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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

**MID-TERM EVALUATION**

*Accompanying the document*

**Report on the Mid-term Evaluation of the Programme for Environment and Climate  
Action (LIFE)**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Launched in 1992, LIFE is the only EU funding programme exclusively dedicated to the environment, nature protection and climate action, all areas of growing concern to the public.

For the current 2014-2020 funding period, the LIFE Regulation<sup>1</sup> will make approximately EUR 3.4 billion available to protect the environment and climate.

During its 25 years of existence, the LIFE programme has been evaluated a number of times. The current programme is the result of these evaluations and has been shaped by the lessons learnt from the programme's implementation over the years.

Following on from the previous LIFE+ programme (2007 - 2013)<sup>2</sup>, LIFE now tackles the environment and climate actions in two explicit sub-programmes, one for environment and one for climate action.

Under the general guidance of the Better Regulation guidelines<sup>3</sup>, this mid-term evaluation explores whether the LIFE programme continues to be relevant in tackling the issues it seeks to address. It assesses whether LIFE is operating in an effective and efficient manner and whether its provisions are consistent and coherent with other programmes, delivering EU added value in the process. Furthermore, pursuant to Article 27(2)(a) of the LIFE Regulation, the Commission, in its mid-term evaluation, must report in particular on<sup>4</sup>:

- the extent to which synergies between the objectives have been reached;
- whether the LIFE programme has contributed (measured in a quantitative and qualitative analysis) to the conservation status of habitats and species listed under Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC;
- how successful integrated projects have been (or are expected to be) in leveraging other EU funds.

This mid-term evaluation also considers the LIFE programme's contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy, especially job creation, and to what extent the LIFE activities can be sustained or reproduced.

The scope of the evaluation encompasses all actions and operations financed under the LIFE programme, and in particular (for further details see section 2.3):

- traditional action grants
- integrated projects
- technical assistance projects
- capacity-building projects

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1293/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the establishment of a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 614/2007, OJ L 347 of 20.12.2013, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 May 2007 concerning the Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE+), OJ L149 of 9.06.2007, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> SWD(2015) 111 final, Commission Staff Working Document, Better Regulation Guidelines.

<sup>4</sup> See Annex 2 for the list of requirements to be reported with the mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme as set out in the LIFE Regulation.

- preparatory projects
- operating grants for non-profit making organisations
- operations through financial instruments (Natural Capital Financing Facility and Private Finance for Energy Efficiency)
- public procurement for support activities.

This mid-term evaluation has been undertaken at an early stage of the programme's implementation: most projects have not started yet, and few projects have been completed (the average duration of a LIFE project is 4 to 5 years).

As a consequence, the mid-term evaluation has focused mainly on the processes put in place (launch of calls, signing of contracts, funding of projects, etc.) to reach the programme's objectives. Where relevant, the evaluation has looked at their expected results and anticipated long-term effects more than the results and long-term effects achieved (since they have not yet had time to achieve their objectives). In addition, where appropriate, the results of the (earlier) LIFE+ projects are used to support and inform the evaluation's findings<sup>5</sup>.

However, with more than half of the LIFE+ projects underway, a full analysis of the long-term effect of LIFE<sup>6</sup>, as required by the LIFE Regulation, is premature at this stage.

This evaluation builds on the 'External and independent LIFE mid-term evaluation report'<sup>7</sup>, (the 'external study') carried out by independent contractors.

Together, the external study and the mid-term evaluation respond to Article 27 of the LIFE Regulation which requires the Commission to submit an external and independent mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme to the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions.

## **2. BACKGROUND OF THE INITIATIVE**

Major environmental and climate challenges have significant consequences for the EU's environment and economy if left unaddressed.

The 7th environmental action plan<sup>8</sup> provides the framework for EU action and identifies three key objectives:

1. protect, preserve and improve the EU's natural capital;
2. turn the EU into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy;

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<sup>5</sup> This is required by the LIFE Regulation, and appropriate given that most of the activities and procedures (traditional projects, operating grants and procurement) of the previous LIFE+ programme have continued under the current programme.

<sup>6</sup> For matter of clarity in this staff working document we will refer to: LIFE+ when referring to the previous programme (2007-2013) while according to the context the LIFE programme can mean the current programme(2014-2020) or the programme in general since its creation in 1992

<sup>7</sup> See 'External and independent LIFE mid Term Evaluation Report'. 2017. Ecorys and AA. .

<sup>8</sup> Decision No 1386/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 on a General Union Environment Action programme to 2020 'Living well, within the limits of our planet'. OJ L 354, 28.12.2013, p. 171-200,.

3. safeguard the EU public from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing;

It also identifies four ‘enablers’:

1. better implementation of legislation,
2. better information by improving the knowledge base,
3. more and wiser investment for environment and climate policy,
4. full incorporation of environmental requirements and considerations into other policies.

## **2.1. The LIFE programme’s objectives**

Within this policy framework, the LIFE Regulation establishes the EU’s instrument to fund environmental, nature conservation, and climate action projects throughout the EU.

Its general aims (contained in Article 3) are to:

1. help move towards a resource-efficient, low carbon and climate resilient economy, improve the quality of the environment and halt and reverse biodiversity loss;
2. improve the development, implementation and enforcement of EU environmental and climate policy and legislation, and act as a catalyst for, and promote, the mainstreaming of environmental and climate objectives into other policies and practices;
3. support better environmental and climate governance at all levels, including better involvement of civil society, NGOs and local actors;
4. support the implementation of the 7th environmental action plan.

In this context LIFE provides support to an extremely wide range of stakeholders. They range from the private sector (a lead player in production processes) to public institutions (primarily responsible for legislation and governance), civil society organisations (which carry out awareness-raising and environmental protection activities) and the general public (which benefits from environmental goods).

## **2.2. Problems that LIFE intends to solve**

According to its ex ante impact assessment<sup>9</sup>, the role of the LIFE programme is to focus on specific problems linked to institutional barriers such as:

- uneven and inadequate implementation of legislation in Member States;
- uneven inclusion of environment and climate concerns in other policies and Member States’ practices;
- inadequate level of awareness of and sharing of information on environmental and climate change goals; and
- limited support to eco-innovation.

Because of its limited size, the LIFE programme is not meant to solve environmental and climate problems. Rather, it is meant to act as a catalyst for developing and exchanging best practices and knowledge. The programme’s role is also to build up and improve capacity, speed

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<sup>9</sup> Commission staff working paper ‘Executive Summary of the Impact Assessment accompanying the document Proposal for a Regulation on the establishment of a programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE)’. [SEC\(2011\) 1541 final](#).

up the implementation of EU legislation, and help private players, in particular businesses, to test small-scale technologies and solutions.

### **2.3. The structure of the LIFE programme**

The LIFE Regulation replaced the LIFE+ programme, which covered the years 2007-2013.

#### **LIFE+: the results of the evaluation**

LIFE+ had a budget of EUR 2.1 billion, divided into three components: nature and biodiversity, environmental policy and governance, and information and communication. They were used to finance action and operating grants and procurement contracts for the development and implementation of environmental legislation.

The EU provided EUR 1.7 million in funding for grant projects under LIFE+. It mobilised more than EUR 1.8 million in non-EU funding from other private or public sources.

Several independent evaluations<sup>10</sup> found that, in general, the LIFE+ programme was a successful instrument to implement Union environmental policy and legislation, and had significant added value<sup>11</sup>.

However, the following weaknesses were identified<sup>12</sup>:

1. There needs to be a more strategic focus. Given that a minimum of 78 % of the LIFE+ budgetary resources were devoted to action grants, the possibility of addressing Union environmental and climate policy issues depended on the quality and quantity of the applications received (a ‘bottom-up’ approach based on demand for action grant projects).
2. The application process and reporting obligations need to be simplified, as underlined by stakeholders.
3. The objectives of certain strands need to be better defined. This is especially the case with environmental policy and governance and information and communication. There also needs to be more focus on implementing and creating multipliers to improve the utilisation of project results and the transfer of know-how.
4. There needs to be more complementarity and synergies with other EU Funds.

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<sup>10</sup> “LIFE ex-post evaluation” carried out by COWI in 2009; “LIFE+ mid-term evaluation” carried out by GHK in 2010; “Combined impact assessment and ex-ante evaluation of the review of the LIFE+ Regulation’ carried out by a consortium led by GHK in 2011 and ‘Climate Change in the future multiannual financial framework’ carried out by the Institute for European Environmental Policy in 2011.

<sup>11</sup> See Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council ‘Final evaluation of Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 concerning the Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE+)’. COM/2013/0478 final.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

## The new features introduced in the LIFE programme

After analysing options in the impact assessment and consulting stakeholders, the Commission included some changes in the new LIFE Regulation compared to the previous LIFE+ programme. These are summarised in Figure 1 below.

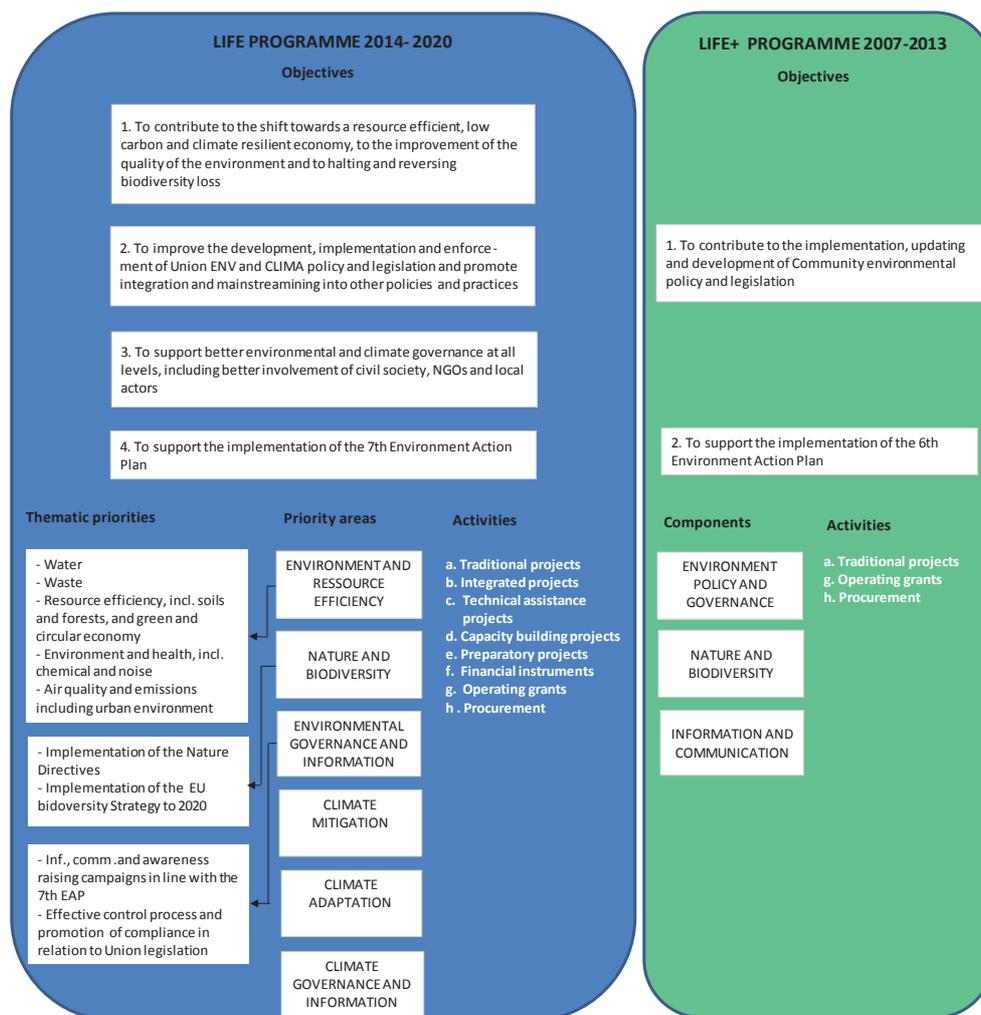
The main features introduced in the new LIFE Regulation are:

1. **a change in the overall objectives**, with two additional objectives clarifying the general purpose of the LIFE programme (see objective 1 of the LIFE programme), the importance of environmental and climate governance with the involvement of all stakeholders (see objective 3 of the LIFE programme), and the role of the LIFE programme in the enforcement of environmental and climate policy and legislation (see objective 2 of the LIFE programme in comparison with objective 2 of LIFE+).
2. **two sub-programmes**, one for environment (under the responsibility of the Directorate-General for Environment with a budget of EUR 2.59 billion) and one for climate action (under the responsibility of the Directorate-General for Climate Action with a budget of EUR 0.86 billion). The creation of a sub-programme for climate action upgraded the former thematic strand ‘climate change’, which showed a percentage of projects of around 14 %. Given that the Commission intended to increase the climate-related proportion of the Union budget to at least 20 % for all policies, it was decided<sup>13</sup> that the allocation under the LIFE programme would be 75:25 between the sub-programme for environment and the sub-programme for climate action.

**Figure 1. Structure of the LIFE and LIFE+ programmes**

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<sup>13</sup> See [COM\(2011\)500](#) final ‘A Budget for Europe 2020’. Part II.



Source: Based on the LIFE and LIFE+ Regulations

3. **two multiannual work programmes (MAWP)**, which detail the allocation of resources between types of funding, the selection process and specific eligibility and award criteria for grants, and the programme's output and outcome indicators. The first MAWP covers 2014-2017. The second multiannual work programme covering 2018-2020 is expected to be adopted in 2017.
4. **six 'priority areas'** — environment and resource efficiency; nature and biodiversity; environment governance and information; climate mitigation; climate adaptation and climate governance and information — replace the three LIFE+ 'components' — environmental policy and governance; nature and biodiversity; and information and communication.
5. an **overall budget increase** from EUR 2.1 billion (for LIFE+ 2007-2013) to EUR 3.4 billion (for the LIFE programme 2014-2020).
6. a shift from a pure bottom-up approach' with the grants driven only by demand, to a **flexible bottom-up approach** designed to better steer demand, with thematic priorities and specific project topics defined for the environment sub-programme<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Thematic priorities are defined for water, waste, resource efficiency, environment and health, air quality and emissions, nature, biodiversity, environmental governance and information. See Annex III of the LIFE

7. a minimum **81 %** of the overall LIFE budget is **dedicated to action grant projects, which are** awarded funding following an annual call for proposals<sup>15</sup>, **and to operations financed through financial instruments**. Projects and operations through financial instruments continue to depend on the quantity and quality of the applications received. The definition of priorities is expected to improve the programme's strategic focus.

**Table 1. Planned allocation of the financial resources by sub-programme and type of activities**

	Amount in million EUR	% out of the total LIFE		Amount in million EUR	% out of the total LIFE
<b>Environment sub-programme</b>			<b>Climate action sub-programme</b>		
<b>E1 Action grants (item "a" to "e" under point 8)</b>	<b>1067.95</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>C1. Action grants (item "a" to "e" under point 8)</b>	<b>249.96</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>E2. Financial Instrument (item "f" under point 8)</b>			<b>C2. Financial instruments (item "f" under point 8)</b>		
- Natural capital financing facility	30	2%	- Natural capital financing facility	30	2%
			Private financing for energy efficiency	80	4%
<b>E3. Operating grants (item "g" under point 8)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>C3. Operating grants (item "g" under point 8)</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>E4. Commission procurement activities and support expenditures (item "h" under point 8)</b>	<b>219.2</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>C4. Commission procurement activities and support expenditures (item "h" under point 8)</b>	<b>80.6</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Total Env. sub-programme</b>	<b>1347.15</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>Total Climate action sub-programme</b>	<b>449.16</b>	<b>25%</b>
Ceilings included in the LIFE Regulation:					
A minimum of 81% of the overall financial resources available has to be devoted to action grants and financial instruments (E1+C1+E2+C2)					
A minimum of 55% of the resources assigned to action grants and financial instruments (E1+E2) has to be devoted to nature and biodiversity					

Source: MAWP 2014-2017

8. A more structured approach to funding consisting of<sup>16</sup>:

a. **traditional projects:** these are action grant projects to test a new potential best-practice or to demonstrate a technique or a method that has not been applied or tested before or to support communication, dissemination of information and awareness-raising. They must include activities to ensure the project's sustainability and/or replicability.

**Box 1. Example of a LIFE traditional project on nature and biodiversity**

Regulation. These are further detailed as priority project topics in the first MAWP (2014-2017). This is expected to ensure the programme's strategic focus, because the projects will target the priorities identified.

<sup>15</sup> See point 8, items from (a) to (e) and figures 3 and 4 below for more details on the different types of projects and forms of funding.

<sup>16</sup> Under the LIFE+ programme only traditional projects, operating grants and procurement/support activities were financed.

<b>LIFE EUROTURTLES — Collective actions to improve the conservation status of the EU sea turtle populations (LIFE15 NAT/HR/000997)</b>	
EU contribution: €3 793 167.00	Thematic priorities: Nature conservation
Coordinating beneficiary: Croatian Natural History Museum (research institution)	External link: <a href="http://www.euroturtles.eu/">http://www.euroturtles.eu/</a>
<p>This project focuses on the conservation of two priority sea turtle species, the loggerhead turtle (<i>Caretta caretta</i>) and the green turtle (<i>Chelonia mydas</i>). Several important cross-country measures are planned to reduce the impact of anthropogenic threats at nesting sites and fishery-related threats in foraging grounds. These include the extension of marine Natura 2000 network sites in Croatia and Italy to include current turtle ‘hot-spot’ areas, and the improvement of turtle management in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Slovenia. The project is expected to protect more than 700 nesting sites annually and, by working with the fishing industry, reduce turtle by-catch and ensure that more than 2 000 turtles accidentally caught in fishing nets are saved from death. It will also establish an EU network for sea turtle conservation based on common objectives and methods.</p>	

- b. **integrated projects** — new type of intervention introduced by the LIFE Regulation: these are action grant projects that act as a **catalyst** to implement environmental or climate plans or strategies on a large territorial scale. These plans and strategies are required by specific EU environmental or climate legislation, established pursuant to other EU acts or developed by Member State authorities. Under the sub-programme for environment, they focus on the implementation of specific directives related to nature, water, waste, and air. Under the sub-programme for climate action, they address climate mitigation and climate adaptation. They must involve multiple stakeholders and leverage complementary financing by including climate and environment objectives into other policy areas. They are awarded funding following a two-step procedure<sup>17</sup>.
- c. **technical assistance projects** (new type of project): these provide, by way of action grants, financial support to help applicants prepare integrated project applications, and in particular to ensure that those projects comply with the timing, technical and financial requirements of the LIFE programme in coordination with other EU, national, regional or private funds.
- d. **capacity-building projects** (new type of project): these provide, by way of action grants, funding for selected Member States to improve their capacity to participate more effectively in the LIFE programme. According to the eligibility criteria in the

<sup>17</sup> The applicant first submits a concept note summarising the key information of the project (context, objectives, actions and resources, potential beneficiaries and stakeholders, long-term sustainability, major risks and constraints), a full copy of the plan or the strategy that the project is aimed to implement and a financial plan. To be eligible for LIFE financing, the integrated project has to cover a large geographical area, mobilise other funds, involve all key stakeholders and aim at implementing specific environmental and climate plans or strategies. If the concept note is retained, the applicant is invited to submit a full proposal, following a written question and answer phase to allow applicants to clarify doubts. This is assessed taking into account the technical and financial coherence of the action, the extent and quality of its contribution to the objectives, the extent to which the proposed project will mobilise other funds (beyond the minimum eligibility criterion) and the project’s potential to achieve results in other policy areas, create synergies with these policies and integrate environmental and climate action objectives in them.

LIFE Regulation, 15 Member States are eligible to receive such funds under the first MAWP.

- e. **preparatory projects** (new type of intervention): these are identified by the Commission in cooperation with Member States to support specific needs related to the development and implementation of EU environmental or climate policy and legislation. Such projects implement environmental priorities defined each year. Member States are consulted and their comments taken on board as appropriate.
  - f. **operations funded by financial instruments** (new types of projects): implemented by the European Investment Bank, these instruments fund projects in energy efficiency and natural capital.
  - g. **operating grants**: these help to finance the operations of NGOs working on environmental and climate issues at European level. The aim of the funding is to enable NGOs to participate more in environmental/climate policy-making and implementation.
  - h. **Commission procurement and support activities**. Through the procurement activities, the Commission finances:
    - the preparation and/or development of environmental and climate action policies and related legislation (such as the definition of the circular economy package);
    - technical assistance to Member States for the implementation and enforcement of environmental and climate action policies and related legislation (i.e. peer reviews, joint inspections, definition of national plans, etc.);
    - support for the EU's role in international fora (e.g. preparatory work for the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, COP21);
    - other activities for environmental and climate action policies and related legislation (e.g. communication, IT, etc.).
9. **A phasing-out of the national allocation system**. National allocations defining the distribution of funds among Member States for all projects — other than integrated projects — under the sub-programme for environment are included in the LIFE Regulation. They are determined on the basis of solidarity and responsibility-sharing, taking into account the population and natural resources expressed in terms of Natura 2000 sites within a Member State<sup>18</sup>. The final evaluation of the LIFE+ programme showed that:
- a) national allocations did not lead to a significantly more balanced distribution of projects across the EU;
  - b) where progress was made in some countries, it was through the efforts of the national contact points.
  - c) the EU added value was somewhat compromised by the system of national allocations leading to compromises in the quality of projects financed.

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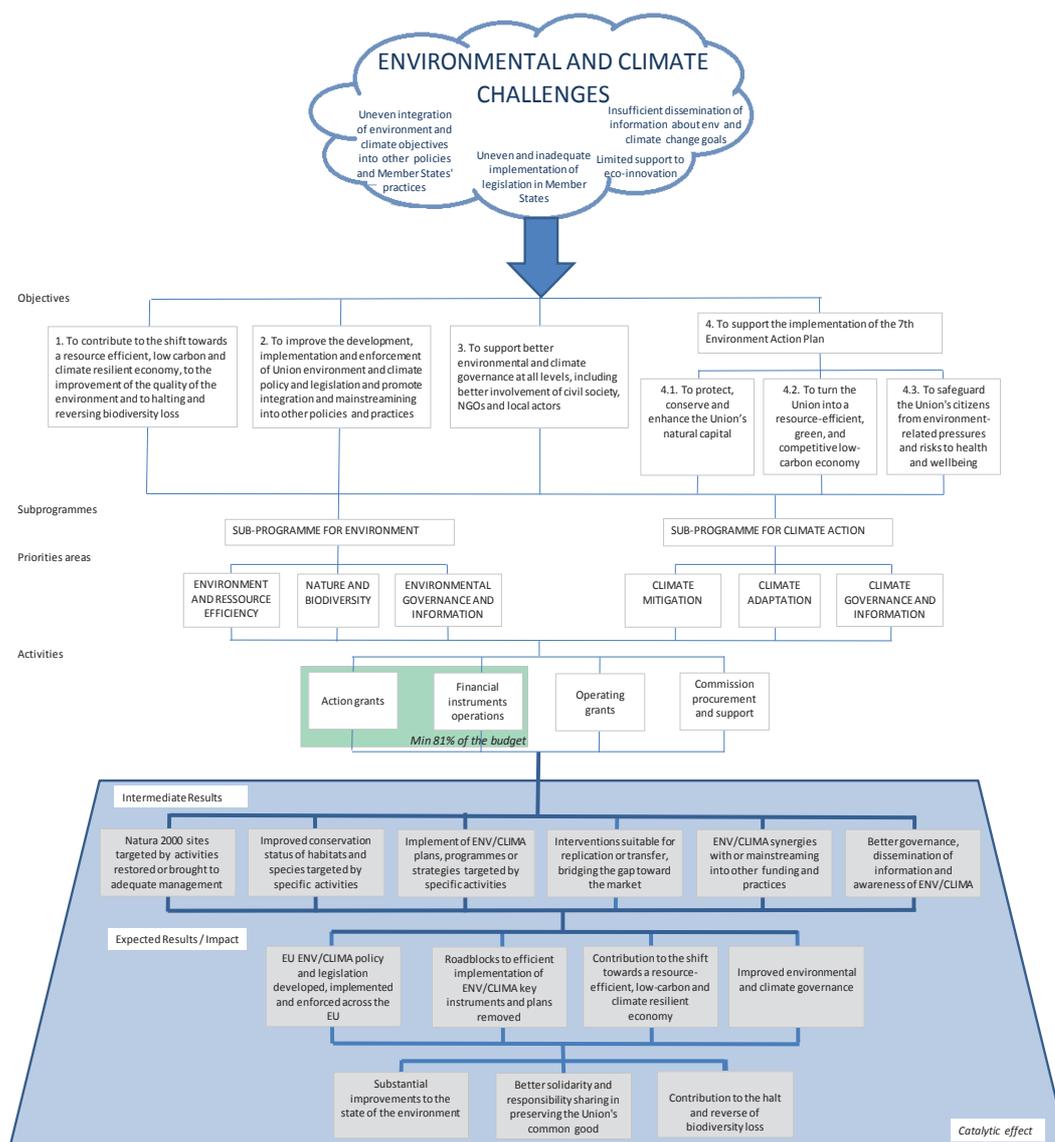
<sup>18</sup> See Annex I of the LIFE Regulation for the specific criteria governing the definition of the national allocations.

According to the LIFE Regulation, this system of a geographical distribution of project funds is applied under the first MAWP 2014-2017 and will no longer be applied in the 2018-2020 MAWP.

## 2.4. The intervention logic

The intervention logic for LIFE 2014-2020 is summarised in Figure 2, for the four key objectives of the LIFE programme, and for the two sub-programmes with their respective priority areas, activities, and intermediate and final expected results.

Figure 2 — Intervention Logic Diagram — The LIFE programme 2014-2017



A minimum of 81 % of the resources devoted to activities is driven by demand, which is steered through the MAWP and annual calls.

Taking into account the actual environmental external factors, environmental and climate issues cannot be solved without a change in the mentality and behaviour of producers and consumers.

This change cannot occur through a top-down approach. It requires the active participation and involvement of the stakeholders.

This makes it difficult to predict in advance which activities will provide the intermediate and expected results.

This is why a specific monitoring system was put in place to measure each project's contribution to the specific objectives of the priority areas (see box 2 below for more information).

At this stage, the LIFE programme is implementing the different activities planned (action and operating grants, procurement, operations funded by financial instruments). The programme's intermediate results (see Figure 2) are only expected to begin materialising in 2019 - 2020 when the first projects are completed.

### 3. METHOD

This mid-term evaluation is designed to answer the evaluation questions (referred to below in paragraph 5 as Q.1 to Q.16) in the Roadmap<sup>19</sup>. It is largely based on the external study by an independent consultant (study required by the LIFE Regulation).

The results of the external study were complemented, where necessary, with background information on the state of play from the Commission's databases that support the programme's management.

The external study was conducted between March 2016 and January 2017. It relied on:

- qualitative assessment tools, including desk research based on available documents, interviews, stakeholder surveys and a public consultation which ran for 12 weeks; and
- quantitative assessment tools (based on the indicator database and the LIFE projects database, which mostly include LIFE+ projects) and the data processing tools designed to manage the LIFE proposals and projects.

The desk research consisted of a review of a certain number of thematic strategic documents and reports, legislative texts and related accompanying documents, and included impact and cost-benefit analyses<sup>20</sup>. It was used as the basis for structuring the external study, informing its different parts.

The external study focused its analysis on those activities that consumed the largest portion of the budget, i.e. on action grants, and particularly traditional and integrated projects which represent 71 % of the available financial resources (see Figure 3 for additional details).

Various complementary consultation activities were conducted as part of the external study, including a public consultation and five specific surveys and over 150 interviews of the key stakeholder groups.

#### **Table 2: Number of interviews and answers to the surveys and public consultation**

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<sup>19</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017\\_env\\_001\\_evaluation\\_life\\_mt\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017_env_001_evaluation_life_mt_en.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> The complete list is included in Annex C of the External and independent LIFE mid-term evaluation report.

<b>Answers to the surveys</b>	<b>Number of answers</b>		<b>Number of answers</b>
Public consultation	256	Monitoring experts	59
Project beneficiaries	208	Unsuccessful applicants	10
National Contact Points	41	Project site visits	8
<b>Interviews</b>			
Implementing bodies (Commission, Executive Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises, European Investment Bank, monitoring team)	36	Project beneficiaries	121

In addition to the consultation activities carried out during the external study, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions provided an opinion on the LIFE programme, which has been taken into consideration.

The aim of the consultations was to gather information on the programme's perceived relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, EU added value and sustainability.

Analysis of the qualitative assessment tools was complemented with data from the monitoring system (see Box 2) to estimate the expected project results.

### **Box 2 — Monitoring system: how it works**

The LIFE monitoring system started in the final year of LIFE+ and was continued and improved to respond to the requirements of the new LIFE regulation. It is based on the following:

- the outcome<sup>21</sup> indicators and 2017 targets for each thematic priority identified in the MAWP for 2014-2017;
- a system to catch, at project level, the qualitative and quantitative outcomes measured on the basis of a comprehensive list of indicators and related parameters that correspond to each thematic priority.

