



EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region Governance Architecture Paper

Finalised at the 23rd Governing Board,
10 October 2024

Contents

- 1. Background..... 1
- 2. EUSAIR governance architecture..... 2
 - 2.1 The EUSAIR Ministerial meeting..... 3
 - 2.2 High Level Group (HLG) 4
 - 2.3 EUSAIR Governing Board (GB)..... 4
 - 2.4 EUSAIR National Coordinators (NCs)..... 5
 - 2.5 The TRIO Presidency..... 7
 - 2.6 The EUSAIR Presidency..... 7
 - 2.7 The EUSAIR Youth Council (EYC)..... 9
 - 2.8 Pillar Coordinators (PC) 9
 - 2.9 The Thematic Steering Groups (TSG) 11
 - 2.10 Pillars’ sub-groups 13
 - 2.11 The European Commission (EC) 13
 - 2.12 EUSAIR governance support..... 14
- 3. IPA ADRION..... 15

1. Background

In the ten years of its existence, the EU Strategy for Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) has provided a unique platform of cooperation for joint planning of processes, projects, and activities for the sustainable and harmonious development of the entire region¹. Due to its geography on the EU external borders and the participation of EU candidate countries and, later, San Marino, the EUSAIR has focused more and more on supporting the EU enlargement process.

The governance of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian (EUSAIR) plays a strategic role for the implementation of its actions and the achievements of its objectives, targets and overall goals. EUSAIR participating countries and key stakeholders have made great efforts to build and ensure an effective and efficient governance for the EUSAIR at all levels.

However, a number of challenges within the EUSAIR governance, and consequently within the implementation of the EUSAIR, still provides room for improvement, starting from reaffirming the crucial role of political ownership and commitment of members in EUSAIR governance bodies, being the essential keystone of the strategy success. Moreover, limited institutional, high staff fluctuation, modest funding enrolment following the embedding, shortcomings in concrete implementation and follow-up of the agreed actions etc. all negatively influence the EUSAIR implementation.

Some of the recommendations of the EUSAIR Evaluation report suggest stronger incentives to tie in with national planning documents, standardization of the TSGs working methodologies, to support them in delivering results, ensuring smoother implementation and stronger political backing of the TSGs and their members from their home institutions². Also, *the Report From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies*³, apart from acknowledging a well-functioning EUSAIR governance system, identifies the above mentioned and other areas for further improvement of the EUSAIR, which aim at simplifying the interplay among EUSAIR key implementers and providing a clarification of their roles. The EUSAIR seeks to make best use of what is available in the Region (funds, knowledge, capacities, skills, etc.), which means that all stakeholders must take on their part of responsibility and be more aware about its potential. At this point, governance should clarify what is essential for the success of Strategy's joint approach, including stronger responsibility of all EUSAIR participating countries and stakeholders, as part of the multilevel governance scheme.

The EUSAIR Facility Point should continuously monitor the overall EUSAIR performance, namely the effectiveness by measuring the degree of the achieved objectives and the efficiency by measuring the output and result targets progress based on the used resources, and regularly report on the matter to the Governing Board.

¹ The Report From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies {COM(2022) 705 final}

² Evaluation of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), Hellenic Ministry of Development and Investments, Project 4, Athens, 2022

³ The Report From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies {COM(2022) 705 final}

Governance improvements are especially required in the field of a stronger political leadership and commitment, effective decision-making and greater clarity in the organisation of work.

The main goals of this paper are to:

- improve coordination and cooperation in view of further enhancing the commitment to the Strategy and its effective implementation;
- adapt the governance architecture to the new revised Action Plan and EC Communication;
- support the development of the necessary administrative capacity to ensure that political commitment translates into effective implementation and real actions which affect and benefit territories of each EUSAIR participating country;
- ensure institutional and effective multilevel governance in the EUSAIR by enhancing the active participation of stakeholders not part of EUSAIR governance bodies - regions, local authorities, academia, youth, business, and civil society organizations.

It is important to capacitate key implementers (National Coordinators, Pillar Coordinators, Thematic Steering Group members, EUSAIR Governance Point, future EUSAIR Youth Council, etc.) and relevant stakeholders as well as to increase the Strategy ownership of the relevant line ministries on the national level. Such recognition also improves mobilisation of regions, cities, agencies and institutions like universities, private businesses and civil society, encouraging them to network, cooperate and participate in the implementation and development of the Strategy, also by increasing the ownership aspect.

The new EUSAIR Governance strengthens management capacity at the strategic level, effective decision-making and reinforces results orientation. Furthermore, it empowers relevant stakeholders, increases their ownership and encourages them to network, cooperate and participate in the implementation and development of the Strategy. Clear links to policy-making at the national and regional levels serve to increase the engagement of line ministries, other public authorities and civil society and to solidify political support and implementation in the EUSAIR participating countries.

This Governance Architecture Paper (GAP) only specifies the main elements of the EUSAIR governance. More details are provided in the dedicated rules of procedure. The Governing Board may decide on further specifications, revision and update of the GAP upon its own initiative. The EUSAIR Facility Point ensures that all documents and other essential information related to the EUSAIR governance, are published on the EUSAIR intranet and/or website.

