

**ANNEX III**

to Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the annual action plan in favour of  
Albania for 2021

**Action Document for “EU for Nature”****SYNOPSIS**

## 1.1. Action Summary Table

<b>Title</b>	<b>EU for Nature</b> Annual Action Plan in favour of Albania for 2021			
<b>CRIS number</b>	IPA III/2021/ 043-666/3			
<b>Basic Act</b>	Financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)			
<b>Team Europe Initiative</b>	No			
<b>Zone benefiting from the action</b>	The action shall be carried out in Albania			
<b>Programming document</b>	IPA III Programming Framework			
<b>PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION</b>				
<b>Window and thematic priority</b>	W 3 - Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity TP 1 - Environment and climate change			
<b>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</b>	Main SDG (1 only): 13 – Climate Action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.  Other significant SDGs (up to 9) and where appropriate, targets: 14 Life below water: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.  15 Life on Land: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.			
<b>DAC code(s)</b>	Main DAC code : 41030 Bio-diversity (90%) Sub-code 1 : 312 Forestry (10%)			
<b>Main Delivery Channel</b>	13000 - Third Country Government (Delegated co-operation)			
<b>Markers (from DAC form)</b>	<b>General policy objective</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women’s and girl’s empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Trade development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Disaster Risk Reduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nutrition	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>RIO Convention markers</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Biological diversity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Combat desertification	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change mitigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Climate change adaptation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Internal markers</b>	<b>Policy objectives</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Digitalisation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>BUDGET INFORMATION</b>				
<b>Amounts concerned</b>	Budget line: 15.020201.02 Total estimated cost: EUR 6 000 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 6 000 000			
<b>MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION</b>				
<b>Type of financing and method(s) of implementation</b>	Project Modality <b>Direct management</b> through procurement <b>Indirect management</b> with the entity(ies) to be selected in accordance with the criteria set out in section 4.3.4.			
<b>Relevant priorities and flagships from Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans [only for the Western Balkans]</b>	Priorities: "Green Agenda"			
<b>Final Date for conclusion of Financing Agreement</b>	At the latest by 31 December N+1			
<b>Final date for concluding</b>	3 years following the date of conclusion of the Financing Agreement, with the exception of cases listed under Article 114(2) of the Financial Regulation			

<b>contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts</b>	
<b>Indicative operational implementation period</b>	72 months following the conclusion of the Financing Agreement
<b>Final date for implementing the Financing Agreement</b>	12 years following the conclusion of the Financing Agreement

## 1.2. Summary of the Action

Nature protection has been identified as one of the key environmental priorities by the Albanian Government for financing under IPA III. This Action is designed to contribute to the effective management of the protected areas as well as to the establishment of new protected areas as part of the preparation for the Natura 2000 network. The overall objective of the Action is to protect and conserve at least 25 per cent of the Albanian territory (at land and at sea), by 2030 - through establishing and implementing an effective system of protected areas, ecosystems connectivity and other effective area-based conservation measures. The focus is on areas particularly important for biodiversity.

The institutional setup and appropriate capacities of the relevant institutions such as the National Agency for Protection Areas and its Regional Administrations (NAPA/RAPA) are key for preserving important habitats and species. Capacities must also include proper resources for inspection and enforcement. The Action shall support the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) in developing national legislation in compliance with EU nature *acquis*. Also, the duties and responsibilities among the relevant authorities will be defined at the national level for the implementation of nature legislation and for the Birds and Habitats Directives (BHD).

The Action shall strengthen the capacities of the relevant institutions to manage protected areas and to establish an effective performance monitoring system. It will directly contribute to improving effectiveness of the management of the protected areas in Albania as well as developing capacities and skills to fight environmental crime and to cooperate with the judiciary. Additionally, support will be provided for the revision of existing and development of new protected areas management plans following Natura 2000 requirements. Finally, implementation of conservation measures and the restoration of degraded habitats/ecosystems will be supported.

The action will contribute to addressing the knowledge gap on distribution of habitat and species in the country, and will therefore provide for science-based decision-making on conservation. Furthermore, the development of new management plans for forests and non-timber forests products will improve sustainability of the management of these important natural resources. Implementation of nature-based solutions, awareness raising, legislation alignment and grants, will garner stronger support to protected areas and overall conservation efforts in Albania.

## 2. RATIONALE

### 2.1. Context Analysis

Albania is considered a biodiversity hotspot in Europe. However, its remarkable biodiversity and valuable natural resources are facing challenges. As an economy in transition, Albania is following a fast development trajectory. New roads and infrastructure, dams, hydro power plants, oil reservoirs and mass tourism infrastructure are intended to benefit the economy of the country, but pose a serious threat to environmental protection. Aiming for EU accession, Albania needs to line its nature conservation efforts up with EU requirements, particularly ensuring the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. The European Commission assessed in the 2020<sup>1</sup> Report on Albania that alignment with the EU *acquis* in the field of nature protection, in particular for the Birds and Habitats Directives, is well advanced. According to the latest data, the transposition of the Habitats Directive is approximately 86%, and the transposition of the Birds Directive is 65%. However, law enforcement on environmental protection remains generally weak.

The first priority is the full transposition of all relevant EU directives/regulations into the national legislation. Legislation is needed to ensure the appropriate assessment of any plan/strategy and programme and/or project likely to have a significant effect on conservation sites.

Given the incomplete information on the population of species that currently exists in Albania, further efforts should be devoted to the inventory and monitoring of bird species. A wide data collection campaign will contribute to improving knowledge on distribution of habitat and species over the country.

An essential condition to advance sustainable development and to achieve a balanced and respectful use of natural resources is a society which is informed, aware and actively committed to its environment. Successful implementation of the Natura 2000 network requires extensive communication and awareness raising among all relevant stakeholders. In line with the IPA III Programming Framework, the Action addresses the global challenge of improving the

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<sup>1</sup> SWD(2020) 354 final

environment and ensuring its preservation for future generations. The Action includes activities that will focus on reversing environmental degradation and promoting the conservation of terrestrial and marine ecosystems.

## 2.2. Problem analysis by areas of support

### **AREA OF SUPPORT #1: Enforcement and implementation of the nature protection legislation at national level**

The first priority for Albania in the field of nature protection, is the full transposition of all EU nature *acquis* in the national legislation. The assessment of the transposition and implementation level of EU nature *acquis* conducted in the framework of SANE27<sup>2</sup>, shows that most of the directives/regulations under the nature sub-chapter are at initial stage of implementation. No specific plans and/or dates are set at national level for their full implementation. In general, the legal provisions and institutions are in place, but enforcement is still weak and inspections are not effective. Legislation should be developed to ensure the appropriate assessment of any plan and/or project likely to have a significant effect on conservation sites. In addition, necessary compensatory measures must be taken to ensure the overall coherence with Natura 2000. Also, legislation must be developed to ensure no measures deteriorate conservation areas and to encourage the management of landscape features of major importance for wild fauna and flora (those essential for the migration, dispersion and genetic exchange of wild species).

Implementation is hindered by the lack of appropriate monitoring and law enforcement mechanisms and clear responsibilities for the competent authorities and institutions. Institutional capacities require strengthening, to enable exercising the assigned responsibilities, in particular related to the management and monitoring of protected areas.

