

## **EUSDR Report June 2012**

### **Priority Area 09** ***“To Invest in People and Skills”***

#### **1. OVERALL PROGRESS**

##### **1.1. State of play**

In the first stage of its implementation phase, the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and more specifically Priority Area 9 “To Invest in People and Skills” (henceforth to be mentioned as “PA9”) shows the value of new approaches of transnational and regional cooperation in the fields of labour market and education policies. It demonstrates a high level of commitment of partners at various levels – national and regional, governmental and non-governmental. It builds especially on the wide input in the open consultation phase. After one year in implementation, it is the PACs assessment that the Strategy is already contributing positively to enhanced cooperation in the Region. However, the implementation process also points to issues needing to be further addressed, including better alignment of funding and reinforcing processes in which people and their ideas can connect by creating possibilities for networking – and thus for cooperating more, coordinating better and exchanging good practices.

Many parts of the Danube Region have been particularly hit by the financial and economic crisis with direct effects on e.g. youth employment and migration. Additionally, rapidly developing information and communication technologies, the need to protect the environment and demographic changes call for action. Education and training are more than ever of key importance in the Danube Region, for socio-economic development and growth, but also equitable and inclusive societies, for the well-being and personal fulfilment of its citizens.

More needs to be done to ensure that education and training systems develop learners' creativity, entrepreneurship and capacity for innovation as well as deliver the knowledge and skills needed in an increasingly macro-regional and globalised labour market. By investing in people and skills and making best use of its human capital, the Danube Region can progress and grow in a smart and inclusive way. In order to be prepared for the changes and challenges ahead, it requires capacity-building and empowerment of actors and institutions on all levels, fighting poverty and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems.

The Strategy has contributed to concrete action within the fields of labour market and education policies, with a more streamlined use of resources and an innovative combination of both bottom-up and top-down processes. The EUSDR is not only about projects, but also strengthens existing initiatives and fosters the development of new networks. New working methods and initiatives have been and will be developed. Already existing initiatives and networks now cooperate under a new umbrella. In addition to that, the Strategy is fostering the development of new inclusive networks, as well as increased cooperation and a better division of labour for existing networks. It provides a common reference point for many organizations, initiatives and networks in

the Danube Region. Increasingly, people and structures are familiar with the priorities set out in the Work Plan of PA 9 of the EUSDR and take them into account within their activities.

### Governance/Priority Area Coordination

The pilot nature of the Strategy, and its ownership by a very broad stakeholder community, including local and regional authorities, national ministries, Commission services, private sector representatives and NGOs, requires an open but effective governance structure.

On the level of Priority Area Coordination, PACs have managed to set up a functioning cooperation and communication structure involving all 14 Danube Region Countries, the EC and the European Training Foundation (ETF), as well as already existing cooperation platforms and networks. In particular, PACs have established a network of national counterparts in the 14 Danube Region countries. For the most part these counterparts are public officers from labour and/or education ministries, but also representatives from NGOs and VET agencies. They form the Steering Group of PA9 (“Steering Group members”, henceforth to be mentioned as SG members). Within the thematic scope of PA9, the ongoing involvement of and coordination with the ETF and the EC (DGs REGIO, EMPL and EAC) are of particular value.

In order to support the coordination and communication within PA9, PACs have installed a website ([www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu](http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu)) which also promotes public awareness on the Strategy.

The Strategy builds on experiences of past cooperation and existing projects. It provides increased visibility, expanded networks, and clearer direct links to national and European policy making. On the level of policy coordination with Intergovernmental Institutions and regional networks, synergies have been created i.a. with the RCC Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital, the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) and the Central European Cooperation in Education (CECE) as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). PACs have also participated in a measure to increase synergies between development cooperation and the EUSDR.

The cross-sectoral approach of the Strategy (cf. conclusions of the General Affairs Council (GAC) on the EUSDR of 13 April 2011) with other Priority Areas (e.g. PAs 3, 7, 8 & 10) is being supported through meetings and ongoing information exchange with the respective PACs and SG members on the national (with the National Contact Points, NCPs) and transnational levels.

PACs participate in national EUSDR coordination meetings on a regular basis. This is also true for some of the SG members of PA9, aiming to ensure a coherent and synergic development of actions. In addition to this, the NCP-PAC meetings as well as the Labgroup meetings with the European Commission brought useful clarifications regarding realistic possibilities but also obstacles and limitations of the Strategy and contributed to a common understanding of what it should be.

### Involvement of stakeholders within Priority Area 9

To succeed, the Strategy needs participation of all relevant public and private stakeholders. This should be both conceptual, influencing the overall development of the

Priority Area, and practical, contributing to implementation (for instance through projects). Such participation needs to be further developed. PACs have supported the networking among relevant stakeholders of Priority Area 9, i.a. through a stakeholder forum held in Vienna as well as through ongoing meetings with representatives from the civil society. PACs also participated in and contributed to different conferences with such diverse topics as education cooperation, Roma inclusion etc. or in the Austrian kick-off for the EUSDR in July 2011. Additionally, PACs are constantly providing relevant information on the Strategy to the citizens, i.a. through the above mentioned stakeholder forum and the website of PA9.<sup>1</sup>

### Work on targets and actions

PACs have examined the Commission's target examples provided in the Action Plan accompanying the Communication on the Strategy published on 8 December 2010. The SG of PA9 agreed on new realistic and feasible targets relevant to the macro-region on 6 December 2011 at its 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting in Zagreb, Croatia. These targets contribute to the achievement of the EU2020 and ET2020 strategies of the EU.

In relation to this, the SG decided on the merging of actions 4 and 5 as well as of actions 7 and 8 of the Commission's Action Plan to action 4 and action 7 respectively. In addition, two new actions related to active citizenship and gender equality were introduced (see also chapter 2). It is proposed to revise the Commission's Action Plan accordingly:

- (Merged) Action 4: "To support lifelong learning and expanding learning mobility"
- (New) Action 5: "To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through education and training"
- (Merged) Action 7: "To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities"
- (New) Action 8: "To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment"

In line with its decision on revising the actions, the SG developed a rolling work plan which gives an indicative list of projects and attributes them to the actions/work areas. Implementation of these work areas will be further supported by the working groups formed at the stakeholder conference.

In April 2012, following a respective request by DG Regio, the SG decided on linking actions/work areas to the targets of PA9 (see Annex 1).

