



**INTERREG DANUBE  
TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMME  
2021-2027**

**STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL  
ASSESSMENT SCREENING**

**Draft**

**2021 June**

Based on the detailed analysis (Annex 1) and screening (Annex 2) of the draft INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027 (DTP) - prepared by the programme Managing Authority - its characteristics and the scope of its Priorities, Specific Objectives and type of actions in connection to the requirements and criteria of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive) it could be concluded that a **Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required for the INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027** for the following reasons:

- The Programme is not prepared specifically for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, but focusing on territorial cooperation addressing challenges relevant on a broader territorial scale within the Danube Region, supporting territorially integrated approaches, building regional capacities and institutionalising cooperation, which can partly be related to the sectors mentioned, but not dedicated to direct, specific sectorial development.
- The Programme do neither set framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 85/337/EEC, nor having likely significant effects on sites in connection to Article 6 or 7 of Directive 92/43/EEC since:
  - The priorities and specific objectives of the Programme, including their thematic and geographic focuses and related type of actions are defined in quite broad term.
  - The type of measures the supported projects can carry out within the Programme are mainly process related and although some of those, like jointly developed strategies, action plans can have certain influence on other strategies and plans, which however are to be further adapted on national, regional levels first, therefore the impact chains from the Programme's interventions to direct effects on specific sectors, or the environment are quite long.
  - The Programme is not funding major infrastructural investments, installations, especially not such, which are listed in the annexes of the EIA Directive.
- Considering the thematic scope of the selected specific objectives of the Programme and the characteristics of the activities that can be supported, some of the specific objectives (e.g. SO 1.2, 3.1, 3.2) are not related to environmental issues either with neutral, or very indirect potential impacts on the environment. In case of some other specific objectives (like SO 1.1, or 4.1), especially regarding certain thematic aspects like green transport, or circular economy can have indirect effects on the environment, which are however expected to be positive. Certain specific objectives are directly addressing environmental issues and challenges of the Danube Region (e.g. the four specific objectives of priority 2 and to a certain extent SO 3.3 as well) and expected to have mainly indirect, but also direct effects on the environment, with the overall aim to bring positive change and impact to the Region.
- Sustainable development as a horizontal principle is integrated into the project selection and monitoring of project implementation as well.

# Annex 1

## Analysis of DTP2 in connection to SEA

### Introduction

This analysis is prepared to determine the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027 (DTP). The document summarises the regulatory background of the SEA and presents the characteristics of the DTP to better understand its relevance in relation to the scope of SEA, as well as its potential effects on the environment.

### Summary of the process

The draft of the INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027 (DTP), its characteristics and the scope of its Priorities, Specific Objectives and type of actions, was analysed in detail, based on the requirements, especially the criteria set in Article 3 of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive). Specifically it was analysed, whether the Programme is prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use and set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 85/337/EEC (EIA Directive), or whether it might have likely effect on sites as defined in Article 6 or 7 of Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive). It was also analysed, how much the Programme take into consideration environmental and sustainability aspects in general, as well as what the potential effects of the different Specific Objectives of the INTERREG DTP 2021-2027 can be on the environment. Based on the detailed analysis, in order to determine whether the Programme is likely to have significant environmental effects, the screening of the Programme was also carried out along the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive.

Following the screening of the Programme, in order to reach the final conclusion whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required, or not for the INTERREG DTP 2021-2027, in accordance with the SEA Directive and the clarification communication of DG Environment sent to the DTP Managing Authority / Joint Secretariat (DTP MA/JS), the DTP MA/JS is consulting the Environmental Authorities of the other Partner States participating in the Programme.

### Regulatory background in connection to the SEA process

The key regulatory document to be considered is the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC *on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment* (SEA Directive).

The SEA Directive is applied in the Member States by transposing its objectives into the national law (e.g. the *Gov. Decree 2/2005. (I.11.)* in Hungary, in the hosting country of the DTP MA/JS). While keeping the objectives of the SEA Directive, there are certain differences in the actual respective legal acts of the different Member States, which complicates its application on transnational programmes like the DTP. Further to that the Programme includes also non-Member States as well, which are not even connected to the SEA Directive. Regarding the SEA process, DG Regio and DG Environment sent a joint communication in 2020 to the Permanent Representations of the EU Member States on the subject of *Environmental assessments applicable to the plans and programmes co-financed by the EU in the period 2021-2027*. In addition to this, DG Environment (EC) sent a clarification communication to the DTP MA/JS detailing in which SEA process case which authorities and in which country(es) are to be consulted. Besides the SEA Directive, these two communications of DG Environment were considered relevant for deciding, what process exactly is to be followed in case of the DTP regarding SEA.

The SEA Directive aims to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of projects, plans and programmes with a view to reduce their environmental impact. Accordingly the SEA Directive regulates in which cases and how an environmental assessment shall be carried out among others for programmes co-financed by the European Community.

EU co-financed programmes require assessment under the SEA Directive, as defined in Article 3.2 of the Directive:

- *which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use **and** set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 85/337/EEC (EIA Directive)*

*or*

- *which, in view of the likely effect on sites, have been determined to require an assessment pursuant to Article 6 or 7 of Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive).*

Further to that, according to Article 3.4 of the SEA Directive *Member States shall determine whether plans and programmes, other than those referred to in paragraph 2 (i.e. Article 3.2 of the Directive), which set the framework for future development consent of projects, are likely to have significant environmental effects.*

The terminology “*set the framework for future development consent of projects*” of the SEA Directive means, if the Programme in view contains criteria or conditions which would guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent on projects.

The terminology “*project*” in the SEA Directive is used according to the definition of the EIA Directive (2011/92/EU):

- *the execution of construction works or of other installations or schemes,*
- *other interventions in the natural surroundings and landscape including those involving the extraction of mineral resources*

According to Article 6.3 of the Habitat Directive (92/43/EEC) *any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives.* The terminology of “site” refers to sites of Community importance, which in the biogeographical region(s) contribute significantly to the maintenance or restoration at a favourable conservation status of a natural habitat type (Annex I of Habitat Directive) or of a species (Annex II) and may also contribute significantly to the coherence of Natura 2000, and/or to the maintenance of biological diversity within the biogeographic region(s).

The joint communication of DG Regio and DG Environment of 2020 reconfirms that *the legal requirements for environmental assessments stemming from the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Habitats and Water Framework Directives fully apply to EU co-financed programmes to be drawn up for the 2021-2027 period under the proposed Common Provisions Regulation.* The letter clarifies that *Programmes developed not in sectors listed in Article 3.2(a) of the SEA Directive (for instance territorial cooperation, social action, migration, security or border management) in principle do not require such assessment. Experience has shown that the interventions supported by such programmes in most cases do not involve works or infrastructure laid down in the annexes of the EIA Directive. However, if such programmes set the framework for the development of projects listed in the annexes of the EIA Directive (such as the construction of schools, hospitals, accommodation facilities for migrants, transnational or cross-border infrastructure), it is necessary to determine if they are likely to have significant environmental effects. If the screening concludes that no assessment is necessary, the reasons for this should be made public.*

The clarification communication of DG Environment sent to the DTP MA/JS explains that:

- In case a screening procedure pursuant to art. 3(6) takes place, the Environmental Authorities (EA) of the involved Member States shall be consulted (ref. art. 6(3));
- If the conclusion of the screening procedure pursuant to art. 3(6) is that no SEA is needed, the result of the determination of the likely significance of effects based on the criteria listed in Annex II of the SEA Directive and according to the assessment by the EA consulted shall be transmitted to the Commission together with the result of this exercise.

## INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme

The Interreg Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) is a financing instrument of the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) framework; better known as Interreg. ETC is one of the goals of the European Union cohesion policy and provides a framework for the implementation of joint actions and policy exchanges between national, regional and local actors from different partner states. Interreg is built around three strands of cooperation: cross-border (Interreg A), transnational (Interreg B) and interregional (Interreg C). Transnational cooperation programmes, like the DTP, bring together European regions and cities located in different

participating countries that share many challenges and opportunities due to their common geography, history, and culture.

The DTP gathers one of the highest numbers of participating countries among all the Interreg programmes: 9 EU countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany – with the two länder Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria -, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia) and 5 non-EU countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine – with four provinces: Chernivetska Oblast, Ivano-Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast and Odessa Oblast).

The whole Danube Region 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 variety of natural environment, the socio-economic differences and cultural diversity of the various parts of the area may be perceived as major challenges but actually represent important opportunities and unexploited potentials. Based on these challenges the main mission of the Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027 is to create a better institutional platform and transnational cooperation environment for the territorial, economic and social integration. In order to achieve a higher degree of territorial integration of the very heterogeneous Danube region, the transnational cooperation programme acts as a policy driver and pioneer to tackle common challenges and needs in specific policy fields where transnational cooperation is expected to deliver results. 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; while activities are focusing on territorially integrated approaches and institutionalising cooperation on a broader territorial scale. This is done by building regional capacities following an integrated bottom-up approach involving and coordinating relevant actors from all governance levels.

The DTP 2021-2027 Cooperation Programme document is currently under preparation by the DTP Task Force (TF) and planned to be submitted to the European Commission for approval in the autumn of 2021. To date the DTP programme document has been drafted as far as defining its strategy, the main challenges and the selected priorities, specific objectives, their focus, as well as the proposed type of actions (see Table 1). The Interreg Danube Transnational Programme 2021-27 is focusing on territorial cooperation and not prepared specifically for any of those sectors listed in Article 3.2(a) of the SEA Directive, (or e.g. the Government Decree 2/2005. (I.11.) of Hungary) such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, even if considering the thematic scope of the priorities and specific objectives selected for the Programme, the future projects to be supported by the Programme can possibly be related to some of those sectors, but focusing on transnational cooperation within.

The DTP 2021-2027, similarly to other Interreg transnational cooperation programmes, has limited financial resources compared to the large size of its programme area, therefore it is not supporting major infrastructural investments, including such that are listed in the annexes to the EIA Directive, but financing projects with “soft” type of cooperation and harmonisation measures in order to increase the capacities of the institutions, organisations involved in the projects. Accordingly, throughout the different thematic fields that the Programme is addressing the type of supported activities can be grouped into four categories:

- Developing **joint strategies/ actions plans** for certain territories and thematic fields to lower the disparities between the DTP regions and provide framework for a harmonised development;
- Developing practical, **harmonised, joint solutions**, ready to implement in practice, like models / methodologies / guidelines / processes etc.;
- Implementing **pilot actions** that are testing, or **demonstrating the practical applicability and viability of the solutions** jointly developed within the projects. Although a pilot action might include small-scale investments, those are rather limited in space and time, having only a testing, demonstrational purpose without full scale implementation;
- Implementing **capacity building actions** for the benefit of the institutions, organisations involved in the projects by jointly organised workshops/ peer reviews/ trainings, or by participating in the joint testing of the strategies / solutions / tools developed by the projects.

The Priorities and Specific Objectives of the Programme, including their thematic and geographic focuses and related type of actions are defined in quite broad term, which do not set framework for future development consent of projects that require an EIA:

- Does not set obligatory terms, conditions, or aspects for evaluation - especially regarding the location, type, size, function, operational criteria, direct resource consumption, load, or other use of natural resources
- Does not prescribe the implementation of the above activities
- Does not influences (esp. facilitates, contributes to, or hinders) the implementation possibilities of the above activities especially regarding their location, type, size, function, operational criteria, consumption, or other use of natural resources.

## Environmental and sustainability aspects at programme level

The main focus of the new programme is developed 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). Thus, measures supporting the overcoming of barrier effects by targeting territorially more integrated actions and more institutionalised cooperation are well advised instead of dot-like and temporal developments and connections.

Transnational projects can act in two directions:

- In case of objectives aiming at aligning legislation, procedures, practices etc. transnational projects could address such issues by soft type of activities implying development of solutions/ concepts, piloting them, setting up road maps and strategies.
- In case of objectives addressing specific concrete issues (e.g. floods, integration of renewables, heritage valorisation etc.), preparation for investments and implementation of small scale investments can be included. In general physical construction works is not supported by the co-operation programme (e.g. the programme will not finance

rehabilitation of heritage sites, construction of flood protection dykes, or green bridges, as those are considered neither as small scale investments nor those have transnational character). The preparation of investments financed by DTP in general do not imply necessarily preparation of feasibility studies or technical projects as such, but lay the ground for future such actions at national/ regional/ local level. In the joint preparation of investments project partners focus on development of joint analyses, solutions etc. for future investments. In the unlikely situation that activities result in feasibility studies these projects may be subject to an EIA procedure at the subsequent level.

One important element of the Programme is that all projects have to demonstrate their contribution to the three horizontal principles of the EU, including sustainable development. It is worth mentioning that DTP projects, due to their non-infrastructure character, report neutral or positive effects on environment of their proposed activities. This is part of the application process, when the applicants are requested to explain and demonstrate the positive contributions of their projects to sustainable development, which is part of the project selection criteria, being assessed by the MA/ JS during the quality assessment. The Programme management is closely checking also the actual contribution of the projects to sustainable development during their implementation, as the selected projects are requested to regularly report in each of their periodic progress report the contribution of their implemented activities to sustainable development.

## Potential effects of the INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027 on environment

The relation and potential effects on environment of the specific objectives and actions selected for the DTP 2021-2027 are analysed here in detail:

### Priority 1 - A Smarter Europe

#### *SO 1.1 Enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies*

Under this specific objective transnational cooperation is expected to support and further advance the innovation potential of the Danube Region through different types of soft interventions (policy papers, strategies and action plans, workshops, trainings, study visits, networking events, laboratory experiments, learning interactions etc.) across various fields of actions, including circular economy or green transport. The circular economy focus is purposed towards building robust transnational circular economy collaboration formats, harmonisation of related policies or uptake of environmental friendly technologies in specific related domains (e.g. electronics and ICT batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food and nutrients). In regard to its transport focus, possible actions aim to offer support for technology generation and uptake of smart, sustainable and green transport technologies and networks, as well as e-mobility solutions in relation to transnational transport networks and transboundary functional urban areas.

Therefore, this specific objective is policy oriented and was designed by considering, amongst other, the key commitments of the European Green Deal, the EU Circular Economy Directive and of the Territorial Agenda 2030, thus not intended to host any type of non-



environmental friendly infrastructure. In fact, it is expected that by nudging the regional research and innovation framework towards eco-friendly designs and solutions and speeding up the uptake of environmental friendly technologies by various decision makers, this specific objective will bring real-life contribution to EU's efforts of creating better living conditions across its regions, having potentially, even if indirect, but positive impact on the environment of the Danube Region.

