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# PROTECTION OF BIODIVERSITY FROM INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

# ACTION PLAN

FINAL VERSION

May 2021

## INTRODUCTION

“Protecting European Biodiversity from Invasive Alien Species/ INVALIDIS” is an Interreg Europe programme project (Nr.PGI05271) that is implemented by seven European countries from June 1, 2018 to May 31, 2023. The Interreg Europe programme aims to facilitate the exchange of experience on national policies and to explore new policies with an aim to improve the content of existing policies.

The INVALIDIS project aims to improve the implementation of policy measures in the project regions by stimulating actions related to the prevention, early detection and control of invasive alien species (IAS) and eradication in terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments.

The aim of the INVALIDIS project is to improve the knowledge and capacity of public administration employees about IAS policies, including the improvement of Latvian policy measures related to:

- 1) Identification of the main types of IAS entry and spread in Latvia and development of actions that would increase the resilience of natural areas to IAS;
- 2) Raising public awareness on the impacts of IAS on biodiversity and agriculture, involving the private sector (landowners) to promote preventive and restorative measures;
- 3) Inclusion of IAS management measures in various policy planning documents.

INVALIDIS project partner in Latvia is Zemgale Planning Region (ZPR).

The project application envisages the preparation of actions for the existing operational program "Growth and Employment". This operational program expires in 2020, but the implementation phase of the INVALIDIS project with the preparation of the action plan lasts until May 2021. Therefore, ZPR agreed with the project lead partner “National Environment and Climate Change Agency” (Greece) that the action plan for Latvia will be developed with the aim to prepare actions for the Latvian Operational Program for 2021-2027. This approach is more rational in terms of both the design of actions and the allocation of funding. The Interreg Europe Programme Secretariat also supports a similar approach to the development of action plans.

## POLICY FRAMEWORK

When drafting the Action Plan, links between the IAS governance policy and other national and regional documents defining development policies, as well as the funding programs for these policies, were assessed (see Figure 1). The Action Plan of the INVALIDIS project is being developed in parallel with the development of new national and regional level planning documents for 2021-2027 by various state and regional institutions. Representatives of the INVALIDIS project of Zemgale planning region communicate and participate in various planning processes to ensure that policy makers consider ISS management aspects in both policy planning documents and funding programs.

The National Development Plan for 2021-2027 and the relevant sectoral policy documents form the basis for the development of the new Operational Program for 2021-2027. Moreover, the Environmental Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027 also play an important role, as the document will include the goals and tasks on biodiversity protection, including problem solving in relation to the IAS. The second key document is the Natura 2000 Priority Action Program for 2021-2027, which is still in the development phase in spring 2021. This action program will form a basis for the Specific Support Objectives (SAM) programs under the Operational Program, which will also cover measures related to IAS management. Accordingly, in the spring of 2021, the SAM programs are only at an early stage of development.

The second edition of the ZPR Development Program for 2021-2027 defines nine medium-term development priorities, action directions for achieving development priorities and planned results. The fifth priority “Adaptation to climate change and mitigation, circular economy” includes the action line “RV 5.2. *Preservation of biological diversity, creation of green infrastructure*”. RV 5.2. Also includes

direct actions related to invasive alien species: R5.2.4 - *Development and implementation of an action plan for combating invasive species with the participation of ZPR, municipalities and Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies*. The development of such plans is also included in the draft Environmental Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027. However, such an activity is not directly included in the National Operational Program, but other financial instruments, such as Interreg Programme projects or LIFE Programme projects could address it.

Priority of the operational program 2.2. "Environmental protection" and SAM 2.2.3 "Improving nature protection and biodiversity, green infrastructure, especially in the urban environment, and reducing pollution" are in accordance with ZPR Development Programme project point 5.2.: *Preservation of biological diversity, creation of green infrastructure*. RV5.2. includes a number of actions, which may also include measures aimed at IAS management.

SAM 2.2.3 "Improving nature protection and biodiversity, green infrastructure, especially in the urban environment, and reducing pollution" includes the "Environmental education" measure for education and public participation in nature protection. When developing these kinds of documents, policy makers should support the topic of identifying and combating IAS.

