



# ACTIVITY REPORT 2025

Report of activities undertaken in 2025

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# PARTICIPATION IN KEY EU REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES



In 2025 the AIE has actively participated in key EU regional development initiatives, including the European Week of Regions and Cities, the EUSAIR Annual Forum, the MedCat Days, and the Euro-MED Regions Summit. Through its involvement in high-level events, the AIE contributed to policy discussions, exchanged best practices with regional and international stakeholders, and strengthened its visibility within the European cooperation landscape.

Participation in these platforms also enabled the AIE to engage in strategic networking with ministerial and European level actors, explore opportunities for future partnerships, and stay aligned with the EU's evolving regional development priorities.

# EUROPEAN WEEK OF REGIONS AND CITIES



The European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC) in Bruxelles is a flagship initiative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR).

Annually, the event brings together +6000 participants from across and outside the EU, including local and regional authorities, policymakers, civil society, academia, practitioners and citizens.

The guiding motto for 2025 was *Shaping Tomorrow, Together*, and the events revolved around three key thematic pillars:

- Cohesion and Growth for the Future: Exploring how Cohesion Policy can evolve to support sustainable prosperity, competitiveness and EU-wide priorities
- The Right to Stay: Unlocking the potential of every territory by improving public services, connectivity, education, health, and local economic opportunities.
- Cities Building Tomorrow: Recognising cities as engines of innovation, resilience and sustainability.

Like every year, the AIE has attended the EWRC to share ideas, shape policy, and reinforce partnerships.

Furthermore, on 15 October, at the CoR, the Secretariat organised the high-level session *New Pact for the Mediterranean - Challenges and Perspectives between Cohesion and Enlargement*.



The event was organised in partnership with the Med Cooperation Alliance, an initiative jointly promoted with the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean, MedCities and the Government of Catalunya.

The Political Debate featured contributions by:

- Dubravka ŠUICA, European Commissioner for the Mediterranean;
- Nikola DOBROSLAVIĆ, President of the AIE;
- Margalida PROHENS, President of the Government of the Balearic Islands and of the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean;
- Jaume Duch GUILLOT, Minister for EU and Foreign Action of the Government of Catalunya.

Commissioner Šuica provided a comprehensive overview of the EU new Pact for the Mediterranean (nPM), detailing the four strategic axes: People, Economy, Security, Resilience, and Migration.

She also stressed that the Pact puts particular attention on young people – their future, their potential and their right to stay. Through education and skills development initiatives (notably via the Mediterranean University and Talent Partnerships), the Pact will empower youth to build meaningful lives and careers in their home regions.



23<sup>rd</sup> EUROPEAN WEEK of REGIONS and CITIES



**"The Mediterranean is a vital yet vulnerable region—to conflict, climate change, pollution, and illegal migration. Its future can only be built together, which is why we support the New Pact for the Mediterranean and all who will carry it forward".**

Nikola DOBROSLAVIĆ, AIE President

#EURegionsWeek



Nikola Dobroslavić, Margalida Prohens, and Jaume Duch Guillot underlined the strategic role of Local and Regional Authorities in securing smooth governance and implementation dynamics.

The members of the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance agreed to support coordination among various voluntary Mediterranean territories and countries – enabling them to jointly prepare and pursue the Pact.

As Rapporteur for a Mediterranean Macro-Regional Strategy, Dobroslavić stressed the importance of endorsing an EU strategy for the Mediterranean, which in his view would enable a more effective and coordinated implementation of the Pact, while ensuring responses to major regional challenges – from environmental degradation and climate change to digital transition and socio-economic inequality – thereby helping to build a more resilient and integrated Mediterranean basin.



The official Communication *The Pact for the Mediterranean: One Sea, One Pact, One Future* was issued the following day, on October 16, 2025.

The Political Debate was webstreamed and it is possible to watch the recordings through the following QR code.



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PUBLICATION



VIDEO  
RECORDING

# EUSAIR ANNUAL FORUM IN CRETE

PARTICIPATION IN THE EUSAIR ANNUAL FORUM OFFERED A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE STRATEGY'S REVISED ACTION PLAN AND OF THE NEW VISION FOR A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE AND YOUTH-CENTRED EUSAIR

The tenth edition of the Forum of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) was held in Georgioupolis, Crete (EL) under the slogan *Bridging Horizons: Strengthening Cooperation, Resilience and Cohesion in the Adriatic-Ionian Region*.

Organised by the Hellenic Presidency, the Forum marked a pivotal milestone in regional cooperation, bringing together over 400 participants from across the Adriatic-Ionian Region –and including government officials, regional and local representatives, entrepreneurs, researchers, civil society, youth, and international partners.

The Forum took place within the framework of EUSAIR Strategy activities and the Interreg IPA ADRION 2021-2027 Programme, which, through Specific Objective of Priority Axis 4 – *Supporting the Governance of the Adriatic-Ionian Region* – ensures continuity and support for the Strategy's implementation during the current EU programming period.

Over the two days, the core themes of the Strategy were addressed, reflecting on the achievements of the first decade of cooperation and joint work, and outlining future priorities. Thematic sessions followed the five EUSAIR pillars – Blue Growth, Connectivity (Transport and Energy), Environmental Quality, Sustainable Tourism, and Strengthening Social Cohesion – with updates on progress and future perspectives in each area.

Thematic sessions addressed regional priorities including green innovation, climate adaptation, connectivity, environmental sustainability, heritage-based tourism, digitalisation, brain drain, gender equality, and improved urban-rural integration.

Special attention was given to youth engagement, with the first participation of the EUSAIR Youth Council (EYC), a new body of the Strategy that brings young people's perspectives into macro-regional decision-making. Composed of two members from each country, the EYC aims to raise key issues such as access to education and employment opportunities, promoting active youth participation in shaping the future of the Adriatic-Ionian Macroregion.

