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



# 10 YEARS OF COOPERATION EUSAIR

A Journey Towards a Stronger  
Adriatic and Ionian Region



SYNERGY IS BETTER THAN MY WAY  
OR YOUR WAY; IT IS OUR WAY.

IRENA BOŠKOVIĆ, EUSAIR member, Montenegro, 2022



## Dear reader,

Europe and its regions are in time of transitions, green, digital, (geo)political. We face common challenges and/or opportunities that know no borders. We need to protect our nature and our people. Especially our Youth. EUSAIR (European Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region), from the very start, emphasises the active role of participating countries – EU member states, EU candidates, and non-EU country – in the Strategy's long-term framework, while painting a vivid picture of their shared realities and their common future in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

The macroregional concept is, by definition, an important innovation in territorial cooperation and cohesion, based on a broader regional sense of identity, a commitment for joint strategic planning and readiness to pool resources for common goals. It comes with strong innovation potential: innovation of intent, innovation of engagement, and innovation in implementation. From the outset, EUSAIR was conceived as an innovation when born in 2014. And you never know where innovation can lead you; that is its miracle.

Please take a moment and reflect on the added value EUSAIR brings to the people of the Adriatic-Ionian Region: how it shapes this diverse region and what would never happen if the Strategy did not exist or would fail to do its job. The essence of EUSAIR initiative should never be forgotten: the spirit and heart of collaboration, dialogue, innovation, and community engagement. The Strategy is the People, those shaping and implementing it and those living in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, whose everyday lives are affected by its outcomes.

Everyone is familiar with the three 'NOs' associated with the macroregional approach. But no one counts the 'YESs'. What value has the Strategy brought and continues to bring since 2014 to this diverse and vibrant region and to the lives of its people?

Let's see together. We invite you to immerse yourself in this EUSAIR celebratory edition and find out. QR codes will lead you outside the limited format of the brochure, providing you with more information and sensory experiences in our EUSAIR world – do not miss this opportunity. Welcome!

**EUSAIR Community**

# About EUSAIR

## EUSAIR Laboratory for a New Europe

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) is one of the four EU macroregional strategies, alongside the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (2009), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (2011), and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (2016). Established in 2014, it currently covers ten countries in the Adriatic-Ionian Region: four EU member states (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Slovenia), five EU candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia), and one non-EU country (San Marino). Starting with eight participating countries, it is the fastest-growing macroregional strategy; North Macedonia joined in 2020, and San Marino followed in 2022. This reflects the attractiveness, fitness, delivery mechanisms, and performance of the Strategy. The role of EUSAIR is also strongly committed in supporting the EU enlargement policy in the Western Balkans, predominantly in policy alignment and institutional capacity.

*“Macroregional strategies like EUSAIR are effective and cost-efficient tools for harmonising practices and policies, providing an excellent way to find common solutions to problems, compared to when individual countries tackle issues alone. For countries that are not EU members yet, the macroregional approach is stimulating, as participation in decision-making and policy formulation allows them to gradually and more swiftly develop a sense of belonging than through the longer accession process, which requires much more effort for each step towards membership.”*



**GILLES KITTEL,**  
representative of the DG REGIO, Team Leader of the  
South-East Europe team, 2025

## The Five EUSAIR Pillars

Despite strong disparities in economic, social, demographic, cultural, political, and institutional capacities, with a unique participation of predominant number of EU candidate and non-EU countries (six), with limited previous experience of mutual collaboration and without a clear shared regional identity, common interests and challenges have been found in several important areas. In 2014, a commitment was made to promote Blue Growth, enhance connections and link the region to the rest of the transport and energy networks, protect environmental quality, and set the tourism sector on a sustainable path together – EUSAIR with its four Thematic Pillars was adopted. As the socio-economic landscape of Europe has changed significantly since then, EUSAIR's Pillars were updated to address the newly emerging challenges. Today, EUSAIR participating countries are working together in five thematic Pillars: **Pillar 1 Blue Sustainable Economy, Pillar 2 Connecting the Region, Pillar 3 Environmental Quality, Pillar 4 Sustainable Tourism and Pillar 5 Improved Social Cohesion.**

## The EUSAIR Governance

The governance of EUSAIR is characterised by the rotating presidency of the Strategy, the joint decision-making body in which all participating countries are represented and need to find consensus and dual coordination of each Pillar. This shared Pillar coordination consists of representatives from one EU member state and one or two EU candidate country. In 2024, Youth formally became part of EUSAIR governance through EUSAIR Youth Council.