### *SO 1.2 Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship*

Similar to the above specific objective, SO 1.2 is policy and framework oriented, based on sustainable development principles and with an eco-friendly character, meaning that it does not plan to support the implementation of any measure (e.g. hard infrastructure) that might result in a negative impact on the surrounding environment. Its focus on industrial transformation is purposed to deliver enhanced policies, trainings, strategies, actions plans or learning interactions, such "soft" measures, that might further support the ongoing transition from fossil based industries towards eco-friendly i4.0 solution such as robotisation, mechatronics, digital technologies (including Internet of things, Artificial Intelligence) etc. In addition, its focus on improving human skills for better delivering products and services with transnational impact and on developing skills for better designing regional smart specialization strategies (RSI3) underlines, once again, its intentions of supporting soft-type interventions e.g. connecting smart and sustainable growth via smart specialization. More exactly, rather than focusing on individual one-off support measures, this SO is stimulating the Danube Region territories to develop comprehensive policy mixes able to support both the demand and supply of the industrial transition efforts. In integrating ecosystem services into RIS3, it is important to take account of sustainable solutions, innovative methods and entrepreneurial ideas that rely on renewable, rather than exhaustible resources that are available in local ecosystems. In conclusion, this specific objective aims at helping the Danube Region making the best use of smart specialization principles for upscaling local sustainable growth with neutral or indirect positive effects on the environment.

## Priority 2 - A Greener Low Carbon Europe

### *SO 2.1 Promoting renewable energy*

The SO main goal is to contribute to the reduction of region's dependency on imported fossil fuels by facilitating a better integration of renewable energy sources and consequently greening the energy and transport sectors. The focus of this specific objective is twofold: increasing the share of renewable energy in the Danube region on one side and decreasing carbon intensity in the power and transport sectors on the other side. Given the limited funds of the programme, the above mention topics are tackled by the programme through joint actions implemented by transnational partnerships for the development of harmonised strategies and policy support, capacity building for the relevant actors, joint development of new, innovative solutions (e.g. for transport, mobility), joint planning of infrastructure. Such process related activities are expected to have positive impact on environment, although due

to the characteristics of these activities only in an indirect way, without likely negative effects. Small scale pilot actions for testing joint solutions (e.g. for introducing alternative fuels, new technologies) can be supported by the Programme, having actually positive effects on environment in an indirect way, still on a very limited scale, as such pilots do not mean full scale implementation, or major investments, which are not supported by DTP and often related to testing procedures, processes, new models etc. (e.g. new monitoring tool, harmonised management practise) without any infrastructural action. The generally formulated objective and type of actions do not set framework for future development consent of EIA related projects either with location, nature, size and operating conditions. The joint implemented actions aim at setting transnational frameworks, which are to be further adapted on national, regional level, extending the impact chain and the potential impact of the Programme on environment as well. While the scale of impacts of the projects to be supported within this SO is expected to be transnational, as described above, these are mainly indirect and positive, without risk on the environment.

*SO 2.2 Promoting climate change adaptation, and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches*

The SO is focusing on promoting climate change adaptation capacities in the Danube Region and disaster management in relation to transnationally relevant environmental risks (floods, droughts, accidental pollution of rivers, wild fires) taking into account ecosystem-based approaches. While the thematic focus of this SO is closely related to relevant environmental issues, the emphasis is on strengthening cooperation of key actors of a broader territory, e.g. in case of flood prevention and protection, or accidental pollution of rivers targeting a whole transnational river(-basin) area within the Danube Region in order to increase capacities and reduce knowledge gaps of relevant institutions and organisations regarding transboundary, harmonised data availability (e.g. developing and applying modelling, monitoring, forecasting systems, databases, tools), harmonisation of management processes to ensure sufficient preparedness for climate change conditions, or environmental disasters (e.g. by joint management plans, contingency planning, improving operational cooperation) as well as elaborating and testing solutions to prevent or reduce potential impacts of climate change related natural disasters (e.g. decision support tools, institutional and technical capacities to ensure interoperability). This can include also nature-based solutions, like reconnection of floodplains in relation to flood protection, but the focus is on examining the potentials and maybe pilot testing on local scale of such solutions instead of supporting big infrastructural investments, which are out of scope of the Programme (just like e.g. hard installation measures on flood protection, or infrastructural technical capacity improvement of emergency response bodies). Solutions can be tested on a limited scale in pilot actions. Knowledge transfer and trainings can be supported in order to improve skills and competences of the key stakeholders. Accordingly, the generally formulated actions of this SO do not set framework for future investments and the project activities supported by the Programme are mostly process related, soft type of measures. The strategies and plans, guidelines to be developed by such cooperation projects can influence relevant national, local strategies and plans of this thematic field, but its long impact chain limits the level of direct influence. Based on the characteristics of the actions to be supported most of these can have rather indirect impact on the environment, while the elaborated processes and

solutions are expected to improve conditions and to have positive impact on the environment.

### *SO 2.3 Promoting access to water and sustainable water management*

This SO aims to ensure sustainable, integrated, transnational water and sediment management in the Danube River Basin ensuring good quality and quantity of waters and sediment balance, clearly addressing environmental problems like water pollution, quality and availability of water. Projects are expected to focus on the main transboundary river(-basin)s of the Danube River Basin, strengthening cooperation of key stakeholders in order to improve policies and institutional capacities (e.g. by integrated strategies, action plans, policy and sectorial dialogs, trainings), harmonising management processes (e.g. management plans), and elaborating joint solutions (e.g. monitoring, forecasting tools, data bases), which are meant to reduce water pollution, ensure balanced water use, improve sediment balance and adaptation to low-water periods along the targeted transboundary rivers and water bodies. Such process related activities are expected to have positive impact on environment, although due to the characteristics of these activities only in an indirect way, without likely negative effects. While small scale pilot actions for testing joint solutions (e.g. for reducing water pollution, floodplain restoration, innovative solutions to avoid water over-exploitation) can be supported by the Programme, which might have more direct impact on the environment, having actually positive effects, but only on a very limited scale and location, as such pilots do not mean full scale implementation, or major investments, which are not supported by DTP (e.g. fixed investments in waste water treatment plants are not part of the programme). Besides of small-scale infrastructure, pilot actions can often be “soft measures” as well, testing procedures (e.g. new monitoring tool, harmonised management practise) without any infrastructural action. The generally formulated objective and type of actions do not contain criteria or conditions which would guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent on EIA Directive related, or other type of projects either with location, nature, size and operating conditions. The transnational strategies, action plans developed by the supported projects can have influence on other strategies and plans, which however are to be further adapted on national, regional level first, extending the impact chain and the potential impact of the Programme on environment as well, which also stands for the contributions to the implementation of relevant EC policies and legislation (e.g. Water Framework Directive), or the objectives of EUSDR that are expected to be positive, but more indirect. While the scale of impacts of the projects to be supported within this SO is expected to be transboundary, as described above, these are mainly indirect and positive, without real risk on the environment, or human health.

### *SO 2.4 Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution*

This complex SO aims to strengthen biodiversity in the Danube Region by improving ecological connectivity along transnational ecological corridors, strengthening cooperation networks in ecological regions, enhancing the conditions for umbrella species, combating

IAS and reducing impacts of climate change on biodiversity with the intention to have positive effects on the related key environmental challenges of the Region. The focus areas of the supported cooperation projects are broader, transnational ecological corridors, transboundary ecological regions, water habitats, wetlands along major transnational rivers. Similarly to the other SOs, most of the supported cooperation activities are related to processes which improve capacities and knowledge of key actors and stakeholders in form of elaborating joint strategies, management plans, harmonising management procedures, establishing, institutionalising networks of cooperation, providing knowledge transfer through joint trainings and awareness raising activities. Joint, harmonised solutions for monitoring, or improving conditions for ecological connectivity, rehabilitation of water habitats, conservation, preservation, restoration techniques within ecological regions, among protected areas, or in relation to umbrella species; combating IAS and increasing the resilience of habitats and ecosystems and their ability to adapt to climate change impacts are also mainly procedural type of activities with mostly indirect and positive effects on environment. Pilot actions, besides testing the developed management processes, or monitoring tools can also monitor and test the efficiency and applicability of floodplain reconnection or other green / blue infrastructure solutions, but only on a very limited scale as big investments, like e.g. green bridges cannot be supported within the Programme. The SO and type of actions descriptions are not specific enough to set framework for future investments, while due to the characteristics of the Programme the indirect and partly direct effects of the supported actions are going to be positive on the environment and this analysis could not identify negative effect on the environment in relation to this SO.

