

Final Evaluation and Socio-economic Impact Assessment

LIFE Unify: Bringing the EU together on climate action
LIFE18 GIC/BE/001190

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BRINGING THE EU
TOGETHER ON
CLIMATE ACTION

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Legal notice

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It is the overarching goal of the LIFE Programme to act as a catalyst for changes in policy development and implementation by providing and disseminating solutions and best practices to achieve environmental and climate goals, and by promoting innovative environmental and climate change technologies.

The information and views set out in this report are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.

ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DNSH	Do No Significant Harm
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
LA	Local Authority
LRA	Local and Regional Authorities
MFF	Multi-annual Financial Framework
MS	Member State
NECP	National Energy and Climate Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
nLTS	National Long-Term Strategy
RRP	Recovery and Resilience Plans
SECAP	Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans
TJTP	Territorial Just Transition Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Unify project was developed in response to the weak climate ambition of most Member States, and the lack of coherence between 2030 policy measures, 2050 decarbonisation pathways, and European Union (EU) Funds programming.

Unify was proposed to facilitate the effective and early transition of ten Member States to low carbon and resilient economies, by increasing the ambition of 2030 National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and 2050 national Long-Term Strategies (nLTS) and aligning the spending of EU funds with the delivery of NECPs and nLTS.

The project consortium of Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe and ten national Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (see full names on page 11) set out to achieve this by facilitating national-level multi-stakeholder dialogue; building the capacity of NGOs and other stakeholders to monitor the development and implementation of policies; providing monitoring tools and best practice solutions; supporting Local Authority (LA) engagement in the development of Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs); and raising awareness among EU citizens.

Effectiveness

The actions of the Unify project have been highly effective in achieving the intended outcomes (specific objectives) of the project, achieving outcomes as expected or with a higher level of success than anticipated.

Specific Objective 1: [Unify has facilitated alignment] of EU funds programming with the implementation of NECPs in ten EU Member States [and at the EU level]	
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EU funds activities highlighted the pervasive lack of transparency across Member States in the way that EU funds are being spent, opening up space for dialogue with decision-makers at the local, national, regional, and EU level. This area of work enabled the Unify consortium to respond quickly to the announcement of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, contributing to discussions at the EU level on the adoption of a Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle in February 2021. This Principle is set out to ensure that no measure (reform or investment) included in Member State's Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) leads to significant environmental harm. The Unify EU Cash Awards campaign helped to exposed planned investments under RRP, cohesion policy and Territorial Just Transition Plans, categorising them as good, bad and ugly. The simple messaging of this campaign proved effective at raising public awareness and attention to the flow of EU funds in their countries.

Specific Objective 2: [As a result of Unify] NGOs are [more] effective at monitoring progress towards the Paris Agreement and holding Member States to account	
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Support Group meetings and capacity building workshops developed in each of the ten countries have successfully enhanced the collaboration of Unify partners with NGOs, decision-makers and other stakeholders, with many partners commenting on the diversity of stakeholders engaged, including progressive businesses, churches, decision-makers, academia, and trade unions. The process of collaboration modelled by ELF during the development of the Just Transition Plan for the

Ida-Virumaa region inspired the government in Estonia to such an extent that they have adopted co-creation as both a phrase and a practice in decision-making. In Poland, where the space for civil society is shrinking, the development of a Support Group has played a significant role in enhancing alliance between NGOs, including those not previously engaged in climate action.

Cooperation between neighbouring countries has also been enhanced through **regional** workshops, such as joint advocacy on the acceleration of green transition, and reform of the fiscal framework, between French and German NGOs, and on renewable power and railway interconnections between Portugal and Spain.

The **NECP Tracker** tool developed by RAC in France, and expanded to all target countries, was highly effective at strengthening the capacity of consortium members to find, compute and display national GHG emissions, bringing to light the emissions reductions by sector of each Member State, and showing the gap between targets set out in NECPs and the measures being implemented to achieve the targets. This enabled consortium members to enhance the monitoring of NECPs the accountability of their governments.

UNIFY partners have also exposed Member States that did not provide meaningful stakeholder engagement in the development of policies and plans.

Specific Objective 3: The [development and] implementation of NECPs, nLTS and other policies has been strengthened by Unify tools [and other products]	
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The **NECP Tracker** was extremely influential in generating a mindset shift among target groups from monitoring the implementation of policy files to monitoring how countries are performing on emissions reduction, and in obliging decision-makers to observe how their country is performing relative to other Member States. The Tracker updates have also attracted considerable web and media interest, particularly with media outlets in France and Portugal, who have used the findings and graphics in their public communications.

The **qualitative nLTS traffic light assessment** used to evaluate Member States' nLTS had less Pan-EU resonance than intended at the start of the project as nLTS have been since been superseded by a Climate Law in some countries, such as Denmark, and nLTS have not been submitted by other countries. However, the report was effective at attracting media attention in Spain, changing attitudes towards renewable energy in Slovenia, and highlighting the need for a climate neutrality scenario in Croatia.

At the local level, supporting municipalities in five of the target countries in the development of **SECAPs** did not yield new SECAPs, but did increase understanding about the importance of local level action in the achievement of national climate and energy goals among stakeholders in Slovenia. In France the SECAPs work opened doors for wider engagement with Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) and stimulated over 100 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to push the environment agenda in local elections. This workstream generated engagement from 200 representatives from the Covenant of Mayors in Spain, and local level engagement on energy poverty in Croatia attracted national attention.

Specific Objective 4: Dissemination and communication of Unify results has ensured effective uptake (replication) of the project's outcomes	
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In addition to the success of the EU Cash Awards campaign in raising **public awareness**, the Unify project raised public understanding of the European climate mandate in several countries, with climate discussions becoming mainstream in the last year. Some partners noted that the public response to local media was more significant than national media due to scepticism and a lack of trust in national politics and media.

Workshops and high-level events have been effective at attracting stakeholders and audiences from other EU Member States, with most partners stating that tools and products produced by Unify are being **replicated** by target groups in other Member States.

Impact

Unify's contribution to impact (overall objective) was measured by the influence of the consortium on climate and energy policy and practice change, and alignment of EU Funds programming with decarbonisation policies and plans. Since Specific Objective 1 is an impact statement, rather than an outcome that can be solely and directly attributable to the actions of Unify, the contribution (rather than attribution) of Unify to Specific Objective 1 is evaluated together with the Overall Objective.

Specific Objective 1: Ten target EU MS are [more] on track to meet or exceed 2030 targets with the programming of EU funds at country level directly enabling implementation of NECPs	
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Six of the ten Unify partners are of the view that Unify has contributed to their country being more on track to meet or exceed 2030 targets, and partners in seven countries believe that Unify has contributed to EU funds at the country level being used to enable implementation of NECPs.

Overall Objective: Effective and early transition of Member States across Europe to low carbon and resilient economies	
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Seven partners concur that the project has accelerated the transition in their country to a low carbon, resilient economy, suggesting that while Member States may not be achieving the level of ambition required to meet climate targets, Unify has helped drive increased ambition towards this in the majority of target countries.

Czechia: The EU funds analysis challenged governments to look at the distribution of funding with more funds now being allocated to communities, marginalised regions, and households. CDE commented that *"this is not something that has happened in previous budgets. We had a big influence on this change."*

Croatia: The action of DOOR at the local level has raised attention at the national level; although gas is still considered a transition fuel in the Croatian RRP, DOOR argued strongly against this and subsequent funding calls for building renovations do not permit gas. DOOR also advocated for SECAPs funding, resulting in a national call for municipalities to access funds through the Fund for Energy Efficiency, and DOOR's engagement with cities on energy poverty, and advocacy on the need for a neutrality scenario, has resulted in invitations from the national government to participate in working groups.

Denmark: Prior to Unify Denmark did not have an emissions reductions target for agriculture. The government view was that little reduction could be achieved in the sector and that agriculture was already low emitting compared to others in the EU27. The Tracker and the Unify Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) exposed the misconception and in October 2021 the government adopted a reduction target for agriculture of 55-65% reduction by 2030 compared 1990. The EU funds analysis and capacity built among the consortium during the Unify project has enabled DK92GRP to provide expert input to EU economic and social committee regarding the Danish RRP.

Estonia: ELF's participation and impact in phasing out oil shale from the Ida-Virumaa region is evident in several documents, including the Green Plan and the Ida-Virumaa Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP), and ELF's recommended date for national exit from oil shale electricity is reflected in the Coalition Agreement of the new government. A Climate Neutral Estonia by 2035 campaign, run as part of Unify, attracted many signatures and was discussed in parliament. Ministers are now open to discuss and explore neutrality targets earlier than 2050.

France: The NECP Tracker developed by RAC has attracted extensive public, media and decision-maker dialogue in France on emissions reductions, driving changes in sectoral targets for building and agriculture, such as an environmental standard for rental properties. Franco-German advocacy championed by RAC and Germanwatch on the lack of commitment to low energy transport provided a platform for SNCF (French National Railway) to argue for greater investment. This has, so far, resulted in a one-off rail investment from the French government.