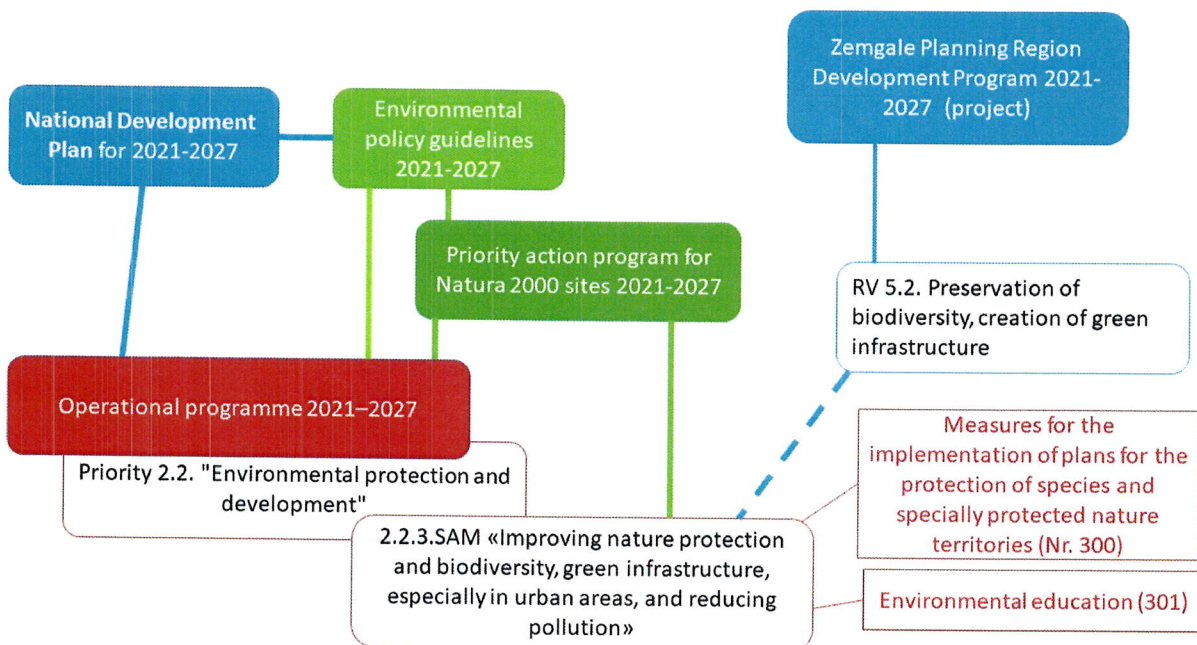


Figure 1. Content link between national and regional policy planning and financial planning documents in the field of IAS governance

## STAKEHOLDERS

The development of the Action Plan is linked to the stakeholder seminars and meetings organized during the INVALIDIS project, where participants were invited to submit their proposals for the improvement of the IAS governance policy and its implementation mechanisms. Six meetings were organized, in which representatives of various state and local governments described the current policy, challenges, as well as measures to tackle the problem. Nature experts and scientists shared their experience with the methods used so far to combat and control IAS. NGO sector representatives and project experts shared their experience in public participation activities aimed at providing information on identifying and combating IAS.

## GOOD PRACTICES

During the implementation of the INVALIDIS project, ZPR has identified the most appropriate practices related to the challenges of Latvian IAS management. In total, the INVALIDIS project has gathered information on 15 good practice examples - <https://www.interregeurope.eu/invalidis/good-practices/>.

The collected practices demonstrate:

- 1) How to raise public awareness on IAS recognition and identification, using various platforms and mobile applications, where it is possible to find information about the IAS and register their spread;
- 2) How to organize national monitoring and information events, risk assessments and monitoring of the IAS;
- 3) How to involve the public in combating IAS by organizing campaigns and voluntary actions for the restoration of natural areas.

