

**Action Plan revision**

**1st Revision Working group meeting**

**Discussion paper**

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http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu

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## Working Group Discussion paper

This document was developed by the EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner as a starting point for discussion in the EUSAIR Action Plan revision Working group.

The aim of the document is to start the discussion on the structure of the Action Plan and some general governance issues, since the inputs from countries on the content are still in the process. This document and primarily the results of the discussion at the meeting will serve as guidance for preparation of more consolidated proposals, which will form the ground for taking decisions at NC/GB meeting in March 2023.

Further details on the revision process and methodology are described in the Background document with Roadmap v4.0.

## Structure of the Action Plan

The structure of the future Action Plan needs to be defined to provide TSGs with basic framework within which they will detail the content of their Pillars during the spring meetings, as planned in the Background document with Roadmap v.4.

The basis for the main questions to be tackled as regards the structure of the Action Plan stem already from the discussions with the National Coordinators in spring 2022.As suggested by the National Coordinators, we also addressed them to TSGs, however not many comments were received.

To be more productive we formed proposals already as starting points of discussion and to collect feedback from the Working Group on how to proceed.

We have pursued an Implementation-oriented approach, considered conclusions of the EUSAIR Evaluation and built on the 2014 Action Plan and existing work done through the flagships process.

### Action Plan as a “rolling document”

This is written in the Action Plan, but what does it mean?

New challenges arise, major changes and shifts occur making the actions planned beforehand ineffective or inadequate or even a wasted effort. It is hard to plan for the future, which by definition is unknown. Detecting trends does help, but is problematic, since it supports “business as usual” and still does not help with major changes.

* Resilient actions are needed but also flexibility – the possibility to reshape existing actions and propose new ones not in the Action Plan document, but through its implementation.
* Furthermore Actions should be evaluated on a regular basis against the actual situation in the region (observed through indicators through time).
* In practice there could be TSG dedicated pages developed at the EUSAIR website, where the status of the actions would be described and updated – what are the activities, strategic projects, flagships - there these revisions of Actions could be communicated. This could also serve as a good bridge towards the next cycle of the Action Plan revision, not starting from scratch.
* Procedure on how and under what conditions these minor adjustments of the Action Plan could be made should be defined, for example, initiated by TSGs on the basis of some study, report, evidence, agreed by TSG members and proposed to GB with justification.
* Could this be the approach to follow?

### Moving the focus from Pillars to Topics

Rationale: a more focused/implementation approach is needed, as noted by EUSAIR Evaluation report.

2014 EUSAIR Action Plan structure

**Chapters per PILLAR:**

**General objective**

Short description of main challenge and how it will be addressed.

**Specific objectives (related to topics)**

Further specification of challenges and needs

**Support of the Pillar for Europe 2020 Strategy**

**Links with other Pillars**

**Cross-cutting issues** – how are they relevant/addressed by the Pillar

**Chapters per TOPIC:**

**Presentation of the issue**

Challenges for the specific topic and introduction of actions

**Adriatic-Ionian specifics**

Description of latest developments in cooperation initiatives (projects, EU, UN initiatives, policies)

Observations:

* lacking harmonised approach – lacking consistency between descriptions, different type and level of information is provided in the same chapters of different Pillars
* challenges, objectives, needs, approach described several times in different chapters – focus is lost
* more condensed ways of presenting information is needed to quickly convey the main messages

Looking at other MRSs

Pillars only as umbrella thematic policy areas/objectives, content is defined per Action Group/Policy Area/Priority Areas.

Proposals:

* We propose to define **general objective for each pillar in terms of what is the main target**, the main change the EUSAIR implementers would like to achieve in the future (2030 or beyond?) through the Action Plan in certain thematic area. With only short description provided explaining the objective: **main characteristic, main challenge and main approach** (2-3 sentences for each)**.**
* Through the general objective and short explanations, we would build on the work done so far and update the objective to align it with relevant EU policies and needs of the region.
* These objectives and descriptions would need to be prepared in cooperation with Pillar Coordinators, their thematic experts and shared with National coordinators and relevant TSG members to gather feedback.
* **More detailed descriptions are then only provided per Topic.**
	+ Could this be approach to follow?