For example, the MAWP includes the following list of qualitative/quantitative outcomes and targets for water:

<b>Thematic priority: WATER</b>	<b>2017 targets/ milestones</b>
<b>Quantitative Outcomes</b>	
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards good ecological status at project level	80%
Water bodies (inland/transitional/coastal) covered by ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions set up to improve their ecological status	100 *
* = It is expected that between 2015 and 2017, 6,900 waterbodies throughout the Union will improve their ecological status, 1.4% of them (100) due to a LIFE contribution.	

The data in the indicators database are based on a pre-defined list of environment and climate action output and outcome indicators, descriptors, and related measuring units, which are aimed at making the results comparable.

Every applicant is required to describe the measurable effects of his/her project (descriptors), and, where

<sup>21</sup> Due to the bottom-up approach and the great variety of environmental and climate change challenges addressed by the LIFE programme and the limited funds available to address them, the uptake of projects in specific areas is uncertain. Quantitative targets cannot be defined ex ante for most of the priority areas covered and objectives pursued, with the exception of the thematic priorities for nature.

mandatory, identify the related values. The applicant is encouraged to provide descriptors and, where available, also estimate values for indicators of complementary effects of his/her project.

For example, a project on 'Water' will need to provide values for one of the water-related indicators. If the project focuses on 'Point source pollution', the applicant will have to choose at least one pollutant (e.g. zinc and its compounds) as a 'descriptor' and provide related values which are expected to be measured at the outset, at the end, and 3 or 5 years after the end of the project with the corresponding measuring units. The applicant will also have to choose from the related drop down list the targeted source(s) of this pollutant and the key type(s) of measures envisaged.

The applicant can also provide complementary data, e.g. on the project's effects on an endangered species affected by the point source pollution<sup>22</sup>.

In the application phase, the values are estimates. On the basis of actual measurements, the baseline values and possibly also the estimates for the end and beyond the project are revised during the first 18 months of the project. The external monitoring experts validate the revised data.

At the time of the evaluation, the LIFE indicators database contained records of 1 123 on-going and completed projects, of which 143 are projects from the current programme with validated data. Most of the projects providing data were financed under LIFE+<sup>23</sup>.

Additional quantitative data have also been sourced from two databases used by the Commission for the technical and financial management of the applications<sup>24</sup> and LIFE projects<sup>25</sup> and a third public online database of LIFE projects<sup>26</sup> designed for public consultation.

### ***Limitations***

This mid-term evaluation is required at a very early stage of the programme cycle. It is therefore too soon to provide any actual results of the LIFE programme. This is because:

- Available data relate to the 2014 and 2015 calls for proposals and their selected projects. Most LIFE-funded projects are still in progress (98 % of the grants awarded since 2014).
- The financial instruments started very recently (in 2015) and are in a pilot phase. Moreover, for the Nature Capital Financing Facility (NCF), two potential beneficiaries could not be interviewed for reasons of confidentiality.

The following mitigation measures have been used to provide additional information for this mid-term evaluation:

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<sup>22</sup> [More information is available on line.](#) .

<sup>23</sup> For LIFE+ beneficiaries, this was a voluntary exercise, since the programme previously required beneficiaries to report on output indicators (e.g. number of prototypes built), and not outcome indicators (e.g. quantity of water cleaned by filtering zinc out of it). .

<sup>24</sup> eProposal is a system to create and submit LIFE proposals and is used by the contracting authority when selecting projects for funding. It includes information on the proposals received, i.e. objectives, expected results, budgetary information.

<sup>25</sup> Butler is an information system of the Directorate-General for the Environment used to manage and follow up on projects co-financed under the LIFE Regulations. It has filtering options for easy searches of LIFE projects. It contains all the data on the projects being implemented including the reports, results of the monitoring visits by the Commission and the monitoring experts, etc.

<sup>26</sup> The LIFE projects database is available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/project/Projects/>. It is a searchable database (i.e. by theme, country, key words, etc.) which includes a short description of each project financed by the LIFE programme and the project's beneficiaries. These databases have been used to complete the available information and help interpret data.

- Data from the indicator database were validated for the anticipated results of the projects from the 2014 call for proposals<sup>27</sup>. These data have been used to estimate the programme's potential effectiveness and efficiency.
- LIFE traditional projects represent a continuation of the LIFE+ traditional projects. Information on the implementation of LIFE+ 2007-2013 projects from the indicators database has therefore been used to perform comparisons to confirm/contradict the anticipated results of the 2014 projects. This was done, in particular, for the data on job creation and project sustainability.
- The results of each evaluation question (e.g. desk research, qualitative findings based on the consultation process and quantitative findings) were compared to cross-validate findings and capture different aspects of a specific issue.
- Where not all data were available for indicators, statistical extrapolations have been made.
- For the NCFF, given that there are no comparable measures in the former LIFE + programme and it was not possible to have contact with perspective beneficiaries because the negotiations were on-going, some interviews were conducted with European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Commission staff. Moreover, literature on similar financial instruments and the experience of other institutions (such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EBRD) were reviewed.

#### 4. IMPLEMENTATION — STATE OF PLAY

The following sections mention the state of implementation of the programme's key activities. They are based on data extracted from the Commission's electronic financial system (ABAC) and from the databases on proposals received and projects awarded funding.

##### How have the LIFE funds been used?

Table 4 shows the overall commitment rate for 2014, 2015 and 2016:

**Table 3. LIFE commitment rate — years 2014-2016**

Budget year/ amount	Available (in million EUR)	Used (in million EUR)	% used
2014 budget	403.37	402.49	99.78%
2015 budget	435.10	434.50	99.86%
2016 budget	462.80	462.63	99.96%
Total	1301.26	1299.62	99.87%

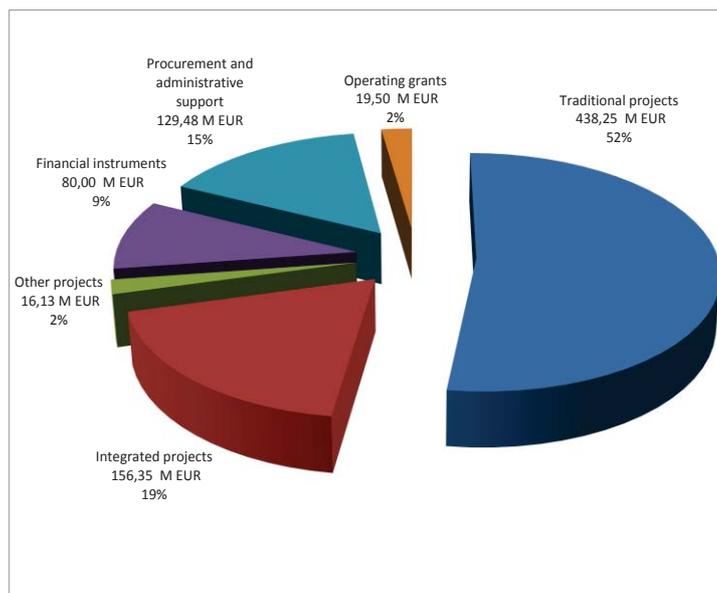
Source: Commission's financial system

The activities that have consumed a significant portion of the budget are traditional and integrated projects, followed by procurement and administrative support and financial instruments.

The budget amounts dedicated to action grant projects and financial instrument operations observe the 81 % ceiling in the Regulation.

<sup>27</sup> Project level indicators were available with related validated values only for the projects from the 2014 call for proposals and therefore were the only ones taken into account. The indicators of the projects from the 2015 call for proposals had not been fully validated at the time of the evaluation.

**Figure 3 — LIFE 2014-2015 — distribution of the funds**

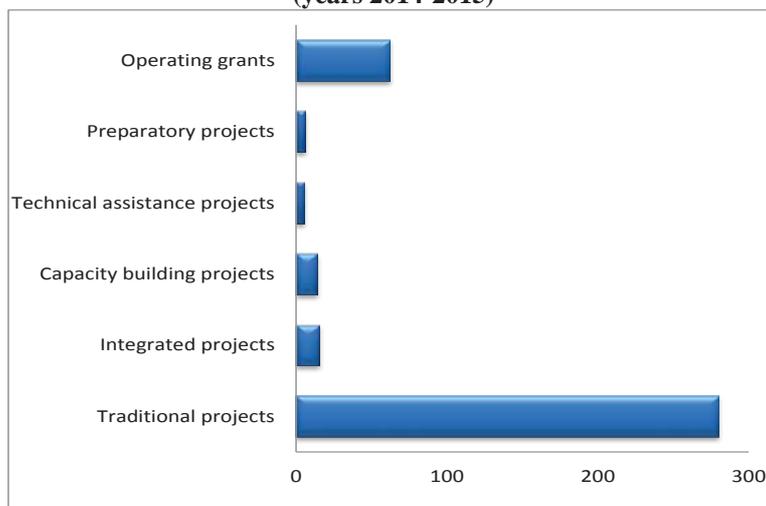


Source: Commission's financial system

#### 4.1. Grants

The following figure shows the number of action grants financed in 2014 and 2015 per type of project and includes the operating grants to NGOs.

**Figure 4 — Number of projects financed (years 2014-2015)**



Source: Commission's database on projects

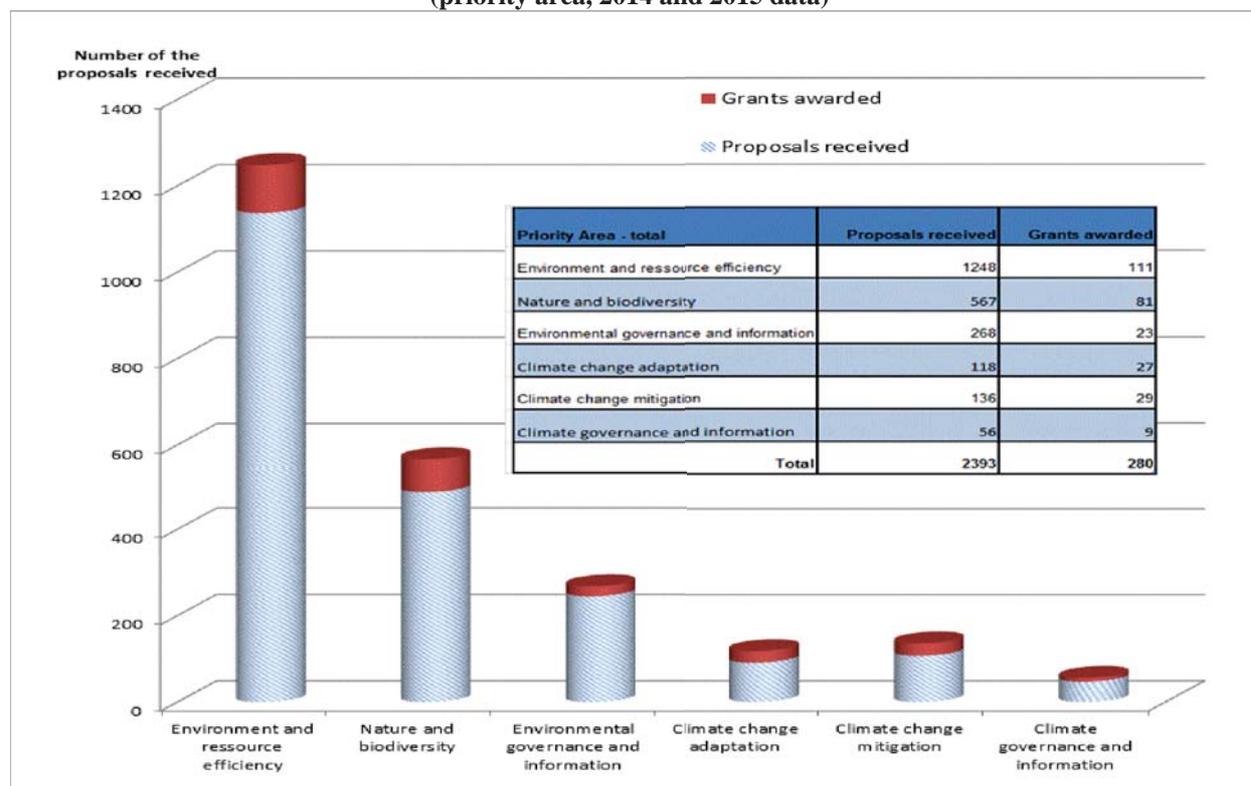
While the average EU contribution per project is EUR 1.5 million, the size of LIFE projects granted under LIFE range from EUR 48 000 for the smallest technical assistance project to EUR 13.4 million for the largest integrated project. Given the prevalence of traditional projects, the following analysis focuses on these.

#### *Traditional projects*

Taking into account the available funds across all the priority areas, the demand for traditional projects appears to be extremely high. Figure 5 shows the number of proposals received per priority area in 2014 and 2015 and the numbers of grants awarded. The average ratio between

proposals submitted and projects awarded is 9 to 1, ranging from 12 to 1 for the priority area environmental governance and information to 5 to 1 for climate change mitigation.

**Figure 5 — Traditional projects awarded funding out of the total proposals received (priority area, 2014 and 2015 data)**



Source: Commission's project database

**Figure 6 — Amount of traditional projects awarded out of total eligible proposals (per priority area, 2014 and 2015 data)**

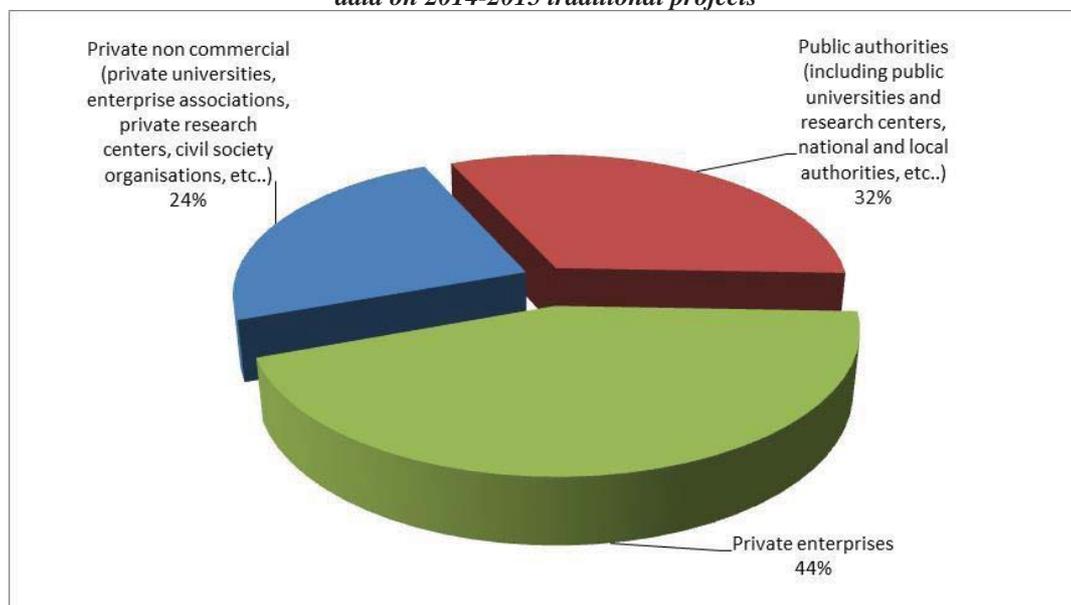
Priority areas /years	2014 and 2015		
	Project awarded (b)	Proposals received (a)	%
Amount (in EUR million)			
Environment and Ressource Efficiency	130,50	3078,05	4,24%
Nature and Biodiversity	198,80	2042,30	9,73%
Environmental governance and information	19,50	398,58	4,89%
Climate mitigation	38,20	316,45	12,07%
Climate adaptation	38,60	115,98	33,28%
Climate governance and information	6,30	52,80	11,93%

Source: Commission's project database

### a. Who are the LIFE beneficiaries?

Grants are awarded to a wide range of different organisations: from small to large businesses (44 % in total, out of which 33 % are small medium enterprises), to private non-commercial organisations (24 %), and public bodies (32 %), as can be seen in the figure below.

**Figure 7 — Legal status of the beneficiaries:  
data on 2014-2015 traditional projects**



Source: Commission's financial system

LIFE project beneficiaries must co-finance the project awarded EU funding. Data on this co-financing show that total EU financing under LIFE of about EUR 438 million mobilised an additional EUR 329 million in external co-financing (43 % of the total project cost — see Table 4 below). Data per priority area show that the percentage of co-financing ranges from 37 % for nature and biodiversity projects to 49 % for projects under the priority areas climate change mitigation and the environment and resource efficiency.

The maximum threshold for the EU co-financing rate in the LIFE programme is 60 % of the eligible costs for all projects for the duration of the first multiannual work programme (MAWP 2014-2017)<sup>28</sup> However the co-financing rate is lower if compared with other similar EU programmes, such as Horizon 2020, societal challenges 5, where the co-financing rate is up to 70% and for some actions can reach 100%.

<sup>28</sup> LIFE finances a maximum of 60 % of eligible costs for all projects. This rate will be reduced to 55 % in the second MAWP (2018-2020). Exceptions will be made for the nature and biodiversity projects for priority habitats or species (up to 75 %) and capacity-building projects (up to 100 %).

**Table 4 — Non-EU funds mobilised by traditional projects per priority area:  
data on 2014-2015 traditional projects**

Value (in EUR million)/ priority area	Climate change adaptation	Climate change mitigation	Environment and resource efficiency	Nature and biodiversity	Climate governance and information	Environmental governance and information	Total
Total cost of the project (A)	73.1	74.3	253.5	319.0	10.6	33.1	763.6
Non EU cofinancing (B)	34.5	36.1	123.0	120.2	4.3	13.6	331.6
Non EU Cofinancing percentage (A/B)	47%	49%	49%	38%	41%	41%	43%

Source: Commission's financial system

## b. How are the priorities defined?

The calls for proposals include specific priorities which are defined differently in the environment and climate action sub-programmes:

- In the environment sub-programme, specific project topics which implement each thematic priority included in Annex 3 of the LIFE Regulation are defined in the MAWP and cannot be modified over its entire duration.

The thematic distribution of projects awarded funding under the sub-programme for environment shows a certain concentration on some thematic priorities and project topics. Based on the classification of projects per thematic area, the highest thematic concentration of grants awarded is for resource efficiency projects implementing the circular economy (23 %) and for nature and biodiversity projects to protect habitats and species in Natura 2000 sites (38 %). Although the number of projects financed during the first two years is rather limited, it is relevant that one thematic priority 'industrial accidents' and about 30 % of the project topics across all the priority areas have not yet been targeted by a successful project.

- In the climate action sub-programme, the Commission specifies non-binding key priorities in the yearly call for proposals. For instance, the distribution of the projects awarded funding in 2014 under the sub-programme for climate action shows a concentration on priority sectors related to land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF), energy and industries. Other priority sectors concern urban adaptation and planning and adaptation in agriculture, forestry and tourism. In 2016, new key priorities in the call for proposals triggered a number of proposals on climate strategies, fluorinated gases and urban adaptation. Such proposals are important given the recent Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol<sup>29</sup>.

## c. How are traditional projects selected?

The eligibility and award criteria applied to select the traditional projects are the result of the programme's 25 years of experience<sup>30</sup>:

To be eligible to receive LIFE funds, the proposed initiative needs either to propose an innovation (which is the case of the pilot<sup>31</sup>, demonstration<sup>32</sup> and best practices<sup>33</sup> projects) or

<sup>29</sup> The Kigali Amendment is a legally binding international agreement to reduce the consumption and production of hydrofluorocarbons (commonly used in refrigeration and air-conditioning). Implementation of this agreement is expected to reduce global warming by 0.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed description of the overall award process, see the 2014-2017 multi-annual work programme.

address shortcomings in communicating the environmental/climate impacts that could hamper an efficient utilisation of resources (information, awareness-raising and dissemination projects).

The merit of an eligible proposal is determined by taking into account the technical and financial coherence of the proposed action and the extent to which it contributes to the specific objectives. In addition, a proposal will score higher if it can demonstrate a specific EU added value<sup>34</sup> and a catalyst effect by:

- ‘improving integration of specific environmental objectives in other policy area’ (mainstreaming);
- ‘including a specific strategy aimed at replicating or transferring the projects’ solutions and mobilise a wider uptake’ (replicability and transferability);
- ‘being transnational and/or ensuring an extensive application of green procurement concepts’;
- ‘planning to take up the results of environmental and climate-related research and innovation projects financed by Horizon 2020 or by previous framework programmes’.

A proposal under the environment sub-programme will also receive additional points if it addresses any priority project topics included in the MAWP.

These criteria are aimed to ensure that the programme is strategically focused because they allow selecting well-conceived projects, with a high demonstrated potential in terms of EU added value and catalytic effect.

### ***Integrated projects***

The integrated projects are a new feature introduced by the LIFE Regulation<sup>35</sup>. The LIFE Regulation states that a maximum of 30 % of the budgetary resources allocated to action grants may go to integrated projects with an indicative allocation of three integrated projects per Member State.

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<sup>31</sup> Pilot projects are projects that apply a technique or method that has not been applied or tested before and that offers potential environmental and climate advantages compared to current best practices.

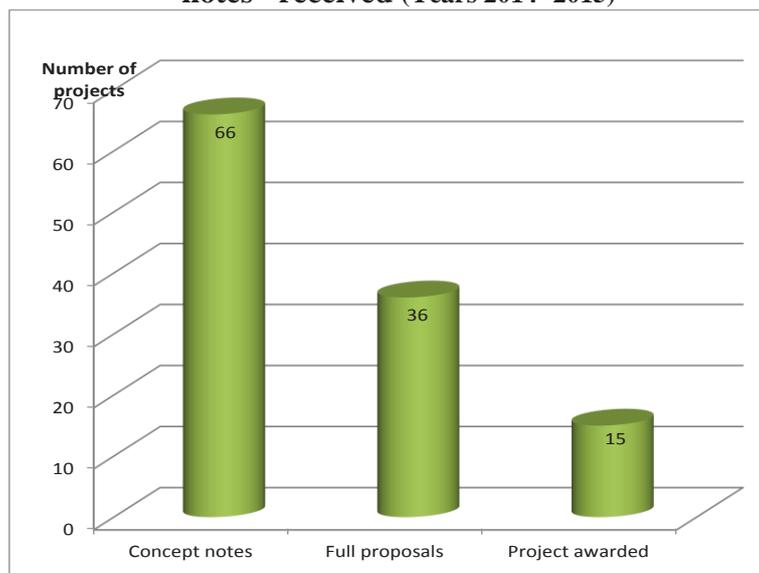
<sup>32</sup> Demonstration projects are projects that put into practice, test, evaluate and disseminate actions, methodologies or approaches new or unknown in the specific context of the project.

<sup>33</sup> Best practices projects — which apply appropriate, cost-effective and state-of-the-art techniques, methods and approaches.

<sup>34</sup> See also the paragraph ‘Novelties introduced in the grant management’ below.

<sup>35</sup> Introduced by the LIFE Regulation, integrated projects tend to be more complex than a traditional project as their aim is to act as a catalyst for the implementation of Union environmental or climate plans or strategies on a large territorial scale with additional co-funding for complementary actions.

**Figure 8. Integrated projects awarded funding out of the total proposals and concepts notes<sup>36</sup> received (Years 2014 -2015)**



Source: Commission's database on proposals

Taking into account their complexity, the integrated projects have been introduced gradually since 2014 under the environment sub-programme (nature and environment projects) and since 2015 under the climate action sub-programme (mitigation and adaptation projects).

Their introduction has been accompanied by technical assistance projects to help potential applicants of integrated projects improve their capacity to plan and manage.

According to the LIFE Multi-Annual Work Programme, the 30 % ceiling is expected to be attained in 2017 and to remain stable in 2018-2020 in view of reaching the indicative allocation of three integrated projects per Member State.

The demand for funding integrated projects has exceeded available resources from the very beginning, as can be seen from the figure below, in all the steps of the award process.

Fifteen integrated projects were selected in 2014-2015:

- Six are supporting the implementation of prioritised action frameworks developed in Belgium, Finland, Italy, Germany and Spain, pursuant to Article 8 of the Habitats Directive<sup>37</sup>,
- Four are implementing river basin management plans developed in Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Belgium pursuant to the Water Framework Directive<sup>38</sup>,

<sup>36</sup> There is a two-step procedure for the award of the integrated projects. The first step is the submission of a concept note summarising key information about the project. If the concept note is retained, the applicant proceeds to the second step, which is the submission of a full proposal (see footnote 16 for more information). This proposal is assessed to determine the integrated projects which will be awarded a grant.

<sup>37</sup> Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7).

<sup>38</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1).

- Two in Italy and Poland (see Box 3) are aimed at implementing and monitoring air quality plans as defined by Directive 2008/50/EC with the ultimate goal of contributing to the national air pollution reduction programmes<sup>39</sup>,
- One in Finland is implementing waste management plans and a waste prevention programme as required by the Waste Framework Directive 2008/98,
- One in Denmark supports the implementation of 21 municipal climate change adaptation (CCA) plans and
- One in Germany aims to better structure and optimise the implementation of the country's climate action programme 2020 and the climate protection plan 2050.

<b>Box 3. Example of an integrated project</b>	
<b>Implementation of an air quality plan for the Małopolska Region — Małopolska in a healthy atmosphere (LIFE14 IPE/PL/000021)</b>	
EU contribution: 9 914 871.00 €	Thematic priority: Air quality
Coordinating beneficiary: Małopolska Region (public local authority)	External link: <a href="http://powietrze.malopolska.pl/en/life-ip/">http://powietrze.malopolska.pl/en/life-ip/</a>
<p>The purpose of this project is to implement an air quality plan in the province of Małopolska in Poland, and regional and local air quality policies in the province of Silesia, and adjacent regions in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Specific aims include improving regional cooperation in these air pollution hotspots, removing barriers to the mobilisation of funding to replace obsolete coal boilers, building local capacity (through 'eco-managers' and a centre of excellence) and raise awareness about how to improve air quality.</p> <p>The province of Małopolska struggles with very poor air quality, particularly during the winter season. Along with Silesia and nearby regions in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, it is one of the most polluted regions in the EU. The major source of air pollution in Małopolska is low-stack emissions (combustion of solid fuels in obsolete household boilers).</p> <p>At the national level, the anti-smog law passed in October 2015 allows local governments to adopt their own local air quality regulations, and set parameters for the stoves allowed to be used in particular areas and for the fuels used (including coal). The fundamental barrier at the local level to the effective implementation of Małopolska's air quality plan is a lack of human resources, organisational capacities and necessary know-how in the municipality.</p> <p>Barriers at the regional level to the effective implementation of Małopolska's air quality plan include insufficient financial resources to eliminate low-stack emissions in individual houses and to make energy-efficiency improvements in buildings.</p> <p>In addition to the budget for the integrated project itself, the project will facilitate the coordinated use of EUR 799 million in complementary funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Polish National and Regional Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, and other national and private funds, as applicable.</p>	

The proposals received for integrated projects for 2014 and 2015 represent a combined total of LIFE and non-LIFE co-financing of EUR 283 million. This co-financing should facilitate the coordinated use of about EUR 3.6 billion in total, as shown in table below.

<sup>39</sup> National air pollution reduction programmes were part of the Air Package of 18/12/2013 and further developed in the proposal for the National Emission Ceilings Directive, Annex III, Part 2 (National air pollution control programmes).

**Table 5 — Integrated projects 2014 and 2015: financial resources**

LIFE Integrated projects/ Fund per source (in million EUR)														
Project	Priority area	Year	LIFE project		European Agricultural Fund for Regional	European Regional Development Fund	INTERREG	European Social Fund	European Maritime and Fisheries	Horizon 2020	European Investment Bank	Public	Private	Total
			LIFE cofinancing	Non-EU cofinancing										
Belgium	Nature	2014	11,40	7,60	33,75	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	169,79	0,00	222,55
Germany	Water	2014	8,50	7,21	1,02	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	26,55	0,00	43,28
Finland	Nature	2014	11,98	7,98	1,87	0,14	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	2,25	0,05	24,28
Italy	Nature	2014	10,00	5,94	75,21	0,50	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	3,10	5,80	100,56
Poland	Air	2014	9,91	5,10	0,00	757,33	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	37,00	0,00	809,35
UK	Water	2014	11,99	7,99	10,45	21,00	2,50	1,00	0,60	0,75	0,00	139,50	52,50	248,28
Germany	Nature	2015	10,13	6,75	43,16	28,20	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	63,90	0,00	152,13
Spain	Nature	2015	13,40	13,88	0,00	0,00	0,00	10,30	11,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	12,00	60,58
Finland	Waste	2015	11,11	7,69	0,23	1,96	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	7,20	0,00	28,19
Italy	Air	2015	9,97	6,83	130,18	679,17	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	41,05	0,00	867,21
Netherlands	Nature	2015	10,47	6,98	0,83	0,00	3,40	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	50,32	90,30	162,29
Sweden	Water	2015	9,74	20,29	9,10	0,00	5,44	0,00	0,30	0,17	0,00	56,00	0,00	101,04
Belgium	Water	2015	9,75	8,36	1,88	0,00	0,00	0,00	13,74	0,00	22,67	237,99	0,00	294,40
Denmark	Clima	2015	7,01	6,40	0,00	2,70	2,68	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	180,80	11,60	211,19
Germany	Clima	2015	8,16	10,84	65,11	29,90	20,08	0,00	0,00	16,19	0,00	166,56	6,29	323,12
<i>Total</i>			153,52	129,86	372,79	1.520,90	34,10	11,30	25,64	17,11	22,67	1.182,01	178,55	3.648,46

Source: Commission's database on projects

### Other projects

In 2014 and 2015, the Commission financed 14 capacity-building projects to help countries less successful in obtaining grants under the LIFE programme. These projects are now being implemented. They cover all the Member States with lower uptake, except one which did not submit any proposal. It is expected that, once completed, the projects will help improve the quality and the quantity of applications from these Member States.