Germany: The mindset shift in Germany towards the EU climate mandate, fostered during Unify by Germanwatch, has opened doors to discuss emissions reductions in the buildings and transport sectors which had previously been difficult to influence. For example, the EU-level REPowerEU requirement for new buildings to include solar helped increase commitment to solar in Germany.

Poland: The space to influence policy and practice in Poland remains limited. However, the Unify assessment of EU Funds spending helped influence EU spending for 2021-2027 in Poland. Although a significant funding for road construction remains, many additional criteria have been added that should result in less intensive road building.

Portugal: The EU Cash Awards campaign had a strong influence on the content of the Portuguese RRP with many of the environmentally harmful road investments removed from the final Plan. ZERO were also influential in the drafting of the Portuguese nLTS, engaging with many experts in the drafting of the emissions reduction scenario that was then adopted in the Portuguese nLTS.

Slovenia: A workshop organised by Focus on coal exit during discussions on the nLTS shifted attitudes towards an acceptance of the need to accelerate uptake of renewable energy. Solar is now at the forefront of energy discussions with communication from the government about funding increases for community energy projects. The date of coal exit in the Slovenian NECP has improved as has the neutrality date in the Environmental Protection Act II, both of which Focus advocated on, and financing for new roads has been scrapped and barriers to renewable energy removed.

Spain: SEO/BirdLife have highlighted the decline in the sequestration potential of carbon sinks in southern dry states. This has altered EU-level dialogue and expectations on carbon sinks, helping to ensure realistic targets that do not exaggerate the mitigation potential of southern countries.

SEO/Birdlife also facilitated the establishment of a national screening process for the DNSH principle which will ensure assessment of new developments planned with recovery funds.

EU level: The Unify action on EU funds has led to the EU making greater demands for evidenced progress from Member States. *“A real attempt has been made to align funding and policies at the EU level. This has been a clear change in the last 12-18 months and is something Unify have been advocating on throughout the project.”* The European Commission (EC) is now asking Member States to report on how EU funds are being used to deliver their NECPs.

The quick response of Unify to the announcement of the Recovery and Resilience Facility contributed to the adoption of the DNSH principle at the EU level in February 2021. This has had a significant impact at the national level as described above.

Contribution to environmental impact: The influence of the Unify project to changes in policy and practice has contributed to concrete environmental impacts including Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions reductions from the agriculture, buildings, and transport sectors; air pollutant reductions from the transport and energy sectors; an increase in the share of renewable energy; and a contribution to the carbon sink effect of managed forests and other sinks.

Socio-economic impact

While some LIFE projects are localised, enabling an assessment of the direct socio-economic impacts on the local economy and local population, it is not possible to attribute and quantify direct social or economic impacts of governance and information projects, such as Unify. Instead, qualified indirect impacts are described.

Driving social change: The Unify project has **mobilised EU citizens** to become involved in climate discussions and to look beyond their borders to progress in other countries and at the EU level. EU citizens have also been mobilised to make demands about how money is being spent and to engage in driving the climate agenda in local elections.

Unify has catalysed a shift toward multi-stakeholder, multi-level **collaborative governance** with all partners commenting on the enhanced local, national, regional and EU level cooperation and influence with decision-makers, other NGOs and other stakeholders. The project has also helped to drive **greater transparency** with the results of the NECP Tracker obliging decision-makers to look at their performance relative to other countries, and the EU funds work has highlighted the lack of transparency on how Member States are spending EU funds.

Socio-economic co-benefits: Most partners are of the view that recommendations made by Unify that have been taken up by governments will contribute to **cleaner air** and the associated health benefits for citizens, such as through accelerating the date of coal exit and the removal of various planned unsustainable development projects. Addressing the energy efficiency of buildings has been a success of Unify through discussions on **energy poverty** and the need to address the vulnerability of low-income households. The leap from advocating for more ambitious decarbonisation targets and **green jobs** is difficult to claim; however, all partners concur that Unify recommendations will contribute towards greater investment in renewable energy, which will generate green jobs.

Relevance and sustainability

Specific Objective 5: Effective project management throughout the project ensures efficient and cost-effective delivery of objectives	
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Relevance: The Unify project has remained highly relevant to the significantly changing policy and funding landscape in the EU. Maintaining an overarching and common focus on decarbonisation and the alignment of EU Funds with climate policy from the local to national to EU level has meant that the project has been responsive and remained coherent across the ten countries.

Partners commented that the flexible approach has enabled them to respond to the most relevant policy files at the national level and share the advocacy load with other NGOs. There is a sense of pride among the consortium about their adaptability, with partners crediting CAN Europe for continuously highlighting the evolving dynamic at the EU level, meaning the consortium did not miss opportunities to influence in a timely fashion.

The collaborative and supportive response of NEEMO (LIFE programme monitor) was emphasised. The responsiveness of the NEEMO contact point to communication from CAN Europe meant that changes could be made at the pace needed. Partners commented that they had *“underestimated the flexibility of LIFE. The project would have been paralysed without this but even so, flexibility wasn’t a given, so it was really great to see this.”*

Sustainability: All partners assert that institutional structures are in place to enable the continuity of processes and tools established during the Unify project both through the work of their organisations and through the follow-on *Together for 1.5* LIFE project which all partners are involved in, together with partners from three further Member States. This will ensure funding and resources for the continuity of Unify activities and processes.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Unify project remains highly relevant to both the EU climate and energy agenda, and national level dialogue processes, and has responded efficiently and effectively to a rapidly changing policy and funding landscape. This has resulted in some considerable impacts that could not have been foreseen at the start of the project, such as the adoption of the DNSH principle.

The project actions have been highly effective, delivering on the specific objectives of the Unify project and contributing to the overall objective of accelerating the transition of Member States to low carbon economies. In particular the Support Groups process of cooperation, the NECP Tracker, and the EU Cash Awards campaign have been particularly effective at engaging and influencing target groups and affecting change.

Maximising the potential of the NECP Tracker in other (all) Member States is endorsed and involving communications expertise to maximise the impact of awareness raising is recommended, with an EU DEAR application suggested. Keeping a record of policy and practice changes influenced by the *Together for 1.5* project and mapping the associated environmental, social, and economic impacts is proposed to facilitate evaluation and ensure successes and learning become institutional knowledge.

INTRODUCTION AND EVALUATION APPROACH

The challenge

EU climate policy and legislation developed in response to the Paris Agreement provides EU Member States with a roadmap for transitioning to a low carbon economy. The Unify project was developed in response to the weak climate ambition of most Member States that is incoherent with the objectives of the Paris Agreement; the lack of alignment between climate policies, decarbonisation pathways, and EU Funds programming; and the low level of stakeholder participation (NGOs, local authorities, think tanks, businesses) in decision-making across Member States, reducing the opportunities for collaborative generation of solutions and the adoption of best practices.

The objectives and actions

The Overall Objective of Unify is to **facilitate the effective and early transition of Member States across Europe to low carbon and resilient economies, unifying the programming of EU funds, 2030 NECPs, 2050 nLTS (and newer policy processes).**

Five Specific Objectives were described with actions contributing to each objective:

1. Ten target EU Member States are on track to meet or exceed 2030 targets, with programming of EU funds at country level directly enabling implementation of NECPs
2. NGOs in ten target EU Member States are highly effective at monitoring progress towards the Paris Agreement goal and holding EU Member States to account at the national level
3. The implementation of NECPs and nLTS is strengthened by tools made available through LIFE Unify, building on best practices and quantitative modelling tools from existing EU projects
4. Dissemination and communication of results throughout the project ensures effective uptake of the project's outcomes
5. Effective project management ensures efficient and cost-effective delivery of objectives

The project consortium contributed towards these objectives by:

- C1: Developing national dialogue among decision-makers, NGOs and other stakeholders
- C2: Providing tools and best practices to strengthen the monitoring of NECP implementation
- C3: Monitoring the implementation of NECPs, nLTS, and other newer policy processes
- C4: Highlighting the (mis)alignment of EU funds programming with NECPs and other policy processes
- C5: Supporting local authorities to develop SECAPs
- C6: Connecting NGOs and decision-makers at the EU level to replicate results and increase ambition
- C7: Building the capacity of NGOs and LRAs to influence EU funds programming, NECPs and nLTS
- C8: Assessing coherence between nLTS and EU-level commitments
- E2: Raising awareness among EU citizens

The consortium

Unify is coordinated by the Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe Secretariat – a network of European NGOs – with ten national NGO project partners (beneficiaries) from ten Member States:

- Croatia - DOOR: Društvo za oblikovanje održivog razvoja
- Czechia - CDE: Centrum pro dopravu a energetiku (Centre for Transport and Energy)
- Denmark - 92GRP: 92-gruppen
- Estonia - ELF: Eestimaa Looduse Fond (Estonian Fund for Nature)
- France - RAC: Réseau Action Climat
- Germany - Germanwatch
- Poland - ISD: Instytut Na Rzecz Ekorozwoju (Institute for Sustainable Development)
- Portugal - ZERO: Associação Sistema Terrestre Sustentável (Association for Sustainability)
- Slovenia - FOCUS: Focus društvo za sonaraven razvoj (Association for Sustainable Development)
- Spain – SEO/Birdlife: Sociedad Española de Ornitología (BirdLife)

Evaluation purpose

The criteria used for evaluating programmes are relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The OECD/DAC (Development Cooperation Directorate) evaluation principles emphasise the need for contextualised evaluations where purpose informs approach.

