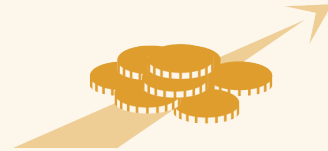


Sustainable Income

Objective: Increase the gross income of participating conservation enterprises

Carpathian Mountains
status: improving



Problem: In the Făgăraş Mountains of Carpathia, as in many other areas of Europe, rural economies and societies have changed over recent decades. This has resulted in increasingly limited employment opportunities for local people, and a recent increase in damaging activities including poaching and encroachment on forest areas.

Action: The Conservation Enterprise Programme was formed to develop [new sustainable enterprises](#) by providing technical support to both Foundation Conservation Carpathia-incubated businesses and businesses established by local people. In addition, the Carpathia Fund provides initial grants to new sustainable enterprises. In turn, these enterprises form relationships with other local businesses and suppliers in the tourism, food and wider hospitality sectors, leading to further indirect job creation. Foundation Conservation Carpathia have also established a [local food distribution network](#) which partners with local producers to sell and distribute local products from the Făgăraş Mountains to cities including Bucharest, Braşov and Piteşti.

Indicator: An increase in the gross income of small- and medium-sized conservation enterprises indicate the amount of money generated from sustainable activities and the financial success of conservation-oriented businesses within the Făgăraş Mountains. Over time, this will provide evidence that non-extractive business models can succeed and that conservation programmes can benefit local people and businesses, as well as nature.



Products developed through the Conservation Enterprise



Products developed through the Conservation Enterprise



Products developed through the Conservation Enterprise

Programme and sold through the food distribution network, Roadele Munților ('Fruits of the Mountains'). Photo: Foundation Conservation Carpathia.

Programme and sold through the food distribution network, Roadele Munților ('Fruits of the Mountains'). Photo: Foundation Conservation Carpathia.

Programme and sold through the food distribution network, Roadele Munților ('Fruits of the Mountains'). Photo: Foundation Conservation Carpathia.

Methods

Gross income was measured via formal company accounts and simple reporting systems which are put in place internally within Foundation Conservation Carpathia or between Foundation Conservation Carpathia's enterprise team and local entrepreneurs.

In addition, to evaluate income from the Food Hub suppliers, data was taken from [Listafirme.ro](https://www.listafirme.ro), an online portal that provides data on gross income, taxes payable and number of employees.

Data on incomes was collected in Romanian leu. This was first adjusted for inflation to 2025, and then converted to euros using exchange rates for 30th May 2025.



Eco-tourism activities. Photo: Foundation Conservation Carpathia.



Cobor biodiversity farm guesthouse. Photo: Jack Wolfskin.



Eco-tourism activities. Photo: Georgiana Cațan.

Results

Prior to the start of the project in 2019, two existing Foundation Conservation Carpathia-incubated conservation enterprises generated € 32,692 in gross income. By 2024, the number of Foundation Conservation Carpathia-incubated businesses had grown to 16 and they generated a gross total income of € 456,631 (Fig. 1).

