



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative

Prepared for the Steering Group of the Initiative

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1. Executive Summary

During 2025, the Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative (Danube WILDisland RRI) consolidated its operational structure and moved further into practical implementation. The year combined institutional development, support for pilot measures and awareness actions, international representation, networking, communication and preparation of future funding opportunities across the Danube Region.

Two full-time staff positions supported the Initiative throughout the year. The Strategic Work Plan 2025–2030 and the Communication Strategy were finalised for Steering Group approval in 2026. Under the Subgrant for practical measure RRI-1, seven projects were selected, six were contracted during 2025 and implementation began immediately after signature; one action in the Bavarian Danube was completed by year-end. Under the Subgrant for practical measure RRI-2, six projects supported awareness-raising activities.

The Initiative was represented at Ramsar CoP15 in Zimbabwe, submitted a major INTERREG Danube Region Programme proposal and was selected for the Living Danube Award.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Report

This Annual Report presents the main activities, results, institutional developments and financial implementation of the Danube WILDisland RRI during the 2025 calendar year. It is prepared for consideration and approval by the Steering Group, as the decision-making body to which the Initiative reports.

The narrative section covers the work of the Initiative and implementation of the EURENI project “Establishing the Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative”. The financial section presents the EURENI project budget and expenditure position on 31 December 2025.

3. Governance, Coordination and Institutional Development

3.1 Coordination and staffing

During 2025, the Initiative operated with two full-time staff positions supporting its coordination and administration: the RRI Coordinator in Bulgaria, and a staff member in Croatia supporting the Middle Danube office and reporting/accounting functions. This staffing arrangement ensured continuous capacity for day-to-day coordination, communication with members and partners, reporting, project preparation, subgrant administration and implementation follow-up.

External accounting and audit services were maintained through formal contracting procedures, strengthening financial management, transparency and audit readiness.

3.2 Strategic and communication framework

The Strategic Work Plan 2025–2030 was developed with external expert support and through consultation with key stakeholders, including National Focal Points, protected-area authorities and non-governmental organisations. It was finalised in coordination with the Steering Group and aligned with the Strategic Plan of the Convention on Wetlands 2025–2034.

A Communication Strategy was developed in parallel by an external expert in close cooperation with the DANUBEPARKS, as official coordinator of the Initiative. It sets out approaches, tools and communication channels intended to improve stakeholder engagement, visibility, recognition and long-term development of the Danube WILDisland RRI.

Both documents were finalised in 2025 and were scheduled for formal Steering Group approval during 2026.

3.3 Internal data exchange

An internal SharePoint/data-exchange platform was established within the DANUBEPARKS digital environment to support internal file exchange and cooperation. By the end of the reporting period, 532.32 MB of files were available on the platform. Wider member access and regular use were still being expanded.

4. Main Activities and Results in 2025

4.1 Ramsar CoP15 in Zimbabwe

The 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (CoP15) in Zimbabwe was a major visibility, networking and governance milestone for the Danube WILDisland RRI. A dedicated joint stand presented Ramsar Regional Initiatives from around the world and provided a continuous space for exchange with Contracting Parties, partner institutions, experts and other participants.

DANUBEPARKS ensured the presence of two representatives at the stand for almost the entire CoP15 period. They presented the Initiative, explained its objectives and activities, and engaged directly with CoP participants and visitors.

The first in-person meeting of the Steering Group was held during CoP15 on 24 July 2025. Eight participants attended, including representatives of four RRI Member States (Austria, Germany, Hungary and Ukraine), together with three keynote speakers. Meeting materials and results were subsequently shared with all members.

During CoP15, the Danube WILDisland RRI also received its official certificate of recognition for the period 2025–2028.

4.2 Pilot measures – Subgrant RRI-1

A competitive call for small-scale pilot measures was launched under Category RRI-1: “Identification, Preparation, and Implementation of Restoration Actions in the Danube Region”. The measure supported the full preparatory-to-pilot cycle of restoration actions, including feasibility studies, preparation of technical design documents, securing necessary permissions and permits, joint monitoring programmes for relevant species and habitats, engagement of local communities and other relevant stakeholders in the planning of future restoration projects, and implementation of small-scale pilot actions.

