

PRoMoting the Governance of Regional
Ecosystem ServiceS

Action Plan - LATVIA
by Riga Technical University

July 2022



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1. General Information

INTERREG EUROPE PROGRESS PRoMoting the Governance of Regional Ecosystem Services

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to the members of the Local Stakeholder Group for their valuable contributions during the workshop sessions developed during this PROGRESS project and especially to the involved official institutions of the Republic of Latvia – Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Nature Conservation Agency and the Ministry of Agriculture engaged in the policy impact activities.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Interreg Europe programme's project "Promoting the Governance of Regional Ecosystem Services" (PROGRESS) aims to initiate a process of policy change towards the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of nature's capacity to deliver the goods and services that we all need.

This Action Plan of Latvia aims to impact two Policy Instruments of Latvia:

1. Environmental Policy Guidelines 2021 – 2027.
2. Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy of Latvia 2023-2027.

The PROGRESS project has been instrumental by providing the interregional learning to its partnering regions and countries by ensuring an active exchange of Good Practices reflected in four Handbooks of Good Practices available here: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/progress/library/#folder=2564> and <https://buni.rtu.lv/interreg-eu-progress/?lang=en>.

The RTU has actively worked by introducing local stakeholders with Good Practices and selecting the most useful and appropriate examples which could be taken over by Latvia. The choice of selected policy instruments of Latvia is based on the evaluation of the importance of the protection and valuing of biodiversity and ecosystem services in Latvia, as well as on the suitability of proposed Good Practices and interregional learning in the frame of the PROGRESS project.

2.1. PROGRESS project: a summary

Interreg Europe PROGRESS project
P*ROmoting the *G*overnance of *R*egional *E*cosystem *S*ervice*S aims to initiate a process of policy change towards the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of nature's capacity to deliver the goods and services that we all need.

Under the global **aim of PROGRESS stated above, the project** develops a series of own activities, and networks with others over its lifespan, as shown on the following diagram.

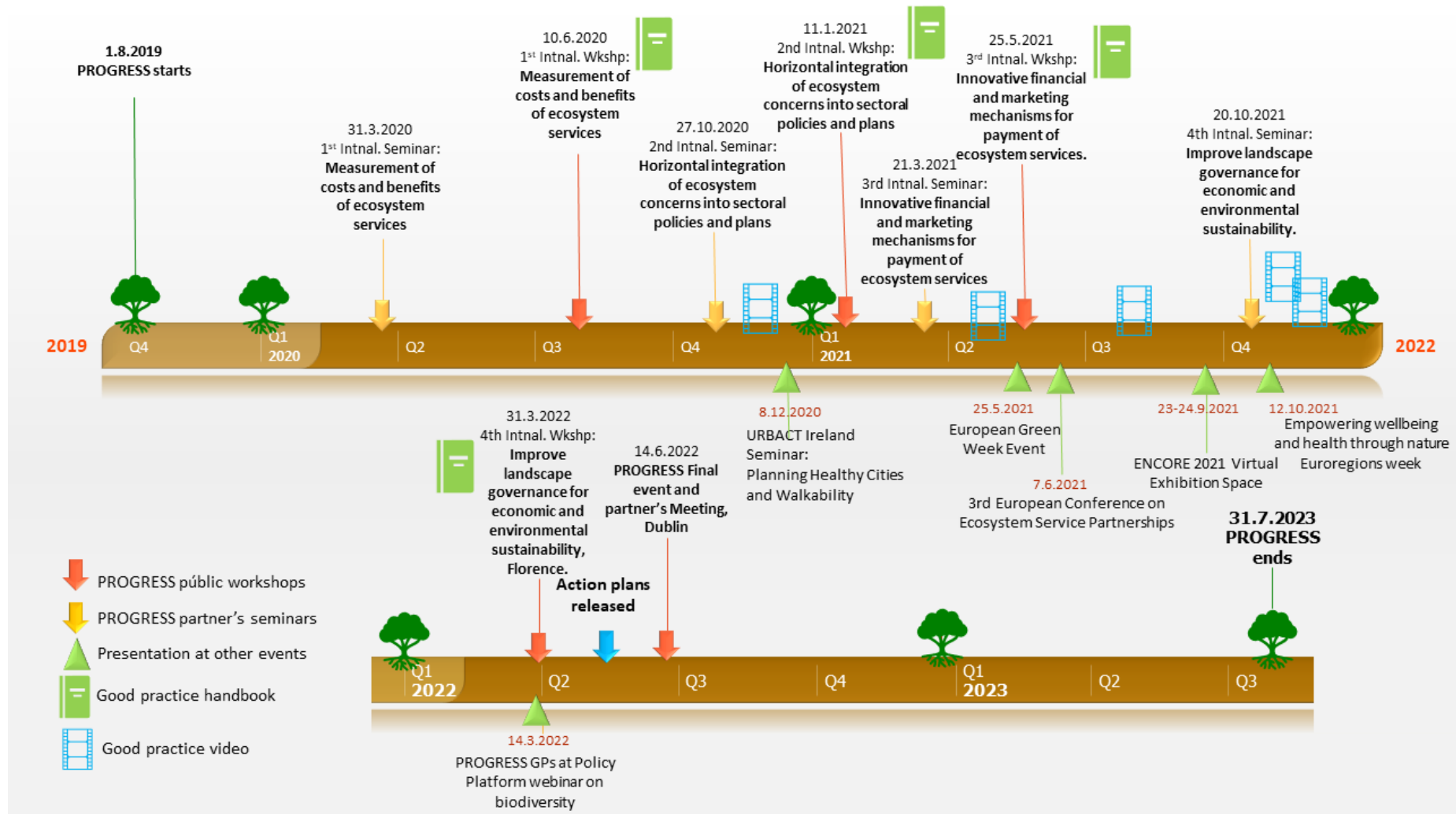
The policy instruments tackled by the project are the ERDF Operational Plans at regional or national level, and other strategies dealing with the protection and valuing of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The approach proposed by the project is based on policy learning and capacity building of the partner organizations and relevant stakeholders of the concerned policy subsystems, as it stimulates a collective multidimensional and dynamic exchange of experience.

