Evaluation of the Start Danube Region Project Fund of PA10 Institutional Capacity of the EUSDR

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List of abbreviations

CBC   Cross Border Cooperation

DG   Directorate General

DSP   Danube Strategy Point

DTP   Danube Transnational Programme

EC   European Commission

ENI   European Neighbourhood Instrument

EUSBSR   European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

EUSDR   European Union Strategy for the Danube Region

IB   Implementing Body

IPA   Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

ISF   Internal Security Fund

LP   Lead Partner

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

NPO   Non-Profit Organisation

PA   Priority Area

PAC   Priority Area Coordinator

PP   Project Partner

Q1   Questionnaire 1 – PAC team and SG members

Q2   Questionnaire 2 – START LPs and PPs

Q3   Questionnaire 3 – General public

SG   Steering Group

SME   Small and Medium Sized Enterprise

START   START Danube Region Project Fund

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1   Introduction

The pilot initiative START Danube Region Project Fund (hereafter START or the initiative) was initiated by Priority Area 10 of the EUSDR to provide small grants in form of seed money for the development and implementation of projects in the Danube Region. It was implemented in the period 2014 – 2016. A total of 48 projects were implemented, with project size ranging from just below 16.000 € to approx. 68.000 €, and START grant per project ranging from 9.970 € to 39.600 €. The projects were implemented by transnational partnerships in the Danube Region, and covered a wide range of topics, from flood protection measures to Roma integration. As a common element, all projects featured a macro-regional impact and pursued objectives or tackled challenges of the EUSDR.

The present evaluation forms a part of the quality management of the START initiative. At the time it is conducted, the initiative is still ongoing, albeit in its final stages. The evaluation investigates its effectiveness, its results and sustainability, and thus takes an ex-post perspective on the initiative as a whole. The approach is summative[1] and intended to provide a conclusive perspective of START as it was programmed and implemented.

At the same time, the nature of START as a pilot testifies that the continuation of the scheme was intended from the very beginning, provided that the design was to prove successful. The evaluation therefore also lists lessons learned and recommendations for possible follow-ups, and includes detailed technical information which may enable successor initiatives to reproduce and adapt structures and configurations as needed.

The overall objective of the present evaluation is thus twofold: It aims at analysing the performance of the START initiative in relation to its original objectives and targets and to make its strengths and weaknesses visible, and at enabling future initiative replications and follow-up initiatives to build on the lessons learned.

Chapter 2 of the evaluation is concerned with the initiative's profile, a description of the different components of the START process chain (application of project proposals, selection, etc.), and the context of the initiative's creation. Chapter 3 and 4 outline the specific evaluation questions as well as the methodology by which the evaluation was conducted. Chapter 5 provides the results of the analysis as regards the initiative's structure, its individual process components, its impact, effectiveness and sustainability. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are given in Chapter 6. The annexes comprise documentation of the evaluation procedure, including the complete results of stakeholder surveys and comprehensive data related to the implementation of START.

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[1] Summative evaluation is understood as „conducted *after* completion of the program (for ongoing programs, this means after stabilization) and *for* the benefit of some external audience or decision-maker." [original emphasis] (Scriven 1991: 340)

2 START initiative

The pilot initiative **START – Danube Region Project Fund** was established to facilitate the preparation or implementation of projects relevant to the Danube Region and the EUSDR, through the provision of small scale grants to final beneficiaries (cf. Grant Agreement 2013CE160AT130 – START DANUBE REGION PROJECT FUND – hereafter START Grant Agreement 2013).[2]

START Danube Region Project Fund initiative – Profile at a glance	
Objective	Facilitate the preparation or implementation of projects relevant to the Danube Region and the EUSDR
Management tasks	Carry out two open calls for proposals, select projects to be funded, provide technical support during implementation, dissemination
Outputs	48 projects implemented over 1,5 years in the 14 Danube Region countries, 1.268.153,13 € disbursed to a total of 204 beneficiaries

START projects main features[3]	
Financial scope	**Small scale**: grants between 20.000 and 40.000 € per project
Type of financing	**Pre-financing**: 50 % payment after Grant Agreement is signed, 25 % if requirements for midterm report are fulfilled, balance payment after finalization
Partnership	**Transnational**: min. 2 partners from 2 Danube Region countries
Thematic scope	All thematic priorities of the EUSDR, application and selection within each PA
Focus	Network and cooperation activities and transfer of know-how
Types of beneficiaries	Beneficiaries without longstanding funding experience
Scope of project activities	Preparation phase OR entire implementation of small projects

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[2] The START Grant Agreement 2013 was not published by the EC.
[3] See further details in Chapter 5.

2.1   Provenance and context of START

In 2010, the European Strategy for the Danube Region was created to make the area "a truly 21st century region, secure and confident […]" (EC COM 2010 p.3) and to set a "sustainable framework for policy integration and coherent development of the Danube Region" (EC COM 2010 p.14). The coordination of actions within the EUSDR was required to be "trans-national, inter-sectoral and inter-institutional" (EC COM 2010 p.12).

In the accompanying Action Plan, the structures and the corresponding thematic priorities of the EUSDR were laid out, including four pillars (connecting the region, protecting the environment, building prosperity and strengthening the region) comprising of 11 Priority Areas, headed by Priority Area Coordinators (PACs). Priority Area 10 *Institutional Capacity and Cooperation* of the EUSDR was established to improve structures and capacity for private and public sector decision-making, including good planning and international cooperation, supported by the macro-regional approach (cf. EC COM 2010 p.11). In accordance with the Action Plan, the Strategy's stakeholders are to promote actions and projects which have a macro-regional impact (cf. EC SEC 2010 p.4). PA10 institutional capacity holds a special role in this context, as its tasks encompass horizontal support to all other PAs to facilitate transnational projects, which gives it a "de facto monopoly position in the Strategy work" (EC C 2013 p.3).

Within its own thematic scope, PA10's targets include the improvement of the region's capacity to absorb EU structural and investment funds in an efficient and effective manner, as is stressed in the defined action: "To review bottlenecks relating to the low absorption rate of EU funds and to ensure better coordination of funding" (EC SEC 2010 p.81).

A study on the needs for financial instruments in the EUSDR commissioned by DG Regional Policy was conducted in 2011 and concluded that amongst the most pressing needs of project promoters in the Danube Region was the need for pre-financing, for small project support, and for the facilitation of project preparation. Overall, the transition of EUSDR projects from conception or preparation stage to implementation – especially as regards the acquisition of funding – was identified as the main bottleneck to be targeted. Thus, early support of project ideas was defined as a desirable objective for future initiatives. It was also concluded that the existing funding programmes did not offer appropriate facilities to fund small projects, as the administrative burden and the complexity of the processes were incommensurate with 'very small' projects (defined in said study as ranging from 20.000 – 200.000 €). Additionally, the fact that the Danube Region countries have different statuses in their relation with the EU and the resulting problems of eligibility within the given funding programmes was referred to as a further obstacle for macro-regional projects (cf. Metis study 2011 p.31ff.).

2.2 START and its objectives

In this context and supported by a grant from the European Commission, PA10 initiated the START Danube Region Project Fund.[4] Its general objective as laid out in the Grant Application was to "facilitate the preparation or implementation of projects relevant to the Danube Region and the EUSDR" (START Grant Agreement 2013 p.48) in accordance with the specific demands defined by the above mentioned study. It targets "projects with strategic impact" and aims at building up partnerships in a transnational environment. (ibid. p.64)

In particular, the START Project Fund was meant to implement concrete project preparation or implementation activities, which support the following specific objectives:

- Contribute to fulfilling objectives of the Action Plan of the EUSDR, in particular the roadmaps of the 11 Priority Areas and to increasing the ownership and the visibility of the Strategy in the Danube Region,

- Address all regions and thematic priorities of the Strategy (although individual projects may have a local coverage and address a singular topic),

- Cannot be (or not yet) financed from other EU-Funding sources (e.g. due to the small size of the project and/or the non-availability of EU funds),

- Support the establishment of network and cooperation activities, transfer of know-how, people-to-people actions, etc.

(START Grant Agreement 2013, Annex I Description of the Action p. 2)

In the context of the specific EUSDR targets (as last validated in the meeting of National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators on 23.05.2016), the START initiative was to contribute to the PA10 target No. IV: "Increase the average absorption rate of EU funds in the Danube Region in comparison to 2007-2013 period" (List of EUSDR targets 2016 p.4).

The START description of the action (Annex to the Grant Agreement) lists amongst its targets to provide "small scale grants to final beneficiaries", to "facilitate the preparation or implementation of projects relevant to the Danube Region and the EUSDR" and to "realise strategic projects of relevance for the Danube Region, as identified in the Action Plan and, more specifically, in the roadmaps of the 11 Priority Areas."

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[4] Within the Danube Implementation Facility, START was joined by the complementary initiatives TAF-DRP (Technical Assistance Facility for Danube Region Projects), EuroAccess Danube Region, and DFD (Danube Financing Dialogue), all of which are not focus of the present evaluation.

3   Evaluation questions

The evaluation pursues two separate but coherent objectives: to analyse the initiative and its achieved results, and to make recommendations for future follow-ups and adaptations of the initiative's scheme. In order to measure the level of achievement of START, the following concrete evaluation questions were posed:

- **To what degree did the START initiative reach its objectives?** In order to measure this level of achievement and thus the effectiveness of the initiative, the following predefined indicators were taken as a point of reference:
    o   Number of projects financed[5]
    o   Number of projects implemented
    o   Number of Priority Areas covered
    o   Number of EUSDR countries covered
    o   Share of projects with follow up activities planned[6]

    The initiative's effectiveness and its level of target fulfilment are analysed in Chapter 5.4 of the present evaluation.

- **To what degree was the structure of the initiative suited for the needs of project promoters in the Danube Region?** The structure of START is analysed in Chapter 5.1.

- **To what extend did the initiative reach its intended beneficiaries?** The impact of the initiative on its intended target groups was researched based on the distribution of funds in relation to the different beneficiary groups (NGOs, universities, etc.) in Chapter 5.4.

- **To what degree can the results of the initiative be considered sustainable?** The sustainability of the initiative's results was assessed by surveying the number of project proposals submitted as a result of START project activities, their success rate, and the follow-up activities planned, amongst others, as addressed in Chapter 5.5.

- **Did START contribute to the increased ownership and visibility of the EUSDR in the Danube Region?** In this context, the number of beneficiaries of the initiative was taken as a point of reference in the context of the results analysis in Chapter 5.5.

In order to allow for a more close-up evaluation of project implementation, additional concrete indicators were applied to individual projects, such as number of workshops/seminars held, etc.

The present study does *not* address the contribution of START to the EUSDR objectives or to the individual PA's roadmaps. Due to the Priority Area Coordinators' key role in the selection procedure of

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[5] Understood here as the number of projects that were originally contracted to receive financing, as opposed to the number of projects that were successfully implemented (success rate)
[6] Number of project proposals submitted as a result of START project activities and their success rate

START projects (cf. below, Chapter 5.3), the compliance with the Priority Area's targets is presupposed. The level of achievement of the individual projects can thus be considered as the initiative's contribution to the objectives of the EUSDR. The present study does also *not* cover content related output analysis of individual projects (via indicators such as 'total length of new or improved inland waterways'). Similarly, the cost efficiency of START is omitted in this evaluation.

4 Methodology

The present evaluation applies both quantitative and qualitative methods. This mixed approach ensures a more complete feedback on the initiative as a whole, and allows for the compilation of a comprehensive base for the evaluation. The two most relevant sources of information were desk research, online surveys and interviews with representatives of the main stakeholder groups.

The evaluation was carried out on two levels: the initiative as a whole was evaluated as well as the 48 individual projects.

On the level of the START initiative, the following main components of the process chain were part of the evaluation questionnaires:

(1) Overall structure: as outlined in the programming phase, including changes made during implementation

(2) Application process: The call procedure including application material

(3) Selection process: The selection of projects to receive funding, conducted with the involvement of the PAC teams and their Steering Groups

(4) Implementation: Including contracting, reporting, monitoring, communication between stakeholder groups, execution of payments and project results

In addition to these components, the success of the initiative is a central subject of the evaluation, including its overall impact, effectiveness and sustainability, as perceived by the initiative's main stakeholder groups.

Three different online questionnaires were distributed between July and October 2016:

(1) Questionnaire 1 (hereafter Q1) distributed to the EUSDR PAC teams and their Steering Groups

(2) Questionnaire 2 (Q2) distributed to START project beneficiaries (Lead Partners and Project Partners) of both calls

(3) Questionnaire 3 (Q3) distributed to the general public via links on publicly accessible websites

The questions covered the different components as applicable to the respective target group (cf. table below for details). The responses were collected anonymously, without any registration required. Only categorization within the target group was requested to facilitate statistical evaluation: Q1 addressees

were asked to affiliate themselves with either PAC team or SG, Q2 addressees whether they had participated in call 1 or call 2 as LP or PP, and Q3 included no categorization questions.

Contents of Questionnaires	Q1	Q2	Q3
Structure	x	x	
Application process		x	
Selection process	x		
Implementation of projects (contracting to reporting)		x	
Management (IB)	x	x	
Success (the initiative's contribution to the Danube Region)	x	x	x
Visibility			x
Sustainability (future projects, also experience gained)		x	

Table 1 – Contents of Questionnaires

(Q1) Q1 comprised of 19 questions for the PAC team and Steering Group members. It was sent to all PAC teams with the request to forward it to their respective Steering Groups. Compliance with this request could not be monitored, thus the number of persons that received Q1 can only be estimated at about 228. Within 30 days, 20 responses were recorded, thus the estimated response rate amounts to an estimated 8,8 %. As Q1 distinguished PAC team members from Steering Group members by means of self-assignment, it can be noted that the response rate for the first (15 of about 48 = 3,3 %) is much higher than for the latter (5 of about 180 = 2,8 %).

Limitations: For the self-assigned sub-group of SG members, the low number of responses effects a non-response bias of the recorded results. The SG members' responses are therefore not used for evaluation separately, but only collectively for the entire group 1.

(Q2) Q2 was composed of 49 questions and was distributed to all START LPs and PPs at the same time, after the beneficiaries of the 2nd call submitted their final reports and thus finalized the project implementation phase. A total of 215 beneficiaries (56 LPs and 159 PPs from both calls) were contacted via email and asked to participate. Within 14 days, 83 responses were recorded, 40 of which identified themselves as LPs, 43 as PPs. The response rate of 38,6 % was thus exceptionally high (71,4 % for LPs and 27,0 % for PPs respectively), indicating the beneficiaries' high level of cooperativeness.

Limitations: In some cases, respondents were not involved in the START project for the entire period. Respondents could therefore leave out questions at their own discretion.

(Q3) Q3 consisted of 7 questions and was published on a number of relevant websites (PA10, DSP, etc.) in order to reach the intended target group of EUSDR stakeholders *other than* PACs and SG members, as well as project promoters *other than* the START beneficiaries. Due to this form of distribution, no estimates can be made concerning the response rate. In addition to START visibility, Q3 contains a basic survey of current needs for funding in the Danube Region.[7] 20 responses were recorded.

The findings of all three questionnaires were summarized to serve as the basis for the evaluation of the initiative. The complete results are provided in Annex I, II and III. The recommendations given in Chapter 6 are derived from the findings of the questionnaires.

The evaluation on the level of individual projects by comparison of planned and successfully implemented indicators was conducted via desk research. For this purpose, the individual project's documents, specifically the final reports, were analysed with regards to a preselected list of technical indicators (e.g. no. of workshops implemented) as well as their key data (e.g. no. of partners, START funding received). As explained above, the present study does *not* cover content related output analysis of individual projects (via indicators such as 'total length of new or improved inland waterways'). Results of this project level evaluation are summarized in Chapter 5.5.

At the time the present evaluation was conducted, all projects selected within the two calls for proposals were finalized in terms of project implementation. The content analysis of the START projects was based on a comparison between planned outputs, as stated in the project descriptions (part of the grant agreements) and achieved outputs, as reported in the final content report provided after finalisation of the project. In some cases, final payments were still pending at the time the information was compiled. However, since all final funding amounts were certified, definite statements could be made regarding absorption of funds. At the same time, statements as concerning the sustainability of the impacts of the initiative – specifically the number of larger projects that were kick-started with the help of START – are limited as some resulting project proposals are still waiting to be submitted or have not received notice yet as to whether they have been successful in obtaining further funding.

5   Results of the analysis and survey

The following section contains descriptions on the technical cornerstones and activities of START to enable potential follow-ups and successors to replicate it.

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[7] These contents are not strictly speaking a part of the evaluation of START, but can be used to adapt possible follow-up initiatives. The processed results can be found in Annex III.

5.1 Structure of the initiative

The following main aspects of the START initiative can be defined and are covered in the analysis of the chapters below:

- Seed money/pre-financing
- Small scale grants
- Transnational partnerships
- Low administrative burden
- Preparatory and *main stage* actions

Additional features of the initiative included that up to 90 % of the total eligible costs could be financed within the START budget, and that no national co-financing was needed. The administrative burden was kept low by the use of unit costs.

The basic eligibility criteria were defined as follows:

- Project partners and activities located in the Danube Region[8]
- Partners from a minimum of two different EUSDR countries
- Eligible applicants are public or private organisations with legal personality
- Topic(s) addressed from at least one of the Priority Areas (PA) of the EUSDR
- Projects of public interest and with a macro-regional impact

Due to the fact that START was designed to function as a pilot initiative, a flexible approach was used during implementation and changes to the more specific application requirements, selection criteria and eligibility criteria were anticipated.

5.1.1 Seed money/pre-financing

In practical terms, the seed money principle was executed by 50 % of the grant being paid up front, upon the signing of the Grant Agreement. Another 25 % were paid after the project's midterm report had been approved, and the final balance payment was conducted after project completion. This scheme was designed to offer support tailored to project holders with limited pre-financing capacities.

This aspect of the initiative received an average grading of 2,05 ("satisfied") by PA teams and SG members (cf. figure below extracted from Q1).

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[8] EU Member States: Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia; EU Accession Countries: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro; non-EU countries: Moldova and Ukraine (part of the country located in the Danube Region).

Q1:

Please give us feedback on the following aspects of the START initiative:

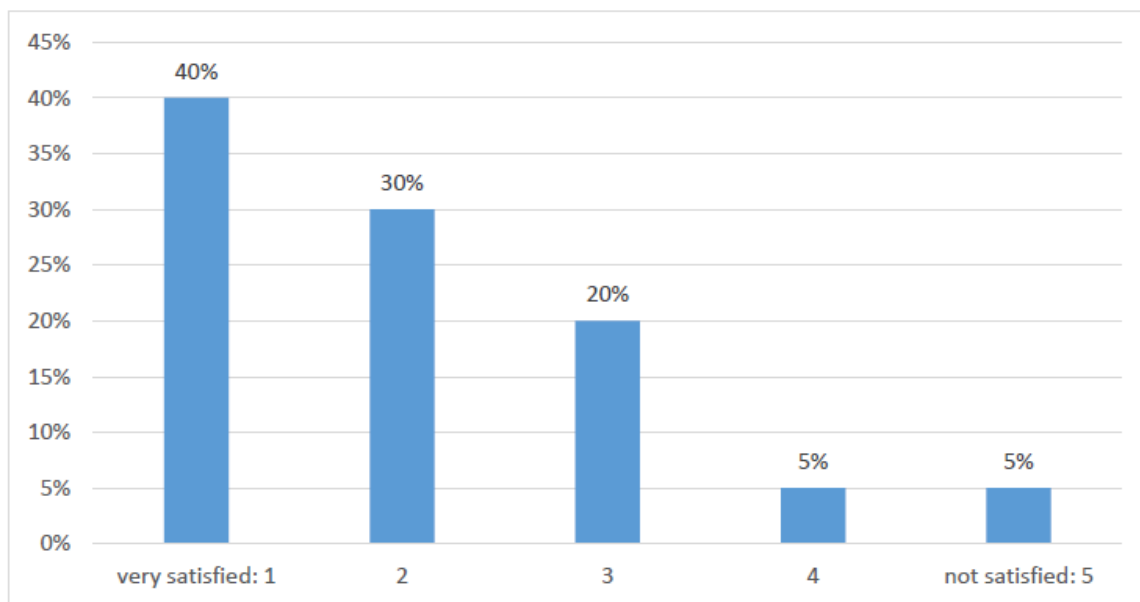## START as a seed money initiative (pre-financing):

Figure 1 (extracted from Annex I)

5.1.2 Small scale grants

For the three-year duration of the initiative, 1.350.000 € were earmarked to be distributed to the final beneficiaries. The allocation per project was originally budgeted between 10.000 and 40.000 €. In the first call, projects could apply for a maximum START grant of 40.000 €, and the average grant amount certified per project was 34.849,10 €. In the second call, the maximum START amount was lowered to 20.000 € per project, and the average grant that the project beneficiaries received amounted to 17.990,61 €. At the same time, the average total project volume for projects selected in the first call amounted to 43.217,44 €, while for projects selected in the second call the average total verified project expenses amounted to 24.244,77 €. This represents a total average EU funding of 78,3 %. For both calls jointly, the respective numbers can be found in the figure below.
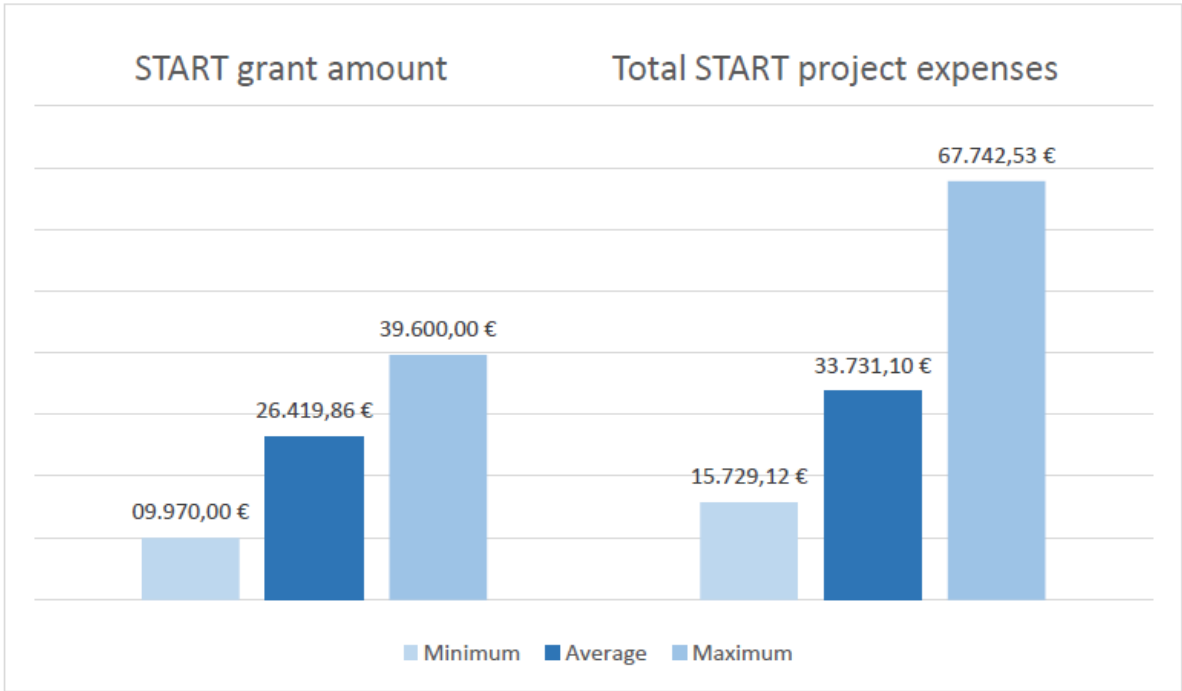
Figure 2 (extracted from Annex VI)

When asked to rate the financial scale of funding awarded via the START initiative, PAC team and SG members gave an average rating of 2,25 ("satisfied"), as can be seen in the figure below.
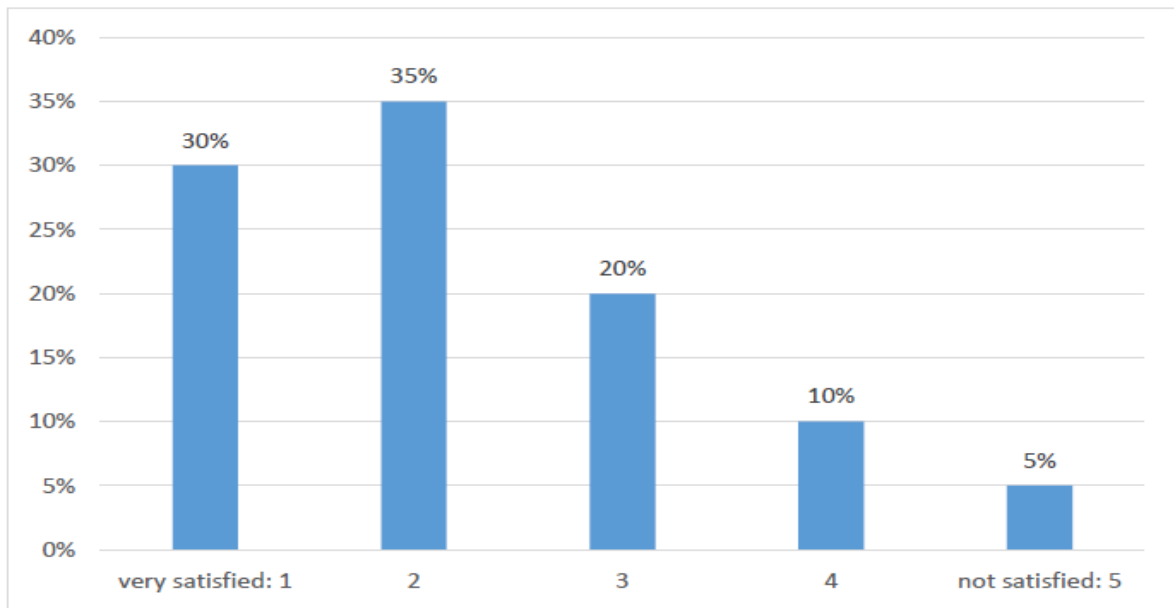
Figure 3 (extracted from Annex I)

5.1.3 Transnational partnerships

START projects were implemented by partners from at least two different Danube Region countries to ensure transnational cooperation. This feature was well received by the PAC team and SG members, as can be seen in the figure below.

START projects implemented by partners from a minimum of 2 Danube Region countries:
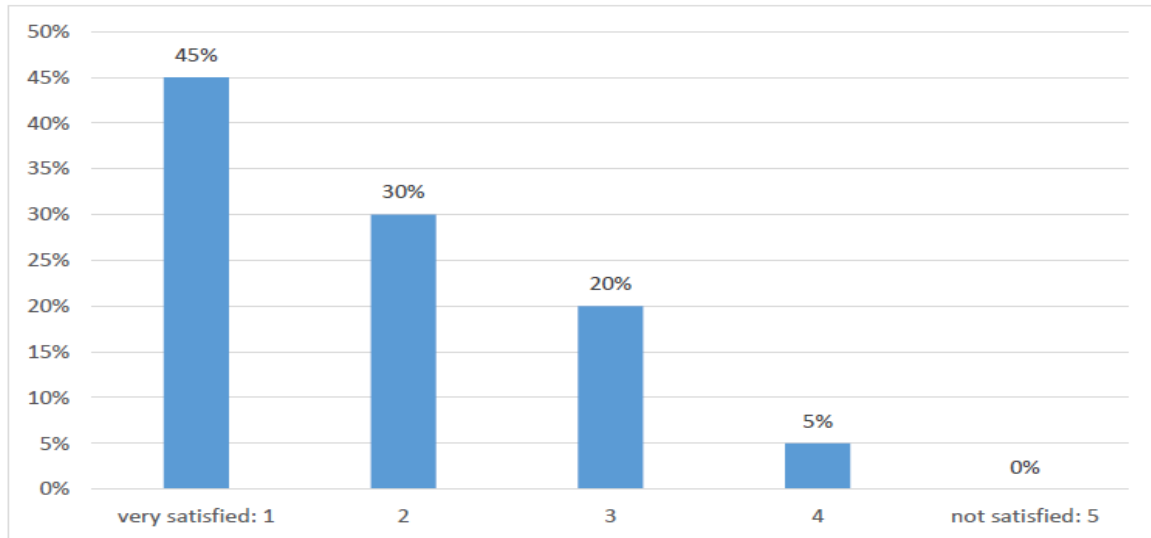
Figure 4 (extracted from Annex I)

5.1.4 Low administrative burden

In order to make such small scale grants viable, the administrative burden of the different parts of the process chain was to be kept very low. As a means to this end, a reporting system based on unit costs was employed in the reporting of personnel costs (standard hourly rates) and meeting and event costs (standardized costs based on number of participants and duration of the event, devised to include costs such as catering and room rent), whereas the reporting of travel costs and external services was based on real costs.

This approach was largely welcomed by all groups involved. The START LPs gave and average rating of 1,9 to the workload of the financial report, the PPs gave it an average rating of 1,91 (cf. results of Q2, Annex II). This also resulted in a perceived low administrative burden of the entire implementation phase, as can be seen below in Figure 5, which includes the answers of both LPs and PPs. The administrative burden of the selection process was rated as rather neutral by the PAC teams and SG members (cf. Chapter 5.3).

However, the use of unit costs in only some budget lines received negative feedback: A more uniform procedure of unit costs vs. real costs was requested by START beneficiaries, as the documentation to be delivered for travel costs was seen as disproportionate in comparison with other budget lines (cf. Annex II p. 27). The unit cost system also led to a lack of differentiation of salaries of staff with different levels of qualification, and to what was perceived as discriminatory differences in payments of work hours between staff members located in different countries (ibid.).

LPs and PPs:

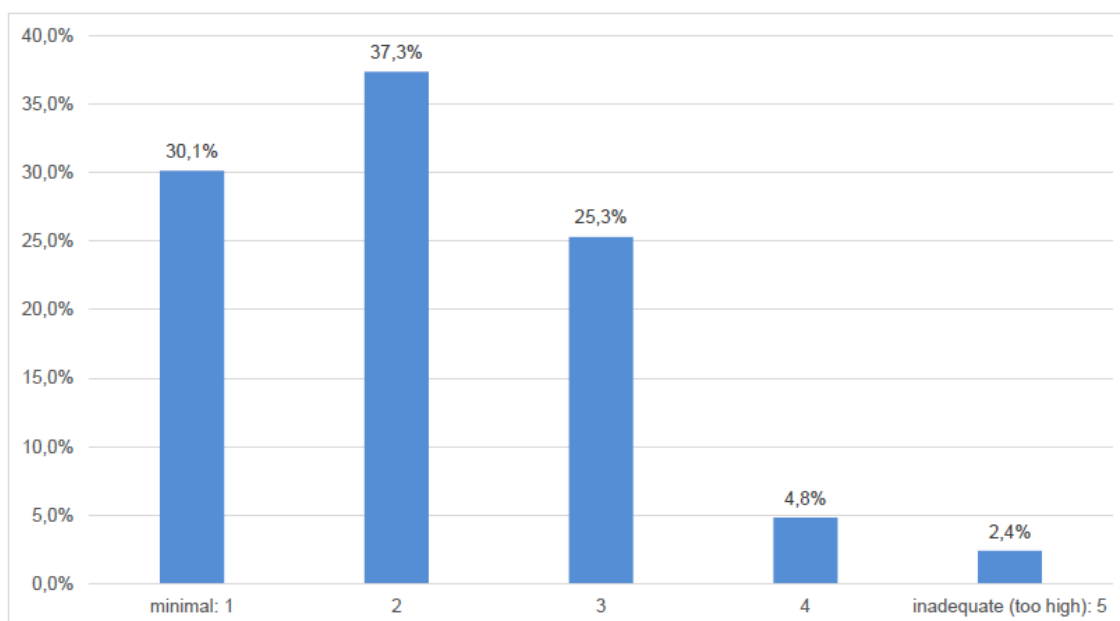**The administrative burden during the implementation phase was...**

Figure 5 (extracted from Annex II)

5.1.5 Preparatory and *main-stage* actions

As regards the scope of project activities, both project development activities and project implementation activities could be financed. Two different types of projects were foreseen: A specific part of a larger project, i.e. the preparation phase of a project or the implementation of specific work packages (*type A* projects) and the implementation of a small project entirely within the framework of START (in the START Grant Agreement 2013, this scope is referred to as 'main stage actions', *type B* projects). The first kind was anticipated as part of a main function of the initiative 'to kick-start project development' in order to facilitate the financing of preparation phases of future projects (cf. Figure 6).

Both of these types of actions were equally needed, as can be seen when looking at the numbers of actually implemented projects: exactly half (24 projects) labelled themselves as *type A* projects, the other half as *type B* projects.[9] This aspect of the START initiative of offering financing opportunities for both preparatory and main stage actions can thus be assessed as well suited to the actual needs of project promoters in the Danube Region.

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[9] In the selection procedure, a balanced distribution of funds between these two types of projects was not targeted.
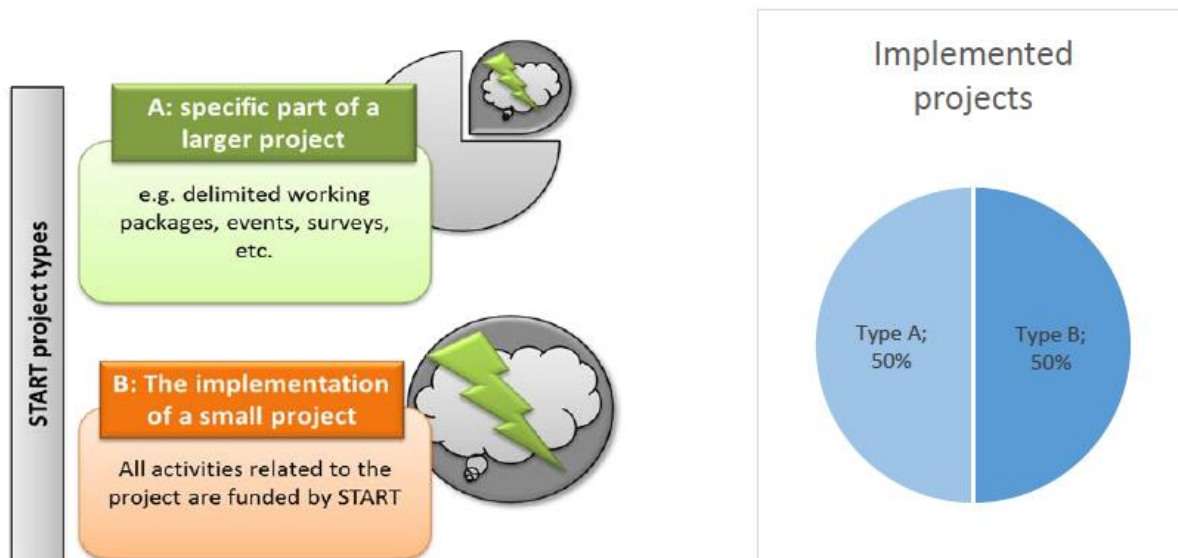
Figure 6 (extracted from Annex VI)

5.2 Analysis of the application process

Two open calls for proposals were publicised via the means of communication of the PAs (websites, mailings etc.). All submitted applications were first formally checked for completeness and correctness by the IB, before being forwarded to the respective PACs for content assessment with the Steering Groups. Hence, only formally correct applications were assessed by the PACs.[10] The first call resulted in 871 applications submitted, 651 of which were considered formally correct. 25 projects were selected for funding (1 of which was stopped during implementation), thus resulting in an exceptionally low success rate of < 4 %.

