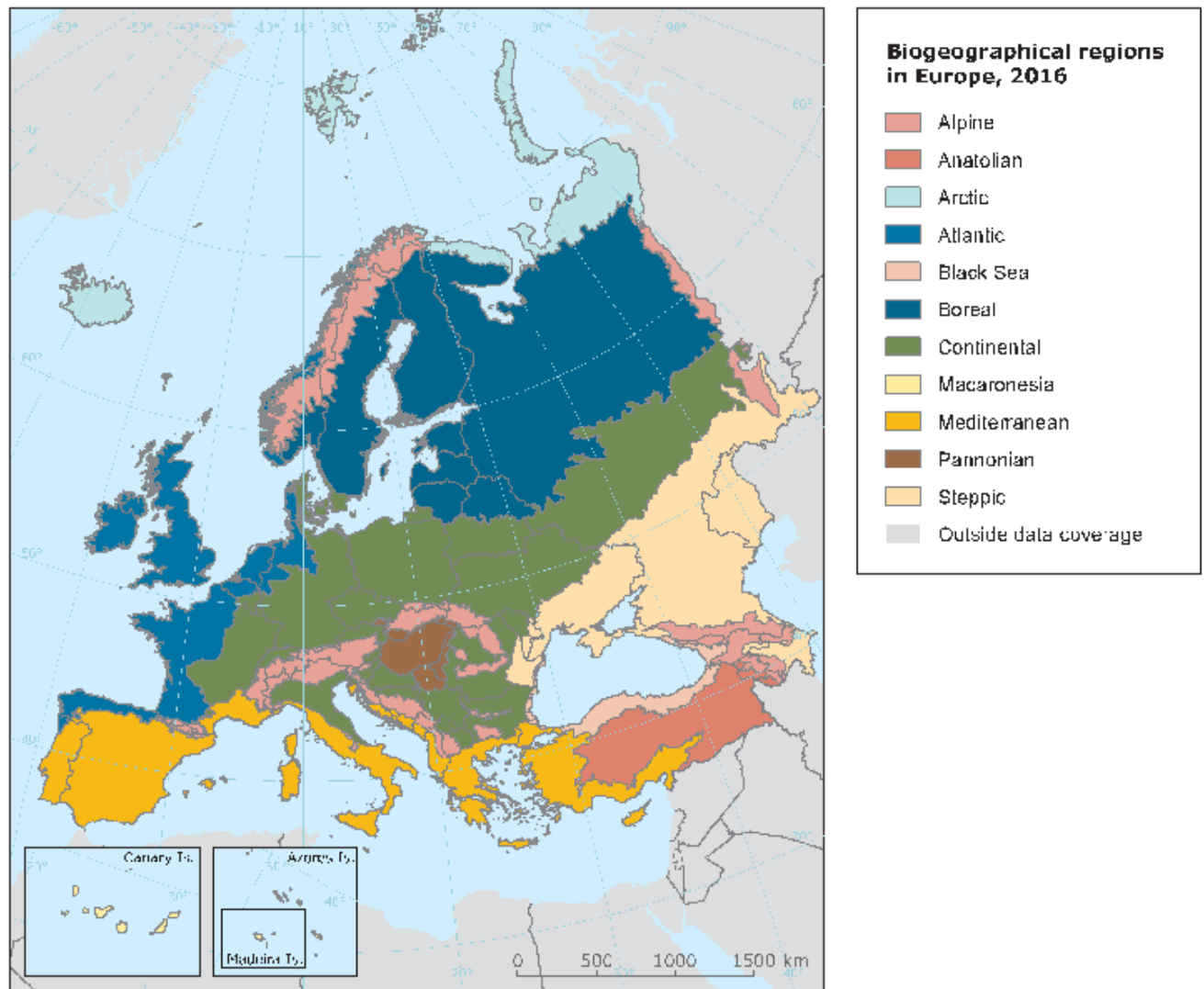


# Alps

The **European Alps** – as defined by the [Alpine Convention](#) – cover an area of roughly 190,000 km<sup>2</sup> and are populated by more than 14 million inhabitants. Additionally, the European Alps receive another 120 million annual visitors. The European Alps are not only an individual biographical area of Europe, but also give their name to an entire type of a European biographic region. They provide [ecosystem services](#) for up to a third of the European population. Three large streams, the Rhine, the Rhone and the Po originate in the Alps, most of the water for the Danube comes from there, justifying their by-name of ‘water tower of Europe’. This water is nourishment, process water and provider of clean and [renewable energies](#) as well as peak electricity for the European grid. Permanent settlement is only possible up to ca. 2000 m a.s.l. This means that 75% of the Alpine area can only be settled seasonally or not at all. Human settlements thus reach the upper altitudinal limit and with it an ecologically highly sensitive border area. At the same time, the Alps represent a hotspot of biodiversity and an important gene pool as well as pools of cultural diversity and are a recreation area of global stature. Scientists may see them as open-air laboratories of [Global Change](#). Here, especially, strategies for sustainable regional development are needed to minimize risks and to leverage opportunities. They can help maintain a unique area in its potency for inhabitants, visitors and for the extra-Alpine population that depends on its resources. In 1991, the Alpine Convention was signed by eight Alpine states. It formed the first crossborder agreement based on the idea of [sustainable spatial development](#) in a mountain area <sup>1)</sup>.



## The Alps in numbers

The Alpine Convention summarizes some of the most important facts on the Alps:<sup>2)</sup>

- 8 countries
- 14 million people
- 120 million guests per year
- Almost 6000 communities
- Population density in area of permanent settlement varies from less than 200 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> (Styria) and more than 16,000 (Principality of Monaco \* )
- 13,000 plant species
- 30,000 animal species
- 550 hydroelectricity plants with more than 10 MW and 2900 GWh annual output
- 4,200 km of main roads within the Alpine perimeter
- 190 million of tonnes freight crossing the Alps per year (65 % by road)
- 6 million vehicles driving on Alpine arc roads each year
- Per capita GDP from 10,000 Euro (Notranjsko- Kraška) to 80,000 Euro in Liechtenstein
- 17% people older than 64

- Warming of 1.5 °C over the last century
- In 2006 the volume of water stored as ice was still 9,84 % greater than that present as liquid, but the margin is narrowing.

### Further reading

- <http://www.alpconv.org>
- <http://tirolatlas.uibk.ac.at/alps/index.html.de>

landscape, environmental policy, AlpES project, governance

<sup>1)</sup>

Oliver Bender, Axel Borsdorf, Andrea Fischer and Johann Stötter (2011). "Mountains Under Climate and Global Change Conditions – Research Results in the Alps." In "Climate Change - Geophysical Foundations and Ecological Effects", edited by Juan Blanco and Houshang Kheradmand, Intech-Open, Rijeka. <https://doi.org/10.5772/24574>.

<sup>2)</sup>

Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention (Ed.) (2010). "The Alps People and pressures in the mountains, the facts at a glance.", Alpine Convention, Innsbruck. ISBN: 978-8-89051-582-8.

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