

EU STRATEGY FOR THE
DANUBE REGION

PA10's Newcomer Compass



PA10

A guide to effective and
informed engagement in
Priority Area 10





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1. Welcome to PA10

1.1. PA10's purpose and objectives

Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” (PA10) is one of twelve thematic Priority Areas defined in the Action Plan[1] of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). Each Priority Area aims at facilitating activities that contribute to the Plans actions in order to improve the quality of life for people living in the Danube Region.

Additionally, each Priority Area is part of one of the four Pillars of the EUSDR. PA10 is integrated into Pillar 4: Strengthening the Region. For more information about the structure of the EUSDR please have a look at Chapter 2: EUSDR Governance.

1.1. PA10 Actions

The PA10 actions described below are according to the Action Plan (2020) and based on the “Consolidated Input” provided by PACs and NCs, as well as on the additional input provided during consultations between NCs and PACs. From this, the following objectives have guided PA10 since 2019:

- Strengthening institutional capacities to improve decision-making and administrative performance.
- Increasing involvement of civil society and local actors for effective policy-making and implementation.
- Enhancing coordination and knowledge for better use of funding and to develop needs-based funding instruments.

With the objectives in mind we turn to PA10’s actions, and their corresponding targets, which clarify the scope of activities in which the priority area is moving. The actions are also supported by current or past examples of PA10 projects and initiatives.

Action 1: To improve institutional capacities in order to provide high-quality public services



What does it mean?

Improving public services, cutting administrative red tape, and boosting collaboration across governance levels are essential for better policy coordination, mutual learning, and the development of shared standards. This enhances service provision alignment between partner countries, addresses spatial spill-over effects, and promotes knowledge growth.

<https://danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/EUSDR-ACTION-PLAN-SWD202059-final-1.pdf>

eGovernance Renaissance

The increasing importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in public administration has unfortunately not rooted itself throughout the EUSDR. Facing challenges in ICT implementation, the eGovernance Renaissance project goal was to train civil servants and develop integrated ICT-enabled curricula. Financed by the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg, the project involved collaboration with institutions from various countries. Its success led to a follow-up project eGovernance Renaissance II. Focusing on a SAP-based education platform for students in EUSDR countries. Managed by the University of Applied Sciences in Ludwigsburg, the platform aims to provide training in eGovernment and administration processes, with funding from the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg.

Action 2: To facilitate the administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions



What does it mean?

Capacity development for top-tier public services, promoting healthy regional development, and fostering trust across borders are vital for ensuring seamless economic, social, and territorial cohesion in the Danube Region. Initiatives such as reducing legal and administrative obstacles and establishing collaborative cross-border public services and governance structures contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of border regions.

Cross-border emergency healthcare in the Danube Region

The prompt response in emergency healthcare is crucial for improving the quality of life, especially in border regions. The European Union (EU) advocates for accessible healthcare and enhanced cross-border collaboration. While existing EU legal frameworks facilitate medical treatment across borders, cross-border (emergency) healthcare in the Danube Region presents additional challenges. Thus, PA10 focuses on promoting mutual learning and capacity building for cross-border emergency healthcare in the Danube Region.

This is tackled through four fields of activity, namely:

- **Legal framework:** the framework covers aspects such as legal security for medical personnel, including doctors and paramedics, as well as aspects like derogation of national laws, patient protection, cost reimbursement, liability, compensation, and dispute procedures. While EU directives cover certain aspects, concrete cross-border cooperation requires more detailed legal clarification, especially in collaboration with accession countries, which may necessitate a comprehensive legal foundation.

- **Administration:** Administering healthcare cooperation across borders requires clarifying the competences of ambulance and healthcare services. This involves implementing cooperation processes among diverse institutional settings that offer emergency healthcare. Additionally, cooperation partners must develop shared emergency protocols and harmonise administrative procedures related to service provision, data exchange, and coordination mechanisms.
- **Technology:** Close cross-border healthcare cooperation requires establishing joint standards for equipment like ambulance cars and addressing legal variations. It also involves adopting cross-border technologies, such as joint communication software and data exchange systems, to overcome language barriers and ensure effective collaboration among medical staff and patients.
- **Culture:** Socio-cultural factors, such as language barriers and trust issues, can hinder cross-border emergency healthcare. Solutions for example, improved communication, cross-border cooperation networks, and joint training for medical staff can enhance patient trust and collaboration across borders.

