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Practical Outline

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

*Engaging with the Black Sea Basin Programme and the EU Digital Decade in
Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye*

Black Sea Innovation Platform DialogueInnoHub

www.dialogueinnohub.com

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DIALOGUE: Dialogue for innovation and better governance"
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Introduction

Citizen participation is a cornerstone of good governance and a prerequisite for **building a more democratic, inclusive, and resilient society**. This is particularly important in innovation policy, where entrepreneurs, researchers, students, civil society organisations, and citizens are often best placed to identify regional challenges, emerging opportunities, and priorities for public investment.

Policies and programmes are more effective when the people and organisations they affect contribute to their development and implementation. Across the European Union and its neighbourhood, public authorities are increasingly expected—and, in many cases, legally required—to integrate participatory approaches into policy-making. Yet many citizens and organisations remain unaware of the opportunities to engage or doubt that their voices can make a difference.

This practical guide explains how public policies and programmes are developed and identifies the main channels through which citizens and stakeholders in Bulgaria, Romania, and, where relevant, Türkiye can participate in shaping them. Drawing on examples such as the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme and the Digital Decade Policy Framework, it highlights practical opportunities for engagement and shows how different actors can contribute to more effective and inclusive public policies.

How this outline matters to the quadruple helix actors

Public authorities & regional agencies

Understand their obligations under national consultation laws and the EU partnership principle, and how to design genuine — not box-ticking — engagement processes.

Businesses & SMEs

Track open consultations, National Contact Points and Monitoring Committee opportunities relevant to their sector.

Academia & research institutions

Contribute evidence and expertise to public consultations, workshops, and advisory or monitoring bodies shaping regional policy.

Citizens & Civil society organizations

Understand their legal right to comment on draft policies and strategies, and the concrete portals and deadlines for doing so.

The Policy Making Process

Policy-making — including the design of programmes such as Horizon Europe, the Digital Decade or the Black Sea Basin Programme — is rarely a single top-down act, even though organisations often only become aware of a new policy, strategy or programme once it is already well underway. In reality it functions as a continuous, iterative cycle that returns to earlier stages as evidence, priorities and circumstances evolve.

The cycle unfolds in 5 stages. It typically opens with *problem definition*, where an issue requiring public intervention is identified and placed before decision-makers as something government needs to address. This feeds into *agenda setting*, where objectives are set on the basis of the problem defined and alternative courses of action are weighed against those objectives. The chosen direction is then carried into *policy/programme development*, the stage at which the actual policy or programme is drafted — its objectives and priorities for a policy, or, for a programme, also its budget, eligibility rules and calls for proposals. Once adopted, it moves into *implementation*, where it is put into practice through concrete measures, projects and funded actions. The cycle closes with *policy/programme evaluation*, when results are assessed against the objectives originally set.

Importantly, the cycle does not always restart from a blank page. Where evaluation shows the underlying problem was rightly identified but the response now needs adjusting, the cycle re-enters directly at agenda setting or programme development through reformulation. A genuinely new problem definition is only needed when evaluation, or a change in context, points to a different or previously unrecognised issue.



The policy-making process, as it becomes clear, follows a cycle with a two-way pattern: "top-down" for goal setting and "bottom-up" for reporting and evaluating results. This hierarchical subordination in the structuring of goals and results is illustrated in the following figure, which traces the chain from strategic policy down to individual projects, and, in reverse, from project results back up to policy evaluation.

Top-down for goal setting | **Bottom-up** for results



Strategic goals set at EU level (e.g. the Digital Decade's 2030 targets, or Horizon Europe's Strategic Plan) cascade into national or joint frameworks — National Digital Decade Roadmaps, Partnership Agreements, the Black Sea Basin cooperation programme — which are then broken down into calls and grant procedures, down to individual projects. Results flow back up the same chain: project outcomes feed into programme monitoring, which feeds into national and EU-level evaluation and the next round of priority-setting.

