EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South-East Regional Programme 2021-2027 is a key instrument for regional development, aiming to improve quality of life and increase economic competitiveness through sustainable investments. Managed by the South-East Regional Development Agency as Managing Authority, the programme has a total financial allocation of EUR 1.47 billion, of which 85% is the EU contribution and 15% the national contribution, for the implementation of the seven priorities covering the South-East region and the Danube Delta area.

Priority 4 ‘Accessible region’ aims to develop and increase sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility. It aims at investing in the rehabilitation and modernization of road infrastructure of regional importance to ensure connectivity to the TEN-T network, improving the public transport system adapted to the specific infrastructure in the Danube Delta area.

The total funding earmarked for this priority is EUR 231 million (EUR 180 million for the South-East region and EUR 52 million for the Danube Delta area), representing 16% of the programme budget. The main areas of intervention include: development of infrastructure for environmentally friendly public transport; expansion of networks of cycle paths and non-motorised mobility solutions; implementation of digital urban mobility management systems; the creation of alternative fuels infrastructure; improving the safety and accessibility of public transport.

An early interim evaluation of the South East Regional Programme was carried out between December 2024 and March 2025. The coherence, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and delivery mechanisms of the priority were analysed in relation to the strategic objectives of the Eropene Union and the South East Regional Programme. The evaluation used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including documentary analysis, interviews, surveys, workshops and focus groups, expert panel.

The evaluation highlighted that the objectives of Priority 4 are aligned both with the strategic directions set by the European Union and with the specific needs of the South-East region. Priority 4 responds to critical issues in the region, such as reduced mobility and accessibility, low road safety and high levels of pollution caused by insufficient and outdated regional infrastructure. In the Danube Delta area, the absence of a public waterborne transport system affects the mobility of passengers and their access to essential services such as health, education and social services in urban areas.

By 31 December 2024, 8 projects were contracted from the Priority 4 budget to rehabilitate and modernise road infrastructure of regional importance to ensure connectivity to the TEN-T network. The pace of implementation is variable, with some projects in advanced stages and others experiencing difficulties in procurement and implementation procedures. Upon completion of the 8 contracts will result approx. 227 km of reconstructed or upgraded roads - outside the TEN-T and a total annual number of users of more than 62 billion passenger-km/year. The projects will contribute to increasing traffic safety by arranging more than 67200 sqm of sidewalks, installing 18 additional elements for traffic safety, arranging 90 stations for public transport, 56 additional illuminated pedestrian crossings.

The development of alternative fuels infrastructure, the development of the public transport system and the berthing infrastructure in the Danube Delta area (including the purchase of ships with high energy performance and the installation of on-shore electric recharging points) are interventions that were not covered by calls for projects until 31.12.2024, the calls being in preparation.

The evaluation shows that Priority 4 is well aligned with the relevant recommendations under the European Semester, in particular as regards the transition to a green economy, the reduction of carbon emissions and sustainable urban mobility. Investments under the Programme shall aim to contribute to the objectives of the European Union regarding decarbonisation, energy efficiency and the development of green public transport infrastructure.

The results of the projects funded by Priority 4 will have a direct impact on the users of the rehabilitated road infrastructure, such as economic agents, inhabitants of the South-East region, as well as tourists and visitors. Also, the beneficiaries will be the passengers, respectively the inhabitants and the tourists/visitors using the public waterborne passenger transport in the Danube Delta area.

Priority 4 contributes to achieving the environmental objectives and the Integrated National Energy and Climate Change Plan by reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable transport. Out of the 8 projects contracted until 31.12.2024 will result 3 stations with two seats each, which will be used exclusively for loading the public transport means of pupils in Ulmu, Ciresu, Liscoteanca locations in Braila County, a total of 20.25 km of bicycle lanes made in Tulcea County, Constanta County, Galati County. Approximately 24300 km of tree alignments and forest curtains will be made along the transport paths.

In relation to the European Pillar of Social Rights, Priority 4 supports the improvement of accessibility for persons with disabilities through access ramps, accessible bus stops and pedestrian crossings with lowered kerbs, etc.

The main challenges identified at programme level relate to reduced administrative capacity at local level, leading to delays in project preparation and approval, excessive bureaucracy in public procurement processes affecting the efficient execution of projects, limited capacity of builders to complete works as planned.

Close collaboration and constant communication between beneficiaries and representatives of the Managing Authority ensure an efficient project implementation process.

In conclusion, the evaluation highlighted the importance of European funds, which, through investments aimed at modernizing and developing the transport infrastructure in the South-East region and the Danube Delta area, will play a key role in promoting local economic development and improving the living conditions of the population in these areas.