



Press Release

Embargo until 00:01 CET, May 15

EUROPE SMASHES DAM REMOVAL RECORD AS OVER 500 BARRIERS ARE DISMANTLED IN A YEAR FOR THE FIRST TIME

- 542 barriers removed in 23 countries – 11% increase on previous record
 - 2900 km of rivers were reconnected across the continent
 - 4 countries removed their first barriers

The dam removal movement set a new record in Europe in 2024 with at least 542 river barriers coming down across the continent, reconnecting over 2900 km of rivers and helping to strengthen climate resilience, enhance water and food security, and reverse nature loss.

Published today, the Dam Removal Europe 2024 report showcases the growing momentum behind the removal of dams and other river barriers. For the first time, removals surpassed 500 in a single year, soaring to a new record – 11% higher than the previous mark set in 2023 and 400% higher than the first continental count in 2020 (Figure 1; Table 1).

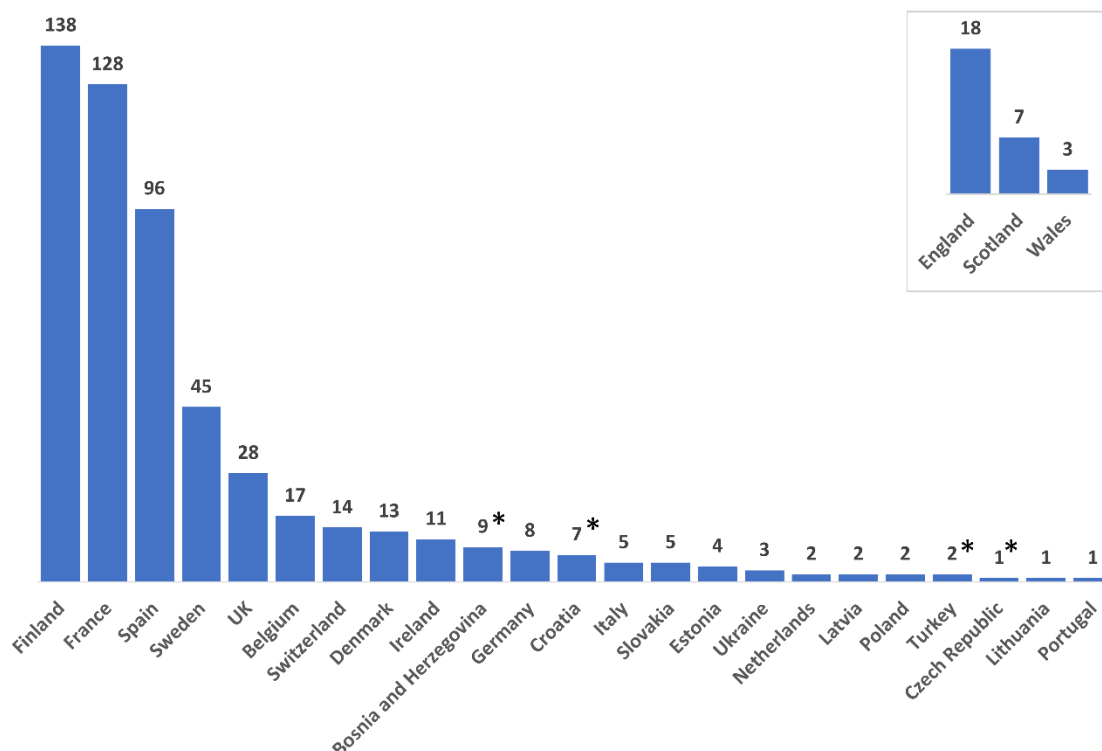


Figure 1. Number of removed barriers per country in 2024. Notes: the inset shows the removals per country in the UK. The countries that officially removed their first barriers in 2024 are marked with an asterisk (*)



Table 1. Number of removals and countries that reported removals to Dam Removal Europe each year

Year	No. of removed barriers	No. of countries
2020	101	11
2021	239	17
2022	325	16
2023	487	15
2024	542	23

Four countries – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic and Turkey – dismantled their first river barriers, officially joining the Dam Removal movement. Overall, removals took place in 23 countries.

“Another record-breaking year highlights the growing support for dam removals across Europe as well as increasing understanding among communities and governments of the benefits of reconnecting and restoring our rivers for people and nature,” said Jelle de Jong, CEO WWF-Netherlands. *“Healthy, free flowing rivers are central to adapting to the climate crisis and boosting biodiversity, but Europe’s rivers are the most fragmented in the world. We need to keep scaling up the removal of small obsolete dams that are blocking our rivers and set new records every year.”*

[Over 1,2 million barriers, including dams, weirs and culverts, fragment European rivers.](#) These barriers, tens of thousands of which are obsolete, have degraded the continent’s waterways, blocking the natural flow of water, sediments (Figure 2), nutrients and species – undermining resilience and ecosystems services, and contributing to the catastrophic loss of nature, including [a 75% decline in freshwater migratory fish populations in Europe](#) since 1970 (Figure 3).

“Dam removals are a proven solution: a quick, cost-effective way to restore degraded rivers and help communities and species to cope with worsening impacts of climate change,” said Codruța Savu from WWF EPO, a partner of the Living Rivers Europe Coalition. *“It is extraordinary to see countries like Finland and France removing over 100 barriers each, but it is particularly inspiring to see so many new countries joining the movement. We need every European country to start dismantling barriers if we are to truly transform our rivers and achieve the ambitious target in the EU Nature Restoration Regulation.”*



Figure 2. Trapped sediment upstream a dam at Valsan River © Dick Harrewijn



Figure 3. Dead Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*, a migratory fish species with declining trend in its populations © Arthur de Bruin



For the first time, Finland topped the count, with at least 138 barrier removals, followed by France, Spain and Sweden. Most of the removed barriers were obsolete culverts and weirs, which can be dismantled cost-effectively, and have a significant cumulative impact.

For example, five barriers were removed along an 11 km stretch of the Giovenco River in Italy in 2024, restoring its natural flow for the first time in decades. The reconnected river will now – once again – be able to support migratory fish and other species, while its natural dynamics will create healthier habitats (Figure 4) for insects, birds and iconic species, like the otter, as well as reducing erosion and building resilience to floods.



Figure 4. Natural river dynamics underwater © Arthur de Bruin

Along with the record removals, 2024 was also the year when the EU Nature Restoration Regulation came into force. Among its many goals is an ambitious target to restore at least 25000 km of fragmented rivers to a free-flowing state (Figure 5) by 2030, primarily through barrier removals. Moreover, barrier removals will also be a key tool in achieving the goals of the global Freshwater Challenge, which the EU has joined and which aims to ensure 300000 km of degraded rivers are under restoration by 2030.



Figure 5. Free-flowing stretch of Lech River, Austria © Arthur de Bruin

Editor's Notes:

You can download the full report, graphs and photos [here](#).

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About Dam Removal Europe

Dam Removal Europe (DRE) is a coalition of six organizations: the World Wildlife Fund, The Rivers Trust, The Nature Conservancy, the European Rivers Network, Rewilding Europe, and Wetlands International Europe. The overall ambition of DRE is to restore the free-flowing state of rivers and streams in Europe. In that respect, DRE aims to establish barrier removal as a restoration tool and to mainstream this practice. Through a bottom-up process DRE has created a continuously growing European network and it is working towards a holistic approach to remove barriers. More information: www.damremoval.eu