2. EUSAIR governance architecture

The EUSAIR is a platform for cooperation and coordination with open and transparent participation, inclusiveness and multi-level governance. The Strategy focuses on challenges and opportunities, which are more efficiently addressed when working in a coordinated manner across countries within the region.

This chapter defines the roles and responsibilities of the National Coordinators, the TRIO Presidency, the EUSAIR Presidency, the Pillar Coordinators, the Thematic Steering Groups, the Working Groups, the European Commission, EUSAIR Governance Point (EGP) and the EUSAIR Youth Council in the framework of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

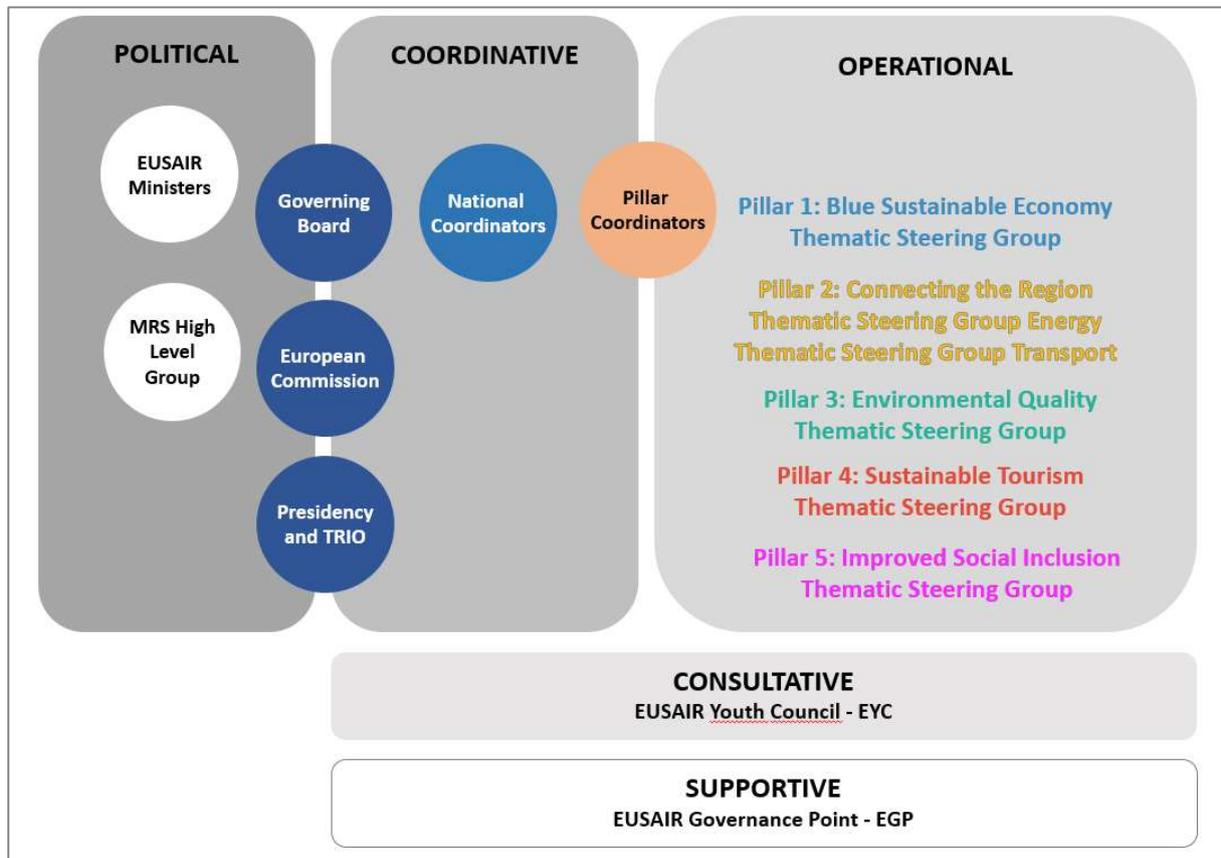


Figure 1: EUSAIR GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE CHART

In addition to the political level, this architecture involves two more levels: the coordinating level and operational level. The Governing Board, the National Coordinators, the Pillar Coordinators, the European Commission, the Presidency and TRIO have the coordinative role in the Strategy. The operational level is represented by Thematic Steering Groups. The EUSAIR Governance Point has supporting role to Strategy's governance bodies. EUSAIR Youth Council is an independent body in an advisory capacity/consultative role. The Commission's Directorate General for Regional Policy (DG REGIO) helps to implement the Strategy by facilitating and supporting actions of the participating countries.

