

Annex 02: Description and timeline for operations of strategic importance - Article 17(3)

Article 17 (3) of the ETC Regulation 2021-2027 provides that “When submitting the programme, this shall be accompanied for information purposes by a list of planned operations of strategic importance, with a timetable”.

To this purpose, in the meeting of 9 December 2020, the 2021-27 Task Force asked the Joint Secretariat to develop a methodology to be discussed, while stressing that:

- a) strategic projects shall consider a contribution to the EUSAIR flagships, involving also pillar coordinators taking into account already established governance structure at the macro-regional (Adriatic and Ionian level);
- b) 2014-2020 TA may be used to prepare 2021-2027 programme, including its strategic projects, e.g. through a “seed” facility, which would speed up the development phase;
- c) these projects may at least indicate main topics, main public authorities in charge (also those involved in 2014-20 thematic projects), a budget pre-allocation and timetable.

Other general aspects to be taken into account in all development phases of the projects of strategic importance are:

- capitalisation of 2014-2020 project results;
- synergies with National and Regional Operational Programmes and with other Interreg programmes, such as ADRION;
- the art. 22 (3) geographical flexibility for Italian partners, essential for achieving the project objective, such as Italian ministries / agencies located in Rome, shall be also taken into account.

1) List of projects of strategic importance

In compliance and consistent with the specific objectives adopted, these are the main objective of the projects of strategic importance, one per specific objective¹:

No. 1.1 CREATIVE South Adriatic

Objective: Improving framework conditions for cultural & creative Industries, including social SMEs, sustainable tourism SMEs, through digitalisation, & restauration of cultural heritage sites to re-use them as creative hubs/touristic attractions. Focus on youth & women & creative sector, incl. provision of policy & business start-up tools.

The project 1.1. CREATIVE South Adriatic may widely contribute to the achievement of the S.O. 1.1., as it aims at improving the framework conditions for growth of the SMEs, especially in sectors like green tourism, cultural and creative industries, in a sustainable and inclusive way.

No. 2.1 RESILIENT South Adriatic

Objective: Increasing climate change adaptation, while preventing risks & becoming resilient to disasters. At the same time, protecting the marine environment & reducing marine pollution with joint cross-border actions. Improving emergency management & system interoperability, as well as civil protection coordination.

The project 2.1. RESILIENT South Adriatic may widely contribute to the achievement of the S.O. 2.1., as it aims at improving the management of risks, especially connected to the marine environment, in a cross-border perspective.

No. 3.1 MORE CONNECTED South Adriatic

Objective: Improving maritime & multimodal transport systems, including small investments on ports, fishermen ports, border crossing points, etc., while at the same time decarbonising ports & city-port connections, improving sea, road, air, railway safety & maintenance schemes, along the connectivity Agenda & European Corridors, incl. actions on green cross-border mobility.

The project 3.1. MORE CONNECTED South Adriatic may widely contribute to the achievement of the S.O. 3.1., as it aims at improving the intermodal connections and access to transport hubs of the programme area.

No. 4.1 SMART & COMPETITIVE South Adriatic

Objective: Improving people skills and creating new competences, while contributing to growth & competitiveness, through trainings in blue economy sector, digitalisation and other strategic fields, through new and integrated models of trainings, aimed at creating innovation ecosystems in sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, coastal /marine tourism etc., ship building, with a focus on innovative start-ups, SMEs, and S3s actions.

The project 4.1. SMART & COMPETITIVE South Adriatic may widely contribute to the achievement of the S.O. 4.1., as it aims at increasing the skills in the blue economy sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, ship building etc., with a specific focus on more vulnerable social groups.

¹ The members of the Task Force agreed that projects of strategic importance are going to be further specified. The Italian delegation is available to facilitate this process.

No. 5.1 GOOD GOVERNED South Adriatic

Objective: Increasing efficiency of public administration, through assistance for Pre-Accession and enhancement of operational competencies to manage EU Cohesion in public institutions, in line with the digital agenda, with training actions in ICTs and measures for e-government in the field of control / monitoring of the territories.

The project 5.1. GOOD GOVERNED South Adriatic may widely contribute to the achievement of the S.O. 5.1., as it aims at improving capacities of the public administration in the programme area, especially in view of supporting the pre-accession process.

During project development, the partnership may further specify or steer the project focus according to the territorial needs and potentialities identified, in consistency with the programme specific objective, the EUSAIR and other initiatives.