The four objective areas towards **change** in policy areas related to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services are as follows. These themes have also structured the shared and compared analysis between partners and stakeholders, as well as the four interregional workshops organised by the project.

OBJECTIVE AREAS OF *PROGRESS*

1. Promote the **measurement of the costs and benefits of ecosystem services** derived from land use.
2. Support the **horizontal integration of the ecosystem concerns into the sectoral policies** and plans.
3. Explore innovative financial and marketing **mechanisms for payment for ecosystem services**.
4. Improve **landscape governance** for economic and environmental sustainability.

2.2. PROGRESS Time frame



POLICY INSTRUMENT I – ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY GUIDELINES 2021 – 2027

3. The Policy Context

3.1. The system of environmental governance and strategical planning

Latvia has a centralised system of environmental governance with the regulatory framework of environmental legislation corresponding with the European Union (EU) directives. The main institution responsible for conducting the environmental policy is the **Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (MEPRD)** and its subordinate institutions, such as the **Nature Conservation Agency (NCA)** responsible for the nature protection planning management and implementation of the respective MEPRD plans. At the same time, there are sectoral areas, where environmental policies are largely in hands of other responsible governmental institutions. For example, the Ministry of Economy plays a key role in the energy sector, and the Ministry of Agriculture – in agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors. At the same time, local governments of Latvia are responsible for land-use planning and environmental services according to local plans.

The **Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia 2030 (Latvia 2030)** is the highest-level and longest-term development plan. The seven-year **National Development Plans (NDP)** following the EU structural funds planning include main policy objectives, outcome indicators and indicative financing for most sectors of the economy. Strategical planning complies with the Paris Agreement and the EU long-term climate ambition objectives. Environmental objectives and planning of actions are presented by the seven-year National Environmental Policy Guidelines 2021 – 2027, which are also related to the NDP and the Operational Programme.

Latvia 2030 defines the nature as the future capital and the sustainable use of nature values and services as one of its priorities, as well as mentions¹ the importance of the spatial planning of nature preservation and restoration. Also, it defines that one of the objectives of Latvia is to become the EU leader in preserving and expanding of the capital of nature and its sustainable use.

The **Latvia's NDP 2021-2027**² stresses the importance of the balanced use of natural capital considering biodiversity protection measures, carbon sequestration commitments and the latest scientific findings on the sustainable and efficient use of natural resources. Moreover, the NDP underlines that the society must reach a consensus during this planning period (2021-2027) on what are Latvia's protected natural values, how much area they cover, what regional growth potential is offered by natural capital, the effects on employment opportunities in rural areas, just compensation for the protected areas and values.

In accordance with the nature protection: key commitments by 2030 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 legally protect a minimum of 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of the EU's sea area and integrate ecological corridors, as part of a true Trans-European Nature Network. Strictly protect at least a third of the EU's protected areas, including all remaining EU primary and old-growth forests. Effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately.³

¹ Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, Sustainable Development Strategy

² Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre, National Development Plan of Latvia for 2014–2020, p. 52

³ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:a3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

3.2. Biodiversity and ecosystems of Latvia

Latvia enjoys abundant biodiversity. Its diverse ecosystems include forests (which cover about half the territory), grasslands, coastal areas, and peatlands. Latvia exceeds the 2020 Aichi targets for protected areas, with more than 16% of marine waters and 18% of land area under some form of protection. However, majority of habitats and species are in unfavourable condition due to land-use change, poor connectivity, agricultural expansion, intensive resource use and pollution. Most of the protected areas lack management plans and are chronically short of human and financial resources.⁴

According to the OECD (2019) Latvia needs to complete its **ecosystem mapping and develop a national biodiversity strategy** to set a coherent policy framework, increase awareness and mobilise resources to meet its biodiversity policy objectives. In addition, the next **forestry strategy** should **fully integrate biodiversity-related objectives** and provide for **sufficient resources**, while the expanding use of economic and voluntary instruments would help improve **sustainable use of forest resources and agricultural land outside protected areas**.

Biodiversity is not priced and is not reflected in accounting reports, so it is often at the expense of biodiversity that competing claims on nature and its use are met. Already in the European Commission's (EC) document "Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020"⁵ is a recommendation that the economic value of biodiversity should be considered in decision making and reflected in accounting and reporting systems. The UN (United Nations) methodology clarifies that the Natural Capital Accounting Approach provides an integrated and comprehensive statistical framework for the organisation of data on habitats and landscapes, measuring ecosystem services, tracking ecosystem assets and associating this information with human economic and other activities.

Latvia2030 stated: Natural capital approaches must be integrated into environmental, economic, spatial, and regional development and land policies. Also, the evaluation of ecosystem products and services should be used at all stages of policy analysis, development, and implementation. However, existing market mechanisms, policy and support programmes have not been effective in the conservation and recovery of natural capital. To change the situation, it is necessary to introduce a natural capital management approach for the identification and assessment of the value of ecosystem goods and services, natural and anthropogenic risks and losses.

