



Applicants Manual for PACs and DSP 2021—2027





GLOSSARY

AA	Audit Authority
AF	Application Form
AfR	Application for Reimbursement
AM	Applicants Manual
ASP	Associated Strategic Partner
CA	Certifying Authority
CfP	Call for Proposals
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation (EU) No 1060/2021 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021
DR	Danube Region
DRP	Danube Region Programme
DSP	Danube Strategy Point
EC	European Commission
EGTC	European grouping for territorial cooperation
EoI	Expression of Interest
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EUSDR	EU Strategy for the Danube Region
GoA	Group of Auditors
IP	Interreg Programme
JEMS	Programme Monitoring System
LA	Lead Applicant
LP	Lead Partner



MA/ JS	Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat
MC	Monitoring Committee
NCP	National Contact Point
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PA	Priority Axis of DRP / Priority Area of EUSDR
PAC	Priority Area Coordinator (EUSDR)
PP	Project Partner
SC	Subsidy Contract
SO	Specific Objective



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Disclaimer:

When launching the PAC/ DSP Call for proposals, the Danube Region Programme (DRP) document (IP) will not yet be approved by the European Commission.

Due to this, applicants shall be aware of the following risks:

- ✓ Content of the Programme may change following negotiations with the European Commission. This may lead to changes in the Programme's thematic scope, thus also affecting the relevance of project proposals submitted within the call.
- ✓ The Programme Monitoring Committee, (body responsible - among others - to approve the terms and conditions for Interreg support from the Programme, as well as the assessment and selection criteria for the project proposals, will be established only after the approval of the Programme by the European Commission. The Monitoring Committee may potentially change such conditions for support and selection criteria, if necessary, even if they were already approved by the Member States participating in the Task Force.

By submitting a project proposal, Applicants (Lead Applicants and all Partners) shall bear and accept the above risks. Under no circumstances can the Programme and the participating Partner States be held responsible or liable in any way for any claims, damages, losses, expenses, costs or liabilities whatsoever (including, without limitation, any direct or indirect damages for loss of profits, business interruption or loss of information).



Foreword

This manual outlines the framework for the applying for funding of the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators and the Danube Strategy Point, as defined under Specific Objective 4.1 of the DRP INTERREG Programme. The defined rules are based on the relevant European Regulations.

General information about the programme and transnational cooperation as well as the regulatory framework can be found on the programme website as well as in other supporting documents for the call <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/new-funding-2021-2027/how-to-apply> .

Restrictions or specific rules, if any, for a certain call will be explained in the Call announcements.

I. Danube Region Programme

I.1. Programme overview

I.1.1. Programme area



The programme area covers **nine EU Member States** (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany with two lands Baden-Württemberg and Bayern, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and **five non-EU Member States** (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine¹ with four provinces: Chernivetska Oblast, Ivano-Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast, Odessa Oblast), being composed of 69 NUTS2 regions.

I.1.2 Programme priorities and Specific Objectives

Programme mission and strategy

“From a region of barriers to a region of flows”

The Danube macro-region is a region of barriers, due to its highly fragmented status in political, socio-economic and administrative aspects as well. The effects of such fragmentation are decisive for the development of the whole region; therefore, the related border effects should be tackled and mitigated. This fragmented status of the Region, besides being a weakness, offers at the same time the opportunity for stronger cooperation and coordinated actions across these countries to overcome these barriers in the field of innovation, environment, governance and social issues. Project financed by DRP

¹ DRP will cover the entire territory of Ukraine provided that the part of the operations implemented outside programme area (the UA regions not officially involved in the programme) directly contribute to the objectives of the programme. (Reg. (EU) 2021/1059, Art.37)



should aim at closing the gap between the countries of the region in terms of innovation, environment, energy, social issues, governance in order to overcome the barriers and support a homogenous development.

Danube Region Programme 2021-2027		Priorities and Specific Objectives	
A smarter Danube Region	Enhancing innovation and technology transfer		
	Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship		
A greener, low-carbon Danube Region	Promoting renewable energy		
	Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster management		
	Improving water and sediment quality		
	Protecting and preserving the biodiversity in ecological corridors and eco-regions		
A more social Danube Region	Accessible, inclusive and effective labour markets		
	Accessible and inclusive quality services in education, training and lifelong learning		
	Socio-economic development through heritage, culture and tourism		
A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region	Increased institutional capacities for territorial and macro-regional governance		



I.1.3 EUSDR and Programme support to macro-regional cooperation

Since its adoption in June 2011, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region facilitates cooperation between EU and non-EU Member States in the Danube macro-region tackling common challenges. The Strategy seeks to create synergies and coordination between existing policies and initiatives taking place across the Danube Region.

The EUSDR is divided into 4 pillars and 12 Priority Areas. The EUSDR defines the targets² for each Priority Area. The EUSDR Action Plan defines the actions to be implemented by all priority areas and includes examples of projects for each priority area as well. The EUSDR Action Plan is a rolling document, subject to regular review, as appropriate.

Each Priority Area is managed by at least 2 Priority Area Coordinators (PACs)³, which are ensuring the implementation of the EUSDR. Their work is transnational, inter-sectorial and inter-institutional. PACs also support the reporting and evaluation of the EUSDR – they identify progress related to the improvements that actions and projects deliver and to achievement of targets. They also regularly provide information/ reports on their work. In doing all their tasks, PACs work together with PA's Steering Groups, which are “the expert drivers of the day-to-day implementation”, providing advice and assistance. Further to that, some Priority Areas created working groups, task forces, advisory bodies around sub-themes and tasks to support the work of the PACs and/or the steering groups.

The National Coordinators (NCs) are core strategic body within the governance structure. They have strategic coordination function within their national or regional government. The NCs coordinate and keep an overview of the participation of their country in the implementation of the EUSDR including all 12 Priority Areas. They also promote EUSDR and inform on national/ regional level the relevant stakeholders of key developments, on-going initiatives, including alignment of policies and funding.

The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) has been first established in 2015 and then its structure changed in 2018. Its primary role is to support the EUSDR implementation, communication, monitoring and evaluation and interlinking with DTP. Through various activities in those areas, DSP also provides necessary information, feedback and proposals for streamlining the operational and political decision-making processes.

For the funding period 2021-2027, the thematic priorities 1-3 and 4.2 of the Danube Transnational Programme have been aligned with the objectives of the Strategy to maximise the synergies and leverage effects on other financing sources in the programme areas. Danube Region Programme offers support for the EUSDR implementation, for example by financing projects directly supporting the EUSDR (as per assessment criteria

² The EUSDR targets are reviewed and revised (if needed) by EUSDR bodies and finally endorsed by High Level Group made up of official representatives of all EU Member States (non-EU partners being invited as appropriate). For EUSDR such process was held in 2011 and a second one finished in 2020.

³ List of the current Priority Area Coordinators is provided in Annex I.



defined jointly by the Programme and the Strategy) and their preparation (Seed Money Facility). In addition, as mentioned above, in this period the Programme provides direct support to the coordination activities of macro-regional cooperation.

I.1.4 PAC and DSP calls budget allocation

Call	Maximum budget EU contribution (Interreg funds)	Maximum budget total
PAC (maximum/ PA/ 6 years)	600 000,00	750 000,00
Total budget PAC support (all PA)	7 200 000,00	9 000 000,00
DSP (maximum/ 6 years)	4 400 000,00	5 500 000,00
EUSDR Annual forum (to be included in the DSP budget)	1 128 000,00	1 410 000,00
Total DSP budget	5 528 000,00	6 910 000,00



I.1.5 Programme management structures

The Danube Region Programme will use a shared management system to manage, coordinate and supervise its implementation, meaning that the Partner States and the Commission will be responsible for the management and control of the Programme.

The **Monitoring Committee (MC)**, consisting of the representatives of each participating country, supervises the implementation of the DRP and selects the projects to be financed. Its overall task is to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the overall Programme implementation process. To fulfil this task the MC is going to be assisted by the Joint Secretariat (JS).

Each participating Partner State is nominating a single **National Authority** within its administrative structure, to officially represent the given country in the transnational programme. **National Authorities are nominating the members of the Monitoring Committee**, who officially represent the given Partner State.

The **Managing Authority (MA)**, assisted by the **Joint Secretariat (JS)** hosted by the Prime Minister's Office of Hungary, is responsible for the overall Programme implementation. The JS will be the central contact point for potential project Applicants and Lead Partners of selected/running operations.

The **Certifying Authority (CA)** is responsible for drawing up and submitting certified statements of expenditure and applications for payment to the European Commission and receiving payments from the EC. The CA shall use the payments received from the EC to reimburse the Lead Partners.

The **Audit Authority (AA)** is responsible for ensuring that audits are done in the framework of the management and control systems and are based on an appropriate sample of operations and on the annual accounts. The AA will be assisted by a Group of Auditors (GoA) comprising the representatives of responsible bodies of each Partner State.

