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EUROPEAN UNION

Danube Transnational Programme



APPLICANTS MANUAL

for EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators

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FOREWORD

This manual outlines the framework for the implementation of the direct financial support offered by the DTP to the EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators, as defined under Specific Objective 4.2 of the DTP Cooperation Programme. The defined rules are based on the relevant European Regulations and have been harmonised with the other transnational programmes.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Audit Authority
AF	Application Form
CA	Certifying Authority
CP	Cooperation Programme
DTP	Danube Transnational Programme
EC	European Commission
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EUSDR	EU Strategy for Danube Region
GoA	Group of Auditors
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession
JS	Joint Secretariat
LP	Lead Partner
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
NCP	National Contact Point
NC	National Coordinator of EUSDR
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

PA	Priority Area
PAC	Priority Area Coordinator
PP	Project Partner
PRaG	Practical Guide to contract procedures for EU External actions
SG	Steering Group
SO	Specific Objective

GLOSSARY

Applicants Manual

The Applicants Manual is part of the Application Pack intended to provide applicants detailed and specific information about the programme, project requirements, eligibility rules, application and assessment processes, project implementation principles and to guide them through the drafting of the project proposals.

Beneficiary

A beneficiary is an entity receiving EU funds for the implementation of a project.

Co-financing

In general terms, it refers to the situation when there are 2 financing sources for the same project or activity. In the EU programmes environment, usually there are 2 or more sources of financing. In case of Danube Transnational Programme, financing is provided from EU funds (ERDF, IPA II or ENI) and national co-financing: state contribution and/or own sources (can be public or private) of the project participant and/or other contribution (e.g. regional/local/other sources).

Cohesion Policy

Cohesion policy was enshrined in the Treaties with the adoption of the Single European Act (1986). It is built on the assumption that redistribution between richer and poorer regions in Europe is needed in order to balance out the effects of further economic, social and territorial integration.

Control system (centralised/ decentralised)

The Control system is set up by each Partner State in order to carry out verifications at national level with regard to the use of ERDF/ IPA funds against established procedures in terms of delivery of products and services according to the approved Application Form, verification of the reality of claimed expenditure, ensuring compliance with the terms of the Commission decision on the programme, compliance with the national and Community rules on eligibility of expenditure, public procurement, state aid, protection of the environment and equal opportunities. The control system may be centralised, i.e. a central body is appointed by the respective country to carry out the control activities, or decentralised, i.e. the controlled project partner appoints its controller (however, in this case, limitations on the selection of the controller may be imposed by the Partner State).

Controller

The Controller is the private or public body or individual designated by the Partner States to carry out control activities with regard to the use of ERDF/ IPA/ENI funds.

Coordination

Coordination is the synchronization and integration of activities, responsibilities, and command and control structures to ensure that resources are used most efficiently in pursuit of the specified objectives.

Durability

Durability of projects outputs and results refers to the long-lasting effect of the project achievements beyond project implementation timeframe.

Eligible costs

Eligible costs are the project-related costs reported by the beneficiaries which are in line with the applicable programme eligibility rules and which are reimbursed from ERDF or IPA II funds.

European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)

Effective from 2014 to 2020, the ENI is one of the instruments providing direct support for the European Union's external policies. It will support the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and turn decisions taken on a political level into actions on the ground.

ERDF and IPA co-financing rate

ERDF and IPA co-financing rate is the 85 percentage applied to the eligible expenditure of each individual partner resulting in the amount of co-financing to be reimbursed.

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

The ERDF is one of the five Structural Funds and it is intended to help to reduce imbalances between regions of the Community. The Fund grants financial assistance for development projects in the EU regions. In terms of financial resources, the ERDF is by far the largest of the EU's Structural Funds.

Flat rate

Flat rate is a level of payment that is the same in all cases, calculated as percentage of a certain amount.

Intervention Logic

The intervention logic is the backbone of the project and the programme, demonstrating the link in terms of existing challenge/ need, objectives, expected results and outputs. The project intervention logic will have to show how the intended change will be achieved through planned activities.

Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA)

The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II (IPA II) is the means by which the EU supports reforms in the 'enlargement countries' with financial and technical help. Prepared in partnership with the beneficiaries, IPA II sets a new framework for providing pre-accession assistance for the period 2014-2020. For the purpose of this Manual, the acronym IPA is used.

Lead partner (LP)

The Lead Partner is the project partner having full financial responsibility for the entire project and being responsible for the overall coordination of the project, including proper reporting of progress to the Joint Secretariat as also stipulated in the Subsidy Contract. For the purpose of this Manual, the Lead Partner is defined as Project Partner 1.

Macro-regional strategy

A macro-regional strategy means an integrated framework endorsed by the European Council, which may be supported by the ESI Funds among others, to address common challenges faced by a defined geographical area relating to Member States and third countries located in the same geographical area which thereby benefit from strengthened cooperation contributing to achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion (according to Article 2(31) of the CPR).

Partner States

Partner States are the 14 countries included in the DTP and in the EUSDR.

Priority Area Coordinators (PACs)

Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) drive the day-to-day implementation of the EUSDR, on the basis of the work of the respective Steering Groups, which decide on the joint work within the Priority Area.

Project Partner

Project beneficiary, as referred to in Article 13 of Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013, of EU funds (ERDF, IPA or ENI). Project Partner 1 in this call has the functions of the Lead Partner.

Programme Priorities

The Programme Priorities are the thematic areas around which the programme is structured.

Progress Report

The Progress Report is the report to be submitted by Project Partner 1 to the JS at the end of each reporting period outlining performed activities within the period as well as associated eligible expenditure. It documents the progress of the project and serves as reimbursement request.

Real costs

Real costs represent the expenditure actually incurred and paid (as opposed to lump sums or sums resulting from applying flat rates) and supported by invoices and other documents of equivalent probative value.

Reporting period

A reporting period generally covers one year period at the end of which the Lead Partners (Project Partner 1) will have to submit a detailed Progress Report. Nevertheless, in order to ensure the cash flow of the PACs, they can submit interim progress reports, based on a reduced activity report, up to 4 times per year, according to their needs.

State contribution

The state contribution is the national public contribution representing a certain percentage of the eligible expenditure to be secured by the Partner States in accordance with national regulations.

Subsidy Contract

The Subsidy Contract is the contract signed between the MA/JS and the Lead Partner (Project Partner 1) of each project stipulating the provisions to be observed by both parties during the implementation of the project.

Target group

The target group consists of those individuals and/or organisations towards which the project aims are directed and which will therefore be directly or indirectly affected by the project activities and results. Even if target groups may not necessarily receive funds and be directly involved in the project implementation, they may exploit project outcomes for their own benefit. In the case of SO4.2 – Support to PACs, the following target groups shall be considered: the PAs Steering Group members and the PAs stakeholders.

PART 1: DANUBE TRANSNATIONAL PROGRAMME

I. General Objectives

The Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) is a financing instrument with a specific scope and an independent decision making body. The DTP supports the policy integration in the Danube area in selected fields under the CPR/ ERDF Regulations. The strategic vision is “policy integration” in specific fields of action below the EU-level (not duplicating efforts in policy integration at the EU-level e.g. TEN-T) and above the national level. Transnational projects should influence national, regional and local policies (policy driver).

In order to achieve a higher degree of territorial integration of the very heterogeneous Danube region, the transnational cooperation programme will act as a policy driver aiming to tackle the common challenges and needs deriving from specific policy fields. Therefore, transnational cooperation is expected to deliver tangible results through the development and practical implementation of policy frameworks, tools and services. To this end, the programme looks to promote concrete pilot investments.

The programme supports the following priorities addressing transnational key challenges and opportunities in the Danube Region:

1. Innovative and socially responsible Danube Region
2. Environment and culture responsible Danube region
3. Better connected and energy responsible Danube region
4. Well governed Danube region

A detailed description of the actions to be funded under priorities 1-3 and 4.1 can be found in the Cooperation Programme.

In addition, in the 2014-2020 programming period, the Programme provides support to projects strengthening the implementation of EU Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR, also Strategy). This support is provided within the framework of Priority 4, Specific Objective 4.2 “Support to the governance and implementation of the EUSDR”. Under this Specific Objective the Programme provides co-financing for the following types of actions:

- Support to Priority Areas Coordinators aimed at increasing the effectiveness of coordination and strategy implementation in each of the Priority Areas of the EUSDR

- Seed Money Facility providing support for preparation of complex strategic transnational projects contributing to the EUSDR, to be further financed by different funding sources existing in the region.
- Establishment and support of the EUSDR Strategy Point aimed at facilitating the information flow between EUSDR actors, as well as strengthening the capacity of the PAC in implementing and communicating the Strategy. As the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) has been already established with other funds, the DTP would support its implementation.

II. EUSDR and Programme support to macro-regional cooperation

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

The EUSDR is divided into 4 pillars and 12 Priority Areas. The EUSDR defines the examples of targets¹ for each Priority Area. The EUSDR Action Plan defines the actions to be implemented by all priority areas and includes examples of projects for each priority area as well. The EUSDR Action Plan is a rolling document, subject to regular review, as appropriate.

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

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

¹ The EUSDR targets are reviewed and revised (if needed) by EUSDR bodies and finally endorsed by High Level Group made up of official representatives of all EU Member States (non-EU partners being invited as appropriate). For EUSDR such process was held in 2011 and a second one is ongoing in 2016.

² List of the current Priority Area Coordinators is provided in Annex I.

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

For the funding period 2014-2020, the thematic priorities 1-3 and 4.1 of the Danube Transnational Programme have been very much aligned with the objectives of the Strategy to maximise the synergies and leverage effects on other financing sources in the programme areas. The Danube Transnational Programme offers support for the EUSDR implementation, for example by financing projects directly supporting the EUSDR (as per assessment criteria defined jointly by the Programme and the Strategy) and their preparation (Seed Money Facility). In addition, as mentioned above, in this period the Programme provides direct support to the coordination activities of macro-regional cooperation.

III. Programme area

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

Geographically, the DTP area overlaps with the territory addressed by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, comprising also the Danube river basin and the mountainous areas (such as the Carpathians, the Balkans and part of the Alps). It is the most international river basin in the world. The area accounts for one fifth of the EU's territory and it is inhabited by approximately 114 million people. 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 they represent important opportunities and unexploited potential.

Figure1. Programme area



IV. Programme budget for SO 4.2 Support to the governance and implementation of EUSDR

The total Programme co-financing allocation for the SO 4.2 (ERDF and IPA) amounts to 15,511,618.18 EUR. This amount covers all three main results of the Specific Objective:

- direct support for PACs,
- Seed Money Facility and
- support for Danube Strategy Point

Specific allocations per Call are defined in the Call Announcements corresponding to each of the above mentioned objectives.

The direct EU financial support to PACs is 100,000 EUR/ year (corresponding to 85% EU funding for ERDF, ENI and IPA partners) for each of the 12 EUSDR priority areas. The national co-financing is 15% which leads to a total amount of 117,647.06 EUR per Priority Area per year.

V. *Legal framework*

The Danube Transnational Programme was developed taking into consideration the broad policy framework channelling the development efforts on macro-regional, national and regional levels.

Please note: The relevant documents listed below are provided on the DTP website. The list is not exhaustive.

- *Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme document adopted by the European Commission on 20 August 2015.*
- *Structural Funds Regulations:*
 - Regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006
 - Regulation (EU) No. 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006
 - Regulation (EU) No. 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal.
- *IPA Regulations:*
 - Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II)
 - Regulation (EU) 447/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 May 2014 on the specific rules for implementing Regulation (EU) No 231/2014 of the European

Parliament and of the Council establishing an Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA II)

- REGULATION (EU) No 236/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 March 2014, Common Implementing Regulation for External Actions

➤ *EGTC Regulation:*

- Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings

➤ *Implementing acts and delegated acts adopted in accordance with the aforementioned Regulations,*

➤ *Directives of the Commission, European Parliament and the Council on public procurement.*

VI. Management structure

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

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

The **Managing Authority (MA)**, assisted by the **Joint Secretariat**, hosted by the Ministry for National Economy of Hungary, is responsible for the overall programme implementation by carrying out the functions laid down in Article 125 of the CPR as well as Article 23 of the ETC Regulation. The JS is the central contact point for potential project applicants and Lead Partners (Project Partner 1) of selected/ running operations.

The **Certifying Authority (CA)** is responsible for drawing up and submitting certified statements of expenditure and applications for payment to the European Commission and receiving payments from the EC. The CA shall use the payments received from the EC to reimburse the Lead Partners (Project Partner 1) in accordance with Article 132 of the CPR.

