

ESP Newsletter - Spring 2023



Dear EUSAIR colleagues,

We invite you to take a look at the Spring Newsletter dedicated to Youth in the Adriatic-Ionian region.

Yours,
EUSAIR Stakeholders Platform

I. EMPOWERING YOUTH: THE CONTEXT



Youth empowerment is a key driver for achieving territorial cooperation and cohesion in the EUSAIR macro region and for building a better and inclusive future in the European space. A new momentum was generated during the last year, which resulted in more attention on how to tackle key challenges faced by the younger generation nowadays and the potential they hold to strengthening democratic values in the respective countries.

In this context, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, argued that “[f]rom climate to social to digital, young people are at the heart of our policymaking and political priorities”, making 2022 the European Year of Youth. This EU-wide achievement coincided with Tirana European Youth Capital 2022, creating new synergies and enhancing further the EUSAIR participating countries’ commitment towards the establishment of an active youth consultation mechanism and a youth dimension in the wider sense within the macroregional strategy. The attention on youth is further enhanced by the Union’s decision to proclaim 2023 as the European Year of Skills, aiming as investing on professional education and upskilling.

In front of the transnational challenges faced by the EUSAIR countries, shifting from physical and digital connectivity to environment and economic development, young people's active participation in the definition of common policies and actions is considered a value-added for the shaping of a sustainable, resilient and attractive macro region where to live in. In its fourth report on the implementation of EU macro regional strategies, the European Commission highlighted the role that the civil society actors can play in "contributing to a better decision-making, in particular by bringing local and regional communities closer". Particular emphasis was put on youth participation in the governance of the macro regional strategies and on enabling the conditions for young people to carry out activities in their fields of interest and concern.

An earlier milestone on the role and contribution of younger generations in strengthening European territorial cooperation policy was marked back in 2020, with the launch of the Youth Manifesto on the 30th anniversary of the Interreg programme. The manifesto identifies five top priorities for young people, such as skills' development, boosting employment, addressing climate change issues, etc. Through this policy document, youth provide concrete recommendations, raising to a higher level their demand for better education and greater civic participation in decision-making processes, breaking existing barriers and working towards common sustainable solutions.

In the last three years, the EUSAIR strategy has moved forward with the formalization of youth inclusion. In May 2021, the Izola Declaration in support for youth engagement was adopted, which led to the Governing Board's agreement on the establishment of the Youth Council. During Albania's EUSAIR Chairmanship, youth was listed among the leading priorities, acknowledging their role and contribution in achieving regional cooperation, reconciliation and peacebuilding. Particularly in the EU-membership seeking countries in the Western Balkans, youth bear the responsibility to bring on democratization and reform processes and see materialized the collective efforts to join the European Union. Herein, the EUSAIR strategy offers the opportunity to promote in these countries the horizontal integration to the EU, contributing to enhancing local and regional ownership, as well as consult and mobilize youth and civic stakeholders at large on themes of transnational importance, such as environment, tourism, etc. As Tirana Declaration argues, by strengthening synergies and exchanges, the younger generations give voice to the European values and EU integration of the region.

The recently concluded present Bosnia and Herzegovina Chairmanship of the macro regional strategy is bringing contributed in bringing on the commitment to have the EUSAIR Youth Council established in the near future, with the ultimate goal of enhancing participatory democracy and meaningful youth involvement in the public policy processes. Along the same line stands also the EUSAIR Chairmanship programme launched in early June by Croatia, whose activities will focus on youth inclusion, women empowerment and EU enlargement. Particular attention will be paid to education and equal opportunities for young people, recognizing their concerns and investing in finding suitable solutions for the prosperity of the region.

II. EUSAIR YOUTH COUNCIL: WALKING THE TALK

The run-up to the establishment of the EUSAIR Youth Council has been conceived as an extensive and inclusive two-phase process. In its meeting of October 2022, the Governing Board agreed on the creation of a Task Force on Youth Consultation, with the aim to identify, connect and collect perspectives and contributions from the national youth councils and other civic stakeholders. In principle, the intention is to avoid a “copy-pasting” mechanism from other macro regional strategies, so as to adequately respond to the sets of characteristics, priorities and challenges faced by young people in the Adriatic-Ionian region.

The Task Force on Youth Consultation is composed of representatives of EUSAIR participating countries and has held two meetings so far, respectively on 9 January and 7 March. Its work is focused on the collection of youth ideas and proposals, as an initial step towards the establishment of the Youth Council and its rules of procedures. A set of proposed guidelines leading to the creation of the Youth Council will be prepared by the Task Force in the next two months and presented to the Governing Board for discussion with the EUSAIR National Coordinators. The meeting of the Governing Board is scheduled in May 2023 in Sarajevo, back-to-back with the 8th EUSAIR Forum. Overall, the EUSAIR Youth Council will aim at representing the perspective of young people for the young people living in the Adriatic-Ionian space.

III. A FEW YOUTH RELATED ACTIVITIES OF THE PAST MONTHS

In the course of the past year and a half, multiple events have been organized in almost all the nine participating countries of the macro-regional strategy. We'd like to share a few of them. Do not forget to consult the [EUSAIR event calendar](#), publicly available on our website!

