

# Joint Action Strategy for the Danube Macro- Region on Research Infrastructures

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# **JOINT ACTION STRATEGY FOR THE DANUBE MACRO-REGION ON RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURES**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

With this document, ResInfra@DR collected 17 distinct actions that form a joint action strategy for the Danube macro-region for research infrastructures (RIs). Its value is to present distinct actions that can be used by differentiated groups of research infrastructure stakeholders.

Stakeholders include RI host organisations such as universities or distinct research organisations, active RI users inside and outside of host organisations, RI operative managers and RI policy stakeholders on macro-regional, national and regional levels. Furthermore it addresses the wider coordination of actors, such as the PA7 Working Group 5 on Research Infrastructures, where it will be also presented. Core content of the joint action plan considers background developments, which include funding and operational challenges.

Over the period March–June 2019, stakeholders from all EUSDR countries covered were involved in consultations during events taking place in the Ukraine, Moldova, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation), Serbia, and at two larger events in Slovakia and Austria. In total, more than 150 people contributed to this consultation and prioritisation action.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

This document contains two distinct parts. Part one introduces a text describing some of the background processes and policy challenges in research infrastructures in the Danube macro-region. Part two introduces a collection of joint action points which were identified during the first two years of ResInfra@DR, with a particular focus on pilot actions 1 and 2 as developed by the project.

This joint-action strategy is also a deliverable of ResInfra@DR, which was developed on the basis of a draft strategy and the results of a public consultation. It considers further input to a draft strategy and was fully developed starting from 11 proposed topics and contains now 17 detailed descriptions of actions.

The consultation also considered the relevance, feasibility and importance to the Danube macro-region, and the priority for the working group on research infrastructure, which exists within EUSDR PA7.

## **2 BACKGROUND DESCRIPTION OF THE JOINT-ACTION STRATEGY**

### **A Joint Action Plan for Research Infrastructure Development in the Danube Macro-region**

Over the last decade, the topic of research infrastructures has become increasingly important on policy agendas. This includes the strategic value of national research bases for full integration in the international research landscape; the growing linkup between distributed RI resources; and the increasing number of relevant topics on national roadmaps, particularly recent ESFRI roadmaps. Also in the EU, the member states current funding rounds for structural funds have addressed RI investment, at the same time increasing attention to the durability of investments and financial sustainability

continues to evolve. Core attributes of research infrastructures include: being mostly mission driven; centring in most cases on basic research; meeting certain criteria of excellence; featuring open access and the provision of services beyond one's organisation; specific rules and limits for economic activities; professional management and human resource development. Considering the macro-regional context, many current research infrastructures do not (or do not fully) organise their operations along these core requirements.

Focusing on existing research capacities, universities are also trying to promote more organised operations and integration of their laboratories, which are now in the hands of active researchers, especially in order to meet new funding requirements. At the same time, newly built research infrastructures and existing smaller laboratories look for increased cooperation both internally and beyond organisational boundaries, which requires new modes and operation principles.

Expectations of better arrangements and a change of governance first includes the positive role of research infrastructures in enhancing international scientific cooperation and a specific influx of researchers to attractive research environments, which can trigger future collaborations. Second, research organisations are under pressure to enhance interaction within the regional economy, relevant industry sectors or existing small – and medium enterprises (SMEs). Taking on applied research questions with the aim of generating income and meeting regional economic demands has certain limitations. Specific funding rules (and state aid regulations), along with the existing capacity for result uptake in the economy, limit the room for entities to manoeuvre regarding this source of income.

Looking at the last funding rounds, and especially at European structural and investment funds (ESIF), which brought many research infrastructures to existence, it can be noted that long-term sustainability is receiving more and more attention. A balanced approach by policymakers and funding bodies must consider: (a) the meaningful distribution of available funding for research infrastructure (RI) establishment and upgrades, and (b) long-term sustainability and the provision of operational costs throughout the lifetime of a research infrastructure.

This joint action plan addresses the above challenges, with a focus on the Danube macro-region. It provides a broad list of specific activities that should trigger increased exchanges of mutual learning, including focused networking; suitable policy options; experiences with existing policy steering tools and information gathering; practical know-how on the management and governance of research infrastructures; and other relevant practical actions. Sharing personal experiences on involvement in processes across the region would provide a core opportunity that the current established network of experts and active organisations could use to improve their own practice.