### Project level

In the framework of PA9, the Strategy has brought a new momentum to already existing projects and serves as a catalyst for the development of new project ideas and more specifically their transnational and macro-regional dimension. PACs have set up a rolling Stock-taking process of both existing and new projects, whereas the SG of PA9 agreed on concrete criteria for projects to be labelled as EUSDR projects (see Annex 2). PACs regularly provided assistance to Lead Partners by making use of already existing sources of information. In addition to this, PACs provided recommendation letters to 6 projects,

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<sup>1</sup> [www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu](http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu)

one of which has already been granted funding by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)/European Transnational Cooperation Operational Programme “Central Europe”.

Based on the ongoing Stock-taking process, PACs have compiled a list of projects and project ideas in PA9. An indicative selection of projects/project ideas can be found in the Annex 3 of this document. A total of 46 projects/planned projects/project ideas have been identified so far (see chapter 1.2). Including the recommended projects, almost 30 projects and cooperation platforms have been labelled as EUSDR projects. Some of these projects already make use of the EUSDR visual identity provided by INTERACT.

Of particular relevance in PA9 is the project “Empowering Young People – Connecting Europe”, which is one of only four special pilot projects financed the EU (see also 2.2.2 and the project folder in Annex 4). The project (running from 2012-13) supports innovative school-based projects and promotes dialogue between cultures, active citizenship and commitment to sustainable development. A project portfolio will be developed to support dissemination and sustainability within the Region.

Further project ideas and synergies between already existing projects have been created at PA9’s stakeholder conference on 13 and 14 June 2012.

### Lessons learned

The EUSDR has increased cooperation in the Danube Region in the fields of labour market and education. It is therefore a useful framework in order to strengthen on-going and enable future cooperation processes. Moreover, it has given projects and cooperation platforms in the Danube Region additional visibility and serves as their common umbrella. There is a particular added value in the inclusion of third countries.

The stakeholder conference of PA9 held on 13 and 14 June 2012 led to a first gathering of relevant stakeholders from the DR countries and to take-stock of the progress so far. The conference clearly and convincingly showed that the following has been achieved in the first year of activities of the EUSDR:

- A higher level of transparency on relevant project activities and a clustering of knowledge
- Willingness to cooperate
- A consistent bottom-up approach ensuring that the ownership of projects and ideas is claimed and that not only funding alone fosters the topics.
- Best use of existing cooperation projects

The contribution the Strategy and PA9 make to cooperation in the Region must now be consolidated. Points to underline are:

- It can clearly be seen that activities in the PA9 enable the development of a long-term coordination framework which promotes decentralised but also coordinated work. A demand for professional exchange and interest in meetings to develop ideas and support collaboration is clearly visible. New forms of learning and easy communication on a day-to-day level are of high value. The previous work mode supports needs-oriented information and knowledge management which is not geared towards the mere collection of data, but towards operational benefit.
- It needs to be highlighted in particular that cooperation between educational and labour market policy-makers and the stakeholders involved can take a central

position. National policies and European initiatives can be developed and implemented with better coordination here while taking into account the interests of the people.

- The PA “Coordinators” cannot “implement” the Strategy. An effective implementation of PA9 requires action on different levels and within different policy frameworks. Ownership by a very broad stakeholder community, including local and regional authorities, national ministries, the relevant Commission’s services, private sector representatives and NGOs is therefore essential.
- While the overall participation of DR countries in PA9 was in general satisfactory, the involvement of some of the DR countries could be improved (e.g. participation of all DR countries in the SG meetings). Moreover, the continuity within the SG of PA9 is of utmost importance in order to make the implementation of PA9 a success and thereby ensuring the regional ownership. Hence, all National Contact Points and DG Regio are invited to ensure that the nominated members to the SG attend the next meetings.
- The chosen work mode of the PACs, which has put the ownership of initiatives and common success strongly at its centre, provides a sound basis for future cooperation. Personal contacts in different work stages have made a valuable contribution in this respect.
- Many very ambitious ideas were raised since the adoption of the Strategy which was seen as a renewed chance to address them. It should however be repeatedly examined to what extent the Danube Region scope can give answers to questions about realistic next steps, where the issues require solutions at local, national state or European level. Learning from others and joint development can make very important contributions here but will not replace policies.
- Where sustainable development is to be initiated it is necessary to undertake efforts to go beyond isolated projects, independent of funding with project budgets of limited duration and the associated project partnerships.
- It can rightly be pointed out that continually reinventing the wheel in projects and initiatives should be avoided. On the other hand, social innovations are mostly connected with a certain need for social recapitulation and adaptation. This requires time and, very importantly, communication. It is necessary to deal with this problem creatively and this should not be confused with inefficiency.
- The alignment of policy and funding towards the Strategy is crucial. It should fully utilise the structural funds, the pre-accession and neighbourhood instruments in non-EU countries, but also all other available sources of EU and national funding. In this context, the financing of projects will be a main challenge in the implementation of the PA9, especially with regard to upcoming budget period and its legislative framework. Existing programmes do not meet the “pattern” of the Danube Region. This can be exemplarily illustrated by the following considerations:
  - Existing programmes at local, regional, national and Community level mostly differ in terms of their regional focus or refer to the different legal situations in the DR countries (member states, non-EU member states). This occasionally leads to challenges for innovative partnerships as it creates barriers for joint actions.

- For instance, in order to implement PA9 projects within the LLL/”Erasmus for all” programmes, the inclusion of some third countries will be challenging.
- Possibilities to support an “all-inclusiveness” of the Strategy should be identified, e.g. by making available funding for countries to participate in projects under programmes, in which they are not eligible.
- Within the ERDF and more precisely European Territorial Cooperation, projects in the field of education and the labour market are not the primary focus. Within the Operational Programmes of the European Transnational Cooperation, there seems to be a contradiction between the prioritization (4 priorities) in the upcoming budget period and the 11 priorities of the EUSDR: This particularly matters for priorities and thematic fields that are not primarily targeted by the ERDF, such as education and labour market.
- In order to implement PA9 projects through the ESF, its transnational element would need to be strengthened.
- The lack of specific funding aligned to the EUSDR raises many questions among (potential) project leaders. Regarding the added value of the Strategy, awareness among (potential) project leaders still needs to be improved.

