Revised EUSAIR Action Plan

(version 8, from 17 April 2024)

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List of abbreviations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ACER | Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators |
| AEWA | African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds |
| AII | Adriatic and Ionian Initiative |
| AZA | Allocated Zones for Aquaculture |
| CEF | Connecting Europe Facility |
| CEM | Clean Energy Ministerial |
| CESEC | Central and South Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity |
| CF | Cohesion Fund |
| CFP | Common Fisheries Policy |
| CINEA | European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency |
| CISE | Common Information Sharing Environment |
| CLLD | Community Led Local Development |
| CMCC | Euro-Mediterranean Centre on Climate Change |
| CONNECTA | Technical Assistance to Connectivity in the Western Balkans |
| CTN | Creative Tourism Network |
| DMO | Destination Management Organisation |
| EAFRD | European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development |
| EASIN | European Alien Species Information Network |
| ECDSO-E | Energy Community Distribution System Operators in Electricity |
| ECTN | European Cultural Tourism Network |
| EEA | European Environmental Agency |
| EIB | European Investment Bank |
| EMFF | European Maritime and Fisheries Fund |
| EMSW | European Maritime Single Window |
| EnC | Energy Community |
| ENTSO-E | European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity |
| ENTSO-G | European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas |
| ERA | European Research Area |
| ERDF | European Regional Development Fund |
| ESF+ | European Social Fund+ |
| EU | European Union |
| EUSAIR | EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region |
| FP | Facility Point |
| GB | Governing Board |
| GFCM | General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean |
| GIZ | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| GWP-Med | Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| ICZM | Integrated Coastal Zone Management |
| IEA | International Energy Agency |
| IRENA | International Renewable Energy Agency |
| IoT | Internet of Things |
| IPA | Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance |
| IPCC | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change |
| IT | Information Technology |
| ITI | Integrated Territorial Investments |
| IUCN | International Union for Conservation of Nature |
| LNG | Liquefied Natural Gas |
| MEAS | Multilateral Environmental Agreements |
| MIO-ECSDE | Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development |
| MSP | Maritime Spatial Planning |
| MPAs | Marine Protected Areas |
| NC | National Coordinators |
| NEETs | Young people neither in employment nor in education or training |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PAP | Priority Actions Programme |
| PC | Pillar Coordinators |
| PCI | Projects of Common Interest |
| PCS | Port Community System |
| RAC | Regional Activity Centre |
| RCC | Regional Cooperation Council |
| RDI | Research, Development and Innovation |
| REMPEC | Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SMEs | Small and medium-sized enterprises |
| SUMP | Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan |
| TEN | Trans-European Networks |
| TEN-E | Trans-European Networks for Energy |
| TEN-T | Trans-European Networks for Transports |
| TSG | Thematic Steering Group |
| VTMIS | Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information System |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNECE | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| WBIF | Western Balkans Investment Framework |
| WFD | Water Framework Directive |

1. Introduction

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) is a macroregional strategy adopted by the European Commission and endorsed by the European Council in 2014. The original strategy was jointly developed by the European Commission and the Adriatic-Ionian Region countries and stakeholders, which agreed to work together on the areas of joint interest for the benefit of each country and the whole region.

At present, the participating countries include the 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.

The objective of the EUSAIR is to promote effective multilevel and cross-sectoral cooperation for economically prosperous, socially inclusive, well connected, more integrated, green and liveable Adriatic-Ionian Region. The participating countries of the EUSAIR agreed on areas of mutual interest with high relevance for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, being it joint challenges or opportunities.

The Action Plan helps the EUSAIR to go from ‘words to actions’ by identifying the concrete priorities for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. The first Action Plan was agreed upon in 2014 when the EUSAIR was launched. Since then, new priorities, challenges and opportunities have emerged – which need to be addressed through joint actions in the Adriatic-Ionian Region – the process of the revision of the Action Plan has started in January 2022. This revision of the Action Plan takes into account the priorities set in the UN Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals, EU policies supporting green and digital transition as well as building just and inclusive Europe on the principles of European Pillar on Social Rights; the changed circumstances and perspectives of EU enlargement; enlarged membership in the EUSAIR as well as experience concerning the capacities of the EUSAIR community in putting the strategy into practice.

The participating countries have set the goal to help facilitate accession process through the revised Action Plan and following this, unlock the full potential of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Joint actions comprise building networks, offering mutual learning, striving for harmonisation, aligning policies, building capacities, strengthening civil society and voluntary service, to highlight some examples. The revision of the Action Plan is informed by a consultation. The Action Plan outlines the way for all involved stakeholders to cooperate on specific topics, priorities and actions to achieve by a common effort the objectives of the Strategy as a whole and in particular those of the Pillars. The drafting process involved a wide range of stakeholders from the Adriatic-Ionian Region representing national, regional and local authorities, but also the private sector, academia and civil society. The Action Plan is therefore a bottom up approach where the role of the governance system of EUSAIR Thematic Steering Groups of the Pillars and the Governing Board have a very crucial role to play, from the drafting of the Plan up to its implementation.

The implementation of the Action Plan is the responsibility of all, at country, regional, and local/municipal level, within each participating country. The EUSAIR governance system supported by its coordination mechanism oversees coordination, monitoring and implementation. The Governing Board is the main decision making and coordinating body, providing strategic guidance for the implementation, monitoring of the progresses achieved, evaluation of the results, and inputs for the adjusting of the strategy to new challenges. National coordinators, representing each participating country will ensure an effective link in each country with the relevant bodies involved in the implementation of the strategy. For each Pillar, a Thematic Steering Group, composed of appointed representatives of participant countries relevant administrations will work closely with their counterparts in the other countries, to develop and implement the Action Plan. To ensure even stronger commitment and effective governance an EUSAIR governance architecture revision is underway, better defining the roles and responsibilities and encouraging improved coordination between the strategic, thematic and operational level of the Strategy as well as improved multilevel and cross-sectoral participation with stronger involvement of regions, local administrations, academia, research, economic actors, civil society and other stakeholders in Strategy implementation. EUSAIR Facility Point, EUSAIR Stakeholders Engagement Point and Strategic Project Development project act as a technical structure providing assistance and support to the Governing Board, the Thematic Steering Groups and the relevant stakeholders, each with its functions.

The Thematic Steering Groups have Pillar Coordinators to ensure an effective implementation of the Actions included in each Pillar. This involves securing agreement on an implementation plan associated to a timetable and a list of indicators for monitoring and evaluating progresses achieved, and ensuring close contacts between project promoters, programmes and funding sources. The Pillar coordination and monitoring activities will be supported by technical assistance provided by the EUSAIR Facility Point with assistance of the other two EUSAIR governance support projects. This work is transnational, inter-sector and inter-institutional.

* 1. Aim of the revision

Starting point of the revision process was the political mandate expressed in the Izola and Tirana Declarations, the findings of the EUSAIR evaluation, relevant Commission reports, experience of the participating countries, the proposals of Thematic Steering Groups and EUSAIR stakeholders. The Sarajevo Declaration, signed during the revision process, was even more specific, welcoming the fifth, Social Pillar in EUSAIR, acknowledging the need for stronger mobilisation of funds and appropriate monitoring tools to evaluate impact of the Strategy and emphasising regional cooperation in equal opportunities, empowerment of women, youth engagement and UN Sustainable Development Goals. On this basis, the Action Plan has been revised to adapt to the changes in its membership and to respond better to current challenges and opportunities.

The revision process also allowed to better align the EUSAIR and envisaged actions with current EU objectives and strategies – e.g. Structural Funds, IPA Funds, Agricultural and Rural Funds, Maritime and Fishery Funds, and EU programmes such as Horizon Europe. The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans and/or other targeted Western Balkans investment plans or instruments were also considered. As a result, the Action Plan targets a mid-term future of 2030.

In light of these aims and time horizon, the existing Pillars of the EUSAIR have been revisited, adjusted and supplemented with introduction of one more Pillar. This resulted in the following Pillars:

* **Pillar 1 – Blue Sustainable Economy** addressing the need to strengthen emerging technologies and innovation in the field, as well as fisheries and aquaculture and progress on joint actions in the field of maritime and marine governance and services. The focus goes beyond the immediate marine and maritime areas; it also involves inland water resources such as rivers and lakes.
* **Pillar 2 – Connecting the Region** addresses the need to strengthen energy and transport networks and services in the region. Inter-linked and sustainable transport and energy networks projects and programmes are needed to develop the region. Cooperation is needed to reduce bottlenecks and develop transport and energy infrastructure networks and services and regulatory frameworks. Coordinated monitoring of maritime traffic and multi-modal transport and energy services will increase competitiveness. The focus goes beyond the major energy and transport infrastructure networks; it also involves urban nodes of the Region in order to reconcile their economic and demographic growth with environmental sustainability and people accessibility to services and innovations, particularly in suburban and rural areas. A particular emphasis is given to the need to also progress on the transition to green (carbon neutral) and digital solutions.
* **Pillar 3 – Environmental Quality** sets out to improve the marine and costal environment and transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity, by further strengthening the development and use of common platforms and tools for data exchange and joint monitoring, supporting cross-border and transnational aspects of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP), strengthening the exchange of experience and the development of new innovative solutions for climate change resilience in the region and ensuring that the results of existing cooperation efforts are disseminated and capitalised. According to the World Economic Forum, it is clearly indicated that all the greatest long-term risks to mankind are likely to be environmental. That is why risk perceptions have shifted to extreme weather conditions, ecological disasters, loss of biological diversity, natural disasters and failure to mitigate climate change. Climate change with special regards to adaptation is defining the scope of work of this Pillar. Environmental and climate change risks have to be recognized and included in everyday activities to generate needed response.
* **Pillar 4 –Sustainable Tourism** takes into consideration all the key dimensions of economic, environmental, cultural and social sustainability. The focus includes the digital and green transition of the tourism ecosystem considering relevant sectors and different public and private actors. It also promotes innovative ways for tourism. The overall objective is to develop the full potential of the Region in terms of innovative, sustainable, responsible quality tourism. Diversification of tourism products and services, along with tackling seasonality, will boost business and create jobs.
* **Pillar 5 – Improved Social Cohesion** promotes social progress concerning labour market opportunities and access and the involvement of future generations in decision making. In doing so, it addresses the importance of preserving and promoting the European social model, and solving social challenges that transcend national borders. An important focus is on skills and youth. The aim of the Social Pillar is to align the Adriatic-Ionian Region with the EU strategies and policies for strengthening focus on social change, and pair the green and digital transition with social transition. It contributes from the macroregional context to achieve equal opportunities, empowerment of women, youth engagement, and access to the labour market, as well as fair working conditions and social protection in the whole region. Cooperation between participating countries may inter alia include exchange of experiences, coordination of policy measures, definition of priorities and standardisation of approaches to solving social challenges that transcend national borders. The Social Pillar will also work as a response to the requirements of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and it will also tackle the human rights dimension of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans.

While the first four pillars are further developed based on the past EUSAIR Action Plan, the fifth, Improved Social Cohesion Pillar has only been decided upon in May 2023. Therefore, its content will be further developed and detailed.

The **Action Plan revision process** took place between January 2022 and June 2023. The revision process was led by relevant EUSAIR Presidencies (Albania from January 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina from May 2022 and Croatia from May 2023) supported by the EUSAIR Facility Point and included a wide range of relevant players of the EUSAIR community. Pillar Coordinators and members of the Thematic Steering Groups for each Pillar, the EUSAIR Governing Board and National Coordinators were involved. A specific Revision Working Group has been established by the Governing Board, with representatives of each participating countries appointed by National Coordinators. The group provided guidance to the Facility Point and approved the work done at each step of the process.

The revision process included also moments of consultation, where stakeholders other than those directly involved in the EUSAIR were asked to provide inputs and comments.

The overall timeline of the revision process is described below.

The most important steps and milestones of the revision process were:

* The first draft of the roadmap (January 2022)
* Engagement of an external expert that shall facilitate the revision (February – March 2022)
* M1: Agreement on the process (February to November 2022)
* Launch of EUSAIR-level public consultation with key stakeholders and interested general public including youth (May – June 2022)
* EUSAIR-level public consultation report published (September 2022)
* Establishment of a Revision Working Group (October/ November 2022)
* Launching of the internal EUSAIR consultation phase on the relevant EUSAIR levels (October 2022-January 2023)
* M2: Agreement on the Action Plan Pillars, Topics, structure, governance (February-May 2023)
* Second round of thematic consultation (March-June 2023)
* M3: 1st Draft Action Plan (June 2023)
* Gathering feedback from regional/national and EC levels (July-September 2023)
* Final round of internal EUSAIR consultation (September 2023)
* M4: Input document for EC Action Plan Staff Working Document (SWD) (October 2023)
  1. Horizontal & cross-cutting topics

Considering the interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities addressed by the EUSAIR, and its wideness, the Pillars are highly interrelated, and some issues cut across Pillars. Therefore, the EUSAIR encourages an integrated or transversal approach highlighting interdependences between its Pillars.

In order to implement this integrated or transversal approach, horizontal and cross-cutting issues have been identified which shall ensure that important topics are addressed adequately under the respective Pillars. The Action Plan outlines the general understanding of the horizontal and cross-cutting issues. During the implementation of the Action Plan, they need to be integrated when appropriate into the Actions proposed in the process of putting the Action Plan into practice.

**Horizontal topics** are topics of utmost importance for the EUSAIR and for the future of the Adriatic-Ionian Region which need to be addressed by all Pillars and Topics. These topics are:

* **Enlargement.** The enlargement of the EU through the envisaged EU membership of Western Balkan candidate countries is a central development feature in the region. All Pillars and all their Topics, where relevant, shall contribute to the EU enlargement processes in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and help the candidate countries to prepare their accession. The EU's commitment to the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and substantial investment through the Economic and Investment Plan emphasise the importance of good environmental governance. Simultaneously, it presents a unique opportunity to accelerate the region's transition to greener economies. Chapters 22 and 27 of the acquis have pivotal roles in guiding the Western Balkans' efforts towards sustainable growth. The implementation of these chapters requires significant administrative capacities and strategic planning that the Strategy will help to develop. Since the biggest proportion of the acquis is implemented by local authorities their participation will be strongly encouraged.
* **Capacity building.** High quality government, governance and capacities are a pre-condition for economic and social prosperity and cohesion. All Pillars and all their   
  Topics, where relevant and necessary, shall contribute to capacity building and to the quality of governance in the region. In particular, policy coherence for sustainable development shall be taken into account in order to allow for the 5 Pillars to be carried out in a mutually supported and integrated way.
* **Innovation and research** in accordance with national/regional smart specialisation strategies. Future oriented development requires research to generate knowledge and innovation to transfer the available knowledge both in terms of technology and social implication, and the ability to translate innovations into new products, markets and services. All Pillars and all their Topics, where relevant, shall contribute to strengthening research and innovation and link to relevant smart specialisation strategies and processes. This should be done through better and stronger cooperation between national/regional governance structures responsible for smart specialisation strategies implementation in the countries/regions and stakeholders (regional, clusters, etc.) in the Adriatic Ionian region. Though this wider RDI potential and critical mass within Adriatic Ionian region will be achieved. Respective stakeholders should position themselves tighter together, building on existing and establishing new value chains also on a global scale. Science driven transformations are urgently needed to enable steeper progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Suggested activities between smart specialisation governance structures and innovation support systems should lead to creation of specific R&D projects, via new or existing cooperation platforms, support services, infrastructures. Cooperation should strive to support innovation upscaling, exchange good practises (and other tools) to increase efficiency of supportive environments in the region, shifting focus from public to private sector support. Building on the results of already realised projects, their stakeholders and results should be used as a basis for the future work and cooperation.

It goes without saying, climate change and the green transition to a carbon-neutral Europe are also widely considered by all Pillars. They are of particular importance as the region – and especially the Western Balkan – is one of the regions in Europe that is most heavily affected by the impact of climate change, as it might face considerable increases in temperature. Estimations suggest temperature may increase by 1.7 to 4.0°C, and even exceeding 5.0°C by the end of the century, depending on the global effort in greenhouse gasses emission reduction (see Green Agenda for the West Balkans 2021-2030).

EUSAIR activities will contribute to the green transition to a carbon-neutral Europe by organising the EUSAIR-related meetings as low-carbon events. As far as possible adoption will be made of virtual meetings while in the case of physical meetings the most climate friendly modes of transport and organisation will be chosen, and possible additional carbon emissions will be compensated through carbon offsetting measures.

It also goes without saying, that the principle of equal opportunities and gender equality are essential to all parts of the Action Plan. The European Pillar of Social Rights on Gender Equality, as well as the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the EU Pay Transparency Directive and the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence are to be considered by all Pillars. All activities that contribute to the objectives and targets of the Action Plan must be in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. This ensures compliance with the principles of gender equality, equal opportunities, and suppression of discrimination. Activities within EUSAIR will be encouraged to include activities that specifically address issues of gender equality and the inclusion of marginalized groups.

**Cross-cutting topics** are topics which could have been thematic pillars in their own right but were found to overlap with the existing Pillars (it should also be noted that all described cross-cutting topics are relevant and heavily addressed in respective S3s). Therefore, these topics have been defined as cross-cutting as they are to be addressed by several Topics of the Pillars. These topics are:

* **Circular economy.** The green transition requires to make circularity work for people, regions and cities. This implies implementing circular economy approaches in a wide range of sectors. In order to increase development and implementation of circular economy, activities should be focused on connecting (national/regional) circular economy entities responsible for national/regional coordination in participating countries, searching for synergies in achieving EU policy goals. Good practices present a useful source of information for capacity building and exchange of experience between participating countries, however new solutions through system innovation approach should be sought as well. With involvement of national/regional stakeholders this would support matchmaking and development of value chains in the entire region encourage uptake of EU initiatives related to circular economy in Western Balkan countries.

This concerns in particular Pillar 1 with focus on green & blue technology reducing human impact on environment and waters in particular, Pillar 2 with focus on renewable energy, and Pillar 4 with focus on sustainable and green tourism.

* **Green rural development.** Rural areas are an important part of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Sustainable development of rural areas concerns a wide range of economic and societal activities – including agriculture – as well as the wise management of the natural and cultural heritage in rural areas. In line with areas of action of Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas the topic is addressed by Pillar 1 with focus on sustainable fisheries and support to local communities, Pillar 2 with focus on sustainable energy production also in rural areas and sustainable mobility in rural areas, Pillar 3 with regard to the management of the environment in rural areas and sustainable agriculture practices, Pillar 4 with focus on sustainable rural tourism as well as Pillar 5 with fight against brain drain.

Supporting efficiency and connectivity through digitalisation of the rural areas to improve living conditions and economic development of rural areas. Raising awareness of importance of digital networks (4/5 G, optic) in rural areas to encourage availability of digital public services.

* **Digitalisation.** The digital transition is essential for the future competitiveness of enterprises and the well-being of people in Europe. This implies strengthening digitalisation in all sectors of our economies and ensure it works for all parts of our society. Establishing network of digital innovation hubs (DIH's) in the region as a priority, following with building stronger connections within the network. This would increase awareness of the importance of digital innovation tools, such as AI and Internet of things.

This concerns in particular Pillar 1 with a focus on digitalisation-related green & blue technology, Pillar 2 with a focus on digitalisation in transport and energy, Pillar 3 with a focus on digital sustainability solutions, and Pillar 4 with a focus on digitalisation in tourism.

* 1. Governance, funding, monitoring and evaluation

The revised Action Plan does not alter the governance system and function of the EUSAIR. However, slight changes which will allow the smooth adaptation of the governance system to the revised Action Plan, without prejudice to the existing structures, might be needed. In short, the main structures of the EUSAIR governance are:

* **Governing Board (GB)** is a decision making body and provides strategic guidance for the implementation of the Action Plan, to the Thematic Steering Groups, National Coordinators and governance support structure, defines the monitoring and evaluation activities to be implemented, and assesses the progress and achievements of the implementation of the Action Plan.
* **National Coordinators (NC)** carry out national coordination and consolidation tasks related to the EUSAIR, in particular by ensuring effective links and coordination with the relevant Administrations and stakeholders and present strategic national positions in the EUSAIR governance and implementation processes.
* **Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs)** coordinate and drive the implementation work under their respective Pillars. There is one Thematic Steering Group per Pillar. For now only in the case of Pillar 2, there are two sub-groups for transport and energy, respectively, which work in close coordination while sharing methodologies and procedures.
* **Pillar Coordinators (PC)** coordinate the work of the respective Thematic Steering Groups. Usually, for every Thematic Steering Group the pillar coordination is shared by at least two coordinators, whenever feasiblecoming from two participating countries, one from an EU member state and one from an EU candidate country or San Marino.
* **Facility Point (FP)** **and the other projects supporting the EUSAIR governance** provide technical and content related assistance to the implementation of the EUSAIR Action Plan, including support to the Governing Board, National Coordinators, Thematic Steering Groups and Pillar Coordinators, and facilitate macroregional (cross-pillar) actions and capacity building for EUSAIR stakeholders and key implementers. The EUSAIR Facility Point with its 4 functions has the main supporting and coordinating role in facilitating governance bodies in administrative and technical manner, in decision-making and capacity building, in communicating the Strategy and in monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy. The EUSAIR Stakeholders Engagement Point encourages engagement with stakeholders, supports financial dialogues and embedding of the Action Plan and together with the Strategic Implementation Project supports the implementation of the Action Plan.

Currently Pillars are coordinated by the following participating countries:

1. Pillar 1: Greece, Montenegro,
2. Pillar 2: Italy, Serbia, North Macedonia,
3. Pillar 3: Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,
4. Pillar 4: Croatia, Albania,
5. Pillar 5: Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The EUSAIR does not have own financial resources. Funding for actions and projects under the strategy has to come from existing financial instruments. It is of main importance to mobilise and use all EU, national and regional programmes and funding sources. Besides the Structural Funds and the IPA funds (including Western Balkan Investment Framework initiative – WBIF initiative[[1]](#footnote-2)), these are, as an example, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), Horizon Europe**,** Trans-European Networks for Transport (TEN-T), Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E), Digital Europe, Erasmus+, LIFE and the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).

Furthermore, EU policy tools such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), Community Led Local Development (CLLD), Local Action Groups under LEADER or Energy Communities are important players to be addressed by the EUSAIR. Activities under the revised EUSAIR Action Plan can offer them useful stepping stones to connect across the Adriatic-Ionian Region for exchanging experience and advocating their bottom-up approaches.

Other means are available, notably from the European Investment Bank and other International Financial Institutions.

All funding sources have their own eligibility rules, selection criteria and implementation modalities. The managing authorities of EU funding programmes, including NIPACs and European Commission (DG REGIO/DG NEAR) play an important role by ensuring the embedding of the actions of the revised Action Plan into their respective programmes and financial instruments. This requires close and long-term cooperation with the managing authorities through establishment of operational networks of managing authorities and NIPACs. Coordination between EUSAIR governance structures and managing authorities is needed for the implementation of EUSAIR priorities embedded in operational programmes, links between the EUSAIR priorities and IPA Programming Framework and flagships of the Economic and investment Plan for the Western Balkans need to be established by the EUSAIR governance structures and appropriate tools to measure impact of the Strategy set in place. National Coordinators and members of Thematic Steering Groups cooperate with managing authorities and NIPACs at the national level, with other National Coordinators on the strategic level, and with members of the Thematic Steering Groups on the operational level.

To ensure an effective implementation of the revised Action Plan – and as regards to its rolling character – regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation activities are needed. This concerns both the state of play of the activities carried out and supported (e.g. by following up on the indicators proposed for single actions), and the evolution of the Adriatic-Ionian Region (e.g. to see whether the Topics of the revised Action Plan are still relevant and whether new urgent Topics emerge).

* 1. Action Plan as rolling

Operationally the Action Plan revisions should be aligned with the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) programming to provide agreements on macroregional thematic priorities to be embedded in the new programmes. In between revisions adjustments to the Action Plan are still possible.

The rolling character of the Action Plan provides all Pillars the chance to further develop and fine-tune their Actions in the years to come, to be able to better respond to changing contexts and possible new crises, challenges and opportunities as they arise. The revised Action Plan is a ‘rolling document’, which implies that the Governing Board and Thematic Steering Groups should remain attentive, and adopt adequate actions if there is a need for adaptation.

Based on results of monitoring and evaluation, EC reports and observed trends in the region, the Thematic Steering Groups might propose readjustments of existing Actions or even new Actions to the Action Plan. When sufficiently justified, the Governing Board approves such modifications.

In addition, as a rule, and where appropriate, until spring 2024 the Thematic Steering Groups, in cooperation with the National Coordinators, Revision Working Group and Governing Board, shall undertake efforts to strengthen the focus and targeting of the Pillars, also considering the integration of horizontal and cross-cutting issues into the actions – rather than at the level of Topics – where appropriate. Based on the more focused Pillars, this will also include setting appropriate measurable indicators and targets that can measure whether the EUSAIR is getting closer to the specific objectives. The indicators will be set not later than the final adoption of the revised EC Communication. The new indicators can take inspiration from past monitoring reports and evaluations of the EUSAIR, the indicators used in other macroregional strategies as well as the indicators for Cohesion or IPA programmes set out in the regulations. The proposal for the strengthened focus and targeting of the Pillars will be adopted by the Governing Board.

* 1. Organisation of the Action Plan

The Action Plan is structured so as to reflect the Pillars as well as the Topics selected under each Pillar. Accordingly, the Action Plan incorporates the following features:

* **Pillars** address the core challenges and opportunities identified as being of central importance for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. They are at the core of the Strategy and are essential to the success of its work, and how it is communicated.
* **Topics** under each Pillar represent the main areas in which the macroregional strategy brings added value. For each Topic, the Action Plan presents the issue and indicates what specific contribution it will bring.
* **Actions** under each Topic are the interventions which EUSAIR governance structures and stakeholders plan to carry out in order to address the set objectives and targets. These include e.g. new approaches, increased coordination in policy making, policy reviews, support to a process already underway, and networking initiatives. The Thematic Steering Groups assisted by the EUSAIR governance support structure will translate the actions into concrete project development processes and together with stakeholders bring added value to the region.

# Pillar 1 –Blue Sustainable Economy

The Adriatic-Ionian Region is rich in natural resources and biodiversity. However, it is quite vulnerable to natural disasters, overexploitation and pollution. Fisheries and aquaculture are important sectors in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, not only due to their economic and ecological contributions, but also due to social and cultural traditions. This concerns seas, coastal areas, islands, lake areas, river areas, and catchment areas of important water bodies (e.g. the whole hydrosphere).

The EUSAIR sets out to further promote the sustainable use of its natural resources, ensuring its conscious exploration and the creation of added value. It aims to develop innovative technologies, to strengthen the regional market by enhancing cooperation and clustering in the region, as well as stakeholder involvement and interrelation of businesses, and to increase competitiveness in related sectors both in coastal and inland areas. All of this will help to ensure comparable production and common and shared environmental standards across the entire region, and in compliance with the EU Acquis.

To fulfil these aims, many challenges must be overcome. First, there are imbalances in innovative capacity, access to knowledge and research networks. There are also considerable differences in access to funding and administrative capacity, especially between EU and candidate countries. Candidate countries are often limited by the lack of support schemes and by obsolete technologies, which restrain their research, development and innovation (RDI) potential. Overexploitation of national resources is one other main challenge, leaving the local fauna in danger, and polluting the environment with an excess of nutrients, pesticides and antibiotics. This also includes the lack of effective waste management, which can result in the accumulation of large amounts of marine litter in the region. Moreover, the Adriatic-Ionian Region is highly exposed and sensitive to the effects of climate change.

Over the past few years, the Adriatic-Ionian Region has gained experience in successful macroregional cooperation, especially thanks to the networks of the largest ports of the region, of research institutions, of Business organisation and Clusters, and/or of regional authorities. The Action Plan of this Pillar gives continuation to these networks and addresses the region’s challenges by promoting further forms of cooperation. This includes, among others, the facilitation of cooperation and networking between national and EU-funded research and innovation activities and the development of regional innovation communities. The strategy supports the coordination of policies aimed at science and research and promotes the use of EU instruments to support research and innovation in blue and green technologies. It also promotes research collaboration, joint projects and sharing of research infrastructure.

In addition, this strategic framework outlines a comprehensive approach to address the challenges, capitalize on the opportunities, and promote the adoption of blue and green technologies in the whole maritime and inland water bodies, sustainable and competitive fisheries and aquaculture and maritime and marine governance and services in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Achieving these objectives will require collaboration among governments, local communities, industry stakeholders, the Academic and Research Communities and international organizations to safeguard the region's marine and freshwater resources and promote economic development.

Marine and maritime services encompass a wide range of activities, including shipping, port management, coastal tourism, biotechnology, fisheries, aquaculture, environmental protection and research, among others. These activities are major drivers of economic growth, job creation and trade facilitation in the AIR region and often constitute and include cross-pillar issues. The blue sustainable economy encompasses a spectrum of endeavours, including activities that are both land-based and marine-based, such as fish processing, sensor manufacturing and valorising fish by-products and unavoidable unwanted catches. It is also significantly influenced by the dynamic interaction between land and sea at the coastal interface, influenced by factors like riverine inputs and human activities. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that blue economy value chains will invariably involve some form of application, utilization, or reliance on marine and coastal environments, resources, or data.

Pillar 1 focuses on three Topics:

1. Blue and green technologies,

2. Fisheries and aquaculture

3. Maritime and marine governance and services.

## Topic 1.1 – Blue and green technologies

**Global objectives.** Blue and green technologies are essential for the transition to a competitive and climate-neutral sustainable economy, i.e. the implementation of the EU Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. This involves the promotion of research, innovation and business opportunities in sustainable blue economy sectors, by strengthening quadruple helix ties and synergies among ongoing initiatives and projects in the region. The focus goes beyond the immediate marine and maritime areas; it also involves other natural habitats such as rivers and lakes, including the biota therein. It also targets the exploitation of the not yet (fully) utilised potentials which contribute to a sustainable technology and economic transitions regardless of where they are located.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The evolution of the marine and maritime sector and the growing importance of water as a key resource for sustainability require a unified approach at EUSAIR level. To promote research, innovation and business opportunities for the marine and maritime technologies and blue biotechnology, there is a need to strengthen synergies among initiatives and funding programs active in the area and cooperation between EU member states and accession countries in the region. The overall objective is to maximise progress in research, technological development and innovation to help solve societal challenges by creating synergies between smart specialisation approaches and strengthening the quadruple helix ties between research units, business support organisations, SME and sector-specific business associations and clusters in the field of green and blue technologies in the region. This may also involve improvement of shipbuilding technology to strengthen green shipbuilding. This involves promoting:

* synergies and networking to jointly work for relevant and useful research, development and innovation activities and initiatives;
* networking and cooperation between regional innovation ecosystems, initiatives and smart specialisation strategies of the Adriatic-Ionian Region;
* macroregional innovation collaboration and investments;
* exchanges between the business sector and the research world;
* easier access to finance for SMEs as well as the promotion of start-ups and SME growth and development;
* support blue-green SMEs of the Adriatic-Ionian Region to develop favourable framework conditions for their internationalization.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* enhancing stable and formal collaborations between Adriatic-Ionian Region innovation ecosystems regarding green and blue (bio) technologies, leading to an increased number of patents in the fields of blue and green growths, increased shares of economic activity and returns in sectors related to blue and green growth as well as increased use of blue and green novel technologies to safeguard the aquatic environment and improve the competitiveness of the maritime, fisheries and aquaculture sectors in global markets; and
* stronger networks among relevant players in the Adriatic-Ionian Region concerning research on green and blue technologies, leading to more intensive research and public- and private collaborations and networks in the field, and increased numbers of players from the Adriatic-Ionian Region involved in Horizon Europe projects.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Capitalising on EUSAIR regions, which are among the EU fastest growing innovation performers.
* Collaboration of lagging regions with more developed regions can improve and facilitate knowledge transfer, technological upgrading and entrepreneurship.
* Easier access to finance for innovative companies and start-ups for marine and maritime technologies and blue biotechnology.
* Establishing competitive macroregional platforms for an enhanced collaborative ecosystem for research, innovation, entrepreneurship, where SMEs could foster the development of existing RDI cooperation in the different technology fields through with strategic and complementary actions that would have a stronger impact and more scalable results.

Challenges:

* Increasing disparities in innovation performance between EU and candidate countries.
* Lagging regions underrepresented in competitive programmes such as Horizon Europe.
* Difficulties in connection and exploit synergies between landlocked countries and countries with access to the sea, and in finding common goals.
* Insufficient support in terms of funding and marketing operations, lack of specific national policies and/or legislation under which blue (bio) technologies could be developed and implemented, fragmentation of the sector, lack of established blue biotech value chains, lack of potential collaboration between science-industry-policy makers and potential ecological risks for the development of the blue (bio) technologies sector.
* In candidate countries, only few research groups and networks are actively involved in this sector and generally they are not specialised in blue (bio) technologies.
* Challenges regarding the cooperation and networking between research institutions and the private sector of marine and maritime technology enterprises, and the common use of resources for developing certain products with common standards.
* Possibilities to link marine and maritime technologies and biotechnologies with landlocked countries, and to link with scientific activities in such countries.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a wide range of EU and national policies related to sustainable blue economy, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy and many other fields:

* A Farm to Fork Strategy [COM(2020) 381 final]
* A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 [COM(2021) 345 final]
* A new Circular Economy Action Plan [COM(2020) 98 final]
* Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 [COM(2020) 380 final]
* Digitising European Industry: Reaping the full benefits of the “Shaping Europe’s digital future” [COM(2020) 67 final] and the “Digital Europe Programme” [Regulation (EU) 2021/694
* A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: Strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment [COM(2018) 673 final]And Bioeconomy Progress Report (2022).
* European Cluster Partnerships
* European Missions [COM(2021) 609 final] ] and especially the Mission Ocean and waters
* European Research Area (ERA)
* A New European Innovation Agenda [COM(2022) 332 final]
* Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans [SWD(2020) 223 final]
* Pact for skills - upskilling shipbuilding and maritime technology workers in Europe
* REPowerEU Plan [COM(2022) 230 final]
* Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions: Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth [COM(2017) 376 final]
* Sustainable Blue Economy [COM(2021) 240 final]
* Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership [Horizon Europe]
* Territorial Agenda 2030 - A future for all places
* Zero Emission Waterborne Platform Partnership [Horizon Europe]
* The EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil'
* Communication ‘[Towards a strong and sustainable EU algae sector](https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/publications/communication-commission-towards-strong-and-sustainable-eu-algae-sector_en)'
* The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Water Framework Directive (WFD) - including in terms of Good Environmental Status and restoration of aquatic ecosystems –
* The Marine Spatial Planning Directive (MSPD)
* UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) and 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development)

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players and potential stakeholders, including:

* Business associations, SME associations, and clusters in the field of science and technology and maritime/ industry/affairs
* Business support organisations, innovation agencies/centres and technology parks
* Chambers of Commerce
* Local and regional authorities
* Ministries of the Economy
* Ministries of Maritime Affairs
* Ministries of University and Research
* Ministries of Science and Technology
* Ministries of SMEs
* Ministries for Rural Development and Food.
* Ministries of Fisheries and Aquaculture
* Ministries for the Environment
* Non-governmental organisations in the field of science and technology and maritime affairs
* Organisations in charge of smart specialisation strategies
* Planning Authorities
* Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs)
* Port authorities
* Projects, networks, clusters in Horizon EU and the EIT
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* Universities and educational institutions
* Initiatives on RDI in the field of blue economy (ex. BlueMed, Blue Mission MED)
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross-cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The activities will help the candidate countries to better integrate with EU member states in the field of research and innovation related to blue and green economy and technology. More specifically, the enlargement activities are related to the *EU acquis* Chapters 3 (right of establishment and freedom to provide services), 6 (company law), 7 (intellectual property law), 8 (competition), 18 (statistics), 20 (enterprise and industrial policy), 22 (regional policy and coordination of structural instruments), 25 (science and research), 26 (education and culture), 27 (environment), 28 (consumer and health protection).
* **Capacity building.** The activities have a strong research and innovation focus which subsequently will contribute to increasing capacities among relevant players in the region.
* **Innovation and research.** The activities are directly targeted to strengthening innovation ecosystems and research in accordance with respective Smart Specialisation Communities (S3s) with aim of building macroregional S3s on sustainable blue economy and green technologies. Building macroregional S3 network on different topics related to green and blue technologies, encouraging cooperation for value chains development.

