



Creating the
European Nature
Academy for applied
Blended LEarning

C5 | SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT



The project and all actions are made possible with support from the LIFE financial instrument of the European Community



Creating the
European Nature
Academy for applied
Blended LEarning

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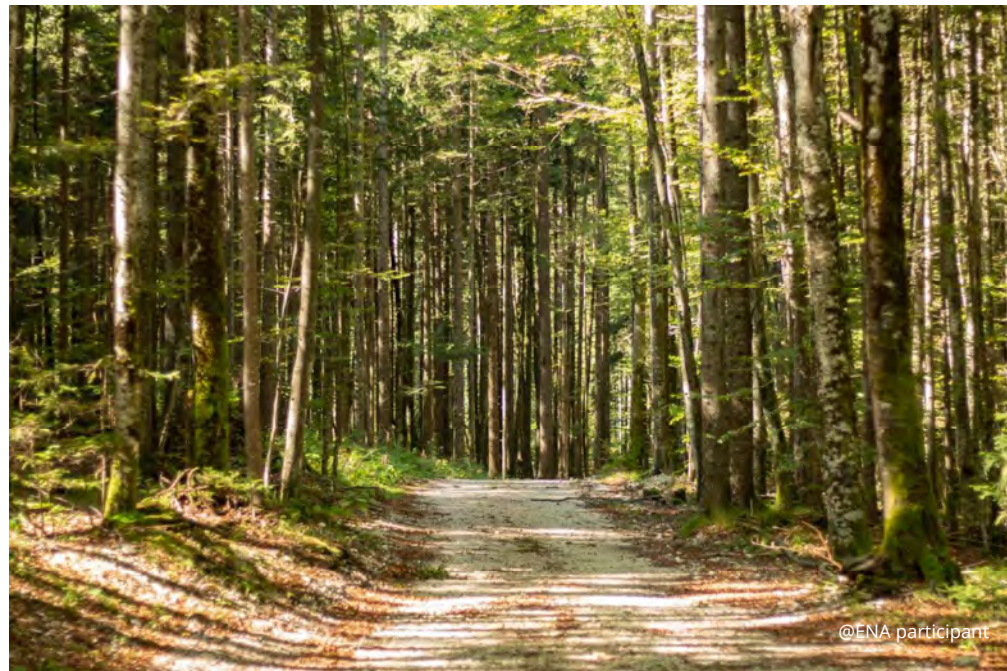
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"It is a great experience! A powerful journey and networking all over Europe."



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This socio-economic impact assessment evaluates the socio-economic impacts of the LIFE ENABLE project, which aims to enhance the competencies of nature managers by establishing the European Nature Academy (ENA) and delivering nine courses through the platform.

The project's main objective is to empower Natura 2000 and Protected Area managers, helping them become more effective, skilled, and confident in their roles by fostering peer-to-peer knowledge co-creation, networking, inclusiveness, and flexibility in training.

The courses received high praise from all participants, successfully addressing their needs and expectations. ENA courses were qualified as informative, enjoyable, well-organised, engaging, and valuable, indicating overall satisfaction with their learning experience.

Most of participants recommended the courses to their colleagues, further indicating widespread recognition of the programme's benefits.



@ENA participant

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@orecmedia

The courses offered by the ENA within the LIFE ENABLE project provide substantial social advantages:

- Networking
- Enhanced professional knowledge
- Increased motivation and engagement
- Sense of EU community
- Open Mindset
- Enhanced core competencies
- Enhanced competencies in training
- Enhanced digital skills.

Through the willingness to pay methodology, the perceived value of courses from participants is:

- € 250.00 for a blended course
- € 75.00 for a mini-course.

To capitalise on LIFE ENABLE results, several options for future developments of the ENA platform were investigated. These include potential expansions, new features, and improved user experiences, all aimed at enhancing the platform's value and reach. Possible options to ensure ENA activities are:

- A fee-based system targeting individuals
- A system where institutions pay for the delivery of courses
- A system that hosts external training opportunities
- A long-term contract-based arrangement.