The Staff of the Secretariat participated to the Forum to present AIE's youth action to the members of the EYC and the other Strategy's actors.



## A REVISED ACTION PLAN FOR A STRONGER STRATEGY

This year's Annual Forum was marked by the official adoption of the revised Action Plan. The Revised Action Plan introduces a comprehensive monitoring system and seeks to align EUSAIR more closely with key EU priorities such as the European Green Deal, Digital Transition, Cohesion Policy, Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, and the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans.

Along with updating its four core thematic areas (: Blue Sustainable Economy, Regional Connectivity -Transport and Energy, Environmental Quality, and Sustainable Tourism), the Strategy has introduced a fifth pillar – Improved Social Cohesion.

The so-called "Purple Pillar" responds to new and evolving social challenges such as reducing social and economic inequalities, empowering youth, and fostering inclusive development across the region.

In addition, the Strategy now incorporates three horizontal strategic priorities: EU Enlargement, Capacity Building, and Research, Innovation and Development. Complemented by three cross-cutting themes: Circular Economy, Green Rural Development, and Digital Transformation.

More than just a policy update, the revised Action Plan represents a strategic shift into a new era for the 10 countries that participate in the Strategy.



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PUBLICATION



ADOPTED TEXT  
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## PRESIDENCY HANDOVER. WHO WILL BE NEXT?

During the Forum, North Macedonia assumed the EUSAIR Presidency with a term that will run until May 2026.

By including North Macedonia in 2020, the Strategy gained its distinctive and recognisable feature, setting it apart from other EU macro-regional strategies: the predominance of non-EU member countries and EU candidate countries.

This achievement is particularly welcomed by the AIE.

Five years apart, North Macedonia's Presidency is grounded around the following priorities:

- Enlargement and gradual integration
- Advancing implementation of the revised Action Plan
- Enhancing cooperation in border regions and stronger regional integration
- Youth engagement, skills agenda and demographic challenges to counter depopulation and enhance resilience
- Sustainable Tourism and smart growth

Italy is the next country to undertake the rotating Presidency. The Italian Presidency will be a strategic opportunity for the AIE to capitalise partnerships and consolidate its presence at macroregional level.



Handover of the Presidency from Greece to North Macedonia

# MEDCAT DAYS IN BARCELONA



The sixth edition of *MedCat Days* was held on 9 July 2025 in Barcelona, marking three decades since the Barcelona Process. Co-hosted by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), the Generalitat de Catalunya, and the European Commission, the forum convened political leaders, institutional representatives, researchers, and civil society actors to reflect on the Mediterranean's future amid heightened geopolitical tensions, environmental pressures, and social and economic inequalities.

A central feature of the forum was the discussion around the four Interreg Euro-MED Missions, in which the AIE actively participates through funded projects. Interreg Euro-MED Missions are playing a significant role in advancing territorial cooperation, multi-level governance, and community empowerment in the Euro-MED region, helping to connect local initiatives with broader regional strategies and promote the uptake of sustainable and innovative solutions.

Roundtable discussions emphasised the need for governance mechanisms that prevent siloed approaches, ensuring that cross-level collaboration—from community projects to regional networks—and amplify impact and systemic change.

The forum also addressed challenges related to EU funding, including the need for streamlined, transparent, and “bankable” mechanisms, requesting a shift away from traditional donor-recipient models toward investment-driven approaches based on shared responsibility. Institutional speakers, including the President of Catalonia, Salvador Illa, and EU Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica, underlined the importance of diplomacy, solidarity, balanced partnerships, and strategic investment, framing the Mediterranean as both a challenge and an opportunity for EU external action, particularly in areas such as social cohesion, economic integration, security, and migration.



# EURO-MED SUMMIT OF REGIONS IN BARCELONA



On 22 November 2025, AIE's Vice-President and President of the Tirana Regional Council, Aldrin DALIPI, participated in the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Regions in Barcelona (ES) focusing on *30 Years of the Barcelona Process. The regional and local vision of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.*

The event was organised by the Government of Catalonia in collaboration with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

Euro-Mediterranean regional leaders and key stakeholders convened in Barcelona to articulate priorities and positions on the EU's forthcoming New Pact for the Mediterranean. Among the contributing regional leaders, the President of Shkrodër Region, Edmond NDOU, and the President of Vlore Regional Council, Ervis MOÇKA.

Opening remarks were made by the President of Catalonia, Salvador ILLA and the event was moderated by the Catalan Minister of European Union and External Action, Jaume DUCH. Final remarks were made by Stefano SANNINO, Director General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf (DG MENA).

Dalipi presented AIE's position and commitment to fostering cooperation in the Mediterranean in the framework of the new Pact for the Mediterranean. His contribution also focused on the importance of capitalising cooperation platforms to encourage young people in the field of innovation and technology.

AIE's presence and contribution to the Summit marks an important step into fostering Euro-Mediterranean relations in a cross-border perspective.



The proceedings of the Summit concluded with the adoption of a Joint Declaration, to be submitted to the Euro-Med Ministerial Summit on 28 November.



JOINT  
DECLARATION

# PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN PROJECTS

THE STRONG EXPERTISE IN PROJECT DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT BROUGHT TERRITORIAL COOPERATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR A WIDER INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH



In 2025, the AIE actively participated in European projects, focusing on four strategic areas: promoting youth engagement through tangible opportunities for participation and skills development; strengthening Euro-Mediterranean cooperation by facilitating dialogue and cross-border collaboration; protecting biodiversity through sustainable practices in the Adriatic-Ionian region.

A new line of action was included in the form of targeted support to Ukrainian refugees, aimed at fostering their integration and social inclusion.

