

FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

TOURISM FACILITY

Establishment and Operationalisation

RegionalCooperationCouncil

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations 5

1. Executive Summary 6

2. Strategic Context, Key Constraints and Rationale for the Facility 8

2.1. Regional Tourism Context and Need for Collective Action 8

2.2. Key Constraints and Development Gaps 9

2.3. Role and Added Value of the Facility 10

2.4. Operational Implications the Facility 11

3. Objectives and Areas of Intervention 12

3.1. Overall Objective of the Facility 12

3.2. Specific Objectives and Areas of Intervention 12

4. Governance and Decision-Making Framework 17

4.1. Governance Principles and Institutional Positioning 17

4.2 Strategic Oversight, WB6 Ownership and Role of the Steering Committee 17

4.3 Technical Governance and Role of the Tourism Expert Group (TEG) 18

4.4 RCC Facilitation and Coordination Support 18

4.5 Decision-Making Process and Rules of Procedure 19

4.6 Oversight and Reporting 21

5. Phases of the Facility 22

5.1 Phase 1: Preparatory and Planning 24

5.2 Phase 2: Execution and Market Activation 25

5.3 Decision Gate for Future Scale-Up 26

5.4 Phase 3: Scale-Up and Advanced Financing 26

5.5 Overall Logic and Expected Results of the Phased Approach 27

6. Financial Framework and Resource Mobilisation 28

6.1. Phased Financing Approach 28

6.2. Resource Mobilisation Across Facility's Development Phases 28

6.3. Sustainability and Future Financial Commitment 29

7. Political Mandate and Way Forward 30

7.1 Berlin Process Endorsement 30

7.2 Endorsed Elements of the Facility 30

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRM	Common Regional Market
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FD	Framework Document
IFI	International Financial Institution
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
NTOs	Domestic Tourism Organisations
PIU	Project Implementation Unit
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RP	Rules of Procedure
SC	Steering Committee
TEG	Tourism Expert Group
TOR	Terms of Reference
WB	Western Balkans
WB6	Western Balkans Six
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Facility is intended to support the implementation of the Common Regional Market (CRM) tourism priority area and the commitments on cooperation and branding under the 2025 Berlin Process, specifically the Declaration on Western Balkans Tourism Branding,[1] through which the WB6 pledged to establish a fund to promote the region as a single destination. It also responds to the continued gap between political commitments and structured regional implementation. Although tourism across the Western Balkans Six (WB6) has grown in importance and the region offers significant cultural, natural and experiential assets, regional tourism development remains fragmented, with limited collective mechanisms for joint market positioning, product development, destination innovation and investment-oriented pipeline preparation. The proposed Facility addresses that gap.

1 https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-of-the-western-balkans-economic-ministerial-conference-16-october-2025-govuk_1761730397.pdf

The purpose of the Facility is to provide a structured regional vehicle through which WB6 can move from fragmented initiatives towards more visible, coherent and implementation-ready regional action. In its initial stage, the Facility operates through an RCC-hosted model that enables coordinated regional planning, market activation, technical prioritisation and preparation of joint initiatives, while progressively strengthening its operational and financing functions over time.

This Framework Document:

- sets out initial model and scope of the WB6 Regional Tourism Facility;
- clarifies the Facility's ownership, governance logic and institutional positioning;
- defines priority intervention areas through which the Facility can deliver regional value;
- sets out the phased pathway for operationalization and future development;
- provides the operating basis for the Facility and its implementation by WB6 stakeholders.

The Facility focuses on five interlinked programme directions:

- regional branding, market positioning and strategic promotion;
- intraregional product development, routes and experience integration;
- smart destination management and sustainable tourism solutions;
- digital tourism intelligence, analytics and regional visibility platforms;
- capacity building, service standards and destination management excellence.

These intervention areas translate regional tourism cooperation into visible and market-relevant actions. In practical terms, the Facility supports the preparation and activation of regional initiatives, strengthens the coherence of the WB6 tourism offer, improves the region's international positioning, and facilitates stronger alignment with EU tourism policy priorities, initiatives and tools, including in the context of the WB6's progressive integration into the EU tourism ecosystem, as well as with other donor-supported opportunities.

The Facility operates through a three-phase development model. The first two phases operate through an RCC-hosted mechanism, which provides the most efficient and practical for the Facility's initial implementation. This allows the mechanism to build on existing institutional, administrative and coordination capacities, avoid unnecessary duplication and become operational without creating a separate structure at the outset, which would entail lengthy procedures and delay the achievement of tangible results, particularly during the initial phase, when the value and effectiveness of the Facility need to be demonstrated. Any later transition to a more dedicated fund structure remains subject to demonstrated results, available resources and WB6 commitment. Phase 1 focuses on preparation and initial activities, Phase 2 on execution and market activation, and Phase 3 provides a possible future scale-up pathway, which could in due course involve establishing the Facility as a separate legal entity with its own dedicated structure. The proposed model maintains a strong WB6 ownership through a two-level governance approach: a Steering Committee (SC) of higher-level WB6 representatives, with the possibility of observer or advisory

participation by the European Commission (EC) and other key stakeholders would provide strategic oversight, while the Tourism Expert Group (TEG), which already exists with an active mandate under RCC as a technical level body, would serve as the main technical platform for shaping initiatives, reviewing priorities and supporting the technical preparation of processes. The RCC would facilitate coordination, institutional hosting and partner engagement, supported by proportionate Rules of Procedure (RP) and operational arrangements suitable to the Facility's initial stage of development. Operating within the RCC in these first phases also avoids the international agreement, ratifications and headquarters arrangements a standalone fund would require, allowing the Facility to begin work as soon as it is endorsed.

Overall, the WB6 Regional Tourism Facility is a practical regional mechanism that can help the WB6 move from cooperation in principle towards structured regional delivery, building a recognisable brand, connecting tourism products and routes across the region, improving destination standards and visitor experience, and creating a coherent platform for mobilising and streamlining EU, donor and International Financial Institutions (IFIs) support for tourism development.

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT, KEY CONSTRAINTS AND RATIONALE FOR THE FACILITY

2.1. Regional Tourism Context and Need for Collective Action

Tourism is an increasingly important economic sector across the WB6, with the capacity to drive output growth, employment and regional visibility well beyond what individual jurisdictions can achieve on their own. At the regional level, its economic weight is reflected in an indicative contribution of around 13% of GDP,[2] underscoring the sector's role as a broader economic driver and a significant source of services exports, jobs, local business activity and destination-related investment. Recent regional data reinforce this: in 2023, tourist arrivals across the Western Balkans rose by around 23% and overnight stays by roughly 27.5% compared with the previous year, part of a broader trend of double-digit annual growth in arrivals and overnight stays across the region in recent years.



2- The indicative regional benchmark of around 13% is calculated as an unweighted estimate based on available World Bank Prosperity Data360 Tourism Jurisdiction Snapshots / World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) Economic Impact Research and relevant strategy-based economic benchmarks. It should be treated as an indicative regional benchmark, not as a harmonised official tourism GDP average.

This momentum confirms both the sector's dynamism and the rising external interest in the Western Balkans as a travel destination. By 2024, tourist arrivals across the region stood well above pre-pandemic levels, reflecting a strong recovery and continued expansion since 2019. Beyond growth, tourism is also a significant source of employment and local economic activity: in leading regional destinations it already accounts for close to one in five jobs and a substantial share of services exports, underlining its role as a driver of inclusive, locally rooted development.[3]

This economic relevance is closely linked to the region's comparative advantages as a tourism space. The WB6 combines geographic proximity, the potential for travel across multiple destinations, a diverse cultural and historical heritage, nature and adventure tourism assets, well-established gastronomy traditions, and an expanding mix of urban short stay and experiential tourism offers. Taken together, these characteristics strengthen the region's ability to attract and retain visitors, while also creating scope for higher spending and wider economic spillovers across the sector.