2.1 The EUSAIR Ministerial meeting

EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting and Adriatic and Ionian Council provide political orientation and guidance to the Strategy in the Ministerial Declaration and raise political profile of the Strategy. The main purpose of such a ministerial meeting, convening ministers from all 10 Adriatic and Ionian Region participating countries and EC representatives, is to give strategic guidance and secure political commitment both at national and macro-regional level. The incumbent Presidency of EUSAIR and

Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (All) oversees drafting of the ministerial declaration and its consolidation between the participating countries and the EC. The adopted ministerial declaration is outlining the objectives and the way the related public (sector) policy is being implemented in the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

The EUSAIR Ministerial Meeting and Adriatic and Ionian Council is organised by the incumbent EUSAIR and All Presidency with the assistance of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat and support of the EGP back-to-back to the EUSAIR Annual Forum. EUSAIR participating countries are represented at the meeting by ministers or high-level delegates from ministries responsible for foreign and/or European affairs or national authorities responsible for the coordination of EU funds. Continuous reaffirmation of the political commitment and ownership of the decision-making process is crucial for the successful implementation of the Strategy.

2.2 High Level Group (HLG)

The High-Level Group (HLG) on macro-regional strategies (MRS) is an EU-level body, advising the European Commission on all macro-regional strategies. It is made up of official representatives of Member States' authorities and other public entities as well as public authorities from Partner Countries. The incumbent presidencies of the 4 MRSs present their Presidency programmes and achievements. It is the forum where the approaches and practices of each macro-regional strategy are presented in order to maximise the leverage and impact of the strategies, by exchanging good practices.

2.3 EUSAIR Governing Board (GB)

The Governing Board (GB) is the core strategic decision-making body of the Strategy. Decisions are made by National Coordinators with consensus. It provides strategic guidance and support to the work of the Thematic Steering Groups in charge of implementation with respect to management and implementation of the EUSAIR and its Action Plan. To this end, representatives from the participating countries are duly empowered by their respective governments. The GB is a guardian of the proper functioning of the EUSAIR.

Standing members with decision-making right:

- National Coordinators: each participating country is represented by two delegates, one from the ministry of foreign affairs, the other from the national authorities responsible for the coordination of EU funds (in EU candidate countries: offices of National IPA Coordinators, respectively national authority responsible for European Territorial Cooperation).

Standing members without decision-making right:

- Pillar Coordinators (Thematic Steering Groups Coordinators)
- Commission services led by DG REGIO. Specific EC Directorate Generals will be invited as appropriate, especially those thematically relating to the Pillars.
- The permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative
- A representative of the Committee of the Region's Adriatic-Ionian Interregional Group
- A representative of the European Economic and Social Committee
- A representative of the European Parliament

- The Managing Authority of the IPA ADRION programme
- Representatives of the EUSAIR Governance Point
- EUSAIR Youth Council representative

The GB can consider inviting other participants, according to the Rules of Procedure.

The GB will be presided by the participating country holding the pro tempore Presidency of the EU Strategy for Adriatic and Ionian Region. At least two GB meetings in the Presidency year shall be organised by the Presidency with support of the EUSAIR Facility Point.

National Coordinators as representatives of the participating countries in the GB adopt and update Rules of Procedure for the GB meetings and adopt accordingly the Rules of Procedure of the Thematic Steering Groups, including possible amendments to be proposed by TSGs.

The EUSAIR GB is monitoring the proper implementation of the Action Plan, is also the Guardian of the proper efficient and effective functioning of the EUSAIR and is entitled to take all the needed decisions and measures to ensure a quality implementation performance of the EUSAIR. Any non-compliance with the Action Plan that affects the proper functioning of the Strategy must be addressed by the GB.

2.4 EUSAIR National Coordinators (NCs)

The NCs are the official representatives of the national level and have a decision-making role in the Governing Board. They also have a strategic coordination function of the Strategy within their country.

NCs are appointed, and replaced, in written form by their government/respective institution. Each participating country has to officially nominate two NCs - one from a national ministry responsible for foreign affairs and one from the national authorities responsible for the coordination of EU funds (in EU candidate countries: offices of National IPA Coordinators/or national authority responsible for European Territorial Cooperation) - and their deputies, respectively. They constantly keep the incumbent EUSAIR Presidency with Facility Point and the European Commission updated as soon as changes occur.

As the participating countries are governing the EUSAIR and they are the sole owners of the Strategy, the key role of NCs, with support of the EGP upon request, is to encourage, coordinate, guide and monitor active participation of their country in the implementation of the EUSAIR including all 5 Pillars (considering Thematic Steering Group meetings, etc.), and to liaise with the appointed country representatives in the Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs) from the national line ministries and other relevant organisations seeking to motivate relevant responsible authorities to consider and implement the EUSAIR in their policy field.

They monitor the progress of the Strategy at macro-regional/national level and provide strategic steering of the Strategy's progress by identifying national and transnational needs and proposing common solutions, bearing in mind the particularities of each participating country.

NCs shall also promote the EUSAIR and its visibility and pursue continuous dialogue with relevant macro-regional/national/regional/local stakeholders of key developments and ongoing initiatives, aiming also at facilitating the involvement of relevant stakeholders.

NCs shall encourage the mutual exchange with relevant programmes operating in the Region (in particular, their managing authorities) also in the framework of networks of managing authorities and financial instruments, aiming at better alignment of policies, resources and funding at national and macro-regional level.