Technical assistance projects provide financial support to help applicants prepare integrated projects. Seven projects were financed in 2014-2015, two of which under the sub-programme for climate action. Three have already led to the successful submission of an integrated project.

Preparatory projects address specific needs for the development and implementation of EU environmental or climate policy and legislation. For climate action, one preparatory project has been funded on the reporting of emissions and removals from land use. Under the environment sub-programme, five projects were funded in 2014 - 2015 on different topics of Commission interest. These include the online bird portals data collection for displaying near-real-time bird distribution across Europe and the financing of young volunteers doing nature protection and climate adaptation activities (European Voluntary Corps — environment strand).

### Novelties introduced in grant management

The LIFE Regulation introduced two main changes in grant management:

1. The transfer of the management of the bulk of grants to the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME)

Following a cost-benefit analysis, the Commission entrusted EASME with the management of the operating grants, the traditional and the capacity-building projects under the two sub-programmes and the integrated and the technical assistance projects under the climate action sub-programme.

The Directorate-General for Environment implements directly the integrated, the technical assistance and the preparatory projects under the environment sub-programme as well as the ongoing LIFE+ projects. The Directorate-General for Climate Action manages the preparatory projects under the climate action sub-programme.

2. The introduction of a system to monitor project outcome and impact on the environment, climate change, and societal and economic issues.

To assess impact, a comprehensive set of quantitative and, where possible, qualitative indicators with related milestones, was included in the LIFE MAWP for 2014 – 2017. A system to monitor these indicators has been developed and implemented at project level so that the programme's performance can be evaluated in an objective manner: Box 2 above describes how it works.

The expected environment and/or climate impact of a project's results is therefore assessed during the project selection phase. Specific award criteria are applied for this, and there is a minimum pass score<sup>40</sup>. As a consequence, projects which are not expected to provide an adequate impact cannot be awarded a grant. A specialised monitoring team validates the expected impact and then continuously checks this during the project's implementation and after it ends.

#### **4.2. Financial Instruments**

Two pilot financial instruments have been introduced to test innovative approaches:

- the Private Finance for Energy Efficiency (PF4EE) supports investments to implement Member States' energy efficiency action plans through financial intermediaries;
- the Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCFF) is designed to demonstrate that natural capital projects can generate revenues or save costs. It intends to establish a pipeline of replicable, bankable operations that will serve as a 'proof of concept' and demonstrate to potential investors that such operations directly addressing biodiversity and climate adaptation objectives are attractive.

Following an ex ante assessment analysing the potential demand and defining the best possible conditions for its financing, the Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) developed and signed specific delegation agreements.

Subsequently, in the case of the PF4EE, the EIB has started to make agreements with financial intermediaries, which have then to develop their own portfolio to provide loans for energy efficiency investments.

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<sup>40</sup> Two award criteria concern the environmental impact under the environment sub-programme: 1. 'EU added value: extent and quality of the contribution to the specific objectives of the priority areas' and 2. 'Contribution to project topics'. Considered together, they envisage the attribution of 30 award points out of 100, with a minimum pass score of 10 points. Under the sub-programme for climate action, two award criteria refer to the climate impact: 'EU added value: Extent and quality of the contribution to an increased climate resilience and/or to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions' and 'EU added value: Extent and quality of the contribution to the specific objectives of the priority areas of the LIFE sub-programme for Climate Action'. They envisage the attribution of 30 award points out of 100, with a minimum pass score of 15 points. See also above the paragraph on 'How are traditional projects selected?'.

At the outset of PF4EE, the EIB expected there would be support for up to EUR 540 million in total investment. However, on the basis of the six agreements signed since 2015 with local intermediary banks and in view of the pipeline, the EIB now expects EUR 1 billion in investments in energy efficiency (EUR 430 million from EIB and EUR 570 million from financial intermediaries) in 10 Member States. There appears to be a high demand for this type of loan.

The other instrument, NCFE, supports the financing of loans and equity for investments in natural capital that help to achieve biodiversity and/or climate change adaptation objectives. The aim is to develop a pipeline of projects that encourages greater uptake of such investments in the market.

Since the launch of the instruments in February 2015, the EIB has scrutinised a significant number of potential operations. The first operation was signed in April 2017, and two or three further operations are expected for the remainder of 2017.

However, many potential operations that were scrutinised did not materialise, in particular because of the difficulty of developing the business case. This confirms the challenges identified in the ex-ante assessment. Greater use of the NCFE support facility to develop more operations is planned for example, for promoting urban adaptation projects.

The recommendation to look into how grants can be used in combination with other type of financing tools to make certain operations more viable

## **5. ANSWERS TO THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS**

At this early stage of the programme's implementation, it is obviously too soon to present actual results. Therefore, the answers to all the evaluation questions take into account, where appropriate, the activities being implemented, their expected outcomes, the processes in place, the initial findings and/or the results of the stakeholder consultation.

The answer to each evaluation question is provided below under the respective evaluation criterion. To make it easier to read, the questions are numbered and a summary is presented at the end of each answer.

### **5.1. Effectiveness**

#### ***Q.1. What are the outcomes likely to be achieved under LIFE 2014-2020***

LIFE is implemented through two multiannual work programmes (MAWP) covering 2014-2017 and 2018-2020 respectively. The first MAWP (1 January 2014 to 31 December 2017) was adopted on 19 March 2014 by decision C (2014)1709.

All the calls planned in 2014, 2015 and 2016 were launched as planned, and the relevant budget fully committed (see Table 3 above). This means that all the steps to implement the action grants in the first half of the LIFE programme 2014 - 2020 have been taken.

To measure the likely outcomes to be achieved under the LIFE programme 2014-2020, the external study analysed the values of the indicators provided by the project beneficiaries of the 2014 call for proposals. These indicators were validated by the monitoring team (see Box 2 for more information). Although the projects awarded are ongoing and their outcome is expected in 4-5 years, the outcome is considered to be realistic.

The results of this analysis were compared with the target milestones indicated as target for 2017 in the first MAWP. These can be found in the MAWP where for each priority area and type of project, qualitative and quantitative outcomes, indicators and targets have been established in line with Article 24 (2)(c) of the LIFE Regulation. Information on how they have been defined appears in Box 4 below.

#### **Box 4. Definition of the MAWP targets**

The 2017 targets in the first MAWP were based on the evaluation of the estimated impact of the LIFE programme and defined in consideration of the following:

- the environmental or climate objectives to be reached by each project which will have to be at least equivalent to or surpass the objectives set by the relevant Union legislation;
- a projection of the number and scope of successful projects within a priority area based on the estimated number of successful applications submitted.

Moreover, given that no project was expected to be finished by 2017, the milestones refer to on-going projects and 'consist in having set up the projects in such a way that they can reach the targets by 2020<sup>41</sup>..

Based on their anticipated results, the 2014 projects already address 70 % of each target milestone included in the first MAWP<sup>42</sup>.

The tables reporting the results of the comparison are included in Annex 5 — Assessment of indicators against targets.

While it is too early to assess the ambition of the targets, the fact that the planned milestones are in some cases exceeded is a positive finding showing that the programme is well on track to achieving its expected results.

Taking into account the links between evaluation questions 1 and 2, more information on the expected outcomes of the activities and some specific examples are included in the next section on question 2.

These anticipated results provide assurance that the LIFE programme 2014-2020 is on track to contribute significantly to its general outcomes.

#### **Q.1. What is the outcome likely to be achieved under LIFE 2014-2020?**

In the absence of actual results, the analysis of the ongoing projects selected in 2014 shows that they already address 70 % of each target milestone to be achieved for 2017 as indicated in the first MAWP.

These anticipated results provide assurance that the LIFE programme 2014-2020 will provide a significant contributions to its expected outcomes.

#### **Q.2. To what extent does the observed outcome correspond to its objectives and to the EU 2020 strategy on sustainable growth?**

<sup>41</sup> Commission Implementing Decision C(2014)1709 of 19 March 2014 on the adoption of the LIFE multiannual work programme for 2014-2017. See in particular the annex, p.58.

<sup>42</sup> The targeted milestones are considered to be achieved if the difference between the actual results and the milestone value is  $\leq 5$  % of the provisional results.

As actual results are not available yet, the expected results of the action grants awarded in 2014 and the activities which are being implemented and which target directly each general objective of the LIFE programme, are presented below together with some specific examples.

The programme's contribution to the EU 2020 strategy on sustainable growth is also analysed taking into account the activities under implementation and their expected outcomes.

**Objective 1 to contribute to the shift towards a resource efficient, low carbon and climate resilient economy and to the protection of the environment including biodiversity and Natura 2000**

According to the results of the external study, the ongoing LIFE projects are expected to contribute to this objective by, inter alia:

- improving the conservation status of 59 habitats, 114 species and 85 Natura 2000 sites;
- reducing adverse effects of chemicals on health and the environment for about 1.6 million people over 5 years;
- reducing energy consumption (about 600 000 MWh per year) by best practice solutions;
- increasing the production of energy from renewable sources (about 500 000 MWh per year from different sources);
- targeting 35 million hectares with climate adaptation measures and developing best practice solutions for adaptation in various areas.

These anticipated results might appear limited compared to the existing needs and challenges. However, as in the case of its predecessor LIFE+, the LIFE programme has a limited size and is not designed to solve all environmental and climate problems but to act as a catalyst for change.

This role of catalyst has been developed over the years along three different dimensions<sup>43</sup>:

- in terms of disseminating best practice and knowledge (spreading effect), because LIFE provides a platform to develop and exchange good practices and knowledge (see Box 5 for a concrete example of how this is happening via LIFE+ funded projects), allowing Member States and stakeholders to learn from each other about implementing EU legislation;

<b>Box 5 — Example of a traditional LIFE+ project on information and communication</b>	
ADEME — European day ‘In town, without my car!’ (LIFE99 ENV/F/000459)	
EU contribution: €1 022 923.00	Thematic priority: Air quality, transport
Coordinating beneficiary: French National Agency for Environment and Energy (national authority)	External link: <a href="http://www.ademe.fr/">http://www.ademe.fr/</a>

<sup>43</sup> Few examples of the catalyst role of the programme are taken from LIFE+ traditional projects, given that this feature of the programme is being developed in continuation with the LIFE+ experience.

Europeans are very worried about urban pollution and mobility.

The overall aim of the 'In town without my car!' campaign was to encourage public awareness of the need to act against pollution caused by the increase in motorised traffic in the urban environment. This involves not just fighting atmospheric pollution or noise but also improving the quality of urban life.

Following on from the success of an 'In town without my car!' operation launched in France in 1998, and capitalising on the experience of other European cities, the project aimed to create a Europe-wide day on the theme 'In town, without my car!' in 2000, financed by national authorities and local communities.

This initiative helped to include environmental considerations in transport policies, in keeping with EU policies in this area, in particular the Air Quality and Noise Directives. A pilot project was carried out in 1999 in a small number of volunteer cities, primarily in the project partner countries. This initial operation was a test, providing feedback for the main operation in 2000. A number of indicators were defined to evaluate the pilot project, e.g. city residents' level of satisfaction, air pollution levels, measurement of traffic and noise levels.

On the basis of this assessment, the theme day for 2000 was launched at a major European seminar. The project partners consulted with the EU member countries to organise the European-wide day for 22 September 2000.

The initiative had a great success and many cities continue to organise each year a day without cars.

- in terms of attracting other funds, given, for example, that LIFE financing (see Tables 4 and 5) is used to mainstream environmental and climate objectives into other EU policies and public and private sector practice. This allows the informed inclusion of environmental and climate concerns in the decisions that drive national, local and sectoral policy, plans, investment and related rules, while addressing the specific needs of environmental and climate action. This is the case, for example, of the integrated projects, whose aim is to facilitate the implementation of environmental and climate plans and to integrate these plans into comprehensive development strategies. It is also the case of the two financial instruments which are expected to support private investments in energy efficiency (PF4EE) and in natural capital operations. Such investments would normally have difficulty obtaining financing from commercial banks because of their risk profile (NCFE).
- in terms of supporting actions to improve and accelerate changes directly targeting environmental externalities, which result in
  - (a) private costs of production and consumption failing to account for all the environmental costs;
  - (b) inadequate information on the environmental/climate impact preventing efficient utilisation of resources, and
  - (c) a systematic discouraging of investments in eco-products/processes, thus limiting their potential return.

LIFE intervenes to address these issues by:

- (a) building up the capacity of the key stakeholders of the production and consumption processes (see project in Box 8);
- (b) by providing adequate tools (legislation, information, etc.. — see examples of the LIFE action in Boxes 9 and 15); and
- (c) by supporting private players, in particular small and medium enterprises in testing small-scale technologies and solutions (see the examples in Boxes 6 and 21).

<b>Box 6 — Example of a traditional LIFE+ project on environmental policy and governance: the Dyemond Solar project</b>	
EU contribution: €1 735 846.00	Thematic priority: renewable energy
Coordinating beneficiary: NLAB Solar AB (private company)	External link: <a href="http://www.dyemonsolar.com/">http://www.dyemonsolar.com/</a>
<p>The overall objective of the Dyemond Solar project (LIFE 09/ENVSE/000355) was to demonstrate a cost-effective means of producing transparent dye-sensitised solar cells (DSCs). This was based on patented technology that uses one-dimensional photonic crystals to improve the efficiency and colour of solar cells. The project aimed to demonstrate a prototype production system at pre-industrial scales which could then serve as a base model for an industrial-scale operation. The result: the solar technology led to quantitative environmental improvements compared with the state-of-the-art technology. There was less embedded energy, a lower volume of waste from production, and a reduction of CO2 emissions in comparison with silicon solar cells. Moreover, it is expected to reduce the investment and operational costs by 50 %.</p> <p>The upgrading of the prototype to an industrial-scale operation has a potential value of over €100 million. The process of marketing is still ongoing, and it is not yet possible to determine whether it will be successful. The technology itself has many advantages compared to other types of solar panels, like silicon and thin film solar cells.</p>	

The activities to develop, implement and enforce EU environmental policy and legislation (see objective 2 below) and support better governance (see objective 3 below) further illustrate LIFE's role in moving towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon and climate-resilient economy and its contribution to environmental protection.

**Objective 2: improve the development, implementation and enforcement of EU environmental and climate policy and legislation**

The external study confirmed that the procurement activities launched by the Commission to support the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental and climate policy and legislation play a key role in achieving the LIFE programme's second objective, especially because they address all stages of the policy cycle (that might not be covered by demand-led activities).

Evaluations and impact assessments provide evidence to inform and support the decision-making process and are carried out in the preparation phase, before the Commission finalises a proposal for a new/ revised policy or legislative act on environment and climate action. These studies are carried out with the support of external expertise and directly funded by the LIFE programme, under the procurement activities budget line.

The LIFE programme (and, partially, the LIFE+ programme) financed, for example, the preparatory and related tasks (such as the impact assessment, stakeholders analysis, communication, etc.) for the adoption of the circular economy package. The package lays the basis for 'closing the loop' of product lifecycles by improving recycling and re-use. LIFE also financed work on the set of proposals for 'Driving Europe's transition to a low-carbon economy', which aims to accelerate the transition to low-carbon emissions in all sectors of the economy.

**Box 7. Framework service contracts for more cooperation with national judges in the field of**

### **environmental law**

National judges play a key role in implementing EU environmental law. The capacity of national courts to guarantee the correct and efficient application of EU environmental law is an essential factor in addressing the legitimate expectations of EU citizens in this domain.

It has also become more and more obvious that without efficient mechanisms to settle environmental matters at national level, enforcement at EU level by the Commission is insufficient for an effective implementation of EU environmental legislation across the EU. An effective implementation and enforcement of the environmental law at national level would allow the Commission to focus on its core activities. On the one hand the Commission should concentrate its resources on systemic, serious matters which cannot be addressed effectively at national level or in only one Member State. On the other hand, the Commission should take measures to ensure the spread of knowledge of EU environmental legislation at national level and help the relevant national bodies to address enforcement effectively.

Appropriate knowledge of EU environmental law is key to this. Therefore, the Commission launched the 'programme for cooperation with national judges in the field of environment law'. In the first phase (2008-2012), training materials for various sectors of EU environment legislation, were developed, and several workshops with judges and prosecutors from almost all Member States were organised. In a second phase, additional training in environmental law was offered to national judges. This phase built on the results of the first phase and extended the programme's scope. Steps were taken to consolidate the partnership with the national judicial training centres and ensure that the project's results were shared and disseminated at national level.

So far about 500 judges and prosecutors from the courts of first instance to the supreme courts of all Member States have attended the roughly 45 workshops organised. During these pan-EU seminars judges from various Member States are able to exchange good practice and compare their experience.

Box 7 gives an example of how the procurement activities are used to support the enforcement of the legislation, by providing training to judges and prosecutors. Box 10 describes a study contract to inform Member States' decision making on a new compliance-monitoring mechanism in the Commission's proposals on waste<sup>44</sup>. At the level of grants, the traditional projects financed under all priority areas support the implementation or enforcement of specific legislative acts. In particular:

- The nature and biodiversity projects (a priority area) focus on Natura 2000 and nature legislation (the Birds and Habitats Directives). The evidence gathered in the recently finalised evaluation of the Directives (fitness-check) confirmed the strategic role that the LIFE programme plays in supporting the implementation of the Directives.
- The projects targeting the priority area environment and resource efficiency are designed to make it easier to develop and share new solutions and best practices for water, waste, resource efficiency — including soil and forests, green and circular economy — set out in the Roadmap for a Resource-Efficient Europe and the 7th Environment Action programme (see Box 19 below).
- Projects under the priority area climate change mitigation aim to help develop and implement climate-related policy and legislation, and, in particular, contribute to 'a roadmap for moving to a competitive low carbon economy in 2050'. For this, the projects focus, inter alia, on the emissions trading system, Member States' efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), renewable energy and energy efficiency, transport and fuels. Below is an example of an on-going project which focuses on GHG.

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<sup>44</sup> See [COM/2015/0595 final. Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste.](#)

**Box 8 — Example of a traditional project on climate change mitigation  
LIFE BEEF CARBON — Demonstration actions to mitigate the carbon footprint of  
beef production in France, Ireland, Italy and Spain (LIFE14 CCM/FR/001125)**

EU contribution: €3 276 300.00

Thematic priority: climate mitigation

Coordinating beneficiary: Institut de l’Elevage  
(national authority)

External link: <http://idele.fr/index.php?id=2487>

Beef production generates 6 % of all human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. LIFE BEEF CARBON is testing and promoting innovative practices to reduce GHG emissions and increase carbon sequestration in beef farms in France, Ireland, Italy and Spain, countries that together account for 32 % of the EU’s cattle population. The project will calculate the beef carbon footprint of over 2000 farms, representing the full range of beef production systems. Carbon mitigation plans will be applied and evaluated on 172 beef farms as a precursor to the development of national action plans. Implementation of these plans is expected to lead to a 15 % reduction of the beef carbon footprint of the four countries in 10 years. The project will thus make a significant contribution to achieving the goals of the EU Effort Sharing Decision on GHG emissions as it relates to agriculture, as well as to the proposed new legislation on integrating emissions from land use in the 2030 climate and energy framework.

- The governance and information projects under both sub-programmes support the development of cooperation platforms and the sharing of best practices for more effective compliance and enforcement, including training programmes for judges and public prosecutors (see Box 17 for an example). The projects also support the development of policies, e.g. by funding actions specifically aimed at increasing the level of understanding among stakeholders.

The 15 integrated projects selected in 2014-2015 (and presented above) help various players in Member States implement key plans and strategies required by specific Union environmental or climate legislation on a large territorial scale. While these projects have only just started, they appear to ensure a systematic and coherent implementation of key environment or climate plans by involving all the players on the ground and ensuring their integration in a comprehensive strategy.

On this basis, taking into account the overall amount of resources involved, their results are expected to be much larger than their limited budget would suggest (see Table 5).

**Objective 3. support better environmental and climate governance at all levels, including better involvement of civil society, NGOs and local actors**

The action grants financed under the priority areas environment and climate governance and information are specifically aimed at broadening stakeholder involvement and promoting more effective compliance with and enforcement of Union environmental and climate legislation (see Box 7 for an example). This is obtained through the award process, e.g. by targeting information and awareness-raising campaigns, capacity building of key stakeholders, activities in support of effective control processes (i.e. enforcement, inspections and surveillance, non-judicial conflict resolution) and measures to promote compliance<sup>45</sup>.

The external study confirms that governance is an integral part of many projects, especially in nature and biodiversity, water, and climate action (see Q9 under Coherence). The analysis of

<sup>45</sup> For further information, see the priority project topics in the first MAWP, pages 20-24.

indicators at project level shows in fact that the beneficiaries are targeting specific outputs and outcome indicators related to environmental and climate governance, even if their project's main aim pertains to another priority area. On the basis of these indicators, the external study estimates that the projects awarded in 2014 and their awareness-raising activities are expected to impact dozens of millions of citizens and more than 6 000 stakeholders.

<b>Box 9. Example of a LIFE Environmental Governance and Information project</b>	
LIFE Legal Actions — Legal Actions on Clean Air (LIFE15 GIE/DE/000795)	
EU contribution: €521 834.00 Coordinating beneficiary: Environmental Action Germany (NGO)	Thematic priority: Air pollution External link: <a href="http://www.right-to-clean-air.eu">http://www.right-to-clean-air.eu</a>
<p>The project aims to empower and motivate EU citizens and NGOs to campaign for effective air quality measures. This means providing information about the sources and effects of air pollution and potential solutions and providing advice on the right of citizens and NGOs to participate in decision-making processes and take legal action if necessary when Member States are not in compliance with the Air Quality Directive.</p> <p>The project's targeted awareness-raising activities are expected to reach 13 million citizens in seven EU countries, with a particular focus on Germany and the Czech Republic. NGOs and citizens will participate in the process of revising Air Quality Plans. LIFE Legal Actions will also motivate political decision-makers to improve air quality legislation and implementation by advising them on existing national and European funding schemes, promoting green public procurement (GPP) as part of a resource-efficient economy, and transferring examples of best practice.</p>	

Furthermore, operating grants financed under the LIFE programme have enabled beneficiary NGOs to operate and thus to be involved in shaping environmental and climate policy, to mainstream climate and environmental policies into other areas and to increase the involvement and knowledge of environmental and climate action priorities among citizens and EU policy makers.

The procurement activities contribute to the third LIFE objective by building up the knowledge base on environmental and climate issues, necessary to underpin policy decision-making (see Box 10 for an example).

About 200 contracts are concluded every year under LIFE to support better environmental and climate governance, including stakeholder involvement, at all levels.

<b>Box 10. The early warning mechanism — Study contract to identify Member States at risk of non-compliance with the 2020 target of the Waste Framework Directive and to follow up on the exercise to promote compliance</b>
<p>This is a study on the state of implementation of the 2020 municipal waste recycling target. The purpose is to identify Member States at risk of non-compliance with this 2020 target and provide a so-called early warning report. The study is based on the idea of a new compliance monitoring mechanism included in the Commission's proposals on the waste targets review — the 'early warning' which would apply to the post-2020 targets proposed. The study will conduct a comprehensive review of the waste management policy of these Member States at risk of not meeting the 2020 target. It will include the reasons for underperformance, looking at the policy measures introduced or expected to be introduced and how relevant these are in closing the gap to the target. Based on the results of this study, detailed, country-specific recommendations will be proposed to each Member State at risk of not meeting the target and included in the Commission's 'early warning report'.</p> <p>This would also help to ensure that the initiative receives the visibility it needs to be effective in anticipating, ahead of the deadline for compliance, any difficulties Member States may have in reaching the proposed targets.</p>

#### **Objective 4: support implementation of the 7th Environment Action Plan (EAP)**

The activities mentioned under the other LIFE objectives also help to implement the 7th EAP, because these activities target the first two objectives of the 7th EAP as well (see Figure 2 above). However, the third objective of the 7th EAP refers to safeguarding public health, and as concluded in the external study, following the 2014 calls for proposals, no projects were directly targeting the thematic area ‘environment and health’.

#### **Support to the EU 2020 strategy on sustainable growth**

According to the LIFE Regulation, the LIFE programme should contribute to the targets of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (the ‘Europe 2020 strategy’).

According to the external study, the LIFE programme:

- directly contributes to the second pillar of the EU 2020 strategy on ‘Sustainable growth: promoting a more **resource efficient**, greener and more competitive economy’ by helping to sever the link between economic growth and the use of resources.
- contributes to the other pillars of the EU 2020 strategy by making it easier
  - to convert new ideas into products and processes (**Innovation Union**) and
  - to develop new skills and **jobs** (Agenda for new skills and jobs).

Some of the most recent policy developments financed by LIFE through the 19 % of the budget dedicated to procurement — namely the 2030 climate and energy framework adopted in 2014, the circular economy package adopted in 2015 and the implementation of the Paris Agreement ratified in 2016 — are expected to help shape the future of the European economy in the coming decades.

The LIFE programme’s support for the Europe 2020 strategy takes different forms:

- All the LIFE projects already funded help to put the EU on a path to **resource-efficiency** and sustainable growth<sup>46</sup>. These are projects aimed at halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity, improving resource efficiency, addressing environmental and health concerns, moving towards a low-carbon and resilient economy and preventing the consequences of floods, droughts, the rise of temperatures and sea levels<sup>47</sup>.

For example, the ongoing projects funded under the priority area ‘environment and resource efficiency’ target the effective implementation of EU environmental policy by the public and private sectors (in particular in the environmental sectors covered by the ‘Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe’) and are facilitating the development and sharing of new solutions and best practices.

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<sup>46</sup> All projects contribute to the EU 2020 strategy because all the priority areas — biodiversity, adaptation mitigation, environment and governance and information — contribute to resource-efficiency and/or sustainable growth.

<sup>47</sup> In connection with this, ‘The implementation of green recovery measures in the EU’, Cambridge Econometric et al (2011) assessed green measures focused on energy efficiency and climate change mitigation as part of recovery packages. It was found these measures contributed to economic recovery and provided a temporary boost to employment. The multiplier effects for green investment were similar to those from any other kind of investment and supported the general conclusion for LIFE projects that they support growth and jobs.

- A contribution to **innovation** is expected from projects funded under all priority areas aimed at developing policy or management approaches, best practices and solutions (so called, demonstration and best practices projects — see, for example, Box 6). This includes the development of innovative technologies for environment/climate challenges and the contribution to innovation is happening by targeting specific types of projects.

The external study extracts from the indicator database that 61 % of the climate change adaptation projects and over 80 % of all the climate change mitigation projects aim to help develop innovative technologies, systems and/or instruments. The external monitors confirmed that this is the result of more emphasis on the business perspective of projects introduced in recent years.

Ongoing projects to promote innovation and investments in energy efficiency and the PF4EE are designed to help reduce energy demand and thus to make the EU less energy dependent, which is one of the objectives of the Energy Union.

Project beneficiaries and external monitors affirmed in their interviews that the LIFE programme is a source of funding for innovation. They mentioned that if LIFE stopped funding or withdrew it, one of the consequences would be less support for innovative environmental solutions<sup>48</sup>.

- Although **employment** is not the primary aim of the LIFE programme, the external study estimates that a total of 139 projects, out of 280, have created jobs as a result of various LIFE actions. This is based on the indicators database for 2014-2015 projects. At the beginning of these projects a total of 330 jobs in FTE (full time equivalent) terms were created. But the number of FTE jobs is expected to increase to more than a thousand by the end of the projects.

The employment generated is generally temporary and directly related to the implementation of the projects. It consists mainly of researchers and technicians but also project managers, assistants, public relations experts, webmasters, accountants, etc. For a large number of projects, it is specified that their implementation is not expected to lead to the direct creation of permanent jobs. However, the projects are expected to stimulate certain sectors and therefore have an indirect positive impact on employment.

There is also mention of some cases (relatively fewer) where long-term unemployed people have been recruited (9 % of all projects reporting employment) including, in 3 projects, people with reduced mobility.

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<sup>48</sup> According to LIFE project beneficiaries, there will be *'less innovative pilot or demonstration technical projects, less environmentally relevant innovation activities by SMEs in particular'* and *'What would disappear is the support to provide solutions for pre-testing / pre-commercialisation (risk-sharing) of innovative environmental solutions'*.

**Table 6 — Employment generated by LIFE and LIFE+ projects:  
average figures per type of projects**

LIFE 2014-2020				LIFE 2007-2013			
	At the beginning	At the end	Beyond		At the beginning	At the end	Beyond
Total average	2,5	13,5	17,8	Total average	8,5	13,2	8,6
Climate change adaptation projects	4,8	25,7	27,4				
Climate change mitigation projects	2,2	9,5	8,2				
Environment and resources efficiency projects	2,4	14,8	30,5	Environment projects	3,1	12,2	10,9
Climate governance and information projects	0	5	0	Information projects	2,2	13,2	2,8
Environment governance and information projects	1,4	12,3	5,5				
Nature and biodiversity projects	2,6	9,4	7,8				
Preparatory projects	6	2,2	1,3	Nature projects	17,4	14,7	6,2
Integrated projects	1,2	26,8	8,8	Biodiversity projects	0,6	12,3	7

Source: External study

On average, 2.5 jobs in FTE equivalent were reported at the beginning of the project. This is expected to increase to 13.5 FTEs at the end of the project and to 17.8 after the end of LIFE funding<sup>49</sup>.