Authorities in charge: Central/Regional public authorities legally responsible for this topic, invited by the programme Monitoring Committee to develop the project. During project development, these authorities may also involve their in-house public agencies, bodies governed by public law, they control, or other public bodies territorially or thematically responsible for the topic.

Pre-allocation of budget: As suggested by the EU Commission in the B.O.P., approximately 30% of the programme budget (to be fixed with an ad hoc MC decision) may be allocated to top-down initiatives, such as projects of strategic importance, but the final project budget depends on the detailed activities and work plan to be developed during the development phase.

2) Link between EUSAIR flagships, 2014-20 projects and projects of strategic importance

These projects contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the EUSAIR itself as well as of defined flagships for the period 2021-2027. In particular during the development phase, pillar coordinators shall be involved to further specify the contribution, in relation to the specificities of the programme area, which is smaller than the EUSAIR area, and in relation to the type of actions and beneficiaries and budget of the strategic projects.

The following table only indicates the main links between EUSAIR flagships and programme specific objectives:

EUSAIR flagship	Programme specific objectives							
	1.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	4.1	4.2I	5.1

1.1. BLUE TECHNOLOGIES : FOSTERING QUADRUPLE HELIX TIES IN THE FIELDS OF MARINE TECHNOLOGIES AND BLUE BIOTECHNOLOGIES FOR ADVANCING INNOVATION, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS ADAPTATION IN BLUE BIO-ECONOMY	X							
1.2. FISHERIES : PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY, DIVERSIFICATION AND COMPETITIVENESS IN THE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTORS THROUGH EDUCATION, RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT, ADMINISTRATIVE, TECHNOLOGICAL AND MARKETING ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE PROMOTION OF INITIATIVES ON MARKETING STANDARDS AND HEALTHY NUTRITIONAL HABITS	X					X		
1.3. BLUE GROWTH : BOLSTERING CAPACITY BUILDING AND EFFICIENT COORDINATION OF PLANNING AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING MARINE AND MARITIME GOVERNANCE AND BLUE GROWTH SERVICES	X							X
2.1. CORRIDORS : THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN MULTI-MODAL CORRIDORS					X			
2.2. POWER NETWORKS : POWER NETWORKS AND MARKET FOR A GREEN ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION				X				
2.3. GAS CORRIDORS : INTEGRATED NATURAL GAS CORRIDORS AND MARKET FOR A GREEN ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION				X				

2.4. LNG : DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF LOGISTICS FOR DIRECT LNG USE AS A CLEAN FUEL FOR THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION					X			
3.1. OIL SPILL RISK : DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ADRIATIC-IONIAN SUB/REGIONAL OIL SPILL CONTINGENCY PLAN		X						
3.2. ICZM & MSP : PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF THE AI REGION BY IMPLEMENTING ICZM AND MSP ALSO TO CONTRIBUTE CRF ON ICZM OF BARCELONA CONVENTION AND THE MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT OF MARINE PROTECTED AREA			X					
3.3. HABITATS : PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF NATURAL TERRESTRIAL HABITATS AND ECOSYSTEMS.			X					
4.1. CULTOURAIR : DEVELOPMENT OF THE NETWORK OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM BUSINESSES AND CLUSTERS RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SME'S PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH-DIVERSIFICATION	X						X	
4.2. DES_AIR: TRAINING AND SKILLS IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM BUSINESSES (VOCATIONAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS)	X					X	X	
4.3. CRUISAIR : EXPANDING THE TOURIST SEASON TO ALL-YEAR ROUND	X						X	
4.4. AIR CULTURAL ROUTES : DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE AND THEMATIC CULTURAL	X						X	

ROUTES/ CONNECTING CULTURAL ROUTES IN EUSAIR							
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Also the outcomes of the 2014-20 projects should be widely used as a basis, thus capitalised as far as possible, not only for the results achieved, but also to assess the capacity of the partners to achieve them and thus to set up the project partnerships.

In following table, some most illustrative examples of projects 2014-20 are included, as well as their progress at the end of 2020 (financial progress in percentage):

