

Frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the PAF format

General questions:

1. **Question:** Will the PAFs be capable of influencing the EU funding programmes (e.g. from rural development)?

Answer: According to the Commission proposal¹, CAP Strategic Plans will need to take into account the environmental planning tools stemming from the EU environmental legislation including the Birds and Habitats Directives (Article 96). Proposals for other funds (European Regional Development Fund [ERDF], Cohesion Fund and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund [EMFF]) also require that nature related funding should be conditional on submission of the PAF. LIFE strategic nature projects (new category of projects under LIFE Regulation) will specifically implement the PAFs as well.

2. **Question:** Is it possible to allocate a fixed percentage of funding in all EU funds to the PAF?

Answer: Currently the Commission proposals for the multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 do not envisage earmarking of funding to nature and biodiversity. Environment as a general thematic priority is however subject of earmarking of 30% from the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund. The same earmarking from the 2nd pillar of the CAP is envisaged in the Commission proposal for the CAP Strategic Plans. National allocations to the LIFE strategic nature projects, which will focus on the implementation of the PAFs, according to the Commission proposal will be decided in the Multiannual Work Programme at a later stage.

3. **Question:** The results of the new reporting round will be available only in April 2019 (for habitats) and June 2019 (for species). Thus, it will not be impossible to use the latest data for the purpose of the PAF. The only data available come from the previous round which was based on expert opinion rather than in-field monitoring. How can this problem be solved?

Answer: The Member States can update the PAFs whenever new data justifying the revision of conservation measures and priorities becomes available. However, as the primary data for estimating financing needs for Natura 2000 should already be available in the form of standard data forms (SDFs), SAC designation acts, site management plans, etc., the prospect of new conservation status data being available in the first half of 2019 cannot justify delay in the elaboration of a first version of the PAF (expected to be submitted in early 2019).

Questions on section C:

4. **Question:** In the section C.2 "Map of the Natura 2000 network" is required. What should be the scale of the map? Should it be presented in the vector format or as an image? It is also

¹ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the Common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, COM(2018) 392 final.

not clear what to include in the map of green infrastructure; should it be limited to the regional ecological networks or should it also include the regional hiking network and other networks.

Answer: The map of the Natura 2000 network should be provided as an image fitting an A4 format. This map is for background information only (e.g. to present the scale of the network to decision-makers who are not always familiar with its extent). Maps presenting green infrastructure network – if available – should reflect the EU definition of green infrastructure i.e. “a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services”. Maps of infrastructure, which do not comply with this definition, should not be included in the PAF.

Questions on section D:

5. **Question:** How should we calculate the values for the period 2014-2020 (section D of the PAF format) if not all eligible funding has been committed yet? Should we only take into account the committed funding or should we present the anticipated amounts as well?

Answer: The data in the section D (“EU and national financing of the Natura 2000 network during the period 2014 – 2020”) should reflect the current situation with regard to funding Natura 2000, i.e. the current levels of commitment and spending. However, in the comments section for every fund/source of financing it is possible to further elaborate on the expected trends and anticipated levels for the whole period. An estimation of the average annual funding for the whole Natura 2000 network available in 2014-2020 can be also presented at the end of the section D.

6. **Question:** Should funds allocated in 2007-2013 but actually spent in 2014-2020 be considered in section D?

Answer: No, funds allocated within the period 2007-2013 but spent after the end of the period (according to the rule n+3) should not be considered in section D. Only funds officially reallocated from the 2007-2013 period to the current period should be considered.

7. **Question:** Should commitments or payments be listed in the section D (funding 2014 – 2020, particularly relevant for the rural development programmes)?

Answer: Both commitments and payments should be listed separately in the section D.

8. **Question:** There is an overlap between two programming periods and some commitments from 2007-2013 pass to 2014-2020. Should these old commitments be added to the funding in section D (2014-2020)?

Answer: Yes, if funds have been reallocated from one period to another this should be reflected in section D. However, if funds have not be reallocated but only spent after 2013, they should be considered for the period 2007-2013 and not reflected in section D.

