

**Action Plan revision**

**2nd Revision Working group meeting**

**Proposal of the Action Plan structure**

Athens, 24 February 2023

http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu

EUSAIR FACILITY POINT Project Partners: Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (Slovenia) | State Agency for Strategic Planning and Aid Coordination (Albania) |

Directorate for European Integration of Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina | Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Croatia | Special Service for Strategy, Planning and

Evaluation (EYSSA), National Coordination Authority of the NSRF, Ministry of Development and Investments (Greece) | Marche Region - Innovation and International Cooperation Unit (Italy) |

Ministry of European Affairs (Montenegro) | Ministry of European Integration Government of the Republic of Serbia | Municipality of Izola (Slovenia)

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EUSAIR FACILITY POINT Project Partners: Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (Slovenia) | Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of Republic of Albania |

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Evaluation (EYSSA), National Coordination Authority of the NSRF, Ministry of Economy and Development (Greece) | Marche Region - Integrated Planning, International

Activities, Trade, Cooperation (Italy) | Ministry of European Affairs (Montenegro) | Ministry of European Integration Government of the Republic of Serbia | Municipality of Izola (Slovenia)

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* 1. Introduction

Proposal for the EUSAIR Action Plan structure was developed based on the comments received on the Action Plan revision Discussion Paper (v. December 2022).

The Discussion Paper was prepared for the 1st Revision Working Group meeting held in Zagreb on 9December 2022. At that meeting it was agreed that countries need more time to examine the document, therefore they were invited to provide comments until the end of January 2023. Within that deadline comments were received from Croatia, Greece, Italy, North Macedonia and Slovenia.

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| Based on the feedback received the structure of the Action Plan should be upgraded compared to the 2014 Action Plan. **The main reason for the structure upgrade is for the Action Plan to better accommodate the necessity for a more focused, streamlined and implementation oriented approach.** In practice this means to set up limited number of feasible common targets with timeline, milestones, key implementers, and focus on actions that lead to their achievement. |

As a result of received comments the EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner developed this proposal on the Action Plan structure to be **fine-tuned and agreed at the 2nd Revision Working Group meeting** **to the extent to allow consolidation and detailing of the Action Plan content in TSG spring and/or revision dedicated meetings**, as planned in the Background document with Roadmap v.5.

## Action Plan as a “rolling document”

Action Plan revision timeline

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| Based on the feedback received, **operationally the Action Plan revisions should be aligned with the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) programming**, as also suggested by the EUSAIR Evaluation Report.  |

The aim should be, as demonstrated by other MRSs to revise the Action Plan in time for inclusion of the MRS priorities/actions into the programmes of the upcoming MFF period. The current Action Plan revision is the first for EUSAIR and we can assume that the future revisions will be able to build on the current experiences and will be therefore more efficient. Also, if the revision timeframe is clear, the TSGs can work on readjusting the actions to any newly arisen circumstances well before the actual revision takes place.

**One year should be enough for the Action Plan revision process implementation**, additional time has to be considered for the EC to draw up the Staff Working Document and for its endorsement.

**The next Action Plan revision should be carried out in 2027, to have the endorsed document in early 2028 at the latest.**

### Action Plan time-horizon

The timeframe of planning the targets per Topics should also be set, because even though the Action Plan is operationally aligned with the MFF programming, it can contribute to the targets set beyond the end of a certain MFF period. This is especially true for those thematic fields where EU policies are setting targets for mid-term and long-term future. For example climate or energy policies and targets are set for 2030 and 2050.

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| Proposal is to set the same time horizon for targets of all Topics, which would be 2030 to align them with EU policies.  |

### Action Plan flexibility

Based on the feedback received TSGs would need to periodically review the planned Actions based on regular monitoring and evaluation of Pillars/Topics and observed macro-regional trends in the fields covered by Pillars/Topics.

TSGs should not wait for the revision process to evaluate their Actions, to develop them further or refocus them if necessary (for example, the need to repurpose LNG infrastructure much earlier than anticipated due to Russia-Ukraine conflict). Italy even proposes to add new actions, if necessary.

In what way should this be done? For sure such refocus/addition should be initiated and agreed by the TSGs and then proposed to NCs. The manner in which to communicate these kind of revisions would need to be defined in this case (for example through specific Action Plans for Pillars, as suggested by Slovenia and through dedicated Pillar/Sub-Groups pages on the website).

## Who provides descriptions for the Action Plan (Who is the pen-holder)

This was not mentioned in the discussion paper, but was raised as a question by several countries.