The **Audit Authority (AA)** is responsible for ensuring that audits are done in the framework of the management and control systems and are based on an appropriate sample of operations and on the

annual accounts. The AA will be assisted by a Group of Auditors (GoA) comprising the representatives of responsible bodies of each Partner State.

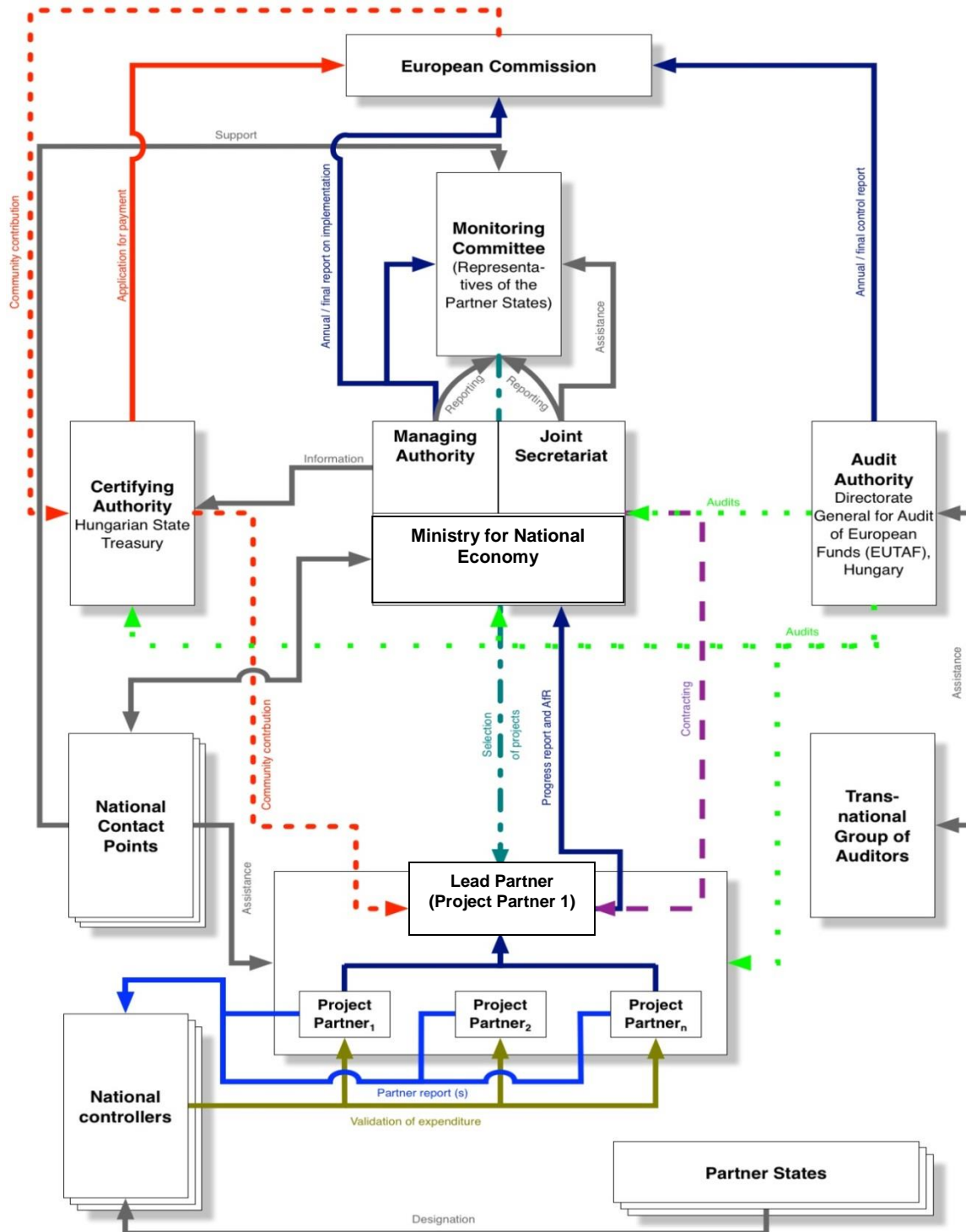
National Contact Points (NCPs) are set up by each participating country to complement transnational activities of the MA and the JS and by involving stakeholders from the national level as well as to contribute to the national and transnational programme management and provide guidance and advice to potential applicants and project partners concerning the national rules on public procurement, national FLC requirements and eligibility of expenditures.³

The **Lead Partners (Project Partner 1)**, located in one of the DTP EU Member States, will be designated by the partners participating in a project to carry out the tasks laid down in Article 13 of the ETC Regulation. In particular, Project Partner 1 shall assume responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the entire operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid.

The **Project Partner(s)** carry out activities planned in the approved Application Form (AF) and agreed in the Partnership Agreement. Among their tasks, they submit reports of project activities to payment claims; assume responsibility of any irregularity in the expenditure which it has declared, repaying the Lead Partner (Project Partner 1) any amounts unduly paid in accordance of the Partnership Agreement signed between the Lead Partner (Project Partner 1) and the respective project partner; carry out information and communication measures for the public about the project activities.

Controllers will be designated by each Partner State to ensure the compliance of expenditure incurred by the project partners with the Community and national rules, by carrying out verifications within the meaning of Article 23(4) of the ETC Regulation as well as Article 125(5) of the CPR, covering administrative, financial, technical and physical aspects of operations. Controllers shall be nominated in line with the national provisions of each Partner State. Each country participating in the DTP will be responsible for verifications carried out on its territory.

³ DSP will provide support to the PAC concerning the content related issues, on voluntary basis.



VII. Horizontal principles

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is fundamental for the implementation of economic and social cohesion policies also governing the Danube Transnational Programme.

Sustainable development stands for meeting the needs of present generations without endangering the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs. When applying for funding under the DTP, applicants should account for the impact of their project on economic, ecological and social aspects within the targeted region.

Applicants have to specify any possible environmental impact of their project on the following aspects: water, soil, air and climate, population and human health, fauna, flora and biodiversity, natural heritage and landscape.

Projects submitted under any Priority Axis are strongly encouraged to incorporate activities for tackling environmental concerns and reducing their environmental and carbon footprint, for example by:

- Contributing to energy efficiency, renewable energy use and reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Contributing to efficient water supply, waste-water treatment and water reuse
- Contributing of green public procurement in a systematic manner
- Contributing to efficient waste management, re-use and recycling
- Contributing to the development of green infrastructures including Natura 2000 sites
- Contributing to reduced transport and mobility-related air pollution
- Contributing to sustainable integrated urban development
- Contributing to enhanced awareness of adaptation to climate change and risk prevention
- Contributing to more employment opportunities, education, training and support services in the context of environment protection and sustainable development

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

Projects must promote equal opportunities for everyone and prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during the

preparation, design and implementation of the transnational cooperation projects. Additionally, projects must account for the particular needs of the various target groups prone to such discrimination and the requirements of ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, when selecting service providers, suppliers or contractors, projects have to ensure equal opportunities for all interested parties and avoid limiting and discriminating with requirements or selection criteria. During project selection, each project will be subject to the verification of compliance with equal opportunities and non-discrimination principles defined in EU and national legislation.

Equality between men and women

The Danube Transnational Programme aims at promoting gender equality in line with the EU policies in this field. In the framework of their activities, projects have to ensure equal participation of men and women and gender mainstreaming and avoid generating discrimination of any kind.

VIII. Environmental sustainability

The total sets of greenhouse gas emissions caused by an organisation, event, product or person define their carbon footprint.

Changes in our lifestyles, attitudes and behaviours towards more environmentally sound choices will provide a contribution to reverse this situation.

The Danube Transnational Programme, covering a wide area of 14 countries and over 114 million of inhabitants that agreed to interact and work together for the next years, has a considerable potential carbon footprint. However, in line with Art 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013⁴, the DTP would like to attempt to reduce any potential increase of carbon dioxide derived from the implementation of the DTP.

Experience of transnational programme implementation showed that two main factors, among others, directly contribute to increasing the carbon footprint of a programme: 1. excessive use of printed documents either for formal or informal use; and 2. extensive travels of the involved actors.

The actions planned to decrease the carbon footprint of the DTP are twofold. On one hand, a reduction of the printed paper needed for the implementation of the DTP and, on the other hand offsetting the CO₂ emitted during the travels of all actors involved in the DTP implementation.

⁴ "The objectives of the ESI Funds shall be pursued in line with the principle of sustainable development and with the Union's promotion of the aim of preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment, as set out in Article 11 and Article 191(1) TFEU, taking into account the polluter pays principle.[...]"

Reduce – reuse – recycle principle

The first step towards a greener direction should be taken during the procuring process: whenever procuring for activities which will produce documents and publications in general, a clear request of using only recycled paper should be indicated in the related ToRs.

Considering the significant number of events planned and expected to be organised throughout the project duration, it is strongly recommended to avoid distributing paper copy of materials used during the events (e.g. agenda, printout of PPTs, discussion documents in general) and make appropriate use of the electronic support.

The DTP ensures a considerable reduction of request of paper documents from the projects in all steps of implementation.

- Application phase: expressions of interest, application forms and all supporting documents will be requested in electronic format only. The signed paper version will be requested only for the signature of the subsidy contracts of approved proposals.
- Reporting phase: progress reports and declarations of validations will be requested in electronic format only. Applications for reimbursement will only need to be sent in the signed paper version. Copies of deliverables will be requested in electronic format only.

We encourage using best practice procedures that stress the reduction of the used paper, its reuse and the recycling through appropriate recycling bins.

Reduce:

- The circulation of printed documents should be reduced by using email wherever possible
- It is advised to always use both sides of paper. Printers and photocopiers should be set to copy double-sided as default

Reuse:

- Waste paper should be used and assembled into notepads
- It is advised to use designated containers to collect part-used waste paper. This can then be fed back through faxes/printers or used for rough working

Recycle:

- Confidential documents should be shred and sent for recycling
- All other used paper should be sent for recycling where possible

Carbon offset

According to a rough estimation that considered the experience of the past programming period, a minimum of 9,400 travels are expected during the Danube Transnational programme and project implementation. Therefore, it can be expected that travelling for programme/ project purposes will substantially increase the carbon footprint.

The DTP strongly suggests the project partners to previously assess the need for travel and to explore the alternative options, such as conference calls, online meetings, etc.

As often travels cannot be avoided, the DTP proposes to first trying to reduce the impact of the travel by combining events together (e.g. steering group meetings with working group meeting and stakeholders' event) and/ or by selecting the venue taking into consideration its accessibility (e.g. location easily reachable by train).

Another option that the DTP offers is the offsetting of the carbon emissions produced by the programme actors (programme bodies and project partners) when flying.

Carbon offsets are achieved through financial support of projects carried out by organisations that act as service providers of CO₂ compensation that reduce the emission of greenhouse gases in the short- or long-term.

Costs for compensating the CO₂ emissions are eligible for co-financing at programme level. Project actors are advised to read carefully the chapter on the eligibility of expenditures to make sure that programme rules are followed when purchasing carbon offsetting.

PART 2: SUPPORT TO EUSDR PRIORITY AREA COORDINATORS

I. *Intervention logic*

I.1. Objectives, results and outputs

The co-financing offered by the Programme is aimed at supporting the PACs in providing successful and effective coordination and strategy implementation in each of the Priority Areas of the EUSDR, thus helping them to reach the EUSDR targets and implement its Action Plan.

According to the Cooperation Programme, all projects submitted for the support of the EUSDR have to aim at *improving the governance system and the capabilities and capacities of public institutions and key actors involved in complex transnational project development to implement the EUSDR in a more effective way (specific programme objective 4.2 of the DTP)*.

When preparing the Application Form, clearly set main objective and specific objectives for the three years period covered by the proposal are needed.

In order to support the PACs in meeting the Programme objective, **the main objective** of the submitted proposals is pre-defined and shall be the same for all Priority Areas: *to ensure the implementation of a stable and effective governance system within EUSDR PA [number of the PA]*.

The specific objectives of the submitted proposals have to be linked to the main project objective as well as to the defined Programme Specific Objective 4.2.