Regional cooperation in tourism has already gained stronger political and strategic relevance within the broader CRM framework, which recognises tourism as a key area for regional competitiveness and sustainable growth. The 2025 Declaration on Western Balkans Tourism Branding sharpens this agenda by committing the WB6 to advance a unified regional brand, strengthen coordinated promotion, and position the region as a coherent tourism destination. While these processes have created real momentum, they have not yet been matched by a mechanism capable of translating shared ambition into structured delivery. The Facility is intended to respond to that need.

The rationale for collective action is to create a practical regional vehicle that adds value where cooperation can generate greater scale, coherence, market relevance and implementation capacity than isolated efforts alone. This includes joint branding and positioning, multi-destination product development, regional visibility tools, shared knowledge and standards, pipeline preparation, and stronger alignment with EU and other partner-supported opportunities. A structured regional mechanism is justified by the need to move from fragmented cooperation towards more visible, organised and implementation-ready regional action.

In view of the EU accession perspective of the WB6, regional cooperation should also support progressive alignment with the EU tourism policy framework and facilitate the participation and integration of Western Balkan destinations and tourism stakeholders in relevant EU initiatives and networks. This includes, where relevant, the priorities and actions of the forthcoming EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism.

2.2. Key Constraints and Development Gaps

RCC has played an important role in advancing regional tourism cooperation under the CRM agenda, helping to shape shared priorities and strengthen the regional coordination framework. Despite this positive trajectory, the economic significance of tourism, its wide spillover effects, and the growing ambition of the regional agenda have also brought into clearer focus a number of persistent constraints and implementation gaps. These relate in particular to limited implementation

3 RCC, "Western Balkans records 23% rise in tourist arrivals last year" (2024), reporting 2023 regional figures; OECD, Western Balkans Competitiveness Outlook 2024, noting sustained double-digit growth in arrivals and overnight stays; World Bank, Tourism Watch (2024–2026), on regional arrivals well above 2019 levels; WTTC, Economic Impact Research (2024), on tourism's contribution to GDP and employment in the region's leading destinations.

capacity, insufficient technical support, and inadequate financial resources to carry shared regional priorities forward in a sustained and effective manner. Addressing these gaps will be essential if the region is to make fuller use of its tourism potential and translate existing cooperation into stronger and more tangible regional results.

Fragmented regional action: Regional tourism cooperation in the WB6 has produced useful dialogue and selected joint activities, with RCC providing a consistent coordination framework throughout this process. At the same time, these efforts have so far remained influenced by project-based support, periodic coordination and ad-hoc follow-up, rather than being anchored in a more structured and sustained regional mechanism. A dedicated mechanism would therefore not replace existing regional cooperation but rather build on existing efforts while helping translate them into a more coherent and implementation-oriented regional tourism agenda.

Limited mechanisms for implementation: Existing regional platforms play an important role in dialogue, technical exchange and alignment, but are not structured to systematically convert regional tourism concepts into implementation-ready initiatives. Promising ideas emerge from this process, but without the operational arrangements needed to carry them forward consistently. A dedicated mechanism would complement what exist by bridging the gap between technical discussion and practical delivery.

Under-leveraged regional market positioning: While the WB6 offers a rich and diverse set of tourism assets, those assets are still too often presented separately rather than as part of a broader and more compelling regional proposition. This constrains the region's ability to build stronger visibility in priority source markets, to develop linked tourism experiences and routes, and to present a more coherent regional tourism narrative. A stronger collective approach would therefore add value in areas where regional presentation, coordinated storytelling and market-facing cooperation would enhance the visibility and attractiveness of the WB6 as a connected tourism destination.

Uneven capacities and limited regional tools: Across the region, capacities in destination management, service standards, digital visibility, and sustainability practices remain uneven, with limited regional mechanisms or targeted support. This unevenness affects the overall quality and competitiveness of the regional tourism offer, and risks widening the gap between more and less developed destinations over time. Addressing it through shared tools and coordinated capacity building would build wider momentum around quality improvement and market responsiveness across the wider tourism ecosystem.

Insufficiently structured access to finance and external support: A key development gap relates to how tourism priorities are translated into initiatives that are sufficiently prepared to attract financing and technical support. Opportunities exist through the donors, IFIs and other partners, and WB6 contributions are also expected to play a role, but access to support is often constrained by fragmented project preparation, weak regional pipeline development and the absence of an operational structure capable of aligning support around shared regional tourism objectives. Access to finance should therefore be understood not only as a funding issue, but as a matter of institutional readiness and coordination capacity. A dedicated regional mechanism can help by supporting the preparation and packaging of initiatives in a way that responds more effectively to both regional priorities and available financing opportunities.

2.3. Role and Added Value of the Facility

The Facility provides the practical next step in the evolution of regional tourism cooperation. The Facility is intended to provide a structured regional vehicle through which the WB6 can move from fragmented efforts towards more coherent and implementation-oriented action, helping the region jointly prepare initiatives, support market activation and strengthen the mobilisation of resources for tourism development.

The case for the Facility is both strategic and operational. Strategically, it reinforces the region's ability to act jointly around agreed tourism priorities and strengthen the visibility of tourism cooperation within the wider regional agenda. Operationally, it creates a clearer pathway from shared priorities to initiative design, programme activation and follow-through. This is particularly important at a stage when the WB6 needs a mechanism that can begin with a manageable institutional set-up while still providing a credible basis for gradual expansion over time.

The Facility is also needed to better connect tourism cooperation with the evolving EU tourism policy framework and relevant EU initiatives, as well as with EU and partner-supported funding opportunities. The Facility improves the WB6's ability to prepare initiatives that progressively align with EU policy priorities and approaches, while progressively strengthening its capacity to channel external financing and technical assistance around shared tourism objectives.

The Facility is an implementation-oriented mechanism, not an additional discussion layer. Its value lies in helping the WB6 move from strategic intent towards structured delivery through clearer prioritisation, stronger technical preparation, and a phased model of institutional development that is realistic about what can be achieved at each stage. The RCC will bring a demonstrated regional tourism track record, having delivered successive EU-funded regional tourism programmes, including the Triple P Tourism (Promotion, Policy and Pilots) project, which combined joint product development, policy work and a regional grant scheme, and having facilitated the TEG and the regional tourism agenda under the CRM over several years. This established base of experience, partnerships and institutional memory is precisely what allows the Facility to build on proven foundations rather than start from zero. The Facility is therefore complementary to them, and cooperation, including possible co-financing or delivery partnerships, remains open.

2.4. Operational Implications the Facility

The constraints and opportunities outlined above suggest several important implications for the Facility. First, the Facility is **implementation-oriented**, with a clear focus on translating common tourism priorities into practical initiatives and visible outputs. Second, the Facility operates through a **phased and realistic approach**, beginning with functions that are feasible within the current institutional environment and expanding as governance, capacity and resources mature. Third, it is **regionally owned**, with the WB6 providing strategic direction and technical structures playing an active role in shaping priorities and guiding initiative preparation. Fourth, it is designed to **improve access to finance**, not only by mobilising resources directly, but by strengthening the region's ability to prepare credible initiatives and engage effectively with EU, donor and other external funding opportunities.

3. OBJECTIVES AND AREAS OF INTERVENTION

3.1. Overall Objective of the Facility

The overall objective of the WB6 Regional Tourism Facility is to strengthen the competitiveness, visibility, coherence, implementation readiness and resource- mobilisation capacity of tourism co-operation across the WB6 by supporting joint regional action in areas where collective approaches can generate clear added value. In doing so, the Facility is intended to enhance the regional tourism offer as a driver of stronger market positioning and broader economic gains, while helping the WB6 capture more value from tourism through better connected experiences, stronger destination performance and more sustained growth. The Facility thereby also supports the progressive integration of the WB6 tourism ecosystem into the wider European tourism ecosystem and convergence with relevant EU policy priorities and initiatives.



