



NEW INTERREG LOGO

INTERREG PROGRAMME SLOVENIA-HUNGARY 2021-2027



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CCI	
Title	Interreg programme Slovenia-Hungary 2021-2027
Draft Version	
First year	2021
Last year	2027
Eligible from	01-Jan-2021
Eligible until	31-Dec-2029
Commission decision number	
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NUTS regions covered by the programme	HU222 – Vas HU223 – Zala SI031 – Pomurje SI032 – Podravje
Strand	A

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)

Text field [0/2 000]

The Slovenia-Hungary Interreg programme area for the period 2021-2027 includes the following eligible NUTS 3 regions (with NUTS codes):

- Pomurje (SI031) and Podravje (SI032) regions from Slovenia, and
- the counties of Vas (HU222) and Zala (HU223) from Hungary.

The territory of the Slovenia-Hungary border region covers 10.627 km² in total, two-thirds of the area belong to the Hungarian, and one-third to the Slovenian border region, divided by a border of 102 km in length. In terms of population, it is a region of approx. 962 thousand inhabitants, thereof 54% lives in Hungary and 46% in Slovenia.

Population density is 90,6 persons/km² which is way under EU-27 average. Podravje region is the most densely populated (151,6 persons/ km²) due to Maribor (the second biggest city in Slovenia), while the other regions are more sparsely populated, (Pomurje: 86 persons/km², Vas: 76 persons/km², Zala: 72 persons/km²) showing rural characteristics. The settlement structure of the programme area shows duality features: besides some important larger cities, the majority of the area's extent is a typically rural, rarely populated region with lots of small villages.

The programme area is characterised by various types of landscape: flat Pannonian areas (Pomurje, Podravje, Vas) are varying with hilly (Podravje, Zala) and subalpine territories (Pomurje, Vas).

General demographical indicators show negative tendencies due to natural loss. Population decline is characteristic for Pomurje and Zala, while in Podravje and Vas population has been growing due to net migration.

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 complimentary 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)

Text field [0 / 50 000]

1.2.1 Introduction

The common challenges and needs in the Slovenian-Hungarian border region are presented according to the five ERDF Policy Objectives and the Interreg specific objective Better cooperation governance. The description is based

on the **Territorial and Socio-economic Analysis**, where the main joint challenges, needs and potentials of the area were identified. The description presents the lessons learned based on the experiences of the previous funding period and the most relevant supported projects.

The results of the partnership negotiations were taken into account in determining future needs. During the preparation of the territorial analysis, the experts conducted *in-depth interviews with key actors* in the border area and carried out the *public survey*. The questionnaire was primarily used to select the main areas of intervention, but respondents also had the opportunity to articulate their other development needs. All this information gained from the analysis, the questionnaire survey, the interviews and other regional and thematic consultations were incorporated in the **Orientation Paper** on strategic thematic directions drawing up a methodology for the selection of Policy Objectives (POs) and Specific Objectives (SOs).

After the description of main joint challenges and needs of the cross-border programme area concerning the different POs, the principles of the relationship with national programmes as well as the relationship with macro-regional strategies are presented.

1.2.2. PO1: A smarter Europe

Introducing the general economic performance, in the programme area *the GDP has increased on both sides of the border between 2013 and 2018*. In case of all NUTS 3 units the GDP growth rate exceeded the EU growth rate, but lagged behind the respective national averages. Examining long-term tendencies, it can be stated that *differences in economic performance (GDP per capita) among the counties/regions of border region did not change significantly*, ranking of the regions did not change.

In the examined period (2014-2018) the number of enterprises has grown on NUTS 3 level and in the border region as a whole. The growth of number of active enterprises and the growth of employed persons was higher in the Hungarian counties than in the Slovenian regions by 2018. The statistical data does not show the effect of the covid-19 pandemic yet.

The R&D expenditure per inhabitant is significantly lower in the border region than in the EU27. The total expenditure is higher in Eastern Slovenia (Vzhodna Slovenija) compared to Western Transdanubia (Nyugat-Dunántúl), but lower than the respective national averages. According to the 2019 data of the European Innovation Scoreboard, *both Slovenia and Hungary belong to the category of moderate innovators*. Based on the attractiveness of the research system, the value of Slovenia is higher than that of Hungary in many categories.

Research and innovation-oriented cross-border cooperation between universities, research institutions, technology parks and innovation hubs are present in the border region. Institutions with common research activities and counselling services are able to support the development of companies operating in key sectors of border area. *Efforts should be made to maximise product, service and process development, especially for SMEs, using local knowledge*. The consultancy programs of R&D institutions should be encouraged to reach companies operating across borders. *The R&D centres in the region need to provide more information about themselves to local businesses in order to increase the number of collaborations*.

Considering the same development and the matter of smart specialisation, it can be stated that on both sides of the border, *the dominant economic sectors are similar, but have different weights in employment or income generation*.