In order to support the PACs in meeting the main project objective and Programme Specific Objective 4.2, the following **set of pre-defined specific objectives** is to be considered when preparing the project proposals:

1. *To support the Steering Groups in implementing the EUSDR PA.*
2. *To support communication and increased visibility of the PA and dissemination of PA's achievements.*
3. *To support policy development and policy initiatives as well as usage of cutting edge knowledge (EU/ international, as appropriate).*
4. *To enhance coordination between PA actors and to encourage involvement of key stakeholders in the PA activities.*
5. *To facilitate the on-going and development of future projects initiatives for the PA, specifically project generation, partner search and identification of funding opportunities for the PA stakeholders.*

No more than 3 pre-defined specific objectives can be selected by a PA, when preparing and submitting a project proposal.

PACs have to define and describe the result that their proposal seeks to achieve through the planned activities (e.g. improved coordination activities with the line ministries of the EUSDR region, improved coordination with international bodies, etc.). The result defined by the PACs has to contribute to the Programme result which is: *improved effectiveness of coordination and strategy implementation in each of the Priority Areas of the EUSDR*.

PACs should also define their **project outputs** in order to contribute to the Programme specific output indicators that capture their work and effort. The achievement of these outputs will be further reported in documents such as the DTP Annual Implementation Reports to the EC, programme evaluations, etc.

*Outputs tell what has actually been **produced** for the money given to the project. They should correspond to a **Programme output indicator** and directly contribute to the achievement of the project result.*

The **project output indicators applied for the PACs support are pre-defined** as listed below. They should reflect the nature of the activities chosen to be supported and the Programme's ambition to advance.

PACs are expected to contribute to the output indicators listed below, but avoid selecting more than one indicator for the same output. Overall, PACs should contribute to at least three compulsory indicators: P07, P29 (automatically calculated as 1), and PAC01. Contribution to other output indicators is not mandatory but expected.

No.	Output indicator	Types of outputs to be recorded:
P07 (mandatory)	Number of documented learning interactions in finalised operations	The term “documented learning interactions” is defined as the process of acquiring/ enhancing the PA's knowledge and capacity for transnational cooperation through, capacity building, training, exchange of experience or any other type of learning processes. <i>Example: joint training (seminar) organised by 2 PAs on capacity building or exchange of best practices and enhanced cooperation.</i>
P29 (mandatory)	Number of EUSDR PAs financed	<i>automatically calculated</i>
PAC01 (mandatory)	Number of policy measures undertaken within the SG	Number of policy reports, studies or recommendations developed within the PA
PAC02 (optional)	Number of project	Number of project proposals supported within the PA

No.	Output indicator	Types of outputs to be recorded:
	proposals supported within the PA	

Besides the specific output indicators listed above, the PACs can contribute, if applicable, also to the Programme output indicators indicated below.

Indicator no.	Indicator
P01	Number of strategies for improving the institutional and infrastructural framework conditions for research and innovation developed and/or implemented
P02	Number of tools for improving the institutional and infrastructural framework conditions for research and innovation developed and/or implemented
P03	Number of pilot actions for improving the institutional and infrastructural framework conditions for research and innovation developed and/or implemented
P04	Number of strategies for increasing competences of employees in the business sector and strengthening entrepreneurial spirit developed and or/implemented.
P05	Number of tools for increasing competences of employees in the business sector and strengthening entrepreneurial spirit developed and or/implemented
P06	Number of pilot actions for increasing competences of employees in the business sector and strengthening entrepreneurial spirit developed and or/implemented
CO26	No of enterprises cooperating with research institutions (EU)
CO04	No of enterprises receiving non- financial support
P08	Number of strategies for improving transnational water management and flood risk prevention developed and/or implemented
P09	Number of tools for improving transnational water management and flood risk prevention developed and/or implemented
P10	Number of pilot actions for improving transnational water management and flood risk prevention developed and/or implemented
P11	Number of strategies for preserving and management of natural and cultural heritage and resources developed and/or implemented

P12	Number of tools for preserving and management of natural and cultural heritage and resources developed and/or implemented
P13	Number of pilot actions for preserving and management of natural and cultural heritage and resources developed and/or implemented
P14	Number of strategies for strengthening approaches to preservation, restoring and management of bio-corridors and wetlands developed and/or implemented
P15	Number of tools for strengthening approaches to preservation, restoring and management of bio-corridors and wetlands developed and/or implemented
P16	Number of pilot actions for strengthening approaches to preservation, restoring and management of bio-corridors and wetlands developed and/or implemented
P17	Number of strategies for improved cooperation and interoperability among the emergency response authorities and stakeholders developed and/or implemented
P18	Number of tools for improved cooperation and interoperability among the emergency response authorities and stakeholders developed and/or implemented
P19	Number of pilot actions for improved cooperation and interoperability among the emergency response authorities and stakeholders developed and/or implemented
P20	No of strategies for the improvement of transport and transport systems developed and/or implemented
P21	No of tools for the improvement of transport and transport systems developed and/or implemented
P22	No of pilot actions for the improvement of transport and transport systems developed and/or implemented
P23	No of strategies to improve energy security and energy efficiency developed and/or implemented
P24	No of tools to improve energy security and energy efficiency developed and/or implemented
P25	Number of pilot actions to improve energy security and energy efficiency developed and/or implemented
P26	Number of strategies for strengthening institutional capacities and transnational multilevel governance developed and/or implemented

P27	Number of tools for strengthening institutional capacities and supporting transnational multilevel governance developed and/or implemented
P28	Number of pilot actions for strengthening institutional capacities and supporting transnational multilevel governance developed and/or implemented

The definition of the Programme output indicators is outlined in the table below.

Type of outputs	
Strategy	<p>In the context of transnational cooperation, defining a strategy should have as starting point, a definition of joint problems/ challenges of the participating countries/ regions. The strategy should set up clear mid and long term objectives and priorities reflecting also the common vision of the Danube Region in the specific field. The involvement of the relevant stakeholders is crucial, since the strategy should be a reflection of their needs and ensure its sustainability and future implementation. Strategies should aim at policy integration in the Danube area in the selected fields and act as policy drivers below EU level but above national level.</p> <p>An action plan should break down the strategy goals and objectives into specific actions. It should include the sequence of steps to be taken, or activities that must be performed, for a strategy to succeed. Therefore, it should include a time line, the financial resources and a definition of the responsible actors.</p> <p>This type of output can relate either to the development of new or further improvement, revision and/or update of existing strategies/policies/action plans as well as their subsequent implementation. The following types of outputs should be included here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ strategic positions ➤ ministerial declarations, etc. <p><i>Each developed strategy/action plan, whether implemented or not, should be only counted once under the respective output indicator. Project management and communication-related strategies such as e.g. the project communication strategy should not be considered under this output indicator.</i></p> <p><u>Example: internet strategies, Danube Region renewable energy action plan, etc.</u></p>

Type of outputs	
Tools	<p>A tool is to be understood as the means for achieving a specific task. Tools should be jointly developed at transnational level and be innovative. Tools can be tangible (physical or technical objects) and intangible (methods, concepts or services). They comprise amongst others of analytical tools, management tools, technical tools, software tools, monitoring tools, decision support tools etc.</p> <p>To be effective, a tool must be tailored to end users' needs and the respective framework conditions and has to be comprehensive and durable.</p> <p>This type of output relates either to the joint development of new or further improvement and/or adaptation of existing durable tools as well as their subsequent operational implementation.</p> <p><i>Each developed tool, whether implemented or not, should be only counted once under the respective output indicator. Project management-related tools internal communication platforms and templates should not be considered under this output indicator.</i></p> <p><u>Example: policy recommendation papers; thematic studies and analysis</u></p>
Pilot actions	<p>A pilot action is to be understood as a practical implementation of newly developed solutions (e.g. services, tools, methods or approaches, even an investment). A pilot action has an experimental nature which aims at testing, evaluating and/or demonstrating the feasibility and effectiveness of a scheme. Therefore, it covers either the testing of innovative solutions or demonstrating the application of existing solutions to a certain territory/sector.</p> <p><i>The results and practices of pilot actions should be exploited on and transferred to other institutions and territories.</i></p> <p><i>A pilot action is limited in its scope (area, duration, scale etc.) and must be unprecedented in a comparable environment.</i></p> <p><u>Example: pilot implementation of innovative management models, pilot implementation of schemes, pilot application/ testing of new technologies, services etc.</u></p>

I.2. Work plans, activities and work packages

Activities proposed by the PACs should be organised in a Work Plan. The Work Plan is composed by three mandatory and one optional Work Packages. The maximum number of activities to be included in each WP is five. The activities to be included in each WP are pre-defined at Programme level. The Work Plan covers all three years of implementation. It is expected that the activities to be performed in 2017 are more detailed, while the 2018-2019 ones are (briefly) outlined in the Application Form. Given the dynamics of the PAC environment, in case new activities, not highlighted in the approved AF, will appear necessary in 2018-2019, these will be introduced in the

project following the submission of a request for project modification and a consequent amendment of the Subsidy Contract..

The Programme is co-financing PACs' expenditure which should be directly linked to their role in the implementation of the EUSDR and its Action Plan. The activities proposed by the PA to be co-funded by DTP should be in line with the Work Plan prepared by all PACs (in a given PA) applying for DTP funding.

WP1 (mandatory): Management, publicity and communication: covers the “conventional” daily management activities (e.g. allocation of staff, planned travels but only related to project management – e.g. meeting with co-PAC(s), reporting, internal communication, general administrative support) and dissemination activities (e.g. posters, leaflets, update of the specific PA website and other communication activities for better communicating PA's work and results, as well as those related to public debate(s) on the macro-regional approach). Attendance of coordination meetings organised by the DSP should be included in WP1.

Besides the above mentioned activities, the WP should also include the work related to the SG meetings and the EUSDR annual forum.

WP2 (mandatory): Policy development: includes the development of policy documents (e.g. joint ministerial statements), policy reports and studies, other reports impacting the policy within the PA's scope, etc.

WP3 (mandatory): Cooperation and coordination: comprises a description of the strategic coordination of the concerned Priority Area and covers the following type of activities:

- Coordination, cooperation and correlation with other PAs.
- Coordination, cooperation and correlation with EU institutions (EC, EP, CoR, EESC, etc.) and/ or other institutions (national, regional, international, as appropriate).
- Exploiting the funding opportunities of the EC centrally managed programmes.
- Cooperation between the PA (PACs and SG) and the authorities dealing with ESIF funding and more specifically with the Managing Authorities and the Monitoring Committees of programmes of interest to the PA.
- Stakeholder conferences, activities with national/ regional governance structures, other events, networks, platforms.

WP4 (optional): EUSDR strategic projects and other projects: covers the support of strategic EUSDR projects (e.g. identification, planning, preparation and/ or implementation, etc.) as well as support to other projects (e.g. identification, planning, etc.) that are in the focus of the PA (the PACs

are not part of the consortium/ partnership), and covers the following type of activities (non-exhaustive list):

- organisation/ participation in meetings, working groups and other similar events with the PA's stakeholders in order to identify EUSDR strategic projects to be submitted to the DSP
- participation in events, workshops or bilateral meetings and other similar events in order to support identification of other projects relevant for the PA
- support for the strategic/ other project implementation through participation in meetings, bilateral discussion, workshops or other similar events

