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1 Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1 Programme area

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(3), point (a) of Article 17(9)

The **AT-HU programme area** is set up by the NUTS 3 regions Nordburgenland, Mittelburgenland and Südburgenland, Niederösterreich Süd and Wiener Umland/Südteil, Wien, Graz and Oststeiermark as well as Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas and Zala.

The actions of the population and companies are interconnected in many ways across borders. The programme area fulfils an important bridging function between Western and Eastern Europe and stretches along a main corridor between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. This **excellent geographic location** has contributed to an above average economic growth, but the region still shows regional disparities: north-south, west-east, urban agglomerations and structurally weaker rural areas. They've been flattening out in some topics for the last ten years.

The region consists of a **broad variety** of urban agglomerations, small- and medium-sized towns and several rural communities. It covers an area of 25 091 square kilometres with a population of **almost 4.5 million residents** (as of 1 January 2019). The Austrian parts represent 78 % of the population on 55 % of the total area, the Hungarian regions 22 % of the inhabitants on 45 % of the area.

The population development over the last 10 years followed almost exactly the trend of the previous decade: shrinking population in Zala, Vas and the Südburgenland, growth in all other regions, very strong growth in Vienna and Graz. The accelerated negative population development in Zala and a slight positive trend reversal in Central Burgenland and Eastern Steiermark are striking. Despite efforts made in Zala to positively manage the situation, the trends in the referred regions are expected to continue.

The demographic change is noticeable in all regions. In the urban regions it is clearly weakened by the positive migration balance of young people, especially in Austria and by the continued domestic migration to Győr-Moson-Sopron County, in Hungary. The COVID-19 crisis might result in a mitigation of the transnational migration.

Hungarian nationals have become more present as inhabitants and workers in Austria in recent years, whereas the number of Austrians living in the Hungarian counties of the programme area is significantly lower. Also, this trend is likely to continue in the future; still, the next years might see a mitigation of this development due to COVID-19.





1.2 Joint programme strategy: Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities as well as inequalities, joint investment needs and complementarity and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments, lessons-learnt from past experience and macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies.

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(3), point (b) of Article 17(9)

1.2.1 Introduction

In the preparation phase of the IP AT-HU 2021-2027 a socio-economic analysis on the programme area was carried out. The findings of this document, the main results of the evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme¹ and the main development directions, provided by the relevant strategies and stakeholders, were summarized in a discussion paper on the potential strategic thematic directions and discussed by the Programming Group.

In compliance with the ERDF policy objectives, the description of the challenges and needs of the border region is structured as follows:

- A smarter Europe: challenges related to the economic structure and performance of the region, including the research and development activities and the situation of the SMEs
- A greener, low-carbon Europe: challenges pointing towards the more integrated and better management of the region's natural resources
- A more connected Europe: the challenges reflect the needs for improved public transport services
- A more social Europe: the challenges mostly relate to the harmonisation of systems in the field of education, and, to a certain extent, the labour market and healthcare cooperation
- Cross-border governance: challenges reflecting the need for a more strategic approach and related institutional conditions in a number of areas

1.2.2 Complementarity and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments

Projects can be implemented in significantly higher quality and produce a greater impact, if they capitalize on the results of other similar projects and work together with project holders of related initiatives. Synergies make project results more widely usable and enable better upscaling. In order to enable complementarity with other initiatives, coordination with fellow Interreg cross-border or transnational programmes, regional-, national-, and other EU programmes, is fundamental.

Complementarities and potential synergies of European, national and regional strategies and programmes with the IP AT-HU 2021-2027 have been considered during programming in the strategy building process, as reflected in the discussion paper on the potential strategic thematic directions. Members of the programming group are involved also

¹ Interreg AT-HU 2014-2020 Impact Evaluation





in the programming task forces of other programmes and have coordination function on national and regional level.

For the programme area one macro regional strategy is relevant: the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). The Interreg programme AT-HU has traditionally strong links with the EUSDR with lot of projects being aligned with one or the other EUSDR priority areas. The contribution of some water management related projects is specifically acknowledged by the supporting letter of the Steering Group of the EUSDR Priority Area 5, one of them an EUSDR flagship project. For these reasons continued synergies and complementarities with EUSDR were important part of the programming. Each of the following sections about the policy objectives include a description of specific links to the respective EUSDR priority areas.

As only a small part of the programme area in Austria overlaps with the territory of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP), the programme will have no impact.

To ensure that synergies and complementarities, beneficial for both programme and project, are effectively used during **implementation**, the following measures are taken:

- Project applicants will be encouraged in the programme manuals to go for increased coherence and complementarity with other projects supported in EU, national and regional programmes as well as with EU macro-regional strategies. Synergies with past or current EU and other projects or initiatives, as well as capitalization on available knowledge shall be described as part of the application form and will be subject to assessment.
- The exchange of information with other (Interreg) programmes (e.g. at joint communication activities) will proactively promote synergies between projects and help to capitalize on outputs and results of other projects. The use of capitalization tools like keep.eu will clearly demonstrate the potential of synergies and complementarities between projects in Interreg AT-HU and other Interreg programmes.
- Links to other EU funded programmes will be ensured by well-established national coordination bodies or existing, stable mechanisms (as provided by national rules and embedded in the partnership agreements of the participating Member States), seeking (to the possible extent) to achieve coordination at all stages of the programme lifetime (e.g. working group CBC in Austria or the responsible coordination bodies for ESI funds in the responsible line ministries of the two member states). The national coordination bodies or mechanisms support members of the Monitoring Committee. The MC involves representatives of institutions participating in the implementation of national and regional programmes supported by ESI Funds.

1.2.3 Strategic use of public procurement

During the implementation of the programme the Managing Authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support policy objectives (including professionalization efforts to address capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to use more quality-related and lifecycle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social considerations as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures.





1.2.4 Compliance with the “do no significant harm” principle

In line with Article 9 (4) and Recital 10 of CPR, in order to comply with the “do no significant harm” (DNSH) principle a dedicated assessment of the types of actions has been carried out aligned to the SEA process with respect to their potential to do significant harm to the environmental objectives in the meaning of Article 17 of Regulation (EU) 2020/852 (Taxonomy Regulation).

All types of actions defined in chapter 2 have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle. The methodology used was based on the provisions of the RRF DNSH technical guidance.

Supporting information on how the DNSH principle has been taken into account is documented in a dedicated chapter of the SEA report.

1.2.5 A more competitive and smarter Europe

1.2.5.1 Joint challenges, disparities and inequalities

In general, the situation of the economy is rather characterised by substantial disparities than joint challenges, as outlined in more details below.

Economy

The differences in economic performance are significant in the region, especially between Wien, Wiener Umland/Südteil and Graz on one hand and the southern Hungarian counties - Zala and Vas - on the other. A decrease in the share of the primary sector (agriculture, forestry) and in the secondary sector (industries) and fast growth in the tertiary sector (trade and commerce) is observable, however, regional differences exist:

- agriculture and forestry, as well as downstream industries such as wood- and food-processing play important role in the Hungarian border region and in Nord- and Mittelburgenland and Oststeiermark, and
- the Hungarian counties have been facing a clear shift from the primary to processing industries (secondary sector), mostly FDI-led automotive and machinery, with higher employment values in this sector than the Austrian regions and over 50% share of gross value added in Győr-Moson-Sopron and Vas.

The level of industrial productivity in Austria is high in EU comparison, while Hungary belongs to the less well-performing Member States. Though productivity of the Hungarian counties of the programme area – especially in Győr-Moson-Sopron County - is among the highest in Hungary, the border between Hungary and Austria represents a great difference in productivity.

Research and development

In Austria, research and innovation are on a significantly higher level regarding expenditures and personnel, especially in Steiermark and Wien. According to the Innovation Union Innovation Scoreboards, Austria is classified among the “Strong Innovators” whereas Hungary is in the group “Moderate Innovators”. In spite of the considerable differences at national level, difference between Burgenland and the Hungarian counties is much smaller which indicates an uneven distribution of R&D expenditures within both Member States, too.

The cooperation in the field of research will remain a great challenge in the future, as the differences of the two sides of the border in these terms are great. However, the



existence of the strong R&D capacities in Austria (like the Universities of Wien and Graz) and a number of Hungarian Higher Education institutions offer a potential for cooperation, especially in sectors strong on both sides of the border (like automotive or machinery).

SMEs and smart specialization

SMEs play an important role in the economy of the area, however, their performance and needs are significantly different in the two countries.

In terms of fields of European Small Business Act, Austria performs above the EU average in four principles: skills & innovation, internationalisation, single market, and environment, while for Hungary considerable room for improvement is proposed on three of these fields: skills & innovation, the environment and internationalisation. While the main challenge for the Hungarian SMEs is to increase their productivity level by stepping up their innovation capacity, development of more innovative products and services of higher added value, the Austrian SMEs are on a much higher level and their need is more to maintain excellence by a better uptake of digital assets.

There are around 50 clusters operating in the area, about 75% of them in Austria, 25% in Hungary, covering a wide range of economic activities. The key sectors are engineering (esp. automotive, mechatronics), IT development, renewable energy, logistics, wood processing, life sciences and wellbeing. The activities of clusters in Austria in general are more intense than in Hungary.

In summary, challenges for both the R&D sector and the SMEs are different on the two sides of the border. Additionally, administrative barriers, concerning also the smooth operation of the labour market, are still hindering the development of stronger cross-border links between SMEs, as well as between research institutions and SMEs. Intermediary institutions that could help organise and manage such cooperation are not sufficiently embedded and their capacities are weak.

Digitisation

Digitisation is backed up by strategies at European level. At national and regional level, it is addressed as an important cross-cutting issue relevant in many thematic contexts. Digitisation, as a driver of increasing productivity in general, is considered as a common opportunity in the programme area.

1.2.5.2 Lessons learned from 2014-2020

In 2014-2020, several projects with different thematic focus include activities related to **research and innovation**. The impact evaluation recommends including research as a horizontal tool in different thematic topics in a focused manner.

According to the 2014-2020 programme's impact evaluation, projects addressing **SME networks** have a limited durability in comparison with thematically more focused projects. In many cases the commitment of partners and beneficiaries ends with the funding. This led to the conclusion that pure SME projects without a clear focus have a lower possibility of achieving any impact. 2014-2020 projects mainly contributed to network development and better cooperation, rather than to any measurable results. The involvement of intermediary organisations has been considered very important in order to ensure take-up of the project results. However, those organisations must make sure they incorporate the project results into their systems. If they do not do this, the knowledge gained does not spread beyond the person originally involved in the project. The evaluation recommends considering SME support as a topic which could be covered



horizontally and indirectly by thematic POs instead of directly focus on SME development, i.e. to support projects for SMEs rather than with SMEs. The evaluation also recommends supporting only projects with a clear strategic or thematic focus rather than funding large scale SME networks.

1.2.5.3 Joint investment needs

- An intensified cooperation of intermediary institutions serving the needs of SMEs and especially the ones linking SMEs and research institutions as well as their capacity building is needed to enable these organisations to effectively manage cooperation networks on the longer run. Cooperation shall address the still existing administrative barriers to cooperation of economic actors especially on the labour market, on devising the framework (strategies, actors, means) for a more comprehensive cooperation among SMEs and R&D institutions and on building capacities and lasting networks.
- The need for digitisation relates to almost all aspects of life, e.g. teleworking, distance learning and e-government, and also enhances the efficiency of cooperation in all fields. Especially, smart solutions in the sectors of transport, education, tourism and the management of natural assets, food production and agriculture are needed to increase the impact of the thematic interventions and improve digital literacy at the same time.
- Need for more innovative approaches in all topics have been identified. Innovation and scaling up experimental activities shall be encouraged horizontally in each intervention wherever such activities are present in the region.

1.2.5.4 Link with EUSDR

The IP AT-HU 2021-2027 can also support the EUSDR Action Plan in its

- Priority Area 7 “To develop the Knowledge Society (research, education and ICT)”, targeting, inter alia, at
 - reverting brain drain and foster brain circulation and
 - further implementing Smart Specialization Strategies in all Danube countries,
- Priority Area 8 “To support the competitiveness of enterprises”, targeting at
 - improving digital skills of entrepreneurs as well as know-how transfer about Digital Innovations to local small and medium-sized enterprises,
 - mapping and evaluation process/benchmarking of the state of the art in terms of the level and quality of the collaboration of the clusters with the regional development stakeholders,
 - fostering the development of methods of the regional strategies by more intense involvement of the cluster representatives in the process (overcoming the current gap between regional strategies and cluster strategies),
 - improving the innovation capacity of female SMEs and
 - fostering cooperation and continuous discussion between national/regional policy level and SMEs regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI) / how to integrate national/regional AI platforms.





1.2.6 A greener and low-carbon Europe

1.2.6.1 Joint challenges, disparities and inequalities

Climate change adaptation

Due to climate change, Central Europe will face an increase in heat extremes and thus in energy demand for cooling, increasing risk of river floods and of forest fires as well as decrease in summer precipitation and in economic value of forests. The programme area will face similar challenges: the weather being overall warm and dry (annual precipitation 550-700 mm) and characterized by large seasonal differences and extreme values - hot summers and cold winters with little snow and low groundwater recharge.

The AT-HU programme area is assessed as having a medium to high environmental sensitivity to climate change. The impact of climate change is already perceivable in many ways and will be a huge challenge for the region's ecosystems, its population and its economy. Differentiations of the variety and extent of the climate change impacts within the region are still hard to predict. Although research is being carried out, the results of it are not translated into practically useable knowledge that could help regional stakeholders develop their tailor made measures or services regarding monitoring and adaptation.

Water management

The Austrian-Hungarian border region is characterized by common water resources regarding surface as well as groundwater bodies. All rivers in the region except the river Zala flow into the Danube, and almost all cross the Austrian-Hungarian border, having great parts of their watersheds in Austria. Danube and its tributaries play an important role in the region; larger border-crossing rivers are the Mur/Mura and Raab/Rába, while smaller rivers include Leitha/Lajta, Ikva/Ikva, Güns/Gyöngyös, Pinka/Pinka. Water yield and sediment movements of these rivers may be very unsteady, and changes may occur quickly if weather conditions in the watershed change. Besides, on the Danube, sediments became a significant water management issue (under hydromorphological alterations), affecting navigation, biodiversity as well as drinking water supply, which call for actual measures in the region. Also, pollution (e.g. micro plastic) is a constant risk to be managed on each river.

Austria and Hungary also share several groundwater bodies near the border, which are at risk of contamination due to chemicals used in agriculture washed into the soil, as a consequence of the expected more intense precipitation. The weaknesses of rainwater drainage – like the existence of joint systems for waste- and rainwater - further exacerbate the problem.

Areas to be considered as focus areas of interventions due to needs and opportunities attached to them, include:

- The cross-border Lake Neusiedl/Fertő is one of few steppe lakes in Europe with substantial reed coverage and of high ecological value and protected by a range of measures. The high evaporation rate in summer causes deep water levels significant fluctuations in the lake level - in recent years this has become an increasing challenge due to climate change. The threatening drying up of the Lake Neusiedl/Fertő would cause substantial damage to the region's ecological and also economic value; a supply with external water is under discussion but is – also due to the lake's very special chemical composition – a complex and controversial issue and thus needs careful cross-border coordination. Apart from this,





the lake is under a high pressure of use, which is why the joint Lake Neusiedl/Fertő strategy study was developed setting the base for common water management measures (e.g. reed management).

- The Waasen / Hanság and the Seewinkel/Fertőzug are ecologically valuable cross-border fen areas south eastern of Lake Neusiedl/Fertő. Water management and drainage measures to enable agriculture have caused that the ambient conditions have changed and the wet areas, including the structure of the typical saline lakes are acutely endangered.
- The Kis-Balaton area (a territory under the Ramsari Convention) is a former part of Lake Balaton where the impact of subsequent drainage measures and landfills have recently been mitigated by effective restoration (including re-flooding) measures that resulted in restored sensitive wetland habitats and increased biodiversity in the area. Effective measures to maintain and further develop these processes - including a balanced and sustainable management of tourists' flow in the sensitive areas - are sought for, as well as experiences of the restoration process can be shared with similar areas in the border region.
- The transboundary biosphere reserve Mura/Drava/Danube (in submission as 5 country UNESCO biosphere reserve) aiming at transforming the customary river management into a modern and ecological one, stopping river channelling and any further removal of gravel and sand from the rivers, restoring degraded river stretches and floodplain areas and halting any further construction plans of new hydropower dams along the Mura and Drava.

Water supply and wastewater management is at a high level in the Austrian regions and the Hungarian regions have caught up considerably in recent years. Minor gaps are still to be tackled in drinking water supply in some areas of Südburgenland, while in the Hungarian part of the region small municipalities of Vas and Zala still lack public sewerage network, mainly as isolated geographical location and small size of these settlements does not allow for an economically viable operation of the network.

