



Creating the  
European Nature  
Academy for applied  
Blended LEarning

## C3 | LIFE ENABLE After-LIFE Plan



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

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## About LIFE ENABLE

LIFE ENABLE is an innovative three-year project, exploring new tools and learning methods to build practical capacity and improve management practice amongst Natura 2000 and Protected Area managers. As a LIFE Preparatory project, LIFE ENABLE's primary goal was to design, test and deliver a new, purpose-built learning platform, the '**E**uropean **N**ature **A**cademy (ENA) for **B**lended **L**Earning'. The ENA is now established as a unique, comprehensive capacity building resource, a locus for the project's tailor-made competence-based training courses, and a ready-made means to ensure progress towards the EU's priorities for nature and biodiversity.

The project was developed to meet the ambitions and challenges of EU policies and priorities, including the Green Deal and targets expressed in the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy. These highlight a need identified by the European Commission (EC) to pick up the pace of Natura 2000 implementation<sup>1</sup> by improving the quality of management practices and the effectiveness of nature conservation objectives and measures. In order to meet this need and improve technical management, it is vital to build individual and organisational capacities through core competences which must be learnt and applied in practice.

By means of four full and five tailor-made training courses, the focus in LIFE ENABLE has been to build Natura 2000 site managers' capacity to do their work better, smarter and more efficiently. The main project objectives were:

- *To demonstrate the need for and value of competence-based learning opportunities for Natura 2000 professionals through innovative learning methods and formats*
- *To develop and test new tools for online learning that would improve and increase capacity building opportunities.*
- *To create momentum for and demonstrate the value of upscaling and replicating blended learning as the key means to improve the quality of Natura 2000 implementation and the impact of management practices in all Protected Areas.*

The project worked inclusively to engage participants from a wide range of backgrounds, different countries and with diverse experiences, with specific attention for those working in forest and marine habitats. During the project, a community of 166 practitioners from 34 countries have participated in the ENA's capacity building courses: on the basis of the external evaluation evidence that shows how over 85% of participants have recommended the ENA to colleagues, it is reasonable to project that a minimum multiplier outreach of more than 5,000 individuals has been achieved. In addition, a pool of experienced Natura 2000 managers has been trained to deliver the ENA courses and materials, increasing capacity to reach greater numbers of peers in future.

As evidenced by the External Evaluation Report, the results and achievements are transformative, changing the way capacity building, continuous professional development and peer-to-peer practical learning can and should be provided for all engaged in nature's management. Based on the direct experiences of participants, partners and other stakeholders, the project's impacts demonstrate how competence-based capacity building, provided in a

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<sup>1</sup> The Natura 2000 is the largest network of Protected Areas in the world, encompassing 784.252 km<sup>2</sup> of European land area and 551.899 km<sup>2</sup> of marine area. Currently, there are 27.863 Natura 2000 sites, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Sites of Community Importance (SCTs). Find out more at [natura2000.eea.europa.eu](https://natura2000.eea.europa.eu)

blended learning environment, can be applied to contribute measurably to improved implementation of Natura 2000 and more effective management for Europe's Protected Areas.

This After-LIFE Action Plan describes briefly the expertise of and investments made by partners, the project's approach, its results and achievements, whilst setting out a range of actions to take forward the legacy in the post-project period ([Table: After-LIFE Plan - consolidating LIFE ENABLE's results & achievements](#)).

## LIFE ENABLE: responding to identified needs

In summary, the 2020 LIFE Preparatory call stated the need for a project to contribute to the achievement of the objectives and ambition of the EU Biodiversity strategy. To achieve this, a project was required to develop and implement a training system at European level related to the implementation of the Natura 2000 network. The training system had to target Natura 2000 site managers and allow them to improve their skills and knowledge on legislative, regulatory, managerial, technical, administrative aspects specific to the management of Natura 2000 sites. Specific focus was to be given to forests, which cover more than 50% of the terrestrial Natura 2000 network, plus at least one more ecosystem type: LIFE ENABLE partners chose marine ecosystems because of the area covered and the scale of capacity building needs. The first hub of the training system and the school for European trainers was required to cover as many Member States as possible. The training activities/courses was expected to be available in as many EU languages as possible. In particular, the training opportunities to be provided were required to set an enabling framework for promoting action at the local level.

LIFE ENABLE proposed a set of actions specifically designed to address the requirements of the call – delivered over three years, the project has:

- **Developed, tested and implemented an innovative and accessible European training system that supports the delivery of EU policy by improving the effective management of the Natura 2000 network.**
- **Established the first European training hub – the European Nature Academy (ENA) - to deliver widely accessible and tailor-made learning experiences for Natura 2000 managers from forest, marine and other European ecosystems.**
- **Boosted 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 on the basis of training needs assessments (TNAs).**
- **Achieved this by utilising expert advice and recommendations provided by the project's collaborative platforms, which bridge academia and practical site management experience.**

In addition, directly responding to the call's needs, LIFE ENABLE has:

- Established a Project Coordination Unit and two Expert Groups (one each for forest and marine) for the development and implementation of the training system at European level.
- Completed a Gap Analysis of current training and capacity building provision.

