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iWATERMAP WATER TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION ROADMAPS

Regional Action Plan

for practical measures, in support of increasing the critical
mass of the water innovation ecosystem in the North-East
Region of Romania

ADR ®
Agenția pentru Dezvoltare Regională
N O R D - E S T

North-East Regional Development Agency

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Part I – General Information

Project:	iWATERMAP – Water Technology Innovation Roadmaps
Partner Organisation:	North-East Regional Development Agency (PP5) (North-East RDA)
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NUTS 2 Region:	North-East
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Part II – Policy Context

The Action Plan will have an impact on:

- ☒ **The "Investments for growth and employment" Programme**
- ☐ The European Territorial Cooperation Programme
- ☐ Another instrument of the regional development policy

Name of the policy instrument addressed:

- North-East Romania's Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027, *Priority Axis 1 "Development of research and innovation capacities and adoption of advanced technologies"* (the axis that continues PA1 of the ROP 2014-2020).

Managing authority:

- ROP 2021-2027: North-East RDA

At the end of 2021, the situation of the projects submitted within the ROP 2014-2020, Axis 1 - Promotion of technology transfer, aiming at promoting investments in C&I, developing links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centers and higher education, in particular promoting investment in product and service development, technology transfer, social innovation, eco-innovation and public service applications, stimulating demand, networking and open innovation through smart specialization, and supporting research activities technological and applied, pilot lines, early product validation actions, advanced production capacities and first production, in particular in the field of key generic technologies and the dissemination of general purpose technologies, is as follows:

Specific Call	Call closing date	No. submitted projects	Required value of submitted projects (million EUR)	Call / region allocation (million EUR)	% coverage of call allocation / region amounts requested projects contacted / in selection	No. signed contracts	No. projects in selection	No. rejected / withdrawn projects
Specific objective 1.2 - Increasing innovation in companies by supporting multisectoral approaches resulting from the implementation of the less developed regions initiative in Romania - Call 1 (1.2)	30.09.2020	11	17.929	29.196	16.18%	3	0	8
Operation A - Support for Innovation and Technology Transfer Entities (ITT) - Call 1 (1.1.A - 2018)	20.04.2019	6	8.242	6.047	11.52%	1	0	5
Operation A - Support for Innovation and Technology	30.10.2020	7	12.296	6.047	82.32%	2	0	5



Transfer Entities (ITT) - Call 2 (1.1.A - 2020)								
Operation B - Support for Science and Technology Parks (SGP) - Call 1 (1.1.B)	13.04.2019	1	1.841	5.982	30.78%	1	0	0
Operation C - Investments for SMEs to implement a result of research - innovation in partnership with ITT - Call 1 (1.1.C - 2017)	25.08.2018	32	5.466	5.889	0.00%	0	0	32
Operation C - Investments for SMEs to implement a result of research - innovation in partnership with ITT - Call 2 (1.1.C - 2020)	15.05.2021	26	4.662	5.889	25.33%	0	8	18

1 Euro = 4,9498 lei (according to <https://www.cursbnr.ro/curs-infoeuro> for the period December 1, 2021 - December 31, 2021)

Within the **priority axis 1 - Promotion of technology transfer**, during 2021, only **5 financing contracts were signed**.

Starting with the programming period 2021-2027, North-East RDA will fulfil the function of Managing Authority for the ROP. The new responsibility of North-East RDA is established by Emergency Ordinance no. 122 of July 29, 2020 on some measures to ensure the efficiency of the decision-making process of non-reimbursable external funds for regional development in Romania, published in the Official Journal of Romania no. 686 of July 31, 2020.

One of the main policy objectives proposed by the European Commission (out of 5) and targeted by this project, is **A smarter Europe (an innovative and smart economic transformation)** and involves improving regional competitiveness by increasing productivity in areas with potential for growth and smart specialization, by stimulating innovation and research capacities and promoting the use of advanced technologies and of information and communication technology services, addressed by priorities no. 1: NE - A more competitive, more innovative region and no. 2: NE - A more digitized region.