### Chapters to define Topics

Rationale: a more focused/implementation approach is needed, as noted by EUSAIR Evaluation report.

 2014 EUSAIR Action Plan

**DEFINITION:**

*TOPICS represent the main areas where the macro-regional strategy can contribute to improvements (either through tackling the main challenges or through seizing the main opportunities). For each topic, the Action Plan will present the issue and indicate what particular contribution it will bring. ~~Examples: To support competitiveness of enterprises, etc.~~ Each topic has to be considered with other policy fields. The Strategy encourages a horizontal approach highlighting interdependence between its four pillars. For example, climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as transition to a low-carbon economy have an impact on transport, energy, tourism, and other policies whilst the latter also have an impact on climate change. ~~Accordingly, for each topic, involvement of bodies and institutions representing other policy fields is required.~~ =>* This was not a practice so far. We suggest to leave this sentence out.

**Chapters per TOPIC:**

**Presentation of the issue**

Challenges for the specific topic and introduction of actions

**Adriatic-Ionian specifics**

Description of latest developments in cooperation initiatives (projects, EU, UN initiatives, policies)

Observations:

* Policy and funding framework is missing
* Often there is no clear difference between the two chapters (presentation of the issue and Adriatic-Ionian specifics)

Looking at other MRSs

All Action Plans have three main levels defined;

1. Pillars/Objectives/Thematic Areas/Pillars
2. Priority Areas/Policy Areas/Action Groups/Topics
3. Actions

Defining the second level helps to streamline the “topics” as intervention areas, sets them in a **strategic context and links them to relevant policies and accompanying funding programmes** (EUSBSR, EUSDR). All MRSs define **specific objectives** per each topic and EUSALP also the **mission**. **How the key stakeholders shall be involved** (EUSBSR) is also foreseen to draw the attention to the way the action plan should be implemented: through and with stakeholders. EUSBSR also defines **key areas of achievement** which is a good way to promote achievements of the Strategy, highlight good practices and direct towards capitalization of existing knowledge.

This would also mean that the Topics would need to be better distinguished and defined. Some considerations related to EUSAIR: should there be subtopics (Pillar 3) or topics which are very interrelated and it is hard to distinguish between them (Pillar 4)?

Proposals:

* **Specific objectives** to be defined – what change key implementers aspire to achieve through EUSAIR in the region regarding the challenges of the topic
* Description of **main challenges/opportunities in the AIR to be addressed** by EUSAIR and what main approach should be taken (indication of actions)
* **Policy and funding framework** (only policies, initiatives or also EU cohesion policy and enlargement provisions)
* **Key stakeholders** to be engaged in implementation
	+ Could this be the structure followed in Topics?

Figure 1 below shows the intervention logic which is proposed to be followed when defining chapters in Topics and Actions.



Figure 1: Topic intervention logic

### Chapters to define Actions

2014 EUSAIR Action Plan

**DEFINITIONS**

*ACTION is the intervention which countries and stakeholders carry out in order to address the set ~~different~~ ~~topics~~ objectives. 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. Examples: ~~New approach: “To legislate at the appropriate level to tackle the problem of by-catch in fisheries”; - Increased coordination in policy making: “To develop a joint position of the Region regarding changes which could be introduced in the framework of the TEN-E"; Support to a process already engaged: “To implement fully commitments under the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative”.~~*

In continuation of the Action Plan criteria for identification of actions are provided. We commented them at the end of each bullet point.

*When identifying actions and projects to be included in the Action Plan, the following criteria shall be taken into account:*