BACID – Building Administrative Capacities in the Danube Region

BACID's overall goal is to improve good public governance in the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova. Now in its third generation BACID III keeps carrying this torch.

BACID III builds on the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) co-financed BACID programme 2014-2021 (BACID I & II) by securing its achievements through specialised activities supported and implemented by the Regional Quality Management Centre of ReSPA and NALAS-Observatory for Transparency and Decentralisation.

Action 3: To review bottlenecks relating to the low absorption rate of EU funds and invest EU

What does it mean?

Enhancing the capacities of project promoters for improved fund coordination is anticipated to boost the development and implementation of projects. This approach aims to support project capitalization and harness the innovative potential of diverse stakeholders at all levels. Improved funding coordination empowers project promoters to optimize the use of available funds, particularly for implementing innovative project ideas.

EuroAccess

EuroAccess, a complimentary online search tool, facilitates the exploration of available funding opportunities to enhance economic, social, and territorial cohesion within the European Union and its Macro-Regions.

Initiated by various EU Member States, Macro-Regional Strategies provide a comprehensive framework to bolster collaboration in areas confronting shared challenges and capitalize on common opportunities.

Under Priority Area 10, "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation," EuroAccess was conceived to aid project promoters in identifying suitable funding for their initiatives. This tool compiles information on calls and funding opportunities from over 500 EU programs, delivering tailored funding alerts regularly.

Since its inception in 2016, EuroAccess has been instrumental in supporting project ideas in the Danube Region. Building on the success of this pilot initiative, our service has now expanded to encompass additional Macro-Regions and their corresponding Strategies.

EuroAccess
Macro-Region

Action 4: To support better coordination of funding



What does it mean?

Improved program-level coordination enhances positive project outcomes at the macro-regional level. Networks for capitalization and coordination between programs contribute to policy alignment and cooperation mechanisms. This initiative targets barriers to joint planning and programming, particularly between EU and Non-EU EUSDR members. It underscores the need to align project funding with objectives in mandatory plans like NAPCPs and RBMPs under the EU acquis.

The Donors' Conference

Partner countries and regions affiliated with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) have recognized the pressing need for enhanced coordination of funding sources, increased awareness of funding opportunities among project promoters, and improved strategic planning for regional development. Addressing this, PA10 introduces the Donors' Conference Framework, offering guidance and recommendations for establishing a platform that facilitates the exchange and coordination of public and private funding. This framework is anticipated to be replicated across the Danube Region.

The Donors' Conferences serve as a platform for: facilitating exchange between public and private funding programs and project promoters; supporting a more strategic utilization of funding, including better alignment of funds and prioritising project ideas; enhancing communication and coordination among public and private funding programs and instruments.

Action 5: To test and support innovative funding solutions (for local actors and civil society)



What does it mean?

Backing the creation and testing of innovative funding instruments tailored to diverse stakeholder needs in the Danube Region is expected to enhance project promoters' capabilities, unlock untapped innovative potential, and introduce them to transnational EU project management. This funding should prioritize facilitating extensive stakeholder involvement in regional development.

Danube Strategic Project Fund

The inception of the Danube Strategic Project Fund (DSPF) aimed to support the execution of transnational strategic initiatives. In this pursuit, the DSPF financially supported projects aligned with the goals of the Danube Strategy (EUSDR), urging project promoters to generate advantages at the crossroads of EU Cohesion and Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy.

Additionally, the DSPF extends its assistance to project ideas addressing the Danube Region stakeholders' needs. Beyond merely backing projects of strategic significance for the Danube Strategy, the DSPF also offered valuable insights into establishing a modest funding mechanism. This mechanism aimed to aid both the evolution of strategic projects and the execution of smaller-scale projects.