Funding sources were identified to cover the costs of new ENA courses. They are:

- EU projects
- Public funding
- Private sponsorships
- Crowdfunding and donations.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

LIFE ENABLE (Creating the European Nature Academy for applied Blended LEarning) is a three-year preparatory project that focuses on developing **practical skills for nature management** among **Natura 2000** and Protected Area managers.

Its goal is to provide individuals and organisations with the **competencies** necessary to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities in nature management over the next decade.

The project built a **supportive framework** for developing a **training system for professional growth**, contributing to advancing the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and its related policies.



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Natura 2000 is the most extensive network of **Protected Areas** in the **world**, designated and regulated by the EU Birds and Habitat Directives (79/409/EEC, replaced by 2009/147 EC, and 92/43/EEC). **Natura 2000 is a crucial legal instrument to address biodiversity loss.**

The **effectiveness** of Natura 2000 management is a key challenge for implementation of EU conservation policies, as current efforts to halt biodiversity decline are failing to be sufficient.

Deficiencies in capacities is considered one of the management problems limiting Natura 2000 effectiveness. **Enhancing the capacity building of Natura 2000** practitioners is crucial for ensuring its effectiveness.

LIFE ENABLE aimed to **create a training system** to improve the knowledge and capacities of Natura 2000 Managers in both public and private land across all EU countries.

Building capacities in Natura 2000 management enables the **professionalisation of conservation and spreading innovative approaches, tools, and skills** that lead to applied learning for Natura 2000.



@ENA participant

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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES



The project's main objective is to **empower Natura 2000** and Protected Area managers, helping them become **more effective, skilled, and confident in their roles** as nature management professionals.

To achieve this, the project employs a **blended learning approach**, enhancing capacities in the essential competencies needed for improved and more effective nature management.

LIFE ENABLE ETHOS

- Foster **structured networking** and **peer-to-peer learning**.
- Increase understanding of Natura 2000 practitioners' **fundamental role beyond biodiversity protection** at local, national, and European level.
- Gain knowledge, information, and learning about **the core legislative, regulatory, managerial, technical and administrative aspects** of their work.
- Apply **technical knowledge** gains by acquiring, improving and developing practical capacities and transversal competencies.
- Enhance skills to contribute to the effective management of ecosystems and the services offered, particularly by **forests and marine areas**.

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The project built a European training system called the '**European Nature Academy**'

LIFE ENABLE PROJECT GOALS

- **Develop, test and implement an innovative and accessible European training system** that will support the delivery of EU policy by improving the effective management of the Natura 2000 network.
- **Establish the first European training hub** to deliver widely accessible and tailor-made learning experiences for Natura 2000 managers, focusing on those working in **forest and marine ecosystems**.
- **Improve individual, organisational and national capacities for Natura 2000 management** by providing learning opportunities for individuals to train as trainers, mentors or facilitators of the project's learning experiences.
- **Utilise the best advice and recommendations** provided by the project's collaborative platforms, which bridge academia and site management experience together.



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NATURA 2000 TRAINING NEEDS

LIFE ENABLE conducted a Gap Analysis to identify the **training needs** of Natura 2000 practitioners. The results were used to create new training opportunities proposed by the European Nature Academy.

The key points focused on:

- The **use of blended learning**, which combines online activities with field and face-to-face experiences to effectively deliver nature management skills.
- Promoting **transnational collaborations** by connecting people from different countries through shared experiences.
- Emphasising **inclusiveness**, especially involving local actors working and living in areas where conservation activities take place.
- Using a **competencies-based approach** to empower managers.

Recognising the existence of numerous training programmes in nature management, LIFE ENABLE training opportunities sought to concentrate on **Natura 2000 management, develop innovative approaches, and prioritise a practical approach**, thus distinguishing itself from existing training options.



