Work plan 2023-2025

Action Group 1 «Research and innovation»

Interreg Alpine Space · Co-funded by the European Union · Support EUSALP

EUSALP EU STRATEGY FOR THE ALPINE REGION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

T The Action Group 1 overall goal is
1. to develop an effective
    a. research
    b. and innovation ecosystem for the Alpine Region (AR).
2. This will be pursued through
    a. the capitalisation of the activities and results achieved in the last years
    b. and through the AlpGov and AlpGov II Project
    c. as well as through the establishment of connections with relevant projects funded at the European and transnational level.

The AG1, for the next working period 2023-25, would like to:
(i) promote Research & Innovation actions on strategic topics for the AR, such as Climate Change Adaptation, water reservoirs and digitalisation,
(ii) give a new impulse to the establishment of the network of Alpine Region Universities and Research Centres,
(iii) promote networking and collaboration among institutions, in order to facilitate the establishment of joint actions on common challenges and topics within the Alpine Region
    a. combining in integrated management
    b. the green and digital 'twin' transitions
    c. for delivering a sustainable, fair, and competitive future.
(iv) Specific attention will be given to the inclusion of the EUSALP Youth Council within the AG activities in order to
    a. promote the prioritisation of topics relevant for Alpine Region youths.
(v) Finally, the AG1 will capitalise what the EC and Member States have already achieved, by adapting and orientating the existing well-functioning developed mechanisms, instruments and procedural approaches on transnational cooperation on EU level, to the EUSALP perspective.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION
1. Mission statement of the Action Group

The Action Group 1 overall goal is to develop an effective Research & Innovation ecosystem for the Alpine Region (AR). This will be pursued by capitalising on the activities and results achieved in the last years through the AlpGov and AlpGov II Project.

Therefore, in the framework of the Support EUSALP project, the AG1 for the working period 2023-2025, will promote networking activities among key stakeholders as well as foster collaboration with different EUSALP Action Groups.

In particular,all the activities will be addressing actors from university, industry, government-public and civil society with a quadruple helix approach.

The AG1 will address the "New European Innovation Agenda" mainstream, as the European way "to bring down greenhouse gas emissions, to make our economies more digital and to guarantee Europe's food, energy and raw materials security."[1] In more detail, the AG1 work will take into the account the Innovation Agenda focus on start-ups and the idea "*to develop new technologies to address the most pressing societal challenges, and to bring them on the market.*" with a very concrete and effective approach[2].

The AG1 will stress the relationship between research activities and their impact on the economic system, with a focus on medium and small enterprises, as on the vocational training system (see also the European flagship action "Pact4Skills"[3]).

These topics will be addressed in coordination with other AGs and in particular with AG2 and AG3.
In accordance with the 5 Common EUSALP Main Topics endorsed by the General Assembly held in 2022, AG1 intends to focus on the following topics: (i) green transition (with a specific focus on climate change effects in the AR, the use of water resources, the deseasonalization and tourist differentiation in mountain areas, the valorisation of biodiversity and agrobiodiversity resources in rural and mountain territories), (ii) digital and energy transition (e.g. coworking and CoworCare and digitalisation in remote and rural areas, digital innovation hubs, facilitation of start-ups and innovative businesses in the Alpine Region) in the field of the energy systems and green technologies supporting cross-sectoral research and innovation collaboration that can increase sustainability and security of energy supply, including acceleration of the development and improvement of advanced clean hydrogen technologies).

This will be pursued through the:

1. Facilitation of the open discussion concerning the establishment shared/common R&I activities, via the involvement of Universities, Research Centres and Innovation Agencies, Clusters, Start UPs and SMEs and public regional governments within the work of the Action Group and the EUSALP Strategy;
2. Establishment of new relationships and promotion of networking activities between the Alpine Region R&I ecosystem actors (public authorities, universities, researchers, students, enterprises, etc.)
3. Supporting the alignment and coordination of R&I initiatives / measures on the topics of the Green and Digital Transition, both at national, regional and transnational level, for example through developing mirror/coordinated actions and related financing tools

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[1] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda_en

[2] Innovation agenda

[3] https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/index_en

and, in compliance with the rules of the respective Funds, any possible joint/complementary calls on specific topics of AR relevance and a profound innovation workshop scheme for universities and research entities.

The AG1 intends to involve the Youth Council through a dynamic dialogue through activities consistent with the young people's expressed needs.

2. Composition and sub-groups

The Action Group 1 is led by Lombardy Region, Department for Economic Development
Action Group 1 is composed of **numerous** members coming from **the** Alpine Region States (Italy, Slovenia, Austria, Germany and France) and

from different organisations (Regional Authorities, Universities and Research Centres, and Innovation Centres). Action Group 1 also sees the involvement of **some** observers such as the European Commission - DG Regio, the Interreg Alpine Space Joint Secretariat, the Joint Research Centre, ISCAR, the Lake Constance International University and ANCI Liguria - Anci Piccoli Comuni.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

Stakeholder	Involvement in AG1 activities
Research Societies & University associations	Research societies and university associations (such as the EUA) should be involved in the AG1 activities in order to foster the prioritization of specific topics for the Alpine Region.
Clusters, Start UPs and SMEs	Stakeholders can be involved in the AG1 process with the aim to carry out every day R&I activities targeted to the territory. Considering the objective of creating qualified job opportunities and improving competitiveness, these stakeholders should be considered the final beneficiaries of an effective R&I AR ecosystem.
Research funding organisation	Research funding organisations should be involved as they are often the implementing agencies for research and innovation programmes on national & regional levels and have fast experience in setting up calls etc.
Research organisations	Research organisations should be involved as they can provide specific knowledge and expertise and should be part of sharing the common path in prioritising R&I topics for the Alpine Region.
Universities & Universities of Applied Sciences in the AR	Universities as drivers of change and knowledge should be involved within the AG1 in order to share a common path in the prioritisation of topics for the research activities as well as promoting exchanges within the AR (both for students and researchers) – Alpine Universities coalition
R&I departments at Regional and Ministerial (National) level	R&I Departments should be part of AG1 as they are involved in R&I strategic and decision-making processes and can contribute to the alignment of activities.

4. The role of the Youth Council

Research and innovation actions are essential to promote a sustainable and lively future in AR territories. In order to facilitate strategic R&I, the input and stimuli of young professionals and researchers is necessary. For this reason, the AG1 will support and endorse the involvement of Youth Councillors in the AG processes and strategic meetings, in order to align the priorities expressed by the experts to the ones of the youths of the Alpine Region.
Within this working period, the AG1 foresees establishing a direct link with the EUSALP Youth

Council involving them in the organisation of dissemination and engagement moments specifically targeting youths and young researchers operating within the Alpine Region. To consolidate the flagship initiatives aimed at improving research networks, AG1 will evaluate with the YC the realisation of summer schools or workshops for young research professionals (Master and PhD students, and young researchers) on the priorities identified in the WP, exploring possible funding of activities (such as Erasmus+).

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

Within the framework of the 2020-22 Work Plan the Action Group 1, in accordance with the EUSALP Action Plan endorsed by the European Commission and the 48 Regions taking part in the macro-regional strategy, has worked on:

- The establishment of a blueprint for the development of a Research & Innovation Agenda (in line with the 2015 EUSALP Action Plan). The process has been initiated through the Interreg Alpine Space A-RING project which allowed the Action Group 1 to: (i) establish a common framework for discussion, (ii) identify the main common topics within the regional S3 strategies and (iii) explore the possibilities and steps towards the definition of a common R&I agenda; -;
- Improving relationships and networking activities between R&I ecosystem actors. This has been achieved through:
    - The Interreg Alpine Space ARDIA-Net Project, which explored 3 different options for cross-regional funding schemes based on 2 different approaches (from the cooperation between single projects to joint synchronised calls with the establishment of a trans-regional coordination office);
    - The Interreg Alpine Space A-RING project which explored the possibility to set up an Alpine S3 Lab - a common framework for managing authorities at the regional level to discuss common R&I priorities
    - The Alpine Region Universities Network initiative: two online exploratory meetings were organised (one in January and one in June 2022) which saw the active involvement of 26 Universities from 6 Alpine Region States. The meetings saw the organisation of specific working tables, which focused on Horizon Europe and Interreg Alpine Space projects with the aim of exchanging working topics and possible future project ideas.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025
1. Key issues and activities

The activities that the AG1 will carry out are as follows:

Activity 1: Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) and innovation in the Alpine Mountain Areas	
Supporting R&I activities to promote **Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in the Alpine Mountain Areas, with emphasis on the economic and social ecosystem**	Nowadays, mountain areas are experiencing rapid changes due to the effects that climate change is having on their overall ecosystem. These impacts are currently increasing natural hazards, reducing water and snow resources with consequences and increased vulnerabilities on key community systems, such as **agriculture, biodiversity, energy, mobility, tourism, and water**. Changes in these territories also strongly affect the lower, mid-hills, and floodplain ecosystems, negatively impacting the water supply, agricultural productivity, tourist, and health sectors. The implementation of innovative Climate Change Adaptation Measures and new solutions can help prepare for and adjust to the irreversible effects of CC, while at the same time leveraging any opportunities that may arise from the climate alteration.

Specific Activities	Outputs
• CCA measures and new innovative solutions can help prepare for and adjust to the irreversible effects of CC, while at the same time leveraging any opportunities that may arise from the climate alteration. The AG1 will collect and promote the establishment of a portfolio of Nature-Based & good practices and solutions for Mountain Regions for instance, the ones analysed by the **Horizon Europe Mission Clima - MountResilience** project led by the University of Milan. The solutions and the good practice will be identified through a mapping activity aimed at promoting and capitalising on what has already been achieved by Alpine Regions. A special focus will be devoted to supporting the identification of commonly developed solutions for the diversification of tourism practices in Alpine Territories with Mountain Resorts, in close connection with the Action Group 2 sub-group on tourism. An example of such solutions is already represented by the **Interreg Alpine Space TranStat** project. • Moreover, will be paid special attention to the mapping and knowledge exchange on key community systems such as agriculture, biodiversity and agrobiodiversity resources. Among others, the **Next Generation EU AgriTech** project will be a source of inspiration.	1 collection of Nature-Based Solutions and best practices implemented in Mountain Regions, 1 Report focusing on the possible solutions and methodologies to be implemented in AR Mountain Territories 1 scientific data collection
Activity 2: Embedding	

Paving the way to embedding activities through the S3comparison and policy networking	The process of **embedding** aims at **facilitating the connection between EUSALP activities and available funding opportunities** by enhancing **dialogue & exchange of information** between Action Groups members and bodies in charge of managing S3 strategies and R&I programs. In this context, AG1 would like to build a policy table to explore and discuss the possible connection among S3 priorities of the Alpine Regions in view of reinforcing the mutual cooperation and paving the way to joint initiatives. This policy table could bring direct and indirect impact on the economic development of the Alpine region, involving actors from the Universities, the Research centres, the companies and the public governments.

Specific Activities		**Outputs**
• The AG1 will operate, in collaboration with EUSALP TSS and within the framework of WP2 of the Interreg Alpine Space Support EUSALP Project, for the establishment of a working table involving policy officers managing S3 strategies. Two roundtables, one per year (2024-2025), will support discussions on topics and objectives on shared S3 issues and on possible joint activities either on the 21-27 programming period or on the future ones, reinforcing cooperation at all levels, especially with local business spheres.		Organisation of 2 working tables (2023, 2024)

Activity 3: Alpine Region Universities for a Green Transition		

Improving relationships and networking activities between R&I ecosystem actors through already existing **Universities Networks**	Universities and Research & Innovation Centers are **important agents of territorial development** able to facilitate the implementation of sustainable models and to foster the implementation of the EU Green Deal. In order to do so, the enhancement and valorisation of existing **a network of universities (formally or not formally established) working in synergy in order to promote research and development actions on AR's specific topics of interest could become a strategic asset for the Alpine Region**, while promoting the upskilling and the acquisition of a specific set of skills tailored for concerned territories of current and future students, researchers and academics by means of promoting exchanges, common classes and interdisciplinary courses.

Specific Activities	**Outputs**

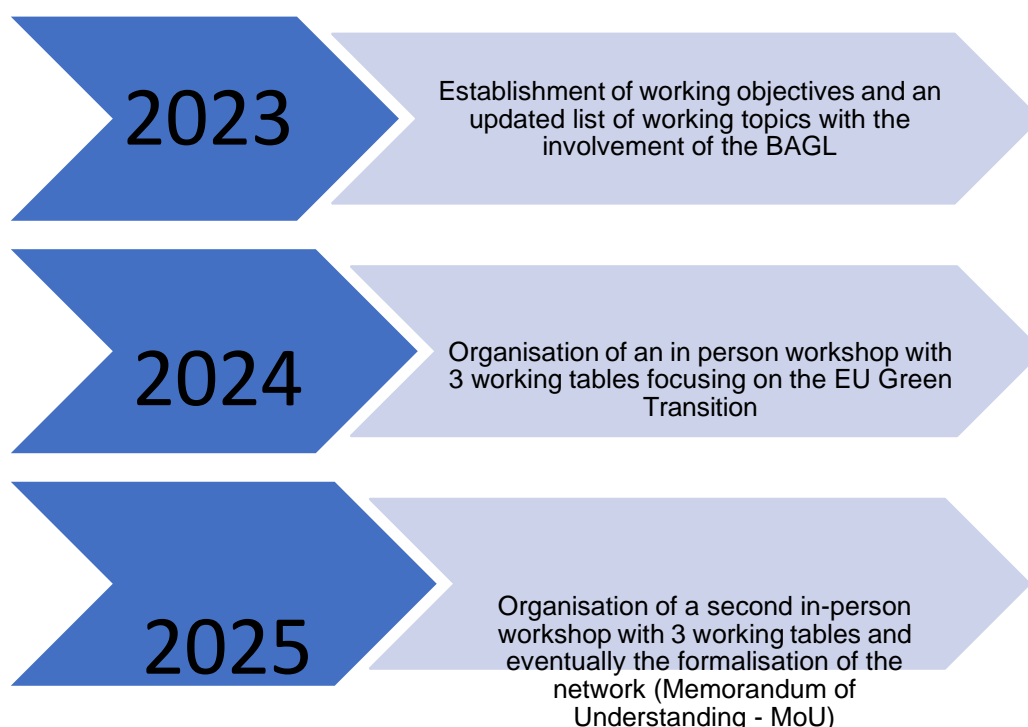|	
• The ambition of this alliance/network of universities is to jointly collaborate in teaching, research and outreach on AR's specific topics of interest, while promoting the upskilling and the acquisition of a specific set of skills tailored for AR territories of current and future students, researchers and academics by means of promoting exchanges, common classes and interdisciplinary courses. It is also quite beneficial to use universities' international and intersectoral openness to establish new forms of collaboration and co-creation with other fields of society, e.g. businesses, intermediates and civil society. • Additionally to the university network, a series of workshops will be deployed within the partnering universities, fostering the knowledge of European research and innovation funding schemes and enabling young researchers and PhD students to form their ideas into projects and competitive proposals. These workshops could have the involvement of representatives of alpine regional governments, of companies and educational and training agencies. This could foster the digital transition and reinforce the innovation through the PA engagement.	The organisation of 2 presence working tables/workshops (2024, 2025) involving AR Universities and Research Centres

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

Nowadays, the Alpine Region faces a wide range of environmental, social and economic

challenges and need to remain competitive in a constantly changing society. These challenges threaten not only mountain communities at the core of the EUSALP strategy but also those in the lowlands that strongly depend on the ecosystem services that mountains provide. At the same time, there are many opportunities for innovative actions building on the specific characteristics of the Alpine Region – also with the support of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region - EUSALP. The promotion of sustainable growth is at the heart of the new priorities defined for the 2021-27 EU programming period. The European Green Deal is a new growth strategy set out to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, boosting the economy, improving people's health and quality of life, and valorising and preserving natural assets while leaving no one behind.

On this matter, Universities and Research & Innovation Centers are **essential agents of territorial development** to facilitate the implementation of sustainable models and to foster the implementation of the EU Green Deal. The AG1 would facilitate & promote the establishment of a **framework for universities in the Alpine Region** to foster their cooperation in R&I and education focused on AR's specific priorities and challenges (such as: hydrogen production and management, circular economy, digitalisation, environmental sciences; energy transition, biodiversity conservation and valorisation; climate change adaptation; water resource management). The network could collaborate with **Action Group 1 – to develop an effective Research & Innovation Ecosystem** and the other EUSALP AGs.

The proposed timeline and milestones are as follows:

2023 — Establishment of working objectives and an updated list of working topics with the involvement of the BAGL

2024 — Organisation of an in person workshop with 3 working tables focusing on the EU Green Transition

2025 — Organisation of a second in-person workshop with 3 working tables and eventually the formalisation of the network (Memorandum of Understanding - MoU)

The Universities joining the Alpine network to be jointly established could benefit from a unique opportunity of networking and dissemination among the quadruple helix actors (policy- makers, academia, civil society, industry) of the research outcomes and the key challenges that the Alpine Region is facing. A series of workshops will support participating universities in becoming successful stakeholders in the European research and innovation funding frameworks.

3. Cross-cutting priorities

The Action Group 1 will support the following cross cutting initiatives:

Objective	Activity	Objectives
Promoting sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water	Water scarcity significantly impacts the management of both mountain areas and their resources, as well as economic sectors that depend on water. Action Group 1, therefore, wants to articulate the cross-sectoral activities of the next three years by putting in place actions supporting the lead – Action Group 6 - that allow socio-economic development scenarios supporting the stakeholders. In detail, AG1 will promote actions that enable the sectors that drive the mountain economy (such as winter tourism, which is heavily dependent on water resources & agriculture) to find new channels for development and management methods towards an environmental transition due to the effects of climate change.	• elaborate transition processes to cope with the effects of climate change in ski territories (TranStat project); • develop a portfolio of Nature Based Solutions for Mountain Areas (MountResilience project)
Promoting digitalisation in the Alpine Region	The digital divide is one of the issues that still constitute a significant obstacle to living in mountain areas. It also causes greater instability in work and imposes sacrifices on workers, often affecting the most vulnerable sections of the population. For this reason, AG1 will work with Action Group 5 by promoting actions to support coworking and the growing phenomenon of coworkation in rural areas. The AG1 will also seek to facilitate access to agile work by promoting caregiving services that help young families or elderly relatives dependent on care. AG1 will contribute with the ARPAF CoworCare project (which ends in December 2023) by building an online coworking and caregiving services platform	• Promote access to coworking and coworkation spaces in rural, remote Alpine areas through the development of an online database and platform (CoworCare project) • Foster networking and

	and drafting a manual/guideline with best practices of parenting and working matches). Technological innovation and innovation of processes and products are strongly impacting the revitalisation of social life and economy in the mountains and peripheral areas. Digital transformation allows new forms of sustainable businesses to be located in the mountain and peripheral areas, thus contrasting de-population and enriching the economic prospects of the territories. Forms of **public-private partnership collaboration, such as the (European) Digital Innovation Hub**, which are composed of the relevant actors of the quadruple helix model (university-industry-government-public), allow the experimentation of new technologies, solutions and business models focusing f on AI, HPC, CS technologies and capabilities and their deployment also in a strategic sector for the development of the Alpine economy: Manufacturing, Agrobiotech, Energy&Environment. AG1, in close cooperation with AG2 and AG5, will animate and facilitate the dialogue among the Alpine (E)DIH to establish possible forms of collaboration and joint projects.	collaboration among Alpine (E)DIHs to exchange best practices, tools/ infrastructures and use cases.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

The AG1 aims to disseminate information on the main activities carried out in the action group using the existing collaboration with relevant stakeholders in the AR as well as through the link with the world of research. The involvement of aforementioned intends to be involved by the AG1 with the aim of obtaining relevant feedback during eventual meetings and, at the same time, setting up a network for the dissemination of the related results. Furthermore, the intention of AG1 is to disseminate information about the EUSALP strategy, its objectives and working groups as well as the main common priorities within partnerships of relevant projects (i.e. through the ARPAF CoworCare, Interreg Alpine Space TranStat, Horizon Europe MountResilience) and networks such as EUROMONTANA, NEMOR - Network for European Mountain Research, ISCAR and MRI - Mountain Research Initiative.

2. Events

For promotional purposes, the Action 1 Group will actively collaborate with other partners on Priorities and Cross-sectoral activities with workshops, seminars, conferences and public meetings. More specifically, the AG1 will:

- Organise 2 meetings involving the university and public and private network with the aim to provide a forum for discussion & thematic working tables;
- Organise events and workshops focusing on the topic of Climate Change Adaptation in mountain regions with the aim also to engage in new networking and partnership initiative the scientist, Labs, Scientific Institution and Centres in synergy with projects such as for example the Horizon Mission Clima "MountResilience" project and the Interreg Alpine Space "TranStat" project and other relevant ongoing projects.
- Organise specific moments of debate on the topic of digitalisation and coworking in remote and rural areas and on the networking and cooperation among Alpine Region (European) Digital Innovation Hubs.

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	0
please describe if possible	
n. cross-border/transnational events	2
AR Universities and public and private bodies Coalition Working Tables	
n. joint policy recommendation	1
Policy Recommendation to promote CCA Actions in Mountain Regions	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme	0
please describe if possible	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes	1
ERASMUS + Projects incubated within the AR Universities Coalition Network	
n. of papers / research works to be published	2
Scientific Papers on CCA in Mountain Regions, MountResilience project	

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Action Group 2 - Economic development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Action Group 2 ("To increase the economic potential of strategic sectors") aims at identifying key Alpine economic sectors which would benefit from action at macro-regional level, and to implement concrete measures to improve their economic and social environment. The added value comprises a better use of Alpine specific resources and potentials in the identified strategic sectors with focus on the improvement of framework conditions and opportunities for SMEs.

The main objectives of Action Group 2 are:
- to develop new or better value chains inside sectors regarded as strategic in the Alpine Region which show potential with distinctive conditions in the region.
- to bridge the gap of disconnected value chains or parts of it.
- to move higher up value chains or adjusting products and services to the green economy.
- to bridge different policies and efforts in order to stimulate the transformation of the industrial structure and drive job creation and growth.
- to support innovation by making better use of cluster initiatives.

To create a more developed economic model, taking into account the peculiarities of Alpine territories, Action Group 2 has identified 4 thematic priorities to which correspond 4 subgroups. Despite the number of cross-cutting priorities affecting EUSALP entirely, Action Group 2 has decided to focus its efforts on:

- Sub-Group **Bioeconomy** (coordinated by VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH Stuttgart)
- Sub-Group **Wood** (coordinated by Sylvain Guetaz Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes with support of Gian Antonio Battistel, Edmund Mach Foundation, Trento)
- Sub-Group **Tourism** (coordinated by Bernhard Lehofer Cluster Innovation Salzburg)
- Sub-Group **Digital Industry** (coordinated by the Luca Mion, Trentino Innovation Hub

In addition, Slovenia proposed the formation of a new Sub-Group called "Circular Economy". For thematic coherence the Executive Board proposed to AG2 to address this theme and as it is not yet formalized, AG2 proposes two possible ways to deal with it:
1. merge the already existing sub-group Bioeconomy with the new sub-group Circular economy.
2. maintain Circular economy as a cross-cutting priority led by AG2.

Should the first of these options be formalised, the likely coordinator would be both Gerd Meier Zu Köcker and Ales Pevc, Tehnoloski Parc Ljubljana.

Should the second of these options be formalised, the likely coordinator of the croos-cutting priority, on behalf of AG2, would be Ales Pevc, Tehnoloski Parc Ljubljana.

To bridge the gaps and improve cohesion, Sub-groups presence appears fundamental to support innovative economic development and achieve compelling results.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group and the Subgroups

Action Group 2 aims to increase the economic potential of strategic sectors and to implement concrete measures to improve the economic and social environment of all macro-regional's subjects. The added value comprises a better use of Alpine specific resources and potentials in the identified strategic sectors with focus on the improvement of framework conditions and opportunities for SMEs.

