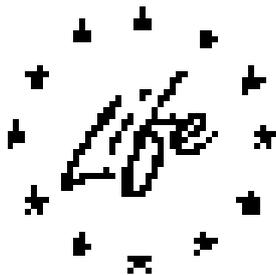


*(Projects funded under the Call 2014 onwards must use this format)*



LIFE Project Number

**LIFE17 ESC/PT/000003**

## **Final Report**

**Covering the project activities from 31/03/2020<sup>1</sup> to 30/06/2021**

Reporting Date<sup>2</sup>

**22/10/2021**

LIFE PROJECT NAME or Acronym

**LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES**

### Data Project

<b>Project location:</b>	Portugal
<b>Project start date:</b>	01/01/2018
<b>Project end date:</b>	31/12/2020 <b>Extension date:</b> 30/06/2021
<b>Total budget:</b>	1751902,00€
<b>EU contribution:</b>	1139115,00€
<b>(%) of eligible costs:</b>	

### Data Beneficiary

<b>Name Beneficiary:</b>	MONTIS – Associação de Conservação da Natureza
<b>Contact person:</b>	Mr Pedro Oliveira
<b>Postal address:</b>	Urbanização Sampaio – Lote21, 3670-270 Vouzela
<b>Telephone:</b>	00351 232774040 / 00351 910202759
<b>E-mail:</b>	Volunteer.escapes@gmail.com
<b>Project Website:</b>	Lifevolunteerescapes.org

<sup>1</sup> Project start date

<sup>2</sup> Include the reporting date as foreseen in part C2 of Annex II of the Grant Agreement

***Instructions:***

Please refer to the General Conditions annexed to your grant agreement for the contractual requirements concerning a Mid-term/Final Report.

Both Mid-term and Final Reports shall report on progress from the project start-date. The Final Report must be submitted to the EASME no later than 3 months after the project end date.

Please follow the reporting instructions concerning your technical report, deliverables and financial report that are described in the document “Guidance on how to report on your LIFE 2014-2020 project”, available on the LIFE website at: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/toolkit/pmtools/life2014\\_2020/documents/how\\_to\\_report\\_on\\_your\\_lifeproject.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/toolkit/pmtools/life2014_2020/documents/how_to_report_on_your_lifeproject.pdf). Please check if you have the latest version of the guidance as it is regularly updated. Additional guidance concerning deliverables, including the layman’s report and after-LIFE plan, are given at the end of this reporting template.

Regarding the length of your report, try to adhere to the suggested number of pages while providing all the required information as described in the guidance per section within this template.

## 1. Table of contents

## 2. List of key-words and abbreviations

APA-ARHAlgarve – Agência Portuguesa do Ambiente – Administração da Região Hidrográfica da Região do Algarve

ASSOL – Associação de Solidariedade Social de Lafões

BCSD Portugal – Conselho Empresarial para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável de Portugal

CEV – Centro Europeu de Voluntariado

CPV – Confederação Portuguesa do Voluntariado

CNPV – Conselho Nacional para a Promoção do Voluntariado

CASES – Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social

EC – European Commission

ESC – European Solidarity Corps

ELIP - Interpretation Centre of Lagoa Pequena

IAS – Invasive Alien Species

ICNF – Instituto de Conservação da Natureza e Florestas

ICNF-PNSC – Instituto de Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas – Parque Natural de Sintra-Cascais

ISPA- Instituto Universitário de Ciências Psicológicas Social e da Vida

MARCA ADL – MARCA Associação de Desenvolvimento Local

MONTIS – MONTIS Associação de Conservação da Natureza

MTV – Município de Torres Vedras

P1A – Plantar uma Árvore

PASS – Placement Administration and Support System Platform

PCP – Project Coordination Team  
Play Solutions – Playsolutions – Audiovisuais, Unip, Lda  
PSML – Parques de Sintra – Monte da Lua  
RRN – Rede Rural Nacional  
RV – Rota Vicentina – Associação para a promoção do turismo de natureza na Costa Alentejana e Vicentina  
SIC – Sociedade Independente de Comunicação, SA  
SPEA – Sociedade Portuguesa para o Estudo das Aves  
VO.U – Associação de Voluntariado Universitário

Key-words

Biodiversity

Conservation

Invasive Alien Species

European Solidarity Corps

Habitat management

Habitat restoration

LIFE Programme

Nature

Portugal

Volunteering

### 3. Executive Summary

The main goal of LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES was to receive 175 ESC, corresponding to 23688 volunteering days to develop nature related tasks within the 9 beneficiaries of the project. Even though the project has faced several difficulties and unexpected problems, the reception of 93,2% of the volunteering days for the regular volunteers foreseen and 34,2% of volunteering days for the joint volunteers foreseen has been achieved. Considering the severity of some of the problems faced as described below, we believe this is quite a satisfactory execution rate. Also, the achievement of most of the indicators, deliverables and milestones was satisfactory. Most of the deliverables and milestones foreseen for 2018, 2019 and 2020 for all actions have been achieved. The indicators regarding conservation works and engagement of communities and entities in activities of the project related to actions A.4 to A.11 have developed well and been, in the majority of the beneficiaries, exceeded.

With the project a total of 240,6 ha of land have been intervened with restoration actions by volunteers, inside nature 2000 sites.

The TV-series has also been fully broadcasted by the time of the final report delivered, with 12 episodes (however in a shorter version required by SIC Notícias) were broadcasted on SIC Notícias, since the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021 until the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021. The series was also published on SIC Notícias website and SIC International platform, as well as the communication channels of LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES.

Regarding problems and unexpected issues that had a significant impact in the project, they were several and are described below.

- In the beginning of the project there was a lack of stability and definition considering the rules that would guide the reception of the ESC volunteers and some other specificity for this project's call. Even though both the EC and EASME have been extremely supportive during the whole project, the lack of information provided, together with the malfunction of the PASS platform, had a very significant impact on the reception of volunteers. Project beneficiaries, especially the ones with a higher number of volunteers to engage, have been forced to seek and recruit volunteers using alternative methods, such as social media, digital advertising, natural volunteer's databases, municipalities, universities, current volunteers' social media, and direct contact in PASS platform. This led to a lack of efficiency on the reception of the volunteers (eg: for 100 direct contacts, only 3 volunteers or less engaged with the project).
- Logistic difficulties to provide international and non-local volunteers, such as accommodation and mobility. Some of the beneficiaries have encountered constraints when trying to receive non-local or international volunteers, due to the difficulties finding accommodation or reasonable priced accommodation for the volunteers. These beneficiaries have searched to overcome these constraints by increasing the number of local volunteers accepted to the project using local volunteer banks, schools/universities, and local platforms.
- Motivation and in-between volunteers' periods. A six-month period of volunteering has proven to be an extensive time for volunteers to commit, especially national volunteers. To overcome this constraint the beneficiaries, and accepted by the EC, settled the time of engagement to a more flexible period, between a minimum of 2 months to 1 year. Even though this flexibility has proven to be useful to increase the number of volunteers applied to the project, it creates a bigger gap of non-volunteering days between new volunteers recruited. The logistics for the recruitment of new volunteers, acceptance of the volunteers in the project, introducing the volunteer's and preparation of a new team of volunteers increase with this flexibility and this problem has led to some discrepancy between the days of volunteering foreseen in the application and the ones really achieved.

Since the beginning of 2020, the situation of Covid-19 pandemic outbreak had strong repercussions on the project. Travel restrictions, social distancing and other well-known measures had a big impact on the reduction of volunteers received. Specially partners operating in urban areas, or partners that are public entities, have faced very strong restrictions, and had to stop the project until they could resume volunteer work. Other partners, such as MONTIS, operating in remote areas faced fewer restrictions and were able to avoid stopping the reception of volunteers, but still felt a significant reduction.

All project beneficiaries have been deeply committed to overcome the problems described, putting an extra effort on the recruitment of volunteers. Due to all the delays and problems, an extension of 6 months to the end date of the project was requested and approved. Only 6 of the 9 partner beneficiaries on the project participated in this extension with the aim of increasing the number of volunteers received. This extra effort has had a very significant impact on the total of received volunteers, with a total by June 2021 of 240 volunteers received and a global execution of 83% (93,2% of regular volunteers and 34,2% of joint volunteers). At the end of December 2020, the partnership had received, as reported on the Yearly Report 2020 (Annex II – “Deliverables of the Project” – C.2 Yearly Report 2020) 196 volunteers, corresponding to 15815 volunteering days and an execution of 66,7% of the reception of volunteers. With the project’s extension was possible to increase the execution by almost 20% and receive more 44 volunteers.

## 4. Introduction

The LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project aims to explore the potential of using volunteer work for environmental protection activities, mainly targeted to Nature 2000 sites and species protected by the Birds and Habitats Directive by means of LIFE preparatory projects built on the mobilization and deployment opportunities of volunteers provided by the European Solidarity Corps. This project seeks a set of combined objectives such as the deployment of at least 175 ESC volunteers to focus on activities on environmental protection, nature conservation and restoration of natural areas. A partnership of 9 Portuguese organizations with different aims and national coverage on the deployment/management of the ESC volunteers deployed. Increase the offer opportunities for ESC volunteers and assess their impact in environment protection activities as well as the capacitation of the participating organizations on volunteering programs. Promote and increase the management of N2000 sites.

Nature conservation results were expected during and after the project’s implementation. The testing of the volunteers working for nature conservation was expected to produce specific results. These results are listed in Annex II “Deliverables of the project” – A.2 Action Report.

## 5. Administrative part

The project was managed by the coordinating beneficiary, MONTIS. To ensure the flow, efficiency and organization of the project, monthly meetings were held with all beneficiaries to discuss the projects development, constraints, solutions, and outcomes. The meetings were held in person and via online (via Skype) during the projects’ course, until the second half of 2020 due to the pandemic outbreak where the meetings were only held online. The presential meetings have allowed the gathering of the volunteers from different partners, to experience the conservation work done in different sites and share experiences with other project volunteers. It has also allowed the coordinating beneficiary and associated beneficiaries to have a better insight of the project progress at other beneficiaries.

During the course of, the project there were significant changing in personnel on some beneficiaries. The project manager on the coordinating beneficiary has changed two times since the start of the project, with the first project manager leaving in November

2018 being replaced by the at-the-time Assistant to Project Manager. The second project manager left the project in September 2019 being replaced by the Assistant to Project Manager. With these replacements new assistants to project manager were hired for the position on both occasions. During 2019 and 2021 was added to the project an assistant to field work to allow the increase of volunteers deployed simultaneously.

The beneficiaries, SPEA, APA ARH-Algarve, BCSD Portugal, Rota Vicentina, MTV had changes on their personnel allocated throughout the project reported under the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Progress Reports. Mentioned changes have not influenced the course of the project's actions and development.

Due to the difficulties faced by the Covid-19 pandemic and the cancellations of volunteer periods until mid-2020, the partnership decided to ask for an extension of the project's period of action in order to increase the indicators of the reception of volunteers until the end of 2020. With the worsening of the contingency measures, the decision was taken to proceed with the extension for 6 months of the project in its entirety until June 2021, with only 6 partners taking part in this extension of the project (MARCA, MONTIS, Plantar um Árvore, Municipality of Torres Vedras, Audiovisual Playsolutions, APA ARH-Algarve).

This extension allowed for an extra effort on the part of the beneficiaries in receiving volunteers in the project in order to make up for delays in the execution of volunteer days. With the departure of the MONTIS fieldwork assistant in 2020 by the reduced team of volunteers, in 2021 a new fieldwork assistant was hired again to support a second team of volunteers stationed in the Pampilhosa da Serra area.

All the project information, technical and financial, has been shared using the support of a virtual cloud where all the documents were uploaded and organized to facilitate the consulting by all beneficiaries.

The communication with the external team from NEEMO was very regular on an e-mail and phone basis, and the partnership held the last monitoring visit to the project on June 2021, with a visit to the intervention areas of MTV and Plantar uma Árvore Sintra.

Since the beginning of the project, the VOLUNTEER ESCAPES has seen four amendments to the Grant Agreement, as listed below:

- 13/02/2018, change of monitoring team for the project to EASME.
- 18/12/2018, change of monitoring team for the project to EC.
- 26/06/2019, adjustments to the financial section of the Grant Agreement
- 10/11/2020, approval of project extension

## 6. Technical part (maximum 25 pages)

### 6.1. Technical progress, per Action

#### **A.1 Co-Definition of Joint Volunteering Program and Preparation of Individual Volunteering Plans**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2018

Actual start date: 01/01/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/06/2018

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action has suffered changes, as reported in previous reports, regarding the preparation of the Individual Volunteering Plan (IVP) and was completed successfully taking in account these changes.

The Individual Volunteering Plans of the volunteers as already explained in previous reports were being prepared alongside the welcoming of each volunteer, as opposite to what was foreseen in the application. This led to the delay on the end date of the action, without any consequences on the project or welcoming of volunteers. The *deliverable* “Individual Volunteering Plans” and the *milestone* “Approval and Public Deployment of all Individual Volunteering Plans concluded” were completed with the reception of the last volunteer of the project received, from MONTIS, on 01/05/2021.

The IVPs and Volunteer Agreements produced from March 2020 to June 2021 can be found in Annex II – “Deliverables of the Project” – A.1 IVPs and Volunteering Agreements.

The *milestone* “Approval and Public Deployment of the first package of Individual Volunteering Plans” was achieved in the beginning of October 2018 with the welcoming of the thirtieth volunteer, with a delay to the foreseen in the application for 31/03/2018, as already reported previously on the project’s progress reports.

The project partners together have received a total of 240 ESC volunteers, which concludes a total of 242 IVPs and 240 Volunteer Agreements produced. During the course of, the project there were some adjustments made to action A.3 in order to try to overcome the difficulties of recruiting volunteers for the joint volunteer program. These adjustments also influenced the foreseen in the application for action A.1. Initially the partnership had decided to formulate a IVP for each entity to be part of the volunteer period of the joint volunteer, and a joint contract in the host organizations and the volunteer. However, the partnership has started to consider discontinuous volunteers and volunteers that were already in the project and showed interest in the joint volunteering as joint volunteers. The logistics associated with the rewriting of volunteering contracts and IVP’s for volunteers these mentioned volunteers were found to be complicated and unnecessary. The contracts and IVP’s would have to be rewritten at every new possibility of a joint volunteer, signed again by all beneficiaries involved, returned copies to each beneficiary which was not efficient. Thus, the number of contracts signed with volunteers hosted in the project and the associated PIV's presents a discrepancy between what would be initially proposed (see folder Annex II – “Deliverables of the Project” – A.1 IVPs and Volunteering Agreements). During the volunteering periods, many volunteers have decided to extend their volunteering period, due to liking of the projects work and contribute for nature conservation. In these cases, an addendum to their volunteering contract was produced (see folder Annex II – “Deliverables of the Project” – A.1 IVPs and Volunteering Agreements).

Until the end of the projects actions the beneficiaries that have participated on the project’s extension, continued using the channels previously mentioned on past reports to recruit volunteers, such as, volunteering banks, conferences, workshops or initiatives, contacts with previous volunteers or current volunteers with their social media or the PASS platform. The later, has however, during the duration of the project proven to be a constraint when recruiting volunteers as previously reported on other reports. The most effective method of recruitment of volunteers seems to have been the direct contact made with potential volunteers found on social media, PASS platform and other channels. However, this method is also the less resource-effective method, as for a small number of received/accepted volunteers at least 3 times more volunteers need to be contacted.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
% of IVP approved/delivered for each action	100	100
Number of joint work meetings	3	5
Number of external stakeholders contacted to prepare IVPs	18	10

### **A.2 Updating Information on Concrete Conservation Areas and Detailing Conservation Activities/Tasks**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2018

Actual start date: 01/01/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/06/2018

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 15/03/2019

The action was finished on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019. As previously reported, the main *deliverable* “Action Report” was completed by all the beneficiaries on the 15/03/2019, with a delay of 9 months from the foreseen date (30/06/2018), due to a set of difficulties found from the beneficiary APA ARH-Algarve. These issues have delayed the preparation of the characterisation files for the intervention sites. All the remaining beneficiaries involved on this Action have delivered the intervention sites materials on the 08/06/2018.

