EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

Brussels, 24.3.2026
C(2026) 1891 final

COMMISSION DECISION

of 24.3.2026

on the financing of pilot projects and preparatory actions in the field of transport and the adoption of the work programme for 2026

COMMISSION DECISION

of 24.3.2026

on the financing of pilot projects and preparatory actions in the field of transport and the adoption of the work programme for 2026

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Having regard to Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union[1] ('the Financial Regulation'), and in particular Articles 58(2) (a) and (b) and 110(1) thereof,

Whereas:

(1) In order to ensure the implementation of the programme, it is necessary to adopt an annual financing decision, which is to constitute the annual work programme, for 2026 in accordance with Article 110(2) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 ('the Financial Regulation').

(2) The envisaged assistance is to comply with the conditions and procedures set out by the restrictive measures[2] adopted pursuant to Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

(3) It is necessary to allow for the payment of interest due for late payment on the basis of Article 116(5) of the Financial Regulation.

(4) In order to allow for flexibility in the implementation of the work programme, it is appropriate to determine the changes, which should not be considered substantial for the purposes of Article 110(5) of the Financial Regulation.

(5) The activities should contribute to climate mainstreaming in line with the Commission Communication 'The European Green Deal'[3] and the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020 on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management, as well as on new own resources, including a roadmap towards the introduction of new own resources[4].

(6) Pursuant to Article 62(1), first subparagraph, point (a) and (c), of the Financial Regulation, direct and indirect management is to be used for the actions specified in the work programme.

(7) The Commission is to ensure a level of protection of the financial interests of the Union with regard to persons and entities entrusted with the implementation of Union

---

1 Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast) (OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.09.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/2509/oj).

2 See www.sanctionsmap.eu – Note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In the case of discrepancy, the OJ prevails.

3 COM (2019) 640 final of 11 December 2019.

4 OJ L 433I, 22.12.2020, p. 28, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_interinstit/2020/1222/oj.

funds by indirect management as provided for in Article 157(3) of the Financial Regulation. To that end, and before a contribution agreement can be signed, such persons and entities are to be subject to an assessment of their systems and procedures in accordance with Article 157(4) of the Financial Regulation and, if necessary, to appropriate supervisory measures in accordance with Article 157(5) of the Financial Regulation,

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1
The work programme

The annual financing decision, constituting the annual work programme for the implementation of pilot projects and preparatory actions in the field of transport for 2026, as set out in the Annex, is hereby adopted.

Article 2
Union contribution

The maximum Union contribution for the implementation of the programme for 2026 is set at EUR 6 520 000,and shall be financed from the appropriations entered in the following lines of the general budget of the Union:

(a) budget line PP 02 26 01 Pilot project – Assessing potential Legal Gaps under UNCLOS and other International and EU frameworks, in and around EU Member State Waters to enhance the Union's Maritime Strategic Interests: EUR 120 000;

(b) budget line PP 02 26 02 Pilot project – Elimination of the language barrier for seamless cross-border rail operations: EUR 1 900 000;

(c) budget line PP 03 26 01 Pilot project – Award for Sustainable Tourism Management: EUR 500 000;

(d) budget line PA 02 26 01 Preparatory action – EU Hub for Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) Production: EUR 4 000 000.

The appropriations provided for in the first paragraph may also cover interest due for late payment.

Article 3
Flexibility clause

Cumulated changes to the allocations to specific actions not exceeding 20% of the maximum Union contribution set in Article 2, first paragraph of this Decision shall not be considered to be substantial for the purposes of Article 110(5) of the Financial Regulation, where those changes do not significantly affect the nature of the actions and the objective of the work programme. The increase of the maximum Union contribution set in Article 2, first paragraph of this Decision shall not exceed 20%.

The authorising officer responsible may apply the changes referred to in the first paragraph. Those changes shall be applied in accordance with the principles of sound financial management and proportionality.

Article 4

Methods of implementation and entrusted entities or persons

The implementation of the actions carried out by way of indirect management, as set out in the Annex, shall be entrusted to the entities referred to or selected in accordance with the criteria laid down the Annex.

Done at Brussels, 24.3.2026

For the Commission
Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS
Member of the Commission

EN

ANNEX

Work programme for 2026 for pilot projects and preparatory actions in the field of transport

1. Introduction

On the basis of the objectives laid down in the budget remarks, this work programme contains the actions to be financed and the budget breakdown for 2026 as follows:

(a) for procurement (implemented under direct management) (point 2);

(b) for actions implemented under indirect management (point 3).

Legal basis

Article 58(2) of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union[1] ('the Financial Regulation')

Budget lines

PP 02 26 01 Pilot project – Assessing potential Legal Gaps under UNCLOS and other International and EU frameworks, in and around EU Member State Waters to enhance the Union's Maritime Strategic Interests
PP 02 26 02 Pilot project – Elimination of the language barrier for seamless cross-border rail operations
PP 03 26 01 Pilot project – Award for Sustainable Tourism Management
PA 02 26 01 Preparatory action – EU Hub for Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) Production

Objectives pursued

The main objectives pursued by this work programme are to strengthen the mobility, transport, and tourism policies by (i) identifying and assessing governance and legal gaps under UNCLOS and related international and EU instruments in waters surrounding the EU to enhance the Union's maritime strategic interests; (ii) supporting the development and testing of pan-European AI-based language tools to eliminate language barriers in cross-border rail operations and improve efficiency for both freight and passenger services; (iii) establishing a European Award for Sustainable Tourism Management to recognize destinations with innovative,

[1] Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast) (OJ L, 2024/2509, 26.09.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/2509/oj).

evidence-based governance models addressing environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability; and (iv) developing and validating the concept of an EU Hub for Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) Production to facilitate SAF market entry, ensure compliance with sustainability and safety standards, and support innovation and competitiveness.