Although AG2 actively participates in all the general action-oriented thematic policy area on which the macro-regional strategy is based, its focus is on the First Thematic Policy Area: Economic Growth and Innovation. Specifically, the priorities are developing innovation and research capacity and transfer into practice; improving and developing support for enterprises; promoting high levels of employment, with the aim of ensuring full employment in the Region. Ag2 is at the forefront of obtaining a more balanced model of development, through innovative approaches to strengthen the sustainability of the region.

The AG2 is divided into 4 Subgroups "circular economy and bioeconomy", "tourism", "smart industry" and "wood". It daily works with the Task Force on Multifunctional Forest and Sustainable Use of Timber and will cooperate also daily with the new Task Force on Circular Economy. AG2 is also strongly involved in the field of Energy, with the establishment of the EUSALP Hydrogen Focus Group (with AG9 – see below). All these cross-cutting issues have a direct impact on human resources: at least one person is dedicated to each cross-cutting priority.

For the complete coordination, and in order to better synchronize all the topics covered by the subgroups and to avoid any duplication, it has been decided to hold plenary sessions at least twice a year and not to organize separate sessions. Targets and indicators are indicated below.

Common challenges are currently concerning all the topics:
- Greening economic activities: for a sustainable economic development,
- Adapt the economic activities to the climate change: which has major impacts on ski resort tourism, wood and timber industry, but also which is a challenge for circular economy and smart industry,
- Take the opportunity of digitalization for fostering new economic activities.

The political coherence of the coleadership of the AG2 is a key issue for the two leading Regions, Piedmont, and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. A political validation is requested on an

annual basis during the annual forum where political authorities are keen in updating the thematic priorities.

Mission statement of the SubGroup «Circular Economy and bioeconomy»
The current mission statement of the SG is to test new circular Bioeconomy value chains development approaches within the Alpine Macro Region. The main objective is to better embed new companies in bioeconomy by increased circular economic thinking.

The sub-group aims:
- to improve the framework conditions for transregional collaboration and to turn the fragmented regional approach into one macro regional approach with the aim of dismantling regional borders.
- to make better use of the S3 approach and the fact that most regions focus on the Bioeconomy in their regional strategies.
- to synchronize and align regional approaches to support bio-based industry in the Alpine Region.

Mission statement of the SubGroup « Wood»
It facilitates cross-sectoral interactions of short forest-timber supply chains aiming to:
- promote the sustainable timber mobilization, processing, transformation and use of wood according to «cascade» principles as well as its potential as Nature Based Solution to mitigate climate change on storing carbon in the construction sector,
- trigger smart/precision wood processing approaches and update of key competencies to scale up digital transformation opportunities and practices,
- forge strategic transversal alliances with non-timber sectors bringing about smart products and social growth within the circular bioeconomy targeting job creation and business development.

Mission statement of the SubGroup «Tourism»:

We will strive to tap the full potential that lies in a truly sustainable approach towards the fields of energy, mobility, spatial planning, water management, mountain and valleys organic agriculture and multifunctional forestry, bio-economy, circular economy, regional value chains, eco and health sustainable tourism, biodiversity, digital transformation of manufacturing and industry 4.0.
The sub-group aims to:

- Accelerate the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development and of the Paris Agreement.
- Preserve Alpine biodiversity and preventing exposure to natural risks related to climate change.

- Accelerate the energy transition in the Alpine region. Developing sustainable transport and mobility solutions. Stimulating transition to sustainable year-round tourism.
- Stimulate the production, processing and consumption of local mountain goods from the Alpine region in short supply chains. Educating young people in mountain culture and enable them to participate in the sustainable development of the Alpine region. Making the Alpine region a model laboratory for multi-level governance

Mission statement of the SubGroup « Smart Industry»

The scope of subgroup on smart industry is to boost the potentials of the Industry4.0 transformation for twin transition in the Alpine Macro Region leveraging knowledge and technology transfer.

The sub-group aims to:

- Boost the potentials of the digital transformation in the Alpine Region with a special focus on the development opportunities for SMEs,
- intensified macro regional cooperation to boost the integration of regional companies into global manufacturing supply chains, gaining competitiveness by leveraging capabilities and regional investments,
- make industry smarter means to make them safer, more efficient, more resilient and more environmentally friendly.
- Make Industry4.0 fully operative in the regions integrating technology with human engagement, towards the Industry 5.0 revolution.

2. Composition and sub-groups

Composition and sub-groups

AG2 is a heterogeneous group composed of representatives from the world of research, experts, public officials, regional authorities, companies and innovation intermediaries. As in all other groups, there are full members, observer members and, thanks to the historical co-leader approach, the group is permeable and always on the lookout for new resources to be included in order to have a dynamic and interactive Action Group. AG2 features a shared leadership between Sylvain Guetaz from Auvergne Rhone alpes and Massimo Lapolla from Piedmont Region.

The sub-group Bioeconomy is coordinated by coordinated by Gerd Meier Zu Köcker VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik GmbH Stuttgart and it is composed by various private and public stakeholders with a broad coverage of key sub-sectors of Bioeconomy. As given in the name of the SG, key stakeholder are also cluster initiatives, representing a critical mass of private and public sector actors.

The subgroup Wood is coordinated by Sylvain Guetaz, representative of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and with the support of Gian Antonio Battistel from Edmund Mach Foundation, Trento. As to short local forest-timber supply chains:

- enhance green labelling of wooden materials coupled with the certification of the "CO_2 footprint", and more effective communication,
- draw up „Collaborative Value Chains" and GPP business models to co-design new products and services through open innovation approaches, for sustainable and climate neutral construction and buildings,
- bridge the business sector with the education and research sectors and decision makers.

The subgroup Tourism is coordinated by Bernhard from Lehofer Cluster Innovation Salzburg and it is composed by 15 members from Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, Germany, France and Slovenia. It should be noted that there are only about a handful of members who are actually active in the group. From Switzerland, this is the University of the Grisons under Prof. Jan Mosdale, in Austria it is the Paracelsus Medical Private University in Salzburg under Prof. Arnulf Hartl and his colleague Christina Pichler.

The sub-group smart industry is coordinated by the Luca Mion, representative of Trentino Innovation Hub. The sub-group is mostly composed by innovation intermediaries such as technology transfer bodies, industry clusters, innovation and development agencies. The members have strict connections with the regional authorities and involved in the implementation of regional S3.

A new activity will be linked to Circular economy: If it will be merged to the **sub-group Bioeonomy**, the likely coordinator will be Ales Pevc, Tehnoloski Parc Ljubljana and Gerd Meier Zu Köcker. If Circular Economy will be just a cross-cutting priority led by AG2, the coordinator would be Ales Pevc, Tehnoloski Parc Ljubljana.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

Involvement of the stakeholders (S)

The main stakeholders are research, academia, regional authorities, companies and innovation intermediaries.

All stakeholders involved actively participate in the numerous internal and external activities that the group pursues. Specifically, they take part in the plenary meetings that take place every year, and actively participate in setting AG2 objectives and priorities in order to involve them and make the work dynamic and interactive. In general, they provide the right conditions to bring stimulus to AG2's work.

Stakeholder	Role
Researchers	Researchers are both beneficiaries and actors in the innovation processes and digital transformation
Regional authorities	For the implementation of the regional S3. They are crucial to provide the right conditions for the innovation to happen trough policy, incentives, infrastructures
Intermediaries	Clusters, associations, innovation/development agencies are the main target of the actions of the subgroup since they can implement actions supporting the collaboration and the innovation
Companies	Beneficiaries of sub-groups actions

AS INTERREG programmes are not the only source of fundings: it is important to widen embedding approaches towards other Programmes (EU shared and directly administered programmes), or better refer to planned activities with financial dialogue networks. In this regard, some initiatives will be launched in the upcoming months by AG2 coleaders (possible next meeting organised in Brussels).

Subgroup "Wood"
- Forest owners & their associations/organizations (FNCOFOR),
- Forest administration (Forest Service of Piemonte, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, ONF, ERSAF),
- Timber processing actors & and their associations/organizations/hub/clusters (Bois de Chartreuse, Promolegno, proHolz Salzburg, Pôle Excellence Bois, proHolzBW-Baden-Württemberg; Xylofutur, VTT, Medef-Aura),
- Associated service (IT, planners, architectures, retailers, engineers, etc.) providers (FORTEA),
- Natural Parks (Parc Chartre Parc Naturel Régional de Chartreuseuse),
- research centers (INRAE, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts/HSLU, Slovenian Forestry Institute/GOZDIS, CNR, University of Tuscia),
- Training and education institutions (CNFPT),
- NGOs/Non-Profit Organizations (Euromontana).
- Farmers youth organizations
- Members of other EUSALP AGs (EUSALP Youth, EUSALP TF-MFSUT)
- Alpine Convention delegates
- Forest & timber standard setting organizations and certification bodies (Bois des Alpes, Holz-von-hier)
- Municipalities (Grenoble Alpes Metropole) and its organizations (UNCEM)
- Regional Administrations (Lombardia, Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes, Baden-Württemberg)
- National Agencies (ANCT)
- EU officers

- Chamber of Commerce (Landwirtschaftskamner Salzburg)

Members will be directly involved in the 6 meetings planned for the three-year period and organised in a hybrid form to allow maximum participation and involvement in the development of activities. Commitment will be maintained with invitations to participate in events organised by AG2 in anticipation of the annual Fora EUSALP and other events related to EU macro-regional strategies (i.e. EUmrsweek). The collection of information on projects and calls to members will be carried out by TF-MFSUT, which will be involved in conferences, workshops and seminars organised by TF-MFSUT.

Subgroup "tourism": Alpine Space Programme:

It provides a framework to facilitate the cooperation between economic, social and environmental key players in seven Alpine countries, as well as between various institutional levels such as: academia, administration, business and innovation sector, and policy making. The members of the AG wish to maintain an ever-closer cooperation with the Alpine Space programme in order to realise the strategic plans on behalf of the EUSALP and Alpine Space programme, including by submitting projects that focus on core strategic challenges of the EUSALP.

- Alpine Convention

   The Alpine Convention contains the guiding principles for sustainable life in the Alps, today and in the future, for identity, heritage and traditions in the Alps. At the same time, it is a living instrument that enables signatory states to address urgent and cross-cutting issues together. The Convention is the legal basis for the protection of sensitive alpine ecosystems, regional culture and the environment.
   A close cooperation shall be provided especially when it comes to the consequences of climate change in the Alps and the protection of ecosystems.

- Presidency

   The ideas of the respective Presidencies should be closely coordinated with the EUSALP, respectively with the working groups, in order to ensure continuity in the work.

   European cross-border cooperation:
   European Cross-Border cooperation, supports cooperation between NUTS III regions from at least two different Member States lying directly on the borders or adjacent to them. It aims to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purposes of the overall harmonious development of the Union.

4. The role of the Youth Council

AG2 strongly believes in involving the Youth Council to ensure that their ideas and viewpoints are considered to act together and discuss the goals of the overall EUSALP strategy. The importance of young people is evident in AG2's decision to organise the first public event with the Youth Council in November 2022 called "Ready to Stay?" to discuss the depopulation of mountain areas and find common solutions at macro-regional level. in addition, youth council representatives for economic development are permanently invited to participate in the AG2 plenary session to provide input.

AG2 will continue to strengthen the relationship with Youth Council through initiatives and events to achieve greater involvement. Joint action is necessary to achieve the AG2's main objectives.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

The Covid-19 pandemic dramatically affected societies in the Alpine region. The emergency measures that were implemented considerably restricted professional and personal mobility. It is now clear that our lifestyles and economies will be impacted in the long term by this health crisis.

The measures put in place imposed the postponement or cancellation of all EUSALP physical meetings scheduled from March 2020 to June 2021. In September and October 2020 and 2021, the improvement of the sanitary situation made it possible to maintain several physical events, which brought together representatives, experts and civil society members, as well as foreign delegations, mostly through videoconference:

The French EUSALP Presidency took this context into account and complemented its annual working plan, undertaking EUSALP actions to both deal with Covid-19 pandemic and initiate a green resilient recovery. Taking into account the sanitary situation, three actions were decided:

Despite this situation, many events were organized by the AG2 and held physically during the FR and IT Presidencies:

1. Mountain forests and climate change (Aix-les-Bains, 2020, September, 3rd and 4th)
2. National Pastoralism Meetings (Barcelonnette, 2020, September 23rd to 25th)
3. Climate, risks, energy conference and workshops (Chamonix, 2020, from September 29th to October 1st)
4. Smart Villages (Vercors and Grenoble, 2020, October 5th and 6th)
5. Energy in ski resorts (Les Orres, 2021, March, 7th and 8th)
6. Euro-Alpine Pastoralist Conference (Grenoble, 2021, October 8th)
7. Agriculture and Local products (Paris, March, 1st)
8. Wood in the Alpes (Chartreuse, 2022, April, 7th)
9. Tourism in the Alpes (Grenoble, 2022, April, 22nd)
10. Smart Industries (Lyon-SIDO, 2022, October, 13th)

11. Ready to Stay? (Milan, 2022, November, 10 ^{th)}

For the subgroup Smart Industry

Topic	Actions	Timeframe
Smart Industry	Alpine Forum on Smart Industry	2019
Twin transition	EUSALP Workshop on digitalization of circular economy. World Manufacturing Forum 2021	2021
Digitalization of value chains	ARPAF project SMART SMEs on digitalization of wood and textile value chains	Ended in 2021
Resilience of SMEs	ALPGOV supported report on how to strengthen the resilience of SMEs in the Alpine Space	2022
Digital IP, data management and valorization	EU project Go-DIP	2021-2022
Digital IP, open data open software and open hardware	EU project ZOOOM	2022
AI and data-driven innovation	Proposal AlpDrive – not funded	2022

Subgroup "Wood"

Subgroup "Wood" Leader co-coordinated the Strategic Cross-sectoral Initiative "*Innovation Hub for green business*" implementing the actions of "*Wood and timber value chains*" topic. It organized 2 meetings a year which involved around 50 representatives of different organizations linked to forest-based sector. It boosted TF-MFSUT activities by providing inputs to the organization of the EUSALP Fora workshops in Nice (2020 and 2021) and Trento 2022. It contributed to the issue of the technical contribution of EUSALP French Presidency "*Multifunctional Forests: Nature Based Solution as Tools for a Holistic Resilience of Alpine Territories*". That was presented on the 7th September 2021 at IUCN World Conference in Marseille. Further impulse was given to the AlpGov2 surveys "*How to strengthen the resilience of SMEs in the Alpine Space? The role of digitalisation and clusters*" and "*Recommendations for strengthening local wood supply chains.*"
During 2020-2022 its members were:
- involved in two ARPAF II projects (REDIAFOR and TRIPLE WOOD),
- successful with the ARPAF III project CAESAR2.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

The <u>tourism sector</u> is one of the most important economic sectors in the Alpine region, marked by a dense fabric of small and medium-sized enterprises, offering numerous development opportunities and providing employment. However, the level of tourist activity and services varies according to the season and its strong dependence on snow resources means that the sector must be able to meet current and future challenges, especially that of adapting to climate change and the ecological transition.

The sector is already moving towards an ecological, diversified and all-season tourism, developing alternative offers to winter sports activities (skiing, etc.) such as health/wellness tourism, agrotourism or new sports and cultural practices.

These issues require going beyond the scale of the resort to the scale of a larger territory, playing on <u>the transitions and complementarities</u>.

<u>Mountain agriculture, pastoralism and forestry</u> offer, when practiced in a sustainable manner, ecosystem services that can preserve biodiversity, mitigate climate change and prevent natural hazards.

On the other hand, the development of territorial food approaches aiming at local consumption of mountain food products in short circuits and the promotion of pastoralism in the Alpine region have been selected as actions. Living, producing and transforming in mountain pastures have been at the heart of the events organized since 2020.

The <u>promotion of regional labels, quality signs and territorial brands</u> to enhance the value of agricultural products in the Alpine region has been favored in the context of the issue of the <u>multifunctionality of wood and forest</u> in the Alpine region.

<u>Industry 4.0</u> must be a central objective for the next months of AG2 activities.

The decarbonized economy offers new perspectives for industry 4.0: the challenges on the supply chain, on the digitalization of production processes, on the circular economy. These avenues must be explored in greater depth in the coming months.

<u>Energy (hydrogen)</u> is the subject of inter-group work (AG2, AG4, AG9).

The Alpine region has a significant potential for the production of renewable energies. Among these renewable energies, a specific place has been given to hydrogen. The Alpine region can be a major territory for hydrogen with 80% of the industrial actors of the sector.

One of the objectives is to establish and implement a global strategy for the development of green hydrogen in the Alpine region: the process launched at the Chamonix conference in September 2020 has resulted in a consortium of 10 regions willing to engage in an Alpine cooperation around hydrogen. A political letter of intent was signed by these 10 Regions in spring 2021. A <u>H2 Focus group</u> has been set up composed of the ten parties and coordinated by the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region in connection with the "Green Hydrogen for the Alps" initiative. Subgroup "Wood" Improves the dialogue among forest-based sector actors, suppliers, civil society and consumers to better explore the potential needs for products or provided services in order to anticipate conflicts related to the use of forests, wood and non-wood forest products, and to highlight new or enhanced business models.

Opportunities in construction / building sector for sustainable buildings:
Innovative Circular economy business models (including the re-use or re-design of waste wood, also as biomass fuel (district heating and cooling, domestic heating)**New bio-economy business models** (bio-chemicals, pharmaceutic industry, etc.) also in relation with new

needs coming out the Covid19 emergency (see also 3. Production and supply chain sustainability & resilience)

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

<u>Tourism in transition:</u>

The winter tourism industry in the Alps is highly dependent on climate conditions and the consequences of climate change in the mountains. As climate change leads to a rapid decrease in snow cover, mountain stakeholders face the challenge of managing impacts on the socio-economic system. Stakeholders in mountain destinations today are confronted with a common challenge: they have to cope with the impacts of climate change without being able to rely on experience-based recommendations for action.

The TranStat project aims to help implement jointly developed approaches for the transition to sustainable mountain destinations - ski resorts and their settlement area - in practice. Based on a participatory and inclusive approach, TranStat aims to elaborate scenarios and jointly developed approaches to respond to the identified challenges in mountain destinations. The challenge is to promote new models of economic, social and environmental development to ensure a livable and sustainable future in the Alpine region. TranStat addresses this cross-cutting issue by creating a physical and digital network of mountain destinations undergoing change to share knowledge and experiences for the future.

Many winter sports areas in the Alps are facing the same preconditions and there are pioneers in some areas who have been dealing with the issue of climate change for a long time. It is important that the knowledge about models of the future that are being developed builds on the findings that are already being tested in other Alpine regions. Here, cross-border cooperation and the exchange of knowledge across borders play an immensely important role. Challenges of this magnitude can best be met through close cooperation across national borders.

The Transtat project will be the main project on the issue of tourism in transition, developing its own living labs but it will be also coordinated with other Alpine Space projects such as Beyond Snow (as presented in the AG2 meeting in 2023, June, 6th).

The final goal is the creation of an alpine network of mountain ski resort in transition. The cross border cooperation will be essential for the benchmarking approach, even if each living lab should be considered with its own specifications.

3. Cross-cutting priorities

AG2 agrees with the facilitation of 4 macro-areas that encompass all the initial proposals.

1- Facilitating <u>circular economy in short supply chains</u>: the theme of circular economy finds full consistency with the action and objectives of AG2. Specifically, the consistency of this initiative finds a strong correlation with the thematic policy area "economic growth and innovation" to which AG2 belongs. In addition, the earlier proposal to create a subgroup called 'circular economy' is an extra incentive to pursue this topic with the help of the capabilities AG2 has acquired over time.

2- Fast-tracking <u>Energy transition for a Carbon Neutral Alpine Region</u>: AG2 is fully involved in these activities through its support of the Hydrogen TF. (Hydrogen initiative (ongoing from AlpGov 2).

3- Promoting sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially <u>water</u>: AG2 supports the proposals for the EUSALP Task Force: WATER TRANSITION to secure and preserve resources in scarcity times.

4- Promoting <u>digitalization in the Alpine Region</u>: the subgroup on Smart industries of AG2 is fully in line with the fourth cross-cutting priorities. In addition, the subgroup's competencies and collaboration with other AGs can bring important expertise to the initiative.

Although not included in the 4 cross-cutting initiatives, the TF "EUSALP Task Force <u>"Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber"</u> (TF-MFSUT) represents a key role that AG2 wants to support through its participation not as a leader but as an active participant. Furthermore, AG2 agrees to include the TF in the cross-cutting issue of Circular Economy and participate in the identification of specific actions and objectives related to the broader cross-cutting priority.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

AG2 aims to strengthen its communication strategy towards both EUSALP actors and external stakeholders.
The AG 2 webpage on the EUSALP website will be regularly updated with news on the Group's activities and events. The studies developed in the current and previous periods will be also uploaded, together with the minutes of the AG2 meetings.

Specific communication campaigns will be targeted to companies, professionals and practitioners – and their networks – operating or interested in the EUSALP area and dealing with the topics of the Group. To this end, each AG 2 member should create a database of relevant national, regional and local contacts to forward them the information and achievements of the Group, in line with the GDPR requirements.
To better target local stakeholders, AG 2 events will be organised with a transnational dimension, but in linguistically homogenous areas. This element will allow for an effective involvement of the local public and anyway enable the creation of transnational knowledge communities/networks to facilitate the exchange of experiences across regions and countries.

English translation will always be available to ensure the participation of all interested EUSALP actors.

Subgroup "Wood" (source, conclusion by **"***Thematic Focus Group Table 3: Cross-sectoral and transdisciplinary communication to enhance mutual understanding for sustainable transition pathways in using timber***")**

In addition to the current main players (academia, public administrations, stakeholders of forest-wood chain), new key actors for collaboration between forestry, timber value chain and society have been identified: Business organisations and municipalities (mayors). The following take-home messages can summarise the contribution of participants in person:

- Implementing simple and attractive communication is urgent and important to reduce the gap between researchers/experts and other stakeholders.
- Business organisations and municipalities are key players to improve communication with the aim to motivate stakeholders and consumers for a transition to sustainable pathways.
- Multidisciplinary/transdisciplinary technical and professional training must be considered as an important educational and communicative tool to reduce the knowledge gap.

2. Events

- **Plenary sessions** ⊡ 4 meetings in the 3 years
  Proposal: 2 plenaries per year (2023-2025), for the AG2, one in Spring and one in the Fall, paid by AURA and RP.

- **Public events** ⊡ 3 events in the 3 years, 1 per year.

  RP's proposals of themes for the events:

  > 2023: H2
  > 2024*:* Data (in collaboration with AG5)
  > 2025*:* Youth

  AURA's proposals of themes for the events:

  > 2023: Tourism
  > 2024: H2/energy
  > 2025: TBD

- **Thematic research** - 2 studies in the 3 years. (to do in the given timeframe 2023-25, according to the choices of each research group)

Joint proposals of themes for the thematic researches:
- Smart industries
- Circular bio/economy

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

SG Bioeconomy **SG Circular Economy**	**Project 1.** Propose new tools including bioeconomy in the value chain among SMEs
SG Digital Industry	**Project 2.** Promote digitalization as a source of innovation in SMEs
SG Tourism	**Project 3.** Create a survey on mountain resorts network **Project 4.** Develop health tourism in Alpine Region resorts
SG Wood	**Project 5.** Promote local exploitation, transformation and consumption of wood
AG2, AG6	**Project 6.** Promote regional and quality labels and brands to add value to the agricultural products of the Alpine Region
AG2, AG9	**Project 7.** Promote hydrogen for alpine corridors
AG2, AG5 *etc.*	**Project 8.** Explore new drivers for the Alpine economy

All these projects are currently driven by specific partners with a clear timeframe. The detailed objectives will be discussed during the plenary meetings which will be held at least twice a year. The updating of these projects should also be validated by the plenary meetings.