This high number of applications exceeded the anticipated interest in the initiative, and posed a higher than expected burden on some PAC teams and their Steering Group members during the selection process (e.g. over 200 applications in the 1st call within PA03). For the second call, it was thus necessary to implement thematic restrictions in some PAs in order to get less, but better matched applications.

Concretely, in PA02, PA03, PA04, PA05, PA09 and PA10 such thematic restrictions were executed, and in PA1a and PA11, priorities for selection by PAs were communicated beforehand to the same end. This approach was successful: in the 2nd call, 205 applications were received, 164 of which were assessed as formally correct, out of which 24 received funding, resulting in a more advantageous success rate of 14,6 % (cf. figure below).

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[10] In the following, 'applications' refers to formally correct applications, unless otherwise specified.

## Formally correct applications
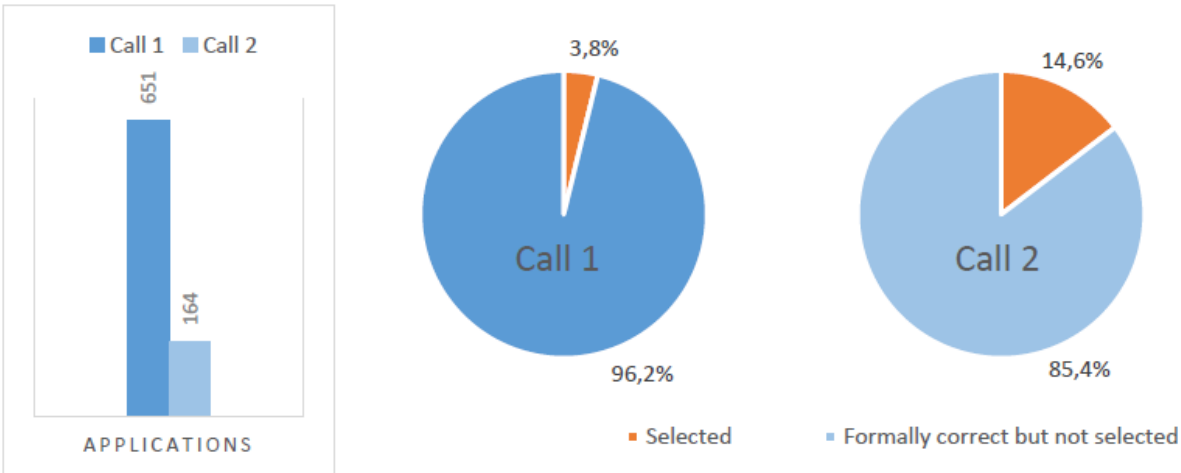
Figure 7 (extracted from Annex VI)

In both calls, the applications were very unevenly distributed within the various PAs: PA03 (Culture and tourism) received the highest number of applications in both calls (247 in total), PA1a (total 14) and PA1b (total 15) received the least. This general tendency could be levelled – at least to a certain degree – in the second call due to the above mentioned thematic restrictions (cf. Annex VI, p.4).

When asked to name improvements between the first and second call for proposals, 64,7 % of the respondents of group one listed "better quality of applications" (cf. figure below). This perceived improved "quality" can largely be attributed to the thematic restrictions that were in place for the second call.

If there were any improvements between the first and second call for proposals: What were the improvements? *
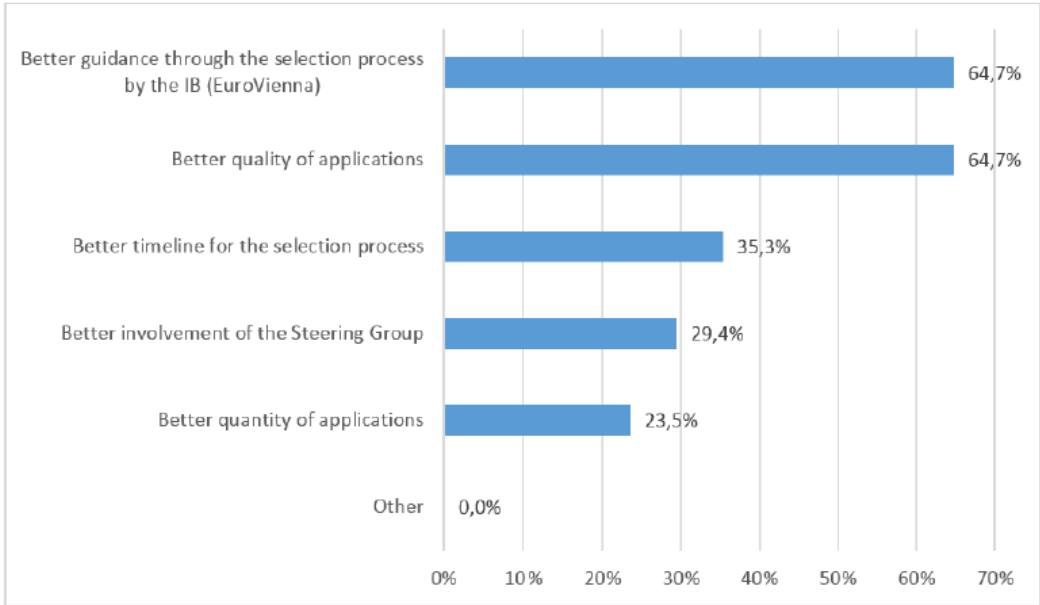
* Multiple answers possible.

Figure 8 (extracted from Annex I)

Thus, the number of applications varied greatly, while the number of projects funded per PA (cumulative for both calls) was designed to be even: In all PAs, a total of 4 projects were financed, except for PA04, where only 3 projects were implemented as one project was stopped during implementation, and PA09, where an additional project was financed in the first call, thus resulting in a total of 5 projects. The specific success rates within the PAs consequently vary between 0,02 % (PA03) and 29 % (PA1a).

Number of funded projects per PA

PA	Number of funded projects
PA01a Mobility - Waterways	4
PA01b Mobility - Rail - Road - Air	4
PA02 Energy	4
PA03 Culture & tourism	4
PA04 Water quality	3
PA05 Environmental Risks	4
PA06 Biodiversity, landscapes	4
PA07 Knowledge Society	4
PA08 Competitiveness	4
PA09 People & Skills	5
PA10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation	4
PA11 Security	4

Figure 9 (extracted from Annex VI)

The LPs rated the overall workload during the application phase with an average of 1,77; the majority of respondents thus labelled it as "very adequate" (cf. Annex II p.11). The involvement of PPs during the application was strong: Only 2,3 % of the PPs state that they were not involved at all in this phase (cf. ibid. p.4).

5.3   Analysis of the selection process

The selection process of project applications was carried out in three stages: A first check of formal criteria was conducted by the IB, leading to the exclusion of formally incorrect applications. A second check of content criteria was carried out by the PACs and their Steering Groups, who ranked all formally correct applications according to criteria such as the relevance of the proposed project for the EUSDR, for the PA, the quality of the partnership and the overall quality of application.

As a third step, a final plausibility assessment of the highest ranked proposals was made by the IB. At this stage, considerations on geographic and thematic balance were included in the final selection, with the aim of supporting participation from all Danube Region countries and all Priority Areas in the START initiative (cf. figure below).
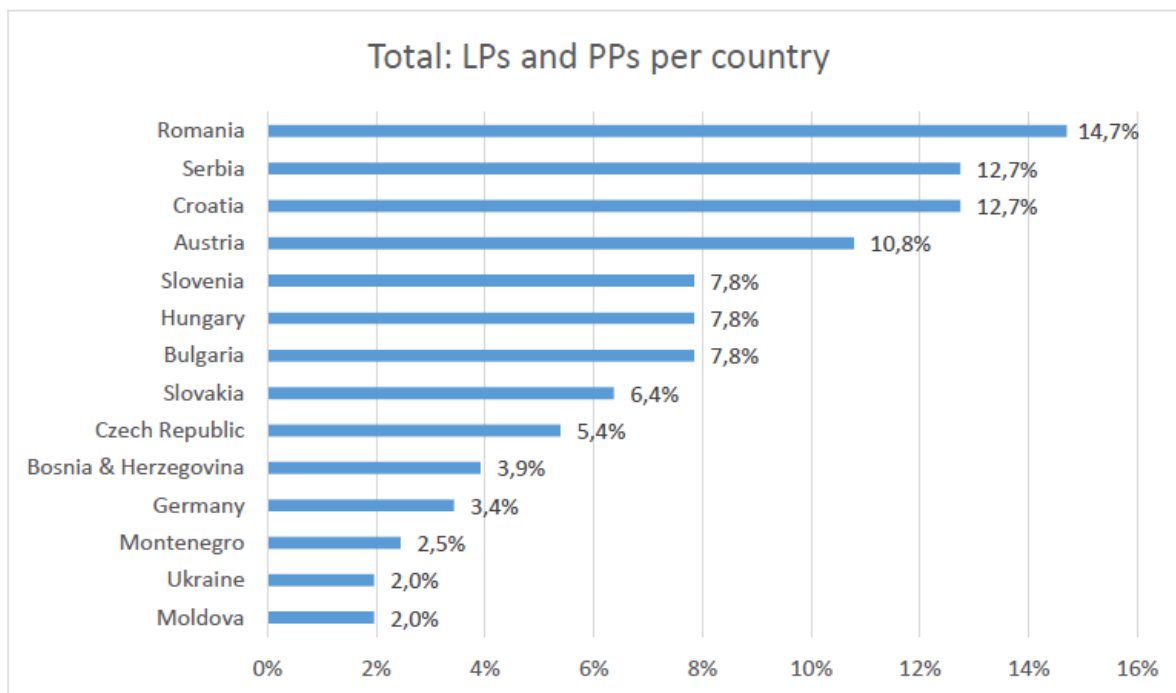
Total: LPs and PPs per country

Country	Percentage
Romania	14,7%
Serbia	12,7%
Croatia	12,7%
Austria	10,8%
Slovenia	7,8%
Hungary	7,8%
Bulgaria	7,8%
Slovakia	6,4%
Czech Republic	5,4%
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3,9%
Germany	3,4%
Montenegro	2,5%
Ukraine	2,0%
Moldova	2,0%

Figure 10 (extracted from Annex VI)

The feedback delivered by PAC teams and their Steering Groups on the described selection process was overall good. The administrative burden was considered 'rather appropriate' or 'neutral' by a majority of respondents, with similar results for the number of applications to be reviewed (cf. figure below and Annex I, p.5). The time for the selection process as well as the application material and the guidelines for the selection process provided by the IB were judged to be 'very appropriate' or 'appropriate' by close to 75 % of the questioned group (cf. ibid. 5ff.).

How was the administrative burden of the selection process?

Rating	Percentage
very appropriate: 1	20%
2	30%
3	35%
4	15%
not appropriate: 5	0%
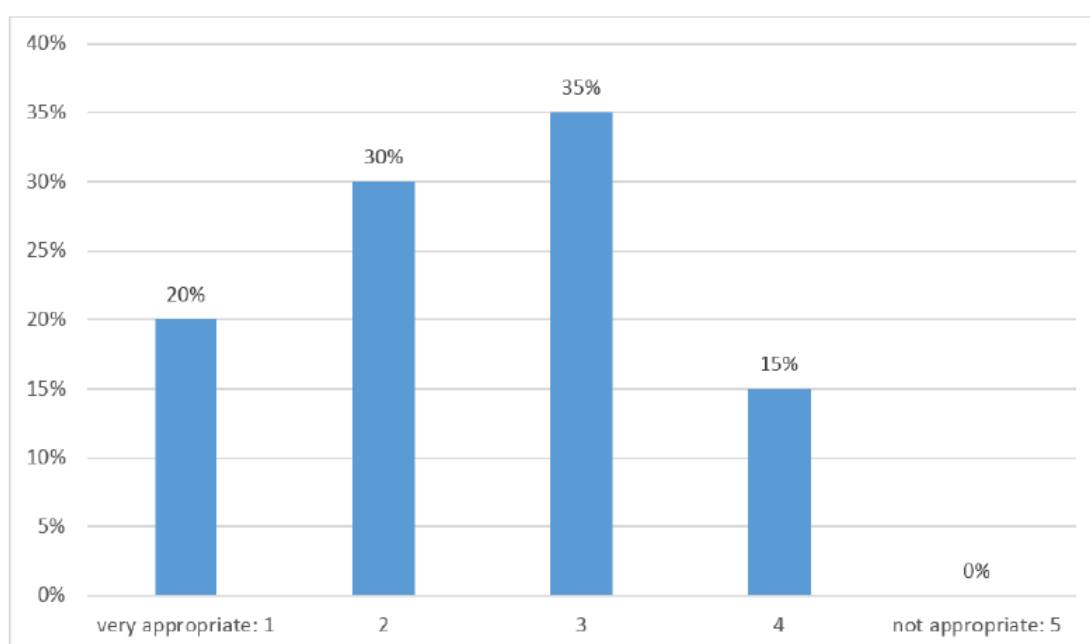
Figure 11 (extracted from Annex I)

85 % perceived that there were improvements implemented between the 1st and 2nd call for proposals. These improvements specifically included better quality of applications (possibly because of a restricted thematic focus that could be defined by the PAs beforehand) and a better guidance through the selection process by the IB (likely because lessons learned in the first call could be used to improve the material), each of which was named by 65 % of respondents. A smaller, but still considerable percentage listed a better timeline of the selection process (35 %), better involvement of the Steering Group (29 %) and better quantity of applications (24 %).

5.4 Impact and effectiveness evaluation

The impact evaluation of START focusses on the distribution of funds to the intended target groups. Funding was made available and spent in all 14 countries of the Danube Region. In total, the START fund distributed 1.268.153,13 € to final beneficiaries (cf. table below).

Total START budget	START grant amount	Percentage
Total START amount available	1.350.000,00 €	100,00%
Total START amount contracted	1.318.050,00 €	97,63%
Total START amount certified	1.268.153,13 €	96,21%

Table 2 – Total START budget (extracted from Annex VI)

START beneficiaries (including both LPs and PPs) were predominantly NGOs, followed by universities and research institutions (cf. figure below).
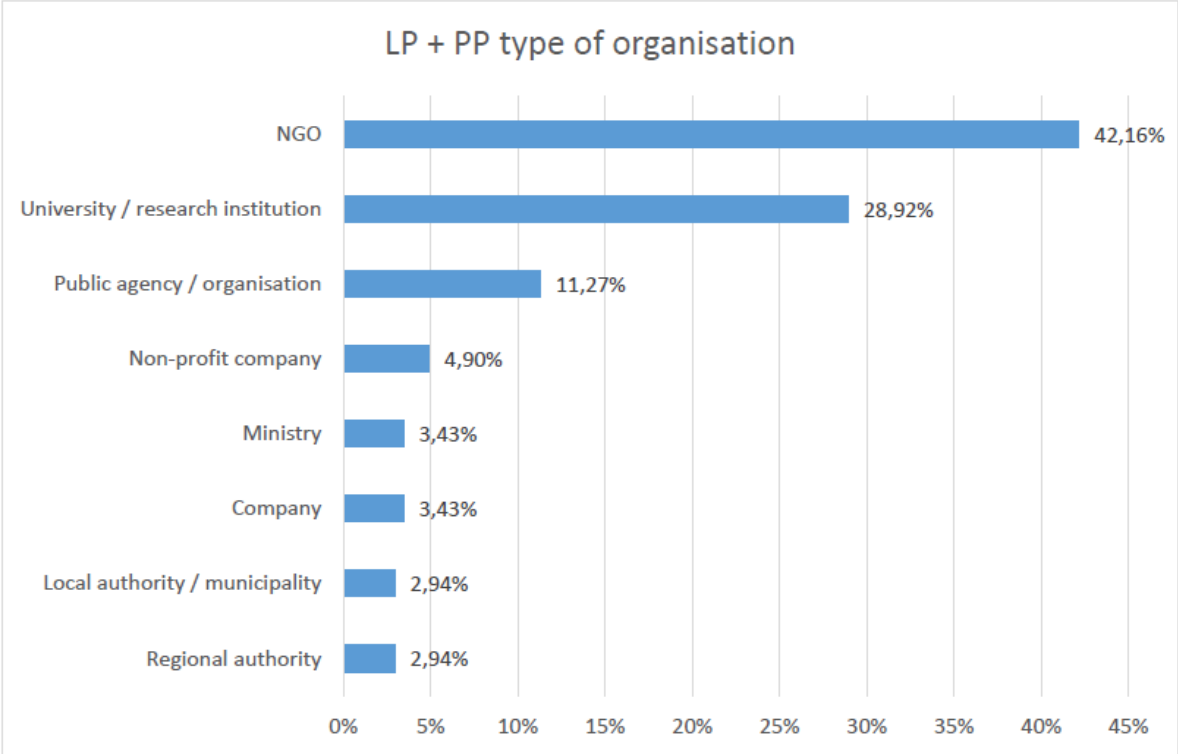
Figure 12 (extracted from Annex VI)

A total of 204 beneficiaries received funding via the START initiative. START was targeted (amongst others) at beneficiaries with little or no experience, and in fact, a considerable minority (22,9 %) of the beneficiaries had no prior experience at all with EU funded projects before START (cf. figure below).

Did you have prior experience with EU funded projects before START?
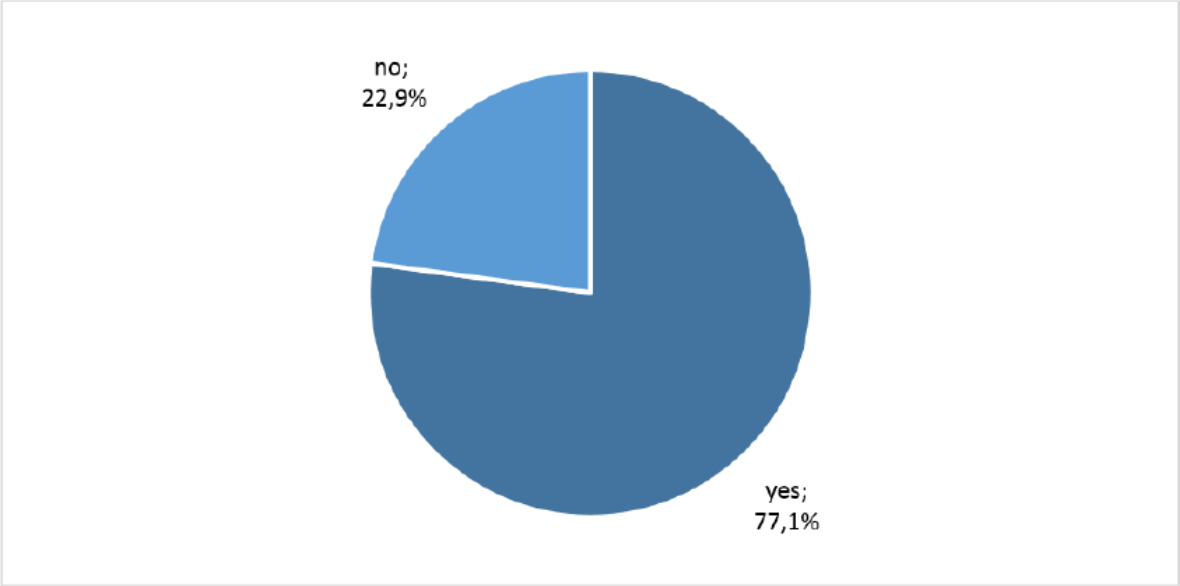
Figure 13 (extracted from Annex II)

The effectiveness of the initiative is assessed by its overall level of achievement and by the key stakeholders' assessment of the initiative's success as a contribution to the Danube Region. The level of achievement of START is measured by the achievements of its predefined indicators:

No of projects financed	**49**
No of projects implemented	**48**
No of PAs covered	**11 out of 11**
No of EUSDR countries covered	**14 out of 14**
Share of projects with follow-up activities planned	**92,8 %**

Table 3 – START indicators

Out of 49 projects that were to be financed by START, 48 were implemented successfully.[11] One project was terminated by decision of the project partnership due to internal problems. This equals a success rate of 98,0 %.

Thematically, all PAs were covered, as was shown above in Figure 9. Equally, beneficiaries from all Danube Region countries were supported, as was shown in Figure 10. The geographic distribution of funding demonstrates that accession countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia) and third countries (Moldova and Ukraine) are comparatively less represented, with the exception of Serbia. Especially Ukraine and Moldova are comparatively underrepresented with only four beneficiaries each.

The number of follow-up activities is measured by the share of respondents who expressed their intentions to submit proposals for further funding in Q2 (cf. Chapter 5.5). In this definition, some follow-up activities such as conferences which were kick-started and are to be held yearly or the establishment of lasting partnerships whose activities are to be funded by other means are not included – the actual number of follow-up actions on the individual projects' level can thus be assumed to be even higher.

The overall assessment of the initiative's success is favourable, as can be seen in the figure below.

Q1 – Q3: How would you rate the success of the START initiative as a contribution to the Danube Region?
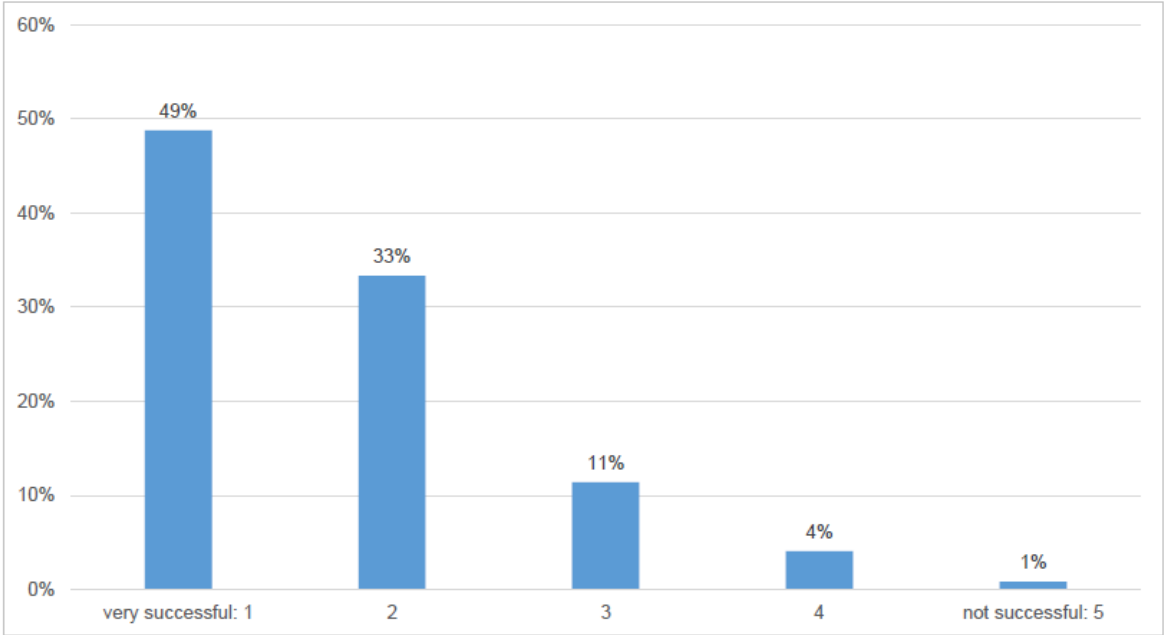
Figure 14 (extracted from Annexes I – III)

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[11] Successful project implementation is defined here as the achievement of min. 50 % of the project targets.

5.5 Results and sustainability evaluation

A complete list of all 48 implemented START projects can be found in Annex V. Within these projects, the kind of activities financed varied greatly. The following details regarding project results can therefore only be exemplary.

The 33 START projects which hosted workshops and seminars for external participants as a part of their project activities held a joint 104 workshops or seminars on their respective topics. Another 18 projects hosted larger events, such as international conferences. Another project activity which was strongly represented was the compiling of scientific studies for publication: 38 of the 48 START projects delivered studies as a project output.

The preparation of project proposals to be submitted for further funding in the various available funding programmes was a central part of many START projects' activities. Out of the 48 implemented projects, 24 defined themselves as *type A* projects in the application forms, thereby clearly stating their intention to implement a specific part of a larger project within the framework of START. However, not in all cases the preparation of proposals for further funding was part of the intended outputs. 14 of the *type A* projects clearly stated their intention to develop and submit further proposals, the majority expressed their specific interest in the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP), others included Erasmus+, other Interreg programmes, Horizon 2020, ISF and national programmes.

The figure below lists both past and planned submissions of proposals to different funding programmes at the time Q2 was open for responses (September 2016).

All past and planned submissions of proposals

DTP	24
Erasmus+	10
Other Interreg: CBC, IPA, ENI	6
Horizon	4
National funding programmes	3
Internal Security Fund	1
EuropeAid	1
UNESCO	1
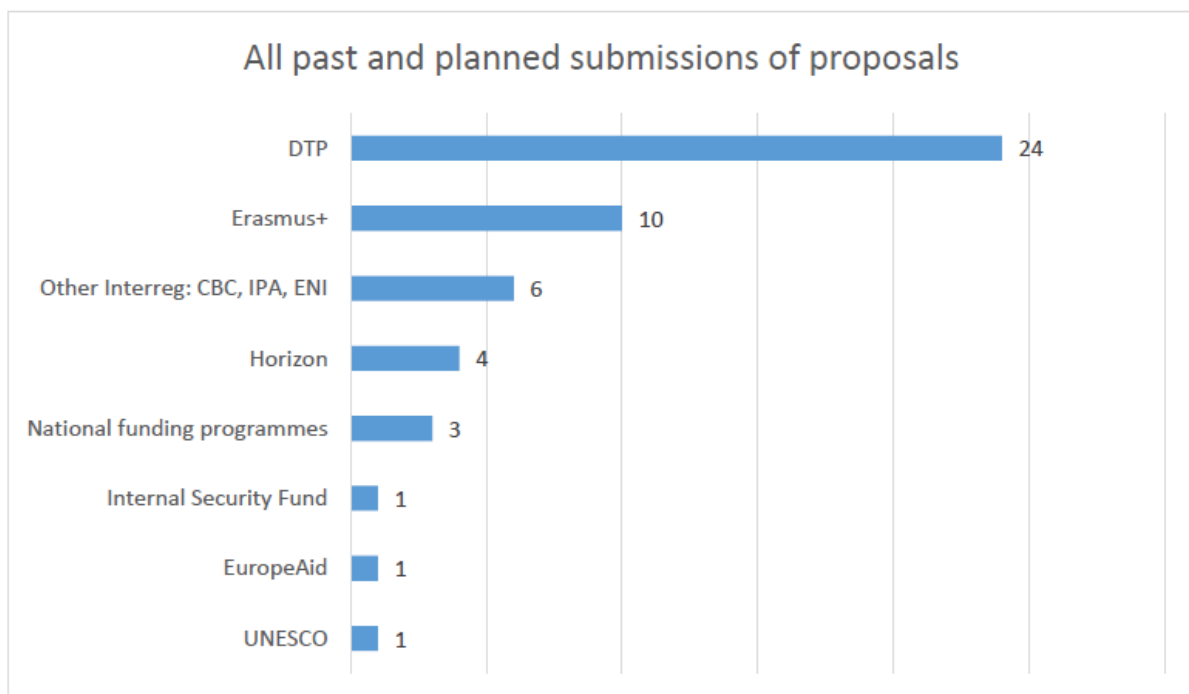
Figure 15 (extracted from Annex II)

Out of the projects that categorized themselves as *type B*, 6 stated their intention to submit subsequent proposals, predominantly to other funding programmes than DTP. Nonetheless, DTP occupies an overall dominant role in the planned follow-up activities of the various START projects: 13 START follow-up projects were submitted in the first call for proposals of DTP, and another 11 projects expressed their intention to submit proposals in the second call in their final reports (cf. figure below).
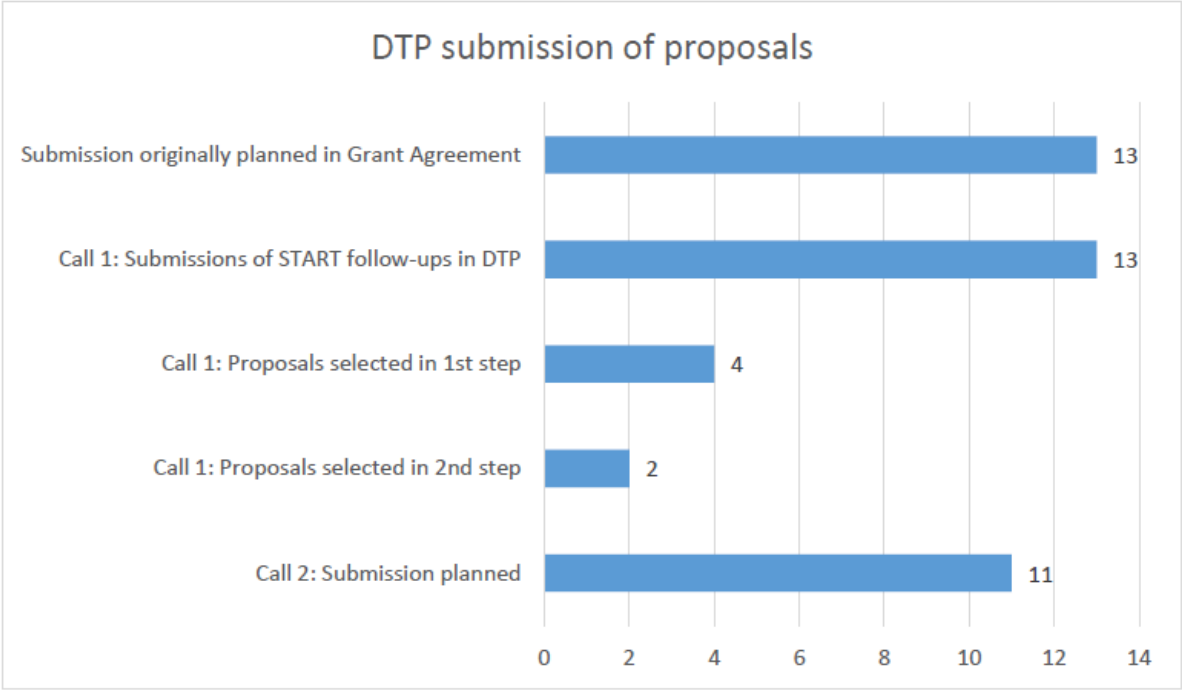
Figure 16 (extracted from Annex II)

Interestingly, the total proportion of START beneficiaries who submitted or were – at the time the evaluation was devised – planning to submit project proposals as a result of the START project activities thus seems to be rather detached from the original self-categorization in *type A* and B projects: More than 90 % of the respondents of Q2 stated that they had originally planned further submissions of proposals for funding, and almost half had already done so, another 44,6 % of the respondents were still planning to do so in the future (cf. figure below).

Did you submit a project proposal as a result of your START project activities?

not yet, but planned in the future; 44,6%

yes; 48,2%

no; 7,2%
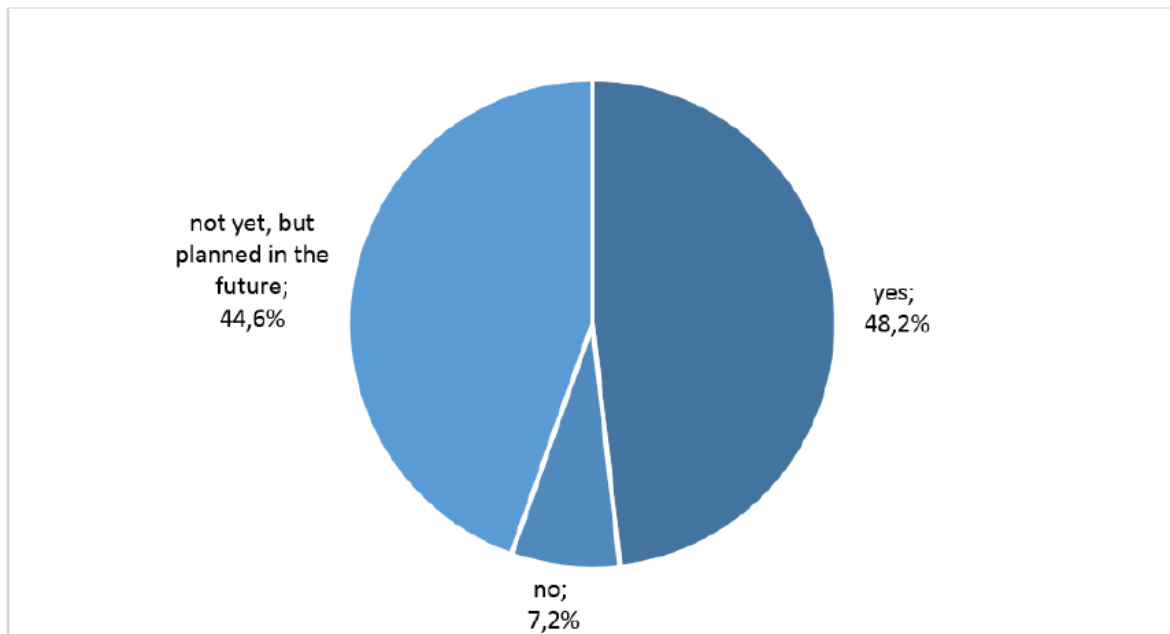
Figure 17 (extracted from Annex II)

Lastly, the experience gained by the beneficiaries through the implementation of their START projects can serve as a valuable indicator of the initiative's sustainability. An overwhelming 94 % of the respondents considers the experience gained as a valuable asset for future EU funded projects (cf. figure below).

Do you consider the experience you gained with START valuable for your future EU funded projects?

rather no; 6%

rather yes; 94%
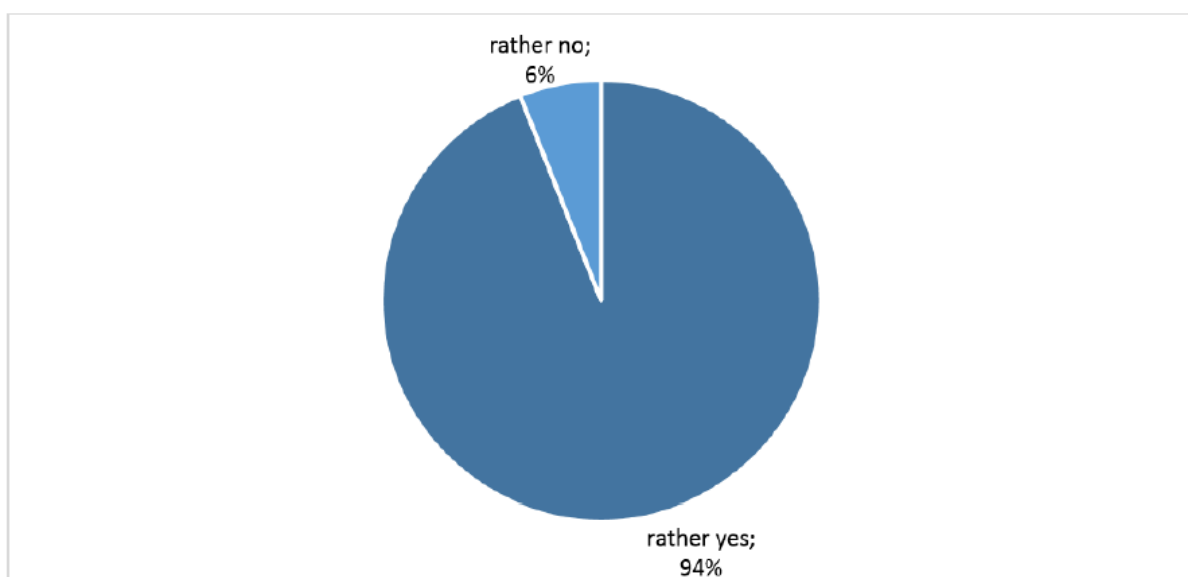
Figure 18 (extracted from Annex II)

6 Conclusions and stakeholders´ recommendations

In the following, only the main recommendations are listed. Other recommendations can be found in the results of the feedback collected via the questionnaires (Annex I – III).