By thematic areas, at the end of project implementation, the largest average employment per project is reported in integrated projects and climate adaptation projects. If this trend is confirmed, it would be suitable to try to understand why these types of projects seem more resource-intensive than the other ones.

Employment after LIFE funding of environment projects ends is expected to double compared to the employment generated at the beginning (30 FTE).

These figures are in line with the findings from the stakeholder consultation that show that pilot or demonstrative environment projects are more sustainable and also score rather well on replicability. Instead, nature and biodiversity conservation projects are mainly replicated through non-market mechanisms, and therefore the employment created is not always visible.

<sup>49</sup> Other recent research estimates that one average LIFE project contributes to 3 full time equivalents (FTEs) per year in the post-implementation phase (or 9 to 15 FTE in total). For every EUR 1 million from the EU budget, a LIFE project would generate 2.5 FTEs per year ex post and between 17 and 25 during the implementation phase. This has not been specified further per type of grant or priority area. See 'LIFE past, present and future contribution to employment and economic growth. LIFE effectiveness and replicability' NEEMO 2016.

A comparison between the two programming periods (2007 - 2013 and 2014 - 2020) provides interesting findings.

The external study examined 700 LIFE+ projects which reported on employment creation for the years 2007-2013. The study found that the LIFE+ programme helped to create 56 000 jobs, of which almost 16 000 are sustainable (28 %).

A comparison between the previous and current programmes shows that for the current LIFE programming period a lot more jobs are expected to be created on average in terms of FTE after the project ends (17.8 FTE) compared to LIFE+ (8.6 FTE).

However, this finding might be due to the efforts made under LIFE 2014-2020 to ensure replicability of results. Or another interpretation could be that LIFE+ projects, which have been completed and/or are near completion, could have a better understanding of their sustainability after the end of LIFE financing.

**Q.2. To what extent do the observed outcomes correspond to the programme's objectives and to the EU 2020 strategy on sustainable growth?**

Actual results are not yet available at this stage of the programme's implementation.

There is evidence that the anticipated results of the projects and the activities under implementation are addressing all of the programme's objectives. However, since 2014 call there have been no projects awarded directly targeting the thematic areas under environment and health (one of the objectives of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP) In particular, the role of LIFE as a catalyst is built on the lessons learnt from LIFE+ and results from the programme's ability to attract other funding, to disseminate best practice and knowledge (spreading effect) and to support actions to improve and accelerate changes directly targeting environmental externalities. Some evidence from LIFE+ and LIFE confirms that the programme is doing well in playing its role of catalyst.

Initial findings from the programme's implementation show that the programme is supporting the Europe 2020 strategy:

- by financing projects expected to contribute to resource efficiency and sustainable growth,
- by promoting innovation and
- by slightly contributing to employment, although job creation is not one of the primary aims of the LIFE programme.

Some of the most recent policy developments financed by LIFE — namely the circular economy package adopted in 2015 and the 2030 climate and energy framework adopted in 2014 — are expected to shape the future of the EU economy in the coming decades.

***Q.3. What are the factors positively and negatively influencing the delivery of the objectives?***

Again, at this early stage of the programme's implementation, it is not possible to determine the factors that are influencing the delivery of the LIFE objectives.

Some of them are outside EU control (such as extreme weather conditions, the financial crisis, etc.) and cannot be addressed by the LIFE programme itself.

However, the experience of these first years of implementation shows some factors which are considered to have a positive and negative influence on the delivery of the objectives.

## Positive influence

The LIFE programme's flexibility to address emerging challenges and priorities, its mix of activities and the support the programme has from the stakeholders are three factors which positively influence the delivery of the objectives.

1. The LIFE programme is flexible because it can finance projects of different sizes that attract small, medium and large enterprises, universities, research centres, national and local authorities, civil society and non-governmental organisations. The LIFE programme's recent contribution to the European Solidarity Corps shows that the programme's existing range of activities is able to rapidly respond to emerging needs and opportunities.
2. The mix of activities combines:
  - the experience acquired during 25 years of programme implementation with
  - the new types of actions introduced by the LIFE Regulation to provide a more comprehensive support (integrated projects), specific assistance (capacity-building and technical assistance projects) and to test new forms of financing (financial instruments).

The traditional projects are managed in accordance with a comprehensive package of specific procedures — based on lessons learnt from experience — which enable the project's life to be followed closely:

- In the award procedure, the applicant is required to identify the project's expected impact of the project, by using specific indicators and descriptors and providing during-project and after-project values.
- From the project's earliest stages, the external specialised monitoring experts and the EASME/Commission officials assist the beneficiary with the project's implementation. Besides the reporting, almost one monitoring visit per year on average is organised to see how each traditional and integrated project is performing, how each is progressing towards the expected impact and concretely how the funds are being used.

According to the initial findings for the programme's first years of implementation, the new types of activities have demonstrated a strong potential to be effective, thus confirming the initial expectations:

- Integrated projects are of a larger scale and have a larger outreach than the traditional projects;
- Financial instruments are pilot initiatives designed to help build the future of financing energy efficiency and biodiversity/climate adaptation;
- Technical assistance projects are improving the quality of integrated projects, and capacity-building projects are investments to enable countries under represented in the LIFE programme to participate more.

The European Economic and Social Committee confirmed this in a recent draft opinion<sup>50</sup>. Taking into account the information received from its constituencies, it welcomes the LIFE programme's high degree of flexibility and adaptability to new challenges and the experience the programme has gained in recent years.

3. The results of the interviews with the project beneficiaries and the open public consultation show a positive perception of the quality of the LIFE projects, which are seen as a concrete answer to existing needs. This positive perception is shared also by unsuccessful candidates, which also recognised LIFE as an important contributor to biodiversity and nature conservation.

For more information on the support from the stakeholders, see Annex 4 and the answer to Q12 below.

### Negative influence

Given that 81 % of the programme's overall financial resources are devoted to projects, the results of the LIFE programme are highly dependent on the projects. This is true for each objective and priority area. The programme's success will also be determined by the capacity to replicate and transfer the project results and thus have a multiplier effect.

Some issues have been identified which can negatively affect the delivery of the objectives:

1. In terms of coverage, LIFE has supported the definition, agreement and development of new emerging priorities — such as the circular economy and the 2030 climate and energy framework targets, the implementation of the Paris Agreement ratified in 2016 as well as the EU's adaptation strategy whose importance and ramifications were unknown when the LIFE Regulation was adopted. These new priorities are de facto being addressed by limiting the financing for other priority issues. This could represent a problem, particularly in the near future, because of the need to adequately finance their implementation and further development.

Taking into account the bottom-up approach which cannot anticipate the quantity and quality of the proposals received or the size of the LIFE budget, which was defined when the Regulation was adopted, there is a greater risk that not all the objectives and priority areas will be adequately covered by projects. The competition for the limited available resources is extremely strong. Following the 2014 and 2015 calls for proposals, under the sub-programme for environment for example, projects addressing the thematic priorities under environment and health and 30 % of the project topics have not received any financing.

Thematic priorities and project topics were introduced in the current LIFE programme to better focus key targets. However, even if it is premature to draw conclusions from the first two years of implementation, some initial observations can be made. Given the available financial resources, the scope of the priorities could be too broad for a critical mass to trigger change on all the environmental and climate issues.

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<sup>50</sup> 'NAT/689 Halbzeitbewertung des LIFE-Programms'. European Economic and Social Committee. Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment. Sustainable Development Observatory. See Box 16. Moreover, the ESC also signalled the following changes introduced in the period 2014-2020: '*focus on the countries with greater implementation deficits; abolition of national quotas; better investment opportunities for enterprises; greater emphasis on innovation; more synergies with other programmes, starting with the new integrated projects introduced in 2014 [...]; use of entirely new environmental financial instruments (PF4EE, NCFE), creating a climate dimension*'.

However, the thematic priorities which reflect environmental needs in all Member States cannot be reduced. There are two main reasons for this:

- a) a reduction would mean that some aspects of the specific objectives would not be covered;
- b) a reduction could have a drastic impact in the Member State if the thematic priority no longer covered reflected specific key needs.

On the project topics, besides the possibility of addressing any possible need, thought should be given to introducing a better focus in the next MAWP. This could be done, for example, by targeting specific project topics, to be selected year by year taking into account targeted challenges and the results of previous calls for proposals.

2. The second risk is related to the outcomes of the projects and to the replicability and transferability of their results.

The potential for replicability and transferability is one of the project award criteria. This criterion ensures the programme's strategic focus to increase its EU added value and its catalytic effect.

Moreover, during the life of the project, there is close monitoring, and platform meetings are organised to encourage the exchange of experiences and best practices. This makes it easier to disseminate and transfer project results. Meetings are also organised with potential investors so the beneficiaries can present their investment plans.

Before the end of the project, 'after-LIFE Plans' are drawn up to organise the continuation of the activities after LIFE financing ends.

Despite these mitigating measures, there is the risk that a project will not produce the expected results. This is particularly the case for nature projects where climatic conditions could have an impact on the outcomes and/or duration of a project.

Indeed, it is not possible to overcome all the obstacles with these measures. This is the case, for example, when beneficiaries lack financial resources and/or lack capacity/human resources to plan an investment. Such a situation may limit the possibility to multiply the project results.

The possibility of providing customised accompanying measures for those projects showing a promising potential for replicability and transferability should be explored. More information on project sustainability and replicability is provided in paragraph.6.6.

### **Q.3. What factors are positively and negatively influencing delivery of the objectives?**

Although it is not possible at this stage of the programme's implementation to definitively determine the factors influencing delivery of the LIFE objectives, and given that some of these cannot be controlled (such as extreme weather conditions, the financial crisis, etc..), the experience of these first years of implementation shows that

- On the positive side:
  - the programme is flexible and able to rapidly respond to emerging needs and priorities;
  - it involves a wide range of stakeholders, who are highly supportive of the programme.
  - the mix of activities combines activities based on lessons learnt from 25 years of experience — such as traditional projects — with new activities — such as integrated, capacity-building

and technical assistance projects as well as financial instruments — which are expected to increase the programme's effectiveness.

- On the negative side:
  - given the new emerging challenges, the bottom-up approach and the available financial resources, there is a risk that not all the priorities will be covered by adequate projects. The possibility of more flexible project topics could be explored.
  - Risks that the projects will not deliver the expected outcomes exists. However, a bulk of measures covering the entire project life cycle is in place to reduce this risk. The introduction of customised accompanying measures to overcome the obstacles that limit the possibility to replicate/transfer the results of the most promising projects could be explored.

#### ***Q.4. To what extent is the geographical distribution of projects effective?***

The distribution of LIFE projects between Member States is pursued through three main mechanisms:

- (a) national allocations;
- (b) capacity-building projects;
- (c) geographical balance for the integrated projects.

(a) Indicative national allocations are established for projects, other than integrated projects, under the sub-programme for environment<sup>51</sup> during the first multi-annual work programme.

At present, some Member States have reached or are close to reaching their quota of funds according to the national allocations. However, the system of national allocation is not exclusive: if funds remain available after the award of a grant to all the successful projects from the Member States which have not exhausted their national allocations, they are redistributed on the basis of merit. As a consequence, two Member States (Spain, Italy) share more than a third of the entire LIFE budget allocation for traditional grants for 2014 and 2015. This further confirms that the national allocations are not effective in ensuring a more balanced distribution of projects.

Also, Spain and Italy submitted the biggest number of proposals and have a reduced percentage of success in comparison to other Member States. As the interviews with project beneficiaries have revealed, one of the reasons for such a strong participation from these two countries is the lack of local public funds for environment and climate action. The proactive action of the national contact points is also thought to play a role in Spain and Italy's active participation.

National allocations will be abandoned in the second multiannual work programme because, as emerged during the impact assessment for the LIFE programme, they 'have not led to a more balanced distribution of projects across the EU (e.g. projects from Italy, Spain and Germany

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<sup>51</sup> These national allocations are determined on the basis of the principles of solidarity and responsibility-sharing. They take into account the criteria defined in Annex I of the Regulation and are based on the population and natural resources expressed in terms of Natura 2000 sites within the territory of a Member State.

receive most of the funding under LIFE+), [...] they may lead to selecting projects of lower quality, which would have an impact on the effectiveness of the Programme to provide EU added value and had a perverse impact on smaller Member States (smaller allocations do not encourage submission of proposals)<sup>52</sup>.

(b) capacity-building projects are aimed at enabling selected Member States<sup>53</sup> to build up their capacity to submit more good quality projects by strengthening the role of the network of national players — the national contact points (NCPs) — .

The NCPs provides institutional support to prepare and implement projects, and their work is appreciated. Nevertheless, the consultations carried out for the external study confirm that the applicants across Europe receive varying degrees of support, depending on the quantity and quality of the resources made available by each Member State.

There need to be minimum standards for all Member States on providing assistance for the submission of proposals. Many NCPs also need to adopt a more proactive approach.

The capacity-building projects have been put in place in anticipation of the phasing-out of the national allocations by 2018, mentioned earlier. They are action grants used to finance training, capacity-building activities, external expertise, the dissemination of information and administrative support.

Of the 15 Member States eligible, 14 submitted a proposal which has been financed and is in progress.

(c) a geographical balance of integrated projects, which is to be achieved by indicatively allocating at least three integrated projects to each Member State under both sub-programmes.

#### **Q.4. To what extent is the geographical distribution of projects effective?**

Two Member States (Italy and Spain) share more than a third of the entire LIFE budget for traditional grants for 2014 and 2015.

There was an uneven distribution of funds among Member States also under the previous programme, with Italy, Spain and Germany receiving most of the grants.

One of the reasons for such a strong participation is the lack of local public funds for environment and climate action. The interviews with project beneficiaries confirmed this. Another reason is the role played by the NCPs, which are more proactive in some countries than in others.

However, in view of the phasing-out of national allocations in the second MAWP that were introduced in LIFE+, different mechanisms have been put in place to ensure a more equitable distribution and greater effectiveness of LIFE funds between Member States. These mechanisms include capacity-building projects to boost selected Member States' capacity to submit more good quality projects and a geographical balance of the integrated projects. However being the

<sup>52</sup> See Commission staff working paper 'Impact assessment accompanying the document 'Proposal for a Regulation on the establishment of a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action' (LIFE)COM(2011)874 final, page 18.

<sup>53</sup> The eligibility criteria for the capacity-building projects are defined in the LIFE Regulation.

programme's implementation at its early stage, it is not possible to make definitive statements on the effectivity of the projects geographical distribution.

These mechanisms are expected to start producing some results during the next MAWP (2018-2020).

***Q.5. What is the role of LIFE in bridging uneven integration of environmental and climate action objectives among Member States?***

The situation in the Member States differs widely when it comes to:

- the availability and use of natural resources and the speed at which they are depleted;
- the degree to which environmental and climate concerns are taken into account in their policies.<sup>54</sup>

Addressing the uneven integration of environmental and climate action objectives is a long-term challenge in a constantly evolving context where environmental and climate legislation and policies are playing a leading role.

As underlined in the reports of the European Environment Agency, 'emissions of specific pollutants to the air, water and soil have generally been reduced significantly. These improvements are to a substantial degree a result of the comprehensive environment legislation established across Europe<sup>55</sup>'.

Since 1992, the only dedicated funding programme, which has systematically supported and accompanied environment and climate legislation and policies, is LIFE.

The LIFE programme's role in bridging the uneven integration of environmental and climate action objectives between Member States is twofold:

- (a) on the one hand, the programme provides customised solutions designed to respond to the specific problems of each Member State by taking into account the existing situation;
- (b) on the other hand, it coordinates at EU level the vision, targets and requirements needed to define, implement and enforce EU environmental and climate legislation and policies.

(a) For the customised solutions, specific actions are defined through a flexible bottom-up approach which takes into account the local situation while targeting the implementation of existing environmental and climate policies and legislation or better governance. This is the reason why 81 % of LIFE's overall financial resources are devoted to grants, which are mainly projects conceived by different stakeholders to solve the needs they perceive (see above answer to question Q.2 for the activities in support of the second and third objectives of the LIFE programme).

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<sup>54</sup> The cross- country comparisons in the report 'The European environment — state and outlook 2015' present some of these differences, from air pollution to biodiversity, greenhouse gas emissions and resource efficiency. See for further details, 'SOER 2015 — The European environment — state and outlook 2015- [Cross countries comparisons](#)' European Environment Agency.

<sup>55</sup> Ibidem. [Executive Summary](#).

The integrated projects are also specifically meant to provide examples of good practice for an efficient and well-coordinated implementation of EU environmental and climate policy in Member States and regions, with the involvement of all stakeholders.

(b) EU-level coordination is mainly ensured through the procurement activities, which are based on a top-down approach: the needs are defined by the Commission with the aim to support the coordinated definition, implementation and enforcement of EU environmental and climate legislation. The procurement activities help target uneven integration of environment and climate action in the practices of Member States by:

- identifying targets for specific legislative acts or policies (see above under Q.1, objective 2, for the LIFE programme's contributions to the EU environmental and climate policy and legislation) which take into account the situation in the different Member States (see Boxes 10 and 15 for possible examples).
- providing specific inputs to Member States on their implementation of environmental and climate policies and legislation and supporting the exchange of solutions and best practices (see Boxes 3 and 11 for concrete examples).

#### **Box 11 — LIFE support to Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy**

The Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy initiative (see [http://www.covenantofmayors.eu/index\\_en.html](http://www.covenantofmayors.eu/index_en.html)) supports the efforts by local authorities to implement sustainable climate and energy policies. LIFE funding is used to run the Covenant of Mayors initiative together with funding from Horizon 2020 and the Foreign Policy Instrument.

By signing up to the Covenant, local authorities commit to implement EU objectives in the 2030 climate and energy package: new signatories have to commit to action to support implementation of the EU 40 % greenhouse gas-reduction target by 2030 and the adoption of a joint approach to tackling mitigation and adaptation to climate change. To date, there are more than 800 signatories that have signed up to implement the 2030 and climate change adaptation targets.

The Covenant of Mayors provides capacity-building to local authorities to design and finance integrated strategies to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> (and possibly other greenhouse gas) emissions and adapt to climate risks. This includes providing information and guidance on funding available from the European budget to support the implementation of strategies.

A concrete example of a capacity-building activity is the twinning programme which offers cities, regions and provinces across Europe the opportunity to take part in exchanges to increase local authorities' capacity and knowledge to mitigate and adapt to climate change. There is also a help desk to provide assistance to signatories.

The LIFE action grants for climate change adaptation and integrated projects also encourage implementation of projects that implement the Covenant framework.

#### **Q.5. What is the role of LIFE in bridging uneven integration of environmental and climate action objectives among Member States?**

The situation in the Member States differs widely when it comes to the availability of natural resources and defining, implementing and enforcing environmental and climate legislation and policies.

EU environmental and climate legislation and policies are already contributing to the integration of environmental and climate objectives into Member States by setting up a comprehensive

environmental legislative framework. The definition, implementation and enforcement of these set of laws have all been supported in a range of ways via the LIFE programme. .

LIFE's role in bridging the uneven integration of environmental and climate action objectives between Member States is twofold:

(a) on the one hand, the programme provides customised solutions to respond to the specific problems of each Member State by taking into account the existing situation. This is done mainly through the 81 % of its resources which are devoted to support bottom-up actions such as grants and financial instruments.

(b) on the other hand, LIFE helps to coordinate at EU level the vision, targets and requirements of EU environmental and climate action. This is done mainly through procurement activities which aim to support the definition, implementation and enforcement of EU environmental and climate legislation and policies as well as the exchange of solutions and best practices.

## 5.2. Efficiency<sup>56</sup>

***Q.6. To what extent are the costs (especially management) of the LIFE programme justified, given the effects which have been achieved, and are likely to be achieved, by the end of the LIFE programme?***

To analyse the programme's efficiency, the external study estimated the value for money of the anticipated results of a series of ongoing LIFE projects from the 2014 call. The estimated value for money was compared to the programme's overall cost.

In particular, the external study estimated the benefits derived from the conservation of 17 million hectares of Natura 2000 sites and the reduction of 489 000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> (including methane and the reduction of electricity consumed). The study used the social cost of carbon (SCC) approach and calculated the quota attributable to LIFE's financing (i.e. 75 % for nature projects and 60 % for climate change mitigation projects on the basis of the related EU co-financing rates).

On the basis of this estimate, the benefits derived from LIFE 2014 financing the conservation of Natura 2000 sites would reach EUR 1.5 billion and the benefits from financing the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> would lead to a savings of EUR 0.2 billion for society.

The relevant projects selected under the 2014 calls for proposals would therefore contribute to a societal benefit of EUR 1.7 billion. This represents four times the cost of the overall LIFE budget for 2014 (EUR 405 million) and shows the programme's high value for money.

On the programme's management, the cost-benefit analysis that led to the transfer of management of most of the LIFE grants to EASME in 2014 estimated that the cost of managing

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<sup>56</sup> The replies to questions Q.6, Q.7 and Q.8 provide an overview of the programme's efficiency. The first and second questions concern the programme as a whole, with the first focused on the justification of the programme's costs in terms of a cost/benefit analysis and the second on the state of play of the measures introduced to increase the efficiency of the current LIFE programme. The third question considers aspects related to the grant management, which mostly concern the Commission and the applicants/beneficiaries.

the programme would be reduced, compared to managing LIFE+. This has now been confirmed by the actual data (see the reply to Q.7).

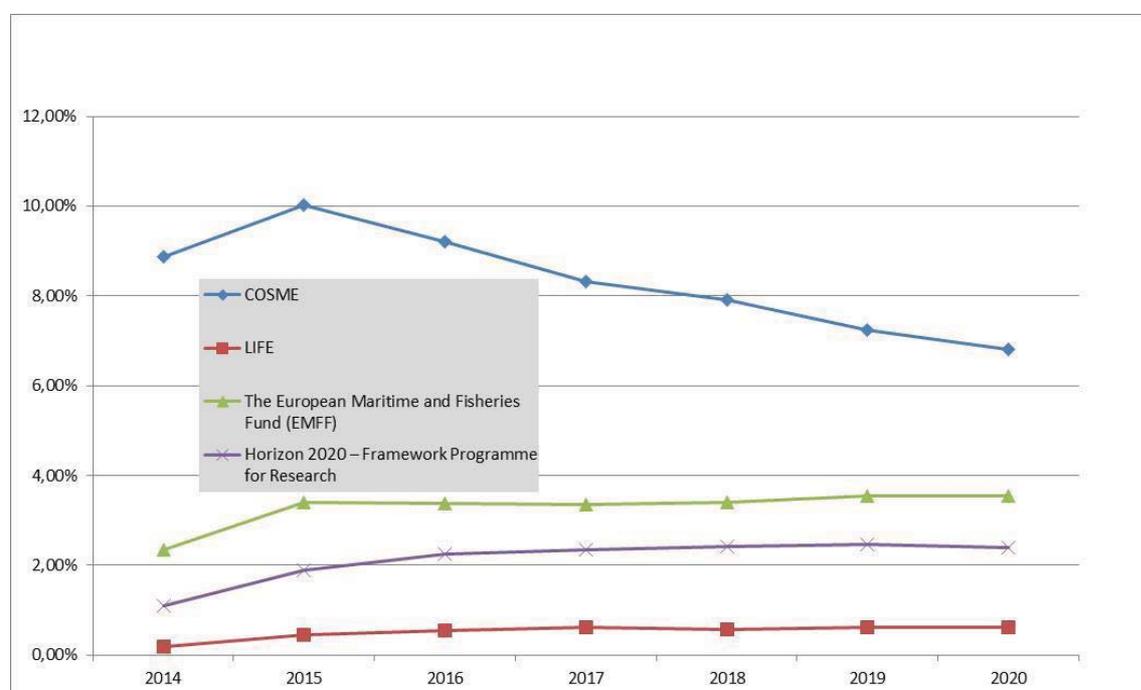
Moreover, the analysis included an estimate of the management costs for different programmes. This implies that some comparisons can be made<sup>57</sup>.

These results were elaborated to determine the human and financial resources needed by EASME in 2014-2020 to manage the implementation of each programme delegated to the Agency.

The data show that LIFE is less costly to manage than other programmes.

Indeed, for the programmes managed by EASME, when comparing the costs of the various programmes as a percentage of the total budget managed, LIFE costs significantly less to manage than COSME<sup>58</sup>, EMFF<sup>59</sup> and Horizon 2020<sup>60</sup>. This can be seen from the figure below.

**Figure 9. Costs of various programmes managed by EASME**



Source: Analysis based on data from the financial statement of COM(2013)9414.

<sup>57</sup> These comparisons are useful to provide an overall idea of the costs of managing a programme. However, it is clear that the comparisons do not have an absolute value, given that each programme has a different mix of activities, such as procurement, grants, etc., which have implications for the related workload.

<sup>58</sup> EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).

<sup>59</sup> European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

<sup>60</sup> The EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

These costs are based on the scenarios analysed when management was transferred from the Commission to EASME and do not include all the costs necessary for the programme's implementation. These are costs such as those related to the work environment (buildings, equipment and other operating expenditures), the other costs (experts, studies, audits, information and communication, IT, etc.) and the costs of supervision by the Commission. These costs are expected to increase progressively<sup>61</sup> and are estimated at EUR 80 million for 2014-2020. They therefore represent 3.6 % of the overall amount of EUR 2.25 billion managed by EASME for the LIFE programme.

In terms of utilisation of funds in the projects, the results of ex-post controls on LIFE+ and on-site monitoring of LIFE projects shows that the 'error rate' — namely the amount that is considered at risk — is well below the materiality benchmark<sup>62</sup> threshold of 2 % and is declining: it was EUR 2.27 for every EUR 100 spent in 2012, falling to EUR 1.24 in 2015 and even further to 0.44 EUR in 2016.

**Q.6. To what extent are the costs (especially management) of the LIFE programme justified, given the effects which have been achieved, and are likely to be achieved by the end of the LIFE programme?**

Although it is premature to establish whether the LIFE programme provides value for money at this early stage of implementation, the external study has examined a series of projects selected under the 2014 calls for proposals. The study estimated that the anticipated results of these projects would have a societal benefit of EUR 1.7 billion. This would cover four times the cost of the overall LIFE budget for 2014.

Further, on the management of the LIFE programme, the reduction of costs linked to externalisation of the management of the programme has exceeded expectations (see the answer to Q.7).

Moreover, in comparative terms, taking into account the financial resources attributed to EASME as a percentage of the funds transferred by the Commission to EASME for the management of the different programmes, the external study has concluded that the LIFE management structure appears to be less costly than the management structure of other EU-funded programmes.

***Q.7. Have the changes made between LIFE+ and the current LIFE programme improved efficiency?***

It is too soon to estimate the impact that the changes introduced in the LIFE programme have had on the programme's efficiency in comparison with LIFE+.

However, given that the major change to increase the programme's efficiency was the transfer of most of the grant management to EASME, some considerations can be derived from the cost-benefit analysis.

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<sup>61</sup> See table 7 for more details on the estimated and real figures in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Materiality benchmark is the threshold above which missing or incorrect information in financial statements is considered to have an impact.

The transfer to EASME is considered to bring efficiency to the management of the programme, because it allows for economies of scale when implementing a large number of homogenous and standardised operations to manage grants. It allows the Commission to focus on policy-making and develop, implement and enforce EU environmental and climate policy and legislation.

As mentioned in the financial statement accompanying Commission Decision COM(2013)9414<sup>63</sup>, the results of transferring part of the management of the LIFE programme to EASME was expected to bring an overall efficiency gain of EUR 8.2 million in the period 2017-2020. This is in comparison to a scenario where the grant management would have remained inside the Commission.

The difference between the initial estimate and the actual data on the programme's implementation shows a further increase of the efficiency gain for the first 3 years, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 7: Transfer from Commission to EASME: estimates and real figures (2014-2016) in EUR.

<i>Estimated figures/years</i>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Total delegated amount (A)	226,840	240,444	258,638
Total management costs (B)	3,476	5,727	7,956
Percentage (B/A)	1.5%	2.4%	3.1%

<i>Real figures/years</i>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Total delegated amount (A)	233,050	249,811	271,511
Total management costs (B)	3,088	5,609	7,170
Percentage (B/A)	1.3%	2.2%	2.6%

Possible negative side effects of transferring management to EASME, such as the lack of continuity and the loss of input from projects for policy-making and vice versa, have been prevented.

This has been done by transferring key human resources from the Commission to EASME and by working on a policy-integration strategy which includes recurrent and one-off activities to ensure that:

- policy needs are reflected in the programme and project implementation;
- relevant outputs and findings from projects reach and can be used by policy-makers.

The strategy includes activities such as training for Agency staff on specific policies, joint thematic cluster meetings with projects, shared reflection on policy needs in the calls for proposals, provision of feedback on project outcomes relevant for policy-making, etc.

