



Danube Strategy Flagships





INTRODUCTION

Danube Strategy Flagships are projects or processes that contribute to the implementation of the [EU Strategy for the Danube Region \(EUSDR\)](#), have a clear macro-regional dimension and a multi-level governance approach. They are of high importance for the Danube Region’s economic, social and territorial cohesion and for improving the quality of life in the Danube Region.

Danube Strategy Flagships strengthen internal and external communication of the Strategy and the visibility of the topics, initiatives and prospects in the Danube Region. They illustrate the progress achieved in implementing the EUSDR and demonstrate exemplarily significant improvement in the Region that is induced by cooperation.

EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators with the respective Steering Groups, in their capacity as representatives and key implementers of the EUSDR, as well as the Danube Strategy Point, are committed to contribute to and promote Danube Strategy Flagships in accordance with the [Guidance Paper for identifying and listing Danube Strategy Flagships](#).

LIST OF DANUBE STRATEGY FLAGSHIPS 2022

Joint PA 1a & PA 11 Working Group on Administrative Processes	3
Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries	4
Danube Region Transport Days (DRTD)	5
Danube Region Multimodal Corridors	7
SUSTANCE - Sustainable public transport solutions and innovative governance schemes for improving connectivity in Central Europe	8
Enhancing hydrogen economy in the EUSDR.....	10
Promote local low-carbon energy actions in the EUSDR	12
Diversification of gas supply in EUSDR.....	12
Sustain and better connect EUSDR Cultural routes	14
Danube Small Project Fund	14
Flagship process on adaptation to climate change	16
Flagship process on migratory fish.....	17
Flagship process on emerging substances	19
Disaster Management Working Group	20
Nature-based solutions for flood risk reduction	22
Improving the Safety of Tailings Management Facilities in the Danube River Basin	23
Priority Area 6 Task Forces – Stakeholder Involvement, multi-level governance, joint implementation.....	24
Danube Tech Valley Initiative.....	25
Multilateral Scientific and Technological Cooperation	27
Western Balkans R&I Information Hub	28
Danube Alliance for SME Competitiveness	31
Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence.....	32
European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training National Reference Points	34
ESF Managing Authorities Network in the Danube Region.....	36
EuroAccess Macro-Regions	37
(Danube) Participation Day	38
Collaboration for Dismantling Drugs Distribution and Illicit Laboratories (CO3DIL)	39



Joint PA 1a & PA 11 Working Group on Administrative Processes

Process, platform, ongoing since 2013

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1a Waterways Mobility, PA 11 Security

Submitted by: PA 1a

The joint EUSDR PA 1a & EUSDR PA 11 Working Group on “Administrative Processes” started its work in 2013 and is since then fully dedicated to facilitate and improve control processes in inland navigation, benefitting both the shipping sector (as united in PA 1a) and control authorities (as united in PA 11). Within the broad field of administrative processes, border controls have always been a main source of delays and additional costs for inland waterway transport on the multinational Danube River, which are therefore addressed with priority. In order to ensure the freedom of movement of persons and goods as foreseen in the EU treaties, simple and time-efficient control processes need to be in place at all Schengen external borders and outside the Schengen area.

The activities of the Working Group are based on a joint effort of Priority Area 1a of the EUSDR which is concerned with further developing inland waterways and Priority Area 11, which aims at enhancing transnational cooperation to improve security and to tackle serious and organised crime.

Objectives: The Working Group is a platform uniting (border) control authorities and stakeholders from the shipping industry alike, tackling the reduction of administrative barriers in inland navigation in the Danube Region in an ongoing process.

Need and (expected) impact: The initiative is necessary because control procedures, especially border controls, are a source of delays, in-transparency and unpredictability, hindering the efficient movement of traffic on the Danube. By harmonising, simplifying and finally digitalising such control processes, the administrative burden on transport operators is reduced and simplified for the control authorities, while becoming more predictable.

SIMPLIFICATION: The Practical Manual on Border Controls has been developed to simplify information on a myriad of control forms and processes applicable at and outside Schengen external borders along the Danube. The manual is the first and only one of its kind improving transparency of border controls and reducing market entry barriers for the waterway transportation industry along the Danube. It is publicly and free-of-charge available to waterway users irrespective of their nationality. The manual is being updated on a regular basis.

HARMONISATION & DIGITALISATION: Based on the efforts of the working group, the so-called DAVID-forms have been developed and officially introduced at all border control points at and outside Schengen external borders in Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. They harmonise the data fields of 3 most often used border control forms (arrival and departure forms, crew lists and passenger lists). Even Slovakia has introduced the forms, although not in the context of border controls but rather port operations. The Working Group is continuing its effort and currently works on the digitalisation of these forms to further reduce the administrative burden.

Recent efforts are also dedicated towards the set-up of a trans-national electronic registration tool (TERM), which enables waterway users to schedule time slots for border controls in a harmonised manner in the countries Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. This will lead to improved plannability and efficiency of border control times for both, the shipping sector and border control authorities alike in all countries at and outside Schengen external borders (as mentioned above).

Furthermore, the use of the transnational control database (IBISWEB) along the Danube is being tackled in order to avoid multiple inspections of vessels and to effectively support the control work of the authorities in a harmonised procedure.



With status June 2022, active users include those control authorities in inland navigation of the EUSDR that are members of Aquapol: Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Germany - along the Danube (Czech Republic – Labe / Elbe).

Control authorities in Austria and Ukraine have observer status in 2022 with an imminent full membership in 2023 (due to the Russian invasion, Ukraine's observer status will be implemented in consultation with Ukraine until further notice).

Macro-regional dimension: Countries involved in the Working Group: Germany (as EUSDR PA 11 PAC), Austria (as EUSDR PA 1a PAC) and all countries at and outside Schengen external borders: Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania (in addition to being outside the Schengen area, Romania is PA 1a PAC), Bulgaria (in addition to being outside the Schengen area, Bulgaria is PA 11 PAC), the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Slovakia is also involved, however to a lesser degree, as it has no Schengen external borders.

All countries contribute to the outcomes of the Working Group and have taken national steps for the simplification, harmonisation and digitalisation of border control processes.

Stakeholders involved: The Working Group is formed by stakeholders from the national Ministries of Transport and underlying authorities (port authorities, naval agencies), as well as from the Ministries of Interior and experts from the national border control authorities, including: customs and border police. The countries involved are listed under "macro-regional dimension".

Budget and Funding: As the national efforts to implement the activities of the joint Working Group cannot be monitored, no estimation can be given. It would be possible to implement parts of the Working Group's activities as own projects with different funding sources, possibly Danube Region Programme.

Further information: <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/working-groups/wg-6-administrative-processes/>

Contact: Simon Hartl (simon.hartl@viadonau.org) and Hubert Griepe (hubert.griepe@polizei.bayern.de).

Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries

Policy-project-cycle, process, ongoing since 2014

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1a Waterways Mobility

Unstable and unpredictable fairway conditions along the Danube lead to cargo vessels that are not optimally loaded. This results in unreliable logistics chains and transport prices per transported tonne that are too high to be competitive. For the passenger shipping industry, unstable fairway conditions may prevent voyages from being carried out as planned, resulting in additional costs for cruise operators and an overall loss of image. Apart from structural river engineering-works on a limited number of strategic waterway bottlenecks, proper fairway maintenance helps in securing stable fairway conditions for waterway operators and their customers.

In response to inadequate fairway conditions along the Danube, Priority Area 1a, together with the waterway administrations and Ministries of Transport of the Danube Region, elaborated the Fairway Rehabilitation and Maintenance Master Plan for the Danube and its navigable tributaries (FRMMP) in 2014. The Master Plan stipulates a target minimum Level of Service of mostly 2.5m fairway depth along the Danube waterway (at Low Navigable Water Level) and defines - for each riparian state - the most important issues that need to be addressed to improve fairway rehabilitation and maintenance activities in order to eventually reach this target depth. The waterway management authorities have also estimated their needed annual operational budgets and listed needed investments for dredging equipment, riverbed surveying and fairway marking equipment.



The FRMMP thus provides a strategic framework for coordinated, concerted action to establish stable fairway conditions along the entire Danube and its navigable tributaries. It was endorsed by 10 riparian states during the Danube Ministers Meeting in Brussels on 3rd December 2014. In order to keep the topic of fairway rehabilitation and maintenance on the political agenda of the Danube riparian countries and to regularly obtain a renewed commitment of the Danube Ministers of Transport to the Master Plan, Priority Area 1a in cooperation with DG MOVE organises a meeting of the Danube Ministers of Transport every two years, where Danube Ministerial Conclusions are signed and the implementation of the Master Plan is reaffirmed again and again. After 2014, such meetings were held in 2016, 2018, 2020 and 2022, where an updated version of the master plan was endorsed.

As with any strategy, the document itself does not change anything; projects are needed on the ground to implement it. After 2014, a number of national and also some transnational projects were initiated by the Master Plan, the best known and largest implementation project of the Master Plan was the FAIRway Danube project (2015 - 2021). In recent years, through such projects and with the help of EU co-funding, viable investments have been made that support the waterway administrations of the Danube Region in their maintenance and rehabilitation tasks.

EUSDR PA 1a regularly monitors the implementation status of the Master Plan and on the one hand supports the waterway authorities in the implementation of the Master Plan and on the other hand organises the political support of the Danube Ministers of Transport and the awareness of the necessary financial means through the Danube Ministerial meetings and the signing of Danube Ministerial Conclusions which take place every two years. This policy-project-cycle has proved successful in the past and will be continued by PA 1a.

Objectives: The overall objective is to establish stable and reliable fairway conditions along the entire Danube and its navigable tributaries of mostly 2.5m fairway depth at Low Navigable Water Level.

Need and (expected) impact: The current situation includes unstable fairway conditions - a situation that needs to be changed as soon as possible.

Macro-regional dimension: Countries involved in this process are those Danube Region countries with international waterways: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine. As the aim is to establish stable and reliable fairway conditions along the entire waterway corridor, all countries need to be equally involved.

Stakeholders involved: Waterway administrations (waterway managers) of the Danube Region and Ministries of Transport (mostly PA 1a Steering Group members) of the Danube Region. The process is intensively supported by DG MOVE.

Budget and Funding: The process itself needs no funding other than the support the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) are receiving. This task is part of the coordination activities of the PA 1a Coordinators.

Further information: <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/working-groups/wg-1-waterway-infrastructure-management/>

Contact: Viktoria Weissenburger (viktoria.weissenburger@viadonau.org) and Gert-Jan Muilerman (gert-jan.muilerman@viadonau.org)

Danube Region Transport Days (DRTD)

Stakeholder Conference, network, platform; ongoing since 2012 until at least 2028

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1b Rail-Road-Air Mobility





Since 2012, EUSDR PA 1b assembles its valued stakeholders e.g. from the European Commission, academia, financing institutions, business representatives and interested general public to collect input across the diverse participants, advance standards of best practice and enable networking.

The purpose of the annual Stakeholders' Conference is to identify guiding principles for selected topics in transport, ascertain the current performance in these areas, and determine how the implementation of EUSDR PA 1b towards its mission can be further improved.

With this information, PA 1b can make effective decisions on its implementation plan. The conference outcomes also provide valuable input for the participants who are able to learn what are the most needed research and project activities for enhanced mobility and multimodality in the macro-region.

Objectives: The objective of Stakeholder Conferences is to achieve high level understanding and support for a common vision on infrastructure and mobility needs in coming years (until 2030, 2040 and 2045) for road, rail and air transport. The outcomes of the Stakeholder Conferences serve and will serve as input for the PA 1b decisions on how to tackle the most important activities of the EUSDR Action Plan. Last but not least the conferences are important for awareness rising and understanding that joint efforts are needed for the international / cross-border projects with clear added value for the Danube macro-region.

Need and (expected) impact: There are several reasons for PA 1b to organise and for participants to attend DRTD conferences, e.g.:

- To network: A big reason for going to conferences is to meet with likeminded people and transport sector peers. DRTD conferences bring together people from Danube macro-region and beyond who share a common discipline or field, and they are a great way to meet new people in the transport field.
- To expand knowledge and find solutions to problems
- To present PA 1b and stakeholders ideas and work to participants
- For participants to meet with organisers and with each other
- Learn beyond one's field or interest.

The DRTD conference attendance enhances both one's professional and personal development. The focused nature of presentations, discussions and learning at a conference allows participants to dig deeper with the understanding of transport and mobility topics of interest and of importance for connectivity and enhanced mobility in the Danube macro-region.

Macro-regional dimension: The Stakeholder Conferences "The Danube Region Transport Days" are organised by the PA 1b coordinators (PACs). During preparations for each conference a great attention is paid that most of the speakers and participants are coming from the 14 Danube Region countries. Of course there are topics that are best presented by representatives of the European Commission or other national or international institutions from the EU and beyond.

Stakeholders involved: In the last six conferences participating as speakers were:

- The European commission (DG MOVE, DG REGIO, CINEA),
- IFIs (EIB, WB, EBRD),
- High level representatives from ministries,
- Academia (University of Belgrade, University of Győr, University of Ljubljana, University of Timișoara, University of Zagreb, etc.),
- International organisations (UNECE, CEI, EIRA-EuroRAP, etc.)
- And many others.