Both in Western Transdanubia and Eastern Slovenia, agriculture has a greater weight in employment than in the EU27 or nationally. Industry has almost the same weight on either side of the border, being above the national averages. In Eastern Slovenia, the share of people employed in trade, transport, accommodation and hospitality is slightly lower than the Slovenian average, that of Western Transdanubia or the EU average. The proportion of

people employed in the professional, scientific and technical fields in the two border regions lags behind the EU27 value and the national averages.

The two most important agricultural areas in Slovenia are Pomurje and Podravje. 81% of the total area of Pomurje is agricultural land, while in the Podravje region of the same use is 70%. In Hungary, the counties of Zala and Vas have a smaller weight in agriculture compared to Podravje.

Vas county and Podravje are more industrialized areas. In Vas county automotive-machine industry and engineering are very significant as well as tourism, wood, furniture and food industry with agriculture are also very important. In Zala county the ZalaZone Automotive proving ground provides new innovative opportunities for automotive and electromobility industry and based on the geographic endowment tourism, forestry and wood industry are more important, while in Pomurje agriculture is dominant. In Podravje animal husbandry and viticulture are also more significant than in the other counties. *Efforts should be made to further develop the local, small-scale food industry and to encourage sales in local markets.* Agricultural activity should seek to strengthen sustainable farming practices, such as expanding the number of organic farms, producing safe food and short supply chains, disseminating innovative solutions such as precision production, and responding to the challenges of climate change. Quality and organic local food products produced in the area can also be attractive to tourists. *In Slovenia, some innovative, fast-growing companies* have emerged in recent years, such as in agriculture, *in organic farming and in the field of information technology*, which can be an example for other business initiatives.

Due to the higher wages in Slovenia, there are *some commuters from Hungary that work in Slovenia, mainly in the construction industry.* They typically go to Hungarian-speaking areas, but German is the common language of communication along the border. *Better foreign language knowledge and common language skills would increase job opportunities in the border area.*

Cross-border cooperation between SMEs is weak and there is a need to encourage links between businesses, e.g. in the field of mechatronic industry. *There are also obstacles to build business linkages, including lack of communication and information. Business development must take into account natural and landscape values,* strive to utilise existing, even disused, facilities, reduce pollution, waste, recycle waste, decrease energy consumption, and increase the use of renewable energy sources.

As developmental potential, economic development shall be built on the scientific and innovation activities of the universities, R&D institutions and technology labs of the region. *Local knowledge must be put at the service of the region's economic interests and social and environmental challenges:* this way the key players of the border region will work together to reduce the negative effects of climate change and demography tendencies, such as managing drought in crop production or aging, and introducing ecologically sustainable tourism solutions.

In terms of digital accessibility, the Hungarian side performs somewhat weaker than Slovenia, however tendencies are generally improving. *In general, internet access and internet use are improving, while the number of individuals not using the internet is in decrease.* This is because border areas with a low population density offer the same high quality of housing, but the highest level of services can be achieved primarily with digital solutions. *Digital solutions need to be used more widely in everyday life,* such as for work in public administration, education, healthcare, social services.

As regards lessons learned apart from tourism two projects were supported in relation to the economic development. One project aimed at the development of wine tourism (Wine Picnic), the other project aimed at strengthening the cooperation of business development organisations with high attention for improving the foreign language knowledge of the entrepreneurs (E-ECONOMY). In order to further encourage the cooperation among the enterprises the following matters were highlighted by the participants of the public consultation: strategic integration of key institutions to facilitate the development of entrepreneurship in the cross-border area; development of cross-border employment in tourism; development of incubator houses in the rural areas; joint education of agricultural farmers, particularly in viticulture and other green cultures; education of heritage crafts.

In the previous cross-border program, tourism was dominant, supported projects (e.g. GardEN, ETHOS LAND, Mura Raba Tour) mainly indirectly contribute to the increase of local income and employment.

1.2.3. PO2: A greener, low-carbon Europe

The cooperation area has *extensive green territories with significant natural values and a high rate of biodiversity* (based on a large proportion of protected areas). This provides a good basis for promoting a sustainable lifestyle in the area where the consumerism and individualism had not yet overshadowed community spirit and close ties with nature that the locals there have and cherish.

One of the most important natural protected territories in the Programme area is the trilateral Goričko–Órség–Raab Nature Park, which forms a border region unique in Europe: the cooperation of three nature parks covering in total 105.200 ha territory of protected areas in Hungary, Slovenia and Austria.

In Slovenia the *Goričko Landscape Protection Park* which centre is located in the Grad castle has an active role in nature protection, while on the Hungarian side the *Órség National Park Directorate* is responsible for carrying out the nature protection activities and supervising the nature protected areas. The cooperation of the two mentioned organisations is dominant in the protection of environmental values in the border region. The Memorandum of Understanding of Partnership between all three National Parks (from Slovenia, Hungary and Austria) was signed in 2006. Since that time different cooperation projects have been implemented (e.g. within the framework of the Interreg Central Europe Programme and previous Slovenia-Hungary cross-border Interreg Programme) and the trilateral park is also a part of the European Green Belt initiative (an eco-tourism thematic route along the line of the former Iron Curtain).

