

GIFT: Green Infrastructure for Forests and Trees

INTERREG EUROPE PROGRAM 2021-2027: first call for proposals (*opening on April 5, 2022*)

MAIN OBJECTIVE: PROMOTE FOREST AND TREES IN EUROPEAN POLICY FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IMPLEMENTATION AS A BIODIVERSITY LOSS, CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION STRATEGY

SCOPE

The profound changes that have taken place in the landscape in recent decades due to urban expansion, infrastructure development, changes in land use and overexploitation of resources have led to excessive fragmentation of natural habitats and significantly reduced biodiversity on different levels (landscape, species, genetic). Alongside **biodiversity loss, climate change** poses a fundamental threat to ecosystems. As a society, we depend on the benefits of nature: food, materials, water, air, flood prevention, pollination; as well as for recreation and employment. Healthy ecosystems are crucial for our health and well-being.

Given this situation, already in 2011, the European Union included in the Objective 2 of the Biodiversity Strategy 2020, the need **to maintain and improve ecosystems and their services through the promotion of the use of green infrastructure** and the restoration of at least 15% of degraded ecosystems. Years later, in 2013, the European Commission¹ adopted the Green Infrastructure Strategy (GI).

EU (2014) defines GI as "*a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas of high quality with other environmental elements, designed and administered to provide a wide range of ecosystem services and protect the biodiversity*". **GI offers opportunities for a cheaper and more sustainable alternative** to classic engineering projects in addressing biodiversity loss as well as climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Natural areas and ecological corridors provide a conducive environment to wildlife species, ensuring the protection of natural ecosystems. Trees absorb and store carbon dioxide, they fight the effects of climate change by preventing flooding and keep soil nutrient rich. Trees in urban green spaces can minimize the negative effects of summer heat waves and improve air quality.

In addition to these **health and environmental benefits**, GI generates multiple **socioeconomics benefits**: it provides jobs and, when it comes to urban areas, it turns them into more pleasant and less polluted living environments.

Tree planting and forest restoration, as a building block for GI, is a **biodiversity and climate change solution** that is available now and can work on a vast scale needed to tackle the global challenges. In recent years tree planting initiatives have sprung up from different forums at the international as well as national and local levels. To ensure long-term, well adapted trees and forests, planting must be well-researched and planned. We need to capitalize on the momentum and provide policy makers with **right information to integrate these solutions in the right policy instruments** throughout different sectors.

In order to mainstream GI potential into planning policy, practice and decision-making process, highlight policy deficiencies and areas for policy improvement, the GIFT partnership will apply in each region a GI policy assessment framework to **improve the design and wording of regional policies that address biodiversity conservation and climate change functions of trees and forests in GI within their planning documents**.

WHAT WE WANT TO DO?

1. To integrate GI with **Nature 2000 and CAP** at **landscape** level
2. To foster collaboration between **actors at local level** to facilitate connectivity through forest and trees within GI
3. To **reinforce cultural and landscape identity and trademarks** of local and sustainable forest and trees products improving local people growth and jobs with GI
4. To support **multiscale perspective** by **landscape** planning instruments to implement GI focussing on a local level
5. To promote **digital mapping segmentation** to increase the efficiency of measures to apply on GI **landscape** model
6. To plant **the right tree species in the right places** to increase connectivity from **landscape** perspective in GI and **ensure adaptable forests in light of climate change**
7. To increase the level of forest and trees connectivity within GI **between rural and urban areas**
8. To **raise public awareness** on forest and trees **landscape** as important building block of GI
9. To reinforce **landscape** and **multifunctional perspective** related to ecosystem services provided by protecting forest and trees on GI

10. To mainstream biodiversity conservation and climate change in the **regional policy planning systems**, using green infrastructure as the key delivery vehicle, through applying a multi-criteria analysis in **a GI policy assessment framework**, with the focus on capturing the biodiversity conservation and climate change functions of trees and forests in GI (based on <https://mainstreaminggreeninfrastructure.com/project-page.php?green-infrastructure-planning-policy-assessment-tool>).

HOW WE WILL DO IT?

1. Building staff and institutional capacities
2. Developing action plans
3. Developing pilot actions

... with local stakeholders and international learning at regional level ...

CONSORTIUM

1. Landscape Studies Institute of Galicia (Spain) - Lead partner
2. Province of Frisian (The Neverlands)
3. Slovenian Forestry Institute (Slovenia)
4. Mures Environmental Protection Agency (Romania)
5. County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland (Sweden)
6. Flemish Land Agency (Belgium)
7. ... (...)
8. ... (...)

NOTE: We are looking for at least 2 new partners preferably public bodies addressing structural funds (ERDF) from the south and north Europe