

Notification of decision EU-support

The Managing Authority has on the 2026-06-09 made a formal decision to allocate 976 287 EUR from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to the project. The support from ERDF is 65,00% of eligible costs

Project name	SMART Aurora
Reference number	20379674
Priority	Green and sustainable transition
Specific objective	Climate change adaptation
Type of project	Regular project
Sub-area	Aurora
Lead Partner EU	Oy Vaasan ammattikorkeakoulu - Vasa yrkeshögskola Ab
Project partners EU	Alavuden Kehitys Oy Energikontor Norr AB LULEÅ TEKNISKA UNIVERSITET Thermopolis Oy
Project start date	2026-08-01
Project end date	2029-06-30

Justification for decision

The Steering Committee of sub-area Aurora has on 2026-06-04 selected the project to be financed by Interreg Aurora.

The project meets the requirements set by the programme regarding cross-border cooperation, specific objective, sustainable development, partnership, logical, value for money and relevance for target group.

Project summary

SMART (Sector-integrated Municipal Adaptation for Resilient Territories) enables small rural municipalities in Sweden and Finland to transition from fragmented, climate-vulnerable infrastructures to integrated, resilient and low-carbon systems. Small Arctic communities face disproportionate climate impacts while managing critical services with limited resources across isolated energy, water, waste and heating systems.

Led by Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, the 36-month project brings together Thermopolis Oy, Alavuden Kehitys Oy, Energikontor Norr AB and Luleå University of Technology to support 3 to 6 pilot municipalities in developing and implementing sector-integrated climate adaptation strategies.

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The project delivers comprehensive climate risk and vulnerability analyses, co-designed adaptation strategies with cross-sector governance models, 5-7 demonstration pilots linking energy, heating, water, waste and critical services, digital simulation tools and decision-support dashboards, and the Arctic Adaptation Network for continued cross-border exchange.

Municipal staff acquire competencies through training in assessment methodologies, planning frameworks and operational tools. All outputs will be released as open-source resources with replication guides, enabling independent adoption across Aurora region.

SMART supports Interreg Aurora Priority 2 and Specific Objective 2.4, advancing the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, the European Green Deal and EU Arctic Policy. The project operationalizes climate resilience for sparsely populated northern regions while strengthening governance capacity and cross-border cooperation for sustainable development.

Activities**WP 1: Climate Risk Mapping and Baseline**

WP1 establishes the evidential foundation for SMART by developing a common cross-border methodology and conducting systematic climate risk mapping and baseline assessments in 3-6 pilot municipalities. Four sequential tasks progress from methodology design (1.1) through system inventories (1.2) and hazard/vulnerability screening (1.3) to validated baseline reports (1.4). Vaasa UAS leads coordination and synthesis LTU leads climate science Thermopolis and Energikontor Norr support their respective national pilot municipalities pilot municipalities contribute local data under partner guidance. Outputs collectively constitute the risk and vulnerability analyses required under Interreg Aurora SO2.4 and contribute to RCO116, RCO87 and the analytical foundation for WP2 and WP3.

Start date: 2026-08-01

End date: 2027-07-31

Cost: 300 385

1.1 Common Methodology and Templates

Activity 1.1 establishes the shared methodological foundation for SMART by producing a common cross-border data protocol, system mapping template and climate risk screening checklist tailored to small Arctic municipalities. Without this agreed foundation, data collected across Swedish and Finnish pilot municipalities would not be comparable, undermining cross-border added value and programme indicator reporting.

Partner roles:

Vaasa UAS leads the activity, coordinates joint methodology workshops and holds overall responsibility for output quality. Thermopolis Oy contributes Finnish municipal planning practice and practical template design.

Main activities:

A joint methodology workshop in Month 1 agrees scope, data categories, indicator sets and validation criteria. Partners develop the Arctic Small-Municipality System Mapping Template covering energy, heating, water, wastewater, waste and critical services the Climate Risk Screening Checklist operationalising EU and Nordic risk frameworks for

Arctic contexts and a Methodology Guide providing step-by-step field instructions for Activities 1.2 and 1.3. All outputs are refined through feedback from regional agencies and finalised by Month 4.

