Interreg Programme
Danube Region

Co-funded by
the European Union

Applicants' Manual 2021—2027

List of abbreviations

AA	Audit authority
AF	Application form
AfR	Application for reimbursement
AM	Applicants manual
ASP	Associated strategic partner
CA	Certifying authority
CfP	Call for proposals
IP	Interreg programme
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
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
Jems	Programme online monitoring system
LA	Lead applicant
LP	Lead partner
MA/JS	Managing authority and joint secretariat

MC	Monitoring committee
NCs	National Coordinators
NCP	National Contact Point
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PA	Priority Axis of DRP
EUSDR PA	Priority Area of EUSDR
PAC	Priority Area Coordinator (EUSDR)
PP	Project partner
SC	Subsidy contract
SO	Specific objective

Disclaimer:

When launching the first call for proposals, the Danube Region Programme (DRP) document (IP) will not yet be approved by the European Commission (EC).

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 (MC), (the 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 Partner 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 presents the main rules, requirements and procedures to apply for funding from Danube Region Programme.

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

- Interreg programme;
- call announcement;
- glossary;
- annex – Eligibility of project expenditure;
- guidelines for expression of interest (EoI);
- guidelines for application form (AF).

The documents for project implementation to be prepared by the programme will also be available on the programme website:

- implementation manual;
- visual identity manual;
- communication toolkit.

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 Ukraine[1] with four provinces: Chernivetska Oblast, Ivano-Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast, Odessa Oblast), being composed of 70 NUTS2 regions.

I.1.2 Programme priorities and specific objectives

I.1.2.1 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

[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)*

the field of innovation, environment, governance and social issues. Project financed by DRP 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.

The whole Danube space is suffering from its highly fragmented political and administrative character, which is further complicated by the extreme economic diversity of its countries and regions. The European measures for a stronger cohesion along with the accession and neighbourhood policies create a new, unique historic situation for the better integration of the Danube space. Creating a better institutional platform and transnational cooperation environment for the territorial, economic and social integration is the main mission of the DRP.

The main focus of the new programme is along those thematic areas where the overall measures for better integration could be linked to those relevant and specific needs, which can be effectively addressed by transnational projects (e.g. depopulation, migration, economic inequalities, energy dependency, climate change). In this very heterogeneous and diverse region, a specific emphasis is to be given to ensure that the different needs of the countries (given their different political and economic status) are considered in a fairly balanced and well-integrated manner.

The programme is therefore organised along four programme priorities that are further broken down into 10 specific objectives.


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 Programme budget

The Interreg funds budget of the programme is **EUR 215 047 857,00, which represents a single amount for all the 14 countries participating in the programme.** This amount will be complemented by the **national contributions** of the project partners (PPs) participating in the supported projects. Individual projects under priority axes 1-4 will receive the European Union support up to 80% of their total eligible costs. The distribution of allocations from the European Union sources among the priority axis is outlined below.[2]

Priority axes (PA)	Interreg funds (EUR)
PA 1: A more competitive and smarter Danube Region	40,489,751.00
PA 2: A greener, low-carbon Danube Region	74,586,383.00
PA 3: A more social Danube Region	55,407,028.00
PA 4: A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region	44,564, 695.00

The indicative allocation of funds for each of the calls for proposals is specified in the respective call announcements.

I.1.4 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,** 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

[2] *Subject to approval by the European Commission*

programme. **National authorities are nominating the members of the monitoring committee**, officially representing the given Partner State

The **managing authority (MA),** assisted by the **joint secretariat** 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.

I.1.5 Programme link with the EUSDR[3]

The Danube Region Strategy addresses a wide range of issues; these are divided among **4 pillars** and **12 priority areas**. The EUSDR Action Plan presents operational objectives, projects and actions for each priority area. In addition, concrete targets are defined for each priority area. Each priority area is managed by Priority Area Coordinators (PACs).

[3] *For further information on transnational programmes and macro-regional strategies please check our website (https://www.interreg-danube.eu/about-dtp/eu-strategy-for-the-danube-region).*

Steering groups advise and assist the work of the PACs. Further to that, some priority areas created working groups around sub-themes and tasks. The National Coordinators (NCs) coordinate the participation of their country in the implementation of the EUSDR. The role of the NC is to promote the Strategy and inform relevant stakeholders at the national level of key developments. The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) is supporting exchange among Priority Area Coordinators and National Coordinators in their tasks and promotes the Strategy predominantly at the European level. The EUSDR website (www.danube-region.eu) provides general information about the EUSDR, its governance, priority areas and PACs, targets per priority area, funding opportunities and key documents.

Contributions of DRP projects to the EUSDR

The EUSDR has been carefully considered during the preparation and set up phase of the DRP. A clear demonstration of the close alignment of the DRP and the EUSDR is that all DRP priority axis and related specific objectives show direct linkages to the pillars of one or more EUSDR Priority Area. However, not all twelve EUSDR Priority Areas are equally reflected by the DRP due to the thematic concentration.

Expected contributions of DRP projects to the EUSDR

Applicants are expected to describe the link to the relevant EUSDR Priority Area(s) and the concrete contribution to the implementation of the Priority Area(s), as well as the contribution toward achievement of the EUSDR current targets, as described in the official list of targets (https://danube-region.eu/about/targets/). Besides the description of the contribution, applicants have to demonstrate throughout their proposal that the Strategy is embedded in the actual implementation of the project (e.g. by involving the Priority Area Coordinators or PA steering groups / working groups or by proposing activities that are involving the EUSDR bodies such as invitation to project meetings, invitation to participate as ASPs etc.). Each applicant is also advised to check the websites of the specific Priority Areas in order to better understand how the proposal can contribute to the EUSDR (https://danube-region.eu/about/priority-areas/)

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 law[4];
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ private bodies (non-profit organisations and private enterprises / private profit-making organisation): 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 registered in the programme area. 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;

[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*

- they apply the principles of public procurement;
- they assume the final financial liability for all sums wrongly paid out

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.

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 principle and requirements

In compliance 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.

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

ATTENTION: for exceptions from the rule please read carefully the call announcement.

The lead partner organisation should follow the legal requirements set out in section II.1.1. Lead partner organisations can be public bodies, bodies governed by public law, private non-profit institutions or international organisations.

Private non-profit bodies acting as lead partner have to demonstrate, through a self-declaration 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).

The programme provides an excel tool where the partners can self-assess their financial situation.

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, is responsible for drafting the application form and submitting it to the MA/JS. After approval of the project, a subsidy contract will be concluded between the MA/JS 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 ("partnership agreement");
- ✓ 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, within Germany-the states of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, 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[5]). As a general rule, EU financing is only provided to project partners

[5] *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)*

located in the programme area[6]. 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.

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.

[6] *The Partner States and the MA/JS 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*

- ✓ **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 (associated strategic partners) are located either in an:

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

  ASP's expenditure is limited to the reimbursement from the programme of *travel and accommodation costs* related mainly to their participation in project meetings, which shall be finally borne by any institution acting as directly financed partner in order to be considered eligible[7].

Summary of the proposed type of partners

Type of partner		Location	Budget	Cost categories[8]
Directly financed partners	**Lead partner**	14 countries of the programme area	Separate	All
	Project partner	14 countries of the programme area	Separate	All
Indirectly financed partners	**Associated strategic partners (ASPs)**	➢ EU countries ➢ Non-EU countries of the programme area	Part of a "sponsoring" directly financed partner budget	Travel and accommodation

[7] *Detailed explanation on costs reimbursement for ASPs is found in Annex- Eligibility of expenditure*
[8] *The eligible expenditure of the DRP include the following cost categories: staff costs, office and administrative expenditure, travel and accommodation costs, external expertise and service costs, equipment expenditure, infrastructure and works*

II.1.4 Composition of the partnership

Each project has to involve at least three directly financing partners from three different countries of the programme area: the lead partner and at least two project partners. At least one partner must be a beneficiary from an EU Member State of the programme area.

> The involvement of relevant organisations from DRP non-EU Partner States
> is part of the quality assessment and is highly recommended

The responsibilities of the project partners are listed below:

- ✓ carrying out activities planned in the approved application form 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 with 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.