The DSPF's financial backing derived from resources allocated to the European Commission by the European Parliament and the City of Vienna. Its administration fell under the purview of PA10, managed by the City of Vienna.



Action 6: To foster cooperation built on mutual trust between state and non-state actors to enhance well-being for the inhabitants of the Danube Region

What does it mean?

Exchanging successful trust-building initiatives, implementing dialogue platforms, and fostering mutual learning for participatory governance aim to enhance cooperation in Danube Region development. Activities like Participation Days boost capacities for active involvement in participatory processes

Danube Participation Days

The Danube Participation Day follows since 2014 the EUSDR's motto of "Prosperity through diversity", making the goal of this initiative to enhance trust and collaboration between public authorities and civil society for the well-being of Danube Region residents. The Danube Participation Day brings together stakeholders from civil society, local, regional and national public authorities, universities, research institutions as well as representatives from the EUSDR governance, European, and international organisations.

This annual event, usually precedes the Annual Forum, and aims to promote cooperation and participation for regional development. It is organised yearly by PA10 and the Danube Civil Society Forum.

National Participation Days

In the EUSDR Action Plan, the 14 partner countries of the Danube Region commit to fostering cooperation based on mutual trust. National and Regional Participation Days provide a platform for aligning strategic objectives with concrete ways of collaboration. National and regional representatives from EUSDR, public authorities, and civil society organizations can work together to develop impactful steps for Danube Region development.

Action 7: To strengthen the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube Region



What does it mean?

Civil society organisations, local actors, and public administrations at all levels require enhanced capacities for meaningful participation in multi-level governance. This involves strengthening political capital for transparent decision-making and policy implementation. Mutual learning and capacity building empower both state and non-state actors to collaboratively develop and promote the implementation of the EUSDR's place-based approach. Emphasis should be placed on youth participation and civic engagement to ensure a long-term perspective on regional development and sustainable democracy.

Young Bled Strategic Forum (Young BSF)

To get a rounded insight into the workings and function of Young Bled Strategic forum, there is need to mention the Bled Strategic Forum (BSF). Over the past eleven years the BSF has grown into an international platform for high-level strategic dialogue among leaders from private and public sectors on key issues facing Europe. Welcoming prominent guests from Europe and beyond, the yearly Forum has established itself as an important gathering aimed at making commitments for the implementation of new strategies designed to confront the most pressing issues of today's Europe. The Forum is organised jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia and the Centre for European Perspective (PA10 SL).

Organised supplementary to BSF, Young BSF has become a unique meeting place and platform for young leaders, entrepreneurs, thinkers and socially active individuals, to share their visions, exchange ideas and network with one another. The topics have varied and evolved throughout the years, nevertheless the main objective remained clear: to bring together bold, brave and action-oriented individuals from different walks of life, and to offer them a collaborative and creative environment for discussion and networking.

Action 8: To enhance capacities of cities and municipalities to facilitate local and regional development

What does it mean?

Cities, municipalities, and regions play crucial roles in tackling territorial challenges and contributing to regional development. Developing territorial strategies, fostering cooperation, and implementing participatory policies are essential for high-quality regional development. Consequently, supporting local actors in enhancing capacities for cooperation and service provision in areas such as Roma inclusion, combating human trafficking, spatial planning, and functional regional cooperation is vital.

Danube Cities Against Human Trafficking (D-CHAT)

Human trafficking (THB) is a multifaceted phenomenon rooted in diverse causes, ranging from poverty and gender inequality to violence against women, conflict, social integration gaps, limited job opportunities, and educational deficits. Local actors, including public authorities and NGOs, often play a crucial role in connecting with both victims and suspects. While public authorities engage victims through labour inspections, health care, or social work, NGOs provide essential services, gaining the trust of victims who may be hesitant to rely on public entities.

