

DOKTASII MID-TERM HIGHLIGHTS

From knowledge to shared stewardship
of the Dinaric Karst Aquifer System

JULY 2026



Editorial



As DIKTAS II reaches its mid-term stage, this special edition offers an opportunity to reflect on the progress achieved in strengthening scientific knowledge, regional cooperation and sustainable groundwater governance across the Dinaric Karst Aquifer System.

Groundwater is often invisible, yet it plays a vital role in supporting communities, ecosystems and climate resilience across borders. Managing a shared karst aquifer system therefore demands more than technical expertise alone—it requires continuous dialogue, mutual trust, and coordinated action among all stakeholders.

Since the project's launch, DIKTAS II has helped advance shared assessments, strengthen collaboration among institutions and build the foundations for long-term cooperative stewardship. This newsletter highlights key milestones, field activities and emerging outcomes, while looking ahead to the next phase of the project.

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DIKTAS II at a glance



How DIKTAS II creates impact



Through this approach, DIKTAS II is moving from coordination and shared rules to operational cooperation and on-the-ground action.

Why the Dinaric Karst Aquifer System matters

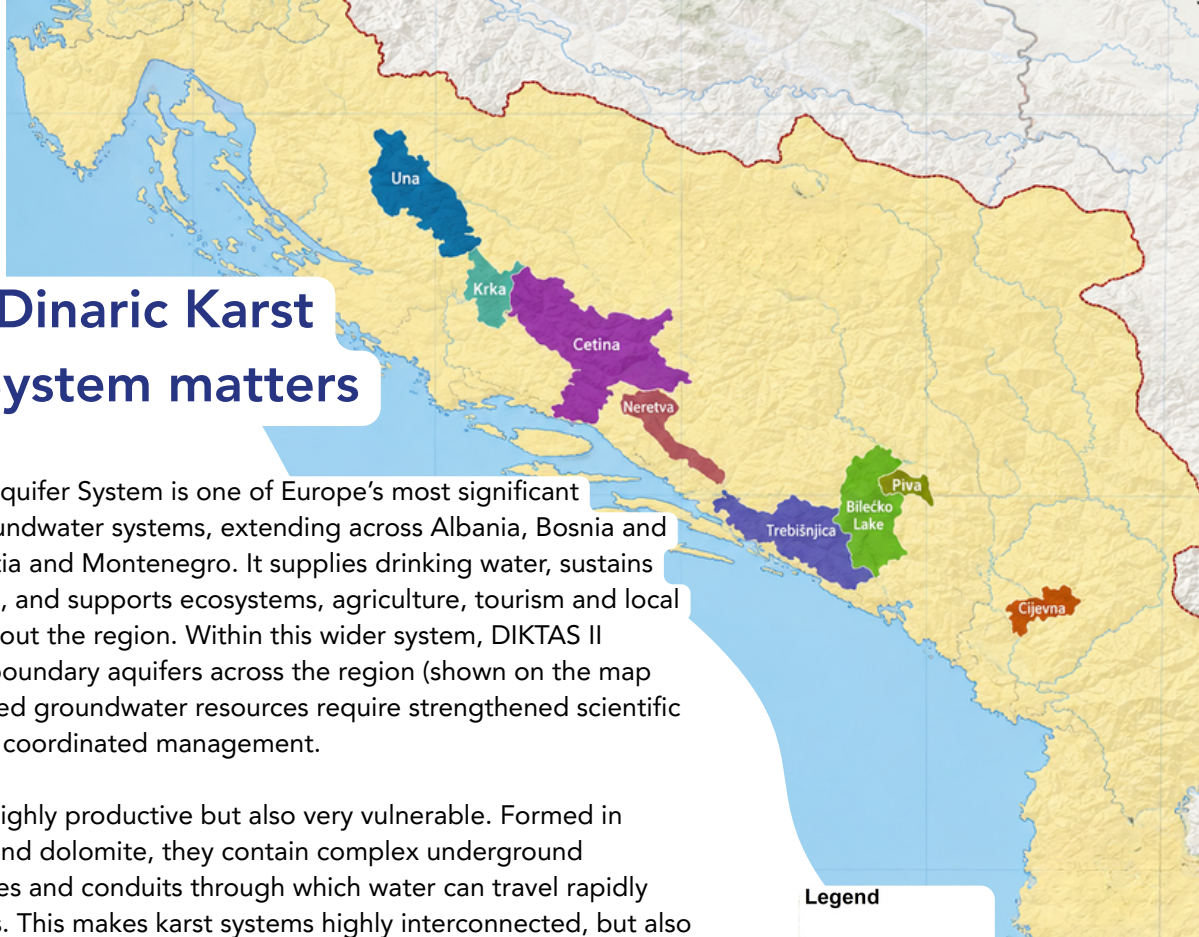
The Dinaric Karst Aquifer System is one of Europe's most significant transboundary groundwater systems, extending across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro. It supplies drinking water, sustains rivers and wetlands, and supports ecosystems, agriculture, tourism and local livelihoods throughout the region. Within this wider system, DIKTAS II focuses on 8 transboundary aquifers across the region (shown on the map above), where shared groundwater resources require strengthened scientific understanding and coordinated management.

