

BALTIC ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM LITHUANIA

Activity Report, 2023



**PROTECTING NATURE
TOGETHER WITH PEOPLE**

[BEF.LT](https://www.bef.lt)

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Baltic Environmental Forum –
an environmental non-governmental organisation
that protects nature together with people.

One of the most experienced environmental
organisations in Lithuania.

20

years of
activity

72

projects

Mission

Working as a non-governmental organisation, we strive to ensure that society lives in a clean and healthy environment, natural resources are properly used, and rich natural diversity is ensured for future generations. We believe that our planet must be protected not from humans, but together with them.

Today, our most important areas of activity are biodiversity conservation, agrarian environmental protection, rural development and nature tourism, sustainable development, management of hazardous chemicals, and social enterprise responsibility.



Our main activity is protecting nature and the environment. We obtain funding for various conservation ideas by developing projects and participating in both national and international project competitions.

We also provide advisory services, get support from the public, and implement voluntary initiatives. Although we are a relatively small organisation, we already have a wealth of experience in a wide range of conservation issues.

We work in various protected areas and municipalities not only in Lithuania but also, with the help of partners, in other European countries.



20

years of
activity

or a 20-
year-long
adventure



Director Žymantas Morkvėnas

In the autumn of 2003, a handful of experts working on the environmental integration of the Baltic States into the European Union decided to set up an organisation that inherited the name of this meaningful process: the Baltic Environmental Forum. The sun was shining then, and we together with the lawyer who drafted our statutes were happily hoping that she had a “lucky hand” in ensuring the longevity of the new-born organisation. In 2023, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our organisation.

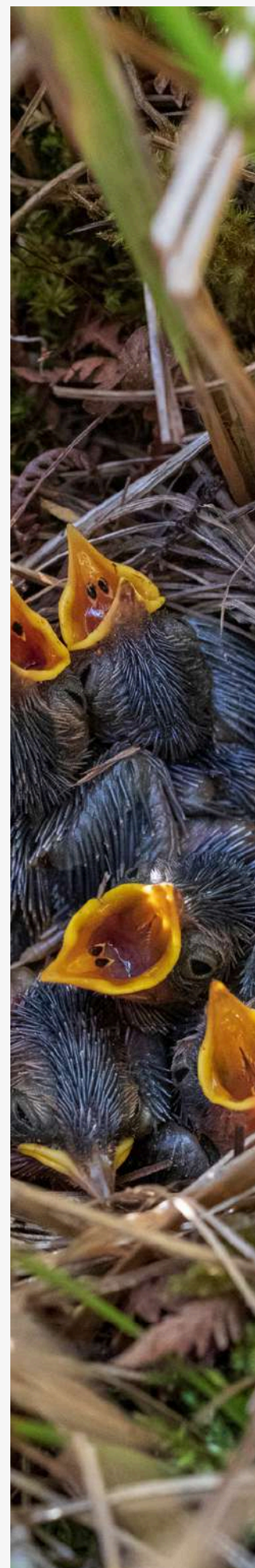
For most organisms, this period is well beyond their life span, but for the Earth in the Anthropocene, it is just a brief moment in a dream. For a human being, it is a time of emerging from mad adolescence into maturity, and for an NGO, it is a beautiful coming-of-age.

We have experienced many challenges, many achievements, many difficult hours in these years of existence. The latter are diminished by the many joyful moments. All in all, we have had a good 20-year-long adventure.

Some achievements have also made a more visible mark on our country's environmental protection. In our early days, we were active in moderating the dialogue between experts, civil servants, industry, and the public in adapting Lithuania's environmental sector to European Union standards. Later, realising the importance of empowering the public, we developed an interactive map-based tool called Report Nature Abuse, where anyone who noticed an inappropriate trace of human activity could effectively report environmental problems, and we, as an NGO, could organise their resolution. In 2008, this tool was very innovative. Later, the tool was complemented by a travel CO2 footprint calculator, thus enabling the planning of more climate-friendly travel routes.

We dug deeper, exploring environmental challenges at the level of chemicals. In the NGO sector, we have become a leader in tackling chemicals that are dangerous to the environment and people. From selecting less polluting components in the industry to detecting traces of hazardous chemicals in our blood. Our "Think Before You Buy" campaign has been well-publicised.

Once, German ornithologists called us anxiously to report the haying and baling of chicks of Europe's rarest songbird, the Aquatic Warbler. We started to look into the problem and work together with farmers to solve it. And so began a 15-year-long journey to protect the Aquatic Warbler. This is probably our most dynamic adventure. We are happy to have made a significant impact - we have managed to halt the dramatic decline of this songbird in Lithuania and have slowly started to climb the upward curve towards a stable and growing population. And there was no shortage of "firsts": we were the first in the world to successfully develop and test the translocation of long-distance migrant passerines to their previously lost and now restored homes. In our country, we were probably the first to confront politicians who value nature only insofar as it is a useful resource in people's daily lives. The value of a small bird and its entire ecosystem has been publicly questioned - after all, "you can't cook it in an oven", so it is "not worth investing" in such conservation.



Since the organisation's establishment, we have also been working on environmental issues in the agricultural sector. At the beginning of our activities, we published a solid textbook on agri-environment. We have gone beyond that and delved into agricultural practice, gaining a better understanding of the bureaucratic intricacies as well as the harmony between agronomic practices and environmental protection. Or the lack of it. We are still active here today, conducting research, analysing the impact of environmental practices, proposing solutions or promoting our country's good farming practices, and encouraging people to think not only about what's on the plate, but also about the impact of the food we grow on our environment.

In nature and conservation, it is important not to forget to have fun. While encouraging the public to connect with nature, spending more adventurous time in there, we have dared to call the outdoor gathering "In the middle of the woods" a nature festival. Now, the nature festival has become a celebration in its own right, full of encounters with new species and territories, forest spells in Žemaitija, the fun of scythe mowing enthusiasts in the meadows of the Nemunas Delta, and the most interesting stories around the campfire in the woods.

We have also been at the forefront of protecting Lithuania's forests. We were active participants in the National Forest Agreement and contributed to the recognition of the traditional human-forest relationship in Lithuania as a national intangible cultural heritage value. However, our greatest achievement is the extension of the Punia Forest Nature Reserve. The exceptional nature of the Punia Forest hasn't been doubted for many decades, but only a small part of the forest has been granted the status of a nature reserve, which would ensure real protection of these ancient woods. Only a few experts have spoken about the need to expand the reserve, and the idea has eventually been relegated to the dreams of naturalists only. However, thanks to our belief in this dream, the support of numerous scientists and experts, and great public mobilisation, we have managed to achieve the expansion of the Punia Forest Nature Reserve almost 5 times! Not all the work has been done yet, there are still some holes to be filled, but we can already be happy that thanks to the stubbornness of our team, we have managed to ensure the strict protection of Lithuania's forests over an area of almost 1800 ha. And we did it in one of the most valuable forests in the country from an environmental point of view.





The attitudes that guide our mission are sometimes embedded in slogans. And one is not enough to describe what we do. "We don't take the easy way!" - means that we dare to venture into uncharted territories to find new and innovative ways to tackle well-known environmental challenges, to get to the heart of the matter and to respond accurately. The T-shirt is embroidered with "It's fun to care!" demonstrates the team's dedication and belief in the idea of protecting nature. The slogan that sums up our approach, "Protecting nature together with people", is more relevant than ever.

The Baltic Environment Forum Lithuania is all about the people who work in the organisation, forming a great and motivated team. A constantly evolving forge of professionals has built a solid foundation of values over twenty years, which continues to change dynamically and shape the character of the organisation. No, far from it, we are not precisely organised (although the precision and thoroughness of the finance department would be envied by many), automated, with work processes that do not necessarily reflect the latest management fashions or sterile protocols for implementing tasks. We operate more like a good jazz band: as dedicated and good professionals, connoisseurs of what we do, we do not limit ourselves to standards and we do not shy away from improvising in search of new forms of expression, while at the same time, we bring our works to life without compromising on quality, and we try not to lose the motivating fun. Because it's fun to care! For me, as a self-taught leader, this is a great challenge, but at the same time an invaluable privilege, for which I am grateful to both past and present colleagues.

Let's look back at Lithuania's nature at the beginning of our organisation 20 years ago and today. Unfortunately, we cannot be optimistic about everything. Over the last 20 years, we have lost around half a million meadows, and with them a large part of our biodiversity. We will see half as many of our usual countryside birds. The effects of climate change are becoming more pronounced. The state of the Baltic Sea has not improved, and the tree cutters are leaving bigger scars than ever in our forests. The imprint of the Anthropocene on our planet is deepening. Too much is said and too little is done. The words "moderation" and "slowness" are receding from everyday life and are becoming aspirational words on New Year's Eve.

Nevertheless, we are seeing a growing need in our society to be outdoors, and a change in our worldview. The view that nature is a useful resource is becoming obsolete, and it is increasingly seen as a value in its own right in the voice of a civil society. Increasingly, there is a search for coexistence with nature and the species that live alongside us, a growing domestication of wild nature's own order and less of a "caging" of it, and an effort to listen and adapt to its rhythms and laws. This gives hope. It inspires us to keep working. So the adventure continues!



2023 in numbers



7 ongoing projects
of which 4 new projects



>160 press coverage on our activity

of which



8



14



Team
15 colleagues
2 regular volunteers



11 events for the public
attended by >1500 people



we reached audience of
>316 k



7 suggestions got legal acts



We administrated
9 websites

which were visited

>69 k

times

IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS

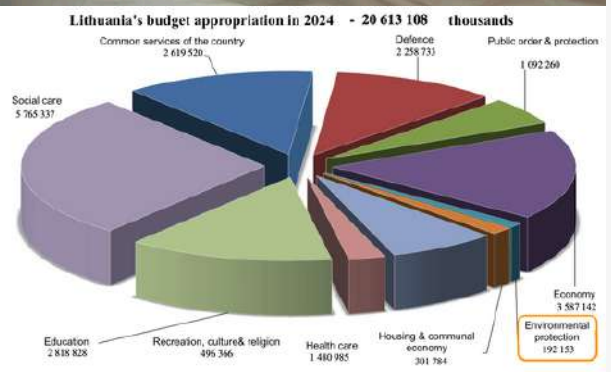




We attract financing for the conservation of Lithuanian nature by our own hard work.

