ANNEX I

PRIORITY AREAS

The areas identified in the SERN strategy 2016-2018 reflect the political priority attached by the members to some key themes which are crucial for local and regional political agendas. The 5 priority areas of SERN are at the same time reflecting issues which are also prioritized by the European Union at policy and at programme level. The annex illustrates more specifically the priorities set out at EU level in relation to the five areas and should serve as a reference for those intending to plan transnational activities through EU funding. When developing, or joining, a project proposal members should recall that relevance to EU programme objectives and priorities represent always a key element in the evaluation process at EU level.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

At EU level, local and regional development as concepts are mainly associated to a set of operations to meet local objectives and needs, through the creation of local partnerships, which contributes to meeting the European Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Europe 2020).

From the perspective of the European Union, Local and regional development as a goal is strongly linked to a set of priorities in the framework of the three main Funds set up by the European Union at the core of its regional policy: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF)and the European Cohesion Fund (ECF).

The most relevant Fund for the SERN members transnational activities, due to its stronger transnational character, is the ERDF. The ERDF focuses its investments on several key priority areas. This is known as 'thematic concentration':

1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation

2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, information and communication technologies

3. Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs

4. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy

These priority areas are then turned into Programme Objectives. Under the current Programming period, SERN members can participate in the following Programmes Interreg V (Transnational Programmes such as Baltic Sea, North Sea Central Europe or Adrion[1] and INTERREG Europe[2] addressing the whole EU), and 3 networking programmes Urbact[3], Interact III and ESPON.

The programmes offer important opportunities for cooperation, however the level of complexity they present require a solid planning and management capacity with the municipalities. The majority of the participating local authorities are often medium-large sized cities. That note, however, that elements pertaining the creation of the conditions for local development can be addressed also through other programmes such as Erasmus+ or COSME[4].

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[1] More information at http://www.adrioninterreg.eu/
[2] More information at http://www.interregeurope.eu/
[3] More information at http://urbact.eu/
[4] More information bout the Programme can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/cosme_en. Information about the calls can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/cosme

EDUCATION AND LEARNING

In the field of education and training the European Union's main instrument for European cooperation at policy level is the Education and Training 2020 (ET2020)[5] strategic framework. It is in the context of ET2020 where the main challenges are identified and deepened and then translated into policy priorities addressed through Erasmus+[6], the EU Programme supporting cooperation in the field of Education and training, Youth and Sport.

ET2020 had identified four main objectives to be reached by 2020

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

These objectives represent the main refence for all those actors wishing to engage in transnational activities in the field of education and training in the context of the EU.

In the framework of SERN the activities carried out so far have been largely focused on school education and adult education. As interest for cooperation in these sectors is likely to continue to be high among the members, the following issues should be considered when identifying themes for common projects.

1) "Systemic" themes which are steadily at the centre of European policy-makers attention include in the school sector *improving pedagogical and organizational quality* of education, *fostering continuity across education levels* (pedagogical, professional, structural) to enhance continuity in education systems and *development of the teaching profession*. In the adult education sector increasing the supply and take-up of high quality adult learning provision to respond to demands for up- and reskilling of the workforce

2) Two transversal themes on which particular attention is, and will be, paid until 2018 are:
   a. *The development of digital skills and competences*. This means projects addressing themes such as the development of digital competences at all levels of learning, including non-formal and informal; Promoting the use of ICT with a view to increasing the quality and relevance of education at all levels; boosting availability and quality of open and digital educational resources and pedagogies at all education levels.

   b. Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. This means projects addressing themes such as: Promoting civic, intercultural, and social competences, mutual understanding and respect, and ownership of democratic values and fundamental rights at all levels of education and training; Tackling discrimination, racism, segregation, bullying (including cyber-bullying), violence and stereotypes.

Members when planning projects should remember to high value put by the European Union on creating synergies between different actors active in the field of education and training and on the value of exploitation of results of previously (EU)funded projects.

