



COOPERATION PROGRAMME

INTERREG VI-A
AUSTRIA – CZECHIA 2021-2027

Version 1



Research & Innovation



Climate & Environment



Education, Culture & Tourism



Cross-border Governance

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Abbreviations

CP	Cooperation Programme
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ISO	Interreg Specific Objective
MS	Member State
PG	Programming Group
PO	Policy Objective
R&D&I	Research, development and innovation
SCO	Simplified Cost Option
SO	Specific Objective
SPF	Small Project Fund

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NUTS regions covered by the programme	<p>Waldviertel (AT124)</p> <p>Weinviertel (AT125)</p> <p>Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen (AT121)</p> <p>St. Pölten (AT123)</p> <p>Wiener Umland – Nordteil (AT126)</p> <p>Wien (AT130)</p> <p>Mühlviertel (AT313)</p> <p>Innviertel (AT311)</p> <p>Linz-Wels (AT312)</p> <p>Steyr-Kirchdorf (AT314)</p> <p>Jihočeský kraj (CZ031)</p> <p>Kraj Vysočina (CZ063)</p> <p>Jihomoravský kraj (CZ064)</p>
Component of Interreg	1

1. Overall programme strategy

1.1. Programme area

The following NUTS-3 regions form the Austrian-Czech border region: in Austria Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen, St. Pölten, Waldviertel, Weinviertel, Wiener Umland-Nordteil, Wien, Innviertel, Linz-Wels, Mühlviertel, Steyr-Kirchdorf; in the Czech Republic: Jihočeský kraj, Kraj Vysočina, Jihomoravský kraj.

The border region between Austria and the Czech Republic has around 6.5 million inhabitants (2018) it is characterized on the one hand by rural villages and small and medium sized towns, and on the other hand by the urban agglomerations of Vienna, Brno and Linz. Around 80% of the settlements are villages with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. Vienna (1.9 million) and Brno (380,000) are the most important centres in the region. The numerous medium-sized and small cities in the region function as regional administrative and local economic centres (Linz 205,000, St. Pölten 55,000, České Budějovice 94,000, Jihlava 51,000).

Table 1: Cooperation Programme INTERREG Austria – Czechia border regions 2021-2027

Country	NUTS-3	Belongs to NUTS-2
Austria	Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen (AT121)	Niederösterreich (AT12)
	St. Pölten (AT123)	
	Waldviertel (AT124)	
	Weinviertel (AT125)	
	Wiener Umland – Nordteil (AT126)	
	Wien (AT130)	Wien (AT13)
	Innviertel (AT311)	Oberösterreich (AT31)
	Linz-Wels (AT312)	
	Mühlviertel (AT313)	
	Steyr-Kirchdorf (AT314)	
Czech Republic	Jihočeský kraj (CZ031)	Jihozápad (CZ03)
	Kraj Vysočina (CZ063)	Jihovýchod (CZ06)
	Jihomoravský kraj (CZ064)	

Source: Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung (2019); letter from the EC 02/2021

Figure 1: Programme area Interreg Austria – Czechia 2021-2027

Source: <https://www.at-cz.eu/at/programm/programmgebiet>

1.2. Summary of main joint challenges, taking into account economic, social and territorial disparities, joint investment needs and complimentary with other forms of support, 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

1.2.1. Demography

Challenges related to demography

Overall, the border region shows a positive population trend and grew by +3.2% between 2014 and 2018. The strongest growth was recorded in Vienna (+6.9%), followed by Linz-Wels (+4.7%) and Wiener Umland/Nordteil (+4.5%). With the exception of Waldviertel (0.0%) and Kraj Vysočina (-0.3%), all sub-regions experienced population growth.

Table 2 shows the population structure (2014, 2018) and the change between 2014-2018 for both countries, as well as for the border regions and sub-regions.

The overall population growth in the programme area (+3.2%) is driven mainly by the Austrian border regions (+4.7%) and especially Vienna, Wiener Umland and Linz-Wels (i.e. less-rural areas). Population growth in the Austrian part of the programme area (+4.7%) was stronger than the Austrian average (+3.7%).

In comparison, the Czech part of the programme has grown much more slowly (+0.7%). The Kraj Vysočina sub-region showed a decrease in total population of -0.3% from 2014 to 2018, while Jihočeský kraj saw an increase of +0.5% and Jihomoravský kraj an increase of +1.1%. Growth in the Czech programme area (+0.7%) was weaker than the Czech national average (+0.9%).

The natural change of population through births and deaths is nearly the same in Austria as in the Czech Republic. The population growth in the joint border region is therefore mainly caused by net migration in Austria which mainly occurs in less-rural NUTS-3 regions (EUROSTAT, 2019c) (net migration is low or even negative in the Czech Republic; for Kraj Vysočina it has been negative since 2009).

The population aged 65 or older is growing significantly in the Czech Republic and the Czech border regions, where this group grew by more than 11% from 2014 to 2018. In the Austrian border region the growth for the same group was only 4.8%.

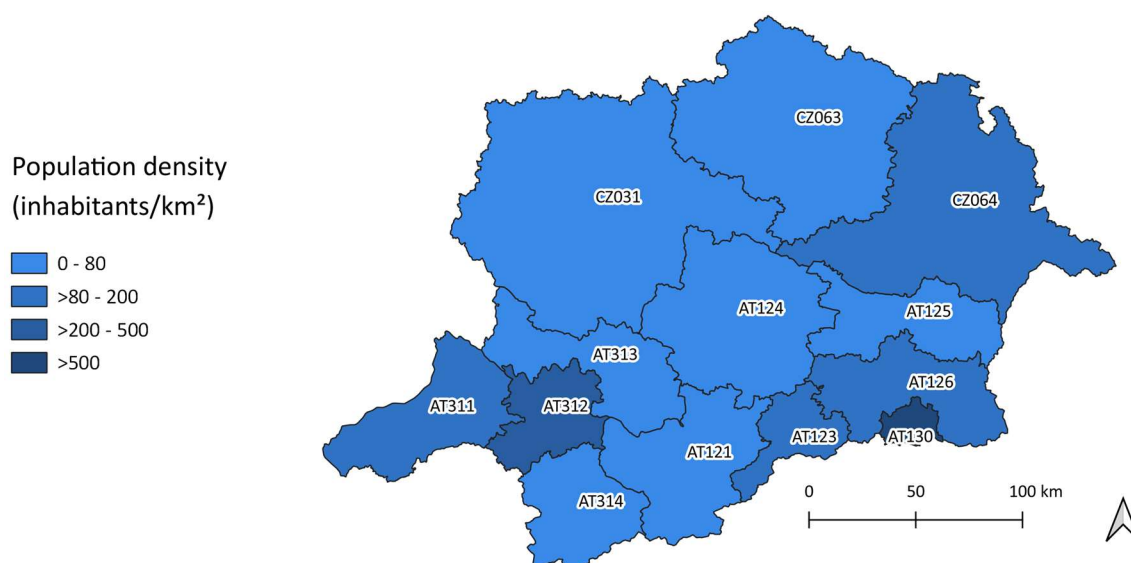
The growing population of older people also becomes visible through the change in the median age from 2014 to 2018. In the Czech border region the median age (42.3 years) is lower than in most Austrian border regions (average 43.1 years), but the increase from 2014 to 2018 was higher in the Czech part (between 1.4 and 1.7 years) than in the Austrian part (0.4 years on average). This confirms, that in the Czech part the aging population is growing faster than in the Austrian border regions.

Table 2: Population distribution 2018 and development 2014-2018

Region	2014			2018			Development 2014-2018		
	Total	Women	Aged 65+	Total	Women	Aged 65+	Total	Women	Aged 65+
Austria (total)	8.507.786	4.352.447	1.556.658	8.822.267	4.483.749	1.646.992	3,7%	3,0%	5,8%
Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen	241.727	121.712	42.944	246.050	123.416	44.944	1,8%	1,4%	4,7%
Sankt Pölten	149.510	76.160	28.250	154.885	78.435	29.762	3,6%	3,0%	5,4%
Waldviertel	218.249	110.618	46.651	218.161	109.933	48.233	0,0%	-0,6%	3,4%
Weinviertel	123.141	62.307	25.548	124.893	63.090	27.138	1,4%	1,3%	6,2%
Wiener Umland/Nordteil	312.952	159.670	58.777	327.072	166.495	62.873	4,5%	4,3%	7,0%
Wien	1.766.746	916.150	300.390	1.888.776	968.011	310.781	6,9%	5,7%	3,5%
Innviertel	276.781	139.255	48.196	286.047	142.935	51.223	3,3%	2,6%	6,3%
Linz-Wels	560.587	287.015	99.815	587.029	298.282	105.849	4,7%	3,9%	6,0%
Mühlviertel	204.708	101.876	33.270	208.483	103.401	35.868	1,8%	1,5%	7,8%
Steyr-Kirchdorf	152.309	77.128	28.757	155.445	78.262	30.346	2,1%	1,5%	5,5%
AT - Border region	4.006.710	2.051.891	712.598	4.196.841	2.132.260	747.017	4,7%	3,9%	4,8%
AT - Border region without Vienna*	2.239.964	1.135.741	412.208	2.308.065	1.164.249	436.236	3,0%	2,5%	5,8%
Czech Republic (total)	10.512.419	5.350.039	1.825.544	10.610.055	5.390.264	2.040.183	0,9%	0,8%	11,8%
Jihočeský kraj	636.707	322.871	111.254	640.196	324.183	125.171	0,5%	0,4%	12,5%
Kraj Vysočina	510.209	256.939	90.271	508.916	256.205	100.357	-0,3%	-0,3%	11,2%
Jihomoravský kraj	1.170.078	597.545	207.776	1.183.207	603.055	229.228	1,1%	0,9%	10,3%
CZ - Border region	2.316.994	1.177.355	409.301	2.332.319	1.183.443	454.756	0,7%	0,5%	11,1%
AT-CZ - Border region	6.323.704	3.229.246	1.121.899	6.529.160	3.315.703	1.201.773	3,2%	2,7%	7,1%