Cost: 45 058

1.2 Municipal System Inventories

Activity 1.2 applies the Activity 1.1 methodology to generate detailed validated inventories of existing infrastructure across 3-6 pilot municipalities covering six system domains. Country-lead agencies coordinate and quality-assure data collection within their respective national contexts, ensuring local technical knowledge is captured systematically.

Partner roles:

Thermopolis Oy and Alavuden Kehitys jointly coordinates and quality-assures Finnish pilot inventories. Energikontor Norr AB performs the equivalent function for Swedish pilots. Vaasa UAS provides methodological oversight and cross-border harmonisation. Pilot municipalities contribute technical staff for data collection, provide access to records and systems, and participate in validation workshops.

Main activities:

Mixed teams collect structured data across six domains -- district heating and energy supply, electricity systems, water and wastewater, solid waste, public buildings and critical services -- using the System Mapping Template from Activity 1.1. Field validation workshops in each municipality confirm accuracy. Structured datasets, system maps showing infrastructure configurations and inter-system linkages, and data quality reports are produced per municipality. Vaasa UAS performs a final cross-border harmonisation check.

Five associate partner organizations support the SMART project and will contribute to project activities without receiving funding: Överkalix kommun (Sweden), Alavus municipality (Finland), City of Lapua (Finland), Isonkyrön Kehitys Oy (Finland), and Evate Oy (Finland). These partners will participate in workshops, training sessions and cross-border study visits, providing local knowledge and contextual input to support development of adaptation methodologies and tools. Associate partners engage relevant municipal departments in project working groups, contribute to testing and validation of sector-integration tools and decision-support frameworks, and share experiences through the Arctic Adaptation Network. Their participation expands the project's reach and validation base while building capacity in additional small Arctic municipalities, strengthening the evidence base for replication across the Aurora region. Associate partners benefit from access to practical tools, training programmes, cross-border peer learning, evidence from pilot case studies, and policy guidance that informs their own municipal adaptation planning without financial or administrative obligations of full partnership.

Cost: 75 096

1.3 Climate Hazard and Vulnerability Screening

Activity 1.3 generates municipality-specific climate hazard profiles and vulnerability assessments by combining structured stakeholder knowledge elicitation and perception mapping with institutional and governance analysis. It runs in parallel with Activity 1.2 so that hazard profiles and system inventories are available simultaneously for integrated synthesis in Activity 1.4.

Partner roles:

LTU leads stakeholder perception analysis and vulnerability screening, drawing on its expertise in mapping how stakeholders perceive risks and needs, and conducting institutional system analyses. Vaasa UAS co-facilitates vulnerability screening workshops and ensures methodological consistency across municipalities. Pilot municipalities contribute local and, where relevant, indigenous knowledge through facilitated workshops.

Main activities:

LTU conducts stakeholder perception mapping to understand how different stakeholder groups (municipal staff, residents, local businesses, and where relevant, Sami and other local communities) perceive climate risks and adaptation needs specific to their context. Vaasa UAS and LTU co-facilitate structured vulnerability screening workshops in each municipality, systematically linking hazards to specific infrastructure components, services and population groups using system maps from Activity 1.2. Workshop findings are documented in preliminary vulnerability matrices and workshop reports.

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Cost:

75 096

1.4 Baseline Assessment Reports

Activity 1.4 synthesises all evidence from Activities 1.1--1.3 into validated baseline assessment reports for each pilot municipality and a cross-border synthesis document, establishing the formal analytical reference point for WP2 strategy co-design and WP3 assessments.

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Partner roles:

Vaasa UAS leads synthesis, report drafting and validation coordination. All partners review drafts for their respective pilot municipalities and participate in the cross-border validation working group. Thermopolis, Alavuden Kehitys and Energikontor Norr support local validation workshops in their countries. Pilot municipalities review findings for contextual accuracy.

Main activities:

Integration of system inventories, hazard profiles and vulnerability assessments into structured municipal baseline reports including strategic focus area recommendations. Local validation workshops in each municipality to review findings with technical and planning staff. A cross-border validation working group meeting comparing findings and agreeing synthesis conclusions. Drafting of the cross-border synthesis report identifying common patterns and shared adaptation opportunities. Finalisation and formal submission of all reports in national languages with English summaries.

