

Annex to the
EUSDR Implementation Report 2022-2023

Overview of progress per Action of the EUSDR Action Plan 2020

Final version, December 2024





PA 1a Waterway Mobility

ACTION 1: Contribute to improve waterway and port infrastructure & management (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>PA 1a coordinators visited key areas along the Lower Danube multiple times to discuss how to address navigational issues. They were actively involved in the Hydrotechnical Working Group of the Danube Commission. Additionally, they advocated for using adaptable infrastructure elements to make the Danube waterway more resilient to low water levels. These new solutions, which can be adjusted as needed, will be tested as part of the Danube Strategy Flagship FAIRway Danube II, scheduled to run from mid-2023 to 2028.</p> <p>Throughout 2022 and 2023, PA 1a played a significant role in setting up a work plan for the revision of the “Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin,” originally launched in 2007 by the ICPDR, the Danube Commission, and the International Sava Commission. As part of this effort, they contributed to a meeting of the Mixed Environment Transport External Expert Team (METEET) in June 2023.</p>	<p>In June 2022, conclusions were drawn during a ministerial meeting regarding the Danube, affirming the political dedication to effectively restoring and maintaining the Danube waterway. Efforts have been made to establish and enhance networks of skilled experts to address critical navigational areas along the Danube waterway. A preliminary plan for revising the Joint Statement on Inland Navigation and Environmental Sustainability in the Danube River Basin was formulated and introduced by the ICPDR during the Joint Statement Meeting in September 2023.</p>	<p>On the Lower Danube, ongoing and new framework contracts have led to extensive maintenance dredging in critical areas. Additionally, multifunctional dredging and maintenance vessels have either started operations or will be delivered in 2024. The multifunctional dredging equipment in Bulgaria, funded partly by the national Operational Programme, was successfully used during the low-water period in 2023.</p>	<p>The FAIRway Danube project, which ran from July 2015 to December 2021, is now being continued through the FAIRway Danube II project, from April 2023 to December 2027. With the support of the Connecting Europe Facility, eight partners across six countries will invest approximately 70 million EUR during this period to carry out the next phase of the Fairway Master Plan. The FAIRway Danube II project is expected to deliver further tangible results, in terms of Good Navigation Status, in the course of the coming years.</p> <p>Regarding the revision of the Joint Statement, the actual revision process is expected to start in Summer 2024. PA 1a will provide expert contributions to this revision process.</p>

ACTION 2: Foster business development (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>PA 1a (viadonau) organised the Danube Business Talks on 12-13 October 2022 in Linz, AT, including business-to-business meetings aimed at raising modal share of inland waterway transport.</p>	<p>On 12-13 October 2022, around 150 participants attended the viadonau Danube Business Talks at the Palais des Kaufmännischen Vereins in Linz, AT, where they witnessed firsthand that the Danube Region is relevant as an economic factor than ever before.</p>	<p>Together with the Steering Group, PA 1a started investigations into promising market segments, such as the segment of heavy and oversized project cargo (e.g. parts of wind turbines). Oversized cargo cannot be transported by railways due to the overhead wires and cause damage to trunk roads. Based on an initiative started in Austria, PA</p>	<p>Hold interviews with key shipping and IWT companies in Spring 2024.</p> <p>Participate in hydrotechnical working group of Danube Commission on 29 February 2024.</p> <p>High-heavy transport segment: investigate cost structures/tariffs applied to project cargo on the</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
		1a started to analyse the main preconditions for the transportation of project cargo on the Danube waterway. This for instance entailed the analysis of costs connected to the approval of project cargo transportation on the roads in the Danube Region.	road in Danube countries through individual shippers, PA 1a Steering Group and PA 1b. Organise Danube Talks 2024 under the flag of the EUSDR on 15 May 2024.

ACTION 3: Facilitate fleet modernisation (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
PA 1a presented the key results of the PLATINA3 project on greening technologies in the framework of the Steering Group meetings. The Steering Group members were requested to provide contact persons in their respective ministries, responsible for fleet modernisation programmes and measures. PA 1a furthermore provided project support services for project initiatives aimed at the implementation of greening technologies.	Higher awareness of Steering Group members on the need for intensification of greening efforts.	Preparations for the creation of a Danube-specific technology pathway towards 2050 have started. Currently, no single technology is expected to enable the zero-emission ambitions towards 2050. With such a pathway, entrepreneurs shall have more investment security when it comes to the choice for new greening technologies.	Summarize results of other projects on fleet modernisation (especially PLATINA3 etc) and translate to Danube context. Carry out interviews with IWT sector representatives to validate promising „low“ or „zero-emission“ technologies and on measures required. Develop Danube-specific technology pathway until 2050. Provide technical support to fleet modernisation projects on case-by-case basis.

ACTION 4: Support the further roll-out and enhancement of River Information Services (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Ongoing coordination meetings with the RIS COMEX consortium regarding the integration of border control procedures in European EU-RIS/CEERIS systems. Series of bilateral meetings/calls with Member States on the improvement of Notices to Skippers (e.g. timely and accurate information on infrastructure blockages).	Higher awareness of Member States and authorities regarding the need for timely and accurate information on the availability of the waterway and lock infrastructure through Notices to Skippers.	The digital systems for data transfer to international platforms are up and running. The necessity to verify published notices and carry out cross checks with EuRIS portal to ensure quality has been underlined in several bilateral meetings.	Ongoing monitoring of the quality of Notices to Skippers and Fairway Information Services. Summarise lessons from joint workshop on the potential of traffic management, supported by RIS, with Danube Commission on 28 February 2024.

ACTION 5: Contribute to the enhanced quality of education and jobs (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Presentation and discussion of the main activities planned under Action 5 at the occasion of the PA 1a Steering Group meetings.	Preparation of interviews with main shipping companies related to the proposed measures to solve the shortage of qualified nautical personnel.	Interviews held with main shipping companies held in Spring 2024.	Discuss recruitment needs and ideas for effective measures with IWT sector representatives in session during Danube Business Talks on 15 May 2024 Investigate if there are existing overviews with education programmes/offers in Europe, that can be used as solid background for any future recruiting campaign.

ACTION 6: Contribute to the simplification, harmonisation and digitalisation of administrative processes (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Involvement of other PAs: Action 6 is a joint Action between EUSDR PA 1a and PA 11. The cooperation is close and well-working.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Ongoing coordination meetings with PA 11, to establish time-efficient, service-oriented and transparent administrative procedures in the framework of navigation on the Danube and its navigable tributaries.	Updated version of Practical manual on border controls published in March 2023. Using the expertise of stakeholders from the shipping sector and control authorities, the Working Group developed a set of so-called Danube Navigation Standard Forms (DAVID forms), with a unified structure and harmonised data fields for three often used forms (arrival and departure forms, crew lists and passenger lists, which are available in national languages and also in English). Starting June 2022, the DAVID forms are in use at all border checkpoints on and outside the external Schengen borders in the Danube Region, thus reducing the administrative workload for the shipping sector.	After Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Ukraine introduced the DAVID forms in 2020, Romania and the Republic of Moldova followed in the first half of 2022, thus completing the roll out process. A video with a presentation of the Danube Strategy Flagship DAVID has been prepared by the DSP in Winter 2023.	Support the preparation of new digital tools to improve the efficiency of border controls such as time slot reservation tool for border controls.



PA 1b Rail-Road-Air Mobility

ACTION 1: To bring to completion the TEN-T (rail and road) core network crossing the Danube Region, overcoming the difficulties and the bottlenecks, and taking into account environmental, economic and political challenges, particularly in the cross-border sections (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>There are five TEN-T core network corridors crossing the Danube macro-region. Progress on implementation was carefully followed also by attending the Core Network Corridor (CNC) fora of two corridors: the Mediterranean and the Baltic-Adriatic. No special activities were needed since the lead in coordination of TEN-T CNCs is in the hands of EU coordinators.</p>	<p>Since 2012 PA 1b SG was trying to influence decision-makers (The European Commission and EU and non-EU member states Ministries responsible for transport) to add a new CNC corridor on the EU TEN-T map. The new corridor should replace Pan-European corridor no.X that was established in 1997. In the 2021 proposal for revised TEN-T regulation the European Commission added "Western Balkans Transport Corridor" to the list of the most important TEN-T routes. The new corridor is included in the revised TEN-T Guidelines that were agreed by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament in December 2023 under the name ""The Western Balkans-Eastern Mediterranean European Transport Corridor"". PA 1b believes that it contributed significantly to adding this corridor among TEN-T transport corridors and this way contributed to better connectivity between the EU and the Western Balkans partners.</p>	<p>Implementation of TEN-T standards on all corridors is progressing well and it is believed that they will be completed by 2030. The good results are based on commitments of national authorities and financial support from the EU funds, in particular CEF.</p> <p>The newly proposed Western Balkans - Eastern Mediterranean corridors that will be formally established in 2024 with new TEN-T regulation published in the OJ of the EU however is expected to be implemented in 2040.</p>	<p>To further support implementation of TEN-T and extension to neighbouring countries.</p> <p>To study macro-region's transport network with aim to further estimate transport infrastructure missing links and bottlenecks.</p>

ACTION 2: To support the implementation of the Rail Freight Corridors (RFC) forming part of the European rail network for competitive freight (Reg. 913/2010) with extension to candidate and neighbouring countries (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Initiative to establish a new rail freight corridor (RFC) linking the Black Sea ports (Constanza) with the Northern Adriatic ports (Koper/Rijeka) has</p>	<p>Promotion of the initiative at number of events.</p>	<p>While the need to start estimation of corridor's potential is supported by all Danube Region countries it has to be noted that progress is slow. Yet</p>	<p>Continuation of efforts to find financial means to carry out feasibility study or market study.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
started in 2013 by Romania and Slovenia. It is supported by all other Danube Region countries. PA 1b believes that this project initiative significantly contributes also to the 3 Seas Initiative.		PA 1b believes it will bring results in years to come, in particular in light of changing geopolitical situation.	

ACTION 3: To enhance cooperation between air traffic stakeholders in order to improve regional connectivity and prepare a plan to implement shorter plane routes (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
No action taken and no project started in 2020 and 2021.	No achievements made to be linked to PA 1b work.	No progress made.	To monitor air transport development and in particular regional air connectivity. Publication on airport infrastructure in the Danube Region is planned with the aim to make visible possibilities for developments and business opportunities for commercial and general aviation. Special attention is to be paid on ATM (within SESAR project) and FABs in the EU and non-EU member states.

ACTION 4: To ensure sustainable metropolitan transport systems and mobility (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Following the rule of subsidiarity for urban and sub-urban transport activities are focused on exchange of best practices between the capital cities and other conurbations at PA 1b events.	Support of projects that are focused on sustainable transport in urban areas and promote walking, cycling and other means of micro-mobility. PA 1b contribution to sustainable urban transport is not measurable. PA 1b contributed to promote cycling and cycling network planning by actively supporting the DTP project.	Due to the fact that sustainable transport systems and mobility are high on political agenda and great number of stakeholders are active in this field progress is visible in all macro-regions. In particular new dedicated cycling routes are important for daily commuters, as well as tourism.	No special action needed. It is only important to keep the momentum. In terms of urban mobility PA 1b continues to focus on sustainable, multimodal transport, infrastructure deployment for alternative fuels, energy efficiency in transport and modification of public transport (from lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic). PA 1b will support all DRP projects that are linked to Action 4, e.g. CityWalk 2.0.

ACTION 5: To improve the regional/local cross-border infrastructure and the access to rural areas by facilitating secondary and tertiary transport infrastructure
(Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>PA 1b supports all projects dealing with efforts to improve regional and cross-border infrastructure and services. PA 1b contributed by active participation at several events organised by INTERREG project implementers, e.g., Crossmoby project, Adripass project, SUSTANCE project, etc.</p> <p>In addition, PA 1b added as one of three Danube Strategy Flagships SUSTANCE (improving public transport for rural and cross-border communities) project. By supporting this project PA 1b shows that transport challenges and solutions are important also beyond Danube Region.</p>	<p>Several pilot projects were implemented by transnational projects, e.g., Austria - Slovenia.</p>	<p>Progress is visible by introducing new cross-border bus and rail connections between Danube Region countries and its neighbouring countries. There is however still a lot of work to be done at local, regional, national and international levels.</p>	<p>To involve SG members into creation of list of most needed cross-border links in terms of social, environmental and economic value.</p>

ACTION 6: To develop further nodal planning for multimodality (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>PA 1b Steering Group monitored and exchanged information on nodes that need to be developed and those that are main cause of congestion, as well on those that need to develop terminals in order to enhance multimodal transport and improve logistic services.</p>	<p>Not measurable.</p>	<p>There are many efforts at national level to improve transport nodes and use of multimodal and intermodal transport services. Major differences are seen between the Danube Region countries of the upper Danube Region and lower Danube region. In order to achieve similar level of performance related to construction of multimodal terminals and business models for logistic services exchange of knowledge, best practices and new financing opportunities are needed. Progress cannot be seen by 2030, while with common efforts significant progress can be made by 2040.</p>	<p>Continuation of promotion of multimodality and intermodality, as well as enabling experts and interested stakeholders to meet and PA 1b events. No concrete projects foreseen in next year or two.</p>

ACTION 7: To develop further Intelligent Traffic Systems by using environmental-friendly technologies, especially in urban regions (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Since 2011 PA 1b monitors and supports activities of ITS projects on national and macro-regional level. Among projects in 2022 and 2023 special attention was paid to two:</p>	<p>Implementers of ITS technologies were contributing at events organised by PA 1b. OJP4Danube final conference was side event of the DRTD 2022 in Ljubljana, SI.</p>	<p>ITS deployment is progressing well in EU member states (also due to Directive 2010/40/EU) while encouragement to use directive in candidate</p>	<p>To follow closely deployment of ITS at the EU level and support deployment in non-EU countries.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
- OJP4Danube (ended on 31.12.2022) and - SMACKER (ended on 30.6.2022).		countries is under way. An ITS project (“X4ITS”) has been included among the Danube Strategy Flagships 2024.	

ACTION 8: To raise awareness for road safety and encourage exchange of best practices (Strategic Objective: Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Involvement of other PAs: There are attempts to join forces with EUSDR PA 11. It is expected that first joint activity (probably a road safety event) start in a year or two.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
PA 1b coordinators (PACs) and SG members monitored and supported activities and projects on national and macro-regional level. In particular PA 1b cooperates well with UNECE ITC and EIRA-EuroRAP on issues related to urban road safety and safe road infrastructure. In 2022 and 2023 no joint event was organised.	PA 1b contributed to the implementation of Interreg DTP project SABRINA (start 1-7-2020, end 31.12.2022). SABRINA focused on cycling infrastructure that gains importance due to increased use of bicycles for commuting and pleasure. Increased number of cyclists is a reason for a greater number of road accidents caused by cyclists.	Road safety in the Danube Region countries is generally improving, yet it is far from reaching “vision zero”. Progress is slow and difficult to measure. It is not possible to say to what extent PA 1b activities (such as awareness rising, contributions to exchange of best practices, networking with stakeholders) are adding to overall safety on macro-regional transport infrastructure.	To continue monitoring and supporting road safety initiatives carried out by local, regional, national, macro-regional and European stakeholders. To exchange information and increase cooperation also with the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat.



PA 2 Sustainable Energy

ACTION 1: To further explore the sustainable use of clean biomass, solar energy, geothermal, hydropower and wind power to increase the energy independency and to promote and support multipurpose cross border RES utilisation projects. (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Involvement of other PAs: When organising the workshop on NECPs EUSDR PA 2 contacted EUSDR PA 1b to suggest a panellist to the transport section. They suggested the representative of the Slovenian Ministry of Infrastructure who accepted the invitation and was one of the invited experts. The representatives of EUSDR PA 1b participated at the workshop.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>To further assist the wider deployment of geothermal energy in the heating sector, PA 2 developed an e-learning material in 2022. The e-learning material has five separate modules that guide the reader through all phases of a geothermal heating project development from pre-feasibility studies and planning to concrete technical design an operational issue. Each module is complemented by interactive Q&A section to test the level of understanding.</p> <p>The most efficient way to further promote the use of renewable energy sources in the Region is to develop cross-border and transnational projects. Thus, PA 2 supported several project ideas in this field. The followings got funded during the period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -European Energy Award along the Danube (use of RES in communities) -HyEfre: (efficient integration of green hydrogen and RES) -Danube Indeet (use of RES in transport and energy systems) -GeHeCo (use of geothermal energy in heating and cooling systems) -NRGCOM (renewable energy communities) -StoreMore (energy storage, balanced RES utilization and electrical grids) 	<p>The publication of an e-learning material in the topic of geothermal district heating systems six winning transnational projects that will contribute to the enhancement of the use of renewable energy sources (European Energy Award along the Danube, HyEfre, DanubeIndeet, GeoHeCo, StoreMore, NRGCom)</p>	<p>The use of geothermal energy in the district heating systems will be facilitated by the e-learning material produced by PA 2.</p> <p>The transnational projects will contribute to the further use of renewable energy sources.</p>	<p>Active involvement in the implementation of the projects as Associated Strategic Partner, dissemination of project achievements; further support of the development of energy projects.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
-SMEnergy (provide assistance to small and medium enterprises with decarbonisation)			

ACTION 2: To promote energy efficiency and use of renewable energy in buildings and heating systems including district heating and cooling and combined heat and power facilities (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>A comparative study was commissioned by PA 2 entitled: “Decarbonisation of heating and cooling sector - promotion of green district heating in the Danube Region”. The study was focussing on how geothermal energy could be used in phasing out fossil fuels (especially gas and coal) in some selected EUSDR countries. In addition to the resource side, the district heating market of these countries were also analysed in detail.</p> <p>Based on the conclusions of the study, two workshops on geothermal district heating were organised in 2023: on October 5 in Zagreb, HR, and on October 12 in Tuzla, BA. The aim of both workshops was to transfer the results of the study into concrete actions. Therefore, the focus was on knowledge transfer between Hungarian companies already experienced in development and operation of geothermal heating systems, and local energy companies. This was facilitated by B2B meetings, where interested parties had the opportunity to discuss directly potential cooperation. At the workshops presentations introduced targeted funding possibilities available for Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina to develop such renewable-based heating systems.</p> <p>To further assist the wider deployment of geothermal energy in the heating sector, PA 2 also developed an e-learning material. The e-learning material has five separate modules that guide the reader through all phases of a geothermal heating project development from pre-feasibility</p>	<p>Two studies commissioned, one about the decarbonisation of the district heating systems and another in the topic of energy efficiency in buildings; three workshops were organised, two knowledge sharing workshops in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the topic of green district heating and one in connection with the energy efficiency in buildings topic; one winning project was supported in the topic of shallow geothermal heating and cooling.</p>	<p>Promotion of the decarbonisation of the heating systems in the Region by showing best practices and offering financial support schemes.</p>	<p>Active involvement into the implementation of GeoHeCo project as Associated Strategic Partner; support of project development in this field.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>studies and planning to concrete technical design an operational issues.</p> <p>During the period the CZ coordination published study on energy efficiency in buildings study.</p> <p>A project titled “GeoHeCo” in shallow geothermal heating and cooling was supported by PA 2 and it got funded by the Danube Region Programme.</p>			