- Developed two new Natura 2000 online Training Needs Analysis tools - one for individuals and one which can be used at team, organisational, regional, national and transnational levels.
- Designed, developed, created and launched an innovative new learning platform for the training system, the European Nature Academy (ENA), including all administration and maintenance procedures, as well as legal protections (GDPR, copyrights and licensing for intellectual property) and necessary terms and conditions of use.
- Developed a comprehensive range of training activities, 9 courses and a programme of 4 webinars covering key legislative, regulatory, managerial, technical and administrative aspects specific to the management of Natura 2000 sites.
- Developed standard procedures and protocols, application processes and selection criteria, which can also be used to support planning for a network of European training sites.
- Developed a plan for the maintenance of the training system at European level.
- Developed a comprehensive range of innovative, high quality communication tools and methods to promote and report the project across the community of Natura 2000 site managers, stimulate participation and support the project's dissemination actions through networking.

The following sections describe how the project partners worked, the actions implemented and the results, impacts and achievements realised.

## The project partners

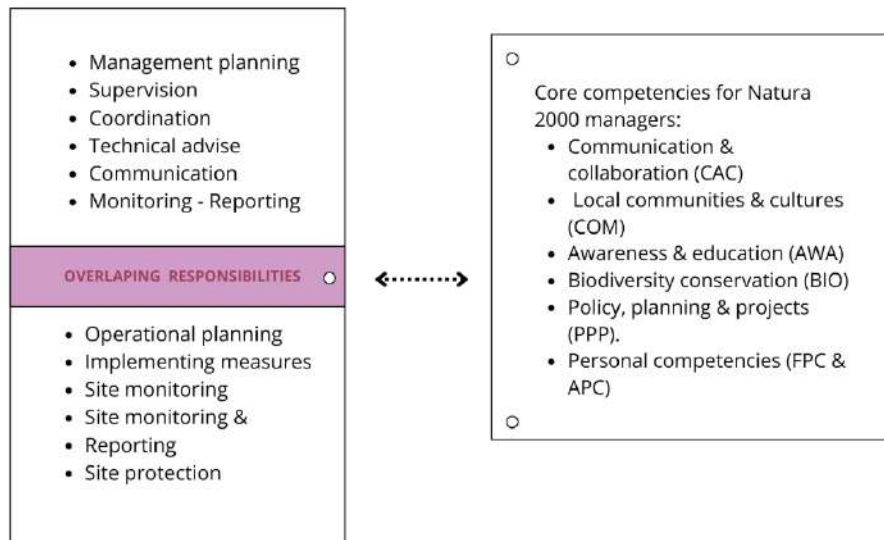
LIFE ENABLE brought together 8 partners and, led by EUROPARC, mobilised their extensive capacity building expertise in an innovative blended learning approach to improve Natura 2000 implementation. All eight project partners work with Natura 2000 and Protected Area managers: EUROPARC, ProPark, Fungobe and MedPAN, through their extensive networks; Metsähallitus across Finland and through its international outreach activities; ECO, TESAF and ATA through their applied education and academic remits.

All partners are committed to continuing to transform capacity building by innovating training delivery, taking advantage of new technology and increasing access to practical training for greater numbers of Natura 2000 site managers and Protected Area practitioners. Working in collaboration, the partners were able to reach 100s of site managers and field staff, managing Forest and Marine habitats especially, as well as local communities, public administrations, scientific and research institutions, policy-makers, environmental agencies and non-governmental organisations. Individually and collectively, the project partners hold real insights about the multiple roles required for Natura 2000 site management, planning and policy implementation and, in particular, the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for effective management practice.

Building on the experience gains from the preceding LIFE e-Natura 2000.edu project (LIFEedu for short), the primary objective of LIFE ENABLE was to enable greater numbers of peers to connect, learn and apply core competencies to improve how nature's managers work. Having analysed the Nature Directives to identify the specific tasks and functions (Figure 1), these were then used

to identify core competencies<sup>2</sup> required by Natura 2000 managers to do their work. This experience and expertise have been applied throughout the project and underpin all European Nature Academy's courses.

**ANALYSIS OF THE NATURE DIRECTIVES  
- CORE FUNCTIONS**



*Figure 1 Analysis of the Nature Directives - core functions*

<sup>2</sup> Identified from a comprehensive analysis of the IUCN [‘Global Register of Competencies for Protected Area Practitioners’](#)

## The ENA's competence-based approach

Natura 2000 sites and Protected Areas need to be proactively managed to achieve progress towards the ambitions of the Natura 2000 network: this can only be achieved through the effective management of species and habitats of Community interest. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to build nature conservation management capacities in Europe and the pressures impacting biodiversity are many, such as, land use changes, species invasions, pollution, acidification, nitrogen deposition and climate change. Getting technical management right is a complex and demanding business: even when managers know what to do, how their nature conservation objectives can be achieved requires a specific set of equally important social skills.