The above horizontal topics will greatly benefit AIR EU member states and candidate countries with increased cooperation between them and the North and Western European countries. This cooperation would aim to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise, as well as the adoption of best practices within the AIR. By encouraging better integration with economically developed regions to the north and west of Europe, the AIR can benefit from their wealth of experience, innovation and successful approaches to various blue and green technologies sectors. This provision underscores the importance of leveraging these partnerships to enhance economic development, sustainability and overall regional progress.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** Blue and green technologies are important enabling components of the circular economy and of the ecological transition. Using developed and new system business models/initiatives (such as Climate-KIC) in participating countries to support implementation of circular economy and value chains development.
* **Green rural development.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to green rural development activities. However, some of the activities related to aquaculture and coastal bioeconomy can contribute to the regeneration of some rural areas. Building on smart community/village concept to support sustainable development of the rural areas using also green and blue technologies.
* **Digitalisation.** The digital transition can be supported e.g. through activities related to the development of favourable framework conditions for the adoption of technological and digital solutions in the field of blue and green growth; the strengthening of Digital Innovation Hubs will facilitate cooperation and networking between national and EU-funded research and innovation initiatives.

### Action 1.1.1 – Building Adriatic-Ionian Region innovation ecosystems that will promote research and innovation networks in green and blue technologies

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Action 1.1.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Building Adriatic-Ionian Region innovation ecosystems that will promote research and innovation networks in green and blue technologies** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Building Adriatic-Ionian Region innovation communities (EIT) (increasing participation in EU competitive programmes, possibilities for innovation up-scaling, better match of innovative sustainable services and products with demand, etc.). * Building and/or strengthening cooperation between smart specialisation strategies and thematic S3 partnerships, interregional innovation investments, and cooperation * Supporting regional partnerships to develop, connect or make complementary use of testing and demonstration facilities in shared Smart Specialisation priority areas. * Cooperation to develop favourable framework conditions for technological and digital solutions in the field of blue and green growth. * Coordination of science and research policies to create a common research and innovation area. * Develop favourable support policies to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from research to application/innovation. * Promote research collaboration on blue and green technologies in the frame of a circular economy. * Promote joint projects and sharing of research infrastructure for common projects. * Support the promotion of EIT Regional Innovation Scheme, Horizon EU Missions, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and other EU instruments to support research and innovation in blue and green technologies. * Facilitate the cooperation and networking between national and EU-funded research and innovation initiatives (Digital Innovation Hubs, Knowledge and Innovation Communities, clusters, etc.).   Promote Green Shipbuilding technologies. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Challenges regarding the interregional innovation cooperation. * Insufficient support in terms of funding and marketing operations, lack of specific national policies and/or legislation under which blue and green technologies could be developed. * Challenges regarding the cooperation and networking between research institutions and the private sector of marine and maritime technology enterprises, and the common use of resources for developing certain products with common standards. * Capitalising on EUSAIR regions, which are among the EU fastest growing innovation performers. * Collaboration between lagging regions and more developed regions can improve and facilitate knowledge transfer, technological upgrading and entrepreneurship. * Challenges to link biotechnologies with landlocked countries, and to link with scientific activities in those countries.   Easier access to finance for innovative companies and start-ups for marine and maritime technologies and blue biotechnology through macroregional platforms for an enhanced collaborative ecosystem for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Creation of Digital Innovation Hubs, Knowledge and Innovation Communities and clusters focusing on green and blue technologies\*, \*\*, P1F1. * Stronger RDI and cooperation among SMEs and between SMEs, large enterprises and research centres operating in the Adriatic-Ionian Region\*, P1F1. * Increased networking between researchers, SMEs and clusters\*, P1F1. * Increased joint research papers and number of researchers exchanged within the macro-region\*, P1F1. * Internationalization of SMEs in the region\*, P1F1. * Easier access to finance and promotion of the creation of start-upsP1F1. * Enhanced stable and formal collaboration between Adriatic-Ionian Region innovation ecosystems regarding green and blue technologies\*. * Stronger networks among relevant players in the Adriatic-Ionian Region concerning research on green and blue technologies\*, P1F1. * Macroregional innovation investments P1F1. * Digital transition and strengthening Digital Innovation Hubs**\*\*.** | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship FOSTERING QUADRUPLE HELIX TIES IN THE FIELD OF MARINE AND MARITIME TECHNOLOGIES AND BLUE BIO-TECHNOLOGIES FOR ADVANCING INNOVATION, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS ADAPTATION IN THE BLUE BIOECONOMY, the following strategic projects were developed so far:  **Monopilar strategic projects**   * **AimFrish** - Evaluating freshness and authenticity with real-time non-destructive methods to increase the value added of Adriatic Ionian macroregion produced fish. * **SeaSusPack** - Sustainable packaging of fish and seafood based on marine bioresources. * **AMOS** - Developing a cost – effective observatory system, tailored to the needs of Aquacultures with remote access, real-time data and forecast capabilities.   **Cross-Pillar strategic projects**   * **BLUECULTURE** - Development of Macro Regional Cluster on BlueCulture Technologies and creation of International Competence Center (Pillars 1 and 4) * **WAI-TP: WATERBORNE** - Adriatic-Ionian Technology Platform (Pillars 1 and 2) | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in project ideas | RCO 84 Interreg: Pilot actions developed and implemented jointly | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |
| OI: No. of new project ideas supported to mature into projects ready for submission |  | 0 p.a. (2023) | 10 (2030) | TSG monitoring system |
| RI: Innovations enabled (number of new products, services, processes, business models or methods) |  | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |
| RI: Jointly developed solutions (number of new products, services, processes, business models or methods) | RCO 116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |

**\***: Horizontal topic expected result/target of the action

**\*\***: Cross-cutting topic expected result/target of the action

P1F1: Pillar 1 Flagship 1 for Topic 1.1.

## Topic 1.2 – Fisheries and aquaculture

**Global objectives.** Aquaculture and fisheries management is a central part of a sustainable regional development, especially in coastal areas and lake regions. In the Adriatic-Ionian Region, fisheries and aquaculture are an integral part of the cultural and economic fabric. However, several challenges have emerged that have changed the approach for sustainable and competitive fisheries and aquaculture. In fisheries, catch levels are lower compared to decades ago; this has led to restrictions and common management measures. Increasing human pressures on the marine environment and demographic changes have also produced changes in the predominantly small-scale fisheries of the region. On the other hand, aquaculture production has grown in the past decades compared to the fisheries production. Although the growth in aquaculture might be comparatively slower than in some other countries globally, it remains a valuable component of the region's seafood industry. Aquaculture offers several benefits, including the production of nutritious and high-quality seafood products, which are vital for food security and a healthy diet. Furthermore, it contributes to employment opportunities, bolstering the regional economy and livelihoods. There is a need for action to build upon existing fishery and aquaculture resources in order to ensure a sustainable, resilient, and competitive future.

Aquaculture and Fisheries management covering the Adriatic-Ionian Sea and relevant inline waters involve the coordination of many inter-sectoral and transboundary issues and responsibilities for better management of the natural resources. Effective and better fisheries management at the sea and relevant inland waters requires strong coordination between the different Macroregional Strategies. In this context, a close collaboration of relevant envisaged activities for inland waters, which have been identified in the Danube Macroregional Strategy (EUSDR) is required to avoid duplication.

The aim of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is to ensure that fishing and aquaculture activities are environmentally sustainable in the long-term and are managed in a way that is consistent with the objectives of achieving economic, social and employment benefits, and of contributing to the availability of food supplies[[2]](#footnote-3). Aquaculture and fisheries represent critical sectors in the AIR's economy and their responsible management is vital to ensure long-term environmental and economic viability as they have the potential to drive economic growth and create job opportunities in the region. The EUSAIR aims to harness these sectors for the benefit of local economies and ensure a consistent supply of seafood products to meet the region's food security needs and envisions a future where aquaculture and fisheries are sustainable, environmentally responsible and economically beneficial.

The EUSAIR should further promote cross-border collaboration among the countries in the AIR and foster knowledge sharing, coordinated efforts in resource management and the development of common policies to ensure sustainable practices. Encouraging research and innovation within the aquaculture and fisheries sectors is a key goal that includes investments in technology, research and the adaptation and development of best practices to enhance sustainability and competitiveness.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The overall objective is to support cooperation efforts aiming at networking policy practices, business practices, research findings and other important assets to strengthen the fisheries and aquaculture sectors (in maritime and lake environments) in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Support shall be offered in the fields of

* Better fisheries management measures, sustainable exploitation of fish stocks, improvement of data collection and fish stock assessment, harmonisation with EU regulations & international organisations.
* Eradicating illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.
* Mitigating the effects of climate change and human pressures to fisheries and aquaculture Production.
* Reducing and mitigating the effects of discards and incidental catch of vulnerable species.
* Sustainable growth of a more efficient and circular aquaculture production, capitalising on innovation, digitalisation, and knowledge sharing.
* Increasing productivity, quality, environmental sustainability, and diversification in fisheries and aquaculture.
* Integrating aquaculture production with environmental protection and habitat restoration.
* Improving the image and competitiveness of farmed aquaculture products including the promotion of initiatives on marketing standards and healthy nutritional habits.
* Improving working conditions for fishermen and aquaculture workers and increasing the attractiveness of the sector for young people.
* Developing skills for professionals operating in the fish value chains.
* Development of protection plans and raising a high awareness of potential extinction of rare and migratory fish species.
* Monitoring, reducing the discard of alien species with ballast water and eradication of IAS (Invasive Alien Species)
* Support and encourage the adoption of sustainable sourcing standards for aquaculture and fisheries stocks through the use of standards such as the MSC (Marine Stewardship Council), Seafood Watch for Aquaculture and others.
* Establishing and developing research centres/institutes, research platforms, partnership and networks and further research infrastructure as a whole for data collection, processing and exchange it with relevant institutions in regional, EU and global level.

EUSAIR actions under this Topic are also related to the other EUSAIR Pillars, in particular activities in the Adriatic- –Ionian Region promoting:, a) sustainable maritime governance and spatial planning; b) circularity in fishery and aquaculture activities, c) green maritime transport and ports; d)) maritime clusters set up as an innovative enabler for a sustainable blue (bio) economy and e) sustainable maritime, coastal, and lake tourism.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* developing of a more sustainable, resilient and competitive fishery industry in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, including an Adriatic-Ionian Region fisheries information system; and
* developing of a more sustainable, resilient and competitive aquaculture sector in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, including both aquaculture at sea and at land, and growing volumes of Adriatic-Ionian aquaculture products on the market.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Growing demand and market prices for fishery products.
* Under the umbrella of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), coordination efforts and joint multiannual fisheries management are being organised to avert overfishing and the decrease of stocks and they are showing encouraging results.
* Establishment of marine protected areas, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) and/or Ecological and Fishery Protection Zones, like the Jabuka/Pomo Pit area in the Central Adriatic, to protect valuable marine habitats, preserve the marine biodiversity and ensure the long-term health of fish stocks.
* Fisheries and aquaculture value chains are well developed in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and they contribute to the socio-economic fabric of the region.
* Further explore and tap into the role of fishery operators for the conservation of the sea.
* Small-scale coastal fishing has a pivotal role in regional development of coastal regions, as it is key for other areas of development (e.g. employment, environment, tourism).
* Huge potential to diversify fisheries and further explore the link between fisheries, aquaculture, wild-life watching (dolphins, seals, birds, etc), recreational activities, and tourism which have not yet been explored extensively.
* Aquaculture production continues to grow due to high demand and restrictions to traditional fishing.
* Positive role of farmed fish and seafood production for environmental sustainability and food security.
* Expansion of aquaculture and cultivation of species (including micro and macroalgae) with an important potential for purposes other than human nutrition.
* The Adriatic-Ionian Region has a several freshwater resources, with numerous lakes and rivers, which can be explored for a sustainable use (fisheries, aquaculture, tourism activities).
* Coordinated spatial planning will allow the further development of aquaculture and other activities in the marine area.

Challenges:

* The situation of some exploited stocks in the Adriatic-Ionian needs close attention.
* Need for coordinated and agreed solutions to reduce overfishing (e.g. fishing quotas, expanding recreational fishing, maritime and river-based tourism).
* Setup a maritime spatial planning to accommodate green and blue maritime activities, allocated zones for Aquaculture AZAs) renewable energy production, marine protected areas (MPAs) and improve and align the legal framework for such investments. Missing data concerning some fish stock assessments.
* Need to improve a culture of compliance, data quality and well as monitoring, control, inspections and surveillance capacity in some Adriatic-Ionian countries.
* Need for an enhanced monitoring of throughout the region with regards to assessment and implementation of fishery management plans that are introduced to achieve maximum sustainable yields and resource conservation.
* Importance of complying with existing regulations, which leads to the need to renovate and restructure fishing fleets and to improve fishing gear efficiency and sustainability; this could be done, for example, through selectivity and new, less polluting engines.
* Lack of coordinated restoration/protection activities on freshwater resources to ensure healthy and sustainable freshwater ecosystems.
* Low rate of adaptation to institutionalised spatial planning: existing areas designated for aquaculture are fully occupied, and conflicts with other uses (e.g. tourism) provide limited spatial possibilities for coastal marine aquaculture development.
* Negative effects on the environment and ecosystems through some aquaculture activities that are not environmentally sustainable.
* High levels of pollution in the Adriatic-Ionian seas and freshwater ecosystems due to marine litter, microplastic, pesticides, antibiotics, excess of nutrients, etc.
* Low level of skills, education, and knowledge in the traditional small-scale fisheries, in the fish processing value chain and in the aquaculture sector. This includes low level of adaptation to new business concepts/activities and digitalisation.
* Need for a more effective harmonisation with the EU regulatory framework.
* Complex and not harmonised processes for licenses and authorisation of fisheries, aquaculture and- land based fish farming installations across the region.
* Need for candidate countries to achieve full compliance with the EU Acquis in the field of fisheries, environmental protection, training and education etc.
* Climate change results in sea warming that promotes the migration and installation of IAS to the Adriatic Ionian latitudes that outcompete or even extinct endemic species.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a wide range of EU and national policies related to sustainable blue economy, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy and many other fields:

* A Farm to Fork Strategy [COM(2020) 381 final]
* A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 [COM(2021) 345 final]
* A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: Strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment [COM(2018) 673 final] and related Bioeconomy Progress Report (2022)
* Blue Transformation roadmap 2022-2023
* The Common Fisheries Policy [Regulation (EU) no. 1380/2013 of 11 December 2013]
* The European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy [(COM(2018) 28 final]
* The EU’s Directive on single-use plastics [Directive (EU) 2019/904]
* The EU’s Directive establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning [Directive 2014/89/EU].
* Directive on Nitrates [91/676/EEC]
* EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 [COM(2020) 380 final]
* GFCM 2030 Strategy for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea
* Malta MEDFISH4EVER Ministerial Declaration
* Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) [DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC]
* Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 [COM (2021) 236 final]
* Water Framework Directive (WFD) [Directive 2000/60/EC]
* Natura 2000 Directives (2009/147/CE and 92/43/CEE)
* UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) and 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).
* EU Fisheries Package 2023 (February 2023):

1. *Communication on the Energy Transition of the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector*
2. *Communication on the common fisheries policy today and tomorrow*
3. *Report on the Common Market Organisation for fishery and aquaculture products.*

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Business associations and Producer Organisations and SME associations, and clusters in the field of fisheries and aquaculture
* Chambers of Commerce
* Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs)
* Local and regional authorities
* Local and regional development agencies
* Local and regional fisheries management organisations, such as the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).
* Ministries of Agriculture
* Ministries of the Environment
* Ministries of Fisheries and Aquaculture
* Ministries of Forestry
* Ministries of Maritime Affairs
* Ministries of University and research
* Ministries of Science and Technology
* Ministries of Transports and Infrastructure
* Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs)Non-governmental organisations in the field of environment, biodiversity and nature protection
* Projects, networks, clusters in Horizon EU and the EIT
* Protected Area Management Units (former Management Bodies)
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* SME and large companies in the fish value chain (also cooperatives and consortia)
* Universities and educational institutions
* EATIP and its mirror platforms in the Adriatic Ionian Region Sector-specific advisory bodies Initiatives on RDI in the field of blue economy (ex. BlueMed, Blue Mission MED)
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The activities help the candidate countries to better integrate with EU member states in field of EU fishery policies and compliance of candidate countries with EU Acquis in the fields of fisheries, environmental protection, training and education. In more detail, the enlargement activities are related to the *EU acquis* Chapters 8 (competition), 12 (food safety and veterinary policy), 13 (Fisheries), 18 (statistics), 20 (enterprise and industrial policy), 25 (science and research), 26 (education and culture), 27 (environment), 28 (consumer and health protection).
* **Capacity building.** The activities have a strong focus on capacity building and training e.g. related to diversifying activities for fishermen, sustainability, new technology and practices as well as funding opportunities in the fields of fisheries and aquaculture.
* **Innovation and research.** The activities include a number of proposals related to research projects, technological pilots, capacity building and investments regarding e.g. the use of aquaculture products (fish, algae etc.) for other purposes (pharmacy, cosmetics, etc.) and new fish products and new species in aquaculture.

By addressing the above activities of horizontal topics, a more integrated, sustainable, and innovative fisheries and aquaculture sector will be fostered in the Adriatic Ionian region. A close collaboration of relevant envisaged activities for inland waters, which have been identified in the Danube Macroregional Strategy (EUSDR) is required to avoid duplication.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** Sustainable fishers and aquaculture are sectors which are directly relevant for the transition to a circular economy.
* **Green rural development.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to green rural development activities. However, some of the activities will probably be related to better utilising resources of rural areas.
* **Digitalisation.** The digital transition can be supported e.g. through activities related to digitalisation in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, e.g. from harvest to distribution using IoT, data science, digital monitoring systems and predictive microbiology.

### Action 1.2.1 – Sustainable, resilient and competitive fisheries in the Adriatic-Ionian Region

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| **Action 1.2.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Sustainable, resilient and competitive fisheries in the Adriatic-Ionian Region** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Exchange of experiences and coordinated activities to reduce overfishing and support the harmonisation of integrated management and monitoring efforts. * Take preparatory actions to develop an Adriatic-Ionian Region small-scale fisheries strategy to encourage networking of fishing associations. * Creating an Adriatic-Ionian Region inter-branch network bringing together players form the fish value chain. * Improving resilience of small-scale fisheries due to climate change and human pressures. * Cooperation in research projects, technological pilots, capacity building and investments. * Best practice sharing, capacity building and coordination of activities to diversify activities for fishermen. * Gather knowledge and share best practices on digitalisation of the fisheries sector, e.g. from harvest to distribution using IoT, data science, and predictive microbiology. * Developing a catalogue of skills (including soft skills) and contents for training and capacity building for fisheries professionals:   + Improved monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, including the use of advanced technology and increased surveillance, to combat IUU.   + Introducing innovative and more selective fishing gears and practices to minimize bycatch and implementing effective discards reduction.   + Enhanced occupational safety standards and improved social welfare programs for workers in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, leading to increased job attractiveness and retention.   + Increased awareness and engagement of local communities in conservation efforts, leading to the protection and preservation of rare and migratory fish species in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Need for coordinated and agreed solutions to reduce overfishing. * Missing data concerning the fish stock assessment. * Lack of monitoring of the application of fishery management plans in order to achieve maximum sustainable yields and resource conservation. * Urgent need to renovate and restructure the fishing fleets and to improve the fishing gear. * Improve the knowledge of the ecological dynamics between small-scale fisheries and protected species and habitats, alien species included. * Lack of coordinated restoration/protection activities on freshwater resources to ensure healthy and sustainable freshwater habitats. * Low level of skills, education, and contemporary knowledge in the traditional small-scale fisheries, in the fish processing value chain including low level of adaptation to new businesses concepts/activities and digitalisation. * Need for a more effective harmonisation with the EU regulatory framework. * Need to achieve compliance of candidate countries with EU Acquis in the field of fisheries, environmental protection, training and education etc. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * A more sustainable, resilient and competitive fisheries industry in the Adriatic-Ionian Region\*, P1F2. * Less polluted Adriatic-Ionian Region Seas and freshwater resources\*, \*\*. * Better management and sustainable exploitation of fish stocksP1F2. * Improvement of data collection and fish stock assessment P1F2. * Improved fisheries management & harmonization with EU regulations & international organizations\*, P1F2. * Compliance & implementation of measures to combat illegal, unreported, unregulated fisheries and elimination of destructive fishing practices P1F2. * Utilization of fish by-products, Unwanted and Unavoidable catches and discards\*, \*\*, P1F2. * Plans to improve professional skills of fishermen\*, P1F2. * Digitalisation in the fisheries sector**\*\*.** | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY, DIVERSIFICATION AND COMPETITIVENESS IN THE FISHERIES SECTOR THROUGH EDUCATION, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT, ADMINISTRATIVE, TECHNOLOGICAL AND MARKETING ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE PROMOTION OF INITIATIVES ON MARKETING STANDARDS AND HEALTHY NUTRITIONAL HABITS the following strategic projects were developed so far:  **Monopilar strategic projects**   * **FishTourAIR -** Fishing tourism and ichthyotourism diversification activities in the Adriatic-Ionian Region * **AimFrish** - Evaluating freshness and authenticity with real-time non-destructive methods to increase the value added of Adriatic Ionian macroregion produced fish. * **SeaSusPack** - Sustainable packaging of fish and seafood based on marine bioresources. | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in project ideas | RCO 84 Interreg: Pilot actions developed and implemented jointly | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |
| OI: No. of new project ideas supported to mature into projects ready for submission |  | 0 p.a. (2023) | 10 (2030) | TSG monitoring system |
| RI: Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations | RCR 104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 (2030) | MA monitoring system / survey |

**\***: Horizontal topic expected result/target of the action

**\*\***: Cross-cutting topic expected result/target of the action

P1F2: Pillar 1 Flagship 2 for Topic 1.2, Action 1.2.1.

### Action 1.2.2 – Sustainable, resilient and competitive aquaculture in the Adriatic-Ionian Region

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| **Action 1.2.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Sustainable, resilient and competitive aquaculture in the Adriatic-Ionian Region** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Cooperation and joint actions to reduce complexity of legal and administrative frameworks. * Characterising the ecological role of fish farming in protected areas * Promoting networking, sharing of good practices and experiences and the creation of clusters on aquaculture to further unlock innovation potential. * Cooperation on establishing a common sustainability certification scheme, including costs and added value for aquaculture in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. * Develop a comprehensive catalogue of skills (including soft skills) and contents for capacity building and training programs designed for aquaculture professionals, while also providing support for their skill development * Gather knowledge and share best practices on digitalisation in the aquaculture sector. * Cooperation in research projects, technological pilots, capacity building and investments regarding: * Developing new processed products and new species. * Assessing the environmental effects of aquaculture in order to mitigate them; * Exploring the potential positive effects of aquaculture in marine environments (e.g. nutrient and carbon sequestration in bivalve farming); * Create dynamic 3dimensional models that will assist the environmental impact assessments and determination of the carrying capacity of an area for licensing; * Use of aquaculture products (fish, algae etc.) for other purposes (pharmacy, cosmetics, etc.); * Increased efficiency and productivity in aquaculture operations through the adoption of innovative and sustainable production techniques; * Enhanced occupational safety standards and improved social welfare programs for workers in the aquaculture sector, leading to increased job attractiveness and retention. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Low rate of adaptation to institutionalised spatial planning: existing areas designated for aquaculture are fully occupied and conflicts with other uses (e.g. tourism) provide limited spatial possibilities for coastal marine aquaculture development. * Need to better define the ecosystem carrying capacity and avoid potential adverse effects on ecosystems from aquaculture activities and define AZAs. * Complex and not harmonised processes for licenses and authorisation of, marine aquaculture and land-based fish farming across the macroregion.   Need for candidate countries to achieve compliance with the EU Acquis in the field of aquaculture, environmental protection, training and education etc. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * A more sustainable, resilient, and competitive marine and land-based aquaculture sector\*, P1F2. * Increase in volume of aquaculture products on the market P1F2. * New fish products and new species in aquaculture\*, P1F2. * Means and plans to improve professional and soft skills of aquaculture professionals\*, P1F2. * Adoption of Common Sustainability Standards\*, P1F2. * Advanced Environmental Impact Assessment Tools\*, P1F2. * Diversification of Product Utilization\*, P1F2. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY, DIVERSIFICATION AND COMPETITIVENESS IN THE FISHERIES SECTOR THROUGH EDUCATION, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT, ADMINISTRATIVE, TECHNOLOGICAL AND MARKETING ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE PROMOTION OF INITIATIVES ON MARKETING STANDARDS AND HEALTHY NUTRITIONAL HABITS the following strategic projects were developed so far:  **Monopilar strategic projects**   * **SeaSusPack** - Sustainable packaging of fish and seafood based on marine bioresources. * **AMOS** - Developing a cost – effective observatory system, tailored to the needs of Aquacultures with remote access, real-time data and forecast capabilities. | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in project ideas | RCO 84 Interreg: Pilot actions developed and implemented jointly | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |
| OI: No. of new project ideas supported to mature into projects ready for submission |  | 0 p.a. (2023) | 10 (2030) | TSG monitoring system |
| RI: Jointly developed solutions (number of new products, services, processes, business models or methods) | RCO 116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 (2030) | MA monitoring system |

**\***: Horizontal topic expected result/target of the action

**\*\***: Cross-cutting topic expected result/target of the action

P1F2: Pillar 1 Flagship 2 for Topic 1.2, Action 1.2.2.

## Topic 1.3 – Maritime and marine governance and services

The EUSAIR places a strong emphasis on maritime and marine governance and services as integral components of its future strategy. Effective governance and services in the maritime and marine domains are essential for the sustainable and integrated development of the region and includes Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) of man-made activities that should balance economic development, environmental protection and social well-being in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Therefore, it has strong links with the other 4 Pillars of the EUSAIR.

The strategy for the future should implement an integrated maritime policy that coordinates and harmonises various activities that take place in the marine environment, including maritime transport, aquaculture, fisheries, marine protected areas, marine reserves and conservation zones to safeguard fragile ecosystems, biodiversity, and endangered species, preservation of submerged cultural heritage sites, including shipwrecks and archaeological relics, port infrastructure, energy generation including siting and regulating offshore energy installations, such as wind farms, wave energy devices and oil and gas drilling platforms, to ensure their safety and minimize environmental impacts. It also includes designate areas for marine tourism, recreational activities and the development of tourism infrastructure (Pillar 4), planning and maintaining underwater telecommunication cables, pipelines for oil and gas transport and electricity transmission lines require careful coordination in MSP to avoid conflicts and environmental damage. The strategy should include activities related to prevent marine litter pollution from plastics and other emerging pollutants, and plans for the cleanup of marine pollution, such as oil spills and the removal of marine debris, that should be integrated into MSP plans to protect the marine environment (synergies with Pillar 3).

**Global objectives.** Maritime and marine governance and services are essential for a sound management of shared resources. This involves improved governance of maritime space and land-sea interactions as well as improved skills and capacities of the relevant players.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The overall objective is to support cooperation among players in the Adriatic-Ionian Region to make better use of the skills that are available and equip people with new skills (including soft skills) that are needed. This covers a wide range of fields including:

* Cooperation of maritime and land-based spatial planning and governance of maritime and land-sea space, in order to ensure relevance on the EUSAIR territory and scope;
* Development of capacities to harmonise standards and regulations to improve the sustainable governance use of maritime technologies and marine resources, including standardisation at macroregional level to allow technological leap forward;
* Data exchange, knowledge sharing and cooperation of planning and control authorities to ensure a sustainable management of natural resources; and
* Promote the use of digital technologies and new technological tools for planning and land-use/marine space analysis and control including hydrodynamic oceanographic models.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* improving the quality of public services and improving governance mechanisms for international cooperation and strengthening institutional capacities in a wide range of sectors (e.g. fishery policy, maritime spatial planning, integrated coastal management);
* improving the evidence base for policy and decision-making by sharing data and knowledge among public bodies and strengthening their capacities to seize opportunities or react to challenges which can be detected earlier if data and information is shared and analysed across countries; and
* improving the state of the maritime and marine environments through an increased uptake of digital technological tools and skills in maritime and territorial spatial planning which help to improve governance and planning processes.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Strengthening cooperation between developed and underdeveloped countries is a great potential for innovation and new business opportunities.
* Capitalisation on existing results, implemented activities and projects within the EUSAIR, ADRION, IPA and others.
* Connecting the EUSAIR Pillars to other macroregional strategies and initiatives.
* Accelerating the implementation of relevant policies in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and related challenges of joint interest to the EUSAIR territory and scope.
* Regarding islands and coastal areas, the increased promotion of the blue economy offers significant potential in relation to the exploitation of marine resources for food, food and health products, management and protection of marine and coastal areas, maritime transport, shipbuilding and shipping services, as well as marine renewable energy.

Challenges:

* The maritime spatial plans (MSPs) were developed to reduce conflicts and create synergies between different activities. The coherence of MSP implementation across borders is needed.
* Urgent need for training in the use of new technologies, oceanographic models, remote robotics, smart devices, etc. A special new workforce is emerging, which should handle these devices and technologies properly.
* The challenge of the multi-use of marine space by various activities: renewable energy, aquaculture, nature conservation, underwater heritage, shipwrecks and tourism. In many cases, there are many and often different obstacles in the current legal framework of each participating country to facilitate the multi-use of marine space.
* The green and digital transition processes are rooted in the competences, therefore it is necessary to reinforce and create skills (upskilling and reskilling) in order to achieve transitions.
* The maritime spatial plans should also promote the prevention and reduction of pollution due to macro and microplastics, pesticides, antibiotics, etc associated with the activities in the area, also focusing on the preservation and restauration of local biodiversity.
* The increased need for integrated intervention and the targeted exploitation of the marine economy with the aim of addressing the special problems faced by island regions such as geographical, economic, environmental and demographic weaknesses and challenges, while at the same time the vulnerability of their natural living conditions and productive systems is high.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a wide range of EU and national policies related to sustainable blue economy, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy and many other fields:

* Directive on establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning [2014/89/EU]
* European Research Area (ERA)
* European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience [COM(2020) 274 final]
* Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean [2010/631/EU]
* Sustainable Blue Economy [COM(2021) 240 final]
* Territorial Agenda 2030 - A future for all places
* The European Green Deal [COM (2019) 640 final]
* The European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy [(COM(2018) 28 final]
* The EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil'
* The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the Water Framework Directive (WFD) - including in terms of Good Environmental Status and restoration of aquatic ecosystems.
* UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) and 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Business associations, SME associations, and clusters in the field of “blue sustainable economy”
* Chambers of Commerce
* Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs)
* Local and regional authorities
* Local and regional development agencies
* Ministries of Agriculture
* Ministries of Environment
* Ministries of Fisheries and Aquaculture
* Ministries of Forestry
* Ministries of Maritime Affairs
* Ministries of Universities, Research and Education
* Ministries of Rural Development
* Ministries of Science and Technology
* Ministries of Transports and Infrastructure
* Non-governmental organisations in the field of environment, biodiversity and nature protection
* Protected Area Management Units (former Management Bodies)
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* SMEs and large companies in the fish value chain (also cooperatives and consortia)
* Universities and educational institutions.
* Sector-specific advisory bodies like BLUEMED, BlueMissionMed and other CSAs
* Projects funded by the Horizon EU Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and waters by 2030’ and the new Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership co-founded by the EU Commission under cluster 6 of Horizon Europe.
* International organisations and treaties, such as the Barcelona Convention through its Regional Action Centres, ACCOBAMS, Bern Convention, etc.
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The activities help the candidate countries to better integrate with EU member states in field of EU maritime and marine policies through the support to the harmonisation of standards and regulations to improve the sustainable governance use of maritime and marine resources and promotion of digital solutions and knowledge exchange among countries. More specifically, the enlargement activities are related to the *EU acquis* Chapters 3 (right of establishment and freedom to provide services), 6 (company law), 7 (intellectual property law), 8 (competition), 18 (statistics), 20 (enterprise and industrial policy), 22 (regional policy and coordination of structural instruments), 25 (science and research), 26 (education and culture), 27 (environment), 28 (consumer and health protection).
* **Capacity building.** The activities have a strong focus on capacity building and training e.g. to increase capacities related to the EU maritime and marine policies, harmonise standards and regulations and seizing opportunities or reacting to challenges that can be detected earlier if data and information is shared and analysed across countries. This should also include development of skills in the Blue Professions/ Improvement of the levels of skills and expertise for the working manpower in sectors such as Maritime transport, Coastal and marine tourism, aquaculture and fisheries, Marine hydrocarbon extraction, Maritime transport and port activities, Shipbuilding and ship repair activities, Marine Renewable energy sources, Blue biotechnology, New technologies at sea and shipping.
* **Innovation and research.** The activities include a number of proposals related to data exchange and digital technological tools in maritime and territorial spatial planning, governance and services, including the promotion of innovative and smart transformation of the islands' production system by strengthening and diversifying local production based on smart specialization.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** Maritime and marine governance are directly relevant for the transition to a circular economy as they help to shape the preconditions for the transition to a circular economy in these fields.
* **Green rural development.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to green rural development activities. However, some of the activities will probably be related to better utilising resources of rural areas and strengthening entrepreneurship and local cooperative schemes, in coastal areas including islands.
* **Digitalisation.** The digital transition can be supported e.g. through activities related to the use of digital tools in maritime and territorial spatial planning, governance and services, including e.g. data exchange platforms, strengthening maritime surveillance and improving the level of navigation safety.

The activities within the Maritime and Marine Governance and Services Topic serve as a crucial catalyst for advancing both horizontal and cross-cutting aspects of the revised Action Plan, driving harmonization, capacity building, innovation and green transition while embracing sustainability and forward-looking practices.

### Action 1.3.1 – Institutional capacity to harmonise standards and regulations

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| **Action 1.3.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Institutional capacity to harmonise standards and regulations to improve the sustainable governance and use of maritime and marine resources** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Cooperation in implementation of adopted Maritime Spatial Plans to achieve coherent practices across borders. * Promotion of MSP principles in accession countries. * Cooperation in adopting clearer legal frameworks for the development of Allocated Zones for Aquaculture (AZAs), marine protected areas (MPAs), other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), exploiting deep-sea water and marine biological and mineral resources. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * New horizontal skills are highly required (listening, relationship-building, team working, and cultural awareness) to accompany the twin transition. * The challenge of the multi-use of marine space by various activities: renewable energy, aquaculture, nature conservation, maritime transport, and tourism. In many cases, there are several obstacles to the current legal framework of each participating country to facilitate the multi-use of marine space. * The challenge between EU and candidate countries in compliance/adaptation with EU Acquis. * Maritime spatial plans should also promote the prevention and reduction of pollution (e.g. microplastic, pesticides, antibiotics, etc.) associated with the activities in the area, as well as the preservation and regeneration of local biodiversity. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Improved quality of public services\*. * Improved maritime and marine governance and services\*, \*\*, P1F3. * Development of common understandings and harmonised standards and regulations as well as sharing of best practices through institutional capacity of the involved public bodies, institutions and stakeholders in a wide range of sectors (e.g. fishery policy, maritime spatial planning, integrated coastal management) \*, \*\*, P1F3 . * Compliance/adaptation of candidate countries with EU Acquis\*, \*\*, P1F3. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship BOLSTERING CAPACITY BUILDING AND EFFICIENT COORDINATION OF PLANNING AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING MARINE AND MARITIME GOVERNANCE AND BLUE GROWTH SERVICES the following strategic projects were developed so far:  **Cross-Pillar strategic projects**   * **WAI-TP** - WATERBORNE Adriatic-Ionian Technology Platform” (Pillars 1 and 2) * **MSP & ICZM** - Establishment a Community for the sustainable management of maritime activities in the AIR” (Pillars 1 and 3) | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in project ideas | RCO 84 Interreg: Pilot actions developed and implemented jointly | 0 p.a. (2023) | 2 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |
| OI: No. of new project ideas supported to mature into projects ready for submission |  | 0 p.a. (2023) | 4 (2030) | TSG monitoring system |
| RI: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | RCR 79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up | 0 p.a. (2023) | 2 (2030) | MA monitoring system / survey |

**\***: Horizontal topic expected result/target of the action

**\*\***: Cross-cutting topic expected result/target of the action

P1F3: Pillar 1 Flagship 3 for Topic 1.3, Action 1.3.1.