Budget and Funding: ERDF, IPA and NDICI (via transnational programme).



The estimated budget needed for one conference for up to 130 participants equals between EUR 14.000 and 23.000. Costs include: conference room, catering (mostly two lunches and a dinner), promotional material and external support (badges, follow up of registrations, technical support during the conference). Technical visits can be also organised as part of a conference.

Funding instrument: Technical support for PACs offered by the European Parliament enabled the organisation of the first couple of conferences, while in the last several years EUSDR PA1b technical support received through Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) and PA 1b project contract was the source of financing (85%).

Conferences are free of charge and the organisers never seek sponsorship.

Further information: <https://transport.danube-region.eu/conferences/>

Contact: EUSDR PA 1b Coordinators: Mr. Franc Žepič, PAC Slovenia, Ministry of Infrastructure, franc.zepic@gov.si and Ms. Tamara Delić, PAC Serbia, Ministry of Construction, Infrastructure and transport, tamara.delic@mgsi.gov.rs

Danube Region Multimodal Corridors

Process; ongoing until 2030 and beyond

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1b Rail-Road-Air Mobility



The development of an interconnected and integrated transport system in the Danube Region is a challenge of macro-regional relevance and consistent with national priorities as well as with the EU objectives of a more connected, greener and low-carbon Europe. It aims at strengthening transport infrastructure networks relations by identifying multimodal corridors alongside the TEN-T network, including connections between the EU and non-EU member states. In addition, the network shall improve connections between the Northern Adriatic and Black Sea and intermodal connections with the river and seaports of the macro-region.

Objectives: A system of multimodal corridors in the Danube Region, alongside the TEN-T network, aims at reducing infrastructural, technological and legislative gaps and improving accessibility, in order to facilitate cross-border demand flows and transport operations, and strengthen interconnections between the logistics and urban nodes of the Region.

The overall goal is contributing to create a seamless, harmonised and competitive transport system with a twofold scale of outcomes: on the one hand to exploit the strategic geographical position of the Danube Region between the Black Forest and Black Sea, intercepting the routes from and to the Far East in the context of global trades; on the other hand to facilitate regional and local connections.

The concept of multi-modal Corridors, crossing and connecting several states, has a macro-regional relevance by definition. In the Danube Region it can include several types of actions and projects, ranging from infrastructural development and upgrading to common functional, quality and safety standards (e.g. those foreseen by Reg. (EU) 1315, establishing the TEN-T network) to soft measures including the development of ICT or other innovative solutions to promote environmental-friendly transports (e.g. micro-mobility, cycling routes...), common safety and security standards and to facilitate cross-border crossings.

Need and (expected) impact: The Danube Region Multimodal Corridors is a policy directed towards the development of a Danube Region-wide multimodal transport network, which contributes to the three principal objectives of the macro-regional policy-making: fostering growth, creating jobs and adapting to climate change. The multimodal corridors are part of the TEN-T and extended TEN-T to non-EU countries which consists of a “core network” layer to be completed by 2030 and a “comprehensive network” layer to be completed by 2050.



A major instrument to facilitate and streamline the coordinated development of the core network is the “transport corridor approach”, in which a set of ten European transport corridors (ETC) have been identified by the European Commission. Newly proposed is the “Western Balkans Transport Corridor”.

The objective of this process is two folded:

- a) to assess the growth, jobs and climate impacts resulting from investments to be made between 2022 and 2030 to implement each macro-regional corridor, in line with the TEN-T network implementation as part of the EU transport policy and
- b) to identify and support additional multimodal corridors with added value for the macro-region e.g. Black Sea – Northern Adriatic Multimodal Corridor.

Planning and decision making on transport infrastructure, including multimodal infrastructure, is time-consuming and a financially demanding task. The results are most often seen after years of hard work.

Macro-regional dimension: Multimodal transport corridors are important for all countries of the Danube Region, the same way as they are of utmost importance for all EU member states.

A well-functioning and modern infrastructure is important for all countries for enabling smooth transport of goods and peoples.

Stakeholders involved: Regardless of the country there are always several stakeholders involved:

- national authorities,
- regional/local authorities,
- the European Commission,
- IFI's e.g. EIB, WB, EBRD.
- International institutions e.g. Transport Community.
- NGOs
- and others.

Budget and Funding: Budget needed: not estimated! Financial sources: national budgets, EU funds (CEF, IPA, NDICI...), bank loans.

Further information & Contact: EUSDR PA 1b Co-ordinators: Mr. Franc Žepič, PAC Slovenia, Ministry of Infrastructure, franc.zepic@gov.si and Ms. Tamara Delić, PAC Serbia, Ministry of Construction, Infrastructure and transport, tamara.delic@mgsi.gov.rs

SUSTANCE - Sustainable public transport solutions and innovative governance schemes for improving connectivity in Central Europe

Project; 01.01.2023 – 31.12.2025

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 1b Rail-Road-Air Mobility, PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation
Submitted by: PA 1b

The SUSTANCE project helps to solve the lack of efficient and sustainable public transport in peripheral and cross-border areas of Central Europe (CE), which have registered an increased mobility, especially at cross-border level, in the last decade.

The lack of public passenger solutions is a challenge for citizens living in sparsely populated areas, leading to an increased dependency on individual mobility and private vehicles. To change this, cooperation is central. A coordinated and jointly developed approach between CE countries, regions and sector stakeholders could ensure



that the passenger transport and mobility system benefits from the new technological and innovative approaches and from new cooperation schemes deriving from the transnational partnership.

To achieve this, the project approach will be based on an innovative methodology with Public Transport accessibility of rural, peripheral and cross-border areas being assessed to identify existing gaps and posing the ground for new innovative services.

Close monitoring, assessment and peer review methodology as well as the design, development and implementation of innovative pilot activities and derived joint solutions will lead to the validation of customised intervention action plans that will be developed in cooperation with relevant stakeholders in a bottom-up approach. A special focus will lie on the transferability and replicability of the achieved results.

Finally, cooperation with the Associated Partners will support the setting up of the SUSTANCE transnational cooperation network, with the final aim of promoting the sustainability of the tested initiatives even after the project lifetime.

SUSTANCE Pilot actions focus on:

a) new/enhanced train services

- New direct passenger experimental train connection along the cross- border route Trieste Villa Opicina – Pivka – Šapjane - Rijeka
- Experimental extension to Sopron (HU) of the cross border train service linking Neusiedl am See (AT) to Fertőszentmiklós (HU)

b) ICT tools to improve mobility of passenger

- Demand responsive transport in Romagna region (IT)
- Maas Application and intermodality improvement in Istria Region (HR)
- Online promotion of cross-border green mobility and healthy lifestyle (HR)

Objectives: The SUSTANCE project aims at improving public transport connections in Central Europe by:

- defining an innovative methodology for analysing public transport accessibility of specific regions or routes;
- testing innovative passenger train services at cross border level, re-establishing and offering to citizens new/enhanced cross-border public transport solutions as well as exploiting the potential of ICT tools to design new on demand services dedicated to citizens living in peripheral and cross border regions (Demand Responsive Transport Application / Maas applications);
- promoting institutional dialogue among public transport operators, public authorities responsible for public transport planning at regional and national level, associations, agencies and other transport stakeholders with the scope of designing a common vision and shared action plans aimed at improving public transport connectivity in the regions/routes addressed by SUSTANCE

Need and (expected) impact: The introduction of innovative public transport services and solutions to link peripheral regions to the main urban transport nodes and TEN-T hubs will reduce individual mobility and will guarantee positive impacts in terms of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and will positively impact on socio economic development of the EUSDR Regions involved (Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia).

Macro-regional dimension: Representatives from five EUSDR countries are involved in the SUSTANCE project proposal: Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy and Slovenia.

Stakeholders involved: Project partners are the following:

- IT - Central European Initiative -Executive Secretariat (Lead Partner)



- IT - Eurac research
- HU - Győr-Sopron-Ebenfurth Railway Corp.
- HR - HZ Passenger Transport Ltd
- HR - Istrian development agency – IDA Ltd.
- IT - Institute for Transport and Logistics Foundation
- SI - Institut of Traffic and Transport Ljubljana I.l.c.
- SI - Slovenian Railways-Passenger Transport, Ltd.

Associated partners are the following:

- IT - EVTZ "Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino" GECT "Euregio Tirolo-Alto Adige-Trentino"
- IT - Abteilung Mobilität des Landes Südtirol Ripartizione mobilità della Provincia autonoma di Bolzano
- HR - Istarska županija
- IT - AMR – Agenzia Mobilità Romagna
- IT - Regione Emilia Romagna – Direzione Generale Cura del Territorio e dell'Ambiente
- AT - Verkehrsverbund Ost-Region (VOR) GmbH
- AT - Schieneninfrastruktur-Dienstleistungsgesellschaft mbH (SCHIG)
- IT - Trenitalia - Direzione Regionale Friuli Venezia Giulia
- SI - Ministrstvo za infrastrukturo
- HU - Innovációs és Technológiai Minisztérium

Budget and Funding: Total Budget: 2.013.259 EUR

Potential funding instrument: Interreg Central Europe Programme 2021-2027 (ERDF, co-financing rate 80%)

Further information: The SUSTANCE project capitalises and builds upon the successful results of the CONNECT2CE project, funded by the Interreg Central Europe Programme in the programming period 2014-2020:

- Project Video: <https://youtu.be/qNEAYCqdTII>
- Pilot action – integrated ticket train/bus Trieste Ljubljana: <https://youtu.be/qfp5Ms33Ts>
- Interreg Central Europe video dedicated to CONNECT2CE: <https://youtu.be/FbT1tY64rkM>
- Project Website: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/CONNECT2CE.html>
- EC online news: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2022/02/02-03-2022-connect2ce-facilitates-cross-border-transport-thanks-to-interreg-central-europe

Contact: Mr. Paolo Dileno - Project Manager Central European Initiative – Executive Secretariat Via Genova, 9 34121 Trieste, dileno@cei.int, mobile phone: +39 040 77 86 769

Enhancing hydrogen economy in the EUSDR

Policy support, project, process, network; preparatory phase; planned duration: up to 5-10 years

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 2 Sustainable Energy

The Flagship will coordinate actions to foster the development of hydrogen economies in the EUSDR countries at a macro-regional level building on synergies of the national actions and the favourable natural /geographical conditions of the EUSDR (e.g. areas of excellent potentials for green hydrogen production from renewables, tremendous transport facilities: either natural, such as the Danube River, or artificial such as the extended gas infrastructures, etc.). It will analyse the entire hydrogen value-chain (production, transport/storage, end-uses) at a macro-regional level in a comprehensive way in order to make policy recommendations on how to adjust the different strengths / opportunities (e.g. production and transport capacities) and visions (e.g. various end-use



development scenarios) at national levels into a transnational context, thus facilitating the development of a fully operational macro-regional hydrogen economy. The analyses will be done by an international expert team from and beyond the EUSDR countries (network) and will be disseminated – also in the form of policy recommendations - via different international workshops, policy conferences, etc.

The Flagship will also foster project generation (including IPCEI projects) in the hydrogen topic, and label selected successful project as flagships. Such first candidate is the project called HyEfre (Driving green hydrogen and efficient renewables integration for a balanced and sustainable central European energy system via targeted entrepreneurial and policy decision-making support) which has been submitted to Central Europe Programme (decision expected in December 2022).

Objectives: To become climate-neutral by 2050 - in line with the European Green Deal - Europe needs to transform its energy system, which accounts for 75% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions. This is also especially relevant for the EUSDR countries, which energy systems are often more outdated and fossil fuel-dependent compared to West Europe. Hydrogen - as an energy vector - can support the decarbonisation of industry, transport, power generation and buildings, and can power sectors that are not suitable for electrification, furthermore it can play a systemic role in the transition to renewable energy sources by providing a mechanism to flexibly transfer energy across sectors, time, and place. This wide-ranging potential of hydrogen provides excellent opportunities for the EUSDR countries to move their energy systems and economies further along the decarbonisation pathways according to their national potentials. The Flagship's objective is to promote the development of a fully operational macro-regional hydrogen economy through different actions (macro-regional analyses, policy recommendations, dedicated workshops and policy conferences, successful projects, etc.). Hydrogen is an innovative and emerging low-carbon technology, thus the activities directly contribute to the fulfilment of the EUSDR Action Plan.

Need and (expected) impact: Hydrogen economies – though getting an increasing importance in the EUSDR countries – are at their infancy (except for Austria, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg) compared to the western part of Europe. Only five countries have national hydrogen strategies (Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) and are in preparation at various stages in the other EUSDR countries. The different priority topics are defined at national levels according to their economic interests and possibilities and thus have a great variety among the countries (e.g. countries with existing gas pipelines and underground gas storage capacities prioritise the retrofitting of these infrastructures along gas blending with hydrogen and hydrogen storage). Nevertheless these national strategies lack transnational aspects on how to match the different “puzzles” of the entire hydrogen value chain (production, transport/storage, end-uses) defined at national levels into a coherent macro-regional vision of a fully integrated and efficient energy system, where the amounts of produced (green) hydrogen is fulfilling the demand of various end users.