The Stakeholders Participation Framework

No stage of the policy-making process described above happens to stakeholders — it happens *with* them. Businesses, researchers, civil society organisations and citizens across Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye have *a recognised right*, and *a practical opportunity*, to help define the problems that reach the agenda, shape the priorities that get set, and influence how programmes are ultimately delivered and adjusted. This reflects a deliberate design choice: policies and programmes are more legitimate, better targeted and more effectively implemented when the people and organisations they affect help shape them.

This participation is organised, not ad hoc. Rather than a single undifferentiated invitation to "have your say," it is structured as a ladder of four channels — **information**, **consultation**, **dialogue** and **partnership** — each opening a different depth of engagement and a different degree of influence over the outcome. A stakeholder can enter at whichever rung suits their capacity and interest, and each successive rung builds on, rather than replaces, the one before it.

The same four channels apply regardless of which of the three countries a stakeholder is based in; what differs is which institution sits on the receiving end — an EU policy body, a national authority, or the Managing Authority, Joint Monitoring Committee or National Contact Point of a specific programme.



01

INFORMATION

The baseline, one-directional right to know: access to data, documents and decisions, available to any stakeholder without an application or eligibility test. It underpins every other form of engagement.

02

CONSULTATION

The right to comment on a draft before it is finalised. Authorities publish draft texts, collect stakeholder input within a defined period, and are expected to consider and respond to it — though the final decision remains theirs.

03

DIALOGUE

Structured, two-way exchange that shapes the substance of a decision rather than simply reacting to it once drafted — working groups, workshops or standing forums that bring authorities and stakeholders together over time.

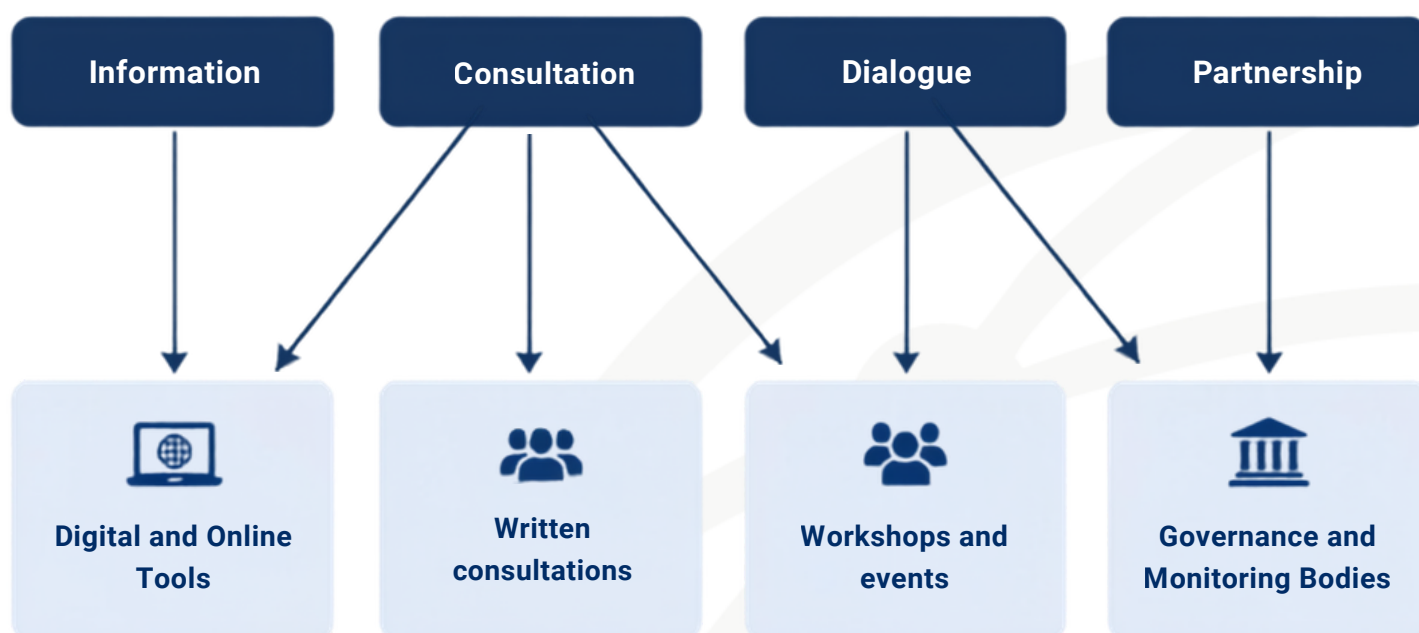
04

PARTNERSHIP

The highest rung: shared responsibility, formalised through a seat — with voting or observer rights — inside the body that actually takes the decision, whether on funding priorities, project selection or programme amendments.