Capacity building for local public authorities is imperative to raise awareness and develop procedures supporting survivors and aiding in the detection and prevention of trafficking. Strengthening cooperation between local authorities, law enforcement, and NGOs is essential for sustainable impact in combating human trafficking, as recommended by the European Union's report on the Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012–2016[1]. In alignment with this, Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacity and Cooperation" collaborates with Priority Area 11 "Security" in the initiative Danube Cities against Human Trafficking (D-CAHT)[2]. This initiative brings together representatives from cities, municipalities, victim protection organizations, research, and law enforcement to enhance capacity building, mutual learning, and cross-sectoral cooperation, fostering a coordinated approach across countries and regions in the Danube Region. We also collaborate with partners like the Regional Implementation Initiative to promote mutual learning and networking.

[1] [EUR-Lex - 52012DC0286 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

[2] [Danube Cities Against Human Trafficking \(D-CAHT\) - PA 10 \(danube-region.eu\)](#)

2. EUSDR Governance

2.1. European Union Strategy for the Danube Region - a brief introduction

The EUSDR is one of four macro-regional strategies of the European Union. The other three are: The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea (2009), the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Sea (2014) and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (2015). The EUSDR was formally created on 13 April 2011 when the EU Council endorsed the Communication and the accompanying Action Plan of the EUSDR at the General Affairs Council (Council Conclusions). The EUSDR Action Plan was revised in 2019-2020 by the partner countries and approved by the European Commission. There are 14 participating countries in EUSDR:

- 9 EU countries - Germany (Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg), the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria
- 5 accession countries - Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova[1].



ILLUSTRATION BY EUROPEAN COMMISSION
WEBSITE, 2023

[1] [EUSDR-Tool-kit_final_dec-2022.pdf \(danube-region.eu\)](#)

2.2. The governance structure of the EUSDR

The governance of the EUSDR is paramount to the implementation of its actions and the achievement of its objectives and targets[1]. Below you will find a visual representation of how the governance scheme in the EUSDR looks like, followed by an in-depth dive into each relevant area.

2.3. Actors and stakeholders in EUSDR



ILLUSTRATION BY THE DANUBE STRATEGY POINT,
AUGUST 2020
LAST UPDATED: NOVEMBER 2023

[1] [EUSDR Governance Paper_07-2020_endorsed.pdf \(danube-region.eu\)](#)

Steering Group (SG)

The Steering Groups (SGs) are key decision-makers at the Priority Area (PA) level, guiding objectives, formats, and cooperation emphases. Comprising experts appointed by their governments, SGs work with Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) on day-to-day implementation, providing advice and assistance. SGs represent national authorities, ensuring transparency with PACs.

SGs operate transnationally and inter-sectorially, embedding efforts effectively into national contexts. Members are appointed and recalled by their governments, possessing the capability and mandate for Strategy tasks. PACs inform the incumbent Presidency of changes. Observers, including non-ministerial implementers, may attend SG meetings.

SG functions encompass cooperative efforts toward targets, identifying and implementing actions/projects in line with Pillars' objectives, and preparing/updating the Roadmap of Actions. They identify funding sources, ensure linkages with other PA Steering Groups, and liaise with relevant EU programs and international organizations. SGs convene ministerial meetings, submit policy proposals to NCs, and update targets in coordination with the EC. They support Strategy reporting and evaluation, identifying progress in actions and projects. PACs report PA progress to the EC and DTP. Each SG defines Rules of Procedure (RoP) for its meetings.

The RoP cover membership, roles, tasks, working language, communication, organisation of meetings, and decision-making processes. Therefore, it is imperative to familiarise oneself with it as soon and as thoroughly as possible. Despite general provisions, each PA adapts the RoP to its specific features, resulting in differences in *modi operandi*.

Membership in SGs includes, representatives from all participating states, EC, and relevant international organisations.

Three types of membership exist:

- Voting members nominated by participating states
- Non-voting observers attending regularly
- Invited members or guests in advisory role

The decision-making process allows each country one vote, with the number of states representatives varying across PA.