The important part of nature protection is also the future 5-country *Transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Mura-Drava-Danube*, which combines the cluster of thirteen protected areas along the Mura-Drava-Danube region and jointly manages the shared river ecosystem in a sustainable manner while boosting economic growth and development in the region. *The Biosphere Reserve in the programme area stretches along the Mura river, covering significant territories in Pomurje and Zala county.* The preservation of the diverse biosphere of Kis-Balaton and Balaton in Zala County is also important, in connection with this special attention must be paid to the water quality of the related cross-border watercourses.

The following habitat types are most at risk in Slovenia: the flowing waters and associated wetlands (Mura, Drava) and dry grasslands (Goričko) and in Hungary: transboundary watercourses, pastures, meadows, grassland habitats, local orchards. The preservation of these habitats is crucial in the future.

The importance of both protected areas is in their transnational character and the impact in terms of ecosystem services and climate mitigation that they offer and that was acknowledged by different countries. In this aspect they can serve as exemplary and a platform for future cooperation when striving towards sustainable development goals in the cross-border area.

On the contrary, *water management is quite a big challenge in the programme area.* Low precipitation means a low rate of recharging capabilities of ground water and surface water. *Global warming could cause further water shortages and droughts, while intensive agricultural activity in Slovenia poses an increasing risk of soil contamination.* On the Hungarian side quality of surface water is better than in Slovenia. *Special attention must be paid to geothermal water that represents a valuable renewable source on both sides of the programme area,* but in order to keep it, its use must become sustainable. Cross-border activities in terms of awareness raising, water management and policy measures could provide a basis for efficient and sustainable water management in this sensitive area. It is necessary *to explore new solutions to prevent soil and water base contamination such as build individual wastewater treatment plants in sparsely populated parts of the settlements.*

The border area is located quite far away from the main population and industry centres, *the air quality is relatively favourable, however particulate matter pollution is problematic in urban areas*, especially in Murska Sobota. Car as dominant mode of transport and the use of fuels in households and services are the main reasons for this.

Climate change will have a significant impact for several sectors, as water management, agriculture, forestry, biodiversity, etc. The spatial planning should receive a determinate role in the next years to find the optimal solutions to mitigate the different effect of the climate change, such find new approaches of the shortage of water supply in the agriculture dominant areas. *The disaster management should be focused on effective preventive measures in all sectors, but especially in the agriculture sector*, in the future. Disaster management is organized on the national level, so it is important that countries keep on the collaboration in the Hungarian–Slovenian Permanent Joint Committee on Disaster Management. In disaster management and risk prevention, great attention must be paid to cross-border cooperation.

The situation of energy supply and consumption is similar to the national patterns, but in national climate strategies both countries are committed to energy efficiency and producing energy from renewable sources. Both countries failed to achieve the targeted share of renewable energy production. *In energy sector more investments in the renewable sector should be made, to connect the waste management as a circular economy or geothermal energy as a renewable source in the whole programme area*. With awareness raising at the level of households (including education of children) even with limited financial resources changes in people's habits may be achieved. The lack of cross-border sustainable mobility options was recognised. *The development of sustainable modes of transport (public traffic, e-mobility tools, biking) in the border area is important* for reducing harmful environmental emissions.

At cross-border level the protection of environmental values (national/nature parks, rivers, thermal waters) can be fostered via cross-border cooperation. One of the options is to preserve the existing flora and fauna, while another one is to *improve services with environmental interest, which are connected to different sectors like tourism, transport, local handmade products, primary/small producers, etc*. This method would help not only to preserve the natural values, but also to enhance the economic performance of the regions. With better spatial planning of urban areas and rural landscapes much more nature values could be preserved in the future.

As regards to lessons learned in the previous programming period two projects were focused especially on nature protection activities. The Green Line project primarily encourages the cooperation of local businesses and institutions in the field of energy. Its aim is to encourage the reduction of energy consumption and to promote the use of renewable energies, for which tools for measuring energy consumption have been introduced. Within the framework of the GreenReg project, it was planned to spread the principles of environmentally sustainable operation in institutions and enterprises within the framework of a digitally accessible tool system. They also helped partnerships between green-minded organizations. Nature conservation appears in connection with a number of tourism projects aimed at presenting natural values in a sustainable way or encouraging active movement in nature. The ETHOS Land project targeted the dissemination of the sustainable economic activities and ethical employment, which values can be applied in wider range.

Dealing with waste is another issue which could be tackled in the Slovenia-Hungary Interreg Programme. It is one of the suitable fields where principles of circular economy can be applied and can build on existing practices. There is a potential in recovering waste into eco-fuels. In the previous programming period, the URBAN SOIL 4 FOOD project was implemented in Podravje (co-financed by Urban Innovative Actions). In Maribor biological waste has been processed into fertile soil for the local community. In Maribor the WCYCLE institute was established for ensuring the management of resource / raw material flows in the local and regional area. It operates mainly at the basic research and development level.