The project ResInfra@DR has tested a number of proposed actions and added other intervention fields identified during ongoing work which deserve equal attention and importance.

The following 17 core action points, grouped into five distinct areas of action chosen through consultation, comprise the approved key components of the "Joint Action Strategy for the Danube Macro-region for Research Infrastructures".

### 3 OVERVIEW OF ACTION POINTS

The following overview of actions comprises all identified actions and guides users through the relevance, feasibility and importance of each point to the Danube macro-region (DR), the main priority of the EUSDR Priority Area 7 (PA7) Working group on Research Infrastructure. It also examines the timing the timing of 17 possible actions:

| Group                               | Short title of intervention  | Relevance | Feasibility | Importance for the DR | PA7 WG on RI priority | Start of action in... |
|-------------------------------------|--|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Information provision & exchange    | Information provision: International trends and developments                   | ●●●●●●    | ●●●●●○      | ●●●●○○                | ●●○○○○                | 1 yr.                 |
|                                     | Information provision: Regional, national and macro-regional developments      | ●●●●●○    | ●●●●●○      | ●●●●○○                | ●●●●●○                | 1 yr.                 |
|                                     | Increasing exchange on national level  | ●●●●●○    | ●●●●●○      | ●●●●●○                | ●●●●●○                | Start now             |
| Investment planning for RIs         | Tools for regional and national investment planning in RIs                     | ●●●●●○    | ●●●●○○      | ●●●●●○                | ●●●●●○                | 1 yr.                 |
|                                     | RI Landscape analysis  | ●●●●●●    | ●●●●●●      | ●●●●●●                | ●●●●●●                | 1 yr.                 |
|                                     | Approaches to involvement in mid-/large-sized international RIs                | ●●●●●○    | ●●●●○○      | ●●●●○○                | ●●○○○○                | 2 yrs.                |
|                                     | Resources for assessment: Reviewer and evaluator database                      | ●●●●○○    | ●●●●○○      | ●●●●●○                | ●●●●●○                | Start now             |
| Capacity building & mutual learning | Training for stakeholders as policymakers and funding agencies relevant to RIs | ●●●●●○    | ●●●●●○      | ●●●●●○                | ●●●●●○                | 1 yr.                 |
|                                     | Training for RI staff  | ●●●●●●    | ●●●●●●      | ●●●●●●                | ●●●●●●                | 1 yr.                 |
|                                     | Peer exchange and learning about RI practice                                   | ●●●●●●    | ●●●●●●      | ●●●●●○                | ●●●●●○                | 1 yr.                 |
|                                     | Building an RI user community  | ●●●●●○    | ●●●●●○      | ●●●●●●                | ●●●●●○                | 2 yrs.                |

| Group                             | Short title of intervention  | Relevance | Feasibility | Importance for the DR | PA7 WG on RI priority | Start of action in... |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Open access to RIs & laboratories | Developing an RI information service system  | ●●●●●●    | ●●●●●●      | ●●●●●●                | ●●●●●●                | 2 yrs.                |
|                                   | Basic principles of open access, practical solutions and operation models for RIs                  | ●●●●●●    | ●●●●●○      | ●●●●●●                | ●●●●●●                | 2 yrs.                |
|                                   | Support actions for small laboratories to improve access to smaller facilities and become real RIs | ●●●●●●    | ●●●●○○      | ●●●●○○                | ●●○○○○                | 3 yrs.                |
|                                   | Research universities and integration tasks for RIs, operation models of RIs                       | ●●●●●○    | ●●●●●○      | ●●●●●○                | ●●○○○○                | 2 yrs.                |
| Practical & horizontal actions    | Measures for increasing the practical cooperation of RIs in the DR                                 | ●●●●●○    | ●●●●○○      | ●●●●●○                | ●●●●●○                | 2 yrs.                |
|                                   | Support for better RI coordination in the DR through lobbying and community information            | ●●●●●●    | ●●●●●●      | ●●●●●○                | ●●●●●○                | 1 yr.                 |