3.2. Specific Objectives and Areas of Intervention

In support of this overall objective, the Facility pursues a focused set of specific objectives and translate them into a defined set of intervention areas through which regional value can be generated. These objectives and intervention areas respond directly to the constraints identified in the previous section and to concentrate Facility support on those dimensions of tourism cooperation where regional action can generate visible and practical results. In operational terms, these specific objectives are pursued through: (i) annual work plans endorsed by the Steering Committee; (ii) a pipeline of regional initiatives identified, assessed and prioritised by the TEG against the selection criteria set out in Section 4.5; and (iii) activities implemented through the RCC-hosted mechanism (and, from Phase 2, through the envisaged small-grants/support window), following the decision-making sequence defined in the Rules of Procedure.

Specific Objectives

The Facility is designed to achieve the following specific objectives:

- strengthen the collective positioning and visibility of the WB6 as a connected and market-relevant regional tourism destination;
- support the development of multi-destination products, thematic routes and integrated visitor experiences that encourage stronger regional circulation and value creation;
- promote more practical, innovative and sustainable approaches to destination management and tourism development across the region;
- improve the use of data, digital tools, analytics and shared visibility platforms in support of regional tourism planning, promotion and management;
- strengthen capacities, standards, skills and institutional cooperation across the wider tourism ecosystem;
- improve the preparation, prioritisation and progressive alignment of regional tourism initiatives with EU tourism policy priorities, initiatives, tools and standards, as well as with current and future EU, donor and partner-supported opportunities.

Figure 1 illustrates the five intervention areas through which these specific objectives will be operationalised.

Intervention Areas and Programme Directions

Five interlinked intervention areas show how the Facility can translate regional tourism cooperation into visible, market-relevant and implementation-oriented action.

1 Regional Branding, Market Positioning and Strategic Promotion

Intervention focus

- Develop a shared regional brand architecture and messaging framework
- Prioritise target markets and visitor segments based on market intelligence
- Support market-tailored outreach campaigns and coordinated fair presence

Indicative examples

- Diverse Balkans: One Region, Endless Experiences
- Connected Cultural Landscapes
- Regional Gastronomy and Lifestyle Promotion
- Coordinated WB6 presence at priority international tourism fairs



2 Intraregional Product Development, Routes and Experience Integration

Intervention focus

- Develop multi-destination tourism products and thematic tourism routes
- Strengthen cooperation among destinations, agencies and tourism operators
- Encourage longer stays and more balanced visitor circulation across the WB6

Indicative examples

- Vibrant Cities of the Balkans Pass
- Cultural Heritage Routes
- Balkan Food, Organic and Healthy Routes
- Active Balkans Adventure Network



3 Smart Destination Management and Sustainable Tourism Solutions

Intervention focus

- Apply practical smart tourism tools for destination management
- Support visitor dispersal, accessibility and off-season activation
- Promote community-based and sustainability-oriented tourism solutions

Indicative examples

- WB6 Smart Tourism Pilot Destinations
- Visitor Dispersal Programme
- Off-season Tourism Activation
- Community-Based Tourism Pilots



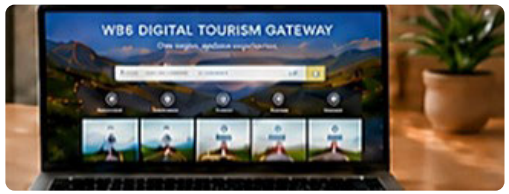
4 Digital Tourism Intelligence, Analytics and Regional Visibility Platforms

Intervention focus

- Establish a regional tourism portal and shared digital visibility tools
- Strengthen tourism data analytics, market intelligence and dashboards
- Support evidence-based planning, promotion and destination management

Indicative examples

- WB6 Digital Tourism Gateway, regional tourism portal
- Regional Tourism Data Hub and Dashboard
- Digital Nomad Hub of the Balkans
- Targeted digital storytelling and campaign insights



5 Capacity Building, Service Standards and Destination Management Excellence

Intervention focus

- Strengthen service standards and destination management capacities
- Build a common professional base across the WB6 tourism ecosystem
- Support peer learning, training and institutional cooperation

Indicative examples

- WB6 Tourism Academy
- Destination Management Excellence Programme
- Regional Tourism Innovation Exchange
- Hospitality Skills and Service Standards Initiative



Figure 1: Intervention Areas and Programme Directions

Taken together, these intervention areas define the Facility's initial programme architecture.

Regional Branding, Market Positioning and Strategic Promotion

This intervention area supports the development of a stronger and more coherent regional tourism presence for the WB6 in priority markets. It will help articulate a clearer shared tourism proposition, complement branding efforts in each WB6 and support coordinated regional outreach, while ensuring complementarity with the EU's Destination Europe branding and promotion activities and exploring opportunities for progressive integration of the Western Balkans offer within the wider Destination Europe narrative. Possible areas of support include common brand architecture and messaging, selection of priority source markets and visitor segments, development of market-tailored outreach concepts and campaigns, and more coordinated regional presence at selected fairs, trade events and Business-to-Business B2B market-facing platforms.

Intraregional Product Development, Routes and Experience Integration

This intervention area aims to support the development of tourism offers that benefit from regional connectivity and complementarity. It will focus on multi-destination products, thematic routes and integrated experiences that encourage longer stays, wider visitor circulation and stronger regional value creation. Possible areas of support include linked cultural routes, gastronomy and lifestyle concepts, nature and adventure circuits, and other tourism offers that are strengthened through regional development and presentation.

Smart Destination Management and Sustainable Tourism Solutions

This intervention area envisions supporting more forward-looking approaches to destination development and management. It aims to help destinations respond more effectively to issues such as visitor flow, seasonality, sustainability, community integration and the overall quality of tourism experiences. Possible areas of support include smart tourism tools, visitor dispersal approaches, off-season activation, sustainability-oriented practices, community-based tourism initiatives and destination pilots that can be adapted or scaled across the region. Activities should, where relevant, draw on EU approaches and good practices for smart, sustainable, accessible and balanced destination management and facilitate the participation of WB6 destinations in relevant European networks and initiatives. In this respect, WB6 destinations are eligible for the European Capital and Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism initiatives, and the area would connect to the work on smart and balanced destination management foreseen under the forthcoming EU Strategy for Sustainable Tourism.

