

## **Newsletter December 2025: EUSDR Priority Area 9 'People & Skills'**

Dear stakeholders,

As 2025 draws to a close, we invite you to take a moment to reflect on the key activities, events, and developments that shaped the work of EUSDR Priority Area 9 'People & Skills' (PA9) over the past months. This final newsletter of the year highlights important initiatives on skills, education, labour markets, and inclusion across the Danube Region, while also looking ahead to upcoming priorities and activities in 2026.

The whole PA9 coordination team sincerely thanks you for your continued engagement and collaboration and wishes you relaxing holidays and all the best for the year ahead.

The team of EUSDR Priority Area 9 'People & Skills'

### **PA 9 | People & Skills**

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## **HIGHLIGHTS – People & Skills**

### **Danube Region Monitor 'People & Skills'**

The Danube Region Monitor 'People & Skills' reports and online database provide information on developments in education systems and labour markets and serve as tools for evidence-based policy-making. Following an expert workshop to discuss the 2025 update of the Danube Region Monitor 'People & Skills' in September, the updated Danube Region Monitor report and its thematic chapter 'Basic Skills and Skills Shortages' were published on the PA9 website in November. The online database will become available on the PA9 website shortly.

Furthermore, the monitor results were presented and discussed with key stakeholder from across the Danube Region in the framework of the PA9 Event during the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Forum and the 29<sup>th</sup> PA9 Steering Group Meeting in November in Sarajevo.

**Have a look at the Danube Region Monitor [here](#).**



### **PA9 Event during the 14<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum ‘Closing the Skills Gap: Green and Digital Skills for a Competitive Europe’, 6 November 2025, Sarajevo, BA**

The PA9 event ‘Closing the Skills Gap: Green and Digital Skills for a Competitive Europe’, held during the 14<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum in Sarajevo, highlighted the growing skills mismatches that the Danube Region is facing amid the green and digital transitions. Discussions underscored the need to modernise education and training systems, strengthen lifelong learning, and better align labour market policies with emerging skills demands. Speakers from World Bank, Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw), European Training Foundation (ETF), among others, emphasised that regional cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement are critical to addressing demographic challenges, retaining talent, and supporting innovation. A strong focus was placed on inclusive approaches to ensure that women, older workers, and vulnerable groups can fully benefit from labour market transformations, thereby enhancing regional competitiveness and resilience.

[More information](#)



## 29<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting of Priority Area 9, 6-7 November 2025, Sarajevo, BA & Online

The 29<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting took place back-to-back with the 14<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum in Sarajevo. Discussions highlighted key developments in education, labour markets, and social policy across the Danube Region. Updates from the European Commission, the Interreg Danube Region Programme, partners, projects and a youth representative showcased ongoing regional cooperation initiatives. The 28<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting took place on 25 June 2025, online.

[More Information](#)



## Thematic Conference ‘Roma Empowerment for the Common Labour Market’, 16-17 October 2025, Vienna, AT

In the framework of the newly established **Danube Labour Market Policy Platform for Roma Inclusion**, the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference took place on 16-17 October in Vienna, Austria under the title ‘**Roma Empowerment for the Common Labour Market – 20 Years of Successful Project Implementation in the Danube Region**’. The conference was hosted by the Austrian Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, with **H.E. Korinna Schumann**, Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection of Austria, and **H.E. Petre-Florin Manole**, Minister of Labour, Family, Youth and Social Solidarity of Romania delivering opening addresses.

Focusing on crucial issues pertaining to labour market policies for the empowerment and integration of vulnerable groups such as the Roma community and strategies to overcome them, the conference included expertise from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, academia and international networks, and demonstrated good practice examples from Danube Region countries. Over the course of the two conference days, it brought together more than 100 participants.

The conference report, presentation materials and photo gallery are available [here](#).



#### **4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence, 30 September 2025, Online**

The Danube Region Platform on Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) was set up in 2021 in cooperation with the European Training Foundation. It aims to promote policy dialogue on VET excellence and CoVEs and to facilitate cooperation between VET institutions. On 30 September, the 4<sup>th</sup> Platform Meeting was held online on 'VET Excellence for an Inclusive, Green, and Digital Danube Region'. The meeting's goal was to promote cooperation in the Danube Region through good practice examples and information on funding opportunities under the Danube Region Programme. The meeting was attended by 68 participants from 13 countries.

[More information](#)





### **13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ESF Network in the Danube Region, 25-26 September 2025, Bratislava, SK**

The European Social Fund (ESF) Network in the Danube Region aims at enhancing transnational cooperation, supporting the accession process of candidate countries, and fostering capacity building in the Danube Region. This joint initiative of PA9 and PA10 'Capacity and Cooperation' serves since 2015 as a knowledge hub for implementation, planning, and exchange of experience with labour market and social policies.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the network took place on 25-26 September 2025 in Bratislava and was hosted by the Slovak Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. It focused on the Youth Guarantee, with project examples like One-Stop-Shops for Young People in Slovakia and the ALMA Pilot Project of Czechia. Other focus areas were simplified cost options and the social dimension of the European Commission's Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034.