### Priority 3 - A More Social and Inclusive Europe

#### *SO 3.1 Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to high quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy*

The DTP's focus for this SO is on the integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market, with a special attention on regions that display high proportions of disadvantaged inhabitants. Developing initiatives to retain skilled labour and sustainable migration within the Danube region is also an important consideration. The Programme will work towards developing joint employment policies, planning and cooperation, for example with territorially integrated action plans for employment. Improving the capacity of employment support bodies is central along with the access of disadvantaged groups to this support. The objective is not to develop new infrastructure, which is beyond the funding scope for the programme, but to plan, link and capacity build provision. Given the nature of the approach and activity there is no direct environmental impact of significance anticipated. There could be some indirect positive impact for example should models for more effective remote working be developed and/or as part of the horizontal sustainability theme responsibilities of all projects e.g. ways of working/paper recycling etc.

#### *SO 3.2 Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training*

This SO looks to develop and enhance inclusive education with a focus on supporting the labour market and sustainable development. This is addressed through maximising the use of existing knowledge and experience in the Danube Region to jointly develop best practices in inclusive education, education policy and advancing education and policy reform. The operational level will be supported with innovative educational models, programs, practical tools and materials for disadvantaged learners. Innovative approaches will be sought to encourage and improve vocational education and training. The development of educational networks is anticipated to provide a basis for considering joint problems and solutions in the Danube Region. These networks can provide a significant contribution both during the programming period and beyond. New infrastructure (e.g. building for education) is not part of the focus of the DTP's approach, which is about connecting and planning for the development and enhancement of effective education service delivery towards inclusion of disadvantaged learners. Given the nature of the approach and activity there is no direct environmental impact of significance anticipated from project activity. There could be some indirect positive impact for example should models for more effective remote education be developed and/or as part of the horizontal sustainability theme responsibilities of all projects e.g. ways of working/paper recycling etc.

### *SO 3.3 Enhancing the role of culture and tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation*

This SO considers culture, heritage and tourism as positive drivers towards the socio economic development of disadvantaged regions and individuals. New tourism concepts, planning methodologies, model regions, and management tools are envisaged in the Danube Region. Of particular interest is capacity building and development of innovative models for community based tourism to better secure the engagement of host communities by involving them in the planning, management and implementation of tourism development in their respective regions. The SO looks towards the valorisation of local cultural and natural heritage for the development of sustainable tourism products and tourism services in order to increase regional value-added and employment. Initiatives are anticipated that promote quality products, services and the use of existing transnational infrastructure in the tourism and culture sector to support the social inclusion of disadvantaged people via new employment forms and job opportunities. Significant Infrastructure development is not a focus of this SO and will not be included, however there is the potential for small scale investments for example in pilots which encourage wider participation e.g. signage, hearing loops etc. Given the nature of the approach and activity there is no direct environmental impact of significance anticipated from project activity. Short term pilot activity forms part of the project output options and this is subject to horizontal theme sustainability responsibilities and monitoring. Post DTP project development on from pilots should be further assessed to ensure potential for impact. During the DTP period there could be some indirect positive impact as part of the horizontal sustainability theme responsibilities of all projects e.g. ways of working/paper recycling etc.

#### Priority 4 - A Better Cooperation Governance

*SO 4.1 Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders*

Under this Specific Objective transnational cooperation is fostered for addressing major territorial governance-challenges like demographic change, severe urban-rural discrepancies or improving the close-to-people character of regional policy. For achieving a high leverage effect a clear focus is put on promoting integrated approaches under strong involvement of civic and local actors, fostering inter-institutional relations along functional areas and strengthening capacities of public bodies in selected fields. The integrative character shall be reflected not only by the integration of different administrative levels but also through connecting sectorial aspects like transport or accessibility to major territorial governance challenges. All measures shall substantially take into account, moreover, existing main territorial/spatial development frameworks such as the Territorial agenda 2030 or the New Leipzig Charter.

Among all Specific Objectives this is the one with the clearest focus on the governance sphere of transnational cooperation, meaning that even on theoretical level basically no infrastructural measures at all are expected as outcomes during the course of Programme implementation. Rather, envisaged activities, outputs and results will overwhelmingly consist in the development of cooperation schemes between different stakeholder groups, capacity building measures, elaboration of studies, action plans or (policy)guidelines and local, small-scale pilots. In relation to the latter a potential minor indirect environmental impact might result in connection to transport and accessibility (which is covered by this SO as a *side*-aspect within integrated territorial development). Yet, the targeted actions are expected to be very limited in scope only (e.g. labelling system for improved “walkability” or bicycle-friendliness of cities), serving to illustrate policy-changes achieved through new governance-mechanisms.

## Annex 2

### SEA screening of DTP2

Based on the detailed analysis, the INTERREG DTP 2021-2027 is assessed against the criteria set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive.

1) The characteristics of the programme, having regard, in particular, to	
<p>a) the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources,</p>	<p>The INTERREG DTP 2021-2027 programme, its priorities and specific objectives, including their thematic and geographic focuses and related type of actions are defined in quite broad term, which do not set framework for future development consent of projects that require an EIA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does not set obligatory terms, conditions, or aspects for evaluation - especially regarding the location, type, size, function, operational criteria, direct resource consumption, load, or other use of natural resources</li> <li>• does not prescribe the implementation of the above activities</li> <li>• does not influences (esp. facilitates, contributes to, or hinders) the implementation possibilities of the above activities especially regarding their location, type, size, function, operational criteria, consumption, or other use of natural resources</li> </ul> <p>The DTP 2021-2027, similarly to other Interreg transnational cooperation programmes, has limited financial resources compared to the large size of its programme area, therefore it is not supporting major infrastructural investments, including such that are listed in the annexes to the EIA Directive, but financing projects with “soft” type of cooperation and harmonisation measures in order to increase the capacities of the institutions, organisations involved in the projects. In general, physical construction works is not supported by the co-operation programme (e.g. the programme will not finance rehabilitation of heritage sites, construction of flood protection dykes, or green bridges, as those are considered neither as small scale investments nor those have transnational character). The type of investment preparations that can be potentially financed by DTP, in general do not imply necessarily preparation of feasibility studies or technical projects as such, but lays the ground for such future actions at national/ regional/ local level. In the joint preparation of investments project partners focus on development of joint analyses, solutions etc. for future investments. In the unlikely situation that activities result in feasibility studies these projects may be subject to an EIA procedure at the subsequent level.</p>
<p>b) the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes</p>	<p>The type of measures the supported projects can carry out within the Programme are mainly process related and although some of those, like jointly developed strategies, action plans can have influence on</p>