ACTION 3: To promote decarbonisation and reduction of air pollutants in the transport sector, regarding both public and freight transportation by developing the infrastructure for alternative fuels (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Stimulating Sustainable Development; Improving Mobility and Connectivity)

Involvement of other PAs: When organising the workshop on NECPs EUSDR PA 2 contacted EUSDR PA 1b to suggest a panellist to the transport section. They suggested the representative of the Slovenian Ministry of Infrastructure who accepted the invitation and was one of the invited experts. The representatives of EUSDR PA 1b participated at the workshop.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>PA 2 follows closely the developments in the field of hydrogen, including utilisation of hydrogen as an alternative fuel.</p> <p>PA 2 supports the Danube Indeet project that aims to develop and implement an integrated and decentralised concept for establishing transnational, sustainable and cross-sectoral transport and energy systems based on renewable energy.</p>	<p>One winning project in the field of sustainable transport based on RES.</p>	<p>Support of project development in the field of sustainable and clean transport.</p>	<p>Following the developments in the field of alternative fuels, with a special attention on hydrogen.</p>

ACTION 4: To improve energy efficient, cost efficient and innovative low-carbon technologies, including smart solutions while respecting the principle of technological neutrality (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Stimulating Sustainable Development; Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>PA 2 follows closely the most promising developments in green energy technologies especially in the field of hydrogen that is expected to have a crucial role in the energy transition in the Region. In 2023, a workshop was organised in this topic at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum in Slovenia entitled “Enhancing hydrogen economy in the Danube Region”. The workshop provided an opportunity</p>	<p>Organisation of a workshop at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum in Slovenia, preparation of a promotional video with DSP about hydrogen infrastructure in the Region, cooperation with EUSALP in the field of hydrogen valleys</p>	<p>PA 2 started to focus on the topic of hydrogen which is considered to have one of the most important role in the energy transition in the upcoming years. The topic has been started in 2023 and it will be in the focus of PA 2’s activities in the next years.</p>	<p>PA 2 will continue to support projects that focus on cutting-edge technologies;</p> <p>PA 2 will continue the topic of hydrogen, it will be one of the main topics in the PAC3 project, during the upcoming years a state-of-art report will be prepared about the status of the use of hydrogen in the Region, that will be followed by recommendations how to support the building of hydrogen economy in the EUSDR countries.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
to explore the key issues and offer possible recommendations for policymakers, focusing on the role of hydrogen in energy diversification and key challenges to the development of hydrogen economy in the Danube Region. With the assistance of DSP, a promotional video on hydrogen was also prepared in 2023.			PA 2 will continue to cooperate with international organisations and other MRS in the topic and will support project development in this field. Expert workshops will be also organised in relevant topics.

ACTION 5: To enforce regional cooperation with the aim of supporting the implementation of projects connecting energy markets with a focus on the projects of the Central and South Eastern European Energy Connectivity (CESEC) initiative (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The Russian invasion over Ukraine at the beginning of 2022 and the resulted energy crisis deeply affected entire Europe, including the EUSDR countries. It showed that more connected energy markets and reduced use of natural gas are crucial for the Region. That is why PA 2 commissioned a study about the Russian gas dependency of Danube Region countries and the potential to reduce this dependency on the short and longer term. It highlighted the importance of solidarity and interconnection of the Danube Region countries as a key to keep the energy supplies under control.</p> <p>To disseminate the results of this integrative study, an online policy workshop was organised in the frame of EUSEW 2022. In this session invited think tanks with high reputation in the field and selected speakers discussed policy options and recommendations for the Region to help phasing out natural gas in the heating sector. The result of the gas phase out study were also presented at the EUSDR 11th EUSDR Annual Forum in Kosice, SK in 2022.</p> <p>Given the unfortunate prolongation of the Russian war against Ukraine and the energy crisis, the topic of investigating the possibilities of gas phase</p>	<p>A complex analysis of the Russian gas dependency of EUSDR countries was published, including the potential of reducing this dependency on short and long term. A policy workshop was organised at EUSEW 2022 in the topic, followed by a discussion by 3 macro-regional strategies (EU-SAIR, EUSALP, EUSDR) on how to handle the gas crisis on macro-regional level, and also a panel discussion at the 11th EUSDR Annual Forum of EUSDR in Kosice in 2022. Also, a 1-pager was published to summarize the main findings and recommendations of the Russian gas dependency study.</p>	<p>PA 2 gave an overview to EUSDR countries about the Region's dependency on Russian gas and also collected several recommendations how to handle it. PA 2 discussed the potential solutions to reduce fossil fuel consumption on different levels, different forums with various stakeholders including national, regional and EU policy makers, think-tanks, macro-regional strategies, service providers, SMEs, project promoters and academia.</p>	<p>PA 2 will continue to follow the developments in Russian gas phase-out and the reduction of the use of fossil fuels in the Danube Region and in other macro-regions too. Two follow-up analysis are planned to be prepared, one compiling the experiences of winter 2023/24 and one of winter 2024/25. Also PA 2 will develop an online gas market indicator visualisation tool. It will be a set of 12 indicators characterizing the gas market and security of supply in all EUSDR countries in the form of easy to understand infographics.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>out continued in 2023. While in 2022 PA 2 was focussing on the Danube Region, in 2023 it expanded the topic looking at other macro-regions as well. Along this concept, a session was organised at the 4th MRS Week in Brussels on 24 April 2023, titled: How to accelerate natural gas phase out in Europe – first hand experiences from MRSs. The objective of the session was to share macro-regions’ experiences so far handling the energy crisis and future potential pathways for reducing their dependence on the Russian gas import while still adhering to the European Green Deal. The session covered 3 macro-regions: EUSDR, EU-SALP and EUSAIR.</p> <p>To assist dissemination of the main messages of the gas-phase out topic, a one-page flyer was also published and disseminated by the PA.</p>			

ACTION 6: To exchange best practices and to develop activities to decrease energy poverty, to increase the protection of vulnerable consumers and to empower consumers to engage in the energy market (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development; Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
no activities during this period			

ACTION 7: To explore new and innovative solutions of (subsurface) energy storage (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Hydrogen is considered to have one of the most important roles in energy storage in the upcoming years. PA 2 started to focus on hydrogen in 2023 and selected it as one of the Danube Strategy Flagships. In 2023 a workshop was organised in this topic at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum in Slovenia entitled “Enhancing hydrogen economy in the Danube Region”. The workshop provided an opportunity to explore the key issues and offer</p>	<p>One winning project (StoreMore) in the topic of innovative energy storage solutions, which benefited from the subsurface energy storage brochure commissioned by PA 2 earlier.</p>	<p>PA 2 was focusing on energy storage in 2020 when it prepared a brochure in the topic of subsurface energy storage. It was disseminated through various channels. The StoreMore project benefited from this brochure.</p> <p>PA 2 will continue and support project proposals in this field.</p>	<p>PA 2 will continue to follow the developments in energy storage technologies, support related project and follow closely their implementation.</p> <p>PA 2 also plans to look for synergies with other ongoing projects in the field of subsurface energy storage, organise site visits and also to establish closer collaboration with international organisations active in this field.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>possible recommendations for policymakers, focusing on the role of hydrogen in energy diversification and key challenges to the development of hydrogen economy in the Danube Region.</p> <p>With the assistance of DSP a promotional video on hydrogen was also prepared in 2023.</p> <p>PA 2 supports the StoreMore project as Associated Strategic Partner, that is funded by the Danube Region Programme. Its aim is to analyse and promote energy storage solutions, develop tools to mitigate the intermittency of RES and contribute to an accelerated transition to renewable energy and more balanced electrical grids. It will collect new and advanced energy storage technologies and use artificial intelligence for planning, prediction and optimisation of RES.</p>			

ACTION 8: To encourage exchange of information and best practices to improve cooperation, create synergies and to initiate joint projects with other macro-regional initiatives and relevant stakeholders at European and global level (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Involvement of other PAs: EUSDR PA 1b, PA 4, PA 5, PA 6

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The PA 2 coordination put special emphasis on cooperation with other PAs and also third parties, such as other regional and macro-regional cooperations, international organisations, NGOs, agencies, universities, SMEs, managing authorities of different funding programmes and other stakeholders.</p> <p>PA 2 cooperated with PA 4 and PA 5 in organising a project financing conference where the most important funding programmes were presented to potential project developers. PA 2 also cooperated with other macro-regional strategies, they organised a panel discussion at the 4th MRS Week (27 April 2023) titled “Energy security and Clean Energy transition: the role of EU MRS” with the participation of EUSALP and EUSAIR, The HU PAC</p>	<p>Joint conference with PA 4 and PA 5 about project financing opportunities where the most important funding programs were presented to potential project developers.</p> <p>Cooperation with other macro-regional strategies, PA 2 organised a panel discussion at the 4th MRS Week (27 April 2023) titled “Energy security and Clean Energy transition: the role of EU MRS” with the participation of EUSALP and EUSAIR, participation at the EUSALP Hydrogen workshop (19 May 2022).</p> <p>Close cooperation with Energy Community, they participated at the hydrogen panel at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum in Slovenia as keynote speaker and panellist. Participation of DG ENER and DG REGIO at the SG meetings of PA 2.</p>	<p>PA 2 initiated dialogue and cooperation with other macro-regional strategies, and continued to work together with relevant stakeholders such as Energy Community, other PAs at EUSDR, line DGs, DSP, etc.</p>	<p>PA 2 will continue the close cooperation with the Energy Community and other MRSs, will put more emphasis on cooperation with line DGs and relevant international organisations.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>participated at the EUSALP Hydrogen workshop (19 May 2022). PA 2 also cooperates closely with Energy Community, they participated at the hydrogen panel at the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum in Slovenia as keynote speaker and panellist. The representatives of DG ENER and DG REGIO participated at the SG meetings of PA 2.</p>			

ACTION 9: To encourage project generation related to the energy field (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>PA 2 issued several LoR-s and/or participated as ASP-s in project proposals that are in line with PA 2 activities submitted to different funding sources (European City Facility, Danube Region Program, Central Europe Program, Interreg Europe Program, LIFE, Horizon Europe). It closely followed the evaluation results and actively participated in those ones that received funding, which are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -European Energy Award along the Danube (national funding from Baden-Württemberg) -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 (Central Europe Program) -Danube Indect: Develop and implement an integrated and decentralised concept for establishing transnational, sustainable and cross-sectoral transport and energy systems based on renewable energy (Danube Region Program) -GeHeCo: Fostering the implementation of shallow geothermal hybrid heating and cooling systems in the Danube Region (Danube Region Program) 	<p>PA 2 issued several Letter of Recommendations and supported several project proposals to various funding instruments.</p> <p>PA 2 became Associated Strategic Partner in 7 projects during the period.</p> <p>A project database was built and regularly updated by PA 2 to facilitate the capitalisation of project results and to have an overview about active project promoters in the energy field.</p>	<p>PA 2 was very active in project generation and project support during the period. The submitted energy related projects for the 1st call of the Danube Region Programme was higher than ever before since the launch of the Programme.</p> <p>PA 2 also built and regularly updates a project database to facilitate the capitalization of project results and to have an overview about active project promoters in the energy field.</p>	<p>PA 2 will continue to follow the call for project proposals in the energy field and will continue to continuously inform its stakeholders about funding possibilities. PA 2 will also continue to support project proposals that are in line with its objectives. The project database will be kept updated continuously.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>-NRGCOM: Creating appropriate operational conditions for renewable energy communities in the Danube Region (Danube Region Program)</p> <p>-StoreMore: Analysing and promoting energy storage solutions, developing tools to mitigate the intermittency of RES, contributing to an accelerated transition to renewable energy and more balanced electrical grids (Danube Region Program)</p> <p>-SMEnergy: Gathering knowledge and analysing the market in order to establish a network of centres which will locally provide the gathered knowledge and assistance with decarbonization to the small and medium enterprises. (Danube Region Program)</p> <p>PA 2 also built and regularly updates a project database to facilitate the capitalisation of project results and to have an overview about active project promoters in the energy field.</p> <p>PA 2 also closely followed the embedding process and gave presentations on PA 2 experiences and good examples at both EUSDR Embedding Week events (13 July 2022 and 12 June 2023).</p>			



PA 3 Culture & Tourism

ACTION 1: Promote sustainable tourism in the Danube Region and capitalise on EUSDR projects in the areas of culture, nature and tourism

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The networking activities carried out by PA 3 coordinators resulted in an increased interest of stakeholders in applying for funding under the Seed Money Facility. The following five projects are currently under assessment: - DRP0401462 – Strengthening rural areas; DRP0401453 – IARTE; DRP0401391 – ReBBitalize; DRP0401377 – DANUCYCLE; DRP0401277 – Eye of the Beholder (certain linkages to PA 5).</p>	<p>In order to strengthen the operational dimension of the EUSDR Action Plan for PA 3 and to set more coherent targets for its implementation, based on a participatory approach was organised several event and direct works with SG Members and stakeholders during the participation on relevant event in order to increase collaboration and extend cooperation between regions and the macro-region level, in this respect PA 3-MDPWA PA 3-EUSDR representative participated in the AI-NURECC Plus High Level Conference ""Sustainable Tourism as a strategic driver for the responsible and inclusive growth of mountain areas in North Macedonia and in the Adriatic Ionian Region"", which will take place in Skopje, MK, on 23 January 2023, in parallel with the 4th Adriatic Ionian Youth Organisations Forum (AIYOF4)-24 January 2023, active participation on NC/PACs Meeting Maribor, Slovenia, March 2023, initiate and run an informal meeting on tourism and culture with representatives of the 4 MRS and CPMR in the framework of the Macro-regional Week, Following the first informal MRS and CPMR meeting in Brussels, BE, April 2023 we continue this cooperation formula and participated via online in the EUSAIR Forum, May 2023 Sarajevo and the events run by AI-NURECC+ and AIC Forum, Brussels. Participation and presentation of PA 3-CLOSE project at the 10th Danube Conference on Culture, April Novi-Sad, Serbia, participation in NC PACs Meeting and EUSDR-EUSAIR Days, Portoroz and Izola, September Slovenia, organisation of SG</p>	<p>-</p>	<p>-</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<p>meeting of PA 3, hybrid event at the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia, Danube Participation Day and EUSDR Annual Forum, Ljubljana, Slovenia, October 2023, to increase the network of actors and stakeholders of PA 3 activity and promote the activities and vision from PA 3_CLOSE project, participation on Conference on Tourism and Navigation, Linz, AT, November 2023, Launch and promote at the SG meeting the AP3 newsletter discussing the project proposal for the second DRP call, promote the Seed Money facility, participate in and promote events related to the second DRP call and the Seed Money facility Discuss with representatives of the different entities applying to the first call of the DRP, promote the EUSDR Action Plan, the AP3 Actions, the AP3- EUSDR Strategic Action and also the AP3-EUSDR Danube Strategy Flagship in order to take count when they build the proposal for the second call, involvement of PA 3 in all the level of the project proposals, as results the PA 3-MDPWA representative are ASP in some relevant projects admitted a first call on DRP.</p>		

ACTION 2: Support and promote cultural tourism in the Danube Region

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The most important decision-making framework for PA 3 is represented by the Steering Group. During the first and second reporting period, the SG meetings fulfilled a more operational role in guiding the implementation the Roadmap of PA 3, which was developed during the previous coordination project.</p> <p>Also, progress was achieved in identifying the Danube Strategy Flagships of PA 3. The focus on relevant projects in terms of fulfilling the objectives of PA 3 Action Plan is also present in Activity 1.2. regarding the development of coordinated</p>	<p>Through a joint activity and agreement with the SG Members, the three Danube Strategy Flagships of PA 3 were identified and promoted in all events, contributing to the work of the DSP in order to identify the representative entities to be promoted in the advertising campaign (short presentation movie) carried out for each priority area. organising several Team Project Meeting online and onsite in Ljubljana, SI, organising online Meeting with the Danube Youth Council representative who support PA 3 activities and onsite with the occasion of EUSDR Annual Forum,</p>	-	-

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>tools for the assessment of projects that contribute to transposing the objectives of PA 3 into on-the-ground actions in the fields of culture, tourism and people-to-people contacts.</p> <p>In addition, higher visibility of PA 3 activities was ensured through the participation to events pertaining to the implementation of the macro-regional strategies.</p>	<p>working together with DYC representative and produce presentation for each of them and uploaded on the PA 3 web page, participation in different relevant event at the regional and macro-regional level in order to increase visibility of PA 3 and EUSDR activity and to increase the network of stakeholders, participation in different event, workshop, conferences organised online in order to present PA 3 CLOSE project and vision related with PA 3 actions and road map, permanently collaboration with other PACs representative and stakeholders, uploaded the PA 3 web page with news and upcoming events, social media related with PA 3 permanently uploaded.</p>		

ACTION 3: Invest in sustainable quality products, services, innovative forms and infrastructure in the fields of tourism and culture, promote skills, education and creating jobs in the related areas

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
-	-	The contribution of innovative and creative tourism to support sustainable local development workshop – ongoing.	The contribution of innovative and creative tourism to support sustainable local development workshop – ongoing.

ACTION 4: Develop a “Smart Destination Danube”

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
-	-	-	-

ACTION 5: Promote and encourage the development of the cultural activities and creative sectors

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>As part of the PA 3 coordination project, a Strategy for urban regeneration through culture and tourism will be developed with the purpose of delivering a coordinated and well-targeted policy approach to support the recovery of tourism and culture with the purpose of enabling their transformative power in terms of urban regeneration. Thematic and regional working groups will be</p>	-	-	-

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>used to draw on the insights and expertise of relevant stakeholders. The study that will substantiate the content of the Strategy pertaining to urban regeneration will focus on a variety of challenges that culture and tourism in urban areas face, including post-pandemic travel trends in the EU countries. In order to endorse the proposed Strategy, a common Declaration will be approved by ministers to work together to ensure better connections between different policy strands so as to secure the uptake of culture and tourism benefits for the revitalisation of urban areas. During this reporting period, the Terms of Reference for the development of the Strategy for urban regeneration and rural development through culture & tourism in the Danube Region were drafted. The ToR will be finalised in the upcoming period and will be published in the national public procurement system.</p>			

ACTION 6: Promote cultural heritage in the Danube Region

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>In August, the Department for Interethnic Relations (partner in the PA 3 CLOSE coordination project) opened the photo exhibition and released the album Community Multiculturalism Development. The project supports the promotion of the heritage through contemporary photography as means of expressing cultural identity, integrating diversity and multilingualism in drafting local/regional strategies. The intention was to demonstrate that the field of art and the economic sphere can constitute a common denominator for the development of the local economy. The exhibition and the album were also presented on the occasion of the National Minorities Day, on December 17, 2023."</p>	-	-	-



PA 4 Water Quality

ACTION 1: HAZARDOUS & EMERGING SUBSTANCES: Promote monitoring, prevention and reduction of water pollution deriving from hazardous and emerging substances (EU priority substances and watch list candidates as well as Danube basin specific pollutants candidates and others e.g. micro plastics-plastics, pharmaceuticals, PFOS).