Macro-regional dimension: All EUSDR countries are cooperating and the expected impacts are relevant to all cooperating countries.

Stakeholders involved: national hydrogen clusters /associations, industry partners from the entire hydrogen value chain, academia, policy- and decision makers, authorities.

Budget and Funding: Flagship projects with their own budgets (potential sources: centrally managed European programs (Horizon Europe, LIFE Clean Energy Programme, Connecting Europe Facility Programme, etc.), Interreg Transnational Programmes (DTP, CE))

Flagship other process/network activities: est. EUR 10.000/year (source: PAC project)

Further information & Contact: Ms Annamária Nádor PAC, email: annamaria.nador@mfa.gov.hu



Promote local low-carbon energy actions in the EUSDR

Project, process, network; preparatory phase; planned duration: 5-10 years

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 2 Sustainable Energy

The Flagship will enable the spread of comprehensive systems, such as e.g. the “European Energy Award” (EEA) that facilitate the daily operation work of local authorities in their municipal energy planning. Such a “seed project” already exists (EEA along the Danube, supported by the State Ministry of Baden Württemberg), but future new projects are also planned (e.g. addressing the 2022 autumn call of DTP) partly to increase the recognition and adaptation of the EEA system in the Danube Region, partly to address new objectives to be elaborated in full details in 2022. One such idea is to establish a network of experts and interested municipalities (“Danube Region Advisory Hub”) that support the set-up of new and the expansion of existing energy communities in a broader sense (going beyond the “prosumer” concept of renewable electricity and smart energy systems, and including local heating systems as well), to assist municipalities to elaborate their Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAP-s), enforce them joining the Covenant of Mayors, harmonise local policies to national and EU strategies, facilitate capacity building and benchmarking, etc.

Objectives: The Flagship activities (existing and future projects, as well as established municipal and expert networks) aim to coordinate and support local, citizen-driven energy actions in the Danube Region to enhance a clean energy transition and fight against energy poverty, thus addressing Action 6 of the EUSDR Action Plan.

Need and (expected) impact: The collective and citizen-driven energy actions that help pave the way for a clean energy transition at local levels have an increasing importance in Europe. They contribute to growing public acceptance of renewable energy projects and make it easier to attract private investments. At the same time, they have the potential to provide direct benefits to citizens by increasing energy efficiency, lowering their energy bills and creating local job opportunities. Nevertheless these initiatives are less common in the Danube Region, especially in its eastern part, where energy poverty is a main hurdle.

The Flagship activities are expected to contribute to a better developed and more energy conscious society in the Danube Region with a higher number of municipalities adapting smart energy planning and management and monitoring systems, as well as participating in relevant EU networks (e.g. Covenant of Mayors, Energy Communities, EEA, etc.) and less areas affected by energy poverty.

Macro-regional dimension: All EUSDR countries are cooperating and the expected impacts are relevant to all cooperating countries.

Stakeholders involved: Policymakers and authorities at national, regional (municipal) and local level, energy and climate agencies, energy suppliers, NGOs and engaged organisations and citizens.

Budget and Funding: Flagship projects with their own budgets (potential sources: Interreg Programmes, European City Facility Programme). The current “EEA along the Danube” project is co-financed by the State Ministry of Baden Württemberg by ca. EUR 200,000. Flagship other process/network activities: est. EUR 10.000/year (source: PAC project).

Further information & Contact: Zsuzsa Bálint Vörös, senior adviser, email: Zsvoros@mfa.gov.hu

Diversification of gas supply in EUSDR

Policy support, process, network; preparatory phase; planned duration: 2022-2024 (any beyond if necessary)

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 2 Sustainable Energy



The Russian gas import of many EUSDR countries is well above 60%, which makes this part of Europe even more exposed than the EU average. The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing and foreseen energy-related sanctions raise the security of supply concerns as never before. To address this challenge, EUSDR PA 2 has initiated several actions, such as:

- It commissioned a study (subcontractor: Regional Centre for Energy Policy Research- REKK) on how to reduce gas import independence in the Danube Region (to be completed by November 2022). The preparation of this study is being carried out by strong collaboration with the Steering Group members and gas experts of the EUSDR countries.
- Together with REKK and Central European Policy Studies (CEPS) PA 2 is organising a session in the frame of the EU Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW) on 19 September 2022. The session will discuss future potential pathways for reducing the Danube Region's dependence on the Russian gas import, while still adhering to the European Green Deal. It will present proposed short-, mid- and long term actions on how to diversify the energy supply of the region's countries, accelerate the use of the untapped renewable and other alternative energy sources. The session will combine keynotes and discussion of natural gas related high level policy options, economics of potential sectoral measures and ground implementation experiences.
- Based on the outcomes of the study and the results of widespread international discussion expected at the EUSEW conference, policy briefs and other follow up activities are planned for 2023 and beyond.

Objectives: Europe's sustainable energy policy has been dramatically impacted by Russia's military invasion of Ukraine and its consequences on the European energy systems. Rapid responses are being formulated (REPowerEU, IEA 10 point plan, a number of high-level policy papers and studies) which aims to reduce the EU's gas imports from Russia by nearly two thirds by the end of 2022, and to make Europe independent from all Russian fossil fuels well before 2030. These documents mark out the main areas of intervention to pave the way for an accelerated clean energy transition and enhanced market resilience, nevertheless details obviously need to be elaborated. European countries have great differences in their energy systems, national resources, infrastructures, economic development, etc. that determine their responses to these new challenges. This is even more relevant for the Danube Region, where regional disparities are huge and vulnerable consumers need to be protected in numerous provinces against volatile energy prices.

Different activities within this Flagship aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of the gas markets of the EUSDR countries, focussing on their vulnerability related to Russian gas import dependency. The study and the workshop aim to outline different options for the countries how to reduce their gas import and replace them with domestic fossil, or preferably renewable energy resources.

Need and (expected) impact: The ongoing war of aggression on Ukraine has serious impacts on the security of energy supply, especially on those countries (most of the EUSDR countries belong to this category) that heavily depend on Russian gas import. Therefore it is of utmost importance to deliver different scenarios, how these countries can diversify and secure their own energy supplies. The outcomes of the study and the results of the workshop discussion will highlight future potential pathways for reducing the Danube Region's dependence on the Russian gas import while still adhering to the European Green Deal. It will also present proposed short-, mid- and long term actions on how to diversify the energy supply of the region's countries, accelerate the use of the untapped renewable and other alternative energy sources, and also present some good practices. The results will provide insights to the policy, regulatory, economic and implementation aspects of the green energy transition to stop EU's, and especially the central and east European regions' reliance on fossil gas import from Russia and propose concrete steps with modelled cost estimates and present showcases of decarbonised and efficient heating alternatives.

Macro-regional dimension: All EUSDR countries are cooperating and the expected impacts are relevant to all cooperating countries.

Stakeholders involved: Policy makers, regulators, industry representatives, system operators at EU, national and regional levels, as well as the wider public, as vulnerable consumers are the suffering targets of this geopolitical crisis.

Budget and Funding: est. EUR 10.000/year (source: PAC projects)

Further information & Contact: Ms Annamária Nádor PAC, email: annamaria.nador@mfa.gov.hu

Sustain and better connect EUSDR Cultural routes

Process; preparatory phase; to be revised after 2 years

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 3 Culture & Tourism

Sustain and better connect all EUSDR Cultural routes (local/regional connectivity with existing or future routes):

Routes4U published a Roadmap for the Danube Region, which summarises the research results and the conclusions drawn during the meeting in Bucharest. The Roadmap highlights recommendations and steps to take in order to successfully develop the Cultural Routes in the Danube Region.

Objectives: In order to establish a strong network of members, stakeholders agreed on national co-ordination of the different destinations of the Cultural Route. These national coordination entities should be established in order to ensure the participatory approach with all members and to create a multiplying effect in the implementation of activities.

Need and (expected) impact: The need for a harmonised distribution of tourism flows through macro-regional territories using Cultural Routes to create innovative diversified tourism products; supporting the development of cycling, walking/hiking routes etc., that would better connect all EUSDR Cultural routes. The challenge is to address the regional connectivity of locally micro-managed routes.

Macro-regional dimension: All EUSDR countries will be involved in the process and also representative of existing cultural routes and entities in charge from other macro regional strategies.

Stakeholders involved: Different categories of stakeholders from local to transnational level.

Budget and Funding: n/a

Further information & Contact: PAC PA 3, Ms Irina Cozma, email: irina.cozma@mdlpa.ro

Danube Small Project Fund

Pilot initiative; preparatory phase (second phase, deadline for application 02.10.2022)

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 3 Culture & Tourism

The basic idea of the Danube Small Project Fund for Culture (DSPF) is to provide an uncomplicated funding platform for Danube-wide collaboration that can disburse even small amounts (<5,000 €) for the most important costs (travel expenses, organisation etc.) without major administrative hurdles. Such an uncomplicated small project funding





scheme has been a long-term desire of the cultural sector in the Danube Region since the very beginning of the EUSDR activities.

➔ Apply to the 2nd DSPF call until 2 October 2022: https://danubeculture.eu/2nd_call_application

Objectives: The Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg initiated a pilot action for the DSPF which is to elaborate the final structure and to test the long-term function of this innovative funding platform. The Partners followed the initiative of the Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg and agreed to jointly establish a DSPF pilot implementation phase from 2021-2023.

The pilot phase is based on simple online calls at least once per year (depending on funding possibilities). Cultural actors in the Danube Region can describe their concepts and enter them into an online form to apply for funding.

Need and (expected) impact: European Danube Academy, involving all Partners. For the elaboration of the DSPF structure the international translation network Traduki was used as a role model. The concrete preparation of the fund was strongly supported by the long-standing experiences of the Working Community of the Danube Regions (ARGE Donauländer). The final structures and procedures have been discussed and confirmed by all Partners.

Macro-regional dimension: Most EUSDR participating countries are involved at this moment.

Stakeholders involved:

The following partners have established a new alliance for culture and creativity in the Danube region.

Institutional founders of the DSPF:

- Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg as initiator
- Province of Lower Austria/Working Community of the Danube Regions (ARGE Donauländer)
- City of Regensburg
- "Kulturreferentin" for the Danube region at the Museum of the Danube Swabians (DZM) Ulm
- Donaubüro gGmbH Ulm/Neu-Ulm

The first private partner and co-founder of the DSPF:

- - Volksbank Ulm-Biberach eG

Associated partners:

- - Danube Cultural Cluster
- - Deutsches Kulturforum östliches Europa Potsdam

The DSPF project is coordinated by the European Danube Academy (EDA).

Budget and Funding: The DSPF is funded by financial contributions from various partners throughout the Danube Region. The sides agree to provide an annual financial contribution to the fund. The Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg and the Province of Lower Austria/Working Community of the Danube Regions (ARGE Donauländer) offered to contribute a higher annual lump sum which builds the fundament of this pilot initiative.

Further information: <https://danubeculture.eu/danube-small-project-fund>

Contact: PAC PA 3, Ms Irina Cozma, email: irina.cozma@mdlpa.ro



Flagship process on adaptation to climate change

Process; 2019-2028

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 4 Water Quality, PA 5 Environmental Risks

Submitted by: PA 4

Climate change is becoming a global challenge and it is a crosscutting issue. EUSDR PA 4 supports a number of related actions in which water availability and water quality are key issues to climate change adaptation as stated in the EUSDR Action Plan (Action 6 of PA 4). Moreover, climate change issues are involved among PA 5 activities.

Among others, PA 4 organised a conference on adaptation to climate change under the Slovak EUSDR Presidency (2021) and prepared a study (2020) and leaflet on water retention measures in urban areas (2021). It supports a number of international projects on replenishing groundwater supplies by managed aquifer recharge (Deepwater-CE), small water and nutrient retention measures (FramWat, OPTAIN), floodplain restoration (DanubeFloodplain), management of drought related risks (DriDanube), water quality and ecosystem services (IDES), local water retention measures (LIFE LOGOS 4 WATERS). PA 4 contributed in the development of a "Guidance paper on Climate Change Induced Water Quantity Issues", prepared in the frame of the JOINTISZA project, focusing on the extreme climate events in Tisza sub-basin scale. PA 4 is planning to assist in setting up an international project to determine water balance for the whole Danube Region and others related to climate change.

Objectives: PA 4 Action Plan, Action 6 objectives:

- Implement water quality measures of the ICPDR Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change.
- Promote concrete measures to control water abstraction and groundwater overexploitation
- Promote the establishment and maintenance of green infrastructure and natural water retention measures (NWRMs)
- Promote water related measures in urban planning
- Raise farmers and public awareness about the importance of soil moisture and soil water retention capacity in soil fertility under changing climate conditions

The process focused on climate change aims at sharing experience and best practices in climate change adaptation emphasising (green) water retention measures, which contribute to better water quality and water availability in the Danube Region. Many initiatives labelled as "climate change adaptation" have emerged in the Danube Region countries. This indicates growing awareness over the last decade on how important the adaptation component has become in numerous sectors of the economy. There are already good stories and first lessons learnt from introduction of novel approaches in water and landscape management. However, there are still a lot of challenges, which need to be addressed jointly with support at political level from top-down viewpoint, and horizontally by various stakeholders and EUSDR Priority Areas.