So far, there were several **LIFE projects** in Latvia to put in place the green infrastructure. Examples of these are the projects to restore bittern habitats and protect coastal habitats. Green infrastructure has also been incorporated into Riga's 2014-2020 development programme and green infrastructure initiatives have been implemented in the city of Liepaja. In 2018, the Latvia-Lithuania cross border co-operation project "Enhancement of Green Infrastructure in the Landscape of Lowland Rivers (ENGRAVE)"⁶ was launched. Lead by Zemgale Planning Region, it will provide methodological guidelines on green infrastructure and landscape planning and test it at four case study areas. Latvia has also been involved the LIFE Viva Grass⁷ project which aims to demonstrate opportunities for the multifunctional use of grasslands as a basis for strengthening the sustainability of rural areas and as a stimulus for local economies. The Viva Grass project was presented on 20 October 2021 to the PROGRESS partners' as one of Latvia's Good Practices. Another project – the LIFE Ecosystem services is about mapping ecosystems and carrying out an economic evaluation of the identified services in several pilot areas⁸ which was discussed with the PROGRESS

⁴ OECD, 2019, Environmental Performance Reviews: Latvia 2019, OECD 2019

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0244&from=EN>

⁶ Keep.eu website

⁷ LIFE Viva Grass project

⁸ European Commission, LIFE Ecosystem Services

partners on 31 March 2020 and 10 June 2020 at the project events during the first policy learning cycle. In 2017 Latvia also started the biophysical mapping of habitats of EU importance with the aim to set the baseline information on the extent, areas and quality of the habitat types listed in the Habitats Directive and present in Latvia. The mapping has been done in the whole country, not only for Natura 2000 sites.⁹

The EC¹⁰ encourages Latvia to: (i) continue its efforts in deploying green and blue infrastructure and incorporating them across other policies consistent with the **Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services (MAES)** framework; (ii) consider the recommendations of the green infrastructure strategy review report¹¹; and (iii) make full use of the EU guidance on a strategic framework for further supporting the deployment of EU level green and blue infrastructure. It is also invited to provide regular updates on its green infrastructure related developments via its country page on the Biodiversity Information System for Europe BISE¹². Moreover, Latvia is invited to provide information about: (i) progress on a restoration prioritisation framework as referred to in Action 6a of the EU biodiversity strategy; (ii) or other strategic approaches to restoration; and (iii) any information on practical implementation. As part of the LIFE+ project Nat-Programme, Latvia has established restoration priorities for habitats of community interest within its Natura 2000 sites.¹³

Despite ongoing activities, still a lot should be done to ensure a proper, united, and systemic approach towards the exploitation of ecosystems reflected in the legislative framework. So far, the **development of ecosystem services and the governance of natural capital** have been based on individual projects described above. The approach towards the ecosystem services remains confined to declarative documents, such as strategies, plans, guidelines, and information, which give an impression of the weak relationship between theoretical concepts and real policies. The spatial planning document package does not include an obligation to carry out an assessment of the site's ecosystems. In addition, no Latvian-wide ecosystem mapping methodology has been developed, representing all natural/ecosystem values, no spatial aspects are considered in decision-making, no landscape planning has been done.

Based on the evaluation of the hierarchical system of environmental and the nature governance and main strategical planning documents, as well as the results of the interregional learning in the frame of the PROGRESS project the RTU has proposed to target a national level policy planning document in Latvia – **Environmental Policy Guidelines 2021 – 2027 (EPGs 2027)**, which targets the green policy in Latvia following the nature protection goals and settings declared as priorities of the EU nature protection, including the conservation and restoration of biodiversity and the ecosystem services.

3.3. The Policy Instrument

The **EPGs 2027** are a medium-term policy planning document for the environmental sector. They have been developed in accordance with the priorities set out in the Latvia 2030, Latvian NDP for 2021-2027 and the strategic objectives of the European Green Course and provide for:

- achieving the 2030 greenhouse gas reduction target and achieve climate neutrality by 2050;
- improving adaptability, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change;
- making progress towards a renewable growth model by decoupling economic growth economic growth from resource use and environmental depletion and acceleration of the transition to a circular economy;

⁹ European Commission, 2019, Environmental Implementation Review 2019 – Latvia, EC, 2019, Brussels, 4.4.2019

¹⁰ European Commission, 2019, Environmental Implementation Review 2019 – Latvia, EC, 2019, Brussels, 4.4.2019

¹¹ The recommendations of the green infrastructure strategy review report

¹² Biodiversity information system for Europe, Green Infrastructure in Latvia

¹³ National Conservation and Management Programme for Natura 2000 sites in Latvia

- aiming for zero pollution in the environment free of toxic substances, including air, water and soil, and thus also protecting the health and well-being of Europeans;
- **protecting, preserving and restoring biodiversity and increasing natural capital, in particular air, water, soil, and forest, freshwater, wetland and marine ecosystems (specific objective 6.2.): Preservation and governance of natural capital;**
- promoting environmental sustainability and reducing environmental and climate pressures related to production and consumption, in the fields of energy, industrial development, buildings and infrastructure, mobility and food systems.

According to the EPGs 2027 the green policy in Latvia follows the nature protection goals and settings declared by the EU. The **conservation and restoration of biodiversity and the ecosystem services** is a priority for the EU nature protection. The implementation of the policy is based on the protection of biological diversity inside and outside protected nature areas. At the same time, Latvia has the right to set other priorities for the preservation of natural diversity. For example, in the list of protected natural monuments, in addition to territories of biological diversity, there are also territories and objects of high geological and geomorphological value, territories of cultural-historical and landscape significance.

However, the EPGs 2027 still have only a fragmented compliance with the framework of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and Latvia2030, as well as under-represented the concept of natural capital, thereby undermining the sustainable management of natural values and services. In addition, there is insufficient emphasis, understanding, assessment and use of the approach of ecosystem services in planning and management. The implementation of the ecosystem services approach in Latvia is being implemented in a fragmented manner and at an insufficient level and extent. For example, the EPGs 2027 policy scoreboard for the performance indicator 6.2.3. “The mapping of ecosystem services for the territory of Latvia has been prepared” shows the value of the base year (2019) – 0%, which needs to be increased up to 25% by 2027. At the same time, the reported base value can't be 0% considering already implemented activities, such as the LIFE Viva Grass and LIFE Ecosystem service project mentioned above, as well as the Interreg BSR project Land Sea Act.

The afore mentioned indicates that recommendations of the EC related to the mapping and evaluation of ecosystems and their services, the evaluation and development of the natural capital accounting system haven't been taken into account. Moreover, it should be noted that in the EPGs 2027 the natural capital accounting system is not included at all.