# EUSAIR Governance Point Supporting EUSAIR Implementation

Macroregional strategies do not have separate funding sources. EUSAIR is a Strategy, not a Programme; joint policy priorities are being implemented together with the stakeholders through the existing funding mechanisms and projects. EUSAIR functioning and implementation has been supported by **EUSAIR Facility Point** since 2016,

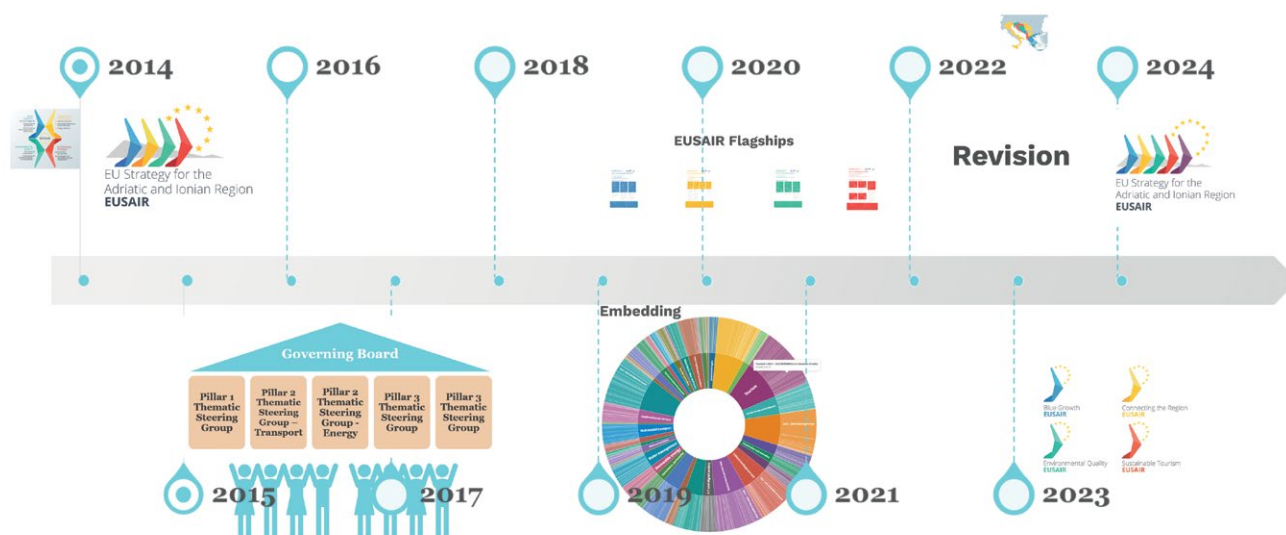
and in 2023 the workload was shared with two additional projects: **STEP** – EUSAIR Stakeholders Engagement Point and **SP4EUSAIR** – EUSAIR Strategic Implementation. All three projects are financed by the Interreg IPA ADRION Programme.

Discover more on [www.adriatic-ionian.eu](http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu)

*“Macroregional strategies are frames, not pictures; they need participation, they need involvement.”*

 **SIMONA MAMELI,**  
EUSAIR member, Italy, 2023

## A Decade of EUSAIR





# Pillar 1 – Blue Sustainable Economy

## Blue Sustainable Economy: Riding the Wave of Opportunity

Pillar 1 focuses on emerging blue and green technologies, fisheries and aquaculture, maritime and marine governance and services, and research and innovation in the field. It also involves inland water resources, such as lagoons, rivers and lakes. Blue foods are vital for the health, economy, culture, and resilience of coastal communities in the Adriatic-Ionian Region: fisheries and aquaculture are important sectors, due to their economic and ecological contributions, but also due to strong social and cultural traditions within the Region. The actions and projects led by EUSAIR's Blue Sustainable Economy priorities not only contribute to the economic development of the Region but also alleviate pressure on natural resources.

