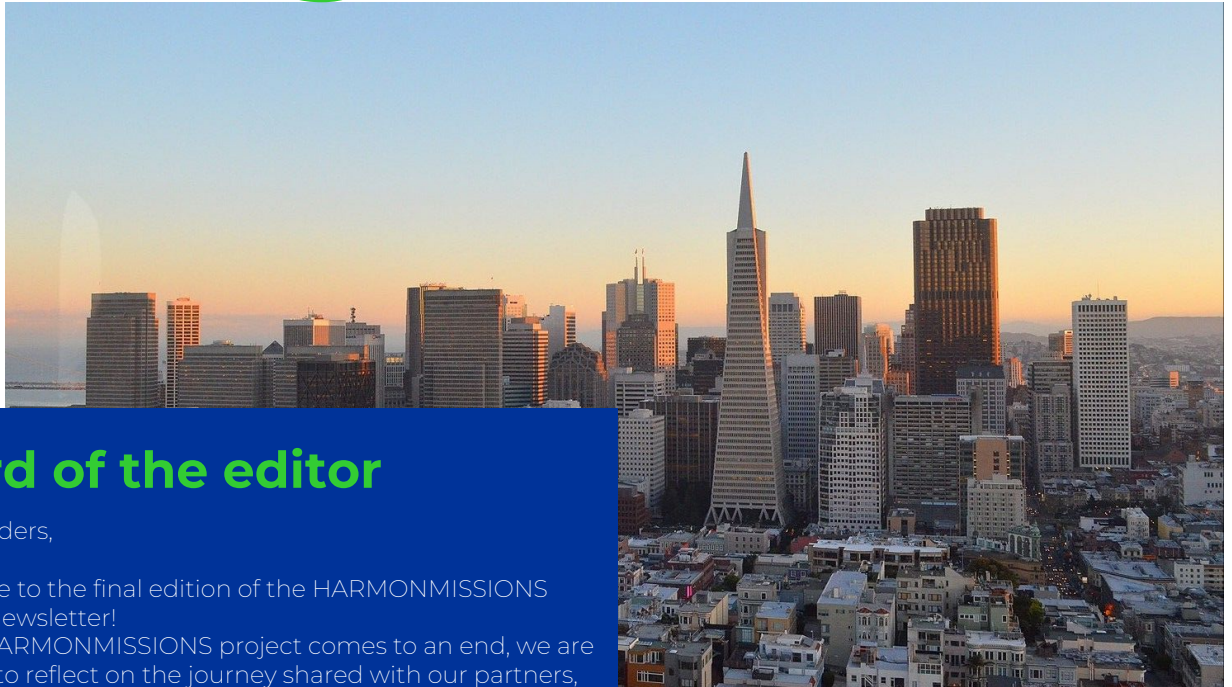




# NEWSLETTER



## Word of the editor

Dear readers,

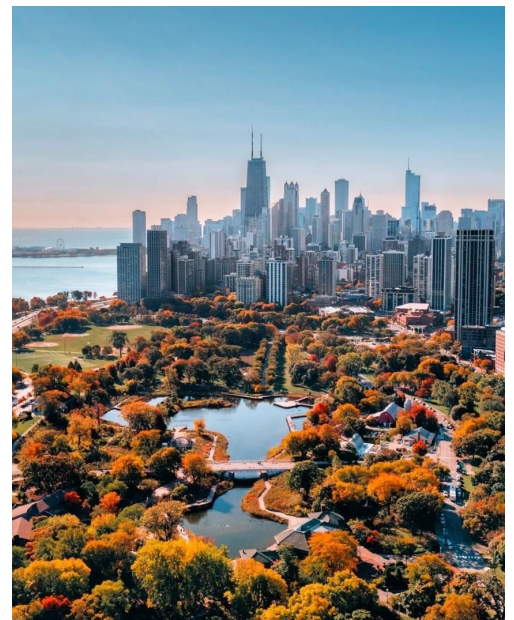
Welcome to the final edition of the HARMONMISSIONS project newsletter!

