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EUSAIR FACILITY POINT

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

2016-2023





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04 EUSAIR FACILITY POINT

05 PROJECT PARTNERS

06 SUPPORTING EUSAIR GOVERNANCE: NURTURING PROGRESS

09 FACILITATING STRATEGIC PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCIAL DIALOGUE

11 EUSAIR STAKEHOLDER PLATFORM: FACILITATING COLLABORATION

13 RECOGNISING ADDED VALUE OF EUSAIR

15 COMMUNICATING EUSAIR: BRIDGING COMPLEXITY WITH CLARITY

EUSAIR FACILITY POINT

The European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian region (EUSAIR) Facility Point serves as a crucial tool for promoting and facilitating the EUSAIR's implementation. Its primary objective is to offer operational support to the EUSAIR's governance structures.

Funded under the INTERREG V-B ADRION programme (2014-2020), a total budget of 11.5 million EUR has been allocated for the functioning of the EUSAIR Facility Point. Originally planned from May 2016 to December 2022, the duration of the project has been extended to October 31, 2023.

The EUSAIR Facility Point operates as a collaborative partnership involving partners from eight EUSAIR participating countries. The lead partner is the Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development of the Republic of Slovenia coordinating the corresponding ministries, a regional entity, and a local authority from the EUSAIR participating countries, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Together, they established a friendship.

The primary role of the EUSAIR Facility Point partnership is to provide valuable support to key entities, including the EUSAIR Governing Board (GB) and the four Thematic Steering Groups (TSGs). These TSGs collectively involve ten countries across the Adriatic-Ionian region, working collaboratively to advance the EUSAIR's objectives.

EUSAIR Facility Point partners are responsible for the implementation of five functions contributing to the implementation of the Strategy. Each function has a responsible leader, coordinating the work of the partnership in the area:

- Assistance to Governing Board and Thematic Steering Groups (leader: Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, Slovenia)
- Facilitating strategic project development and financial dialogue (leader: Municipality of Izola, Slovenia)
- Developing and managing the EUSAIR Stakeholder platform (leader: Marche Region, Italy)
- Building capacities for monitoring and evaluation of EUSAIR (leader: Ministry of Economy and Finance, Greece)
- Communicating EUSAIR (leader: Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, Slovenia)

The work on EUSAIR Facility Point 2016-2023 will persist in future governance support projects: EUSAIR Facility Point 2023-2027, EUSAIR Stakeholders Engagement Point and EUSAIR Strategic Implementation Project. The detailed information about all the work accomplishments in the following publication serves as a showcase of achievements and contributions to the macro-region's development.

EUSAIR Facility Point strategic project is funded under the Interreg V-B Adriatic-Ionian Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 by ERDF/IPAII funds and national funds.

PROJECT PARTNERS

LEAD PARTNER

Ministry of Cohesion and Regional
Development of the Republic of Slovenia

ALBANIA

Prime Minister's Office - State Agency for
Strategic Planning and Aid Coordination

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Directorate for European Integration
of Council of Ministers of Bosnia and
Herzegovina

CROATIA

Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the
Republic of Croatia

GREECE

Ministry of Economy and Finance,
General Secretariat of Public
Investments and PA, General
Directorate for Strategy, Planning and
Implementation of PA, Special Service
for Coordination of Planning,
Evaluation and Implementation



ITALY

Marche Region – Innovation and
International Cooperation Unit

SERBIA

Ministry of European Integration
Government of the Republic of Serbia

MONTENEGRO

Ministry of European Affairs of the
Republic of Montenegro

SLOVENIA

Municipality
of Izola

Supporting EUSAIR Governance: NURTURING PROGRESS

EUSAIR officially saw the light of day in 2014. Almost from its inception in 2016, the EUSAIR Facility Point has played a pivotal role as a governance support unit, recognizing the significance of building and maintaining the necessary capacities and resources for this unique collaborative endeavor. With then 8 countries and with half of them having candidate or potential candidate status it was clear, the Facility Point as a governance support unit is crucial for assurance of necessary capacities and resources for the set-up of the functioning EUSAIR governance architecture.