A mid-term evaluation was conducted for Unify in July 2021 with a reflection, learning and adaptation approach to inform the strategic direction for the remainder of the project and subsequent project collaborations. The evaluation focused on relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and added value, and examined the potential for impact, sustainability, and replication.

The purpose of this final evaluation is to ascertain the effectiveness, impact, relevance and sustainability of the Unify project. This report should be read as a continuation of the mid-term evaluation and incorporates the end of project socio-economic assessment.

Evaluation method

Evaluating influencing projects, such as Unify, requires assessment of whether intended outcomes and impacts have been realised and the causal contribution of the project to these changes. This evaluation explores behavioural change at the specific objective level and the extent to which these outcomes are attributable to Unify activities and examines the contribution of Unify activities to policy change at the overall objective level.

The evaluation focuses primarily on the reflections of the Unify consortium partners. An exploratory questionnaire was developed to collect qualitative information from the partners and facilitated group discussions explored accompanying qualitative stories of influence. A RAG rating has been used to rate the effectiveness of actions and the achievement of objectives.

	Achieved with a greater level of success than anticipated
	Achieved as anticipated
	Some progress but did not achieve as anticipated or did not achieve in all countries
	Little achievement made in all or most countries

SUMMARY OF MID TERM EVALUATION

The purpose of mid-term evaluation was to inform the strategic direction of the project and subsequent project collaborations, with a focus on relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and added value, and examination of the potential for impact, sustainability, and replication.

Relevance of the project: A flexible policy approach was adopted by the Unify consortium in response to the changing EU climate policy landscape, expanding from NECPs, nLTS, SECAPs and Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) programming to include the recovery fund, the Green Deal and the shift from 40% to 55% net emissions reductions targets. All partners believed that adaptation and flexibility helped them remain in tune with national policy contexts and coherent with the internal strategies of their organisations.

Effectiveness of activities: The work packages on NECPs and EU funds were rated as most effective. The NECP tracker tool had helped national stakeholders to understand the misalignment between national climate objectives and the pathways being proposed, enabling Unify partners to make stronger recommendations. Multistakeholder support groups and engagement of local authorities on SECAPs were rated as highly relevant in the six countries where this work package was being implemented. In some countries these activities had been delayed due to Covid-19 or moved online, limiting the effectiveness of dialogue. However, in Slovenia a community of municipalities had engaged in the support group, and in Croatia, Czechia and Slovenia, Unify partners had strengthened the capacity of local authorities to engage in national and EU policymaking.

Potential for impact: All partners stated that the implementation of NECPs and nLTS had been strengthened by tools made available by Unify and that NGOs were more effective at monitoring progress as a result of Unify. Partners also stated that they are on track to contribute towards unifying EU funds, NECPs and nLTS, and transitioning Member States to low carbon, resilient economies. Only a third felt that Member States were on track to meet or exceed the new 2030 targets. Unify findings from NECP assessments had been echoed by the EC; controversial road and aviation projects identified in the EU Cash Awards campaign had been withdrawn by governments in Slovenia, Portugal and Germany; and the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) strategic plans assessment by Unify stimulated a debate on the Danish CAP plan in national parliament.

Potential for sustainability and replication: All Unify partners were using the tools and products developed during the project to inform their wider work and said that Unify products and results are relevant for replication by other stakeholders and Member States. Partners said they would welcome further projects highlighting the need to continue activity on NECP revisions in 2023-2024 and Fit for 55 and supporting local authorities in decision-making and the development of SECAPs.

Added value: Partners were very much of the opinion that the Unify project had deepened engagement and collaboration among the partners and that being part of Unify had increased their knowledge about other Member States and expanded their engagement in EU-level policy dialogue. Most partners also agreed that Unify had enhanced the legitimacy and credibility of their work at the national and EU level and increased the connectivity between EU and national level policies. The CAN secretariat reflected that their resonance with the EC and the European Parliament was enhanced by providing experience and evidence from different Member States.

Mid-term evaluation recommendations update

Recommendation	Update
Explore possibilities for enhancing the SECAPs/LA work.	The SECAPs work gathered pace in the last year. Unify published a that brought together different experiences from the ground. Several partners (in PT, SI, HR, ES, FR) organised workshops and meetings with municipalities and local actors, and new approaches were trialled e.g., an interactive map showing SECAP development across Croatia, and a questionnaire with Spanish municipalities that have SECAPs.
In future projects, ensure that specific objectives are defined within the sphere influence of the project within the timeframe of the project.	This has been taken into account during the drafting of the <i>Together for 1.5</i> project which will follow on from Unify.
Collect regular mini stories of change from each country with supporting evidence.	No follow up action.
In future projects, ensure an adequate translation capacity or budget is allocated for each country.	Translation capacity has been taken into account in the <i>Together for 1.5</i> project.
Explore options for translation and amplification of the NECP tracker tool to other countries.	The NECP tracker will be significantly expanded and improved during <i>Together for 1.5</i> .
Integrate further 'from the ground' compilations for EU advocacy into subsequent projects.	Reports compiling experiences from Member States are planned in the <i>Together for 1.5</i> project, notably on NECPs.
Determine the opportunities and approaches to enhance the reach and replication potential.	Discussed as part of the development of the <i>Together for 1.5</i> project.
Ascertain the most important and effective thematic sub-groups.	The decision has been made not to continue the subgroups in <i>Together for 1.5</i> .
Survey Unify stakeholders to ascertain their use and replication of Unify products and tools.	No follow up action.
Explore the potential for transfer of Unify products and tools to other sectors through NEEMO, CINEA, and during EU LIFE events.	Not taken up so far.
Explore the operation model(s) for future projects i.e., CAN Europe as coordinator versus delegation to other partners.	In <i>Together for 1.5</i> CAN Europe will be the coordinator, but delegation of activities to partners is more pronounced which fits the larger country-based focus of the project.
Make applications for subsequent projects and discuss the thematic scope of follow-on project(s), including continued tracking of NECPs, the Fit for 55 package and SECAPs.	<i>Together for 1.5</i> will allow continuity on the Unify work strands, although SECAPs will be a small part compared to Unify.

EFFECTIVENESS

Evaluation questions: *Have the Unify outcomes (Specific Objectives) been achieved? To what extent is this attributable to the actions of Unify? Have the products and processes developed during Unify been used or scaled up to other stakeholders and Member States?*

This section looks at the extent to which the Unify project has built the capacity and awareness of technical target groups, and fostered collaboration and mindset shifts among these groups. The achievement of Specific Objectives and effectiveness of Actions is evaluated using the RAG rating:

	Achieved with a greater level of success than anticipated
	Achieved as anticipated
	Some progress but did not achieve as anticipated
	Little achievement made in all or most countries

1. Promoting alignment of EU funds with climate policies

Specific Objective 1: [Unify has facilitated alignment] of EU funds programming with the implementation of NECPs in ten target EU MS [and at the EU level]	
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Most partners (90%) concur that negotiations at the EU level on the MFF (2021-27) have been strengthened by Unify and 70% believe that EU funds and climate policies have become more aligned as a result of Unify.

Partners in six countries are of the view that Unify has contributed to greater alignment between the programming of EU funds at the country level and NECPs, nLTS, and other newer policy processes. It was noted that without Unify, Member States would always pretend they are having an impact, and that the work on EU funds has highlighted the gap between policy and practice.

EU funds analysis

C4: Evaluation of alignment between the EU funds programming and climate policies	
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The EU funds activities were developed to examine the alignment between EU funds programming and decarbonisation policies and plans. Originally analysis of EU Funds that were part of the 2021-27 MFF were considered, including the Cohesion Fund (Operational Programmes, Partnership Agreements) and the Just Transition Fund (JTF). Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) analysis was subsequently added to the EU Funds activities. Decarbonisation policies linked to EU funds programming were NECPs, nLTS, SECAPs, to which some relevant ‘Fit for 55’ legislative files (notably the ESR) were added after the approval of the new EU climate targets, as well as the RRFs following Covid-19. Further changes stemming from the announcement of the REPowerEU plan, such as the central role of RRFs in its implementation at the national level were also partly taken up during the project’s final months.

The EU Cash Awards campaign, run as part of the Unify project, highlighted the good, the bad and the ugly measures in the spending plans of Member States, encouraging them and the European Commission to exclude all climate and environmentally harmful measures and promote solutions to tackle the climate and environmental crises. The campaign identified practices that were not aligned with climate commitments, calling for them to be scrapped. These included greenwashing and missed opportunities for investments in low carbon transport or renewable energy (bad), and measures aimed at propping up oil, gas, and coal use, carbon intensive industries, and the development of unnecessary new roads (ugly). The campaign also highlighted positive measures presented in the plans and called for their enhancement.