Within in the specific scope of PA9 of the EUSDR, the establishment of a small project funding (SPF) mechanism is desirable in order to enable the implementation of projects, as financing tool for very small projects or as project preparation facility. This specific need has also been stressed in a study prepared by METIS and commissioned by DG Regio.<sup>2</sup> The establishment of a SPF is also one of the targets of PA9 (see also 1.3).

## 1.2. Process

The EU Member States endorsed the EUSDR at the General Affairs Council on 13 April 2011. In succession, PA9 “To Invest in People and Skills“ constituted itself at a kick-off meeting of the SG on 28 June 2011 and started to work towards the achievement of the Deliverables communicated to PACs by DG Regio in August 2011:

Deliverable 1: Each action is broken down in operational steps (milestones, responsible and deadlines) - Status: **Achieved**

PA9 has developed a Work Plan including milestones and responsibilities within the PA, which was adopted by the SG members in December 2011 (see Annex 5 - Work Plan), as well as rules of procedure for the SG. The specific PA9 overall activities are aimed at the coordination between the participating countries, as well as the organisation and implementation of the SG meetings, meetings of the Working Groups and Stakeholder Conferences. Current challenges within the EUSDR can be seen in the area of country specific circumstances, like the fact that Slovenian officials do not currently have travel budget available. Also the implementation of the EUs existing structural funds remains a

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<sup>2</sup> METIS (2012): *Final Report: Analysis of needs for financial instruments in the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)*, see <http://www.danube-region.eu/item/241475>

challenging task. One of the crucial points of the EUSDR is the creation of a better access to the Structural Funds.

Deliverable 2: A certain number of new projects - i.e. not yet implemented - are identified (with project leaders), for example 5-10 to be decided by the Steering Groups - Status: **Achieved**

and

Deliverable 3: A certain number of existing projects - i.e. already implemented - are identified (to build on them further), for example 5-10 to be decided by the Steering Groups - Status: **Achieved**

PACs have set up a rolling and on-going stocktaking-process of projects to identify both existing and new projects (see Annex 3 - Project Portfolio; for the stocktaking-questionnaire see Annex 6). So far, 46 projects were identified, out of which 6 have received a recommendation letter (template see Annex 7) and 26 were labelled as EUSDR projects (see table below):

<i>Received from</i>	<i>Projects</i>	<i>Finished Projects</i>	<i>Ongoing Projects</i>	<i>Planned Projects</i>	<i>Project Ideas</i>	<i>Recommended</i>	<i>Labelled Projects</i>
<i>AT</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>BA<sup>3</sup></i>							
<i>BG</i>	<i>5</i>			<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	
<i>CZ</i>	<i>1</i>			<i>1</i>			
<i>DE</i>	<i>1</i>			<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>		
<i>HU</i>	<i>1</i>		<i>1</i>				<i>1</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>1</i>		<i>1</i>				<i>1</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>4</i>				<i>4</i>		
<i>RO</i>	<i>5</i>		<i>4</i>		<i>1</i>		<i>4</i>
<i>RS</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>7</i>			<i>1</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>SI</i>							
<i>SK</i>							
<i>UA</i>							
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>46</i></b>	<b><i>3</i></b>	<b><i>26</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>	<b><i>11</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>	<b><i>26</i></b>

Table 1: Projects submitted to PA9

<sup>3</sup> Most of the countries that have not yet submitted projects are involved in some of the projects submitted by other countries.

Deliverable 4: The SG has met at a reasonable frequency, for example 2 times between June 2010 and June 2011 - Status: **Achieved**

The SG of PA9 “To Invest in People and Skills“ constituted itself at a kick-off meeting in Vienna on 28 June 2011 and is mainly composed by public officers from labour market and education ministries of the Danube Region, as well as some representatives of NGOs from states involved in the EUSDR. Furthermore, Commission services (DGs REGIO, EMPL and EAC) as well as the ETF participate in its proceedings. The SG has adopted Guidelines for its functioning (see Annex 8).

Since the endorsement of the EUSDR, PA9 held three SG meetings. The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting took place on 5-6 December 2011 in Zagreb, Croatia, upon kind invitation of the Croatian Ministry of Labour and Pension System. Meeting 3 was held in Vienna, Austria, on 14-15 June 2012, back to back with the International Stakeholder Conference of PA9 “To Invest in People and Skills - Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region”.

<i>Event</i>	<i>AT</i>	<i>BA</i>	<i>BG</i>	<i>CZ</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>HR</i>	<i>HU</i>	<i>MD</i>	<i>ME</i>	<i>RO</i>	<i>RS</i>	<i>SI</i>	<i>SK</i>	<i>UA</i>	<i>ETF</i>	<i>REGIO</i>	<i>EMPL</i>	<i>EAC</i>
<i>SG 1</i>	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	x	x	-
<i>SG 2</i>	x	x	x	-	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	x	-	x	x	-	-
<i>SG 3</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	-	x	x	-	x
<i>Conf.</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	x	x	x	x	x	x

Table 2: Attendance of meetings of PA9

Deliverable 5: A seminar has been organised with the stakeholders (NGOs, regional and local authorities, private sector, civil society, etc.) - Status: **Achieved**

On 13-14 June 2012, the International Stakeholder Conference of PA9 “To Invest in People and Skills - Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region” took place in Vienna, Austria, with about 160 participants from 13 Danube Region Countries. One of the main aims of the Stakeholder Conference was to set up Working Groups, following the eight actions within PA9 (see also Chapter 2), which has been successfully implemented. The conference convened stakeholders from European institutions and International Organisations, Ministries responsible for Education, Labour and Social Affairs, non-governmental organisations active in the field of human capital building, education and labour market experts, researchers and international donors (for details about the conference, see Annex 9 - Concept of the Conference).

As regards coordination with stakeholders, additionally, synergies have been sought in with regional networks, e.g. the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council, the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) and the Central European Cooperation in Education (CECE). The cross-sectoral approach of the Strategy (cf. General Affairs Council conclusions on EUSDR of 13 April 2011) with other Priority Areas (7 & 3) is being supported.

Furthermore, the participation of the PACs in meetings relevant to the EUSDR is taking place on a regular basis, as well as the participation of the PAC staff, where relevant or



appropriate. The kick-off of the EUSDR on Austrian level took place on 4 July 2011, where PA9 was represented. The PACs are participating at meetings of coordination at national level of the EUSDR on a regularly basis, as well as at the meetings between the EC, National Contact Points and PACs (Gödöllő, Hungary 2011, Bucharest, Romania 2012). The participation at the EUSDR Labgroup took place regularly (Vienna, Austria 2011, Budapest, Hungary 2011, Belgrade, Serbia 2011).