How the four channels operate in practice

In practice, each rung of the ladder operates through a recognisable set of everyday tools: Information mainly through digital and online portals; Consultation through written, time-bound comment procedures or meetings with selected interested parties; Dialogue through workshops and multi-stakeholder events; and Partnership through governance and monitoring bodies.



The next section walks through each of these in turn, with the concrete entry points in Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye.

How the four channels operate in practice

Information

Most national legislation in EU countries gives any person the right to request information from public bodies, and a growing number of open-data and tracking portals let anyone follow an initiative online without needing to apply or qualify. This is the lightest-touch channel — the entry point for everything else, since stakeholders cannot meaningfully consult, dialogue or partner without first knowing what is being decided, and on what basis.

Bulgaria

- **Access to Public Information Act** — any person may request information from state bodies, territorial units and municipalities, in writing or electronically; a reply is due within 14 days (extendable by up to 14 more days).
- Requests via pitay.government.bg (request platform) and data.egov.bg (open data portal)

Romania

- **Law No. 544/2001 on free access to public information** — gives any person the right to request information of public interest from public authorities, addressed directly to the relevant authority; response due within 10 days for straightforward requests (up to 30 days if more research is needed).

Türkiye

- **Law No. 4982 on the Right to Information** — requests can be submitted directly or through CİMER, the Presidential Communication Centre, also reachable via the e-Devlet portal. CİMER includes a dedicated "Participate in the Administration" (Yönetime Katıl) section where citizens can respond to selected policy topics.



Consultation

Consultation is one of the most common ways citizens and stakeholders contribute to public policies and programmes: transparent publication of draft texts and impact assessments, defined minimum comment periods, an obligation to record — and in some cases respond to — comments received, and dedicated online portals.

It can happen at several points in the policy cycle; the earlier stakeholders are involved, the greater the potential for their input to influence the final direction.

At EU level

The "Have Your Say" portal is the European Commission's single online gateway for public input into EU policymaking, run by the Commission's Directorate-General for Communication. It consolidates every consultation opportunity the Commission has published since November 2018 and covers several stages: an early roadmap or "call for evidence" (around four weeks), a formal public consultation once a proposal is more developed (around twelve weeks), and — once the Commission has adopted a proposal — an eight-week feedback window on the adopted text before it goes to the co-legislators. Anyone can respond by creating a free EU Login account, as an individual or on behalf of a registered organisation.

- **Horizon Europe:** each multi-year Strategic Plan is developed through a formal "co-design" process combining a public survey with stakeholder workshops — the 2025–2027 Strategic Plan was co-created with more than 2,000 stakeholders and citizens.
- **Digital Decade:** the annual "State of the Digital Decade" review draws on consultations and stakeholder surveys — the 2025 review ran separate surveys for industry, civil society, NGOs, national authorities, regions and cities, plus a call for evidence open to the general public, alongside a citizen-facing Eurobarometer survey.



Cross-border programmes

To capture both national and shared cross-border perspectives, the Programme runs its own series of consultation rounds hosted directly on its [website](#) rather than through a centralised EU portal.

The Managing Authority first consults stakeholders in participating countries (structured written questionnaires or dedicated events); once priorities are set, successive drafts of the cooperation programme document are each published with a structured questionnaire, and stakeholders across Bulgaria, Romania, Türkiye and the other participating countries are invited to comment before the next draft is finalised.

This mechanism targets the design of the cooperation programme itself — what gets funded, how, and for whom — rather than broader EU legislation.