In other words, conservation challenges require specific technical knowledge, which must be applied **competently**. Natura 2000 and Protected Area staff have to work inclusively with local communities and other stakeholders, take the social-economic context of a site and cultural traditions into account in the development of management plans, work together with wider society to create broad social acceptance of and understanding about nature's priorities. These are equally technical, fundamentally relationship-building skills, which require specific capacity building and training provision.

Competence-based training for Natura 2000 and Protected Area staff lies at the heart of all the ENA's courses. These were delivered in ways that create an interactive, experience-based, co-learning environment, enabling participants as peers to not only be expert nature conservation specialists, but also be more effective managers. The core competencies included, effective communication, stakeholder engagement for participatory management, co-working with local communities and respecting cultural traditions: these are pre-requisites to improved and more effective management practice.

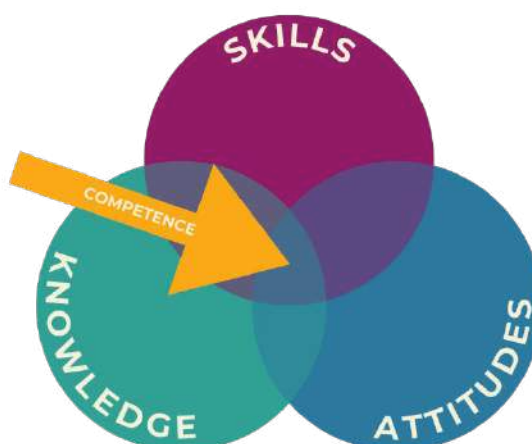
Through the ENA, 166 selected participants were enabled to learn, develop and apply the core skills, knowledge and attitudes (Figure 2) to deliver specific tasks and functions expected of managers. Those managing Natura 2000 forest and marine habitats were prioritised, but not to the exclusion of other managers.

## Competent Natura2000 Managers

### Competencies

The combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, & attitude to do something well.

HOW an individual performs depends on their personal attributes.



Global Register of Competencies for Protected Area Practitioners (Appleton M.R., 2016) - The PA Competence Register

*Figure 2 A practical definition of competencies/ [A Global Register of Competences for Protected Area Practitioners, Compiled by Mike Appleton](#)*

To increase access to training opportunities, LIFE ENABLE created the European Nature Academy (ENA) as a unique, one-stop-shop to learn the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for effective Natura 2000 management and policy implementation. This purpose-built learning platform has been developed to become a unique resource for capacity building and the continuous professional development of Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners. As part of LIFE ENABLE's legacy, further development and roll-out of the ENA will be the main focus for attention in the post-project period.

### What makes the ENA unique?

Precisely because Natura 2000 is a living network of places and people, Natura 2000 managers have to be more than technical specialists. Effective Natura 2000 managers need specialist competence-based training to know how to apply their expertise in the context of the sites that they are responsible for – above all, this requires:

- Know-how to develop, apply and work with participatory processes
- Ability to engage local communities & diverse stakeholders
- Specific consideration of socio-economic contexts
- Willingness & ability to think and work together with others to find solutions.
- Necessity to engage and communicate across sectors and influence political and policy decisions.
- Develop creative and impactful communications that highlight the values of Natura 2000 sites and Protected Areas to wider society.

Through the ENA, project partners elaborated a range of capacity building courses as part of a unique training hub – the courses are:

- Core competencies for effective management – developed and delivered by EUROPARC and Fungobe

- Tools for Natura 2000 Forest Managers – co-developed and delivered by ECO and TESAF, supported by Fungobe;
- Tools for Natura 2000 Marine Managers – developed and delivered by MedPAN with support from Fungobe;
- Train the Trainers – led by EUROPARC
- 5 short intensive courses – coordinated by EUROPARC with support from Fungobe, developed and delivered by experienced Natura 2000 managers, trained as ENA Trainers through the Train the Trainers course.

All participants engaged in interactive group-based peer-to-peer co-learning. Each of the four full courses included a face-to-face workshop. All of the courses were delivered via a series of online modules, scheduled to include a 'live' session for participants to interact: all such sessions were recorded so people who were not able to join could view when they had time. Throughout all courses, participants had full and flexible access to the ENA and its resources for self-learning, recap or preparation.

### **Blended learning: delivering practical capacity building**

#### **PROJECT IN A NUTSHELL**

**Full name: LIFE ENABLE: Creating the European Nature Academy for applied Blended Learning**

**Total budget: €1.6m**

*Figure 3 Project in a nutshell*

The ENA's unique and comprehensive training focuses on subjects which other projects and learning providers give (at best) scant attention, but which are crucial in order to apply technical knowledge in working practice. (See the project's [Gap Analysis](#) report for evidence). Nature conservation professionals require support and access to capacity building opportunities that meet their specific needs.

New technologies and online learning are key to increasing access to training for the numbers of Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners necessary to ensure progress towards more complete implementation of policy priorities for nature (including restoration). Our blended learning approach enabled participants to learn together in a variety of settings, online and face-to-face, where they interact with each other, share experiences, gain new knowledge and insights which they can use to develop and apply practical solutions for their Natura 2000 management challenges, as well as innovative new practice. At all times, the focus in the project was to generate maximum impacts at local levels by empowering Natura 2000 managers to apply their learning, thereby improving their management practices.

