Annex AG\_L – Horizontal Issues

**Horizontal issues**

The project will have to clearly describe how will comply with the horizontal principles set in the EU regulations and described in the Programme. This means that horizontal principles and issues should, to the possible extent, be integrated in the project activities, outputs and results, thus ensuring their fulfilment.

The project should respect the fundamental rights[[1]](#footnote-1) and should describe its specific contributions to the main three horizontal principles on sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination and equality between men and women, during all phases of the project lifecycle, from its design and preparation to its implementation and reporting.

The accomplishment of the minimum requirements of the law in the fields of promotion of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women and sustainable development is mandatory for all projects and will be monitored during project implementation.

Projects are however expected to take concrete actions at operational level more than just accomplishing the minimum required by law, but to actually have a substantial added value towards promotion of sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, equality between men and women.

Another horizontal issue that will have to be considered by the applicants and integrated in the projects is the New European Bauhaus[[2]](#footnote-2), an initiative that connects the European Green Deal[[3]](#footnote-3) to the daily lives and living spaces. It calls on imagining and building together a sustainable and inclusive future that is beautiful for the eyes, minds, and souls.

Also, the contribution to the European Union Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR)[[4]](#footnote-4), EU Green Deal and EU Territorial Agenda 2030[[5]](#footnote-5) must be proven and detailed in the application form, with clear indication of the Priority Area to which the project is contributing.

In addition, the contribution and synergies with the national, regional and local strategies/plans/strategic documents should be described in the application form.

When drafting the application, the following details should be considered, as they will be assessed and scored.

**More details regarding the horizontal issues that need to be approved by the project are included in the Annex L – Horizontal issues.**

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Sustainable development has three dimensions that interrelate:

* **environmental sustainability** – ensuring that natural environment is used in a way that will preserve resources for future generation,
* **economic sustainability** – capacity of future generation to earn an income and allow for economic growth,
* **social sustainability** – future generation having the same or improved access to social resources such as human rights, political stability.

Choosing the sustainable way means commitment to preserve and protect the environment from potential harmful effects of human interventions and to enforce the safeguard of social, environmental and climate benefits. It requires everyone to make decisions in a way that the economic, ecological and social effects of each decision are taken into account.

Project should follow an “environmental sustainability by design” approach. This means that environmental or broader sustainability considerations effects shall be integrated from the beginning into all activities.

To this end, the project will specify which possible effects (positive, neutral or negative) will likely have on the environment, by considering among others the following aspects: water, soil, air and climate, population and human health, fauna, flora and biodiversity, cultural heritage and landscape. It should also refer to the practices, models, solutions, networks and/or knowledge that shall be created by the project and should live on after the project ends.

Project shall fully respect the Union environmental acquis and national legislation on the matter and they shall be in line with the objective of promoting sustainable development, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals[[6]](#footnote-6), the Paris Agreement[[7]](#footnote-7) and the "do no significant harm[[8]](#footnote-8)" principle.

For further information on the main environmental protection objectives and their interlinkages with the Programme, please refer also to the Programme strategic environmental assessment (SEA) available here/at the programme website/link.

**DO NO SIGNIFICANT HARM (DNSH)**

The project activities contribute to one of the six environmental objectives and they are compliant with Do no significant harm objectives:

* Climate change mitigation
* Climate change adaptation
* Sustainable use & protection of water & marine resources
* Pollution prevention & control
* Transition to a circular economy
* Protection and restoration of biodiversity & ecosystems

Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation[[9]](#footnote-9), defines the significant harm for the six environmental objectives. Thus, an activity is considered to do significant harm:

* + *to climate change mitigation if it leads to significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;*
  + *to climate change adaptation if it leads to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature or assets;*
  + *to the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources if it is detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters;*
  + *to the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling, if it leads to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or if it significantly increases the generation, incineration or disposal of waste, or if the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term environmental harm;*
  + *to pollution prevention and control if it leads to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land;*
  + *to the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems if it is significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest.*

The project will have to promote solutions that are friendly with the environment and observe the Do No Significant Harm Principle.

When developing the application form and the technical annexes, the applicant must include adaptation measures, in this regard please consider at least the measures identified in the *Annex AG\_I. DNSH\_Interreg VI-A RoBg level¸*for the corresponding Priority and Specific Objective.

The adaptation measures included in the ***Annex AG\_I DNSH\_Interreg VI-A RoBg*** level are mandatory for all projects! Therefore, before designing your project and the technical annexes, please check the adaptation measures identified for the Specific Objective and Priority under the project will be submitted.

Please bear in mind that these are minimum requirements, and they can be complemented with additional ones, depending on the legal requirements and the type of the project.

All these adaptation measures shall be implemented and checked during the project execution. Also, please bear in mind that it is your responsibility to request the service provider/contractor to comply with these requirements and monitor their implementation during the works execution/equipment providing.

As such, the terms of reference for works execution, service and equipment providing should clearly mention the compliance with the *Do No Significant Harm*" and the adaptation measures that must be applied.