* *They should address identified priorities, 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 should have been thoroughly discussed with these partners since their support is crucial during the implementation phase. Generally speaking, actions and projects should reinforce existing EU policies such as: Europe 2020, Territorial Cohesion, Trans-European Networks (transport and energy), the Energy and the future Transport Communities1 , disaster risk management policy; or implementation of EU strategies such as the strategies on Biodiversity2 and on Adaptation to Climate 1 While the Transport Community Treaty is not signed, actions and projects in the transport sector should build upon the South-East Europe Observatory (SEETO) 2 COM(2011) 244 final 5 Change3 , both of which encourage the development of (macro) regional strategies, as well as relevant EU Directives4 . Finally they should also associate, as appropriate, transnational initiatives of relevance for the macro-region, such as the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, the Regional Cooperation Council, or the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean.*
	+ Is this section still valid? We propose it is, only the policies could be omitted, since they will be included in the Topics, (if agreed so by the National Coordinators). Can we agree on that?
* *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 macroregion (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 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.*
	+ Is this section still valid? We propose it is, can we agree on that?
* *They 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,*
	+ Is this section still valid? We propose it is, can we agree on that?
* *They should build on existing initiatives and have reached a fair degree of maturity.*
	+ The actions should reflect the whole path done in the past years (including the work on defining the Flagship projects) but also go further in defining activities for the future, in line with recent and future policy development.
	+ Is the fair degree of maturity necessary for the action? If for example a new challenge or issue arises and there is a clear need and agreement among countries the challenge should be addressed, probably such an action should still be included, even though the maturity criterion is not met.
* *They should pay attention to the cross-cutting aspects identified in the Communication, further developed in this Action Plan.*
	+ Probably this claim is still valid. Can we agree on that?
* *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.*
* Still valid we suppose. Is there agreement on that? This issue was also raised by TSG3 and the need to have an environmental impact assessment done for the Action Plan or at least to check all actions against the TSG3 matrix.
* Is there another criterion for the actions that would need to be considered?
* We would add criterion that for each action outputs and results clearly liked to indicators and targets shall be planned (in line with EUSAIR Evaluation report).
* 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. ‘Project– to policy loop’ is a process where a link between a macro-regional process and a policy change is ensured. In this context macro-regional process can initiate policy discussion/change as well as be an outcome of it.*

**Chapters per ACTIONS**

**Indicative Actions**

In some Pillars described in more detail in others only one sentence.

**Table**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Actions** | **Indicative actors** | **Examples of possible projects** |
| Tile of the action | Types of institutions | Past or current project that could be further applied |

**Examples of targets by 2020**

Observations:

* More harmonisation is needed between Pillars how the Actions should be defined, which elements to define for each Action.
* Even though Actions were defined as indicative, TSGs took them over and worked on their implementation. In some cases, they decided to leave one or the other Action aside or they prioritised (they focused on a smaller number of actions – e.g. Pillar 4).
* Targets are only defined as examples, they lack target values, baseline and measuring method.

Looking at other MRSs

**EUSDR**

In the Action **description** the objective of the action is provided and how the objective will be achieved, through what means and in what way (approach, key principles to follow). **Target** is set for each action, but in many cases it is defined as “contribution to improvement or implementation of legislation/policy”, which is difficult to measure and the actual “level of improvement/implementation” to be achieved is not defined. At the end of the Priority Area examples or projects/activities (past/present/future) are provided for some of the listed Actions.

 **EUSBSR**

Each Action has **objective** and **description** indicating how the objective will be achieved, through which activities. A very clear **indicator system** is provided:

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

Furthermore ongoing or planned flagships under the Action are provided and project(s) and other activity(s) planned under the action.

It is evident that EUSBSR is going now into the third round of implementation cycle (third multiannual financial framework) and builds on numerous networks, policy processes, flagships and projects.

Proposals:

* 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.**
	+ Is there agreement on that?
* **Actions** are planned to contribute to the set objectives 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.
	+ - Could this be the definition?
* There should be agreement reached on **definition of Actions and the main criteria** they have to follow to have a more harmonised approach towards Actions and assure implementation orientation (avoiding Actions out of scope of the EUSAIR framework or Actions that are mere projects)
	+ Is there agreement on that, can we use revised existing criteria, as suggested above (pages 6-7)?
* As follows from the EUSAIR Evaluation a clear **indicator system shall be developed** to set realistic targets and monitoring basis. *The definition of limited SMART result indicators for each topic would benefit the guidance of the TSGs and stakeholders towards the desired change.*..*A clear connection between indicators and targets and a clear connection between actions /output /results should be developed[[2]](#footnote-2).*
* We agree with EUSAIR Evaluation to use ESIF indicators, as much as possible. This approach could also streamline the Actions and steer the thematic consultation in the direction of planning realistic outputs and results.
* 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 has 2-4 Actions defined for each Policy area.
* Could an agreement be reached on that?
* Reconsider the term **flagship** - they are not mere projects to be funded. Rather, successful projects can evolve into flagships, regardless if they are initiated top-down or bottom-up, they successfully combine both approaches. As flagships have both policy and practical impact, they are driven by a vision of policy impact. Flagships gather all possible stakeholders in a long-term process of co-creation of both policy and action. This way, flagships become ‘home’ for projects and any other forms of action, such as policy dialogues, policy-making workshops, public consultations and become areas for alignment of funding, too.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* From what we observed in the Action plan and in communication with TSGs, there are three ways in which implementation of Actions is approached:
	+ Support for projects beyond the scope of EUSAIR (large infrastructure projects) – for these kinds of Actions it has to be defined, what kind of specific support from EUSAIR is foreseen
	+ Activities/projects driven by governance structures to resolve a trans-border issue or need (harmonisation, integration, coordination, joint development/planning and similar)
	+ Projects driven by stakeholder networks in efficient collaboration with authorities aimed at contributing to EUSAIR Action Plan implementation (the potential of these projects could be better seized, but a harmonised approach between pillars and exchange between TSGs and stakeholders would be needed)
* Elements that description of each Action should contain - we propose to follow the example of EUSBSR: each action has **objective** and **description** indicating how the objective will be achieved, through which activities, outputs and results. A very clear indicator system should be provided:

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

### Horisontal/cross-cutting topics/issues

2014 Action Plan

How each Pillar contributes to horizontal topics is provided in descriptions under each Pillar (see above).

Observations:

* Since these descriptions are provided on the level of the Pillar, they are quite general.

Proposals:

Cross-cutting issues should be reflected on the level of Actions, the following questions need to be addressed to form a clear understanding:

* How effectively are horisontal topics being implemented through Pillars?
* What is the objective - what do we want to achieve with a certain horisontal topic and then we see whether this can be achieved through Actions of planned Pillars and in what way?
* What activities are needed, how well are they integrated into Actions and who will do them? (everyone's and no-one's task, lack of commitment, introduction of topic coordinator)
* How to measure achievements/impact?

## Governance considerations

*The EC Report (COM (2020) 578 final) identifies gaps between commitment in the political level of the EUSAIR and the subsequent capacity of the administrations to adhere and deliver, and between the governance structure and the civil society of the area. The complex structure and the lack of an engaging narrative for the EUSAIR added value and vision as well as targeted communication to stakeholders requires more effort in developing relevant communication activities and attracting the media. The main recommendations stemming from the report are as follows:*

* *Invest in a systematic approach to increase ownership and understanding of the EUSAIR in the national and subnational multi-level governance.*
* *Ensure regular participation in the governing structures and most prominently in the TSGs*
* *Intensify and streamline communication effort by all key implementers to engage more stakeholders[[4]](#footnote-4).*
* Systematic approach in addressing complex governance issues should be kept separate to the revision of the Action Plan. It is necessary and it has to be tackled, but do the implementers have sufficient resources to deal with these two complex topics in parallel? We propose to deal with governance issues in the revision of the Action Plan process in as far as the governance issues are directly related to the Action Plan elements.

We would however continue to collect proposals to improve governance also during the revision related consultations, since the effectiveness of governance and of implementation go hand in hand. Below are just a few points/ideas raised by TSG members or Pillar Coordinators:

* Consideration to divide TSG in Pillar 1 to Sub-Groups, existing TSG 1 would become Sub-Group for Fisheries and Aquaculture, a new Sub-Group for Blue technologies and biotechnologies would be formed. The latter Topic has a high innovation and growth potential, however it is hard for current TSG members, which are mainly representatives of fisheries and aquaculture ministries to address this topic properly. Consequently, the Topic with high potential of creating impact is being set aside.
* Pillar-coordinator function has become very demanding, requiring a full-time employed professional.
* Presidency of the EUSAIR could be reflected also on the TSG level. In EUSDR PAC members from the Strategy presiding country also preside the TSG for the year. In this way TSG members have a more active role at least for the year and are therefore more engaged also before and after the presidency, leading to improved commitment and ownership. PAC coordination remains in the domain of the two responsible countries.
* Harmonised RoPs should be prepared for TSGs including all main processes carried out by TSGs. Harmonised RoPs also for Pillar Coordinators, Pillar thematic experts, TSG members (roles and responsibilities)