Biodiversity

Unique, varied landscapes with special and typical fauna and flora habitats have developed in the region. Many of the region's valuable eco-systems are protected as national parks, nature parks, Natura 2000 sites and/or landscape reserves, establishing core elements of a transnational biotope network e.g. for water bird migration. The joint management of large protected areas or biotope network systems is quite established. Also, there are several hot spots of physically linked protected areas across the border: in the North with the Lake Neusiedl/Fertő (National Park), in the middle with Geschriebenstein-Írottkő (Nature Park) and in the South with Raab/Őrség/Goričko (Nature Park) areas. Although not having direct border contacts to Austria, the Balaton-uplands National Park in the Hungarian part of the Programme Area is also committed to nature and habitat protection, mainly through awareness raising and nature-conscious tourism promotion activities performed in direct collaboration with all national parks in the Programme Area. The Austrian part of the programme area also has a national park not touching the border to Hungary: the National Park Donau-Auen, situated in Wien and Niederösterreich is the largest complete, ecologically intact natural riverine environment of its kind in Central Europe. Unteres Murtal Biosphere Reserve in Steiermark is also a potential target area and beneficiary of cooperation projects. Even in well conserved habitats, appearance of invasive species represents a problem in fauna and flora.

Niederösterreich, Burgenland, Steiermark and Nyugat-Dunántúl can be considered as rural regions predominantly shaped by croplands and woodlands. They are increasingly





confronted with drought. Among others (biodiversity impacts see below), this has an impact on agriculture and forestry (including hunting), as well as downstream industries such as wood- and food-processing, which play a similarly important role on both sides of the border region. The existence of large woodlands in the programme area (Zala, Vas, Steiermark, Wien) provides good opportunity for cooperation in the entire wood-related activity chain (research, including climate change adaptation, manufacturing, awareness raising, etc.).

Urban environments face an increased occurrence of urban heat islands, meaning that due to the high absorption of solar radiation on paved surfaces, heat storage by built-up structures, lack of vegetation etc., the cities are generally warmer than their rural surrounding, especially at night. This enhances heat stress, causes health risks for the urban population and reduces the quality of life. Several settlements in the programme area, including the Hungarian counties, larger cities and some smaller towns, as well as many cities on the Austrian side, have already developed their strategies to mitigate the effect of the climate change. However, experience in actions to cool down the urban environment by green and water areas is scarce and the use of green roofs, façades and application of reflective surfaces is only in the initial phase.

The border region has a very diverse business landscape with a large number of SMEs, which are especially threatened by the economic development in the light of COVID-19. It is also imperative that this segment of the economy becomes more resilient to future climate impacts and takes advantage of the opportunities offered by the transition to a green economy. At the same time, these businesses are well positioned to develop and sell products and services that strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities. A number of clusters are operational in the region that could play an intermediary role.

Austria has established pilot programmes for awareness raising at regional level, in Hungarian counties and larger cities the basic strategies are available, however, communication on the practical impacts of the climate is not intense and is uncoordinated, making awareness to climate change adaptation on local level very low level.

Circular economy

Austria is the European champion in the recycling sector in terms of recycling quota. In Hungary, awareness of this issue has increased significantly in recent years, but further efforts are to be made both to improve the ratio of recycled materials and to develop the institutional and financing framework. The differences regarding the stages of development and the approaches followed by the two countries constitute an explicit barrier to meaningful crossborder projects in this sector.

Energy

Awareness of energy issues and climate protection is more pronounced in Austria than in Hungary. Austria is one of the top countries in the EU, while Hungary is among the less performing Member States in this field. While the EU's ambitious climate targets will force all states to increase their share of renewable energies, the very different approaches of the two states limits the scope of potential cooperation to the extreme.

1.2.6.2 Lessons learned from 2014-2020

The impact evaluation has revealed that there was no demand for sectoral objectives related to the topic of **energy efficiency**.

All projects related to **climate change adaptation, risk prevention and water management** build on existing structures like the Austro-Hungarian Water Commission,





contribute towards the implementation of general framework documents (e.g. EU Floods Directive), and/or are embedded in the work of mainly public authorities and research institutions. The durability of the projects is above average and the focus on specific cross-border problems and the trigger for cross-border expert exchange with Interreg funding mirrors the purpose of the Interreg approach. On this basis the evaluation strongly recommends to continue with projects addressing climate change adaptation/risk management and water management.

There is a long tradition of cross-border cooperation in the border region which generated improvements and knowledge in **nature conservation and environmental protection**. Evaluation has shown that the results of the projects are of high value but should be better embedded in the strategic and regulatory framework of the region.

Evaluation of projects in the field of **biodiversity** reveals that projects increased know-how, increased awareness, and enabled future research projects. The continuation of projects after funding ended show that there is a strong stakeholder interest in research, awareness raising and education regarding biodiversity and environmental protection. The results of the projects are of high value but should be better embedded in the strategic and regulatory framework of the region. Ambiguity between thematic focuses of tourism and the protection of natural sites has been detected. Cross-border cooperation between research institutions and organisations managing protected areas is important and needs to be supported further. An important aspect of cross-border cooperation could be overcoming the difference in legal and ownership frameworks and the impact of those on environmental protection.

1.2.6.3 Joint investment needs

Climate change adaptation

- Results of climate research need to be converted into practical implementation of tailor-made field surveys, monitoring and adaptation measures, with a focus on areas particularly affected, such as forestry and agriculture, tourism, SMEs, urban environment, construction and settlement development.
- Long periods of drought can cause considerable crop failures and increase the risk of wild-fires. In the border region has up to now been no increase in forest fires, but projections show that this risk will increase in future, posing an explicit threat to settlements, infrastructure, livelihoods and human lives. The development and implementation of adaptation measures related to risk prevention and disaster resilience of natural risks with cross-border spillover effects are needed to reduce these risks.
- The severity of climate change requires public and private actors to work together in reducing vulnerability and adapting to the impacts. Education and awareness-raising as well as expert- and data-exchange in forestry, biodiversity, water management issues are needed to manage the impacts of climate change, enhance adaptive capacity, and reduce overall vulnerability.
- To cool down the urban environment by green and water areas, cost-effective, scientifically sound, practical and consistent solutions are needed to increase quality of life in a sustainable way in the region's cities and towns.
- The SMEs in the region need information and assistance regarding the availability and benefits of sustainable or adaptive technologies.

Water management





- Common measures need to be devised to manage the risks of water shortage of water bodies (lakes ponds, small rivers, etc.), with special emphasis on Lake Neusiedl/Fertő.
- In case of several surface waters ecological status is still a matter of concern, identification and implementation of the necessary measures to ensure good status in terms of hydromorphology (e. g. river continuity) or the prevention of pollution from diffuse and point pollution sources is essential.
- A number of rivers in the area, especially the Danube, show major problems in sediment balance due to their regulation, also leading to the deterioration of the ecological status. The phenomenon needs continuing coordination of analysis and approaches to solutions, even with pilot actions between Austria and Hungary.
- Cross-border groundwater bodies and thermal groundwater bodies are to be examined together in order to expand the recent knowledge and, based on this, to agree on the management measures and consensus stipulations.
- Intelligent irrigation systems in agriculture are needed to protect the surface water and ground water bodies (especially in ecological sensitive areas such as the Waasen/Hanság, Kis-Balaton or the Raab – Órség – Goričko area), as well as to ensure the future irrigation of agricultural land.
- Coordinated flood monitoring and –forecast systems are needed, as the border region is particularly expected to face an increasing risk of river floods.
- Small-scale local practices for retaining water – including rainwater – need to be developed and followed to tackle problems of extreme distribution of precipitation and water shortage
- Advancement is needed in the areas of drinking water supply targeting Südburgenland and of wastewater treatment targeting small and isolated settlements in Hungary with proper, economically viable solutions.

Biodiversity

- Despite the undisputed importance of the biodiversity and the related eco-system services in the region and the contribution of a number of successful projects addressing such issues in the 2014-2020 period, the general public is still not sufficiently aware about these assets and what each one can do to preserve it. Further education and awareness-raising is therefore needed in this field in order to better translate and disseminate the knowledge on nature protection.
- Ongoing land consumption and pressure of use due to the region's economic development caused by housing development, the construction of roads or tourism projects – additionally fired by climate change – bears increasing risks of habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity and reduced ecosystem services. In order to keep up the resilience of the habitats, there is a need to improve the cross-border connectivity of protected areas and bio-topes, e.g. by establishing cross-border migration corridors and additional stepping stone biotopes helping to connect areas of habitat, allowing species move between them and to engage in genetic exchange as well as improving the permeability of migration barriers (rail, road, weirs). Additionally, sharing local experiences on practices and solutions regarding the strengthening of the resilience of the habitats is needed to deepen the knowledge-base and speedup the application of effective methods.
- Climate change has a specific impact on eco-systems by changing the composition of fauna and flora, shifting the vegetation cycles and favouring pests. There is a need for more knowledge and exchange of experiences on neobiota (new





animal and plant species) in the programme area, their influence on both protected and unprotected habitats and the related ecosystem services and possible measures to conserve biodiversity and species protection.

- Biodiversity is not to be seen as a detached, sectoral issue, but rather as an integrated one, being strongly influenced by human activities like agriculture, forestry, hunting, tourism, transport, water management or regional development. Thus, an integrated approach towards preserving the regions biodiversity considering those types of stakeholders and activities is needed to extend this issue to other relevant fields. This integrated approach is already being implemented in the nature and national parks. Continuation and extension of this experience is needed, so that it can serve as starting points for further development.

1.2.6.4 Link with EUSDR

The IP AT-HU 2021-2027 can support the EUSDR Action Plan in its Priority Area 4 of the EUSDR “To restore and maintain the quality of waters” targeting generally at realising of integrated river basin management measures in the Danube Region in line with the EU Water Framework Directive and with the International Danube River Basin Management Plan (DRBMP) in order to save human health and fresh-water ecosystems.

It can also contribute to the

- Priority Area 5 “To manage environmental risks” targeting, inter alia, at
 - addressing the challenges of water scarcity and droughts in line with the Danube River Basin Management Plan – Update 2015, the report on the impacts of droughts in the Danube Basin in 2015 (due in 2016) and the ongoing work in the field of climate adaptation,
 - providing and enhancing continuous support to the implementation of the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan – adopted in 2015 in line with the EU Floods Directive – to achieve significant reductions of flood risk events by 2021, also taking into account potential impacts of climate change and adaption strategies and
 - supporting the assessment of disaster risks in the Danube Region, encouraging actions to promote disaster resilience, preparedness and response activities in line with the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism.
- Priority Area 6 “To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils” targeting, inter alia, at
 - improving management of Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas through transnational cooperation and capacity building,
 - strengthening the efforts to halt the deterioration in the status of species and habitats occurring in the Danube Region.

1.2.7 A more connected Europe

1.2.7.1 Joint challenges, disparities and inequalities

While cross-border commuting in this border region is one of the most intense ones in Europe and cross-border tourism is emerging, clear gaps of the public transport have been identified especially in terms of intra-regional and cross-border accessibility. Without improvement further increase of motorised traffic is expected, with all its harmful consequences on environment, human health and economic performance. Attractiveness of existing public transport services can be increased via better coordination and





improving them, including increasing multimodality and the use of information and communication technologies.

Institutional arrangements for the management of mobility services are different in Austria and Hungary: while mobility management on all levels has become a focus of transport policy in Austria within the last years, in Hungary the coordination of the various transport modes is managed at central level with no practical results applicable at the local level yet. While the Mobilitätszentrale Burgenland or the Mobility Management Service in Niederösterreich are institutions with practical experience in mobility management, in Nyugat-Dunántúl, the institutional background to the coordinative function is weak: the Közlekedéstudományi Intézet (KTI Institute for Transport Sciences) has relevant experiences in design and organisation of various aspects of mobility management and has a regional office in Szombathely (involved successfully in several EU-funded transport coordination projects), the Institute does not have any authority in relation to the provision of transport services. Lack of competent regional institution hinders the establishment of the tools for an effective regional level coordination (like joint ticketing system, harmonization of timetables, management of cross-border services).

Awareness, knowledge and expertise is not sufficiently available at local level to effectively organise mobility-related services. Some good practices developed under 2014-2020 programme – such as mobility checks of railway stations or municipality level mobility plans - could be used to enable local authorities to effectively plan and manage mobility services in their area.

Walking and cycling are extremely important elements of the integrated mobility services in the region. Besides their role as daily means of transport, both are important factors in the tourism and leisure industry of the region. However, their full potential is far from being exploited. Attractiveness of the walking and cycling infrastructure should be increased, in order to attract more regular and ad-hoc users.

There are regional disparities with regard to accessibility to the TEN-T core network: the Austrian and the northern Hungarian parts are well connected both in terms of rail and road, whereas accessibility of TEN-T of the southern part of the Hungarian area is less developed. However, ongoing large-scale road developments will very soon result in a much better connectedness of the main regional centres to the Hungarian motorway network and the reconstruction of the Hegyeshalom – Rajka line will fulfil TEN-T Core Network requirements, too.

1.2.7.2 Lessons learned from 2014-2020

In 2014-2020, projects aiming to improve **cross-border connectivity** focused too much on individual traffic. The main obstacles to mobility in the border regions are the missing public transport links, thus, projects should focus on public rather than individual transport, with the aim of reducing environmental pollution and improving direct connectivity across-borders, especially in the southern part of the region.

The project “Smart-Pannonia” covers a wide variety of different tasks aiming to serve the whole region. Results of the project – like pre-feasibility study for Oberwart – Szombathely rail link, the comprehensive study on the development of public transport links or the development of pilot local mobility strategies – can serve as starting point of actions for the programme. To look for the efficient take-up of results of projects has been recommended by the evaluation.





1.2.7.3 Joint investment needs

- A move towards a more efficient cross-border traffic which needs gradually building up a common management framework of transport services at regional level and which ensures that services are available in an integrated and border-crossing manner.
- Awareness and capabilities to organise mobility in an integrated manner at local level needs to be developed.
- Harmonisation of the railway and bus systems is needed in both technical and organisational aspects to improve cross-border connectivity.
- Improving efficiency and multimodality of the transport system is essential to shift mobility towards sustainability. Applications based on digital technologies are needed to offer easy-to-use services on various modes of transport, including on combination of various transport modes throughout a journey.
- The inter-regional cycling network has been improved over the last decade. Further potential to extend the use of this mode exists in organising common services and marketing of the network, as well as ensure access to stations, stops and transport information for cyclists.
- In areas where traffic flow does not make investments in public transport financially sustainable, facilitation of a smoother flow of traffic and convenient access to public transport by car is needed to reduce the environmental and economic burden of motorized traffic.

1.2.7.4 Link with the EUSDR

The IP AT-HU 2021-2027 can support the EUSDR Action Plan in its Priority Area 1B "To improve mobility and intermodality – rail, road and air" targeting inter alia at supporting safe and sustainable transport and mobility in the Danube Region.

1.2.8 A more social and inclusive Europe

1.2.8.1 Joint challenges, disparities and inequalities

Labour market and employment

Labour costs differ dramatically comparing the Austrian and Hungarian part of the programme region. More than 80 000 Hungarians live in Austria, recent figures of EURO-STAT indicate that more than 56 000 Hungarians commuted to Austria in 2019, mostly to Burgenland, Wien, eastern parts of Niederösterreich or Steiermark, with increasing tendency.

Thus, labour market and employment issues have strong cross-border relevance. However, the risks of changes in this field, due to unforeseeable consequences of COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market, threaten the previously good absorption capacity of direct interventions.

Education and lifelong learning

The regional population is well educated; the education infrastructure is good on both sides of the border. The share of early leavers from education and training is in all regions below the EU-average.

The prime location for high-quality education and research facilities within the Austrian-Hungarian border region are the cities of Wien, Wiener Neustadt and Graz, whereas in Hungarian counties – in spite of two universities that have the head offices and the





central campuses in the region – capacities are considerably weaker. Capacities, however, are present, so that cooperative developments with the participation of higher education institutions have a considerable potential in the region. Provision of accessible high-quality education could narrow the gap in terms of attractiveness of these concentrated hubs and the rest of the region, contributing to the increased competitiveness of the border region, as a whole.

Education is considered a tool that serves for multiple objectives in the Austria – Hungary border region. Experiences point out, that a more strategic approach to the approximation of outputs of the educational systems – especially vocational training and further trainings – would be beneficial to increase the integration of the cross-border labour market, therefore improve its responsiveness to changing needs. Current challenge is the alignment of the offer and capacities in training- and qualifications with needs of the labour market, with a focus on vocational training, further training, higher education diplomas, joint development and mutual recognition of qualifications. In general, however, this area lacks the joint strategic background.

Language barriers and still existing cultural differences in most of the segments of the population are the main obstacles of deepening cooperation in the border region. Intercultural learning approaches rank among the most effective ones to address these barriers and the existing prejudices and to foster changes in people's perspective and mind-set. Projects that address cross-border subjects do not have a priority status in sectoral policies at national level.

