



LIFE Nature & Biodiversity

Priority topics for Standard Actions projects (SAPs)
in the MAWP under the new LIFE Regulation (2021-24)

Frank VASSEN & Daniel Nuijten
DG ENV.D3, Nature Protection Unit

SMART outcome-based implementation of EU nature & biodiversity legislation or targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030

- **Two areas of intervention:**
 - “Space for nature”
 - “Safeguarding our species”
- **Nature & Biodiversity legislation & policy:**
 - Support to the implementation of EU legislation : EU Birds and Habitats directives (incl. Natura 2000) and the IAS Regulation
 - Support to the targets under the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Trans-European Nature Network & EU Restoration Plan

EU Nature and Biodiversity legislation and policy

1: The extent to which the proposal contributes to the objectives of EU Nature and Biodiversity legislation in particular under the EU Birds and Habitats Directive (incl. Natura 2000) and Regulation 1143/2014 on Invasive Alien Species

2: The extent to which the proposal contributes to the targets of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 for a Trans-European Nature Network and the EU Restoration Plan

Two areas of intervention that require specific and measurable (SMART) outcome based objectives

Intervention area 1:
"Space for nature": area-based conservation and restoration measures

Intervention area 2:
"Safeguarding our species": measures targeting specific species

Any proposal that falls into at least one of the two areas of intervention and at least one of the two policy priorities could be financed through a Standard Action Project under LIFE Nature and Biodiversity

Two areas of intervention

“Space for Nature ”

Any project with actions for improving the condition of species or habitats through **area-based conservation or restoration** measures falls within the eligible scope of the intervention area “Space for Nature”. This may include, for example, **projects for restoring or improving natural or semi-natural habitats, or habitats of species, both within and outside existing protected areas**. This may also include **projects for creating additional protected areas (or improving the biodiversity focus and contribution of existing protected areas), ecological corridors or other green infrastructure, projects testing or demonstrating new site management approaches, projects acting on pressures, etc.**

“Safeguarding our species”

Any project aimed at improving the condition of species (or, in the case of invasive alien species, reducing their impact) through any relevant actions other than area-based conservation or restoration measures falls within the scope of the intervention area “Safeguarding our species”. Considering the broad range of threats that may act on species in addition to the degradation of their habitats, **such projects may apply to a wide range of measures, spanning from hard infrastructural works to awareness raising of stakeholders.**

Standard Action Projects (SAPs) should be SMART !

Specific – targets a specific feature (species/ habitat type) for improvement

Measurable – quantify / suggest indicators of progress

Assignable – specify who will do it

Realistic – state what results can be achieved, given available resources

Time-related – specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

SMART targets as a pre-condition for prioritising projects based on their expected outcome

In order to allow for effective comparison of merits of proposals addressing different nature and biodiversity policy priorities the following principles will be applied for the prioritization in terms of outcome-based targets under the two intervention areas:

- For proposals targeting species and habitats covered by the EU Habitats Directive , priority is given to those that are **clearly targeting** habitats or species in unfavourable and declining conservation status, in particular when their status is unfavourable bad and declining (**U2-**) **both in the EU and at national biogeographical region(s) level** where the project is taking place.
- For bird species, and for species and habitats not covered by EU Nature legislation , priority is given to proposals **clearly targeting** species or habitats that are in **higher extinction risk categories (in particular: endangered or worse) in the relevant EU red lists of habitats or species (or, for EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories, in the Global IUCN red lists).**

EU co-funding rates for SAPs under LIFE Nature and Biodiversity (→ indicated in the MAWP):

→ Up to **75%** of total eligible costs for projects that exclusively concern:

- priority habitat or species as listed in the relevant annexes of the EU Habitats Directive Directive;
- bird species considered as “priority for funding” by the Ornithological Committee (EU Birds Directive);
- habitat type or species listed in the annexes of the Habitats Directive, **the conservation status of which has been assessed as unfavorable-bad and declining (U2-)** in the most recent available EU- and national-level biogeographical region assessments;
- habitat type or species (other than bird species) the EU-level threat status of which has been **assessed as “endangered” or worse in the most up-to-date European species or habitats Red Lists**
- other habitat or species in territories not covered by the European Red Lists, the threat status of which has been assessed as “endangered” or worse in the most up-to date **global IUCN Red Lists**.

Applicants will need to argue in their proposal that all actions are clearly tailored towards benefiting habitats or species that qualify for 75% co-funding.

→ Up to **67%** EU co-funding for projects targeting both priority and non-priority habitats and/or species, provided priority species/habitats represent a clear focus of the project.

→ Up to **60%** of total eligible costs for all other projects.

Best practice, demonstration, innovation...

Each project will be assessed on the basis of its specific merits, whether as best-practice, innovation or demonstration projects

→ Projects focusing on best-practice are perfectly eligible.

Policy priority areas: EU Nature legislation

Priority is given to proposals for **improving the conservation status or trends of species and habitats of EU importance**, notably where such projects are implementing objectives and measures as outlined in national or regional *Prioritized Action Frameworks (PAFs)*. In particular:

- “Space for Nature”: projects that focus their actions on the **implementation of conservation objectives for existing Natura 2000 sites**, notably where such conservation objectives are clearly established, improving the condition of species and habitats for which the sites are designated.
- “Protecting our species”: projects that focus their activities on **reducing mortality of these species (e.g. poisoning, illegal killing, by-catch), preventing stakeholder conflicts, improving acceptance and promoting co-existence** with protected species.