Through these four lines of action, the AIE consolidated its role as a proactive and socially responsible actor, reinforcing regional development, environmental stewardship, and humanitarian support across Europe and its neighboring regions.



Sustainable tourism



Innovative sustainable economy



PROMONT





# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT DECLINED IN CONCRETE OPPORTUNITIES

- GEARUP!
- SMARTYOUTH

## GEAR UP!

Global citizenship Education Actions to strengthen youth engagement through local support to LAs and CSOs, to accelerate Progress towards sustainable development

## MAIN DATA

Duration: 1 January 2024 / 30 June 2027

Programme: EU Dear Programme

Role of the Euroregion: Project Partner

Topic: Global Citizenship Education

Lead Partner: Marche Region (Italy)

Website:

[www.dearprogramme.eu/project/gear-up/](http://www.dearprogramme.eu/project/gear-up/)

## IN A NUTSHELL

GEAR UP! aims to accelerate progress towards sustainable development by promoting and enabling the active engagement of EU citizens, especially young people, in development issues and addressing global challenges at local and global levels.

Small and medium sized regionally and/or locally operating Local Authorities (LAs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), facing financial and administrative difficulties in applying for EU funds, will be supported through sub-granting, capacity building and networking activities.

The financed organisations will tackle one (or more) project topics such as Sustainable Development (SD), SGDs and gender issues, in relation to active citizenship.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To support initiatives of LAs and CSOs in 8 EU countries and 5 IPA countries through financial support to third parties, aimed at raising awareness and critical understanding of global agenda on development and “global/local” interdependencies, and to empower them to take part in participatory processes and in local decision making
- To strengthen skills, competences, exchange processes and resources of LAs and CSOs concerning Global Citizenship Education (GCE)
- To increase awareness and sensitivity towards Sustainable Development and global challenges among young people aged 15-30 living in the 8 EU and 5 IPA territories
- To increase knowledge and awareness on gender and non-discrimination field, as a key concern among policy makers, associations, networks and young people, strengthening partnerships for the advancement of gender equality and intersectional approach and ensuring a balanced application in the implemented activities in terms of practices and policies.

## TERRITORIAL COVERAGE

The action develops in Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Czech Republic, Latvia, Croatia and Hungary with a focus on IPA Countries, through previously established co-operation and networking of co-applicants.

The GEAR UP! project engages at least 105 LAs and 335 CSOs, providing them with the necessary resources, training, and support to implement GCE activities and effectively engage with their communities.

Based on ongoing partnerships with various LAs networks and CSOs active in Western Balkans, AIE's role is to facilitate capacity building and sub-granting process in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia.

Project partner CROSOL complements the action, by focus on Montenegro and Serbia.

GEAR UP! allows continuity for AIE's youth engagement actions in the Western Balkans, this time with a particular focus on promoting awareness on climate change, sustainable development, gender equality issues as part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

# SARAJEVO EVENTS

The Secretariat organised a series of GerUP! events on 5 March at the Europe House in Sarajevo (BA). The events brought together EU and UN representatives, key GCE players, EU and Western Balkan public authorities, EU projects, NGOs and youth, to jointly explore the transformative power of youth engagement and the role of Global Citizenship Education in advancing sustainable development and gender equality.

The events included a *European Networking Seminar* on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) for sustainable development, the *Local Networking Talks* on mainstreaming youth engagement and widening partnerships for SDGs and an *Info Session* for the launch of the Call for Proposal about the Gear-UP! Third Parties Support.

Opening remarks were given by Gilles KITTEL, Team Leader at DG REGIO (European Commission). Ingrid MacDONALD, UN Resident in BiH, provided a keynote speech. Both emphasised the importance of multi-level and multi-actor cooperation for a more sustainable and effective youth engagement.

The European Networking Seminar was followed by a very participated and interactive round table that presented successful EU DEAR projects.

The following Networking Talks session was moderated by AIYN representative and WBAA Regional Board Member Milan STOJANOVIC, provided a platform of exchange for representatives of youth organisations such as AEBR Balkans (RS), LDA Mostar (BA), RYCO (BA), the EUSAIR Youth Council and youth organisation Klubs "Māja" (LV).

The events were closed with the official Launch of the Public Call for Third Parties Support in Bosnia Herzegovina. Many local public authorities and NGOs attended the session and collected information to participate in the Call.

FULL  
REPORT



EU DEAR  
NEWSLETTER



# INFO DAY IN TIRANA

On 5 June 2025, the AIE organised a second Info Day in Tirana to present the Public Call addressed to Third Parties established in Albania and North Macedonia. The event was opened by AIE Vice President Aldrin DALIPI, who underlined AIE's long-standing commitment in providing Western Balkan youth with opportunities to better connect with the EU, understand its processes and engage with them. Vice-President Dalipi recalled the organisation of two editions of the Adriatic Ionian Youth Forum (AIYOF) in Tirana (in 2019 and in 2022), and the many achievements of the Adriatic Ionian Youth Network (AIYN).

Albanian Deputy Minister of Tourism and Environment, Ilva GJUZI, remarked the importance of consolidating the good results attained through new and concrete investments.

AIE Secretary General, Francesco COCCO, explained how the Euroregion established an active collaboration with the youth organisations forming the AIYN, directly engaging them in a continuous dialogue aimed at promoting the uptake of youth perspectives in EUSAIR decision making.



Under the coordination of the AIE, the Network has supported youth appropriation of the EUSAIR Action Plan and thematic priorities, elaborating and submitting youth-centred recommendations on the revision of the strategy, and actively participating in the consultations that brought to the establishment of the EUSAIR Youth Council in November 2024.