According to the new version of the **North-East ROP 2021-2027**, which was sent to the European Commission on **10.12.2021**, the operations dedicated to investments, corresponding to Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region in the period 2021-2027 are:

- Integration of RDI organizations into interregional and international cooperation structures, partnerships and projects, aligned with the RIS3 domains;
- Consolidation of the regional RDI ecosystem;
- Developing the innovation capacity of enterprises;
- Innovative development of clusters;

The North-East RDA is the initiator of the first Smart Specialization Strategy in Romania - RIS3 North-East (2013), and its updating has been done together with regional public and private actors: companies, universities - research and development centres, public administrations and civil society.

RIS3 North-East 2021-2027 (correlated with National Strategy of Research, Innovation and Smart Specialization) aims to establish the areas in which investments will focus on, as Policy Objective 1 of cohesion policy "A smarter Europe". In order to operationalize the strategy, it is necessary to implement projects (investment, skills development, research-development-innovation, technology transfer or cooperation / association) whose benefits should be reflected in improving the quality of life in the region's communities.

In this sense, in order to update RIS3 Nord-Est, 12 EDPs (entrepreneurial discovery process) were organized by North-East RDA, during March-July 2020 so as to identify and revalidate

potential priority areas and niches of specialization, update the sectoral vision, targets and intervention mechanisms necessary to be implemented in the period 2021-2027 for each area of specialization, update the monitoring and evaluation system based on the analysis of regional innovation potential, the analysis of competitive and comparative advantages and the skills mapping process for sectors with specialization potential.

The new reconfiguration of the **ENVIRONMENTAL priority area**, with *Water - innovative solutions*, *Air - innovative solutions* and *Circular Economy* niches and related sub-niches (*indicative and not limiting description*) resulted from the EDP process, were validated by the quadruple helix representatives, voted in the public debate, and will be the basis for future investment directions.

ENVIRONMENT Sector	
Niche	Sub-niches (<i>by way of example, not limitation</i>)
Water (Innovative solutions)	Innovative solutions for water efficiency
	Wastewater treatment and treatment technologies
	Technologies for recovery and recirculation / reuse of wastewater
	Advanced water quality monitoring and control systems (incl. Priority and emerging pollutants)
	Sludge treatment and recovery

Unlike the previous period (ROP 2014-2020), depending on the existing financing measures at national level, **ROP 2021-2027 will involve an important component dedicated to the operationalization of the RIS3 Strategy**, as providing technical assistance to project promoters in the RIS3 portfolio, including by resolving requests for information on RIS3, the conditions for accessing funding available through the Axis 1 ROP 2014 - 2020 at the level of the North-East Region and the call for the preparation of infrastructure projects in the field of smart specialization for the North-East Region, etc.

Romania is consistently listed as a modest innovator, with the lowest percentages of technology transfer and marketing innovation and the lowest percentage of companies that have innovated and marketed in the EU. Basically, one of the main problems seems to be the ability to absorb innovation in companies, the main features of the innovation and technology transfer process referring to: reduced cooperation between SMEs and research and development institutions; a small number of innovative SMEs participating in knowledge transfer activities; SMEs are more interested in capacity building than in research and innovation; low technology transfer rate and weak entrepreneurial culture.



Part III – Planned Actions

Increase collaboration between regional stakeholders by initiating and activating Action Groups (AG), and stimulate and support them in order to increase the capacity to innovate and successfully apply for funding under future funding schemes

1. Context

The problems related to the water sector, encountered by the regional entities, are partly dependent on the specifics of the entity, their location, the availability of resources and their quality. The main problems resulting from the consultation of regional entities are:

- the continuous increase of the competition for water as a result of an increased consumption model;
- outdated infrastructure and high operating costs of regional water operators;
- limited capacity to absorb innovation in companies;
- reduced cooperation between SMEs and research and development institutions;
- small number of innovative SMEs participating in technology and knowledge transfer activities;
- SMEs are more interested in capacity building than in research and innovation;
- low rate of technology transfer;
- poorly developed entrepreneurial culture at regional level;
- lack of qualified staff.