Decisions within the SG can be adopted during meetings or via email in a written procedure. Details of the decision-making process vary among the PAs, in PA10 decisions take place as follows:

- Decisions that the SG is entitled by the EUSDR to make will be taken by consensus, which is understood as absence of objection.
- Decisions can be made when at least half of the participating countries attend the SG meeting.
- Each participating state has one vote per decision
- In case the consensus is not reached, the Chairperson shall give a 30 minutes recess for consultations in order for the present members to reconsider their position; it is reconsidered impossible to reach consensus if, after two rounds of discussions on one certain issue, a consensual decision cannot be reached.
- In case of opposition by several members, the Chairperson decides whether the decision is postponed or defeated. However, if consensus cannot be reached due to one single opposing position the SG may decide, at the initiative of the Chairperson, by unanimity minus one, meaning, all members but one support the decision.

[Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Group Rev March 201214 .pdf \(danube-region.eu\)](#)

[https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/09/Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Group Rev March 201214 .pdf](https://capacitycooperation.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/09/Guidelines_for_the_Functioning_of_the_Steering_Group_Rev_March_201214_.pdf)

Responsibilities of SGs

The Steering Group (SG) represents the central executive body of PA10, playing a crucial role in transnational, inter-sectoral and inter-institutional cooperation. They assist the PACs in developing their activities and according to the EUSDR Need Assessment report, 2021 make decisions regarding the future development of the area, its objectives, co-operations and guidelines[1].

As a SG member, the following responsibilities are mandated to you:

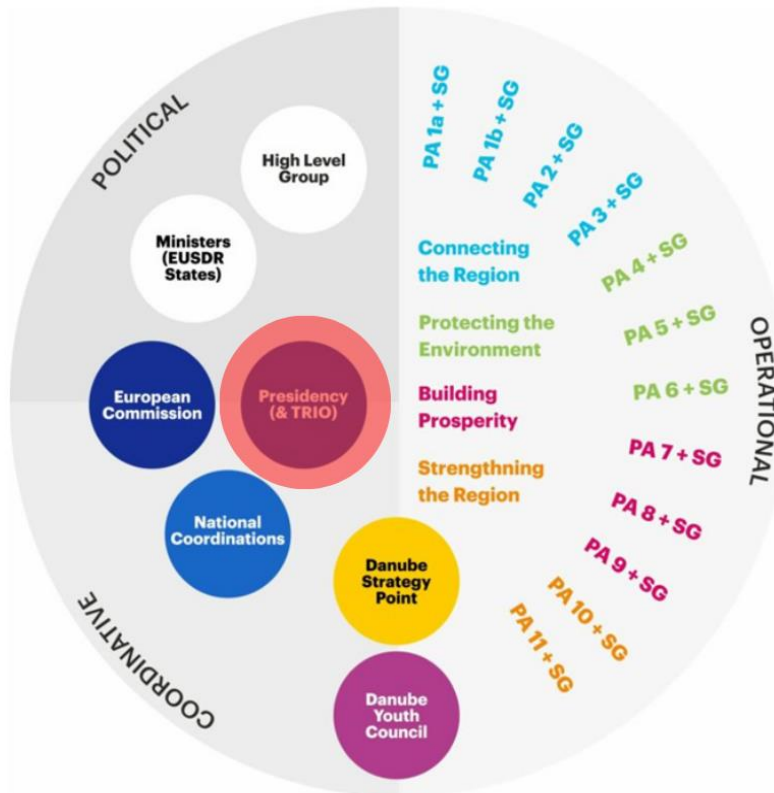
Priority Area Coordinators (PACs)

The Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) oversee the twelve key sectors of the Danube Strategy, grouped into four Pillars. PACs drive the process, identifying sectors for action and adopting goals to implement improvements. Two or more PACs from different Danube Region states manage each Priority Area, authorised by their respective governments. PA10 finds its counterpart PAC in Slovenia. The list of PACs is approved by the National Coordinators (NCs), who are updated on changes.

PACs facilitate the Strategy, acting as liaisons between PA groups and coordinating initiatives, stakeholders, and policy processes. They work on implementing PA actions, collaborating with the EC, EU agencies, and stakeholders at various levels. PACs play a transnational, inter-sectorial, and inter-institutional role, acting on behalf of participating states.