In recent years, various myths have been circulating in the public speculating that environmental NGOs are receiving millions of euros in projects in a non-transparent way, and that such 'awards' are made by friends or former colleagues. That is a lie. All projects are initiated by us, from the initial idea to the implementation - we come up with the ideas, prepare the applications, and participate in international or national project competitions. We win them or not. Big projects don't "fall" from the sky, they are not "assigned" to us. Our hard work ensures that additional funding is attracted for conservation of Lithuanian nature. You can imagine for yourself what the situation would be like without additional funding when environmental protection is one of the least publicly funded areas. Meanwhile, we sometimes spend years working on one project application. And then there is the challenge of winning the call for projects.

For example, most of our projects are currently funded directly by the European Commission through the LIFE programme. In 2023, we submitted a project application and 653 projects were submitted to this programme that year.



PROTECTION OF THE AQUATIC WARBLER (LIFE MAGNI DUCATUS ACROLA)



**2016-2023 IN
LITHUANIA AND
BELARUS**

**2023-2026 IN
LITHUANIA AND
POLAND
(PROLONGATION)**

MELDINE.LT

The conservation of the Aquatic Warbler is perhaps the best-known activity of our organisation. We have been caring for this species and its home for 15 years.

In 2023, we continued our work to protect Europe's rarest songbird. The extension of the project "Stepping stones towards ensuring long-term favorable conservation status of Aquatic warbler in Lithuania" (LIFE MagniDucatuAcrola) has started. Now we are focusing on the second phase of the translocation of the aquatic warblers.

The second phase of the translocation of the aquatic warbler

In 2018 and 2019, together with our colleagues, we were the first in the world to translocate the aquatic warbler. Our aim then was to test whether this method works at all. This was a big challenge because we had to successfully find the birds (aquatic warblers, and especially their nests, are very hard to find in a swamp covered with the monotonous vegetation), raise them (only a few people in Europe had raised aquatic warblers before) and breed them, release them at the right time so that they remember their new place (Žuvintas) as their home, wait for their return next spring after a double 6000 km journey from their wintering grounds in Mali, and successfully find them again in the swamp and photograph them so that we can identify the bird in question. AND we have been very successful in doing this - our experience has shown that translocation works.



In 2023, we launched the next phase with a very different goal. Our goal now is to restore threatened or endangered populations of the warbler using translocation. The first place where this goal has been set is the Pomeranian region on the Polish-German border. Together with colleagues, we relocated 57 birds to the Rozwarowo wetland in 2023. Birds were brought from the other side of Poland, from the Biebrza National Park. Some of the chicks had aspergillosis and did not survive, despite the best efforts of our vets and Polish colleagues. 49 chicks were successfully released into the marsh. Considering the natural mortality of the chicks, this survival rate is considered a success by the scientists. The survival rate was 86%, whereas the minimum survival rate for this species, which is considered successful by the scientific community, is 74%. Thus, the second phase of translocation in Poland, although less successful than the first phase in Lithuania, is so far progressing reasonably well.



Colleagues from the OTOP have created a film about the translocation of the aquatic warblers.



We are looking forward to seeing how many aquatic warblers will return to Rozwarowo in 2024 after wintering in Africa.

We especially hope that at least one bird will show up on the German side of the border, as this would mean that we have officially saved the aquatic warblers from extinction in this country. In 2024, it will be 10 years since the last aquatic warbler was seen in Germany. If it is not recorded here this year, the species will be officially removed from the list of birds living in Germany. It would be the first in a long time.

Traditional aquatic warbler count

We counted 220 male birds in Lithuania in 2023. This is slightly more than in 2022 (when 208 males were recorded). Scientists estimate that the population in Lithuania is stable at around 200 males. The Nemunas Delta population (especially in the Alka polder) remains the most important breeding site for the bird in our country. This is due to the farmers and special agri-environmental measures. It is also important to note that for the third year already two males have been singing in the newly restored territories of the Kliošiai Landscape Reserve near Dituva Gardens. The population of Žuvintas has increased significantly in 2023 (from 7 to 19 males). Naturalists attribute this to improved habitat conditions due to proper management.

New bird-watching tower in Šyša Polder near Rupkalviai

In 2023, we installed a new observation tower at one of the best bird-watching sites in the Nemunas Delta - Šyša Botanical and Zoological Reserve. Symbolically, it is named after the aquatic warbler.

Although the warbler is a celebrity of the whole coastal region, if not of all of Lithuania, the Šyša Polder is a very important place for the species. It reflects the essence of the protection of Europe's rarest songbird - it needs the help of humans, and more specifically, farmers, to survive. The relatively small area of the Šyša Polder is managed by many different farmers. Many of them have made, and are still making, considerable efforts to reconcile conservation and farming interests. In addition, the site was once home to a significant population of aquatic warblers. We hope that conditions for these rare birds will only improve here.

It is also important to note that the Aquatic Warbler Tower is located on the farms of local farmers, who are constantly looking for the best ways to coexist with nature.

Visit this tower, preferably in April/May, and enjoy the thousands of geese or other birds.

To promote nature tourism, in 2023 we also produced press releases and special maps about the Nemunas Delta as an exceptional place for bird-watching.



[More about this](#)

Young Nature Rangers platform update

In 2023, we presented an updated version of The Young Nature Rangers Platform gamtosreindzeris.lt to the public, where both children and their parents or teachers can find free games and activities about nature.

With thousands of children flocking to the platform during quarantine, we realised that we needed to strengthen the technical part of the platform. As the platform is quite complex technologically, the whole process has taken quite a while, but we can finally welcome the new version, which should make both solving and creating nature activities easier and more convenient.

Most of the updates were technical - to make the platform faster, able to support more people, and make it more convenient for browsing on phones or searching for a task of interest. However, the updated platform also includes more content - not only new tasks, but also a new tool - the Nature Calendar. For each month, we have a calendar that offers a task or interesting fact about nature for each day.

The Nature Calendar reviews:

"Thank you, it's a wonderful tool for our kindergarten. The children read the calendar every day and do the exercises. The photos show how the children were interested in the skylark and how they filled in the nature diary. We thought that we should not only say thank you in our minds but also say thank you to you for your activities."

It is good to see that The Young Nature Rangers platform has regained its popularity after the relaunch, with 5,000-6,000 page views per month.



Lithuanian scythe mowers competed not only in the National Scythe Mowing Championship, but also in Poland

In August 2023, we have organised the third Lithuania's Scythe Mowing Championship, which has become a tradition. The ones who have the fastest and best quality scything were awarded as The Mowers of the Year. The most intriguing nomination, the Male Scythe Mower of the Year, came as a surprise: local Arūnas Kakta won the title, beating his teammate Kozmas Auškalnis, who had been the best for two years in a row. The title of the Female Scythe Mower of the Year went to Dovilė Staponkienė, who returned to the competition after a year break. The Championships surprised everyone with the presence of 4 of the best scythe mowers from Poland, who were happy to invite everyone to take part in the 18th event of the same nature in Biebrza National Park.

Nearly 50 participants from Šilutė, Plungė, Klaipėda, Kaunas, Alytus, Šiauliai, Vilnius and other districts gathered in the village of Rupkalviai with their scythes and were accompanied by passionate support teams. A particularly large group came from Kėdainiai - almost a busload of mowers and their supporters. The Švendubrė team from Dzūkija, who were in high spirits, surprised everyone again this year with their special attention to clothing and authentic details - for example, the team wore bast shoes for the competition.

Participants were captivated by a spectacular scythe-trimmer battle, held for the first time, to find out whether the machinery often used in cities is really better than scything. Arūnas Kakta, the Male Scythe Mower of the Year, who dared to challenge the trimmer, covered the course with a scythe twice as fast and with twice the quality of the noise-making trimmer. The audience gave a loud ovation in support of the like-minded hay mower who defended this unique craft.

In September, we travelled with 4 teams from Lithuania to the International Scythe Mowing Championship in Biebrza National Park, Poland. It was good to train with very strong Polish and Belgian scythe mowers, to see how such a championship is organised abroad and to talk to like-minded people. The championship is also traditionally held here in the habitat of the aquatic warbler. Although the Lithuanians did not win the World Scythe Mowing Championship title, they went up on the stage 3 times, and all the participants remarked on the exceptional quality of haying by all the Lithuanian teams!

[More about the 2023 results](#)

[Register to The next Scythe Mowing Championship](#)

[More about The Scythe Mowing Championship Poland](#)



NATURALIT (OPTIMISING THE MANAGEMENT OF THE NATURA 2000 NETWORK IN LITHUANIA) - FOR THE FULL PROTECTION OF NATURA 2000 SITES IN LITHUANIA



**2018-2027
IN LITHUANIA**

NATURALIT.LT

Together with our partners, we continued our strategic nature conservation project in 2023, which aims to tackle the highly complex challenges of protected areas and test new modern tools.



**The end of the pilot result-oriented measure
"Conservation of natural flowering meadows"**

2023 is the last year in which an innovative result-oriented agri-environment measure was tested. It is the first measure in Lithuania where farmers are compensated for specific environmental achievements rather than for specific restrictions. In this case, it was for maximising plant diversity. 30 farmers participated in this pilot measure. With the help of conservation professionals, they decided for themselves how to farm these fields and watched how the grassland plants changed.



This year, indicator plant species, which determine how well farmers have performed, were counted in the field by both farmers and the project's expert botanists to improve comparability of results. However, it has not been an easy year for this work, as the prolonged drought has burnt some of the grasslands, so many plants simply did not emerge this year, while others were quite difficult to identify. Although at a loss to the farmers, this experience is very valuable in testing the tool.

Spring 2023 started with a meeting with farmers participating in the measure. It discussed practical aspects of the implementation of the measure, issues to be addressed in the future and gathered farmers' feedback on the measure itself. It is encouraging that farmers identified the opportunity to learn more about their meadow, its vegetation and maintenance methods, and to understand the true value of their meadow with the help of a botanist, as the biggest plus point of the measure and the most motivating factor for their participation.

At the end of the year, we started to analyse the data collected during the three years of testing the measure. We will use the insights from this analysis to prepare a proposal package for a result-oriented measure, which we will submit to the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania, to have this measure included in the Strategic Plan for Agriculture and Rural Development of Lithuania 2023-2027. In this way, all Lithuanian farmers and landowners who manage valuable and species-rich grasslands would be able to participate in the measure.

Promotion of livestock farming as a means of maintaining open habitats

Livestock in protected areas is decreasing. Meadows and other open habitats and the species that live in them are also disappearing. This is a systemic problem and one that the Naturalit project is trying to address. We are working both in agricultural policy, with proposals for payments to farmers and eligibility requirements, and in the implementation of complex practical cases of nature restoration in Lithuania's protected areas. These include the Kretuonykščiai bog and Ginučiai Oak Forest in Aukštaitija National Park and Grūda river Valley in Dzūkija National Park.



