofitting existing infrastructure and low-impact energy storage solutions. Supporting public consultations and civic engagement, enabling local communities to influence decisions affecting their rivers and natural heritage.



3.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED



WWF's efforts contributed to protecting several rivers from harmful developments, including:

- Nera River flowing freely today thanks to strong community mobilization, supported by WWF, where hundreds of local opposers led to the hydropower project withdrawal.
- Topolog River is protected, after the authorities rejected the hydropower project.
- Other rivers: Șucu, Oleana, and Bistra Mărului (Banat), Mara, and Cosău (Maramureș) were safeguarded.

Beyond individual cases, this work also inspired a broader civil society movement advocating for free-flowing rivers, increased public awareness about the ecological value of rivers, and shifted the attention away from micro-hydropower projects.

At the same time, it helped promote cleaner alternatives in the hydropower sector, such as modernising existing hydropower plants and developing low-impact pumped-storage solutions while promoting acceleration of sustainable solar and wind development, showing that Romania can expand renewable energy without severely harming nature. poate extinde energia regenerabilă fără a afecta semnificativ natura.

3.D NEXT STEPS

Challenges remain, including legacy hydropower projects planned in the heart of protected areas such as Răstolița and Defileul Jiului that do not meet modern environmental standards.

➤ Looking ahead, WWF will:

- continue advocacy to protect remaining free-flowing rivers and prevent high-impact developments
- influence national energy strategies to shift away from new hydropower in sensitive ecosystems
- promote modernization and retrofitting of existing hydropower infrastructures as a lower-impact alternative
- promote transparent and open expert dialogue among involved sectors with a focus on science-based, integrated and innovative solutions and good practice exchange.
- support low-impact energy storage solutions to increase system flexibility
- accelerate sustainable solar and wind development, including better spatial planning to avoid biodiversity conflict.



4 NATURE-POSITIVE RENEWABLE ENERGY PLANNING ADVANCED IN ROMANIA

Accelerating solar and wind development while avoiding impacts on biodiversity and communities

4.A INITIAL CONTEXT

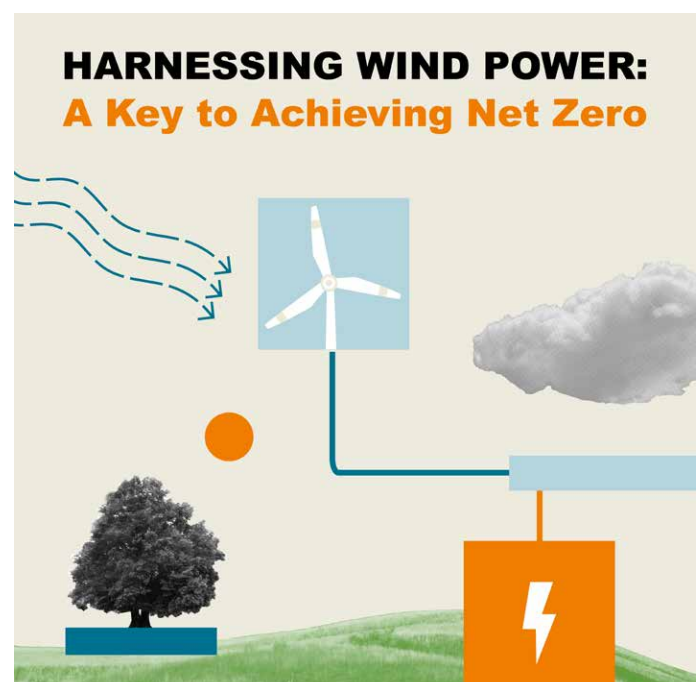
As Romania accelerates renewable energy deployment to meet EU climate targets, new risks have emerged. Without proper planning, large-scale solar and wind projects can create conflicts with biodiversity, land use, and local communities. At the same time, EU legislation (RED III) requires Member States to designate Renewable Acceleration Areas (RAAs), increasing pressure for rapid but responsible implementation.

4.B WWF'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

WWF-Romania contributed to shaping a more balanced approach by developing a science-based, multi-criteria methodology to identify suitable areas for renewable energy.