With the inclusion of the data from APA ARH-Algarve, the partnership has improved and delivered this *deliverable* as expressed on the last report, Annex III – “Deliverables of the Project”.

The partnership has also produced an updated report for the Action Report A.2, in which is mentioned the results achieved for each intervention areas, the results that were achieved, and why and new relevant information such as new areas intervened with the volunteers from LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES. This report can be found on Annex II “Deliverables of the project” – A.2 Action Report.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Number of maps with operational plots delivered by project partners	7	53
% of concrete conservation areas with updated field information and proposal of operational plots	100	100
Number of joint work meetings	3	4

### **A.3 Joint Volunteering Program for integration of ESC with nature and biodiversity conservation**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/07/2018

Actual start date: 24/10/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/03/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action was accomplished below the goals foreseen in the application. Only 17 joint-volunteers from the 32 foreseen in application were welcomed to the project during its course.

The 17 joint-volunteers received by ROTA VICENTINA, MONTIS, MARCA, Plantar uma Árvore and SPEA have completed 1379 volunteering days of 4032 foreseen corresponding to 34% of joint-volunteer received execution (18% of the execution of the original number of joint-volunteers).

The action was scheduled to start on the beginning of July 2018, being the first joint-volunteer welcomed, as already reported, at 24/10/2018, completing the *milestone* “Welcome to the first volunteers”.

The main reasons for the underachievement of the actions goals, namely receiving joint volunteers, was that volunteers were not interest in the joint-volunteering programme; Longer time commitment from the volunteers or even difficulties accommodating joint-volunteers with the volunteers teams in each beneficiary with no placements left or scheduled volunteers has proven to be more challenging than expected; Synchronization of the availability of acceptance of volunteers between the associations.

During the course of the project, the beneficiaries have tried to overcome these difficulties by adopting and readjusting the joint-volunteering criteria foreseen in application. Resulting from these adjustments, and as previously reported to the EC, the adjustments were:

- Discontinuous volunteers that have engaged with the project with more than one partner beneficiary as a normal volunteer were considered joint volunteers.
- It was allowed for volunteers that were already in a beneficiary to change their volunteering contract from normal volunteer to joint volunteer.
- The joint volunteer could engage in the project without having to complete a period of 2 month in the coordinating beneficiary
- It would be possible, although as avoidable as possible, to accept joint volunteers for 1 month as long as the sum of their volunteering period on each beneficiary would correspond to 2 months or more, being eligible for the project.

These adjustments proved that they would not impose a different experience on the volunteer than that described in the application. The volunteer would have access to the same training, monitoring, learning and experiences. The possibility for volunteers to choose when and which organizations to volunteer with was noted to be one of the advantages and factors for potential volunteers to choose this program.

Despite the adjustments made to Action A.3, the difficulties in engaging volunteers with the joint programme continued throughout the project.

By the end of the project, the partnership had more experience with raising rotating volunteers, and we believe that it would be possible to advance further in the execution of this action with more project time and with an improvement in the synchronization of the availability of acceptance of volunteers between the associations specially with a partnership of 9 beneficiaries. Having two volunteer programs available, regular, and joint, to coordinate and plan, also proved to be an obstacle to getting more rotating volunteers. Sometimes, despite the possible availability of the volunteer, the beneficiary or chosen beneficiaries could not respond to the demand because project partners had no room for more volunteers “Annex VII - Volunteers (foreseen and executed)”.

The volunteers received under this action have integrated the teams of regular volunteers from the beneficiaries and have engaged with the same nature conservation management tasks as the normal volunteers, as for the results are expressed from Action A.4 to A.11.

As reported previously in the application it was foreseen the reception of 30 joint-volunteers, corresponding to 7560 volunteering days. However, each partner as only foreseen the reception of 2 joint-volunteers which indicates that MONTIS has 8 volunteers that do not have a beneficiary to rotate to. Therefore, as a correction MONTIS would only have 16 joint volunteers to receive and each remaining beneficiary 2. As proposed on the last progress report, with the budget for the joint volunteers, that are not foreseen in the other partners and therefore not distributed in the application, the partnership discussed the distribution of this amount between the partners that could accept more joint volunteers that expected during the extension of the project. If not possible the budget would be shared between the actions A.4 to A.11 for beneficiaries that could receive more regular volunteers. Ultimately, MONTIS increased the number of regular volunteers received in Action A.6

It was not possible to establish, during the course of the project, any project/programme with national aim that included/worked with joint volunteering. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the level of national aimed project calls has decreased, and it was not possible to approved or structure a project for these last years in which we had acquired more significant experience. On an international aim, however, the coordinator beneficiary was contacted by Instituto Federal Farroupilha of Panambi from Brazil to develop an application to replicate the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project and that could incorporate the joint-volunteering programme. More details about the development of this contact can be found under item 6.4.4 of the current report.

Progress indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
% of ESC volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills, useful for nature conservation	100	100
% of ESC volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment	90	80
Average number of new skills competencies acquired by ESC volunteers useful for	2 to 4	4

nature conservation		
% of increase in number of activities for nature conservation deployed by partner organizations, compared to historical work	125	125
Number of organisations capacitated for undertaking new activities for nature conservation	9	9
Number of joint volunteering programs with national aim in operation after the project ends	1	0

**A.4 Volunteering for awareness-raising on natural capital protection, conservation, and enhancement**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/07/2018

Actual start date: 01/08/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/06/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/03/2021

The goals of Action A.4 have overall been successfully met and with regards to several indicators, they have gone beyond what was foreseen in the application (Annex II “Deliverables of the project” – A.3 to A.11 Assessment Report). Due to a higher number of candidates, BCSO hosted four volunteers instead of the two volunteers that were foreseen in the application, corresponding to 545 volunteering days – the first volunteer was hosted from September 2018 until July 2019; the second volunteer, who left before the hosting period ended, was hosted from October 2019 until January 2020; the third volunteer was hosted from January 2020 until June 2020; the fourth volunteer was hosted from June 2020 until December 2020. This led to an average number of 18 activities organized and implemented by each volunteer, instead of 32 as foreseen in the baseline, leading to a total of 64 activities organized by the four volunteers.

The process of selecting, recruiting, preparing, and training of the volunteers was carried out successfully, and an Individual Volunteering Plan (IVP) was made for each successful candidate. A working-plan which included the scheduling and planning of the activities was also developed.

With regards to the number of good practices sharing sessions among companies and their stakeholders (A.4.3), the total number of sessions carried out was seven, while the application foresaw eight. Two sessions took place in the second semester of 2019 and were attended by 72 participants overall; one session was held in the first semester of 2020, attended by 20 participants; the remaining four sessions were held in the second semester of 2020 and were attended by an additional 83 participants, thus bringing the total of participants to 175, which is 25 participants short of the 200 foreseen in the application.

While the first three sessions were held in-person and included field visits to eco-trails, the remaining four sessions during the second semester of 2020 were all held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Two sessions planned for the second semester of 2020, with The Navigator

Company and SUMOL+COMPAL, were cancelled by both companies. In the former case, the company left the partnership with BCSD, claiming it would not be possible for them to host the planned session this year. In the latter case, the person responsible for the project at SUMOL+COMPAL was diagnosed with Covid-19 and it was therefore not possible to hold the planned session. Constraints caused by the pandemic also led to additional difficulties with regards to the scheduling of sessions and finding suitable dates. These difficulties were handled by increasing the number of contacts made.

The number of awareness-raising sessions for young entrepreneurs, start-ups, and SMEs (A.4.4) was 8, matching the number foreseen in the application. The first two sessions were held during the first semester of 2020 and gathered 78 participants, whereas six sessions were held during the second semester of the year, bringing a total of 64 participants between them. One session scheduled for the second semester of 2020 with Casa do Impacto was cancelled due to a low turnout at the time of the session – the participants were forwarded to an upcoming A.4.3 session with SECIL, who supported this decision. In order to compensate for this cancelled session, an attempt was made to hold another partnership with Impact Hub which could act as a double partnership, or as a replacement partnership, but Casa do Impacto was not available in the dates proposed. The overall number of entrepreneurs and start-ups representatives in these awareness-raising sessions was 142, which went beyond the 120 foreseen in the application.

Similarly, the remaining indicators under Action A.4 too performed beyond what was foreseen in the application. The number of awareness-raising sessions for secondary school students (A.4.5), implemented during the school year of 2018/2019, reached 56, whereas the number foreseen in the application was 48. The number of secondary students in the awareness-raising sessions is by far, the top performing indicator – the number foreseen in the application was 960, but a total of 3 457 students attended those sessions, representing a total number 3.5 times above the original target. These sessions consisted of a PowerPoint presentation that framed the issue of natural capital and the dangers represented by environmental issues, as well as the relevance of individual and business contributions towards mitigating these problems, accompanied by case studies. The evaluation, made by the teachers responsible for each class that attended the sessions, was very positive. 28 responses were submitted, with a satisfaction degree of 77%, and 50% considered the students' participation was good and that the contents and approach used were positive, with an overall good contribution towards improving school programs in the fields covered. The relevance of the topics was also pointed out by the teachers as a positive element.

Finally, and regarding the number of businesses that gave a positive evaluation to the usefulness of ESC volunteers for awareness raising and good practice dissemination, the performance of this indicator matched the number foreseen in the application – 20. The evaluation made by attendants to the webinar with Porto Business School also highlighted that 66.67% of respondents considered that natural capital in a context of sustainability is a 'very relevant' topic, 55,56% held the same view on the topic of a need for action on behalf of the business community, and 66.67% considered as exceptionally relevant the advantages of integrating natural capital in corporate management. Overall, there were 61 responses to the evaluation forms on the participants' satisfaction with the awareness-raising sessions, with 52 respondents answering they were 'very satisfied' or 'fully satisfied' with the event, representing 85% of the answers. Still on the uptake, the project inspired the companies to attach more importance to the issue of natural capital and environmental protection.

Given the current pandemic context, online questionnaires were used to gather the assessments from the participants following the four online-based sessions held during the second semester of 2020. This included both the best practices sharing sessions (A.4.3) and the awareness-raising sessions (A.4.4). The questionnaires asked how the participants assessed the performance of the volunteers in those sessions, with 20 business representatives providing a positive assessment. The questionnaires were done anonymously, therefore it is not possible to determine the views of each individual participant.

The main factor affecting the implementation of Action A.4 was the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to changes in the ways the sessions were carried out, namely from an in-person events format to an exclusively online format. One of the sessions under Action A.4.3 was cancelled due to the person responsible for handling the project at the target company being diagnosed with Covid-19, while other cancellations happened under Actions A.4.3 and A.4.4, though only the indicator related to Action A.4.3 fell below the performance foreseen in the application, by one session. Overall, the difficulties imposed by the pandemic led to a delay in the end date of those actions towards 31 December 2020, instead of 30 June 2020, as foreseen in the application. Work on the brochure about natural capital and business was also completed in December 2020 due to the difficulties and delays imposed by the pandemic. Finally, the changes made to the activities, from in-person events to online-exclusive sessions, also led to a change in the brochure’s format, from a printed product to an online product (Annex II “Deliverables of the Project” – A.4 BCSD Materials)

Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Average number of activities organized and implemented by each volunteer	32	18
Number of good practices sharing sessions among companies and their stakeholders	8	7
Number of companies and stakeholder’s representatives in the good practices sharing sessions	200	175
Number of awareness-raising for young entrepreneurs and start-ups	8	8
Number of entrepreneurs and start-ups representatives in the awareness-raising sessions	120	142
Number of awareness-raising sessions for secondary school students	48	56
Number of secondary students in the awareness-raising sessions	960	3457

Number of businesses evaluating positively the usefulness of ESC volunteers for awareness raising and good practice dissemination	20	20
---	----	----

### **A.5 Volunteering Activities for Green Infrastructure within the Municipality of Montemor-o-Novo**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/07/2018

Actual start date: 12/04/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/06/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The undertaken activities were the same as foreseen in project application and the ones approved in project extension.

In total Marca-ADL hosted 18 volunteers and 3 rotating volunteers corresponding to 2025 volunteering days; there were some deviations regarding the period of volunteering of some volunteers, which started working professionally, stopping the volunteering contract before than expected. Nonetheless this deviation did not pose any problem or constrain on the achievement of the total number of volunteering days, nor to the accomplishment of environmental objectives.

The main volunteering activities performed by the volunteers were plant nursery works in order to supply project planting activities, control of plant invasive species, planting activities and several educational activities to promote awareness around environmental topics.

In total the project allowed the intervention in: 3 riparian areas; 6 areas in 2 Natura 2000 sites of Cabrela and Monfurado; 24 areas in Natura 2000 buffer zone of the 2 Natura 2000 sites of Cabrela and Monfurado.

Regarding local volunteers the project involved students, people with disabilities, local landowners, general audience, and young adults from other volunteering projects, such as from International Youth Camps.

Regarding the planned outputs for this action and time schedule, Marca-ADL has surpassed all planned outputs and results, except for one indicator. The only indicator that was not fully achieved was % of ESC volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment. Nonetheless, the difference between expected and achieved was not significant. Overall, deliverables and milestones were achieved as expected.

The major constrains in the execution of this action, did not have to do with the main project focus, which was the reception of volunteers for nature conservation tasks. The main issue faced had to do with planting activities. There were some constrains due to high mortality rate after the first summer following planting. Plant losses have had an impact on the amount of time and resources that we have used this activity, especially in what regards watering, number of used seeds and amount of substrate used in the plant nursery. More resources were therefore allocated to these activities, some financial adjustments were made to ensure project results, but did not impose a formal change on budget execution.

## Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Area of habitats protected by the Habitats Directive improved (ha)	12	12,20
Area of riparian habitats improved/restored (ha)	1,2	2,36
Area of IAS controlled (ha)	8	8,11
Number of autochthonous trees and shrubs produced and planted	2000	3000
Number of autochthonous plants planted in conservation works	2000	2841
% of ESC volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills, useful for nature conservation	100%	100%
% of ESC volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment	80	90%
Number of local volunteers – from LIFELINES Volunteering Program – participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	75	2576
Number of local landowners engaged in nature conservation activities following contacts with ESC volunteers	10	15
Number of LIFE funded projects with which ESC volunteer will iterate	1	2

### **A.6 Volunteering Activities for improvement of nature and biodiversity conservation in private land**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/07/2018

Actual start date: 19/03/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/06/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

This action is finished, and the execution was as expected taking in account the difficulties in the reception of volunteers. MONTIS has welcomed since the start of the project 70 volunteers, being 65 regular volunteers and 5 joint-volunteers. The first volunteer was received on the 19/03/2018, 4 months prior to the foreseen in application (01/07/2018) completing the *milestone* “Welcome to the first volunteers”. In total, the regular volunteers in MONTIS have completed 5267 volunteering days surpassing numbers foreseen in the application (3780

volunteering days) and the joint volunteers have completed 449 volunteering days from a total of 3024 volunteering days foreseen in the application. Resuming there was an execution of 139% for regular volunteers, and 15% for joint volunteers.

With the extension of the project MONTIS has received 35 more additional volunteers, from which 3 were joint volunteers. The welcoming of these volunteers allowed to overcome the delay on the action regarding the reception of volunteers and surpass the number for regular volunteers-days foreseen. Despite the difficulties faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic and impacts on the reception of volunteers were not as significant as expected.

Although the first few months of the pandemic were difficult to manage with the ongoing volunteers and the delays in the reception of new volunteers already planned, MONTIS put an extra effort on the recruitment of more volunteers during the project's extension. After the lifting of the first lockdown restrictions, in 2020, MONTIS resumed the reception of volunteers for LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES. There was an increase in the interest of national volunteers in the project, mainly due to the lack of more international opportunities during the pandemic, lack of employment and continuity of studies. The interest of international volunteers continued as expected, and the reassurance that the location of the volunteering/intervention areas was isolated, and therefore lower risk regarding Covid-19, contributed to the increase of volunteer's desire to engage with the project.

Most of the volunteers received from March 2020 to June 2021 extended their volunteer period due as mentioned to the lack of opportunities with the pandemic, but especially because of the desire to continue this specific project with the team of volunteers they were already engaged with. Two of the volunteers received during this period returned even after their first volunteer period due to the motivation and involvement they had with the project, wishing to return to work with the association and former team members.