The evaluation of the START initiative shows its high level of achievement. All major components of the process chain received favourable ratings, thus showing the suitability of the initiative to the needs of the Danube Region as perceived by the key stakeholders.

> All major components of the START initiative should be replicated in possible follow-up activities, as stakeholder feedback shows that the main features were well suited to the needs and the demand to be met is still high.

Some project proposals were submitted under what was perceived by the PAC teams as the wrong PA. This led to problems in the timeline of the selection process, as 'mismatched' proposals had to be forwarded and then belatedly rated by a different PA. This rating and selection system did not offer the opportunity to rate and consequently fund projects that targeted more than one PA. Such projects could however provide an added value to the EUSDR and should thus be an additional focus of any future follow-up initiative.

> Applications should not be limited to one PA only. Given the nature of the EUSDR, a more interconnected, integrated approach would be beneficial (cf. amongst others EC SEC 2010 p.3). Project selection should be conducted by two or more PAs cooperatively to ensure alignment with more than one of the Strategy's targets.

The financial scale of funding awarded to an individual project was considered overall adequate by the stakeholder groups. However, the comparatively equal administrative burden of very small projects (<20.000 €) in comparison to slightly larger projects makes for a less efficient project implementation.

> The financial scale of projects should be adapted to improve efficiency. A minimum budget of 15.000 € per partner could be considered a lower threshold to make participation in a project viable from an administrative point of view (cf. Annex IV).

Open, thematically unrestricted calls can lead to overwhelming numbers of applications, specifically in some PAs. These applications are often mismatched with the actual specific targets laid out by the PA.

> Thematic restrictions can be used to reach more targeted project applications and avoid an unnecessarily high workload during the selection process and a high frustration rate among applicants.

Conclusively, it can be said that the initiative START was very well suited for the needs in the Danube Region. Its generally high level of achievement, the high number of applications received and the resulting competitive pressure show that follow-up is needed.

References

European Commission documents:

EC C (2013): European Commission: Commission decision concerning the adoption of a financing decision and work programme for 2013 for the implementation of the Preparatory action titled "Definition of governance model for the European Union Danube region - better and effective coordination" to be financed under budget line 13 03 29 and for the implementation of the Preparatory action titled "Towards a common regional identity, reconciliation of nations and economic and social cooperation including a Pan-European Expertise and Excellence Platform in the Danube macro-region" to be financed under budget line 13 03 35 – 27.09.2013 - C (2013) 6180 final.

EC COM (2010): COM(2010) 715. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - European Union Strategy for the Danube Region. 08/12/2010.

EC SEC (2010): SEC(2010) 1489. Commission Staff Working Document. Action Plan. Accompanying document to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - European Union Strategy for the Danube Region [COM(2010) 715]. 08/12/2010.

Other references:

List of EUSDR targets (2016): Version last validated on 23.05.2016. http://www.danube-region.eu/attachments/article/616574/List%20of%20EUSDR%20targets_FIN.docx.pdf [accessed on 09.12.2016]

Metis study (2011): Final Report: Analysis of needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). http://www.danube-region.eu/images/olddocs/FinalReport_09_01_2012.pdf [accessed on 09.12.2016]

Scriven, Michael (1991): Evaluation Thesaurus. Fourth Edition. SAGE Publications: Newbury Park, London, New Delhi.

START Grant Agreement (2013): Grant Agreement 2013CE160AT130 – START DANUBE REGION PROJECT FUND. Unpublished.

List of annexes

Annex I: Questionnaire I PACs and Steering Group members – summary of responses

Annex II: Questionnaire II START project beneficiaries (LPs and PPs) – summary of responses

Annex III: Questionnaire III other stakeholders/public – summary of responses

Annex IV: Interview with Gudrun Pabst, START Implementing Body

Annex V: Summary of selected START projects

Annex VI: Statistical data of START

START Evaluation
Annex I

Questionnaire 1 (Q1)

PAC team and SG members

Target group:	PAC team and SG members
Contents:	Selection process, START initiative structure
Distribution:	Online questionnaire sent via email to all 12 PAC teams with the request to forward it to their respective SGs
Survey period:	18.07.2016 – 16.08.2016
Responses:	20 (response rate: approx. 8.5%)

Content

General question:

Are you part of the PAC team or a Steering Group member?

Steering Group
member;
25%
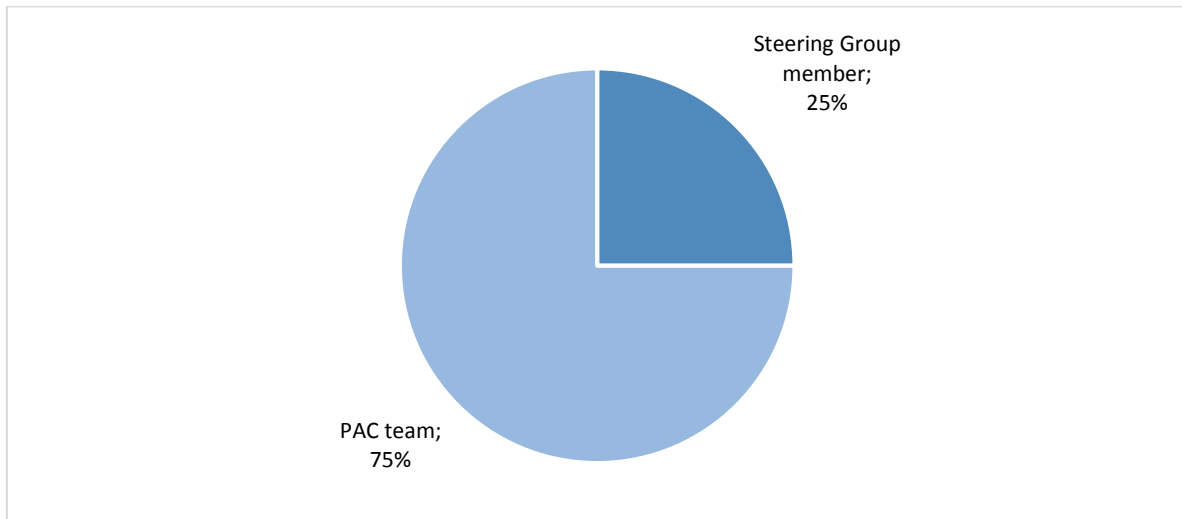
PAC team;
75%

For PAC team members:

How was the information flow between the IB (EuroVienna) and the PAC team?

66,7%

13,3%   13,3%

6,7%

0,0%

| very good: 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | bad: 5 |
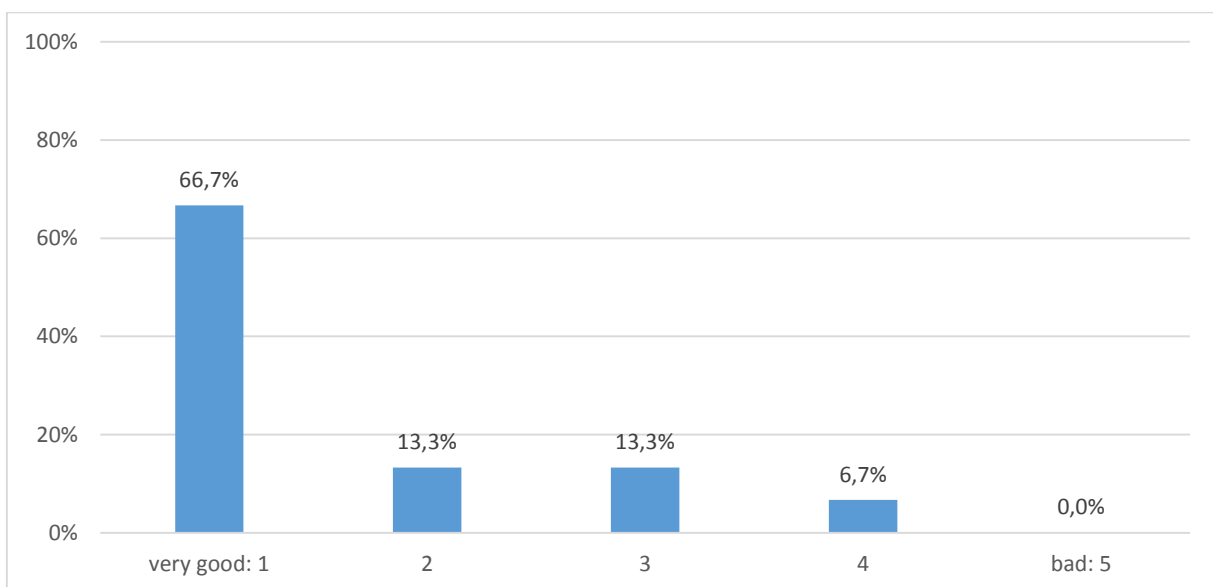
For Steering Group members:

How was the involvement of the Steering Group in the selection process?
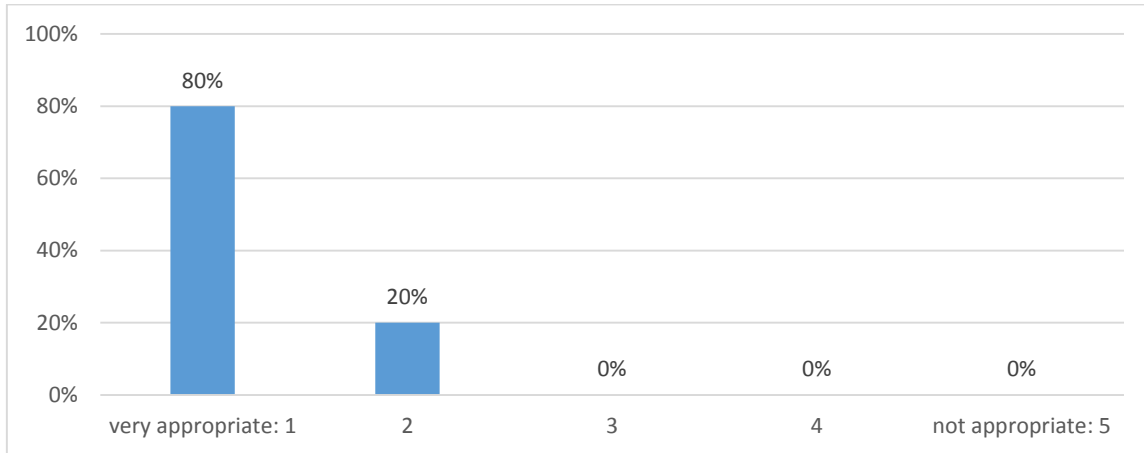
Please evaluate the selection process:

How was the administrative burden of the selection process?
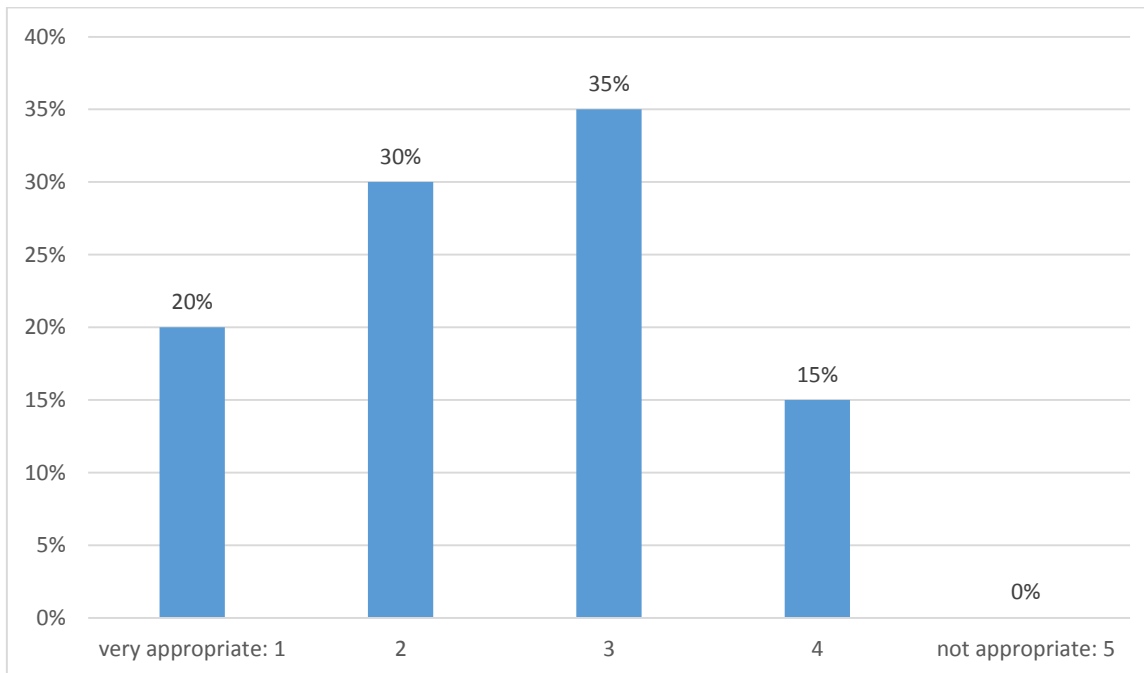
How was the number of applications to be reviewed?
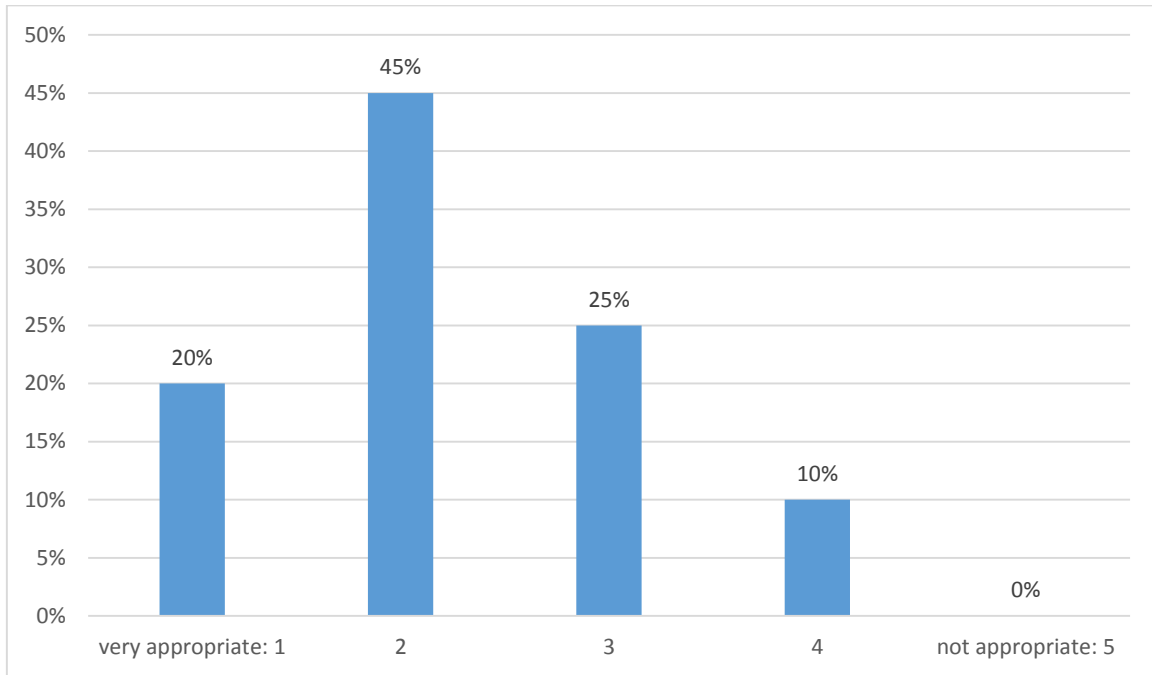
How was the amount of time scheduled for the selection process?
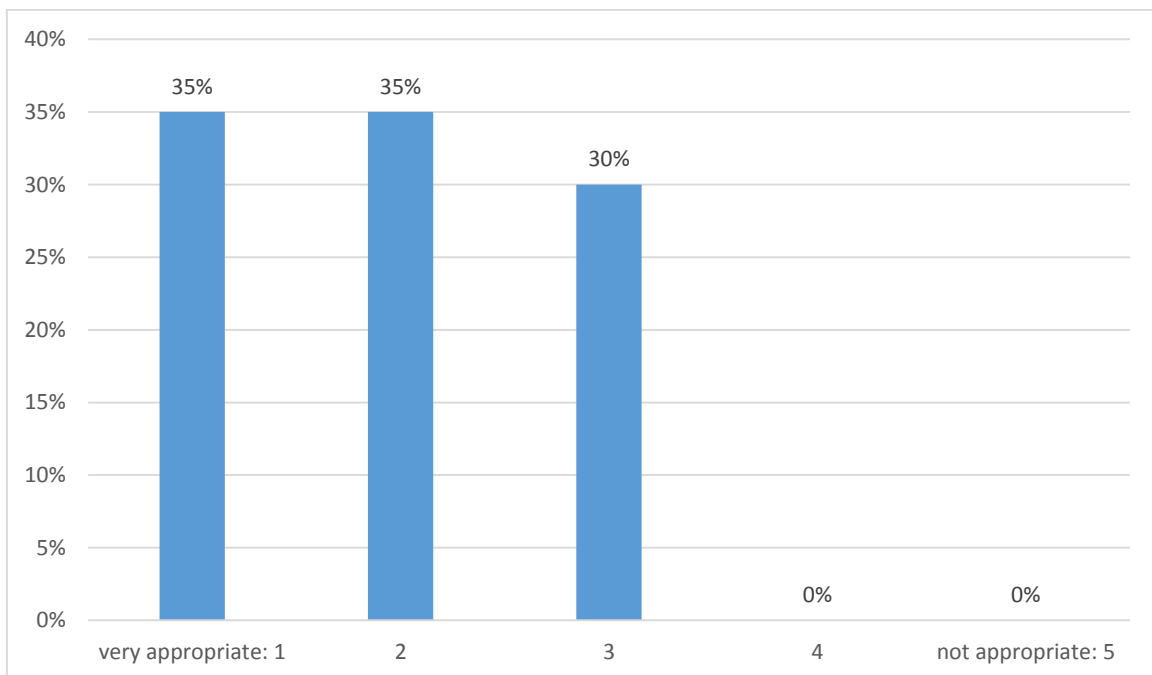
How was the quality of application material (forms, etc.)?

(Bar chart: very good: 1 = 35%, 2 = 45%, 3 = 20%, 4 = 0%, bad: 5 = 0%)
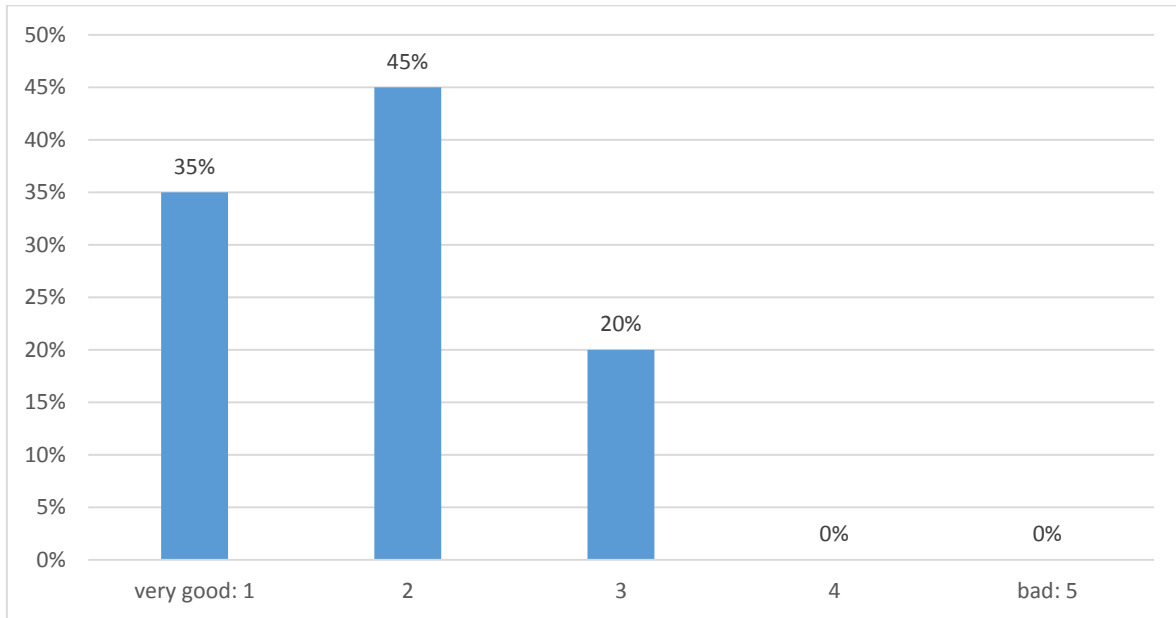
How was the overall quality of applications?

(Bar chart: overall very good: 1 = 20%, 2 = 25%, 3 = 45%, 4 = 10%, overall bad: 5 = 0%)
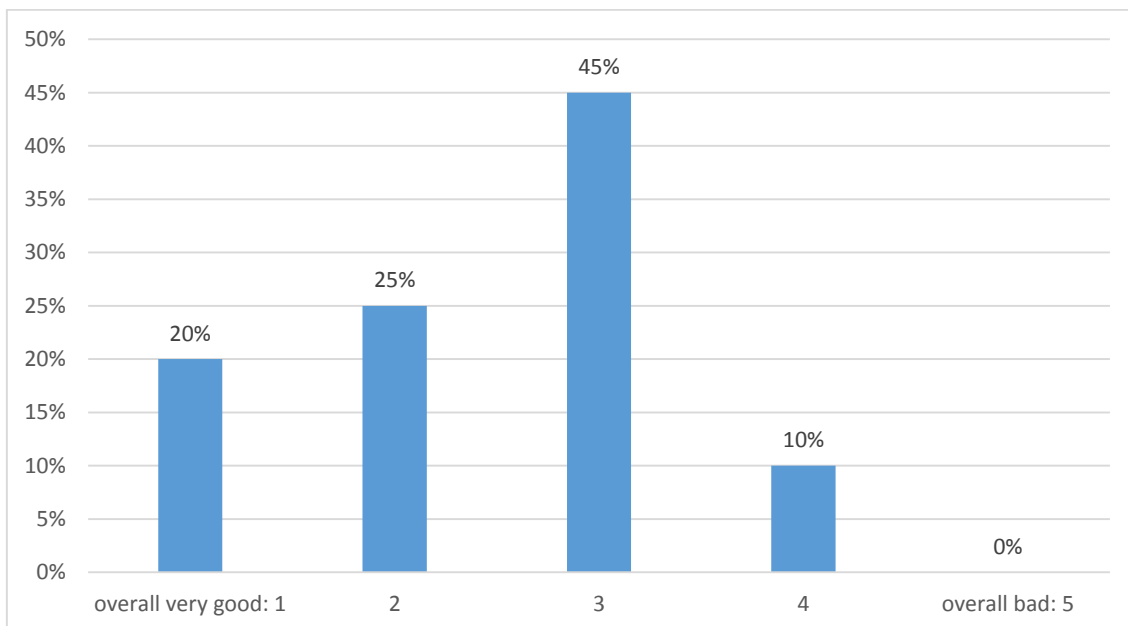
How were the guidelines for the selection process?
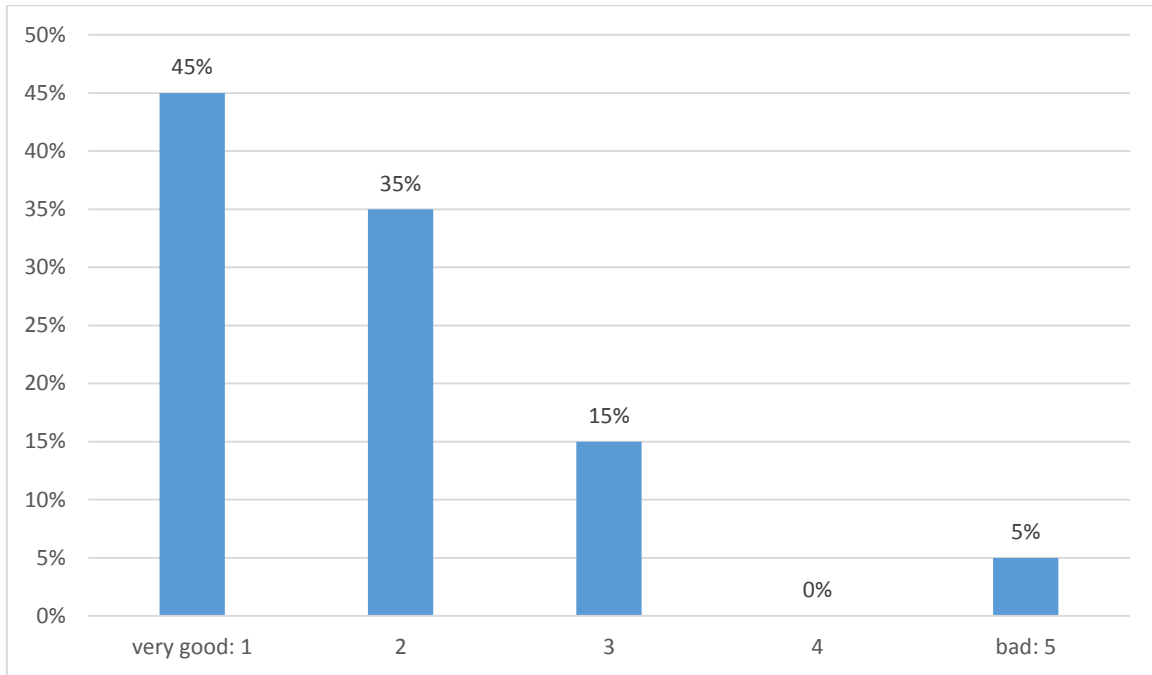
Were there improvements between the 1st and the 2nd call for proposals?
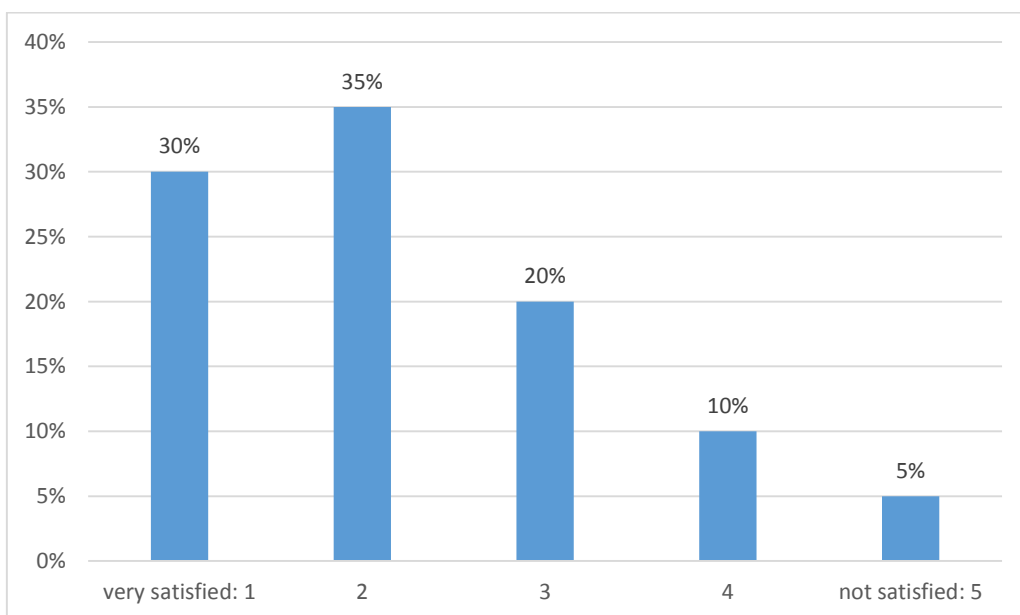

no;
15%

yes;
85%

If yes: What were the improvements?*

Category	Percentage
Better guidance through the selection process by the IB (EuroVienna)	64,7%
Better quality of applications	64,7%
Better timeline for the selection process	35,3%
Better involvement of the Steering Group	29,4%
Better quantity of applications	23,5%
Other	0,0%
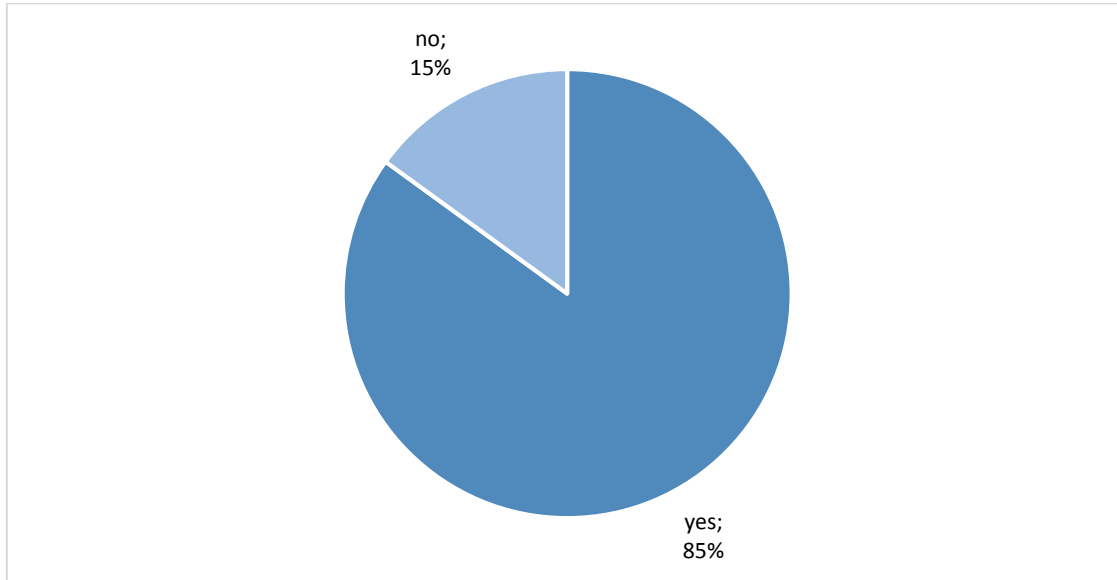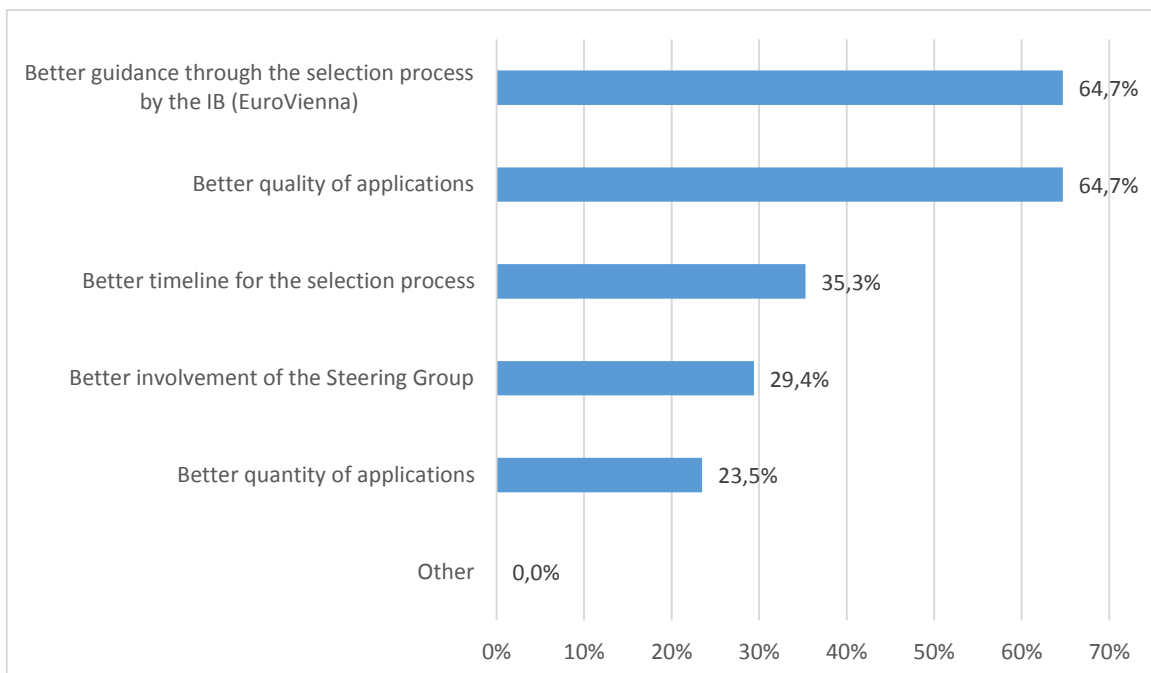
* Multiple answers possible.