LIFE ENABLE training opportunities seek to address Natura 2000 needs by promoting:

NETWORKING to facilitate communication among Natura 2000 professionals and establish a **community of Natura 2000 practitioners across the EU**. This will serve as a basis to encourage international collaborations and **promote social and ecological connectivity** throughout the EU.

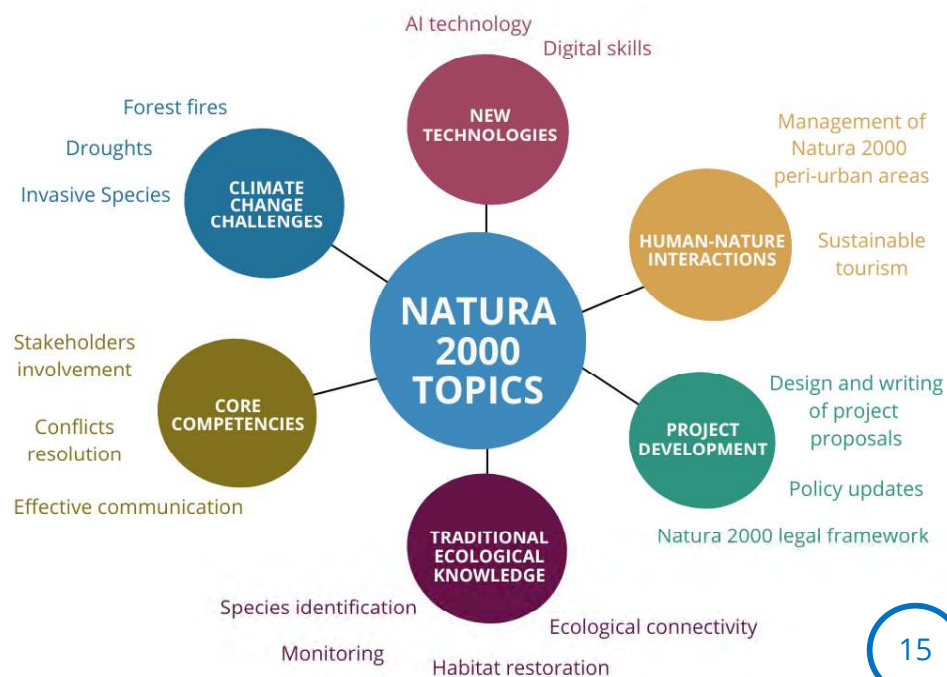
FLEXIBILITY is key to **meeting the needs and preferences** of various users. The blended learning approach accommodates time constraints and different learning preferences, ensuring a **balance between work duties, training activities, and personal life quality**.

INCLUSIVENESS ensures the long-term sustainability of Natura 2000. Opening courses to all, regardless of their background or country, made LIFE ENABLE training opportunities a means to foster the **sharing of different perspectives** and the resolution of conflicts about Natura 2000 management.

