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Actionable Policy Recommendation Report

Project: DIALOGUE (BSB01104) – Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme



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Index Actionable Policy Recommendation Report ... Hata! Yer işareti tanımlanmamış.

1. Introduction and Purpose	3
1.1 Background of the DIALOGUE Project	3
1.2 Purpose of the Report	3
1.3 The Strategic Context	4
2. Methodology	4
3. Summaries and Synthesis of Regional Findings	4
3.1. Summaries of Regional Needs Analysis Reports	5
3.2. Synthesis of Common Cross-Border Gaps	6
4. Actionable Policy Recommendations	7
4.1. Promoting Civic Engagement and the Quadruple Helix	7
4.2. Incentivization for SME Green and Digital Transition	7
4.3. Knowledge Transfer and Ecosystem Development	8
4.4. Cross-Border Integration and Legal Synergies	8
5. Key Questions for Further Consultation (Input for RESC Report)	8

1. Introduction and Purpose

1.1 Background of the DIALOGUE Project

The DIALOGUE project (BSB01104) is a collaborative initiative supported by the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme 2021-2027. The project addresses the shared challenge of low innovation capacity and fragmented institutional coordination across the target regions in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania.

Its primary objective is to enhance the institutional capacity of, and dialogue between, public and civil society actors within the regional innovation ecosystems. By fostering people-to-people actions and improving cross-sectoral communication, the project aims to build mutual trust and facilitate deeper integration among communities and institutions across the Black Sea Basin.

1.2 Purpose of the Report

In accordance with the project's technical specifications, the purpose of this report is to translate the findings of the Regional Needs Analysis (conducted in Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania) into specific, actionable policy recommendations. It is important to note that the main policy document for this project will be the "Recommendations for Effective and Sustainable International Cooperation" (RESC) report. This current document serves as a foundational basis and core input for the RESC report. By defining the exact interventions required by regional stakeholders, it guides the subsequent design, operating model, and long-term sustainability frameworks of the Black Sea Innovation Platform (BSIP) that will be finalized in the main RESC report.

1.3 The Strategic Context

To ensure the long-term viability of the proposed recommendations, the regional goals established in this report are aligned with the European Green Deal, the Digital Europe Programme, and the Horizon Europe (WIDERA) frameworks. The recommendations specifically target the integration of the Quadruple Helix model (Public-Private-Academia-Civil Society) into regional policymaking.

2. Methodology

The findings and recommendations presented in this report were developed through a structured, multi-stage methodology combining needs analysis and stakeholder consultation:

- **Regional Needs Analysis:** Field research conducted in December 2025 across TR21 (Türkiye), BG33 (Bulgaria), and RO22 (Romania) to identify gaps in innovation capacity.
- **International Workshop (Varna, Bulgaria):** A joint session held on January 19-21, 2026, where regional partners synthesized local findings to identify common cross-border bottlenecks.
- **Policy Synthesis:** The alignment of identified regional needs with actionable policy steps aimed at civil society engagement and SME incentivization.

3. Summaries and Synthesis of Regional Findings

To formulate effective cross-border policies, it is necessary to first outline the specific ecosystem dynamics, challenges, and capacities identified in each partner region during the Needs Analysis phase.

3.1. Summaries of Regional Needs Analysis Reports

3.1.1 TR21 Trakya Region (Türkiye)

The TR21 region is characterized by a dual economic structure: an export-oriented industrial base concentrated in Tekirdağ/Çorlu and a traditional, agriculture-focused economy in Edirne and Kırklareli. The regional innovation ecosystem currently operates primarily on a Triple Helix model (Government-University-Industry). Civil society participation in innovation is weak and is represented mostly by business associations rather than citizen-centric NGOs.

A shortage of qualified technical personnel is noted as a primary barrier to industrial innovation. While large enterprises are aligning their operations with the EU Green Deal due to supply chain requirements, SMEs generally perceive these adaptations as cost burdens and lack implementation capacity. Conversely, the region possesses an established incubation infrastructure; Technoparks and the Chamber-led TEKMER (Technology Development Center) serve as functional models for bridging R&D and commercialization.

3.1.2 BG33 Severoiztochen Region (Bulgaria)

Classified as an 'Emerging Innovator', the BG33 region experiences structural fragmentation and funding challenges within its research and innovation system. The ecosystem is defined by a separation between research institutes and higher education institutions, which affects industry-science collaboration and the commercialization of research results.

The analysis indicates a need for practical and technical support for SMEs and the civil sector to translate national and European policies into practice. Furthermore, there is a requirement to improve interdisciplinary coordination among academic and research organizations to generate innovations with higher added value. Priority thematic areas for the region include ICT, mechatronics, biotechnology, and clean technologies.

3.1.3 RO22 South-East Region (Romania)

The RO22 region's policy framework aligns with EU strategic priorities, focusing on the sustainable blue economy, food and bioeconomy innovation, digital transformation, and crossborder environmental monitoring. However, regional integration into broader EU research and innovation networks remains limited due to capacity constraints in joint project development and structured networking.