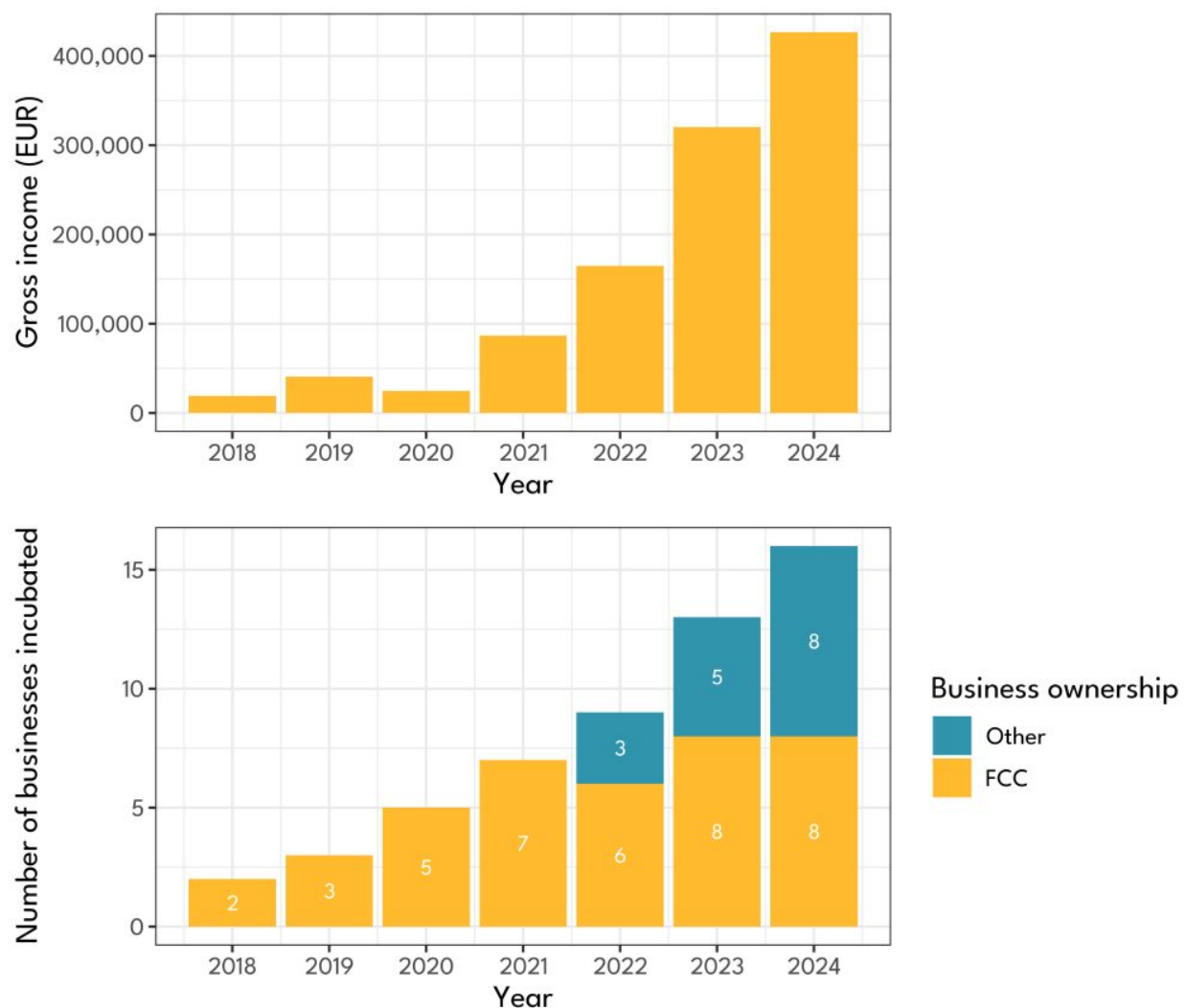


Figure 1: Gross inflation-adjusted income in euros (top) across all businesses incubated by Foundation Conservation Carpathia (bottom), including both Foundation Conservation Carpathia-owned businesses and other locally-owned sustainable businesses.

Interpretation

The data on Foundation Conservation Carpathia-incubated businesses (Figure 1) shows that gross income increased year on year, except in 2020 when this fell by more than 50% as a result of the impact of COVID-19, before rebounding in 2021.

In 2023-2024, gross income generated by Foundation Conservation Carpathia-incubated businesses has more than doubled, due to increasing numbers of tourists to the Wildlife Hides, to Poiana Tamas tented camp, and Food Hub sales.

Growth in gross income in Foundation Conservation Carpathia-incubated businesses can at least partly be



Selling locally-produced food at the annual Făgăraș Fest. Photo: Foundation Conservation Carpathia.

attributed to increased supply of nature tourism experiences through growth in the number of tourism businesses, as well as growth in tourism demand and [interest in nature-based tourism](#), stimulated through investment in marketing and sales, [media attention](#) and by positive reviews.

This has also led to an increase in income for local businesses not incubated by Foundation Conservation Carpathia, since the increase in the number of tourists increases demand for other local suppliers and businesses, including food hub suppliers, as well as housekeeping and cleaning services.

Partners