Need and (expected) impact: Continuing climate change, especially climate extremes – floods and droughts, pose the challenges on water quality and water availability for all users. This includes increased uncertainty and variability of extreme weather events. Therefore, adaptation strategies in the water sector need to address several emerging trends driven by climate change as interventions on supply and demand side. While supply side adaptation options involve measures for water retention in the country, demand side include measures to ensure water for key consumers and critical infrastructure, including ecosystems. The addressed water retention measures (e.g. polders, lakes, ditches, dams) flatten the flood waves, store the water for dry periods, enable recharging groundwater supplies, and are favourable for ecosystems. Moreover, the potential conflicts among users in drought periods must be clearly managed within emergency plans. Besides water accessibility from a quantitative viewpoint, the adequate water quality should be maintained.

Adaptation to climate change is very difficult since there are not enough relevant data and it often turns into maladaptation: decisions may fail to meet their objectives, and they may even increase vulnerability of other



systems. This is a case of water management sector as well e.g. development of an irrigation system may result in water shortage as the consequence of climate change. The implementation of climate change adaptation measures should be considered in complex way. When designing adaptation projects, there is a need to assess the negative externalities associated with infrastructure projects on both ecosystem and human sides.

Macro-regional dimension: Since climate change is a global problem, it reaches the whole Danube Region. Therefore, the adaptation measures will be functional and effective only if they are applied transnationally, so at macro-regional level. Many of the Danube countries have already adopted the Climate Change Adaptation Strategies and applied first measures to avoid adverse impacts of droughts/floods. However, it is still not enough and to apply measures into practice should be supported and properly implemented.

Stakeholders involved: Policy and decision makers at government bodies of Danube Region countries, international water related bodies, think tanks entities, NGOs, academic and research sector, land users, water service providers, and practitioners in urban planning.

Regular cooperation with the mentioned organisations, ensured by trilateral and SG meetings, joint events.

Budget and Funding: The process has already been partly financed by implementation of the PA 4 relevant projects related to climate change. The transnational projects were financed by Interreg Central Europe, Interreg Danube Transnational programme, Horizon 2020 and LIFE programmes.

The new financing is needed to be allocated for climate change adaptation related projects and processes (e.g. negotiations, meetings, conferences, workshops and public awareness raising campaigns).

Further information:

- <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/DEEPWATER-CE.html>
- <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/FramWat.html>
- <https://www.optain.eu/>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/danube-floodplain>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/dridanube>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/ides>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/jointisza/outputs>
- <https://lifelogos4waters.bm.hu/en/home/>
- https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/sites/13/2019/09/Action_Plan_EUSDR-1.pdf

Contact: PAC PA 4: Balázs Horváth: horvath.balazs@ovf.hu

Flagship process on migratory fish

Process; 2019-2028

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 4 Water Quality, PA 6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality
Submitted by: PA 4

EUSDR PA 4 in cooperation with EUSDR PA 6 is very active on increasing the knowledge base on migratory fish species, including sturgeon - the Danube endemic fish species, and is looking for possibilities of re-establishing their migration routes. PA 4 supports international projects like the MEASURES project to restore ecological corridors for migratory fish or We Pass I and II projects to enable fish migration at the Iron Gates, and presented a brochure "Promoting Measures to Enable Fish Migration in the Danube River Basin" summarising the current knowledge. PA 4 is carrying out a study on effects of noise and waves on fish species and is planning to prepare a



fish migration restoration document for the Upper and Middle Danube Region. PA 4 will also promote hydro-morphological measures to achieve good ecological status of waters needed for fish migration.

Objectives: PA 4 Action Plan, Action 5 objectives:

- raising broad public awareness for the Danube sturgeons as flagship species for the Danube River basin and for the ecosystems and biodiversity of the Danube River basin as a whole;
- fostering sturgeon conservation activities including protection of habitats, restoration of fish migration routes and ex-situ conservation measures;
- closing knowledge gaps concerning monitoring of pressures and planning of measures for fish migration in coordination with PA 6.

There are two major barriers on the Danube River for migratory fish species – Iron Gates in Romania/Serbia and Gabčíkovo Water Structure/Dunakiliti in Slovakia/Hungary. Construction of fish passes in Iron Gates can serve as information base for construction of other fish passes in Danube River (e.g. Gabčíkovo, and upper Danube ones). Migratory Fish Flagship Process will make an effort to facilitate removing the fish barriers on the Danube River.

Need and (expected) impact: In 2021 PA 4 prepared the brochure “Promoting Measures to Enable Fish Migration in the Danube River Basin”. Currently, in 2022, PA 4 prepares two activities directly related to fish migration. It organises the fish migration working meeting on 12 October 2022 in Bratislava. It will provide the platform for discussion about behaviour of migratory fish species and about technical solutions of fish pass designs e.g. the Iron Gates and Gabčíkovo Water Structure. In addition, PA 4 facilitates the preparation of the fish migration document. The purpose of the document is to provide a database of relevant information on migratory fish restoration (e.g. methodologies, the investigation on behaviour of fish species; an overview of ichthyocenoses in the Middle and Upper Danube); and to estimate alternative technical solutions of fish pass design for specific migratory fish at Gabčíkovo Water Structure. Taking into account the fish migration restoration activities in the Iron Gates, the document will serve as the actual knowledge base for designing and constructing fish passes in the Danube River.

Macro-regional dimension: Migratory fish species (e.g. sturgeons) can spawn only in the river without barriers and borders, so this process will affect all countries on the Danube River. Therefore, conservation measures will be effective only in case they are applied at macro-regional level. Moreover, countries and operators of Iron Gates and Gabčíkovo Water Structure should closely cooperate for creating the most feasible solution for fish passes.

Stakeholders involved ICPDR; PA 6 – DSTF (Danube Sturgeon Task Force); related projects leaders, related hydropower operators (e.g. Water Construction, Slovakia, Hidroelctrica), experts on migratory fish protection in the Danube Region, experts in the field technical design of fish passes, PA 4 SG members, etc.

Regular cooperation with the mentioned organisations, ensured by trilateral and SG meetings, joint events.

Budget and Funding: The process has already been partly financed by implementation of the PA 4 relevant projects related to sturgeons. The transnational projects were financed by European Commission and Interreg Danube Transnational programme.

The new financing should be allocated for sturgeon conservation measures projects and processes (e.g. negotiations, meetings, conferences, workshops and public awareness raising campaigns).

Further information:

- <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/promoting-measures-to-enable-fish-migration-in-the-danube-river-basin/>
- <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/measures>
- <https://www.we-pass.org/>
- Plans: Fish migration restoration document (not finished yet), study on effects of noise and waves on fish species (not finished yet)



Contact: Andrea Vranovská, Priority Area 4 implementation team member, Water Research Institute, Bratislava, Slovakia - andrea.vranovska@vuvh.sk

Flagship process on emerging substances

Process; 2019-2028

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 4 Water Quality

EUSDR PA 4 has been very active in the field of emerging substances as they represent a significant risk to the water environment. Although in accordance with Watch List of Directive 2000/60/EC (Water Framework Directive – WFD; Annex X - the substances are specified in detail in Directive 2013/39/EU), there is an obligation to monitor hazardous and emerging substances in surface water, and for groundwater it is not compulsory. Since this list is continually enlarging, currently there is not enough relevant data available on their occurrence as well as on their impacts on ecosystems and humans.

PA 4 organised data collection on microplastic and is supporting international projects and project proposals on plastic and microplastic like Tid(y)Up, PlasticFreeDanube and MapRiverPlastic. PA 4 also helps awareness raising on the plastic pollution of waters by cooperating with the CleanDanube project and by its own brochure on best practices towards reduction of plastic pollution. Furthermore, pilot research was made on micropollutants in the Danube at 5 wastewater treatment plants in 2021 in Hungary.

Moreover, PA 4 in 2019 prepared a study on the pharmaceuticals occurrence in surface water and groundwater, which had positive impact on policymaking and development. As continuation to this topic, PA 4 plans to organise a conference on pharmaceuticals occurrence in water, when the respected legislation will be valid. Moreover, PA 4 also contributed to supporting the bo-DEREC-CE international project. The established cooperation with the EU Baltic Strategy in hazardous substance issues is promising to solve the challenges jointly. Future activities are also planned in this flagship process like the upcoming conference on pharmaceuticals or a follow-up of the Tid(y)Up project, (micro)plastics' impacts on ecosystems should also be studied further.

Objectives: As defined in the EUSDR Action Plan, PA 4 Action 1 objectives:

- Close knowledge gaps on monitoring of hazardous and emerging substances in surface waters, biota and sediment
- Determine sources and pathways of hazardous and emerging substances emissions
- Quantify water emissions and loads
- Implement prevention and mitigation measures including a more comprehensively evaluation of measures efficiency
- Contribute to capacity building in monitoring, modelling and management of hazardous substances pollution
- Contribute to improved quality of sediments

The flagship process will contribute to achieving the foreseen targets of PA 4 in the upcoming 6 years.

Need and (expected) impact: The flagship process will contribute to close the knowledge gap on monitoring of hazardous and emerging substances in surface waters, biota and sediment, and will provide updated information on the situation related to hazardous and emerging substances, such as pharmaceuticals, and microplastics in the Danube Region.

The future challenge is not only to monitor the occurrence of hazardous substances in the waters and sediments, but also to investigate their impacts and impacts of their metabolites to humans and biota.



Macro-regional dimension: PA 4 prolongs already established cooperation with the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in the field of pharmaceuticals and their removal from waters. Based on the study completed in 2019 PA 4 is planning to organise the international pharmaceutical conference in the future when respected legislation will be valid.

In the past PA 4 organised two macro-regional meetings focusing on water issues and there was one study elaborated about macro-regional strategies by our HU partner (TRENECON company). The first meeting was attended by representatives by all four macro-regional Strategies (Baltic, Danube, Adriatic-Ionian and Alpine) and there was an excellent exchange of knowledge and experience, especially in hazardous substances in the water.

Stakeholders involved PA 4 SG members; Baltic Strategy experts; DG ENVIRONMENT experts; International Commission for Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR); International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC); Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe (GWP CEE); NGOs active in plastic pollution; Water companies; laboratories, etc.

Regular cooperation with the mentioned organisations, ensured by trilateral and SG meetings, joint events.

Budget and Funding: The PA 4 project contains a budget for implementing PA 4 actions, including topics listed in this flagship process. The process has already been partly financed by implementation of the PA 4 relevant projects related to hazardous substances, e.g. projects implemented: PlasticFreeDanube; TIDY – UP; CleanDanube; bo-DEREC-CE; project proposal MapRiverPlastic). They were financed by Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria, Interreg Danube Transnational programme, Interreg Central Europe programme, and other sources.

The new financing should be allocated for monitoring of hazardous and emerging substances occurrence and for investigation of their impacts on humans and ecosystems. The process will be supported by the organisation of events and public awareness raising campaigns, e.g. meetings, conferences, workshops.

Further information: <https://waterquality.danube-region.eu/>

The process includes also:

- Tid(y)Up project and its potential continuation (<https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/tid-y-up>)
- PlasticFreeDanube project (<https://plasticfreeconnected.com/>)
- CleanDanube project (<https://www.cleandanube.org/?lang=en>)
- MapRiverPlastic project proposal
- Plastic brochure
- Small project on microplastic at WWTPs
- bo-DEREC-CE project (<https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/boDEREC-CE.html>)
- Study on occurrence of pharmaceuticals in the waters of the Danube region Pharmaceuticals cooperation with the Baltic Strategy
- Planned pharmaceuticals conference

Contact: PAC PA 4: Balázs Horváth: horvath.balazs@ovf.hu

Disaster Management Working Group

Project, process, network, platform; started in 2019, ongoing constantly reviewed and renewed milestones

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 5 Environmental Risks

Extending the cooperation and joint efforts of the countries in the Danube Region presents an opportunity for reaching a common understanding and for developing standards regarding the management of environmental



risks. Developing recommendations for the involvement of civil protection organisations and fire and rescue services involved in disaster management would encourage standardised response activities.

The Disaster Management Working Group (DM-WG) was established in 2019 to concentrate on emergency response and preparedness elements of managing environmental risks which are within the scope of EUSDR PA 5.

Objectives:

- Provide a platform for cooperation between relevant stakeholders of the 14 Danube Region countries in the field of disaster management;
- Cooperate with International Commission for the Protection of Danube River (ICPDR) in all activities concerning water management to achieve good synergy and to contribute to their efforts from a disaster response viewpoint;
- Support the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) coordinated by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) in cross-border and regional level disaster management with the involvement of authorities and (volunteer) non-governmental organisations;
- Trigger discussions and activities concerning disaster preparedness and response elements in the management of environmental risks;
- Work on the development of recommendations for volunteer organisations involved in disaster response in the Danube Region;
- Focusing on the development and adaptation of “Minimum standards for civil protection organisations and fire and rescue services involved in international or cross-border disaster response in the Danube Region” at policy and at operational levels;
- Identify existing practices and procedures to minimise duplications.