9. **Question:** Should data on funding include only funds available from central or regional budgets or all sources of funding including own resources of all sorts of bodies responsible for management of Natura 2000?

Answer: Data on the use of EU funds will mostly come from the central or regional authorities. If there are other sources of funding available to finance the needs of Natura 2000 (subsidies, state aids, endowments, entry fees, royalties etc.) they can be included in the section D.6 “Other funding for Natura 2000”.

Questions on section E:

10. **Question:** Should information be provided for each individual site or in general at the Natura 2000 network.

Answer: There is no need to provide information on conservations priorities and measures per site. Information should be aggregated at the network level.

11. **Question:** Is there a predetermined list of the types of conservation measures which should be used for the purpose of section E (“Priority measures and financing needs for 2021 – 2027”)? Should the Article 17 of the Habitats Directive typology of conservation measures be used?

Answer: There is no predetermined list of conservation measures established for the purpose of the PAF. However, where the Members States consider it useful, they may use the list established for the purpose of reporting under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive and Article 12 of the Birds Directive to cross-reference with the measures listed in section E of the PAF. This may be most useful in the context of the agricultural related and forest habitats.

12. **Question:** In relation to calculating the cost of management of the Natura 2000 network, as regards one-off costs, bearing in mind that MFF covers 7 years, is it correct to divide the total cost by 7 to provide the annual cost?

Answer: PAFs are aimed at providing information on the anticipated average annual costs of the management of the network (and not on actual costs, which may fluctuate every year). So for example if a Member State estimates that it needs to spend 10,000,000 EUR to restore habitats within a given ecosystem type (e.g. wetlands) in 2021-2027 this figure has to be divided by 7. It does not matter if in reality the measure will take 3, 5, or 7 years to implement. If a Member State considers that it will need e.g. 20 years to fully implement certain one-off measures, for the purpose of the PAF, it should only take into account the fraction of the costs which can be associated with the 2021-2027 period.

13. **Question:** Should the PAF list all necessary conservation measures and the costs associated with them or only priority measures?

Answer: PAFs have a double role, on the one hand they are expected to make a comprehensive assessment of measures necessary to achieve the objectives of EU nature legislation (i.e. favourable conservation status of habitats and species) and, on the other

hand, to present the measures that should be implemented in the upcoming financial period 2021-2027 in order to progress towards those objectives. Non-deterioration of the conservation status of the habitats and species is one clear priority (to give effect to Article 6(2) of the Habitats Directive). However, in many cases mere maintenance of Natura 2000 sites will not be sufficient. For this reason, restoration measures that contribute to the achievement of a favourable conservation status are another priority. The best possible assessment of the conservation status should be the basis for any priority setting.

There is a range of prioritisation approaches discussed at EU level that might help the Member States in priority setting. First, there are priority habitats and species indicated in the annexes of the Habitats Directive and priority bird species defined for the LIFE Programme. Furthermore, there are habitats defined in the framework of the new biogeographic process for priority action. Several European Species Action Plans were also elaborated and should be implemented urgently. In addition, habitat types and species for which the Member States have particular responsibility should be a logical priority for maintenance and/or restoration measures.

As mentioned above, the Habitats Directive in Annexes I and II identifies certain habitat types and species as priority. One has to remember, however, that this classification was established more than 25 years ago and it might not reflect current conservation priorities in all Member States; national “red lists”, or other similar indexes of endangered habitats and species, could be used to update the lists of priorities for the purpose of the PAF.

Priorities could also be selected based on the bottom-up approach as a result of aggregation of needs of individual Natura 2000 sites.

14. **Question:** Should all the necessary measures for the Natura 2000 be included in section E.2 and should they serve as the basis for setting priority measures? Should costs be estimated only in relation to the priority measures?

Answer: Yes, all measures necessary to reach the objectives of the Directives should be listed under ‘Measures needed to maintain or restore favourable conservation status’. Costs should be estimated only for ‘List of prioritized measures to be carried out, and estimated costs for these measures’.