## Sustainable Seafood Production: Nurturing Our Seas

The **FOOD4HEALTH** project aims to create a sustainable and innovative agri-food and fisheries value chain for SMEs in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, enhancing its competitiveness by improving production techniques, facilitating transfer, sharing, and adoption of European quality standards, and by promoting typical and traditional fisheries products.

### Living labs in the sea – organic farming of shells and product branding – Montenegro

Mussels and oysters, cultivated exclusively in Montenegro's Boka Kotorska, thrive due to the bay's exceptional biological and ecological conditions. Implementing geographical indications, organic certification, and branding could enhance production, competitiveness, and global visibility for small producers in the region.



*“Two shellfish farms in Boka Kotorska served as pilot zones during the implementation of project activities. Each microlocation for organic mussel and mollusc farming was previously assessed by researchers from our University. The pilot farms were equipped to begin organic shell breeding, utilising renewable energy sources and equipment that improved the production process. Additionally, the microalgae that shellfish feed on were also organically grown in controlled pilot activities.”*

 **MILICA MANDIĆ,**  
University of Montenegro, Institute of  
Marine Biology, Kotor, FOOD4HEALTH  
project, 2021

## Innovating for the Sustainable Blue Economy

The **ARIEL** and **ARIEL Plus** projects have led to significant milestones in accelerating innovation and uptake within the small-scale fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The **Geo Data Portal** of the **Adriatic-Ionian Region (GAIR)** provides access to various existing datasets gathered from projects, administrations and other initiatives related to coastal and marine areas, and several modules for Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Maritime Spatial Planning analysis, and risk assessment. The GAIR portal has been built to support the analysis and risk assessment within the Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Maritime Spatial Planning processes, and to be a concrete tool for the EU-SAIR Action Plan implementation. It was created within the **PORTODIMARE** project.

The study **“Ideal EUSAIR”**, developed in 2021, identified opportunities for the design and implementation of EUSAIR Flagship actions and projects under the first EUSAIR Pillar during the 2021- 2027 programming period. Following the quadruple helix model, the analysis revealed the presence of 579 stakeholders active in the Blue Growth sector in the Adriatic-Ionian Region that can be classified in: government (148), academia (250), industry (99), and civil society (82).

**FishTourAIR**, **AimFrish**, **EURYNOME**, **SeaSus-Pack**, and **AMOS** are flagship projects currently awaiting suitable sources of funding. They will demonstrate their results and positive impact on the development of the Adriatic-Ionian Region in the area of Blue Economy in the very near future.

*“New partnership, called ‘Pact for Blue Skills’ will anchor the EU Pact for Skills in the Adriatic and Ionian Region Strategy. All members of the Pact will benefit from three dedicated services offered by the EU Pact for Skills: the Networking Hub, the Knowledge Hub and the Guidance Hub.”*

 **MICHAEL CHATZIEFSTATHIOU,**  
Pillar 1 Coordinator, Greece, 2024

The **Blue Sustainable Economy Pillar** (former **Blue Growth**) is coordinated by Greece and Montenegro.



## Pillar 2 – Connecting the Region – Transport

### Connecting the Region, Ensuring Safety, Embracing Sustainability

Collaborative governance within the framework of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, involving both EU and non-EU countries with diverse transport infrastructure backgrounds, has helped to foster better integration and cohesion across the entire area. In order to enhance the transnational cooperation capacity of the countries involved in the planning, construction, and modernisation of roads, railways, ports, and airports, as well as to improve accessibility and stimulate economic growth, **EUSAIR second thematic Pillar, Connecting the Region** and its **Transport** strand, was established. Its main focus over the past 10 years was on maritime transport, intermodal connections to the hinterland, and sustainable urban mobility.

*"The unique and fragmented environmental heritage of the Adriatic-Ionian Region requires transport policies that reduce environmental impact by promoting the use of more sustainable transport modes, and can stimulate economic growth and territorial cohesion."*

 **PIERLUIGI COPPOLA,**  
Pillar 2 Transport Coordinator, Italy, 2025

### Identification and Promotion of Projects of Macroregional Relevance

Over the past years, the EUSAIR contributed to the improvement of connectivity, integration of transport modes and technologies within the Adriatic-Ionian Region by identifying and monitoring projects of macroregional relevance that enhance accessibility to TEN-T networks, with particular attention to last-mile connections, interoperability and cross-border connections for freight and passengers, inter-modality, and digitalisation of transport to address structural gaps and improve the quality and security of transport services.

