

25.05.2020

STATEMENT: LIFE 2021-2027

More added value on the ground through more active local authorities

The European Office of the Metropolitan Region FrankfurtRheinMain highly welcomes the very relevant and promising four working priorities in the LIFE programme for 2021-2027, as already provisionally agreed between European Parliament and Council. The design captures the core challenges in the field of environment and climate protection and mirrors the EU Green Deal ambitions. But given the presumably rather modest financial size of the programme, more focus will be needed in the implementation. Public authorities, especially those closest to the citizens, should thus play a stronger role in the future LIFE programme to make the EU Green Deal priorities visible on the ground. An engagement of smaller public bodies might also help to deliver more sustainable, long-lasting project results.

But therefore, it is necessary to lower the application and administration barriers. Throughout the current programming period only one single LIFE-project with the participation of a local authority has been active in the Metropolitan Region FrankfurtRheinMain with its 5,8 million inhabitants. We received the feedback from the municipalities in our region, smaller or bigger ones alike, that this is not due to irrelevant or unattractive funding priorities in the LIFE programme but caused by the rather deterrent complex and effort taking application procedure, as well as the administrative burdens within a project.

We know that there are a lot of good reasons on the Commission's side to have the programme implementation structured as it is. But in the light of the feedback received we highly support two reforms adjusting this design in the current programming process for the new LIFE-programme:

- ★ Introduce a **two-step application procedure** in all parts of the programme.

What is already being tested in the environment sub-part today might be a good solution to overcome the current challenge of a relatively low funding-rate, a low success-rate and high application efforts preventing local administrations with their limited resources from taking a more active role in LIFE. The two-step application procedure should therefore be the normal modus operandi in all programme parts in the future.

- ★ Introduce **small-grants projects** (at least in the nature and biodiversity part, but best also in the climate change mitigation and quality of life sub-parts).

The introduction of small-grants projects proposed in the latest consultation is a good idea, to give smaller civil society projects and municipal actors a role in LIFE. These small-grants projects should therefore be designed with a budget which is as comprehensive as possible and be open to applicants from all parts of the Union. Although it has actually been triggered by the COVID-19 crisis, the introduction of third party-grants in the 2020 LIFE-Call shows that the Commission is well aware of the demand for and potential in such small-scale projects.

To start this new instrument in the future nature and biodiversity branch makes full sense, especially as enhancing biodiversity in urban or peri-urban areas might play a stronger role in the future EU thematic strategies. But especially in the thematic fields of climate change mitigation and raising the quality of life in cities, a lot of local public authorities are also very eager to develop innovative solutions on the ground. Here the thematic nexus of EU policy goals (Green Deal) and the local implementation is particularly relevant and therefore could also be an area where small-grants projects might lead to an added value.