The number of partners may considerably vary between the projects depending on the character of the project as well as the territories addressed. 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 involved. No maximum limit of partners is fixed at the programme level.[9]

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

[9] *Further details on how to set up the partnership are included in the guideline on how to develop a transnational project.(https://www.interreg-danube.eu/uploads/media/default/0001/52/5ba19a29eb36cdf81e19b383f765bac5ba99868a.pdf)*

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 funds. 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 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 (through a specific public co-financing scheme) 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 sources of a directly financed partner, whose institutional budget is state financed is considered as *public contribution*, but not s*tate contribution. Additionally if the co-financing is ensured by a third party (e.g. regional administration, ministry) based on bilateral agreements it is also considered as public contribution.*

State contribution is provided only in certain Partner States, applying different systems. An overview on the national co-financing systems 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 their 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 (LP ensures the overall project management while at partner level there are project structures dealing with the individual tasks of the PPs).

If applicable, projects can contribute to all four cooperation criteria.

II.2 Project 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 Sustainable development

Sustainable development stands for meeting the needs of present generations without endangering the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs, ensuring balanced economic growth, social progress, and protection and improvement of the quality of the environment at the same time.

Projects to be supported by the DRP shall be in line with the EU objective of promoting sustainable development, as well as all related EU and national regulations, taking into account also the UN Sustainable Development Goals[10], the Paris Agreement[11] and the "do no significant harm" principle[12].

Accordingly, project partnerships already at the project designing phase shall take into consideration any potential significant sustainability, environmental, climate change and health issues in relation to the project activities, outputs, results, their future impact and define the implementation methodology and the work plan by choosing such options, which eliminate, or minimise the potential negative effects on the environment, or human health. Projects are ideally expected to have positive, direct, or indirect contributions to sustainable development and within that to the environmental and climate objectives.

Applicants have to describe in the application form (which will be subject of assessment), how their proposed project would promote sustainable development and account for the impacts on economic, ecological and social aspects in the targeted area of the Danube Region. It shall specify with concrete details any element of the project proposal, which would have potential risk of significant harm (within the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council) to the EU environmental objectives (climate change mitigation; climate change adaptation; sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources; transition to a circular economy; pollution prevention and control; protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems), as well as the planned measures of the project to eliminate such negative impacts. At the same time the potential direct or indirect positive impacts of the planned project measures and outcomes to these environmental objectives shall be concretely detailed, what exactly would improve, by which project element and how and reflected by the work plan. This shall relate not only to the (future) impact of the project outputs and results, but also to such project implementation activities and solutions (e.g. “green” approach in project event organisation, travels, public procurements, energy efficient solutions, etc.) which can reduce the ecological and carbon footprint of the project implementation. The concrete contributions of the selected projects to sustainable development and (potential) impacts on the environment will be regularly monitored by the programme through the project progress reports and by other means, if necessary.

[10] *https://sdgs.un.org/goals*
[11] *https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement*
[12] *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020R0852&from=EN*

II.4.2 EU Charter of fundamental rights, gender equality, non-discrimination

Projects financed by the programme have to respect the fundamental rights[13] and the horizontal principles of equal opportunity, non-discrimination (including based on national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, mental or physical disability or sexual orientation), gender equality and accessibility during project design and implementation and will have to embed them in the work plan. Applicants 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, both regarding the contributions of delivered project outcomes, as well as project implementation measures.

II.4.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

During the project 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 human 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.

In the application phase, under the Horizontal principles / Strategic Environmental Assessment sections of the application form it shall be indicated (if relevant) in connection to which project output, deliverable, or investment a SEA procedure, or EIA is expected to be carried out.

II.4.4 New European Bauhaus[14]

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

[13] *In accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in compliance with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060*

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

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, financing through other initiatives or funds, leverage of investments, 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. The ownership of the investment in the project is to be retained within the project partner. The durability of the investment is to be ensured for 5 years following the final payment to the beneficiary.

II.6 Public Procurement[15]

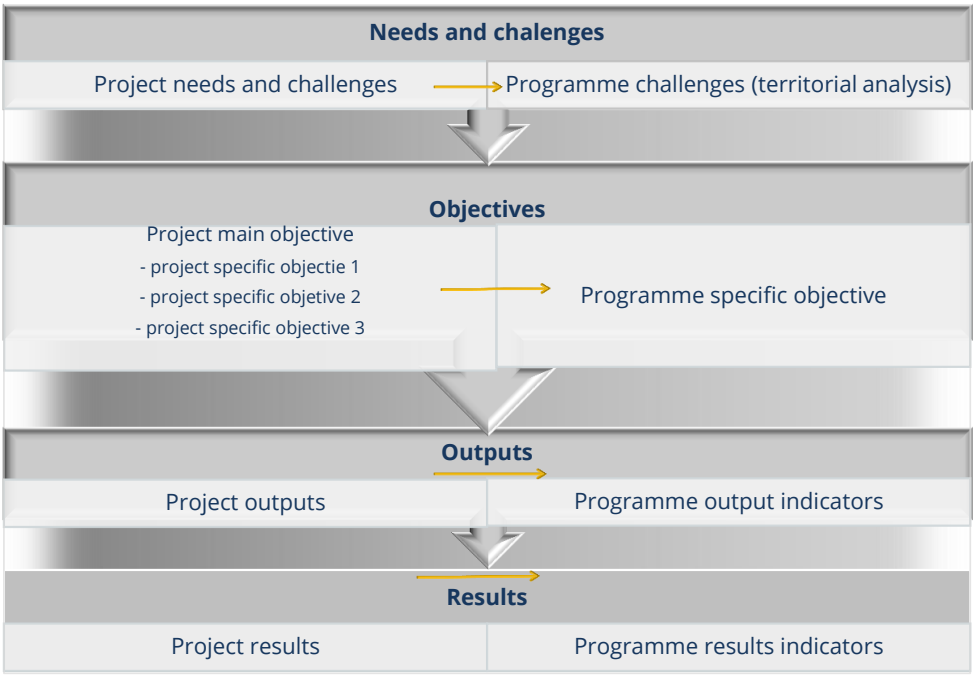
Beneficiaries are encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures.

II.7 Intervention logic[16]

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 main and specific objectives, activities, outputs and results) with the programme intervention logic (specific objectives, output and result 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.

[15] *Further details on public procurement at programme level can be found in the Manual on Eligibility of Expenditure*
[16] *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/uploads/media/default/0001/52/5ba19a29eb36cdf81e19b383f765bac5ba99868a.pdf))*



Coherence of the project intervention logic with the programme intervention logic of the targeted programme SO and the related programme results is a pre-condition for a project to be approved and funded by DRP.

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

- Project main objective - describes the strategic and long term change that the project seeks to achieve for the benefit of the target groups.
- 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. It can be captured by a programme result indicator.
- 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 indicators[17]

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

Output RCO 87 - Organisations cooperating across borders and the corresponding result indicator are mandatory for all the projects

Output indicator	Definition of indicator	Result indicator	Definition of the indicator
RCO82 Participations in joint actions promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion	The indicator counts the number of participations in joint activities principally adressing horizontal principles (gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion) implemented in the supported projects. Joint actions could include, for instance, exchange activities or exchange visits. Participations (i.e. number of persons attending a joint action) are counted for each joint activity organised on the basis of attendance lists or other relevant means	RCR85 Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	The indicator counts the number of participations in joint actions across borders after the completion of the project, organised by all or some of the former partners or associated organisations within the project, as a continuation of cooperation. Joint actions across borders could include, for instance, exchange activities or exchange visits organized with participants from at least two countries of the programme area. Participations (i.e. number of persons attending a joint action

[17] *For further details and examples on output and results indicators please check the Annex 1 Programme output and results indicators*

	of quantification. A joint action is considered as the action organised with the involvement of organizations from at least two participating countries (for programmes falling under strands A, B, C as defined in the Interreg Regulation) or is developed in the scope of programmes falling under strands D or E as defined in the Interreg Regulation. Participations in public events promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion, organized in supported projects, should not be counted in this indicator.		across borders) are counted for each joint action organised on the basis of attendance lists or other relevant means of quantification. For the definition of this indicator, the joint action includes training schemes.
RCO 83 Strategies and action plans jointly developed	The indicator counts the number of joint strategies or action plans developed by supported projects. A jointly developed strategy aims at establishing a targeted way to achieve a goal oriented process in a specific domain. An action plan translates an existing jointly developed strategy into actions. Jointly developed strategy or action plan implies the involvement of organisations from the partnership in the drafting process of the strategy or action plan.	RCR 79 Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	The indicator counts the number of joint strategies and action plans (not individual actions) adopted and implemented by organisations during or after the project completion. At the time of reporting this indicator, the implementation of the joint strategy or action plan does not need to be completed but effectively started. The organisations involved in take-up may or may not be direct participants in the supported project. It is not necessary that all

			actions identified are taken-up for a strategy/action plan to be counted in this context. The value report should be equal to or less than the value for "RCO83 Strategies and action plans jointly developed".
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 transfer of practices. In order to be counted by this indicator, - the pilot action needs not only to be developed, but also to be implemented within the project and - the implementation of the pilot action should be finalised by the end of the project. Jointly developed pilot action implies the involvement of organisations from the partnership in its implementation.	ISI[18]: Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders, other than organisations counted under RCO 87 Organisations cooperating across borders (PPs, etc.) – e.g. organisations external to the partnership RCR 104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	The number of organisations, other than the ones involved in the partnership that increased their institutional capacity in the thematic field of the project by actively participating in cooperation activities across borders. 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