The need to solve the above-mentioned issues is inevitable, through cooperation both at regional and interregional level because, in view of the characteristics of the water field, these difficulties cannot be addressed locally or individually.

One of the good practices identified in the project, namely the **S3 “Water Smart Territories” (WST) Partnership**, pays special attention to supporting cross-sectoral collaboration between the water sectors and the IT&C field with the highlighting of the most promising innovations. The exchange of experience between inter-regional value chains, portfolios and investment platforms, has the role of strengthening the industrial dialogue and will foster the development of technologies and innovation services. The **North-East Region joined and became a formal member** of the Water Smart Territories partnership in **2019**.

In order to develop and increase the critical mass of the innovation ecosystem in the water sector, the activity within the S3 Platform inspired us and we considered it opportune to initiate and activate Action Groups (AG) which is a first step towards attracting different actors from various sectors, for collaboration in solving the challenges in the water-energy-environment-circular economy-biodiversity sector. Quadruple-Helix Action Groups (AGs) - government authorities / agencies - private sector - academia and RDI - NGOs, represent a community for debate, where information can be exchanged, opportunities for international collaboration can be identified, the alignment between the educational profile and the market demand, ideas, projects, concepts, technologies, products, etc. can be generated.

Another best practice that inspired us is WaterCampus Leeuwarden an umbrella organisation for WETSUS, CEW si Water Alliance, that stimulates the cooperation between (inter)national



businesses, knowledge institutes and governments within the water technology sector, in order to create synergy for world class innovation, education and entrepreneurship.

In this case, we focused on the Entrepreneurship phase, bundled all the knowledge and experience, with certified coaches in order to turn innovative ideas into successful breakthrough innovations - e.g. the regional call for innovation project ideas, organized by North-East RDA, and the support programme for the development of innovation capacity, implemented in collaboration with the World Bank – aimed to foster the number and the quality of project applications to the calls organized under the Priority Axis 1 of the ROP 2021-2027.

Moreover, in developing the sub-actions from the Regional Action Plan, we were inspired by the partners contribution to the regional evaluations, the good practices identified but also by the one-on-one discussions in the interregional meetings. Therefore, in order to improve innovation policies for increasing the critical mass of innovation ecosystems, the regions of Crete (Greece), Murcia (Spain), South Moravia (Czech Republic) and the Northern Region (Portugal) have set out to increase and improve public consultation during the preparation of regional RIS3 and water innovation policies and Latvia proposed to set up a strong stakeholder group to work with the managing authorities to ensure a better absorption of funds.

By implementing these actions, we aim to eventually increase the collaboration within the region and stimulate the stakeholders to apply with a higher number of project applications for innovation and technological transfer in the water sector, submitted for financing under the Priority Axis 1 of the ROP 2021-2027 and not only. Such initiative is highly necessary for the implementation of the policy instrument, whose major challenge during the 2014-2020 period was the reduced number of project applications, and the even lower number of accepted applications, hence the insufficient absorption of the allocated funds.

2. Action

The action that will be implemented in North-East Romania will have two main sub-actions (phases):

1. Strengthening regional innovation ecosystems;
2. Stimulate and support regional stakeholders to submit project applications.

2.1. Sub-Action 1: Initiation, activation and maturation of regional action groups and involvement in regional and / or interregional partnerships

Strengthening regional innovation ecosystems through the maturation of Regional Action Groups and their involvement in interregional collaborations on various topics, is closely **linked to all 3 roadmaps**, namely: **1: Increasing the critical mass of the innovation ecosystem, 2: Human Resources** and **3: Internationalization**. The maturation of these AGs involves, in addition to developing the critical mass of the innovation ecosystem by improving cross-sectoral collaborations, increasing skills through training in water, raising awareness of the importance of water, and connecting with similar regional / European initiatives; identification of potential projects for implementation in partnership with local, regional, international actors.

The following Action Groups (AGs) were proposed and agreed by regional stakeholders who participated in the regional meetings organized in the North-East Region:

(a) “Green Infrastructure” Regional Action Group

(b) “Digitization of Water Services” Regional Action Group



(c) “Circular economy in the water sector” Regional Action Group

For the maturation of these action groups, meetings will frequently take place in which the following will be addressed: regional needs and challenges, funding opportunities, project ideas, consortium creation, good practices, training needs, projects, meetings matchmaking, planning and organizing events awareness and responsibility in the field of water, etc.