NCs and TSG representatives are in a systematic two-way exchange between the national and the EUSAIR level in the multi-level governance system, including the nominations of TSG members and the general exchange with/involvement of TSG members at national level, taking into consideration the particularities of each participating country.

Apart from Governing Board meetings NCs from all participating countries shall meet at least twice a year at the Technical NC meetings. These meetings are organised and presided by the country holding the rotating EUSAIR Presidency, with the support of the Facility Point according to their project's obligations. The European Commission is also invited to participate. If required, other stakeholders may be invited, on a case-by-case basis. The Technical NCs meetings aim at the exchange of views among NCs and the facilitation of the GB decisions. For the purpose of more operational work on specific topics or EUSAIR processes, GB can decide to establish specific NC Task Forces. Mandate and nominations are defined as needed and on case-by case basis.

Important role is delegated to EUSAIR key implementers regarding the horizontal and the cross-cutting topics. Proper Working Groups or Task Forces will be agreed at the GB and set up with concrete tasks, i.e. monitoring the level that the horizontal priorities are embodied in the Pillars and reporting.

NCs functions include:

- Acting as interface between the operational level (Thematic Steering Groups) and the political/ministerial level;
- Coordinating, keeping an overview and encouraging active participation of their country in the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan;
- Contributing to effective, efficient and impactful implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan on all levels;
- Informing and involving the line ministries, as appropriate;
- Convening and preparing meetings with line ministries, as appropriate;
- Adopting possible revision proposals of the Strategy, providing the Thematic Steering Groups with strategic guidelines and ensuring linkages between them, following up the implementation of these guidelines;
- Providing common Rules of Procedure governing the Thematic Steering Groups, after TSGs propose any possible amendments to be adopted by the GB;
- Facilitating linkages between Pillars (together with TSGs);
- Approving the EUSAIR Youth Council members and encouraging meaningful contribution of the Youth Council to the Strategy;
- Providing support and guidelines for the orientation of the EUSAIR Annual Forum as proposed by the EUSAIR Presidency (e.g. setting the agenda);
- Raising awareness on EUSAIR, its priorities and added value as well as on the Adriatic and Ionian Region within relevant ministries, among relevant stakeholders and the broader public;
- Guiding and adopting communication, information and publicity about the Strategy in order to enhance its visibility;
- Ensuring coordination with existing cooperation organisations in the Adriatic and Ionian region, as appropriate;
- Guiding and adopting a monitoring and evaluation framework;
- Guiding the development and functioning of EUSAIR MA networks to demonstrate added value of the Strategy;
- Informing the other NCs of nominations in EUSAIR governance bodies;
- Providing guidance to the EGP (taking into account the specific requirements of the IPA ADRION Programme);

- Ensure well-functioning EUSAIR governance;
- Any non-compliance with the principles laid down in this document, affecting the proper functioning of the Strategy, shall be discussed by the NCs.

2.5 The TRIO Presidency

For securing coherence, ensuring strategic stability and greater continuity of the work between EUSAIR Presidency cycles, regular coordination between the incumbent Presidency, the former and the subsequent Presidencies is proactively pursued.

The TRIO Presidency has a clear supportive role for the incumbent EUSAIR Presidency. Regular exchange on strategic and coordinative issues must be secured and TRIO meetings are held back-to-back with Governing Board meetings, NC meetings and joint NC and PC meetings.

EC and Facility Point project (as support to Presidency) are invited to participate in the TRIO Presidency meetings. Other EGP projects may be invited, if appropriate, based on the functions assigned to them. Information on TRIO meetings are presented at the GB if needed.

The incumbent EUSAIR Presidency, after consultation within the TRIO Presidency, prepares all major meetings and documents.

The TRIO Presidency (via incumbent Presidency) represents the GB vis-à-vis the European political level (e.g. addressing jointly agreed letters on behalf of the GB to the European Parliament, etc.). TRIO Presidencies also represent EUSAIR at the meetings of the Chairpersons of the National Coordinators groups of EU Macro-regional Strategies and the European Commission (MRS 4 TRIO Presidency meetings) and at the meetings of the High-Level Group on MRSs.

2.6 The EUSAIR Presidency

Pursuing a rotation principle, the EUSAIR Presidency is taken over by each EUSAIR participating country for a one-year period, i.e. from June 1st till May 31st of the following year. The presidencies sequence will in principle follow the order of alternating EU member state and EU candidate country, to grant the presence of both EU and EU candidate countries within the EUSAIR TRIO Presidency. The order is defined until 2027/2028. In 2026 the Governing Board will have to agree on the presidencies order for the years after 2027/2028.

The Presidency order until 2028 is the following:

| Year | Country |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 2024/2025 | Greece |
| 2025/2026 | North Macedonia |
| 2026/2027 | Italy |
| 2027/2028 | Montenegro |

The EUSAIR Presidency will coincide with the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative Chairmanship.

In case the current or future incumbent Presidency is, due to force majeure, unable to perform its duties and tasks as the Presidency, it will immediately inform the GB about the situation. The Trio

Presidency members (including the country unable to perform the Presidency duties) will propose to the GB possible solutions upon which GB decision shall be taken.