Seven projects were approved with a total approved subgrant value of EUR 49,284.10¹. The project portfolio was as follows:

No.	Project	Implementer	Approved subgrant	Status at end-2025
1	Creation of a breeding island for <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Landratsamt Neuburg-Schrobenhausen (district office Neuburg-Schrobenhausen)	EUR 8,990.65	Contract signed in autumn 2025; implementation underway
2	Riparia: Restoring River Nesting Grounds	Public Institution Agency for the Management of Protected Natural Values in the Osijek-Baranja County	EUR 6,563.13	Contract signed in autumn 2025; implementation underway
3	Resurrection of Danube Island Wetland for Floodplain Inhabitants	BROZ – ochrannárske združenie (BROZ – conservation association)	EUR 6,000.00	Contract signed in autumn 2025; implementation underway
4	Study of the possibility of improving the water regime of the Kaykusha wetland with water from the Danube River	Persina Nature Park Directorate	EUR 12,000.00	Contract signed in autumn 2025; implementation underway
5	Baseline Monitoring of Habitat 91E0 – Foundation for Restoration in SNR Gornje Podunavlje	Public Enterprise “Vojvodinašume”	EUR 4,000.00	Approved; contract not signed in 2025
6	Information meeting and symposium “Wild Islands in the Bavarian Danube”	District Passau	EUR 5,730.32	Completed by year-end; final eligible expenditure EUR 4,029.50
7	Research on <i>Unio crassus</i> in the Sava River in Lonjsko Polje Nature Park	Lonjsko polje Nature Park Public Institution	EUR 6,000.00	Contract signed in autumn 2025; implementation underway

The first signed contract with the District of Passau was successfully implemented during the 2025.

¹ Approved subgrant amounts represent the maximum amounts awarded; final eligible expenditure may be lower following project completion and financial reporting.

The other signed contracts, concluded in autumn 2025, entered implementation immediately after signature. Activities still ongoing at the year-end were planned for completion by the end of 2026.

Vojvodinašume's project had been approved but its contract had not been signed by the end of 2025.

Completed RRI-1 action in the Bavarian Danube

Implementer / location	District of Passau, Germany – Bavarian Danube
Approved subgrant	EUR 5,730.32
Final eligible expenditure	EUR 4,029.50
Status	Completed by the end of 2025. The project was implemented in full of lower expenditure than the approved subgrant amount.
Scope	Assessment and preparation work related to restoration opportunities for Danube islands in the Bavarian Danube.
Key results	Approximately 360 Danube islands assessed; around 80 areas identified as having potential for restoration of former islands; main ecological and technical constraints to island restoration identified; restoration approaches developed, including measures supporting more natural river dynamics; results presented and discussed with authorities, experts and stakeholders.

4.3 Awareness-raising support – Subgrant RRI-2

A second subgrant stream, Subgrant for practical pilot measures Category RRI-2: „Awareness-raising events for the Danube WILDIsland RRI“, supports awareness-raising events for the Danube WILDIsland RRI. Six projects, including 28 events, were approved with a total budget of EUR 5,600.

Supported activities implemented during 2025 included:

- International Danube Day, Erdut, Croatia;
- International Drava Day, Bilje, Croatia;
- Danube Volunteer Day 2025, Persina Nature Park, Bulgaria;
- 25 Years of Persina Nature Park, Bulgaria; and
- Educational initiative “Bat Patrol”, Osijek, Croatia.

These activities complemented supported the visibility of the Initiative at local and regional level.

4.4 INTERREG Danube Region Programme project proposal

An external expert supported preparation of the project proposal “Integrated water and sediment management for the Danube WILDisland RRI” under the INTERREG Danube Region Programme. The proposal was prepared with partners and stakeholders and submitted in December 2025. It is intended to address wetland loss, improve conservation and strengthen river-restoration efforts through transnational cooperation.