The concept of circular economy should be introduced to all aspects of human activities and should be reflected in business models, government policies and circular culture (citizens), three interdependent aspects that are at the core systemic change from a linear to a circular economy. *A strategy for circular economy of the cross-border area*

should be elaborated with a view that its application can generate numerous green working places and improve the quality of living and attractiveness of this environment. In order to achieve the ambitious plans for the transition to a circular economy as set out in new Circular Economy Action Plan of EU (2020), a supportive environment to provide knowledge and information in the field of circular economy models could be designed within the cross-border programme.

In the future, *efforts must be made to preserve natural values, such as biodiversity*, which is a key value of the border region. At the same time, *more and more enterprises and institutions must be encouraged to operate in an environmentally sustainable manner*, which also needs for wide awareness raising activities among the citizens.

During the partnership negotiations, emphasis was placed on the need to develop green infrastructure, to disseminate knowledge on nature conservation and the use of renewable energy, to disseminate electric mobility widely, and to monitor natural risks.

1.2.4. PO3: A more connected Europe

The Slovenia-Hungary border region – although being a very short (102 km length) border section – is an important gateway from public roads point of view as well. *The motorway branch of the Mediterranean corridor (Lyon–Trieste–Koper–Ljubljana–Budapest–Ukraine – former corridor V) crosses the region at the border crossing Pince/Tornyiszentmiklós.* The Graz–Maribor–Ljubljana link is part of the Baltic-Adriatic TEN-T corridor, while the Maribor–Gruškovje (–Zagreb–Belgrade–Niš–Thessaloniki) connection (A4, E59) is one of the branches of former corridor X, which is an important north-south internal axis of Podravje, also an important linkage from Austria and Germany towards the Adriatic coast, therefore suffering from severe congestions during summer holiday season. In general, the Slovenian side of the border area is very well connected, both to the core area of Central Europe and the Balkans/East Mediterranean as well.

The accessibility of the rural areas in the inner parts of the regions needs to be further developed in order to ensure a better interconnectivity of smaller villages.

Concerning the cross-border traffic, *border crossings are accessible within half an hour in whole Pomurje and about nearly half of Zala county.* More remote urban centres (Maribor, Szombathely and Zalaegerszeg) are within the 60-minute accessibility range too (by car). This is due to a *high density of border crossings* that have been especially developed after the accession of Hungary and Slovenia to the Schengen zone.

In terms of *public transport*, as the scheduled coach service, they are provided on both sides in order to access micro regional and regional centres, or to reach the national capitals. *Concerning cross-border connections, currently no service is available between Hungary and Slovenia. The restoration of previously existing connections would be essential for the facilitation of cross-border cooperation.*

The population of the border region is having a very limited access to cross-border rail services, with very low frequency and unfavourable journey time, which is valid for both sides of the border. Railway infrastructure in both countries is concentrated in the state capitals. In terms of cross-border traffic currently there is only one daily IC train between Budapest and Ljubljana which crosses the border area. Furthermore, on each workday there are four more connections from Zalaegerszeg to Hodoš, however to reach Murska Sobota, an additional transfer is needed. The frequency of trains may be considered sufficient. *For an efficient cross-border mobility direct connections should be established between the regional centres. Changes in the timetables would be crucial to support cross-border passenger traffic and tourism flows.*

In the past two programming periods *several cycling infrastructure development projects were implemented.* The Interreg V-A Slovenia-Hungary Cooperation Programme promoted the establishment of two new border crossings for cyclists:

- the Lendvadedes-Dedeskecskés–Dolga Vas connection as part of the Iron Curtain Cycling project; and
- the Orfalu–Budinci connection within the Guide2Visit project.

As most of the programme area is flat and small settlements are dominant, cycling is a preferred mean of transport in the area, particularly in Pomurje. *Besides longer distance tourism routes, all major urban areas have been equipped with safe cycling infrastructure that serves commuting and leisure purposes as well.* In hilly areas more people may be involved in cycling through the availability and rental of electric bicycles.

There are two international airports in the area: in Maribor and the state owned Hévíz-Balaton International Airport at Sármellék. The Edvard Rusjan Airport in Maribor has been renovated in 2012, which was followed by opening of several lines to various German cities and charter flights. Scheduled flights stopped in August 2018. The Sármellék airport used to serve seasonal charter flights, between May and October, from different German airports. The number of passengers peaked in 2014, since then tendencies were decreasing. Due to the pandemic services have been stopped in 2020.

There is no navigable river in the border area. Sport-related (kayak, canoeing) navigation and small boats are used on the Drava, Mura, Kerka and Rába rivers.

Among the lessons learned, in recent years, projects such as IronCurtainCycling and Guide2Visit have been implemented to promote cycling tourism, just like project Green Exercise. The projects aim to spread electric cycling, designate cycling routes and develop cycling services.

As part of the partnership consultation, the need for the development of e-mobility and public transport was highlighted. Furthermore, the stakeholders consider it to be important to take into account the aspects of the disabled and the elderly in the development of transport services.

1.2.5. PO4: A more social Europe including culture and tourism

The employment situation gradually improved since 2010 on both sides, however, effects of the covid-19 pandemic have slightly increased the number of job seekers. In general, the most difficult employment situation is for those with a low level of education or other disadvantages in the labour market. Cross-border employment in the area is weak.