<p>including those in a hierarchy,</p>	<p>other strategies and plans, which however are to be further adapted on national, regional level first, therefore the impact chains from the Programme's interventions to direct effects on specific sectors, or the environment are quite long. The policy makers of the programme partner states can be supported in their work through the cooperation projects by such transnational strategies, plans and guidance papers in harmonising efforts to tackle challenges relevant for areas, broader than their region, or the country, which can be very relevant e.g. in connection to ensuring good quality and quantity of water along the main transboundary river systems within the Danube Region, or harmonising measure in relation to climate change adaptation, transferring knowledge in relation to sustainable development and innovation, defining integrated approaches for better governance in relation to different social challenges. As analysed in detail along the different programme specific objectives, the strategic aspects of the projects are expected to have often indirect and neutral effects on the environment, while in case of such projects, addressing more directly environmental issue, the respective objective is to bring positive change and improvement regarding the specific environmental challenge of the Danube Region.</p>
<p>c) the relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,</p>	<p>The INTERREG DTP 2021-2027 programme can have contribution to promote the integration of environmental considerations and sustainable development by the relevant actors in the plans and measures developed for the targeted territories within the Danube Region. Within its Priority 2 the programme is going to support cooperation projects that are directly addressing key transboundary environmental issues of the Danube Region in relation to climate change adaptation, management of environmental risks, integrated water management, protection of the nature, biodiversity, or to improve ecological connectivity, but also in specific objectives of other priorities relevant sustainable development topics can be addressed, like smart, sustainable and green transport technologies and networks in connection to innovation, supporting the greening of the energy sector, or sustainable tourism development. Contributions to these issues can be made by supporting transnational cooperation actions of key stakeholders through which they will gain improved capacities, integrated strategies, cooperation networks and harmonised, joint management solutions in relation to the thematic field, which are not expected to have significant negative, but mainly positive effects on the environment.</p> <p>Besides the specific, environment related focus of certain specific objectives, another important element of the Programme is that all projects, not only those addressing environmental issues, have to demonstrate their contribution to sustainable development, being one of the horizontal principles of the EU. In the application and project selection process, the applicants are requested to explain and demonstrate the positive contributions of their cooperation projects to sustainable development in the application document, which is also part of the project selection criteria, being assessed by the MA/ JS during the quality assessment. Further to that, in the implementation phase of the supported projects the programme management is closely checking also the actual contribution of the projects to sustainable development through the periodic progress reports of the project, in which the</p>



	<p>partnerships are expected to report the specific contribution of their implemented activities to sustainable development.</p>
<p>d) environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme,</p>	<p>The INTERREG DTP 2021-2027 addresses many different environmental problems and challenges of the Danube Region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the Danube Region is forecasted to be affected more and more by the impacts of climate change, the adaptation capacities of many countries are lagging behind;</li> <li>• Environmental risks, which are also becoming more frequent and heavier due to climate change, like floods, droughts, or challenges like low water periods need transnational cooperation, in prevention, as well as for disaster management especially along the main transboundary river systems of the Danube Region;</li> <li>• Pollution and the decreasing quality of water, especially of the main transboundary river systems of the Danube Region call for transnational solutions;</li> <li>• Increasing water usage and overexploitation need harmonised solutions for a more balanced water use within the Danube River Basin;</li> <li>• Fragmentation of transnational habitats and ecosystems are key challenges of the macro-region which need support for the improvement of ecological connectivity between habitats, nature protection areas, wetlands along transnationally relevant ecological corridors;</li> <li>• Invasive species endanger the ecological balance in many transboundary ecological area;</li> <li>• Instead of irreversible exploitation of natural heritage and protected areas the valorisation and sustainable economic utilisation of areas with high biodiversity are to be supported;</li> <li>• Sustainable energy production and consumption would require significant decrease of fossil fuels and a shift to renewables in the countries of the Danube Region.</li> </ul> <p>Some of the specific objectives of the DTP 2021-2027 are directly addressing these key transnational environmental challenges of the Danube Region by supporting transnational cooperation actions of key stakeholders through which they will gain improved capacities, integrated strategies, cooperation networks and harmonised, joint management solutions, which can lead to positive changes in the status of the environment. The Programme and the supported activities, including those, which are not specifically addressing the above mentioned environmental problems, are not expected to increase the possibility of significant negative effects on the environment and especially not to generate new environmental problems.</p>
<p>e) the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection).</p>	<p>The INTERREG DTP 2021-2027 programme and especially the specific objects of Priority 2 have good potentials to contribute to the implementation of relevant Community legislation in the field of the environment, like the European Green Deal, the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change, the Environment action programme to 2030, the Biodiversity strategy for 2030, the Green Infrastructure Strategy, or such regulations like the Water Framework Directive, the Flood Directive, the Habitat</p>

	<p>Directive, or IAS Regulation. The Programme is expected to contribute also to regionally relevant strategies and policy legislations like the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable use of the Danube River, or the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians.</p> <p>The specific contributions to the implementation and to reach the objectives of these EC and Danube Region scale relevant environmental strategies and legislations can be expected through the improved capacities of the relevant stakeholders and the harmonised, joint plans, management solutions and tools to be developed by the transnational cooperation projects, which contributions are expected to be positive in case of those future projects, which are directly addressing these policies, while neutral in case of those projects, which are out of scope of the environmental legislation.</p>
2) Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to	
f) the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects,	<p>The Priorities and Specific Objectives of the Programme, including their thematic and geographic focuses and related type of actions are defined in quite broad term, therefore only a rough estimation of the characteristics of the environmental effects is possible, since at this stage it is not known, what concrete activities and in which area will be implemented by the future projects. As reflected by the detailed analysis of the specific objectives the probability of negative effects of the Programme on the environment is not likely, since most of the supported types of activities are neutral towards the environment, while in case of those Specific Objectives, which are directly related to environmental issues, it is probable that the cooperation projects will result positive effects on the environment, but even in those cases these will be reached mostly indirectly, by the developed joint strategies, improved capacities of key actors and target groups, harmonised, coordinated management practises and tools. Major investments are not going to be supported by the Programme and the limited number of small-scale infrastructures will have pilot testing character with unlikely significant environmental effects.</p>
g) the cumulative nature of the effects,	<p>Based on the detailed analysis of the specific objectives of DTP 2021-2027 their thematic scope and the characteristics of the supported type of activities, many topics are neutral to the environment and in most cases of those thematic issues, which are more related to the environment can be expected to have only indirect and positive effects on the environment. In the field of energy, water management, climate change adaptation, landscape management, nature protection and biodiversity, or natural heritage valorisation thematic fields, in which interventions can have cumulative effects on the environment, the Programme provide support for such transnational cooperation projects, which intend to bring positive changes to the respective challenges and problems of the Danube Region, contributing to the improvement of the environmental status and sustainable development.</p>
h) the transboundary nature of the effects,	<p>Considering the characteristics of the INTERREG DTP 2021-2027, which is supporting cooperation of relevant actors to address key transnational challenges of the Danube Region, in general the impacts of such projects are expected to be transnational, transboundary. Regarding the possible environmental</p>