Given the limited information on the population of species present in Albania, further efforts should be devoted to the inventory and monitoring of bird species. The limited level of knowledge on distribution of habitats and species hinders the appropriate identification and protection of relevant sites, as well as the selection and implementation of appropriate conservation measures. A preliminary list<sup>3</sup> of potential Sites of Community Importance (pSCIs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) has been developed and includes 44 sites. However, not all pSCIs are well defined in terms of boundaries and management priorities. The proper definition of pSCIs boundaries requires further expert support for habitat mapping and species distribution areas on each proposed site. Additionally, a wide data collection campaign must be undertaken to improve knowledge on habitat and species distribution over the country. This information shall contribute to the revision of existing and development of new Management plans of protected areas.

Although legally required, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has not proven to be a sufficient tool to ensure the proper conservation of sensitive important species and habitats. In most cases, the data and provisions of the EIA reports are widely challenged and opposed by independent experts and civil society organisations. Often, public consultations are only conducted formally. Participation and involvement of all stakeholders are weak.

The implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives requirements will also need funding. The establishment of the Natura 2000 network is a lengthy, demanding and costly process, particularly in case of limited in-country expertise on species and habitat mapping. So far, nature conservation activities are mostly funded by donor contributions. The proportion of funds coming from the state budget should be increased significantly to provide for the implementation of the monitoring activities and conservation measures required by the directives/regulations. Capacity building and an improved institutional set up should be supported financially. It is necessary to explore and develop financial instruments to provide for the implementation of the requirements of the EU directives.

### **AREA OF SUPPORT #2: Increasing the wider society's commitment towards nature protection**

Implementation of regulations/directives under the nature sub-chapter requires close cooperation with academia/universities and civil society organisations. Consequently, mechanisms should be developed to guarantee their involvement and scientific contribution for the implementation process.

Research on the protection, management and use of naturally occurring wild species and habitats on the national territory is still at an initial stage. Limited funding is provided by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) to research institutions for collecting and providing data on wildlife. The bulk of funding comes from external sources, such as projects supported by the EU and the EU Member States. There are some limited scientific capacities in specialised fields (invertebrates) among state research institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> Supporting Albanian Negotiations in Environment, Chapter 27 is a program funded by SIDA (Please see Section 2.5 for details)

<sup>3</sup> The NaturAL Project (2015-2019) has already developed a preliminary list of potential sites to be included in the Natura 2000 network.

An essential condition for sustainable development and a balanced and respectful use of natural resources lies in an informed and aware society which is actively committed to its environment. Successful implementation of the Natura 2000 network requires extensive communication and awareness raising among all relevant stakeholders. Enhanced awareness and information on the role protected areas serve not only to support biodiversity conservation, but also as a tool to foster sustainable development and the wise use of natural resources. It is paramount to ensure support from the relevant stakeholders and civil society in general.

### 2.3. Relevance and complementarity with strategies supported by key national stakeholders

Over the last decades, Albania has made considerable progress in its policy on environmental protection, including nature conservation. The National Biodiversity Strategy and an Action Plan 2015-2022 are currently the only policy documents that directly target nature protection. The Strategy was updated in 2020 following its Midterm Review and clearly identifies the main areas of work, including among others:

- Increase of the Protected Areas (PA) coverage up to 20% on terrestrial PAs and 10% on marine and inland water PAs.
- Completion of the legal framework in line with the EU *acquis* for nature and the environment in accordance with the Birds and Habitats Directives.
- Strengthening law enforcement by the means of improving legislation and building institutional capacities.

The activities under this Action comply with the recommendations from the National Biodiversity Strategy's Midterm Review Report (2020) which identify the following objectives for the future:

- Further completion of the legal framework in the field of nature protection and achieving full approximation with the EU *acquis* in this field.
- Practical implementation of the national legal framework in the field of nature protection.
- Establishment of the Natura 2000 Network of Areas of Interest for the European Community and ensuring their sustainable management.
- Increasing the surface of the Protected Areas, especially marine and coastal protected areas, as a contribution to achieving the global target for these "Aichi target 11" areas and the rehabilitation of protected areas.
- Further enhancing and strengthening the capacity of protected area management structures.
- Implementation of management plans for protected areas that have an existing plan, and drafting new and updating existing management plans.
- Implementation of existing action plans for species and habitats and drafting new plans for endangered species.
- Strengthening the implementation of the 5-year hunting moratorium and completing the legal framework in this area.

EU integration is a top priority for the Albanian Government and for more than a decade Albania has been working intensively on transposing the EU Directives within its national legislation. Although the transposition of the respective directives is progressing well (86% of the Habitats Directive, 65% of the Birds Directive), the implementation of both is still at initial stage.

First, full transposition must be completed. The list of habitats and species of Community Importance occurring in Albania is adopted, although experts consider it can be improved. Additionally, a number of correction/additions to the list of species and habitats of community interests in Albania have been identified. The preliminary list of Sites of Community Importance (pSCI) developed by the NaturAL Project includes 44 sites covering existing protected areas, as well as areas not yet under protection. Methodological guidance on how to identify pSCI borders based on scientific research and a participatory approach are developed. However, detailed habitat maps covering the country are missing. Knowledge about the distribution area of species is limited and/or scattered.

### 2.4. Relevance and complementarity with EU policy and EU and other donors' assistance

This Action is in line with the **IPA III Programming Framework** Thematic Priority 1: Environment and Climate Change under Window 3 – Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity. Its overall objective is to promote the green agenda by reinforcing environmental protection, contributing to mitigation and increasing resilience to climate change, and support nature protection and restoration. Reducing the environmental and climate footprint of food systems will also strengthen the capacity of food value chains to face future challenges.

The Action is in line with the **EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030**<sup>4</sup>. The strategy contains specific commitments and actions to be delivered by 2030, including the establishment of a larger EU-wide network of protected areas on land and at sea, building upon existing Natura 2000 areas, with strict protection for areas of very high biodiversity and climate value. Moreover, a series of concrete commitments and actions shall be undertaken to restore degraded ecosystems across the EU by 2030, and to manage them sustainably, addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss.

This programme is in line with the **Green Agenda for the Western Balkans**<sup>5</sup>. Mainstreaming biodiversity safeguards across all economic activities is one of its five pillars and is central to the European Green Deal. Protection of biodiversity is the fourth pillar of the Green Agenda, with actions such as protection and restoration plans, and nature-based solutions. The implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives, together with the enforcement of Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment Directives are seen as preconditions for further sustainable infrastructure development. The Green Agenda also emphasises under Pillar I the deployment of nature-based solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The **Albania Report 2020** recognises that alignment with the EU *acquis* in the field of nature protection, in particular for the Birds and Habitats Directives, is well advanced, but law enforcement remains generally weak and despite numerous capacity building activities and technical assistance, the institutional capacities are still limited, including the capacities in the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA). The legislation on strategic investment raises concerns for the protection of biodiversity, as it may allow large tourism and industrial investments in protected areas, e.g. the proposed airport in the Vjosa-Narta area. This conflicts with other national laws and with international biodiversity protection conventions that Albania has ratified. Albania should comply with national and international nature protection and water management obligations, ensure public participation and consultation, and guarantee high quality EIA reports that include impact assessments on nature and biodiversity.