During this last period of the project, the tasks of the volunteers continued to be adapted to the profile and skills of the volunteers in order to maximize their efficiency during the volunteer period in terms of nature conservation tasks. All volunteers have been working on the intervention sites described in the plan under Action A.2, performing the foreseen conservation works.

These conservation works, based on the action plans prepared annually by MONTIS for the management of the association's properties in order to restore ecosystems and increase biodiversity, produced the following results:

- Control of 10.07 ha of controlled invasive species area, below that foreseen in the application. The control techniques used seem to have had some result and the growth of species after the first and second interventions reduced and/or became slower, which did not allow, at the time of the project, to have third and fourth interventions in the controlled areas as well as in new areas resulting in seed dispersal.
- Planting of 30241 autochthonous trees in the common areas of Carvalhais, Vieiro and Costa Bacelo as foreseen in the intervention plan of action A.2. Plantations were also made in the trees of Pampilhosa da Serra.
- 39,9 ha of improved and protected area under the Habitats Directive, corresponding to the work areas developed on the properties of Costa Bacelo, Vieiro and Carvalhais

wasteland, included in Natura 2000 “Serra das Freita e Arada” (PTCON0047) and “Rio Paiva” (PTCON0059) areas.

- Construction and installation of 146 natural engineering devices, gabions and palisades, to control erosion and aid in sedimentation in watercourses or runoff to improve riparian gallery ecosystems.
- Maintenance and opening of more than 5,52km of tracks and accesses to intervention areas.
- Seeding of native tree acorns in 2,23 ha.
- Register of fauna and flora species found on properties for monitoring biodiversity, with more than 2349 records made and processed by volunteers
- Maintenance of jay trays, during the course of the project, 3 jay trays were placed, and during the acorn season they were kept for jays.

For the project extension period, MONTIS decided to add another extra effort to increase the reception of volunteers: taking volunteers to a new conservation area in Pampilhosa da Serra. For that an assistant to field work was hired (replacing former employee João Soares). With the implementation of this new team of volunteers in 2021, it was possible to exponentially increase some conservation indicators, such as the placement of natural engineering devices, as well as the number of volunteers received. At the end of 2020 MONTIS had welcomed 51 volunteers achieving an execution of 53,4%, with the new team in Pampilhosa da Serra, it was possible to increase the reception of volunteers by at least 6 more simultaneously, having already a team of 8 volunteers in Vouzela and 3 in Deilão’s house. Essentially 3 areas of the association were worked on in this region. Information on these new areas of intervention, management plan and results can be found in Annex II "Deliverables of the project" – A.2 Action Report.

Simultaneously with the nature conservation work developed in the field, the volunteers were also involved in around 128 activities with the community, including workshops, international work camps, volunteer days, academic volunteering, bioblitzs, seminars, among others. The involvement of volunteers in these activities not only allowed them to acquire a set of skills related to the engagement of people with nature conservation, but also an exchange of experiences, culture, and confrontation with other perspectives on the environment and associated issues between community-volunteers.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the planning of MONTIS calendar of activities outside the project for 2020 and 2021 has undergone some changes with a reduction in the number and adjustment of the logistics of some of the activities. Some of the longer-term activities, such as volunteer weekends, have been adjusted to shorter durations in order to reduce contact time between participants and also between volunteer-participants; Some other activities have been reworked to webinar format.

During the 3 years of the project, several students welcomed as volunteers in the project also produced the experience as part of their work study reports. In 2021, as a way of disseminating the results of the work of these volunteers and of the project in general and because of the adjustment of activities vis-à-vis covid-19, 4 webinar sessions were held where these volunteers presented their work (see Annex XVI “Complementary material produced by volunteers”).

In early 2021, volunteers participated in the second controlled fire in the Baldio de Carvalhais, having helped in the opening and maintenance of the containment strips in the burning area, as well as helping with the day's logistics and accompanied the firefighters and controlled fire technicians during the fire.

The sharing of experiences between MONTIS volunteers and volunteers welcomed by the other beneficiaries was continued, in order to encourage interaction between them and the transmission of knowledge and learning. During 2020 and 2021, volunteers hosted at MONTIS visited and participated in the Plantar uma Árvore conservation activities in Sintra, during the partnership meeting on 14 January; With volunteers in the Municipality of Torres Vedras, in the control of invasive species in dune ecosystems on March 9 during the project's partnership meeting; In the water quality monitoring activities in the riverside ecosystems of Monchique with the APA ARH Algarve, on the 9th and 10th of July and on the 12th of February 2021 they participated in the plantations in Serra do Alvão with the partner Plantar uma Árvore.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Area of IAS controlled (ha)	20	10,07
Number of autochthonous plants planted	3000	30241
Number of erosion control devices set in water lines with natural engineering works	120	146
Area of habitats protected by the Habitats Directive improved (ha)	20	39,9
% of ESC volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills, useful for nature conservation	100	100
% of ESC volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment	80	92%
Number of other volunteers, from local community and public and private bodies, participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	240	1716
Number of other volunteers, with MONTIS membership, participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	120	214
Number of partner institutions (public or non-profit) engaged in nature	4	25

conservation support and participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers		
Number of partner institutions (companies) engaged in nature conservation support and participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	4	8
Number of LIFE funded projects with which ESC volunteers will iterate	1	3
New jobs created and expected to be maintained for the post-project	1	4

### A.7 Volunteering Activities for nature conservation within the Municipality of Torres Vedras

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/07/2018

Actual start date: 06/11/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/06/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action is finished and have achieved 88% of execution regarding regular volunteering days slightly under what foreseen in application due to the difficulties in recruiting volunteers mainly during the pandemic outbreak. Nonetheless, the received volunteers have allowed to surpass greatly the progress indicators.

Município de Torres Vedras (MTV) involved 20 volunteers from ESC in the project, 2 of which decided to repeat the volunteering program. Their participation led to 1326 volunteering days of the 1638 foreseen in the application, corresponding to 80% of the reception of volunteer's execution and allowed the development of 38 activities open for the population throughout the project, including volunteering activities, workshops, raising-awareness sessions, among others.

The project had a very significant impact on volunteers outside the project, schools, and community. The ESC volunteers played a central role in the coordination of groups of volunteers, making possible to involve 5118 local volunteers in the project activities (the foreseen number for this indicator in the application was 80).

The volunteers were involved in several activities such as control of invasive alien species (*Carpobrotus edulis* and *Acacia spp.*) present in dunes and forests within Natura 2000. These species have major impacts in the chances of other plants, namely native plants, to survive. As a result of the volunteering activities, it was possible to intervene in more than 21 ha.

Planting autochthonous dune plants in Natura 2000 sites (e.g., *Ammophila arenaria*, *Eryngium maritimum*, *Juniperus turbinata*, *Euphorbia paralias*, *Armeria welwitschia*), and native trees and shrubs (e.g., *Pinus pinea*, *Ceratonia siliqua*, *Quercus faginea*, *Quercus robur*, *Quercus*

*suber*, *Fraxinus excelsior*) took place in municipal lands such as Serra de São Julião and Paisagem Protegida das Serras do Socorro e Archeira, among others. The afforestation activities allowed the plantation of more than 21000 trees and shrubs. Furthermore, the interventions in Serra de São Julião began in 2020 and were only possible given the existence of a volunteer team.

As for the restoration of the riparian habitats of Sizandro and Alcabrichel rivers there were actions of removal of invasive alien species (*Arundo donax* and *Procambarus clarkii*) which impairs the habitat of the endemic specie *Achondrostoma occidentale*. Alongside, the plantation of native species promoted the conservation of such habitats in an extension of 1,6 km. Both activities were performed by ESC volunteers and MTV team.

Given the pandemic situation in Portugal between March and May 2020, a lockdown was imposed. Nevertheless, the Municipality was able to receive 3 new volunteers and 1 volunteer who had participated in the project in 2019. The volunteers contacted the MTV to know more about the project, after being told about it from previous volunteers.

From January to March 2021 another lockdown was decreed. During both periods of lockdown, the volunteering activities were cancelled. Regardless this striking as a central reason for volunteers to extend the volunteering period, in order to complete the minimum days, this was not the only reason. Some volunteers asked to extend given the lack of other options of occupation, namely work or study. However, in February 2021 two new volunteers were welcomed to the MTV team.

The pandemic also had an impact on the development of an intervention foreseen for the Spring of 2020, that was then projected for next Spring. The action was intended to occur as external assistance, which would involve both theoretical and practical training concerning natural engineering. Given the specificity of the works to be developed, that relied on the season, weather conditions and availability of the technical team, the actions were postponed from 2020 to 2021. However, considering the pandemic and the other factors aforementioned, there was no opportunity to schedule and execute the activity.

The volunteers performed the volunteering activities under supervision of MTV project team, namely the technician hired for monitoring the activities and other members from the team.

In general, the volunteers were asked to attend the activities whenever they could. Since most of them were students or were also working, they had some time constraints and participated in the activities more sporadically. However, for most of the times the team of volunteers had a total of 4 members on a regular volunteering day. Also, given the more discontinuous mode of the volunteering activities, sometimes it proved challenging to regain the interest of the volunteers in the activities.

The experience of volunteering has been crucial to increase the intervention areas in Torres Vedras. For that reason, through a more sporadic volunteering, the MTV intends to maintain the work that has been done.

Mostly, volunteering activities for nature conservation directed to the public will allow the maintenance of some of the interventions developed in LIFE Volunteer Escapes. Alongside, raising awareness actions will prove essential to inform the citizens about the importance of keeping and expanding the biodiversity on a local level.

As for conservation activities, in general, it is intended the development of maintenance of plantations and control of invasive alien species in Natura 2000 sites such as the dunes of Praia Azul and Paisagem Protegida das Serras do Socorro e Archeira, and the municipal lands.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Area of habitats protected by the Habitats Directive improved (ha)	7	37,12
Length of riparian habitats improved/restored for <i>Achondrostoma occidentale</i> (km)	1	1,6
Area of IAS controlled (ha)	8	21,6
Number of autochthonous trees and shrubs produced and planted	2000	21029
% of ESC volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills, useful for nature conservation	100%	100%
% of ESC volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment	80%	66,7%
Number of local volunteers – from Local Volunteer Bank – participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	80	5118
Number of local landowners engaged in nature conservation activities following contacts with ESC volunteers	10	2
Number of corporations engaged in nature conservation support and participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	10	8
Number of non-profit organizations engaged in nature conservation support and participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	4	6

## **A.8 Volunteer Programs for Native Habitats Restoration, Promotion and Conservation and Management of Visitation Impacts**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/07/2018

Actual start date: 09/07/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/06/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action as finished with a 75% of execution for the regular volunteers received in the project and 234% of joint volunteers received.

P1A has deployed a total of 92 ESC volunteers for the whole duration of the project, being 87 of them regular volunteers under action A.1 and 5 joint-volunteers under action A.3, corresponding to 6056 and 296 days of volunteering respectively.

As foreseen, the activities developed were focused on fieldwork to restore, promote, and conserve native habitats with the manual control of invasive alien species, identification and promotion of natural native regeneration, definition of plantation methodologies, maintenance plan and assessment of plantations survival rate and control results on invasive flora. The action also included maintenance of pedestrian trails and awareness actions next to tourists to reduce the ecological impacts, natural engineering in water lines and identification of bank seed hotspots for nursery propagation. The escapes volunteers developed all the interventions with the presence and coordination of P1A team. These works were done also with groups of volunteers, from the community, enterprises, schools, or social institutions coordinated by P1A and escapes volunteers.

With the exception of the nursery production activities, all the other actions were well accomplished according to the goals, and some were even outdone, as for example, more than 35ha of area controlled regarding invasive alien species, 33231 autochthonous plants planted and 7619 volunteers from the community engaged in joint activities with ESC volunteers.

The works in Sintra-Cascais were consolidated and expanded in most of the plots, to mention that 80% of all the interventions in Monge were done during the program considering 7.30 ha, the works in Azóia doubled the area to 3.60 ha, the 2 ha of Peninha and the 12.40 ha of Estrada da Serra were consolidated in the oldest parts and new limits were defined to expand and the works in Tapada do Saldanha and Seteais and Malveira trails just started with the program, totaling 9 ha and 3.60 km each. During LIFE Volunteer Escapes was possible to articulate more the interventions in Sintra with the rangers of the park, using mechanic tools to shred high bushes and cut and remove wood load from falling trees, important interventions to prepare the areas and keep effective maintenance by the team. The areas and works in Alvão started all with the program so the 13 ha in Lagoa do Alvão, 12.60 ha in Baldios do Minheu and 0.21 ha in Carvalhal do Castelo are results 100% associated to project.

Considering monitoring results, though the data was informally collected by the team observing the works evolution per area and year, it's possible to conclude that the 33 231 plantations had at least 80% success rate in Sintra, in Peninha up to 90%, and in Alvão 50%, considering mortality associate to lack of soil, light, presence of wildlife or more continental weather, all factors more common in Alvão region.

The 39.38 ha of native habitats promoted correspond not only to planted area but also native regeneration increased as a result from IAS control; still about the IAS controlled, it's relevant to mention that the 35.32 ha it's an on-going intervention area in some of the plots, like Azoia,

having effective debarks and uproots but also bank seed germinations that require a long-term plan of regular control in the future. The 50.80 km of trails maintained, 93% located in Alvão region, include works as painting signalization, control of bushes, plantations and more detailed works done in Sintra regarding infrastructures maintenance, as wood bridges and re-planning sections by closing shortcuts from visitors.

Though most of the actions were mainly developed in Sintra-Cascais and Alvão plots, along the project there was the opportunity to explore new partnerships and working areas in the mainland and also in some of Azorean islands, considering that news register files were created for both teams named as “Outras Areas”. As so, was possible to increase the number of working areas from two to ten regions, being two of them from the partners MONTIS and MARCA. Working in new lands allowed more plantations, control of IAS and also capacitation of volunteers on different works like irrigation or rock mulching. These activities when happening for more than one day in a row were considered “Saídas de Campo” and proposed as a new indicator, with a total of 43 national field trips being done.

About the awareness actions with visitors to promote more sustainable behaviours on protected areas, which included garbage collection in trails and at touristic cultural sites entrances in Sintra, guided visits in Alvão trails and the global strikes for the climate, the last one was a good alternative to keep some actions during the pandemic outbreak without the possibility of having tourism in the areas. In Alvão the field works with the community revealed to be enviable in a rural context and as so, other dynamics were explored better adapted to reach the locals to communicate the project activities and make some environmental awareness. As so, the escapes volunteers made regular workshops with a local school, the scouts and the senior university and produced articles and podcasts for a local newspaper and radio. These were new indicators proposed for the action, counting a total of 35 formation sessions with the local community and awareness actions and 148 communication contents for the local media.

The 7 619 volunteers involved in activities, 96% coordinated by Sintra team, was a great opportunity of capacitation for the escapes volunteers to gain experience in field orientation, planning, being able to make the technical briefing and an opportunity for cultural exchange with the local community and to communicate the project itself. Adding to that the big impact on intervention areas having bigger groups working.

The nursery production was, as mentioned, the indicator with less achievement (38%) considering lack of viable bank seed for collection in both regions to produce plants and the tight time window for it, only 2018, to produce plants for next plantation season. Even so, some sowings were made in the following years with propose of giving the experience to more escapes volunteers and involving groups in environmental workshops.

The 30 local institutions involved, were quite important with logistic support, as with infrastructures for workshops, communication of activities, suppliers of materials or regular participants in initiatives.

Regarding the volunteer’s capacitation and evaluation of the experience, the overview is quite positive considering that all the 92 volunteers received were able to acquire new competences with the experience and give a positive return about the experience, mentioning it as life changing, challenging, and enriching in most of the cases. Although the inquiries answers were few despite efforts to increase them, by around 50%, it was possible to take such conclusions in regular team meetings and in the final testimonies requested to the volunteers.

The only milestone related to the action A.8. was the first volunteer reception that had a few days of delay happening on 09/07/2018 instead of 01/07/2018, considering constraints in the ESC platform to contact and receive volunteers' applications and due to logistic preparations on the volunteer's accommodation to be provided.