Many partners commented that prior to Unify the EU budget was not a topic of discussion, commenting that the EU Cash Awards campaign opened up a dialogue on EU funds programming, forcing politicians to look at where big money is going. *“In France the EU budget was not discussed before. The EU budget work has helped us have this conversation with regional authorities on the spending, which was missing before.”*

The EU Funds work also raised awareness about the widespread lack of transparency and alignment across Member States, with partners commenting that it was observed that other countries are also struggling with transparency on how EU funds are being spent.

The Unify focus on EU funds enabled the consortium to quickly respond to the announcement of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and contribute to discussions at the EU level on the adoption of the Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) principle in February 2021. This Principle sets out to ensure that no measure (reform or investment) included in Member States’ RRP leads to significant harm to six environmental objectives: climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, circular economy, sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, pollution prevention and control, and protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems.

2. Building NGO monitoring capacity and stakeholder collaboration

Specific Objective 2: NGOs are [more] effective at monitoring progress towards the Paris Agreement goal and holding [calling] EU Member States to account [as a result of Unify]	
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The Unify project has substantially strengthened the capacity of the ten partner organisations with 70% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing that their organisation has greater capacity to engage in the Unify policy areas due the project. *“As national organisations we have a much better idea of how our governments are applying policies across the package and how other countries are performing.”*

All Unify partners agreed that the project has increased the effectiveness of their organisation in calling decision-makers to account, and that as a result of Unify, they have improved communication and collaboration with EU institutions and decision-makers. Most (90%) Unify partners also felt that other NGOs in their country are more effective at monitoring national progress towards the Paris Agreement goals as a result of Unify. UNIFY partners have also exposed Member States that did not provide meaningful stakeholder engagement in the development of policies and plans.

Support groups and workshops

C1: National dialogue (Support Groups) among NGOs, decision-makers, et al	
C7: National and regional workshops to build advocacy capacity of target groups	

Support Groups were developed in each of the ten target countries, and one at the pan-EU level, to build understanding and facilitate collaboration among pro-ambition stakeholders. National and regional workshops were held on specific topics to build the capacity and motivation of NGOs, LRAs and other stakeholders to engage in the programming of EU funds, NECPs, nLTS, RRP, TJTPs and other climate plans.

National level

All Unify partners agree that the Support Groups have enabled their organisations to enhance collaboration with other NGOs and other stakeholders relevant to the Unify policy strands. Many partners commented on the diversity of stakeholders engaging in the Unify support groups, including progressive businesses, churches, decision-makers, academia, and trade unions. In some Unify countries, such as Germany, there are over 100 diverse participants in the Support Groups.

In Estonia, ELF hosted a workshop on a participatory process for developing a TJTP for the Ida-Virumaa region. A significant mindset shift among decision-makers at the workshop was observed during the meeting: *“Decision-makers became inspired by the way we collaborated, and a lot spun off from the meeting. Since the roundtables the government has adopted ‘co-creation’ as a phrase as well as a practice. It feels like the government really sees that it is beneficial to have everyone contributing to plans. This is the first time this has happened and is new since Unify.”* Similarly, a coal workshop in Slovenia attracted a diverse audience including businesses, and during the workshop there was a noticeable shift in mindset to accepting that exit from coal is needed.

In other countries, such as Croatia and Poland where there have been opportunities for NGOs to engage with decision-makers at the national level, the Support Groups have been a lifeline. In Poland the declining space for NGOs is resulting in many NGOs ceasing to operate; financial support from the Unify project to establish Support Groups has enabled ISD to enhance cooperation between NGOs and maintain the work of ISD during a time when there is little recognition or opportunity to engage with the government. The Support Groups have strengthening cohesion and readiness to respond collaboratively: *“Prior to the establishment of the Unify Support Groups there was little collaboration between CSOs in Poland. The Support Groups have drawn in CSOs who were not previously involved in climate work, and we have a few trade unions in the support groups which is unusual. We even have some political representation from the opposition. Now we talk and have dialogue before responding.”*

This highlights an important role for LIFE projects in holding space for environmental NGO activity among NGOs, other stakeholders and at national and local levels of governance in the absence of democratic space or national support for NGOs.

Regional level

Workshops between neighbouring Unify countries have enhanced collaboration and united advocacy directed at the country and EU level. RAC and Germanwatch collaborated in regional dialogue on accelerating the European green transition through recovery programmes in 2020, and on reform of the EU fiscal framework in 2021. Both resulted in cross-national NGO declarations signed by 14 national and international NGOs.

ZERO and SEO/Birdlife have collaborated on Iberian workshops on renewable power and railway interconnections between Portugal and Spain. The workshops were very participative and highlighted the need for a common pathway to decarbonisation between the countries and a well-structure, electrified rail network that connects all points of the Iberian Peninsula.

3. Strengthening the implementation of NECPs, nLTS and SECAPs

Specific Objective 3: The [development and] implementation of NECPs, nLTS and other policies has been strengthened by Unify tools [and other products]	
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Most partners (90%) are of the opinion that the programming and implementation of NECPs, RRP and Cohesion Funds by decision-makers has been strengthened by tools made available by Unify. Only 50% believe that the programming and implementation of nLTS has been strengthened by tools made available by Unify with 30% disagreeing and two countries saying they do not know.

Monitoring NECPs

C2: Development of tools to strengthen the monitoring of NECP implementation	
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C3: Assessment of NECP implementation across ten target Member States	
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An NECP Tracker tool was developed – initially by RAC France and then expanded to embed all the countries of the consortium – to compare emissions reductions by sector in target Member States with the climate and energy targets of countries’ NECPs (or other sectoral legislation). The tool was used to consolidate large amounts of technical data and produce at-a-glance progress in emissions reductions and renewables uptake by sector in an accessible, visual, navigable format.

The NECP Tracker was emphasised by partners as being extremely influential in generating a mindset shift among NGOs from monitoring the implementation of specific policy files to monitoring how countries are performing on emissions reduction in relation to the targets set out in their NECPs.

The tool has put a spotlight on the gaps between policy targets and the measures being implemented, providing credibility to and justification of the actions that have been recommended. *“Just last week (June 2022) the academia group within our support group [in Portugal] said the NECP tracker is incredible at helping us to see how we are progressing, otherwise it is just another policy report.”*

In Czechia NGOs have used the NECP Tracker extensively to advocate for strengthened climate ambition, in Poland the Tracker has highlighted issues that were not well understood, and in Germany the Tracker reports showed that compensation strategies would not reduce emissions as anticipated.

The Tracker has also raised awareness about the details of NECPs from Member States and the measures that are being applied. In several countries partners noted that as soon as a tracker update was released, web and TV media use the findings and graphics in their communications, especially in France. This has obliged decision-makers to observe how their country is performing relative to other Member States. CSOs and ministers have approached Unify partners with questions about how they compared to other countries. *“There was a sense that our country is doing the best in energy transition and the results of the NECP Tracker made our government a bit more humble. For example, Tracker reports showed them that they missed their 2020 renewable energy target while other countries had met their targets.”*

Monitoring nLTS

C8: Assessment and monitoring of nLTS and coherence with NECPs	
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Little progress has been made on nLTS in most countries, limiting the capacity of the Unify consortium to influence; nLTS were supposed to have been submitted in January 2021 but to date, seven of the target countries have not done so and Poland did not present a 2020 draft.

However, Unify partners commented on the quality of the nLTS qualitative traffic light assessment tool, developed as part of the Unify project. The report attracted media attention in Spain with SEO/Birdlife being contacted by a radio station. In Slovenia, discussions on the nLTS changed attitudes towards accelerating renewable energy, with solar energy and community energy now at the forefront of energy discussions. In Portugal, ZERO engaged many experts in the development of proposal of a nLTS emissions reduction scenario.

The Croatian nLTS does not include a neutrality scenario, but following the release of the nLTS report, DOOR advocated on the need for a national neutrality scenario and have since been asked by national government to be part of a working group to develop a neutrality scenario.

Facilitating local level planning

C5: Supporting municipalities to develop or improve SECAPs	
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The Unify project engaged in the development of SECAPs with local authorities and other local actors in five of the ten target countries (Czechia, France, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain), holding workshops, and developing good practice guidelines and lessons learnt from across the countries.

In Slovenia the SECAPs work has raised understanding about the importance of local level planning in the achievement of climate and energy goals among diverse stakeholders from ministries and businesses. In France, the SECAPs work has opened doors for engagement with LRAs and stimulated substantial local interest, with over 100 local CSOs pushing the environment agenda in local elections, championing discussions about concrete measures such as low emission zones and local transport. RAC have also supported CDE (Czechia) in the development of local engagement models.

The SECAPs work has also helped to highlight the role of local authorities in delivering on climate action in Spain, especially in the transport and buildings sectors. SEO/Birdlife have conducted a survey of the Spanish Covenant of Mayors in SECAPs with 200 responses, showing considerable interest in engaging in cross-country exchange on local level climate action. The SECAPs work has also shown Spanish local authorities that civil society is interested in engaging on climate action, and

a debate about SECAPs in Poland brought about a public declaration from one of the municipalities about joining the Covenant of Mayors.