The **National Plan for European Integration (NPEI) 2021-2023** defines as main priorities for the coming period, the identification, study and completion of standard proposal forms for each potential Natura 2000 area for Albania. In parallel, the Government and local authorities will need to strengthen the capacities of all structures in the field of nature protection at central and local level aiming at the integrated management of protected areas. Efforts are needed for the implementation of the moratorium on hunting and forestry exploitation.

## 2.5. Lessons learned and links with previous financial assistance

Considering the importance of Albania as a biodiversity hotspot, the EU and other donors have provided significant support to build national capacities on nature conservation in Albania in the past years. This Action shall follow up on the recommendations and lessons learned from the previous assistance to maximise the expected results.

The **EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA) 2019-2022** in the Western Balkans and Turkey is the major driver of reform and development in environmental governance through compliance with the EU environmental *acquis*. The programme builds on the results of the Regional Environmental Network of Accession (RENA) and Environment and Climate Regional Accession Network (ECRAN) programmes by supporting the regional cooperation and strengthening the administrative capacities of the beneficiaries. Regional cooperation provides the framework for sharing knowledge, expertise and good practices, and for addressing common environmental problems in a more sustainable and efficient way. The programme aims to strengthen the implementation of the EU environmental *acquis* in the Western Balkans and Turkey in areas relevant for addressing trans-boundary environmental issues. The purpose is to assist the European Commission in providing the Secretariat of the EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA). The main beneficiaries are the Ministries of Environment of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

The EPPA has provided support for the implementation of biodiversity strategies to the Ministries in the Region. The study on green infrastructure deployment and ecological connectivity status of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia provides a basis for defining concrete proposals and recommendations for the protection, development and improvement of ecological connectivity throughout the region. The development of initial proposals for the establishment of new Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, will contribute to establishing an ecological network of MPAs to protect at least 10% of the marine and coastal waters of the Mediterranean. These studies provide the basis for the future nature protection activities in Albania.

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<sup>4</sup> COM(2020) 380 final

<sup>5</sup> SWD(2020) 223 final

\* This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with the UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

The project **NaturAL** – “Strengthening National Capacities in nature conservation – preparation for Natura 2000 Network” (IPA 2013), aimed to halt the loss of biodiversity in Albania through improved Management of Protected Areas. It initiated and supported the designation of the Natura 2000 network by developing a preliminary list of Natura 2000 sites, and invested in 3 visitor centres, 8 rangers’ buildings, equipment, tools, infrastructure, means of transport, knowledge, capacities and skills in 10 Protected Areas, covering 66% of the national territory under protection.

This Action will build on the experience gained with NaturAL. It will acquire knowledge on habitats and species on some of the sites in the preliminary list of Natura 2000 sites, complete Standard Data Forms (SDF) and pave the way for the designation of Natura 2000 sites in Albania. The model of designing a Natura 2000 site, developed under NaturAL, provides a technical-scientific reference to assist the future site designers of the Natura 2000 network.

The EU-funded “**Institution building for enforcing environmental and climate *acquis* (IBECA)**” strengthened the capacity of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment to build and implement a sound sector strategy, and to implement and enforce environmental and Climate Change legislation. This Action will build on the experience and capacities developed, and will support the activities defined within the Directive Specific Implementation Plan.

The Swedish Government finances the programme “**Supporting Albanian Negotiations in Environment, Chapter 27**” (SANE27) aiming to strengthen the capacity and capability of the Albanian Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) and other institutions to prepare for EU Chapter 27 negotiations. The programme started in April 2018, implemented in partnership between the MTE and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. The programme includes preparation for Chapter 27 screening, and strategic planning for Chapter 27 Negotiations. It developed the Need Assessment Documents for Chapter 27 identifying the main needs to close the gaps for the main 73 EU directives and legislations. SANE27 also supports the involvement of CSOs in the preparations for the negotiation process, and building the capacities of stakeholders in preparation for EU negotiation, the screening process and requirements for EU directives and regulations. This Action shall address a number of gaps in implementation of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives defined in the Needs Assessment Document developed by SANE27.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

#### 3.1. Planned results and intervention logic

The Action will improve the management of the existing protected areas (PA) and those that may be established during this Action. The main impact will be to protect and conserve through a well-connected and effective system of protected areas and other area-based conservation measures at least 25 per cent of the Albanian territory (at land and at sea), by 2030, with the focus on areas particularly important for biodiversity. This will support Albania to meet the EU *acquis* requirements for nature protection and to enhance climate mitigation and adaptation capacities.

The intervention consists of eight outputs contributing to the following **outcome** target of improving the effectiveness of the management of the protected areas. The Action will strengthen the capacities of relevant institutions, revise and compile new management plans for protected areas and for the use of forest and non-timber forest products, support the establishment of performance monitoring systems, support the implementation of conservation measures, support CSOs in implementing nature-based solutions and measures against environmental crime, and raise awareness on Natura 2000 and conservation.

The NAPA and MTE in charge of the action have experience from the previous NaturAL project. Legislation to support the action is in place and there is a recent decision to establish the Special Fund for Protected Areas (SFPAs) and to invest there the revenues generated by NAPA. The ToRs and Application Guidelines are being prepared with the help of SANE27 experts.

#### **Output 1: Strengthened capacities of the relevant institutions (NAPA/RAPA) to effectively manage protected areas according to the EU *acquis* and best practices**

The institutional setup and capacities of the relevant institutions (NAPA/RAPA), including inspection and enforcement are important for preserving habitats and species. The full alignment of the legislation with EU *acquis* is the basis for the Action. Therefore, the Action shall support the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) in further developing national legislation in compliance with EU nature *acquis* and defining the duties and responsibilities among the authorities at the national level responsible for the implementation of nature legislation and in Birds and Habitats Directives (BHD). The next step is to identify the required skills and capacities at various levels through a technical and training needs assessment for implementation of BHD (including the inspection and law enforcement). This will be



followed by the development and implementation of a tailor-made comprehensive training programme (short and long term). The Action shall develop specifications to ensure that all conditions are in place for effectively managing the protected areas. Furthermore, the Action will support the development of capacities and skills to fight environmental crime, as well as cooperation with the judiciary system (prosecutors and judges) through the organisation of joint activities. Necessary technical and field equipment will be supplied.