[18] *Interreg Specific Indicator developed by the programmes together with INTERACT*

			in the project. The uptake / up-scaling should be documented by the adopting organisations in, for instance, strategies, action plans etc.
RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions	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. A jointly developed solution implies the involvement of organisations from the partnership in the drafting and design process of the solution.	RCR 104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	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.
RCO 87 Organisations cooperating across borders[19]	The indicator counts the organisations cooperating formally in supported projects. The organisations counted in this indicator are the legal entities including project artners and associated organisations, as mentioned in the application for and subsidy contract.	ISI: Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	The number of organisations that increased their institutional capacity in the thematic field of the project by actively participating in cooperation activities across borders.
RCO118 Organisations cooperating for	The indicator counts the number of legal entities supported by the	RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across	The indicator counts the organisations cooperating across

[19] *Mandatory indicator*

the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies[20]	programme, listed in the financing agreements, and also contributing to the multi-level governance of macro regional strategies. 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.	borders after project completion	borders after the 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.
RCO120 Projects supporting cooperation across borders to develop urban-rural linkages	The indicator counts the number of projects which aim, as a primary objective, to enhance the cooperation across borders between urban and rural areas. The urban-rural linkages developed within the project should enable a stronger urban-rural cooperation and partnership for implementing initiatives in various key relevant policy areas.	Not applicable	Not applicable

[20] *This indicator applies only for S.O.4.1 related to EUSDR governance support.*

Definitions of the programme indicators concepts:[21]

- Jointly developed **strategy** aims at establishing a targeted way to achieve a goal oriented process in a specific domain. A joint strategy shall define the common problems / challenges of the targeted area and its regions. The strategy should set up clear mid- and long-term objectives, priorities and the course of action designed to achieve the planned objectives, reflecting also the common vision of the Danube Region in the specific field.
- Jointly developed **solution** contributes to solve a common problem, challenge addressed by the project. The joint solution shall be pilot tested (RCO84) to prove whether the solution meets the needs of the target groups.
- Jointly developed **pilot action** has an experimental nature either testing of innovative products, methodologies, tools etc. or demonstrating the application of existing products, methodologies, tools to a certain territory/sector; the feasibility and effectiveness of procedures, new instruments, tools, experimentation or the transfer of practices.

The interconnection between the programme outputs and results indicators is reflected in the scheme below:

Output indicator	**Result indicator**
RCO82 Participations in joint actions promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion	RCR85 Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion
RCO 83 Strategies and action plans jointly developed	RCR 79 Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations
RCO 84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	ISI[22]: Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders, other than organisations counted under RCO 87 Organisations cooperating across borders (PPs, etc.) – e.g. organisations external to the partnership
RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions	RCR 104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations

[21] *detailed information on programe indicators is presented in the Annex 1*
[22] *Interreg specific Indicator developed by the programmes together with INTERACT*

RCO 87 Organisations cooperating across borders →	ISI: Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders
RCO118 Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies →	RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion
RCO120 Projects supporting cooperation across borders to develop urban-rural linkages	

II.7.2. Type of project activities

Activities and related expenditures are eligible according to the eligibility rules set out in the Interreg Programme. This being the case, projects should carefully consider the following aims:

- contribution to sustainable territorial development;
- leverage effect on investment, development perspectives and policy development;
- facilitation of innovation (including social innovation), entrepreneurship, knowledge economy and information society by concrete cooperation action and visible results (creation of new products, services, development of new markets, improvement of human resources based on the principles of sustainability);
- contribution to integration by supporting balanced capacities for transnational territorial cooperation at all levels (systems building and governance).

ATTENTION: The orientation on research, technology and innovation encompasses a significant entrepreneurial development aspect. **As a consequence, projects focusing on purely academic cooperation or basic research activities or aiming at only networking and exchanging of experience and/or not demonstrating the translation of outputs arising from "soft" actions (surveys, studies, networks, etc.) into concrete and sustainable results will not be supported by the DRP.**

Projects could include activities such as development and implementation of strategies, studies and operational plans, capacity building activities, promotion actions, development of tools, set-up of services, preparation and development of investments proposed by transnational strategic concepts, including small scale infrastructure investment if appropriate and justifiable. Additional activities could include networking and exchange of information, though not as stand-alone activity, as purely networking activities will NOT be supported. Activities proposed by the projects should consider overcoming the disparities between east and west, EU and non-EU partner states, rural-urban. The territorial approach is of utmost importance when developing the proposals and specific needs of the territories should be at the centre of the projects.

It is the task of each project applicant and each proposed intervention to present an adequate activity mix, which will produce concrete results, ensure the fulfilment of the proposed project specific objectives and contribute to the programme specific objectives.

II.8 Capitalisation

Capitalisation is an integral part of every project since the previously available results should be used and work should not be duplicated.

Based on previous experience, capitalisation proved to be a very fruitful exercise that can bring added value.

In this respect, capitalisation can be used both internally within the programme, but also externally for the purpose of cooperation and finding synergies with the other programmes.

The programme emphasises the importance of building upon past efforts and existing knowledge (relevant information can be found on the DTP/DRP Programme website, INTERACT database Keep 2.0 etc.). This being the case, relevant and up-to-date knowledge, tools and partnerships which are appropriate for the development, implementation and dissemination of planned outputs and results are needed to build a solid ground for innovation and to avoid the duplication of efforts. Furthermore, this will allow for existing disparities between regions and uneven development of regions in the cooperation area to be effectively addressed. In this respect, the programme also invites partnerships to reach out to relevant stakeholders and professionals in order to ensure effective networking beyond their project partnerships.

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 the projects and the programme 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 (final) conferences addressing common stakeholders.

Please note: Capitalisation activities are mandatory and the related budget have to be envisaged already in the Application Form. The capitalisation activities have to be included in the project work plan in a coherent manner, according to the project structure and the expenditures included in the concerned activities.

III. Application and assessment

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**

annuncements 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.1 Overview

As a general rule Calls for proposals of the Danube Region Programme can be organised in one or two relevant steps. The Call announcement will specify the call procedure. In case of a two-step call the following process is followed:

- "First step" with the expression of interest (EoI) outlining mainly the intervention logic of the proposal and the strategic relevance for the DRP submitted through the programme monitoring system (Jems).
- "Second step" with the submission of the completed application form (AF) with the required annexes through the programme monitoring system (Jems).

Only proposals pre-selected in the first step phase can submit the completed application form (with its required Annexes) in the second step.

This part illustrates clearly and transparently the project selection system. This system is made public in order to make all stakeholders, potential applicants and their project partners aware of the selection procedures and criteria before preparing their applications. Hence, they can develop high quality proposals and assist the programme to reach its specific objectives of realising high quality, result oriented transnational projects relevant to the programme area.

III.2. Application process for 2-step call

III.2.1 First step

In the first step, applicants are requested to submit an EoI based on a reduced level of information compared to the application form.

The EoI presents mainly the partnership, intervention logic and the strategic relevance of the proposal. A simplified operational part that includes the overall budget as well as the total budget of each partner, and the work plan is also described but its details in this phase are reduced compared to the complete application form. Once filled in completely and accurately, the EoI can be submitted in the programme monitoring system (Jems). No additional documents will be accepted and/or considered. 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 EoI is carried out by the MA/JS following the 4-eye principle and applying strictly the selection criteria as described below. The assessment results are then presented to the MC who decides which EoIs are to be invited to submit a full application.

Applicants are informed about the decision of the MC through electronic communication. Those applicants, who are invited for the second step, are provided also with recommendations on their proposal (e.g. extending the partnership, merging with other project proposals, etc.).

Please note: The programme recommends that project proposals are already at an advanced stage at EoI submission: project partners are involved and the overall structure is well defined. Only project proposals matching a certain readiness, quality level and responding to the selection criteria can be invited to enter the 2nd step of the application procedure.

ATTENTION: The LP and the intervention logic cannot be changed between the first and second step.

III.2.2 Second step

In the second step, applicants are requested to submit the full project proposal (application form).

