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HARMONMISSIONS

Strategy for coordination of involvement of EU Missions in the Danube region

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Content

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1. Introduction and context (scope and objectives)

The Danube Region is a transnational area that stretches from Germany's Black Forest to the Black Sea, encompassing a total of 14 countries that are interconnected through the Danube River. Including both EU member states and accession countries, the Danube Region is home to about 115 million inhabitants (EUSDR, 2025) and numerous major cultural and economic centres. The countries considered to comprise the Danube Region are Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine.

Because these countries share the same major waterway, they also share interconnected challenges and opportunities - such as water quality, flood risks, biodiversity protection, transportation routes, energy networks, and economic development. To address these issues collectively, these countries cooperate within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, launched in 2011 by the European Council. The EUSDR provides a framework for coordinating policies, funding, and cross-border projects, being structured around four key pillars, which are divided into twelve priority areas. The first pillar supports connecting the Region by optimizing waterways (PA 1a) and rail-road-air mobility (PA 1b), while advancing sustainable energy (PA 2), culture and tourism (PA 3). Through the second pillar, the strategy balances this development by Protecting the Environment, focusing on water quality (PA 4), managing environmental risks (PA 5), and preserving biodiversity and air/soil quality (PA 6). To ensure long-term growth, the Building Prosperity pillar invests in the knowledge society (PA 7), enterprise competitiveness (PA 8), and people's skills (PA 9), while the last one (Strengthening the Region**)** aims to reinforce institutional capacity (PA 10) and internal security (PA 11), in order to create a stable environment for cross-border cooperation (for more information, see annex 1). Overall, these are designed to guide joint action

and long-term governance, allowing national, regional, and EU-level policies to be aligned, offering a strong foundation for integrating and coordinating EU Missions within the Danube Region.

Specifically, the EUSDR lays the foundation for the regional framework for cooperation among the Danube countries, being strongly connected with the EU Missions that set Europe-wide targets, tools and innovation pathways. Under Horizon Europe, the EU Missions address major societal challenges through research, innovation, and large-scale coordinated initiatives. The five EU Missions - **Adaptation to Climate Change**, Cancer, Restore Our Ocean and Waters, **100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030**, and A Soil Deal for Europe (see Annex 2) - require strong collaboration and alignment across governance levels. Their implementation plans highlight the need for shared processes, coordinated governance structures, citizen engagement, joint monitoring, and consistent communication, ensuring synergies across missions, especially where local engagement and climate-related planning overlap.

Starting from the existent significant disparities in the level of understanding, setup, and implementation of the European Missions among Danube regions and in line with the EUSDR and the EU Missions' milestones, the Harmonisation of Mission in the Danube region (HARMONMISSIONS) project addresses such needs within Mission 1 (Adaptation to Climate Change) and Mission 4 (100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities), through a good coordination between these two missions (see Annex 3).

For the Danube Region, aligning these two missions within the EUSDR framework enhances climate resilience and sustainable urban transformation, supporting regional objectives in environmental protection, mobility, and cross-border cooperation. Therefore, to ensure effective coordination and harmonisation of the two missions, the HARMONMISSIONS project developed a dedicated strategy. Expert teams from Austria, Slovakia,

Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Croatia analysed the stakeholders involved in Missions 1 and 4, mapped the region's key strengths, and identified the main regional challenges faced by each country, as well as their roles in the areas of Missions 1 and 4 (see Annex 4).

Austria, for example, demonstrates a robust and highly structured national commitment to Mission 4, a core strength evidenced by its national mission, "Klimaneutrale Stadt," launched in 2022. A key point is the dedicated, substantial financial and institutional backing provided by the Federal Ministry of Climate Action (BMK) and a specialized expert network supporting 47 pioneer cities, including the EU Mission city Klagenfurt. This formalization provides a comprehensive learning and knowledge exchange platform. The main challenge, however, centers on coordination and communication, specifically, on the need to better align the Mission, which is embedded within research and innovation policies, with broader sectoral policies and to expand engagement with additional societal stakeholders to maximize public awareness and impact.

Germany leverages a robust, decentralized framework anchored by the Federal Climate Change Act to target net-zero emissions by 2045. While Horizon Europe Missions are not formally codified, "Mission-aligned" progress is driven by Development Bank concessional loans and integrated urban development frameworks (I**ntegrated Urban Development Concept**). However, administrative fragmentation and complex funding access remain key hurdles for smaller municipalities. To optimize impact, Germany should formally embed Mission goals into national law, streamline funding pathways, and enhance vertical coordination between federal and local authorities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains committed to aligning its environmental policies with EU frameworks and the 2021 National Adaptation Plan. Activities are mainly promoted through the two entity-level environmental ministries

which then coordinate their international communication via the central Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Economic Relations. While not an EU member, the country leverages opportunities for progress through international partnerships, donor support, and EU instruments like the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), which builds local capacity for assessing climate risks. Major cities such as Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Tuzla show growing interest in initiatives for energy efficiency and sustainable mobility; however, these efforts are hindered by the absence of dedicated funding and a centralized national platform for the promotion of Mission 1. Consequently, institutional fragmentation, regulatory barriers, and limited financial resources remain the primary challenges, often resulting in reactive climate strategies rather than long-term, integrated urban planning. However, as for Mission 4, progress has been made, as the Platform[1] and the Citizens Assembly have been established in the Sarajevo Functional Urban Area, which is the only signatory and member of the Mission “100 Net Zero Emission Cities” from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Romania presents a significant success story for Mission 4 through the establishment of the Mirror Mission Cities Hub Romania (M100), a formal national platform coordinated by six national ministries. This structured, inter-ministerial framework is a key strength, providing policy coherence, technical assistance, and funding guidance to selected and aspiring cities, accelerating the climate neutrality ecosystem. In contrast, Mission 1 currently lacks a dedicated, formal national platform, which is the primary challenge for climate adaptation efforts. However, a key opportunity lies in the synergies with the M100 Hub, which is increasingly integrating adaptation into its mandate. Persistent challenges include limited institutional capacity and insufficient coordination across ministries, particularly for Mission 1, alongside the absence of regional governance structures needed for effective multilevel coordination.

[1] Smart Sarajevo: https://smart.sarajevo.ba/

The Republic of Moldova is aligning with EU standards to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, primarily through the Low Emissions Development Strategy (LEDS) and international frameworks like the Covenant of Mayors, City2City Network, or Twin Cities programme. While active in cities like Kishinev, Balti, Anenii Noi, Ceadîr-Lunga, or Ungheni local climate action remains largely voluntary, donor-dependent, and lacks a formal national mandate or dedicated funding. Significant barriers include limited inter-ministerial coordination and a lack of technical capacity in smaller municipalities. To scale progress, Moldova must formalize local climate governance, establish a national municipal finance facility, and explicitly integrate Horizon Europe Mission goals into its regional development laws.

The Czech Republic is strategically building its national framework, aligning with the EU's climate neutrality target. Its key strength lies in its multi-ministerial coordination and the emerging national support structure, which utilizes a multi-stakeholder working group and leverages the established Healthy Cities Network for outreach and peer learning. Liberec serves as a crucial key point as the sole EU Mission city, acting as a flagship for demonstrating challenges and progress. The main challenge is the need for institutional formalization. particularly in the absence of an operational national platform. Additionally, while funding is available through broader European channels, the development of dedicated, tailored financial mechanisms specific to the Missions' objectives remains an evolving area, requiring focused attention to support the inevitable increase in municipal involvement.

Hungary's support framework is defined by the active participation of three official Mission Cities (Budapest, Miskolc, and Pécs) and two Twinning Programme participants, which represents the key strength and focus of national efforts. This informal collaboration, primarily led by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office, is a key mechanism for facilitating cooperation among the Mission cities and national actors. The

principal challenge is the absence of institutional formalization, which creates reliance on ad-hoc collaboration and limits the scope and coherence of support beyond the core Mission cities, requiring the existing working group to be formalized into a structured platform.

Bulgaria's engagement is characterized by a significant strength at the municipal level, with two cities selected for Mission 4 and thirteen municipalities signing the Mission 1 Charter, demonstrating strong and active local-level commitment through integrated urban development plans. However, this local momentum is severely undermined by a low national institutional support, which is the country's primary challenge. Furthermore, systemic challenges are multifaceted, driven by just transition complexities, political instability, and a pervasive lack of institutional trust, which collectively pose significant barriers to effective vertical integration.

Slovakia demonstrates a substantial policy commitment through strategic documents like the Low-Carbon Development Strategy and the pending Climate Law, which provides a key foundation for climate action. The integration of sectorial strategies addressing climate change and other challenges addressed by Agenda 2030 represents Vision and Strategy Slovakia 2030 as the main implementation document of Agenda 2030 in Slovakia approved by the government. Financial instruments, including EU Cohesion Funds and the Just Transition Fund, offer vital resources, though their uneven accessibility remains a challenge. The key challenge lies in fragmented implementation and regional disparities in administrative capacity and funding access, often favoring larger urban centers. To fully realize its potential, the country must address the insufficient intergovernmental coordination and establish a centralized, well-resourced coordination platform.

In **Croatia**, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition acts as the central authority and national contact point. A significant strength

lies in the independent engagement of individual ministries and specific entities, such as the City of Zagreb and Krapina-Zagorje County. Conversely, a critical barrier is the absence of dedicated national financial support; without assigned funding streams to promote or facilitate the Missions, effective implementation capacity remains limited

Montenegro demonstrates a strong policy intent aligned with EU goals, notably through the adoption of a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and the active participation of the City of Podgorica in Mission 4, including the development of a Climate City Contract. While this municipal activity and high-level planning are the key points of strength, there is a critical need to strengthen coordination mechanisms for effective adaptation planning and integrated governance, coupled with limited technical expertise within institutions. Furthermore, progress is often dependent on external project-based efforts, as securing adequate domestic funding remains a critical challenge.

In **Serbia**, while certain national targets exist for climate action, a key weakness is that these objectives are not explicitly connected to the EU Missions, and local implementation mechanisms are largely absent. The key point of strength is primarily a legislative base provided by national policy documents. However, coordination among key stakeholders is sporadic, hampered by the lack of a unified strategic approach and a structured multi-level governance model. In addition to that, a critical challenge is related to inadequate financial support, as financial tools like green bonds or climate risk insurance are virtually nonexistent, leaving local governments unsupported in Mission-related activities.

Ukraine's efforts are currently defined by the severe constraints of the ongoing conflict, resulting in a very low level of formal national support. Nevertheless, a significant strength is the initiative shown by local governments and civil society organizations, such as the city of Rivne's

participation in the Net Zero Cities pilot program. This local momentum demonstrates a clear potential for future climate action. The principal challenges are multifaceted: a widespread lack of shared ambition and awareness across government levels, the absence of enabling policies and dedicated financing programs, and institutional capacity constrained by martial law. Financial support is minimal, relying heavily on EU and international funds, underscoring the critical need for a centralized national contact point and formalized resources.