2023 was a busy year in protected areas. We continued and completed the restoration works of the Kretuonykščiai bog and the Grūda River Valley. The restored meadows of the Grūda River valley were re-grazed throughout the season by a herd of cows bought by the project and handed over to a local farmer. The first phase of restoration is now halfway through in the Ginučiai Oak Forest. The areas are slowly regaining their original appearance.



Grazing in such high value areas is not only complicated by natural conditions, but also by bureaucratic pitfalls. The project team has been very active and contributed to the legalisation of grazing in national forests. This provision will allow for the future maintenance and conservation of European and Lithuanian protected habitats such as Fenoscandian wooded pastures. These are the habitats recorded in the restored area of the Ginučiai Oak Forest. The project team has also taken the initiative to change the requirements for the construction of shelters for livestock in protected areas, which will help farmers to provide better conditions for their animals. The project team also initiated a visit to the restored meadows of the Gruda river valley by representatives of several state authorities - although the meadows have been restored and are grazed by livestock, farmers have not been able to declare the meadows for the last two years due to the wording of certain rules. Following a meeting, the issue has been addressed and it is likely that in 2024 the meadows of this valley and similar valuable areas with specific habitat features (e.g. hummocks) will be declared for both direct and environmental measures and receive payments. This will be of great benefit for habitat maintenance and conservation.

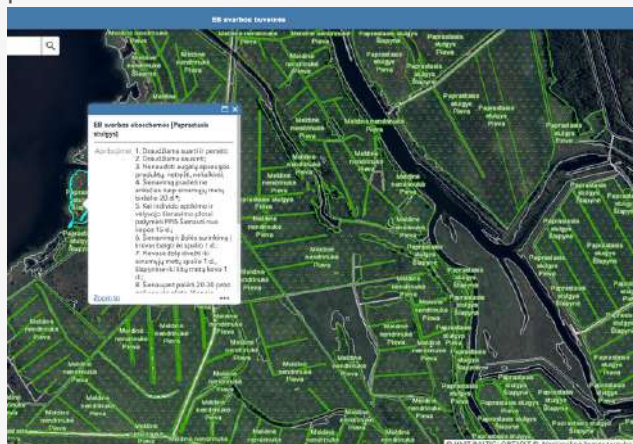
The project team has also made several proposals for changes to the Strategic Plan and the package of rules for implementation, both to make farming conditions more favourable for farmers and to preserve natural values.

As one of the tools to promote animal husbandry, the project envisages the installation of a slaughterhouse and a meat cutting workshop. Such an infrastructure was planned in the village of Marcinkonys, but the idea was not supported by the local community, therefore the project team continues to work to find alternative places for its installation. In 2024 the team will also work on solving systemic problems related to the animal husbandry sector.



Agri-environmental protection and Lithuanian agricultural and rural development strategic plan for 2023-2027

The project team further on provided suggestions how to improve the Lithuanian Agriculture and Rural Development strategic plan for 2023-2027 and the measures provided in it. They also carried out a campaign to popularize eco-schemes and, together with the project partners, prepared a thematic map for the eco-scheme's "Complex meadow and wetland maintenance scheme" activity "Management of natural meadows, wetlands and habitats of species of EC importance". By clicking on a specific area on the map, the farmer can see what value is protected and what management requirements apply to that particular area.





The Good Farmer Championship 2023

In 2023, we organised the third Good Farmer championship, which awarded three ambassadors – farms that work in harmony with nature. The aim of this initiative is to highlight leaders who, through their food production, also care for the common good - a healthy, sustainable and thriving nature.

We believe that a good farmer today is one who operates in harmony with nature and creates a much wider public good than just quality products. So we want to use good examples to show that nature-friendly farming can be agriculturally, economically and socially progressive.

„The Good Farmer championship consisted of two parts the farmer and the municipality competitions. In the Farmers’ competition, 3 farms were selected as ambassadors for 2023 - Rasa and Andrius Prusakovai’s Bačkonys farm, Asta and Remigijus Marozai’s dairy farm, and the organic Martinėliai farm.



At the awards event, the special title of Audience favourite went to Bačkonys Farm. This farm received the most support from in a public vote that lasted more than a week.





In addition to farmers, the event also honoured nature-friendly municipalities. The municipalities that have promoted the most ecoschemes and nature friendly measures to farmers this year received special awards and certificates of appreciation at The Good Farmer Championship.

The ceremony awarded the Agri-environmental Champion - the municipality with the largest area of agricultural land declared for ecoschemes this year. The winner was Šiauliai district municipality, Meškuičiai eldership. A special commendation was also awarded to Eržvilka municipality of Jurbarkas district municipality for the highest number of applications for ecoschemes in 2023. Special commendations signed by the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania were also presented to the specialists working on agricultural issues in these municipalities.



The Label of Protected Areas Product identifies products from the most naturally valuable areas and helps local people



Choose products and services
from protected areas!

The Label of Protected Areas Product - "a duck" -- recognises authentic, environmentally friendly products and services from protected areas. Each protected area has its own label, awarded by a committee appointed by the specific management authority. The aim of the label is to bring together local people who share the values of the protected areas and support the principles of sustainable tourism, and promote their activities. The Naturalit project analyses and, where necessary, updates the criteria for the label, communicates regularly with label holders, refines the added value and carries out promotional activities.

The reorganisation of Lithuania's regional parks has also led to changes in the administration of the Protected Areas label. The administration of the Regional Park product labels has been taken over by the larger merged Directorates and the key persons in charge of the label have changed. Therefore, there was some confusion and mowelty in 2023. It will take some more time for new working practices to settle in.



In 2023, we devoted quite some time on relaunching the <https://gamtoje.org> website. On this website, we showcase all entrepreneurs, craftsmen, handicraft artisans and service providers whose products or services carry the Label of Protected Areas Product. Due to many changes and the expiry of some of the label holders' certificates, it has taken us a while to reorganise the information. We were pleased to find that the number of label holders is increasing, with 212 in 2023

Last year, we also organised a Christmas campaign, which has become a tradition, inviting people to choose gifts from protected areas. For the first time, we organised a special Christmas fair in Vilnius called "Greetings from Protected Areas". All the label holders who traded at the fair were happy with the event and asked us to continue this tradition.

In 2023, we organised a seminar for small entrepreneurs with the Protected Areas Product Label once again, inviting them to share their experiences and take part in the nature festivals we organise.



Nature festivals - making nature more understandable, interesting and appreciated

To bring the meaning of natural values to the inhabitants of protected areas and the general public, we organise three major events each year - nature festivals.



“In the middle of the woods” - welcoming spring in Dzūkija National Park

In the Middle of the Woods is a welcome to the awakening spring nature of Dzūkija, which invites you to feel, take your time and enjoy the Čepkeliai landscape. The festival is famous for the interesting hikes led by experienced naturalists in the surrounding area, and the walk to the “Bear's butt”, which is an integral part of the event, and is particularly popular with young nature lovers. Traditionally held at the end of April, In the Middle of the Woods offers a wide range of activities to familiarise visitors with the surrounding environment, traditions and local community. The highlight of the festival is an overnight stay at a campsite near Lake Kastinis, with a dinner by the fire and a crane chorus to wake you up in the early morning.

2023 was a record year for the festival. 389 visitors attended the event. As every year, hiking was one of the most popular activities of the festival, and this year's new route Mythological Trails of Pagrūdžiai with cultural heritage specialist Dalia Blažulionyte was an incredible success, with no more places available within minutes of the start of the registration.





Natura Fest - an introduction to yet another Lithuanian protected area

Natura Fest is a travelling nature festival that introduces the values of a different protected area each year. It is about getting to know Lithuania's natural treasures while having fun in nature over the weekend. Hikes, nature stories, discussions and just being around the campfire with naturalists invite you to take your time and enjoy nature. The festival combines the knowledge of nature and culture, and aims to showcase the best, the most interesting and the most unique features of a particular protected area. The core of the festival is the discovery of species and natural areas protected at European level. These areas are part of the Natura 2000 network and are home to a wide variety of fascinating species.



In 2023, a festival of this kind was organised for the first time (replacing the previous "Middle Lakes" festival). It took place in the Vištytis Regional Park. Around 130 participants met unicorns, magnificent landscapes and highlands unusual for Suvalkija on a weekend in June and embarked on a mystical night-time encounter with nature. A particularly magical moment was the sunset on the castle mound, accompanied by the enchanting music of the kanklės (a Lithuanian plucked string instrument played by local musician Girmantė Demeniūtė).



in 2024 Natura fest will take place on 8-9 June in the Dieveniškės Historical Regional Park:

“Forest Spells” is a theatrical festival for children taking place in Žemaitija National Park in autumn

Forest Spells is a theatrical festival for families raising children aged 3-12 years, which has no analogues throughout Lithuania. During the event, various activities and games are organized, which are led by the characters of Žemaitija mythology. This is the only day of the year when the King of the Forest spirits and other magical creatures come out of their home in the reserve to talk with the children and tell them about the magical world of nature through various games. The spectacular scenery, costumes and games help children to learn interesting stories about nature in an engaging way, and encourage them to explore and spend time there, and thus develop a love for nature over time.

In 2023, the festival was further strengthened by additional support from Plungė District Municipality. The event was once again held in Plokštinė, next to the Plokštinė Strict Nature Reserve. It was supposed to be another record-breaking event with over 1700 participants, but stormy weather disrupted some of their plans. The festival still went ahead, with around 800 of the most loyal participants attending. Participants spoke highly of the event - as many as 100% of 2023 participants would recommend the festival to their friends! Some participants call the Festival the best event for children in Lithuania.

The 2023 Festival also saw the launch of an innovation - audio letters from the King of Forest creatures to the participants of the event.



RESTORATION OF THE BALTOJI VOKĖ WETLAND COMPLEX - PILOTING INTEGRATED WETLAND RESTORATION APPROACHES IN LATVIA AND LITHUANIA (LIFE MARSHMEADOWS)



**2021 - 2027 IN
LITHUANIA AND
LATVIA**

SLAPYNE.LT

For several years now, we have been working to restore some of the destroyed wetlands in the Baltoji Vokė wetland complex near Vilnius. Seventy years ago, peat was dug here to heat the city of Vilnius, and all living nature was destroyed. We are trying to speed up the recovery of the wetland.

This has been an intense year. We started the spring with bird and nature watching tours, which are free and open to the public, to help people see the area through the eyes of a conservationist, to see and hear birds, plants, insects and, most importantly, to explain the importance of open wetland and grassland habitats and how to look after them in order to preserve the natural values. The tours also feature the area's host cows, the Highland cows, who work tirelessly throughout the year to remove excess woody vegetation and create a dynamic landscape.



