

# NEWSLETTER

## INTERREG IPA ROMANIA-SERBIA PROGRAMME

### Public Consultation

concerning the documents for the second call for project proposals, which will exclusively accept projects related to Priority 1 - Environmental Protection and Risk Management.

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Facebook post on the launch of the public consultation.



Decorative photo: reducing CO2.

### Public Consultation **page 2**

The Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration launched a public consultation on the documents for the second call for project proposals under the Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia Programme 2021-2027. With a total budget of €10.3 million (including €8.8 million in IPA funds), this call focuses on Priority 1 Environmental Protection and Risk Management, Specific Objectives 1.2 and 1.3.

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Decorative photo.

# Public Consultation online

The Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, as the Managing Authority for the Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia Programme 2021-2027, launched on **November 11, 2024**, for public consultation, the documents related to the second call for project proposals.

The second call for project proposals, with a total budget of €10.3 million, out of which **€8.8 million are IPA funds**, will be open exclusively for **Priority 1 – Environmental Protection and Risk Management**:

- **Specific Objective 1.2** – Promoting energy from renewable sources in accordance with Directive (EU) 2018/2001, including the sustainability criteria provided therein,
- **Specific Objective 1.3** – Promoting energy efficiency measures and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

All the relevant documents will be available on the website [www.romania-serbia.net](http://www.romania-serbia.net), in the **section dedicated to the second call for project proposals**.



Decorative photos: renewable energy.

# Citizen engagement in the management of EU funds

## What is citizen engagement, participation?

Citizen engagement, participation refers to “all the ways in which citizens and stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery” [OECD, Recommendation on Open Government – 2017]

Citizen engagement means directly involving people in the decision-making processes that have an impact on their daily lives. EU Cohesion policy, which accounts for nearly one-third of the total EU budget, amounting to approximately 400 billion euros for the programming period of 2021–2027, greatly contributes to improving the quality of life for EU citizens residing in various regions. Citizens can have a greater role to play if we involve them in the design, implementation, and monitoring processes. This inclusive approach will foster trust in institutions, promote more inclusive governance, facilitate problem-solving, address specific situations, and ultimately improve the quality of results for projects funded by the ESIF.

## Not everyone is convinced by the value of citizen engagement, participation... Citizen participation?

Oh, no!



"Participatory democracy? What's the point? Citizens are already given a right to vote for people to represent them."

"Working with citizens is useless because they are not experts."

"Citizens are better at complaining than at finding solutions."

There are many reasons & pretexts for NOT involving citizens...

And these reasons are used as arguments for continuing business as usual...

Meaning doing policies without involving the people they're made for.



Decorative photo: young people holding dialogue clouds (source: Canva)

# Citizen engagement in the management of EU funds

## BUT, COULD CITIZEN PARTICIPATION BE ...THE NEW IMPERATIVE?

Citizen participation is not in the natural DNA of public authorities. Yet, citizen participation is becoming a form of new imperative... At least, it gets harder to make policies without any citizen.

Engaging citizens in policy making allows governments to tap into wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions, and **improves the quality of the decisions reached**.

Citizens don't only care for themselves, their personal individual interest, they also **care for the common good**. And having as many parties involved as possible can bring together many different perspectives to determine the overall best decisions for the "common."

Citizens don't only want to take part to the public decision-making process, their want **to take part to the delivery of public action**. Considering them as a contributing resource (and not discarding tasks on them) can reveal synergies with public services!

Citizens can participate at different levels, in different ways. Citizen participation can take place in all areas of public action:

- URBANISM - (roadworks, urban renewal, redesigning a park/public square, etc.)
- PUBLIC SERVICES - (access to public services, administrative procedures, town hall reception, sports/cultural/social services, etc.).
- PUBLIC POLICIES - (investment budgets, transition policies, social policies, cultural policies, educational policies, etc.).
- PLANS/STRATEGIES - (sustainable development strategy, forward-looking vision of the region, climate plan, strategic plan, etc.).

### Why should public authorities involve citizens?

- Helps authorities **solve problems** or address specific situations.
- Helps authorities **take better decisions** that respond to citizens' needs.
- It **increases the quality** of policies, services, and regulations.
- It is good for **inclusion** and **diversity** of voices in decision-making.
- It is good for **legitimacy** and facilitates implementation.
- It is good for **democracy**.