[More information](#)



The EUSDR ESF Network was presented at the workshop 'Embedding in Practice: Aligning EUSALP Priorities and EU Funding' in the framework of the Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) in November in Innsbruck.

[More information](#)

### **Cooperation Across Macro-Regional Strategies**

PA 9 is actively contributing to strengthening the cooperation across the four EU Macro-Regional Strategies (EUSDR, EUSAIR, EUSALP, EUSBSR). This year, a new pillar on Improved Social Cohesion was introduced within the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). As a result, all four Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS) now include Policy Areas addressing topics similar to PA 9 'People and Skills'. An initial meeting with colleagues from all four MRS took place in Vilnius before the summer,

focusing on social innovation, followed by a second meeting in November in Brussels to discuss the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

### **13<sup>th</sup> International Stakeholder Conference of PA9, 12-13 May 2025, online**

The 13<sup>th</sup> PA9 Stakeholder Conference ‘Towards an Innovative, Resilient and Inclusive Danube Region through Unity and Cooperation’, took place on 12–13 May 2025, online. The conference brought together key stakeholders from across the Danube Region to exchange best practices and develop new ideas in response to current and emerging challenges within Priority Area 9 ‘People and Skills’. Against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Ukraine and its impact on education, social and labour systems, discussions focused on strengthening resilience through innovation and cooperation. The conference addressed EU accession-related labour and education challenges, the attractiveness of vocational education and training, reskilling and lifelong learning for vulnerable groups, and the role of cooperation and financial instruments in supporting a sustainable and inclusive transformation of the Danube Region.

[More information](#)

### **Danube Strategy Flagship Projects**

These projects or initiatives are of high importance for the Danube Region’s economic, social and territorial cohesion and for improving the quality of life in the Danube Region. In 2025, the Steering Group of Priority Area 9 ‘People and Skills’ has identified the following PA9 Danube Strategy Flagships:

- [Skills4Life](#) – Supporting the socio-economic integration of youth leaving child protection systems by developing their skills and capacities through more inclusive leaving care policies in the Danube Region
- [TransAC](#) – Establishing a Danube training academy as measure against brain drain from rural and crisis regions
- [WIN](#) – Improving the position of Women in labour markets of peripheral INdustrial regions

Find out more about all PA9 flagship projects and initiatives [here](#).

## **HIGHLIGHTS – EUSDR**

### **Bosnian EUSDR Presidency and the 14<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum**

With the 14<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina successfully concluded its EUSDR Presidency event programme. On 5 November, the Danube Foreign Ministers adopted the Sarajevo Danube Declaration, reaffirming their shared

commitment to regional unity, stability, and a common European future. On 6 November, for the first time, the four Presidencies of the EU Macro-Regional Strategies met within the framework of an EUSDR Annual Forum. The Annual Forum's thematic sessions covered topics including EU enlargement, security, tourism, and connectivity, as well as education, skills, and labour market (see PA9 Event above).

You can find out more about the Bosnian and Herzegovinian EUSDR Presidency [here](#), about the 14<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum [here](#), the Sarajevo Danube Declaration [here](#), and about the meeting between the four Presidencies [here](#).



## **Council Conclusions on the 5<sup>th</sup> European Commission's Report on EU Macro-Regional Strategies**

The Council Conclusions adopted on 16 September 2025 underscored the importance of the four EU Macro-Regional Strategies, including the EUSDR, as instruments for cooperation and their role in supporting EU enlargement. Enhanced efforts are needed to respond to current challenges related to competitiveness, resilience, as well as the green, digital, and fair transitions. Improved governance and stakeholder engagement, embedding, and reinforced communication and visibility are also key.

You can access the Council Conclusions [here](#).



## **Bulgarian EUSDR Presidency 2026**

With 1 January 2026, Bulgaria will take over the EUSDR Presidency from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The tentative political focus will include reducing regional disparities, acknowledging the role of cities as drivers so that no region is left behind. Advancing social cohesion, skills, and cultural connectivity will be relevant dimensions in this regard. The tentative thematic priorities will be connectivity for growth, embedding of MRS goals post-27, support to candidate countries, the Danube-Black Sea link, and the

strengthening of the EUSDR governance. The presidency programme will be available soon.

You can find out more about the EUSDR presidencies [here](#).

## OUTLOOK – 2026

- 30<sup>th</sup> PA9 Steering Group Meeting, first half of 2026, location tbc
- 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ESF Network in the Danube Region, first half of 2026, online
- 31<sup>st</sup> PA9 Steering Group Meeting, second half of 2026, location tbc
- 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ESF Network in the Danube Region, second half of 2026, location tbc
- 15<sup>th</sup> EUSDR Annual Forum, 3-4 November, BG

OeAD – Austria's Agency for Education and Internationalisation, which will leave the PA9 coordination team as of 2026, would like to take this opportunity to thank all stakeholders for the excellent cooperation over the past years.

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