Meeting with the locals

As well as organising tours and talking about the natural values, it is also important to involve local communities in the restoration process, to establish contacts and to keep them informed about the ongoing processes. After the first live meeting, the inhabitants of Pakrempè, who were sceptical about the project at first, realised that conservationists are not so scary, and when they were leaving, they asked to meet twice a year, because it is fun to meet neighbours and have a chat.

The monitoring results

Monitoring is an integral part of the warm season. Many people imagine that conservationists spend most of their time in nature, but unfortunately, this is a fun but small part of our job. Last spring-summer season we did monitorings of Northern crested newts, European Fire-bellied Toad, birds, plants, and water level and quality. The results were 0 Northern crested newts - even in the control sites we did not detect them. We conclude that due to the dry, warm and early spring newts were active earlier than every year and we simply did not see them during the monitoring. This year, we will bring forward and extend the monitoring to better understand the behaviour of newts in the area.

The good news is that last year we were able to find common newts in the newly dug ponds, so we are confident that conditions are right. This year we have once again confirmed that the wetlands of Baltoji Vokė are a paradise for European Fire-bellied Toad, with large populations in every water body, and in spring the whole area is buzzing with their calls. During the monitoring of the target species, 2 Bluethroats, 1 Spotted crane and no Great snipes were recorded at the monitoring points.





Events for farmers

In Lithuania, agricultural land covers about half of the country's territory, so working in environmental protection requires working together with farmers to provide them with the information they need on environmentally friendly farming practices. In September, we organised the first event of the project for farmers to demonstrate wet farming methods, techniques and biomass use.

Future plans

This year we also plan to start restoring the hydrological regime, continue monitoring species, continue grazing cattle, develop management plans, and work towards recovering the wetlands of Baltoji Vokė. In 2024, we have plans for events for the public, farmers, and conservationists.



ADVOCACY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION IN AGRICULTURE



2023 – 2025 IN LITHUANIA

BEF.LT/KLIMATO-KAITA-ZEMES-UKYJE/

In 2023, we launched a new project which aims to reduce the impact of agriculture on climate change.

We will analyse a range of policy documents to inform policy makers and the public about how our country is doing in delivering on its promises to tackle climate change, encourage farmers to adopt environmentally and climate-friendly farming practices, raise public awareness of the impact of food and agriculture on climate, and ensure that public opinion is heard and represented. The project will implement several public awareness campaigns on the impact of agriculture on climate change.

The project is funded by a new instrument, the Climate Change Programme. We are happy that finally a financial instrument has been created in Lithuania to support the most important function of environmental NGOs in society - advocacy. Until now, there has been no financial source to support the activities that by their nature NGOs are supposed to carry out, i.e. to monitor the implementation of nature conservation or environmental policy. While abroad this is done through generous public support for environmental NGOs, in Lithuania, unfortunately, this support has so far been more symbolic. As a result, advocacy in Lithuania has been carried out on a voluntary basis, alongside other direct responsibilities of the organisations, and has been fragmented, focused on one or several aspects, and inconsistent. We believe that new instruments such as the Climate Change Programme will strengthen Lithuania's environmental protection. And with this project, we will strengthen public interest advocacy in agricultural policy.

There was a lot of preparatory work done in 2023, including active advocacy.

Information for the media about the COP28 conference was prepared

We prepared detailed information about the international climate change conference – COP28 – 3 press releases were issued, media reports and articles were proposed. 7 media appearances were achieved.

Information on what to do if you have received a notification of special land use conditions

In 2023, there was a big public debates when landowners received letters about meadows, marshes and springs on their land. These areas are subject to Special Land Use Conditions (SLUCs), which effectively mean that the landowner cannot destroy this important ecosystem because it provides a public good for all citizens - it cleans water, protects soil from erosion, helps mitigate climate change, provides a home for pollinators and other insects, and other benefits. In response to the lack of information, we have prepared a short memo for landowners who have received such information notices. This information has been used, publicised and shared by public authorities such as the State Service for Protected Areas and the Ministry of Environment.

Active participation in public debates on agricultural policy issues

In December 2023, farmer protests began over problems in agriculture. The protest organisers have put forward 6 main demands, mainly against nature conservation. We took an active role in representing the interests of nature conservation and society. We prepared a public response to the demands made by the protest organisers and actively promoted it on social networks and in the media. We also initiated and drafted a joint position paper of environmental NGOs with proposals on how agricultural policy should change. We presented it to the country's top politicians.





Environmental protection is one of the founding goals of Lithuania's future vision "Lithuania 2050"

Žymantas Morkvėnas, Director of the Baltic Environment Forum, is a member of the Council for State Progress, where he is responsible for the environment (including climate change). He has been actively involved both in working groups and in the drafting the text phrases. We have ensured that the vision adopts an ecocentric approach to nature and that environmental protection is among the strategy's fundamental objectives. It also ensured that the strategy provides for the development of protected areas. The Vision Lithuania 2050 has been approved and we are continuing work on the National Progress Plan.



Preparations underway for the "Save the Baltic Sea" expedition around the Baltic Sea

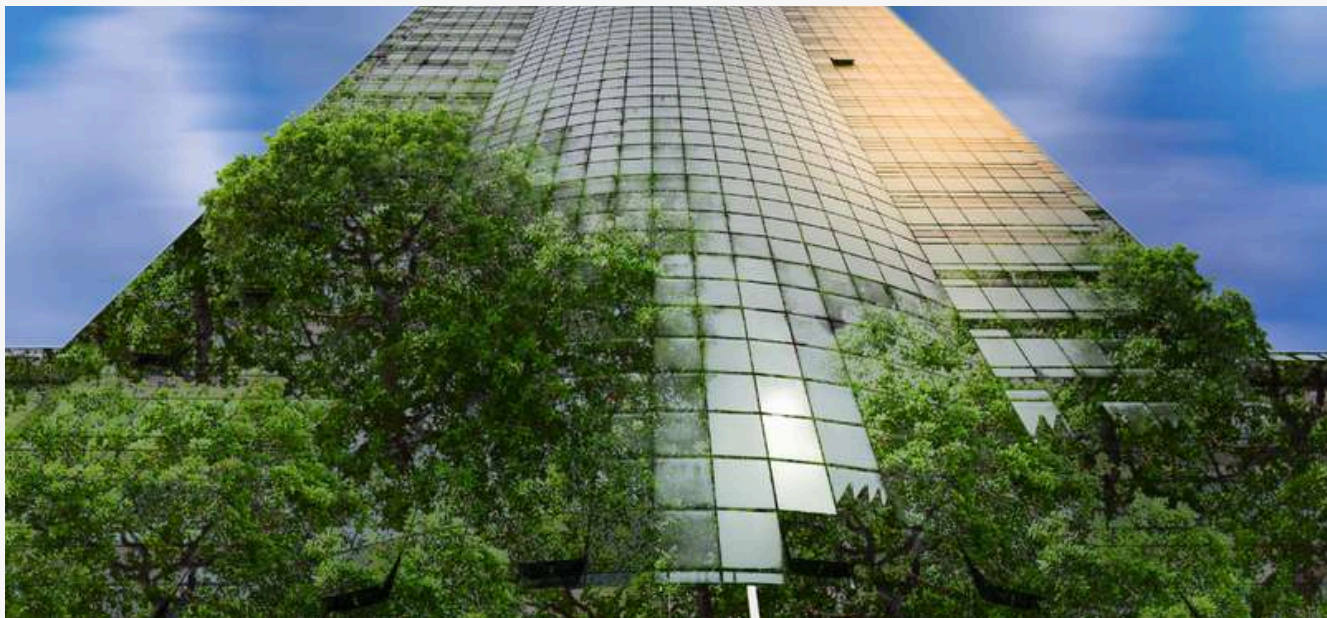
The project partner "For Clean Lithuania" has gathered a team and is fully prepared for an ambitious walking expedition around the Baltic Sea "Save the Baltic Sea", which will include talks on pollution from agriculture and ways to reduce it. A team of 10 people, united by a common goal, will embark on a 9-month trek around the Baltic Sea on 11 March 2024. It will include educational and scientific events, discussions, seminars and research in 8 countries. The aim is to accelerate action on the most pressing pollution problems in the Baltic Sea.

[Find out more and follow the expedition](#)



In Lithuania, many meadows are being converted into monoculture fields, leading to environmental problems.

PAVING THE WAY FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION WITH REDUCED HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES (NONHAZCITY 3)



**2023 - 2025 IN LITHUANIA,
LATVIA, SWEDEN, FINLAND,
ESTONIA, DENMARK,
GERMANY, POLAND.**

PAGALVOK.LT

A new project on chemicals, NonHazCity 3, was launched in 2023, bringing together partners from 8 countries in the Baltic Sea Region, including public authorities, municipalities, research institutions, NGOs and private companies. The project is led by Riga City Municipality. As in the previous NonHazCity and NonHazCity 2 projects, the aim remains the same - to educate the public, municipalities and businesses on how to avoid the use and release of hazardous chemicals into the environment, and on what decisions municipalities and businesses should take to reduce their exposure to chemicals.

NonHazCity 3 focuses on the more specific topic of building materials and the hazardous chemicals they contain. During the first year of the project, the project team has worked diligently to develop several publications, including: a catalogue of construction materials; a home renovation guideline for residents; a sustainable construction guideline for municipalities; a strategic solutions guideline for construction materials and site management procedures; and a summary for construction professionals. An update of the Checked application has also been released to assess exposure to hazardous chemicals in the home environment due to contamination from construction materials. This content (in English) is available on [the Internet page](#) and [the project website](#).



Activities in project municipalities

At the end of 2023, activities related to sustainable construction and reducing the use of hazardous chemicals in the construction sector started in the project municipalities (Riga, Tallinn, Stockholm, Helsinki, Västerås and Holbek). Construction projects in the municipalities are subject to green building criteria, both in design and in the procurement of goods and services. Project activities include the renovation of public housing; the procurement of a public building project; the design and construction of a non-toxic and zero-emission pre-school, etc. In other participating countries (Germany, Poland, Lithuania), preparations for activities with residents have started. Specialists will advise project volunteers renovating their homes on the choice of environmentally friendly building materials.

International Sustainable Construction Awards

The international NonHazCity Building Awards were announced as the project activities got underway. The aim is to raise awareness of construction-related initiatives among decision-makers, businesses and citizens. Nominations are open for a wide range of regional, national or municipal policy decisions: legislation, action plans, programmes, resolutions, standards or guidelines that protect people and the environment from exposure to hazardous chemicals, embrace circularity, and aim for zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.