National Contact Points (NCPs) will be set up by each participating country to complement transnational activities of the MA and the JS and by involving stakeholders from the national level as well as to contribute to the national and transnational programme management and provide guidance and advice to potential applicants and Project Partners.

National Controllers will be designated by each Partner State to ensure the compliance of expenditure incurred by the Project Partners with the Community and national rules, by carrying out verifications covering administrative, financial, technical and physical aspects of operations. Controllers shall be nominated in line with the national provisions of each



Partner State. Each country participating in the DRP will be responsible for verifications carried out on its territory.

II. Project requirements

II.1. Partnership requirements

II.1.1 Eligibility of partners

According to their legal status, the following types of partners are eligible for funding within the Danube Region Programme:

- ✓ Local, regional, national public bodies
- ✓ Bodies governed by public law⁴
- ✓ International organisations acting under the national law of any DRP Partner State or under international law, provided that, for the purpose of the project, they fulfil the EU, programme and national requirements in terms of control, validation of costs and audits, can be considered as eligible for funding. In particular, these organisations should express in written form (through a form of declaration) that:
 - They agree to comply with applicable community policies, including the respect of principles on public procurement;
 - They accept the national control requirements set in the framework of the Danube Region Programme;
 - They agree to accept the controls and audits by all bodies entitled to carry out such controls in the framework of the Programme, including the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat, the Audit Authority and the European Court of Auditors as well as the relevant national authorities of the Member State in which the international organisation acting as Project Partner is located. Storage of all documents required for these controls must allow performing them in the geographical area covered by the Danube Region Programme;
 - They assume the final financial liability for all sums wrongly paid out.

⁴ *Bodies governed by public law* as defined in Article 2(1) of DIRECTIVE 2014/24/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing DIRECTIVE 2004/18/EC (OJ L 94, 28.3.2014).

The definition of a body governed by public law is the following according to Article 2(1) of DIRECTIVE 2014/24:

'bodies governed by public law' means bodies that have all of the following characteristics:

- ✓ They are established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character (being not relevant the industrial and commercial character)
- ✓ They have legal personality, and
- ✓ They are financed, for the most part, by the state, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; or are subject to management supervision by those authorities or bodies; or have an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law



- ✓ Private bodies: In the context of this programme, the concept of “private bodies” means all organisations which are founded by private law such as (but depending on the country) chambers of commerce, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, private enterprises coming from EU Member States. They may receive funding if they fulfil the following criteria:
 - They have legal personality
 - They make the results of the project available to the general public
 - They apply the principles of public procurement

Only legal entities listed in the approved Application Form are eligible for funding and may report their costs. In order to ensure a proper audit trail, the MA/JS needs to know which organisations receive programme funding and whether they are eligible according to the programme rules. Therefore, an “umbrella” type of partnership structure, where one partner collects funding and represents other partners without naming them is not possible.

II.1.2 Lead Partner (LP) principle and requirements

In line with the “Lead Partner principle” each project partnership shall appoint one organisation acting as LP. The LP takes full financial and legal responsibility for the implementation of the entire project.

The LP can be either from DRP EU Member States or from DRP non-EU Member States.

The Lead Partner organisation should follow the legal requirements set out in section II.1.2.1. Lead Partner organisations can be public bodies, bodies governed by public law, private non-profit institutions or international organisations. Furthermore, private non-profit bodies acting as Lead Partner have to demonstrate that:

- ✓ They have no debts to the state budget
- ✓ No liquidation or bankruptcy procedure has been initiated against them
- ✓ They are financially autonomous
- ✓ They are solvent (meaning that they can cover their medium and long-term commitments)



Private non-profit LPs will demonstrate the fulfilment of the criteria above through the Declaration of co-financing and pre-financing statement.

Private enterprises cannot be Lead Partners

The Lead Partner in the application phase is called the Lead Applicant (LA), who, together with the Project Partners, are responsible for drafting the Application Form and submitting it to the MAJS. After approval of the project, a Subsidy Contract will be concluded between the MAJS and the LP, being formally the final beneficiary of the Interreg funds and the only direct link between the project partnership and the Programme.

According to Art.26 of the EU Reg. 1059/2021 the Lead Partner shall:

- ✓ lay down the arrangements with the other partners in an agreement comprising provisions that, inter alia, guarantee the sound financial management of the respective Union funds allocated to the Interreg operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid;
- ✓ assume responsibility for ensuring implementation of the entire Interreg operation; and
- ✓ ensure that expenditure presented by all partners has been paid in implementing the Interreg operation and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the partners, and is in accordance with the document provided by the MA pursuant to Article 22(6).

II.1.3 Geographic eligibility rules

The Programme covers 14 countries, 9 of them EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany-Baden Württemberg and Bayern, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and 5 non-EU member states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Republic of Serbia and Ukraine with four provinces: Chernivetska Oblast, Ivano-Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast, Odessa Oblast). As a general rule, EU financing is only provided to Project Partners located in the Programme Area⁵. The geographic location of an EGTC is considered to be in the country where it is registered and its costs shall be verified according to the control system established in that Partner State.

⁵ The Partner States and the MAJS may decide that for certain call for proposals partners outside of the programme area are allowed to participate as financial partners (exemption making organisations from DE and UA as described above). They will be confirmed with the NCPs



Please note: Exceptions

Legal entities located in **Germany** (in the sense of legal registration) but outside the Programme area can receive EU financing, if:

- a. Are competent in their scope of action for certain parts of the eligible area, e.g. federal ministries, federal agencies, national research bodies which are registered outside the Programme area etc.,
- b. Fulfil the basic requirements specified in point II.1.1 and
- c. Carry out activities which are for the benefit of the regions in the Programme area.

Danube Region Programme covers the entire territory of **Ukraine** by considering that the part of the operations implemented outside programme area (the UA regions not officially involved in the programme) directly contribute to the objectives of the programme.

Based on the geographical location the following two types of partners are identified:

- ✓ **LP and PPs:** receiving directly financial contribution from the Programme (by Interreg funds) and bearing full responsibility for their budget.
- ✓ **ASPs (Associated Strategic Partners):** being not directly financed by the Programme but – eventually – “sponsored” by a directly financed partner that is bearing the responsibility for their participation in the project. Associated Strategic Partner (ASP) in the DRP is an organisation whose participation is considered crucial for the added value given to the partnership. As an example, ASP can potentially be a ministry, which does not want to apply and contribute financially because of administrative burdens and financial reasons but it is interested to participate in a project for ensuring the political sustainability of delivered outputs and results.

ASPs are located either in an:

- ✓ EU country (inside or outside the Programme area) or in
- ✓ Non-EU country of the Programme area



Expenditure is limited to reimbursement from the Programme of *travel and accommodation* costs related mainly to their participation in project meetings, which shall be finally borne by any of the institution acting directly financed partner in order to be considered as eligible.

Summary of the proposed type of partners

Type of Partner	Location	Budget	Budget lines ⁶	
Directly financed partners	LEAD PARTNER (LP)	14 countries of the Programme Area	Separate	All
	Project Partner (PP)	14 countries of the programme area	Separate	All
Indirectly financed partners	Associated Strategic Partners (ASPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ EU countries ➤ Non-EU countries of the Programme Area 	Part of a "sponsoring" directly financed partner budget	TRAVEL and ACCOMODATION

II.1.4 Composition of the partnership

Each project has to involve at least **two financing project partners from two different countries** of the Programme area: the Lead Partner and at least another project partner. At least one project partner has to be located on the territory of an EU Member State of the Programme area.

A European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is eligible as sole beneficiary provided that the above-mentioned minimum requirements are complied with. However, to be eligible as sole beneficiary, an EGTC must be established in one of the Danube Region Programme Partner States.

The number of partners may vary between the projects depending on the character of the project as well as the internal governance of a PA and DSP. The project partnership should be comprised in a strategic manner and well adapted to its purpose. Keeping this in mind, the partnership should always reflect on the optimal number and role of partners to be

⁶ The eligible expenditure of the DRP include the following budget lines: staff costs, office and administrative expenditure, travel and accommodation costs, external expertise and service costs, equipment expenditure, infrastructure and works



involved. No maximum limit of partners is fixed at the programme level.⁷The responsibilities of the Project Partners are listed below:

- ✓ Carrying out activities planned in the approved Application Form (AF) and agreed in the Partnership Agreement
- ✓ Submitting reports of project activities to payment claims
- ✓ Assuming responsibility of any irregularity in the expenditure which it has declared, repaying the Lead Partner any amounts unduly paid in accordance of the Partnership Agreement signed between the Lead Partner and the respective project partner
- ✓ Carrying out information and communication measures for the public about the project activities

II.1.4.1 Specific Requirements for PAC

Organisations responsible for the coordination of the specific Priority Area of the EUSDR Action Plan as nominated by the EUSDR governance bodies are eligible to apply for the PAC support.

As a general rule, one project covers one Priority Area of the EUSDR; therefore, it should involve at least two PACs responsible for coordination of that PA. Furthermore, each Priority Area Coordinator can be represented in only one application.