**Deliverable 6: There is a website in place - Status: Achieved**

PA9 implemented also various publicity measures. A website was set in place ([www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu](http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu)).

Additional web-related publicity measures have been undertaken on national levels in order to promote the Strategy and the Action plan, for instance in Austria and Montenegro.

### 1.3. Funding

In its conclusions of 13 April 2011, the General Affairs Council stressed that macro-regional strategies are based on the principle **no new EU funds**, no additional EU formal structures and no new EU legislation. Nevertheless, it invited the Commission and the EU Member States concerned to support the aims of the EUSDR by facilitating the coordination of existing EU funds and instruments and by simplifying the relevant rules of implementation to enable quick and effective project generation. In addition to this, it called on the Commission and the EU Member States to provide technical assistance.

Towards the end of 2011, PA9 was granted by the Commission a **technical assistance** in the amount of € 200.000 for the years 2012 and 2013 to support the beginning of the implementation phase. This technical assistance supports i.a. the facilitation of Steering Group Meetings, Working Group Meetings and Stakeholder Conferences, and in particular supports the participation of Non-EU MS at these events through covering travel and accommodation costs.

In addition to this, PA9 was granted a total of € 275.000 to implement the special **Pilot Project** “Empowering Young People - Connecting Europe” (see also 2.2.2.)

In general, as regards funding of projects, the Council and the Commission drew the attention to **unused funding sources** in the current budget period 2007-2013. The reason for the non-use of funding might be a lack of information, of technical knowledge or of resources in order to comply with the manifold challenges of the application processes. With the help of the technical assistance, PACs can provide platforms and possibilities for potential project partners to network and to **exchange and provide information**, also about funding of projects.

As already outlined above, within the specific thematic scope of PA9, the **funding of macro-regional projects** seems to be particularly challenging. For instance, the ESF does not primarily focus on transnational projects; and not all countries are eligible under the EU Programmes for Education and Training. Incompatibility of regulations for funding instruments in the Member States and outside the EU (in particular IPA and EN(P)I) inhibit cooperation across some Danube Region countries. Moreover, funding within the European Transnational Cooperation only partly targets education and labour market projects. In order to cope with these challenges and the specific needs of PA9 in the upcoming budget period, PACs have supported the alignment of funding towards the Strategy and have promoted macro-regional strategies within the discussions on the new legislative framework (2014-2020). The Austrian Minister for Education, Arts and Culture has proposed in the Education Council a reference to macro-regional strategies within the new “Erasmus for All” Programme; this proposal was supported by Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Moreover, Austria has advocated including a reference to macro-regional strategies in the IPA II regulations for the new legislative framework.

In addition to this, PA9 has set the **establishment of a Small Project Funding mechanism** as one of its main strategic targets (see Annex 1), as there is a clear need for funding of smaller regional projects up to approx. € 200.000. Such a mechanism should be accessible for all DR countries and also provide **seed money** for project development activities. In order to foster synergies in the Danube Region it is considered of particular importance to implement also very small projects including network activities between different stakeholders working in the same sector, civil society activities, projects in order to exchange know-how and disseminate information. In particular, regional projects in the field of education and training, but also for example culture, have special requirements regarding their scope and complexity of application procedures.

There have been also initiatives for aligning funding towards the Strategy at **national/regional levels**. For instance Hungary has invited to tender for transnational cooperation in the field of vocational and adult training. At the moment, the applications are under consideration. In the German State of Baden-Württemberg, an inter-ministerial working group has been established in order to develop EUSDR projects in all Priority Areas. The commitment of Baden-Württemberg is reflected by the recent allocation of significant financial support in order to facilitate the projects in their initial phase (2012-2013). About 10% of the funding will be reserved for projects related to PA9. Following the initial phase, financing must be continued by European funding (ESF, ERDF, Erasmus for All, etc.).

#### 1.4. Next steps

- The next event to be held will be the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the **Steering Group**, which will tentatively be held back to back to the 1<sup>st</sup> **Annual Forum** of the EUSDR in November 2012 in Regensburg, Germany. The 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Steering Group is scheduled to take place in Moldova in the first half of 2013.
- PACs will participate in the next **EC/NCP/PAC meeting** (October 2012).
- A follow-up event to the **Stakeholder Conference** is planned to be held in 2013.
- The eight **Working Groups**, following the eight actions within PA9 of the Danube Region, which were initiated within the conference, need to be continued. Some of the Working Groups have already scheduled an appointment for a follow-up meeting in the second half of 2012.
- Activities to support the **development of regional projects** will be continued. A workshop to develop projects under the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) on the topic of “Transition from School to Work” will be held in Austria in October 2012 in cooperation with the Austrian National Agency for the LLP.
- The labelling of existing and new **projects** of the EUSDR will be continued.
- Discussion on and further development of PA9 **targets** and objectives will be continued in line with developments on the overall EUSDR level
- The **website** of PA9 [www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu](http://www.peopleandskills-danuberegion.eu) is being regularly updated with new contents.

## **2. PROGRESS BY WORK AREA**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Coordination of PA9 “To Invest in People and Skills” has decided to report in this chapter along the “Actions”. Reference to the “Targets”, as proposed by the European Commission in its report template, for this report will be made in Annex 1. Shaping the report along “Targets” would cause a rather complex and confusing structure of the report, as several actions, measures, projects etc. refer to several targets.

The version of the “Action Plan” we are referring to is already an adapted one (see above under 1.1.). Adaptations have been undertaken according to decisions of the Steering Group and the PACs, resulting in the merging of two times two Actions and the introduction of two new Actions which assured that the total number of “Actions” stays the same.

In detail, the following actions have been performed: Former Actions 4 and 5 (as in the original version of the document) have been merged to become Action 4. A new Action 5 has been introduced. In the same way former Actions 7 and 8 have been merged to become Action 7 and a new Action 8 has been introduced.

In practical terms, Actions of PA9 were grouped to secure efficient implementation and clear working structures: The Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection took over the direction of Actions 2, 6, 7 and 8, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture took over the coordination of Actions 1, 3, 4 and 5.