[More information about the contest](#)

Information for the inhabitants

In 2023, we also launched the project's information campaign, which informs the public about environmentally friendly building materials and sustainable construction and renovation. We will reveal how to avoid the use and impact of hazardous chemicals in construction. We will also address the topic of construction and the circular economy and zero emissions. We will share stories of change from cities, businesses and organisations in different countries that are also working to reduce the footprint of hazardous materials in construction!



SUPPORTING NATURAL CLIMATE PROTECTION IN AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES



**2023 - 2026 IN
LITHUANIA, CZECH
REPUBLIC, ROMANIA,
CROATIA AND
GERMANY**

**BEF.LT/KLIMATO-
APSAUGA-
AGRARINIAME-
KRASTOVAIZDYJE/**

In 2023, we launched a new project. It will gather the best European practices for carbon storage in agriculture. These will be used as a basis for recommendations at both the national level (for the country's agricultural strategic plan) and at the European level. It will also include international workshops, field visits, training for farmers and presenting the results to decision-makers.

Preparatory work started in 2023.

THE BALTIC SEA DIALOGUE



**2023 - 2025 IN
LITHUANIA,
GERMANY, POLAND,
AND SWEDEN**

**BEF.LT/BALTIJOS-
JUROS-DIALOGAS/**

In 2023, another new project started. It aims to create an international network of environmental organisations, fisheries, agriculture, tourism, science and government. The network would contribute to effective conservation and restoration measures and sustainable fisheries management in the Baltic Sea and coastal ecosystems.

Preparatory work started in 2023.

ALL THE PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED IN 2023

*This column shows the total budget of all partners participating in the project for the entire duration

Duration	Total budget*	Financed by	Name	Partners/implementers	Project website
2016-2026	4 097 038 EUR	EU LIFE programme, Republic of Lithuania and project partners	Stepping stones towards ensuring long-term favorable conservation status of Aquatic warbler in Lithuania (LIFE MagniDucatus Acrola)	Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania (coordinating beneficiary), Lithuanian State Forest Enterprise, Žuvintas Biosphere Reserve Directorate, The State Scientific and Production Amalgamation "Scientific and Practical Center of The National Academy of Sciences of Belarus for Biological resources"	https://meldine.lt/en
2018-2027	17 000 044 EUR	EU LIFE programme, Republic of Lithuania	Optimizing the management of Natura 2000 network in Lithuania (LIFE IP PAF-NATURALIT)	Environmental Projects Management Agency under the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania (coordinating beneficiary), Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania, State Service for Protected Areas under the Ministry of Environment, National Paying Agency under the Ministry of Agriculture, State Forest Enterprise, Aukštaitija National Park and Labanoras Regional Park Administration, Dzūkija National Park and Cepkeliai Strict Nature Reserve Administration, Žemaitija National Park Directorate, Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania, Vytautas Magnus University Agriculture Academy, Lithuanian State Forest Enterprise, Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania	https://naturalit.lt/en
2021-2027	4 295 806 EUR	EU LIFE Programme, Republic of Lithuania and project partners	Piloting integrated wetland restoration approaches in Latvia and Lithuania (LIFE MarshMeadows)	Latvian Fund for nature (coordinating beneficiary), Baltic Environmental Forum Lithuania, SIA FRIEDRICH HAASE, SIA M.M.P Vest, Pievu pauksčiai, SIA Sita Nature park, SIA Tiravoti	https://slapyne.lt/

*this column shows the total budget of all partners participating in the project for the entire duration

Duration	Total budget*	Financed by	Name	Partners/implementers	Projects website
2023-2025	4 886 621 EUR	Baltic Sea Region (INTERREG) programme, Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania and project partners	Reducing hazardous substances in construction to safeguard the aquatic environment, protect human health and achieve more sustainable buildings (NonHazCity3)	Riga City Council (project coordinator), City of Stockholm, City of Västerås, City of Helsinki, City of Tallinn, Auraplan Architects, ECAT - Environmental Center for Administration and Technology, Holbaek municipality, Swedish University for Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS), POMInnO Ltd., Building Products Assessment (BVB Service AB), BEF Germany, BEF Estonia, BEF Latvia, BEF Lithuania,[RJ1] Ecodesign Competence Centre, World Future Council Foundation, Coalition Clean Baltic, NOMAD architects, German Environment Agency, Kaunas University of Technology	https://pagalvok.lt/
2023-2025	117 368 EUR	Climate change programme (EPMA) and project partners	Advocacy of climate change mitigation in agriculture	Baltic Environmental Forum (BEF) (project coordinator) ir Už švarią Lietuvą	https://bef.lt/klimato-kaita-zemes-ukyje/
2023-2025	358 845 EUR	European Environment Initiative (EURENI) and project partners	Establishing a network of international stakeholders to effectively protect and restore the marine and coastal ecosystems of the Baltic Sea (Baltic-Coast-Dialog)	Rewilding Oder Delta e. V. (project coordinator), Baltic Environmental Forum (BEF), Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V. (DUH), Fisheries Secretariat (FishSec), OTOP (BirdLife Poland) and Hel Marine Station	https://bef.lt/baltijos-juros-dialogas/
2023-2026	657 320 EUR	European Climate Initiative (EUKI) and project partners	LANDCARE EUROPE Captures Carbon – Supporting Natural Climate Protection in Agricultural Landscapes	Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege (DVL) e.V. (project coordinator), Baltic Environmental Forum (BEF), Agri-Cultura-Natura Transylvanica Association (ACNT), Brod Ecological Society (BED), Czech Society for Ornithology (BirdLife Czechia)	https://bef.lt/landcare-europe-captures-carbon-supporting-natural-climate-protection-in-agricultural-landscapes/?lang=en

SERVICES PROVIDED



In addition to our direct work on conservation projects, we also provide consultancy services to businesses, public institutions and private individuals. Since practically no financial programme provides 100% funding, by providing services we raise most of the missing funds for the projects we initiate and implement.



We contributed to making Vilnius the European Green Capital of 2025

"Vilnius - the greenest city in the making". With this slogan, Vilnius won the title of European Green Capital 2025. Although the Lithuanian capital is one of the greenest cities in the world with its abundance of parks, forests, meadows and green spaces, there is still room to go "greener" in transport, energy, mobility, buildings and other areas. We carried out an assessment of the city's green initiatives in seven areas (air quality, water, biodiversity and land use, waste and circular economy, noise, mitigation, adaptation) and based on this assessment, we prepared an application and a presentation for the awards. The city's efforts, policies and vision for the future have been assessed as very promising and worthy of attention, and in 2025 Europe will look to Vilnius as a model for sustainability and climate change.

Our team also helped present Vilnius as the future European Green Capital at events such as "Adventur" and the "Book Fair", providing information and advice on stand content.

We are proud to be Vilnius' environmental NGO and to be able to contribute to the development of the city's green initiative, to promote it, and to provide an incentive for institutional representatives to continue to work in the direction of sustainability.





Helping business learn about nature

The wetlands of Baltoji Vokė are a wild place that is slowly starting to let visitors in. It is a great place for birdwatching in the spring, plant watching in the summer, and during the rest of the year, to learn about wetlands, bogs, peatlands, peat use, vernal pools and open ecosystems, and how to care for and restore them. In late autumn, Swedbank staff organised a Sustainability Week, during which employees had the opportunity to learn about various sustainable projects and visit the Baltoji Vokė wetland.



We helped set up the Landcare Europe network

On 7 June 2023, we founded Landcare Europe in Brussels, together with 8 other organisations from other European countries. It brings together agriculture, nature conservation and communities to preserve biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and quality of life in Europe's cultural landscapes. The network now has 11 members from as many European countries and is constantly expanding. Our team member Justas Gulbinas was elected to the Board of Directors at the time of its launch.



[More about the network](#)



Helping organisations implement green public procurement - we organise trainings

Green public procurement is an important tool for achieving sustainable development and environmental policy objectives related to climate change, sustainable use of resources, consumption and production. Green procurement is becoming an important part of the market. In all contracting authorities, contracting entities and non-procuring organisations, green procurement should have represented at least 10% of the value of all public procurement between 1 July 2021 and the end of the year, at least 50% of the value of all public procurement in 2022, and 100% of the value of all public procurement every year from 2023.

So in 2023, we launched the Green Public Procurement (GPP) training. The training is based on the European Commission's Green Public Procurement Training Programme, which is used in eleven countries. It is coordinated by ICLEI, an organisation of local authorities committed to sustainability, and the Baltic Environment Forum.

The training brings together 25 participants from 12 different organisations from the state and local government, education, health and other sectors.

The training consists of four sessions, two of which took place in October and December 2023. The training is conducted with exercises between sessions, allowing participants to put their knowledge into practice. Topics cover the following aspects of GPP: implementation, legal context, procurement needs assessment, cooperation with suppliers and circular economy procurement. In addition, the training covers specific categories of products and services.



OTHER INITIATIVES



In addition to our direct activities in nature conservation projects, as a non-governmental organisation we also initiate voluntary activities that are necessary for the conservation of Lithuanian nature. They exist only thanks to the enthusiasm of our team and your support.

RARE COMMON TERNS FIND A HOME ON AN ARTIFICIAL ISLAND IN TRAKAI FOR A THIRD YEAR IN A ROW

For the third year in a row, rare birds - common terns - have been having their babies in Lake Totoriškės, Trakai. They settled here after we built an artificial island.

We are extremely happy that this raft - an artificial island - is living its life very successfully. The terns settled here in the first year of the raft's construction and have returned every year since. This year we counted 10 pairs of these birds settling in the area, and we have been watching the fluffy chicks. However, our raft was not spared by the bird flu going around in Lithuania. Several birds died and we made sure that they were disposed of properly.

Although this year has not been without its challenges, such islands are becoming reliable homes for endangered birds when natural habitats are in serious decline. Common terns breed only on islands in rivers or lakes that are not covered by vegetation. Such areas are in very short supply and, if left unmanaged, become overgrown with scrub. They are also at high risk of drowning of nests due to fluctuating water levels. Artificial islands are one way of creating new safe homes for these birds. It has been increasingly adopted in various countries.

The raft was built with the help of businesses and public support. In 2023, the money needed to repair the raft was raised in just a few days. Thank you to everyone who contributed! You can continue to support our initiatives similar to this one.



[Donate](#)

CONSERVATION OF PUNIA ANCIENT FOREST



PUNIOSSILAS.LT

For the fifth year in a row, we continued our volunteer initiative to preserve one of Lithuania's most valuable forests – Punia Ancient Forest.

A major victory - the reserve expanded by 5 times

Several years of effort have finally yielded amazing results - on 5 May 2022. The Government approved the decision to extend the area of Punia Forest Strict Nature Reserve by 5 times.