Lack of language knowledge is a barrier to cross-border employment. Besides national languages, the common languages of communication, i.e. German or English, should be encouraged at school age.

The population of the border area is better educated than the EU average, but those without a profession are in the most difficult position in terms of employment. There are opportunities in educational cooperation, as high-quality public education may have a significant labour-retaining effect. For the time being in some cases Hungarian students go to Slovenian bilingual primary schools. But in Hungary, the children can learn Slovenian as national language in the primary schools of Felsőszölnök and Apátistvánfalva.

Schools and kindergartens have a major role in environmental education and raising awareness of sustainability values. The valuable natural environment is suitable for kindergartens and schools to try out various alternative, outdoor teaching methods. In addition to sustainability, *digitalization is a defining trend today, which can be prepared for primary schools with electronic and robotics experimental education programmes.*

There may be a need to provide a place for cross-border internship for students in vocational training and higher education. The obstacles for cooperation in practical trainings of vocational education must be handled by the cooperation of interested schools and national level institutions responsible for the regulatory framework.

University education is present on both sides of the border in larger cities, the most important being the multidisciplinary university in Maribor and there are smaller university units at Szombathely, Zalaegerszeg, Nagykanizsa, Keszthely and Kőszeg. This provides untapped opportunities for cooperation.

The rate of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is almost similar on the Hungarian and the Slovenian side, while in the eastern part of Slovenia the poverty risk rate is higher than the national average. In Hungary the border region is in a more favourable situation compared to the national average. Unemployed people, people with low education and lack of profession belong to the group of people at risk of poverty.

The life expectancy is generally higher in Slovenia (SI: 77 years for men and 82 for women / HU: 73 years for men and 80 for women), both on country level and in the border region. Both in the Hungarian and Slovenian part of the Programme area women live longer than men. Ageing is considered the most severe social problem in the border area, particularly in low-populated villages. The social welfare system is under increasing pressure due to the ageing population and the emigration of young people. In the future, not only the care capacity should be expanded, but the efficiency of services through modern digital solutions should be promoted as well. There is a need to train participants in social care, as the neighbouring country Austria also has a significant labour-absorbing effect in the social and health spheres.

In healthcare, the use of cross-border services is not very common, administrative barriers exist. In both social care and health care, it is recommended to introduce modern technical solutions, focus on prevention, which has been pointed out by the covid-19 pandemic. Healthy lifestyle tends to be more popular in the future. Health-related development needs can also create new jobs in the region, offer cooperation between companies, universities and research institutions.

Tourism plays a very important role in the economy of the border region. According to the latest territorial data available from the statistical databases of both countries, in the Slovenian-Hungarian programme area more than 2,3 million tourists spent closely 7,3 million overnight stays in 2019. Comparing this data with the year of 2014 – the beginning of the current programming period – the registered growth in the number of tourists is more than 40%, while in the tourism overnights nearly 20%.

Government measures introduced to curb the Covid-19 epidemic have limited the operation of accommodations, which has periodically reduced tourist traffic in 2020 and this year as well. At the same time, the epidemic has led to an increase in the number of teleworkers, with more and more people choosing rural areas as temporary or permanent residences. In the future, this will offer new opportunities for tourism and population attraction for the border region.

Some remarkable cultural heritage sites and traditions can be found in the border region as well:

- The historical past connects the two sides of the border: the historical ethnic region, the Vendvidék and Muravidék (Slovensko Porabje and Prekmurje) includes Slovenian and Hungarian regions as well.
- Living traditions of the smaller villages provide an insight into the everyday life of the countryside, thus rural tourism has a great potential in the small village areas. Several monuments of the bigger historical cities preserve the memory of the region's rich folk past.
- Several thematic routes have been already established on both sides of the border, the connection of these routes across the border, however, is still unsolved.

Most of the tourism values are located in the border region. *Tourism demand is very concentrated on both sides of the border region: there are several well-known and famous destinations with a great tourist turnover (the famous wellness/health resorts, lake Balaton and Maribor), while the majority of rural areas are less visited by tourists. Except for wellness/health resorts, tourism (lakes, rivers, forests, vineyards) is seasonal and stronger in*

outdoor activities. Cooperation should focus on creation of joint tourism products and services by development of sustainable tourism models, with special focus on lesser-known areas. In the last programming period, the Guide2Visit project focused on development and marketing of such tourism products and the results of the project shall be used in the future.

The great potential and the similarities of the tourism sector on the two sides of the border provide *good opportunities to align them into joint cross-border tourism products in line with the principle of sustainable tourism development*, i.e. with responsibility to the environment and the needs and interests of local inhabitants and to avoid mass tourism. Special focus should be given to lesser-known areas and connection of them to the existing tourism magnets.

Development of sustainable tourism infrastructure and mobility is needed and integration and improvement of tourism quality standards with effective and coordinated joint tourism marketing and promotion activities are also important including application of creative tourism marketing tools. Raising awareness and specialised training activities are essential to improve quality of human resources in tourism sector and also contributing to raising hospitality of the local people. Joint tourism destination management and new innovative tourist attractions and services open up possibilities and require new tourism accommodations contributing to the increase of income of local companies and households.