An energy caps workshop with municipalities in Croatia motivated authorities to be more ambitious in local climate planning and emissions savings. DOOR (Croatia) commented on the effectiveness of collaborating with authorities at the local level in raising national attention: *“During Unify we advocated on energy poverty at the local level, working city by city with local authorities. We have now been asked by the national government to be part of a working group to discuss this.”* However, there has not been any action beyond the working groups as yet. Similarly, the Polish energy poverty report was well received by NGOs and a starting point for many local energy costs debates in 2022.

4. Dissemination and replication

Specific Objective 4: Dissemination and communication of Unify results has ensured effective uptake (replication) of the project’s outcomes	
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Public awareness-raising

E2: Public awareness raising	
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Most (90%) partners believe that public awareness has been raised by Unify on NECPs and climate governance instruments. The EU Cash Awards campaign was successful in raising public awareness about how EU money is being allocated and spent in all target countries except Czechia. In Croatia, civil society who were previously not motivated to look at EU funds are now asking many questions, though there has been little response from the Croatian government.

Germanwatch and CDE commented on their ability to raise public awareness of the European climate mandate in their countries: *“In Germany climate has become mainstream in the last 9-12 months and due to Unify we have been able to make the link between the national and EU-level.”*

SEO/Birdlife noted that communication with local media had a greater resonance with citizens, suggesting that citizens place more trust in local media: *“When local media picked up on our national press briefing, the public response was greater than the coverage by national media.”* This sentiment was reflected by other partners, highlighting an interesting strategy to enhance delivery of the EU Climate Pact (which focuses on generating engagement and action by citizens) through local media engagement.

In technical projects the involvement of communications expertise in the design phase often results in an under-resourcing for communications and media activities. A few partners commented on the need to amplify the communications work and interact more with media organisations in the future. *“Moving forward we want to amplify our voice among citizens. We did not maximise this opportunity enough during Unify and it is a learning for the next project.”*

ZERO is the main media influencer among environmental NGOs in Portugal and has generated a lot of media coverage during the project; for example, the Unify report on nLTS was disseminated widely on social media and cited by many newspapers, radio stations and websites. There is an opportunity for ZERO to strengthen the communications capacity building among the partners in the *Together for 1.5* project.

Replication and transfer

C6: Replication and transfer to NGOs and decision-makers at the pan-EU level	
E3: Briefings and conferences to enhance networking and technical dissemination	

During the mid-term evaluation 93% of partners said the tools and products produced by Unify are relevant for replication by other stakeholders or Member States, but only 33% were aware of other stakeholders using Unify products to inform their work. When asked during the final evaluation, 80% of partners said that tools or products produced by Unify are being used by target groups in other Member States.

Workshops and high-level events have scaled up the outreach of Unify to other Member States and audiences: at least one Unify-related session was organised during CAN Europe's biannual General Assemblies to disseminate Unify's knowledge and results; all Support Group meetings, SECAP meetings, national and regional workshops provided an opportunity to disseminate Unify findings; numerous bilateral meetings with decision makers on NECP enabled the consortium to share results; and interested partners received Unify communication through a quarterly newsletter.

Two high-level events attracted 120 and 150 participants to discuss how to accelerate climate action (Autumn 2021) and the consequences of the REPowerEU package (June 2022). These events showed that European climate policy not only needs to be more ambitious, but also needs to pay careful attention to unanticipated social impacts which, if anticipated early, can significantly accelerate the EU's race for a carbon-neutral future.

The European Commission has placed increased emphasis on replication and transfer in LIFE, asking projects to ensure replication occurs and is evidenced during the project implementation. *'LIFE projects represent a considerable investment. Successful continuation, replication and/or transfer require a strategy including tasks to multiply the impacts of the projects' solutions and mobilise a wider uptake, reaching a critical mass during the project. This goes beyond transfer of knowledge and involves putting the solutions developed and/or applied in the project into practice elsewhere.'*

Many of the tools and processes established during the Unify project remain highly relevant over the coming years, such as the NECP Tracker, and nine partners said that the results of Unify are being used to inform other projects and programmes beyond this consortium, showing the replication impact of Unify. The follow-on project *Together for 1.5* will expand to include three other Member States, Belgium, Bulgaria and Hungary, ensuring the wider replication of Unify activities and results.

Activities promoting the uptake of Unify products and tools to secondary target groups within and beyond the ten target member states in the *Together for 1.5* project would help to scale up the reach and impact of Unify beyond the official life of the project. Short follow up surveys with these secondary target groups would provide an overview of which products, tools and results are being replicated, by whom and in what context. The scaling and replication potential of the NECP Tracker tool and the success of the Cash Awards campaign were highlighted, both of which are factored into the *Together for 1.5* project.

IMPACT

Evaluation questions: Has the intended impact (Overall Objective) of Unify been realised? What is the contribution of Unify to the achievement of impact?

This section evaluates the impact of the Unify project i.e., the extent to which Unify has helped to accelerate the transition of Member States to low carbon, resilient economies (Overall Objective). Unify’s contribution to impact is measured by the influence of the consortium on climate and energy policy and practice change, and alignment of EU Funds programming with decarbonisation policies and plans.

Unify influence on policy and practice change at the national level

In the mid-term review it was noted that Specific Objective 1 is an impact statement rather than an outcome directly and solely attributable to the actions of Unify. Therefore, the contribution (rather than attribution) of Unify to Specific Objective 1 is evaluated together with the Overall Objective.

Specific Objective 1: Ten target EU Member States are [more] on track to meet or exceed 2030 targets with the programming of EU funds at country level directly enabling implementation of NECPs	
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NECPs: During the mid-term evaluation 93% of Unify partners rated their influence on 2030 NECPs to be medium-high but only 33% felt that their country was on track to meet 2030 targets with 60% disagreeing. In this final evaluation, 60% of partners now believe that Unify has contributed to their country being more on track to meet or exceed 2030 targets with two disagreeing and two unsure.

EU Funds: Partners in seven countries stated that Unify has contributed to EU funds at the country level being used to enable implementation of NECPs, and that Unify has contributed to increases in funding for renewables and energy efficiency. Three countries said they do not know. Only two partners agree that Unify has contributed to more funding being allocated by their governments for the development and implementation of SECAPs, with most saying they do not know and two disagreeing.

Overall Objective: Effective and early transition of Member States across Europe to low carbon and resilient economies	
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Seven partners conclude that the project has accelerated the transition in their country to a low carbon, resilient economy, with three unsure. This suggests that while Member States may not be achieving the level of ambition required to meet climate targets, Unify has helped drive increased ambition towards this in at least the majority of target countries.

In general, a hesitancy was observed in the willingness of many partners to claim their contribution to policy and practice change, despite the qualitative evidence demonstrating their role illustrated below. Regular capture of influence and change would support the capture of further examples, and ensure this information is not lost or overlooked if there are staffing changes.

Czechia

Czechia has an energy-intensive economy that is based on 'old' energy but there is increasing pressure for this to change. The EU funds analysis challenged governments to look at the distribution of funding with more funds now being allocated to communities, marginalised regions, and households. *"This is not something that happened in previous budgets. We [Unify] had a big influence on this change."*

CDE said the project has increased the resonance of their organisation, and they are now part of more monitoring committees, such as the Monitoring Committee of the Operational Programme at the Ministry of Industry and Trade and co-chairing many debates such as the Working Group working on Public Participation as a result of Unify. Both have helped drive the regional distribution of funding and new energy models in the country

Croatia

In Croatia the limited space for NGO engagement with the government made it challenging for DOOR to hold decision-makers to account. *"We did a lot of good work on EU funds in Croatia, but there was little uptake."* However, some buildings measures that DOOR advocated for have been adopted. For example, although gas remains a transition fuel in the Croatian RRP, which DOOR argued against, subsequent funding calls for building renovations do not allow gas to be used as a transition fuel.

DOOR has also managed to influence public funding for SECAPs from the Fund for Energy Efficiency, claiming that *"this is due to Unify because we made many comments on the importance of SECAPs and advocated extensively for SECAPs funding. A national call is now being opened to allow municipalities to access funding for the implementation of measures in their SECAPs."*

The Unify energy poverty analysis also resulted in ministries in Croatia following up directly with DOOR, suggesting there is more traction for engagement in policies with social co-benefits. Reflections were made that any level of influence at the national level is not about the democratic process or the quality of products, tools and analysis, but about building personal relationships with decision-makers.

Following DOOR's advocacy on the need for a neutrality scenario in Croatia's nLTS, DOOR was invited to be part of a working group to develop a scenario with a verbal commitment from the government to agree a scenario. However, there has been no follow up to date.

Denmark

Prior to Unify Denmark did not have an emissions reductions target for agriculture. The government view was that little reduction could be achieved in the sector and that agriculture was already low emitting compared to others in the EU27. The Tracker and the Unify Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) exposed the misconception and in October 2021 the government adopted a reduction target for agriculture of 55-65% reduction by 2030 compared 1990. The EU funds analysis and capacity built among the consortium during the Unify project has enabled 92GRP to provide expert input to EU economic and social committee regarding the Danish RRP.

