



EUSDR PRIORITY AREA 8

Competitiveness of Enterprises

Future of Businesses within the Danube Region
Conference
9 October 2025
Győr



European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

- Adopted by the Commission in 2010 and endorsed by the EC in 2011
 - Intends to develop coordinated policies and actions in the area of the river basin, reinforcing the commitments of Europe 2020 towards the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth based on four pillars and twelve priority areas
 - A key element is coordination, by encouraging the increase in the level and quality of network activities, strengthening the existing regional and interregional cooperation but also fostering new cooperation
 - The Strategy is not focusing on funding - The Danube Transnational Programme provides co-financing the activities carried out by the Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) of the EUSDR
-
- **14 participating countries**
 - 9 EU MS: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia,
 - 5 Non-EU countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine
 - 115 million inhabitants



EUSDR vs. Interreg

- EUSDR = EU Macro-Regional Strategy for the Danube Region PACs
 - no funding, but strategic political instrument, e.g. to:
 - interlink different regional/national strategies
 - foster linkages among transnational value chains
 - harmonise different funding schemes
- Interreg Danube Transnational Programme (DTP)
 - financing instrument of the EU structural funds
 - different priorities (Innovation, Environment/Culture, Connectivity, Governance)
 - 85% co-financing
 - support of the EUSDR (projects and governance)
 - not the only instrument for funding the EUSDR!



EUSDR - Pillars and Priority Areas

Connecting the Region

PA 1a: Waterways Mobility
PA 1b: Rail-Road-Air Mobility

PA 2: Sustainable Energy

PA 3: Culture and Tourism

Protecting the Environment

PA 4: Water Quality

PA 5: Environmental Risks

PA 6: Biodiversity and Landscapes

Building Prosperity

PA 7: Knowledge Society

**PA 8: Competitiveness of
Enterprises**

PA 9: People and Skills

Strengthening the Region

PA 10: Institutional Capacity and Cooperation

PA 11: Security



EUSDR PRIORITY AREA 8 (PA 8) Competitiveness of enterprises

- PA 8 is one of 12 Priority Areas of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).
- PA 8 is coordinated by **Baden-Württemberg** and **Croatia**.
- PA 8 aims to support the competitiveness of enterprises in the Danube Region. The project's main objective is to further support the effective and efficient EUSDR implementation through well established structures of EUSDR and PA 8 support for SMEs including the Working Groups, close and intense cooperation between Steering Group members and other relevant stakeholders.
- Baden-Württemberg and Croatia have assumed responsibility for increasing resilience and competitiveness in key areas of businesses in the EUSDR, which offers great opportunities for further development of work of the PA 8 activities in the Danube Region



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF PA 8

- National Coordinators
- Priority Area Coordinators (2 countries per priority): **Germany/BW:** **Carmen Hawkins** & **Croatia:** **Karmen Maričić**
- Steering Group (governmental representatives)
- Working Groups (business support organizations, SME, universities etc.)



Main actions of PA 8:

- To foster **cooperation and exchange of knowledge between SMEs**, creative industry, academia, the public sector and civil society in areas of competence in the Danube Region.
- Establishment of an Innovative Digital Ecosystem in the Danube Region in order **to support SMEs when tackling the challenges of a digitalized world.**
- Improvement of framework conditions, support programs and capacity building of stakeholders, to **enhance the collaboration between cluster initiatives and regional innovation strategies**, with an accent on rural areas.
- To improve business support to **strengthen the innovative and digital capacities of female-led-SMEs**
- **Enhance the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies** in the Danube Region.



EUSDR PA 8

Competitiveness of enterprises

- Priority Area Coordination team members are
 - **Carmen Hawkins** (Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour and Tourism Baden-Württemberg)
 - **Karmen Maričić** (Croatian Ministry of Economy)
 - **Helia Kovačević Grčić** (Croatian Ministry of Economy) and
 - **Alexandra Gölz** (Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour and Tourism Baden-Württemberg).
- PA 8 Website: <https://competitiveness.danube-region.eu/>



