**PILLAR 5: Improved Social Cohesion**

**ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT FOR YEAR 2024 OF THE EUSAIR TSG5**

**IMPROVED SOCIAL COHESION**

**Prepared by EUSAIR Pillar 5 Coordinators, Croatian Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy**

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| ***Background:***  Considering the special status of Pillar 5 and the fact that the adoption of the EUSAIR Action Plan is pending this Report was made by Croatian Ministry of Labor, Pension System, Family and Social policy (MLPSFSP) as the Pillar 5 coordinator.  ***General remarks:***  The following table of content and the template itself show the sections that should be completed (none of them should be left blank or deleted from the report). If necessary and justified, additional (sub) sections could be added.  The report shall not exceed a maximum number of **5 pages (*Arial 12 or equivalent*).**  Additionally, please note the following:   * The information should be well-structured within each of the sections and should be synthetic and to the point, addressing the content and not aiming for quantity. * Do not include information which could be found elsewhere, e.g. minutes of the meetings or list of TSG members. * The language should be direct and clear. Using acronyms, jargon or internal technicalities is not recommended. * Refer to factual information and be as concrete as possible. Vague and general comments (e.g. "the situation is progressing favourably and quite rapidly") without justification should be avoided. * Any other important information (monitoring reports etc.) should be added as annexes. |

**TSG PROCESS (GOVERNANCE)**

At the 8th EUSAIR Annual Forum in Sarajevo, on May 24, the Sarajevo Declaration was adopted at the ministerial meeting, in which the agreement on the establishment of the Social Pillar as the 5th Pillar of EUSAIR was welcomed.

Agreement on establishing Pillar 5 was achieved at the GB meeting in October 2023. and TSG5 members were appointed during that year but official actions of the TSG5 will start after adoption of the new Action Plan.

In February 2024. Governing Board approved Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as Pillar Coordinators of *Pillar 5* *Improved Social Cohesion* and all conditions for the start of regular work in TSG 5 were completed.

With the introduction of the Pillar 5, the Strategy corresponds more strongly with the fourth policy objective of the Eu Cohesion Policy: "a more social and inclusive Europe".

In May at the Annual forum in Šibenik, the first informal meeting was held, aiming to briefly introduce the members of the TSG 5, and the first formal meeting was held in Zagreb, on 5th December, where three EU countries and three non-EU countries participated.

1. **ACTION PLAN**

* According to the Action Plan, the topics and actions of the Pillar 5 are:

1. **Youth Engagement and Employment** (Further development of the Pillar Improved Social Cohesion, Promoting empowerment and involvement of youth and Boosting Youth Employment)
2. **Promoting Skills Acquisition for Future Labor Markets** (Harmonization of skills policies, Promoting employement opportunities through upskilling/reskilling for disadvantaged groups of the labour market
3. **Decent Work and Gender Equality** (Enhance EUSAIR cooperation and exchange of best practices on Gender Equality and Quality of Employment)
4. **Social Innovations** (Adriatic Ionian Ecosystem for social innovation)

* The draft of the revised Action Plan was sent to the European Commission (DG REGIO) for its opinion and the adoption of the Action Plan is expected in the first half of 2025.

1. **22nd GOVERNING BOARD MEETING – Zagreb, February 2024.**

* Governing Board approved Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as Pillar Coordinators of Pillar 5 Improved Social Cohesion
* With the Governing Board approval of Pillar 5 coordinators, all conditions for the start of regular work in TSG 5 were completed and costs related to the support of work of Pillar 5 could be declared.

1. **ANNUAL FORUM – Šibenik, May 2024.**

* Conclusions for the Pillar V *Improved Social Cohesion* session:

1. Harmonize the Adriatic-Ionian region with the strategies and policies of the European Union aimed at improving social cohesion, in accordance with the broader framework of green and digital transition.
2. Through the activities foreseen in the 5th Pillar, it is intended to respond to identified challenges, considering the importance of preserving and promoting the European social model.
3. For the candidate countries that are working towards membership, this new pillar will give further opportunities to mutually learn and exchange on social rights, to be stronger linked to the European “social” acquis, to the European pillar of social rights.
4. **23rd GB MEETING – Bruxelles, October 2024.**

* Conclusions for the *Pillar 5 Improved Social Cohesion* Pillar

1. Specific criteria for strategic project selection have yet to be developed and definition of strategic and cross-pillar projects has yet to be established.
2. Pillar Coordination from Croatia reported that Bosnia and Herzegovina officially appointed Pillar Co-Coordinator and that the first informal meeting of TSG 5 took place during the Annual Forum in Šibenik to discuss future steps.
3. Slovenia made a proposal of two flagship projects that will be discussed at the first TSG 5 meeting in December 2024.
4. Future steps of TSG 5 include the development of Rules of Procedure and the start of the implementation of the activities outlined in the Action Plan.
5. **1st Membership and Capacity Building Meeting of the EUSAIR Youth Council – Dubrovnik, November 2024**

* Pillar Coordinator presented Pillar 5, its Action plan and potential Flagships and participated in the discussion about the issues members find to be important from youth perspective in the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

1. **1st Meeting of the Thematic Steering Group 5 – Zagreb, December 2024**

* The meeting was attended by the representatives of TSG5 members, 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
* Croatian Pillar 5 coordinator presented Pillar 5 Action plan, its topics and activities planned. 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.
* EC gave report on activities from the last GB meeting and updated information on EC activities.
* 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 that have been received from Slovenia were presented at the meeting.
* TSG members were asked to reflect on potential project ideas that could be developed for future Interreg calls and potential topics for the studies should be delivered.
* The next TSG meeting was scheduled for April 2025.

**MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS**

* Organization of the first official TSG5 meeting

**MAIN ISSUES/CHALLENGES ENCOUNTRED**

* Administrative incapacity
* Prolongation in adoption of the new Action Plan
* Active involvement of TSG members

**THE WORK AHEAD**

* TSG5 will actively participate at the 10th EUSAIR Forum in Greece
* Participating capacity building workshop that will be organized within the SP4EUSAIR project. The workshop will focus on identifying relevant funding opportunities for topics related to Pillar 5

**In the year, 2025 TSG5 will mainly focus on:**

* Organization of the second TSG5 meeting – adoption of the Rules of procedure and planning future activities
* Determination of Flagship projects for Pillar 5
* Identifying common social policies among TSG5 member countries
* Establishing cooperation among TSG5 members and with other Pillars
* Contribution to the EUSAIR Workshop on *Promoting policies and practices for skills in the macroregion*, which will be held in Athens, Greece
* Further implementation of activities for the candidate countries regarding European pillar of social rights
* Cooperation with Youth Council and MA networks

**ANNEX 1**

**ATTENDANCE AT TSG 5 MEETINGS IN REPORTING YEAR 2024**

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| **Pillar 5.** | **1st Meeting of the Thematic Steering Group (TSG) for Pillar 5 – Improved social cohesion** |
| ***05th December 2024, Zagreb*** |
| **EU Country** |  |
| CROATIA | 12 |
| GREECE | 1 |
| ITALY | 0 |
| SLOVENIA | 3 |
| **Non-EU Countries** |  |
| ALBANIA | 0 |
| BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA | 1 |
| MONTENEGRO | 3 |
| SERBIA | 1 |
| NORTH MACEDONIA | 0 |
| YOUTH COUNCIL | 2 |
| **TOTAL** | **23** |

**ANNEX 2**

**MACRO-REGIONAL PROJECT/MEASURES**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Project/measure title** | **Main activities**  *Short description of the project/measure, what are the objectives, added value for the EUSAIR, envisioned period…* | **Mono / *Cross Pillar project -****Indicate, if The strategic project has a mono or cross pillar approach, indicate the relevant pillar(s)* | **Status**  *Describe the status of the project/measure (e.g. project idea/concept, mature project ready for implementation, project under implementation or completed, etc.)* | **Involvement of EUSAIR countries** | **(Targeted) funding sources** |
| n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
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**ANNEX3**

**PILLAR / TSG EVENTS AT NATIONAL OR MACRO-REGIONAL LEVEL IN THE REPORTING PERIOD**

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| **Event / County / National or Macro-regional** | **Short description** | **Participants *(what kind of participants)*** | **Main outputs** |
| ANNUAL FORUM organized in  Šibenik, Croatia, May 2024. | Forum acknowledged the addition of a new fifth Pillar of cooperation to the EUSAIR portfolio, which aims at further aligning the Adriatic-Ionian Region with the EU strategies and policies.  Pillar V session Stronger Social Cohesion - a response to the challenges of the future was held with the special reference to how Adriatic and Ionian macro-region can be strengthened through mainstream funds, how to connect the region and engage young people on the topics covered by Pillar 5. | Krisela Hackaj, Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI), a Think Tank from Tirana, Albania, as a non-profit and non-governmental organization.  Coordinators of thematic pillar 5 from Croatian Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, Directorate for management of EU operational programmes  Estelle Roger, European Commission  Forum participants interested in Pillar5 topics | Pillar 5 aims at improving social cohesion, in accordance with the broader framework of green and digital transition. Its activities intend to respond to identified challenges, considering the importance of preserving and promoting the European social model. For the candidate countries that are working towards membership, this new pillar will give further opportunities to mutually learn and exchange on social rights, to be stronger linked to the European “social” acquis, to the European pillar of social rights. |
| 1st Membership and Capacity Building Meeting of the EUSAIR Youth Council – Dubrovnik, November 2024 | Pillar Coordinator presented Pillar 5, its Action plan and potential Flagships and participated in the discussion about the issues members find to be important from youth perspective in the Adriatic and Ionian Region. Together they explored potential solutions to regional challenges and possible actions within Pillar 5. | All TSG’s coordinators; members of the EUSAIR Youth Council; representatives of Croatian National Coordinators, FP LP from Slovenia | It was concluded that if young people's challenges are similar across the Adriatic-Ionian region, they should be addressed at that level together with Youth Council as an independent advisory body. |
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