The driving of the AG is particularly but not exclusively focused on projects with important milestones during all the periods including also numerous and diverse activities that are fundamental to the achievement of AG overall goals. A strategic coherence needs also to be assured by the coleadership of the AG, with the support of all involved stakeholders.

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	
please describe if possible	
n. cross-border/transnational events	2 per year
For 2023: H2/Tourism For 2024: Data/ Energy For 2025: Youth	
n. joint policy recommendation	1 final

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please describe if possible	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group)	3 per year
See AG2 plenary meetings agenda	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group)	2 per year
See AG2 plenary meetings agenda	
n. of papers / research works to be published	1 per year
proposal for the thematic research: one about smart industries one about circular bio/economy	
budget to be raised with European funding	
please describe if possible	
other:	
please describe if possible	

Figure 1: Fototeca Trentino Sviluppo S.p.A. – photo credits Alberto Blasetti "Val di Non - Vigo di Ton - Mieli Thun"

Work plan 2023-2025

Action Group 3 'Labour market, education and training'

Table of content

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

T he activities of AG 3 have a cross-sectoral value and are relevant to both educational and professional contexts.

The file rouge that links the objectives and activities proposed by the Group is providing professional profiles that both address the needs of the Alpine labour market and tackle the challenges related to the green and digital transitions, by targeting, not only, students and young people (especially those enrolled in VET schools), but also workers through life-long learning programmes, in line with the mission of the Group "*to improve the adequacy of labour market, education and training in strategic sectors*". The twin transition is creating new job opportunities, which require the creation of new professional profiles as well as the up-skilling and re-skilling of (adult) workers.

In the upcoming years, the Group aims to work in continuity with the results achieved in Alp Gov 2 and will focus on three main topics: first, experiences connected to vocational education and training; second, the acquisition and assessment of soft skills in learning and professional contexts; and third, bridging the gap between the supply and demand of jobs in the Alpine region by, on the one hand, supporting young people in identifying employment opportunities in the Alps, especially in rural area, and, on the other hand, supporting local employers in the selection of qualified personnel.

The creation of an Alpine-wide network of VET institutions can contribute to the achievement of the aforementioned objectives by facilitating the connection and exchanges across countries, enabling the mobility of students and teachers, broadening the network of companies involved in dual training experiences, and pooling courses and training modules that respond to the evolving dynamics of the Alpine and global economies. In particular, to tackle the peculiarities of the Alpine job market, VET institutions should invest in developing specific training content connected to key sectors (timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism) and useful at improving the job matching between supply and demand. Attention should be also paid to the potential contribution to circular economy practices. The Alpine-wide network of VET institutions can be a first step toward the creation of a common macroregional educational space.

Digital and remote opportunities of learning, training and working can offer a concrete solution to the abandonment of mountain areas, especially rural and inner areas. Therefore, the Group aims to contribute to the dedicated cross-cutting priority within the EUSALP framework.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

AG 3 actions aim to contribute to developing an Alpine-wide labour market as well as improving the link between workforce supply and demand. To this end, the activities foreseen in this work plan are meant to create professional profiles that respond to both the requests of the Alpine labour market and the challenges related to the green and digital transitions. First of all, people – youth in particular – should be aware of the employment opportunities available in Alpine regions and effectively prepared to meet the needs of local companies. In this context, it is foreseen to develop education curricula, up-skilling and re-skilling courses that value the acquisition of professional and technical competences as well as soft skills, which are complementary to the former and crucial to effectively operate in a working context, required in specific jobs or sectors. Attention should be paid to those sectors and value chains that are relevant throughout the entire Alpine arch – such as timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism – with the objective to strengthen circular economy (cross-cutting priority). Cooperation and exchanges of experiences are crucial to improve VET and HVET systems of the different Alpine States and Regions as well as to increase mobility of students and (future) workers. Such mobility could be further enhanced by both the creation of an Alpine-wide network of VET institutions and other relevant stakeholders (strategic flagship initiative) and the mutual recognition of HVET titles in the EUSALP area. The remote/digital dimension of learning, training and working should be promoted to foster digitalisation throughout the Alps and increase living and working opportunities in inner areas (cross-cutting priority).

2. Composition and sub-groups

As of May 2023, AG 3 is composed of 18 members representing national and regional institutions of five EUSALP Countries (Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland) and is coordinated by a steering group of the Autonomous Province of Trento led by Giuliana Cristoforetti (Local Language Minorities and European Audit Unit) and including representatives of the provincial entities dealing with the topics addressed by AG 3. Most of the members belong to the educational and professional training sectors. In addition, there are two observers: Estelle Roger (European Commission – DG REGIO) and Rainer Steindler (Alpine Space Programme).

In line with the request of the EB, the existing sub-groups will cease to operate, and the AG 3 will work on the thematic priorities listed below, under the guide of "thematic coordinators". The thematic priorities are:
1) Fostering dual systems in all EUSALP countries and strengthening their potential to address market needs. One of the main activities will be testing the CEN Workshop

Agreement (CWA) "Guidelines for dual-based training systems" in companies and promote their adoption.

2) Valuing soft skills in addition and as complementary to the technical and professional ones due to their importance in learning processes and the labour market. The aim is to study, experiment on and promote tools and processes that enable the development and formal recognition of soft skills in work-based learning (WBL) contexts, based on the Study "*Tools and guidelines for identification and assessment of a set of soft skills related to WBL and the development of the Alpine economy*".

3) Improving the connection between youth and the Alpine labour market by making young people aware of their possibilities in terms of mountain businesses, traditional professions, green jobs and remote working/training opportunities (hereinafter "Youth and Jobs" priority/activities). These activities aim to reduce depopulation trends in inner Alpine areas, support employers in finding work force, strengthen and promote vocational education in connection with job opportunities in the Alpine region.

4) Activities contributing to the cross-cutting priority on digitalisation.

5) Activities contributing to the cross-cutting priority on circular economy.

6) Strengthening VET and HVET cooperation in the Alpine Region with the involvement of political representatives.

All these priorities aim to improve the connection between the education and training sectors and the labour market through the creation of professional profiles that respond to both market needs and the challenges related to the green and digital transitions.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

- VET institutions and high schools;
- Professionals in the training and education sectors;
- SMEs and traditional mountain businesses;
- Business support organisations;
- YC and young peoples of Alpine countries.

The stakeholders will be targeted with dedicated communication actions and involved in some of the Group activities foreseen for the future. For instance, local companies and young people will be involved in planning and participating to the "Discover mountain jobs" workshop(s) organised under the Youth and Jobs priority. VET institutions and companies will be invited to adopt the CWA on dual-training experiences as well as to experiment on the development of soft skills in learning and professional contexts.

4. The role of the Youth Council

Involving the YC is of crucial relevance to capture the perspective of young generations and their expectations in terms of new professional profiles and employment opportunities in the Alps. For this reason, AG 3 welcomes the opportunity to include the councillor(s) since the very beginning of the planning phase of future activities, especially through the participation in AG 3 meetings and direct exchanges with AG 3 members.

In particular, the YC will be invited to contribute to the activities under the priority "Youth and Jobs" by both planning and participating in the "Discover mountain jobs" workshops, inventory and surveys. It will also be involved in drafting the project proposal aimed at developing learning and training courses focused on Alpine peculiarities in key sectors and contributing to strengthening circular economy practices.

The YC will be relevant in communicating AG 3 activities by playing an active role in the dissemination of the achievements of the Group.

Some activities of this work plan are addressed to young people living in the Alpine Region, more generally, and the YC can help promoting them among peers. For instance, the creation of the Alpine-wide network of VET institutions will eventually benefit VET students that could participate in mobility projects, follow courses provided by other schools, and enrol in new course developed to address Alpine specificities, add circular economy aspects in relevant Alpine sectors, and acquire selected soft skills in line with market requests.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

In the framework of the Alp Gov 2 project, AG 3 developed the study *Tools and guidelines for identification and assessment of a set of soft skills related to WBL and the development of the Alpine economy* (hereinafter Soft Skills Study), which proposes a common framework and tools for observing and evaluating, as learning outcomes, the soft skills considered most significant in a work-based learning (WBL) context. These skills are also "strategic" for the development of the whole Alpine region and economy since "they can be applied in many different types of jobs … [and] can empower persons … to find better jobs and positively contribute to the working organizations".[1]

In addition, AG 3 focused on the theme of non-academic tertiary education in the EUSALP context. A dedicated study highlighting the peculiarities and the experiences of the different national systems was presented in Bruxelles, in occasion of the event *Fostering cooperation in higher vocational education and training in the EUSALP area*. HVET could be one of the privileged tools for increasing the matching of labour supply and demand within the European Union and, more generally, could represent a response to employment crises. The

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[1] I.R.E.S. (2022), *Tools and guidelines for identification and assessment of a set of soft skills related to WBL and the development of the Alpine economy*, p. 61.

conference brought together key players operating at European and national levels to launch a debate towards the future adoption of a pact for HVET, in line with the European Skills Agenda and the European Higher Education Strategy. Other topic addressed were the issue of the added value of cooperation in higher education, together with its implications in terms of inclusion, mobility, digitisation, lifelong learning and knowledge transfer. Representatives of the Friends of EUSALP Initiative intervened to highlight the political relevance of such cooperation.

Furthermore, AG 3 worked and developed a Cen Workshop Agreement – a document constructed through consensus of the parties involved – on *Quality Assurance Guidelines for Dual training systems*, which includes best practices of dual-training experiences, a code of conduct for the hosting enterprises, and the general principles of a training contract.

AG 3 organised several events. "How I Met...My future Job" was held in January 2021 and aimed at showcasing real possibilities for the youngest to stay and work in the Alpine area, not only in the traditional fields related to mountain activities. The event "Training and labour market: training trainers in dual education systems" was held in November 2022 to present some of the best practices for high quality company training. AG 3 co-organised, together with AG 5, the second edition of the Digital Alps Conference, which addressed, among the others, digitisation in the education sector and digital skills.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

AG 3 aims to work in continuity with the 2020-2022 period by further developing the topics described below. The Group will organise in-presence "AG3 labs" with the support of a facilitator, to concretely define the activities and outputs to be achieved within the year, identify funding resources (embedding), and ensure the adoption of a comprehensive and strategic approach.

Dual systems

The Group aims to support the adoption of the CWA "Guidelines for dual-based training systems" in companies hosting VET students in the EUSALP area, with the aim of increasing the standards of WBL experiences in all EUSALP regions/countries. To this end, a group of experts from different EUSALP countries will be created to facilitate, train and advise on the adoption of CWA in companies and become "CWA advisors" through a dedicated capacity-building course.

The CWA will undergo a testing phase in a limited number of companies to apply the standards set therein and verify their effectiveness. Based on the practice collected, the CWA could be subjected to a re-evaluation phase to improve its content and detail specific aspects, such as that of security during training periods. The CWA can be further promoted through the network of VET institutions.

Soft skills

The recognition and validation of soft skills are key processes since state/regional dual systems focus only on the recognition of technical-professional competences, but ignore soft skills, which are complementary and crucial components for future workers. Therefore, the set of soft skills identified in the dedicated Soft Skills Study will be tested in selected VET institutions and companies hosting students to explore modalities, tools and contexts that facilitate the emergence of these skills, their recognition and validation. This experience will enable the production of a new document on how to evaluate soft skills during a "trainee" period in companies. The development of tools for the recognition of soft skills by a company tutor is relevant for mobility projects and linked to the topic of **micro-credentials**, which the Group aims to address in the future in connection to both dual-based training and life-long learning experiences.

Youth and jobs

The main goal of this axis is to raise awareness of mountain professions and employment opportunities in the Alps for young people when building their professional project, and thus discourage migration towards bigger centres. The activities foreseen encompass professional training, vocational guidance and job matching between supply and demand, and include:

- adapting the French "Eductour" to the EUSALP context by creating different models of "Discover mountain jobs" sessions depending on the needs, possibilities and opportunities of each Alpine country. These workshops target young people and local companies, whose direct involvement is crucial to define the workshop context and programme and increase the participants' commitment. A follow-up phase is based on the collection of feedbacks and a de-briefing aimed at improving the structure of the workshop;
- developing a database/map of VET institutions in the Alps (dealing with forestry, agriculture, tourism etc.) to create a network, which is the AG3 strategic flagship initiative;
- including a focus on STEM disciplines in curricular and extracurricular courses to support the selection of STEM careers and address the shortage of skilled workers.

Other Youth and Jobs activities will contribute to the cross-cutting priorities as explained below.

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

AG3 identified the need to create a network of VET schools in the Alps to strengthen cross-country connections between these institutions, which address challenges common to the whole Alpine Region. This network will build on previous and existing experiences, such as the one foreseen in the Interreg project "YOUrALPS- Educating Youth for the Alps" and the

network of vocational mountain high schools in the French Alps, by enlarging them and providing stability in terms of both human and financial means.

This network aims to:
- create a long-term connection between VET institutions in the Alps;
- share a common database of companies involved in dual training experiences to improve the connection with companies across the Alpine Region;
- enable mobility among students and teachers;
- develop specific training content targeting the Alpine peculiarities of specific sectors (timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism) and useful at improving the job matching between supply and demand;
- exchange good practices and lessons learnt on VET aspects emerging from projects, especially those funded by the ASP and relevant Interreg cross-border programmes.

Outputs of the network are:
- short-term: a web-based platform connecting the VET institutions that join the network;
- long-term: an Erasmus+ or ASP small-case project proposal aimed at developing Alpine-focused training courses and testing them within some of the VET schools participating in the network.

Stakeholders to be involved include:
- VET schools (directing bodies and teachers);
- companies hosting students enrolled in VET schools;
- project partners of EU-funded projects dealing with VET aspects.

Timeline/future steps:
- AG 3 members provide a database of VET schools potentially interested in the network to be contacted;
- identification of additional financial means;
- development of project proposal.

3. Cross-cutting priorities

AG 3 aims to contribute to cross-cutting priorities "Facilitating circular economy in short supply chain" and "Promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region".

On the circular economy priority, the main objective is to promote the creation of professional profiles in key Alpine sectors contributing to circular economy through the following activities:
- addressing circular economy aspects in educational curricula for relevant Alpine sectors (timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism);

- creating ad hoc courses for VET institutions useful at acquiring soft and technical/professional competences required by sectors contributing to circular economy
- creating lifelong learning courses for workers that cannot access higher education opportunities but require academic level knowledge – such as those in the craft and agricultural sectors. These courses should encompass a balanced mix of theory and praxis, introduce the topic of future skills, integrate trans-sectoral competences, and include a specific focus on digital and green jobs. This action should foster innovation by easing knowledge and technological transfer between research institutions and SMEs.

The digitalisation priority is relevant to the focus of AG 3 since the **remote dimension of training and working** is inherent to today's education and job market, and should thus be addressed in any of the activities developed by the Group, in particular by pursuing the following objectives:
   a) supporting the adoption of remote working, training and learning for inner areas, including through the network of VET institutions;
   b) fostering the acquisition of digital skills in educational and professional contexts as well as the adoption/diffusion of digital learning practices.

Objective a) would be pursued by:
- exchanging on remote working, training and learning practices adopted in EUSALP countries, including through the network of VET institutions;
- fostering awareness on existing opportunities of remote working for young peoples through dedicated workshops;
- developing the concept of "multi-activity" mountain jobs combining physical with remote working activities.

Specific activities aimed at pursuing objective b) include:
- promoting the diffusion of digital skills as soft skills required by the Alpine job market;
- liaising with the Pact for skills initiative for promoting digital skills in peripheral areas;
- exchanging on digital learning solutions (DLS) to promote the development and adoption of blended learning in VET institutions.

Collaboration with other AGs is also expected beyond the aforementioned priorities.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

AG 3 aims to strengthen its communication strategy towards both EUSALP actors and external stakeholders.

The AG 3 webpage on the EUSALP website will be regularly updated with news on the Group's activities and events. The studies developed in the current and previous periods will be also uploaded.

Specific communication campaigns will be targeted to companies, professionals and practitioners – and their networks – operating or interested in the EUSALP area and dealing with the topics of the Group. To this end, each AG 3 member should create a database of relevant national, regional and local contacts to forward them the information and achievements of the Group, in line with the GDPR requirements.

To better target local stakeholders, some AG 3 events could be organised with a transnational dimension, but in linguistically homogenous areas. This element will allow for an effective involvement of the local public and enable the creation of transnational knowledge communities/networks to facilitate the exchange of experiences across regions and countries. English translation will always be available to ensure the participation of all interested EUSALP actors.

AG 3 wishes to participate in initiatives organised at EU level, such as the European Vocational Skills Week and the MRS Week. In addition, it will propose an annual event connecting to the priorities of the annual Presidency, ideally to be hosted in the context of the Annual Forum or as part of the Presidencies' calendar.

2. Events

- Capacity building on the CWA targeting experts from different EUSALP countries to be trained as "CWA advisors", in order to support the dissemination and effective application of the CWA at national level;
- dissemination of the CWA at national/regional level with the support of the "CWA advisors" to involve local companies and business support organizations for its promotion (a series of events could be organised in linguistically homogenous areas, each focusing on a specific sector: timber/forestry, agri-food and tourism);
- evaluation workshop gathering "CWA advisors" after the pilot implementation;
- strong involvement in the Macro Regional Strategies Week 2023 (panel discussion on "Skills for resilient societies" and presentation of AG 3 main achievements and future activities on skills for 2023-2025;
- presentation of the Soft skills Study in Trento and in the framework of the European Vocational Skills Week;
- AG 3 in-person labs (Autumn 2023 and 2024) to concretely develop activities with the support of a facilitator;
- "Discover mountain jobs" workshop in France (Summer 2024);
- event on HVET Cooperation;
- annual event on AG 3 topics in line with the Presidencies priorities (ideally in the context of the EUSALP Annual Forum).

Other topics:

HVET cooperation

On the one hand, there is the intention to further support the political process behind the mutual recognitions of HVET titles in the EUSALP areas. In this regards, the dedicated 2022 HVET Study underlines the benefits in terms of mobility for the EUSALP-wide labour market. On the basis of this Study a Roadmap for cooperation and a connected Declaration could be developed. On the other hand, an exchange among practitioners on existing practices of HVET systems (state- or regional-based, extent of company participation, learning and training solutions, professional opportunities connected to HVET, etc.) could foster the development of more effective HVET systems and solutions in EUSALP countries.

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	0
n. cross-border/transnational events	2
- Workshop on the CWA targeting experts from different EUSALP countries; - Workshop on Soft skills involving stakeholders from other MRS (with the support of DG Regio).	
n. joint policy recommendation	2
- Encouraging the mutual recognition of educational titles, in particular relating to Higher Vocational Education and Training (HVET); - creating a common Alpine system for the validation and certification of soft skills acquired in learning and WBL contexts.	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme	1
Creation of a web-based platform connecting VET institutions operating in the Alps (based on the SFI)	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes	1
Development of Alpine-focused training courses and testing them within some of the VET schools participating in the network, with a student mobility component	
n. of papers / research works to be published	3

- Roadmap towards a Declaration on a common Alpine space of education in the Alpine Region (potential focus on cooperation in the mutual recognition of HVET titles). - Paper on the evaluation of soft skills during a "trainee" period - Definition of "multi-activity" mountain jobs	
budget to be raised with European funding	tbd
please describe if possible	
Other:	
Experts from EUSALP countries trained as "CWA Advisors": minimum n. 10 (2 for each EUSALP country represented in AG 3)	
CWA adopted in companies: minimum n. 15 in the EUSALP area	
Soft Skills recognition and validation procedures tested: minimum n. 4 pilot areas in the countries represented in AG 3	
"Discover mountain jobs" workshop: minimum n. 1 workshop organised	

Work Plan 2023 - 2025

Action Group 4 - Mobility

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

U nder the 2nd Strategic Objective of EUSALP, partners focus on the most important challenges and opportunities concerning mobility and connectivity in the Alpine Region. Action Group 4 addresses the need for sustainable mobility solutions by promoting, inter alia, intermodality and interoperability in passenger and freight transport.

Three priority topics have been identified by AG4 members at the beginning of the process:
- Implementation of modal shift policies with a focus on toll systems,
- Infrastructure for sustainable transport,
- Interconnecting public transport systems.

Based on the evaluation of the achievements of the previous Work Plan 2020 – 2022 as well as expanding and adapting its Thematic Areas (TAs) to current developments, for the period 2023-2025, EUSALP AG4 aims to realise these objectives through activities in the following priorities:

1. **Smart clean logistics and policy measures in freight transport to support modal shift (rail and combined and multimodal transport)**
2. **Secondary railway infrastructure (local and regional transport links)**
3. **Resilient road and rail infrastructure**
4. **Smart and sustainable passenger transport (local, regional and cross-border mobility)**

Moreover, AG4 has launched a new strategic flagship initiative "**energy transition in the transport system**".

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

Transport is one of the main causes of climate change – almost thirty percent of all greenhouse gas emissions in the Alps can be attributed to transport – and both passenger and freight traffic volumes are rising continuously. Road transport, in particular, causes further negative externalities such as air pollution, noise and traffic congestion. The development of public transport, rail services for freight and alternative mobility solutions has been boosted considerably by Alpine countries and regions in the last years, but is still insufficient in many parts. This makes mobility one of the biggest challenges for the social, economic and ecological development of the Alpine regions.

Moreover, transport accounts for one third of the total energy consumption in the Alpine Region. The transport sector therefore demonstrates a high potential for reducing energy demand and for becoming more energy efficient. With regard to current developments and the energy crisis, an increased engagement by EUSALP actors for reducing energy consumption in the transport sector is indispensable. In the Alpine Region, activities and solutions need to be adapted to the specific needs of the region and the environment. This concerns spatial planning, tourism mobility, trans-alpine freight transport flows, the sensitive landscape as well as land use and impacts on ecosystems that come along with large-scale renewable energy production.

With representatives from 48 Alpine regions, covering seven national states and more than 80 million inhabitants, the AG4 Mobility offers a platform to coordinate and harmonise the activities of Alpine regions and countries for a sustainable transport and mobility system. Its mission is to build a common understanding on a future-proof transport policy and mobility, to define common objectives and to launch specific activities and projects within the framework of the fundamental principles of free movement in line with Articles 34, 35 and 36 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

2. Composition and sub-groups

Similar to the composition of Work Plan 2020-2022, in the period 2023-2025, the idea is to organize members´ involvement around pre-defined activities under now five TAs as described above.

The following list provides an overview of the AG4 members with decision-making capacity and the persons representing them in AG4:

- France (Sylvie Vigneron)
- Germany (Katharina Erdmenger)
- Italy (Grazia Maria Cacopardi, Paolo Angelini, Armando Tagliatela)
- Liechtenstein (Henrik Caduff)
- Slovenia (Franc Zepic, Zlatko Podgorski)
- Switzerland (Matthias Rinderknecht, Markus Liechti; Alexis Kessler, Aurelio Vigani)
- Aosta Valley (Antonio Pollano)
- Bavaria (Harry Seybert)
- Carinthia (Hans Schuschnig, Jörg Putzl, Volker Bidmon, Karsten Schröder)
- Friuli Venezia Giulia (Alberto Cozzi, Massimiliano Angelotti)
- Liguria (Gabriella Rolandelli, Jacopo Riccardi, Raffaele Cattani, Michele Cervetto)
- Lombardy (Alessandra Bellomi)
- Région Sud Provence-Alpes-Côte d´Azur (Xavier Garcia, Didier Biau)
- Piedmont (Matteo Brumati)
- Salzburg (Ralf Kühn)
- South Tyrol (Simone Messner)
- Styria (Alfred Nagelschmied)
- Trentino (Massimo Negriolli)
- Tyrol (Ekkehard Allinger-Csollich, Patrick Skoniezki, Michael Bürger)
- Veneto (Marco d'Elia)
- Vorarlberg (Stefan Duelli)

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

Members in Advisory Role are NGOs, umbrella organizations, fora or associations representing a large group of stakeholders or civil society. These members ensure the link between the AG and EUSALP-wide actors and their activities. Four members in advisory role and five observers are currently represented in AG4, with the following fields of interest:

Members in Advisory Role:
- **Central European Initiative:** with the final goal of promoting integration and sustainable development among its 17 member States, paying particular attention to supporting the

mobility of goods and people in the CEI area, it participates in many EU funded projects relevant to AG4.