Slovenia possesses a solid legal foundation and a strategic commitment to reach climate neutrality by 2050, supported by the Spatial Planning Act and participation in EU initiatives (e.g., NetZeroCities). National plans like the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) cover mitigation and adaptation, providing a clear policy direction and access to EU structural funds. However, there are no national mandates or dedicated national funding streams for municipalities to implement climate-neutrality plans, forcing heavy reliance on ad-hoc EU project financing. The key challenge is to formally integrate the Missions, introduce legal obligations or incentives for local planning, and ensure sustained national financial and technical support, especially for smaller cities. Taking into consideration the context of the countries provided above, we conclude that the need for this strategy arises from the fact that the Danube Region - far beyond being defined only by the river itself - represents an extensive, interconnected socio-economic, environmental, and cultural space where multiple countries face shared challenges and opportunities; therefore, a coordinated action, aligned priorities, and a common strategic framework are essential to address cross-border challenges, strengthen regional capacities, and ensure coherent progress toward the objectives of EU Mission 1 and Mission 4.

2. Strategy Vision

EU policies will continue to develop and the climate-related Missions will likely need to be adapted and enriched with new strategies and objectives. This chapter presents a vision for how the EU Missions should be integrated into the Danube Region in accordance with their overall goals. The EU Missions' ambitious objectives are related to wider EU policies, strategies, and initiatives. These frameworks aim to strengthen climate action, including through enhanced international cooperation.

The key stakeholders include public institutions, non-governmental organisations, private sector representatives, academia and funding agencies. Their roles and contributions to the promotion of the Missions' objectives are multifaceted, encompassing activities such as decision-making responsibilities, policy changes, provision of financial support, investment in green solutions, awareness-raising and provision of professional education. The "vision-to-action" mapping aspect includes investments in infrastructure, the improvement and alignment of legislation, the improvement of national platforms, and the development of additional opportunities for stakeholders to meet, interact and take joint action.

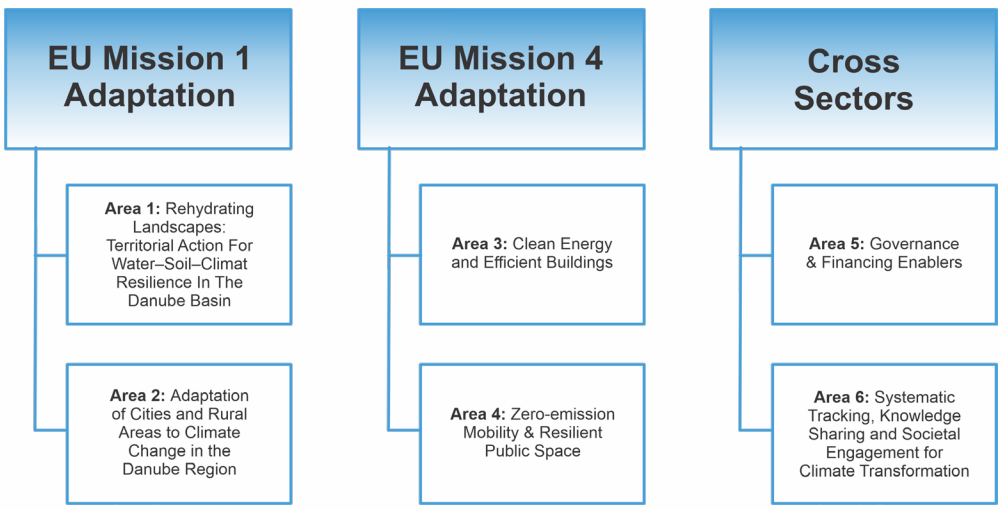
The present Strategy's vision statement can be defined as:

[The cultivation of] a resilient and competitive Danube Region, guided by a holistic and fair approach, where innovative governance drives a just green transition through sustainable resource valorization, high environmental awareness, behavioral change, and self-reliance, ensuring adaptability and shared prosperity for all.

3. Priority Areas for Coordination *(Mission 1 and Mission 4)*

This chapter outlines the key thematic areas in which coordinated international efforts are most important for the implementation of EU Missions 1 and 4 in the Danube Region, in line with the objectives and areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region that are closely linked to climate change and environmental systems. The information for this chapter was compiled by researching the Information from the strategy development process, as well as by analysing certain key documents. Among them are the City Climate Contract of 17 cities in the Danube region (NetZeroCities portal), coordination tools such as EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) Flood Risk Management Plan, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans, the NetZeroCities framework, the EU Urban Mobility Framework (SUMP), the NAIADES III programme (Action Programme for Inland Waterway Transport 2021–2027), the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), and other relevant projects and documents.

Six priority thematic areas for coordination are proposed:



Priority Area 1: *Rehydrating Landscapes: Territorial Action For Water–Soil–Climate Resilience In The Danube Basin*

The Danube River Basin, spanning over 803,000 km² and shared by 19 countries, is a unique European macro-region where climate change, soil degradation, and water imbalance interact in complex ways. Over the past century, river regulation, drainage, intensive agriculture, and urban expansion have reduced the natural capacity of the landscape to retain water and regulate the local climate, leading to more frequent floods, droughts, soil erosion, and biodiversity loss.

Analyses (Annex 6) show that targeted water retention and landscape restoration measures could increase the water retention capacity of the basin by up to 12 km³ repeatedly throughout the year, allowing ecosystems to use at least an additional 48 km³ of water per year and significantly improving the resilience to climate change across the region. This is a significant improvement compared to the total annual precipitation of 600 km³ in the Danube basin.

This priority **area focuses on strengthening the capacity of the Danube River Basin to restore small water cycles, rehydrate soils, and enhance resilience to climate change** through coordinated, data-driven, and nature-based measures, using the Water–Soil–Climate NEXUS framework (Annex 6) . Across the Basin, Territorial Action Plans (TAPs) will be developed at local, regional, national, and sub-basin levels. These plans will provide methodological and decision-making support for the following actions:

- Assessing the condition of small water cycles.
- Analysing surface runoff and hydrological-climatic risks.
- Defining adaptation and restoration measures that rehabilitate degraded landscapes, improve soil health, and increase water retention.

TAPs will also guide the implementation and financing of nature-based solutions (NBS) such as floodplain reconnection, wetland restoration, regenerative agriculture, and landscape rehydration, thereby improving preparedness for extreme rainfall events and restoring the biotic regulation of local and regional climates. As instruments of integrated territorial planning, they connect sectoral policies—climate, water, soil, and land use—creating positive synergies and coherence across the Danube Basin.

This Priority Area directly supports the EUSDR, particularly the three Priority Areas of Pillar 2: Protecting the Environment – Water Quality; Environmental Risks; and Biodiversity, Landscapes, Air and Soil Quality, which emphasize cross-border management of water, sediment, and soil. It is fully aligned with the Flood Risk Management Plan for the Danube River Basin District (ICPDR, 2021–2027) by promoting natural water retention measures (NWRMs), floodplain reconnection, and “room-for-the-river” approaches that reduce flood peaks and enhance drought resilience. Moreover, this priority area supports four key EU Missions: *Adaptation to Climate Change*, by strengthening territorial resilience through nature-based and place-based actions; *A Soil Deal for Europe*, by restoring soil health, improving water retention, and promoting regenerative land management; and *Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities*, by reducing emissions, enhancing green-blue infrastructure, and improving the urban–rural water balance and Restore our Oceans and Waters by restoration of water cycle stability and systematically rehydrating landscapes with water from the natural water cycles.

Policy recommendation:

Preparation of Territorial Action Plans (TAPs) and linking them to national climate change adaptation strategies and river basin management plans, ensuring consistency between water retention measures, soil health, and land use.

Actors & engagement:

At the national level of the Danube Region countries, the preparation and integration of TAPs should be led and supported by the Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, and Regional Development in close cooperation with national water management, environmental, forestry and agriculture agencies, which will ensure methodological coordination, legislative anchoring, and links with climate and soil policies. Local and regional territorial self-governments have an important coordinating role at their level of multi-sector action planning.

Priority Area 2: *Adaptation of Cities and Rural Areas to Climate Change in the Danube Region*

The Danube Region is home to several major European cities, such as Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade and Bucharest, as well as extensive rural areas facing both unique and overarching climate risks. Cities are particularly vulnerable to urban heat islands and torrential rainfall: heat waves, which have roughly doubled since 1960,cause thousands of premature deaths each year, estimated at ~62,700 in 2024[2].Paved, impervious surfaces increase the frequency of pluvial floods and property damage, while unequal access to quality urban green spaces further exacerbates the situation. Rural areas are struggling with soil degradation – an estimated 1/4 of European soils are at high risk of erosion – which reduces the retention capacity of the landscape and groundwater recharge, thereby increasing the impacts of drought.

The trend of extremes is accelerating in the Danube basin: Europe is the fastest warming continent, and 2024 was the warmest year on record, with unprecedented heatwaves and widespread flooding in central and Southeastern Europe. Between 1980 and 2023 climate extremes caused ≈ €738 billion in losses in the EU.[3] Blue-green infrastructure and retention solutions are among the most cost-effective measures with multiple benefits,

as they can simultaneously improve water quality (reducing sewer network overload and relief sewers) and bring economic benefits.

Priority Area 2 **focuses on safeguarding people and critical infrastructure across the Danube Region** by tackling the most acute climate risks where they occur. In cities, these efforts extend to reducing heat islands, implementing cooling networks, and nature-based shading. Simultaneously, cities are safeguarded under this Priority Area through the reduction of pluvial-flood damages via blue-green infrastructure, nature-based solutions and stormwater decoupling, the last of which also improves water quality. In rural areas, the primary focus is on the regeneration of the soil-water buffer, which includes enhancing soil health, adding water retention measures, and reconnecting flood plains - the last of which is intended to soften drought impacts and reduce downstream flood peaks. In the broader context of the entire Danube Basin, the focus is on achieving institutional alignment and shared data - common indicators (heatwave days, pluvial-flood incidence, soil moisture), cross-border pilots, and open data - to guide decisions and track progress. An equity lens runs through all actions, prioritizing neighborhoods most exposed to heat and floods and with the least access to quality green space.

[2] https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/europe-had-over-62700-heat-related-deaths-2024-report-finds-2025-09-22/

[3] https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/indicators/economic-losses-from-climate-related

The development of this Priority Area is based on the objectives of the EUSDR, in particular Priority Area 5 - Environmental Risks. It essentially comprises three crucial elements, linking measures derived from:

- the Flood Risk Management Plan for the Danube River Basin District, which provides Basin-wide measures for reducing existing risks and avoiding new ones, strengthening resilience, raising awareness and generating solidarity through nature-based solutions, natural water retention measures and urban stormwater management

- EU Mission 1: Adaptation to Climate Change, which promotes regions' advancement toward climate resilience via risk understanding, adaptation pathways and city-rural demonstrators
- EU Mission 4: 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, which furthers nature-based solutions for the cooling of buildings and public areas.

Policy recommendation:

Integration of urban and rural adaptation measures into their national strategies and spatial planning, also regarding vulnerable groups of the population.