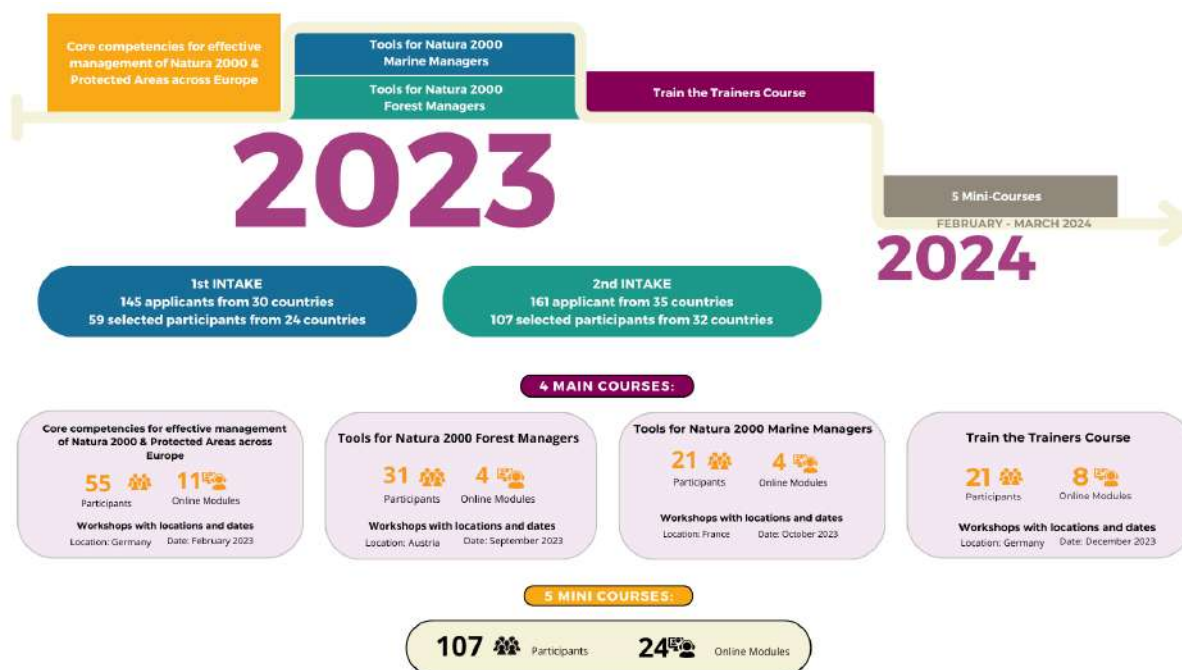


Figure 4 ENA Courses Information

In addition to the unique training offer provided through the ENA, a sophisticated range of delivery tools were used within the ENA's 9 training courses – these included:

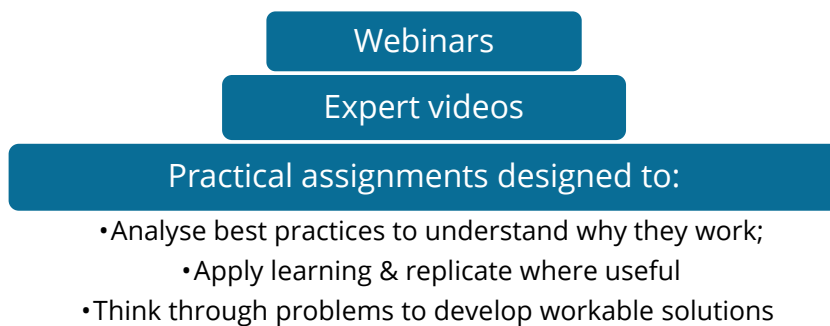


Figure 5 Range of delivery tools

## What has LIFE ENABLE achieved?

LIFE ENABLE's achievements set a benchmark for all future capacity building projects. Specifically, the creation of the European Nature Academy has generated results which are transformative in the approach to capacity building for nature management staff and organisations. As evidenced by the external evaluation report, participants to the ENA have emerged more confident, inspired and informed about why their work is important, how they can apply their learning to improve technical conservation practices and why participatory management is key to the realisation of their priorities for nature.



Figure 6 ENA Training impact

**There is clear and continuing need for training provision to be competence-based, blended in delivery and directed towards applied learning so that nature conservation objectives and management practices can be achieved more effectively and efficiently.** To increase access for greater numbers of Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners, flexible, online and face-to-face training must be created and provided – also in languages other than English - to stimulate peer-to-peer co-learning, to improve practices and solve common management challenges. This must be delivered in ways that ensure that learning can be applied according to local circumstances and needs within prevailing cultures. Also, assessing how learning is delivered to agreed consistent standards will be a core feature of future capacity building projects. This is essential to ensure consistency of training quality and expansion of future practical competence-based capacity building programmes.