Foundations of Functionality

In the early years, the primary focus was on establishing the groundwork for EUSAIR. This encompassed organizing meetings, defining operational procedures, and setting up document repositories. The Facility Point worked tirelessly to provide unwavering support to National Coordinators, the Governing Board, and EUSAIR Presidencies, ensuring a continuous and efficient flow of macro-regional processes.



Thematic Empowerment

To bolster the thematic and organizational aspects of the Thematic Steering Groups, the Facility Point enlisted Pillar thematic experts. These experts keep a keen eye on regional trends, the activities of key stakeholders, and studies within the Pillar's thematic area. When necessary, specific workshops and studies are commissioned to address emerging needs. This comprehensive approach equips members with an in-depth understanding of the macro-regional context, helping them identify needs and develop effective responses.

Recognizing the importance of innovation as a catalyst for overcoming disparities within the region, innovation experts, capacity-building events, and studies were deployed to reinforce the efforts of the Thematic Steering Groups in innovation.

Thematic Issue Papers

As part of its thematic support to the Pillars, the Facility Point commissioned thematic issue papers. These papers serve as the foundational backdrop for actions taken within the Pillars, guiding the implementation of the Action Plan and flagship projects.

1

Pillar 1 BLUE GROWTH



For the Blue Growth Pillar, two thematic papers were commissioned to bolster innovation in the Adriatic-Ionian region. One study delved into the multi-level use of marine space, advocating for a cross-sectoral approach to mitigate the environmental impact of various blue growth activities. Another study explored the development of a transnational monitoring and recording network for early climate change detection in the maritime and coastal areas of the region.

2

Pillar 2 CONNECTING THE REGION



Five issue papers related to Pillar 2, "Connecting the Region," scrutinized various aspects of the Adriatic-Ionian transport networks. The EUSAIR Multimodal Transport Model assessed network performance and environmental impacts. Additionally, the significance of the Baltic-Adriatic Corridor within the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) was explored. Recognizing the pivotal role of urban nodes in enhancing network efficiency was a significant focus, as well as green and smart ports concepts were checked.

3

Pillar 3 ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY



The Environmental Quality Pillar developed a study on legal basis for establishment and further development of Marine Protected Areas within EUSAIR. The primary focus of the study was on the cross-border declaration of Marine Protected Areas, seen as a tangible realization of interconnected sea and land conservation areas in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. This approach aimed to directly contribute to the objectives outlined in the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 by implementing Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Marine Spatial Planning protocols from the Barcelona Convention and relevant EU directives. Awareness of the national governments was raised upon the necessity for declaration of protected areas as means to preserve the traditional fishing practices and Mediterranean lifestyle.

4

Pillar 4 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



Within the Sustainable Tourism Pillar, several issue papers addressed diversifying tourism products and services in the macro-region. The papers aimed to enhance the quality and innovation of tourism offerings. The EUSAIR Gastro Tourism Handbook and EUSAIR Wellbeing Tourism Handbook provided valuable insights into the region's tourism products, destinations, and development potential. A study on the attitudes of visitors from EUSAIR countries towards tourism can be used as support in the decision-making process on specific issues related to sustainable tourism. The "Manual for Participatory Tourism: Connecting Community and Culture Through Storytelling" elucidated the theory of participatory tourism in cultural and tourism products at every stage of development.



Thematic Events

EUSAIR engages stakeholders through thematic events dedicated to specific Pillars. Between 2016 and 2023, more than 30 such events were organized, fostering in-depth discussions on EUSAIR priorities and topics. For instance, the Pillar 1 Conference on Blue Growth held in Crete in October 2022 was a platform for exploring the significance of a sustainable blue economy, particularly in areas like Blue Technologies, Fisheries, and Aquaculture. A cross-pillar conference titled "The EUSAIR Macro-regional Strategy For Tourism and Transport: The Maritime Western Silk Road Opportunities," organized by the Italian Presidency in Venice in 2018, coincided with the inauguration of the Europe-China Tourism Year.

The Mediterranean Coast and EU Macro-regional Strategies Week, initiated on the Slovenian Coast in 2016, has become a hallmark event. Held annually during the autumn, coinciding with the peak activities of the Environmental Quality Pillar, this event has grown in significance as a platform for cross macro-regional exchange. Situated in Izola, it capitalizes on its position at the crossroads of three Macro-regional Strategies: Adriatic-Ionian, Danube, and Alpine.



EUSAIR Annual Forum

The main event is the EUSAIR Annual Forum. Organized by the EUSAIR Presidency in collaboration with the European Commission and with the support of the Facility Point, the 8th forum held in 2023 convened over 800 stakeholders from the region. This forum served as a platform for discussing the main challenges, achievements, and future plans of the region and its thematic Pillars. For in-depth exploration of specific topics related to a particular Pillar, thematic sessions are organized by Pillar Coordinators and Thematic Steering Groups, with the support of the Facility Point.

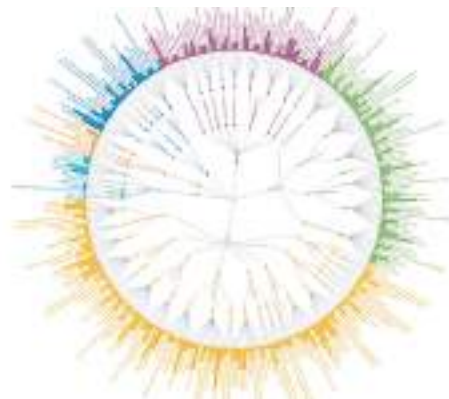
In summary, the support provided to EUSAIR governance structures has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for this collaborative endeavor. The Pillar-specific focus, thematic issue papers, and annual events have enriched the region's understanding and implementation of EUSAIR's ambitious goals. The journey of EUSAIR continues, with these efforts marking significant milestones in fostering regional cooperation and development.

Facilitating STRATEGIC PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCIAL DIALOGUE

The central mission of the EUSAIR Facility Point project is to support key EUSAIR implementers in aligning existing funds with the strategy and coordinating with sector-specific initiatives, programmes, and private sector involvement. This effort also involves engaging international financial institutions.

One key focus has been on the Financial Dialogues, aimed at fostering closer connections between Managing Authorities of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programmes, Interreg Programmes, National IPA Coordinators, and EUSAIR governance bodies. The goal is to encourage the implementation of EUSAIR priorities and enhance the quality and coordination of projects funded at the macro-regional level.

To facilitate these dialogues, background documents were prepared, serving as the foundation for technical meetings in participating countries, starting with EU Member States. These dialogues gained particular significance during the programming period for the new multiannual financial period spanning from 2021 to 2027.



The EUSAIR Facility Point organized five ACTION LABS for Managing Authorities of European Territorial Cooperation Programmes in 2021 and 2022 through the EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform. These labs aimed to put the embedding of EUSAIR priorities into practice, connecting experiences, frameworks, needs, and procedures. Over eight years, 28 financial dialogues were organized in Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, and Slovenia. To further embed EUSAIR priorities into new EU-funded programmes, the concept of EUSAIR Flagships was introduced. Flagships represent action-oriented priorities developed by Pillar Thematic Steering Groups and approved by the EUSAIR Governing Board. They are designed to support and demonstrate the progress of the strategy, serving as pilot examples for desired action within EUSAIR Pillars. Flagships align with top EU priorities, helping participating countries implement resilience and growth-enhancing reforms.

Flagships also form the basis for incorporating EUSAIR priorities into EU-funded programmes. The Facility Point conducted an analysis of funding sources for EUSAIR Flagships in the 2021-2027 financial framework. This analysis matched flagships with relevant financing instruments (ERDF, ESF+, MFEF, Horizon Europe, CEF, LIFE, etc.) and their policy objectives and priorities. It facilitated the integration of EUSAIR priorities into all regional and national operational programmes in participating EU Member States, led by the European Commission.

To encourage the implementation of flagships and address shared challenges and opportunities among participating countries, Thematic Steering Groups, stakeholders, and the Facility Point collaborated on strategic projects, masterplans, and actions for each flagship. These outputs were made freely available to the community and stakeholders, allowing them to advance these concepts into project proposals and submit them to calls. This process remains ongoing, and by the end of the 2016-2023 Facility Point project, in total 25 projects, masterplans, actions were developed.



The involvement of stakeholders and the public in this process has been pivotal, with over 95 presentations of flagships and strategic projects delivered within and beyond the region. This collaborative effort contributes to the effective realization of EUSAIR priorities and enhances regional development.

EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform: FACILITATING COLLABORATION

EUSAIR provides a unique governance framework for bringing together various sectors and levels to tackle the development challenges and potential of the Adriatic-Ionian region. To foster greater engagement of stakeholders in coordination and implementation processes, the EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform was established.

This platform offers stakeholders, project beneficiaries, and the interested public the opportunity to interact and collaborate with EUSAIR key implementers on issues concerning the Adriatic-Ionian region. It actively promotes dialogue among stakeholders.

The EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform functions as a virtual space that supports two-way communication. On one hand, it enables stakeholders to communicate with EUSAIR key implementers, including members of the EUSAIR Governing Board and Thematic Steering Groups. On the other hand, it fosters communication among stakeholders, serving as an online forum.

The platform is designed for both EUSAIR governance key implementers and local, national, and transnational stakeholders. Its key functions include:



- Providing a virtual infrastructure to engage with EUSAIR stakeholders, promoting a sense of ownership of the Strategy/Action Plan and strengthening its democratic legitimacy.
- Serving as an online tool for raising awareness and networking, complementing other implementation efforts.
- Enabling Thematic Steering Groups to consult with non-state actors regarding Action Plan implementation, Strategy long-term priorities, project ideas, and masterplan development.
- Offering cost-effective collaboration options for governance.
- Providing online access to various resources, information, databases, and tools/applications.
- Offering interactive e-learning courses for all relevant stakeholders in the Adriatic-Ionian region.

The EUSAIR Stakeholder Platform played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions. From 2020 to 2023, approximately 500 online meetings were organized by the platform, continuously supporting EUSAIR stakeholders. It also facilitated virtual communication for several Interreg programmes managed by Italian regions, especially in 2020, and led to the establishment of Adriatic-Ionian Working Groups of Managing Authorities.

Over the years, the platform has evolved, undergoing graphic redesign to enhance user-friendliness and user-centricity. Some notable achievements of the platform include:

- Establishment of 50 thematic working groups, allowing for meetings, document sharing, and collaboration.
- Offering eight different online courses on EUSAIR topics through an e-learning channel.
- Sending out 10 newsletters to subscribers.
- Attracting 1258 subscribers to the platform.



Recognising added value OF EUSAIR

To assess the Strategy's achievements and oversee Action Plan progress, an extensive monitoring and evaluation system was established. This included the creation of a territorial knowledge database to track developments in the region within the Pillars' specific thematic areas. It also involved enhancing the monitoring, evaluation, and implementation improvement capacities of public administrations and other stakeholders involved in EUSAIR.

As a result, a three-tier monitoring and evaluation framework was developed, encompassing the following:

- Monitoring the broader EUSAIR macro-region and its main development trends.
- Monitoring the Strategy's implementation at the Pillar level.
- Monitoring EUSAIR governance and its procedures.

The primary output of the EUSAIR monitoring system consisted of Annual Pillar Monitoring Reports, which were issued at the end of each year. Additionally, a Synthetic Annual EUSAIR Monitoring Report was compiled.

To enrich the macro-regional knowledge base, several activities were conducted:

- Specific studies and knowledge bases were produced for each EUSAIR Pillar.
- A mapping of existing studies, databases, and statistical sources across EUSAIR member countries was carried out.
- Identification of projects providing data on specific topics at national or macro-regional levels and research initiatives for further utilization within the macro-regional framework.



Furthermore, a fundamental indicator system for monitoring macro-regional developments at the socioeconomic and technical levels was established. A SWOT analysis of thematic sectors was completed for all Pillars.

Capacity-building events aimed to enhance the abilities of key actors involved in EUSAIR implementation. This included national/regional authorities responsible for EU funds, programme Managing Authorities, and relevant stakeholders at the Pillar level. Five national capacity-building events were organized for EU Member States, along with one jointly organized event for the five Western Balkans candidate countries participating in EUSAIR (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia), and two macro-regional capacity-building events. These capacity-building efforts focused on procedures, methods, and tools to measure EUSAIR achievements in terms of outputs, results, impacts, proposed indicators, and best practices from other Macro-regional Strategies.



Following eight years of Strategy implementation, an EUSAIR Evaluation Report was produced, addressing three main evaluation topics:

- Evaluating EUSAIR as a Macro-regional Strategy during its first five years.
- Assessing the mechanisms for implementing the Strategy.
- Evaluating the functioning mechanism and governance system of EUSAIR.

This report served as a primary resource for the revision of the Strategy and Action Plan, which began in 2022.

Communicating EUSAIR: BRIDGING COMPLEXITY WITH CLARITY

In recent years, significant efforts have been invested in establishing effective communication for the EUSAIR. The objective has been to ensure that key messages about this strategy reach a diverse audience across different countries. These efforts have been instrumental in advancing EUSAIR's objectives, and the journey has been marked by strategic milestones and innovative approaches.

Setting the Communication Stage

The foundation for EUSAIR's communication was laid in 2017 when the EUSAIR Facility Point developed a comprehensive Communication Strategy formally adopted by the Governing Board. To stay current and adaptive, annual communication plans are collaboratively formulated by the EUSAIR Facility Point Project Partners. These plans serve as dynamic roadmaps, evolving to meet the changing needs of stakeholders.

Navigating Complexity

The challenge in communicating EUSAIR lies in its intricacies. Different actors from various countries often have distinct interpretations of what EUSAIR represents, making it difficult to recognize its tangible outcomes and added value. To address this complexity, multiple initiatives were launched. In 2018, a Communication manual specifically tailored for EUSAIR governance structures was released. Furthermore, two capacity-building events were organized in Tolmin and Kobarid, focusing on enhancing the capabilities of National Coordinators, Pillar Coordinators, Thematic Steering Group members, and Facility Point Project Partners.



Digital ENGAGEMENT

The EUSAIR website has emerged as a pivotal information hub. Continually updated, it serves as a conduit for newsletters, documents related to EUSAIR events, conferences, panel discussions, and roundtables, as well as information about EUSAIR processes. The website offers dedicated pages in national languages, managed by Project Partners, fostering the dissemination of Strategy-related news to national stakeholders.

Social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn, have been instrumental in broadening EUSAIR's digital presence. These platforms cater to a diverse audience, sharing information and connecting with stakeholders across different age groups. Notably, LinkedIn has facilitated connections beyond EUSAIR, engaging with organizations and associations outside the immediate EUSAIR scope.

Strategic COMMUNICATION

In 2019, another workshop and survey on strategic communication were conducted to shape the mission, vision, key messages, and recommendations for future communication activities. This collaborative approach involved key implementers, ensuring that communication aligns with EUSAIR's strategic objectives.