The Tracker tools has given 92GRP better data insight allowing them to input to the Danish independent climate council, which is officially tasked with assessing whether government policies are aligned with Denmark's 2030 targets, and 92GRP have provided expert input to EU economic and social committee regarding the Danish RRP.

Estonia

Since the Unify roundtable on the Ida-Virumaa's TJTP, the government has adopted 'co-creation' as a practice, replicating the process for other decision-making processes. ELF's participation and impact in phasing out oil shale from the Ida-Virumaa region is evident in several policy documents, including the Green Plan and the Ida-Virumaa TJTP. When the new progressive government coalition came into power in February 2021 ELF focused their advocacy on the Coalition Agreement, providing strong environment and climate recommendations. Direct reference to these recommendations can be seen in the Agreement, such as the date for national exit from oil shale electricity.

The campaign Climate Neutral Estonia by 2035 attracted 3000 signatures and influenced the mindset of ministers. *"The petition was discussed in parliament, opening up a door to consider that neutrality could be achieved quicker than 2050. Ministers are now open to discuss and explore the possibility of neutrality targets for earlier than 2050."*

France

Prior to Unify, NECPs were not well known by the public and the EU budget was not discussed in France. Decision-makers did not tend to refer to policies in their communication about climate action. This changed during Unify, largely due to the awareness raised by the NECP Tracker.

Bringing together best practices from across countries helped create the link between the EU level and national level in RAC's national advocacy and drive change in sectoral targets such as in the buildings and agriculture sectors. For example, a requirement for rental properties to achieve higher environmental standards has been adopted, which Unify advocated on.

Unify opened doors for dialogue with LRAs in France and has mobilised community action at the local level; around 100 local groups have been pushing the environment agenda in local elections, facilitating the adoption of concrete policy measures such as low emission zones and local transport plans.

The increased Franco-German dialogue brought about by the Unify project on the lack of investment and action in low energy transport i.e., trains and rail infrastructure provided a platform for SNCF to argue for a greater investment in railways. So far, the response from the French government has been a one-off investment, but this is providing leverage for further action.

Germany

In Germany the 'race to zero' dynamic generated by Unify helped to create the link between the national and EU levels. *"The Unify support groups have really shifted the mindset in Germany to an EU focus. At the start of the project, they could not see the EU level, just the German situation, while now they hear European music. Decision-makers now understand the link between EU policy and national mandates and that they need to play their part. The EU is often several steps ahead and we*

were able to get our government to see this. We now have an expert body in climate and there is a sense that stakeholders are anticipating EU directives rather than just waiting for them [to be enforced], which Unify has influenced.”

Germanwatch had previously found it difficult to influence emissions reduction in the building and transport sectors, but the Unify action on Fit for 55 helped them to advocate for what was being supported in Brussels as part of the EU climate mandate. For example, the REPowerEU requirement for new buildings to include solar helped move forward solar discussions in Germany and increase commitment.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that RRP rose up the agenda in Germany providing Germanwatch with an opportunity to lobby on the DNSH principle, which has subsequently become a significant component of the German Climate Law.

Poland

The space to influence the government remains limited in Poland, though ISD report that Covid-19 and the war in the Ukraine is creating more space for dialogue. ISD organised a workshop on the role of agriculture in meeting EU decarbonisation goals and received feedback from the Ministry of Climate and Environment, and the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Unify assessment of EU Funds spending helped influence EU spending for 2021-2027 in Poland. Although a significant funding for road construction remains, many additional criteria have been added that should result in less intensive road building. ISD since received a good reception on their energy transport policy report (Polish version) from ministry responsible for transport.

Portugal

The EU Cash Awards campaign had a strong influence on the content of the Portuguese RRP with many of the environmentally harmful road investments removed from the final Plan. ZERO were also influential in the drafting of the Portuguese nLTS, engaging with many experts in the drafting of the emissions reduction scenario that was then adopted in the Portuguese nLTS.

Slovenia

In Slovenia, a Unify workshop on coal exit as part of discussions on the nLTS shifted attitudes towards accelerating the uptake of renewable energy. Solar is now at the forefront of energy discussions with communication from the government about renewable energy projects and funding increases for community energy projects. The adoption of coal exit in the Slovenian NECP is not what Focus had asked for but is an improvement, and the new government may expedite the exit date.

In Slovenia Focus also advocated strongly on the Environmental Protection Act II which now includes improvements on the Slovenia neutrality date, and the development of an independent consultation body. Focus also made recommendations on the strategic environmental assessment and the most ambitious scenario has been adopted into the final Slovenian NECP. This will result in significant GHG emissions reductions.

Focus also influenced the Slovenia RRP by raising awareness of planned projects that would be environmentally harmful during the EU Cash Awards campaign. Most of the projects were

subsequently scrapped, such as financing for new roads. In other acts, barriers to renewable energy were also removed and support for solar energy was enhanced.

Spain

In Spain SEO/BirdLife helped to ensure realistic targets were set for carbon sinks in southern dry countries. Unify work on the Spanish nLTS demonstrated that climate sinks in Spain are absorbing less and less carbon year on year due to the impacts of climate change. This has highlighted the limitations to carbon sequestration as a mitigation strategy in southern dry states, altering EU-level dialogue and expectations. SEO/Birdlife also facilitated the establishment of a national screening process for the DNSH principle of assessment for new developments funded with recovery funds.

SEO/Birdlife commented on their increased recognition within the NGO community and among other institutions as a result of Unify: *“We are typically recognised as a nature conservation organisation but are now seen as a strong player in the climate and energy debate and are receiving invites from other NGOs to talk on climate and energy at their events.”*

Unify influence on policy and practice change at the EU level

The Unify action on EU funds has led to the EU making greater demands for evidenced progress from Member States; following Unify’s work to raise awareness of the misalignment between EU funds spending plans and climate and energy policies, the EC is now asking Member States to report on how EU funds are being used to deliver their NECPs. *“A real attempt has been made to align funding and policies at the EU level. This has been a clear change in the last 12-18 months and is something Unify have been advocating on throughout the project.”* The EC has confirmed (during LIFE Unify’s final high-level event in July 2022) that this requirement will be further detailed and enhanced throughout the revision of NECPs in 2023-24. Several recommendations put forward in a joint briefing by the LIFE Unify project while Member States were drafting their RRP were also taken up by the EC in their recommendations to Member States.

The quick response of Unify to the announcement of the Recovery and Resilience Facility contributed to the adoption of the DNSH principle at the EU level in February 2021. This sets out to ensure that no measure (reform or investment) included in Member States’ RRP leads to significant harm to six environmental objectives: climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, circular economy, sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources, pollution prevention and control, and protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems. The impact of the adoption of a DNSH Principle has been significant at the national level as described above.

Unify contribution to environmental impact

The influence of the Unify project to changes in policy and practice has contributed to concrete environmental impacts including GHG emissions reductions from the agriculture, buildings, and transport sectors and from an increase in the share of renewable energies; air pollutant reductions from the transport and energy sectors; and a contribution to the carbon sink effect of managed forests and other sinks. This will be qualified and quantified in line with the LIFE Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as part of the final report and is not available for inclusion in the final evaluation.

UNIFY CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

The LIFE guidelines stipulate that ‘an assessment of the socio-economic impact of the project actions on the local economy and population is obligatory’ and that this can ‘take the form of a study consolidating the data and results over the project lifetime’. Examples of socio-economic impacts given in the guidelines include direct or indirect employment growth; enhancement of activities that develop supplementary income sources; offsetting social and economic isolation; and raising the profile of the area.

While some LIFE projects are localised, enabling an assessment of the direct socio-economic impacts on the local economy and local population, it is not possible to attribute and quantify direct social or economic impacts of governance and information projects, such as Unify. Instead, qualified indirect impacts can be described. Since a socio-economic framework of intended co-benefits with qualitative indicators was not defined for the Unify project, this assessment takes an exploratory approach, describing the ways in which the Unify project has indirectly contributed to social change and socio-economic co-benefits.

Driving social change

The Unify project has influenced the understanding, mindsets, and behaviour of target groups contributing to social action and collaborative local and national processes. In doing so, the Unify project has also contributed to the European Climate Pact, an EU-wide initiative inviting a movement of people, communities and organisations united around a common cause, participating in climate action and building a greener Europe, with a focus on green areas, green transport, green buildings, and green skills.

Mobilisation of EU citizens

As discussed in the effectiveness section of this report, the Unify project has raised the awareness of citizens in nine of the ten target countries about the need for greater climate ambition in NECPs and the allocation of EU funds, which has mobilised citizen action.

The NECP tracker and EU funds analysis have helped mainstream climate discussions in several countries, triggering citizens to look beyond their borders at progress in countries around the EU, and building an understanding of the EU climate and energy mandate.

The simple and effective EU Cash Awards campaign raised citizens awareness about the allocation of EU funds, motivating them to ask questions and make demands about how money is being spent, contributing to the allocation of more funds to communities, marginalised regions, and households in Czechia, and divestment from environmentally and socially harmful projects in most of the target countries.