Digital Tourism Intelligence, Analytics and Regional Visibility Platforms

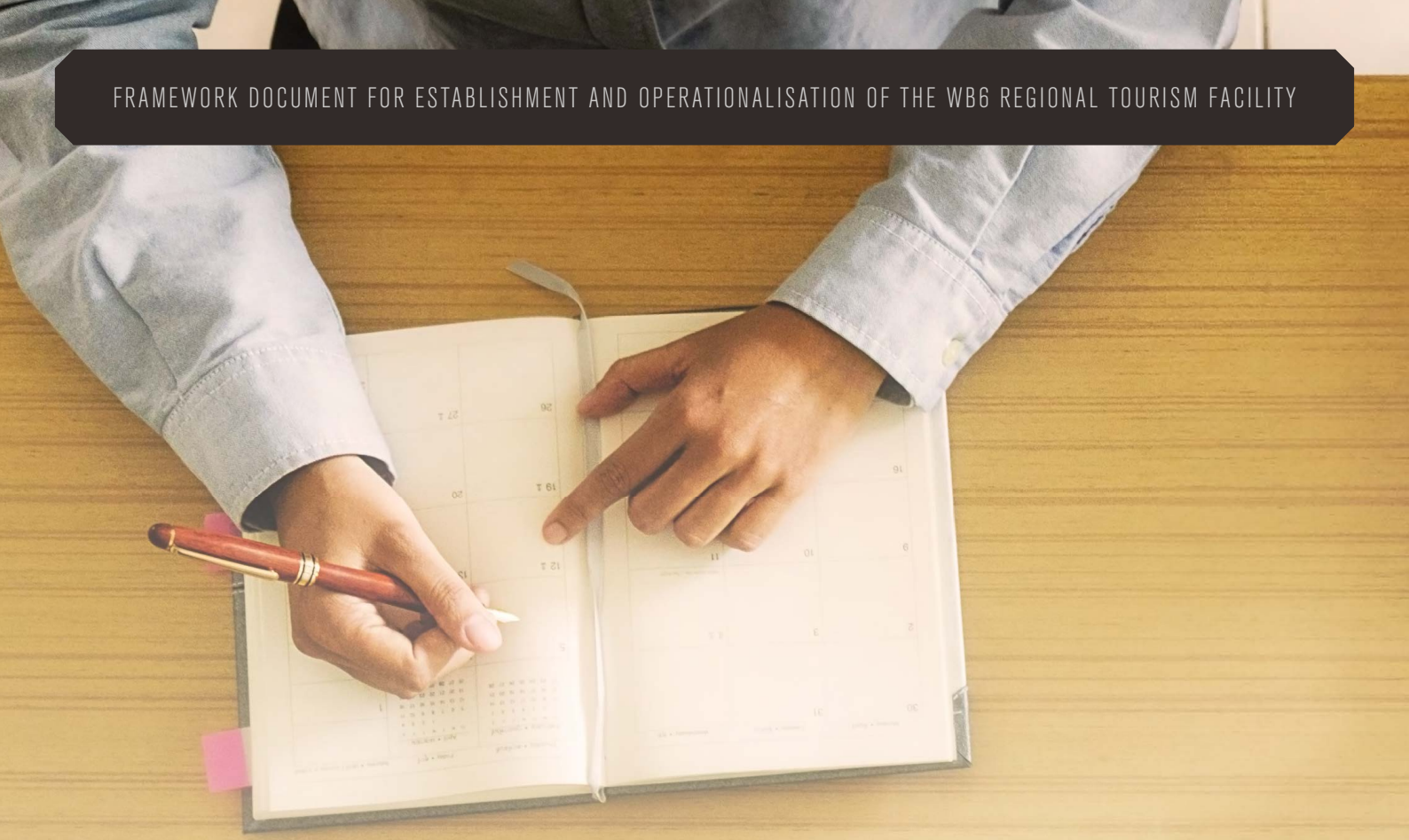
This intervention area aims to strengthen the digital and analytical foundations of regional tourism cooperation, improving the ability of the WB6 to use data, digital tools and shared platforms in support of evidence-based planning and stronger regional visibility. Possible areas of support include the development of a shared regional digital presence serving both as a public-facing tourism portal and as a backend platform for data, insights and content coordination, as well as tourism intelligence dashboards, market insight functions, and digital storytelling approaches that improve the discoverability and market visibility of the regional tourism offer. Such tools should be developed with a view to interoperability and complementarity with relevant EU tourism data

initiatives and platforms, avoiding unnecessary duplication and facilitating future integration into the European tourism data ecosystem. Interoperability would be pursued in particular with the EU Tourism Dashboard, the EU Tourism Data Space and the wider EU Tourism Platform, so that regional tools can connect to EU systems rather than develop in parallel.

Capacity Building, Service Standards and Destination Management Excellence

This intervention area aims to strengthen human, institutional and professional capacities across the tourism ecosystem, building a common base of knowledge, skills and standards that can improve tourism quality and delivery capacity across the WB6. Possible areas of support include peer learning, targeted training, service quality initiatives, destination management support, and practical tools for cooperation among tourism institutions and wider sector stakeholders. Capacity-building activities should, where relevant, build on and facilitate participation in relevant EU initiatives and tools, while supporting familiarisation and progressive alignment with EU tourism policies, standards and good practices. These activities draw in particular on the EU Tourism Skills Academy and the forthcoming EU model of tourism management, ensuring complementarity with EU-level capacity-building tools.

Across all intervention areas, the Facility will support the prioritisation, pipeline preparation and implementation readiness, with sustainability and data-informed planning and progressive alignment with relevant EU tourism policies, initiatives, tools and standards as cross-cutting considerations. Among these, intraregional product development and shared tourism data and analytics carry the most direct regional added value: multi-destination circulation and intraregional visitor intelligence cannot be delivered by any single administration acting alone. This also allows the Facility to remain focused and realistic in its initial stage, while creating a credible basis for gradual scale-up through the phased model set out in the following sections.



4. GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK

4.1. Governance Principles and Institutional Positioning

The WB6 Regional Tourism Facility is a regionally owned mechanism for advancing shared tourism priorities through structured and implementation-oriented cooperation. Its governance framework is designed to ensure clear WB6 strategic ownership, supported by technical review, coordinated facilitation and proportionate accountability arrangements. The Facility is structured to be functional and credible within a manageable institutional set-up from the outset, with operational and financing functions strengthening progressively over time.

The initial institutional positioning combines WB6 strategic ownership with technical support through the existing TEG and RCC-facilitated operational support. This allows the Facility to become operational without an overly complex structure in the early stage, while remaining anchored in regional priorities. The governance model is guided by five core principles: regional ownership, technical credibility, operational practicality, phased development, and alignment with external partnership and financing opportunities.

4.2 Strategic Oversight, WB6 Ownership and Role of the Steering Committee

Strategic oversight of the Facility remains firmly with the WB6, with a Steering Committee (SC) established as its dedicated governance body. The SC is composed of high-ranking WB6 representatives, nominated by the ministry responsible for tourism in each WB6 (a senior official or equivalent formally designated through official government channels), with the possibility of appointing a designated alternate (e.g. the NTO director); the EC and other relevant partners would be invited to take part in an observer or advisory capacity, helping to ensure complementarity with relevant EU tourism initiatives and to avoid duplication. Its role is to ensure that the Facility remains anchored in shared regional priorities and develops as a collectively owned instrument for advancing regional tourism cooperation, not to manage day-to-day technical matters.

In practical terms, the SC will be responsible for:

- setting the overall strategic direction of the Facility, on the basis of proposals prepared through the technical level;
- approving priority areas, programme orientations and annual work plans;
- deciding on recommendations submitted through the technical governance level, including endorsement of the initiative pipeline;
- reviewing progress, and implementation results;
- taking the decisions related to the phased development of the Facility, including at the decision gate.

This strategic role is complemented by the TEG, which provides the technical basis for reviewing priorities, shaping initiative concepts and informing SC decision-making.

4.3 Technical Governance and Role of the Tourism Expert Group (TEG)

The TEG serves as the technical governance body of the Facility, responsible for shaping its operational direction and ensuring that proposed activities reflect sector priorities, practical needs and implementation readiness. The TEG already exists as an active RCC-supported technical body, which strengthens the credibility and immediate feasibility of the governance model.

The TEG will be responsible for:

- supporting the technical implementation of the Facility's strategic priorities;
- reviewing and refining proposed intervention areas and initiative concepts;
- contributing to the identification and prioritisation of a pipeline of regional actions;
- assessing the relevance, feasibility and regional added value of proposed initiatives;
- providing technical recommendations to the SC and supporting its decision-making processes.

As part of Phase 1 operationalisation, the TEG's Terms of Reference (TOR) will be updated to formally include NTOs and other competent tourism bodies across the WB6, ensuring that the Facility's technical work is informed by practical market knowledge, destination management experience, and product-development expertise from the institutions most directly engaged in tourism promotion and delivery. Provision will also be made for private-sector participation in a consultative capacity, where needed: tourism business associations and chambers from across the WB6 would be invited to relevant TEG sessions, and, where appropriate, to SC meetings as observers, without a decision-making role.

4.4 RCC Facilitation and Coordination Support

RCC plays a facilitation and coordination role in supporting the functioning of the Facility. This role will remain essential throughout the existence of the Facility. A legal analysis undertaken in preparation of this document confirms that the RCC-hosted model is firmly grounded in the RCC's mandate, institutional framework and experience in supporting regional cooperation mechanisms.