- **CIPRA International:** Ensures link with civil society and environmental protection in AG4 activities. Participates in many Interreg projects relevant to AG4. Partnered with AG4 Lead in ARPAF project CrossBorder.
- **CIPRA Youth Council:** ensures youth participation in AG4 activities and launched Yoalin (Youth Alpine Interrail) relevant to AG4.
- **EUROCHAMBRES:** ensures compatibility with economic interests in AG4 activities.

Observers:
- **European Commission:** ensures embedding AG4 activities in the Strategy, informs about relevant initiatives at EU level, advises in all AG4 activities.
- **Interreg Alpine Space Programme:** ensures synergies and exchange with projects, advises in launch of new projects.
- **Alpine Convention:** ensures synergies with WG Transport. Interested in all activities.
- **EUSALP Youth Council:** ensures the participation of the alpine Youth in AG4 activities and the representation of their interests
- **Canton of Grisons** (The Swiss cantons act as observers in AGs following a decision by the Swiss Confederation.)

4. The role of the Youth Council

The Youth Council has become an important voice in developing the activities of all EUSALP AGs. EUSALP AG4 is committed to engage the Youth Council in all AG4 activities in order to take up specific considerations and "fresh" viewpoints from the young generation and to ensure their involvement in the decision-making process. EUSALP AG4 is dedicated to consulting with the Youth Council on initiating projects as well as the implementation of the strategy. Currently, the Youth Council is working on implementation of the project AlpTick for a cross-border ticket for young people in the Alpine Region. AG4 is committed to support the Youth Council with the implementation. Moreover, EUSALP AG4 is engaged in actively involving the Youth Council in events organized by EUSALP AG4 such as Action Group 4 Meetings, the EUSALP Mobility Conference and further sessions

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

EUSALP AG4 has tackled most of the Thematic Areas and Activities defined by the previous Workplan 2020-22, which is well reflected in the EUSALP Policy Brief of 2022, the Declaration on Rail Transport in Alpine Regions, the Labelled EUSALP AG4 Projects and events organised and attended by AG4 representatives.

In light of the European Year of Rail, EUSALP AG4 concluded to summarize the priorities which were shared by politicians at the AG4 Mobility Conference. The resulting Declaration on Rail Transport in the Alpine Region, a contribution by EUSALP to join forces for a sustainable transport and mobility system, was finally presented at the 5th EUSALP Mobility Conference 2022 in Innsbruck. The Declaration calls on the European Union to create a level-playing field between transport modes as basic requirement for an effective modal shift, to optimise the potential of rail to serve as the backbone of an interconnected multi-modal transport system and to improve infrastructure provisions for rail transport.15 Alpine regions officially declared their support by means of a Letter of Support.

Moreover, the commonly adopted EUSALP AG4 Assessment Methodology for Individual Projects serves to identify and label projects with a relevance for the fostering of sustainable mobility solutions in the Alpine Region from a macro regional perspective. Promoters of such selected projects can communicate their endorsement by the macro-region to decision-making authorities who are in the position to boost their implementation and/or to provide adequate financial support.

In addition, a consumer-friendly interface integrating the already existing iMONITRAF! WebGIS with further layers on AG4 activities has been further developed. This Alpine Platform of Knowledge for Mobility and Transport has become an interactive communication tool which informs about projects of AG4 and transport-related data in the Alps (traffic flows, environmental data, pricing components).

Under the first AG4 Work Plan, one of the priorities was the interconnection of public transport information across borders. As a result, AG4 actively helped building a project consortium, which led to the Interreg Alpine Space project "Linking Alps". The project that concluded in 2022 has built an operational structure for improved access to low-carbon mobility options and provides seamless, cross-border information through end-user services for tourists and for citizens, in particular for daily commuters so that they change mobility behaviour.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

The key issues and activities on which AG4 will work in the next three years are based on the four priorities outlined below as well as the strategic flagship initiative on energy transition in the transport sector. The priorities build on previous activities of AG4, but also aims to identify synergies, strengthen cooperation and avoid duplication with the Alpine Convention WG Transport by referring to their last and current mandates.

In addition, , AG4 will continue with a third call for labelling individual projects that foster sustainable mobility solutions in the Alpine Region from a macroregional perspective, based on the AG4 assessment methodology.

1. Smart clean logistics and policy measures in freight transport to support modal shift (rail and combined and multimodal transport)

AG4 will promote, exchange, and inform on activities and projects that optimise rail and combined transport (CT) infrastructures, services and logistic processes for freight transport to support modal shift, and new potentials of innovative technologies and digitalisation for improving capacity, efficiency and quality of rail and combined transport solutions in the Alpine Region. This can include infrastructure projects related to inland terminals and ports, smart CT, smart rail, automatisation of logistic processes, and freight matching that support modal shift from road to rail. Moreover, the iMONITRAF! network will continue to regularly inform AG4 members on policy measures that support rail and CT, such as the harmonisation of related pricing mechanisms, pertinent external costs, and data collection in the frame of the established monitoring system. All iMONITRAF! data is integrated in the [Alpine Platform of Knowledge for Mobility and Transport](#).

Specific activities:

- Sharing of best practices
- AG4 project labelling third call (likely in 2024) to identify concrete projects that contribute to sustainable mobility in the Alpine Region
- Cooperation with EU funded projects
- Political conferences and technical workshops
- Data collection

Expected results:

- Sharing of innovative solutions in combined transport
- Coordinated policy measures to support rail and CT
- Harmonization of related pricing mechanisms, pertinent external costs

Link to ongoing projects:

- iMONITRAF!

- AG4 labelled projects (FVG.2, FVG.5, KTN.2, STM.1)

2. Secondary railway infrastructure (local and regional transport links)

AG4 will work on key issues such as modernising and maintaining existing infrastructure to guarantee efficient accessibility also in remote Alpine regions suffering from depopulation for a resilient and socially and economically sustainable Alpine transport system. A third project call as part of the AG4 labelling will be launched which may identify additional missing links in the Alpine rail network and projects on upgrading of local railways that contribute to sustainable mobility in the Alpine Region with a macro-regional added value.

Specific activity:

- AG4 project labelling third call (likely in 2024) to identify concrete projects that contribute to sustainable mobility in the Alpine Region

Expected results:

- Identification of missing links in the Alpine rail network, upgrading of local railways

Link to ongoing projects:

- AG4 labelled projects (GRB.1, PAC.1, PIE.1, TIR.1, VEN.2, VEN.3, BAV.11)

3. Resilient road and rail infrastructure

Major road and rail infrastructure works along the transalpine corridors are expected in the years to come, which could lead to redistribution effects between corridors. Alpine States and regions will increasingly focus on managing capacities to absorb the anticipated increases in traffic volumes, both in terms of transport of goods and people. In a first step, AG4 will collect data and information on ongoing infrastructure interventions for more transparent exchange between transalpine corridors and the affected regions. In the context of climate change, resilience of transport infrastructure in the Alpine Region are increasingly taken into account. AG4 can be a platform to exchange knowledge and experiences on potential impacts of climate change on transport infrastructure and measures for adaptation as well as the analysis on further protection measures to future-proof infrastructure.

Specific activities:

- Collection of data and information of ongoing intervention measures on existing road and rail infrastructure in the Alpine Region
- Sharing of best practices
- Possible EU co-funded project on climate resilience of infrastructure
- AG4 project labelling third call (likely in 2024) to identify concrete projects that contribute to sustainable mobility in the Alpine Region

Expected results:

- Overview of relevant road/rail infrastructure works and their effects on traffic flows and capacity management during disruptions to improve coordination and manage traffic flows across the Alpine Region
- Give more visibility to the funding needs of infrastructure measures in the context of climate change adaptation

Link to ongoing projects:

- AG4 labelled projects (STM.4, TIC,1)
- iMONITRAF!

4. Smart and sustainable passenger transport (local, regional and cross-border mobility)

Building on previous projects such as ARPAF CrossBorder and the Interreg Alpine Space project LinkingAlps, AG4 will continue to provide a platform to put smart and sustainable passenger transport with a focus on cross-border mobility on the political agenda. Measures relevant to this priority include:

- Closing gaps of infrastructures and/or services/operation in cross-border regions
- Development of alternative transport solutions
- Mobility as a Service and last mile solutions
- Integrated information and ticketing for public transport
- Coordination of local and regional transport planning at macro-regional level

Specific activities:

- AG4 project labelling third call (likely in 2024) to identify concrete projects that contribute to sustainable mobility in the Alpine Region
- Support EUSALP Youth Council in the implementation of the AlpTick project
- Political conferences and technical workshops
- Promotion of CrossBorder policy recommendations in Alpine cross-border regions

Expected results:

- Improve public transport and smart mobility services in the Alpine Region with a special focus on innovative (e.g. on demand) solutions and the need to close missing links in cross-border regions, making use of digital innovation and adapting to changing lifestyles
- Make progress on the implementation of policy recommendations of the ARPAF project CrossBorder

Link to ongoing projects:

- AG4 labelled projects (FVG.4, BAV.2, VBG.1, FVG.1, LIG.1, LIG.2)

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

In order to complement the Work Plan 2023-2025, EUSALP AG4 identifies the flagship initiative "**Energy transition in the transport system in the Alpine Region**".

The current energy crisis has given new dynamics and urgency to the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources. Transport plays an important role in tackling the energy crisis: the sector needs to catch up both in respect to a more efficient use of energy but also in the transition to renewable energy. Today, the transport sector is responsible for roughly one third of the total energy consumption in the EU and is highly dependent on fossil fuels. Oil-derived fuels account for 95 % of energy consumption in transport. Moreover, the overall demand for transport and mobility has picked up again following two years of low demand related to Covid. Thus, from European to the local level, there are currently significant efforts to accelerate measures towards decarbonisation in the transport sector.

In the Alps, measures and activities need to be customized and tailored to the needs and specific characteristics of the Alpine region, considering the specific settlement patterns, the needs of tourism mobility, and trans-alpine freight transport flows. Measures to decarbonise transport should follow the „avoid-shift-improve" approach (reduce demand; modal shift from road to rail and soft modes; alternative propulsion systems). Better public transport, shared mobility services and modal shift from road to rail and soft modes can reduce overall energy consumption in the transport sector. EUSALP AG4 is committed to identify, develop as well as promote measures and activities. Moreover, smart, cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches are needed to capture the potentials of energy transition. This includes the identification of innovative approaches to accelerate the energy transition in the transport and mobility sector, considering new players in a cross-sectoral perspective and supporting existing policy measures, financial incentives and cooperation structures.

Cooperation with Action Groups 5 and 9 already started in 2022 with a dedicated session at the 21st AG4 meeting as well as a joint session at the EUSALP Annual Forum 2023. Moreover, AG4 and AG9 co-organised a stakeholder session together with transport coordinators of the Danube and Baltic Sea Region macro-regional Strategies at the MRS week in April 2023 on energy in transport. The three MRS plan to co-organise a joint high-level policy conference at the latest in 2025.

Moreover, synergies with the Alpine Convention Working Group Transport are ongoing. A joint EUSALP-Alpine Convention event will take place in October 2023 on the implementation on the EU Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation.

Specific activities:

- Data collection in the frame of the Interreg Alpine Space project CERVINO
- EUSALP/Alpine Convention Stakeholder meeting "Accelerating the Electrification of Road Transport in the Alps (AFIR-Cooperation)" in Innsbruck on 12/10/2023
- High-level political conference in cooperation with other MRS in 2025 in Brussels
- AG4 project labelling third call (likely in 2024) to identify concrete projects that contribute to sustainable mobility in the Alpine Region

Expected results:

- Identification of innovative approaches to accelerate the energy transition
- Consideration of new players in a cross-sectoral perspective
- Support of existing policy measures, financial incentives and cooperation structures
- Contribution to decarbonisation and more efficient use of energy in transport sector with coordinated measures

3. Cross-cutting priorities

At the EUSALP Annual Forum 2022 in Trento, AG4 in cooperation with AG9 and AG5 organised a technical workshop on "Success factors for energy transition – smart solutions and strategies for tackling the energy crisis in the Alpine Region". This workshop paved the way for a further collaboration between the Action Groups on the topic of energy transition in the Alpine Region.

Under the new Interreg Alpine Space project SupportEUSALP, the AGL defined "Fast-tracking Energy Transition for a Carbon Neutral Alpine Region" as one of the four cross-cutting priorities of EUSALP for the period 2023-25.

AG4 will focus on addressing the following objectives:

- Better public transport, shared mobility services
- Modal shift from road to rail and soft modes to reduce overall energy consumption in the transport sector
- Smart, cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches to capture the potentials of energy transition.

These objectives will be addressed the following activities:

- Data collection on energy consumption of the transport sector
- Identify innovative approaches to accelerate decarbonisation of transport, considering new players in a cross-sectoral perspective and supporting existing policy measures, financial incentives and cooperation structures.
- Possible high-level conference with other Macro-Regional Strategies

AG4 may also support AG9 on the following projects related to the development of hydrogen:
- Support EUSALP: organization of H2 focus group, coordination of the cross cutting priority, participation to public events
- AMETHyST and H2MA Alpine Space projects will produce knowledge through an online platform and pilot cases
- Horizon Europe Hydrogen Valleys calls: to build regional eco-systems on H2
- Alternative fuel facility: to invest in H2 infrastructures along Alpine corridors

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

The AG4 main consumer-friendly interface is called the "Alpine Platform of Knowledge for Mobility and Transport". As in the previous period, it serves as an interactive communication tool to be continually updated with information about the activities and projects of the AG4. It contains information on indicators like "road traffic flows", "composition vehicle fleet", "rail traffic fluxes", "air pollutant emissions", and "toll prices". Moreover, the Alpine Platform of Knowledge informs about relevant AG4 outputs such as the labelled projects, the ARPAF CrossBorder project, the AG4 Conflict Map and other studies. On the one hand, the aim is to reach a wider public and to draw attention to AG4 activities, on the other hand, to convey certain technical contents for political decision-making and implementation of the Strategy. Strong communication ties also exist with the relevant Interreg projects (Alpine Space, Central Europe) as well as with the transport coordinators of the other EU macro-regional strategies.

Concerning the participation to other initiatives, the AG4 Lead acts as an observer in the Alpine Convention WG Transport by communicating regular updates and paving the way for more effective cooperation. Moreover, several AG4 members are involved in the iMONITRAF! Network. Direct exchange occurs on a regular basis on technical contents.

2. Events

As was the case within the framework of the last two Work Plans, the AG4 will be hosting annual Mobility Conferences under Work Plan 2023-2025, too. Mobility Conferences are planned:
- 01/09/2023 in Lugano, Switzerland,
- May/June 2024 in Bolzano, Italy,
- 2025 in Innsbruck, Austria.

Additional events co-organised by EUSALP AG4 will include:

- EUSALP/Alpine Convention Stakeholder meeting "Accelerating the Electrification of Road Transport in the Alps (AFIR-Cooperation)" in Innsbruck on 12/10/2023
- High-level political conference in cooperation with other MRS in Brussels in 2025

These conferences offer a platform for dissemination and interaction with the wider public, stakeholders, the press and political authorities.

Internally, AG4 organizes three Action Group meetings per year, one online and two physical. Such meetings allow the group members to ensure effective cooperation, to update each other on their ongoing activities, and to deliberate about relevant issues. Non-members are usually welcome to join these meetings, in accordance with the agenda of the meeting.

The AG4 regularly organises workshops, exchange meetings or conferences on certain issues in need of technical know-how and/or input in the form of best practice examples from specific stakeholders (e.g. on energy transition in the transport system). Furthermore, the AG4 is committed to organise and attend cross-cutting meetings as well as to foster cross-MRS cooperation.

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	1
please describe if possible: focus on energy transition in the transport system	
n. cross-border/transnational events	3
please describe if possible: annual EUSALP Mobility Conferences	
n. joint policy recommendations	5
please describe if possible: in particular on energy transition in the transport system	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group)	2
please describe if possible: there is specific objective on transport in the ASP, therefore a maximum of two projects seems realistic	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group)	0
please describe if possible	
n. of papers / research works to be published	1
please describe if possible: focus on energy transition in the transport system	
budget to be raised with European funding	2 Million

please describe if possible: one large scale and one small scale ASP project seems realistic	
other:	0
please describe if possible	

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Workplan 2023-2025

Action Group 5 – Connectivity and accessibility

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

M ountain areas lack connectivity and services compared to more populated areas. The AG5 is committed to bringing the benefits of digitisation to rural and mountain areas, through the dissemination of the Smart Villages approach, dissemination of good practices in the Alpine Space and synergy with other actions. In parallel, the AG5 is emphasising the importance of transnational connectivity in remote areas and the relevance of data through studies that have shown that there is still room for improvement. All results of these activities found their place in the Digital Alps Conference, one of the main events of the Alpine Macro-Regional Strategy which brings together all initiatives and projects dealing with digitalization in the Alps and unleash the potentials of digitalization.

Starting from the policy statements of the Annal Forum 2022, which defined the digitalisation of territories as one of the five relevant topics for the General Assembly, the AG5 has identified the **Digital transition of Alpine territories** as its main priority for 2023-2025. The work of the AG5 will be structured along thematic focus areas. These focus areas are:

- *Digital Transformation of Rural and Mountain Territories.* To countering depopulation, the AG5 aims to mainstream the Smart Villages approach through communication, exchange of good practice, and capacity building actions via the **Smart Alps network**, a network of Smart and Sustainable villages in the Alps, evolving the Smart Villages approach into a Smart and Sustainable Communities approach, including in the SV approach the valorisation of local cultural heritage and environmental sustainability They will also **test the potential of digitalisation** in test areas and explore how **remote working** can help retain young people in rural areas.

- *Future-proof digital infrastructures*. The AG5 will continue to develop this priority, enabling the potentials of rural areas communicating the importance of digital infrastructures for remote areas such as the relevance of **digital infrastructure** for growth, sustainability, and competitiveness of the Alpine region. AG5 wants to **promote a territorial ecosystem approach** with data centres in mountainous areas and advocating for a **network of rural DIHs**.

- *Relevance of data in mountain economy.* The AG5 also aims to encourage the **adoption of Open Data** in the Alpine Space and develop new projects to demonstrate the value of the data and related new technologies (AI, Big Data etc.) in the adaptation to climate change and scarce natural resources (water management).

In addition, through its cross-cutting initiatives as a three main line of intervention, the AG5 wants to highlight **how digitalisation can contribute to people, environment, and economy**, promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region.

All the AG5 initiatives will be spread through the Digital Alps Conference every year in a different alpine country. This will allow to get in touch with more key stakeholders and to increase the visibility.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

AG5 is striving for the digitalisation of the Alps, working to improve the e-connectivity and the accessibility to services of general interest in the Alpine Area.

Therefore, AG5:

1.   constitutes **the focal point for discussion on the potentials of digitalization** in the Alpine area and brings together existing and new strategies and projects on digitalization in a strategic, alpine-wide approach;

2.   gives a **strategic dimension to the digital transformation of rural and mountain territories** with new initiatives, transferable models and their implementation on the policy level and leads an alpine wide discussion on the opportunities offered by the digitalization of the Alps;

3.   gives a **strategic dimension to the relevance of digital infrastructures** for growth, sustainability and competitiveness of the Alpine region;

4.   gives a **strategic dimension to the relevance of data** in the Alps, becoming a key economic and environmental resource in our mountain societies;

5.   encourages the **exchange of experiences in the EUSALP-perimeter** through amongst others the cooperation with various Alpine Space Programme projects, cross-border cooperation projects and stakeholders' networks at European and Alpine level;

6.   coordinates its work with the other Action Groups of EUSALP to develop **common technological solutions based on ICT** for joint initiatives.

AG5 Motto:

> AG5 wants to make the Alps the forerunners of digitalization in Europe

2. Composition and sub-groups

AG5 itself is composed of:

- Carlo Vigna, Leader of AG5, Valle d'Aosta Autonomous Region (IT)
- Members from Ministry for Environment and Agricolture (IT)
- Member from Ministry of Public Administration (SLO)
- Member from Office of Economic Affairs (LI) (pending replacement)
- Member from Office of the Styrian Provincial Government (AT) (pending replacement)
- Member from Bavarian State Ministry of Finance, Regional Development and Home Affairs (DE) (pending replacement)
- Members from Trentino Digitale (IT)

- Member from Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region (IT)
- Members from Association Adrèts (FR)
- Member from ITC Cluster (SLO)
- Member from ANCI Liguria (IT)
- Members from ERSAF (IT)
- Observer from Alpine Space Programme (EU)
- Observer from DG REGIO (EU)
- Observers from DG CNECT (EU)

The work in AG5 during the period 2023 – 2025 will be focused on the main topic of **Digital Transformation of rural and mountain territories** of the Alps. The main events (i.e. the DAC - Digital Alps Conference) and general policy documents are jointly discussed by AG5 Leader with members and receive input from the focal points.

From the period 2020 – 2022, AG5 has changed its working methods by structuring itself in a more flexible organization, focused on Areas of Interest and with a wider stakeholder involvement. This organization will be reproposed and based on "focal points", within a common coordination at the AG5 level, and it will allow to interact with an increased number of networks of stakeholders who can bring issues and solutions within the AG5.

The focal points, that are the main point of reference for networking and activities coordination on a AG5 specific priority, are:

- **Digital Transformation of Rural and Mountain Territories**, led by Autonomous Region of Valle d'Aosta. Building on the Smart Villages experience, this focal point will go beyond this successful approach by providing communities with methodologies and tools for digital transformation, also through the results that the AG5 Flagship initiative will produce.
- **Future-proof digital infrastructures**, led by Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. It is dealing with all aspects concerning strategies about digital infrastructures and general opportunities/issues of digitalisation (i.e. Cross-border connectivity, Data infrastructures and Distributed facilities).
- **Relevance of data in mountain economy**, led by ITC - Innovation Technology Cluster (SLO). This focal point will explore the potential of open data, AI and new technologies for the Alpine economy and environment.
-

AG5 in numbers:

- 1 leader
- 14 members
- 3 focal points on :
  – Digital Transformation of Rural and Mountain Territories
  – Future-proof Digital Infrastructures
  – Relevance of Data in Mountain Economy

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

The AG5 wants to involve as many stakeholders as possible in its activities. For this reason, it decided to change its internal organisation and identify focal points to get in touch with networks of stakeholders outside AG5. This organisation makes it possible to exchange ideas and possible project initiatives with a larger number of stakeholders than in the past.
To reach as many stakeholders as possible, AG5 will be supported by the TSS by the Stakeholder Engagement Plan that will be developed.
The main target groups that the AG5 aims to reach are:

- Local public authorities: to share regularly relevant information for knowledge implementation and exchange, to raise awareness of its role in the smart transition, to discover and test digital tools, to test innovative and smart solutions, to actively participate in the network of smart Alpine communities, to participate to the DAC.

- Regional and national public authorities: to share regularly relevant information for knowledge implementation and exchange, to discover and test digital tools, to test innovative and smart solutions, to develop new policies on smart transition, to stimulate the participation of local authority and citizens in the network of smart Alpine communities, to strengthen relations with EUSALP and other European strategies dedicated to rural areas, to participate to the DAC.

SMEs: to share regularly relevant information for knowledge implementation and exchange, to invite and cooperate in existing and new tools, to inform about the activities in the pilot areas and to test innovative and smart solutions, to participate to the DAC.

