

Joint meeting of macro-regional coordinators on climate and disaster risk reduction

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Report

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Introduction

The EU macro-regional strategies are aiming at addressing challenges shared within a functional area. They also aim at better implementation of the EU policies and more coordination of existing institutions and financial resources. Macro-regional strategies address broad scope of priorities, making an effort for cooperation and coordination across the territory.

Currently there are [four EU macro-regional strategies](#) adopted and in different implementation stages. However, it is clear that most of the priorities or policies addressed by the strategies are similar. Acknowledging specifics of each of the macro-regional strategies, their goals and individual approaches established, there are certain processes all coordinators experience, e.g. setting up governance structures for the implementation of specific priority, defining focus of the action/priority or thematic field, reaching common agreement across the countries and defining milestones to be achieved, involving relevant institutions and multi-level actors, monitoring implementation of the priority/ policy/ pillar/ action. Even more, through macro-regional actions and aligned efforts, coordinators are aiming at contributing to the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

Acknowledging experience of INTERACT II Programme, Interact III Programme has been asked to support developing new ways of cooperation where macro-regional framework is a part of it. Interact is working towards increasing awareness of macro-regional framework, developing pilot models for coordination and cooperation, strengthening dialogue across funding programmes for creating synergies within macro-regional framework and supporting exchanges across macro-regions. With primarily focus on supporting Interreg programmes, Interact has launched an Interreg programmes network addressing climate change and risks thematic. Close link between this network of programmes and macro-regional coordinators could be built.

Taking into account above said as well as by the initiative of the coordinators of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Interact III called for a meeting of macro-regional coordinators on climate and disaster risk reduction from the all four EU macro-regional strategies.

Event content and main conclusions

The meeting gathered coordinators dealing with climate and disaster risk reduction matters in the all four EU macro-regional strategies for informal exchange of practices and experiences in implementing their tasks. Unfortunately, the meeting was lacking representative participation of funding programmes for thorough discussion among the coordinators and programmes.

The meeting focused on the experiences of coordinators regarding challenges, achieved solutions and detected failures to address a particular aspect in a macro-regional strategy. It provided general overview on the state of play in the implementation of each of the Strategies, identified and shared approaches taken in addressing challenges. Furthermore, the meeting addressed the question of key areas of cooperation and closer coordination between climate change and civil security experts. During the two days of the meeting the coordinators¹ presented their experiences in individual presentations, which were followed by the collective discussions.

Participants of the meeting agreed that it was very useful to meet their peers from other macro-regional strategies and proposed to continue meetings in this format (e.g. annually). The coordinators made several agreements on cooperation and knowledge exchange, which led to further concrete ideas on joint events and interaction.

Discussions during the meeting can be reflected around following issues: governance and coordination of a priority/policy area/pillar or action (named differently in macro-regional strategies, later in the text referred as priority), communication and visibility as well as potential for coordination within and across the EU macro-regional strategies.

Governance and coordination of the priority work

Under this chapter various conclusions discussed with coordinators on how the process on setting up governance structures for the implementation of the priority, involving relevant institutions and multi-level governance actors, defining focus of the priority and its interlink to the Agenda 2030 and relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as defining milestones to be achieved and monitoring of the priority are summarised.

It should be mentioned that recent study launched by DG REGIO, European Commission “Macroregional strategies and their links with Cohesion Policy” focuses on capacity and governance topics in the macro-regional context. The study has been circulated to all relevant stakeholders within the macro-regional strategies in end of November 2017. The study was conducted by consultancy company COWI.

¹ The EUSALP Action Group 8 was represented by Action Group member on behalf of the leaders.

Coordinators shared following achieved solutions, best practices and proposals for improvement in setting up governance structures for the implementation of a priority and involving relevant institutions and multi-level governance actors in the implementation:

- Capacity building activities raising awareness and increasing understanding about the macro-regional strategies (as well as interlinkages between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction) is needed at national level.
- It is crucial for the coordinators of climate related priorities to be involved in the development of the national climate change adaptation strategies.
- Harmonising indicators for climate change adaptation within macro-regions would benefit all the countries.
- It could be beneficial for the EU macro-regional strategies to define a climate change adaptation as a separate priority into the action plans.
- A relevant national ministry, acting as a priority coordinator, increases the effectiveness of its implementation due to direct and close involvement in the EU policy development, discussions and implementation.
- Steering group members' participation in the relevant EU working groups can be a great catalyser of the coordination efforts within a macro-regional priority.
- Coordinators provide financial support for participation of the non-EU countries in the steering/coordination/action groups, where relevant and possible.
- Building on pre-existing traditions of transnational cooperation in the region, engaging existing transnational entities and their expertise in the implementation of macro-regional priority as well as using existing transnational coordination frameworks to strengthen coordination and cooperation, are success factors for addressing climate change and disaster risks reduction work. Signing an agreement/memorandum of understanding across various existing organisations addressing similar priorities/topics is advisable.
- Creating an attractive “package” for the steering/coordination/action group members and partners serving their interests and needs is vital for successful coordination of the macro-regional priority. Active participation in a steering /coordination/action group/project should help partners in fulfilling their everyday tasks, not add an additional responsibility.
- “Real implementation” of climate change adaptation and especially prevention as well as disaster risk reduction work happens at the local level. Therefore, it is crucial to include city councils and municipalities into the work of a priority.
- Meetings, organized back-to-back with other high-level events, increase representation of

countries of a macro-region, the level and relevance of participants.

- National representatives show more interest in events, organized by coordinators, when concrete projects and their results are discussed.
- Measures for sustainability of project results should be incorporated in the project from the beginning to ensure continuity.

While defining focus of the macro-regional priority and interlinking it to the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the relevant SDGs, the coordinators highlighted the following solutions, best practices and proposals for improvement:

- To bring more added value to the macro-regional strategies and their priorities, they could be streamlined, focusing on existing international agreements and cooperation frameworks to which countries already committed (such as [Paris Climate Agreement](#), or [UN Sendai Framework](#)).
- One of the effective ways of defining the focus of a priority area is based on a series of undertaken activities: scientific identification of risks and capacity gaps, followed by a multi-level dialogue and implementation process, which brings the results to the end users at the local level.
- The macro-regional strategies as the multi-stakeholder partnerships can support implementation the SDGs in the EU. The SDGs can become a tool for policy coherence and holistic implementation post 2020.
- Many climate change and disaster risk reduction relevant priorities within the EU macro-regional strategies are already contributing to the implementation of the [UN Sendai Framework](#), especially in better understanding of disaster risk, based on research and strengthening disaster risk governance by bringing the local level stakeholders into the process.
- Macro-regional cooperation helps countries to save money for research (for example identifying areas with increased disaster risk due to climate change).

While discussing monitoring process within the priorities, it is clear that coordinators apply different approaches. The EUSDR apply project management approach to the implementation of the priority area as well as actions defined under the priority area are implemented via projects. Therefore, monitoring of achieved outputs is ensured against project planned outputs. The EUSBSR representatives highlighted that monitoring of the changes brought by the Strategies is a long-term process and can be followed up identifying certain stages of implementation. In addition, it was mentioned that coordinators should focus on policy change instead of only project management.

Challenges shared by coordinators while discussing matters related to the governance and coordination of the macro-regional priorities are:

- Inactivity of the members in steering/coordination/action groups, varied decision-making capacity and constant changes in representation.
- Precondition for an active participation of members in work of the steering/ coordination/ action group depends on relevance of the macro-regional priorities (themes) to national policy priorities.
- Lack of high-level political support and commitment to the EU macro-regional strategies is a serious challenge for the success in implementation.
- Implementation of the EU macro-regional strategies is a long process, which demands a dedicated, well-funded team, establishment of long-lasting relationships with relevant stakeholders and overcoming the conservative nature of national institutions.
- Funding for coordination activities is not flexible enough and often limits the scope of the coordinators' activities.
- Climate change adaptation is not as relevant to the funding programmes, especially Interreg transnational programmes, as mitigation, which creates problems in stakeholder engagement in implementation of macro-regional strategies. Climate change adaptation should become a funding priority in programmes post 2020.
- Involvement of the private sector in the implementation of the priorities in focus of the meeting is often overlooked. However, if involved, private sector can bring much needed expertise, innovation and connection to the end users, and ensure sustainability of the project results.
- Coordinators have to operate in between several initiatives existing and established in parallel to the macro-regional strategies. This requires significant efforts from the coordinators not only to avoid overlaps but also to build synergies and complementarities across those.

Increased visibility and communication

Throughout the discussions the event participants brought up the matter of increased visibility and communication of the macro-regional strategies at all governance levels from the EU to local.

The matter was addressed from two angles - visibility of the macro-regional strategies in general (as whole) and of the policies Strategies are addressing, their priorities and macro-regional projects in particular.

It was concluded that pragmatic, clean, tailor-made awareness raising and communication activities would improve not only recognition of the Strategies and would increase political support to their implementation, but even more would support coordinators in stakeholder engagement into the governance and coordination work.