# “PROTECTING EUROPEAN BIODIVERSITY FROM INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES / INVALIDIS”

## I – General information

Project: “Protecting European Biodiversity from Invasive Alien Species / INVALIDIS”

Partner organization: Zemgale Planning Region

Other partner organizations (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Country: Latvia

NUTS2 region: Latvia

NUTS3 region: Zemgale

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## II – Policy context

Linking the action plan to documents:  Growth and Employment Programme  
 European Territorial Cooperation Programme  
 Other regional development policy documents

Title of the policy document:

- Operational programme for 2021-2027
- Environmental policy guidelines for 2021-2027
- Zemgale planning region development program for 2021-2027

## III – Description of the planned actions

### **ACTION 1 RAISING AWARENESS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC RISKS AND IMPACTS OF INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES**

1. **Justification** (please describe the lessons learned during the project, which are the basis for the development of this Action Plan)

The INVALIDIS project aims to improve the implementation of policy measures in the participating regions by stimulating actions related to the prevention, early detection and control of invasive alien species (IAS), as well as the limitation of these species in terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments. One of the key aspects of limiting IAS is timely and comprehensive dissemination of information to both the general public and individual target groups. Project surveys and stakeholder discussions highlighted the lack of information and knowledge in the project region.

The dissemination activities carried out until 2021 have been fragmentary, mainly by individual projects that have demonstrated ways of involving and informing the public in identifying and combating IAS. However, the strategic and systematic approach as outlined by this action is lacking. The LIFE IP LatViaNature project (2020-2028) has also included activities to raise awareness of the spread of IAS and its consequences.

Action 2 is also in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which emphasizes the need to restore nature: substantially improving the status of protected species and habitats, increasing landscape elements and organic farming in rural areas, ensuring good marine environment, restoring free flow for rivers, helping with urban greening plans, as well as limiting the impact of invasive species.

Public awareness-raising approaches have been demonstrated in several examples of good practices from INVALIDIS project partners, such as: "[Daru labu dabai](#)" (I do good to nature), "[Is it alien to you? Share it!](#)"; "[Invasoras](#)".

This action has been influenced by good practice "Daru labu dabai". The initiative seeks to create a sense of cohesion between public authorities, environmental organisations, volunteers and local communities and set forward a participatory and coordinated approach to IAS management. The aspiration is that local community participation and volunteering will sustain over time, making this a sustainable long-term solution for the management of invasive species. This action also involves different parties: state institutions, municipalities, landowners, pupils, volunteers etc.

Overall, the initiative "Daru labu darbu" aims to halt the proliferation of invasive alien species, by raising public awareness on the problems biological invasions cause and engaging local communities in reporting, control and management activities. This is also planned in this action: Mobile and internet platforms and applications for different target groups that explain the IAS problem, informs about the need for identification and reporting of IAS, as well as has information on restrictive and preventive methods.

The network is looking for volunteers to join efforts in the battle against invasive species. Volunteers should be passionate about nature and have a strong desire to contribute in conserving fragile natural ecosystems and keeping it clear of invasive alien species, for the benefit of native wildlife and local communities. Practical work is combined with capacity building activities, awareness raising campaigns, recreational opportunities and excursions in Latvian nature. The network provides a wide range of opportunities/ways for volunteers to contribute to IAS management, from invasive plant removal to reporting new sightings. Developing this action this practise has been used: Voluntary public involvement in clean-up (restoration) activities aimed at eradicating IAS in different areas.

Good practice "Is it alien to you?" (iSea) shows different new and attractive ways to inform society about IAS and we have used these ideas in the Action 1. This good practice aims to monitor the expansion and establishment of marine alien species in Greece and neighbouring countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, in particular Cyprus. The project is based on observations sent by non-experts that spend their time at the sea. Furthermore, citizen scientists sent to iSea specimens of alien and rare species in order to study their biology and ecology.

Good practise "Invasoras" goal is to raise awareness about biological invasions, make known the different invasive plants in Portugal and stimulate public participation in mapping of species, the control of plant populations and education. They have created comprehensive profiles of the species considered invasive in Portugal, and they provide useful tools and information for managers, scientific community members and anyone interested in the topic. In addition, "Invasoras" offer support material for environmental education, for teachers [and informal action groups](#). We have learned from this that when implementing activities, it is important to identify the precise target groups to be reached and then to create specific content for them. In this Action plan in Activity 1 actions have been planned for different target groups and under activities it is mentioned that prepared materials should also include a summary of practical advice on the control of different (plant, animal) IAS.