### Cohesion policy: key reasons for involving citizens

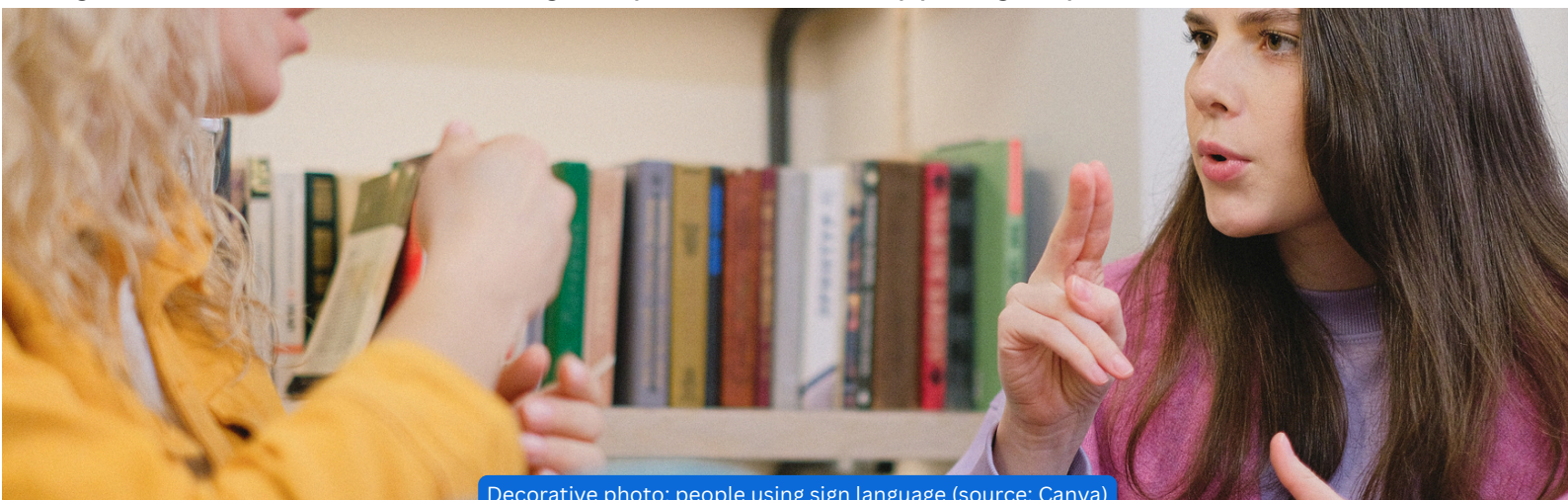
- Ensure that EU cohesion funds address citizens' most pressing needs.
- Enhances inclusion and diversity of actors involved in cohesion policy.
- Increases awareness and understanding amongst the public about the implementation of EU cohesion policy.
- Helps pre-empt public conflict during EU cohesion policy programmes.

Decorative photo: young people holding dialogue clouds (source: Canva)

# Citizen engagement in the management of EU funds

## CHALLENGES still remain:

1. **Integrate citizen participation in formal processes**, be it political, electoral, or administrative, to break this isolated or parallel state in which these efforts currently exist vis-à-vis formal decision-making spaces.
2. **Build an environment that supports flexibility and experimentation** needs to be created in public administration, so that civil servants feel more comfortable with exploring new practices and approaches to policy.
3. For the **participation to be effective and impactful**, considering the diversity component and ensuring inclusion of marginalised or under-represented people are crucial steps to faithfully represent the demographic composition of society.
4. **Citizens require incentives**, be they symbolic or financial, as well as time for them to commit to the participatory process.
5. Need to build and **strengthen a culture of participation to make it scalable**. This includes approaches in and out of government, to establish a democratic infrastructure to promote participatory decision-making, involving regulation, skills development, toolkit creation, spaces, platforms, and shared methodologies.
6. **Capacity building to equip both civil servants and civil society** with the skills needed to better support and participate in such processes.
7. **Building trust** between citizens and government, so that citizens trust their government and that their participation has weight in governmental decision-making. Likewise, that governments trust their citizens to give actionable and valuable input in key policy issues.
8. Governments need to **adapt and create formal spaces for participation**, integrated in their administrative culture.
9. **Prioritize resource allocation** for these processes, namely impactful participation can only be achieved with dedicated financial, human, or technical resources.
10. **Strengthen networks and bonds of mutual learning** and support are crucial aspects to demystify participation, breaking the initial barriers and resistances stemming from fear or ignorance, to be able to scale good practices and support groups.