Need and (expected) impact: Due to climate change, floods, droughts, wildfires and low-flow events, as well as water-scarcity situations and extreme storms, are likely to become more intense. In recent years, most notably in 2002, 2006, 2013 and in summer 2014, parts of the Danube River Basin were being affected by very strong or extreme flooding events. These events caused significant human and economic damage in the affected countries and communities.

There were significant damages caused by seasonal fires during the dry season, also the extreme weather conditions are causing hailstorms, damaging houses, and triggering flash floods in mountainous regions. Industrial accidents were also evident in the Region, while often the risk spots are connected to tailing management facilities and other industrial factories located close to the Danube or to the tributary of the river.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism and its new Decision (EU) 2019/420 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2019 and the Regulation (EU) 2021/836 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 (amending Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism) includes the importance of regional level disaster prevention and management, highlighting that their response capacities need to be appropriately involved in coordination and deployment activities. It should minimise overlaps and foster interoperability. “Such authorities can play an important preventive role and they are also the first to react in the aftermath of a disaster, together with their volunteers’ capacities” (Decision (EU) 2019/420 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2019).

“The role of regional and local authorities in disaster prevention and management is of great importance, and, where appropriate, their capacities are included in the activities carried out under Decision No 1313/2013/EU, with a view to minimising overlaps and fostering interoperability. There is therefore also a need for ongoing cooperation at local and regional levels across borders, with a view to developing common alert systems for rapid intervention prior to the activation of the Union Mechanism. Similarly, and having regard to national structures, it is important to acknowledge the need to provide technical training assistance to local communities to enhance

their first response capacities where appropriate. It is also important to keep the public informed on initial response measures” (Regulation (EU) 2021/836 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021).

“To improve resilience and planning for disaster prevention, preparedness and response, the Union should continue to advocate for investment in prevention of disasters across borders and sectors, and for comprehensive risk management approaches that underpin prevention and preparedness, taking into account a multi-hazard approach, an ecosystem-based approach and the likely impacts of climate change, in close cooperation with the relevant scientific communities, key economic operators, regional and local authorities and non-governmental organisations operating in the field, without prejudice to the established Union coordination mechanisms and competence of the Member States.”

Regional solutions specific to environmental risks and the involvement of volunteer non-governmental organisations and authorities are therefore needed.

Macro-regional dimension: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia

Stakeholders involved

- National-level governmental disaster management organisations
- National-level non-governmental organisations from the field of disaster management
- Research institutes and universities in the field of disaster risk reduction and climate change
- Municipalities, county-level councils
- Rescue organisations
- Water management organisations

Budget and Funding:

- Horizon 2020, DAREnet, EUR 3.500.000
- EU (DG ECHO), DiMaND, EUR 341.608
- EU (DG ECHO), PROFOUND, EUR 631.954
- International Visegrad Fund, Wildfirex, EUR 26.980
- Western Balkan Green Centre, PREP-R, EUR 49.301.400
- INTERREG SKHU, RISKHUB, EUR 395.129
- DTP, WACOM, EUR 1.570.581



Further information:

- <https://environmentalrisks.danube-region.eu/>
- <https://disastermanagement-danube.net/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/DiMaNDnetwork>
- <http://darenetproject.eu/>
- <http://profoundexercise.eu/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/ProfoundExercise>
- <https://www.facebook.com/riskhubproject>

Contact: Zsolt Kelemen, budapest@tuzoltoszovetseg.hu

Nature-based solutions for flood risk reduction

Platform; ongoing; one project is not selected for founding yet (CARPWET), some projects have been finished (LIFE-MICACC, FRAMWAT), some under implementation (LIFE LOGOS 4 WATERS, LIFE SANBOIL & DAREnet) and some activities are planned (Policy Recommendation).



Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 5 Environmental Risks

Countries are facing a pressing, complex and interlinked set of environmental crises. In terms of climate change water scarcity, drought and flooding is one of the most frequent and damaging natural hazard globally. While nature-based solutions can reduce flood risk, they are not part of mainstream risk management. However, they can minimise the flood risk and have added value compared to grey solutions (concrete).

Objectives: The EUSDR PA 5 Nature-based solutions for flood risk reduction Platform provides a project example to address flood risk, with policy recommendations according to the topic throughout the Danube Region countries.

Need and (expected) impact: Effective flood risk management is critical to protect people and their livelihoods from flooding and to limit future losses. Nature-based measures and their ability to address flood risk are receiving increasing attention. Until recently, most flood risk management involved conventional engineering measures. These measures are sometimes referred to as “hard” engineering or “gray” infrastructure. Examples include building embankments, dams, levees, and channels to control flooding. Recently the concept of “nature-based solutions”, “ecosystem-based adaptation”, “eco-DRR” or “green infrastructure” has emerged as a good alternative or complement to traditional gray approaches. Nature-based solutions make use of natural processes and ecosystem services for functional purposes, such as decreasing flood risk or improving water quality. The objective is to present principles and implementation guidance for planning, such as evaluation, design, and implementation of nature-based solutions for flood risk management as an alternative to or complementary to conventional engineering measures.

Macro-regional dimension: All Danube Region countries, and in the frame of the LIFE SANDBOIL project another macro-regional strategy is involved, since Italy (Po-river basin) is the lead partner

Stakeholders involved: ministries (Ministry of Interior of Hungary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary), water authorities (OVF, ÉDUVIZIG, KÖTIVIZIG), municipalities, universities (NUPS, UNIBO), non-governmental organisations (ICPDR, WWF, Carpathian Convention, associations (MMK, KBT SZ)

Budget and Funding: CBC Programmes, Interreg DTP, Horizon Europe, LIFE (Climate Action, Environmental Programme)

Further information: <https://environmentalrisks.danube-region.eu/>

Contact: László Balatonyi (PAC PA 5), Laszlo.Balatonyi@mfa.gov.hu

Improving the Safety of Tailings Management Facilities in the Danube River Basin

Project; in planning phase

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 5 Environmental Risks

Mining is one of the world’s most traditional industrial sectors, and continues to provide valuable ores and minerals. A significant waste stream however, is generated by these operations. One of the components of mining waste is mining tailings – such as waste rock and mine water – and this all needs to be stored and handled in tailings management facilities (TMFs). Due to the physical characteristics and chemical nature of substances that can be found in the tailings, TMFs pose risks to both environment and population. Pollution of water bodies and the related risk or damage to environmental resources often has a negative transboundary effect too, and accidents at TMFs may lead to long-term negative and chronic effects. More than 300 TMFs are located in the Danube River Basin (DRB), for which adequate safety conditions and measures have to be put in place. Past



accident events dramatically demonstrated how serious impacts on people and water resources TMF failures could have.

Objectives: This project proposal aims to close practical knowledge gaps while raising awareness of TMFs and their hazards in the Danube River Basin and strengthening the technical and management capacity relating to these facilities.

Need and (expected) impact: Respecting a common set of minimum standards and safety requirements in the DRB to reduce accident risks, providing tools and strategies to improve TMF safety, updating and completing the TMF inventory of the DRB, amending an existing hazard assessment method and integrating land use planning aspects into it (risk), further enhancing and completing a previously developed detailed checklist method, providing recommendations for the Danube Region countries on managing TMFs and ensuring sustainability of the results.

Macro-regional dimension: Potentially all Danube Region countries are going to be involved

Stakeholders involved: University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Civil and Geodetic Engineering, Chair of Hydrology and Hydraulic Engineering (Research group), Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests, Directorate for Water Resources Management of Romania, Budapest Firefighter Association, Occupational Safety Research Institute of Czech Republic, Jaroslav Černi Water Institute from Serbia, Umwelt Bundesamt from Germany, University of Miskolc Institute of Geology from Hungary, Ministry of Environmental Protection of Serbia, Research Institute for Sustainability and Disaster Management, Babes-Bolyai University from Romania, Civil Protection Directorate of Republic of Srpska, Hungarian Civil Protection Association, Hungarian Red Cross and I International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (APC-EG)

Universities, ministries, governmental and non-governmental organisations, associations, institutes and agencies.

Budget and Funding: Danube Transnational Programme

Further information: <https://environmentalrisks.danube-region.eu/>

Contact: László Balatonyi (PAC PA 5), Laszlo.Balatonyi@mfa.gov.hu

Priority Area 6 Task Forces – Stakeholder Involvement, multi-level governance, joint implementation

Process; ongoing (The Task Forces exist as long the activities can be carried out. In the past, some Task Forces were closed, but new ones emerged as well. It is a dynamic process.)

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality

EUSDR Priority Area 6 deals with a variety of topics, all of which have to do with the protection and preservation of our natural resources. We cannot manage these tasks alone. For this reason, PA 6 from the beginning put great emphasis on the involvement of stakeholders, experts and enthusiasts who wanted to work with us to implement the objectives of the EUSDR Action Plan. This has resulted in the establishment of a number of working groups, the PA 6 Task Forces. Here, representatives of civil society, academia and authorities gather to jointly define goals and implement their own work programme. In this way, existing knowledge and experience is pooled and integrated into the governance of the EUSDR. This process is a central element of PA 6 and therefore an EUSDR Flagship that explicitly involves all current six PA 6 Task Forces.

Objectives: The process aims in particular to bring the implementation of the EUSDR and PA 6 to the surface and to give each interested person the opportunity to participate in the implementation. The Task Forces themselves are integrated into the PA 6 Steering Group through their chairs. In this way, multi-level governance can succeed.

In terms of content, the Task Forces deal with the following topics:



- Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF): Protection and reintroduction of Danube sturgeon species.
- Danube Region Invasive Alien Species Network (DIAS): Control and prevention of invasive alien species.
- Danubeparks: Cooperation of protected areas in the Danube Region to improve ecological connectivity
- SONDAR: Soil protection and sustainable development
- Danube Landscape Task Force (DLTF): Sustainable landscape development
- Masterplan Bavarian Danube (WGMPBD): Preservation and strengthening the biodiversity along the Bavarian Danube

Need and (expected) impact: The starting point for the establishment of the Task Force more than 10 years ago was also the initial situation for the EUSDR: a quite high number of topics and activities to be implemented in the area, plus two coordinators and a Steering Group. Here it was obvious: support from the experts from the different regions in the EUSDR, as well as on the different topics in PA 6, was needed. At the beginning, therefore, the focus was especially on networking, from which the Task Forces emerged. The DSTF was the first and now has its own structures, such as Rules of Procedure, Chair and Co-Chair, an Executive Committee and a General Assembly. The Task Forces now play an important role as NGOs in their own right by intervening in political decision-making processes. PA 6 is very proud of this and wants to continue on this path.

Macro-regional dimension: Through the Task Forces, representatives of almost all Danube Region countries are involved in the process, who in turn drive forward the implementation of their Task Force's work program at regional and local level. In this way, a true multiplier effect is created.

Stakeholders involved: Each of the six Task Forces has around 20-40 members in several countries (please refer to the Task Force Chairs, listed below in the contact section).

Budget and Funding: The Task Forces themselves do not receive funding. Costs for meetings and travel & accommodation can be funded by the PAC projects from the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme. Most of the Task Forces however develop bankable projects for EU funding programmes (e.g. Interreg A and B, LIFE, Horizon Europe) and PA 6 does the best to support these efforts.

Further information: <https://nature.danube-region.eu/>

Contact:

- Task Force Chairs Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF); Peter Gammeltoft; peter@gammeltoft.de
- Danube Region Invasive Alien Species Network (DIAS); Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IBER-BAS), Teodora Trichkova, trichkova@gmail.com
- Danubeparks - Network of Protected Areas, Nationalpark Donauauen, Georg Frank, g.frank@donauauen.at
- Soil Strategy Network in the Danube Region (SONDAR), Government of Lower Austria, Erwin Szlezak, erwin.szlezak@noel.gv.at
- Danube Landscape Task Force (DL:TF), Harald Kutzenberger; h.kutzenberger@tb-kutzenberger.com
- Masterplan Bavarian Danube (MASTERPLAN); Landratsamt Neuburg-Schrobenhausen, Siegfried Geißler; siegfried.geissler@lra-nd-sob.de

Danube Tech Valley Initiative

Platform; 2022-2024

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 7 Knowledge Society, PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises, PA 9 People & Skills, PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation

Submitted by: PA 7



The Danube Tech Valley Initiative (DTVI) will be a leading open, voluntary, and inclusive platform facilitating bottom-up cross-border interactions and initiatives among diverse stakeholders in the Danube Region including, among others, local and regional governments, research institutes and universities, start-ups, and corporations. The primary goal concerns bolstering and accelerating the innovation potential of the Danube Region through this cooperation.

To this end, lessons learned from prior Danube initiatives should be heeded: it is vital that the DTVI benefits from existing best practices, initiatives, structures, and programmes and actively seeks out ways to bridge and connect them. There is, in fact, untapped value in opening up existing nationally defined start-up associations (other entities) and promoting cross-border links. The DTVI, importantly, is not oriented towards replacing existing cross-border initiatives in the region or competing with them but rather providing a “horizontal platform” that will connect and link them.