As regards to lessons learned, among the projects targeted human resources development and supported in the previous programming period the following can be mentioned.

Right Profession II project targeted the improvement of vocational training system in order to reach better focus on the real professional needs of the border area, the career guidance of students and training of profession instructors were in the focus of the project. Any further education-oriented projects shall focus on implementation of cross-border training programmes beside the institutional development.

The MOTIVAGE project dealt with the improvement of social care services for elderly people. Within the project the experience of the village caretaker service and home care for the elderly were discussed and applied. Based on the experiences the more advanced services of the border region or the digital solutions can be disseminated or applied in wider range.

Among the lessons learned in case of tourism development it is worth to highlight that in the field of tourism was supported the most of the project. 12 funded projects relate to the various field of tourism, such as, eco-tourism (GO IN NATURE), culture (ESCAPE), wine and gastronomy (Wine Picnic), cycling (IronCurtainCycling), horse riding (HORSE BASED TOURISM), canoeing (MURA RÁBA TOUR), sustainable green tourism (Guide2Visit). Most of the projects focus on lesser-known rural areas in terms of tourism. Almost all projects contain marketing activities, but generally these activities rather focus on fulfilment of implementation of any project activities than integrate into the overall tourism marketing activity of the border region, at the same time, good example of the implementation of joint cross border destination management (TELE-KA-LAND) can be found. In the future, unified, integrated communication of several tourism products towards the target group is needed. In the current programme the SIHU Pro project deals with finding synergies among the nature based and cultural touristic projects and creating a coherent concept for the longterm sustainability of the mentioned projects.

Based on the partnership negotiations, in addition to the above, the importance of maintaining designated trails and built facilities was emphasized. In the future, besides developing new tourism products, it is reasonable to focus on improving the quality of existing tourism products and supplementing them with creative elements.

The relevant statements of the Impact Evaluation of the Cooperation Programme Interreg V–A Slovenia–Hungary 2014–2020 carried out in 2020 are the followings: According to the objectives and planned actions of the tourism-oriented projects: „[T]he project brought changes on the local level. The local communities’ awareness about the opportunities offered by the region has increased. As a result, local residents welcome tourists and know how to

advise and direct them towards different sights of interest. Also, additional investments were made that were not financed by the programme. The cross-border area is still poorly connected (particularly as regards public transport) and the tourism potential of the area, especially outside the large tourist centres (spa tourism as an example), is still underutilised.”

1.2.6. ISO1: A better cooperation governance

The Slovenia-Hungary border region is involved in altogether three European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs). Out of these structures the most important one from the programme area’s point of view is the *Muraba EGTC*. The organisation was set up for the sake of strengthening cooperation across the border and promoting the rights of national minorities in the territories of mixed ethnic population. Its founding members are the Town of Szentgotthárd, the Municipality of Lendava, the National Slovene Self-Government from Hungary, and the Mura Region Hungarian Self-Government Community from Slovenia. Another EGTC with Slovenian and Hungarian membership is the Pannon EGTC, initially established by Hungarian and Slovenian institutions. Currently it counts 66 members, including three local governments from Slovenia (Lendava, Moravske Toplice and Ptuj). The Mura EGTC is a small, yet very active partnership, composed of 13 local governments from Zala county, but it has no members from Slovenia.

Out of the tools of integrated territorial development, *Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)* is applied neither in Slovenia, nor in Hungary. Concerning the tool *Community-based Local Development (CLLD)* in both countries in the rural areas local action groups (LAGs) within the LEADER programme have been set up.

In cultural relations minorities play a key role. Hungarian minority is concentrated in Pomurje, while Slovene minority (Porabje Slovenes) live in the area of Szentgotthárd (Monošter). The region has a significant Roma minority as well.

The most important institution of Hungarian cultural life in Slovenia is the Hungarian National Cultural Institute in Lendava, which is home to several civil organisations being active in cultural life. The Pomurje Hungarian Radio (MMR) is part of the Slovenian national broadcaster, it has become a cross-border regional radio station. In Lendava also Hungarian public school institutions are operating.

Slovene cultural institutions in Hungary are concentrated in the area of Szentgotthárd, where the Association of Slovenes of Hungary is operating. This organisation has ten cultural artist groups, regularly organising various cultural events, art workshops for adults and children (painting, sculpturing), publishing volumes and offering language courses also for the non-Slovenian local population and operating the sample-farm at Felsőöszölnök through its non-profit ltd. Szentgotthárd is also the seat of the Slovene-language Radio Monošter. The general consulate of the Republic of Slovenia is located in Szentgotthárd, also Hungary has a general consulate in Lendava. The Slovene minority self-government is seated in Felsőöszölnök. It maintains two public primary schools, in Felsőöszölnök and in Apátistvánfalva.