Cooperation-willingness and trust

Effective cross-border cooperation requires a good level of trust between partners. Intercultural differences often bring about difficulties in establishing or maintaining the trust among the potential collaborators across the border. A clear improvement has been achieved in this field through a number of interventions of previous cross-border cooperation programmes. Experiences show that the participation of local and well-established civil organizations in projects in various sectors as well as projects with wide partnership tend to be effective in strengthening trust and willingness to cooperate. Networks created by projects, however, are often less durable than expected.

Healthcare and long-term care

The supply of hospital beds is not optimal in all areas of the region; especially in the rural areas of Hungary, but also in the Seewinkel region, the accessibility of hospitals is not always adequate. Accessibility of medical services is not evenly distributed either and tends to be not sufficient in rural areas or in remote, isolated small villages. This applies to both countries, but probably is a bigger problem in Hungary, where also at regional level 40 GP's practice are unfilled, further impairing living conditions locally. Resolving the bottlenecks in health care infrastructure is not a realistic target for the programme, but by the improvement of institutional cooperation it is possible to contribute (among others) to the interoperability of emergency services.

Social inclusion and poverty

The risk of poverty and social exclusion is unequally distributed throughout the region. In Wien, the relevant indicator is relatively high, while in other sub-regions the risk of poverty and social exclusion is not significant. However, Hungarian regional level data hides some intra-regional disparities: in some isolated small settlements with high proportion of ageing and unqualified population mostly situated in the north-eastern and south-western areas of Zala the risk of poverty can be high.





The problem of addiction including the addictive disorders is present in many communities – both in more urban and rural ones – and in many groups of the society on both sides of the border. Most vulnerable groups of the society are threatened most by addictive disorders, especially the ones belonging to groups threatened by poverty in the same time.

Tourism

The border region is rich in natural resources (e.g. hills, lakes, rivers, landscape and great variety of ecosystems, thermal water and spas) and common cultural heritage (e.g. cities, castles, music, festivals). These attractions and their combination generate stay and excursion tourism. Tourism is an important part of economy in all regions, and generates much regional value added for many sectors from agriculture to commerce.

Overnight stays have developed positively in all NUTS 2 regions between 2011 and 2018. The highest increases were recorded in Wien and Nyugat-Dunántúl. The share of foreigners in all regions except Wien remains below the EU-average. The bed occupancy rate is below the EU average everywhere except in Wien. Even without Wien, the tourism industry is more developed on the Austrian side: in terms of bed-places the Hungarian counties account for 22 % of the total regional offer (without Wien), whereas in terms of overnight stays the Austrian regions' share (excluding Wien) is 78 %.

Tourism is one of the branches most heavily affected by travel restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, substantial changes may occur in the whole tourism structure regarding both supply and demand. The reconstruction of tourism could be a good basis for cross-border cooperation. The changing preferences in the tourism sector offer further opportunities to expand tourism on the basis of the available assets, while, in the same time, environmental and social sustainability of operations have to have the same focus, as economic impacts.

1.2.8.2 Lessons learned from 2014-2020

In the long run projects have the potential to address the regional **labour market** if they are taken up by the general public and in some cases by SMEs and employees. But labour market challenges depend to a large extent on aspects outside the scope of the programme, and thus the impact of the programme will remain limited. The evaluation recommends addressing only projects with a clear focus and a strategic value for the region.

Education projects address subjects that have little attention at national level and thus need to be continuously supported by Interreg. Intercultural learning approaches in education rank among the most effective approaches to address barriers and prejudices, and to foster changes in perspective and mindset. The innovative character of such projects might be limited, but it is important to sustain such initiatives in Interreg programmes since quite often cross-border education initiatives lack political interest due to the dominance of national priorities.

The evaluation recommends continuing support of early years **learning of language**. Notwithstanding the need for innovation, it should be acknowledged that language barriers are the main obstacle in the border region and need to be continuously addressed in Interreg programmes. Projects that continue over several funding periods might be justified. Evaluation also recommends to implement people to people projects for trust-building.





Interventions in **tourism** need stronger strategic approach. Synergies should be used to increase the efficiency of individual activities and ensure better durability of the project results. Projects are still concentrated in the middle and northern part of the programme area. Effects and potential take-up of projects are not always visible or long-lasting. However, the take-up of project results will contribute to common understanding of, and an integrated, coordinated approach to green tourism. The evaluation recommends to continue addressing cultural and natural heritage either in combination with natural and environmental protection or assure that future projects will be embedded in a strategic framework.

1.2.8.3 Joint investment needs

- A more strategic approach to the approximation of outputs of the educational systems – especially vocational training and further trainings – is needed to increase the integration of the cross-border labour market, therefore, to improve its responsiveness to changing needs. For a more strategic approach, the need for an institutionalised cooperation has emerged.
- The development of a more intense cooperation in each segment of the society is still considerably hindered by the low-level knowledge of the language of the neighbouring community. Joint learning activities are needed to serve as catalysts to build mutual trust and raise awareness of communities to acknowledge and accept the values of others.
- Encouragement and support is needed for small local organisation (such as schools, sports clubs, cultural and other civic organisations) that are not or not yet prepared to manage full-blown Interreg projects to carry out small scale local trust-building activities jointly.
- Substantial improvements in performance of the region in the field of innovation has been considered as key factor in increasing the regions' potential for competitiveness, including making the region attractive to young and talented people. In this respect, increasing the offer of high-quality education and training is needed in the region, based on the involvement of well performing institutions that could enable less developed regional actors to access and take part of processes leading to innovations.
- Better access of vulnerable groups to education is needed – including young people or people living in marginalized communities or in dominantly rural areas – to improve social and territorial cohesion of the region. Use of digital technologies in education improves both the efficiency and the outreach of these initiatives.
- To exploit the opening opportunities in the tourism sector improvement and moderate extension of the offer based on the natural resources and cultural heritage, increased and shared knowledge, better integration of the activities with other sectors (like agriculture, ecosystem services) as well as improved cross-border connectedness of attractions and destinations is needed, with strong focus on environmental and social sustainability.

1.2.8.4 Link with the EUSDR

The IP AT-HU 2021-2027 can support the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) in its Priority Area 9 "To invest in people and skills", targeting, inter alia, at

- contributing to improved educational outcomes, skills and competences, focusing on learning outcomes for employability, entrepreneurship, innovation, active citizenship and well-being;





- contributing to increased higher quality and efficiency of education, training and labour market systems;
- contributing to ensuring inclusive education and training and promoting inclusive labour markets, equal opportunities and non-discrimination as well as the promotion of civic competences and lifelong learning opportunities for all;
- contributing to closer cooperation between educational, training and labour market and research institutions.

1.2.9 Cooperation governance

1.2.9.1 Joint challenges, disparities and inequalities

Institutional background for cross-border cooperation is still weak. Sustainability and lasting impact of implemented initiatives is hindered by the lack of organizations capable of maintaining their results. No joint organisation is operational in the region, cross-border networks are incidental, more oriented to cooperate in implementing joint projects than to carry out systemic and lasting activities. In many cases, institutional weaknesses hinder the development of joint development strategies, as their ownership and management cannot be tied to any organisational actor or network. As a consequence the introduction of a more strategic approach is not possible, however, it would be absolutely needed to improve the effectiveness of the cooperation in key areas.

In the preparation phase, a strategic coordination in the following key areas were identified as especially relevant for the AT-HU region in a cross-border context:

- SME support and smart specialisation,
- labour market,
- health and long-term care services,
- digitisation and digital connectivity,
- sustainable tourism.

Some elements of functionally coherent sub-regions can vaguely be identified in the programme area, with various thematic focus – like areas around national parks, or areas with similar transport needs or situation, or thematic interconnectedness of project activities of various fields - but identification lacks systemic strategic justification. To further advance in identification of any cross-border sub-regions, the wider thematic strategic framework needs to be established.

1.2.9.2 Lessons learned from 2014-2020

In the 2014-2020 programme, “Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration - Improving institutional cross-border cooperation in order to strengthen the integration” is a priority. All 2014-2020 projects could be seen relevant to this policy objective, since the cooperating project partners are mainly public institutions and organisations.

The impact evaluation reveals that the projects addressing ‘improving institutional cross-border cooperation in order to strengthen the integration’ contribute a great deal to **cross-border cooperation between public administrations**, and some of those projects have already achieved joint agreements and common standards. A considerable proportion of the projects have contributed, or aim to contribute, to balancing governance capacities in the cross-border region. Most successful were projects with a specific focus. Projects with the aim of cooperation per se, without a clear focus, tend to fail in





terms of effectiveness and impact. Thus, larger projects are not necessarily more effective. This is also supported by the results of the stakeholder consultation.

In any case, the tangible value of these projects lies in their durability and potential uptake after the project funding ends. Intangible benefits lie with the participants, though in many cases it remains an open question whether those participants are able to transfer the benefits in their organisational surroundings.

The evaluation recommends to continue with sporting projects and local people-to-people like projects. However, the implementation meets the needs of the region only if appropriate projects are funded. Thus, projects have to have the potential to address pressing needs in the region, schemes under relevant specific objectives need to be open to small scale people-to-people activities and the selection procedure needs to react flexibly to current needs. The evaluation also recommends to consider intangible results such as 'cultural markers' as an important parameter in project evaluation. For projects aiming for cooperation among people, a simplified approach is recommended.

Conclusions of the impact evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme emphasize that a strategic umbrella would increase the added value of projects and the durability of their results in each priority or thematic area.

1.2.9.3 Joint investment needs

- Intermediary organisations and their networks need to be supported to enable them to build joint cross-border database, understand barriers of cooperation of SMEs and SMEs with research institutions and to devise effective strategies to tackle identified challenges concerning smart specialisation in the border region.
- Long-term strategy is needed to ensure the harmonic and sustainable development of the cross-border labour market, focusing on compiling relevant joint database on the cross-border labour market and reducing legal or administrative obstacles.
- Institutional cooperation needs to be established between Austrian and Hungarian stakeholders in health care and long-term care services to find forward-looking strategies and plans to make services more accessible in remote, close-to-the border-areas and to improve the emergency response capabilities of ambulance and rescue services in the programme area.
- A strategic framework for the region's tourism needs to be devised to assure synergies among future projects with a view on the recovery from the damages caused by COVID-19 pandemic, including the compilation and management of a joint database related to tourism.





1.3 Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(3)

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
PO2	iv	A green and resilient border region (priority 1)	<p>The AT-HU programme area is assessed as having a medium to high environmental sensitivity to climate change. The impact of climate change is already perceivable in many ways and will be a huge challenge for the region’s ecosystems, its population and its economy, which can be addressed under this specific objective.</p> <p>The Border Orientation Paper AT-HU 2019 suggests addressing jointly natural risks with cross-border spillover effects such as those posed by river floods and forest fires. Annex D of the Country Report 2019 on Hungary identifies the need to promote climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience, in particular by an increased cross-border and transnational co-operation, in order to identify the most suitable climate adaptation, risk prevention and management measures, including sharing of best practices and developing harmonized data systems.</p> <p>The lessons learned and results show that projects related to climate change adaptation were already successfully implemented and form a very good basis for basis future cooperation.</p> <p>Within SO iv) it is possible to implement measures aimed at promoting and strengthening coordination and cooperation across the borders to better adapt to climate change impact and improve disaster risk management.</p>
PO2	v	A green and resilient border region (priority 1)	<p>The Austrian-Hungarian border region is characterized by common water resources regarding surface as well as groundwater bodies. Therefore, joint water management remains an important common issue which can be addressed under this specific objective.</p> <p>The Border Orientation Paper suggests addressing jointly natural risks with cross-border spillover effects such as those posed by river floods and forest fires.</p> <p>Existing platforms and networks (e.g. permanent Austro-Hungarian Border Water Commission) can be taken up by the programme and better utilised to improve the programme implementation in this matter.</p> <p>Lessons learned show that the durability of projects related to water management is above average in comparison to all other projects.</p>





			<p>Within SO v) it is possible to implement measures aimed at joint sustainable water management.</p>
PO2	vii	A green and resilient border region (priority 1)	<p>Unique, varied landscapes with special and typical fauna and flora habitats have developed in the region, many of which are protected. These assets are under increasing pressure due to ongoing land consumption, pressure of use and climate change. In this context, environment protection and promotion of biodiversity remain important topics with respect to cross-border cooperation between Hungary and Austria.</p> <p>The Border Orientation Paper suggests continuing and deepening cross-border actions on nature as there are shared natural resources along the border (e.g. Neusiedler See/Fertő tó, the jointly managed nature park Geschriebenstein-Írottktó and the 3-country site nature park Raab-Őrség-Goričko). The paper also recommends considering developing further green infrastructure, as there seems to be potential especially in some areas (extension of the Austrian core green infrastructure to Hungary).</p> <p>Annex D of the Country Report 2019 on Hungary identifies priority investments needs to enhance biodiversity, green infrastructure in urban environment and reducing pollution, and in particular to improve air quality and related monitoring and modelling and support for biodiversity and the Natura 2000 network in urban areas.</p> <p>A long tradition of cross-border cooperation in the AT-HU border region generated improvements in nature conservation and environmental protection and builds a solid base for future cooperation.</p> <p>Implemented projects on biodiversity increased know-how, increased awareness, and showed sustainability regarding ongoing cooperation after funding.</p> <p>Within SO vii) it is possible to implement measures to promote cooperation to reduce land use pressure and jointly manage settlements as well as protected areas in a more sustainable way.</p>
PO3	ii	A better connected border region (priority 2)	<p>While the main road and rail axes are well developed in the border region, there are clear gaps, especially in terms of intra-regional and cross-border accessibility in public transport. Fostering multimodal transport nodes with a focus on sustainable mobility and harmonised technical and organisational railway systems are an important issue for the region.</p> <p>The Border Orientation Paper suggests improving cross-border connectivity, in particular rail projects, which have been identified as potential priority investments, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intermodal measures (park&ride, bike&ride, access bike routes) or smaller measures (extension Gols) to accompany cross-border rail links • improvement of cross-border bus connections (e.g. Güssing-Szombathely, Oberwart-Szombathely) • multi-modal cross-border connections by providing safe and direct bike paths and bike parking facilities • check need of harmonised technical and organisational railway systems. <p>Annex D of the Country Report 2019 on Hungary identifies the need to promote sustainable urban mobility, in particular</p>





			<p>to investments reducing the negative externalities of transport, in particular congestion, emissions, and traffic accidents by fostering sustainable and accessible modes like regional/light railways, multi-modal transport, cycling, including cycle transportation on public transit services)</p> <p>Lessons learned show that a wide variety of different tasks aiming at sustainable mobility were tackled already, which need to be efficiently uptaken in the period 2021+.</p> <p>Within SO ii) it is possible to enable measures for a more sustainable regional and local mobility both in terms of services and infrastructure.</p>
PO4	ii	A competent border region (priority 3)	<p>Language barriers and still existing cultural differences in most segments of the population are the main obstacle of deepening cooperation in the border region. Thus language and intercultural education is to be considered as a central theme with high CBC relevance, especially language learning programmes and linking the education/qualification systems (joint or bilingual schools, recognition of qualifications).</p> <p>The Border Orientation Paper recommends actions to strengthen and deepen cross-border cooperation related to educational institutions (both primary and secondary) taking into account the existence of language barriers and to support more extensive and structured language-learning activities as a vector for building trust but also as an employment-boosting factor. The Annex D of the 2019 country report Austria identifies the need to develop and implement access to life-long learning and to continuing vocational education. Annex D of the Country Report 2019 on Hungary identifies the need to improve the quality and labour market relevance of education and training and equal access to it, and in particular to strengthen basic skills, including digital skills in vocational education and training and general education, key competences and smooth transition to work.</p> <p>Lessons learned show that is hard to 'mainstream' cross-border cooperation in education due to budgetary restrictions and focus on national priorities in both countries. Thus without support it is very likely that intensity of cooperation will drop. It should be acknowledged that language barriers are the main obstacle in the border region and need to be continuously addressed in Interreg programmes.</p> <p>Under this SO ii) joint measures can be implemented to increase foreign language competences as well as cultural skills on both sides of the border. Additionally, various cross-border interventions can be carried out to support synergies between vocational bodies to also address the labour shortage.</p>
PO4	vi	A competent border region (priority 3)	<p>Tourism is an important part of economy in all regions of the AT-HU programme area, and generates much regional value added for many sectors from agriculture to commerce. Tourism is one of the branches most heavily affected by restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will cause substantial changes in the whole tourism structure regarding both supply and demand. The reconstruction of tourism could be a good basis for cross-border cooperation.</p> <p>The Border Orientation Paper states a strong potential to continue cooperation projects in the area of tourism and natural and cultural heritage. The paper recommends continuing projects relating to tourism/natural and cultural heritage</p>





			<p>within a strategic context, involving stakeholders within a multi-governance context.</p> <p>Lessons learned show a long tradition in tourism cooperation although effects and potential take-up of projects are not always visible or long-lasting. Nevertheless, the results of the projects implemented in 2014-2020 are considered to contribute to a common understanding and an integrated, coordinated approach to green tourism.</p> <p>Within SO vi) it is possible to strategically implement measures supporting the regions tourism sector.</p>
ISO1	b	An integrated border region (priority 4)	<p>Institutional background for cooperation is still weak in the border region. Sustainability and lasting impact of implemented initiatives is hindered by the lack of organizations capable of maintain their results. Enhanced institutional cooperation, strategic planning and reducing administrative barriers in various areas (such as digital connectivity, health or labour market) are important for the programme area.</p> <p>The BOP recommends strengthening cross-border structures and entities and engage them in the planning and implementation of future cross-border measures. It is highly recommended by the paper to put in place mechanisms to finance smaller projects or people-to-people projects that make a strong contribution to the social and civil cohesion of the cross-border region.</p> <p>The Annex D of the 2019 country report Austria identifies strengthening the capacity of beneficiaries, stakeholders, social partners, civil society organisations and other bodies as a factor for effective delivery of Cohesion policy.</p> <p>Lessons learned show that cooperating project partners are mainly public institutions and organisations independently from the specific objective they are implemented under. Projects aiming to improve institutional cross-border cooperation contribute a great deal to cross-border cooperation between public administrations, and some of those projects have already achieved joint agreements and common standards. A considerable proportion of the projects have contributed, or aim to contribute, to balancing governance capacities in the cross-border region. Most successful were projects with a specific focus.</p> <p>Within the specific objective b) it is possible to enhance efficient public administration and this way reducing legal and other obstacles as well as to develop and deepen legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions in the programme area including people-to-people projects.</p>





2 Priorities

Reference: points (d) and (e) of Article 17(3)

2.1 Priority 1: A green and resilient border region

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.1.1 Climate change adaptation (PO2 (iv))

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

The aim of the specific objective is to improve the border regions preparedness and resilience towards climate change impacts, including natural hazards with cross-border spillover effects.