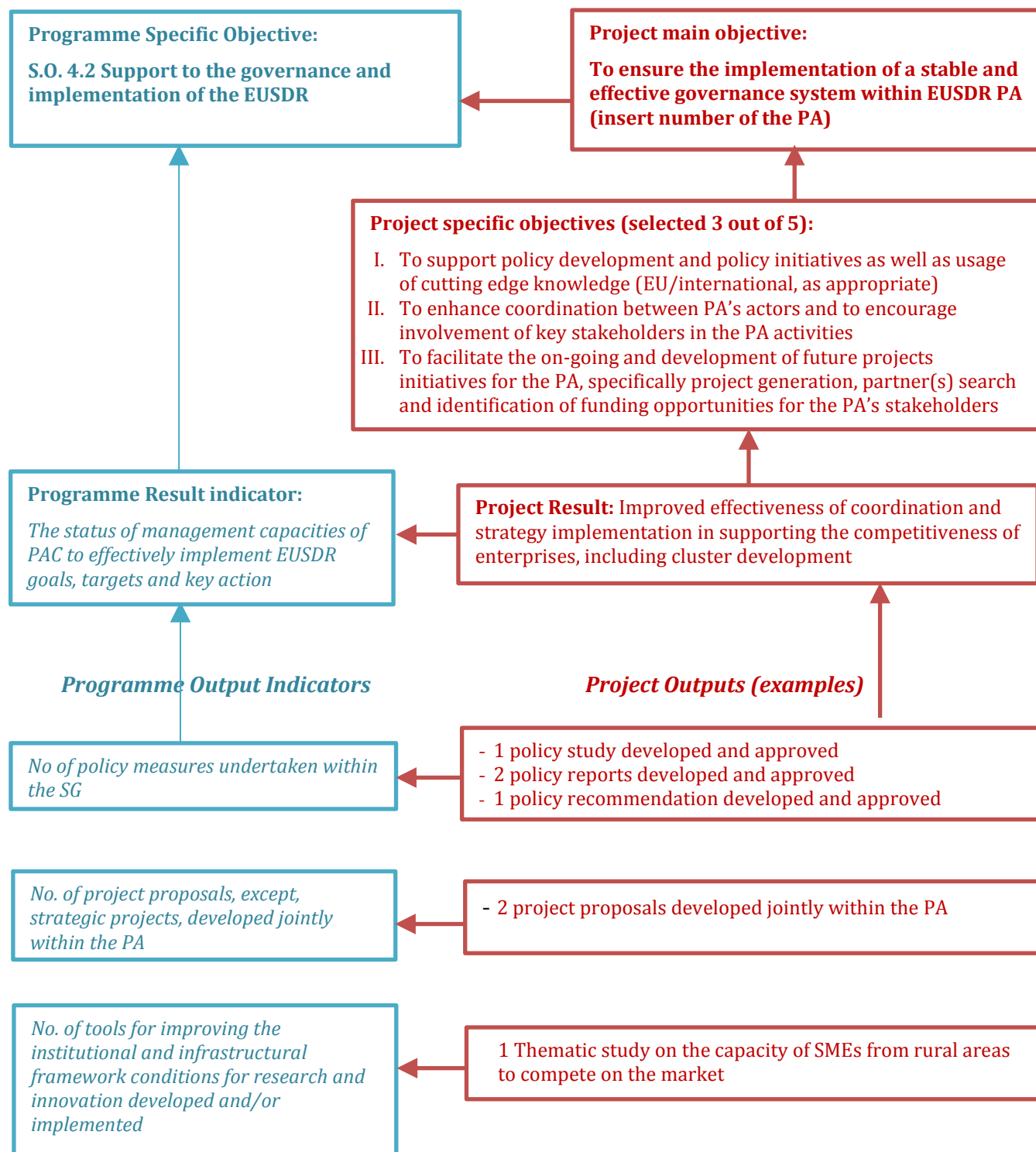
In order to avoid double financing, WP4 finances PA activities of support to other consortia/ partnerships in the identification/ preparation/ implementation of relevant (or strategic) projects for the PA. Direct involvement of the PACs in partnerships/consortia is not financed under this WP.

Project intervention logic glossary

Term	Definition
Project main objective	Describes the strategic and long term change that the project seeks to achieve for the benefit of the target groups.
Project specific objective	Describes the specific and immediate effects of the project and it can be realistically achieved within the implementation period.
Project result	Constitutes the immediate advantage of carrying out the project, telling us about the benefit of using the project main outputs. It should indicate the change the project is aiming for.
Project output	It tells us what has actually been produced for the money given to the project. It can be captured by a programme output indicator, and directly contributes to the achievement of the project results.
Project work package	Represents a group of related project activities required to produce project main outputs.
Project activity	Describes specific task performed for which resources are used. It is a work package component which may or may not result in a deliverable or an output.
Project deliverable	Is a side-product or service of the project that contributes to the development of a project's main output.

Programme intervention logic terminology is explained in the relevant EC regulations and guidance papers.

Example on how to link the project intervention logic to the programme intervention logic



II. *Lead Partner Principle*

According to the EU Regulation 1299/2013, art 13, the “Lead Partner principle” applies to Danube Transnational Programme.

This means that the Lead Partner (LP) should be nominated by the partners from amongst themselves.

Therefore, each EUSDR Priority Area has to appoint a Lead Partner, named Project Partner 1, who is responsible for the submission of the Application Form. In case of approval of the project, Project Partner 1 takes over the full responsibility for reporting and communicating the project progress to the DTP MA/ JS. Project Partner 1 bears legal responsibility for the partnership and is also the link between the project and the MA/JS of the Programme.

According to Art.13 of the EU Reg. 1299/2013, Project Partner 1 shall:

- Lay down the arrangements with other beneficiaries in a Partnership Agreement comprising provisions that, *inter alia*, guarantee the sound financial management of the funds allocated to the operation, including the arrangements for recovering amounts unduly paid (a template is provided by the DTP).
- Assume responsibility for ensuring implementation of the entire operation.
- Ensure that expenditure presented by all beneficiaries has been incurred in implementing the operation and corresponds to the activities agreed between all the beneficiaries, and is in accordance with the document provided by the Managing Authority pursuant to Article 12(5) of the EU Reg. 1299/2013.
- Ensure that the expenditure presented by other beneficiaries has been verified by the responsible Controller where this verification is not carried out by the Managing Authority pursuant to Article 23(3) of the EU Reg. 1299/2013.

III. *General rules for the eligibility of partners*

Eligible applicants are the nominated EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators, listed in Annex 1, having one of the following legal statuses:

- Local, regional, national public body/ body governed by public law (including EGTCs in the meaning of Article 2(16) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013)
- International organisation

- Private body (including private enterprise registered in a EU Member State of the Programme area)

A. Local, regional, national public bodies⁵/ bodies governed by public law (including EGTCs in the meaning of Article 2(16) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013)

Bodies governed by public law

Bodies governed by public law as defined in Article 2(9) of DIRECTIVE 2014/24/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and repealing DIRECTIVE 2004/18/EC (OJ L 94, 28.3.2014).

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

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

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

B. International organisations

International organisations (having legal personality) acting under the national law of any DTP Partner State or under international law, provided that, for the purpose of the project, they fulfil the EU, programme and national requirements in terms of control, validation of costs and audits, can be considered as eligible for funding. In particular, these organisations should express in written form (through a form of Declaration) that:

- They agree to comply with applicable community policies, including the respect of principles on public procurement

⁵ E.g. ministries, municipalities, regions, etc.

- They accept the national control requirements set in the framework of the Danube Transnational Programme
- They agree to accept the controls and audits by all bodies entitled to carry out such controls in the framework of the Programme, including the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat, the Audit Authority and the European Court of Auditors as well as the relevant national authorities of the Member State in which the international organisation acting as project partner is located. Storage of all documents required for these controls must allow performing them in the geographical area covered by the Danube Transnational Programme
- They assume the final financial liability for all sums wrongly paid out

C. Private bodies

In the context of this programme, the concept of “private bodies” means all organisations which are founded by private law such as (but depending on the country) chambers of commerce, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, private enterprises⁶. They may receive funding if they fulfil the following criteria:

- They have legal personality
- They make available the results of the project to the general public
- They apply the principles of public procurement

ATTENTION: Private enterprises coming from non-EU countries of the programme area are not eligible for funding.

IV. *Geographic eligibility rules*

The Programme covers 14 countries, 9 of them EU Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany-Baden Württemberg and Bavaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) and 5 non-member states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine with four provinces: Chernivetska Oblast, Ivano-Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast, Odessa Oblast).

⁶ In the context of the Danube Transnational Programme private enterprises refers to any type of profit making body, including SMEs

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

- **Directly financed partners:** receiving financial contribution directly from the Programme (ERDF, IPA or ENI) and bearing full responsibility for their budget
- **Indirectly financed partners (Associated Strategic Partners –ASPs):** being **not directly** financed by the Programme but – eventually – “sponsored” by an ERDF Partner that is bearing the responsibility for their participation to the project. Associated Strategic Partner (ASP) in the DTP is an organisation whose participation is considered crucial for the added value brought to the work of the Priority Area. As an example, ASP can potentially be a strategic institution for the objective of the specific PA, which is interested to participate in the project in order to ensure the *leverage effect and durability of the results*.

ASPs are actors not contributing financially to the project and are located:

- **either in an EU country (inside or outside the Programme area)**
- **or in a Non-EU country of the programme area**

Their expenditure is limited to reimbursement from the Programme of *travel and accommodation*⁷ costs related to their participation in relevant (project) meetings, which shall be borne by the institution acting as ERDF “sponsoring partner” in order to be considered eligible. In line with the rules set in Article 20(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 EC Regulation, expenditures of the EU partners located outside the Programme area and non-EU partners of the programme area cannot exceed 20% of the ERDF PPs’ budget in total.

V. Composition of the partnership

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

Each project has to involve at least **two financing project partners from two different countries** of the Programme area: the Project Partner 1 and at least another Project Partner. Project Partner 1 has to be located on the territory of an EU Member State of the Programme area.

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

⁷ *Travel and accommodation costs for ASPs is reported under travel and accommodation BL of the sponsoring partner*

The responsibilities of the Project Partners are listed below:

- Carrying out the activities planned in the approved Application Form (AF) and agreed in the Partnership Agreement
- Submitting reports on the progress of project activities and associated reimbursement claims
- Assuming responsibility for any irregularity in the declared expenditure, repaying Project Partner 1 any amounts unduly paid in accordance with the Partnership Agreement signed between Project Partner 1 and the other project partner.

VI. Financial capacity of Project Partners and national co-financing

The Programme works based on the reimbursement principle. This means that Project Partners have to pre-finance their activities and the amounts paid are reimbursed after the submission and evaluation of the Progress Reports.

Under the Danube Transnational Programme, projects are co-financed by ERDF, IPA. The co-financing rate per partner is up to 85% for ERDF, **ENI** and for IPA partners. The remaining budget (15%) can be covered by state contribution (where applicable) and/or own sources (can be public or private) of the project partner and/or other contribution (e.g. regional/local/other sources).

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

Each Partner State applies a different system in providing state co-financing. An overview on the national co-financing system of the Danube Partner States is available on the Programme website (<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/relevant-documents/programme-main-documents>). However, as more detailed information might be available at national level, Partner States, through the DTP NCP, should be contacted for further clarifications.

VII. Duration of Projects

The maximum project duration (implementation of project activities) is **36 months**.

Costs reported in the last reporting period and control costs related to the Final Progress Report have to be paid within 60 calendar days from the project end date at the latest.

VIII. Calls for Proposals

The programme expects to launch 2 Calls for supporting the EUSDR Priority Areas Coordinators activities during the programming period, both of them for 36-month duration.

The timing and duration of the Calls are set by the Monitoring Committee and they will be specified in the Call Announcements.

PART 3: ELIGIBILITY OF EXPENDITURE

I. Legal background and hierarchy of rules

In the framework of Danube Transnational programme there are three levels of rules that govern the eligibility of expenditure:

➤ **EU regulations:**

- REGULATION (EU, Euroatom) No. 966/2012 (Financial regulation) providing the financial framework applicable to the general budget of the Union.
- REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 - Common provisions regulation is setting the basic rules for, among others, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), one of the main financing sources of the Programme. More specifically, Articles 65-71 are dealing with the eligibility of expenditure.
- REGULATION (EU) No 1301/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 - ERDF Regulation is dealing solely with the ERDF. Regarding eligibility of expenditure, Article 3 is the most relevant in which scope of support from ERDF is established, stating what can and cannot be financed from the ERDF.
- REGULATION (EU) No 1299/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 - ETC regulation is dealing with the eligibility of expenditure in Articles 18-19.
- COMMISSION DELEGATED REGULATION (EU) No 481/2014 of 4 March 2014 - Delegated Act on Eligibility for cooperation programmes supplements the ETC regulation and provides detailed rules for staff costs, office and administrative expenditure, travel and accommodation costs, external expertise and services costs, and equipment expenditure.
- REGULATION (EU) No 236/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 March 2014 - Common Implementing Regulation for External Actions is laying down common rules and procedures for the implementation of the Union's instruments for financing external action
- REGULATION (EU) No 231/2014 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 March 2014, IPA II

- COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) No 447/2014 of 2 May 2014 – IPA II implementing regulation sets more detailed rules for the implementation of IPA II.
- **Programme rules on eligibility of expenditure outlined in Part 3 of the Applicants Manual⁸ for EUSDR PACs.**
- **National (including specific institutional) rules which apply for matters not covered by the EU regulations and Programme Rules.**

Please note: The eligibility rules laid down in the Applicants Manual cannot be overruled by national legislation or institutional rules.

II. *General eligibility rules*

The rules on eligibility of expenditure for the Danube Transnational Programme are developed based on the EC Delegated Regulation No. 481/2014, referred in the present Applicants Manual for EUSDR PACs as “Delegated Act” and in line with the EU Regulations listed in section I. of Part 3 of the Applicants Manual.