15. **Question:** Should the estimate presented in the PAF relate to all the financing need or only to the requested EU co-funding?

Answer: The Commission is interested in assessing the overall costs of network and not only the costs linked to the EU co-financing. The Commission will aggregate the data from the Member States to arrive at the overall cost of conservation and management of Natura 2000 in the EU.

16. **Question:** Should “priority measures” be understood as implying the need to present them in an order of priority?

Answer: There is no need to present measures in any specific order of priority.

17. **Question:** Cost estimations are reliable if they are based on management plans. How can costs be reliably estimated if not all sites have up-to-date management plans? Are there indicative average cost tables available for the estimation of costs?

Answer: There are no standardized average cost tables as the cost of each measure will depend on the specific situation in each case and in each Member State. Ideally, cost estimates of measures should be based on the “bottom-up” approach (aggregation of measures and their costs from all the sites). If not all the sites have up-to-date management plans, average costs of managing certain habitats or of certain species related measures can be multiplied by a number of hectares of a given habitat type or number of locations where a measure is necessary (extrapolation). The purpose of this exercise is not to get an accurate picture of the costs of management of each individual site but rather of the scale of the required funding needs.

18. **Question:** Is it possible to use other sources than the management plans to estimate the costs of the measures included in the PAF?

Answer: Yes, other available sources of cost estimations could be used, for example national biodiversity strategies, results of LIFE projects, scientific papers and other studies.

19. **Question:** The PAF format requests an indication of targets (unit and quantity) for the measures to include under sections E.2 (“Site-related maintenance and restoration measures”) and E.3 (“Additional species-specific measures”). What are the units to be considered? Is it necessary to indicate always the number of hectares covered by the measures?

Answer: Targets should be quantified. Different types of units can be considered depending on the measures and the types of costs, e.g. numbers of plans, number of projects, number of sites where the activity is to be carried out, hectares, etc.

20. **Question:** How can the very long lists of measures be summarised or simplified?

Answer: Similar measures can be aggregated; however it is necessary to bear in mind that similar measures may not have similar costs in different places and situations (e.g. hand mowing and mechanical mowing, or management of hay meadows in lowland and highlands).

21. **Question:** Should all nature related research needs be included in the PAF?

Answer: Only research which is needed to support the management of the Natura 2000 network (e.g. habitat inventories) or required to improve or define the conservation status of the habitat types or species of EU interest should be included. Fundamental research (e.g. on genetics, zoology, economics, social studies etc.), if not linked directly to conservation of habitat types and species of EU interest or management of the Natura 2000 network, should not be included in the priorities and cost estimation.

22. **Question:** How should a habitat type be classified if it is not clear whether it belongs to one or another ecosystem type (e.g. a habitat type could be classified as marine or coastal).

Answer: A comprehensive database assigning individual species and habitat types of EU importance to the MAES ecosystems is available for download from the European Environment Agency website². We recommended that the allocation of measures and costs to ecosystem types follow this typology.

23. **Question:** The details of the CAP Strategic Plans will not be known before mid-2019. The scope of eligible measures will also not be known before the regulations (Common Provisions Regulation and fund specific regulations) are adopted. This is a challenge in view of defining the priority measures in the PAF (section E).

Answer: The PAF should present the financing needed to achieve the objectives of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. The identifications of needs (both in terms of their scope and costs) should be possible even if not all sources of funding is known by the time of PAF preparation. Time wise, it makes sense to have the PAF ready before the programmes are finalised as the PAFs should feed into their preparation as far as investments in nature and biodiversity are concerned. The set of measures currently available for rural development programmes will be also available in the CAP Strategic Plans and the structure of plan has already be presented in CGBN and NADEG. In principle, the current set of measures should be available also after 2020.