Finally, the Secretariat staff presented the Public Call aimed at supporting youth engagement projects in Albania and North Macedonia, including initiatives promoting awareness of global issues linked to sustainable development, civic engagement of youth, gender equality. The Secretariat staff strongly encouraged all Albanian organizations to consider the Call for proposals and contribute to the creation of a more inclusive, conscious and sustainable future. The Info Day was an important opportunity to strengthen the engagement, cooperation and global citizenship of young people in Albania.

Following the requests of North Macedonian applicants, the Secretariat also organised an online Info Day in the following weeks.



# MISSION TO SPAIN



On 18 November, in Barcelona, Project Officers Carmela VACCARO and Maria Luisa ESPOSITO participated in the European Networking Seminar organised by Provincial Government of Barcelona. The Seminar focused on *European Local and Regional Government Exchange on Global Citizenship Education as a Public Policy*.

The Seminar was opened by Maria Eugenia GAY, Vice President of the Barcelona Provincial Council Relations and the UN Agenda 2030, and by Manuel SZAPIRO, Director of the Representation of the European Commission in Barcelona.

Three successive sessions explored GCED from the three different perspectives:

- Exchanging views among European local governments;
- GCED in towns and rural areas;
- Local GCED in cities and metropolitan areas.

The event was an opportunity to explore different perspectives on GCED, as both an international endeavour and a regional and local level public policy.



On 19 November, in Zaragoza, took place the event entitled *Strengthening European Local and Regional Civil Society Organisations' Networking on Global Citizenship Education*, organised by the Provincial Government of Zaragoza, GearUP! associate partner.

The event provided a space for dialogue and networking on current challenges to the uptake of GCED in local public policy and social action. Participants identified some possible solutions: eliciting the political commitment to articulate decision-making process through tailor-made participatory processes; change the narrative about democracy and democratic values; activate stronger relationships between CSOs and media; use artificial intelligence and social media campaigns to better engage youth. In the afternoon session, three simultaneous networking workshops delved into European funding, good practices, and possible synergies and cooperation. The results of the workshops were presented in a final plenary session, including a dynamic of collective synthesis that allowed participants to highlight key takeaways from the day.



On 20 November 2025, AIE Secretariat Staff took part in the *GearUP! Third Steering Committee Meeting*, held at the City Hall of Zaragoza.

The meeting was opened by Alfonso MENDOZA, Councilor of Participation in representation of the City Council of Zaragoza.

The GearUP! partnership evaluated the results achieved in the first two years of project implementation and in setting the forthcoming agenda of activities. Every aspect of project implementation was thoroughly reviewed and discussed, with a particular attention given to reporting of Third Parties Support Schemes as implemented by the GearUP! Consortium.

The Third Parties Support Scheme builds collaborations with hundreds of organisations across eight EU and five IPA countries, offering funding, capacity building, and networking. AIE is responsible for delivering these opportunities in three IPA countries: – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia.

Through the GearUP! project, the AIE continues to expand its long-standing youth action in Western Balkan countries—adopting new methodologies, internationalising its outreach, and managing innovative financial support tools to strengthen the role of youth organisations and young people in sustainable development.



## SMARTYOUTH

Shaping Modern Approaches for Realistic Territorial Engagement Among Young Citizens

### MAIN DATA

Duration: August 2024 / November 2025

Donor: DG REGIO - Call: ERDFTA-2024-YOUTH4COOP

Role of the Euroregion: Sole Beneficiary

Topic: Youth Engagement in Territorial Cooperation

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Incorporate youth perspectives in Cohesion Policy and Territorial Cooperation Programmes, to ensure that the needs, ideas, and aspirations of young people are integrated into the post-2027 framework.
- Increase youth awareness and understanding of EU Cohesion Policies, enhancing in particular their knowledge of Interreg Programmes, Macroregional strategies and Cohesion Policy.
- Enhance youth participation in democratic and civic life of the EU, fostering a more profound sense of European citizenship and engagement among young people through active participation in the project activities.

## IN A NUTSHELL

SMART Youth was conceived as a strategic response to the persistent underrepresentation of young people in decision-making processes related to European Territorial Cooperation and Cohesion Policy. Despite being key drivers of innovation and social transformation, young citizens have traditionally had limited influence on the design of post-2027 cooperation frameworks. The project addressed this gap by creating structured spaces for participation, dialogue and co-creation, enabling youth to actively contribute to shaping the future policy landscape for the 2028-2034 programming period.

The project covered the Adriatic-Ionian area, involving EU and IPA countries including Italy, Croatia, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Albania, and specifically targeted young people aged 18-30, alongside Managing Authorities, youth organisations, communication experts and regional stakeholders.

Through a combination of participatory governance, capacity building and innovative engagement tools, SMART Youth effectively integrated youth voices into policy discussions at regional and European levels. The project reinforced the EU objective of bringing institutions closer to citizens while promoting inclusive, transparent and participatory approaches to territorial cooperation.

# INTERREG GO! EVENT



On 27 and 28 March, Spyridon KOURNOUTIS, President of the NGO Network of Youth Engagement Katerini (EL), member of the Adriatic Ionian Youth Network (AIYN), participated in the Interreg GO! event in Gorizia-Nova Gorica.

Dedicated to the 35th anniversary of the Interreg initiative and to youth engagement in territorial cooperation, the event offered a remarkable opportunity to engage in critical conversations with high-level representatives, including key figures such as Commissioner Raffaele FITTO, Commissioner Marta KOS, and Director of DG REGIO Slawomir TOKARSKI, together with local government delegates, and other stakeholders involved in EU policy making, and not least with youth initiatives such as the Interreg Volunteering Youth (IVY).

Spyridon collected information about the “Declaration by Young People on the Future of Territorial Cooperation”, a document published in January 2025 and produced in the framework of the YOUTH4COOPERATION initiative, which supports SMARTYOUTH.