In principle, the same eligibility rules apply to ERDF and to IPA Funds due to the integration of IPA Funds at programme level. In case of exceptions due to different rules for IPA, these are explicitly mentioned under the relevant sections.

a. General provisions

In general, in order to be considered **eligible** the expenditures have to fulfil all the following criteria:

- All expenditures are related to the initiation and implementation of the project as approved by the Monitoring Committee, and essential for the achievement of the agreed project activities
- All expenditures must comply with the principle of efficiency, effectiveness and economy
- All expenditures must comply with the principle of real costs, with the exception of the costs calculated as flat rates

⁸ According to Article 18(2) of the ETC Regulation, “the participating Member States in the monitoring committee, shall establish additional rules on eligibility of expenditure for the cooperation programme as a whole”

- All expenditures are incurred and paid by the project partner indicated in the application form during the eligibility period of the project
- All expenditures relate to activities that have not been financed from other financial instruments
- All expenditures are supported by invoices or other documents with probative value directly attributable to a certain project partner with the exception of the costs calculated as flat rates
- All expenditures are in line with eligibility rules on EU, programme and national eligibility rules

b. Ineligible expenditure

- Fines, financial penalties and expenditure on legal disputes and litigation
- Costs of gifts, except those not exceeding 50 EUR per gift where related to promotion, communication, publicity or information
- Costs related to fluctuation of foreign exchange rate
- Interest on debt
- Purchase of land and existing buildings
- Value added tax except where it is non-recoverable under national VAT legislation
- Contributions in kind, as defined in Article 69(1) of regulation (EU) No. 1303/2013
- Project expenditure split among project partners (i.e. sharing of „common costs”)

c. Eligibility in time

The rules for the eligibility period are set to Article 65 (2) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013. Within the Danube Transnational Programme, the eligible project period shall be set **between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2022**.

The project period shall be defined in the approved Application Form as a project start date and end date. However, the project start date shall not be earlier than 1st January, 2017.

Eligible project expenditure shall be incurred and paid within the project period defined by the start date and end date of the project according to the approved Application Form with the exception of:

- 1) **Control costs related to the last progress report and application for reimbursement** can be incurred after the end date of the project period, but it shall be paid within 60 calendar days from the end date of the project at the latest;
- 2) **Expenditure reported in the last reporting period** shall be paid within 60 calendar days from the end date of the project; the deadline for payments will be explicitly specified in the subsidy contract

III. Eligibility of expenditures by budget lines

In accordance with the Delegated Act and the relevant EU regulations, specific rules on the eligibility of expenditure for PAC support within the Danube Transnational Programme are established by budget lines for the four expenditure categories of the Delegated Act.

Project expenditures are eligible under the following budget lines:

- I. Staff costs**
- II. Office and administrative expenditure**
- III. Travel and accommodation costs**
- IV. External expertise and service costs**

I. Staff costs

The costs of the personnel employed by the beneficiary institution and executing tasks for the project management (project coordinator, project manager, assistant, financial manager, etc.) and/or tasks for the project content related activities (e.g. coordination and support to the priority area coordinator, etc.) are eligible to be reimbursed by the Programme.

Expenditure on staff costs shall be limited to the following:

- a. **Salary payments** related to the activities which the entity would not carry out if the operation concerned was not undertaken, fixed in an employment/work contract, an appointment decision (both hereinafter referred to as "employment document") or by law, relating to responsibilities specified in the job description of the staff member concerned;
- b. Any **other costs directly linked to salary payments incurred and paid by the employer**, such as **employment taxes and social security** including pensions as covered by Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council provided that they are:

- (i) Fixed in an employment document or by law;

(ii) In accordance with the legislation referred to in the employment document and with standard practices in the country and/or organisation where the individual staff member is actually working; and

(iii) Not recoverable by the employer.

The above rules apply to any other additional benefits incurred and paid by the employer over the monthly salary. Additional benefits must be directly linked to the salary payments and figure on the payslip. Ad-hoc regulations for additional benefits, ad-hoc salary increases or bonuses applicable only to the project are not eligible.

Overtime is eligible only in case it is directly related to the project, it is foreseen in the employment document and it is in line with national legislation and the standard practice of the beneficiary, and on the basis of appropriate time registration system. In case of part time employment, overtime shall be proportionally allocated to the project.

Staff costs may be reimbursed in the Danube Transnational Programme either:

- a. On a **real cost basis** (proven by the employment document and payslips); or
- b. As a **flat rate up to 20% of direct costs** other than staff costs.

Each project partner must choose one of these reimbursement options already in the Application Form which will remain unchanged through the entire project period.

a. Staff costs are reimbursed on real costs basis:

The staff can be allocated to **work full time** (100% of the working time is allocated to the project) **or part time** for the project.

Please note: Staff costs of **the part-time** employees have to be calculated using one of the following methods:

- a. Part-time with a fixed percentage of time worked per month on the operation, with no obligation to establish a separate working time registration system
- b. Part-time with a flexible number of hours worked per month; in line with a number of hours varying from one month to the other worked on the operation, based on a time registration system covering 100 % of the working time of the employee
- c. On an hourly basis

For part-time assignments with a fixed percentage of time worked per month:

- The percentage of time to be worked on the project shall be fixed in the employment document (work contract/job description/other equivalent document) by the employer for each project staff member. The percentage of time dedicated to the given project shall be mentioned in the documents where the other tasks/ projects are referred, as well as the percentage of time to be allocated to other tasks/projects. Description of project-related tasks and responsibilities of the person working on the project shall be available and the time allocated to the project per work package shall be in line with the project related tasks.
- There is no obligation to establish a separate working time registration system.
- In case the percentage of time to be worked on the project is changed during the project duration, the related document shall be submitted to the Controller, as well as the documents justifying the necessity and plausibility of the changes.

For part-time assignments with a flexible number of hours worked per month:

The reimbursement of staff costs shall be calculated on an hourly rate basis determined either by:

- (i) Dividing the monthly gross employment cost by the monthly working time fixed in the employment document expressed in hours; or
 - (ii) Dividing the latest documented annual gross employment cost by 1,720 hours.
- The hourly rates calculated under points (i) and (ii) shall be multiplied by the number of hours actually worked on the operation.
 - The hourly rates shall be in line with the actual gross employment costs (monthly/annual), therefore the hourly rates shall not be fixed for the entire project duration.
 - Methods under points (i) and (ii) can be combined for the staff of the same partner according to the different contract provisions (e.g. newly hired staff, etc.)
 - Time registration system covering 100 % of the working time of the employee shall be established.

For part time assignment on an hourly basis:

Staff costs related to individuals who, according to the employment document, work on an hourly basis, costs shall be eligible applying the number of hours actually worked on the operation to the hourly rate agreed in the employment document based on a working time registration system.

Time registration system covering 100 % of the working time of the employee shall be established.

ATTENTION: Staff costs of the employees of the institution involved in the project are to be considered cash contribution and not in-kind contribution! (In kind contribution means unpaid voluntary work, and the value of that work is determined by taking into account the verified time spent and the **rate of remuneration for equivalent work**. According to programme rules, in kind contribution is not eligible).

Examples for the calculation of staff costs:

Type	Calculation
Full time employment	<p>100% of the gross employment costs are allocated to the project</p> <p><u>Example:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project manager is assigned to work 100% on the project. This is clearly stated in the relevant employment document along with the role within the project and the relevant tasks. Project reporting is on 6 months basis. Gross employment cost of project manager is 3,500 EUR (including 2,660 EUR gross salary and 718 EUR social charges paid by the employer and 122 EUR other payments related to salary including taxes paid by the employer). During a particular month, project manager is working solely on project related tasks. At the end of the reporting period, relevant partner report is prepared by the project partner. In the partner report the expenditure are claimed for project manager in the amount of 21,000 EUR (6 * 3,500 EUR). No obligation to establish a separate working time registration system – no timesheet necessary
Part time employment	<p>a. with a <u>fixed percentage of time worked per month</u></p> <p>The percentage set in the employment document (work contract/job description/other equivalent document) is multiplied by the monthly gross employment costs.</p>

		<p><u>Example:</u></p> <p>50% of working time is allocated to the project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial manager is assigned to work 50% on the project. This is clearly stated in the relevant employment document along with the role within the project and the relevant tasks. Project reporting is on 6 months basis. Gross employment costs of financial manager is 3,500 EUR (including 2,660 EUR gross salary and 718 EUR social charges paid by the employer and 122 EUR other payments related to salary including taxes paid by the employer). During a particular month, financial manager is working 50% of her/his working time on project related tasks. At the end of the reporting period, relevant partner report is prepared by the project partner. In the partner report the expenditure are claimed for financial manager in the amount of 10,500 EUR = 6*(3500*0,5). No obligation to establish a separate working time registration system
	<p>b.(i) with a flexible number of hours worked per month <u>calculated with a monthly hourly rate</u></p>	<p>Number of hours worked in the project multiplied by the pre-calculated monthly hourly rate.</p> <p>hourly rate = monthly gross employment cost/ monthly working time fixed in the employment document (expressed in hours).</p> <p><u>Example:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> monthly working hours according to the contract: 168 hours gross employment costs for June: EUR 3,500.00 → hourly rate: $3500/168 = 20.83$ EUR total number of hours worked for the project (June): 80h total project costs: $80h * 20.83$ EUR = 1,666.40 EUR <p>➤ time registration system covering 100 % of the working</p>

		<i>time of the employee is established.</i>
	b.(ii) with a flexible number of hours worked per month calculated with a yearly hourly rate	<p><i>Number of hours worked in the project multiplied by the pre-calculated yearly hourly rate.</i></p> <p><i>hourly rate = latest documented annual gross employment cost/ 1,720 hours</i></p> <p><u>Example:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> gross annual employment costs of the previous year: 42,000.00 EUR → hourly rate: 42.000/ 1,720.00 = 24.41 EUR total monthly hours worked for the project (June): 80h total project costs (June): 80h*24.41 = 1,952.80 EUR <p>➤ <i>time registration system covering 100 % of the working time of the employee is established.</i></p>
	c. with a flexible number of hours worked per month calculated on a contracted hourly rate basis	<p><i>Number of hours worked for the project multiplied by the hourly rate set in the employment document.</i></p> <p><u>Example:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> hourly rate set in the employment document: 16 EUR total number of hours worked for the project (June): 80h total project costs: 80h*16 EUR=1,280 EUR + 345 EUR social charges paid by the employer = 1,625 EUR (Gross employment costs is eligible also in this case meaning that social charges paid by the employer and other salary related payments are also eligible). <p>➤ <i>time registration system covering 100 % of the working time of the employee is established.</i></p>

b. Staff costs are reimbursed on flat rate basis:

The flat rate for staff costs shall be applied at the level of the partner budget and **cannot exceed 20%** of the eligible direct costs other than the staff costs of the partner budget.

The eligible direct costs as basis of the calculation of the staff costs are the amounts planned under the travel and accommodation costs and external expertise and service costs. The expenditure

planned under office and administration is not considered as direct costs, therefore it cannot be included in the basis of calculation of the staff costs.

No further justification or supporting document is needed from the project partners to justify the staff costs declared.

Further eligibility rules:

- The flat rate defined in the approved Application Form shall be **automatically applied** by the given project partner for reporting staff costs **in each reporting period**
- In case the flat rate method is applied for the reimbursement of staff costs, **no further staff costs incurred on real costs basis can be reported** under this budget line or under other budget lines
- In case staff costs are not eligible for financing for the given project partner according to national eligibility rules, staff costs cannot be declared on flat rate basis to the project (i.e. the eligibility of expenditure does not depend on the form of reimbursement)
- The flat rate approved in the application form shall be applied in case of budget changes of a project partner affecting the amount of direct costs being basis of the calculation of the staff costs.

II. Office and administration expenditure

Office and administration costs related to the project implementation shall be declared on a flat rate basis of **15% of the eligible staff costs of the project** (i.e. costs declared under “Budget line 1 Staff costs” no matter if the flat rate or real costs method is used for the staff costs).

No further justification or supporting document is needed from the project partners to justify the Office and administration costs declared.

Office and administrative expenditure cannot be claimed as direct cost under other budget lines.