POPRI EUSAIR YOUTH 2023

This year's edition of POPRI EUSAIR took place on 24 and 25 May in Sarajevo, alongside the 8th EUSAIR Annual Forum, and saw the participation of students from all countries of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region. The initiative aims at stimulating the development of knowledge and active participation of young people in shaping their own future. Around 300 teams took part in this year's competition and the best ones had the opportunity to present in person their innovative ideas in the form of business models. The first place teams will participate in the POPRI Startup Challenge in Nova Gorica, Slovenia in October 2023, whereas the second placed teams will have the opportunity to visit the European Capital of Culture 2025, Nova Gorica - Gorizia.



EUSAIR COMMUNICATION ACADEMY



EUSAIR Communication Academy 2022

On 24-28 October 2022, the EUSAIR Communication Academy held its last module in Bled. Conceived as a three-module capacity-building program, the academy was addressed to government communicators, key implementers and youth participants from the Adriatic-Ionian region. The in-person event saw the participation of 40 persons, whereas more than 100 attended the online sessions organized during the summer period.

The academy focused on skill-building activities, by providing applicable knowledge on digital communication tools, along with experience sharing and interactions of the young participants with field professionals.

“We really wanted to give [to the young participants] some knowledge that was useful for them and while receiving this knowledge, they [gave] us something in return, by making up the EUSAIR digital campaign”, declared Magdalena Rakovec from the Center for European Perspective, which co-organized the academy together with the EUSAIR Facility Point Lead Partner. The program offered to young participants an opportunity to learn more about the macro-regional strategy, which may appear distant and abstract at first glance to non-expert audiences. They were trained on how to develop messages for the wider public about the policy areas covered by the EUSAIR, followed by a practical workshop on developing an EUSAIR digital communication campaign. “I think that the EUSAIR needs to be narrowed down to very specific issue areas. Educating youth representatives or anyone that’s coming in and giving them some very intense background knowledge so that they can provide information to others,” added Ms. Rakovec on the capitalized experience. Overall, the academy contributed to raising awareness among youth about the EUSAIR and improving their digital literacy skills, contributing therefore to the address of the communication challenge identified in the Youth Manifesto.

POPRI EUSAIR YOUTH 2022



POPRI EUSAIR Popri is a Slovene-led initiative on youth competition of business ideas. The second edition took place in Tirana on 16-17 May 2022, bringing together young participants with an innovative and creative mind-set from the Adriatic-Ionian region, at the margins of the 7th EUSAIR Forum. The competition is open to two categories, namely to high school students age 16-18 y.o. and university students age 18-29 y.o.

During the first stage, under the support of mentors, the participants undergo an intense process of skills-building and entrepreneurial thinking, trying to find innovative solutions to real problems. Afterwards, they attend the regional pitch competition to present their ideas in front of an international jury. Youngsters have the opportunity also to meet successful young Startup entrepreneurs with whom they can discuss openly on issues of common interest. In the 2022 edition, the first place went to both team categories from Serbia, followed by the teams from Slovenia and from Italy. The next edition of EUSAIR Popri took place in May in Sarajevo, alongside the 8th EUSAIR Annual Forum.

EUSAIR4YOUTH Project



The EUSAIR for Youth is a project funded by DG Regio and implemented by the Municipality of Durres, in cooperation with UniAdrion and the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities. The project ran in 2022 and sought to strengthen the role and contribution of youth in achieving social inclusion and cohesion in the EUSAIR macro region.

Among the various activities, the project provided for an intensive training course on the strategy and an EUSAIR Academy Youth Contest, opened to university students and young graduates from the Adriatic and Ionian region. The participation at the academy was through the submission of policy papers, project proposals, audio-visual representations, etc. and a winner per each EUSAIR participating country had the opportunity to visit the European institutions in Brussels (10-14 October).

Youth Conference “For a meaningful involvement of young people in European cooperation”

The conference took place on 9 December 2022 and aimed to stimulate the participation of youth in the governance and decision-making processes of the EUSAIR and Interreg IPA programs in the Adriatic and Ionian region. It was organized by CDI in cooperation with DG Regio and in partnership with Tirana Youth Capital 2022. A particular attention was paid to the Youth Manifesto’s recommendations and how the institutions can contribute to tackling the challenges faced by the younger generation in the macro region. The discussions focused on the reasons affecting youth participation in territorial cooperation matters, such lack of information, adequate resources, skill barriers, availability of opportunities etc. Nonetheless, the complexity of the EU-funded programs has hampered youth participation. The panelists agreed that capacity-building and awareness-raising activities are needed in order to enhance youth competences and engagement.

IV. INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

Western Balkanship programme

The Adriatic Ionian Initiative in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs have set up an internship scheme for student mobility in companies and institutions operating in the macroregional area. The Western Balkanship programme was launched at the start of the academic year 2022/2023 and seeks to support the circulation of ideas, knowledge and skills. It aims to activate up to 50 exchange internships between students living in Italy and in the Western Balkan countries.