### Action 1.3.2 – Data exchange and knowledge sharing

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| **Action 1.3.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Data exchange and knowledge sharing** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | Setting up a platform for information exchange and data sharing related to maritime spatial planning, terrestrial spatial planning and relevant activities in the field of sustainable blue economy | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Coordinated spatial planning will allow the further development of aquaculture and other activities in the marine area. * Need for candidate countries to achieve compliance with the EU Acquis in the field of fisheries, environmental protection, training and education etc. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Improve the evidence base for policy and decision-making in the region. Sharing data and knowledge among public bodies in the region can increase the efficiency of the public administration (e.g. by avoiding duplication of monitoring or data collection efforts) and increase their capacity to seize opportunities or react to challenges which can be detected earlier if data and information are shared and analysed across countries. This may be done in cooperation with action 3.1.1. (Enhancing marine and coastal biodiversity). | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship BOLSTERING CAPACITY BUILDING AND EFFICIENT COORDINATION OF PLANNING AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING MARINE AND MARITIME GOVERNANCE AND BLUE GROWTH SERVICES no strategic projects were developed so far. | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in project ideas | RCO 84 Interreg: Pilot actions developed and implemented jointly | 0 p.a. (2023) | 1 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |
| OI: No. of new project ideas supported to mature into projects ready for submission |  | 0 p.a. (2023) | 2 (2030) | TSG monitoring system |
| RI: Public institutions supported to develop digital services, products and processes | RCO 14 ERDF: Public institutions supported to develop digital services, products and processes | 0 p.a. (2023) | 4 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |

### Action 1.3.3 – Promote the development of skills and digital technological tools in the maritime industry and territorial spatial planning, governance and services

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| **Action 1.3.3** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Promote the development of skills and digital technological in the maritime industry and territorial spatial planning, governance and services** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Network of training/education centres/technological and higher education institutes/industry to cooperate in development/sharing of blue skills programmes. * Encouraging networking and exchange in the planning and implementation of best practices.   Trans-regional cooperation between community-led local development (CLLD) strategies for actions implemented by FLAGs. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Unlock the capacity needed at the regional and local level to deliver quality training and mobilise collaborating arrangements in order to anticipate and respond to the fast changing skills needs for skills on the labour market. * Urgent need for training in the use of new technologies, remote robotics, smart devices, etc. A special new workforce is emerging, which should handle these devices properly. * The green and digital transition processes are rooted in the competences; therefore it is necessary to reinforce and create skills (upskilling and reskilling) in order to achieve transitions.   Many blue economy sectors have difficulties finding suitably skilled employees, which hampers their growth. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | This action will contribute to:   * Improving the state of the maritime and marine environments through an increased uptake of digital technological tools and skills in maritime industry and territorial spatial planning which help to improve governance and planning processes P1F3. * Improved Skills and career development in blue economy and strengthening of networks of academics, training organisations and professional organisations of maritime sectors in the region P1F3.   Trans-regional cooperation between CLLD strategies for actions implemented by FLAGs P1F3. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship BOLSTERING CAPACITY BUILDING AND EFFICIENT COORDINATION OF PLANNING AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING MARINE AND MARITIME GOVERNANCE AND BLUE GROWTH SERVICES no strategic projects were developed so far. | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in project ideas | RCO 84 Interreg: Pilot actions developed and implemented jointly | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 (2030) | TSG & MA monitoring system |
| OI: No. of new project ideas supported to mature into projects ready for submission |  | 0 p.a. (2023) | 8 (2030) | TSG monitoring system |
| RI: Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion | RCR 84 Interreg: Organisations cooperating post-project | 0 p.a. (2023) | 10 (2030) | MA monitoring system / Survey |

## Indicative list of relevant funding sources

Relevant EU Cohesion Policy objectives: PO1 - a more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity and PO2- a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility.

Relevant IPA Programming Framework window: all windows, specifically windows 3: Green agenda and sustainable connectivity and 4: Competitiveness and inclusive growth.

The EUSAIR participating countries can utilize the following EU funding instruments 2021-27:

**Applicable to EU member states**

* The ERDF and Cohesion Fund,
* the ESF+,
* the EAFRD,
* the EMFAF,
* Creative Europe,
* Interreg Programmes of EUSAIR Member States: Croatia-Italy, Croatia-Slovenia, Greece-Italy, Italy-Slovenia,
* ERDF Regional and Sectoral mainstream programs, which include Specific objectives of the 5 EU Policy Objectives related to Pillar 1.

**Applicable to EU member states in cooperation with EU candidate countries**

* Life (which supports the environment, biodiversity, and nature through awareness-raising campaigns, studies, evaluation, training, workshops, and networking),
* Horizon (which supports the development of skills, technology transfer, and innovation in the sectors and clusters on digitalization, innovation systems, food, and environment),
* Erasmus + (to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional, and personal development of people in the fields of education and training of youth, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs, and social cohesion),
* Digital Europe Programme,
* Connecting Europe Facility on Energy Efficiency Fields,
* Invest in the EU Programme (which supports employment, youth, and SMEs along with economic, social, and territorial cohesion).
* the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI),
* the European Investment Bank (EIB),
* EU funding mechanisms: Sustainable Blue Economy, Blue Invest, I3,
* Relevant Interreg transnational and CBC programmes 2021-27:
  + IPA Adrion, Euromed and Next Med transnational Programmes,
  + South Adriatic, Greece-Albania, Greece-North Macedonia, Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro, Croatia-Serbia.

**Applicable to the EU candidate countries**

* **The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)** specific objectives and thematic priorities related to Pillar 1,
* **6 IPA cross-border programs** among WB countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro, Montenegro – Albania, North Macedonia – Albania, Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia – Montenegro, Serbia – North Macedonia,
* **The Western Balkans Investment Framework** improving twin green and digital transition and labour market participation, especially of women, young people, disabled people, disadvantaged groups, and minorities, will be a priority in the EUSAIR Action Plan and can strongly contribute to blue and green sustainable development and economic growth**.**

# Pillar 2 – Connecting the Region

The overall objective of Pillar 2 ‘connecting the region’ is to improve connectivity, integration and cohesion within the Adriatic-Ionian Region and with the EU regarding transport and energy programmes, initiatives and projects. This objective is requiring thorough coordination of transport and energy policies and initiatives by countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Cooperation is envisaged on infrastructure developments and harmonised operation of transport and energy systems to build Region that is more inclusive, cohesive and competitive.

The Adriatic-Ionian Region is a geographically diverse place where coastal, mountainous and insular areas demand investments on technical infrastructures, and many areas are still not well connected. The transport and energy systems of the region are rather fragmented and outdated. There is a clear need to accelerate the green transition and to cope with the challenge of global climate change while looking at an improved and streamlined governance of the transport and digital transition energy systems.

With regard to transport and energy systems, there is a significant potential for quality improvement and better integration, removing roadblocks to project investments, focusing on the enabling factors for the creation and development of regional enterprises along the free and regulated European market principles.

Various bottlenecks have limited the development opportunities stemming from the motorways of the sea. Railway transportation is lagging behind the EU average both in terms of infrastructure, as well as in freight and passenger volumes. In many EUSAIR countries, and especially in Western Balkans, there are poor quality rail systems and unsafe roads. The network of airports has inadequate capacity to sustain tourism development and connectivity in general, mostly due issues concerning the economy of scale of the related catchment area. At the same time, connectivity is a key asset for Western Balkans within the enlargement process.

In the field of energy, connections can be improved to jointly address the transition towards decarbonised energy systems. Today, unavailability of grid capacity to dispatch fluctuating energy from renewable sources is a factor limiting the development of renewable energy. Hydropower is the most commonly used type of renewable energy in the region. Despite the fact that the region has great potential for the development of renewable energy sources notably, solar and wind energy, it performs below the EU average as for solar and wind energy, eco-innovation and energy efficiency. The Strategy should also ensure appropriate alignment with the National Energy and Climate Plans of the participating member states.

National programmes and actions can only partially address all the challenges, due to the capital intensive measures required to improve and upgrade transport and energy networks and systems. Even bilateral cooperation may not be sufficient to overcome bottlenecks and to promote connectivity and cooperation aimed at developing projects of joint interest. Wider macroregional cooperation consultation and capitalisation are needed to provide services and benefits to the EUSAIR countries. Most major infrastructural projects and programmes only make sense if looked at from a well-coordinated macroregional perspective.

In this light, the EUSAIR sets out to improve connectivity, integration and cohesion within the Adriatic-Ionian Region and with the rest of the EU regarding transport and energy programmes and actions. This objective is requiring thorough coordination of transport and energy policies and initiatives, collaboration on infrastructure developments and delivery of transport and energy services. Relations with stakeholders and research of public consensus and support transport and energy infrastructures and projects will be a major concern. The experience of broad long-term frameworks programme studies will be continued. The intent is to update and expand along a three-year period or so studies such as the EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, the EUSAIR Master Plan on Energy Networks for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, the Road Map towards a EUSAIR Power Exchange and Natural Gas Trading Hub for the Adriatic and Ionian Region. These framework studies aim at creating consensus on priorities, actions, while identifying problem areas and opportunities for convergence for projects and cooperation along short-term and long-term perspectives.

The specific objectives of the Pillar are:

* to strengthen safety and security of port operations and develop a competitive macroregional interconnected port system;
* to develop reliable multimodal and intermodal connections with the hinterland, both for freight and passengers;
* to support the integration of urban nodes and regional transport systems into a greener TEN-T network;
* to achieve a well-interconnected and well-functioning internal energy market supporting the three energy policy objectives of the EU, i.e. confronting climate change, enhancing security of supply and competitiveness;
* to confront the challenges of the energy transition towards decarbonised and resilient energy systems, while promoting renewable energy sources and energy efficiency**.**

Based on the approach of the European Green Deal, the Communication from the European Commission ‘An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans’ with its guidelines for the implementation of the ‘Green Agenda for the Western Balkans’ are framing relevant actions on transport and energy while proposing improved connectivity competitive services and alignment with the EU Acquis. To achieve its overall objective and specific objectives Pillar 2 will focus and organise according to five Topics: Topic 2.1 Maritime transport, Topic 2.2 Intermodal connectivity, Topic 2.3 Urban nodes, Topic 2.4 Energy networks, Topic 2.5 Green energy. The description of the five Topics is in the following.

## Topic 2.1 – Maritime transport

**Global objectives.** Developing maritime transport, in particular motorways of the sea as navigation corridors, is of paramount importance and must go hand-in-hand with the creation of modern and efficient intermodal ports integrating maritime transport with other transport modes such as rail and road. Such an extension of infrastructure and transport activities must be accompanied by a coherent sustainable transport plan linked, inter alia, to an air quality plan. Investments in innovation and modernisation of infrastructure, reduction of procedural constraints and bureaucratic burden (especially in port operations) and promotion of safe maritime traffic should be given priority in the entire sea basin.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The EUSAIR sets out to improve connectivity, integration and cohesion within the Adriatic-Ionian Region and with the EU regarding transport and energy programmes, initiatives and projects. The focus is on the coordination of transport and energy policies and initiatives by countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, collaboration on infrastructure developments and harmonised operation of transport and energy systems.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* removing roadblocks to project investments, focusing on the enabling factors for the creation and development of regional enterprises along the free and regulated European market principles;
* increasing safety and security of port operations and resilience of infrastructure, through a vessel traffic monitoring and information system (VTMIS) and investments in ports to increase safety, security and ports' capacity and interconnectivity;
* improving the effectiveness of port infrastructure and equipment, hence the competitiveness of maritime transport services, through interoperability of IT systems and solutions in ports including the development and/or improvement of Port Community System (PCS); and
* greening ports and maritime transport and increasing the number of certified ports (ISO 14001, PERS and EMAS).

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* A well-established network of motorways of the seas links, with further potential for growth.
* A dynamic port system interconnected to the most relevant TEN-T transport corridors.
* A multipurpose port system integrated in the regional economy and energy industry, located along the One Belt and One Road global initiative.

Challenges:

* Need to increase safety and security of port operations and resilience of infrastructure.
* Need to improve the effectiveness of port infrastructure and equipment, hence the competitiveness of maritime transport services.
* Greening ports and maritime transport.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a wide range of EU and national policies related to maritime transport policies including relevant regulations for the safety and environmental standards of ports and many other fields, among which:

* A new Circular Economy Action Plan [COM(2020) 98 final]
* Directive on port reception facilities for ship-generated waste and cargo residues [2000/59/EC]
* Directive on port reception facilities for the delivery of waste from ships [(EU) 2019/883]
* Directive on river information services [2005/44/EC]
* Directives and regulations on digital maritime systems and services, including on the European Maritime Single Window (EMSW) [2005/44/EC, 2010/65/EU, (EU) 2019/1239, (EU) 2023/204, (EU) 2023/205]
* Regulation on the security on ships and in port facilities [(EC) No 725/2004]
* Regulation (EU) 1315/2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, currently under repeal by the Proposal of the European Commission for the new TEN-T Regulation.]
* Regulation (EU) 2021/1153 establishing the Connecting Europe Facility and repealing Regulations (EU) 1316/2013 and (EU) 283/2014, currently under amendment by the Proposal of the European Commission for the new TEN-T Regulation
* Regulation (EU) 913/2010 concerning a European rail network for competitive freight, setting up the EU Rail Freight Corridors, currently under: a) amendment by the Proposal of the European Commission for the new TEN-T Regulation and b) potential repeal by the Proposal of the European Commission for a Regulation on the use of railway infrastructure capacity, with effect from December 2023
* The Fuel EU Maritime initiative.
* The EU AFIR Initiative

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Civil protection and disaster control authorities
* European Investment Bank
* Local and regional authorities
* Ministries of Transports and Infrastructure
* Ministries of Maritime Affairs
* Multimodal operators
* Port authorities
* Port users
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* SME and large companies in the field of shipping and freight transport
* Universities and educational institutions
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** In the context of transport policy (Chapter 14), enhancing and harmonizing traffic monitoring and management within the Ports of the Adriatic-Ionian Region through the implementation of advanced technologies such as Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information Systems (VTMIS) and Information Technology (IT) solutions holds significant potential. This strategic move not only contributes to the efficient operation of maritime traffic but also plays a crucial role in aligning the infrastructure and standards of the IPA Countries with those of EU member states.

As the ports enhance their technological capabilities, they contribute to the broader objective of aligning with EU standards. This is particularly crucial for IPA Countries seeking to integrate more closely with EU member states. Improved traffic monitoring and management not only enhance the overall functionality of ports but also demonstrate a commitment to aligning with EU norms and regulations, making the transition smoother for potential accession.

Furthermore, the harmonization of monitoring systems for emissions, water quality, and air quality in the Ports of the Adriatic-Ionian Region is pivotal for aligning the IPA Countries with EU environmental standards (Chapter 27) and for ensuring a sustainable and environmentally responsible approach to port operations, fostering seamless integration with EU member states.

The EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport will be updated and upgraded with a view at the EU enlargement as foreseen by a key horizontal topic of the strategy. Activity is cross-cutting the entire Topic 2.1, Topic 2.2 and Topic 2.3 of the EUSAIR Action Plan.

* **Capacity building.** Improving IT solutions and implementing emission monitoring measures in the Ports of the Adriatic-Ionian Region enhance the region's maritime capabilities, providing valuable insights into traffic patterns, safety protocols, and navigation efficiency. This, in turn, contributes to capacity building by empowering port authorities with real-time data to make informed decisions and optimize operational processes.

Simultaneously, the monitoring of emissions aligns with contemporary environmental standards, promoting sustainability and responsible maritime practices. Furthermore, cooperation to improve vessel monitoring and emission control measures improve the capacity of the Adriatic-Ionian ports through knowledge sharing and the dissemination of successful strategies, and contribute to a more sustainable, efficient, and informed maritime environment in the broader context of the EU Green Deal.

* **Innovation and research.** Enhancing IT solutions for vessel monitoring and implementing emissions monitoring in the Ports of the Adriatic-Ionian Region serves as a catalyst for innovation and research. The integration of advanced IT solutions in maritime operations not only optimizes efficiency but also provides a rich source of data for researchers to explore and analyse. Moreover, monitoring emissions in these ports could stimulate research into cleaner technologies, alternative fuels, and emission reduction strategies, promoting innovation in green shipping practices. The Adriatic-Ionian Region, by actively engaging in such initiatives, becomes a hub for pioneering research that contributes to the broader global efforts to address environmental challenges in the maritime sector.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to circular economy activities. However, Advanced technologies, notably Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information Systems (VTMIS) can promote resource efficiency, reduce waste, and encourage the adoption of sustainable practices, aligning the sector with the broader goals of a circular and environmentally responsible economy. In fact, VTMIS employs cutting-edge surveillance and communication tools to monitor vessel movements, enhance navigational safety, and optimize traffic flow in and around ports, and, in so doing fostering efficiency and environmental responsibility within port operations. By streamlining maritime logistics, VTMIS minimizes fuel consumption, reducing the carbon footprint associated with shipping activities. This increased efficiency aligns with circular economy principles by maximizing the utility of resources and minimizing waste. Moreover, the integration of emission monitoring systems in ports further strengthens the circular economy approach. Continuous tracking and analysis of Ports emissions help identify areas for improvement and enforce stricter environmental standards. By holding ships accountable for their emissions, ports can incentivize the adoption of cleaner technologies and practices, promoting a more sustainable maritime ecosystem.

The circular economy is centred on the concept of closing the loop, wherein resources are reused, recycled, and regenerated. VTMIS, alongside emission monitoring, contributes to this circularity by fostering a closed-loop approach in maritime operations. Efficient traffic management reduces unnecessary fuel consumption and associated emissions, while monitoring emissions directly addresses the environmental impact of shipping activities.

* **Green rural development.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to green rural development activities, as it the focus is on maritime transport.
* **Digitalisation.** The implementation of VTMIS allows for real-time monitoring and tracking of vessel movements, enhancing overall safety, security, and efficiency in port operations. This not only streamlines maritime traffic but also ensures compliance with international maritime regulations. By adopting modern IT solutions, the Ports of the Adriatic-Ionian Region can establish a cohesive and interoperable framework, promoting seamless communication and data exchange among various stakeholders involved in port management.

The digital transition can be supported e.g. through activities related to use of joint monitoring systems, and more explicitly the identification of bottlenecks for the interoperability of IT systems and solutions in ports including the development and/or improvement of Port Community System (PCS).

### Action 2.1.1 – Improving and harmonising traffic monitoring and management

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| **Action 2.1.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Improving and harmonising traffic monitoring and management by expanding the use of vessel traffic monitoring and information system (VTMIS)** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Identify areas with the prioritized needs for improving VTMIS. * Disseminate knowledge and good practices on VTMIS in the region. * Leverage investments in VTIMS. * Improving maritime safety in the region. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Interaction with ports authorities, ministries and stakeholders in many countries could be challenging. * Opportunities could come from the Interreg programmes funding pilot projects and creating network of stakeholders involved in the deployment processes. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Better safety and security of port operations and resilience of infrastructure and staff training programmes and initiatives. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS and its component “Green and Smart Ports”. Under this Flagship the following Masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport** – Vol. 1 Maritime dimension | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Extension of areas in the Adriatic and Ionian Sea covered by VTMIS | RCO 14 - Public institutions supported to develop digital services, products and processes  RCR 11 - Users of new and upgraded public digital services, products and processes | 0(2023) | tbd | tbd |
| Agreements and/or governance solutions among port authorities and key stakeholders to implement actions for improving and harmonizing traffic monitoring and management | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR 79 Interreg - Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations  RCO 116 Interreg - Jointly developed solutions  RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations | 0(2023) | tbd | tbd |

### Action 2.1.2 – Improvement of the interoperability of IT systems and solutions in ports

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| **Action 2.1.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Improvement of the interoperability of IT systems and solutions in ports including the development and/or improvement of Port Community System (PCS)** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Upgrade the EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport with a focus on intermodality in the ports of the Region. * Identification of bottlenecks for the interoperability of IT systems and solutions in ports including the development and/or improvement of Port Community System (PCS). * Identification of the areas with the biggest needs to investment. * Strengthen cooperation on port development. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * To suggest relevant staff training programmes and initiatives.   The digitalisation of port operations. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Reduction of procedural and bureaucratic barriers. * Better collaboration between multiple players of the port industry and hence improvement of the effectiveness of port performance and the competitiveness of maritime transport services and Staff training programmes and initiatives. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS and its component “Green and Smart Ports”. Under this Flagship the following Masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport** – Vol. 1 Maritime dimension | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | IT systems by typology (e.g. for handling operations, inter-modality, resource management, …) developed in the Ports of the Region (distinguishing by Port dimension and typology) | RCO 116 Interreg - Jointly developed solutions  RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations | 0(2023) | tbd | tbd |

### Action 2.1.3 ̶ Improving monitoring of environmental quality in ports

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| **Action 2.1.3** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Monitoring emissions, water quality and air quality** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Disseminate knowledge on monitoring environmental quality in ports. * Development of an EUSAIR monitoring system for emissions, water quality and air quality of ports in the EUSAIR. * Publication of annual monitoring reports. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * The adoption of monitoring tools and procedure could be challenging. * Opportunities could come from the Interreg programmes funding pilot projects for testing and for the diffusion of monitoring tools and procedure. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Greener and smart ports and * More certified ports (ISO 14001, PERS and EMAS). | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS and its component “Green and Smart Ports”. Under this Flagship the following Masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan of Transport** – Vol. 1 Maritime dimension | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Monitoring systems (for air and water quality) and protocols adopted in the Ports of the Region (distinguishing by Port dimension and typology) | RCO 116 Interreg - Jointly developed solutions  RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations | 0(2023) | tbd | tbd |
| Agreements among port authorities to implement, manage and control emissions in the Ports of the Region (same as above) | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR 79 - Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0(2023) | tbd | tbd |

## Topic 2.2 – Multimodal connectivity

**Global objectives.** A fully operational, multimodal Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) for sustainable and smart connectivity is an objective set out in the EU ‘Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy’ and an important asset to achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The objective of the Topic is to foster the development of effective multimodal connections, taking into account the integration of maritime transport of passengers and goods with landside modes such as rail and road networks, as well as the connection to the main airport nodes. Ports and airports of the Adriatic and Ionian seas are immediate entry points to the region from abroad, whereas inland waterways provide important international connections to/from the region. An appropriate transport policy must take into account all these considerations promoting multimodality, while also taking into account environmental aspects (e.g. air emission), economic growth and social development.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* new investment projects in ICT infrastructure to improve multimodal connections;
* interoperable rail infrastructure and services among countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Region to increase the rail connections between cities in the Western Balkan;
* increased rail transport capacity and quality thorough a reduction of missing links and bottlenecks and upgraded rail network of the region to TEN-T standards; and
* increased road safety of rail and road networks.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Rail infrastructure and intermodal nodes belonging to the TEN-T network and mostly to the TEN-T transport corridors.
* Growing trends in freight and passenger demand across Europe.
* Rail network already interconnected with most of the ports in the regions.
* Potential growth of air passenger traffic due to tourism activities.

Challenges:

* Dealing with a number of transport operators (multi- modes, multi -countries).
* Harmonisation of regulation and services among EUSAIR countries.
* Interoperability of infrastructure among EUSAIR countries.
* Increase rail transport capacity, quality and road and rail safety and resilience.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a wide range of EU and national policies related to the development of multimodal transport networks and multimodal/intermodal infrastructure as part of it, and particularly

* Directive laying down for certain road vehicles circulating within the Community the maximum authorised dimensions in national and international traffic and the maximum authorised weights in international traffic (Text with EEA relevance) [(EU) 2015/719]
* Directive on the establishment of common rules for certain types of combined transport of goods between Member States [92/106/EEC]
* Regulation concerning a European rail network for competitive freight, setting up the European Rail Freight Corridors, currently under revision [(EU) 913/2010]
* Regulation on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network [(EU) No 1315/2013]

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Trans-European Networks – Transport (TEN-T) stakeholders
* Transport Community
* Ministries of Transports and Infrastructure
* Local and regional authorities
* Airports authorities
* Civil protection and disaster control authorities
* European Investment Bank
* Multimodal operators
* Public transport operators
* Port authorities
* Road authorities
* Railway infrastructure managers and railway undertakings
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* SME and large companies in the field of transports
* Universities and educational institutions
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in transport infrastructure, coupled with efforts to enhance interoperability and increase road and rail capacity, stands as a pivotal strategy to bolster the enlargement process of the European Union in the Western Balkans (Chapter 14). By embracing ICT solutions in transportation, the region can achieve heightened connectivity, real-time monitoring, and streamlined logistics. This not only facilitates the smooth flow of goods and people but also aligns the Western Balkans with the advanced technological standards of the EU. Interoperability, achieved through standardized systems and collaborative frameworks, further strengthens the Western Balkans' integration with the EU.

A harmonized and interconnected transport network enhances the efficiency of cross-border movements, reducing transit times and trade barriers. Furthermore, increasing road and rail capacity responds to the growing demands of commerce and travel (chapter 4). Upgrading and expanding transportation infrastructure not only accommodates rising traffic volumes but also enhances the region's overall competitiveness, contributing significantly to the seamless integration of the region into the broader Trans-European Transport network (Chapter 21).

* The EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport will be updated and upgraded with a view at the EU enlargement as foreseen by a key horizontal topic of the strategy. Activity is cross-cutting the entire Topic 2.1, Topic 2.2 and Topic 2.3 of the EUSAIR Action Plan.
* **Capacity building.** The strategic implementation of ICT in transport infrastructure, coupled with a focus on interoperability and increased road and rail capacity, could contribute to capacity building in the Adriatic Ionian Region, since it not only enhances operational efficiency but also fosters continuous learning and skill development, laying the foundation for a well-equipped and knowledgeable workforce capable of managing the region's evolving transportation needs.

By promoting ICT infrastructure and interoperability, the region is better equipped to build the collective expertise necessary for effective transportation management and optimization.

* **Innovation and research.** The implementation of ICT transport infrastructure creates a data-rich environment that researchers can leverage to study and to develop innovative solutions for optimizing logistics and traffic management. Interoperability enhancements encourage collaboration among transport stakeholders and the exchange of ideas for supplying new mobility services in the region. The Adriatic Ionian Region, with its diverse economic activities and geopolitical significance, can benefit from collaborative research efforts focused on ICT solutions in rail transport. Cross-border projects can explore the development of smart transportation corridors, leveraging digital technologies for enhanced connectivity and efficiency. This collaborative approach stimulates innovation, attracts research funding, and creates a conducive environment for the emergence of groundbreaking solutions for the connectivity of the Region.

Increasing road and rail capacity paves the way for research into novel technologies and sustainable practices, aligning the region with the latest advancements in transportation. Commitment to modern infrastructure not only stimulates local innovation but also attracts research initiatives and partnerships.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions into rail transport systems, such as smart sensors, predictive analytics, and digital communication, can enhance efficiency, and contribute to circular principles. In fact, streamlining logistics and enhancing overall supply chain efficiency (e.g. minimizing delays, reducing idle times, …) optimizes resource utilization, fostering a circular economy by ensuring that transportation resources are used to their maximum potential. Optimize the performance of rail systems contribute to circularity by improving resource efficiency and minimizing the environmental footprint associated with rail operations.
* **Green rural development.** The Topic does not focus on green rural development activities. However, improved multimodal connectivity and especially road connectivity can also support the development of rural areas offering transport solutions improving overall accessibility.
* **Digitalisation.** The implementation of cutting-edge Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions in the realm of rail transport holds immense potential for fostering research and innovation in logistics optimization, traffic management, and sustainable transportation practices. Researchers can explore ways to leverage ICT for real-time monitoring, predictive maintenance, and resource-efficient operations, contributing to advancements in transportation sector and novel approaches to design, construction, and maintenance. ICT solutions, such as advanced simulation models and digital twin technologies, can be employed to test and optimize various scenarios, enabling researchers to develop innovative solutions that enhance capacity while minimizing environmental impact.

### Action 2.2.1 – Implementation of ICT infrastructure at nodes and along logistics chains

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| **Action 2.2.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Support the implementation of ICT infrastructure at nodes and along logistics chains, as well as systems interoperability in the Adriatic-Ionian Region** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Upgrade the EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport with a focus on intermodality along the logistics chains of the Region. * Identify the areas with the highest need to the implementation of ICT infrastructure at nodes and along logistics chains. * Leverage investments ICT infrastructure at nodes and along logistics chains. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Different interest and infrastructure development among EUSAIR Countries. * Opportunities comes from the extension of TEN-T railways corridors in the Western Balkans that could help to identify common priorities for the implementation of ICT solutions and other measures for improving the logistic chains along the corridors. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | New investment projects in ICT infrastructure to improve multimodal connections to transport nodes, and staff training programmes and initiatives. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS. Under this Flagship the following Masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport** – Vol. 5 Rail and related intermodality | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Number of multimodal hubs (for freight and passengers) in the Region upgraded with ICT infrastructure and services | RCO 116 Interreg - Jointly developed solutions  RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations | 0(2023) | tbd | tbd |
| Agreements and/or governance solutions within logistics clusters and along multimodal routes, to develop and implement actions, including ICT for the promotion of multimodal and intermodal transport and harmonized traffic monitoring and management | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR 79 Interreg - Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations  RCO 116 Interreg - Jointly developed solutions  RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations | 0(2023) | tbd | tbd |

### Action 2.2.2 – Upgrade of the network to provide continued and interoperable international rail links between countries

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| **Action 2.2.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Upgrade of the network to provide continued and interoperable international rail links between countries, also by elaborating integrated planning for infrastructure developments and defining joint roadmaps for investments** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Upgrade the EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport with a focus on interoperability. * Support the railway connecting between the capital cities in the Region. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Dealing with an ecosystem consisting of different rules, operators, interests. * Opportunities comes from the extension of TEN-T railways corridors in the Western Balkans that could help to identify common priorities. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Interoperable rail infrastructure and services among countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS. Under this Flagship the following Masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport** – Vol. 5 Rail and related intermodality | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Km or % (over total network extension) of interoperable rail infrastructure in the Region (e.g. distinguishing by single vs double track; electrified vs not electrified, …) | RCO 50 - Length of rail reconstructed or modernised - non-TEN-T  RCR 58 - Annual users of newly built, upgraded, reconstructed or modernised railways  RCR 101- Time savings due to improved rail infrastructure | tbd | tbd | tbd |
| Daily Frequency or number of rail services between the main cities (e.g. the Capitals of the Region) | RCR 58 - Annual users of newly built, upgraded, reconstructed or modernised railways  RCR 101- Time savings due to improved rail infrastructure | tbd | tbd | tbd |

### Action 2.2.3 – Increase rail transport capacity and quality in the Region

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| **Action 2.2.3** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Increase rail and road transport capacity and quality (remove missing links and bottlenecks; complete rail reforms) in EUSAIR countries and upgrade the rail and road network of the region to TEN-T standards** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Upgrade the EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport – Vol. 5 Rail and related interoperability. * Analyse and list needs of transport capacity and quality in EUSAIR countries and potential for upgrade. * Support the development of transport capacity and quality in the EUSAIR countries. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Increase rail transport capacity, quality. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Increased rail transport capacity and quality (solve missing links and bottlenecks; complete rail reforms) in EUSAIR countries and upgraded rail network of the region to TEN-T standards. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS. Under this Flagship the following Masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport** – Vol. 5 Rail and related intermodality | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | % of rail network in the region upgraded to TEN-T quality and safety standards (Core and Extended Core) | RCO 50 - Length of rail reconstructed or modernised - non-TEN-T  RCO 49 - Length of rail reconstructed or modernised - TEN-T  RCR 58 - Annual users of newly built, upgraded, reconstructed or modernised railways  RCR 101- Time savings due to improved rail infrastructure | tbd | tbd | tbd |
| % of road network in the region upgraded to TEN-T quality and safety standards (Core and Extended Core) | RCO 108 - Length of roads with new or modernised traffic management systems - TEN-T  RCR 55 - Annual users of newly built, reconstructed, upgraded or modernised roads | tbd | tbd | tbd |

## Topic 2.3 – Urban nodes

**Global objectives.** Sustainable urban mobility is a key objective of EU urban and mobility policies to enhance mobility and reduce congestion, accidents and air pollution in urban areas. It shall improve the overall quality of life for residents and commuters by addressing major challenges related to for example congestion, development of intermodality air/noise pollution, climate change, and road safety and, more generally, transport energy.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The objective of the Topic is to foster the improvement of urban mobility solutions and transport systems talking/anticipating the challenges and the already existing criticalities deriving from growing urbanisation (urban sprawl) and from some socio-economic (e.g. aging population) and environmental trends, calling for the a reduction of the impacts of passengers and goods mobility in the cities. The improvement of integrated local public transit (LPT) systems (including 'last-mile' solutions, such as active mobility, micromobility, and shared mobility solutions) is essential to increase transport efficiency and to achieve the decarbonisation targets by the promotion of urban low -emission mobility, also in a cross-border framework.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* the adoption of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) for all urban nodes in the region to actively promote sustainable mobility solutions, and sustainable logistics measures.
* integrated public transport services solutions (including also fare structure) for the largest urban nodes, covering their functional urban areas, to increase the modal share of public transport;
* a better coverage of bike lanes and networks (more km of cycling lanes) in all urban areas and measures to promote cycling, to increase bike modal share.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* An extended network of urban nodes belonging to the TEN-T, according to the proposal for the revision of Regulation (EU) 1315/2013.
* Multifunctional urban nodes, many of them also representing tourism attractions and/or classifiable as city-ports.

Challenges:

* Improvement of local public transport networks and integration with other services( e.g. shared-mobility services).
* Improve road safety, particularly for vulnerable users.
* Development of accessible and safe cycling solutions for local and tourist mobility.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a wide range of EU and national policies related to sustainable mobility in urban areas and the integration of urban nodes in the TEN-T network, among which:

* Regulation on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure and repealing [No 347/2013]
* Territorial Agenda 2030 - A future for all places
* The New EU Urban Mobility Framework [COM(2021) 811 final]

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Local and regional transport authorities of metropolitan and urban areas
* Ministries of Transports and Infrastructure
* Public transport passenger associations
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* SME and large companies in the field of transports
* Public transport operators
* Universities and educational institutions
* Urban and regional planners in metropolitan and urban areas
* Local and Regional Authorities
* Cycling Associations, organizations, etc
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans emphasize environmentally friendly transport solutions, aligning the region with EU sustainability standards (Chapter 27). The adoption of Mobility as a Service (MaaS) fosters efficient and integrated urban transport systems, demonstrating the Western Balkans' commitment to modern and interconnected urban mobility (Chapter 14). Additionally, investing in cycling infrastructure not only promotes healthy and sustainable commuting but also aligns the region with EU emphasis on alternative and green modes of transportation (Chapter 27). These measures collectively contribute to the harmonization of transport practices, a key component in the Western Balkans' journey towards EU accession (Chapter 14).

The EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport will be updated and upgraded with a view at the EU enlargement as foreseen by a key horizontal topic of the strategy. Activity is cross-cutting the entire Topic 2.1, Topic 2.2 and Topic 2.3 of the EUSAIR Action Plan.

* **Capacity building.** The implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) offers a comprehensive framework for urban planners and policymakers to enhance their expertise in sustainable urban development, fostering capacity building in local governance. By introducing innovative, technology-driven and integrated transport solutions, MaaS encourages the development of skills and knowledge among professionals involved in urban mobility management. Investing in cycling infrastructure not only contributes to healthier and more sustainable transport but also supports capacity building by creating opportunities for training and expertise development in urban planning, transportation engineering, and alternative mobility solutions.
* **Innovation and research.** The implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs), Public Transport single-ticketing platform (including Mobility as a service solution, MaaS), and cycling infrastructure in the cities of the Adriatic-Ionian Region would provide a fertile ground for research into novel technologies and urban planning strategies. MaaS introduces a transformative approach to transportation, encouraging research into seamless integration of various modes of transport and user-centric mobility solutions. The development of cycling infrastructure may stimulate innovation in urban design and safety measures, attracting research initiatives focused on enhancing the cycling experience and integrating it effectively into urban transport systems.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** The Topic does not include any link to Circular Economy.
* **Green rural development.** Integrated public transport services may be extended beyond urban areas and to some extent support connectivity in the neighbouring rural areas.
* **Digitalisation.** The integration of public transport systems including fare and single ticketing systems will include the development of digital platform and data sharing systems. In fact, SUMPs leverage digital technologies to optimize urban mobility, fostering the integration of smart solutions for traffic management and data-driven decision-making. MaaS[[3]](#footnote-4) introduces digital platforms that seamlessly connect various transportation modes, providing users with real-time information and payment options through digital channels. Additionally, the development of cycling infrastructure may incorporate digital tools for route planning, bike-sharing systems, and safety measures, collectively contributing to the overall digital transformation of transportation in the region's cities.