- Higher education and research and Education institutions: to share regularly relevant information for knowledge implementation and exchange, to invite and cooperate in existing and new tools, to inform about the activities in the pilot areas and to test innovative and smart solutions, to participate to the DAC.
- Infrastructure and (public) Service Provider: to invite and cooperate in existing and new tools and to test innovative and smart solutions in test areas, to participate to the DAC.
- Interest groups. Incl. NGOs: to share regularly relevant information for knowledge implementation and exchange, to invite for testing and using existing and new tools, to inform about the activities in the pilot areas, to participate to the DAC.
- General public: to share regularly relevant information for knowledge implementation and exchange, to invite for using existing and new tools, to inform about the activities in the pilot areas and to discover smart transition good practices in the Alpine Space, to participate to the DAC.

AG5 stakeholders:

- Local public authorities
- Regional and National public authorities
- SMEs
- Higher education and research and Education institutions
- Infrastructure and (public) Service Provider
- Interest groups. Incl. NGOs
- General public

4. The role of the Youth Council

The AG5 strongly believes in involving young people in its activities. Therefore, since the first edition of the DAC in 2021, it has involved young people from the Alps to understand their needs and expectations related to the topic of digitisation.
In the DAC 2021 a young mayor of the Alps and a representative of the Youth Parliament to the Alpine Convention (YPAC) were invited to speak during the conference, while in the DAC 2022 a representative of the EUSALP Youth Council (YC) and one of the YPAC were able to dialogue with political representatives on policy options to unleash the potentials of digitisation.

In the period from 2023 to 2025, the AG5 wants to continue its activities to involve young people and to increase the number of opportunities for discussion and exchange of ideas.
Youth involvement will therefore take the form of specific activities within the AG5 flagship initiative, involvement of YC in AG5 meetings on specific topics, participation in the DAC and inclusion in cross-cutting initiatives. Moreover, the Regional Stakeholders Groups within the test areas will include a least one youth to have his visions, ideas and perspective on the themes of the Digital transition of Alpine territories.

Youth involvement:

- specific activities within the AG5 flagship initiative
- involvement of YC in AG5 meetings
- participation in the DAC and inclusion in cross-cutting initiatives

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

During the 2020-2022 period, the AG5 met various key achievements:

The AG5 led the **Smart Villages cross-sectoral strategic initiative** with AG1, AG3, AG4, AG9 based on the results of the Alpine Space Programme SmartVillages project. The initiative established an overview of existing Smart Villages and smart regions initiatives in the Alpine area and related financial support mechanisms. The studies were published on the EUSALP website, and communication activities were carried out through dedicated workshops during DAC, a Roadshow in Trieste, studies, brochures, and promotional materials. The **Smart Alps network** was launched to spread the Smart Villages approach and increase the capacity building of small communities. The network will be financed and strengthened through the SmartCommUnity project. The AG5 also carried out dissemination activities to the Financial Dialogue Network to encourage **the embedding of the Smart Villages approach** within the Programmes and facilitate access to financial resources for rural and mountain areas. Finally, **policy recommendations** were inserted into the policy cycle to discuss them with relevant stakeholders in the Alpine area.

The Alpine Region is a challenging environment for **digital infrastructures**, and the AG5 has developed a **roadmap** to identify key elements for future-proofing them.

The AG5 also developed a **Roadmap and action plan for Open Data** (OD) to raise awareness of the importance of data in the Alps and **a study on potentials of OD** for the Alpine Space within the framework of the EUSALP Strategy.

To continue the dialogue on **cross-border mobility**, AG4 and AG5 integrated the findings into the **policy cycle**.

The AG5 published a **Thesis paper on Best practices on E-Health and Best practices on 5G and SGI**.

AG5 in collaboration with AG2 and AG3 developed the **project "SmartSMEs"** to analyse the potentials of **digitalisation for SMEs in the natural fibre-based value chains**.

Finally, **policies** relevant to these topics **were included in the policy cycle** to discuss them with all relevant stakeholders in the Alpine area

AG5 Key Achievements 2020-2022:

Priority	Key Achievements
Smart Villages cross-sectoral strategic initiative	- Overview of existing Smart Villages and smart regions initiatives in the Alpine area and related financial support mechanisms - Dissemination activities during DACs with dedicated workshops - Roadshow in Trieste during DAC 2022 - SV studies on EUSALP website - Launch of Smart Alps network - Embedding of SV approach within FDN - Policy recommendations
Digital infrastructures	- Roadmap to identify key elements for future-proofing digital infrastructures - Policy recommendations
Open data	- Study on potentials of Open Data for the Alpine Space within the framework of the EUSALP Strategy - Roadmap on Open Data - Action plan on Open Data - Policy recommendations
Cross-border mobility	- Installation of a new Subgroup within AG4 - Integration of the findings into the policy cycle
Services of General Interest	- Publication of a Thesis paper on SGI - Publication of Best practices on E-Health - Publication of Best practices on 5G and SGI
Smart SMEs	ARPAF Smart SMEs project with AG2 and AG3. Digitalization of natural fiber-based value chains SMEs: - collection of existing knowledge on digitisation to assess the level of digitisation of SMEs and identify problems hindering the implementation of digitisation process - collection of best practices and identification of new indicators for measuring the maturity level of digitalization in selected value chains - desk research to identify existing digital tools suitable for SMEs - action plan with a list of intervention fields, actions, timeline, stakeholders identification and risk assessment

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities
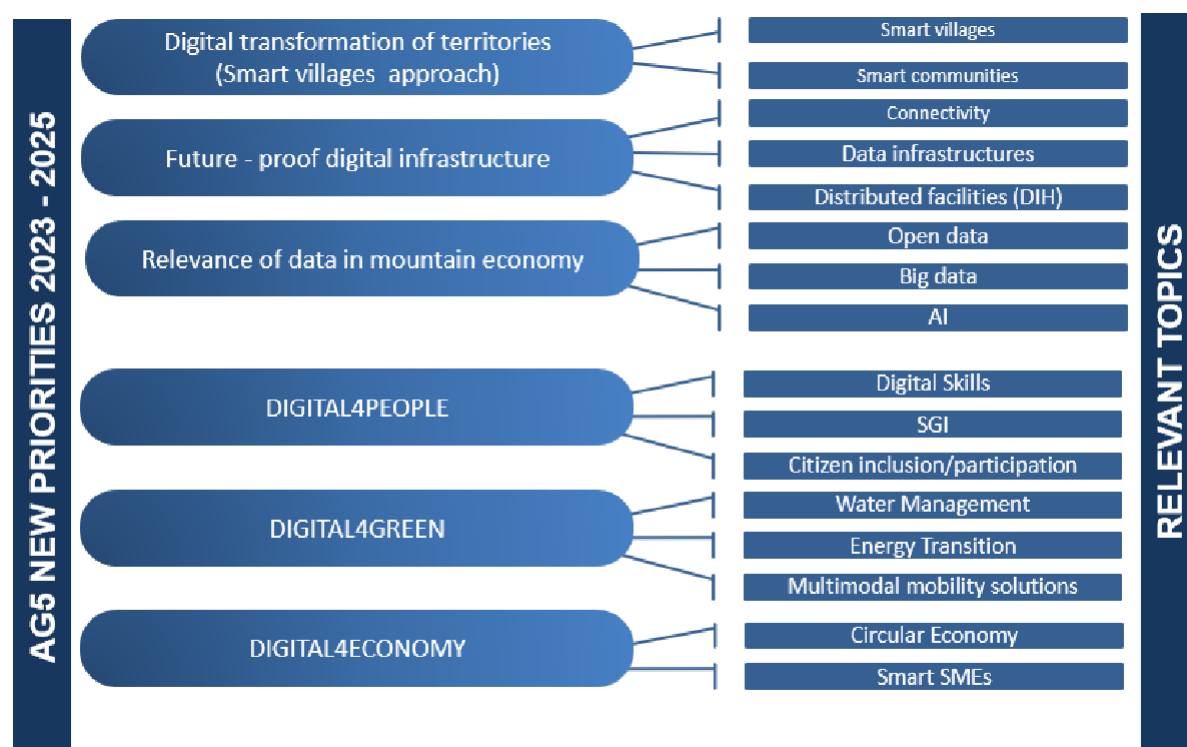
The AG5 identified the **Digital transition of the Alpine territories** as the main priority for 2023-2025.

The table below outlines initiatives, priorities and activities for promoting digital transition in the Alpine region. These include the digital transformation of Alpine territories, relevance of digital infrastructure for growth and sustainability, relevance of data in the mountain economy, promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players, facilitating circular economy, fast-tracking energy transition, and promoting sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, in particular water management. Activities include exchanging good practices, developing policies, studying potentials of digitalisation, and capitalizing results from relevant projects. Collaborative events such as conferences are also important for sharing best practices and exploring funding opportunities.

AG5 Priorities 2023-2025:

Initiative	Priority/Relevant Topics	Activities
Disseminate and evolve Smart Villages approach	• Digital Transformation of Territories (Smart Villages, Smart Communities)	- develop AG5 Flagship initiative on Smart Communities - exchange of best practices and capacity building actions via the Smart Alps network - capitalise results from others relevant projects - sharing of best practices during DAC workshops - develop a joint political declaration on the relevance of Digital transformation of territories and the approach to be endorsed
Communicate the importance of digital infrastructures also in remote areas	• Future-proof Digital Infrastructures (Connectivity, Data Infrastructures, Distributed facilities)	- promote a territorial ecosystem approach for data infrastructures - capitalise results from relevant projects - sharing of best practices during DAC workshops or during other events
Foster the relevance of Data in mountain economy	• Relevance of Data in mountain economy (Open data, Big data, AI)	- sharing of best practices during DAC workshops - explore data relevance in main priorities (e.g. satellite data for water management) - capitalise results from relevant projects - dissemination during other events
Embedding of AG5 priorities into relevant programmes	• Digital Transformation of Territories • Future-proof Digital Infrastructures • Relevance of Data in mountain economy	- definition of policies - embedding of policies within FDN - contribute to the overall embedding process of EUSALP

The horizontal priorities to which digitisation can contribute (Digital4People, Digital4Green, Digital4Economy) are addressed by cross-cutting priorities in collaboration with other AGs and can be further enhanced by specific AG5 activities during the workplan programming period.

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

Since the beginning of its activities, AG5 has explored how new technologies and digital can support the development and attractiveness of remote and rural areas. Through the Smart Villages approach and the subsequent SmartVillages project of the Alpine Space Programme, a common vision has been developed on how a digitally supported participatory approach can be instrumental in revitalising remote areas facing demographic decline, testing the approach in various test areas and defining digital tools and platforms that can support other territories that want to undertake a digital transformation process.

To foster the smart and sustainable transition of territories and on the basis of the successful Smart Villages initiative, AG5 promoted the emergence of a new concept, the **Smart Communities,** evolving the Smart Villages approach into a Smart and Sustainable Communities approach, including in the Smat Villages the valorisation of local cultural heritage and environmental sustainability.

By the new **AG5 flagship initiative on Smart Communities**, the most relevant impact that will be achieved will be to:

- Create a common definition of the Smart Community concept across alpine territories and generations
- Counter the depopulation of mountain and rural areas using digitalisation for their development
- Preserve a local identity that is shared by old and new generations
- Support a common smart and sustainable transition of mountain and rural areas
- Create a network of Alpine villages that is a reference point and leads to a modern vision of the Alps

Smart communities are communities of people, in mountain or rural areas, that are proud and aware of their identity, their territory, their craftsmanship, their products and their close-knit social fabric, and that want to become active players in determining their own future, owning and driving the changes that the future, and any digital transition, may entail. Smart communities are open to innovate, to learn and to inspire, and to work holistically towards smart and sustainable rural and mountain areas, that are lively and lived, and that can be or become attractive to live and work for all age groups.

Under the strategic initiative of digital transformation and to further develop and expand the Smart Communities concept, the AG5 initiated several initiatives such as the creation and coordination of a specific cross-cutting priority on "promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region", the launch of a network of Alpine Smart Villages and, in particular, starting the project SmartCommUnity with several members of the Action Group 5 and 9 as active partners.
Through the results of the SmartCommUnity project, starting from data and knowledge gathered on the field from the 12 test areas, the foundations will be laid for a more intense, engaging and strategic-political oriented initiative that can be capitalised over time by a joint

declaration on the relevance of digital transformation of territories, going further and bringing the benefit of digital transformation to all rural and mountain areas of EUSALP interested in joining the process.

By **Smart Communities approach,** AG5 aims to create a transnational community aimed at changing both habits and perceptions of smart rural and mountain areas, promoting a sense of a structured Alpine community with common challenges and visions.

In particular, through the SmartCommUnity project, the project partners aim to go beyond the Smart Villages approach and create an informal network of Alpine villages and regions, the Smart Alps network, coordinated by local political representatives of municipalities and regions that aims to:
- disseminate the Smart and Sustainable Communities approach and promote the intelligent transformation of mountain and rural areas in the Alpine space
- encourage the exchange of information and experience between Smart Villages and Smart Regions in the Alpine region
- convey a modern image of mountain and rural areas
- promote contacts with similar networks and initiatives for mountain and rural areas throughout Europe

The Smart Alps network, chaired by the Smart Alps committee composed of mayors from the Alpine area of EUSALP, was established as the core of the Test Areas of the previous SmartVillages project and will later expand with the Test Areas of the SmartCommUnity project with the ambition of enlarge the network with other communities.

Smart Alps activities include facilitating the capacity building of rural areas, promote existing digital tools and solutions and develop new innovative and interactive digital tools for local communities.

By working closely with all Test Areas at the EUSALP level and testing innovative solutions for the smart transition, other partner areas and Alpine regions will be inspired to follow suit. With the goal of making the Smart Alps network self-sustainable, the Smart Alps committee, with the support of AG5, will consider how to ensure the continuity of the network, e.g. by introducing membership fees or other forms of financing to guarantee its sustainability beyond the end of the SmartCommUnity project.

SmartCommUnity started in November 2022 and will end in October 2025 involving partners from all over the Alps. The main timeline for the initiative is the following:
- 2023: put the partners to work together on pilot areas,
- 2024: bring onboard to the Smart Alps network the communities from pilot areas,
- 2025: further enlarge the network with other communities.

Smart Communities in a nutshell:

A transnational community

Through various synergic actions, including the cross-cutting priority on digital, the Smart Alps alpine village network and the SmartCommUnity project, the aim is to bring the benefit of digital transformation to all rural and mountain areas of EUSALP interested in joining the process, creating a transnational community to change both the practices and perceptions of smart rural and mountain areas, fostering a sense of a connected Alpine community with common challanges and visions.

Digital tools and innovative solutions

The 12 project partners of SmartCommUnity will facilitate capacity building of rural and mountain areas, promote existing digital tools and solutions and develop innovative and interactive digital tools.

Closely work with all Test Areas at EUSALP level

Experiment innovative solutions for the smart transition of the test areas and inspire additional areas in the partner and other Alpine regions to follow suit.

The Smart Communities flagship initiative in particular aims to :
- Create a common definition of the Smart Community concept across alpine territories and generations
- Counter the depopulation of mountain and rural areas using digitalisation for their development
- Preserve a local identity that is shared by old and new generations
- Support a common smart and sustainable transition of mountain and rural areas
- Create a network of Alpine villages that is a reference point and leads to a modern vision of the Alps

3. Cross-cutting priorities

AG5, in order to think of the cross-cutting priority initiative, started from the European Digital Strategy that will make in Alpine region the digital transformation that everyone is experiencing in their lives work for people, businesses and the planet, in line with EU values. It's based on 3 streams of action:
- Technology that works for people,
- A fair and competitive digital economy,
- An open, democratic and sustainable society

The full transition to the digital age we are all experiencing plays a key role for the future development and resilience of the Alpine territories and this transformation need to be fair, sustainable and competitive.

For this reason, AG5, in collaboration with AG1, AG2, AG3 and AG9, thought of developing a cross-cutting priority (CCP) on "**promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region**". This initiative may be enriched by the other AGs that wish to participate in this CCP.

The cross-cutting priority aims to disseminate and support networking on the main priorities for digital transition of Alpine territories, such as the development of local communities and economic actors, through 5 main pillars:

- smart and sustainable communities
- key enabling technologies (KET) for local economic players
- data economy enabled by data spaces and open platforms
- co-working, remote working and learning
- digital skills and digital learning

The main objectives of the cross-cutting priority are to:

- collect and disseminate best practices and tools on smart and sustainable communities to enable mountain communities to become smart and sustainable themselves. This will be achieved through the AG5 flagship initiative SmartCommUnity and other related initiatives.
- investigate how to unleash the potentials of the data and data economy through Alpine data spaces (and other KETs) and open platforms catalogue on key EUSALP priorities. This will be achieved through a study on data spaces and related key platforms useful for EUSALP and for local economic players and by contributions from other relevant projects as Next Gen. EU Agritech Project and Cervino. A focus will also be on sharing satellite data for climate adaptation policies.support the adoption of co-working and remote working, training and learning practices in inner areas, and foster digital skills and digital learning practices. The network of VET schools in the Alps (i.e. AG3 flagship initiative) will contribute to the achievement of these objectives.

Working together, the AGs will promote new methodologies and tools to fully exploit the benefits of digitisation.

The AG5, through the participation of its members, will also be active in the other cross-cutting priorities contributing:

- to explore how digitalisation can facilitate the circular economy in short supply chain,
- support the transition to H2 through digital technology
- promote a sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially on smart water management.

These initiatives are fully coherent with the AG5 Priorities 2023-2025, in particular with the so-called DIGITAL4ECONOMY, DIGITAL4PEOPLE AND DIGITAL4GREEN priorities.

AG5 cross-cutting priorities:

CC Priority	Relevant Topics	Activities
Promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region (Lead by AG5)	Tools for local communities	- collect and diffuse best practices and tools on smart and sustainable communities
	Relevant Data spaces and open platforms for EUSALP	- study on the potentials of data spaces in the context of alpine priorities (e.g. water, wood, etc) and open platforms catalogue on key EUSALP priorities
	Coworking and remote working	- support the adoption of coworking and remote working, training and learning for peripheral areas
	Digital skills and digital learning practices	- foster the acquisition of digital skills in educational and professional contexts as well as the adoption/diffusion of digital learning practices
Facilitating circular economy in short supply chains	Contribution of digitisation to the circular economy	- Promote the use of digitisation in the circular economy by dedicated workshop during DAC
Fast-tracking Energy transition for a Carbon Neutral Alpine Region	Exploring how digitalisation can support the transition to H2	- Participation to the H2 focus group - Presentation of ideas and good practices
Promoting a sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water	Contribution of the digitisation in water management	- Participation to the water task force - Presentation of ideas and good practices

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

Through the Support EUSALP project and the establishment of the Technical Support Structure (TSS), communication activities will be developed consistently and each AG will benefit from a dedicated team. AG5 will therefore contribute to **common communication activities** under the TSS umbrella.

Moreover, the AG5 will develop its communication activities **through three main channels: the new EUSALP website**, updating the Action Group 5 page and related content; **the LinkedIn channel**, disseminating relevant content and getting in touch with interested stakeholders; **the content dissemination activities**, participating in project events and stakeholder networks (i.e. BCO networks).

As a main communication activity, AG5 will continue to organise the **Digital Alps Conference (DAC).**

Thanks to the **Smart Alps network**, the AG5 will also get in touch with remote areas that need capacity building to foster the digital transformation of territories and the spread of the Smart Villages approach.

AG5 communication channels:

- EUSALP website
- LinkedIn channel
- Events in stakeholder networks

2. Events

The AG5 will continue to organise the **Digital Alps Conference as the main communication event** of the topics of interest on digitalisation.

The Digital Alps Conference is a major event of EUSALP. The event is promoted by Action Group 5 with the aim to bring together all initiatives and projects dealing with digitalization in the Alps and to unleash the potentials of digitalization. The conference is organized on two days, presenting both plenary sessions and thematic workshops with participation of regional institutions and European Commission (see additional information on https://digitalalps.eu/). The aim of the AG5 is to organise the conference in the country that will hold the annual EUSALP Presidency (2023 Switzerland, 2024 Slovenia, 2025 Austria). This will allow to get in touch with more key stakeholders and to increase the visibility. If this is not possible, the AG5 will look for other options to hold the Digital Alps Conference (other host countries or online). In the year 2022, the Conference was organized together with AG3 in Trieste (Italy) within the EUSALP Italian Presidency Program.

Target public for the Digital Alps Conference are:
- representatives from EUSALP and the Alpine Space Programme
- representative from public authorities and service providers dealing with digitalization
- representatives from existing networks dealing with digitalization in the Alpine area (BCO Network, S3 Strategies, Smart Alps Network etc.) and key stakeholders
- general public interested in digitalization

In addition to the Digital Alps Conference, the AG5 will participate in various workshops and events of international relevance to showcase the results of the Action Group's work.

A partial list of these events includes those organised by the EU Macro-regional week, those of Euromontana, the Broadband Competence Offices network and the European Week of Regions.

Besides participating in these international outreach events, the AG5 will continue to offer support for the participation of all its members in other specific events to further disseminate issues relevant to the digital transformation of the Alps.

AG5 events:

Digital Alps Conference
Digital Alps Conference, organised annually by Action Group 5, aims to bring together different digitalisation initiatives and projects in the Alps to unleash their potential.

Relevant Digital-related Events
Organise/contribute to workshops on the digital aspect of specific topics (circular economy, energy transition, etc.).

Specific Dissemination events
Participation of AG5 members in specific dissemination events relevant to the digital transformation of the Alps

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

AG5 aims to continue promoting the digital transformation of the Alpine region through various initiatives such as Smart Community, Smart Villages, and exchanging best practices with the Financial Dialogue Network. They plan to test the development opportunities of Alpine territories sustained by the digitalisation in some test areas. They also want to explore the possibilities of connectivity in inaccessible areas and establish an ecosystemic approach of local data infrastructures. AG5 aims to promote the use of open data and help manage the climate impact on the region, exploring the potential of frontier technologies such as AI. They will also contribute on facilitating the circular economy, fast-tracking energy transition, and

promoting sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, in particular water management. Lastly, they will collaborate with other AGs to disseminate and support networking on priorities for digital transition of Alpine territories.

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	1
A proposal for a joint political declaration will be developed by the end of the Support EUSALP project (2025) on the relevance of Digital transformation of territories and the approach to be endorsed	
n. cross-border/transnational events	3
Organization of an annual relevant event on digital topics	
n. joint policy recommendation	1
A set of policies recommendations will be elaborated on experiences on the territories or specific sectoral studies	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group)	3
Possible projects will be presented for the digital transformation of territories, the improvement of climate change planning tools and water management, the contribution to the circular economy or within the other AG5 priorities	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group)	1
A possible project idea on remote working for cross-border areas or within the other AG5 priorities will be submitted to a transnational cooperation programme	
n. of papers / research works to be published	1
AG5 will explore through dedicated studies relevant topics such as AI for local economic players of the Alps, potentials of data spaces in the context of alpine priorities, innovative distributed facilities for multi-service delivery or dissemination of digital skills in remote areas	
other: Stakeholders network supported	1
AG5 will support the development of a network of Alpine Smart Communities that can mainstream the Smart Villages approach through communication, exchange of good practice and capacity building actions	

Workplan 2023-2025

Action group 6 – Resources

Interreg
Alpine Space

Co-funded by
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Support EUSALP

EUSALP
EU STRATEGY FOR
THE ALPINE REGION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the third Thematic Policy Area "Environment and Energy" of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) Action Group 6 (AG6) focuses on the most important challenges and opportunities concerning natural and cultural resources including water. The Alpine region is characterised by a particular wealth of these natural and cultural resources, such as the rich biodiversity of the mountainous habitats and the cultural diversity, which are assets of a high-quality living area. The resources of the Alpine region are widely used and there is strong competition in particular for land and water for several purposes, including energy, households, tourism, agriculture, forestry and industry. Against this background, EUSALP AG6 is aiming to provide sustainable and balanced models of resource management and production to enable also future generations to enjoy the unique living space of the Alps. EUSALP Action Group 6 addresses this objective towards a more inclusive environmental framework and renewable energy solutions as well as the need for sustainable development and the preservation of the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Alpine Region.