Objectives:

- To create a leading open, voluntary and inclusive platform facilitating bottom-up cross-border interactions and initiatives among diverse stakeholders in the Danube Region.
- To boost the innovation potential of the Danube Valley Region by laying down foundations for a regional innovation ecosystem.
- To enhance the innovation performance of the Region by mutual cooperation in areas where cooperation leads to synergies without creating in-region competition.
- To provide a horizontal platform connecting existing start-up associations and innovation initiatives, both national and cross-border ones, with the aim of maximising their impact and providing mutually beneficial effects.
- To strengthen the main innovation ecosystem pillars in the region by developing specific projects and initiatives for each of the following pillars: financial capital; human capital; markets; regulatory framework; support systems and culture.

Need and (expected) impact: The DTVI is taking place at a critical juncture for European policymaking. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has initiated a new geopolitical era, with the Kremlin’s extraordinary use of force spurring Europe to transition away from its energy dependence on Russia. Russian aggression in Ukraine has placed an unprecedented global spotlight on the Region. It, furthermore, underscores the heightened potential for the region to leapfrog and emerge anew as a centre for innovation, a magnet for international capital, and a laboratory for cross-border collaboration, mutual assistance, and intensified exchange of skilled labour.

This geopolitical backdrop follows two years of turbulence fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic. The moment presents a rare historical opportunity for Europe - and particularly the Central and Eastern European (CEE) Region – to broadly transform its growth strategy to achieve greater sustainability and prosperity.

The impetus is especially pressing for much of the CEE Region (Slovakia, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia) – as these countries have attained middle-income status over the past couple decades. Yet innovation remains key if they are to further unlock their international competitiveness vis-à-vis global economic rivals and lay down the foundations for more sustainable and smarter future economic growth models.

The GLOBSEC benchmarking tool, the CEE Strategic Transformation Index, and other indicators feature comprehensive metrics spanning: education and conditions, human capital quality, number of researchers, citations, knowledge-intensive firm share, and innovation outcomes such as patents and designs, and access and volume of financial capital are the identified priorities. The aggregate results of these indicators speak uniformly and attest to the region’s laggard performance on innovation vis-à-vis other European regions. The DTVI, to this end, is seeking to further reinforce progress herein at the regional level.

Macro-regional dimension: At this stage of the initiative, two countries are cooperating on the project: Slovakia and Austria have manifested their support of the initiative by a Joint Statement of the Federal Chancellor of the



Republic of Austria, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, and GLOBSEC on the Danube Tech Valley Initiative from 3 June 2022. The respective governments of Austria and Slovakia have declared their will to cooperate on the implementation of the project as well as to encourage the participation of other governments of the Danube Region states. Down the line, the goal is to involve in the DTVI platform another six countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Serbia.

Stakeholders involved: GLOBSEC, a Bratislava-based think-tank, is a longstanding advocate for close cooperation and integration of regional economies. As the creator of the project, GLOBSEC has a dedicated team for the initiative. The DTVI is led by its Steering Committee composed of public officials, policy experts, innovators, financiers, and third and private sector leaders from Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary. Intellectual and financial partners for the DTVI will include leading regional financial institutions, international organisations, governments, and firms.

Besides, the DTVI enjoys political backing from the Slovak and Austrian Prime ministers, lending it legitimacy and political capital at the highest levels of government. GLOBSEC intends to support the objectives of the Slovak and Austrian governments through developing and implementing, in close cooperation and consultation with these governments, a four-year partnership programme in both countries (via the DTVI).

Budget and Funding: The project aims to be funded by a combination of public and private funds. For the moment (as of June 2022), the project has benefited from private funding of EUR 50.000 and is in the process of finalising financial support agreements from both the Austrian and Slovak Governments. The project team is actively seeking out funding opportunities from other national and international (European) funding programmes, such as Interreg (one application submitted in early 2022, another planned for next call), Horizon Europe, etc.

Given the nature of the project, there is no fixed budget for the whole duration. The budget for 2022 is EUR 150.000.

Further information & Contact: Dr. Katarína Cséfalvayová Danube Tech Valley Initiative | Executive Lead GLOBSEC Policy Institute, Mobile: +421 907 574 941, e-mail: katarina.csefalvayova@globsec.org

Multilateral Scientific and Technological Cooperation

Projects, i.e. Multilateral Danube Call; Joint funding instrument; so far 2 calls implemented, and the calls should be launched regularly every 2-3 years.

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 7 Knowledge Society

The joint funding instrument MULTILATERAL SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION IN THE DANUBE REGION was created based on existing bilateral cooperation programmes. Using already tested application and evaluation schemes lowers the bureaucratic burden for both applicants and implementing agencies.

Objectives: The overall aim of this call is to support project cooperation in the Danube Region among the participating EUSDR countries. Aims of the Call:

- To contribute to scientific advancement in the abovementioned countries by funding researchers' mobility in the frame of joint research projects;
- To contribute to research capacity development in the Region;
- To support the advancement of cross-border research cooperation; and
- To provide an opportunity for young/female researchers in the abovementioned countries to cooperate in an international setting and to develop their scientific careers.
- To facilitate joint participation in European research projects.
- To promote the involvement of the Danube countries in the European Research Area



Need and (expected) impact: The strengthening of collaborations in the Danube Region should lead to increased submission of joint cross-border projects in different national and EU funding schemes and raise the scientific excellence in the Danube Region.

Macro-regional dimension: The Multilateral Call for the Danube Region was specifically created to foster scientific cooperation between the countries of the Danube Region, focusing on creating new partnerships. The target for the flagship approval is to increase the number of countries/regions participating in the calls.

Stakeholders involved: Ministries for Education, Science and Research and National Funding Agencies for the policy as well as implementation level; researchers from universities and research organisations as beneficiaries.

Budget and Funding: For the funding of the multilateral project's budget initially available for bilateral funding has been repurposed for the calls. Some countries have made an available extra budget for the calls.

Further information: Published on the different websites of the funding agencies once opened. For example in Austria: Scientific & Technological Cooperation (S&T Cooperation) | OeAD, Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation (<https://oead.at/en/cooperations/international-he-cooperations/scientific-technological-cooperation-st-cooperation>) or in Slovakia: Grant Schemes | Multilateral Calls | The Slovak Research and Development Agency (<https://www.apvv.sk/grantove-schemy/multilateralne-vyzvy/archiv/dunajska-strategia-2016.html>)

Contact:

- AT: Christian Gollubits, Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research
Christian.Gollubits@bmbwf.gv.at
- SK: Marcel Sládok, Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic:
marcel.sladok@minedu.sk
- CZ: Luděk Kos Ministry of education youth and sports; ludek.kos@msmt.cz
- RS: Snežana Omić Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development;
snezana.omic@mpn.gov.rs
- FR: Kristiana Stoitseva; Ministry of Higher Education and Research,
kristiana.stoitseva@recherche.gouv.fr

Western Balkans R&I Information Hub

Project, network, platform; ongoing, planned for 4 years, from March 2022 to February 2026.

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 7 Knowledge Society, PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises, PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation

Submitted by: PA 7

The Western Balkans Info Hub is currently (March 2022-February 2026), provided by the Horizon Europe funded project, called POLICY ANSWERS, which deploys a vast array of tools – from high-level meetings to information services, from pilot activities to policy recommendations on key innovation issues – to support a better integration of the Western Balkans into the European Research Area (ERA).

WESTERN BALKANS Info Hub

powered by  POLICY ANSWERS



POLICY ANSWERS
R&I POLICY making, implementation AND Support in the WEStERn BalkanS



The project aims at continuing and scaling up the common efforts of the European Union and the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo* , Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia - for cooperation on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. The background of the project is the enlargement policy and association of the WB to Horizon Europe and inclusion to the European Research Area, Higher Education Area etc. The goal is to ultimately foster stability and prosperity while strengthening the European perspective of the region.

The focus on the Western Balkans (WB) allows for a contribution both to the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) as well as to the EUSDR (as foreseen in the project plan).

Led by the Centre for Social Innovation (ZSI) in Vienna and involving 14 partner institutions, the project builds on the solid ground created by successful past experiences, including WBC-INCO.NET and Danube-INCO.NET.

The Western Balkans Steering Platforms (WB SPs) for Research & Innovation and Education & Training have been playing a central role in stimulating, monitoring and supporting the cooperation in research, education and innovation between the EU Member States, the European Commission and the WB in EU funded programmes and beyond for several decades. Regular platform meetings, including at Ministerial level, are bringing a multitude of stakeholders together to identify common priorities, discuss latest policy and reforming measures, decide on spin-off activities and follow-up measures as well as on topics for regional cooperation with EU assistance.

Past efforts supported by the EU have also built widely-used information hubs and services: from websites and social media to monthly newsletters, which provide high quality targeted information on research, technology and innovation in, with and for the WB but also touching upon education, culture, youth and sports.

Objectives: The project runs from March 2022 until February 2026 and focuses, among many things, on the following activities:

- Organising policy dialogue events such as Ministerial and Steering Platform meetings as well as ad-hoc policy coordination meetings, offering room for exchange about policy implementation.
- Supplying an information hub and web platform, www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu, addressing R&I, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport in the WB to enable better information sharing, creating opportunities for joint actions and get the WB closer to EU policy making.
- Carrying out analytical activities such as mapping of relevant institutions, programmes, initiatives, needs and common priorities in the WB, and monitoring ongoing activities related to the implementation of the [WB Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport](#).
- Designing informed policy recommendations to decision makers in the region, addressing the EU's key priorities such as: digitalisation, green economy and health, and aligning them.
- Implementing regional pilot activities which reach out directly to academia, industry and civil society, in order to strengthen links between academia and industry in the WB region, and to support mobility of researchers within the area. Targeted actions will also be taken to increase the visibility of WB research infrastructures in the wider European research landscape.

At all stages of the project, special emphasis is put on the inclusion of so-far underrepresented groups and the coordination with key stakeholders and international organisations.

With its ambitious and wide-ranging work programme, POLICY ANSWERS aims at impacting on science, economy and society, thus contributing to a faster recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and to the digital and green transitions in the WB.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



POLICY ANSWERS supports policy makers, researchers, students, innovators, entrepreneurs, underrepresented groups and therefore improves the framework conditions for building the knowledge society, especially in the non-EU countries of the Danube Region. The project activities contribute to the EUSDR PA 7 actions and targets with its strong focus on the following aspects: policy dialogue in the R&I field, stakeholder mapping, capacity building in accordance with the identified national needs, academia-industry links, mobility of researchers and youth, open access to research infrastructure, education in the field of R&I, alignment of priorities in the fields of Digital Transformation and Green Agenda.

POLICY ANSWERS also contributes to the competitiveness of enterprises (PA 8) with its policy dialogue and policy briefs, the planned “Regional Innovation Academy” and with the regional support scheme for academia-industry cooperation.

Finally, the project activities are in line with PA 10 in terms of supporting better coordination of funding (via policy dialogue) and strengthening institutional capacities (via capacity building activities).

Need and (expected) impact: Policy coordination in the knowledge area is needed.

Other project aspects relevant for the EUSDR:

- Coordination of activities between the WB and the EU Member States, e.g. via organisation of Steering Platform meetings
- Funding coordination via pilot activities, e.g. joint regional support schemes
- Sharing of information in relation to available funding, in particular Horizon Europe, EUREKA, COST, etc.
- Strengthen cooperation along Priority Areas (digitalisation, green deal / green agenda, healthy societies)
- Increase awareness about R&I from the target countries (partially overlapping with the Danube Region)
- Organisation of activities (including a conference) bringing together business and academia
- Cooperation with stakeholders including clusters, Digital Innovation Hubs, etc.

Macro-regional dimension: From the Danube Region, the following countries are represented in the project: Austria, Croatia, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia.

Beyond the Danube Region, Italy, Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia are represented in the project.

Generally, the project aims at involving more EU Member States and promote the WB in the EU.

Stakeholders involved: The Information Hub invites all regional stakeholders to use its service to disseminate results, funding and participation opportunities, event announcements, news, documents, etc. The Project Advisory Board includes several partners from different EC Services (including DG R&I, DG JRC, DG GROW, DG REGIO, DG CNCT, DG NEAR, etc.) as well as the Regional Cooperation Council. It is embedded in the stakeholder network of the Steering Platform including e.g. COST, EUREKA, CEI, Berlin Process, etc.

The project ecosystem aims at mobilising and coordinating broader networks, and acts as a true info hub or respectively builds a network of networks. Cooperation with EUSDR actors is therefore highly appreciated.

Budget and Funding: Estimated budget for the POLICY ANSWERS project: EUR 4.993.109

Further information: www.westernbalkans-infohub.eu

Contact: Elke Dall, dall@zsi.at Policy-answers@westernbalkans-infohub.eu



Danube Alliance for SME Competitiveness

Project, 01.01.2020 – 31.12.2022

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises

Danube Alliance

Resilient Value Networks



The EUSDR focuses in its Priority Area 8 on increasing the competitiveness of SMEs in the Danube Region. As a flagship project of this PA, the “Danube Alliance” aims to contribute to a better resilience of value chains in the Danube Region, especially in order to promote regional competitiveness in sub-regions of the Danube Region in a sustainable way. The main beneficiaries are micro enterprises, SMEs and public administrations. In this way, the project responds to the effects of disruptions and uncertainties in supply chains described above.