The AF presents in detail the partnership, context of the project, intervention logic, work plan and budget. Once filled in completely and accurately, the AF can be submitted in the programme monitoring system (Jems). Additionally the signed declarations and the partnership agreement have to be uploaded and submitted electronically only. Only electronic submission is allowed.

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 following the 4-eye principle and applying strictly the selection criteria as described below. 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 for financing of the MC through electronic communication.

III.3. Assessment procedure

III.3.1 Assessment procedure of the first step

The aim of a *first step* of a 2-step call is to allow the programme bodies and applicants to focus on the relevance of the project proposals for the call and programme requirements, reducing the administrative burdens necessary for participating in the call to the minimum. The overall procedure is based on a sense of trust towards the lead applicant (LA) who is submitting the project proposal as most of the verification on the documents is postponed to the *second step*.

In course of the selection process, two different sets of criteria are applied to come to the decision of approving an application:

- Eligibility criteria;
- Quality criteria

The eligibility check aims at confirming that the proposal has arrived within the set deadline, that the Expression of interest is complete and conforms to the requirements and that the partnership and the project fulfil the criteria established at programme level. This check will be carried out by the MA/JS, supported by the NCPs for the verification of the

eligibility of the Lead Applicant, and the decision is taken by the MC. **Failure to meet the eligibility requirements leads to the rejection of the proposal**.

Eligibility criteria are of "knock-out nature" and should be clearly answered with a YES or NO as to a large extent they are not subject to interpretation.

No.	Eligibility criteria	Description
1	The EoI has been submitted within the set deadline (date and time)	The EoI has been submitted within the date and time set in the call announcement.
2	The EoI has been submitted through the application system of DRP	The EoI has been submitted through the application system of the programme, in line with the call announcement.
3	The EoI is compiled in English	All parts of the EoI are compiled in English, the official language of the DRP.
4	Partnership is composed by at least three financing partners from at least three DRP partner countries. At least one partner shall be a beneficiary from an EU Member States	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement for a transnational DRP partnership: at least three financing partners (receiving Interreg funds co-financing) from at least three DRP partner countries. At least one partner shall be a beneficiary from an EU Member States
5	Lead Applicant is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirements set out in section II.1.1 of this manual.
6	The proposal has selected at least two programme output (out of which one is RCO 87 – Organisations cooperation across borders) and two programme result indicators in connection to the outputs and results defined by the applicant.	The proposal has selected at least two programme output and two programme result indicators to which it contributes to. Out of the two programme output indicators one is the mandatory one RCO87 – Organisations cooperating across border.
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.

The quality check forms the basis for an assessment of the EoI with the aim of bringing the projects into a certain ranking for selection.

Each question is assessed on basis of criteria with each being scored from 0 (not present / missing) to 5 (very good):

Score	Description	
0	None	The information requested is missing (either not filled in or not provided in the text). The information provided is not relevant for the criterion.
1	Very poor	The information provided has minimum relevance.
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

The criteria for the quality check will assess five different aspects of the proposals along 4 questions, while regarding the partnership the total scoring is given by two sub-questions.

Assessment main questions	Points	Weight	What is being assessed
To what extent is the proposal in line with the focus of the programme and the call?	Max. 5 points	30	The assessors shall check if the project topic is in line with the selected programme specific objective and the provisions of the call for proposals. In addition, assessors must determine if the project is in line with the programme provisions of not supporting investment, nor research orientated projects and not focusing on mere networking/exchange of experience. The score will be lower in case the topic addressed by the proposal is not fully in line with the selected programme SO and the provisions of the call or the project is mainly investment or research orientated or it aims at mere networking/exchange of experience, and/or is not demonstrating the transposition of outputs arising from "soft" actions (surveys, studies, networks, etc.) into

			concrete and sustainable results. The score will be lower in case the project presents a mere duplication of actions already implemented in the past in the addressed field. On the contrary, in case the project builds on past initiatives and the added value is demonstrated the score will be higher.
To what extent is the project's intervention logic coherent and in line with the programme's one?	Max. 5 points	20	The intervention logic of the project should mirror the programme's intervention logic in terms of link between the project objectives, outputs and results which have to be linked to the programme 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 selected specific objective and results of the relevant priority. The more inconsistencies there are between the programme and the project's intervention logic, the lower the score should be.
To what extent is the project clearly demonstrating a transnational dimension and impact?	Max. 5 points	15	A high score should be assigned in cases where it is clearly demonstrated that the project arises from a common need and it does not represent a collection of local actions. The transnational dimension of the project activities (if the project topic, the addressed challenge and the planned activities have transnational territorial and/or thematic relevance) as well as the transnational impact of the project outputs (if based on the planned activities and outputs the impact of the project can be considered relevant on a transnational scale and not only on a local level in different parts of the region) will be analysed. The more deficiencies identified, the lower the score.

Is the budget coherent with the planned activities and involved partners?	Max. 5 points	5	This criterion is reflecting the overall value of the proposal. The general quality, structure and soundness shall be analysed against the requested Interreg funds budget. PP allocations: Role of LP, generally higher budget allocated to the LP. Not realistic if too low budget planned for the LP (role of the LP to be checked in the project management structure) as generally LP has more responsibility and more complex project coordination and management activities generating higher budget compared to the other PPs. Role of responsible partners to each PSOs / Activities, and the overall activities to be checked.
Partnership	Max. 5 points	30	
a) To what extent is the composition of partnership overall relevant, justified and balanced for the proposed project?	Max. 5 points	weights 50% in the partnership score	It is to be examined how much the project partners are covering the target area of the project and the territory addressed by the identified thematic challenge and need. Based on the type of PPs involved, it is also to be examined how much the thematic expertise and competences of the PPs are relevant, balanced and well fitted in relation to the thematic scope of the project and among Project Partner countries. The more the partnership can ensure territorial and thematic relevance and competence in a coherent and balanced way for the proposed project, the higher the score shall be. The quality of partners and the networks they are gathering and representing are crucial for a high score. Commitment of right actors can also be achieved by key networks – clusters – or by co-funding by key institutions or by ASPs. When checking the relevance of partners three

			different groups of actors are considered: (1) demand side – those who have to do something, which need to act in a certain field, (2) supply side - those having knowledge and / or experience and (3) result users (that could be also other institutions not directly involved as partners). The orientation of the project shall be considered (i.e. investment orientation - setting the ground for future investments, international agreements orientation, etc.). According to the orientation the relevant policy levels shall be involved. The assessors shall evaluate if the distribution of tasks among the partners is equitable and if it contributes to achieving the project's objective.
b) To what extent are the non-EU countries of the programme area involved in the partnership?	Max. 5 points	weights 50% in the partnership score	This criterion is reflecting the proportional involvement (involvement of the relevant institutions from non-EU countries which are representing territories sharing the same challenges as the other PPs involved in the project) of the partners coming from different non-EU countries in the partnership in line with the relevance of the territorial challenges addressed by the project and their competences in the territories they represent. Missing PPs from non-EU countries for which the identified territorial needs and challenges are relevant leads to a lower score.
Total score	Max. 5 points		

In the assessment process all the questions have been assigned a weight in line with the importance of the criterion in the first step. It is considered that the alignment of the project theme to the programme SO and the partnership play an important role thus have been assigned the highest weights.

The overall score will be calculated as a weighted average considering the weights defined in the table above.

Project proposals receiving a minimum 75% of the maximum score will be recommended by the MA/JS for immediate selection.

Project proposals receiving between 60% and 74% of the maximum score will need further discussions and a final decision will be taken by the MC.

Project proposals receiving less than 60% of the maximum score will be recommended by the MA/JS for rejection.

III.3.2 Assessment process of the second step

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.

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

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 has been submitted through the programme monitoring system	The AF has been submitted through the official programme monitoring system (Jems).
3	The AF is compiled in English	All parts of the AF are compiled in English, the official language of the DRP.
4	Partnership is composed by at least three financing partners from at least three DRP partner countries. At least one partner shall be a beneficiary from an EU Member States	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement for a transnational DRP partnership: at least three financing partners (receiving Interreg funds co-financing) from at least three DRP participating countries out of which at least one is a beneficiary from an EU Member State.