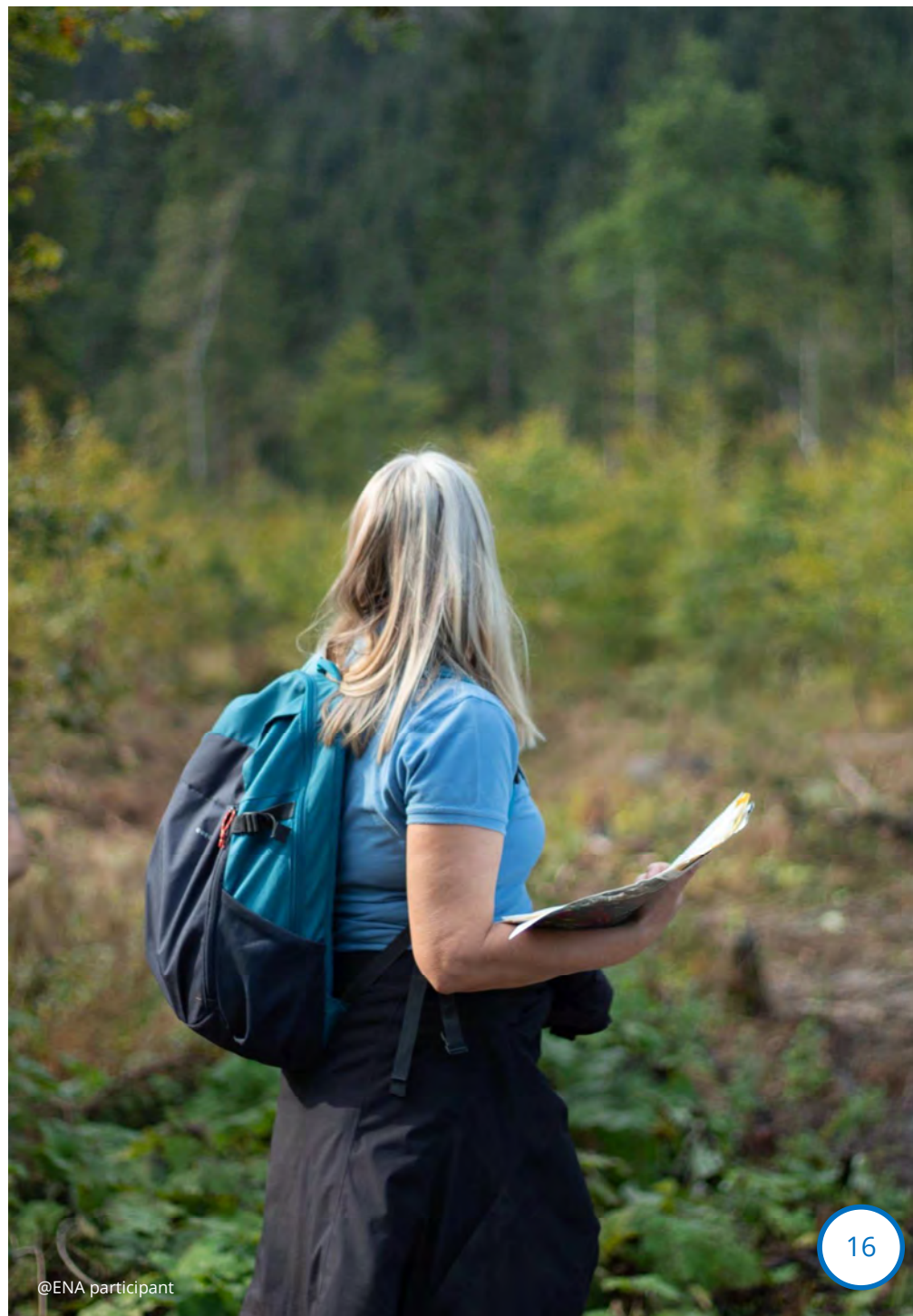




To ensure **relevance**, LIFE ENABLE activities explored Natura 2000 challenges to identify **topics** for courses provided through the European Nature Academy.



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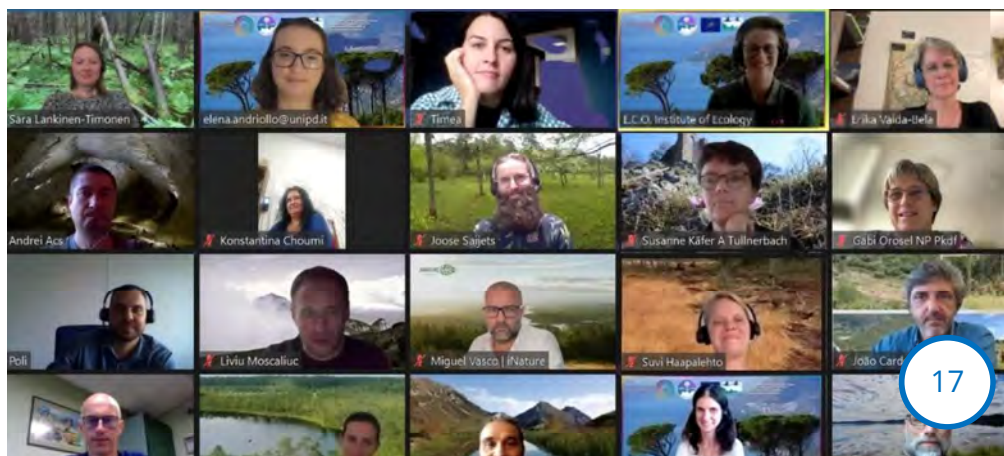
THE EUROPEAN NATURE ACADEMY