	<p>effects, as explained in other parts of this analysis and assessment, in case of most of the projects are expected to be neutral and/or indirect, while in case of future projects addressing the topics like water pollution, water quality management, flood prevention and protection, response to accidental pollution, which all are expected to focus on transnationally relevant rivers and river systems, the effects are actually expected to be transboundary and positive, improving the environmental conditions of the target areas, even if in most cases in an indirect way, due to the characteristics of the type of actions supported by the Programme. Similar positive transboundary and mainly indirect effects can be expected from future projects that are related to transnational ecological connectivity topics, or joint, harmonised management of transboundary eco-regions and networks of protected areas, as well as ensuring resilience and adaptation to climate change in such transboundary areas.</p>
i) the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents),	<p>Considering the characteristics of the INTERREG DTP 2021-2027, the general type of activities that can be supported, as well as the transnational thematic issues to be addressed, mainly neutral, or positive effects can be generally expected, even if often in an indirect way, though developed strategies, solutions and increased capacities of stakeholders. Efforts to decrease carbon intensity in the power and transport sectors; improving adaptation capacity of the society and the environment to the climate change impacts; reducing the risk and better preparedness for floods, droughts, water pollution, water scarcity are all expected to bring positive changes in combating the risks to human health or the environment.</p>
j) the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected),	<p>The INTERREG DTP 2021-2027 programme document defines those thematic fields, where transnational cooperation is expected to bring positive change to the Danube Region, including its environment. In general term, the Programme is expected to have impact on the whole macro-region, but the actual impact is depending on the concrete projects, which will be supported in the framework of the Programme and cannot be properly estimated at this stage. It is also to be considered that in case of most of the specific objectives the environmental effects are expected to be indirect and only to a certain extent can be more direct. Accordingly the concrete effects on the environment regarding magnitude and spatial extent cannot properly be estimated at this stage, but in a very general term expected to be positive, or in most cases neutral.</p>
k) the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:	
k.i) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage,	<p>Territories of the Danube Region with special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage can be targeted by projects, which can be supported in SO2.2 (climate change adaptation and environmental risk management), 2.3 (water management), 2.4 (protecting biodiversity in ecological corridors and eco-regions) and 3.3 (socio-economic development through heritage, culture and tourism). The focuses of these specific objectives are to improve conditions of these areas, including their environmental value and conditions combating the potential negative effects and not creating ones. Such positive effects can be expected more in indirect form due to the characteristics of the type of supported</p>

	activities.
k.ii) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values,	Taking into consideration of the thematic fields to be addressed and the type of activities planned to be supported by the INTERREG DTP 2021-2027, it is not expected that the supported projects would have such effects on their targeted areas to exceed environmental quality standards, or limit values (of air, biological, chemical, noise, etc.). In fact, e.g. projects to be supported in relation to water quality are expected to make steps towards improvement in this field, and even if indirectly, contributing to the reduction of the pollution of waters. Similarly, projects focusing on decreasing carbon intensity in the power or transport sectors can be expected to indirectly improve the environment and keep pollution within threshold limits.
k.iii) intensive land-use,	None of the specific objectives of the INTERREG DTP 2021-2027 is focusing on supporting activities in relation to intensive land-use; therefore, in connection to the Programme, no such negative effects can be expected in the Danube Region and the specific target areas of the projects to be supported.
l) the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status.	Most of the Programme objectives are neither related to, nor expected to have significant environmental effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, Community or international protection status. Certain type of actions of SO 2.4 can directly focus on protected areas, to strengthen transnational networks of cooperation in relation to the ecological regions and among such protected areas, or to improve ecological connectivity between habitats, nature protection areas along transnationally relevant ecological corridors and in case of such projects the effects on relevant protected areas are expected to be positive, although considering the type of supported activities, mainly indirectly. Other supported topics, like ensuring resilience and adaptation of relevant eco-regions to climate change to reduce its impacts on biodiversity, or the valorisation of natural heritage for the development of sustainable tourism products and services can have potential effects relevant protected areas, if targeted by a certain project, which are also expected to be positive and mainly indirect.

## Conclusion

This report is prepared to determine the need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027 (DTP) based on the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive).

The analysis and screening of the draft DTP 2021-2027 Cooperation Programme document, considering the general characteristics of the Programme, the selected priorities, specific objectives and type of actions and its potential effects on the environment, concluded that a **Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required for the INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme 2021-2027.**

This conclusion has been reached because of the following reasons:

- The Programme is not prepared specifically for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, but focusing on territorial cooperation addressing challenges relevant on a broader territorial scale within the Danube Region, supporting territorially integrated approaches, building regional capacities and institutionalising cooperation, which can partly be related to the sectors mentioned, but not dedicated to direct, specific sectorial development.
- The Programme do neither set framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to Directive 85/337/EEC, nor having likely effects on sites in connection to Article 6 or 7 of Directive 92/43/EEC since:
- The priorities and specific objectives of the Programme, including their thematic and geographic focuses and related type of actions are defined in quite broad term.
- The type of measures the supported projects can carry out within the Programme are mainly process related and although some of those, like jointly developed strategies, action plans can have influence on other strategies and plans, which however are to be further adapted on national, regional level first, therefore the impact chains from the Programme's interventions to direct effects on specific sectors, or the environment are quite long.
- The Programme is not funding major infrastructural investments, installations, especially not such, which are listed in the annexes of the EIA Directive.
- Considering the thematic scope of the selected specific objectives of the Programme and the characteristics of the activities that can be supported, some of the specific objectives (e.g. SO 1.2, 3.1, 3.2) are not related to environmental issues either with neutral, or very indirect potential impacts on the environment. In case of some other specific objectives (like SO 1.1, or 4.1), especially regarding certain thematic aspects like green transport, or circular economy can have indirect effects on the environment, which are however expected to be positive. Certain specific objectives are directly addressing environmental issues and challenges of the Danube Region (e.g. the four specific objectives of priority 2 and to a certain extent SO 3.3 as well) and expected to have mainly indirect, but also direct effects on the environment, with the overall aim to bring positive impact.
- Sustainable development as a horizontal principle is integrated into the project selection and monitoring of project implementation as well

**TABLE 1: DTP 2021-27 – PRIORITIES, SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES, THEIR FOCUS AND TYPE OF ACTIVITIES**

<b>Priority 1</b>  <b>A Smarter Europe</b>	<b>SO1.1 Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies</b>	
	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>
	<i>Focus 1:</i> RDI related transnational policies and processes for closing innovation gaps and towards the uptake of innovation and advanced technologies e.g. nanotechnologies, advanced materials, advanced manufacturing and processing (production technologies) and biotechnology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improving transnational cooperation to support joint technology generation, uptake and upscaling in the following fields: nanotechnologies, advanced materials, advanced manufacturing and processing (production technologies) and health industry (establishing joint medicine research clusters/centres, usage of digitalisation and artificial intelligence in medicine/health care, analysing big data sets in medicine, biotechnology).</li> <li>➤ Support for transnational uptake of technologies alongside thematic value chains: specialisation in transnational Danube Region clusters for emerging industries, support for a higher level and new forms of collaboration within the quadruple helix to encourage co-inventions and innovation cooperation as well.</li> <li>➤ Support for transnational circular economy collaboration forms, harmonisation of related policies and uptake of technologies in specific related domains (e.g. electronics and ICT batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food and nutrients);</li> <li>➤ Support for technology generation and uptake of related technologies regarding smart, sustainable and green transport technologies and networks, as well as e-mobility solutions in relation to transnational transport networks and transboundary functional urban areas;</li> <li>➤ Support for the uptake of advanced technologies in relation to smart infrastructure in Danube Region cities: integration of smart cities and smart regions solutions in the planning, management and development of the Danube Region cities and regions.</li> </ul>
	<i>Focus 2:</i> Transnational RDI related activities for capacity building along thematic value chains.	
	<i>Focus 3:</i> Technology transfer and technology uptake towards and from SMEs and improved access to quadruple transnational research and innovation infrastructures with macro-regional significance.	
	<i>Focus 4:</i> Circular economy policies and processes in specific related domains e.g. electronics and ICT batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food and nutrients.	
	<i>Focus 5:</i> Developing smart, sustainable and green transport technologies and networks, as well as e-mobility solutions.	
	<i>Focus 6:</i> Integration of smart cities and smart regions solutions in the planning, management and development of DR regions and cities.	
	<b>SO 1.2 Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship</b>	
	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>
<i>Focus 1.</i> Skills development for and of joint	➤ Enhancing cooperation related to entrepreneurial skills in advanced technologies,	