As the HARMONMISSIONS project comes to an end, we are pleased to reflect on the journey shared with our partners, stakeholders, and the wider Danube Region community. The final conference in Bratislava marked an important closing moment, bringing together key actors committed to advancing EU Missions 1 and 4, climate adaptation, and sustainable urban transformation.

Throughout the project, HARMONMISSIONS supported cooperation, knowledge exchange, and a better understanding of how EU Missions can be translated into concrete actions at national, regional, and local levels. We invite you to stay close to the project outcomes, follow and use the HARMONMISSIONS platforms, and continue building on the cooperation established throughout the project.

Although HARMONMISSIONS is reaching its conclusion, we hope its results will continue to inspire and support new initiatives for more resilient, sustainable, and climate-ready communities across the Danube Region and beyond.

**UEFISCDI's team**



## ANNOUNCEMENT

### Capacity-building for Horizon Europe and EU Missions Participation

Within the HARMONMISSIONS project, the Applied Research and Communications Fund is conducting an online 4-day training course on the Horizon Europe programme, the first module of which is carried out in cooperation with Bulgaria's Ministry of Education and Science. Between 23 and 26 June 2026, participants will be familiarised with all parts and specificities of the Horizon Europe application form, the life cycle of projects and their realisation, as part of a broader effort to increase participation in Horizon Europe's climate-related Missions throughout the Danube Region.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Author: SOVVA

## From Stakeholder Engagement to Citizen Ownership

One of the key lessons emerging from the Harmonmissions project is that successful implementation of the EU Missions requires more than policies, funding, and technical solutions. It requires people.

Throughout the project, Harmonmissions has brought together public authorities, researchers, businesses, civil society organisations, and mission practitioners from across the Danube Region. Through stakeholder workshops, capacity-building activities, brokerage events, and collaborative platforms, partners have worked to strengthen cooperation and create new opportunities for knowledge exchange.

These activities have highlighted an important insight: stakeholder engagement is only the first step. To achieve long-term impact, mission-related actions must ultimately reach and involve citizens. Whether addressing climate adaptation, climate-neutral cities, or ecosystem restoration, local communities play a crucial role in shaping, supporting, and sustaining change.

The tools and networks developed within Harmonmissions, including the SHARED platform for knowledge exchange, the EU Missions Observatory (EMO) for monitoring mission-related developments, and the Climate City Contracts (CCC) platform supporting cities on their climate-neutrality journey, help organisations move from consultation to collaboration. Together, they provide stakeholders with access to expertise, examples of good practice, networking opportunities, and practical resources that strengthen mission implementation across the Danube Region.

As the project approaches its final phase, one message stands out clearly: lasting transformation happens when citizens are not only informed about change, but empowered to become part of it



Image source: AI-generated (OpenAI ChatGPT)

