

The establishment of the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON) in the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region

Annexes:

- DYON expression of interest survey results (June 2024)
- Concept for the establishment of the EUSDR Danube Youth Council (DYC) & Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON), endorsed by the EUSDR National Coordinators in March 2022 ([online](#))
- Report of the Meeting of Task Force DYC Members on the next steps towards the establishment of the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON) – 23 April 2024
- Report of the 2nd meeting of interested youth organisations concerning the planned establishment of the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON) – 26 April 2024

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1. Introduction and background

The involvement of youth in the Danube Region and their cooperation with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) continues to evolve. The EUSDR recognises the importance of youth engagement and involvement in addressing the Region's challenges and opportunities.

This document provides possible outlines for the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON) establishment and in the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region aiming to offer strategic support to the Austrian EUSDR Presidency, as part of its agenda, to the Danube Youth Council Task Force (TF DYC) for further elaboration and decision-making concerning future cooperation initiatives and operational functionalities.

The Danube Youth Council (DYC) was created to facilitate institutionalised cooperation with young individuals within the EUSDR governance structure. Acting as an independent advisory body, the DYC collaborates with various levels of EUSDR governance and other institutions in the Danube Region and European Union, offering advice and input on youth policy matters, among others policy contexts of Priority Areas, where relevant.

Also, youth organisations in the Danube Region continue to play a vital role in addressing various issues affecting young people, including education, employment, mental health, social justice, democracy, and environmental sustainability. With the increasing interconnectedness facilitated by technology and social media, youth organisations have expanded their impact, by mobilising resources, advocating for changes, and fostering community engagement. It therefore seems only logical to link these previously connected youth organisations in the Danube Region into one platform and connect them to the EUSDR in a more strategic way.

The Task Force DYC "[Proposal for the establishment of the EUSDR Danube Youth Council \(DYC\) & Danube Youth Organisations Network \(DYON\)](#)" was endorsed by the EUSDR National Coordinators in March 2022. In this proposal, the DYON was conceptualised as an open network of youth organisation across the Danube Region, aiming to facilitate cooperation and sharing of experiences among youth organisations and with key stakeholders, without restrictions on membership or mandatory participation. It was also outlined that its development would involve collaboration with various organisations and entities in the Region.

The DYC and the DYON are to be seen as complementary structures. While the DYC tackles institutional involvement of youth in EUSDR at a level of individuals representing the voice of their generation, the DYON can focus on organisational outreach, reaching out to larger numbers of young people and not necessarily have young people being members of the network.

This cooperation within DYON aims to provide platforms for youth organisations to exchange experiences, share best practices, and contribute to the development of policies and initiatives relevant to the Danube Region. By cooperating with youth organisations, the EUSDR seeks to involve the creativity, energy, and perspectives of young people at a broader extent to drive positive impact in areas such as sustainable development, social cohesion, and cultural exchange within the Danube Region.

Moreover, cooperation between youth organisations and EUSDR stakeholders, such as governmental institutions, civil society organisations, and international institutions, are crucial for fostering youth participation in the implementation of EUSDR objectives. This cooperation ensures that youth perspectives are integrated into decision-making processes and that policies are more inclusive and responsive to the needs of young people in the Danube Region. Furthermore, the EUSDR and DYON can leverage their respective resources, expertise, and networks to maximise their impact and advance the well-being and empowerment of young people in the Danube Region.

The first steps to facilitate collaboration between youth organisations and the EUSDR through establishing the DYON involved the (online conducted) expression of interest for youth organisations in the Danube Region in