## 4 DESCRIPTION OF ACTIONS

### 4.1 Action group: Information provision & exchange

| Short title of action  | Challenges addressed   | Aims of the action   | Activities   | Outputs/results   |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| Information provision: International trends and developments               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information on current developments to establish international networks with strategic fora such as ESFRI and others, as the Group of Senior Officials (GSO) on global Research Infrastructures are not well known and it is challenging to receive adequate insight</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide access to background studies and reports to access "early" information on new developments</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systematic collection of relevant materials and provision of access (primarily addressing policymakers, decision makers in research organisations)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessible relevant documents and inventory of initiatives, currently active projects</li> </ul>   |
| Information provision: Regional, national and macro- regional developments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information about regional, national and macro-regional initiatives, cooperation and access offers are not collected systematically or distributed to a full range of actors</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The systematic collection and distribution of up-to-date information and targeted information provision i.e. including CERIC-ERIC calls, ERRIS offers, other calls etc.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A LinkedIn page (or a regular newsletter) can provide necessary information in a timely manner, or a dedicated hashtag can be promoted to enable adequate sharing of information</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Permanent update through electronic channels</li> <li>Newsletter items</li> <li>Readers of newsletter</li> </ul>                                       |
| Increasing exchange at a national level                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different actors do not exchange information about current national or international developments; stakeholder lists are not collected in countries to facilitate exchange</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief on developments: current challenges and analysis; planned new initiatives or funding rounds; Horizon2020/Horizon Europe calls</li> <li>Inform about international developments i.e. ESFRI; regionally active bodies such as CERIC ERIC and user access offers</li> <li>Network with national stakeholders, including policymakers, agencies and active research organisations, as well as users of RI's beyond academic circles</li> <li>Meet with specified target groups</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up stakeholder lists on RI topics</li> <li>Prepare information for stakeholder groups i.e. on funding opportunities or EU processes, including using the Horizon 2020 National Contact Points NCP information</li> <li>Organise meetings for exchange and better national coordination</li> <li>Provide newsletters for outreach</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National-level meetings (variable openness)</li> <li>Networking opportunities</li> <li>Newsletters or other accessible information channels</li> </ul> |

## 4.2 Action group: Investment planning for RIs

| Short title of action  | Challenges addressed   | Aims of the action  | Activities  | Outputs/results   |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| Tools for regional and national investment planning for RIs (overview of current practice) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regional/national planning approaches, including roadmaps or specific policy steering mechanisms, which could follow valuable international examples are not collected systematically. Access is limited to collections of guidance documents or toolboxes, progress on reviews of current practice limits</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A commented overview of practical guidelines and toolboxes of direct relevance for policy steering, funding and specific monitoring or assessment approaches</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Systematic collection of relevant materials and provision of access</li> <li>Webinars to present available tools</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accessible overview and commented collection of toolboxes and examples</li> </ul>  |
| Approaches to involvement in mid- to large-sized international RIs                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Policymakers are often concerned with decisions regarding participation in international infrastructures</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present solutions for the assessment of participation. (e.g. benefits, access, economic value and return on investment, intellectual property, user community size, cost)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-hand presentation by peer policymakers of assessment frameworks or evaluation grids used; coordination with the user community</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops</li> <li>Webinars</li> <li>Sessions at macro-regional events addressing policy-makers</li> </ul>   |
| Resources for assessment: Reviewer and evaluator database                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For the systematic evaluation of RI support calls and all other assessments, a sufficient and regionally embedded reviewer list is currently missing. This creates a bottleneck for funding programmes or specific assessments. Programme evaluations do not count on experts from the macro-region</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and enrich the established RI reviewer database.</li> <li>Inform users about the existence of and opportunities provided by an RI reviewer database</li> </ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide and enlarge quality-ensured reviewer database on RI assessments (primarily addressing policy stakeholders, policy delivery organisations as agencies and research organisations for their own steering)</li> <li>Organise Web meetings to provide information</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Permanently updated database of RI reviewers, starting e.g. with the ResInfra@DR reviewer database</li> <li>Access by main users to the database (by keeping data protection regulations)</li> </ul> |