In addition to the above, priority will also be given to certain habitats and species in unfavourable conservation status (including certain species listed in annex IV and V of the Habitats Directive), under the Biodiversity Strategy-related policy priority for “Implementing EU nature restoration targets for species and habitats”

Policy priority areas: IAS Regulation

Priority is given to proposals addressing:

- **invasive alien species included on the list of invasive alien species of Union concern** pursuant to Article 4(1) of the Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014, and/or invasive alien species of Member State or regional concern pursuant to Articles 12 and 11 of the Regulation respectively; or
- **other invasive alien species** that negatively affect the conservation status or trends of species and habitats of EU importance, other threatened species protected under EU legislation, or listed as threatened species in EU or global red lists (for species groups and/or regions not covered by EU Red lists).

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

- **Establishing a coherent network of protected areas**
- **Implementing EU nature restoration targets for species and habitats**
- **Restoring degraded and carbon-rich ecosystems; prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters**
- **Improving the health and resilience of managed forests**
- **Reversing the decline of pollinators**
- **Bringing nature back to agricultural land**
- **Greening urban and peri-urban areas**
- **Measuring and integrating the value of nature**

Some key issues to be considered

- More funding for SNAPs, BEST, national LIFE coordinators, etc.... means there is no budget increase for SAPs → **need to focus SAP funding on outcome**
- **Stronger focus** on species and habitats that are most threatened /in worst conservation status (including those not covered by EU Nature legislation)
- Some of the topic reflect +/- deviations from the above principle (large carnivore focus under “species”, urban greening, “integrating the value of nature”)
- No pure communication/awareness raising SAP projects, nor projects focusing on monitoring or inventories; however certain actions can be funded as part of projects with wider objectives (SAPs, SNAPs, etc.) or possibly even as “Other projects”
- Many strategic and governance issues are mainly to be covered by the SNAPs ! (SNAPs are outside of the scope of the current topics document)



Thank you for your attention !

Annex :

Policy priority areas in detail

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

Establishing a coherent network of protected areas

In relation to this target of the EU Biodiversity strategy, priority is given to:

- Proposals focused on **increasing the share of EU land or marine area under protection** (within the definition of “protected areas” in the relevant EU Guidance under the Biodiversity Strategy).
- In this context, priority is also given to the set-up of ecological corridors, such as green and blue infrastructure that reduce land or seascape fragmentation and pressures/ threats, and that directly **contribute to the resilience, effective management, and connectivity of protected areas**.
- Proposals focused on **increasing the share of EU land or marine area under strict protection** (within the definition of “strictly protected areas” in the relevant EU Guidance under the Biodiversity Strategy).

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

Implementing EU nature restoration targets for species and habitats

According to the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, “The Commission will request and support Member States to raise the level of implementation of existing legislation within clear deadlines. It will in particular request Member States to ensure no deterioration in conservation trends and status of all protected habitats and species by 2030. In addition, Member States will have to ensure that at least 30% of species and habitats not currently in favourable status are in that category or show a strong positive trend.”

Therefore, **once Member States have submitted their commitments or pledges** in relation to this target, projects that are focused on implementing any such national commitments or pledges, including through trans-national or trans-boundary approaches are given priority for LIFE support.

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

Restoring degraded and carbon-rich ecosystems; prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters

Project proposals with a focus on **restoring degraded and/or carbon-rich ecosystems** are given priority for LIFE support. For forests, this includes proposals aimed at forest restoration to primary forest structure, composition and functioning.

Proposals with a focus on deploying Green and Blue Infrastructure in line with the EU guidance as well as other nature-based solutions and restoration actions **that would help prevent or reduce the impact of natural disasters, including river restoration projects**, are given priority for LIFE support.

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

Improving the health and resilience of managed forests

Project proposals for **demonstrating “closer to nature forestry” practices**, meaning practices that try to achieve management objectives with the minimum necessary human intervention and combine conservation with productivity objectives, are given priority for LIFE support; these practices are also defined as continuous cover forestry, reduced impact logging, retention forestry, or as mimicking natural disturbances. See EU guidelines on closer-to-nature forestry, developed pursuant to the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/guidelines-closer-nature-forest-management_en)

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

Reversing the decline of pollinators

Project proposals for the restoration of habitats where pollination by animals plays an important role, **need to outline how the improvement of their associated pollinator communities is taken into account by the project activities.**

Furthermore, even where proposals do not directly address pollinators, applicants are invited to measure the project's success against, among others, the improvement of pollinator communities. Indicators for improvement could be based, for example, on measuring changes in the diversity or abundance of Apoidea, Syrphidae, Lepidoptera or any other relevant taxonomic groups.

Project proposals that have a positive impact on pollinator communities based on at least one of the above requirements are given priority for LIFE support.

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

Bringing nature back to agricultural land

Project proposals that **demonstrate innovative approaches to restoring high-biodiversity landscape features** in agroecosystems that also bring benefits for farmers and communities (such as preventing soil erosion and depletion, filtering air and water, and supporting climate adaptation) and communicate such approaches, are given priority for LIFE support.

(LIFE funded actions must complement those to be financed under the CAP strategic plans, hence a focus on the demonstration of innovative approaches)

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

Greening urban and peri-urban areas

Project proposals for the **restoration of healthy and biodiverse ecosystems in urban green areas**, as well as for the development of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions that bring about significant benefits for biodiversity while providing solutions to urban challenges and increasing access to nature, are given priority for LIFE support, especially if they implement biodiversity objectives and measures in urban greening plans.

Policy priority areas: EU Biodiversity Strategy

Measuring and integrating the value of nature

Project proposals that lead to an **effective accounting, measurement and integration of biodiversity values into public and private decision-making** applying the guidance, methods, criteria and standards developed by the Commission are given priority for LIFE support.