The deliverable considered for the action was the assessment report on the works of the action A.8. predicted for 30/09/2020 and one year postponed for 30/06/2021 due to project the extension request. The extension for P1A, like previously considered on the request, made possible to increase the achievement associated to the volunteering, namely, the number of escapes voluntary days done, costs associated with the volunteering and outputs related with the activities, as the area of IAS controlled and to keep increasing all the other indicators that already were well accomplished.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Area of IAS controlled (ha)	12	35,32
Number of autochthonous plants planted	6000	33231
Number of plants propagated in nursery	8440	3230
Area of N2000 forest habitats improved with conservation works (ha)	20	59,38
Length of interpretation trails maintained/restored (km)	40	50,38
% of ESC volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills, useful for nature conservation	100%	100%
% of ESC volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment	80%	80%
Number of other volunteers, from local community and public and private bodies, participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	480	7619
Number of local institutions engaged in nature conservation support and participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	8	30
New jobs created and expected to be maintained for the post-project	2	2

New indicators	Mid-term Report	Final Report
Number of national field trips (Un)”	5	43
Number of formation sessions with local community (Un)	24	35
Number of media publications (Un)	27	148

### A.9 Volunteering Activities for nature conservation along the Rota Vicentina Nature Trail

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2019

Actual start date: 07/01/2019

Foreseen end date: 30/04/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 31/12/2020

The goals of Action A.9 have overall been successfully met and with regards to several indicators, they have gone beyond what was foreseen in the application.

Due to a low number of candidates, RV hosted five volunteers instead of the six volunteers that were foreseen in the application, in which 2 of them were joint volunteers. The 3 regular volunteers received have completed 208 days of volunteering and the 2 joint volunteers have done 249 days of joint-volunteering. The first three volunteers were hosted from January 2019 until April 2019; the fourth volunteer was hosted from March until June 2020; the fifth volunteer was hosted from April until July 2020;

The two joint volunteers received by RV have after their joint volunteering period returned again to RV for a second regular volunteering period. The process of selecting, recruiting, preparing, and training of the volunteers was carried out successfully, and an Individual Volunteering Plan (IVP) was made for each successful candidate. A working-plan which included the scheduling and planning of the activities was also developed.

Anchoring on the experience of working with volunteers, this action explored a model for combining the work of ESC volunteers with the needs to promote and maintain sustainable nature tourism along Rota Vicentina trails. In 2020, considering the Covid-19 context, the actions and the number of participants in these actions were considerably reduced compared to what was initially expected. Some new actions were done to achieve the defined goals, namely a remote volunteering platform, individual maintenance campaign and communication campaign on social networks. But overall, the action went well.

Rota Vicentina received 5 ESC volunteers and they worked together with the internal team of RV in these three different topics, as described below:

Control of invasive flora species that exist along some stretches of the Fishermen’s Trail (FT) (mostly *Acacia sp* and some *Carpobrotus edulis*), which are invading adjacent areas, threatening protected natural habitats and species. 25 ha were intervened.

Maintenance and restoration of the directional equipment and trail signage along the trails that integrate Rota Vicentina, in order to improve their use by tourists, directing them along the right ways to walk and therefore avoiding the use of other trails and the potential negative effects on natural flora (which could compromise conservation targets for several populations of protected flora, including endemics, for which trampling is a current threat). The maintenance system

planned for this action was based on three sets of actors (heritage of the work of last years): volunteers; trail caretakers and Parish councils. Its realization was hampered by the pandemic, confinement, activity restrictions, etc. While being a concern, the maintenance system was remodeled to achieve Rota Vicentina's objectives: monitoring; maintenance and involving local community.

Thus, in addition to regular walks with volunteers (who sign up through the calendar of maintenance activities) and maintenance by the RV team, a campaign was launched in May 2019 to return to the Walking Trails, entitled Let's walk together but apart, which it allowed monitoring by the local community and maintenance by the caretakers.

After the lockdown, the campaign was launched to return to the walking trails for their monitoring, maintenance. It was from May 15th to June 15th. This campaign was launched on Rota Vicentina social networks, as well as on the website and sent by newsletter.

Environmental awareness raising and engagement of tourists using Rota Vicentina trail with the nature and biodiversity targets that are set for the area within which it is set, contributing for N2000 implementation. Several awareness actions were carried out with local community whose theme was the native and invasive flora. Training sessions were also held, one being online.

In 2020, due to the pandemic context, there was a growing search for natural areas, as was the case of the Natural Park of Southwest Alentejo and Costa Vicentina, and there were unsustainable practices increase in coastal areas that coincide with some of Rota Vicentina walking trails. In the summer of 2020, Rota Vicentina called for the co-responsibility of visitors to the region, with a small awareness campaign on this topic was carried out on social networks.

While achieving the objectives defined, the ESC volunteers helped to reinforce the link with local community and stakeholders. Each person from the local community or visitor becomes a potential ambassador for good practices in the trails and region.

Beside this, due to the pandemic context, it was not always possible to do fieldwork, so the contribution of the volunteers had to be reconsidered. They worked in other things:

- adaptation of walking trails route files.
- creation of the distance volunteering platform (in Portuguese and English).
- creation of maintenance material for the Pedestrian Trails (bottles of paint and molds).
- creation of environmental awareness content for social networks.
- preparation of various communication contents related to walking trails and Rota Vicentina.

### Progress indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Length of Rota Vicentina trails maintained/restored (km)	450	750 (some trails were reviewed two times – each year)
Area of IAS controlled (ha)	2	25
% of ESC volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills, useful for nature conservation	100	100
% of ESC volunteers fully	80%	100%

satisfied with their deployment		
Number of other volunteers, from public and private bodies, participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	40	359
Number of corporations from the tourism sector engaged in nature conservation support and participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	20	24
Number of public bodies from the tourism sector engaged in nature conservation support and participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	5	2

#### **A.10 Volunteering Activities for Bird Conservation**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/10/2018

Actual start date: 08/10/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/09/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 31/12/2020

The action was concluded at the end of December 2020, with a total of 21 volunteers received, and an overall execution of 84% for deployment of volunteers in the project. During the course of the project SPEA's volunteers completed a total of 2323 days: 19 regular volunteers completed 2218 days, corresponding to 80% of execution from the foreseen in application and 2 joint-volunteers with MONTIS and RV that completed 105 days corresponding to 83% of execution from the foreseen in application. The joint volunteer with MONTIS has quit the project before the ending period of volunteering, leading to a lower number of days of volunteering than the foreseen in application. The recruitment of volunteers in SPEA involved the sharing of the project in SPEA communication channels, advertise of offers in the project's website, advertise of offers in the European Solidarity Corps platforms and social media. Due to the difficulties getting volunteers to take part of the project during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in some of the intervention areas, such as Azores that is independently regulated from the continent, it was not possible to achieve the totally of the number of volunteering days foreseen in application. But SPEA make efforts to minimize this impact and increased in 2020 the number of days of some volunteers in the areas of the project in the continent.

With the engagement of the 21 volunteers, it was possible to improve during the 3 years of the project 92 ha of protected habitats, 90 ha of area controlled for invasive alien species and planted/produced 7500 autochthonous plants that was below the foreseen in application due to the difficulties on the Azores site and prioritizing of other conservation tasks. 1102 people were involved in activities for conservation purposed with the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES volunteers.

## **Conservation of marine birds in Berlengas:**

In Berlengas site, the volunteers received have performed several field interventions mainly within the scope of the Conservation Plan After-LIFE Berlengas: removing invasive plants (*Carpobrotus edulis*, *Oxalis pes-caprae*), regular monitoring seabirds populations (Band-rumped Storm-petrel, Cory's Shearwater and European Shag), construction and maintenance of artificial nests for Cory's Shearwater and Band-rumped Storm-petrel, bird ringing, setting up nets for catching and ringing passerines, transects to detect traces of rabbits presence, monitoring biosecurity measures installed in Berlenga Island, monitoring native vegetation, maintenance of the 2 trails on Berlenga, with replacement of the stones that delimit the route and bird census from the coast.

They also had the opportunity to participate in other activities, not foreseen in the application, such as a practical training in vertical work and carry out a beach cleaning.

Alongside the fieldwork in Berlengas, the volunteers have also engaged with different office tasks, such as data analysis and visualisation of photos collected by camera traps or writing reports. These tasks were intensified especially during the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, allowing their volunteering period to continue despite the pause of field work during this time.

The volunteers from Berlengas also had the chance to participate in the activities of LIFE Ilhas Barreira (LIFE18 NAT/PT/000927), collaborating in the monitoring of seabirds, mammals and vegetation. This allowed them to improve their skills and the discovery of a new Natura 2000 site.

## **Interpretation Centre of Lagoa Pequena – Sesimbra (ELIP):**

Initially it was foreseen to receive 2 volunteers to the EILP site. However, with the course of the project and with the interest shown by potential volunteers it was possible to receive three volunteers, and for a longer period of time, in this area increasing the goals achieved for this site.

This is a natural area dedicated to receiving visitors and so the tasks of the volunteers were related to guarantee a good experience to them, in terms of activities and conditions of the site. During their time at the project, the volunteers carry out diverse types of tasks: visitor reception (do the entrance register, give information, rent binoculars, apply satisfaction questionnaires), digitizing and analysing the registration of visitors and satisfaction questionnaires and elaborate reports about in, prepared and implemented guided tours for birdwatching, activities for schools within the scope of the EILP Educational Service and for the general public (ex. commemorative days, workshops, etc.) and participate in other volunteer activities with specific groups (ex. scouts). Their coloration was also crucial to support some tasks related with the maintenance the space, such as cutting vegetation, arranging holes in the fence, replacing boards in the walkways, etc.

They also have the opportunity to increase their knowledge in bird identification by participating in the monthly bird monitoring census, elaboration of an inventory of bird species registered in the EILP in the last 10 years and monitoring, maintenance and mapping of nest boxes.

With the Covid-19 pandemic break, the tasks were adapted, and the volunteer receive at the time focused on collecting and analysing data, preparing an informational poster about the

phenology of migratory passerines from Lagoa Pequena to be displayed at the site. The volunteers have also developed a guided tour model adapted to the pandemic conditions that when implemented proven to be a success.

### **Conservation of *Pyrrhula murina* in São Miguel (Azores)**

During the course of the project, the volunteers received in Azores have done in general all the activities foreseen in application and have the opportunity to be involved in new ones. The major of the time were spent in habitat recovery at high and mid-altitude intervention areas (Graminhais plateau, Mata dos Bispos and Altitudinal Gradient), plant production in the native species nursery and awareness raising and environmental education activities in Interpretation Centre of Priolo.

The Azores team has faced a challenge with the project regarding the volunteering period of the volunteers. The long volunteering periods foreseen have translated into a more continuous conservation work, with repetition of tasks, to which the volunteers have expressed was demotivating for them to be in the project for such a long time. It was important, therefore, for SPEA to adapt and diversify the works performed by the volunteers, to elevate the motivation of the volunteers, and so volunteers have also been involved in the preparation of the annual Priolo Census, bird monitoring, organizing the International Conference of LIFE Lands of Priolo project. Punctually, some of the volunteers collaborated with database creation, data analysis, graphic design and other office work.

Due to Covid19 and the cancelations of flight for the Archipelago, the work foreseen for 2020 was cancelled and it was not possible to continue the volunteer reception and work throughout the last year of the project in this site.

#### Progress indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Area of N2000 priority habitats improved (ha)	30	92
Area of IAS controlled (ha)	20	90
Number of autochthonous plants produced/planted (ha)	30000	7500
% of ESC volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills useful for nature conservation	100	83
% of ESC volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment	80	81
Number of other local volunteers, from schools and resident population, participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	480	521 (if considering participants from awareness raising activities and volunteering activities, total is 1102)
Number of local institutions with nature conservation	10	8

support and/or participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers		
Number of municipalities engaged in nature conservation support and participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	1	4

### **A.11 Volunteering Activities for Conservation of Riparian/Aquatic Habitats within the Regional Structure for Environmental Protection and Conservation**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/07/2018

Actual start date: 17/09/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/06/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

In the period 2018-2020, APA-ARH Algarve hosted 7 volunteers within the scope of the project, corresponding to a total of 955 days of volunteering, compared to the initially foreseen in the application, of 1008 days of volunteering, associated with 4 annual volunteers and 2 rotating quarterly. The temporal extension of the project until June 2021 allowed the increase of volunteer days in a global total of 1291 volunteer days.

Despite the pandemic, the contribution of these volunteers and the contracted coordinator was essential to achieve 99 Volunteering actions during the duration of the project, which enabled the training of 2357 volunteers, as well as the organization of 56 events within the scope of the project, including workshops, seminars, actions awareness campaign, with 4583 participants, the vast majority of which were promoted between the last quarter of 2018 and the end of 2019.

Until February 2020, despite the limitations associated with the delays in administrative procedures of the APA – ARH Algarve, it was possible, among other things, to achieve many of the objectives proposed in the application, namely in terms of education and environmental awareness actions in school communities of Algarve, many of them with field trips and carrying out volunteer actions in the ecosystems foreseen in the application.

With the pandemic, the situation changed and the APA– ARH Algarve team and volunteers were restricted to teleworking (3 months) and this time was used for: the analysis of the results of 10 years of voluntary environmental monitoring; the improvement of the existing digital resources of the “Environmental Volunteering for Water” project, with, for example, the creation of information leaflets and new field sheets; the increase in communication on social networks and the preparation of future education projects for sustainability with regional relevance.

Only on June 5, 2020, World Environment Day, symbolically and still with many health restrictions, the APA-ARH Algarve team restarted, with due care, fieldwork with 1 or 2 volunteers alternately and with great focus in campaigns for environmental monitoring of aquatic ecosystems.

One of the reasons that led APA-ARH Algarve to extend the application beyond December 2020 was the possibility of intervening in some areas, which, due to the pandemic, had not

materialized, namely the intervention with volunteers/school communities in the water lines and reach the 1 km foreseen for the indicator “Length of riparian habitats improved/restored”. Although this indicator was not achieved, conditions were created for a post-LIFE phase and in public works of intervention in streams to contemplate the contribution of Environmental Volunteering, from a perspective of participatory management of water resources, an example of which is the case of the stream of Aljezur.

Thus, in 2021, contrary to expectations, the monitoring/volunteering actions were carried out in a smaller number and only by the LIFE team with rare exceptions in which there was a very small number of local volunteers, however, it should be noted that some of the our partners, namely local authorities and associations, which received training to remove the most common invasive exotic plants in the region, are already promoting control actions in their territories, with the participation of citizens and school communities.

In conclusion, the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project, through the APA-ARH Algarve, has significantly contributed to promoting and energizing, at a local level, the participatory management of water resources and natural resources, through the promotion and dynamization of education/awareness actions, of capacity building and environmental volunteering in local communities, allowing to contribute to the strategic objectives of the Water Framework Directive and other community legislation.

#### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Length of riparian habitats improved/restored (km)	1	0,126
Area of IAS controlled (ha)	2	4,21
Number of local Volunteers participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	500	2357
Number of External Partner institutions (private) participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	4	11
Number of External Partner institutions (public or non-profit) participating in joint activities with ESC volunteers	16	46
% of ESC volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills, useful for nature conservation	100	100
% of ESC volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment	80	80

### **B.1 Definition and Implementation of Communication Program**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2018

Actual start date: 01/01/2018

Foreseen end date: 31/12/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action is finished and was overall a well-developed action despite finishing with a lower execution rate regarding progress indicators that the foreseen in the application. The action B.1 was useful for the partnership, to understand and learn possible and effective ways to communicate nature conservation and especially volunteering for nature conservation, how to captivate the community for these topics.

With the logistical and coordination load that this type of projects requires regarding the coordination of teams of volunteers in the field, efforts to recruit volunteers and preparation of monitoring material, the importance of communication teams attached to this type of projects, that can enhance the dissemination of the work of volunteers for nature conservation in an effective, clear, rapid and coherent way should be considered. In this project, a communication team was not foreseen, and it would have been something that could have helped to implement the project's communication plan more rigorously.