At the same time, in November 2021, North-East RDA launched the “Success Stories” online campaign, which promotes good practices from the RIS3 North-East priority areas, presenting to the general public examples of regional and international innovation projects successfully implemented by success entities in the North-East Region.

The plan of activities that has been done or in progress in order to be realized in Phase 2 of the project, can be consulted in the following table:

No.	Period	Activities	% Finalized
1	11.2020-12.2020	• Determining the membership criteria for each Action Group (GA). Selection of regional actors for participation in Action Groups, depending on skills and experience gained.	100
2	12.2020	• Development of the strategy form of each action group. Consultation of actors invited to participate voluntarily.	100
3	01.2021	• Initiation and organization of 3 meetings, one for each GA. Discussion of the topic to be addressed in each GA. Preparation of the minutes of the meetings and information of the participating volunteers from each GA.	100
4	02.2021	• Initiation and organization of the second round of meetings. Developing the vision of each GA, depending on the specific themes and requirements of the market. Preparing the minutes of the meeting and consulting the volunteer participants.	100
5	04.2021 – 12.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing the organization of meetings or inviting stakeholders to participate at different related events, conferences, searching and sending related financial opportunities, promoting best practices, etc. (<i>eg North-East Climate Awareness Day, 05.11.2021 - representatives from academia and business were invited to present implemented projects and innovative technologies in the field of water</i>); • Meetings of regional action groups discussing: regional needs and challenges, funding opportunities, project ideas, creating consortia, best practices, training needs, projects, matchmaking meetings, planning and organizing awareness and responsibility events in the field of water etc. (<i>eg the regional meeting of the regional action groups, 26.11.2021 - the challenges, the needs of the regional action groups were discussed and it was proposed to create a Cluster in the field of Environment</i>) • Launching a campaign to promote success stories in the North-East Region in the areas of smart specialization (<i>eg Newsletter # 2 - promotion of the project aimed at the circular economy in the field of water</i>) – share on North-East RDA website and Facebook Connect Nord-Est (projects implemented or in progress) 	100

6.	01.2022 – 05.2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing events to meet the regional needs and challenges discussed in previous meetings of the action groups (inviting regional / national / international actors to share best practices, experts to share perspectives, etc.) • Frequent regional action group meetings to discuss: funding opportunities, project ideas, consortium creation, best practices, training needs, projects, matchmaking meetings, planning and organizing water awareness and responsibility events, etc. • Maturation of regional AGs through involvement in interregional partnerships, international networks, project proposals in partnership, training of specialists, etc. 	-
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2.2. Sub-Action 2: Stimulating and supporting the participation of the regional stakeholders in order to apply for funding under future funding schemes

North-East RDA has launched **an open call for the RIS3 North-East project portfolio** (4 September - 14 December 2020). The purpose of this call was to establish a portfolio of priority project proposals in the fields of smart specialization of the North-East Region and to support them to be successfully implemented in the programming period 2021-2027, through the North-East ROP 2021-2027, other operational programs and public funds available at national level or funds managed directly by the European Commission, which support innovative development.

The call ended with **118 proposals received on time** (budget of 980.68 million euros), proving the interest and confidence of regional actors in the transparent and professional mechanism proposed by North-East RDA. The project proposals were analysed and evaluated by experts from North-East RDA, resulting in a number of **85 proposals accepted** and selected in the project portfolio of RIS3 North-East. The promoters of the project sheets will **receive the support of North-East RDA** in order to develop the project ideas and will be invited to participate in Project Development Lab Workshops (PDL) in which appropriate sources of funding for their projects will be identified and feedback on how they can improve their ideas will be offered, etc.

Two of the submitted project proposals concern the niche **"Water (innovative solutions)" (area of specialization: Environment)** and the niche "Energy efficiency" (area of specialization Energy), and refers to **reducing the environmental impact by implementing innovative solutions in the field of water** within two private companies in the region, in collaboration with academia and research.

Moreover, in order to overcome the regional needs, the North-East Regional Development Agency launched in 2021, the second call of the **Research Valorisation Program (RVP 2.0)** to identify research projects with high commercial potential in the North-East Region and to support related project teams to strengthen knowledge and skills to advance their own project to a higher level of technological training (TRL). RVP 2.0 is an English-language program run by North-East RDA to facilitate the transition of research results to the market, through a personalized journey designed to cover all the specific needs of research teams. This support is provided in the form of business development workshops, personalized coaching sessions and market launch assistance. In order to carry out this program, North-East RDA received technical assistance from the World Bank under the Administrative Agreement (EC 2018.CE.16.BAT.059) between the European Commission and the World Bank signed in 2018.



Within this call, experts from the World Bank and the North-East RDA selected **10 projects** from the North-East region to provide assistance and guidance to strengthen capacity and facilitate interaction with industry, such as marketing strategies, intellectual property rights, marketing strategies and so on. One of the selected applications covered the **Environment (Water – innovative solutions)** area of smart specialization, entitled: *„Innovative and sustainable solutions for the elimination of priority and emerging pollutants for advanced wastewater treatment processes (PureGeo)“* applied by „Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi.

Research teams from the regional Universities received support from North-East RDA and Senior Innovation Consultants from World Bank Group for needs-based coaching and mentoring for capacity-building and facilitation of interaction with the industry, such as (but not limited to) marketing strategy, intellectual property rights, commercialization strategy etc. and provided international advisory focused on entrepreneurship, innovation ecosystems, innovation strategy, accelerator programs, research commercialization and spin-outs, innovation district planning, and economic development strategy.

The results of call for project portfolio RIS3 and RVP 2.0 showed us that project ideas in the water and innovative technologies domain exist and we will try to support the beneficiaries with project maturation and finance in the next programming period 2021-2027.

The proposed activities to improve the policy instrument, ROP 2021-2027, Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region, Specific objective ERDF a (i) Development of research and innovation capacities and adoption of advanced technologies, will consist in:

- Inviting all stakeholders in the field of water - innovative technologies, to be involved in the public consultation process when the specific Guidelines for Priority 1 calls will be available;
- Stimulating regional actors in the field of water to apply with project sheets to the next call for the establishment of the project portfolio related to RIS3 North-East # 2 (2022);
- Presentation of a proposal to the Management Authority of the North-East ROP 2021-2027, in order to improve the Technical-Financial Evaluation Grid for future calls of projects under Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region, through granting additional points in the technical-economic evaluation grid for that project proposals that are included in the RIS3 North-East portfolio, based on specialization priorities related to the sectors and niches identified and validated in RIS3 North-East (incl. Water-innovative technologies niche);
- Support offered by North-East RDA: Information sessions, one-to-one meetings, coaching programs, invite experts based on stakeholders needs for workshops, etc. for the maturation of proposals and for submitting project applications for regional / national or international funding.

The plan of activities that were and will be realized within Sub-action 2, in Phase 2 of the project, can be consulted in the following table:

No.	Period	Activities	% Finalized
1	09.2020-02.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of open call for the establishment of the project portfolio related to RIS3 North-East; • Invitation sent to regional stakeholders in order to participate to the informative and further clarification session on the call for the establishment of the portfolio of innovative projects in the fields of smart specialization RIS3 North-East; • One-to-one information or clarifications (telephone or email) regarding the successful completion of the project file. 	100