TSGs should agree on the descriptions. Based on inputs received from the participating countries through the Revision Action Plan Questionnaires the Facility Point Lead Partner will prepare some proposals to be used in the moderated discussion at the TSG meetings. All main elements of the chapters that will be agreed at the Revision Working Group meeting will need to be agreed at the Spring 2023 TSG meetings.

In this way we will ensure the same methodology is followed in all Pillars and that the consolidation of the content is achieved through active involvement of all 10 participating countries. Based on the discussion in the TSGs first descriptions of the Pillars will be prepared by the Facility Point Lead Partner and sent to Pillar Coordinators for review. Consolidated version will be shared with TSG members, members of the Revision Working Group, National Coordinators and the European Commission for any further commenting/fine-tuning. This step is foreseen for May/June 2023. At this point it would also make sense to carry out any possible national consultations if foreseen and the second round of public consultation.

After a couple of feedback-rounds the draft Action Plan should be ready for the approval of the Governing Board in Autumn 2023.

## Purpose of the Action Plan

From the comments that we received there seems to be a concern that the Action Plan is to programme-like. The idea behind the proposed structure is to establish the link between the policy (strategy) and implementation which on one hand happens through the activities of the TSGs and through projects. The descriptions that will be provided in the Pillars and Topics set the policy objectives to address the challenges in the region. The action part of the Action Plan describes in which way this will be achieved through concrete actions. In the actions TSGs define which activities will be implemented by the implementers in cooperation with the stakeholders and by the stakeholders to achieve the targets set for the Topic. Strategic projects are just one of the outputs of this process.

## Moving the focus from Pillars to Topics

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| Based on the feedback received **Pillars, Topics and Actions** should remain. Pillars as a very general level should be more briefly described, while **more focus in the Action Plan should be put on describing the Topics**.  |

Chapters to be defined for description of each Pillar:

**General objective -** defines the **main target, the main change** the EUSAIR implementers would like to achieve in the **Adriatic-Ionian territory** **until 2030** through the Action Plan **in the thematic area** of the Pillar.

**Main characteristic** (2-3 sentences) - of the Adriatic-Ionian Region in the thematic area of the Pillar.

**Main challenge(s) to be addressed** (2-3 sentences) – what are the main challenges (maximum 3) in the Adriatic-Ionian Region as regards the thematic area of the Pillar.

**Main approach** (2-3 sentences) – in what way the Strategy intends to address the main challenge to achieve the set target/change.

## Chapters to define Topics

**DEFINITION:**

TOPICS represent the main areas where the macro-regional strategy can contribute to improvements. For each topic, the Action Plan will present the issue and indicate what particular contribution it will bring. Each topic has to be considered with other policy fields. The Strategy encourages a horizontal approach highlighting interdependence between its Pillars. In practice this means that Topics/actions planned in one Pillar should not contradict with the Topics/actions of the other Pillar, rather complementary and synergetic effects should be sought for the benefit of the territory.

**CHAPTERS**

**Specific objectives** (up to 3)– what change key implementers aspire to achieve through EUSAIR in the region regarding the challenges of the Topic, setting also the main qualitative targets (EUSAIR is not ready to set realistic and evidence based quantitative targets without data collected on macro-regional level and monitored over time).

**Main challenges/opportunities –** what are the main challenges/opportunities **in the Adriatic-Ionian Region (AIR)** to be **addressed by the EUSAIR** and what **main approach** should be taken (reference to the Actions described in the next chapter).

**Policy framework** – there seems to be an agreement as regards the inclusion of policies, initiatives, and reference to EU Cohesion Policy provisions (policy objectives, specific policy objectives) and EU Enlargement provisions.

**Key stakeholders** to be engaged in the implementation.

## Chapters to define Actions

There should be a clear definition of Actions and a clear commitment by the EUSAIR implementing bodies to support their implementation – **no indicative only agreed Actions.**

**DEFINITION**

ACTION is the intervention which countries and stakeholders carry out in order to address the set objectives and targets. It can be a new approach, an increased coordination in policy making, policy review, support to a process already engaged, a networking initiative, etc. An action may not necessarily require financing. All actions should be understood without prejudice to existing EU competences and requirements of the EU acquis.