It is also consistent with the RCC Statute, which provides for the RCC support, monitor and facilitate relevant regional initiatives, including by helping them access regional and international political, technical and financial support.[4]

The RCC Secretariat provides the enabling, coordination and operational support required for the Facility to function, in line with its established role in supporting regional cooperation processes, while ownership of the agenda and strategic decision-making would remain with the WB6. Strategic direction remains with the WB6 through the SC, and technical direction with the TEG. RCC would provide the institutional platform and operational support needed to ensure that the mechanism functions effectively in practice.

Within this framework, RCC will be responsible for:

- coordination and support for governance and technical processes (in particular preparation of SC and TEG sessions, technical review cycles for initiative proposals, pipeline documentation, and monitoring and reporting flows);
- chairing of SC and TEG meetings and preparation and circulation of their agendas, in consultation with WB6 members, as further specified in Section 4.5;
- support for communication and coordination among participating WB6 stakeholders;
- assistance in tracking progress, next steps and initiative development;
- support for underpinning analyses and other similar support;
- facilitation of joint promotion of the WB6 as a single destination;
- other secretariat and administrative assistance.

4 RCC Statute: Point 7; Point 16(n); and Point 17(b) https://www.rcc.int/pages/95/statute

In particular, the RCC chairs both the SC and the TEG and prepare and circulate their agendas in consultation with WB6 members. This active role in chairing and agenda-setting is essential to keep the mechanism functioning: it ensures that meetings are convened, that items are brought forward for decision, and that the process is not stalled by the absence or inaction of any single participant.

As part of its operational role, the RCC Secretariat assumes fiduciary responsibility for the Facility during Phases 1 and 2. Expenditure will be approved and executed through the Secretary General or delegated authority, in line with the RCC's Financial Management Manual, which defines the applicable financial and grant procedures, controls and approval steps. Such expenditure will be based on the annual work plan and initiative pipeline approved by the SC. Accordingly, fiduciary responsibility rests with the RCC Secretariat, while programmatic decision-making remains with the SC.

4.5 Decision-Making Process and Rules of Procedure

A clear decision-making process will be essential to the functioning of the Facility. The governance model will therefore be supported by a clear set of Rules of Procedure defining how priorities are identified, how initiatives enter the Facility's pipeline, how recommendations are elevated to the strategic level, and how implementation is tracked. The RCC would prepare the draft RP and circulate them in advance to the nominated WB6 representatives on the SC for consideration, with a view to their formal adoption at the SC's inaugural meeting.

The decision-making process will follow a structured sequence consisting of:

1. identification of regional priorities and initiative concepts through ongoing technical engagement and stakeholder inputs;
2. technical review and prioritisation through the TEG, including assessment of regional relevance, feasibility and alignment with Facility objectives;
3. strategic consideration and endorsement by the SC;
4. operational follow-up and coordination supported by RCC;
5. monitoring, reporting and periodic review to inform future prioritisation and phased development.

To strengthen the consistency and transparency, the RP will also define a basic set of initiative selection criteria to guide the technical review. These may include regional added value of the initiatives, implementation readiness, market relevance, sustainability considerations, alignment and complementarity with relevant EU tourism policy priorities and initiatives, potential for co-financing and the practical capacity to support implementation, ensuring the Facility remains focused on initiatives that are both strategically relevant and sufficiently mature and credible to move towards implementation. In applying these criteria, the TEG and SC will observe a soft regional-balance principle: the geographic distribution of supported initiatives would be monitored over a rolling three-year period, so that each of the WB6 sees a reasonable share of activity over time, without compromising quality-based selection.

The table below presents the core elements of the Facility's RP.

ELEMENT	OPERATING APPROACH
Roles and Responsibilities	TEG reviews and prioritizes initiatives SC endorses the initiatives and provides strategic guidance RCC supports coordination, documentation and procedural follow-up
Meeting Arrangements	SC meets periodically (at least once a year or as deemed necessary) TEG meets more regularly (at least three times per year) for technical review and pipeline development
Agenda and Document Circulation	Agendas and supporting materials are shared at least 7-10 days before TEG/SC meetings
Initiative Proposal and Review	initiatives are presented in an agreed format and reviewed first at technical (TEG) level.
Documentation of Decisions	Each TEG/SC meeting will include a written report outlining the key decisions, actions, responsibilities and timelines.

Table 1: Proposed Elements of the Rules of Procedure

The RP provide the operational basis for how the SC, TEG and RCC will interact, and may be refined as the Facility evolves.

The RP address the following principles: chairing and agenda-setting by the RCC, quorum, the treatment of non-attendance, written/silence procedures between meetings, and the handling of cases where consensus cannot be reached. These arrangements will follow the existing common practices already in place at the RCC for similar regional groups, and will be set out in detail in the Rules of Procedure adopted by the SC.

Beyond the initiative proposal and endorsement stage, the full financial implementation cycle, including the selection and award of support, disbursement modalities, payments in instalments where relevant, review of spending, financial reporting and audit arrangements, will be further elaborated in the RP and accompanying financial annexes, prepared by the RCC in close consultation with the TEG and approved by the SC. During Phases 1 and 2, all disbursements will be executed exclusively through the RCC's existing financial rules, bank accounts, controls and audit arrangements.

4.6 Oversight and Reporting

The Facility will be supported by a proportionate oversight and reporting system to ensure that implementation progress is monitored, decisions are evidence-informed and the governance structure remains responsive to the Facility's gradual development.

Reporting will take place at both levels. At the strategic level, periodic reports to the SC will cover overall progress, key outputs, emerging challenges and issues relevant to the Facility's

development. At the technical level, the TEG will review initiative preparation, pipeline development and implementation readiness, and should use this to inform its technical recommendations to the SC.

These arrangements will also support periodic consideration of lessons learned, operational bottlenecks, and alignment with wider regional tourism priorities. Oversight and reporting should therefore be treated as practical tools for strengthening Facility performance and informing strategic decision-making, not merely as formal requirements.