The proposal involved a consortium of 14 partners from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova. At the end of 2025, the proposal was under evaluation.

4.5 Recognition – Living Danube Award

In 2025, the Danube WILDisland RRI was selected for the Living Danube Award. The award provided external acknowledgement of the Initiative and its approach to conservation and cooperation. The official award ceremony was scheduled for 2026.

4.6 Representation, institutional cooperation and networking

The Initiative maintained active representation and cooperation with partner institutions and regional and international networks. The 2025 programme included on-site meetings, workshops, study exchanges and participation in events relevant to wetlands, river restoration and Danube cooperation.

Key engagements during 2025 included:

- 17–18 June 2025 – 23rd ICPDR Standing Working Group Meeting, Postojna, Slovenia;
- 24 July 2025 – first in-person Steering Group Meeting during Ramsar CoP15, Zimbabwe;
- 25–26 September 2025 – 14th International Symposium “Kopački rit – Past, Present, Future”, Croatia;
- 29 September 2025 – online experience-exchange meeting with MedWet RRI;
- 7–8 October 2025 – 17th Meeting of the Trilateral Ramsar Platform “Floodplains of the Morava–Dyje–Danube Confluence”, Slovakia;
- 6 November 2025 – side event during the Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- 14 November 2025 – participation in the Steering Committee meeting of the UNESCO Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve, Bad Radkersburg, Austria; and

- 10–11 December 2025 – ICPDR 28th Ordinary Meeting, Vienna, Austria.

Cooperation with other Ramsar Regional Initiatives was also continued. Exchange with MedWet RRI was maintained during 2025, while earlier contacts with the Carpathian Wetland Initiative supported broader RRI-to-RRI networking and exchange of experience.

4.7 Capacity building and exchange of experience

Capacity building and experience exchange in 2025 were implemented through thematic workshops, on-site meetings and study visits designed to transfer practical knowledge and good practices among RRI members and partners.

The WILDislands Workshop in Passau, Germany, on 25 April 2025 focused on collecting ideas and presenting practical examples relevant to island and wetland restoration.

An on-site meeting programme in Persina Nature Park, Bulgaria, from 19 to 22 May 2025 involved 41 participants (22 women and 19 men) and provided space for field-based exchange and discussion of the Initiative's work and future actions.

A Study Exchange Visit in Lonjsko Polje, Croatia, from 13 to 15 October 2025 further supported peer learning on protected-area management, wetland conservation and restoration practice.

Together with additional international exchange activities in Germany, these actions strengthened cooperation between members, helped identify and refine restoration opportunities, and provided practical input for pilot measures and future joint projects.

5. Communication, Digital Platforms and Visibility

The Danube WILDisland RRI does not operate a separate standalone website. Communication and visibility are managed through the established platforms of DANUBEPARKS and the LIFE WILDisland project.

During 2025, the Initiative used the following channels:

- DANUBEPARKS website – www.danubeparks.org
- DANUBEPARKS Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/DANUBEPARKS>
- DANUBEPARKS Instagram – <https://www.instagram.com/danubeparks/>
- LIFE WILDisland project website – <https://wildisland.danubeparks.org/>

These platforms were used for regular news updates, event communication, presentation of activities and results, promotion of funding opportunities and wider public outreach. During 2025, website communication reached more than 10,000 views and social-media communication reached more than 13,000 people.

Activities related to the Danube WILDisland RRI are also regularly promoted through the newsletters of DANUBEPARKS and the LIFE WILDisland project. Subscription links are available here: <https://danubeparks.org/newsletter>, <https://wildisland.danubeparks.org/contacts/>

Communication materials were also developed and printed for use at events and by network members. These included four roll-up banners in two designs, 700 brochures, 250 business cards, 100 promotional tote bags, 50 water bottles, 100 waterproof bags, 100 badges and an interactive Danube Region map. A broader communication toolkit and the internal SharePoint/data-exchange platform were also completed during 2025.

