

PRESS RELEASE | Brussels, 04/03/2020

Elia's LIFE project achieves very positive results in improving biodiversity under high-voltage lines

BRUSSELS – The Elia LIFE project has had the aim of creating green corridors to enhance biodiversity under overhead electrical lines. Project partner Ecofirst has now compiled a scientific report on the biological monitoring of the project sites. The report takes stock of the actions carried out between 2011 and 2017 in order to assess the impact of the investments on biodiversity. The results are highly encouraging, with 98% of evaluated sites showing conclusive outcomes.

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We strive to integrate our overhead lines into their immediate surroundings as much as possible. It's essential that our company can carry out these actions, which are designed to establish innovative practices for managing these green corridors. The project also serves to raise awareness among various target groups of the importance of biodiversity in these corridors. The results are very encouraging and show us that we're moving in the right direction, so we now need to keep up the momentum.

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Ilse Tant, Chief Community Relations Officer, Elia

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Restoring habitat in the forest corridors beneath high-voltage lines was a bold objective. There were many challenges to overcome during the Elia LIFE project, but the results are really encouraging, often exceeding expectations. Thanks to the biological monitoring financed by Elia, we can now say clearly that biodiversity is expanding very successfully within the anthropogenic corridors. Heritage species are appearing on the restored sites, plant communities are making good progress, rare plants are flowering or spreading, habitat connectivity has improved, and invasive species are being curbed. This is very good news for nature.

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G rard Jadoul, Elia-RTE Project Coordinator, Ecofirst

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429 hectares transformed into green corridors

Elia Transmission Belgium

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To prevent incidents and guarantee security of supply, Elia must observe safety distances around the electrical conductors of its high-voltage lines. Keen to avoid cutting down trees and vegetation unnecessarily, Elia joined forces with the French transmission system operator RTE to set up the LIFE project, partly funded by the European Commission and the Walloon Region. A total area of 429 ha has been adapted so that it is managed in ways that enhance the biological quality of habitats and reduce the infrastructure's long-term environmental impact. The aim is for Elia's grid in wooded areas to contribute to the country's ecological fabric by creating areas of special biological interest that are managed appropriately.

Positive results inspire new programme entirely funded by Elia

Ecofirst carried out biological inventories during the summers of 2018 and 2019 in order to analyse the changes in habitats and populations of animal and plant species and identify the impact of the alterations made as part of the LIFE project. Full inventories were undertaken on a selection of 52 sites deemed representative of the diversity of actions carried out. A total area of around 130 ha was assessed. Of the 52 sites studied:

- just 2% (1 out of 52) yielded no results;
- 71% (37 out of 52) achieved the specified objective;
- 19% (10 out of 52) exceeded the specified objective;
- 8% (4 out of 52) showed positive progress on biodiversity unrelated to the LIFE project.

In view of the results, Elia has decided to launch a new five-year follow-up project, this time without external funding.

A benchmark project for Europe

One of the objectives of the LIFE project and its successor is to set an example for all the other European transmission system operators (TSOs). Contact has been made with TSOs in 14 EU Member States that have expressed a great interest in the project and in implementing it in their own country. A 'best practice guide' describing various ways of managing these green corridors and outlining the financial benefits resulting from the project is used within Elia and distributed to other European TSOs, for example through international associations such as the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E) and the International Council on Large Electric Systems (CIGRE).

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About the Elia Group

One of Europe's top five players

The Elia Group is active in electricity transmission, ensuring that generation and consumption are balanced at all times. We supply 30 million end users with electricity and manage 18,990 km of HV lines via our subsidiaries in Belgium (Elia) and north-east Germany (50Hertz). As such, our Group is one of Europe's top five system operators. With a reliability level of 99.999%, we give society a robust power grid, which is important for socio-economic prosperity. We also aspire to be a catalyst for a successful energy transition towards a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy system.

Achieving the energy transition

By expanding international high-voltage connections and integrating ever-increasing amounts of renewable energy, the Elia Group promotes both the integration of the European energy market and the decarbonisation of our society. At the same time, innovation is reshaping the Group's operational systems and we are developing new market products to enable the latest technologies and new market players to access our system. In this way, the Elia Group is making the energy transition happen.

In the interests of society

As a key player in the energy system, the Elia Group is committed to working in the interests of society. We are constantly adapting our transmission grid to the rapidly changing energy mix, incorporating ever more renewable energy. We also ensure that investments are made on time and within budget and guarantee maximum safety. When we carry out our projects, we manage stakeholders proactively by establishing two-way communication with all affected parties very early on in the development process. We also offer our expertise to our sector and relevant authorities to help build the energy system of the future.

International focus

In addition to serving as a transmission system operator in Belgium and Germany, the Elia Group provides consultancy services to international customers via Elia Grid International (EGI). Elia is also a member of the Nemo Link consortium, which operates the first subsea electricity interconnector between Belgium and Great Britain. The Elia Group operates under the legal entity Elia Transmission Belgium, a listed company whose core shareholder is the municipal holding company Publi-T.

For more information, visit [eliagroup.eu](https://www.eliagroup.eu).

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