In an attempt to overcome the difficulty in consistently communicating the work carried out in the various communication channels of the project, several partners tried to somehow encourage the volunteers to enhance the communication of their work. Volunteers from P1A Vila Pouca de Aguiar, for example, regularly produced a column for the local newspaper about the work of nature conservation carried out in the intervention areas, while volunteers from SPEA and MONTIS developed some explanatory videos of the daily life of a volunteer and the progress of nature conservation work in the areas (Annex XVII – “Supplementary materials produced by volunteers”). The videos were made available on the project's Youtube channel and were shared on the project's social networks. Under the Annex XVII “Supplementary materials produced by volunteers” you can find all the material (videos, posts, photos, etc.) produced by the volunteers during their time in the project that were not foreseen in the application by have contributed greatly to the project’s dissemination.

The project’s website and facebook page were developed, are online and fully operational. This met the *deliverables* “Project’s website online and fully operational” foreseen to 31/05/2018 and “Project’s facebook page online and fully operational” foreseen to 31/01/2018, respectively.

The website and facebook page have helped share the project to a larger range of people, mainly potential volunteers. The partnership posts continuously the development of activities, achievements with the project, feedback from project volunteers, etc. The *milestone* “First project post on facebook online and shared” foreseen for 31/01/2018 was completed.

Three Facebook pages were created in scope of the Project:

- Project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES Facebook page, where the communication was ensured by the partner beneficiaries of the project, which has reached a total of 2066 followers and 1892 likes by the time of reporting, and an overall satisfactory engagement of the community built of 54%. Link: <https://www.facebook.com/volunteer.escapes>

- Project Facebook group page with the aim to offering a place for socializing between project participants and the community to exchange experiences. This group was fed with publications identical to those published on the project page by the beneficiaries, however, in general, there was no community membership to discuss topics in this group. Link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1744159582359498>
- “Voluntariado pela Natureza em Portugal”, was created on 01/03/2021 to share actions, programmes, initiatives and opportunities of volunteering for nature conservation in Portugal. Contrary to what was reported in the last progress report, the partnership reviewed the proposal to be used, concluding that it would be less confusing for the public than to publish other entities on the project's facebook. Link: <https://www.facebook.com/VoluntariadoNaturezaPT>

The media visits to the intervention areas and TV coverage of the project works progressed well, with increasing interest from National/Regional channels related to nature conservation for the results of using volunteering as a nature conservation tool to increase biodiversity (having achieved already the *milestone* “First media visit to intervention areas accomplished” and “First TV coverage of project works accomplished” as previously reported). During the period of report, MONTIS received the BIOSFERA team, a television program in National Television, for a reporting on the project, with interviews to the volunteers, project manager and assistants, and as well covering the conservation works being done and results already shown.

On September 10<sup>th</sup> 2019, the project’s mid-term seminar with the title “Volunteering for nature conservation” took place in Vila Nova de Gaia, Porto, in partnership with Vila Nova de Gaia Municipality that provided all the logistics. The seminar got together more than 30 participants including volunteers from different beneficiaries and ex-volunteers. A representative of ICNF, member of the project’s Advisory Board engaged actively with the seminar, giving the opening session regarding the importance that volunteering has in nature conservation and the biodiversity goals it can achieve.

The seminar enabled the partnership to network and discuss the challenges with volunteering for nature conservation projects, with 14 institutions being 2 of them part of the SAB. The seminar was attended by several entities that work in some way with environmental volunteering, such as the Super Bock Group, in corporate volunteering or LIFE Followers with long-term volunteering. The presentations of these partners, such as the Volunteering project in the Montesinho Natural Park, a project focused on Environmental volunteering but considering social volunteering and local community involvement, allowed us to identify potential ways of community involvement in volunteering for nature and to understand how to overcome some of the challenges encountered during the execution of volunteering projects in nature conservation.

During the afternoon session, working groups were organized, divided by typology, where volunteers, motivation, and results (measurement and dissemination) were discussed. Within each group, three questions were asked to define: what the limiting factors for volunteering for nature conservation are, what are the opportunities (what has been gained from volunteering for nature conservation) and what we can do to improve the future (what can be done to improve this type of volunteer projects/opportunities). Within the group itself, there were moments of sharing and voting on the issues discussed. At the end of the parallel sessions/group work, the issues and outcomes were exposed to all workshop participants who were able to vote on the aspects proposed by the other working groups. These votes allowed a validation between what

the groups themselves found most relevant within each question worked, and what the other groups considered relevant.

The limiting factors varied greatly from partner to partner, considering the intervention sites.

With this seminar, the *milestone* “Project’s mid-term seminar concluded in Porto” foreseen for 31/12/2019 is therefore completed.

The Final Project Seminar, foreseen for Lisbon, was organised on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 2021, with the end of the projects actions in a webinar format due to the pandemic. More than 40 people, excluding partners and ESC volunteers, were present (“Annex III – “Project Communication Materials” – B.1 Final Seminar). This webinar counted with the participation of the project’s volunteers that have shared their experience in the project and have created a video with short testimonials to describe the meaning of this volunteering period for them. The webinar was also translated live to English with the help of volunteers from the project and coordinators and was uploaded to the project’s social media.

During 2021, in order to increase the motivation and spirit of the volunteer’s team, due to the 2<sup>o</sup> wave of the pandemic that stroke Portugal, decided to organise two webinars, closed to the general public, where the volunteers could meet and interact with each other from different beneficiaries. The partnership has prepared some ice breakers games for the volunteers and was an overall enrichment experience for the teams (“Annex III – “Project Communication Materials” – B.1 Volunteers webinar).

Some of the progress indicators foreseen have suffered a small impact due to the global pandemic, such as media visits promoted, or radio news broadcasted.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Number of web site users	250	8929
Number of Facebook page followers	5000	2076
Number of links to project events posted by the National Rural Network website	12	0
Number of media visits promoted	20	7
Number of National TV news broadcasted	4	4
Number of radio news broadcasted	10	3
Number of press releases deployed	20	9
Number of press news	40	230
Number of similar organizations (NGO’s, national/regional/local public administrations) attending technical seminars	80	72

Number of other members from the national rural network attending technical seminars	18	0
% of volunteers sharing their experiences through specific events	100	60

## **B.2 Production and Deployment of Teaser(s) to Raise Awareness and Engage ESC Volunteers**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2018

Actual start date: 01/01/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/09/2018

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 16/05/2019

Teaser for Engagement of Volunteers was initiated in January 2018 and ended on 16 May 2018, on the same date as its first publication (*milestone* “First public deployment of the teaser concluded, Foreseen for 15/04/2018). Although its conclusion was originally scheduled for 1 April 2018, the fact that it was a video for recruitment of volunteers was important for its display to be in articulation with the operation of volunteer registration platforms. This was the reason for the delay in completing this action. The video displayed on the Youtube and Vimeo had about 1600 views (the indicator “Youtube visualizations of the teaser(s)” had also the number of visualizations on the Vimeo, as was explained in the last report).

See “Annex III – Deliverables of the Project” to find the two versions (PT and EN) of the teaser. The indicator “In country ESC volunteers engaged” includes all volunteers received under the project, the number is 240.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
In country ESC volunteers engaged	175	240
Facebook views of the teaser(s)	12000	7133
Facebook shares of the teaser(s)	100	82
Youtube visualizations of the teaser(s)	2000	747
Mails sent to deploy the teaser(s)	2000	1146

## **B.3 Production and Deployment of TV Series for Dissemination, Replication and Transfer**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/04/2018

Actual start date: 01/06/2018

Foreseen end date: 30/09/2019

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action is completed, though its fulfilment was very delayed when compared to the foreseen in the application. Despite the delays the series was well received by the public with an average of 1015400 views of the series, surpassing greatly the indicator foreseen in application.

As previously reported, the episode of the TV-Series “Business and Natural Capital” was finished in 21/06/2019 (see “Annex IV – “Project’s TV Series”), completing the *deliverable* “TV Series – episode on “Business and Natural Capital” foreseen for 30/09/2018, with a delay mainly due to some late improvements from BCSD’s partners as previously reported. The episode was shared by BCSD social media and channels and uploaded to the project Youtube channel and Facebook with more than 600 visualizations. As requested by the EC the updates to the episode “Business and Natural Captiral” have been done.

Despite the last delay imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic to the filming of the remaining episodes reported on the last progress report, it was possible to film during the second half of 2020 the following episodes:

- 2 episodes for APA-ARH Algarve
- Half episode for MTV
- 1 episode for Plantar uma Árvore Vila Pouca de Aguiar/project’s lessons

The filming of the TV Series was finished on February 12<sup>th</sup> 2021, with the filming of the last episode in Serra do Alvão, which included alongside the work of Plantar uma Árvore in Vila Pouca de Aguiar, a summarize of the projects outcomes, results and overall benefits for nature conservation, volunteers engaged and communities.

After completed and approved the majority of the series episodes by SIC Notícias, the TV-Series has finally broadcasted its first episode on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021. Despite foreseen the length of the episodes to be 15 minutes, the channel SIC Notícias has requested to shorten the length of the episodes to 8-10 minutes each in order to fit the timeslots available for the broadcasting, to which the partnership has complied and reported previously to the External Monitoring Team.

All episodes of the TV Series have been broadcasted on national television, every Friday starting as mentioned on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021, with a repetition on each Sunday in SIC Notícias channel.

After each episode broadcasted on national television, the full-length 15 minutes episode foreseen in application has been uploaded by SIC Notícias to their website and SIC International channel, as well as the project’s Youtube Channel, Facebook page and Website. All episodes can be found within the requirements of the EC and in Portuguese with English subtitles.

Playsolutions Audiovisuais, in addition to foreseen in application and has stated under the project’s extension request as produced 12 short teasers to promote weekly each episode on social media. The teasers can be found on the project’s Youtube Channel. The beneficiaries have made great efforts to promote the TV series of the project, with disclosure on personal channels, projects social media, each beneficiary social media, newsletters, national radio, national newspapers and platforms, and others.

Overall, the TV series has been very well received by the spectators (see “Annex IV – “Project’s TV Series” – Audience tables), with a overcome of the progress indicators, good reviews and interest by the communities with several contacts from interested parties to know more about the project and how to engage. Resulting from the TV series, it was also possible to establish contacts of networking, post-project execution, especially for replication purposes. More detailed information under item 6.4 “Analysis of Benefits”.

## Progress indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>2nd Progress Report</b>
Number of TV spectators watching the series	500000	At episode n°7: First exhibition 374500 With all repetition 1015400
Number of web downloads of the TV series – PT version	100	At episode n°10: 990 views
Number of web downloads of the TV series – EN version	200	At episode n°10: 990 views

### **B.4 Networking with other LIFE project/teams**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2018

Actual start date: 19/09/2018

Foreseen end date: 31/12/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action is finished with an execution below what was foreseen in the application. With the aim of receiving volunteers for nature conservation, LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES made possible and foreseen, since the application, interaction with other LIFE projects at national level. The beneficiaries of the project before LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES were already coordinators or beneficiaries of other LIFE projects, and this project made it possible to leverage the actions of other nature projects. ESC volunteers worked actively during the project in the following LIFE's: LIFE Terra do Priolo, LIFE LINES, LIFE ELCN and LIFE Berlengas. In the last year of the project, they also had the opportunity to participate in the LIFE Ilhas Barreira and LIFE ENPLC in SPEA and MONTIS respectively. In addition to the life directly linked to the project's beneficiaries, the ESC volunteers received also participated in the conservation work of LIFE BIODISCOVERIES, LIFE IP Vidalia and LIFE IP Azores through volunteer actions with P1A, such as, control invasive species in the Machada Forest, or through actions awareness campaigns, such as seminars, with MONTIS.

LIFE FOLLOWERS was invited and was present on the project seminar held in 10/09/2019 in Vila Nova de Gaia, with the title “Volunteering for nature conservation”, achieving therefore the *milestone* “Initial Networking invitation to visit project”.

The first networking visit to external projects was foreseen for May 2020, with an invitation from LIFE FOLLOWERS to their event “Followers, Young volunteers for the Natura 2000 Network”, however due to the COVID-19 this event has been postponed for later in 2020.

Besides the participations in joint activities with other LIFE projects in Portugal, mainly the ones involving the project beneficiaries (such as SPEA and MARCA), MONTIS has organised a seminar in partnership with LIFE BIODISCOVERIES in May 2019, where the ESCAPES volunteers were present and participated in the logistics of the event. The seminar gathered more than 30 people and was live broadcasted by Barreiro Municipality.

In 2019, MONTIS has submitted, as a partner, an application for an ESC volunteering project with the Latvian Fund for Nature, a contact that resulted from the networking made by the project manager and assistant in the “platform meeting” “Volunteering for Nature Conservation” in Tartu, Estonia that happened in September 2018.

MONTIS was invited to present the project and volunteering work in an ELCN Workshop in Romania, which had no related cost with our project. The invitation, besides from MONTIS being a beneficiary of LIFE ELCN, was in some extent due to the network resulting from the ELCN Workcamp organised by MONTIS in May 2019 and where the volunteers from our project have collaborated and helped the participants, shown the conservation work and its result.

SPEA organised a Conference "LIFE+ Terras do Priolo - Azores" to promote the work done in LIFE Berlengas and LIFE Volunteer Escapes. This conference was held in São Miguel (Azores) in May 2019. The beneficiary had the chance to exchange ideas with national and international groups working with control of invasive plants (e.g. Invasoras.pt; LIFE Fura-bardos from Madeira Island; LIFE STOP Cortaderia and mammals, LIFE PonDerat from Italy). This was important to evaluate the methodologies implemented in Berlengas and to know what is done on other parts of the world. The ESC volunteers in Berlengas had also the chance to participate in the activities of LIFE Ilhas Barreira (LIFE18 NAT/PT/000927), collaborating in the monitoring of seabirds, mammals, and vegetation. This engagement allowed the volunteers to improve their skills and the discovery of a new Natura 2000 site.

SPEA and MONTIS were invited to participate in the Final Conference of LIFE Biodiscoveries project, presenting their work and the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project. The conference was scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of March but due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic was cancelled.

In January and February 2020, the ESC volunteers from P1A collaborated in the volunteering activities promoted by LIFE Biodiscoveries in Local Protected Area of Machada Forest and Coina Marshes for mainly the conservation task of IAS control and plantation of native species. During April 2019, P1A engagement with ESC volunteers in a trial experience for a new volunteering project in Azores, testing and elaborating a plan for short-term high impact intervention for invasive species control.

Due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, several projects had to adapt their activities to new formats such as webinars, MARCA ADL participated in a LIFE Food & Biodiversity webinar/workshop that tackled the relation between biodiversity and the agri-food business.

All networking reports can be found in Annex II – “Deliverables of the Project” – B.4. Networking visits reports.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Number of networking Synthesis Reports (with a critical review) delivered	10	10
Number of critical review reports delivered by invited LIFE projects	2	1
Number of external visits promoted to the project	2	0
Number of external LIFE project teams actively cooperating	20	7

Number of external LIFE project teams actively cooperating with the project beneficiaries after the project works	10	0
Number of external LIFE project teams actively cooperating in sending EU volunteer for the post-project join volunteering program	1	0

### C.1 Overall Project, Partnership and Stakeholder Management

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2018

Actual start date: 01/01/2018

Foreseen end date: 31/12/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

#### C1.1. Internal Management

The *milestones* “Contract signed with Project Manager”, foreseen for 01/01/2018 and “First Meeting of the Project Coordination Team Concluded” foreseen for 31/01/2018 were completed as previously reported.

For the whole duration of the project, 34 PCT monthly meetings were held, being presential meetings and remote meetings (using platform “Skype”, see folder “Annex VI – Information about the Management Meetings held” for more information on the meetings held on the project). The monthly meetings have been ensuring a good coordination of the team and administrative, financial, and technical management of the project, with presential meetings interspersed with online meetings.

From the April 2021 onwards, there was no PCT meetings being held, as the partnership has felt it was not necessary to be able to close the projects actions by June 2021.

Apart from the foreseen meetings between the PCT for managing general concerns, several other meetings were held in person or over Skype, with the beneficiaries, to discuss specific difficulties felt by the beneficiaries and ensure the financial and administrative management of the project. Since the last report two more meetings were held with the External Monitoring Team from NEEMO, one in October 2020 and the last one in June 2021.

The project coordination and management has been supported by the use of a web cloud (drive) where all the project administrative and financial archive has been updated and kept for consult of all involved.