Source: EUROSTAT (2019a)

Regions in the programme area are very heterogeneous with respect to their population density (Figure 2). This is very low in two Austrian regions directly on the border (Waldviertel and Weinviertel, with 48.1 and 52.3 inhabitants per square kilometre, respectively). Population density in the Czech border regions of Jihočeský kraj (66.5/km²) and Kraj Vysočina (72.5/km²) are also low. All these regions show stagnating (or even decreasing) population density from 2005 to 2017.

Figure 2: Population density (inhabitants/km²) 2017

CZ031: Jihočeský kraj, CZ063: Kraj Vysočina, CZ064: Jihomoravský kraj, AT121: Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen, AT123: Sankt Pölten, AT124: Waldviertel, AT125: Weinviertel, AT126: Wiener Umland/Nordteil, AT130: Wien, AT311: Innviertel, AT312: Linz-Wels, AT313: Mühlviertel, AT314: Steyr-Kirchdorf,

Source: EUROSTAT (2019d)

Rural regions close to the urban centres are mostly dynamic, as measured in both demographic and economic terms. The peripheral parts, which are poorly connected to economic urban centres, are declining in terms of both population and jobs. The programme area as a whole shows an overall positive trend in terms of population development, but rural and peripheral regions are declining in terms of population and jobs. This results in growing regional disparities between urban and rural areas. Ageing society leads to several challenges, ranging from the labour market to the supply of health services. The demographic change will create a greater need for health and social institutions. Document analysis of the evaluation of the 2014-2020 programming period showed a strong need for change in the social and healthcare sector to provide common solutions to the demographic change and deal with the associated challenges.

1.2.2. Economic capacity and structure, business development

Challenges related to economic capacity

Economic capacity in the programme regions shows strong disparities between Austria and the Czech Republic (Table 3). In 2016, the Austrian border regions had a GDP of 175.2 billion €, while the GDP in the Czech border regions was 34.7 billion € in the same year. The total economic capacity in the programme region was therefore 209.95 billion € in 2016, an increase of 90 billion € compared to the year 2000. Driven especially by the Austrian regions of Vienna and Linz-Wels, the GDP per capita in the programme region was 32,589 € in 2016. GDP per capita in 2016 shows strong disparities between the Austrian (42,532 € per inhabitant) and Czech border regions (14,950 € per inhabitant). On the other hand, there is also heterogeneity between the cross-border regions at NUTS-3 level, in particular on the Austrian side.

Table 3: Total GDP and GDP per capita for 2000, 2005, 2010, 2016

Region	Total GDP (Mio. €)				GDP per capita (€ per inhabitant)			
	2000	2005	2010	2016	2000	2005	2010	2016
Austria (total)	213.606,48	254.075,03	295.896,64	356.237,59	26.700,00	30.900,00	35.400,00	40.800,00
Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen	4.778,06	5.464,20	6.354,92	7.796,79	20.400,00	22.800,00	26.400,00	31.800,00
Sankt Pölten	3.647,42	4.453,02	5.396,41	6.507,99	26.000,00	30.500,00	36.400,00	42.400,00
Waldviertel	3.946,61	4.556,50	5.219,07	6.246,63	16.700,00	20.500,00	23.800,00	28.500,00
Weinviertel	1.721,18	1.894,13	2.253,74	2.763,82	13.300,00	15.300,00	18.200,00	22.200,00
Wiener Umland/Nordteil	4.840,81	5.970,35	7.561,48	8.790,60	18.900,00	20.700,00	24.800,00	27.300,00
Wien	57.659,46	67.364,39	78.130,06	91.221,72	37.200,00	41.000,00	46.100,00	49.200,00
Innviertel	5.089,58	6.307,78	7.616,48	9.871,90	18.800,00	23.000,00	27.700,00	34.900,00
Linz-Wels	18.094,78	21.629,58	25.335,50	29.721,14	34.400,00	40.200,00	46.200,00	51.300,00
Mühlviertel	2.916,81	3.404,72	4.137,10	5.543,34	14.800,00	16.700,00	20.300,00	26.700,00
Steyr-Kirchdorf	3.946,61	4.887,18	5.516,55	6.768,21	25.700,00	31.900,00	36.100,00	43.700,00
AT - Border region*	106.641,32	125.931,85	147.521,31	175.232,14	-	-	-	42.531,87
AT - Border region without Vienna*	48.981,86	58.567,46	69.391,25	84.010,42				36.850,00
Czech Republic (total)	66.838,76	109.627,66	156.718,24	176.370,13	6.500,00	10.700,00	14.900,00	16.700,00
Jihočeský kraj	3.830,34	6.065,91	8.018,08	8.775,47	6.100,00	9.700,00	12.600,00	13.800,00
Kraj Vysočina	2.771,45	4.491,31	6.133,37	6.985,78	5.300,00	8.800,00	11.900,00	13.700,00
Jihomoravský kraj	6.702,23	10.826,00	16.140,34	18.956,98	5.900,00	9.600,00	14.000,00	16.100,00
CZ - Border region*	13.304,02	21.383,22	30.291,79	34.718,23	-	-	-	14.949,71
AT-CZ - Border region*	119.945,34	147.315,07	177.813,10	209.950,37	-	-	-	32.589,08

*GDP per capita for the border regions as a group has been calculated by the project team, since data are not available for this agglomeration of regions.

Source: EUROSTAT (2019e)

Comparing the average annual growth of total GDP in the programme regions for three different periods (2000-2016, 2005-2016, 2010-2016) shows an interesting pattern. In the Austrian border regions the annual growth rates stay the same during all three programming periods. In the Czech regions, on the other hand, there are differences in growth rates between the three programming periods. In the first years of the Czech Republic's membership of the European Union, growth reached a very high level before flattening in later years. In Jihočeský kraj, for example, the annual rate of GDP increase was 5.3% per year from 2000 to 2016, 3.4% from 2005 to 2016, and 1.5% from 2010 to 2016. Similar developments can be observed for Kraj Vysočina, Jihomoravský kraj and the Czech Republic as a whole.

In Austria, on the contrary, the average annual growth of GDP is more stable: lower in the long term, but higher since 2016. The catching-up process of the Czech regions in terms of economic performance has therefore slowed down considerably, indicating competitiveness problems.

Nevertheless those statistical data are from before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it can be assumed that the economic and employment situation in the region has dramatically worsened during the 2020 year.

Challenges related to economic structure

By comparing the economic structure by gross value added (GVA), the following differences between Austrian and Czech border regions can be observed:

Both regions have a strong industrial sector (20% of GVA in the Austrian border regions, 32% in the Czech border regions), including a large manufacturing sector (17% of GVA in Austria, 27% in the Czech regions). The Czech programme area is clearly more industry-oriented whereas in the Austrian border region private and public services are more distinctive. Without Vienna, however, the differences would be smaller.

In the Austrian border regions only 14% of all employed people work in the industrial sector, which has a GVA share of 19.5%. The difference of 5.5 percentage points demonstrates productivity gains in the industrial sector driven by investments in technology, innovation and research.

In the Czech border regions, 29.8% of people are employed in industry, which accounts for 32.4% of GVA (a difference of only 2.5 percentage points).

In the Austrian border regions the share of employment in public administration, education and health is about 8% points larger than their share of GVA. In the Czech border regions, on the other hand, the corresponding gap is only about 3% points indicating of more productive services.

Challenges related to business development

Growth in the number of active enterprises in the Czech Republic and its border regions since 2013 has been very positive. The number of enterprises in the CZ border regions grew by more than 13,000 (+5.9%) from 2013 to 2016. The opposite is true for the Austrian border regions, where a decrease of -4.7% has been observed. As a consequence, the development of active enterprises in the AT-CZ border region stagnated between 2013 and 2016 (+0.3%) (EUROSTAT, 2019g).