Considering the above mentioned the RTU jointly with the local stakeholders' group have decided which Good Practices could be the most useful for improving the EPGs 2027 to ensure a proper, united, and systemic approach towards the exploitation of ecosystems, development of ecosystem services and the governance of natural capital. In addition, the responsible government authority – MEPRD has declared that the public opinion expressed by non-governmental organizations and other interest groups is important for developing Latvia's green policy.

The PROGRESS project has helped to identify problems in the conservation of ecosystem services, such as lack of public awareness, education, cooperation, financial and marketing mechanisms, costs, measurements, technology, sustainability issues etc., and will be also helping to define required solutions. Good Practices of other partner regions have been acknowledged and discussed with local stakeholders for a potential transferring of Good Practices to Latvia to implement necessary changes into relevant environmental and nature policy instruments of Latvia. Conservation of biodiversity and natural capital are key areas which need to be tackled to ensure the sustainability of ecosystem services in Latvia.

During the stakeholders meeting on 27 July 2021 it was proposed that learning and taking over features of the two Good Practices of the PROGRESS project could be particularly useful for

Latvia to deal with existing shortages related to the mapping and evaluation of ecosystems and their services and improve the policy instrument – EPGs 2027:

- Territorial Information System for the Network of Open Areas in the province of Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain);
- National Ecosystem and Ecosystem Service Mapping Pilot for a Suite of Prioritised Services - NEES Mapping Pilot (Ireland).

Additionally, RTU is involved in local consortium work, which aims to determine 30% of Latvian territory as protected areas, which is stated in the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. Within the work of this consortium, two above-mentioned Good Practices are planned to be transferred. The analysis of the selected Good Practices and their usefulness for Latvia are presented in the Part 3.4.

3.4. The Good Practices and Potential Actions

3.4.1. Territorial Information System for the Network of Open Areas in the province of Barcelona – SITxell

Overview

SITxell¹⁴ is a territorial analysis system used to analyze and evaluate the non-urban areas of the Province of Barcelona. Information related to SITxell is made available to the authorities, municipalities, and departments of Catalonia to support urban and regional spatial planning processes. SITxell has been supportive of the implementation of the Barcelona Metropolitan Plan and the Strategic Environmental Assessment and lends itself to being used in large infrastructure projects. The information system shall also provide environmentally friendly information for measuring the costs and benefits of ESs from land use.

SITxell is a Cartographic and alphanumeric database on a scale of 1:50,000, developed in an ArcGis environment, organized in two thematic modules that use complex parameters and indicators for the definition and characterization of open areas.

The modules underlying the SITxell structure are:

1. *Environmental modules* that allow you to view different layers and maps (Geology, hydrology, flora, vegetation and habitat, fauna, landscape ecology, cultural heritage);
2. *Land Use modules* that include different information layers related to socio-economic aspects, urban planning, regulations, transport infrastructure and technical services. Each layer has a metadata file with geographic information.

The base data used by SITxell have a scale of 1:25,000 and 1:5 000 although the database reference scale remains 1:50 000.

More information: <http://www.sitxell.eu/en/default.asp>

Potential Actions

This Good Practice is directly related to the improvement of the EPGs 2027 specific objective 6.2. performance indicator 6.2.3. action “The mapping of ecosystem services for the territory of Latvia has been prepared”.

Considering that there is no planning of green infrastructure in Latvia, as well as planning does not take place at landscape level, the SITxell approach could help to improve the methodological framework for mapping Latvia's territory, including mapping ecosystem services groups such as food, forest biomass, carbon absorption, erosion control, potential recreational sites, and species habitats. These elements would contribute not only to the achievement of targets of the EPGs 2027, but also to the overall conservation of biodiversity. In addition, the take-over of this Good

¹⁴ <http://www.sitxell.eu/en/default.asp>

Practice would extend the mapping range and provide opportunities for the development of map groups such as: 1) habitats and flora; 2) fauna; 3) socio-economic; 4) the ecology of landscape; and 5) geology. Therefore, this Good Practice could provide an opportunity to integrate mapping methodologies and the approach of ecosystem services into decision-making by promoting sustainability-based governance.

3.4.2. National Ecosystem and Ecosystem Service Mapping Pilot for a Suite of Prioritised Services (NEES Mapping Pilot)

Overview

This Good Practice has drawn on existing tools, approaches and data to develop and demonstrate a mapping approach for ecosystem services. The dataset contains ecosystem service maps at the national scale for a set of services prioritised through stakeholder consultation. The NEES Mapping Pilot was funded by the Department of Arts Heritage Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (a central Government Department of Ireland) at a cost of €106,000 and developed over an 11-month period.

In operationalising the MAES (Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services) and the CICES (Common International Classification of Ecosystem Services), the mapping pilot has been an important resource for national, regional and local governments as they begin to quantify and account for ecosystem services within their authority areas. At the local level, various councils have started to use the National Habitat Asset Register (developed by the pilot) to quantify, map and value their ecosystem services. At the regional level, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) has used the NEES Mapping Pilot to demonstrate how ecosystem services can contribute to regional development for healthy living, climate action and economic opportunity, the key principles of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the region. Therefore, it provided the basis for regional uptake and co-ordination of ecosystem services mapping across 12 local authority areas. At the national level, the NEES has directly influenced the National Biodiversity Action Plan (2017-2021) for Ireland. In terms of an extra-regional impact, this national level mapping pilot has been included as a GP for the implementation of MAES on the Biodiversity Information System for Europe (BISE).

More information:

<https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/IWM95.pdf>

<https://www.npws.ie/news/national-ecosystem-and-ecosystem-services-mapping-pilot-ireland>

Potential Actions

This Good Practice is also targeting the EPGs 2027 specific objective 6.2. performance indicator 6.2.3. action “The mapping of ecosystem services for the territory of Latvia has been prepared”.