### **Output 2: Revised and new protected areas management plans through assessment of biodiversity values and threats following Natura 2000 requirements**

The establishment of the Natura 2000 network in Albania has been initiated. This process has revealed significant knowledge gaps concerning the distribution of habitat and species in the country. Successful establishment of the Natura 2000 network requires updated and new management plans (MPs) for the protected areas, addressing the challenges in nature conservation and management, including climate change. The Action will facilitate defining PA sites, by preparing full data sets required by the Birds and Habitats Directive for at least ten sites of Special Community Interest, which will be proposed as Natura 2000 sites and a minimum of ten (10) other sites, to support the preparation of new MPs, according to requirements of the BHD for these sites, thus ensuring their protection and sustainable management in the future. The Action shall also strengthen the capacities of the relevant institutions (MTE, NAPA), universities, and local CSOs working in botany, zoology, and nature conservation in the principles of the implementation and management of the Natura 2000 network. With the assurance of full commitment by the national authorities, particularly the MTE and NAPA, to cooperate in selecting a minimum of twenty sites, the Action shall support the preparation of the MPs and the assessment of the biodiversity values and threats. The assessment shall identify priority conservation and restoration measures taking into account ecosystem connectivity, needed to prevent further degradation of the biodiversity, habitats, and ecosystems. This will be done according to requirements of the BHD, to ensure their protection and sustainable management in the future. The selection of the management plans (MPs) for revision shall be based on the assessment of the validity of each MP, the endangerment of the ecosystems, species, and habitat, and the intensity of human activities in the protected areas. The MTE and NAPA should ensure the selected sites include a variety of ecosystems and habitats, including marine and coastal areas. Also, new areas to be possibly designated as protected areas will be included. The selection of the protected areas and development of new will be accompanied with a proposal for a variety of conservation measures to ensure species and habitat conservation including climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. The assessment and review process shall involve a participatory approach. The Action shall also improve the collection of data and evidence concerning the revision and implementation of the actions/measures within the MPs. Data collection will be based on analytical tools (such as the Advanced Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool - METT) and in-situ research. The MPs will use the collected data, and the Action shall propose measures to improve the monitoring of the implementation of the MPs.

### **Output 3: Performance monitoring system in place**

The Action shall support the MTE and NAPA in developing a Performance Monitoring System with a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan. The monitoring framework will be based on the protocols and tools for the maintenance of the species and habitats conservation status. The Monitoring and Evaluation Plan will systematically organise the collection of specific data on ecosystems, habitats and species. The data is to be assessed and stored in a geo-referenced Information System which will constitute an organised repository of data for managing key numeric information allowing the establishment of an effective monitoring and reporting for the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives. NAPA's capacities for implementation of the MPs and evaluation of their implementation will be strengthened. This will contribute to better surveillance and law enforcement activities, increasing their efficiency and improving reporting on results of patrols and indictments. To improve the prosecution of environmental crimes, the Action will support cooperation with law enforcement agencies and judicial institutions (state police, prosecution, judges). Indicators and monitoring procedures will be developed for reporting by NAPA on the results of law enforcement and fight against environmental crime. Capacities of relevant institutions for providing evidence to easier and faster resolution of courts cases related to the legislation for nature protection will be strengthened. The performance monitoring system will also support commitment from the government partners at all levels to participate and benefit from the Action. The necessary equipment for the monitoring, surveillance, and law enforcement activities will be provided. This will allow collection of sufficient evidence for prosecution.

### **Output 4: Conservation and restoration measures foreseen in the management plans are implemented**

The Action will implement conservation measures and restoration of degraded natural and semi-natural ecosystems. It will support the achievement of Aichi Biodiversity Targets 14 and 15 to restore and safeguard the ecosystems that provide essential services and to restore of at least 15 % of degraded ecosystems. The Action also contributes to the

achievement of commitments under other conventions<sup>6</sup>. The Management Plans which are still valid and up to standards contain several conservation measures and rehabilitation activities which have not been implemented due to lack of funding and lack of a dedicated fund/financial autonomy of the Protected Areas. The needed conservation and restoration measures (including climate change mitigation and adaptation measures) will be assessed and designed under Output 2. Under Output 4, the conservation status of relevant biodiversity elements (habitats and/or species) will be enhanced. The action will improve forest management and reforestation/afforestation actions, to improve adaptation capacities (e.g. afforestation in river basin to contribute to a more stable hydrologic regime and to reduce floods). The works will contribute to reversing the loss of biodiversity, recovering connectivity, improving ecosystem resilience, enhancing the delivery of ecosystem services, mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change, combating desertification and land degradation, and improving human well-being while reducing environmental risks and scarcities. The Action shall support a number of conservation measures in selected sites through small-scale works. Ecosystem restoration will take place across all types of habitat, biomes, and ecosystems, including forests, grasslands, croplands, wetlands, and other terrestrial and inland water ecosystems, marine, and coastal ecosystems, for a range of purposes, and with different actors. The conservation action may be also expanded along suitable corridors enabling the connection among protected areas. This will ensure the population viability, and investment in green infrastructure to decrease human impact on biodiversity in PAs which have settlements. Ecosystem restoration activities will be planned and implemented using the best available science and traditional knowledge and envisage the potential of Nature Base Solution approach. The national authorities shall ensure inclusiveness by involving the local communities, academia, civil society environmental organisations, and other relevant stakeholders. Communication, education, and public awareness will be employed to increase understanding of the benefits and costs of ecosystem restoration activities. A participatory approach will foster buy-in by locals and will increase support for protected areas and biodiversity conservation efforts. Monitoring should begin during the early stage to enable ecosystem conditions and socio-economic effects to be measured against a reference model. Effective monitoring involves extensive planning before the initiation of restoration activities, including establishing baselines, using biological indicators, and setting clear and measurable restoration objectives.

#### **Output 5: New management plans for the use of forest and non-timber forest products developed**

Forests, woodlands and pastures cover about 340,438.00 ha or 66% of the protected areas network. 21% of the total forest and pasture area of Albania is in the network. The Action shall support the preparation of a new Forest and Pasture Management Planning process, based on information acquired through the forest and pasture inventory. The multifunctional forest management plans shall ensure the sustainability of the forests, also taking into account the functions of, and services provided by forests, climate change mitigation and adaptation potential, and the needs and requests of all the stakeholders. Well-managed forests can serve as buffer zones around protected areas. They form parts of ecological and conservation corridors between protected areas and help to maintain biodiversity. The national authorities will select the areas for which forest management plans shall be developed (minimum 10,000 ha in total) in cooperation with local authorities. The importance of the areas for the species and local communities will be considered. The new forest management plans should be multipurpose, covering social, economic, climate change and ecological aspects. They should also be based on optimal functional zoning of the forest management unit, safeguarding the socio-economic benefits without jeopardising biodiversity and the ecological functions of natural ecosystems. The management plans will ensure a forest and pasture inventory and integration and standardisation of information on forests and pastures in protected areas within the national forest information system (AIFIS). AIFIS aims to establish a standardised approach to ensure harmonised and comparative results at a national level. This will require close cooperation with the newly established National Forests Agency (NFA) and relevant municipalities.

#### **Output 6: Support to civil society for environmental protection and restoration of protected areas**

This output will target CSO involvement in the environmental protection and restoration of protected areas. Among others, important topics will be identification and implementation of mechanism in nature conservation and sustainable development of the PAs. The Action will develop and support the implementation of models of nature-based solutions and green infrastructure within protected areas and capacity building for topics related to the sustainable use of nature resources and their conservation. Civil society has been an important player in fighting environmental crime, which has risen during the last two years in Albania, especially in PAs. This action will support the civil society in identifying applicable measures and in cooperation with government institutions responsible for the law enforcement. It will support their role as part of the implementation measures against environmental crime in the PAs, strengthen their cooperation with the PAs administration and state institutions, and build capacities to better combat environmental crime not just within, but also outside PAs. On one hand civil society needs support in combatting environmental crime, and on the other hand in remedying the damages of environmental crime and human activity in PAs.