On the one hand, the initiative facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experiences of Italian students in the eastern shore, and on the other hosts in Italian companies the students from the Western Balkans countries. The Western Balkanship is open to all the students and young graduates of the universities affiliated with UniAdrion and will run until August 2023. The internships run last from 3 to 6 months and are fully funded.

Erasmus for young entrepreneurs

The European Union has launched a new opportunity for young people aspiring to become entrepreneurs and run their own business initiatives. The initiative is known as Erasmus for young entrepreneurs and provides skills building, knowledge exchange and on-the-job training to interested participants coming from 45 participating European countries, including all EUSAIR participating countries. The new entrepreneurs have the chance to stay and collaborate for a period of 1 to 6 months with a host experienced professional and the stay is partially financed by the Commission.

The programme has activated a local contact point in each participating country and the interested participants can interface it for further information and for the application procedure.

V. AN INTERVIEW WITH MS. SIMONA MAMELI, OFFICE OF THE ITALIAN NATIONAL COORDINATOR

Recently we notice a particular attention on young people living in the participating countries of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy. Could you briefly elaborate on the evolution of this new youth dimension within EUSAIR?

The EU Youth Strategy, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018, represents the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027. The Strategy fosters youth participation in democratic life; it also supports social and civic engagement and aims to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. Being the DG REGIO in charge of boosting socio-economic wellbeing in all European regions and beyond, in 2020, within the celebration of 30 years of Interreg, published the "Manifesto for Young People by Young People to Shape the European Cooperation Policy", with 12 concrete recommendations mainly addressing national, regional and local politicians and administrations to show them what they can do to best address young people's requests. As the Manifesto needed to be disseminated as extensively as possible among decision makers and multiplier, DG REGIO addressed also the 4 EU Macro-regional Strategies, urging them to include youth in their decision-making processes. The EU MRS addressed differently the request; the Baltic, the Danube and the Alpine region moved forward to the establishment of a youth dimension on the ground of their previous experiences with youth involvement. Since the Adriatic-Ionian strategy does not yet have, so far, any institutional mechanism for involving youth, we thought what better opportunity to learn from the experiences of others and try to offer greater participation to our young people. The Task Force on Youth Consultation was created with the specific aim of involving young people from the region in the definition of the EUSAIR Youth Council. It is also worth mentioning that many Countries, such as Italy, are very sensitive to the issue of youth empowerment.

Which is Italy's position on the inclusion of young people in EUSAIR?

Including youth in the Strategy means investing in its sustainability. Italy has been investing in the youth agenda in the Balkans for several years now, because they are simply the future of the region and a driving force to foster reforms towards an acceleration of the EU integration process. In addition to the macro-regional strategy, we have many projects in the region that work with and involve young people and we pay special attention that stems from our national sensitivity. Like many other countries in Europe, Italy faces the impact and challenges of demographic change every day and understands to the importance to address them effectively.

Which is the contribution that young people can give to the implementation of the Adriatic-Ionian strategy?

For us it is crucial that young people really participate in the strategy and that the creation of a Youth Council is not merely a mechanism that somehow guarantees a deliverable to the strategy. We are now working on revising the EUSAIR Action Plan and probably also the strategy. The creation of a social pillar is being considered.

The EUSAIR strategy is a dynamic process, albeit a rather slow one, so the participation of young people is crucial because the future dynamics in the meantime concern them, and youth perceive it much earlier than the bureaucracy. That is why it is crucial for us to find a way to include them in a stable way in the EUSAIR framework.

In your opinion, of the three other macro-regional strategies, which youth involvement mechanism could serve as a model for inspiration?

Each strategy has its peculiarities and therefore we should avoid a mere duplication of other schemes. What is important is that youth dimension in EUSAIR will be based on concrete and direct engagement of the youth from our region. In order to reorient and keep the EUSAIR strategy up-to-date, we need young people's voice, their consultation, which then over time will become direct participation. This is what we stand for.

Focusing on Pillar 3 of the EUSAIR dedicated to environmental quality, it is an area where young people are quite active already. Which are the prospects for youth to become stakeholders in promoting environmental education and awareness-raising initiatives in their own countries?

Our aim is not to modify the current Pillar structure of the Strategy, in the sense of dismissing or downgrading existing pillars. What we aim for is young people's participation in the strategy, and when I say participate it means not only that they should act as an advisory force to the Governing Board, but that they may be active in all four pillars, and eventually also in the social Pillar, contributing to the implementation of the Strategy at large.

Pillar 2 on connectivity is Italian-led, as well as Serbian and Macedonian-led, and within it there are already projects that in some ways involve young people. Having them as direct stakeholders is difficult because there is a problem of how to create a mechanism of involvement that is not casual, but also not too institutionalized and structured, otherwise we cannot get their fresh views. Our idea, as Italy, is definitely to involve them, especially in an area like environmental activism, which on the one hand is fundamental for the region and for all of us, and on the other hand has proven to be a very cohesive issue, which transcends all differences in gender and national belonging.

ESP Marche Region

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