Now, Punia Forest is the first strict nature reserve of its size in Lithuania, covering almost the entire forest area. According to experts, this is one of the most important environmental achievements in Lithuania since the country's independence. Finally, Lithuania has its first state-protected forest. We have not had a single strict nature reserve protecting an entire old-growth forest. Until now, the prevailing practice has been to give the status of a strict nature reserve to swampy areas, such as the Čepkeliai, Žuvintas, Kamanos swamp complexes, and others.

We are actively working to plug the "holes" left behind

In the project of Punia forest strict nature reserve, approved by the government, the previous area of the reserve is increased 5 times, but without including genetic reserves, which constitutes one tenth (11 percent, almost 300 ha) of the entire territory of Punia forest. By expanding the reserve, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania obliged the Ministry of the Environment to further increase the protection of the Punia forest and the integrity of the natural reserve, paying the greatest attention to the planning process for the protection of these genetic reserves. We will be watching to see how this protection is implemented, as integrity is very important to Punia's forests.



Genetic reserves, that are not included to the territory of Punia forest strict nature reserve

So, in 2023, we monitored how this protection would be implemented, as the integrity of the Punia Forest is very important. We have asked the Ministry of the Environment on several occasions when the promised study on the compatibility between biodiversity and genetic resource protection will be prepared. To date, this study has not been prepared.

We have also been actively following what is actually happening in the Punia Pine Forest. We publicized the fact that the Ministry of the Environment did not keep its promises by carrying out clear-cutting when the above-mentioned study on nature-friendly farming in genetic woods had not yet been prepared.

This situation only confirms the fears we expressed during the expansion of the reserve - that the forestry principles applied in genetic reserves will threaten with loggings. Although scientists have found natural values of European importance in these areas, which we are committed to protecting, they continue to be dominated by the sawmill.

Following this information, the Minister of the Environment has suspended all sanitary logging in Punia Pine Forest.

Support our efforts to protect the Punia Forest by making a donation.

[Donate](#)



© Renatas Jakaitis



ADVOCACY FOR NATURE CONSERVATION IN KEY POLITICAL PROCESSES

In addition to advocacy activities supported by projects or specifically focused on the protection of the Punia Ancient Forest, we also voluntarily contribute to other political processes that we consider to be important in the defence of the public interest.

Although we do not have the financial capacity to work in these areas on a consistent basis, we periodically contribute as much as we are able to raising the profile of the following issues: forest policy, hunting, nature restoration.

You can help us to become more active in advocacy by making a donation.

[Donate](#)



Forest policy in Lithuania

National Forest Agreement finalised, time for political decisions.

In 2023, our team continued to be involved in the National Forest Agreement (NFA) process. Two representatives of our organisation provided comments and observations and attended meetings.

The discussions between the social partners are closed. Three key issues remained unresolved: the protection of biodiversity, multi-purpose and economic use of forests. This was opposed at the last stage by the forest industry lobby. Agreement was found on other issues. The Ministry of the Environment summarised the results of the discussions and prepared the text of the proposed National Forest Agreement. This is the basis for a political decision by politicians.

The responsibility now rests on the shoulders of the Members of the Parliament to speak up for the future of Lithuania's forests. Obviously, it is up to the politicians to decide on those issues where there is no consensus among stakeholders.

To our knowledge, political consultations have taken place, during which the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party has stated that it will not sign the agreement due to the protracted process. The other parties took the cover of this convenient situation by claiming that if the Social Democrats did not support the document, there was no reason to raise the issue further. The agreement has remained in politicians' drawers.

For our part, we have appealed to all parties to sign the NFA or to make their position on the future of forests clear. We will continue this work.

In 2023, we also contributed to raising the issue of sanitary logging in the public debates on media as well as by taking part in the potest "Whose Forest?".



Legalisation of night vision sights in Lithuania

Together with other Lithuanian environmental NGOs, we have actively advocated AGAINST the using night vision in hunting in Lithuania. We contributed to the preparation of information for the media, talking to politicians and explaining the harm of such legalisation to the environment. This issue has even been raised several times in 2023.



Nature Restoration Law in the European Union

Together with other Lithuanian environmental NGOs, we have also been actively involved in urging Lithuanian members of the European Parliament to vote in favour of a Nature Restoration Law.



SUPPORT AND VOLUNTEERING



SUPPORT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BALTIC ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM LITHUANIA

Baltic Environment Forum protects nature with people. Together it is much easier.

Many of our initiatives that protect nature and promote human personal experience (residence) in it could not exist without public support. Help us support existing and implement new ideas.

By supporting our activities, you have contributed at least in part to the following activities:

- Activities that promote human immersion (experience in a hurry, getting to know) in nature. An example of such activities are the festivals in nature "In the middle of woods", "Forest spells", "In the middle of lakes"
- Preserving forests for future generations.
- Help protect the globally endangered Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*).
- Contribute to informing the public about hazardous substances in everyday products.
- Contribute to the production of new publications on nature.

You can also support specific activities that interest you.

In 2023, a total of €3,830 was received. THANK YOU!



Give 1.2% support

In 2023, a contribution of €780 was received from the 1.2% of the personal income taxes. Compared to 2022, the amount of donations collected remained practically unchanged and was used for outdoor festivals and the organization's activities.

[Donate](#)



Make the donation you want

In 2023, we received €3,050 in donations from private persons and business. UAB URBAN WIND RESIDENTIAL supported the organisation of the Lithuania's Scythe Mowing Championship event with €2,500; €550 was provided by individuals for the repair of the tern's raft, for outdoor festivals and for the organization's ongoing activities.

[Donate](#)

VOLUNTEER AT BALTIC ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM

Volunteering to help protect nature.

We give motivated people the opportunity to join in and protect nature together.

If you're enthusiastic and keen, and nature conservation is one of the most important areas for you, you're welcome to join us. Contact us via info@bef.lt.

Last year, 2 people volunteered regularly in our organisation and 71 people volunteered episodically. Justina Raleva, a great volunteer from Chicago, brought the most action to the organisation.

Justina has done a lot during her six weeks of volunteering, actively joining us both in the office and in the field. We joke that after her experience in Poland during the translocation of aquatic warblers, she has become the ultimate expert on fixing cages. She helped up a lot to set up a new home for the birds in the marsh.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT



BEF's CO2 AND WASTE FOOTPRINT IN 2023

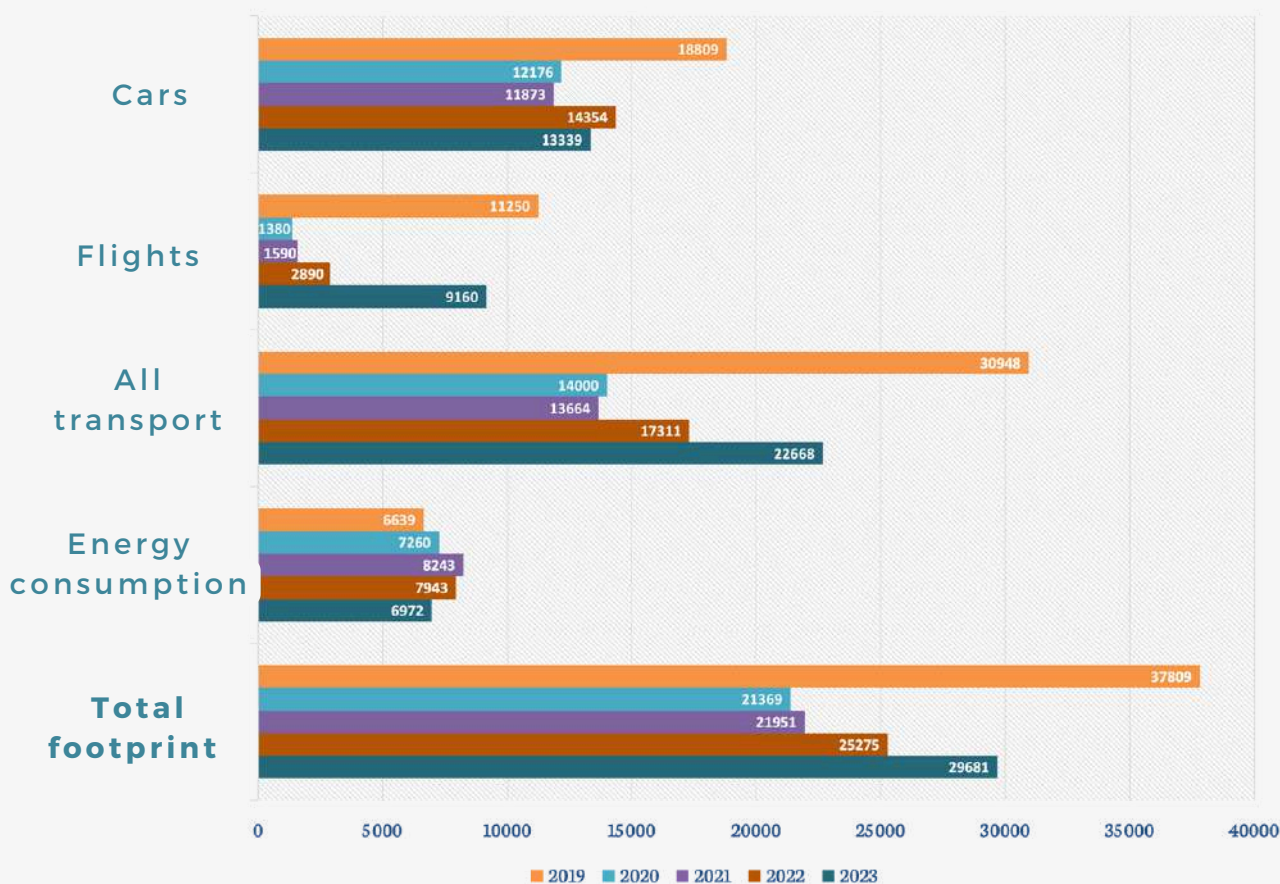
In our organisation, we inevitably use electricity, car fuel and other resources that have an impact on the environment. Since 2011, we have been calculating our operational footprint in terms of CO2 equivalent emissions to measure the environmental impact of our organisation. We also calculate how much waste is generated in our office. We have been tracking these indicators for 13 years now, and we can see that our carbon footprint is highly dependent on the activities we carry out each year. In some years we travel more, do more training or have other specific activities in areas further away from our headquarters, so we use more fuel.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) CO2 equivalent footprints

In 2023, our organisation's total GHG footprint was 29.7 tonnes of CO2 equivalent, or 1,799 kg per employee. The transport footprint accounted for the largest share, 76.4%. Car journeys and air travel both contributed the most.