Involvement of other PAs: Potentially within Pillar 2.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Implemented further policy initiatives and tools: Plastic conference planned in October 2024. Based on the study completed in 2019 PA 4 plans to organise the international pharmaceutical conference in 2026.	Due later Implementation of projects: CLEANDANUBE - raise public awareness about plastic pollution in rivers Danube Hazard m3c - control and reduce hazardous substances pollution Tidy UP - decrease plastic pollution in the Tisza River and the Danube River	Due later	The pharmaceutical conference will be organised when the changes in legal setting will materialise in the Danube countries, planned 2026.

ACTION 2: WASTE WATER: Continue boosting major investments in building, upgrading, maintaining and rehabilitating urban wastewater treatment facilities and promote alternative collection and treatment of wastewater in small rural settlements, including measures to build capacity at the regional and local level across the Danube basin

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Sludge utilisation options-survey (coop. with PA 2 and other EU institutions) is planned in 2024.	Due later Implementation of projects: Revital I - revitalisation of the Solotvyno salt mine	Due later	Continue discussions with DG ENV on the outcome in the revision phase. Wastewater treatment study (2027) and workshop (2028)

ACTION 3: WATER & AGRICULTURE: Promote prevention and reduction of diffuse pollution, promote nutrient retention, smart irrigation and water reuse, foster and develop an active process of dialogue and cooperation between authorities responsible for agriculture and environment to ensure that measures are taken to address diffuse pollution and ensure smart water use

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Preparation of the brochure - Green Agriculture - sustainable agriculture measures implementation in the Danube Region (case studies)	Issued online brochure - Green Agriculture - sustainable agriculture measures implementation in the Danube Region (case studies) Implementation of projects:	Achieved the milestone of PAC3 PA 4 project	Climate change reflected in agriculture – conference (2025)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	Optain - water retention and reuse in agricultural catchments		

ACTION 4: DRINKING WATER: Promote measures aimed at reducing knowledge deficits related to protecting water resources and safeguarding drinking water supply

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
To contribute to the topic of resource efficiency, effective water consumption and drinking water quality from source to tap: a leaflet was originally foreseen to be prepared in 2022.	Due to the new Drinking Water Directive, the leaflet was prepared earlier than planned. Implementation of projects: The IDES - improving water quality through integrated floodplain management	Leaflet prepared, dissemination ongoing.	Further dissemination

ACTION 5: MIGRATORY FISH: Promote measures to enable fish migration in the Danube River basin.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Fish migration restoration activities.	Fish migration working meeting (Oct 2022), Fish migration restoration document (2022) The English version of the “Action plan for the conservation of sterlet (<i>Acipenser ruthenus</i>) in Hungary” has been prepared (2023). Implementation of projects: DALIA - better decision-making and ecosystem restoration in the Danube River Basin LifeLineMDD - restore ecological connectivity LIFE Living Rivers - implementation of the 3rd Danube River Basin Management Plan; river connectivity SaveGreen - protection of ecological corridors.	Achieved the milestones of PAC2 PA 4 project.	Fish migration restoration working meeting (2025) and workshop (2027).

ACTION 6: CLIMATE CHANGE: Promote measures to adapt to climate change impacts in relation to water quality and quantity. (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
The conference on „Adapting to Climate change in relation to WATER - Changes in the qualitative and quantitative parameters of waters in the light	conference organised Implementation of projects:	Climate change topic was promoted among decision makers, experts and the public.	Climate change reflected in agriculture – conference (2025).

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
of climate change” was organised in Budapest, HU, on 28 November 2023.	Deepwater-CE - role of Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) in addressing water management challenges in Central European countries LifeLogos4Waters - natural water retention		

ACTION 7: TOOLS: Enhance cooperation, increase and exchange knowledge and secure financing to water quality measures in the Danube Region.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
In all SG meetings continue providing information on the alignment of funding possibilities Supporting Youth involvement	Action 7 In all SG meetings continue providing information on the alignment of funding possibilities Supporting Youth involvement. Cooperation with the new stakeholders. PA 4 exploits the funding opportunities of the EC centrally managed programmes and collects information related to water related financing needs. Funding brochure completed in 2022 Water success stories brochure completed for projects 2020-2022. Co-organising the „Summer School & online discussion with hydrogeologist. Baseline Study on youth and water prepared in 2023. Establishment of the cooperation with International Association of Water Service Companies in the Danube River Catchment Area (IAWD). Established cooperation with NYC members, mutual information on needs and expectations of PA 4/DYC, Continue providing information on funding possibilities. Continue in supporting youth related activities as online streams, educational games/quizzes, summer school, etc. Prolong cooperation with key stakeholders. PA 7 1.3 What is the specific added value of the above-described activities (beyond reaching the EUSDR targets/objectives) for the reporting.	expectations of PA 4/DYC	Continue providing information on funding possibilities. Continue in supporting youth related activities as online streams, educational games/quizzes, summer school, etc. Prolong cooperation with key stakeholders.



PA 5 Environmental Risks

ACTION 1: Provide sufficient support for development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Involvement of other PAs: EUSDR PA 4

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>1.1 Collaborate with ICPDR in order to produce regular updates of the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan (DFRMP) (Danube basin-wide flood risk management including forecasting focussing on reducing the existing flood risks, avoiding new flood risks such as flash floods, strengthening resilience, awareness raising and basin-wide solidarity); Improvement of flood forecasting Information exchange on the operation of hydraulic structures; Coordination of operative flood management plans; Development of elements of FRMPs for trans-boundary sub-units of common interest; Exchange of flood protection techniques, technologies and experiences; Develop an education/training network; Enhance coordination of operative flood protection methods and equipment</p> <p>1.2 Promote sustainable floodplain management including green infrastructure</p> <p>1.3 Foster basin wide management planning on specific issues (e.g., ice on rivers)</p> <p>1.4 Support relevant actors in developing risk assessment related to droughts, forest fires, hail and other climate change related disaster risks</p>	<p>Danube Forecasting Forum was organised (1.1.) Nature based solutions workshop was organised & Policy Document was published (1.2.)</p>	-	-

ACTION 2: enhance the capacities, extend the coverage of basin-wide or regional forecasting and warning systems, and develop rapid response procedures
(Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Involvement of other PAs: EUSDR PA 4

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Create stronger links and synergies between the European information systems, like European Flood Awareness System and the European Forest Fire Information System, and the national or regional early warning systems to support preparedness efforts at regional level;</p> <p>Support the development of the DanubeHIS system;</p> <p>Support regular ICPDR Danube Accidental Early Warning System (AEWS) maintenance, testing and usage;</p> <p>Support drought forecasting and drought management in the Danube basin</p>	<p>Danube HIS improvements (connected BIH) 2.2</p> <p>SAFETY4TMF project started 2.3</p>	-	-

ACTION 3: Strengthen disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organisations (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Enhancing Democracy, Sound Administration and Strong Involvement of Civil Society and Youth)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>PA 5 Disaster Management Working Group (DMWG) initiated numerous activities. There were three DM-WG meetings and several workshops with the attendance of stakeholders from disaster management. The project support was active during the period.</p>	<p>Four disaster management related projects were successfully completed thanks to the work of the network and the support of PA 5 DM-WG. Several joint events were conducted with projects, such as DiMaND, PROFOUND, DAREnet. The glossary of disaster management terms was developed to support common understanding. Furthermore, The Rules of Procedures, the Terms of Reference were developed for the DMWG, and the Roadmap for Action 3.</p>	<p>The progress of the work was greatly supported by the work of the DMWG's activities related to Action 3. It was tracked with the support of the Roadmap of Action 3. The finalisation of relevant projects was successful.</p>	<p>Development of project proposal (such as In-DiMaND, Integrated Disaster Management in the Danube Region) to continue the work and integrate the results of completed projects (DiMaND, PROFOUND, DAREnet) is planned. Furthermore, the implementation of another cross-border project, RISKHUB II is starting after the reporting period. Further cross-border relation proposals are also planned.</p>

ACTION 4: Decrease human impacts that evolves natural risk factors resulting in environmental damages (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
PA 5 jointly with ICPDR developed a project proposal focusing on tailings management facilities. An Expression of Interest was developed, and the partnership was created. The Expression of Interest was submitted to the 1 st Call of the Danube Region Programme, and it got selected for the second round. The full proposal was developed with the help and support of PA 5.	Tailings Management Facilities project (SAFETY4TMF) proposal was fully developed jointly with ICPDR APC EG representatives and the partnership. The proposal was selected for funding and it has been already started in 2024.	The progress can be measured by the successful project proposal development which supports the relevant stakeholders from the field in the Danube Region.	The SAFETY4TMF project starts in 2024. Furthermore, PA 5 is planning to support joint organisation of a project event and the Expert Group meeting of ICPDR APC EG also in 2024.

ACTION 5: Anticipate regional and local impacts of climate change (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change; Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Involvement of other PAs: EUSDR PA 2, PA 4, PA 6

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
-	-	-	-



PA 6 Biodiversity & Landscapes, Quality of Air & Soils

ACTION 1: Establish transnational cooperation and harmonisation of the strategic management documents between protected areas on river systems in the Danube basin (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>A1.1. In 2022, DANUBEPARKS (as one of the six PA 6 Task Forces) started with activities within DANUBE4all - an EU “Lighthouse Initiative” in support of Mission “Restore our ocean and waters by 2030”. This 5-year, Horizon Europe funded project consists of a consortium of 48 Partners and Associated Partners from 14 European countries. DANUBE4all aims to restore freshwater ecosystems in the Danube River Basin through the development of a comprehensive, scientifically-based and practically-orientated Restoration Action Plan (RAPDRB). The project seeks to address the lack of knowledge, awareness, and participation of local people and business actors in the implementation of freshwater ecosystem restoration. DANUBE4all is an unprecedented co-creation process between scientists, researchers, SMEs, investors, public bodies, policymakers, and local communities.</p> <p>A1.2. DANUBEPARKS together with the LIFE WILDisland project team initiated the establishment of the Danube WILDisland Regional Initiative as the first river-focused Ramsar Regional Initiative in Europe to foster international and cross-sector cooperation and natural river island protection.</p>	<p>Related to the new Ramsar Regional Initiative (RRI), until now, DANUBEPARKS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developed a full set of submission documents - Secured National Support Letters from a total of ten countries (AT, SK, HU, HR, SRB, BG, RO, MD, UKR) - Presented the future RRI as the 40 years anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands in Austria (September, 2023) and the 20th Steering Group meeting of PA 6 of EUSDR (November, 2023) - Secured the support of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River ICPDR (which undertook the formal hosting role and submitted the proposal to the Ramsar Secretariat in December 2023) - Developed and submitted funding proposals, which would guarantee the setting up and financial maintenance of the coordinating office of the RRI for the next six years. <p>These are real milestones for our attempts to gain political support to strengthen the Danube as an ecological corridor connecting more bio-geographic regions than any other corridor in Europe, and act as an example of best practices for the establishment of European Green and Blue Infrastructure, stressing on restoring river dynamics and natural hydrological regimes.</p>	<p>DANUBEPARKS is progressing in the preparation for establishment of their new office in Lower Danube (Persina Nature Park, Bulgaria) for the purpose of coordination of the Danube WILDisland RRI.</p>	<p>-</p>

ACTION 2: Build capacities of national and local authorities, non-governmental organisations, expert and scientific community in the environment related matters (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Involvement of other PAs: DSTF has an important interface not only with EUSDR PA 6 of which DSTF is a part, but also with EUSDR PA 4 (Water Quality) with which EUSDR PA 6 cooperates closely in view of the important role of water management in sturgeon conservation, including in the ICPDR.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>A2.1. On the 30 and 31 May 2023, the Conference “DANUBEPARKS Newt Conservation Partnership & Climate Change” (supported by Central European Initiative) was held in Văleni, MD, and it was concluded with great success. The Conference brought together experts, scientists, and conservationists from DANUBEPARKS to address the critical issues of newt conservation and climate change.</p> <p>A2.2. Initiated within the Interreg DTP DANUBEparcs-CONNECTED project, for the 4th time Danube Volunteers Day initiative is gathering volunteers from all along the Danube to work on the preservation of the Danube as a habitat corridor. After a short break during the COVID-19 pandemic time, in 2022 Danube Volunteers Day actions were organised in Protected Areas from six Danube countries: Germany, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. To make this action successful, the annual topic of action is regularly defined. The main idea behind the 4th Danube Volunteers Day was to work on the protection of flagship species of the Danube River Basin. Suggested activities were: - Citizen science & monitoring (e.g. birdwatching with volunteers, roadkill monitoring...), - Waste collection in protected areas, - Removal of invasive species, - Native tree species planting (e.g. black poplar, white willow...)"</p>	<p>A2.1. At the event, the commitment of DANUBEPARKS and its partners to long-term conservation efforts, was confirmed by signing two strategic documents: 1. Memorandum of Cooperation „DANUBEPARKS Newt Conservation Partnership“, signed between DANUBEPARKS - Danube River Network of Protected Areas represented by Mr Vlatko Rožac and Societas Europaea Herpetologica (European Herpetological Society) represented by Mr Andreas Maletzky, 2. Cooperation Agreement between DANUBEPARKS and Lower Prut Natural Reserve represented by Mr. Vasilica Gheorghe, Lower Prut Natural Reserve Director.</p> <p>A2.2. From September until December 2022, 375 volunteers invested 1 845 hours in nature protection activities in Danube Region. In total (four campaigns): the Danube Volunteers Day initiative mobilized 1567 volunteers. During 50 actions, 5745 volunteer working hours were invested in the preservation of the Danube river as a habitat corridor.</p>	<p>In 2023, „Danube Dragon Conservation“ (Schutz des Donaudrachens) was submitted to the private sponsor and approved.</p>	<p>A2.1. The first concrete activities are starting in the first half of 2024 with the implementation of the „Danube Dragon Conservation“ project (Schutz des Donaudrachens). Planned activities involve: - Hydrological improvement of water balance (Duna-Drava National Park in Hungary and Perisina Nature Park in Bulgaria) - Creation of small water bodies (Koviljsko petrovaradinski rit Special Nature Reserve and Gornje podunavlje Special Nature Reserve in Serbia) - Protection of terrestrial habitats (purchase of land in Dunajsky luhy Protected Landscape Area in Slovakia) - Best practice management (grazing) in Slovakia - Habitat network improvement (mitigation of roadkills in Kopački rit Nature Park in Croatia) - eDNA monitoring (Danube-wide)</p>

ACTION 3: Develop and/or implement conservation action plans and/or management plans for endangered umbrella species of the Danube Region (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Involvement of other PAs: A.3.1 DSTF has an important interface not only with EUSDR PA 6 of which DSTF is a part, but also with EUSDR PA 4 (Water Quality) with which EUSDR PA 6 cooperates closely in view of the important role of water management in sturgeon conservation, including in the ICPDR.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The Danube Sturgeon Task Force (DSTF) was established as an EUSDR PA 6 Task Force in 2012. It is a multistakeholder platform with participation from water and nature management, civil society and academia with an interest and expertise in sturgeon conservation. Contrary to other Task Forces, it does not develop, implement or manage projects itself. Instead, it contributes to the development, management and implementation of projects led by other entities.</p> <p>DSTF has annual General Assemblies which review and discuss developments in the conservation of Danube sturgeons and the associated governance issues, ongoing conservation projects, set priorities for DSTF activities. The annual General Assembly of DSTF also elects an Executive Committee which manages the implementation of decisions and priorities as decided by the General Assembly. The Executive Committee which normally meets online met 21 times in 2022 and 2023. The Executive Committee has published annual reports which can be found at http://dstf.info/events/ under the respective General Assemblies. A comprehensive overview of measures needed to restore Danube sturgeon populations can be found in the Sturgeon 2020 programme and in the Bern Convention Pan-European Action Programme (PANEUAP) for Sturgeon Conservation. The current main priority conservation measures identified by DSTF are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Effectively enforced measures to prevent taking of Danube sturgeons in the wild 2) Effective migration corridors, including unhindered passage of Danube sturgeons between the Black Sea and sturgeon habitats in the upper 	<p>1) COOPERATION WITH OTHER ACTORS 1a) EUSDR DSTF participates as an observer in the Steering Group of EUSDR Priority Area 6 where it has, in addition to contributing generally to its discussions, made concrete proposals to strengthen the participation of Danube countries' nature protection authorities to monitoring and assessment of the state of Danube sturgeon populations. Several countries have expressed a support for a joint monitoring system to be hosted by ICPDR.</p> <p>Also, DSTF cooperates with EUSDR Priority area 4 with respect to sturgeon efforts, in particular in the context of efforts in Slovakia to promote passage of sturgeon across the obstacles at the Gabčíkovo water structures.</p> <p>1b) International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) The DSTF has an Observer Status in the ICPDR. As such it has participated in the Ordinary Meetings of the ICPDR as well as in meetings of its Standing Working Group, its River Basin management Expert Group, its Hydromorphology Task Group and its Monitoring and Assessment Expert Group. DSTF contributes in particular to ensuring the free passage of fish (including sturgeons) throughout the basin, to the need for monitoring of Danube sturgeon populations and their habitats and the need to strengthen the participation of nature protection authorities in these efforts. DSTF has also made significant contributions to the development of the 2022 Ministerial Danube Declaration. As a result of DSTFs intervention the resolution from the ordinary Meeting of ICPDR OM-26""asks the MA EG to review the possibilities of</p>	<p>1) Status of sturgeons and time-horizon for population recovery Of the known Danube sturgeons two have already been declared locally extinct by IUCN and of the four remaining species, three are considered "critically endangered" and one "endangered" (IUCN update 2022). Of special concern is that despite protective measures having been taken in the last ten years, IUCN considers that the status of all species has continued declining. In view of the long reproductive cycles of sturgeons, turning the tide and putting sturgeon populations on track to recovery cannot happen in the space of a handful of years but will necessarily require sustained efforts spanning several decades. Current programming arrangements in support of recovery of biodiversity and species are not designed to sustain efforts over such timespans.</p> <p>2) Development of basin-wide monitoring Basin-wide monitoring is an essential tool to assess population development and to inform decision-making about conservation measures. DSTF activities with a view to establish monitoring: - DSTF works closely with the ICPDR Monitoring and Assessment Expert Group with a view to establishing a sturgeon population monitoring system and to involving also nature protection authorities. - In parallel DSTF has pursued discussions in the framework of EUSDR Priority Area 6 with a view to activating and involving nature protection authorities in discussions about future sturgeon monitoring.</p>	<p>A) Need for immediate next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of basin-wide sturgeon monitoring, including guidelines for population and habitats, with participation of water and nature protection authorities and, where appropriate, fisheries authorities. • Decisions by Romanian and Serbian authorities to implement fish passage at the Iron Gate at the end of the We Pass 2 project and to prioritise use of EU funds to finance the necessary infrastructure. • Activation of countries' Nature Protection authorities to contribute fully to sturgeon conservation and establishment of a clear division of labour with water management. • A stronger role for National Coordinators and the European Commission in ensuring consistency between EUSDR priorities, targets and objectives and national implementation and funding priorities • Nomination of a DSTF sturgeon envoy to strengthen communication with political and high-level decision makers with a view to strengthening sturgeon conservation action at national level. <p>B) Need for steps in the medium term (next 5 years)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision by Slovakia to implement effective fish passage measures for sturgeons at the Gabčíkovo water structures and to prioritise funding for the necessary infrastructure • Establishment of an additional permanent Ex-situ brood stock facility with secured long-term funding in the Lower Danube