In France, citizens have become driven at the municipal level, with many local CSOs engaging in local elections, pushing local authorities to implement concrete policies such as better and sustainable local transport, and low emission zones.

Collaborative governance

Collective (collaborative) governance is well recognised as an innovative solutions-oriented model of governance where diverse stakeholders work in partnership to improve the management of public resources and delivery of services.

As well as seeking to influence climate and energy policies, Unify aimed to create social change by catalysing a shift toward multi-stakeholder, multi-level governance through Support Groups at the national level and SECAPs at the local level. Greater collaboration and action at the regional and EU level has been fostered by the Unify project.

EU level: Nine of the ten Unify partners assert that the Unify project has helped them to communicate their messages to EU institutions and decision makers, and eight believe that as a result of Unify they have increased their collaboration with EU-focused entities. Partners commented that the focus of the NECP Tracker on how Member States are actually doing in emissions reductions, rather than the targets set out in their legislation, has made them more relevant dialogue partners with the EC. This has resulted in, for example, invitations to the Danish 92GRP to participate in EU committees as experts where they previously did not have a voice, the development of Franco-German to EU dialogue, and the adoption of the French minimum standard for buildings by the EC.

Regional level: The project has stimulated collaboration between French and German NGOs towards accelerating the European green transition through recovery programmes, and on reform of the EU fiscal framework in 2021 resulting in cross-national NGO declarations, and collaborations between Portuguese and Spanish stakeholders on renewable power and railway interconnections.

National level: The Support Groups have been impactful in all countries with nine partners believing that Unify has helped them to strengthen collaboration with national level decision-makers and a wide diversity of stakeholders. In Estonia, the collaborative process fostered by the Unify project has generated a significant shift in approach, with the government adopting 'co-creation' as a phrase and a practice for decision-making. In Poland, in the absence of space for civil society engagement in decision-making, collaboration with NGOs and other stakeholders has been strengthened.

Local level: In the development of green spaces the Climate Pact aims to offer local authorities solutions to restore, protect and enlarge green urban areas and to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation between communities, businesses, landowners and local governments. The Unify project has contributed towards this in five countries through capacity building of local authorities on the development of SECAPs. This has helped to highlight the role of local authorities in delivering on national climate targets, especially in the transport and buildings sectors. In two countries the Unify engagement at the local level, coupled with the work on EU funds, has contributed to the allocation of more funds for SECAPs.

Transparent institutions

The NECP Tracker and the EU funds activities have helped to drive greater transparency in the target Member States, but also at a pan-EU level. The results of the tracker have forced decision-makers to look at their performance relative to other countries, driving change, and the EU funds work has highlighted the pervasive lack of transparency on how Member States are spending EU funds, resulting in the EC asking Member States how they are using funds to deliver on the NECPs.

Socio-economic co-benefits

Although the Unify project has not mapped or reported on socio-economic co-benefits, there are impacts that can be extrapolated from the policy changes influenced by Unify.

Improvements to air quality: Seven of the Unify partners report that recommendations made by Unify have been taken up by their governments that will contribute to cleaner air and the associated health benefits for citizens. In Slovenia the project shifted attitudes towards accelerating the date of coal exit and Unify contributed to the removal of various planned fossil fuel projects through the EU Cash Awards campaign, calling for a halt to these ‘ugly’ investments.

Reduction in energy poverty: Addressing the energy efficiency of buildings has been a success of Unify, advocated for directly in the western countries such as France. In CEE and the Balkans, energy efficiency has gained traction through dialogue on energy poverty: Raising awareness of energy poverty with local authorities has helped gain attention at the national level in Croatia with a national energy poverty policy being discussed. In Czechia, energy communities and energy poverty discussions are coming to the fore due to the Ukraine crisis, providing Unify with a platform to discuss the needs of vulnerable customers.

Contribution to green jobs: Only 40% of partners feel that the project has contributed towards the development of green jobs or business opportunities, because the leap from advocating for more ambitious decarbonisation targets, and green jobs, is intangible. However, all agree that Unify recommendations will contribute towards greater investment in renewable energy, which will generate green jobs. As a result of Unify, a Support Group has been developed in Estonia focused on the Green Plan, which is about the development of the green economy and green jobs, demonstrating a contribution of Unify to these sorts of discussions.

Funds for community energy: The democratisation of the energy sector was described by a few partners as a contribution of Unify, for example, financial flows for community energy projects and grants for solar in Slovenia.

During the interview discussions, CAN Europe noted that there are increasing discussions about job losses from energy and climate transition, and the need for positive communication away from job losses toward the socio-economic co-benefits of transition in the *Together for 1.5* project. The need to focus more on co-benefits in the next project is recognised with a co-benefits study planned based on concrete socio-economic co-benefits data and a possible campaign to shift the transition dialogue from negative to positive social and economic benefits.

RELEVANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Evaluation questions: Has the Unify project remained responsive to the rapidly changing EU and national level policy dynamic? Has the LIFE programme enabled Unify to take an adaptive approach? Will the results and benefits of the project last?

Specific Objective 5: Effective project management throughout the project ensures efficient and cost-effective delivery of objectives	
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The policy landscape has changed extensively since the LIFE Unify project was developed in 2018, when 2030 NECPs and 2050 nLTS were the primary policy tools for decarbonisation at the national level, with SECAPs at the municipal level, and the EU had an overall emissions reduction target of 40%. Partnership Agreements (PAs) and Operational Programmes (OPs) constituted the EU's structural funds for delivery of these policies.

In 2019, The EC launched the EU Green Deal, contextually proposing a 2050 climate neutrality objective, and a 2030 climate target of at least 55% net emissions reductions, rendering NECPs and other relevant national and EU policy instruments outdated – which later brought the EC to adopt the 'Fit for 55' legislative package. Then, in March 2020 (six months into the Unify project) the Covid pandemic changed the policy context further. The European Commission announced a top up to Just Transition Funds (for TJTPs) and introduced a Recovery Fund for 2021-2027 (for RRP). An overall budget of €1.8 trillion was announced in July 2020, the largest package ever financed through the EU budget.

The increased ambition in 2030 and 2050 targets, and the overall EU climate spending target of 30%, and 37% for RRP, provided the Unify consortium with the opportunity to widen the project scope to facilitate a positive correlation between EU and national spending priorities and the development of ambitious climate and energy plans and long-term pathways. However, the announcement of these policy changes shifted the political attention of some Member States away from NECPs and LTS toward the 'Fit for 55' legislative package as well as towards the RRP and other relevant national plans legislation, such as climate laws. This meant that the policy focus was no longer the same across the ten target Member States for Unify; yet without each country adapting to align project actions with national policy priorities, the project would no longer be relevant to the national context.

Remaining relevant

During the mid-term evaluation, 86% of Unify partners said the project remained relevant to the national policy context, and 100% concurred that adapting to a changing policy focus enabled them to remain in tune with discussions taking place nationally. During the final evaluation all partners agreed that the project has continued to remain relevant to the EU and national policy contexts in the last year of the project and the flexible policy approach has enhanced their ability to meet the Unify project objectives.

Despite the differing policy focus across Member States, all partners said the project remains coherent between Unify target countries due to common focus on decarbonisation and the unification of EU Funds and climate policy from the local to national to EU level.

Adaptability of the consortium

Partners in several countries reported that a flexible approach has enabled them to efficiently share the load with other NGOs in their countries. *“In Estonia there is an NGO focused on the RRP, so we have placed our emphasis on Fit for 55.”* Flexibility therefore not only enables the project to remain relevant to national discussions but enhances synergy and complementarity whilst avoiding duplication.

Flexibility has also enabled partners to collaborate effectively with other organisations on the hottest topics and respond to what the media were picking up on. It has also enabled CAN Europe and partners to be very responsive, reacting to a rapidly changing dialogue at the EU and national level: *“Keeping our focus on the EU budget and decarbonisation meant we could jump to other policy files very quickly as things changed.”*

The Unify consortium commented on being proud of their adaptability. There is a notably positive dynamic among the Unify team with praise for the coordination and responsiveness of CAN Europe which is beyond that observed in other LIFE projects. The responsiveness of CAN Europe in highlighting the evolving dynamic at the EU level was emphasised, which ensured the consortium did not miss an opportunity to influence. The Fit for 55 package and the Green Deal were mentioned by multiple partners. *“In Czechia the flexibility has been absolutely fantastic. Without it we could not imagine that Unify would be at this stage of success. By adapting our work to respond to the Fit for 55 package we were really able to engage in the preparatory phase of Fit for 55 and get involved in the DNSH agenda where we could see our influence in Brussels.”* The need for continued flexibility in the subsequent *Together for 1.5* project, starting in September 2022, was emphasised.

Adaptability of the LIFE monitoring and Commission

CAN Europe remarked that their contact at NEEMO was reactive, collaborative, and supportive when the need to adapt and be responsive was raised. Although official approval for any changes needed to come from CINEA after each monitoring visit, the good communication between CAN Europe and NEEMO, and between NEEMO and CINEA meant that changes could be made at the pace needed, with a good level of certainty that CINEA would support justified changes.