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<sup>6</sup> including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, and the United Nations Forum on Forests, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

### **Output 7: Nature-based solutions (focusing but not limited to nature protection /conservation and fighting of environmental crime) implemented**

Nature-based solutions (NbS) are intended to support the achievement of society's development goals and safeguard human well-being in ways that reflect cultural and societal values and enhance the resilience of ecosystems, their capacity for renewal, and the provision of services. Therefore, the proposed Action will develop and support the implementation of models of nature-based solutions within protected areas through the identification and development of nature-based solution activities, the implementation of such activities, and capacity building for topics related to NbS. The collaboration with the CSOs and local stakeholders is crucial in making the implementation sustainable in time and efficient in the adaptation process.

Assuming that there is wide interest, participation, involvement, and commitment of the wider stakeholders, professional bodies, private sector, academia, municipalities, and civil society organisations, the implementation of NbS shall address some major societal challenges, such as food security, climate change, water security, human health, disaster risk, social and economic development, tourism-related economic activities, as an important precondition for effective management of the protected areas.

The environmental crime should be part of the work of the government institutions for identification and enforcement. The action will increase synergies and collaborations between NAPA and other institutions (such as inspectorates and the justice system) and will so contribute to put in place mechanisms that will reduce the incidence of environmental crimes. This action will be linked with the action in Output 6, connecting the fighting against the environmental crime with the work of the CSOs.

### **Output 8: Increase communication, awareness and engagement of communities and private sector in nature conservation and Natura 2000**

Raising public awareness for the importance of Nature and Biodiversity Protection in Albania is essential for the implementation of the models of nature-based tourism activities within the protected areas. The Action shall support the responsible authorities with the effective communication on the special appeal of protected areas to visitors. The Action shall also raise awareness on the benefits of implementing the EU Environment and Nature Protection objectives and of having NATURA 2000 sites.

## **3.2. Indicative type of activities**

The Action will support the achievement of **Output 1, Output 2, Output 3, Output 5 and Output 7** with **technical assistance activities** that will cover the following:

- Strengthening the administrative capacities of the relevant institutions (Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE) the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA)/Regional Administration of Protected Areas (RAPA)) for the effective management of protected areas through assessing their training needs, developing a Training Programme and delivering training, developing manuals of procedures, etc.;
- Identifying technical needs for supplies for the management and monitoring of protected areas and data collection and reporting;
- Developing necessary legislation to ensure the full transposition of EU nature *acquis*;
- Addressing the knowledge gap on habitat and species distribution providing for better science-based decision-making on conservation;
- Providing support to the revision of existing and development of new management plans for the protected areas, following the requirements from Natura 2000, as well as developing new management plans for the forest and pasture areas to attain the sustainable use of forests and non-timber forest products and improve the management of these important natural resources in close cooperation with local communities, taking into account climate change mitigation and adaptation measures;
- Developing a performance monitoring system, supporting monitoring activities and the collection of specific data on habitats and species and the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of management plans;
- Identifying the necessary conservation and restoration measures and the degraded areas (ecosystems and habitats) that need rehabilitation and the developing designs needed for their implementation, including climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

**Output 1** and **Output 3** are partially related to strengthening administrative capacity and are linked to provision of equipment, monitoring tools, and surveillance equipment for management and monitoring of protected areas, data collection and reporting, improving the surveillance and law enforcement activities, and developing of the Performance Monitoring System.

Activities related to **Output 4, Output 7** and **Output 8** include:

- Investments (works) concerning conservation measures and restoration of degraded habitats/ecosystems (Output 4);

- Technical Assistance for supervision of the implementation of the works;
- Implementation of the awareness campaign on nature conservation and Natura 2000 (Output 7).

Concerning **Output 6**, related to the support for the civil society for environmental protection and restoration of protected areas, the Action foresees a grant scheme, focusing, but not limited to, nature protection/conservation and restoration on one hand and measures against environmental crime on the other hand, to foster support from the non-governmental actors for protected areas and overall conservation efforts in Albania.

### 3.3. Risks and assumptions

Risks	Risk level (H/M/L)	Mitigating measures
Lack of inter-institutional data sharing or collaboration.	H	Information technologies implemented or used throughout the project which are best suited to the local context and do not restrict the transfer and communication of information. A web-based platform will be created during the project to share data and information, as part of a dedicated management information system (MIS).
Delays in transposition of the relevant EU Directives into the national legislation	M	Engagement with the institutions from the beginning, including developing and supporting realistic transposition plans with on-going monitoring of progress.
High turnover of staff in the implementing agencies and lack of knowledge and experience in nature protection	H	Institutions participating in the action will identify at inception persons that could replace key staff in the case of turnover, in order to ensure institutional continuity of participation in the action. Technical guidelines will be developed in English and Albanian to guide new staff that become involved in the action.
Lack of capacities and mechanisms to properly plan and mobilise funds for the long-term upscaling of conservation	H	A strategy to up-scale, sustain and to implement conservation measures will be developed. Assistance will be provided to support public institutions at all levels with medium term budget planning. The Government of Albania (GoA) approved in January 2021 the rules for the management of revenues generated by fees paid in Protected Areas, and the establishment of the Special Fund for Protected Areas (SFPAs). This will allow the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA) to use the revenues generated by SFPAs and re-invest them in PAs.
Conflicting interests with other stakeholders (conservation vs use/development or wildlife vs humans) using the same shared natural resources.	H	These challenging situations will be mitigated by bringing people together in multi-stakeholder dialogues and training in mediation and negotiation and finding and supporting alternative solutions.
Limited national technical capacity hinders project interventions.	H	Identify and develop capacity as required. The action shall initiate collaboration and foster exchange between national institutions and international research institutes. The Special Fund for PAs will allow NAPA to employ extra staff and contract necessary expertise.
Limited commitment/buy-in from local communities.	M	A stakeholder engagement plan shall be developed to ensure engagement and buy-in into the project. The action shall engage local communities during implementation with targeted communication actions.
<b>Assumptions (to be reflected in the Logical Framework Matrix above) – grouped by outputs and outcomes</b>		
Outcome 1		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Albanian Government, in line with the EU accession process, considers nature conservation a priority.</li> <li>• The national institutions shall ensure timely decision-making in the development of the relevant legislation and policy(es). Also, project decisions shall be made in a timely manner to enable smooth implementation.</li> <li>• The authorities shall ensure the involvement of local communities, academia, and civil society environmental organisations during the whole implementation of the Action.</li> </ul>		
Output 1:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government is fully committed to implement the recommendations on improving the institutional capacities and on providing adequate budget allocations.</li> </ul>		

Output 2, and 5:

- Central government institutions and relevant on-going projects are ready to cooperate and share all the available technical, administrative and institutional information regarding nature conservation.

Output 3:

- The main government partners dedicate sufficient time and staff at all levels, to participate in and benefit from the project.

Output 4, 6 7 and 8:

- There is wide interest, participation, involvement and commitment of the wider stakeholders, professional bodies, academia, municipalities and civil society organisations.
- The Government of Albania is committed to fight environmental crime in and out of the protected areas.
- NAPA/RAPA are fully dedicated and participate in the implementation of the communication and awareness campaign.