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>reaches of the Danube Basin and effective conservation of sturgeon habitats in the basin and the Black Sea</p> <p>3) Ex-situ conservation including the establishment of Danube sturgeon broodstocks to secure the gene pool, and coordinated restocking of sturgeons to enable critically endangered Danube sturgeon populations to recover.</p> <p>4) Effective long-term basin-wide Danube sturgeon population monitoring to verify impact of conservation measures and guide decisions about priorities for conservation Saving the Danube sturgeon species is a truly multi-level governance challenge which will require the involvement of many different sectors and authorities at different administrative levels, stakeholders and civil society. Effective action requires coordination of action between different territorial jurisdictions and the relevant international organisations and authorities.</p> <p>In order to promote the implementation of these priority measures, DSTF cooperates with Danube basin countries and with organisations and structures with competences relevant for this purpose, including not only EUSDR Priority Area 6 PACs and Steering Group, but also its Priority Area 4, the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), the FAO's General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and its Black Sea Working Group, the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and with various departments in the European Commission.</p> <p>DSTF also has close relations with a number of other organisations with strong interests in sturgeon conservation and with whom it exchanges information and experience and coordinates positions where positions are shared. These organisations include the World Sturgeon Conservation</p>	<p>including the sturgeon monitoring into the TNMN (TNMN = TransNational Monitoring Network) and of accommodating the external sturgeon data into the TNMN database." The currently planned 2025 Joint Danube Survey can only provide a small glimpse, but may help increase the attention of ICPDR and countries' other efforts.</p> <p>1c) FAO's General Fisheries Council for the Mediterranean (GFCM)</p> <p>DSTF has contributed to the development by the GFCM's Black Sea Working Group of a pilot project on sturgeon conservation in the Black Sea with the focus to assess the extent of sturgeon bycatch in Black Sea fisheries, the need and the possible means to limit such bycatch, and the creation of a network of sturgeon experts. DSTF members have contributed to a sturgeon side meeting coorganised by WWF and GFCM in the frame of the GFCM Fish Forum 2024 in Turkey highlighting the plight of the species and the urgent need to accelerate action to save sturgeon populations in and around the Black Sea. The "LIFE Boat 4 Sturgeon" project was highlighted and the need for matching conservation efforts in the Danube basin with efforts in the marine life cycle of migratory sturgeons, in particular to safeguard the thousands of tagged fish being released to the Lower Danube in the coming years. The message was taken on board in the final conclusions of the meeting with a number of important recommendations to strengthen the protection of sturgeons in the Black Sea which will be transmitted to the GFCM Working group for the Black Seas meeting in July 2024.</p> <p>1d) European Commission</p> <p>DSTF has cooperated and exchanged views with the European Commission on a number of topics of common interest. These include the launch of</p>	<p>- DSTF has also started discussions with the ICPDR about integrating sturgeon habitats into its monitoring of hydromorphology</p> <p>- Romania, supported inter alia by DSTF and WWF, has led the development of a project proposal (MONSTUR) on sturgeon monitoring to the Interreg B Danube Region Programme to support monitoring discussions in ICPDR and the EUSDR</p> <p>- DSTF is instrumental in securing information flow between projects and further use of their results, for example its members contributed to the development of technical guidelines for sturgeon population and habitat monitoring in the frame of the EU service contract, promotes the use of habitat data collected by the MEASURES project or the database currently in use under LIFE Boat project to wider stakeholders beyond the project partnerships.</p> <p>3) Governance challenges (including embedding problem for investment)</p> <p>The rebuilding of stocks of the Danube sturgeon populations is riddled with serious governance failures that must be addressed directly or circumvented if a sustained recovery of these populations is to be attained. Some of the most important governance failures are:</p> <p>a) Absence of political will and political ownership/leadership in countries' governments for nature protection authorities to take actions national level consistent with politically agreed sturgeon protection targets at European and/or EUSDR level in the absence of specific obligations for strict protection of the Danube sturgeons under the Habitats Directive.</p> <p>b) Absence of a binding basin-wide transboundary cooperation framework in the area of nature protection and absence of a basin-wide authori-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of a single authority with basin-wide responsibility for the integrity of a migration corridor between the Black Sea and known sturgeon habitats in the Danube basin • Establishment of funding instruments compatible with the multidecadal need for supporting sturgeon conservation measures.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Society (WSCS), the International Association for Danube Research (IAD) and WWF Central and Eastern Europe (WWF CEE).</p>	<p>the We Pass 2 project for fish passage at the hydropower dams at the Iron Gate on the Serbian/Romanian border, implementation of the PANEUAP and the followup the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 where DSTF has invited EUSDR National Coordinators to encourage their national counterparts to submit conservation pledges for sturgeons to the European Commission. Also, DSTF provided comments and suggestions in response to a public consultation on the proposal for a Nature Restoration Law Regulation, in particular in relations to its shortcomings with respect to basin-wide transboundary cooperation on conservation of migratory species and on the coordination between marine and terrestrial conservation measures for diadromous species such as sturgeons. A real achievement is the launch of the project „LIFE Boat 4 Sturgeons“ (see the subsection on projects below) financed with EU LIFE+ funds. It aims to establish a broodstock of the remaining 4 Danube sturgeon species in facilities in Austria and Hungary and release about 1,6 Mio sturgeons until 2030. For the first time partners from different countries work together to collect broodstock from various basin countries, to secure a genetic gene pool and to allow breeding based on genetic assesments, according to conservation guidelines with the ambitions to rear fish fit for survival in the wild and ready fo release in all Danube countries. Also the project brings partners together involved in sturgeon monitoring and took the first steps towards join protocols and shared databases for collecting information of releases and re-capture of released fish.</p> <p>1e) INLAND FISHERIES AUTHORITIES Fishing bans are in place throughout the Basin. Most Danube Basin countries have completely banned targeted sturgeon fishing. However, Aus-</p>	<p>ties responsible for the integrity of sturgeon migration corridors and requirements to sturgeon related monitoring.</p> <p>c) Absence of an effective Black Sea-wide protection framework for sturgeons, including the need for protected or closed areas at aggregation sites.</p> <p>d) Absence of effective embedding of politically agreed sturgeon protection targets at European and/or EUSDR level in national priorities for use of EU funds, in particular for large infrastructure needed for sturgeon protection purposes.</p>	

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<p>tria, Slovakia and Croatia still allow regulated angling of sterlets. DSTF members have been involved in annual surveys on illegal catches of sturgeons and commercialisation of sturgeon products in the Lower Danube. These show that poaching continues to be a very important problem and that despite improved performance by enforcement authorities, there is in many places a need for more vigorous implementation. It remains important to elevate the issue on regional level as illegal killings affect shared populations. On a positive note, however, the surveys also show that responsible authorities are aware of the issue and continue to collect data.</p> <p>2) DSTF POSITION PAPERS</p> <p>2a) Monitoring DSTF Position Paper on sturgeon monitoring from 2022 DSTF additional paper on population monitoring from 2023: “Process towards a basin wide sturgeon monitoring – What has happened so far? What is needed?”</p> <p>2b) Nature Resoration Law proposal DSTF proposals in response to proposal for Nature Restoration Law regulation</p> <p>3) PROJECTS WITH DSTF CONTRIBUTIONS AND/OR INVOLVEMENT</p> <p>3a) GFCM Pilot Project – implementation 2022-2024 – Funded by GEF - budget unknown DSTF has participated in the preparation of the GFCM Pilot Project on sturgeon conservation in the Black Sea, has participated in discussions with the GFCM Black Sea Working Group on this subject leading to the adoption of a GFCM Resolution on mitigating impacts of fisheries on Black Black Sea sturgeon populations.</p> <p>3a) We Pass 2 project – implementation 2022-2024 – budget ca. EUR 2 Million. DSTF has contributed actively to support the implementation of the European Parliament Pilot</p>		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<p>Project launched by the European Commission: Making the Iron Gate Dams passable for Danube Sturgeon' (acronym WePass2) to conduct a feasibility study analysing the options to establish fish migration at the Iron Gate that includes (a) the study of alternatives for up- and downstream fish passage restoration at both Iron Gate dams, (b) a preliminary design of fish passes comprising all their technical elements, and (c) a cost estimate for the construction of the fish passes.</p> <p>3b) Blue corridor project – developed in 2023 and submitted to DRP but not accepted</p> <p>DSTF contributed to the development of this project proposal aiming to follow up on the Interreg MEASURES project on management and restoration of ecological migration corridors for fish in the Danube with a focus on strengthening the necessary governance was submitted to the Danube Regional programme in 2023 but failed to get support. The concept has been revised and resubmitted in a changed partnership and with a clear focus to establish the basin wide sturgeon monitoring system in the framework of ICPDR. The project has been submitted on 29 March 2024 under the title „MONitoring STURgeons in the Danube“ by the Romanian Ministry of Environment.</p> <p>3c) LIFE Boat 4 Sturgeons - launched 2022 – (implementation period 2022-2030) – budget ca. EUR 12 Million - https://lb4sturgeon.eu/</p> <p>DSTF has contributed to the development of this project which aims to establish a living gene bank for the remaining four sturgeon species in the Danube River Basin and strengthen the wild fish population by introducing young fish from the project hatcheries to the habitat. Within the project, the “LIFE-Boat 4 Sturgeon”, a floating ex situ facility in the Danube in Vienna (Austria) will be established to keep and reproduce broodstock</p>		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<p>and rear juveniles. In addition, a similar facility for fish broodstock will be built along the Koros (Hungary) to minimise risks. A hatchery container will be installed on the Mur's riverbank (Slovenia).</p> <p>3d) SCUTE project (A European Commission contract to support the implementation of the "Pan-European Action Plan for Sturgeons" (PANEUAP) – launched 2022 – (implementation period 2022-2024) – budget ca. EUR 0,7 Million DSTF members form part of the consortium implementing this service contract. which among others builds on the habitats data aggregated from a previous Interreg funded project (MEASURES), by expanding the approach to other European rivers. It will provide an assessment of the status of implementation towards the PANEUAP for 18 countries in Europe, including 10 of the Danube Basin. Further deliverables (available at end of 2024) under this contract are technical guidelines for population and habitat monitoring, ex situ programmes and a study on bycatch and will offer relevant guidance for implementation of monitoring in the Danube basin. The consortium works across 5 regions in Europe – also making links with other macro-regions such as the Baltic Region – where a dedicated sturgeon action plan exists under HELCOM.</p> <p>3e) Anadrom project – implementation period 2022-2023 - budget ca. EUR 11 Million from Romanian Operational Programme DSTF was involved in the development of this project which resulted in monitoring information in the Lower Danube and release of several sturgeon from a purpose-built floating hatchery and rearing facility.</p> <p>3f) Horizon/RTD projects DSTF members are involved in a substantial number of research projects including elements relating to Danube stur-</p>		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	geons which have been financed by the EU's Horizon programmes. Examples of such projects are Dalia, Danube4All and GoNexus.		

ACTION 4: Promote research to develop and apply the most appropriate methods for prevention and control of IAS and for management of the priority pathways in line with the DIAS Strategy and IAS Regulation (EU) 1143/2014 (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Involvement of other PAs: DIAS activities may have relation to EUSDR PA 4 (Water quality) and EUSDR PA 5 (Environmental risks).

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The Danube Region Invasive Alien Species Network (DIAS) was established as a PA 6 Task Force. DIAS promotes an improved coordination among all actors in the thematic field of invasive alien species (IAS) within the Danube Region. Politically independent, it brings together scientists, authorities and stakeholders and supports sharing of knowledge, formulates a strategy and work plan to efficiently tackle the issue of IAS in the Danube Region. At the regional level to facilitate solving IAS issues The East and South European Network for Invasive Alien Species (ESENIAS) was established. ESENIAS has the aim to exchange and sharing of IAS information, facilitate collaboration between institutions and IAS experts from SE Europe, joint research activities, regional IAS policy development and harmonisation as well as integration to European and global IAS initiatives. Points that require transnational cooperation within the Danube Region regarding the IAS are data collection and management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Necessity of relevant information and high-quality data on IAS - Necessity of well-designed large-scale survey with the best available methodology - habitat/species oriented sampling programme - Lack of harmonized methodology - Surveillance on transboundary waters can be done in cooperation - Shared databases 	<p>The 18th PA 6 Steering Group Meeting of the Priority Area 6 held on 21 April 2023 with the attendance of 42 participants was focussed on DIAS and its current activities and achievements. Representatives from the Danube Region presented the current state of monitoring, warning systems and joint measures for prevention of the spread of IAS.</p>	<p>Summary of results on IAS presented at the two conferences organised by DIAS and ESENIAS and publications of two abstract books: http://esenias.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=576:57&catid=52:esenias-news&Itemid=125 http://esenias.org/files/11th_ESENIAS_DIAS_Conference_2022_Book_of_Abstracts_website_v1.pdf</p> <p>Summary and publication of results from JDS4 related to IAS in the Bulgarian sector of the Danube River: https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/14/15/2299/htm</p> <p>Organisation of European Bioblitz under the Alien CSI project, including four Danube countries and co-organised by DIAS in Bulgaria: Alien CSI Bioblitz: a citizen science project to engage society in invasive species monitoring https://iasbioblitz.creaf.cat/ Austria: https://iasbioblitz.creaf.cat/austria-vienna Bulgaria: https://iasbioblitz.creaf.cat/bulgaria-pancharevo-lake Croatia: https://iasbioblitz.creaf.cat/croatia Czech Republic: https://iasbioblitz.creaf.cat/czech-republic</p> <p>DIAS members from some Danube countries were involved in the project: Identification, assessment, sharing and dissemination of best practices for the humane management of invasive alien species</p>	<p>There are many ways where DIAS/PA 6 EUSDR assist in the IAS prevention and management including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate transnational and international cooperation • Foster the linkages of the national and regional approaches • Provide experts, formation of expert teams on different topics • Develop common lists of alien and invasive alien species for the Danube River Basin • Develop and organise common monitoring programmes at river basin level • Develop programmes for intercalibration of methods for rapid detection and identification of alien species in the coastal area of the Black Sea • Develop and implement Action plans on IAS pathways and management plans on IAS at river basin/ transnational level • Consider updating the DIAS Strategy, need to organise the TF meeting and discuss further on this proposal.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional list of IAS - Common early warning systems 		<p>(2020–2022); Funding: European Commission; Leading organisation: IUCN https://www.iucn.org/our-work/projects/identification-assessment-sharing-and-dissemination-best-practices-humane</p> <p>Under this project, the final version of the manual on the measures available to eradicate, control and contain populations of vertebrate IAS of EU concern was prepared. The communication plan was implemented, including preparation and dissemination of information materials.</p> <p>Participation in the project: Restoration of the Danube River Basin waters for ecosystems and people from mountains to coast (DANUBE4all) (2023–2027), Contract No. 101093985; Funding: EU FP Horizon Europe, HORIZON-MISS-2021-OCEAN-02; Leading organisation: Universität für Bodenkultur (BOKU), Vienna (project) https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101093985</p> <p>Aquatic IAS will be used as indicators for assessment of connectivity and ecological state in the Danube River Basin.</p> <p>Participation in the project: Technical and Scientific Support in Relation to the Implementation of Regulation 1143/2014 on Invasive Alien Species (2023–2024), Contract No. 09.0201/2022/876950/SER/ENV.D.2; Funding: European Commission; Leading organisation: IUCN Organisation of The Joint ESENIAS and DIAS Scientific Conference 2022 and 11th ESENIAS Workshop entitled 'Invasive alien species under conditions of global crisis', 13–15 November 2022, Demre, Antalya, Türkiye, in a hybrid format http://esenias.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=579:60&catid=52:esenias-news&Itemid=125 http://esenias.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=581:11th-esenias-and-dias-</p>	

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
		<p>conference-2022-and-11th-esenias-workshop-outcomes&catid=52:esenias-news&Itemid=125</p> <p>Publication and dissemination of a manual on humane management of vertebrate IAS among different stakeholder groups: A manual for the management of vertebrate invasive alien species of Union concern, incorporating animal welfare. 1st Edition. Technical report prepared for the European Commission within the framework of the contract no. 07.027746/2019/812504/SER/ENV.D.2. https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/docs/Humane%20manual-FINAL.pdf</p> <p>Publication of a short guide on IAS in Bulgaria and dissemination among different stakeholder groups: http://esenias.org/files/AlienCSI_12_Guide_IAS_Bulgaria_web2.pdf (in Bulgarian)</p> <p>Publication of a flyer on IAS citizen science and dissemination among different stakeholder groups in Bulgaria: Increasing understanding of alien species through citizen science: Approaches to citizen science, data management and standards. IBER-BAS, DIAS, Sofia, Flyer, 6 pp. (In Bulgarian) http://esenias.org/files/AlienCSI_12_Bulgaria_web2.pdf</p> <p>Publication and dissemination of brochures in different languages in the Danube Region under the project led by IUCN and funded by EC: Management of vertebrate invasive alien species of Union concern, incorporating animal welfare. EC, Brochures (2022). In English: https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Brochures/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_English_FINAL.pdf</p> <p>In Bulgarian:</p>	

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
		<p>https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Brochures/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_Bulgarian_FINAL.pdf</p> <p>In Croatian: https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Brochures/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_Croatian_FINAL.pdf</p> <p>In German: https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Brochures/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_German_FINAL.pdf</p> <p>In Hungarian: https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Brochures/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_Hungarian_FINAL.pdf</p> <p>In Romanian: https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Brochures/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_Romanian_FINAL.pdf</p> <p>In Slovak: https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Brochures/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_Slovak_FINAL.pdf</p> <p>In Slovenian: https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Brochures/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_Slovenian_FINAL.pdf</p>	