6. Reporting, Accountability and Compliance

Narrative and financial reporting continued in accordance with the requirements of the Convention on Wetlands, the Steering Group and EURENI. Reporting covered activity implementation, progress against agreed objectives and indicators, expenditure and follow-up actions.

For EURENI, the interim narrative and financial reporting cycle covered implementation up to 31 December 2025 and was submitted in 2026. Reporting to the Convention on Wetlands and to the Initiative's own governance structures was maintained in parallel, supporting transparency, accountability and regular oversight of the Initiative's work.

7. Implementation Observations and Follow-up Priorities

The experience of 2025 confirmed the importance of maintaining a clear and consistent identity for the Danube WILDisland RRI within the broader landscape of organisations and projects working on Danube and wetland conservation. Continued communication is needed to explain the Initiative's specific mandate, practical added value and opportunities for cooperation, while using existing DANUBEPARKS and WILDisland communication channels efficiently.

As the Initiative moves from establishment towards implementation, follow-up should focus on completing and documenting the pilot measures, maintaining regular exchange among members, increasing practical use of the internal cooperation tools, ensuring continuity between strategic planning and on-the-ground actions, and securing sustainable financing for the period beyond the current project framework. Regular in-person and online interaction will remain important for keeping members informed and enabling broad participation in the Initiative's activities.

8. Financial Report for 2025 – EURENI Project

The financial section covers the project “Establishing the Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative” (EURENI_24_A_038). It presents the agreed project budget, expenditure accrued during 2025, cumulative expenditure to 31 December 2025 and the remaining project budget.

Budget category	Agreed budget	2025 expenditure	Cumulative expenditure (2024+2025)	Remaining budget
Personnel expenditure	EUR 173,935.00	EUR 47,489.50	EUR 56,822.42	EUR 117,112.58
External services	EUR 47,000.00	EUR 26,509.40	EUR 28,509.40	EUR 18,490.60
Events	EUR 1,000.00	EUR 174.74	EUR 174.74	EUR 825.26
Travel	EUR 24,316.23	EUR 8,892.69	EUR 23,047.71	EUR 1,268.52
Subgrants to implementing partners	EUR 56,000.00	EUR 16,311.06	EUR 16,311.06	EUR 39,688.94
Items / investments over EUR 800	EUR 5,443.77	EUR 0.00	EUR 5,443.77	EUR 0.00
Administration fees	EUR 8,808.00	EUR 966.95	EUR 5,659.81	EUR 3,148.19
TOTAL	EUR 316,503.00	EUR 100,344.34	EUR 135,968.91	EUR 181,534.09

On 31 December 2025, cumulative project expenditure was EUR 135,968.91, corresponding to 42.96 % of the total agreed project budget of EUR 316,503.00, leaving EUR 181,534.09 for the remaining project period.

8.1 Detailed Expenditure Breakdown

The summary budget table above is further detailed below by individual expenditure item. The 2025 expenditure column includes costs recorded during the 2025 calendar year, while cumulative expenditure reflects total project expenditure from the start of implementation to 31 December 2025.

Where applicable, cumulative figures therefore include expenditure incurred in 2024.

Budget category	Expenditure item	2025 expenditure	Cumulative expenditure
Personnel expenditure	RRI Coordinator – Lower Danube	EUR 20,402.49	EUR 22,559.81
Personnel expenditure	Office Manager – Middle Danube	EUR 27,087.01	EUR 34,262.61
PERSONNEL EXPENDITURE	SUBTOTAL	EUR 47,489.50	EUR 56,822.42
External services	Accounting and auditing	EUR 8,784.89	EUR 8,784.89
External services	Long-term Strategic Work Plan (EUR 2,000 paid in 2024 + EUR 3,000 in 2025)	EUR 3,000.00	EUR 5,000.00
External services	Communication Strategy	EUR 4,875.00	EUR 4,875.00
External services	External project development (first instalment; second EUR 5,000 instalment paid in 2026 and excluded)	EUR 5,000.00	EUR 5,000.00