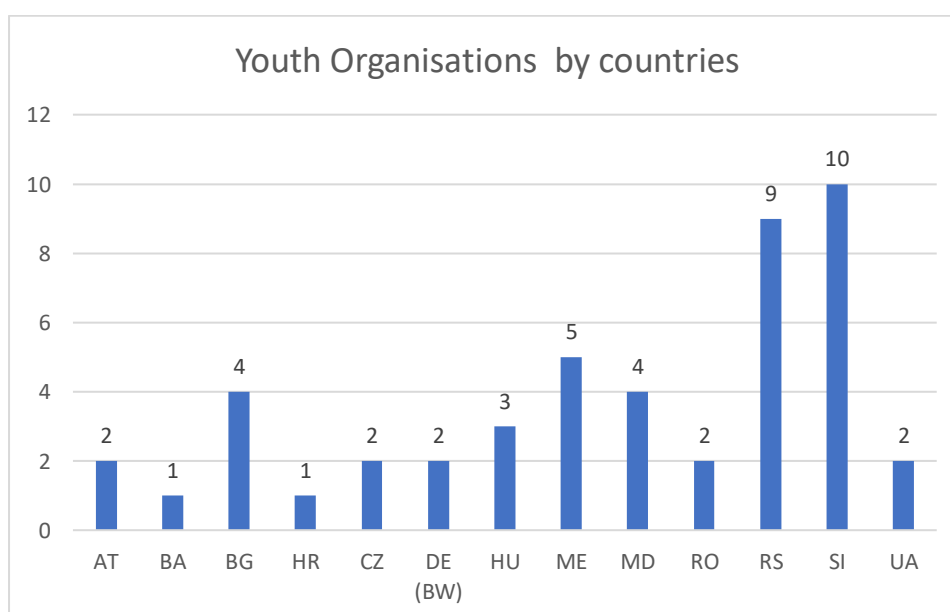
participating in the DYON, indicating their willingness to collaborate and engage with EUSDR initiatives and the collection of information about the youth organisations in order to identify areas of effective cooperation between the DYON and EUSDR. This [online](#) expression of interest run from June 2023 and is still open for youth organisations to join the network.

Upon expressing their interest in joining the DYON, youth organisations were required to fill in a questionnaire detailing their mission, activities, and experience in collaborating with other organisations in the Danube Region. Organisations also highlighted the specific benefits they anticipated from DYON membership and shared ideas for joint activities within the network.

The open questions addressed within the questionnaire are presented below:

- Please describe your youth organisation's mission and thematic focus
- Please describe your youth organisation's scope of activities: / Through which activities is your youth organisation trying to fulfil its mission?
- How would you describe the situation and needs of youth organisations in your country and the Danube Region countries?
- Does your youth organisation have previous experience collaborating with other organisations in the Danube Region on youth topics and if yes, with whom?
- Why is it an asset for your youth organisation to become a member of the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON)?
- What are your ideas regarding joint activities of the Danube Youth Organisations Network (DYON)?

Until July 2024, a total of 48 youth organisations and associations of youth organisations, from 13 Danube Region countries (seven EU member States and five accession countries), have shown keen interest in joining the DYON and have expressed their willingness to cooperate with the EUSDR stakeholders¹. The majority of organisations expressing interest in the DYON are established in Slovenia (10 organisations) followed closely by Serbia (nine organisations).



¹ Since the initial drafting of this document (May 2024), the Croatian Youth Network joined the DYON and Javni zavod Mladi zmaji decided to unsubscribe from the DYON. The DYON currently comprises 47 youth organisations and associations.

The next step involved carefully examining the responses to identify synergies across the submissions. This included thematic focuses, types of activities, perceived needs of youth organisations in the region, and potential for cooperation.

Once clustered, the data were analysed and synthesised to extract key insights. This involved identifying common challenges, shared objectives, and potential areas for collaboration among the youth organisations and with EUSDR.

Most of the youth organisations have experience in working at both national and international level (37 organisations) while others only at national level (10 organisations), primarily the newly established ones. Their activities are related mainly to education, social integration and employment, advocacy, policy development, culture, environment, health and well-being, etc.

The challenges and needs of youth organisations are various and depend on factors such as geographical location, socio-economic conditions, access to funding and global events but a growing emphasis on youth participation in decision-making processes at local, national, and international levels, can be observed, highlighting the importance of empowering young people to contribute in shaping their future.

