

**Interreg
Danube Region**



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From Challenges to Solutions: Why Nature-Based Solutions Matter

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D-CLEAN summary in words

“Improving Water Quality in the Danube River Basin: Nature-Based Solutions for Sustainable Wastewater and Stormwater Management in Small Settlements”



The D-CLEAN project aims to address the pressing issue of **wastewater** and **stormwater** pollution in the **small settlements** in Danube River Basin by **raising awareness, building capacity, and identifying, testing and showcasing practical solutions**. Our aim is to **improve water quality** within the DRB by **promoting the use** of sustainable WW and SW management practices resilient to climate change (NBS) and providing stakeholders with the **necessary tools**.

D-CLEAN Key Messages

D-CLEAN wants to demonstrate that Nature-based solutions offer a practical and cost-efficient solution for wastewater and stormwater management in small settlements. They are adaptable to local conditions and deliver multiple environmental, social, and economic benefits.

D-CLEAN plans to contribute to the implementation of EU water policy by supporting countries in meeting the requirements of the revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and the Water Framework Directive, with a particular focus on small and rural settlements.

D-CLEAN wants to empower stakeholders with the knowledge and tools needed to plan and implement sustainable, decentralized wastewater and stormwater solutions. Through hands-on training, co-design in pilot areas, and the development of a practical planning guide, the project strengthens local capacity and supports long-term environmental resilience in the Danube River Basin and beyond.

D-CLEAN – how we will achieve this?

Analyse

Assess wastewater and stormwater challenges.

Understand stakeholder needs.

Select suitable solutions.



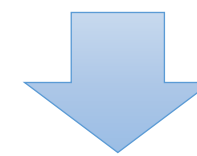
Catalogue of suitable solutions

Train

Build local skills through training.

Co-design and test solutions in five pilot areas.

Prepare a practical roadmap.



Training and implementation roadmap

Upscale

Support policy dialogue.

Develop a regional strategy.

Share knowledge through a transnational hub.



Regional strategy and knowledge hub

Regional assessment

~60,000

settlements with fewer than 2,000 residents

~17.4 million

people living in these settlements

Wastewater treatment remains uneven

Infrastructure gaps persist. Discharge rules and local planning vary between countries.

Local capacity shapes what is feasible

Small communities often lack funding, technical support and staff to manage their systems.

Stormwater needs more attention

Heavy rainfall, sewer overflows and limited land put existing infrastructure under pressure.

Small settlements need solutions that fit local conditions and are manageable over time.

Stakeholders' needs assessment

What did 196 stakeholders tell us?



KEY MESSAGES



1. PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE IS THE TOP PRIORITY

Stakeholders are stating main need is practical knowledge on:

- Design and planning
- Operational and maintenance
- Cost-benefit analysis



2. HIGH MOTIVATION TO BE FURTHER ENGAGED

Stakeholders show strong willingness to participate in future activities, trainings and knowledge exchange.



3. FINANCIAL UNDERSTANDING

Better guidance on funding, investment planning and financial mechanisms is essential.



4. NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Strong interest and support for NBS across the region.



CONFIRMATION: The survey confirms that D-CLEAN's integrated approach – combining **PILOT ACTIVITIES**, **PRIORITIZATION OF NEEDS**, **GIS TOOLS** and a **STRATEGIC APPROACH** – is the right direction to address real challenges and support stakeholders in the Danube Region.



PILOT
ACTIVITIES



PRIORITIZATION
OF NEEDS



GIS TOOLS



STRATEGIC
APPROACH

The catalogue of nature-based solutions

Using natural processes to treat wastewater and manage stormwater

What guided the selection?

Treatment performance and robustness

Reliable operation despite changing flows and loads.

Fit with local conditions

Available land, climate and local requirements.