The following types of expenditures are included under this budget line (exhaustive list):

- a. Office rent
- b. Insurance and taxes related to the buildings where the staff is located and to the equipment of the office (e.g. fire, theft insurances)
- c. Utilities (e.g. electricity, heating, water)
- d. Office supplies

- e. General accounting provided inside the beneficiary organisation
- f. Archives
- g. Maintenance, cleaning and repairs
- h. Security
- i. IT systems
- j. Communication (e.g. telephone, fax, internet, postal services, business cards)
- k. Bank charges for opening and administering the account or accounts where the implementation of an operation requires a separate account to be opened
- l. Charges for transnational financial transactions

Example:

IT system support purchased by the project partner to support delivery of general project activities can be covered under this budget line.

Further eligibility rules:

- The **same flat rate** (15%) shall be automatically applied **for each reporting period**, by each project partner. **In case staff costs are not declared for the relevant reporting period, the office and administration expenditure cannot be declared**
- Office and administration expenditure is eligible also in case the staff costs are declared on flat rate basis
- In case **staff costs are not eligible** for financing for the given project partner according to national eligibility rules, **office and administrative expenditure cannot be declared to the project** (i.e. the institution of the project partner financing the staff of the project shall finance the related office and administration expenditure as well)
- The 15% flat rate shall be applied in case of budget changes affecting the amount of direct staff costs of a project partner's budget

III. Travel and accommodation costs

Project related travelling costs of the project staff employed by the beneficiary are eligible for financing under the travel and accommodation costs budget line, according to the following rules:

Eligible expenditure includes (exhaustive list):

OPTION 1:

1) Travel costs:

- Tickets: flight tickets (including the costs for carbon offsetting), bus, train, local transportation tickets, etc.
- Travel and car insurance
- Fuel, car mileage according to the rules relevant for the beneficiary's institution
- Toll
- Parking fees (e.g. parking at the event, at the airport)
- Taxi costs and car rental according to the criteria of "further eligibility rules" of this budget line

2) Costs of meals

3) Accommodation costs

4) Visa costs

5) Daily allowances

In case travel costs, meals, accommodation costs and visa costs are covered by the daily allowance, they cannot be reimbursed as an addition.

Further eligibility rules applicable to this option:

- Daily allowances are eligible according to national legislation or internal rules of the partner's organisation. In case national or internal rules of the partner's organisation are not available, the daily allowances according to the Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 337/2007 of 27 March 2007⁹ shall be applied. Hierarchy or rules (national, internal and Euratom) shall be kept. Daily allowances accounted for the project shall include the related social contributions/taxes according to the relevant national rules

⁹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32007R0337&from=EN>

- Daily rates for the hotel accommodation costs shall not exceed the amounts defined according to the Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 337/2007 of 27 March 2007.¹⁰ Higher daily rates can be accepted in exceptional and duly justified cases, e.g. hotel available only for higher daily rate, due to the location of the event (e.g. Brussels)
- Taxi costs are eligible, e.g. for travelling to/from the airport/train station, to/from the venue of the event/hotel, in case they are well justified (e.g. the only effective travel solution if public transportation is not available)

OPTION 2:

I. Travel costs:

- Tickets: flight tickets (including the costs for carbon offsetting), bus, train, local transportation tickets, etc.
- Travel and car insurance
- Fuel, car mileage according to the rules relevant for the beneficiary's institution
- Toll
- Parking fees (e.g. parking at the event, at the airport)
- Taxi costs and car rental according to the criteria of "further eligibility rules" of this budget line

II. Per diems according to the **EC-funded external aid contracts**. In this context, per diems cover accommodation, meals, local travel within the place of mission and sundry expenses. The current per diem rates can be found on the EC website <https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/perdiem-rate-20150318.pdf>.

Further general eligibility rules applicable in both OPTION A and OPTION B:

- Travel and accommodation costs must be clearly linked to the project: they must be justified by activities carried out within the project (e.g. participation in events, meetings etc.) and the related activities shall be relevant for the implementation of the project
- The duration of the travel shall be clearly linked to the concerned event/meeting and cannot be longer than from the day before to the day after the concerned meeting, unless it is clearly justified and documented. Further overnights and related costs (e.g. extra hotel costs, extra daily allowances, additional staff costs) not justified shall not be eligible

¹⁰ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32007R0337&from=EN>

- In principle, travelling costs of the “project staff” (as defined by the BL1 staff costs) are eligible
- In case staff costs of the partner’s institution cannot be charged to the project due to national legislation, but it is proved that these persons are directly contributing to the project implementation, their travelling costs are considered eligible as well (e.g. civil servants)
- Travel and accommodation costs must be definitely borne by the partner’s institution as beneficiary. Direct payment of costs by a staff member of the beneficiary must be supported by a proof of reimbursement from the employer before submitting the expenditure for validation to the Controller. Travelling costs of the Associated Strategic Partners (ASPs) are eligible, where the invoice and/or the relevant accounting document is addressed to the “sponsoring” Partner and it is directly paid or reimbursed by the Partner before submitting the expenditure for validation to the Controller.
- Travel and accommodation expenses of external experts and service providers shall be declared under the external expertise and services costs
- Project related travels within the programme area of the Danube Transnational Programme and within the EU territory are eligible costs
- As a general rule, the most economical way of transport should be used. In principle, business-or first class tickets are not eligible. Business-or first class tickets can be accepted only in exceptional cases, if cost effectiveness and efficiency can be clearly proved with documented booking options
- Car rental is eligible in exceptional cases and in justified circumstances, e.g. the location of the event is not accessible by public transport, cancellation of travel by public transport not due to fault of the travelling person, costs effectiveness due to the number of travelling persons, etc.
- Furthermore, environmentally friendly means of transport should be chosen whenever possible (e.g. train over flight, public transport over taxi/car etc.)
- Costs for flight carbon offsetting are eligible provided that the costs are included in the same invoice of the flight. In case it is not included in the flight ticket, the project partner can select the service provider of CO₂ compensation and the costs are eligible provided that

the related invoice contains the following details: project acronym/code, name of the passenger, flight number/destination.¹¹

IV. External expertise and service costs

Expenditure on external expertise and service costs shall be limited to the following services and expertise provided by a public or private law body or a natural person other than the beneficiaries of the project:

- Studies or surveys (e.g. evaluations, strategies, concept notes, design plans, handbooks)
- Training
- Translations
- IT systems and website, modifications and updates
- Promotion, communication, publicity or information linked to the project
- Financial management
- Services related to the organisation and implementation of events or meetings (including rent, catering or interpretation)
- Participation in events (e.g. registration fees)
- Legal consultancy and notarial services, technical and financial expertise, other consultancy and accountancy services
- Intellectual property rights
- Verifications: Externalised control activities for the verification of the project expenditure where it is relevant for the control system of the concerned Partner State
- The provision of guarantees by a bank or other financial institution where required by Union or national law or in a programming document adopted by the monitoring committee
- Travel and accommodation for external experts, speakers, chairpersons of meetings and service providers

¹¹ Carbon offsets are achieved through financial support of projects carried out by organisations that act as service providers of CO₂ compensation that reduce the emission of greenhouse gases in the short- or long-term (see Part 6 section VII Environmental sustainability)

- Other specific expertise and services needed for the project

Further eligibility rules:

- External expertise and services must be clearly and strictly linked to the project and be essential for its effective implementation
- The selection of the external experts shall comply with the relevant EU and national public procurement law in force, and in case of the IPA partners, with the PraG rules in line with the provisions of the Financial Regulation (detailed rules in section V.)
- Programme specific rules shall be applied for the procurements between 5,000 EUR (excluding VAT) and the national public procurement thresholds (detailed rules in section V.)
- Procurements shall comply with the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and equal treatment
- Project partners cannot be contracted as an external expert or a subcontractor in the same project
- Travel and accommodation for external experts, speakers, chairpersons of meetings and service providers shall be declared under this budget line. In case only the travel and accommodation costs are reimbursed to the external expert (not receiving fee), the contract shall state that only travel costs and accommodation costs supported by invoices will be paid
- If applicable, the deliverables respect the information and publicity requirements of the DTP
- Gifts are eligible up to a maximum value of EUR 50 per item and they must be linked to promotion, communication, publicity or information activities included in the application form or approved by the MA/JS beforehand. Information and publicity requirements of the DTP shall be respected for the gifts as well
- Expenditure on external expertise and services cannot be split among the project partners, i.e. common costs are not allowed

V. Expenditure of the Associated Strategic Partners

EU partners and non-EU partners of the programme can be involved as **Associated Strategic Partners (ASP)** in the projects; therefore the following **general conditions** apply:

- The **involvement** in the project **of ASPs** is possible, where it has an added value for the project
- The need for the involvement of the ASP for the implementation of the project and the benefit for the DTP area has to be always demonstrated, in the description of the project proposal and during the implementation
- **ASPs** are **indirectly financed** from the project budget, i.e. the concerned ASP contributes to the project without separate budget. ASP can be included in the project without receiving any financial support.
- The costs of the concerned **ASP shall be planned in the budget of one "sponsoring" ERDF PP** and **shall be paid by the "sponsoring" ERDF PP** as well. In line with the rules set in Article 20(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 EC Regulation, expenditures of the **EU partners located outside the Programme area** and **non-EU partners of the programme area** cannot exceed 20% of the ERDF PPs' budget in total.
- **Only travel and accommodation costs** of the ASPs related to project activities **are eligible** according to the eligibility rules for BL3 travel and accommodation costs in section III.

Specific rules:

- The costs shall be **traceable** from the **approved Application Form**
- The expenditure shall be verified by the Controller of the "sponsoring" ERDF PP and has to be reported in the Control Certificate as well

VI. Procurement procedures

General principles

Public procurement is a process used by organisations and companies receiving public funds for choosing and contracting providers of goods, services and works by ensuring transparency and equal treatment of the potential providers. The public procurement procedures aim at a more efficient and transparent use of public funds as well as at increasing competitiveness. The main principles to be followed when procuring goods, services or works are the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and equal treatment. Compliance with the procurement requirements is vital for the projects, as it ensures the eligibility of the reported costs of the particular goods, services and works.

In the framework of the Danube Transnational Programme, all project partners implementing projects must comply with the relevant public procurement legislation, independently from their legal status. The rules are set at the following levels:

- EU directives (Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on Public Procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC)
- Financial Regulation (Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 and Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1268/2012)
- National public procurement law of the Partner State of the project partner
- Programme rules set by the Danube Transnational Programme
- Institutional rules relevant for the project partner

In principle, procurement rules are different depending on the subject of the procurement, contract value, etc. Moreover, different rules apply for ERDF partners and for IPA partners.

- a. ERDF partners shall apply the EU and national public procurement rules, and the programme specific rules;
- b. IPA partners shall follow the PraG procurement rules in line with the provisions of the Financial Regulation (Chapter 3 of Title IV of Part Two of Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 and of Chapter 3 of Title II of Part Two of Delegated Regulation (EU) No 1268/2012).
- c. In addition, in order to have harmonised procurement procedures at programme level, the **Danube Transnational Programme is setting a threshold of 5,000 EUR (excluding VAT)** to be applied in the ERDF Partner States of the Programme for the procurements below national thresholds. **Above this amount and below the national public procurement threshold, the “bid-at-three” rule shall be applied by the ERDF project partners** (unless national/institutional rules are stricter in which case they should be applied). **Below this 5,000 EUR net amount, no specific rules are set at programme level**, however, national guidelines/internal rules of the beneficiary’s organisation might set stricter rules.

Procurement procedures for ERDF Partners within the Danube Transnational Programme:

Thresholds	Rules to be applied	Procedure to be applied
Below 5,000 EUR (excluding VAT)	National/institutional rules (if any)	Procedure to be checked at national/ institutional level (if any)

Between 5,000 EUR (excluding VAT) and national public procurement thresholds	Programme specific rules or national / institutional rules if stricter	Bid-at three rule or national/institutional rules if stricter
Between national and EU public procurement thresholds	National public procurement law	National wide tenders
Above EU public procurement thresholds	EU directives /National public procurement law in line with EU directive	EU wide tenders

“Bid-at-three” rule: when purchasing goods or services with a contract value between 5,000 EUR (excluding VAT) and the national thresholds the Danube Transnational Programme requires the implementation of a “bid-at-three” rule. This procedure is introduced at programme level to ensure transparent selection procedures, equal treatment and cost efficiency for goods and services below the national thresholds. The same programme level threshold is applied in each ERDF Partner State of the Programme.

Project partners shall **request at least three offers** for all contracting amounts above 5,000 EUR (excluding VAT) and below the national and EU thresholds. **If it is not possible to obtain three offers, the activities undertaken to acquire the offers have to be documented.** It shall be ensured that prices for similar goods, services or works have been compared and the selection procedure is transparent, as well as the appropriate audit trail being followed.