	<p>advancement of smart specialisation strategies and policies including a special focus on less advanced regions.</p> <p><i>Focus 2.</i> Skills development and cross sectorial collaborations between smart industries and traditional type of industries for industrial transformation and transition towards industry 4.0, robotisation, mechatronics, digital technologies (including internet of things, artificial intelligence and creative industries).</p> <p><i>Focus 3.</i> Skills development for delivering products and services with transnational impact</p>	<p>industries of high Danube Region importance (i.e. owing to social impacts, market needs) to better combine existing capacities and competences;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Building cooperation structures to obtain innovation capacity needed to be competitive at regional and EU level, identify niches within the EU market and become attractive as a partner within the Danube Region or towards other EU regions;</li> <li>➤ Establishing platforms enabling transfer of knowledge and skills and building inter-regional synergies for the development of regional smart specialisation strategies and policies with a special focus on the involvement of entrepreneurial actors and existing networks in discovering and exploiting promising areas of specialisation;</li> <li>➤ Setting up and piloting measures for regions allowing for exchange of experience on implementation of smart specialisation strategies, e.g. networking of regions specialised in the field of industry 4.0 and related professional skills, support for related knowledge exchange between model regions and regions lagging behind in terms of elaborating and implementing industry 4.0 planning schemes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority 2</b></p> <p><b>A Greener Low Carbon Europe</b></p>	<p><b>SO 2.1 Promoting renewable energy</b></p>	
	<p><b>Focus</b></p> <p><i>Focus 1:</i> Increasing the share of renewable energy in the Danube region</p> <p><i>Focus 2:</i> Decreasing carbon intensity in the power and transport sectors</p>	<p><b>Type of activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strategy making and policy support in reaching low-carbon energy production and supporting the decrease of energy dependency in countries and regions most dependent on fossil fuels and resources from external (non-macro-regional) energy markets;</li> <li>➤ Capacity building for sustainable energy planning especially in regions with high share of non-RES energy production or consumption;</li> <li>➤ Support for harmonised actions and transnational cooperation in the buildings' heating and cooling sector (e.g. decreasing carbon intensity in heating, RES integration in building sector combining it with storage and charging solution systems for e-mobility) with special attention to countries and regions where heating and cooling sector has outstanding share in energy consumption;</li> <li>➤ Reduction of GHG emissions in the transport sector: introduction of alternative fuels and new technologies (e.g. electric vehicles) in transportation and innovative mobility solutions, support shift to more environmentally friendly means of transportation, especially in public transport and freight transport, coordination between energy providers in relation to infrastructure elements of Danube Region relevance;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Joint planning of infrastructure for the utilisation of renewable energy sources with the facilitation of knowledge exchange between regions of the lowest and the highest share of RES in the energy mix;</li> <li>➤ Development of incentive policies to encourage the renewable energy production based on the Danube Region available resources.</li> </ul>
<b>SO 2.2 Promoting climate change adaptation, and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account ecosystem-based approaches</b>	
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>
<p><i>Focus 1:</i> Supporting harmonised, joint capacities and data availability in Danube Region scale climate change forecasting and vulnerability assessment to support policy making and awareness raising</p> <p><i>Focus 2:</i> Supporting harmonised, coordinated, joint disaster prevention, preparedness and response activities on environmental risks, on floods, droughts, or accidental pollution of rivers on transnational river(-basin) scale and climate-change related other disasters (e.g. wildfires, heat waves)</p> <p><i>Focus 3:</i> Strengthen the preparedness and adaptive capacity of the society (including also disaster management organisations, volunteer rescue teams), economy and nature to cope with impacts of climate change and establish climate services to foster the resilience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Harmonised, joint solutions and measures for climate change modelling, forecasting and vulnerability assessment on Danube Region / River Basin scale ensuring their application at policy and, or operational level;</li> <li>➤ Integration of new research results into climate change adaptation practice for different types of territories in targeted thematic fields (e.g. floods, droughts) and improving skills and competences for policy makers and stakeholders;</li> <li>➤ Coordinated, harmonised efforts on transnational river(basin) scale to prevent flood risks, or drought, including application of nature-based solutions;</li> <li>➤ Harmonised, joint planning, monitoring and alert systems, accident hot-spot inventories on industrial, mining and contaminated sites, improving operational cooperation, interoperability, institutional and technical capacities of emergency response authorities and non-governmental organisations to combat environmental risks, such as flood, drought or accidental pollution of transboundary river(-basin)s, or wildfires and climate-change related other disasters;</li> <li>➤ Developing and implementing regional level climate change, environmental risks related disaster preparedness activities and establish standardised minimum requirements for disaster responders to achieve better and more effective transnational disaster response in the region.</li> </ul>
<b>SO 2.3 Promoting access to water and sustainable water management</b>	
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>
<p><i>Focus 1:</i> Strengthening capacities for prevention and mitigation of water pollution or for restoration of good quality of transnational water bodies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ensuring harmonised data availability by more effective monitoring and modelling systems for improving transnational water management measures ;</li> <li>➤ Strengthening institutional, management and technical capacity to prevent and</li> </ul>



	<p><i>Focus 2:</i> Harmonising management practises between water management, agriculture, environment, navigation, hydropower and flood protection to improve the quality and quantity of water and sediment in transnational river systems, taking into consideration the potential impacts of climate change.</p> <p><i>Focus 3:</i> Transnational coordination of water supply management, especially in relation to basin-wide importance of groundwater bodies</p>	<p>mitigate water pollution or to restore good quality of water with special regard to hazardous and emerging substances pollution, agriculture and waste water management, taking also into account the possible impacts of climate change on the quality of water;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improving sediment balance and related morphodynamics, or exploring the potentials of reconnection of adjacent floodplains / wetlands in order to improve water quality, in transnational water bodies;</li> <li>➤ Developing harmonised, joint monitoring and modelling system(s) in order to better understand the transboundary groundwater systems of Danube River Basin;</li> <li>➤ Defining joint strategies and harmonised measures, elaborating and adopting innovative solutions in relation to water exploitation and protection ensuring balanced use of water, taking also into account the impacts of climate change for future water demand;</li> <li>➤ Ensuring harmonised data availability, adaptation of integrated strategies, plans and solutions in connection to climate change induced increase of low water periods on the main transnational rivers of DRB, affecting sediment transport, navigation, hydropower management and the ecosystem</li> </ul>
<b>SO 2.4 Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution</b>		
	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>
	<p><i>Focus 1:</i> Transnational cooperation for the improvement of ecological connectivity between habitats, nature protection areas along transnationally relevant ecological corridors of the Danube Region and for transnational conservation and restoration measures for endangered umbrella species as well.</p> <p><i>Focus 2:</i> Creation and strengthening of networks of cooperation in relation to the ecological regions and among protected areas</p> <p><i>Focus 3:</i> Coordinated and harmonised measures within transnationally relevant ecological regions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Harmonised, joint efforts to improve, restore, manage and monitor ecological connectivity along transnationally relevant ecological corridors, including examination of the potentials of green and blue infrastructure developments and solutions for effective defragmentation;</li> <li>➤ Actions in revitalisation and rehabilitation of water habitats along major transnational river (systems), exploring the potentials of restoration and reconnection of floodplains, wetlands and their adjacent areas;</li> <li>➤ Establishing (institutionalised) management and cooperation network(s) of ‘Danubian’ transboundary ecological regions, harmonised management strategies and solutions, conservation and preservation techniques, toolkits ensuring also sustainable use of natural resources;</li> <li>➤ Increasing the resilience of habitats and ecosystems of transboundary ecological regions and their ability to adapt to climate change impacts by development of eco-friendly land use systems, landscape management and soil protection measures;</li> </ul>

