

Priority 1. Climate and environment.

Specific Objective 2.7 - **Enhancing nature protection, biodiversity and reducing all forms of pollution.**

NB: This factsheet presents a **summary** of Specific Objective (SO) 2.7 of the Interreg North-West Europe Programme (NWE IP). The comprehensive description of SO 2.7, which contains detailed explanations and further examples **should be consulted for a full understanding of the SO in Chapter 2.1 of the NWE IP.**

Territorial challenges and opportunities

The potential for additional green / blue infrastructure is relatively low in the North-West Europe (NWE) Programme area due to intense land use and fragmented natural ecosystems. The maintenance and improvement of connectivity between protected areas and the restoration of natural areas is therefore crucial. There is also a strong need to improve the ecological status of blue infrastructure by addressing pollution and discharges caused by agriculture, industry, or wastewater treatment plants. Reducing heat stress and improving air quality by addressing – notably – transport issues as well as the impact of industries and farming on air pollution are also major challenges to be tackled in the NWE region.

Objectives

Within this Specific Objective, the Programme aims to support projects that:

- Develop green/blue infrastructure to ensure the protection or restoration of ecosystems and prevent the loss of biodiversity and natural capital.
- Embed in strategic ecosystem-based approaches and solutions blue and green corridors, biodiversity, and natural capital.
- Show the benefits of sound green/blue infrastructure to combat climate change effects e.g., heat stress.
- Reduce the incidence of human activities on air quality and air pollution.

Target groups

- **Local/regional/national authorities, governmental agencies, public equivalent organisations**, (including agencies or para-public organisations) with responsibilities relating to rivers, environment, natural protection etc. to steer processes to improve biodiversity protection and green/blue infrastructures, and drive change towards more resilient regions.
- **Universities, public research centres, private research units, schools and higher education, training centres** are highly relevant as innovation drivers that can create

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and spread knowledge and provide scientific insight on challenges related to biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure.

- **SMEs and business support organisations** are a driving and innovative force of the economy. They can also help drive behavioural change for biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure at business and industry level.
- **Sectoral associations, NGOs, lobby organisations, citizens groups** can act as multipliers to their networks to promote educational initiative, raise awareness or influence policies on biodiversity and green/blue infrastructure development. They may also develop and implement community-based solutions.

Activities

Projects should implement a combination of activities, such as:

- **Elaboration and implementation of joint strategies and/or action plans**, for example, nature management plans for measuring, maintaining, enhancing, and valorising green/blue infrastructure, ecosystem services, biodiversity (e.g., invasive species); or adaptation and mitigation measures at local or regional level with the aim to reduce heat stress and air pollution in the NWE area.
- **Pilot actions for testing tools and/or solutions**, for example demonstration and joint implementation of scalable and replicable solutions to embed green infrastructure and ecosystem-based approach in relevant strategies and measures; or of innovative measures to reduce heat stress by enhancing and installing green and blue infrastructure for adaptation.
- **Capacity building and awareness raising activities** in the field of innovation for resilience, for example, training schemes related to biodiversity, promoting its management, or planning and implementation of environmental protection and nature-based solutions, green / blue infrastructure, etc.

Results

The **combination of these activities** may lead to results such as:

- Key aspects of biodiversity preservation, green/blue infrastructure or heat stress and air pollution better embedded into territorial strategies and local initiatives.
- Increased knowledge and capacity of stakeholders about green/blue infrastructure and biodiversity-enhancing / nature-friendly practices.
- Innovative technologies, solutions, products, and services taken up aiming to prevent or reduce heat stress and air pollution, ensuring coherence between the proposed approaches and local/regional needs.

Outputs and results of projects must contribute to the NWE Programme indicator framework (see the NWE IP).