#### C1.2. – Capacity Building and Training of Volunteer Mentors

Each beneficiary allocated qualified staff members to monitor the tasks to be developed by the volunteers that provided the adequate training and formation to mentor the volunteers received according to the methodology adopted by each association. The support of the volunteer during their volunteering period was a concern throughout the project as well as the increase of diversification in the volunteer’s tasks that provided a panoply of skills they could acquire from the project. All the IVP’s produced included the name and background of the volunteer mentor and the conditions and tasks to be made by the volunteer during their period in the project.

Medical, logistical, and emotional assistance was also provided by the staff members from the organisation when necessary, to the volunteers, especially during the difficult times of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak.

### C1.3. – Governance and Stakeholders

Involving the designated project stakeholders proved to be extremely difficult and very resourced consumed throughout the project. The stakeholders related with national and international volunteering (CPV, CEV and CASES) despite not actively engaging with the project, have through the course of the actions been in contact with the coordination team, participated in seminars and helped understanding which volunteering platforms could be used by the partnership to overcome the difficulties in recruiting volunteers from PASS platform.

As mentioned on previous reports, the partnership instead of involving the main office of ICNF with the implementation of the project, which has proven to be difficult to obtain engagement, decided to involve the stakeholder with the works of specific beneficiaries in the intervention sites. Such as, the ICNF brigade involved with the work of SPEA in Berlengas Island, Lagoa Pequena and Ilhas Barreira. The ICNF technicians from Parque Natural da Ria Formosa, Reserva Natural do Sapal de Castro Marim e Vila Real de Santo António and Parque Natural da Costa Vicentina e Sudoeste Alentejano that engage with the activities developed by APA ARH-Algarve, such as the events “ERVAA” and “SEIVA”.

MARCA also had the participation of ICNF technicians in different activities for conservation tasks in the project intervention areas with local communities. ICNF has also been present and made part of the presentation board of the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES Seminar “Volunteering for Nature Conservation” held on 10th September 2019 in Vila Nova de Gaia.

It was foreseen that the Advisory Board was constituted by Confederação Portuguesa do Voluntariado - CPV, Centro Europeu de Voluntariado - CEV and Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social – CASES, ICNF – Forest and Nature Conservation Institute and RRN – the Rede Rural Nacional.

Despite the efforts and suggestions purposed by the partnership and CE it was not possible to involve the RRN on the project implementation. The RRN was contacted several times during the project with no return. By the short last period of the project, it was crucial to focus the efforts from the beneficiaries to overcome the difficulties imposed by the pandemic and to improve exponentially the execution for the volunteers received under the project.

The Stakeholders Advisory Board was received in 26/09/2018, achieving the *milestone* “First Meeting of the Stakeholders Advisory Board concluded”, foreseen for 31/01/2018. The meeting was held during the SEIVA event, organised by APA-ARH Algarve, which was open to the general public and allowed the disclosure of the project, the exchange of ideas and experiences between the project beneficiaries, the Stakeholders Advisory Board and the public.

The second meeting foreseen with the SAB was held during the 2º LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES Seminar “Volunteering for Nature Conservation” in 10th September 2019 in Vila Nova de Gaia, where the stakeholders, ICNF CPV and CNE were present. The seminary was open to the public and allowed the sharing of the project and debate of the challenge’s resultant from volunteering for nature conservation. Despite efforts, the last meeting with the SAB team was not possible to be held due to constraints regarding the pandemic and management of the volunteer’s team.

## Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Number of Project Progress Reports delivered on time	3	4
Number of Meetings from Project Coordination Team	18	34
Number of Meetings from Stakeholders Advisory Board	4	2
Number of Stakeholders integrating the various meeting from SAB	20	6
Number of Staff to be assigned mentor role undertaking former capacity/training workshops	100	100

### **C.2 Overall Management of the ESC Volunteer Cycle**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2018

Actual start date: 01/01/2018

Foreseen end date: 31/12/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action is finished. The *deliverable* “Yearly Report on ESC Deployment to the Commission - 2020”, foreseen for 31/01/2021 can be found in Annex II – “Deliverables of the Project” – C.2 Yearly Report 2020.

All the volunteers received under the project can be found listed on the European Solidarity Corps platform. However, most of the volunteers that engaged were forwarded to the PASS platform instead of being recruited from it. Throughout the project, the PASS platform proved to not be prepared for aiding the guidelines of this project and not to be an essential tool to recruit volunteers and share the project. The public offers for the project to be displayed at the ESC page most of the times were barred from being shown, not appearing in the main page which created difficulties for potential volunteers in finding the offers.

Every IVP was produced taking in account the tasks that the volunteer would do, and this was given to the volunteer before he engaged with the project. When it is possible to see that some volunteer had more interest in one subject than other, the beneficiary tried to adjust his IVP so that the volunteers would feel more comfortable and pleased. In addition to the IVP the volunteer also had to sign a “Volunteering Agreement” and to this was attached the IVP. These two documents together had all the information about the organisation, volunteer, volunteering, conditions, tasks. All the Volunteering Agreements and IVP’s can be found in the folder “Annex II – “Deliverables of the Project” – A.1 IVPs and Volunteering Agreements”.

One of the items of this action is the “continuous monitoring of the work conditions and assessment of accomplishment of the proposed tasks for each volunteer”. The model that the partnership produced at the start of the project and was sent with the previous reports showed not to be efficient and some partners had difficulties in the implementation of this model. On the final course of the project, some partners have continued using the model decided at the

start of the project and some other have provided a more detailed scheme of the volunteers work data. It is also mentioned that with the Final Report the work performed by the volunteers during the project can be found detailed described under Action A.2 update report, deliverable of the Assessment reports and on the complementary material sent as annex and produced by the volunteers (see folders “Annex VI “Monitoring of the Tasks of the Volunteers” – C.2 Monitoring Data”; “Annex II “Deliverables of the Project” – A.2 Action Report and A.3toA.11 Assessment Reports”; “Annex XVI “Complementary Material produced by volunteers”).

The first certificate was prepared by 17/09/2018, 13 days before the foreseen in application (*milestone* “First Certificate of Participation endorsed” foreseen to 30/09/2018). Until the end of the project, 229 certificates were produced (see the attached “Annex VI “Monitoring of the tasks of the volunteers” – C.2 Certificated for Volunteers”) and 23 volunteers have ended before expected their volunteering period in the project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES, mainly due to professional reasons (job opportunities). The volunteers received during the project were encouraged to produce testimonial videos of their arrival, making themselves known to the community that followed the project as well as a final video where they reported their experience during the volunteering time, what they liked, what they did not liked, what they managed to learn from the project and what they left for future volunteers.

These videos would help spread the project and recruit more volunteers. During the course of the project some volunteers did not feel comfortable with recording videos and made their testimonies in written text. All the testimonies of the volunteers were published on the social networks of the project and can be found in “Annex VI “Monitoring of the tasks of the volunteers” – C.2 Testimonials”.

The *deliverable* “Yearly Report on ESC Deployment to the Commission -2018” with date for 31/01/2019, was completed in the foreseen date and sent to the External Monitor of the project. The *deliverable* “Yearly Report on ESC Deployment to the Commission – 2019” with date for 31/01/2020 was completed and delivered with the 2<sup>nd</sup> progress report. The *deliverable* “Yearly Report on ESC Deployment to the Commission – 2020” with date of 31/01/21 was completed and delivered on 29/01/2021 to the External Monitoring Team and is also included on this report. These *deliverables* are in the folder “Annex II – “Deliverables of the Project” – C.2 Yearly Report 2020”.

The project has welcomed 240 volunteers since the beginning until the time of reporting, corresponding to 93,2% of normal volunteers foreseen in application and 34,2% of joint volunteers foreseen in application taking in account the number of volunteering days instead of the number of volunteers. As explained in previous reports, due to agreement of receiving volunteers from 2 months to 12 months of volunteering, an adjustment was made to the calculation of volunteers received. The total of volunteering days per beneficiary was calculated by multiplying the number of volunteers foreseen in application by the number of months for each volunteer by an average of 21 volunteering days per month. Then the number of actual volunteering days per volunteer (recorded on the Payment Receipts and the Summary of Individual Support for Volunteer) is divided by the total number of volunteering days of the beneficiary and multiplied by 100%. The percentage of the normal and joint volunteers achieved is then obtained by the sum of all the individual percentages for the beneficiaries and divided by 9 partners.

### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
Number of yearly reports submitted	3	3
Number of ESC Volunteers giving up after hosting	0	23
% of ESC Volunteers signing a contract for the tasks being offered	100	100
% of ESC Volunteers issued a Certificate of Participation by MONTIS and Associated Beneficiaries	100	92,9
% of ESC Volunteers acquiring new competencies and skills, useful for nature conservation	100	100
% of ESC Volunteers fully satisfied with their deployment	100	82

### **C.3 External Audit**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/04/2018

Actual start date: 20/03/2018

Foreseen end date: 31/03/2021

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 22/10/2021

As foreseen in application on Annex X of the Grant Agreement (“Financial and Administrative Guidelines”) and external audit committee was hired and an agreement was signed on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019, between MONTIS (as Coordinator Beneficiary of the project) and LCA - Leal, Carreira & Associados SROC LDA (as Auditor). The audit has elapsed by the end of the project as expected and the report produced can be found under Annex VIII “External Audit Report”.

Due to the delay with the hiring of the External Audit team the *milestone* “First documents verified by External Audit” foreseen for 30/09/2018 was consequently delayed, being completed on February 2020 with the analysis of the project’s documents of the coordinator beneficiary MONTIS.

The audit was performed as stated in the Annex X of the Grant agreement regarding the verification of a sample of the expenses incurred to the project for each beneficiary instead of the 100% as described in application, more details on the procedures taken by the auditor can be found on the Annex VIII “External Audit Report”.

#### Progress Indicators

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Foreseen in the application</b>	<b>Final Report</b>
% of Project’s expenditure verified by external audit	100	The Auditor examined all items if a cost category consisted of less than 10 items, otherwise a sample of minimum 10, 10% of the items or 20% of the amount claimed, whichever is the greater, except

		personnel and 6B. Individual or organizational support for Volunteers cost where the auditor examined all items.
% of Project's expenditure certified in respect to the General Conditions of the Model LIFE Grant Agreement	100	The Auditor examined all items if a cost category consisted of less than 10 items, otherwise a sample of minimum 10, 10% of the items or 20% of the amount claimed, whichever is the greater, except personnel and 6B. Individual or organizational support for Volunteers cost where the auditor examined all items.

**C.4 Monitoring project outputs and impact in LIFE performance Indicators and the local socio-economy**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/01/2018

Actual start date: 01/01/2018

Foreseen end date: 31/12/2021

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/06/2021

The action is finished and was overall successful considering the execution of reception of volunteers finished with 83,3%, almost at 100% despite all the constraints felt during the project. The nature conservation indicators, distributed by actions A.4 to A.11, were also largely complied with, with several of the indicators ending up with an over-execution of what was expected in the application. It was possible with the project to reach 240.6 ha of protected and restored habitat and 94842 of native trees planted, for example. The progress indicators that were significantly lower than expected in the application were the project's communication and networking indicators. The partnership had difficulty, without a fixed communication team, to put into practice the project's communication plan, and the pandemic situation of the last two years, not only made the networking plans made unfeasible, but also forced the beneficiaries to focus even more on recruiting volunteers in order to achieve as much execution as possible by the end of the project.

The project indicators can be found compiled under Annex IX "Socio-economic indicators" and described with an analysis of the outcomes throughout the report in the project's actions.

Regarding the socio-economic indicators, the partnerships had two meetings during the project to improve and discuss questions related with the socio-economic indicators designed for the project.

The social indicators were divided into 4 dimensions that include citizenship, for number of people that engaged in activities in scope of the project; Communication to evaluate the impact on social media and other media channels of the project actions; Partnerships, including the collaborations and new partnerships that developed with the project and volunteering to measure the results regarding the ESC volunteers involved with the project.

As for the economic indicators the partnership has decided to divide them into 3 dimensions including, intervention on the territory that measures the results of the actions from A.5 to A.11 of the conservation works made on the field; Enrolment of enterprises to analyse the impact on local economy and Employment for the impact of job positions related to the project actions

and development. It was made one guideline document and one Excel for the registration of the indicators (see “Annex IX - Socio-economic Indicators” for more information).

For most of the socio-economic indicators chosen by the partnership the baseline was 0, as working with long-term volunteering was a new tool for most beneficiaries. For those indicators that had a baseline, especially the social indicators regarding enrolment of the community and the economic indicators regarding local partners, jobs created and local expenses with the project, were, in most beneficiaries, especially on NGO’s, greatly increased.

With all the activities developed within the project, it was possible to involve more than 25114 people with the ESC volunteers and nature conservation works; Create an average of three job positions in each beneficiary and establish partnerships with more than 86 local suppliers.

**C.5 Drafting and delivering the After-LIFE Plan**

State: completed

Foreseen start date: 01/07/2020

Actual start date: 01/07/2020

Foreseen end date: 31/12/2020

Actual (or anticipated) end date: 30/09/2021

The action has ran as expected by the partnership and elapsing of the project. A total of 5 meetings were held between the partner beneficiaries in order to organise a template and ideas for the After-LIFE Plan. The majority of beneficiaries will continue to carry out conservation and community engagement actions with volunteering programmes resulting from the favourable outcomes of long-term volunteering taken by the last three years of the project. The lessons learnt by managing significant number of volunteers, challenges, outcomes and benefits from haven undertaken actions under this project has proven to be valuable information to adapt and understand the potential of using volunteers for nature conservation by the partner beneficiaries.

In Annex X – “After LIFE Report” you can find the After-LIFE Plan for LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES with more detailed information on how the beneficiaries will continue to carry out the actions developed under the project.

Progress indicators

Indicator	Foreseen in the application	Final Report
After-LIFE Plan Delivered	1	1

**6.2.Main deviations, problems and corrective actions implemented**

Throughout the project several constraints were felt and reported to the CE in the previous reports. The partnership has tried to adapt during the project to correct these constraints in order to achieve the foreseen in the application. Although the project has not achieved 100% of financial or technical execution, the partnership was very close to achieve the foreseen in application during the 3 years of project with the delays and constraints felt.

Being this project a preparatory one, the guidelines and management of the project were since the beginning a challenge. The reception of long-term volunteers for nature conservation, the main goal of the project, has proven to be a very effective tool to engage the community to

environmental matters. However, the partnership has felt difficulties in the recruitment of these 175 ESC volunteers foreseen in the application. The difficulties were felt essentially in technical issues, such as the ones experienced with the PASS platform regarding volunteering offers, and social issues, such as the interest and recruitment of volunteers for such long periods of time. The partnership has tried to overcome these by contacting directly potential volunteers or using other platforms to share the project and recruit volunteers. Adjustments were made to the volunteering programme, admitting international volunteers due to the low interest of national volunteers in the project and accepting volunteers for shorter periods of time, from 2 months to 12 months instead of 6 months.

During the elapsing of the project, constraints were also felt on the management of the teams of volunteers. The partnership has realised the difficulties regarding the logistics to provide the volunteers and their motivation. Several volunteers have expressed their discontentment with the repetition of the nature conservation tasks and the beneficiaries have tried to adapt their volunteering period to the needs of nature conservation work in the intervention areas, in order to present more diverse tasks to them.

The Covid-19 pandemic outbreak as also imposed a delay to the reception of volunteers and activities organised during this time. With the project extension to June 2021, the difficulties and constraints felt the last two years, and with the effort done by all the beneficiaries, it was possible to achieve almost 100% of the foreseen in the application.

Overall, it can be concluded that the initial constraints felt in the project were later on overcome and the results have been positive for a preparatory project.

### 6.3. Evaluation of Project Implementation

The reception of long-term volunteers for nature conservation a learning curve throughout the project. Although most of the beneficiaries of this project already work with volunteering in associations, long-term volunteering was new to many. Mainly on a large scale, with the reception and coordination of teams of volunteers with more than 2 to 3 elements. The project started with a delay in the reception of volunteers due to problems encountered with the PASS platform used to publicize the project on the ESC portal, but mainly due to the low participation of national volunteers in the project, the initial target audience of LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES.