The enterprise landscape in the Czech border regions is more dynamic than in the Austrian regions. This is shown by higher enterprise birth rates in the Czech border regions, accompanied by higher enterprise death rates. The Austrian enterprise landscape is in general more stable, with higher enterprise survival rates (i.e. share of enterprises founded in 2013 and still active in 2016) at national level (Austria 63%, Czech Republic 60.3%). In the Austrian border region (without Vienna), 64.9% of all companies founded in 2013 were still active in 2016, compared to 61.3% in the Czech border regions. The cross-border area's current performance shows that it is in the middle range with respect to enterprise birth and death rates and the share of high-growth enterprises in comparison to other EU regions. The framework conditions are poor in terms of infrastructure and market size. Cross-border support networks for start-ups could help to address these challenges.

To sum it up, there are strong disparities in economic performance between the Austrian and Czech border regions and strong disparities in economic performance between conurbations and rural border areas. There are no indications that these disparities are diminishing; on the contrary, the levels of economic development are expected to diverge.

Again this does not reflect the latest changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly in the hospitality sector business development has literally stopped for almost a year which will have a considerable impact on the business development in the region.

Challenges related to digitalisation

Fostering digitisation is a key challenge for boosting innovation and productivity and increasing internationalization and competitiveness in the region. Digitalisation requires new ways of thinking and investment in digital infrastructure, information and communication technology and digital competences. While the digital revolution is global, the pace of adaptation and policy reaction will be largely national or regional, taking into account the different economic structures and social preferences.

The daily frequency of computer use has gone up in both countries, particularly at the end of the last programming period in the Czech Republic, which had a daily frequency of computer use by individuals of 23% in 2012. In 2017, the daily frequency of computer use in the Czech Republic was 66% – a significant development. The level of internet access of both Austrian and Czech households has also gone up. While Austria is above the EU average (87%), the Czech Republic still lags slightly behind, with 83% of households having internet access.

Productivity in the service sector can be increased, for example through digital applications. As digitalisation does not end at borders, there is a development opportunity for cooperation in this field. Furthermore, digital literacy and the implementation of digitalisation in different sectors are of increasing importance.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown how important digitalisation is and how much the region is lagging behind in the necessary infrastructure.

Lessons learned from the 2014-2020 programming period

Attention should be paid primarily to the benefits of cooperation to **create structural effects** and to the dismantling of barriers in the cross-border region. In the context of the specific objectives, it is important to review those issues for which cross-border cooperation is necessary and/or for which beneficial and thematic foci should be identified (e.g. thematic focus in RTI). The heterogeneity of the programme region also needs to be taken into account.

In rural areas, and especially areas close to the border, disparities between the two countries are even more evident and it is clear that these regions suffer from structural disadvantages. Cooperation Programme INTERREG Austria – Czechia 2021-2027 can focus on cross-border cooperative interventions to increase the quality of life in the border area and to dismantle barriers. In urban areas, Cooperation Programme INTERREG Austria – Czechia 2021-2027 can add value if it focuses on urban qualities through which cross-border cooperation competences are strengthened and international visibility is increased, thus helping these cities and towns to face international competition.

It is important to equip the **population**, particularly young people, with specific skills and qualification to be able to adapt easily to the changing work environment. The provision of common qualifications and education is therefore crucial. Labour and student mobility are essential elements when dealing with the changing nature of work. Furthermore, the integration of SMEs and large enterprises in the qualification system will continue to play an important role.

As **digitalisation** does not end at borders, there is a development opportunity for cooperation in this field. Cooperation between institutions can provide a forum for addressing the challenges posed by the digital revolution and bringing it forward.

Needs for cooperation

In summary, when addressing disparities and the levels of economic development there is a need to:

- focus on reducing barriers and achieving structural cooperation effects;
- in addition, continue the smaller-scale activities to lower the threshold for new interventions and to reach small beneficiaries;
- consider the different needs and potentials of rural and urban areas, and follow differentiated strategies for these;
- implement digitalisation in a horizontal way.

1.2.3. Research and innovation

Challenges related to research and innovation

The region shows strong, though dispersed, R&D&I potential. The main drivers are the three urban areas of Vienna, Linz-Wels and Brno, which are home of the majority of the regions' R&D&I and economic potential. With economies of scale gained through sharing of R&D&I facilities, regional innovation can leverage potential in rural border areas.

Despite some territorial heterogeneity in terms of research and innovation spending, there is a strong potential for joint R&D&I actions on this topic in the territory. While in the private sector the level of R&D expenditure per capita varies on both sides of the border, its growth rate in

recent years has been comparable and relatively dynamic. The region's innovation potential could also be illustrated by comparing research and development expenditure in the private sector with the national level: in the Czech part of the programme area this corresponds approximately to the Czech national average, while in the Austrian part it significantly exceeds the Austrian average.

As far as science and research staff (in the private sector) are concerned, the situation on both sides of the border is markedly similar: both around 4.3 FTE per 1000 inhabitants. There is a significant concentration in urban areas, which also naturally concentrate the highest potential for cross-border research and innovation solutions.

The border region is generally well-equipped with research and development facilities. Among others these bodies have a strong potential to give SMEs access to R&D&I results, and so assure the practical application of these results in the private as well as the public sector. Cross-border cooperation between thematically specialised institutes can lead to complementary research projects based on the division of work.

An important challenge for the cross-border innovation environment is the mobility and exchange of experts and research staff.

The full integration of SMEs into the innovation system, as well as cross-border matching of innovative firms with partners (research institutions, for example), are important needs to be addressed in the border region. SMEs play a crucial role in innovation policy, as they are likely to face barriers when innovating or commercialising their innovations.

Cross-border cooperation is an opportunity to create and strengthen R&D&I platforms in order to unlock the full potential of R&D in the region's economic development. This is not limited to sharing good practice in technology transfer and related fields; cooperation could also increase market availability for local R&D institutions and give them the opportunity to engage in global networks.

Lessons learned from the 2014-2020 programming period

The supported research projects, which in some cases also include the establishment of hard infrastructure, strengthen the innovation system in the cross-border area and benefit the organisations involved (scientific publications and higher visibility). The cross-border approach shows positive structural effects through joint capacity building and with strong prospects for continuous cooperation. However, the joint projects strengthen existing (informal) links rather than creating new cooperation.

From experience, direct SME support under Interreg has limited success due to the administrative burden of Interreg projects. It is therefore recommended to support projects that address the needs of SMEs and / or provide research infrastructure usable for research and innovation activities that will benefit SMEs.

In future programmes, attention should be paid to the specific added value (structural effects) in combination with scientific fields of high relevance in the cross-border area (e.g. based on common foci in the regional smart specialisation strategies, where the current programme shows high potential e.g. in life sciences, biotechnologies).

Needs for cooperation

In summary, there is a need to

- close missing links between R&D&I project results and concrete applications;
- reduce insufficient facilities and equipment in R&D centres;
- address the slow adaptation to global trends such as digitalisation which could offer development opportunities for local businesses;
- reduce the insufficient involvement of SMEs in R&D activities, and insufficient access by SMEs to results of R&D&I;
- improve resource efficiency through eco-innovation.

1.2.4. Climate change and environment

Challenges related to climate change

Climate change clearly constitutes a long-term determining factor for the border region. Cross-border cooperation in this field is already well advanced and is thus a valuable instrument to effectively address mutual challenges arising from climate change, such as disaster risk assessment and management, flood protection, etc.

It is expected that regions on both sides of the border will be affected in similar ways by climate change, including more heatwaves, less summer rain, higher water temperatures, more forest fires, and reduced economic value of forests. Natural areas and forestry form different functional areas in the programme region.

The most important problems caused by the forecast climate change are:

- natural hazards with risks to infrastructure, buildings and economic activities;
- droughts and water shortages will have consequences for energy production and agriculture;
- heatwaves are especially a problem in cities and urban agglomerations (e.g. health problems, energy and water supply, and infrastructure).

Adapting to the consequences of climate change has become a major challenge. It ranges from ensuring a tolerable microclimate in cities to adaptation in forestry, agriculture and ecosystems, and the future of tourism. Activities to adapt to climate change in rural areas are primarily supported through rural development instruments (EAFRD) with only national scope. To address climate change in the border region there is a need to enhance the exchange of know-how and data.

In the last 20 years, the border region has regularly suffered from catastrophic floods and some smaller ones. The risk of floods and other natural disasters, and their cross-border impacts, are increased by the local character of the landscape, particularly soil stability, as well as being affected by the general drainage pattern described below. Activities in flood control and flood protection have been expanded, especially in the Austrian regions.

Agriculture and forestry suffer from species displacement and soil erosion due to changing temperatures and precipitation, one-off events such as heavy rain and hailstorms, and invasive animal and plant pests.

However, climate change often triggers effects at local level, meaning that towns and municipalities are increasingly exposed to risks such as storms, floods and heatwaves. In order for municipalities to develop sustainable structures and solutions, they should prepare for the consequences of climate change today.

Challenges related to risk management

With regard to cross-border fire protection, rescue services and civil protection there are, still many obstacles to joint or shared emergency services. Different regulations and administrative practices between Austria and the Czech Republic, and competences spread across different levels of government in each country, lead to losses in efficiency and flexibility in the case of emergencies that have cross-border relevance.