Actors & engagement:

Actors and engagement for Priority Area 2 are based on coordinated action at national, regional and local levels, integrating urban and rural adaptation. National and regional authorities embed climate resilience into spatial planning, water management and sectoral policies, while cities and rural municipalities implement heat mitigation, blue-green infrastructure, stormwater management, soil restoration and water retention measures. Research institutions and data providers support risk assessment and monitoring, while civil society, local communities, farmers and the private sector contribute to socially equitable, place-based and scalable solutions.

Priority Area 3: *Clean Energy and Efficient Buildings*

Heating and cooling are major producers of emissions in urban areas, yet they may also be drivers of resilience. The Priority Area "Clean Energy and Efficient Buildings" is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving climate neutrality in the Danube macro-region. The revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) creates a binding framework for the gradual transition to zero-emission buildings, the systematic renovation of the existing stock, and the development of digitally ready buildings. The EU's 100 Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Mission highlights the **need for rapid transformation of urban energy systems, with buildings playing a crucial role**. At the same time, the Danube Strategy identifies energy efficiency and clean energy sources as a horizontal priority supporting the competitiveness and resilience of the region. An analysis of 17 Climate City Contracts in cities in the Danube Region confirms that cities have already made ambitious commitments in the areas of building renovation, decarbonization of central heating sources, and the development of renewable energy sources. The alignment between European legislative frameworks, Mission targets, and practical city strategies clearly shows that a focus on clean energy and efficient buildings is a key prerequisite for the successful implementation of European missions. The selection of this Priority Area will also enable the harmonization of investments, the strengthening of innovative potential, and the creation of synergies between individual cities and countries in the region

Within this Priority Area, the Danube Region will **focus on accelerating the deep renovation of public and residential buildings in line with EPBD requirements**, including the introduction of renovation passports and energy management systems. An important task will be the gradual **decarbonization of central heat sources** through the development of geothermal energy, large heat pumps, and the use of waste heat. Regional cities should systematically support the **installation of photovoltaic systems** on

municipal and community buildings, complemented by energy storage and charging infrastructure. Particular attention will be paid to the development of urban energy communities, pilot projects on flexibility, and digitization through smart metering and building readiness assessments. At the same time, the social dimension of the transition must be ensured through mechanisms to alleviate energy poverty and inclusive financial instruments. The Danube Region should exploit its potential for joint project packages, harmonization of technical standards, and a coordinated approach to financing from European and national sources. Focusing on harmonized progress indicators will enable a comparable assessment of the results achieved and create a basis for effective scaling of solutions. This approach will strengthen the position of the Danube region as a model area for the implementation of climate-neutral and energy-efficient construction in Europe.

Policy recommendation:

Adopt harmonized building renovation standards aligned with the revised EPBD and clean energy across Danube countries and introduce energy management systems in the public sector.

Actors & engagement:

Actors and engagement for Priority Area 3 are based on coordinated action at national, regional and local levels to deliver clean energy and efficient buildings across the Danube Region. National authorities ensure alignment with the revised EPBD and supportive regulatory and financing frameworks. Cities and regions lead deep building renovation, decarbonisation of district heating, deployment of renewables and energy management systems, supported by public building owners, utilities and energy agencies. Financial institutions and private actors enable investment and implementation, while civil society and community initiatives support citizen engagement, social inclusion and the reduction of energy poverty.

Priority Area 4: *Zero-emission Mobility & Resilien t Public Space*

The "Zero-emission Mobility & Resilient Public S pace" Priority Area reflects the urgent need to transform transport systems and urban public spaces in the Danube Region to reduce emissions, improve quality of life, and enhance resilience to climate change. This area directly builds on the objectives of the **EU Mission 1 and EU Mission 4** linking decarbonisation with adaptation through systemic, cross-sectoral approaches. It is also aligned with the **EU Strategy for the Danube Region, New EU Urban Mobility Framework**, and the **Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation**, which together promote sustainable, multimodal, and climate-resilient mobility systems.

Findings from **Climate City Contracts** in Danube Region cities clearly demonstrate that mobility and public space are among the most critical intervention areas for achieving climate neutrality. The majority of analysed **Climate City Contracts** include comprehensive packages of actions targeting **electrification of public transport**, expansion of **cycling and walking infrastructure**, introduction of **low- and zero-emission zones,** and transformation of **streets and public spaces** through nature-based and blue-green solutions. Cities are testing innovative measures such as **electric and hydrogen bus fleets, shared mobility hubs, digital platforms for traffic and energy management**, and **"cool streets"** combining shading, vegetation, and water retention. These pilot projects confirm that mobility transition and spatial adaptation must be addressed together to achieve measurable emission reductions, enhanced resilience to heat and flooding, and improved urban liveability.

Bringing these initiatives together under a single strategic priority will enable **stronger coordination of investments, replication of successful Climate City Contracts measures**, and **transnational cooperation** along the Danube corridor. This integrated approach will accelerate the deployment of zero-emission mobility solutions and resilient urban design, positioning the

Danube Region as a frontrunner in implementing the EU Missions' objectives towards **climate-neutral, healthy, and adaptive cities.**

Policy recommendation:

Preparation and integration of zero-emission mobility plans and their alignment with other climate plans on national, regional and local level.

Actors & engagement:

The implementation of Priority Area 4 should involve the Ministries of Transport, Environment and Regional Development, as well as cities, and transport companies, which, together with research institutions, the private sector, and civic initiatives, will create integrated solutions for zero-emission transport and resilient public spaces.

Priority Area 5: *Governance & Financing Enablers*

Across the Danube Region, mapping and self-assessment under the HARMONMISSIONS process revealed significant fragmentation in governance, a lack of national coordination platforms, and very limited financial and technical capacity for implementing the EU Missions 1 and 4. In most countries, the Missions are addressed only indirectly through general climate or urban policies, with few formal structures, dedicated funding mechanisms, or cross-sectoral coordination bodies. Cities and municipalities—although often proactive and innovative—operate largely in isolation, constrained by insufficient national support, weak vertical integration, and low access to investment tools.

These findings clearly demonstrate that successful engagement with the EU Missions in the Danube Region **depends on establishing robust governance and financing enablers**. Strengthening multi-level coordination, aligning legal and policy frameworks, and building investment readiness are essential to unlock the Missions' transformative potential.

Effective governance ensures coherent planning, participation and accountability, while innovative financing models are crucial to attract private capital and blend it with EU and national funds.

This Priority Area therefore **aims to create a systemic enabling environment** for Mission implementation. It builds directly on lessons learned from the City Climate Contracts, which show that mission-oriented transformation requires not only visionary projects but also clear governance arrangements, data-driven decision-making, and sustainable financial ecosystems. National examples such as Romania's M100 Hub illustrate how structured governance, and financial support can accelerate progress—yet similar mechanisms are largely missing across other Danube countries.

Policy recommendation:

Establish national coordination hubs for EU Missions to bridge cities, ministries, and regional agencies — ensuring Missions' alignment across sectors and funds.

Actors & engagement:

Actors and engagement for Priority Area 5 focus on creating governance and financing enablers for effective EU Mission implementation across the Danube Region. National governments and line ministries establish Mission coordination hubs to connect cities, regions and sectoral agencies and to align policies, funding and implementation. Regional authorities and national agencies support vertical coordination, capacity building and data-driven planning. Cities and municipalities contribute through Climate City Contracts and place-based delivery. Financial institutions and private investors develop blended financing instruments, while research bodies and civil society support monitoring, knowledge exchange and transparency.

Priority Area 6: *Systematic Tracking, Knowledge Sharing and Societal Engagement for Climate Transformation*

Most countries in the Danube Region collect climate, environmental, and energy data in a fragmented manner—separately by department and without uniform methodologies. This fragmented system hinders joint impact assessment, evidence-based policy-making, and the participation of cities in European initiatives (EU Missions 1 and 4). The analysis of national contexts in the introduction reveals that even where mission-aligned policies exist, mechanisms for evidence-based decision-making and continuous learning are fragmented or underdeveloped. Furthermore, as shown in the Climate City Contracts, cities across the region are implementing a wide range of mitigation, adaptation actions — from renewable energy integration in Ljubljana, Cluj-Napoca, and Dresden, to advanced green infrastructure planning in Gabrovo, Velenje, and Kranj. However, these actions are monitored inconsistently, and results are rarely shared in a structured regional framework.

This priority area addresses the need for a **common architecture for systematic tracking and knowledge exchange** that supports the implementation of Missions 1 and 4 while also strengthening **citizen engagement and climate literacy**. It should build on existing platforms such as the *EU Mission Implementation Platform*, *NetZeroCities*, and *CapaCITIES*, linking them together to ensure interoperability and transparency. By harmonizing key performance indicators (KPIs) and reporting processes at the national, regional and local levels alike, the Danube Region can strengthen accountability, policy learning, and the replication of successful approaches.

In the context of EU Mission 1, Priority Area 6 supports the establishment of climate data observatories and resilience indicators that enable the measurement of adaptive capacity and vulnerability reduction. Under EU

Mission 4, it supports the creation of integrated data spaces and digital twins to monitor emissions, energy consumption, and progress in urban transformation. In addition, consistent monitoring will facilitate access to green finance by providing verified evidence of impact – one of the key factors for governance and financing identified in Priority Area 5.

Complementing this technical infrastructure, the priority area also focuses on **public involvement**, including mechanisms for citizen science, participatory tracking, open data access, and climate communication campaigns. Strengthening **climate awareness and literacy increases societal support for transformational measures and enables citizens (especially young people)**, businesses, and communities to actively contribute to climate goals.

This Area additionally reinforces the Priority Areas *Knowledge Society* and *Environmental Risks* of the EUSDR by supporting cooperation in research, innovation transfer, digital tools for smart governance, and public participation. It connects research institutions, urban networks, climate centers, and civil society organisations across the region to create a shared evidence base and an informed public that collectively support strategic planning, assessment, and communication of results.

Policy recommendation:

Ensure harmonised climate reporting and indicator frameworks across all governance levels, aligned with existing climate monitoring systems, as well as river basin and urban planning cycles, including the use of remote sensing and proxy data. Strengthen participatory governance by promoting public engagement, open data and citizen science in the development, implementation and monitoring of climate measures. Invest in climate literacy through the modernisation of formal education and the support of informal education and lifelong learning.

Actors & engagement:

Actors and engagement for Priority Area 6 focus on building a shared system for climate data, knowledge exchange and societal participation across the Danube Region. National authorities and climate, environmental and statistical agencies coordinate harmonised indicators, reporting frameworks and data governance. Cities and regions contribute data, implement monitoring through Climate City Contracts and engage in peer learning. Research institutions and digital innovation actors support data integration, analysis and evidence-based decision-making. Civil society, educational institutions and citizen science initiatives strengthen participatory tracking, open data use, climate communication and climate literacy.

4. Goals: What We Want to Achieve

This chapter outlines the specific, measurable objectives that the Strategy aims to achieve in order to ensure the successful coordination and involvement of stakeholders in EU Missions across the Danube Region. Objectives are interconnected with the priorities, as analysed in the previous chapters, all through the particular activities complementing EU Missions 1 and 4.