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The types of action indicated in this section contribute to the specific objective predominantly by the following approaches:

- bridging the gap between climate research and practical implementation (what does the state-of-the-art mean for the region?), with a focus on areas particularly affected such as nature and biodiversity, forestry and agriculture, tourism, SME, urban environment and settlement development or health
- supporting risk prevention and disaster resilience to natural hazards with cross-border spillover effects, imposed by climate change, helping to mitigate threats to settlements, infrastructure, livelihoods and human lives
- finding sustainable, replicable, cost-effective, scientifically sound and consistent solutions for climate resilient cities and communities
- empowering the regional diverse business landscape to adapt their business models, products and services ("Greening the economy"), strengthening the SMEs' resilience to climate change impacts.

Related types of action are:

Type of action 1.1 Cross-border research as well as data collection and exchange to improve know-how and preparedness towards climate change impacts

The aim of the type of action is to enhance know-how and preparedness towards climate change impacts and risks on regional and local level with a special focus on joint research, the application of research results in the area as well as creating personal and digital interfaces. Indicative actions:

- studies and analysis to better understand the interrelation of vulnerability and adaptive capacity or to better explore the regions natural "buffers", for example the reed belt of the Neusiedler See/Fertő





- data monitoring and set-up of common data bases on climate-related risks in the border region, such as extreme weather, heat or pests as well as on the impact of adaptation actions
- citizen science activities, for example phenological observations
- developing research networks on climate change enabling a sustainable and long-term collaboration across the border
- workshops, conferences, discussion panels on possible climate-change adaptation measures and related topics in the context of climate change involving different types of target groups and stakeholders on local and regional level also using digital means and social media

Type of action 1.2 Developing cross-border strategies, management and action plans addressing climate change impact, risks and natural hazards in the border region

The aim of the type of action is to boost strategic development across the border to allow for a better adaptive capacity to climate change and climate change-induced risks in the border region especially regarding sectors or areas particularly affected such as nature and biodiversity, forestry and agriculture, tourism, SME, cities and municipalities or health. Indicative actions:

- action plans defining goals and specific measures how to address future climate change impacts
- interdisciplinary strategies for climate related actions such as soil protection or green and open spaces for recreation and leisure uses under changing climatic conditions
- risk management concepts in specific sectors in the cross-border region (e.g. nature and biodiversity, agriculture and forestry, tourism, spatial planning, housing, services and infrastructure or health), also involving emergency response organisations
- plans and strategies related to early warning systems for extreme weather events

Type of action 1.3 Implementing actions including small-scale investments in climate change adaptation and mitigation measures

The aim of the type of action is to promote the implementation of replicable, innovative actions helping to adapt to climate change impacts on regional and local level, building on and providing good practices at local, national and EU level. Indicative actions:

- specific actions at local level such as plantings of drought-resistant species or shading measures in residential areas
- develop and adapt as well as assist in the application sustainable, climate-friendly and adaptive products, technical processes and services, for example modified and innovative techniques for wood processing taking into account potential changes in wood quality and tree species or "climate change-adapted architecture"
- development and adaptation of digitalisation models oriented towards climate resilience
- actions implementing new research results into practice
- skill development activities addressing local business actors in order to increase the resilience of production, sales, and operational infrastructure of the SMEs in the region
- developing tool boxes with different sustainable adaptation measures for local business and communities aiming at reducing heat islands in the urban area,





cooling buildings or adapting infrastructure towards more energy efficiency and reduction of CO2 emission

- civil protection pilot actions, for example early warning systems for extreme weather events or trainings to improve the preparedness of the region against climate change related hazards
- joints actions building stronger links between associations/organisations responsible for risk prevention and management at local level (e.g. associations of fire-fighters)

Type of action 1.4 Awareness raising on climate change adaptation and mitigation, especially on local level

The aim of the type of action is to raise the awareness of - predominantly local - decision makers and the wider public on climate change impacts and related adaptation measures. Indicative actions:

- general awareness raising activities addressing the wider public, such as gaming events, urban gardening activities, fieldtrips, trainings, school events or exhibitions
- (digital) seminars or other specific information activities addressing local decision makers
 - on climate-related health risks such as heat, the spread of allergenic and toxic species or outbreaks of infectious diseases, taking into account the learnings of the COVID-19 pandemic
 - on civil protection measures and on natural hazards

The actions are connected to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) priority area 4 (PA4) “Climate change” strategic topic and to PA5, and shall contribute for example to the development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards, strengthening disaster prevention and preparedness among governmental and non-governmental organizations and anticipating regional and local impacts of climate change.

All implemented projects shall consider related strategies and action plans on regional, national and EU level, such as the EU Adaptation Strategy (2021), the Austrian Strategy on Climate Change Adaptation (2017) or the Hungarian National Plan for Energy and Climate 2020.

2.1.1.2 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ob-ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	iv	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	0	38
1	iv	RCO83	Strategies and action	Strategy / action plan	0	5





			plans jointly developed			
1	iv	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	Number of participants	0	279
1	iv	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Number of solutions	0	7

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	iv	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	26	Monitoring	
1	iv	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy / action plan	0	2021	3	Monitoring	
1	iv	RCR85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	Number of participations	0	2021	84	Monitoring	
1	iv	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Number of solutions	0	2021	3	Monitoring	





2.1.1.3 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main **target groups** of the actions are

- the population in the programme area directly benefitting from adaptation and mitigation measures,
- public and private institutions in the programme area, especially those in the field of forestry and agriculture, civil protection, tourism and economic development, urban environment and regional development by being involved in the actions or taking up solutions and/or improving their resilience, such as
 - local, regional or national public authorities, including EGTCs,
 - sectoral agencies such as local or regional development agencies, Nature Park Directorates, environmental associations or energy agencies,
 - service providers for infrastructure and/or (public) services such as transport providers,
 - interest groups including NGOs such as volunteer rescue teams or fire brigades,
 - institutions for higher education and research,
 - educational institutions, training centres and schools,
 - economic development institutions,
- a wide range of further public and private institutions in the programme area taking up solutions and/or improving their resilience to climate change impacts, such as public service providers or SME.

2.1.1.4 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

The whole programme area is affected by climate change and thus actions can be implemented throughout the entire area. Territories that turn out to be particularly vulnerable, for example valuable agricultural land, densely populated regions or protected areas with a sensitive ecosystem, are to be given priority. Additionally, urban and rural areas will be affected differently, so measures need to consider the specific challenges and characteristics of the territory they are applied to.

No territorial tools will be used.

2.1.1.5 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

n/a





2.1.1.6 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Short title ²	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	iv	171	Enhancing co-operation	1 478 800
1	ERDF	iv	58	Climate change adaptation: floods and landslides	4 436 400
1	ERDF	iv	60	Climate change adaptation: storms and drought	1 478 800

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	iv	01	Grant	7 394 000

Table 6: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	iv	32	Other types of territories targeted	7 394 000

2.1.2 Sustainable water (PO2 (v))

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

The aim of the specific objective is to ensure the sustainable management of water bodies in the border region and to promote the sustainable use of water resources, considering water quality, water ecology, flood hazards, water scarcity, wastewater treatment and drinking water supply.

² For codes, titles and short titles of intervention fields (dimension 1) pls. see Appendix 4.





2.1.2.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The types of action indicated in this section contribute to the specific objective by the following approaches:

- coordinated monitoring and implementing measures suitable to tackle the challenges imposed on the border region's surface, thermal and ground water bodies by human intervention (such as agriculture, intensive land use, river regulations, tourism) and climate change
- supporting joint flood monitoring, forecast and protection as the border region is particularly expected to face an increasing risk of river floods due to climate change
- enhancing the knowledge and capacities of policymakers and stakeholders as well as the general public about sustainable water management issues promoting sustainable use of water resources

Related types of actions are:

Type of action 2.1. Data collection, monitoring and analysis as well as (interdisciplinary) know-how exchange to improve the knowledge on water quality and ecology, on sustainable water management as well as on flood hazards

The aim of the type of action is to improve the knowledge of and coordination among relevant stakeholders and decision makers to manage cross-border water bodies, considering water quality, water ecology, flood hazards, water scarcity, wastewater treatment and drinking water supply. Indicative actions:

- jointly developing methods for monitoring and modelling of river morphology and habitat quality
- studies, monitoring and modelling activities for example on the water balance of surface waters, cross-border impact of water abstraction on the transboundary groundwater bodies or sediment transport, or on the impact of human intervention (agriculture, tourism...)
- cross-sectoral know-how exchange between water management bodies and nature conservation institutions
- interdisciplinary know-how exchange and show-how e.g. on innovative irrigation measures in sensitive areas
- improving capabilities and skills of relevant stakeholders to make better use of digitization and digital connectivity regarding sustainable water management
- improving capabilities and skills on local water reprocessing possibilities
- know-how exchange for integrative river management
- know-how exchange, data collection and analysis on wastewater treatment, especially in remote areas

Type of action 2.2 Developing strategies and action plans for a more sustainable water management in the border region

The aim of the type of action is to boost strategic development across the border to allow for sound water bodies and a more sustainable water management in the border region, involving also other relevant sectors such as nature protection or tourism. Indicative actions:





- strategies on specific water management measures addressing for example (thermal) water resources, water quality, river restoration or the hydromorphology of the regions' water bodies
- interdisciplinary strategies addressing more sustainable land use to reduce impacts on water quality as well as ground water level, involving other relevant sectors
- strategies or action plans on improving the regional fresh and drinking water supply in a more sustainable way
- strategies and action plans for flood warning systems
- strategies translating the EU Water Frameworks Directive and EU Flood Directive to a regional level

Type of action 2.3 Implementing actions including small scale investments promoting the sustainable water management and sustainable use of water resources

The aim of the type of action is to promote implementing measures for monitoring, protecting and improving the regional surface and ground water bodies and contributing to a sustainable use of water resources including access to clean drinking water Indicative actions:

- implementing (integrated) monitoring systems on border crossing rivers
- implementing flood warning systems
- measures addressing biodiversity in water management for example by revitalisation of ecological niches
- measures improving the ecological status of the water bodies and ensuring long-term continuity
- application of replicable good practices enhancing the drinking water supply in rural communities
- measures aiming at improving the groundwater management such as small-scale local practices for retaining water, including rainwater and at developing sustainable management practices of thermal water resources, replicable as feasible
- establishing a know-how exchange centre on integrative water management
- education and awareness raising measures of the general public on sustainable use of water resources also by using digital means and social media, such as field trips or (digital) exhibitions

The actions are connected to the EUSDR PA2 Action 1, PA4 climate change strategic topic, Action 1, 3, 4 and 6 as well as PA5 Action 1 and 2, and shall contribute for example to best management practices, to the implementation of the DRBMP and its Joint Programme of Measures, to preventing and reducing water pollution, to reducing knowledge deficits related to protecting water resources and safeguarding drinking water supply as well as to enhance the capacities, extend the coverage of basin-wide or regional forecasting and warning systems, and develop rapid response procedures.

All implemented projects shall consider and be in line with related strategies and action plans on regional, national and EU level, such as the EU Water Framework Directive (2000), the EU Floods Directive (2007), Adaptation strategies to climate change for Austria's water management (2011) or the Hungarian National Water Strategy (2017).





2.1.2.2 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 7: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ob-	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	v		RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	0	33
1	v		RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy / action plan	0	5
1	v		RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Number of solutions	0	6

Table 8: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	v	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	33	Monitoring	
1	v	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy / action plan	0	2021	4	Monitoring	
1	v	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Number of solutions	0	2021	5	Monitoring	





2.1.2.3 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main **target groups** of the actions are:

- the population in the programme area directly benefitting from access to safe and reliable drinking water supply as well as to high quality, ecological sound surface waters
- public and private institutions in all sectors directly benefitting from access to high quality, ecological sound surface and groundwaters, for example in the field of agriculture, fishery, tourism, sports
- the population and regional enterprises, communities and other infrastructure and public service providers by being better protected from flood risks
- public and private institutions in the programme area responsible for water management, agriculture, environment, infrastructure and public services by being involved in the actions or taking up solutions for a more sustainable water management, such as Local, regional or national public authorities, including EGTCs
 - sectoral agencies such as local or regional development agencies, Nature Park Directorates, environmental associations or energy agencies
 - service providers for infrastructure and/or (public) services such as supply and disposal utilities
 - interest groups including NGOs such as nature parks
 - institutions for higher education and research
 - educational institutions, training centres and schools
 - economic development institutions
 - institutions for higher education and research
 - educational institutions, training centres and schools
 - economic development institutions

2.1.2.4 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Activities shall be implemented in the entire programme area. This applies especially to measures aiming at a more sustainable use of water resources.

In the field of sustainable water management and, if applicable, in flood prevention, the focus of intervention shall be given to the

- cross-border Lake Neusiedl/Fertő as one of few steppe lakes in Europe with substantial reed coverage and of high ecological value,
- Waasen/Hanság – Seewinkel/Fertőzug as an ecological valuable cross-border fen area,
- Kis-Balaton area (a territory under the Ramsari Convention),
- transboundary biosphere reserve Mura/Drava/Danube (in submission as 5 country UNESCO biosphere reserve) aiming at transforming the customary river management into a modern and ecological one,





- border crossing rivers and their water sheds, such as the Danube and its tributaries, the Mur/Mura and Raab/Rába, Leitha/Lajta, Ikwa/Ikva, Güns/Gyöngyös, Pinka/Pinka,
- areas featuring thermal water in Mittelburgenland, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Vas, Zala
- transboundary groundwater bodies

Regarding activities aiming at enhancing drinking water supply and wastewater treatment options, rural areas in Südburgenland, Vas and Zala shall be in the focus.

No territorial tools will be used.

2.1.2.5 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

n/a

2.1.2.6 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 9: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Short title ³	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	v	171	Enhancing co-operation	1 254 600
1	ERDF	v	64	Water management	5 018 400

Table 10: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	v	01	Grant	6 273 000

Table 11: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	v	32	Other types of territories targeted	6 273 000

³ For codes, titles and short titles of intervention fields (dimension 1) pls. see Appendix 4.





2.1.3 Nature protection and biodiversity (PO2 (vii))

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

The aim of this specific objective is to preserve and restore biodiversity in sensitive areas as well as to improve the cross-border connectivity of protected areas, biotopes and related ecosystem services also as an essential contribution to climate mitigation.