This work brought together public authorities, experts, and civil society to:

- identify low-conflict areas for solar and wind development
- integrate biodiversity, land-use, and social criteria into planning decisions
- provide practical tools to support national and regional planning processes
- strengthen collaboration between stakeholders to reduce conflicts early in the process



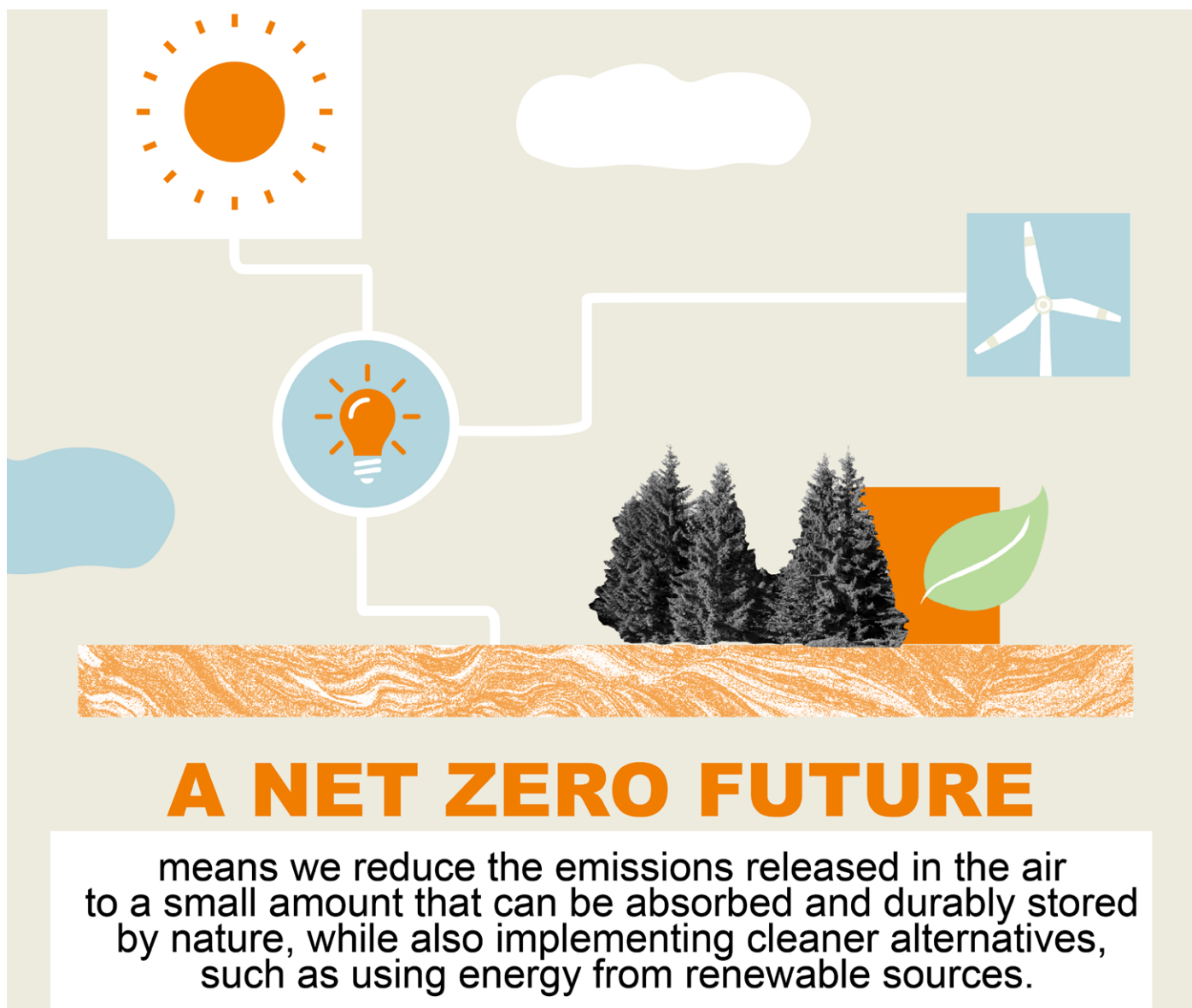
4.C CURRENT SITUATION AND PROGRESS ACHIEVED

This methodology was successfully tested in pilot regions such as Braşov and Prahova, demonstrating that renewable energy can be deployed in a way that avoids sensitive ecosystems and reduces local opposition.