### 4.3 Action group: Capacity building and mutual learning

| Short title of action                                  | Challenges addressed   | Aims of the action  | Activities   | Outputs/results  |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Training for stakeholders, (policymakers and agencies) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific knowledge for policymakers concerned with rapid policy developments can scarcely be found in training sessions or workshops</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide training according to the needs of policymakers and policy-delivery agencies</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train stakeholders for better steering, as well as planning, monitoring and commissioning of studies i. e. to assess economic impact</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training for Policy maker and policy delivery organisation staff</li> </ul>   |
| Training for RI staff                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RI management tasks are challenging, including e.g. user access provision needs, specific hard and soft skills and providing adequate support structures</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train research infrastructure staff to improve operations, access and cooperation</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide training events, workshops or online webinars on current RI management practice i.e. access models, user interaction, governance issues</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings (virtual, real)</li> </ul>   |
| Peer exchange actions (for RIs)                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RIs need to follow international trends to ensure appropriate development, yet the format for peer assessment or institutional peer review is barely known and rarely used. This includes policymaking, agency funding operations and research organisations hosting RIs</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide peer exchange, mutual learning and reviews addressing:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>policymaking and delivery;</li> <li>research infrastructures and their hosts/umbrella organisations</li> </ol> </li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploit reviewer database</li> <li>Organise Web meetings to provide information</li> <li>Provide seminars and workshops focussing on topics specific to RI issues</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer support actions in pairs or other settings</li> <li>Meetings – web meetings, seminars and workshops</li> </ul> |
| RI user community building                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are many offers to establish new RIs or facilitate access to laboratory facilities. In order to attract excellent users, the visibility of capacities is often not adequate; in addition, information often does not reach future users. Currently there is no specific exchange on how to provide outreach and information about broader tools to the RI-user community</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchange on best practices regarding how to map and attract potential users in specific research fields, as well as consideration of systematic approaches</li> <li>Provide tools to inform about opportunities for potential users of an RI</li> <li>Exchange information on practices regarding user community management, considering the specific and widely varying DR situation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thematic exchange on RI user community building actions via showcasing current practices and using systematic methodologies and approaches</li> <li>Interregional exchange on user community building actions, options and experiences in specific research fields</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thematic exchange sessions for RI staff and RI managers (virtual and real meetings)</li> </ul>                      |

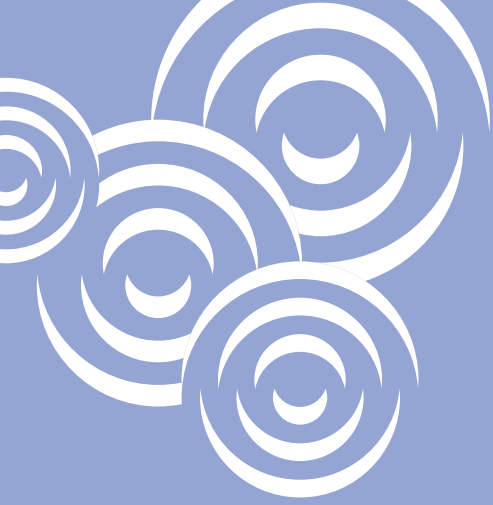
## 4.4 Action group: Open access to RIs and laboratories

| Short title of action  | Challenges addressed   | Aims of the action   | Activities  | Outputs/results  |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Developing an RI equipment and service information system                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently, existing RI capacities are not visible and access is hindered, due to an inability to find the right contact persons. Additionally, a reference point for funders on existing capacities and equipment is rarely existent and investing twice in similar equipment occurs, despite under-usage of similar systems</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Showcase active RI service systems such as ERRIS</li> <li>Explore opportunities to map a specific research field and associated RI services</li> <li>Exchange information on possible booking systems that include a broader range of equipment (also across the DR)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present service systems on current examples i.e. ERRIS (Romania) which operates as booking system for access</li> <li>Test a systematic approach for service arrangements regarding a specific field of research in a pilot project</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information sessions (virtual/real) for RI stakeholders to gather information about the ERRIS approach</li> <li>Thematic pilot actions for service catalogues using existing RI information systems</li> </ul>  |
| Open access basic principles, practical solutions and operation models for RIs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open access is a precondition when public funding is involved, but includes a fee-based operation and must respect state aid rules for economic use</li> <li>Openness to all types of users is requested more and more, this requires new approaches that are often unknown (how to organise, what can be charged)</li> <li>Cost models for open access to RIs</li> <li>IPR rules and other conditions</li> <li>Special conditions for funding by the European Commission and structural funds, as well as from national funding schemes (state aid rule=20% commercial use)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide better understanding and streamlining of RI offers and services</li> <li>Propose and showcase open access models and what they mean for the operation of an RI</li> <li>Fulfil meaningful funding conditions and corresponding documentation</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchange on open access models for RIs, including the pricing of use of services</li> <li>Collect current practice examples to see open access provisions and options</li> <li>Steer and manage access (beam time allocation i.e. by use of a review mechanism, services for users, access for educational/teaching purposes, etc.)</li> <li>Share models for IPR management</li> <li>Monitor and document open access (specific indicator framework)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchange meetings</li> <li>Online presentations and webinars</li> <li>Sharing current practice with interested actors in workshops or newsletters</li> <li>Sharing relevant material for the monitoring of operations, pricing, and steering of access</li> <li>Monitor indicators and provide materials</li> </ul> |
| Support to small laboratories to improve access to facilities                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A number of smaller facilities maintain valuable research resources, equipment, laboratories or databases. In many cases, access for users outside of research entities remains limited.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capitalizing on current access approaches i.e. through open calls, and the use of small research facilities, can be facilitated. The needs of users need to be reflected on a case-by-case basis.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RIs can be provided with essential information for their management challenges and options. These could be: (a) cooperation and management model agreements or examples adapted to one's own needs. (b) Pilot support cases can focus on specific thematic "silos"</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information about user access cases for small research facilities or specific thematic solutions</li> </ul>   |