2.1.3.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The types of action contribute to the specific objective predominantly by the following approaches:

- gaining knowledge about the regions' ecological status and threats as well as developing and demonstrating innovative measures suitable to tackle the challenges imposed by pressure of use focused on preserving and restoring biodiversity in sensitive areas, improving the cross-border connectivity of protected areas and biotopes and related ecosystem services also as an essential contribution to climate mitigation
- integrating biodiversity and reducing pollution into other sectors like agriculture, forestry, education, hunting, tourism, transport, water management or regional development in order to establish a common approach for a clear focus, use of synergies and more sustainable results
- fostering knowledge transfer and awareness raising on nature protection, biodiversity and related ecosystem services among decision makers, stakeholders and the general public at regional/local level aiming at changes of attitude and behaviour

Related types of action are:

Type of action 3.1. Data collection and research as well as (interdisciplinary) know how exchange to gain better knowledge about the region's ecological status and threats

The aim of the type of action is to improve the knowledge of and coordination among relevant stakeholders to manage nature protection, green infrastructure and pollution, including of stakeholders other than environmental institutions. Indicative actions:

- jointly developing synchronised methods for monitoring and surveys
- studies and analysis, data collection or setting up joint data bases for example on invasive or migratory species or the impact of actions taken
- citizen science activities (bird watching etc.)
- research and know-how exchange in the field of circular economy and green technology
- workshops, conferences, field trips or other forms of (digital) know-how exchange





- among research institutions, public and private institutions in the field of nature conservation and local and regional authorities to gain knowledge about local and regional biodiversity and the status of protected areas or subjects of protection (e.g. endangered plants, animals or biotopes) in the cross-border region.
- between sectoral stakeholders, research institutions and decision makers in order to learn best available technologies e.g. in reducing ammonia emission or GHG emission
- between the management of nature parks, national parks and other protected areas of the programme area ("nature park academy network")
- improving capabilities and skills on biodiversity and reducing pollution of all relevant stakeholders, such as municipalities, agriculture, forestry, tourism, transport, education, water management, regional planning and local SMEs, also by implementing enhanced and innovative digital tools

Type of action 3.2 Developing strategies and action plans to enable a positive development of nature and biodiversity in the cross-border region

The aim of the type of action is to boost the strategic development across the border to enable joint protection and preservation approaches, also taking into account a variety of society’s demands, contributing to societal health, human well-being, and the green economy. Strategic documents will be developed with the participation of the relevant stakeholders, to enhance their commitment to connect to and act according to the developed strategies in a longer run. Indicative actions:

- specific strategies on the conservation and valorisation of special habitats ("protecting by using") for example meadow orchards
- strategies addressing the preservation of autochthonous plant varieties and livestock breeds (agrobiodiversity)
- interdisciplinary strategies on nature conservation and biodiversity, contributing to both climate mitigation and adaptation
- strategies addressing the joint management of cross-border nature parks or establishing common goals in managing sensitive areas, for example grasslands
- strategies translating the Updated Bioeconomy Strategy or the European Green Deal to a regional level
- action plans for developing model regions of the circular economy and bioeconomy
- strategies on awareness raising measures on biodiversity, green infrastructure or reducing pollution

Type of action 3.3 Implementing actions including small scale investments that contribute to protecting nature or reducing pollution

This type of activity aims at the implementation of tangible, sustainable and replicable measures contributing to preserve and restore biodiversity, green infrastructure or to reduce pollution, including also circular economy and green technology approaches. Indicative actions:

- specific actions improving biodiversity and cross-border ecological connectivity
- establishing green infrastructure for protection of biodiversity and public recreation
- developing business models to exploit the market potential for maintaining and improving ecosystem services and green infrastructure
- pilot projects in the field of circular economy and green technology





- technological digitalisation models oriented towards sustainable development and resource awareness
- actions integrating the topic of sustainability in the education system, including vocational training
- developing tool boxes with measures for local business and communities aiming at adapting material management towards circular economy

Type of action 3.4 Awareness raising activities on the need of nature protection and reducing pollution at local and regional level

The aim of the type of action is to improve the awareness of decision makers and stakeholders, local actors and of the general public towards biodiversity, green infrastructure and related ecosystem services, as well as towards reducing pollution, aiming at changes of attitude and behaviour. Indicative actions:

- improving the knowledge and level of acceptance on environmental issues, for example by guided tours or other informal training events (like summer schools, camps, urban or private gardening events etc.), or using digital means and social media
- information events such as exhibitions or field trips on the role of traditional cultivation techniques and knowledge in preserving biodiversity

The actions are connected to the EUSDR PA6 Action 3, 4, 5, and 7 and shall contribute for example to improve the management of Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas, to halt the deterioration in the status of species and habitats, to reduce the introductions and spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in the Danube Region or to maintain and restore Green Infrastructure elements.

All implemented projects shall consider related strategies and action plans on regional, national and EU level, especially the European Green Deal (2019), including sub-strategies such as Farm to Fork, Circular Economy Action Plan, Biodiversity Strategy 2030, EU Climate Strategies and targets, as well as the Updated Bioeconomy Strategy.

2.1.3.2 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 12: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ob-ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	vii	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	0	38
1	vii	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy / action plan	0	5





1	vii	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Number of solutions	0	7
1	vii	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	Number of participations	0	207

Table 13: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	vii	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	26	Monitoring	
1	vii	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy / action plan	0	2021	3	Monitoring	
1	vii	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Number of solutions	0	2021	5	Monitoring	
1	vii	RCR85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	Number of participations	0	2021	62	Monitoring	





2.1.3.3 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main **target groups** are:

- the population in the programme area directly benefitting from improved green infrastructure and induced eco-system services and reduced pollution
- public and private institutions in all sectors directly benefitting from improved green infrastructure and induced eco-system services and reduced pollution for example in the field of agriculture, forestry, tourism and water management
- public and private institutions in the programme area for example in the fields of nature protection, forestry, education, hunting, tourism, transport, water management or regional development, material management or green economy by being involved in the actions or taking up solutions, such as
 - local, regional or national public authorities, including EGTCs
 - sectoral agencies such as local or regional development agencies, Nature Park Directorates, environmental associations or energy agencies
 - service providers for infrastructure and/or (public) services such as transport providers
 - interest groups including NGOs such as nature parks
 - institutions for higher education and research
 - education and training organisations including kindergarten
 - economic development institutions

2.1.3.4 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Activities shall be implemented in the entire programme region. This applies especially to awareness raising activities, as well as to measures aiming at preserving and enhancing green infrastructure as an essential contribution to climate mitigation and nature protection, and to measures aiming at reducing pollution being crucial both in the urban and rural areas.

Regarding preserving and restoring biodiversity, a special focus shall be given to the region's sensitive and protected areas such as the nature and national parks or Natura 2000 sites as core elements of a transnational biotope network, and the areas interlinking them as they are crucial to enhance the cross-border connectivity of protected areas and biotopes and related ecosystem services. Additionally, also not protected areas with valuable natural assets, particularly affected by environmental pressure and/or having potential for restoring the region's biodiversity are to be given priority.

No territorial tools will be used.





2.1.3.5 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

n/a

2.1.3.6 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 14: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Short title ⁴	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	vii	171	Enhancing co-operation	1 413 600
1	ERDF	vii	79	Nature and biodiversity	5 654 400

Table 15: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	vii	01	Grant	7 068 000

Table 16: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	vii	32	Other types of territories targeted	7 068 000

⁴ For codes, titles and short titles of intervention fields (dimension 1) pls. see Appendix 4.





2.2 Priority 2: A better-connected border region

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.2.1 Sustainable transport (PO3 (ii))

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

The aim of this specific objective is to harmonise and improve smart, safe, and sustainable regional and local mobility offers both in terms of services and infrastructure.

2.2.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The types of actions indicated in this section contribute to the specific objective predominantly by the following approaches:

- better organisation and coordination of different modes of transport including a common management framework of transport services ("cross-border mobility platform") to enhance smart, safe, active and sustainable cross-border mobility services
- coordinated closing the gaps in sustainable mobility infrastructure (especially daily cycling and walking infrastructure) contributing to a better cross-border multimodality and public transport connectivity
- fostering knowledge and awareness on smart, safe, active and sustainable mobility on local level aiming at changes of attitude and behaviour towards rail and bike (e-bike) and walking to increase multimodality of transport

All actions are essential contributions to the mitigation of the impacts of the climate change by reducing the environmental burden of mobility.

Related types of action are:

Type of action 4.1 Cross-border data collection and know-how exchange on cross-border traffic patterns and the mobility behaviour of the population in the programme region

The aim of the type of action is to improve the knowledge needed to harmonise and enhance cross-border sustainable mobility services of stakeholders and decision makers in the programme area. Indicative actions:

- collection and harmonisation of traffic data, especially commuting and employment data, passenger surveys and floating phone data, calibration with other mobility data
- setting up a joint database of mobility-related data contributing to the operation of a cross-border mobility platform
- joint research and cooperation of research institutions exploring further perspectives of intelligent ("smart") mobility in the programme area





- implementing a model region for mobility panels measuring the mobility behaviour of the population of a specific area and thus create reliable figures for discussion and planning processes (e.g. an app)
- workshops and conferences on cross-border sustainable mobility

Type of action 4.2 Developing strategies and action plans aiming at a better organisation and linking of different modes of sustainable transport

The aim of the type of action is to boost strategic development across the border to allow for better organised and more sustainable mobility services, enhanced cross-border multimodality as well as improved public transport and bike connectivity for commuting and touristic travel across the border. Indicative actions:

- establishing a long-term strategy, a feasibility analysis, an action plan necessary to operate a coordinative forum (“cross-border mobility platform”), also integrating results of previous projects, facilitating the cooperation of potential members of the platform, such as transport service providers, regulatory authorities and other stakeholders
- outlining and approving at least one pilot joint sub-regional mobility strategy
- elaborating concepts on intelligent traffic management services on roads and border crossings that allows for dynamic management of traffic capacities to minimize vehicle emission and reduce traffic congestion (e.g. by providing information for road management bodies and road users) and improve road safety
- elaborating local and sub-regional park&ride/bike&ride concepts, accessibility studies and integrated mobility concepts and offers, including integrating E-mobility and micro-level public transport solutions, ride sharing, cycling and walking into these concepts

Type of action 4.3. Implementing actions including small scale investments to better connect regional and local public transport and cycling infrastructure and to enhance the sustainability, multimodality and safety of cross-border mobility

The aim of the type of action is to promote the implementation of sustainable measures enabling or encouraging people (mainly tourists and commuters) to travel safer and more sustainable in the programme area or across the border , including the provision of useful tools that help them do so. Indicative actions:

- identifying and planning sustainable technical solutions needed for harmonisation of the railway systems or bus routes across the border
- preparing (planning, feasibility studies, technical plans, etc.) and implementing small-scale pilot investments with high demonstrative effect, using, wherever possible, existing infrastructure
 - in cycling and walking infrastructure (for example shortcuts or safe crossings),
 - in public transport infrastructure (for example guidance systems),
 - or in measures that connect rail with other modes of transport (for example park/bike & ride places, bike rentals at stations or ride sharing solutions for the last mile) based on the result of “multimodality checks”
- elaborating and implementing community-level mobility checks, small scale (city-, functional urban area, or settlement-level) sustainable transport development plans and a related provision of training for “Mobility Officers” (persons taking care of mobility issues on local level)





- developing and implementing technical assistance to the mobility platform's participants to enable them to work in framework of the platform and to build technical capabilities of its own
- developing manuals, evaluation concepts or implementation handbooks for local mobility projects
- developing and testing of innovative modes of transport like ride sharing solutions, Mobility On Demand services, etc.
- developing, testing and implementing systems, services and IT solutions providing cross-border information on all available modes of transport and helping to combine various means in CB journeys
- awareness raising actions at local level to accelerate the shift towards smart, active and sustainable mobility and to increase awareness of transport safety in a broad sense, also related to safe use of the railway, safe railway crossings, design of road space (enabling safe use by all)

The actions are connected to the EUSDR PA 1B Action 5, 7 and 8, and shall contribute for example to new sustainable solutions to change the mobility patterns of people in the border region, to intelligent traffic systems or increased road safety. All implemented projects shall consider related strategies and action plans on regional and national level, such as the Overall Transport Plan and the Integrated National Climate and Energy Plan in Austria and the National Strategy for the Development Transport Infrastructure and the National Plan for Energy and Climate 2020 in Hungary.

2.2.1.2 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 17: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ob-ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	ii	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	0	30
2	ii	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy / action plan	0	2
2	ii	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Number of solutions	0	4

Table 18: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
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2	ii	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	21	Monitoring	
2	ii	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy / action plan	0	2021	1	Monitoring	
2	ii	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Number of solutions	0	2021	3	Monitoring	

2.2.1.3 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main **target groups** of the actions are:

- The population in the programme area directly benefitting from better – more convenient, safer and greener - mobility solutions. Special focus is on daily commuters and visitors of tourism destinations of the region, including the visitors and workers crossing the border
- Public and private institutions in the programme area, especially those involved in the coordination and provision of transport services and local and regional public authorities, by being involved in the actions or taking up solutions developed in the actions, such as
 - local, regional or national public authorities, including EGTCs
 - sectoral agencies such as local or regional development agencies, Nature Park Directorates, environmental associations or energy agencies
 - service providers for infrastructure and/or (public) services such as transport providers
 - interest groups including NGOs
 - institutions for higher education and research
 - educational institutions, training centres and schools
 - economic development institutions





2.2.1.4 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Activities shall be implemented in the entire programme region.
No territorial tools will be used.

2.2.1.5 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

n/a

2.2.1.6 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 19: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Short title ⁵	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	ii	171	Enhancing co-operation	4 435 000

Table 20: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	ii	01	Grant	4 435 000

Table 21: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	ii	32	Other types of territories targeted	4 435 000

⁵ For codes, titles and short titles of intervention fields (dimension 1) pls. see Appendix 4.



2.3 Priority 3: A competent border region

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.3.1 Education and training infrastructure (PO4 (ii))

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

The aim of this specific objective is to increase the offer of mutually accepted high-quality education and training, encompassing also digital competences, as well as of learning activities fostering language and cultural competences in the border area.

2.3.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The types of actions indicated in this section contribute to the specific objective predominantly by the following approaches:

- supporting strategically coordinated learning activities serving as catalysts to build mutual trust and raise awareness of communities to acknowledge and accept the values of others, fostering language and cultural competences
- supporting harmonisation of the vocational education and training systems, tackling the lack of skilled work force and increasing the offer of high-quality education and training, encompassing also digital competences, with a focus on vulnerable groups in the programme area, for example youth and marginalized communities.

Related types of actions are:

Type of action 5.1. Cross-border research and data collection as well as developing strategies to improve coordinated decision making on education and training issues across the border

The aim of the type of action is to create a solid base of information on main characteristics of training needs and the training offer as well as create a strategic framework for development in the border region, in order to enable both regional decision-makers and regional stakeholders (such as educational institutions, training service providers) to take coordinated decisions on education and training issues. Indicative actions:

- data collection and research on competences and training possibilities in the programme area, especially on language and cultural competences as well as regarding digitisation and sustainability
- assessment and identification of needs of vulnerable groups in the programme area
- setting up and operating joint database(s) of subregional data on educational services, needs and projects
- conducting feasibility analysis on the development of institutional structures serving cross-border coordination for education and training on a longer run





- developing sub-regional cross-border education and training strategies and action plans

Type of action 5.2. Implementing actions in cross-border education and training

The aim of the type of action is to help stakeholders to jointly develop and implement methods and tools enabling them to design and provide more effective training and educational services with a special focus on digitalisation. Indicative actions:

- building and operating digital platforms for cross-border learning, skills-development and student-exchange
- developing and testing specific and innovative (digital) approaches, methods and training tools
 - for various target groups in line with lifelong learning approach, focusing on key areas, such as language- and intercultural trainings, environmental consciousness and protection, climate change, various aspects of sustainability, the use of digital technologies
 - supporting SMEs including start-ups in their digital transformation and environmental consciousness, helping to restructure and revitalise sectors most heavily dependent on traditional industries and support the economic diversification of rural areas, especially in the fields of green technologies, renewable energy sources and eco-tourism
 - for work-based learning practices (like dual or triple training systems) in all sectors
 - in job orientation, especially in sectors relevant for the programme area (for example automatization, digitisation, robotics, green jobs...)
- developing and promoting methods of civil society engagement in actions in the field of education, training and lifelong learning

Type of action 5.3. Implementing joint training actions focusing on language- and intercultural aspects as well as labour-market needs

The aim of the type of action is to deliver formal and informal training events to enhance the language and intercultural competences of the local population and to develop skills of local and regional workforce, applicable on the labour-market of both countries with a special focus on digitalisation, taking into account formal, non-formal and informal education approaches. Specific tools that ensure proper access of vulnerable groups to education – such as innovative approaches to learning, enhanced digitization or tailor-made contents – will be preferred. Indicative actions:

- developing and delivering training courses, formal or informal training events for a wide range of people to improve their language and intercultural competences (all ages, including kindergarten age and seniors)
- developing and delivering trainings enhancing the competences among business actors in the region regarding key areas like digitalisation, innovation, adaptation to climate change impacts, environmental awareness, helping to restructure and revitalise sectors most heavily dependent on traditional industries and supporting the economic diversification of rural areas, especially in the fields of green technologies, renewable energy sources and eco-tourism
- developing and delivering trainings strengthening the capacity of all groups of the society regarding the future challenges such as climate change or digitalisation as well as trainings serving the prevention of addictions





- developing and delivering joint trainings in work-based environment and offering mutually accepted exams and certifications
- developing and pilot-testing of targeted massive open online courses (MOOC) in relevant sectors
- summer camps, festivals or youth exchange aiming at better intercultural competences

The actions are connected to the EUSDR PA9, and shall contribute for example to improved educational outcomes, skills and competences, increased quality and efficiency of education, training and labour market systems as well as civic competences and lifelong learning opportunities for all in the border region. All implemented projects shall consider related strategies and action plans on regional and national level, such as the Austrian Life Long Learning Strategy and the Programme for a More Competitive Hungary and the Hungarian Strategy for Digital Education at national level.