Challenges related to water resources

The cross-border region covers several water catchment areas, each of which constitutes a functional area. The Vysočina region is the main continental divide between the Elbe and Danube river systems and thus covers two watersheds. The Jihočeský region is drained to the north by the river Vltava into the North Sea, as is the north-western part of the Vysočina region. In the Jihočeský region, the eastern part of the Jindřichův Hradec district, the south-eastern part of Vysočina and practically all of the Jihomoravský region drain to the south, to the Austrian side of the border and ultimately the Black Sea.

The Austrian section of the programme area has only very limited drainage to the north: in the north-eastern part of the Waldviertel and the northern part of the Mühlviertel. Most of the Austrian programme area drains to the south. This geographic situation has immediate influence on the watercourses and water regimes in the border region, and is important when analysing the risks of flooding and water pollution.

In Austria only 8% of the surface water bodies have “poor” ecological status and only 2% “bad” status. The general situation in the Austrian border region is very good, though deficiencies were identified mainly in the eastern part of the region.

In the Czech part of the region, the quality of surface water has improved. Significant improvement during the last 10 or 15 years is especially noticeable in the Vysočina and Jihomoravský regions, where water pollution in the monitored sections has decreased by 10%. The Czech part of the region, however, still does not meet the Aquis water treatment requirements. The deficit is especially obvious in the Vysočina region: in 2008, 85% of surface water in the region was treated, which is the lowest proportion in the Czech Republic. The Jihočeský and Jihomoravský regions are doing better, with around 95% of surface water treated in 2008.

The European Water Framework Directive (WFD) provides a well-developed legal framework for water protection. The central objective of the WFD is to achieve “good” status for groundwater and surface water bodies by 2027 at the latest. The cooperation programme can make a targeted contribution on a transboundary scale to accelerated implementation of the legal obligations under the WFD.

Groundwater and surface water are part of the water ecosystem. The entire functional area should therefore be an important topic in the programme. Together with an integrated approach to water protection in linked to ecology. The functional areas need a better water management to protect the water resources.

Challenges related to natural areas and biodiversity

With regard to the conservation of biological diversity, the strength of the border area lies in the large number of protected areas of different classifications in the Austrian and Czech regions. The border region covers a diverse landscape comprising five national parks (including the Thayatal-Podyjí cross-border national park), eight large protected landscape areas, nine nature parks and many Natura 2000 sites (250 in AT, 387 in CZ) and some biosphere parks. The Waldviertel ponds are an internationally important wetland (‘Ramsar’) site directly along the border on the Austrian side, plus several other Ramsar sites within the cross-border area. Besides these clearly defined sites, the entire so-called “Green Belt” serves as a functional area. Most of these preserved areas are essential for recreation and tourism.

On the other hand, several areas within the border regions in both Austria and the Czech Republic are assessed as having low levels of Green Infrastructure (GI) networks, with a medium capacity to deliver ecosystem services and low capacity to provide habitat and connectivity for large mammals.

The conservation status of NATURA 2000 protected areas is mostly not favourable and there is a high level of landscape fragmentation on both sides of the border (there is, however, evidence of the reintroduction of endangered animal and plant species).

A common challenge is posed through the fact that strategies for climate change adaptation, environmental protection and biodiversity in Austria and the Czech Republic are at different levels: some are the responsibility of the regions, while others operate at national level. None of them apply cross-border, although there are higher-level EC guidelines that apply to every Member State (e.g. EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, European Green Deal, EU commitment to global climate action under the Paris Agreement) and need to be addressed in a cross-border context.

Differing administrative structures make it difficult to coordinate conservation objectives and develop common organisational and implementation tools. Nature conservation is often not effective enough across borders because the respective national designations of protected areas do not match. Conflicts of interest in nature conservation and environmental protection are particularly evident at the border, for example when areas are designated under the Habitats Directive on one side and the Birds Directive on the other. Furthermore, research findings are difficult to put into practice in the absence of coordinated implementation instruments.

Another problem in nature conservation is the spread of invasive species. Climate change is leading to changes in flora and fauna, which poses an increasing risk. Some heat-loving species may benefit from climate change and thrive within the programme area. For other species, the increase in extreme weather events associated with climate change (e.g. long dry periods and heavy rainfall) represents an additional threat.

Comprehensive protected area management and re-cultivation contribute to the conservation and reintroduction of endangered animal and plant species. However, it is also necessary to give appropriate priority to protecting species and biotopes outside the protected areas.

Protected areas and their interlinked biotope systems represent the most important starting point for conserving biodiversity and adapting to climate change. Cooperation between these areas, both in terms of protected status and across national borders, is therefore an important topic for the Interreg programme. Identifiable results are to be achieved by selecting interconnected priority areas (networked green infrastructures).

Lessons learned from the 2014-2020 programming period

The programme contributes to the stability of regional ecosystems. The projects contribute to improved knowledge of the ecosystems themselves, their challenges and potential solutions. Coordinated approaches across the border are developed and measures to preserve the ecosystems are implemented. Awareness-raising measures are part of the projects. Sustainability of the results is guaranteed by the fact that all relevant responsible authorities on both sides of the border participate in the projects.

The cross-border approach shows positive structural effects by supporting long-term partnerships (e.g. national parks) which implement coordinated actions for common interests. Project results are included in national and institutional strategies.

Needs for cooperation

The cross-border programme does not have the capacity to address all climate change related challenges. Thus a selection of feasible aspects has been taken in the following summary of the needs and further actions:

- cooperation on practical climate policy;
- qualitatively developing and deepening cooperation on cross-border risk management such as fire protection, rescue services and civil protection;
- continuation of cooperation particularly to promote and broaden pilot implementation strategies for improving water quality in the border area;
- protection of the green infrastructure in the border region;
- improving the accessibility of green infrastructure and natural heritage for recreational purposes;
- transfer of knowledge gained from individual activities;
- longer-term monitoring of the success of the area protection measures;
- further supporting the conservation of biological diversity in the border area with both physical and non-physical protection measures.

1.2.5. Education and social inclusion

Challenges related to education

In general, there is a high level of education in the programme area. A large part of the population has attained secondary education level (for 54.7% of the population of this age group (15 years and older) this was the highest attained educational level). This is driven especially by the Czech border regions, where about 68% of the population report secondary education as their highest level (for the Austrian border region, including Vienna, the figure is 47.5%). At the same time, the Austrian border region has a larger percentage of the population with basic or no education (26.3%), and a larger percentage with the highest educational level (26.2%). According to the statistics, the Austrian part lacks the more highly qualified “middle” (secondary education level). The share of women with only basic or no education (25.7%) in the border region is slightly higher than for the population as a whole. This is true for both the Austrian and the Czech border regions.

The border region is well-equipped with educational facilities. There are universities in Vienna, Linz, Krems, Brno and České Budějovice. In Jihlava there is a College of Polytechnics, and a Faculty of Management was set up in Jindřichův Hradec. Higher vocational education is concentrated mostly in the large cities; Austria's *Fachhochschulen* are also located in medium and smaller towns to foster regional development and cooperation with regional/local enterprises. At secondary level the school systems offer both general and specialised education: there are technical schools, schools for management and business, and for health and social affairs.

In the Czech Republic as well as in Austria there is a mismatch between the qualifications available and the requirements of national and regional labour markets. The rate of adult participation in further education is still low and the figures fall further with advancing employee age. Additionally, a lower share of working-age population characterizes rural areas and the smallest municipalities. The countryside suffers from migration due to lack of employment opportunities.

Language barriers and low level of trust across the border remain a challenge for cross-border cooperation. The border-specific Eurobarometer survey carried out in 2015 put the Austria-Czech Republic border region at the bottom of the table in terms of respondents' perception of language barriers, cultural differences and lack of trust in people living on the other side of the border. In terms of the effect of language differences on cross-border cooperation, 78% see it as 'a problem', whereas 19% see it as 'not a problem at all'.

Education is an essential tool to connect the two sides of the border region. School cooperation, in particular, has the potential to increase young people's interest in their neighbours across the border, reducing prejudice and distrust. Cooperation in education and skills also increases the employability and skills of the people involved. Early childhood and primary education play a key role here. Existing partnerships and links between municipalities that provide pre-school and primary education represent a good basis for increased cooperation.

Cooperation in the education sector is still broadly institutionalised. More educational networks would therefore be needed, as they are an investment in future cooperation.

Regarding primary and secondary education, new joint learning programmes will be needed, since these could offer the best courses from different schools and make best use of know-how and specialisations. The exchange of knowledge and awareness-raising activities, as well as innovations in lifelong learning, have the potential to increase demand and supply (and quality) across the region, thereby helping to eliminate the structural difficulties of the labour market.

It is essential to assure a common and up-to-date educational and training equipment and to invest in education, training and vocational training for skills – actions that are already partly addressed in the current cooperation programme. Joint education and training are key to the development of the border region. Greater acceptance of qualifications across borders and an improved common framework for education and qualification could help tackle some of the issues.

The geography of the border region also offers excellent opportunities to increase the quality of education through cooperation from both countries.