Objectives:

- Identify potentials to build up resilient value chains in the Danube Region in order to spur sustainable economic development
- Understand specific (bioeconomic) value chains, their characteristics and potentials in terms of sustainable economic development including social and ecological aspects
- Build a methodological framework to analyse and simulate resilient value chain scenarios (including economic, social and ecological factors) as well as business opportunities based on data
- Actively involve stakeholders from the Danube Region (policy makers, regional developers, clusters, SME representatives) to discuss potentials and challenges regarding implementation of value chain use cases
- Disseminate the approaches and support measures provided by the Danube Alliance and raise awareness about value chain resilience and bioeconomy in the political realm

Need and (expected) impact: The Danube Alliance was formed as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which revealed the economy’s weak points. Global value chains showed to be vulnerable in extreme situations, not being able to function effectively when the suppliers were compromised due to the pandemic lockdowns as well as geopolitical conflicts or extreme weather events. Because of this, the need to strengthen the resilience in existing macro-regional value chains and develop new green and resilient value chains has significantly increased – especially in the Danube Region where there is a high disparity of living standard, industrial competitiveness and research and innovation. Thus, it is important to raise awareness about the importance of value chain resilience amongst intermediaries and policy makers, and promote new cooperation models and methodologies at regional level to help build up sustainable value chains with economic, social and ecological benefits. Especially the bioeconomy can be understood as key enabler in this regard due to the agricultural structures and great potential in terms of biomass use in large parts of the Danube Region.

Macro-regional dimension: The Danube Alliance addresses the entire Danube Region. While most countries have been involved so far in the form of information events or workshop discussions (e.g. Romania, Austria, Croatia, Serbia, Czech Republic, Slovakia), others are cooperating in the context of developing specific value chain use cases (Vidin region, Bulgaria and Hungary)

Stakeholders involved: Project Partners:

- VDI/VDE-IT (lead partner)
- BIOPRO Baden-Württemberg GmbH
- Steinbeis-Europa-Zentrum
- Reutlingen University

Partner Stakeholders from Danube Region:



- Several regional developers and cluster managers from many countries in the Danube Region (e.g. Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Austria) have been involved in (online) workshops, information events and other formats (e.g. Danube Festival Ulm 2022)
- Together with ANTEJA ECG from Slovenia, the VDI/VDE-IT conducted a study in the context of the Danube Alliance
- The project consortium will meet and discuss cooperation potentials with Bulgarian policy makers and regional developers in the course of a field trip to Vidin and Sofia in September 2022
- To develop a use case for a Miscanthus value chain in Bulgaria, the project consortium collaborates with an entrepreneur from Baden-Württemberg
- Further actors from research and business level are involved to further develop value chain use cases (e.g. ICP in Slovenia or entrepreneurs from food and packaging sector in Hungary)

Budget and Funding: EUR 222.500 total (EUR 200.000 funded by the state of Baden-Württemberg, EUR 22.500 own funds by project partners)

Other: A study was conducted together with ANTEJA ECG about the Impacts and Potentials of the Ukraine Crisis on Supply Chain Development for the Danube Region (https://anteja-ecg.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Anteja_Ukraine_workingpaper_Final.pdf)

Further information: <https://competitiveness.danube-region.eu/danube-alliance/>

Contact: Benedikt Sedlmayr, project leader, VDI/VDE-IT Benedikt.sedlmayr@vdvide-it.de

Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence

Platform, ongoing since 2021

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 9 People & Skills



DANUBE REGION PLATFORM ON CENTRES OF VOCATIONAL EXCELLENCE



The Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence was launched by EUSDR Priority Area 9 in cooperation with the European Training Foundation (ETF) to provide a forum for exchange on national, regional and international experiences and best practices regarding centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs). The platform's thematic focus lies on the topics of going green and social inclusion. As part of the initiative, a Policy Platform on CoVEs with national representatives from Danube Region countries and experts from the European



Commission, PA 9 and ETF was established. The Danube Region Platform will also promote cooperation between CoVEs from the Danube Region within the ETF Network for Excellence.

The kick-off event took place online on 29 November 2021. A second platform meeting is planned to be held in the second half of 2022.

Objectives:

In the EUSDR Action Plan, “promoting the establishment of ‘centres of vocational excellence’” is named under Action 6 as an important goal of PA 9. In this context, the Action Plan refers to the function of CoVEs as “catalysts for local business investment, supporting local innovation and smart specialisation strategies by ensuring supply of high quality skilled workers through flexible and timely offer of training”.

Need and (expected) impact: The Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence was established as a result of a joint initiative of PA 9 and ETF and in close cooperation with the Steering Group of PA 9. The thematic focus of the platform lies on VET excellence in the areas of going green and social inclusion, which are highly relevant in the context of the green transition and efforts to make sure to leave no one behind.

The platform provides a forum for exchange on national, regional and international experiences and best practices. It supports cooperation in the Danube Region both on a policy and implementation level:

The Policy Platform promotes dialogue on national approaches to VET excellence and current developments regarding CoVEs in the Danube Region. Experts from the EC, PA 9 and ETF contribute to the discussions and share information on developments on a national, regional and international level and opportunities for cooperation and financial support, e.g. in the framework of the ETF Network for Excellence, Erasmus+ or other relevant instruments. Best practice examples in the form of project presentations from CoVEs at platform meetings further support mutual learning and cooperation.

The Danube Region Platform will also promote cooperation between CoVEs from the Danube Region within the ETF Network for Excellence. As a potential further step, if a partnership between Danube Region CoVEs reaches the stage of concrete elaboration, participating CoVEs could apply for Erasmus+ or other funding sources to finance project activities.

Macro-regional dimension: As of July 2022, the following 10 Danube Region countries have agreed to participate in the platform: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Stakeholders involved: The Policy Platform brings together a core group of representatives of responsible national administrations/institutions from Danube Region countries (i.e. ministries or public agencies/institutions responsible for vocational education and training and in particular CoVEs) and experts from the EC, PA 9 and ETF.

Another group of stakeholders involved are CoVEs active in the respective thematic areas (going green and social inclusion). Representatives from CoVEs share good practices during platform meetings. The platform will also promote cooperation between EUSDR CoVEs in the thematic fields within the ETF Network for Excellence.

Budget and Funding: The policy platform is facilitated via the PAC project in cooperation with ETF.

Potential spin-off activities could apply for Erasmus+ or other funding sources to finance project activities.

Further information: <https://peopleandskills.danube-region.eu/events/kick-off-danube-region-platform-on-centres-of-vocational-excellence/>

Contact: PAC9 AT: Jürgen Schick, Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria (Juergen.Schick@bmbwf.gv.at); Sarah Fellner, OeAD – Austria’s Agency for Education and Internationalisation (Sarah.Fellner@oead.at)



European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training National Reference Points

Projects: EQAVET-NRP-RO 2019 (01.04.2019 – 31.03.2021), EQAVET-NRP-RO 2021 (01-04.2021 – 31.08.2023)

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 9 People & Skills



Co-funded by the European Union

At system level, the project beneficiary (Romanian National Centre for TVET Development) develops a national programme on quality assurance (QA) in vocational education and training (VET) for the VET school staff, organises and supports a peer review of the system, that will focus on the QA of the mechanisms established for the quality assurance of the design, assessment and review of qualifications and organises national events to inform all relevant stakeholders on the project's developments. At provider level, the VET schools from the partner networks formed in the previous QANRP project are continued to be supported, by: training of teachers with responsibilities in quality assurance, testing methodology and peer review tools, adapted to the national context, supporting the schools to use the European instrument SELFIE, to develop improvement plans and to collect feedback from students on the provision of their training programs, with a focus on the evaluation of the learning outcomes. Because the communication and involvement of as many stakeholders as possible is important, national information sessions will be organised and the results of the project will be promoted through different communication channels (GNAC site, "Alege-ți drumul" platform, Facebook, etc.). Regarding the collaboration with other Member States and the strengthening of mutual trust, a peer review at system level on the monitoring of graduates and skills forecasting will be organised. The Romanian experts also participate in peer reviews organised by other QANPRs and in other European events.

Objectives:

- Contribute to improved educational outcomes, skills and competences, focusing on supply and evaluation of learning outcomes
- Strengthen of VET students' involvement in the revision and improvement of VET programmes
- Improvement of VET schools' capacity to apply QA mechanism and its instruments, with a focus on the additional elements of the new EQAVET
- Develop international cooperation on QA in VET by providing support for the participation of EU peers in a system peer review and of the project implementation team in events organised at EU level

Need and (expected) impact: Romania has been one of the first countries who adapted the EQAVET Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council to the national context. In 2009, the National Quality Assurance Framework in TVET has been developed on the basis of the European Quality Assurance Framework in VET (EQAVET), to which it is perfectly compatible in terms of principles, methodology and instruments. All VET schools apply the specific tools for quality assurance in VET: Self-Assessment Handbook and Inspection Handbook. The Self-Assessment carried out at school level is completed by external monitoring of quality, by which the representatives of the social partners and school inspectorates guide and support the schools in the process of quality assurance, check the way in which quality requirements are observed and make proposals for quality improvement.

The new Recommendation on VET for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, adopted in 2020, includes new areas of interest, such as the quality of qualifications and learning outcomes, certification and assessment, stakeholders' consultation, the role of teachers and trainers, foster of international cooperation and exchange of good practice. This new approach at EU level is coherent with the national developments in VET in the last years, therefore requiring a set of specific actions to further develop the existing QA tools, to train VET staff in



line with the new developments in the field and to strengthen cooperation at national and international levels. The project aims to:

- Strengthen the VET students' involvement in the assessment and improvement of the VET provision. The collection of VET students' feedback on the quality of their VET programmes has been done on a random basis by their teachers and, with the support of the previous QANRP project, a digital platform for students' feedback collection has been set up, but there is a need to make this platform more user-friendly in terms of access and use of information collected and to further expand its use;
- Improve the application of the Review and Improvement phases of the EQAVET quality cycle (Plan –Do –Check- Act) and mainstream the use of the EQAVET criteria, at system and provider levels. In the 10 years of implementation of the QA mechanisms, at system level and at VET schools' levels, a lot of experience was gained in applying the QA cycle, but although the first two phases of the QA cycle are running smoothly in terms of Planning and Implementation of QA mechanisms, for the last 2 phases of the QA cycle (Review and Improvement) there is a need for further support and peer guidance. Furthermore, the new Recommendation introduced additional criteria and quality descriptors and for their implementation VET schools need guidance and support;
- Expand cooperation on QA in VET at both system and provider levels. At VET schools level, inter-institutional assistance networks have been set up on all major economic sectors, so that schools could cooperate in activities such as monitoring, collecting evidence, sharing experience. At system level, the Romanian QANRP has been involved in exchanges of good practice at EU level, working groups, study visits to other QANRPs. All these activities have led to significant improvement, but there is a need to be continued and further developed, to keep up with the dynamic of VET developments.

Short term impact: The VET students who will use the feedback platform will have the satisfaction that their voice is listened to when evaluating the training programmes and their accountability on their own process of learning will be increased.

Long term impact: Increased accountability of VET students in quality assuring VET provision, as after the end of the project, the feedback platform will be used by all VET schools to collect feedback from their students.

A success of the EQAVET-NRP-RO 2019 project was the exchange of experience from the 60 mutual learning activities organised at the level of the partner networks of VET schools in which teachers, students and company representatives participated.

Macro-regional dimension: National students and teachers from VET schools, members of the partnership networks. Peers from: Finland, Malta, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia will participate in the peer review at system level. Participation of Romanian experts in peer reviews in other EU Member States (Croatia, Lithuania, Malta and Belgium)

Stakeholders involved: Students and teachers from VET schools in partner networks, peers from other EU Member States.

Budget and Funding: EQAVET-NRP-RO 2019 – EUR 120.379

EQAVET-NRP-RO 2021 – EUR 203.889 (estimated budget)

Further information:

<https://gnac.montivagant.ro/activitati-curente/proiecte-nationale-in-derulare/asigurarea-calitatii-in-educatia-si-formarea-profesionala-la-nivel-european-si-la-nivelul-punctelor-nationale-de-referinta-egavet-nrp-ro-2019-2021/>;

<https://gnac.montivagant.ro/activitati-curente/proiecte-nationale-in-derulare/european-quality-assurance-in-vocational-education-and-training-national-reference-point-ro-2021-egavet-nrp-ro-2021/>

Contact: Dana Stroe – deputy NCTVETD, dana.stroe@yahoo.com; Carmen Musat – project manager, carminamus@yahoo.com

ESF Managing Authorities Network in the Danube Region

Network, ongoing since 2015

EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 9 People & Skills,
PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation
Submitted by: PA 9 & PA 10

The Network of ESF Managing Authorities (MAs) in the Danube Region constitutes a platform to facilitate the exchange and the coordination between the ESF MAs in the Danube Region, the respective Priority Areas of the EUSDR and the European Commission as well as further relevant stakeholders. It aims at fostering transnational cooperation and coordination within the ESF Operational Programmes in the Danube Region, to thereby connect cooperation and investment, and serve as a joint knowledge hub for implementation, planning and exchange of experience with social policies. In doing so, the network seeks to improve social cohesion through exchanging knowledge and increasing capacities.