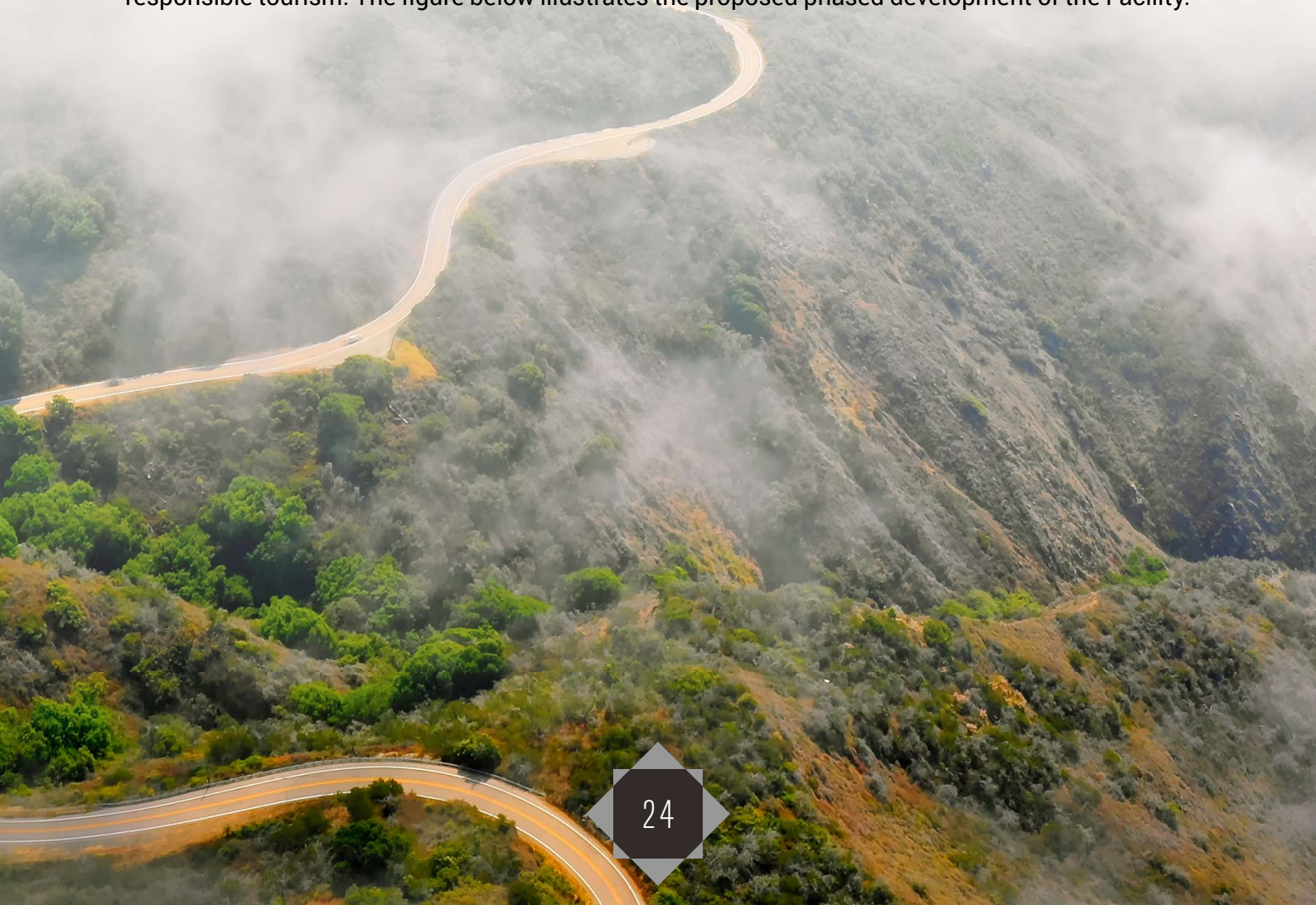
The RCC will support these arrangements through coordination of reporting inputs, maintenance of summary records, follow-up on agreed actions and facilitation of information flows between the two levels. Format and frequency of reporting will be defined through the RP, proportionate to the Facility's stage of development and without unnecessary administrative burden. The possible need for any additional oversight layer (e.g. RCC Board) beyond the proposed governance structure may be assessed in light of implementation experience, reporting needs and the Facility's evolving scope.

5. PHASES OF THE FACILITY

The WB6 Regional Tourism Facility develops through a phased approach that enables the mechanism to begin in a realistic and operationally feasible form, while creating a structured pathway for gradual expansion over time. The Facility will not assume excessive institutional or financing functions at the outset, but evolve in line with governance readiness, implementation capacity, partnership support, and results. In practical terms, the phased model provides a sequential pathway from preparatory and planning activities (also with limited piloting) to execution and market activation, and, only where justified, to later scale-up and advanced financing.

Phases 1 and 2 operate through an RCC-hosted operational mechanism, allowing the Facility to establish its governance, test its intervention logic, activate regional initiatives and build a track record of delivery before any consideration is given to more advanced institutional or financing arrangements. The legal basis for this approach has been established in preparation of this document, confirming that the RCC's mandate and institutional framework accommodate the hosting and facilitation of the Facility in its initial phases. Phase 3 should therefore be understood only as a possible future stage, not as an immediate institutional commitment or a parallel option to be pursued from the outset.

Across all three phases, the Facility will be guided by a common set of cross-cutting elements: regional coordination, streamlining access to EU and other donor opportunities, tourism intelligence and data-driven decision-making, stakeholder engagement and ownership, and sustainability and responsible tourism. The figure below illustrates the proposed phased development of the Facility.



WESTERN BALKANS TOURISM FACILITY – PHASED DEVELOPMENT ROADMAP

From preparation and planning to market activation and scale-up

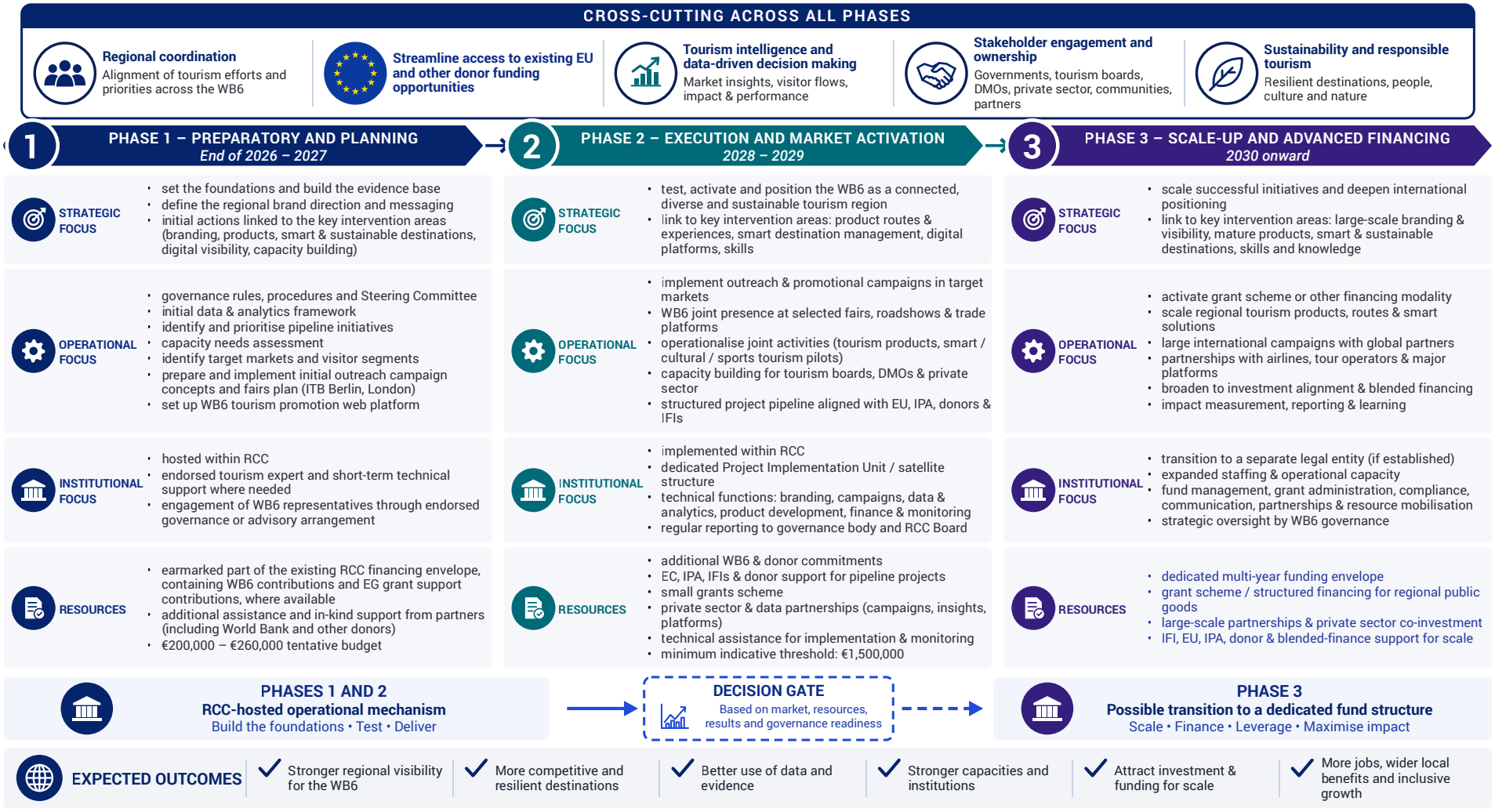


Figure 2:Phases of the Facility

5.1 Phase 1: Preparatory and Planning

Phase 1 is the foundation, pilot and initial activation stage of the Facility, to be launched at the end of 2026 and implemented through 2027. Its purpose is to establish the governance and analytical foundations of a credible regional tourism mechanism while generating the first concrete actions and building blocks for regional market positioning, product development and implementation readiness.

