

# Policy recommendations

## Promoting green jobs along the Bulgarian Green Belt



© Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation

More  
power  
for the  
European  
Green Belt

**BESTbelt**

## Imprint

### Editorial team

Anne Katrin Heinrichs (EuroNatur)

Jessica Bitsch (EuroNatur)

Eleonora Yosifova (Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation)

Petko Tzvetkov (Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation)

Dimitar Sabev (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences | BAS · Economic Research Institute)

### Contact

#### **Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation**

ulitsa Triaditsa 6, office 504

1000 Sofia, Bulgaria

[bbf@biodiversity.bg](mailto:bbf@biodiversity.bg)

#### **EuroNatur Foundation**

Westendstraße 3

78315 Radolfzell, Germany

+49-7732-9272-0

[info@euronatur.org](mailto:info@euronatur.org)

### Date

27 March 2025

*The policy recommendations and the related case were produced with the financial support of the European Union through the BESTbelt project. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.*

## Executive summary & context

The policy recommendations presented in this document have been derived from a case study on green jobs along the European Green Belt in Bulgaria. The case study was carried out by the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation in cooperation with EuroNatur as part of the [EU-funded BESTbelt project](#). The case study aimed at exploring opportunities for the creation of green jobs on the ground, developing specific ideas and actions on the local level, assessing factors of success as well as challenges for turning the identified potential into reality, and developing policy recommendations. The study focused on three regions: the Strandzha Mountains, the Western Stara Planina Mountains, and the Belasitsa Mountains. Methods included field research with stakeholder interviews and local forums, and desk research assessing socioeconomic development. Key findings indicate several shared but also individual challenges for each region.

## Green jobs

According to the report "[Comprehensive analysis of the potential of sustainable jobs along the European Green Belt and its valorisation](#)", carried out by Trinomics in 2023, sustainable or green jobs in relation to the European Green Belt can be defined as *"jobs [ ... ] that avert climate change and environmental degradation and, at the same time, contribute to social development and delivery of decent work for all."*<sup>1</sup> The term is further refined into direct and indirect green jobs:

### Direct green jobs...

- Directly contribute to the conservation and restoration of ecosystems along the European Green Belt.
- **Examples:** Jobs in nature conservation, sustainable forest management or organic agriculture.

### Indirect green jobs...

- Are created because of the existence of the European Green Belt and have no detrimental impacts on the environment.
- **Examples:** Jobs in eco-tourism, sales of local products.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: Comprehensive analysis of the potential of sustainable jobs along the European Green Belt and its valorisation - Final Report, 2023

# Challenges & Recommendations

## 1. Challenge: Lack of labor force

There is a severe lack of labor force in the rural areas of Bulgaria, e.g. Strandzha. Currently, this is also the main reason for low investment activities in these regions.

### Recommendations

- Upgrade green jobs by offering adequate remuneration to increase the attractiveness of the region by providing jobs that secure local livelihoods.
- Increase green jobs' availability by initiating new large-scale nature conservation and restoration programs. This can offer attractive jobs and contribute to socio-economic regional development.
- Development actors (economic, social and environmental authorities responsible for planning and development of opportunities for job creation and policies on the topic) need to be addressed with key arguments to follow this recommendation.

**Policy level:** International EU level, national governmental.

## 2. Challenge: Lack of skills

Some municipalities in rural areas still have large populations. However, they lack an educated and skilled labor force.

### Recommendations:

- Offer training and guidance for municipalities on how to stimulate and create green jobs in the region.
- Train local stakeholders in setting up businesses in the sustainability sector.
- Develop education programs to increase knowledge and competencies in nature conservation and habitat restoration.

**Policy level:** International, EU, national, regional (Governmental Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations) and local.

### 3. Challenge: Underestimated potential of green jobs

The potential for green jobs in Bulgarian rural areas along the European Green Belt is not yet recognized.