II.1.4.2 Specific Requirements for DSP

Organisations responsible for the implementation of regular/ongoing tasks during entire project life-time (“core-partnership”) as well as the ones responsible for the implementation of the EUSDR Annual Fora (usually the organisation representing the periodical EUSDR Presidency) as nominated by the EUSDR governance bodies are eligible to apply for the DSP support.

Organisation of Annual Fora through the DSP

Among the tasks of the DSP, the organisational, financial and technical support to the EUSDR Presidency for the EUSDR Annual Forum is expected. The Annual Forum is to be jointly organised by the EUSDR Presidency, DG REGIO of the EC and the MAJS of the DRP.

⁷ Further details on how to set up the partnership are included in the guideline on how to develop a successful project. <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/new-funding-2021-2027/how-to-apply>



Therefore, the topic, the agenda and the speakers of each Annual Forum will be agreed upon jointly by the three parties.

The institution of the incumbent EUSDR Presidency shall be added as PP to the core-partnership for the sake of carrying out the specific task of organising the Annual Forum. After the technical and financial finalisation of the Annual Forum the partner can withdraw from the project or remain in the partnership as “silent partner” (without taking over any further tasks and without generating any further expenditure).

The budget for the given Annual Forum allocated to the DSP initial partnership, is to be allocated to the incumbent EUSDR Presidency as new partner. A maximum budget of 235,000.00 EUR (188,000.00 EUR to be co-financed by the DRP, with 47,000.00 EUR of national co-financing - provided by the incumbent EUSDR Presidency either as full partner or as regulated in a specific contract) is eligible to be spent for the preparatory activities and for the actual event each year. This budget refers to: rooms’ reservation, catering (the catering can cover lunch and coffee breaks, as well as dinner reception), event materials, travel and accommodation of speakers and guests, event website and communication materials, and overall event organisation.

The amounts not spent for the organisation of the EUSDR Annual Forum will be returned to the programme. In this respect the MA/ JS together with the DSP will analyse the spending in relation to the Annual Forum and, in case there are savings will proceed with the modification of the project budget.

II.1.5 Financial capacity of project partners and national co-financing

The Programme works based on reimbursement principle, which means that project partners have to pre-finance their activities and the amounts paid are reimbursed after the submission and evaluation of the project progress reports. As a general rule, progress reports are submitted twice a year and cover a six-month period each. Since the timeframe between the payment made by a PP and the reimbursement of its Interreg funding part is approximately up to 10 months, Project Partners have to have sufficient cash-flow throughout the whole project implementation to be able to finance their project activities.

Under the Danube Region Programme, projects are co-financed by Interreg funds⁸. The co-financing rate per directly financed partner is up to 80% EU contribution. The remaining budget (20%) can be covered by state contribution (where applicable) and/or

⁸ The programme task force decided to use Interreg funds which are pooling together ERDF, IPA and NDICI funds into one single allocation at programme level from which projects are financed.



own sources (can be public or private) of the directly financed partner and/or other contribution (e.g. regional/local/other sources).

Please note: *State contribution* has to be indicated in the AF only in case the Partner State provides national public contribution at state level to a directly financed partner specifically for the implementation of the projects selected by the Monitoring Committee, and therefore the amount is covered in total or partially by the state.

Own resources of a directly financed partner, whose institutional budget is state financed is considered as *public contribution*, but not *state contribution*

Each Partner State applies a different system in providing state public contribution. An overview on the national co-financing system of the DRP Partner States is available on the Programme website. However, as more detailed information might be available at national level, Partner States, through the DRP NCP, should be contacted in order to clarify the position.

II. 1.6 Cooperation criteria

In order to be eligible, projects must contribute to at least three out of the following four cooperation criteria.

- ✓ Joint development (compulsory) – i.e. partners have to be involved in an integrated way in developing ideas, priorities and actions in the project development process.
- ✓ Joint implementation (compulsory) – i.e. project activities must be carried out by partners in a cooperative way that ensures clear content-based links and be coordinated by the Lead Partner.
- ✓ Joint financing– i.e. the joint project budget shall be organised in line with activities carried out by each Project Partner. The LP is responsible for the administration and reporting towards the programme bodies as well as the distribution of the funds to the partners.



- ✓ Joint staffing – i.e. the project should not duplicate functions within the partnership. In particular, project management functions should be appointed only once at project level.

II.2 Projects' duration

The maximum duration of the projects is fixed in the call announcement. However all projects financed by DRP have to be finalised by 31 December 2028.

II.3 Activities outside programme area

Project Partners may implement activities outside the Programme area under the following conditions:

- ✓ The activity contributes to the objective of the Programme
- ✓ The activity is essential and is in the benefit of the programme area.

These activities have to be included and described in the Application Form.

II.4 Horizontal principles

II.4.1.1 EU Charter of fundamental rights, gender equality, non-discrimination, sustainable development

Projects financed by the programme have to respect the horizontal principles of equal opportunity, non-discrimination (including based on national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age or mental or physical disability), gender equality, sustainable development and accessibility (green public procurement, nature-based solutions, lifecycle costing criteria, standards going beyond regulatory requirements, avoiding negative environmental impacts, climate proofing and 'energy efficiency first principle') during project design and implementation and will have to embed them in the work plan. In the application phase the Lead Partners will be requested to explain in the Application Form how these horizontal principles are followed and how they are integrated in the activities (and this will be subject to quality assessment), while during implementation the partnership has to report in each Project Progress Report how the horizontal principles have been applied in practice providing evidence in this respect.

II.4.2. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), contribution to climate and biodiversity objectives



During the programme implementation the responsible Project Partners are requested to carry out SEA procedure in accordance with their respective national regulations in case a cooperation project supported by the Programme intends to develop a strategy or plan at transnational, national or local level in a thematic field with potential significant impact on the environment including nature, as well as on health, which falls into the scope of the SEA Directive and/or that of the UN Protocol on strategic environmental assessment of the Espoo Convention. The responsible Project Partners shall also follow their respective national regulations on the Environmental Impact Assessment within the environmental licensing procedure in case a cooperation project intends to plan, implement investments with potential significant adverse environmental impacts, on nature and protected areas falling into the scope of the EIA Directive and/or that of the UN Espoo Convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context.

II.4.3 New European Bauhaus⁹

During project development the partners should create synergies with the New European Bauhaus initiative and integrate its core values that are in line with the programme Specific Objectives in their proposals, if relevant.

II.5 Durability of operations

Durability of project outputs and results is crucial for ensuring territorial impact and long-term benefits which continue after the project end, in order to reach the project`s overall objectives. Therefore, projects have to ensure that outputs obtained and results achieved are durable and suitable to be continued after project closure. This may include follow-up activities, handover to the policy level, ownership, etc. In order to achieve durability, projects need to adopt from the beginning a long-term, strategic perspective that leads to desired results for the target groups over an extended time frame. In order to achieve such long-term benefits, it is essential to consider needs of key stakeholders as well as the institutional context already when designing the project. In particular, key stakeholders should be actively involved from the early stages of the project development.

II.6 Public Procurement¹⁰

Beneficiaries are encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures.

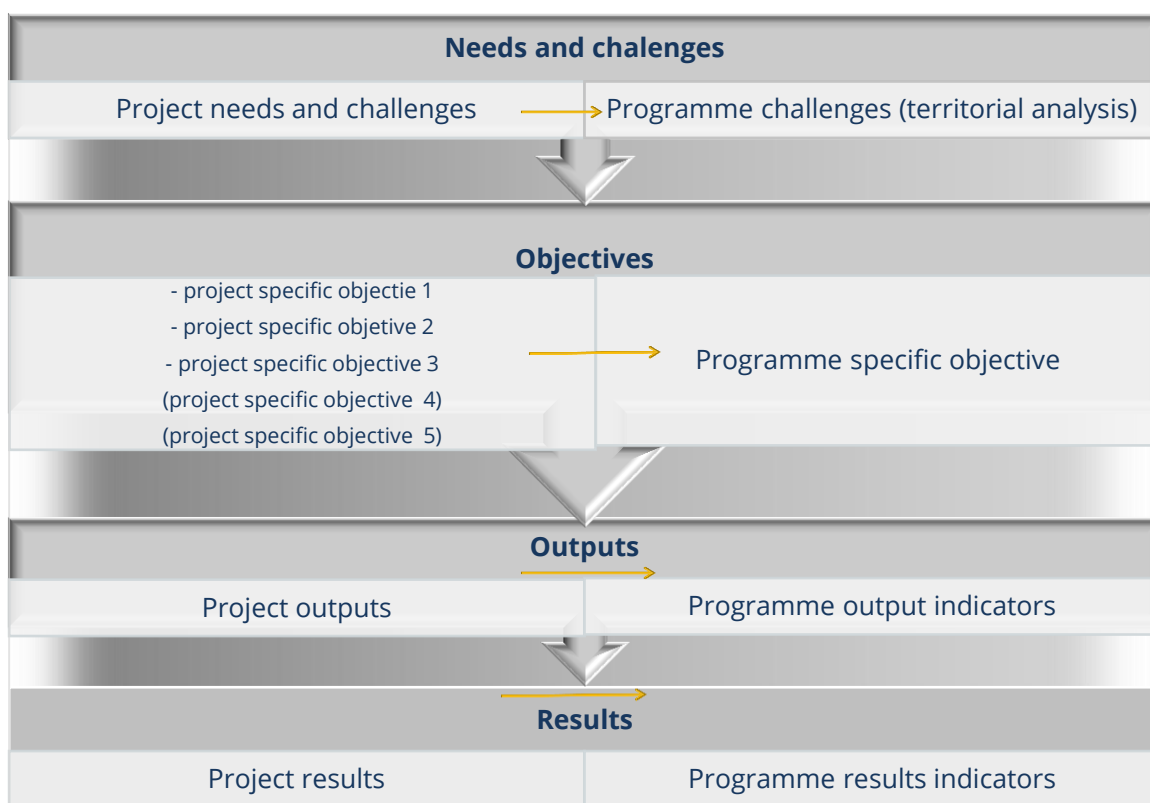
⁹ For further details on the New European Bauhaus please consult the following link https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en