**GO GREEN WITH YOUR PROJECT!**

When designing and implementing your project, you can act in many ways to reduce impact on the environment and reduce the carbon footprint. You are thus strongly encouraged to apply energy efficient and sustainable principles to the project activities. In fact, measures reducing the impact on the environment cannot only add value to the project in terms of credibility, but it can also result in lower costs.

There are several examples about how projects can implement sustainability on the operational level:

* Carefully consider the impacts of the project activities on economical, ecological and social aspects within the project eligible area targeted;
* Consider giving priority to using “green infrastructure” solutions over “grey solutions” whenever this is possible;
* Practice to make your daily working choices the sustainable way;
* Rethink your meeting habits in order to minimise environmental impact;
* Practice green procurement.

Guidance on simple greening measures projects can apply to contribute to sustainable development are to be found in the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) guide to climate neutrality: “kick the habit[[10]](#footnote-10)” and the UNEP Green meeting Guide[[11]](#footnote-11).

Here are some tips you can follow:

* *Go paperless or if you really have to use paper, make it recycled one;*
* *Publications should be printed for external communication purposes (if needed only). For electronic publications, a “printer-friendly” version (less colours, more compact text, less pages) should be made available;*
* *Use the Programme electronic system and e-mail for communicating with the Programme structures or your project partners;*
* *Information on the greening efforts made at the meeting/event is provided electronically prior to, and after the meeting;*
* *Materials produced for the events (such as banners, posters, signs, etc.) are designed and written in a generic way to allow them to be reused for other events;*
* *A dedicated area is provided for participants to return material that can be re-used (such as badges);*
* *Switch to cloud computing;*
* *Consider online meetings instead of face-to-face meetings where possible;*
* *Modernize your equipment - updating and upgrading your equipment can make a significant difference in how eco-friendly you are;*
* *Include environmental criteria in procurement procedures.*
* *Operate fuel efficient vehicles (electric or hybrid cars);*
* *Give preference to environmentally-friendly mobility options (in particular for short travel distances);*
* *Use eco-friendly means of transport or go on foot;*
* *If possible, all waste produced at the venue of an event is sorted for recycling and sufficient, well-marked bins are provided in both participants and staff areas;*
* *Consider resource efficiency and the use of renewable energy at all levels;*
* *Consider near-Zero Energy Building*
* *Make use of regional supply chains (reducing supply chain length and CO2 emissions).*



Mandatory!

Projects aimed at renovation/modernization of existing buildings and/or construction of new buildings must consider the implementation of solutions to improve energy efficiency, as well as the use of renewable sources of electrical/thermal energy.

**GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT**

Green Public Procurement (GPP) is defined as *"a process whereby public authorities seek to procure goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle when compared to goods, services and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured[[12]](#footnote-12).*

The Programme encourages sustainable measures and supports the inclusion of additional `green` criteria in tendering whenever legally possible. Thus, by using your purchasing power to choose environmentally friendly goods, services and works, you can make an important contribution to sustainable consumption and production.

Public procurement rules allow for horizontal aspects such as the protection of the environment, social considerations or the enforcement of innovation to be taken into account when purchasing a product, service or work. Thus, the applicants are invited to make use of this possibility whenever possible.

Practicing green procurement involves sourcing goods and services that are produced and supplied in a sustainable way. When you procure goods/services, pay attention to the following aspects or review your procurement policies:

* Are manufactured in a sustainable fashion
* Do not contain toxic materials or ozone-depleting substances
* Can be recycled and/or are produced from recycled materials
* Are made from renewable materials
* Do not make use of excessive packaging
* Are designed to be repairable and not throwaway
* Here are some examples of green contracts:
* Energy efficient computers
* Office furniture from sustainable timber
* Low energy buildings
* Recycled paper
* Cleaning services using ecologically sound products
* Electric, hybrid or low-emission vehicles
* Electricity from renewable energy sources

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Guaranteeing equal opportunities and preventing discrimination are important principles in project implementation. No one should be discriminated based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Instead, project activities should, where possible, increase the possibilities of all groups to participate in the activities of the society. Any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation has to be prevented. Accessibility for persons with disabilities shall be taken into account. At the level of projects, applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project complies with, and possibly even strengthens, equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

Here are some tips you can follow:

* *Ensure products, goods, services and infrastructures that are open or provided to the citizens are accessible to all citizens including those with disabilities;*
* *Accessibility to the physical environment, transport, ICT shall be ensured in order to promote inclusion of disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities;*
* *Guarantee that all communication products (websites, electronic newsletters, publications, etc.) are accessible;*
* *Use straightforward language that guarantees cognitive accessibility;*
* *Emphasise social diversity in videos, posters, etc., using people with a variety of profiles to encourage identification among all groups;*
* *Involve members of minority groups in your activities* *and/or* *composition of the project team;*
* *Take into account the needs of the various target groups at risk of discrimination.*

**EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

In addition to the general principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination the programme pays attention to the equality between men and women.

Ensuring equality between men and women means in principle to make possible that everyone, regardless of gender, has the right to work and support themselves, to balance career and family life, and to live without the fear of abuse or violence. Gender equality implies not only equal distribution between men and women in all domains of society. It is also about the qualitative aspects, ensuring that the knowledge and experience of both men and women are used to promote progress in all aspects of society, placing equal value and emphasis on the knowledge and skills of both men and women, including ensuring equal pay for work of equal value.