EUROPEAN NATURE
ACADEMY



One of the main results of LIFE ENABLE is creating the **online platform, “European Nature Academy” (ENA)**, entirely dedicated to training and building capacities to improve Natura 2000 management.

The ENA is a **dynamic co-learning environment**, enabling peers to learn together using practical courses and tailor-made practical activities. These are specifically designed to assist **Natura 2000 and Protected Area managers** in their work. ENA aims to enhance the effectiveness, competence, and confidence of nature management professionals. It is intended to strengthen individual, organisational, and national capacities for managing Natura 2000 areas while also developing a series of replicable courses and customised learning activities using a variety of **in-person, blended, and online delivery methods**.



The ENA platform tested and delivered **9 courses** through the LIFE ENABLE project. Courses were **blended** (Core competencies for effective management of Natura 2000 & Protected Areas across Europe, Tools for Natura 2000 Forest Managers, Tools for Natura 2000 Marine Managers and Train the Trainers Course) and **fully online** (Mini-courses: Bloom Away, Sea Jedi, Ejya, Clovers, Brain on Nature). **Mini-Courses were delivered by trained trainers** who followed the “Train the Trainers” Course mirroring content provided by the first three courses.



LIFE ENABLE selected and certified **143 participants** (53 in the first tranche, 90 in the second tranche) from **37 countries** (24 EU and 13 other countries in Europe).

IMPACT OF ENA COURSES

The LIFE ENABLE training programme received high appreciation, particularly because it is **unique** and **specifically tailored** for Natura 2000 and Protected Areas practitioners.

Most participants (90-100%) declare that all or some of the content provided by ENA courses would be useful for their work

The programme **fulfilled participants' needs and expectations** as they applied what they learned in their daily work and for future projects.

All the participants in the first intake and 80% of the Mini Course participants discussed the ENA training with their colleagues.

The considerable number of participants who **strongly recommend ENA courses to their colleagues** underscores their success. It indicates strong support for its further development and long-term sustainability.

85% of participants would recommend the ENA courses to a colleague



All courses consistently **met the participants' expectations** and provided the desired knowledge.

92% of the 1st intake of participants strongly agreed that the ENA provided them with new ideas to apply in their work

The **blended learning approach**, combining online live, online self-paced, and face-to-face events, was **positively perceived** because it accommodated most participants' working schedules during the courses.

96% of the 1st intake participants confirmed that blended learning is helpful for the development of skills and competencies

Positive feedback from mini-courses shows that **the learning-teaching stream developed by ENA is successful** and that the quality of courses delivered by trained trainers is fully satisfactory.

"It was a perfect example of what peer-to-peer learning should be. The ability to exchange ideas and a tailored curriculum was inspiring. I would recommend it to anyone working in conservation at any level."



All participants giving feedback on ENA courses confirmed that a few months after the end of the training, they would still have wished to participate in the ENA courses, and a clear majority of them were already applying the knowledge and skills gained from the course in their work.