With reference to the impact assessment exercise conducted at the project's kick-off meeting, the following table summarises the projects' main impacts from LIFE ENABLE in terms of high, medium-high and medium-low impacts from three different perspectives – partners', learners' and external stakeholders' perspectives.

Perspective	High impact	Medium-high impact	Medium-Low impact
Project partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Benefits of creating and delivering highly interactive, participatory, peer-to-peer co-learning opportunities which can be applied in practice.</li> <li>- The importance of consistent, high quality, innovative and inclusive communication activities throughout the project, especially with regard to use of social media, to promote opportunities to get involved, as well as to be informed about results.</li> <li>- Competence-based approaches are essential to design better tailor-made capacity building initiatives that meet measurable training needs in specific areas required to improve management practices.</li> <li>- With further development and investment, the ENA's capacity building courses and tools can be adapted and replicated – for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o For organisations, area teams and groups of managers working in specific specialisms;</li> <li>o For development of Nature Restoration Action plans or adaptive management responses to climate change.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Capacity building projects can be vitally important catalysts for networking and collaboration between other organisations, projects and partners with common goals and vision.</li> <li>- The ENA provides a good-to-go means to apply and test emerging new technologies that can</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Operational knowledge of online platforms, innovative digital tools and learning methods – e.g. Moodle, Chroma videos etc – requires continuity of time and financial investments to stay abreast of new and emerging technologies.</li> <li>- Knowledge of and practical experience with managing a LIFE project.</li> <li>- Accreditation based on continuous assessment by trained assessors able to evaluate learning impacts can and should be a feature of all capacity building initiatives which focus on practical and applied learning. <b>As modelled by the ENA, this would require increased assessment capacity and more secure funding streams, but the benefits would be significant to ensure continuous improvement of management effectiveness.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Within the period of the project, the assessment process enables us to measure how learning (e.g. practical skills and knowledge) has been applied by participants but not what the impacts of their learning will be in the long-term. This would only be possible with continuous and uninterrupted funding.</li> <li>- Ways to formally certify practical competence-based applied learning merit further investigation. Formal certification with approval from further education institutions would not be an immediate goal for the following reasons – adherence to academic systems and processes would: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Overly formalise the learning system making it less attractive and accessible to Natura 2000 managers;</li> <li>o Make course content overly academic to fit academic certification systems, thereby shifting the emphasis away from practical applied learning in Natura 2000 sites;</li> <li>o Reduce the need for practice-based, adaptive, flexible training;</li> <li>o Risk brining in trainers with little direct experience of Natura 2000 management practices.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Perspective	High impact	Medium-high impact	Medium-Low impact
	<p>amplify capacity building – for example, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is evolving rapidly and holds tremendous potential for making training courses and materials available in many languages. In terms of cost-efficiency, this further places the future of capacity building in an online environment.</p>		<p>- This is a complex area and one that requires long-term thinking and more extensive consultations.</p>
<b>Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New awareness of how competencies relate to daily work and how they can be applied to improve practice.</li> <li>- Training provided by peers with experienced Natura 2000 managers trained as ENA trainers.</li> <li>- Exposure to and practical experience of working with a range of innovative, participatory online tools and learning methods.</li> <li>- The benefits of participating in training which combines expert-led intervention alongside the creation of a new 'co-learning' community amongst peers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TNA: Increased awareness of individual (competence-based) training needs</li> <li>- Variable opportunities to apply learning in their own organisation or Natura 2000 site – limiting factors included time, available resources, degree of commitment from line managers etc.</li> <li>- Opportunity for team or area managers to use the new TNA tool to assess group competencies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of availability in languages other than English is a barrier for many potential ENA users. However, only the online environment has potential to overcome this using AI for multi-lingual training provision.</li> <li>- Although participants felt more confident working online and using a range of digital technologies, uptake and use of the smartphone app was low: this required a lot of time to maintain when much more information can be more easily and efficiently provided via the ENA.</li> </ul>

Perspective	High impact	Medium-high impact	Medium-Low impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexible yet structured learning which combines opportunities to access resources when time suits with interactive 'live' group sessions.</li> <li>- Purpose-built opportunities to network with peers across Europe (30+ countries) and share and adopt new practical experiences.</li> <li>- New contacts established that will extend long in to the future.</li> <li>- Increased motivation and interest to participate in new (continuous) capacity building activities and projects.</li> </ul>		
<b>External stakeholders / project observers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The opportunity for and merits of developing dedicated capacity building programmes tailored for Natura 2000 managers and designed to support the achievement of EU priorities for nature.</li> <li>- Despite a high evaluation score and the best efforts of partners, it has not yet been possible to secure a successor project for LIFE ENABLE through the LIFE Programme. This highlights the competitive nature of LIFE calls for proposals, high probability of funding alternative projects which 'reinvent the wheel' and the inherent risk of failure that this can hold. Of more concern, is the fact that this equates to a failure to capitalise on investments made to-date – by the LIFE Programme and project partners - with a consequent loss of momentum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An economic case for the investment of capacity building and training can increasingly be made – for relatively small investments of time and money, new and improved skills can be developed which improve 'on-the-job' effectiveness and efficiency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A continuing need to grow recognition of the importance of competence-based training that is tailored for Natura 2000 managers' specific needs – e.g. GAP Analysis, online Natura 2000 Training Needs Analysis tool etc.</li> </ul>