### Action 2.3.1 – Boost the uptake of SUMPs initiatives especially in urban nodes

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| **Action 2.3.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Boost the uptake of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) initiatives especially in urban nodes with strong urbanisation trends, including co-design of solutions for local mobility** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Upgrade the EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport – Vol. 7 Accessibility to urban nodes and tourist attractions. * Set up an EUSAIR peer to peer community on sustainable urban transport plans. * Develop an EUSAIR best practice handbook on sustainable urban transport plans. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Uptake technological mobility solutions. * Raising people awareness about the impact of sustainable urban mobility solutions on the environment and their daily activities. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | All urban areas of the Adriatic-Ionian Region have Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) and actively promote sustainable mobility solutions and sustainable logistics measures. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS. Under this Flagship the following masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport** – Vol. 7 Accessibility to urban nodes and tourist attractions | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Number or % of cities in the Region (e.g. with a population above 50.000 or 100.000 Habitant) that have adopted a SUMP according to EU guidelines | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR 79 Interreg - Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | tbd | tbd | tbd |
| Extension (Km /per habitant) of Mass Rapid Transit (e.g Tram , Metro, Bus Rapid Transit) | RCO 55 - Length of new tram and metro lines  RCO 56 - Length of reconstructed or modernised tram and metro lines  RCR 63 - Annual users of new or modernised tram and metro lines | tbd | tbd | tbd |

### Action 2.3.2 – Diffusion of integrated Public transport system including integrated fare structures (MaaS)

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| **Action 2.3.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Promote the diffusion of integrated fare and single ticketing solutions** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Upgrade the EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport – Vol. 7 Accessibility to urban nodes and tourist attractions * Initiate an EUSAIR peer to peer community on integrated fare and single ticketing solutions. * Promote integrated public transport systems including fare and single ticketing solutions through Mobility as a Services platforms. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * The challenge is the integration of local public transport networks and services, and integrated fare systems.   The opportunity may come from the on-going diffusion of MaaS platforms and MaaS operator. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Integrated fare and single ticketing solutions within the majority of urban and interurban areas, especially in Western Balkan countries. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS. Under this Flagship the following Masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport** – Vol. 7 Accessibility to urban nodes and tourist attractions | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Number or % of cities in the Region that have adopted MaaS solutions or local public transport (LPT) integrated fare systems (e.g. public transit and sharing mobility systems) | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR 79 Interreg - Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | tbd | tbd | tbd |
| Number of MaaS operators in the Region, distinguishing by extension of the services embedded in the MaaS platform, e.g. city-wide or region-wide including rural areas | RCO 87 Interreg - Organisations cooperating across borders  RCR 84 Interreg - Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion | tbd | tbd | tbd |

### Action 2.3.3 – Support the realisation of cycling lanes and networks

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| **Action 2.3.3** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Support the realisation of cycling lanes and networks and other measures for the promotion of cycling mobility** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Upgrade the EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport – Vol. 7 Accessibility to urban nodes and tourist attractions. * Promote cycling lanes and networks. * Development of EUSAIR long-distance biking routes (incl. EUROVELO network). | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Development of safe cycling solutions for local and tourist mobility. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Good coverage with cycling lanes and networks in all urban areas and active measures for the promotion of cycling mobility. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | The action is strictly related to the EUSAIR Pillar 2 (Transport sub-group) Flagship THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS and its component “Adriatic-Ionian Cycle Routes”.  Under this Flagship the following masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR Master Plan on Transport** – Vol. 7 Accessibility to urban nodes and tourist attractions   and the following **Cross-Pillar strategic projects:**   * **ADRIOCYCLETOUR** - ADRiatic IONian CYCLE route for sustanable TOURism (Pillars 2 and 4) | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Extension (Km /per habitant) cycling lanes in the cities of the Region, by typology (e.g. segregated vs. mixed use lanes, urban vs. suburban…) | RCO 58 - Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported  RCR 64 - Annual users of dedicated cycling infrastructure | tbd | tbd | tbd |

## Topic 2.4 – Energy networks

The key objective of this Topic is achieving well-interconnected and well-functioning electricity and natural gas systems and markets in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, to foster security of energy supply, and to improve competitiveness of energy delivery in view of the transition towards decarbonised energy systems to confront the climate change challenge. Priorities are enacting the energy goals of the European Green Deal, RePower EU, and the Green Agenda for Western Balkans, while contributing to the energy transition, large-scale deployment of renewable energy sources, increased electrification of the energy system, energy efficiency and resilience of energy infrastructure with a view at EU enlargement.

**Global objectives.** Energy systems are made up of energy networks, energy markets and energy uses. The liberalisation and integration of the EU electricity and natural gas markets, pursued by the EU directives and regulations, contribute to security of supply, competitiveness, sustainability and affordability. The energy policy objectives of the EU – sustainability, security of supply, competitiveness and affordability – can only be achieved through a well-interconnected and well-functioning internal energy market.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The focus is on the cooperation energy policies and initiatives by countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, collaboration on infrastructure developments and harmonised operation of energy systems.

The electricityand natural gas systems and markets in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and even more in the Western Balkans Region remain fragmented. Actions for greater integration will be addressed under this Topic.

Investments in infrastructure are crucial for achieving security of supply, market integration, competitiveness, price convergence and affordability. Investments would be public and private or both. Projects which have not secured sufficient public, or EU funding should be implemented through market-based instruments, such as incremental capacity processes, concessional agreements, own equity or support from commercial banks. Support and realisation of the projects within the different activities must be linked with the confirmation from the market that these infrastructures are needed and funding will be secured through market mechanisms.

On 30 May 2022, the European Union adopted Regulation (EU) 2022/869 on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure repealing Regulation (EU) No 347/2013.

On a proposal by the European Commission, on 14 December 2023 the Energy Community Ministerial Council followed by adopting a Decision adapting Regulation (EU) 2022/869 to the Energy Community to foster decarbonisation efforts of the Energy Community Contracting Parties in relation to energy infrastructure. This TEN-E Regulation sets out a revised regional cooperation framework for selecting and implementing key infrastructure projects necessary for achieving the 2030 and 2050 energy and climate targets and The European Green Deal. The TEN-E Regulation is key for accelerating investments in grid infrastructure. By including infrastructure for renewable and low-carbon gases, it will support the decarbonisation of gas markets and support the transformation of industrial clusters. The Energy Community Contracting Parties have to transpose the Regulation by end 2024. In parallel, the process for the selection of Projects of Energy Community Interest has been launched early 2024 by the Energy Community Secretariat with an objective to finalise this process also by the end of 2024.

In the electricity markets of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, the ultimate objective is the development of well-functioning electricity markets, underpinned by the removal of regulated retail electricity prices, the easing of network congestion**s**, integration of renewable energy sources (RES) into meshed power gridsand unhampered cross-border exchanges of power, followed by market coupling of the electricity markets of non-EU EUSAIR participating countries with the EU Member States.

Hydropower is the most commonly used type of renewable energy source in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Substantial increase in installed capacity and generation from variable solar and wind power are expected in the coming years.Limited availability of electricity grid capacity to connect power from distributed renewable energy sources is limiting the development of renewable energy and the existing bottlenecks in the uptake and distribution of solar and wind power need to be thoroughly assessed and addressed.

Electricity infrastructure projects, identified under the EU Projects of Common interest/Projects of Mutual Interest and Energy Community Projects of Energy Community lists, as well as the CESEC Action Plan aim at connecting new renewable energy to the power grid, and improving the reliability and quality of energy services. Interconnection of electricity grids and adequate grids capacity are pre-conditions for large-scale investments in renewable energy and its deployment.

In the natural gas market, limited investments are required in gas transmission and storage infrastructure, to address remaining bottlenecks.

Natural gas can be viewed as a transient fuel enabling the transition towards decarbonised energy systems through the European Union by the year 2050. Conditions should be created according to a long-term perspective to shift away from natural gas to renewable and low-carbon gases, in particular biomethane, synthetic methane and hydrogen.

To this end, repurposing of existing gas pipelines for hydrogen transportation should be planned. With regard to natural gas use hydrogen – ready solutions should be envisioned as well as highly efficient cogeneration and processes while carbon capture and sequestration technologies and the corresponding investments should receive consideration.

Increased supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) is foreseen in countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Direct use of LNG for transport and process industry can also be a transient option because of its lower carbon content as compared with other hydrocarbon fuels. LNG terminals, might serve as facilities for importing hydrogen in the future, however their potential and technical compatibility for conversion and repurposing still requires in-depth analysis and simulations.

Based on already existing natural gas infrastructure in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, and with completion of limited number of interconnectors in the Western Balkans Region whose implementation is already ongoing among EU Projects of Common Interest, Projects of Energy Community Interest and REPowerEU Plan, Western Balkan countries will be able to diversify supply sources and routes and to enhance security of energy supply.

Along a mid-term perspective developing natural gas infrastructure would help currently isolated areas and regions to have access to natural gas supplies, to ensure continuous and secure supplies by having networks renovated and modernised, and to bring natural gas from a range of export markets via new routes (notably, the upgraded Trans-Adriatic Pipeline – TAP2. The TAP project has been implemented and its upgrading and doubling of capacity are in progress.

In addition, liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure in ports and on land enabling new gas import routes and fuel switching to LNG would also benefit security of supply and improve environmental quality.

**Flagships.** The work under Topic 2.4 is a continuation and expansion of work on the previous EUSAIR Action Plan and commitment to flagship projects. Three flagship projects have been identified and proposed: ‘Power networks and markets for a green Adriatic-Ionian region’, ‘Integrated natural gas corridors and markets for a green Adriatic-Ionian Region’ and ‘Development and operation of logistics for direct LNG use as a clean fuel for the Adriatic-Ionian Region’. The flagship projects support the objective of expanded and better integrated national power and gas systems and the development of small-scale direct use LNG as a low-carbon fuel for the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the scope as above, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* removing roadblocks to project investments, focusing on the enabling factors for creation and development of regional enterprises along the free and regulated European market principles;
* Integrated power networks and markets for a green Adriatic-Ionian Region;
* Completing limited number of priority gas infrastructure projects, subject to market interest, aiming at enhancing diversification of sources and routes for pipelined gas and LNG.
* Fostering energy market integration and security of energy supply of the Adriatic-Ionian Region.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities and challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Connecting and integrating power and natural gas networks to reduce energy system vulnerability and risk of disruptions of energy supply.
* Enhancing cooperation on cross-border energy networks to allow for investments on large energy infrastructure which would find difficulties given the limited national outreach capacity.
* Exploiting complementarities of the energy systems through the Adriatic-Ionian Region to improve security and competitiveness.
* Sharing resources concerning newpower and natural gas networks and infrastructure would compensate lack of highly trained technical staff and human resources.

Challenges related to electric power concern among others:

* Insufficiently integrated power grids and power infrastructure and market supporting the energy transition of the Adriatic-Ionian Region.
* Restricted electricity market activities in the Adriatic-Ionian Region due to inefficient use and low exploitation of interconnections as well as subsidies causing electricity market distortions.
* Regulatory barriers that hinder electricity market integration as well as the functioning of power exchange through the Adriatic-Ionian Region.
* Inability of the existing electricity grid to accommodate generation of large amounts of electricity from intermittent renewable and distributed energy sources.

Challenges related to natural gas concern among others:

* Delayed implementation of the priority cross-border gas infrastructure projects.
* Regulatory barriers that hinder energy market integration and natural gas trading through the Adriatic-Ionian Region such as lack of uniform criteria for the allocation of transborder capacity
* Insufficient reverse flows and storage capacities for natural gas to enhance regional security of supply.
* Very limited readiness of the regional gas infrastructure for transporting and storing pure hydrogen and hydrogen fuels and need to identify priorities for corresponding future investments in infrastructure.

Further challenges:

* Pending reform of the Energy Community Treaty envisaging reciprocity with EU Member States and credible enforcement of the EU directives and regulations, as they are relevant to facilitate energy market integration.
* Prosperous business environment is required to attract investments for the development of networks and international and regional interconnections. Political instability, which is a recurrent phenomenon in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, is often regarded as a threat and deterrent to committing long-term investment on energy networks.
* Alliances, agreements, joint ventures amongst energy enterprises from countries of the Adriatic Ionian Region should be promoted and looked for to create larger and efficient regional industry players with adequate human resources and international connections while facing technology innovations and economies of scale.
* Cyber-security threats to power and natural gas networks and infrastructure, as well as to information systems used for providing essential services in the energy sector. Exceptional events due to global climate change with the consequent need for reducing vulnerability and ensuring early warning and continuity of energy services when facing incidents and disruptions.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a wide range of EU and national policies related to energy provision and networks and many other fields:

* An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans [COM(2020) 641 final]
* Council Regulation on enhancing solidarity through better coordination of gas purchases, reliable price benchmarks and exchanges of gas across borders [(EU) 2022/2576]
* European Investment Bank (EIB) Guidelines for (Energy) Project Financing and Risk Assessment
* Fit for 55 Package: Clean Energy for All Europeans Package
* Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans [SWD(2020) 223 final]
* Regulation (EU) 2022/869 on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure repealing Regulation (EU) No 347/2013.Regulation on European Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network [(EU) No 1315/2013]
* REPowerEU Plan [COM(2022) 230 final]
* The Central and South Eastern Europe energy connectivity (CESEC)
* The Energy Community Treaty [2006/500/EC]
* The European Green Deal [COM (2019) 640 final]
* The Paris Protocol – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020 [COM/2015/081 final]

In addition, the Topic also links to following policy framework:

* Directive on common rules for the internal market for electricity [(EU) 2019/944]
* East Mediterranean Gas Forum - Long-term strategy
* Regulation concerning measures to safeguard the security of gas supply [(EU) 2017/1938, (EU) 2022/1032]
* Regulation on risk-preparedness in the electricity sector [(EU) 2019/941]
* Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Action to Confront Climate Change [(EU) 2018/1999]
* Regulation on the internal market for electricity [(EU) 2019/943]
* South East Europe 2030 Strategy (Regional Cooperation Council)
* Strategy for EU External Energy Engagement [REPowerEU]

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII)
* Central and South Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity (CESEC) High-Level Working Group
* Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)
* Energy Community (EnC)
* Energy Community Distribution System Operators in Electricity (ECDSO-E)
* European Investment Bank
* European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E)
* European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSO-G)
* Technical Assistance to Connectivity in the Western Balkans (CONNECTA)
* Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF)

In addition, also the following stakeholders may be of relevance for the Topic:

* Adriatic and Ionian Interregional Group at the Committee of the Regions
* Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER)
* European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)
* International Energy Agency (IEA)
* International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)
* Local environmental associations (e.g. Friends of the Earth)
* Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
* United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

### Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The activities help candidate countries to better integrate with EU Member States in field of EU energy policies, also including programmes and projects and their harmonisation and alignment to the EU directives and regulations. Enactment and implementation of cross-border interconnections and transnational energy infrastructures would contribute to the integration of non-Member States with the European Union. The creation of integrated markets within the Adriatic-Ionian Region would allow cost reductions and regulatory alignment with the EU Member States while reducing risk in energy supply and distribution.
* **Capacity building.** The activities have a strong focus on capacity building to ensure relevant players are well informed and involved. This includes, among other activities, joint capacity building and innovative solutions for implementing a common market. Local energy enterprises may find new opportunities while creating joint ventures and merging into larger more efficient regional enterprises.
* **Innovation and research.** The activities will touch on innovation and research in various contexts, e.g. related to new technologies improving energy transmission and storage while activating measures for cybersecurity.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** The Topic does not explicitly address circular economy. However, improving energy networks to support a green transition is also supporting the transition to a circular economy.
* **Green rural development.** Increased energy interconnections and power grid meshing would facilitate the inclusion of rural and remote areas into the main power and natural gas infrastructure.
* **Digitalisation.** The digital transition and large-scale use of artificial intelligence are an integral part of the development of energy networks. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence would be a key driver for the operation of the energy networks, for the management of spore capacity, deployment of smart power grids, prevention of human errors and recovery from accidents and failures.

### Action 2.4.1 – Integrated power networks and market supporting the green transition

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| **Action 2.4.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Integrated power networks and market supporting the green transition and security of energy supply of the Adriatic-Ionian region** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Master Plan 2026 of Energy and Energy Networks for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Activity cross-cutting Topic 2.4 and Topic 2.5 of the EUSAIR Master Plan. * Promoting projects supporting the Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor.[[4]](#footnote-5) * Digitalising the power system, smart electricity grids deployment adapting smart grid technologies across the Adriatic-Ionian Region to efficiently integrate the behaviours and actions of all users connected to the electricity network in particular the generation of large amounts of electricity from renewable or distributed energy sources and demand response by consumers, energy storage, electric vehicles and other flexible sources. * This would include:  1. Doubling the existing Trans-Adriatic power interconnectors. 2. Enhancing power supply for islands and islands systems where renewable energies can play a fundamental role. 3. Promoting early warning and cybersecurity capabilities for the resilience of the power and electricity system when facing threats and incidents.  * Road Map 2026 towards a EUSAIR Power Exchange and Natural Gas Trading Hub for the Adriatic-Ionian Region Activity cross-cutting Action 2.4.1 and Action 2.4.2 of Topic 2.4 * Developing analysis and evaluating differences in the regional and national electricity markets, with respect to regulatory frameworks, market maturity and barriers to cross-border investments. Developing customised approaches to address these barriers while paying close attention to systemic market differences. * Supporting joint capacity building and innovative solutions for the building of a common power market. * Creating a wholesale power market for the Adriatic-Ionian Region[[5]](#footnote-6) including support to the flagship ‘Power networks and markets for a green Adriatic-Ionian Region’[[6]](#footnote-7) and the establishment of a Coordinated Auction mechanism and instruments. * Implementing and operating the Western Balkans Energy Regulators School. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Insufficiently integrated power grids and power infrastructure and market supporting the energy transition of the Adriatic-Ionian Region; * Restricted electricity market activities in the Adriatic-Ionian Region due to inefficient use and low exploitation of interconnections as well as subsidies causing electricity market distortions; * Inability of existing electricity grid to accommodate generation of large amounts of electricity from intermittent renewable and distributed energy sources; * Regulatory barriers hindering energy market integration as well as the functioning of power exchange through the Adriatic-Ionian Region. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Integrated power networks and markets for a green Adriatic-Ionian Region.   Progressive power markets and systems coupling and harmonisation. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship POWER NETWORKS AND MARKET FOR A GREEN ADRIATIC- IONIAN REGION the following masterplan was developed:   * **EUSAIR MPEN –** Master Plan of Energy Networks for the Adriatic-Ionian Region | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
|  | OI. Number of implemented transnational interconnectors to the Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders  RCO117 Interreg: Solutions for legal or administrative obstacles across border identified | 0 (2023) | 2 (2029) | TSG |
| OI. Master Plan 2026 of Energy and Energy Networks for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Activity is cross-cutting Topic 2.4 and Topic 2.5 | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | Update(2023) | 1 (2026) | TSG |
| OI. Roadmap 2026 towards an electricity market and natural gas trading hub for the Adriatic -Ionian Region. Activity cross-cutting Action 2.4.1 and Action 2.4.2 | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | Update(2023) | 1 (2026) | TSG |
| OI. Operation of the Western Balkan Energy Regulators School | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | 1(2025) | TSG |
| RI. Improved electricity interconnection in Western Balkan Region with reduced electricity cost, sharing spare capacity and increased supply reliability with a view at the horizontal topic of EU enlargement | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders  RCO117 Interreg: Solutions for legal or administrative obstacles across border identified | 0 (2023) | 1(2027) | TSG |
| RI. Defining priorities with a view at different shared policy scenarios according to a long-term perspective (years 2030 and 2050 as the time horizon) | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | 0 (2023) | 1 (2027) | TSG |
| RI. Integration of power and natural gas markets of Western Balkan Region into a coherent and harmonised regional market. First achievements expected: market coupling, sharing of spare capacity, joint mechanisms to confront risk of energy supply. Energy market integration is key element to the horizontal topic of EU enlargement. Activity is cross-cutting Action 2.4.1 and 2.4.2. | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0 (2023) | 1 (2027) | TSG |
| RI. Training of energy (electricity and natural gas) regulators from the Adriatic and Ionian Region according to shared principles, methodologies and criteria with a view at the horizontal topic of EU enlargement. Activity is cross-cutting Action 2.4.1 and Action 2.4.2. | RCO81 Interreg: Completion of joint training schemes | 0(2023) | 1(2025) | TSG |

### Action 2.4.2 – Integrated natural gas corridors

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| **Action 2.4.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Integrated natural gas corridors, infrastructure and market supporting the energy transition and security of energy supply of the Adriatic-Ionian Region** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Master Plan 2026 of Energy and Energy Networks and Road Map 2026 towards Energy Market Activity as under Action 2.4.1. * Subject to market interest and financial viability, supporting projects concerning cross-border gas infrastructure, in accordance with the flagship project on integrated natural gas corridors and markets for a green Adriatic-Ionian Region, including   + Promoting and implementing transborder interconnections towards a Trans-Balkan Gas Ring with a view its future conversion into a Trans-Balkan Hydrogen Ring including priority gas pipeline interconnections between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and between Serbia and Croatia   + Doubling of the Trans-Adriatic gas Pipeline " and Matagiola - Massafra pipeline   + North Macedonia natural gas interconnectors with Greece and Serbia   + New Compressor Station in Sulmona and Minerbio-Sulmona gas pipeline and as a part of the Adriatic Line project   + Expanding of the Krk LNG terminal in Croatia with related natural gas network reinforcement   + Building and operating Floating Storage and Regasification Units (FSRU) in the Adriatic-Ionian Sea – Port of Vlora (Albania), Port of Ravenna (Italy) and LNG refuelling points aimed at supply diversification and security with a view at future non-carbonated gas supply.   + Designing and financing the East-Med Gas Pipeline including the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline and Poseidon Gas Pipeline depending upon their continuing strategic interest and changing geopolitical context as concerns. * Supporting projects increasing gas storage capacities and their flexibility, and reverse flows for security of supply and competitiveness. * Supporting the development of a natural gas trading hub for the Western Balkan Region.[[7]](#footnote-8) * Developing and implementing pilot projects for adapting and repurposing natural gas transport networks and infrastructure to the transmission and distribution of renewable and low-carbon gases and eventually hydrogen. * Promoting cybersecurity capabilities for the resilience of the natural gas system when facing threats and incidents. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Insufficiently integrated natural gas corridors and gas infrastructure and market support towards the energy transition of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. * Insufficient readiness of the regional gas infrastructure for biomethane and hydrogen and the need to identify priorities for future investments in infrastructure. * Insufficient storage capacities and reverse flows to allow for flexibility, better security of natural gas supply and competitiveness. * Regulatory barriers that hinder natural gas trading through the Adriatic-Ionian Region. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Integrated natural gas corridors, infrastructure and market supporting the energy transition and security of energy supply of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship INTEGRATED NATURAL GAS CORRIDORS AND MARKET FOR A GREEN ADRIATIC- IONIAN REGION the following Action Plan was developed:   * **EUSAIR AP** - Action Plan (Road Map) towards a EUSAIR Power Exchange and Natural Gas Trading Hub | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
|  | OI. Dou-bling of Trans-Adriatic Pipeline | RCO81 Interreg Participation in joint/actions across borders | 0 (2023) | 1 (2026) |  |
| OI. Operating Floating Storage and Regasification Units in the Adriatic-Ionian Sea  Expansion of the Krk LNG terminal | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0(2023) | 1 (2026) |  |
| OI. Pilot projects for adapting and repurposing natural gas transport infrastructure to non-carbonated gases. | RCO90 Interreg: Projects for innovation networks across borders  RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0 (2023) | 1(2029) | TSG |
| RI. The doubling of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP2) can contribute to connecting countries through the Adriatic-Ionian Seas to improve security of natural gas supplies, to increase diversification. | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders  RCO87 Interreg: Organisations cooperating across borders | 0(2023) | 1(2026) | TSG |
| RI. Improving LNG delivery and security of supply | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0 (2023) | 1 (2027) | TSG |
| RI. The EU objective is at decarbonising the energy systems through the EU and candidate countries by the year 2050. Decarbonisation is mandatory. The pilot project might involve all the interested countries of the Adriatic- Ionian Region. | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions  RCO90 Interreg: Projects for innovation networks across borders | 0(2023) | 1(2027) | TSG |

### Action 2.4.3 – Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) logistics and infrastructure

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| **Action 2.4.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) direct use, logistics and infrastructure, for marine and road transport, as well as other use (notably in process industry)** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Promoting agreements between Port Authorities of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas on logistics for the deployment and use of LNG as a fuel for maritime transport. * Designing, constructing and operating a network of LNG refuelling stations along blue corridors for road heavy transport and rail transport. * Promoting simulations and analyses of existing LNG terminals and storage facilities on their capability to receive hydrogen, biomethane and synthetic methane. * Projects are foreseen for:  1. Marine and road truck engine conversion to the LNG use as a fuel; 2. Direct small-scale LNG use in process and gas-intensive industries and applications.  * Supporting to the flagship project on the ‘Development and operation of logistics for direct LNG use as clean fuel for the Adriatic-Ionian Region’. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Challenges related to the LNG concern among others the need to repurpose LNG infrastructure to renewable fuels and hydrogen, biomethane and synthetic methane in the future. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Small-scale direct use of LNG as a fuel is transient option for the Adriatic-Ionian Region requiring existing and new logistics and infrastructure which would be converted in the future to delivery and use of hydrogen and other non-carbonated gas. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF LOGISTICS FOR DIRECT LNG USE AS A CLEAN FUEL FOR THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION no strategic implementation formats were developed yet. | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
|  | OI. No. of agreements on LNG logistics between Port Authoritiesthrough the Adriatic and Ionian Seas signed. | RCO87 Interreg: Organisations cooperating across borders | 0(2023) | 1(2028) | TSG |
| OI. Blue corridors ans logistics for the use of LNG in road transport: preliminary design of LNG logistics. | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0(2023) | 1(2028) | TSG |
| OI. Converting LNG infrastructure to deployment of non-carbonated gases. No of pilot projects for hydrogen use | RCO84 Interreg: Pilot actions developed and implemented jointly | 0(2023) | 1(2028) | TSG |
| RI. Agreement on the use of LNG as clean fuel for the marine transport would facilitate the adoption of LNG and other clean fuels through the Adriatic and Ionian Seas while harmonising safety requirements and logistics. Result is cross-cutting Topic 2.1 and Topic 2.2 of Pillar 2. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0(2023) | 1(2026) | TSG |
| RI. Blue corridor for road transport implying LNG refuelling stations and cross-border agreements. Result is cross-cutting Topic 2.1 and Topic 2.2 of Pillar 2. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0(2023) | 1(2026) | TSG |
| RI. Non-carbonated gases are key to the transition towards a net-zero carbon energy system. Pilot projects are providing background and means towards the goal of decarbonisation. | RCO84 Interreg: Pilot actions developed and implemented jointly | 0(2023) | 1(2027) | TSG |

## Topic 2.5 – Green energy

The leading objective is confronting global climate change while accelerating the transition towards decarbonised energy systems in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, enhancing security of energy supply and delivery, granting affordable and equitable energy access for all consumers. Priorities are enacting the energy goals of The European Green Deal, REPowerEU and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The decarbonisation of the energy systems and the transition towards net-zero carbon economies will entail large-scale deployment of renewable energy sources and other low-carbon energy options, improved energy efficiency, increased electrification and eventually the development and use of hydrogen fuels. Energy technology innovation and digitalisation will be key drivers.

New market structures and technologies that are developed and deployed would imply a new organisation of the energy systems. In the past energy systems were based on long-distance energy networks and concentrated energy supply while the future will see more distributed and local energy production and delivery. During the past few years, active consumers such as prosumers, energy communities and demand-side participants have emerged that contribute to more efficient decentralised markets and networks management. For these market participants to become an integrated part of the energy system, any development of energy infrastructures should take them involved and into account. The transition towards decarbonised energy systems might require new forms of governance of the transition. Cooperation in the development and implementation of National Energy and Climate Plans is foreseen. An intent of this Topic is to exchange experiences and consultation between and among countries from the Adriatic-Ionian Region on the governance for the energy transition and public acceptance. Ad-hoc analyses and studies can be foreseen. Pillar 3 and Pillar 5 might have a role and contribute.

**Global objectives.** The commitment to tackling global climate change and other environmental challenges is this generation’s defining task. It is a new growth strategy that aims at transforming EU Member States and EU candidate countries into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. This green strategy also aims to protect, conserve, and enhance the Adriatic-Ionian Region’s natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of its citizens from environmentally related risks and impacts. At the same time the transition should be just and inclusive. It must put people first, and pay attention to the local communities, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges. Since it will bring substantial change, active public participation and confidence in the energy transition is paramount if policies are to work and be accepted.

**EUSAIR objectives.** It is assumed that the Adriatic-Ionian Region should develop a collective ability to transform its economy and societies to follow a more sustainable energy path. Delivering substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions is a challenge. It will require massive public investment and increased effort to direct private capital towards climate and environmental action, while avoiding lock-in into unsustainable practices. The Adriatic-Ionian Region should be able to coordinate and promote its efforts towards building a coherent financial public-private system that supports sustainable solutions. These investments should also be an opportunity to put the Adriatic-Ionian Region firmly on a new path of sustainable and inclusive growth while enhancing security of energy supply and delivery and ensuring affordable energy access and equity. Energy efficiency improvements should be considered with a view to enhancing security of supply and to achieving a better degree of energy independence and to protect the environment.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy mix across the Adriatic-Ionian Region;
* improving and enhancing energy efficiency of the economies of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, through better energy use and management and thus reducing the energy intensity, in terms of the energy required for GDP unit;
* introducing and deployinghydrogen in the energy mix and increasing cooperation on advanced energy technologies in the Adriatic-Ionian Region;
* promoting better cohesion through the development of energy communities in the Adriatic-Ionian Region;
* ensuring affordable energy supply by fighting energy poverty and protecting energy consumers.

### 2.5.1 EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Exploiting the potential of renewable energy sources in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Specifically, solar energy, onshore and offshore wind power hydropower and possibly geothermal energy are expected to make a substantial share in the future electricity mix. Furthermore, advanced biofuels would have a role in transport and other use.
* Providing the economies of the Adriatic-Ionian Region (in several cases with significantly lower GDP per capita than the EU overage) with opportunities for international investors in the green energy sector, while ensuring that transparent and reliable regulatory frameworks are in place.
* Making the transition to a renewable-based energy supply and to high energy efficiency driven by domestic resources can enable countries to capture increasing shares of the energy value added chain within the Adriatic-Ionian Region, progressively build domestic technological capacity and turn the energy system into a driver of clean economic growth, and social cohesion.
* Accelerating the deployment of renewables energies in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and increasing energy efficiency are a cost-effective strategy to reduce dependency on energy imports and improve the security of supply. At the same time, expanded electrification of the energy system with renewable energy sources would allow the phasing out of coal uses as well as avoiding further investments in redundant natural gas infrastructure, which would be at high risk of becoming stranded if the Adriatic-Ionian Region is to meet the goals of The European Green Deal.

Challenges:

* Regulatory (complex, lengthy administrative procedures, integration in spatial plans, inefficient coordination of renewable energy sources regulations between countries), political (possible instabilities), financial (fossil fuel subsidies, investment security), technical (grid integration restrictions, lack of functional power exchanges), socio-economic and environmental barriers to the deployment of renewable energy sources.
* High energy intensity of a number of EUSAIR participating countries. Reducing energy intensity is the challenge.
* High share of greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector per GDP unit in some countries from the Adriatic-Ionian Region. High dependency of energy sectors on fossil fuels (i.e. lignite) and hydropower (affected by impacts due climate change and potential conflicts with Water Framework and Habitats Directives).
* Accelerating the transition towards a net-zero carbon economy to decarbonise the energy systems while promoting security of energy supply and delivery, energy affordability and access. Coping with the cost of energy transition to low-carbon technologies and stranded costs emerging form the phasing out of coal-using facilities and producing areas.
* Dealing with the more vulnerable energy customers (due to the possibility of increasing energy prices) in cooperation with Pillar 5.

Further challenges:

* Creating an energy technology innovation facility or hub for the Adriatic-Ionian Region with contribution and cooperation from all the EUSAIR participating countries while exploiting existing capabilities.
* Ensuring fair supply of strategic materials and critical components for the energy transition.
* Promoting the creation of new industrial players in the Adriatic-Ionian Region to design and construct green facilities and supply energy efficient systems.
* Providing energy supply and delivery with security and resilience against cybersecurity threats.

### 2.5.2 Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a wide range of EU and national policies related to green energy, energy transition and many other fields:

* A Renovation Wave for Europe Strategy: Greening our Buildings, Creating Jobs, Improving Lives [COM(2020)662 final]
* An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans [COM(2020) 641 final]
* Directive on Energy Efficiency [(EU) 2018/2002]
* Directive on Energy Performance of Buildings [(EU) 2018/844]
* Directive on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources [(EU) 2018/2001]
* European Investment Bank (EIB) Guidelines for (Energy) Project Financing and Risk Assessment
* Fit for 55 Package: Clean Energy for All Europeans Package
* REPowerEU Plan [COM(2022) 230 final]
* The Energy Community Treaty [2006/500/EC]
* A Europe fit for the digital age

Other relevant policy framework include:

* Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability [COM(2020) 474 final]
* Regulation Establishing the Framework for Achieving Climate Neutrality [(EU) 2021/1119]
* Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Action to Confront Climate Change [(EU) 2018/1999]
* The European Green Deal [COM (2019) 640 final]
* The Paris Protocol – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020 [COM/2015/081 final]

### 2.5.3 Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM)
* Energy Community (EnC)
* European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)
* UN Conference of the Parties of the Framework Convention on Climate Change
* Local and regional authorities
* Local energy agencies networks
* Local environmental associations (e.g. Friends of the Earth)
* Local public and private energy communities
* Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF)

Other relevant stakeholders are:

* Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII)
* Adriatic and Ionian Interregional Group at the Committee of the Regions
* Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER)
* Covenant of Mayors
* European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and Environment (FEDARENE)
* International Energy Agency (IEA)
* International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA)
* National Associations for Renewable Energy Sources and Energy Efficiency
* National energy RDI agencies
* National regulatory agencies
* Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)
* REScoop.eu (European Federation of Citizen Energy Cooperatives)
* United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### 2.5.4 Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The shared commitment to large-scale development and deployment of renewable energies and energy efficiency is a key element for the integration of EU candidate countries into the common energy market. Net-zero carbon energy systems by the year 2050 are the ultimate goal while the national energy systems should be organised accordingly. The National Energy and Climate Plans represent a step forward in the process of EU enlargement which is followed by candidate countries The enactment of activities under the Topic Green Energy would provide a clear contribution.
* **Capacity building.** The activities as foreseen under the present Topic are requiring adequategovernance and organisation of the energy system to involve the relevant players from administrations and industry. In particular, the large-scale deployment of renewable energies and energy efficiency are demanding information, initiatives and implementation at local scale within a meshed and distributed energy system where new types and forms of capacity building are at its background. Energy communities for the deployment and use renewable energies and energy efficiency are representing a promising advancement.
* **Innovation and research.** The activities which are proposed under this Topic have their ground on energy technology innovation and technology advancements are expected. Cooperation and collaboration on energy technology innovation and research and demonstration will be promoted while EUSAIR participating countries are invited to share information and practice on their best cases and experiences regarding the deployment of renewable energies and energy efficiency.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** The promotion of green energy is a direct contribution to the transition towards a circular economy. Connecting system models/initiatives (such as Climate-KIC) to support implementation of circular economy in EUSAIR participating countries and value chain development are expected under the present Topic. In particular, circular economy and its principles are a driver for energy efficiency through the life cycle of goods, appliances, and industrial equipment. Clear synergistic interactions are expected.
* **Green rural development.** The large-scale deployment of renewable energies would contribute to green rural development activities. Supporting smart community/village and energy communities in rural areas would increase self-sufficiency, attractiveness, and sustainable development of the rural areas (also using experiences made in other Macro Regions). The development of advanced second-generation technologies for the energy use of biomass might represent a valuable asset for some rural areas depending on local circumstances and eventual economic and environmental benefits.
* **Digitalisation.** It is assumed that the transition towards green energy and a net-zero carbon economy according to the long-form perspective and commitments can find a driver in the digital transition and progressive digitalisation of the energy system. Viceversa the energy transition will promote further digitalisation in the economy and extended use of artificial intelligence. Applications of artificial intelligence and blockchain are envisaged. Artificial intelligence will be a key instrument in the operation, management and maintenance of remote renewable energy systems while artificial intelligence would also entail a new generation of energy efficient applications and arrangements in the residential, transport, industrial and services sectors.