Karst aquifers are highly productive but also very vulnerable. Formed in soluble limestone and dolomite, they contain complex underground networks of fractures and conduits through which water can travel rapidly over long distances. This makes karst systems highly interconnected, but also particularly sensitive to pollution, over-abstraction and land-use pressures.

Climate change is adding further pressure. More frequent droughts, changing rainfall patterns and rising temperatures increasingly affect groundwater recharge, water availability and ecosystem resilience across the Dinaric region.

Because groundwater flows invisibly across borders, pressures originating in one country may affect springs, rivers and groundwater-dependent ecosystems in another. Effective management therefore cannot rely on isolated national approaches alone.

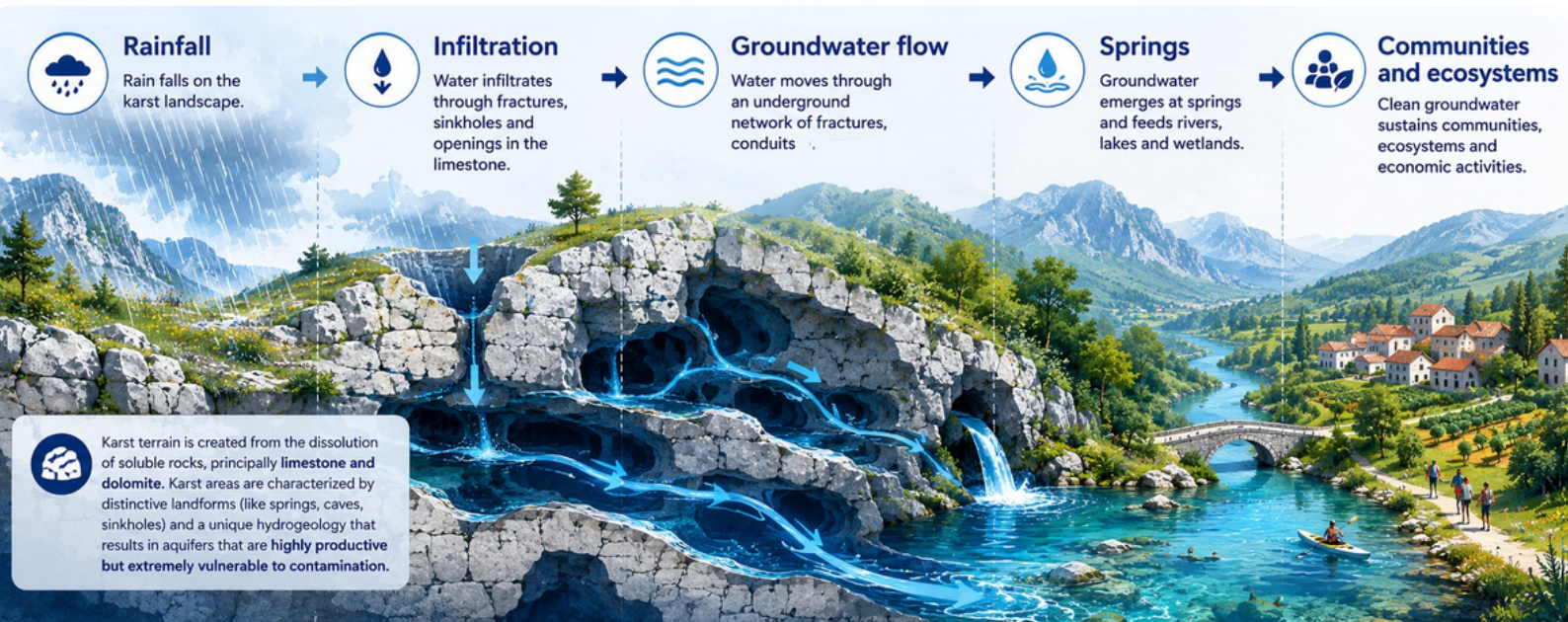
DIKTAS II helps build the shared scientific knowledge, cooperation mechanisms and governance frameworks needed to better understand, protect and sustainably manage this vital transboundary resource.