*"The Transport Thematic Steering Group of Pillar 2 has 'labelled' 58 projects, including 27 infrastructure projects and 31 'soft measures', i.e. small-scale pilot actions, services/facilities, and feasibility studies. The 'EUSAIR-labelled' projects have varying degrees of maturity, ranging from the proposal stage to execution and completed projects."*

 **JASMINKA KIRKOVA,**  
Pillar 2 Transport Coordinator, North Macedonia, 2025

**The ADRIATIC-IONIAN CYCLE ROUTE** is an example of project developed with EUSAIR cooperation. It consists of a cycling route running along the coast of the entire Adriatic and Ionian basin, from Italy to Greece and connecting the hinterland areas of the Region. The routes aim to serve a dual purpose: providing infrastructure integrated with public transport systems (rail, road, sea) for cycle tourism, and promoting sustainable urban and inter-urban mobility.



# New Transport Corridors: Linking People and Economies

## The EUSAIR Transport Masterplan

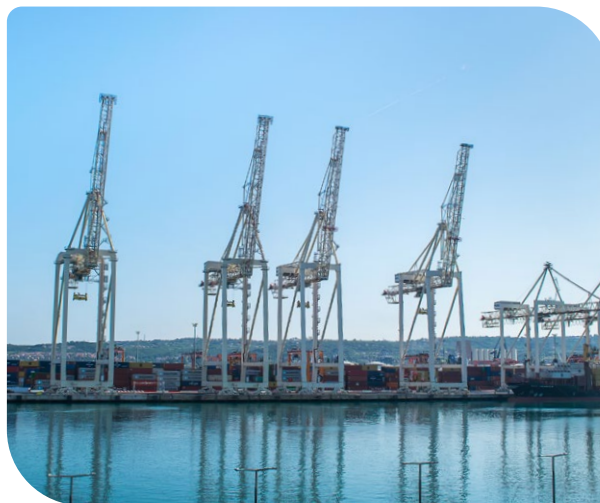
*“EUSAIR Masterplan of Transport is the main achievement of collaboration between EUSAIR participating countries and the key long-term shared vision document that, with the time horizons to 2030 and 2050, lays the foundation for the common understanding of transport policy in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, analysing opportunities, challenges, and ongoing projects, while proposing a multimodal EU integrated Corridors, greener and more effective regional transport system. It explores infrastructure scenarios and strategies that can help to bridge up the accessibility gaps and to improve seamless transport of goods and people in the Region, while reducing environmental impact.”*

 **PIERLUIGI COPPOLA,**  
Pillar 2 Transport Coordinator, Italy, 2025

Development and modernization of road and rail corridors, infrastructure enhancement for electric vehicles and cycling paths, and improvements to maritime transport through digital and green transitions, are set to transform the way we live and travel in the Adriatic-Ionian Region very soon. Establishing integrated transport systems and better connectivity will not only facilitate travel and improve quality of the regions, but also promote trade and tourism, boosting economies and social cohesion of the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

The **EMTM – EUSAIR Multimodal Transport Model** is a multimodal tool developed within Pillar 2 to simulate passenger and freight transport for both rail and road modes of transport. It enables the assessment of the impact of infrastructure and socio-economic development on transport networks. It supports the evaluation of the effectiveness of various future infrastructure scenarios in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, with a focus on rail and road transport, and provides a comprehensive overview of the entire transport system in the Region.

The **Connecting the Region Pillar - Transport** is coordinated by Italy, North Macedonia and Serbia.



## Pillar 2 – Connecting the Region – Energy

### Energy priorities, Actions and Investments to Confront the Global Challenges of Climate Change

#### New Energy Corridors and Projects towards the EU Enlargement and Single European Market

With regard to **Pillar 2 Connecting the Region - Energy** and energy networks, the EUSAIR has been focusing on transnational energy projects to better connect and integrate the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Well-connected energy systems allow for more effective coping with the shared energy challenges, such as the transition towards decarbonised energy systems, new geopolitical context, threats to energy access, security of energy supply, affordability, and prices.