The incumbent EUSAIR Presidency proactively performs the coordination among NCs and PCs, supported by the Facility Point and in cooperation with the EC and facilitates decision-making and cooperation. Each EUSAIR Presidency should closely collaborate with the EUSAIR Youth Council (EYC), e.g. by inviting the EYC to EUSAIR Presidency-related events, giving the EYC an active role in such events, collecting EYC inputs on EUSAIR Presidency papers/declarations and actively involving the EYC in the EUSAIR Annual Forum.

The incumbent EUSAIR Presidency is in charge of hosting the EUSAIR Annual Forum, back-to-back with the EUSAIR ministerial meeting/Adriatic and Ionian Council where a ministerial declaration is to be adopted.

An annual forum is organised in May to support the EUSAIR. Its purposes are to communicate the work of the Strategy, its objectives and achievements to stakeholders, policymakers and a wider audience, to stimulate policy discussions, to share results and to provide stakeholders with a networking opportunity.

The Annual Forum takes place in the EUSAIR participating country in presidency and aims to attract key stakeholders and active partners of the EUSAIR from local, regional, national and EU level.

Based on previous experience, each EUSAIR Presidency shall prepare, together with the EGP projects as appropriate to their functions, a work plan on how to improve the implementation of the EUSAIR. Depending on its focus, this plan should be included in the agenda of at least one of the GB meetings. It shall be duly coordinated and aligned with the EUSAIR communication strategy to ensure coherence of messaging while engaging with the public.

The EUSAIR Presidency's priorities shall also ensure a good level of continuity from the past Presidencies as well as a response to the emerging challenges also securing the involvement of the future EUSAIR Presidencies (TRIO Presidency).

Each All Chairmanship/EUSAIR Presidency is invited to organise Annual Conferences of Parliamentarians of the Adriatic and Ionian Region during its term, to increase the outreach of the EUSAIR on the level of Parliaments/National assemblies.

In line with Council Conclusions each EUSAIR Presidency is also invited to organize participative exchange between EUSAIR implementers and regions, local authorities, civil society, research, business and youth organizations during the Annual Forum and beyond taking in consideration the availability of funds.

Since the EUSAIR Presidency overlaps with the All Presidency, and the All aims at supporting the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region, the All Presidency programme will provide specific insights on selected EUSAIR Presidency topics, promoting the know-how exchange among All members on specific topics through the All Round Tables. The All Permanent Secretariat will support the All-EUSAIR Presidency to implement them, with special attention to EU candidate EUSAIR participating countries.

2.7 The EUSAIR Youth Council (EYC)

The EUSAIR has a strong commitment to address the needs of the youth in the region, aligning closely with the objectives of the Strategy as a whole and the Improved Social Cohesion Pillar in particular.

Following the conclusions of the 17th EUSAIR Governing Board meeting (March/2022) and the adoption of the Tirana Declaration, which recognises the need for stronger involvement of Youth in the EUSAIR, the process to establish the EUSAIR Youth Council (EYC) started. The Youth Council Concept paper was drafted based on EUSAIR youth consultation results and discussions held in the EUSAIR Youth Consultation Task Force, participated by EUSAIR NCs and/or their delegates.

The EYC will be soon established based on the Concept paper (founding document) approved by the Governing Board. The Task Force is granted a mandate to continue with concrete actions to support the establishment and first operational functioning of the EUSAIR Youth Council.

EYC will be a platform for institutional involvement of young people (18-29 years) in all EUSAIR governance bodies to make ideas and viewpoints of young people heard and considered on a political and thematic level and to enable dynamic exchange and learning processes. Youth will have an active role in communicating, orienting and implementing EUSAIR.

As agreed by the EUSAIR participating countries, the Rules of Procedure of the EYC will be prepared by the first EYC under the guidance of the Task Force and afterwards endorsed by the Governing Board. As it will be made up of youth representing themselves as young citizens of the EUSAIR participating countries, the EUSAIR Youth Council will be an independent body representing the perspective of Youth of the Adriatic and Ionian region interacting with the EUSAIR Governing Board and the Thematic Steering Groups. The EYC will be granted a consultative status, operating for strengthening EUSAIR communication and contributing to implement EUSAIR priorities through activities and projects. The youth representatives are expected to voice opinions and recommendations regarding EUSAIR topics upon their choice and especially when dealing with youth-related themes.

TF will continue to support the EYC to the full function and remain a relevant body to monitor the involvement of the EYC and youth in general and report to the Governing Board.

2.8 Pillar Coordinators (PC)

Pillar Coordinators (PC) coordinate the work of the respective Thematic Steering Groups. Usually, for every Thematic Steering Group the Pillar coordination is shared between at least two coordinators, whenever feasible coming from two participating countries, one from an EU member state and one from a candidate country. Deputy Pillar Coordinators may be appointed as well. The procedure for appointing Pillar Coordinators is the same as for appointing TSG members. Deputies can be appointed as well.