At the strategic level, Phase 1 will define the Facility's initial direction by building the evidence base, shaping the first regional brand direction and messaging, and linking the Facility to its key intervention areas. The evidence base developed in this phase will include demand-side analysis, in particular the share of international arrivals already making multi-destination trips and visitor perceptions of the WB6 as a connected destination. In practical terms, this phase will generate an initial value proposition for the WB6 as a regional tourism destination, identify priority target markets and visitor segments, and define a preliminary set of priority routes, products and pilots.

At the operational level, Phase 1 will combine preparation with early implementation covering governance set-up, an initial data and analytics framework, identification and prioritisation of pipeline initiatives, capacity needs assessment, and preparation of initial outreach concepts and market-engagement plan. Where feasible, Phase 1 will also support limited pilot actions, including early visibility activities and the initial set-up of a shared regional tourism promotion web platform. In parallel, it will begin the structured mapping and streamlining of relevant funding and partnership opportunities, so that early priority initiatives are shaped with cofinancing logic in mind from the outset.

At the institutional level, Phase 1 will be hosted within RCC, supported by existing institutional capacity and targeted short-term technical assistance. Hosting would take place under the existing RCC rules and procedures (administrative, procurement, financial and reporting), without the creation of any new legal structure, separate bank account or parallel administrative arrangements in this phase. Partner support, including from the World Bank, can contribute to market research, visitor-flow analysis, and other analytical inputs needed to shape the Facility's initial strategic and operational architecture.

At the resource level, Phase 1 is planned to build on the existing RCC financing envelope and ongoing regional tourism work programme, including existing EC support for the activities of the TEG and related regional tourism initiatives. This may be complemented by additional WB6 contributions, where agreed, as well as technical assistance and in-kind support from partners under agreed cooperation arrangements. Resources will support the Facility's set-up and initial activities, including brand direction and messaging, the data and analytics framework, priority route and product concepts, pipeline development, and selected pilot actions. The indicative Phase 1 resource envelope is estimated at EUR 200,000 - 260,000. Approximately EUR 200,000 would come from the existing RCC financial envelope, including the new EC grant and RCC core funds contributions (business as usual), while the envelope could be increased by an additional EUR 60,000 through voluntary contributions of EUR 10,000 from each WB6. These WB6 contributions could be made in cash or in a formalised in-kind form (venues, content production, seconded staff time, fair-stand space), treated as equivalent. Note that the approximate amount of EUR 200,000 should be understood as the baseline level of support already envisaged and pre-defined for the CRM tourism agenda, which would be streamlined into the Facility to ensure a more coordinated, efficient

and coherent delivery of regional tourism activities, avoid duplication of efforts, and provide a single operational framework for implementation. This includes TEG meetings providing strategic guidance, technical assistance, and the related human resources costs.

Significant additional in-kind support is also expected, particularly through the World Bank Regional Tourism Assessment (pipeline development exercise, among others), which will provide an important contribution to the Facility's development. Overall, Phase 1 will establish the Facility's foundations and generate a first set of concrete outputs and implementation-ready priorities for Phase 2.

5.2 Phase 2: Execution and Market Activation

Phase 2 the execution and market activation stage of the Facility, covering the period 2028-2029. Its purpose is to move from preparation into visible implementation and delivery of Facility-supported initiatives, the stage in which the Facility demonstrates practical regional value.

At the strategic level, Phase 2 will advance and operationalise the priorities and pilot actions developed in Phase 1, positioning the WB6 as a more connected, diverse and sustainable tourism region. This includes stronger regional branding and market positioning, activation of thematic routes and experience-based products, smart destination solutions, shared digital platforms, practical skills support for tourism institutions, and more systematic use of tourism intelligence. Phase 2 will also support the further refinement, packaging and activation of the project pipeline initially developed in Phase 1, including progressive alignment with relevant EU tourism initiatives and tools, and access to EU, Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), donor and IFI opportunities. Where agreed through the governance structure and subject to available resources, Phase 2 may also include a limited small-grants or support window linked to Facility priorities.

At the institutional level, Phase 2 remains within the RCC-hosted mechanism, but with a strengthened delivery structure and small-grants/support window, where agreed. This phase may require a dedicated PIU under the RCC Secretariat functioning as a dedicated operational structure or satellite arrangement within this model to support day-to-day execution across priority functions such as branding and campaign delivery, data and analytics, product development, finance coordination and monitoring. The PIU would operate under the strategic guidance of the SC and technical recommendations of the TEG. From a staffing perspective, the envisioned PIU structure in Phase 2 would comprise RCC tourism expertise, administrative support and grant management functions, complemented by additional short-term technical expertise as required.

To support the expanded operational mandate of Phase 2 and its delivery structure, a minimum indicative threshold of EUR 1.5 million is required. This resource base covers the establishment and staffing of the PIU, alongside the costs of technical activities, joint promotional campaigns, and the activation of a limited small-grants/support window, where agreed. This amount is intended to include both cash and formalised in-kind contributions, and, together with donor support and related projects, the overall resource base can realistically expand well beyond it. The EUR 1.5 million figure is indicative at this stage and will be validated through a costed Phase 2 work plan prepared during Phase 1, marking the level at which Phase 2 can be delivered credibly, while leaving clear room to grow. The work plan would be accompanied by a resource-mobilisation plan identifying confirmed and potential funding sources. Should cash contributions alone not reach this level,

formalised in-kind contributions and complementary donor and project support would help bridge the gap, keeping the target realistic without setting expectations disproportionately above it. The Phase 2 activity set is deliberately modular, so that its scope can be adjusted to the resources actually secured without undermining the core delivery functions. Funding and alternative support for this phase are expected to be mobilised through additional WB6 and donor commitments, complemented by IFI and donor support for pipeline projects, technical assistance for implementation, and strategic private-sector and data partnerships.

5.3 Decision Gate for Future Scale-Up

At the end of Phase 2, the Facility will be subject to a decision gate through which the WB6 governance structure will assess whether conditions exist for transition to a more advanced stage, ensuring that future scale-up is based on performance and readiness rather than assumption.

The assessment should be based on four main considerations: market traction, resource availability, implementation results and governance readiness. In practice, this means evaluating whether the Facility has generated sufficient visibility and relevance, whether the initiative pipeline and partnerships have matured, whether resources are adequate to support expansion, and whether governance and operational arrangements are strong enough to sustain a broader role. The assessment would be conducted by the SC, informed by a technical review from the TEG and an independent results-based evaluation, against criteria to be further defined in the RP. This step is key to the proposed phased model because it ensures that the WB6 retain control over whether and how the Facility evolves beyond the RCC-hosted mechanism.

5.4 Phase 3: Scale-Up and Advanced Financing

Phase 3 provides a possible future stage, considered only if the decision gate confirms sufficient maturity, results, resources and governance readiness. At the strategic level, Phase 3 would focus on scaling successful initiatives, deepening international positioning and linking the Facility more strongly to mature regional tourism priorities, including larger-scale branding and visibility, stronger tourism products and routes, smart and sustainable destination solutions, and continued investment in skills and knowledge.

At the operational level, Phase 3 would include activation of a larger grant scheme and structured financing window, scaling of regional tourism products and smart solutions, larger international campaigns with global partners, partnerships with airlines, tour operators and major platforms, and stronger movement towards investment alignment and blended financing. This phase would also require more developed impact measurement and reporting.