Perspective	High impact	Medium-high impact	Medium-Low impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High potential exists for a service-based contract to develop the ENA and ensure continuity of capacity building and training provision, directly linked to EU priorities for nature can be envisaged.</li> <li>- Development of standards and protocols in the design and delivery of quality online learning which can be directly applied to improve Natura 2000 management practices.</li> <li>- Online learning is easily and cost-effectively 'up-scalable' – now created, the ENA as an online learning platform holds huge potential to increase the numbers of Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners able to access training.</li> <li>- Increased networking amongst and between related projects at European and global levels, as well as the project being invited to join EC Biogeographical Seminars, global conferences (IUFOR Stockholm, June 2024), Natura 2000 Awards and a global capacity building workshop as part of a LIFE IP in Akamas, Cyprus (Nov 2022).</li> </ul>		

## Meeting current and future training needs

Project participants, partners, contributing trainers and external experts mobilised for the ENA courses have endorsed the need for and value of the ENA's use and future development. Whilst recognising that the creation of other learning spaces with LIFE projects is perhaps inevitable, the feasibility and sustainability of supporting multiple learning platforms able to maintain relevance and consistent quality standards is highly questionable. For funders and partners alike, it is essential to provide efficient, cost-effective and continuous competence-based capacity building for Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners.

**LIFE ENABLE has demonstrated the value of quality online learning as a means to reach greater numbers of participants than through (solely) face-to-face capacity building events. With sufficient continuous investments, the ENA can be a space for all LIFE projects: as a functioning training hub, the ENA is already available and has demonstrated that blended learning is a complementary, cost-effective and alternative approach to capacity building. As a training hub, the ENA and its training content is visible, sustainable and infinitely replicable.**

Along with the continued commitment of project partners, external stakeholders are seen to be key to fully realise the significant benefits that would accrue from the ENA's continuous development. For example, the ENA can be developed to address important factors inhibiting progress towards development of National Restoration Plans, or support implementation of adaptive management responses to climate change. Furthermore, with appropriate support and sustained funding, the ENA can be positioned as an enabling tool to support Member States achieve greater progress towards compliance with the Nature Directives and associated legislation: existing and new courses can build momentum and measurably improve effective management practices across a range of ecosystem types, especially where restoration actions will be required. Working on the basis of applied best practices, use of and reference to practical case studies would continue to be integral training tools to all ENA courses.

Furthermore, there are several other important areas where the ENA can play a significant role to support and improve management effectiveness in the years ahead – these include:

- **By increasing access to scientific research so that results can be applied**

We know that there is demand and interest, especially from within the research community, about practical ways to increase access to their work, especially in ways that enable them to generate greater impacts by applying the data modelling and technical tools which exist or they are currently developing. This is an area which most Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners find difficult to keep abreast of, mainly due to poor signposting but also pressures of time. The ENA can help in the following areas:

- Dedicated competence-based courses can be provided for researchers to help them to identify and engage more effectively with stakeholders (in particular, practitioners) by improving their communication practices which increase access to research data and findings.
- Working with others, assess how available research can be applied in practice to scale-up ecological connectivity.
- Seeking ways to support the implementation of the new EU biodiversity governance framework as it develops, including the new [Science Service for Biodiversity](#) and inform

that process by integrating the views, opinions, expectations and needs of nature management practitioners.

- **By making increased use of new technologies**

To achieve maximum outreach, it will increasingly be necessary to find ways to make capacity building content and training courses accessible in multiple languages. Online, there are greater practical and cost-effective measures which should be explored and, where possible, applied to increase the accessibility of content and training courses. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a rapidly growing area of technical development which can be deployed to provide multi-lingual capacity building and training: dedicated investment is required to test and develop AI's potential in Protected Areas.

- **By training greater numbers of experienced Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners to deliver ENA courses**

Combined with increased use of AI, developing a team of Trained ENA Trainers from multiple countries can also help to roll-out and scale-up access to the ENA courses, materials and resources. Tried and tested within LIFE ENABLE, this was a unique feature of the ENA, highly evaluated as being important in future. Training would require to be provided to ensure new trainers know how to comply with the ENA's quality protocols and standards, but they would be ideally placed to roll-out materials and courses according to locally defined needs and, potentially, in local languages.

## Future plans

The project's results have unequivocally demonstrated the benefits of competence-based approaches to capacity building for individuals and organisations with responsibilities for Natura 2000 and Protected Area management. Based on the feedback of ENA participants alone, which have consistently confirmed the value of the competence-based training courses to improve their management and conservation practices, there is a strong, tried-and-tested foundation for the LIFE ENABLE (and indeed LIFEedu) approach to be further developed, rolled-out and applied in a wide variety of settings and nature conservation contexts.