### 2.5.5 Action 2.5.1 – Cooperation in deployment of renewable energy sources in the Adriatic-Ionian Region

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| **Action 2.5.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Cooperation in deployment of renewable energy sources in the Adriatic-Ionian Region** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Master Plan 2026 of Energy and Energy Networks for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Activity as under Action 2.4.1 * Convening a EUSAIR Conference for Cooperation in the Adriatic-Ionian Region to Confront Global Climate Change Challenge. Cooperating in the development and implementation of National Energy and Climate Plans with a view at decarbonising the energy system, energy security and sustainability. Activity cross-cutting the entire Topic 2.5. * Preparing a Renewable Energy Roadmap for the Adriatic-Ionian Region while mapping the renewable energy potential, identifying implementation challenges and barriers to renewable energy sources. * Promoting the use of renewable energies in the residential, transport, industry and services sectors. * Integrating and managing renewable energy energies into existing energy systems and cooperating for the establishment of a comprehensive investment and regulatory framework. * Supporting and creating energy communities according to the EU directives and regulations. Promoting cooperation and exchange of experiences amongst energy communities as well as through macroregional networking and best practice sharing. * Cooperating on projects of biomass refineries for production of advanced biofuels with a view at net-zero carbon emissions. * Cooperation envisaged and new projects would include:  1. Supporting alignment of countries from the Adriatic-Ionian Region with the EU Acquis related to the decarbonisation of the energy systems in the framework of the Energy Community. 2. Cooperating on low-carbon and de-carbonised district heating solutions as well projects for desalination of sea water. 3. Cooperating in fund-raising and joint regional project proposals on renewable energy sources. 4. Exploring opportunities offered by European initiatives (such as the ‘coal regions in transition’, Western Balkan Economic and Investment Plan, European Climate Pact) for encouraging best practice sharing, capacity building and cooperation during the phasing - out of coal - fuelled power plants and process industry. 5. Implementing the project for ‘Harnessing Offshore Renewable Energy Potential in the Adriatic and Ionian Sea’. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * The Adriatic-Ionian Region is promising in terms of potential of renewable energy sources. * High share of greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector per GDP unit in a number of countries from the Adriatic-Ionian Region. High dependency of energy sectors on fossil fuels (i.e. lignite) and hydropower (affected by impacts due to climate change and potential conflicts with Water Framework and Habitats Directives). | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Increased share of renewable energy in the EUSAIR energy mix. * Large-scale deployment into the Adriatic-Ionian Region of photovoltaics, wind power, advanced biofuels, geothermal energy in addition to hydropower. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: EUSAIR Conference on Climate Change | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | Concept (2023) | 1(2025) | TSG2 |
| RI: Aim of the Conference is at presenting problems, options and solutions on how to confront the climate change issue for the Adriatic and Ionian Region while developing harmonised positions and approaches. Cross-cutting aspects with Topic 2.4, all aspects of Topic 2.5 and Pillar 3 are relevant for the horizontal topic of EU enlargement. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | Concept (2023) | 1 (2025) | TSG2 |
| OI: Renewable Energy Roadmap for the Adriatic and Ionian Region – study completed. | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | Concept (2023) | 1(2025) | TSG2 |
| RI: Focus of the renewable Energy Roadmap is at opportunities for progress and prospects of renewable energies in the Region. Options for streamlining siting and operation are defined. Result is needed to cope with the horizontal topic of EU enlargement. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | Concept (2023) | 1 (2025) | TSG2 |
| OI: Development of project for biomass refinery for biofuel production. | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0(2023) | 1(2026) | TSG2 |
|  | RI. Second generation and advanced use of biomass would have a role within the expanded energy production and use of renewable energies in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Biorefineries appear at the technological frontier. | RCO116  Jointly developed solutions | 0(2023) | 1(2027) | TSG2 |

### 2.5.6 Action 2.5.2 – Improving energy efficiency in the through action and cooperation

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| **Action 2.5.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Improving energy efficiency in the Adriatic-Ionian Region through action and cooperation** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Master Plan 2026 on Energy and Energy Networks for the Adriatic and Ionian Region. Activity as under Action 2.4.1. * Convening a EUSAIR Conference for Cooperation in the Adriatic-Ionian Region to Confront Global Climate Change Challenge. Activity as under Action 2.5.1. * Organising permanent EUSAIR Forum on Energy Efficiency for the Adriatic-Ionian Region to promote and foster macroregional cooperation in all efficient energy uses, energy efficient housing and industrial processes, energy efficient public buildings and services, energy efficient mobility. This would include cooperation on: * Public lighting, telemetering and monitoring energy delivery and use, energy-efficient city planning; * Domotics, heat pumps, energy-efficient heating and cooling for buildings and residential purposes; * Shared recommendations and standards to combine energy efficiency measures with applications of renewable energies for residential purposes and services sector; * Electric vehicles, low-carbon fuels and hydrogen for transport and mobility. Activity cross-cutting with Topic 2.2 and Topic 2.3. * Strengthening macroregional cooperation on energy programmes and plans. This would include: * Addressing administrative, legal and financial barriers to speed up a renovation of public and private buildings, including cooperation and sharing of best practices in designing innovative financing schemes. * Cooperating in the development and implementation of national energy end-use building and industry renovation strategies. * Supporting macroregional networking, best practice sharing, capacity building and project development with energy efficiency. * Developing and implementing energy communities to empower local stakeholders by improving their capacities in exploiting renewable energy sources and increasing energy efficiency on a local scale. Energy communities will rely upon bottom-up approaches including engagement of enterprises and enhanced mutual trust of local authorities and citizens who want to create instruments aimed at boosting the energy transition. Activity will be shared by Action 2.5.1 and Action 2.5.2. * Creating and harmonising through the Adriatic-Ionian Region instruments aimed at fighting energy poverty and ensuring continuing and sustainable access to energy for the isolated communities and vulnerable consumers groups notably, the elders and disabled consumers, persons under medical care requiring constant electricity supply, the poor, populations impacted by natural disasters (e.g. floods and earthquakes). Cooperation with Pillar 5 – Improved Social Cohesion is foreseen to these aims | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * High energy intensity of the EUSAIR economies. Reducing energy intensity is the real challenge. * Regulatory, political, financial, technical, socio-economic and environmental barriers to the deployment of energy efficient technologies and their acceptance. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Increased energy efficiency of the EUSAIR economies, through better operation and introduction and implementation of energy efficiency practices and standards. * Alignment of energy use efficiency through the Western Balkan Region to the EU average standards. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Master Plan 2026 on Energy and Energy Networks for the Adriatic and Ionian Region. | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | Master Plan 2023 | 1(2026) | TSG2 |
| RI: The EUSAIR Master Plan 2026 on Energy would update and upgrade the 2023 Master Plan on Energy Networks for the Adriatic and Ionian Region with a view at it’s the EU enlargement as foreseen by a key horizontal topic of the strategy. Time horizons are the years 2030 and 2050. Activity is cross-cutting the entire Topic 2.4 and Topic 2.5 of the EUSAIR Action Plan. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | Master Plan 2023 | 1 (2026) | TSG2 |
| OI: EUSAIR Forum on energy efficiency. | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0’(2023) | 3(2027) | TSG2 |
| RI: Improved efficiency through the entire energy system is key to align countries with the average EU energy efficiency standards while preparing for the EU enlargement according to a horizontal topic of the Strategy. The Forum will focus on solutions, shared practice and procedures. Pilot projects would be launched. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0(2023) | 1 (2027) | TSG2 |
| OI: Establishment of energy community in the Western Balkan Region. | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0(2023) | 2(2027) | TSG2 |
|  | RI: Energy communities for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources are foreseen by new EU directives and financial support. The activity will contribute to the alignment of countries from the Western Balkan Region to the best practice adopted by EU member states according to the horizontal topic of EU enlargement. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0(2023) | 2 (2027) | TSG2 |

### 2.5.7 Action 2.5.3 – Promoting advancements on energy technologies and hydrogen economy

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Action 2.5.3** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Promoting advancements on energy technologies and hydrogen economy** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Strengthening cooperation on advanced energy technologies, energy technology innovation and R&D while promoting effort towards the establishment of an energy technology innovation facility or hub for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, notably for the Western Balkans Region. * Advancing electricity storage, fuel cells, superconductivity, artificial intelligence uses through the energy systems. * Promoting and developing carbon capture sequestration (CCS) and carbon use (CCUS) to decarbonise carbon fuels. * Promoting hydrogen production and use through different technologies and systems, and prospects for green hydrogen. * Developing alternative low-carbon and zero-carbon fuels for transport, as well as hydrogen transport and storage, hydrogen use in the main energy, transport and consuming sectors. Activity partially cross-cutting with Topic 2.2 and Topic 2.3). This would include:  1. Preparing a **H**ydrogen **P**roduction and **D**eployment **R**oad-**M**ap for the Adriatic-Ionian Region with focus on opportunities, roadblocks, potential industry players and R&D needs; 2. Building hydrogen logistics, transport and storage; 3. Deploying hydrogen fuels, synthetic methane and e-fuels use in the transport and main energy-consuming sectors; 4. Developing of integrated hydrogen systems while including advanced biofuels and ammonia fuels. 5. Supporting the North Adriatic Hydrogen Valley project as well as other hydrogen projects as an open-ended hydrogen valley to test and demonstrate feasibility of hydrogen economy and technology;  * Projects for exploiting advanced digitalisation techniques and artificial in the energy systems. * Cooperating on advanced nuclear fission power and nuclear fusion, including R&D and new technologies for secure exploitation of nuclear energy with a view at new generation nuclear power plants and small modular reactors (SMRS) while entering prospects for nuclear fusion. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Accelerating the transition towards a net-zero carbon economy to decarbonise and the energy system while promoting security of energy supply and delivery and energy affordability and access. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Increased share of hydrogen in the EUSAIR energy mix and increased technology innovation and RDI cooperation in the EUSAIR on advanced energy technologies. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Created energy technology innovation hub with focus on the Western Balkan Region. | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | 0(2023) | 1(2027) | TSG2 |
| RI: Countries notably from the Western Balkan Region lack capacity to innovate key energy technologies (including energy storage, carbon capture and storage systems, fuel cells and so forth) and to deploy the best solutions. The energy technology innovation hub and new cooperation agreements would fill the gap. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0(2023) | 1 (2027) | TSG2 |
| OI: North-Adriatic Hydrogen Valley supported and outreach action completed. | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | Definition (2023) | 1(2026) | TSG2 |
| RI: The North Adriatic Hydrogen Valley as well as other hydrogen valley through the Adriatic and Ionian Region are proposed for an outreach action with a view at the proposed European Bank on Hydrogen. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | Definition (2023) | (2026) | TSG2 |
| OI: Advanced digitalisation of the energy system - . two pilot projects on digitalisation and artificial intelligence for the energy system developed. | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | Concept (2023) | 2(2027) | TSG2 |
|  | RI: Digitalisation and artificial intelligence are cross-cutting topics for the EUSAIR. Two pilot projects on advanced digitalisation techniques and applications will be designed and implemented according to a cooperative approach involving interested EUSAIR participating Countries. | RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0(2023) | 2(2027) | TSG2 |

## 2.6 Indicative list of relevant funding sources

Activities can be implemented through public and private investment or both. Private investment has a key role in the large transport and energy projects which will contribute to the economic development of the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Conditions should be created to make private funding and national and international investment possible and facilitated.

With regard to public investment the EUSAIR participating countries can use the following EU funding mechanisms and instruments during the years 2021-27:

Relevant EU Cohesion Policy objectives: PO2- a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, energy communities, climate change mitigation and adaptation and risk prevention and management, PO1 - a more competitive and more competent Europe by promoting innovative and intelligent economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity and PO3 - a more connected Europe by enhancing mobility, supporting the digital and green transition of the transport sector while continuing to improve connectivity and traffic safety.

Relevant IPA Programming Framework window: all windows, specifically window 3: Green agenda and sustainable connectivity.

**Applicable to EU Member States**

* The ERDF and Cohesion Fund,
* The ESF+ ,
* The EAFRD,
* The EMFAF,
* Just transition mechanism,
* Interreg Programmes of EUSAIR participating countries: Croatia-Italy, Croatia-Slovenia, Greece-Italy, Italy-Slovenia,
* ERDF Regional and Sectoral mainstream programs, which include specific objectives of the 5 EU Policy Objectives related to Pillar 2- Transport and Energy.

**Applicable to EU Member States in cooperation with EU candidate countries**

* Life (which supports the environment, biodiversity, and nature through awareness-raising campaigns, studies, evaluation, training, workshops, and networking),
* Horizon (which supports the development of skills, technology transfer, and innovation in the sectors and clusters on digitalization, innovation systems, energy communities, and environment),
* Erasmus + (to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional, and personal development of people in the fields of education and training of youth, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs, and social cohesion),
* Digital Europe Programme
* Invest in the EU Programme (which supports employment, youth, and SMEs along with economic, social, and territorial cohesion).
* EU funding mechanisms: Connecting Europe Facility for Transport and for Energy Efficiency and RePower EU plan through EIB funding aimed at reducing Europe's dependence on fossil fuel and accelerating the transition to green energy
* Relevant Interreg transnational and CBC programmes 2021-27:
* IPA Adrion transnational Programme, Euro med and Next Med 2021-27
* South Adriatic (Italy-Albania-Montenegro), Greece-Albania, Greece-North Macedonia, Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro, Croatia-Serbia.

**Applicable to the EU candidate countries:**

* The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) specific objectives and thematic priorities related to Pillar 2- Transport and Energy
* 6 IPA cross-border programs among Western Balkan countries: [Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro](https://cbibplus.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-montenegro/), [Montenegro – Albania](https://cbibplus.eu/montenegro-albania/),  [North Macedonia – Albania](https://cbibplus.eu/north-macedonia-albania/), [Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina](https://cbibplus.eu/serbia-bosnia-and-herzegovina/), [Serbia – Montenegro](https://cbibplus.eu/serbia-montenegro/), [Serbia – North Macedonia](https://cbibplus.eu/serbia-north-macedonia/)

The Western Balkans Investment Framework- WBIF can also strongly contribute to the Green Agenda, clean energy and sustainable transport in the Western Balkans, as well as to green, sustainable development and economic growth.

# Pillar 3 – Environmental Quality

The Adriatic-Ionian Region contains a number of unique ecosystems. Pillar 3 builds on past period 2020 – 2023 when flagships were designed and approved and are recognising the vital eco system services important for the sustainable development. The preservation of these is essential to Europe's natural heritage and requires joint action and cross sectoral cooperation (Pillar 3 matrix approved by EUSAIR Governing Board in 2018) from the countries concerned. Several countries of the region are home to shared eco-regions stretching across borders. These eco-regions include the Illyrian deciduous forests, and the Dinaric Mountains and the Pannonian mixed forests. Overall, the Adriatic-Ionian Region has a rich biodiversity in comparison to the average European region, with many species. All countries of the macroregion provide habitats for Europe’s large carnivores, including the wolf, the Eurasian lynx and the brown bear. These species require large habitats to sustain viable populations, and cooperation is therefore needed on joint management and on ensuring that infrastructure investments will not result in significant fragmentation of important landscape features.

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are vital for marine environment conservation and are part of broader environmental law measures. The EU's focuses on the legal framework for creating and managing new protected areas. Under the Birds and Habitats Directives, EU member states must designate areas to protect endangered species and habitats. The NATURA 2000 network is a significant global network for safeguarding nature in the EU.

However, there are gaps in protecting marine elements like certain fish species, invertebrates, and offshore habitats under the current directives. The EU Commission opts for a practical approach, emphasizing Natura 2000's broad coverage.

The Habitats Directive also influenced the Bern Convention, which laid the groundwork for the EU's Nature directives. But their implementation varies due to different legal systems.

The EU introduced the "EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030" in response to the European Green Deal. It aims to create a comprehensive Trans-European Nature Network, legally protecting at least 30% of land and sea, with one-third under strict protection. This was endorsed by the EU Council of Ministers in October 2020.

The Adriatic-Ionian Region is increasingly vulnerable due to human expansion and climate change effects, including rising sea levels, erosion, marine encroachment, saltwater infiltration, water shortages, droughts, and biodiversity loss. There's escalating strain on coastal zones and their communities at both national and cross-border scales. Climate change amplifies these vulnerabilities and risks. Maintaining healthy ecosystems is crucial for human health, water, food, energy, climate, and biological safety. Such ecosystems are pivotal for sustainable growth and are at the heart of a sustainable blue economy.

The marine realm, a vast canvas of wonder and enigma, faces mounting challenges from human actions. The intricate marine life balance is jeopardized by numerous human-induced factors. Maritime transport, especially, has a significant footprint on the marine environment. The Adriatic and Ionian Seas are major conduits for worldwide maritime activities. While ships enable global commerce as they navigate these seas, they unintentionally affect marine habitats.

High-traffic maritime pathways, particularly in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, are accident hotspots, posing threats of mishaps, oil discharges, and marine life disruptions. Recognizing these dangers, national bodies are proactively devising strategies to lessen maritime traffic's adverse effects, especially in high-risk areas.

Overfishing is another major issue. Historically viewed as an inexhaustible resource, recent data indicates the seas are not limitless. Fishing, vital for coastal populations and the global food network, has consequences. Overharvesting marine resources disrupts marine food chains. Accidental catches of non-targeted species compound the issue, often resulting in dwindling numbers of marine mammals, birds, and other unintended catch species.

Pollution from terrestrial sources is a significant marine challenge. Coastal zones, teeming with human activities, often discharge contaminants into the seas. These pollutants, from farm runoff to industrial emissions, can harm marine organisms. Effective waste handling, especially along coastlines, is crucial, underscoring the importance of holistic approaches to address this problem.

Finally, invasive foreign species pose a threat to marine environments. These species, when introduced to unfamiliar territories, can dominate, prey on, or introduce illnesses to indigenous species, often causing major ecosystem shifts. Some marine conservation zones have acknowledged this risk, allowing regulated removals to oversee and limit invasive species numbers. It's our shared duty to ensure future generations inherit vibrant seas, not barren waters.

Climate change, along with other natural and anthropic processes, severely affect much of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, especially natural habitats and biodiversity. This is one of the regions in Europe most heavily affected by increases in temperature, droughts and water scarcity. Estimations suggest temperature may increase by 1.7 to 4.0°C, and even exceeding 5.0°C by the end of the century, depending on the global effort in greenhouse gasses emission reduction (see Green Agenda for the West Balkans 2021-2030).

The Adriatic flyway is one of the main routes for millions of migratory birds crossing the Mediterranean, with birds making a resting stop along the eastern Adriatic. A number of bird species also spend the winters in the area. The low number of undisturbed wetlands on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, lack of hunting ban areas and hunting rules which are not in line with EU legislation, (as well as low enforcement of the rules in place) result in vulnerable, threatened or endangered migratory bird species being killed. This has impacts for the entire EU, as efforts to protect species breeding risk are being undone if protection is not ensured during migration.

This Pillar sets out to strengthen the collaboration in the Adriatic-Ionian Region in improving the marine and costal environment and transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity, by further strengthening the development and use of common platforms for data exchange and joint monitoring, supporting the implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), also at cross-border and transnational level, strengthening the exchange of experience, and the development of innovative solutions in the region. Actions will ensure that the results of existing cooperation efforts are disseminated and capitalised.

The EUSAIR aims to address environmental issues faced by the macroregion will contribute to implementing the EU environmental Acquis, particularly the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, Maritime Spatial Planning, EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, Nitrates Directive, Waste Framework Directive, Birds and Habitats Directives, Common Fisheries Policy, EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries as well the EU Green Infrastructure Strategy. EUSAIR is important subregional approach to enhance and complement regional activities (Barcelona convention)[[8]](#footnote-9).

Reference should be made to the fact Adriatic sub-regional cooperation has been in the past, even outside the Barcelona Convention (institutional) framework, particularly accentuated in the field of protection and preservation of the marine environment. This had been, however, prior to 1990, particularly due to the isolationistic policy of Albania, understood as a de facto cooperation between Italy and the former Yugoslavia. The two States took active part in the existing Mediterranean cooperative arrangements which included, beside the Barcelona system, also the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), in the field of fisheries, and the Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM), in the field of marine scientific research, while specific sub-regional forms of cooperation were primarily aimed at supplementing those already existing at the regional (Mediterranean) level.

The four main existing forums for sub-regional cooperation within the Adriatic and Ionian may be accordingly summarized as follows:

1. additional sub-regional cooperation within the institutional framework of the Barcelona Convention and its protocols;
2. cooperation within the Joint Commission for the Protection of the Adriatic Sea (Trilateral Commission – between Croatia, Italy and Slovenia) based on the 1974 Belgrade Agreement between Italy and Yugoslavia; becoming Quadrilateral Commission with the entrance of Montenegro to the Agreement;
3. cooperation within the framework of the intergovernmental Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII);
4. cooperation within the framework of the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian macro region (EUSAIR).

Reference should be made to the fact that enhanced sub-regional cooperation requires also cooperation among various cooperative networks, as for example the Trilateral Commission and AII or, nowadays an even more outstanding example, cooperation and coordinated action between the AII, EUSAIR and the Trilateral Commission.

The Actions included in Pillar 3 represent a selection considered by the Thematic Steering Group. Additional ideas for Actions under this Pillar are available in annex 6.2.

## Topic 3.1 – Marine and coastal environment

**Global objectives.** Mitigation of/and adaptation to climate change might be possible by conserving and sustainably using the ocean and marine resources for sustainable development (SDG 14). Ensuring good environmental and ecological status of the marine and coastal environments in line with post-2020 biodiversity targets of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the relevant EU Acquis, the ecosystem approach roadmap of the Barcelona Convention and looking towards the 2030 targets in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (specially the 30x30 target). This also includes also addressing threats to marine biodiversity and ensuring safety and security of green and blue corridors. And to contribute to the aim of the EU Biodiversity Strategy that Europe's biodiversity will be on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, climate, and the planet, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with the objectives of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change.

**EUSAIR objectives.** Therefore, the objective of this Topic is to strengthen the collaboration in the Adriatic-Ionian Region in improving the marine and costal environment and biodiversity and ecosystem services. This includes a range of different issues where joint or harmonised efforts to analysing risks, mapping, monitoring, awareness raising and action are needed. Particular efforts are needed to capitalise on existing networks, platforms and also on results from EU-funded projects, especially in the context of the Interreg Programme ADRION. This Topic is also to be seen in the context of strengthening circular economy activities in the region.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* improving biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, through better monitoring and management of the coastal and marine biodiversity and better coordination in the fields of maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management;
* reducing in the amount of microplastics, oil spills and other pollutants in seawater, leading to improved water quality and reduced risks to human health and marine life;
* reducing the introduction and spread of non-native species and pollutants into the sea;
* adapt to new natural and biodiversity reality due the climate changes issue;
* increase work on blue and green corridors to achieve good environmental status, and ensure safety and security management on that regard.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* The Adriatic-Ionian Region contains a number of unique marine and inland ecosystems, including karstic regions and tectonic lakes.
* The Adriatic and Ionian Region is characterized by rich marine and coastal biodiversity. The Adriatic Sea hosts nearly half of the recorded Mediterranean marine species and several marine protected areas.

Challenges:

* Measures/interventions to adapt to climate change are insufficient, in particular considering that the Mediterranean has been identified as a hotspot by the IPCC.
* Adverse impact of fishing, extraction and other human activities, especially on sensitive species and seabed habitats.
* There is a need to broaden and improve the coverage of habitat maps of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, marine and maritime monitoring, and cross-border data exchange.
* Aquaculture is a rapidly growing industry which is not regulated in all countries so as to ensure sustainability.
* Excessive, uncontrolled and illegal coastal development often leads to destruction of habitats and to the loss of the natural capacity of coastal territories to adapt to changes (resilience).
* Increasing numbers of invasive alien species in farming activities where regulatory frameworks are lacking and ballast water discharge can pose a threat to the ecosystem.
* Coverage in terms of offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) beyond 12 nautical miles is the lowest of all EU marine regions, while existing MPAs are sometimes not adequately managed. There is also an insufficient integration between marine conservation and marine spatial planning processes.
* Intense maritime transport activities and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation result in oil spills, including large scale pollution events, and noise pollution.
* Insufficient wastewater treatment in several participant countries leads to pollution from rivers, exacerbated by use of nitrates on agricultural lands. Pollution is also caused by ecologically unsound aquaculture practices and excessive use of chemical and pharmaceutical products.
* Marine litter stemming both from land and sea-based sources, such as lost and discarded fishing gear and recreational activities poses a serious problem. There is insufficient marine and riverine litter monitoring.
* Microplastic pollution in seawater threatens human health and ecosystems with unknown impacts.
* The increasing number of offshore wind turbines and solar farms (floating or fixed) presents a new challenge in terms of spatial planning and the marine environment.
* Recognize environmental and climate changes risks to be able to implement Preventive actions on adaptation to climate change and prevent other environmental disasters.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a range of global, EU, and national policies related to sustainable blue economy, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy, zero pollution and many other fields.

Relevant global policies include:

* Convention on the protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution (Barcelona Convention) [Document 21976A0216(01)] and its Protocols
* The Paris Protocol – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020 [COM/2015/081 final]
* UN Convention Biological Diversity and its Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
* UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
* UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
* UN Resolution on Single-Use Plastics
* The UN Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals

Relevant EU policies include:

* 8th Environment Action Programme
* A Farm to Fork Strategy [COM(2020) 381 final]
* A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 [COM(2021) 345 final]
* Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 [COM(2020) 380 final]
* Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
* The Common Fisheries Policy [Regulation (EU) no. 1380/2013 of 11 December 2013]
* EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries
* Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals [Document 21979A0623(01)]
* Directive as regards reducing the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags [(EU) 2015/720]
* Directive on establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning [2014/89/EU]
* Directive on Nitrates [91/676/EEC]
* Directive on port reception facilities for the delivery of waste from ships [(EU) 2019/883]
* Directive on quality of water intended for human consumption [(EU) 2020/2184]
* Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora [92/43/EEC]
* Directive on the conservation of wild birds [2009/147/EC]
* Directive on Urban Waste Water Treatment [(EU) 91/271/EEC]
* Directive on Waste Framework [(EU) 2008/98/EC]
* EU Action Plan: Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil [COM(2021) 400 final]
* European Alien Species Information Network (EASIN)
* European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy [SWD(2018) 16 final]
* Forging a climate-resilient Europe - the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change [COM(2021) 82 final]
* Green Infrastructure — Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital [COM/2013/0249 final]
* Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans [SWD(2020) 223 final]
* Integrated Costal Zone Management (ICZM) [(EU) 2002/413/CE]
* Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) [Directive 2008/56/EC]
* Recovery and Resilience Facility [Document 02021R0241-20230301]
* Regulation as regards introducing new environmental economic accounts modules (Natural capital accounting) [(EU) No 691/2011]
* Regulation on Invasive Alien Species [(EU) 1143/2014]
* The European Green Deal [COM (2019) 640 final]
* Water Framework Directive (WFD) [Directive 2000/60/EC]
* New approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the EU [COM/2021/240 final]
* Council conclusions on a sustainable blue economy acknowledging blue corridors [Council conclusions, May 2021, 9153/21]

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Regional and National Environmental Protection Agencies
* Authorities in charge of Protected Areas Management (local, regional, subregional level)
* Local and regional authorities
* Local and regional authorities in charge of environment, biodiversity and nature protection
* Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAS)
* Non-governmental organisations in the field of environment, biodiversity and nature protection
* Regional Fisheries Management Organizations
* Regional Sea Conventions
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* Universities and educational institutions
* International Development and Cooperation
* Environmental and Agricultural Associations
* NGOs and Non-profit Organizations
* Fisheries and Marine Management
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** In the context of the EUSAIR Action Plan's "Marine and Coastal Environment" topic, the activity under the "Enlargement" horizontal topic focuses on collaborative efforts with EU candidate countries to enhance marine ecosystem protection. This collaboration aims to harmonize marine conservation policies and practices across the region, aligning with Chapter 27: Environment of the EU acquis. Key areas of focus include marine biodiversity conservation, pollution control, and sustainable fisheries management. The expected result of this activity is to **strengthen regional cooperation in marine conservation and achieve harmonized policies across the EU member states and Republic of San Marino and candidate countries**. The progress will be measured by the number of **joint initiatives undertaken** and **the degree of policy alignment achieved**, as indicated by various alignment indicators. Key stakeholders in this initiative include environmental ministries and agencies from both EU member states and Republic of San Marino and candidate countries, cross-border conservation initiatives, biodiversity research organizations, as well as policy makers and legal experts specializing in environmental conservation. Their collaboration is crucial in achieving the goals of enhanced marine ecosystem protection and policy harmonization in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.
* **Capacity building.** Under the "Capacity Building" horizontal topic in the EUSAIR Action Plan, an activity has been designed to enhance the capabilities of local communities, authorities, and stakeholders in managing marine and coastal environments sustainably. This involves comprehensive training programs, workshops, and seminars covering marine biodiversity conservation, sustainable fisheries management, pollution control, and coastal ecosystem protection. These educational initiatives aim to empower local actors with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective environmental stewardship. Aligned with Chapter 27: Environment of the EU acquis, this capacity-building activity seeks to significantly improve local and regional capacities in sustainable marine and coastal ecosystem management. The progress and effectiveness of this initiative will be measured by the number of training programs conducted and the observed improvements in management practices. Key stakeholders in this initiative include local conservation groups, environmental NGOs, educational and research institutions specializing in biodiversity, community leaders, and local government units. Their involvement is crucial for achieving the desired improvement in sustainable management of marine and coastal areas.
* **Innovation and research.** Under the "Innovation and Research" horizontal topic in the EUSAIR Action Plan, there is a dedicated activity focused on promoting innovation and research to address marine and coastal environmental challenges. This involves the development of advanced technologies and methods for controlling marine pollution, with a particular emphasis on oil spill detection, plastic waste management, and sustainable fisheries. This activity aligns with Chapter 27: Environment of the EU acquis, which encourages innovative approaches to environmental conservation. The expected results include the development and implementation of cutting-edge technologies and practices that will significantly improve marine conservation efforts and enhance pollution control. The success of this initiative will be measured by the number of research projects initiated and their successful implementation. Key stakeholders in this venture include technology companies specializing in environmental monitoring and pollution control, academic researchers in marine sciences and environmental engineering, and various public and private sector stakeholders in maritime industries. Their collaboration and expertise are vital for achieving breakthroughs in marine and coastal environmental protection.

This Topic, as well as related Actions are strictly connected with green transition challenges and needs as they face environment degradation and contribute to strengthen climate action.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** In the realm of Circular Economy, particularly under the Marine and Coastal Environment, a pivotal activity involves the enhancement of recycling initiatives coupled with a concerted effort to reduce waste in coastal regions. This initiative aligns seamlessly with the Environment chapter of the acquis, emphasizing Waste Management and the principles of the Circular Economy. The primary goal of this activity is to effectuate a noticeable decrease in marine pollution, concurrently driving an upsurge in recycling rates within coastal communities. The success of this endeavor will be quantitatively assessed through key metrics, primarily focusing on the percentage reduction of coastal waste and a marked improvement in recycling rates. The implementation and effectiveness of this initiative hinge on the collaborative efforts of a diverse set of stakeholders, including local governments, environmental NGOs, waste management companies, and the coastal communities themselves. This integrated approach not only addresses the immediate environmental concerns but also fosters a sustainable model for marine and coastal conservation.
* **Green rural development.** In the framework of Green Rural Development within the Marine and Coastal Environment, an essential activity focuses on supporting sustainable agricultural practices in coastal rural areas, aimed at minimizing runoff and pollution. This activity is closely linked with the chapters of the acquis concerning Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as Water Quality. The expected outcomes of this initiative are multifaceted, including a significant reduction in agricultural runoff, enhancement of water quality, and consequent improvement in the health of marine ecosystems. The progress and effectiveness of this initiative will be monitored through specific measurements, particularly the reduction in pollutants found in agricultural runoff and the overall improvements in water quality metrics. The realization of these goals requires the active participation and collaboration of various stakeholders, such as farmers, agricultural cooperatives, water management authorities, and environmental NGOs. By aligning these efforts, the initiative not only aims to mitigate environmental impact but also to ensure the sustainability and resilience of coastal rural communities.
* **Digitalization.** For Digitalization in the Marine and Coastal Environment, a key activity involves the development of community-based applications and platforms dedicated to coastal conservation and awareness. This initiative aligns with the Digital Agenda and Civic Participation chapters of the acquis, emphasizing the role of technology in civic engagement. The expected results from this undertaking include enhanced public engagement in coastal conservation efforts and more effective dissemination of information related to coastal environmental issues. The success of these digital tools will be measured through user engagement metrics and their effectiveness in raising awareness and promoting conservation efforts. The realization of this project depends on a collaborative effort involving IT developers, local communities, educational institutions, and conservation groups, all working together to leverage digital technology for environmental education and community-based conservation initiatives.

### Action 3.1.1 – Enhancing coastal and marine biodiversity

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| **Action 3.1.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Enhancing marine and coastal biodiversity** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Promotion of sustainable blue economy of the Adriatic-Ionian Region by implementing Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) including area-based conservation-management measures.   + Establishment and further development of coastal and marine biodiversity information networks and platforms for data and information exchange for all relevant players. This will be conducted in synergy with platforms already existing at Mediterranean level, in particular through the INFO/RAC of the Barcelona Convention.   + Defining priorities for new spatial protection of regional importance in contribution to global and EU targets for biodiversity including identifying joint approach on the conservation measures with neighbouring countries.   + research activities to fill in knowledge gaps on status of habitat types and species and identifying restoration activities for reaching good environmental status of marine ecosystems monitoring activities for migratory marine species, including monitoring of threats and pressures and activities to address them Promote the development of ecosystem services.   + Enhancing the network of marine protected areas.   + Cooperation in management of marine protected species and of invasive alien species (IAS). This may be done in cooperation with Action 3.1.3. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Measures/interventions to adapt to climate change are insufficient, in particular considering that the Mediterranean has been identified as a hotspot by the IPCC.   + There is a lack of habitat maps coverage of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, marine and maritime monitoring and cross-border data exchange.   + Overfishing, where it occurs, habitat degradation, and incidental catches pose serious threats to marine biodiversity. Monitoring and enforcement, in some cases, are insufficient.   + Coverage in terms of offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) beyond 12 nautical miles is the lowest of all EU marine regions, while existing MPAs are sometimes not adequately managed. There is also an insufficient integration between marine conservation and marine spatial planning processes.   + Excessive, uncontrolled and illegal coastal development often leads to destruction of habitats and to the loss of the natural capacity of coastal territories and ecosystems to adapt to changes (resilience).   + The increasing number of offshore wind turbines and solar farms (floating or fixed) represents a new challenge in terms of spatial planning and the marine environment. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Improved biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.   + Better management of the coastal and marine biodiversity and better coordination in the fields of maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal management.   + Improved habitat maps, monitoring, and cross-border data exchange. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF THE AI REGION BY IMPLEMENTING ICZM AND MSP ALSO TO CONTRIBUTE CRF ON ICZM OF BARCELONA CONVENTION AND THE MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT OF MARINE PROTECTED AREA the following strategic projects were developed:  **Monopillar strategic projects**   * + **ICZM and MSP** - To promote a sustainable growth of the AI region by implementing ICZM and MSP also to contribute CRF on ICZM of Barcelona convention   + **3MPS** Monitoring and management of marine protected species   **Cross-Pillar strategic projects**   * + **CROSSPILLAR ICZM&MSP** - Using high quality research to strengthen dialogues and institutional capacities for effective implementation of MSP/ICZM in support of inclusive and sustainable growth in the AIR (Pillar1&3) | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Number of trans-boundary cooperation events in the field of MSP | n.a. | (2023) | TBD | EU Countries: TSG3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participations in joint training schemes | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG 3 |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participation in joint actions across borders | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG 3 |
| RI: Biological diversity is maintained or enhanced. The quality and occurrence of coastal and marine habitats and the distribution and abundance of coastal and marine species are in line with prevailing physiographic, hydrographic, geographic and climatic conditions |  |  |  | Annex I DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC and Decision IG.26/3 COP Barcelona Convention |

### Action 3.1.2 – Reduction of the pollution of the sea and inland waters

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| **Action 3.1.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Reduction of the pollution of the sea and inland/transition waters** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Cooperation on the assessment of the status, target setting, monitoring, reporting and implementation of measures related to marine litter and micro litter.   + Raise awareness about pollution deriving from maritime traffic and marine litter from ships.   + Support the implementation of Adriatic-Ionian sub/regional oil spill contingency plan (REMPEC).   + Support for development of suitable measures, practical solutions and policy recommendations for the reduction of chemical and pharmaceutical substances in agriculture/aquaculture practices.   + Sharing of best practices in the field of waste management, including marine litter. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Marine litter stemming both from land and sea-based sources, such as lost and discarded fishing gear and recreational activities poses a serious problem. There is insufficient marine and riverine litter monitoring.   + Microplastic pollution in seawater threatens human and ecosystems health with unknown impacts.   + Intense maritime transport activities and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation result in oil spills, including large scale pollution events, and noise pollution. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Joint measures, such as clean-up programmes, addressing marine litter stemming from land-based sources, lost and discarded fishing gear, and recreational activities.   + Reduction in the amount of microplastics and other pollutants in seawater, leading to improved water quality and reduced risks to human health and marine life.   + Activities supporting the implementation of the sub/regional oil spill contingency plan (REMPEC) for the Adriatic-Ionian Region.   + Improved of monitoring and the knowledge base of nutrient flows and load, to enable better decision-making and more targeted interventions. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under flagship IMPLEMENTATION OF ADRIATIC-IONIAN SUB/REGIONAL OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN - **ASOSCoP** the following strategic projects were developed:  **Monopillar strategic projects**   * + **NAMIRS** – North Adriatic Maritime Incident Response System (Grant agreement for project under DG ECHO – Union Civil Protection Mechanism   + **NEATNESS** - cleaN thE AdriaTic aNd thE ionan sea from the plaSticS | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action | OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participations in joint training schemes | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | tbd(2030) | TSG 3 |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participation in joint actions across borders | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG 3 |
| OI: Number of events on pollution deriving from maritime traffic and marine litter from ships | Completion of joint training schemes (RCR81) | 0 (2023) | 3 (2023) TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
| RI: Marine litter does not adversely affect the coastal and marine environment |  |  |  | Decision IG.26/3 COP Barcelona Convention  Annex I DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC |
| RI: Concentrations of contaminants are at levels not giving rise to pollution effects |  |  |  | Decision IG.26/3 COP Barcelona Convention  Annex I DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC |
| No. of dissemination events of the REMPEC contingency plan | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
|  | RI: Human-induced eutrophication is minimised, especially adverse effects thereof, such as losses in biodiversity, ecosystem degradation, harmful algal blooms and oxygen deficiency in bottom waters |  | ? (2023) | Tbd (2030) | Decision IG.26/3 COP Barcelona Convention  Annex I DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC |

### Action 3.1.3 – Reduced pollution through ballast water and other releases in the sea and water

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| **Action 3.1.3** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Reduced environmental problems deriving from ballast water and other releases at sea from inland/transition waters** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Raise awareness about environmental problems from ballast water and other releases at sea and inland/transition water.   + Promote the use of technical equipment on ships for cleaning ballast water.   + Support the introduction of ship tracking by discharge CISE system at the Maritime Administration. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Increasing numbers of non indigenous species from farming activities where regulatory frameworks are lacking and ballast water discharge threaten ecosystems.   + Intense maritime transport activities and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation result in oil spills, including large scale pollution events, and noise pollution. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Reduced introduction and spread of non-native species and pollutants into the sea.   + Better environmental status of the sea.   + Increase safety and security in the blue and green corridors to achieve good environmental governance. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | |
| Indicators How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
|  | OI: Number of events for better environmental status of the sea | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
| OI:  No. of dissemination events on the IMO Guidelines | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participations in joint training schemes | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG3 |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the development of strategies and action plans | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG 3 |
| RI: Non-indigenous species introduced by human activities are at levels that do not adversely alter the ecosystems. |  |  |  | Annex I DIRECTIVE 2008/56/EC and Decision IG.26/3 COP Barcelona Convention |

## Topic 3.2 – Transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity

**Global objective.** Transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity is increasingly under threat, mainly due to human activities. Declining biodiversity and climate change effects are mutually reinforcing each other.