Pillar Coordinators ensure an effective implementation of actions and activities included in the Action Plan under each Pillar, who work in consultation with the Commission, relevant EU agencies and regional bodies. This involves securing agreement on the Roadmap of Actions of the Pillars, including the timetable and the list of indicators for monitoring and evaluating progresses achieved, and ensuring close contacts between project promoters, programmes and funding sources. Regular reporting on annual basis is foreseen, including biennial reporting to EC. The Pillar coordination and monitoring activities will be supported by technical assistance provided by the Facility Point project. In

stakeholder engagement and funding through embedding in ESIF/IPA programmes (or other pre-accession programme), PCs will be supported by StEP project and in strategic implementation by SP4EUSAIR project. This work is transnational, inter-sectoral and inter-institutional.

Pillar Coordinators report on the activities performed and planned by their TSGs to the EUSAIR Governing Board, through an interactive and dynamic exchange of views.

Pillars' Leadership: The PCs represent very important and vital component of the Strategy. PCs and the TSG members represent the expertise in the respective sector and drive forward the overall process, identifying key areas for action and adopting the most suitable approaches to implement Actions. Having the overview of the sector and in accordance with the Action Plan they have to identify key processes leading to fulfilment of the Strategy's goals through different activities and through selecting how to best implement solutions, including use of potential proper funds.

The PCs represent the TSG and therefore they must ensure proper involvement and inclusion of all TSG participants. They are key facilitators of the Strategy and serve as a liaison between their TSGs, Governing Board and National Coordinators as well as stakeholders by offering a platform for exchanging and coordinating initiatives, policy processes and information/communication. They work – with the proper governance support - on the implementation of related Pillar Actions, in close contact with the EC and relevant EU agencies, relevant stakeholders at different territorial levels (international, European, national, regional, local) and of different background (governmental, inter-governmental, non-governmental, experts, researchers, intermediate bodies, civil society, financial instruments etc.), as listed in the Action Plan under each Pillar. Based on evidence, they lead the preparation of proposals for revisions of the Action Plan. They ensure proper follow up on agreed strategic guidelines provided to the Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs) by the GB and NCs.

The PCs shall ensure equal relevance, ownership, involvement and treatment towards all participating countries in the decision-making and operation of TSGs as well as transparency in the coordination and the leadership of the Pillar.

Pillar Coordinators, with the support of Facility Point project, shall organize at least 2 TSG meetings per Presidency year. The PCs shall inform the TSG members about the meetings in advance and allow sufficient time for the preparation for the active involvement at the meeting in compliance with the RoPs.

The horizontal and cross-cutting topics as defined in the Action Plan (Enlargement, Green Rural Development etc.) and in accordance with the identified need for their stronger address, must be taken into account in the implementation of the Pillars. To this end, appropriate involvement of TSGs' in horizontal working groups should be ensured. Pillar Coordinators ensure that horizontal and cross-cutting topics are appropriately integrated into actions and activities. Upon the decision of the GB, leading Coordinators could be established on horizontal and cross-cutting priorities and topics working groups upon necessity.

2.9 The Thematic Steering Groups (TSG)

Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs) drive the Action Plan implementation work under their respective Pillars. Generally, there is one Thematic Steering Group formed per Pillar apart from Pillar 2, where there are two TSGs, Transport and Energy TSG respectively, which work in close coordination while sharing methodologies and procedures.

TSGs are in charge of proposing and consolidating (among participating countries, stakeholders and EC) the priorities and Actions under their Pillar in the Action Plan. In cooperation with the National Coordinators, stakeholders and supported by the EGP, they are also in charge of Action Plan implementation, on all governance levels (macro-regional, national, regional and local). This is done through policy coordination and consolidation processes followed by operational implementation achieved by engagement of relevant managing authorities and stakeholder partnerships/networks.

Members of Thematic Steering Groups in cooperation with the National Coordinators cooperate with responsible authorities (including managing authorities and NIPACs) at the appropriate level (national, regional, local, etc). They also cooperate with members of other Thematic Steering Groups on the operational level to achieve synergies and complementarities.

The revised Action Plan is a 'rolling document', which implies that the Governing Board, National Coordinators and Thematic Steering Groups should remain attentive and adopt adequate actions if there is a need for adaptation. The Thematic Steering Groups assisted by the EGP will adopt the most suitable approaches to implement Actions and together with stakeholders bring added value to the region.

Based on results of monitoring and evaluation, EC reports and observed trends in the region, the Thematic Steering Groups may propose to the GB readjustments of existing Actions or even new Actions to be included to the Action Plan.

Governing Board provides common Rules of Procedure governing the Thematic Steering Groups. TSGs can propose possible amendments to be adopted by the GB.