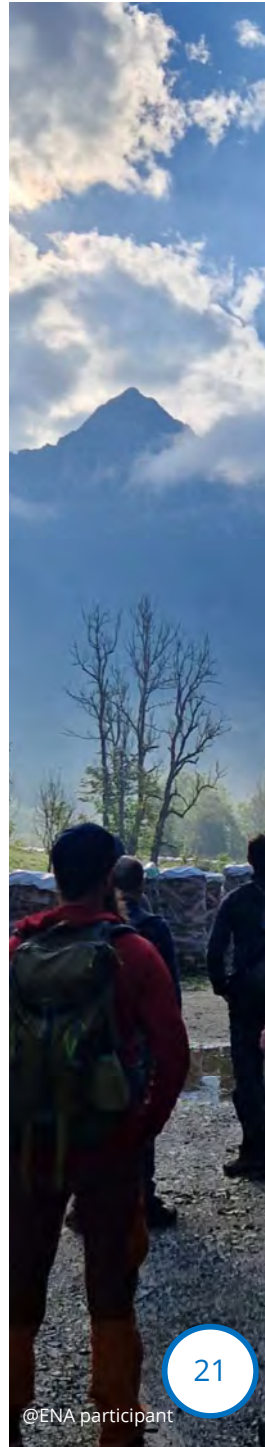
More than 50% of participants confirmed they would be willing to pay to participate

Participants appreciated that the courses were open to all. They noted that it is uncommon to find training programmes dedicated to nature managers, and the fact that this was open to participants from different countries, as well as various backgrounds, is one of the key strengths of ENA courses.

"Attending the European Nature Academy connected me with like-minded individuals passionate about environmental conservation. The knowledge and skills I gained have empowered me to work with people"

The evaluation process confirms that the ENA platform is rich in tools and materials. This contributes to making learning more interactive, fun, and adaptable to different learning needs and teaching approaches.

95% of participants found the ENA platform user-friendly and with a clear structure



SOCIO-ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF ENA COURSES

NETWORKING

Participants identified the most important benefit of ENA courses as the [opportunity to meet and exchange ideas](#) with practitioners from across the EU.

Networking was fostered by tools such as [group exercises](#), live online discussions, and [face-to-face workshops](#).

This is valuable for enhancing relations among various Natura 2000 sites across the EU and promoting [transboundary conservation and collaboration](#).

"I found it amazing to know new colleagues and share a lot of experiences with them. I feel richer."



ENHANCED PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND IMPROVED SKILLS RELATED TO NATURA 2000 MANAGEMENT

New [knowledge](#) provided through ENA courses enhanced participants' professional skills, offering [new tools, strategies, and best practices](#) for application in their Protected Areas.

Improved professional capacities in Natura 2000 management foster [enhancements in biodiversity conservation](#) and ecosystem services delivery.

INCREASED MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN NATURA 2000 MANAGEMENT

Participants intend to improve Natura 2000 site management by [using new strategies and tools](#) from the course and peer discussions.

This could increase [motivation, the number of projects, better collaborations, and job satisfaction](#). It will also foster a positive environment and encourage [community engagement](#), supporting biodiversity conservation.

"I gained a lot of knowledge, experience, ideas and contacts through ENA that I am sure will be useful for me in the future."





SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND EU ADDED VALUE

The **transnational approach** fostered by the LIFE ENABLE project nurtured a **stronger sense of belonging to the EU** by promoting awareness of shared EU values and goals.

Natura 2000 practitioners could strengthen their **European identity** and **commitment to EU objectives** by pursuing common environmental goals.

"It was an eye-opener in terms of understanding better what the Natura 2000 and PA network is all about, and seeing the "own" area as a part of the big puzzle"

OPEN MINDSET AND ETHICAL INSIGHTS

ENA courses offer a valuable opportunity to foster dialogue and collaboration in Natura 2000 management, promoting **open-mindedness, knowledge co-creation, and inclusive communities** across the EU.

Increased exchange helps **break down barriers**, fosters **equity** in Natura 2000 management, reduces stereotypes, and promotes a **sense of solidarity** and inclusiveness within every Natura 2000 site community and the entire EU.

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ENHANCED CORE COMPETENCIES IN NATURA 2000 MANAGEMENT

ENA courses represent **unique training opportunities** focused on **developing or improving core competencies** in nature management. They provide tools and knowledge to foster inclusiveness, participation, adaptability, and equity.