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
		<p>ready/IUCN_HumaneBrochure_Slovenian_Final.pdf</p> <p>Publication and dissemination of IAS factsheets in different languages in the Danube Region under the project led by IUCN and funded by EC:</p> <p>Factsheets on IAS of Union concern. Management of vertebrate invasive alien species of Union concern, incorporating animal welfare. EC, Flyers (2022).</p> <p>In Bulgarian (seven factsheets), e.g. Pseudorasbora parva https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Factsheets/Bulgarian/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneManagementFact-sheet-Pseudorasbora_parva_BU_SCREEN.pdf</p> <p>In Hungarian (ten factsheets), e.g. Alopochen aegyptiaca https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Factsheets/Hungarian/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneManagementFact-sheet-Alopochen_aegyptiaca_HU_SCREEN.pdf</p> <p>In Romanian (seven factsheets), e.g. Ondatra zibethicus https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Factsheets/Romanian/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneManagementFact-sheet-Ondatra_zibethicus_RO_SCREEN.pdf</p> <p>In Slovenian (six factsheets), e.g. Trachemys scripta https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/easin/Document/Final-deliverables-humane/D2C_4_Dissemination_materials_translated/Factsheets/Slovenian/Web-ready/IUCN_HumaneManagementFact-sheet-Trachemys_scripta_SI_SCREEN.pdf</p> <p>Celebration of World Fish Migration Day 2022 in Bulgaria co-organised by DIAS</p>	

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
		https://worldfishmigrationday.com/event/citizen-science-bioblitz-survey-of-invasive-alien-species/	

ACTION 5: Anchoring the concept of EU green infrastructure in the Danube Region (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>A 5.1. The idea of islands as important stepping stones developed into a Danube-wide habitat network forms the core of the large scale LIFE WILDIsland project, which unites a total of 15 partners (protected areas from DANUBEPARKS Network, waterway administrations, hydropower operators, forest administrations) from eight Danube countries, coordinated by the Donau Auen National Park, Austria.</p> <p>A 5.2. DANUBEPARKS partners are part of the LIFE DANUBE FREE SKY project. During the period of over 5 years of project implementation, 15 partners from seven countries will develop strong collaboration and implement the most effective solutions in order to prevent existential threats to birds.</p>	-	<p>A5.1 All partners are finalizing their technical plans and procurement procedures or waiting for formal approval in order to start their individual revitalisation works:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forestry actions against invasive species are already running in Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia and Romania. • The establishment of the Danube WILDIsland Ramsar Regional Initiative was initiated • A total of 0,92 ha have been purchased in Slovakia • Partners have started their individual hydrological, morphological and biotic monitoring measures before the start of the revitalization measures • The first stage of data collection for the Danube wide socio economic survey was completed by all partners, gathering over 2,500 responses from locals, visitors and stakeholders from a total of 8 countries • The second WILDIsland cross border public event and project coordination meeting took place in October in Lipot (Hungary) and Veľký Iľ (Slovakia) • The project has been presented at a number of public events, a number of transborder cross sector project visits have been organised. <p>A5.2. LIFE DANUBE FREE SKY progress 2022-2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International GIS Online Database Designed 	<p>A 5.2 After this period, the visibility of more than 245 km of top priority power lines will be increased. Also, more than 3 200 of the most dangerous pylons within the project area will be adjusted to ensure birds' safety.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigation plans prepared • Installation of the nest boxes for the European Roller in Slovakia • 6 Imperial Eagles in Slovakia monitored with satellite transmitters • Installation of the nest boxes for the Saker Falcon in Slovakia • Installation of flight diverters in SPA Lehnice, Slovakia • 50 artificial nest boxes for the European Roller were installed in Bulgaria • Three nest boxes for the Saker Falcon have been installed in Croatia • Flight diverters installation on 35kV power lines in Croatia is in progress • Nest boxes installation for the Red-footed Falcon in Bulgaria has been finished • Installation of the flight diverters on railway lines in Austria • Third birdwatching camp was organised in Croatia • Saker Falcons in Slovakia have been tagged with satellite transmitters • Installation of the satellite transmitters on Saker Falcons in Serbia • Monitoring of the installed nest boxes in Bulgaria • New video series Birds and Power Lines Around Us released • Survey of the food spectrum of the European Rollers in Bulgaria • Project Meetings were organised and various promotional materials were developed" 	

ACTION 6: Promote ecological connectivity through cooperation between macro-regional strategies (MRS) (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
PAC 6 is involved in Acton Group 7 of the EUSALP, which is dealing with Ecological Connectivity and therefore regularly participating at the AG 7 meetings. Mutual exchange is already established and will continue.	Consideration took place under which framework the cross MRS exchange could take place efficiently.	-	To be developed in the near future.

ACTION 7: Enhance and/or maintain soil-related ecosystem services (ES) (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Involvement of other PAs: Within the activities at HOAL Petzenkirchen, a link between EUSDR PA 7 and PA 4 is established.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>1) Activities 2022</p> <p>27 and 28 September 2022 Danube Conference, Tulln, AT "Integrated Land use Systems for multifunctional Landscapes - Best Practice for Soil Deal for Europe"</p> <p>Competing demands for soil services such as the production of food, feed, renewable materials and energy, infrastructure, or recreation, and related soil degradation require proper land use planning and innovative solutions. This conference was dedicated to explore options for the implementation of integrated, multifunctional land use systems at landscape and regional level. Contributions should address action fields and solutions for restoring soil and ecosystem health and mitigating climate change, while producing sufficient food and feed without further enhancing the biogeochemical cycles of nitrogen and phosphorus. As reliable soil information is essential for developing soil health policies. This conference welcomes also presentations on mapping of relevant soil health criteria and soil services, as well as soil monitoring data documenting temporal changes. We welcome oral and poster contributions from all Danube countries as well as from abroad from scientists, professionals and students.</p> <p>https://unserboden.at/899-0-Donaulaender.htm</p>	<p>Arcadia (EU Horizon Project): nature-based solutions for climate adaption -TrAnsfornative climate ResilienCe by nAtur-baseD solutions in the continental bio-geographical region (Project 101112737) Lower Austria and Croatia are model region and Partner in the project</p> <p>Preparation and start of Interreg AT-CZ project: „Plants4cooling“Methodes for using the cooling effect of plants in settlements and in the landscape.</p>	<p>Changing of the Forest Law (AT). Agroforest systems, like multifunctional hedges, are no longer regarded as forest. As a consequence, the acceptance of landowners to plant hedges, as green infrastructure improved strongly. This enables the creation of biotope networks of hedges in the landscape and the agricultural regions</p>	<p>Creating a co innovation labs for showing the effects of nature-based solutions.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Interreg AgriNatur HUAT - Biodiversity through anthropogenic use of natural resources Conference in Mosonmagyaróvár (HU) 29 September 2022 Interreg SYM: BIO AT-CZ 234 - Network of drought-adapted and biodiversity-promoting cultivation in urban and rural areas Conference in Vienna https://unserboden.at/1307-0-Symbio.htm 29-30 September 2022 Land consumption and climate change - regional and European perspectives “Soil - a scarce resource” https://www.bodenbuendnis.org/</p> <p>Activities 2023 Interreg AT-CZ SYM: BIO Network of drought-adapted and biodiversity-promoting cultivation in urban and rural areas, helps to produce awareness materials. (http://www.unserboden.at/1307-1-Symbio.htm).</p> <p>June 2023 The Draft for a „Soil Management Law “improved all activities to harmonise the Soil Data and Soil monitoring in the Danube Region as a basis for creating soil maps.</p> <p>12-13 September 2023: Danube Conference on „Soil Health in the Danube Region, Tulln, AT: Soil data, mapping, monitoring, awareness and demonstration in the context of the EU Strategie for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe“ Monitoring frameworks for soil health indicators, related pedotransfer functions, and emerging techniques such as satellite imaging for mapping of soils, provide new opportunities to develop more accurate, regularly updated, multi-purpose soil information. The Conference provided a forum for scientists and professionals to discuss the soil health indicator framework and related monitoring activities, as well as soil mapping tech-</p>			

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>niques at national and European scale, with emphasis on the Danube Region. Moreover, changing demands for multi-purpose soil maps and information, such as soil data required for supporting spatial information on soil and ecosystem services, soil health policy, including legislation and incentive programmes, was discussed during the conference. https://unserboden.at/1307-0-Sym-bio.htm</p> <p>14-15 September 2023 ELSA (European Land and Soil Alliance Europa) Annual Conference in Wuppertal (DE) „Soil and Climate“ http://www.bodenbuendnis.org</p>			

ACTION 8: Identify locations with obsolete pesticide and similar chemical remains and prepare a remediation plan and a risk management plan in the case of environmental accidents (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
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ACTION 9: Take measures to gradually reduce air pollution, with as a minimum step to respect the limit values for pollutants according to the Air Quality Directive (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
-	-	-	-

ACTION 10: Stimulate the management and the ecological restoration of wetlands, particularly in the Danube delta (Strategic Objective: Counteracting Climate Change)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
-	-	-	-



PA 7 Knowledge Society

ACTION 1: To promote coordination of national, regional and EU funds to stimulate excellence in R&I, in research areas specific for Danube Region (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Involvement of other PAs: When exploring good examples of academia-business cooperation for further implementation across the EUSDR, cooperation links with EUSDR PA 8 Working Groups (and other MRSs) will be established. When the new calls or publication possibilities for scientists, innovators and educators are/will be open, EUSDR PA 7 will approach all relevant PACs according to their fields of the interest.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Eureka – Danube Region call for innovative projects 2022 DANUBE REGION MULTILATERAL S&T CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR 2023-2025 JOINT PROJECTS Horizon Europe Opportunities for Danube countries ON-LINE Infoday 24 May 2023 Danubius Award and Danubius Young Scientist Award winners of 2023 “Evaluation of the knowledge society in the Danube Region (2010-2020)” carried on in 2022	24 joint projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening cross-border research cooperation • Contributing to research capacity development in the Region • Providing an opportunity for young/female researchers to cooperate in an international setting and to develop their scientific careers; • Facilitating joint participation in European research projects 	New countries involved: BG and ME	Evaluation of the projects in 2025 Involving further countries, possibly also from other MRS

ACTION 2: To promote participation of Danube countries in EU R&I Programmes, in particular in Horizon Europe (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Involvement of other PAs: Other PAs were informed about the EUSDR PA 7 activities in this Action and invited to share information about the EUSDR PA 7 survey, study, policy recommendations and organised networking events.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Horizon Europe Opportunities for Danube countries ON-LINE Infoday 24 May 2023	Raising awareness of the stakeholders from Danube countries on opportunities of the EU Framework Programme focused on Widening call, Sharing information from preparation of the project proposals and project management	After establishing a previous matchmaking and B2B platform (in 2021 with a focus to Widening participation and spreading excellence of Horizon Europe), PA 7 organised an event dedicated to a specific Teaming call of Horizon Europe in 2022.	Mapping participation of Danube countries in Horizon Europe, focused on Widening calls.

ACTION 3: To strengthen cooperation among universities, research organisations and SMEs in the Danube Region (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development; Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Involvement of other PAs: Especially EUSDR PA 9 and PA 10.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Danube youth scientists awards</p> <p>A very good Cooperation of PA 7 WG on HEI with the Danube Rectors' Conference (DRC)</p> <p>The actions of this WG were very much affected by the events in Ukraine in terms of solidarity actions supporting Ukrainian universities with the aim to support their activities during the war period. The European University Initiative has tasked the alliances to be test-beds shaping the European universities of the future. Of the 17 alliances selected in the first call in 2019, all but three have members from the Danube Region. In the second call in 2020, 24 alliances were selected and 20 of them have partner universities from the Region. At the moment 60 universities from the Danube Region are members of European university alliances, but only 22 of those universities are now members of the DRC.</p>	<p>Danubius Young Scientist Awards open to all scientific disciplines</p> <p>112 applications – 14 award winners – one per EUSDR country</p> <p>Information about the number of scientific publications in the Danube Region; co-authorships of scientific publications; top Danube universities in 2021 ARWU rankings; U21</p> <p>Ranking of National Higher Education Systems; R&D expenditures and patent applications was prepared (2022).</p> <p>An interesting way of regional co-publications with highly cited publications with co-authors from all Danube countries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breda, J et al., (2021) Methodology and implementation of the WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI), OBESITY REVIEWS, 2021, Supplement 6, DOI 10.1111/obr.13215 • Loeber, J. Gerard, et al. (2021) Neonatal Screening in Europe Revisited: An ISNS Perspective on the Current State and Developments Since 2010, INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NEONATAL SCREENING, Volume7, Issue1, DOI 10.3390/ijns7010015 	<p>Promoting visibility of Science in the Danube Region, promoting careers of young scientists, preventing brain drain, supporting Ukrainian students, teachers and researchers, promoting various mobility schemes.</p>	<p>New calls are ongoing, cooperation among Danube Regions universities, research organisations and SMEs should be supported and results should be promoted.</p>

ACTION 4: To increase awareness and visibility of science and innovation in the Danube Region (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Involvement of other PAs: Cooperation with all PAs in the sense of promotion of science and its visibility (not only on the macro-regional level but beyond) is crucial.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>On-line streaming - with the intention to promote renowned Danube Region researchers, scientists, innovators, and their topics of interest in the appealing form to a wider public. The topics of</p>	<p>Increasing awareness about science in general and current topics of interest, scientific achievements, and possibilities of usage of scientific results in ordinary life or in commerce - in a form of</p>	<p>Cooperation with flagship projects established, capitalisation activities are ongoing.</p>	<p>Further activities on water protection will follow.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
streaming were dealing with the topics of COVID-19, Space and Water Quality Organisation of events to spread information about dedicated calls for scientists, researchers and innovators Spreading information and promoting projects (ongoing and also support of establishing new consortia) relevant for the Danube Region	Facebook streaming accessible for wide public. Topic contributing to raising awareness on environmental protection"		

ACTION 5: To support exchange of information and experience sharing for the purpose of preparation of future strategic R&I documents applicable in the new programming period (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development; Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)
Involvement of other PAs: Other PAs were informed about the EUSDR PA 7 activities in this Action and invited to share information about the EUSDR PA 7 survey, reports and policy recommendations.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
PA 7 WG on RIS3 working on few different levels concerning the smart specialization strategy. Co-operation with RIS4DANU project - new PA 7 Danube Strategy Flagship Participation at the 7 th Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (2022) Participation at the JRC Science Summit in Italy, and there will be a regional RIS3 event in Skopje (2022)	The WG prepared the study based on the survey on RIS3 implementation, challenges/achievements, monitoring, evaluation, thematic platforms and macro-regional S3 partnerships, RIS3 and COVID-19.	The most common RIS3 priorities in the Danube Region are Food, ICT and Health/Medicine. Other very important priorities are related to automotive and mobility, manufacturing, creative industries and environment protection. Initiatives facilitating S3 cooperation in the Danube Region are Joint Research Centre, Danube Funding Coordination Network, Call for multilateral scientific and technological cooperation in the Danube Region, Danube Transnational Programme. Results of the study contribute to general overview of the development in RIS3 implementation in Danube Region and formulation of policy recommendations.	An updated study of RIS3 in the Danube Region shall be prepared in 2024.

ACTION 6: To promote horizontal cooperation in science and technology across all PAs and other MRS (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)
Involvement of other PAs: Cooperation with EUSDR PA 8 and PA 9 as explained in the section "activities".

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
One cross-macroregional workshop (Macro-regional impact - from where to start?) attended in Izola, SI, 2023 MSTC supporting participation of Danube Region countries going beyond (FR)	Exchange of knowledge and experience on R&D&I across the regions Establishment and support of a platform tracking innovation to advance the Danube Region, https://danubetechvalley.dealroom.co/intro	DTVI strives to provide a platform for the stakeholders to be referenced, contributing to a better understanding of the Region, and opening the door to growth opportunities.	Further activities to support building of the Danube Tech Valley.



Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Active contribution and participation of PA 7 at the EUSDR SI Presidency event “Towards Knowledge–driven Society and Professions of the future”</p> <p>PA 7 via its Danube Strategy Flagship DTVI contributed to the section of the MRS Week (2023) focused on “The contribution of the Regional Innovation Valleys to cohesive EU via funding & shared knowledge”</p> <p>Discussion with PA 7 about cooperation possibilities with the PA 7 Danube Strategy Flagship Danube Tech Valley Initiative</p>			



PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises

ACTION 1: To foster cooperation and exchange of knowledge between SMEs, creative industry, academia, the public sector and civil society in areas of competence in the Danube Region (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>In the last two years, Steinbeis Europa Zentrum and other members of the Working Group Innovation and Technology Transfer (WG I&TT) of the Priority Area 8 (PA 8), Competitiveness of the SMEs, continued working towards the strategic goals of the WG I&TT as well as PA 8 to improve business support to strengthen the capacities of SMEs for cooperation and trade, within different INTERREG and Horizon projects and within the framework of WG I&TT's Danube Strategy Flagship, Danube Transfer Center (DTC) Network. In the following the main activities of the WG I&TT contributing to the goals of PA 8 have been summarised:</p> <p>1. WG I&TT Community of Practice – Danube Strategy Flagship “Danube Transfer Centre Network” as HUBs for SMEs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2022, DTC Network celebrated the 10th anniversary. The Network has played and still plays a decisive role in fulfilling the goal of WG I&TT to support and improve the I&TT framework conditions at the local and regional level, as well as to support and increase the participation of the Danube actors in EU innovation and technology transfer financed projects. • Six on-line meetings in the format “DTC Coffee Kitchens” to discuss cooperation opportunities have been organised: Date Location Event Name DTC Present Topic <p>02 June 2022: On-line Coffee Kitchen 9 DTCs - Social Innovation</p>	<p>WG I&TT Community of Practice, Danube Strategy Flagship project “Danube Transfer Centre Network” as HUBs for SMEs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success Story: DTC Entry Point Iasi (Moldova Region), Romania • New members in the WG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Regional Development Agency West, Romania o National Technical University of Ukraine, “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”, Ukraine <p>WG I&TT support to increase the participation of the Danube Actors in EU technology transfer financed projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the foundation of the DTC Network 2012 a total sum of 52.782.074,18 EUR funding acquired with partners from the DTC Network • Successful invitation of 10 new Danube partners in EU financed projects • Running and new projects in 2022-2023: see table below <p>DepoSIt (Horizon 2020) 01 September 2019 – 28 February 2022 499.611,25 DTC Germany, DTC Zagreb</p> <p>Rosewood4.0 (Horizon 2020) 01 January 2020 – 30 June 2022 2.047.901,25 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem</p> <p>Restart4Danube (Interreg DTP) 01 July 2020 – 31 December 2022 1.814.195,00 DTC Germany, DTC Bucharest, DTC Craiova, DTC Maribor, DTC Zagreb, DTC CUAS, DTC Pannon</p> <p>BrainTwin (Horizon 2020) 01.09.2020</p>	<p>WG I&TT Community of Practice, Danube Strategy Flagship “Danube Transfer Centre Network” as HUBs for SMEs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two new full partners at DTC Network by signing Memorandum of Understanding in 2022: Technical University of Iasi (Romania) and University POLITEHNICA from Bucharest, RO; One new partner signing letter of intent in 2022: National Technical University of Ukraine, “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute” • Three new partners signing Letters of Intent in 2023: Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia, School of Advanced Social Studies Nova Gorica, SI, Transylvanian Furniture Cluster, RO • Organisation of the Thematic and Policy dialog workshops with the topic relevant for the Danube Region actors active in I&TT activities • Participation at 3 scheduled Steering and Working Group meetings • Provision of the 4 projects related Policy recommendation papers • 2 Interreg DTP and 1 HORIZON EUROPE Projects have been approved for the implementation in 2023: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o BrAIIn – Bringing the Artificial Intelligence to the SMEs (DTP SO 1.1: Enhancing innovation and technology transfer in Danube Region) – Danube Strategy Flagship of PA 8. The project has been developed jointly with WG AI. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation of on-line meetings – Coffee Kitchen (approx. each six to eight weeks) • Organisation of one in-person event in the format “DTC Ceremony” in Vienna, AT (June 2024) • Organisation of WG I&TT Workshop in Ulm, DE (July 2024) • Participation at the PA 8 Steering Group meetings (July 2024) • Initiation of the new collaboration through the development and implementation of the projects for the EU funding programmes. The following calls for 2024 have been identified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Interreg DRP o Interreg DRP Seed Money Facility o I3 Instrument o HORIZON EUROPE – calls under Widening participation Destination • Participation at the PA Steering Group meetings • The Danube Transfer Centre Network as a flagship project of the PA 8 WG I&TT will continue looking for the opportunities and search for the financial solutions to extend the networking to Ukraine and Moldova which are part of the Danube Strategy