¹⁰ Further details on public procurement at programme level can be found in the Eligibility of Expenditure document

II.7 Intervention logic¹¹

The core principle of Danube Region Programme is result-orientation, the basis for the result-orientation approach being the **“change”**. Therefore, all the projects that will be approved and implemented need to embrace the same principle. The intervention logic should reflect the path of the project and the necessary steps that will lead to change. It should be clear, simple and easy to monitor and implement.

The coherence of the project intervention logic (projects specific objectives, activities, outputs and results) with the programme intervention logic (specific objectives, output indicators and results indicators) is a pre-condition for a project to be funded under DRP. Projects not showing a clear link to a programme specific objective and/or not contributing to the respective programme results will not be funded in the programme’s framework.



The intervention logic should clearly describe objectives, planned activities, outputs and expected results of the project. These terms are defined as follows:

¹¹ A detailed description on how to develop the intervention logic can be found in the document: *How to develop a transnational project* <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/new-funding-2021-2027/how-to-apply>



- Project specific objective - describes the specific and immediate effects of the project and it can be realistically achieved within the implementation period.
- Project result - constitutes the immediate advantage of carrying out the project, telling us about the benefit of using the project main outputs..
- Project output - tells what has actually been produced for the money given to the project. It can be captured by a programme output indicator, and directly contributes to the achievement of the project results.
- Project activity - describes a specific task performed in order to achieve the Specific Objectives that contribute to the development of the project outputs, for which resources are used.
- Project deliverable - is a side-product or service of the project that contributes to the development of a project's main output.

II.7.1 Programme outputs and results indicators¹²

ATTENTION: Projects have to contribute to the following programme output and result indicators to be considered eligible (unless different rules are set in a specific call).

- RCO118 Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies
- RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion

Output indicator	Definition of indicator	Result indicator	Definition of the indicator
RCO 84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	→ The indicator counts the pilot actions developed jointly and implemented by supported projects. The scope of a jointly developed pilot action could be to test e.g. procedures, new instruments, tools etc. experimentation or the		

¹² For further details and examples on output and results indicators please check the Programme output and results indicators document



<p>RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions</p>	<p>transfer of practices. In order to be counted by this indicator,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the pilot action needs not only to be developed, but also to be implemented within the project <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the implementation of the pilot action should be finalised by the end of the project. <p>Jointly developed pilot action implies the involvement of organisations from the partnership in its implementation.</p> <p>The indicator counts the number of jointly developed solutions from joint pilot actions implemented by supported projects. In order to be counted in the indicator, an identified solution should include indications of the actions needed for it to be taken up or to be upscaled.</p> <p>A jointly developed solution implies the involvement of organisations from the partnership in the drafting and design process of the solution.</p>	<p>RCR 104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations</p>	<p>The indicator counts the number of solutions, other than legal or administrative solutions, that are developed by supported projects and are taken up or up-scaled during the implementation of the project or within one year after project completion. The organisation adopting the solutions developed by the project may or may not be a participant in the project. The uptake / up-scaling should be documented by the adopting organisations in, for instance, strategies, action plans etc.</p>
<p>RCO118 Organisations cooperating for the multi-level</p>	<p>The indicator counts the number of legal entities supported by the programme, listed in the</p>	<p>RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after</p>	<p>The indicator counts the organisations cooperating across borders after the</p>



governance of macro-regional strategies	<p>financing agreements, and also contributing to the multi-level governance of macro regional strategies.</p> <p>As a concept, the multi-level governance refers to collective decision making processes where authority and influence are shared between stakeholders operating at multiple levels of governance and in different policy sectors. This concept may be customised and understood according to the context of each macro regional strategy.</p>	project completion	<p>completion of the supported projects. The organisations are legal entities involved in project implementation. The cooperation concept should be interpreted as having a statement that the entities have a formal agreement to continue cooperation, after the end of the supported project. The cooperation agreements may be established during the implementation of the project or within one year after the project completion. The sustained cooperation does not have to cover the same topic as addressed by the completed project.</p>
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The interconnection between the programme outputs and results indicators is reflected in the scheme below:

Output indicator	Result indicator
RCO84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions	RCR 104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations
RCO118 Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies	RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion



II.7.2. PAC project objectives, work plans, activities and outputs

In order to support the PACs in meeting the Programme Specific Objective 4.1, the following **set of pre-defined specific objectives** is to be considered when preparing the project proposals:

1. To coordinate Steering Groups and to develop activities for a better involvement of the Steering Group Members in the Priority Areas' activities for implementing the EUSDR Action Plan; providing coordinated support to EUSDR monitoring and evaluation.
2. To facilitate the embedding of the EUSDR into EU-funded programmes
3. To support policy development and policy initiatives as well as usage of cutting-edge knowledge (EU/ international, as appropriate).
4. To enhance coordination between core PA stakeholders and to encourage their involvement in the implementation and updating of the EUSDR
5. To facilitate on-going projects and development of future projects for the Priority Area, specifically project generation, partner search and identification of funding opportunities for the Priority Area stakeholders.

A minimum of 3 specific objectives (among them specific objective 1 is mandatory for all PAs), must be selected by a PA, when preparing and submitting a project proposal.

A better inclusion of non-EU-member states shall be considered as horizontal principle relevant under all specific objectives. Additionally, the encouragement and better inclusion of youth into the implementation of the EUSDR action plan shall be considered by relevant PAs.

Activities proposed by the PACs should be organized in a Work Plan. The Work Plan is composed by **pre-defined mandatory and/or optional activities** which are linked to the specific objectives chosen by applicants. Further activities to support the specific objectives can be defined by applicants.

Pre-defined compulsory and optional activities are, furthermore, linked to a set **of pre-defined mandatory and/or optional outputs**. Further outputs can be defined and applicants are recommended to do so in order to best capture the project's concrete contribution the Programme Specific Objective 4.1. The achievement of outputs will be further reported in documents such as the DRP implementation reports to the EC, programme evaluations, etc.



All activities and outputs selected or defined should be directly linked to the role of the respective PACs in the implementation of the EUSDR and its Action Plan.

Management, publicity and communication are to be considered as horizontal tasks, contributing to the achievement of each specific objective selected. They cover the “conventional” daily management activities (e.g. allocation of staff, planned travels but only related to project management – e.g. meeting with co-PAC(s), reporting, internal communication, general administrative support) and dissemination activities (e.g. posters, leaflets, update, content wise, of the specific PA website and other communication activities for better communicating PA’s work and results, as well as those related to public debate(s) on the macro-regional approach).

Pre-defined activities and related outputs per specific project objective:

Specific objective 1: To coordinate Steering Groups and to develop activities for a better involvement of the Steering Group Members in the Priority Areas’ activities for implementing the EUSDR Action Plan; providing coordinated support to EUSDR monitoring and evaluation.

Mandatory activity:

- Planning, organization and implementation of SG meetings and work with SG members through sharing of information, consultation, coordination and other communication with the SGs.

Optional activity:

- Planning and implementing evidence-based measures for the further development of the PA.

Mandatory output/deliverable:

- Documentation of implemented SG meetings

Optional output/deliverable:

- Action plan for strengthening SG capacities and performance

Specific objective 2: To facilitate the embedding of the EUSDR into EU-funded programmes

Mandatory activity:



- Exchange and cooperation of PAs (PACs and SGs) with Cohesion Policy programmes IPA/NDICI Programme Authorities in fields of interest to the PA.
- Exploiting the funding opportunities of the EC centrally managed programmes. Cooperation with MA networks and general coordinating with other institutions engaged in the embedding process.

Mandatory output/deliverable:

- Documentation of embedding activities

Specific objective 3: To support policy development and policy initiatives as well as usage of cutting edge knowledge (EU/ international, as appropriate).

Mandatory activity:

- Developing and preparing thematic policy initiatives, studies or recommendations and activities on the policy level and promoting policy exchange, mutual learning and knowledge sharing.