› Beyond technical results, the initiative helped:

- introduce a more structured and transparent approach to renewable energy siting
- improve dialogue between public authorities, experts, and civil society
- position WWF as a key contributor to national discussions on renewable energy in general with a focus on Renewable Acceleration Areas.

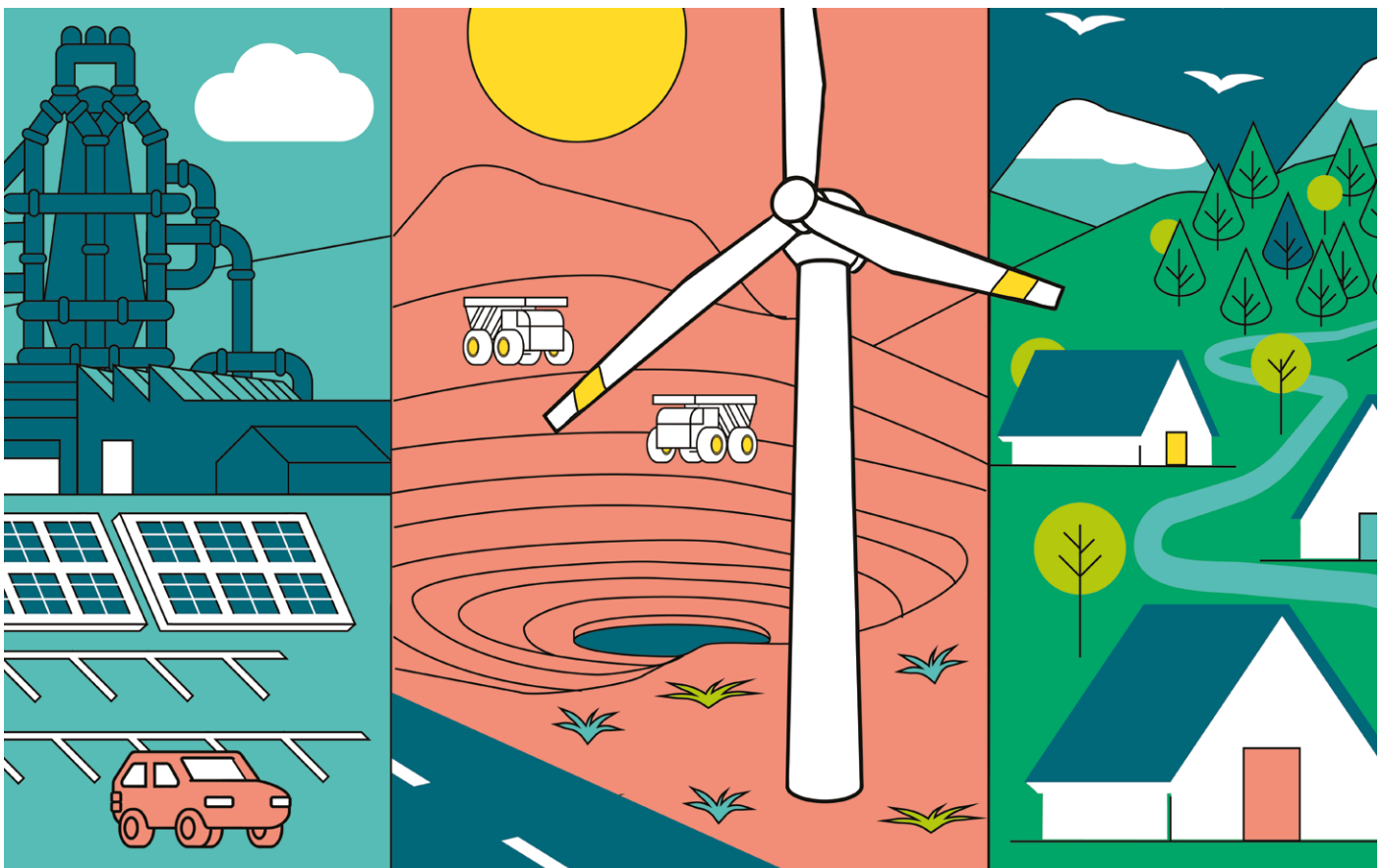
This work shows that accelerating renewable energy and protecting nature are not conflicting objectives but can be addressed together through better planning.