Cooperation with other youth organisations, public institutions, universities and other relevant stakeholders is considered most important for achieving youth organisations' goals, along with ensuring their financing (e.g. via projects) and support on national levels (recognition and trust).

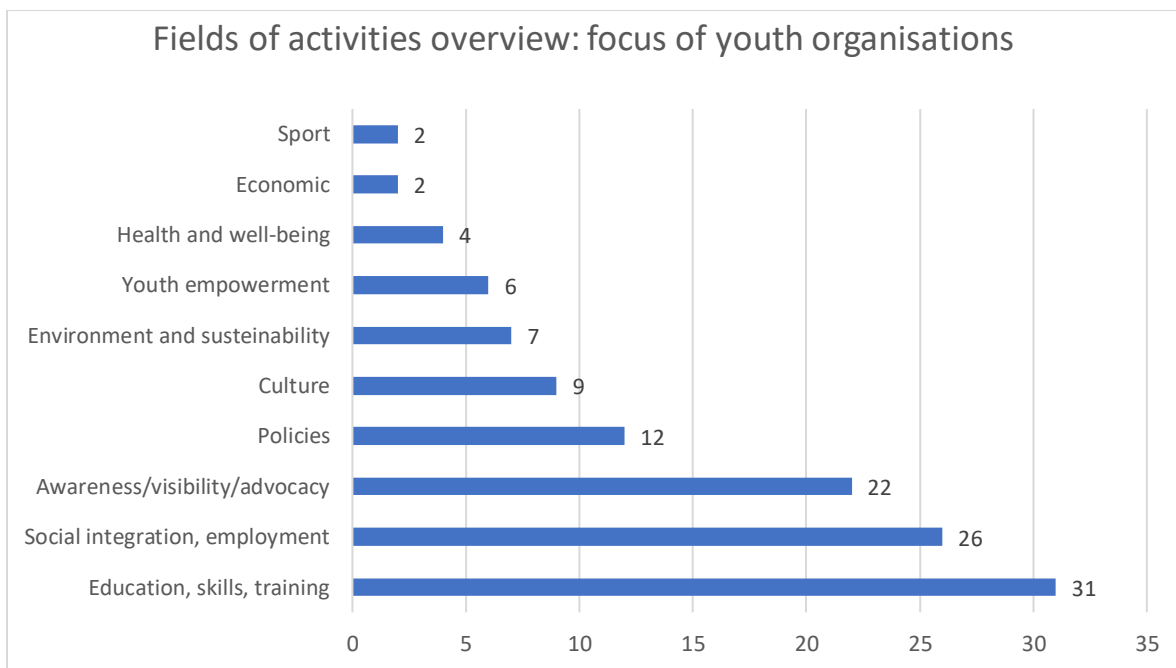
The main ideas of the youth organisations as regards possible activities of the DYON are related to **developing partnerships for joint projects and initiatives, exchange of good practices and experiences among youth organisations, and organisation of joint events** dedicated to and possibly led by youth (such as conferences, fora, workshops, study visits, festivals). Thematical cooperation could be also developed considering the scope of the youth organisations and the EUSDR objectives.

2. General overview on youth organisations activities, challenges and needs

The collection of information from the youth organisations aimed to provide the knowledge of their scope, needs, and challenges in order to identify areas of effective cooperation between DYON and EUSDR.

As of their background, the respondent youth organisations are operating in various fields, such as social services and community development, education and skills development, advocacy, capacity building and mental health. Specifically, they focus on supporting children, youth, and families facing various challenges, including social disadvantage, marginalisation, and lack of access to education and employment opportunities.

Youth organisations activities in the Danube Region have been categorised and ranked in the chart below. It is important to underline that some organisations are focused on multiple areas such as education, employment, social integration and youth empowerment while others concentrate on specific areas like sport, scout or migrant support.



The challenges faced by youth organisations in various countries across the Danube Region include: lack of governmental support, capacity building, sustainability, employment and education, policy advocacy, inclusivity and diversity, funding, recognition and support, collaboration with institutions, general youth participation, awareness and cooperation, access to EU funding programmes, environmental advocacy, international collaboration, and civil dialogue.