		<p>Support in creating regional partnerships (online discussions and meetings);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The call ended with 118 proposals received on time, were analysed and evaluated by experts from the North-East RDA - 2 project proposals target Water niche (innovative solutions); • Publication of the results: 85 project proposals accepted and selected in the RIS 3 North-East project portfolio. 	
2	03.2021-12.2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the support strategy from North-East in order to mature the project ideas included in the RIS3 portfolio; • Information session on North-East RDA in order to mature the project ideas included in the RIS3 portfolio and frequent meetings with the initiators of the project files; • Support given for maturing project proposals (eg. <i>Launch of the second call of the Research Results Development Program (RVP 2.0) - 13 applications submitted, 10 selected - 1 application in the field of Environment, Water niche (innovative solutions) - online workshops designed to improve the commercial nature of projects proposed. The personalized coaching program started in October, which last approximately 3 months and will end in February 2022 with a DemoDay (event in which the teams that have successfully completed the coaching program will present their project ideas in the face of investors).</i> 	100
3	01.2022 – 05.2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information session / Project development labs (PDL) in order to mature the project ideas; • Consultation meetings on improving the application documentation (specific guide, administrative compliance and eligibility verification grid, technical-economic evaluation grid, etc.) under the ROP 2021-2027, Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region, and making proposals, if necessary; • Preparation of a proposal to the Management Authority of the North-East ROP 2021-2027, in order to improve the Technical-Financial Evaluation Grid on future calls for projects under Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region, by awarding additional points in the technical-economic evaluation grid for the project proposals included in the RIS3 North-East portfolio; • Support offered by North East RDA in order to realize applications that will be submitted for financing in the ROP 2021-2027, Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region, and not only. 	-

3. Involved stakeholders

It will be considered to increase the number of actors involved by promoting the activities and good practices carried out within the AGs. The regional actors involved in the implementation of the action are part of the following entities:



Entity	Role
North-East RDA	<p>Coordination and overall implementation of regional action plan activities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitating contacts in order to create regional / international project consortia and offer support in order to increase the capacity of a project application; • initiation and mediation of preliminary and advanced discussions; • organizing or participating in events of interest and inviting regional actors to share good practices; • encourage stakeholders to join project consortia, apply to different project calls, participate at thematic webinars, conferences and courses for capacity building; • inviting regional actors to consult on improving the implementation documentation under the ROP 2021-2027, Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region; • preparing a proposal to the Managing Authority of the North-East ROP 2021-2027, in order to improve the Technical-Financial Evaluation Grid on future calls for projects under Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region, by awarding additional points for the project proposals included in the RIS3 North-East portfolio.
The academic and research-development-innovation environment in the field of water and the fields related to AGs within: “Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi and/or “Al. I. Cuza” University from Iasi and/or „Vasile Alecsandri” University from Bacau and/or „Stefan cel Mare” University from Suceava	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active participation within meetings / round tables / trainings; • get involved in regional / international project consortia; • share success stories – to be promoted on different media’s or be presented in different events; • offer trainings and technical support if needed; • get involved and give feedback in the consultations on improving the implementation documentation within the ROP 2021-2027, Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region; • preparation of project applications in partnership.
Local authorities and NGOs The Prut –Bârlad and Siret water basin administrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in meetings / round tables / trainings; • involvement and feedback in the consultations on improving the implementation documentation within the Regional Operational Program 2021-2027, Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region.
Intercommunity Development Associations (ADIs) in the water sector	
County Environmental Protection Agencies	
Local Public Administrations	
Companies Regional water infrastructure operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in meetings / round tables / trainings;

Private companies, water technology providers, including those in the IT&C sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involvement and feedback in the consultations on improving the implementation documentation within the Regional Operational Program 2021-2027, Priority 1. North-East - A more competitive, more innovative region. • share success stories – to be promoted on different media's or be presented in different events.
Private and public companies, water consumers (food industry, textile, etc.)	

4. Timeframe

Sub-Action 1: November 2020 - May 2023

Sub-Action 2: September 2020 - May 2023

5. Costs

Due to the nature of the action and the global pandemic context, most meetings take place online. However, the North-East RDA has planned two physical meetings of the North-East regional action group in the form of one-to-one meeting, interview, talk on opportunities for collaboration, support for project proposals, etc.

- Travel and subsistence costs (if applicable) – Internal transport for meetings with members of the stakeholder group in the North-East Region that consists in car trips for individual meetings in the region
- Costs related to organizing the events (if applicable) - preferably is to organize the meetings online
- No additional costs required (excluding irrelevant salary costs)

6. Financing source

Potential sources of funding:

- Own for participating organizations
- Other sources will be identified

Date

Signature

Stamp of the organisation