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Cost:

60 077

1.5 Project Management

This activity ensures effective coordination of all SMART activities, securing high-quality implementation and alignment with Interreg Aurora SO2.4 objectives on climate adaptation. Vaasa University of Applied Sciences as lead partner manages overall project coordination, financial administration, programme reporting and partner communication to ensure smooth execution across all three work packages. A structured monitoring and evaluation framework tracks progress against RCO and RCR indicators, identifies implementation challenges and ensures timely adjustments when needed. The Steering Committee with representation from all five core partners and pilot municipalities meets quarterly to provide strategic guidance and approve major decisions. The Project Management Group comprising Vaasa UAS and work package leaders holds monthly coordination meetings to monitor milestones, resolve operational issues and facilitate knowledge exchange. Financial management includes budget oversight, bi-annual expenditure reporting, partner reimbursements and audit compliance according to Interreg Aurora guidelines.

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Work package management is distributed among partners according to their expertise: Vaasa UAS leads WP1 baseline assessments and WP3 decision-support tools, while Thermopolis Oy, Alavuden Kehitys Oy and Energikontor Norr AB jointly lead WP2 strategy co-design and pilot implementation. Cross-border working groups established for each work package ensure joint development of methodologies, templates and outputs rather than parallel national efforts. Regular partner exchanges both digital and in-person facilitate coordination across Sweden and Finland.

Quality assurance mechanisms include joint methodology validation before fieldwork, structured peer review at key milestones, cross-border validation workshops comparing findings and integrated reporting combining all partner perspectives. This distributed leadership structure with strong central coordination guarantees effective delivery of sector-integrated adaptation strategies, pilot demonstrations and the Arctic Adaptation Network, contributing to lasting climate resilience in small Arctic municipalities.

Cost: 45 058

WP 2: Strategy Co-Design and Pilot Implementation

WP2 is the strategic and operational core of SMART, progressing from participatory opportunity identification (2.1) through formal strategy and governance adoption (2.2), technical pilot implementation (2.3) and performance monitoring (2.4). Thermopolis, Alavuden Kehitys and Energikontor Norr lead facilitation and pilot delivery Vaasa UAS leads strategy development and quality assurance pilot municipalities participate as co-authors and implementation hosts. WP2 delivers the primary contributions to RCO83 (strategies and action plans jointly developed), RCO84 (pilot actions implemented) and RCR79 (strategies taken up). It spans Month 6 to Month 28 with overlapping task timelines enabling learning between strategy development and pilot implementation.

Start date: 2027-01-01

End date: 2028-12-03

Cost: 600 772

2.1 Co-Design Workshops and Opportunity Identification

Activity 2.1 translates WP1 baseline evidence into concrete prioritised sector-integration opportunities through structured participatory co-design in each pilot municipality. It provides the substantive content foundation for the adaptation strategies in Activity 2.2 and the pilot selection in Activity 2.3.

Partner roles:

Thermopolis Oy leads facilitation design and delivery across all pilot municipalities. Energikontor Norr AB co-facilitates Swedish pilot workshops. Alavuden Kehitys Oy is responsible for organising pilot workshops in Alavus municipality. Vaasa UAS contributes the integration opportunity assessment methodology and cross-border synthesis. Pilot municipalities participate by mobilising representatives from energy, heating, water, waste, buildings and emergency management, alongside relevant SMEs and community stakeholders.

Main activities:

Design of a structured facilitation framework applicable in both national contexts.
Delivery of 1 full-day workshops per municipality exploring integration opportunities

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using WP1 vulnerability matrices and system maps. Feasibility assessment of integration concepts covering technical, governance and financial dimensions. Prioritisation for Activity 2.2 strategy development and Activity 2.3 pilot selection. Documentation of Integration Opportunity Portfolios per municipality and a cross-border compilation report aggregating shared solutions.

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Cost: 105 135

2.2 Sector-Integrated Adaptation Strategies and Governance Models

Activity 2.2 produces formal sector-integrated municipal adaptation strategies and cross-sector governance models, the central strategic deliverables of SMART. Strategies integrate energy, heating, water, wastewater, waste and critical services into a unified planning framework with coordinated governance arrangements.