Bulgaria

All ministries and agencies are required to publish draft laws, strategies, and other normative acts on the [Portal for Public Consultations](#) — run by the Council of Ministers' administration for public comment, typically for a minimum 30-day window under the Normative Acts Act, before they can be adopted. It's the closest Bulgarian equivalent to "Have Your Say" and is the right first stop for any stakeholder wanting to track or respond to draft national legislation.

Small-scale acts such as the drafts of calls for proposals are published for consultation through another online platform - the [Information System for management and Monitoring of the EU Funds in Bulgaria](#).

Romania

[E-Consultare](#) — the government's centralized platform for citizen and civil-society input on draft legislation, launched by the General Secretariat of the Government alongside a companion transparency platform ("Info-Transparență") is the available tool for accepting written comments on policies and programmes. It operationalizes Romania's Law 52/2003 on decisional transparency, which already obliges every public institution to publish draft normative acts and allow a minimum 10-working-day comment period — historically scattered across individual ministry websites, with e-Consultare aimed at centralizing that.



Türkiye

Beyond CİMER, the Presidential Communication Centre, also reachable through the e-Devlet portal) of Türkiye — is the main national channel for citizens to submit opinions, requests, and suggestions to public institutions, and includes a dedicated "Participate in the Administration" (Yönetime Katıl) section where citizens can respond to selected policy topics. Beyond CİMER, consultation is typically organized ad hoc by individual ministries rather than through one central portal, so this is worth flagging as a structural difference from the Bulgaria/Romania mechanisms.

Dialogue

Dialogue is a structured, longer-lasting and results-oriented process grounded in mutual interest, valued at every stage of decision-making and crucial for agenda-setting, policy formulation and reform.

It takes two main forms:

- *General dialogue* — a two-way communication channel for the ongoing exchange of views, ranging from open public hearings to specialised meetings between stakeholders and public authorities.
- *Dialogue for cooperation* — used in the development of a specific policy, which typically leads to joint recommendations, strategies or legislative change and carries greater political weight. The initiative can come from either public authorities or stakeholder organisations. The initiative for dialogue can come from both public authorities and stakeholder organisations.

At EU level

- **Horizon Europe** sets priorities at the start of each multi-year Strategic Plan through the same formal co-design exercise referenced under Consultation above, combining a public survey with in-person and online workshops.
- **Digital Decade:** the Commission's technology department (DG CNECT) convenes an Annual Digital Decade Strategic Workshop, bringing together Member State representatives, industry and academia to feed directly into the annual State of the Digital Decade report.



Cross-border Strategies and Programmes

Beyond written consultations, the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat of the INTERREG NEXT Black Sea basin for example organise info days and partner-search forums ahead of each call for proposals, multi-stakeholder workshops and hearings on programme priorities, standing thematic working groups, and training and capacity-building sessions for applicants and beneficiaries during implementation.

Bulgaria

Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) workshops under Bulgaria's Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (ISSS) — a continuous, quadruple-helix process (public sector, business, academia and citizens/civil society) that shapes which technologies and sectors receive support, including through regional structures such as the Varna–Dobrich cluster.

Romania

Regional EDP workshops run by the Regional Development Agencies (ADRs) — including ADR Sud-Est, covering the region eligible under the Black Sea Basin Programme — combine stakeholder interviews, focus groups, workshops and open questionnaires for companies, local authorities, universities, research centres and civil society.

Türkiye

Beyond CİMER, Türkiye's main channel for multi-stakeholder events is the EU-funded Civil Society Dialogue (CSD) programme, financed under IPA. CSD organises recurring workshops, study visits and networking events pairing Turkish civil-society organisations with counterparts in Bulgaria, Romania and other EU Member States — complementing the Black Sea Basin Programme's own Info Days and Partner Search Forums as an entry point for Turkish organisations.