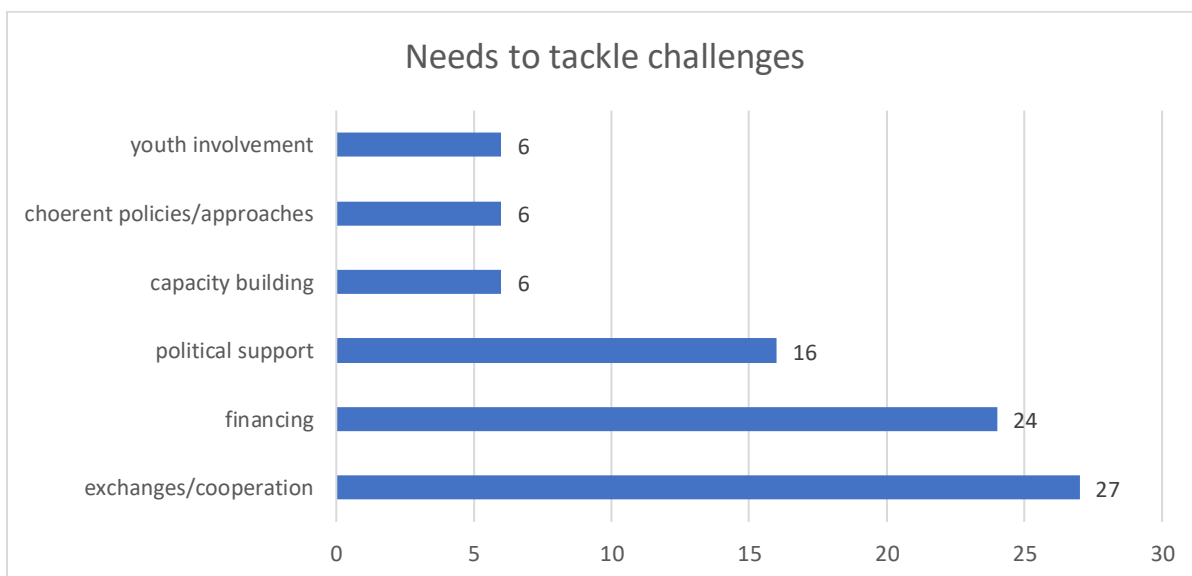
The table below provides a brief summary of the challenges, needs and possible approaches described by the youth organisations in the Danube Region interested in cooperation within the DYON.

Topics	Description
Governmental support	Youth organisations often face challenges due to the lack of (adequate) governmental support, including limited funding from public authorities, insufficient institutional recognition, and inadequate policy engagement. Efforts are needed to establish stable funding mechanisms, ensure recognition of youth work, and integrate youth priorities into policy-making processes. Collaborative partnerships with government bodies, ministries, and local municipalities are essential for addressing these challenges effectively.
Education and training	There is a need for education, training, and exchange of methods and ideas within youth organisations. Focus areas include health, critical media literacy, inclusion, diversity, and creativity. Youth organisations play a crucial role in providing learning opportunities and addressing current issues in communities. Youth organisations should invest in non-formal education by offering diverse training programmes, workshops, and mentorship opportunities to empower young people with practical skills and experiences.
Knowledge about environmental sustainability	Prioritising education and awareness campaigns on environmental and social sustainability issues is crucial for addressing sustainability challenges. Sharing sustainability-related resources and practices can drive positive change in the Danube Region countries. Youth organisations play a crucial role in promoting sustainability practices, environmental education, and climate action. Efforts