The transfer of most of the LIFE grants to EASME is taking place in line with the initial planning. Respondents to the public consultation reported that the transfer of grant management

<sup>63</sup> Commission Decision of 23.12.2013 delegating powers to the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises with a view to performance of tasks linked to the implementation of Union programmes in the field of energy, environment, climate action, competitiveness and SMEs, research and innovation and ICT, comprising, in particular, implementation of appropriations entered in the general budget of the Union.

to EASME was done smoothly, and different stakeholders perceive the Agency's work as valuable. Thus, externalisation does not seem to be affecting quality.

**Q.7. Have the changes made between LIFE+ and this LIFE programme improved efficiency?**

As this stage of the programme's implementation, the major change involves the transfer of part of the management of the LIFE programme from the Commission to EASME.

For 2014-2020 the transfer is expected to result in a EUR 8.2 million gain in efficiency compared with a scenario where the grant management would have remained inside the Commission. Initial figures for actual costs are already indicating that efficiency gains may be even greater than estimated

Further, the transfer was done smoothly, and LIFE stakeholders perceive EASME's work as valuable.

Lack of continuity and loss of input from projects for policy-making and vice versa have been prevented by transferring key Commission staff to EASME and by promoting activities such as training of Agency staff on specific policies, joint thematic cluster meetings with projects, shared reflection on policy needs in the calls for proposals, provision of feedback on project outcomes relevant for policy-making, etc.

**Q.8. Is there scope for efficiency gains, simplification and burden reduction?**

Following the LIFE+ evaluation which highlighted the demand to simplify the application process and reporting, the following simplification measures were introduced:

- a two-step award procedure for the integrated projects;
- a reduced burden to present some certificates;
- a streamlining of the system for the electronic submission of proposals (e-proposal).

The two-step award procedure for the integrated projects is particularly appreciated by both the applicants and the Commission: a complete proposal is submitted only for projects which, after a first screening, are eligible for a grant. This simplifies the work of the applicant and the evaluation and makes possible an interaction between the Commission and the applicant to strengthen specific aspects of the proposals.

Recently the requirement to submit an external audit certificate and/or the VAT certificate was waived. Particularly for the audit certificate, the beneficiaries will be able to save time and money by no longer having to contract out/select/support the work of an external auditor, whose reports did not always meet the Commission's expectations. The beneficiaries reacted very positively to this simplification.

E-proposal is a useful tool for the applicants to build and submit LIFE project proposals and for the Commission/EASME to organise and run the award process.

According to the beneficiaries, e-proposal has reduced the administrative burden of submitting proposals and conducting the award process in general. It has also led to increased communication among applicants/beneficiaries and the Commission/EASME during the award phase. However, according to unsuccessful applicants, the submission of proposals is perceived to be still too complicated, requiring an unnecessary amount of information from the start.

It can be concluded from the overall results of the consultations process that, although e-proposals introduced some improvements, there is still a widespread demand to simplify LIFE procedures for grants. This came through in the interviews with all stakeholders.

The requirements on participating in the calls for proposals and managing the projects are based on the lessons progressively learnt from twenty five years of implementation of the programme but need to be further streamlined.

Some possible measures envisaged by the external study to reduce the burden include:

- waiving for all applicants the requirement to submit at the start of the process a complete proposal by introducing a two-step award procedure for traditional projects for priority areas where the demand is particularly high;
- adapting reporting requirements in proportion to the length and complexity of projects and the value of the grant. This would reduce the administrative burden for small projects or for projects of a limited duration. A more supportive role of the monitoring experts could also be envisaged here;
- simplifying the project topics and the indicators database, which project beneficiaries see as particularly cumbersome.

Some of these concerns may be addressed by fine-tuning internal practices in EASME or the Commission. In this context the second LIFE MAWP (2018-2020) to be adopted at the end of 2017 will offer the opportunity to address some specific concerns such as the methodology for project selection and the definition of priority topics and related indicators.

For LIFE communication activities, the external study found that the mix of actions is reasonably appropriate at project level. Moreover, project beneficiaries rate the LIFE communication activities as 'good' or 'very good', in particular the LIFE website (75 %) and the LIFE best project publications and awards (72 %).

However, it appears that there is some room for improvement, especially when it comes to the Commission's social media activities, press releases and best practice events.

The main shortcomings are:

- reliance on passive one-way communication tactics,
- vague definition of target audiences,
- lack of objective-specific and target-specific key messages,
- lack of structured coordination between the several players involved in the delivery of the communication actions,
- absence of a procedure to keep the strategy responsive to the needs of target groups and strategic needs,
- lack of an approach based on results-driven communication, and
- emphasis on the type and number of activities rather than on the importance of results-driven communication.

These strategic weaknesses potentially reduce the value of all communication activities and risk limiting their potential contribution to the LIFE programme's policy objectives.

#### **Q.8. Is there scope for efficiency gains, simplification and burden reduction?**

As far as grant management is concerned, there is still a widespread demand to further streamline LIFE procedures, as not all the simplification measures originally proposed by the Commission for the

LIFE programme in 2014-2020 have been introduced and further improvements are possible in the application process and project management.

The external study, therefore, identified some measures to reduce the burden for the submission of proposals, reporting requirements and indicators. The measures could be introduced by fine-tuning internal practices in EASME or the Commission, or through the second LIFE MAWP (2018-2020).

Need for improvement was also identified for the LIFE communication strategy to ensure a more active and responsive approach, better targeting audiences and delivering objective-specific and target-specific key messages.

### 5.3. Coherence

*Q.9. To what extent does the LIFE programme have a coherent structure taking into account its two sub-programmes, its priority areas and the various types of interventions (internal coherence)?*

The internal structure of the LIFE programme is consistent with EU policies and priorities, covering the most relevant climate and environmental topics:

- The introduction of the climate action sub-programme and the 75:25 allocation of funds between the two sub-programmes have helped to respond to the Union request of increasing the climate-related proportion of the Union budget to at least 20 % for all different policies.  
The level of demand across the three priority areas for climate action since their introduction has further demonstrated that the allocation of funds is adequate because:
- It has allowed the programme to respond to an increased demand in absolute value for climate action projects;
- There are fewer proposals in comparison to the proposals presented to the other sub programme (13 % of the total demand for projects and 23 % of the project overall up-take) and overall value (8 % of the total project demand and 19 % of the overall up-take) to the one for the projects under the environment sub-programme priority areas.
- In terms of value, the total of the EU funding request at the proposal level for the calls 2014 and 2015<sup>64</sup> presented under the sub programme for environment was €3.093.966.224 (the total EU co-financing for ENV proposals for 2014-2015 was €353.770.241) while the EU funding request at the proposal level for the call for 2014 and 2015 presented under the sub programme for climate action was €383.049.723 (the total EU co-financed for CLIMA proposals for 2014-2015<sup>65</sup> was €83.928.508).
- The results of the calls for proposals do not show any need to revise the ceiling of 81 % of the programme's budget devoted to projects, which is in line with the 78 % applied under LIFE+. In addition, no sign of concern emerged from the public consultation on the 81 % ceiling.
- The priority areas nature and biodiversity, environment and resource efficiency, climate mitigation and adaptation — as defined in the Regulation — are intended to address a range of issues of importance to various key stakeholders'.

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<sup>64</sup> For traditional projects

<sup>65</sup> Idem

The priority areas environmental and climate governance and information are a response to more cross-cutting needs. They address the market failure arising from the lack of information, contribute to compliance with and enforcement of legislation and broaden the participation of stakeholders in the consultation on and implementation of policies.

This difference is reflected in the type of activities financed for each priority area, as shown in Figure 10 below.

**Figure 10. Types of activities per priority areas (LIFE 2014-2015)**

Activities/Priority areas	Nature and biodiversity	Environment and resource efficiency	Environmental governance and information	Climate mitigation	Climate adaptation	Climate governance and information
Traditional projects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Integrated projects	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Technical assistance projects	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Preparatory projects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Capacity building projects			✓			✓
Operating grants			✓			✓
NCFE	✓				✓	
PF4EE				✓		

Source: Commission's databases

For an optimal use of resources and to produce a combined effect, the LIFE Regulation calls for cooperation on actions under the environment sub-programme and climate change adaptation and mitigation measures under the climate action sub-programme. Moreover, the Regulation underlines that projects financed by the LIFE programme should help to achieve the specific objectives of more than one priority area.

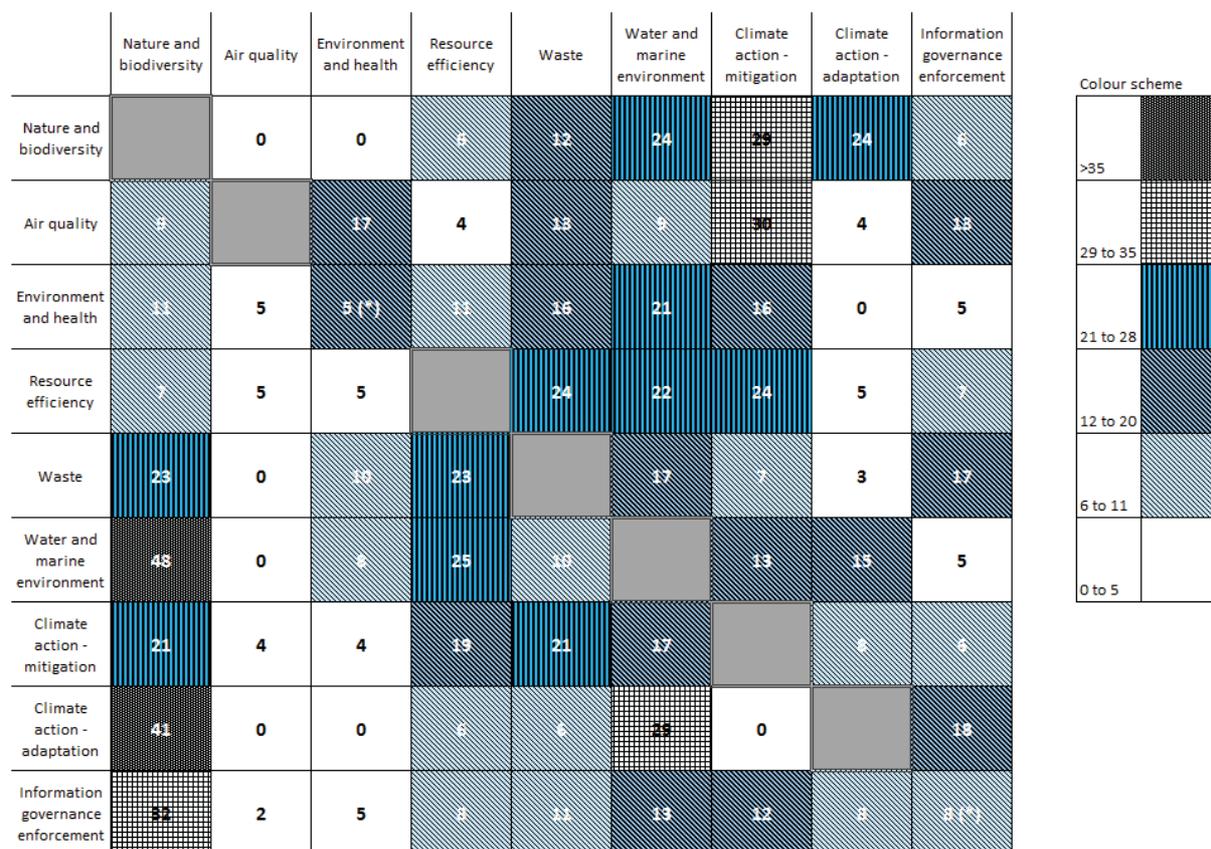
In this context, the external study —by analysing the database of indicators — documented cases of a combined effect, i.e. synergies between the priority areas and/or the thematic priorities and confirmed that these synergies are consistent with the objectives per priority area. In particular:

- Nature and biodiversity projects also contribute very strongly to water and marine environment, climate adaptation and information and governance indicators;
- Resource-efficiency projects contribute significantly to waste indicators, and waste projects contribute a lot to resource efficiency as well as to environment and health indicators and to climate mitigation;
- Climate mitigation projects contribute a lot to nature and biodiversity and air quality but also to resource efficiency and climate adaptation indicators. In turn, climate adaptation projects also contribute to nature and biodiversity;
- Water and marine environment projects contribute a lot to climate adaptation but also to nature and biodiversity, resource efficiency and environment and health.

The figure below shows this synergy: the numbers stated are percentages (the amount is 100 % for each row).

For instance, the first row indicates the percentage of projects from other priority areas that have contributed to nature and biodiversity indicators. The colours indicate the frequency (i.e. in the first row between 12 to 20 resource-efficiency projects have declared an impact on at least one biodiversity indicator. This represents 6 % of the overall contribution from projects of different priority areas to biodiversity indicators).

**Figure 11 — Extent of synergies in LIFE projects**



(\*) Information and governance projects are marked to have contributed to information and governance indicators when environment project have contributed to climate indicators and viceversa. The same for environment projects which have contributed to health indicators.

Source: External study

**Q.9. To what extent does the LIFE programme have a coherent structure, taking into account its two sub-programmes, its priority areas and the various types of interventions (internal coherence)?**

As this stage of the programme’s implementation, no particular problem of coherence in the internal structure of the programme was detected.

The external study has documented combined effects or synergies between the priority areas and/or the thematic priorities based on indicators, finding that much of the ongoing projects contribute strongly to other priority areas. For example, as required by the LIFE Regulation, climate mitigation projects contribute to climate change adaptation, nature and biodiversity, air quality and resource efficiency.

Also the 75:25 allocations of funds between the two sub-programmes has been demonstrated to be adequate.

***Q.10. To what extent is the LIFE programme complementary and enjoying synergies with other relevant EU funding programmes (i.e. the European Structural and Investment Funds — ESIF, Horizon 2020) (external coherence)?***

LIFE is the only EU dedicated funding programme for environment and climate action.

Taking into account its overall features and as envisaged in the LIFE Regulation, LIFE is designed to be complementary to other EU funding programmes. This is particularly the case for Horizon 2020 (the framework programme for research and innovation), the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (which work to support economic development across all EU countries, in line with the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

As this stage of all the programmes' implementation, it is not possible to conclude on the external coherence of LIFE. Even small changes in how one action is implemented can trigger more or less complementarities with other ongoing actions. Nonetheless, the possible risk of overlap is limited because the programmes have different scopes.

In particular, the LIFE Regulation mentions explicitly the need to develop synergies with Horizon 2020 and to ensure coordination to prevent double funding. Moreover, it underlines that the LIFE programme should also encourage the uptake of the results of environmental and climate-related research and innovation under Horizon 2020.

In this context, the transfer of the relevant part of the two programmes from the Commission to a sole executive agency represents the best possible answer to this need for synergies and coordination.

EASME recently undertook an analysis<sup>66</sup> to identify areas of synergies and potential overlaps.

The analysis confirmed that LIFE and Horizon 2020 contribute to common objectives in different — and in some cases complementary — ways. During these first years of implementation, LIFE and Horizon 2020 have functioned in a mutually reinforcing manner.

Under Horizon 2020, environmental and climate action research is tackled by a series of actions and opportunities for collaboration under the societal challenge 'climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials'. Moreover, specific activities could also be financed under the societal challenge 'secure, clean and efficient energy' or under relevant cross-cutting priorities for 2016-2017 (i.e. the circular economy).

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<sup>66</sup> *Uptake of the results of EU-funded research projects in the LIFE NAT 2014-2015 portfolio.* EASME Ares(2016)4835449 - 29/08/2016

### **Box 12: Example of uptake in LIFE projects of research-funded activities**

The project ‘Re-establishment of the Ribbed Limpet (*Patella ferruginea*) in Ligurian Marine Protected Areas by Restocking and Controlled Reproduction’ (LIFE15 NAT/IT/000771 — RELIFE project) built upon the experience and the results of two FP7 projects: ENRICH and RESURCH. The coordinator of these two projects is also the Scientific Coordinator of RELIFE. The ENRICH project aimed at optimising sea urchin *Paracentrotus lividus* rearing, in order to enrich pre-existing aquaculture farms (based on sea bass, bream, and/or different bivalves). RESURCH focused on the technology required to make commercial sea urchin production a reality across Europe. Experience gained and techniques developed in both projects are expected to be used in *P.ferruginea* rearing by RELIFE.

The genetic studies to be undertaken in the project ‘Conservation and restoration of mediterranean *Taxus baccata* woods (9580\*) in the Cantabrian Mountains’ (LIFE15 NAT/ES/000790 — LIFE BACCATA) will make use of the outcomes of the FP6 project EVOLTREE and the Biodiversa-funded LinkTree project. The experience from these projects will be integrated in the actions planned in LIFE BACCATA. Lessons from this project will help develop best practice for conservation by providing indicators and guidance to LIFE BACCATA.

‘The rescue of endemic priority plant species *Minuartia smejkalii*’ (LIFE15 NAT/CZ/000818 — Life for *Minuartia*) project, to be implemented in the Czech Republic, will follow the latest results from Horizon 2020 projects dealing with climate change. The project plans to include these results in their network. In addition, in the context of its work to model the impact of climate change on *Minuartia smejkalii*, the project plans to use the findings of three FP7 projects on climate change (CCTAME, Past4future and Carbon-extreme) as well as data from the Copernicus climate change information service and from the EU Climate Adaptation Platform Copernicus service.

The project ‘Improvement of habitats and population connectivity for endangered amphibians in the city-region of Aachen’ (LIFE15 NAT/DE/000743 — Amphibienverbund) will implement the results of the BiodivERsA-funded project RACE — Risk Assessment of chytridiomycosis to European amphibians — in some of its activities. This will particularly be the case with compliance with standards on health checks to be performed on the donor population.

The results of the FP7-funded project SCALES were used to plan the methodology for the location of ecological corridors between protected areas proposed in the project ‘Osprey conservation in selected SPA Natura 2000 sites in Poland’ (LIFE15 NAT/PL/000819 — LIFEPandionPL). This was particularly the case for planning and selecting potential areas for settlement by ospreys.

The project ‘Conservation and management of freshwater fauna of EU interest within the ecological corridors of Verbano-Cusio-Ossola’ (LIFE15 NAT/IT/000823 — IdroLIFE) plans to take up the lessons learnt from the implementation of the EU-funded research projects WISER, MARS, REFRESH, BIOFRESH and REFORM. These are projects on water management, freshwater ecosystems and climate change. Three of these projects specifically aimed to support the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. Further links with relevant Horizon 2020 projects will be pursued.

However, the possible risk of overlap is limited because of the programmes’ different scopes, the transnational nature of most Horizon 2020 projects, its special targeted priorities, and the different average sizes and lengths of projects<sup>67</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Horizon 2020 supports projects with an average EU contribution of around EUR 5 million (societal challenge 5 — even if in the case of societal challenge 3 the bracket is slightly lower at EUR 3-4 million) and a duration of 24-36 months. In comparison, the average EU contribution for LIFE traditional projects, which tend to last 36-48 months, is around EUR 1.5 million. Moreover, in the case of Horizon 2020’s SME instrument, the target beneficiaries are small and medium enterprises, while LIFE also targets big enterprises, public and civil society organisations.

Respondents to the survey addressed to the LIFE beneficiaries found that the LIFE programme is largely coherent with other EU programmes and they saw synergies especially with Horizon 2020.

To encourage synergies, LIFE provides for a mechanism to promote the uptake, into LIFE projects, of the results of environmental and climate-related research and innovation under Horizon 2020 and previous framework programmes for research: during the award process, an extra point is granted to proposals that plan to take up results generated through EU-funded research projects. In this perspective, LIFE gives an incentive to implement and scale up knowledge and solutions developed, tested and deployed through EU-funded research activities.

According to EASME's analysis of the results of the 2014 and 2015 calls for proposals for LIFE nature, 32 % of the successful projects from the 2015 call (which corresponds to 13 projects out of the 41 funded<sup>68</sup>) linked their activities to the results of EU-funded research projects. Moreover, 18 % (15 projects) of all the LIFE nature projects financed in 2014 and 2015 have planned in some way to take up the results of EU-funded research projects and/or to network with them during implementation (see Box 12 for some examples).

<b>Box 13: Example of a LIFE integrated project</b>	
<b>LIFE-IP RBMP-NWRBD UK — Integrated water management approach to delivery of the North West England river basin management plan (LIFE14 IPE/UK/000027)</b>	
EU contribution: €11 988 811.00 Coordinating beneficiary: Environment Agency (national authority)	Thematic priority: Water External link: <a href="http://naturalcourse.co.uk/">http://naturalcourse.co.uk/</a>
<p>One third of the poorest quality rivers in England and Wales is currently found in the North West (England) river basin district (NW RBD). A range of factors combine in the NW RBD, which create several significant challenges to meeting the requirements of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- high urban population densities located at relatively short distances from the sea;</li> <li>- wastewater discharges with high phosphorous concentrations;</li> <li>- highest trade effluent flows in England and Wales;</li> <li>- extensive diffuse pollution issues from agriculture and other rural sources;</li> <li>- historic chemical and metal pollution in river sediments mobilised in high-flow conditions.</li> </ul> <p>These factors make the NW RBD an ideal location for implementing actions to help improve delivery of WFD Annex VII (river basin management plans) and to demonstrate solutions for problems relevant to the rest of Europe.</p> <p>In particular, the project will address barriers holding back the achievement of 'good' ecological status for the region's water bodies, as required by the Water Framework Directive. The project aims to build stakeholder capacity, reduce policy conflicts, identify water and flood management measures that produce multiple benefits — thus allowing greater use of relevant funds — and improve knowledge of innovative measures such as sustainable drainage systems.</p> <p>In addition to the LIFE integrated project budget, the project will facilitate the coordinated use of EUR 37 050 000 of complementary funding from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), EUR 139 500 000 in national public funds and EUR 52 500 000 in private sector funds.</p>	

<sup>68</sup> Most of them were financed under the 7th framework programme (FP7).

As far as the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) are concerned, the main areas of potential intersection are with the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Funds (EMFF).

**Box 14: Example of rural development-funded projects piloted in LIFE**

In Belgium (Wallonia Region), grasslands / moors / bogs / mires have been purchased and/or restored by some 25 LIFE projects, including those still ongoing, using a little over EUR 60 million in EU money. Most of these LIFE projects involve removing shrubs and spruce pine from Natura 2000 priority habitats (bogs, various grasslands, heaths, etc.). The restored areas need to be regularly grazed or mowed to prevent them from being overgrown and degraded and to protect the long-term sustainability of these considerable investments (EUR 60 million from the EU and almost as much from the Wallonia Region). Building on this, the Walloon rural development programme created a specific measure for extensive grazing of Natura 2000 sites.

In Bulgaria, LIFE project LIFE09 NAT/BG/230 on red-breasted geese successfully developed and trialled an agri-environment measure specifically for this priority species. National authorities have included it in the rural development programme. Apparently, it is well liked by the local farmers, as already in the first year 240 have applied for it. This covers some 18 000 ha of wintering red-breasted geese habitats, mobilising EUR 1.8 million this year alone (EUR 3.5 million and 40 000 ha if one includes the more general wintering geese measure). This is a great success for this highly endangered species (the entire world population winters in a small part of north east Bulgaria and feeds in the fields near the coast).

In Ireland, within measure 16 (cooperation) of the rural development programme an action for the hen harrier and fresh water pearl mussel supports Natura 2000 implementation. This is because of the precarious state of the hen harrier and fresh water pearl mussel and the fact that there are real pressures from agriculture and land use on them. This project builds on a LIFE project for the fresh water pearl mussel (<http://kerrylife.ie/>) and another project in the south-west of Ireland that embraces the hen harrier (<http://duhallowlife.com/raptor-life/>). Moreover, the Burren project, also in Ireland (LIFE04 NAT/IE/000125), successfully piloted a conservation farming scheme to boost the high nature value of important limestone habitats in the west of Ireland. It laid the foundations for a large-scale environmental farming initiative for the whole region, which is now underway. The project's overall objective was to develop a blueprint for sustainable agricultural management of the Burren's priority habitats. The project resulted in its continuation and mainstreaming under the (2010-12) Burren farming for conservation programme (BFCP), where EUR 3 million were allocated by the Department of Agriculture and Food to support high environmental value farming, with tourism spin-offs.

In general, the common provisions regulation (CPR) of the ESI Funds acknowledges this complementarity and contains a special section (in Annex I.4, common strategic framework — see below) on coordination and synergies between the ESI Funds and LIFE. The ESI Funds focus to a significant extent on major investments with benefits for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. LIFE, on the other hand, is more focused on management approaches, environmental restoration (especially for nature and ecosystems) and demonstration of new solutions to environmental and climate problems. Thus, LIFE works as a gap filler, as can be seen in Table 4 on integrated projects and from the example in Box 9.

The consultation specifically mentioned the ERDF as complementary to LIFE and a way to follow up funding of actions piloted in LIFE projects after they end.

Given that they are mostly implemented in shared management by national authorities, eligibility criteria (e.g. beneficiaries, types of measures to be funded) vary from one Member

State to another, depending on the various programmes that are agreed with the Commission and in line with the Funds' Regulations.

Complementarity with the LIFE programme is systematically checked in all the programming documents (such as the partnership agreement and the operational programmes), and where necessary, a specific mention is added.

A link between LIFE and EAFRD has been successfully established for 12 Member States that have opted for integrated projects on nature, air and water. This is mobilising a total budget of EUR 373 million of which EUR 153 million from LIFE

For the EMFF, coordinating mechanisms have been established to ensure that measures (e.g., more sustainable fishing practices) tested by LIFE can be scaled up by EMFF and to address environmental problems in integrated projects.

At this stage of the programme's implementation, it is difficult to make an appropriate assessment on whether this works and to what extent.

Some empirical evidence of how the complementarity works in practice can be derived from previous LIFE programmes:

- there are several examples of actions funded by rural development programmes, which were at first piloted in LIFE (see Box 14 above)
- some beneficiaries of traditional projects<sup>69</sup> reported having obtained Interreg funding.

**Q.10. To what extent is the LIFE programme complementary to and enjoying synergies with other relevant EU funding programmes (i.e. the European Structural and Investment Funds — ESIF, Horizon 2020) (external coherence)?**

LIFE is designed to be complementary to other EU funding programmes (in particular Horizon 2020). But at this stage of the programme's implementation, the complementarity and synergies cannot be strongly established.

However, initial results show that LIFE and Horizon 2020 contribute to common objectives in different and in some cases complementary ways. The risk of overlap is limited because of the programmes' different scopes, the transnational nature of most Horizon 2020 projects, its special targeted priorities, the different average sizes and lengths of projects. Preliminary findings provide evidence that LIFE is successful in encouraging the uptake of the results of projects financed by previous research programmes. Since the 2014 LIFE call for proposals evaluation process, one extra point is granted to projects that plan to take up the results of environmental and climate-related research and innovation projects financed by Horizon 2020 or by previous framework programmes.

Data based on the results of the 2015 LIFE calls for proposal show that almost 32 % of the successful projects are linking their activities to the results of EU-funded research projects (corresponding to 13 projects out of 41 funded). This was reported in an EASME study released in August 2016.

As for ESIF, these funds are mostly implemented in shared management by national authorities, with criteria and contents which vary from one Member State to another. They tend to focus to a significant extent on major investments with benefits for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The ERDF is highlighted as being complementary to LIFE, acting as a source of follow-up funding after actions piloted in LIFE projects have come to an end.

<sup>69</sup> LIFE00 NAT/F/007277; LIFE03 NAT/UK/000042; LIFE03 NAT/SLO/000077; LIFE05 NAT/D/000056; LIFE05 ENV/DK/000155; LIFE07 ENV/D/000222.

For the EMFF, coordinating mechanisms have been established to ensure that measures tested by LIFE (e.g. more sustainable fishing practices) are scaled up by the EMFF and to address marine-related environmental problems in integrated projects.

## 5.4. Relevance

### *Q.11. To what extent are the programme objectives pertinent to the needs, problems and issues addressed?*

This evaluation question is linked to Q.14 ‘To what extent do the issues addressed by the intervention continue to require action at EU level’ and to Q.15 ‘What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the existing EU intervention’. To avoid repetition, more to address this question can be found in the related answers.

The fact that there is a high level of demand for funding projects and at the same time a relatively low level of co-financing compared with other programmes underlines the continued interest in LIFE<sup>70</sup>. Following the results of the various consultations, the applicants choose LIFE to submit their proposals even if it meant their projects would be financed at a lower rate than in other programmes, because LIFE addresses specific needs which are not addressed by other programmes.

This emerged from the interviews of the beneficiaries and from the questionnaire completed by the unsuccessful applicants who consider LIFE funding vital for the realisation of the projects: for example, one of the respondents stated in the open question section of the public survey that: *‘I find that it is difficult to find alternative funding programmes addressing problems of conservation and biodiversity, i.e. not addressed by other funds on European, national or regional level’*.

The participation of a wide range of beneficiaries of LIFE projects, which include private enterprises (SMEs, etc.), public authorities and private non-commercial organisations (see Figure 7 above), demonstrates that the programme is capable of answering different needs and attracting extremely different stakeholders concerned with climate/environmental policies.

In this respect the Committee of the Regions *‘notes that local and regional authorities are amongst the main beneficiaries of the LIFE programme and make direct use of it by implementing LIFE projects and developing regional and local partnerships. What makes the programme attractive to regional and local authorities is the broad range of thematic priorities funded, the possibility of cooperating with a large number of stakeholders and the diversity of funding models’*<sup>71</sup>.