3.1. Overarching Strategic Goals

Strategic goals have to represent the practical mirror of the Strategy's vision statement (defined in Chapter 1), as it provides the context for their creation. Thus, the goals seek to support the development of "A resilient and competitive Danube Region built on a holistic and fair approach, where innovative governance supports a just green transition, sustainable resource use, and high environmental awareness to ensure long-term adaptability and shared prosperity".

These goals are intended to simultaneously lead to the realisation of this vision, respect and support the recognised priorities, and align themselves with EU Missions 1 and 4. For this purpose, they should address all Priority Areas provided in Chapter 2:

● Strengthen the climate resilience of the Danube Region: this goal refers to supporting regions and communities in the Danube in becoming climate-resilient by 2030, through the effective adaptation of their own local strategies and innovative solutions which would be aligned with present Strategy. (Area 1, Area 2)

● Increase the efforts to reach climate neutrality and to complete the smart city transitions: communities in the Danube Region must accelerate the efforts to achieve climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 for the signatory cities, so that these practices could be expanded even beyond 2030. (Area 2, Area 3, Area 4)

● Foster sustainable raw material exploitation through appropriate industrial practices and respect environmental protection standards: the Danube Region communities must continue to maintain their focus on environmental protection, the improvement of water quality, the enhancement of biodiversity and the mitigation of environmental risks. (Area 3, Area 5, Area 6)

● Enhance collaboration between regional and local governance bodies: this goal suggests that the constituents of the Danube Region have to work toward a governance framework which will facilitate coordination between national, regional, and EU-level policies, thereby ensuring the efficient implementation of the present Strategy. (Area 5, Area 6)

● Achieve regional prosperity through knowledge and innovation: the exchange of best practices will be crucial to the timely achievement of the two Missions' goals in the Danube Region. This process would include connecting educational and research institutions, implementing digital innovations, and improving access to learning opportunities, thereby ensuring the accelerated achievement of the both Missions' goals in the Danube Region. (Area 6). In order to achieve the overarching strategy goals it is necessary to support integration of smart climate change adaptation, low carbon, safety, security and resilience strengthening goals and policies into the transformation and recovery strategies at local, regional and national levels in the Danube territorial collaboration building on diverse experience and knowledge of the countries in the Danube region.

3.2. Specific Objectives for the better implementation of EU Missions in the Danube Region

Developing and implementing regional adaptation plans

Climate adaptation action plans need to be developed at national and regional levels and effectively transferred and implemented at the local level by promoting vertical coordination. The numerous financial mechanisms developed in the European Union for this purpose may also be successfully mobilized. As recognized in the elaboration of Area 1, the EUSDR can be utilized here since it specifically emphasizes adaptation to extreme weather events and fosters cooperation on joint monitoring and flood management. In order to achieve rehydration of the landscapes, maximizing the involvement of stakeholders will be crucial for the Danube Region. An exemplary organization for potential involvement could be the International Commission for Protection of Danube River (ICPDR), whose thematic expert groups could facilitate regional cooperation for improved monitoring and response to climate changes.

Early warning systems for climate-related hazards improvements

Multiple functioning initiatives like the European Flood Awareness System have to be promoted as tools to support the strengthening of warnings and preparedness for climate-related hazards, especially floods and erosions, as described in Area 1. Systems, especially in the urban areas of the Danube Region, need to improve their resilience in order to effectively cope with hazardous events and reorganize in need of response, which is clearly related to understanding, planning, and managing the consequences of climate-related impacts (Area 2). To overcome the complexity of hazard event response and vulnerability, best practices in integrated disaster risk management could further support the region. Some of them, such as “Dynamic Adaptive Policy Pathways” or “Multi-Risk” are already partially used, but require additional buildout throughout the Danube Region.

Improving the public's awareness and capacity building for climate resilience

Through permanent outreach campaigns which will help translate global and national policy instruments into accessible and comprehensible messages for local communities, the Missions may adapt and better approach specific needs.

Fostering participatory data collection and planning

Public information on the national or local level about risk and disaster mitigation plans should be encouraged (as given in Area 6). This approach is best implemented by using local sources and knowledge, and involving citizens in the planning and decision-making processes.

Increasing the availability of training and informal learning

It is important to ensure the availability of training and informal learning activities for citizens, particularly on topics such as climate risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. The provided knowledge may stem from civil protection trustees, local emergency management teams and different volunteers, and be implemented with the support of journalists.

Integrating climate risks into the formal education chain

Disaster risk reduction should be promoted and involved in the education curricula and institutional development at all levels, starting from the primary education and mobilising pupils, students and teachers. As climate change could be overly abstract or difficult to grasp among younger students, it is crucial to adapt and simplify the disseminated knowledge and encourage viable public engagement.

Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Urban Areas

The European Union has set clear goals of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Mission 4, which aims for "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by

2030," (analysed in the elaboration of Area 2) is even more ambitious. The energy efficiency of buildings must continue to be realized in a twofold manner: on one hand, via the renovation and upgrading of technical systems in existing buildings, and on the other hand, by implementing the greenest technologies available in new buildings. In the case of renovations, the following measures must be applied: better insulation, the replacement of older windows with triple-glazed ones, and insulation of the distribution system pipes. Renewable energy sources must be installed in households, but more importantly fossil fuels must be replaced with innovative technologies in district heating systems, including heat recovery from sewage and air, geothermal energy systems, heat pumps integrated into low-energy networks, and photovoltaic systems. This is especially efficient if combined with smart energy management by introducing metering and regulation control systems in order to further reduce energy consumption. Notable research in this area suggests that efficient measures also include energy-efficient tenant contracts. Finally, green infrastructure must be maximized in city planning, incorporating measures such as low-emission zones ("zoning"), green surfaces, and urban tree planting at even minimally available surfaces for the improvement of air quality.

Promoting Sustainable Urban Mobility

The greenhouse gas emissions from traffic are a major source of air pollution, and the European Union aims to reduce them by 90% until 2050 - an objective which this Strategy suggests as Priority Area 4. Smart city signatories must reach these goals even faster with the following measures:

● Shifting to Sustainable Modes: Shift from private fossil-fuel vehicles has to be strongly encouraged and replaced by sustainable alternatives like electrified public transport, cycling, and walking.

● Innovation and Technology: New technologies or emerging projects of best practices can be found in the Smart City Guidance Package, and could help

communities to foster knowledge exchange on innovative sustainable urban mobility solutions, covering public transport, infrastructure, city logistics, and integrated planning.

● Smarter Mobility Solutions: Utilizing data and digitalization for services like real-time information for Park & Ride and car sharing, and door-to-door transportation services are highly recommended.

● Enabling lifestyle change: Promoting sustainable lifestyles through campaigns, regulations, and infrastructure that make sustainable choices easier and more attractive.

Fostering Citizen Engagement in Climate Action at the Local Level

Directly involving citizens and the private sector in the form of community engagement in developing and implementing climate strategies in cities is vital for the success and sustainability of local climate action plans. Citizens' assemblies lead to innovative and progressive recommendations and will speed up achievements from priority Area 6. Local governments play a decisive role in developing strategies to involve citizens and stakeholders in achieving the smart city's definition in the accepted timeframe, especially of Mission 4. Fostering social spirit within communities leads to shared visions, values and identity, and improves the knowledge transfer that is essential for communities' effective climate action to achieve neutrality. Challenges, such as limited time and budget, legal/organizational hurdles, and inadequate local government support need to be objectively analysed, along with the benefits (that are usually much better documented) to ensure the successful participation of citizens and enable differentiated means of financial support, as emphasized by Priority Area 5.

5. Mechanisms for coordination *(such as transnational alliance in CapaCITIES)*

Mechanisms for coordination, such as the transnational alliance in CapaCITIES, are essential to link local climate action with the broader goals of the two EU Missions on Adaptation and Climate-Neutral Cities respectively. They connect cities, regions, academia, businesses, and communities into a shared Community of Practice, similar to the networks fostered through MIP4Adapt, Mission Portals, EUI and ERRIN. By aligning local initiatives with European tools, funding and knowledge platforms, these alliances help co-create adaptation pathways, Climate City Contracts and innovative pilots, ensuring coherence, mutual learning and stronger, scalable impact on resilience and climate neutrality.

Mission Implementation Platform (MIP4Adapt)

Overview

The Platform supports European regional and local authorities in preparing and planning adaptation pathways to climate resilience. It helps authorities use existing vulnerability and risk assessments, develop adaptation plans, identify and access funding, implement demonstration projects, and engage citizens and stakeholders.

The Mission Implementation Platform for Adaptation (MIP4Adapt) MIP4Adapt supports regional and local authorities in building climate resilience through several key activities:

- It creates a Community of Practice, connecting Charter Signatories, Friends of the Mission, Mission Projects, and national authorities to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices.

- It coordinates EU-funded projects to ensure coherence and synergy in adaptation planning across Europe.

- Through the Climate-ADAPT portal, it provides guidance, data, tools, and project information to help authorities plan and implement climate adaptation measures.

- It delivers tailored technical assistance to Charter Signatories, helping them develop adaptation plans, design demonstration projects, access funding opportunities, and engage stakeholders.

- A dedicated helpdesk offers support and answers questions related to adaptation planning and MIP4Adapt activities.

- MIP4Adapt promotes communication and awareness of the EU Mission on Adaptation by sharing news, events, and training opportunities with regional authorities, academia, companies, and communities.

- It organises the annual Mission Forum, a key event bringing together diverse actors to review progress and discuss future directions.

Finally, it monitors, reports, and evaluates the performance and progress of the Mission, its participating regions, communities, and projects.

The platform is funded by the EU Horizon Europe programme and delivered in partnership with the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Commission.

European Urban Initiative (EUI)

The European Urban Initiative (EUI) is a key EU instrument under Cohesion Policy 2021–2027 that supports cities of all sizes with funding, capacity building and knowledge to drive sustainable urban development. It consolidates and extends earlier instruments (Urban Innovative Actions and the Urban Development Network) and is closely linked to the Urban Agenda for the EU and the URBACT IV programme. The overall objectives of EUI are to strengthen integrated and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development and to create a stronger link between local action and EU policies, especially the Cohesion Policy. It is embedded in Policy Objective 5 of the Cohesion Policy ("Europe closer to citizens"), which requires each Member State to devote at least 8% of its ERDF resources to priorities selected by cities on the basis of their own sustainable urban development strategies. EUI thus sits in a wider framework where more than EUR 100 billion of Cohesion Funds are invested in cities in 2021–2027, with cities directly steering over EUR 24 billion of these investments. The EUI is thus positioned within a wider framework: EUR 100 billion of the available Cohesion Policy Funds for 2021-2027 are invested in cities, which in fact directly steer over EUR 24 billion of these investments.

EUI combines several types of support for urban authorities. Firstly, it funds "Innovative Actions" that allow cities to test novel, unproven solutions to complex urban challenges and to act as testbeds whose results can be replicated elsewhere. Secondly, it finances capacity and knowledge building, territorial impact assessment, policy development and communication activities that help cities design and implement integrated, participatory development strategies. These two strands ensure that EUI is not only a grant scheme for individual pilots but also a mechanism to systematise learning and strengthen long-term urban governance.