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>15 March 2023 On-line Coffee Kitchen 17 DTCs - HE Project – EEN support for EIC Accelerator - HE Project – EcoDalli - 13 Instrument, HE Calls - WIDERA 03 May 2023 On-line Coffee Kitchen 13 DTCs - Interreg CE Project – Capacity2Transform - HE Project – EIC Accelerator - HE Calls – EIE Connect 28 June 2023 On-line Coffee Kitchen 8 DTCs - Research on policy dialogue – DTC Cluj, - HE Calls 04 October 2023 On-line Coffee Kitchen 14 DTCs - DTC Ceremony in the Framework of the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum - DTC Governance and Monitoring System - On-going projects and HE Calls 12 December 2023 On-line Coffee Kitchen 21 DTCs - HE Project – DaWetRest - Presentation of the Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek – FAZOS - Short presentation of approved Interreg Danube Region Program projects - Interreg DTP 2nd call, HE Calls • Two in-person Events in the format “DTC Ceremony” have been organised with the objectives of celebrating the introduction of new members to the DTC Network and the reinforcement of existing alliances: Date Location Event Name Focus 9 October 2022 Košice, SK, 11th EUSDR Annual Forum of the EUSDR - Ten years anniversary of the DTC Network - Signatures of Memorandum of Understand (2 DTCs) and Letter of Intent-Lol (1 DTC) 14.10.2023 Brdo pri Kranju 12th EUSDR Annual Forum of the EUSDR - Awarding of the EUSDR Danube Strategy Flagship Certificate to the DTC Network - Signatures of Lol (3 DTCs)</p>	<p>– 31.08.2023 900.000,00 DTC Germany, DTC Iasi Upgrade SME - Extension (Interreg Europe) 01.10.2021 – 30 September 2022 340.000 DTC Germany, DTC Pannon PrAectiCe (Horizon Europe) 01.11.2022 – 30 April 2026 6.985.275,00 DTC Germany, DTC Maribor EcoDaLLi (Horizon Europe) 01.01.2023 – 30 June 2026 2.869.875,00 DTC Germany, DTC Novi Sad FOREST4EU (Horizon Europe) 01.01.2023 – 31 December 2025 2.006.668,75 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem DaWetRest (Horizon Europe) 01.06.2023 – 31 May 2027 9.099.088,75 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem TOTAL 2022-2023 26.562.615,00 WG I&TT Community of Practice, flagship project “Danube Transfer Centre Network” as HUBs for SMEs • Success Story: DTC Entry Point Iasi (Moldova Region), Romania • New members in the WG: o Regional Development Agency West, Romania o National Technical University of Ukraine, “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”, Ukraine WG I&TT support to increase the participation of the Danube Actors in EU technology transfer financed projects • Since the foundation of the DTC Network 2012 a total sum of 52.782.074,18 EUR funding acquired with partners from the DTC Network • Successful invitation of 10 new Danube partners in EU financed projects • Running and new projects in 2022-2023: see table below DepoSIt (Horizon 2020) 01 September 2019</p>	<p>o Culinary Trail - Culinary Trail of the Minorities' Cuisine in the Danube Region (DPT 3.3: Socio-economic development through heritage, culture and tourism) o TWIN SYNERGIES - Empowering participation and accelerating synergies in Widening countries with a focus on Green & Digital Transition (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-04-01) All projects start with the implementation in 2024.</p>	

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>2. Organising and participation of the WG I&TT in different specific thematic workshops, brokerage events, and other conferences and events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WG I&TT organised two thematic WS and participated at three Steering and Working Group Meeting organised by the PACs <p>14 November 2022 Stuttgart, Germany Joint Workshop - EUSDR PA 8 WG I&TT and WG AI Increasing Danube Region SMEs' resilience and competitiveness - Artificial Intelligence - Advanced technologies</p> <p>15 November 2022 Stuttgart, Germany PA 8 21st Steering and Working Group Meeting - Activities of PA 8</p> <p>09 July 2023 Stuttgart, Germany Danube Region towards the Net-Zero Age in the framework of the PA 8 event "The Danube Region at the Turn of Times" - Innovations from the Danube Region towards the Net-Zero Age</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Green Deal in Manufacturing Sector in the Danube Region <p>09 July 2023 Stuttgart, Germany PA 8 22nd Steering and Working Group meeting - Activities of PA 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EUSDR Danube Strategy Flagships EUSDR Seed Money facility <p>21 September 2023 Zagreb, HR and On-line PA 8 22nd Steering and Working Group meeting - Activities of PA 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus topic: Bioeconomy <p>3. WG I&TT to improve the policy dialog in the Danube Region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the framework of different projects, four policy dialogue workshops were organised, mainly in the frame of the extended Interreg DRP projects and 4 policy papers were published <p>Workshops:</p> <p>10 March 2022: Online B2B Training Session: Access to Finance - Sustainable wood use</p>	<p>– 28 February 2022 499.611,25 DTC Germany, DTC Zagreb</p> <p>Rosewood4.0 (Horizon 2020) 01.01.2020</p> <p>– 30 June 2022 2.047.901,25 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem</p> <p>Restart4Danube (Interreg DTP) 01.07.2020</p> <p>– 31 December 2022 1.814.195,00 DTC Germany, DTC Bucharest, DTC Craiova, DTC Maribor, DTC Zagreb, DTC CUAS, DTC Pannon</p> <p>BrainTwin (Horizon 2020) 01.09.2020</p> <p>– 31 August 2023 900.000,00 DTC Germany, DTC Iasi</p> <p>Upgrade SME - Extension (Interreg Europe) 01 October 2021</p> <p>– 30 September 2022 340.000 DTC Germany, DTC Pannon</p> <p>PrAectiCe (Horizon Europe) 01.11.2022</p> <p>– 30 April 2026 6.985.275,00 DTC Germany, DTC Maribor</p> <p>EcoDaLLi (Horizon Europe) 01.01.2023</p> <p>– 30 June 2026 2.869.875,00 DTC Germany, DTC Novi Sad</p> <p>FOREST4EU (Horizon Europe) 01.01.2023</p> <p>– 31 December 2025 2.006.668,75 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem</p> <p>DaWetRest (Horizon Europe) 01.06.2023</p> <p>– 31 May 2027 9.099.088,75 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem</p> <p>TOTAL 2022-2023 26.562.615,00</p> <p>WG I&TT Community of Practice, Danube Strategy Flagship "Danube Transfer Centre Network" as HUBs for SMEs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Success Story: DTC Entry Point Iasi (Moldova Region), Romania New members in the WG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Development Agency West, Romania National Technical University of Ukraine, "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute", Ukraine 		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>11 March 2022 Online B2B Training Session: How to develop a collaborative project - Sustainable wood use</p> <p>05 April 2022 online 2nd Policy Dialogue Workshop on future plans to better integrate the creative industries in urban regeneration in the Danube Region - Creative and Cultural Industries and urban regeneration</p> <p>21 October 2022 online 4th Policy Dialogue Workshop - Clusters in Agro-Food</p> <p>Policy papers:</p> <p>28 February 2022 Interregional Analysis of COVID-19 impact on SME internationalization Up-GradeSME (Interreg Europe) - SME Internationalisation</p> <p>31 March 2022 Mapping of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social economy ecosystems and policies Social Seeds (Interreg Europe) - Social Innovation / Social Entrepreneurship</p> <p>31 August 2022 Mapping of new social enterprise development policies and programmes in the partner regions/ countries Social Seeds (Interreg Europe) - Social Innovation / Social Entrepreneurship</p> <p>21 December 2022 Second Chance Entrepreneurship Community Strategy for the Danube Region Danube Chance 2.0 (Interreg DTP) - Re-start of SMEs</p> <p>4. WG I&TT support for generated concrete Technology Offers and Technology Requests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful connection of Danube partners via Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) generate 23 Technology Offers and Technology Requests • Numerous bilateral meetings between SEZ and WG I&TT members 	<p>WG I&TT support to increase the participation of the Danube Actors in EU technology transfer financed projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the foundation of the DTC Network 2012 a total sum of 52.782.074,18 EUR funding acquired with partners from the DTC Network • Successful invitation of 10 new Danube partners in EU financed projects • Running and new projects in 2022-2023: see table below <p>DepoSIt (Horizon 2020) 01 September 2019</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 28 February 2022 499.611,25 DTC Germany, DTC Zagreb <p>Rosewood4.0 (Horizon 2020) 01.01.2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 30.06.2022 2.047.901,25 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem <p>Restart4Danube (Interreg DTP) 01.07.2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 31 December 2022 1.814.195,00 DTC Germany, DTC Bucharest, DTC Craiova, DTC Maribor, DTC Zagreb, DTC CUAS, DTC Pannon <p>BrainTwin (Horizon 2020) 01 September 2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 31 August 2023 900.000,00 DTC Germany, DTC Iasi <p>Upgrade SME - Extension (Interreg Europe) 01 October 2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 30.09.2022 340.000 DTC Germany, DTC Pannon <p>PrAectiCe (Horizon Europe) 01 November 2022</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 30 April 2026 6.985.275,00 DTC Germany, DTC Maribor <p>EcoDaLLi (Horizon Europe) 01 January 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 30 June 2026 2.869.875,00 DTC Germany, DTC Novi Sad <p>FOREST4EU (Horizon Europe) 01.01.2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 31 December 2025 2.006.668,75 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem <p>DaWetRest (Horizon Europe) 01.06.2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 31 May 2027 9.099.088,75 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem 		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<p>TOTAL 2022-2023 26.562.615,00</p> <p>WG I&TT Community of Practice, flagship project “Danube Transfer Centre Network” as HUBs for SMEs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success Story: DTC Entry Point Iasi (Moldova Region), Romania • New members in the WG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Regional Development Agency West, Romania o National Technical University of Ukraine, “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”, Ukraine <p>WG I&TT support to increase the participation of the Danube Actors in EU technology transfer financed projects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since the foundation of the DTC Network 2012 a total sum of 52.782.074,18 EUR funding acquired with partners from the DTC Network • Successful invitation of 10 new Danube partners in EU financed projects • Running and new projects in 2022-2023: see table below <p>DepoSIt (Horizon 2020) 01 September 2019 – 28 February 2022 499.611,25 DTC Germany, DTC Zagreb</p> <p>Rosewood4.0 (Horizon 2020) 01 January 2020 – 30 June 2022 2.047.901,25 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem</p> <p>Restart4Danube (Interreg DTP) 01 August 2020 – 31 December 2022 1.814.195,00 DTC Germany, DTC Bucharest, DTC Craiova, DTC Maribor, DTC Zagreb, DTC CUAS, DTC Pannon</p> <p>BrainTwin (Horizon 2020) 01 September 2020 – 31 August 2023 900.000,00 DTC Germany, DTC Iasi</p> <p>Upgrade SME - Extension (Interreg Europe) 01 October 2021 – 30 September 2022 340.000 DTC Germany, DTC Pannon</p> <p>PrAectiCe (Horizon Europe) 01.11.2022</p>		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	– 30 April 2026 6.985.275,00 DTC Germany, DTC Maribor EcoDaLi (Horizon Europe) 01.01.2023 – 30 June 2026 2.869.875,00 DTC Germany, DTC Novi Sad FOREST4EU (Horizon Europe) 01.01.2023 – 31 December 2025 2.006.668,75 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem DaWetRest (Horizon Europe) 01.06.2023 – 31 May 2027 9.099.088,75 DTC Germany, DTC Slavonija, Baranja and Srijem TOTAL 2022-2023 26.562.615,00		

ACTION 2: Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalised world
 (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Main Objectives: To combine the major regional and transnational stakeholders and their complementary resources, systems and skills – supported by instruments like e.g., digital innovation hubs/digital service platforms/value chains – with the clear goal to generate new digital business models, products, processes or services.	The WG – Digital Danube achieved target 2 with three different methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wine configurator and store for a Romanian wine producer • AI-based consulting platform for fastening systems for a tape manufacturer in Baden-Württemberg • IoT-based smart city service in Croatia, where smart devices for a connected city were introduced. Positive effects on economic output due to the digitalization of value chains were observed. The objectives were presented in the linked presentation, which was published in August 2023. It is unclear when the targets were achieved and whether the set timeframe was adhered to. 01 March 2024, Source: https://competitiveness.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/sites/4/2023/08/PA-8-Working-Group-Digital-Danube_2023_08.pdf	The WG – Digital Danube achieved target 2 with 3 different methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wine configurator and store for a Romanian wine producer • AI-based consulting platform for fastening systems for a tape manufacturer in Baden-Württemberg • IoT-based smart city service in Croatia, where smart devices for a connected city were introduced. Positive effects on economic output due to the digitalization of value chains were observed. The objectives were presented in the linked presentation, which was published in August 2023. It is unclear when the targets were achieved and whether the set timeframe was adhered to. 01 March 2024, Source: https://competitiveness.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/sites/4/2023/08/PA-8-Working-Group-Digital-Danube_2023_08.pdf	Support to the EDHs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targi Mures, RO • Maribor, SI • Sisak/Varaždin, HR, in setting up digital service catalogues Transnational development of a Biomass Energy Value Chain in Vidin, BG The Action Plan can be updated with the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of a Trans-Danube Digital Service Platform for SMEs, hub managers, business developers by 2027 • Development of five further use cases regionally and/or Trans-Danube Digital Value Chains by 2027

ACTION 3: Improvement of framework conditions, support programs and capacity building of stakeholders, to enhance the collaboration between cluster initiatives and regional innovation strategies, with an accent on rural areas (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>A funding event between the cluster initiatives and the regional developers was already held before the 2019 survey period, but before the 2020-2022 period. In addition, a cluster cooperation event was held in October 2023, which did not take place on time.</p> <p>04.03.24 Source: https://competitiveness.danube-region.eu/workshop-on-the-role-of-clusters-and-industrial-development-of-the-regions-december-3rd-in-dubrovnik-croatia/</p> <p>04.03.24 Source: https://competitiveness.danube-region.eu/cluster-collaboration-laboratory-c2lab-in-slovenia/</p>	<p>A funding event between the cluster initiatives and the regional developers was already held before the 2019 survey period, but before the 2020-2022 period. In addition, a cluster cooperation event was held in October 2023, which did not take place on time.</p> <p>04.03.24 Source: https://competitiveness.danube-region.eu/workshop-on-the-role-of-clusters-and-industrial-development-of-the-regions-december-3rd-in-dubrovnik-croatia/</p> <p>04.03.24 Source: https://competitiveness.danube-region.eu/cluster-collaboration-laboratory-c2lab-in-slovenia/</p>	<p>Working Group made a progress in different projects.</p>	

ACTION 4: To improve business support to strengthen the innovative and digital capacities of female-led-SMEs (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The majority of activities of this Working Group are planned in 2024.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target 4.1 has no specific timeframe. A training programme and platform will be launched on 01 July 2024 and completed by the end of 2025. In the previous timeframe, training was completed in 2019. • Target 4.2: The original timeframe for achieving the target has been extended to 2026, as the target was not completed until December 2021 in the previous timeframe. Events and cooperation took place and there are four inclusive events in Zagreb, HR. 	<p>Target 4.1 has no specific timeframe. A training programme and platform will be launched on 01 July 2024 and completed by the end of 2025. In the previous timeframe, training was completed in 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target 4.2: The original timeframe for achieving the target has been extended to 2026, as the target was not completed until December 2021 in the previous timeframe. Events and cooperation took place and there are four inclusive events in Zagreb. 	<p>In 2025 under Interreg Danube Region WE.Circular project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transnational learning network (e-platform) will be established that will address TARGET 4.1. 2. 12 WE.Circular Labs will be established as a space where female entrepreneurs, public sector and other organisations come together to co-create CE ideas, tools and models focused on i4.0 transition addressing regional needs, testing and validating them as well as Transitional Policy Learning Centre (TPLC) that will be linked with the Transnational WE.Circular learning network and WE.Circular Labs that will address TARGET 4.2.

ACTION 5: Enhance the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in the Danube Region SMEs

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>As Leader of the AI WG, PBN initiated cross-border DIH cooperation – Improve project. It largely contributed to achieve tangible outcomes and served as an example for further players in the Danube Region. International workshops and seminars were realised, and the cross-border DIH network was enlarged towards Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia. PBN also prepared an analysis of the DIH Catalogue, that is accessible on the JRC platform. As a result, PBN could provide insights that what specialization of DIHs could play added value role, what would be an ideal geographical distribution. The AI WG also phrased a Danube Strategy Flagship initiative, that was formulated in the Danube Strategy. In order to operationalise it, the participants agreed to form an international project. It was called Bringing AI towards SMEs, that was granted by the JS.</p>	<p>After 2020, a total of 39 new EDIHs were created by eight following countries (Austria four, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria - South Germany two, Bulgaria eight, Croatia four, Hungary three, Romania six, Slovakia five, Slovenia three) in the following technology areas: Artificial Intelligence and Decision Support, Cybersecurity, High Performance Computing. The target is more than seven times higher than the initial target of five EDIHs until the end of 2024.</p> <p>The Austrian EDIH system was impacted by the Improve work, and multiple partners of the Improve project play vital role in the operation of EDIH-Ost and EDIH-West Austria.</p> <p>In Hungary a collaboration was developed between DATA-EDIH and PBN. It contributed to the service delivery of the EDIH.</p> <p>In Slovenia, the member of the AI WG, just like in Bulgaria, are respected value and content creators of their respective EDIHs.</p>	<p>The cooperation within the WG was smooth and several bilateral and transnational projects were identified. The cooperation among DIHs and EDIHs is a huge added value for each new project proposal.</p>	<p>BrAI project is being implemented, in the Danube Region from 01 January 2024 to June 2026. Continuous communication is ongoing with EIT and we are working on new initiatives and possible project proposals.</p>



Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	All these five EDIH units have been created in close partnership with the AI WG members.		



