

# EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Invitation to submit an offer

Process/Implementation Evaluation, assessing the strategic dimension, governance and technical implementation of the EUSDR.





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## 1. Background and context

The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) is the Secretariat of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). Following the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the EUSDR is the second macro-regional strategy (MRS) in Europe, proposed by the European Commission (EC) in 2010<sup>1</sup>, adopted by the Council of the European Union and endorsed by the European Council in 2011. A macro-regional strategy is an integrated framework, which may be supported by the EU funds allocated to Cohesion Policy among others, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to EU Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The EUSDR addresses a wide range of thematic fields and objectives, which serve as the backbone of the Strategy's structure. According to the [EUSDR Action Plan](#) (SWD(2020) 59 final), they are grouped in four Pillars and 12 Priority Areas (PA). While Pillars express the core fields of action of the Strategy, Priority Areas are the 12 thematic areas in which the macro-regional strategy shall contribute to improvements through tackling main challenges and through seizing opportunities.

The governance of the EUSDR consists of the following levels and core stakeholders:



Figure 1: EUSDR governance structure (source: <https://danube-region.eu/about/governance/>)

The EU Funding Agency of the City of Vienna, as the Lead Partner of the project “Danube Strategy Point” (DSP), carries out procurements of external services needed to support and enhance the governance and implementation of the EUSDR. As a project of the Interreg Danube Region Programme (DRP), the DSP works in close cooperation with the European Institutions, especially the EC/DG REGIO, the National Coordinators (NCs) and the Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) of the countries participating in the EUSDR and beyond.

The DSP, in close coordination with the EUSDR Steering Group for evaluation (SG DANUVAL), has elaborated an [Evaluation Plan](#), which sets out the evaluation approach taking into account existing reports, studies, and academic literature on the EUSDR. The results of the evaluation should enhance the effectiveness of the governance of the EUSDR and enable the key implementers of the Strategy to take appropriate policy decisions to improve the EUSDR's implementation and revise the EUSDR Action

<sup>1</sup> COM(2010) 715

Plan whenever necessary. The EUSDR Evaluation Plan sets out the framework to properly plan and implement quality evaluations with the aim to secure the EUSDR's effectiveness, efficiency, and impact.

To support the DSP in the entire evaluation process, the SG DANUVAL was set up, composed by representatives of the EC, NCs, PACs, DRP, Danube Youth Council (DYC) and invited experts. The SG DANUVAL represents the Strategy's stakeholders and allows their participation in designing and delivering the Evaluation Plan. The SG DANUVAL supports in particular the development and update(s) of the Evaluation Plan; the elaboration of Terms of Reference (ToR) for the selection of external evaluators; the elaboration of evaluation questions; access to information, data and/or data sources; the review of evaluation reports; and follow-up measures based on the evaluation findings.

The DSP has the main coordination responsibility on activities related to external evaluation and ensures good communication flows and smooth interaction between all stakeholders concerned. The SG DANUVAL will be providing input, feedback and advice.

**This awarding procedure is aimed at selecting a service provider to conduct the Process/Implementation Evaluation, assessing the strategic dimension, governance and technical implementation of the EUSDR.**

## 2. Awarding procedure

The procurement procedure with the DSP (EU Funding Agency Ltd.) as Contracting Authority is based on Austrian procurement law. According to this law (*Bundesvergabegesetz 2018* in connection with *Schwellenwertverordnung in the current version<sup>2</sup>*), the present service contract will be awarded via direct contracting. The contract will be set up based on Austrian law and concluded with EU-Funding Agency Ltd./DSP. Herewith all interested companies are invited to submit an offer, via e-mail to [office@eusdr-dsp.eu](mailto:office@eusdr-dsp.eu) by **05 February 2024, 1:00 pm** (Central European Time).

## 3. Specification of services

The Process/Implementation Evaluation should focus primarily on the EUSDR's strategic dimension, policy implementation and governance architecture. Also, the policy impact resulting from the [revised EUSDR Action Plan 2020](#) as well as funding ([EUSDR embedding process](#)) should be considered. As a follow-up of both, the [Operational Evaluation from 2019](#) and the [Impact Evaluation from 2022](#), the evaluation aims at:

- Assessing the responsibilities, capacities and cooperation intensity of/among EUSDR key stakeholders
- Identifying well-functioning processes and workflows providing concrete learning and implementation examples
- Identifying obstacles in the implementation of the Strategy and develop recommendations on how to overcome them
- Develop appropriate conclusions and recommendations for future revisions of the EUSDR Action Plan

The target audience of this evaluation includes the following groups:

- Key implementers of the Strategy (EUSDR National Coordinators, Priority Area Coordinators, Steering Group Members);

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<sup>2</sup> Schwellenwertverordnung BGBl. II Nr. 34/2023 in der Fassung BGBl. II Nr. 405/2023



- European Commission, especially DG REGIO (but also DG NEAR, DG EMPL, DG MOVE, DG HOME, etc.);
- Authorities involved in the management of funds (e.g. programming/managing authorities or Joint Secretariats of Cohesion Policy Programmes);
- Danube Youth Council;
- Other stakeholders, where relevant.