Thus, at the beginning of the project, the partnership asked to open the reception of the project to international European volunteers, resulting in the influx of adherence necessary to start the project. Trying to understand the reasons for the lack of participation of national volunteers, due to difficulty in making commitments for long periods of time (6 months in the application) and for wanting opportunities outside Portugal, the partnership also decided to change the periods of volunteering, allowing volunteers to participate for a minimum of 2 months up to 1 year. This modification resulted in a goal of 23688 days of volunteer work to be fulfilled in the 3 years of the project.

During the project, the partnership discussed and adjusted difficulties in coordinating groups of volunteers, tasks, fundraising, etc. with the little details learned over time

Beneficiaries identified the most effective fundraising method for each one, for example, in the case of public and local entities, local volunteer grants and especially professional schools and universities. In the case of non-profit entities, direct contacts with potential volunteers, despite a lot of “time consuming” turned out to be effective, as well as using volunteers already in the project as support in disseminating the project. At the level of coordination, it was important to adapt the volunteering tasks, combining the environmental needs and the volunteers' capacities, in order to maintain the teams' motivation and offer the best possible experience to the volunteer in terms of learning.

LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES ended with an overall volunteer execution of 83.2%, with 18320 days of regular volunteering (93.2%) and 1379 days of rotating volunteering (34.2%). In terms of conservation, 240,6 ha of protected areas improved and restored, 194,3 ha of controlled areas of invasive species, 94842 of planted and produced trees, 800,38 km of maintained trails, among others (see Annex XIV – “Indicators of the Project”). The partners BCSD Portugal and Playsolutions also fulfilled their project indicators, with 71 activities developed and 3774 people involved (BCSD indicators) and the 12-episode series of the project produced, respectively. The approval of the request to extend the project for another 6 months in 2021 was crucial for us to achieve the objectives of volunteering, conservation, and community involvement. Without the extension of the project's actions, we would have been around 54% of the planned normal volunteer days and 19% of the planned joint volunteer days.

Working with Nature takes time, and more with conservation and restoration, and therefore it is not yet possible to quantify with immediate certainty the results of the project, which is a more reliable task for After-LIFE. The indicators that stand out the most for an immediate result are the awareness and involvement of the community, with more than 24079 people involved in the activities developed under LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES with volunteers.

It is important to draw some conclusions from the management of this project, the human resource load required to manage a long-term volunteer project, with teams of volunteers larger than 6 volunteers simultaneously, must be taken into consideration. It is necessary the involvement of coordinators in the planning of volunteers and close monitoring of them, and this reduces the ability to follow up on project management tasks, as is the case of communication and dissemination of the project, which despite the efforts made by the beneficiaries throughout of this project, and which in general were well achieved and the work developed publicized, could have benefited more from the forecast of human resources allocated exclusively to the coordination and production of communication plans.

Unfortunately, due to the covid-19 pandemic there were several networking indicators that were not possible to complete as the visits were cancelled. However, the partnership made an effort to, during this last period of the project, volunteers be able to visit other national LIFE and environmental volunteer projects, as well as joint activities between beneficiaries, as mentioned throughout actions A.4 to A.11.

## 6.4. Analysis of benefits

### 1. Environmental benefits

The 240 volunteers welcomed with the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project gave the opportunity to work with nature conservation in degraded areas and with environmental

problems in Portugal. In terms of nature conservation, the application foreseen for the restoration and protection work of 91 ha of relevant area in terms of habitat and control and/or eradication of 69 ha of area dominated by invasive species. Three years into the project, and with the help of the motivated work of ESC volunteers, it was possible to achieve the control of 194.3 ha of area dominated by invasive species, intervene in 240.6 ha of environmental interest area for protected habitats, work maintaining 800 km of pedestrian paths and planting 94842 native trees in the intervention areas of this project.

The use of volunteering proved to be a valuable help in the nature conservation tasks assigned to the intervention areas of this project, managing to exceed 3 times the values foreseen in the application.

## 2. Economic benefits

With more than 4252 activities carried out during this project, including workshops, volunteers, work camps, awareness sessions, among others, community involvement had a significant impact on the economic and social benefits of this project. Volunteers welcomed were involved in all partnership activities and several partnerships were established locally that supported the project.

From the 3870 individuals foreseen to engage with the activities developed in scope of the project, the partnership and the volunteers managed to engage a total of 24621 people, reaching to a substantial amount of people about environmental issues. The project's work also involved 23 private landowners from the 20 foreseen in application with the conservation work developed on the intervention sites and 172 private and/or non-profit/public organizations with the activities developed.

The project also created an average of 3 job positions in each beneficiary and more than 86 local suppliers supported the project's activities.

## 3. Social benefits:

The social benefits of this project are categorized into the benefits within the team of volunteers and the benefits arising from the interaction between volunteers and the community. The volunteers received under LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES, included 28 different EU nationalities. The different cultures brought by each of the volunteers, ethnicities, and costumes drove the volunteers to be able to adapt, understand and respect each other as a team. Alongside, the communities that had the opportunity to interact with the project volunteers were also driven for a sense of curiosity regarding the different nationalities and understanding of their costumes, especially on remote communities that some of partner beneficiaries interact with. The diversity and enthusiasm of the project volunteers have allowed to elevate the social benefits foreseen with these types of projects.

Many of the volunteers received under the project have expressed that their volunteering period in LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES has influenced greatly their life course and study/work choices. In MONTIS, several volunteers that were not previously from study environmental areas have continue their academy path connecting both their interests and nature conservation, for example, Adèle Pottier, with a bachelor's in law has continued to a master's in environmental law and Chloé Defoux chose to continue to a degree related with Social Environmental Sciences. In some beneficiaries, such as APA ARH-Algarve, BCSD and

MONTIS, some volunteers have even continued their work in the associations after their volunteering period, either by being hired as volunteers' coordinators, or volunteering project coordinators.

Generally, all partners throughout the project have shared that their volunteers have expressed how their volunteering period as helped them getting experience in the area from which they would greatly benefit in the future searching in the job market.

Different beneficiaries have used this project to involve the community and explore the potential of groups of people with fewer opportunities. MARCA ADL and MTV have for example focused their efforts of the reception of local volunteers. MTV has worked with the local professional schools giving the opportunity to students involved with nature-based studies to improve their knowledge and get some on-field experience for their future. P1A has given the opportunity to 12 local young people, with few opportunities to engage with the project for almost a year. Other beneficiaries such as MONTIS and P1A have collaborated with associations for mentally handicap people or refugees in activities dedicated to nature conservation in which the ESC volunteers have participated, such as ASSOL (Assoc.Sol.Soc.Lafões and Lisbon Project).

This enrollment of the project with local communities, and specially in partners that have a more isolated scope of work, such as P1A in Vila Pouca de Aguiar, MONTIS or MARCA, the volunteers have played a crucial part in the positive impacts of their stay in isolated locals helping to fight against the rural abandonment. For example, MONTIS has had more than 20 volunteers passing the village of Deilão, a village with only 5 habitants. The volunteers daily helped, after fieldwork, the population with their agricultural tasks, have participated on old traditions with them, such as magusto (chestnut festival) or desfolhada (preparation of storing of corn). P1A Vila Pouca de Aguiar, as well, as received 44 volunteers in the village of Afonsim. The village only has between 30 to 40 habitants and the insertion of this volunteers into their community has played a great part on the social and local economy.

Although it is still very soon and not being possible to measure the impact, it is expected that the exhibition of the series produces effects of the dissemination of the natura 2000 network, of the importance of volunteering for nature conservation, and consequently simultaneously motivates new volunteers and new volunteer projects for nature conservation and an increased interest in the management and conservation of the Natura 2000 network.

The volunteers have worked in degraded areas helping improve their resilience to problems that Portugal environment faces, such as wildfires. The work done by the volunteers, can help diminish the impact of wildfires into the intervention areas which produces positive economic and social effects. The gathering of the biodiversity information made by the volunteers throughout these 3 years of project have also provided relevant information for the general and scientific community. For example, volunteers in MONTIS used the platform iNaturalist to record the biodiversity evolution of the intervention areas, this has translated in finding such as record of *Platycerus spinifer* a very specific type and endemic type of Lucanus.

Overall, it was a great benefit in terms of social benefits to have received international volunteers during the project, it has made the experience richer and more diverse to the volunteers and the community that was involved with them. It was surprising seeing the low interest from national volunteers to want to engage with the project, which demonstrates that Portugal is a country that is much less socially prepared for this type of initiatives. We believe that the project has added a demonstrative value to the community, sharing the potential of this

type of projects to the potential interested ones by having volunteers engaged with the project. It is expected that this project can give a small contribution to the increase of this type of opportunities to future generations and that make the community more interested in being part of projects that work with volunteering for nature conservation.

#### 4. Replicability, transferability, cooperation:

From the experience acquired with this project, long-term volunteering programmes have proven to be of great value for nature conservation. Being a preparatory project, LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES helped understanding the difficulties and constraints of working with volunteering programmes for nature conservation, but also, and specially the value of these projects.

It seems to be likely that LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES could be replicated and would be successful done so. Walking nowadays to a more green-driven society and with the sustainable development goals of EU the search from the younger generation for projects that can fulfil their desire for doing something to fight for nature there is a need for these projects to arise. Many volunteers received under this project have shared their desire to engage with these types of projects before but have found that the projects available in Europe are very limited, either for the restrictions imposed to be part of the project, or even the number of calls and funding available.

However, despite the existence of a clear search and market for this type of project, and the benefits and value they can bring to nature conservation and associations connected to these matters, the existence of entities that can finance these projects and retribute financially the volunteers are very scarce. Nature conservation fortunately is getting more financial assistance every day, but the combination of volunteering work for nature conservation, which from the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES outcomes is of great value to have a continuous work on habitat restoration and awareness raising, does not seem yet to have enough spotlight.

During the course of the project, the partnership has shown and presented the work of the volunteers in nature conservation to the community and to entities that would be potentially interested in replicating, with the means to do so, the project. As mentioned under Action B.3, resulting from the dissemination of the projects TV series, the coordinating beneficiary was contacted by Instituto Federal Farroupilha of Panambi from Brazil, to discuss the possibility of replicating the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project, in Brazil. A meeting between the Instituto Federal Farroupilha of Panambi and MONTIS was held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021, with the participation of the Brazilian NGO Arpa Fiúza, where the project was presented, the issues of the region of action of the Instituto Federal was presented as well as the needs of the region regarding nature conservation. The discussion has also allowed the parties to brainstorm a raw project application. A future meeting was scheduled, and the next steps will converge with the need to find an entity to finance this project replication.

In September 2018, MONTIS was invited to participate and present the project in the “Platform meeting” – “Volunteering for Nature Conservation” in Tartu, Estonia. As a result of the networking made by the project manager and assistant in this meeting, MONTIS has submitted in 2019, as a partner, an application for an ESC volunteering project with the Latvian Fund for Nature with short-term volunteers (6 weeks) that will occur during 2022 (postponed due to Covid-19). In the preparatory meetings of the project questions related to the ideal duration of

the volunteering periods for nature conservation have been discussed as well as the management needed for this type of volunteers. MONTIS has been sharing the experience that resulted from LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES and the lessons learnt from the beneficiaries in order to improve future volunteering project.

The experience gained with the execution of the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES has been complemented with the other LIFE projects that several beneficiaries of the project have managed and been part of, such as LIFE Terras do Priolo (SPEA), LIFE Ilhas Barreira (SPEA), LIFE LINES (MARCA ADL) and LIFE ELCN (MONTIS). This complemented experience has also allowed the partnership to invest in new LIFE projects, for example MONTIS is currently leading a volunteering group under the project LIFE ENPLC for nature conservation in private land. This volunteering group deals with volunteering topics with a vast European network of partners, that include entities such as Natuurpunt, NABU, Eurosite and MONTIS is transferring all the experience and knowledge acquired receiving and managing volunteers with LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES to the partners of this new project that want to implement volunteering for nature conservation projects. A webinar is being organized with the theme of volunteering in private land in which several LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES ex-volunteers will present their input from their volunteering period and MONTIS will present the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project and lessons learnt.

Besides the external partnerships that have benefit from the experience acquired with this project, the instrument of this project has also benefits to take from it. The European Solidarity Corps could design and open specific calls for 6 months volunteering to work in nature conservation projects, with flexible volunteering periods such as the ones provided by LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES, that seem to be applying to volunteers that do not want to commit for longer periods of time, and also want to have the possibility of continue to engage with other ESC projects in the future, and wouldn't be able to if engaged with a long term volunteering from the start (ESC guidelines).

The partnership has also used the experience acquired with this project to replicate and design volunteering projects, for example MARCA ADL, MONTIS and P1A are partners on a ESC volunteering programme, Nature.com, that is based on a model very close to the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES one (volunteers from several nationalities, together by long periods of time working in nature conservation). The Project is already on course and is benefiting greatly from the experience acquired during LIFE VESC and is being important to continue the work done by the volunteers received regarding nature conservation.

During the project development, P1A has programmed and developed a series of field trip activities, to which the ESC volunteers have participated and has allowed the beneficiaries to have a larger reach regarding nature conservation actions in other intervention areas. These field trip activities, were reported previously in the project reports, and have originated three new progress indicators under action A.8. Consequentially to these activities, and with the necessity to link these activities to the project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES, as the activities were developed by the project's volunteers, P1A has used a *label* "Volunteer ESCAPES" to refer to their camps. This label allowed the beneficiary to have a better reach to the public, and in social media and will continue to be used after the project is finished. A more detailed information about this label can be found on the project's After-LIFE.

In conclusion with this project was possible to comprehend:

- The economic advantages of long-term volunteering versus short-term volunteering, as the long-term volunteers have enabled to reduce the efforts of constant recruitment efforts (when compared to short-term volunteers), better results regarding quality and quantity of the tasks to be implemented, as the long-term volunteers have more time to adapt and internalize their tasks when compared with short-term volunteers that do not have time to evolve their volunteering and engagement with the project purposes.
- Despite the volunteering not replacing the professional work and not being necessarily less costly it has more relevant outcomes than professional work, such as the awareness raising and sensibilization for environmental issues and sharing of possible solutions for them, creation of public opinion about these topics, and volunteer's capacitation.
- Volunteering is a great instrument with great benefits to be used by NGO's for their social impacts.

#### 5. Best Practice lessons:

During the course of the project the partnership has been able to learn and adjust the methods for employment of volunteers foreseen in the application. It was important to understand the volunteers' expectations and motivations to be in the project and how that would evolve and influence their volunteering time. It was important to understand the need of a full-time volunteer's coordinator allocated to the team of volunteers received to improve their field dynamics.

Managing long-term volunteers has proven to be a challenge. Managing the expectations of the volunteer before the volunteering period was one of the best adjustments employed by the partnership during this project.

The description of the volunteering tasks, the team arrangement, coordination, and general management, during the recruitment period as sometimes been perceived differently by volunteers, as well as understating the monotony and the physical demand of working with nature conservation. Shorter volunteering periods and consequent extensions if needed of the volunteering period when the volunteer is already in the project, have proven to be more effective to maintain the volunteer's interest in the project. The commitment for such long-periods of time (more than 3 months) for many volunteers was a decisive point to not engage with the project. The partnership has also come to understand that a mutual flexibility regarding planning and schedule between the volunteers and the coordination of the beneficiaries has proven to be useful to maintain the engagement of the volunteers with the tasks under contract.

As a preparatory project, these lessons learnt and the adjustments that the partnership has deployed can be a great asset for future volunteering in nature projects.

#### 6. Innovation and demonstration value:

Being a preparatory call itself, there was an innovative dimension related to the test of using the LIFE funding to support volunteers from the European Solidarity Corps for long-term volunteering for nature conservation. Despite all the problems that the project has faced, arising mostly from administrative issues related to the need to make both programmes compatible, the conclusion of the project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES is that there are many advantages in combining these two programmes.