Language and intercultural education is a central theme with high cross-border relevance, especially language learning programmes and links to education and qualification systems (joint schools, bilingual schools, recognition of qualifications).

Results from 15 years of Interreg projects are still not sufficiently taken into account in structural funding in the education sector, which is why education projects in this area still need to include innovative priorities (e.g. MINT, digitisation), aimed at language acquisition and intercultural education. Possibly a strategy to coordinate with the education departments could be a first step towards integrating this topic into the structural education landscape of the two countries involved.¹

Lessons learned from the 2014-2020 programming period

It is essential to develop a common educational and training infrastructure and invest in education, training and vocational training for skills, since this increases the employability and mutual understanding of the people involved. In particular, early childhood and primary education play a key role in this.

Needs for cooperation

In summary, the main needs in relation to education and its interrelation with the labour market in the border region are to:

- increase in the quality of the education sector and its interaction with the needs of the labour market and business sector;
- increase the quality of vocational training in cooperation with employers;
- find ways to overcome language barriers in the cross-border region and build trust among citizens as well as administrative bodies.

¹ ConnReg AT-CZ Datenanalyse, 27 February 2020, p. 66.

1.2.6. Tourism and cultural heritage

Challenges related to tourism and cultural heritage

The programme area is rich in cultural assets and tourist sites of distinctive cross-border value. Austria and the Czech Republic share a common historical and cultural heritage, both having for centuries been part of the former Austrian empire and Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. They have large numbers of protected historic monuments, objects of cultural property and UNESCO cultural heritage sites. In total, the programme region includes nearly 30,000 protected historic monuments, 51 objects of cultural property (Hague Convention 1954) and 12 UNESCO cultural heritage sites that offer potential for tourist exploitation and intangible cultural heritage (such as common history, contemporary art; language, folk culture (architecture), culinary heritage; religious heritage (e.g. monasteries in the border region), literature, visual arts (e.g. Czech design artists of the interwar period trained in Austria), music (e.g. reviving music collections through regional orchestras), bilingual museums; Their cross-border added value can be supported accordingly.

Tourism based on this cultural and natural heritage is an important economic factor in the programme region. This is shown by the number of establishments and bed-places within the programme region. Before the COVID-19 pandemic the number of establishments increased strongly, especially in Vienna (+1,364), Jihovýchod (+402) and Jihozápad (+302), from 2000 to 2018 (2000-2017 for the Czech regions). This strong growth can also be observed for the number of bed-places, which in the same period increased by 77% for Vienna, 121% for Jihozápad and 88% for Jihovýchod. The capacity for tourism in all three regions grew significantly more strongly than the national averages (AT: 12%; CZ: 64%).

The current economic situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the tourism and leisure industry. The uncertainties in this sector may leave long-term damage but might also open up new opportunities for local and regional tourism and leisure offers. . The fast and effective establishment of sustainable tourism locations, strengthening existing locations and creating diversification based on the rich cultural and natural heritage potential of the region is likely to support economic recovery of the hospitality sector (accommodation, food, drinks, travel) in the border region. The support of tourism in the border region should thus foremost support employment and help the sector to adapt to new ways of tourism management and promotion. This can be achieved by better interconnection and promotion of the whole cross-border area, as well as by improving local services for tourism.

On the other side, the pandemic could also open up new opportunities for local and regional tourism and leisure activities in the cross-border region, provided that it becomes a trigger for changes in the tourism sector involving a revival of cross-border tourism and a departure from established patterns and structures towards more sustainable tourism.

There are considerable development opportunities in the current situation for natural and sparsely populated areas, which are more attractive than ever for an important tourist target group. The increase in the number of guests in the Waldviertel, South Bohemia and the Podyjí National Park, during the COVID 19 pandemic, can serve as an example of the new opportunities that could arise from increased cooperation, especially for remote and rural areas close to the border whose tourism potential is not yet sufficiently exploited.

The rapid and effective creation of sustainable tourism sites, the strengthening of existing sites and the promotion of diversification based on the rich cultural and natural heritage of the regions would help to promote the economic recovery of the tourism sector, including the hospitality industry. More use should be made of the potential of joint strategies to increase the number of guests and overnight stays in the border region. A special focus should lie on sustainable (green) tourism infrastructure and its more targeted use (e.g. the cross-border cycling and hiking trail network). Tourists should be encouraged to focus also on less tourist-exposed areas with potential to curb the seasonality. There is a need to shift towards a more

sustainable and green tourism which focuses on sustainable transportation and provides the basis for new jobs in the field of sustainable digital tourism.

Adapting to new forms of tourism management and promotion is essential for revitalising the sector and creating jobs in a region with less job opportunities in general. Cross-border cooperation should be one of the main tools to better promote the whole programme area and improve local tourism services. However due to the diversity of the region and the different types of offers possible a joint online presence is essential to increase the attractiveness. This requires digital knowhow in the region which not only establish the virtual promotion but also maintain it. The region lacks tourism staff with digital literacy and a coordinated cross border digital presence.

Lessons learned from the 2014-2020 programming period

A majority of stakeholders, beneficiaries and workshop participants agreed on the importance of tourism and culture in the cross-border region. Connecting tourist destinations, cross-border cycle paths and hiking trails were given as good examples of cross-border cooperation, and the stakeholders would like to see these continued in the future.

The programme supports the valorisation of regional cultural and natural assets in a sustainable way. Cross-border mechanisms for the protection and valorisation of natural and cultural heritage are established. Awareness-raising and infrastructure measures are often part of the projects. An important aspect of sustainability for the supported projects is to ensure further use and maintenance of the facilities after the end of the projects. Nevertheless, it is still the case that the numerous projects operate individually, without an overarching strategic approach. As there is no common cross-border tourism strategy, it is hard to identify synergy effects between the projects. Weak public transport connections across the border are a challenge for the projects. Aspects of soft tourism are underrepresented in some of the projects.

Needs for cooperation

In summary there is a need to:

- improve the strategic approach in the region to better embed projects for tourism, cultural and natural heritage in the region;
- strengthening the resilience of the tourism and cultural heritage business in the region;
- supporting the hospitality sector in the region with innovative new solutions to enhance sustainability of jobs and products;
- strengthening the capacity (skills) of the tourism sector to better respond to future economic crisis;
- improve the tourism infrastructure including digital infrastructure, digital equipment;
- strengthening the capacity to take-up innovation and future oriented business opportunities;

1.2.7. Governance

Challenges related to institutional cooperation

Cooperation between state, municipal and other public institutions in both the Austrian and the Czech parts of the programme area is already taking place at all levels.

However, there is still a considerable need for further qualitative development and deepening of institutional cooperation, against the background of societal developments such as more efficient provision of administrative services, and securing services of general interest in rural areas. For example, cooperation between hospital services and health facilities could be of interest and in terms of professional exchange (e.g. in general professional terms, regarding new models in health provision or the applicability of new technologies), in order to contribute to better qualification and greater efficiency.

The greatest challenges are the different structures and responsibilities on both sides of the border. This concerns, among other things, the relationship between the federal administration and municipalities in Austria, and between ministries and districts in the Czech Republic.

The further development and strengthening of cooperation between the authorities and in the administration, despite the different structures, is an ongoing challenge to which the cooperation programme can contribute, as far as the legal competence situation allows (cooperation in the programme area has no influence on national or European legislation).

For smaller administrative units, the application for and implementation of “large-scale projects” from the cooperation programme is administratively challenging. Although these administrations have partnership contacts and are interested in cooperation, they have only limited staff and financial resources. This can lead to the potential for institutional cooperation in the region remaining untapped. Small-scale projects (e.g. people-to-people projects) can ease the access to low-threshold cooperation.

Lessons learned from the 2014-2020 programming period

The Interreg programme has distinct added value, since the cross-border aspect would usually not have been possible without ERDF funding. The projects typically focus on networking and awareness-raising activities between the main actors in a thematic field. They usually do not include joint development of products, services or tools. Project partners are mostly provinces/regions or provincial/regional state agencies. The common types of project activities are well-suited to improving cross-border cooperation. Long-standing partnerships and follow-up projects strengthen the ties established between the actors.

The need assessment of the programme evaluation 2014-2020 cooperation programme revealed a lack of concentration on the health sector and social affairs. This relates particularly to questions regarding the ageing population, the falling population share in the pre-productive age group, childcare services, the joint provision of healthcare services, and emergency services. Despite the inclusion of some social, or rather cultural, aspects in the current programme, demographic change and its major challenges as mentioned above (ageing population, etc.) are almost invisible in the cooperation programme.

Such challenges could also be addressed in a cross-thematic way, for example by connecting health and environmental issues, or health and sports. Such an approach would be particularly useful at the local level, where involving the local population is of high importance.

More emphasis needs to be laid on the actual impact of the projects on the region, beyond simply cooperation effects within the project consortia themselves.

Attention should be paid primarily on the benefits of cooperation to create structural effects and the dismantling of barriers in the cross-border region.

