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 6 ‘An attractive region’ aims to implement measures that contribute to strengthening the attractiveness of the region by promoting a quality living environment, attracting investment, developing tourism infrastructure, protecting and enhancing natural and cultural heritage.

The total funding earmarked for this priority is approximately EUR 174 million (EUR 149 million for the South-East region and EUR 25 million for the Danube Delta area), representing 12% of the programme budget. The main areas of intervention include: integrated development in urban areas through urban regeneration, heritage conservation and tourism development, harnessing tourism potential in non-urban areas.

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 6 are aligned both with the strategic directions set by the European Union and with the specific needs of the South-East region. Priority 6 responds to problems in the region, such as the poor state of cultural, historical and natural heritage, the low quality of adjacent infrastructures, the attractiveness and low functionality of public spaces in the urban area. Priority 6 includes specific measures for small towns to reduce regional disparities and provide them with development opportunities.

By 31 December 2024, 29 projects worth more than EUR 60 million, representing 35% of the Priority 6 budget allocation, had been contracted. Of the 29 projects 6 are implemented in the Danube Delta area. The projects cover a wide range of areas, including restoration and preservation of cultural heritage, improvement of recreational infrastructure, urban regeneration and promotion of sustainable tourism. They reflect a diversified approach to regional development aimed at increasing the quality of life and stimulating tourism, education and the local economy.

Projects such as the restoration of Carsium Fortress, the Museum of National History and Archaeology of Constanta, the Roman Mosaic Edifice or the "Buna Vestire" Orthodox Church in Tulcea are essential for the protection and promotion of the national cultural heritage. These investments have the potential to attract tourists and capitalise on the cultural identity of the regions concerned. Projects such as the restoration of the Orthodox Church "St. Gheorghe’ in Isaccea or the Greek Orthodox Church ‘St. Nicolae” in Sulina aligns with the need to protect places of worship, which are an important part of the cultural and religious identity of the regions.

The projects at Lake Belona in Eforie or Murghiol tourist area are intended to improve the tourist infrastructure, making the regions more attractive to tourists and supporting the development of sustainable tourism. Restoration and arrangement of historical sites (e.g.: Saving the Hypogeu Painted Tomb) can help diversify the tourist offer and increase the number of visitors, while supporting the local economy.

Projects such as Carmen Sylva Center of Excellence and Panciu Youth Center will improve access to recreational activities, being essential for the development of local communities, especially in areas with a young population. The establishment of youth centers in Eforie Sud and Panciu responds to the need to create opportunities for young people, for personal and professional development.

Infrastructure modernization projects in the cities of Odobesti, Braila or Isaccea will contribute to improving the quality of life by renovating and equipping public spaces, creating a more attractive and functional urban environment. Urban regeneration projects, such as the Revitalisation of Ceair in Isaccea or the Systematisation of the ‘Summer Garden’ in Mangalia, are essential for the revitalisation of disadvantaged areas, improving access to public facilities and a cleaner and more pleasant urban environment. Projects aimed at modernising public spaces and infrastructure in Panciu and Pogons will support both economic development and improving citizens' quality of life. Projects aimed at building social housing, such as in Pogoanele or Năvodari, are important for improving living conditions in disadvantaged areas, providing not only housing, but also spaces for recreation and socialization.

Many of the projects mentioned have a direct impact on the quality of life, both by improving urban infrastructure and by developing integrated cultural and recreational services, contributing to the overall well-being of the community. The pace of implementation is variable, with some projects in advanced stages and others having difficulties in procurement and implementation procedures.

The results of the projects financed under Priority 6 will have a direct impact on the inhabitants of the urban area of the South-East Region served by the improved infrastructure, entrepreneurs, private owners of heritage buildings/located in protected built areas, tourists/visitors.

The main challenges identified at programme level are related 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, shortage of specialists for restoration works of historical and heritage monuments.

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 urban regeneration, heritage conservation and tourism development and harnessing the tourism potential and heritage conservation in non-urban areas in the South-East region and the Danube Delta area, will play an important role in economic development, job creation, development of the local community and improvement of the living conditions of the population in these areas. In addition, investments for the construction and modernization/ rehabilitation of social housing will have a significant impact on improving living conditions for people in situations of social vulnerability.