Further eligibility rules:

- For all cases of procurement, the **proper audit trail shall be ensured**. The selection and contracting procedure, as well as offers received from the tenderers, have to be well documented to ensure transparency of the process;
- **Framework contracts** can be eligible for the project’s purposes, where goods and/or services have been already procured outside the project by the project partner’s organisation according to the relevant public procurement rules;
- **In-house contracting** can be eligible under condition that the requirements set up by the public procurement regulations at national level for in-house contracting are fulfilled and the costs are declared under the relevant budget line according to the rules on eligibility of expenditure, reporting and audit trail of the Programme are ensured as well. In case of in-

house contracting, only the actual costs are eligible to be reimbursed, no profit margin can be charged by the company contracted with (e.g. subsidiary company). The Controllers have to check that the requirements set up at national level for in house contracting have been fulfilled.

- **Sub-contracting project partners** as an external expert or a subcontractor to carry out project activities within the same project **is not allowed** within the Danube Transnational Programme.

- **Risk of conflict of interest** shall be minimised during each procurement process:
 - i. Conflict of interest exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other shared interest with a recipient.
 - ii. Each project partner is responsible to ensure that the appropriate measures are taken to minimise any risk of conflict of interest during the procurement process. Although the character of the conflict of interest is diverse depending on the parties, types of the relationships and interests involved the common matter to be ensured is transparency of the decision making process and fair treatment for all tenderers.
 - iii. Special attention should be paid in cases where project staff is also involved in external companies participating in the tenders organised by the respective project partner. However, in all cases measures need to be carefully analysed to minimise any possible risks of conflict of interest. For specific requirements the national legislation should be consulted. In case a conflict of interest is detected in the procurement procedure financial implications might be set (see Commission Decision C(2013) 9527 and the annexed 'Guidelines for determining financial corrections to be made to expenditure financed by the Union under shared management, for non-compliance with the rules on public procurement')

Examples:

Within the framework of projects with transnational relevance, usually at least a few cases of procurement would occur. Some examples of common procurement situations are listed below:

- *Procurement for development of studies or surveys for different purposes*
- *Procurement for development of IT platform*
- *Procurement of project management and/or communication expertise necessary for the project*

VII. State aid rules

Public support granted by the Danube Transnational Programme must comply with state aid rules applicable at the point of time when the public support is granted. According to Article 107 (ex. Article 87) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, state aid is defined as “any aid granted by a Member State or through State resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods”, therefore affecting trade between Member States.

Please note: In practical terms, state aid applies when all criteria listed below are met:

- a. The recipient of the aid is an “undertaking”, i.e. an entity engaged in an economic activity (i.e. offering goods and services on the market), regardless of its legal status and whether its aim is to make profit or not. An undertaking can be a public body, a charity, a NGO, an association, a university, a private firm, etc.
- b. The aid comes from the State, which is always the case for Interreg programmes.
- c. The aid gives an economic advantage (a benefit) which an undertaking would not have obtained under normal market conditions.
- d. The aid is selectively favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods.

Public support given by the programme to undertakings will be granted under the *de minimis* rule.

This implies that undertakings will receive grants under the Danube Transnational Programme only if they have not received public aid under the *de minimis* rule totalling more than 200,000 EUR within three fiscal years from the date of granting the aid. This ceiling is reduced to 100,000 EUR in the road transport sector while other sectors as agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries have lower ceilings. The public aid considered for the applicable *de minimis* ceiling comprises all aids granted by the national, regional or local authorities, regardless of whether the resources are provided from

domestic sources or are partly financed by the European Union. However, this will not affect the possibility of an undertaking to receive public support under other state aid schemes.

As a consequence, undertakings (i.e. not only private companies but also public authorities, NGOs etc.) carrying out state aid relevant activities in the project might receive limitations on the public contribution to their budgets.

Within the Danube Transnational Programme and notwithstanding the fact that it consists of 14 member countries, the country of the partner is to be considered the country granting *de minimis* aid.

VIII. Use of Euro and exchange rate

The method proposed by the Partner States for the conversion of expenditure incurred in another currency than the Euro in line with the above regulation is the following:

Expenditure incurred by project partners in a currency other than the euro shall be converted into euro by using the monthly accounting exchange rate of the European Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/budget/contracts_grants/info_contracts/infoeuro/infoeuro_en.cfm) in the month during which expenditure was submitted for verification to the controller. This method shall be applicable to all project partners. The conversion shall be verified by the controller in the Partner State in which the respective project partner is located.

The following rules shall be applied for the conversion:

- The **date of submission** for verification to the controller is the day in which the project partner **submitted for the first time** the Partner Report **online** through the Danube Programme Monitoring System to the Controller. Further submissions due to completion and/or clarification to the Partner Report, date of submission of documents to the Controller and date of on-the-spot checks by the Controllers shall not be considered
- The date of online submission is registered through the Danube Programme Monitoring System, which can be traced at any time in the system
- The same rule applies to **all project partners** and not only to beneficiaries located outside the euro-zone

IX. Revenues

Revenues represent cash inflows directly paid by the users for the goods and services developed by the project.

Please note: As a general rule, ERDF contribution in a project (corresponding to the eligible expenditures) shall be reduced according to the net revenue generated by the project both during project implementation as well as three years after project completion.

Net revenues¹² are understood as revenues (as defined above) minus any operation costs and replacement costs of short-life equipment incurred during the corresponding period. Please note that operating cost-savings generated by the project shall be treated as net revenue unless they are offset by an equal reduction in operating subsidies.

In case of revenue-generating projects, applicants have to calculate the expected net revenues following the method described under Articles 15 to 19 of the Delegated Regulation (EU) No 480/2014.

Treatment of revenues:

➤ **Application phase**

Expected net revenues are to be indicated in the application form in order to offset the corresponding ERDF contribution. Applicants shall not indicate expected net revenues in the application form if the specific project output generating net revenue is state aid relevant (for further information on state aid, please refer to section VI.).

➤ **Project implementation phase**

Project partners are responsible for keeping account of all the revenues and to have the required documentation available (e.g. for control purposes). The revenues, if not deducted at the application phase, must be stated in the partner reports and must be deducted from the eligible expenditure, i.e. the certified eligible expenditure cannot include any revenues. Project partners have to provide their Controller with information on the revenues generated in the reporting period and to support this with the accounting or equivalent documents.

➤ **After the project closure**

¹² In accordance with Articles 61 and 65(8) of Regulation (EU) 1303/2013

If a project expects to have any revenues within three years after the project closure the respective net revenues have to be reported to the JS and have to be deducted from the final application for payment of the Programme submitted to the European Commission.

X. Visibility rules

For the purpose of project dissemination, projects organise different types of events and produce publications, documents and promotional materials for which the visual identity of the programme has to be respected, including the Visual Identity Manual.

The Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 (Annex XII, Article 2.2) requires all beneficiaries to follow a number of rules regarding the use of the logo of the European Union and the respective fund. The Danube Transnational Programme logo already respects all these requirements, and all approved projects are obliged to use it on all their communication materials, deliverables and outputs (both hard copy and electronic) as well as to display it in events.

In addition to displaying information on the Programme and EU support as described above, for the purpose of promoting the Strategy, PACs shall use the EUSDR Priority Area logo in all their written and audio-visual communication materials, deliverables and outputs. In order to respect the Commission Implementation Regulation (EU) No. 821/2014, PACs are requested to include an additional EU emblem of at least the same size in height or width as the EUSDR logo.

However, the Danube Transnational Programme must always be visible in a prominent place and of a comparable size to other logos used.

Within six months after the approval of the project, each project partner has to place at least one poster with information about the project (minimum size A3), including the financial support from the EU, at a location visible to the public, such as the entrance area of a building (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Annex XII Article 2.2 paragraph 2.b).

The poster needs to stay visible for the whole duration of the project. The production costs of the poster need to be budgeted.

PART 4: APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT

I. Application

EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators are expected to prepare the Application Form according to the provisions of their Priority Area and submit it through the DTP website within the deadline set in the Call Announcement. Detailed information on how to fill in the Application Form is provided in the EUSDR PAC Guidelines for the AF.

II. Assessment

The submitted proposals will go through an eligibility and quality check, both performed by the JS.

The **eligibility criteria** aim at confirming that the proposal has arrived within the set deadline and that the Application Form is complete and compliant with the requirements. Eligibility criteria are to be answered with YES or NO.

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

In case of missing documents or signatures in the Annexes to the AF, Project Partner 1 will be awarded five working days from the JS notification for the submission/ completion of the documents.

The following table lists all eligibility criteria:

Nr	Eligibility criteria	Description
1	The AF has been submitted within the set deadline (date and time)	The AF has been submitted within the set deadline.
2	The amount per Priority Area (and per PAC) is in line with the call provisions.	The total amount of the proposal is up to 300,000.00 EUR of EU funding.

3	The AF has been submitted through the DTP website	The AF has been submitted through the official DTP website.
4	The AF is compiled in English	All parts of the AF are compiled in English, as the official language of the DTP.
5	Partnership is composed by at least two financing partners from at least two participating countries of which at least one (Project Partner 1) is located in a Member State	Partnership complies with the minimum requirement for a transnational DTP partnership: at least two financing partners (receiving ERDF, IPA co-financing or ENI) from at least two participating countries, of which at least one (Project Partner 1) is located in a Member State.
6	Financing partner/s (ERDF/ IPA/ENI) are eligible	The ERDF/IPA/ENI financed partner/s fulfil/s the requirements set in Part 2, section III (General rules for the eligibility of project partners) and Annex 1 of the Applicants Manual.
7	Completeness of Partnership Agreement	The Partnership Agreement is signed by all directly financed partners.
8	Completeness of submitted ERDF/IPA/ENI partner documents, including ASP	The documents (Declaration of co-financing and State Aid declaration and ASP Declaration) are filled in and signed by each partner.
9	At least 3 joint cooperation levels are indicated	According to Art 12(4) of EU reg. 1299/2013, among the four levels of cooperation (joint development, joint implementation, joint staffing and joint financing) beneficiaries shall cooperate in the development and implementation of projects and in either the staffing or the financing of projects, or in both.

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

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

The sub-criteria are defined using a set of questions to be answered by the assessor. Due to the complex requirements of transnational projects, these questions cannot be answered with yes or no. The assessor must assess to what extent and to which level of quality the proposal answers the questions and then, the assessor gives an appropriate score.

Assessment main questions	Guiding questions	Score
<i>Are the challenges of the PA well identified, described, addressed and in line with the scope of the Call?</i>	To what extent are the challenges of the PA identified and described? Are they connected to the scope of the Call for Proposals?	Up to 5 points
	To what extent is the proposal addressing the identified challenges?	
<i>Is the proposal clearly contributing to the EU Strategy for Danube Region?</i>	To what extent are the activities clearly described and directly contributing to the achievement of the PA and EUSDR objectives?	Up to 5 points
	Is the proposal involving relevant target groups?	

<i>Is the intervention logic coherent with the Programme SO 4.2 and internally well-structured?</i>	Is there a clear and logical link between the challenges, objectives, activities, outputs and result?	Up to 5 points
	Are the proposed activities expected to reach the planned result?	
	Is the proposed work plan realistic?	
<i>Do the partners have clear and balanced roles in the partnership?</i>	Is the role of the partners clearly described?	Up to 5 points
	Is the partners' involvement in the project balanced?	
<i>Is the project budget coherent and realistic?</i>	Is the overall budget realistic compared to the proposed activities?	Up to 5 points
	Is the budget appropriately distributed between the PPs?	
	Is the budget of WPs and BL coherent with the planned activities?	

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

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

III. Support for the development of applications

The DTP shall assist and support PACs throughout the development of project proposals and submission of the AF.

During the **project proposal development phase and when the call is open**, the Joint Secretariat (JS) shall:

- Organise seminars to disseminate information on application procedures and rules of the programme
- Provide consultations in the JS premises, written or phone feedbacks to received questions

- Offer PACs technical assistance and support (e.g. for the re-submission, if necessary)

Throughout the application process, the DTP shall ensure full transparency and non-discriminatory access to the same information to interested parties, regardless of their location.

PART 5: OVERVIEW ON PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

I. Approval and contracting

A smooth starting phase of a project is crucial for successful project implementation. In order to avoid any early turbulence which might negatively affect the further pace of project implementation, PACs should be aware of specific challenges related to the project inception phase.