### 3.4. Mainstreaming

**Gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities:** The action will develop a baseline gender needs assessment proposing the methodology and concrete recommendations for gender actions. Throughout the implementation of this Action, gender analysis shall be carried out to ensure gender mainstreaming across activities, such as plans, the promotion campaign, development of policies, assessments or evaluations. Gender mainstreaming into the project activities is considered as a means for the fulfilment of Natura 2000 objectives. The gender perspective shall facilitate equal access to resources and opportunities. It will promote participation of women in planning processes and awareness activities. Gender approach will also foster equal opportunities through the economic activities, including farming, tourism, forestry, and infrastructure projects. During the implementation equal participation of men and women in project activities will be analysed and supported. Stakeholder decisions will be made with a gender balanced representation.

**Environment and Climate change:** The Action will have strong positive environmental impact. It aims to enhance the capacity of national stakeholders to plan and implement conservation measures for restoring degraded habitats and to conserve valuable biodiversity. It will improve environmental conditions in the short- to long-term. By promoting and supporting nature conservation efforts, the project will indirectly address environmental sustainability and improve the overall resilience of the country to climate change effects. Since the action will engage international consultancies, international travel will occur. Carbon off-setting and other interventions (supporting tree planting) will be considered.

**The Rights Based Approach:** Changes in the environment and natural resources have the greatest impact on people living in poverty, whose resilience to such changes is weak. The Human Rights Based Approach provides the legal ground and principles to guide work for people living in poverty. The action shall integrate the rights perspective into the planning process, based on existing EU and Albanian legislation, while taking into account progressive standards. Extensive non-discriminatory consultation and participation is foreseen with allocated time and budget. Emphasis is placed on identifying and involving vulnerable groups. Inclusive partnership with local organisations is supported to empower also the most vulnerable and marginalised groups to expand their democratic ownership over policies and initiatives affecting their lives.

**Engagement with Civil Society:** Meaningful participation of the rights holders is crucial for sustainable biodiversity conservation. Local communities, CSOs and other stakeholders should understand and exercise their rights to assemble, express themselves, and to participate in decision-making processes – from building councils and official bodies in PAs, to those community-led and connected to the specific resource or sector. Community resilience will be improved through the creation of platforms for participation in the management of PAs, as a long-term mechanism to ensure participatory decision-making and shared ownership. It will also be fostered through educational activities; by empowering the youth to engage in conservation challenges, while creating environmentally sensitive leaders of tomorrow.

**Conflict resolution:** Competing interests between groups of people depend on the context and the diverging interests. Their causes could lead to an outbreak of violence. Potential conflicting interests with different stakeholders include e.g., confrontation between local communities and conservation groups with hydropower developers within protected areas or sites defined as potential Natura 2000 sites; or conflicts between wildlife and humans that share the same areas and compete for the same natural resources for survival. Potential conflicts will be mitigated through multi-stakeholder dialogue, training in mediation and negotiation, and supporting alternative solutions. The Action adopts an approach for preventing potential conflicts before the uprising tensions become violent.

### 3.5. Conditions for implementation

In January 2021 the Albanian Government approved the rules for the management of revenues generated by fees paid in Protected Areas, and the establishment of the Special Fund for Protected Areas (SFPA). The Special Fund for PAs aims to pool NAPA's own revenues and donors' contributions and project funds. This allows the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA) to use the revenues it generated in line with its needs and priorities to guarantee the sustainability of the action, and to re-invest revenues in PAs' conservation and ecosystem restoration actions, purchasing and maintenance of equipment, awareness raising, and creating seasonal employment in PAs.

- For a better and transparent operation of the SFPA, by the end of the first year of the action's implementation, NAPA will elaborate and adopt clear procedures and necessary documents for using this Fund in a proper way and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and Albanian laws.

The Government of Albania developed a PAs Assessment Study in 2019-2020 and presented it in the final workshop in February 2020 as the basis for the new system of PAs. The Government of Albania (GoA) has prepared draft Decisions of Council of Ministers (DCM) for each proposed PA and their new borders. The draft DCMs are undergoing a consultation process with all stakeholders and line ministries before approval.

- The GoA and NAPA will take into account the comments received during the consultation process on draft DCMs. During the implementation of the action, GoA and NAPA will further involve the scientific community, CSOs, the EU, donors and other stakeholders, to improve and review any change to the system of protected areas in compliance with the Albanian legislation, international law, and the EU *acquis*.

Failure to comply with the requirements set out above may lead to a suspension and/or recovery of funds under this programme and/or the re-allocation of future funding.

### 3.6. Logical Framework

Results	Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10)	Indicators (at least one indicator per expected result)	Baselines (2021)	Targets (2026)	Sources of data (1 per indicator)	Assumptions
<b>Impact</b>	To protect and conserve through a well-connected and effective system of protected areas and other area-based conservation measures at least 25 per cent of the Albanian territory (at land and at sea), by 2030, with the focus on areas particularly important for biodiversity.	% of territory (at land) of Albania under a well-connected and effective system of protected areas. % of territory (at sea) of Albania under a well-connected and effective system of protected areas	18%  1%	25%  4 %	Report on assessment of protected areas of Albania/Data on Protected areas in Albania.	<i>Not applicable</i>
<b>Outcome 1</b>	Improved management effectiveness of protected areas.	% of total protected areas under Good management effectiveness score (according to METT).	30%	55%	Scores of the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT).	The Albanian Government, in line with the EU accession process, considers nature conservation a priority. The national institutions shall ensure the timely decision-making in the development of the relevant legislation and policy(es). Also, project decisions shall be made in a timely manner to enable smooth implementation. The authorities shall ensure the involvement of local communities, academia, and civil society environmental organisations during the whole implementation of the Action.
<b>Output 1 related to outcome 1</b>	Strengthened capacities of the relevant institutions (NAPA/RAPA) to effectively manage protected areas according to the EU <i>acquis</i> and best practices.	Number of trained staff (disaggregated by age and sex) who have improved their professional skills and capabilities.	40	80	Action implementation reports.	The Government is fully committed to implement the recommendations on improving the institutional capacities and on providing adequate budget allocations.
<b>Output 2 related to outcome 1</b>	Revised and new protected areas management plans through assessment of biodiversity values and threats following Natura 2000 requirements.	Number of protected areas with revised management plans with foreseen climate change mitigation and/or adaptation measures.  Number of protected areas with new management plans following the Natura 2000 model, with foreseen CC mitigation and/or adaptation plans  Area (Hectares) of habitats and species mapped.	0  0  0	10  10  30 000	Management Plans reports with Habitats maps.	Central government institutions and relevant on-going projects are ready to cooperate and share all the available technical, administrative and institutional information regarding nature conservation.