Partner roles:

Vaasa UAS leads the strategy drafting framework, analytical inputs and cross-border harmonisation. Thermopolis Oy and Alavuden Kehitys Oy support strategy co-drafting and sector integration content for Finnish municipalities. Energikontor Norr AB supports Swedish municipal drafting and adoption processes. Pilot municipalities participate as active co-authors in local drafting groups and are the formal bodies responsible for approving and implementing the strategies.

Main activities:

Development by Vaasa UAS and Thermopolis Oy of a shared strategy structure and drafting template. Formation of local strategy drafting groups in each municipality. Iterative co-drafting covering climate risk summary, integrated technical measures, governance arrangements, financing pathways and implementation roadmap. Peer review between pilot municipalities. Development of formal Governance Model documents defining cross-sector coordination structures. Support for council or board adoption processes within the project timeline.

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Cost: 150 193

2.3 Pilot Design and Implementation

Activity 2.3 designs and implements 5--7 sector-integration demonstration pilots providing tangible operational proof of the integration approaches in the Activity 2.2 adaptation strategies. Country-lead agencies manage full implementation within their national contexts, ensuring compliance with national procurement and permitting requirements.

Partner roles:

Energikontor Norr AB leads design and implementation of Swedish pilots. Thermopolis Oy and Alavuden Kehitys Oy perform the equivalent role for Finnish pilots. Vaasa UAS provides procurement compliance guidance and cross-border technical quality assurance. Pilot municipalities provide site access, operational cooperation and staff for commissioning, testing and operator training.

Main activities:

Structured pilot appraisal in Months 13-14 assessing integration concepts against technical feasibility, strategic relevance, learning potential and timeline compatibility. Full implementation cycle per selected pilot: technical design and permitting public procurement contractor engagement and installation commissioning, testing and operator training preparation of handover documentation. Candidate pilot types include wastewater heat recovery, renewable energy microgrids for critical buildings, smart load control systems, water system resilience upgrades and waste heat utilisation.

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experiences through the Arctic Adaptation Network. Their participation expands the project's reach and validation base while building capacity in additional small Arctic municipalities, strengthening the evidence base for replication across the Aurora region. Associate partners benefit from access to practical tools, training programmes, cross-border peer learning, evidence from pilot case studies, and policy guidance that informs their own municipal adaptation planning without financial or administrative obligations of full partnership.

Cost: 255 328

2.4 Pilot Monitoring and Replication

Activity 2.4 captures, documents and packages the operational performance and lessons from each pilot in replication-ready formats for use across the Aurora region and beyond.

Partner roles:

Energikontor Norr AB coordinates monitoring and knowledge packaging for Swedish pilots. Thermopolis Oy and Alavuden Kehitys Oy performs the same for Finnish pilots, ensuring consistent monitoring standards. Vaasa UAS coordinates cross-border synthesis and integration of outputs into the open-access toolkit. Pilot municipalities contribute operational performance data and observations as system operators throughout the monitoring period.

Main activities:

Implementation of a standardised monitoring protocol covering five performance dimensions -- technical, operational, resilience, environmental and economic -- for each pilot. Documentation of performance under real climate stress events where they occur. Production of monitoring datasets and summary performance reports per pilot. Preparation of 5--7 case studies and replication guides describing design rationale, implementation, performance results and lessons learned. Compilation of a Solution Portfolio presenting all pilots as a coherent replicable evidence base.

Cost: 90 116

WP 3: Resilience Assessment, Environmental Analysis and Decision Support

WP3 provides the analytical, digital and dissemination infrastructure transforming SMART's pilot experience into generalisable tools and evidence-based policy guidance. Four integrated tasks cover stakeholder and governance analysis (3.1), combined governance/policy/institutional assessments (3.2), decision-support platform development (3.3) and policy synthesis with Arctic Adaptation Network establishment (3.4). LTU leads governance and policy analysis Vaasa UAS leads digital tool development and network coordination all partners contribute evidence and dissemination. WP3 spans Month 8 to Month 36 and contributes primarily to RCO116, RCR84 and capacity building objectives.