At the institutional level, Phase 3 may involve a transition to a dedicated Facility structure or separate legal entity (e.g. Foundation), but only if justified and separately agreed following the decision gate. This should be treated as a future possibility, not a predetermined outcome. This would require expanded staffing for fund management, grant administration, compliance, communications, and technical support while strategic oversight would remain anchored in WB6 governance.

At the resource level, Phase 3 would require a more substantial and predictable financing base, including a dedicated multi-year envelope, a larger-scale grant scheme and/or structured financing window, large-scale partnerships, private-sector co-investment, and broader support from IFIs, the European Union, IPA and donor or blended-finance sources. Phase 3 is the stage at which the Facility may scale, leverage and maximise impact, but only if the earlier phases create a sufficiently strong basis for doing so.

5.5 Overall Logic and Expected Results of the Phased Approach

The logic of the phased approach is straightforward: Phase 1 builds the foundations, Phase 2 tests and delivers, and Phase 3 remains a possible future scale-up phase, when the mechanism could be upgraded into a dedicated structure, subject to a WB6 decision. This sequencing ensures the Facility develops in a controlled and evidence-based way, while preserving flexibility for future institutional evolution if justified.

If implemented effectively, this approach will help deliver stronger regional visibility, more competitive and diverse destinations, better use of data and innovation, and improved ability to attract investment with wider local benefits through more inclusive tourism growth. The phased approach thus provides the practical bridge between the Facility's governance framework and its longer-term institutional and financing pathway.

Each phase is accompanied by a set of output-level indicators aligned with the Facility's intervention areas. Phase 1 indicators would focus on pipeline readiness, governance deliverables and the initial data and analytics framework. Phase 2 indicators would track the number of campaigns delivered, pipeline projects developed and regional products or routes piloted. Any future Phase 3 indicators, if pursued, would measure the scale of initiatives supported and the volume of financing mobilised.



6. FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK AND RESOURCE MOBILISATION

6.1. Phased Financing Approach

The Facility's financing framework is designed to develop alongside the Facility itself, remaining proportionate to its stage of operational maturity and governance readiness. Rather than requiring a large upfront commitment, the approach begins with a realistic and limited resource base that allows the mechanism to become operational in a credible and manageable way.

The financing mix will evolve across phases. Phase 1 relies primarily on grant-based, technical assistance and in-kind support. Phase 2 may introduce co-financing and a limited small-grants/support window, where agreed. Any future Phase 3 may draw on more advanced modalities, including blended finance, subject to readiness and available resources. This structure preserves flexibility for future strengthening where justified by performance and WB6 commitments.

6.2. Resource Mobilisation Across Facility's Development Phases

The Facility's resource needs will evolve in line with its phased development, with both the scale and nature of financing expected to change as the mechanism moves from preparation to implementation and possible later expansion. One operational option to be further examined would be an equal contribution approach across the WB6, with payments made into an RCC account designated for this purpose, subject to agreed legal, financial and procedural arrangements. Detailed modalities of any such arrangement should be defined later through the relevant planning and implementation framework, in line with applicable RCC financial rules. In Phases 1 and 2, this arrangement would not entail the establishment of any separate legal entity, bank account or set of accounting books: WB6 contributions would be received into the RCC's existing accounts and tracked through a dedicated budget line with separate analytical bookkeeping. A fully separate bank account and books would be introduced only in the event of a possible Phase 3 transition to a dedicated structure, if so decided at the decision gate.

In Phase 1, resources primarily support the Facility's set-up and the initial activities foreseen for this phase (brand direction and initial messaging, the data and analytics framework, priority route and product concepts, the outreach and fairs plan, the identification of pipeline initiatives and criteria, the initial regional tourism web platform). The phase would rely on RCC supported resources, EC and other donor support, World Bank technical assistance, in-kind partner contributions and, where feasible, additional WB6 contributions, which may also be provided in kind. For planning purposes, the indicative budget would be in the range of EUR 200,000 - 260,000, with the remaining support expected largely in kind, particularly through the World Bank Regional Tourism Assessment.

In Phase 2, the Facility's resource needs are expected to expand in order to support a more active implementation role covering priority activity delivery, joint promotion in key markets, selected fairs and events, pipeline follow-up, and the first set of priority regional routes and product initiatives. Phase 2 also envisages the establishment of a dedicated PIU within the RCC requiring stronger alignment with EU, IPA, donor and IFI-supported opportunities in order to sustain a growing programme portfolio and broader market activation. For planning purposes, Phase 2 would require an indicative budget of at least EUR 1.5 million covering the staffing and operational costs required for implementation, and the limited small-grants/support window, where agreed.

If the Facility were to progress to Phase 3, resources would need to become significantly more substantial, supporting a wider operational role, stronger fund-management capacity and, potentially more advanced financing functions including a multi-year funding envelope, structured financial instruments and broader co-financing arrangements. Such a resource base would only be realistic if the earlier phases demonstrate sufficient results, institutional readiness from WB6 and strategic value. In that event, the Facility could be transformed into a separate legal entity; for the first two phases, however, the RCC-hosted solution is operating model.

6.3. Sustainability and Future Financial Commitment

The long-term sustainability and possible future expansion of the Facility will depend not only on implementation results and external partner support, but also on stronger financial commitments from the WB6. The end of Phase 1 should therefore serve as a point for reviewing and, where

appropriate, confirming the scale and modality of WB6 financial participation needed to support the transition to Phase 2. The Facility's credibility as a shared regional mechanism will increasingly depend on whether regional ownership is reflected in financial as well as governance terms.

This does not imply that a fully developed contribution structure must be agreed immediately, nor that all commitments must take the same form from the outset. Sustainability should be built progressively, in line with the Facility's maturity and demonstrated value, moving over time, from ad hoc support towards a more predictable and structured financing basis. Any future expansion of the Facility should be matched by a commensurate strengthening of its resource base and WB6 ownership commitments.



7. POLITICAL MANDATE AND WAY FORWARD

This section outlines the political mandate and key elements underpinning the implementation of the WB6 Regional Tourism Facility. It builds on the framework presented in the preceding sections, highlighting the endorsement provided through the Berlin Process and summarising the Facility's institutional arrangements, governance structure, programme priorities, phased implementation approach and financing requirements.

7.1 Berlin Process Endorsement

The WB6 Leaders through Chair's Conclusions of the Berlin Process Summit held in Sveti Stefan on 22 October 2026 endorsed the Western Balkans Six Regional Tourism Facility establishing a structured mechanism for joint regional tourism initiative[5]. The Conclusions identify promotion, sustainable tourism, digital solutions and capacity building as core areas of Facility action and confirm that implementation is to be facilitated by the RCC.

5 Chair's Conclusions of the Berlin Process Summit, Budva, 22 October 2026, paragraph 10. The Chair's Conclusions also include a footnote that Belgrade has not yet confirmed its endorsement of the Framework Document, pending the completion of internal consultations, and is invited to confirm its endorsement at a later stage..

7.2 Endorsed Elements of the Facility

The endorsement of the Facility covers the following elements:

- the establishment of the WB6 Regional Tourism Facility as a phased, RCC-hosted regional mechanism;
- the governance model, comprising strategic oversight and decision-making by the SC, technical governance through the TEG, and facilitation, coordination and fiduciary execution by the RCC, together with the adoption of the RP at the constitutive SC meeting;
- the five intervention areas as the Facility's initial programme architecture;
- the launch of Phase 1 (end of 2026 through 2027) with an indicative envelope of EUR 200,000 - 260,000, and invite each WB6 to confirm its voluntary contribution, in cash or in a formalised in-kind form;
- the indicative Phase 2 threshold of at least EUR 1.5 million, understood to include both cash and formalised in-kind contributions, together with the preparation during Phase 1 of a costed Phase 2 work plan and an accompanying resource-mobilisation plan;
- the decision-gate principle, under which any transition towards Phase 3 remains subject to a separate WB6 decision based on demonstrated results, resource availability and governance readiness.

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