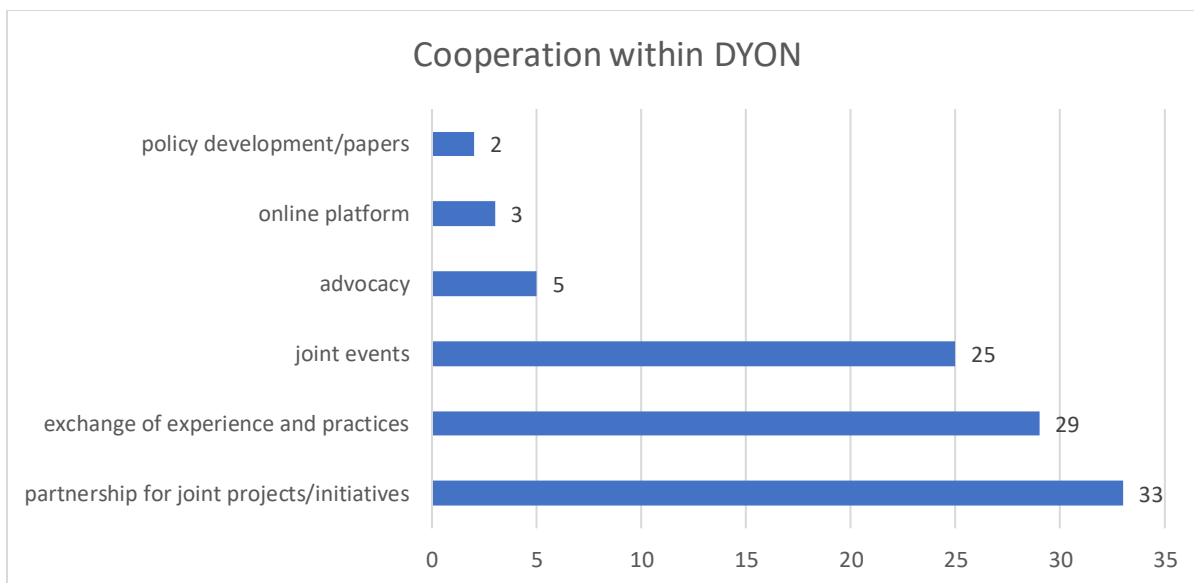
	to address environmental challenges contribute to the overall well-being of communities and ecosystems.
Lack of youth participation in policy-making	There is a need to develop value-based forms of youth participation, responding to relevant problems faced by youth professionals. Meaningful youth participation in various activities, including EUSDR activities, is essential but currently missing due to the lack of democratic traditions and collaboration.
Cooperation and networking	Strengthening connections and fostering collaboration among youth organisations across countries in the Danube Region and other relevant entities is essential for addressing diverse challenges faced by young people. Increased connectivity, knowledge sharing, and collaboration beyond national borders are crucial for enhancing the capacities of youth organisations and delivering more impactful outcomes. Initiatives promoting cross-border partnerships, joint projects, and shared resources are essential for amplifying the collective and individual voices of youth organisations and driving positive change in the Region.
Funding and resources	Youth organisations often face challenges in securing sustainable funding and resources to support their initiatives and programmes. Limited access to funding, strict eligibility criteria, and bureaucracy hinder the operational capacity of youth organisations. Collaborative efforts and mutual support mechanisms are vital for fostering a cohesive and impactful youth sector.
Policy advocacy	Engaging with policy-makers to influence decisions that impact youth is crucial. Advocating for policies addressing the specific needs and concerns of young people, such as employment, education, and civic engagement, requires active participation and collaboration among youth organisations.
Employment	Youth in various countries face difficulties in accessing quality education and finding meaningful employment opportunities. Youth organisations address these issues by providing skills development programmes and advocating for improved policies in education and employment.
Inclusivity and diversity	Ensuring that youth organisations are inclusive, and representative of diverse backgrounds is crucial. Addressing issues related to gender equality, cultural diversity, and inclusivity is one of the goals for youth organisations, requiring concerted efforts to create welcoming environments for all young individuals.
Digital skills	Promoting digital literacy among youth is essential in the digital age. Providing access to technology and teaching digital skills that enhance employability are key initiatives for youth organisations to empower young people and prepare them for the future workforce.
EU integration (for specific countries)	Youth organisations in Danube Region countries may be involved in activities related to EU integration, promoting European values, and preparing young people for EU membership.
Capacity building and organisational development	Youth organisations face challenges related to organisational capacity, sustainability, and recruitment. Efforts are needed to develop organisational strategies and plans, to enhance professionalism. Access to training and support for youth workers is crucial for improving the effectiveness and continuity of activities with and for young people.
Youth engagement and participation	Apathy and lack of involvement among young people, as well as restricted access to decision-making processes. Youth organisations advocate for increased youth participation, social inclusion, mental health support, and access to quality healthcare. Cross-border collaboration and exchange programmes are desired to address regional issues and foster social cohesion. Efforts are needed to ensure inclusiveness, accessibility, and capacity-building among young members and volunteers.