In the framework of this Good Practice, the Irish Register of Habitats Assets – a national map of habitats, compiling all nationally important habitat data into a single data set. The methodology used in this Good Practice provides an opportunity to represent all or part of the complex ecosystem interaction. Considering that the Latvian mapping methodology is not complete and there has been no national mapping of ecosystem services so far, that consideration should be given to taking over and adapting this good practice to the conditions of Latvia.

3.5. First steps for action from phase 1

Stakeholders' meetings organized by the RTU have regularly taken place during the 1st Phase for the implementation of PROGRESS project. From the start of the project there were 7 meetings (22 January 2020 onsite; 9 July 2020 onsite; 28 January 2021 online; 27 July 2021 onsite; 31 January 2022 online; 23 May 2022 online and 20 June 2022 onsite). During these meetings the Latvian stakeholders were informed about the Good Practices of the PROGRESS partners according to the specific policy learning cycle, as well as planned activities. As there were 4 different policy learning cycles in the project, the experts at the stakeholders' meetings were changing as well in the relation to their expertise and area. Anyway, the core stakeholders' group has been developed. In addition, relevant stakeholders were involved both in the PROGRESS Interregional Thematic Seminars (ITs) on 31 March 2020; 27 October 2020; 21 March 2021 and 20 October 2021, and Interregional Training Workshops (ITWs) on 10 June 2020; 11 January 2021; 25 May 2021 and 31 March 2022 where selected Good Practices of Latvia were presented and stakeholders participated in the interregional learning and exchange of experience activities. The project's Final Event was held on 13-14 June 2022, where also Good Practice holders and stakeholders from Latvia were participating. Moreover, stakeholders' meetings in 2022 were aimed at discussing specific Good Practices and assessing their transferability potential to Latvian conditions.

During the stakeholders meeting on 27 July 2021 it was proposed that learning and taking over features of the two Good Practices of the PROGRESS project could be particularly useful for Latvia to deal with existing shortages related to the mapping and evaluation of ecosystems and their services and improve the policy instrument – EPGs 2027.

Following the evaluation of Good Practices and decision taken by the stakeholders the RTU has prepared recommendations for the MEPRD for the improvement of the policy instrument – EPGs 2027 and submitted them. In addition, recommendations have been discussed with the Latvian Nature Conservation Agency, which is responsible for implementation of the policy and particularly interested in transferring Good Practices related to the mapping of ecosystems and ecosystem services. Currently, RTU is involved in local consortium work, which aims to determine 30% of Latvian territory as protected areas, which is stated in the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. Within the work of this consortium, Good Practices presented by PROGRESS partners: SITxell and NEES Mapping Pilot are planned to be transferred.

4. Action Plan 2021-22 in Latvia – Policy Instrument I

Action 1 – Improving the Environmental Policy Guidelines 2021 – 2027	
Relevance to the project	This Action is based on the analysis of Good Practices presented by PROGRESS partners: SITxell and NEES Mapping Pilot, as well as discussions with stakeholders about the appropriateness of these Good Practices for the Latvian green policy, as well the EPGs 2027.
Nature of the action	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Based on the assessment of Good Practices and decision taken jointly with stakeholders, the policy recommendation have been submitted to the MEPRD, as well as to the NCA of Latvia for introduction in the policy document – EPGs 2027. 2) The RTU follows up the improvement of the policy instrument and assists the responsible institution in the process of further interregional learning, exchange of experience and taking over features of the proposed Good Practices. 3) Continuing working with stakeholders and monitoring the implementation of the ecosystem and ecosystem services mapping.
Responsible	The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development
Other stakeholders involved / Role	Natural Conservation Agency, Baltic Environmental Forum Latvia, Latvian Fund for Nature, Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences of the Latvia University, Spatial Planning Department of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and related industries portal for the whole society, Latvian Forest Certification Council, Latvian State Forest Research Institute "Silava", Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Liepāja city administration, Zemgale Planning Region, Kurzeme Planning Region, Latgale Planning Region, Association Baltic Coasts, Latvian Association of Surveyors.
Indicative costs	n/a
Funding sources	n/a
Implementation calendar	April 2022 - July 2023

POLICY INSTRUMENT II – Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy of Latvia, 2023 – 2027

5. The Policy Context

In recent decades, wild pollinators in the EU have declined in abundance and diversity. In 2016, the global assessment of the **status of pollinators**¹⁵ concluded that wild pollinators are decreasing under the increasing threat from human activity, including climate change. A 2019 worldwide assessment report on insects¹⁶ confirmed a negative trend in the number of insects in general, with over 40 % of insect species threatened with extinction. The most affected insect species are butterflies, moths, bees, and beetles.

In 2020, the World Economic Forum¹⁷ placed loss of biodiversity among the top five long-term global risks. It saw a decline of pollinators leading to a shift in crop cultivation from nutrient-rich food crops (fruits, vegetables, and nuts – all of which require pollinators) to energy-dense, nutrient-poor staple crops (for example rice, corn, wheat, soybean, and potatoes). A loss of habitat from conversion to intensive agriculture, and the use of pesticides and fertilisers are among the main causes of such a decline.¹⁸

The **EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030**, as one of the pledges of the EU's Natural Renewal Plan to be implemented by 2030, is to reverse the trend of declining pollinators. The Strategy also stresses that the new governance framework should ensure the participation of all stakeholders in the performance of the EU biodiversity commitment, supporting dialogue with stakeholders and participatory governance bodies. In turn, the European Commission (EC) will assess the success and appropriateness of this approach in 2023, and will consider whether the management approach should be legally binding.

The EC has stated that it expects Member States to support the objectives of the EU Farm to Fork Strategy and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, including **the goal to reverse the decline of pollinator populations**. Overall, the National Action Plans (NAP) should deliver substantially more positive actions to reduce the pressures of pesticides on wild pollinators. In this respect Latvia has set an objective to hold three information campaigns for protection of pollinating insects during 2020-2023 (led by State Plant Protection Service and Latvian Beekeepers Association). At the same time, an overarching recommendation of the EC is to set up mechanisms to share and exchange Good Practices between countries.¹⁹ Therefore, interregional learning and transferring of Good Practices should be the next step for Latvia, which would also need to be reflected in a new **Strategic Plan (SP) of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of Latvia 2023-2027**.