Decorative photo: people using sign language (source: Canva)

## Navigating Risk and Disaster Management in Cross-Border Projects



Decorative photo: mitigating risk.

When different countries come together to collaborate on a project, the potential for innovation and mutual benefit is immense. The European Union, through initiatives like the INTERREG programmes, has championed this kind of cross-border cooperation for decades. These projects have paved the way for sustainable development, infrastructure improvement, and cultural exchange across borders. Yet, as promising as these collaborations are, they come with their own set of challenges—most notably, the need to effectively manage risks and prepare for disasters.

Imagine coordinating a project involving partners from multiple countries. Each of them brings their own regulations, legal frameworks, cultural norms, and communication styles. Add to that the unpredictability of natural and man-made disasters, and it's clear why risk management and disaster preparedness are essential.

### The Complex Web of Risks in Cross-Border Projects

Cross-border projects are like complex, living organisms, dynamic, multi-layered, and interconnected. Imagine a project aiming to improve the connectivity of transport networks between two neighbouring countries. At first glance, it sounds simple enough: build roads, bridges, and railways. But beneath the surface lies a labyrinth of potential challenges.

Legal and regulatory differences can delay construction if one country's environmental regulations clash with another's transport policies. Misunderstandings can arise from cultural and communication differences, leading to inefficiencies or conflicts among stakeholders. Financial risks, such as fluctuating currencies and funding uncertainties, can threaten the project's sustainability. Political shifts might change priorities overnight, putting projects on hold or altering their course entirely.

If there's one thing recent years have taught us, it's that disasters can strike at any time. From floods and wildfires to industrial accidents and cyberattacks, the list of potential crises is long. For cross-border projects, being prepared for disasters is not just a precaution—it's a necessity. Effective disaster management ensures that projects can withstand unforeseen events, safeguarding investments and minimizing disruptions.

# Navigating Risk and Disaster Management in Cross-Border Projects

The European Union has recognized the importance of effective risk and disaster management, developing several regulations and strategies to support these efforts. These frameworks are designed to encourage cooperation, ensure projects are resilient, and provide a consistent approach across different regions and sectors.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism is a cornerstone, enabling coordinated responses to disasters across the EU. This mechanism ensures that member states can provide assistance to one another, not just during emergencies but also through disaster preparedness and training. This kind of support is critical for cross-border projects, where the impact of a disaster often doesn't stop at national borders.

In addition, the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change is a key pillar in disaster management which encourages projects to incorporate climate adaptation measures. The strategy is a response to the increasing impacts of climate change, advocating for the integration of resilience measures into infrastructure, urban planning, and environmental management. Projects funded under the INTERREG programmes are encouraged to adopt these measures, ensuring that they are not only sustainable but also prepared for climate-related risks.

## Stories from INTERREG: Learning from the Field

The best way to understand the value of risk and disaster management is to look at how real projects have navigated these challenges. Let's explore a few stories from the INTERREG programmes, each illustrating different aspects of risk and disaster management.

### 1. A Watery Challenge: Managing Floods in the Danube Region

The Danube is Europe's second-longest river, flowing through ten countries and impacting countless communities. While it's a source of commerce, transport, and natural beauty, it also poses a significant flood risk. The INTERREG Danube Transnational Programme funded a project to tackle this problem head-on, bringing together countries that share the river to create a unified flood forecasting and early warning system.

Flooding doesn't respect borders, and without collaboration, no single country could effectively manage the risks. By sharing data and resources, the project improved flood prediction accuracy and response times. This story highlights how cooperation can turn a shared vulnerability into an opportunity for resilience. It also underscores the importance of having a disaster management plan that can be activated swiftly across borders.

# Navigating Risk and Disaster Management in Cross-Border Projects

## 2. Safer Mountain Passages: The Alpine Space Project

The Alpine region is renowned for its beauty but is also prone to natural disasters such as avalanches, landslides, and earthquakes. The Safer Alps project, part of the INTERREG Alpine Space program, was born out of the need to enhance disaster preparedness in this mountainous terrain. The initiative united Austria, Italy, Slovenia, and Switzerland in a joint effort to improve safety and emergency response.

Through this project, countries shared best practices, conducted joint training exercises, and developed standardized emergency protocols. The focus was on collaboration and mutual support, recognizing that a disaster in one part of the Alps could quickly affect neighbouring regions. The Safer Alps project is a prime example of how cross-border projects can enhance safety through collective action.