The external study shows that the specific objectives for each priority area and the thematic priorities under the sub-programme for environment are able to address ongoing challenges — such as the ones linked to the implementation of the EU biodiversity strategy<sup>72</sup> — and recent

<sup>70</sup> On the opinion to the European Commission on the mid-term evaluation of LIFE (ENVE-VI/016), the Committee of the Regions invites the EC to better align the co-financing rates of LIFE with the rates of other both directly and jointly managed EU funding programmes increasing LIFE the co-financing rate in the next LIFE programme

<sup>71</sup> ENVE-VI/016, *Draft Opinion, Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme*, Committee of the Regions. 121st plenary session, 8-9 February 2017.

<sup>72</sup> The mid-term review of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 concludes that ‘the LIFE programme remains a small but highly effective funding source for nature and biodiversity’.

policy developments, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) — with LIFE expected to provide a contribution to 11 SDGs (see Annex 7).

LIFE also contributes to the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, because LIFE projects help to promote innovative environmental and climate technologies, develop new beneficial work skills and, to a limited extent, create jobs.

**Box 15. LIFE study contract on ‘methods and considerations for the determination of greenhouse gas emission reduction objectives for international shipping’**

On 12 December 2015, the international community agreed in Paris to common objectives to adapt to climate change and mitigate its impact. State parties notably emphasised the urgent need for measures to hold ‘the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels’. After Paris, discussions on greenhouse gas reduction objectives were re-opened at the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). This was triggered by submissions from the shipping industry of Belgium, Germany, France, Morocco, the Marshall Islands and the Solomon Islands. At the April 2016 session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC), the EU, some other developed countries, several small island developing states and a few others supported the calls to determine a contribution for shipping to the global efforts to limit climate change and to develop a work plan and timetable (as proposed by Belgium and others) to determine shipping’s contribution. MEPC adopted a roadmap for the adoption of an IMO comprehensive strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from shipping<sup>73</sup>. To define such an emission reduction objective requires sound methodology, and a number of issues (such as reduction potentials of technical and operational measures, cost implications, projections of future growth in world trade, impacts on least developed countries, etc.) have to be taken into account to facilitate global agreement.

The Committee of the Regions, after consultation of its constituency, also confirmed this in the recent opinion mentioned above<sup>74</sup> when it said that it *‘believes that the LIFE programme plays an important role in developing new solutions in the area of environmental protection and climate, promoting eco-innovation and building capacity for new instruments such as green infrastructure and nature-based solutions. The Committee of the Regions encourages the Commission to continue this approach both under the current multiannual programme and after 2020’*.

Procurement activities continue to support the new and emerging needs related to the development of the knowledge base and/or related to international development/issues (see Box 15 for a concrete example).

**Q.11. To what extent are the programme objectives pertinent to the needs, problems and issues addressed?**

As emerged from the results of the external study, the LIFE programme responds to the needs of a wide range of beneficiaries, who submit a proposal to be financed by the LIFE programme, even if it offers a lower co-financing than other programmes.

LIFE in fact enables project beneficiaries to tackle issues and problems which are not covered by

<sup>73</sup> Although the roadmap does not include specifically a reference to the setting-up of a contribution objective for the sector, a number of proposals made in view of the forthcoming meeting at MEPC in July 2017 (sponsored by some EU MS, small island developing states, Canada, Japan and key industry representatives) call for the inclusion of such a reduction objective in the initial IMO strategy. This is to be developed in 2018, either as a binding or aspirational objective.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

other programmes.

The objectives of the LIFE programme are highly relevant to ongoing and new challenges such as those identified in the mid-term review of the EU biodiversity strategy (2015) or in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in particular, in sustainable development goal 11).

LIFE also contributes to the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, because LIFE projects help to promote innovative environmental and climate technologies, develop new beneficial work skills and, to a limited extent, create jobs.

#### ***Q.12. To what extent do stakeholders support the LIFE interventions?***

Among the LIFE stakeholders, EU citizens strongly support climate and environmental policies. The 2015 Eurobarometer survey on the environment reported that:

- 95 % of EU citizens surveyed consider that protecting the environment is important to them personally and there is a strong consensus on the importance of environmental protection in the European Union.
- Most Europeans think that decisions on the environment should be made not only at national level but jointly within the EU.
- Over three quarters of respondents (77 %) agree that European environmental legislation is necessary to protect the environment in their country.
- Over eight out of ten respondents (84 %) believe that more EU funding should be allocated to support environmentally-friendly activities.

The importance attributed to the environment by EU citizens mirrors the appreciation of the LIFE programme: taking into account the different stakeholder consultations for this mid-term evaluation, all the stakeholders are supportive of what the LIFE programme does<sup>75</sup>, because they see it as responding to their needs and providing concrete results.

The results of the open public consultation show that an overwhelming majority of respondents (between 94 % and 99 % of 256 respondents) acknowledges that the LIFE programme addresses environment and climate action needs and that the programme is necessary.

Different stakeholder groups, in particular the project beneficiaries and LIFE national contact points, rate the importance of the objectives that LIFE pursues as very high. They are of the view that the programme's objectives and types of activity are very well suited to the needs in the different priority areas.

In its recent opinion<sup>76</sup> the Committee of the Regions also supports the LIFE programme's activities and *'believes that LIFE is a small but flexible programme, with ambitious environmental and climate targets which are not covered directly by other EU programmes or are implemented in another area by such programmes. With its support for specific projects at regional level, the programme is an excellent catalyst for carrying out other projects and for mobilising national and private funds [...]The Committee of the Regions 'reiterates its strong support for LIFE, as an independent, directly managed funding programme, entirely dedicated*

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<sup>75</sup> In this specific case the 'LIFE programme' could also refer to previous programmes, given that the opinion of the stakeholders could be related to their experience with previous LIFE programmes.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

to the environment and making a significant impact in terms of creating jobs and growth, to be continued after 2020, and for a serious increase in its budget’.

The European Economic and Social Committee also echoes this opinion<sup>77</sup>, as can be seen in the box below.

**Box 16 — Extract from European Economic and Social Committee on the Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE programme — — NAT/689**

*‘ Over the last 25 years, the LIFE programme has been instrumental in European environmental policy, and increasingly in sustainability policy as well. It is fair to say that it has become part and parcel of the EU’s environmental policy, which it has strengthened considerably. [...] LIFE projects have*

- *directly contributed to achieving direct and tangible successes: for example, certain endangered species that are protected under EU law have been protected from outright extinction thanks to projects funded by LIFE;*
- *given local people an illustration of the positive concepts underlying the EU’s environment policy, and the benefits of this policy for people, nature and the environment. LIFE has thus become a kind of ‘bridge’ between EU policy and the ‘Europe of citizens and regions’, which is particularly important at a time when the added value of Europe is increasingly being called into question.*

*The LIFE programme, which is particularly appreciated for its constant adaptation to new challenges, has also demonstrated that there is within civil society great deal of potential and a real willingness to get involved in implementing and developing the EU’s environmental and sustainable development policies. The implementation of EU law is far more than just a legislative act that the Member States have to put into effect. Environmental and sustainable development policy stands and falls on public acceptance; it must be publicised and made transparent, which is another area where LIFE can make an extremely valuable contribution.[..]*

*The implementation of the UN’s 2030 Agenda (the SDGs) in European policy is one of the major challenges facing the EU over the next few years. LIFE will need to support this process [...] in order to turn the much-discussed integration of environmental and nature protection in other policy areas into a reality.[..]*

*The permanence of the LIFE programme is paramount to the effectiveness and credibility of the EU’s environmental policies, which must be safeguarded by the horizontal integration of the 7th Environment Action programme, the UN’s sustainability agenda and the Paris climate resolutions into all other European policy areas and funding programmes. The EESC would point out that it has also repeatedly called for a greener and fairer European Semester. [...]*

**Q.12. To what extent do stakeholders support the LIFE interventions?**

The importance assigned by the stakeholders helps to show that the programme remains relevant..

In line with EU citizen support for EU action on the environment, there is strong evidence of stakeholder support for LIFE activities. The main reasons mentioned to justify such support are that the programme responds to their needs and provides concrete results.

The results of the public consultation show that the LIFE programme addresses environmental and climate action needs and that the programme is necessary. This position is further echoed by the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions.

<sup>77</sup> ‘NAT/689 Halbzeitbewertung des LIFE-Programms’. European Economic and Social Committee. Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment. Sustainable Development Observatory.

## 5.5. EU added value

### *Q.13. What is the additional value resulting from the EU intervention(s), compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national and/or regional levels?*

The EU added value of the LIFE programme is embedded in its core target and in its approach and focus. This makes its activities especially well-suited to environmental and climate needs. This EU added value can be summed up as follows:

1. more effective knowledge-sharing: as an EU platform to exchange practices and knowledge on implementing EU legislation and policies, LIFE enables players across the EU to learn from each other's experience in addressing specific environmental and climate problems more effectively and efficiently. LIFE attracts partnerships that would otherwise be difficult to set up, for example providing capacity-building to local authorities across Europe to design and finance integrated strategies to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> (and possibly other greenhouse gas) emissions and adapt to climate risks. This includes information and guidance on funding from the European budget to support the implementation of strategies (see Box 13 above and Box 17 below). There are often economies of scale in undertaking efforts at EU level for capacity building, research, information and data gathering, knowledge transfer, exchange of best practice (i.e. by making more green technologies available and known, by financing peer reviews, by coordinating cooperation between judges, etc.).
2. better distribution of solidarity and responsibility sharing: environmental assets are often of a public good nature (environment, climate) and are unevenly distributed across the EU<sup>78</sup>. LIFE allows for a better distribution of responsibility and solidarity in preserving the EU environmental common good. It does this by assisting Member States that have the most valuable EU natural capital, disseminating solutions and best practices and promoting innovative environmental and climate change technologies (see Box 1 for a concrete example).
3. better response to trans-boundary or transnational environmental problems, which cannot be adequately addressed by Member States acting alone: for example, by financing the preparation of international conferences (i.e. the Paris agreement), LIFE has helped to reach important commitments at international level on the environment/climate and avoid coordination failures (see the example in Box 15).
4. increased coherence of EU action: LIFE ensures the coherence of EU environmental and climate legislation and policies, supporting implementation in Member States. LIFE assists Member States in progressing towards common targets through positive incentives (i.e. by financing peer reviews, coordinating cooperation between judges, helping to enforce environmental and climate legislation and policies in Member States, etc. — see Box 7) and negative incentives (fines — see Box 19). Several studies investigated the contribution of LIFE projects to the implementation, dissemination and further development of EU environmental policies and legislation across all stages of the policy development and

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<sup>78</sup> Article 8 of the Habitats Directive explicitly links the delivery of conservation measures to the provision of EU co-financing.

implementation process (see, for example, the studies on LIFE water<sup>79</sup>, waste<sup>80</sup> and soil<sup>81</sup> projects).

5. catalyst and leverage effects: LIFE acts as a catalyst for action, providing one-off investment needed in a specific area, eliminating initial barriers to the implementation of EU environmental and climate policy and testing new approaches for future scaling-up. LIFE helps Member States and stakeholders to accelerate and improve the implementation of EU legislation by creating complementarity and synergies between the LIFE programme and other Union funding programmes and national funds while leveraging additional public and private sector resources (i.e. integrated projects — see Box 4 for a concrete example). LIFE also raises the visibility of EU environmental and climate action and brings the EU closer to citizens by showing the EU’s commitment to environmental and climate objectives and making those objectives more relevant at national and local level (see Box 9).

In the case of action grants, EU added value is ensured at all the stages of the project life cycle:

- The EU added value is analysed when the project is awarded the grant and represents between 50 and 60 points out of a total of 100 points. Projects have to be of high quality individually, and their impact should have a demonstrated potential to produce a multiplier effect through dissemination and sharing of project results. The results should reach a maximum number of policy-makers and stakeholders across the EU.
- During implementation, monitoring experts check and provide impulse to the project’s added value. Platform meetings and other initiatives, such as Green Week, are all opportunities where projects are invited to share their experience.
- At the end of the project, after-LIFE plans are also drawn up to ensure that the results are sustainable and to define how the project will continue to disseminate the achieved results.

The LIFE programme’s added value is further confirmed by previous evaluations of LIFE+.

<b>Box 17 — Example of a traditional project on environmental governance and information</b>	
<b>LIFE-ENPE — European Network of Prosecutors for the Environment (LIFE14 GIE/UK/000043)</b>	
EU contribution: €643 439.00	Thematic priority: Governance and information
Coordinating beneficiary: Environment Agency (national authority)	External link: <a href="https://www.environmentalprosecutors.eu/">https://www.environmentalprosecutors.eu/</a>
Interpol and the United Nations Environment Programme estimate the cost of international environmental crime to be \$213 billion per year. This problem affects the EU as it does other regions. High levels of environmental crime can be partly attributed to inefficient and ineffective prosecution and sanctioning. Wildlife crime is notoriously difficult to prosecute because the law in this area is complex and because criminal circles are small, highly organised, closed and hard to penetrate. Chemical pollution and waste crimes also adversely impact biodiversity, and many EU rivers are falling short of Water Framework Directive targets.	

<sup>79</sup> [Contribution of LIFE ENV/INF/NAT projects to the implementation, dissemination and further development of EU environmental policies and legislation. Water sector \(2012\).](#)

<sup>80</sup> [Contribution of LIFE ENV/INF projects to the implementation, dissemination and further development of EU environmental policies and legislation, focusing in particular on resource efficiency. Pilot study on waste \(2012\).](#)

<sup>81</sup> [Contribution of LIFE ENV/INF projects to the implementation, dissemination and further development of EU environmental policies and legislation. Pilot study on soil.](#)

Additionally, large-scale pollution incidents are complex, requiring transnational cooperation to successfully prosecute.

LIFE-ENPE is a 5-year project (starting date 2015). Its objectives are to develop its network and to undertake a programme of support for the operative work of prosecutors. It aims to improve compliance with EU environmental law by addressing uneven and incomplete implementation across Member States through improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of prosecutors and judges in combating environmental crime and fostering a greater culture of transnational cooperation between prosecutors and judges. The England-based Environment Agency (EA) in Bristol runs this project, which involves a consortium of four other partners: the European Union Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUFJE); the Irish Environmental Protection Agency; the Office for Serious Fraud and Environmental Crime of the National Public Prosecutor's Office (FP, Netherlands) and the National Environmental Crimes Unit at the Swedish Prosecution Authority (REMA).

The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Mid-term review of the LIFE+ Regulation<sup>82</sup> stated that the programme achieves added value by improving the implementation of EU environmental policy at national, regional or local levels and by providing EU-wide exchange of information. Most environmental and climate problems in fact are of a cross-border nature and cannot be adequately solved by Member States alone. Furthermore, the Member States note that LIFE+ has been 'a successful instrument with significant EU added value'<sup>83</sup>, leading to:

- improved conservation and restoration of some 4.7 million hectares of land;
- improved water quality over an area of approximately 3 million hectares;
- more healthy air quality for some 12 million people;
- waste prevention of some 300 000 tonnes and recycling of a further 1 million tonnes;
- 1.13 million tonnes in reductions of CO2 emissions per year<sup>84</sup>.

The EU added value of the LIFE programme is largely confirmed by the results of the public consultation. The overwhelming majority of the respondents confirm that the programme has significant EU added value because it:

- responds to European and global environment and climate challenges, which are unlikely to be addressed by a Member State alone (98 % of the respondents);
- supports the coherent development, implementation and enforcement of EU environment and climate policy and legislation, (98 % of the respondents);
- tackles environmental and climate problems more efficiently (98 % of the respondents);
- preserves EU environmental resources which, even if unevenly distributed across the EU, benefit the EU as a whole (94 % of the respondents);
- helps to leverage the funds for environmental protection and climate action (97 % of the respondents),

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<sup>82</sup> See Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 'Mid Term Review of the LIFE+ Regulation. COM(2010) 516 final.

<sup>83</sup> See Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 'Final evaluation of Regulation (EC) No 614/2007 concerning the Financial Instrument for the Environment (LIFE+)'. COM/2013/0478 final.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

- contributes to EU-wide sharing of ‘best practices’, knowledge transfer, demonstration, and awareness-raising (99 % of the respondents).

**Q.13. What is the additional value resulting from the EU intervention(s), compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national and/or regional levels?**

Based on the external study findings and drawing on views of all the stakeholders, the LIFE programme improves the implementation and enforcement of EU environmental and climate policy and legislation at national, regional and local levels and promotes an EU-wide exchange of information. By doing this, the programme provides:

- more effective knowledge-sharing: as the EU platform to exchange practices and knowledge on implementing EU legislation and policies, LIFE enables players across the EU to learn from each other’s experience in addressing specific environmental and climate problems more effectively and efficiently;
- a better distribution of solidarity and responsibility sharing: environmental assets are often of a public good nature (environment, climate) and are unevenly distributed across the EU;
- a better response to transboundary or transnational challenges which are unlikely to be addressed by a Member State alone;
- coherence for EU environmental and climate legislation and policies by analysing problems and issues with a comparative view, defining common targets and contributing to their implementation and enforcement;.
- a catalyst and leverage effect by eliminating initial barriers to the implementation of EU environmental and climate policy and testing new approaches for future scaling-up.

Although final results are not available yet:

tools are in place to select the projects with the most relevant EU added value and to check them in all phases of the project life cycle

the EU added value of the programme is confirmed by the results of previous evaluations and acclaimed by the overwhelming majority of respondents to the public consultation.

***Q.14. To what extent do the issues addressed by the intervention continue to require action at EU level?***

EU environmental and climate policy and legislation are delivering substantial improvements to the state of the environment.

However, major environmental and climate challenges remain. Only by addressing these challenges will Europe be able to harness the full potential linked to an efficient use of available resources<sup>85</sup>.

As stated in the LIFE Regulation, other EU funding programmes cannot address all specific needs relating to the environment and climate action.

For example, the evidence gathered in the recently finalised evaluation (fitness-check) of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives<sup>86</sup> (the ‘Nature Directives’) confirmed the strategic role that the LIFE programme plays in supporting the implementation of the Directives.

<sup>85</sup> See above for the existing potential related to the reduction of the cost of inaction linked to climate change and the savings which could be derived by implementing the circular economy.

<sup>86</sup> The Bird Directive is the oldest piece of EU legislation on the environment and one of its cornerstones. Amended in 2009, it became Directive 2009/147/EC. Habitat loss and degradation are the most serious threats

‘Apart from the allocation under the LIFE programme there is no earmarking of funds for nature and biodiversity under different EU funds and that, as Member States are not obliged to fully avail of the opportunities for financing Natura 2000 available under different EU funds, this can result in relatively low levels of allocation in the context of national programmes. Furthermore it reports that limited information is available about how efficiently the EU available funding instruments are delivering outcomes that help achieve the objectives of the Directives. An exception is represented by the LIFE fund, whose projects are closely monitored in relation to delivery of results in the implementation of the Nature directives’<sup>87</sup>.

LIFE therefore remains the key funding instrument that most focuses on supporting implementation of the Nature Directives (especially for Natura 2000) through demonstration and best practice projects. The programme also expands the knowledge base to enable more informed decision-making on measures and targets.

Grants and procurement activities under LIFE aim at addressing these needs (see the example in the box below).

According to the public consultation, very little of what LIFE projects have achieved would have been possible without the programme’s support, in particular for nature and biodiversity.

On this, see also the European Economic and Social Committee opinion in Box 16.

**Box 18. Modelling of biophysical and economic impacts of EU water policy implementation scenarios (hydro-economic modelling)**

This contract will ensure the direct input of crucial knowledge and expertise in policy evaluation (the refit/review of the Water Framework Directive) and policy formulation (future Water Framework Directive implementation support strategy on which the Directorate-General for Environment will work in parallel with the Water Framework Directive review).

In particular, it will provide the resources to:

1. continue ongoing hydro-economic modelling work and strengthen it;
2. ensure continuous support for the tender to develop an integrated policy assessment method and software linked to models of the freshwater and marine environment and to assess the economic benefits of EU water policy and the costs of its non-implementation (BLUE2 Study).

**Q.14. To what extent do the issues addressed by the intervention continue to require action at EU level?**

LIFE is the only EU programme which has a core focus on environment and climate action.

The other EU funding programmes do not address all specific needs relating to the environment and climate action.

This makes LIFE the key funding instrument to address some crucial challenges such as the existing gaps in the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

to the conservation of wild birds, of which 500 species live in Europe and one third of the population is not in good condition. The Directive therefore places great emphasis on protecting habitats for endangered and migratory species. It establishes a network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) including all the most suitable territories for these species. Since 1994, all SPAs are included in the Natura 2000 ecological network, set up under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

<sup>87</sup>Commission staff working paper, Fitness check of the EU Nature Legislation (Birds and Habitats Directives),SWD(2016) 472 final, pg. 52.

According to the recent fitness-check, LIFE plays a strategic role in implementing the Directives.

This is confirmed by the results of the public consultation, which highlight that very little of what LIFE projects have achieved would have been possible without the programme's support, in particular for nature and biodiversity.

Natural capital is not distributed equally across Member States but it is an EU common asset which provides shared benefits. This implies the need of an action at EU level and confirms the relevance of the programme for solidarity and responsibility-sharing on natural capital resources.

***Q.15. What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the existing EU intervention?***

The evaluation results of LIFE + highlighted that according to many applicants the programme was a key funding mechanism for promoting and implementing nature conservation throughout the EU since its primary objective was protecting nature. They noted that in other programmes this objective was secondary. LIFE+ helped to adopt management plans, restore valuable habitats, recover emblematic species and develop the Natura2000 network. It also helped to create collaborative platforms that enhance partnerships and therefore facilitate the transfer of best practice between stakeholders and decision-makers. The biodiversity strand was an important instrument to finance the implementation of the biodiversity action plan with a focus on the conservation of biodiversity at large<sup>88</sup>.

Furthermore, according to most of the external monitoring experts and national and regional contact points consulted (97 % and 79 % of 59 and 41 respondents respectively), very little of what the LIFE projects have achieved would have been launched or achieved without the programme's support. This is also confirmed by other stakeholders.

As underlined by the project beneficiaries during the interviews, LIFE is the EU funding source devoted specifically to the environment.

Two thirds of the stakeholders also believe that the main consequences of stopping or withdrawing LIFE activities would be mostly negative. According to them, discontinuing the LIFE programme would have major consequences, as several environmental and climate-specific needs will be not addressed by other EU financial instruments. In addition, the following issues were mentioned in relation to a discontinuation of the programme:

- Member States' capacity — and in some cases commitment — to pursue the EU's objectives on environmental protection and climate action would be reduced;
- the impact on employment and economic growth would be negative; and
- there would be less support for innovative environmental solutions<sup>89</sup>.

The end of LIFE support would have serious consequences, particularly for NGOs which receive operating grants covering a maximum of 70 % financing of their annual work programme. These organisations are of key importance when it comes to developing

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<sup>88</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 'Mid Term Review of the LIFE+ Regulation. COM(2010) 516 final.

<sup>89</sup> According to LIFE project beneficiaries, there will be 'less innovative pilot or demonstration technical projects, less environmentally relevant innovation activities by SMEs in particular' and 'What would disappear is the support to provide solutions for pre-testing / pre-commercialisation (risk-sharing) of innovative environmental solutions'.

environmental and climate legislation and policies. Without alternative funds, they would have to downsize their activities.

**Box. 19. Support to the Commission on analysis of information and related follow-up to the fulfilment of the requirements of EU water legislation**

The Commission has conducted several assessments of Member State implementation of the Water Framework Directive and its related directives on groundwater and priority substances. These assessments have highlighted many gaps/shortcomings in the implementation of legislation. In response, the Commission published recommendations for improvement in view of the 2016 update of the river basin management plans (RBMPs). When these recommendations are not followed up or accepted, the Commission undertakes legal action where necessary. However, before seizing the Court with an infringement, the Commission has to conduct the pre-litigation phase from the so called ‘pilots’ to reasoned opinions. In these exchanges with the Member State concerned, the Commission seeks further detailed or additional clarification on a specific issue or group of issues. Pilot cases may also be opened by the Commission following a complaint from the public or a European institution, to which the Commission must be able to respond. In this context, large amounts of information are exchanged, at times only in the language of the Member State concerned. The Commission needs technical assistance to help assess the information at issue and prepare its reaction to the Member State’s submissions. The Commission also regularly receives complaints or petitions that involve analysis of large volumes of information claiming bad implementation of EU water legislation. The technical assistance should help the Commission to assess whether such complaints are well founded.

For the procurement activities, the absence of LIFE funds would imply that other possibilities would have to be found to finance the activities needed to fulfil commitments to environmental/climate legislation and policies and/or to fulfil international commitments (see box below). One may ask if it would be suitable to have such funding through programmes whose primary objective is not environment or climate action.

**Q.15. What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the existing EU intervention?**

According to the public consultation, very little of what LIFE projects have achieved would have been possible without the programme’s support, in particular on nature and biodiversity.

Discontinuing the LIFE programme would have major consequences, as several environmental and climate-specific needs would not be addressed by other EU financial instruments. In particular, stopping the LIFE programme would reduce Member States’ capacity — and in some cases commitment — to pursue the EU’s objectives on environmental protection and climate action and would affect related economic growth and employment. It would also reduce the support to innovative environmental solutions

Stopping or withdrawing the existing LIFE activities would reduce the capacity of NGOs to advocate environmental protection and climate action.

Other sources of funding would be needed for certain procurement activities that allow the Commission to fulfil existing commitments at EU and international level.

**5.6. Project sustainability, impact and/or replicability to date**

***Q.16. To what extent are the positive effects of projects likely to last after EU funding ends, especially the demonstration effect and what is the scope for replication of the projects?***

The final evaluation of LIFE+ showed that ‘many projects demonstrated technical feasibility and to be economically viable, however there is evidence that the demonstration potential being

present was often not fully released or exploited because the necessary dissemination of activities and results did not take place or at least only to a limited extent<sup>90</sup>.

This is why the current procedures for implementing the LIFE programme pay special attention to the potential of projects to be sustainable/replicable in different stages of the project life:

1. During the award process, the multiplier effect of the projects, namely their potential for replicability and/or transferability, is assessed on the basis of a specialised award criterion<sup>91</sup>. Projects which do not anticipate results which can be replicated/transferred or which do not include an adequate strategy for this replication/ transfer to materialise, will not be awarded the grant. For the LIFE environment and climate mitigation projects in particular, this has resulted in a shift toward close-to-the-market projects<sup>92</sup> which are meant to contribute to innovative solutions on water, waste, air, chemicals and resource efficiency. This makes it possible to promote innovative eco-products/processes which could be discouraged by the market rules (see Box 20 below).

<b>Box 20. Example of a traditional project on environment and resource efficiency</b>	
<b>LIFE BIOPOL — Production of leather-making biopolymers from biomasses and industrial by-products, through life cycle designed processes (LIFE15 ENV/IT/000654)</b>	
Total budget: €3 879 018.00 EU contribution: €2 147 863.00 Coordinating beneficiary: CODYECO SPA (private company)	Thematic priority: Waste External link: <a href="http://www.codyeco.com/biopol.html">http://www.codyeco.com/biopol.html</a>
LIFE BIOPOL is a close fit with the goals of EU circular economy policy. It will demonstrate industrial symbiosis by designing, building and validating an industrial pilot plant to recycle waste biomass from the leather treatment process and agro-food industries, turning it into new biopolymers for leather tanning and fat-liquoring applications.  The new process will also allow the substitution of hazardous chemicals currently used in leather tanning.	

2. During the implementation of the projects, platform meetings are organised to encourage replication and transfer results between beneficiaries or with other stakeholders. In specific cases, selected beneficiaries are offered the opportunity to present their investment plans to potential investors. Some platform meetings have already taken place.

<sup>90</sup> Ex-Post Evaluation of Projects and Activities Financed under the LIFE Programme. Final Report. Part 6: Conclusions and Recommendations, page 6.

<sup>91</sup> For the award criterion ‘EU added value: replicability and transferability’ 10 points out of 100 can be given, with a minimum pass score of 5 points. Replicability and transferability are the potential the project has to be replicated and transferred during and after its implementation. Successful replication and transferability require a strategy that includes tasks to multiply the impacts of the projects’ solutions and mobilise a wider uptake. The aim is to reach a critical mass during the project and/or in a short and medium-term perspective after the end of the LIFE project. This goes beyond transfer of knowledge and networking. It involves putting the techniques, methods or strategies developed or applied in the project into practice elsewhere.

<sup>92</sup> Projects with technology readiness level (TRL) equal or higher than 7. .

A close-to-market task force has been set up within the LIFE unit of EASME. The first result is a number of ongoing activities to reinforce the framework to help promising projects reach the market by, e.g.:

- creating a framework to attract investors for the continuation of projects and using business coaching to help the projects with market uptake;
  - using the Europe Enterprise Network (EEN) to support LIFE close-to-market projects (C2M) and to diffuse information about the LIFE programme<sup>93</sup>;
  - establishing cooperation in the framework of the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) to tunnel promising projects benefiting from various EU-programmes, including LIFE, to the European Investment Project Portal (EIPP). The aim is to increase the visibility of projects to possible investors and business partners, diversify financing sources, support project screening processes, etc.
3. The sustainability/replicability/transferability is also checked/encouraged by the monitoring team and Commission officials just before the end of the project. The beneficiaries are asked to draft an 'after-LIFE' plan, detailing how the project activities will continue when LIFE funding ends. The impact of these plans cannot be assessed at this stage of the programme, but the plans have proved to be effective for LIFE+ projects.