Based on the current needs concerning the Alpine Region and the evaluation of the achievements of the previous AG6 Work Plan 2020 - 2022, AG6 members have collectively identified priority topics for 2023 - 2025. In this respect EUSALP Action Group 6 aims to realise its objectives through a series of activities in the following **four main thematic clusters**: water, forestry and agriculture, soil and biodiversity, as well as cultural heritage.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group 6 (AG6)

The Alpine Region has outstanding natural and cultural resources. The ways in which these resources have been transformed into economic assets have varied through history and had distinctive effects both on the Alpine environment and on the resources itself. There are various conflicts of interest between the elements to protect natural resources and their economic use. The overall mission of Action Group 6 is to preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources in the Alpine Region. AG6 aims to provide valuable contributions to an Alpine strategic framework that allows the establishment of sustainable and balanced models of resource management and production. Thus, Action Group 6 aims at preserving and sustainably valorising the Alpine natural and cultural heritage to also enable future generations to enjoy the unique living space of the Alps. Therefore, the motto of EUSALP AG6 remains *"With Alpine heritage today for a sustainable, resilient and innovative tomorrow"*.

2. Composition and sub-groups

Action Group 6 is co-led by the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention and the Region of Carinthia in Austria. The members of AG6 come from national and regional administrations, municipality associations, NGOs and research institutions from Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, and Switzerland. These members contribute with their various thematic expertise to the work of AG6. Additional members are very welcome to increase the expertise within and the representativeness of AG6.

AG6 will apply a flexible mode of operation without defining fixed sub-groups responsible for implementing specific parts of the work plan. For the single activities AG6 members commit themselves to work together as coordinating members or supporting members.

AG6 applies the core set of the rules of procedure for the Action Groups as decided by the EUSALP Executive Board. As the other provisions can be adapted in every respect to the individual needs, AG6 adopted the whole set of the rules of procedure and reserved its right to modify the non-compulsory ones, if the need arises. In daily work and as far as a formal voting can be avoided all AG6 members are treated as equals and are called upon to contribute to the activities to the best of their ability. AG6 members and further stakeholders get involved around pre-defined topics of the work plan. Among the AG6 members the greatest possible consensus is sought to achieve the best possible acceptance of the decisions taken. AG6 meetings can be carried out in different formats, including physical, hybrid and virtual meetings, as required.

AG6 will align all activities to its mission and motto. The EUSALP Action Plan serves as a guideline for tackling the challenges of the Alpine Region in the policy areas dealt with by AG6. AG6 strives to identify and generate projects linked to its field of action as defined in this work plan. For this purpose, AG6 capitalizes the results of and coordinate its activities with on-going and planned projects on European, national, and regional levels.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

Relevant stakeholders and experts get involved in the activities of AG6 as appropriate. A continuous flow of information between the AG6 members and the exchange with other relevant EUSALP Action Groups as well as with the other EUSALP governance levels, with the aim to follow a cross sectoral approach, ensures not only transparency but also ownership. These objectives are also served by regular updates of AG6 on current developments in the EUSALP process and on other pertinent Alpine processes and by using synergies with the Thematic Working Bodies of the Alpine Convention relevant for the AG6 topics.

AG6 members in advisory role also include NGOs, umbrella organizations and associations representing a certain group of stakeholders or the civil society. Representatives of the civil society provide substantial contributions to the work of EUSALP AG6 in all its thematic fields. They are welcome to participate in AG6 meetings and their participation is facilitated as far as possible.

In particular AG6 will possibly involve the following stakeholders and target groups:
- Civil society for further exchange, as audience for events and communication, and as possible project partners
- EUSALP Youth Council as AG6 members and participants in ASP projects
- Higher education and research institutions as AG6 members, participants in projects, and possible project partners
- SMEs as audience for events and communication
- Interest groups including NGOs as AG6 members
- Business support organisations as AG6 members
- Alpine Convention Thematic Working Bodies for further exchange and as audience for events and communication
- National, regional and local public authorities as AG6 members and as partners in projects
- Associations as AG6 members and as partners in projects
- Infrastructure and public service providers for further exchange and as audience for events and communication
- International organisation under international law for further exchange and as audience for events and communication
- Others

4. The role of the Youth Council

The Youth Council has become an important voice in developing the activities of all EUSALP Action Groups. A continuous flow of information between the AG6 members and the EUSALP Youth Council has been already established. AG6 collaborates with the EUSALP Youth Council and regularly invites their representatives to AG6 meetings and other events. This exchange also includes bilateral communication with the Youth Council. AG6 is committed to further engage the EUSALP Youth Council in all AG6 activities to take up specific considerations and "young" viewpoints from the younger generation and to ensure their involvement in the decision-making process. AG6 is dedicated to consult the EUSALP Youth Council on initiating projects as well as the implementation of the strategy. Moreover, AG6 actively involves the Youth Council in events organised by AG6 such as Action Group 6 meetings, public conferences, workshops, and further sessions.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

In the period from 2020 to 2022 EUSALP Action Group 6 especially focused its work on the overarching topic "co-operating for landscapes in times of climate change" and carried out a considerable number of corresponding activities. Landscape is a basic component of the natural and cultural heritage and an important part of the quality of life for people in the Alpine Region. Humans have shaped the landscapes of the Alpine Region over centuries with farming and cultural practices as well as place-specific know-how. Developments in agriculture, forestry, industry, spatial planning, transport, infrastructure, tourism as well as in the global economy are in many aspects accelerating the transformation of Alpine landscapes. AG6 has cared about this resource by contributing to a general framework, in which the quality and diversity of Alpine landscapes can be safeguarded and innovated through international cooperation towards protection and sustainable management.

In accordance with the "Protocol on Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development" of the Alpine Convention, the harmonisation of economic interests with the need to protect the environment should be the core aim of planning activities in the Alpine Region. AG6 contributed substantially to the AlpGov2 strategic priority policy area "Spatial planning" also by enabling a regular exchange of information with the Thematic Working Body "Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development" of the Alpine Convention. In this respect, AG6 particularly has supported safeguarding and managing the diversity of natural and rural sites, productive landscapes, traditional practices, cultural heritage, and also urban locations of value. In this connection, the pertinent provisions of the Protocols of the Alpine Convention on mountain farming, mountain forests, nature protection and landscape conservation, on tourism and on soil conservation have provided additional orientation for the activities of AG6.

To strengthen the value of cultural landscapes in times of the ongoing climate crisis and to provide a concrete follow-up to the "EUSALP Political Declaration on Sustainable Land Use and Soil Protection" elaborated in 2018, AG6 commissioned a study on preservation and valorisation of the diversity of Alpine natural and cultural landscapes in times of climate crisis. Apart from that AG6 carried out a mapping of natural and cultural landscapes and organized the successful EUSALP Landscape conference back-to-back with a Road Show Stop on spatial planning focusing on land use conflicts related to renewable energy production at EURAC in Bolzano/Bozen.

Furthermore, AG6 successfully organized the second international conference "Territorial Brands in the Alpine Region" with more than 90 practitioners of the agri-food sector and experts on local development focusing on small scale territorial brands in the Alps. During the pandemic various participants met online to discuss different ways of creating a successful territorial brand and the framework conditions underpinning such processes. Furthermore, the impact of a successful territorial brand on the sustainable development of the corresponding territory was discussed. A transnational approach was adopted to identify best practices and replicable development paths for the safeguarding and commercial valorisation of existing knowhow. It has been a key aim to link the different geographical units of EUSALP to concentrate mountain and rural potentials, assets, and initiatives and to better benefit from urban markets and consumers in particular in the pre-alpine areas. This approach also fosters the emergence of an Alpine identity based on the common cultural values expressed in food heritage, valorising Alpine heritage, and enhancing protection and conservation of the Alpine area.

AG6 also contributed to relaunch the EUSALP Task Force on Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber (TF-MFSUT) coordinated by two AG6 members and involving members of AGs 2, 7, 8 and 9. The activities to implement the mandate of the TF-MFSUT included among other things a statement of the Action Groups involved to the consultation-process for the new "EU Forest Strategy", the organisation of workshops at the EUSALP Annual Fora and a continued input to the development of the document of the French EUSALP Presidency on "Forests and multifunctionality: nature-based solutions as tools for the resilience of alpine territories". Moreover, the TF-MFSUT held many workshops and seminars such as "Short Forest-Timber Value Chains in Climate Change and Geo-Political Crises" at the Annual Forum 2022 in Trento and contributed to many projects such as for example the ARPAFII project "REDIAFOR" and the Alpine Space project "ALPTREES".

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

In the period 2023-2025 EUSALP Action Group 6 continues to address a more sustainable environmental framework as well as the need for sustainable development and the preservation of the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Alpine Region. Within this general orientation and based on the current needs of the Alpine Region as well as on the evaluation of the achievements of the previous AG6 Work Plan 2020 - 2022, AG6 members have collectively identified priority topics for 2023 - 2025. In this respect EUSALP Action Group 6 aims to realise its objectives through a series of activities in the following **four main thematic clusters**: water, forestry and agriculture, soil and biodiversity, as well as cultural heritage. The key issues and activities on which AG6 will work in this period are based on these identified thematic clusters.

The key issues and activities of AG6 will most likely include the following:

Water:

- Establish an EUSALP Task-Force Water Transition dealing with a smart and sound management of water resources in times of the ongoing climate crisis (one of the four cross-cutting priorities of EUSALP)

- Water security in EUSALP in a changing environment – water scarcity: Development of a policy brief on Alpine permafrost dependant water resources and of guidelines on the qualitative monitoring of these water resources (coordinated by Edmund Mach Foundation, Italy)

- Sharing of river contract processes as an instrument to implement the European Water Framework Directive and the relevant political-legal framework of the non-EU Member States of the Alpine Region; contribution to three international workshops: one in 2024 and two in 2025 (coordinated by ERSAF, Italy)

Forestry and Agriculture:

- Coordination of and contribution to the activities of the TF-MFSUT (Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber) as the flagship initiative of AG6 (coordinated by Fondazione Edmund Mach and EURAC Research, Italy)

- Contribution to the Forest EcoValue ASP classic project and establish links to forest networks (coordinated by INRAE, France)

- Gathering and exchanging good practices on the recovery and innovation of traditional agricultural techniques and the dynamic management of Alpine biodiversity (including propagation of regional wildflowers, shrubs, and trees) (coordinated by Rete Semi Rurali, Italy)

- Exchange on transhumance and pastoralism in the EUSALP Region (coordinated by AG6 Lead)

Soil and Biodiversity:

- Land recycling and unsealing in the Alpine region: unsealing of sealed surfaces by using sealed/built/developed areas, awareness-raising event with political debates on land use/protection with involvement of citizens (coordinated by AG6 Lead and supported by Lower Austria, Austria and Plattform Land, Italy)

- Contribution to the international workshop of the Life project "IP GESTIRE 2020" in October 2023 to share its results in the framework of EU's biodiversity strategy for 2030 and to also consider the relevant political-legal framework of the non-EU Member States of the Alpine Region in this respect (coordinated by ERSAF, Italy)

Cultural Heritage:

- Contribution to the ASP classic project AlpTextyles (coordinated by Polo Poschiavo, Switzerland)

- Continuation of exploration of feasibility of GIAHS (Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems) in the EUSALP area (coordinated by Polo Poschiavo, Switzerland)

- Supporting the UNESCO Inscription of Alpine Food Heritage in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices for Intangible Cultural Heritage (coordinated by Regione Lombardia, Italy)

- AG6 public events, such as the Second EUSALP Landscape Conference in 2024 to showcase the work of the AG6 members for example on the topic of soil

All activities and their timing outlined in this work program are subject to possible changes.

The following options for financing the activities might be available:

For events, conferences, meetings, workshops, networking activities:
Support EUSALP project within the limits of the budget (incubator function), sponsoring by AG6 members or others, synergies with existing already financed events by AG6 members or others, synergies with already financed projects, such as AlpTextyles (Alpine Space) as well as IP GESTIRE 2020 (LIFE) or Rock-me (Euregio Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino)

During the implementation of this work plan, AG6 will continue its embedding efforts and also explore the use of other funding sources such as INTERREG cross-border cooperation programmes but also programmes managed directly by the EC and regional or national funds.

2. Strategic flagship initiative

For the period 2023-2025 AG6 has identified the flagship initiative to further coordinate and enhance the contribution to the activities of the EUSALP Task Force on Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber (TF-MFSUT). The EUSALP Task Force on Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber plans to further involve members of EUSALP AG2, AG7, AG8 and AG9 with a focus on climate change impacts on forests and along its different value chains.

One of the main issues addressed by the TF-MFSUT are the governance mechanisms that would allow to increase the resilience of mountain forests, in particular regarding the impacts of climate change. With the establishment of the TF-MFSUT in 2019, an integrated and cross-sectorial perspective has been initiated enabling future-oriented and innovative approaches for the timber and non- timber forest value chains. Its objective is to raise awareness and manage conflicts of interest in the context of the multifunctionality of EUSALP forests. Beyond conflicting issues, the idea is to create a bridge between the different thematic approaches and to identify the common denominator(s) capable of meeting shared challenges and coordinated actions in favour of greater territorial resilience in the broadest sense. The TF-MFSUT builds on the implemented REDIAFOR project to meet these objectives and aims to further contribute to the "EU Forest Strategy".

Furthermore, the TF-MFSUT continues to promote the implementation of nature-based solutions as an effective way to address challenges of preserving biodiversity, protecting against natural hazards, and maintaining the multifunctionality of EUSALP forests. For instance, nature-based solutions can be used to promote the renewable material wood capable of replacing artificial raw materials or fossil energy sources, whereby further emissions of greenhouse gas could be captured and reduced. In this perspective, multifunctional forests, as nature-based solutions, are further explored as a tool for territorial resilience to be promoted and combined with existing technical solutions.

The aim is to ensure a smooth information exchange on the forest-based sector among the concerned Action Groups through regional, national, and international meetings within the EUSALP area to tackle conflicts as well as to support joint interests. Moreover, the TF-MFSUT will strengthen the communication among forest owners and administrations and organisations, timber clusters and associated service providers (such as IT, planners, architectures, retailers, engineers, etc.), youth organisations, training and education institutions and NGOs.

The findings and results might be capitalised on the political level. Apart from that, the findings of its activities will be published on the TF-MFSUT LinkedIn profile and on the forthcoming standalone website for the TF within the EUSALP webpage to ensure the visibility of the work carried out. In addition, the TF-MFSUT will involve the Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry Working Body of the Alpine Convention (MAMF) and will involve the results originated by ongoing projects on ecosystem services linked to the forest-based sector and funded by regional, national and EU programmes.

3. Cross-cutting priorities

For the period 2023-2025 the Action Groups proposed to establish an **EUSALP Task Force on the topic of water transition** to secure and preserve water resources in scarcity times as a cross-cutting priority of EUSALP. This proposal fits one of the four defined cross-cutting priorities which is to promote a sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water.

The overall goal of the TF "Water Transition" is to enhance the transition to an EUSALP water smart society guided by an anticipatory vision of front-running value chain actors and stakeholders of civil society for a sound management of water resources. Also, the TF will favour the exchange, knowledge, and experience among concerned AGs to tackle conflicts, support joint interests and capitalize results on the political level. With their activities the single Action Groups will address the following objectives:

- RESEARCH: AG1 aims at elaborating a transition process to cope with the effects of climate change in ski territories (TranStat project) as well as to develop a portfolio of nature-based solutions for mountain areas (MountResilience project).

- CIRCULARITY: AG2 will focus on supporting water management projects funded by the European programms 21-27.

- CONNECTIVITY: AG5 aims at contributing to the digitisation in the field of water management through exchange of ideas and good practices

- QUALITY: AG6 will bring in its expertise by coordinating the TF with the aim of enhancing the exchange on water management. In addition, AG6 will focus on sharing river contact processes, water scarcity and traditional agricultural techniques.

- BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE: AG7 aims at highlighting the interconnection of green and blue infrastructures, investigating, and understanding the carrying capacity of Green Infrastructure as well as the management of river corridors and the link with nature restoration law and peatlands.

- WATER EXTREMES: AG8 will contribute with indicators, scientific results and policy recommendations to the topic of weather extremes, which includes water scarcity, droughts, and heavy precipitation events to improve the management of these extreme events. In the field of natural hazard and risk management, the topic nature-based solutions is frequently discussed and has already been part of previous AG8 activities. As the development of a portfolio for nature-based solutions is planned, AG8 aims to support this process with its knowledge and experience.

- EUSALP YOUTH COUNCIL aims at bringing in the perspective of young people in order to improve resilience of cities, agriculture and industry.

Each Action Group will support and contribute to the Task Force "Water Transition" in their respective field of experience and will participate in the exchange of knowledge and best practices. For each Action Group one or more coordinators will be assigned to assure the implementation of the single activities within the respective Action Groups and fulfilment of the requested contributions. In the period 2023-2025 the EUSALP Task Force on "Water Transition" will organise at least three exchange meetings.

Apart from the EUSALP Task Force on the topic of water transition AG6 will also participate in the **cross-cutting priority on circular economy**. Circular economy offers specific opportunities for rural and mountainous regions with their sustainable valorisation, their complementarity as well as the exploration of the new opportunities. Additionally, regional material cycle solutions are particularly appropriate for mountainous areas. Circular economy is a horizontal economic principle to be addressed by multiple working groups in EUSALP and is a unique opportunity to create joint innovative actions, extend value chains, new supporting instruments such as tools, cross-border financial instruments and new projects in support of sustainable use of limited Alpine resources (water, wood, metals) and support to accelerated use of clean and green energy. In this regard AG6 will use the synergies with the Alpine Space classic project AlpTextyles, the ARPAF-III project "Made in the Alps" and the EUSALP Territorial Branding.

In the framework of the cross-cutting priority on circular economy, AG6 aims at the following objectives:

- Raising awareness of territorial branding to ensure diffusion of circular approaches among SMEs in the Alpine regions (topics for the 2023 and 2025 EUSALP territorial branding conferences)
- Promoting circularity in the Alpine textile value chains (valorisation of local resources, such as wool, linen, hemp, dyeing plants)
- Integrating knowledge on consumers and their desire for sustainable lifestyles and purchases in the policy debate on circularity
- Educating about the links between circular economy and safeguarding cultural heritage (e.g., Thriftiness and creative uses of all available local resources have long characterized Alpine population); exploring possible links to UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage lists or to GIAHS: Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems)
- Stimulating responsible use of waters and woods

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

AG6 conducts regular communication work on its activities and results through the EUSALP, Alpine Convention and Region of Carinthia media channels. Communication at EUSALP level is regularly coordinated with the EUSALP communication officer of the TSS and the communication officer of the Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention.

2. Events

Within the Work Plan 2023-2025 AG6 plans to carry out at least one public conference, such as the AG6 Landscape Conference 2024 and/or the AG6 Territorial Brands Conference 2023, in order to disseminate the results of the activities carried out by AG6. These events also offer a platform for interaction with the wider public, stakeholders, the press, and political authorities.

Furthermore, AG6 organises workshops, exchange meetings or conferences on the core topics of AG6 (water, forests, agriculture, biodiversity, [soil] and cultural heritage). Apart from that, EUSALP AG6 is also committed to organise virtual cross-cutting meetings and to foster cross-MRS cooperation.

Internally, AG6 organises a minimum of two Action Group meetings per year. Such meetings allow the group members to ensure effective cooperation, to drive the implementation of the

Work Plan forward, to update each other on their ongoing activities, and to deliberate about relevant issues. Non-members and further experts are usually also welcome to join these meetings, in accordance with the agenda of the meetings.

WORK PLAN OUTPUT AND RESULTS

The main activities of AG6 are the ones described above. The main outputs of these activities will most likely include for example:

- 2nd Landscape Conference in 2024
- 3rd Territorial Brands Conference in 2023
- Policy recommendations on potentials and challenges of "Current issues of Alpine water management"
- Exchange workshops on topics of AG6 for example on river contract processes or on multifunctional forests and sustainable use of timber
- Other outputs capitalising the key AG6 activities

Possible Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	0
please describe if possible	
n. cross-border/transnational events	2
please describe if possible: 2nd Landscape Conference in 2024, 3rd Territorial Brands Conference in 2023,	
n. joint policy recommendations	1
please describe if possible: Policy recommendations on potentials and challenges of "current issues of Alpine water management"	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group 6)	1
please describe if possible: possibly on land use/recycling and renewable energy or another core topic of AG6	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group 6)	0
please describe if possible	
n. of papers / research works to be published	0
please describe if possible	

budget to be raised with European funding	0
please describe if possible	
other:	2
please describe if possible: for example: exchange workshops on specific topics, activities of the Task Force on Water Transition	

Workplan 2023-2025

Action group 7 – Green infrastructure

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

G reen infrastructure[1] has been defined as *"A strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services, while also enhancing biodiversity."* AG7 acts as a facilitator with the objective to empower stakeholders with knowledge and tools to set and implement policies for the benefit of both nature and 'alpine' people.

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[1] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/green-infrastructure_en

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

AG7 focuses on developing ecological connectivity within a multifunctional GI[2] network and thus on strengthening, improving and restoring biodiversity, as well as ecosystem services. With its broad representation of members from Alpine countries and regions as well as of advisors with different institutional and sectoral backgrounds, AG7 builds on a dialogue including stakeholders from all relevant sectors. It aims at setting up a comprehensive macro-regional scheme by applying the EU Strategy for Green Infrastructure to regional scales and making the Alps an outstanding candidate for GI in Europe. The AG7 provides the framework for developing a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas, including features in rural and urban areas, which together – and functionally interconnected – ensure diverse advantages for nature, as well as social benefits, cultural and economic prosperity for humans.

The main fields of interest of the different members are reflecting the specific objectives of the AG7.

- To identify Alpine GI elements of transnational relevance, improve planning instruments, governance approaches and explore funding opportunities.
- To promote the various benefits of GI as complementary solutions to Grey Infrastructure and bring GI onto the political agenda of the Alpine Region.
- To allow the benefits of ecological connectivity to emerge at ecosystem and societal dimensions, enhancing resilience to threats such as climate change.
- To contribute to better transboundary governance on the field of nature and GI.
- To facilitate ideas and bridge the gap between nature and economy by promoting green infrastructure as a tool towards green and circular economy

To halt biodiversity loss, develop and propose solutions and address challenges such as missing connections between natural areas and homogeneous and impoverished lowlands.

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[2] Green infrastructure (GI) is a network of natural and semi-natural areas designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services. This network of green (land) and blue (water) spaces can improve environmental conditions and therefore citizens' health and quality of life.

2. Composition and sub-groups

AG7 is composed by public members with decision making capacity representing Alpine states and regions. In the past the public members with decision-making capacity unanimously decided to involve (non- public) key stakeholders in the implementation process (IUCN, Alpine Network of Protected Areas-ALPARC, CAA-Club Arc Alpin, Alpine Metropoles Network, ISCAR, CIPRA, WWF). This was based on their expressed interest for joining the Action Group and their potential to its contribution. Connection to the European level is ensured by participation of DG Environment.
However, there is a need to clarify and consolidate the membership of the AG7 in terms of active participation to the meetings and clear appointment of representatives. AG7 will closely cooperate with TSS (EUSALP Technical Support Structure) to support this process.

Within the AG some members were nominated as caretakers for specific topics or so called 'star initiatives. This allows better coordination and focus of some of the members according to their preferences and competences.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

The topic of AG7 is addressing a wide variety of different fields. Most stakeholders are representatives of different governance level. The objective of the current workplan is to better reach 'middle management' at ministries and administrations that is usually responsible for the preparation and implementation of the policies.