5	Lead applicant is an eligible beneficiary	The Lead Applicant fulfils the requirement set in Section II.1.1 of the Applicants Manual.
6	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.
7	Completeness of partnership agreement	The partnership agreement is complete and signed by all directly financed partners.
8	Changes of partners between the EoI and the AF respected the thresholds	Changes (replacement and/ or withdrawal) of directly financed partners do not exceed the threshold of maximum number of partners defined in the call announcement. (adding partners is permitted without limitation)
9	The project intervention logic in the AF has not been modified compared to the one outlined in the EoI[23]	The project main objective, specific objectives, results, outputs as outlined in the EoI are not modified in the AF (but only improved according to the recommendations of the MA/JS).
10	The lead applicant in the AF has not been changed compared to the one in the EoI	The institution of the lead applicant in the AF is the same as the one applying in the EoI. Administrative changes are not considered to be a change under this criterion.

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.1.1 of the applicants manual.
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.

[23] *Points 8-10 are only applicable in case of two-step Calls*

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 and are common to all Priorities.

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

- Strategic assessment criteria - The main aim is to determine the extent of project's contribution to the programme's objective(s) and to the programme's result(s).
- Operational assessment criteria - The main aim is to assess the viability and the feasibility of the proposed project, as well as its value for money in terms of resources used against delivered outputs and result.

Each criteria group ("Strategic" and "Operational") is assessed on 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.

Score	Description	
0	**None**	The information requested is missing (either not filled in or not provided in the text). The information provided is not relevant for the criterion
1	**Very poor**	The information is provided has minimum relevance
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

The criteria for the quality check in case of two-step call will contain:

- Six sub-criteria for the strategic relevance for a maximum score of 30 points.
- Four sub-criteria for the operational relevance for a maximum score of 20 points.

To determine if the project is strategic for the programme and in line with the provisions set in the call announcement, the *strategic assessment* is carried out first and independently

from the *operational assessment*. Only projects successfully passing the *strategic assessment* are assessed operationally. **The knock-out threshold for the assessment is set at 60%.**

The following procedure applies:

- If a proposal receives a lower score than 60% in the strategic assessment, then it won't be assessed operationally and it fails the overall assessment.
- If a proposal receives at least 60% in the strategic assessment, then it will be assessed also from an operational point of view and the final score will be given by the sum of the scores related to the strategic and operational assessment, taking into consideration the weight that each criterion provides to the overall points (strategic 30/50 = 60% of the total score, operational 20/50 = 40% of the total In the following tables the sub-criteria to assess the strategic and operational aspects 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.

A. Strategic relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points	What is being assessed
Are the territorial needs and challenges identified and duly justified?	To what extent are the territorial needs/ challenges coherently described and relevant for achieving the programme objectives?	Max 5 points	The assessor shall check if the needs/ challenges are clearly and comprehensively described, if those are relevant in the context of the programme's objectives and if the country level information is provided for the target area of the project. In case pilot actions are planned for certain areas, details about the particular needs of these areas should be provided. Applicants should prove their thorough knowledge of the specificities of the Danube Region in the addressed thematic field.
	To what extent is the proposal clearly addressing the needs/ challenges?		The assessor shall check if, and to what extent the activities described in the work plan are responding to the identified needs/ challenges. The more concrete the description and the stronger the links with the programme's relevant objective the higher the score.
	To what extent does the proposal take into consideration the capitalisation of relevant previous projects and the synergies with on-going projects and brings added value to them?		The applicant has to explain if, and what existing knowledge, gained from previous projects, is to be exploited and if the potentials given by in parallel implemented projects and activities have been considered in the proposal. Added value compared to past initiatives has to be demonstrated. Missing capitalisation does not necessarily affect negatively the score, if it is demonstrated that the stand-alone character of the project does not require it. Higher score shall be given if the applicant specifies the details (not only the name of projects to be capitalised but specifying also which outcomes shall be further used for what purposes, as well as not only naming the ongoing projects but also specifying how synergies shall be fostered concretely).

Is the intervention logic coherent?	To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent with the programme's one?	Max 5 points	The project's intervention logic should mirror the programme's one in terms of links between the project's objectives, results and outputs 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. The more inconsistencies there are between the programme and the project intervention logic, the lower the score should be.
	To what extent is the project intervention logic coherent and well defined in terms of: ➢ definition of the objectives, expected results and outputs ➢ link between the objectives, expected results and outputs ➢ link between the needs of the target groups and the proposed outputs and results		The project's main objective should be defined in a clear way and should not be a mere duplication of the programme's terminology. Furthermore the assessors shall check the coherence between the project's main objective and the project's Specific Objectives. 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. 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). The assessors shall check if the proposed outputs and results are in line with the needs of the target group and if they are useful.

			<u>Investments</u>: does the investment help achieving the project objectives and thereby beneficial to the partnership (no local interest only – going beyond office equipment). Relevance of the investment to the objective of the project (transnational impact of the investment is demonstrated at the description of the activity).
	To what extent the envisaged activities can realistically reach the planned outputs and results?		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.
To which extent the proposal contributes to EU strategies and / or policies?	To what extent is the project concretely contributing to relevant EU strategies/ policies (other than EUSDR) of the thematic field addressed by the project?	Max 5 points	The link between the project objectives and expected results and relevant EU policy(ies) and strategy(ies) has to be clear, logical and comprehensive. The LA should not just list the relevant EU strategies/ policies but shall also highlight clearly how the proposal is actually contributing to them. The more detailed the explanation, the higher the score.
	To what extent does the project clearly contribute to one or more targets of the selected EUSDR Priority Area(s), as set out by the Priority Areas?		The link between the project objectives, including expected results and one (or more) PA of the EUSDR, as set out by the Priority Areas and targets, has to be clear, logical and comprehensive. The clearer and more concrete the explanation is in the specific section of the AF, the higher the score will be.

	To what extent is the EUSDR embedded in the proposal (at the level of needs and challenges, synergy/ capitalisation, work plan, durability and transferability)?		The LA has to demonstrate in practical terms how the EUSDR is embedded in the proposal either by involving the relevant Strategy bodies (PACs, SG etc.) and/ or by proposing concrete activities to ensure the uptake of the project result by the EUSDR. The more detailed the explanation (which can be in different sections of the AF), the higher the score.
Is the partnership composition relevant, justified and balanced for the proposed project?	To what extent is the partnership representing the right mix of countries and competences according to the project topic, its geographic focus if relevant, and the proposed outputs and result?	Max 5 points	It is to be examined how much the project partners are covering the target area of the project and the territory addressed by the identified thematic challenge and need. Based on the type of PPs involved, it is also to be examined how much the thematic expertise and competences of the PPs are relevant, balanced and well mixed in relation to the thematic scope of the project and among project partner countries. The more the partnership can ensure territorial and thematic relevance and competence in a coherent and balanced way for the proposed project, the higher the score shall be. The quality of partners and the networks they are gathering and representing are crucial for a high score. Commitment of right actors can also be achieved by key networks – clusters – or by co-funding by key institutions or by ASPs. When checking the relevance of partners please consider three different groups of actors: (1) demand side – those who have to do something, which need to act in a certain field, (2) supply side - those having knowledge and / or experience and (3) result users (that could be also other institutions not directly involved as partners).

			Please consider the orientation of the project (i.e. investment orientation setting the ground for future investments, international agreements orientation, etc.). According to this orientation the relevant policy levels shall be involved. In case the partnership is dominated by one / two countries (by number of PPs, by budget allocation of PPs) the score will be lower. The same applies in case certain countries are underrepresented within the partnership. The sheer higher number of partners is not necessarily leading to a higher quality of partnership and to higher score. Please, consider non-eligibility of specific partners (if the case).
	To what extent is the role of the partners balanced and relevant for achieving the main objective?		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 objective.
	To what extent are the non-EU countries of the programme area involved in the partnership?		This criterion is reflecting the proportional involvement of the partners coming from different non-EU countries in the partnership in line with the relevance of the territorial challenges addressed by the project and their competences in the territories they represent. Missing PPs from non-EU countries for which the identified territorial needs and challenges identified are relevant leads to a lower score.
Is the need for transnational cooperation demonstrated?	To what extent does the project have a clear transnational dimension/ impact?	Max 5 points	High score should be assigned in case it is clearly demonstrated that the project arises from a common need/ challenge and it does not represent a collection of local actions. The transnational dimension of the project activities (if the project topic, the addressed challenge and the contributing project activities have transnational territorial and/or thematic character and relevance) as well as the transnational impact of the project outputs (if based