23.5% of the footprint was made up of office electricity and heating, while the remaining small proportion (around 1%) was made up of taxi, bus and train journeys, as well as the footprint related to the use of paper. Compared to 2022, the total footprint increased by 17.4%. This is due to increased travel in 2023, as well as participation in conferences and meetings with foreign partners. Compared to the arithmetic average of the previous 5 years, the GHG footprint in 2023 is 1% higher. The chart below shows our organisation's footprint for the past 5 years for comparison.

BEF footprint of emissions, kg CO2 ek.



BEF's CO2 equivalent footprint in 2023: 29.7 tonnes:

- That's the average annual emissions of 12 passenger cars in Lithuania;
- Such a footprint would result from driving a car around the globe 6 times;
- That's the amount of CO2 absorbed by a 3 ha wetland per year (the equivalent of 4 standard football fields).

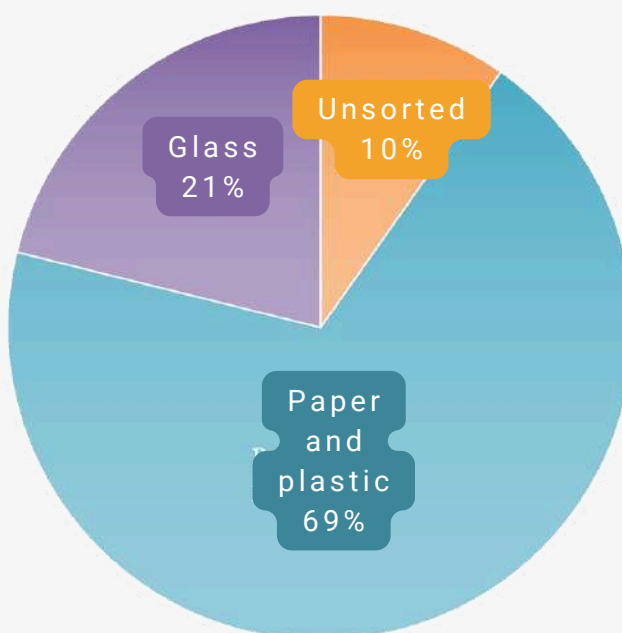


Waste

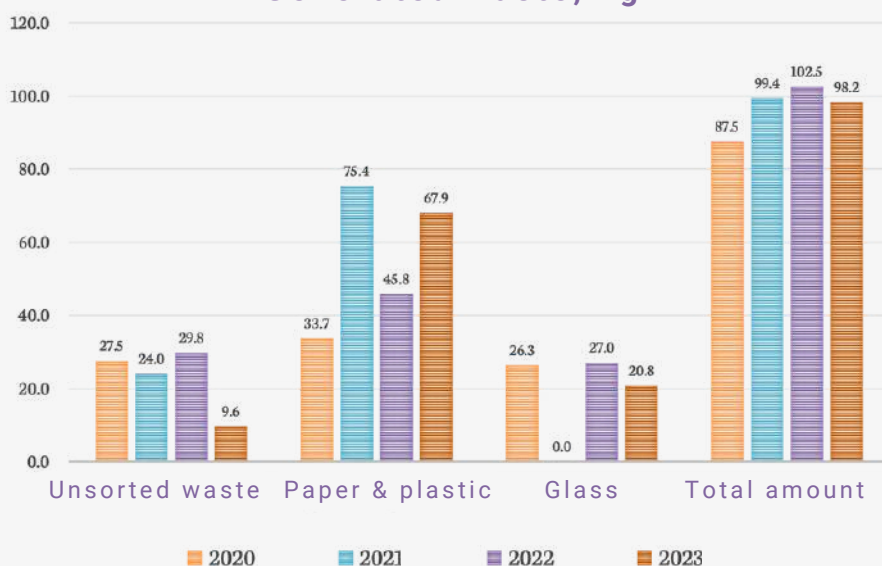
In 2023, we generated only 98 kg of waste, which is similar to 2021 or 2020, when we were working remotely most of the time. Unsorted waste accounted for only 10% of total waste. The rest was paper and plastic (69%) and glass (21%), which we sorted into recyclable waste.

Compared to the previous 3 years, the amount of unsorted waste has decreased significantly. We think we have managed to reduce the amount of unsorted waste because we have started composting food waste from summer 2022. We intend to continue this practice in the future, as it allows us to reduce the amount of unsorted waste by several times (in 2023, we generated about 10 times less than the 2015-2019 average, when we were not yet working remotely).

Generated waste



Generated waste, kg



FINANCIAL REPORT



INCOME

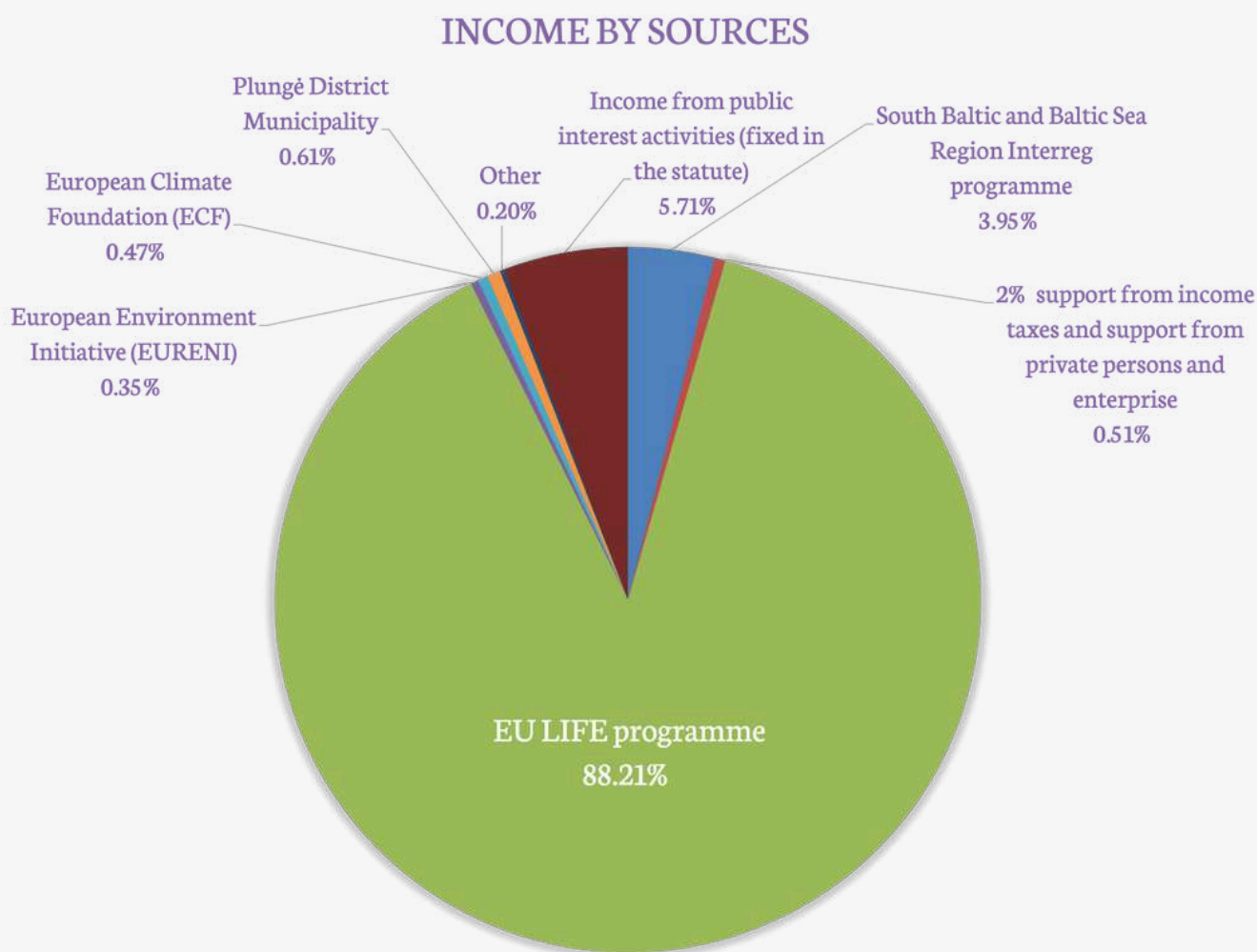
Total income for 2023 year was 757 764 euro*. Part of this sum was related with Project expenses reimbursement from 2022 and another part with Project expenses from 2023, income from public interest activities, advance payments for projects activities implementation and support.

**A remark. According to the LR public organizations legislation, the activity report has to indicate the received income, and this amount does not match with the financial turnover in the balance sheet, because the turnover in the balance sheet is counted cumulatively.*

Part of income from EU LIFE programme (including previous years income) was distributed to Project partners – 64 % from such income. Institutional part here was left 36 %.

We got 780 euros 2% support from taxes and 3 050 euros from private persons and companies (URBAN WIND RESIDENTIAL, UAB supported National Scything Championship event with 2 500 eur).

73 persons contributed to the project activities and festivals through the voluntary work - they volunteered 709 hours in 2023.