Results	Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10)	Indicators (at least one indicator per expected result)	Baselines (2021)	Targets (2026)	Sources of data (1 per indicator)	Assumptions
<b>Output 3 related to outcome 1</b>	Performance monitoring system in place.	Number of annual performance reports by NAPA/RAPA.	0	1 report NAPA 12 reports RAPAs	NAPA/RAPA annual reports.	The main government partners dedicate sufficient time and staff, at all levels, to participate in and benefit from the project.
<b>Output 4 related to outcome 1</b>	Conservation and restoration measures foreseen in the management plans are implemented.	Area (ha) where any number of conservation measures have been implemented.  Area (ha) of degraded habitats/ ecosystems with restored habitats.	0  0	10 000 ha.  Minimum 3000 ha.	Action implementation report.	There is wide interest, participation, involvement and commitment of the wider stakeholders, professional bodies, academia, municipalities and civil society organisations. The Government of Albania is committed to fight environmental crime in and out of the protected areas. NAPA/RAPA are fully dedicated and participate in the implementation of the communication and awareness campaign.
<b>Output 5 related to outcome 1</b>	New management plans for the use of forest and non-timber forest products developed.	Area (Hectares) of forest areas with new management plans with foreseen climate change mitigation and/or adaptation measures	0	10 000 ha.	ALFIS database.	Central government institutions and relevant on-going projects are ready to cooperate and share all the available technical, administrative and institutional information regarding nature conservation.
<b>Output 6 related to outcome 1</b>	Support to civil society for environmental protection and restoration of protected areas	Number of activities implementing environmental protection and restoration of protected areas solution models.	0	6	Action implementation report	There is wide interest, participation, involvement and commitment of the wider stakeholders, professional bodies, academia, municipalities and civil society organisations.
<b>Output 7 related to outcome 1</b>	Nature based solutions (focusing but not limited to nature protection /conservation and fighting of environmental crime) implemented	Number of activities implementing nature-based solution models	0	6	Project implementation report	The Government of Albania is committed to fight environmental crime in and out of the protected areas. NAPA/RAPA are fully dedicated and participate in the implementation of the communication and awareness campaign.
<b>Output 8 related to outcome 1</b>	Increase communication, awareness and engagement of communities and private sector in nature conservation and Natura 2000.	Effective campaign to raise awareness and engagement of the public in nature conservation. Percentage of people aware of Natura 2000 and nature conservation in the community.	No awareness campaigns.  N/A	1 awareness campaign implemented Increase percentage of people in communities aware of Natura 2000 areas and surroundings	Action Baseline Report. Action Final Report. Activities' report. Initial and final surveys on awareness of Natura 2000 and nature conservation.	



## 4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS (this section must be included in the TAPs of the Financing Agreement)

### 4.1. Financing agreement

In order to implement this action, it is foreseen to conclude a Financing Agreement with the Republic of Albania.

### 4.2. Implementation of the budget support component

N.A.

### 4.3. Implementation modalities

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures<sup>7</sup>.

#### 4.3.1. Direct Management (Grants)

N.A.

#### 4.3.2. Direct Management (Prizes)

N.A.

#### 4.3.3. Direct Management (Procurement)

Output 8 will be achieved through a service contract.

Subject	Indicative type (works, supplies, services)	Indicative trimester of launch of the procedure
Increase communication, awareness and engagement of communities and private sector in nature conservation and Natura 2000	Services	Q2 2022

#### 4.3.4. Indirect management with an entrusted entity (i.e. Member State Organisation, third donor country, EU specialised (traditional/regulatory) agency, international organisation)

A part of this action may be implemented in indirect management with an entity which will be selected by the Commission's services using the following criteria:

- i. Mandate of the entrusted entity covering the nature of the action.
- ii. Experience of the potential entity in particular in the context of the European Union and in the sector, with experience in the sector in the Western Balkans, or in the sector in countries of the two most recent enlargement waves (Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia) being an advantage.
- iii. Operational capacity/technical expertise, logistical & management capacities, including at the local level.
- iv. Impact, results, leverage effect of cooperation with other entities/donors, also covering effectiveness of the delegation of tasks, included in Albania.
- v. Reduced transaction costs
- vi. The capacity of the entity for providing possible co-financing.

The implementation by this entity entails outputs from 1 to 7.

#### 4.3.5. Indirect management with an IPA III beneficiary

N.A.

<sup>7</sup> www.sanctionsmap.eu Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

4.3.6. Contribution to <name of the relevant Regional Blending Facility/Platform>

N.A.

4.3.7. EFSD+ operations covered by budgetary guarantees

N.A.

4.3.8. Changes from indirect to direct management mode (and vice versa) due to exceptional circumstances (one alternative second option)

In case negotiations with an entity under 4.3.4. fail, that part of this action may be implemented in direct management in accordance with the implementation modalities identified in section 4.3.3.

4.4. Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act and set out in the relevant contractual documents shall apply, subject to the following provisions:

The Commission's authorising officer responsible may extend the geographical eligibility on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of services in the markets of the countries or territories concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where application of the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult.

4.5. Indicative budget

	<b>EU contribution (amount in EUR)</b>	<b>Indicative third-party contribution, in currency identified</b>
<b>Output 1 - Strengthened capacities of relevant institutions (NAPA/RAPA) to effectively manage protected areas according to the EU <i>acquis</i> and best practices</b> <b>Output 2 – Revised and new protected areas management plans through assessment of biodiversity values and threats following Natura 2000 requirements</b> <b>Output 3 - Performance monitoring system in place</b> <b>Output 4 - Conservation and restoration measures foreseen in the management plans are implemented</b> <b>Output 5 - New management plans for the use of forest and non-timber forest products developed</b> <b>Output 6 - Support to civil society for environmental protection and restoration of protected areas</b> <b>Output 7 - Nature-based solutions (focusing but not limited to nature protection /conservation and fighting of environmental crime) implemented</b> Composed of:	<b>5 500 000</b>	N.A
Indirect management with (an) entrusted entity(ies) – cf. section 4.3.4	5 500 000	N.A
<b>Output 8 Increase communication, awareness and engagement of communities and private sector in nature conservation and Natura 2000</b> Composed of:	<b>500 000</b>	N.A
Direct management (Procurement) – cf. section 4.3.3	N.A	
<b>Procurement - total envelope under section 4.3.3</b>	<b>500 000</b>	N.A.
<b>Evaluation, (cf. section 5.3)</b>	will be covered by another decision	N.A.
<b>Audit/Expenditure verification(cf. section 6)</b>	will be covered by another decision	N.A.
<b>Communication and visibility (cf. section 7)</b>	0	N.A.

	<b>EU contribution (amount in EUR)</b>	<b>Indicative third-party contribution, in currency identified</b>
<b>Contingencies</b>	0	N.A.
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 000 000</b>	

#### 4.6. Organisational set-up and responsibilities

In the case of direct management, the **Contracting Authority will be the EU Delegation in Albania**. The EU Delegation shall be responsible for all contractual arrangements with the selected contractors. In the case of indirect management with an entrusted entity, responsibilities of the entrusted entity / entities for this Action shall be stipulated in the Contribution Agreement.

The main counterpart to the Contracting Authority(es) during the implementation of the projects shall be the **Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE)**, as the Lead Beneficiary of the Action. Due to the close involvement of other national stakeholders, such as the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA), National Environmental Agency (NEA), and State Inspectorate on Territory Protection, as well as the municipalities in the protected areas, the MTE shall closely coordinate with them during the implementation of the activities.

Several institutions within the national administration in Albania, having different responsibilities regarding nature protection, shall play an important technical role in the implementation of the action, such as:

- The Ministry of Tourism and Environment responsible for the improvement of nature conservation efforts by implementing the Birds and Habitats Directives.
- The National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA) that has the overall responsibility for the management of the protected areas in Albania.
- The National Environment Agency, the main institution responsible for biodiversity monitoring and assessment and licensing of activities occurring on natural areas and/or affecting biodiversity values.
- The State Inspectorate on Territory Protection is responsible for surveillance, inspection and overall law enforcement on nature conservation related issues.