2.3.1.2 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 22: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ob- ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
3	ii	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	0	66
3	ii	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Number of solutions	0	9
3	ii	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	Number of participations	0	275
3	ii	RCO85	Participations in joint training schemes	Number of participations	0	110





Table 23: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	ii	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	33	Monitoring	
3	ii	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Number of solutions	0	2021	6	Monitoring	
3	ii	RCR85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	Number of participations	0	2021	192	Monitoring	
3	ii	RCR81	Completion of joint training schemes	Number of participations	0	2021	88	Monitoring	

2.3.1.3 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main **target groups** of the actions are:

- The population in the programme area directly benefitting from the better – more diverse, better quality and more accessible - educational offer. Special focus is on the population in working age for the job-related interventions. For businesses, SMEs including start-ups are in the focus of the actions and all age-groups are targeted by the general competence-building actions.
- Public, private and civil (NGO) institutions in the programme area, especially those involved in the coordination and provision of formal and informal education





- at all levels, including kindergartens, by being involved in the actions or taking up solutions developed in the actions, such as
- legal entities responsible for education and training
 - educational institutions, training centers and schools including public and private kindergartens, vocational- and higher education institutions, training- or job-orientation centres
 - organisations providing non-formal or informal education
 - interest groups including NGOs
 - local, regional or national public authorities including EGTCs and sectoral institutions (such as National Park Directorates, local or regional development agencies, environmental associations or energy agencies)
 - institutions for higher education and research
 - economic development institutions and organisations (such as management organisations of clusters, local development agencies)

2.3.1.4 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Activities shall be implemented in the entire programme region.
No territorial tools will be used.

2.3.1.5 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

n/a

2.3.1.6 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 24: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Short title ⁶	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	ii	171	Enhancing co-operation	7 706 000

⁶ For codes, titles and short titles of intervention fields (dimension 1) pls. see Appendix 4.





Table 25: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	ii	01	Grant	7 706 000

Table 26: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	ii	32	Other types of territories targeted	7 706 000

2.3.2 Culture and sustainable tourism (PO4 (vi))

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

The aim of this specific objective is to better and more sustainably valorise the regions natural and tangible/intangible cultural heritage in a strategically coordinated way in order to strengthen the regions economically important tourism sector.

2.3.2.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

The types of actions indicated in this section contribute to the specific objective predominantly by

- developing a joint strategic approach to a better and more sustainable valorisation of the regions natural and tangible/intangible cultural heritage
- promoting activities in tourism niches, based on local natural and cultural assets aiming at extending the tourism activity throughout the year
- concentrating on environmentally sustainable touristic offers and measures mitigating negative impacts of the tourism
- boosting new and innovative solutions in the tourism sector
- improving the resilience and adaptivity of the cultural and the hospitality sector for example by strengthening regionality
- supporting the economic bailout from the COVID-19 crisis in the hospitality sector
- enhancing the digitalisation process in the culture and tourism sector

Related types of actions are:





Type of action 6.1. Cross-border data collection and know-how exchange in the field of tourism and culture to better understand the cross-border tourism landscape and potential

The aim of the type of action is to create a solid base of information on main characteristics of the cultural assets and services of tourism in the programme area. Indicative actions:

- collection, harmonisation and sharing of data relevant for tourism and culture, including intangible culture and regional products
- mapping and monitoring the cultural heritage, (industrial) building culture and cultural landscape assets
- preparation and feasibility analysis for the establishment of a joint cross border forum serving the coordination of the projects and initiatives in the tourism sector
- elaboration and implementation of joint procedures for systematic visitor monitoring
- conferences, seminars or discussion panels related to the role of culture and cultural heritage in the border region

Type of action 6.2. Developing cross-border strategies and action plans to allow a better strategic embedment of projects addressing culture and tourism

The aim is to provide a strategic framework for future tourism projects and for the tourism-oriented cooperation in the cultural sector in the cross-border region. Indicative actions:

- strategic alignment of tourism services in sub-regions (e.g. Südburgenland, Zala; Mittelburgenland, Vas)
- strategies for new products and heritage sites for yet not explored industrial or agrarian sub-regions
- developing joint marketing strategies for the cross border region
- developing tourism strategies to better coordinate existing and planned tourism activities in
 - natural heritage sites, including areas with geological and geomorphological values, for example a potential UNESCO Global Geopark
 - cultural heritage sites, including archaeological and historical sites for example the Iron Curtain
- developing a sustainability strategy or the hospitality sector to improve its resilience
- further developing frameworks for sustainable tourism in protected areas, with a focus on soft mobility, building on previous projects
- developing frameworks for cooperation in the cultural sector, including (intangible) cultural heritage

Type of action 6.3. Implementing actions including small-scale infrastructure developments for sustainable culture and tourism development in the cross-border region

The aim of the type of action is to prepare and implement measures including small-scale investments in cultural and natural heritage that have a clear added value, for example better accessibility, avoiding any negative environmental impact. All actions shall be based on a strategic framework. Indicative actions:

- developing joint labels and key themes (or a unique combination of themes) and related thematic tourism routes (e.g. iron curtain, wine and bike, hike and bike,





wine architecture, archaeological and historical heritage, nature and bike, hiking and biking trails and tracks, spiritual paths, health and spa)

- improving cooperation of destination managements and create joint (cross-border) destinations under one label, taking into account already established brands, destinations and platforms
- planning and implementing small-scale infrastructure developments valorising the brand identity and the consistency of the service quality
- implementing investments to complement holistic tourism offers, for example barrier-free access or soft mobility offers
- implementing culture and tourism marketing with supporting tools such as digital guides, tutorials, exhibits or other digital means of information, including multi-lingual services
- developing joint communication platforms
- development and valorisation of the cultural heritage by cultivation, processing and marketing of regional products
- elaboration and implementation of joint procedures for visitor management

Type of action 6.4. Implementing thematic trainings and skill development of stakeholders in the culture and tourism sector

The aim of the type of action is to increase the level of knowledge and develop the skills of tourism actors on sub-regional and local level and services at the local and sub-regional level. Activities should be embedded in the strategic framework of the border region. Indicative actions:

- skill development related to culture and tourism
 - covering all relevant product development topics (e.g. nature tourism, sustainable products, cultural heritage, cultural events, regional agricultural product chains (local cuisine), take up of historical characteristics)
 - in digitalisation
 - in management and marketing
 - related to environmental issues and the sustainable and long-term use of the natural and cultural heritage sites
 - related to public health (for example health protocols for service providers, for tour guides, etc.)
- training and skill development with the aim of integrating disadvantaged groups (long-term unemployed, NEETs, elderly) into culture and tourism activities.

The actions are connected to the EUSDR PA3 and shall contribute for example to sustainable forms of tourism (like green tourist products and sustainable mobility solutions), to the sustainable preservation, conservation, socialization and contemporary interpretation of cultural heritage and natural values and to valorising, promoting and protecting the cultural heritage of the border region. All implemented projects shall consider related strategies and action plans on regional and national level, such as the Masterplan on Tourism and the Master plan for rural areas in Austria and the National Tourism Development Strategy 2030 in Hungary at the national level.





2.3.2.2 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 27: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ob-ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
3	vi	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	85
3	vi	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy / action plan	0	11
3	vi	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Number of solutions	0	13
3	vi	RCO85	Participations in joint training schemes	Number of participations	0	216

Table 28: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	vi	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	43	Monitoring	
3	vi	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy / action plan	0	2021	5	Monitoring	





3	vi	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Number of solutions	0	2021	9	Monitoring	
3	vi	RCR81	Completion of joint training schemes	Number of participations	0	2021	108	Monitoring	

2.3.2.3 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main **target groups** of the actions are:

- The population in the programme area directly benefitting from the more sustainable – more inclusive, more stable and environmentally less harmful – flow of tourists in the programme area.
- The public, private and civil (NGO) organisations and individuals providing tourism-related services or managing natural or cultural assets in the border region by being involved in the actions or taking up solutions developed in the actions such as
 - local, regional or national public authorities, including EGTCs
 - sectoral agencies such as local or regional development agencies, environmental management organisations or associations such as tourism organisations
 - service providers for infrastructure and/or (public) services such as transport providers
 - museums
 - interest groups including NGOs
 - institutions for higher education and research
 - educational institutions, training centres and schools
 - economic development institutions

2.3.2.4 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Activities shall be implemented in the entire programme region.

No territorial tools will be used.





2.3.2.5 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

n/a

2.3.2.6 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 29: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Short title ⁷	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	vi	171	Enhancing co-operation	1 854 800
3	ERDF	vi	165	Public tourism assets and tourism services	5 564 400
3	ERDF	vi	166	Cultural heritage and cultural services	1 854 800

Table 30: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	vi	01	Grant	9 274 000

Table 31: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	vi	32	Other types of territories targeted	9 274 000

⁷ For codes, titles and short titles of intervention fields (dimension 1) pls. see Appendix 4.





2.4 Priority 4: An integrated border region

Reference: point (d) of Article 17(3)

2.4.1 Legal and administrative cooperation (ISO1 (b))

Reference: point (e) of Article 17(3)

The aim of this specific objective is to reduce legal and other obstacles as well as to develop and deepen legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions in the programme area.

2.4.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

Reference: point (e)(i) of Article 17(3), point (c)(ii) of Article 17(9)

Governance entails all parts of steering and supporting of the citizens' life in the in the border region and allows for the flexibility to respond to needs appearing in the region due to different global, national or regional challenges of which some are currently unknown. The specific objective is chosen to allow stakeholders at all levels to address cross-border aspects and obstacles when they appear. The range of different actions is wide and cannot be predefined for the programming period. Experience shows that specific cross-border obstacles become evident only in the course of the actual initiating or implementing cross-border cooperation.

Key thematic fields among others which are defined based on previous programmes and projects are:

- demographic changes and the impacts on economic and social development in the border region, including areas of gender equality and social inclusion (including youth, women, disabled)
- SMEs and smart specialisation, with a focus on supporting intermediary institutions in clarifying and better understanding development processes, assets, needs and administrative barriers
- labour market integration, with a focus on the identification and reduction of legal or administrative obstacles and establishing a strategic approach to overcome them
- cooperation in health care and long-term care services contributing to a better accessibility also in remote, close-to-the border-areas as well as to a quick emergency response
- harmonised regional development in the border region
- cooperation along the principles of the concept of circular economy
- digital transformation
- enhanced cross-border crisis management capacity, competence and communication (responding to the COVID-19 pandemic), is an additional key thematic field which contributes to improve the overall crisis resilience in the programme area





As a horizontal principle, environmental considerations shall be included, with a view to achieving sustainable development.

In order to address those challenges adequately a set of type of actions is proposed which should support the capacity building and strengthening of governance to face the future challenges and topics.

Type of action 7.1 Elaborating monitoring and data exchange systems to improve cross-border know how exchange and decision making

The aim of the type of action is to enhance the information and data exchange across the border to support joint administrative and legal activities addressing border obstacles. Indicative actions:

- data exchange and joint monitoring enhancing the availability of data needed for a more targeted cross-border cooperation, for example in the field of
 - regional development with a focus on more sustainable rural development
 - demographic changes and the impact on economic and social development in the border region or
 - health and social care with a specific focus on the COVID-19 pandemic
 - crisis resilience
 - circular economy
- studies and analyses identifying cross-border obstacles, for example related to environmental issues
- workshops, discussion panels or conferences addressing experts and public authorities enabling a joint view on border obstacles

Type of action 7.2 Developing strategic frameworks among public organisations in all relevant fields to address upcoming challenges of the border region

The aim of the type of action is to boost strategic developments across the border to allow for better strategic embedding of economic and social cooperation on all identified key thematic fields. Indicative actions:

- joint strategies to reduce legal and administrative obstacles across the border
- joint strategy development
 - in the field of SME support and smart specialisation including for example R&D needs, SME development, start-ups, cross-border economic exchange (demanded goods and services), social innovation, digitalisation and aspects supporting the economic diversification especially in the fields of green technologies, resource efficiency and eco-innovation
 - addressing social matters and a better integration of horizontal issues (e.g. gender equality and social inclusion, including youth, women, disabled)
 - addressing a better crisis resilience
 - supporting effective and comprehensive regional development and implementation of pilot projects

Type of action 7.3 Implementing joint solutions to improve cross-border governance and reduce cross-border obstacles

The aim of the type of action is to boost joint solutions across the border to reduce barriers and obstacles caused by different legal and administrative systems. Indicative actions:





- joint initiatives finding specific solutions for border obstacles, for example in the field of:
 - employee protection across the border,
 - cross-border services for employers (SME) and employees, such as consulting in the mother tongue
 - recognition of qualification, safeguarding and creating new employment opportunities for example in eco-innovation
 - social and health services
 - circular economy
- coordination of services and joint actions to boost digitalisation of joint services for example in the field of crisis management, social and health care and emergency services

Type of action 7.4 Developing skills as well as awareness raising aiming at a better cross-border cooperation

The aim of the type of action is to actively improve mutual and cross-border understanding. Indicative actions:

- (digital) seminars or other training events addressing authorities and stakeholders and aiming at improving their skills and knowledge about cross-border cooperation, it’s obstacles and how to overcome them
- sport events, student exchanges, field trips or other awareness raising activities contributing to a better cross-border understanding and increased mutual trust

The actions are connected to the EUSDR PA3 and PA10 action 2 and PA11 action 1 and 3, and shall contribute for example to cooperation ensuring information exchange, to align the regulatory framework and improve governance in the different sectors, to support better cooperation governance and more effective cooperation between administrations, to strengthening the institutional capacities to improve decision-making and administrative performance in the border region and increasing the involvement of civil society and local actors for a more effective policy-making and implementation at regional level in the programme area.

2.4.1.2 Indicators

Reference: point (e)(ii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iii) of Article 17(9)

Table 32: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ob- ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
4	ISO1 (b)	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	0	56
4	ISO1 (b)	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy / action plan	0	9





4	ISO1 (b)	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Number of solutions	0	11
4	ISO1 (b)	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	Number of participations	0	169

Table 33: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
4	ISO1 (b)	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	39	Monitoring	
4	ISO1 (b)	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy /action plan	0	2021	5	Monitoring	
4	ISO1 (b)	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Number of solutions	0	2021	8	Monitoring	
4	ISO1 (b)	RCR85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	Number of participations	0	2021	152	Monitoring	





2.4.1.3 Main target groups

Reference: point (e)(iii) of Article 17(3), point (c)(iv) of Article 17(9)

The main **target groups** of the actions are:

- The main target group is the public who benefits from cross-border achievements such as better coordinated approaches to effectively address major societal challenges and obstacles in the programme region and to provide services of general interest in a more efficient way.
- Additional target groups are local and regional public organisations who benefit from improved administrative processes and increased capacity such as local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, intermediary organisations, EGTCs, agencies, interest groups including NGOs and other organisations.
- Finally for small scale projects the target group is mainly all citizens directly at the border; this includes the general public as well as economic stakeholders in the region.

2.4.1.4 Indication of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

Reference: Article point (e)(iv) of 17(3)

Activities shall be implemented in the entire programme region.
No territorial tools will be used.

2.4.1.5 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: point (e)(v) of Article 17(3)

n/a

2.4.1.6 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Reference: point (e)(vi) of Article 17(3), point (c)(v) of Article 17(9)

Table 34: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Short title ⁸	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO1 (b)	171	Enhancing co-operation	1 482 240

⁸ For codes, titles and short titles of intervention fields (dimension 1) pls. see Appendix 4.





4	ERDF	ISO1 (b)	173	Enhancing institutional capacity	5 928 960
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Table 35: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO1 (b)	01	Grant	7 411 200

Table 36: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Title	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO1 (b)	32	Other types of territories targeted	7 411 200





3 Financing plan

Reference: point (f) of Article 17(3)

3.1 Financial appropriations by year

Reference: point (g)(i) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 37

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF (territorial co-operation goal)	0	8 466 549 €	8 602 547 €	8 741 266 €	8 882 757 €	7 360 436 €	7 507 645 €	49 561 200 €
IPA III CBC⁹								
NDICI-CBC⁹								
IPA III¹⁰								
NDICI²								
OCTP¹¹								
Interreg funds¹²								
Total								

⁹ Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.