#### Designing a shared energy outlook for the Adriatic-Ionian Region - the energy Green Deal to confront the challenges of climate change and energy security.

**The EUSAIR Master Plan on Energy Networks** provides a comprehensive outlook on energy systems, programmes and policies, notably on electricity and natural gas systems throughout the EUSAIR participating countries. It defines priorities, energy projects, and recommendations with a view of the two time horizons, 2030 and 2050, aiming to promote the goals of energy efficiency, green energy and decarbonisation in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

#### The Road Map towards Energy Markets Integration

*“The Road Map towards Energy Markets Integration includes actions to harmonise and coordinate the electricity and natural gas markets throughout the Adriatic-Ionian Region, with a view of improving energy security and competitiveness. The Road Map highlights three possible energy scenarios for the long-term, including a carbon-neutral scenario by 2050, speeding up the integration and interconnection of energy networks throughout the Adriatic-Ionian Region, enhancing energy efficiency and moving towards the increased degree of electrification, while preparing for the hydrogen economy. The EU enlargement and accession would be facilitated by these actions.”*

 **SERGIO GARRIBBA,**  
Pillar 2 Energy Coordinator, Italy, 2025

#### The EUSAIR-labelled Projects

The collection of 33 EUSAIR-labelled Projects on Energy Networks for the Adriatic-Ionian Region has been identified by Pillar 2 – Energy. Four of them deserve a mention, given their impact on the Region and their connections with the Trans-European Energy Networks, namely: **MONITA 2** – the new Undersea Power Link between Montenegro and Italy; **GRITA2** – the new high voltage direct current (HVDC) Power Link between Greece and Italy; **TAP** – the Gas Pipeline completing the gas corridor transporting natural gas from Azerbaijan to Greece, Albania and Italy; **FSRU** – the Floating Storage and Regasification Units at Port of Vlora (Albania) and Port of Ravenna (Italy).



## Enhancement of Stakeholders' Involvement, Interaction, and Cooperation

Participation of industry stakeholders helped to identify gaps and means for project financing, while providing ideas on how to move forward with new technologies, notably the digitalisation of energy systems. In its workshops and conferences, Pillar 2 – Energy involved NGO representatives in order to

exchange views regarding major challenges ahead, including measures and means to cope with global climate change, security of energy supply against physical and cyber-risks, and access to energy at affordable and competitive prices and conditions.

**The Connecting the Region Pillar - Energy** is co-ordinated by Italy, North Macedonia and Serbia.



## Pillar 3 – Environmental Quality

### Connecting River Basins, Coasts, and Seas for a Resilient Future of the Adriatic-Ionian Region

Water and air have no national identity, and neither do birds and fish. They do not recognise borders and do not possess passports. Their mobility is entirely independent of these 'human' constructs. Waste, or other types of pollution from one country can quickly reach the seas or the rivers of another. Climate change and human activities with special regards to adaptation and nature conservation are defining the scope of work of the **Pillar 3 - Environmental Quality**. It sets out actions to improve the marine and coastal environment, and transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity.

### A Green and Blue Future of the Adriatic-Ionian Region

**Blue-Green corridors** represent an innovative approach to fostering environmental sustainability, enhancing biodiversity, and promoting the well-being of local communities. Following the **Handbook for Recognising and Planning Green Infrastructure**, developed in Pillar 3, sustainable coexistence – balancing human activities with nature, conserving migratory water birds, and managing large carnivore populations – has been put into practice.

**The Deviation of the coastal road to the tunnel** is one of the best practices and one out of four hot spots within the Pillar 3 EUSAIR flagship of Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Marine Spatial Planning in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. After decades of heavy traffic, the road between the Slovenian coastal cities of Koper and Izola was finally closed to motor vehicle traffic, and a **Green Corridor** was established. This was preceded by the activities from the project '**Let's Draw the Coast**' (2018). The project takes an innovative participatory approach to spatial planning, emphasising the importance of local community involvement, sustainable development, and democratic urban planning; and it brought together 17 civil society organisations, 10 schools, 2 municipal public institutions, 4 public professional institutions, and 18 groups of individuals.