Mandatory output/deliverable:

- Policy documents (studies, recommendations, handbooks, guidelines etc.)

Optional output/deliverable:

- Implemented further policy initiatives and tools (large-scale policy-focused conferences, policy-networks, platforms for policy exchange etc.)

Specific objective 4: To enhance coordination between core PA stakeholders and to encourage their involvement in the implementation and updating of the EUSDR

Mandatory activities:

- Coordination actions among EUSDR PAs, further relevant EUSDR bodies/actors with focus on the involvement of youth (where relevant) and contributing to the main EUSDR developments and initiatives.
- Coordination actions between EUSDR PAs and EU institutions as well as other macro-regional, EU-level or international key-actors.
- Improving the coordination between EUSDR PAs and further stakeholders .

Optional output/deliverable:



- Solutions for strengthening the capacities and performance of PA working groups
- Implemented high level visibility measures (ministerial, macro-regional, EU- or international level)
- Stakeholder cooperation schemes and networks

Specific objective 5: To facilitate on-going projects and development of future projects for the Priority Area, specifically project generation, partner search and identification of funding opportunities for the Priority Area stakeholders.

Mandatory activity:

- Supporting project development as well as capitalisation and networking of ongoing macro-regional projects.

Mandatory output/deliverable:

- Projects supported (development and/ or implementation)

II.7.3. DSP project objectives, Work plan, activities and outputs

In order to support the DSP in meeting the Programme Specific Objective 4.1, the following **set of pre-defined specific objectives** is to be considered when preparing the project proposals:

Specific objectives:

1. To provide support to the EUSDR core-governance and core-stakeholders in the implementation of the EUSDR; supporting the internal and external communication aiming for an increased visibility of the EUSDR in the macro-region and beyond.
2. To strengthen the internal and external horizontal coordination of the EUSDR on cross-cutting issues between Priority Areas and National Coordinators as well as on the embedding of the EUSDR into EU-funded programmes.
3. To further develop and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation framework for the EUSDR as basis for evidence-based decision making and for visualizing the added-value of the EUSDR. To coordinate EUSDR reporting.
4. To develop and support measures aiming to improve stakeholder involvement in EUSDR Action Plan implementation and / or revision

All four pre-defined specific objectives must be addressed by applicants, when preparing and submitting a project proposal.



Additionally, a **better inclusion of non-EU-member states shall be considered as horizontal principle relevant under all specific objectives.**

Activities proposed by applicants should be organized in a Work Plan. The Work Plan is composed by **pre-defined mandatory activities** which are linked to the four compulsory specific objectives defined above. Further activities can be defined by applicants,

Pre-defined compulsory activities are, furthermore, linked to a set **of pre-defined mandatory and/or optional outputs**. Further outputs can be defined and applicants are recommended to do so in order to best capture the project's concrete contribution to the Programme Specific Objective 4.2. The achievement of outputs will be further reported in documents such as the DRP implementation reports to the EC, programme evaluations, etc.

Management and communication are to be considered as horizontal tasks, contributing to the achievement of each specific objected selected. They cover the "conventional" daily management activities (e.g. allocation of staff, planned travels but only related to project management, reporting, internal communication, general administrative support) and dissemination activities (e.g. posters, leaflets, etc.).

Pre-defined activities and related outputs per specific project objective:

Specific objective 1: To provide support to the EUSDR core-governance and core-stakeholders in the implementation of the EUSDR; supporting the internal and external communication aiming for an increased visibility of the EUSDR in the macro-region and beyond.

Mandatory activities:

- Providing support for decision making of EUSDR bodies relating to the core-governance and -management of the EUSDR and the implementation of the EUSDR Action Plan.
- Providing support to the respective EUSDR Presidency for planning and implementing the Annual Forum.
- Increasing the visibility of the EUSDR and ensuring smooth internal as well as external communication based on the existing communication strategy; evaluation and further development of the existing communication strategy.
- **Mandatory outputs/deliverables:**
 - Implemented Annual Forum
 - Updated EUSDR Communication Strategy



- Documentation of implemented NC meetings, PAC-meetings, NC-PAC meetings, or other main events in relation to the EUSDR core-governance

Specific objective 2: To strengthen the internal and external horizontal coordination of the EUSDR on cross-cutting issues as well as on the embedding of the EUSDR into EU-funded programmes.

Mandatory activities:

- Providing support for NCs and PACs with respect to EUSDR-internal horizontal coordination measures.
- Facilitating a stronger involvement of EUSDR core-stakeholders (including relevant EU-institutions or bodies) into PA and Steering Group activities
- Building stronger ties, facilitating exchange and promote closer cooperation and exchange between the EUSDR and further relevant stakeholders (regional, national and international alike) and encouraging the exchange of experiences with other relevant programmes, as well as with other macroregional strategies.
- Facilitating close contact with the Managing Authorities of the Cohesion Policy instruments and other European Funding instruments and other financing institutions and facilitation of MA-Networks. Monitoring and analyzing the state of embedding.

Mandatory output/deliverable:

- Interim and final report/analysis on embedding

Specific objective 3: To further develop and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation framework for the EUSDR as basis for evidence-based decision making and for visualizing the added-value of the EUSDR. To coordinate EUSDR reporting other than to the DTP.

Mandatory activities:

- Further developing and implementing an EUSDR monitoring, evaluation and data collection system in close cooperation with the NCs, PACs, European Commission and appropriate experts
- Supporting the revision of EUSDR core-documents, EUSDR core-decision making processes and EUSDR reporting (other than PAC reporting to the DTP) based on evidence gained through monitoring and evaluation.

Mandatory outputs/deliverables:



- Updated Monitoring and Evaluation framework and related documents
- EUSDR evaluation report
- Templates for EUSDR core-documents
- Revised decision-making process and internal procedures
- EUSDR reporting template

Specific objective 4: To improve stakeholder involvement and to support EUSDR stakeholders in implementing the EUSDR Action Plan.

Mandatory activities:

- Providing a platform for multilevel exchange to bring together thematic, funding, national, regional and EU and other relevant stakeholders in accordance and cooperation with EUSDR Priority areas.
- Planning and implementing capacity building measures

Mandatory outputs/deliverables:

- Updated Framework for strategic EUSDR projects
- Capacity building framework

PAC/ DSP project design

During the implementation of both PAC and DSP governance support project the MA/ JS will continuously cooperate with the EUSDR Presidencies/ NCs in order to ensure that the projects are being updated and follow the developments of the strategies. The two year revision of the projects will be done in close cooperation with the EUSDR governance bodies in order to take into consideration all the needs of the Strategy. The Implementation Manual will contain a detailed description of the processes.

Both PAC and DSP EUSDR governance support projects are planned to be have a period of implementation of 6 years (2023-2028). Nevertheless, detailed planning for such a long period of time proves to be very challenging and non-effective in most cases, since there is a need of fast adaptation to the changing environment therefore a flexible approach is taken as follows:

- based on the mandatory and permanent activities of PAC and DSP (as defined by the EUSDR) the applicants will provide in the AF an overall work plan covering the 6 years of implementation at the same time defining the main outputs to be delivered by the end of the project.



- given the comparably long life-time of the PAC/DSP project an exact anticipation of each (minor) work-step cannot be expected by applicants; however, a clear project structure containing main milestones and main achievements comprising the entire 6 years shall be provided in the initial Application Form and at least for the first two years of implementation a detailed planning should be presented which includes also non mandatory activities, outputs, deliverables.
- the spending forecast should be clearly aligned with the work plan: at least in the first two years the 6 months forecast should be as precise as possible in line with the detailed plan.
- every two years the MA/ JS together with the projects will review both the implementation status of the content as well as finance (within 3 months after the finalisation of the two year period). In case the activities planned have not even started and the budget is not committed then it will be deducted from the total project budget. During the 2 year review each LP will have to submit a revised and detailed plan for the following two years together with a spending forecast.
- the LA should not plan a spending forecast that concentrates majority of the budget in the last periods as this goes against of the EUSDR support type of projects.
- the projects reviews are subject to MC approval.

Annual Forum organisation:

- the Annual Forum budget is planned in the DSP budget, with the exception of the incumbent presidencies which are joining the project
- since the presidency countries are known for the first two years these can be included in the AF with the corresponding budget.
- after the two Annual forums have been organised, during every two years review, the annual forum budget unspent (if applicable) by the two presidencies will be deducted from the project.

II.8 Capitalisation

Based on previous experience, capitalisation proved to be a very fruitful exercise that can bring added value. The EUSDR had a very active role in past (DTP) capitalization activities, both in contributing to and moderating such activities between DTP projects as well in view building up ties to key-stakeholders of the EUSDR, of other macro-regions and/or on European level. During the new funding period 2021 – 2027 PAC and – where applicable – the DSP shall feel encouraged to further engage into DRP capitalization activities.