PA 9 People & Skills

ACTION 1: Intensify Cooperation in Labour Market Policies (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Involvement of other PAs: EUSDR PA 10 co-organises the meetings of the ESF MA Network

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The issue was being addressed in the framework of the Annual Stakeholder Conferences of PA 9 and in the PA 9 Steering Group meetings.</p> <p>11th Stakeholder Conference (online): “A more Resilient, Safer and Smarter Danube Region at Challenging Times” (13-14 November 2023)</p> <p>10th Stakeholder Conference (Vienna, AT, and online): “Young People in Times of Crisis: Building Responsive Education, Training and Labour Market Systems in the Danube Region” (9 June 2022). Furthermore, one on-site meeting of the Network of ESF Managing Authorities in the Danube Region was organised (July 2022, Vienna, AT)”</p>	<p>An EaSI project called “SI PLUS” emerged from the ESF MA network and was successfully completed 2023. A follow-up project is currently running.</p> <p>One meeting of the ESF MA was held to intensify the embedding process as well as transnational cooperation projects in the Danube Region. The partners auf the ESF MA Network have designed a common text module on transnational cooperation related to the EUSDR to be integrated in their respective ESF OPs.</p>	<p>On track.</p>	<p>Next steps are focusing on the development of transnational cooperation projects in the frame of ESF and EUSDR/PA 9.</p> <p>In cooperation with PA 10, PA 9 is working on expanding the ESF-Network. For this purpose, an inception meeting with candidate countries will take place in April, followed by another meeting planned for September in Croatia.</p> <p>PA 9 is preparing in close cooperation with Montenegrin partners a Thematic Workshop in June in Montenegro on the topic of digitalisation of the public labour market administration.</p>

ACTION 2: Digitalisation and Innovation in the World of Work (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The issue was being addressed in the framework of the Annual Stakeholder Conferences of PA 9 and in the PA 9 Steering Group meetings. Also, partners implemented the Danube Region Monitor that provides a basis for evidence-based indicators in the Danube Region. The Monitor was made available on the internet and will be regularly updated.</p>	<p>An international cooperation INTERREG project between Austrian and Hungarian trade unions was successfully completed with the aim of implementing participatory approaches when introducing new technologies: Digi-O: Offensive for New Work through Digitisation in the Austrian-Hungarian Border Region.</p>	<p>On track.</p>	<p>The next Stakeholder Conference “Fair, Green and Digital Transition in Education and Labour Market Policies in the Danube Region” will take place on 23 May 2024 in Vienna, AT, and will address the topics of changing skill demands and labour market developments as a result of the green and digital transition as well as challenges for ensuring an inclusive and fair transition.</p> <p>The topics of the Stakeholder Conference will be taken up once more within the framework of the breakout session “Skills and Education for the Green Transition” hosted by PA 9 during the 13th EUSDR Annual Forum on 20 June 2024.</p>

ACTION 3: Integration of Vulnerable Groups into the Labour Market (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Involvement of other PAs: EUSDR PA 10

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
The issue was being addressed in the framework of the Annual Stakeholder Conferences of PA 9 and in the PA 9 Steering Group meetings. Under the EUSDR umbrella, marginalised communities such as the Roma can be addressed and a transnational element can be added to the intergovernmental and supranational efforts in this regard. Furthermore, the issue was addressed in the framework of the ESF MA Network.	The topic of integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market is also one of the identified topics of the ESF MA Network.	Meetings have been held with PA 10 for the further planning.	A conference/workshop is planned for autumn/winter 2024.

ACTION 4: Fighting Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion for All (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
The issue was being addressed in the framework of the Annual Stakeholder Conferences of PA 9 and in the PA 9 Steering Group meetings. Furthermore, the issue was addressed in the framework of the ESF MA Network.	The topics of active inclusion in fighting poverty are also one of the identified topics of the ESF MA Network and was addressed within the work of the Social Innovation Competence Centres (SI PLUS) in the respective countries, which will continue with the SI PLUS follow-up project.	On track.	A workshop related to this topic will be held in the framework of the upcoming stakeholder conference of PA 9.

ACTION 5: Quality and Efficiency of Education and Training Systems (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
The resilience of education and training systems was addressed in the framework of the 10 th (“Young People in Times of Crisis: Building Responsive Education, Training and Labour Market Systems in the Danube Region”) and 11 th PA 9 Stakeholder Conferences (“A More Resilient, Safer and Smarter Danube Region at Challenging Times”) and Steering Group meetings. PA 9 actively cooperated with key partners, including the	The 10 th International Stakeholder Conference focused on challenges and future priorities with respect to effective education, training and labour market policies and related projects to support young people in the Danube Region in the context of current crises like the war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The 11 th International Stakeholder Conference focused on	On track.	The Danube Region Monitor and the online database will be updated in 2024.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>European Commission, the OECD, the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) and other macro-regional strategies (MRS). The monitoring tool was updated in 2022 (“Danube Region Monitor”). The 11th Stakeholder Conference in 2023 included a workshop entitled “Resilience, safety and rehabilitation in the Danube Region”.</p>	<p>the pressure of education, labour market and social systems resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and in particular the Russian war against Ukraine. Main achievements included exchange on policy developments, sharing good practices and the exchange on opportunities for cooperation.</p> <p>Both in the framework of the mentioned conferences but also the Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence there was a focus on strengthening VET resulting in policy exchange and mutual learning among the participants of the meetings.</p> <p>The Danube Region Monitor and the online database were updated in 2022.</p>		

ACTION 6: Relevant and High-Quality Knowledge, Skills and Competences (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>The 10th and 11th Stakeholder Conference dealt with concrete issues of Action 6, e.g., a workshop on digital skills at the 11th Stakeholder Conference. Initiatives creating better opportunities for young people and equipping them with the competences needed in the future was one of the main objectives of the 10th Stakeholder Conference.</p> <p>In the context of the Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence established in 2021, a second meeting of the Platform was held in 2022 bringing together 48 participants from 11 Danube Region countries with the objective to identify areas for cooperation on going green and social inclusion. In 2023, a survey was conducted among policy platform members to identify key developments in the respective countries regarding CoVEs and greening of skills.</p>	<p>The 10th International Stakeholder Conference of PA 9 provided inputs by experts on the current situation and highlighted existing initiatives and developments on EU and macro-regional levels. In addition, it gave participants the opportunity for networking, exchange and discussions about challenges in these times of crisis and how empowering young people through education and training, as well as labour market policies can contribute to a more responsive Danube Region.</p> <p>With the Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence, PA 9 continued the work developed through intensified cooperation with the European Training Foundation, resulting in the identification of regional and national focuses, exchange on policy developments, information on events and calls, etc. In the survey con-</p>	<p>On track.</p>	<p>At the 12th International Stakeholder Conference of PA 9 in May 2024, two of the workshops will focus on green and digital skills. PA 9 will conduct a session at the EUSDR Annual Forum focusing on Skills and Education for the green transition. In the framework of the Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence a third meeting of the Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence is scheduled in April 2024 under the title “Greening of VET in the Danube Region: Changing skill demands and the role of Centres of Vocational Excellence”. The overall objective is supporting the establishment of a CoVE in the Danube Region.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	ducted in 2023 a sectoral focus of the next meeting in 2024 was identified (green energy and green construction).		

ACTION 7: Lifelong Learning and Learning Mobility (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
PA 9 co-organised two Danube Region eTwinning conferences in 2022 and 2023. The conferences offer a platform to enable schools to work together on projects in a transnational context.	PA 9 contributed to increased transnational cooperation among schools in the Danube Region by co-organising two Danube Region eTwinning conferences. They brought together 40 teachers from 11 Danube Region countries in 2022 and 43 teachers from 11 Danube Region countries in 2023. A total of 19 school cooperation projects were developed by the participating teachers. The conferences support innovative approaches to teaching and learning and strengthen the digital skills of teachers through the use of the online eTwinning platform and other digital means of communication. In 2023 eTwinning was labelled as Danube Strategy Flagship, being outstanding projects/initiatives having a particular impact on the Danube Region countries. In this regard, a video was published, promoting the eTwinning seminar.	On track.	The next Danube Region eTwinning conference will be held in June 2024.

ACTION 8: Inclusive Education, Equity, Common Values and Sustainable Development (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Involvement of other PAs: Cooperation with EUSDR PA 7 for the collection of good practices on remote schooling and digital education in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Cooperation with EUSDR PA 10 during the 7th Danube Participation Day.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Risks of increased learning losses, early school leaving and educational inequalities as a result of home schooling during the war in Ukraine were discussed during 11 th PA 9 Stakeholder Conference. The Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence has a focus on the topics of going green and social inclusion. In addition, PA 9	The topics of inclusion and equity were at the centre of the regional exchange during PA 9 Stakeholder Conferences and Steering Group meetings. With the launch of the Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence, PA 9 also started a new initiative to support exchange	On track.	The Stakeholder Conference in 2024 will have a working group dedicated to fair transition. The Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence will put a focus on social inclusion in 2025.



Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>contributed to EUSDR meetings, raising awareness of the importance of skills for the green and digital transition and the role of education for youth empowerment.</p>	<p>on the topics of VET excellence and social inclusion.</p>		



PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation

ACTION 1: To improve institutional capacities in order to provide high-quality public services (Strategic Objective: Enhancing Democracy, Sound Administration and Strong Involvement of Civil Society and Youth)

Involvement of other PAs: Priority Areas are invited to participate in activities and networks and are involved depending on their expertise in a specific subject.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Strategic Project Webinars on Youth involvement & digitalisation in local public authorities: In 2022, PA 10 organised strategic webinars to provide insights into funding opportunities and practical information on project management in the specific fields of youth involvement and digitalisation in cities and municipalities.	Following the exchange, PA 10 continued close cooperation with and involvement of the Danube Youth Network, which has become a Danube Strategy Flagship for PA 10. Furthermore, the strategic projects webinar on digitalisation resulted in closer cooperation across all 4 MRS on Smart Communities and the involvement of local stakeholders from the Danube Region in the development of a project proposal for the Horizon programme (SMART ERA).	The activities marked the emphasis on the topics within the realm of PA 10 and facilitated the development of strategic projects.	The next step is to establish synergies with networks and organisations of local authorities (e.g., NALAS) that focus on establishing digitalisation/eGovernment in local authorities.

ACTION 2: To facilitate the administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Involvement of other PAs: The ESF+ managing authorities network is jointly coordinated by EUSDR PA 10 and PA 9.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Cross-border emergency healthcare Task Force: In September 2022, the Priority Area 10 Coordination launched a policy discussion on improving cross-border public services (CPS) based on the ESPON Targeted Analysis Cross-border Public Services 2.0. Subsequently, the PA 10 Steering Group identified cross-border emergency healthcare as a focus area for macro-regional coordination and established the Task Force for Crossborder Emergency Healthcare. The Task Force consists of PA 10 Steering Group members as well as nominated experts in the area of healthcare and cross-border cooperation. The Task Force addresses various challenges of cross-border emergency	In the reporting period 2022-2023, the Cross-border emergency healthcare Task Force defined priorities for cooperation; i.e.: legal frameworks, administration, equipment and socio-cultural challenges. Furthermore, in February 2023, an expert round table provided insights on concrete questions from the Steering Group on developing and implementing cross-border emergency healthcare. In addition, the expert round table initiated further bilateral exchange and networking between partner countries and experts.	Priority Area 10 has helped intensifying on-going initiatives for cross-border healthcare and supports the kick-off of new initiatives (e.g., in Croatia). Furthermore, the activities of the task force define concrete success factors and enabling conditions to establish cross-border emergency healthcare.	Priority Area 10 will organise a study visit in the cross-border healthcare facility at the Austrian-Czech Border (Healthcross) and will elaborate further actions with the Steering Group in order to support new initiatives as well as on-going ones.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
healthcare ranging from bilateral agreements to legal implementation, from socio-cultural challenges (e.g., language barriers) to medical equipment or exchange of data. The Task Force aims at supporting existing cross-border healthcare initiatives to improve as well as planned initiatives to take off. Thereby, Austrian institutions (e.g., Notruf NÖ, Gesundheitsagentur des Landes Niederösterreich) take a leading role in the process of mutual learning and networking. Likewise, the initiative also aims at connecting with European institutions (e.g., EC Border Focal Point/DG REGIO, EC DG SANTE, EUREGHA).			

ACTION 3: To review bottlenecks relating to the low absorption rate of EU funds and Invest EU (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Involvement of other PAs: Priority Areas are involved on a basis of their expertise and interest that have a mutual opportunity for knowledge exchange and cooperation. Within the ESF+ Network of managing authorities, EUSDR PA 10 cooperates with EUSDR PA 9 at the capacity of secretariat and support of the network. Stakeholders from other PAs and governance structures within the EUSDR are invited to cooperation in various settings, networks and opportunities.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
Strategic Project Webinar Series: In 2022, PA 10 established the format of Strategic Project Webinars. The format addressed issues such as youth involvement, cross-border services, and digitalisation in public authorities. The webinars aim at providing comprehensive insights into the most relevant funding sources in the field as well as practical information on policy developments and drafting proposals in order to facilitate further project development. Project Management Training for Civil Society Organisations: In the course of the Danube Participation Day in 2022, PA 10 and the DCSF organised in cooperation with ALDA a project management training with a special focus on candidate countries.	PA 10 has organised three strategic project events and established networking with representatives from EUSALP, the Danube Youth Network, ESPON, and the cross-border healthcare initiative Healthcross and Heal Now. In the course of the seminars, over 60 stakeholders have taken part in the capacity building on different strategic topics. PA 10 (with DCSF and ALDA) organised a project management training for candidate countries to enhance capacity building for civil society organisations in candidate countries.	Over 60 stakeholders/project promoters took part in the webinars and engaged in the capacity building activity.	In the next step, PA 10 will decide with the Steering Group, which strategic topics need to be addressed next in order to encourage strategic project development.

ACTION 4: To support better coordination of funding (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Involvement of other PAs: The ESF+ Network of managing authorities is jointly coordinated by EUSDR PA 9 and PA 10

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Network of ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region: The network of ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region was continued by PAC 9 and PAC 10 (and incl. the ESF+ Austria). In the reporting period, the network focused on how to include the EUSDR in the Cooperation Programmes and to identify potential topics for transnational coordination and cooperation. In July 2022, the network met in Vienna, AT.</p>	<p>In July 2022, the network of ESF+ Managing Authorities in the Danube Region defined topics for joint cooperation and discussed the progress in programming in relation to the integration of the EU Danube Strategy.</p>	<p>All ESF+ Programmes in the Danube Region have a clear link to the EU Danube Strategy and the topics for joint cooperation.</p>	<p>In the next phase, the network will explore concrete steps for macro-regional cooperation as well as how to expand the network to include IPA/NDICI programmes focussing in social affairs in the Danube Region.</p>

ACTION 5: To test and support innovative funding solutions (for local actors and civil society) (Strategic Objective: Enhancing Democracy, Sound Administration and Strong Involvement of Civil Society and Youth)

Involvement of other PAs: Involvement and invitation of stakeholders from other PAs in potential areas of cooperation and synergies.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>EUSDR funds in Baden-Württemberg, DE: Within Baden-Württemberg, two funds specifically dedicated to the EUSDR have been established and are available to support local actors and civil society in their Danube Region related activities. The State Ministry manages a project fund dedicated to seed and small project funding. Since its establishment, 106 projects have been supported, amounting in EUR 6,5 Million.</p> <p>The second fund is managed by the non-profit Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (programme Perspektive Donau: Bildung, Kultur und Zivilgesellschaft). This programme has supported several projects since 2012, mostly from CSO, educational or environmental institutions and the municipal level. Throughout the reporting period, the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung has supported also targeted (humanitarian) aid to Ukraine and border regions as well as integration of Ukrainian refugees thanks to the set-up of an “Ukraine Emer-</p>	<p>DE/BW: Considering the reporting period, ten out of eleven approved projects focused on capacity building and/or civil society and/or the support of accession in candidate countries. In addition, a “Ukraine Emergency Fund” has been set up that supports non-profit organisations. So far, 22 projects have been funded.</p> <p>MD: During the reporting timeframe, the funding facility for civil society was under development.</p>	<p>DE/BW: Considering the reporting period, ten out of eleven approved projects focused on capacity building and/or civil society and/or the support of accession in candidate countries. In addition, a “Ukraine Emergency Fund” has been set up that supports non-profit organisations. So far, 22 projects have been funded.</p> <p>MD: During the reporting timeframe, the funding facility for civil society was under development.</p>	<p>DE/BW: In the next step, BW will look into continuing the facilities and adapt if deemed necessary.</p> <p>MD: In the next step, the funding facility will be implemented and assessed in view of further replicability in the Danube Region.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>gency Fund” for non-profit organisations. 22 projects with an overall budget of approx. EUR 0,45 Mio. have been supported so far.</p> <p>Funding Facility for Civil Society in MD: In 2023, the Republic of Moldova developed a civil society funding facility.</p>			

ACTION 6: To foster cooperation built on mutual trust between state and non-state actors to enhance well-being for the inhabitants of the Danube Region (Strategic Objective: Enhancing Democracy, Sound Administration and Strong Involvement of Civil Society and Youth)

Involvement of other PAs: EUSDR PA 10 cooperates with other PAs and relevant stakeholders, depending on the topic of activities and the field of expertise in which new stakeholders can contribute at a partnership capacity. EUSDR PA 10 cooperates with EUSDR PA 9 in the preparation of support for Young representatives of the EUSDR and established representative bodies, as well as within thematic events and discussions implemented.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>In 2023, Hungary and Slovenia have organised Danube Participation Days.</p> <p>Further to that, in November 2023, there has been a decision of the cabinet on the further implementation of the EUSDR in Baden-Württemberg, recalling the achievements since 2011, renewing the political commitment to the Strategy as well as re-defining thematic priorities in the regional implementation. Amongst the priorities are Capacity Building, including the support of Civil Society and the Youth, as well as to support the five candidate countries on their European path.</p>	<p>The National Participation Days support outreach to national/regional stakeholders and bring them closer to the EU Danube Strategy.</p> <p>Furthermore, the events facilitate dialogue between civil society/local actors and national public authorities and representatives from the EUSDR Governance.</p>	<p>As of 2023, 11 out of 14 countries have organised at least one National Participation Day.</p>	<p>In the next step, PA 10 aims at encouraging the regular organisation of National Participation Days as well as the establishment of National Participation Days, where it has not yet taken place.</p>

ACTION 7: To strengthen the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube Region (Strategic Objective: Enhancing Democracy, Sound Administration and Strong Involvement of Civil Society and Youth)

Involvement of other PAs: EUSDR Priority Area 10 cooperates with other PAs and relevant stakeholders, depending on the topic of activities and the field of expertise in which new stakeholders can contribute at a partnership capacity. The EUSDR PA 10 cooperates with EUSDR Priority Area 9 in the preparation of support for Young representatives of the EUSDR and established representative bodies, as well as within thematic events and discussions implemented.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Danube Participation Day: In 2022 and 2023, PA 10 organised in cooperation with the DCSF and in</p>	<p>PA 10 and the DCSF have organised.</p>	<p>The activities of the Priority Area have successfully implemented the foreseen activities for fur-</p>	<p>PA 10 will continue to support further opportunities and integration options within EUSDR for lo-</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>coordination with the respective EUSDR Presidency the Danube Participation Day, an annual conference and side event of the EUSDR Annual Forum with the focus on civil society and local actors and their contribution to the EU Danube Strategy (and in particular, to the priorities of the EUSDR Presidency). Young Bled Strategic Forum: In 2022 and 2023, PA 10 organised in cooperation with several partners the Young Bled Strategic Forum as part of the Bled Strategic Forum. The event gathers young leaders to discuss strategic issues for the Region and elaborates ways forward to address key challenges for the Western Balkans.</p>		<p>the presentation of opportunities for stakeholders within the EUSDR, and have contributed towards their stronger involvement. On a yearly basis, the PA organises D-LAP meetings in order to support further collaboration of stakeholders within the network, exchange of best practices and information sharing and prepare the annual Participation Day. The PA has contributed to further cooperation of stakeholders with the preparation of Young BSF and BSF activities. Strategic involvement and representation of young EUSDR representatives are supported by a task force that also includes PA 10 representatives.</p>	<p>cal actors, civil society representatives and representatives of young generations. Strategic cooperation will additionally include the establishment of networks within an online platform titled bridging the gap, which will enable a sustainable sharing of information and cooperation within an online platform. Further activities within the PA events foresee the publishing of a strategic paper on best practices for civil society engagement enabling an overview of good practices of civil society engagement in decision-making processes. The PA will continue to organise thematic activities involving all of the stakeholders, implementing traditional events (participation day, D-LAP meeting, Young Bled Strategic Forum and Bled Strategic Forum) as well as other new activities depending on the needs and wishes of stakeholders. The PA will continue to promote opportunities and possibilities of cooperation within our promotional activities on the PA 10 webpage, social media and other networks to engage more representatives and organisations within the activities.</p>

ACTION 8: To enhance capacities of cities and municipalities to facilitate local and regional development (Strategic Objective: Establishing and Enforcing Knowledge Society, Stimulating the Economy and Fight Poverty)

Involvement of other PAs: Cooperation with PA 9 within the network of Empowerment Roma and with PA 11 within the network on Fighting Trafficking in Human Beings.

