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Horizon Europe Mission Project Kicks Off to Rethink Climate Adaptation in the Danube Region

A new Horizon Europe project was officially launched on 4 June 2025 in an online kick-off meeting, bringing together all project and associated partners. The initiative is part of the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change and aims to support systemic and just climate adaptation across the Danube Macro-Region — one of Europe's most climate-vulnerable areas.

12 European partners from eight European countries, along with six associated and implementing partners from six countries (including Ukraine, Türkiye and Switzerland), came together to start a three-year collaboration. Together, they aim to rethink how climate change adaptation (CCA) is integrated into regional innovation strategies, governance, and everyday life.



Photo Credit: VDI/VDE-IT

During the meeting, representatives of the European Commission (DG RTD) and CINEA welcomed the consortium and presented the broader Mission policy context of the funding programme. The partners then reviewed the project structure and work plan in detail, ensuring a common understanding and clear onboarding for the collaborative journey ahead.

A Shared European Challenge — and a New Scale of Action

The Danube Macro-Region, stretching from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, is home to 115 million people. It faces intensifying climate risks — from heatwaves and droughts to flooding and biodiversity loss — yet many areas lack sufficient adaptive capacity and innovation infrastructure.

To address this, the project promotes a **new level of action: the “city-region.”** This concept refers to urban centres and their surrounding rural and peri-urban areas, understood as a **functional unit** shaped by shared infrastructure, mobility, and economic flows. In contrast to fragmented efforts, this approach enables more **coordinated, systemic climate planning** across territorial boundaries.

In the words of the coordinator, Dr. Oliver Ziegler from VDI/VDE Innovation+ Technik GmbH:

“If we want to turn adaptation into opportunity, we must move beyond isolated urban solutions and look at city-regions as cohesive, dynamic spaces of change.”



**Funded by
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Climate Adaptation as a Cross-Sector Transformation

The project takes a **holistic view of climate adaptation** — not as a sectoral issue, but as a **societal transformation** that cuts across health, mobility, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, and ecosystems. It recognises that adapting to climate impacts requires **rethinking how we innovate, plan, and govern**.

This is why the project is grounded in the principles of **Transformative Innovation Policy (TIP)** — an emerging policy framework that goes beyond short-term interventions and aims to **catylyse long-term, structural change**. TIP redefines the role of innovation in society by:

- Aligning it with grand societal challenges, such as climate change
- Emphasising **inclusive learning** and **co-creation**
- Involving stakeholders from across government, business, science, and civil society
- Encouraging experimentation and the exploration of **alternative future pathways**

Transformative Innovation Policies are not just about better tools — they are about **governing change differently**. They foster the conditions for deep innovation, where adaptation becomes integrated into strategic regional development and is no longer treated as an isolated concern.

Four City-Regions Leading the Way

As a first step, the project is working with **four pilot cities** — **Burgas (Bulgaria), Debrecen (Hungary), Maribor (Slovenia), and Suceava (Romania)**. Together with their surrounding administrative regions, these cities will co-design and test new models of climate governance and policy experimentation, including the development of **Local Green Deals**.

While the Danube countries face significant climate risks, many also have **below-average innovation performance**. The project thus views these territories not only as vulnerable but also as **rich in untapped potential** — ideal testbeds for forward-looking, inclusive adaptation strategies.

“This is not just a climate project — it is an innovation project, a governance project, and a social transformation project,” noted the coordinator during the launch. *“Our aim is to create space for new ideas, new actors, and new alliances that can shape a resilient future for the Danube Region — and beyond.”*

With the kick-off complete, the consortium embarks on a three-year journey to demonstrate that climate resilience is not just a necessity, but an opportunity to renew how Europe collaborates, innovates, and builds its future. **Partners will closely collaborate with the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change to leverage synergies and yield significant and sustainable impact.**

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