			on the planned activities and outputs the impact of the project can be considered relevant on transnational scale and not only on local level in different parts of the region) will be analysed. Limitations to these criteria will result in a lower score.
	To what extent the added value of the transnational cooperation is clearly described?		The added value of transnational approach should be clearly demonstrated in comparison for example to a national/ cross-border, etc. approach. Should there be evidence that the proposal would suit better in the cross-border strand of a different funding programme, a lower score shall be assigned.
Is the target group defined and does it have ownership of the project results?	To what extent is the target group clearly identified and involved throughout the project implementation?	Max 5 points	High score is assigned if the target groups of the project are clearly defined and specified and the work plan properly details how these target groups are to be involved during the project implementation and the proposed outputs are answering their needs. Furthermore, the assessors shall check if the target groups are realistically quantified.
	To what extent does the proposal clearly explain how the target group will integrate/use the project outputs?		The assessor shall check if the proposal clearly and concretely describes how the target groups will integrate the project outputs and will make further use of them after the end of the project. Clear reference to the specific project outputs and how they will be used by which target groups should be checked.
	To what extent are the durability and transferability of the outputs clearly ensured?		The assessor shall check if concrete, specific and logical provisions supporting the durability (from an institutional, financial and political point of view) and transferability (e.g. towards other regions, relevant sectors) of project outputs and results are provided. The more concrete, specific and logical are the provisions for durability and

			transferability of project outputs and results the higher the score is assigned (not plain list of names).
	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 concrete and coherent with the overall territorial needs and with the programme, project, as well as EU and national objectives. The LA should outline how the project is bringing a contribution to the different 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. In case the assessment identifies potential negative effects of certain project activities, deliverables, outputs (e.g. in relation to the environmental, or other horizontal objectives), which are not detailed in the application form, or no mitigation measures planned for those in the project, that will lower the score of this criteria. The more specific, concrete and realistic the description of the contributions is (what exactly would improve, by which project activity, measure, outcome and how), the higher the score.
Total		Max 30 points	

B. Operational relevance

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Points	What is being assessed
Is the work plan realistic, consistent and coherent?	To what extent are the proposed timetable and spending forecast coherent and realistic?	Max 5 points	The assessors shall check if the overall duration of the project and that of individual activities in connection to the SOs is realistic in comparison with the planned actions and outputs. Also, the assessor shall check if the sequence of activities and the interdependencies between activities/ SOs are logical and coherent. **Spending forecast:** consider the delay between spending, certifying expenses and the reporting. In general there should be lower costs reported at project start. Is there a peak in the reported expenses (if yes, is it justified by concentrated activities at a certain period of time/ seasonal activities)? The work plan should demonstrate coherence and readiness to be implemented.
	To what extent are the activities described in detail (how, where, when and by whom they will be undertaken) and balanced in terms of geographical implementation (national, regional, local)?		The assessors shall check if the activities are described in detail in terms of how they will be implemented, where, when and by whom (who are the responsible partners and who the other involved ones are?) and they are balanced in terms of geographical implementation (not merely local type of activities).

To what extent are management structures and procedures in line with the project size, duration and needs?	To what extent are the management structures (e.g. project steering committee) and procedures (e.g. internal procedures, quality assurance etc.) clear, transparent, efficient and effective?	Max 5 points	High score should be allocated in case the governance of the project is clear (including decision making process, procedures etc.) and the project makes provisions for an effective transfer of know-how inside the partnership. The quality assurance of the outputs should be explained in detail. The *work plan* section of the proposal shall also reflect what is described in the *Project management* section of the AF
	To what extent does the lead applicant demonstrate its capacity to manage EU co-financed projects or other international projects or can ensure adequate measures for management support?		Should the Lead Applicant demonstrate clearly that it has the knowledge and resources to manage international partnerships or, in case not, plans concrete measure to ensure them (justifying also the related budget part) a high score should be awarded.
To what extent are communication activities appropriate and forceful to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?	To what extent are the communication objectives clearly linked to the project specific objectives?	Max 5 points	High score should be awarded in case the communication activities and tools are clear, consistent realistic and appropriate to reach the project specific objectives.
	To what extent are communication activities and deliverables appropriate to reach the relevant target groups and stakeholders?		Should the communication activities and deliverables be tailored to the needs and specificities of the target groups identified higher score should be awarded.
Does the project budget demonstrate value for money?	To what extent is the budget allocated to each content related activity justified and correctly quantified?	Max 5 points	This criterion is reflecting the overall value of the proposal. The general quality, structure and soundness shall be analysed against the requested Interreg funds budget. PP budgets: Role of LP, generally higher budget allocated to the LP. Not realistic if too low budget planned for the LP (role of the LP to
	To what extent is the budget of each cost category coherent with the planned activities and involved partners?		

	To what extent the partners' budget is consistent with their involvement in the activities?		be checked in the project management structure, generally LP has more responsibility and more complex activities in connection to project management and communication and this generates higher budget compared to other PPs. Role of responsible partners to each SOs, and the activities and the respective budget allocated are to be compared. The "weight" of staff costs and external expertise allocated within a PP budget to be checked (in case the PP is professionally important in the partnership, higher staff costs are realistic). Cost categories allocations: in case of high expenses planned for "external experts & services" does the work plan description provide justification for that? Is the "travel and accommodation" budget consistent with the planned meetings? Infrastructure and works (investments): Cost-effectiveness /at least realistic. Equipment: If specific equipment is listed, are all the items of equipment related to the project objectives, and necessary for the implementation of the project? Is it traceable from the description of activities that project needs specific equipment? Office equipment – realistic to the project size and staff costs. If equipment costs are not foreseen, the consistency between this and the activities is checked. The more incoherencies are detected the lower the score will be.
Total		Max 20 points	

Comment [CSE1]: text will be adjusted for the second step depending on the method for reimbursement

The strategic relevance counts 60% in the total score, while the operational relevance counts 40% in the total score.

Project proposals scoring overall 75% or more will be recommended by the MA/JS for immediate selection.

Project proposals scoring overall between 60% and 74% will be subject to further discussions and a final decision will be taken by the MC. Final decision on financing the proposals will be taken by the MC, based on the results of the technical assessment coordinated by the MA/JS and on the available amounts per Priority.

Project proposals scoring less than 60% will be recommended by the MA/JS for rejection.

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, based on the available information 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, based on the available information 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. 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).

1. 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.

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

When the answer to all the questions related to direct state aid (Annex IV. 2, questions 1-6) 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 (e.g. from a national or regional co-financing scheme).

2. Indirect state Aid

The question No. 7 of Annex IV. 2 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 EUR 20.000 per undertaking and per project.
- ✓ 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:

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.

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 process[24].

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 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 assessment[25] 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.

[24] *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.*

[25] *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.

Annex 1 – Programme outputs (RCO) and results indicators (RCR)

OUTPUT INDICATORS

Programme indicator RCO 82 Participations in joint actions promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion

What it measures?

- ✓ The indicator counts the number of participations in joint activities principally addressing horizontal principles (gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion) implemented in the supported projects.

Definitions:

- ✓ Joint actions could include, for instance, exchange activities or exchange visits.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ Participations (i.e. number of persons attending a joint action) are counted for each joint activity organised on the basis of attendance lists or other relevant means of quantification.
- ✓ A joint action is considered an action organised with the involvement of the project partners (from the definition of the content to its practical implementation).
- ✓ Participations in public events promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion, organized in supported projects, should not be counted in this indicator.

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is collected from the DRP monitoring system, based on the project application form and project progress reports.

Programme indicator RCO 83 Strategies and action plans jointly developed

What it measures?

- ✓ The indicator counts the number of joint strategies or action plans developed by supported projects.

Definitions:

- ✓ **Jointly developed strategy** aims at establishing a targeted way to achieve a goal oriented process in a specific domain. A joint strategy shall define the common problems / challenges of the targeted area and its regions. The strategy should set up clear mid- and long-term objectives, priorities and the course of action designed to achieve the planned objectives, reflecting also the common vision of the Danube Region in the specific field. Strategies should aim at policy integration in the Danube area in the targeted fields and act as policy drivers below EU level but above national level.
- ✓ **Joint action plan** translates an existing jointly developed strategy into actions. It shall include the sequence of steps to be taken, or activities that must be performed, for a strategy to succeed. Therefore, it should include a timeline, the financial resources and a definition of the responsible actors.
- ✓ A **jointly developed** strategy or action plan implies the involvement of organisations from the partnership in the drafting process of the strategy or action plan. The involvement of the relevant stakeholders is also crucial, since the strategy, or action plan shall reflect the needs of these stakeholder groups and ensure its sustainability and future implementation.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ A joint strategy/action plan is to be counted if it is developed by the project, while revision or update of existing strategies/action plans cannot be counted under this indicator.
- ✓ Each developed strategy/action plan of the project shall be counted only once under the respective output indicator.
- ✓ In case a strategy is developed by the project and based on that also action plan(s) are developed within the same project, these are to be counted separately for this indicator.
- ✓ Project management and communication-related strategies such as e.g. the project communication strategy, should not be considered under this output indicator.
- ✓ Guidelines, policy recommendations and other similar documents of strategic relevance, but not being strategy/action plan shall not be counted under this output indicator.