2. **Actions / activities** (please list and describe the activities to be performed)

Activity	Description
Informative materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital materials: videos, animations, brochures</li> <li>• Exhibitions and stands at nature trails and elsewhere, showing how to combat the IAS.</li> <li>• Mobile and internet platforms and applications for different target groups that explain the IAS problem, informs about the need for identification and reporting of IAS, as well as has information on restrictive and preventive methods.</li> <li>• The prepared materials should also include a summary of practical advice on the control of different (plant, animal) IAS.</li> </ul>
Informative events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaigns in various media to raise awareness and explain aspects of IAS management</li> <li>• Social network "trend" - pictures from areas with invasive species before and after clean-up, with explanations on how invasive species affect biodiversity; involving people (individually or in small groups) in the work and then disseminating it on social networks.</li> <li>• Competitions for agriculture farms to show good examples on how to address IAS issues;</li> <li>• Show the consequences experienced by other countries when not paying attention to IAS prevention measures, including information on costs</li> <li>• Interactive educational events in nature, in the form of games, excursions, hiking routes, educational tourism activities in nature.</li> </ul>
Training for different target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training for staff of Nature Conservation Agency, State Plant Protection Service, Food and Veterinary Service on the latest techniques in IAS eradication, public involvement; setting up a network of experts.</li> <li>• Training for landowners, managers and anyone interested in IAS threats, impacts and management.</li> </ul>
Activities for pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum standards, such as for mainstream schools.</li> <li>• Nature lessons for children in schools including hikes in meadows, forests, etc.</li> <li>• Educating in nature (outdoor) in the form of games, informative stands with icons and information on how to fight IAS.</li> </ul>
Public clean-up (restoration) activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary public involvement in clean-up (restoration) activities aimed at eradicating IAS in different areas. The emphasis could be on public outdoor spaces in municipalities.</li> <li>• Involve angler in competitions, where they need to catch invasive fish species.</li> </ul>

3. **Parties involved** (please identify the organizations in the region involved in the design and implementation of the action plan and explain their role)

Zemgale Planning Region develops actions and implements them.

Nature conservation Agency coordinating institution on IAS management in Latvia, leading partner in the LIFE IP LatViaNature project, which also manages activities on the topic of IAS management.

State Plant Protection Service – control body for invasive plants.

Food and Veterinary Service – supervisory authority for animals.

Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development – plans financial resources for SAM programmes, also developing specific implementation requirements, this organization is important in planning action support.

ZPR municipalities – supports ZPR in the implementation of various activities at the local level.

#### 4. Time period

The identified planning documents within which this action will be implemented are from year 2021 to 2027. The planning of specific activities must take into account the available funding and the relevant programme (DP – SAM 2.2.3, 2.1.3) (Interreg Latvia-Lithuania; Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus), project (LIFE LatViaNature IP) schedules.

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#### 5. Costs (if applicable)

Costs vary depending on which of the activities are included in specific projects.

#### 6. Source of financing (if necessary):

Main possible source of funding is SAM 2.2.3. “Improving nature protection and biodiversity, green infrastructure, especially in the urban environment, and reducing pollution”. It could be connected with National Development Plan 2027 measure “Environmental Education”, where it is planned to support skills development (professional training), incl. in fields related to the environment and the circular economy; knowledge transfer; environmental information and non-formal education in sectors related to climate, nature, waste, air pollution, energy, bio economy.

While this source is not yet available, LIFE IP LatViaNature project could ensure the implementation of Activities of Action 1. The Latvian Environmental Protection Fund also regularly announces competitions for various educational events.

As the level of invasive alien species is relatively high on the Lithuanian border<sup>1</sup> and in the medium range on the Latvian border, activities could be implemented through the Latvia-Lithuania cross-border cooperation program, where the Zemgale planning region is one of the active partners in project implementation.

### **ACTION 2 SUPPORT FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IAS ERADICATION AND CONTAINMENT MEASURES IN NATURAL AREAS**

#### 7. **Justification** (please describe the lessons learned during the project, which are the basis for the development of this Action Plan)

The INVALIDIS project aims to improve the implementation of policy measures in the participating regions by stimulating actions related to the prevention, early detection and control of invasive alien species (IAS), as well as the limitation of these species in terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments. As two plant and nine animal species specified in the EU regulation are found in the wild in Latvia, it is important to provide support in the implementation of eradication and containment measures. In addition, experts are developing the Latvian National List of Invasive Species, which will make an additional contribution to the protection of biological diversity in the country.

Action 2 is also in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which emphasizes the need to restore nature: substantially improving the status of protected species and habitats, increasing landscape elements and organic farming in rural areas, ensuring good marine environment, restoring free flow for rivers, helping with urban greening plans, as well as limiting the impact of invasive species.