24. **Question:** The proposal for the Regulation on the CAP Strategic Plans refers to the PAF as a document which needs to be taken into account when preparing the plans. This raises the problem of possible consequences if the CAP Strategic Plans are not fully aligned with the PAFs. Therefore, it would be desirable to consider an option to revise the PAFs after all the EU regulations as well as all national documents stemming from them have been adopted. Should therefore preparation of the PAFs and the CAP Strategic Plans be a bi-directional process whereby PAF should inform the definition of objectives in the CAP Strategic Plans and the measures approved in the plans should be reflected in the definitions of measures within the PAF?

Answer: The proposal for the CAP Strategic Plans Regulation specifies that when setting their environmental objectives in the plans the Member States must take into account the national plans emanating from the relevant environmental legislation including the EU Birds and Habitats Directive. Practically it means that the Member States need to properly address in their CAP Strategic Plans the priorities and measures identified in the PAFs but also other national plans such as species action plans (e.g. The Turtle Dove Plan, plans aiming at co-existence with large carnivores, multi species action plans such as “Breeding Waders in wet grasslands habitats” etc.).

² Linkages of species and habitat types to MAES ecosystems <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/linkages-of-species-and-habitat#tab-european-data>

PAFs may be revised once all the programmes have been adopted, e.g. for the purpose of submitting an accurate and up-to-date application for funding from strategic nature project under the new LIFE Programme.

25. **Question:** Should Member States estimate their total funding needs in view of reaching the ideal (favourable) status, or just taking into account real possibilities of funding in the given programming period? A practical example may be the calculation of funding needs for certain migratory aquatic species (e.g. salmon), which very much depend on rivers permeability. With the first approach, measures along the whole river would need to be considered. With the second one, only local measures within and nearby sites could be taken into account. The difference between these two approaches may amount to millions of euro.

Answer: While the objective for all habitats and species is to maintain and restore a favourable status, it is also clear, that this cannot be completely achieved within the next MFF. What has to be done is to make a cost-estimation on what is possible to achieve in the given financing period. 'Possible' refers to the possibility of the reaching improvements in nature (e.g. temporal feasibility of reaching improvements in certain circumstances) and not to the availability of funds. The PAF Guidance states that "*the measures to be identified in the PAFs shall mainly be designed to maintain and restore, at a favourable conservation status, natural habitats and species of EU importance, whilst taking account of economic, social and cultural requirements and regional and local characteristics.*"

Please see also answer to the question no 13 re. priorities setting.

26. **Question:** Is there a mechanism for cross checking of data in the PAF and CAP Strategic Plans? What would be the consequences of CAP Strategic Plans not fully integrating the priorities and measures identified in the PAFs? Would timely adoption of CAP Strategic Plans be jeopardised in this case?

Answer: The information in the PAFs should be sufficiently specific to provide certainty that the priority measures and associated financing needs are likely to achieve a significant improvement of the conservation status of species and habitats, and avoid deterioration. CAP Strategic Plans should match this level of ambition, with regard to those financing needs that should be covered through the CAP. A CAP Strategic Plan not fully integrating the priorities and measures identified in the PAFs will not be compliant with the CAP Strategic Plans Regulation and especially Article 103 (SWOT analysis), Article 96 (assessment of needs), Article 97 (intervention strategy). The adoption of the CAP Strategic Plans might be delayed until the Member States submit a CAP Strategic Plan fully integrating the priorities and measures identified in the PAFs.

27. **Question:** Should the measures in the PAF be set up by programmes and titles or rather by protected habitat types or species (particularly relevant for the CAP)?

Answer: Measures and financing needs in the PAF should be established based on the requirements of individual species and habitats. The allocation of measures and financing needs to individual programmes should only be the last step in this exercise. If data is

available, the correspondence between the PAF measures per habitat or species and the relevant agri-environmental measure of the CAP Strategic Plan should be indicated.

28. **Question:** In the fictitious example of section E.2.4 of the PAF, it is not clear if it refers to the real (optimum) needs of habitat conservation (at least maintenance), or to the planned possibilities of agri-env-climate measures. Could the Commission clarify which is the case?