#### 4. Evaluation questions

The evaluation should primarily answer the following questions, organised around five main topics:

##### 1) Strategic dimension

- How can the political commitment to the EUSDR be assessed and improved?
- What are best practice examples for promoting MRS on the political level?
- What is the impact and influence of EUSDR high-level meetings (e.g. Ministerial, Parliamentary) on the EUSDR and on national/regional levels, and how can these be further enhanced in the future?
- What is the impact and influence of the High Level Group (HLG) and 4 MRS TRIO Presidencies formats on the implementation of the Strategy, EUSDR and on national/regional levels, and how can these be further enhanced in the future?

##### 2) Governance

- How can the roles and responsibilities among key stakeholders of the EUSDR be assessed? Where is room for improvement?
- Which workflows/processes work well and which should be improved?
- What is the impact of strong/well elaborated agendas (e.g. by the (TRIO) PCY) on the governance of the Strategy?
- How can the involvement of the Danube Youth Council (DYC) and the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON) in the EUSDR be assessed? What are the learnings from the DYC (pilot project) so far?

##### 3) Technical implementation and policy coordination

- How can the involvement of stakeholders in the EUSDR/PAs/SGs be improved?
- How has cooperation (intensity) between key stakeholder groups in the EUSDR changed over time? How can this cooperation be further improved?
- What are the main gaps prevailing in the technical implementation of the EUSDR?

##### 4) Policy impact

- What concrete policy impact has been generated by the Strategy on regional, national and EU level? What are the territorial differences (e.g. urban vs. rural, in EU and EU accession countries)?
- What can be done to generate more strategic outputs/impact in the short-, mid- and long-term?
- How do changes in EUSDR structures (e.g. for action and decision-making) and processes determine policy impact?

## 5) Funding

- How effective and efficient were the EUSDR embedding tools (specifically Annex 1A and 1B to the Guidance Paper for embedding, the documents resulting from the surveys among managing/programming authorities and the Guidance Papers by the EUSDR Presidencies) in the programming phase 2021-2027?
- How can the (expected) absorption of different funding sources in the 2021-2027 programming period be assessed?
- How can the operation of EUSDR managing authority networks (ESF+, CF/ERDF, IPA III/NDICI) support and put into practice the embedding of EUSDR into funding programmes?
- How can cooperation among national/regional, EU and non-EU stakeholders responsible for programming and programme implementation be ensured, in order to effectively monitor the outcomes of the aligning of EUSDR and different funding mechanisms, with special focus on synergies, avoiding overlaps and efficiency of work?
- What could be done to further develop synergies for the implementation of (strategic) projects and processes? How could the EUSDR improve the information flow on implemented (strategic) projects and processes in the twelve thematic fields?

More details on the evaluation questions as well as potential questions for data collection (online surveys, interviews etc.) can be found in the EUSDR Evaluation Plan 2023-2028.

Since an assessment dedicated to external communication will be performed in 2024, this topic will not be in focus of the Process/Implementation Evaluation. However, in order to use synergies, some questions on communication might be included in questionnaires/interviews among EUSDR core stakeholders.

### a. Methods and available data

The evaluation questions can, to a large extent, be answered by desk research taking into account existing data from previous evaluations ([online](#)), the EUSDR monitoring system (to be provided by the DSP) and other documents and information sources, such as:

- Reporting from the NCs to the EC (where available, to be provided by the DSP)
- EUSDR Implementation Reports ([online](#))
- EUSDR key documents ([online](#)), including:
  - EUSDR Action Plan
  - EUSDR Governance Architecture Paper
  - Rules of Procedure of PACs and NCs
  - Joint Statements of the Ministers responsible for the implementation of the EUSDR
  - Joint Statements of Danube Parliamentarians
  - EUSDR Needs Assessments (on cooperation between PACs and relevant stakeholders, and on the engagement in Steering Groups)
- Capacity Building Needs Assessment for EUSDR core stakeholders (final report expected in Spring 2024, to be provided by the DSP)
- Evaluation of the DYC Pilot Action (DYC members' and PACs' answers from the respective feedback surveys to be provided by the DSP)
- EUSDR Presidencies' Programmes ([online](#)) and Embedding papers by the EUSDR Presidencies including DSP's Embedding tools ([online](#))

- Reports from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies and the accompanying Annexes ([online](#))
- Council conclusions on the Implementation of EU macro-regional strategies ([online](#))

Further documents and sources of information can be found in the EUSDR Evaluation Plan 2023-2028, chapter 2.4.