The main objectives of capitalisation are:

- To valorise and further build upon the knowledge resulting from projects working in a thematic field
- To fill knowledge-gaps by linking actors with complementary thematic specialisation, experiences, methodological approaches or geographical scope
- To increase the visibility of initiatives and to ensure their impact on the policy making process at local, regional, national and European levels
- To strengthen strategic thematic networks in the Programme area
- To encourage the wider take-up of project outcomes from outside the DRP area
- To contribute to the design and/or implementation of future transnational cooperation in the area

Possible capitalisation activities could include:

- Joint thematic meetings to exchange on projects' content and outputs
- Joint thematic studies and policy recommendations
- Peer review or benchmarking of project outputs
- Exchange visits between projects, if this enables cross-fertilisation and/or take-up of results
- Joint dissemination activities such as joint conferences addressing common stakeholders

Please note: Capitalisation activities, in case addressed, and the related budget have to be planned already in the Application Form. The capitalisation activities have to be included in the project work plan and budget in a coherent manner.

III. Application and assessment

III.1 Overview

The Danube Region Programme selects projects and allocates Interreg funds co-financing through “calls for proposals”. Specific rules, conditions and project selection criteria of these calls are decided by the Programme Monitoring Committee.

This chapter presents **general** rules and assessment criteria to be followed when applying for funding, while **special conditions and/or restrictions may be set in the call**



announcements which are part of the application package. Such terms and conditions may include, among others:

- Thematic objective and focus of the call;
- Applicant and partnership requirements;
- The procedure for the selection of proposals and the award criteria;
- Budget allocated to the call;
- Procedure and deadline for submission of project proposals.

Information in this chapter is therefore complemented by information and requirements outlined in the Call announcements. **Both documents (Applicants Manual and Call announcement) should be read together as they are essential for properly submitting a project proposal.**

Further information and guidance can then be found in other supporting documents and tools developed to help applicants in designing and submitting their project proposals.

III.2. Application process

Different to “regular” DRP projects, for which either a 1-step or 2-step procedure is applied, applicants to the PAC and DSP CfP prepare and submit their application form (AF) in one single step.

The AF presents in detail the partnership, context of the project, intervention logic, work plan and budget. The Application Form is filled in and submitted through the programme monitoring system. Additionally the signed declarations and the partnership agreement have to be submitted electronically only. Only electronic submission is allowed and only the last version submitted will be taken into account.

Any previous version of the same project proposal will not be considered as valid and will not be assessed. Once the e-version of the document is submitted no changes are possible. Once the deadline for submission has expired, the assessment of the AF is carried out by the MA/JS. The assessment results are then presented to the MC who decides which projects are selected for financing (at this stage the selection can be with or without conditions).

Applicants are informed about the decision of the MC through electronic communication.

III.3. Assessment procedure

During the assessment process, two different sets of criteria are applied to come to the decision of approving an application: eligibility and quality criteria.



The **eligibility criteria** aim at confirming to the applicant whether their proposal has arrived within the set deadline and that the Application Form is complete and conform to the requirements. As the eligibility criteria are of “knock-out nature”, they should be answered with a YES or NO as they are not subject to interpretation.

This phase will be carried out by the MA/JS and assisted by the NCPs.

Failing to meet the eligibility requirements leads to the rejection of the proposal or to the rejection of the partner whom the eligibility problem is related to.

No.	Eligibility criteria	Description
1	The AF has been submitted within the set deadline (date and time)	The AF has been submitted within the date and time set in the call announcement.
2	The AF including LP confirmation have been submitted through the programme monitoring system	The AF and the signed LP confirmation have been submitted through the official programme monitoring system.
3	The AF is compiled in English	All parts of the AF are compiled in English, the official language of the DRP.
4	The amount requested by the individual project is in line with the call provisions	The total EU funding request by each PAC project or DSP project is in line with the maximum defined in the call for proposals
5	Partnership is composed by at least two financing partners from at least two DRP participating countries. At least one partner shall be a beneficiary from a Member States	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement for a transnational DRP partnership: at least two financing partners (receiving Interreg funds co-financing) from at least two DRP participating countries. At least one partner shall be a beneficiary from a Member State of the programme area.
6	Lead Applicant is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirement set in Section II. of the Applicants Manual.
7	At least 3 joint cooperation levels are indicated	According to Art 23(4) of EU reg. 2021/1059, among the four levels of cooperation (joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing and joint financing) beneficiaries shall cooperate in the development and implementation of projects as well as in the staffing or financing of projects, or both thereof.
8	Completeness of Partnership Agreement	The Partnership Agreement is complete and signed by all directly financed partners.
9	The proposal has selected the mandatory programme output indicator <i>RCO 118</i> –	Each EUSDR support project has to contribute to the output indicator RCO118 - <i>Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macro-regional</i>



	<i>Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies and the corresponding result indicator RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion</i>	<i>strategies and the corresponding result indicator RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion</i>
10	The proposal is addressing all mandatory project objectives and related mandatory activities as well as related mandatory outputs/deliverables	The proposal addresses all elements (specific project objectives, activities, outputs/deliverables) defined as mandatory in section II. of the Applicants Manual. In order not miss one of the mandatory elements when setting up the project structure a easy-to-use overview over the intervention logic is provided as Annex 2 of the Applicants Manual.

The following table lists all eligibility criteria at project level. Failure to meet any of the criteria below results in rejecting the whole proposal.

The following table lists the eligibility criteria applicable to individual partners. Failure to meet any of the criteria below by a partner results in rejecting the respective partner:

No	Eligibility criteria	Description
11	Financed partners are eligible	The financed partner fulfils the requirements set in Section II.1 (General rules for the eligibility of project partners) and Annex I (list of PACs/ DSP).
12	Completeness of submitted partner documents	The documents (Declaration of co-financing, State Aid declaration, Declaration for International organisations) are filled in and signed by the partner.
13	Completeness of submitted ASP documents	The document (ASP declaration) is filled in and signed by the ASP.

In case of missing documents, parts of documents and/or signatures, the LA will be allowed 5 working days from the **MA/JS electronic notification** for the completion of the documents.

The purpose of the **quality criteria** is to assess the quality of the eligible project proposals. Quality criteria are closely linked to the specific objectives and results of the DRP IP. Each quality criterion is assessed on the basis of sub-criteria, with each being scored from 0 (not present / missing) to 5 (very good). The score of the main question is an average of the scores of the related guiding questions.

This phase will be carried out by the MA/JS. The assessment is based on an assessment matrix consisting of the following criteria groups:



Score	Description
0	None The information requested is missing (either not filled in or not provided in the text). The information is provided has minimum relevance.
1	Very poor The information provided is considered as not relevant or inadequate
2	Poor The information provided lacks relevant quality and contains strong weaknesses
3	Fair The overall information provided is adequate, however some aspects are not clearly or sufficiently detailed
4	Good The information provided is adequate with sufficiently outlined details
5	Very Good The information provided is outstanding in its details, clearness and coherence

In the following tables the criteria to be assessed are illustrated. The sub-criteria are defined by a set of questions with the aim of guiding the assessor through, while performing his/ her evaluation. Due to the complex requirements of transnational projects, these questions cannot be answered in a “yes or no” manner. The assessor must check to what extent the questions are satisfactorily answered by the applicant and then give an overall assessment score. Guiding questions, as well as the maximum score that can be attributed to a single guiding question shall be considered binding.



Assessment Criteria PAC			
Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points	What is being assessed
Are the challenges of the PA well identified, described, addressed and in line with the scope of the Call?	To what extent are the challenges of the PA identified and described? Are they connected to the scope of the Call for Proposals?	Max 5 points	The assessors shall check if the needs/ challenges of the PA – both regarding policies in the field concerned as well as governance of the PA - are clearly and comprehensively described and if they are linked with the scope of the Call for Proposals.
	To what extent is the proposal addressing the identified challenges?		The assessors shall check if, or to what extent, the activities described in the work plan are responding to the identified needs/ challenges.
Is the proposal clearly contributing to the EU Strategy for Danube	To what extent are activities clearly targeted at improving the functioning of the PA and in line with the EUSDR Action Plan?	Max 5 points	The assessors shall check if the activities are appropriately related to the coordination of the PA and are in line with the EUSDR Action Plan.