TSG functions include:

- Making appropriate efforts to contribute to the implementation of the formulated Pillars priorities, objectives, actions, activities and indicator targets in the Action;
- Identifying Actions/activities/projects to be included in the Action Plan, ensuring that they comply with the Pillars' objectives and needs, including cross-cutting and horizontal topics, according to their possibilities. In this, possible funding source(s) should be identified as well;
- Preparing, monitoring and updating when necessary, the Roadmap of Actions of the Pillars (e.g. detailing commonly agreed milestones setting their deadlines, linking with related projects as well as to the results of thematic studies, tracking status of achievement etc.) where applicable and based on the Pillars needs;
- Following on agreed strategic guidelines provided to the Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs) by the GB and NCs.
- Identifying and engaging with relevant stakeholders on all governance levels, promoting Pillars' objectives and encouraging their active participation in the implementation of Actions;
- Ensuring linkages with the other Thematic Steering Groups whenever appropriate and based on the Pillars needs;

- Liaising with responsible (managing and/or programming) authorities/ National IPA Coordinators and contact points of EU programmes in EU and candidate countries whenever appropriate and based on the Pillars needs;
- With the support of the EC, liaising with relevant EU programmes managed directly by the Commission, international financial institutions, regional cooperation organisations, etc. whenever appropriate and based on the Pillars needs;
- Submitting to the GB policy proposals and recommendations for revisions of the Action Plan;
- Support the reporting and evaluation of the Strategy – e.g. they identify progress in Actions, achievement of indicator targets PCs and TSG members participate in networking activities with managing authorities, NIPACs and EU funding entities to promote embedding of the Strategy;
- TSGs shall duly take into consideration proposals of the stakeholders, submitted by the Pillar Representatives.

EGP projects assist TSG members in performing their functions, each project according to its assigned functions.

TSGs are the decision-making and executive bodies at Pillars' level regarding objectives, formats and emphases of cooperation and future developments. TSGs members are 'the expert drivers of the day-to-day implementation', who decide on the joint work and who provide advice and assistance.

The TSG members are representatives of the national and regional governments of the participating countries. TSG members should come from key ministries or authorities in the relevant field. The work of the TSGs is both transnational, inter-sectorial, inter-institutional and aiming at an effective embedding into the various national contexts.

TSGs members thus have a dual function: on the one hand, they ensure the transfer of EUSAIR topics from the Pillars to the national level/line ministries and, on the other hand, they bring national topics from the line ministries to the EUSAIR level regarding the needs of the Pillars.

TSGs members are appointed (upon the request of the NC to the ministry responsible for the certain policy/sector) and replaced in written form by their ministries and should have the mandate and the sufficient capability and resources to fulfil their tasks for the Strategy (e.g. to organise in-country consultations and express national positions, to take decisions and to vote in a TSG meeting). Appointments and replacements of TSG members are communicated to EUSAIR Facility Point via National Coordinators. TSG members should also have a good knowledge and awareness of their assigned tasks, especially those of their dual function as described above."

NCs shall inform the TSG members, within their mandate, about their roles and responsibilities, in line with the Governance Architecture Paper. In the same way Pillar Coordinators shall ensure towards TSG members the awareness of their roles and responsibilities within the respective TSG.

In addition to the standing members, limited number of representatives of key stakeholders (local authorities, non-ministerial/governmental and other stakeholders, MAs etc) may also attend the TSG meetings when deemed necessary as observers accompanying the nominated representative, upon invitation of the latter and with the approval of the TSG coordinator.

2.10 Pillars' sub-groups

Pillar Coordinators are in charge of setting up appropriate operational working structures, best suited to implement the actions, to agree on a work programme between the stakeholders involved and to trace progress achieved. For these tasks, Pillars' informal sub-groups may be established such as working groups, task forces or advisory bodies around sub-themes.

Upon necessity, the Governing Board could also establish Cross-Pillar working groups specially to encourage operational implementation and monitoring of horizontal and cross-cutting topics.

2.11 The European Commission (EC)

The EC plays a key role within the EUSAIR, as it does in the three other EU macro-regional strategies. DG REGIO provides strategic coordination and advice to the GB and NCs on the management and development of the Strategy and gives guidance to EUSAIR actors on prioritising strategic frameworks and policies. It also strives to ensure that the EUSAIR is duly taken into account in the design and implementation of all relevant EU policies and financial instruments, EC strategically supports the implementation of the EUSAIR in cooperation with the participating countries, Council and European Parliament.

DG REGIO actively pursues strategic coordination at policy level (Council, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee, other EC DGs, NCs) and seeks to better interlink and align the Strategy with programmes during programming and implementation (i.e. EU, national, regional, centrally managed funding instruments). DG REGIO actively promotes the embedding of the EUSAIR both at the strategic document level (e.g. Partnership Agreements, Operational Programmes etc.) and at operational level (for instance through practical advice and good examples). This is done, inter alia, by promoting continuous dialogue between EC actors (DG REGIO/NEAR state desk officers, desk officers from other DGs) and programme bodies (managing/programming authorities, Joint Secretariats, intermediate bodies).

Furthermore, DG REGIO promotes and facilitates the dialogue and involvement of stakeholders within the Adriatic and Ionian Region, within the EU (other DGs, programmes, platforms, and other stakeholders) and across macro-regional strategies – in thematic or procedural terms. This also comprises the exchange of information, good practices, lessons learned, and solutions perceived for triggering learning effects and for contributing to the streamlining of processes.