As regards lessons learned, in terms of institutional cooperation capCROSSplan project’s goal was to establish strong cross-border network of development organisations in the border area and to prepare suitable initiatives and suggestions for the regional development. Similar activity is done by SIHU PRO project in the case of the supported cross-border touristic projects. In the programming period 2014-2020 three projects were supported which can be considered as relevant project for people-to-people actions. All projects focused on the development of cultural assets (e-documenta Pannonica, Back in the Day, Folk Music Heritage). Experienced in the past, the culture can be a significant topic for the people-to-people cooperation. Other hand the improvement of common actions between various communities is also important, including the learning of foreign languages. The existed cooperation can mean the basis of further new projects. In the future the small-scale projects should reach the smaller communities with capability of implementation cross-border projects.

The relevant statements of the Impact Evaluation of the Cooperation Programme Interreg V–A Slovenia–Hungary 2014–2020 carried out in 2020 are the followings: The institution building “projects generally focused on networking, cooperation and connecting of the institutions and organisations in the whole cross-border area. This could be achieved by exchanging experience, organising workshops, preparing databases and promotion. All these efforts have improved conditions for greater future cooperation in the cross-border region. The main impact that can be directly attributed to the programme is the stakeholders’ perception that it is necessary to establish connections and cooperation with partners across the border in order to develop the region as a whole. Another important impact is the increased capacity of the stakeholders and target groups involved, which was achieved through workshops, sharing of good practices, study visits and exchange of employees in the field of economic development of the area.” Furthermore, “in order to achieve a greater and more lasting impact in the future, the next CP should more effectively built by fostering the achievement of projects already implemented. This can be done via strategic cross-border project(s), capitalisation projects, linking of similar projects that are implemented at the same time and a small project fund.”

Complementarity and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments

The planned interventions of the cross-border program should focus primarily on those thematic areas that are decisive in the border area, e.g. nature protection, tourism and institutional, people-to-people connections. Projects should support cooperation between organizations on both sides of the border. The national programmes primarily aim at developments and investments within the country borders. At project level, it should be examined that there is no overlap between activities between projects in national and cross-border programmes.

Projects financed by INTERREG programmes have cross-border effects and therefore a special character compared to the projects financed by national programmes.

In the case of Hungary, the document of “Partnership Agreement for Hungary on the European structural and investment funds” for 2021-2027 period served as the basis for the analysis of synergies with the Interreg programme. The projects financed from the operational programmes in the frame of the Partnership Agreement can supplement the outputs or the effect of cross-border projects. In the case of Hungary the following synergies can be realized according to the Specific Objectives of the Slovenia—Hungary Interreg Programme 2021-2027:

- Biodiversity and reduced pollution (SO 2.7.) – The Environmental and Energy Efficiency OP+ can finance supplementary projects
- Culture and tourism (SO 2.6) – The Economic Development and Innovation OP+ can finance supplementary projects initiated by Órség National Park. Territorial and settlement development OP + Plus can finance projects of municipalities in the field of tourist attraction.
- Better cooperation governance (ISO1) – Digital Renewal OP+ can finance projects for development of the state and local level governance institutions.

In case of Slovenia, there is no relevant information about the planned operational programmes within the framework of the Partnership Agreement and therefore the potential synergies or complementarities with national programmes will be assessed later.

1.2.7. Correlation with macro-regional strategies

In case of the correlation with macro regional strategies, only the thematic fields of the selected Specific Objectives of Interreg Programme 2021-2027 are assessed.

PO 2 – a greener, low-carbon Europe:

Concerning protection of natural assets, a very high synergy can be observed with the EUSDR (EU Strategy for the Danube Region), where Pillar 2 is entirely dedicated to the protection of environment, including PA4 aiming at the improvement of water quality, PA5 focusing on reducing environmental risks and PA6 supporting biodiversity, landscapes, air and soil quality. EUSAIR (EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region) also includes environmental protection as one of four key intervention areas. Topic 2 aims at the improvement of transnational terrestrial habitats and biodiversity. Within this intervention area the highest correlation is expected with Action 1, targeting the development of joint management plans for cross-border habitats and ecosystems, with specific focus on NATURA 2000 sites.

PO 4 – a more social and inclusive Europe:

Both EUSDR and EUSAIR put significant focus on development of natural and cultural heritage-based tourism assets. EUSDR deals with tourism in PA3 (“Culture and Tourism, People to People”) of Pillar 1 (“Connecting the region”). Proposed interventions of Slovenia-Hungary Interreg Programme provide valuable contributions to most Actions of this PA, via promoting sustainable tourism, cultural activities, creative sectors and cultural heritage (Actions 1, 2, 5 and 6). Pillar 4 of the EUSAIR is entirely dedicated to sustainable tourism under Topic 1 (“Diversified tourism offer”), especially Action 5 (focused on the establishment of sustainable and thematic tourist routes, Action 6 (fostering the cultural heritage of the macro-region) and Actions 7-8 (improving tourism products and their accessibility). EUSAIR also supports actions under Topic 2 of the pillar (“Sustainable and responsible tourism management”), via measures expanding the tourist season, and building a more sustainable and responsible tourism sector (Actions 4 and 7). Specific actions of Pillar 4 of the EUSAIR target sustainable tourism either through the enhanced access to finances of tourism SMEs or the support of internationalisation of tourism SMEs.