Under the Innovative Actions strand, EUI provides up to 80% co-financing and a maximum ERDF contribution of EUR 5 million per project, typically over a period of up to four years. Eligible applicants are urban authorities or groupings of urban authorities (cities, towns or suburbs) with at least 50,000 inhabitants in EU Member states. Calls focus on specific themes such as energy transition, technologies applied to cities, climate neutrality and the broader economic, environmental, demographic and social challenges of urban areas. EUI encourages projects that generate transferable and scalable solutions of clear EU relevance, rather than purely local one-offs.

Beyond project grants, EUI invests in building the capacities of city administrations to plan and implement sustainable urban development in an integrated and participatory way. It provides a "knowledge environment" where cities can access thematic and horizontal guidance, learn from each other and from completed Innovative Action projects, and feed experiences back into national and EU-level policymaking. This knowledge function is intended to reduce fragmentation across many existing EU urban initiatives, maximise synergies with URBACT IV, and strengthen multi-level governance under the Urban Agenda for the EU.

European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP)

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) is an initiative of the European Commission designed to strengthen collaboration among industrial clusters and their members across Europe and beyond. It serves as a central meeting point where cluster organisations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), policy makers, and international partners can connect, share knowledge, and explore new business and innovation opportunities.

The platform plays a key role in supporting Europe's green and digital transition by helping clusters become more innovative, competitive, and sustainable. Through the ECCP, clusters can find partners for cooperation, discover funding opportunities, and take part in matchmaking and networking

events. The online portal also offers a rich knowledge base, including news, publications, and practical tools that guide clusters in improving their performance and expanding internationally.

One of the platform's greatest strengths is its large database of more than a thousand cluster organisations from various sectors and regions. This makes it easier for European and non-European stakeholders to identify potential partners and create cross-sectoral or cross-regional value chains. In addition, the ECCP provides insights into European cluster policies and supports the exchange of best practices among members.

Overall, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform acts as a "one-stop shop" for cluster development and cooperation in Europe. By encouraging collaboration, innovation, and resource efficiency, it helps clusters and their SMEs grow stronger, access new markets, and contribute to the resilience of the European economy.

Mission Portals

The Mission 1 portal serves as a central online hub for the EU's climate adaptation mission, aiming to guide at least 150 European regions and local authorities towards resilience by 2030.

Key features and functionalities include:

● Access to knowledge, data and tools specifically designed to help regional/local authorities understand climate risks and develop adaptation pathways.

● An online Community of Practice where Charter Signatories, friends of the mission, national authorities and mission projects can exchange best practices and receive technical assistance.

● A database of solutions and mission projects, and a Regional Adaptation Support Tool (RAST) that guides authorities through each stage of adaptation planning.

Regional Adaptation Support Tool (RAST)

- The Regional Adaptation Support Tool (RAST) is an online resource developed under the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change. It helps regional and local authorities plan and implement effective climate adaptation strategies.

- RAST provides step-by-step guidance through the entire adaptation process — from assessing climate risks and vulnerabilities to identifying, implementing, and monitoring adaptation actions. It includes practical examples, data sources, methodologies, and best practices that support evidence-based decision-making.

- The tool is designed to be flexible and user-friendly, allowing each region to adapt the process to its specific context, needs, and level of preparedness. Overall, RAST serves as a practical roadmap for building climate resilience at the regional and local levels across Europe. Regularly updated news, events and opportunities for involvement, helping stakeholders engage and stay informed.

Overall, the portal is a user-friendly platform that connects stakeholders across regions, equips them with resources, and supports collaborative efforts to build climate resilience at local and regional levels.

The Mission 4 portal serves as the central online platform supporting cities across Europe in their journey toward climate-neutrality and smart urban development. It is managed under the umbrella of the EU's research and innovation programme Horizon Europe.

Key Features & Services

- It provides a knowledge repository and tools tailored to cities, covering topics such as urban energy systems, mobility, buildings, waste management, governance and citizen engagement.

- Participating cities develop so-called Climate City Contracts — co-created with citizens and stakeholders — which lay out their roadmap toward climate neutrality, including action plans and investment plans.

Climate City Contracts (CCCs)

Climate City Contracts are key instruments of the EU Mission for 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030. Each contract represents a formal commitment between a city, its citizens, local stakeholders, the European Commission, and national authorities to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.

These contracts outline a city's vision, action plan, and investment strategy for reducing emissions across all sectors — such as energy, transport, and buildings. They are co-created with citizens and local partners to ensure transparency, inclusiveness, and strong community engagement.

In essence, Climate City Contracts serve as a roadmap for transformation, helping cities align policies, attract funding, and accelerate their transition towards a greener and smarter future.

- The portal connects cities with peer learning networks, twinning programmes, technical assistance, and access to funding and investment guidance (including links to the European Investment Bank, finance tools and open calls).

- It also acts as a community hub, encouraging collaboration across local authorities, citizens, businesses and regional/national stakeholders to share good practices and innovation.

Purpose and Impact

By enabling cities to act as “innovation hubs” and experiment with systemic transformations, the portal supports the wider goal of making *all* European cities climate-neutral by 2050. The portal therefore combines practical tools, funding pathways and collaborative networks to accelerate urban climate action.

EU Funding and Tender Portal

The EU Funding & Tenders Portal is the European Commission’s central online platform for managing all EU funding opportunities and project applications. It provides access to programmes such as Horizon Europe, LIFE, and other instruments that support research, innovation, and sustainable development. Through this portal, users can explore open and upcoming calls for proposals related to the EU Missions, including Mission 1 – Adaptation to Climate Change and Mission 4 – 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities. For Mission 1, the portal offers funding for projects that build regional and local resilience, develop climate adaptation plans, and test innovative solutions against climate impacts. For Mission 4, it provides opportunities for cities and partners to design and implement strategies for achieving climate neutrality and digital transformation by 2030. Applicants can

create an account, form international consortia, and submit proposals directly through the platform. The portal also offers detailed information about eligibility rules, evaluation criteria, and budget distribution. In addition, it includes tools for partner search and project management during and after grant approval. By centralising all funding programmes, the portal ensures transparency, efficiency, and equal access to EU resources. Ultimately, it serves as a key gateway for organisations, municipalities, and researchers aiming to contribute to Europe's green and digital transition through the EU Missions.

EU Programmes and Funds Available for Missions 1 and 4

The implementation of Mission 1 – Adaptation to Climate Change and Mission 4 – 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 can be supported through several EU funding programmes and financial instruments.

1. Horizon Europe (2021–2027)

This is the main EU funding programme for research and innovation and the primary instrument through which Mission-related actions are financed. Each Mission has specific *calls for proposals* published on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal.

- For Mission 1 Adaptation to Climate Change and Mission 4 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 – relevant calls include those under the identifier HORIZON Programme.

These calls are open to cities, local authorities, research institutions, SMEs, and public–private partnerships.

2. LIFE Programme (Environment and Climate Action)

The LIFE Programme complements Horizon Europe by funding pilot and demonstration projects that contribute to climate adaptation and urban

sustainability. It supports actions such as nature-based adaptation measures, decarbonisation of buildings and transport, green infrastructure, and public awareness initiatives.

3. Cohesion Policy Funds

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF) can co-finance regional or local initiatives aligned with the EU Missions, especially those promoting climate adaptation, resilient infrastructure, and smart city development. Cities and regions can integrate Mission goals into Operational Programmes and apply through national or regional managing authorities.

4. Other Supporting Instruments

- The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) may be used to develop smart mobility and energy infrastructure in line with Mission 4.

- The European Investment Bank (EIB) provides loans and blended finance to support Mission-related investments.

- Widening Participation and Spreading Excellence under Horizon Europe helps less-developed regions (such as some in Central and Eastern Europe) strengthen their capacity to join Mission projects.

ERRIN - European Regions Research and Innovation Network

The European Regions Research and Innovation Network (ERRIN) is a Brussels-based platform that connects more than 120 regional organisations across Europe, supporting cooperation in research and innovation. Through its online portal, ERRIN provides access to information about EU funding opportunities, partner searches, and project development tools. It plays a key role in helping regions and cities engage with the EU Missions, especially Mission 1 – Adaptation to Climate Change and Mission 4 – 100 Climate-

Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030. For Within Mission 1, ERRIN supports regional authorities in developing climate adaptation strategies, sharing best practices, and building cross-border partnerships to strengthen resilience. For the achievement of the objectives Missionof Mission 4, its Smart Cities Working Group promotes cooperation between cities and regions to accelerate the transition toward climate neutrality, sustainable mobility, and digital innovation. The portal also hosts thematic working groups and events where members can exchange ideas and align local initiatives with EU policies. ERRIN's partner search and matchmaking services help cities and regions form strong consortia to apply for Horizon Europe Mission calls. By joining the network, local and regional actors gain early access to policy updates and funding information relevant to their missions. ERRIN therefore serves as a bridge between local innovation ecosystems and European funding instruments. In this way, it empowers regions and cities to actively contribute to Europe's green, digital, and climate-resilient future.

SHARED Platform

The **SHARED Platform** (accessible via harmonmissions.eu/ shared/) represents the "knowledge heart" of the HARMONMISSIONS project. While the broader project focuses on the harmonization of EU Missions across the Danube Region, the SHARED platform is specifically designed as a collaborative ecosystem for exchanging experiences, capitalising on existing results, and fostering regional cooperation to tackle climate change and urban sustainability. Below is an in-depth analysis of its purpose, structure, functionality, and strategic importance.

The name "SHARED" is an acronym and a philosophy: it stands for the collective pooling of resources, data, and experiences. In the context of the European Union's Mission-oriented approach, regions often face the "silo effect," where valuable innovations or policy successes in one city remain unknown to a neighbor only a few hundred kilometers away.

The SHARED platform was built to break these silos. Its primary vision is to ensure that the Danube Region—a geographically diverse and politically complex area—can act as a unified block in achieving the goals of the **European Green Deal**. By "sharing" the burden of research and the benefits of success, the platform accelerates the transition toward climate neutrality.

Core Objectives of the SHARED Platform

The platform's operations are guided by four pillars:

- **Knowledge Capitalisation:** Identifying and promoting results from previously funded Interreg, Horizon 2020, and Horizon Europe projects.
- **Experience Exchange:** Providing a space where practitioners (city mayors, urban planners, environmental engineers) can discuss what worked and, more importantly, what failed.
- **Policy Alignment:** Helping local authorities align their regional strategies with the high-level goals of the EU Missions (Climate Adaptation and Smart Cities).
- **Resource Centralisation:** Acting as a one-stop-shop for technical manuals, case studies, and implementation guidelines.

Key Target Groups and Users

The SHARED platform is not a public social network; it is a specialized tool for professional stakeholders, including:

1. **Public Authorities:** Municipalities and regional governments looking for proven templates for "Climate City Contracts" or "Regional Adaptation Plans."
2. **Research and Academia:** Scientists seeking data or partners for pilot projects related to carbon sequestration, flood management, or renewable energy.

3. **SMEs and Innovators:** Companies offering green technologies that need to understand the specific regulatory and environmental needs of Danube cities.
4. **NGOs:** Organizations focused on social innovation and community engagement in the green transition.