Please give us feedback on the following aspects of the START initiative:

START as a seed money initiative (pre-financing):
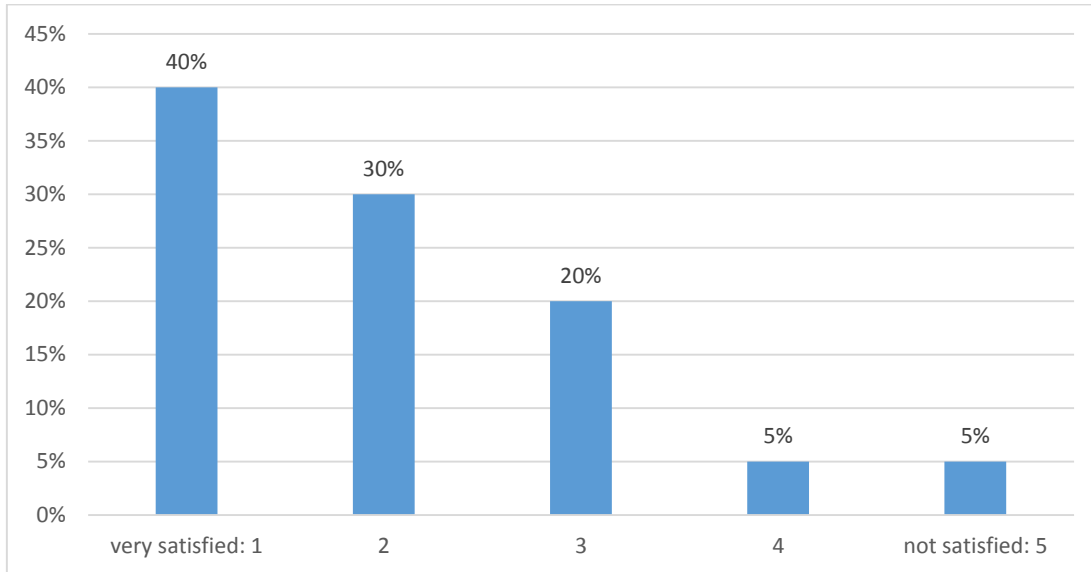
START as a financing tool for small scale projects (max. 20.000/40.000,- respectively):
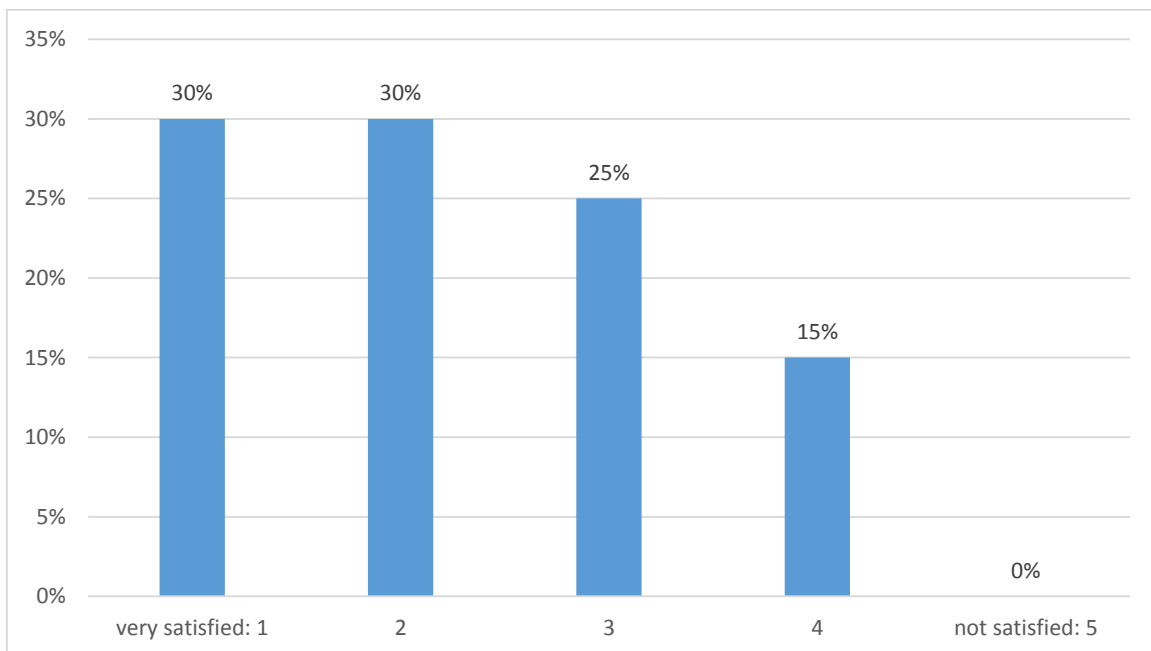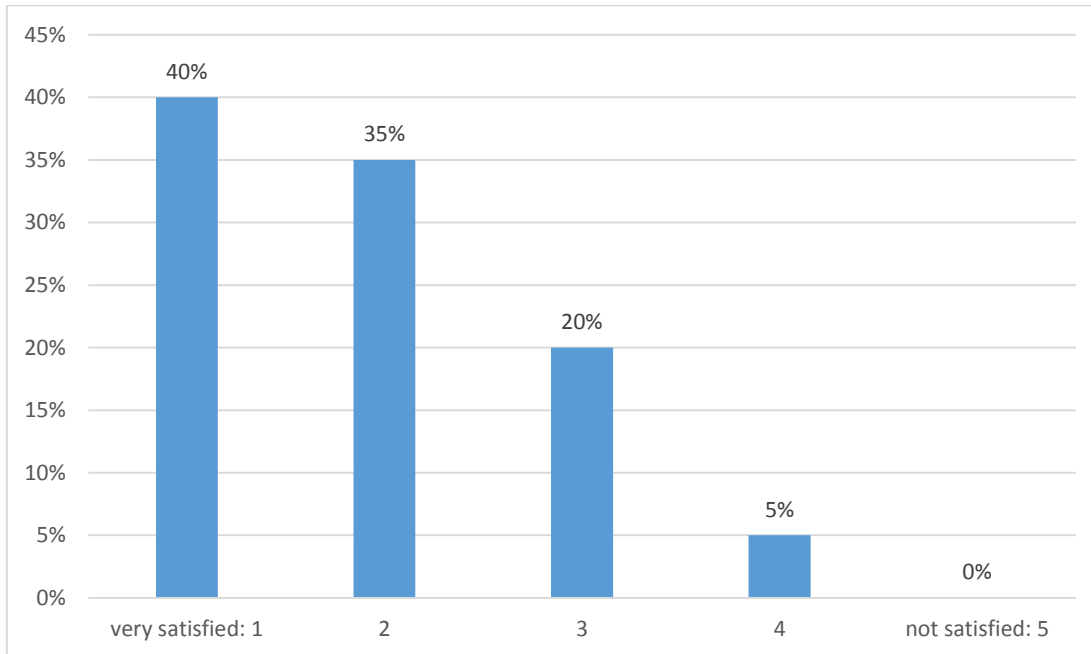
START as based on open calls for project proposals:

Bar chart showing satisfaction levels:
- very satisfied: 1 — 25%
- 2 — 40%
- 3 — 25%
- 4 — 5%
- not satisfied: 5 — 5%
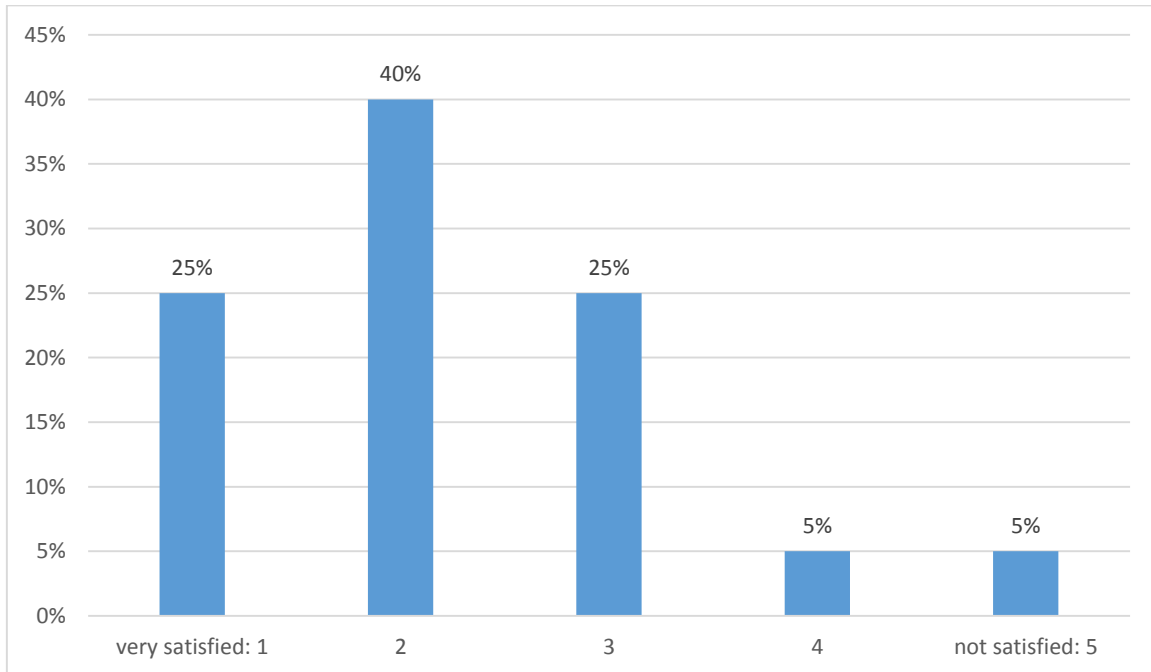
START as focused on small organisations (e.g. NGOs):

Bar chart showing satisfaction levels:
- very satisfied: 1 — 30%
- 2 — 30%
- 3 — 25%
- 4 — 15%
- not satisfied: 5 — 0%

START projects implemented by a minimum of 2 partners:

Bar chart:
- very satisfied: 1 — 40%
- 2 — 35%
- 3 — 20%
- 4 — 5%
- not satisfied: 5 — 0%

START projects implemented by partners from a minimum of 2 Danube Region countries:

Bar chart:
- very satisfied: 1 — 45%
- 2 — 30%
- 3 — 20%
- 4 — 5%
- not satisfied: 5 — 0%
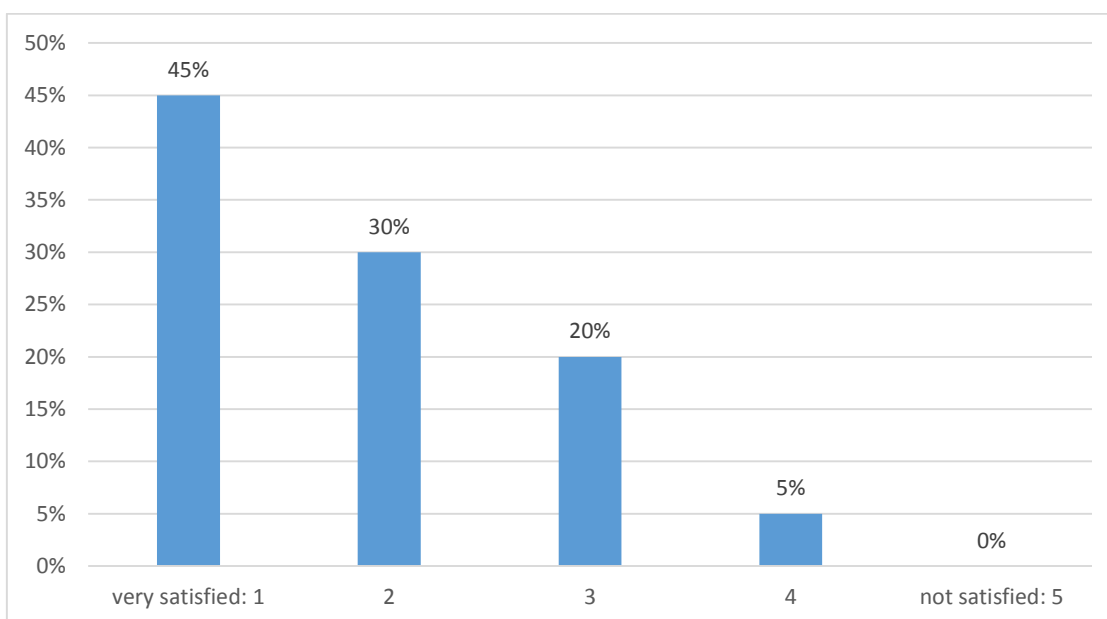
START success

How would you rate the success of the START initiative as a contribution to the Danube Region?
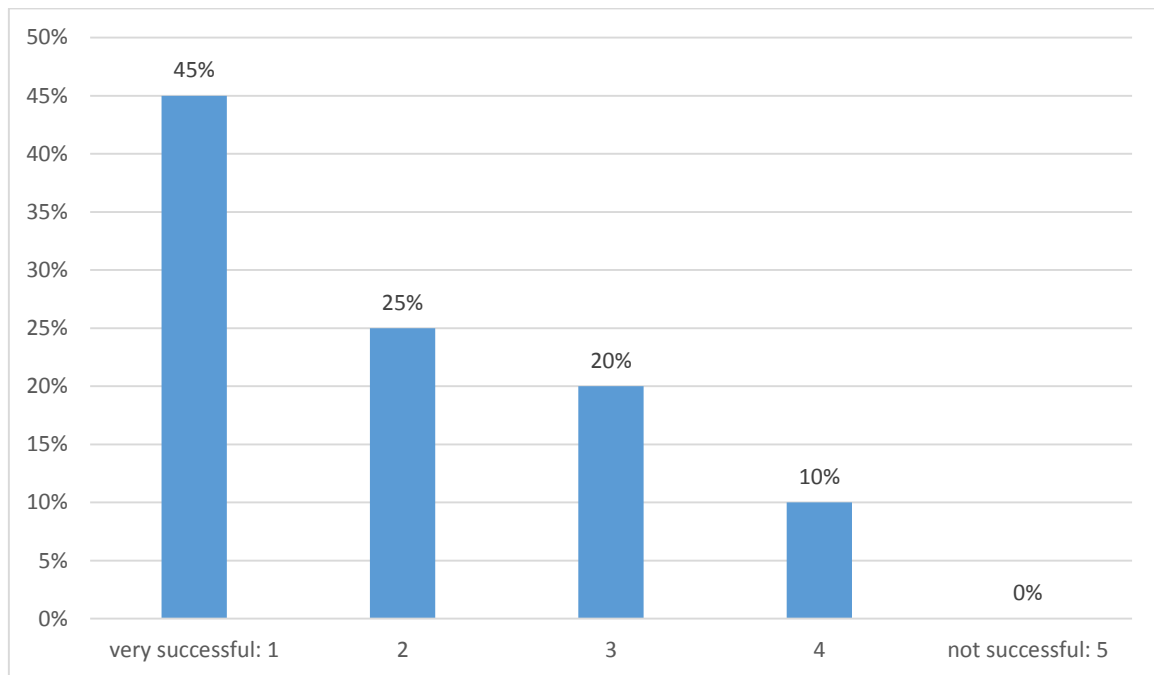
Open question:

Do you have any other feedback concerning the START initiative?[*]

- Region is rich in project ideas, but funds are scarce. START had very limited funds; too few projects could be funded in comparison to the number that applied. Follow-up is needed for the re-application of these projects.

- Actual funds are needed for the implementation of EUSDR.

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[*] Responses to open questions were summarized.

START Evaluation
Annex II

Questionnaire 2 (Q2)

Lead Partners (LP) and Project Partners (PP)

Target group: Lead and Project Partners of START projects of both calls

Contents: All phases of the START initiative, START initiative structure, prior

experience, proposals for further funding

Distribution: Online questionnaire sent via email to all 215 beneficiaries of both calls

for proposals
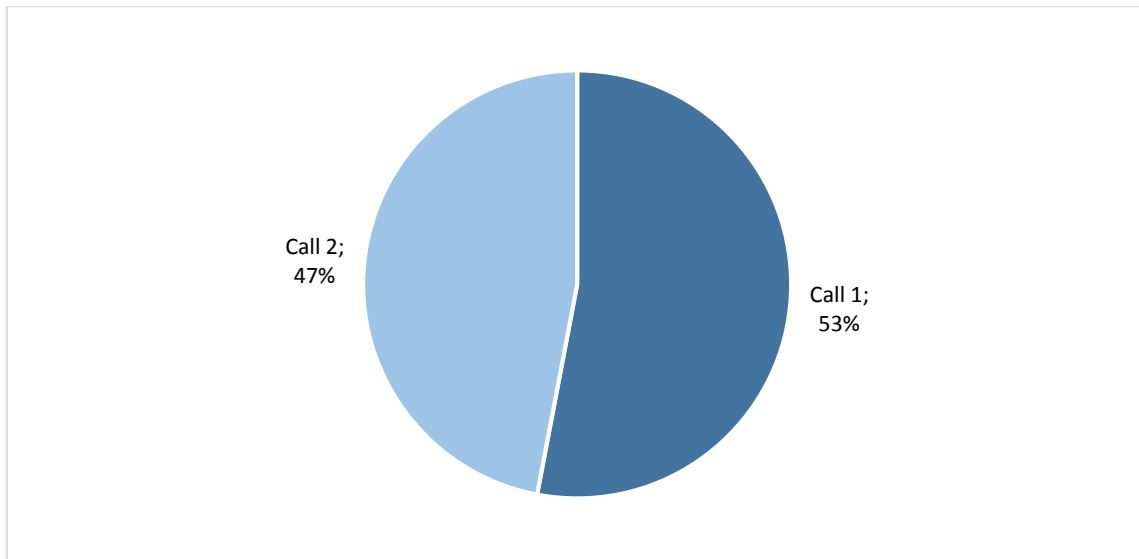
Survey period: 20.09.2016 – 03.10.2016

Responses: 83 (response rate: 38,6%)

Content

General questions

Please give us feedback on your experience with the START initiative:

Did you participate in call 1 or call 2 of the START initiative?

Were you/are you a Lead or Project Partner of a START project?
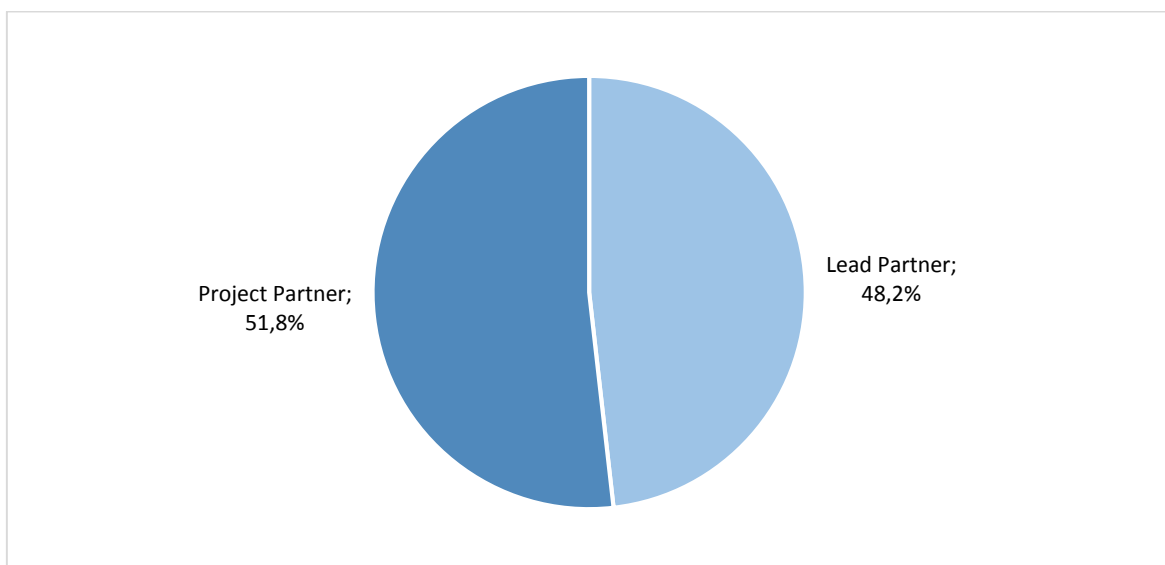
Questions for Project Partners

Please evaluate the application phase of your START project:

How was your involvement during the application phase?
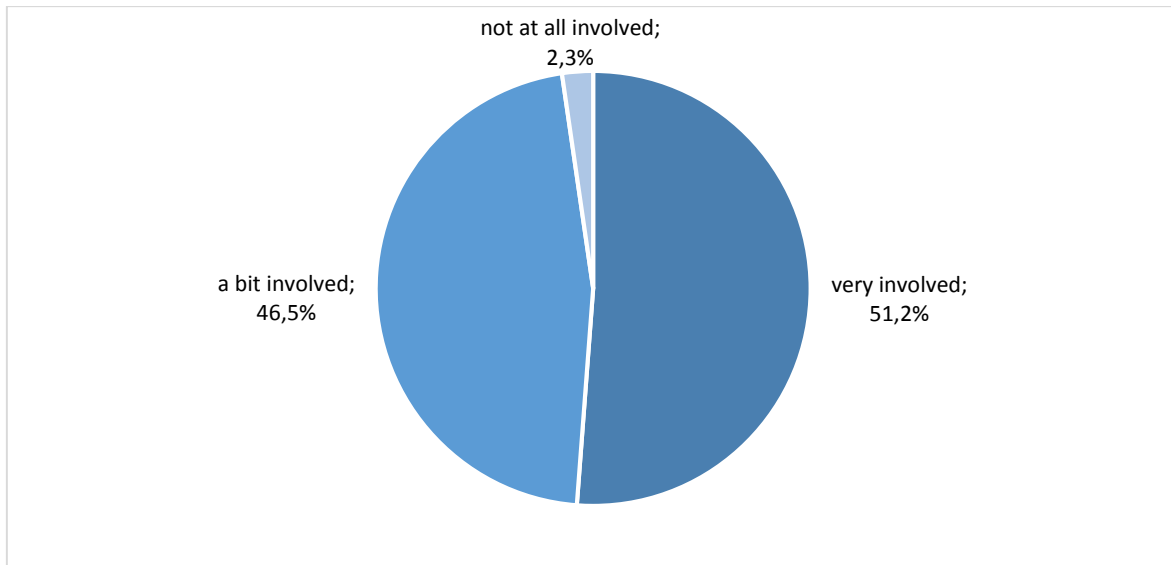
How satisfied were you with your involvement during the application phase?
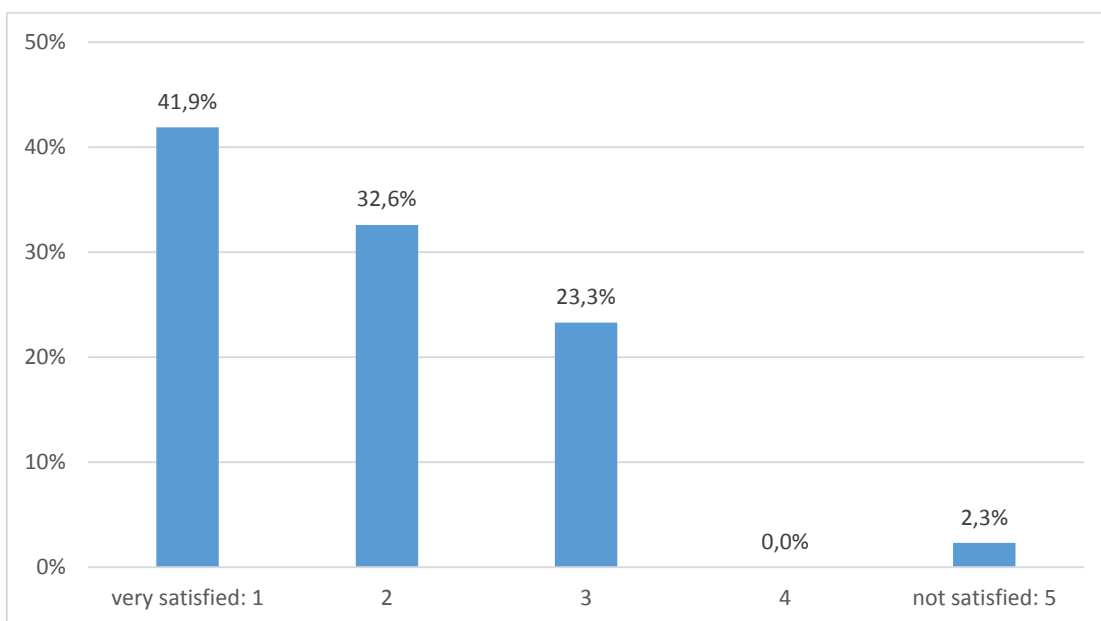
Please evaluate the contracting phase of your START project:

How was your involvement during the contracting phase?
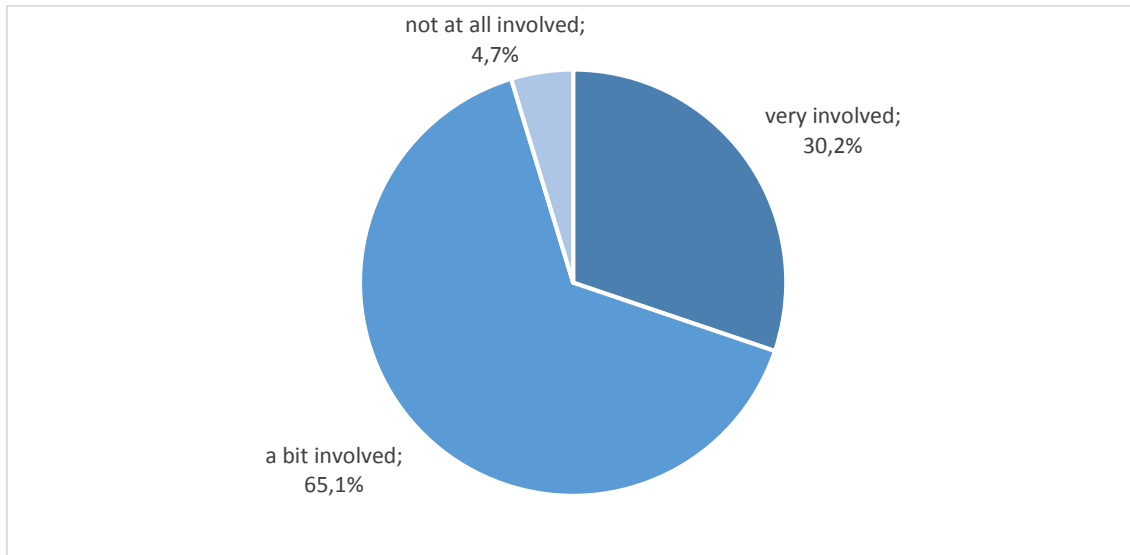
How satisfied were you with your involvement during the contracting phase?
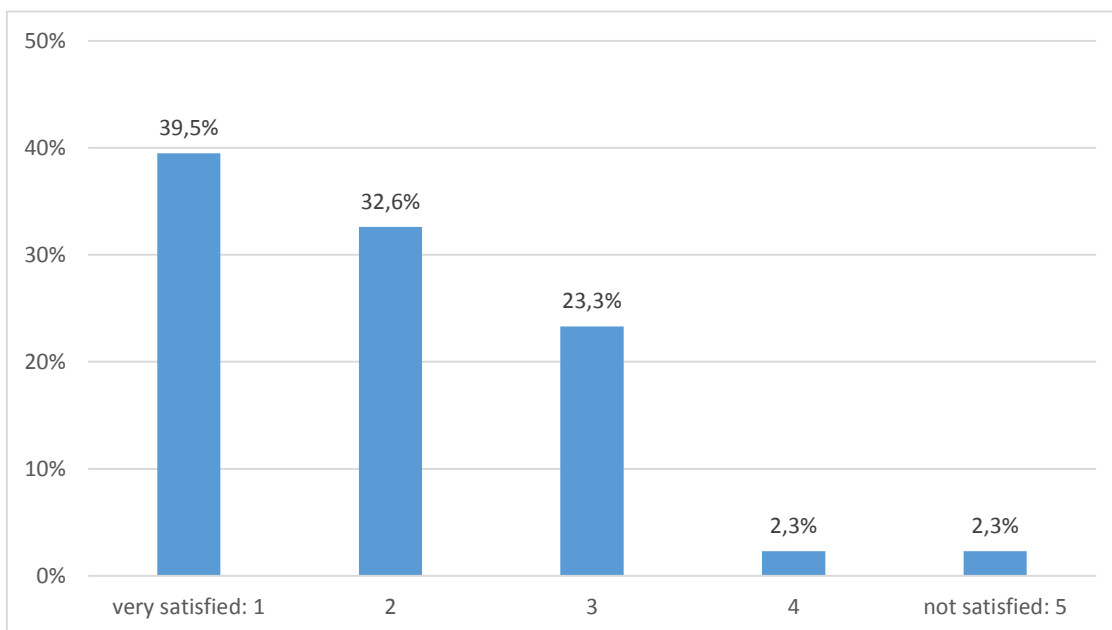
Please evaluate the implementation phase of your START project:

Were you satisfied with your involvement during the implementation phase?
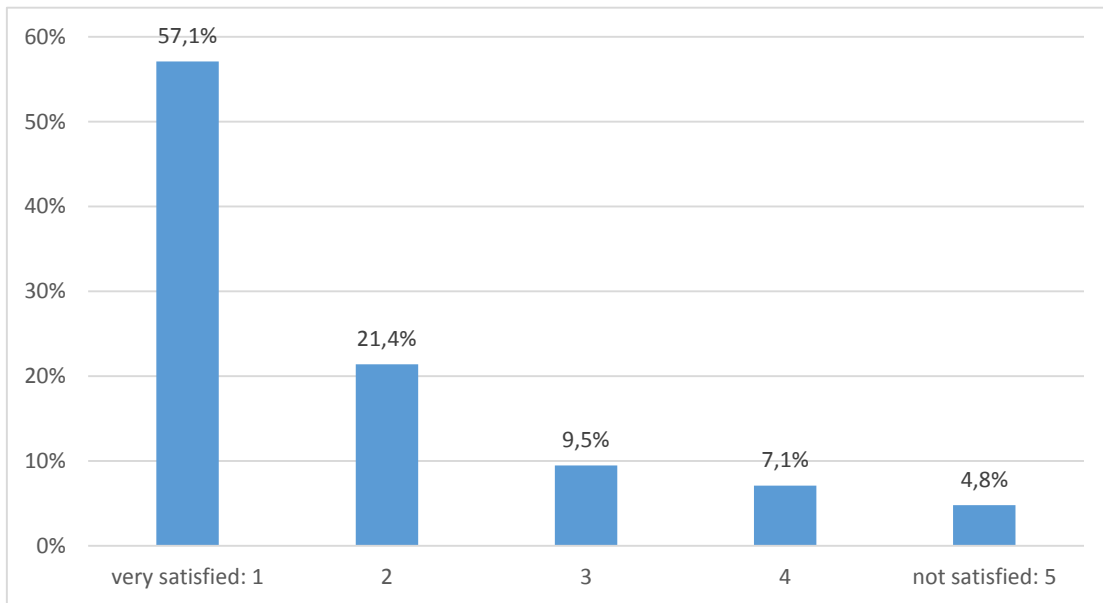
In general, I would rate the implementation of my START project as…
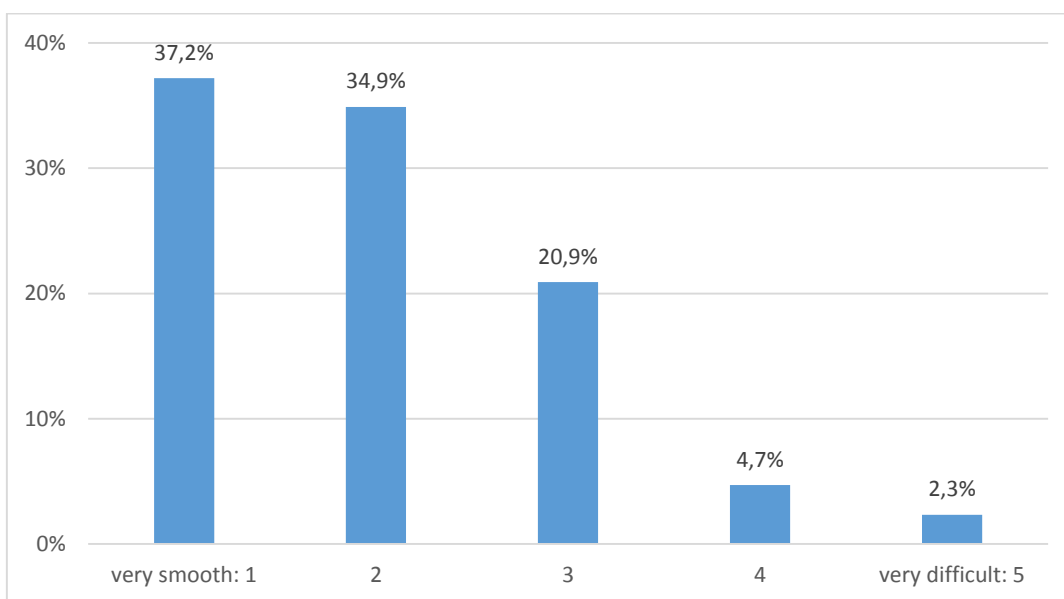
The templates (timesheets, etc.) were…
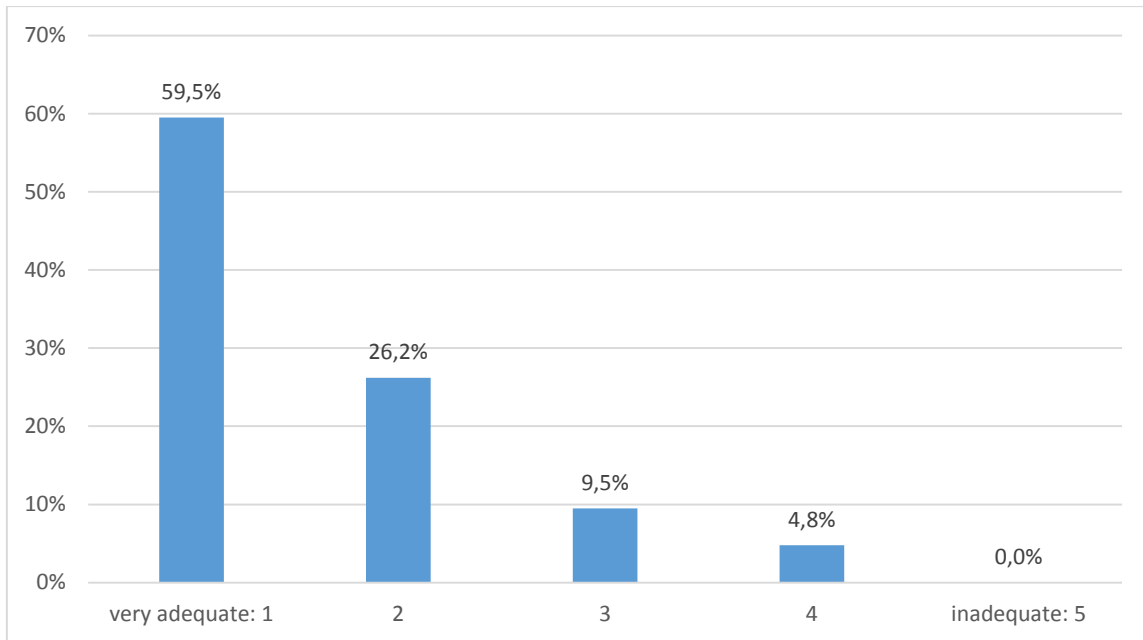
The administrative burden during the implementation phase was…
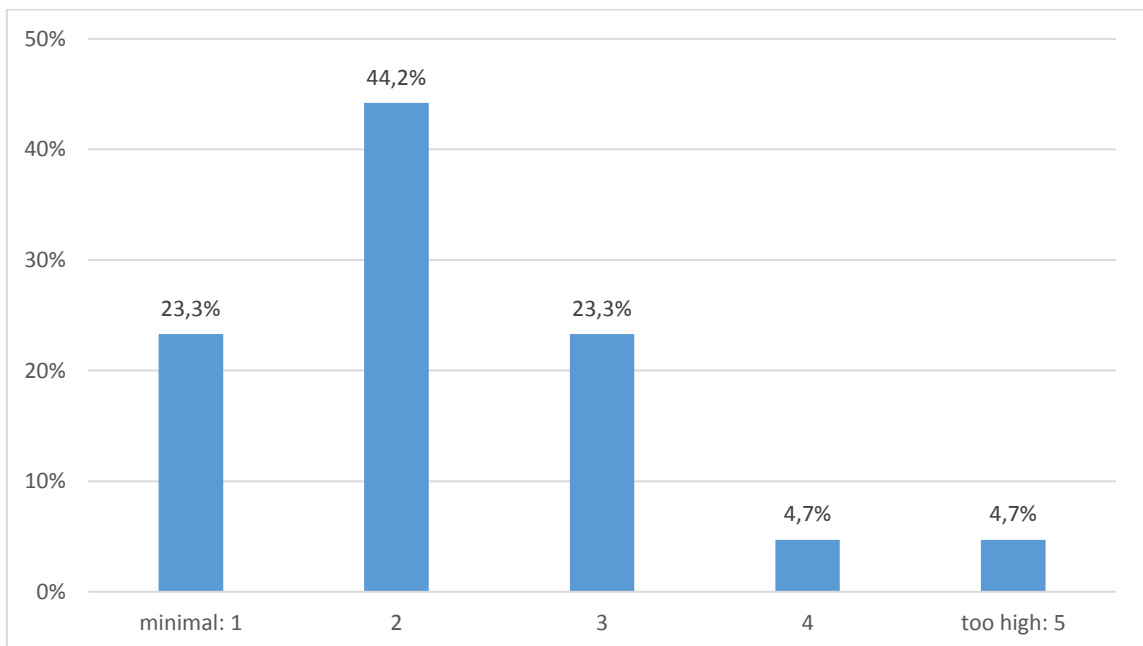
How was the information flow between project partners?
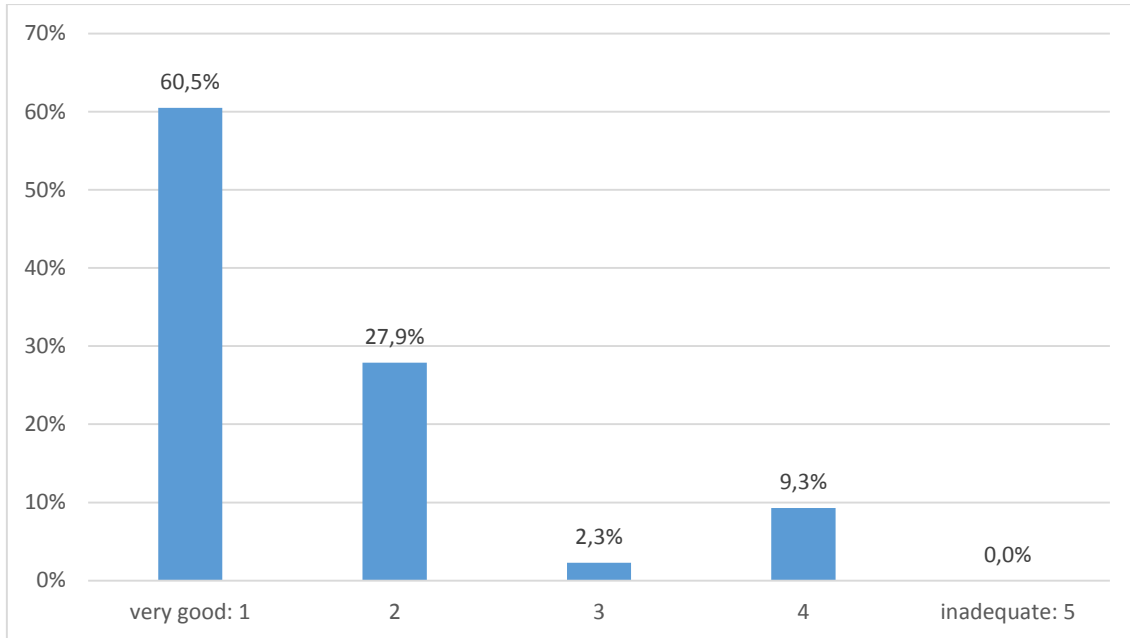
Please evaluate the reporting phase of your START project:

Were you involved in the reporting phase?