The implementation the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is under the responsibility of **the Ministry of Agriculture (MA)** of Latvia and its subordinate institutions.

The MA is the leading national administrative authority in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sector, which organizes and coordinates agricultural, forest and fisheries policies and the implementation thereof. The MA is responsible for the pollination of plants as an ecosystem service.

¹⁵ IPBES, "The assessment report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services on pollinators, pollination and food production", 2016

¹⁶ Sanchez-Bayo F., A.G. Wyckhuys K. "Worldwide decline of the entomofauna: A review of its drivers", 31 January 2019

¹⁷ World Economic Forum, "The Global Risks Report 2020", 15th Edition, 15 January 2020

¹⁸ <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/pollinators-15-2020/en/>

¹⁹ https://ieep.eu/uploads/articles/attachments/d8e4c51c-f7f2-4ad7-8367-012b7e4d3205/IEEP2020%20Pollinators%20SUP%20report_final%20rev.pdf?v=63793582832

Pollinators are an integral part of ecosystems, since the continuation of many species is dependent on them. Agricultural crops can also produce harvests thanks to pollinators' activities. In the EU alone, around 84% of crop species and 78% of wild flower species depend at least partly on animal pollination (European Commission, 2018).²⁰

Ecosystem services are all the benefits, resources and processes provided to humanity by nature. **Plant pollination** is part of the support services provided by the ecosystem. If the ecosystem is no longer able to perform this service, a person should be involved in pollination of fruit trees in order to perform this function mechanically, which is time-consuming and cost-inefficient work.

Bees play an important role in crop pollination and are the main pollinating agents in nature. The largest group of pollinators is honeybees. According to data from the Central Statistical Bureau²¹, since 2009 the number of bee families in Latvia has tripled. By 1 July 2020, already 108 069 flocks, almost a fifth of which have been certified in the organic farming system.²²

The regular honeybee can visit 500 to 1,000 flowers during its flight, while the bee carries out 10-15 such flights per day, while the number of nectar gainers active in the bee family reaches several thousand. As a general rule, the number of insects is sufficient, plant pollination is ensured in nature.²³

Bumble bees are the only insects whose snout length is sufficient to allow nectar to be obtained from the red clover's barrel-shaped flower bottom, as well as other morphological-like flowers. The house bees can't do it, so the red clover fields are hardly visited. The decline in the number of bumble bees in Europe was linked to the trend of increasing fields typical of intensive farming. This resulted in the disappearance of uncooked grasslands and grasslands, the habitats in which bumble bees form their own nests. Methods for commercial propagation have been developed to attract bumble bees to agricultural areas. They are currently used mainly in greenhouses and covered areas: crop pollination of tomatoes, strawberries, beans, etc.²⁴

Currently, there is no **monitoring of pollinators** in Latvia. Consequently, Latvia does not calculate the **pollinator species index**, so there is no information on the impact of agriculture on pollinators. In the EU too, there is insufficient knowledge of the state of pollinators and the causes and consequences of their extinction, so the EC published the "Pollinator Initiative" in 2018. It is stressed that there is a need to support monitoring and research of the EU's emerging pollinator species and populations, which provide monitoring and evaluation capabilities for EU pollinators. On the other hand, the Priority Action Plan (2021-2027) states that, in order to ensure a favourable position for pollinators, a support measure should be introduced for the establishment of buffer zones along water bodies, roads, among different agricultural areas, etc.²⁵

Various targeted buffer zones (green bands, fieldsides, forest borders) are important for the maintenance of biodiversity (including pollinators), particularly along areas of crops that are important for bees.

²⁰ KOMISIJAS PAZIŅOJUMS EIROPAS PARLAMENTAM, PADOMEI, EIROPAS EKONOMIKAS UN SOCIĀLO LIETU KOMITEJAI UN REĢIONU KOMITEJAI ES Apputeksnētāju iniciatīva. COM/2018/395 final/2

²¹ LLG220. Lauksaimniecības dzīvnieku skaits gada beigās (tūkstošos):

https://data1.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/lauks/lauks__05Lopk__ikgad/LLG220.px/?rxid=dce86984-a965-41cb-9beb47f0e62130cf

²² https://www.zm.gov.lv/public/files/CMS_Static_Page_Doc/00/00/02/21/49/Ilpielikums_SM_6_SVID.pdf

²³ https://www.zm.gov.lv/public/files/CMS_Static_Page_Doc/00/00/02/21/49/Ilpielikums_SM_6_SVID.pdf

²⁴ [https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/projekti/vides_izglitiba/materiali/Neklatiene/NKL-2.LEKCIJA-](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/projekti/vides_izglitiba/materiali/Neklatiene/NKL-2.LEKCIJA-EKOSISTEMU%20PAKALPOJUMI.pdf)

[EKOSISTEMU%20PAKALPOJUMI.pdf](https://www.lu.lv/fileadmin/user_upload/lu_portal/projekti/vides_izglitiba/materiali/Neklatiene/NKL-2.LEKCIJA-EKOSISTEMU%20PAKALPOJUMI.pdf)

²⁵ Nature Conservation Agency, 2020, Priority Action Plan (2022-2027), p. 51

The European Citizens' Initiative “**Save Bees and Farmers**”, supported by more than a million inhabitants, successfully closed this autumn (Latvian citizens were among the most active signatories of the initiative). The Latvian Beekeepers Association has stressed that at European level, beekeeping has been recognised as a priority sector because the number of pollinators in Europe is declining, honey bees and other pollinators are suffering from pesticides, but Latvia at the same time is reducing support for beekeepers. Moreover, the Biodiversity Strategy of the EU Green Course sets out a commitment to address the trend of decreasing pollinator numbers by 2030. However, this strategy has not been taken into account when planning the future agricultural policy in Latvia.²⁶

Therefore, this is the area, where Good Practices and interregional learning during the implementation of the PROGRESS project can bring valuable results.

5.1. The Policy Instrument

One of Latvia's strategic settings for the implementation of the **SP CAP 2023-2027 after 2023** is “each farm invests effectively in the conservation of biodiversity and climate change mitigation”, which is consistent with the EU Environmental and Climate Goals (Green Course) indicators.

This is expected that the SP CAP will be approved in the 4th quarter of 2022. It emphasises that there is currently no monitoring of pollinators in Latvia, however, given the role of pollinators in the continuation of many species, including farming, and harvesting, it is necessary to promote plant pollination by promoting sustainable farming. The SP CAP should also foresee the implementation of agricultural practices, including the establishment of buffer zones, and the spread of bees within the traditional and organic farming system (SM6 V6 - Promoting plant pollination by promoting the implementation of sustainable farming practices).

Considering the importance of monitoring and protecting pollinators in the implementation of SP CAP in Latvia, the RTU during the stakeholders meeting on 31 January 2022 has introduced the Ministry of Agriculture with Good Practices proposed by the Irish partner in the framework of PROGRESS project, namely:

- All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) Framework;
- Protecting Farmland Pollinators (PFP).

The MA has recognized that Good Practices proposed by PROGRESS project could be used for improving the **SP CAP 2023-2027 action SM6 V6 - Promoting plant pollination by promoting the implementation of sustainable farming practices**, to deal with such an important ecosystem service as the pollination. It will also help to implement the Latvia's NAP of the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

Therefore, the MA has expressed the interest in further exploring and considering taking over the experience of the above-mentioned Good Practices in the final stage of the preparation of the SP CAP 2023-2027 action SM6 V6, as well as in its possible implementation through several planned interventions, which contribute to the development and maintenance of wild pollinator habitats, such as fruit and berry orchards, and even the creation of “green bands” along fieldsides and water bodies, and the promotion of the cultivation of various flowering nectar plants (including legumes) without the use of plant protection products, minimizing the harmful effects on pollinators.

²⁶ <https://www.delfi.lv/news/national/atbildigi-daba/lauksaimniecibas-politikas-anatomija-bezzobaina-attieciba-uz-vidi-ar-ilelu-apetiti-uz-industrializaciju.d?id=53916333>

5.2. The Good Practices and Potential Actions

5.2.1. All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) Framework

Overview

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) and its framework is an island-wide (Ireland and Northern Ireland) attempt to reverse declines in pollinating insects (primarily bees and hoverflies). In providing targeted and actionable information that can be used to sell a biodiversity message to a very wide audience, it has been developed in recognition that the decline of pollinators is a serious problem which requires immediate attention to ensure the sustainability of our food production, avoid additional economic impact on the agricultural sector and protect the health of the environment.

The AIPP was developed on a voluntary basis and without funding under the leadership of the 15 stakeholders, which included experts from universities, relevant government departments, municipalities and interest groups. The National Biodiversity Data Centre contributed €2,000 for document (graphic) design and a limited print run. There is no fixed implementation budget for the AIPP. In 2020, the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine provided a small budget to develop resources (€15,000), while 100+ partners fund their own actions. Others (mainly partnering local authorities) fund print runs and dedicated activities e.g. awards and videos. There is no dedicated permanent staff for the AIPP, with the steering group chair (project manager) dedicating 1.25 days/week within their existing role, while a dedicated project officer position is subject to external funding. The first Plan covers the period 2015-2020 and a new version is currently under development to cover the 2021-2025 period.

More information here: <https://pollinators.ie/>

Potential Actions

While halting the loss of biodiversity entails costs, the disappearance of biodiversity for society, particularly for economic operators in sectors directly dependent on ecosystem services, will cost much more. For example, the estimated economic value of insect pollination in the EU is €15 billion a year.

Considering the role of pollinators in the development of a sustainable Latvian economy, this Good Practice of Ireland could be particularly useful. For example, the Ireland's Pollination Plan was drawn up, acknowledging that the decline in the number of pollinators is a serious problem that needs immediate attention. Applying this Good Practice or adapting some of its elements to Latvian conditions would increase awareness of the economic, environmental and social value of regulating services provided by pollinators, as well as contribute to the preservation of biodiversity.

5.2.2. Protecting Farmland Pollinators

Overview

Protecting Farmland Pollinators (PFP) is a five-year EIP-Agri project working with a group of 40 farmers, across farm types (beef, dairy, mixed, and tillage) and intensities (high, medium, and low) in Co. Kildare and neighbouring counties in the Eastern and Midland Region of Ireland. The project has four key objectives: 1) To test the effectiveness of a range of pollinator measures across different farm types in Ireland and to identify those that have most impact, and those that are most cost-effective; 2) To test the impact of these pollinator measures on overall biodiversity; 3) Based on the pollinator measures, to develop a simple farm-scale pollinator scoring system that uses a habitat matrix approach to quantify how pollinator-friendly the entire farm is, and 4) To develop a simple results-based payment method that encourages and assists farmers in attempts to improve their whole farm pollinator score. The project is effective as it is built on evidence-based actions and a results-based payment model, where

participating farmers receive an annual payment based on their overall farm pollinator score, which is calculated based on the quantity and quality of pollinator-friendly habitats on the farm.

The project is built on evidence-based actions and a results-based payment model. The participating farmers receive an annual payment based on their overall farm pollinator score, which is calculated based on the quantity and quality of pollinator-friendly habitat on the farm. Scores are based on indicators relating to the following 5 criteria: 1) Flowering hedgerows, 2) Pollinator-friendly trees; 3) Pesticide inputs; 4) Flowering margins around field edges; and 5) Flowers. The higher the pollinator score of the farm, the more the farmer will be paid annually. The maximum payment any farmer is able to draw down in any year is limited to €4,000. The farmer is required to complete the scorecard and the project team then calculates the score based on the information submitted by the farmer. Actions are weighted, so that those actions that are more beneficial to pollinators score more. Scores are also further adjusted for quality.