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Cross-macro-regional network for smart communities - SMART ERA: In 2023, stakeholders from AG Connectivity (EUSALP) reached out to PA 10 (EUSDR), PA Innovation (EUSBSR), and the EUSAIR Facility Point (EUSAIR) to develop a joint cooperation on boosting the concept of smart communities in all four macro-regions. In the course of 2023, the endeavour of setting up a cross-macro-regional network became part of the project design of Smart Era, a project aiming at developing</p>	<p>PA 10 could establish a cross-MRS cooperation with all four macro-regions on smart communities as well as develop a contribution to the SMART ERA project proposal that includes the set-up of a permanent cross-MRS network. In 2023, the network organised a joint event at the European Week for Regions and Cities.</p>	<p>PA 10 took part in the development of a strategic project - SMART ERA. The proposal was submitted to the Horizon Programme and approved.</p>	<p>In the next phase, PA 10 will contribute to setting up the cross-MRS network and promote the smart communities approach with local stakeholders in the Danube Region.</p>



Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>a procedure to facilitate participatory smart communities. The project application has been submitted to the Horizon Programme and has been selected for funding (project start: 01 January 2024) The project consortium also includes Austrian partners, who have previously worked on smart villages/smart communities in the context of the EUSALP and extend their experience to roll the approach out to all four macro-regions, including the EUSDR. Fighting Trafficking Human Beings: PA 10 supported the Regional Implementation Initiative in their activities regarding expert round tables on fighting trafficking in human beings.</p>			



PA 11 Security

ACTION 1: Security offensive – Enhancing police cooperation with the aim of improving security and tackling serious and organised crime in the EUSDR countries and strengthening the efforts against terrorism threats (Strategic Objective: Enhancing Democracy, Sound Administration and Strong Involvement of Civil Society and Youth)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>During the last reporting period, a conference related to “Fight against domestic burglaries” was organised between 5 and 7 October 2022 in Bavaria, DE. It is indicated as event No. D.T1.2.2 - Workshop on the topic of data exchange and analysis in the field of burglary and motor vehicle crime from Workpackage 2 Policy Development (2020 – 2022).</p>	<p>The implementation of this output contributes to Activity Title A.T.1.1: Organisation of PA 11 thematic events in the field of “Security offensive - Enhancing police cooperation with the aim of improving security and tackling serious and organised crime in the EUSDR countries and strengthening the efforts against terrorism”.</p> <p>The event took place between 5-7 October 2022 in Ainning, Bavaria, DE, under the DTP-PAC2-PA 11 Security Project. The conference topic was: “Opportunities and constraints of data analysis and exchange in the fight against mobile organised crime groups (MOCGs)”. Invitations were sent in August via the Coordination Bureau with the Lead partner. Around 90 participants from nine countries and Europol attended the event. A total of 11 expert presentations on topics such as updates on modi operandi, new technology to detect and fight MOCGs, new capabilities and funding opportunities for long-term cooperation were delivered.</p> <p>The concrete results that were registered were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support of the Police Departments of Berlin, DE, and Hamburg, DE, to the Police of Dresden, DE, in currently on-going investigations against a Moldovan MOCG • A Dutch colleague connected colleagues from Nuremberg, DE, with Rotterdam, NL, which 	<p>The seminar was in line with the revised Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy that was adopted in April 2020, just after the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis.</p> <p>Due to this reason, a lot of events that were planned for the last year had to be cancelled or postponed.</p> <p>For the whole DTP project the LP and the PP managed to organise two events in an on-line environment (the conference against hybrid threats, the conference against drugs) and one in presence event.</p>	<p>A follow-up activity is envisaged under the framework of the DRP-PAC3-PA11 Project.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<p>helped to solve at least two cases of home burglaries committed by Georgian MOCGs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of funding opportunities led to first talks on joint operation meetings • The transnational operation of MOCGs leaves no alternative but to intensify cooperation between law-enforcement agencies in order to be able to investigate not single burglaries but to get to the organisers behind them 		

ACTION 2: Promoting strategic long-term cooperation between law enforcement actors along the Danube River by enhanced networking (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>2023 DARIF Operation /10th Anniversary Joint DAY/2022 DARIF Operation /Joint Days/</p>	<p>The 9th DARIF Joint Operation took place on 13-15 September 2022. It was cancelled in two consecutive years due to COVID-19. (in 2020 and 2021) The aim was to improve safety and security for the Danube river. It was carried out as a complex multi-purpose joint river operation as a way of continuing good practices.</p> <p>The Operation was organised by the Ministry of Interior of Hungary, according to member states demands, their own risk assessment, current situation on the national Danube sections and reinforcement sources, at the end of the peak season in Danube River traffic.</p> <p>A total of ten countries participated in the operation as well as guest officers from Europol, SELEC and FRONTEX. Mr Kalmar informed about the purposes and objectives among which the main ones were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fight against illegal immigration, trafficking in human beings - Fight against counterfeit goods with and impact on public health and safety - Fight against synthetic drug production - Transport of dangerous goods - Organised theft from cargo vehicles 	<p>After the 2022 operation, as an additional added value tool, an on-line anonymous survey was developed /a questionnaire prepared in 9 different languages to encourage respondents to participate/ which gathered together the responses of 201 law-enforcement officers from the 10 Danube Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine). This is the first such international survey on the opinion of the staff of control authorities on risks related to improvements of border control and it became available in English in spring 2023 and was circulated by PACs of PA 11 to interested parties.</p>	<p>To organise further Joint Operations</p> <p>The DARIF project is mostly associated with the core of the work of PA 11 and that it was developing so successfully during the years. It proved to be a very useful tool for practical cooperation between different stakeholders and now it was also impressing that an innovative approach with the on-line survey was used to build on the results of the Joint Operation.</p> <p>PACs of PA are ready to support this initiative in the coming years as well.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detection of document forgery - Detection of illegal waste transport etc. <p>Increased control measures were taken at their own river sections by the respective authorities of each participating Member States. A framework operation plan was prepared which containing national operational plans in which the tasks of the authorities were specified. In addition, a temporary coordination centre was set in Mochas where all participating counties sent one expert in order to enhance reaction abilities and information exchange.</p> <p>A total of 379 information exchanges were made between the participating authorities; a total of 35 offences were detected, eight persons were apprehended; the imposed fines amounted to EUR 500. Four counterfeited Ukrainian ID cards were detected near Vienna Port misused by a Georgian family trying to acquire a registered status as displaced persons from Ukraine. One Bulgarian wanted person was detected on board ship at Vienna port, AT. Two Austrian wanted persons detected on board ship in Melk, AT. Two Ukrainian women as irregular immigrants were detected. One man from Tunisia was apprehended after illegal border crossing from Serbia to Hungary and an attempt to cross Danube by a rubber boat at 1443 km.</p> <p>The 10th successful DARIF Joint Operation took place in September 2023. The aim was again to improve safety and security for the Danube river. It was carried out as a complex multi-purpose joint river operation as a way of continuing good practices. The Operation was organised by the Ministry of Interior of Hungary.</p> <p>A total of ten countries participated in the operation as well as guest officers from Europol, SELEC and the DYC (as observer). The main purposes and objectives were:</p>		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitation of illegal immigration, trafficking in human beings, actions against illegal immigration - Counterfeit goods with an impact on public health and safety - Synthetic drugs production and poly-drug trafficking in the EU - Transport of dangerous goods and waste related offenses, environmental crime - Detections of tobacco smuggling, Detections of smuggling of other dangerous products on board (weapon, armament and ammunition, radioactive materials) - General waterway law enforcement on vessels, in ports, on bridges and navigation structures (e.g. dams, ferry-crossings etc...) - Detections of document forgery, Detections of wanted persons in the crew or in passengers - Detections of illegal waste transport, controls on environmental protection - Search of cargo ships and shipload with sniffer dogs - Controls of destination ports and controls on labour employment on members of crew. A total of 379 information exchanges were made between the participating authorities. Authorities involved in the DARIF 2023 Joint Operation by ten participating States during three operational days altogether deployed: 859 officials; they have used a daily average of 35 duty boats and 36 duty cars. A total of 18 964 persons as well as 19 111 documents were checked during the controls. A total of 36 illegal activities were identified. The imposed fines amounted to EUR 1661. Europol guest officers completed 1244 checks, during the successful operation. There was only one hit at the Europol on the last day. During the operation no event or activity emerged from this hit. Some of the most important results of operation were – Austrian authorities find 1 wanted person 		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	at the Vienna passenger harbour; Altogether 2 irregular immigrants were apprehended in Bulgaria; In Port of Ilok, Croatia, on the board of the cruise ship "AVALON PASSION" 1,3 grams of Hashish drug was found at a crew member; Bavarian authorities launched administrative proceeding in one case; Romanian authorities apprehended two persons who were carrying out commercial fishing without a fishing license or authorization using two monofilament nets; one case of diesel fuel smuggling in Serbia was detected; one offence for violation of Waste Management on the board of BD Laborec was detected by Slovak Environmental Inspectorate.		

ACTION 3: Improving the systems of border control, document inspection management and cooperation on consular related issues in the Danube Region
(Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
No activities were implemented during the reported period. Nevertheless several events related to border security and document inspection management were elaborated and included in the new DRP PAC 3 PA 11 project and the first one was already implemented in February 2024 but it should be reported in the next evaluation tool.	-	-	-

ACTION 4: Promoting the rule of law and the fight corruption (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
One event was planned during the 2020-2022 DTP project however it was cancelled due to the pandemic. The same event was moved to the new DRP - PAC3 PA 11 project and is to be implemented during the lifetime of the project	-	-	-

ACTION 5: Setting up a structure of Danube River Forum (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>Please see Action 3 - Further to the DARIF operations described in details, PA 11 members are involved in the cooperation with Aquapol</p>	<p>The membership of EUSDR countries in Aquapol is linked to the use of software related to the river navigation and border control - IBISweb.</p> <p>Currently the following EUSDR countries are active users: Austria (since 2023), Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic (Labe), Germany (Rhine), Hungary and Romania.</p> <p>Ukraine's observer status since 2021 has been extended until further notice due to the ongoing Russian invasion. Slovakia has been an observer status since 01 January 2023 and we expect it to become a full member of AquaPol in 2024. The Republic of Moldova and Serbia have not yet applied for AquaPol membership. With the exception of the Republic of Moldova and Serbia, all EUSDR countries have now joined AquaPol. Due to the EU categorisation of the Republic of Moldova as a safe country of origin and further support on the path to accession to the European Union, support from AquaPol would also be conceivable. This would also give them the opportunity to use the control database for international inland navigation (IBISweb).</p>	<p>There is a constant progress with this area.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Interior of Hungary, supported by PAC of PA 11 is convinced to further promotion of joint cooperation between EUSDR members states.</p>

ACTION 6: Joint work with Priority Area 1a “Mobility: Waterways” (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Involvement of other PAs: Both PAs - EUSDR PA 1a and PA 11 are actively involved

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
<p>A total of 4 meetings of the Joint Group on Administrative Process took place in 2022 and 2023. All of them were organised in an on-line environment. The Technical Coordinator from Bavaria, PA 11, responsible for the cooperation with PA 1a was actively involved in ensuring that the measures for which PA 11 is responsible, are taken into account.</p>	<p>PA 11 is responsible for namely Measures 6, 7 and 8 of the Joint Action Plan between the 2 PAs. Concerning M6 - Territorial extension of an already existing-database from AQUAPOL named IBISweb, the inland navigation control-authorities with an Aquapol membership are Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Germany and for the River Labe the Czech Republic. M 7: the Creation of a common transnational platform for control bodies to exchange know-how and best practices</p>	<p>This fruitful cooperation was useful not only for the law-enforcement authorities but also the economic operators.</p> <p>The shipping sector had sent positive feedback on this publication so it is considered to be another success story within the work performed by PA 1a and PA 11.</p>	<p>There is a clear vision between the two Coordinators on how the cooperation will continue during the next reporting period. New meetings have already been plan to further work on the elaboration of joint measures for facilitation border control.</p>

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<p>and to develop harmonised control mechanisms in the Danube Region. It has been discussed that the Ukrainian initiative for the meeting of water police forces which had been planned as a stand-alone event could be organised as a joint kick-off event for M7 in the first half year 2023 in Passau / Bavaria in coordination with Ukraine. Later it was cancelled due to the continuing war.</p> <p>Concerning M 8 - the Installation of an independent single point of contact for problem-management in Danube shipping which collects, actively surveys and manages feedback from shipping companies in connection with border and nautical controls with annual collection of feedback.</p> <p>The Danube Commission will act as a single point of contact for managing problems and forwarding feedback to the respective authorities so that they can take action. The Joint PA 1a and PA 11 working group will receive feedback in connection with the control processes. The digital solution is the integration of a contact form directly on the website of the Danube Commission with contact information and problem description. Unfortunately, the full implementation of the measure, which was planned for September 2022, will be somewhat delayed. Due to the war, the Danube Commission is busy coordinating the revival of the previously inactive ports on the lower Danube in order to be able to transport grain.</p> <p>Concerning the measures for which PA 1a is responsible, namely – Control Forms /M1 and M2/; Control Process /M 3 and M4/ and Guidance for Shipping Companies /M5/.</p> <p>Concerning the first two measures - the introduction of DAVID forms, a process that started in February 2020 and concluded in May 2022. The</p>		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	<p>forms were introduced in Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine. The introduction was accompanied by a communication and information campaign dedicated to border control authorities and to shipping sector. The feedback from the shipping sector was very positive. The introduction of these harmonised forms was not only a completed mission in itself but also a starting point for future developments. Having said this Mr. Hartl presented the state of play of the Trans-national Electronic (Registration and) Time Management Tool (in short TERM) that has been established with the Joint Working Group between PA 1a and PA 11. This electronic tool will serve the following purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will enable users of shipping industry to register and schedule a time for border control electronically - Will allow border control authorities to manage and plan their controls based on incoming registration. <p>Therefore there will be benefits for both sides /win-win approach/ It is important to say that this is an additional service to currently existing registration procedures and there is no obligation for the shipping industry to use it. Regarding this tool a technical frame was created; a first technical workshop was implemented. The tool was integrated in the RIS COMEX 2 project proposal that was submitted in the 2nd call of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) in January 2023. A second technical workshop was held in 2023 in order to clarify the legal, technical and financial aspects, including making an agreement about the maintenance in the course of the long-terms operation of the tool. Last but not least during the reporting period an Update of the Practical Manual on Border Control</p>		

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
	(4 th edition) took place with the involvement of control authorities of all affected countries. The document was finalised in 2022 and published in spring 2023. The shipping sector had sent positive feedback on this publication so it is considered to be another success story within the work performed by PA 1a and PA 11.		

ACTION 7: Implementation of a Ministerial Conference every 3 years (Strategic Objective: Stimulating Sustainable Development)

Involvement of other PAs: This event was foreseen as a high level forum of the political level - namely the Ministers of Interior of the 14 EUSDR participating states

Activities	Achievements	Progress	Next steps
The 3 rd Danube Security Conference was held in Brussels, BE, in the Permanent Representation of Bavaria on 23 and 24 March 2023. In Brussels, Bavaria's Interior Minister Joachim Herrmann was the host of this Conference, which was attended by four interior ministers and five deputy ministers as well as other representatives from the Danube riparian states. International police experts and representatives of the European Parliament have also been invited. Among other things, they discussed the effects of the Russian war against Ukraine, how to combat illegal migration more consistently and how to improve border management. This was the first event held in-person after the long COVID-19 period. The event, attended by Ministers, Secretaries and State Chiefs of Police, gave the opportunity to address a number of important issues and exchange of information, in particular with regard to the challenging situation in Ukraine. Bilateral meetings were held between the Minister of Interior and delegations from Member States of the Danube Region, with very impressive and interesting input. In addition, the EU COM, Interpol, Europol, SELEC Center and DSP also attended the event.	Two main topics were discussed during the Conference Visions for the future of international police cooperation in the Danube Region: in particular on questions of international police cooperation in the Danube Region concerning irregular migration, people smuggling, human trafficking and the protection of critical (transnational) infrastructure as well as on the impact of the Russian war against Ukraine on the security in the Danube Region. The event ended with the adoption of Joint Ministerial Conclusions in which the ministers expressed their further support to the objectives and targets of PA 11 Security.	The Ministerial Conferences demonstrated the high political support of the managerial level in all EUSDR member states.	It is to be decided when the 4 th Ministerial Conference will be held, hopefully in the next reporting period.