Answer: The example is based on measures, which are necessary and possible to carry out in the next financing period.

29. **Question:** In which section of the PAF format information related to marine biodiversity protection needs (financing from European Maritime and Fisheries Fund 2021-2027) should be provided? We see a possibility of placing it under E.2.1 or under E.3 alternatively.

Answer: Measures clearly focusing on marine species (e.g. measures aimed at reducing fishing mortality of cetaceans or seabirds) should be listed in section E.3, whereas measures improving marine habitat types or marine habitats of species should be listed in section E.2.1.

30. **Question:** In which section of the PAF format information related to general national biodiversity conservation measures (e.g. strategic landscape management measures are not related to specific habitats/species) should be provided?

Answer: Very broad landscape conservation or restoration measures which do not benefit any specific habitat or species covered by the EU Nature Directives fall outside the scope of the PAF. Such measures and their costs should therefore not be considered in the PAF.

31. **Question:** How detailed should information on individual sites/localities be specified in part E.2? Is it enough to describe necessary conservation measures for the habitats/species on the scale of the Member State only? Detailed listing of territories is too time-consuming and might become a problem at later stages of implementation as the knowledge evolves.

Answer: Member States are not expected to provide detailed geographical information on the location of the measures within their territory.

32. **Question:** Should the measures for management/restoration of good status of water bodies - to be implemented under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) - be described in section E.2.8 and summarized in section 2.8b? This may be hardly possible at this stage.

Answer: Financing needs for measures implementing the WFD should be covered in the PAF if they contribute to maintaining or restoring the favourable conservation status of species or habitats covered by the EU Nature Directives. Where such measures are clearly related to maintaining or restoring Annex I freshwater habitats or freshwater habitats of species, they should indeed be covered under section E.2.8.

Costs for such actions should be listed, together with any other relevant costs, and summarized on line 2.8.a of the PAF financing summary table (for measures linked to Natura 2000 sites) and 2.8.b (for measures outside Natura 2000 sites, i.e. so-called “green infrastructure” measures).

33. **Question:** Should Annex V species be included in the PAF, under section E.3.1?

Answer: Annex V species might be included in the PAF because, according to Article 14 of the Habitats Directive, they could be subject to conservation measures (to ensure that the taking in the wild of specimens of such species as well as their exploitation is compatible with their being maintained at a favourable conservation status). Additionally, some Annex V species could be of high conservation priority in some Member States and should therefore be included in the PAF.

34. **Question:** When allocating the financial needs to the funding sources, how is possible to choose between several available funds when they overlap?

Answer: In principle national programmes should not overlap. According to the Commission proposal for the so called Common Provisions Regulation (Article 8), complementarities and demarcation between different national and regional programmes should be decided in the Partnership Agreements prepared by every Member State.

35. **Question:** What is the scope of ring-fencing of 30% targeted at environment and climate under the next CAP.

Answer : According to the Commission's proposal for the Regulation on the CAP Strategic Plans, the ring-fencing will mostly be reserved to agri-environment-climate measures and others measures such as environmental investments (non-productive investments), which contribute to climate, water, soil, air and biodiversity objectives. According to the proposal, the ring-fencing will no longer apply to the payment for areas with natural constraints (ANC), which should result in more money available for agri-environment measures. The proposal for Regulation (Article 86) reads : *At least 30% of the total EAFRD contribution to the CAP Strategic Plan shall be reserved for interventions addressing the specific environmental- and climate-related objectives set out in points (d), (e) and (f) of Article 6(1) of the CAP Strategic Plan Regulation, excluding interventions based on Article 66.*

36. **Question:** Where should information on measures aimed at controlling invasive alien species be provided?

Answer: If measures are focused on specific ecosystem type, e.g. forests, they can be provided under this ecosystem type. If measures are broader and do not fall under any specific ecosystem type, they can be included in sections E.3.1 "Species specific measures and programmes not covered elsewhere".