Also the proposals from Country position papers are to be considered:

* Call for more high-level involvement (Commissioner level, Ministerial level). In particular, on-site participation of European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms and responsible Ministers of the participating countries at the EUSAIR Annual Forums should be a rule, not an exception.
* Review, if needed redefine and unify the Rules of Procedures across TSGs. In particular, TSG RoPs should have clear descriptions of methods, procedures, deadlines, timeframes, etc. related to their regular work and decision-making process. Decision-making process needs to be clearly presented and transparent; all relevant information shaping a particular decision needs to be available in full and inside adequate (ample) timeframe. Public procurement calls with related documentation, which are normally subject to national procedures and legislation of one EUSAIR participating country, should be translated to the formal working language of EUSAIR and delivered to respective TSG and National Coordinators on time to allow for possible applications from legal entities from other EUSAIR participating countries. Outside/external expert organisations and individuals – who in most cases drive the implementation of projects on the ground – should be given access to the work of TSGs, either at observer level or as contributors to the governance process. Ideally, the work of TSGs should be harmonised with the dynamics of public calls.

More generally, TSGs should focus on prioritising and accelerating the implementation of relevant policies in the Adriatic-Ionian region and related projects of common interest.

* Recommend a practice of merging the roles of Pillar coordination and FP project partnership within a single national entity. For example, in Croatia the Ministry of Tourism and Sport is both the co-coordinator of Pillar 4 and the FP Project Partner.
* Develop a platform for training of newcomers to EUSAIR. Structured instructions for newcomers to the EUSAIR ecosystem should be organised by the FP on regular basis, ideally semi-annually.
* Develop a system for easy on-line overview of statuses of all EUSAIR project activities. A database of all EUSAIR flagships/projects with their implementation statuses, hosted at the Strategy website or the EUSAIR Stakeholders’ Platform.
* Prior to this, a clear definition of terminology related to EUSAIR project activities (flagships/project ideas/projects etc.) should be adopted.
* Establish a formal link between EUSAIR stakeholders (GB and TSG) and managing/programming authorities. The embedding process clearly demonstrated the necessity of this connection. As the embedding process is recognised as vital for the future of EUSAIR (or any macro-regional strategy), the involvement of managing/programming authorities in the work of EUSAIR should be more direct.

In practice, this may include the following: greater involvement of TSGs in calls preparation; technical assistance (a person per programme); targeted calls; structured dialogues with MAs; macro-regional financial dialogues; frequent data sharing; focus on real needs.

* Territorial dimension (coastal vs inland) and compromise solutions should be taken into consideration during the revision process. In particular, review and update where needed the sectoral parts of EUSAIR, by taking into consideration similarities/differences/shared interests of EU participating countries and non-EU (IPA) participating countries.
* The revision of the Action Plan can surely bring to technical improvements of the toolbox supporting the Governance (e.g.: data collection and monitoring, project selection and evaluation procedures, consultation of stakeholders and civil society, functioning of TSGs and sub-groups), to be better defined in the coming months, also taking into account the inputs that will come from the TSG and the stakeholders.
* To increase the effectiveness of the Strategy, Italy proposes that a time horizon is given to the Action Plan, in order to keep the Strategy as a long period general reference framework, and to provide a clearer timetable to the selection and implementation of the projects. Italy suggest that the Action Plan is aligned with the duration of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MMF), in order to promote the process of embedding of the projects in the programs and projects co-financed at EU and national level. When a new MMF is defined, the Action Plan should not expire, to ensure continuity, but should be reviewed, to make the changes and improvements that would be necessary, based on the evidence of monitoring and evaluation procedures. To have a clear alignment with the MMF would provide evidence and concreteness to the “rolling” character of the Action Plan, as stated in the Strategy, and encourage stakeholders to proactively promote the embedding of the EUSAIR projects within the timeframe and financing framework of European and national projects

**Prepared by EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner:**





1. How do macro-regional strategies deliver: workflows, processes and approaches (Interact 2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Evaluation of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. EU Macro-regional Strategies Non-paper [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Evaluation of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (2022) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)