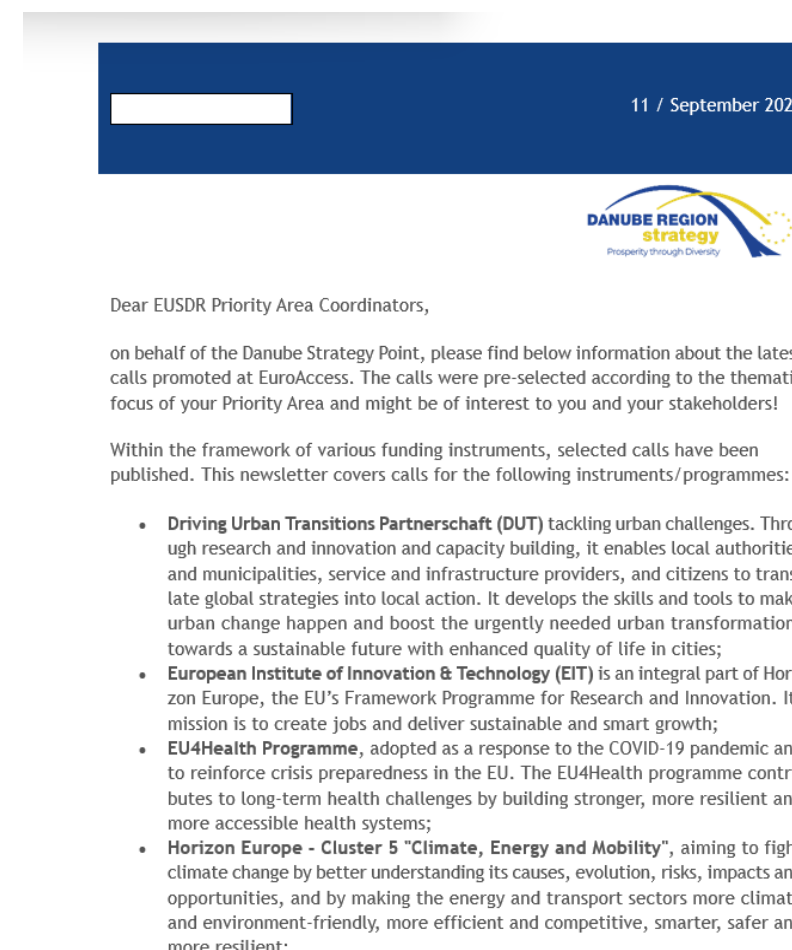
Tasks of PA 8

- Two PA 8 Steering Group Meetings per year
 - Members are Representatives of Economic Ministries of the 14 Danube Countries
 - Working Group Coordinators
 - PA 8 Danube Youth Council members
 - Representatives of DSP and DG REGIO
 - Observers
- Embedding
- Steering Group Meetings - Combined with bigger events/WG meetings
- Influencing national policies and focus on improving the competitiveness of SMEs in the Danube region



Tasks of PA 8

- Regular information about Funding opportunities sent to Steering Group members as multipliers in their country
- Invitation to Thematic events
- Support of policy development
- Support of PA 8 flagship projects
- Support to development of PA 8 flagship projects





PA 8 – Working Groups

Aims, Objectives and Functionality:

- Given the complexity of the tasks of the Priority Area 8, it was imperative to set up Working Groups. Their role is to reveal, synthesize and present concrete projects, which are in line with the Actions set for the Danube Region Strategy by Priority Area 8
- The Priority Area Coordinators together with the Steering Group established six thematic Working Groups



PA 8 – Working Groups



WG – Innovation and Technology Transfer



WG – Digital Danube



WG – Artificial Intelligence



WG – Clusters and Regional Development



WG – Circular Economy and Bioeconomy



WG – Female Entrepreneurship



Flagship projects

- Danube Strategy Flagships are **projects or processes** that **contribute to the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)**, have a **clear macro-regional dimension** and a **multi-level governance approach**.
- They are of high importance for the Danube Region's economic, social and territorial cohesion and for improving the quality of life in the Danube Region



Flagship projects

In the framework of our cooperation in the EUSDR PA 8 we handed over the **Certificates** in Stuttgart on 8 May 2025 at the congress “Virtual Worlds – Experience Opportunities in the Metaverse”.

The new 2025 PA 8 Danube Flagships are:

[TEX-DAN – Moving forward with circularity in textile and fashion value chains](#)
Represented by Zoltan Bendo, South-Transdanubian Regional Innovation Agency, HU, Leadpartner of the project

[SpinIT – Boosting IT Spin-offs and Smart Specialisation in Danube Region](#)
Represented by Mirza Sikirić, Zenica Development Agency ZEDA, BiH, Leadpartner of the project

[DRWO4.0 – Danube Region Wood Industry Transformation Model towards Industry 4.0](#)
Represented by Danijela Šarić Bartolović and Ivan Ambros, Competence Centre Ltd, HR, also leadpartner of the project

All three projects are funded by Interreg Danube Region Programme



Flagship projects



FLAGSHIP PROJECTS

PA8 Flagship Project 2024:
DECIDE

PA8 Flagship project 2024:
PLAN C

PA8 Flagship Project 2024:
WE.Circular

PA 8 Flagship Project Danube
Transfer Centre Network

PA 8 Flagship Project BrAIIn
(BRINGING ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE TOWARDS
SMEs)

Danube Alliance – The
flagship project of Priority
Area 8 was successfully
completed

The event financed by the Implementation Operative Programme
Plus 0.3.2.-23-2023-0001 project.