**CRITERIA**

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| Criteria for identification of actions were listed in the Action Plan and are to be **used as guidance to TSGs when formulating the actions**. We would suggest **to skip these criteria in the Action Plan itself**. There should be an agreement reached on **definition of actions and the main criteria** they have to follow to have a more harmonised approach towards actions in all Pillars and assure their implementation orientation.  |

For the identification of actions to be included in the AP, the criteria taken into account by the TSGs should be the following:

* Actions should address identified challenges, meeting well-substantiated needs and be widely supported. The need for the action or project concerned should have been clearly expressed by countries, regions and stakeholders or Commission’s services. The proposals have been thoroughly discussed with these partners since their support is crucial during the implementation phase. Which policies the actions should reinforce is listed under each Topic.
* Their scope or impact should be transnational, if not macro-regional. Most actions and projects having an impact at the macro-regional scale will involve several countries who wish to cooperate and coordinate their efforts. If, however, a national/regional project has a direct impact on (i.e. is for the benefit of) the macro-region (e.g. the construction of a waste water treatment plant that improves the water quality of rivers or extension of a port to buttress a macro-regional transport networks), it could also be included.
* The impact of the action should ideally be articulated in terms of an impact indicator which could be evaluated over time. Consideration should be given to the data which will need to be gathered in order to evaluate the impact (including definition of the baseline situation). To contribute to this end, an inventory of data already available, including their quality, should be established. Actions and projects spanning national boundaries with a view to implementing the Strategy should furthermore complement each other.
* For each action outputs and results shall be planned in as far as possible. In the description of the actions it is recommended not to only list the planned activities but also what is the goal of these activities, the outcome, output of these activities. This will help the TSGs to be concrete and to have a clear understanding of what they would like to achieve through a certain activity.
* Actions are planned to contribute to the set objectives/targets (of the Topic) through activities described under each action. The format of the activities to be implemented under each action is decided to best suit the needs of the action. Activities under an action can be – but are not limited to – flagships, projects (single or grouped in clusters), processes, networks or platforms.
* Actions should be realistic and credible. Projects should be feasible (technically and financially) and there should be overall agreement between countries, stakeholders and the Commission of their worth. In particular, the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of a project should be established and a realistic source of funding should be identified. Confirming the consistency of a project with the Action Plan does not per se guarantee funding,
* They should pay attention to the cross-cutting aspects identified in the Communication, further developed in this Action Plan.
* They should be coherent and mutually supportive. While mainly relating to one particular pillar, each action or project must take fully into account possible impacts on actions and projects carried out under other pillars. Actions and projects undertaken under the different pillars must thus be compatible with each other and create win-win solutions. For example, transport projects or energy efficiency initiatives should not jeopardise achievement of environmental targets, such as air quality, and should preferably contribute to achieving such targets.
* Introduction of “project chains” and “project to policy loop” concepts[[1]](#footnote-1), whereas ‘Project chain’ is a process where several operations (projects) are interlinked within one priority, policy, pillar, action of the MRS. This is how the flagships should work, it should not be just one project that shall realise a certain flagship, there might be a number of projects-operations (some cross-border, some only national) through which the flagship will be implemented. Also successful projects are capitalised in more projects that might spread the project to a different territory or generate further investments or projects, each dealing with one aspect of the original project etc.

‘Project– to policy loop’ is a process where a link between a macro-regional process carried out through projects and policy implementation or development is ensured. In this context flagship projects can initiate policy discussion/change as well as be an outcome of it. This is another logic behind the flagships and strategic projects. Flagships gather all possible stakeholders in a long-term process of co-creation of both policy and action. Flagships can be a result of a bottom up or a top-down approach, where protagonists in the bottom-up approach are the stakeholders and protagonists of the top-down approach are the EUSAIR key implementers.

**NUMBER OF ACTIONS**

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| Based on the feedback received there seems to be **no agreement on whether the number of actions should be limited or not.** The proposal could be to give recommendation to the TSGs to try and limit themselves on those actions with the highest priority for the participating countries. Revision Working Group could also decide to recommend the number of actions for the TSGs to follow if possible.  |

* **Greece and Croatia** agree to define a limitation for the number of Actions per topic (to encourage TSGs to focus on those actions with the highest potential for impact, to streamline the work of TSGs, to avoid a large number of project-like actions and to focus rather on systemic, management approach). For example EUSBSR[[2]](#footnote-2) has 2-4 Actions defined for each Policy area.
* **Italy** disagrees, the choice of actions should be consistent with the criteria adopted without limiting the TSGs how many actions are needed to achieve the objectives.