Region?	To what extent is the durability of the project outputs clearly ensured?		The assessor shall check if concrete, specific and logic provisions supporting the durability (from an institutional, financial and political point of view) of project outputs and main result are provided.
	To what extent does the project prove to make a positive contribution to the programme's horizontal principles?		The description of the project contribution to the horizontal principles is coherent with the overall territorial needs and with the programme and project objectives. The LA should outline how the project is bringing a contribution to the horizontal principles and how this is translated at the level of the work plan. In case of negative effects, the steps to overcome such negative effects should be realistic and time bound.
	Is the proposal involving relevant target groups?		The assessors shall check if all relevant target groups are identified and listed in a coherent manner.
<i>Is the intervention logic coherent?</i>	To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent with the programme's one?	Max 5 points	<p>The project's intervention logic should mirror the programme's one in terms of links between the project's objectives, results and outputs/ deliverables to the programme's ones in a clear and coherent way. Furthermore it shall offer the possibility to assess the extent of the project's contribution to the achievement of the specific objective and results of the relevant priority.</p> <p>The more inconsistencies there are between the programme and the project intervention logic, the lower the score should be.</p>



	<p>To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent and well defined in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ definition of the objectives, expected results and outputs/ deliverables ➤ link between the objectives, expected results and outputs ➤ link between the needs of the target groups and the proposed outputs and results 		<p>First the assessors should check if the elements of the intervention logic are well defined and explained (Specific Objectives, activities, outputs/ deliverables, results). The project's intervention logic should follow a cause – effect relation: IF right activities are implemented and appropriate outputs/ deliverables are delivered, THEN the planned objectives are reached and the envisaged results are achieved.</p> <p>The assessor shall check the coherency and comprehensiveness of the description of activities and their added value compared to past similar initiatives. Please, consider whether the activities described are in line with the type of involved partners (and their overall competences) and if the sequence of the activities are logical: the more incoherencies are detected the lower the score will be (please list the incoherencies).</p> <p>The assessors shall check if the proposed outputs/ deliverables and result are in line with the needs of the target group and if they are useful.</p>
	<p>To what extent the envisaged activities can realistically reach the planned outputs/ deliverables and results?</p>		<p>Please consider if the proposed outputs/ deliverables and results are achievable within the project's lifetime and by implementing the proposed activities and if they are realistically and correctly quantified.</p>
	<p>Is the proposed work plan realistic?</p>		<p>The assessors shall check if the structure of the work plan is clear and if there are logical correlations between the activities and the role of the PPs. Furthermore the assessors shall check if the planning of activities is detailed for the first two years and if it offers a clear overview on the main activities and outputs to be developed by the end of the project.</p>



<i>Do the partners have clear and balanced roles in the partnership?</i>	Is the role of the partners clearly described?	Max 5 points	The assessors shall evaluate if the roles of the PPs are described in a coherent and clear way.
	Is the partners' involvement in the project balanced?		The assessors shall evaluate if the distribution of tasks among the partners is equitable and if their involvement corresponds to their thematic competence and it contributes to the achievement of the project objectives.
<i>Is the project budget coherent and realistic?</i>	Is the budget realistic compared to the proposed activities?	Max 5 points	<p>The assessors shall evaluate the overall value of the proposal. The general quality, structure and soundness shall be analysed against the requested Interreg funds budget.</p> <p>The assessors shall evaluate the appropriateness of the allocated budget/ activity/ period/ cost category considering the planned actions, duration and involved partners.</p>
	Is the budget appropriately distributed between the PPs?		<p>Generally, the LP has more responsibility as it is responsible for the general management of the project and this might generate higher budget compared to the other PP(s). Role of the LP should be checked in the description of the project management structure.</p> <p>Role of the partners in each activity should be checked against allocated budget.</p>



Total	Ma x 25 points	
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Assessment Criteria DSP			
Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points	What is being assessed
Are the challenges of the DSP well identified, described, addressed and in line with the scope of the Call?	To what extent are the challenges with regard to supporting the governance of the EUSDR identified and described? Are they connected to the scope of the Call for Proposals?	Max 5 points	The assessors shall check if the needs/ challenges of the DSP with regard to supporting the governance of the EUSDR and it's main actors are clearly and comprehensively described and if they are linked with the scope of the Call for Proposals.
	To what extent is the proposal addressing the identified challenges?		The assessors shall check if, or to what extent, the activities described in the work plan are responding to the identified needs/ challenges.
Is the proposal clearly contributing to the EU Strategy for Danube	To what extent are activities clearly targeted at improving the functioning of the EUSDR.	Max 5 points	The assessors shall check if the activities are appropriately related to supporting the governance of the EUSDR and it's main actors.



Region?	To what extent does the proposal take into consideration the capitalisation of outputs/ deliverables and results of the previous DSP project(s) (i.e. what outputs and results will be used and how they will be integrated in the day-to-day work)?	The assessor will check if the applicant explained which and how the existing knowledge/ outputs/ results of the previous DSP project are exploited and for which purposes.
	To what extent is the durability of the project outputs/ deliverables clearly ensured?	The assessor shall check if concrete, specific and logic provisions supporting the durability (from an institutional, financial and political point of view) of project outputs and main result are provided.
	To what extent does the project prove to make a positive contribution to the programme's horizontal principles?	The description of the project contribution to the horizontal principles is coherent with the overall territorial needs and with the programme and project objectives. The LA should outline how the project is bringing a contribution to the horizontal principles and how this is translated at the level of the work plan. In case of negative effects, the steps to overcome such negative effects should be realistic and time bound.



	Is the proposal involving relevant target groups?		The assessors shall check if all relevant target groups are identified and listed in a coherent manner.
<i>Is the intervention logic coherent?</i>	To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent with the programme's one?	Max 5 points	<p>The project's intervention logic should mirror the programme's one in terms of links between the project's objectives, results and outputs/ deliverables to the programme's ones in a clear and coherent way. Furthermore it shall offer the possibility to assess the extent of the project's contribution to the achievement of the specific objective and results of the relevant priority.</p> <p>The more inconsistencies there are between the programme and the project intervention logic, the lower the score should be.</p>



	<p>To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent and well defined in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ definition of the objectives, expected results and outputs/ deliverables ➤ link between the objectives, expected results and outputs/ deliverables ➤ link between the needs of the target groups and the proposed outputs and results 	<p>First the assessors should check if the elements of the intervention logic are well defined and explained (Specific Objectives, activities, outputs, results). The project's intervention logic should follow a cause –effect relation: IF right activities are implemented and appropriate outputs are delivered, THEN the planned objectives are reached and the envisaged results are achieved.</p> <p>The assessor shall check the coherency and comprehensiveness of the description of activities and their added value compared to past similar initiatives. Please, consider whether the activities described are in line with the type of involved partners (and their overall competences) and if the sequence of the activities are logical: the more incoherencies are detected the lower the score will be (please list the incoherencies).</p> <p>The assessors shall check if the proposed outputs and result are in line with the needs of the target group and if they are useful.</p>
	<p>To what extent the envisaged activities can realistically reach the planned outputs and results?</p>	<p>Please consider if the proposed outputs and results are achievable within the project's lifetime and by implementing the proposed activities and if they are realistically and correctly quantified.</p>
	<p>Is the proposed work plan realistic?</p>	<p>The assessors shall check if the structure of the work plan is clear and if there are logical correlations between the activities and the role of the PPs. Furthermore the assessors shall check if the planning of activities is detailed for the first two years and if it offers a clear overview on the main activities and outputs to be developed by the end of the project.</p>



<i>Do the partners have clear and balanced roles in the partnership?</i>	Is the role of the partners clearly described?	Max 5 points	The assessors shall evaluate if the roles of the PPs are described in a coherent and clear way.
	Is the partners' involvement in the project balanced?		The assessors shall evaluate if the distribution of tasks among the partners is equitable and if their involvement corresponds to their thematic competence and it contributes to the achievement of the project objectives.
<i>Is the project budget coherent and realistic?</i>	Is the budget realistic compared to the proposed activities?	Max 5 points	<p>The assessors shall evaluate the overall value of the proposal. The general quality, structure and soundness shall be analysed against the requested Interreg Funds budget.</p> <p>The assessors shall evaluate the appropriateness of the allocated budget/ activity/ cost category considering the planned actions, duration and involved partners.</p>
	Is the budget appropriately distributed between the PPs?		<p>Generally, the LP has more responsibility as it is responsible for the general management of the project and this might generate higher budget compared to the other PP(s). Role of the LP should be checked in the description of the project management structure.</p> <p>Role of the partners in each activity should be checked against allocated budget.</p>



Total	Ma x 25 points	
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The final score is calculated as percentage where 25 points represents 100%.

Project proposals have to receive a minimum 60% to be recommended by the MA/JS for selection. Proposals might be selected for approval with or without conditions (to be fulfilled within the deadline set by the DRP MA/JS).

Project proposals scoring less than 60% will be recommended by the DRP MA/JS for re-submission.

III.4. Verification at national level

During the assessment phase, the MA/JS is supported by the NCPs. The support provided by the NCPs is not subject to scoring system but it provides important background information, which will be integrated in the overall assessment result.

Specifically, the MA/JS through the NCP will provide the following information during the eligibility check:

- Support in the verification/confirmation of the legal status of the LA and PPs;
- Support in verifying the correctness of the “Declaration of pre-financing and co-financing Statement” as far as possible, and informing the MA/JS in case any additional information exists or if some minor corrections are necessary;
- Support in verifying the correctness of the “Self-declaration on State Aid” as far as possible and providing the MA/JS with any additional and relevant information available at national level.

State Aid check

The State aid analysis is performed with the twofold purpose of identifying the State aid relevance of project proposals and the concerned partners, furthermore, to ensure the elimination of the state aid relevant activities if the aid intensity in a project exceeded the maximum co-financing rate provided by the programme. The de minimis regulation is not applicable to DRP co-financed projects.