To gain more detailed information in specific fields considered interesting and relevant for the evaluation, as well as to verify and/or update the data, concerned stakeholders shall be involved. The experts interested in the contract shall present in their project proposals the most suitable and effective methods, allowing to reach the objectives of the evaluation and to provide comprehensive answers to the evaluation questions using sound scientific methods. The project proposals shall be presented and discussed with the DSP as contracting authority as well as with the SG DANUVAL in the kick-off meeting.

b. Time schedule and coordination

The following time schedule is foreseen for the Process/Implementation Evaluation:

March 2024	Kick-off meeting
14 April 2024	Draft Inception Report
15 May 2024	Final Inception Report
May – September 2024	Data collection and analysis
20 September 2023	Interim Report
September – December 2024	Further data collection and analysis, discussion of results with EUSDR core stakeholders
12 December 2024	Draft Final Report
Beginning/Mid-March 2025	Final Evaluation Report

The DSP will be in charge of coordinating the evaluation work and ensuring quality review. The EUSDR core stakeholders’ comments and feedback on the reports will be collected by the DSP and provided to the expert(s) in a consolidated version.

The expert(s) shall be available for online meetings with the DSP/SG DANUVAL to discuss the evaluation concept, the evaluation findings and the conclusions/recommendations whenever needed/on demand. In addition, the expert(s) shall be available for 2-3 on-site meetings (in Danube Region member states or Brussels) to present the (preliminary) results to the EUSDR core stakeholders.

The working language of the EUSDR is (British) English, thus work and papers done and produced in the framework of the present evaluation must be written in (British) English.

5. Required qualifications of the evaluation experts and award criteria

Evaluation experts interested in the present contract shall have

- Qualified knowledge and practical expertise in the work with EU macro-regional strategies;
- Qualified knowledge of the EU Cohesion Policy, including European Territorial Cooperation;
- Experience and skills in quantitative and qualitative research methods/analysis and professional English language skills.

These qualifications shall be met specifically by the single experts involved in the evaluation and not only in general by the organisation submitting the offer. In case the tenderer proposes a team of

experts to carry out the evaluation, an experienced project manager should be appointed, who will take the role of a leader or be a coordinating expert. The project manager as well as the other members must:

- Hold a Master’s degree or equivalent;
- Demonstrate proven experience in evaluation/analysis of macro-regional strategies;
- Demonstrate proven experience in project management (at least three years of experience);
- Demonstrate proven experience in team management (concerns evaluation project manager).

The following criteria will be applied to assess the offers:

Experience and qualification of evaluation expert(s) 40 % = 40 points;

Methodology proposed/compliance with EUSDR Evaluation Plan 2023-2028 and Terms of Reference 40 % = 40 points;

Price excl. VAT 20 % = 20 points *(The points will be given according to the formula of relationship: Price offer of the cheapest offer divided by the price of offer x in %. The cheapest offer gets 100% of the 20 points and the others in relation to it.)*.

## 6. Required content of the offer

The offer, in English language, must contain:

- information about experiences and qualification of the proposed evaluator(s);
- information on the methodological approach;
- information on calculated person days and calculated daily rate;
- a detailed calculation of costs;
- a detailed time and work plan.

The offered price shall be a lump-sum which covers any costs arising from the complete delivery of the services described above such as office and material costs, travel and subsistence costs, costs for any subcontracts, overhead costs, taxes, charges. Additional costs will not be reimbursed. VAT is to be indicated separately and prices have to be indicated as fixed prices. The total price should be expressed in Euro (EUR), excluding VAT. For orientation, the DSP/EU Funding Agency has estimated a budget for the Process/Implementation evaluation not exceeding EUR 60.000,00 (excluding VAT).

No reimbursement of costs arising from the elaboration and submission of the offer will take place.

Please be aware that the EU-Funding Agency Ltd./DSP as contracting authority may request additional documents to verify the authorisation of the company to deliver the service, its professional reliability as well as its financial, economic and technical ability to perform the services.

**The offer signed and scanned shall be submitted by 05 February 2024 1:00 pm (Central European Time) via e-mail to [office@eusdr-dsp.eu](mailto:office@eusdr-dsp.eu).**

For questions, please address an e-mail to [office@eusdr-dsp.eu](mailto:office@eusdr-dsp.eu) until 25 January 2024 1:00 pm. All received questions/requests and the respective answers will be published anonymously on the EUSDR website until 26 January 2024 e.o.b.