| Short title of action                               | Challenges addressed  | Aims of the action   | Activities   | Outputs/results   |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| Research universities and integration tasks for RIs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universities increasingly try to pool their research base by forming joint or “core laboratories”, often in the hands of the rectorate. At the same time, faculties have acquired knowledge of procurement and other procedures to purchase equipment.</li> <li>The challenge of integrating university-wide facilities includes issues such as human resources and ownership by faculties, and is a pressing development</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide interplay of research groups and their research infrastructures with faculties. The rectorate must activate the full potential of existing laboratories and research infrastructures.</li> <li>Actions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify steering and governance models integrating existing resources</li> <li>Provide operations models which can be adapted to best utilise existing RIs and address future upgrading phases</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share experiences of similar tasks in webinars or at thematic meetings</li> <li>Use synergies with the Danube Rectors conference and other stakeholders to bring the topic to the agenda</li> <li>Inform about internationally recognized and tested models as “core facilities” in the microbiology or medical and genomics</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thematic online meetings</li> <li>Sharing successful cases or existing assessments (i.e. with news or including DR stakeholders’ specific thematic newsletters, etc.)</li> </ul> |

## 4.5 Action group: Horizontal activities

| Short title of action   | Challenges addressed  | Aims of the action  | Activities   | Outputs/results  |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| Measures for increasing practical cooperation of RIs in the Danube Region               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many RIs work in isolation and do not exploit international opportunities in the DR</li> <li>A number of smaller laboratories do not consider the added value of services which are organised together with other RIs or laboratories including distributed facilities</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create an exchange on existing collaboration models within the region</li> <li>Establish practical exchanges on strategic planning for internationalisation</li> <li>Explore how to integrate and open up smaller distributed RIs in the DR, as well as in specific thematic fields</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share new RI and laboratory networks and reflecting on added value in online talks or at relevant events</li> <li>Inform about internationalisation options with thematically similar organisations within/outside of the region</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thematic meetings reflecting the topic and providing insights for participation options</li> <li>Online talks or sessions to demonstrate concepts</li> </ul>  |
| Support for better RI coordination in the DR through lobbying and community information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The PA7 WG will support future activities, but financial means need to be acquired for such tasks. ResInfra@DR has been developing a clear action strategy with this document that requests small resources for further implementation. Being to some degree a neglected topic in the DR, stronger lobbying for RI investment in the region is necessary.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use existing resources to maintain topic interest in the region on RI, including the PA7 WG</li> <li>Maintain a list of interested people in the region to address thematic information</li> <li>Lobby for regional cooperation and support actions</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present the joint action plan at PA7 WG meetings or organise such meetings.</li> <li>Prepare a regular newsletter (with the community, the H2020 NCPs, the Danube rectors conference, the JRC, ESFRI)</li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Briefings at topic-related events about feasible actions (and an action plan)</li> <li>Release of a thematic newsletter to maintain contact with RI-related staff</li> <li>Lobbying initiatives i.e. for funding of coordination initiatives</li> </ul> |



With this document, ResInfra@DR collected 17 distinct actions that form a joint action strategy for the Danube macro-region for research infrastructures (RIs). Its value is to present distinct actions that can be used by differentiated groups of research infrastructure stakeholders.