This approach can help create **more cohesive and effective conservation strategies**, foster **environmental stewardship**, and lead to **acceptable and more implementable management decisions**.

ENHANCED COMPETENCIES IN TRAINING

The "Train the Trainers" course focused on improving participants' **training abilities**. Trained trainers replicated courses and organised live sessions after attending the course.

Trained trainers could use training competencies extensively in their working activities to **educate the local community** and colleagues, empowering them to take an active role in conservation and **fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility**.



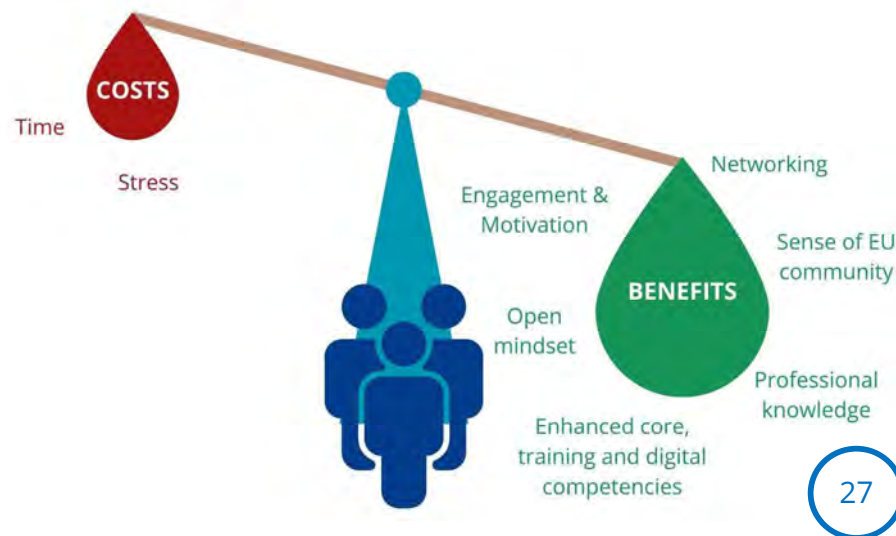
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IMPROVED DIGITAL SKILLS

Tools and approaches used by ENA courses fostered the **enhancement of the digital skills** of both trainers and participants.

Improved digital skills can enhance participants' professional work, resulting in **better communication, data management, and monitoring**. This leads to increased efficiency and public awareness in Natura 2000 management.



PERCEIVED VALUE OF ENA COURSES

As part of the ENA evaluation, participants were asked if they would pay for the ENA courses and how much they were willing to pay.

This approach helps capture the perceived value of the course to the participants.

The findings showed that people's willingness to pay for ENA courses varies for both blended and mini-courses.

On average, they would pay:

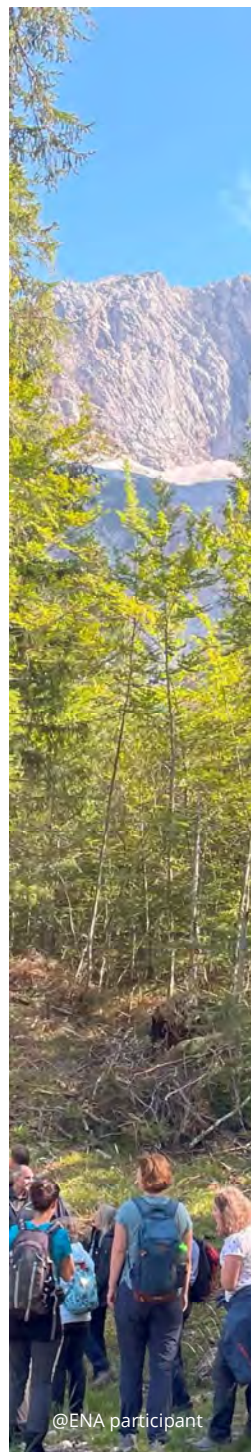
- **€ 250.00 for a blended course**
- **€ 75.00 for a mini-course**

Many participants would attend ENA courses only if their institution or external funding covered the training fee since they considered it part of their job responsibilities.