The declaration urges that youth participation be embedded at the core of future Interreg programs. It stresses two main actions: prioritising young people’s involvement in shaping upcoming Interreg regulations, and ensuring that existing cross-border cooperation structures become more accessible and open to youth. Overall, the declaration calls for young people to remain central in guiding the future of European territorial cooperation.

## DECLARATION



Spyridon had the chance to promote the work of the AIYN, emphasising it as a youth hub of dialogue, a unifying factor connecting youth from across the 10 Adriatic and Ionian countries. An entity that not only represents youth organisations from different countries and allows them to reach out and exchange valuable experiences, but that has a strong multiplying effect in local communities. The AIYN was in fact built to advance the idea that youth should not just be participants in European cooperation, but be integral to shaping the policies and decision-making structures that govern it.

He advocated for the continued development of AIYN in the framework of territorial cooperation, and for creating space for future conversations on how to enhance youth involvement in EU projects, for instance by building a constructive dialogue and collaboration with the EUSAIR Youth Council.



## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE EUSAIR BOOSTED VISIBILITY



On 6 May, the EUSAIR Facility Point invited Project Officer Maria Luisa ESPOSITO to contribute in the *EUSAIR Youth Council Inauguration Networking Session*, as part of the 10th EUSAIR Annual Forum in Crete (EL).

Esposito detailed key milestones of the 7-years-long path that supported youth participation in the EUSAIR, including 6 youth-led Adriatic Ionian Youth Organisations Fora (AIYOF), skills development and capacity building activities, in increasingly close collaboration with the Presidencies and the Facility Point.

She reported that since 2018, thanks to EU-funded projects like AI-NURECC (2018/19), Youth4Cohesion (2020), AI-NURECC PLUS (2021/23), GearUP! (2024/27) SMARTYOUTH (2024/25), hundreds of Adriatic Ionian youth have been provided with the opportunity to explore, understand and embrace macroregional cooperation.

In 2022, aligned with the Tirana Declaration calling for the establishment of a EUSAIR Youth Council, the Secretariat launched the idea of creating the first EUSAIR-wide network of youth organisations.

The idea was to provide the Council with a sustainable operative branch to support the uptake of EUSAIR priorities and opportunities among younger generations.

For the two following years, working in coordination with the AIE, the AIYN has been participating to the EUSAIR concretely:

- Contributing to the EUSAIR Strategy revision with youth recommendations for the (then) 4 Thematic Pillars
- Facilitating learning and consultation on cross-pillar issues such as circular economy, creative industries, social innovation;
- Advancing macroregional discourse on key youth topics including brain drain, creativity, employability, sustainable development, and social cohesion
- Participating in consultations to help shape the EUSAIR Youth Council and develop operative cooperation ideas between EYC and AIYN.

Since 2023, the Adriatic Ionian Youth Network (AIYN) is part of AIE's Working Group on Youth, as deliberated by the XIX General Assembly.

This is a remarkable legacy for the Association to continue connecting with youth in the region, enhance mutual understanding and dialogue, and shape a future collaboration grounded in innovation and shared purpose.





# PLAYING A PIVOTAL ROLE IN EURO-MED COOPERATION

- COMMUNITY4TOURISM
- DIALOGUE4INNOVATION

# COMMUNITY4TOURISM

Enhancing sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean

## MAIN DATA

Duration: January 2023 - December 2029

Programme: Interreg EURO MED

Role of the Euroregion: Project Partner

Topic: *Enhancing sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean*

Lead Partner: Diputació de Barcelona (Spain)

Website:

[www.sustainable-tourism.interreg-euro-med.eu](http://www.sustainable-tourism.interreg-euro-med.eu)

## MAIN OBJECTIVE

The project is based upon the main objective of improving a better governance of cooperation, both policy governance and multi-sectoral, multi-level and transnational territorial governance, with a strong focus on environment and climate, promoting a smarter and greener Mediterranean, which is in line with the European Green Deal, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations Agenda 2030.

Community4Tourism (C4T) integrates the four Programme's specific objectives, as tourism has shown to be a transversal issue in the MED area, involving all kinds of stakeholders, agents and territories. It will address its activities to pursue the consolidation of a competitive innovation ecosystem, support a circular economy, promote climate change adaptation, and enhance nature and biodiversity. As a result of its activities, it will come up with jointly developed solutions and promote cooperation across borders.

## IN A NUTSHELL

Community4Tourism is an Interreg Euro-MED Thematic Community project coordinated by the Barcelona Provincial Council and falls under the program's Mission "Enhancing Sustainable Tourism". It is a seven-year project that aims to contribute to the EU Territorial Cooperation and its transnational dimension through the objectives included in the Programme and the main goals of Mission 4, related to the enhancement of sustainable tourism in the MED Area and the transition towards a climate-neutral and resilient society.

The project is built upon the outputs of the Interreg MED 2014/2020 Sustainable Tourism and BleuTourMed Projects but reinforces its objectives to current new challenges.

The project ensures also the necessary synergies with the Dialogue4Tourism, the other governance project of the tourism mission, and other EURO MED initiatives and stakeholders to ensure the capitalisation of the project results in other territories, improve multi-level governance and contribute to supporting macro-regional and sea basin strategies in the basin. The Adriatic Ionian Euroregion has a key role in the project as leader of the Transferring Work Package and activities.

# PATHS THAT LAST, EVENT IN SPLIT



The AIE Secretariat participated in the event *Paths That Last - Collaborating for a Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean*, held in Split (HR) on 25-26 June 2025. The event was a key initiative of the Mediterranean Multi-Programme Mechanism (MMM) – a collaboration platform among eight Interreg programmes in the area (Interreg Euro-MED, Interreg Greece-Cyprus, Italy-Croatia, Italy-Slovenia, Italy-France Maritime, Italy-Malta, Italy-Tunisia, and NEXT MED).