¹⁰ Interreg B and C.

¹¹ Interreg B, C and D.

¹² ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C.





3.2 Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Reference: point (f)(ii) of Article 17(3), points (a) to (d) of Article 17(4)

Table 38

Policy objective No	Priority	Fund (as applicable)	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a)=(a1)+(a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries (for information)
					without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)	for TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)			
PO 2	Priority 1	ERDF	total eligible	20 735 000 €	19 169 319 €	1 565 681 €	5 183 750 €	5 183 750 €		25 918 750 €	80%	
PO 3	Priority 2	ERDF	total eligible	4 435 000 €	4 100 117 €	334 883 €	1 108 750 €	1 108 750 €		5 543 750 €	80%	
PO 4	Priority 3	ERDF	total eligible	16 980 000 €	15 697 856 €	1 282 144 €	4 245 000 €	4 245 000 €		21 225 000 €	80%	
ISO 1	Priority 4	ERDF	total eligible	7 411 200 €	6 851 587 €	559 613 €	1 852 800 €	1 852 800 €		9 264 000 €	80%	
	Total	All funds		49 561 200 €	45 818 879 €	3 742 321 €	12 390 300 €	12 390 300 €		61 951 500 €	80%	





4 Action taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preparation of the Interreg programme and the role of those programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Reference: point (g) of Article 17(3)

In line with article 8 of CPR, the preparation of the Interreg programme should involve a partnership with competent regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, relevant bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, as well as research institutions and universities, where appropriate.

The main reason for involving stakeholders in programming is to identify mutual interests and needs, secure commitment and ownership for the Interreg programme and ensure its practical implementation. A number of platforms for an effective communication with relevant partners and stakeholders have been introduced throughout the programming process.

To steer the programming a bilateral programming group (PG) was established, and the Interreg Programme was elaborated with the wide involvement and active participation of important strategic partners for cross-border cooperation both from the national and especially from the regional level. Representatives in the PG have consulted social and economic partners and institutions responsible for specific topics in the respective region on a regular basis. This has served as an important input especially in identifying investment priorities, verifying of demand for possible activities and establishing the financial plan. The PG had 9 meetings between June 2020 and December 2021.

The programming process was coordinated by the managing authority (Austria) and joint secretariat (Hungary) of the Austria-Hungary Interreg 2014-2020 Programme, and it was supported by a bilateral team of external experts.

According to its rules of procedures the work of the PG was supported by the Bilateral Working Group (BWG), as far as discussions of operational details and decision preparation for the PG are concerned. The BWG is constituted (besides the MA and JS) of the Regional Coordinators (RCs) of all Austrian and Hungarian regions in the programme area, and Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFA), as representative of the Member State Hungary. The RCs (both AT and HU) and the MFA, had a crucial role in the programming, collecting and organising local inputs from their respective regions and forwarding them to the PG.

In order to involve the broadest possible circle of relevant national, regional and local stakeholders, and in line with regulatory requirements laid down in the draft common provisions regulation, a consultation process was launched in November 2020, built on the thematic discussions and preliminary decisions taken at the previous meetings of the Programming Group. The aim was to collect feedback on an early draft version of the future Interreg Programme, which already indicated possible future programme priorities, selected specific objectives, horizontal topics as well as relevant fields of action.

Almost 1300 stakeholders were invited to provide their feedback in an online survey, which requested quantitative feedback about the relevance of the priorities and possible





fields of activity per specific objective, and additionally respondents could include qualitative inputs. In total 220 persons, representing all regions of the programme area, participated in the online survey which was a valuable source of information for further fine-tuning the programme strategy and for drafting the programme. The comments were further discussed in the frame of two online stakeholder workshops - 01.02.2021 with Hungarian stakeholders and 16.02.2021 with Austrian stakeholders (due to the pandemic "live" workshops were unfortunately not possible).

In order to ensure their transparent processing, all comments received in the online consultation and the stakeholder workshops had been compiled in a list of comments containing information about the source of the comment and how they were considered in the programming process. The outcomes of the stakeholder consultation were also integrated in a consolidated way in the report on the Strategic Thematic Directions as well as in the draft Interreg Programme.

The draft Interreg Programme was elaborated in observation of the inputs of the consultation process and was discussed by the PG at its subsequent meetings.

The draft Interreg Programme was published on the Programme website for information and feedback of the general public Between 15 July and 16 August 2021, 48 comments were received, with more than one third giving explicit consent to the draft IP. On the basis of other contributions the draft IP has been revised for improved alignment with stakeholder expectations.

The strategic environmental assessment (SEA) process, beginning in spring 2021, was built on the programme draft that already included the results of the stakeholder consultation process. Launched at the end of April 2021, in the scoping consultation to the SEA comments of all relevant environmental bodies on national, regional and county levels had been collected in line with the respective EU- and national legislation, and taken on board in the SEA process. Parallel to the public consultation to the Interreg Programme document, the environmental report and its non-technical summary were also made available to the general public and to the relevant authorities, as an integral part of the consultation process. In the period of one month, 38 mostly supportive answers were received. Further comments were incorporated in the revised SEA and taken on board in the IP to support the programme's positive expected environmental impact.

Beside the activities on programme level, information and consultation was also carried out on the level of different projects and regions. In 2019, the project ConnReg AT-HU carried out an online survey, qualitative group interviews with institutional experts as well as bilateral thematic workshops. The consultation activities were organised along the thematic topics of the AT-HU Interreg 2014-2020 Programme: competitiveness, sustainability, accessibility and networking. Beneficiaries and strategic partners of AT-HU Interreg 2014-2020 as well as potential new project partners and other stakeholders were addressed. More than 100 Austrian and Hungarian stakeholders took part in the consultation process. The aim of these interviews was to assess possible improvements of the AT-HU Interreg programme and collect experts' ideas and inputs for the funding period 2021+.

In **Vienna**, the RC set the following measures to map the interest and potential in cross-border project work:

- In August 2019 an online-survey was sent out to 516 potential project stakeholders including all relevant municipal departments in order to gather the principle interest in cross-border cooperation 2021 – 2027 as well as to record the topics relevant for Vienna. With 161 completed questionnaires, the response rate is





31%. Results are published at https://cbc.wien/inter-reg/news_folder/Ergebnisse%20der%20Umfrage%202021-2027.

- Due to the Covid-19 crisis (online) bilateral meetings with key stakeholders took place end 2020/beginning of 2021. In six meetings, the RC discussed with strategically relevant stakeholders (20 participants) possible future topics of mainly PO2 and PO4.

Vienna provides regular information on the status of the programming process on its website www.cbc.wien.

In **Styria**, the information and consultation process started with an analysis of existing strategies for various sectors (e.g. energy, climate, economy, tourism) in order to identify their cross-border aspects. This analysis was followed by consultation with the representatives of relevant departments from the regional government, major stakeholder institutions and municipalities, to ensure expert input throughout the programming process.

The development process for the strategy 2030+ of Styria, which took place in the course of 2019, was additionally used to develop the Styrian strategic topics.

In **Lower Austria**, all thematically responsible departments of the Office of the Lower Austrian Regional Government and important stakeholder institutions were involved into the programming process from the beginning.

In January 2020, the RC informed them in a coordination meeting about the new regulations, about the requirements of the EC, potentials and about the programming process in the INTERREG AT-HU program. Furthermore, topics and first ideas for potential activities and projects for the period 2021-2027 were collected and were afterwards communicated to the programming group.

In May 2021, another coordination meeting with Lower Austrian responsible departments took place, where the selected priorities and specific goals were presented and the financial allocation discussed. This information has also flowed into the programming process.

These activities accompanied the stakeholder consultations and workshops organized by the program, in which numerous Lower Austrian stakeholders took part.

In **Burgenland** a platform was founded to bring together relevant stakeholders for international cooperation and international projects. In the platform regionally important topics for the future period were analysed and discussed, and also the future priorities for the cross-border programmes were fixed on regional level. Additionally, responsible persons in Burgenland for the implementation of Interreg projects were part of the regional working groups for the programming and setting the relevant priorities for the national objective 2 programme 2021-2027.

Close cooperation and a use of synergies between the main stakeholders supported the definition of main objectives for the future strategies and activities of Burgenland.

In **Hungary**, beside the ConnReg events, appropriate discussions were carried out with the relevant institutions of further ATHU projects as well (e.g. WeCon) and of the counties participating in the programme area. Before each PG meeting, Hungarian PG members plus the relevant line ministries had regular preparatory meetings, ensuring the effective involvement of a broad range of aspects. The RC's participation at project events, presentation about and exchange related to the programming process also





helped that the RC could transport all aspects from stakeholder into the programming process.

Many partners involved in the preparation of the Interreg Programme are foreseen to be involved in the Monitoring Committee with the aim of ensuring continuity for the implementation and monitoring of the cooperation programme in the future. Having a link between preparation and later implementation contributes to good management of the programme and achievement of the objectives intended.

With that in mind, the Monitoring Committee is going to be set up in line with the provisions of Art. 29 of the Interreg regulations. It shall consist of both representatives of the national level and the regions participating in the cooperation programme, furthermore, representation of policy areas relevant for the programme and participating regions shall be ensured. The representatives of the broad partnership referred to in Art. 6 (1)(a)-(ca) of the CPR have already been invited to the MC of the 2014-2020 programme as advisory members – their participation in the MC shall be ensured in line with the relevant provisions of the EC for the 2021-2027 programme period, thus ensuring the broadest possible involvement of programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Interreg Programme.





5 Approach to communication and visibility for the Interreg programme (objectives, target audiences, communication channels, including social media outreach, where appropriate, planned budget and relevant indicators for monitoring and evaluation)

Reference: point (h) of Article 17(3)

Communication activities of the programme are not standalone initiatives but parts of a horizontal approach and thus, serve the achievement of all programme objectives. Besides the general aim of awareness raising and providing information, the programme strives for community building and enhanced involvement of stakeholders for the overall objective of an enhanced cooperation culture in the programme area.

Communication objectives

Based on programme and management objectives, the main communication objectives of the programme are:

- Improved internal communication among programme bodies to harmonise the programme implementation process and to establish a common understanding of requirements;
- Enhanced transparency, awareness among applicants regarding the simplifications and new requirements for application, implementation and the value of participation in a cross border programme;
- In-depth, harmonised understanding of the requirements among beneficiaries and programme bodies;
- Efficient and effective visibility of the programme results in the border region and beyond, with focus on capitalisation – in continued cooperation with neighbouring Interreg programmes.

The communication approach is further specified in a communication roadmap, to be adapted annually, including target groups, channels and measurement of indicators.

Target groups

- Programme bodies,
- (potential) applicants,
- beneficiaries,
- stakeholders relevant for the programme's thematic interventions,
- citizens of the region (focusing on areas of project interventions).

Implementation and planned budget

The implementation is a shared responsibility of all programme bodies and coordinated by a communication manager at the JS who accompanies the programme bodies in all communication activities.

The programme foresees an estimated communication budget (excluding staff costs) of at least 0.3 percent of the total programme budget.

Main communication channels

Communication channels include:

- Website: it is the main communication channel of programme bodies, where (potential) applicants and beneficiaries can easily and directly access information.





Downloadable tools also serve as communication channels (e.g. manuals, webinars, project information and achievement library).

- Programme events are tailored to the particular needs of the relevant target groups during the project lifecycle: help (potential) applicants and beneficiaries to understand the programme requirements, encourage network building and the use of synergies, and in the long run support capitalisation of project results.
- Internal platform: the programme management uses a data-sharing platform for all programme bodies to foster and harmonise information exchange;
- Direct contact to applicants and beneficiaries via programme bodies: the advisory system will be improved with better internal and external know-how exchange and communication;
- The wider public – relevant stakeholders and citizens – will be approached best via projects. Project communication plays a fundamental role in increasing awareness about the programme and its achievements. It shall be tailored to thematic stakeholders and can raise interest of citizens in the project area. The past has proven that project events and infrastructure have the highest impact in terms of awareness raising for Interreg.
- Social media play a key role in reaching various target groups and thus will be increasingly used by the programme as well as by projects. The programme's social media channels (e.g. Facebook, YouTube) will be used to reach out to all target groups and to present tailored information on programme news, events, project results or campaigns in cooperation with other Interreg programmes.

The vital use of the harmonized Interreg brand will increase commitment of projects to the programme and support the programme's natural contribution to greater visibility for Interreg throughout Europe.

Monitoring and evaluation

The programme will use a set of indicators to monitor and evaluate the progress and achievements of the communication activities. The following types of indicators are foreseen:

- Output indicators measure the outputs produced by communication actions (e.g. nr. of participants, nr. of events, nr. of visitors, etc.); data will be collected with project reports, internal statistics and web analysis.
- Result indicators measure the specific changes that will be achieved in response to communication outputs (perception of participants and beneficiaries, communication quality, quality of the guidelines, efficiency in the project implementation, etc.); data will be collected with interviews and surveys.

Capitalisation

The capitalisation system established will allow utilising the most suitable communication channel for promoting different (predefined) types of results to the relevant target group. Capitalisation however is not only in the responsibility of the programme but should be embedded in each project. Therefore, project partners will be encouraged to plan capitalisation activities already in the project design.





6 Indication of support to small-scale projects, including small projects within small project funds

Reference: point (i) of Article 17(3), Article 24

The Austria-Hungary Interreg 2021-2027 Programme offers direct support to small-scale projects in accordance with Article 24(1)(a) of the Interreg Regulation. Article 25 (SPF) will not be applied.

Starting point for small-scale projects in Interreg Austria-Hungary

In the period before Hungary's accession and shortly thereafter, small projects were used as a tool to introduce cross-border cooperation and were popular among beneficiaries on both sides of the border. Over the last two periods the projects got bigger in terms of financial volume and partnerships, there was high interest in the implementation of strategic as well as broad and comprehensive sets of cross-border activities as part of comparatively large, longer-term projects. Because of this, and due to the related administrative burden and comparatively low funding, in the last two programme periods neither a small project fund nor another simplified solution for small cross border initiatives was implemented in the programme region.

Purpose and rationale of small-scale projects

Small-scale projects will help to reduce the growing average project size, and offer easier management with fewer administrative burden for less experienced potential beneficiaries of also projects with limited financial volume. Although the available funding for 2021-2027 has substantially decreased compared to the previous period, smaller projects can help to maintain the outreach of the programme.

Small-scale projects shall

- promote direct cooperation between citizens and institutions,
- attract new beneficiaries to the cross-border cooperation,
- anchor cooperation in more and unprecedented fields,
- put cooperation on more solid feet owing to diversification,
- and increase the visibility of the programme and hence Interreg in the whole region.

Although especially newcomers and small sized institutions are invited to implement their cross-border ideas and hence to bring the programme closer to the citizens of the cross-border AT-HU region, the measure should give opportunity to implement small-scale projects under simplified conditions to all potential beneficiaries of the Interreg Programme. This is also in line with the recommendation of the impact evaluation to the Austria-Hungary Interreg 2014-2020 Programme.

Potential beneficiaries can apply for funding of small-scale projects in all priorities of the Austria-Hungary Interreg 2021-2027 Programme, depending on the thematic focus of their cooperation. The Programme welcomes small-scale projects with the following purposes (the list is not exclusive):

- First cooperation actions for newcomers;
- Establishing new governance networks (including new elements of cooperation);
- Testing and seed financing for larger projects;
- Small and targeted pilot actions;





- Capitalisation on the results of other initiatives (incl. know-how transfer and knowledge exchange);
- Awareness raising actions for the general public;
- People-to-people actions, promoting contacts and interaction between people, trust building;
- Direct co-operations between SME's (rather thematic than business co-operations desired).

As this approach is new for the programme, approximately 25 directly managed small-scale projects are expected, although more are welcome.

Implementing provisions

Compared to the average funding above 1.2 million euro per project, average partner budget exceeding 300 000 euro, with large partnerships involving 4 partners on average in the 2014-2020 period, attractive conditions shall be established for smaller projects in 2021-2027.

- The indicative size of directly managed small-scale projects is between 25 000-200 000 euro (total eligible budget),
- Head for small partnerships: at least one Austrian and one Hungarian partner (not more than 3 project partners altogether);
- Limited duration (indicative length maximum 18 months);
- Beneficiaries of small-scale projects shall use SCOs offered by the programme to the fullest possible extent (in line with second subparagraph of paragraph 1, Article 48, CPR). Real costs shall be possible only if the flat rate option is chosen (up to 20% staff or 40% for all eligible costs other than direct staff costs). This will contribute to more simple reporting, control and accelerated reimbursement.
- The programme is heading for a proportionate management approach, i.e. "downscaling" of implementation provisions and administrative requirements. For the application, project selection, reporting and control procedures simplified versions of the Harmonised Implementation Tool templates will be used wherever possible, as they are applied in the programme's monitoring system.