Start date: 2027-03-01

End date: 2029-06-30

Cost: 600 771

3.1 Resilience Simulation Models and Toolkit

Activity 3.1 develops calibrated energy and infrastructure system simulation models for small Arctic municipalities under climate hazard scenarios, released as an open-source resilience simulation toolkit. Models quantify the service continuity and resilience benefits of sector integration relative to the fragmented baseline, providing the analytical engine for Activities 3.2 and 3.3.

Partner roles:

LTU leads stakeholder engagement, governance framework analysis, and policy analysis components, drawing on its expertise in institutional systems, multi-level governance, and social acceptance of climate adaptation. Vaasa UAS contributes to model specification, user interface design and toolkit packaging to ensure accessibility for non-specialist municipal users and compatibility with the Activity 3.3 platform.

Main activities:

Calibration of representative municipal infrastructure system models using WP1 baseline data from Month 8. Parallel development of fragmented baseline models and integrated scenario models reflecting WP2 configurations. Scenario runs covering prolonged cold, heavy snowfall, flooding, drought and compound events. Calculation of service continuity metrics, recovery times, resource use under stress and indicative avoided damage costs per scenario. Validation against historical event data and with municipal technical experts. Release as open-source toolkit with documentation, user manual and configuration templates.

Cost:

180 231

3.2 Resilience, LCA and Cost-Benefit Assessments

Activity 3.2 applies simulation models from Activity 3.1 and pilot monitoring data from Activity 2.4 to generate quantitative assessments comparing integrated and fragmented municipal system configurations across resilience, environmental and economic dimensions.

Partner roles:

LTU leads governance analyses, policy analyses, institutional system assessments, and examines collaboration processes and support mechanisms needed for successful adaptation strategy implementation, and authors related reports. Vaasa UAS supports synthesis for non-technical audiences, policy framing and integration of findings into the Activity 3.3 platform. Thermopolis, Alavuden Kehitys and Energikontor Norr support local validation sessions. Pilot municipalities provide empirical monitoring data as inputs and participate in validation of contextual findings.

Main activities:

Resilience assessments quantifying service continuity improvements, recovery time reductions and avoided damage costs under each hazard scenario. Life cycle assessments covering GHG emissions, primary energy, water use and materials over a 20-year horizon. Cost-benefit analyses incorporating capital costs, operating costs, avoided damage and energy savings. Sensitivity analyses on fuel prices, climate scenario intensity and discount rates. Preparation of combined assessment reports per

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municipality and a cross-border synthesis report with benchmarks and policy conclusions.

Cost: 165 212

3.3 Decision-Support Tools and Visual Dashboards

Activity 3.3 develops an open-access online decision-support platform and visual dashboards translating SMART's analytical outputs into accessible planning tools for municipal leaders, planners and technical staff who are not modelling or environmental assessment specialists.

Partner roles: Vaasa UAS leads platform development, UX design, iterative user testing and multilingual content, applying human-centred design principles for public sector audiences. LTU provides the scientific back-end, integrates simulation model outputs and ensures the validity of all dashboard computations and displayed metrics.

Main activities:

Development of the Online Decision-Support Platform integrating baseline data, strategy targets, pilot configurations and assessment results into an interactive web interface. Implementation of scenario comparison functionality enabling users to evaluate integration options by resilience performance, GHG emissions, lifecycle costs and co-benefits. Development of configuration templates for municipalities outside the pilot group. Iterative user testing with municipal staff. Preparation of training materials including quick-start guides and video tutorials. Release as a multilingual (Finnish, Swedish, English) open-source solution hosted by Vaasa UAS.

Cost: 150 193

3.4 Policy Briefs, Dissemination and Arctic Adaptation Network

Activity 3.4 synthesises SMART's evidence into targeted policy outputs and ensures wide dissemination through strategic communication, while formally establishing the Arctic Adaptation Network as a permanent cross-border knowledge exchange mechanism for Arctic municipal climate adaptation.