Budget category	Expenditure item	2025 expenditure	Cumulative expenditure
External services	Communication toolkit	EUR 2,915.00	EUR 2,915.00
External services	Guidelines for best practices	EUR 0.00	EUR 0.00
External services	Website management / data exchange platform	EUR 950.00	EUR 950.00
External services	RRI-2 awareness-raising activities	EUR 984.51	EUR 984.51
EXTERNAL SERVICES	SUBTOTAL	EUR 26,509.40	EUR 28,509.40
Events	Event-related expenditure recorded in 2025	EUR 174.74	EUR 174.74
EVENTS	SUBTOTAL	EUR 174.74	EUR 174.74
Travel	Steering Group Meeting / Ramsar CoP15, Zimbabwe	EUR 5,511.73	EUR 5,511.73
Travel	Experience exchange and study visits – expenditure recorded in 2025	EUR 3,380.96	EUR 3,380.96
Travel	Experience exchange and study visits – previous expenditure to end-2024	EUR 0.00	EUR 14,155.02
TRAVEL	SUBTOTAL	EUR 8,892.69	EUR 23,047.71
Subgrants to implementing partners	District of Passau	EUR 4,029.50	EUR 4,029.50
Subgrants to implementing partners	Persina Nature Park Directorate	EUR 9,000.00	EUR 9,000.00
Subgrants to implementing partners	Osijek-Baranja County	EUR 3,281.56	EUR 3,281.56
SUBGRANTS TO IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS	SUBTOTAL	EUR 16,311.06	EUR 16,311.06
Items / investments over EUR 800	Bulgarian office equipment	EUR 0.00	EUR 2,275.26
Items / investments over EUR 800	Croatian office equipment	EUR 0.00	EUR 3,168.51
ITEMS / INVESTMENTS OVER EUR 800	SUBTOTAL	EUR 0.00	EUR 5,443.77

Budget category	Expenditure item	2025 expenditure	Cumulative expenditure
Administration fees	Administration fees recorded in 2025	EUR 966.95	EUR 966.95
Administration fees	Previous administration expenditure to end-2024	EUR 0.00	EUR 4,692.86
ADMINISTRATION FEES	SUBTOTAL	EUR 966.95	EUR 5,659.81
TOTAL		EUR 100,344.34	EUR 135,968.91

8.2 Financing structure

The project financing combines the BMUV/EURENI grant with complementary support from the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Secretariat), recorded in the EURENI financial report under the third-party grants category.

On 31 December 2025, expenditure remained within the total agreed project budget.

Financing source	Agreed amount	2025 expenditure	Cumulative expenditure	Remaining amount
Ramsar core support and other contribution ²	EUR 92,500.00	EUR 23,283.29	EUR 39,149.53	EUR 53,350.47
BMUV grant	EUR 225,149.00	EUR 77,061.05	EUR 96,819.38	EUR 128,329.62
TOTAL	EUR 317,649.00	EUR 100,344.34	EUR 135,968.91	EUR 181,680.09

9. Overall Assessment

2025 marked the transition of the Danube WILDisland RRI from institutional establishment towards broader practical implementation. The Initiative combined functioning coordination structures, strategic planning, pilot support, awareness actions, international representation, exchange with partner institutions and other RRIs, communication activities and preparation of larger follow-up funding opportunities.

Continued work is required to complete and document the pilot actions, translate the Strategic Work Plan and Communication Strategy into regular implementation after their approval in 2026, broaden practical participation across the Initiative's activities, maintain consistent communication and visibility, strengthen the use of shared cooperation tools and secure sustainable financing for the period beyond the current project framework.

² The Ramsar contribution includes in this financing line is EUR 30,000 per year for 2025, 2026 and 2027 (EUR 90,000 in total) and other contribution includes EUR 2,500 from the Danube Living Award.

10. Steering Group Adoption

The Annual Report 2025 is submitted to the Steering Group of the Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative for consideration and approval.

Decision	The Steering Group approves the Annual Report 2025 of the Danube WILDisland Ramsar Regional Initiative.
Date of adoption	21 October 2026
Reference	Minutes of the Third Danube WILDisland RRI Steering Group Meeting, Agenda Item 4

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