An assessment will be made of the relevance of gender in the project: does the project take gender into account, does the project have an impact on the equality between men and women, etc. This principle is relevant for all projects and priorities. Equality between men and women is taken into consideration also in projects implementation, for instance when recruiting staff and in all personnel policy. At the level of projects, applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project complies with, and possibly even strengthens, gender equality.

Here are some tips you can follow:

* *Take into account findings from gender analyses, gender impact assessment, or stakeholders consultation when planning your project;*
* *Elaborate gender-specific objectives in line with the latest findings and with the objectives of the project and explain how these objectives would be achieved;*
* *Take into account gender-balanced composition of the project team;*
* *Ensure the participation of gender experts in teams or groups;*
* *When organizing events and conferences, give a good balance between women and men speakers;*
* *Give visibility to gender issues and avoid the use of sexist language and stereotypical or discriminatory images;*
* *Take into account to promote gender equality through the goods, services or works being purchased* *( it means that the buyer and supplier examine the impact of all contracted activities on women’s and men’s needs, interests and concerns, and design and deliver contracts in a way that reduces inequalities).*

**NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS**

The New European Bauhaus[[13]](#footnote-13) initiative promotes a new lifestyle where sustainability matches style, thus accelerating the green transition in various sectors of the economy such as construction, furniture, fashion and in the society as well as other areas of our daily life. The aim is to provide all citizens with access to goods that are circular and less carbon-intensive, that support the regeneration of nature and protect biodiversity.

Three core inseparable values guides the New European Bauhaus:

* sustainability[[14]](#footnote-14), from climate goals, to circularity, zero pollution, and biodiversity,
* aesthetics, quality of experience and style, beyond functionality,
* inclusion, valorizing diversity, equality for all, accessibility and affordability.

The New European Bauhaus initiative constitutes one of the main horizontal issues of the Programme. The applicants are invited to explain in their application form how their project will contribute to implement the New European Bauhaus initiative.

Therefore your project will have to take the opportunity to explore ways to contribute to creating and delivering sustainable, affordable, accessible, inclusive and beautiful products and/ or services, whether we refer to new cycling infrastructure, digitalization of heritage, learning programs or green areas in cities.

Your project can contribute to implement the New European Bauhaus initiative with a wide range of solutions, from educational and cultural activities, to implementation of nature-based solutions, while making the built environment more attractive.

Also, implementing solutions for making cities greener and using sustainably sourced nature-based materials and a zero pollution ambition model, from environmental actions to tourism, are horizontal objectives which can contribute to the New European Bauhaus initiative implementation.

Fostering sustainable living by improving the common spaces to be used by the local community and making use of the cultural assets (heritage, arts, local craft, etc.) and natural assets (landscapes, natural resources, etc.) projects can offer opportunities for connection and social interaction, including for people at risk of exclusion or poverty, the binding element that creates a sense of belonging.

Here are several examples about how projects can implement the New European Bauhaus initiative on different categories:

* *Techniques, materials and processes for construction and design –* *tools that may support design and co-creation for more sustainable building and planning processes;*
* *Building in the spirit of circularity –* *places/physical sites that demonstrate the re-use and recycling of materials, renovations, or buildings planned with full circularity in mind contributing to inclusiveness in relation to their function or accessibility;*
* *Solutions for the co-evolution of built environment and nature –* *showing how the built environment may contribute to the protection of nature and biodiversity, taking into account cultural and social needs, or blending of buildings in landscape, or integration of living nature in construction;*
* *Regenerated urban and rural spaces –* *reconversions of abandoned or challenged areas in cities, upgrading of territories and regions in decline;*
* *Preserved and transformed cultural heritage* – *models of preservation that enhance access to cultural heritage for all, or reconversion of heritage infrastructure with a high social purpose and a low carbon footprint;*
* *Reinvented places to meet and share –* *the development and use of public spaces such as streets, squares and parks; or particularly inspirational models of community centers, community gardens, co-creation places that combine style with a strong social purpose and sustainability;*
* *Interdisciplinary education models* – *models and methods that integrate the values of sustainability, inclusion and aesthetics in the content of the curricula and in the learning process.*

1. In accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in compliance with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://danube-region.eu/about/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://territorialagenda.eu/ta2030/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://sdgs.un.org/goals [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Referring to six environmental objectives as laid down in the EU Taxonomy Regulation, https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/sustainable-finance-taxonomy-regulation-eu-2020-852\_en [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32020R0852 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Kick the Habit: A UN Guide to Climate Neutrality | GRID-Arendal (grida.no) https://www.grida.no/publications/225 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Green%20Meetings%20Participant-guide.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For more details regarding green procurement, you can check the European Union site: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index\_en.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For more details regarding the New European Bauhaus you can check The EU’S site: https://europa.eu/new-european-bauhaus/index\_en [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For the purpose of the New European Bauhaus initiative, “sustainability” is understood as “environmental sustainability”. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)