Partner roles:

Vaasa UAS coordinates policy synthesis, network establishment and all dissemination. All partners contribute evidence and practitioner perspectives from their national and sectoral contexts. Thermopolis, Alavuden Kehitys and Energikontor Norr support national stakeholder outreach and Network membership development in Finland and Sweden.

Main activities:

Production of 2--3 concise policy briefs targeting municipal, national and EU policymaking audiences. Development of practitioner guides and training modules for use of the decision-support platform and sector integration planning. Organisation of two cross-border Arctic Adaptation Network symposia and a targeted webinar series. Presentations at major international conferences. Formal establishment of the Arctic Adaptation Network with governance charter, membership criteria and initial work programme before project end. Integration of all outputs into the open-access toolkit.

Cost: 105 135

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Expected results

Output indicators

Jointly developed solutions	Targetvalue: 2
Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Targetvalue: 1
Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Targetvalue: 1
Organisations cooperating across borders	Targetvalue: 7

Result indicators

Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Targetvalue: 4
Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Targetvalue: 4

Budget EU

Cost categories	VAMK	Alavuden Kehitys Oy	Energi- kontor Norr AB	Thermo- polis Oy	LTU	Total
Staff cost	270 038	108 259	215 000	199 508	280 000	1 072 805
Other costs 40%	108 015	43 304	86 000	79 803	112 000	429 122
Sum costs	378 053	151 563	301 000	279 311	392 000	1 501 927

Financier	VAMK	Alavuden Kehitys Oy	Energi- kontor Norr AB	Thermo- polis Oy	LTU	Total
Lapin liitto	92 610	37 730	0	68 600	0	198 940
REGION VB	0	0	73 745	0	96 100	169 845
VAMK	39 690	0	0	0	0	39 690
Energikontor Norr AB	0	0	31 605	0	0	31 605
LTU	0	0	0	0	41 100	41 100
Alavuden Kehitys Oy	0	15 310	0	0	0	15 310
Thermopolis Oy	0	0	0	29 150	0	29 150
EU-support	245 753	98 523	195 650	181 561	254 800	976 287
Total financing	378 053	151 563	301 000	279 311	392 000	1 501 927

Appeal

This decision can not be appealed.

Decision-making officer

Tina Nilsson has made the decision after a presentation by Veronica Estling.

Reporting and payment applications

The payment application regarding the EU-funding is submitted in Min Ansökan by the Lead Partner EU with a joint progress/final report for the whole project. For instructions on how to report, please see

www.interregaurora.eu

Period	Start date	End date	Date for submission
1	2026-08-01	2027-01-31	2027-03-31
2	2027-02-01	2027-07-31	2027-09-30
3	2027-08-01	2028-01-31	2028-03-31
4	2028-02-01	2028-07-31	2028-09-30
5	2028-08-01	2029-01-31	2029-03-31
6	2029-02-01	2029-06-30	2029-09-30

Questions

For questions regarding this decision, please contact Johanna Liikamaa.

Lead partner EU is responsible for distributing this notification to all project partners.

ANNEX:

General conditions – support from Interreg Aurora (EU - ERDF)

All partners shall make sure the project is implemented in accordance with the regulations of the European Union, the national laws, any other provisions and documents applicable to the EU support, as well as the programme manual for Interreg Aurora and in particular:

- keep separate accounts for the project (not applicable to flat-rates)
- pay the expenditures of the project within deadlines for reporting
- follow the regulations regarding public procurement
- keep all project documents and accounts available for a period of seven years following the end of the calendar year when the project was formally closed by the Managing Authority, or longer if it is stipulated in other rules applicable to the project partner
- repay to the Lead Partner any amounts unduly paid
- highlight the support from EU, and upon request, make communication and visibility material available for use by Union institutions, bodies, offices or agencies.

The Lead partner shall, in particular:

- conclude a partnership agreement with all partners of the project,
- ensure implementation of the project within the project period,
- ensure that the expenditure presented by all partners has been paid in implementing the project and corresponds to the activities in the decision of EU-support to the project,
- deliver progress- and final reports regarding the implementation of the project
- make payment applications regarding the EU-support for the project
- ensure that the other partners receive their part of the EU-support
- as soon as known, inform about any changes regarding the implementation of the project
- repay to the Managing Authority any amounts unduly paid.