With SG support, PACs assess policy areas, identify drivers, and recommend ways to overcome barriers. PACs monitor, report, and communicate activities to the public, updating websites for consistent EUSDR branding with DSP support. They may issue Letters of Recommendation for projects aligned with their actions, based on SG decisions, and define Rules of Procedure for their meetings.

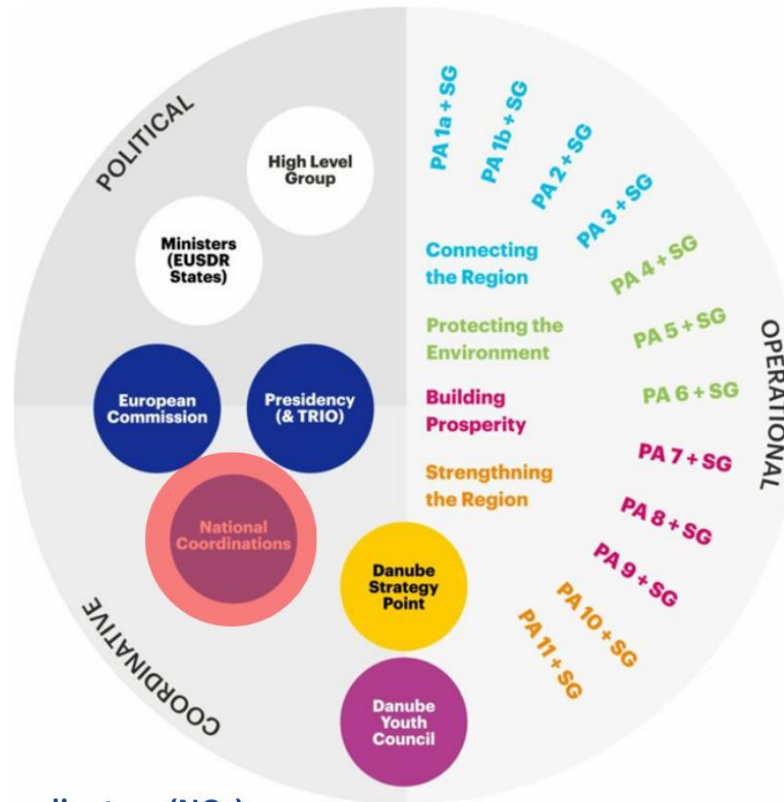
[EUSDR Need-Assessment-SGs_02.2021_final.pdf \(danube-region.eu\)](#)



Presidency and TRIO Presidency

The EUSDR Presidency rotates yearly among participating states following alphabetical order. The incumbent Presidency coordinates among NCs and PACs, organising key meetings and the Annual Forum. They aim to host a ministerial meeting, aligning sectoral policies, adopting a ministerial declaration for political commitment and strategic guidance at national and European levels, in cooperation with the EC and DSP.

The TRIO presidency ensures coherency, strategic stability, and continuity between cycles. It actively coordinates with the incumbent, past, and future Presidencies supporting the incumbent Presidency in strategic matters. Trio meetings coincide with the NC and joint NC-PAC meetings, with the EC and DSP participating. The incumbent Presidency, in consultation with the TRIO, prepares major meetings and documents. Upon NC agreement, the TRIO Presidency represents NCs at the European political level.