START is part-financed by the European Union
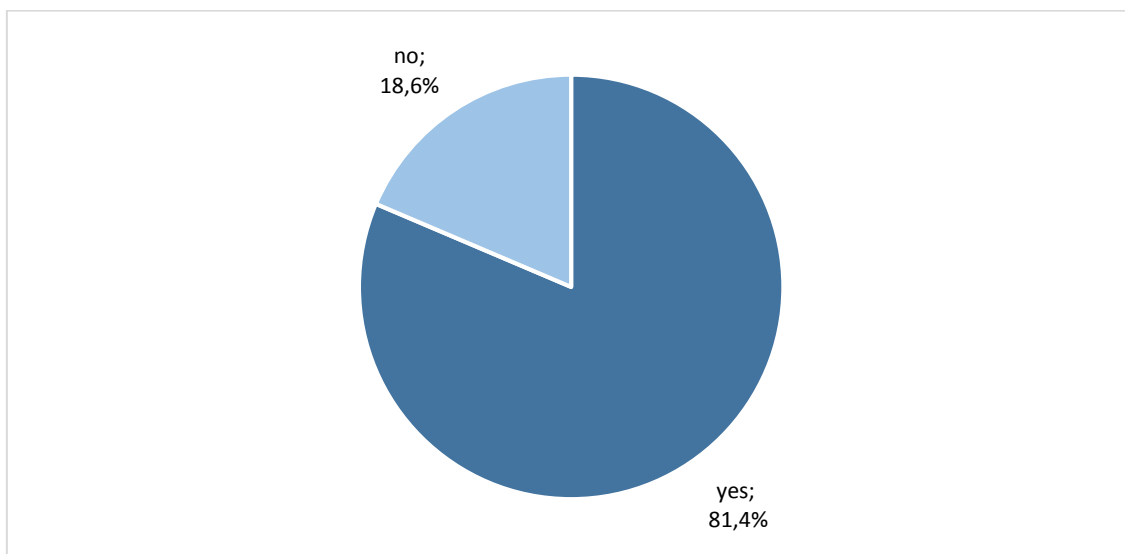
The number of reports that had to be devised (midterm and final report) was ...
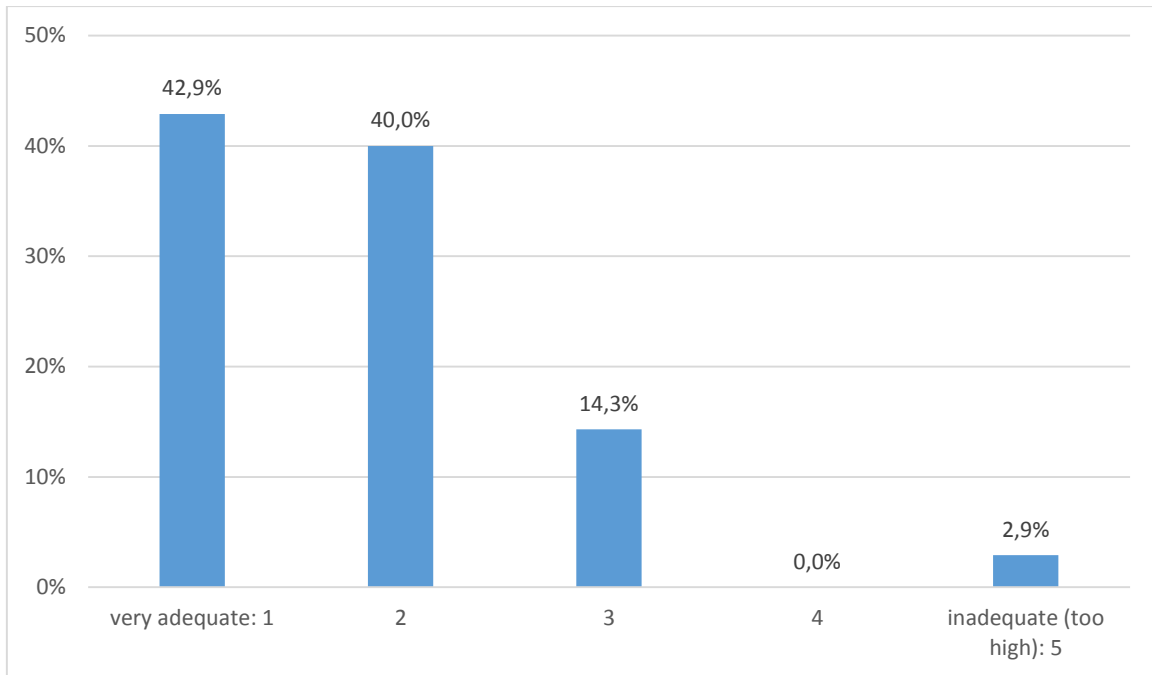
How was the workload for the final content report?
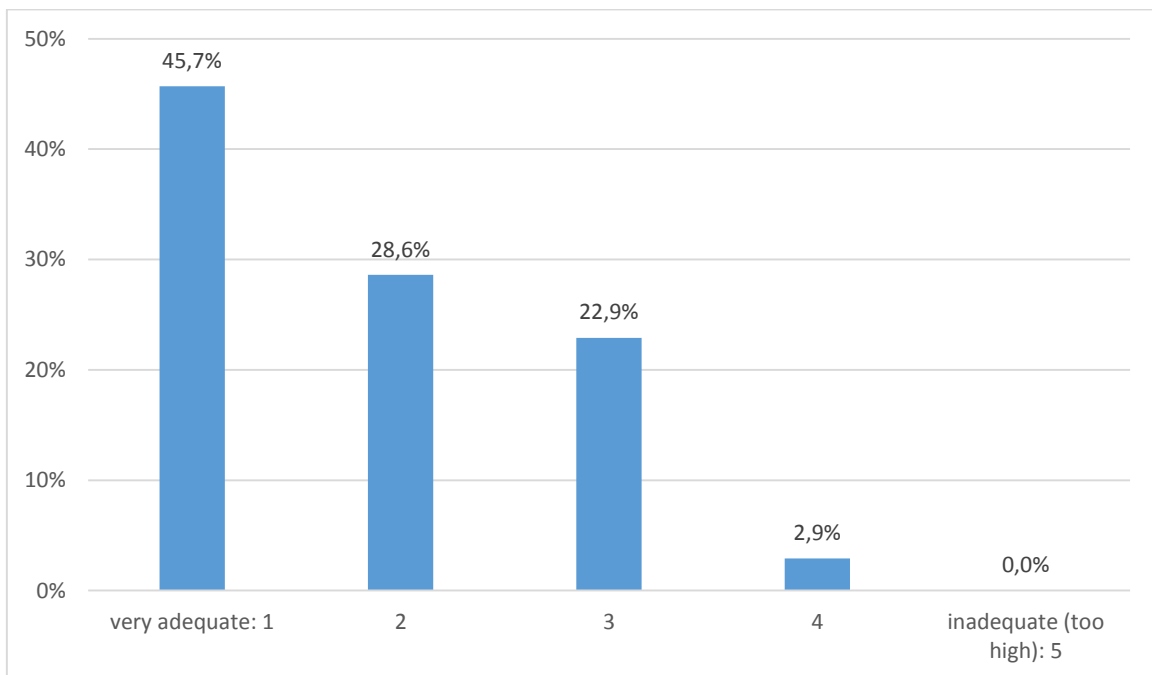
How was the workload for the final financial report?

Bar chart:
- very adequate: 1 — 45,7%
- 2 — 28,6%
- 3 — 17,1%
- 4 — 5,7%
- inadequate (too high): 5 — 2,9%

How was the timeline for the reporting?

Bar chart:
- very well suited: 1 — 48,6%
- 2 — 34,3%
- 3 — 5,7%
- 4 — 2,9%
- not well suited: 5 — 8,6%

StaDt+Wien
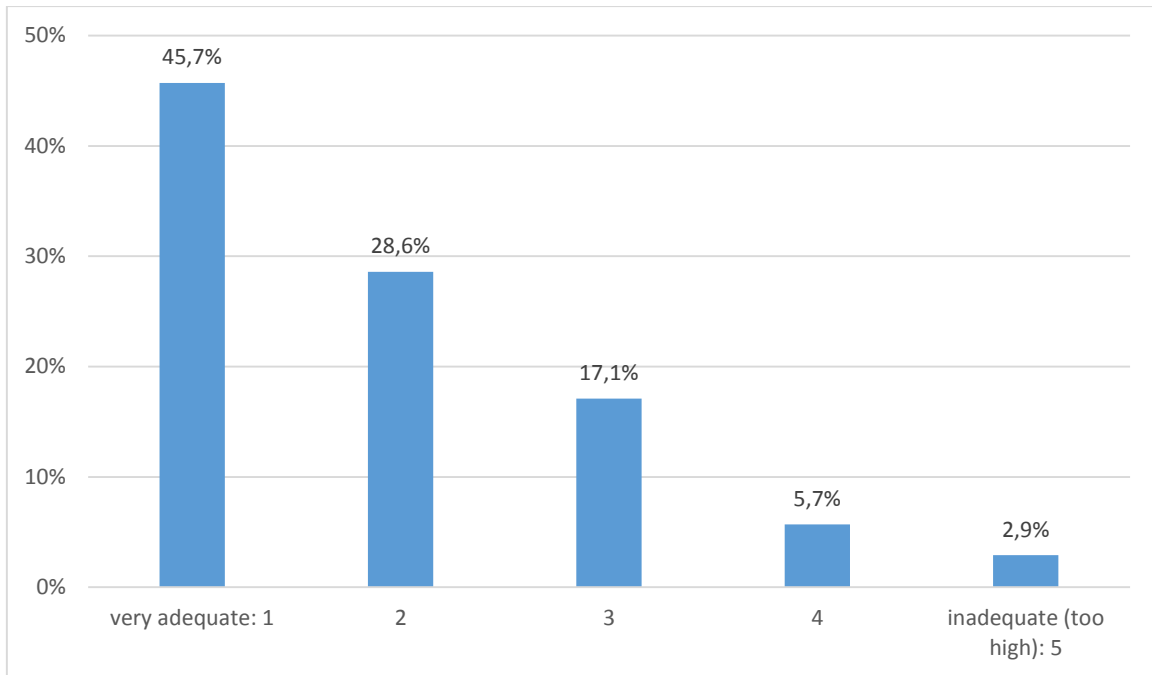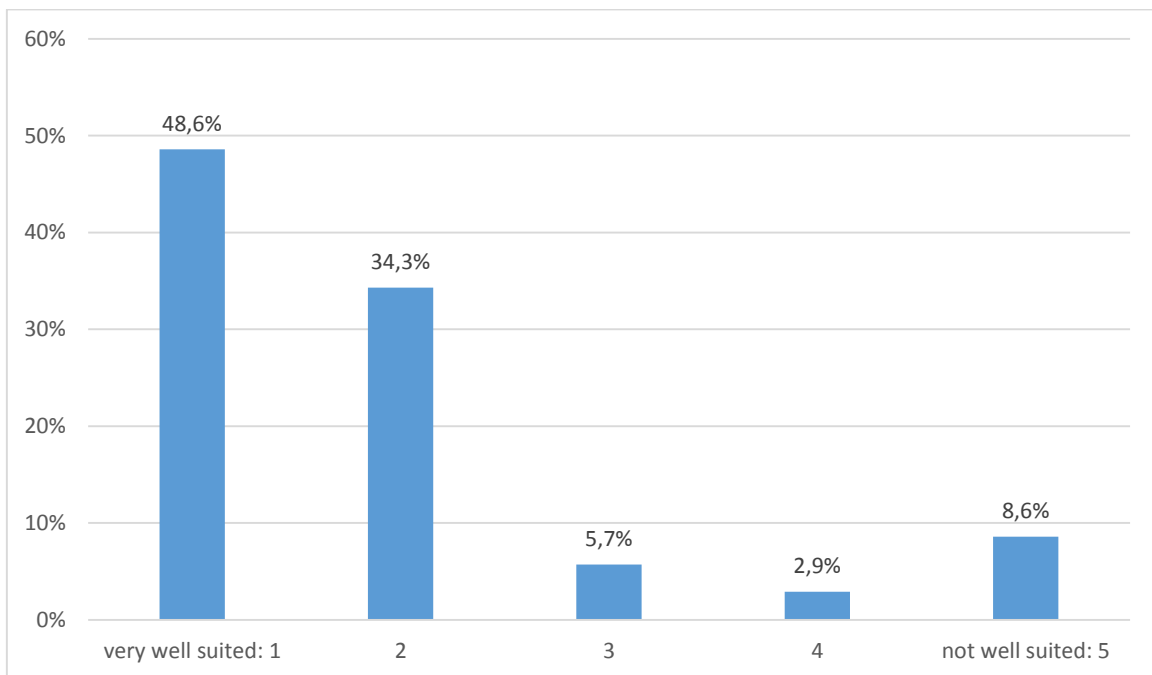
How was the LPs support during the reporting phase?
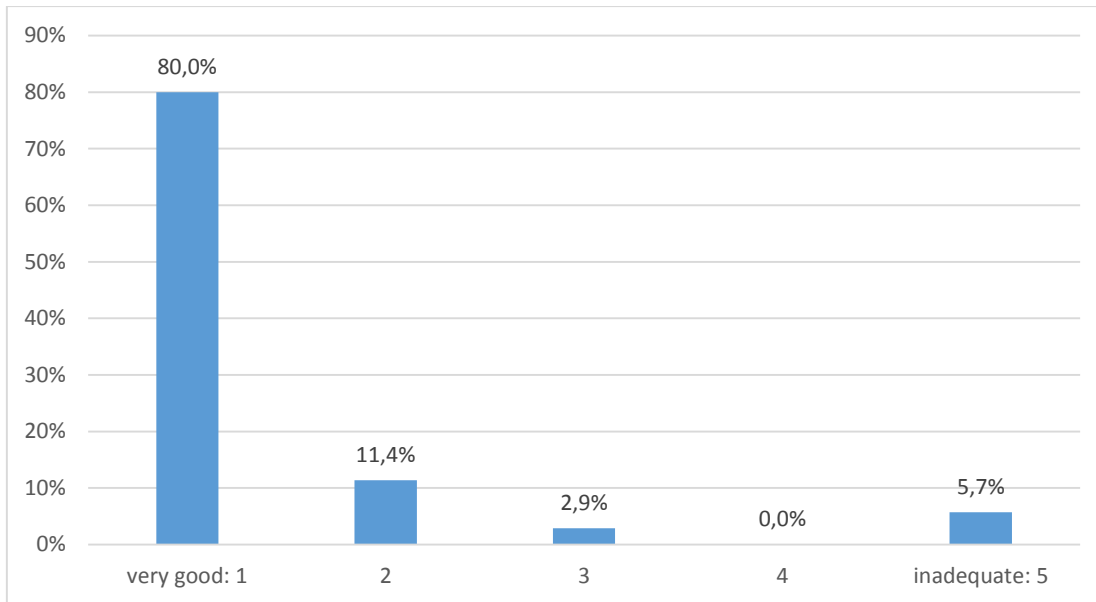
Questions for Lead Partners

Please evaluate the application phase of your START project:

How was the workload during the application phase?
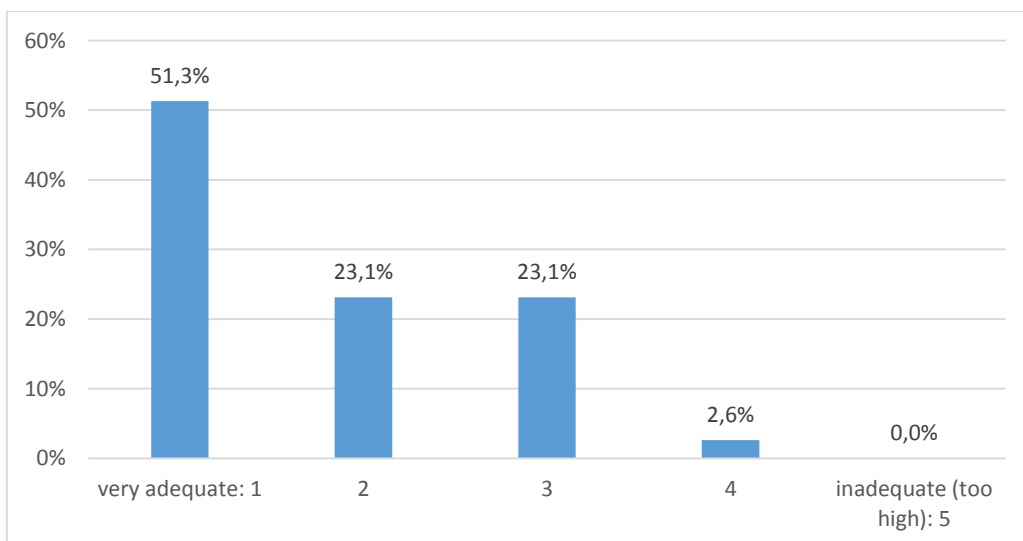
How was the application material?
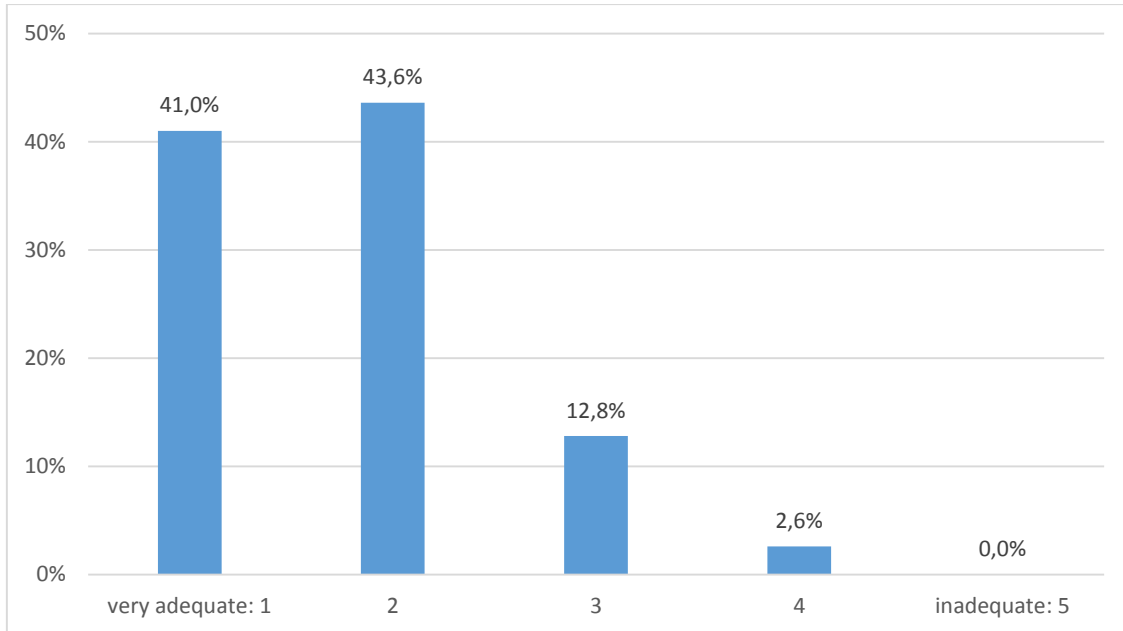
How was the timeline (from first information regarding the initiative to award decision)?

START is part-financed by the European Union
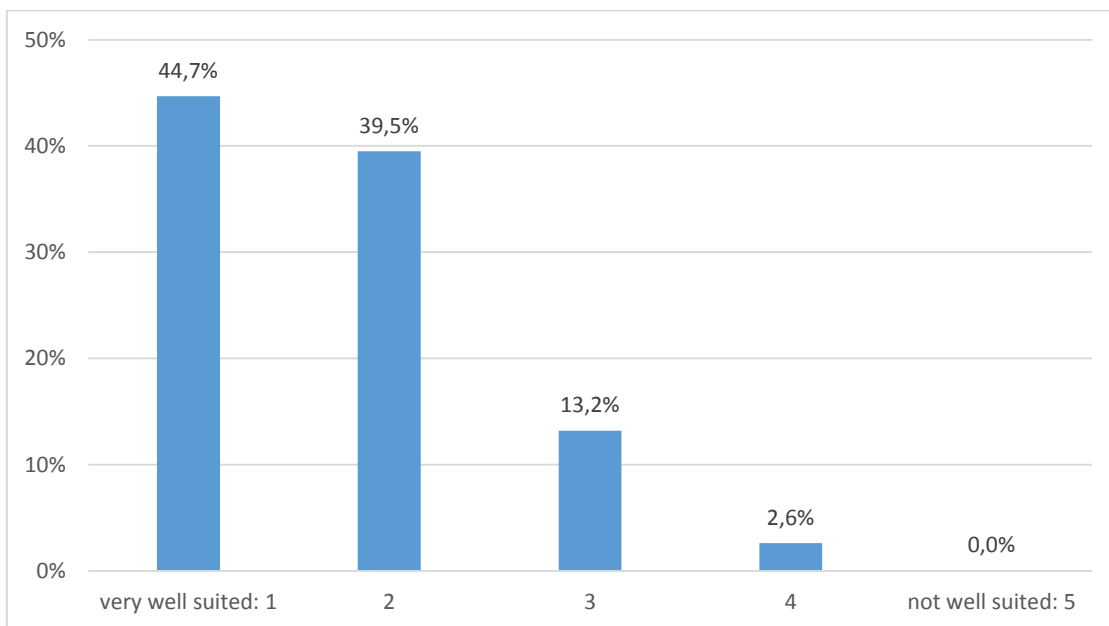
How was the IB's (EuroVienna's) support during the application phase?
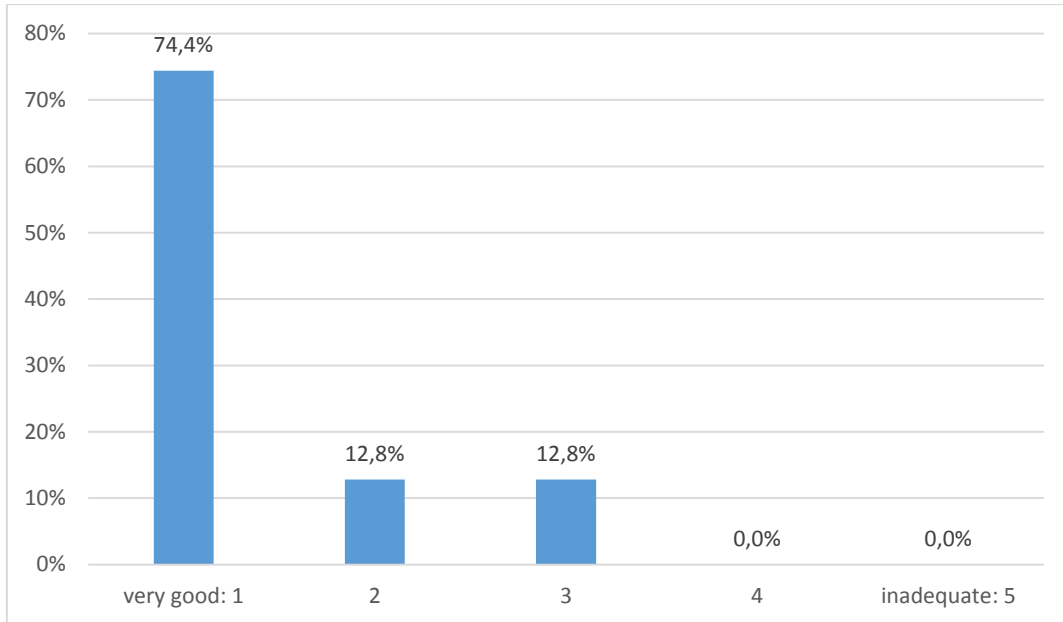
Please evaluate the contracting phase of your START project:

### How was the workload during the contracting phase?
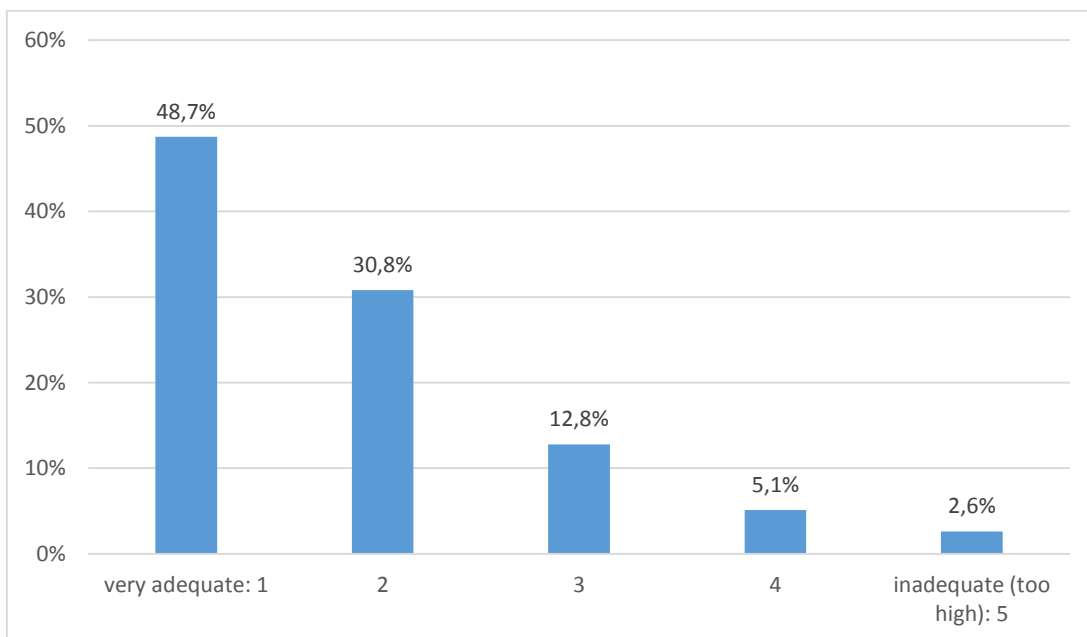
How clear were the eligibility rules (Schedule 3)?

	very adequate: 1	2	3	4	inadequate: 5
	42,5%	37,5%	10,0%	7,5%	2,5%
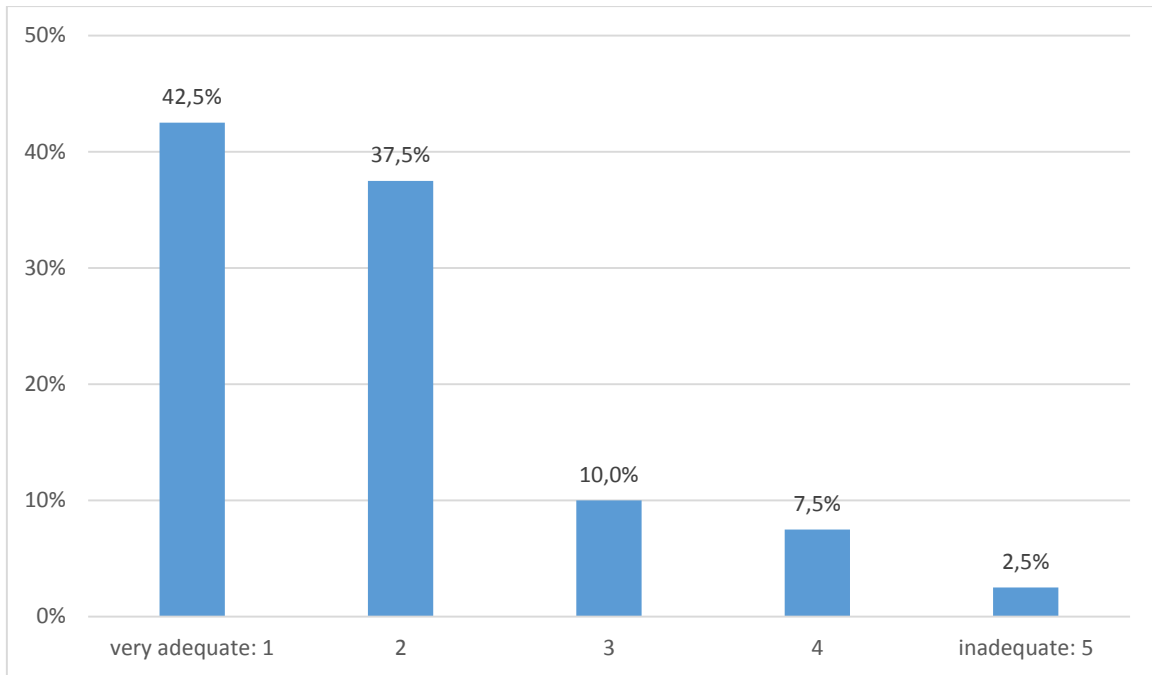
How was the timeline (from award decision to finalizing the contract)?

	very well suited: 1	2	3	4	not well suited: 5
	41,0%	38,5%	7,7%	12,8%	0,0%
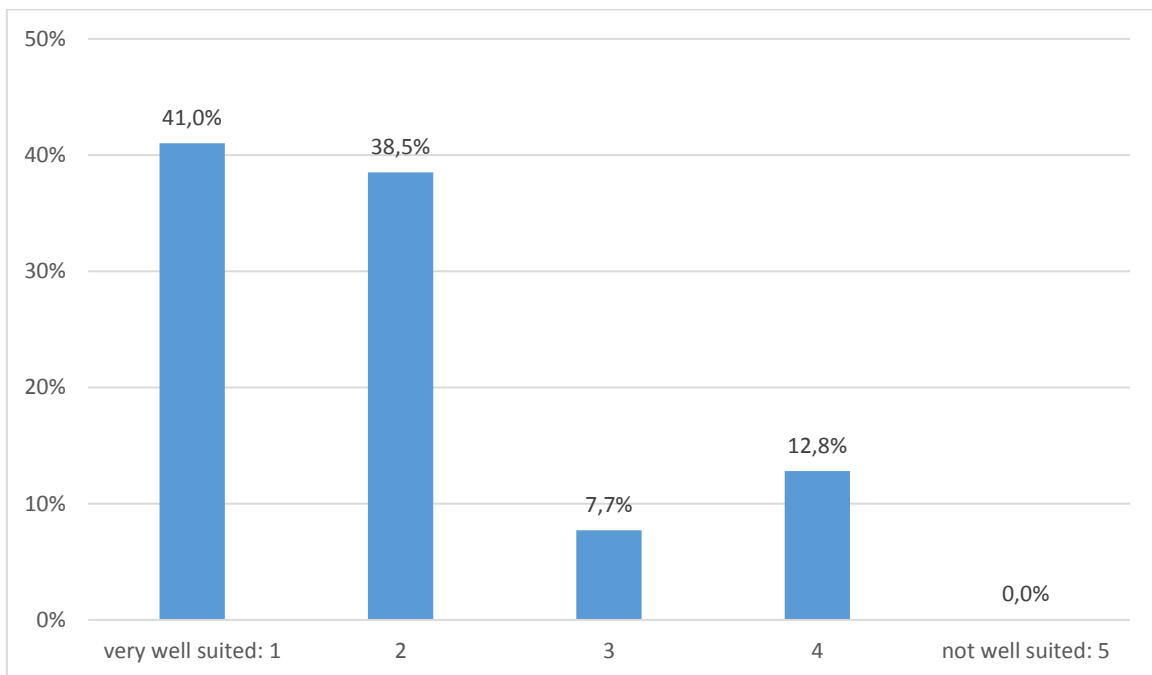
How was the IB's (EuroVienna's) support during the contracting phase?
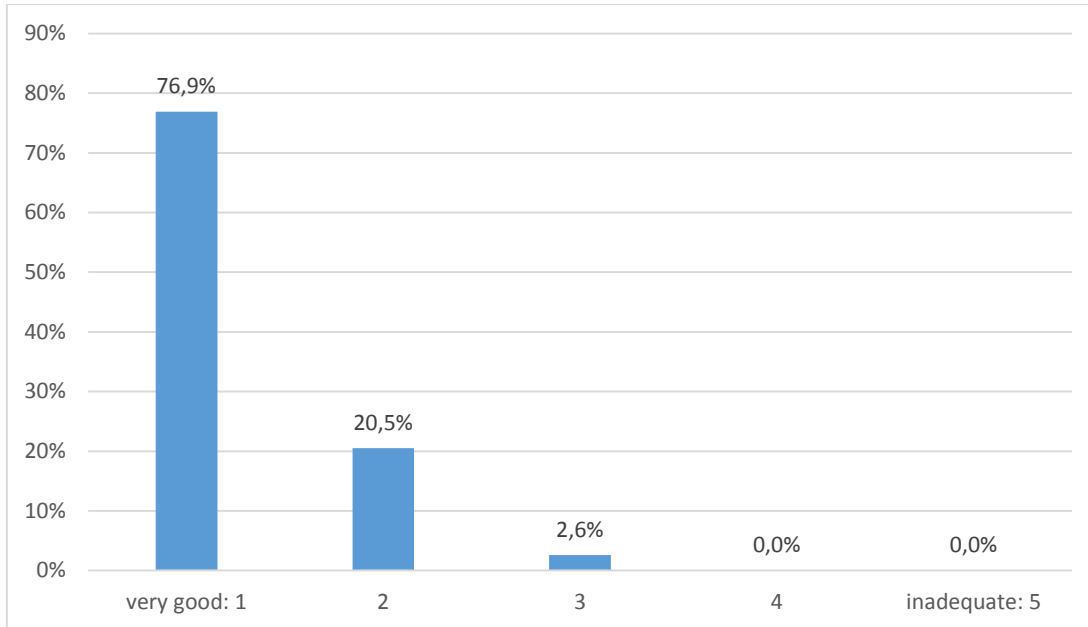
Please evaluate the implementation phase of your START project:

In general, I would rate the implementation of my START project as...