Technical and Functional Structure

The platform is organized into several modules that facilitate different types of interaction:

A. The Best Practices Database

This is the cornerstone of the platform. It contains a curated list of "Success Stories" from across the 9 participating countries. Each entry is tagged by mission (e.g., *Adaptation* or *Cities*), country, and specific theme (e.g., *Nature-Based Solutions, Circular Economy, Green Mobility*). This allow users to find highly relevant examples that match their local geographic or economic conditions.

B. The Repository of "Learned Lessons"

Unlike many platforms that only showcase success, SHARED emphasizes learning from challenges. This module includes reports and white papers that detail the barriers encountered during the implementation of green projects—such as lack of private investment, regulatory hurdles, or low citizen participation—and provides recommendations on how to overcome them.

C. Toolkits and Guidelines

This section provides practical "how-to" guides. For example:

- How to conduct a climate risk assessment for a medium-sized city in the Danube basin.

- Steps to involve citizens in co-designing urban green spaces.
- Financial models for public-private partnerships in renewable energy projects.

D. Interactive Mapping

The platform often utilizes visual data to show where specific Mission-related activities are happening. This geographic overview helps users identify "neighboring" projects, facilitating potential site visits and physical cooperation between nearby regions.

Synergy with the EU Missions

The SHARED platform is specifically calibrated to support the two most critical missions for the Danube area:

- **Adaptation to Climate Change:** The Danube River is the lifeblood of the region but also a source of risk (floods, droughts). The platform hosts data on transboundary water management and drought-resilient agriculture, which are vital for the rural parts of the region.
- **100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities:** For urban centers like Zagreb, Bratislava, or Sofia, the platform offers a pathway to replicate the "Climate City Contract" (CCC) model. It simplifies the complex requirements of the Mission into actionable steps for local administrations.

The "Danube Factor": Cross-Border Harmonization

One of the unique strengths of the SHARED platform is its focus on the **Danube Transnational Program (Interreg DTP)** context. The region consists of EU member states, candidate countries, and non-EU countries (like Ukraine and Montenegro). The SHARED platform acts as a "translator" of EU standards for non-member states, helping them adopt EU-compliant

environmental practices even before formal accession. It fosters a sense of regional identity where the shared ecology of the Danube basin dictates the necessity of shared solutions.

Sustainability is ensured by constant updates. The platform is not a static archive; it is a living ecosystem that grows with every new project call and every new city that signs a climate pledge. It is designed to remain relevant well beyond the official end of the HARMONMISSIONS project, serving as a long-term legacy for the region.

Impact and Expected Outcomes

By utilizing the SHARED platform, the Danube Region expects to achieve:

- **Faster Implementation:** Reducing the time between "policy design" and "ground-level action."
- **Cost Efficiency:** Preventing the duplication of research and trial-and-error costs.
- **Higher Success Rates in Funding:** Users of the platform are better informed about Horizon Europe requirements, leading to higher quality project proposals.
- **Stronger Resilience:** A better-connected region is more capable of responding to sudden climate disasters (such as extreme heatwaves or flash floods).

The **SHARED platform** is more than just a website; it is the digital infrastructure for a "Green Revolution" in the Danube Region. It empowers local leaders with the knowledge that they are not alone in their struggle against climate change. By providing a transparent, accessible, and expert-backed repository of information, SHARED ensures that the best green ideas in Europe can flow as freely as the Danube itself, benefiting every city and community along its banks.

For any stakeholder involved in urban planning, environmental protection, or regional development, the SHARED platform is the essential starting point for turning European "Missions" into local realities.

EMO Platform

The **EMO Platform** (European Mission Observatory), accessible via harmonmissions.eu/_emo/, serves as the "strategic intelligence unit" of the HARMONMISSIONS project. While the SHARED platform acts as a repository for past knowledge, the **EMO Platform** is forward-looking. It is a dynamic, operational tool designed to monitor, track, and analyze the real-time evolution of EU Missions—specifically focusing on **Climate Change Adaptation** and **Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities**.

Below is an in-depth exploration of the EMO Platform's architecture, its strategic role, and its impact on the stakeholders of the Danube Region.

The Core Mission: Observation as an Engine for Action

The primary objective of the EMO Platform is to eliminate the information gap between European Union headquarters in Brussels and the local implementers in the Danube basin. In the complex landscape of **Horizon Europe**, staying updated on shifting regulations, funding cycles, and policy updates is a full-time challenge.

The EMO Platform acts as a **specialized observatory** that filters through the noise of the vast EU bureaucracy to deliver high-relevance, localized intelligence. It transforms passive data into "actionable insights," allowing regions to anticipate changes rather than simply reacting to them.

Functional Modules of the EMO Platform

The platform is built around several key operational pillars that cater to the daily needs of project managers, policy makers, and researchers:

A. The Funding & Call Tracker

This is the most "high-traffic" segment of the platform. It provides a centralized dashboard for:

- **Active Horizon Europe Calls:** Specifically filtered for those supporting the five EU Missions.
- **Interreg and Regional Funding:** Highlighting opportunities specific to the Danube Transnational Program.
- **Deadlines and Requirements:** Summarizing technical eligibility criteria to help organizations decide quickly whether to invest resources in a bid.

B. The Policy & Legislative Monitor

Climate policy is moving at an unprecedented pace. The EMO Platform tracks:

- **EU Green Deal Updates:** Monitoring how new directives (like the Nature Restoration Law or Energy Performance of Buildings Directive) impact local governance.
- **National Adaptation Strategies:** Providing a comparative view of how different countries in the Danube region (from Croatia to Ukraine) are translating EU mandates into national law.

C. The Stakeholder Mapping & Matchmaking Tool

The EMO Platform functions as a "professional LinkedIn" for EU Missions. It allows users to:

- **Identify Lead Partners:** Find institutions with a proven track record in specific mission areas.
- **Build Consortia:** Facilitate the search for partners from different sectors (e.g., a city looking for a technical university and a green-tech SME).
- **Regional Networking:** Specifically bridging the gap between Western and Eastern Danube countries to ensure geographic balance in project proposals.

D. The Performance & Progress Dashboard

A unique feature of the Observatory is its role in monitoring the *status* of the missions themselves. It tracks how many cities in the region have signed the Climate City Contracts and the progress of "Living Labs" for climate adaptation, providing a "heat map" of mission maturity across the region.

Strategic Importance for the Danube Region

The Danube Region faces unique geopolitical challenges, with a mix of EU members, candidate countries, and non-EU states. The EMO Platform performs a vital **harmonization function**:

- **Standardization:** It ensures that a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia has access to the same strategic intelligence as a city in Slovenia or Slovakia.

- **Competitiveness:** By providing early warnings on upcoming calls, it gives Danube-based organizations a "head start" in forming competitive consortia, traditionally dominated by Northern or Western European entities.

Supporting the Dual-Mission Focus

The EMO Platform is specifically optimized for two priority areas:

- **Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities:** It tracks the progress of the "100 Cities" initiative, providing updates on the NetZeroCities platform activities and technical assistance opportunities for urban centers.
- **Adaptation to Climate Change:** It monitors the latest scientific climate projections for the Danube basin, linking these data points to available funding for flood prevention, heatwave mitigation, and resilient agriculture.

User Experience and Accessibility

The platform is designed with **scannability and clarity** in mind. Recognizing that local officials are often overworked, the EMO interface uses visual indicators, timelines, and concise summaries. It serves as a bridge between the high-level technical language of the European Commission and the practical, ground-level language of municipal administration.

Long-Term Impact: From Observation to Leadership

The ultimate goal of the EMO Platform is to move the Danube Region from being a "follower" of EU policy to being a "leader." By providing the tools to master the complexities of the Mission-oriented approach, the platform empowers regional actors to influence future EU work programs.

It fosters a culture of **evidence-based policy making**, where decisions are guided by real-time data and a deep understanding of the European legislative landscape.

The **EMO Platform** is the strategic "watchtower" of the Danube Region's green transition. It provides the foresight necessary to navigate the complexities of the 21st-century environmental landscape. For any stakeholder looking to be more than just a bystander in the EU Missions, harmonmissions.eu/_emo/ is an indispensable resource. It ensures that the Danube Region is not only informed but is actively competitive, collaborative, and ready to lead the way toward a climate-neutral 2030.

CCC Platform

The **CCC Platform** (Climate City Contract), accessible via harmonmissions.eu/_ccc/, is the "governance and implementation" pillar of the HARMONMISSIONS project. While the SHARED platform provides the history (knowledge) and the EMO platform provides the future (intelligence), the CCC Platform provides the legal and operational framework for the present.

It is specifically designed to support the EU Mission: 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030, serving as a roadmap for cities in the Danube Region to formalize their commitment to sustainability through structured, multi-level contracts.

A Climate City Contract is not a traditional, legally binding international treaty, but rather a high-level political and operational commitment. It is a new governance model introduced by the European Commission to break down the silos between city departments, private investors, and citizens.

The CCC serves as a "Memorandum of Understanding" between a city, its stakeholders, and the European Commission, outlining a clear path toward carbon neutrality. The CCC Platform on harmonmissions.eu is the digital tool that guides Danube cities through the complex process of drafting, signing, and executing these contracts.

Core Objectives of the CCC Platform

The platform's mission is to simplify the transition from "vague environmental goals" to "concrete investment plans" through:

- Standardization: Providing templates that align with EU requirements but are adaptable to the specific socio-economic realities of the Danube Region.
- Multi-Level Governance: Facilitating communication between local mayors, regional authorities (like REDEA in Croatia), and national ministries.
- Investment Readiness: Helping cities transform their climate goals into projects that are attractive to private investors and EU grant evaluators.

Key Components of the CCC Framework

The platform breaks the Climate City Contract down into three essential "sub-documents" or modules:

A. The Climate Neutrality Commitment

This is the political heart of the contract. The platform provides resources for cities to define their 2030 targets. It includes guidelines on how to secure a "Mission Label"—a prestigious recognition from the EU that unlocks priority access to funding and technical assistance.

B. The Climate Neutrality Action Plan

This module helps cities identify *where* emissions are coming from (energy, transport, waste, buildings) and *how* to reduce them. The CCC platform offers:

- Sector-specific strategies: E.g., transitioning public bus fleets to electric or hydrogen.
- Nature-based solutions: Integrating green infrastructure into urban planning to reduce "heat island" effects.

C. The Climate Neutrality Investment Plan

Perhaps the most critical part of the platform, this section focuses on the financial "how-to." Achieving climate neutrality requires massive capital. The CCC platform provides tools for:

- Identifying funding gaps: Calculating the difference between available municipal budgets and the total cost of the transition.
- Innovative financing: Guidance on green bonds, energy performance contracting, and crowdfunding for local solar projects.

Technical Features and Tools

To make the CCC process manageable, the platform includes:

- The "CCC Toolkit": A collection of downloadable manuals, checklists, and self-assessment forms.
- Best Practice Library: Showcasing cities that have already successfully submitted their CCCs, providing a "peer-to-peer" learning experience.
- Webinars and Training Modules: Specialized content on how to engage the private sector and how to calculate a city’s carbon footprint.