Policy advocacy and institutional support	Engagement with policy-makers and institutional support are essential for integrating youth priorities into political and governance programmes. Recognition of youth work as a profession and youth workers as professionals is crucial. Systematic collaboration with educational institutions, ministries, and local municipalities can strengthen the youth sector. Governmental support, including stable funding on long term, is necessary for the optimum functioning of youth organisations.
Mental health support	Youth organisations recognise the importance of mental health support for young people. Efforts are required to address mental health issues within organisations and provide relevant support to youth members.
Awareness and advocacy	Awareness of each other's activities and advocacy for common issues are essential for youth organisations in the Danube Region. Cooperation can lead to improved advocacy campaigns, advanced experience exchange, and strengthened international reach. Priorities include promoting civil dialogue, cultural exchange, and addressing environmental concerns within the Danube Region.

Based on the analysis of the collected information, a ranking of most shared needs was established, clustered in six main categories. The youth organisations are considering the inter-institutional regional cooperation, ensuring funding and political support as crucial for achieving their goals and to address the current challenges.



Expectations and ideas regarding cooperation within the DYON are mainly related to partnerships for joint projects and initiatives, exchange of experience and good practices, joint events, joint actions for advocacy, online platform for disseminating information on relevant planning activities and events, as well as policy development including preparation of policy papers on youth related topics.



Possible joint projects and initiatives suggested by the youth organisations could be focused on cultural exchange, environment and sustainability, cycling infrastructure, educational workshops and trainings, cross-border volunteer programmes, digital collaboration and innovation, language learning, youth empowerment initiatives, circular economy, capacity building for both youth and youth organisations, advocacy campaigns, and mobility of youth.

3. Common goals mutual benefits

Strengthening collaboration and partnerships among youth organisations in the Danube Region is vital for addressing common challenges and fostering regional development. Exchange of good practices, joint initiatives, and the development of common strategies can improve the Region's prospects.

The EUSDR and youth organisations are sharing common goals centred on youth empowerment, sustainable development, and regional cooperation in the Danube Region. Both seek for actively engage young people in decision-making processes, including the implementation phase, build their capacity to drive positive change, foster cross-sectoral collaboration among various stakeholders, promote sustainable development practices, and enhance regional integration and cohesion.

The EUSDR can benefit from the active participation of the Danube youth organisations, which ensures that youth perspectives are integrated into regional policy-making processes providing access to innovative ideas and perspectives from young people. Moreover, the EUSDR can gain increased visibility among young people and can contribute to the development of youth-led initiatives relevant for EUSDR Priority Areas, facilitating broader outreach and engagement efforts across the whole Danube Region.

Youth organisations can benefit from increased opportunities and access to policies' developments that affect young people in the Danube Region, by gaining access to a broader network, expertise and knowledge of EUSDR stakeholders, enabling them to develop more informed and effective initiatives for youth in the Region.

The cooperation of the DYON with the EUSDR provides valuable learning opportunities for its members, helping them develop leadership, communication, and collaboration skills that are essential for their personal and professional growth.

4. Cooperation between DYON and EUSDR

Given the complex structure of the EUSDR, and the DYON being an open network, effective collaboration requires careful coordination and the establishment of clear mechanisms for communication to advance the shared goals of promoting youth empowerment, regional cooperation, and sustainable development in the Danube Region.

Cooperation between the EUSDR and the DYON should be seen as an investment in the future, supporting youth activities and further ongoing development of the Danube Region.