The LIFE Unify consortium decided to quickly adapt to policy opportunities – for example, in the case of the Effort-Sharing Regulation – without the certainty that such activities would substitute some deliverables that had become irrelevant in a changed policy context. Oftentimes, this had to be done prior to CINEA being able to officially approve these changes (which were however checked by the project monitor). In practice, CINEA accepted all justifications showing that although it might take a bit of time to get an official approval, CINEA is willing to be flexible in the approach to reaching the objectives of the project. Partners familiar with LIFE observed this flexibility in other LIFE projects they are involved in commenting that it is necessary to be effective, but still appreciated. Others observed that they had *“underestimated the flexibility of LIFE. The project would have been paralysed without this but even so, flexibility wasn’t a given, so it was really great to see this.”*

The Unify consortium has rapidly adapted to the evolving EU and national policy contexts, ensuring the project continues to be relevant to the different national contexts, whilst remaining a coherent project across the ten Member States. This accomplishment appears to result from a combination of partners rooted in the national context, with CAN Europe firmly engaged at the EU level, tracking change and feeding partners with new policy narratives as they emerge.

The success has also come from keeping focused on the overarching theory of change for Unify - to facilitate the effective and early transition of Member States across Europe to low carbon and resilient economies by unifying the programming of EU funds with short term (2030) and longer term (2050) strategies and targets – rather than retaining a fixed focus on a specific policy process.

Sustainability

All partners state that institutional structures are in place to enable the continuity of processes and tools established during the Unify project. All Unify partners are involved in the *Together for 1.5* project which has been designed as a follow on from the Unify project. This will ensure funding and resources for the continuity of Unify activities and processes. As a partner organisation, CAN Europe will continue wider work on Fit for 55 and EU funds, keeping members informed of EU developments.

During the mid-term evaluation it became clear that continuing thematic working groups and expanding local level action on SECAPs was not feasible without additional resourcing. These aspects do not feature as strongly in the *Together for 1.5* project and will focus on advocating for more funding for SECAPS. However, engaging at the local level certainly constitutes an entire project, if not many, and a lesson from Unify is that the differences in the needs of local authorities across the EU is vastly different, making a cohesive multi-country project difficult. There are opportunities for expansion of this work through EU LIFE and Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) funding streams, looking at the contribution of local action to achievement of national climate goals.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The Unify project remains highly relevant to both the EU climate and energy agenda and national level dialogue processes and has responded efficiently and effectively to a rapidly changing policy and funding landscape. This has resulted in some considerable impacts that could not have been foreseen at the start of the project, such as the adoption of the DNSH principle. NEEMO and CINEA have supported the adaptation, without which the Unify project would not have been as impactful.

The project actions have mostly been highly effective, delivering on the specific objectives of the Unify project and contributing to the overall objective of accelerating the transition of Member States to low carbon economies.

The national Support Groups have enhanced NGO and multi-stakeholder collaboration and capacity in all countries and to high level in some countries, for example, with the government in Estonia subsequently adopting 'co-creation' as a process for policy-development. In Poland and Croatia, the space for NGO engagement at the national level is limited. The Unify project has enabled ISD in Poland to continue operations, with the Support Groups facilitating strong NGO collaboration and engagement at the LA level.

The NECP Tracker has been very effective at building awareness and driving mindset shifts among all target groups, from decision-makers to citizens. The tool has enabled stakeholders to observe the progress towards decarbonisation in their countries and compare this with other member states, stimulating media interest and increasing the commitment of governments to accelerate decarbonisation and adopt stronger sectoral measures, such as the energy efficiency of buildings. The tool will be strengthened and scaled out to two new countries in the *Together for 1.5* project and replicating the tool to all Member States would be of value.

The EU Cash Awards campaign was a simple and successful approach to raising awareness of the mismatch between the planned spending of EU funding at a national level and the commitments made in climate policies. This has pushed governments in the target Member States to redistribute funding and remove unsustainable development plans, such as gas as a transition fuel and new roads, which are not aligned with decarbonisation efforts. As one partner reflected, the action follows the money, so continuing to drive transparency in the allocation and distribution of EU funds in Member States is important. A similar activity is planned in the *Together for 1.5* project

The SECAPs work was focused in five of the ten Unify countries but highly effective at generating awareness about the role of local authorities and the interest of local stakeholders in climate action. All countries would benefit from a scaling up on SECAPs work specifically, and local level multi-stakeholder action in general, not least because local authorities do not have the knowledge or capacity to develop SECAPs, nor the funds to recruit support for the development of SECAPs. However, this was a time intensive component of work, which could easily constitute multiple projects. There is a need for greater fund availability for NGOs to support local level action.

The qualitative assessment of nLTS was well received in some countries, helping to drive the development or acceleration of neutrality targets in some countries. However, the fact that nLTS are not a primary policy tool in many Member States limited the effectiveness of this action in several countries.

Public awareness raising was highly effective in a few of the countries, driving climate policy dialogue and discussions on the use of EU funds into mainstream discussions. In other countries there was a sense of a lost opportunity and a drive to put greater focus into public awareness raising and action in the *Together for 1.5* project. There is scope to increase the effectiveness of public awareness raising by ensuring the budgeting and engagement of communications expertise, and there is scope to focus on awareness raising through, for example, the EU DEAR budget line. As a communications-focused organisation, ZERO could build the capacity of other consortium partners in their communications and media engagement action during the *Together for 1.5* project.

The *Together for 1.5* project will help to ensure the continuity, sustainability and replication of Unify processes, tools and results, and there is plenty of scope for additional projects that build on the findings of Unify in other Member States, or that focus on the LA level or awareness-raising. As a member organisation, CAN Europe will ensure continuity, keeping members informed on developments at the EU level and opportunities in which to engage.

Various actions have been delivered to promote the uptake of Unify approaches at the Pan-EU level. Many of the processes, such as the Support Groups and tools, such as the NECP Tracker, have a wide level of applicability in other Member States, and the SECAPs activities have the scope to resonate across the target countries. Creative, low-cost opportunities to proactively maximise replication with and through member organisations and their networks should be explored.

Overall, the Unify project has been highly impactful at the Member State and EU level. As is common with influencing projects, the change brought about by the project is largely qualitative, and these qualitative stories of influence and change have not been systematically captured. It is common for evaluators to hear comments such as “I’m new so I am not too sure of the history” or “the person who did that work has left so we don’t know.” Although the evaluation interviews have uncovered examples of change and the contribution of Unify to this change, there are certainly likely to be further cases not captured above, especially for Denmark and Portugal. Routinely recording evidence of causal contribution to change would help the consortium celebrate their influence, facilitate the evaluation process, and ensure that impact is recorded as institutional knowledge.

The Unify project did not map intended socio-economic co-benefits for the project. While social and economic change, and indeed environmental change, cannot be directly attributed to influencing projects, identifying desired policy change and the associated environmental, social and economic benefits, would help to link the contribution of influencing projects to such impacts. For example:

Anticipated policy influence	Environmental impact	Socio-economic impact
Accelerated coal exit in # Member States	Reduced national GHG emissions and air pollutants	Cleaner air for # citizens in coal-fired power station regions
Increased fund allocation for energy efficiency in # Member States	Reduced GHG emissions from buildings sector	Reduced energy poverty for # low-income citizens

Recommendations

Recommendations to the Unify consortium	
1	Maximise the potential of the NECP Tracker in other (all) Member States through increased funding, translation budget, and training of organisations to use and input to the tool.
2	Involve communications expertise in project design phases to maximise the opportunities, channels and methods for media engagement and public awareness raising and consider having a communications working group for cross-fertilisation of ideas.
3	If there are funds unspent in the final month of the project, consider how these funds could be used to enhance replication of project results to other Member States or other stakeholders such as local authorities through e.g., webinars or workshops.
4	Consider an application to the EU DEAR budget line to maximise the potential of awareness raising and local level actions.
5	Map the intended/desired policy and practice influence of projects and the associated environmental, social, and economic impacts that would result.
6	Record evidence of anticipated and unanticipated change showing the causal link between project actions and the changes occurring to help celebrate the impact of the project and ensure that stories of change are institutional knowledge (rather than individual knowledge).
7	Continue to monitor and adapt to national situations, shifting the focus to NGO collaboration, local level engagement, localised media activity, or other strategies where national impact is proving ineffective and therefore inefficient.

Recommendations to the European Commission	
1	Support multi-country projects that involve partners from Member States where environmental NGOs have restricted space to engage to maintain their operations and clout through cross-country activities and local level climate action.
2	Support the development of further visual tools that enable Member States to observe and be accountable for their performance relative to other nations.
3	Develop/improve ad hoc funding instruments for NGOs to specifically support the development of SECAPs and wider level collaborative action among local stakeholders.
4	Continue enabling NEEMO to make judgement calls that allow NGOs to rapidly respond and adapt to changing policy landscapes in the delivery of LIFE and other projects.
5	Evaluate the success of projects that have been coordinated by membership organisations to ascertain whether a coordinating body whose role it is to serve the associated beneficiaries enhances project impact and whether there are lessons for future projects.