The State aid assessment is performed by MA/JS only on those project proposals which are likely to be funded, i.e. as described above in the quality assessment performed by the two independent assessors scored at least 60 % and minimum quality thresholds are met.



The State aid analysis is performed on the basis of information included in the full application form as well as in the lead applicant and partner declarations. Furthermore, other information sources might be used.

The State aid analysis is carried out by MA/JS and validated by the Monitoring Committee.

The State aid analysis is performed in the following consecutive steps, as presented below.

Step 1: Verification of existence of aid

Interreg funds provided by DRP must comply with State aid rules and regulations. State aid can be granted under Art. 20 (applicable to direct aid) and 20 (a) (applicable to indirect aid) of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treat (GBER amending regulation).

Direct State aid

State aid relevant activities are eligible to the extent of the maximum co-financing rate of the programme (80%). Submitted applications undergo a specific “State aid assessment” focusing on the following five criteria:

The recipient of the aid is an “undertaking”, which is carrying out an economic activity in the context of the project.

1. The aid comes from the state, which is the case for any Interreg programme.
2. The aid is granted to an undertaking that performs economic activity in the context of the project.
3. The aid confers advantage that distorts or risk to distort competition in the market.
4. The aid is selectively favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods.
5. The aid affects trade between Member States; meaning it does not have only local effect.

When the answer to the questions related to direct state aid (State Aid Declaration) is “yes”, the project activities are considered as State aid relevant and in line with the amending



GBER regulation, they are compatible with the internal market and they are eligible unless the partner receives any additional public co-financing.

Indirect State Aid

The question no. 7 of State Aid Declaration is related to indirect state aid that is granted to third parties outside the partnership, which it would not receive in the absence of funding granted by DRP.

If the answer is “yes”, the aid granted to an undertaking that is the final beneficiary of the project activities is compatible with the internal market under Art. 20a of the amending GBER regulation if the following conditions are met:

- The amount of aid granted to final beneficiaries cannot exceed 20 000 euro.
- The project activities that are affected by indirect state aid shall be determined by the concerned partner and it has to be approved by the MA/JS.

Step 2: Identification of State aid elements in the project proposals

Project proposals characterised by State aid relevance are further analysed in order to identify, for each proposal, which specific beneficiary(ies) acting as undertaking(s) is(are) performing which specific activities of economic nature in the context of the project. The analysis has to bring evidence of the State aid relevance of the concerned activity as well as of the budget allocated to that activity (and to the related output). If the information available in the application form does not allow completing the analysis, additional information is retrieved from the lead partner following the MC decision for funding. Clarification of the potentially state aid relevant activities is requested only in the condition clearing process for the already approved projects.

Step 3: Drafting of conditions

The result of step 2 of the analysis allows the MA/JS to draft conditions for approval for those partners who declared to receive additional public co-financing. Conditions formulated by the MA/JS are meant to eliminate the aid cause through specific measures to be implemented by the affected applicants:

- All findings must be made public free of charge, including background documents, data and methodologies. It should be possible for any organisation



outside the partnership to duplicate the project's work from the material provided.

- No intellectual property rights can be claimed by a beneficiary or by the project. The project or a beneficiary may require that it is cited as the original source of material but it cannot limit access to material or make any kind of charge for this.
- All beneficiaries including private enterprises must act on a not-for-profit basis for all project activities. This means that all expenditures must be charged to the project at cost and without profit.
- EU, national and organisational public procurement procedures must be followed when buying external expertise, services or other goods for the project. This also applies to private sector enterprises and organisations, which are not normally subject to tendering rules.

In case the partner wishes to receive additional public co-financing and the conditions for elimination of the aid cannot be fulfilled, then the activities falling under state aid are considered ineligible and have to be deleted from the Application Form.

The entire assessment process is reflected within a State aid assessment grid containing guiding questions for assessment and text fields for assessment conclusions and MA/JS recommendations.

Validation of State aid assessment results

The MC is provided with the ranking list where the projects presenting a risk of State aid are indicated. If State aid cannot be eliminated:

1. Activities of those partners, who will receive more than 80% public co-financing for the project, are not eligible and have to be removed from the application form.
2. Direct State aid granted to the partners. In this case the entire budget allocated to the concerned partner is regarded as State aid granted under GBER.
3. Indirect State aid granted to third parties outside the project partnership. In this case, a contractual condition setting a threshold to the aid granted to third parties is set.

III.5. Complaint procedure

Assessment and selection procedures set in this manual offer a fair and transparent consideration of all received proposals.



The rules set in this section are aimed at providing a transparent complaint procedure against decisions taken by Programme authorities during the project assessment and selection process¹³.

1. The Lead Applicant is the only one entitled to file a complaint.
2. The right to complain against a decision regarding the project selection applies to the Lead Applicant whose project application (AF) was not selected for the Programme co-financing during the project assessment and selection process.
3. The complaint is to be lodged against the communication issued by the Managing Authority/Joint Secretariat based on the decision by the Monitoring Committee as the MA/JS' communication is the only legally binding act towards the Lead Applicant during the project assessment and selection process.
4. The complaint can be lodged only against the outcomes of the eligibility assessment¹⁴ performed by the MA/JS, supported by the NCP and approved by the MC.
5. The complaint should be lodged in writing by e-mail to the Managing Authority of the Programme within 5 calendar days after the Lead Applicant had been officially notified by the MA/JS about the results of the project selection process. The complaint should include:
 - a. Name and address of the Lead Applicant;
 - b. Reference number and acronym of the application which is a subject of the complaint;
 - c. Clearly indicated reasons for the complaint, including listing of all elements of the assessment which are being complaint and/or failures in adherence with procedures limited to those criteria mentioned in point 4;
 - d. (e-)signature of the legal representative of the Lead Applicant (scanned signatures are accepted);
 - e. Any supporting documents;

¹³ In case of appeal to the judiciary system against the decision of the programme authorities during the project assessment and selection process, the court of Hungary has the jurisdiction on the matter.

¹⁴ For the quality assessment the applicants can request further information and justification from the MA/ JS and can ask for face to face consultations. However a complaint against the quality assessment is not possible since the assessment of the proposals and the MC decision cannot be reviewed.



6. The relevant documentation shall be provided for the sole purpose of supporting the complaint and may not alter the quality or content of the assessed application. No other grounds for the complaint than indicated in point 4 will be taken into account during the complaint procedure.
7. A complaint will be rejected without further examination if submitted after the set deadline or if the formal requirements set in point 5 are not observed.
8. In case the complaint is rejected under provisions set in point 7, the MA/JS conveys this information within 10 working days to the Lead Applicant and informs the Monitoring Committee.
9. Within 5 working days after the receipt of the complaint the MA/JS confirms to the Lead Applicant in writing having received the complaint and notifies the Monitoring Committee.
10. The Managing Authority, assisted by the Joint Secretariat examines the complaint and prepares its technical examination regarding the merit of the complaint.
11. The complaint will then be examined on the basis of the information brought forward by the Lead Applicant in the complaint and the technical examination prepared by the MA/JS by the Complaint Panel.
12. The Complaint Panel is the only body entitled to review a complaint against a decision regarding assessment and selection of projects co-financed by the Programme.
13. The Complaint Panel comprises of 3 members of whom one is the Chair of the Monitoring Committee, one is member of the Monitoring Committee and the third one is member of the Managing Authority or Joint Secretariat (not involved in the assessment).
14. The members of the Complaint Panel are appointed by the Monitoring Committee.
15. Impartiality of members of the Complaint Panel towards the case under review has to be ensured. If this cannot be provided, the distinct member shall refrain from the distinct case's review and be replaced by another impartial member.
16. The Joint Secretariat acts as the secretariat for the Complaint Panel and provides any assistance necessary for the review of the complaint.
17. The Managing Authority shall provide the Members of the Complaint Panel no later than 10 working days after the receipt of the complaint with a copy of:



- a. The complaint with the technical examination by the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat
 - b. The original application and all supporting documents that were taken into consideration by the relevant bodies during the project assessment and selection process;
 - c. All documents relating to the assessment of the application in question including checklists and the record of the Monitoring Committee's decision;
 - d. Any other document requested by the Members of the Complaint Panel relevant to the complaint.
18. The Complaint Panel will have 5 working days to provide a binding decision through written procedure.
19. The decision if the complaint is justified or to be rejected is taken by the Complaint Panel by consensus. In case it is justified, the case will be sent back to the Monitoring Committee to review the project application and its assessment. The Complaint Panel has to provide the Monitoring Committee with a written justification with explicit reference to the criteria established in the Complaint Procedure.
20. The decision of the Complaint Panel is communicated by the MA/JS in writing to the Lead Applicant and the Monitoring Committee within 5 working days from the receipt of the Complaint Panel decision.
21. The complaint procedure, from the receipt of the complaint to the communication of the Complaint Panel's decision to the Lead Applicant, should be resolved within maximum 30 calendar days.

The decision of the Complaint Panel is final, binding to all parties and not subject of any further complaint proceedings within the Programme based on the same grounds.