As evidenced by the Socio-economic Impact Assessment and the Guidelines for Replicability, LIFE ENABLE holds valuable lessons for all engaged in protecting Europe's nature: this includes all Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners, project partners with capacity building expertise, members of the scientific research community, and the EC as the main policy-making and future funding decision-making body.

Whilst EUROPARC and its partners are convinced that the ENA can be further developed to meet incontestable areas of capacity building need, all future actions identified in this After-LIFE Plan are of course contingent on finding appropriate funding mechanisms. These new funds will be essential to contribute to personnel and IT development costs required to fully realise the potential of the European Nature Academy and the online Training Needs Analysis tool created through LIFE ENABLE. Project partners are committed to that end: however, it will not be

possible (or equitable) to do it alone. Therefore, a newly formed ENA Governance Team, drawn from project partners and other experts, will continue to work in dialogue and partnership with the EC, LIFE Programme, other funding streams and other potential investors: the goal will be to secure continuity of investment and ensure sustainable development opportunities for the ENA and online Natura 2000 Training Needs Analysis tools.

In future, we aim to consolidate the ENA and develop new approaches for individual and organisational capacity building required to meet the major challenges impacting Europe's nature in the 21st century. This involves investing in professional capacity building programmes to make sure that our current and future nature management professionals and their organisations have the specific competencies they need to do their work and protect our natural world.

## Concluding remarks

As the primary product of LIFE ENABLE, the European Nature Academy will continue to be maintained for a minimum of 5 years post-project. However, more than that, EUROPARC in particular will seek all means necessary to continue to develop the ENA as the 'go-to' learning hub and training platform for Natura 2000 managers, Protected Area practitioners and projects with capacity building objectives.

LIFE ENABLE's Guidelines for Replicability (B3), the Layman's Report (B5) and this After-LIFE Plan (C3) have been purposefully designed to support the business case for dedicated capacity building for all working in Natura 2000 sites and Protected Areas. Post-project continuity of investment is essential to ensure maximum value for money from work delivered to-date.

The following table sets out the main objectives and associated actions together with an indicative cost that will consolidate LIFE ENABLE's results and achievements. However, without any immediate certainty of follow-up funding, the objectives reflect the need for dialogue and partnership working to develop capacity building programmes that respond to the range of policy priorities expected to be progressed by nature conservation practitioners and organisations. In particular, recognising a need for urgency and to avoid losing momentum, we call upon the EC and other potential investors to support progress towards these objectives and commit to full realisation of the power and potential of the ENA to improve the practice, quality and effectiveness of nature's management in the years ahead.

## After-LIFE Plan - consolidating LIFE ENABLE's results & achievements

<b>Objective 1: Continue to make a strong business case for the ENA: as a ready-made, purpose-built, comprehensive capacity building training platform, the ENA requires continuous investment to improve management effectiveness and ensure progress towards the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and Restoration Action Plans.</b>			
<b>Associated actions:</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Indicative cost</b>
1.1 Establish a Governance Team to support and oversee the ENA's future development.	Short term (by end 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw upon LIFE ENABLE project partners and recruit other relevant experts to form the ENA Steering Committee.</li> <li>• Agree a schedule for online meetings and aim to produce a strategic development plan for the ENA by early 2025.</li> <li>• Use evidence from LIFE ENABLE to develop a funding strategy for future development of the ENA.</li> </ul>	€
1.2 Promote the ENA to attract further investment for its future development and secure new funding for expanded provision of needs-based and demand-led competence-based training courses.	Short-medium term (2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the possibility of a continuous service contract with a European level institution with a stake in improved implementation of policy priorities for nature and biodiversity.</li> <li>• Submit a new project proposal when a call offering serious prospects of success arises.</li> <li>• Market competence-based training based on high levels of satisfaction and involvement among ENA course participants to-date.</li> <li>• Capitalise on the ENA's unique offer and the high demand to be selected for participation – in LIFE ENABLE, places available were over-subscribed 3:1</li> <li>• Increase the range of competence-based co-learning courses to improve management effectiveness and meet known areas of demand - for example, biodiversity conservation through restoration action planning, effective communication strategies, stakeholder engagement and local capacity building actions.</li> <li>• Promote opportunities to include use of ENA and/ or creation of new competence-based courses in projects and initiatives led by others when personnel and technical development costs would be covered.</li> </ul>	€€