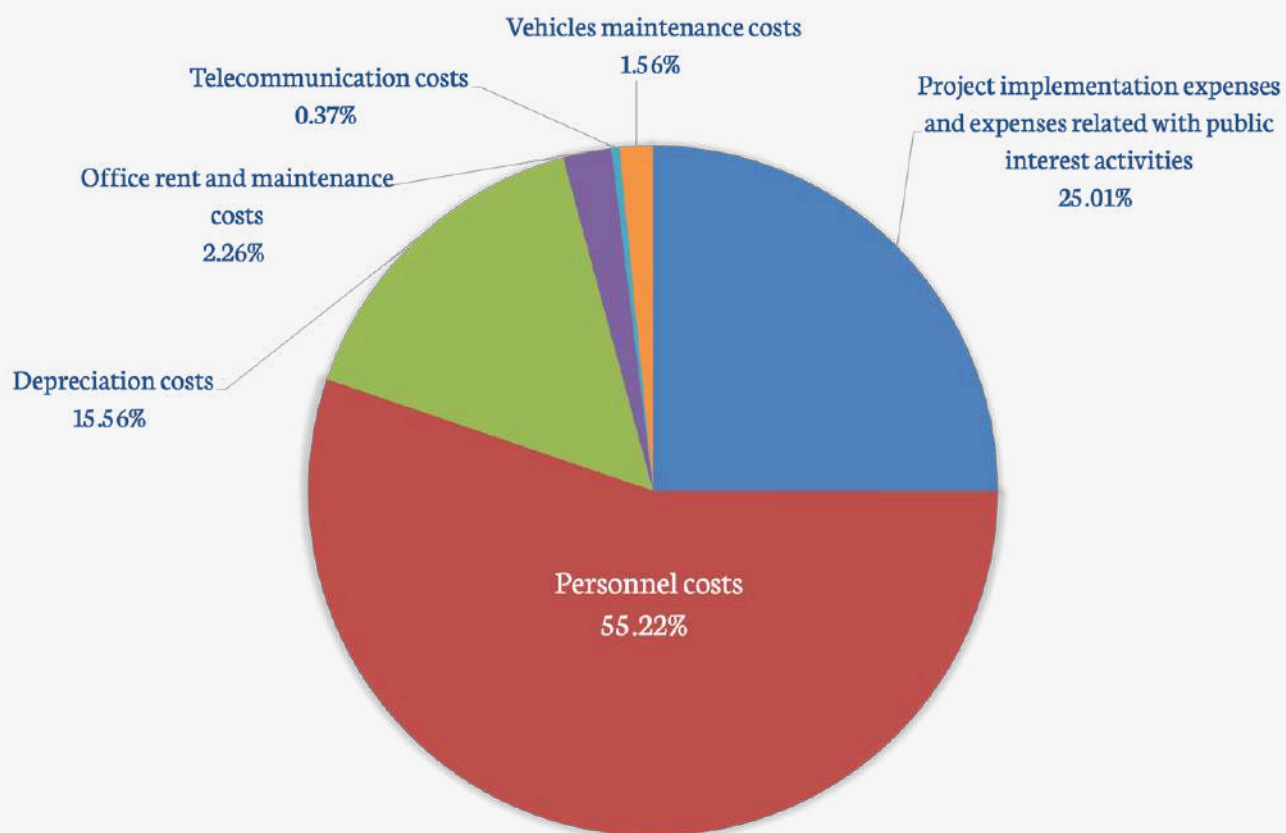


EXPENSES

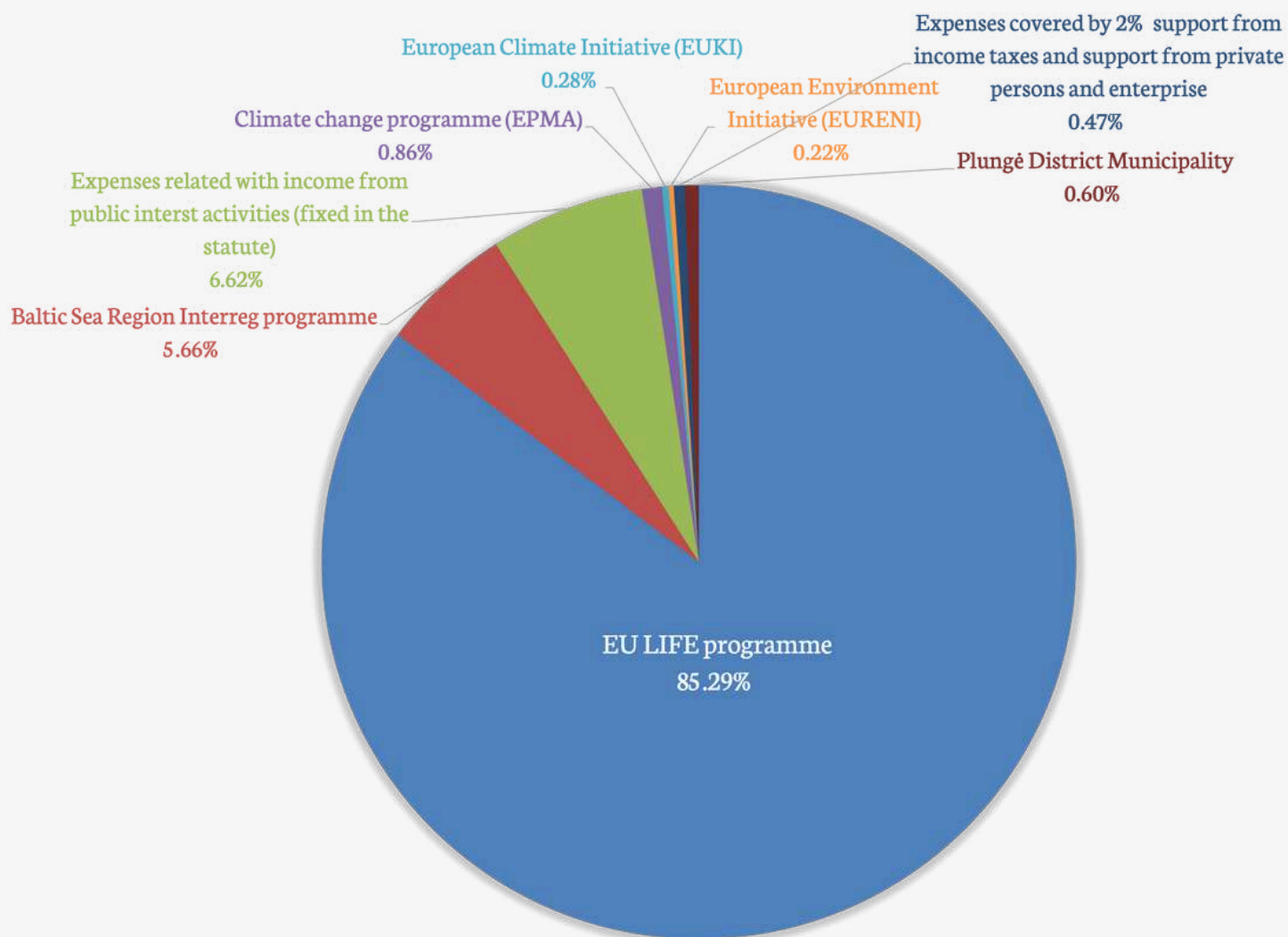
Total expenses for 2023 year were 767 104 euro. Part of these expenses were covered from previous years funding and another will be reimbursed from receivable funding on 2024.

In diagrams below you can see “Expenses by categories” and “Expenses by sources”.

EXPENSES BY CATEGORIES



EXPENSES BY SOURCES



EMPLOYEES AND STAKEHOLDERS

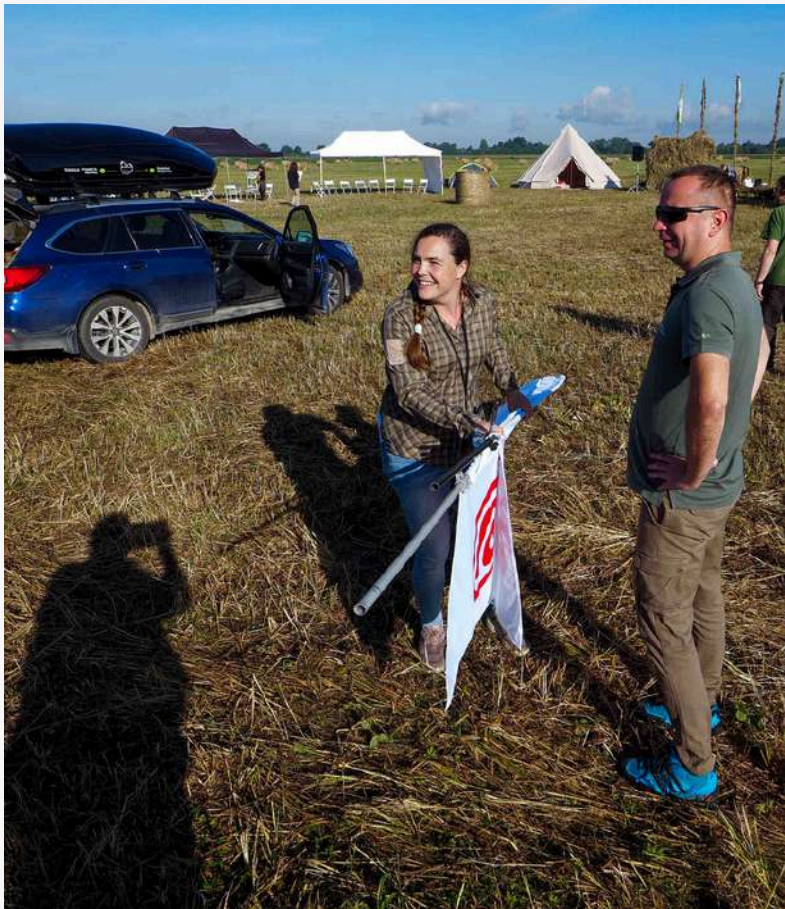
At the beginning of the year 14 employees worked in organization, 3 of them were part-time employees and 2 persons were on Maternity leave. At the end of the year 15 employees worked in organization, 2 of them were part-time employees and 2 persons were on Maternity leave.

There was no any changes in a shareholders' structure on 2023. The shareholders contribution is 1 554 euro (with the proportions 96%, 2%, 1% and 1 %). Because the organization is public (non-governmental) institution all of shareholders has one vote right (information about public organization shareholders can be found at the State Enterprise Centre of Registers). The current shareholders are four private persons, Žymantas Morkvėnas, Rita Jonkuvienė, Rita Grinienė and Heidrun Fammler.

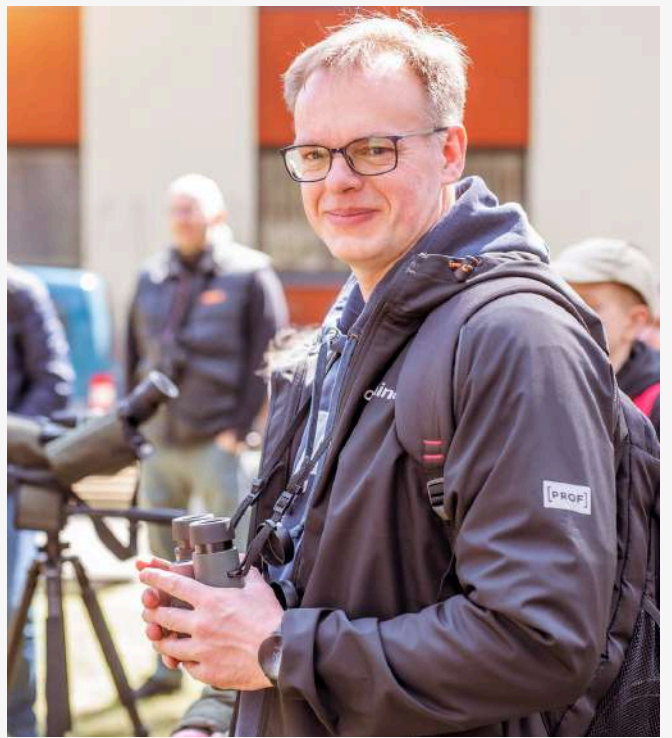
TEAM MOMENTS





















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