To advance key youth-related priorities within the framework of EUSDR, such as promoting youth engagement, fostering social inclusion, and driving sustainable development in the Danube Region coordination at EUSDR governance level is suggested. In this way, youth voices and perspectives can be amplified, thereby facilitating closer cooperation, coordination, and alignment between youth-led initiatives and the EUSDR.

Following its formal establishment, the DYON and EUSDR may in the future formalise cooperation by establishing formal/institutionalised procedures or organisational guidelines under the EUSDR Presidency. This document may outline the context, the scope of collaboration, areas of mutual interest, roles and responsibilities of each party, and mechanisms for communication. The document shall however provide enough flexibility for both DYON and EUSDR bearing in mind the primary DYON's network character and the EUSDR's political background.

As next steps, concrete activities could be done via the respective EUSDR Presidencies and the DYON to oversee and facilitate collaboration between the DYON and EUSDR, for example:

- Representatives of the EUSDR and DYON could meet regularly to exchange information, share good practices, define thematic areas of cooperation, and to coordinate activities. For example, yearly meetings could be organised, potentially during the EUSDR Annual Fora as a dedicated session, providing a platform for DYON to present progress and future activities. These meetings could serve as opportunities for reviewing achievements, planning initiatives, and fostering dialogue. Seeking synergies with other events/networks connected with civil society (such as Danube Participation Day) is proposed.
- Additionally, regular online meetings between EUSDR stakeholders, DYON and DYON could be facilitated by the EUSDR Presidency, enabling ongoing communication, exchanges on current activities, and collaborative planning. These meetings could contribute to engage not only organisational representatives but also young people directly.
- Later on, following a process where enough capacity has been built and after thorough consultation, DYON members could be invited to participate in the EUSDR managing authorities (MA)/programming authorities Network meetings and EUSDR Embedding Weeks, where thematically and content wise appropriate. This could serve to align their activities not only with the EUSDR but also with funding programmes and financing opportunities, thereby facilitating broader connectivity and resource accessibility.
- Establishing of a relation between the DYON and DYON would be a process to look into under the guidance of EUSDR Presidency. The DYON has already emphasised its intention to intensify this cooperation.
- A cooperation platform could be one of the first concrete outcomes of the DYON, where DYON members could exchange and look for suitable partners for concrete initiatives and projects proposals and/or project implementation, based on the matchmaking chart prepared by the DSP. Such a platform should

be operated and managed by the DYON - EUSDR (e.g. TRIO Presidency, DSP, EC) can be invited to attend - itself in order to guarantee ownership and minimise administrative efforts.

- Elaborating concrete proposals via TF DYC what the EUSDR can offer the DYON and vice versa, in order to see further potential cooperation fields. This process of expectation management between DYON and the EUSDR will be guided by the EUSDR Presidency, formulating inputs that the EUSDR can provide and what cooperation benefits the EUSDR can offer as well receive from the DYON.

The benefit of fostering collaboration within the DYON under the guidance of the EUSDR Presidency lies in its capacity for swift implementation, fostering flexibility, and maintaining impartiality.

Moreover, the EUSDR Presidency could receive limited DSP support with ensuring timely updates to the contact list, particularly in case that new organisations will express interest to join DYON. Additionally, DSP could facilitate online meetings by providing meeting links (e.g. for partnership matchmaking) and by providing support for the TF DYC meetings. Furthermore, in alignment with fostering collaboration, DSP could extend the invitation for DYON to participate in the EUSDR managing authorities (MA)/programming authorities Network meetings and EUSDR Embedding Week. Beyond this, the DSP cannot offer further support. Hence more activities would require more resources either via EUSDR Presidency or others (reports of the meetings, follow-up of meetings and strategic development of activities, formulation of recommendations etc.).

An alternative approach to foster cooperation and to promote increased youth engagement within the Danube Region involves the formal establishment of the DYON as a legal entity. This would be subject of later developments and further discussions on EUSDR levels and within DYON.