A recent report<sup>94</sup> shows that on average 83 % of projects are sustainable<sup>95</sup> after the end of LIFE funding and three quarters have good potential for replication.

According to this report, sustainability and replicability are highly correlated and, based on an econometric analysis, there are some variables that affect them both such as:

- the number of project partners: a higher number of (associated) partners has a significantly negative impact on sustainability and replicability, as it probably complicates the management of the project after the grant period. Therefore, smaller partnerships that are easier to manage have a greater chance of successful replication;
- the level of innovation shows a non-linear (U-shaped) relation with sustainability and replicability. This implies an optimal region of values that maximises the variable's influence on the project's potential to be sustainable and replicable: in a scale of innovation of 0 to 9, the peak influence is obtained around a value of 7.4 and, in the case of prototypes, a middle value gives the highest positive influence on both sustainability and replicability;
- the amounts spent on prototypes: projects that either do not focus on prototypes at all, or focus on them heavily, tend to be both more sustainable and more replicable. Projects that

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<sup>93</sup> On-going activities are, for example, the presentation of the LIFE programme and the 2017 call at the EEN Environmental Sector Group in Berlin (March 2017); a presentation to EEN Circular Economy Thematic Group in Brussels (autumn 2017), and ongoing work with the EEN communication team to promote LIFE calls and the C2M dimension.

<sup>94</sup> Report on LIFE past, present and future contribution to employment and economic growth: LIFE effectiveness and replicability. NEEMO 2016. This analysis is based on LIFE+ projects and does not take into account the expected improvements in the current LIFE programme.

<sup>95</sup> Sustainability is perceived as the ability to continue or to follow up on the activities performed during the project's life; i.e. it is the viability of the project after the end of LIFE financing — the continuation or follow-up is ensured by the beneficiary itself, its partner or successor.

focus on prototypes heavily are the most sustainable and replicable<sup>96</sup>. On the contrary, projects perceiving any prototype only as a by-product of their primary activities or where prototype construction is not their primary point of focus are the most likely to be less sustainable and replicable.

Concerning sustainability and replicability separately, the report<sup>97</sup> mentions that:

- The duration of the projects exhibits a hump-shaped effect, meaning that extremely short or too long lasting projects tend to be less sustainable.
- Projects in which personnel costs represent ca. 50 % of the overall budget are, on average, more replicable. Reversely, projects either too reliant on the personnel budget or not enough are more likely to be less replicable.
- In terms of the economic sector, projects relevant for the manufacturing and construction sectors are significantly more sustainable as these are more performance and output-oriented. Similarly, the share of infrastructure costs out of the total costs is positively linked to the level of replicability.
- Water projects show positive sustainability, while health sector projects are significantly more replicable, probably because their goal usually matches global and currently relevant issues which makes it easier to get sufficient financing for them.
- In contrast, energy and waste projects are shown to have a lower level of replication as they might be constrained by institutional and legal boundaries specific to individual countries and the market structure (including disruptions such as a monopoly, lobby, etc.).

The data on the overall sustainability and replicability are confirmed by the responses collected during the survey. They reveal that for the majority (78 %) there is either good or very good potential for demonstrating and transferring the results of LIFE projects.

Most of the new LIFE projects analysed in the external study are planning a follow-up by transferring project activities to new entities or projects, new sectors or different geographical areas. As for the related funds, interviews of about 70 project beneficiaries revealed that 40 % of them report that they will/already have attract(ed) funding to further develop project results after the end of EU funding.

**Box 21 — Example of a LIFE traditional project on climate change adaptation: climate-resilient construction materials with a market potential**

Total budget	€2 476 158.00	Thematic priority: Climate change adaptation
EU contribution	€1 442 784.00	External link: <a href="http://www.lifeherotile.eu/">http://www.lifeherotile.eu/</a>
Coordinating beneficiary:	Industrie Cotto Possagno S.p.A. (private company)	

The overall objective of the LIFE HEROTILE project (LIFE14 CCA/IT/000939) is to design and produce two types of roof tiles (Marseille and Portuguese roof tiles, which cover more than 60 % of pitched roofs in Europe) with a shape characterised by higher air permeability through the overlap of

<sup>96</sup> However, this data should be regarded with caution because the substance of high prototype costs is driven by only a limited number of projects of the dataset.

<sup>97</sup> Report on LIFE past, present and future contribution to employment and economic growth: LIFE effectiveness and replicability. .

the tiles and improved energy performance through under-tile ventilation.

The project's ultimate aim is to demonstrate that the designed tiles can help cool buildings while saving up to 50 % of the energy used for cooling.

The tiles are tested in real environments in the Mediterranean region (Italy and Israel) to compare performances with standard rooftop materials. This includes comparing rates of heat disposal in the summer season. The next steps include implementation of a pilot plant for tiles production.

The project has also developed practical and free software for architects and technicians to model the energy performance of buildings by changing only the roof configuration.

Respondents to the public consultation were also asked whether projects under LIFE have led to long-term positive effects. Over 80 % of the respondents felt that projects had medium or great positive long-term effects.

The consultations revealed, however, that obstacles to a project's continuation after its end are related to the lack of beneficiaries' financial resources. This is combined with a lack of capacity/human resources for planning an investment (including possible loans), a lack of interest and sense of urgency from decision-makers and a lack of information and communication within the programme.

Although 'after-LIFE' plans are seen as a positive improvement, a systematic follow-up of all projects to identify best practices and cost-saving measures and a comprehensive customised support for the most promising ones could allow the replication/sustainability potential to further materialise.

**Q.16. To what extent are the positive effects of projects likely to last after EU funding ends, especially the demonstration effect, and what is the scope for replication of the projects?**

Following the final evaluation of LIFE+ which showed a need to understand the full demonstration potential, considerable attention is paid to project sustainability and replicability in all phases of the project cycle.

A recent report shows that on average 83 % of projects are sustainable after the end of LIFE funding and three quarters have a good potential for replication.

According to this report, sustainability and replicability are highly correlated and, based on an econometric analysis, there are some variables — such as the number of project partners, the level of innovation, the investment in prototypes — which affect them both. Further variables relevant for sustainability or replicability are the duration of the project, the share of personnel costs, the economic sector in which they operate.

This is confirmed by the result of the external study: most of the projects analysed envisage a follow-up by transferring project activities to new entities or projects, new sectors or different geographical areas. As for the related funds, the interviews of about 70 LIFE project beneficiaries revealed that 40 % of them report that they will/already have attract(ed) funding to further develop project results after the end of EU funding.

Moreover, the consultations revealed that obstacles to a project's continuation after EU funding ends are related to beneficiaries lacking financial resources. This is combined with a lack of capacity/human resources for planning an investment (including possible loans), a lack of interest and a sense of urgency from decision-makers and a lack of information and communication within the programme.

In this respect, LIFE projects could have a greater potential for replication, in particular, if there were a systematic follow-up of all projects and comprehensive support for the most promising ones.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation comes at an early stage of the programme's implementation: most projects have yet to start and few projects have finished, given that the average duration of a LIFE project is between 4 and 5 years. The first actual results are expected in 2019-2020.

This is why this mid-term evaluation has focused mainly on the processes put in place to reach the programme's objectives, the ongoing activities (such as contracts/projects already financed) and, where relevant, their anticipated results.

Despite these limitations, the external independent evaluation provides reasonable assurance that the programme's implementation is progressing in the right direction.

The evidence collected shows that the LIFE programme is on track to being:

- **effective**, because it is well placed to meet the stated targets and deliver on environmental and climate objectives, thus contributing to the Europe 2020 strategy. Ongoing projects expect to reach 70 % of the milestones envisaged for 2017. They are doing this by, for example, targeting the improvement of the conservation status of 59 habitats, 114 species and 85 Natura 2000 sites. The evidence gathered in the recently finalised evaluation of the Birds and Habitats Directives (fitness-check) confirmed the strategic role that the LIFE programme plays in supporting the Directives' implementation.

The new features introduced by the LIFE Regulation — especially the sub-programme devoted to climate action and the integrated projects — are seen to respond to existing needs and to improve the programme's effectiveness.

- **efficient**, because the projects are expected to provide value for money. It is estimated that the benefit to society of some of the projects selected following the 2014 call for proposals will amount to EUR 1.7 billion, which represents four times the cost of the overall LIFE budget for 2014.

Moreover, the transfer of most of the grant management from the Commission to the executive agency EASME is exceeding the expected efficiency gain of EUR 8.2 million initially planned for 2014-2020.

The complementary financial resources mobilised by the integrated projects are extremely high, thus confirming that the programme is playing the role of catalyser very well.

Taking into account the low error rate, the funds are being used so far according to the rules.

- **relevant**, because the ongoing projects address some crucial challenges such as halting the loss of biodiversity, deriving savings from the circular economy, reducing the costs of inaction related to the consequences and effects of environmental degradation and climate change.

LIFE is consistent with EU policies and priorities, covering the most relevant topics on climate and environment, and being the framework in which some of the most recent policy developments — such as the circular economy package and the targets of the 2030 climate and energy framework -, have been prepared. It is also contributing to innovation and job creation, although these are not its primary aim.

LIFE is a flexible instrument, which finances projects of different sizes and is able to attract large and small enterprises, universities, research centres, national and local authorities, civil society as well as various non-governmental organisations. As demonstrated recently

with the European Solidarity Corps<sup>98</sup>, which includes a specific environmental strand, LIFE is able to react very quickly on many political and societal needs.

- **complementary** to other programmes, as the potential overlaps are limited and there are documented synergies: LIFE has encouraged using the results of the projects financed by research programmes and are further developing and disseminating the results of LIFE projects via the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

The existence of synergies between the projects of the different priority areas has been documented.

Moreover, the LIFE programme shows a substantial and unanimously recognised **EU added value**, because it helps to make the application of EU environmental and climate legislation and policies is consistent across the EU. It provides a way to respond effectively to cross-border challenges which a Member State is unlikely to address alone. Initial evidence also confirms that the programme is successfully playing its role of catalyst, promoting activities to exchange best practice and knowledge and to improve the utilisation of project results as well as the transfer of know-how.

Projects show a good potential for **sustainability and replicability** and good value for money, as they are addressing the reduction of emissions and energy consumption and promoting biodiversity activities by improving species conservation status.

The evaluation also highlights aspects which need to be improved. This involves:

- simplifying grant management procedures, in particular the application and reporting processes;
- increasing the strategic focus of the demand-driven part of the programme, e.g. by targeting topics not covered by the projects funded in previous years;
- doing more to reproduce the projects and transfer their results, e.g. by developing the capacity to plan and implement investments and addressing the lack of financial resources;
- improving the communication strategy to better target audiences, deliver more objective-specific and target-specific key messages and ensure more structured coordination between players.

The results of the LIFE mid-term evaluation exercise will help to improve these aspects under the next multiannual work programme (MAWP 2018-2020) and in the next multiannual financial framework.

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<sup>98</sup> [See COM\(2016\)942 final.](#)

## Annexes

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## Annex 1: Procedural information concerning the process to prepare the evaluation

Lead DG: European Commission Directorate General Environment, DG ENV

Co Chef de File: European Commission Directorate General Climate Action, DG CLIMA

Agenda planning reference: ENV/2017/001

### Organisation:

Preparation for the evaluation began on July 2015. The initial phase of the evaluation focused on the preparation of the Evaluation Roadmap that was finalized at the end of July, after the approval of the Inter-service Steering Group and published in October 2015<sup>99</sup> by the Secretariat General. Immediately after the approval of the Roadmap, the preparation of the terms of reference for carrying out the external and independent mid- term evaluation of the LIFE Programme started. The drafting of the terms of reference involved a large number of colleagues from different DG ENV units and from DG CLIMA as well as the European executive agency on small and medium sized enterprise. Finally it was approved by the Inter-service Steering Group in December and a service request under a framework contract was launched towards the end of 2015<sup>100</sup>. The service contract was awarded to a consortium of experts led by ECORYS and the contract was signed on March 2016 with duration of ten months (end of the contract: 21 January 2017)

The findings come from several major sources: the draft final report of the mid-term evaluation carried out by the contractor, the impact assessment of the LIFE Programme, two databases used by the Commission services for the technical and financial management of the applications and the LIFE projects and the online database of the LIFE projects. The indicator database was as well a major source.

A Steering Group of relevant Commission Services was established to oversee the evaluation and had contacts throughout the entire evaluation period. The Steering Group was composed of DG ENV, CLIMA, GROW, AGRI, RTD, ECFIN, BUDG, REGIO, ENER, ECHO, SG and EASME. The task of the Steering Group was to check the key elements of the service contract, to support and monitor the evidence gathering and stakeholder consultation process, to review the draft evaluation report as well as the Commission draft staff working document and to assist with the quality assessment of the contractor's evaluation report.

### Consultation of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board

The Regulatory Scrutiny Board has discussed the file at its meeting on the 15 February 2017 and issued a positive opinion on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017.<sup>101</sup> The Board highlighted aspects for improvement: addressing a number of key shortcomings, using the information from the evaluation study and incorporating the longer-term results of the LIFE+ programme.

The main considerations of the Board were in relation to design and methodology, effectiveness, efficiency, simplification, coherence and EU added value.

All the issues identified by the Board have been taken into account when finalising the Staff Working Document

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<sup>99</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017\\_env\\_001\\_evaluation\\_life\\_mt\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017_env_001_evaluation_life_mt_en.pdf)

<sup>100</sup> SPECIFIC CONTRACT No 07.020300/2016/SI2.727892/SER/E.4implementing Framework contract ENV.F.I/FRA/2014/0063

<sup>101</sup> Ref Ares(2017)892697

RSB comment	Action taken	Where in the SWD
<b>Better explain and justify the scope of the mid-term evaluation and why it does not address all the questions of the MFF</b>	The scope of the MTE has been made clearer and where possible LIFE + examples have been brought up to support evidence of the continuity between LIFE+ and LIFE. Given that more than half of the LIFE+ projects are underway, the long term effect of LIFE+ cannot be fully covered. However, where possible, the results of the LIFE+ project and the anticipated long term effect have been included in the Staff Working Document.	Introduction, state of play, effectiveness, sustainability, EU added value
<b>To provide evidence as to whether and how the LIFE Programme has achieved a strategic focus (e.g. in thematic priorities, programme structure, multiannual work programme).</b>	The effectiveness part has been expanded to adequately explain how the LIFE Programme strategic focus is ensured. An assessment on the effectiveness of the pre-allocation of funding has been also carried out.	Implementation state of play Paragraph 5.1
<b>To demonstrate the catalytic role of the LIFE Programme</b>	More information and concrete examples have been used to demonstrate the catalytic role of the LIFE Programme in mobilising additional funding (with IPs and traditional LIFE+ projects), integrating environmental and climate objectives into other policies (with nature traditional projects), and in spreading good practices in particular under effectiveness (replicability and continuation)	Paragraph 2.2.Problems that LIFE intends to solve; paragraph 2.3.Background of the LIFE Programme; effectiveness paragraph 6.1,
<b>To provide a full analysis of the Programme's actual implementation costs or its simplification potential (e.g. lump sums, VAT, selection procedure)</b>	The discussion of simplification potential has been strengthened and the analyses of the actual implementation costs have been reported.	Efficiency
<b>To explain the EU added value of the LIFE Programme and the synergies with other funding programmes</b>	The section on the EU added value has been expanded and new examples have been provided. LIFE + traditional projects have been also used to show the continuity with the past Programme. Examples of	EU added value, paragraph 6.5. and coherence, paragraph 6.3

synergies with other EU funding programmes have been included in the SWD.

## Annex 2: Requirements for the Mid Term Evaluation set out in the LIFE Regulation

Extract from the Regulation (Eu) No 1293/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the establishment of a Programme for the Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) and repealing Regulation (EC) No 614/2007

Recital 38:

With a view to simplifying the LIFE Programme and reducing the administrative burden for applicants and beneficiaries, more use should be made of flat rates and lump sums without compromising the eligibility of VAT and of permanent staff costs under the conditions laid down by Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012. As per current practice, the sum of the public organisations' (as coordinating beneficiary and/or associated beneficiary) contributions to the project should exceed by at least 2 % the sum of the salary costs of the personnel of national administrations charged to the project. Union funds should not be used to subsidize national budgets, for example, to cover VAT costs. However, only limited information is available on the amounts of Union funds used to cover VAT. The Commission should, therefore, provide an overview, in the mid-term and ex- post evaluations of the LIFE Programme, of VAT reimbursements per Member State that project beneficiaries under the LIFE Programme have requested at the final payment stage.

Relevant articles:

Art. 9

2. [...]The Commission shall review and, if necessary, revise the thematic priorities set out in Annex III at the latest by the mid-term evaluation of the LIFE Programme referred to in point (a) of Article 27(2).

Art. 17

5. A maximum of 30 % of the budgetary resources allocated to action grants in accordance with paragraph 4 may be allocated to integrated projects. That maximum percentage shall be re-evaluated in the framework of the mid-term evaluation of the LIFE Programme referred to in point (a) of Article 27(2) and accompanied, if appropriate, by a legislative proposal

Art 20

2 [...]The Commission shall provide an overview, in the mid-term and ex-post evaluations of the LIFE Programme, of VAT reimbursements per Member State that project beneficiaries under the LIFE Programme have requested at the final payment stage.

Art. 24,

4. The Commission shall, by means of an implementing act, review the multiannual work programme at the latest by the mid-term evaluation of the LIFE Programme. That implementing act shall be adopted in accordance with the examination procedure referred to in Article 30(2).

Art. 27

2. The Commission shall submit to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions the following reports:

(a) no later than 30 June 2017, an external and independent mid-term evaluation report of the LIFE Programme (and its sub-programmes), including qualitative and quantitative aspects of its implementation, the amount of climate-related expenditure and biodiversity-related expenditure, the extent to which synergies between the objectives have been reached, and its complementarity with other relevant Union programmes, the achievement of the objectives of all the measures (at the level of results and impacts, when possible), the efficiency of the use of resources and the Union added value of the Programme, with a view to taking a decision on the renewal, modification or suspension of the measures. That mid-term evaluation report shall also include a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the contribution of the LIFE Programme to the conservation status of habitats and species listed under Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC. The evaluation shall additionally address the scope for simplification, its internal and external coherence, the continued relevance of all objectives, as well as the contribution of the measures under the LIFE Programme to the Europe 2020 Strategy objectives and targets and to sustainable development. It shall take into account evaluation results on the long-term impact of LIFE+. The mid-term evaluation report shall be accompanied by remarks by the Commission including the manner in which the findings of the mid-term evaluation shall be taken into account when implementing the LIFE Programme, and, in particular, the extent to which the thematic priorities set out in Annex III need to be modified.

The mid-term evaluation report shall contain or be accompanied by a thorough assessment of the extent and quality of the demand for, planning and implementation of integrated projects. A special focus shall be given to the realised or expected success of integrated projects in leveraging other Union funds, taking into account, in particular, the benefits of increased coherence with other Union funding instruments, the extent to which stakeholders have been involved and the extent to which previous projects under LIFE+ have been or are expected to be covered by integrated projects.

## Annex 3: Methods

The external evaluation report covers in total 44 evaluation questions, however, the main questions addressed by the mid-term evaluation are those mentioned in the Roadmap. The evaluation questions are structured according to 6 evaluation criteria, namely: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Coherence, Relevance, EU added value, Sustainability. Their main questions are the following:

Effectiveness:

- Q.1. What is the outcome likely to be achieved under LIFE 2014-2020?
- Q.2. To what extent does the observed outcome correspond to the objectives?
- Q.3. What are the factors positively and negatively influencing the delivery of the objectives?
- Q.4. What is the distributional effectiveness?
- Q.5. What is the role of LIFE in bridging uneven integration of environmental and climate action objectives among Member States?

Efficiency:

- Q.6. To what extent are the costs (especially management) of the LIFE Programme justified, given the effects which have been achieved, and are likely to be achieved by the end of the LIFE Programme?
- Q.7. Have the changes made between LIFE+ and this LIFE Programme improved efficiency?
- Q.8. Is there scope for efficiency gains, simplification and burden reduction?

Coherence:

- Q.9. To what extent does the LIFE Programme have a coherent structure taking into account its two sub-programmes, its priority areas and the various types of interventions (internal coherence)?
- Q.10. To which extent is LIFE Programme complementary and enjoying synergies with other relevant Union funding programmes (i.e. the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Horizon 2020) (external coherence)?

Relevance:

- Q.11. To what extent the Programme objectives are pertinent to needs, problems and issues addressed?
- Q.12. To what extent do stakeholders support the LIFE interventions?

EU Added Value:

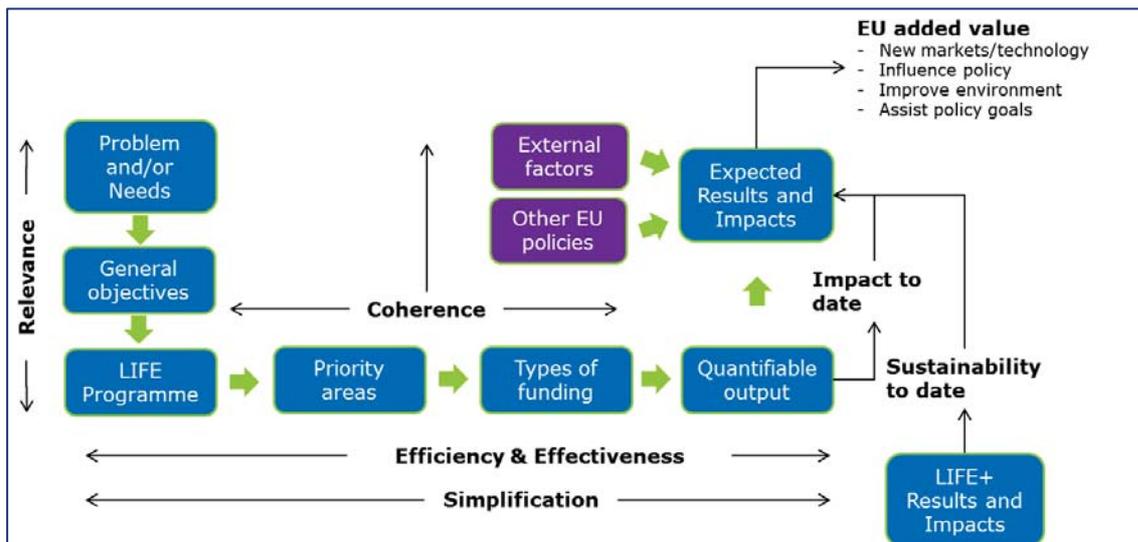
- Q.13. What is the additional value resulting from the EU intervention(s), compared to what could be achieved by Member States at national and/or regional levels?
- Q.14. To what extent do the issues addressed by the intervention continue to require action at EU level?

Q.15. What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the existing EU intervention?

Sustainability:

Q.16. To what extent are the positive effects of projects likely to last after the end of the interventions, especially of the demonstration effect and scope for replication of the projects?

The evaluation criteria and evaluation questions assess each a specific aspect of the Intervention Logic of the LIFE Programme (although some overlap occurs). The figure below provides an overview of what aspect of the LIFE Programme and/ or Regulation is analysed per evaluation criteria and guides the evaluation process.



The evaluation used a balanced mix of qualitative and quantitative methods (e.g. desk research, qualitative interviews and quantitative survey findings) are presented.

## Qualitative methodologies

### Desk research

The desk research carried out in this evaluation relies on a multitude of sources of information. To those belong, among others, the following documents:

- Programme documents – Regulations, MAWP, Programme Statement;
- Strategy documents - Europe 2020 strategy and 7th Union Environmental Action Programme;
- Previous LIFE evaluations;
- LIFE Communication strategy;
- Data on LIFE+ and LIFE projects, including financial data (particularly needed for the effectiveness and efficiency analysis);
- Project applications – characteristics of applicants, concept notes, and full applications;
- Commission’s methodology on tracking expenditure;
- Management costs and benchmarks;
- Relevant socio-economic analyses and studies on Financial instruments;
- Information on communication and decision-making procedures;

- eProposal tool – reports on the system;
- Delegation agreement with the EIB for the financial instruments;
- Memorandum of Understanding between EASME, DG CLIMA and DG ENV regarding the grants implemented by EASME.

### **In-depth interviews**

Interviews were held with LIFE and LIFE+ beneficiaries, IP project coordinators, Commission Services and EASME officials, NEEMO stakeholders, Financial Instruments stakeholders, and other stakeholders.

For all stakeholder groups specific interview guidelines were developed with questions to guide the semi-structured interviews. These questions are generally related to the following issues:

- the thematic area of the project;
- financial aspects, and problems during the application process if any;
- sustainability to date;
- impact to date (other than quantitatively derived from the indicator analysis); and
- opinion regarding simplification of any aspects of the project life cycle.

After all interview exchanges had been transcribed into a common template, the software-tool ATLAS.ti to analyse the transcriptions was used. Content analysis is a method utilized to interpret meaning from the content of textual data, in order to identify themes and topics and assess the extent to which they are emphasised or not in the responses. In this case, it implied using pre-defined codes or labels that are linked to the evaluation questions prior to analysing how strongly those elements appear in the interview responses. Whenever necessary for newly encountered themes, or sub-themes, new codes were created. The interview results are aggregated and documented in a structured manner to facilitate the ‘triangulation’ and thematic analysis activities.

More than 120 interviews were conducted with LIFE and LIFE+ beneficiaries for each priority area. The beneficiaries have been randomly selected using as first criteria an equal split per sub-programme (similar to LIFE budget distribution, e.g. a higher number of NAT beneficiaries), secondly by an even split across all 28 MS and thirdly per MS a distribution across the priority areas.<sup>102</sup>

### **Stakeholder questionnaires**

In addition to the open public consultation, six questionnaires targeting the following stakeholder groups were implemented:

1. LIFE and LIFE+ beneficiaries;
2. National and Regional Contact Points;
3. NEEMO monitoring experts;
4. Unsuccessful applicants to traditional projects;
5. NGOs benefitting from Operating grants;
6. LIFE Capacity building project beneficiaries.

The development of the questionnaires consisted of the following steps. Firstly key questions mainly related to general aspects of the programme were developed and i.e. how stakeholders are

involved/informed. Secondly, sub-questions that varied between the questionnaires were elaborated to provide additional in-depth insight on specific issues

Regarding the analyses, standard statistical tools were used to produce descriptive statistics. Furthermore, for the beneficiaries, NCPs, NEEMO and unsuccessful applicants a separate report was prepared (similar to the public consultation); these are included in the Annex D of the external report. The results from the various questionnaires have been integrated in the cross-analysis using also the results from other actions, e.g. interviews, in order to come to conclusions on each evaluation question.

### ***LIFE Indicator Database***

The LIFE Indicator Database was provided by the external monitoring team NEEMO, who is responsible for the monitoring and control of LIFE projects and the maintenance of LIFE Indicator Database website (life.idom.com). To obtain the available data, a relational database management system (SQL) server was developed and the data were extracted by SQL queries. Additionally, in order to facilitate the wider use of the tables for analytical purposes a large excel table was prepared.

### ***Financial Instruments***

The MAWP 2014-2017 provides the basis for two financial instruments: the Natural Capital Financing Facility (NCFE) and the Private Finance for Energy Efficiency (PF4EE). Both are implemented by the European Investment Bank (EIB) on the basis of delegation agreements between the Commission and the EIB. For PF4EE three operations have so far been signed. Regarding NCFE no contracts have been signed yet although two are in the final negotiations. This implies that for this interim evaluation it is too early to present any findings on achieved results and impacts at project level for the financial intermediaries and clients or final recipients.

For this interim evaluation an approach consisting of several elements has been used:

- Using the key evaluation criteria from Evalsed and OECD DAC as leading and grouping the evaluation questions from the European Commission (EC) (from the Terms of Reference) as much as possible under the main evaluation criteria;
- *Desk research and analysis:* documentation of EIB regarding the applications for NCFE and PF4EE was consulted. This included (where possible) delegation agreements, applications of intermediaries, eligibility letters, appraisal reports and due diligence reports provided by EIB.. Furthermore, literature on similar financial instruments and experiences of other institutions (such as the EBRD) was reviewed;
- A theory of change based upon economic analysis and causalities was designed in order to identify the key outputs, results, and intermediate and ultimate impacts. For NCFE insights to the interviews based upon economic analysis were added, as well as project finance experience and specific literature regarding the assessment of relevancy of the instrument;
- *Interviews.* The valuers have conducted two interviews with EIB staff – one for each instrument – interviewed the technical assistance provider for PF4EE (Adelphi company) and spoke with two intermediary financial institutions for PF4EE. These were Komerční Banka (from the Czech Republic) and Crédit Coopératif (from France). There were no agreements yet signed with intermediaries of NCFE and no beneficiaries have yet been financed and started as a result of the Irish Equity Fund.