These stories illustrate the benefits of cross-border cooperation in addressing shared risks. By working together, countries can leverage their resources, share expertise, and develop innovative solutions to common challenges. However, this cooperation requires a commitment to standardized practices, transparency, and open communication.

## Recommendations for Future Projects

Based on the insights from these experiences, here are some recommendations for improving risk and disaster management in future cross-border projects:

1. **Create a Unified Risk Management Framework:** A standardized approach to risk assessment and mitigation can ensure that all stakeholders are on the same page. Flexibility within this framework will allow for adaptation to different sectors and regions.
2. **Promote Open and Continuous Communication:** Effective disaster management depends on seamless communication. Establishing clear channels for sharing information, particularly during emergencies, is critical for coordinated action.
3. **Integrate Climate Adaptation Measures:** As climate change becomes an increasingly significant risk, integrating resilience measures is vital. Projects should assess vulnerabilities and implement strategies to mitigate climate-related risks.
4. **Regular Training and Simulations:** Preparedness isn't a one-time activity. Continuous training and regular simulations can ensure that all partners are equipped to respond effectively when needed.
5. **Leverage EU Support and Resources:** The European Union offers various support mechanisms, including funding, to strengthen risk and disaster management strategies. Projects should take advantage of these resources to build resilience.



# Navigating Risk and Disaster Management in Cross-Border Projects

The success of cross-border projects depends on the ability to manage risks and respond to disasters effectively. By prioritizing these elements, project beneficiaries can ensure that initiatives funded under the INTERREG programmes and other EU-supported initiatives not only meet their goals but also contribute to a safer and more sustainable future for communities across Europe.

In an interconnected world, cooperation is more than just a strategic advantage—it's a necessity. Through enhanced risk and disaster management, cross-border projects will continue to thrive, building bridges not just between countries, but between people, ideas, and opportunities.

Decorative photos from Interreg projects.



# Projects in focus

## Project RORS-241: Healthy aging and dementia – better life



1. The EU's ultimate vision is to significantly improve dementia care at local, national, and European levels. At local level, the aim is to enhance healthcare infrastructure and promote innovative therapeutic approaches for dementia patients. Nationally, the project identifies and addresses key risk factors for dementia, improving diagnosis, treatment, and care across healthcare institutions. At the European level, the project showcases the EU's commitment to promoting health and social inclusion, serving as a model for collaborative efforts in addressing common health challenges like dementia.

2. **Innovation and progress** – particularly in addressing complex health issues such as dementia. By showcasing innovative approaches to dementia care, the project demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and advancement in healthcare practices.

**Dignity and respect** – the importance of upholding the dignity and rights of individuals living with dementia, as well as their caregivers and families.

3. By emphasizing compassionate care, innovative approaches, and community support, individuals living with dementia experience improved quality of life, enhanced dignity, and increased social engagement. Families and caregivers receive valuable support and resources, reducing stress and burnout while promoting well-being. Healthcare professionals gain access to training and resources that enable them to provide more effective and person-centered care, leading to better outcomes for all involved.

4. Investments in dementia care contribute to the overall health and prosperity of European societies, aligning with the EU's commitment to promoting inclusive and sustainable development for all its citizens.

### HERE ARE THE ANSWERED QUESTIONS:

**1. EU Vision – what will be the desired ultimate status? At local/national/European level.**

**2. What is the value of this priority to be communicated in our messages?**

**3. What is the benefit of this priority in the lead target group?**

**4. Why is the EU investing in this area/how will each European benefit?**

Collage of project results.



# INTERREG IPA ROMANIA–SERBIA PROGRAMME

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Photo of the Danube between Romania and Serbia.

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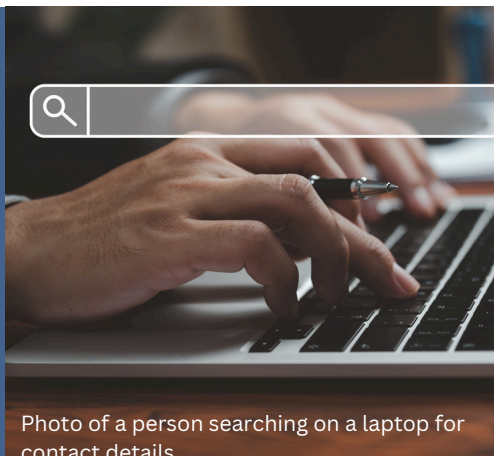


Photo of a person searching on a laptop for contact details.

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