Legend

- Dinaric Karst
- DIKTAS 2 Project Area
- Transboundary Aquifers**
 - Bilečko Lake
 - Cetina
 - Cijevna
 - Krka
 - Neretva
 - Piva
 - Trebišnjica
 - Una

A karst aquifer system explained



DIKTAS II progress across 5 components and 6 outcomes

Across these 5 components and 6 outcomes, DIKTAS II is moving from coordination and shared rules to operational cooperation and on-the-ground action.

The snapshot below highlights what has been delivered or is now underway at mid-term—from expert consultation and governance frameworks, to monitoring design, data-sharing arrangements, joint action programmes, and targeted outreach. Each component is summarised with a plain-language objective, a clear progress status, and one concrete proof point to show how the project is turning shared knowledge into shared stewardship.

Signals of transboundary progress



Cross-border data flow increasing



Regular exchange deepening confidence



Joint priorities shaping national planning



Stronger recognition of shared stewardship

Building the cooperation and evidence foundations

1 Transboundary cooperation & coordination

Make cross-border cooperation routine by formalising how countries consult, share information, and resolve issues around shared karst waters

● Advancing



Proof point

Draft multilateral cooperation agreement plus proposed amendments to existing bilateral agreements, supported by a Stakeholder Involvement Plan

2 Groundwater governance & protection zones

Align governance rules and safeguards—especially sanitary protection zones—so groundwater is protected consistently across the Dinaric Karst System

● Advancing



Proof point

Groundwater Governance Diagnostic Analyses completed in project countries, and joint framework proposals for policy / legal / institutional developments on sanitary protection zones

3 Monitoring and data management

Design a DIKTAS-wide, multi-purpose monitoring system that tracks groundwater quantity/quality and ecosystem signals in a comparable way across borders

● Advancing



Proof point

Monitoring network design missions completed for the Una and Cemi/Cijevna aquifers, and a methodology for biodiversity monitoring in subterranean environments

Turning shared systems into joint action and uptake

4 Real-time data sharing & interoperability

Enable timely cross-border decisions by putting in place a shared mechanism for harmonised, real-time groundwater data exchange

● Establishing



Proof point

Draft concept note / mechanism design outline for a joint data-sharing system

5 Action planning & remedial measures

Turn risk hotspots into agreed action by drafting joint programmes and practical rules/guidelines that accelerate remedial measures in vulnerable areas

● Advancing



Proof point

Joint Action Programmes (JAPs) covering priority transboundary influence areas identified in the TDA (with JAPs for all 6 areas under development)

6 Stakeholder engagement, communication & gender equality

Increase uptake of project results through targeted communication and engagement—while strengthening gender equality in the water sector

● Advancing



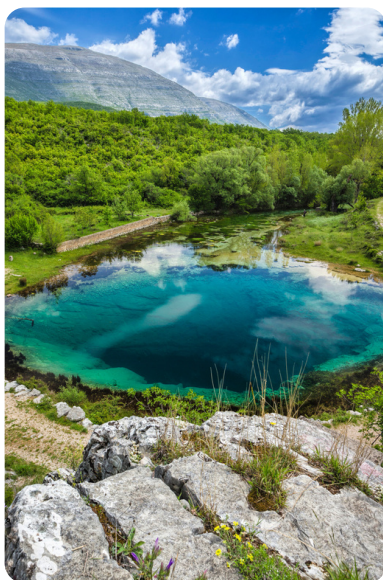
Proof point

Project Communication Strategy, country gender analyses for the water sector, and published contributions to the IW:LEARN newsletter

DIKTAS II in action

Across the Dinaric Karst, DIKTAS II is translating scientific cooperation into field action. Monitoring campaigns, ecological assessments and stakeholder engagement activities are generating the evidence needed to better understand shared groundwater systems and support more coordinated management across borders.