Current activities of PA 8

Study Identification of Lighthouse Projects and Communication measures

- Lighthouse Projects in three fields
 - Greentech, Circular Economy, Bioeconomy
 - Digitisation, Artificial Intelligence, Metaverse, Virtual Worlds
 - Supply Chains, Finance
- Communication measures
 - Workshops (8.5.2025 Stuttgart, 5.-6.11.2025 Sarajevo)
 - Publication on PA 8 Website
 - Presentations



Current activities of PA 8

Project development

- Short study on the current economic situation in Ukraine,
- Identification of thematic fields and stakeholders in Ukraine,
- Implementation of two hybrid Workshops and
- development of Project Concepts

with the goal to establish flagship projects for the Priority Area 8 (PA8) of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in cooperation with Ukrainian stakeholders

The initiative is possible through funding of the Interreg Danube Region Programme and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Labour and Tourism Baden-Württemberg, embedded in the activities of PA 8 to support competitiveness of enterprises.

The contactors are VDI/VDE-IT GmbH and Ukrainian Institute for International Politics



Outlook - upcoming activities of PA 8

Thematic exchange site visit

- Organization of a thematic exchange study trip in cooperation with the coordinators of WG Circular Economy and Bioeconomy, on the territory of the Danube microregion in Croatia, in mid-2026
- The goal is for members of the WG and companies, SME sector to become more familiar with examples of good practice in the Danube macroregion and to make contacts for future cooperation and raising competitiveness
- Visits to regional "success stories", policy makers institutions and SMEs along the same value chain, estimated length several days, contribute to strengthen networking and future project development. Thematic framework proposed:
 - collection and recycling of discarded textile products and textile waste
 - the role of social entrepreneurship in the process of collection and recycling of textiles
 - connecting the commercial SME sector and social entrepreneurship on examples of textile recycling



Outlook - upcoming activities of PA 8

14th EUSDR ANNUAL FORUM, Sarajevo 4 - 6 November 2025

Participation of PA 8:

- EUSDR PA 8 Event (DECIDE - Digital Services for Circular Economy - a Toolbox for Regional Developers & SME
- Danube Transfer Centre Network Ceremony (PA 8, RAIS, SERDA)
- Steering Group Meeting EUSDR PA 8
- EUSDR PA 8: Workshop on Lighthouse Initiatives from the Danube Region
- EUSDR PA 8: Working Group meeting on Circular Economy and Bioeconomy
- Digitalisation, boost for competitiveness, sustainability and growth (EUSDR PA 8, IDDEEA)
- EUSDR PA 8 - Workshop on Lighthouse Initiatives from the Danube Region
- Public Conference on EUSDR PA 8 DECIDE project



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ABOUT US

NEWS

EVENTS

PROJECTS

FUNDING & FINANCING

E-MATERIALS

CONTACT US

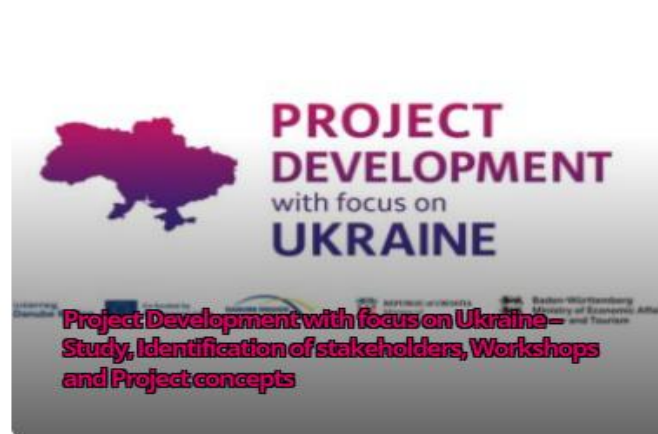


PA 8

Main News



Mid-term dissemination event of the project TEX-DAN



Project Development with focus on Ukraine – Study, Identification of stakeholders, Workshops and Project concepts



DRWO 4.0. 2nd Thematic meeting LEAN & Non-destructive testing of wood-based materials

Latest News



28.07.2025

Mid-term dissemination event of the project TEX-DAN



30.06.2025

Project Development with focus on Ukraine – Study,

Upcoming Events

NOVEMBER 2025

05 - 06
NOV

14TH EUSDR ANNUAL
FORUM

Wednesday,
Sarajevo, Bosnia
and Herzegovina

EVENT
DETAIL



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Thank you!