Needs for cooperation

The socio-economic analysis and workshops with stakeholders have identified the following issues where increased institutional cooperation and better-coordinated strategy development of regional/local bodies would be useful in removing obstacles:

- common themes in tourism (tourism strategy);
- address the ageing population, the shrinking share of the population below working age, childcare services, joint provision of healthcare services, and emergency services;
- mobility strategies, mobility management (cross-border local public transport, harmonised regional ticket pricing and ticketing system);
- environment for SMEs to work across borders (e.g. joint R&D strategies, facilities and equipment in R&D centres, access to R&D&I results, cross-border marketing);
- water management strategies;

- strategy to protect against skills shortages, and cooperation among labour market services to tackle demographic change;
- cooperation in the provision of public services (e.g. water, energy, waste) to promote eco-innovation;
- support for renewable energy through political strategy and coordinated approaches by institutions;
- better coordination of climate change policies;

1.2.8. Horizontal principles

The programme strategy is in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, gender equality, non-discrimination including accessibility and sustainable development. All types of action support the horizontal principles and have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH Principle. The SEA has been carried out. Where appropriate the New European Bauhaus principle will be considered in the programme implementation.

Horizontal principles will be implemented where appropriate with using appropriate selection criteria, implementing sustainable event management, implementing non-discrimination in communication and collecting gender relevant data in the monitoring process.

1.2.9. 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.

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

It is intended to make use of a Union contribution to the programme based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates. The proposal will be coordinated with the Audit Authority and shall be submit acc. Reg.(EU) 2021/1060, Art.94(2) to the Commission as a request for amendment of the programme.

1.2.10. Complementarities/synergies between different programmes and strategies

For the programme area two macro regional strategies (EUMRS) are relevant: the EU Macro-regional strategy for the Danube region (EUSDR) and the EU Macro-regional strategy for the Alpine region (EUSALP). The Interreg Programme Austria – Czechia 2021-2027 could support actions arising from the EUSDR, which also contribute to the specific objectives of the cross-border area. The specific topics relevant for priority areas of the two strategies are described in section 2 for each SO.

Linking with the EUSDR and the EUSALP will allow the cross-border programme to reach a bigger impact (on a wider territory), as well as to have good projects with a political support and better visibility. In addition, stronger links with the neighbouring CBC programmes can be built where the AT-CZ region is overlapping with other cross-border programmes. Establishing

close working relationships among the cross-border programmes as well as the national ERDF and ESF programmes with the aim to encourage active promotion of complementarities/synergies in central Europe.

To ensure better synergies and collaboration, good coordination will be needed with macro-regional actors, primarily with the National Coordinators of the EU Macro-regional strategies, but also with thematic coordinators as well as bodies coordinating EUMRS. Furthermore, the cross-border programme will develop and apply specific project selection criteria to encourage the development of projects that support the priorities of the EUSDR and EUSALP.

Coordination in Austria

The Austrian Spatial Planning Conference (ÖROK) office acts as a national contact point for the transnational and interregional ETC programmes (National Contact Point). The AG CBC (Working Group Cross Border Cooperation) was set up in 2011 as a permanent working group in the ÖROK office, with the aim of networking the seven cross-border ETC programmes within Austria. Various topics such as programme content, project selection and evaluation as well as interfaces with other programmes in Austria (ERDF) and the transnational programmes especially Central Europe, Danube Transnational, Alpine Space and the interregional programmes INTERACT, Interreg Europe are coordinated at regular meetings. Worth mentioning the synergies established with the Danube Strategy point Vienna and Interact Office Vienna. In addition to the regional coordinators of the federal states, members include several federal ministries, the CBC managing authorities based in Austria and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism.

In respect to EUMRS, national coordination meetings are taking place regularly – involving Priority Area Coordinators as well as Steering Group Members, e.g. representatives of federal ministries or of federal states.

Coordination in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the coordination of complementarity and synergies between other programmes are coordinated by the National Coordination Authority. The National Coordination Authority plays a central methodological and coordinating role for all operational programmes in the Czech Republic. This Authority is performed by the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic. The particular coordination of the programme Interreg Austria - Czechia with other programmes in the Czech Republic is ensured by the membership of the National Authority of the Interreg Austria - Czechia programme in the coordination platforms established in the Czech Republic for the purpose of coordinating support from the ESI Funds.

The activities planned in the cross-border programme are mainly focused on the joint strategic development of key topics in the field of tourism, cultural and natural monuments in the border area. Additionally, on the Czech side, there is support for more expensive renovations of monuments and construction of more extensive tourist infrastructure from the Integrated Regional Operational Programme 2021-2027 and also from the national programme of the support of the tourism and the support of the restoration of cultural monuments. The synergistic effect of these supports will create a more attractive and visited Czech-Austrian border.

In the Czech Republic, the EU strategy for the Danube Region lies within the competence of the Government office of the Czech Republic. In order to coordinate the macro-regional strategies and fulfilling the role of a national contact point the State Secretary established the so called Coordination Group for macro-regional strategies. Members of this group are mainly: Czech representatives of the steering groups, representatives of other resorts, of regional stakeholders and representatives who are in charge of negotiating the CP of Danube trans-

national cooperation. Information about the development of macro-regional agenda and about the role of the Czech Republic in particular initiatives and projects is being exchanged also within ministries (including the Ministry of Regional Development – National Authority of the Programme). In that manner it can be ensured that all relevant stakeholders are informed. When necessary, particular stakeholders can be invited as guests to the Monitoring Committee meetings.

1.3. Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg specific

This part fully covers section 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*) in the draft template.

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>PO1 A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity</p>	<p>(i) Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Cooperation between R&I institutions in the region has a long tradition. However, the full integration of SMEs into the innovation system, as well as cross-border matching of innovative firms with research partners needs to be addressed. SMEs play a crucial role in innovation policy, as they are likely to face barriers when commercialising their innovations.</p> <p>Cross-border cooperation is an opportunity to create and strengthen R&D&I platforms in order to unlock the full potential of R&D in the region's economic development. Cooperation could increase market availability for local R&D institutions and give them the opportunity to engage in global networks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within SO (i) it is possible to implement measures aimed at exploiting the potential for cross-border cooperation in research and innovation, including application in business and the use of R&I results by SMEs, and by the public sector, in eco-services and other areas relevant to the cross-border region. • The Programming Group, composed of AT and CZ programme partners, considers SO (i) to be highly significant, with high needs and potentials for joint approaches. • The Border Orientation paper AT-CZ (EC 2019) mentions cooperation on innovation in the border region, with a focus especially on applied research and innovation activities, including common social, cultural and creative activities, exploiting innovative niches in traditional sectors. Focus on demand-driven research and innovation by the needs of business and society, to reach the market. • The ConnReg Workshops in AT and CZ in 2019 and 2020 identified research and innovation as highly relevant topics for cooperation projects. • The topic of research and innovation is directly addressed by existing strategies in all participating regions. There are relevant strategies on the Austrian side as well as on CZ side.