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is collected from the DRP monitoring system, based on the project application form and project progress reports.

Example

Countries along the Danube River intend to address the challenge of increasing low-water periods induced by climate change affecting different sectors. In order to improve adaptation capacities regarding that challenge and to reduce the potential damage, project partners being key actors from different affected sectors of Danube riparian countries joining forces and develop a joint strategy, involving also stakeholders, decision makers from their countries beyond the project partnership. Within the joint cooperation they define those elements of this challenge that are common and would need joint efforts of the countries, based on which mid- and long-term objectives, the related priorities and course of necessary actions are elaborated in the strategy.

Programme indicator RCO 84 - Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects

What it counts?

- ✓ The indicator counts the pilot actions developed jointly and implemented by supported projects.

Definitions:

- ✓ Jointly developed **pilot action** has an experimental nature either testing of innovative products, methodologies, tools etc. or demonstrating the application of existing products, methodologies, tools to a certain territory/sector; the feasibility and effectiveness of procedures, new instruments, tools, experimentation or the transfer of practices.
- ✓ **Jointly developed** pilot action implies the involvement of organisations from the partnership in its implementation. The concept and implementation details of the pilot actions have to be jointly developed by the partnership, even though its implementation can be individual in certain partner regions.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ In order to be counted by this indicator, the pilot action needs not only to be developed, but also implemented within the project and the implementation of the pilot action should be finalised by the end of the project.
- ✓ Carrying out project activities in a certain "pilot area" without testing, or demonstrating a solution is not considered as pilot action and not to be counted under this indicator.

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is to be collected from the DRP monitoring system, based on the approved project application form and the project progress reports.

Example

A project is developing a new concept and wishes to test it in different environments by the different actors. The partners are developing the pilot action concept jointly and then implement it in different environment, analyse the outcomes and make improvements. Following this exercise at the end of the implementation a solution can steam out of the project (please see below RCO 116).

Programme indicator RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions

What it measures?

- ✓ The indicator counts the number of jointly developed solutions from joint pilot actions implemented by supported projects.

Definitions:

- ✓ Jointly developed **solution** contributes to solve a common problem, challenge addressed by the project. The joint solution shall be pilot tested (RCO84) to prove whether the solution meets the needs of the target groups.

- ✓ The **forms of solutions** can be very diverse, tools (e.g. analytical, monitoring, management, decision making tools, instruments), technologies (software, ICT solutions, platforms), methodologies, concepts, guidelines, processes, agreements, services etc.
- ✓ A **jointly developed** solution implies the involvement of organisations from the partnership in the drafting design and evaluation process of the solution.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ In order to be counted in the indicator, an identified solution should include indications of the actions needed for it to be taken up by the target group or to be up scaled.
- ✓ Each developed solution of the project shall be counted only once under the respective output indicator.
- ✓ In case a solution (e.g. a methodology) is jointly developed by the project, but not pilot tested and validated within the project to be feasible and applicable (see RCO84), then that product of the project shall not be counted under this output indicator.
- ✓ Project management-related tools, like internal communication platforms, templates should not be considered under this output indicator.

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is collected from the DRP monitoring system, based on the project application form and the project progress reports.

Example

Several regions from different Danube Region countries intend to contribute to reducing GHG emission in their area and decide to apply innovative mobility solutions in their public transport systems. The project partners jointly analyse the common problems and possibilities and identify some alternative transport solutions, which are tested by two-three project partners in their area as pilot actions (RCO84). The solutions verified by the pilot actions to be feasible and applicable in other areas as well is counted as *jointly developed solutions output* (RCO116).

Programme indicator RCO 87 - Organisations cooperating across borders

What it counts?

- ✓ The indicator counts the organisations cooperating formally in supported projects. The organisations counted in this indicator are the legal entities including project partners and associated strategic partners, as mentioned in the application form and subsidy contract.

Definitions:

- ✓ **Project partners** are the institutions included in the application form who receive financial support from the programme (Interreg funds).
- ✓ **Associated strategic partners** are organisations which are essential for the successful development of meaningful and useful outputs. These are the associated strategic partners defined in the project application form as well as such organisations, which are not directly involved in the project partnership, but the partnership plans to sign cooperation agreements with them. Their involvement in the development and assessment of outputs ensures that the end product is one that meets their expectations and is relevant to their needs and situations. They provide insight and information that would be difficult to obtain without their participation. Sustaining the outputs by, for example, adopting tools and strategies developed by the project, is also a primary role of the ASPs in ensuring the project has long-lasting legacy.
- ✓ **Formal cooperation** is cooperation between independent entities which is based on written contracts.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ At Programme level, double counting should be avoided at the level of project partners and ASP. When counting for the output indicator organisations cooperating across borders, it should be a legal entity. If the different departments of a university/city hall, etc. are established as individual legal entities, then they can be counted separately. If they don't have a legal status on their own then they should be counted as one entity.

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is to be collected via the DRP monitoring system, based on the approved application forms of the projects (project partnership).

- ✓ The programme is responsible for verifying the consistency of the aggregated data in the overview table provided by the programme in order to exclude double counting of same organisations from different projects.

Programme indicator RCO 118 - Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macroregional strategies

What it counts?

- ✓ The indicator counts the number of legal entities supported by the programme, listed in the application form and subsidy contract, and also contributing to the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies.

Definitions:

- ✓ **Multi-level governance** is a term used to describe the way decision making is spread vertically between many levels of government and horizontally across multiple quasi government, non-governmental organizations and actors. This situation develops because many countries have multiple levels of government including local, regional, state, national or federal, and many other organisations with interests in policy decisions and outcomes.
- ✓ **Macro-regional strategy** is a policy framework which allows countries located in the same region to jointly tackle and find solutions to problems or to better use the potential they have in common. The key macro-regional strategy for the DRP is the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), since the target area of the Strategy and the programme are the same.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ The indicator is solely dedicated for EUSDR governance support therefore the number of project partners (PPs, ASPs) involved only in the EUSDR governance support projects (PAC, DSP, SMF) financed by DRP are to be counted for this indicator.

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is collected from the DRP monitoring system, based on the project application forms and project progress reports.

RCO120 - Projects supporting cooperation across borders to develop urban-rural linkages

What it counts?

- ✓ The indicator counts the number of projects which aim, as a primary objective, to enhance the cooperation across borders between urban and rural areas.

Definitions

- ✓ Understanding rural-urban linkages provides the basis for measures that can improve both urban and rural livelihoods and environments.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ The indicator should be counted by the project only if by general approach or at least one specific objective of the project is addressing the developing of urban-rural linkages. Since the indicator is counting the number of projects, if selected by the LA, the target value will always be 1.

RESULT INDICATORS

Programme result indicator RCR 85 Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion

What it measures?

- ✓ The indicator counts the number of participations in joint actions across borders after the completion of the project, organised by all or some of the former partners or associated organisations within the project, as a continuation of cooperation
- ✓ For the definition of this indicator, the joint action includes training schemes.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ Joint actions across borders could include, for instance, exchange activities or exchange visits organized with participants from at least three countries of the programme area. Participations (i.e. number of persons attending a joint action across borders) are counted for each joint action organised on the basis of attendance lists or other relevant means of quantification.

Collection of data:

- Data for this indicator is collected from the DRP monitoring system.

Programme indicator RCR 79 Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations

What it measures?

- ✓ The indicator counts the number of joint strategies and action plans (not individual actions) adopted and implemented by organisations during or after the project completion.

Definitions:

- ✓ Joint strategies and action plans **taken up** by organisations means that the elaborated strategy/action plan is endorsed and applied by its target group and the implementation of at least certain parts of the strategy/action plan already starts during project implementation or until the deadline of submission of the final progress report (three months after the project end).

- ✓ The **organisations** involved in take-up means those target groups who are expected to apply and implement the elaborated strategy / action plan, which organisations may or may not be direct participants (PP, ASP) in the supported project.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ At the time of reporting this indicator, the implementation of the joint strategy or action plan does not need to be completed but effectively started.
- ✓ It is not necessary that the implementation of the strategy/ action plan is fully finalised in order to count the indicator.
- ✓ Together with the final progress report the lead partner shall provide the MA/JS with the timespan of strategy/ action plan implementation, timetable that should cover at least one year after the project end.

Collection of data:

- Data for this indicator is collected from the DRP monitoring system.