The event offered to the AIE a unique opportunity to connect with project partners and beneficiaries across the eight programmes; share insights, best practices, and results from sustainable tourism initiatives and co-develop strategies and key recommendations to influence the future of tourism in the Mediterranean.

In this context, it was officially announced that the IPA South Adriatic Programme is the ninth mechanism participating programme.

Very soon the MMM programmes are expected to launch coordinated calls for proposals focused on capitalisation, aiming to expand the impact of existing projects across other Mediterranean territories.



# 2ND ANNUAL MEETING IN TIRANA

On 1-2 October the Community4Tourism project organised the *Euro-MED Sustainable Tourism Community Annual Meeting* in Tirana (AL). The AIE was represented by Secretary General Francesco COCCO and Project Officer Andrea DI GIROLAMO, who also moderated a panel.

Around 100 participants from Euro-MED Thematic and Governance Projects, along with institutional actors and experts, met to discuss the future of cooperation for sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean.

On 1 October, the projects discussed their strength and innovative approaches to climate change. On 2 October, 4 working groups were formed to discuss key approaches (Innovation, Circular Economy, Climate Change Adaptation, Biodiversity) and elaborate messages for the 2026 Annual Meeting in Barcelona.



# DIALOGUE4INNOVATION

Stimulating innovation and sustainability dialogue across Mediterranean institutions and stakeholders

## MAIN DATA

Duration: January 2023 - December 2029

Programme: INTERREG EURO MED

Role of the Euroregion: Project Partner

Topic: *Innovative Sustainable Economy*

Lead Partner: Emilia Romagna Region (Italy)

Website:

[www.innovative-sustainable-economy.interreg-euro-med.eu](http://www.innovative-sustainable-economy.interreg-euro-med.eu)

## IN A NUTSHELL

Dialogue4Innovation (D4I) is the Institutional Dialogue project funded by Interreg EURO MED Programme and coordinated by Emilia Romagna Region. The seven-year project falls under the programme's Mission "*Innovative Sustainable Economy*".

The project aims to support mission-oriented innovation policy and the creation of long-lasting conditions for a permanent dialogue on innovation in the Mediterranean. Dialogue4Innovation will work to increase the coordination, coherence and alignment of policies and actions for innovative sustainable economy at the basin scale.

Capacity building is one of the pillars of the project, which will develop tools to increase the capacity of policy makers and stakeholders to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more effectively. By working with territorial actors through Transformative Innovation Policy Labs (TIPLs), the project will promote the diffusion of more systemic and integrated approaches, which are necessary to tackle the urgent challenges of the ecological transition.

D4I will contribute to improve the long-lasting conditions for a permanent institutional and social dialogue in the Mediterranean, bridging the transnational dimension with local solutions. It will become a reference platform for Mediterranean innovation ecosystem stakeholders aimed at fostering an open, inclusive, and effective governance, increasing the visibility and relevance of the Mediterranean instances at the European and international levels. To amplify its impact, the project will support Mediterranean challenge-driven multi-actor alliances. To meet its objectives, it will build on the outcomes of the Interreg Euro-MED thematic projects, narrowing the gap with the policy priorities (at local, regional, national, Mediterranean & European level) and promoting their integration in structural policies and practices.

# 3RD MED INNOVATION CAMP IN PORTUGAL



On 23 and 24 November, the staff of the Secretariat participated in the third edition of the *MED Innovation Camp* in Olhão (PT), as part of the Innovative Sustainable Economy (ISE) Mission of the Interreg Euro-MED Programme. The event was organised in collaboration with the EU's Joint Research Centre and entailed capacity building activities.

The ISE Mission brings together actors from across the Mediterranean to explore how local innovation ecosystems can be better connected to interregional collaboration networks to deliver more effective responses to the following challenges related to climate change.

Among them:

- Degraded soil health and declining biodiversity leading to reduced climate resilience
- Water scarcity intensified by extreme weather events and unsustainable management
- High emissions and limited circularity in agri-food value chains.

Over two days, participants worked on real case studies to explore how to design and support local innovation environments through collaborative experimentation spaces, novel governance frameworks, and policy instruments, to foster localised systemic responses to these challenges.





# PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY IN THE ADRIATIC IONIAN REGION

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- PROMONT

## PROMONT

Protetion and RegeneratiOn  
of MOuNTains

## MAIN DATA

Duration: 02.09.2024 - 02.09.2027

Programme: Interreg IPA ADRION

Role of the Euroregion: Project Partner

Topic: *Environment and Nature Protection, Tourism  
in rural areas*

Lead Partner: Pieriki Anaptixiaki (Greece)

Website: coming soon

In this project, the AIE will be coordinating the Work Package "*Capitalisation and Transferring*", with the aim to enhance the potential replicability of the practices and tools that will be realised by the project.

## IN A NUTSHELL

PROMONT project focuses on ADRION rural areas with mountain relief, characterised by unique biodiversity as threatened by the unruled overexploitation of resources, by the unsustainable economic activities and by the seasonal mass-tourism that have led to pollution and overall loss of biodiversity. The overall objective is to protect and preserve the fragile and rich ecosystems of the Adriatic Ionian mountains by promoting actions for environmental regeneration involving and empowering local communities and stakeholders.

The project wants to foster a positive change of mindset about the human presence and its relation with mountain biodiversity: biodiversity and local communities will benefit from the success of the actions implemented by PROMONT, in the short and in the long term.

## 2ND PROJECT MEETING IN THESSALONIKI



The second official meeting of PROMONT took place on 2-3 April 2025 in Thessaloniki (EL), hosted by the International Hellenic University, the project's scientific reference partner and lead for the first work package. The two-days event provided a productive and engaging space and it allowed project partners to define and work through more hands-on aspects of this first stage of the project.