**OUTPUTS, RESULTS, INDICATORS**

Thorough this discussion paper we are striving to agree on the logic and structure of the Action Plan to be followed when drafting the Action Plan. We are now at a different point of implementation than we were in 2014. We should be ambitious and at least strive for actions that are clearly defined with activities and outputs/results.

There are different views as regards whether indicators should be set or just targets and what indicator system should we use:

* **Greece** advocates for the use of ESIF indicators in as far as possible.
* **Italy** supports the development of an indicator system for which ESIF indicators and indicators of other EU funded programmes should be the inspiration source, but an adequate level of flexibility is needed as well.
* **Slovenia** is not in favour of the use of ESIF indicators. Slovenia is advocating for a realistic and measurable progress, following the example of EUSDR[[3]](#footnote-3).

As follows from the EUSAIR Evaluation a clear indicator system shall be developed to set realistic targets and monitoring basis.

**We have to understand that in order to monitor the implementation of the Action Plan the indicators will have to be developed in any case.** It would be beneficial if these indicators are agreed in the TSGs already at the time of the development of the Action Plan and planning of the actions. We should not confuse the indicator targets with the targets that are defined for each Topic. The targets in the Topics set the level of the change the EUSAIR implementers aspire to achieve through the implementation of the actions, however the actions should be more concrete.

EUSDR example: Achieve a notable improvement of the fairway conditions and shore side infrastructure along the Danube and its navigable tributaries, confirmed by the waterway users by means of an annual user survey.

To comment on the EUSDR example, it actually includes the result (improvement of the fairway conditions and shore side infrastructure) and measurement method (annual survey among waterway users) as well as the target (notable improvement). In this case the target is not quantitative but qualitative.

The indicators planned under the actions measure if the outputs and results planned in the Action Plan were realized by the implementers and stakeholders and to what extent. For example, if a TSG agrees to encourage the establishment of an AIR network of some sort, the indicator would be the number of networks established. Or if an EUSAIR example is taken, the number of AIR Transport Masterplans developed could be another indicator, obviously the target would be 1, but for the next period the indicator could be the number of AIR Transport Masterplans updated. Also a number of flagships or projects developed could be another example of an indicator. Another example, large infrastructure projects are not decided on the level of EUSAIR, EUSAIR can only encourage their inclusion in the future investment plans (EU, WBG). In this case the result would be the number of infrastructure projects included in the investment plans.

**So EUSAIR is ready for quantitative indicators to some extent, but the qualitative indicators could be planned as well.** In either way these indicators could be described in a table form as suggested:

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| Indicator title | Value | Baseline/year | Target/deadline | Data source |

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| **No agreement yet, needs to be discussed and decided at this WG meeting in order to continue the work in TSGs.**  |

**CHAPTERS**

**Title of the action**

**Description of activities** - following the agreed criteria listed above.

**Indicators** – the system to be agreed.

**List of the flagships and strategic projects** under implementation, to build on the work done, and enhance the results achieved. Only financed projects.

It would be good to have a dedicated page at the website per Pillar/Sub-Group where developments in the Pillar/Topic would be communicated. For example, new flagships under implementation or new strategic projects developed in order to provide an up-to-date status in each Pillar/Sub-Group.

## Horisontal/cross-cutting topics/issues

**The issue of cross-cutting topics will be addressed in the discussion paper prepared for the discussion on the thematic elements of the Action Plan** (to be sent on Monday, 20 February).

## Governance considerations

In this chapter we are only addressing the question whether to address the governance revision in the revision of the Action Plan or not.

Greece: Governance not to be described in the Action Plan and should not be the task of the Action Plan revision.

Croatia: Governance to be described in the Strategy (EC COM).

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| * Could the countries agree that the governance should not be described in the Action Plan?
* The description of Governance in the Strategy should remain very general, as it is now, only the main governance structures and their tasks/relations.
* Based on the feedback received the governance revision is necessary as well, considering the number of suggestions collected.
* Through the revision of the Action Plan these suggestions and country positions should be collected, but tackled separately. When? After the main activities of the Action Plan revision are completed not to overburden ourselves?
* Even if the countries decide to postpone the governance revision some governance issues will have to be dealt with as a consequence to the revised Action Plan, for example, possible establishment of a new TSG or TSG subgroup.
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**Prepared by EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner:**





1. How do macro-regional strategies deliver: workflows, processes and approaches (Interact 2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The EU Strategy for the Danube Region [↑](#footnote-ref-3)