Potential for coordination activities within and across macro- regional strategies

All participants agreed that there is a potential for closer coordination and cooperation across priorities within the same macro-regional strategy and across the macro-regional strategies. While addressing the question of **potential for closer coordination across priorities within the same macro-regional strategy**, the following achieved solutions, best practices and proposals for improvement were shared:

- Active exchange of information between the coordinators of different priorities is crucial in a process of drafting/revising the action plan and planning objectives, key actions targets and indicators. It would contribute to identify areas of joint intervention and to avoid duplication and overlapping.
- Cooperation between the coordinators is needed while preparing and initiating new projects (one project can cover or address several policy areas). Such cooperation can result in joint project support letters or joint development of new flagships. It would also contribute to more efficient use of existing resources and sustainability of the outputs.
- Format for coordination across priorities within the macro-regional strategy can vary, e.g. by developing shared papers - Inter-pillar matrix developed in the EUSAIR or jointly arranged events (examples of cross-cutting areas: culture and climate, energy and climate, tourism and climate) and daily exchanges, like in EUSDR and EUSBSR.
- Involvement of the relevant priority coordinators in steering group meetings of the other priority to create policy coherence and synergies.
- Mainstreaming cross-cutting issues is needed as it “does not happen by itself”.
- Horizontal issues – such as climate change, need dedicated coordination.

Potential for coordinating activities across macro-regional strategies is seen in the following activities:

a) General coordination issues:

- Transfer and capitalisation of the good practices and project outcomes.
- Initiating cross-macro-regional strategies projects.
- Inviting other macro-regional strategies’ coordinators to relevant events (steering group meetings, annual forums, project study tours etc.) to discuss common governance and policy issues.

- Peer-learning between coordinators of similar priority/policy areas.
- Organising annual macro-regional strategies coordinators meetings within the same or interlined thematic priorities. It can be organised as a part of annual forums (could be done on rotating basis). They could be also thematically specific or addressing more general issues, like macro-regional governance and coordination.
- Since Interreg Climate change and risks network has been recently kicked off by Interact III (kick-off meeting held in June 2017), further closer coordination across network members and the macro-regional coordinators could be considered.
- Setting up a joint support and coordination body (secretariat) for all the macro-regional strategies. Its responsibilities may include harmonised communication and visibility, capacity building, harmonisation of terminology, organising regular meetings of relevant coordinators, serving as a link between the EU and the macro-regional levels and other. It would provide equal and harmonised access and approach to the support for coordinators.

b) Climate change and disaster risk reduction issues:

- Exchanging information across macro-regional strategies on:
 - policy/EU directive reviews. Macro-regional coordinators are already making an effort to provide inputs to the policy/EU discussions, but by combining resources it could be done more efficiently. It would contribute to more integration of EU, national, regional and macro-regional policies.
 - Climate adaptation strategy updates (e.g. work of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR)).
 - Implementation of the EU level relevant strategies, e.g. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and its Action Plan.
 - Recent developments, trainings, publications, practices, etc.
- Mutually evaluate and support EU supervision surveys.
- Organising peer-learning interactions on:
 - Establishing contacts with relevant stakeholders and project support (e.g. ice management)
 - Identification of transferable topics and knowledge on drought management and sediment management.

In addition, the coordinators expressed their will for more focussed macro-regional strategies build on the shared political priorities by the countries of the macro-region, funding alignment to all priorities of macro-regional strategies and more funding flexibility and transnationality of the funds.

Further reading and useful resources

- All four MRS in one short brief: [Macro-regional strategies in changing times](#)
- [keep.eu](#): source of aggregated information of projects and beneficiaries in territorial cooperation. Knowledge management tool including database, website, search engine. Including also information on macro-regional strategies projects, currently EUSBSR and EUSDR.
- [Capitalisation Network on Climate change and risks](#) launched by Interact III. Brings together practitioners from the Interreg community, regional stakeholders, experts and other EU programmes and knowledge communities active in the field of climate change and risks.
- Final report of the study '[Added value of the macro-regional strategies for projects and programmes](#)'
- [Macro-regional strategies' common themes](#)
- [Glossary: Macro-regional strategies](#)
- [UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#)
- [EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change](#)
- [Study on the mainstreaming of adaptation into the European Structural and Investment Funds \(ESIF\) 2014-2020](#)
- Final report of the study '[Insurance of weather and climate-related disaster risk: Inventory and analysis of mechanisms to support damage prevention in the EU](#)'