EUSAIR Flagships	2014-20 Projects (progress 31/12/20)	S.O. 2021-27
1.1 <u>Blue technologies</u>	3C4SME (41%), SMART ADRIA *tm (9%), ADRINET (29%)	1.1
1.2 <u>Fisheries</u>	ADRINET (29%), FOOD4HEALTH *tm (11%)	1.1, 4.1
1.3 <u>Blue growth</u>	SMART ADRIA *tm (9%), ADRINET (29%), FILA (69%)	1.1, 5.1
2.1 <u>Corridors</u>	ALMONIT-MTC *tm (3%), SAGOV (66%), PORTS (79%)	3.1
3.1 <u>Oil spill risk</u>	Risk: FLAT (80%), TOBEREADY *tm (4%), 3WATCHOUT (66%)	2.1
3.2 <u>Habitats</u>	LASPEH (62%)	2.2
3.3 <u>ICZM and MSP</u>	BLUE LAND (60%), WELCOME (73%)	2.2
4.1 <u>Tourism clusters</u>	COCOTOUR (54%), HAMLET (58%), PAST4Future (65%)	1.1, 4.2
4.2 <u>CULTOURAIR</u>	NEST (51%), INNOTOURCLUST (35%), 3C *tm (18%), 3DIMPACT (63%)	1.1, 4.2
4.3 <u>AIR CULTURAL ROUTES</u>	DUEMARI *tm (3%), TOURNEE (56%), CROSSBORDEROL (60%), ADNICH (71%), MONET (35%),	4.2

1) Indicative timetable

Indicatively this is the timetable for developing and starting the projects of strategic importance, but the start depends on the programme submission to the EU Commission:

	2021	2022				2023
	4 qt.	1 qt.	2 qt.	3 qt.	4 qt.	1 qt.
1. Start-up phase						
1.1. Submission of the I.P. to EC						

1.2. Involvement of responsible authorities						
1.3. Set up of the Seed Facility						
1.4. Partnership building						
2. Development phase						
2.1 Analysis of the common needs & potentials						
2.2 First draft objectives + actions						
2.3 Agreement on draft projects						
2.4 Partners eligibility check by JS						
3. Finalisation phase						
3.1 Developing detailed work plan and budgets						
3.2 Submission of final projects						
3.3 Decision by the MC and contracting						
3.4 Project kick-off meetings						

Precise project duration shall be set in the application form, starting from the 1st quarter 2023 until the 4th quarter 2027 (approx. 5 years), in any case to close in time for finalising all programme closure procedures.

1. Start-up phase

1.1. Submission of the I.P. to EC

The submission of the Interreg Programme to the European Commission starts the start-up phase and accordingly it may postpone all subsequent steps of the entire timetable.

According to the current timetable, the I.P. may be finalised between the third and fourth quarters of 2021, depending also on the SEA procedure and on how quick the participating countries may sign the pre-agreements. The approval by the EU Commission depends also on the legislative timetable and approval of the Regulations.

1.2. Involvement of responsible authorities

The representatives of the participating countries, members of the national delegations, shall submit a list of responsible regional and national authorities for the project topics in own region/country (including offices in charge and contact person's email address), as well as preliminarily indicate, which country/region takes the lead in which project. Partnership may further discuss and agree on leadership, according to their capacities, and other partners needed to achieve the project objectives.

The responsible authorities identified are going to be the addressee of a public notice, once the programme is approved, which shall include the main features of the projects and of the project development process, based on this paper. The notice shall also include the eligibility and key quality criteria, the projects must comply with, in compliance with the approved programme.

1.3. Set up of the Seed Facility

The Seed Facility for the projects of strategic importance is the mechanism set up to facilitate the project development and to make sure that these projects are timely developed and started.

In particular, as the 2021-2027 programme will be adopted and the financing agreements for IPA countries signed at a later stage (estimated around 1st- 2nd quarter 2022), the 2014-2020 programme technical assistance is going to be used also to develop the projects of strategic importance, as these projects are substantial part of the programming exercise, in compliance with article 32 (1) of the Implementing Regulation No 447/2014. The seed facility expenditures will anyway incur between the last months of 2021 and approximately 31/12/2022, thus in any case within the 2014-2020 eligibility period.

Therefore, the Managing Authority, identifies a group of Interreg experts (including national experts), based on minimum qualifications and years of experience in Interreg (see *appendix 1*), following up on a procedure, in compliance with the Italian public procurement rules, on the basis of transparent criteria related to the qualification and years of expertise of the experts' CVs. The Interreg experts are going to be contracted and assigned by the Managing Authority, according to thematic and national background or a random draw, one per project. The group of Interreg experts are contractually obliged to assure the necessary expertise and specific support may be provided, as needed and in agreement with the Managing Authority (e.g. in case of expert's sick leave, specific financial expertise required, etc.).

The Interreg expert shall accompany the entire development process, under close supervision and guidance of the Joint Secretariat, while:

- facilitating the project partnership meetings (preparation, moderation and agreements), both online and in person whenever possible and efficient;
- researching, collecting and analysing data and information on common needs and potentials of partners;
- drafting agreements and all necessary intermediate documents, such as work plans per partner, timetables and procurement plans, budget plans, etc., in agreement with the project partners;
- ensuring a timely delivery of standardised deliverables, i.e. documents for each of the three development phases, ending with the submission of the project application in the system of the programme.