A special attention will be given to:

cross-MRS cooperation on Ecological Connectivity (EUSDR (PA6), possibly EUSAIR)
Basic element to improve cross MRS cooperation in the field of ecological connectivity strategies is to promote the exchange of best practices and experiences between the different strategies and relevant Action Group / Priority Area. To this end, regular meetings, workshops, and conferences could be organized to bring together representatives of the different strategies to discuss their approaches and results and to learn from each other.
Another approach would be to establish common platforms that could facilitate the exchange of information and foster collaboration among the MRS working on joint topics. Such platforms could also help identify synergies between the different strategies and develop joint projects and actions. Areas of ecological connectivity between MRSs may become focal areas for concrete actions on the ground and for applying trans-MRS governance.
Milestone: at least one event or action per year with another MRS or in a corridor between two MRSs.

Alpine biodiversity board (ABB)
The composition of ABB and AG7 allows a good flow and exchange of the information regarding common issues. It is foreseen to connect activities and to use the synergies as both

groups share similar objectives and stakeholders. One of its objectives is to enhance transboundary cooperation and ecological connectivity.
Milestone: at least one AG/-ABB joint event/action per year

AG6 and AC MAMF (Mountain Agriculture and Mountain Forestry Working Group)

A lively and governed landscape is pivotal for ensuring the development of an Alpine GI network. It should rely on the active involvement of the citizens living in the interested territories, with a particular focus on the most relevant ecological corridors. Usually, they are located in valleys and plateau where concurrent uses are in operation. The actual dynamics both at demographical and economic level call for a specific attention the topic of mountain agriculture on the one side. On the other side the loss of biodiversity and loss of ecological connectivity in the lowlands shows the importance of the involvement of the valley farming to find solution and strengthen the dialogue between mountain and valley actors. AG7 will provide AG6 and AC MAMF.
Milestone: the position of GI disseminated to AG6 and AC MAMF

4. The role of the Youth Council

One representative of the youth council will be following the work of the AG7. The plan is to 'use this asset' to secure a good flow of information that will help AG7 to better address the youth as one of the target groups. On the other hand, it is about addressing future challenges through the eyes of the future generations.

AG7 will therefore:
- Establish cooperation between **GI goes business award** and the **Pitch your project** initiative. They both follow innovative, nature friendly business solutions and could benefit one from another in terms of promotion, better visibility and inclusion of green infrastructure in more interesting ideas.
- Include youth representation and perspective in other foreseen activities and project proposals.

Milestone: common dissemination activity among GI goes business award and Pitch your project

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

According to its mission statement, AG7 promotes Green Infrastructure (GI) as a basis for life of present and future generations in the Alpine Region. AG7 tackles current and upcoming ecological, economic, and social challenges and implements practice-oriented projects to offer demand-oriented products and services in the field of knowledge transfer, networking and informed decision-making.

In doing so, AG7 strongly followed a policy cycle approach: starting with political decision making by the adoption of the political declaration "Alpine Green Infrastructure – Joining Forces for nature, people and the economy", strategic initiatives have been developed - the so-called "star initiatives". Several projects under different (EU) funding programs were set up to implement these star initiatives, like the Alpine Space Program project "LUIGI – Linking urban and (inner)alpine Green Infrastructure" and "ECO-ALPSWATER - Innovative Ecological Assessment and Water Management Strategy for the Protection of Ecosystem Services in Alpine Lakes and Rivers", INTERREG A project "INNsieme", and the ones co-funded by ARPAF as ALPJOBS (ended February 2020), REDIAFOR and IMPULS4ACTION (first steps towards an Alpine wide peatland process), which strongly demonstrated the cooperation with other AGs in particular the cross AGs collaboration has been reinforced with an active participation into the EUSALP Task Force "Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber".

AG7 participated at the development of the Joint paper on Spatial Planning with a specific contribution on Alpine GI network.

With the EUSALP Innovation Facility a feasibility study outlines the potentials of the EUSALP Innovation Award as tool for supporting innovative solutions.

So, the successful set-up of the "GI goes business" award is worth to be highlighted as one of the key activities of AG7. In 2021 the EUSALP AG7 launched the first edition of the competition to support innovative ideas, products, and services for a Green Economy in the Alpine Macro region. Based on the success of this first round a second edition was launched at the occasion of the Annual Forum 2022 under Italian EUSALP Presidency. The awarding ceremony of the 2nd edition took place with the Bavarian State Minister of the Environment on 4 May 2023 in Munich.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

GI and ecological connectivity affect entire landscapes that are composed of different ecosystems (wetlands, forests, farmland, urban areas etc) and relate to different sectors (agriculture, forestry, energy, water etc). As such AG7 in future aims to take a stronger landscape perspective, where individual ecosystems or economic sectors constitute individual elements of a landscape that need to be considered separately, but also as part of a multifunctional landscape. This perspective also helps to define interlinkages between the

elements and to identify synergies, trade-offs or conflicts that arise in a landscape setting. Ecosystems or sectors to be further explored in the context of GI and connectivity are: peatlands, rivers, multifunctional forest, (mountain) agriculture and green business.

1. CONNECTED ECOSYSTEMS AND LANDSCAPES

1.1. PEATLANDS

Peatlands are an essential part of an intact Green Infrastructure network. They provide the habitat for distinctive flora and fauna and are therefore a significant factor with regard to biodiversity. As peatlands store large amounts of sequestered carbon, the protection and preservation of peatlands is an important component of mitigating climate crisis.

Based on the stakeholder workshops held, the resulting road map for peatlands, the impact model and the activities on the issue of peatlands will be continued. The focus here lies on involving stakeholders in direct implementation for peatland protection and restoration and sustainable use of organic soils. For this purpose, a proposal for an ASP classic project with an Alpine wide scope and impact should be prepared.

Main output: project proposal submitted to ASP

Policy impact: public administrations supported in passing policies favourable to peatlands

Financial resources : internal + ASP

1.2. RIVERS

Rivers and river corridors are an essential part of the GI in the Alps. Settlement development, (renewable) energy production, intensified land use, over tourism and many more are current threats to rivers and ecosystems. In addition, climate change with severe droughts on the one side and floods or landslides on the other side in the last years only build pressure to water resources of the Alps. AG7 wants to point out the need to understand water bodies as a transboundary network of interconnected (eco)systems and to strengthen the existing law e.g., the Water Framework Directive (WFD). AG7 welcomes the establishment of the Water transition task force and will actively participate in it. As well it will be pursued the idea, coming from different AG members and regions, to design project proposals and apply for financing at ASP, INTERREG or other European programmes.

Main output: project proposal submitted to ASP

Policy impact: contribution to the implementation of WFD

Financial resources: internal + ASP

1.3. MULTIFUNCTIONAL FORESTS

Multifunctional forests are increasingly seen as a more sustainable and resilient approach to forest management, as they promote ecological integrity and provide a range of benefits beyond just timber production. However, implementing multifunctional forest management can be challenging, as it requires coordination among multiple stakeholders and careful consideration of competing values and interests. AG7 will continue to contribute to the Task

Force and would like to work on Ecosystem services (ES) provided by peri-urban forest sites with High Biodiversity Value in times of climate crisis. Another activity is the analysis of the changes in forest land cover in the Alps (2000-2018) to be financed with internal funds or with external resources whenever a specific working group will be established.

Main output: dissemination of findings to forest administrations

Policy impact: public dialogue

Financial resources: internal

2. HORIZONTAL ACTIVITIES

2.1. GI GOES BUSINESS AWARD

The Green Infrastructure goes business award supports innovative ideas, products and services for a Green Economy and promotes sustainable development in the EUSALP. It is one of the key achievements of AG7 and there have been two consecutive editions (2022, 2023). The pilot edition ran from autumn 2021 to spring 2022. The second edition was financed by the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and the Bavarian State Ministry of the Environment and Consumer Protection. Funding is the recurring challenge of the initiative. As a next step the third edition is foreseen following the pattern of the first two. The third edition will be used to gain concrete outputs towards the next steps of evolution to secure financing, improve visibility and profile and finally scale it up to a real green business incubator.

Main output: 3rd + n edition of the GI goes business award

Policy impact: high level event with political representation to promote winners

Financial resources: regional/national contributions

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

The Nature Restoration Law is a key element of the EU Biodiversity strategy which calls for binding targets to restore degraded ecosystems, in particular those with the most potential to capture and store carbon and to prevent and reduce the impact of natural disasters. The Alps are a crucial region for biodiversity in Europe, as they are home to many unique and endangered species and their habitats, as well as provide other benefits such as improved air and water quality, carbon sequestration, and opportunities for recreation and tourism. EU countries are expected to submit National Restoration Plans to the Commission within two years of the Regulation coming into force, showing how they will deliver on the targets.

AG7 recognises the need to highlight the importance of nature, green infrastructure and its transboundary character. It aims to liaise with experts and public and regional administrations that will be engaged in the preparation of ecosystem restoration plans to also stress the role of GI and connectivity in an Alpine-wide, cross-country and multilevel perspective. AG7 will closely work together with other initiatives (e.g. Alpine Biodiversity Board) that support the development and implementation of restoration

plans and foster the establishment of exchange and cooperation networks to raise awareness for coherent approaches.

The concept of Nature Based Solutions (NBS) will be used in the process as a tool to better understand what Green Infrastructure is and how it can be used to maintain or increase the quality of life. They also show a possibility to connect nature and (green, circular, bio-) economy in a sustainable way. A set of NBS will be selected and used to support activities in awareness rising of the general public and capacity building of the experts.

Nature-based solutions (NBS) refer to actions that make use of nature and its biodiversity to address social and environmental challenges. These solutions leverage the power of ecosystems to provide a range of benefits to people and the planet, such as climate mitigation, disaster risk reduction, water security, and biodiversity conservation.
Examples of nature-based solutions include reforestation, restoration of wetlands and grasslands, sustainable agriculture and forestry practices, green infrastructure, and protected areas. These solutions work by enhancing ecosystem functions, such as carbon sequestration, water regulation, and soil fertility, which in turn support human well-being and ecological resilience.
Nature-based solutions are increasingly recognized as an important approach to addressing global challenges, particularly in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss. They offer a sustainable, cost-effective, and scalable way to promote human well-being while protecting the natural systems on which we depend.
Policy impact:

-   approval and implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Law made smoother
-   crossborder connectivity becoming part of the political agenda

Financial resources : internal, DG ENV

3. Cross-cutting priorities

Facilitating circular economy in short supply chains
AG7 will try to link the GI goes business award with the work of the Circular economy group (AG2). Green infrastructure with the tools such as Nature based solution show great potential to expand the idea of circular economy, make it greener and more mainstream.

Promoting a sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water
Water is a meeting point of many ecosystems. By participating in the Task force AG7 wants to highlight the transboundary interconnection of GI. The idea is also to link management of rivers, river corridors and other aquatic habitats as peatlands with Nature restoration law and/or Water Framework Directive and highlight the need to better address different water uses and conflict prevention/solving.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

Crucial for success is a strict focus on the needs of the target groups (client orientation), high speed and effective communication, especially with actors on the ground (municipalities, Local Action Groups) and sectoral administrations of the regions (middle management). Better communication is more important than even more content. Therefore all activities have a clear and dedicated communication pillar – with dialogue in both directions. AG7 will link its communication activities with other groups and networks that work on similar issues (E.g. other AGs, Alpine Biodiversity Board, ...). AG also recognises the need to better link its work and disseminate relevant information to the EB.

Communication channels :

- EUSALP and partner websites
- GI wiki (green infrastructure definition and discussion system for general public)
- GI PR campaign (easy going small messages via social media based on wiki)
- AG7 as a knowledge hub (facilitation point of/for projects; network of projects → AG7 → EB)
- High level political representatives as promoters

2. Events

AG7 will organise events that will address especially experts and implementers of policies in regions/states for the topics listed in Priorities section. It will try to find synergies with other partners within EUSALP and other networks to ensure better outreach.

Yearly editions of the GI goes business awarding ceremony are foreseen that will include high level political representation.

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	
please describe if possible	
n. cross-border/transnational events	3
please describe if possible	
n. joint policy recommendation	1
GI and RES	

n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group)	2
Peatlands, rivers	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group)	1
n. of papers / research works to be published	1
please describe if possible	
budget to be raised with European funding	
please describe if possible	
other: joint initiatives with other MRS	2
please describe if possible	

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Work Plan 2023 – 2025

Action Group 8 – Risk Governance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Action Group 8 aims at improving and enhancing policies and management strategies in the areas of risk management and climate change adaptation. The overall objective is to contribute to the strategic, sustainable and climate-resilient development of the Alpine macro-region. To reach that goal exchange and cooperation are imperative. Action Group 8 serves as a focal point for the exchange of knowledge and experiences and enables to find a common approach to challenges in the field of risk management and climate change adaptation. The work of AG8 will mainly be carried out through the strategic flagship initiative CAPA (Climate Adaptation Platform for the Alps) as well as by organising events on AG8 topics, collaborating closely with associated projects, involving its stakeholder network, and promoting and engaging in the development of new funding projects.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

The overall objective of Action Group (AG) 8 is to improve and enhance risk management, including the prevention of risks from natural hazards, and climate change adaptation in the Alpine region. Therefore, AG8 is focussed on the following tasks in the implementation of the EUSALP strategy:

- Stocktaking of relevant actors and interests, mapping and enhancing governance structures and processes in the policy fields of risk/hazard management and climate change adaptation
- Improving risk and adaptation governance mechanisms in the EUSALP region by enhancing, valorising, and leveraging the existing cooperation structures
- Identifying good practice solutions for tackling challenges in natural hazard and climate change adaptation policy
- Promoting, developing, and implementing local, regional, and international pilot projects and programs based on strategic priorities, and exploring funding opportunities on both EU as well as national/regional/private levels.

2. Composition and sub-groups

Action Group 8 has two Co-leaders, one from Austria and one from South Tyrol, Italy. For Austria, the Co-Chair is the head of the Austrian Service for Torrent and Avalanche Control from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management. Its field of expertise lies in natural hazard management. The second Co-Chair is EURAC Research, a research center headquartered in Bolzano (South Tyrol) that has many years of expertise in the field of climate risk assessment, risk governance and climate change adaptation and works in close collaboration with the Autonomous Province of Bolzano.

The members of Action Group 8 are from territorial governments, public administrations and agencies at national and regional levels, research organizations as well as interest groups from the Alpine macro-region. The following countries are represented: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, and Switzerland. The professional backgrounds are varied, broad and include the following fields of responsibilities and expertise: civil protection, natural hazard management, forest management, spatial planning and climate change (adaptation). Accordingly, interest and involvement stem from different angles, while complementing each other.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

AG8 actively engages and collaborates with different stakeholders, such as policy makers and practitioners from local, regional and national administrations, scientists from universities and research institutions, experts from NGOs, and international networks. The goal is to work on the integration of shared topics and initiatives, to use synergies and expertise, to collect stakeholder needs in terms of risk management and climate change adaptation, and to share and disseminate results.

AG8 will engage and involve different stakeholder groups. The following table gives an overview of the different stakeholders and the types of involvement.

STAKEHOLDER	TYPE OF INVOLVEMENT
Local, regional and national public authorities	Knowledge and experiences sharing, involvement in policy recommendations, planning and organisation of AG8 events; involvement on specific topics and activities (e.g., collection of good practises, needs assessment)
Universities and research organisations	Consultation, knowledge sharing, involvement as technical experts in AG8 events
Non-governmental organisations	Weighing in the perspective of civil society, fostering societal negotiation processes, dissemination of results to people/local communities
International organisations	Cooperation in activities, sharing and dissemination of results
Networks	Sharing and dissemination of results, participation of AG8 in conferences and events

Local, regional and national public stakeholders are institutions and authorities of the respective member countries that work in the field of risk management or climate change adaptation or are important for the implementation. They have different areas of expertise and responsibilities. Universities and research organisations include academic and non-academic scientific institutions present in the AG8 member countries as well as the International Research Society INTERPRAEVENT, which deals with topics closely linked to AG8. Participating NGOs with status observer are currently the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Club Arc Alpin. International organisations include the Alpine Convention, especially the Working Group on Natural Hazards (PLANALP) and the Alpine Climate Board (ACB), the European Topic Centre Climate Adaptation (EEA ETC/CA) and the UN Disaster Risk Reduction Office for Europe and Asia., including the European Environment Agency (EEA). AG8 will engage with existing networks on disaster risk reduction and climate change

adaptation such as the European Network We4DRR (women exchange for disaster risk reduction) the Disaster Competence Network Austria (DCNA) and others, for the dissemination of results and AG8 activities and events.

4. The role of the Youth Council

AG8 will invite interested representatives/members of the Youth Council to its meetings to present them the purpose and activities of AG8 and include them in AG8 activities if they are interested to cooperate.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

The key achievements during the last period are:

- Analysis of climate resilient spatial planning in the Alps (CLISP-ALP) to assess the possibilities and necessities of climate-resilient spatial planning.
- CLISP-ALP Video for dissemination of the results of the analysis
- [Climate Change Adaptation Platform for the Alps (CAPA)](): further deployment and quality-assured content enhancement to support the knowledge transfer of existing good practices, knowledge resources, experiences and project results on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in the Alpine region; online editing tool enabling users to share their own resources; package of dissemination materials (flyer, slide sets, offline description).
- Contribution to the EUSALP policy brief to give an overview of the work of AG8 and EUSALP by summarising and presenting the most important results.
- Embedding workshop on policy recommendations of the EUSALP Action Groups: Discussion between AG8 and regional and national policy makers from Austria to identify implementation pathways of the EUSALP results into regional and national policies.
- Embedding Workshop on Natural Risk Prevention and Management at the Macro-Regional Strategy Week to connect interested parties and show funding options.
- EUSALP Roadshow stop "Natural Hazards" for awareness raising of the public, especially children.
- Explain Video "Call to Action: Managing natural risks together" to raise awareness of the issue natural hazard management and personal responsibility and to show the work of EUSALP AG8
- Forest fires in the Alps: State of knowledge, future challenges, and options for an integrated fire management - White Paper for policy makers

- Interreg transnational project "Hochwasserwissen" (Flood knowledge) from Bavaria-Austria to develop practicable tools for knowledge transfer between key stakeholders with regards to the origin and management of floods
- Study of physical natural hazard models and new prototype of an interactive natural hazard model for risk communication and knowledge transfer
- Support of the Task Force "Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber" (TF)

Further details and project results are available on the EUSALP webpage under: https://www.alpine-region.eu/action-group-8-Risk-governance

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

Action Group 8 aims at improving and enhancing policies and management strategies in the areas of climate change adaptation and risk management.
The overall objective is to contribute to a strategic, sustainable and climate-resilient development of the Alpine region. Therefore, AG8 deals with

- natural hazard management, including extreme events,
- the role and effects of climate change and adaptation,
- the contribution of risk management and climate change adaptation to the sustainable and climate-resilient development of Alpine settlement areas.

In the period 2023 – 2025, AG8 plans to have a strategic focus on the following key issues:

Management of large-scale extreme weather events driven by climate change, compound impacts and cascading risks: On this topic, AG8 will collect and identify the main gaps and needs in the management of extreme and cascading events and the demand for new policies and measures to increase the resilience of Alpine communities.

Enhancement of climate risk management and climate change adaptation by strengthening the adaptive capacity of Alpine territories: AG8 will foster and support the exchange of good practices and processes on climate change adaptation in the Alpine region. This will be carried out during dedicated sessions at AG8 meetings and in the form of a workshop (Autumn 2024) to bridge the gaps between research, practitioners, and policymakers.

The role of nature-based solutions as relevant tools in climate change adaptation, under different aspects: the functions and values of green and open spaces for climate adaptation and natural hazards prevention; the role of protective forests; knowledge and approaches for considering climate change-related ecosystem services in spatial planning and land use management; the distribution of costs and benefits between private actors, social groups, and the public interest. On this topic, AG8 will establish an exchange and a collaboration with the Interreg Alpine Space project MOSAIC to support the collection, harmonization and sharing of data on Alpine climate-related disasters and trends and to raise awareness among foresters, risk managers, decision-makers, and the public.

To increase visibility and the need for actions also on a political level, AG8 will develop policy recommendations on the topics of climate change adaptation and natural hazard management.

AG8 will continue to collaborate with AG 2, 6, 7, and 9 on the Task Force "Multifunctional Forests and Sustainable Use of Timber" (TF). To ensure the transfer of knowledge and foster topics related to forests and wood, the task force was established in September 2019. AG8

will be represented in this TF through two members, which will also ensure the constant information flow between the work of the TF and the AG and participate in meetings and events organized by the TF.

AG8 will work on these issues mainly through its strategic flagship initiative, collaborating closely with associated projects, involving its stakeholder network, organising dedicated events, such as a side event at the International Conference, to advance and transfer knowledge on risk management, climate adaptation and resilience in the Alpine region. Close collaboration with the Alpine Space Projects X-Risk-CC, ADAPTNOW, and MOSAIC will also be promoted.

For all key issues and activities, it is important to transfer and disseminate knowledge, and raise awareness among practitioners, policymakers, and the population. All AG8 results will be integrated into and disseminated through the CAPA platform as well as through various other communication channels (e.g., the EUSALP website, LinkedIn, existing networks and platforms).

Finally, AG8 is committed to promote, support, and engage in the development of at least one new project for application to EU funding programmes. A new project shall contribute to tackling the key issues outlined before. Besides the Interreg Alpine space funding scheme, AG8 will also screen other suitable funding opportunities beyond the transnational and cross-border Interreg programme lines, such as HORIZON Europe (2021-2027 Programme), LIFE, and national funding sources.

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

Action Group 8 brings together different countries and institutions, is a focal point for the exchange of knowledge, experiences and latest developments, and enables to find common approaches to challenges in the field of climate change adaptation and risk management. Cooperation and knowledge exchange are the key for finding sustainable and effective policy and management solutions throughout the EUSALP region. Therefore, the flagship initiative of Action Group 8 is the web platform CAPA (Climate Adaptation Platform for the Alps). CAPA is the central knowledge transfer infrastructure of AG8. It allows adaptation and risk management actors in all Alpine countries to benefit from transnational knowledge sharing, bridging the gap between the generation and the actual use of relevant knowledge and experience. It contains information, findings, and recommendations from thematically relevant projects, national documents and guidelines, and other relevant knowledge resources related to the key issues. Furthermore, it strengthens cross-linkages with other existing regional and thematic online portals. Building on established functionalities for user-driven content enhancement, AG8 members and their stakeholder network will contribute with new resources and knowledge items and share them with the macro-regional community. A

communication roadmap will also be developed on how to make the CAPA platform better known to interested stakeholders in the Alpine region.

3. Cross-cutting priorities

AG 8 will contribute to the cross-cutting priority "Promoting a sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources, especially water". The contribution of AG8 will focus on the topics of weather extremes, which include water scarcity, droughts, and heavy precipitation events. AG8 will contribute with the expertise of its members and support the development of policy recommendations for dealing with extreme events. As the development of a portfolio for Nature-based Solutions is planned as part of the activities, AG8 could support this process with its knowledge and experience based on previous AG8 work. Furthermore, AG8 will support the activities of the Taskforce Water in the fields of experience and knowledge exchange, communication, and dissemination and will participate in organized events and meetings as far as possible. To ensure effective collaboration, AG8 will appoint one or two members to act as a point of contact for the Taskforce Water and as an interface between the activities of AG8 and the Taskforce.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

AG8 and its members make use of a portfolio of communication tools and channels. One important platform is the EUSALP website, where the main outcomes of the AG and information are presented and shared. AG8 will employ the CAPA portal as infrastructure for the provision and transfer of knowledge resources generated and identified by associated projects, flagship initiatives, and institutional AG8 members. In addition, the AG8 members will use their institutional communication infrastructures, networks, and the networks of partner organisations to distribute information and results. Moreover, AG8 will be present at relevant national and international events, including all EUSALP events, conferences, and workshops.