![Danube Region Strategy START - Danube Region Project Fund logo]
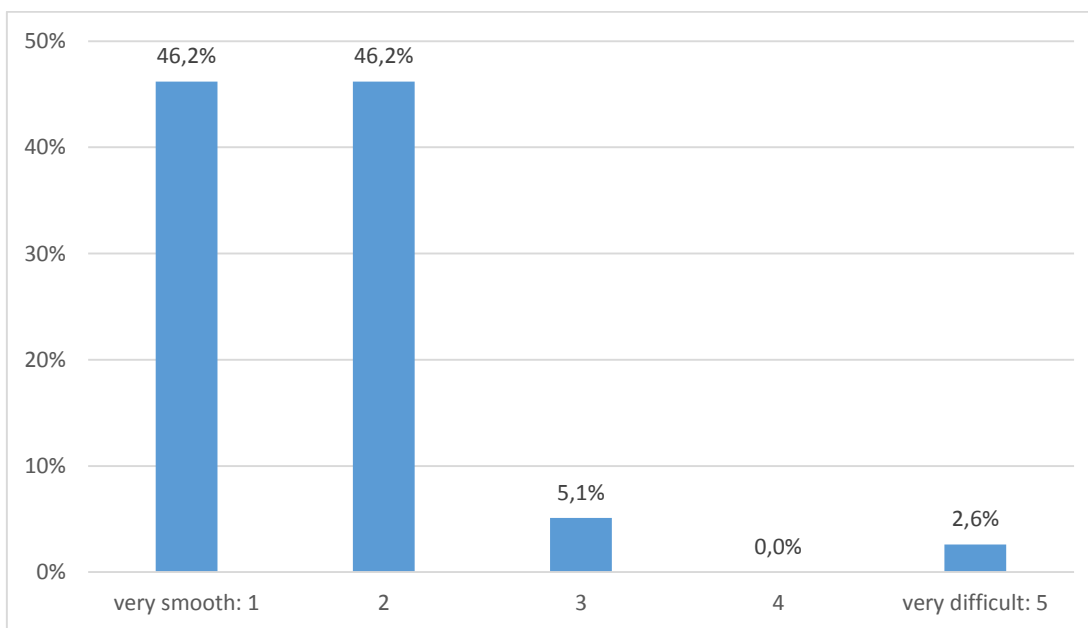
The joint START Kick-Off Event was...
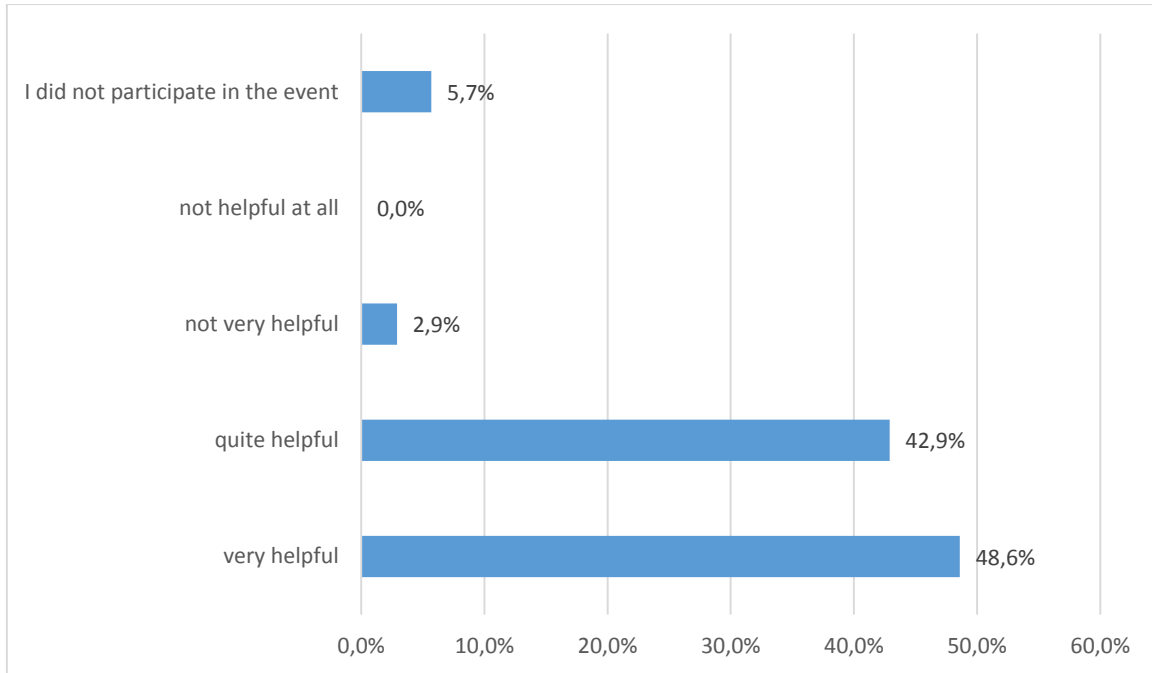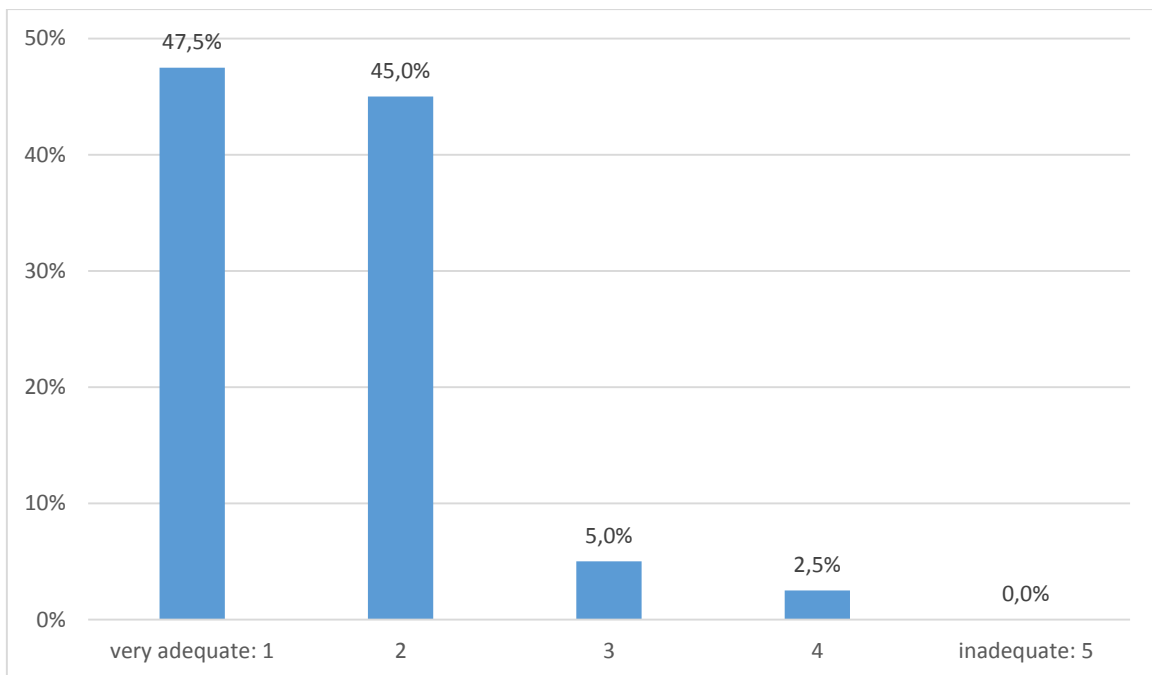
Category	Percentage
I did not participate in the event	5,7%
not helpful at all	0,0%
not very helpful	2,9%
quite helpful	42,9%
very helpful	48,6%

(Chart x-axis: 0,0% 10,0% 20,0% 30,0% 40,0% 50,0% 60,0%)

The templates (timesheets, etc.) were…

Rating	Percentage
very adequate: 1	47,5%
2	45,0%
3	5,0%
4	2,5%
inadequate: 5	0,0%

(Chart y-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%)

StaDt+Wien

The administrative burden during the implementation phase was…

**How was the information flow between project partners?**

How was the IB's (EuroVienna's) support during the implementation phase?
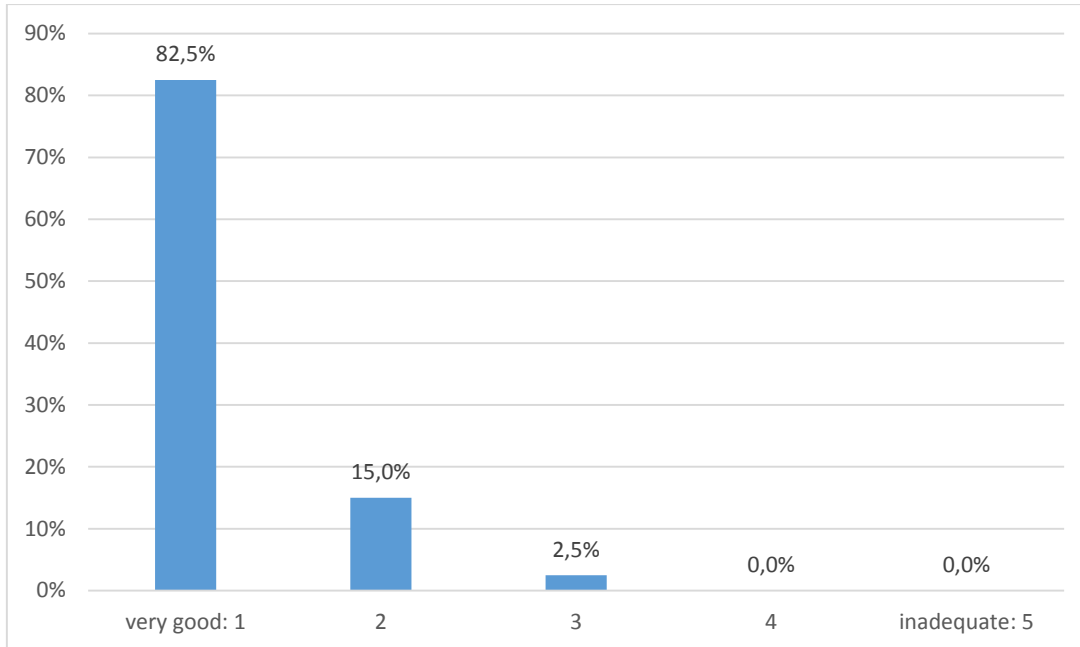
(Bar chart)
- very good: 1 — 82,5%
- 2 — 15,0%
- 3 — 2,5%
- 4 — 0,0%
- inadequate: 5 — 0,0%

Please evaluate the reporting phase of your START project:

How was the workload for the final content report?

(Bar chart)
- very adequate: 1 — 35,0%
- 2 — 47,5%
- 3 — 12,5%
- 4 — 5,0%
- inadequate (too high): 5 — 0,0%

The number of reports that had to be devised (midterm and final report) was ...

Chart: Bar chart showing responses on a scale from "very adequate: 1" to "inadequate (too high): 5"

very adequate: 1	2	3	4	inadequate (too high): 5
48,7%	38,5%	7,7%	2,6%	2,6%
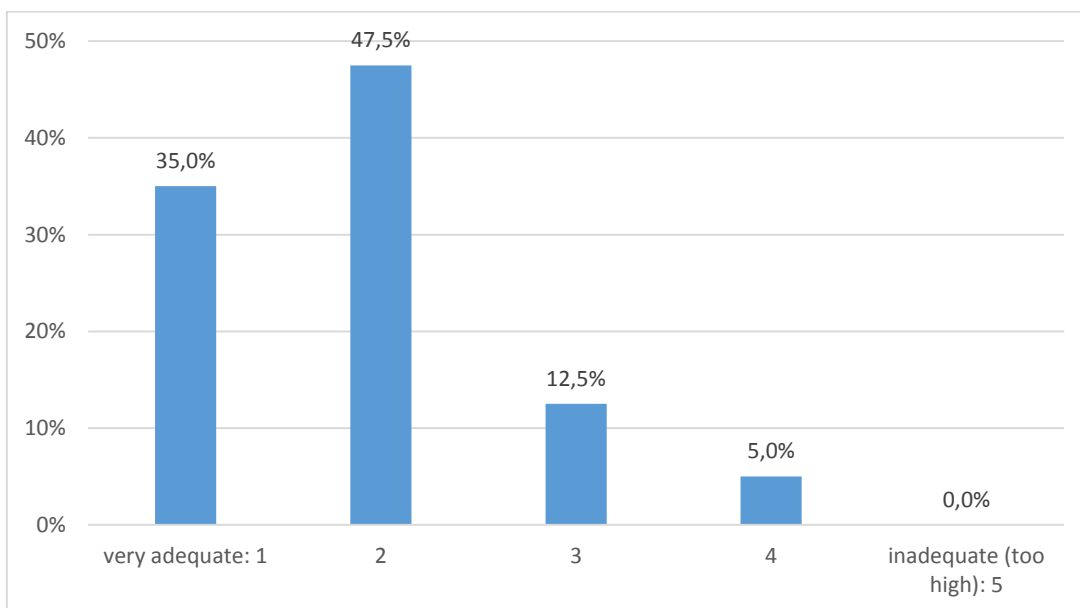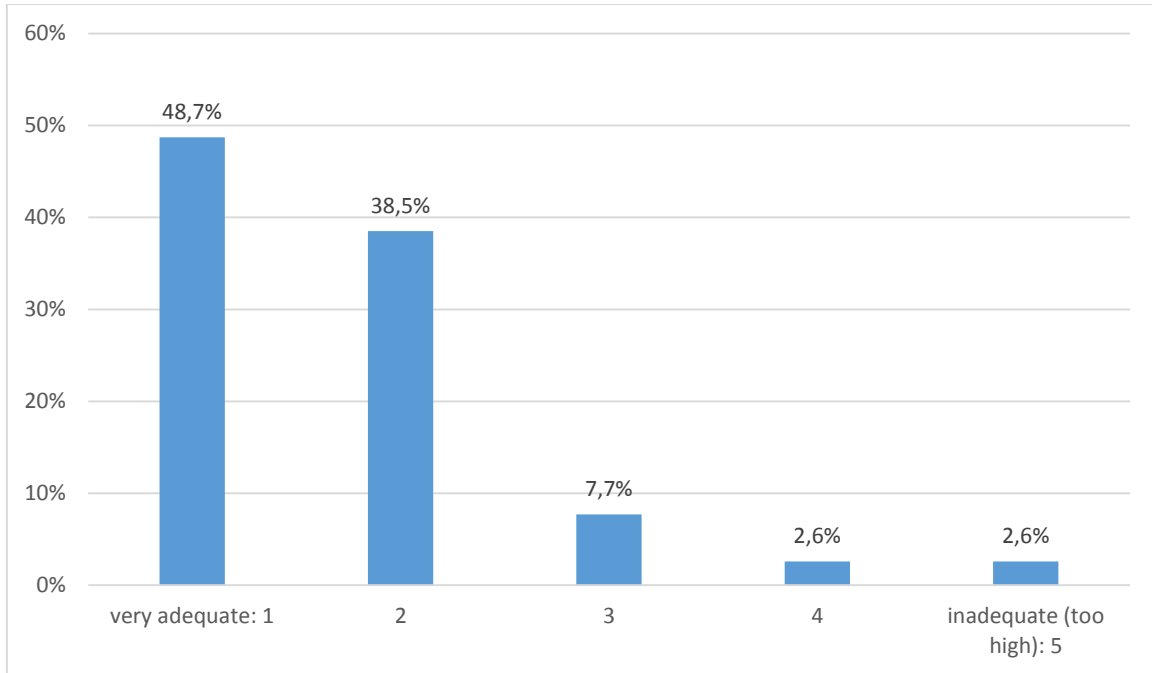
How was the workload for the financial report?
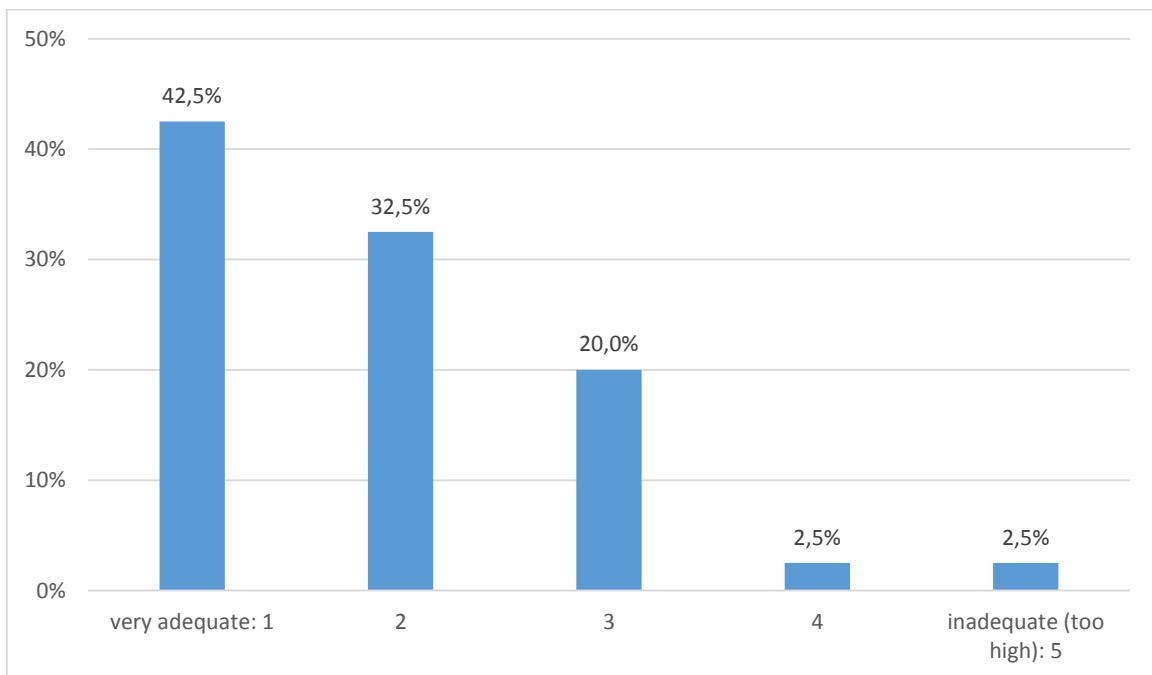
Chart: Bar chart showing responses on a scale from "very adequate: 1" to "inadequate (too high): 5"

very adequate: 1	2	3	4	inadequate (too high): 5
42,5%	32,5%	20,0%	2,5%	2,5%

How was the timeline for the reporting?

Bar chart values:
- very well suited: 1 — 57,5%
- 2 — 32,5%
- 3 — 7,5%
- 4 — 0,0%
- not well suited: 5 — 2,5%

How was the IB's (EuroVienna's) support during the reporting phase?

Bar chart values:
- very good: 1 — 90,0%
- 2 — 7,5%
- 3 — 2,5%
- 4 — 0,0%
- inadequate: 5 — 0,0%

START is part-financed by the European Union
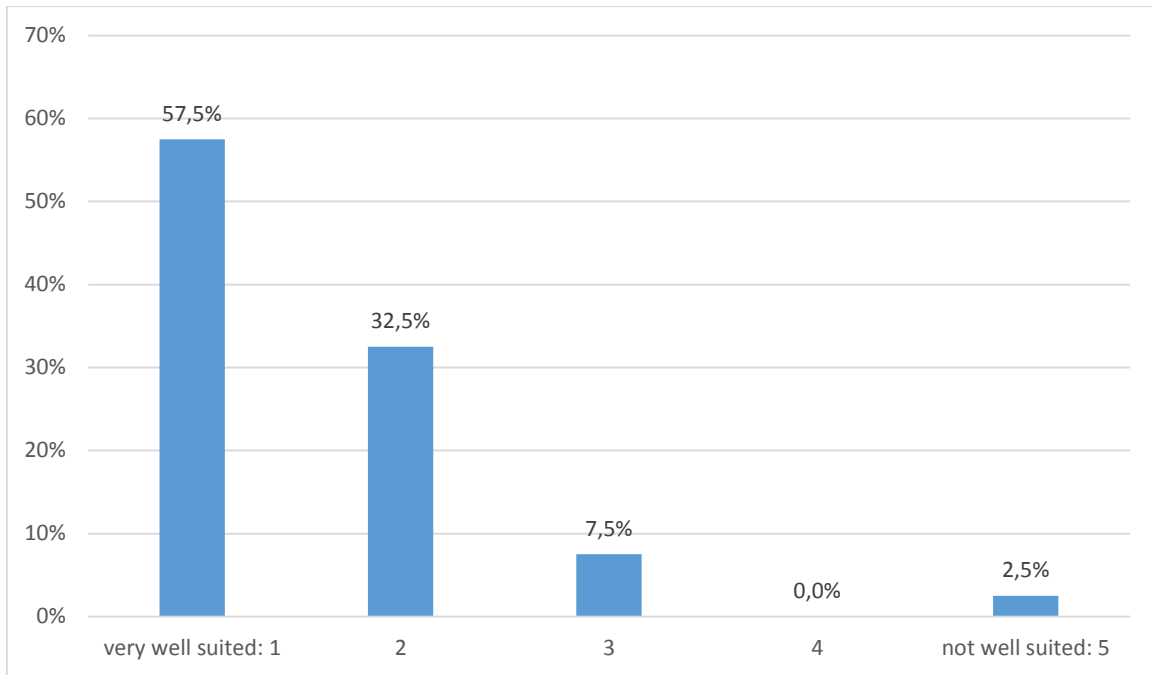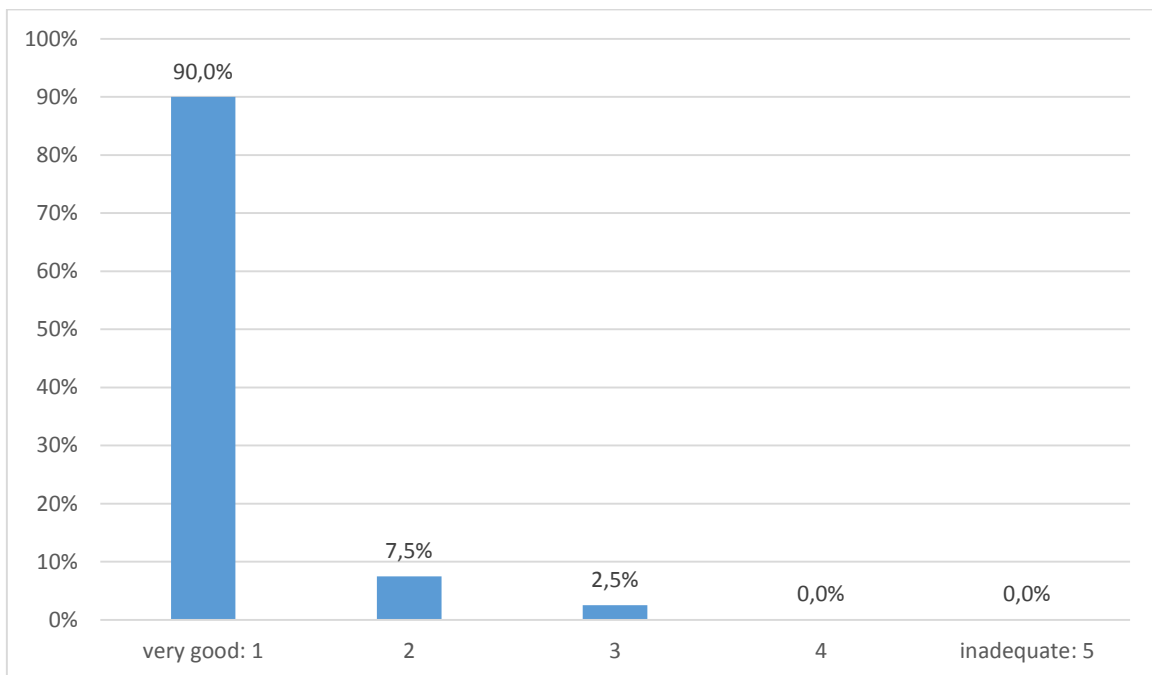
Please evaluate the payments to your START project:

Please evaluate the overall timeline of the START initiative (from application to final instalment):

Bar chart:
- very good, well suited timeline: 1 — 38,5%
- 2 — 43,6%
- 3 — 17,9%
- 4 — 0,0%
- badly suited timeline: 5 — 0,0%
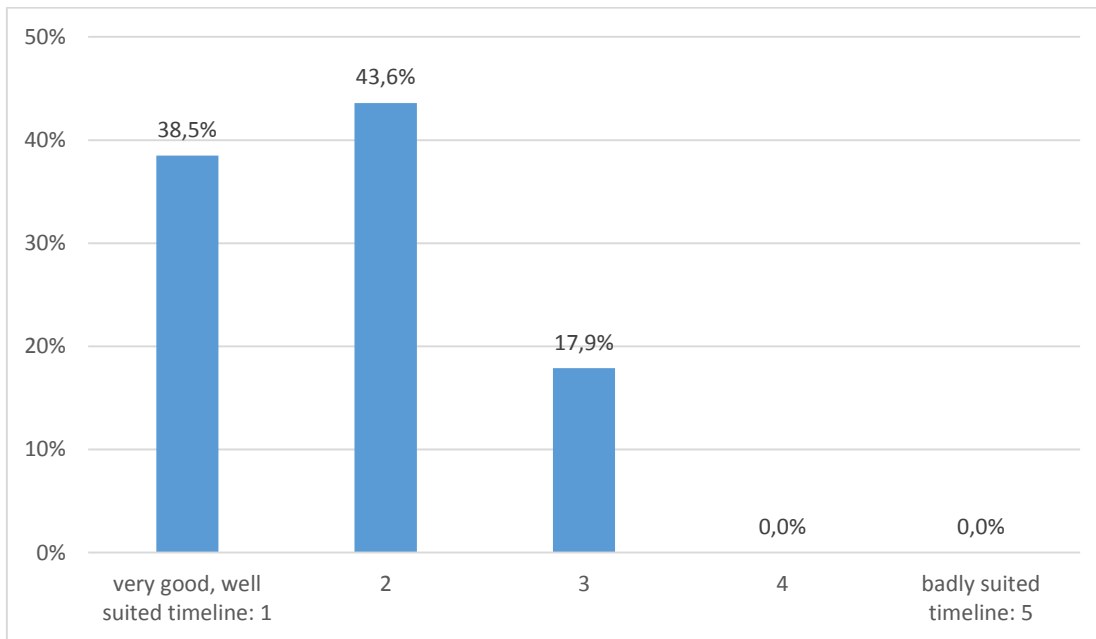
Please evaluate the time within which the payments were conducted:

Bar chart:
- very good: 1 — 33,3%
- 2 — 43,6%
- 3 — 20,5%
- 4 — 2,6%
- inadequate: 5 — 0,0%
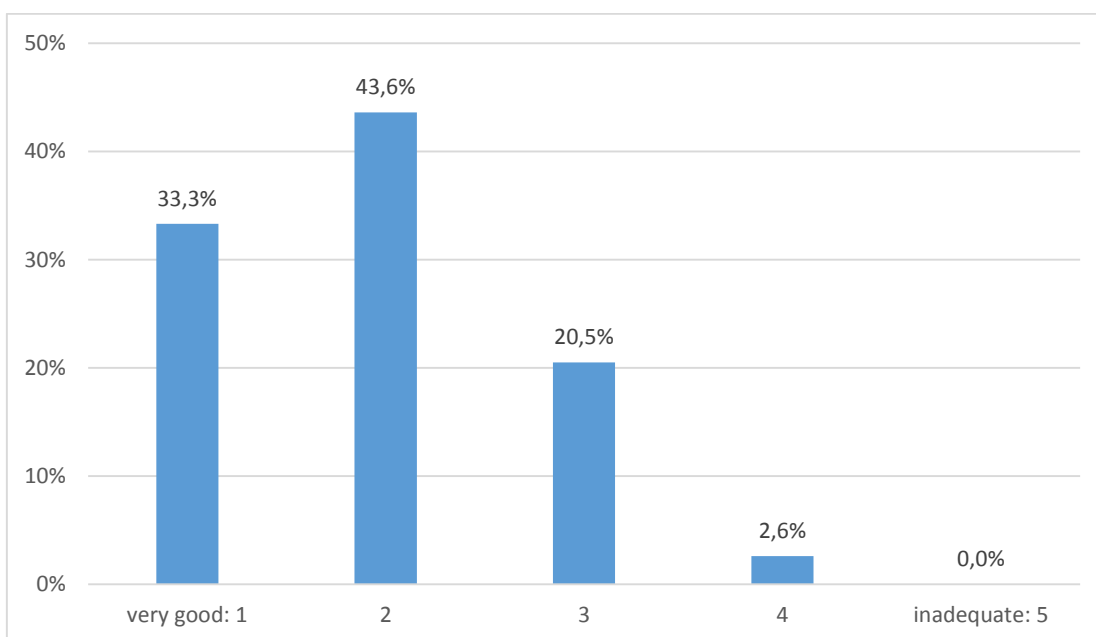
Questions for Lead and Project Partners

Experience:

Did you have prior experience with EU funded projects before START?
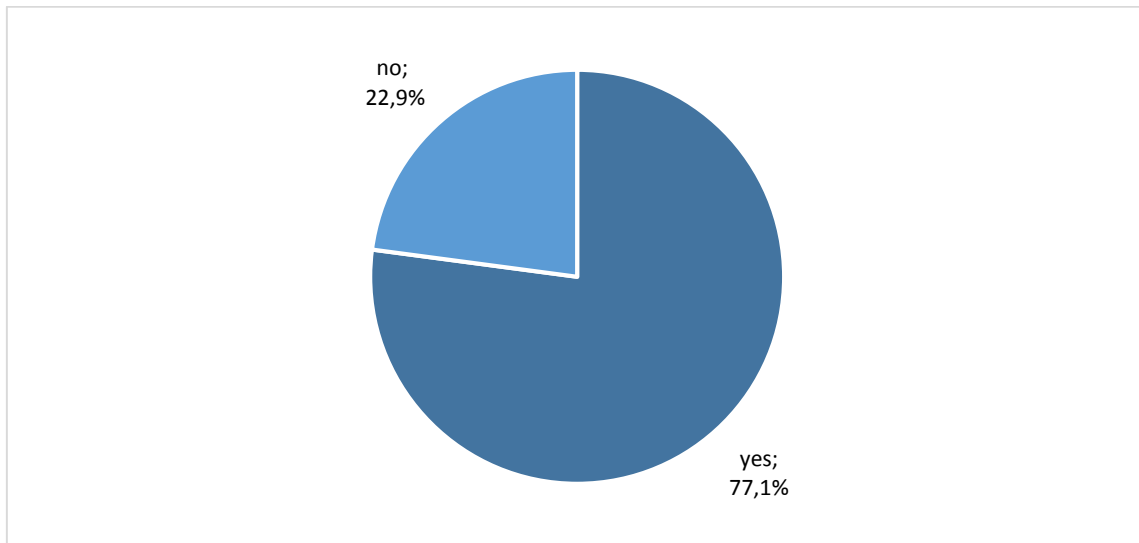
Do you consider the experience you gained with START valuable for your future EU funded projects?
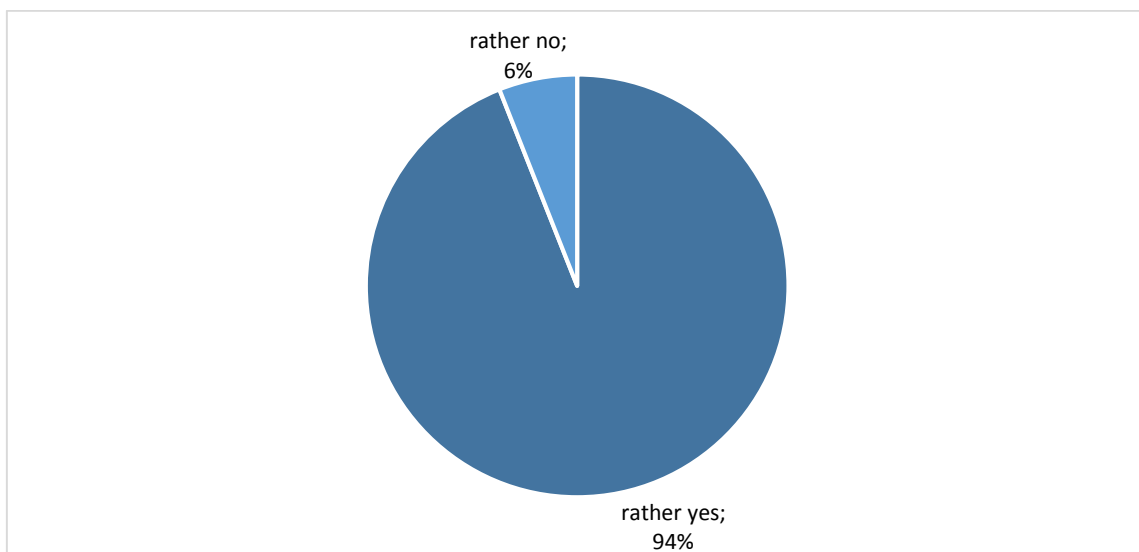
Your START project:

Was the funding adequate for your project?