#### Recommendations

- Make the sustainable development of rural areas a national priority and provide adequate expertise and financial resources.
- National, regional and local authorities should identify region-specific potentials for green jobs and actively promote them.
- Develop and actively implement strategies and plans to create green jobs, highlighting the potential of the Bulgarian Green Belt areas for sustainable development.
- Include requirements for creating green jobs into national and EU-wide financing programs targeting local enterprises at the Bulgarian Green Belt.
- Present existing green jobs potential to the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, its Agency of Labor, and the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works.
- Create new green jobs in sustainable forestry and farming, green manufacturing, and sustainable nature-based tourism to stimulate the development of these sectors.

**Policy level:** EU, national, and regional level.

### 4. Challenge: Untapped potential of municipalities near Sofia

Bulgaria's capital, Sofia is a powerful consumer center that offers opportunities for local businesses in regions such as Belasitsa or Western Stara Planina. Sofia is a potential market for products of local farmers. In addition, tourists from Sofia can easily reach nearby regions, which can use this potential by offering tourism options. Sofia also provides easy access to a wide range of administrative, financial and other services.

#### Recommendations

- Expand existing and establish new farmers markets.
- Do dedicated marketing of local products and services from European Green Belt areas.
- Increase and diversify tourism offers including outdoor tourism, gourmet and wine tourism, spa and recreation tourism for tourists from Sofia.
- Support networking between restaurants and producers from European Green Belt areas.

**Policy level:** National and regional.

## 5. Challenge: Low capacities of Nature Park Directorates

The human and financial resources of many Nature Park Directorates are often limited. Their staff and local experts are poorly paid and must manage projects with low operating budgets, which reduces the capacity for sustainable local development. At the same time the Nature Park Directorates provide green jobs.

### Recommendations

- The Ministry of Agriculture and Food should support the Nature Park Administrations under their authority politically and financially.
- Establish a separate State Agency on Protected Areas and Natura 2000 with an adequate budget and status.
- Increase staff of Nature Park Administrations.

**Policy level:** National.

## 6. Challenge: Limitations of existing green job best practices

Most of the existing green job best practices along the Bulgarian Green Belt are small-scale. In addition, they suffer from unproportionally high political, fiscal, regulatory, economic, and demographic pressures.

### Recommendations

- EU and national subsidies and programs must consider regional particularities and explicitly include creating green jobs.
- Provide the necessary support to local farmers to run their sustainable businesses harmoniously with existing Natura 2000 regulations.
- Support local (mainly seasonal) businesses in rural areas on their way to building sustainable and well-established businesses through tax incentives.

**Policy level:** National and regional.

## 7. Challenge: Underdeveloped potential of green manufacturing

The potential for good green jobs in relation to the sustainable processing of local resources (timber, agriculture, etc.) is only partially tapped in. Modern green manufacturing has the potential to increase the region's value and economic power while working resources efficiently and environmentally friendly and to attract skilled labor forces.

## Recommendations

- Raise awareness of the value of local primary resources and the potential for green jobs.
- Strengthen the local and regional portfolio in the green manufacturing sector to attract companies.

## 8. Challenge: The natural and cultural values of the Bulgarian Green Belt are not well-known

The Bulgarian Green Belt is not yet well known in terms of the natural and cultural values it offers. Especially, the potential for recreation and sustainable tourism is not promoted sufficiently.

## Recommendations

- Promote the European Green Belt as an essential initiative to protect nature along the Bulgarian Green Belt and as attractive destination for sustainable tourism.
- Create joint visibility and identity, develop and implement regional trademarks with specific criteria.
- The Ministry of Tourism should establish a calendar on [bulgariatravel.org](http://bulgariatravel.org) that promotes regional and local events, to inform and attract visitors.
- Proclaim new large, protected areas and promote their international recognition, e.g. under UNESCO, as World

Heritage/MAB Biosphere Reserves/Global Geoparks to protect and promote the regions' natural values.

- Organize cultural events like festivals or exhibitions with local communities as a powerful for promoting the region, its products and good practices.
- Promote good practices through the European Green Belt community, NGOs like the Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation, Park Administrations, municipalities, local/regional state structures.

**Policy level:** National and regional.