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[5] ET 2020 http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework_en
[6] The Erasmus+ is managed by national agency in Italy www.erasmusplus.it and Sweden www. http://utbyten.se/

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND MIGRATION

The European Commission supports and complements the Member States' policies in the fields of social inclusion and migration. The Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth sets targets to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion and to increase employment of the population aged 20-64 to 75%. The flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy, including the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, support efforts to reach these targets.

Though the Platform against Poverty and social Exclusion[7] , the European commission has identified the five areas for actions:

-        Delivering actions across the policy spectrum with, a particular focus on access to employment; access to welfare services; education and youth policies; migration and integration of migrants; social inclusion and antidiscrimination

-        Greater and more effective use of the EU Funds to support social inclusion

-        Promoting evidence-based social innovation;

-        Working in partnership with civil society to implement policies

-        Enhanced policy coordination among the Member States

There are different funding programmes supporting the implementation of actions for contrasting the risk of poverty and social exclusion, each one has with a focus on the issues listed above, such as: the European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI – Progress Axis); the Erasmus+ programme; the Justice programme; the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and the Europe for Citizens programme.

In the latest years the projects implemented within SERN focused on critical issues for local authorities in this field, like the welfare services delivered to marginalised people (especially elderly people); the integration of newly arrived citizens, and the development of public-private partnership with civil society organisations.

Some strategic priorities for the programming period 2014-2020 have been set out in the different programmes. These should be taken into consideration when planning future project proposals:

-        Education and training is a key instrument to promote the inclusion of people with disadvantaged backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants. Given the current context concerning migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, particular attention will be given to projects supporting inclusion though education, training, adult education and youth policies.

-        Contrasting all forms of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, violence against children or women and other forms of intolerance, as well as promote gender equality are key issues for the future as these could foster further marginalisation among the most vulnerable or excluded people within EU societies.

-        Investing in people's skills and capacities is a way to ensure an adequate standard of living throughout their life. The contributions of elderly or disabled people to society as carers for others or volunteers should be actively encouraged in order to allow them to remain in charge of their own lives for as long as possible, and reduce the need for long term care. Stakeholders such as NGOs, social partners, businesses, universities are key players in society and the economy, consulting them and mobilising their support is crucial for activities to be successful.

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[7] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0758:FIN:EN:PDF

HEALTH AND WELFARE

At EU level, a definition of welfare policy has not yet been identified owing to the fact that this word includes various EU policies, such as:

- ageing and elderly policy;
- employment and unemployment protection policy;
- combating poverty and social exclusion policies;
- pensions system policy.

In addition, there is no 'Single European Scheme' but every country implements its own systems as long as they abide by the guidelines of the provisions set by the European Commission and achieve an overall result of equality, stability and access to resources that every European individual should be provided with.

These elements are strictly connected to the priorities and flagships of the Europe 2020 Strategy where five goals in the areas of employment, innovation, education, poverty reduction and climate/energy have been identified to achieve a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

When it comes to the provision of Health care policies there is a continuous use of the open method of coordination[8] among Member States mainly because the rights to health care have been recognised in the Charter of Fundamental rights of the EU with 3 key points: access, quality and sustainability. Indeed, it is important to underline that organising and delivering healthcare is the responsibility of national governments and the EU's role is to complement national policies by helping them in achieving shared objectives.

Health care policy is also linked to the EU's food safety policy that covers "from farm to fork". It is designed to guarantee safe, nutritious food and animal feed, high standard of animal health and welfare and plant protection as well as a clear information on the origin, content and labelling and use of food.

EU Programmes linked to these themes which members could explore are:

Active Assisted Living Programme[9]
The AAL Programme is the funding activity that aims to create better conditions of life for the older adults and to strengthen the industrial opportunities in Europe through the use of information and communication technology (ICT). It carries out its mandate through the funding of transnational projects (at least three countries involved) that involve small and medium enterprises (SME), research bodies and user's organisations (representing the older adults).