Partnership

Formal governance structures give organised stakeholders a standing seat at the table throughout a programme's lifetime, not just at the design stage. At EU level, this is most visible in Cohesion Policy, where it is formalised as the partnership principle: the European Code of Conduct on Partnership requires managing authorities to involve regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, and civil society bodies throughout the preparation and implementation of Partnership Agreements and operational programmes, with partners sitting on Monitoring Committees that meet regularly and take part in decisions on programme strategy and project-selection criteria.

Cross-border programmes

Dialogue for cooperation is embodied in the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme's Joint Monitoring Committee, bringing together representatives of all participating countries — Bulgaria, Greece and Romania as EU Member States, alongside Georgia, Moldova, Türkiye, Ukraine and Armenia as partner countries, with Türkiye represented through its National Authority (the Ministry for EU Affairs), reflecting its status as an IPA-funded candidate country rather than an EU Member State. The Committee meets regularly and has issued more than 60 formal decisions since the programme's launch, covering project-selection criteria, budget transfers and strategic and communication guidelines.

Bulgaria

- **Monitoring Committees for 2021–2027 EU-funded programmes** reserve seats for non-governmental legal entities acting in the public benefit, across five thematic groups (gender equality and non-discrimination; social inclusion; environment; education, science and culture; local action/fisheries groups). Selection follows an open call on eufunds.bg; eligible NGOs must demonstrate at least two years of active, relevant work.
- **Regional Councils for Development** (one per planning region, including Severoiztochen and Yugoiztochen, the Black Sea Basin-eligible regions) include three NGO observers with voting rights.
- Bulgaria also maintains a standing, **tripartite Economic and Social Council** issuing opinions on strategic economic and social matters, including EU-integration topics.



Romania

- As in Bulgaria, Romania involves regional and local authorities, economic and social partners and civil-society bodies in preparing and monitoring the Partnership Agreement and each operational programme, through partnership working groups during programming and reserved civil-society seats on each programme's Monitoring Committee, coordinated by the Ministry of Investments and European Projects.
- Thematic working groups tied to each Monitoring Committee provide a standing channel for business associations, universities and civil-society organisations to discuss implementation priorities between formal consultation rounds.

Türkiye

Because Türkiye is not yet an EU Member State, the Cohesion Policy partnership principle does not apply domestically in the same way; formal partnership-style engagement runs mainly through the Black Sea Basin Programme's own Joint Monitoring Committee (via the National Authority) and through EU-funded Civil Society Dialogue structures, rather than through reserved NGO seats on domestic Monitoring Committees comparable to Bulgaria or Romania — worth flagging as a genuine asymmetry rather than glossing over it.



How to get Involved

Not sure where to start? Five steps take you from awareness to active participation, regardless of which channel or programme you end up using

01**EXPLORE**

Work out which policies and programmes affect your organisation or community, and which stage of the policy cycle (Section II) they are currently at.

02**TRACK**

Bookmark your national consultation portal (strategy.bg or e-consultare.gov.ro), the EU's Have Your Say portal, and the Black Sea Basin Programme website, and watch for open windows relevant to your sector.

03**CONNECT**

Join a relevant network (e.g. the Black Sea Innovation Platform, the Black Sea NGO Network, your nearest European Digital Innovation Hub) for direct access to workshops and consultation opportunities.

04**PREPARE**

Draft clear, evidence-based written comments, or formally request a public debate meeting where that right exists (Romania), well before a deadline.

05**APPLY & SHARE**

Submit your input, attend the relevant workshop or Monitoring Committee session, and share the outcome with your network so others can engage too.



Checklist by type of Actor

If you are an individual citizen

- Check whether your municipality falls within a Black Sea Basin-eligible region, or is running Digital Decade-linked activities (e.g. digital skills training, a nearby European Digital Innovation Hub).
- Subscribe to your national consultation portal to be notified of relevant drafts.
- Attend an open municipal council meeting where regional development priorities are discussed.
- At EU level, comment through the Have Your Say portal, or — once enough signatures are collected across enough Member States — support a European Citizens' Initiative.

