**EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR)**

**1st Meeting of the Thematic Steering Group (TSG) for Pillar 5 – Improved social cohesion**

*05th December 2024, Zagreb*

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| **Venue:** | Ministry of Tourism, Prisavlje 14, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia |
| **Chairs:** | **Ms Blanka Belošević**, Head, Department for International Cooperation, Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia |
| **Ms Sonia Popa**, Director for Tourism, Ministry of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade and Entrepreneurship of the Republic of Albania |
| **Participants:**  | EUSAIR Thematic Steering Group (TSG) members (or their representatives) and representatives of the Commission services (DG REGIO and DG GROW). |

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| **Venue:** | Oris, House of architecture, Kralj Držislav 3, Zagreb  |
| **Chair:** | **Mr Filip Miličević**, Pillar Coordinator, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy |
| **Participants:** | EUSAIR Thematic Steering Group (TSG) members and guests: European Commission (DG REGIO), Croatian National EUSAIR structure representatives, Lead Partners of 2 EUSAIR support project 2023-2027, Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Youth representative, Croatian Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education representative |

**DRAFT OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS/ MINUTES**

1. **and 2. Welcoming addresses**

The 1st TSG5 meeting was organised in Zagreb in Oris the house of architecture, and opened with the welcoming words of Mrs Dunja Šare, who hosted the meeting. Afterwards, Mrs Naida Mekić, Pillar Coordinator from Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy greeted the gathered. Mrs Lidija Pansegrau Hadrović welcomed all to Zagreb as National coordinator, and Mrs Sanela Fočo as the Bosnian co-coordinator greeted everyone. After welcoming all the participants, the meeting has officially started.

1. **and 4. Presentation on Pillar 5 Action Plan and EC activities**

Croatian Pillar 5 coordinator, Mr Filip Miličević presented Pillar 5 Action plan to all TSG members. He introduced the members to the initial idea of including pillar 5 in the Action Plan and explained the process of preparing the action plan. In addition, the topics of pillar 5 and the activities planned within those topics were presented. The presentation provided an overview of horizontal and cross-cutting themes within the pillar. A reflection on ideas for future activities was also shared, such as embedding and establishing a managing authorities’ network at the strategy level. Also, special emphasis was placed on cooperation with the Youth Council.

Since there were no questions regarding the Pillar 5 work, the floor was given to Mrs Gabby Hagmuller, from the European Commission.

Mrs Hagmuller introduced herself and her role in the Commission, as well as her role within the EUSAIR strategy. She presented the status of the Action Plan and the expected timeline for its approval. She clarified that approval cannot be achieved now, as the draft of the action plan for some pillars has not yet been finalized. Changes within the Commission were also mentioned (new commissioner), and she explained the approval procedure. She emphasized that she is available to all members of the TSG, as well as to the coordinators, and is at their disposal for communication with the Commission.

***OC: Pillar coordinator gave report on Pillar 5 Action plan***

***OC: EC gave report on activities from the last GB meeting and updated information on EC activities***

**5. Tour de table**

After the coffee break, all meeting participants were asked to briefly introduce themselves to the other members of the TSG, and to share their expectations regarding the implementation of pillar 5 activities, their participation in the thematic working group, as well as any expectations they may have from this meeting. The tour de table revealed some interesting expectations. Some participants reflected on demographic issues, expressing a desire to discuss common problems of the macro-region, share knowledge and examples of good practices, develop joint policies, and expand understanding of shared challenges, policies, and best practices in the participating countries. Representatives of the Youth Council expressed hope that the opinions of young people would be heard in the future activities of the pillar and in the implementation of upcoming actions.

Mr. Kornilakis from Greece (also the representative of the presidency) presented the timeline for upcoming activities planned under the EUSAIR strategy for 2025. He mentioned an event in Athens, which will take place on 25-26. February 2025, focusing on topics related to pillar 5 (vocational education and other educational programs, youth guarantee, best practices of member states in the field of education, etc.). He expressed hope that the coordinators' representatives would participate in this event. He also touched upon the 10th anniversary forum, which will be held from May 6-8, 2025, in Crete.

***OC: Presidency will provide more information on future TSG 5 event in Greece.***

**6. Presentation on Flagship project proposals**

During the preparation of the action plan, all TSG members were asked to submit proposals for flagship projects that could support and include in pillar 5. Two proposals have been received from colleagues in Slovenia. Simon Colnar, representative of the Republic of Slovenia in the TSG gave a presentation on the topic of flagship projects. Since there were 2 proposals received, Simon presented Multidisciplinary Research and Development Center for Social Innovations for Active and Healthy Ageing project, while Mrs Olga Abram shortly gave the information about the POPRI project. To all TSG members present, it was emphasized that the procedure for the approval of proposed projects is not yet established, so that is one of the things a TSG members should soon prepare.