Health Programme[10]
The programme has 4 overarching objectives: 1. Promote health, prevent diseases and foster supportive environments for healthy lifestyles considering the 'health in all policies' principle; 2. Protect the EU citizens from serious cross-border health threats; 3. Contribute to innovative, efficient and sustainable health systems; 4. Facilitate access to better and safer healthcare for EU citizens.

A focus on the exchange of best practices and exchange of experiences, could also be carried out through the Programmes Europe for Citizens (Measure 2.2., Networks) and the Programme Erasmus+ (KA1 Adult Education, KA2 Strategic Partnership) provided that the theme of the project is relevant to the programme objectives and priorities.

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[8] For an explanation of the OMC see http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-AaG-542142-Open-Method-of-Coordination-FINAL.pdf

[9] AAL www.aal-europe.eu

[10] Health Programme - http://ec.europa.eu/chafea/health/index.html

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

EU environmental policy is guided in the period 2016-2020 by the General Union Environmental Action Plan to 2020 "Living well, with the limit of our planet" with the mission "to develop and facilitate the implementation of policies and legislation that contribute to enabling EU citizens to live well, within the planet's ecological limits, based on an innovative, circular economy, where biodiversity is protected, valued and restored and environment-related health risks are minimized in ways to enhance our society's resilience, and where growth has been decoupled from resource use".

In this framework, energy and environmental policies are inextricably linked, indeed all energy production and consumption has environmental impacts. For this reason, in many regards energy and environmental objectives go hand in hand, such as:

-       energy efficiency and reducing energy use: saving energy can help avoid impacts associated with extractive industries and with energy generation, transformation, distribution and consumption in general. It can help reducing GHG emissions, air pollution, impacts to surface and ground waters, habitat fragmentation and biodiversity disturbance through infrastructure and land use.

-       measures to increase the share of sustainable renewable energy sources in the energy mix can lower overall environmental and climatic pressures compared to other forms of energy. Such measures can also contribute to improved resource efficiency where they result in a more efficient utilization of non-recyclable waste streams.

-       measures aiming at using resources in a more efficient way also contribute to reducing energy demand: this is in particular the case when products are re-used, materials recycled, when all production and consumption chains are organised in a more efficient way.

Two priorities for the period 2016-2020 can be highlighted: 1. Ensuring the sustainability of environment and 2. Preservation of natural resources. These two driving themes led to the identification of three focus areas:

- *Green growth* - Natural capital and the ecosystem services it provides such as clean water, pollination and good quality soil are a precondition for lasting growth, social cohesion and well-being.

- *Connecting with EU citizens* - A healthy environment is also crucial for the health and well-being of citizens, demonstrating that the EU is also producing benefits for citizens on the ground beyond the economic agenda;

- *Making it happen* – it is about better implementation and enforcement of the existing legal framework and about understanding the common challenges and the diversity of the Member States.

Two Programmes can be used to concretise the objectives set in the EU policies:

- **LIFE Programme** - it is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action. The general objective of LIFE is to contribute to the implementation, updating and development of EU environmental and climate policy and legislation by co-financing projects with European added value.[11]

- **Horizon 2020 as** far as concerned the environmental research and innovation policy. This policy aims at promoting more and better research and innovation and at defining and implementing an agenda to greening the economy and to achieve a truly sustainable development. [12]

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[11] http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/index.htm
[12] http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/area/environment-climate-action

In order to proceed with a comparison on best practices and exchange of experiences, the Programmes Europe for Citizens (Measure 2.2., Networks) and the Programme Erasmus+ (KA1 Adult Education, KA2 Strategic Partnership) can be used and useful.

As far as the priority set in the SERN Strategic Plan are concerned, it is useful to highlight the impact and the effect of projects in the environmental field linked to:

-        Local sustainable development, connected both to the protection of nature areas and to the promotion of the territories and their economy (sustainable tourism)

-        Creation of resource efficient and climate resilient society and economy at local level with a more efficient use of materials to contribute and reduce energy demand

-        Information and raising awareness among different actors (schools, entrepreneurs, public authorities) about EU environmental policy priorities