Author: CVTISR

## Integrated planning at local level has its basis in local water planning

The “sponge city” effect and the “sponge landscape” effect are collective names for environments where the water-holding capacity of land and landscape is purposefully increased. Such landscapes are able to retain rainfall water much longer in landscape structures, creating time and space for better infiltration of rainfall water into the soil, promoting the growth of biomass and vegetation, while at the same time effectively cooling the landscape surface. "The ‘sponge’ effect significantly reduces the risks of flooding and drought downstream. With higher retention and detention of rainfall water on the land, the production of ‘green water’, water evaporated from the land by evapotranspiration, is also restored. Such landscapes are called ‘climatic landscapes’ in professional circles because they are effectively cooled, promoting the recovery of fog and dew, which are important indicators of the recovery of the local microclimate. Climatically active landscapes contribute to the maintenance of a functional small water cycle in the landscape as well as to the biotic regulation of the terrestrial climate. Cool oases in the landscape cooled by vegetation retain moisture much longer and create suitable conditions for the life and health of the inhabitants. The water-holding capacity of the land and landscape is the highly decentralized general-purpose water infrastructure of the landscape that is attached to each parcel of land. Maintaining or restoring the water-holding capacity of soil and landscape at a high level activates the ecosystem functions of parcels and land by enabling increased ecosystem use of available rainfall water in the landscape, with a range of synergies and benefits. These benefits include groundwater recharge, soil moisture recharge, cooling of the landscape by transpiration of water by plants while increasing biomass growth and restoring the productive capacity of the soil. This approach is needed if we are to build resilient cities, communities and landscapes that are prepared for climate variability, weather extremes, but which also reduce climate and disaster risks through increased resilience. In a traditionally built-up area, rainfall runoff as well as soil and area drainage is at a high level. However, persistent urban runoff without benefit reduces groundwater recharge, accelerates the discharge of rainwater into rivers, seas and oceans, contributing its share to sea level rise and groundwater decline. The New Urban Approach therefore puts into practice an adaptive approach, whereby ways and systems are sought to adapt stormwater runoff in the current built environment, but at the same time new regulation and requirements for the retention and ecosystem use of rainwater are defined in the context of new urbanisation and development. The interplay between development and the meaningful use of stormwater and green cooled surfaces is not only possible but also necessary. It demonstrates a new water and soil culture, architecture and urbanism of a new quality. A common feature of integrated planning for cadastral areas of towns and municipalities is the monitoring of the “annual rainfall water budget” not only of the entire cadastral area, but also of the individual parts of the cadastral area - catchment microwatersheds, up to the monitoring of the balance of rainfall water use at the level of individual parcels, buildings, but also parts of the open countryside, fields, forests and meadows. The key is to monitor the proportion of the ecosystem's rainfall water use of the territory during the year. A cadastral area of 1000 hectares in Central Europe receives on average 7.5 million m<sup>3</sup> of rainfall per year, of which about 1/3 is transformed into surface runoff from the area per year and 2/3 is transformed into soil moisture recharge, which supplies plants with water for photosynthesis via the root system (transpiration), some of which evaporates directly from the land surface (evaporation).

A smaller part of the precipitation water contributes to the recharge of groundwater reserves, which depends mainly on the soil structure and its geological subsoil. If an area is heavily sealed, built-up or erosion-damaged, or lacks functional vegetation, a much larger proportion of the rainfall runoff per year flows out of the surface without benefit. At the same time, a smaller proportion of the rainfall contributes to the cooling of the landscape through vegetation; such an area overheats to a greater extent. The new approach to local land use planning is to recalculate the available rainfall volume of the cadastral area during the year and to track the transformation of the area to rainfall drainage neutrality. According to local conditions, rainwater should be used as much as possible in an ecosystem-based manner to provide comprehensive benefits to the area throughout the year. Local water planning is thus the first step in integrated planning at local level, which is followed by land planning (erosion protection, appropriate structure of landscape features and nature-friendly measures), production planning (optimisation of production in fields and forests) and spatial planning, which can thus create space for the blue and green infrastructure elements of settlements. Such spatial planning, which restores the stability of the water cycle in the landscape through a targeted set of measures for the ecosystem use of rainwater, is part of modern urban and spatial planning as well as the concept of “smart cities”. Water is the basis of life. Rainwater is the primary source of replenishing the water resources of a territory. Water in water cycles connects all climatic environments of the Earth. Water plays a central role in the Earth's climate system. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of the strategic role of ensuring the neutrality of rainwater runoff in land use, land use change or new land development. By introducing the concept of rainfall drainage neutrality and promoting the increase of ecosystem-based use of the available rainfall water of the territory, we are establishing a new holistic approach in the spatial development strategy and the development of rural communities (NEXUS water-land-climate, also referred to as WEF NEXUS). It is the territorial contribution of each territory to the restoration of the stability of the global water cycle .



Source: iStock. (2026).tonbluesman. *View of Benchakitti Park in the evening* [Stock photo]. iStockphoto. [View of Benchakitti Park in the evening](https://www.istock.com/photo/1234567890/View-of-Benchakitti-Park-in-the-evening) - iStock

<sup>1</sup> [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/european-water-resilience-strategy\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/european-water-resilience-strategy_en)

<sup>1</sup> <https://watercommission.org/>

## Pathways2Resilience

**Full title:** Pathways2Resilience – Co-developing pathways towards climate-resilient regions in Europe

**Acronym:** P2R

**Duration:** 1 January 2023 – 31 December 2027

**Funding scheme:** Horizon Europe – Research and Innovation Action (HORIZON-RIA)

**Call / topic:** HORIZON-MISS-2021-CLIMA-02-02 – EU Mission “Adaptation to Climate Change”

**Coordinator:** Climate-KIC (Stichting Climate-KIC International Foundation), Netherlands

**Consortium:** 14 organisations from 10 countries (incl. Deltares, ICLEI Europe, IIASA, ERRIN, Regions4, Red Cross Climate Centre, Tecnalia)

**EU budget: €29.6 million (100% EU contribution)**

Climate change is reshaping the Danube Region. The rivers that have long defined the macro-region’s geography and economy now also concentrate its greatest climate risks – flooding, alongside intensifying heatwaves and droughts. Meeting these risks demands more than isolated, one-off projects: it requires a systemic, long-term approach to building resilience across whole regions and communities. This is precisely the gap that Pathways2Resilience (P2R), the flagship project of the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, was designed to fill.

Funded under Horizon Europe and coordinated by Climate-KIC, P2R empowers more than 100 European regions and communities to co-design visions of a climate-resilient future and the transformative pathways to reach it. Rather than treating adaptation as a series of stand-alone risk-reduction measures, the project takes a systemic, capability-driven approach. At its heart is the Regional Resilience Journey – a structured framework, backed by tailored services, that guides regions in developing climate-resilience pathways and connected innovation agendas across their Key Community Systems, such as water, food, health, energy and infrastructure. A Resilience Maturity Curve helps each region baseline and monitor its progress, while locally-led innovation practice groups and a dedicated climate-finance lab build both the knowledge and the access to finance that turn ambition into action.

Crucially for regional and local authorities, P2R does not stop at frameworks. The project channels €21 million in cascade funding to regions through two open calls, with sub-grants of up to €210,000 each, complemented by an extensive capacity-building programme. A first cohort of 39 regions – selected from 164 applications and home to some 53 million people – began their resilience journey in October 2024. A second cohort of 62 climate-vulnerable regions, representing around 55 million people, followed from January 2026 to August 2027. Together, the two cohorts bring the initiative’s reach to 100 local and regional authorities representing more than 100 million citizens.



Source: [www.pathways2resilience.eu](http://www.pathways2resilience.eu)

The relevance to the Danube Region is direct. Among the climate hazards prioritised by the second cohort, coastal and river flooding ranked first (43%), ahead of heat stress (36%) and drought (21%) – the very combination of pressures that defines the Danube basin, from its upper Alpine reaches to the Black Sea. Danube-region authorities are already on board. Budapest, which hosted the Pathways2Resilience Summit in February 2026, has become an emerging leader in integrated resilience planning through nature-based solutions and innovative water management; the Košice Self-Governing Region in Slovakia joined to modernise its adaptation strategy against drought and extreme precipitation; and Odesa Oblast in Ukraine was selected as a coastal region facing mounting climate pressures. Their participation shows how the programme’s methodology, tools and peer-learning translate directly into the macro-region.

For Danube regions and communities working within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), Pathways2Resilience offers both a proven model and a living community of practice to draw on as the EU Mission on Adaptation pursues its goal of supporting at least 150 climate-resilient regions and communities by 2030.

P2R embodies exactly the kind of systemic, multi-level and finance-linked governance that HARMONMISSIONS promotes across the Danube macro-region: moving regions from fragmented pilots to coherent, well-resourced resilience strategies. By connecting with the Pathways2Resilience community, adopting its Regional Resilience Journey methodology, and preparing early for future EU Mission on Adaptation opportunities, regional and national authorities in the Danube Region can accelerate their own transition to a climate-resilient future – and strengthen the macro-region’s collective ability to withstand the climate risks ahead.

---

**Sources:**

Pathways2Resilience – CORDIS Fact Sheet ([www.cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101093942](http://www.cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101093942) );

Pathways2Resilience project website ([www.pathways2resilience.eu](http://www.pathways2resilience.eu));