If you represent an NGO or civil society organisation

- Build and document at least two years of active, verifiable work in a relevant thematic area — the standard eligibility bar for NGO seats on Monitoring Committees and Regional Councils for Development.
- Watch for open calls for NGO representatives on eufunds.bg (Bulgaria) or through the Ministry of Investments and European Projects (Romania).
- Join a thematic network — such as the Black Sea NGO Network — for basin-wide projects and advocacy, or, in Türkiye, an EU-funded Civil Society Dialogue partnership.
- Respond to public consultations on draft Partnership Agreement documents, operational programmes, and Digital Decade roadmap updates.

Checklist by type of Actor

***If you are a
business, SME, start-
up, cluster or
researcher***

- Contact your nearest European Digital Innovation Hub for a digital-maturity assessment and connections to funding and testing opportunities.
- Register with your national Horizon Europe National Contact Point (NCP) network for guidance on calls, partner search and proposal support.
- Participate in your region's Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (S3/RIS3) consultations — interviews, focus groups, workshops or online questionnaires.
- Monitor Black Sea Basin Programme calls, especially Priority 1 ("Blue and Smart Region") and Priority 3 ("Competent and Resilient Region"), for cross-border research and innovation partnerships.

***If you are a local
or public authority***

- Ensure local development plans are opened for public comment and reflect regional S3/RIS3 and Digital Decade priorities.
- Nominate or support representatives to sit on Regional Councils for Development or equivalent regional bodies.
- Signpost residents and local businesses to the nearest European Digital Innovation Hub and to Black Sea Basin Programme information days.

Purpose	Portal / body	Country / level
 Access to public information / information /	pitay.government.bg data.egov.bg	Bulgaria
 Access to public information / information /	Requests to individual public authorities	Romania
 Access to public information / information /	CİMER (via e-Devlet)	Türkiye
 Public consultation on draft legislation & strategies	strategy.bg	Bulgaria
 Public consultation on draft legislation & strategies	e-consultare.gov.ro	Romania
 EU funds programming and monitoring	eufunds.bg	Bulgaria
 EU funds programming and monitoring	Ministry of Investments and European Projects	Romania
 Commission consultations at every policy stage	ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say	EU-wide
 Horizon Europe calls, documents, results	ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders	EU-wide
 Horizon Europe guidance, partner search, proposal support	National Contact Points (NCPs) — one network per country	BG / RO / TR
 Digital Decade policy, national roadmaps, country reports	digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu	EU-wide
 Smart Specialisation / Entrepreneurial Discovery Process guidance	Smart Specialisation Platform — s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu	EU-wide
 Black Sea Basin Programme — calls, consultations, governance	blacksea-cbc.net	Programme-wide
 Black Sea Innovation Platform — calls, consultations, partners search	dialogueinnohub.com	Programme-wide

Outlook: What to Watch Toward 2027+

This outline is a living rather than a final document. Three developments are worth tracking closely by anyone using it:

01

BLACK SEA BASIN PROGRAMME

the current 2021–2027 call cycle is entering its final rounds; attention will increasingly shift to the design of a successor cross-border programme, where early civil-society input carries particular weight.

[www://](http://www.dialogueinnohub.com)

02

DIGITAL DECADE & HORIZON EUROPE

both are reviewed on regular cycles – the annual State of the Digital Decade report and Eurobarometer, and the next Horizon Europe Strategic Plan and Framework Programme for the post-2027 period – with Bulgaria and Romania expected to revise their national roadmaps as targets and funding commitments evolve

03

POST-2027 COHESION POLICY

preparations are already underway, including active civil-society advocacy in Bulgaria for earlier and more meaningful participation in programming – a debate innovation-ecosystem and civil-society stakeholders in all three countries have a direct interest in joining.



Get in Touch

This Practical Outline is developed in the framework of the BSB 1104 DIALOGUE project (Dialogue for Innovation and Better Governance), co-funded by the INTERREG NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme.

For questions about this guide, partnership opportunities, or support navigating public consultations, workshops or governance bodies in Bulgaria, Romania or Türkiye, contact the Black Sea Innovation Platform — DialogueInnoHub:

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EU Funding & Tenders Portal: ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders