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The external evaluation recommends allocating more resources for the priority of research and innovation compared to the 2014-2020 programme. <p>In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The funding should initiate sustainable collaborations and best meets the needs of the stakeholders. Other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results. The topic is of public interest and does not generate any profit.</p>
<p>PO2 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</p>	<p>(iv) Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience, taking into account eco-system-based approaches</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>The Czech-Austrian programme area has experienced various extreme weather events over the last two decades, including e.g. floods, droughts, torrential rains and hailstorms. The region as a whole, and in particular some of its hotspots, have had to deal with the spread of invasive species caused by climate change. Climate change will further increase the occurrence of extreme events and poses risks to infrastructure, economic activity, energy and water supply, and the health of residents. Transboundary cooperation is therefore important to effectively address common challenges arising from climate change.</p> <p>In the field of risk management and especially cross-border protection, there are still many obstacles to common or shared solutions. Different legislation and administrative and organisational practices lead to less efficiency and flexibility in emergencies with a cross-border dimension.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under SO (iv) it is possible to tackle many types of risks related to climate change (drought, fires, floods, etc.) as well as cooperation on cross-border civil protection and risk management, and cooperation on practical climate policy in cities. The Programming Group, which is composed of Austrian and Czech programme partners, considers SO (iv) to be significant, with high needs and potential for joint approaches. The Border Orientation paper AT-CZ (EC 2019, p. 14 f) addresses climate change adaptation and risk management, and recommends investment in joint climate change adaptation with a focus on sustainable and ecological measures (e.g. forest fires and floods, risk management strategies, joint emergency services). The Stakeholder Workshops in AT and CZ in 2019 and 2020 have identified climate change adaptation as relevant topics for cooperation projects. The external evaluation (Metis et al 2020) supports the selection of PO2 but provides no specific statements on climate change adaptation and risk management. <p>In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The cross-border cooperation should accelerate the effort to address climate change jointly. Other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results. The topic is of public interest and does not generate any profit.</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
	(vii) Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution		<p>The cross-border region has a rich natural and cultural landscape and a large number of protected areas, including national parks. On the other hand, several areas within the border regions have low levels of Green Infrastructure networks, with a medium capacity to deliver ecosystem services and low capacity to provide habitat and connectivity for large mammals.</p> <p>The conservation status of NATURA 2000 protected areas is mostly not favourable and there is a high level of landscape fragmentation on both sides of the border.</p> <p>A common challenge is posed through the fact that strategies for environmental protection and biodiversity in AT and CZ are at different levels. None of them apply cross-border, although there are higher-level EC guidelines that apply to every Member State and need to be addressed in a cross-border context. The region not only lacks a common strategy but also a common data exchange and the respective skills.</p> <p>The cross-border region covers several water catchment areas, each of which constitutes a functional area. There are still deficits in the water quality of surface and ground water management and protection. The WFD provides a well-developed legal framework for water protection. Groundwater and surface water are part of the water ecosystem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Programming Group considers SO (vii) as significant, with needs and potential for joint approaches. • The Border Orientation paper AT-CZ recommends strategic actions and the improvement of awareness of the population to better manage natural resources and protect biodiversity jointly (green infrastructure, fragmentation of natural spaces, water quality, etc.). • The Stakeholder Workshops in AT and CZ in 2019 and 2020 identified biodiversity and water management as relevant topics for cooperation projects. • The external evaluation (Metis 2020) supports the selection of PO2 and states that projects targeting cross-border ecological systems have high added value. It is highly recommended to keep this thematic focus in the next funding period. <p>In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. Due to the nature of the cooperation level other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results. The topic is of public interest and does not generate any profit.</p>
PO4 A more social Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	(ii) Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through	3	<p>In the CZ as well as in AT there is a mismatch between the qualifications available and the requirements of national and regional labour markets. The rate of adult participation in further education is still low and the figures fall further with advancing employee age. Additionally, a lower share of working-age population characterizes rural areas and the smallest municipalities. The countryside suffers from migration due to lack of employment opportunities. The</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
	<p>developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training</p>		<p>ageing of the population in the region will lead to growing challenges, e.g. in relation to health and social services or the labour market, which will increase the need for cross border solutions. On the other side there is a high level of labour exchange across the border.</p> <p>School co-operation, in particular, has the potential to increase young people's interest in their neighbours across the border, reducing prejudice and distrust. Cooperation in education and skills also increases the employability and skills of the people involved. Early childhood and primary education play a key role. Existing partnerships and links between municipalities that provide pre-school and primary education represent a good basis for increased cooperation.</p> <p>SO (ii) is of high priority and large potential for cooperation in the programme area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • .. • The evaluation recommends to: Continue to support human resource development in the future, focusing on the specific added value of the CBC approach in dismantling barriers and increasing cross-border linkages between the education/qualification systems. The Border Orientation paper recommends investing in joint education schemes supporting more extensive and structured language learning activities and addressing any territorial challenges with providing access to education and training in the rural and remote areas. • The Stakeholder Workshops in AT and CZ in 2019 and 2020 identified education as relevant topics for cooperation projects. <p>In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant., Other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results. The topic is of public interest and does not generate any profit.</p>
	<p>(vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation</p>		<p>AT and the CZ share a common historical and cultural heritage. Tourism based on this cultural and natural heritage is an important economic factor in the programme region. The current economic situation due to the pandemic has had a major impact on the tourism and leisure industry. The uncertainties in this sector may leave long-term damage but might also open up new opportunities for local and regional tourism and leisure offers. There is a need to shift towards a more sustainable and green tourism which focuses on sustainable transportation and provides the basis for new jobs in the field of sustainable digital tourism.</p> <p>Cross-border cooperation should be one of the main tools to better promote the whole programme area and improve local tourism services. More use should be made of joint strategies and marketing to increase the number of guests and overnight stays in the border region.</p> <p>Due to the diversity of the region and the different types of offers a joint marketing approach is essential to increase the attractiveness. This requires digital knowhow for establishing and maintaining an effective online marketing which</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>efficiently promotes the diversity of the region. The region lacks tourism staff with digital literacy and a coordinated cross border digital presence.</p> <p>SO (vi) addresses the needs and potentials for joint approaches in culture and tourism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Border Orientation paper AT-CZ (EC 2019, p. 8) recommended further investment in common historical, natural and cultural heritage products and services to create employment for small companies. The attractiveness of the region as a destination for green tourism and cultural heritage should be increased. • The external evaluation (Metis 2020) supports tourism and culture but recommends avoiding individual tourism projects without shared strategic approaches (p 64). • The Stakeholder Workshops in AT and CZ in 2019 and 2020 identified tourism and culture as relevant topics for cooperation projects. • The development of tourism and culture is directly addressed by existing strategies in all participating regions. <p>In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. Other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results. The topic is of public interest and does not generate any profit.</p>
ISO1 Better cooperation governance	(ii) Enhancing efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and institutions, in particular, with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions	4	<p>There is still a considerable need in the region for further qualitative development and deepening of institutional cooperation, against the background of economic and societal developments such as more efficient provision of administrative services, and securing services of general interest-</p> <p>There is a broad consensus in the Programming Group to support institutional cooperation and better-coordinated strategy development in the cooperation programme in order to reduce barriers and obstacles for cross-border development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Socio-Economic Analysis (2019) for the cross-border region identified needs and indicative types of action related to institutional cooperation in various thematic fields. • The Border Orientation paper AT-CZ (EC 2019, pp. 8, 12, 15, 18, 22) recommends establishing joint territorial instruments (e.g. joint CLLD strategies) and deepening institutional cooperation in various thematic fields. • The external evaluation (Metis et al 2020, p. 96) clearly proposes supporting better cross-border governance, while avoiding projects without tangible results and significant and measurable impact on the institutional setting in the border region. Such impact should go beyond mere cooperation effects within the project partnership, which usually has a long history of joint projects. • Workshops with stakeholders have identified topics for increased institutional cooperation and better-

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>coordinated strategy development of regional/local bodies.</p> <p>In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The further development and strengthening of cooperation between the authorities and in the administration, despite the different structures, is an ongoing challenge to which the cooperation programme can contribute, as far as the legal competence situation allows. The funding should trigger the establishment of sustainable collaborations and best meets the needs of the stakeholders. There is no investment and no infrastructure funding, other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results. The topic is of public interest and does not generate any profit.</p>
	(iii) Building up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions		<p>For smaller administrative units, the application for and implementation of “large-scale projects” from the cooperation programme is administratively challenging. Although these administrations have partnership contacts and are interested in cooperation, they have only limited staff and financial resources. This can lead to the potential for institutional cooperation in the region remaining untapped. Small projects can ease the access to low-threshold cooperation. There is a need to support the further development and deepening of partnership cooperation in order to strengthen mutual trust and the development of cross-border cooperation between municipalities and institutions. Due to the different administrative environment bottom-up people-to-people projects are sometimes more effective in achieving results. This is especially important in topics related to their immediate concern such as intercultural exchange, environment, labour market and economic development. A Small-Project Fund (SPF) is ranked as a high priority by the programme partners. The use of SCOs would become a “must” in the future management of SPFs to reduce the administrative burden for administrative bodies and beneficiaries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Socio-Economic Analysis for the cross-border region identified the need to build trust among citizens as well as administrative bodies. • The Border Orientation paper highly recommends investing significantly in building trust measures and exploring possibilities for Small Project Funds or micro-project schemes. • The external evaluation clearly proposed continuing with the Small Project Fund because it enables scope for new interventions and reaches out to small beneficiaries. • Stakeholder workshops raised the idea to support research activities focused on people-to-people. <p>In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The funding should trigger the establishment of sustainable collaborations and best meets the needs of the stakeholders. There is no investment and no infrastructure funding, other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			stimulate the desired results. The topic is of public interest and does not generate any profit.

2. Priorities

2.1. Priority 1 - Research & Innovation

The border region is generally well-equipped with research and development facilities. Nevertheless, cross-border cooperation is an opportunity to create and strengthen R&D&I platforms in order to unlock the full potential of R&D in the region's economic development. Thus, the cooperation programme considers SO i (Research and innovation).

2.1.1. Specific objective - Research and innovation

Table 4: Overview of types of action under the respective priority and specific objective

Priority	Specific objective	Types of action
Priority 1 / PO1 (short title: "Research and innovation")	SO i) (short title "Research and innovation")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of action 1.1 cross border research and know how exchange Type of action 1.2 joint pilot actions and joint solutions in shared research facilities and research application Type of action 1.3: communication and mobility of researchers

2.1.1.1. Interventions of funds

Related types of action

The types of action have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since: they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance.

The following **considerations** are made when defining the types of action:

- digital transformation is considered as a horizontal topic,
- better coordination of ETC support with other funding instruments for research and innovation is necessary (ERDF mainstream, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Creative Europe etc.),
- pay attention during the implementation of the programme to its potential contribution to European Research Area and its policy objectives to strengthen the competitiveness of the programme area.
- the RIS3-strategies of the programme regions serve as a common strategic ground common RIS3 areas are for example circular economy, bioeconomy, biotechnology, ICT and digital transformation, environmental branches, life sciences, creative industries, medicine, building and construction materials and the introduction of eco-innovation, culture science, life science, digitalisation, advanced machinery/technology, social innovation;
- the proposed types of action should not only strengthen sector-specific economic cooperation and networks but rather promote interdisciplinary activities, i.e. cooperation between multiple sectors in line with smart specialisation strategies.