The concept of paying farmers for producing ecosystem services on the other hand is a relatively new idea. Until recently, the wide diversity of ecosystem services provided by farmers (such as water quality, flood and fire resilience, and soil quality) has not been acknowledged in payments to farmers. This lack of connection between farming enterprise and the provision of wide-ranging ecosystem services results in a disproportionate level of reward being granted to the food provision service. This practice ultimately comes at the cost of the other ecosystem services.

More information here: <https://biodiversityireland.ie/>

Potential Actions

This Good Practice is five-year project (2019-2023), where 40 groups of farmers practising different types of farming (cattle rearing, dairy farming, farming) are collaborating. Within the framework of the project, a pollinator evaluation system has been developed which includes 5 main criteria: 1) flowering hedges; 2) pollinator-friendly trees; 3) low levels of pesticides used; 4) flowering rural boundary bands (edges); 5) the range of flowers adjacent to the holding. The evaluation system covers the most important aspects of pollinator well-being: food, safety, shelter. The evaluation system developed examines the effectiveness of the range of pollinator measures in the various types of farms in Ireland and the impact of pollinator measures on overall biodiversity. Using the Habitats Matrix approach, it is assessed how friendly the whole farm is to pollinators. A simple, results-based payment method has been developed in the framework of good practice. In expert judgement, this Good Practice also has the potential for application to Latvian conditions.

5.3. First steps for action from phase 1

Stakeholders' meetings organized by the RTU have regularly taken place during the 1st Phase for the implementation of PROGRESS project. From the start of the project there were 7 meetings (22 January 2020 onsite; 9 July 2020 onsite; 28 January 2021 online; 27 July 2021 onsite; 31 January 2022 online; 23 May 2022 online and 20 June 2022 onsite). During these meetings the Latvian stakeholders were informed about the Good Practices of the PROGRESS partners according to the specific policy learning cycle, as well as planned activities. As there were 4 different policy learning cycles in the project, the experts at the stakeholders meetings were changing as well in the relation to their expertise and area. Anyway, the core stakeholders' group has been developed. In addition, relevant stakeholders were involved both in the PROGRESS ITSs on 31 March 2020; 27 October 2020; 21 March 2021 and 20 October 2021, and ITWs on 10 June 2020; 11 January 2021; 25 May 2021 and 31 March 2022 where selected Good Practices of Latvia were presented and stakeholders participated in the interregional learning and exchange of experience activities. The project's Final Event was held on 13-14 June 2022, where also Good Practice holders and stakeholders from Latvia were participating. Moreover, stakeholders' meetings in 2022 were aimed at

discussing specific Good Practices and assessing their transferability potential to Latvian conditions.

The RTU during the stakeholders meeting on 31 January 2022 has introduced the MA with the above-mentioned Good Practices of the PROGRESS project to be used by the MA for improving the **SP CAP 2023-2027 action SM6 V6 – Promoting plant pollination by promoting the implementation of sustainable farming practices.**

The MA has conceptually supported the proposal of the RTU to consider taking over the experience of the above-mentioned Good Practices in the final stage of the preparation of the SP CAP 2023-2027 action SM6 V6, as well as in its implementation through several planned interventions.

Transferring of the Good Practices could result in preparing and applying in Latvia:
- the framework of the **Latvian Pollinator Plan**, in consistency with the SP CAP 2023-2027 and addressing the problem identified by the European Court of Auditors in Special Report 15/202027: “The Commission's initiatives have failed to deliver results for the protection of wild pollinators”, which recognizes that the existing Latvian Pollinator initiative has not provided expected policy change in the main areas and activities;
- a **system for evaluating pollinators**, which would allow the calculation of support payments based on a certain, simple methodology ensuring good management of natural capital.

Considering that the national regulatory framework for the introduction of SP CAP for the post-2023 will be developed during 2022, this is important that the pollination issues are taken into account in order to successfully implement the EU's Nature Restoration Plan, as well as examining the possibility of including additional conditions in the agricultural support mechanism which would contribute to protecting agricultural terrestrial pollinators, for example, by including an additional point tenders for the selection of projects to be supported, provided that the conditions for the preservation of pollinators are met.

During the 1st Phase of the PROGRESS project the RTU continues actively work with the MA on promoting the improvement of the SP CAP 2023-2027.

6. Action Plan 2021-22 in Latvia – Policy Instrument II

Action 1 – Improving the Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy of Latvia 2023 – 2027	
Relevance to the project	This Action is based on the analysis of Good Practices proposed by the Irish partner in the framework of PROGRESS project, namely: All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) Framework; Protecting Farmland Pollinators (PFP).
Nature of the action	Based on the assessment of Good Practices and decision taken jointly with stakeholders, this was decided that two Good Practices will be further analysed and transferred to Latvia. The RTU follows up the improvement of the policy instrument and assists the responsible institution in the process of further interregional learning, exchange of experience and transferring features of the proposed Good Practices. Continuing working with stakeholders to create preconditions for starting the development of Latvian pollination plan and promoting it in accordance with good practices of Ireland, and monitoring its implementation.
Responsible	The Ministry of Agriculture of Latvia
Other stakeholders involved / Role	The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Natural Conservation Agency, State Plant Protection Service, Latvian Beekeepers Association, Baltic Environmental Forum Latvia, Latvian Fund for Nature, Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences of the Latvia University, Forest and related industries portal for the whole society, Latvian Forest Certification Council, Latvian State Forest Research Institute "Silava", Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Liepāja city administration, Zemgale Planning Region, Kurzeme Planning Region, Latgale Planning Region, Association Baltic Coasts, Latvian Association of Surveyors.
Indicative costs	Tbc.
Funding sources	Tbc.
Implementation calendar	April 2022 and June/July 2023

APPROVAL

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Stamp of the organisation (if available): _____