The general progress and state of play in the “Actions” of PA9 can in the best way be described via the on-going projects as well as via process, outcome and results of the Working Groups within the Stakeholder Conference “To Invest in People and Skills: Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region” on 13-14 June 2012 in Vienna, Austria. Eight Working Groups were established during their first session within the Stakeholder Conference. The reports from these Working Groups will be completed by on-going and future projects, which in many cases represent a reliable structure to build on for future developments in the strategy.

### **2.2. Report on Actions 1, 3, 4 and 5**

With the aim to work towards the Strategy EU 2020 and in line with the Education and Training 2020 framework, the Danube Region countries have set up a strategic framework for cooperation in education and training spanning education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective. Lifelong learning should be regarded as a fundamental principle underpinning the entire cooperation, which is designed to cover learning in all contexts – whether formal, non-formal or informal – and at all levels: from early childhood education to adult learning. VET plays a key role in this context, as a tool to help meet immediate and future skills needs, and, in parallel, to reduce the social impact of and facilitate recovery from the crisis.

Specifically, Danube Region cooperation takes place in the following four actions:

- “To enhance performance of education systems through closer cooperation of education institutions, systems and policies”

- “To support creativity and entrepreneurship”
- “To support lifelong learning and expanding learning mobility”
- “To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through education and training”

Working groups consisting of experts and policy makers will support the implementation of these actions. The working groups will be coordinated by the PA Coordination in cooperation with a partner country/institution from the Danube Region. So far, Bulgaria has expressed interest in becoming involved in this task.

However, as some ideas and projects from the four actions have many similarities and related objectives, further reflection is necessary on the extent to which it is possible to create synergies between related action lines in terms of contents. This might be achieved by providing mutual information (observation, creation of structured networks) or by operational cooperation or merging of activities. Some of the treated topics are strongly connected in terms of content and should by no means be analysed in an isolated manner (such as issues of mobility and the qualifications-frameworks). On the other hand, the topics are so intrinsically complex and some also address and involve other actors that it does not seem realistic to work on them jointly. Consequently it would be necessary here to secure coordination efforts at strategically decisive points of development rather than plan for over-complex work arrangements.

Work in the working groups until now has revealed that activities and initiatives within the framework of the EUSDR do not have to start from scratch. The following aspects were repeatedly named as providing important support for joint activities:

- preparatory meetings
- seed funding
- conferences, project fairs (information brokerage, identifying partners)

With a view to the modes of work applied in the projects, networks and initiatives it can be seen that there is no lack of methods: learning mobility, peer learning, networking, dissemination of results, exchange of good practice and more. The creation of an inventory aiming to create a ‘DR set of tools’ could help enhance clarity and systematise cooperation to support planning and implementation for project promoters and partners.

In the further work process it should be examined if all the major stakeholders or also experts are sufficiently integrated into the processes. In the upcoming process, a systematic or thematic enrichment of the ongoing working groups could be important.

### ***2.2.1. Action/Work Area 1 “To enhance performance of education systems through closer cooperation of education institutions, systems and policies”***

The work area on “Enhancing the performance of education systems” deals with improving the quality and efficiency of education and training. It is also about ensuring the acquisition of key competences, high quality teaching and improving leadership in education as major challenges, while developing the attractiveness of education at all levels, VET in particular. Furthermore, it addresses developing effective QA systems and to promote evidence-based policy and practice.

In the reporting period, major progress was achieved through already on-going projects and within cooperation platforms and networks. For example, countries cooperate in clusters to improve the attractiveness of VET and to increase capacities for evidence-based policy making in education, respectively. Work is also done in the fields of school leadership and teacher professionalism. On the level of platforms, the Education Reform Initiative in South East Europe (ERI SEE) is in the process of becoming an Intergovernmental Organization with an International Secretariat in Belgrade, Serbia. ERI SEE has also been increasingly recognized by the EC as a potential partner within the Western Balkan Platform on Education and Training as well as for the implementation of regional projects.

Projects associated (by adoption of the SG) with this action as of June 2012 are:

Cooperation platforms and networks:

- **Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) – Regional Platform for Cooperation in Education and Training; Specific activity: Establishment of an International ERI SEE Secretariat in Belgrade in 2012 (Lead/Chair: RS)**
- **Central European Cooperation in Education (Rotating lead: SI in 2011, AT in 2012)**
- **Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council (Lead: RO, AT, HR)**

Governance and policy action:

- **Cluster of knowledge on evidence –based policy making in education (Lead: RS)**
- **Improving quality assurance (QA) in Vocational Education and Training (VET) through schools’ networks (Lead: RO – National Centre for TVET)**

Attractiveness and relevance of VET:

- **Cluster Modernising VET system – improving performance, quality and attractiveness of VET (Lead: RO – National Centre for TVET)**

Professional development of teachers, trainer and school leaders:

- **International Cooperation For School Leadership (ICSL) (Lead: HU – Tempus Public Agency)**

Various:

- Projects linked to LLP, such as Comenius, Leonardo, etc.

Building on these activities, the work area was further developed in a workshop of the Stakeholder Conference on 13-14 June 2012. The workshop succeeded in the identification of key thematic fields as well as the development of project plans and supported the networking among potential project partners. A short project fair with presentation of current projects was held in order to find a common understanding of what is the state of play and to find ideas for the future and to identify potential next steps. The projects and project ideas which were presented encompass a wide range of topics, such as cooperation between schools and communities and green skills in VET.

Moreover, the following success-critical factors for current and future projects were identified: macro-regional impact of the project, good leadership, involve leadership of school principals (for projects in VET ), joint ventures between education institutions and companies (for projects in VET), perceived added value, have a mobility component in the project, peer review and mutual learning component, be realistic and not overburden institutions, clear monitoring and evaluation plan developed from a very early stage, show concrete results, start even if you do not have funding at the beginning.

Key issues for further work that have been identified include:

- Strengthening evidence based policy making in education
- Increasing VET attractiveness and quality in VET
- National Qualification Frameworks
- Professional development of teachers
- Closer cooperation between VET schools and companies
- Early school leavers
- Social inclusion
- Skills for jobs
- Stronger involvement of civil society

In addition, six new projects conducted by the participants were identified, three of which were further developed in small groups:

- Strengthening Evidence-Based Policy-Making in Education in the Western Balkans through the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE). Proposal to be funded under multi-beneficiary IPA for 2013
- Capacity-Building for Teachers of VET in the Danube Region - Project on in-service teacher training in VET; initial planning workshop organised by the Baden Württemberg Ministry
- Developing a Network of University Brands of Excellence, promoted by the University of Ruse in Bulgaria

Work in this area will continue in the second half of 2012.

### ***2.2.2. Action/Work Area 3 “To support creativity and entrepreneurship”***

Work Area 3 primarily deals with transversal key competences, entrepreneurship education and the promotion of innovative learning environments and creative partnerships between education, culture, civil society and the economy.

Within Work Area 3, implementation of the EUSDR Pilot Project “Empowering Young People - Connecting Europe” has started. The aim of the project is to support reconciliation and excellence through education and training targeting the youth of the Danube Region. Active citizenship, creativity and intercultural dialogue shall be supported through innovative and joint teaching programmes for students in the Danube region. This will be reached by developing innovative school-based projects promoting active citizenship, participation in civil society at national and regional level, intercultural awareness through cross-cultural interaction and sustainable development and entrepreneurship. Based on this experience, a “Danube Region Project Portfolio” will be developed as an innovative guide for teachers. The motto of the project is: “Re-shaping Life in our Region” focusing on the vision young people have of the future of the Danube region and of their role in shaping it. 16 schools from 10 different countries (Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Germany, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Ukraine) have been selected to take part in the project. A project homepage was set up as an instrument to inform about the project and will be developed into a communication tool for the project ([www.empoweringyoungpeople.net](http://www.empoweringyoungpeople.net)).

Furthermore, important activities are and will be implemented in the field of promoting entrepreneurship education, e.g. via training firms in business schools in the project ECO NET. The project “SMART i.e.” which was recommended by the PACs and the SG has been granted funding by the ERDF Operational Programme “Central Europe.”

On-going projects associated (by adoption of the SG) with this work area as of June 2012 are:

- **Empowering Young People - Connecting Europe (EUSDR-Pilot Project; Lead: AT – MoE)**
- **ECO NET - Support for Training Firms in SEE (Lead: AT - KulturKontakt Austria)**
- **Training the teachers from economic VET schools to implement the training firms method (Lead: RO)**
- **ET-Struct: Economic Educational Territorial - Structure (Lead: AT – European Office, Vienna Board of Education)**
- **SMART i.e. - SMART Training Network for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Emerging Sustainable Economic Sectors (Lead: AT - European Office, Vienna Board of Education)**

Planned Projects:

- Creativity and business – unlocking the potential (Lead: BG - Human Resources Development Agency)
- E-Log - Online Competency-Oriented Education in Logistics (Lead: BG - Human Resources Development Agency)
- Innovative Competency-Oriented E-learning in Tourism – ICOELIT (Lead: BG - BSC SME, Ruse)

Issues related to this action were discussed by the respective Working Group in the framework of the stakeholder conference on 13-14 June 2012. The Working Group used the conference to exchange expert experiences and, at the same time, to create networks at personal and institutional levels. One expected overall impact of the EUSDR is seen in the task of information “brokerage”. This could and should benefit smaller institutions in particular. Especially for the members of this working group it was important to establish contacts with other PAs of the EUSDR, apparently because the topic was strongly perceived as a cross-cutting theme.

### ***2.2.3. Action/Work Area 4: “To support lifelong learning and expanding learning mobility”***

Progress in this area was achieved through activities and cooperation efforts addressing e.g. the development of NQFs and competence based assessment in VET as well as learning mobility. Here, the work area can build on on-going successful projects, such as the CEEPUS programme or the Mobility Programme of the Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital.

New initiatives in the field of lifelong learning may be still developed, e.g. regarding topics of greater openness towards non-formal and informal learning and recognition of learning outcomes. A workshop aiming at developing new Danube Region projects on the topic of transition from school to work will be organised by the Austrian NA for the LLP in October 2012.

On-going projects associated (by adoption of the SG) with this work area as of June 2012 are:

- **Capacity Building Mobility Programme (Lead: AT, Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital)**



- **CEEPUS - Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (Lead: N/A, Central office in AT)**
- **Cluster on Development of National Qualification Frameworks (Lead: HR)**
- **Training on competence based assessment for VET teachers (Lead: RO – National Centre for TVET)**

In the respective Working Group at the Stakeholder Conference in June 2012, comprehensive LLL strategies and their implementation have been identified as a priority for the development of knowledge societies and mobility and measures to facilitate mobility were pointed out as key factors supporting lifelong learning. But making these effective and increasing their impact for individual learners remains an ongoing challenge.

Attention needs to be paid to the following points during the further implementation process:

- Administration - reduction of obstacles, simplification of regulations, common development of regulations, briefings of civil servants
- Focus on existent schemes – find a balance between new and old ideas, secure financing
- Information management – elaborate short, user friendly documents and schemes
- Promotion of mobility as a way of life
- Promotion of the Danube region - have a positive approach towards its developments and achievements
- Ask for dissemination strategy as a condition for application and project approval
- Awareness of the link between language and identity

In addition, two new project ideas were discussed, intending to

- Coordinate the NQF development in the Danube region – exchange of information on how to develop and operationalize NQF at system level (regulations needed, steps taken, exchange of good practice); and to
- Support the networking of schools in specific sectors (e.g. agriculture, tourism etc.) – possible areas for cooperation: mobility of teachers and students, training programmes development, teachers training, extracurricular activities, online cooperation platforms.

#### ***2.2.4. Action/Work Area 5 “To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through education and training” (Action 5 NEW)***

Major challenges in this area are to work towards education and training systems that will enable all individuals to acquire and develop skills and competences required for their employability as well as to foster tolerance, intercultural dialogue and non-discrimination.

Important project examples in this area focus on fostering cooperation of young people, such as ACES which aims at creating a sustainable network of shared knowledge, mutual learning and innovation, and the cooperation between schools and communities, such as the Codes-project. The work area can additionally build on the already finished Danube Region project EDTWIN.

On-going projects associated (by adoption of the SG) with this work area as of June 2012 are:

- **aces - Academy of Central European Schools (Lead: SK - Vceli Dom, AT – Interkulturelles Zentrum)**
- **Collaboration of Schools and Communities for Sustainable Development (CoDeS) (EU-Comenius multilateral network; Lead: CH - Stiftung Umweltbildung Schweiz)**

Finished project:

- **EdTWIN - Education Twinning for European Citizenship in the Centroppe Region (Lead: AT - European Office of the Vienna Board of Education)**

In the respective Working Group at the Stakeholder Conference in June 2012, participants agreed on the fact that the Strategy should be used as a tool to establish contacts, exchange information, find synergies and get new ideas on cooperation. Needs were voiced for awareness-raising to discover the possibilities in the EUSDR and to share information, find project partners and ideas.