The "Social Innovation" Aspect

A major focus of the CCC Platform is Citizen Engagement. The EU Missions emphasize that climate neutrality cannot be forced from the top down; it must be co-created with the people. The platform provides "Participation Blueprints" that teach city officials how to:

- Organize Climate Assemblies or "Citizens' Juries."
- Use digital tools for crowdsourcing urban design ideas.
- Communicate the benefits of climate action (e.g., lower energy bills, cleaner air) to skeptical populations.

Regional Impact: Bridging the "East-West" Gap

For cities in the Danube Region—many of which face tighter budgets than their Western European counterparts—the CCC platform is a leveler of the playing field. It helps cities in Croatia, Serbia, or Romania adopt "smart city" governance models that would otherwise be too expensive or complex to develop from scratch. It ensures that the "100 Cities" mission is not just a club for wealthy capitals, but an inclusive movement for every town in the Danube basin.

A Contract for the Future

The CCC Platform (harmonmissions.eu/_ccc/) is the operational blueprint for the 21st-century city. It moves beyond rhetoric and into the realm of accountability. By providing the templates, financial strategies, and engagement tools necessary for a Climate City Contract, the platform empowers the Danube Region to take ownership of its environmental destiny.

It is a tool for mayors who want to leave a legacy of clean air, modern transport, and sustainable energy—turning a daunting "Mission" into a manageable, step-by-step success story.

6. Monitoring: KPI, Tools and Reports

This chapter outlines how progress in implementing the Strategy will be monitored, reviewed, and used for learning and adaptation (for exact KPIs see annex 5).

The EU's climate change mitigation targets are not a single set of numbers but are rather embedded within the broader European Green Deal, which aims for climate neutrality by 2050. The primary adaptation-related goal is to build resilience and adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

- 2030 target: Reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% compared to 1990 levels. For cities with the Mission 4 label, the goal is to achieve climate neutrality by 2030.
- 2040 target: A proposed target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by 90% compared to 1990 levels has been put forward.
- 2050 target: Achieve climate neutrality, meaning net zero greenhouse gas emissions for the EU as a whole.

The monitoring framework links activities to expected outputs, outcomes, and long-term impacts. Monitoring outputs (what is delivered) and outcomes (what results from the activities) will provide evidence for periodic learning and adaptation.

Key Performance Indicators

Key performance indicators (KPIs) are quantifiable measures used to evaluate success in meeting strategic and operational goals. They are devised to be as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) as possible.

The set of KPIs provide concrete data to track whether cities, regions and countries are meeting their climate targets. Regular monitoring, which takes into consideration selected KPIs, allows for the adaptation of strategies and

operations to better achieve the Missions' goals. Finally, monitoring reports based on the selected KPIs enable coherent and effective reporting to the cities, regions, member states up to the European Parliament and Council on the Missions' achievements.

Where possible, KPIs combine quantitative measures (e.g. number of initiatives implemented) with qualitative evidence (e.g. improved stakeholder collaboration). Baseline data are most often established during the first implementation phase.

The indicators provided below are linked with goals and specific objectives set in Chapter 3 and are set by the Priority Areas. For a more detailed description of selected KPIs see Annex 5.

Priority Area 1: *Rehydrating Landscapes: Territorial Action for Water–Soil–Climate Resilience in the Danube Basin*

This Priority Area focuses on strengthening the capacity of the Danube River Basin to restore small water cycles, rehydrate soils, and enhance resilience to climate change through coordinated, data-driven, and nature-based measures, using the Water–Soil–Climate NEXUS framework.

Quantitative indicators:

- Number of prepared Territorial Action Plans (TAPs)
- Number of prepared Regional Adaptation Plans (RAPs)

Qualitative indicator:

- Integration of TAPs and RAPs into national climate change adaptation strategies and river basin management plans

Priority Area 2: *Adaptation of Cities and Rural Areas to Climate Change in the Danube Region*

In cities, the focus is to reduce heat islands, implement cooling networks, and nature-based shading, while cutting pluvial-flood damages via blue-green infrastructure, nature-based solutions and stormwater decoupling that also improves water quality. In rural areas, the focus is to rebuild the soil–water buffer—enhancing soil health, adding small-water retention, and reconnecting floodplains—to soften drought impacts and reduce downstream flood peaks. Basin-wide, the focus is on institutional alignment and shared data—common indicators (heatwave days, pluvial-flood incidence, soil moisture), cross-border pilots, and open data—to guide decisions and track progress.

Quantitative indicators:

- Losses from natural disasters in the Danube Region
- Reducing the percentage of vulnerable groups in the population
- ND – GAIN country index score (upper income countries/upper middle)
- Number of NbS (nature-based solutions) for streets and public spaces

Qualitative indicators:

- Integration of urban and rural adaptation measures into national strategies and spatial planning
- Improved early warning systems for climate related hazards (Early Warnings for All Dashboard)

Priority Area 3: *Clean energy and efficient buildings*

Within this Priority Area, the Danube Region will focus on accelerating the deep renovation of public and residential buildings in line with EPBD requirements, including the introduction of renovation passports and energy management systems. An important task will be the gradual decarbonization of central heat sources through the development of geothermal energy, large heat pumps, and the use of waste heat. Regional cities should systematically support the installation of photovoltaic systems on municipal and community buildings, complemented by energy storage and charging infrastructure. Particular attention will be paid to the development of urban energy communities, pilot projects on flexibility, and digitization through smart metering and building readiness assessments.

Quantitative indicators:

- Renovated m2 of public and residential buildings
- Decarbonization of heat and energy sources – GHG emissions reduction in the energy sector
- Energy class of issued Energy Passports/Renovation Passports for buildings

Qualitative indicators:

- Harmonized building renovation standards in the Danube Region
- Sustainable raw materials exploitation – reduced environmental impacts

Priority Area 4: *Zero-emission mobility & resilient public space*

Findings from City Climate Contracts in Danube R egion cities clearly demonstrate that mobility and public space are among the most critical intervention areas for achieving climate neutrality. The majority of analysed Climate City Contracts include comprehensive packages of actions targeting

the electrification of public transport, the expansion of cycling and walking infrastructure, the introduction of low- and zero-emission zones, and the transformation of streets and public spaces through nature-based and blue-green solutions. Cities are testing innovative measures such as electric and hydrogen bus fleets, shared mobility hubs, digital platforms for traffic and energy management, and “cool streets” combining shading, vegetation, and water retention.

Quantitative indicators:

- Number of zero-emission mobility plans in the Danube Region
- GHG emissions reduction in the transport sector in the Danube Region countries

Qualitative indicators:

- Integration of zero-emission mobility plans and their alignment with other climate plans on national, regional and local level.
- Electrification of public transport, expansion of cycling and walking infrastructure, introduction of low- and zero-emission zones, deployment of zero-emission mobility solutions, electric and hydrogen bus fleets, shared mobility hubs, digital platforms for traffic and energy management.

Priority Area 5: *Governance & Financing Enablers*

The successful engagement with the EU Missions in the Danube Region depends on establishing robust and flexible governance and financing enablers able to activate synergies between all territorial available resources. Strengthening multi-level coordination and governance structures based on quadruple helix architecture integrating governments, businesses, academia and civil society actors, aligning legal and policy frameworks in public and private sectors and building investment readiness are essential to unlock the Missions’ transformative potential. Effective governance ensures coherent

planning, participation, and accountability, while innovative financing models are crucial to attract private capital and blend it with EU and national funds.

Quantitative indicators:

- Number of national coordination hubs for EU Missions to bridge cities, ministries, and regional agencies
- Dedicated funding mechanisms for the implementation of the Missions
- Level of awareness of public and the public's capacity building for climate resilience

Qualitative indicators:

- Multi-level coordination
- Alignment of the legal and policy frameworks
- Investment readiness

Priority Area 6: *Systematic Tracking, Knowledge Sharing and Societal Engagement for Climate Transformation*

This Priority Area addresses the need for a common monitoring and knowledge architecture that supports the implementation of Missions 1 and 4. It should build on existing platforms such as the EU Mission Implementation Platform, NetZeroCities, and CapaCITIES, linking them together to ensure interoperability and transparency. By harmonizing key performance indicators (KPIs) and reporting processes at all levels (national, regional, and local), the Danube Region can strengthen accountability, policy learning, and the replication of successful approaches.

Quantitative indicators:

- Number of organized climate assemblies that strengthen citizen engagement and climate literacy per country
- Number of large-scale demonstrations of systemic transformations to climate resilience (per million inhabitants)

Qualitative indicators:

- Harmonization of climate reporting (indicators) at all levels in relation to existing climate monitoring systems.
- Alignment of monitoring with river basin and city planning cycles
- Remote sensing of proxy data.
- Citizen's engagement in climate action

Tools and Reports

➔ Data Collection and Management

Monitoring data will be collected through different sources as identified under each KPI, such as: government and ministry reports, EU reports and statistics, routine project and program reporting, administrative and statistical records, but also surveys, interviews, or focus groups and partner organizations as needed. The frequency of data collection is different for each KPI, as are the tools and platforms and responsible institutions.

Regular quality checks will ensure data accuracy, completeness, and comparability across reporting periods. Progress reports will be prepared, summarizing progress toward indicators, achievements, challenges, and lessons learned. These reports will inform review meetings with key stakeholders, updates to the implementation plan and public communication on achievements.

➔ How to Measure Qualitative Progress

Unlike quantitative indicators, qualitative ones will be measured by:

- Tracking the number of participants/involved subjects: Monitor how many regions and communities are officially supported by the mission.
- Using project-based metrics: analysing the performance of funded projects for outcomes like emission reduction, energy savings, or species protection.
- Collecting data from implementation reports: using reports from projects and the technical assistance provided to track the development and implementation of adaptation pathways and solutions.
- Particularly for Mission 4: Through metrics related to investments, innovation uptake, quality of life improvements, citizen engagement, and the reduction of carbon emissions and pollution at city level.

➔ Roles and Responsibilities

Clear roles are defined to ensure consistent and credible monitoring. The key responsibilities are within a Coordination body, which is established by the Lead partner.

Actor/institution	Role in monitoring	Who
Coordination body	*Overall oversight and synthesis*	*Lead Partner*
Partners / stakeholders	*Collect and report data for assigned objectives. Contribute data and participate in reviews*	*All partners*
M&E Officer / Unit	*Quality assurance, data analysis, and reporting*	

➔ Learning and Adaptation

Monitoring findings will feed into structured learning processes, such as reflection workshops or learning briefs, organized by the Danube program. Lessons learned will be used to adjust implementation plans, improve coordination, and inform the design of future strategies or programs.

➔ Resources

A dedicated share of the Strategy's budget should be allocated for monitoring and evaluation activities, including staff time, data collection, and evaluation studies.

➔ Risks and Assumptions

Effective monitoring depends on:

- Availability and quality of data
- Institutional cooperation and reporting discipline
- Stability of funding and staff capacity

Mitigation measures will include clear data-sharing agreements and periodic training.