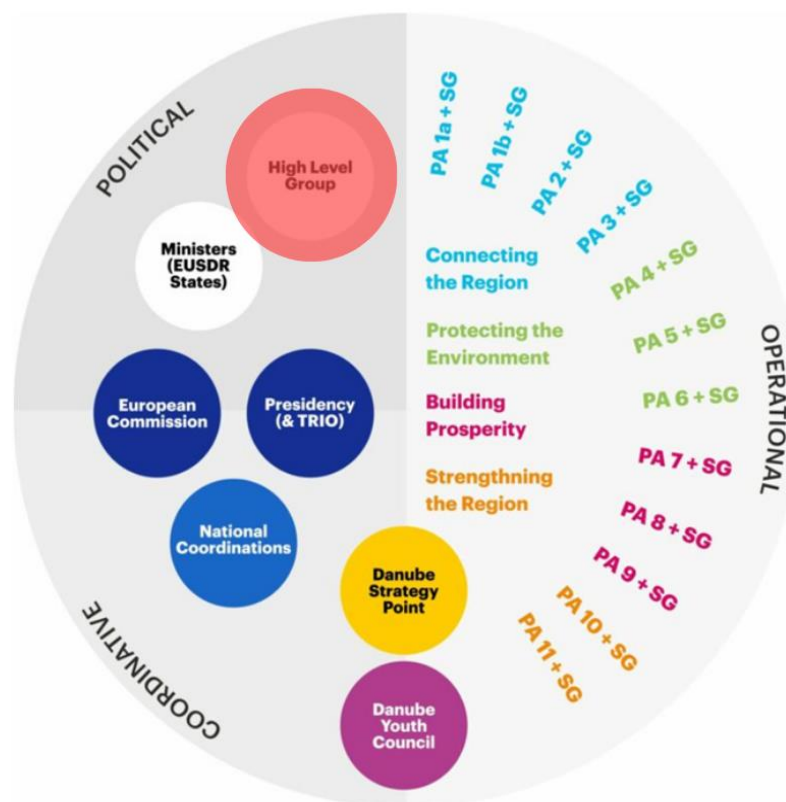


National Coordinators (NCs)

National Coordinators (NCs) are pivotal decision-makers for the EUSDR at the national level. Appointed by their governments, they coordinate, guide, and monitor their state's EUSDR participation, ensuring regular updates to the incumbent Presidency and the European Commission. With support from the Danube Strategy Point (DSP), NCs facilitate coordination within their state, engaging with ministries and organisations to integrate the EUSDR into policies.

NCs monitor the Strategy progress, considering national specificity and receive reports, discussing findings at least annually. They promote EUSDR visibility, engage stakeholders, and encourage alignment of policies and funding. Meetings with Priority Area Coordinators (PACs) occur twice a year.

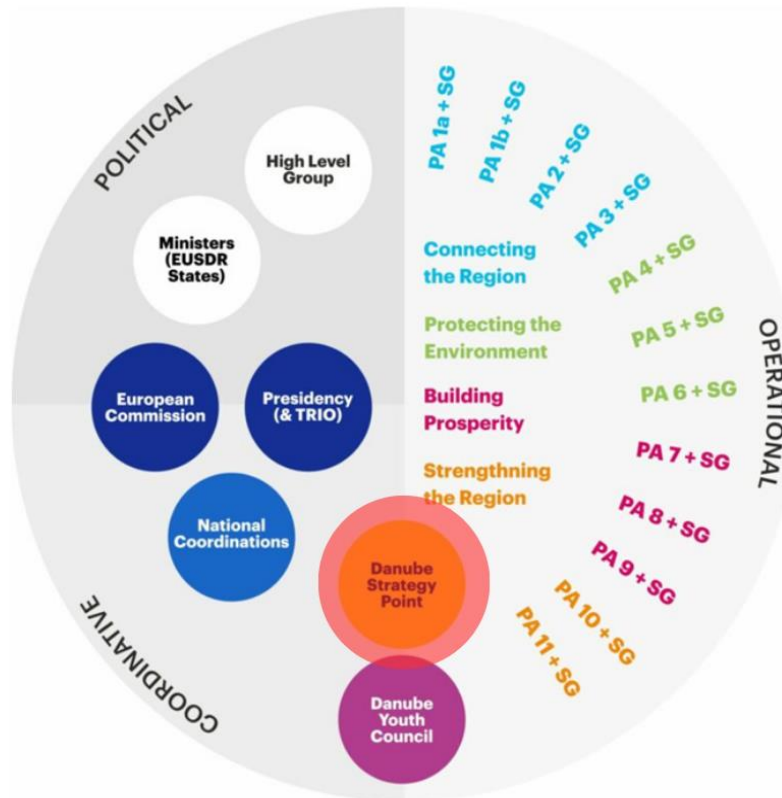
Key functions include coordinating state participation, linking operational and political levels, raising awareness, proposing revisions, endorsing a monitoring framework, leading the DSP, and ensuring governance compliance.