*"The mobility of blind and visually impaired persons in public spaces is extremely dangerous due to the inaccessibility of public infrastructure. Despite this, I maintain an active lifestyle that includes many outdoor activities. The green corridor between Koper and Izola has provided me with safety and a new dimension of enjoyment – whether it's walk & talk, or tandem cycling along the green corridor."*



**DRAGO ŠAJN,**  
Secretary of the Inter-municipal Association for the  
Blind and Visually Impaired in Koper, 2025

Collaborative efforts among countries and stakeholders are essential to realise the full potential of these corridors.



## Towards Adriatic-Ionian Marine Protected Areas Network

*"The attempt to establish transboundary marine protected areas in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas aims to achieve the goals of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, In Pillar 3, within the framework of the presidency of the Barcelona Convention, we have prepared a proposal for all EUSAIR countries, which is the result of EUSAIR expertise. We believe the discussions in Pillar 3 help countries consider transboundary protected areas beyond territorial waters, as ecosystems do not recognise boundaries."*

 **MITJA BRICELJ,**  
Pillar 3 Coordinator, Slovenia, 2023

Marine protected areas keep the seas healthy and full of life. By taking care of the sea now, it is made sure that future generations can enjoy clean water, rich marine life, and strong coastal communities that depend on fishing, tourism, and nature. Protecting parts of the sea helps the whole region stay balanced and resilient. Towards that end **Scenario for Designation of Marine Protected Areas Network** was developed in Pillar 3.



**NAMIRS** project has adopted a holistic approach to marine pollution incident management, both at sea and on shore, with the aim of preventing maritime disasters and protect against potential effects and damage in the North Adriatic Sea – a semi-closed basin where the three partner countries in this project, Croatia, Italy, and Slovenia, share a marine surface area of approximately 550 km<sup>2</sup>. To strengthen maritime protection against the effects of pollutant spillover, particularly in the event of large-scale accidents at sea that cannot be managed by a single country, the results of the NAMIRS project will be transferred across the entire Adriatic Sea, thanks to **ASAP** – the **Adriatic Sensitive Area Protection Mechanism** project. Both projects are implementing the Pillar 3 EUSAIR flagship **ASOSCoP** – Transnational Contingency plan in the event of accidents at sea.

The **Environmental Quality Pillar** is coordinated by Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.





## Pillar 4 – Sustainable Tourism

### Towards Sustainable Tourism: Balancing Nature and Culture

The overall objective of **Pillar 4 - Sustainable Tourism** is to develop the full potential of the Adriatic-Ionian Region in terms of innovative, sustainable, responsible and quality tourism, and to balance all the key dimensions of sustainability: economic, environmental, cultural and social. Diversification of tourism products and services, along with tackling of seasonality, establishing macroregional networks and routes, supporting countries in their progress towards improved tourism data systems that are in line with the European data systems and include sustainability indicators, and helping tourism stakeholders develop new capacities to integrate green and digital transition in tourism strategies – they all mark the work of its key implementers.

### Diverse Products, New Experiences: The Future of Tourism

#### **EUSAIR's Cultural thematic routes as a driver of innovative, creative and sustainable tourism**

Cultural routes promote collaboration of tourism destinations with other innovative stakeholders at local, regional and national level, and lead to tourism services and products based on cross-border collaboration. They foster an understanding of our shared history and culture, encouraging the creation of the European cultural identity. *The Routes of the Olive Tree, the Phoenicians' Route, the Iter Vitis Route, the European Route of Fairy Tales, the Route of Women Writers, and the Route of Historical Cafés* are just a few of the routes that pass through EUSAIR participating countries. For the first time in the history of the Council of Europe Annual Advisory Forum, at its 35<sup>th</sup> year celebration event in Greece 2022, a macroregional session organised by EUSAIR Pillar 4 was held and nine speakers presented examples of good practice in the use of cultural and tourist products on EUSAIR's cultural routes.