1.3 Continue to make the ENA a locus for other projects focusing on training and capacity building	Short term (by end 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in the LIFE-Nat meeting in Hanover, Oct 2024 to explore potential sources of funding.</li> <li>Continue to promote and roll-out the H2020 NaturaConnect stakeholder engagement courses.</li> </ul>	€€
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<b>Objective 2: Continue to disseminate and promote competence-based learning as the required approach for capacity building to relevant audiences, projects and capacity building networking events.</b>			
<b>Associated Actions:</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Indicative cost</b>
2.1 Connect, amplify & synergise the work of existing science/biodiversity platforms, academia and projects to form new collaborative alliances, which build trans-disciplinary support for applied learning and continued transformation of capacity building programmes.	<b>Short-Medium term (2024/2025)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to engage with relevant European projects, policy and research platforms and a wide range of stakeholders beyond the nature conservation sector – e.g. Biodiversa+, EUBP etc. – as a means to increase awareness about the ENA and opportunities for practical, applied, competence-based capacity building.</li> <li>Build dialogue with a range of stakeholders to discuss and inform the further development and expansion of ENA courses, contents and training provision: the key aim is to show how research and scientific outputs can be made more accessible and applied in practice.</li> </ul>	€€
	<b>Medium-long term (2026 - 2028)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work across disciplines and communities of interest to produce a four-year Roadmap (2026 to 2030) to set out a range of practical actions which can be taken to increase access to research and scientific information and support communication activities.</li> </ul>	€€
2.2 Create a range of networking opportunities to show how case studies, scientific research and management models can be applied in practice	<b>Short-Medium-Long term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Network with projects pursuing ways to improve and measure increased management effectiveness (e.g. LIFE PAME) and promote the ENA.</li> </ul>	€€

to benefit Natura 2000 and Protected Area competence-based capacity building.	<b>(2024 - 2027)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to appropriate investments from research platforms and related initiatives, develop and deliver blended learning curricula and content for up to 3 capacity building courses, combining best examples of available research, science and practice to demonstrate the power of effective communication, support applied learning and improve management effectiveness.</li> <li>• Continue to discuss future ENA webinars as a means to present and share results and findings of research projects (including those led by ENABLE partners ECO and TESAF).</li> </ul>	€
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<b>Objective 3: Continue to maintain and expand the ENA by growing the range of competence-based blended learning training courses and increasing access for greater numbers of Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners to capacity building.</b>			
<b>Associated Actions:</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>Indicative cost</b>
3.1 Increase the scale and scope of capacity building provision through continued development and use of the ENA learning platform: meet the needs of larger numbers of Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners and others engaged in implementation of diverse projects with a capacity building component.	Short-medium-long term (2024/2025/ 2026/ 2027/ 2028)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the ENA for various current and prospective future projects where capacity building is a key implementation action – e.g. H2020 NaturaConnect, LIFE PAME, other yet-to-be approved or implemented projects.</li> <li>• Work together with nature conservation organisations, with particular responsibilities for Natura 2000 implementation and restoration action planning, to explore opportunities to create and run tailor-made capacity building training under contract and within the context of their projects – for example, National Parks &amp; Wildlife Finland, National Parks &amp; Wildlife Service Ireland, regional management authorities in Spain and Romania etc.</li> </ul>	€€
3.2 Run a new Natura 2000 Management Effectiveness short training course through the ENA and with inputs from ENA trained trainers for	Winter/ Spring 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EUROPARC is committed to organising and running a tailor-made training course for applied learning by Natura 2000 site managers by mid-2025. Specific attention will be given to Restoration Action Plans, how to develop them and monitor their effectiveness. Indicatively, this course</li> </ul>	€€ €

Objective 3: Continue to maintain and expand the ENA by growing the range of competence-based blended learning training courses and increasing access for greater numbers of Natura 2000 and Protected Area practitioners to capacity building.			
Associated Actions:	Timescale	How	Indicative cost
selected project participants to co-learn, develop and acquire new skills.		would run over 4 to 6 online sessions and include a 3-day face-to-face workshop.	
3.3 Seek to incorporate new digital technologies to create an advanced and more accessible European Nature Academy.	Long-term (by 2028)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep abreast of advances in new digital technologies that can expand online training provision.</li> <li>Explore ways to incorporate AI as a means to increase accessibility for greater numbers of platform subscribers by providing multi-lingual content.</li> </ul>	€ €€ €
3.4 Create a set of new competence-based courses for Natura 2000 and Protected Area staff working in similar functions as a logical extension of LIFE ENABLE: for example, for individuals working in communication & awareness raising functions, participatory governance & inclusion roles, project finance & administration to improve management effectiveness.	Medium-long term (2025-26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subject to appropriate funding mechanisms, expand ENA training courses by utilising existing content and creating new materials where necessary.</li> <li>Catalyse large-scale deployment of best practices by continuing to promote the need for competence-based capacity building programmes through increased use of practical case studies that show how competencies <b>specifically required</b> by nature managers are applied – e.g. communication and collaboration, stakeholder engagement, inclusive governance, biodiversity conservation and management planning including monitoring etc.</li> </ul>	€€ €
3.5 Increase the number of experienced Natura 2000 managers trained to adapt and deliver ENA courses to meet capacity building needs.	Medium term (2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to apply the promotion, application and selection criteria developed and used in LIFE ENABLE to attract experienced Natura 2000 managers to train as ENA trainers.</li> </ul>	€
3.6 Continue to promote and maximise use of the online Training Needs Analysis tool as a basis for	Medium-long term (2025/2026)		€€

the creation of pilot organisational and regional/ national capacity building training programmes.			
3.7 Seek to establish 'Centres of Excellence' for strategic capacity building and development at national and/ or regional levels in countries identified as having 'high potential' – e.g Finland, Ireland, Romania & Spain.	Long term (2026/ 2027)		€€€