Given the extensive process and efforts entailed in such establishment, the undertaking steps for this approach necessitates substantiation of its benefits in resource allocation, thereby calling for a consolidated perspective from both youth organisations and EUSDR stakeholders.

5. Challenges and future perspectives

Collaborating within the DYON offers youth organisations a range of benefits, including access to policies development, capacity building, networking opportunities, increasing visibility, and strategic alignment.

At the same time, both EUSDR and DYON may face resource constraints, including funding, staff capacity, and logistical support, which can affect their ability to effectively coordinate and implement joint activities. Streamlining the topics and establishing clear mechanisms for cooperation could contribute to a better use of resources.

EUSDR stakeholders and youth organisations may have diverse priorities and approaches, making it challenging to find common ground and establish mutually beneficial cooperation. Facilitating dialogue to understand the priorities and perspectives of both, youth organisations and EUSDR stakeholders, identify common areas of interest, and building consensus on collaborative activities can address this challenge.

Establishing clear communication channels and platforms to facilitate regular exchange of information, updates, and feedback between the EUSDR and DYON, are essential for successful cooperation which may lead to establishing long-term cooperation protocols.

Aligning the DYON objectives with EUSDR priorities, establishing collaboration mechanisms, supporting youth-led initiatives that are addressing EUSDR priorities, fostering cross-sectoral collaboration, and implementing

monitoring and evaluation frameworks could contribute to a better use of opportunities for deeper integration and synergy between the EUSDR and the DYON. By taking advantage of these opportunities, cooperation within the DYON can be enhanced, amplifying youth participation, and driving sustainable development in the Danube Region.

6. Conclusions and next steps

Cooperation between the EUSDR and the DYON provides potential for advancing youth empowerment and sustainable development in the Danube Region. EUSDR can establish the cooperation with DYON and harness synergies through alignment, enhanced cooperation mechanisms, youth representation in shaping the future, capacity-building initiatives, support for youth-led initiatives addressing EUSDR priorities, cross-sectoral partnerships, and effective monitoring and evaluation. By using the creativity, energy, and perspectives of young people, this collaboration can drive positive change, foster inclusive regional development, and build a brighter future for the whole Danube Region.

Youth is an essential component of policy making in the Danube Region, especially in the fields of employment and education policies but also in other policy areas. This is a significant strategic feature and therefore EUSDR PAs should be part of the process in discussing how the DYON can be concretely involved into the implementation of the EUSDR on PA and policy levels, for example in the fields of employment and education the DYON can provide a strategic feature for investing in people and skills in the Danube Region and hence EUSDR Priority Area 9 has to be part of this process.

By supporting the establishment of DYON, EUSDR can further support empowerment of young people, drive sustainable development, and shape the future for Danube Region. Active functioning and involvement of the DYON relies primarily on the capacity of organisations involved in DYON and available (limited) support from the side of EUSDR structures. Further support and resources would be needed to achieve the common goals of the EUSDR and youth organisations, as well as aligning efforts of both providing opportunities to build a more inclusive, resilient, and prosperous Danube Region for future generations.

Proposals for next steps:

- Approval by the NCs of the DYON establishment and coordination on behalf of EUSDR by AT EUSDR Presidency;
- Identify the EUSDR governance body that can provide the necessary support for DYON;
- Coordination / representation of DYON by an organisation chosen from the midst of the DYON organisations – to be decided by the DYON;
- Inform the youth organisations on the outcome of the NC meeting and discuss next steps (DYON governance and leadership; long-term sustainability; opportunities for cooperation);
- Invite DYON to EUSDR meetings/conferences open to the public and, upon approval by EUSDR NCs / EUSDR Presidency, consider to invite the DYON to selected EUSDR core-governance meetings (NC, PAC, NC-PAC meetings) when needed and appropriate;
- Support DYON in identifying concrete actions and thematic topics for cooperation with EUSDR, working closely with all the EUSDR core-stakeholders, especially the PAs;
- Support DYON in identifying funding opportunities;
- Support DYON in organising next meeting.