The High Level Group (HLG)

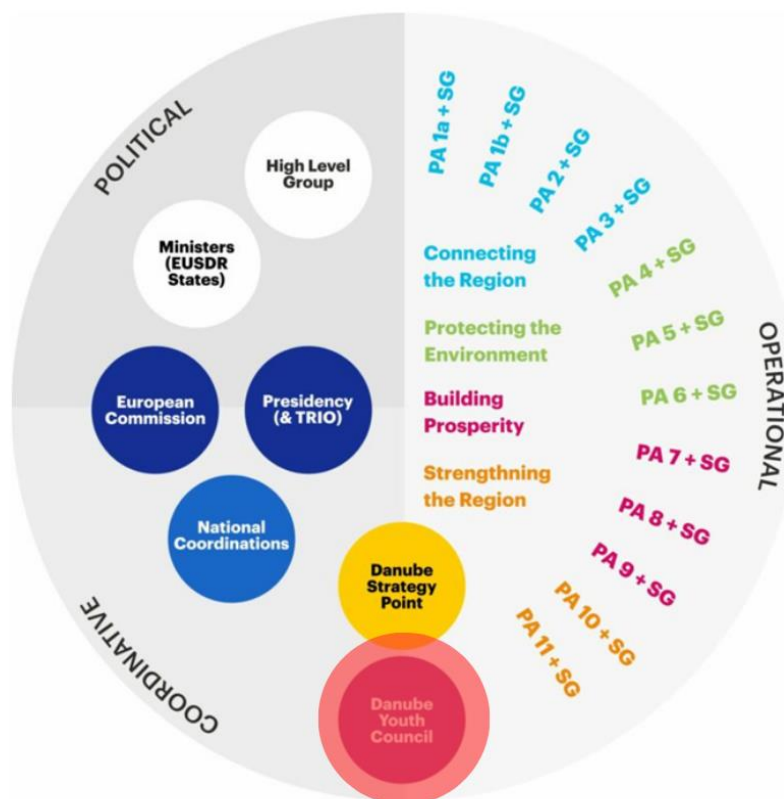
The HLG on MRS takes on an advisory role to the European Commission on the coordination and monitoring of MRS. It is composed of official representatives from all EU Member States and the non-EU states which are part of the MRS. The HLG ensures coordination and monitoring across all MRS, assesses progress made in their implementation and may provide policy orientation and strategic guidance. It is the overarching forum where the approaches and practices in each MRS are compared to maximise the leverage and impact[1].

[EUSDR Governance Paper_07-2020_endorsed.pdf \(danube-region.eu\)](#)



The Danube Strategy Point (DSP)

The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) is a strategic unit supporting EUSDR implementation, communication, and capacity building. It aids both decision-makers (NCs) and operational levels (PACs), connecting to EU financial resources and DG REGIO. The DSP facilitates communication among the (Trio) Presidency, EC, NCs, PACs, stakeholders, and the public, ensuring EUSDR's regional and European promotion. It provides technical support, information, and feedback, aligns the Strategy with funding instruments, collaborates with actors, and ensures institutional memory. The DSP contributes to capacity building, conducts cross-reference analyses of PA work, and works closely with the incumbent Presidency.



Danube Youth Council

The Danube Strategy Point (DSP) is a strategic unit supporting EUSDR implementation, communication, and capacity building. It aids both decision-makers (NCs) and operational levels (PACs), connecting to EU financial resources and DG REGIO. The DSP facilitates communication among the (Trio) Presidency, EC, NCs, PACs, stakeholders, and the public, ensuring EUSDR's regional and European promotion. It provides technical support, information, and feedback, aligns the Strategy with funding instruments, collaborates with actors, and ensures institutional memory. The DSP contributes to capacity building, conducts cross-reference analyses of PA work, and works closely with the incumbent Presidency.