A system to evaluate the quality of the work of the Interreg experts is going to be set up by the Joint Secretariat. At the JS, each project will have a contact person, who guides the work of the Interreg expert and timely informs the MA, in cases of poor performance or major breach of the contractual obligations.

In three instalments, upon delivery of the standardised deliverables planned for each phase, the group of Interreg experts receives as remuneration for the delivered services indicatively a total amount of 10.000 € -VAT excluded- for each Interreg expert per project (corresponding to the amount of the project preparation costs of 2014-20 standard projects). The remuneration shall also cover expertise and ancillary costs, such as e.g. expert's daily travels within own country in the programme area.

In addition to the Seed Facility, starting from the date, when expenditures start to be eligible for the 2021-2027 programme, own travel and meeting costs, incurred during project development by each project partner, are eligible as preparation costs, to be reported after project approval as real costs up to 5.000 € (IPA + co-financing) per partner (or covered by the specific SCO), under condition that the project is approved with the partner concerned.

1.4. Partnership building

The list of responsible authorities provided in the previous steps shall be updated by the responsible authorities, in coordination with the Interreg expert of the Seed Facility. In this phase, at least one partnership meeting, shall be duly prepared, moderated and followed-up on by the Interreg expert.

In this phase it is necessary to pre-agree on the project lead partner, on the basis of interest, previous experiences and capacity to assume these responsibilities by the partners identified.

Online meetings are encouraged, but if, circumstances allow, at least one meeting in person is strongly recommended. The Interreg expert shall also make sure that the legal representative of each partner signs an expression of interest to be a partner of the project, where he/she commits also to actively participate with an appointed staff member for the development process.

The involvement of EUSAIR pillar coordinators (and/or thematic steering group members, thematic experts) is necessary already in this phase, enhanced through the facilitation of the Interreg expert. if necessary, to achieve the project objectives, Institutional partners located in Italian Regions² outside the eligibility area (having the same control system in place), shall be already involved already in this phase.

Deliverables of the start-up phase:

- 1) List of Partners (a template will be provided)
- 2) Expressions of interest to be partner of the project, one per partner, signed by its legal representative (a template will be provided)
- 3) Minute of at least one partnership meeting, including pre-agreement on the timetable for project development

2. Development phase

2.1 Analysis of the common needs & potentials

Starting from the territorial analysis made during programming, in this step, the Interreg expert is going to collect data and information from project partners to identify common needs and potentials, in view to establishing a possible project intervention logic, objectives, specific actions and activities. The coherence with EU, macro-regional, national and regional strategies shall be assured, especially a concrete contribution to the EUSAIR flagships and priorities. Lessons learnt from 2014-20 period, especially from Thematic Projects shall be taken into account. Capitalisation

² Involvement of partners from other countries shall be priorly agreed on by the Managing Authority, because legal arrangements must be in place to ensure a) a well-functioning control and audit system in the country concerned, and b) subsidiary liability by central bodies of the country concerned, i.e. to ensure possibility to recover expenditures.

on other programmes and initiatives, such as ADRION capitalisation, may provide strategic and operational inputs as well.

For this phase, an intense discussion with the project partners is necessary, online and whenever possible with physical meetings. Additional project partners (or associate partners, participating without budget) may become necessary and involved accordingly. In the analysis paper to be delivered, joint obstacles, gaps, needs, potentials and possible cooperation actions to overcome the obstacles identified shall be already described.

2.2 First draft objectives + actions

On the basis of the analysis, a first draft of project objectives and action plan is going to be proposed by the Interreg expert to the partnership. Specific meetings necessary to achieve an agreement shall be organised online and where possible in person. At this stage, the programme Monitoring Committee shall be informed by the Joint Secretariat on the objectives and actions planned by each project, in form of a project summary and first descriptive sections of the programme Application Form.

In this phase, the documentation including the partner's declarations required for the eligibility check shall be collected by the Interreg expert and submitted through the programme system to the Joint Secretariat, for its eligibility check.

2.3 Agreement on draft projects

After the necessary discussions and agreements among partners facilitated by the Interreg expert, partners shall agree (e.g. through the minutes of a dedicated partnership meeting) on the work packages, the role of lead partner and partners, the specific actions, investments, project timetable and project deliverables. The related sections of the programme application form shall be filled in online, but not submitted. In this phase, a rough idea of the project budget may be already possible, but the detailed budget will be prepared in the next phase.