2. Events

Action Group 8 holds two regular meetings per year as well as additional interim meetings to discuss progress or developments as needed. Furthermore, AG8 actively participates in the Annual Forum and other EUSALP events, conferences, and workshops.

AG8 will organise a side event at the International Conference Interpraevent 2024 (Vienna) to advance and transfer knowledge on climate risk management and resilience in the Alpine region.

AG8 will organise a workshop (to be held in Autumn 2024) between AG8 members and partners from the Alpine Space project ADAPTNOW to collect good practices on climate change adaptation from different regions and countries and discuss how they could be transferred to other contexts and be upscaled to the EUSALP scale.

Members of AG8 will participate in a workshop (to be held in 2024/2025) together with partners from the Alpine Space project X-Risk-CC to co-develop transalpine guidelines on how to better deal with extreme events.

Action Group 8 will promote and support exchange between different ongoing Interreg Alpine Space projects dealing with topics relevant to the Action Group such as X-RISK-CC, ADAPTNOW, MOSAIC.

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

The main outputs of the AG are described in the sections above. All outputs contribute to the envisaged overall result of AG8 that is the exchange, cooperation, knowledge transfer and improvement of policies and practises in the areas of risk management and climate change adaptation. AG8 will carry out different knowledge-transfer, and awareness-raising initiatives and use different communication channels for the dissemination of AG8 activities and results.

Furthermore, AG8 plans to develop and submit a new project proposal (e.g., a small-scale ASP project) initiated during the AG8 meetings until 2025. The meetings will serve as a platform to identify and promote topics for project proposals and put forward policy recommendations. AG8 will screen additional European funding programmes and their opportunities and linkages with the topics of AG8.

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	0
n. cross-border/transnational events	11
2 AG8 meetings per year, AG8 side event at an international conference, 3 EUSALP Annual Fora, science policy workshop on good practices in climate change adaptation, various events related to initiatives and projects related to AG8 topics	
n. joint policy recommendation	2
Based on the results of different projects and the expertise of AG8 members, the AG will develop 2 policy recommendations on the topic of CCA and natural hazard management	
n. project to be submitted to the Alpine Space Programme	1
n. project to be submitted to others European Programmes	0
n. of papers/research works to be published	3

including roadmap for CAPA	
budget to be raised with European funding	tbd
one project submission is planned	

Work Plan 2023-25

Action Group 9 - Energy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The geographic and structural characteristics of the Alps provide good potentials for renewable energies and enhanced energy efficiency to make the Alpine region a European **"Model region for renewable energies and energy efficiency"**. Macro regional policy planning helps the Alpine region to tackle the challenge to meet energy demand sustainably, securely and affordably. The crisis in Ukraine led to a rise in the price of fossil fuels and electricity, to which the European Commission responded with the REPowerEU plan, to get out of dependence on energy imported from Russia (mainly gas and oil products). Faced with this sharp rise in energy costs, governments, local authorities and citizens must reorganize themselves to consume less energy, increase energy efficiency and develop renewable energies at a faster pace than in recent years.

The Action Group is keen to support a significant reduction of energy consumption in the Alps thereby contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions and energy dependency from non-EU states. The policy framework of the activities of the Action Group is provided by, inter alia, the European Union's energy directives, the EU goals for 2020 and 2030, and the Energy Union Package, the aforementioned REPowerEU plan as well as national and regional policies. The AG is a network of regions and states to **foster good public policy making based on scientific evidence and piloting activities**. The group is determined to foster well-informed dialogue and decision-making following a **multi-level energy policy approach** in the Alps. The goal of the group is to undertake concerted actions through commonly developed activities and projects. To overcome the challenge of renewable energy scarcity and to make the region a good practice example for the rational use of energy, **EUSALP Action Group 9 focuses on energy data management, production and use of green hydrogen, promotion of energy communities and smart communities, energy efficiency in enterprises (esp. SMEs) and the building sector.** Furthermore, it will develop activities in the field of **CO_2-compensation**, as well as awareness-raising and communication activities to promote energy policy related issues.

Last but not least, since energy policy planning has interfaces with many regulatory areas, such as spatial planning, resource management, economic development, and environmental and nature conservation, AG9 works in a fundamentally cross-sectoral manner. In the work plan period 2023-25, Action Group 9 will continue to foster the cross-sectoral dialogue with other Action Groups to **further develop the five common main topics relevant for the strategy** as approved by the General Assembly on 24 November 2022 in Trento.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

Action Group 9 has the mission to "make the Alpine region a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy". The Action Group is set up of thematic sub-groups that focus on the following specific issues:

- Energy observatory for collection of energy data in the EUSALP
- Use and production of green/low-carbon hydrogen in the EUSALP
- Promotion of energy communities and smart communities in the EUSALP
- Energy efficiency in small and medium enterprises and the building sector
- CO_2-compensation tools and projects in the EUSALP
- Awareness-raising and communication activities to promote energy policy related issues in particular and the work of the EUSALP in general

Since 2019, EUSALP Action Group 9 is co-led by the Energy Agency South Tyrol - CasaClima and the Energy and Environment Agency Auvergne Rhône-Alpes. The Action Group consists of members with decision making capacity from Austria, France, Germany, Italy. Also, experts from research and university as well as interest groups from the economic and the non-governmental sector are represented in the AG. The work of the AG is regularly followed by DG Regio, DG Ener, the Alpine Space Programme the Alpine Convention and supported by the EUSALP TSS.

Emphasis of the work of the Action Group lays on gathering information and expertise that support the above-mentioned thematic subgroups in the development of their activities and implementation of their work plan. Studies, experts' workshops and input presentations accompany the implementation and decision-making of the AG. In the current work plan period 2023-2025, Action Group 9 will foster the dialogue with other Action Groups (esp. AG2, AG4, AG6, AG7 and AG8) to further develop the five common main topics relevant for the strategy as approved by the General Assembly on 24 November 2022 in Trento.

2. Composition and sub-groups

As of 31.12.2022, there are 16 (sixteen) AG 9 members nominated by states and regions of the EUSALP, including the two Action Group leaders. They come from the five Alpine Countries Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia. In addition, the Action Group includes stakeholders from different sectors in the role of observers, including:

- The European Commission, DG Regio and DG Ener (2)
- Research and science institutions (2)
- EU funding programmes (1)
- Chambers of commerce (1)

- Transnational and non-governmental organisations (2)
- The Technical Support Structure

AG9 members regularly invite stakeholders and experts as guests to their closed Action Group meetings. All Alpine countries except Liechtenstein are represented in the AG 9 as members or observers.

The Action Group is organised into the following sub-groups:

1. *Energy Observatory for* energy data collection in the EUSALP
Leader: EURAC Research, Institute for Renewable Energy
Partners: Cervino project partners and observers
Goal: At present, there are no aggregated energy data sets available for the EUSALP area. The activity will create a data tool that will enable the optimal collection, processing, visualization and use of energy data at macro-regional level. The tool will support decision-making processes on energy matters across the Alps.

2. *Use and production of green hydrogen in the EUSALP territory*
(Cross-sectoral activity together with Action Group 2)
Leader: Auvergne-Rhone Alpes Energy and Environment Agency
Partners: AMETHyST project partners, members of the LOI signature regions
Goal: To strengthen cooperation between Alpine regions in order to foster investment in H2 infrastructure and applications in the Alps. To transfer good practices and create pilot cases and create know-how on funding opportunities among public authorities.

3. *Energy communities and smart communities in the EUSALP*
Leader: Energy Agency Friuli Venezia Giulia and Energy and Environment Agency Lower Austria
Goal: To capitalize and disseminate project results, to develop common project proposals in cross-border and transnational programmes, to showcase good practices and pilots in the field of energy communities and smart communities. AG 9 leads activities on energy communities, while AG 5 has the lead on smart communities. Both AGs collaborate through the ASP SmartCommUnity project and the cross-sectoral priority "Promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region". Synergies emerge from this cooperation and ensure cross-fertilization in the respective AGs.

4. *Energy efficiency in enterprises and the building sector*
Leader: Energy Agency South Tyrol - CasaClima
Partners: Energy Agency Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Action Group 2
Goals: To map relevant projects and instruments, to develop checklists and policy recommendations, and to improve awareness among stakeholder through a public event.

5. CO2-compensation schemes to support sustainable development in the Alps
Leader: Energy Agency South Tyrol – CasaClima
Goals: To assess the feasibility for the setting-up CO_2 compensation mechanisms that allow to compensate emissions coming from private and public actors with the goal to support local sustainability projects.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

The AG proactively engages with stakeholders, experts and the interested public. Besides the organization of experts' workshops, the Action Group organizes the **EUSALP Energy Conference** on a yearly basis. The goal of the conference is to deepen the dialogue between experts and policy makers on issues that regard the energy transition in the Alps. The conference contributes to the implementation of the Action Plan and promotes the MRS as a policy forum through which common challenges in the Alpine energy sector are addressed. In order to raise public attention and political interest, **AG Leaders are keen to promote the organization of the event under the patronage of EUSALP presidencies**.

Various stakeholders collaborate with Action Group 9. After approval from Action Group members, they can participate in the official Action Group meetings as guests and are invited to participate to all workshops and conferences that are organized by EUSALP Action Group 9.

In 2023-2025, AG leaders will proactively reach out to actors to join the AG in order to better capture the geographical representation in the AG.

Stakeholder	Involvement in AG 9 activities
Sectoral Energy agencies	Involvement in the planning and implementation of specific projects and initiatives
Local, regional and national public authorities	Involved in the organisation of events and in the planning and implementation of specific initiatives; policy makers targeted on specific topics such as e.g. hydrogen cooperation
Infrastructure and public service providers	Involved in the organisation of events and in the planning and implementation of specific initiatives
International organisations	Involved in the coordination of activities and to find synergies. One example is the ACB of the Alpine Convention
Universities and research institutes	Involved as (external) experts where technical discussions and external studies are foreseen
General public	Targeted via general communication online and through public events

4. The role of the Youth Council

The AG aims to strengthen the cooperation with the EUSALP Youth Council to transfer knowledge and capacities with a focus on sustainable development and the role of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. **In coordination with the TSS, Action Group 9**

offers Youth Council members to participate in selected AG activities, including in particular, visiting of local good practices accompanied by energy experts (e.g. field trips realised in the framework of cooperation projects such as **AMETHyST and Smart Villages**). In addition, the EUSALP AG9 invites the Youth Council to **act as a member of the EUSALP Energy Award jury** to evaluate projects and select the winners of the competition.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

Project incubation

During the last work phase 2020-2022, AG9 incubated projects of relevance for the implementation of the work plan. Worth mentioning in this respect are the project development of the ASP projects AMETHyST "A MultipurposE and Trans sectorial HYdrogen Support for decarbonized alpine Territories" and CERVINO "Creating an EneRgy data exchange and VIsualizatioN toOL for the alps" as well as the ARPAF project CAESAR 2 "ClimAte & Energy Solutions for small Alpine enterpRises". Furthermore, AG9 was project partner of the cross-sectoral project Rediafor "Multifunctional FORest in the Alps Reinforcing DIALogue" as well as the ASP projects "Smart Villages" and "Smart communities".

Fostering political commitment and policy advise

AG9 has continuously contributed to the deepening of cross-sectoral cooperation with other AGs and MRS. The cross-AG cooperation in the field of hydrogen, was manifested with a **letter of intent from 10 Regions from the EUSALP demonstrating their political commitment to engage in a coordinated manner to explore the potential of green hydrogen to become a relevant energy vector in their territories.**
Within the framework of the AlpGov II project, EUSALP **AG9 developed policy recommendations for decision makers** in the energy policy field.
The Action Group leaders contributed to improve the visibility of the Strategy and the thematic focus areas by participation to European initiatives such as the **EU MRS week and the European Union Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW)**.

Communication: Energy Conference and the EUSALP Energy Award

The AG organises on an annual basis the EUSALP Energy Conference. In the previous years, **the conference regularly attracted more than 100 participants and stakeholders**. In 2022, and under the umbrella of the Italian presidency, the **AG9 initiated the EUSALP Energy Award**. The EUSALP Energy Award recognizes best practices that are contributing to the implementation of the energy transition in the Alpine area through the roll-out of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. The award edition 2022 « Citizen activation and participation in the energy transition » honoured activities and projects of citizens, municipalities, start-ups, established companies, research institutions and NGOs

that are exemplary for citizens' involvement in the energy transition. **Of the 23 initiatives received from all over the Alps, seven were selected by an international jury of experts**.

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

Action Group 9 will focus its activities in the perspective of the current needs and policy objectives on European, national and regional level. The AG will actively reach out to relevant projects funded under different programmes.

a. Promote Smart Villages/Smart communities and digitalization of the energy sector

The goal of this activity is to promote a network of smart rural areas with a common smarter and greener vision for their communities. The activities in the period 2023-25 include:

- 2023-2025: Regular updates on the results of the Alpine Space SmartCommUnity project and support to the AG5 concerning the refinement of the smart community concept in the cross-cutting priority "Promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region" led by AG5.
- 2024: Based in the project results best practices will be identified and knowledge transfer will be intensified.
- 2024-2025: Promotion of a traveling exhibition on climate action of smart communities, e.g. during the EUSALP Energy Conferences 2024 and 2025 (October) or during the Annual Fora.

b. Enhance energy efficiency in enterprises and the building sector

Enabled by the ARPAF project CAESAR 2, which pursues the goal to support SMEs to address their energy efficiency and carbon footprint, the period 2023-2025 will see the following activities:

- 2023: Mapping of relevant tools and projects which enable implementation of energy efficiency analysis and carbon footprinting;
- 2023: Development of checklists for energy and carbon footprint analysis for key economic sectors;
- Organisation of a final transnational workshop in autumn 2023, probably during the EUSALP Annual Forum, with the involvement of AGs 2 and 9 and the development of policy recommendations.
- 2024-2025: Screening of funding programmes and opportunities.

The Action Group will further create connections to ongoing projects, such as EnTrainer (LIFE), and capitalize on their activities.

c. Evaluate a CO2 compensation scheme

The aim of the activity is to assess the feasibility for the setting-up a compensation mechanism that allows to compensate CO2 emissions coming from private and public actors with the goal to support local sustainability projects (e.g. reforestation activities, climate change adaptation, roll-out of renewable energies in the Alps, etc.).

Roadmap for implementation
2024-25: Development of a small-scale project to pilot the implementation of a regional CO2 compensation scheme within the ASP Call 2024 e.g. in the governance pillar.
- Goal: develop, implement and test CO2 compensation mechanisms at regional level
    - CO2 assessment methodology for private and public actors
    - Definition of a methodology to screen local projects for CO2-emission
    - Networking and pooling of already existing local/regional CO2 compensation projects in the Alpine area to foster knowledge transfer

d. Participation to the Task Force Multifunctional Forest and Sustainable Use of Timber

The AG9 will participate to the work and events organized by the TF MFSUT.

As forests products (Timber for construction, biomass for renewable heating…) are important for the energy transition, AG9 will participate to TF MFSUT annual workplan, mainly concerning communication activities:
- Promotion of the LinkedIn account
- Participation to shape the new TF MFSUT organizational model
- Transfer of information between TF MFSUT and AG9 members
- Participation to events

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

a) Energy Observatory for data collection in the EUSALP

Access to reliable energy data is the basis for decision-makers to formulate, implement and verify the coherence of energy policies and measures. Public authorities engaged in sustainable energy planning, require access to territorial, aggregated and accurate energy

data. To the same token, energy data will be needed at macro-regional level to support EUSALP consortium in defining and implementing a long-term energy strategy for the Alpine territory.

Action Group 9, together with the European CERVINO project, will collect energy data from the EUSALP regions and make them accessible via a dynamic data visualization platform. Data entry and processing of the management tool will be facilitated and a roadmap will ensure regular surveys on energy data. This platform will update and make available the energy data of the Alpine regions, allow comparison between regions and aggregation at EUSALP level.

Timeline
Collection of regional energy data (2023)
Integration of the CERVINO EUSALP energy data platform in the EUSALP website (2024)
Roadmap for the establishment of a EUSALP energy observatory (2024)
2024: Online data visualization platform
2025: Decision on improvements to the platform and integration of additional (e.g. adaptation to climate change)

b) Energy Communities

Renewable energy communities in the alpine region can reduce carbon emissions and help combat climate change by replacing fossil fuels with clean and sustainable energy sources. These communities can also enhance energy security and resilience by reducing dependence on non-renewable energy imports and strengthening local energy production.
The use of renewable energy in alpine communities can also provide economic benefits by creating local jobs and stimulating sustainable economic development.
Additionally, the development of renewable energy projects in the alpine region can help preserve the natural environment by reducing the need for destructive fossil fuel extraction methods and promoting sustainable land use practices.
Finally, the use of renewable energy in alpine communities can also promote social cohesion and community engagement by fostering local ownership and participation in energy production and decision-making processes.
During the previous budget period 2014-21, Alpine Space projects have addressed this topic, in particular the Smartvillage and Alpgrids projects.

Activities in the Work Plan period 2022-2025 will include:
- Capitalization and dissemination of AlpGrids, Smart village results, and ongoing projects such as SmartCommUnity
- Common project development in cross-border programmes (France-Switzerland, Alcotra (France-Italy), ...
- Showcasing of good practices and pilots through the EUSALP Energy Award 2024 that could be organized under the umbrella of the Slovenian Presidency
- Development of policy recommendations 2024 and presentation during the EUSALP Energy Award 2024

3. Cross-cutting priority: Fast-tracking Energy Transition for a Carbon Neutral Alpine Region

The current energy crisis has given new dynamics and urgency to the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources. The priority will focus on:

a) fast-tracking the adoption of green and low carbon Hydrogen in the Alpine region, in accordance with the REPowerEU strategy that "recognizes the role of the MRS in promoting cooperation in investments in hydrogen infrastructure". Alpine regions are very dynamic and proactive in the development of the hydrogen sector, in the production, storage, transport, distribution and uses for mobility and industries. Many regional initiatives exist, and this cross-cutting priorities will focus on
- Strengthening the process of embedding hydrogen in regional policies
- Exchanging on strategies for mobilizing European funds to implement tomorrow's hydrogen infrastructures, supporting each other in the dedicated EU calls, so that a maximum number of regions can invest and thus ensure the continuity of hydrogen infrastructures in the Alps
- Increase the skills of local authorities and local stakeholders to understand the challenges of hydrogen and to initiate local projects in pilot areas

b) facilitating the decarbonization of the transport sector, which has been lagging behind in promoting the use of renewable energy sources. Oil-derived fuels account for 95% of energy consumption in transport. Measures to decarbonize transport should follow the „avoid-shift-improve" approach (reduce demand; modal shift from road to rail and soft modes; alternative propulsion systems).

Objectives of the cross-cutting priority
The first objective is to foster investments in hydrogen infrastructure, relying on the Alpine hydrogen value chain and its many innovative companies producing fuel cells, electrolysis, hydrogen refueling stations and new or retrofitted hydrogen vehicles. The EUSALP H2 focus

group, established with a letter of intent of cooperation signed by 10 Alpine regions aims to reach the goal of the EU H2 strategy for 2030. It will explore available funding opportunities, connect regional initiatives such as Hydrogen valleys to each other and draft an EUSALP hydrogen roadmap.

The second objective is to work at local level to bring out new concrete H2 projects, in mountain and urban areas. 2 projects, AMETHyST and H2MA, are currently funded by the Alpine Space Programme until 2025 and aim at increasing capacities of local public authorities and connect them with hydrogen private developers and companies. Study visits, public events, technical studies, tools, results and outputs will be capitalized and widely disseminated in the Alpine area.

The third objective is to connect the EUSALP H2 initiatives with other EU H2 initiatives such as Hydrogen Europe and the Clean Hydrogen partnership, giving visibility, building networks, and connect with other macro-regional strategies.

The final objective is to accelerate the energy transition in the transport sector, by collaborating across sectors, identifying best practices, streamlining policies and incubating new projects.

Indicators to evaluate the implementation of the priority:

The following indicators will be used:

- Establishment of an EUSALP H2 roadmap
- Number of H2 focus group meetings per year: the target is 3 per year
- Number of responses to EU calls to finance hydrogen development (Interreg, AFIF, Hydrogen Valleys…) in the Alps
- Number of participations to public events
- 1 political declaration on energy transition in the transport system
- 1 High-level policy event with all four MRS in Brussels on energy transition in the transport system
- 4 public events / workshops
- 10 selected best practices published on the EUSALP website for Transport and Mobility

Coordinators & involved Action Groups

The overall coordination will be done by Action group 9 "Energy" co-leaders, Etienne Viénot (AURA-EE), Maren Meyer and Benjamin Auer (Casaclima).

Action group 9 will be also in charge of the Implementation of AMETHyST project, capitalization and transfer of results and outputs (concerning also H2MA project), with the creation of an EUSALP H2 online platform as a knowledge resource center. AG 9 will be in charge of the connection with other EU initiatives, such as Hydrogen Europe, European Hydrogen week, CHJU. AG9 will organize, promote and participate to public events to promote H2 alpine initiatives.

Action group 2 "Economic development", Sylvain Guetaz (AURA Region) and Massimo Lapolla (Piemonte Region), will organize 3 EUSALP H2 focus group meetings per year and prepare an EUSALP H2 roadmap.

Action group 4 "Mobility", Patrick Skoniezki (Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino) and Michael Bürger (Tyrol region) will collect and detail data on energy consumption in the transport sector. AG2 will also identify innovative approaches to accelerate decarbonisation of transport, considering new players in a cross-sectoral perspective and supporting existing policy measures, financial incentives and cooperation structures.

Action group 5 "Connectivity and accessibility", Marco Tomasi (Trentino Digitale SpA) will collaborate with the local territorial excellences (https://energy.fbk.eu/, https://www.autobrennero.it/en/sustainability/) to investigate the relationship between decarbonisation and digitalisation, highlighting how the latter can represent a fundamental lever for decarbonising not only energy systems, but also business processes, contributing to the achievement of the European objectives which envisage a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030 and climate neutrality to 2050.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

Action Group 9 shares information about the group's activities through direct contact with stakeholders, and via the online communication channels available to the leaders/members. The EUSALP web portal is used to communicate all news and events to the wider public. The Action Group, through its leaders and/or members, participates to initiatives and events organised by stakeholders and institutional partners. Particular emphasis shall be given here to the initiatives organised by the European Commission.

To ensure synergies and effectiveness of the actions, AG 9 actively seeks exchange with other relevant projects and with the Managing Authorities of the main funding programmes.

The EUSALP website will be one of the main recipients of communication activities:

- Integration of the EUSALP energy data platform in the EUSALP website
- In EUSALP website, links toward the online platform developed by AMETHyST partners
- Communication on events
- EUSALP Energy Conference every year
- Energy Award on bi annual basis

2. Events

- Annual EUSALP Energy conference 2023, 2024, 2025 (always in autumn)

- EUSALP Energy Award 2024 (autumn, organized together with the EUSALP Energy Conference)

- Participation to Macro-Regional Strategies Week every year in Bruxelles

- Participation to EUSALP annual forum every year

- Participation and organisation of workshop during the European Hydrogen week and European Sustainable week

- Participation to EUSALP presidencies events related to the topics of AG9

- Possible events in collaboration with other AGs

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	1
Energy Transition in the Alps (focus to be defined with other AGs and EB) 2025	
n. cross-border/transnational events	10
2-3 EUSALP Energy Conference, 1 EUSALP Energy Award centred on the issue of renewable energy communities, Public events AMETHyST, 3 participations to MRS week, 3 Annual Forum, and various events organized by projects related to AG9	
n. joint policy recommendation	2
Hydrogen (2025) and Energy Communities (2024)	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group)	1
Pilot on CO2 compensation mechanism for sustainable development projects	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group)	1
Energy communities	
n. of papers / research works to be published	0
Currently not planned.	
budget to be raised with European funding	
The AG continuously screens EU funding programmes for potential opportunities for transnational cooperation within the Alpine Region.	
other:	