It aims at fostering transnational cooperation and coordination within the ESF Operational Programmes in the Danube Region, to thereby connect cooperation and investment, and serve as a joint knowledge hub for implementation, planning and exchange of experience with social policies. In doing so, the network seeks to improve social cohesion through exchanging knowledge and increasing capacities.

The network is organised by EUSDR PA 9 “People and Skills” and EUSDR PA 10 “Institutional Capacity” together with the ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region and other partners.

Objectives:

The ESF MA Network embeds the targets of the EUSDR into the ESF programmes and fosters transnational cooperation in the EU-MS in the Danube Region. The network aims at:

- Developing a common understanding of the role of the EUSDR in relation to the ESF / ESF+;
- Consolidating the network: Enhancing Know-how-transfer and co-designing of a state of the art of social innovation; capitalising on and disseminating good practice out of project results and experiences;
- Handling spill-over effects: Curbing and/or managing negative spill over effects and increasing the positive impact through closer coordination;
- Managing transnational cooperation: Building a viable programme framework to foster transnational cooperation.

Need and (expected) impact:

In 2015, the ministers in charge for EU funding in the Danube Region expressed the need for better coordination of funding and embedding of the EUSDR in ESIF Programmes. Against this background, the ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region launched together with representatives of the EUSDR the Network of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region. In the funding period 2021-2027, the need for embedding macro-regional strategies in EU Cohesion Policy Funding has been reiterated. Building on the experience of the previous funding period and exchange with other macro-regional MA networks, the ESF Network in the Danube Region will continue its efforts to foster transnational cooperation in the ESF+ and thereby support the implementation of the EUSDR Action Plan.

Macro-regional dimension: The network addresses the ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region. In addition, the network plans to reach out to non-EU member states to exchange on social policies beyond the



European Union. One of the future meetings is envisaged to be dedicated to capacity building in the field of social/employment policies between EU MS and (potential) candidate countries.

Stakeholders involved: Representatives of the EUSDR (PA 9, PA 10), ESF Managing Authorities (Baden-Württemberg/Germany, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, (Bulgaria)), national line ministries, European Commission (DG EMPL and DG REGIO), CSO & NGOs.

Budget and Funding: The network is enabled by the PAC projects (via Danube Transnational Programme) & national funding (MAs)

Further information:

<https://peopleandskills.danube-region.eu/esf/>

<https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/esf-network-danube-region/>

Contact:

PA 9: Roland Hanak, Ministry for Labour, Austria, hanak@bma.gv.at and Barbara Willsberger, L&R Social Research, willsberger@lrsocialresearch.at

PA 10: Claudia Singer, claudia.singer@pa10-danube.eu

EuroAccess Macro-Regions



Project, ongoing since 2013

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation

Since 2016, EuroAccess Macro-Regions has been supporting project ideas from the Danube Region in becoming projects. EuroAccess is a comprehensive online database on EU funding opportunities and calls in the EU's macro-regions. The database collects, processes and disseminates data of more than 200 EU funding programmes and open calls that operate within the geographical scope of the macro-regions. EUSDR PA 10 implemented the project and extended the platform's service to all four macro-regional strategies (MRS). After the successful pilot phase, the project has been continued by the DSP in 2021.

Objectives: EuroAccess Macro-Regions facilitates the search for suitable funding opportunities for project ideas in the EU's macro-regions. In doing so, the platform supports project promoters in implementing EU funded projects and caters to a concrete need that has been voiced by project promoters. The platform is also used as a regular tool in consultations for strategic projects.

Need and (expected) impact: The need for the funding database has been voiced by project promoters in the Danube Region and was a result of discussions with members of the Danube Local Actors Platform on project development and implementation in the Danube Region.

One of the core tasks of Priority Area Coordinators is to support the coordination of instruments in order to achieve the macro-regional strategies' goals. This also includes the provision of a better overview of and/or better insights into suitable funding sources and calls for project proposals. Since project promoters often do not have the resources to scan the wide scope of potential EU funding, EuroAccess Macro-Regions provides a supporting tool that helps project promoters to find funding for their ideas for the respective geographic area with the respective partners. Moreover, EuroAccess Macro-Regions offers a regular call alert that can be customised by users to make sure that project promoters do not miss relevant calls or funding opportunities.



In the funding period 2021-2027, the database is also used to monitor the progress of the strategy embedding process.

Macro-regional dimension: EuroAccess Macro-Regions is implemented by the City of Vienna (AT) in order to provide a service for all regions and countries that are part of one of the four EU macro-regional strategies (MRS). Initially, the funding database addressed the 14 member states of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (including non-EU countries) and has been later expanded to include the Baltic Sea Region, Alpine Region, and Adriatic-Ionic Region. Thereby, the database is expected to support project promoters in all four macro-regions and to facilitate cross-macro-regional project development as the search for funding can be easily adapted accordingly.

Stakeholders involved: The database was implemented by the City of Vienna. In the course of the project implementation, there was a close cooperation with all Strategy/Facility Points in the four macro-regional strategies, as well as National Contact Points for EU Funding Programmes, universities, business clusters, and working groups in the Danube Region Strategy.

Budget and Funding: EC Grants (EUR 504.000); Danube Transnational Programme; City of Vienna

Further information: <https://www.euro-access.eu/>

Contact: Claudia Singer, claudia.singer@pa10-danube.eu

(Danube) Participation Day

Platform, ongoing since 2014

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation

The Participation Days are a format that brings together representatives of local, regional and national public administrations, civil society, the EU and EUSDR governance and further interested stakeholders of the Danube Region Strategy. In

doing so, the Participation Days promote cross-sectoral cooperation, exchange know-how and experience and facilitate better coordination between the EUSDR and projects.

The objective of Participation Days is to strengthen trust between public and private stakeholders for participatory governance and to co-create sustainable solutions for regional development in the Danube Region.

Objectives: The Participation Day format is expected to foster exchange between state and non-state actors about the (implementation of) the EUSDR. By engaging in a regular exchange, the format facilitates trust-building and capacity building for all involved stakeholders.

Need and (expected) impact: The involvement of civil society is one of the key features of macro-regional Strategies. However, due to a perceived lack of capacities, administrative culture, lack of trust etc. the involvement of and communication with civil society fell behind the expectations. In 2014, the Danube Civil Society Forum and EUSDR PA 10 organised the first Danube Participation Day in order to establish a macro-regional platform for state and non-state actors to exchange on the Danube Region Strategy and to formulate concrete needs of civil society organisations in order to get involved in the realisation of the EUSDR and increase ownership.

Macro-regional dimension: The Danube Participation Days are a side event of the EUSDR Annual Forum and address stakeholders from all 14 participating countries of the EUSDR. Likewise, the National Participation Days are supposed to be organised in all Danube Region countries on a regular basis. So far, 80% of Danube Region countries have held at least one National Participation Day.





Stakeholders involved: Danube Civil Society Forum, PAC 10, NGOs in the Danube Regions; NCs and PA 10 Steering Group members

Budget and Funding: The funding of National Participation Days and Danube Participation Days varies;

The Danube Participation Days have been funded/supported by Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, Foster Europe, Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, City of Vienna, EUSDR Presidencies etc.

The National Participation Days have been funded by national/regional funds, different project funding over time.

Further information:

- <https://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/what-we-do/danube-participation-days>;
- <https://dcsf.danubestrategy.eu/what-we-do/national-participation-days>;
- <https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/participation-day/>

Contact: Stefan Lütgenau, luetgenau@foster-europe.org

Collaboration for Dismantling Drugs Distribution and Illicit Laboratories (CO3DIL)

Project, 01.02.2019 – 30.10.2021 (33 months)

Submitted by / EUSDR Priority Area(s): PA 11 Security



The project focused on international cooperation in the field of detection of illegal laboratories for the production of methamphetamine, including trade in precursors and chemical substances for its production and subsequent distribution networks. The CO3DIL project has been instrumental in linking available information on methamphetamine illicit drug markets in Europe, deepening actionable law enforcement cooperation and naming production, distribution and user trends in this area.

The central motive of the project was operational cooperation in criminal proceedings. During the two years that the project was implemented, 18 operational meetings were held on specific cases, seven joint operational measures, 18 methamphetamine laboratories were seized and 67 perpetrators were apprehended. Furthermore, five expert meetings with a professional educational programme were held in order to create a network of experts covering the issue. All shared experiences have been summarised in a methodological manual that unifies the process of detecting and documenting methamphetamine production and distribution across European police forces and is one of the tools for effective international police cooperation.

Objectives:

Strategic objectives:

- Dismantling storage and production facilities for illicit drugs
- Development of methodology on how to detect, dismantle, classify and follow manufacturing of methamphetamine in illicit labs
- Enhance the collaborative EU member states and third country law enforcement capacity to target drug trafficking relaying on LEA expert network

Strategic focus:

- Detection of illicit methamphetamine laboratories
- Identification of precursors exploited for methamphetamine production and its trafficking routes
- Identification of Organised Criminal Groups and High Value Targets involved in precursors trafficking and methamphetamine production and distribution



- Multi agency approach and strengthening international cooperation

Need and (expected) impact: The project was created with particular attention to methamphetamine and illicit meth labs, which feature in the increasing and significant drug market in the project partner countries. The new EU member states remain the largest criminal markets for synthetic drugs (MDMA, amphetamine, and methamphetamine) which are very dynamic and complex. However, distribution of methamphetamine affects all EU member states.

The Organised Criminal Groups (OCGs) involved in the production of synthetic drugs are highly flexible and have significant financial resources to continually explore new market opportunities and new production technologies and exploit different legally accessible medicaments or chemical substances. Methamphetamine produced in the EU is exported not just within EU MS, but also to other regions of the world, such as Australia and Japan. The online drug market (Internet/Dark net) of meth is growing, which might be seen on numbers of meth seized in parcel shipments worldwide.

At present, most investigations into the EU's illicit drugs are international in scope and cannot be tackled efficiently without strengthening the participation of all participating countries, both within the police, customs, and judicial systems.

The primary objective of the project was to dismantle storage and production facilities of methamphetamine through the strengthening of international drug investigations by enhancing and intensifying the exchange of operational information, knowledge gathering and improving investigation capacity of the drug law-enforcement authorities (LEA). Customs and other national LEA were invited to the project. The idea was that the project would have a positive impact on the reduction of synthetic drug supply on the EU market.

The project challenged the traits and aspects of one of the most dynamic criminal segments of the drug scene, relating to a complex factor of trafficking, money laundering and financing of radicalisation/terrorism-related activities. The existence of different networks and international organisations dealing with drug manufacturing and precursors trafficking enables broader access to information and support. The project made full use of the existing analytical and infrastructure provisions across the EU and the Balkans.

The output of the project was the deepening of cooperation of the network of national experts, exchange of operational information, concrete case investigation, methodology on dismantling illicit meth drug labs, reports etc.

The CO3DIL project offered a platform for dealing with methamphetamine in Europe, an opportunity and support for direct case cooperation, support for existing and long lasting law enforcement activities, law enforcement networking, and practical multi-agency approach. The project also identified new trends in the transfer of production, Mexican OCGs activities in Europe, Afghan meth in Europe via the Balkan route and in new precursors.

Macro-regional dimension: The leader of the project was the National Drug Headquarters of the Criminal Police and Investigation Service of the Police of the Czech Republic. Main partners were the security forces of Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and Serbia.

Other participants: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States of America.

The project was supported by international actors – Europol, DEA, Interpol, EMCDDA, Frontex, SELEC, EUSDR.

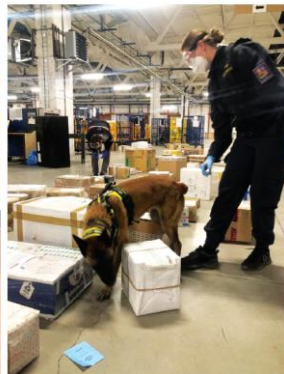
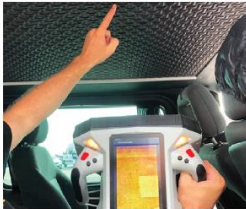
Stakeholders involved: In general - Police, customs and judiciary

- Security Forces – Police – drug units experts
- Customs Drug Units
- Criminalistics institutes

- Prosecutor's offices

Budget and Funding: Total budget: EUR 236.195 (90% of the costs were covered by EU Internal Security Fund; 10% by the Police of the Czech Republic)

Further information & Contact: Bretislav BREJCHA Czech National Drug Headquarters Police of the Czech Republic
bretislav.brejcha@gmail.com



Source: Police of the Czech Republic, CO3DIL Project Final OVERVIEW