The current regional architecture lacks a continuous, multi-actor platform to aggregate knowledge, coordinate stakeholders, and integrate citizen input into innovation and climate adaptation initiatives. The region requires a formal governance mechanism to support ongoing dialogue and facilitate participation in European funding streams.

3.2. Synthesis of Common Cross-Border Gaps

The comparative analysis of the regional reports indicates three primary areas requiring immediate policy intervention across the Black Sea Basin:

1. **The "Missing Helix" (Civil Society Deficit):** In all three regions, the innovation ecosystem functions primarily as a Triple Helix (Government-University-Industry). Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are largely excluded from the innovation design process and function only as passive beneficiaries.
2. **SME Hesitancy Towards the Green Transition:** SMEs across the target regions view the requirements of the EU Green Deal and digital transformation primarily as cost burdens rather than drivers of competitiveness.
3. **Human Capital and Skills Mismatch:** A shared challenge is the lack of qualified technical staff and the misalignment between academic curricula and the immediate needs of the digital and green economy.

4. Actionable Policy Recommendations

Based on the synthesized findings, the following actionable policies are recommended to strengthen the regional innovation ecosystem and guide the establishment of the Black Sea Innovation Platform (BSIP).

4.1. Promoting Civic Engagement and the Quadruple Helix

Objective: Transform NGOs from passive beneficiaries into active co-creators within the innovation system.

- **Action 1: Capacity Building for CSOs:** Regional development agencies and chambers of commerce should develop specific training modules for CSOs. These modules must focus on EU funding mechanisms (e.g., Horizon Europe, Erasmus+) and project cycle management to enable CSOs to participate effectively in international consortia.
- **Action 2: Co-Creation Mandates:** Public funding programs at the regional level should introduce criteria that reward or require the inclusion of CSOs in the design phase of innovation and sustainability projects, ensuring that local community needs are integrated into technological solutions.

4.2. Incentivization for SME Green and Digital Transition

Objective: Encourage SMEs to view the green and digital transitions as tools for competitiveness.

- **Action 1: "Test Before Invest" Infrastructure:** Utilize the Black Sea Innovation Platform to connect regional SMEs with existing European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) in the broader network. This allows SMEs to test digital and green technologies in real-world environments without heavy initial capital expenditure.
- **Action 2: Targeted Financial Instruments:** Regional authorities should develop localized incentive schemes, such as innovation vouchers or matched funding, specifically for SMEs undertaking green audits or implementing circular economy practices.

4.3. Knowledge Transfer and Ecosystem Development

Objective: Enable the transfer of operational know-how to build sustainable startup ecosystems.

- **Action 1: Codification of Best Practices:** Successful regional models, such as the Chamber-led TEKMER (Technology Development Center) in Çorlu, Türkiye, should have their operational processes codified. This knowledge can then be transferred to partner regions through the BSIP to support the establishment of similar incubation structures.
- **Action 2: Cross-Border Mentorship Programs:** Establish structured mentorship networks connecting mature technology parks and experienced innovators with emerging tech hubs across the Bulgaria-Romania-Türkiye corridor.

4.4. Cross-Border Integration and Legal Synergies

Objective: Facilitate seamless knowledge exchange and joint initiatives across borders.

- **Action 1: Harmonization of Innovation Metrics:** The BSIP should advocate for the use of common indicators (aligned with the European Innovation Scoreboard) across the three regions to allow for accurate benchmarking and joint policy assessment.
- **Action 2: Joint Policy Task Forces:** Establish thematic working groups within the BSIP (e.g., Agri-Tech, Green Logistics) comprising representatives from the Quadruple Helix of all three countries to draft joint position papers and align regional regulatory approaches.

5. Key Questions for Further Consultation (Input for RESC Report)

The following questions must be addressed by stakeholders during the upcoming International Forum to finalize the governance and sustainability models for the RESC report:

1. **Governance:** How can we design a "flexible governance model" for the Black Sea Innovation Platform that maintains momentum without becoming bureaucratically burdensome?

2. **Capacity Building:** What specific curriculum is needed to train Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to become effective partners in Horizon Europe consortia?
3. **Knowledge Transfer:** How can the specific operational know-how of regional Technoparks be codified and transferred to partners to jump-start startup ecosystems in the wider Black Sea Basin?
4. **Incentivization:** What additional policy or financial incentives can be offered to encourage SMEs to view the green transition as a tool for competitiveness and to increase their active adoption of innovations?
5. **Cross-border integration:** What legal and administrative options exist for creating interregional competence centers or hubs that facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation practices across regions?
6. **Civic engagement:** How can the active participation of NGOs in the innovation system be promoted, transforming them from passive beneficiaries into active co-creators, transferring their specialized knowledge about local community needs and wellfunctioning models into added value for innovations?
7. **Synergies with other initiatives:** How can the DIALOGUE project synchronize its outcomes with similar initiatives in the Black Sea region to avoid duplication and maximize effectiveness?
8. **Alignment with European Programmes:** How can the Black Sea Innovation Platform identify and target specific calls within Horizon Europe, the Digital Europe Programme, and other relevant European funding streams to support joint regional initiatives?