Start of implementation and eligibility of costs

The project implementation can start after the final approval is given by the DTP MC. Applicants have to keep in mind that within the DTP approval procedure two ways can lead to the **final approval of a project application** by DTP MC:

- Direct final **approval without conditions**
- **Approval with conditions**

In case the DTP MC will approve a project with conditions, Project Partner 1, supported by the other partner(s) and by the JS, is recommended to undertake all necessary steps for the fulfilment of these conditions (e.g. provision of further information or re-phrasing of certain sections of the Application Form and/or modification of the project budget) by the given deadline provided by the JS.

Contracting

The contracting starts right after the final approval of a project application by MC, i.e. after the direct approval (without conditions) or after the successful fulfilment of conditions.

Once Project Partner 1 submitted the necessary set of official documents, the JS prepares the Subsidy Contract. The Subsidy Contract is to be signed first by the MA and will then be sent to Project Partner 1 for signature.

Guidance during the starting phase

The main source of information for projects during the starting phase and beyond will be the DTP Implementation Manual for Priority Area Coordinators. In addition, further advice and guidance is offered through the following elements:

- Official DTP documents, management tools, FAQ (available on DTP website)
- Continuous advice and support through the DTP JS
- Direct JS-project consultations

- Lead Partner seminars and specific seminars (communication, financial issues)
- Further Programme or project meetings during the starting phase which offer the platform for bilateral consultations.

II. Reporting

According to the Subsidy Contract to be concluded between Project Partner 1 and the MA, one of the Project Partner 1's obligations is to submit **yearly reports** highlighting the progress of project implementation and requesting at the same time reimbursement of the paid amounts. Within the Danube Transnational Programme, reporting is done through Progress Reports drafted once a year and submitted via the programme electronic monitoring and information system. Nevertheless, in order to ensure the cash flow of the PACs, **interim progress reports can be submitted up to 4 times per year, according to the needs.**

The yearly progress report consists both of an activity report (highlighting the progress of the activities and development/ delivery of outputs) and a financial report (providing information regarding project-related expenditure).

Reporting activities and outputs

In the yearly progress reports, the project has to describe the progress made regarding the implementation of the activities and the outputs achieved in the given reporting period. In case of (possible) delays in implementing planned activities, these also have to be reported as well as the plans to overcome them. The activities implemented by each project partner should be clearly described, underlining also the possible problems within the partnership, if any. Additionally, the involvement of the target groups and project stakeholders needs to be outlined.

Reporting finances

The expenditures of all project partners are reported to the JS in the joint financial report, which is part of the Progress Report (yearly or interim). All costs included in the financial report must be paid, validated and correctly allocated to a certain WP and budget line.

Each project partner is responsible to have its costs validated before submitting them to Project Partner 1, who compiles all the reports. Both financial reporting and expenditure validation is done thorough the programme monitoring system (for all the partners).

As soon as the financial report is accepted by the JS, the EU funds (85% of ERDF, ENI and/or IPA) of the eligible expenditures are reimbursed to Project Partner 1, who will transfer the corresponding amount to the other partners(s), according to the provisions of the Partnership Agreement.

III. Project changes

This chapter presents the main project changes allowed by the Programme while detailed procedures to be followed by the partnerships will be outlined in the Implementation Manual.

During the lifetime of a project the following types of project changes are allowed:

Minor changes which do not affect the content and the main outputs of a project and only need the approval of the JS project officer (e.g. change of the location of an event, budget reallocations with the 10% flexibility limit)

Major project changes which have an impact on the project content (e.g. budget reallocation between partners, adding new activity etc.). Depending on their type, major project changes would need the approval of MA/ JS or the MC. The following project changes are allowed by the DTP:

- Changes in the budget (budget reallocations between WP and budget lines above the flexibility rule, budget reallocations between project partners)
- Changes in the content of the project, not affecting the delivery of the main project outputs

IV. Audit and control

The audit and the control in the Programme understanding are two different terms.

The term “*control*” refers to the checks performed by the Controllers in order to validate the legality and regularity of expenditures declared by the project partners. The procedure for control in the Danube Transnational Programme follows the Lead Partner principle, which means that the verification of expenditure should be performed by the responsible Controller at national level for each project partner and Project Partner 1 is responsible to prepare the Application for Reimbursement at project level based on the expenditure validated at partner level. The Progress Report and the Application for Reimbursement shall be submitted by Project Partner 1 to the Joint Secretariat **within three months from the end date of each reporting period**.

As a general rule in the framework of the programme two different Control systems are applied by the countries:

- Centralised Control system (a central body is appointed by the respective country to carry out the verification of expenditure)
- Decentralised Control system.

A detailed description of the national control systems is available on the DTP website (<http://www.interreg-danube.eu/relevant-documents/programme-main-documents>).

In some countries, the control is not free of charge. Therefore, these costs have to be included in the budget of the respective partners. Nevertheless, the partners are advised to get in contact with the National Contact Points in order to get more information.

The term “second level audit” refers to the checks performed by the auditors based on the samples selected by the Audit Authority during the project implementation or after its closure.

Besides the control and the sample checks performed as second level audit, other audits might be carried out during and after the project period. These audits can be carried out by any of such responsible auditing bodies of the EU, audit bodies of the participating EU Member States, IPA Partner States, the Audit Authority, Managing Authority, JS and Certifying Authority of the Programme. The aim of these audits is to verify the proper use of funds by Project Partner 1 or by the project partners.

Verifications can be carried out from different perspectives to check the regularity of project expenditure, e.g. checking of the Control Certificates already issued by the Controllers against the supporting documents and other relevant information at the premises of Project Partner 1 and / or the other Project Partner(s) in order to verify the accuracy and validity of the Control Certificate, checking of the project documentation and audit trail, the accounting of project expenditure, etc.

The list of possible auditing bodies, as well as the aspects of the verifications mentioned above, is not exhaustive.

ANNEX 1 List of PACs

PA	Country	Legal entity	Legal representative	Contact person /PAC	Support to PAC	Email
PA 1a	Romania	Ministry of Transport	Dan Marian Costescu			
				Marius Humelnicu		cabinet.humelnicu@mt.ro; marius.humelnicu@mt.ro
					Cristina Cuc	cristina.cuc@mt.ro
					Monica Patrichi	monica.patrichi@mt.ro
	Austria	viadonau Österreichische Wasserstraßen- Gesellschaft mbH	Hans-Peter Hasenbichler			hans-peter.hasenbichler@viadonau.org
				Ursula Zechner		ursula.zechner@bmvit.gv.at
					Gert-Jan Muilerman	Gert-Jan.Muilerman@viadonau.org
					Gudrun Maierbrugger	Gudrun.Maierbrugger@viadonau.org
PA 1b	Slovenia	Ministry of Infrastructure	Peter Gašperšič			
				Franc Žepič		franc.zepic@gov.si
					Maja Bovcon	maja.bovcon@gov.si
	Serbia	Ministry of construction, transport and infrastructure (Ministry in charge for transport)	Zorana Mihajlović			
				Miodrag Poledica		miodrag.poledica@mgsi.gov.rs
					Mirjana Jovanović	mirjana.jovanovic@mgsi.gov.rs
PA 2	Hungary	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	József Bacsikai			

		and Trade		Pál Ságvári		danube-energy@mfa.gov.hu
					Kinga Mate	KMate@mfa.gov.hu
	Czech Republic	Office of the Government of the Czech Republic	Tomáš Prouza			
			Pavel Dvořák			
				Markéta Ročejdlová		rocejdlova.marketa@vlada.cz
PA 3	Bulgaria	Ministry of tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria	Nikolina Angelkova		Ministry of Culture	
				Lyubomir Sirakov		L.Sirakov@tourism.government.bg
	Romania	Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration	Vasile Dincu			
				Teofil Gherca		teofil.gherca@mdrap.ro
				Marius Andra	Ministry of Economy, Trade and Business Environment	marius_andra@minind.ro
				Mihai Monoranu	Ministry of Culture	mihai.monoranu@umpcultura.ro
				Octavian Arsene	National Tourism Authority	oarsene@mturism.ro
PA 4	Slovakia	Water Research Institute, Bratislava	Lubica Kopcova			riaditel@vuvh.sk
				Andrea Vranovská		vranovska@vuvh.sk
					Alena Kurecova	Kurecova@vuvh.sk
					Ministry of Environment, Water department (V.Novak)	
	Hungary	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Jozsef Bacskai			
				László Perger		perger.laszlo@ovf.hu

					Zsuzsanna Kocsis-Kupper	kocsiskupperzs@t-online.hu
					Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	
PA 5	Romania	Ministry for Environment, Water and Forests	Cristiana Pasca Palmer			cabinet.ministru@mmediu.ro
				Simona Olimpia Negru		olimpia.negru@mmediu.ro
					Silvia Neamtu	silvia.neamtu@mmediu.ro
					Gheorghe Constantin	gheorghe.constantin@mmediu.ro
	Hungary	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Jozsef Bacskai			
				Laszlo Dobi		dobi.laszlo@ovf.hu
					Zsofia Ekes	Danube.Envirisks@mfa.gov.hu
					Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade	
PA 6	Bavaria	Bavarian State Ministry of Environment and Consumer Protection	Wolfgang Klug			wolfgang.klug@stmuv.bayern.de
				Florian Ballnus		florian.ballnus@stmuv.bayern.de
	Croatia	Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection of the Republic of Croatia	Slaven Dobrović			
				Ana Kobaslic		ana.kobaslic@mzoip.hr
					Ivana Vukšić	
PA 7	Slovakia	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic	Juraj Draxler			kancelaria.st@minedu.sk
				Štefan Chudoba		stefan.chudoba@minedu.sk
					Ľubica Pitlová	lubica.pitlova@minedu.sk
					Jaroslava Szüdi	jaroslava.szudi@minedu.sk
	Serbia	University of Belgrade	Vladimir Bumbasirevic			

				Viktor Nedović		viktor.nedovic@mpn.gov.rs; vnedovic@agvif.bg.ac.rs
					Dijana Štrbac	dijana.strbac@pupin.rs
PA 8	Baden-Württemberg	Ministry of Finance and Economics	Hartmut Reichl			
				Hans-Peter Herdlitschka		hans-peter.herdlitschka@mfw.bwl.de
					Karlheinz Bechtle	Karlheinz.bechtle@mfw.bwl.de
					Maria Doz	maria.doz@mfw.bwl.de
	Croatia	Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Crafts of the Republic of Croatia	Dijana Bezjak			
				Dragica Karaić		dragica.karaic@minpo.hr
PA 9	Austria	Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection		Roland Hanak		roland.hanak@sozialministerium.at
		Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs or KulturKontakt Austria		Jürgen Schick		juergen.schick@bmbf.gv.at
				Monika Mott		monika.mott@kulturkontakt.or.at
	Moldova	Ministry of Labor, Social protection and Family (MLSPF)	Mircea Buga			secretariat@mmpsf.gov.md
				Anna Gherganova		anna.gherganova@mmpsf.gov.md
					Ms Adriana Rosca	adriana.rosca@edu.md
PA 10	Austria	City of Vienna (EU-Funding Agency Ltd.)	Brigitte Jilka			brigitte.jilka@wien.gv.at
				Rudolf Schicker		rudolf.schicker@pa10-danube.eu
					Jörg Mirtl	joerg.mirtl@pa10-danube.eu
					Claudia Singer	claudia.singer@pa10-danube.eu

PA 11	Slovenia	CEF - Center of Excellence in Finance	Mira Dobovisek		Irena Lukač	irena.lukac@cef-see.org
				Maja Tomšič		maja.tomsic@cef-see.org
	Germany	Federal Ministry of the Interior	Christoph Hübner			christoph.huebner@bmi.bund.de
				Christoph Hübner		
					Csilla Remann	csilla.remann@bmi.bund.de
					Martina Niehaus	martina.niehaus@bmi.bund.de
	Germany, Bavaria	Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Building and Transport	Wilhelm Schmidbauer			stmi.eusdr@polizei.bayern.de
				Wilhelm Schmidbauer		
					Martin Krauß	martin.krauss01@polizei.bayern.de
					Patrick Weeger	patrick.weeger@polizei.bayern.de
					Kathrin Heckl	kathrin.heckl@polizei.bayern.de
	Bulgaria	Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria	Rumyana Bachvarova			
				Snezhina Marinova		smarinova.14@mvr.bg
					Blaga Stancheva (CB)	eusdr@mvr.bg