**EUSAIR objective.** Therefore, the objective of this Topic is to address threats to terrestrial biodiversity and contribute to the aim of EU Biodiversity Strategy, so that Europe's biodiversity will be on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, the planet, the climate and economy, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with the objectives of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. In the context of the Adriatic-Ionian Region the aim is to protect and enhance natural terrestrial habitats and ecosystems with particular attention to the ecological connectivity of blue and green corridors/infrastructure.

**Flagship.** Pillar 3 approved the flagships “PET HAB ECO – Protection and enhancement of natural terrestrial habitats and ecosystems”. The flagship’s overall objective is to improve the resilience of large carnivore populations at transnational level in the face of environmental threats and risks. The activities to be undertaken are primarily related to conservation and restoration of large carnivore populations, public awareness activities to bring these unique species to the public’s attention, and restoration of ecosystems in which they play a key role. The flagship aims at strengthening the protection and enhancement of natural karstic terrestrial habitats and ecosystems, with particular attention to ecological connectivity of the blue and green corridors/infrastructure. Connecting the Adriatic-Ionian Region’s protected areas (including Natura 2000 areas and other networks) with tourism, in order to strengthen the region through joint management. Pillar 3 also works on interpillar projects, which have evolved from flagships and have been developed based on the Pillar 3 matrix. This matrix is not just a theoretical tool; it is being used in actual process, ensuring the efficiency and focus of Pillar 3 approaches.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* minimising conflicts between humans and large carnivores, among others through improving institutional capacities;
* rehabilitating and restoring sites and habitats for migratory water birds occurring within the Adriatic-Ionian Region, and developing harmonised research and monitoring methods; and
* improving the management of nature resources in protected areas and harmonisation of national and transnational policies on management, including more environmentally friendly farming practices, and better analysis and implementation of climate-related risk mitigation and adaptation measures.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* The Adriatic-Ionian Region contains a number of unique ecosystems, including karstic including transbound underground water bodies and habitats and tectonic lakes.
* The Adriatic-Ionian Region provides habitats for Europe’s large carnivores, including the wolf, the Eurasian lynx and the brown bear.
* The Adriatic flyway is one of the main routes for millions of migratory birds crossing the Mediterranean, with birds making a resting stop along the eastern Adriatic. A number of bird species also spend winter in the area.

Challenges:

* Negative effects of human activities on transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity (e.g. land use intensification and fragmentation), i.e. long term viability of (large) carnivores’ populations is threatened by habitat fragmentation and destruction due to urbanisation, farming and linear infrastructure.
* Insufficient integral natural reserves and connections between protected areas in coastal, transitional environment and wetlands to preserve biodiversity.
* Increasing presence of non-indigenous invasive species also in coastal/terrestrial areas (not only animals, but also plants and other species are threatening the endemic ecosystems).
* Insufficient capacity of protected areas to manage natural resources and to harmonise national and transnational policies on management and conservation of large carnivores.
* Insufficient Adriatic-Ionian Region-wide scientific evidence and coordinated monitoring of transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a range of global, EU, and national policies related to sustainable blue economy, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy, and many other fields.

Relevant global policies include:

* Convention on the protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution (Barcelona Convention) [Document 21976A0216(01)]
* Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora [CITES CoP19]
* Convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals [Document 21979A0623(01)]
* The Ramsar Convention
* UN Convention Biological Diversity and its Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
* UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
* UNESCO World Heritage Convention
* The Paris Agreement – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020 [COM/2015/081 final]
* The UN Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals

Relevant EU policies include:

* A Farm to Fork Strategy [COM(2020) 381 final]
* A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040 [COM(2021) 345 final]
* Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)
* Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 [COM(2020) 380 final]
* Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
* Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora [92/43/EEC]
* Directive on the conservation of wild birds [2009/147/EC]
* Green Infrastructure — Enhancing Europe’s Natural Capital [COM/2013/0249 final]
* Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans [SWD(2020) 223 final]
* Regulation on Invasive Alien Species [(EU) 1143/2014]
* EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA)
* Regulation as regards introducing new environmental economic accounts modules (Natural capital accounting) [(EU) No 691/2011]
* Regulation on the European Environment Agency and the European Environment Information and Observation Network [(EC) No 401/2009]
* The European Green Deal [COM (2019) 640 final]

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Environmental and agricultural associations
* Regional and National Environmental Protection Agencies
* Authorities in charge of Protected Areas Management (local, regional, subregional level)
* Local and regional authorities in charge of protected areas and heritage sites
* Local and regional authorities
* Non-governmental organisations in the field of environment, biodiversity and nature protection
* Local and regional authorities in charge of environment, biodiversity and nature protection
* Local public and private energy communities
* Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAS)
* Non-governmental organisations in the field of environment, biodiversity and nature protection
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* Universities and educational institutions
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** Under the "Enlargement" horizontal topic in the EUSAIR Action Plan, an initiative focusing on collaborative conservation efforts with EU members country and Republic of San Marino and candidate countries is being proposed. This activity involves the development and implementation of joint projects aimed at protecting and managing transboundary terrestrial habitats and biodiversity. Such projects will focus on endangered species and critical ecosystems. Aligned with Chapter 27: Environment of the EU acquis, this activity emphasizes nature protection and biodiversity conservation. The expected outcome is an enhanced conservation of biodiversity across national borders, focusing on shared terrestrial habitats. Success will be measured by the number of joint conservation projects initiated, improvements in biodiversity indices, and the degree of policy alignment between participating countries. Key stakeholders include environmental ministries and agencies from both EU member states and Republic of San Marino and candidate countries, cross-border conservation initiatives, biodiversity research organizations, as well as policymakers and legal experts in environmental conservation. Their collaboration is vital for the effective conservation of transboundary terrestrial habitats and biodiversity.
* **Capacity building.** Under the "Capacity Building" horizontal topic in the EUSAIR Action Plan, there's a key initiative to implement educational initiatives focused on terrestrial biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration. This activity encompasses training on effective biodiversity conservation strategies, habitat restoration techniques, sustainable land management, and species protection. Aligned with Chapter 27: Environment of the EU acquis, this activity specifically targets education and capacity building in biodiversity management. The expected result is the enhancement of knowledge and skills among stakeholders in biodiversity conservation. Success will be gauged through participant feedback and the number of habitats successfully restored. Key stakeholders in this initiative include local conservation groups, environmental NGOs, educational and research institutions focusing on biodiversity, as well as community leaders and local government units. Their involvement is crucial for fostering a deeper understanding and practical skills in biodiversity conservation and habitat restoration.
* **Innovation and research.** Under the "Innovation and Research" horizontal topic in the EUSAIR Action Plan, there is a significant focus on fostering innovative research projects dedicated to habitat conservation, species protection, and sustainable land use. This activity seeks to explore and develop new methods and strategies for terrestrial ecology and land management. Aligned with Chapter 27: Environment of the EU acquis, the activity emphasizes innovative approaches to land and species conservation. The expected result is the development and implementation of novel conservation strategies. The effectiveness of this initiative will be measured by the number of research projects undertaken and their successful implementations. Key stakeholders include research institutions specializing in terrestrial ecology, innovators and entrepreneurs in sustainable land use, and both public and private sector entities involved in land and resource management. Their collaboration and expertise are vital for driving innovation in conservation and sustainable land management practices.

This Topic, as well as related actions are strictly connected with green transition challenges and needs as they face environment degradation and contribute to strengthen climate action.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** In the area of Circular Economy, particularly within the scope of Transnational Terrestrial Habitats and Biodiversity, a critical activity is the promotion of sustainable land use and waste reduction strategies. This initiative is closely aligned with the Environment chapter of the acquis, with a specific focus on waste management. The primary goal here is to achieve enhanced biodiversity conservation, coupled with a reduction in the ecological footprint across transnational terrestrial habitats. The success of this endeavour will be gauged through measurable outcomes, such as a noticeable decrease in waste production and tangible improvements in sustainable land use practices. This ambitious undertaking necessitates the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, local governments, the agricultural sector, and conservationists, all working together to foster a more sustainable and ecologically responsible approach to land use and waste management in these critical habitats.
* **Green rural development.** In the context of Green Rural Development concerning Transnational Terrestrial Habitats and Biodiversity, there is a significant emphasis on encouraging biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices in rural areas. This approach is in line with the Agriculture and Rural Development and Environment chapters of the acquis. The main objective of this activity is to enhance ecosystem services and conserve biodiversity within rural landscapes. To assess the impact of these practices, measurements will focus on the levels of biodiversity present in agricultural areas and the rate at which these biodiversity-friendly practices are adopted. Key stakeholders in this endeavour include farmers, agricultural cooperatives, environmental agencies, and the rural communities themselves. Their collaboration is crucial for achieving the desired improvements in ecosystem health and biodiversity conservation, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of rural areas while maintaining their ecological balance.
* **Digitalization.** Under the theme of Digitalization in Transnational Terrestrial Habitats and Biodiversity, a key activity is the development of digital tools for the monitoring of biodiversity and habitat health. This initiative is aligned with the Digital Agenda and Environment chapters of the acquis, highlighting the integration of technology with environmental management. The expected outcome of this activity is to enhance the monitoring capabilities and facilitate data-driven decision-making for the conservation of habitat and biodiversity. The effectiveness of this approach will be measured by both the number and the efficacy of the digital monitoring tools deployed, as well as their impact on conservation policy and practices. A diverse group of stakeholders plays a crucial role in this initiative, including tech companies, research institutions, conservation NGOs, and policy makers. Their collaboration is essential in leveraging digital technology to improve conservation efforts and policy implementation, thereby contributing to the sustainable management and protection of terrestrial habitats and biodiversity.

### Action 3.2.1 – Joint population management for large carnivores

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| **Action 3.2.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Joint population management for large carnivores and awareness rising activities, protecting the habitats and working towards quality of life and coexistence**[[9]](#footnote-10) | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Joint mapping, monitoring and population management plans for large carnivores and non-indigenous invasive species.   + Increased cross-border collaboration on monitoring such as standardised methods and protocols.   + Support for international networking and exchange of experience between key stakeholders and authorities.   + Foster the coexistence of large carnivores and traditional agricultural activities, such us grazing.   + Capacity-building on population management for large carnivores, incl. cross-sectoral cooperation (agriculture, spatial planning, hunting), stakeholder engagement and awareness raising for improvement of sectoral plans and practices and reduction of conflicts.   + Rehabilitation of the key habitats of international importance and improve connections between protected areas.   + Better integration of the results and findings on population management for large carnivores in spatial planning and indicators measuring their implementation.   + Support to accession countries in aligning with EU Nature Acquis. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Insufficient integral natural reserves and connections between protected areas in coastal, transitional environment and wetlands to preserve biodiversity.   + Insufficient capacities of protected areas for management of nature resources and to harmonise national and transnational policies on management and conservation of large carnivores.   + Insufficient Adriatic-Ionian Region-wide scientific evidence and coordinated monitoring of transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Human – large carnivore conflicts properly addressed and substantially minimized in a timely manner (communities and institutional capacity building implemented, exchange and implementation of know-how, knowledge, best practices transfer is improved). | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | |
| Indicators How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
|  | OI: Number of cross-border projects for large carnivore conservation | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG 3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of public awareness raising events focused on large carnivores | RCO115 Interreg: Public events across borders jointly organised | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participation in joint actins across borders | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG 3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the development of strategies and action plans | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations |  | tbd (2030) | TSG3 |
| RI: Species show no deterioration in conservation trends and status |  |  |  | EU Biodiversity Strategy Dashboard |

### Action 3.2.2 – Conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats

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| **Action 3.2.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats: Support for implementation and enforcement of Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian migratory waterbirds (AEWA)** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Identify sites and habitats for migratory waterbirds occurring within their territory and encourage the protection, management, rehabilitation and restoration of these sites.   + Capacity building on AEWA, incl. cross-sectoral cooperation (agriculture, hunting, spatial planning), stakeholder engagement and awareness raising for improvement of sectoral plans and practices.   + Harmonisation of AEWA research and monitoring methods in the Adriatic-Ionian Region.   + Awareness raising for the need to improve hunting legislation and its proper implementation.   + Support to accession countries in aligning with EU Nature Acquis. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Insufficient capacities of protected areas for management of nature resources and to harmonise national and transnational policies on management and conservation of waterbirds and their habitats.   + Insufficient Adriatic-Ionian Region-wide scientific evidence and coordinated monitoring of transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Rehabilitated and restored sites and habitats for migratory water birds occurring within the Adriatic-Ionian Region.   + Harmonised of research and monitoring methods for AEWA in the Adriatic-Ionian Region and rehabilitation of key habitats of international importance.   + Rehabilitation of the key habitats of international importance.   + Improved management of nature resources in protected areas and harmonisation of national and transnational policies on management and conservation of large carnivores.   + Improved scientific evidence and coordinated monitoring of transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Number of surveys of migratory water bird populations | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of events for improvement of sectoral plans and practices and to improve hunting legislation | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participation in joint actions across borders | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG3 |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participations in joint training schemes | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG3 |
| RI: Species show no deterioration in conservation trends and status |  |  |  | EU Biodiversity Strategy Dashboard |
| RI: No. of rehabilitated and restored sites of migratory water birds and their habitats | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |

### Action 3.2.3 – Improve interaction between anthropic and natural ecosystems and habitats

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| **Action 3.2.3** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Improve interaction between anthropic and natural ecosystems and habitats** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Awareness rising activities on implementation and financial aspects of environmentally friendly farming practices, with focus on the interaction between anthropic and natural ecosystems and habitats.   + Joint analysis on climate related risks and possible mitigation and adaptation measures (e.g. forest fires prevention, native forest restoration, campaigns to regenerate the tree cover, nurturing patches of forest and woodland in agricultural/urban landscapes).   + Promote the development of ecosystem services. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Insufficient capacities of protected areas for management of nature resources and to harmonise national and transnational policies on management and conservation of large carnivores.   + Insufficient Adriatic-Ionian Region-wide scientific evidence and coordinated monitoring of transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Increased adoption of environmentally friendly farming practices through awareness raising activities and financial support.   + Improved analysis and implementation of climate-related risk mitigation and adaptation measures, such as prevention of forest fires and native forest restoration.   + Promote the development of ecosystem services.   + Improved management of nature resources in protected areas and harmonisation of national and transnational policies on management and conservation of large carnivores.   + Improved scientific evidence and coordinated monitoring of transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under flagship PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF NATURAL TERRESTRIAL HABITATS AND ECOSYSTEMS - PET HAB ECO the following strategic projects were developed:  **Monopillar strategic projects**   * + **FOREST READAPT** - Renewal of the adaptation of coppice forests in a drastically changing environment   + **SEC-DIV-CONIFERS** - Secure diversity through a holistic approach for the most threatened Mediterranean conifer ecosystems: combining genetic, physiology, biodiversity indexes, germination and restoration   + **Bio-Shelters** - Botanical Gardens as Biodiversity Shelters and Nurseries | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Number of project concepts addressing anthropic-natural habitat interaction | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of events on the importance of ecological connectivity and its ecosystem services | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the development of joint solutions | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG3 |
| OI: Number of activities supporting the implementation of global and EU targets for biodiversity through the participations in joint training schemes | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 (2023) | tbd (2030) | TSG3 |
| RI: Significant areas of degraded and carbon-rich ecosystems are restored. Habitats show no deterioration in conservation trends and status. |  |  |  | EU Biodiversity Strategy Dashboard - Target 4 partially modified to fit into Action 3.2.3 |
| RI: Introduction of new best practice measures on prevention of forest fires and forest restoration | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions  RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations | 0 (2023) | TBD | TSG3 questionnaire |

## Indicative list of relevant funding sources

Relevant EU Cohesion Policy objective: PO2 – A greener, low-carbon Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate adaptation and risk prevention and management and PO 5 – A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of urban, rural and coastal areas and local initiatives.

Relevant IPA Programming Framework window: all windows, specifically windows 3: Green agenda and sustainable connectivity and 5: Territorial and cross border cooperation.

The EUSAIR participating countries can utilize the following EU funding instruments 2021-27:

**Applicable to the EU member states**

* The ERDF (PO 2.4, PO 2.5, PO 2.6, PO 2.7, PO 5.2) and Cohesion Fund (PO 2.4, PO 2.5, PO 2.6, PO 2.7),
* sectoral and regional mainstream ERDF programmes including the relevant Policy Objective 2 and Priority Objective 5,
* the EMFF, (Priority 2: Article 22: Protection and restoration of marine biodiversity and ecosystems and Priority 3: Article 28: Maritime surveillance),
* the Recovery and Resilience Fund (EUSAIR flagships provide for concrete measures aimed at protecting the environment, which is indirectly addressed in RRF Flagships under "Power up" and "Recharge and refuel"),
* relevant ERDF Interreg programmes incorporating Policy Objective 2 (Sustainable region),
* The Green Deal (protection of biodiversity and ecosystems; reduction of air, water and soil pollution; ensuring the sustainability of our blue economy and fisheries sector).

**Applicable to EU member states in cooperation with EU candidate countries:**

* The Life Programme (Sub-programme: Nature and Biodiversity),
* Horizon Europe Programme (Cluster Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment. Intervention area: Biodiversity and natural resources),
* Digital Europe Programme (Digital technologies across the economy and society),
* Relevant ERDF-IPA Interreg programmes incorporating Policy Objective 2.

**Applicable to the EU candidate countries**

* IPA III thematic priorities:
* Applicable to mainstream IPA - Annex II of IPA III Regulation, Paragraph r) Protecting the environment and improving the quality of the environment, addressing environmental degradation and halting biodiversity loss, promoting the conservation and sustainable management of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and renewable natural resources, investing in air quality, water and waste management and sustainable chemical management, promoting resource efficiency, sustainable consumption and production and supporting the transition to green and circular economies, contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, increasing resilience to climate change and promoting climate action governance and information and energy efficiency. IPA III shall promote policies to support the shift towards a resource-efficient, safe and sustainable low-carbon economy and strengthen disaster resilience as well as disaster prevention, preparedness and response.
* Applicable to IPA-IPA Interreg programmes - Annex III of IPA III Regulation, paragraph b) protecting the environment and promoting adaptation to climate change, the mitigation of climate change, and risk prevention and management through, inter alia: joint actions for environmental protection; promoting sustainable use of natural resources, coordinated maritime spatial planning, resource efficiency and circular economy, renewable energy sources and the shift towards a safe and sustainable low-carbon, green economy; improving air and water quality, including by enhancing alignment with European environmental standards, and waste and water management; promoting investment to address specific risks; ensuring disaster resilience and disaster prevention, preparedness and response; and promoting and enhancing international coordination of transboundary rivers.
* The Western Balkans Investment Framework, which have an investment priority among other also in environment and climate.

# Pillar 4 – Sustainable Tourism

The Adriatic-Ionian Region is rich in natural and cultural heritage. It comprises 72 cultural and natural properties belonging to UNESCO World Heritage List, plus 44 elements inscribed in the UNESCO list of Intangible Heritage Humanity. The heritage sites, but also unexploited natural wealth, are a significant attracting factor. Indeed, incoming tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian Region is growing steadily, despite the rebound during the COVID-19 crisis. At the same time, new challenges such as climate change and natural disasters, e.g. floods and heat waves, pose severe threats for the future.

The economy of the region is heavily depending on tourism – in most cases mass tourism. The issue of high seasonality in tourism industry affects employment, environment and availability of local services. In the most attractive places, it has already created a situation of over-tourism at the expense of natural resources, cultural heritage and welfare of local communities. At the same time, tourism offers an important development potential. Innovation in tourism can help manage visitor flows and reduce the negative impacts on nature and resources. Rural and cultural tourism provides development and employment opportunities to inland marginal areas, isolated from the main areas of development.

There are notable differences in tourism infrastructure in the region, with most of the EU candidate countries lagging behind in terms of marketing, promotion, quality standards of accommodation. Although the digitalisation of the tourism industry offers new possibilities and increases the outreach for new products (sites, experiences etc.) there is a low level of investment. However, new emerging patterns in the tourism industry – in terms of customer approach, new products and experiences, and supply side – demand quick innovative reactions.

In order to create a common understanding of sustainable and innovative destination management, all countries can learn from the more experienced destinations in the region. Macroregional routes and cross-border networks can help to develop the Adriatic-Ionian Region as one integrated tourism area. This Pillar focuses on promoting sustainable tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, taking into consideration all the key dimensions of economic, environmental, cultural and social sustainability. The work of the Pillar will contribute to promotion of innovative ways for tourism and to building resilience against global crises such as wars, climate change and loss of biodiversity. The Actions of Pillar 4 will be in accordance with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its commitment to support tourism that creates sustainable jobs and promotes local culture, products and services.

The EUSAIR work in the field of tourism builds on the European Agenda for Tourism 2030 and will contribute to the co-implementation process of the Transition Pathway for Tourism between the European Commission, member states and tourism stakeholders.

The EUSAIR has the vision to promote innovative, resilient, sustainable and universally accessible tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. The activities shall help to support the digital and green transition of the tourism ecosystem considering relevant sectors and different public and private stakeholders. They will contribute to create favourable framework conditions supporting the sustainable management of destinations and to develop new capacities and skills to strengthen resilience and prepare the sector for the future. This includes also ensuring the carrying capacities in relation to nature and environment are not exceeded and the tourism pressure on the environment, in particular marine protected areas, is reduced.

## Topic 4.1 – Facilitating digital and green transition of the tourism and cultural heritage offer

**Global objectives.** The tourism ecosystem was among the most severely affected ecosystems by COVID-19. Resilient public policies and favourable framework conditions at national and regional level shall help the tourism sector to recover and to develop a sustainable and resilient tourism offer. The green and digital transition has to be promoted and implemented by all tourism stakeholders to make the tourism and cultural heritage sector sustainable and resilient. Sustainable tourism development makes optimal use of cultural and environmental resources, helping to conserve nature and biodiversity. It also respects the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The objective of this Topic is to develop favourable framework conditions and facilitate digital and green transition with the aim to diversify and strengthen the tourism offer in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. This covers the promotion of collaborative governance of tourism destinations, improved exchanges and knowledge on statistics and indicators for tourism, and the promotion of digital and green objectives in tourism strategies. Particular efforts are needed to capitalise on existing networks, platforms and also on results from EU-funded projects, especially ADRION. In the long-run, the Adriatic-Ionian Region could become a global leader in sustainable tourism, considering it is already one of the most extensively developed touristic macroregions in the world.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* establishing macroregional networks and routes, to promote collaboration of tourism destinations and with other innovative stakeholders at local, regional and national level, and lead to tourism services and products based on cross-border collaboration;
* supporting EUSAIR countries in progressing towards improved tourism data systems, that are in line with European data systems and include sustainability indicators;
* helping tourism stakeholders to develop new capacities to integrate green and digital transition in tourism strategies.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Rich history and very diverse cultural heritage Rich customs tradition and intangible cultural assets (including traditional food and beverages, crafts etc.).
* Rich natural heritage, biodiversity and many protected areas.
* Innovative way to deal with high-volume visitor inflows in most popular areas.
* Large areas whose potential for tourism is not yet developed.
* Existing collaboration through tourism clusters and networks.
* Existing tourism strategies in most countries at national level to support the digital and green transition.
* Support digital and green transition in tourism through available EU and national funds.
* Strong presence of CCIs in the Area, also working in close cooperation with the tourism sector.

Challenges:

* Intense seasonality of tourism.
* Concentration on ‘sun and sea tourism’ products and services based on mass tourism.
* Unbalanced territorial distribution of tourism offer in most countries (focus on urban and coastal areas).
* Poor implementation of sustainable tourism policies and responsible tourism concepts.
* Insufficient data on smart and sustainable tourism.
* Insufficient experience with sustainable tourism destination management.
* New models and tools for stakeholder involvement (local population, communities, visitors).
* Complex and not harmonised regulatory frameworks.
* Lack of knowledge on innovation and digitalisation practices in tourism.
* Lack of infrastructure to support digital and green transition of tourism.
* Use of cultural heritage whilst ensuring its transmission to future generations
* Lack of managerial capabilities within CCIs.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a range of EU and national policies related to sustainable tourism, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy and many other fields:

* A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism [COM/2014/086 final]
* European Agenda for Tourism 2030 - Council conclusions (adopted on 01/12/2022)
* EuroVelo: the European cycle route network
* National tourism strategies of EUSAIR participating countries
* Resolution establishing the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes [CM/Res(2013)66]
* Resolution on establishing the EU strategy for sustainable tourism [2020/2038(INI)]
* Resolution on the implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture and the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations [2022/2047(INI)]
* Sustainable Blue Economy [COM(2021) 240 final]
* The European Green Deal [COM (2019) 640 final]
* Transition Pathway for Tourism, European Commission [DG GROW]
* UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
* New European Agenda for Culture [COM/2018/267 final] and national cultural strategies
* Digital Services Act [Directive 2000/31/EC and Regulation (EU) 2022/2065]

Capitalise on existing EU networks:

* Creative Tourism Network (CTN)
* Decision on establishing the Union action for the European Capitals of Culture for the years 2020 to 2033 [No 445/2014/EU]
* European Capital and Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism
* European Creative Hubs Network: A New European Agenda for Culture [SWD(2018) 167 final]
* European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN)
* UNESCO World Heritage Convention

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Business associations, SME associations, and clusters in the field of tourism, and cultural and creative industries (CCIs)
* Tourism and culture and creativity stakeholders
* Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) at national, regional and local level
* European Institute of Cultural Routes
* International development organisations
* International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
* Local and regional authorities
* Local and regional authorities in charge of protected areas and heritage sites
* Local and regional tourism offices and development agencies
* Local, regional and national tourism boards
* Ministries of Culture
* Ministries of Tourism
* Non-governmental organisations in the field of tourism, culture, natural protection and heritage
* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
* Research institutes and scientific organisations, national statistics offices
* Rural communities
* UNESCO World Heritage Convention
* United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
* Universities and educational institutions
* UNWTO World Tourism Organization
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities

### Support to horizontal and cross-cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** Activities help candidate countries to better integrate with EU member states in field of sustainable tourism policies and related regulatory frameworks and activities in the fields of data management and smart specialisation. Knowledge transfer will take place during the TSG4 meetings and other EUSAIR thematic events dedicated to tourism and culture by promoting best practices and presenting experiences. EUSAIR activities and projects should also address the enlargement chapters: 1-9 related to Internal market, 28 to consumer and health protection, 27 to environment and climate change, 15 to renewable energy, 21 to Trans European networks, 10 to Information society and media, 11 to Agriculture and rural development, 12 to food safety, 18 to Statistics.
* **Capacity building.** The envisaged activities comprise, among others, capacity building on data collection practices on tourism statistics and various efforts to strengthen the sharing of knowledge and experiences of data using for policy planning e.g. concerning collaborative sustainable destination management models, innovation of tourism products and services and the cooperation between private, public and non-profit stakeholders.
* **Innovation and research.** The digital and green transitions of the tourism and cultural heritage offer has a strong focus on innovation and great potential in the region. It is also acknowledged as one of the key drivers of tourism transformation in the Region within respective S3s. Among others, it includes activities on sustainable innovation in tourism destinations and promotes collaboration between tourism stakeholders dealing with innovation and research. It also includes monitoring tourist trends in the region. In order to ease the pressure of touristic flows during the pick season (classical mass tourism), the Adriatic and Ionian Region should start monitoring touristic trends in the region and strive towards a balanced tourism development. In line with the Sustainable development goals the UNWTO international network of sustainable tourism observatories is trending and, in this respect, also a macro-regional observatory or information centre could be developed in order to measure the impact of tourism on the cities/countries/region, in close cooperation with CCIs.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** Sustainable tourism is an important element of the transition to a circular economy. Activities will contribute to raising awareness of the importance of the circular economy in tourism as a key element of sustainable development that minimizes its environmental impacts, including waste and pollution as well as CO2 emissions. Connecting business models/initiatives (such as Climate-KIC) to support value chain development and implementation of circular economy in participating countries.
* **Green rural development.** Activities under this Topic will also address sustainable tourism in rural areas and thus contribute to green rural development. The promotion of the green and balanced tourism development will also include rural areas where is especially important to take care of the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development. Supporting smart community/village concept by increased digitalisation and public services uptake to support tourism development in rural areas.
* **Digitalisation.** Digital transition of the tourism sector is addressed through activities promoting green and digital transition in tourism strategies. Activities under this topic will contribute to the innovations that ensure the continued competitiveness, growth and sustainable development of the sector.

### Action 4.4.1 – Collaborative governance and sustainable innovation in tourism destinations

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| **Action 4.1.1** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Collaborative governance and sustainable innovation in tourism destinations** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Sharing knowledge and experiences on collaborative destination management models, importance of circular economy in tourism and the cooperation between private, public and non-profit stakeholders. * Study and share best practice on sustainable destination governance, innovation and management, e.g. related to cruising tourism and nautical tourism. * Developing a strategy or masterplan on green and balanced tourism development.Most of the tourist visits are still oriented towards cities or centres, based around the cost of the Adriatic and Ionian Region. In order to re-direct tourist flows towards the hinterland of the region and rural areas, a strategy or masterplan should be developed, specifying how to attract and engage local population towards the development and investment into tourist offer. The strategy also should take into account the social and labour dimension, such as permanent (not seasonal) workforce, tourist labour migration issues etc. * Promote the collaboration between destinations and tourism clusters to promote knowledge exchange on sustainable and smart innovation in tourism and collaborative destination management, with a specific focus on the exchange and transfer between EU and candidate countries. * Promote the collaboration between tourism stakeholders with actors dealing with innovation and research, culture and creativity, e.g. in the context of smart specialisation strategies. * Development of "niche" tourism in connection to the outdoor activities could encourage the extension of the tourist season from "summer" season to the whole year season. That could be supported by different gastronomic offers and cultural activities and the inclusion of local population. This shift would also reduce the EUSAIR region form dependency on classical mass tourism and contribute to the Sustainable development goals. * Protect and promote Europe's cultural heritage as a shared resource in the green transition aiming culture-based solutions. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Intense seasonality of tourism. * Focus on ‘sun and sea tourism’ products and services based on mass tourism. * Unbalanced territorial distribution of tourism offer in most countries (focus on urban and coastal areas). * Insufficient experience with sustainable tourism destination management. * Insufficient knowledge on innovation and digitalisation practices in tourism. * Insufficient infrastructure to support the digital and green transition in tourism. * Integration of cultural heritage in digital and green transition. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Macroregional networks and routes developed. * Knowledge exchange on sustainable innovation in tourism and collaborative governance between EU and candidate countries. * Increased collaboration between tourism destinations at all levels. * Sustainable innovation in tourism is facilitated through the cooperation between tourism ecosystems and other innovative players at local, regional and national level. * Cultural heritage as a transformative force for community regeneration being enhanced. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship EXPANDING THE TOURIST SEASON TO ALL-YEAR ROUND the following strategic project was developed:  **Monopillar strategic project**   * **CruiseAir** - Destination Management Plans preparation for Cruise destinations within the Adriatic-Ionian Region   **Cross-Pillar strategic project**   * **ADRIONCYCLETOUR** - ADRiatic IONian CYCLE route for sustainable TOURism (Pillars 4 and 2)   Under Flagship DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE AND THEMATIC CULTURAL ROUTES/CONNECTING CULTURAL ROUTES IN EUSAIR the following strategic project was developed:  **Monopillar strategic project**   * **AIR Cultural Routes** - Adriatic–Ionian Region Cultural Routes Tourism Governance Model: An Opportunity for the EUSAIR Area | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: No. of activities promoting collaborative destination management and cooperation of tourism stakeholders with other sectors | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| OI: No. of activities promoting cooperation of tourism actors with other sectors/actors (innovation, creative sectors etc.) | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| OI: No. of activities to promote and raise awareness on the role of cultural heritage in the green transition | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
|  | RI: Increase in the number of destinations that apply collaborative destination management | RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
|  | RI: Destinations develop innovative tourism offer? based on cultural heritage | RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled | 0 p.a. (2023) | 3 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |

### Action 4.1.2 – Promoting the use of smart and sustainable indicators for tourism

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| **Action 4.1.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Promoting the use of smart and sustainable indicators for tourism** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Sharing and transfer knowledge to candidate countries on requirements, implementation needs and opportunities of European tourism data systems, such as the European Tourism Dashboard, DATES Project or the European Data Space for Tourism. * Exchanging experiences and best practices on smart tourism data and indicator systems at national and regional level. * Organise workshops and capacity building on data collection rules on tourism statistics and ways to include elements on economic, social and environmental sustainability. * Analysing and preparing the use of sustainability indicators at destination level that will contribute to the innovations and facilitate research. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Lack of data on smart and sustainable tourism. * Complex and not harmonised regulatory frameworks. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * EUSAIR participating countries are making progress towards improved tourism data systems, which include sustainability indicators and are in line with the European tourism data systems. * Improved collaboration between stakeholder in field of data collecting, sharing and harmonising. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under flagship RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SME’S PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH- DIVERSIFICATION the following flagship was developed:  **Monopillar strategic project**   * **CulTourAIR** - Survey on cultural tourism demand in Adriatic-Ionian Region | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: No. of activities on EU tourism data systems | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| OI: No. of activities to promote the integration of sustainability in tourism statistics | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| RI: Increased number of stakeholders that use tourism data sources | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| RI: Number of destinations measuring and collecting statistics that include elements on economic, social and environmental  Sustainability | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |

### Action 4.1.3 – Promoting the green and digital transition in tourism strategies

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Action 4.1.3** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Promoting the green and digital transition in tourism strategies** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Awareness raising and supporting the green and digital transition in all MS countries. * Stimulating exchanges of experiences and ideas regarding national or regional strategies taking account of the green and digital transition of tourism. * Disseminating best practices for digital, green transition as well as participatory and inclusive strategy development. * Developing of innovative and digital solutions. The unavoidable digitalisation solutions in tourism and culture sector should be addressed (i.e. in relation to tourist offer, promotion, reservation system) that can contribute to a balanced development of the Adriatic and Ionian region. * Promoting the development of cross-border, transnational or macroregional strategies for sustainable tourism and green and digital transition in tourism through organisation of capacity building trainings. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Focus on ‘sun and sea tourism’ products and services based on mass tourism, lacking niche, quality-based products and services. * Unbalanced territorial distribution of tourism offer in most countries (focus on urban and coastal areas). * Poor implementation of sustainable tourism policies and responsible tourism concepts, accessible tourism including * Lack of models and tools for stakeholder involvement (local population, communities, visitors). | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Effective cooperation and an exchange of experiences on the green and digital transition in tourism strategies have been established in the AI region. * Best practices on the support/promotion of green and digital transition in local, regional and national tourism strategies have been identified and disseminated. * Exchange of experiences and ideas to develop cross-border, transnational or macroregional strategies for sustainable tourism and green and digital transition in tourism. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship DEVELOPMENT OF THE NETWORK OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BUSINESSES AND CLUSTERS  GREEN MAPPING FOR THE AI REGION - SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT AND MARKET ACCESS FOR RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATIONS (MANAGEMENT) AND MICRO/SME OPERATIONS IN THE EUSAIR REGION the following strategic projects were developed:  **Cross-Pillar strategic projects**   * **BLUECULTURE** – Development of Macro Regional Cluster on Blue Culture Technologies and creation of International Competence Centre (Pillars 4 and 1) * **STETAI** - Sustainable Tourism through Environmental Energy Technologies in Buildings of High Architectural Interest (Pillars 4 and 2) | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: No. of activities/projects promoting the green and digital transition in tourism strategies | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| OI: No. of activities to promote participatory and inclusive strategy development in tourism | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| RI: Increased number of data-driven destination  management tools and green certification  schemes | RCO116 Interreg: Jointly developed solutions  RCR104 Interreg: Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| RI: EUSAIR participating countries or their key tourism regions to have comprehensive tourism strategies | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |

## Topic 4.2 – Preparing for the future: knowledge, skills and management

**Global objectives.** Tourism is a unique economic sector that builds on effective management of destinations and on quality services and products for visitors and travellers. The green and digital transition offer new opportunities for tourism companies and destination management organisations (DMOs) to become more sustainable, innovative and shock resilient. However, the knowledge on sustainable practices and digital tourism is not yet present in all DMOs and companies. Especially SMEs, which most often face structural challenges and lack the necessary knowledge, skills and funds to introduce new sustainable, circular, energy-efficient or digital solutions into their businesses. SMEs also have problems learning about new relevant skills and capacities or to identify and access relevant training and education opportunities.