Many participants in the blended courses were willing to cover travel costs to attend the face-to-face workshop.



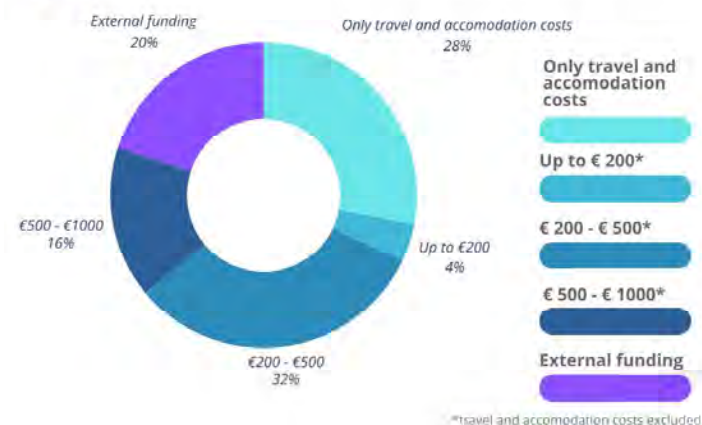
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@ENA participant

WILLINGNESS TO PAY

Blended Courses



WILLINGNESS TO PAY

Mini Courses



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ENA FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Five **potential paths for the future growth** of the ENA platform were identified to capitalise on LIFE ENABLE results, each with its own outcomes, benefits, and risks.

These options are designed to ensure **the platform's long-term sustainability** and meet the diverse needs of the Natura 2000 community.

- 1 A fee-based system where individuals pay an annual fee and undertake a required continuous learning programme.
- 2 A system where Natura 2000 institutions pay for the development and delivery of courses addressing their special needs.
- 3 A system where employers contribute towards continuous professional development programmes for their staff.
- 4 A system where training institutions contribute towards the continuous professional development of Natura 2000 practitioners.
- 5 A long-term contract-based arrangement with a stakeholder institution.

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The feasibility study shows that ENA courses have great social and professional benefits. However, **external funding is crucial** to cover costs and ensure long-term sustainability.

It's important to **explore various funding strategies** in order to broaden economic sources and minimise reliance on any single funding channel.



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CONCLUSIONS

LIFE ENABLE has established the ENA platform and proposed nine courses for nature managers. These courses have shown that the ENA platform can improve the skills of Natura 2000 practitioners, **fostering social benefits to participants and to society as a whole.**

Participants have given **positive feedback**, indicating that the ENA courses provide added value, especially in creating **flexible and engaging learning experiences** that combine online activities with face-to-face interactions.

KEY FINDINGS

1. High demand and need. Feedback from ENA participants and existing training analysis show the **unique focus of ENA courses**, dedicated totally to Natura 2000 and Protected Areas management.



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@ENA participant



2. Networking and collaboration. Networking is the most important value added to ENA courses, providing opportunities to **exchange knowledge, build relationships, and design future collaborations.**

3. Blended learning approach. Blended courses, combining online and in-person training, are the **most effective method**, accommodating diverse learning preferences and offering **flexibility** to a wider audience of Natura 2000 practitioners.

4. Social impact. The courses offered by the ENA provide **substantial social advantages**, including advanced professional knowledge, networking opportunities, increased motivation, and a sense of community, contributing to the improvement of society.

5. High potential for replicability. Mini-courses provided by trained trainers demonstrated the high potential for replicability of ENA courses.

In conclusion, as evidenced by the external evaluation of the project, **the ENA has transformed approaches for capacity building for Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners.** This Assessment further demonstrates that the **ENA is cost-effective and that the benefits outweigh the costs.** There is significant potential to replicate and roll-out the ENA courses to improve the effectiveness of Natura 2000 management practices.

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