The **National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC)** has the mandate for overall coordination of the programming of the IPA, as well as being the main counterpart of the European Commission for overall process of strategic planning, coordination of programming, monitoring of implementation, evaluation and reporting of IPA III assistance at programme level.

For overall policy and assistance coordination the Government of Albania has an inter-institutional and operational organisational structure in place for managing the implementation of a broad sectoral/cross-sectoral approach through the Integrated Planning System (IPS), which acts as the main system that sets the tools and mechanisms for integrated public policy planning. The Prime Minister Order (No 157) on 22 October 2018 revised the Integrated Policy Management Groups (IPMGs) and associated sectoral steering committees' structures for implementation of a broad sectoral/cross-sectoral approach to manage and coordinate policies of priority areas and sectors of special importance, as well as inter-sectoral programming through the formation of a sectoral / cross-sectoral management mechanism. The Sectoral steering committees (SSC) for Environment, Climate and Waste Management, provide cooperation at the steering level, within the sectors of special importance for reforms and inter-institutional coordination. Thematic groups (TG) for Competitiveness and Innovation provide for cooperation at technical level including with development partners, within the specific sectors of the respective priority area.

A **Project Steering Committee (PSC)** will be established that will steer the project implementation. The PSC shall involve representatives from the main stakeholders, including the NIPAC, EU Delegation. The PSC shall closely monitor the fulfilment of the project objective and the project results. The NIPAC shall have the role of monitoring the fulfilment of the objectives at the level of the Action.

## 5. PERFORMANCE/RESULTS MONITORING AND REPORTING

### 5.1. Internal monitoring

The Action will be subject to monitoring from the EU Delegation in Albania and the Beneficiary at national level. The NIPAC has overall responsibility over the implementation of the IPA Assistance in the Country and shall monitor the implementation of the action and the fulfilment of the set objectives. The Contracting Authority shall monitor the implementation of the activities at contract level. The Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MTE), as part of the Operating Structure, will follow the achievement of the indicators and the outputs defined within the Action. The MTE will regularly inform NIPAC and the relevant stakeholders on the implementation of the indicators. Moreover, the MTE

shall follow the implementation of the respective activities and shall alert on any delays and the reasons that caused such delays.

The **Sector Monitoring Committee** (SMC) on Environment and Climate Change shall oversee the overall implementation of the action(s) financed under IPA III Window 3. Specific coordination will be conducted with participating municipalities and other implementing partners, to ensure policy dialogue and knowledge management between the central and sub-national levels of government. CSOs will also be consulted during the implementation. In line with the European Commission rules and procedures set in the Financing Agreement, an **IPA Monitoring Committee** will be organised, with the participation of NIPAC, the Beneficiary Institutions, the Implementing Agency/Contracting Authority, and the EU Delegation in Albania, to review IPA related actions and progress.

## 5.2. Roles & responsibilities for data collection, analysis & reporting

The monitoring arrangements concerning performance and results shall be in line with the established monitoring system as described in Section 5.1. above.

The sector monitoring systems are currently limited, and this action will contribute to developing better capacities for data collection and reporting at the sector strategy level on biodiversity issues.

The NIPAC shall be responsible at national level to monitor, review and evaluate the progress on the implementation of the indicators established within the Action logframe matrix and communicate the information with the European Commission services.

The beneficiary institution directly involved in the implementation of the Action shall have the responsibility to collect the data concerning the indicators and timely reporting to the NIPAC.

## 5.3. Evaluation

Having regard to the importance and the nature of the action a final evaluation will be carried out for this action or its components via independent consultants, contracted by the Commission.

The evaluation will be carried out for learning purposes as well as for assessing the impact of the proposed activities regarding nature protection, thus providing basis for planning further activities for nature protection in Albania to be supported by IPA III. It will also be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision), taking into account in particular implementation of the management plans for protected areas following Natura 2000.

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least three months in advance of the dates foreseen for the evaluation missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts, and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises and activities.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partner country and other key stakeholders. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the partner country, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

## 6. AUDIT

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audits or expenditure verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

## 7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Visibility of EU funding and communication about objectives and impact of Actions are a legal obligation for all Actions funded by the EU, as set out in the EU communication and visibility requirements in force.

In particular, the recipients of EU funding shall acknowledge the origin of the EU funding and ensure its proper visibility by:

- Providing a statement highlighting the support received from the EU in a visible manner on all documents and communication material relating to the implementation of the funds, including on an official website and social media accounts, where these exist; and

- Promoting the actions and their results by providing coherent, effective and proportionate targeted information to multiple audiences, including the media.

Visibility and communication measures shall be implemented, as relevant, by the national administrations, entrusted entities, contractors and grant beneficiaries. Appropriate contractual obligations shall be included, respectively, in financing agreements, delegation agreements, and procurement and grant contracts.

The measures shall be based on a specific Communication and Visibility Plan, established and implemented in line with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force. The plan shall include, inter alia, a communication narrative and master messages for the Action, customised for the various target audiences (stakeholders, civil society, general public, etc.)

Visibility and communication measures specific to this Action shall be complementary to the broader communication activities implemented directly by the European Commission services and/or the EU Delegation. The European Commission and the EU Delegation should be fully informed of and associated to the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities, notably with respect to the communication narrative and master messages.

## 8. SUSTAINABILITY

The most important precondition for the sustainability of the Action is good cooperation and a strong working relationship between the team and the direct beneficiaries during the implementation of the action which shall ensure a continuous upgrading of the capacities of the PAs' management staff as well as a sound maintenance plan for the infrastructure, equipment and tools provided by the Project.

Transfer of knowledge and development skills shall be ensured by employing a variety of training techniques including workshops, on-job training, exchange visits, demonstration events, etc and providing detailed training materials and documented toolkits. The project will establish close cooperation with the key beneficiaries (MTE, NAPA, NFA, NEA) to minimise staff turnover and increase staff motivation.

Sustainability and replication of the processes for reviewing and/or developing new management plans for protected areas require the active participation of staff from beneficiary institutions. Tools and procedures employed in the process shall be detailed and documented for future use by beneficiaries.

The development and implementation of a performance monitoring system contributes to the overall sustainability of nature conservation efforts. It builds buy-in by the relevant Albanian institutions, who shall closely participate in developing the system and widely implement it during the action.

Additionally, the implementation of conservation measures and rehabilitation of degraded habitats/ecosystems as well as the application of nature-based solutions will provide useful experience to beneficiaries indicating the level of efforts required to implement such measures in the future. Full participation in developing tendering documentation as well as during supervision of the implementation of these works will provide useful capacities to institutions and ensure sustainability of performed works.

Beneficiary institutions shall ensure medium-term budget planning and a budget line in the Special Fund to ensure the proper implementation of the relevant Directives, the maintenance of equipment and any environmental works, the implementation of management plans, and task permanent or temporary staff with the maintenance of the investment and equipment done and purchased under this programme.

Fostering effective participation and communication with other relevant stakeholders (civil society, local communities, and municipalities) will reinforce the sustainability of the implemented actions and provide long-term support for nature conservation efforts in Albania.