ISO 1 – a better cooperation governance:

Governance and cooperation are important cross-cutting areas for both related macro-regional strategies (EUSDR and EUSAIR). In addition to that, EUSDR has also a dedicated PA focusing on improved institutional capacities and enhanced cooperation between macro-regional stakeholders (PA10 under Pillar 4 titled “Strengthening the region”). Proposed interventions of Slovenia-Hungary Interreg Programme contribute to the improved institutional capacities for high-quality public services (Action 1), better administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions (Action 2), enhanced cooperation between state and non-state actors (Action 6) and intensified involvement of civil society and local actors in governance (Action 7).

1.2.8. Programme vision, mission and delivery principles

The vision of the cross-border programme for the programme area is to establish an active and cooperating border region that is aware of its environmental, natural and cultural values, promotes their sustainable utilisation, equally preservation and exploitation for tourism purposes, setting up a well identifiable and attractive green tourism destination. In terms of implementation, the programme aims at the continuation and capitalisation of the initiatives launched in the previous periods, however opening up opportunities to identify new thematic areas for cooperation, as well as offering support to people-to-people cooperation.

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: Justification for selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
PO 2 – a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	SO 2.7 - enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution	1. Green border region	<p>The programme area has extensive green territories with significant natural values and high rate of biodiversity. The border area is located relatively far from main large urban centres, which results in relatively good air quality. The two national parks, one nature park, the Mura-Drava Danube UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, several Natura 2000 territories cover the most valuable part of the border area from biodiversity point of view that is a significant asset of the border region to be safeguarded. On the other hand, climate change affects the entire ecosystem that needs mitigation actions. The border region water management has particular challenges: low precipitation negatively affects ground water and surface water quantity, which, in combination with intensive agriculture, may reduce biodiversity.</p> <p>There is a high need for fostering cross-border initiatives for preservation of the existing flora and fauna and protecting valuable natural assets, and also to improve services with environmental interest contributing to sustainable economic growth of the bordering regions. Cross-border collaboration in water and disaster management is important for preservation of natural assets and reduction of pollution.</p>
PO 4 – a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European	SO 4.6 - enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic	2. Inclusive border region based on sustainable tourism	Tourism plays a very important role in the economy of the border area. The tourism offer, along with cultural elements, is very much natural-value based: health, eco, active, rural and wine tourism play the most important roles in the tourist turnover throughout the whole programme area. One of the biggest challenges of the tourism sector of the programme area is that the tourism

<p>Pillar of Social Rights</p>	<p>development, social inclusion and social innovation</p>		<p>demand is rather concentrated on both sides of the border region on the so-called tourism magnets, mainly on the famous wellness/health resorts with a great tourist turnover, while the majority of rural areas are less visited by tourists. COVID-19 and possible further pandemics may affect competitiveness of the border region's tourism, generating higher demand to nature and health-oriented tourism. Great potential and similarities of the tourism sectors on the two sides of the border provide good opportunities to align them into cross-border tourism products.</p> <p>Cooperation should focus on creation, further development, multiplication of joint tourism products and services by development of sustainable tourism models, with special focus on lesser-known areas. Besides new or updated tourism products connected tourism services should be developed in line with the sustainability principle, paying attention to social inclusion and social innovation. Lesser-known areas that build on local capabilities and products should be promoted and connected to existing tourism magnets. Sustainable mobility connections should be developed and promoted, including cross-border ones. High emphasis should be put on development of joint tourism quality standards and establishment of cross-border tourism destination models. There is also high need for human resource development in tourism sector (awareness raising actions, tourism-related trainings, skill developments).</p>
<p>ISO 1 "A better cooperation governance"</p>	<p>b) enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions</p> <p>c) build up mutual trust, in particular by</p>	<p>3. Cooperating border region</p>	<p>➤ Thematic cooperation</p> <p>Although both countries belong to unitary centralised states, public administration and governance structures show significant differences on regional and local level. Besides local governments and their institutions there are several stakeholders that may be carriers of thematic cooperation in areas that have been so far unrevealed for cross-border initiatives.</p> <p>Enhanced cooperation of local and regional governance structures are needed for the sake of identifying new areas of cross-border cooperation in various domains that represent challenges or opportunities for the cross-border area: <i>inter alia</i> in energy efficiency, utilisation of renewable energy resources, circular economy, cross-border urban mobility, e-mobility, education and labour market cooperation, social and health care, with particular attention to ageing population. Projects should focus on identifying obstacles, providing solutions, preparing and implementing pilots, fostering digitalisation, transferring good practices.</p> <p>➤ People-to-people cooperation</p> <p>The border region is traditionally characterised by a positive and cooperative relationship between the two</p>

	<p>encouraging people-to-people actions</p>		<p>sides. Local governments, civil and cultural organisations are active players. Also, mutual existence of minorities provides a good basis for cooperation.</p> <p>In order to build mutual trust, promotion of cultural exchange and dialogue support is essential to civil organisations, operating in the following fields: culture, including minority languages, sport, youth activities. Projects should focus on establishment of durable cooperation and involvement of local population from both sides of the border.</p>
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