4.D NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, WWF will:

- prioritise siting renewables on artificial and low-conflict surfaces (e.g., brownfields, former industrial and contaminated sites) to reduce pressure on nature and communities
- support authorities to identify and map suitable brownfield areas for solar and wind development, on the one hand, and exclude the sensitive areas from the acceleration process, on the other hand, using clear, practical, science-based criteria
- develop and promote decision-support tools that streamline permitting and guide projects toward low-impact locations
- run pilot implementations that demonstrate how brownfield-based renewable projects can be delivered at scale and how sensitive areas can be protected through better planning and proper mitigation
- continue to embed biodiversity and social safeguards into planning frameworks for Renewable Acceleration Areas (RAAs)
- contribute to more transparent and evidence-based decision-making, including better integration of cumulative impacts and cross-regional dynamics in energy planning





SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES AHEAD

Despite clear progress driven by policy improvements, local pilots, and increased public engagement, several systemic barriers continue to slow down a just and nature-positive climate and energy transition in Romania:

- despite stronger policy engagement and improved strategic frameworks, governance remains fragmented and subject to frequent shifts across key institutions (Energy, Environment, Agriculture, Spatial Planning, Investments), leading to delays and inconsistent implementation (e.g., NECP revisions, recovery plan measures, RED III Directive, transposition and implementation)
- while tools for better spatial planning are emerging, the rollout of mechanisms such as Renewable Acceleration Areas remains slow and uneven, with biodiversity data still insufficiently integrated into siting decisions
- although harmful micro-hydropower expansion has been reduced, legacy projects and cumulative pressures on river ecosystems continue to pose significant risks

- despite increased recognition of energy poverty and initial policy shifts, structural vulnerabilities persist in rural areas, particularly for households relying on firewood, where support schemes still struggle to reach those most in need
- due to the multiple geopolitical and economic crises, many of those who were initially not in the vulnerable category are becoming vulnerable
- even as renewable ambitions grow, grid constraints and permitting bottlenecks continue to delay deployment and discourage low-impact, well-planned projects
- while data availability has improved in some areas, transparency and access to consistent, high-quality data (on emissions, subsidies, project impacts) remain limited, constraining evidence-based decision-making and public oversight
- despite growing attention to sustainable investment, financial flows are not yet aligned with climate and nature objectives, with both public and private investments still enabling environmentally harmful projects
- even where successful local pilots and partnerships exist, trust and coordination gaps persist at scale, with communities, authorities, and investors often operating with misaligned incentives.

Addressing these challenges requires not only technical solutions, but stronger governance, clearer rules, and better alignment between policy, finance, and on-the-ground implementation.



These gaps point to the need for more integrated approaches, linking energy, finance, land-use, and social systems, and for aligning investments, planning tools, and public policies with long-term climate and nature objectives. This direction underpins the priorities outlined in the next section.

LOOKING AHEAD



WWF-Romania will continue to support Romania's shift toward a climate-neutral and resilient future by integrating climate action with nature protection and social equity.

The next phase will depend not only on scaling renewable energy, but on ensuring that solutions are implemented in ways that protect ecosystems, support communities, and build long-term resilience.

A key priority will be advancing sustainable finance and the greening of financial systems, in line with WWF international approaches. This includes:

- redirecting financial flows away from activities that harm nature and climate and toward climate-aligned investments
- integrating climate-related risks and transition criteria into financial decision-making across public and private sectors
- aligning public and private finance with climate and biodiversity goals

At the same time, WWF will:

- **drive a nature-positive and socially inclusive energy transition** by shaping policies and planning frameworks that accelerate renewables while avoiding environmental and social risks
- **integrate climate and nature considerations into public health policies**, addressing exposure to air pollution and heat
- **advance a sustainable bioeconomy**, ensuring responsible use of biomass resources and reducing emissions
- **strengthen risk-informed planning**, aligning infrastructure and land-use decisions with long-term climate risks
- **support climate-smart entrepreneurship**, enabling SMEs and start-ups to develop low-carbon business models
- **enable a fair and inclusive energy transition**, improving access to clean energy and reducing reliance on high-emission systems



By addressing both how energy is produced and how it is financed, and how risks, health, and economic systems are managed, WWF aims to help shape a transition that is not only low-carbon, but also nature-positive, fair, and future-proof.



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