	ensuring resilience and adaptation to climate change to reduce its impacts on biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Coordinated, joint solutions in prevention and control of IAS and management of their priority pathways.</li> <li>➤ Joint and harmonised development and implementation of transnational monitoring, conservation and restoration and management plans for endangered umbrella species (e.g. sturgeons, large carnivores) of the Danube Region</li> </ul>
<b>Priority 3</b>  <b>A More Social Europe</b>	<b>SO 3.1 Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to high quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy</b>	
	Focus	Type of activities
	<p><i>Focus 1:</i> The integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market, with special attention on regions that display high proportions of disadvantaged.</p> <p><i>Focus 2:</i> Retaining skilled labour and developing a more sustainable migration of educated people.</p> <p><i>Focus 3:</i> Capacity building for employment support bodies (information and data systems; coordination; training e.g. in social economy)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Joint coordination of policies and planning aimed at integrating disadvantaged groups (elderly people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, rural people, women, youth etc.) to support inclusive employment in regions that display high proportions of disadvantaged populace;</li> <li>➤ Support for designing innovative policies and planning to retain skilled labour and a more sustainable migration of educated people (e.g. by introducing transnational study and RDI programmes, promoting innovative employment schemes suitable for the needs of the tertiary educated living in rural regions or regions significantly affected by this type of migration);</li> <li>➤ Creation of an information system and support for the provision of information and data about life events connected to periodic and permanent migration of workforce, caused by labour market inequalities; between the eastern and the western parts of the macro region;</li> <li>➤ Coordinated policies and strategies to tackle active ageing (e.g. by social entrepreneurship) in regions and cities of the macro region affected by a high level of ageing;</li> <li>➤ Developing cooperation and innovative planning between bodies responsible for labour market integration and the private sector towards enhancing the inclusion of the disabled in the labour market;</li> <li>➤ Build-up of a “Danube observatory system” about labour migration and its impacts on cohesion; involving public bodies responsible for monitoring &amp; evaluation, academia and civil society;</li> <li>➤ Developing models to explore and demonstrate the effectiveness of remote working towards developing employment inclusiveness and meeting regional social and economic goals;</li> <li>➤ Restructuring and diversification of employment by the implementation of</li> </ul>

		territorially integrated action plans for employment with a special focus on enhancing the spreading of innovative structures targeting mono-functional (e.g. agricultural, industrial) regions. This could include green jobs development
<b>SO 3.2 Improving access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training</b>		
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>	
<p><i>Focus 1:</i> Developing innovative educational models, programs, practical tools and materials for disadvantaged learners, including early school leavers</p> <p><i>Focus 2:</i> Maximising the use of existing knowledge and experience to develop best practices in inclusive education policy and advancing education and policy reform</p> <p><i>Focus 3:</i> Innovative approaches to encourage and improve inclusive vocational education and training and and life long learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Development of joint innovative educational models, programs, practical tools and materials to support inclusive education for disadvantaged learners. The expected approach to develop on from model regions within the Danube region and with mutual learning developed from pilot regions;</li> <li>➤ Developing best practices in education policy, gathering and disseminating knowledge and advancing education and policy reforms at the national and regional level across the Danube Region;</li> <li>➤ Establishment or development of existing scientific and educational networks to combat brain drain, whereby educated and skilled individuals leave regions for better prospects. Networks should bring existing knowledge and research together and develop concrete outputs;</li> <li>➤ Innovative digital and remote education with e-solutions to mitigate rural disadvantage, provide employment related training and combat brain drain;</li> <li>➤ Knowledge exchange and the sharing of experience in elaborating and developing inclusive vocational education and training models and systems. This should lead to concrete outputs e.g. the development of work based training schemes which better support relevant skills development to match the needs of the labour market</li> </ul>	
<b>SO 3.3 Enhancing the role of culture and tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation</b>		
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>	
<p><i>Focus 1:</i> Valorisation of local cultural and natural heritage for the development of sustainable tourism products and tourism services in order to increase regional value-added and employment</p> <p><i>Focus 2:</i> Improvement of accessibility of cultural and natural heritage for all, amongst others youth and vulnerable groups in order to promote social</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improving the accessibility of tourism and culture infrastructure, products and services for vulnerable groups, such as minorities, people with disabilities, the elderly and youth in regions with low levels of accessibility and high levels of vulnerable groups;</li> <li>➤ Valorisation of joint natural and cultural heritage and cultural activities through the elaboration of new or improved thematic initiatives for example cultural, hiking, cycling or other thematic routes and initiatives across the macro-region with a special focus on rural or less visited areas;</li> </ul>	

	<p>inclusion</p> <p><i>Focus 3:</i> Promoting community led natural and cultural heritage management and associated nature based and cultural tourism in rural areas and small cities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Capacity building and development of innovative models for community based tourism to better secure the engagement of host communities by involving them in the planning, management and implementation tourism development in their respective regions;</li> <li>➤ Capacity building in social innovation to better support valorisation of joint cultural and natural heritage, in particular for tourism and their heritage management schemes (study, collection, preservation, digitalisation, exhibition and re-interpretation of joint tangible and intangible elements);</li> <li>➤ Promoting quality products, services and transnational infrastructure in the tourism and culture sector to support the social inclusion of disadvantaged people via new employment forms and job opportunities. This especially in relation to regions with a high share of ethnic minorities and areas with a large share of population at risk of poverty including the youth, elderly or disabled;</li> <li>➤ Promote sustainable and slow tourism concepts, planning methodologies, model regions, and management tools in the Danube Region, in regions of mass tourism as well as in regions having a weakly developed tourism sector. Actions should promote and safeguard employability and employment possibilities to vulnerable groups of host communities, and capitalise on EUSDR projects in the interconnected areas of culture, nature and tourism</li> </ul>
<b>Priority 4:</b>	<b>SO 4.1 Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies</b>	
<b>A Better Cooperation Governance</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Type of activities</b>
	<p><i>Focus 1:</i> Transnational cooperation is needed to address major territorial governance-challenges like demographic change, severe urban-rural discrepancies or fostering the close-to-people character of regional policy. For achieving a high leverage effect a clear focus should be put on promoting truly integrated approaches under strong involvement of civic and local actors, fostering inter-institutional relations along functional areas and strengthening capacities of public bodies in selected fields. The integrative character shall be reflected not only by the integration of different administrative levels but also through connecting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Integrated governance models for addressing challenges arising from demographic change (e.g. aging, depopulation, brain drain);</li> <li>➤ Integrated urban-rural governance models including specific territorial development strategies for rural/remote areas as well as accessibility aspects and transport bottlenecks;</li> <li>➤ Support for more and stronger inter-institutional relations for the integrated development of transboundary functional areas;</li> <li>➤ Capacity building considering especially a better involvement of local and regional public bodies as well as civic actors in transnational policy making, territorial development frameworks and governance models;</li> <li>➤ Support for the monitoring and analysis of territorial processes affecting the cohesion and cooperation of the Danube Region to assist capacity building and</li> </ul>

	<p>sectorial aspects like transport or accessibility to major territorial governance challenges. The improved provision of public services of general interest and digitalization are to be considered as horizontal elements. All measures shall substantially take into account, moreover, existing main territorial/spatial development frameworks such as the Territorial agenda 2030 or the New Leipzig Charter</p>	<p>institutional capacity</p>
--	--	-------------------------------