**EUSAIR objectives.** This Topic addresses knowledge gaps on sustainable destination management and green and digital skills in tourism in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. The objective is to raise awareness on the opportunities of the twin transition and to develop, support and promote effective dissemination, sharing and learning on green and digital skills among all tourism stakeholders, especially Destination Management Organisations, tourism business associations/cluster and SMEs.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* increasing the level of knowledge and capacities about sustainable and smart destination management among tourism SMEs and tourism stakeholders;
* a wide adaptation of education models and skills in tourism to the new tourism trends and tourists needs including people with access needs, in particular to the digital and green transition, e.g. through corresponding courses at universities/training centres and the development/updating of national guidelines on training/education in the tourism sector.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities that the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Rich history and very diverse cultural heritage.
* Rich customs tradition and intangible cultural assets (including traditional food and beverages, crafts etc.).
* Rich natural heritage, biodiversity and many protected areas.
* Innovative ways to deal with high-volume visitor inflows in most popular areas.
* Large areas whose potential for tourism is not yet developed.
* Existing collaboration through tourism clusters and networks.
* Existing tourism strategies in most countries at national level to support the digital and green transition.
* Support available via EU and national funds to support the digital and green transition in tourism.
* Strong presence of CCIs in the Area, also working in close cooperation with the tourism sector.

Challenges:

* Lack of experience and knowledge on sustainable tourism destination management.
* Lack of experience and knowledge on sustainability, energy efficiency, and circular approaches in tourism SMEs.
* Lack of knowledge on available funding opportunities for tourism actors.
* Lack of experience and knowledge on digital practices in tourism at the level of SMES and destinations.
* Lack of awareness in SMEs on the need to develop new capacities and skills on digital and green tourism solutions.
* Lack of awareness in destination management organisations and tourism authorities on the tourism pathways and the twin transitions.
* Lack of visibility and knowledge on training and capacity-building opportunities on green and digital tourism.
* Need to integrate green and digital skills into the tourism education and training.
* Lack of managerial capabilities within CCIs.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a range of EU and national policies related to sustainable tourism, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy and many other fields:

* European Agenda for Tourism 2030 - Council conclusions (adopted on 01/12/2022)
* EuroVelo: the European cycle route network
* National tourism strategies of EUSAIR participating countries
* Resolution establishing the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes [CM/Res(2013)66]
* Resolution on establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism [2020/2038(INI)]
* Resolution on the implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture and the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations [2022/2047(INI)]
* Sustainable Blue Economy [COM(2021) 240 final]
* The European Green Deal [COM (2019) 640 final]
* Transition Pathway for Tourism, European Commission [DG GROW]
* UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
* New European Agenda for Culture [COM/2018/267 final] and national cultural strategies

Capitalise on existing EU networks:

* Creative Tourism Network (CTN)
* European Creative Hubs Network - A New European Agenda for Culture [SWD(2018) 167 final]
* European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN)
* European Research Area (ERA)
* UNESCO World Heritage Convention

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Business associations, SME associations, and clusters in the field of tourism, and cultural and creative industries (CCIs)
* Tourism and culture and creativity stakeholders
* Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) at national, regional and local level
* European Institute of Cultural Routes
* International development organisations
* International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
* Local and regional authorities
* Local and regional authorities in charge of protected areas and heritage sites
* Local and regional tourism offices and development agencies
* Local, regional and national tourism boards
* Ministries of Culture
* Ministries of Tourism
* Non-governmental organisations in the field of tourism, culture, natural protection and heritage
* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
* Research institutes and scientific organisations
* Rural communities
* UNESCO World Heritage Convention
* United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
* Universities and educational institutions
* UNWTO World Tourism Organization
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities

### Support to horizontal and cross-cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The activities help the candidate countries to better integrate with EU member states in field of sustainable tourism policies and related regulatory frameworks and activities related to knowledge management and skills in the field. The knowledge, best practices and experiences will be shared at the TSG4 meetings and other EUSAIR thematic events. EUSAIR activities and projects should also address the enlargement chapters: 19 related to Social Policy and employment, 20 to enterprise and industrial policy, 25 to science and research, 26 to education and culture, 22 to regional policy and structural instruments, 23 to fundamental rights.
* **Capacity building.** The envisaged activities comprise among others capacity building with a strong focus on knowledge and skills needed for the future of the tourism sector, including e.g. re-skilling, up-skilling and renewing tourism education with new skills profiles in vocational education and training policy and curricula. The activities facilitate also learning in tourism SMEs through providing user-friendly access points for tourism SMEs on self-learning resources and through providing online spaces where tourism SMEs can connect with each other to share learning. Only proper addressing of this issue can give proper answers to the challenges of the modern society (transition to sustainable economy and society, de-population of aging society, brain drain, economic migration, digitalisation, green and blue transformation, inclusion of youth).
* **Innovation and research.** The digital and green transition of the tourism industry and related skills development has a strong focus on innovation in the field. The activities focus on putting new solutions into practice, also in close cooperation with CCIs, and enable tourism players to learn about them. Activities will contribute to the development of data-driven destination management models and mechanisms as well as to innovative tourism services using advanced technologies and digitised cultural heritage.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** Sustainable tourism is an important element of the transition to a circular economy. The envisaged activities include, among others, sharing of knowledge on best practices and experiences with green transition of tourism stakeholders and SMEs, including new skills necessary for circular economy approaches in tourism.
* **Green rural development.** Activities under this Topic will also address sustainable tourism in rural areas and thus contribute to green rural development, such as are: sustainable and smart tourism management in rural destinations, promotion of knowledge and skills necessary for stakeholders in rural tourism areas.

**Digitalisation.** The digital transition of the tourism sector is addressed through activities promoting digitalisation in tourism, and the need to strengthen digital skills of players in the tourism sector. Activities will help to raise awareness on the need to develop digital skills as well as promote the future digital skills needed by tourism, cultural and creative sectors.

### Action 4.2.1 – Sustainable and smart tourism management and services

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| **Action 4.2.1** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Promotion of sustainable and smart tourism management and services** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Promoting the exchange of information on best practice, peer learning and networking on sustainable, accessible and smart tourism management practices and approaches. * Awareness raising activities for tourism actors on the benefits of digitalisation and on existing digitalisation programmes. * Supporting the exchange of ideas and experiences on digitalisation in tourism. * Sharing knowledge on best practices and experiences with green transition of tourism stakeholders and SMEs, in particular CCIs, including circular economy approaches in tourism. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Lack of experience and knowledge on sustainable tourism destination management. * Lack of experience and knowledge on sustainability, energy efficiency, and circular approaches in tourism SMEs. * Lack of knowledge on available funding opportunities for tourism stakeholders. * Lack of experience and knowledge on digital practices in tourism at the level of SMES and destinations. | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Established an effective cooperation and exchange of experiences on the promotion of sustainability, energy efficiency, circular economy in tourism. * Increased knowledge and capacities among tourism stakeholders about sustainable and smart destination management. * Available information for SMEs and DMOs to learn from best practices and support ideas on the benefits and implementation of digital and green tourism practices. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship DEVELOPMENT OF THE NETWORK OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BUSINESSES AND CLUSTERS  GREEN MAPPING FOR THE AI REGION - SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT AND MARKET ACCESS FOR RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATIONS (MANAGEMENT) AND MICRO/SME OPERATIONS IN THE EUSAIR REGION the following strategic projects were developed:  **Monopillar strategic projects**   * **ProDestAIR** - Adriatic-Ionian Strategy and Solutions for Smart Integrated Destination Management based on Multiple Intelligence Systems * **LIVING THE SEA 4.0** - Digitalisation of cultural heritage of fishing traditions and fish industry for creation of virtual touristic points of interest in EUSAIR * **TG AIR** - Green Mapping for the Adriatic-Ionian Region - Supporting Development and Market Access for Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Destinations and Micro/SME Operations in the EUSAIR Region   Under Flagship TRAINING AND SKILLS IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM BUSINESSES (VOCATIONAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS) the following strategic project was developed  **Cross-Pillar strategic project**   * **ADRIONet** - Managing Tourism Flows in Protected Areas (Pillars 4 and 3) | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: No. of activities to promote sustainable, accessible and smart tourism practices and management | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders  RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| OI: No. of activities on the digital transition of tourism | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders  RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| OI: No. of activities on the green transition of tourism | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders  RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| RI: Increased number of destinations that offer accessible and smart tourism services | RCR12 Digital: Users of new and upgraded digital services, products and processes developed by enterprises | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| RI: Increased number of destinations using advanced technologies and digitised cultural heritage | RCO77 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported  RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites  supported | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
| RI: Increased number of green tourism destinations | RCO77 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported  RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites  supported | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |

### Action 4.2.2 – Knowledge and skills for the future

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| **Action 4.2.2** | Description of the Action | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Knowledge and skills for the future** | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Awareness-raising activities on the need to develop digital and green skills within the Tourism Transition Pathway to destination authorities, destination management organisations, tourism business associations, clusters and SMEs, in particular CCIs. * Developing opportunities to distribute information on key support resources and funding opportunities for skill development and innovation in tourism SMEs on European, national and regional level. * Developing and renewing tourism education: promoting the incorporation of new skills profiles in vocational education and training policy and curricula. * Facilitating learning through providing user-friendly access points for tourism SMEs on self-learning resources and through providing online spaces where tourism SMEs can connect with each other to share learning. * Promote the skills needed by cultural and creative sectors, including digital, entrepreneurial, traditional and specialised skills. | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Lack of awareness in SMEs on the need to develop new capacities and skills on digital and green tourism solutions. * Lack of knowledge on available funding opportunities for tourism actors. * Lack of visibility and knowledge on training and capacity-building opportunities on green and digital tourism. * Need to integrate green and digital skills into the training and education curricula on tourism as well as to informal learning. | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Raised awareness on the skills needed for the digital and green transition in tourism. * Education models and curriculum in tourism adapted to new tourism trends and tourists needs, in particular to the digital and green transition. * Tourism SMEs, students and workers, as well as tourism organisations, clusters, universities and schools can find/feed information on education and skills in tourism in knowledge portals and e-learning platforms. | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Under Flagship TRAINING AND SKILLS IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM BUSINESSES (VOCATIONAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS) the following strategic project was developed:  **Monopillar strategic projects**   * **DES\_AIR** - Education for Integrated Sustainable Tourism Destination Management | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: No. of activities to promote new skills and adapted curricula in tourism | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes  RCR81 Interreg: Completion of joint training schemes | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG |
| OI: No. of best practices shared on digital and green skills in tourism | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes  RCR81 Interreg: Completion of joint training schemes | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
|  | OI: Information on skills  needs and training opportunities for twin  transition in tourism disseminated | n/a | 0 p.a. (2023) | 5 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |
|  | RI: New curricula in tourism developed and implemented | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes  RCR81 Interreg: Completion of joint training schemes | 0 p.a. (2023) | 2 p.a. (2030) | TSG4 |

## Indicative list of relevant funding sources

Relevant EU Cohesion Policy objectives: PO4, Culture and Sustainable Tourism.

Relevant IPA Programming Framework window: all windows, specifically window 3: Green agenda and sustainable connectivity and 4: Competitiveness and inclusive growth.

The EUSAIR participating countries can use the following EU funding instruments during 2021-27:

**Applicable to EU member states**

* The ERDF and Cohesion Fund,
* the ESF+ ,
* the EAFRD,
* the EMFAF,
* the Just Transition Fund,
* the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund,
* the Recovery and Resilience Fund and
* the Single Market Programme.
* Interreg Programmes of EUSAIR Member States: Croatia-Italy, Croatia-Slovenia, Greece-Italy, Italy-Slovenia.
* ERDF Regional and Sectoral mainstream programmes which include PO4 Specific objectives.

**Applicable to EU member states in cooperation with EU candidate countries**

* Life (which supports environment, biodiversity, nature through awareness raising campaigns, studies, evaluation, training, workshops and networking),
* Horizon (which supports the development of skills, the technology transfer and innovation in the sectors and clusters of culture, creativity, digitalisation, innovation systems, food, agriculture and environment),
* Creative Europe (enhancing the intercultural dialogue and the cultural heritage as well as the capacity of the European cultural and creative sectors, including the capacity of individuals working in those sectors, to cultivate talent, to innovate, to prosper and to generate jobs and growth),
* Erasmus + (to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional and personal development of people in the fields of education and training of youth, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion),
* Digital Europe Programme (which via its specific objective 4 develops advanced digital skills),
* Invest EU Programme (which supports employment, youth and SMEs along with economic, social and territorial cohesion),
* Relevant Interreg programmes (incorporating Policy Objective 4 or IPA-IPA Thematic Priority 5): Greece-Albania, South Adriatic; Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Montenegro; Greece-North Macedonia; Croatia-Serbia.

**Applicable to the EU candidate countries**

* IPA III thematic priorities:
* applicable to mainstream IPA - Annex II of IPA III Regulation, Paragraph o) relevant for tourism SMS and
* applicable to IPA-IPA Interreg programmes - Annex III of IPA III Regulation, paragraph e) encouraging tourism, especially sustainable tourism, and preserving and promoting cultural and natural heritage.
* 6 IPA cross-border programmes among WB countries: [Bosnia and Herzegovina – Montenegro](https://cbibplus.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-montenegro/), [Montenegro – Albania](https://cbibplus.eu/montenegro-albania/), [North Macedonia – Albania](https://cbibplus.eu/north-macedonia-albania/), [Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina](https://cbibplus.eu/serbia-bosnia-and-herzegovina/), [Serbia – Montenegro](https://cbibplus.eu/serbia-montenegro/), [Serbia – North Macedonia](https://cbibplus.eu/serbia-north-macedonia/).
* The Western Balkans Investment Framework Improving labor market participation, especially of women, young people, disabled people, disadvantaged groups and minorities, will be a priority in the EUSAIR Action Plan and can strongly contribute to tourism sustainable development and economic growth.

# Pillar 5 –Improved Social Cohesion

The Adriatic-Ionian Region suffers from aging, labour market disbalances, social exclusion, the inflow of refugees, poverty pockets and brain drain. On top of this, it was largely impacted by the pandemic, especially due to its dependency on tourism, highly affecting the labour market.

The main objective of this Pillar is to align the Adriatic-Ionian Region with the EU strategies and policies for improving social cohesion, in line with the broader framework of the green and digital transition. These strategies and policies are designed to create a demand and supply for new and relevant skills, swift adaptation to increasingly changing economic landscape and increase resilience toward future crisis. The Pillar 5 should promote social cohesion, contribute from the macroregional context to achieve equal opportunities, youth engagement and access to the labour market.

In this respect, great attention shall be given to the European Pillar of Social Rights, and in particular to the Action Plan for its implementation, endorsed by the three EU institutions, EU member states and European Social Partners and Civil Society Organisations at the Porto Social Summit on 7-8 May 2021.

The Action Plan sets three areas for action – More and Better Jobs, Skills and Equality, Social Protection and Inclusion – and three targets for upward convergence:

* Employment: at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030.
* Training: at least 60% of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030.
* Reducing Poverty: a reduction of at least 15 million in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2030.

COVID-19 has exposed the region, as well as the rest of Europe, to further drastic changes in jobs, education, economy, welfare systems and social life. Furthermore, other challenges in the Adriatic-Ionian Region are the demographic change, aging, the inflow of refugees, social exclusion of vulnerable groups and a general trend where societies become more polarised with poverty pockets. At the same time, the region has an active civil society which is an important asset for addressing social issues in the context of the EUSAIR.

The Pillar 5 intends to address these challenges by taking into account the importance of preserving and promoting the European social model, as well as the aspirations of EU candidate countries to join the EU. Macroregional cooperation through this Pillar would be an additional tool for strengthening European and national policies in relevant fields. Cooperation would include exchange of experiences, coordination of policy measures, definition of priorities and standardisation of approaches to solving social challenges that transcend national borders. It will also work as a response to the requirements of the European Pillar of Social Rights initiative, and it will also tackle the human rights dimension of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans.

As the Pillar 5 has only been decided upon in May 2023, it is still under development. The scope of the Pillar will be further discussed and defined in the years to come. This work will be supported by the below action.

### Action 5.0.1 – Further development of the Pillar Improved Social Cohesion

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| **Action 5.0.1** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Further development of the Pillar Improved Social Cohesion** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Perform the strategic consultation with relevant stakeholders, as defined in the ‘Background document with the Roadmap’. * Perform the thematic consultation with relevant stakeholders, as defined in the ‘Background document with the Roadmap’.   In the context of the further elaboration of the Topics framing this Pillar also important social aspects such as equal opportunities, gender equality, social inclusion of vulnerable groups, fight against discrimination, active ageing and child poverty can be taken on board. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Challenge: to collect inputs from all national representatives of the Adriatic Ionian region in a short period of time.  Opportunity: to develop a new Pillar aligned with the macroregional needs and expectations. | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | An effective new Pillar aligned with the expectations and needs of the macroregion. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | Not relevant. | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | No. of stakeholder consultation activities under this Pillar | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 1 (2024) | TSG |

## Topic 5.1 – Youth engagement and employment

**Global objectives.** To stimulate the empowerment of young generations, by increasing their capacity to actively participate in the social and economic life, and by supporting their increased participation in society and labour market. It is important to involve youth in topics such as education, employment, cultural exchange, social inclusion and environment care, and all topics that have an impact on young people’s lives.

**EUSAIR objectives.** The EUSAIR should give to their young population the tools and mechanisms that will help them building their own capacities and allow them to develop innovative and entrepreneurial thinking, in order to be properly equipped for tackling joint existing and future challenges within the region. This should not be limited to the capitals and cities, but it should include youth from rural areas.

**Flagships.** Pillar 5 is newly introduced, but one of the flagships of this topic is further support and development of the EUSAIR POPRI youth process as a mechanism for knowledge transfer and improving the employability of young people in the EUSAIR. The established EUSAIR Knowledge Hub, composed of technology parks, schools, incubators and companies, will continue under this flagship as it provides young people with entrepreneurial skills to make them innovative, skilled and employable, thus contributing to global and EUSAIR objectives**.**

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* creating a stronger link with EU policies;
* amplifying the voice of young people in public policymaking as actors of change and including young people and youth representatives in the decision-making process, e.g. through setting up an EUSAIR Youth Council;
* including youth representatives in the development and implementation of the EUSAIR strategy to make the strategy more inclusive; and
* promoting activities aiming at increased youth employability.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Existing youth councils at national level.
* Existing active civil society.
* Some of the Adriatic-Ionian countries already have well-established cooperation programmes between youth representatives and governing bodies.
* Existing tools and initiatives at the EU level, such as EU Youth Dialogue and ALMA initiative
* Existing EUSAIR POPRI network of technology parks

Challenges:

* Difficulty in obtaining engagement, and communicating with the local young population.
* Lack of direct involvement of youth in the EUSAIR strategy and Interreg programmes.
* Low dissemination of The Manifesto for Young People by Young People to Shape the European Cooperation Policy.
* Social exclusion of vulnerable groups.
* Obstacles in reaching young NEETs in activation programmes
* Limited access to entrepreneurial knowledge and skills relevant to labour market needs

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a range of EU and national policies related to sustainable blue economy, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy and many other fields:

* Manifesto for Youth by Youth to Shape European Cooperation Policy
* The European Pillar of Social Rights [Document 52017DC0250]
* The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 [Document 42018Y1218(01)]
* Youth Guarantee [2020/C 372/01]
* ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) [(EU) 2022/2175]
* European Alliance for Apprenticeship (EAfA)
* European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship (2018/C 153/01)
* Youth Employment Support Package
* Quality Framework for Traineeships (Council Recommendation 10/03/2014)
* Recommendation of establishing a European Child Guarantee [(EU) 2021/1004]
* Regulation on establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport [(EU) 2021/817]
* Regulation on establishing the European Solidarity Corps Programme [(EU) 2021/888]
* Regulation on establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps [(EU) No 375/2014]
* European care strategy [COM(2022) 440 final]
* Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (09/2023) document “The Transformative Power of Education: Universal Values and Civic Renewal”

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* National/Regional Authorities
* Association of European Border Regions Young Leaders
* Civil society and social partners
* Erasmus Student Network (ESN)
* Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY)
* EUSAIR POPRI network of technology parks
* Uniadrion
* Universities and educational institutions
* Young European Ambassadors (YEAs)
* The European Youth Forum
* Youth associations
* Youth Regional Network (YRN)
* Public employment services
* Youth workers and youth workers association
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross-cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** Within the topic Youth engagement and employment activities will be oriented to help the candidate countries to better integrate with EU member states in field of youth policies and participatory approaches to youth empowerment and start adjusting to the EU Youth Policy, and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Regarding the EU aquis, activities are aligned with Chapter 26 Education and culture which put focus on Council Recommendations in several areas related to school, vocational, higher, and adult education, youth volunteering and mobility. Goals regarding youth and youth policy's potential are stated in the EU Youth Strategy, which is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027. Through 11 goals, the EU Youth Strategy should contribute to realising vision of young people by mobilising EU level policy instruments as well as actions at national, regional, and local level by all stakeholders. Collaboration on activities proposed will include various stakeholders in charge of youth.
* **Capacity building.** The activities helping to build capacities among the youth representatives involved as well as among other players concerning the strengthened involvement of youth representatives. Activities will aim strengthening awareness of the importance of active involvement of young in the macro-regional strategy, through training programs, workshops, participating in on-line meeting and conferences, etc. This is in accordance with Youth Goal 1 Connecting EU with Youth and goal 11 Youth Organisations & European Programmes. These two goals aim to foster the sense of youth belonging to the European project and build a bridge between the EU and young people to regain trust and increase participation, but also to ensure equal access for all young people to youth organisations and European youth programmes, building a society based on European values and identity and to ensure participation of young people in governance processes of European youth programmes.
* **Innovation and research.** The activities contribute to social innovation linked to the involvement of youth representatives as drivers of change. They will be encouraged to develop new innovative solutions within the activities carried out through this topic. Majority of topics described under this Pillar especially those related to acquisition of (cutting-edge) knowledge and skills for the future of youngsters and adults go hand in hand with respective S3s goals and contribute in best manner to social cohesion in the Region.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to circular economy activities.
* **Green rural development.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to green rural development activities, but activities will include promotion of youth development in green and rural development, and focus will be placed on creating employment opportunities for green jobs in rural areas according to dual transition framework. Activities envisaged through this topic are in accordance with the goal 6 Moving Rural Youth Forward of the EU Youth Strategy, to ensure sustainable, high-quality jobs created and accessible to young people in rural areas. Also, the idea is to ensure active participating of young people in rural areas in decision-making processes (especially in EUSAIR Youth council), and to be aware of importance of protection of rural traditions. Supporting attractiveness of rural areas for young people by supporting smart community/village concept also based on experiences in other macro regions.
* **Digitalisation.** The digital transition can be addressed through supporting youth employment in digital jobs accordingly dual transition.

### Action 5.1.1 – Promoting empowerment and involvement of youth

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| **Action 5.1.1** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Promoting empowerment and involvement of youth** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Sharing practices in creation and implementation of national youth policies. * Address the Tirana Declaration for youth empowerment. * Combating youth peer-to-peer violence and promoting non-violence. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Social exclusion of vulnerable groups such as young NEETs. * Building capacities regarding articulation of youth needs. * Difficulty in obtaining engagement and communicating with the local young population. * Lack of direct involvement of youth in the EUSAIR strategy and Interreg programmes. * Awareness of importance to implement needs of youth in broader policy making. * Existing youth councils at national level. * Some of the macro-region countries’ already have well-established cooperation programmes between youth representatives and governing bodies. * The existing network of youth in the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region. | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Stronger engagement of young people with EU, macro-regional and national policies. * Young people from candidate countries will be empowered through sharing experiences with their EU colleagues. * Strengthening of preconditions for better employment of young people. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Number of public events to promote empowerment and involvement of youth | RCO115 Public events across borders jointly organised | 0  (2023) | 6  (2030) | TSG5 |
| RI: Recommendations on implementation of EU policies regarding youth adopted on macro-regional level | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0  (2023) | 2  (2030) | TSG5 |

### Action 5.1.2 – Boosting youth employment

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| **Action 5.1.1** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Boosting youth employment** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Sharing practices in Youth Guarantee implementation * Sharing practices in active measures for access of youth to labour market, prevention of youth’s exploitation and promotion of equality and non-discrimination of youth in the labour market and the society * Sharing practices on preventive approaches/measures to reduce the risk of becoming NEET focusing on youth at a higher risk of early school leaving in cooperation with social partners * Promote EU tools and initiatives in the field of youth employment, such as ALMA initiative. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * High rates of youth unemployment and young NEETs. * Risk of brain drain since young people seek job position abroad. * Existing EU and national frameworks to promote youth employment and activation of young NEETs. * Existing ALMPs available to young people. | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Harmonization of youth employment policies at the macro-regional level. * Promoting implementation of EU policy framework and initiatives for youth employment and activation on the labour market. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Number of public events to harmonize youth employment policies | RCO115 Public events across borders jointly organised | 0  (2023) | 6  (2030) | TSG5 |
| RI: Recommendations on implementation of EU policies regarding youth employment adopted on macro-regional level | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0  (2023) | 2  (2030) | TSG |

## Topic 5.2 – Promoting skills acquisition for future labour markets

**Global objectives.** The global objectives of this Topic are to promote life-long learning opportunities and access to the labour market for the Adriatic-Ionian population, by addressing current issues such as skills mismatching, brain drain, underemployment and precariousness, and technological changes. To promote respect for diversities and equal opportunities in a social and economic environment free from discrimination is a strong asset to promote sustainable development, to contribute to the 2030 Agenda objectives, and to promote innovation at large. Better cooperation and exchange can pave the way to enhance social cohesion in the region, and promote quality of life, encouraging economic and social development.

**EUSAIR objectives.** EUSAIR should promote harmonization of skill policies in the macro-region. That includes joint work in development of both VET and adult education curricula and supporting their implementation. Since other Pillars include sectoral skills (blue economy, tourism), activities under this Topic should pay closer look at supporting such activities.Objectives include a boost in upskilling/reskilling opportunities, and better targeting of skill policies for disadvantaged groups, such as people with disabilities, women, Roma etc.

**Flagships.** Since the Pillar 5 is newly introduced, there are no previous activities to build upon.Possible flagships could build on transnational projects aiming to harmonize curricula in VET and adult education.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* supporting policy harmonization in macro-region with emphasis on implementation of EO skills frameworks and initiatives; and
* modernization of VET and adult education curricula in line with the labour market needs.

### EUSAIR specificities opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Existing networks of educational institutions
* Cooperation between PES (Public Employment Services), training institutions, social partners
* Established EU policy frameworks and support from EU institutions

Challenges:

* Brain drain
* Unemployment, underemployment, precariousness and general lack of opportunities – targets are far from the targets adopted by the EU
* High rates of early leavers from school in some of the regions
* Low rates of participation in adult education
* Low perception and desirability of VET
* Large gender employment gap in the entire Adriatic Ionian region
* Segregation in the educational system
* Lack of programmes focused on the inclusion of disadvantaged groups into the labour market

### Relevant policy frameworks

This Topic connects to a range of EU and national policies related to sustainable blue economy, green transition, research and innovation, circular economy and many other fields:

* Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy [SWD(2021) 373 final]
* European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience [COM(2020) 274 final]
* Harnessing talent in Europe’s regions [COM/2023/32 final]
* Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults [2016/C 484/01]
* Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability [COM(2021) 770 final]
* Recommendation on individual learning accounts [COM(2021) 773 final]
* Regulation establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) [(EU) 2021/1057]
* Regulation on establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport [(EU) 2021/817]
* Strengthening Innovation in Europe's Regions: Strategies for resilient, inclusive and sustainable growth [COM(2017) 376 final]
* The European Pillar of Social Rights [Document 52017DC0250]
* Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence Programme (Horizon Europe)
* Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (09/2023) document “The Transformative Power of Education: Universal Values and Civic Renewal”
* Europe fit for Digital Age

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this Topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* Chambers of Commerce,
* European Commission (DG EMPL and DG EAC)
* Ministries of Education
* Ministries of Employment
* Regional and local authorities
* Educational institutions (schools)
* Training institutions
* Scientific institutions
* Universities
* PES (Public Employment Services)
* Social Partners and civil society organisations
* National/regional youth workers associations
* Uniadrion
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross-cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The activities help the candidate countries to better integrate with EU member states in field of education and skills policies, supporting the participation of the candidate countries in the European Education Area, the European Pillar of Social Rights and activities related to reducing the brain drain from EU candidate countries to EU member states. Also, these activities are aligned with stated in chapter 19 *Social policy and employment* of aquis which includes adoption of minimum standards in the areas of labour law, equality, health, and safety at work and anti-discrimination. Chapter 26 *Education and culture* of aquis consists of Council Recommendations in areas related to school, vocational, higher, and adult education, youth volunteering and mobility, numerous Council Conclusions and Resolutions.
* **Capacity building.** The activities are all geared towards increasing capacities and skills in the region through supporting apprenticeship schemes and work-based learning respecting equal possibilities for all. Also, the goal is to share experiences in decreasing of the rates of unemployment, underemployment, and general lack of opportunities within the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region. Also, EU Youth Strategy Quality Learning aims to integrate and improve different forms of learning, equipping young people for the challenges of an ever-changing life in the 21st century. The goal is to support universal and equal access to quality education and life-long learning, equal access to adequately funded non-formal education at all levels, for all young people, including those marginalised. Capacity building activities will be focused on promotion of open-mindedness and supporting the development of interpersonal and intercultural skills. Sharing knowledge and experiences in creating and implementing more personalised, participative, and cooperative learner-centred methods of the education process is another way how to strengthen capacities of young people within the EUSAIR strategy.
* **Innovation and research.** The activities may contribute to innovation by empowering more people to enter research activities and encouraging cooperation between countries on development of innovative solution for decreasing high rates of early leavers from school and increasing the rates of participation in adult education on the other hand. The approaches in increasing skills and reaching out to the relevant target groups may also include aspects of policy innovation. Innovation and research processes will be encouraged in creating new ways to stop the brain drain. Majority of topics described under this Pillar especially those related to acquisition of (cutting-edge) knowledge and skills for the future of youngsters and adults go hand in hand with respective S3s goals and contribute in best manner to social cohesion in the Region.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to circular economy activities, but activities within this topic will be oriented to raise awareness on importance of circular economy and its benefits. Using already developed tools (and potentially new ones) of the circular economy for skills development and upscale.
* **Green rural development.** Since skills are daily transformed and modernized, it is necessary to take care of the simultaneous development of the green economy, and to predict activities which will ensure balanced skills supply/demand for green rural development. It is important to ensure equal access to high quality education for young people and afterwards, sustainable, high-quality jobs, accessible to young people in rural areas. **Digitalisation.** The digital transition can be supported e.g. through the activities increasing the skills level in the region related to digital literacy and encouraging the use of digital learning tools. Also, due to rapidly transforming technological and socio-economic reality it is necessary to adapt digital skills in a framework of dual transition.

### Action 5.2.1 – Harmonization of skills policies

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| **Action 5.2.1** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Harmonization of skills policies** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Support programmes that encourage VET and adult education. * Sharing practices in mapping and tracking skills needs (with the emphasis on green and digital transition). * Sharing practices in development of curricula for VET and adult education in line with the needs of the labour market (European qualification framework). * Support programmes that offer soft skills related to macroregional cooperation and civil society. * Cooperation between all stakeholders in promoting VET excellence. * Sharing practices in development of platforms and tools for the implementation of EU initiatives, such as recommendation on individual learning accounts and micro-qualifications. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Low level of participation in adult education. * High rates of early leavers from school in some of the regions. * Existing experience in ALMPs implementation. | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Improved effectiveness of skills policies with better targeting of disadvantaged groups. * Better adaptation to future labour market needs. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: Number of public events promoting skills | RCO115 Public events across borders jointly organised | 0  (2023) | 6  (2030) | TSG5 |
| RI: Recommendations on implementation of EU policies regarding skills adopted on macro-regional level | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0  (2023) | 2  (2030) | TSG5 |

### Action 5.2.2 – Promoting employment opportunities through upskilling/reskilling for disadvantaged groups on the labour market

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| **Action 5.2.2** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Promoting employment opportunities through upskilling/reskilling for disadvantaged groups on the labour market** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Support participation of disadvantaged groups in upskilling/reskilling programmes. * Support development of VET and adult education curricula in line with labour market needs. * Support programmes that promote inclusive and equal work environments. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Brain drain. * Unemployment, underemployment, precariousness, and general lack of opportunities. * Large gender employment gap in the entire Adriatic Ionian region. * Financing opportunities through ESF+, IPA and INTERREG. | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Higher participation level of disadvantaged groups in the VET and adult education. * Better quality of upskilling/reskilling programmes. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | Capacity building events across borders jointly organised | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes  RCR81 Interreg: Completion of joint training schemes | 0  (2023) | 8  (2030) | TSG5 |
| Capacities for upskilling/reskilling on macro-regional level strengthened | RCO85 Interreg: Participations in joint training schemes  RCR81 Interreg: Completion of joint training schemes | 0  (2023) | 1 p.a. (2030) | TSG5 |

## Topic 5.3 - Decent work and Gender Equality

**Global objectives.** The global objectives of this topic are to promote gender equality and decent work in the Adriatic-Ionian Region, by addressing current issues such as gender inequality and discrimination, gender pay gaps, irregular work, precariousness, labour exploitation (especially for seasonal and cross-border labour, and particularly in sectors like tourism, agriculture and aquaculture, services connected to transport, home care). To promote respect for diversities and equal opportunities in a social and economic environment free from discrimination is a strong asset to promote sustainable development, to contribute to the 2030 Agenda objectives, to achieve the targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights and to promote innovation at large. Better cooperation and exchange can pave the way to enhance cohesion in the region, and promote quality of life, encouraging economic and social development.

**EUSAIR objectives.** Objectives include better cooperation, coordination, and exchange of best practices between public administrations, PES, labour inspectorates, social partners, and civil society, to address phenomena of labour exploitation and discrimination and build an equal and inclusive labour environment. Groups such women at work, vulnerable categories of workers, mobile seasonal and migrant workers will be targeted.