➔ Communication of Results

Monitoring results will be communicated through periodic progress reports, dashboards and online platforms, annual summaries and presentations to stakeholders. This transparency ensures accountability and encourages broad engagement in achieving the strategy's goals.

7. Conclusions and recommendations *(for an action plan)*

The Danube Region is a highly interconnected area where environmental, economic, and social challenges frequently extend across borders. In this context, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) already provides a strong framework for cooperation, while the EU Missions offer clear objectives for climate adaptation, climate-neutral cities, and broader sustainability transitions. However, implementation across the region remains uneven. Significant differences persist in governance capacity, access to funding, institutional coordination, and technical expertise. Country analyses show that many promising local initiatives exist, but these are often not supported by strong national coordination. As a result, fragmentation across institutions, sectors, and governance levels remains the main obstacle to effective and large-scale action.

The proposed strategy is fully aligned with the European Green Deal and relevant EU Missions and is based on a model of multi-level, cross-sector collaboration. Its central purpose is to move beyond policy ambition and focus on implementation. The overall vision is to build a resilient, competitive, and sustainable Danube Region capable of addressing climate risks, reducing emissions, and promoting balanced territorial development through coordinated action.

To achieve this, the strategy is structured around six priority areas. Alongside recommendations, the strategy presents relevant actors and engaged stakeholders, as well as quantitative and qualitative indicators of success as follows:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">PA1</th><th colspan="4">PA2</th></tr>
<tr><td>Recommendation</td><td colspan="3">Preparation of Territorial Action Plans (TAPs) and linking them to national climate change adaptation strategies and river basin management plans, ensuring consistency between water retention measures, soil health, and land use.</td><td>Recommendation</td><td colspan="3">Integration of urban and rural adaptation measures into their national strategies and spatial planning, also regarding vulnerable groups of the population.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Actors & engagement</td><td colspan="3">Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, and Regional Development in close cooperation with national water management and environmental agencies</td><td>Actors & engagement</td><td colspan="3">National and regional authorities, research institutions, data providers</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Quantitative</td><td colspan="2">Qualitative</td><td colspan="2">Quantitative</td><td colspan="2">Qualitative</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">● Number of prepared Territorial Action Plans (TAPs)
● Number of prepared Regional Adaptation Plans (RAPs)</td><td colspan="2">● Integration of TAPs and RAPs into national climate change adaptation strategies and river basin management plans</td><td colspan="2">● Losses from natural disasters in the Danube Region
● Reducing the percentage of vulnerable groups in the population
● ND – GAIN country index score (upper income countries/upper middle)
● Number of NbS (nature-based solutions) for streets and public spaces</td><td colspan="2">● Integration of urban and rural adaptation measures into national strategies and spatial planning
● Improved early warning systems for climate related hazards (Early Warnings for All Dashboard)</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">PA3</th><th colspan="4">PA4</th></tr>
<tr><td>Recommendation</td><td colspan="3">Adopt harmonized building renovation standards aligned with the revised EPBD and clean energy across Danube countries and introduce energy management systems in the public sector.</td><td>Recommendation</td><td colspan="3">Preparation and integration of zero-emission mobility plans and their alignment with other climate plans on national, regional and local level.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Actors & engagement</td><td colspan="3">National authorities, cities and municipalities, financial institutions</td><td>Actors & engagement</td><td colspan="3">Ministries of transport, environment and regional development, cities, transport companies, private sector</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Quantitative</td><td colspan="2">Qualitative</td><td colspan="2">Quantitative</td><td colspan="2">Qualitative</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">● Renovated m2 of public and residential buildings
● Decarbonization of heat and energy sources – GHG emissions reduction in the energy sector
● Energy class of issued Energy Passports/Renovation Passports for buildings</td><td colspan="2">● Harmonized building renovation standards in the Danube Region
● Sustainable raw materials exploitation – reduced environmental impacts</td><td colspan="2">● Number of zero-emission mobility plans in the Danube Region
● GHG emissions reduction in the transport sector in the Danube Region countries</td><td colspan="2">● Integration of zero-emission mobility plans and their alignment with other climate plans on national, regional and local level.
● Electrification of public transport, expansion of cycling and walking infrastructure, introduction of low- and zero-emission zones, deployment of zero-emission mobility solutions, electric and hydrogen bus fleets, shared mobility hubs, digital platforms for traffic and energy management.</td></tr>
</table>

PA5		PA6	
Recommendation	Establish national coordination hubs for EU Missions to bridge cities, ministries, and regional agencies — ensuring Missions' alignment across sectors and funds.	*Recommendation*	Ensure harmonised climate reporting and indicator frameworks across all governance levels, aligned with existing climate monitoring systems, as well as river basin and urban planning cycles, including the use of remote sensing and proxy data. Strengthen participatory governance by promoting public engagement, open data and citizen science in the development, implementation and monitoring of climate measures. Invest in climate literacy through the modernisation of formal education and the support of informal education and lifelong learning.
Actors & engagement	Governments and ministries, regional authorities and national agencies, cities, municipalities, financial institutions and private investors	*Actors & engagement*	National authorities and climate, environmental and statistical agencies, cities and regions, research institutions, digital innovation actors, civil society, educational institutions and citizen science initiatives
Quantitative	*Qualitative*	*Quantitative*	*Qualitative*
• Number of national coordination hubs for EU Missions to bridge cities, ministries, and regional agencies • Dedicated funding mechanisms for the implementation of the Missions • Level of awareness of public and the public's capacity building for climate resilience	• Multi-level coordination • Alignment of the legal and policy frameworks • Investment readiness	• Number of organized climate assemblies that strengthen citizen engagement and climate literacy per country • Number of large-scale demonstrations of systemic transformations to climate resilience (per million inhabitants)	• Harmonization of climate reporting (indicators) at all levels in relation to existing climate monitoring systems. • Alignment of monitoring with river basin and city planning cycles • Remote sensing of proxy data. • Citizen's engagement in climate action

The strategy combines broad strategic goals with practical objectives. At the strategic level, it seeks to strengthen climate resilience, accelerate climate neutrality, protect the environment, improve governance, and make better use of innovation and digital tools. At the operational level, the strategy aims to scale up adaptation planning, improve early warning systems, raise public awareness, strengthen climate education and training, integrate climate topics into formal education, reduce emissions from buildings and energy systems, support sustainable mobility, and encourage the co-creation of local climate solutions with citizens and stakeholders.

Successful implementation depends on effective coordination mechanisms and access to existing EU tools and platforms. These include transnational alliances, MIP4Adapt, the European Urban Initiative, ECCP, Mission platforms, the RAST tool, Climate City Contracts, the EU Funding and Tenders Portal, ERRIN, SHARED, EMO, and the CCC platform. Together, these mechanisms can support planning, capacity building, partnership development, investment, and monitoring.

Overall, the key challenge in the Danube Region is not the lack of strategies or initiatives, but the lack of connection between them. The Strategy is built around the need for clear coordination, stronger project pipelines, and shared tracking and learning across the Danube Region. The main role of this strategy is therefore to reduce fragmentation, connect existing capacities, and translate a shared vision into coordinated and measurable action.

Communication and outreach component

This part specifies the communication component of the Strategy – how to reach national, regional and local stakeholders in the Danube region countries.

Purpose and Scope

1. *Importance of communication for harmonizing European Missions 1 & 4*

   The Strategy identifies fragmentation, weak national platforms, limited technical and financial capacity, and poor knowledge-sharing as systemic barriers hindering the implementation of European Missions in the Danube region. In this context, communication matters because harmonisation cannot happen through policy design alone. It requires:

   - a common operating framework for ministries, regional authorities, municipalities, utilities, knowledge institutions and civil society;
   - regular exchange of information and good practices;

- visible proof that joint Mission delivery produces tangible benefits for communities.

Communication therefore becomes the essential mechanism through which fragmentation is reduced, common priorities are explained, and a shared sense of direction of European Missions 1 & 4 is built across the Danube macro-region.

2. *How communication and outreach section supports the strategic objectives of the overall Strategy*

The communication and outreach section supports the overall Strategy by turning its strategic objectives into an operational framework for stakeholder alignment and delivery. The Strategy is built around the need for clear coordination, stronger project pipelines, and shared tracking and learning across the Danube Region. A dedicated communication component supports each of these objectives by:

- strengthening coordination by linking governance levels and actors;
- tailoring messages to the needs of each target group - from policy coherence and funding guidance at national level to Climate City Contracts, adaptation pilots, financing options and practical templates at local level;
- embedding citizen engagement, climate awareness and knowledge-sharing into the overall harmonisation process;
- supporting project generation by informing stakeholders about tools, templates, opportunities and partnerships;
- reinforcing monitoring and learning by ensuring that results, practices and lessons are communicated back into the regional system.

Governance of Communication

1. Roles and responsibilities at the Danube Region level:
- New coordinating body responsible for Strategy monitoring in the following 5 years (tbd)
- National Contact Points in the Danube region countries;
- EUSDR Priority Areas as a cross-link.
2. Outlining coordination mechanisms between EU, national, regional, and local levels (mirroring the EUSDR's multi-level governance model).

Communication framework for outreach

1. *Target Audiences*
- National (ministries, agencies, national platforms/hubs): policy coherence, funding orientation, Mission governance updates, peer learning across countries.
- Regional (counties/NUTS2 authorities, regional development agencies): programme embedding, project pipelines, technical help, matchmaking.
- Local (municipalities, utilities, local development agencies): Climate City Contracts, adaptation pilots, financing options, templates, training.
- Ecosystem (NGOs, business/finance, media, citizens): calls/opportunities, knowledge resources, co-creation, citizen engagement.
2. *Communication Objectives*
- Raise awareness and understanding of EU Missions 1 & 4 among regional and local actors.
- Promote stakeholder engagement and co-creation of solutions.
- Strengthen visibility and ownership of Danube-level coordination.
- Ensure two-way communication for feedback and learning.

3. *Communication Channels and Tools*

- Project website: SHARED – lessons learned, case libraries, partner search. EMO – live monitoring of legislation, calls, events + stakeholder registry. CCC – materials and exemplars for Climate City Contracts.
- Social media: LinkedIn (policy/experts), local FB where relevant.
- Media relations
- Communication toolbox: visual identity, logo lockups, slide master, one-pagers, factsheets.
- EUSDR Synergies: dissemination through DSP and Priority Area networks & newsletters.

Message architecture

- Umbrella narrative (Danube-level): *By aligning EU Missions 1 and 4, the Danube Region can build safer, healthier and more prosperous communities through integrated action that simultaneously strengthens climate resilience and accelerates the transition to climate-neutral, smart and liveable cities.*
- Pillars: Adaptation (risk & resilience) & Cities (climate neutrality & quality of life).
- Proof: best practices and pilots from Danube cities and regions.

Calls-to-action by level:

- National – designate contact points, align programmes, publish guidance.
- Regional – aggregate projects, co-finance instruments.
- Local – sign/advance CCCs, submit/transfer/implement pilots, use templates/toolbox.
- Language policy: English is main language + country-language summaries (≤1 page) and subtitled videos.
- Accessibility: plain language, alt-text, captions; PDFs compliant where possible.