

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultancy for Development of Standard Data Forms (SDFs) and National Guidelines for Selected Protected Areas in Albania (Shebenik National Park, Albanian Alps National Park, Prespa National Park, Korab – Koritnik Nature Park, and Protected Landscape Pogradeci Lake)

1. Background

The National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA) is the competent authority responsible for the overall management of protected areas in Albania. NAPA operates through a network of 12 Regional Administrations for Protected Areas (RAPAs), which are mandated to carry out on-the-ground management, monitoring, and enforcement within their respective jurisdictions. Each RAPA is structured into two core units: (i) a Monitoring Sector, composed of monitoring specialists and rangers responsible for field surveillance and data collection, and (ii) a Management Sector, responsible for planning, coordination, and implementation of management measures. The Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) is a transboundary conservation trust fund established in 2015 by the MAVA Foundation and the KfW (German Development Bank) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Its mission is to support long-term nature conservation through sustainable financing mechanisms and strategic partnerships. PONT delivers its support through two principal grant windows: (i) co-financing of operational costs of protected areas, and (ii) co-financing of environmental actors, including civil society organizations, local government units, and academic and research institutions.

In Albania PONT is active and supporting five Protected Areas, namely Albanian Alps National Park (AANP), Korab-Koritnik Nature Park (KKNP) Shebenik National Park (SHNP), Prespa National Park (PNP) and Protected Landscape Pogradeci Lake (PLPL). A three-year grant cycle is in its final year of implementation (2026) with each Protected Area. In line with the approved Annual Operational Plan, the 2026 grant covers a 12-month implementation period starting in January 2026. In general, the grants aim to support the operational management of the PAs, in accordance with their approved Management Plan. The intervention contributes to strengthening biodiversity conservation while also supporting sustainable livelihoods for local communities within and around the protected area. The grants are implemented by the National Agency of Protected Areas, in close cooperation with the Regional Administrations for Protected Areas of Kukës, Dibër, Shkodër, Elbasan and Korçë. These regional structures play a key role in planning and overseeing the implementation of project activities at the local level, as well as ensuring coordination and engagement with relevant local stakeholders.

Albania, as a candidate country for membership in the European Union, is progressively aligning its environmental legislation and practices with the EU acquis. This includes approximation to the requirements of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC. A key component of this process is the preparation for the establishment of the Natura 2000

ecological network. While Natura 2000 sites are not yet formally designated in Albania, preparatory technical work is required to support future designation.

The Standard Data Form (SDF) is the official European Commission tool used to document ecological characteristics of sites, including habitat types, species, conservation status, and pressures.

This assignment aims to support Albania in this preparatory phase through the development of:

- National guidelines for completing SDFs
- Pilot Standard Data Forms for the five selected protected areas (AANP, KKNP, PNP, SHNP and PLPL)

2. Objectives

Overall Objective

To support Albania's alignment with Natura 2000 requirements through the development of standardized, EU-aligned ecological data and reporting tools.

Specific Objectives

- Develop a national guideline for preparing Standard Data Forms
- Compile and structure ecological data for selected sites
- Produce EU-aligned, preliminary SDFs
- Establish a reference (gold-standard) SDF
- Strengthen national and local institutional capacities in completing the forms
- Ensure that all SDFs and supporting datasets are compatible with EU reporting standards and can be integrated into EIONET data flows

3. Scope of Work

The consultancy shall undertake the following tasks:

Task 1: Review and Data Collection

- Review existing:
 - Management plans
 - Biodiversity inventories
 - Monitoring data and other available data such as studies, assessments etc.
 - GIS datasets

- Coordination with ongoing project EU4Nature and previous consultation with the documents produced in frame of other projects in order to have unified SDF forms and processes applicable for all the sites
- Identify data gaps and uncertainties

Task 2: Development of National SDF Guidelines

Prepare a practical national guideline including:

- Explanation of all SDF sections and fields
- Instructions for:
 - Habitat classification (Annex I)
 - Species reporting (Annex II, IV, V and birds)
- Data standards and sources
- Coding systems (EU standard)
- Data quality and confidence levels
- Practical instructions on data processing, storage and calculation

Task 3: Field Verification (Targeted)

- Conduct field visits where necessary to:
 - Validate habitat presence
 - Confirm key species
- Apply standardized methodologies

Task 4: Preparation of Standard Data Forms

Prepare SDFs for:

- Prespa National Park (*Gold-standard SDF*)*
- Shebenik National Park
- Albanian Alps National Park
- Korab-Koritnik Nature Park
- Protected Landscape Pogradeci Lake

For each site:

- Define boundaries (GIS-based)
- Identify and assess:
 - Habitat types
 - Species populations
- Evaluate:
 - Conservation status
 - Pressures and threats
- Complete all SDF sections

Task 5: Capacity Building

- Deliver at least one training workshop
- Provide practical guidance on:
 - SDF completion
 - Data management

4. Nature of Outputs (Critical Clause)

The outputs of this assignment are preparatory and do not constitute official Natura 2000 submissions.

All Standard Data Forms shall:

- Follow the structure and methodology of the European Commission
- Be based on best available data
- Clearly indicate data gaps and confidence levels
- Serve as a national reference for future Natura 2000 designation

5. Deliverables

The consultant(s) shall deliver:

1. Inception Report

- Methodology
- Work plan

- Data sources
- System of data elaboration
- 2. **Draft National SDF Guidelines**
- 3. **Draft SDFs (Excel format)** for all five sites
- 4. **Gold-standard SDF (Prespa)***
 - Fully detailed
 - High data traceability
 - Reference-quality
- 5. **GIS Database**
 - Site boundaries
 - Habitat maps
 - Species layers
- 6. **Final SDF Guidelines (validated)**
- 7. **Final SDFs**
 - Excel format and a guideline
- 8. **Training Materials and Report in English and Albanian**

6. Duration and Level of Effort

- Duration: **4–6 months**
- Level of effort: 100 – 150 days

7. Required Expertise

Team of Experts

- Team Leader / Senior Ecologist
- Habitat/Botany Expert
- Fauna Expert
- GIS Specialist
- Advanced degree in ecology, biodiversity, or related field

- 7–10+ years of experience
- Proven experience with:
 - o Natura 2000 / SDFs
 - o Habitat and species assessments
 - o GIS

8. Reporting and Coordination

The consultant(s) will report to:

- National Agency of Protected Areas (AKZM)
- Regular coordination meetings will be required.

9. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- Technical approach (30%)
- Relevant experience (30%)
- Team composition (20%)
- Financial proposal (20%)

10. Application Requirements

Applicants must submit:

- Technical proposal
- Financial proposal
- CV(s)
- References of similar work
- Documents must be submitted either by regular mail or in person to NAPA (National Agency of Protected Areas): (Call: _____. Attention: Financial and Technical Specialist of PONT in NAPA, Address: Blvd. Dëshmorët e Kombit, No. 1, Tirana) or by email to: info@akzm.gov.al with the subject: PONT_SDF
- Deadline: 4th of May 2026

11. Key Principles

- Alignment with EU standards
- Transparency of data
- Realistic assessment (no overestimation)
- Practical usability of outputs