**Flagships.** Since the Pillar 5 is introduced just recently, there are no previous activities to build upon.Possible flagships could build on the existing EU and national legal frameworks and regulations in the fields of gender equality, decent work and the fight against labour discrimination, the development of cooperation actions and networks, including exchange of best practices between all EUSAIR institutions and stakeholders, notably social partners, and the inclusion of such cooperation in broader implementation of the EUSAIR.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

In light of the above objectives, challenges and opportunities, the activities under this Topic aim at

* supporting people in the Adriatic-Ionian Region to overcome and prevent gender discrimination at work and labour exploitation, and to build gender equality and decent work, in line with the principles and targets of the European Pillar of Social Rights;
* promoting equal opportunities in the labour market and thus reduce the gender gaps and discrimination in terms of employment and payment; and
* better protecting labour rights and conditions of the local population, and thereby increase the employment rate and reduce poverty at work.

### EUSAIR specificities, opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above objectives, the Adriatic-Ionian Region faces a number of specific challenges and opportunities which the revised Action Plan aims to address.

Opportunities:

* Existing networks and cooperation between PES (Public Employment Services), labour inspectorates, and stakeholders notably social partners.
* Existing EU, national and regional legislation and regulations.
* Existing collective agreements and framework agreements.

Challenges:

* Gender discrimination at work.
* Gender pay gap.
* Glass ceiling for women’s career opportunities.
* Lack of social protection and services for women.
* Pension segregation.
* Unemployment, underemployment, precariousness, and general lack of opportunities – targets are far from the targets adopted by the EU.
* Irregular work, precariousness, labour exploitation – especially for seasonal and cross-border labour, and particularly in sectors like tourism, agriculture and aquaculture, services connected to transport, home care.

### Relevant policy frameworks

This topic connects to a range of EU and national policies related to sustainable gender equality, quality employment, fight against exploitation and discrimination at work:

* European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan [COM/2021/102 final]
* UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals
* EU Pay Transparency Directive [Directive (EU) 2023/970]
* EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages [Directive (EU) 2022/2041]
* EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions [Directive (EU) 2019/1152]
* EU Legal Framework on Labour Mobility
* EU Legal Framework on Labour Migration, particularly Seasonal Workers
* EC Communication on decent work [COM(2022) 66 final]

### Indicative key stakeholders

The implementation of this topic needs to draw on the engagement of a wide range of players, including:

* EU DG Employment
* European Labour Authority (ELA)
* Ministries of Employment
* PES (Public Employment Services)
* Labour Inspectorates
* Relevant Regional Administrations
* Social Partners
* Gender equality organisations
* Other interested stakeholders
* Uniadrion
* Relevant official bodies in charge of human and minority rights
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross-cutting topics

Activities under this Topic contribute actively to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised Action Plan.

**Horizontal topics:**

* **Enlargement.** The activities help the candidate countries to better integrate with EU member states in field of gender equality and quality of employment, fight against discrimination, the European Pillar of Social Rights and activities related to reducing labour discrimination and exploitation. Activities will support mutual learning process and sharing practices in creating measures for reducing gender discrimination. Proposed activities are aligned with Chapter 19 *Social policy and employment* of Aquis which includes minimum standards in the areas of labour law, equality, health and safety at work and anti-discrimination. Also, activities will focus on finding and exchanging experiences in creating quality jobs which guarantee fair working conditions, working rights and the right of living wage for all young people, in accordance with goal 7 of the EU Youth Strategy.
* **Capacity building.** The activities are all geared towards increasing capacities of the various stakeholders in the region to address gender equality and quality of employment. Also, activities will help in development of civic and social skills to empower citizens and other stakeholders of gender inequality and labour exploitation prevention. Since there’s a concern about employment rights and discrimination in the labour market and workplace that young people feel, it is important to work on capacity building among various stakeholders in those areas. It is important to strengthen the linkage between stakeholders, such as relevant regional administrations, employers, ministries of employment, civil rights and gender equality organizations, etc. and young people looking for a job with goal of sharing experiences form all sides and finding common solutions for better employment quality and gender equality.
* **Innovation and research.** The activities may contribute to increase research activities and innovation in the fields of gender equality and quality of employment. The activities to address discrimination and exploitation, based on existing legal framework and regulation, may improve their implementation and introduce elements of policy innovation.

**Cross-cutting topics**:

* **Circular economy.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to circular economy activities.
* **Green rural development.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to circular economy activities.
* **Digitalisation.** The digital transition can be supported e.g. through the activities increasing the skills level in the region related to digital literacy.

### Action 5.3.1 –Enhance EUSAIR cooperation and exchange of best practices on Gender Equality and Quality of Employment

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| **Action 5.3.1** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Enhance EUSAIR cooperation and exchange of best practices on Gender Equality and Quality of Employment** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Development of cooperation and exchange of best practices on Gender Equality and Quality of Employment, involving: EU DG Employment, European Labour Authority, Ministries of Employment, PES (Public Employment Services), Labour Inspectorates, Relevant Regional Administrations, Social Partners, Gender equality organisations, Uniadrion. * Support preventive approaches/measures to reduce gender discrimination at work, gender pay gap, glass ceiling for women’s career opportunities, lack of social protection and services for women, pension segregation affecting women. * Development of cooperation and exchange of best practices to reduce irregular work, precariousness, labour exploitation – especially for seasonal and cross-border labour, and particularly in sectors like tourism, agriculture and aquaculture, services connected to transport, home care. * Develop research and analysis to map and track such phenomena in the region. * Development of cooperation and exchange of best practices for the full implementation of existing legislation and regulations in the fields of gender equality and decent work. * Improve cooperation on gender equality and decent work among stakeholders active in the EUSAIR region. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * High levels of gender discrimination in the region. * High levels of unemployment, underemployment, precariousness, and general lack of opportunities in the region. * High level of irregular work, precariousness, labour exploitation – especially for seasonal and cross-border labour, and particularly in sectors like tourism, agriculture and aquaculture, services connected to transport, home care. * Need to promote gender equality and decent work, and to combat discrimination and exploitation, through better analysis, coordination and cooperation, and policy action. | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Support to the Adriatic-Ionian population in overcoming gender discrimination and labour exploitation and improve equality, protection of rights and social inclusion in the region. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: No. of activities supporting the share of practices on prevention of gender discrimination and promoting gender equality | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0 p.a. (2023) | 6  (2030) | TSG5 |
| OI: No. of activities supporting the share of practices on prevention of labour exploitation and decent work promotion | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0  (2023) | 6  (2030) | TSG5 |
| RI: Recommendations on implementation of EU policies regarding prevention of gender discrimination adopted on macro-regional level | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0  (2023) | 2  (2030) | TSG5 |
| RI: Recommendations on implementation of EU labour policy initiatives adopted on macro-regional level | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0  (2023) | 2  (2030) | TSG5 |

## Topic 5.4 - Social Innovations

**Global objectives.** Global objectives of Social Innovations Topic are to further promote this concept in the Adriatic-Ionian Region by addressing some of the most pressing issues that for example include active and healthy ageing as a response to a trend of ageing population in the region and in developed countries. Better cooperation and knowledge transfer between stakeholders can promote the field of social innovations in the region and enhance the overall wellbeing of individuals, including vulnerable groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities, while indirectly contributing to overall better wellbeing and quality of life in our society as a whole.

In general, the term social innovation is typically concerned with empowering people and driving change in a way that contributes to sustainable social inclusion. Social innovations are always evolving with new products and services, often under social economy umbrella, that are providing a response to a social problem and enhance the quality of life and wellbeing on a micro, macro or regional level. As such social innovations are novel solutions to a social problem that is more effective, efficient and sustainable, which adds value to the Adriatic Ionian region and society as a whole. Moreover, they can take many different forms such as actions, systems, processes, services, products, regulations or technical solutions.

Social innovations also enable the opportunity for knowledge transfer between different stakeholders. State-of-the art analysis reveals that social innovations were successfully applied in numerous fields, including active and healthy ageing and many other fields that have an important societal impact. Implementing such solutions is especially beneficial for socially vulnerable groups or individuals that we will address within the scope of this Topic. One example could be explained by population ageing as older adults will have to work longer and due to combination of shrinking available workforce, a blend between youth and older generation is necessary as a social innovation to overcome the gap in specific skills, knowledge and competences in organizations. As people age, they also become more fragile, exposed to cognitive and other health related issues.

**EUSAIR objectives.** Objectives include better collaboration and knowledge transfer between national and public bodies, research and academia, business world and other organizations, and professional and general public. Groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups will be targeted within the Topic of Social Innovations, while at the same time we must not neglect the population as a whole.

**Flagships.** Since Pillar 5 is introduced in the near past, there is a gap in connection to previous activities. Possible flagships could build on the existing state within EU and national frameworks in the field of social innovations/social economy and include a vast number of potential activities between included stakeholders on all levels, local, regional, national and cross national.

**Specific objectives of the Topic**

As a summary of the written text, we can conclude that the activities under the Topic of Social Innovations aim at:

* Promoting existing solutions for social innovations and social economy that are a step towards building an ecosystem of different stakeholders and that promotes collaboration.
* Supporting the Adriatic Ionian region to overcome some of the key challenges of contemporary times such as the above-average rapid growth of the share of older adults.
* Strengthening the capacities of decision-makers and transfer of knowledge in the field of social innovations.
* Promoting a better way of life towards a sustainable and solidary future.
* Promoting an active, strategic approach to the field of social innovation/social economy.
* Providing professional support in training and education of vulnerable groups.
* Better awareness of the Topic of Social Innovation through different media channels.
* Promoting age friendly and inclusive environments for all age groups.
* Enhancing life-long learning and knowledge-interaction for all generations.

### EUSAIR specificities, opportunities & challenges

Linked to the above, we would like to highlight some potential opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities

* Utilizing the full potential of already established networks and collaboration between different stakeholders functioning in the field of social innovation and social economy.
* Following the quadruple helix approach, including members from research and academia, municipalities, ministries and other national and public bodies, and other interested stakeholders.
* Extending on existing EU, national and regional frameworks.

Challenges

* Connecting stakeholders to an ecosystem of social innovations and social economy.
* Above-average and rapid growth of older adults.
* Life-long learning for all generations.
* Providing appropriate training and education to vulnerable groups.
* Intergenerational knowledge transfer.
* Identifying social innovations that are the invention, development and implementation phase.
* Potential knowledge loss due to retirement and turnover.
* Providing age friendly and inclusive environments.

### Relevant policy frameworks

* Agenda towards sustainable Europe by 2030
* Green paper on ageing
* European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan [COM/2021/102 final]
* Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy [COM(2021) 778 final]
* A Europe fit for the digital age

### Indicative key stakeholders

* National and public bodies.
* Research and academia.
* Business world and organizations.
* Professional and general public.
* Other interested stakeholders.
* Relevant EU and other funds managing authorities.

### Support to horizontal and cross-cutting topics

Activities under this Topic are well aligned to the horizontal and cross-cutting topics of the revised version of the action plan.

**Horizontal topics**

* **Enlargement.** The activities help involved countries to develop and better function in the field of social innovation/social economy and to provide a better environment that enables higher quality of life and improvements in wellbeing for individuals, groups and society as a whole. Also, all countries will be encouraged to participate in the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) strand of the European Social fund Plus (ESF+) and to develop their social innovation policies. Activities within this topic are aligned with stated in chapter 19 Social policy and employment and in chapter 26 Education and culture of aquis.
* **Capacity building.** All activities actively promote increased capacities of all included stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on policy and decision makers aiming recognizing social innovations as one of the drivers of an inclusive society.
* **Innovation and research.** The findings of this Topic can increase awareness and raise knowledge in relation to the number of research and innovation activities. In line with this topic, it is integral that the research world and academia are included. Also, the aim of these activities is to support innovative and sustainable social innovations systems.

**Cross-cutting topics**

* **Circular economy.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to this activity.
* **Green rural development.** The Topic does not include an explicit link to this activity. Using smart community/village concept to support vulnerable groups in rural areas, supporting living conditions based also on experiences of other macro regions.
* **Digitalization.** Digital skills are one important element when it comes to social innovations, especially as the availability of digital technologies provides value to knowledge transfer. One important avenue of this Topic is also to increase the overall levels of digital literacy.

### Action 5.4.1 Adriatic Ionian Ecosystem for Social Innovation

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| **Action 5.4.1** | Description of the Action | | | | | |
| Name of the Action | **Adriatic Ionian Ecosystem for Social Innovation** | | | | | |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Promoting existing social innovation and social economy ecosystems that include a broad range of stakeholders and promote collaboration and knowledge transfer. * Supporting the region with development of activities to overcome the challenges associated with ageing of the population. * Promoting measures aimed at strengthening the capacities and knowledge transfer of decision and policy makers in the field of social innovations/social economy. * Promoting active, strategic approaches and measures in the field of social innovations/social economy. * Sharing practices in developing training and education programs for vulnerable groups. * Increasing awareness about social innovation/social economy through different media channels. * Promoting existing and development of new measures to enhance age friendly environments.   Supporting activities related to life-long learning and knowledge-interaction for all age groups. | | | | | |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * Need to utilize the full potential of existing network for social innovations/social economy. * Gaining knowledge from the quadruple helix approach and its members. * High level of older adults in the region. * Higher level of individuals included in the process of life-long learning. * Need to increase training and education to vulnerable groups. * Need to promote age friendly and inclusive environments. * Lowering the level of knowledge loss due to retirement and turnover. * Enhancing connections between stakeholders engaged in the field of social innovation/social economy. | | | | | |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | Supporting the Adriatic Ionian region in enhancing awareness and knowledge about the field of social innovation/social economy and improve the quality of life and wellbeing of people, especially people in vulnerable groups such as older adults. This will enable the EUSAIR region a better response to current and future social problems. | | | | | |
| EUSAIR Flagships and strategic projects | / | | | | | |
| Indicators | Indicator name | Common Indicator name and code, if relevant | Baseline value and year | Target value and year | Data source |
| How to measure the EUSAIR activities under this Action? | OI: No. of activities supporting the share of practices in the field of social innovation/social economy | RCO81 Interreg: Participation in joint actions across borders | 0  (2023) | 6  (2030) | TSG5 |
| RI: Recommendations on EU level social innovation/economy initiatives adopted on macro-regional level | RCO83 Interreg: Strategies and action plans jointly developed  RCR79 Interreg: Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations | 0  (2023) | 2  (2030) | TSG5 |

## Indicative list of relevant funding sources

For addressing above mentioned, the indicative list of relevant funding sources is proposed:

* Relevant EU Cohesion Policy objective 4, for a more social and inclusive Europe,
* Relevant IPA Programming Framework: window 4 Competitiveness and inclusive growth.

The EUSAIR participating countries can utilize the following EU funding instruments 2021-2027:

**Applicable to the EU member states**

* the ESF plus fund,
* the Just Transition Fund,
* the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund,
* the Recovery and Resilience Fund,
* relevant ERDF Interreg programmes

**Applicable to EU member states in cooperation with EU candidate countries**

* Horizon (which supports the development of skills, the technology transfer and innovation in the sectors and clusters of culture, creativity, digitalization, innovation systems, food, agriculture, and environment),
* Creative Europe (enhancing the intercultural dialogue and the cultural heritage as well as the capacity of the European cultural and creative sectors, including the capacity of individuals working in those sectors, to cultivate talent, to innovate, to prosper and to generate jobs and growth),
* Erasmus + (to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional, and personal development of people in the fields of education and training of youth, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion),
* Digital Europe Programme,
* Invest EU funds Programme (which supports the employment, the youth and the SMEs along with the economic, social and territorial cohesion),
* Relevant ERDF-IPA Interreg programmes.

**Applicable to the EU candidate countries**

* IPA III thematic priorities:
* Applicable to mainstream IPA - Annex II of IPA III Regulation, Paragraph l) Fostering quality employment and access to the labour market and paragraph m) Promoting social protection and inclusion and combating poverty.
* Applicable to IPA-IPA Interreg programmes - Annex III of IPA III Regulation, Paragraph a) promoting employment, labour mobility and social and cultural inclusion across borders and Paragraph f) investing in youth, sport, education and skills.
* The Western Balkans Investment Fund Improving labour market participation, especially of young people and women, disabled people, disadvantaged groups, and minorities, will be a priority in the EUSAIR Action Plan and can strongly contribute to Pillar 5 objective.

# Annex

Besides the actions mentioned in the revised Action Plan, more ideas on possible future actions have been developed by the thematic steering groups in the course of the revision process. They can possibly picked up again during the implementation of the Action Plan. The principle of a rolling Action Plan implies that new actions can be brought on board easily.

## Possible further actions under Pillar 2 Transport

The transnational steering group of Pillar 2 has collected additional ideas for Actions on the transport Topics.

### Maritime transport

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Increase the resilience of maritime port infrastructure and IWW infrastructure to extreme weather events |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Identify which ports with the biggest needs to increase the resilience of port infrastructure * Leverage investments in the resilience of port infrastructure * Disseminate knowledge and good practices on port and IWW resilience in the region |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Need to increase safety and security of port operations and resilience of infrastructure |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Deploy telematic applications to improve safety and security within ports and for monitoring the status of infrastructure |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Collection of best practice on telematic applications to improve safety and security within ports and for monitoring the status of infrastructure * Identification of the areas with the biggest needs to invest in telematic applications to improve safety and security within ports and for monitoring the status of infrastructure |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Need to increase safety and security of port operations and resilience of infrastructure |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Improve port infrastructures and equipment for specific traffic types, developing the ports and port terminals in order to boost maritime transport, short-sea shipping capacity, ferry connectivity and access to/from the city centres |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Identification of the areas with the biggest needs to improve port infrastructures and equipment for specific traffic types * Leverage investments in port infrastructures and equipment for specific traffic types |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Need to improve the effectiveness of port infrastructure and equipment, hence the competitiveness of maritime transport services |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the a  Action | Improve sustainability and energy efficiency within ports including circular economy initiatives, waste management, optimisation of energy consumption, and green and smart logistics operations deployment for integrated port-hinterland connections |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Develop a handbook on sustainability and energy efficiency within ports * Promotion of sustainability and energy efficiency within ports |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Greening ports and maritime transport |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Boosting the uptake of alternative fuels and low carbon vessels in ports |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Disseminate knowledge and good practices in alternative fuels and low carbon vessels * Promote the uptake of alternative fuels and low carbon vessels in ports through EUSAIR events |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Greening ports and maritime transport |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Develop cold ironing solutions |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Disseminate knowledge and good practices on cold ironing solutions * Develop EUSAIR pilot projects to develop cold ironing solutions |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Greening ports and maritime transport |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

### Multimodal connectivity

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Increase ports connection to national railway lines with construction (or upgrading if existing) of rail connections to ports and rail infrastructure inside ports |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Identify which ports are most in need of connection to national railway lines * Leverage investments in port connection to national railway lines |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Improve multimodal connections to transport nodes |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Improve intermodal connections of Urban nodes to/from airports |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Identify the areas with the highest needs to improve intermodal connects of urban nodes to and from airports * Leverage investments in intermodal connects of urban nodes to and from airports |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Improve multimodal connections to transport nodes |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Avoid cumbersome procedures that are still leading to excessive delays for freight transport at border-crossing points |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Identify the most cumbersome procedures (and their reasons) still leading to excessive delays for freight transport at border-crossing points * Collect best practice solutions on how to overcome these procedures and simplify freight transport |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Harmonisation and interoperability of infrastructure and services among EUSAIR countries |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Define National and Cross-Country Transport Plans in Western Balkans to support seamless multimodal railways services |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Collect existing national and cross-country transport plans in Western Balkans to support seamless multimodal railways services * Identify gaps in the set of existing plans * Develop national and cross-country transport plans in Western Balkans to support seamless multimodal railways services |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Increase rail transport capacity, quality and road safety and resilience |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Upgrade existing road network in the WB to improve road safety  Upgrade infrastructure resilience to extreme weather events |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Identify the areas most in need to upgrading existing road networks * Leverage investments in upgrading existing road networks |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Increase rail transport capacity, quality and road safety and resilience |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

### Urban Nodes

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Improvement of LPT networks and services |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Initiate an EUSAIR peer to peer community on local transport planning |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Improvement of LPT networks and services |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Boost the renewal, electrification and the use of alternative fuels in public transport fleet |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Promote the renewal, electrification and the use of alternative fuels in public transport fleet * Collect and disseminate knowledge and best practice examples on the use of alternative fuels in public transport fleet |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Improvement of LPT networks and services |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Support the connection of bicycle paths to railway stations to enhance the use of bicycle for tourism on medium and long distance ranges |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Promote cycling paths to and parking infrastructure at railway stations |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Development of cycling solutions for local and tourist mobility |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Support urban design practices aimed at the safety of cycling and pedestrian |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Develop an EUSAIR best practice handbook on urban design aimed at the safety of cycling and pedestrians. * Promote urban design aimed at the safety of cycling and pedestrians |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Development of cycling solutions for local and tourist mobility |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Improve the availability of sustainable and innovative urban logistics solutions |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Set up an EUSAIR platform on sustainable and innovative urban logistics solutions * Set up an EUSAIR peer to peer community on sustainable urban transport plans |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Uptake technological and sustainable urban mobility solutions |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Support the improvement of safety standards for road infrastructures in urban areas |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Develop an EUSAIR best practice handbook on safety standards for road infrastructures in urban areas * Set up an EUSAIR peer to peer community on safety standards for road infrastructures in urban areas |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Uptake technological and sustainable urban mobility solutions |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Support the diffusion of sustainable private and/or shared transport modes and promote the diffusion of MaaS initiatives to integrate traditional and innovative mobility solutions |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * Set up an EUSAIR platform on mobility as a service (Maas) solutions, sharing practices across the EUSAIR |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | Uptake technological and sustainable urban mobility solutions |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? |  |

## Possible further actions under Pillar 3

The transnational steering group of Pillar 3 has collected additional ideas for actions on their Topics.

### Threats to coastal and marine biodiversity

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Coastal and marine biodiversity information network will be used by all stakeholders |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Implementation and further development of common platforms for data exchange and coastal/maritime planning analysis[[10]](#footnote-11)   + Promote the use of European Environment Information and Observation Network (and focal points) to gather macroregional information relevant for the implementation of Actions under subtopic 1.1 and subtopic 1.2.   + Promote the use of Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (IMAP) to gather macroregional information relevant for the implementation of Actions under subtopic 1.1 and subtopic 1.2.   + Promote the use MSP information network (The use of European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet) as a gateway to a range of data for MSP) |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Measures/interventions to adapt to climate change are insufficient, in particular considering that the Mediterranean has been identified as a hotspot by the IPCC.   + There is a lack of habitat maps covering the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, marine and maritime monitoring and cross-border data exchange. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Development of common platforms for data exchange and coastal/maritime planning analysis in Adriatic Ionian region. * Promote the use of IMAP to gather macroregional information. * Promote the use of MSP information network, including EMODnet, for better data for MSP. * Improved measures/interventions to adapt to climate change. * Improved habitat maps, monitoring, and cross-border data exchange. * Stakeholder more informed capacity building more improved |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Enhancing the network of marine protected areas |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Support the processes of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (UNEP MAP); of Fisheries Restricted Areas under the GFCM, by completing marine NATURA 2000 network and by designating further protected areas to form a coherent and representative network of MPAs, in accordance with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.   + Establishment of AIR marine protected areas network   + Cooperation and harmonisation of protected areas management planning   + Exchange of best practices among managing authorities of Marine protected areas |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Coverage in terms of offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) beyond 12 nautical miles is the lowest of all EU marine regions, while existing MPAs are often not adequately managed. There is also an insufficient integration between marine conservation and marine spatial planning processes. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Improved conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Mediterranean region. * Increased protection of important marine areas in the region, such as Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance under UNEP MAP and Fisheries Restricted Areas under GFCM. * Completion of the marine NATURA 2000 network under Birds and Habitats Directives, which would improve the protection of vulnerable species and habitats. * Establishment of a coherent and representative network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) according to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which would help to safeguard the health and resilience of marine ecosystems in the region. * Better management of protected areas, including joint or coordinated management with maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal management, to ensure their long-term sustainability and effectiveness. |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Promotion of sustainable growth of the Adriatic-Ionian Region by implementing integrate coastal zone management (ICZM) and maritime spatial planning (MSP) |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Support in drawing-up and implementation of coherent MSP/ICZM following the ecosystem approach, addressing land-sea interaction and adaptation to climate change as a tool to manage potential conflicts among various sectoral policies (preparation of guidelines on the application of ecosystem approach in transnationally coherent MSP for AIR, capacity building activities).   + Evaluation of implementation of ICZM and MSP on macroregional level (e.g. application of ecosystem-based approach, identification of needs for better transboundary coherence, identification of areas needing transboundary harmonisation).   + Share experiences in guiding sectoral development to minimize economic losses and the weakening of ecosystem services.   + Capitalization of EU funded projects 2014-2020 and exchange of best practice. |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Coverage in terms of offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) beyond 12 nautical miles is the lowest of all EU marine regions, while existing MPAs are sometimes not adequately managed. There is also an insufficient integration between marine conservation and marine spatial planning processes.   + Uncontrolled and illegal coastal development often leads to destruction of habitats and to the loss of the natural capacity of coastal territories to adapt to changes (resilience).   + The recent trends for offshore wind turbines and solar farms (floating or fixed) will present a new challenge in terms of spatial planning and the marine environment. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Coherent MSP/ICZM implementation: The action aims to support the development and implementation of coherent MSP/ICZM plans, which follow the ecosystem approach and address land-sea interactions and adaptation to climate change. The expected result would be the reduction of potential conflicts among various sectoral policies, better transboundary coherence, and harmonisation of areas. * Evaluation of ICZM and MSP: The action intends to evaluate the implementation of ICZM and MSP on a macroregional level, identifying areas that need transboundary harmonisation, application of ecosystem-based approach, and better transboundary coherence. * Guiding sectoral development: The action aims to share experiences in guiding sectoral development to minimize economic losses and the weakening of ecosystem services. * Capitalization of EU funded projects: The action seeks to capitalize on EU-funded projects from 2014-2020 and exchange best practices, resulting in more effective MSP/ICZM plans, better sectoral development, and improved evaluation processes. |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Cooperation in management of marine protected species |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Joint monitoring and management of marine protected species, incl. improve data collection and sharing.   + Identification of hot spot marine biogenic formations that are excluded from Marine protected areas or are not adequately managed.   + Evaluating the status of the selected marine protected species due to risks related to pollutants (e.g. marine litter, microplastics) and climate change.   + Capacity building for relevant sectors. |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Measures/interventions to adapt to climate change are insufficient, in particular considering that the Mediterranean has been identified as a hotspot by the IPCC.   + There is a lack of habitat maps covering the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, marine and maritime monitoring and cross-border data exchange.   + Overfishing, where it occurs, habitat degradation, and incidental catches pose serious threats to marine biodiversity. Monitoring and enforcement, in some cases, are insufficient. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Improved joint monitoring and management of marine protected species, including better data collection and sharing. * Identification and management of hot spot marine biogenic formations. * Improved measures to adapt to climate change. * Improved habitat maps and marine/maritime monitoring, and cross-border data exchange. * Reduction of overfishing, habitat degradation, and incidental catches to preserve marine biodiversity. |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | EUSAIR management of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Joint list of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) of transboundary concern.   + Improve data collection and sharing   + Coordination of action plans to address the priority pathways in line with IAS Regulation   + Transboundary eradication plans |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Increasing numbers of invasive alien species in farming activities where regulatory frameworks are lacking and ballast water discharge can pose a threat to the ecosystem. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * Development and implementation of joint action plans to address priority pathways of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) of transboundary concern, in line with the IAS Regulation. * Improved data collection and sharing on IAS, including the establishment of a joint list of IAS of transboundary concern. This will help in identifying and addressing the threat of increasing numbers of invasive alien species from aquaculture and ballast water discharge to the ecosystem functions. |

### Pollution of the sea and inland waters

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Improve marine litter management |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Best practice sharing, capacity building and coordination on marine litter management   + Cooperation on the assessment of the status, target setting, monitoring, reporting and implementation of measures related to marine litter and micro litter carried out in accordance with relevant provisions of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive   + Cooperation on drawing up and implementation of Land-based Source (LBS) National Action Plans under the UNEP/MAP Regional Plan for the Management of Marine Litter in the Mediterranean   + Definition of joint measures (e.g. clean-up programmes) |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Marine litter stemming both from land-based sources, lost and discarded fishing gear and recreational activities poses a serious problem, and there is insufficient marine litter monitoring, including litter deriving from riverine fluxes in the area.   + Microplastic pollution in seawater threatens human health with unknown impacts.   + Intense maritime transport activities and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation result in oil spills, including large scale pollution events, and noise pollution. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Increased sharing of best practices and capacity building on marine litter management.   + Improved cooperation on the assessment, monitoring, and implementation of measures related to marine litter in accordance with relevant provisions of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.   + Drawing up and implementation of joint Land-based Source (LBS) National Action Plans under the UNEP/MAP Regional Plan for the Management of Marine Litter in the Mediterranean.   + Development of joint measures, such as clean-up programmes, to address marine litter stemming from land-based sources, lost and discarded fishing gear, and recreational activities. |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Development and implementation of Adriatic-Ionian sub/regional oil spill contingency plan (ASOCSoP) |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Assessment and extension of the contingency plan for Northern Adriatic to other Adriatic-Ionian countries,   + Joint assessment of possible risks and future events or circumstances that could damage the Adriatic-Ionian macroregion environment   + Development of joint prevention and damage control measures |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Intense maritime transport activities and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation result in oil spills, including large scale pollution events, and noise pollution. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Development and implementation of a sub/regional oil spill contingency plan (ASOCSoP) for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, which includes an assessment of possible risks and future events, and the development of joint prevention and damage control measures.   + Extension of the contingency plan for the Northern Adriatic to other Adriatic-Ionian countries.   + Improved management and response to oil spills and other environmental risks in the Adriatic-Ionian macroregion. |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Reduction of nutrients, chemicals and pharmaceuticals from diffuse and point sources on land |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Support for development of suitable measures, practical solutions and policy recommendations for reduction of chemical and pharmaceutical substances.   + Developing and testing of solutions and practical in measures through cooperation in projects (incl. nature-based solutions such as nutrient trapping structures/methods)   + Knowledge transfer and capacity building incl. cross-sectoral activities and measures that reduce nutrient discharges to the Sea from diffused (agriculture) and point sources (urban areas, aquaculture)   + Improve monitoring and the knowledge base of nutrient flows and load   + Raise awareness among relevant stakeholders about best practices |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Intense maritime transport activities and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation result in oil spills, including large scale pollution events, and noise pollution. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Development of suitable measures, practical solutions, and policy recommendations for reducing chemical and pharmaceutical substances and implementing nature-based solutions for nutrient trapping structures/methods.   + Testing of solutions and practical measures through cooperation in projects, including cross-sectoral activities and measures that reduce nutrient discharges to the sea from diffused (agriculture) and point sources (urban areas, aquaculture).   + Improvement of monitoring and the knowledge base of nutrient flows and load, to enable better decision-making and more targeted interventions.   + Raising awareness among relevant stakeholders about best practices for reducing the discharge of nutrients, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals from diffused and point sources on land to the sea. |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Cooperation in order to regulate the intensive maritime transport |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Raise awareness about pollution deriving from maritime traffic and marine litter from ships   + Knowledge transfer and capacity building concerning negative effects of intensive maritime transport and possible solutions   + Testing of solutions and practical measures through cooperation in projects |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Intense maritime transport activities and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation result in oil spills, including large scale pollution events, and noise pollution. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Tackle the cross-border and transnational aspects of MSP and ICZM.   + Transfer of best practices developed by implementing EU Directives to EU candidate countries.   + Further development of common platforms for data exchange and coastal/maritime environment monitoring and spatial planning analysis, already created within previous projects and initiatives focusing on the AIR (capitalization of all the Interreg Programmes 2014-2020, especially ADRION).   + Joint effort in the analysis of climate change related risks and in the elaboration of adaptation measures. |

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| **Action** | Description of the Action |
| Name of the Action | Reduction and prevention of pollutants and in particular micro plastics with filtration and upgrading of treatment plants |
| What are the envisaged activities? | * + Conducting research and assessments to determine the extent and sources of microplastic pollution in seawater   + Developing and implementing effective filtration and treatment technologies for removal of microplastics from wastewater, including upgrading of treatment plants   + Encouraging the adoption of best practices by industry and individuals to reduce the use and release of microplastics into the environment   + Conducting public education and awareness-raising campaigns on the impacts of microplastic pollution on human health and the environment, and the importance of preventing it. |
| Which challenges and opportunities is this Action addressing? | * + Microplastic pollution in seawater threatens human health with unknown impacts. |
| What are the expected results/targets of the Action? | * + Reduction in the amount of microplastics and other pollutants in seawater, leading to improved water quality and reduced risks to human health and marine life.   + Upgraded treatment plants that are better equipped to filter out microplastics and other pollutants, leading to improved efficiency and effectiveness in treating wastewater.   + Increased awareness and knowledge among stakeholders and the general public about the impacts of microplastic pollution on the environment and human health, leading to increased support for measures to prevent and reduce microplastic pollution.   + Enhanced cross-border cooperation and collaboration in the implementation of measures to reduce and prevent microplastic pollution, leading to more coordinated and effective action in addressing this issue at the regional level. |

1. The Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) is a joint initiative of the EU, financial institutions (IFC, EIF, EBRD, CEB, KfW, WB, AFD), bilateral donors (Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Norway) and beneficiaries (Western Balkans countries), aimed at enhancing harmonisation and cooperation in investments for the socio-economic development of the region and contributing to the European perspective of the Western Balkans. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. According to Article 1 of the [Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1380), the CFP covers: (a) the conservation of marine biological resources and the management of fisheries and fleets exploiting such resources and (b) in relation to measures on markets and financial measures in support of the implementation of the CFP: fresh water biological resources, aquaculture, and the processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture products. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. **Mobility as a Service (MaaS)** integrates various forms of transport and transport-related services into a single, comprehensive, and on-demand mobility service. MaaS offers end-users the added value of accessing mobility through a single application and a single payment channel (instead of multiple ticketing and payment operations) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. New power transmission lines, their reinforcements to allow electricity trade, improve grid stability and the large-scale deployment of source, future-proofing - market integration of planned RES investments. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Power market coupling and integration according to steps including harmonisation of electricity transmission tariffs, addressing regulatory barriers and pending Treaty reform in the Energy Community , progressive market coupling, power purchase agreements and use of blockchain to facilitate electricity trading. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. It is in the interest of all EUSAIR participating countries to interconnect their power grids, as a means to optimise the deployment of low-carbon power generation, to maintain grid stability and security while expanding the use of intermittent and diversified power sources. Electricity storage, digitalisation of the power grid and smart grids offer further opportunities for reducing costs and improving the service. Electricity market integration, market coupling would be feasible should investments in new power infrastructure become a reality. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. The natural gas trading hub would allow to exchange contracts, enhance competition when feasible, while promoting security of natural gas supply. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Barcelona convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean sea is composed by the following protocols:

   the Protocol for the Prevention of the Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft (Barcelona, 1976);

   the Protocol concerning Cooperation in Preventing Pollution from Ships and, in Cases of Emergency, Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea (Valletta, 2002; in force from 17 March 2004);

   the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution from Land-Based Sources (Athens, 1980);

   The Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean (Barcelona, 1995);

   The Protocol concerning Pollution resulting from Exploration and Exploitation of the Continental Shelf, the Seabed and its Subsoil (Madrid, 1994);

   The Protocol on the Prevention of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (Izmir, 1996) ;

   The Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Mediterranean (Madrid, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. The initiative to establish a transnational platform for large carnivores in the area of the Dinaric-Balkan-Pindos was launched at the beginning of 2021. The aim of the platform is to establish a long-term mechanism for the exchange of experiences and data management of large carnivores (Slovenia to Greece for bears and to Bulgaria for wolves and lynxes). This approach reflects models established in other regions, such as the Alpine Convention or the Carpathian Convention, in which there is already established cooperation on the topic of tourism, agriculture, transboundary management of large animals, etc.

   In 2022, the continuation of activities is financed by the Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMU) which runs the Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP) to support projects aiming for environmental protection in the countries covered by the programme. The target regions of the programme are the states of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasian countries and Central Asia. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Examples:

    PORTODIMARE project developed the Geoportal of Adriatic and Ionian Region (GAIR), a platform providing access to datasets and analytical tools designed for MSP and ICZM, and tested the use of the GAIR in 4 action plans feeding national maritime or coastal plans - Responding to flagship 3;

    HARMONIA project developed a data portal on contaminants in the AIR, and 2 Adriatic – Ionian regional strategies, one for harmonised monitoring and assessment of contaminants in the marine environment, and one for a shared and harmonised evaluation of the risk due to contaminant dispersion from different sources of pollution – Responding to flagship 1;

    IMPRECO produced a Strategy for EcoSystem management and conservation, and a mapping of Eco-system (ES) and Ecosystem Services (ESS) available on the GAIR – Responding to flagship 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)