



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Regulatory Scrutiny Board

Brussels,
Ares(2017)

Opinion

Title: Evaluation / LIFE Programme for Environment and Climate Action

Overall opinion: POSITIVE

(A) Context

LIFE is an EU programme that promotes action on the environment and climate. It has existed since 1992. For the period 2014-2020, the programme will spend approximately EUR 3.4 billion. It leverages other funds rather than trying to by itself solve environmental or climate problems. To this end, LIFE acts as a catalyst for growing capacity, supporting private actors and spreading best practices.

Operationally, LIFE finances action grants, operating grants, and procurement contracts that address design and implementation of environmental policies. The current programme has also started to finance financial instruments.

The LIFE Regulation requires the Commission to produce a mid-term evaluation report on the LIFE programme and its sub-programmes by 30 June 2017. This evaluation should also take into account the long-term impact of LIFE+, the predecessor programme for the period 2007-2013.

(B) Main considerations

The Board notes that the Commission services undertook the mid-term evaluation at an early stage of the implementation of the programme (2014-2020). Therefore information on the actual impacts of projects is not yet fully available.

The Board gives a positive opinion, but considers that the report should be adjusted in order to address a number of key shortcomings, using the information from the evaluation study and incorporating the longer-term results of the LIFE+ programme:

(1) The scope of the evaluation is unclear. It does not cover all questions of relevance for the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF). It is unclear whether its focus encompasses the whole programme or only its new features.

(2) The report does not provide evidence as to whether and how the LIFE programme has achieved a strategic focus (e.g. in thematic priorities, programme structure, Multi Annual Work Programme).

(3) The report does not demonstrate the catalytic role of the LIFE programme in mobilising additional funding, integrating environmental and climate objectives into other policies, and in spreading good practices.

(4) The report does not provide a full analysis of the programme's actual implementation costs or its simplification potential (e.g. lump sums, VAT, selection procedure).

(5) The report does not sufficiently explain the EU added value of the LIFE programme and the synergies with other funding programmes.

(C) Further considerations and recommendations for improvement

(1) Scope of the evaluation (design and methodology)

The report should clarify the purpose and scope of this evaluation, in particular whether it covers:

- the LIFE programme, as a continuation of the previous environmental programmes, in order to serve as an input for the next MFF;
- the LIFE programme as such;
- only the new features of the LIFE programme (two sub-programmes, two multiannual work programmes, six priority areas, financial instruments, integrated projects, technical assistance projects, capacity building projects, preparatory projects, phasing out of the national allocation system).

In the latter case, it should explain better how these new features have worked so far and whether the Commission still needs to address some problems. The report should also explain why it does not systematically look at the long-term effects of the LIFE+ programme. Because this is required by the legal base, the report should explain how and when the Commission services will subsequently assess these aspects to feed into forthcoming reflections on the next MFF.

(2) Strategic focus of the programme (effectiveness)

The Life Programme has two sub-programmes, six priority areas and thematic priorities covering the whole range of environmental and climate policy. Hence, the report should better demonstrate whether and how the implementation of the programme is achieving its strategic focus. In particular, it should explain how the programming and selection process chooses the projects that best address current priorities. In addition, the report should assess the effectiveness of the pre-allocation of funding (e.g. 75% to environment and 25% to climate, 81% to demand-driven action grant projects, 30% ceiling for integrated projects). It should also analyse more closely why only few actions are implemented to safeguard citizens' health, which is one of the three objectives of the 7th Environmental Action Plan and an objective of LIFE. The report should also clarify whether this puts into question the relevance of this objective.

(3) Catalytic role (effectiveness)

The report should improve the evidence of effectiveness of the programme, in particular of its role as a catalyst. For example, LIFE has the core function to establish a financial instrument that will catalyse environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects throughout the EU.

In this context, the report should also demonstrate how the selection of projects considers their catalytic effects. It should explain their monitoring during and after project implementation. In doing so, the report should present evidence from the prior evaluations of LIFE+ on the catalytic role of past projects. This analysis should cover all types of beneficiaries and all types of measures within LIFE.

The report should also elaborate on the leverage effects of different instruments such as integrated projects or financial instruments. In doing this, it should distinguish between public and private financing and between mobilising existing funds and leveraging additional funds.

(4) Implementation costs (efficiency)

The report should provide further evidence of efficiency. It should give a more complete analysis of implementation costs and savings. In particular, it should reflect all LIFE implementation costs and not only those incurred by EASME. The report should compare the actual management costs to the costs expected in the cost-benefit analysis. It should include not only selection costs of the programme, but also its running costs. The analysis of implementation savings and costs should reflect the results from the underlying study in an accurate and transparent way (e.g. regarding the roles of EASME and the external consultant). The results of the analysis should reflect the scope set out in the evaluation (see nr. 1 above) and support the conclusions of the report.

The report should also clearly show which of the announced simplifications were introduced and what savings they generated. It should explain why certain simplifications were not (yet) implemented.

(5) EU added value and coherence with other instruments

The evaluation report should elaborate on coherence with environment and climate actions that are funded by other instruments. It should show the scale of LIFE funding in comparison with the other EU funding programmes, and analyse how LIFE complements these. Further, it should explain how it achieves complementarities and synergies with Member State environmental and climate funding, e.g. if there is a pattern of Member States funding selected, but not awarded projects through the LIFE programme.

Some more technical comments have been transmitted directly to the author DG.

(D) RSB scrutiny process

The lead DG is advised to ensure that these recommendations are duly taken into account in the report prior to launching the interservice consultation.

Full title	Mid-Term Evaluation of the LIFE Programme for Environment and Climate Action
Reference number	2017/ENV/001
Date of RSB meeting	15/02/2017