Partners presented the species or ecosystems on which their actions will focus on, while initiating a pre-selection of equipment needed for biodiversity monitoring and restoration activities.

From a first assessment, it emerged that most partners will focus on flower and tree species, while others will work on ecosystems, wildlife, and even mushrooms. Such variegated choice will enhance impact on the territories involved, which often share ecosystem characteristics and conditions.

Partners also focused on the state of play of creating a shared methodology, drafting a report on good practices, conducting a multi-criteria analysis for monitoring, and initiating local activities such as forming working groups, training sessions and awareness workshops.

Partners were also trained on the use of a digital mapping software, a key tool for the project's future activities, especially for processing content for PLATEAU, the digital platform envisaged by PROMONT.

Through the staff of the Secretariat, the AIE participated actively in the meeting, as partner in charge of coordinating the capitalisation phase that will consist of engaging and activating local stakeholders.



## 3RD PROJECT MEETING IN BERAT



From 26 to 28 August 2025, the PROMONT project partners met in Berat (AL), the famous "city of a thousand windows" declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008. The destination was chosen for its proximity to Mount Tomorr, where the host project partner, the Regional Centre for Development and Cooperation (RCDC), operates.

The AIE Secretariat actively participated in the meeting and presented the first draft of the project's capitalisation plan. This contribution allowed partners to begin shaping the strategy for transferring and replicating project results across the Adriatic-Ionian region.

The meeting included field visits to Mount Tomorr, where partners had the chance to engage with local stakeholders and attended a demonstration of drone-based monitoring activities. Additional visits to Bogova waterfall and the Berat castle deepened understanding of the PROMONT integrated approach, which combines environmental protection and the valorisation of cultural identity.

# SUPPORTING UKRANIAN REFUGESS

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- SIMPLE



## SIMPLE

Social Innovation Models to Promote Learning and Employability

### MAIN DATA

Duration: 1 May 2025 to 1 November 2026

Programme: ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative

Role of the Euroregion: Project Partner

Topic: Social innovation to enhance the employability and integration of Ukrainian refugees, focusing on educational interventions and vocational training

Lead Partner: CTS sed Training Solutions sp. z o.o. (Poland)

Website: <https://simpleinnovation.eu>

### MAIN OBJECTIVE

SIMPLE Project aims to improve the employability and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Europe, with a focus on education, vocational training, and support for vulnerable groups, especially women and older adults. It promotes collaboration among academia, industry, government, and civil society. In response to the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees—such as job mismatches, unstable incomes, and social exclusion—SIMPLE seeks to:

- Identify and scale up effective social innovation practices.
- Engage and empower key stakeholders.
- Develop, test, and implement a new integration model.
- Ensure long-term impact through dissemination and capacity-building efforts.

## IN A NUTSHELL

SIMPLE focuses on mapping existing social innovation practices and needs for more effective integration of refugees from Ukraine in EU countries, with a particular focus on employability and education.

SIMPLE focuses on supporting vulnerable groups, especially women and older adults, through tailored educational and vocational training opportunities. The project brings together stakeholders from academia, industry, government and civil society (quadruple helix model) to develop, test and share innovative solutions that respond to the real challenges refugees face in accessing stable employment and fully integrating into host societies.

The SIMPLE project is co-funded by the ESF+ Social Innovation+ Call ESF-SI-2024-UA-01, which supports transnational cooperation and the scaling of innovative solutions aimed at enhancing the integration and social inclusion of people displaced from Ukraine within the European Union.

# KICK-OFF - MEETING IN BRUSSELS



SIMPLE was officially launched in Brussels on 19 May at the premises of the Belgian partner, Institut de Haute Formation aux Politiques Communautaires (IHF). SIMPLE was officially launched in Brussels on 19 May at the premises of the Belgian partner, IHF. The event brought together all partners to define the project roadmap and align on shared objectives, including the implementation timeline, key deliverables, and performance indicators. A hands-on workshop helped refine the methodology for assessing and transferring social innovation practices, while highlighting the importance of inclusive stakeholder engagement. The meeting set a solid foundation for the project's successful implementation.

The SIMPLE project is enabling the Euroregion to broaden and strengthen its approach to social innovation, particularly in addressing key social challenges related to migration and inclusion of Ukrainian displaced individuals, helping them rebuild their lives with dignity and opportunity.



## PROJECT MEETING IN PESCARA

On 29 October 2025, SIMPLE partners gathered in Pescara (IT) to review and finalise the assessment of the existing best practices in social innovation drawn from previous EU-funded initiatives, particularly those aimed at enhancing migrant employability through educational and training solutions.

During the meeting, partners focused on the evaluation of qualitative and quantitative indicators and collaboratively validated the results.

The event also included sessions related to:

- mapping of key institutional, social, educational and economic stakeholders to be involved at territorial level;
- some pilot activities to be planned in order to enhance stakeholders' capacities to adopt innovative educational solutions that support the employability and integration of Ukrainian migrants
- dissemination of results in a to-be-planned final event.

To know more about the project policy background, visit the Social Innovation+ Initiative website:

<https://socialinnovationplus.eu>



# REINFORCING LONG- LASTING PARTNERSHIPS

PARTNERSHIPS WITH WIDER NETWORKS HELPED ALIGNING MORE CLOSELY WITH EU PRIORITIES, WHILE CREATING CRITICAL MASS AND ENSURING IMPACT IN THE TERRITORIES OF THE EUROREGION

## INSTITUTIONAL POLICY SESSION IN NICE



On 10 June 2025. The AIE President Nikola DOBROSLAVIĆ, participated in the Institutional Policy Session entitled *Protecting the Oceans from Source to Sea: A Multi-Level and Integrated Dialogue*, held in Nice (FR).