Example

Following the example of RCO83 regarding the joint strategy elaborated by project partners from Danube riparian countries addressing the challenge of increasing low-water periods induced by climate change; once the joint strategy is endorsed by the key actors, which are partly the PPs and other relevant stakeholders in their countries, in some countries the defined priorities are integrated into sectorial policy documents and procedures, in other countries specific action plans are elaborated to detail the realisation of the strategy within those countries. This means that the strategy started to be implemented in practice therefore the indicator shall be reported.

Programme indicator RCR 104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations

What it measures?

- ✓ 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.

Definitions:

- ✓ Joint solutions **taken up** by organisations means that the solution developed jointly by the partnership is adopted and applied by its target group (documented by the adopting organisations in, for instance, strategies, action plans etc.) already before, or until the submission of the final report (3 months from the end of project implementation). In case the solution is finalised at the end of the projects and thus its uptake will happen after project finalisation, the lead partner shall provide, together with the last progress report a time plan for the uptake of the solution in practice (by organisations within the partnership and or outside the partnership).
- ✓ The **organisations** involved in take-up means those target groups who are expected to adopt and apply the developed solution, which organisations may or may not be direct participants (LP, PP, ASP) in the supported project.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ This indicator counts solutions that are used by at least one organisation within or outside the project partnership. The solution should be used either by an organisation that was not using it before the project or by an organisation that was already using it before the project and will now extend the planned duration or increase the scale.

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is collected from the DRP Monitoring System.

Example

Following the example of RCO116, once the innovative mobility solutions were developed and validated by pilot testing by the project partnership, in some participating / neighbouring regions relevant organisations start using these solutions by adjusting their relevant regulatory framework accordingly / integrating it into their mobility plan / providing new mobility services by which they increase the effectiveness of mobility in the respective area and contributing as well to the reduction of GHG emission.

Programme indicator RCR 84 - Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion

What it counts?

- ✓ The indicator counts the organisations cooperating across borders after the completion of the supported projects. The organisations are legal entities involved in project implementation and counted only under the output indicator: RCO 118 **Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies**.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ The indicator is solely dedicated for EUSDR governance support therefore the number of project partners (PPs, ASPs) involved only in the EUSDR governance support projects (PAC, DSP, SMF) financed by DRP and cooperating after project end are to be counted for this indicator. The cooperation should be documented by a formal agreement (EUSDR decisions, national decisions, letters of intent etc.)

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is collected from the DRP monitoring system and requesting proof of document signed by the partnership

Programme indicator ISI - Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders

What it measures?

- ✓ measures the number of organisations that actively participated in cooperation activities of a project across borders and consequently increased their institutional capacity.

Definitions:

- ✓ **Institutional capacity** is defined as an organisation's ability to set and achieve goals through knowledge, skills, systems and institutions. An organisation increases its institutional capacity by securing the resources (human or technical) and structures (organisational or governance) it needs to successfully perform its mandated tasks.

- ✓ **Cooperation activity across borders** is defined as a process of exchanging knowledge and experience between participants from multiple countries (this can be done through e.g. testing solutions, tools, innovative concepts etc. developed by the project, through peer-reviews, trainings etc.). This process can lead to creating joint objectives and commitments and actions fulfilling these commitments.
- ✓ Organisations **actively participating** can relate both to the project partnership (LP, PPs, ASPs), as well as such organisations, which are not involved in the partnership, but actively participated in cooperation activities project across borders, by which they increased their institutional capacity in the thematic field of the project.

Practical implementation of the indicator:

- ✓ An organisation is to be counted if it has undergone this kind of learning process through project activities. This is defined as more than one instance of tangible exchange in which the organisation played an active role.
- ✓ An organisation is to be counted no more than once per project regardless of how many activities it was involved in or how many departments were involved.
- ✓ An organisation is to be counted only if its increased institutional capacity is in the thematic field of the project.
- ✓ An organisation that is involved in the project partnership (LP, PPs, ASPs) are to be counted for this result indicator, if the result indicator is linked to the output indicator RCO87 (cooperation across border).
- ✓ An organisation, which actively took part in a project pilot action and increased their institutional capacity in the thematic field of the project, but not involved in the project partnership shall be counted for this indicator, if it is linked to the output indicator RCO84 (joint pilot actions).

Collection of data:

- ✓ Data for this indicator is to be collected via a survey provided by the programme to the project lead partner.
- ✓ The project may decide to translate the survey into local languages if necessary. The project lead partner is responsible for ensuring that the survey is completed by the organisations that participated in project activities. The lead partner is responsible for collating the responses in an overview table that it provides to the programme.

- ✓ The programme is responsible for verifying the consistency of the aggregated data in the overview table provided by the programme. The programme is not responsible for verifying the accuracy of the data at the level of the individual organisations.

Example

18 rescue service organisations in six countries tested existing procedures and communication designed for accidents in the Danube through a set of joint large-scale exercises. They assessed and further developed these procedures and communication. As a result, they can respond to accidents more effectively in a transnational setting.

Interconnection between the programme outputs and results indicators

In the frame of the programme intervention logic the programme output indicators are linked to the programme result indicators, which is presented in this table.

Output indicator	Result indicator
RCO82 Participations in joint actions promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion	RCR85 Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion
RCO 83 Strategies and action plans jointly developed	RCR 79 Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations
RCO 84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	ISI[26]: Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders, other than organisations counted under RCO 87 Organisations cooperating across borders (PPs, etc.) – e.g. organisations external to the partnership
RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions	RCR 104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations
RCO 87 Organisations cooperating across borders	ISI: Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders
RCO118 Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies	RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion
RCO120 Projects supporting cooperation across borders to develop urban-rural linkages	

RCO 87 Organisations cooperating across borders, which is a mandatory output indicator, is linked to result indicator *ISI Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders,* as it is expected that the institutional

[26] *Interreg specific Indicator developed by the programmes together with INTERACT*

capacity of the organisations directly involved in the project partnership (LP, PPs and ASPs) will be increased by participating in the project cooperation and implementation.

RCO 82 Participations in joint actions promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion is linked to *RCR 85 Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion,* as DRP is supporting implementation of joint actions which are promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion with the expectations that participantions in such actions continue after project implementation.

RCO 83 Strategies and action plans jointly developed is linked to *RCR 79 Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations*, as DRP is supporting projects that are developing viable and practical outputs therefore it is expected that the strategies and action plans developed by the projects are actually implemented.

RCO 84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects is linked to *ISI Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders*, as it is expected that the institutional capacity of those organisations, which are not involved in the project partnership (LP, PPs and ASPs), but actively participating in the implementation of the pilot actions of the project will be increased by participating in the project cooperation and implementation. (Of course it is also expected that the institutional capacity of the organisations of the project partnership will also increase by taking part in a project pilot action, but since this increase is already considered within the project cooperation in general (*RCO 87 – ISI)* this shall not be double counted within the *RCO 84 – ISI* linkage).

There is also linkage between the output indicators *RCO 84 Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects* and *RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions*, since only such solution, project product can be counted as project output contributing to RCO 116, which stems out of and validated by a pilot action of the project.

RCO 116 Jointly developed solutions is linked to *RCR 104 Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations* since DRP is supporting projects that are developing viable and practical outputs therefore it is expected that the solutions developed by the projects are actually adopted and applied by the target organisations.

RCO118 Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macro-regional strategies is linked to *RCR 84 Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion*, which indicators are related to the cooperation within EUSDR governance support projects and it is assumed that the governance of the EUSDR (PACs, DSP, SMF etc.) will not be terminated after the finalisation of the programme.

Survey template – for ISI
(sample only**)**

[Preamble]

1. Identification

Your name and surname: _____

E-mail address: _____

Organisation name: _____

Country: _____

2. Status in project:

☐ LP/PP
☐ Associated strategic partner
☐ Other stakeholder

3. Did the institutional capacity of your organisation increase as a result of involvement in this project?

☐ Yes
☐ No / Not sure

4. If you answered 'Yes': How has your organisation changed? Select all that apply.

☐ Used new knowledge or skills

Please describe: _____

☐ Adopted new tools

Please describe: _____

☐ Adopted new procedures or workflows

Please describe: _____

☐ Changed the organisational structure

Please describe: _____

☐ Other

Please describe: _____

5. If you answered "No": what were the factors that lead to failure in increasing the institutional capacity? Select all that apply form the following:

☐ Unclear information received;

Please describe: _____

☐ No new information, tools etc. provided;

Please describe: _____

☐ Lack of consistent participation in the project;

Please describe: _____

☐ Other, please specify.

Please describe: _____