#### Annex 4: Synopsis report on the Stakeholder consultation

The stakeholder consultation activities have been undertaken between the mid-June and October 2016. Depending on the stakeholder groups different types of consultation activities were identified, as envisaged in the consultation strategy:

- Open Public consultation
- Interviews with relevant LIFE Programme stakeholders
- Surveys addressed to specific stakeholder groups
- Participation at specific events where stakeholders were approached during the following events:
  - The annual NCP training organised by EASME on the 2 and 3 June 2016 in Brussels
  - The Life Info Day on the 17 June in Brussels
  - The Life Committee meeting held on the 5 July
  - Platform meetings on specific topics.

**Table 1: Number of interviews and answers to the surveys**

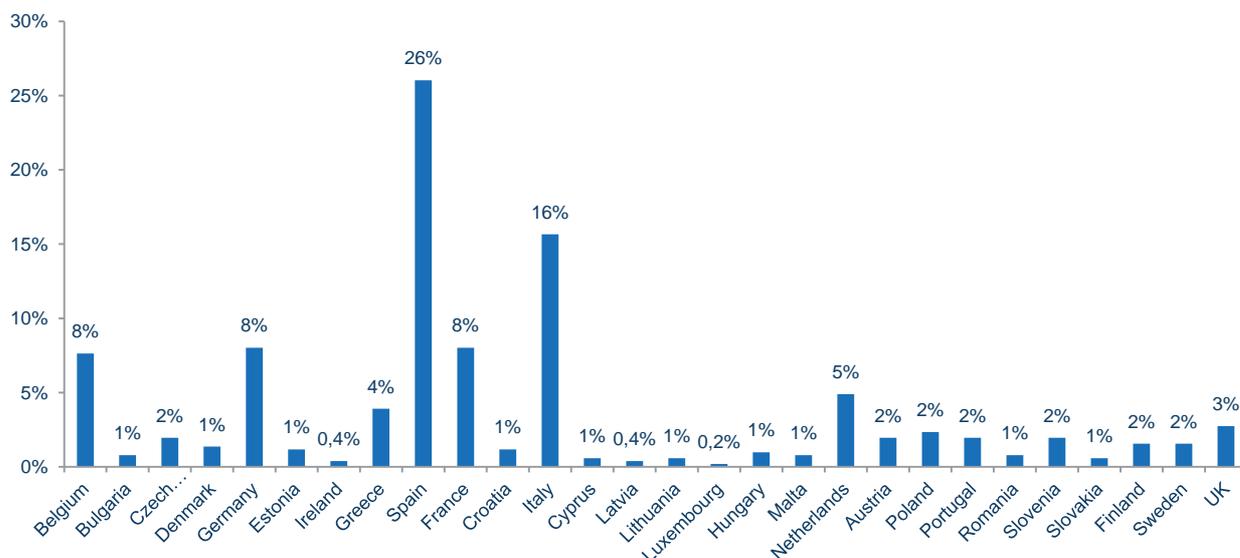
Answers to the surveys	Number of answers		Number of answers
Public consultation	256	Monitoring experts	59
Project beneficiaries	208	Unsuccessful applicants	10
National Contact Points	41	Project site visits	8
<b>Interviews</b>			
Implementing bodies (Commission, Executive Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises, European Investment Bank, monitoring team)	36	Project beneficiaries	121

#### Open Public Consultation

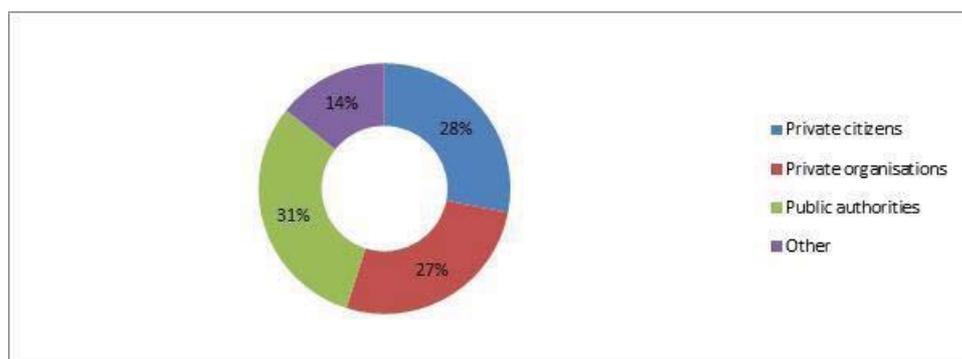
In line with the Better Regulation Guidelines, an open public consultation was launched on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2016 to collect through an online survey, the views of citizens and associations of citizens, as well as of all other interested stakeholders. The public consultation has been published for 12 weeks on the Your Voice in Europe website. In total 256 replies were submitted.

Moreover, the public consultation elicited contributions from various stakeholders. In total 35 documents were received, including two from public authorities (the Coordination Committee for International Environmental Policy – CCIEP; and the Autonomous Region of Azores), three from citizens, six from organisations registered in the Transparency register of the European Commission (EDF, VERBUND Hydro Power GmbH, SUEZ Groupe SAS, WWF-UK, the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, Birdlife International), and six from non-registered ones (the Chartered Institution of Wastes Management, the Association de la Ville et des Communes de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale asbl, Eco Innovation AB, Platform for climate adaptation & disaster risk reduction, The Nature Laboratory, and the European Water Platform – WssTP). The responses and contributions of those who agreed to publish will be made available to the public.

Regarding the distribution of the respondents by place of residence, the most represented countries were Spain and Italy, followed by Belgium, France, and Germany, whereas only a few came from Luxembourg, Latvia and Ireland.



The participation of different stakeholder categories was overall balanced with about one third of the responses coming from private organisations, citizens, and public authorities, and the rest from other entities, including National and Regional Contact Points, European Commission staff, and NGOs.



Likewise, the distribution of responses per thematic area was overall balanced, with a slight predominance of nature and biodiversity, climate change, natural resources management and water, and few respondents coming from the area of noise, industry, health and chemicals.

#### Other consultation activities:

In addition to the public consultation, six complementary surveys were carried out in parallel, targeting specifically the following stakeholder groups:

- LIFE and LIFE+ project beneficiaries;
- National and Regional Contact Points (the survey was distributed during a specific workshop for NCP's and some of the main results were presented during a workshop for the LIFE Committee);
  - External monitoring experts (NEEMO);
  - Unsuccessful applicants to traditional projects;
  - NGOs benefitting from Operating grants;
  - LIFE Capacity-building project beneficiaries.

The surveys consisted of a series of specific questions addressing the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, EU added value, sustainability. The respondents were asked to indicate, for most of the questions on a predefined scale, to which extent they agreed to a specific statement. The surveys also included a number of open questions to allow the respondents to further express their opinion on the LIFE Programme.

### **Feedback on the Roadmap:**

An individual feedback was received on the Roadmap ([http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017\\_env\\_001\\_evaluation\\_life\\_mt\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017_env_001_evaluation_life_mt_en.pdf)). The comment was treated as not strictly related to the mid-term evaluation roadmap as the comment was addressed to the next LIFE multi annual work programme (2018-2020). The feedback will be assessed in the context of the preparation of the LIFE multi annual work programme instead, as the subject of the request was to give more relevance to the status of the invertebrate species of the Habitat Directive, under the sub programme for Environment.

### **Summary of all the consultation activities undertaken between mid-June and October presented for each key evaluation criteria:**

#### **Effectiveness**

The results of the interviews with the project beneficiaries confirm a positive perception of the quality of the LIFE projects, which are seen as a concrete answer to local needs and further identify a "quality mark" for the projects awarded with a LIFE grant, which makes it easier for them to mobilise additional resources afterwards. According to the beneficiaries interviewed, LIFE is known for delivering results and having a substantial impact on the ground.

#### **Efficiency**

While overall the costs for the management of the LIFE Programme were deemed to be relatively low by the majority of stakeholders (also compared to other EU funding programmes), other stakeholders argued that the set-up with external monitoring contractors acting as a kind of "third" layer of management increases overall costs and that the internalisation of these tasks and costs into the workings of EASME might be more efficient. The analysis of the consultation activities has overall highlighted that there is room for realising efficiency gains if the external contractor for monitoring and communication and EASME streamline their cooperation.

The decision to phase out national allocations over a 4-year period, as seen in the 2014-2017 MAWP, was much welcomed by NCPs. However, the distribution of LIFE projects across thematic priorities and across Member States and regions is not balanced, as shown by clustering of countries that specialise in either Nature or Environment projects, and by a significant number of Nature funds that are directed to regions of low conservation priority (e.g. in Northern or Central Europe), while Southern and Eastern States may have been underfunded.

LIFE is a funding programme that is close to the market and that demonstrates technical and commercial solutions. Private sector participation to LIFE calls for proposals and (co-)funding mobilised by the private sector can still be improved according to various stakeholder target groups.

The roles of all main stakeholder groups in the implementation of the LIFE Programme are overall clear and sufficiently distinct from each other (only the role of EASME, although being perceived as overall effective, needs to be further communicated). Some stakeholders pointed out that there is some overlap in the distribution of tasks among EASME or the Commission on the one hand, and the external contractor for monitoring and communication, on the other. As resulted from the survey, the beneficiaries are particularly satisfied (over 90%.) with the extensive support received from the external contractor for monitoring and communication during all project stages. NCPs are considered overall as useful in particular during the application phase with critical remarks made only by individual project beneficiaries, however large differences in capacity and performance exist across Member States. The EIB appeared rather unknown to

the consulted stakeholders. The majority of beneficiaries is also not aware of the existence and role of the external communication consultants.

With regards to the LIFE Communication activities, despite the fact that improvements are needed, project beneficiaries rate it as “good” or “very good”. Particular high appreciation is given to the LIFE website (75%) and the LIFE best project publications and awards (72%).

## Coherence

The majority of the stakeholders found that LIFE is both internally and externally coherent. Indeed for some parts of the LIFE Programme, such as Nature and Biodiversity, LIFE is the only source of funding at Union level and thus is highly coherent with the remaining EU programmes as it fills a niche.

Found project overlaps in topics are perceived positive by more than 51% of the beneficiaries who took part to the survey, indicating that they are not undesired, but rather lead to complementarities and synergies. Especially where a project builds on the results and experiences of previous projects, or a second project replicates the results of a previous project in a new location with the challenges it faces, an overlap in topic is occasionally found.

Concerning external coherence with other EU programmes, according to stakeholders, overlaps between LIFE and H2020 and the ERDF are found not to lead to deadweight, but to synergies. The programmes have distinct goals and activities, yet these are interrelated and mutually consistent suggesting they are highly coherent. Increased emphasis on the business perspective of LIFE projects is in line for the EU 2020 Strategy and it has allowed an increased involvement of the private sector, which looks at LIFE as a continuation of the support received under the CIP-Eco-innovation.

The majority of stakeholders (more than 51%) agree that LIFE functions as a catalyst, providing a source of funding projects that can later be funded by other, larger EU, national or regional funds. However, the analysis of the consultation activities also highlight that the potential catalytic role is not fully exploited at present and should be further enhanced, bridging the gap to larger EU funds, i.e. ERDF (including INTERREG).

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is specifically mentioned as being complementary, and as a source for follow-up funding after the LIFE Programme. This means that the LIFE Programme is very coherent with the ERDF and its sub-programmes (including INTERREG). This is in contrast to the national level, where across the EU there are few national programmes focused on LIFE themes.

## Relevance

The results of the open public consultation shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents (between 94% and 99%) agreed that the LIFE Programme is relevant and it addresses needs, problems and issues in the area of environment and climate action at regional, national and EU level, especially for countries where (national) budgets are insufficient to address these issues. This is especially found to be the case in the areas of biodiversity, habitat protection, sustainable resource use and preventing/ adapting to climate change.

Where at programme level LIFE is seen by most stakeholders as “a very important instrument to adapt to and focus on environmental and climate priorities” and considered fully relevant for EU 2020 Strategy and the 7th EAP, at project level relevance is not always undisputed. A limited budget and broad policy goals means that not all policy objectives can be addressed in an equal manner (pointing to a need for prioritisation), and replication and dissemination is often insufficient. Furthermore, some individual stakeholders also noted that improvement is needed in terms of the project topics implementing the thematic priorities which, according to an observer where often “badly written/designed, responding more to a short term policy priority need that LIFE is not designed to deliver”.

As noted before, in many of these areas, LIFE is largely perceived by stakeholders to be the most relevant source of funding for their activities (85% of the unsuccessful applicants stated that it is *difficult to find alternative funding programmes addressing problems of conservation and biodiversity*). LIFE is overall

considered to be an important instrument in supporting the second pillar of the EU 2020 Strategy on sustainable growth, and its projects result in jobs and in the development of new work skills. This is supported by stakeholders' acknowledgement of the increased emphasis put on the business perspective of projects.

Finally, different stakeholder groups, in particular the project beneficiaries and the LIFE National Contact Points, rate the importance of the objectives that LIFE pursues as very high, and deem that the programme's objectives and types of interventions are very well suited to the needs in the different priority areas.

## **EU added value**

In the open public consultation the stakeholders largely acknowledged (95%) the catalytic role that LIFE is playing for better solidarity and responsibility-sharing in preserving the common good of the Union's environment and climate, leading to a less costly implementation of environmental and climate change policies, in particular for the implementation of Natura 2000 and of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. Notably, the added value of the Programme lies in the EU co-funding that enables project beneficiaries to deliver results that in most cases would either not be realised at national, regional and/or at local level, or would be pursued at slower pace and on a lesser scale, especially in MS that have fewer financial mechanisms in place or when these mechanisms are difficult to access.

In addition, the overwhelming majority of the respondents to the public consultation confirm that the programme has an important EU added value because it:

- responds to European and global environment and climate challenges, which are unlikely to be addressed by a Member State alone (98% of the respondents);
- supports the coherent development, implementation and enforcement of Union environment and climate policy and legislation, (98% of the respondents);
- tackles environmental and climate problems more efficiently (98% of the respondents);
- preserves EU environmental resources which, even if unevenly distributed across the EU, benefit the EU as a whole (94% of the respondents);
- contributes to leveraging the funds for environmental protection and climate action (97% of the respondents),
- contributes to EU-wide sharing of 'best practices', knowledge transfer, demonstration, and awareness raising (99% of the respondents).

Many beneficiaries noted during the interviews that the enforcement of Union policy and legislation is one of the core tasks of the LIFE Programme, which is fulfilled effectively.

The consultation also highlighted that the main consequences of stopping or withdrawing the existing LIFE interventions would be mostly negative, reducing MS' capacity – and in some cases commitment – to pursue the Union's objectives in the area of environmental protection and climate change, but also negatively affecting employment and economic growth.

Furthermore according to the majority of the external monitoring experts and of the National and Regional Contact Points consulted (respectively 97% and 79%) very little of what LIFE projects have achieved would have been launched or realized without the programme's support, in particular for nature protection and biodiversity conservation.

Stakeholders also believe that the main consequences of stopping or withdrawing the existing LIFE interventions would be mostly negative, including the reduction of Member States' and NGOs' capacity to pursue the Union's objectives in the area of environmental protection and climate action or the failure of the Commission to meet the commitments taken on the basis of EU environment or climate legislation or at international level.

## **Sustainability**

Responses collected during the survey reveal that the demonstration and transferability potential of the results of LIFE projects are for the majority (78%) either good or very good.

However, according to the beneficiaries, the main barriers for the replicability of project results, are linked to the lack of financial means, to the lack of interest and sense of urgency from decision makers, to lack of specific information and communication on transferable solutions and applications or business models, as well as to the lack of capacity/human resources at project level.

The replication potential of LIFE project results by the private sector is perceived as significant, but could be further enhanced. According to interviews with beneficiaries the private sector uptake could be improved through raising of awareness about results and by providing specific financial support.

The recently introduced After-LIFE plans are considered by stakeholders as a positive step in improving sustainability of the LIFE programme.

As for the related funds, during the external study, the interviews of about 70 project beneficiaries revealed that 40% of them report that they will/already have attract(ed) funding to further develop project results after the end of EU funding.

Respondents to the public consultation were also asked whether projects under LIFE have led to long-term positive effects. Over 80% of respondents feel that projects had medium or great positive long-term effects.

According to LIFE project beneficiaries, especially LIFE Environment projects contribute significantly to job creation and (sustainable) growth, as the thematic areas industry, resource efficiency and waste management appear to have higher chances for commercialisation of project results (products or methods). Nature projects lead to a limited increase in direct employment after ending of LIFE funding and mainly contribute to indirect job creation through preservation or restauration of recreation areas. Half of the LIFE Climate Action projects are expected to contribute to job creation. The impact of information and awareness raising on job creation was found difficult to quantify, as job creation will to a large extent be indirect and linked to creation of networks.

## Annex 5: Table of assessment of indicators against targets

### A. LIFE 2017 MILESTONES

#### NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY INDICATORS

**Table 1 Data on the indicators of LIFE Programme (2014, 2015 call for proposals) and LIFE+ Programme (based on a sample of projects)**

Comparison item	LIFE (2014, 2015 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects set up to improve the conservation status within the meaning of Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds	98%	98%	100 %
Percentage of habitats targeted by ongoing or finalised projects that are progressing towards an improved conservation status	46%	63%	10 % of the habitats targeted
Percentage of species targeted by ongoing or finalised projects that are progressing towards an improved conservation status	66%	30%	10 % of the species targeted
Percentage of Natura 2000 sites targeted by ongoing or finalised projects that are progressing towards an improved conservation status	26%	21%	10 % of the Natura 2000 sites/ha of Natura 2000 sites targeted
Contribution of other projects to Nature and Biodiversity indicators	Climate Change Actions (53%) Water (24%)	Information and awareness (22%); Governance (21%) Water (17%)	-

#### AIR QUALITY MILESTONES

**Table 10 Data on the indicators of LIFE Programme (2014, 2015 call for proposals) and LIFE+ Programme (based on a sample of projects)**

Comparison item	LIFE (2014, 2015 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards reaching or surpassing the relevant Union air quality target on project level	77%	63%	80%
- in Air Quality zones where pollutant levels are above targets established by law: projects foresee to reach/surpass these targets on project levels;	38% (66% if only air projects are accounted)	43% (58% if only air projects are accounted)	
- where Air Quality policies are being developed and implemented: projects foresee to develop new measures, methods or techniques that can serve as models for Union policy development.	77%	63%	
Persons covered by ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions progressing towards reaching or surpassing the relevant Union air quality target.	99%	99%	-
Contribution of projects in other areas to Air indicators	Climate actions (34%); Environment and health (17%); Waste (13%)	Climate actions (30%); Environment and health (14%); Waste (14%); Governance (15%)	-

Source: Indicator database and own calculations

## CHEMICALS AND NOISE INDICATORS MILESTONES

**Table 2 Data on the indicators of LIFE Programme (2014, 2015 call for proposals) and LIFE+ Programme (based on a sample of projects)**

Comparison item	LIFE (2014, 2015 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards reaching or surpassing the relevant Union chemical substance target on project level	76%	86%	80%

Comparison item	LIFE (2014, 2015 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
Percentage of persons covered by ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions set up to reduce adverse effects of chemicals on health and environment, including estimates over the long term effects - after 3 or 5 years	78%	99%	-
Contribution of projects in the other sectors to the reduction/substitution of chemicals	Water (40%); Climate Change Actions (20%) and Resource efficiency (20%)	Waste (36%) and Water (21%), Resource efficiency (13%)	-
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards reaching or surpassing the relevant Union noise reduction target on project level	67%	71%	80%
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions targeting noise reduction progressing towards reducing noise exposure by at least 3 dB	33%	43%	-
Number of the persons benefitting from ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions set up to reduce noise levels by at least 3 dB	4.000		10.000

Source: Indicator database and own calculations.

## RESOURCE EFFICIENCY INDICATORS MILESTONES

**Table 3 Data on the indicators of LIFE Programme (2014, 2015 call for proposals) and LIFE+ Programme (based on a sample of projects)**

Comparison item	LIFE (2014, 2015 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards implementing aspects of green circular economy	76%	75%	80%
Percentage of additional companies covered by ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions set up to implement green circular economy	77%	77%	-

Comparison item	LIFE (2014, 2015 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards maintaining or improving soil functions	91%	71%	80%
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards implementation of the European Forest Strategy	67%	65%	80%
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions set up to provide data for the European Forest Data Centre (EFDAC)	70%	100%	80%
Contribution of other projects to resource efficiency (not including soil and forest)	Climate Change Actions (29%); Waste (24%), Water (22%)	Climate Change Actions (30%); Waste (36%), Water (12%)	-
Contribution of other projects to resource efficiency – Soil	Climate Change and Biodiversity (22%);	Nature and Biodiversity (26%); Climate Change Actions (21%); Governance (19%)	-
Contribution of other projects to resource efficiency – Forest	Nature and Biodiversity (43%); Climate Change Actions (35%)	Nature and Biodiversity (66%); Climate Change Actions (12%)	-

## WASTE INDICATORS MILESTONES

**Table 4 Data on the indicators of LIFE Programme (2014, 2015 call for proposals) and LIFE+ Programme (based on a sample of projects)**

Comparison item	LIFE (2014, 2015 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards adequate waste management	76%	65%	80%
Percentage of municipalities or regions covered by ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions set up to reach adequate	89%	78%	-

Comparison item	LIFE (2014, 2015 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
management of waste			
Contribution of other projects to waste indicators	Nature and Biodiversity (23%); Resource efficiency (23%); Water (17%)	Climate actions (18%) Nature and Biodiversity (16%); Resource efficiency (16%); Water (16%)	

## WATER INDICATORS MILESTONES

**Table 5 Data on indicators of LIFE (2014) and LIFE+ Programme (based on sample of projects)**

Comparison item	LIFE (2014 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
Percentage of ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions and progressing towards good ecological status at project level	63%	61%	80 %
Number and percentage of water bodies (inland/transitional/coastal) covered by ongoing or finalised projects implementing replicable or transferable actions set up to improve their ecological status	49 (70 total) 70%	245 (627 total) 41%	100 <sup>103</sup>
Contribution to water indicators or to improvement of water bodies by projects, funded in other sectors (non-water)	Nature and biodiversity (48%), Climate actions (28%), Waste (10%)	Nature and biodiversity (62%), Waste (9%)	-

Table 25 - Percentage of increase of stakeholders and citizens targeted by awareness-raising projects implementing replicable or transferable actions becoming aware of the environmental policy objectives pursued by these projects as measured in ex-ante and ex-post surveys (carried out by LIFE projects or other entities) (2014 call for proposals) and LIFE+ programme (based on a sample of projects)

LIFE (2014 projects)	LIFE+ (sample of 2007-2013 projects)	2017 Milestone
<b>567%</b>	<b>510%</b>	<b>25%</b>

Source: Indicator database and own calculations.

<sup>103</sup> It is expected that between 2015 and 2017, 6,900 waterbodies throughout the Union improve their ecological status, 1,4% of them (100) due to a LIFE contribution

## Annex 6: Total amount non-deductible VAT reimbursed per Member State

The following amounts of VAT reimbursements per Member State, requested by beneficiaries at the final stage can be reported: **EUR 181.135,72**

It should be noted that very few (19) final reports have been processed until the date of this report in relation to the LIFE programme 2014-2020.

### Breakdown per Member States

AT	€4.403,37
BE	€88.731,21
CZ	€5.056,09
DE	€15.563,80
IT	€22.983,51
NL	€24.315,67
SE	€7.007,70
UK	€13.074,37

## Annex 7: LIFE's Programme contribution to Sustainable Development Goals

LIFE is at the heart of the SDGs, taking into account their strong environmental and climate dimensions.

The LIFE programme supports **SDG 2** "*End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture*" because it encourages an environmentally friendly agriculture, in view of the protection, preservation and improvement in the quality of water, air and soil and the protection of bio-diversity.

To improve resource efficiency in food production and reduce impact on water resources, LIFE is also promoting sustainable nutrients management in agriculture.

Moreover, the National Emission Ceilings Directive for air pollutants, the Member States' targets to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions as well as the proposal to integrate the land use sector into the EU 2030 Climate and Energy Framework are aimed at incentivising Member States to take additional sustainable action in their agriculture sectors.

On **SDG 3** "*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*", with environmental stressors having significant impacts on health, LIFE complements Member States' action through legislation and other initiatives on environment related health problems, which are linked to air quality, industrial emissions, chemicals, waste and water.

Examples include the 7th Environment Action Programme, the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, or the rules on the sustainable use of pesticides which underline the link with health policy aspects.

The EU Chemicals Policy also covers regulation on persistent organic pollutants; trade in hazardous chemicals; fluorinated gases; and hazardous waste. The so-called "REACH" framework aims to improve the protection of human health and the environment from the risks that can be posed by chemicals, while enhancing the competitiveness of the EU chemicals industry.

In view of **SDG 6** "*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*", the EU water policy is a cornerstone of the LIFE Programme and provides for a framework to address water protection and achieve good ecological status for inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater. It comprises regulation including on drinking water, bathing water and urban waste water, prevention of pollution caused by nitrates, industrial emissions, pesticides and persistent organic pollutants.

The transition to a circular economy should also lead to greater resource efficiency for example by improving the conditions for water re-use in several sectors.

Through the circular economy package, LIFE addresses economic and environmental concerns by maximizing efficiency in the use of resources, and thus contributes to **SDG 8** "*Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*".

Moreover, the 7th Environment Action Programme confirms that EU prosperity and healthy environment stem from an innovative, circular economy where nothing is wasted and where natural resources are managed in a sustainable way, and biodiversity is protected, valued and restored.

LIFE also contributes to **SDG 9** "*Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation*":

The 2030 Climate and Energy Policy Framework strives for a competitive low-carbon and climate-resilient economy and the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change identifies resilient infrastructure as a priority action area under the strategic objective of mainstreaming adaptation measures.

The circular economy fosters eco-innovation and sustainability objectives.

As regards as **SDG 11** "*Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*", the 7th Environment Action Programme has as a horizontal priority objective to make the Union's cities more sustainable.

Other environmental and climate policies and legislation are vital for sustainable urban development such as Noise Legislation, the EU's Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Strategies, Drinking Water and Urban Wastewater Treatment, the framework on energy performance of building, the strengthen of the resilience of urban settings through climate related risks.

Urban energy consumption generates about three quarters of global carbon emissions. Therefore, cities play a crucial role in terms of energy and climate policy (the Clean Air Package, Air Quality, etc.). The EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy is a bottom-up local and regional action for tackling in an integrated manner climate change mitigation and adaptation, and access to secure, sustainable and affordable energy.

Moreover, the circular economy package contributes to this SDG under many aspects, such as by addressing sustainable waste sorting and recycling and by shifting energy consumption onto more sustainable pathways.

In view of reaching **SDG 12** "*Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns*", resource efficiency and circular economy actions aim to decouple economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation. By covering the whole cycle from production and consumption to waste management, they are at the core of the LIFE actions under the priority areas Environment and Resource Efficiency.

Moreover, the 7th Environment Action programme has as a key objective to turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy. Another related key objective is to safeguard EU citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing.

Concerning **SDG 13** "*Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*", climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation are two priority areas of the LIFE programme. The 2015 Paris Agreement is a historically significant landmark in the global fight against climate change; a success for the world and a confirmation of the EU's path to a low-carbon and climate resilient economy. With the support of LIFE, ambitious 2020 and 2030 targets<sup>104</sup> have been set up to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve energy efficiency and increase the share of renewable energy. Renewable energies and energy efficiency play an increasingly important role in tackling climate change.

The EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) is a key tool for cutting greenhouse gas emissions from large-scale facilities in the power and industry sectors, as well as the aviation sector.

The EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change provides a framework and mechanisms to improve the preparedness of the EU for current and future impacts of climate change, thus contributing to a more climate-resilient society.

On **SDG 14** "*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*", the 7th Environment Action Programme sets the objective to protect the Union's natural capital to, inter alia, reduce the impact of pressures on marine waters, in order to achieve or maintain good environmental status.

The Birds and Habitats legislation complement the Marine Strategy Framework by protecting 5% of the EU sea area through a network of Marine Protected Areas part of 'Natura 2000'.

Moreover, to tackle marine litter and pollution, LIFE supports a wide set of instruments, including regulation on waste management and prevention, port reception facilities for ship generated waste and cargo residues.

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<sup>104</sup> For the period up to 2020, the Europe 2020 Strategy aims at cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, at meeting 20% of the EU's energy demand with renewables, and at increasing energy efficiency by 20% by 2020. The 2030 Climate and Energy Policy Framework aims to achieve a greenhouse gas emissions reduction of 40%, a renewables' share of at least 27% in the EU's energy mix, and an increase of energy efficiency by at least 27% (with a view to 30%) for 2030.

As regards as **SDG 15** "*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss*", the environmental *acquis* provides a high level of protection in areas such as water quality and nature conservation, though the development and implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives and of the Natura 2000 network.

The EU Forest Strategy has as one of its key principles global forest responsibility, promoting sustainable production and consumption of forest products.

The circular economy offers an opportunity for modernising the economy, making it more green and competitive. It also contributes to lower carbon dioxide emission levels and energy savings as well as decreased air, soil and water pollution. It focuses on resource efficiency and minimising waste and has a strong potential in terms of new jobs and growth and for stimulating sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Finally, by supporting the compliance and enforcement of environmental and climate legislation and the access to justice on environmental matters in Member States, LIFE is contributing to **SDG 17** "*Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*".