As it is the case for all MRS, DG REGIO is in charge of reporting to the other EU institutions (Council, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee) on the progress made in implementing the EUSAIR and the results achieved, including facilitating the bridging with relevant activities at EU-level, like e.g. by ESPON's MRS monitoring, etc.

For that purpose, every two years the EC publishes a report on the implementation of EU MRS to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, based on contributions given by the Strategies' key implementers (the first was published in 2016).

The EC participates in the EUSAIR strategic partnership and at meetings such as the GB, NCs, PCs technical meetings, and - as far as feasible - TSG meetings in its advisory and supportive role, encouraging participation/involvement of sectoral line DGs in the EUSAIR work.

To establish a stronger alignment of IPA programming framework and any future IPA strategic planning document with EUSAIR and ensure relevant role of the EUSAIR in the support to EU enlargement process, enhanced cooperation with DG NEAR and line DGs is crucial. Participation of DG NEAR will be sought through the EUSAIR network of NIPACs and IPA Interreg managing authorities. At the occasion of EUSAIR Annual Forum meeting dedicated to strategic planning and monitoring of the success of EUSAIR in support to EU enlargement will be organised among NCs and representatives of DG REGIO and DG NEAR.

Based on inputs from the participating countries (National Coordinators and Pillar Coordinators) the European Commission reports regularly to other EU institutions on the progress made in implementing the EUSAIR and on the results achieved. It also promotes coherence and mutual learning between the EUSAIR and other EU macro-regional strategies. For this purpose, every two years, the European Commission presents a report on the implementation of EU macro-regional strategies to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

2.12 EUSAIR governance support

The EUSAIR Facility Point Strategic Project for the 2014-2020 has been conceived as an instrument to promote and facilitate the implementation of the EUSAIR.

After 2023 the EUSAIR governance support structure was renamed into EUSAIR Governance Point and consists of three projects providing technical and content related assistance to the implementation of the EUSAIR Action Plan, including support to the Governing Board, National Coordinators, Thematic Steering Groups and Pillar Coordinators, and facilitate macro-regional (cross-pillar) actions, embedding and capacity building for EUSAIR stakeholders and key implementers.

The functions of the EUSAIR Governance Point projects identified by the EUSAIR Governing Board are as follows:

- 1) EUSAIR Facility Point. This project will ensure:
 - WP1 - Administrative and operational support to the EUSAIR governance meetings at all levels;
 - WP2 – Communication and Coordination;
 - WP3 - Support to decision making and capacity development of the implementers;
 - WP4 - Monitoring and evaluation of EUSAIR.
- 2) EUSAIR Stakeholders Point (StEP). This project will ensure:
 - WP1 - Improvement and management of the EUSAIR Stakeholders' Platform;
 - WP2 - Knowledge management;
 - WP3 - Stakeholders' involvement and engagement;
 - WP4 - Supporting the EUSAIR financial dialogue and the embedding into cohesion programmes;
 - WP5 - Supporting the EUSAIR Embedding into IPA III Programmes.

- 3) EUSAIR strategic implementation (SP4EUSAIR). This project will ensure:
- WP1 - Development of strategic implementation formats;
 - WP2 - Support to implementation of strategic implementation formats;
 - WP3 - Capitalization and performance assessment.

Lead partners of the EGP projects ensure transparent provision of macro-regional functions following macro-regional objectives, decisions agreed by EUSAIR governance bodies and common macro-regional interests. The Joint coordination mechanism will be established in the form of a Joint Steering Committee comprising the Lead Partners (LPs) of the EGP projects. Regular exchanges are planned quarterly. Within the mechanism, annual planning will be ensured with an annual work plan delivered and agreed by the LPs which will include all the horizontal functions. The three projects will agree on the methodology of operation and on how each project interacts with governance structures in performing its functions in corresponding guidelines document.

3. IPA ADRION

ADRION Programme, originating during the programming period 2014-2020 to support the implementation of the EUSAIR and its successor, Interreg IPA ADRION 2021-2027 programme, is considered as one of key partners for implementing EUSAIR objectives. The Programme was developed in a way to represent a significant part of potential financing source for the projects of EUSAIR interest.

Furthermore, IPA ADRION programme area is geographically fully aligned with EUSAIR area and Programme specific objectives as selected in 2022 match then with the original four EUSAIR Pillars, to which the fifth social pillar has recently been added.

IPA ADRION primarily supports the implementation of the EUSAIR and is aligned with the macro-regional flagships in specific objectives and proposed related types of actions.

At least 80% of the IPA ADRION budget, in accordance with art. 15.3 of ETC Regulation, shall contribute to the objectives of the EUSAIR.

Permanent collaboration between IPA ADRION and the EUSAIR is enhanced by membership of the IPA ADRION Managing Authority in the EUSAIR Governing Board as well as the participation of the Programme at EUSAIR Annual Forum.

Additionally, through the Interreg Specific Objective ISO1, IPA ADRION shall further continue supporting the EUSAIR governance and implementation through the three strategic projects (cf. 2.6. EUSAIR governance support for further details) in charge of implementing the functions identified by the EUSAIR GB.

The document was prepared under the Croatian and Hellenic EUSAIR Presidencies 2023/2024.

October 2024