The major challenges which were named by the members of the working group were:

- Reducing unemployment, matching labour market demand and supply
- Improving equity of the education system, and targeted support to vulnerable, most disadvantaged groups
- Encouraging people to active participation
- Developing of adult training, with regard to labour market needs
- Active aging
- Diversity of pupils, students, migration

The participants also collected topics for potential projects, such as:

- Learning citizenship (learning active citizenship by adults – methodology, curriculum)
- Empower citizenship on a common goal, through a common issue (like sustainability)
- Learning partnership
- Mobility of low educated people
- Diversity management for social cohesion and human rights network of intercultural educators
- Motivation to learn (LLL)
- Early school leaving, qualifying people, empowering – Leonardo project ongoing, future application for ETC project

Based on this, the workshop developed two project ideas. One is related to active citizenship education, another one to intercultural education.

### **2.3. Report on Actions 2, 6, 7 and 8**

As described before, this group of Actions are closer linked to the competences of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection.

Action 2 deals with “To foster cooperation between key stakeholders of labour market, education and research policies in order to develop learning regions and environments”, Action 6 is “To improve cross-sector policy coordination to address demographic and migration challenges”.

As also mentioned before, in this group former Actions 7 und 8 have been merged to become new Action 7 “To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities”. and a new Action 8 “To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment” has been introduced.

A decision on this change in the Action Plan has already been taken by the Steering Group, the formal procedure on the level of the Action plan will be introduced in due course.

Please note that a more detailed description of the Actions/Working Areas can be found in the Work Plan (Annex 5). A more concise description of the projects as well as outputs of ongoing projects

#### ***2.3.1. Action/Work Area 2 “To foster cooperation between key stakeholders of labour market, education and research policies in order to develop learning regions and environments”***

Formal Description in the Action Plan: “To increase innovative capacities of the labour force in the Danube Region, new forms of partnerships and cooperation among key stakeholders (labour market, education and training, research and employers) need to be further developed. Employers (private, public and voluntary) have an important role to play in identifying the knowledge, skills and competences needed in working life. To increase the employability and entrepreneurial potential of all learners, communication and active cooperation should be further developed between education and training institutions on the one hand and employers on the other.”

#### **State of Play after the Establishment of the Working Group**

25 participants from 11 DR-Nations and one International Organization (ILO) joined the workshop. All in all it was a quite broad range of institutions, e.g. ministries, public employment services, research institutions, employer’s associations etc.

The most important result of the discussion in the working group is the commitment of the participant to meet again. There should be two meetings of the working group per year for information exchange. To prepare these meetings a “smaller working group” or “working party” should be installed, which discusses the main focus of each meeting, develop the agenda and also an action plan per year. The colleagues from Zagreb were so kind to invite the relevant participants for this meeting to Zagreb in September.

In the first discussion round every participant described already existing projects in his/her organization or region and future needs. A huge range of good practice projects was mentioned, e.g. active labour markets measures, competence base trainings,

vocational trainings, research activities, installation of databases, mobility programs, network and cooperation projects, etc. etc.

In the second discussion round we were able to identify five common needs and topics:

#### youth unemployment

Youth unemployment is one of the main topics in the whole Danube Strategy Region and therefore an exchange of information as well as the conception of new projects will be important, e.g. research projects about the situation of young people and their needs, motivation measures, dual vocational trainings etc.

#### vocational orientation

The participants experienced that there is a lack of information about the needs on the labour market and possible job qualifications among young people, their parents and also their teachers. Therefore competent vocational orientation and information is necessary and also a more intensive cooperation between labour market institutions and schools.

mismatch of skills/qualifications and demands of employers/needs of the labour market

The mismatch as well as the skills shortage are topics, which many of the participants announced in their statements. Suggested measures and projects are a combining of labour market institutions and educational systems, conception of trainings or train the teacher projects. A point of interest was also the exchange of know how to develop curricula which are based on the demands of employers.

#### labour market forecasts

Many different methods of labour market forecasts exist, with already as many different results as methods. Thus the participants argued that an exchange of existing methods which work well would be interesting and necessary. There is also a special focus on regional analyses and forecasts.

#### local partnerships for employment

Local partnerships for employment already exist in some countries. There public employment services, social partners, enterprises, regional governments and other labour market institutions work together to reduce unemployment. An exchange of existing, well running partnerships would be interesting and maybe also projects between these existing partnerships

The participants gave the exchange of information and experiences top priority. They stated, that the wheel shouldn't be reinvented, but we should learn from our neighbours and other Danube Region Countries. This should happen in meetings and working groups, but also some other instruments were suggested:

#### Develop a toolbox

The discussion in the working group demonstrated, that some institutions/countries have a demand for information about certain topics and other can provide this information.

Therefore a possibility for an information exchange would be a toolbox, which provides different information in the internet, e.g. project descriptions, curricula, research reports etc.

### Create a support-platform for project providers

Especially within the Danube Region Strategy the financing of projects is a problem, because of different financing systems as IPA, ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), ESF (European Social Fund) and others. It is a challenge to combine these different systems for one project. Therefore a support platform, which provides information about financing possibilities, about developing of project tenders, about possible partners etc. would be an important assistance for project providers.

List of projects associated with the work area as of June 2012:

- Cross-border discussion forum for Labour Market Policy: Austro-Hungarian Expert Academy (EXPAK AT.HU) (Lead: AT - L&R Social Research Institute)
- Cross-border discussion forum for Labour Market Policy: Austrian-Slovenian Expert Academy (EXPAK AT.SI) (Lead: AT - L&R Social Research Institute)
- Cross-border discussion forum for Labour Market Policy: Austrian-Slovak Expert Academy (EXPAK AT.SK) (Lead: AT - L&R Social Research Institute)
- Cross-border discussion forum for Labour Market Policy: Austrian-Czech Expert Academy (EXPAK AT.CZ) (Lead: AT - L&R Social Research Institute)
- Cooperation in Labour Market Issues: Austria-Bulgaria (KOOP AT-BG) (Lead: AT - ÖSB Consulting)
- Cooperation in Labour Market Issues: Austria-Romania (KOOP AT-RO) (Lead: AT - ÖSB Consulting)
- Network for Labourmarket Cooperation in the Border Region Hungary-Austria (NETLAB\_) (Lead: AT - Regionaler Entwicklungsverband Industrieviertel)
- Bilateral Exchange in Labour Market Policy Austria – Moldova (ongoing)
- IPA 2011 project: “Preparation of Serbian Labour Market Institutions for European Employment Strategy” (Lead: Serbian Ministry of Economy and Regional Development)
- IPA 2008 project: “Forecasting and NES data management”
- Mastering Skills of European Professional Medics (MED) (planned to apply for funding in programming period 2014- 2020, Lead: Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises - Ruse)
- Establishing of a Network of Agricultural Training Centres (planned to apply for funding in programming period 2014- 2020, Lead: Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises - Ruse)
- Qualification Network Danube Area (project start 2012, Lead: Vocational Training Institute Burgenland)