*"Out of the 45 cultural routes certified by the Council of Europe, 24 pass through the areas of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. However, the number of participants and stakeholders, which totals 300, is even more important than the number of routes. These individuals actively participate in the development and maintenance of cultural routes, thereby contributing to the social and economic development of the Region."*



**STEFANO DOMINIONI,**  
Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes,  
2022

**Authenticity is a key resource for tourism, and local people are the central ‘stars’ of the tourist landscape in the new paradigm of sustainable, responsible, and resilient tourism.**

*“Authenticity is one of the key values of the local community. It supports tourism as an economy of identity by providing attractiveness and transformative experiences for visitors. It is revealed through stories, and storytelling is a tool that can convey local values and meanings to visitors.”*

 **SENKA DANIEL,**  
Pillar 4 Coordinator, Croatia, 2022

The **Manual for Participatory Tourism: Connecting Community and Culture Through Storytelling**, created within this EUSAIR Pillar and aimed at upskilling professionals in tourism, integrates storytelling with cultural and community engagement. It became a starting point for developing the adult educational programme **Creative Tourism and Storytelling in the Function of Heritage Valorisation**. The first generation of students starts education in May 2025 at the Craft College – an adult education institution in Zagreb. The **Handbook on Gastronomic Tourism** and the one on **Wellness Tourism**, covering the new areas of interest of modern tourists, were also produced within Pillar 4 as a strategic tool that directly supports EUSAIR Pillar 4’s vision of sustainable, competitive, and regionally integrated tourism, while upskilling workforce in the field.

**Sustainable tourism depends on efficient transport systems and strong environmental protection measures**, making cross-pillar cooperation essential. By collaborating with other EUSAIR Pillars, through joint projects, such as **STETAI** and **ADRIONCYCLETOUR (Pillars 2 and 4)**, **BLUE-CULTURE (Pillars 1 and 4)**, and **ADRIONet (Pillars 3 and 4)**, Pillar 4 strengthens its commitment of fostering responsible, high-quality, and environmentally conscious tourism.

The **Sustainable Tourism Pillar** is coordinated by Croatia and Albania.



# Pillar 5 – Improved Social Cohesion

## EUSAIR Improved Social Cohesion: The launch of the EUSAIR Thematic Pillar 5 is One of the Major Achievements of the Strategy

The socio-economic landscape of Europe has changed significantly since the adoption of EUSAIR in 2014; and it is recognised that many of the new challenges and needs should be addressed by EUSAIR for the new period. The first decade of the Strategy was strongly focused on the Smart and Sustainable Growth, while the correlation with the Inclusive Growth was less pronounced. The next decade will surely address social issues in a more focused and structured way within the new established EUSAIR Social Pillar. Pillar 5 promotes social progress concerning labour market opportunities for the whole society and for future generations.

### The Path Towards Establishing a New Pillar

*“The introduction of the Social Pillar represents a step forward towards creating a prosperous region where people are at the centre of public policies. With the introduction of Pillar 5, the Strategy will align more closely with the fourth policy objective of the EU Cohesion Policy: a more social and inclusive Europe. As a new component of the Strategy, we are in the process of organising our joint work, structuring the most relevant actions, and focusing on topics that are common and familiar to most of our Pillar 5 members. We are actively engaged and find it important to establish contact with other Pillars, as the topics addressed by Pillar 5 extend across all existing Pillars.”*

 **NAIDA MEKIĆ,**  
Pillar 5 Coordinator, Croatia, 2023

More than other areas of the Strategy, the topics presented in Pillar 5 are particularly addressing the issues of young people. Accordingly, youth members have a significant place and role in the activities of the Pillar.

*“Promoting the empowerment and involvement of youth, boosting youth employment, and creating opportunities through upskilling/reskilling for disadvantaged groups in order to meet the demands of the new digital and artificial intelligence labour market is our obligation for the future of the region and its inhabitants.”*

 **LJILJANA JURAK,**  
Pillar 5 Coordinator, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2025

As Pillar 5 was only established in May 2023, it is still under development. The scope of the Pillar will be further discussed and defined in the years to come.

The **Improved Social Cohesion Pillar** is coordinated by Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

# Future of EUSAIR

Including Youth in EUSAIR activities is crucial for ensuring a sustainable and forward-thinking macro-regional strategy, as young people bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and long-term commitment to shaping the future of the Region.