7 Implementing provisions

7.1 Programme authorities

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(6)

Table 39

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	E-mail
Managing authority	Wirtschaftsagentur Burgenland GmbH	Tatjana Paar	tatjana.paar@wirtschaftsagentur-burgenland.at
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries, if appropriate)			
Audit authority	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism Unit ERDF Audit Authority	n.n.	efre_finanzkontrolle@bmlrt.gv.at
Group of auditors representatives	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds	Balázs Dencsó	balazs.dencso@eutaf.gov.hu
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Wirtschaftsagentur Burgenland GmbH	Tatjana Paar	tatjana.paar@wirtschaftsagentur-burgenland.at

7.2 Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

Reference: point (b) of Article 17(6)

In accordance with Article 46 (2) Interreg Regulation, the managing authority, after consultation with the Member States, sets up a joint secretariat (JS) assisting the managing authority and the monitoring committee in carrying out their respective functions.

In continuation of the implementation of two successive programmes in 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, the JS remains in Sopron hosted by Széchenyi Programme Office (SzPO). The structural and implementation arrangements within the hosting organisation will be kept.





Participating Member States consider stable implementation structures as an anchor of successful programme implementation. Taking into account the good programme partnership approach, all JS members are selected in a transparent way with the involvement of both Member States and are bilingual/trilingual, possessing representative linguistic competence and relevant programme area knowledge. Thus, the JS with its highly experienced, multilingual and long-term team members ensure smooth transition and an uptake of long-term Interreg experience.

The JS will work in close cooperation with the MA assisting in all programme coordination and implementation tasks and supporting the monitoring committee in monitoring the implementation of the programme. Furthermore, the JS will provide support to potential applicants by providing them information on funding opportunities and assist all beneficiaries in the implementation of operations.

Building on the positive experiences of the past two programmes, the MA's and JS's work to aid potential applicants and beneficiaries is further supported by the Regional Coordinator Network of the Austrian regions and their Hungarian counterpart in Western Transdanubia.

7.3 Apportionment of liabilities among participating Member States and where applicable, the third or partner countries and OCTs, in the event of financial corrections imposed by the managing authority or the Commission

Reference: point (c) of Article 17(6)

The arrangements related to irregularities and the apportionment of liabilities among Member States will follow the already established principles from the 2014-2020 programming period.

Without prejudice to the Member States' responsibility for detecting and correcting irregularities and for recovering amounts unduly paid according to Article 63 (2) of the CPR, the MA shall in accordance with Article 52 (1) of the Interreg Regulation ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the lead partner. The project partners shall then repay the lead partner any amounts unduly paid.

In line with Article 52(2) of the Interreg Regulation, the MA will not recover any amount unduly paid if it does not exceed EUR 250 ERDF, not including interest, paid to an operation in a given accounting year.

If the LP – bearing overall responsibility for the project – does not succeed in securing repayment from a project partner, or if the MA does not succeed in securing repayment from the LP, the Member State responsible for the control of the project partner concerned (in the case of an EGTC where it is registered), shall reimburse the MA the amount unduly paid to that PP in accordance with Article 52 (3) of the Interreg Regulation. The MA is responsible for reimbursing the amounts recovered to the general budget of the Union, in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the participating Member States as laid down below. The MA will reimburse the funds to the Union once the amounts are recovered from the LP/PP/Member State.





Should the MA bear any legal expenses for recovery recourse proceedings – initiated after consultation and in mutual agreement with the respective MS – even if the proceedings are unsuccessful, these will be reimbursed by the MS hosting the LP or PP responsible for the said procedure.

Since Member States have the overall liability for the ERDF support granted to LPs or PPs for whose control they are responsible, they shall ensure that – prior to certifying expenditure – any financial corrections required will be secured and they shall seek to recover any amounts lost as a result of an irregularity caused by a beneficiary for whose control the MS is responsible. Where appropriate, a MS may also charge interest on late payments.

In accordance with Article 52 (4) of the Interreg Regulation, once the Member State has reimbursed the MA any amounts unduly paid to a partner, it may continue or start a recovery procedure against that partner under its national law.

If the Member State has not reimbursed the MA any amount unduly paid to a partner, in accordance with Article 52 (5) of the Interreg Regulation, the amounts shall be subject to a recovery order by the European Commission (EC) which will be executed, where possible, by offsetting with amounts due to the Member State. Such recovery shall not constitute a financial correction and shall not reduce the support from the ERDF to the respective Interreg programme. The offsetting shall concern subsequent payments to the same Interreg programme. In such an eventuality, the Managing Authority will start bilateral discussions with the Member State at fault so as to find a joint solution. In case no solution is found, as a last resort, the MA shall offset the amount deducted by the European Commission with amounts due to beneficiaries of that Member State.

Member States will bear liability in connection with the use of the programme ERDF funding as follows:

- Each Member State bears liability for possible financial consequences of irregularities caused by LPs and PPs for whose control the MS is responsible.
- In case of a systemic irregularity or financial correction (decided by the programme authorities or the European Commission), the Member State will bear the financial consequences in proportion to the relevant irregularity detected on the respective Member State territory.
- For a systemic irregularity or financial correction on programme level that cannot be linked to a specific Member State, the liability shall be jointly borne by the Member States in proportion to the ERDF claimed for project partners (for whose control the MS is responsible) to the European Commission for the period which forms the basis for the financial correction.

The liability principles described above shall also apply to financial corrections to Technical Assistance (TA) calculated in compliance with Article 27 of the Interreg regulation, since such corrections would be the direct consequence of project related irregularities (whether systemic or not), if they cannot be reused. The MA will keep the Member States informed about all irregularities and their impact on TA. At the end of the programming period, the MA will carry out a reconciliation to verify if there is a remaining balance of irregularities that have affected the TA budget. In case of a remaining balance, the MA will inform the respective MS and ask MS to reimburse the corresponding ERDF amount. The reimbursed amount shall be transferred to the TA account of the MA.

As stated in article 69 (12) of the CPR, MSs shall report on irregularities in accordance with the criteria for determining the cases of irregularity to be reported, the data to be provided and the format for reporting set out in annex XII of the CPR. Irregularities shall





be reported by the MS in which the expenditure is paid by the Lead Partner or project partner implementing the project. The MS shall at the same time, inform the MA who will then further inform the Audit Authority (AA). Specific procedures in this respect will be part of the description of the programme management and control system to be established in accordance with article 69 (11) of the CPR.





8 Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Reference: Articles 94 and 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR)

Table 40: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95	YES	NO
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under priority according to Article 94 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>





9 Appendices

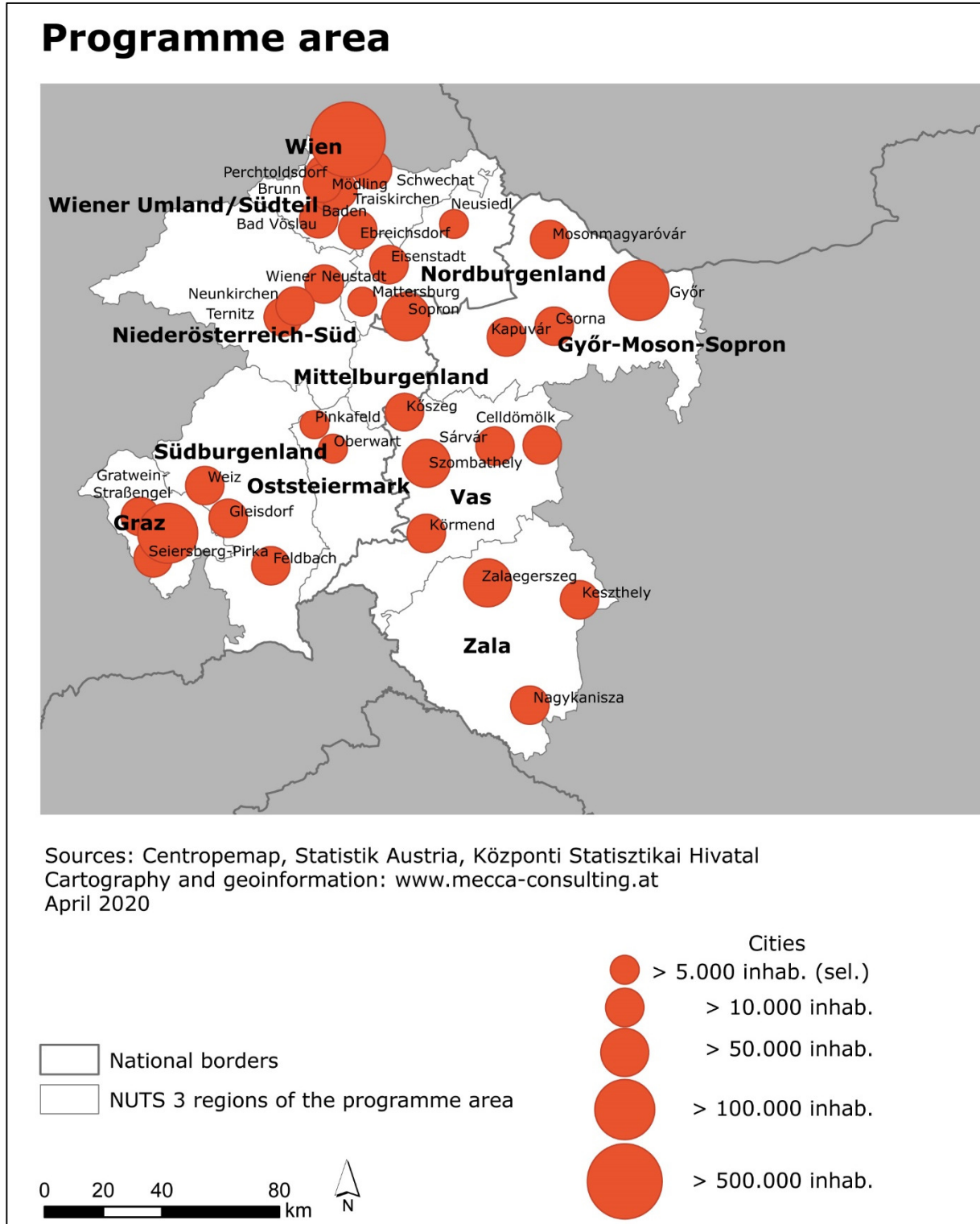
Map 1:	Map of the programme area
Appendix 1:	Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates
Appendix 2	Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs
Appendix 3:	List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable
Appendix 4:	List of codes, titles and short titles of the intervention field (dimension 1) used in the Programme





Map

Map of the programme area





Appendix 1

Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

(Article 94 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR))

Date of submitting the proposal	

This Appendix is not required when EU-level simplified cost options established by the delegated act referred to in Article 94(4) of CPR are used.





A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	Estimated proportion of the total financial allocation within the priority to which the simplified cost option will be applied in %	Type(s) of operation covered		Indicator triggering reimbursement		Unit of measurement for the indicator triggering reimbursement	Type of simplified cost option (standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates)	Amount (in EUR) or percentage (in case of flat rates) of the simplified cost option
				Code ¹	Description	Code ²	Description			

¹ This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex I CPR.

² This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable.





B. Details by type of operation (to be completed for every type of operation)

Did the managing authority receive support from an external company to set out the simplified costs below?

If so, please specify which external company:

Yes/No – Name of external company

1.1	Description of the operation type including the timeline for implementation ¹	
1.2	Specific objective	
1.3	Indicator triggering reimbursement ²	
1.4	Unit of measurement for the indicator triggering reimbursement	
1.5	Standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate	
1.6	Amount per unit of measurement or percentage (for flat rates) of the simplified cost option	
1.7	Categories of costs covered by the unit cost, lump sum or flat rate	
1.8	Do these categories of costs cover all eligible expenditure for the operation? (Y/N)	
1.9	Adjustment(s) method ³	
1.10	Verification of the achievement of the units delivered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – describe what document(s)/system will be used to verify the achievement of the units delivered – describe what will be checked and by whom during management verifications – describe what arrangements will be made to collect and store the relevant data/documents 	
1.11	Possible perverse incentives, mitigating measures ⁴ and the estimated level of risk (high/medium/low)	
1.12	Total amount (national and EU) expected to be reimbursed by the Commission on this basis	

¹ Envisaged starting date of the selection of operations and envisaged final date of their completion (ref. Article 63(5) of CPR).

² For operations encompassing several simplified cost options covering different categories of costs, different projects or successive phases of an operation, the fields 1.3 to 1.11 need to be filled in for each indicator triggering reimbursement.

³ If applicable, indicate the frequency and timing of the adjustment and a clear reference to a specific indicator (including a link to the website where this indicator is published, if applicable).

⁴ Are there any potential negative implications on the quality of the supported operations and, if so, what measures (such as. quality assurance) will be taken to offset this risk?





C. Calculation of the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates

1. Source of data used to calculate the standard scale of unit costs, lump sums or flat rates (who produced, collected and recorded the data; where the data are stored; cut off dates; validation, etc.):

2. Please specify why the proposed method and calculation based on Article 88(2) of CPR is relevant to the type of operation:

3. Please specify how the calculations were made, in particular including any assumptions made in terms of quality or quantities. Where relevant, statistical evidence and benchmarks should be used and, if requested, provided in a format that is usable by the Commission:

4. Please explain how you have ensured that only eligible expenditure was included in the calculation of the standard scale of unit cost, lump sum or flat rate:

5. Assessment of the audit authority or authorities of the calculation methodology and amounts and the arrangements to ensure the verification, quality, collection and storage of data:





Appendix 2

Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

(Article 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR))

Date of submitting the proposal	

This Appendix is not required when amounts for EU-level financing not linked to costs established by the delegated act referred to in Article 95(4) of CPR are used.





A. Summary of the main elements

Priority	Fund	Specific objective	The amount covered by the financing not linked to costs	Type(s) of operation covered		Conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission		Indicator	Unit of measurement for the conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Envisaged type of reimbursement method used to reimburse the beneficiary or beneficiaries
				Code ¹	Description	Code ²	Description			

¹ This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex I to the CPR and Annex IV to the EMFAF Regulation.

² This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable.





B. Details by type of operation (to be completed for every type of operation)

1.1	Description of the operation type			
1.2	Specific objective			
1.3	Conditions to be fulfilled or results to be achieved			
1.4	Deadline for fulfilment of conditions or results to be achieved			
1.5	Unit of measurement for conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission			
1.6	Intermediate deliverables (if applicable) triggering reimbursement by the Commission with schedule for reimbursements	Intermediate deliverables	Envisaged date	Amounts (in EUR)
1.7	Total amount (including Union and national funding)			
1.8	Adjustment(s) method			
1.9	<p>Verification of the achievement of the result or condition (and where relevant, the intermediate deliverables)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - describe what document(s)/system will be used to verify the achievement of the result or condition (and where relevant, each of the intermediate deliverables) - describe how management verifications (including on the spot) will be carried out, and by whom - describe what arrangements will be made to collect and store relevant data/documents 			
1.10	Use of grants in the form of financing not linked to costs/ Does the grant provided by Member State to beneficiaries take the form of financing not linked to costs? [Y/N]			
1.11	<p>Arrangements to ensure the audit trail</p> <p>Please list the body(ies) responsible for these arrangements.</p>			





Appendix 3

List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable - Article 17(3)

As set out in article 17(3) of Regulation (EC) 2021/1059 and article 22(3) of Regulation (EC) 2021/1060 the Member State shall ensure that the programme submitted is accompanied for information purposes by a list of planned operations of strategic importance and a timetable.

The Austria-Hungary Interreg Programme 2021-2027 is planning to select all operations via open calls for proposals. Therefore, no pre-identified operations of strategic importance have been embedded in the Programme.

Nevertheless, in the ATHU Interreg Programme, environment is a topic of horizontal strategic importance. Environmental and sustainability aspects are reflected not only in the dedicated Priority 1 (A green and resilient border region), but also in the other priorities, e.g. in Priority 2 through sustainable transport options, and in every other priority. In line with the proposals of the SEA report, environmental aspects are going to be specifically supported horizontally in the project application and selection procedures, as well as followed up in the programme evaluation. As such, for the ATHU Interreg Programme operations with an environmental focus can be considered as of strategic importance. More specific agreement about definition of strategic themes/operations, as far as required, still needs to be made in the Programming Group in early 2022.





Appendix 4

List of codes, titles and short titles of the intervention field (dimension 1)
used in the Programme

Code	Title	Short title
58	Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: floods and landslides (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	Climate change adaptation: floods and landslides
60	Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: others, e.g. storms and drought (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	Climate change adaptation: storms and drought
64	Water management and water resource conservation (including river basin management, specific climate change adaptation measures, reuse, leakage reduction)	Water management
79	Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	Nature and biodiversity
165	Protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets and tourism services	Public tourism assets and tourism services
166	Protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services	Cultural heritage and cultural services
171	Enhancing cooperation with partners both within and outside the Member State	Enhancing cooperation
173	Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	Enhancing institutional capacity