no;
15,7%

yes;
84,3%
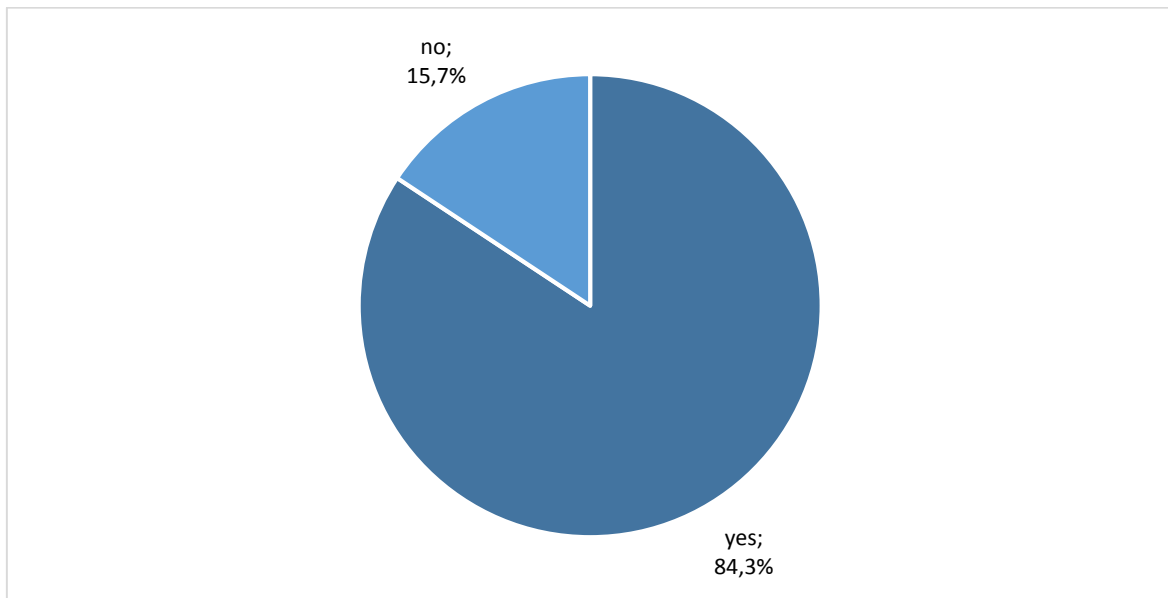
Was the timeline adequate for your project?

no;
4,8%

yes;
95,2%
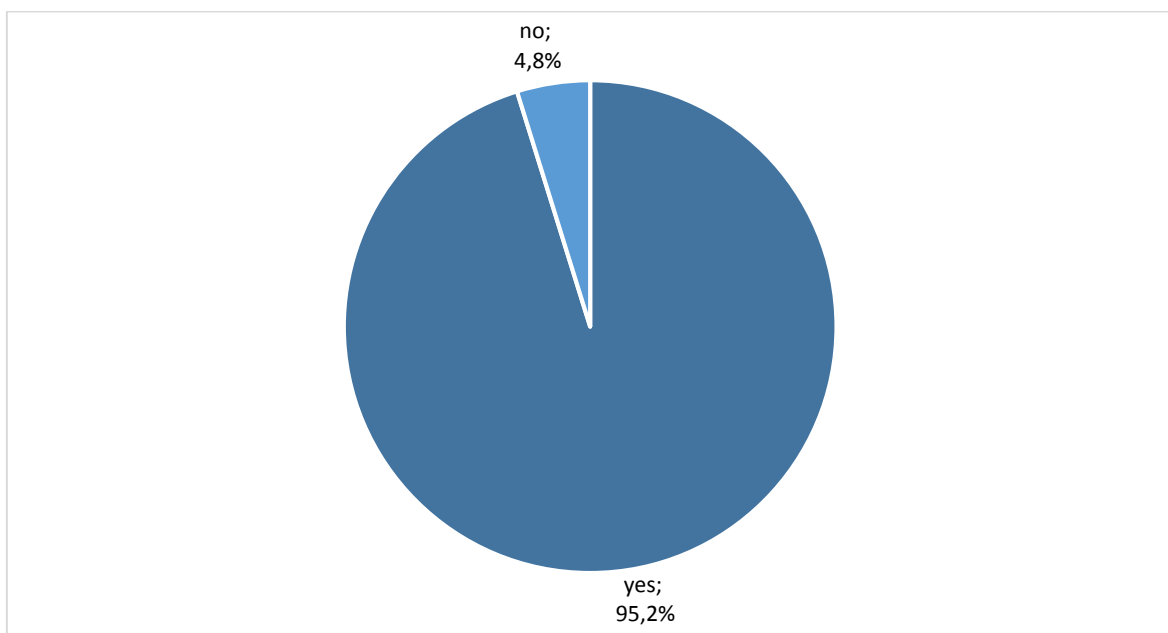
Are you planning to implement follow-up activities of your START project?

no;
4,9%

yes;
95,1%
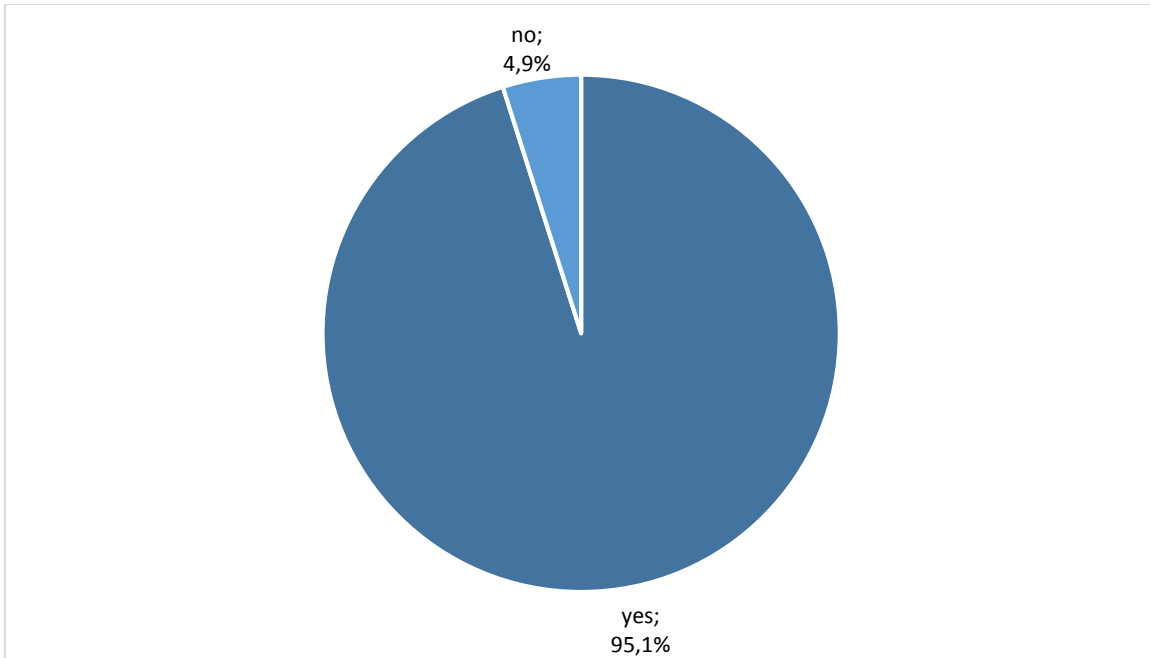
Would you submit an application to the START initiative again?

no;
11%

yes;
89%

*START is part-financed
by the European Union*
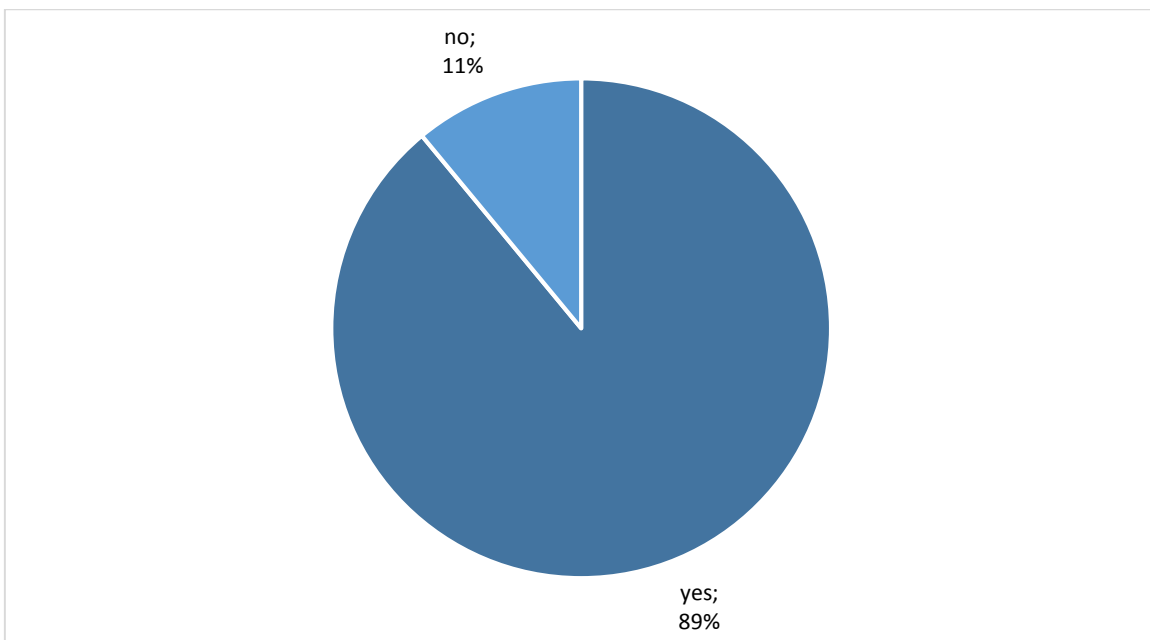
Submission of proposals for further funding:

Did you originally plan to submit a project proposal as a result of the START project activities?
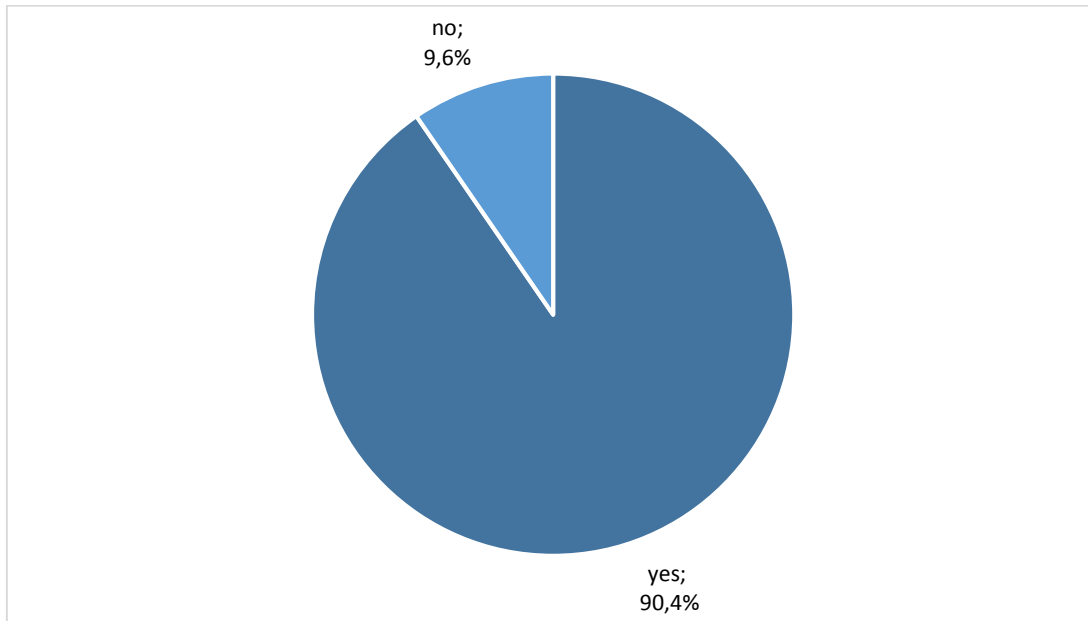
no;
9,6%

yes;
90,4%

Did you submit a project proposal as a result of your START project activities?

not yet, but
planned in the
future;
44,6%

yes;
48,2%

no;
7,2%
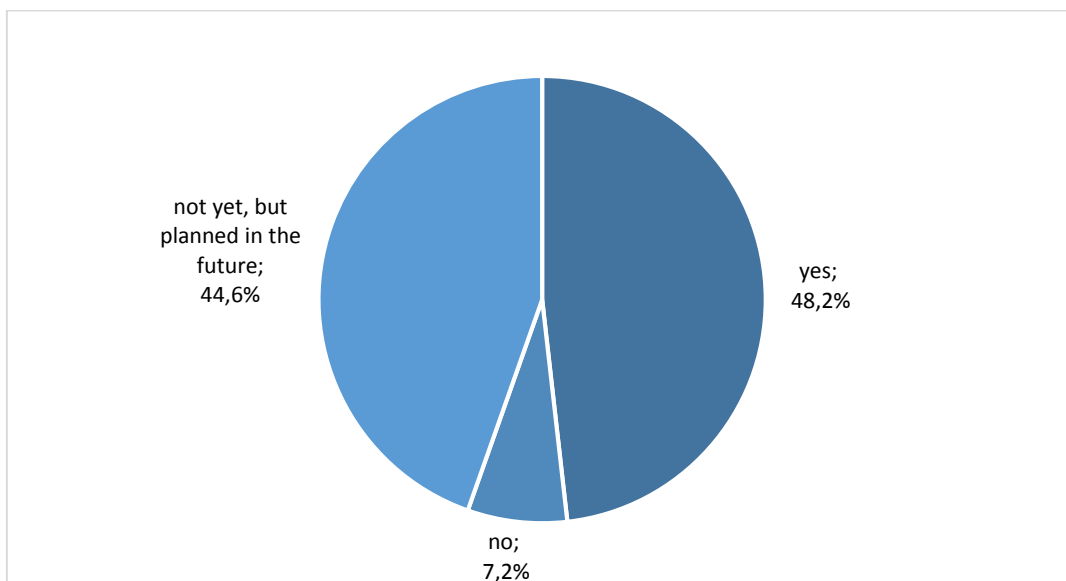
Was your project proposal selected for funding?
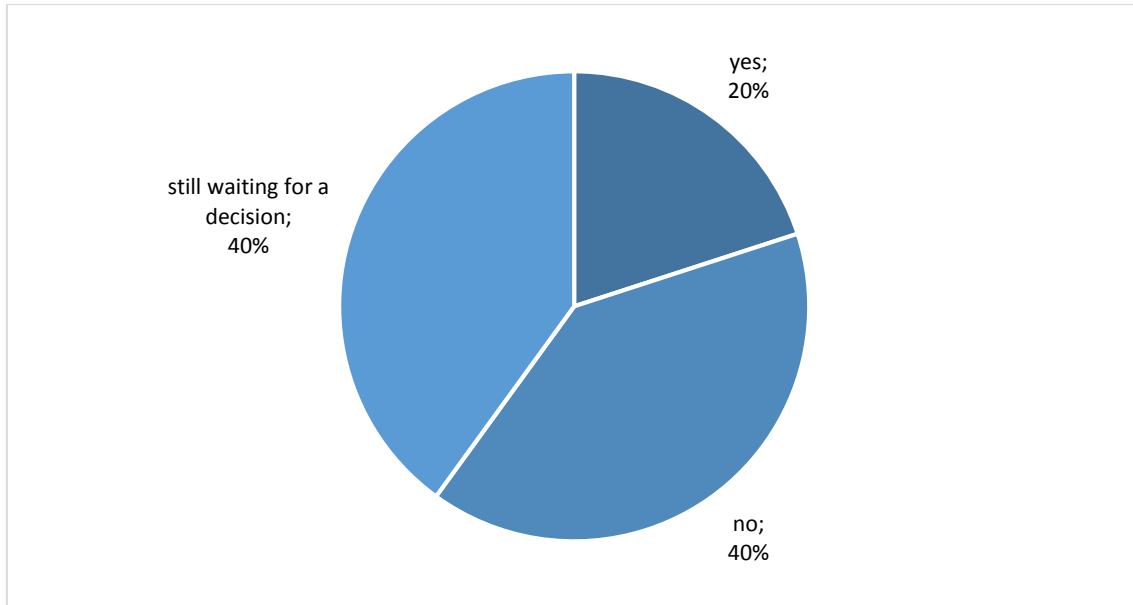
still waiting for a
decision;
40%

yes;
20%

no;
40%

START success:

How would you rate the success of the START initiative as a contribution to the Danube Region?

	53,0%	36,1%	7,2%	3,6%	0,0%
	very successful: 1	2	3	4	not successful: 5
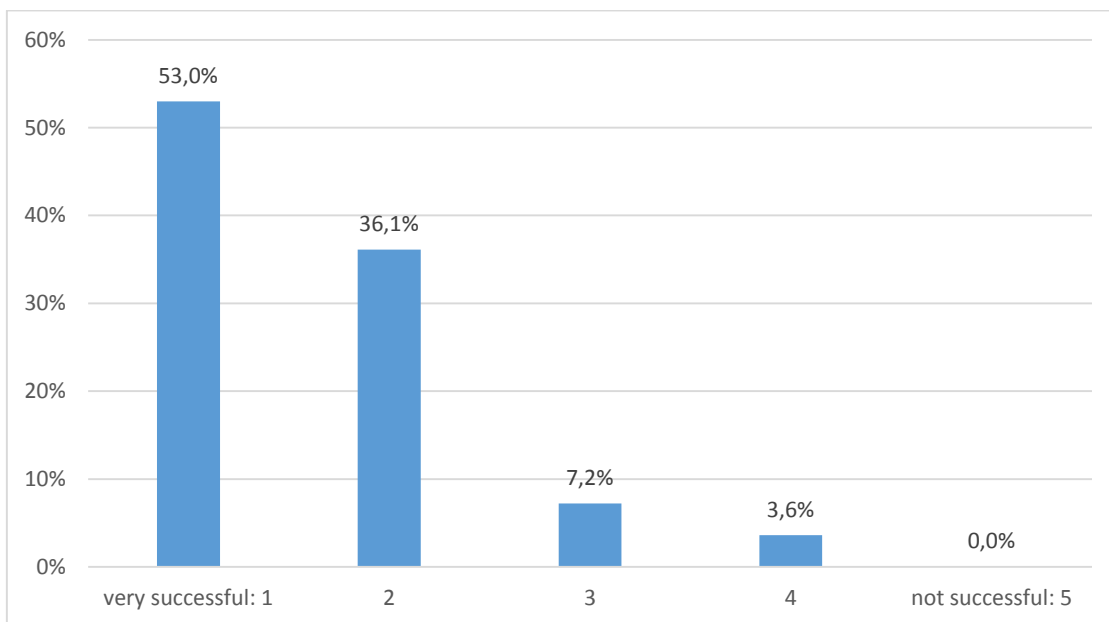
Open question:

Do you have any other feedback concerning the START initiative? [*]

Positive:

- Structure:

    - Very helpful mainly for small organizations

    - Well organized and structured

    - Beneficiary friendly implementation, not so complicated processes

    - Smooth implementation and minimal administrative burden thanks to unit costs

- Cooperation with IB (EuroVienna):

    - Donor showed real interest in content and progress of projects

    - Good support from IB (EuroVienna), kind and helpful management staff

    - Communication fluent and efficient, extremely available for all questions

Negative:

- Reporting: complicated, administrative burden too high

    - Hourly pay scale inadequate, dated and discriminatory to certain new EU members

    - Lack of differentiation in the salaries (staff with different level of qualification) unfair

- Eligibility: too rigid and not covering all situations that were part of the submitted projects

    - The issue of covering general costs for external participants were inappropriate and unrealistic.

    - Travel cost payment confirmations were disproportionate in comparison to requirements in other budget lines.

- Payment: Final (balance) payment should be done sooner

---

[*] Responses to open questions were summarized.

Recommendations for follow-up:

- Structure:

  - Larger projects

  - More partners

- Eligibility:

  - Travel costs for all participants in events should be eligible (not just speakers)

  - Subsistence allowance for external participants should be eligible

- Reporting:

  - Copies instead of originals accepted for reporting

  - Real travel costs should be replaced by flat rates as well (cf. Erasmus Grundtvig programme)

- Timeline:

  - More time for project selection phase (projects were notified of funding decision too shortly before the official start of the project)

  - Midterm reporting could be better scheduled considering the late contract signing

- Closer and defined relationship with DTP, as START projects demonstrate the priorities of EUSDR PAs

START Evaluation
Annex III

Questionnaire 3 (Q3)

Target group: General public

Target group:	General public, EUSDR stakeholders
Contents:	Visibility of START, current needs for funding in the Danube Region
Distribution:	Link to online questionnaire published on DSP website, PA10 website, EuroVienna website, EuroAccess Danube Region website
Survey period:	17.10.2016 – 30.10.2016
Responses:	20 (response rate unknown due to form of publication)

Content

In your opinion, what funding initiatives are currently most needed in the Danube Region?

Funding opportunities for which project sizes?
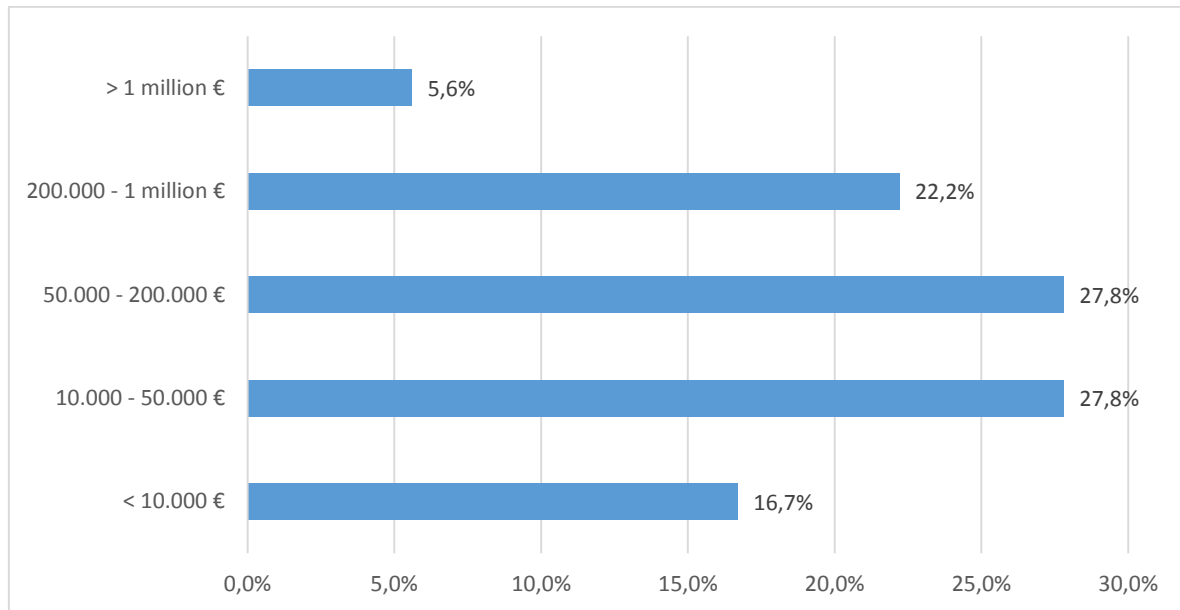
Funding opportunities for which project holders?[*]

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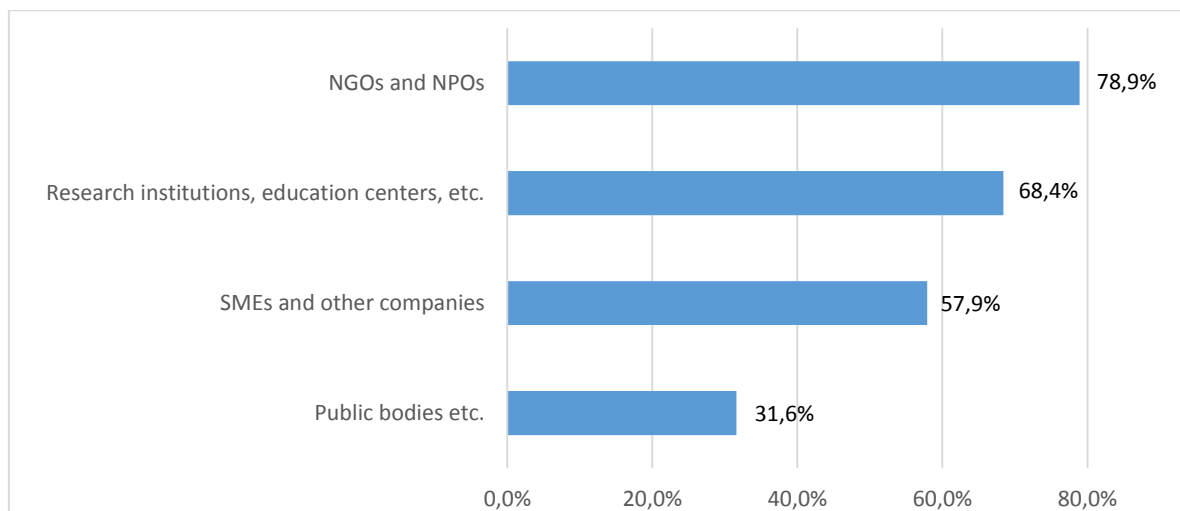
[*] Multiple answers possible

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Funding opportunities for what stage of project development?

Other; 5,3%

Preparatory actions; 36,8%

'Main stage' actions; 57,9%
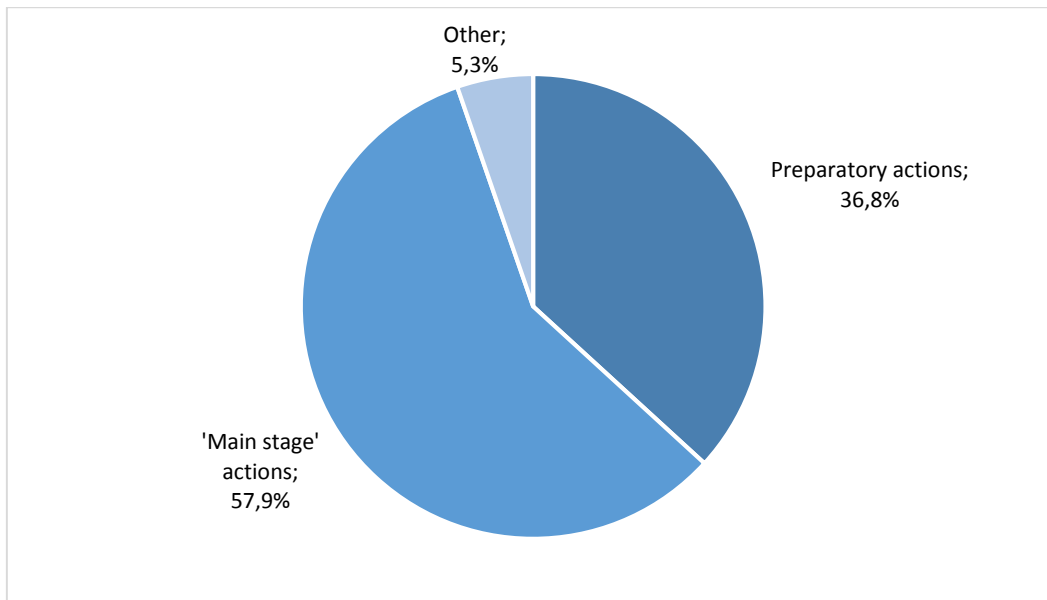
Open question: What specific needs are not addressed by currently available funding opportunitites in the Danube Region?*

- Project holders:

  - Local governments and NGOs must receive a majority of the subsidies rather than central government bodies

  - Needs of local actors, smaller municipalities and NGOs are not addressed adequately

  - Specific needs of NGOs in the field of biodiversity

- Topics:

  - Social development of Danube communities, economic opportunities for family associations, difficulty to implement similar activities along specific Danube sectors (e.g. Lower Danube - Ukraine, Moldova not partners in DTP)

  - Societal challenges, improving the education curricula

---

* Responses to open questions were summarized.

- Accessible tourism

- Organic food production

- Waste management

- Project sizes:

  - Mid-size projects, which will elaborate preparatory actions

- Structure:

  - Simple decentralized funding options with low administrative barriers

START visibility

How did you hear about the START initiative?
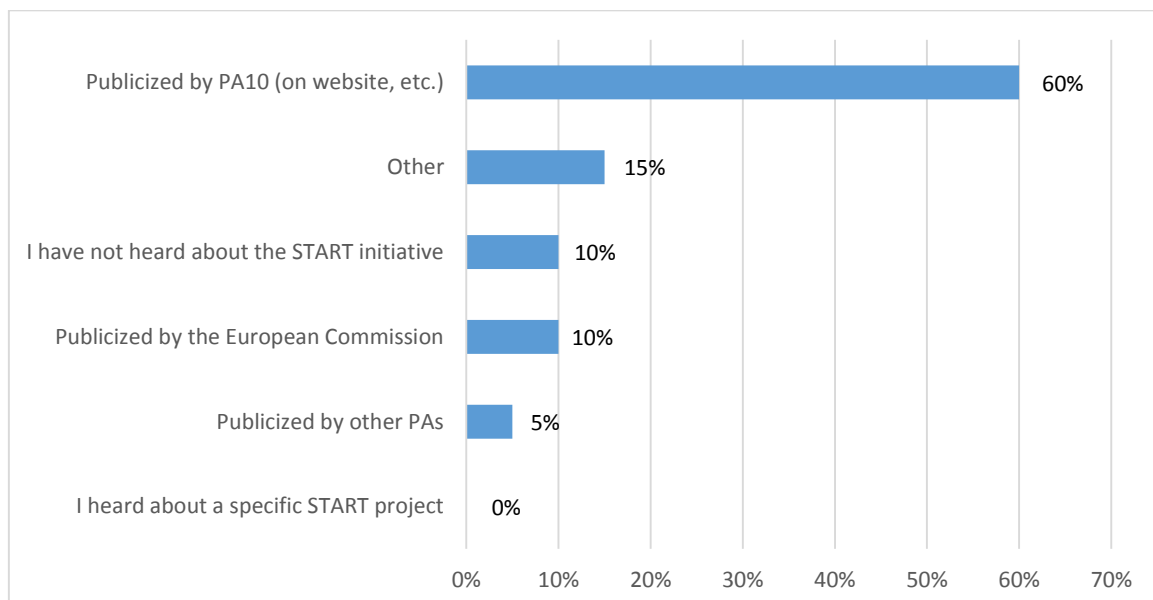
Category	Percentage
Publicized by PA10 (on website, etc.)	60%
Other	15%
I have not heard about the START initiative	10%
Publicized by the European Commission	10%
Publicized by other PAs	5%
I heard about a specific START project	0%

START success

How would you rate the success of the START initiative as a contribution to the Danube Region?
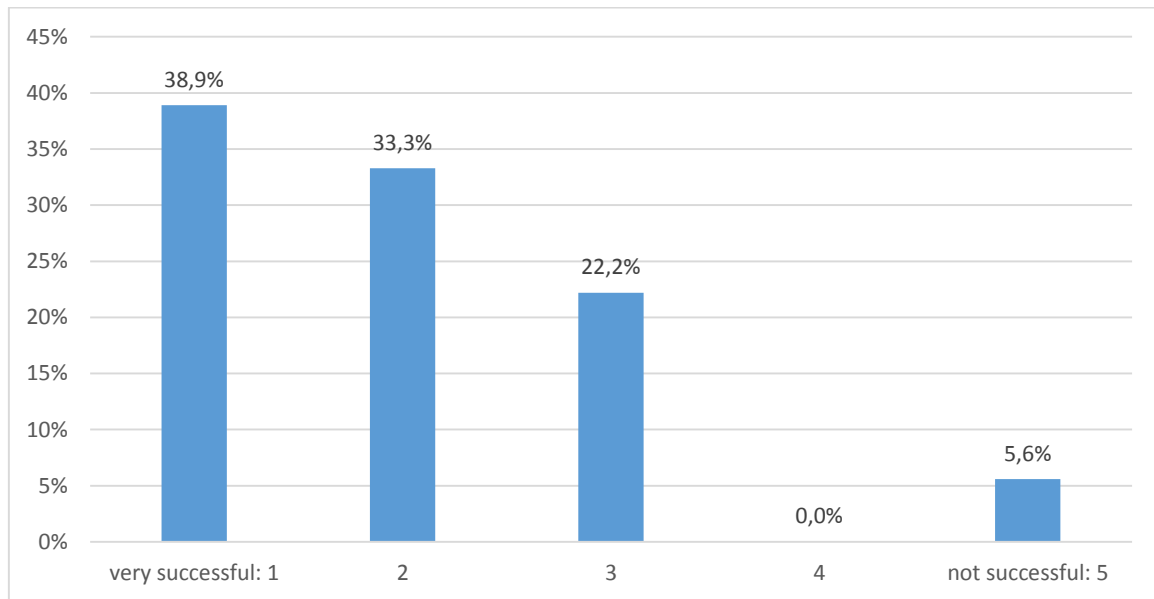
Open question

Do you have any other feedback concerning the START initiative?[*]

Positive:

- Continuation wanted

Negative:

- Should be more transparent

---

[*] Responses to open questions were summarized.

- Participation in management should be extended to all DR countries, with equal participation conditions. Without it, START remains only an Austrian/Viennese interest, which is inconsistent.

- Too little funds available in total, considering the high number of applications

Recommendations for follow-up:

- Further calls to elaborate the ideas and preparatory researches done within previous best START projects

- True follow-up wanted (outside INTERREG-B)

- It should be communicated more on the national levels in the Danube Region

START Evaluation
Annex IV

Interview

with Gudrun Pabst

The interviewee Gudrun Pabst works as a project manager for the Implementing Body of the START initiative, EuroVienna. She was responsible for the initiative's management, from the programming to finalizing its implementation.

The interview is conducted as a part of the evaluation process of the initiative, in order to complete the picture given by other involved groups via questionnaires.

It was conducted in written form on November 16th 2016.

Question 1: Please evaluate the administrative burden of the IB in relation to the grant amount!

The administrative burden of the implementation of the initiative differed greatly as regards the two calls, as well as regarding the different work packages. For the first call, the entire system had to be set up, and although some parts of the EUSBSR Seed Money Facility could be used as a starting point, quite a substantial part had to be devised from scratch or adapted considerably to the requirements of the EUSDR. I would thus like to point out that generally, in pilot initiatives such as START, the administrative burden is of course highest in the first call. Every further call will obviously be more efficient due to routine and experience.

That said, from an administrative point of view, the formal check of all 871 applications submitted in the first call and the personal support provided to all applicants beforehand as they prepared their applications proved to be very time-consuming. As the evaluation was conducted by the PACs and their SGs, this process was less labour-intense for the IB. Overall, the processes from application to selection made up for an appropriate administrative burden in relation to the amount of funding.

On the other hand, the following contracting process with the selected project beneficiaries was very labour-intense again, especially since budget plans had yet to be devised at this stage. This process proved to be very demanding for the IB, as constant and very close cooperation with the LPs was necessary to match budget and the contents of the submitted project descriptions.

In the second call, this procedure was consequently adapted: The budget plan had to be prepared beforehand by the applicants and was part of the application material. The number of applications in the second call amounted to only about 25% of those received in the first call, which can partly be traced to this adaptation. At the same time, the quality of the submitted proposals was higher from a technical point of view, and the contracting process was much smoother.

Additionally, in the second call the grant amount per project was reduced, as well as the eligible number of project partners, all of which led to a reduction of the administrative burden.

Overall, the verification of project expenditure accounted for the highest intensity in labour for the IB. Despite simplified reporting obligations (such as unit costs for personnel, meetings and – partially – travels), the expenses for the verification process were still disproportionate. 100% of project expenditure was verified by the IB in a two-step procedure. LPs were asked to provide missing documentation after the first step, which was essential given the quality of submitted final reports. For follow-up initiatives, an even further simplified procedure of accounting and verification, such as lump sums, should be considered for reasons of cost efficiency.

Question 2: Please evaluate the grant amount per project and the size of partnerships!