### ***2.3.2. Action/Work Area 6 “To improve cross-sector policy coordination to address demographic and migration challenges”***

The main goal of this working area is to develop a knowledgebase on the status quo, on drivers and impacts of migration flows and demographic change, to develop a basis for enhanced cooperation of different policies at all levels of governance. Cross-sector policy coordination between relevant government departments, education authorities, social services, healthcare services, cultural policy authorities, housing and spatial planning authorities as well as asylum and immigration services at local, regional and national level, as well as dialogue with civil society are essential to ensure an adequate level of support. Spatial consequences of migration-induced social, economic and cultural changes and possible responses in the framework of urban and rural development should be considered.

Progress in the implementation of the action

To work on those topics above a Working Group was established during the Stakeholder Conference “To invest in People and Skills: Empowerment through Co-operation and Networking in the Danube Region”. The PACs have gained the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for Cooperation to play an important role within this Work Area beforehand. The group can profit from the existing analysis and recommendations of the International Organisation for Migration.

At the Kick-off meeting, the participants discussed about exchanging data on labour market demand and labour market supply in connection with migration. There was the strong wish communicated by all the participants to establish a knowledge management tool to exchange such data.

To further on discussion the next meeting of Working Group 6 will be held in the first week of November 2012 in Beograd hosted by Serbia.

The participants of the Working Group will send some projects to the Priority Area Coordination Staff for labelling those projects as projects of the Danube Region strategy PA 9 in the meantime.

List of projects associated with the action as of June 2012

- Monitoring of Skilled Workers (FAMO - regular survey of supply and demand of skilled workers at the border region of eastern Austria and Slovakia) (Lead: AT - Paul-Lazarsfeld-Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung) (ongoing)
- Central European Knowledge Platform for an Ageing Society (CE-Ageing Platform) (Lead: AT - Centre for Social Innovation) (ongoing)
- Re-Turn – Regions benefitting from returning migrants (Lead: DE – Leibniz Institut for Regional Geography). (ongoing)
- Support to National Efforts for the Promotion of Youth Employment and Management of Migration (Lead: RS – IOM) (ongoing)
- Programme Promoting Peace Building in Southern Serbia (Lead: RS – ILO) (ongoing)

- Migration for Development in the Western Balkan (Lead: BiH - IOM) (ongoing)
- Capacity Building of institutions involved in Migration Management and Reintegration of Returnees in the Republic of Serbia (Lead: RS – IOM) (completed)
- Labor Migration in Central Europe (Lead: IOM) (project idea)

### **2.3.3. Action/Work Area 7 “To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities”**

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the former actions 7 and 8 have been merged to become action 7. The Working Group “To fight poverty and social exclusion of marginalised communities in the Danube Region, especially the Roma communities” is especially aimed on the target “Contribution to the improvement of labour markets and social inclusion in the region“. Actions to reduce the number of people in risk of poverty need to complement each other, applying an integrated approach. Special attention must be paid to the living conditions of Roma communities.

- Progress in the implementation of the action

At the first session of the Working Group within the Stakeholder Conference on June 13-14 2012, urgent issues affecting Roma communities were determined in the field of employment, education and social housing. As regards experiences in the field of housing, it was stated that the need of involvement of Roma e.g. in the construction and maintenance of social housing is an important element, as well as the need for role models on the labour market. For further development of possibilities of funding projects, in particular through the European Social Fund, Working Group 7 will meet again in November 2012 in Budapest. A platform was set up to encourage exchanges. The group is coordinated together with Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

List of projects associated with the work area as of June 2012

- European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma under the Structural Funds (EURoma)
- THARA Novi Vidici (ongoing project with the focus on the particular situation of Roma in the field of unemployment)
- NSRS in the Danube Region (project idea, which aims at supporting the access to the education of children, especially of Roma)

#### **2.3.4. Action/Work Area 8 “To promote gender equality on the labour market, especially in payment“**

This action, which was newly introduced after adoption of the Steering Group in December 2011, is especially aimed on the target “Contribution to the improvement of labour markets and social inclusion in the region“. To create equal opportunities for women and men on the labour market, discrimination, educational stereotypes, labour market segregation, precarious employment conditions, involuntary part-time work and the unbalanced sharing of care responsibilities with men must be overcome. The full realisation of women’s potential and the full use of women’s skills must be fostered with the emphasis to facilitate a better gender distribution on the labour market and to allow the number of quality jobs for women to be increased. Besides the discrimination against women in career opportunities, the discrimination against female employees, with regard to their wage level, is imminent.

- Progress in the implementation of the action

At the 1<sup>st</sup> workshop within the Stakeholder Conference in June 2012, the participants exchanged transnational gender equality project examples. One conclusion was that the participants would like to have a closer exchange about gender equality strategies and policy in the participating countries. The topics on which the Working Group will meet again in October 2012 are gender equality strategies, parental leave schemes and working time arrangements. The main aim of the meeting will be to develop a joint project in this area. The focus until autumn will be to include more NGOs, social partners, as well as participants from different countries, participating in the EUSDR, into Working Group 8.

- List of projects associated with the work area

Due to the new introduction, the project identification is ongoing.



## ANNEXES

- Annex 1: Targets of PA9 as submitted to the EC/DG Regio
- Annex 2: Project criteria for labelling
- Annex 3: Project Portfolio
- Annex 4: Empowering Young People – Connecting Europe
- Annex 5: Work Plan of PA9
- Annex 6: Stock-taking questionnaire
- Annex 7: Template for PAC recommendation letter
- Annex 8: Guidelines for the Functioning of the Steering Group
- Annex 9: Concept of the Stakeholder Conference