The Joint Secretariat shall be informed of all stages. Where needed, experts may be involved by the Managing Authority for legal or technical opinions, for example on technical feasibility, suitability, for State Aid or other legal issues.

2.4 Partners eligibility check by the Joint Secretariat

The partners are subject to the eligibility check by the Joint Secretariat, according to the criteria decided by the Monitoring Committee and included in the notice.

Deliverables of the development phase:

- 1) Analysis paper on common needs and potentials
- 2) Documentation of partners, required for the eligibility check and submitted through the programme system to the JS, including the declarations (template will be provided)
- 3) Draft chapters of the application form on work packages, lead partner and partners, actions and deliverables filled in (HIT template will be provided)
- 4) Minutes of at least one partnership meeting, pre-agreeing on draft chapters

3. Finalisation phase

3.1 Developing detailed work plan and budgets

In this phase the project application form shall be developed, filled in and finalised in all its parts. A detailed budget is necessary (according to appropriate market researches), as well as a detailed timetable, especially as far as public procurement is concerned, for which draft ToRs are recommended already at this stage. Considering that Interreg projects all reach on average maximum 90% / 92% of spending level at project closure, and to mitigate the risk of automatic de-commitment for the programme, it is highly advisable to include an over-budget (with own commitments by project partners), which would cover additional eligible activities, which have to be related to and functional to the achievement of the project objectives.

Additionally, the legal representative of each project partner shall commit in writing to assure sufficient human resources, internal and/or external, already in the first months of project implementation. The commitment shall include at least a precise information on the steps and timing to appoint internal staff -with sufficient skills and availability- and/or on the launch of procurement procedure incl. ToRs for externalising the **project management team**. Conflict of interests of the Interreg expert in relation to the procurement procedure for the management team shall be avoided (e.g. the expert shall not be involved in defining the technical qualification and expertise requirements, etc.).

3.2 Submission of final projects

Projects are submitted in the programme system. In this phase, the Joint Secretariat is going to confirm the quality of the proposal, in view of a decision by the 2021-2027 Monitoring Committee.

3.3 Decision by the MC and contracting

The proposal is going to be approved by the 2021-2027 Monitoring Committee, with or without conditions. A negotiation between Managing Authority and Lead Partner may take place to further specify, clarify and improve technical details or fill in specific gaps identified.

3.4 Project kick-off meetings

To close the project development phase, the project kick-off meeting of the partnership shall be prepared, moderated and followed up on by the Lead Partner, supported by the Interreg expert.

In this meeting, the timetable and procurement plan shall be discussed and agreed on.

Deliverables of the development phase:

- 1) Application form filled in and submitted (in the programme system)
- 2) Written commitment by each project partner to appoint/contract project management team as soon as project starts (internally -indicating names, competences/ experiences - or externalised - ToRs for future procurement-)
- 3) Minutes of the negotiation meeting with the JS and lead partner
- 4) Minutes of the kick-off meeting of the partnership, including the project public procurement plan (template will be provided)

Appendix 1 - Selection criteria for the experts

The group of experts should be composed by

- 1 Senior expert, coordinating and supervising the junior experts and the implementation of the assignments,
- 5 Junior experts, each assisting / facilitating the development of one project, with guidance by the JS officers. The expert is assigned to each strategic project by the Managing Authority, on the basis of previous thematic experience / national background or a random draw.

SENIOR EXPERT minimum requirements:

- University degree
- At least 10 years of experience, even non-consecutive, in the design and management of Interreg (ETC) projects, funded by ERDF or IPA,
- Of which with at least 5 years of experience, even non-consecutive, in the management of public multi-national partnerships, proven with respective references of assigned projects.
- Knowledge of English and Italian at least at B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Knowledge, or equivalent level, or mother tongue speaker.

Five JUNIOR EXPERTS minimum requirements:

- University degree
- At least 2 years of experience, even if not consecutive, in the design and management of European projects funded by ERDF or IPA, preferably Interreg (ETC).
- Knowledge of English at least at B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Knowledge, or equivalent level.
- Knowledge of the Italian, Albanian and Montenegrin languages, each by at least one of the members of the working group (certified by certificates issued by certifying bodies or mother tongue speakers).
- Work experiences with Italian, Albanian and Montenegrin public bodies (incl. bodies governed by public law or similar), each by at least one of the members of the working group (proven with previous work experience as clearly indicated in the CVs).