**7., 8. And 9. Presentation on EUSAIR strategic projects and workshop**

Although representatives of all 3 strategic projects were invited, representatives of 2 strategic projects participated in the meeting. On behalf of the strategic project FACILITYPOINT, Ms. Olga Abram presented the project. TSG members were presented with the activities so far, as well as the planned future activities of the project, the roles that the FACILITYPOINT project has in the implementation of the EUSAIR strategy.

The representative of the project SP4EUSAIR, Mr. Lovre Karamarko presented technical data on the project itself and gave an insight into the main goals and key deliverables of the project. The aim of the project is to enable conditions for identifying key strategic ideas and sources of financing for future strategic implementation formats. Mr. Karamarko presented the activities carried out so far related to Pillar 5 (online in-depth interview with Pillar Coordinators) for the purpose of drafting a Report that was formally approved at the GB meeting (October 2024). The report contains identified needs for Pillar 5.

A capacity building workshop has been proposed (early 2025). TSG 5 members were introduced to implementation formats (strategic projects (mono-pillar or cross-pillar), action plans, master plans, and other types of formats) that could potentially be developed in the future).

After the presentation of the SP4EUSAIR project, a discussion was initiated on possible topics of the capacity building workshop, whereby the coordinator believes that the project representatives should carry out a mapping of calls that are already financed from various funds, mechanisms, centralized calls and Interreg calls. In addition, they believe that it is necessary to present to the members of TSG 5 the possibilities of financing project ideas that TSG has yet to develop. Mr Kornilaks agreed with this proposal. There is no methodology for selecting project ideas, nor is there a way to get potential project ideas for now. Representatives of SP4EUSAIR project believe that it is necessary to develop a methodology for the selection of project ideas, and to agree at the level of TSG on the way in which the received project ideas will be collected and evaluated. The question of the user, and the implementation of future project ideas arose.

**OC: It was concluded that the Pillar coordinator will, by Christmas, propose potential dates and topics for the capacity building workshop, which will be held in an online format. TSG members were asked to reflect on potential project ideas that could be developed for future Interreg calls.**

**10. and 11. Conclusions and the next TSG 5 meeting**

During the final session some topics for future TSG meeting and activities were proposed.

All TSG members were asked to think about possible Flagship projects proposal ideas for future TSG meeting. After the new RoP template adoption, TSG members will have to propose and agree on adoption of proposals received so far. Mr Miličević proposed topic for the next TSG meeting. The proposal is to make 2 presentations on relevant national policies within the Pillar 5 umbrella. It was agreed that Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will deliver presentations on their national youth policies at the next meeting. If needed, it is possible to invite guests on the next TSG to present the policies, and the aim is to share experiences from one member state and one non-member state country. Another proposed item on next meeting agenda is expert presentation of some specific EU policy initiative or measure (such as youth employment initiatives, ILA experiences and good practices, etc). Ideas for such topic will be sent to the TSG members by the end of 2024.

Also, transnational cooperation call preparation (under the Croatian Ministry of education) is being developed, and colleagues from the line Ministry briefly presented the experiences in the implementation of a similar call for regional centers of excellence in the past financial period.

Since the Pillar 5 coordinator has the possibility to contract the preparation of 2 thematic studies regarding the area of activity of Pillar 5, TSG members are asked to think about potential topics that the studies could cover.

The Pillar Coordinator thanked everyone for participation concluding the meeting saying that is yet to be decided where the 2nd TSG5 meeting will eventually take place.

Operational conclusion and minutes will be sent to TSG members by the end of 2024, together with date and topic proposals for capacity building workshop.

The meeting was concluded at 15.30.

*OC: It is needed to decide which 2 countries will make presentations on relevant policies within the Pillar 5.*

*OC: Potential topics for the studies should be delivered*

***OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS - in brief:***

1. ***OC: Pillar coordinator gave report on Pillar 5 Action plan***
2. ***OC: EC gave report on activities from the last GB meeting and updated information on EC activities***
3. ***OC: Presidency will provide more information on future TSG 5 event in Greece.***
4. ***OC: It was concluded that the Pillar coordinator will, by Christmas, propose potential dates and topics for the capacity building workshop, which will be held in an online format. TSG members were asked to reflect on potential project ideas that could be developed for future Interreg calls.***
5. ***OC: Presentations on national youth policies will be an item on the next TSG meeting agenda (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina)***
6. ***OC: Presentation on some specific EU policy topic (initiative or measure) should be decided and included as an item on next TSG meeting agenda.***
7. ***OC: Potential topics for the studies should be delivered***