The planning and implementation of measures to limit the spread of invasive alien species [in specially protected nature territories and areas of protected habitats] is included as one of the measures in the draft Environmental Policy Guidelines for 2021-2027.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://latlit.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Border-Orientation-Paper-LV-LT.pdf>



INVALIDIS project partners shared their experiences with the development and implementation of various IAS control methods. One example is from Romania – “IAS early detection & monitoring system in Constanta”, and Portugal - “Invasoras” <https://invasoras.pt/en/>. Good practice “Invasoras” informs society, specialists, experts about IAS species, about control and combat methods, that could be used in Action 2 implementation. Best practice from Constanta, Romania is valuable, because there are nature reserves, national parks included in territory and in Latvia the financing is planned for Nature 2000 territories.

**8. Actions / activities** (please list and describe the activities to be performed)

Activity	Description
Restoration of invaded habitats and ecosystems	Practical activities for the restoration of biodiversity in significantly affected areas, taking into account expert assessments.
Equipment support for combating invasive species	Small grant schemes, small-scale investment projects can support local organizations and municipalities to purchase the necessary equipment to combat IAS in public outdoor spaces and in hard-to-reach and difficult-to-manage places (river valleys, ravines, roadsides).

In order to stimulate and effectively implement these activities, it is important to provide information on experience and methods for each of the IAS. Since not all landowners can combat IAS themselves, it is important to provide information about potential service providers who can ensure to implement the measures needed.

**9. Stakeholders** (please identify the organizations in the region involved in the design and implementation of the action plan and explain their role)

Zemgale Planning Region: develops projects, participates in their implementation, and involves various target groups.

Nature Conservation Agency: coordinating institution on IAS management in Latvia, leading partner in the LIFE IP LatViaNature project, which also manages activities on the topic of IAS management.

State Plant Protection Service – control body for invasive plants.

Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development – plans financial resources for SAM programmes, also developing specific implementation requirements, this organization is important in planning action support.

ZPR municipalities – supporting ZPR in the implementation of various activities at the local level.

**10. Time period**

The identified planning documents within which this action will be implemented are from year 2021 to 2027. The planning of specific activities must take into account the available funding and the relevant programme (DP – SAM 2.2.3, 2.1.3) (Interreg Latvia-Lithuania), project (LIFE LatViaNature IP) schedules.

**11. Costs (if applicable)**

The cost depends on the specific area where the event is about to take place.

**12. Source of funding (if applicable):**

Main possible source of funding is SAM 2.2.3. “Improving nature protection and biodiversity, green infrastructure, especially in the urban environment, and reducing pollution”. It connects with the National Development Plan 2027 measure “Measures for the Implementation of Special Protection Areas and Species Protection Plans”,

where it is planned to support the implementation of the Natura 2000 Priority Action Program programme and measures for the maintenance and restoration of species and habitats to ensure a favourable conservation status, including the implementation of nature and species protection plans in specially protected nature territories (including actions to reduce anthropogenic pressures in Natura 2000 territories). The view of the parties involved in the development of this Action 3 was that activities could also be implemented outside Nature 2000 sites.

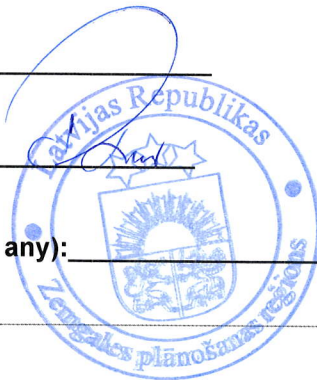
While this source is not yet available, Action Activities could also be implemented within the LIFE IP LatViaNature project. The Latvian Environmental Protection Fund also finances habitat restoration activities. Accordingly, a project could be prepared to support the fight against and containment of IAS.

As the level of invasive alien species is relatively high on the Lithuanian border<sup>2</sup> and in the medium range on the Latvian border, activities could be implemented through the Latvia-Lithuania cross-border cooperation program, where the Zemgale planning region is one of the active partners in project implementation.

Date: 15.10.2021

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization stamp (if any): \_\_\_\_\_



<sup>2</sup> <https://latlit.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Border-Orientation-Paper-LV-LT.pdf>