Most of these advantages have already been referred throughout this final report, but to make a final statement on this subject these advantages are listed below:

- It allows longer volunteering periods, that typically between 3 to 6 months provide more and better conservation results, more engagement of the volunteers, and more capacity building and valuing of volunteers.
- It allows volunteers to receive a larger amount of pocket money. This has proven to be an important factor to increase the engagement of volunteers for longer periods of time.
- The possibility of using all the knowledge, structure, and experience from both programmes into a project is very empowering. There would have to be adjustments to the administrative processes and also an evolution in terms of the ESC platform to make it more adapted to this type of volunteers, but the outcomes would certainly overcome the efforts.

Using long-term volunteering for nature conservation has proven to be an important and effective tool and the LIFE program should consider the possibility of integrating ESC volunteers in the traditional projects for nature conservation, namely giving additional points in the evaluation of LIFE applications. Volunteering is one of the best tools to raise awareness in nature conservation and biodiversity, as the volunteers will be involved in an on-field nature conservation that brings them close to the environmental problems. An interesting result from this engagement of volunteers in on-field nature conservation that has been revealed throughout this project is the increase of the interested regarding nature conservation and environmental issues of volunteers from non-environmental related study-areas. These volunteers will potentially be future helpers for new projects and new ideas related to environment and conservation.

One of the most innovative topics of this project was the testing of a joint-volunteering programme, that would allow the volunteers to interchange knowledge acquired in the different beneficiaries regarding nature conservation and experience the work done by different types of institutions of nature conservation. This programme however demonstrated to have, during the 3 years of the project's course, low enrolment, and interest from the volunteers. The motivation needed for a volunteer to enrol with this type of programme is very specific. It was important throughout the project to adapt the original plan for this programme and to approach it with different guidelines. Instead of having volunteers deciding to engage with the project since the start the partnership allowed the enrolment after being in the project as a regular volunteer, or as discontinuous volunteers (doing 2 months in one beneficiary in 2019 and another 2 months in another beneficiary in 2021 for example); The period of volunteering of 2 months in each beneficiary was often not well taken by the volunteers, despite it being a reasonable minimum time to engage with this type of project.

Despite the adaptations made there was a constraint felt by the partnership to increase the number of joint volunteers, the availability to receive volunteers at the time they had interest. Has the demand for the joint programme was lower than the regular programme, and the partnership was focused on receiving as many volunteers as possible, there would often not be availability on the volunteers' teams in the beneficiaries to accommodate a potential joint-volunteer.

By the end of the project's time, the partnership was getting more experienced in dealing with the logistics involved to receive joint volunteers and to motivate potential volunteers to this programme. However, it seems unlikely for now, that unless this type of programme is

restructured with some of the lessons learnt from LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES it would not be a viable long-term volunteering programme. It would be also an interesting perspective to look at this type of programme as a more flexible type of volunteering, for example 2 weeks in a different beneficiary, or more volunteering camps/days with the different teams of the beneficiaries, as P1A has done during the project. This would provide the volunteers some insight on how the volunteering works in other association without having to commit beforehand and to know other volunteers in the project.

Despite the difficulties from our project regarding the joint volunteering programme, the lessons learnt from the partnership on how to better manage this type of volunteering could help improve projects within this scope. Joint volunteering programmes not only would allow the volunteers to have different experiences on several associations but can also bring the associations involved a greater interaction, networking, and cooperation with each other. Projects that could foment the cooperation of European associations for nature conservation, conservation, and policy, etc.

## 7. Key Project-level Indicators

The execution of reception of volunteers finished with 83,3%, almost at 100% despite all the constraints felt during the project. The nature conservation indicators, distributed by actions A.4 to A.11, were also largely complied with, with several of the indicators ending up with an over-execution of what was expected in the application. It was possible with the project to reach 240.6 ha of protected and restored habitat and 94842 of native trees planted, for example. The progress indicators that were significantly lower than expected in the application were the project's communication and networking indicators. The partnership had difficulty, without a fixed communication team, to put into practice the project's communication plan, and the pandemic situation of the last two years, not only made the networking plans made unfeasible, but also forced the beneficiaries to focus even more on recruiting volunteers in order to achieve as much execution as possible by the end of the project.

For most of the socio-economic indicators chosen by the partnership the baseline was 0, as working with long-term volunteering was a new tool for most beneficiaries. For those indicators that had a baseline, especially the social indicators regarding enrolment of the community and the economic indicators regarding local partners, jobs created and local expenses with the project, were, in most beneficiaries, especially on NGO's, greatly increased.

With all the activities developed within the project, it was possible to involve more than 25114 people with the ESC volunteers and nature conservation works; Create an average of three job positions in each beneficiary and establish partnerships with more than 86 local suppliers.

## 8. Comments on the financial report

At the beginning of the project, the individual financial statement provided through the LIFE toolkit was filled in, which did not include the specific items of this Project, F6A and F6B regarding costs with volunteers. The partnership inserted sheets for these costs in this document. At the end of 2019, a new individual financial statement was provided by the external monitoring team for the project that foreseen for these items mentioned, but which in terms of personnel did not provide the necessary information for the daily rate calculations. It was decided after a meeting with the monitoring team that the beneficiaries would continue to use

the old excel to fill in the personnel categories (F1) in order to obtain the daily rate calculations that would later be added to the new financial statement.

Despite the challenges felt during the course of the project, especially in the reception of volunteers, it was possible, with the 6-month extension requested at the end of 2020, to reach 90.6% of the total financial execution of the project. A more detailed analysis by heading can be found below, in section 8.1.

During the project, with progress reports, mid-term report and monitoring visits, the partnership responded to requests for clarification of doubts and suggestions from the EC. All letters and their responses, as well as documents from the external monitoring visits, can be found in Annex XII “Communication with EC and NEEMO”.

### 8.1. Summary of Costs Incurred

PROJECT COSTS INCURRED			
Cost category	Budget according to the grant agreement in €*	Costs incurred within the reporting period in €	%**
1. Personnel	693760	738480,34	106,4%
2. Travel and subsistence	98951	40667,78	41,1%
3. External assistance	102516	142081,72	138,6%
4. Consumables	75046	67437,93	89,9%
5. Other direct costs	70661	50283,83	71,2%
6. Costs for volunteers (insurance)	15675	2879,72	18,4%
7. Costs for volunteers – Organisational support	586495	441074,86	75,2%
8. Overheads	108798	103701,50	95,3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1751902</b>	<b>1586607,68</b>	<b>90,6%</b>

\*) If the EASME has officially approved a budget modification through an amendment, indicate the breakdown of the revised budget. Otherwise, this should be the budget in the original grant agreement.

\*\*) Calculate the percentages by budget lines: e.g. the % of the budgeted personnel costs that were actually incurred

The overall costs at the end of the project were 90,6% of the budget foreseen in the application. As predicted on the second progress report, due to the increase of the duration of the project’s actions initially to December 2020 and after to June 2021, the personnel category has surpassed the 100% execution foreseen in the application to 106,4%. However, in fact, this execution should consider the exceeded execution as well under External Assistance category, as several beneficiaries (APA ARH-Algarve, RV, Playsolutions) have switched their personnel costs to this category in result of the external audit to the project.

Despite the constraints throughout the project to the reception of volunteers, with the project’s extension it was possible to achieve, as mentioned, 83,2% of volunteer’s execution, which has translated on an increase to 75,2% of financial execution for the category costs for volunteers – organisational support. Still under the foreseen in application as the execution for either regular volunteers or joint volunteers received have not been 100% achieved. The category for costs for volunteers – insurance finished with a quite low execution, 18,4% from the foreseen in application. This is due mostly to the changes on the insurance market since the application to the time of hiring

for the reception of volunteers. The insurance costs were lower than the foreseen in application which has translated into a lower execution rate.

The individual financial statements of the project's beneficiaries and consolidated financial statement with more detailed information of the project's costs can be found under Annex XIII – "Financial Report". It is to mention that due to the impossibility of clearly calculating the daily rates of the project's personnel with the new financial statements templates provided at the end of 2019, the partnership has used the financial statements for personnel from the initial financial statement templates to calculate the costs for personnel. The costs were then copied to the new financial statement template. You can find the initial financial statement for personnel under Annex XIII – "Financial Report" as well. It is also to highlight that the financial statement for personnel costs has an error of "budget not in balance" only since this template was not completely filled, only the sheets for the personnel.

In spite of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020 and the difficulties it has imposed the reception of volunteers into the project during the following years, the partnership continued to work with the volunteers already in the project at the time, and the project's extension has proven to be a good decision to increase not only the financial execution of the overall project but also the reception of volunteers received. From the extension to the project request until June 2021, the main focused of the partnership was to increase as much as possible the volunteers' teams to achieve a better execution result than the foreseen at the end of December 2020, 54% for joint volunteers and 19% for joint volunteers. These efforts made by the beneficiaries, and as predicted, have translated into the increase of execution of many financial categories, especially in personnel and volunteers' costs. Three beneficiaries have finished the project above 100% of execution (MARCA ADL, Plantar uma Árvore, APA-ARH Algarve). As the rest of the project's beneficiaries have stayed below the 100% execution foreseen in the application the exceeded budget by these three beneficiaries can be compensated with the budget of the beneficiaries that have not completed their execution.

As it can analyse on the individual statement reports and consolidated report, many of the beneficiaries' categories have surpassed the 100% financial execution, all to ensure the materials, support and coordination of the volunteers received on the project's extension.

The exceeded execution of the financial categories and the overall execution of the three mentioned partners have considered and respected the flexibility of 20% limit of budget transfers foreseen under the project's Grant Agreement Article II.22 – Budget Transfers. It is kindly requested again that all the expenses made within the projects execution not foreseen in the application to be accepted as eligible expenditures. Other changes to the budget foreseen in the application and already reported on previous reports and monitoring visits can be found under Annex XII – "Communication with EC and Neemo".

## 8.2. Accounting system

In order to ensure that the invoices charged to the project by the beneficiaries can be easily linked to the project, the beneficiaries during the project took into account some of the methods suggested by the EC, such as putting the description of the project code on the invoices, project stamp or invoices are placed on cost centers created by almost all partners.

At the personnel level, timesheets were filled in for the personnel assigned to the project, unless the personnel are assigned by contract 100% to the project, which allows the non-use of the timesheet.

Regarding the accounting system of each beneficiary, as reported previously, all beneficiaries except APA ARH-Algarve have created an accounting system specifically for the project to allow the track of the project's costs. Below are brief explanations of the beneficiaries accounting systems:

- MONTIS has created an accounting system with the code 913 for the LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES project. All expenses of the project, after approved and stamped with the projects code were sent to the accountancy company of MONTIS to be categorized to the projects accounting system. This method as allowed the easy track of the expenses regarding the project. After the expenses were classified by the accountancy company were then confirmed by the project manager, filled into the

financial statement of MONTIS and digitalized to the shared drive platform of the project. All personnel under the project in MONTIS have filled timesheets for their time on the project.

- BCSD has created an accounting system code 14100 for the expenses of the project. All expenses were stamped with the projects code and classified into the mentioned accounting system by the subcontracted company for this matter. Afterwards, the expenses were filled to the LIFE financial statement of BCSD and digitalized to the share drive platform. All personnel under the project have filled timesheets monthly for their time on the project.
- SPEA has created an accounting system code 265 for the project's expenses under the financial programme SAGE. The expenses were stamped with the project's code, the payments were supervised by the project's coordinator and were sent to the accountancy company to be classified under the accounting system mentioned. The project's coordinator was in charge of filling the financial statement of SPEA for the project with the expenses incurred. All staff involved in the project have filled a monthly timesheet for their project's time.
- Municipio de Torres Vedras has used the code 246099017 to all costs associated with the project LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES. All invoices of the project's expenses were stamped with the projects code and allocated to the categories of the LIFE financial statement of MTV. Staff allocated to the project has filled a timesheet for their project's time.
- Rota Vicentina has 11 cost centre codes to LIFE VOLUNTEERS ESCAPES Project. To ensure that invoices contained a clear reference to the LIFE project, after an internal approval, Rota Vicentina, contacted, by email, the supplier to approve a quotation for a LIFE expense and inform him/her that the invoice or receipt had to have a mandatory data plus the service or product description: "LIFE VOLUNTEER ESCAPES / LIFE17 ESC/PT/003". When the invoice arrived, the Project Manager checked if the mandatory data was there, if yes, the invoice would be sent to the Financial Manager to be paid. If it was not possible to fill the project's code on the invoice, the invoice would be stamped with the projects code. Regarding the timesheets, every personnel related to the project had its own timesheet, electronically full filed until the end of each month.
- MARCA ADL has created different accounting system codes for the project expenses: "A1 - Co- Definition of Joint Volunteering Program and Preparation of Individual Volunteering Plans" has the code 110; "A2 - Updating Information on Concrete Conservation Areas and Detailing Conservation Activities/Tasks" has the code 111; "A5 - Volunteering Activities for Green Infrastructure within the Municipality of Montemor-o-Novo" has the code 112; "B4 - Networking with other LIFE projects/teams" has the code 113; "C1 - Overall Project, Partnership and Stakeholder Management" has the code 114; "C2 - Overall Management of the ESC Volunteering Cycle" has the code 115; "C4 - Monitoring project outputs and impact in LIFE performance Indicators and the local socio-economy" has the code 116; "Overheads" has the code 117. The project expenses were all recorded with the respective cost center and were validated monthly by two people from the headboard.
- PLAYSOLUTIONS has created the accounting system code 10 for the project's expenses. All expenses were stamped with the projects code or added an observation on the invoice with the project's code. After the expenses are classified by the accounting company were then filled by the coordinator to the LIFE financial statement. All staff related to the project has filled a respective timesheet for their time on the project.
- PLANTAR UMA ÁRVORE – Associação has created the accounting system code P1A LIFE17 ESC and has allocated the category of expenses related with the project to the

described code. All expenses of the project were either stamped with the project's code or added the project's code in observations of the invoice. Every expense was added to the LIFE financial statement with the document number and relevant information. P1A staff has not filled timesheets as their time was 100% under the project.

- APA ARH- Algarve, Public institution, has not created, as previously reported, and explained, an autonomous accounting cost center for the project's expenses. The project-specific expenses were identified in the contracting procedures with the indication of the LIFE project code, allowing for their individualization and correct identification. For the expenses regarding personnel the criteria defined by the LIFE Programme Regulations were followed for the allocation of this type of expenses. Under Annex XII "Communication with EC and NEEMO", a document can be found that demonstrates an example that specifies how an expense was accounted on the accounting system. All staff under the projects have filled timesheets for their time.

### 8.3. Partnership arrangements (if relevant)

At the beginning of the project, it was decided between the partners to create an online platform, Google Drive, where all auxiliary documents for managing the project would be placed. A specific folder for the financial management of each partner was created. In this folder, subfolders were created with the categories of expenses defined in the project application. These subfolders were used to place the scans of all expenses charged to the project by the beneficiaries.

In each beneficiary folder, the Financial Statement of each beneficiary was also added. At the beginning of the project, the old Financial Statement model indicated by the EC was used, which later in 2019 the partnership changed to fill in the recent financial statement provided and requested by the EC. As this last financial statement did not provide for the same daily rate calculations as the previous document, and following the 3rd monitoring visit by NEEMO, each beneficiary used only the personnel items from the initial document for the daily rate calculations that were later added in the current financial document.

Each beneficiary was responsible for monthly filling in the corresponding financial statements and for digitizing the documents relating to expenses. The financial statement was subsequently reviewed quarterly, or when necessary monthly, by the coordinating beneficiary, as well as the timesheets associated with the staff assigned to the project, and inconsistencies found were discussed with the beneficiaries in question.

The Consolidated Cost Statement presented with the final report was produced by the project manager at the coordinating beneficiary based on the individual financial statements provided and filled in by the partners.

The partnership contracts, sent with the mid-term report, were unchanged throughout the project.

### 8.4. Certificate on the financial statement

In Accordance with the project's Grant Agreement, the coordinator beneficiary has hired an external entity to audit the project. LCA - Leal, Carreira & Associados SROC LDA was chosen by MONTIS as the entity to audit the project based on their experience with LIFE project's. A contract between both parties was celebrated in July 2019.

The auditor's report can be found under Annex VIII – "External Audit".

## 8.5. Estimation of person-days used per action

As reported previously on the project's mid-term report, delivered on 25/04/2019, the partnership has not foreseen the hours or days per action of the personnel integrated in the project. Therefore, the partnership has decided to not fill this table as it would not be realistic within the application.