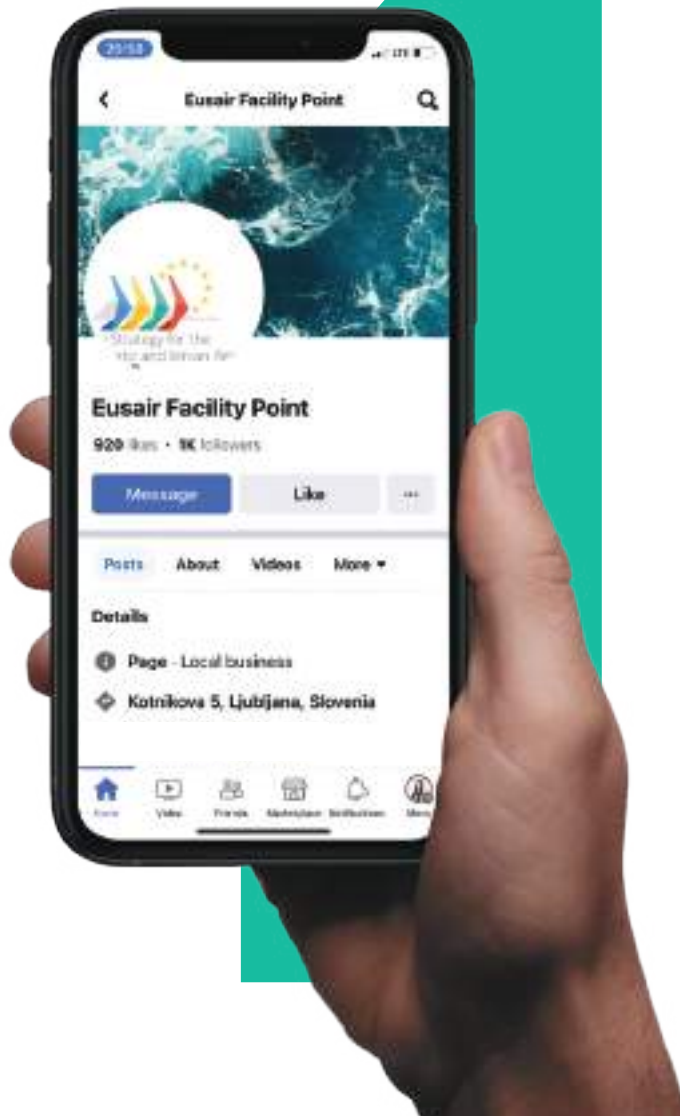
Showcasing ACHIEVEMENTS

The power of visuals has not been overlooked. EUSAIR promotional videos and live streamed events on YouTube have added a dynamic dimension to EUSAIR's communication efforts, making it more engaging and accessible.

Capacity Building for EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner initiated two EUSAIR Communication Academies. The first Communication Academy modules organised during 2022 (2 modules on-line and the last one in Bled) provided in-depth training on communication fundamentals, digital strategies, and storytelling. Importantly, they were not exclusive to government communicators and key implementers; they also welcomed the participation of youth, injecting fresh perspectives into EUSAIR's communication approach.

The second Communication Academy, held in Thessaloniki in 2023, took a holistic approach. It bridged the communication gap between EUSAIR key implementers, government communicators, and journalists, ensuring that EUSAIR's narrative is both comprehensible and relatable to the public.





EUSAIR Youth Consultation

Engaging with THE MEDIA

EUSAIR has actively pursued media relations on macro-regional and national levels. In 2023, the EUSAIR Press Contest was initiated, encouraging journalists to report on the cooperative framework and its regional benefits. In cooperation with Slovene national broadcaster, Televizija Slovenija a series 'Macro regions: Here and Now' was produced and broadcasted as part of an EU co-funded project. The series featuring 25 short broadcasts was later on aired also by the other national broadcasters in the region.

Engaging WITH YOUTH

Numerous events were organised in the region with students and schools to bring EUSAIR to their attention and to encourage youth to take part in EUSAIR activities. In 2023 at the end of the Facility Point 2016-2023 project an extensive youth consultation accompanied with a communication campaign was carried out to gather opinions from youth organisations and individuals on the establishment of EUSAIR Youth Council and its operation. In the same year the youth photo competition Frames of inspiration commenced and first awards were presented.

In conclusion, EUSAIR's journey in communication has been marked by dedication, adaptability, and innovation. These efforts have not only fostered a deeper understanding of EUSAIR but have also established it as a cooperative framework with tangible regional benefits. The commitment to clarity, engagement, and strategic communication continues to be central to EUSAIR's mission.