The session was organised by the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and Région Sud-Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, in the framework of the General Assembly of the CPMR Intermediterranean Commission (ICM), and back-to-back with the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC).

The event offered a unique opportunity to reaffirm the pivotal role of regional and local authorities in advancing ocean and maritime protection, climate resilience, and territorial cooperation across the Mediterranean. It featured high-level participation from institutions and regional stakeholders, setting the stage for a renewed push towards a resilient, united, and multi-level governance model for the Mediterranean.

Discussions highlighted the critical connection between sustainability and socio-economic development.

President DOBROSLAVIĆ contributed to the first panel dedicated to local and regional authorities, which also saw the participation of Calabria Region, MedCities, Balearic Islands, also in representation of Pyrenean-Mediterranean Euroregion.

Each intervention provided grounded insights into the challenges and solutions for achieving a cleaner, fairer, and more integrated Mediterranean. Speakers underlined the need for stronger coordination and integration across the basin, potentially supported by the development of a macro-regional strategy for the area.

A key moment of the session was the signing of the document *Commitments for a Sustainable Mediterranean* and the adoption of the IMC 2025 Final Declaration, which outlines shared priorities and a united vision for sustainable development and climate adaptation in the region.



# 53RD CRPM GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN BARCELONA



On 20 November the AIE' Secretary General Francesco COCCO attended the *53rd General Assembly of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)*, held in Barcelona (ES) from 19 to 21 November.

The event, hosted by the Provincial Government of Catalonia, brought together representatives from across Europe and beyond, allowing the network to discuss current EU challenges and define shared regional priorities. The six CPMR Geographical Commissions reunited in Plenary Meetings and side-events were also held.

During their 53rd General Assembly, the members of the CPMR adopted a strong Political Declaration for a more robust territorial and multilevel governance approach. As emphasised in the Declaration, maritime and peripheral regions are on the frontline of Europe's most pressing climate-related and geopolitical challenges. At the same time, these regions are essential drivers of competitiveness, resilience and preparedness. Their territorial expertise and strategic assets make them indispensable in shaping Europe's future in line with its core values of lasting peace and democracy.

With this document, the CRPM members called the EU to equip regional actors with the tools and means needed to fully harness this unique potential and contribute effectively to a common European project based on effective and sound territorial cooperation and cohesion.

Secretary General Cocco attended the meeting of the Intermediterranean Commission (IMC). The Plenary reviewed the activities and the achievements of the past year, including the advancements by the IMC Working Groups, updates on current and new projects, and the overall activity report of the Commission. It also endorsed the Euro-Mediterranean Summit Declaration.

Participation in the meeting was strategic to coordinate common positions on the future of the Euro-Mediterranean region, following the results of the Political Debate on the future of the Mediterranean in Brussels (see pages 3-4), and the Euro-Med Summit of Regions in Barcelona (see page 8).

AIE/CRPM mutually beneficial and long-lasting cooperation in joint initiatives such as the Community4Tourism project (see page 20) reflect a shared vision for sustainable development, territorial cohesion, and the promotion of an integrated Mediterranean area.



# STATUTORY MEETINGS



AIE Executive Committee was held in Tirana on 5 June, organised in cooperation with the Tirana Regional Council.

The event was attended by the Dubrovnik-Neretva County (HR), Tirana Regional Council (AL), Shkoder Regional Council (AL), Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (BA), Molise Region (IT), and the Kotor Municipality (ME).

The Executive Committee was opened and moderated by AIE President and Member of the Regional Assembly of Dubrovnik-Neretva County, Nikola DOBROSLAVIĆ, supported by Secretary General Francesco COCCO.

Several representatives and delegates actively participated in the discussions: AIE Vice-President and President of the Tirana Regional Council Aldrin DALIPI; Prime Minister of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton Marija BUHAČ; Gaspare TOCCI as delegate for Molise Region; Jelena STJEPČEVIĆ as delegate for Kotor Municipality; Andrea JAKOVA as delegate for Shkoder Regional Council.

Secretary General Cocco presented the Association's main documents, which were unanimously approved by the Steering Committee:

- the Official Financial Statement submitted to the Croatian Authorities year 2024, and its annexes
- Upcoming activities of the Association and General Report of the Secretary General
- Governance of the Association and convening of the next General Elective Assembly

Secretary General underscored that the operations of the Association were sustainably secured through European project grants — a result of the strong expertise in project design and management, and of the active participation in European initiatives and fora. He also remarked that through the steadfast dedication to youth engagement, a central pillar of the EU Cohesion Policy, it has gained visibility and recognition from the European Commission and the EUSAIR actors.



The Secretary General notified the attendees that Nikola Dobroslavić has concluded his term of office as Prefect of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County and, by extension, as President of AIE. Accordingly, the forthcoming XX General Assembly shall be convened in an elective capacity.

Reflecting on almost a decade of impactful leadership, Cocco acknowledged Dobroslavić's contribution to the advancement of the Association, as well as the invaluable support provided by Luca VIDAK and Jasna GAVRIĆ. Cocco further underscored that the efficient coordination and harmonious interaction among the Association's various structures were pivotal to ensuring smooth governance.

Lastly, he called for planning the next Elective Assembly and encouraged the Executive Committee to steer the Secretariat in its operations. In addition, he highlighted that on the occasion of the Euroregion's twentieth anniversary in June 2026, a celebrative event will be planned.

The Executive Committee agreed to convene the next Elective General Assembly before the end of 2025. Several potential dates and locations were proposed. The Secretary General was entrusted with coordinating input from Executive Committee members and ensuring the finalisation of all necessary practical and statutory arrangements.

President Dobroslavić expressed sincere appreciation for the cooperative efforts of the Committee and acknowledged the significant progress achieved by the Association in 2025.



## GET IN TOUCH WITH US

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## ADRIATIC IONIAN EUROREGION



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