Real places. Real people. Real impact.



Beyond groundwater

Integrated monitoring

In the Cemi/Cijevna Transboundary Aquifer Area, DIKTAS II experts are building a monitoring network that goes beyond groundwater alone—combining hydrological, climatic and biodiversity data to better understand how this shared karst system functions across borders.

Key takeaway

Combining multiple sources of evidence helps countries build a shared understanding of aquifer behaviour and emerging pressures.

Coming soon



Life within our aquifers

Biodiversity

Beneath the Dinaric Karst lies a hidden world of caves, springs and underground rivers that sustain rare and highly specialised species. DIKTAS II is helping make this invisible biodiversity visible through harmonised monitoring approaches.

Key takeaway

Groundwater sustains far more than water supply—it supports unique ecosystems and exceptional biodiversity that depend on healthy aquifer systems.

Continue reading online



Gender evidence for better governance

Inclusive governance

Who participates in water governance matters. DIKTAS II gender analyses across 4 countries reveal how stronger evidence on participation, representation and decision-making can support more inclusive groundwater governance.

Key takeaway

Effective groundwater governance depends not only on science, but also on inclusive institutions that ensure diverse perspectives help shape decisions.

Continue reading online



Nature's hidden drought buffer

Climate resilience

During droughts, aquifers quietly store and release water, sustaining springs, rivers and communities. DIKTAS II highlights how protecting recharge areas strengthens resilience to climate change across the Dinaric Karst Aquifer System.

Key takeaway

Healthy aquifers act as natural drought buffers, helping secure water resources, sustain ecosystems and improve resilience to climate-related pressures.

Coming soon



More stories and photos online
Scan the QR code or visit diktas2.iwlearn.org/



From knowledge to joint action

At mid-term, DIKTAS II is demonstrating how transboundary groundwater cooperation moves from principle to practice. Regular expert exchange is helping countries align priorities and work from a more comparable evidence base. In parallel, governance diagnostics and protection-zone frameworks are clarifying what “good groundwater governance” looks like in the Dinaric Karst Aquifer System context, while monitoring design work is building the foundations for consistent tracking of groundwater pressures and groundwater-dependent ecosystems.

What this progress enables is simple: shared understanding that can be converted into shared decisions—through agreed rules, reliable data flows, and joint planning tools. In a region where groundwater crosses borders invisibly, this shift is essential for drought resilience, ecosystem protection, and long-term water security.

Looking ahead



Consolidate assessments and monitoring

DIKTAS II will continue strengthening the shared evidence base through technical assessments, harmonised monitoring and data integration across priority transboundary aquifers. These efforts will further improve understanding of groundwater dynamics, ecosystem linkages and emerging pressures.



Strengthen cooperation

Ongoing regional dialogue, expert exchange and stakeholder engagement will help deepen trust and reinforce cooperative governance across borders. Strengthened collaboration remains essential for addressing shared groundwater challenges effectively.



Scale up solutions and secure sustainability

Building on mid-term progress, DIKTAS II will support the development of practical management tools, governance frameworks and long-term cooperation mechanisms. These efforts aim to help translate scientific knowledge into sustained action and lasting impact beyond the project lifecycle.



Upcoming events and engagement opportunities

Over the coming months, DIKTAS II will continue to share progress and strengthen regional dialogue through expert meetings, technical workshops and international knowledge exchange events. These engagements will provide opportunities to review project findings, align next steps and connect the Dinaric Karst Aquifer System with broader global discussions on groundwater governance, climate resilience and transboundary water cooperation.



**1 aquifer system.
4 countries.
A shared future.**

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