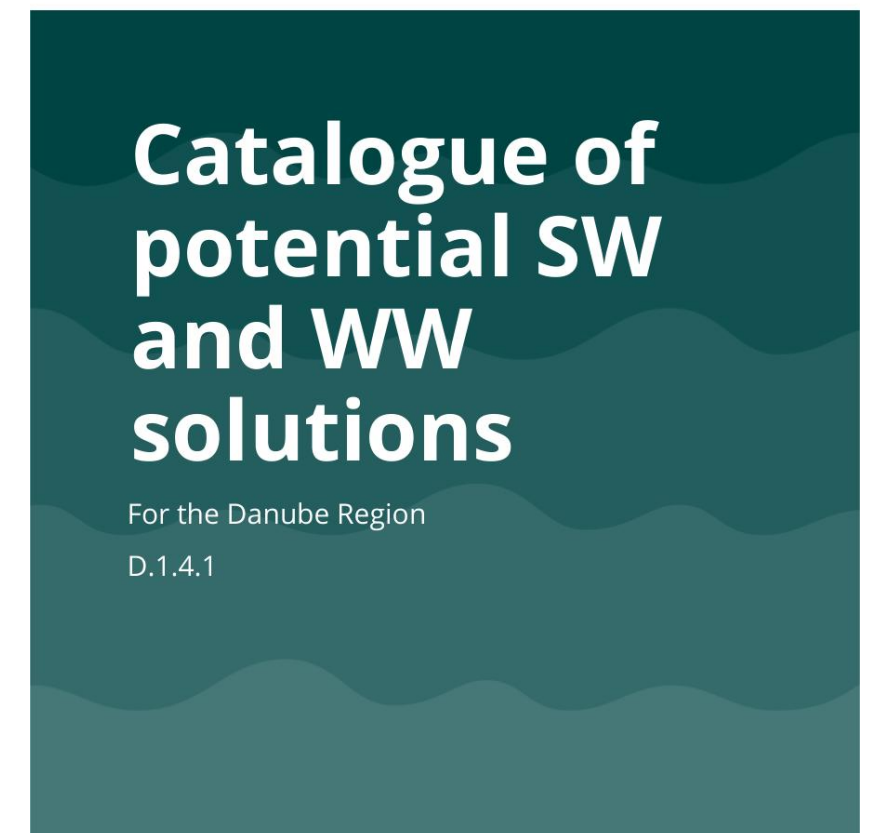
Affordable operation

Energy use, maintenance needs and required skills.

Benefits beyond treatment

Water retention, biodiversity and climate resilience.

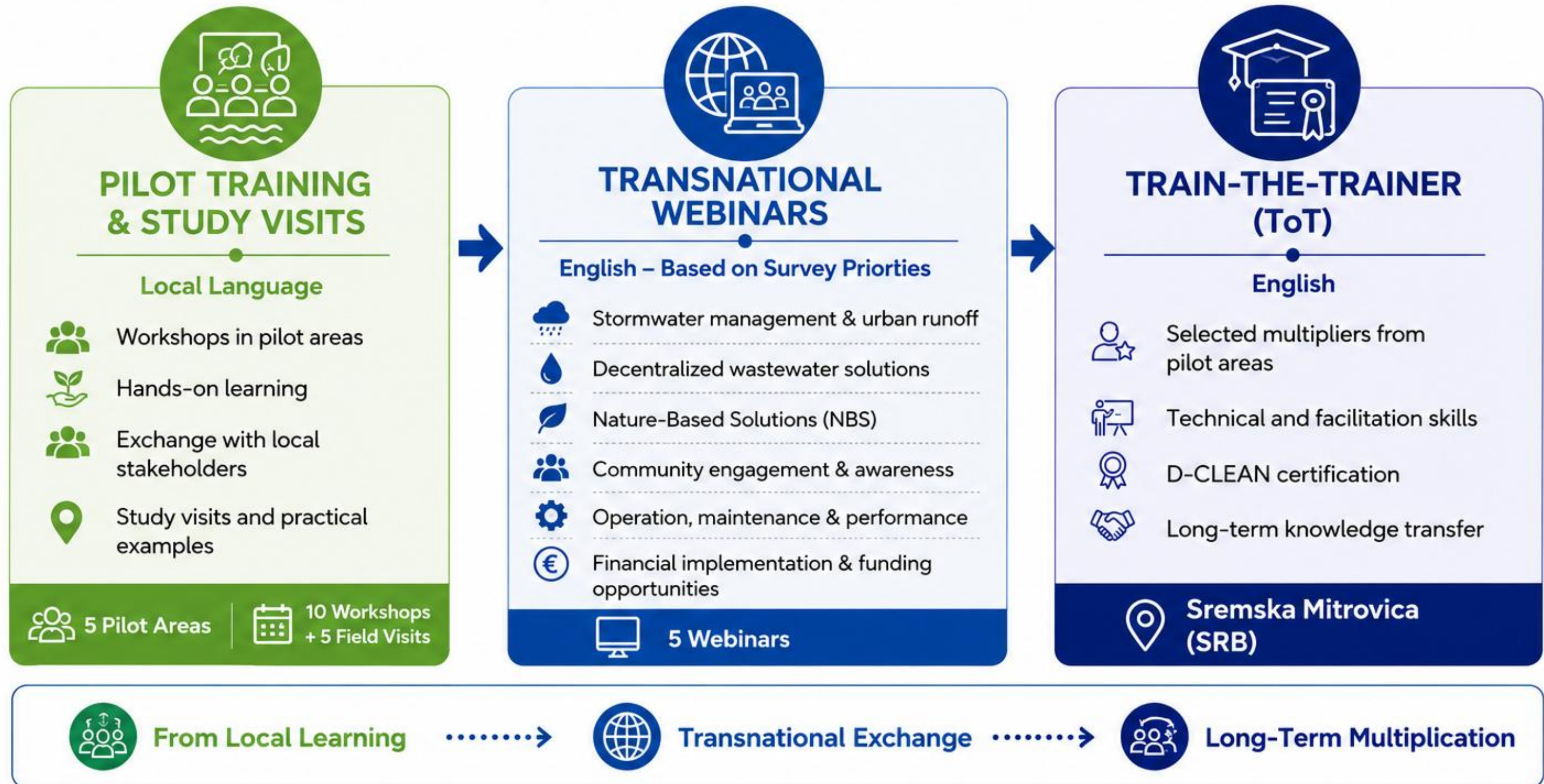
Based on regional and pilot assessments, stakeholder input and expert review.



8 wastewater solutions
7 stormwater solutions

What is next?

Building capacity through local learning, transnational exchange and knowledge multiplication



April 2026 – March 2027

Thank you!
Hvala!
Хвала!
Danke!
Mulțumesc!
Ďakujem!
Köszönöm!



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