In the first call, the maximum size of project consortia was up to 6 partners receiving jointly up to 40.000 € in START funding. During implementation, partnerships of 5-6 partners proved to be too much, as the coordination of 5-6 organizations as well as collecting documentation of project expenses was too time-consuming in comparison to the content-related outputs which the projects could deliver for the amount of funding received. In the second call, the maximum amount of partners was lowered to 4, but at the same time, the maximum amount of funding per project was lowered to 20.000 €. In order to improve efficiency in possible follow-up initiatives, a benchmark sum of min. 15.000 € per partner (thus minimum of 45.000 € for a consortium of 3 partners) would be recommended.

START Evaluation
Annex V

List of funded START projects

The following data on the 48 projects funded within the START initiative has been extracted from the START projects' applications and reports. Details on project contents can be found in the publication START - 48 Stories of Success, published in November 2016 by EuroVienna.

Number of projects:	48
Project duration:	Between 6 and 12 months
Implementation period:	Between March 2015 and July 2016
Total project volume:	1.619.093,03 €
Total START funding:	1.268.153,13 €

Priority Area	Call	Project acronym	Project title	Name of LP (English)	Country LP	Total verified project expenses	START funding received	START funding rate
PA1a	1	**POPEI**	Danube ports in the light of numbers - Introducing the new level of Port Performance Indicator System for the inland waterway ports	Hungarian Federation of Danube Ports HFDP	Hungary	40.317,24 €	35.400,00 €	87,80%
PA1a	1	**TRAINING4PORTS**	Building Competency-based Training for Port Sector Labour Force in a supportive environment	Union of Romanian Inland Ports	Romania	47.558,14 €	38.600,24 €	81,16%
PA1a	2	**CLEAR BASIN**	Research of River-Port Sediment and its Potential use in Civil Engineering	Faculty of Civil Engineering Osijek	Croatia	20.308,11 €	16.400,00 €	80,76%
PA1a	2	**MREIND**	Measurement of reliability in inland navigation along the Danube fairway	Innovation Center of Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Belgrade Ltd.	Serbia	23.170,54 €	19.500,00 €	84,16%
PA1b	1	**RADAR**	Risk Assessment on Danube Area Roads	European Road Assessment Association	Slovenia	45.041,26 €	39.000,00 €	86,59%
PA1b	1	**TLC_VUKA**	Transport Logistic Centre "VUKA"	Vukovar-Srijem County	Croatia	48.395,07 €	39.600,00 €	81,83%
PA1b	2	**INTR**	Intervention Routes	Geoplus Ltd.	Slovenia	26.064,64 €	20.000,00 €	76,73%
PA1b	2	**SENT**	Southeast Europe Network of Transport and Logistics Centres	Intermodal Transport Cluster	Croatia	27.792,70 €	18.500,00 €	66,56%
PA02	1	**DanReGeotherm-DATA**	Data support for the enhanced use of deep geothermal energy in the Danube Region	Geological and geophysical Institute of Hungary	Hungary	43.797,60 €	39.397,84 €	89,95%

Priority Area	Call	Project acronym	Project title	Name of LP (English)	Country LP	Total verified project expenses	START funding received	START funding rate
PA02	1	**SMEP**	Sustainable municipal energy policy	Porsenna NGO	Czech Republic	37.145,00 €	30.629,46 €	82,46%
PA02	2	**EPIC**	Energy Planning in Communities	South Transdanubian Regional Development Agency	Hungary	22.503,06 €	19.200,00 €	85,32%
PA02	2	**IEEDR**	Improving Energy Efficiency in local authorities in the Danube Region	Association EcoEnergy	Serbia	25.187,14 €	18.900,00 €	75,04%
PA03	1	**Danube Cycling**	Middle and Lower Danube Cycling Routes	Danube Competence Center	Serbia	38.520,35 €	34.361,29 €	89,20%
PA03	1	**AUTHENTIC DANUBE**	Authentic Danube - delivering tourism excellence for visitors and industry	Authentic Bulgaria Association	Bulgaria	42.165,05 €	36.310,47 €	86,12%
PA03	2	**Danube Ecotourism**	Cross-border ecotourism in the Danube Region	Association for the development of Social&Wellness Tourism	Romania	23.103,43 €	20.000,00 €	86,57%
PA03	2	**MYD**	Make Your Day! - Contemporary Fine Artist exchange and networking	Culture and Green Zona Association of Szigetvár	Hungary	22.872,88 €	17.900,00 €	78,26%
PA04	1	**STAWA**	Towards the assesment of ecological status of water bodies in the Sava River Basin	University of Belgrade, Institute for Biological Research Siniša Stanković	Serbia	38.494,64 €	33.751,64 €	87,68%
PA04	2	**SANDANUBE**	Sustainable sanitation in small settlements of the Danube Region	Global Water Partnership Central and Eastern Europe	Slovakia	24.742,90 €	20.000,00 €	80,83%

Priority Area	Call	Project acronym	Project title	Name of LP (English)	Country LP	Total verified project expenses	START funding received	START funding rate
PA04	2	**CleanRiver**	CleanRiver - creation of feasibility study for improvement of wastewater treatment facilities in Ukraine	NGO Transcarpathian Agency for Investment, Innovation and Development	Ukraine	22.358,72 €	19.227,50 €	86,00%
PA05	1	**DELOG-FLOOD**	Decision support tool for logistic operations of flood management	Bay Zoltán Nonprofit Ltd. for Applied Research	Hungary	43.382,34 €	38.868,68 €	89,60%
PA05	1	**HTU**	HelpTeamUkraine - capacity building and improved cooperation of volunteer rescue teams for better flood and emergency protection	Comprehensive Rescue Center	Ukraine	48.653,06 €	38.700,00 €	79,54%
PA05	2	**E-FLOOD platform**	Establishment of Flood Forecasting platform for Drava and Mura River	Drava River Electricity producer Ltd.	Slovenia	15.729,12 €	12.900,00 €	82,01%
PA05	2	**MORCHFLOOD**	Quantification of morphological changes in river channels and its impact on flood risk	University in Ostrava	Czech Republic	19.249,72 €	16.311,05 €	84,73%
PA06	1	**STURGENE**	Ex-situ survey to preserve sturgeon genetic diversity in the Middle and Lower Danube	International Association for Danube Research	Austria	67.742,53 €	36.520,14 €	53,91%
PA06	1	**B=B**	Bee=Biodiversity	Veles' Vision	Serbia	36.730,97 €	32.000,00 €	87,12%
PA06	2	**SONDAR+**	Soil- and Sustainable- Operations Network in the Danube Region	BIENE - Soil-, Bio-energy and Sustainability Network Lower Austria / Europe	Austria	27.404,64 €	20.000,00 €	72,98%
PA06	2	**ConnectGREEN**	Preserving wildlife corridors in mountains as green infrastructure in the Danube Basin	Friends of the Earth Czech Republic, Olomouc branch	Czech Republic	20.669,92 €	17.900,00 €	86,60%

Priority Area	Call	Project acronym	Project title	Name of LP (English)	Country LP	Total verified project expenses	START funding received	START funding rate
PA07	1	**WORTH**	Pulsating water jet as an orthopaedic technique without thermal and mechanical damage of large joints with minimal traumatizing impact on patient	Institute of Geonics AS CR, v.v.i.	Czech Republic	35.390,66 €	26.499,55 €	74,88%
PA07	1	**BEST-NetWORK**	BioEthics Standards in Translational research: an integrated approach of the Bioethics education in biomedical sciences and its role in the development of the Knowledge Society in Danube Region countries	University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine (UASVM)	Romania	41.464,10 €	37.186,85 €	89,68%
PA07	2	**Danube Peering**	Strengthening peering and supporting Internet Exchange Points in Danube Region	NIX.CZ Association	Czech Republic	28.615,68 €	18.389,47 €	64,26%
PA07	2	**START-SoPI**	Feasibility Study on Implementing a Pan-European Social Platform to Support Lifelong Learning and Employability	Bucharest University of Economic Studies	Romania	22.811,34 €	17.400,00 €	76,28%
PA08	1	**Furnitu-RE**	Smart Furniture Remanufacturing	Bulgarian Furniture Cluster	Bulgaria	42.875,17 €	33.820,98 €	78,88%
PA08	1	**SIRA DANUBE connected**	Smart and Innovative Rural Areas - Connect Centres of Competences	University of Hohenheim	Germany	32.801,36 €	23.608,07 €	71,97%
PA08	2	**DANUBE ICT**	Danube ICT Clusters' sustainable cooperation for smart and inclusive growth	Foundation "Cluster Information and Communication Technologies"	Bulgaria	24.763,33 €	18.700,00 €	75,51%
PA08	2	**SRIID**	Sava region initiative for innovative development	Technology transfer centre Ltd.	Croatia	22.769,79 €	19.800,00 €	86,96%
PA09	1	**Danube ENTRE**	Danube Competence Centres for Creativity and Entrepreneurship	Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises-Ruse	Bulgaria	37.631,66 €	33.200,00 €	88,22%

Priority Area	Call	Project acronym	Project title	Name of LP (English)	Country LP	Total verified project expenses	START funding received	START funding rate
PA09	1	**MLD**	"Milestones of Learning Development" - Strategic improvement and development of life long learning programs within Danube region	South East European Youth Network	Bosnia and Herzegovina	44.543,12 €	35.000,00 €	78,58%
PA09	1	**DSSEC**	Danube Social Service & Education Cluster - Creating more accessible, effective and integrated social services and inclusive education programmes delivered to vulnerable groups in danger of social exclusion through clustering of	Federation of Social NGOs in Bulgaria	Bulgaria	42.674,73 €	37.730,66 €	88,41%
PA09	2	**RID**	Roma integration across the Danube: best practices and social entrepreneurship models exchange between Romania and Bulgaria	Romanian Center for European Policies	Romania	25.185,99 €	17.800,00 €	70,67%
PA09	2	**RomaEdu-Danube**	Integration of Rroma children into education system - countries of Danube region	Institute for romological studies, education and culture	Slovenia	31.164,66 €	20.000,00 €	64,18%
PA10	1	**START-DANTE4PA**	START-Danube Network of Training Experts for Public Administration	Euro-Institute	Germany	59.094,00 €	39.200,00 €	66,33%
PA10	1	**B-CAP**	Building Capacities in the Danube Region	L&R Social Research	Austria	42.574,00 €	33.556,55 €	78,82%
PA10	2	**CCR**	Capacity building for small and medium cities - city centre revival	Academia Istropolitana Nova	Slovakia	21.038,78 €	16.700,00 €	79,38%
PA10	2	**goodworks ATHURO**	Socio-ecological production: goodworks and practical cooperation for sustainable public procurement	Goodworks Innovation Agency EEIG	Austria	30.706,90 €	20.000,00 €	65,13%
PA11	1	**CSDanube**	Cybersecurity in Danube Region	CZ.NIC Association	Czech Republic	51.315,14 €	38.500,00 €	75,03%

Priority Area	Call	Project acronym	Project title	Name of LP (English)	Country LP	Total verified project expenses	START funding received	START funding rate
PA11	1	ITF	Illicit Trafficking of Firearms in the Danube Region	Foundation - Centre for European Perspective	Slovenia	28.911,46 €	24.936,09 €	86,25%
PA11	2	DanubeLE_2.0	Combating Cybercrime in the Danube Region - Law Enforcement 2.0	Ministry of the Interior Baden-Württemberg	Germany	33.225,38 €	16.276,60 €	48,99%
PA11	2	CTP	Countering Trafficking in Persons	Southeast European Law Enforcement Center SELEC	Romania	20.435,01 €	9.970,00 €	48,79%
Total						1.619.093,03 €	1.268.153,13 €	

START Evaluation
Annex VI

Statistical data of START

The following statistical data on the START project applications, selected projects and project implementation has been extracted from the START online monitoring system, the project applications and reports, as well as other relevant documentation of the initiative.

Content

Applications

Applications: Per call and success rate

Calls	No. of applications	No. formally correct*	Percentage formally correct	Selected	Success rate
Call 1	871	651	74,74%	25	3,84%
Call 2	205	164	80,00%	24	14,63%
Total	**1076**	**815**	**75,74%**	**49**	**6,01%**

*The number of formally correct applications was used to calculate the success rates, as the number of applications includes double and test submissions.
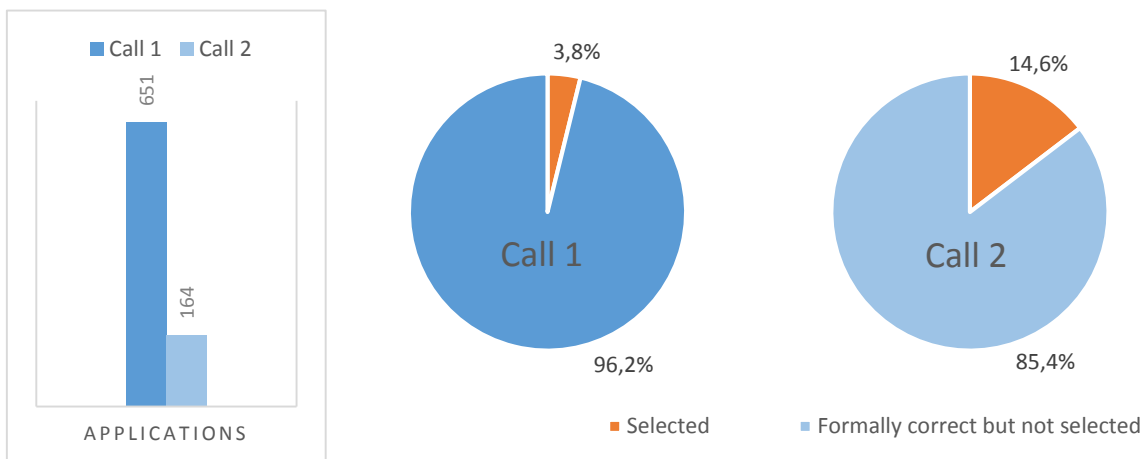
Applications: Per Priority Area (PA)

PA	Applications Call 1		Applications Call 2		Applications total	
PA01a Mobility - Waterways	10	1,15%	4	1,95%	14	1,30%
PA01b Mobility - Rail - Road - Air	11	1,26%	4	1,95%	15	1,39%
PA02 Energy	58	6,66%	16	7,80%	74	6,88%
PA03 Culture & tourism	207	23,77%	40	19,51%	247	22,96%
PA04 Water quality	40	4,59%	9	4,39%	49	4,55%
PA05 Environmental Risks	57	6,54%	8	3,90%	65	6,04%
PA06 Biodiversity, landscapes	63	7,23%	15	7,32%	78	7,25%
PA07 Knowledge Society	81	9,30%	32	15,61%	113	10,50%
PA08 Competitiveness	76	8,73%	35	17,07%	111	10,32%
PA09 People & Skills	127	14,58%	16	7,80%	143	13,29%
PA10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation	128	14,70%	20	9,76%	148	13,75%
PA11 Security	13	1,49%	6	2,93%	19	1,77%
Total	**871**	**100,00%**	**205**	**100,00%**	**1076**	**100,00%**

Funded projects

Funded projects: Per Priority Area (PA)

Funded projects per PA	Call 1	Call 2	Total
PA01a Mobility - Waterways	2	2	4
PA01b Mobility - Rail - Road - Air	2	2	4
PA02 Energy	2	2	4
PA03 Culture & tourism	2	2	4
PA04 Water quality	1	2	3
PA05 Environmental Risks	2	2	4
PA06 Biodiversity, landscapes	2	2	4
PA07 Knowledge Society	2	2	4
PA08 Competitiveness	2	2	4
PA09 People & Skills	3	2	5
PA10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation	2	2	4
PA11 Security	2	2	4
Total	**24**	**24**	**48**

Number of funded projects per PA
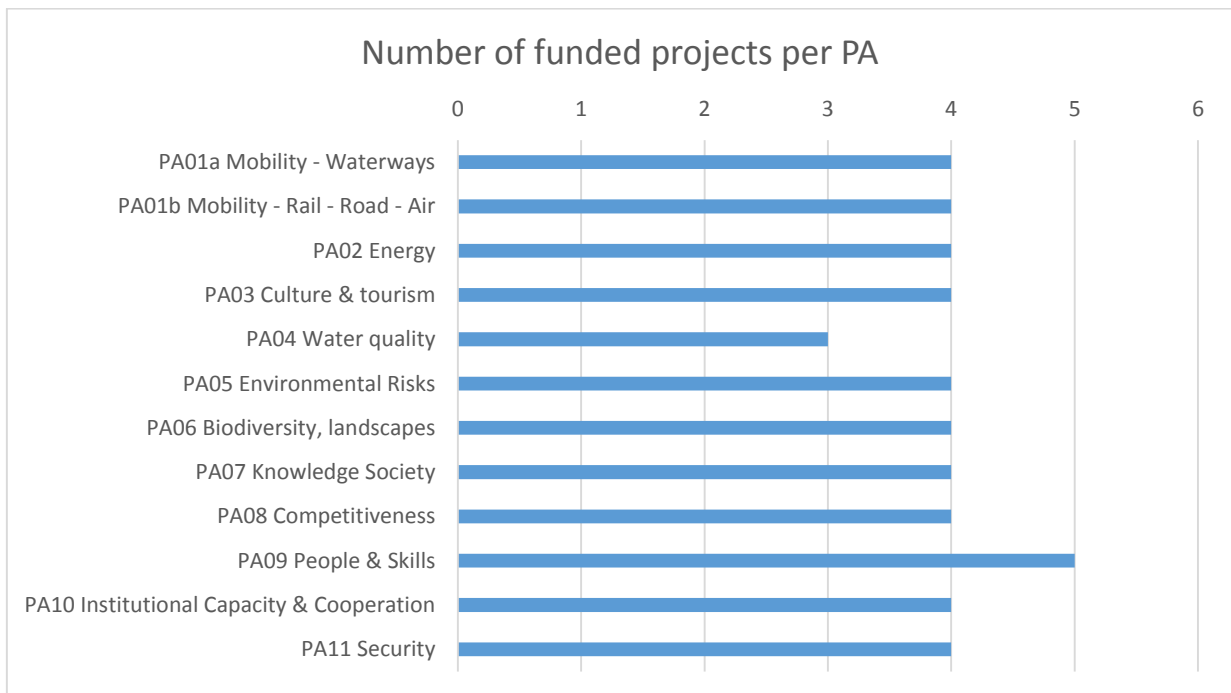
Funded projects: Lead Partners per country

Country	LPs Call 1	LPs Call 2	Total
Austria	2	2	4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	0	1
Bulgaria	4	1	5
Croatia	1	3	4
Czech Republic	3	3	6
Germany	2	1	3
Hungary	3	2	5
Moldova	0	0	0
Montenegro	0	0	0
Romania	2	4	6
Serbia	3	2	5
Slovakia	0	2	2
Slovenia	2	3	5
Ukraine	1	1	2
Total	24	24	48

Total: LPs per country
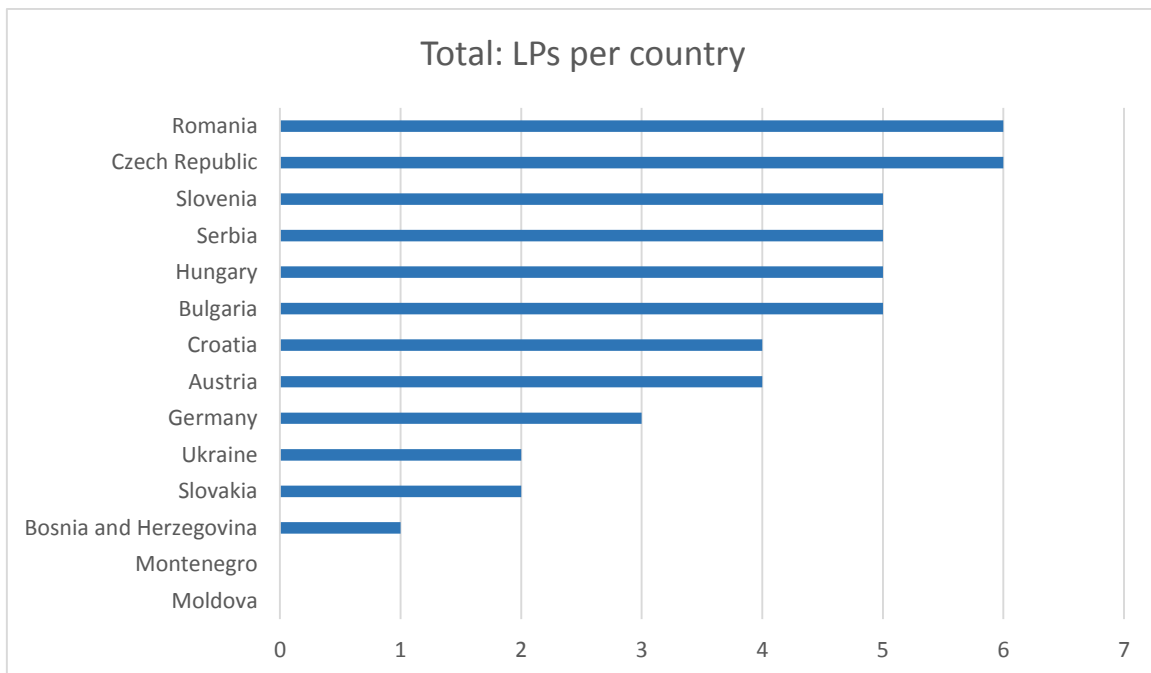
Funded projects: Lead and Project Partners per country

Country	LP	PP1	PP2	PP3	PP4	PP5	Total PPs	Total LPs + PPs
Austria	4	8	5	5	0	0	18	**22**
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1	2	3	1	1	0	7	**8**
Bulgaria	5	2	3	4	1	1	11	**16**
Croatia	4	6	12	2	0	2	22	**26**
Czech Republic	6	1	1	2	1	0	5	**11**
Germany	3	1	0	2	1	0	4	**7**
Hungary	5	1	4	2	1	3	11	**16**
Moldova	0	1	1	1	0	1	4	**4**
Montenegro	0	1	1	3	0	0	5	**5**
Romania	6	10	4	2	6	2	24	**30**
Serbia	5	4	6	5	3	3	21	**26**
Slovakia	2	5	4	1	0	1	11	**13**
Slovenia	5	5	2	3	1	0	11	**16**
Ukraine	2	1	1	0	0	0	2	**4**
Total	**48**	**48**	**47**	**33**	**15**	**13**	**156**	**204**

Total: LPs and PPs per country

Country	Percentage
Romania	14,7%
Serbia	12,7%
Croatia	12,7%
Austria	10,8%
Slovenia	7,8%
Hungary	7,8%
Bulgaria	7,8%
Slovakia	6,4%
Czech Republic	5,4%
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3,9%
Germany	3,4%
Montenegro	2,5%
Ukraine	2,0%
Moldova	2,0%

StaDt+Wien
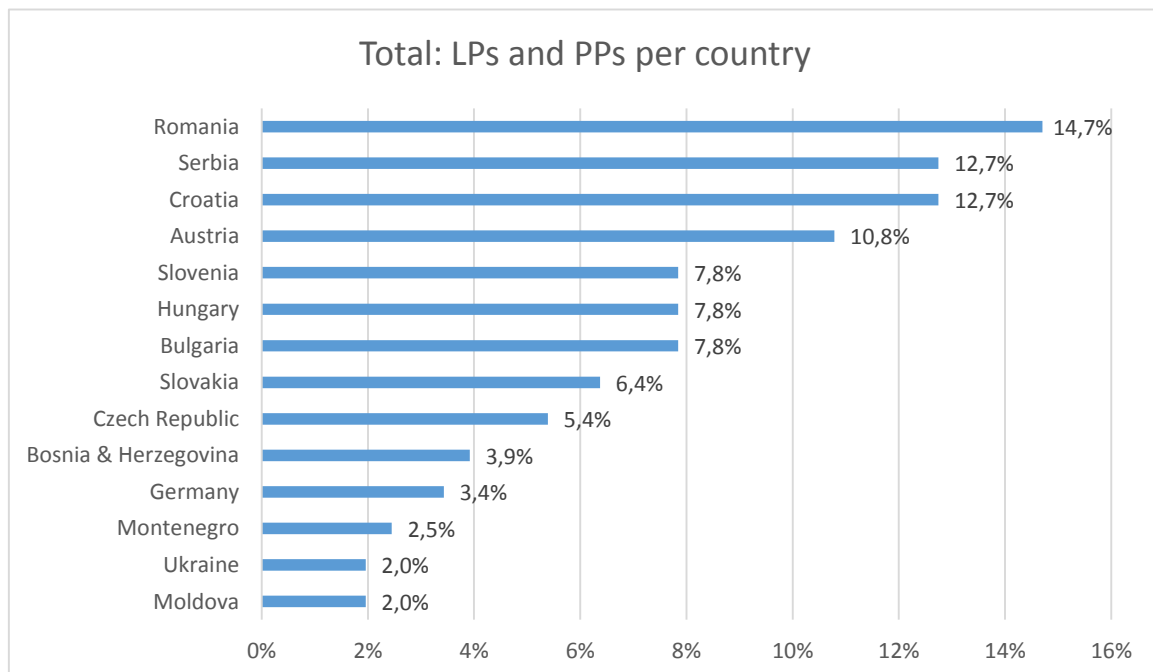
Funded projects: Type of organisation

Type of Organisation	LP		PPs		Total	
NGO	27	**56,25%**	59	37,82%	86	**42,16%**
university / research institution	11	**22,92%**	48	30,77%	59	**28,92%**
public agency / organisation	2	**4,17%**	21	13,46%	23	**11,27%**
non-profit company	2	**4,17%**	8	5,13%	10	**4,90%**
company	3	**6,25%**	4	2,56%	7	**3,43%**
regional authority	2	**4,17%**	4	2,56%	6	**2,94%**
local authority / municipality	0	**0,00%**	6	3,85%	6	**2,94%**
ministry	1	**2,08%**	6	3,85%	7	**3,43%**
	48	100,00%	156	100,00%	204	100,00%

LP type of organisation

- NGO: 56,25%
- University / research institution: 22,92%
- Company: 6,25%
- Non-profit company: 4,17%
- Public agency / organisation: 4,17%
- Regional authority: 4,17%
- Ministry: 2,08%

LP + PP type of organisation

Type of organisation	Percentage
NGO	42,16%
University / research institution	28,92%
Public agency / organisation	11,27%
Non-profit company	4,90%
Ministry	3,43%
Company	3,43%
Local authority / municipality	2,94%
Regional authority	2,94%

Funded projects: Type A and type B projects

START project types

A: specific part of a larger project

e.g. delimited working packages, events, surveys, etc.

B: The implementation of a small project

All activities related to the project are funded by START

Implemented projects

Type A; 50%

Type B; 50%
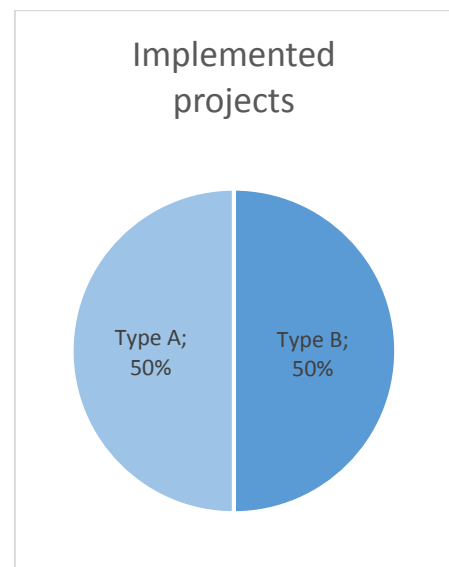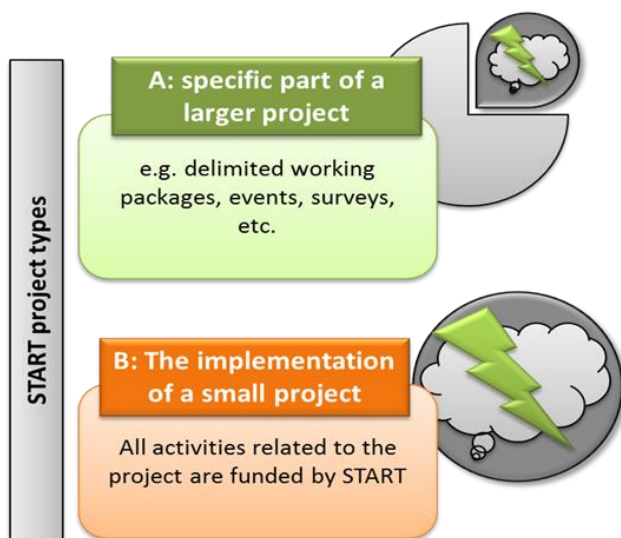
Budget

Total START budget

Total START budget	START grant amount	Percentage
Total START amount available	1.350.000,00 €	100,00%
Total START amount contracted	1.318.050,00 €	97,63%
Total START amount certified	1.268.153,13 €	96,21%

START budget per project

START budget per project	START grant amount	Total START project expenses
Average per project	26.419,86 €	33.731,10 €
Minimum	9.970,00 €	15.729,12 €
Maximum	39.600,00 €	67.742,53 €
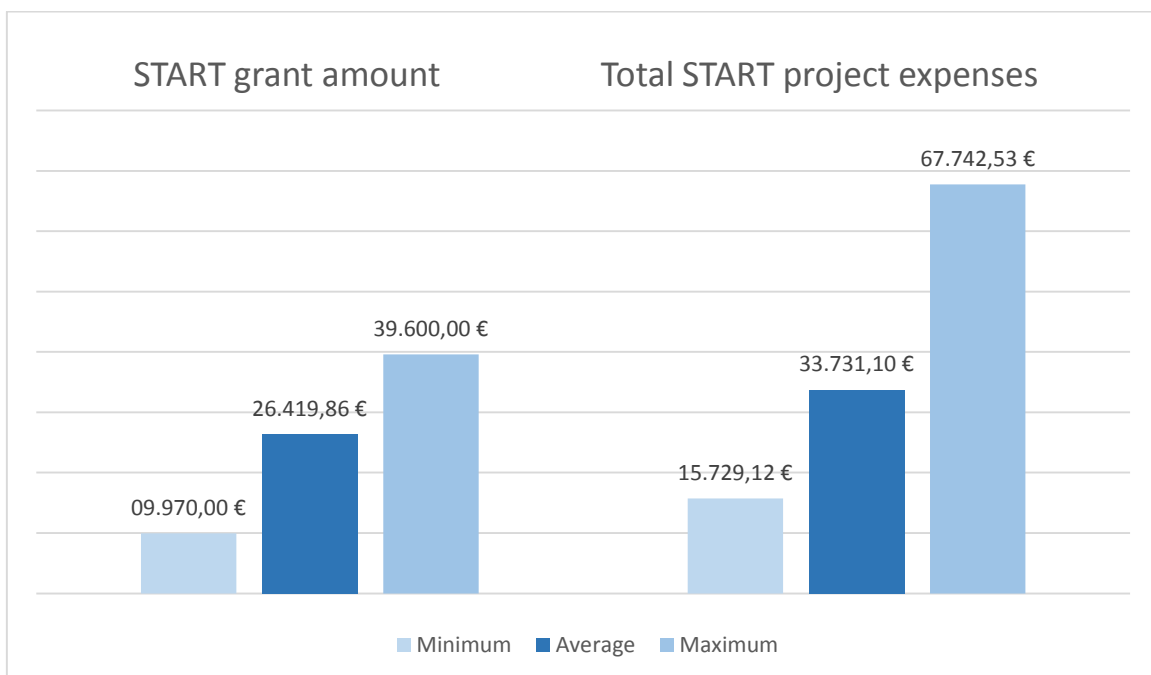
Submission of proposals for further funding

Danube Transnational Programme (DTP)

| Submission of proposals for further funding	No.
Submission originally planned in projects' Grant Agreements	13
Call 1: Submissions of START follow-ups in DTP	13
Call 1: Proposals selected in 1st step	4
Call 1: Proposals selected in 2nd step	2
Call 2: Submission planned	11

DTP submission of proposals

Category	Value
Submission originally planned in Grant Agreement	13
Call 1: Submissions of START follow-ups in DTP	13
Call 1: Proposals selected in 1st step	4
Call 1: Proposals selected in 2nd step	2
Call 2: Submission planned	11
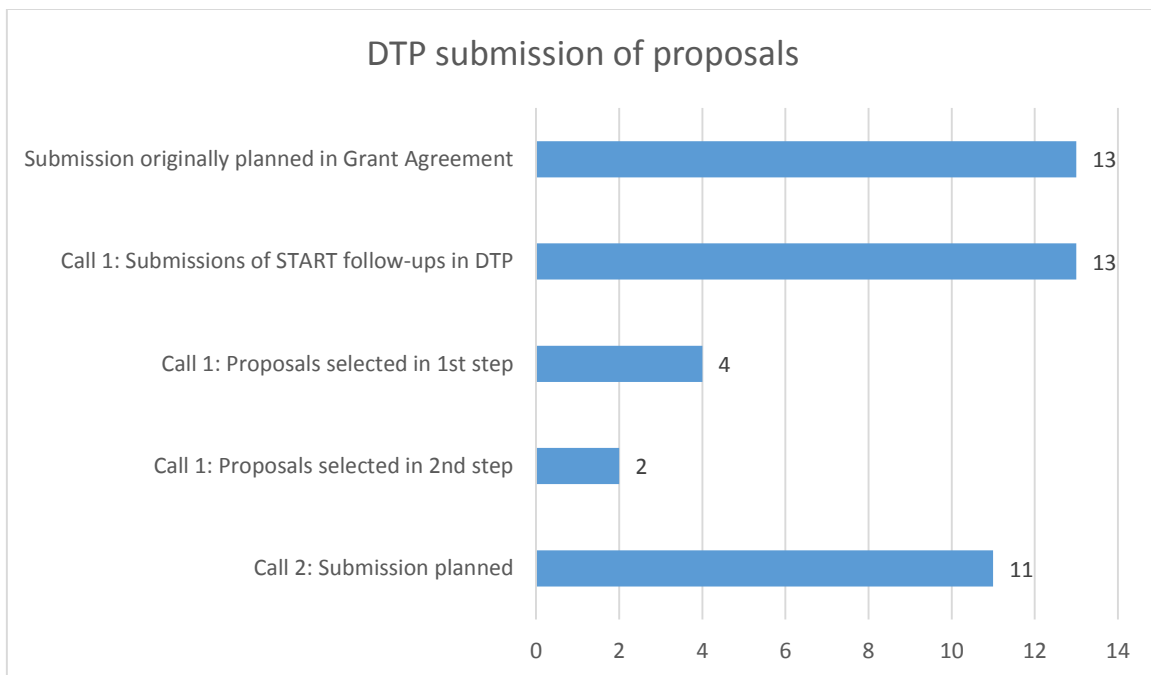
All funding programmes

Submissions of START follow-up project proposals both past and planned (includes re-applications)

Programme	No. of past and planned submissions
Interreg DTP	24
Erasmus+	10
Other Interreg: CBC, IPA, ENI	6
Horizon	4
National funding programmes	3
Internal Security Fund	1
EuropeAid	1
UNESCO	1
Connecting Europe Facility	1
Unspecified	6
Total	**57**

All past and planned submissions of proposals

Programme	Value
DTP	24
Erasmus+	10
Other Interreg: CBC, IPA, ENI	6
Horizon	4
National funding programmes	3
Internal Security Fund	1
EuropeAid	1
UNESCO	1