Following the EU Youth Strategy resolution and the Manifesto for young people by young people to shape the European cooperation policy, the **EU-SAIR Youth Council** was officially established to enhance youth participation: 20 members out of impressive 185 applications from all 10 countries were selected in 2024.



*"If I could, what I would do for a better Adriatic-Ionian Region, is put greater emphasis on climate action in the Region and let young people lead the way – because we are bolder, more determined, and we know what's at stake."*

**ANKICA SOKOLIĆ** | born in 1999 | Skopje, North Macedonia



*"The Adriatic-Ionian Region in which I would like to live is a place where nature is cherished, people are connected, and opportunities grow like waves on the shore."*

**ALTIN GUBERI** | born in 1995 | Liobrazhd, Albania



*"For a better Adriatic-Ionian Region, I would build stronger bridges between young changemakers, rural communities, and green industries — empowering people to co-create a region that is resilient, inclusive, and future-ready."*

**LEJLA HADŽIJUSUFOVIĆ** | born in 1999 | Zeta, Montenegro





*"It is essential to hear young voices and provide them with insight into international discussions and processes. Our region, shaped by diverse cultural influences, holds a wealth of historical wisdom that we must pass on to future generations for shared benefits."*

**LIDIJA PANSEGRAU HADROVIĆ | Croatia | EUSAIR National Coordinator, 2025**

Youth engagement in EUSAIR did not start with the Youth Council, there are various initiatives and organisations connecting Strategy and Youth in the Region, such as the **Adriatic Ionian Youth Network**, **Adriatic Ionian Youth Organisations Forums** and **Connecting Youth platform** as well as projects like **GEAR UP** and **POPRI international**.

**POPRI international** is a competition for the best entrepreneurial idea among young people from all ten countries, which started initially as a national competition in Slovenia 21 years ago. Its integration into EUSAIR began during the 6th EUSAIR Forum in 2021, and it is a recurring activity since then.



*"By removing administrative and bureaucratic barriers, we strive to make movement across borders easier, especially in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, where we see great potential for deeper integration and exchange."*

**BENJAMIN STRAJNAR | POPRI contestant born in 2002 | Ljubljana, Slovenia**

Benjamin and Lara Kodrin developed the Mobility portal, specialized, technologically advanced online platform designed to remove administrative and legal obstacles for individuals travelling abroad.



*"The Adriatic-Ionian Region can be described by one simple thing: astonishing coastal seas. Unfortunately, trash has been accumulating more and more each year in these beautiful waters, making an effective solution to this issue more important than ever. This is where our project comes in."*

**ERNESTO SIGALAS | POPRI contestant born in 2000 | Athens, Greece**

Ernesto and Marios Konstantoudakis developed the Trash Feaster Vessel, which aims to be used in marinas, harbours and other geofenced environments to collect floating trash and debris with minimal human intervention.



*"Our role is to help people with communication difficulties by using thought instead of words to communicate."*

**RICCARDO MALAVASI | POPRI contestant born in 1999 | San Marino**

Riccardo, Alessandro Pederzani, Linda Ciandrini and Cristina Bacchini from San Marino developed CAP, an innovative and revolutionary tool that reproduces human thought directly into an image, which overcome the communication difficulties for people with specific diseases, syndromes or disorders.





## Frames of Inspiration – EUSAIR Through the Lens of Youth

An international photography contest for youth was organised by EUSAIR Facility Point in 2023, aiming to encourage participation of young people from the Adriatic-Ionian region and raise awareness and visibility of the EUSAIR. The contest focused on four themes highlighting the four thematic priorities of EUSAIR, representing critical challenges and key opportunities in the Region. The contest was organised in collaboration with the Centre for European Perspective, the Digitalni Foto Klub, other photographic associations and clubs in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, and under the patronage of the Photographic Association of Slovenia.

Winning photo: Dying World, Anja Tomanič

Anja asked her friend to lie down in a children's pool full of water and trash.



EUSAIR National  
Coordinators



EUSAIR Pillar  
Coordinators



[www.adriatic-ionian.eu](http://www.adriatic-ionian.eu)  
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EUSAIR Facility Point

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