Expected results

The actions in this Work Programme are expected to enhance the EU's maritime governance and legal preparedness, foster smoother and more efficient cross-border rail operations through innovative digital language tools, promote excellence and better governance practices in sustainable tourism management across Europe, and accelerate the large-scale deployment of SAF by establishing a dedicated EU Hub that strengthens innovation, competitiveness, and autonomy of the European aviation sector.

Climate mainstreaming contribution

The 2026 pilot projects and preparatory actions in the field of transport contribute to achieve the objective set out in the Commission's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy of a 90% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector by 2050, as part of the objective of achieving EU climate neutrality by then.

2. Procurement

The global budgetary envelope reserved for procurement contracts in 2026 is EUR 620 000.

Budget line

PP 02 26 01 Pilot project – Assessing potential Legal Gaps under UNCLOS and other International and EU frameworks, in and around EU Member State Waters to enhance the Union's Maritime Strategic Interests

2.1 Assessing potential Legal Gaps under UNCLOS and other International and EU frameworks, in and around EU Member State Waters to enhance the Union's Maritime Strategic Interests

General description of the contracts envisaged

This pilot project will support a comprehensive legal study focussing on identifying legal and operational gaps that affect the EU's capacity to monitor, assess, enforce and respond to maritime threats—particularly in international waters surrounding the Union and where there are Ship Reporting Schemes in place. While building on existing tools such as Directive 2002/59/EC on vessel traffic monitoring and information systems (VTMIS Directive), and the Marine Insurance Directive 2009/20/EC, the project will be expected to examine how broader regulatory, reporting and information-sharing and cooperation mechanisms could be adapted or expanded to enable more effective maritime oversight, enforcement, and coordinated EU responses particularly in relation to non-compliant or "dark/shadow" fleets and evolving geopolitical and safety and security challenges.

The work is expected to identify and assess governance gaps in waters surrounding the EU, through a comprehensive EU legal analysis, taking into account the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and other relevant legal frameworks, including potential limitations for EU Member States as coastal States and/or port States in relation to flag States. The work will encompass necessary stakeholder consultations, comparative analysis of State practices, including current ship reporting systems and their operations with a view to recommend possible legal measures to strengthen maritime safety, security, and EU strategic interest, by improving monitoring, surveillance, compliance, enforcement and information-sharing at national, EU and international levels.

Implementation

Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport

Budget line

PP 03 26 01 Pilot project – Award for Sustainable Tourism Management

2.2 Award for Sustainable Tourism Management

General description of the contracts envisaged

This pilot projectwill support the design, implementation, and promotion of the European Award for Sustainable Tourism Management. Working in synergy with the European Capital and Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism awards, the contractor will be responsible for developing the award's concept, identity (including brand and logo), and evaluation framework, including the definition of evidence-based selection criteria and performance indicators covering environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability. Tasks will include setting up and coordinating an independent panel of experts to assess applications, providing administrative and logistical support for the selection and communication processes, and managing a comprehensive communication and visibility campaign at EU and international levels. The contractor will also design and produce the award trophies, coordinate PR and communication support for the winning destinations, and cover eligible costs related to winners' participation in international promotion activities. The final deliverables will include the full operational framework of the award, evaluation reports, communication materials, and recommendations to ensure the continuity and visibility of the initiative beyond the pilot phase.

Implementation

Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport

3. Actions implemented in indirect management

The global budgetary envelope reserved for indirect management in 2026 is EUR 5 900 000.

Budget line

PP 02 26 02 Pilot project – Elimination of the language barrier for seamless cross-border rail operations

3.1 Elimination of the language barrier for seamless cross-border rail operations

Implementing entity

The European Union Agency for Railways (ERA) is a decentralised agency, falling under the scope of Article 70 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 and may be entrusted with budget implementation tasks pursuant to Article 62(1), first subparagraph (c), point (iv) of that Regulation.

Description of the entrusted tasks, including the objectives pursued and expected results

The objective of this pilot project is to support the development and testing of pan-European AI-based language tools to eliminate communication barriers between train drivers and signallers in cross-border rail operations. The entrusted tasks will include assessing operational and linguistic challenges faced by railway stakeholders, defining technical and functional requirements for digital communication tools, and testing these solutions in real cross-border settings, such as the Munich–Verona corridor via the Brenner. The project will also propose interoperability requirements aligned with the Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSIs) and ensure consistency with ongoing initiatives by Rail Net Europe and other industry actors.

The expected result is the creation of a validated digital communication framework enabling seamless, safe, and efficient cross-border rail operations, contributing to a truly integrated and borderless Single European Railway Area.

Budget line

PA 02 26 01 Preparatory action – EU Hub for Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) Production

3.2 EU Hub for Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) Production

Implementing entity

European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) established in accordance with Article 75 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1139, a decentralised agency falling under Article 70 of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046.

Description of the entrusted tasks, including the objectives pursued and expected results

The objective of this Preparatory Action is to develop and validate the concept of a self-standing EU Hub for Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) Production that will provide a single, independent European capability to support the market entry of SAF compliant with sustainability and safety standards, while removing technical barriers and facilitating SME participation.

The expected results are the establishment of a validated, self-sufficient Hub model supported by an operational framework and governance proposal, a detailed assessment of barriers faced by European producers (especially SMEs), and the creation of new “Made-in-EU” SAF pathways. The project will enhance Europe’s technological autonomy, boost innovation and R&D capacity, diversify SAF feedstocks and production methods, and ultimately accelerate the large-scale deployment of sustainable aviation fuels across the Union.