Expected contribution to the specific objective

- utilization of the R&I potential of the programme area,
- development of specific areas of research common to both sides of the border,
- increase the competitiveness of SMEs through improved access to R&I results and advanced technologies,

- diffusion of innovations, where the peripheral parts of the programme area also benefit from the joint results implemented in areas with a concentration of research and innovation activities,
- acceleration of the transfer of research and innovation results into practice (to the market of goods or services, incl. public services);
- increasing the efficiency of the use of existing or new research and innovation capacities,
- sharing and transfer of know-how of research institutions.

Types of action

Type of action 1.1 cross border research and know how exchange

The aim of the type of action is to strengthen cross border cooperation between researchers and SMEs. Particular fields of interest in the region are for example circular economy, bioeconomy, biotechnology, ICT and digital transformation, environmental branches, life sciences, creative industries, medicine, building and construction materials and the introduction of eco-innovation.

Indicative actions:

- cooperation in research and innovation in fields of common interest with possible involvement of SMEs,
- research and innovation driven by demand from local businesses with specific focus on sectors of relevance in the border area.

Type of action 1.2 joint pilot actions and joint solutions in shared research facilities and research application

The aim of the type of action is to improve existing and boost new shared research and innovation infrastructure and services in the cross-border region and to improve access to research infrastructure for SMEs.

Indicative actions:

- investments in new jointly used/shared R&I facilities, based on relevant research strategies and with high thematic focus to the programme area;
- adding services to core offerings of industries by “servitization” to make industries more innovative and competitive;
- extension and modernisation of technology facilities and research capacities of cross-border interest; Sharing of high-quality R&I facilities;
- better linking research institutions with SMEs and increase access of SMEs to R&I results, application of research and innovation results with the aim to reach the market;
- joint set-up of innovation hubs.

Type of action 1.3: communication and mobility of researchers

The aim of this type of action is to increase access to research results to the relevant target groups in the cross-border area like SMEs or researchers with suitable communication and to enhance the exchange between individual researchers. The exchange should always be in the context of the cross-border region. The indicative actions should only form a part of projects and are not seen as stand-alone projects. Cooperation should be strengthened in the context of implementation of joint cross-border innovative projects in action 1.2 which

have relevance for the regional business sector, and/or science-business collaboration under action 1.1.

Indicative actions:

- supporting the cross-border mobility of researchers;
- science communication (informing, educating, raising awareness of science-related topics).

Contribution to the other EU, national and regional strategies

The actions shall contribute to priority area 7 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region according to the EUSDR - Action Plan (2020), for example to strengthen cooperation among universities, research organisations and SMEs in the Danube Region (action 3) and increase awareness and visibility of science and innovation in the Danube Region (action 4).

The actions shall contribute to the 1st objective of the EU strategy of the alpine region EUSALP “fair access to job opportunities, building on the high competitiveness of the Region”. For example, the actions shall contribute to enhanced capacity building of research institutions, networks and infrastructure with an Alpine Region dimension and to taking into consideration existing international research / innovation coordination activities of EUSALP.

All implemented projects shall consider related strategies and action plans on regional, national and EU level. In particular projects should consider the relevant **Smart** Specialisation Strategies of the border region in Austria and the Czech Republic as well as results from projects and other EU programmes such as LIFE and Horizon 2020.

Main target groups

The main target groups are small and medium enterprises as well as public actors who benefit from cross-border achievements in the field of R&I, such as knowledge and technologies development and transfers, as well as concrete results of cross-border research and innovation activities. Among other private and public research institutions, universities and universities of applied studies and sciences.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

The entire programme area is targeted.

2.1.1.2. Indicators

Output indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Milestone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
1	ERDF SO 1 i)	RCO 07	Research institutions participating in joint research projects	No. of participants	0	2021	0	34
1	ERDF SO 1 i)	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	No. of solutions	0	2021	0	16
1	ERDF SO 1 i)	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	No. of participations	0	2021	0	29

Result indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Target 2029	Source of data
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
1	ERDF SO 1 i)	RCR08	Publications from supported projects	No. of publications	0	2021	20	monitoring
1	ERDF SO 1 i)	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	No. of solutions	0	2021	8	monitoring
1	ERDF SO 1 i)	RCR85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	No. of participations	0	2021	20	monitoring

2.1.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 5: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO (i)	28	13 486 177
1	ERDF	SO (i)	29	5 779 791

Table 6: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO (i)	01	19 265 968

Table 7: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO (i)	32	19 265 968

2.1.1.4. Planned use of Financial Instruments

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The funding should initiate sustainable collaborations and best meets the needs of the stakeholders. Other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results.

The application of financial instruments (Article 59(2)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060) is in this Specific objective not planned as the planned investments in Research and Innovation do not allow sufficient reflows to be expected. The projects will not generate any profit during the support.

2.2. Priority 2 - Climate & Environment²

The border region is characterised by agriculture, forest and water resources with several natural parks of different protection levels. The given functional areas require a close cooperation across the border to cope with the future challenges accompanied with climate change. Thus, the cooperation programme considers SO iv and SO vii.

Table 8: Overview of types of action under the respective priority and specific objective

Priority	Specific objective	Types of action
Priority 2 / PO2 (short title "Climate & Environment")	SO iv) (short title "Climate change adaptation")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of action 2.1 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to improve the preparedness towards climate change impacts. Type of action 2.2 joint pilot actions and joint solutions in climate change adaptation Type of action 2.3 awareness raising and training on climate change adaptation
	SO vii) (short title "Nature protection and biodiversity")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of action 2.4 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to improve water management Type of action 2.5 joint pilot actions and investments in joint ecological water management solutions Type of action 2.6 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to enhance biodiversity Type of action 2.7 joint pilot actions and joint solutions to improve and protect biodiversity Type of action 2.8 awareness raising activities and training for enhanced biodiversity

2.2.1. Specific objective – climate change adaptation

2.2.1.1. Interventions of funds

Related types of action

The types of action have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since: they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance.

Expected contribution to the specific objective

The cooperation programme will contribute to climate change adaptation where it is applicable and feasible in the context of the programme. Possible joint actions to support climate change adaptation in the framework of the cross-border programme are:

- joint adaptation actions in sectors particularly affected by climate change, (e.g. production, environmental protection, civil society, agriculture and forestry),
- in case of planning and developing climate adaptation infrastructure nature-based solutions should be preferred, wherever possible, above hard or grey infrastructure. This includes flood plains, ecosystem restoration, afforestation, natural water retention measures and other green (or blue) infrastructure measures that have a direct benefit for climate change adaptation and risk prevention.
- joint improvement of water management concepts and practice to better adapt to climate change.

² Draft PO2: 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 and risk prevention and management

- climate fit communities & cities: climate protection and adaptation to climate change in communities and cities as an integrative cross-cutting theme.

Type of actions

Type of action 2.1 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to improve the preparedness towards climate change impacts.

The aim of the type of action is to enhance the cross-border understanding of climate change impacts and to enable adequate actions based on a common data base.

Indicative actions:

- exploring the impacts of climate change in the programme area and specific regions including economic risks created by climate change;
- data exchange and set of monitoring systems of climate change related impacts;
- know-how exchange across the border on climate change related impacts.

Type of action 2.2 joint pilot actions and joint solutions in climate change adaptation

The aim of the type of action is to implement joint risk management, joint solutions and investments across the border to be better prepared towards climate change.

Indicative actions:

- strengthen cooperation to build up an integrated risk management system;
- cooperation in climate change adaptation actions (e.g. planting drought-resistant species, urban / rural gardening, green and blue infrastructures for reducing heat island effects);
- joint solutions for environmental measures on agri-land and in forests (e.g.: soil improvement, avoidance of erosion);
- joint pilot activities for example in the areas of greening, reduction of land consumption, building refurbishment, water retention for a pleasant microclimate, increase of resilience in the soil.
- joint development of tools for identification of risks and water management measures;
- joint solutions for appropriate water resource management (e.g.: agricultural irrigation, water retention, ecological measures for natural water retention, securing the drinking water resources);

Type of action 2.3 awareness raising and training on climate change adaptation

The aim of the type of action is to increase awareness of the danger and social, economic and ecological consequences of climate change impacts and to enhance behavioural change of the public as well as local authorities.

Indicative actions:

- Awareness raising campaigns, making the issue of climate protection visible to the population in the communities (e.g. awareness raising campaign among community leaders, common civil protection awareness raising);
- Training and skill development in the field of climate change (e.g.: support population training);

Contribution to the other EU, national and regional strategies

Actions shall contribute to priority area 5 – “environmental risks” of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region according to the EUSDR - Action Plan (2020), for example by providing

support for 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.

Particularly to improve risk management and to better manage climate change, including major natural risks prevention (Action group 8) by stocktaking of relevant actors and interests, mapping and enhancing governance structures and processes in the policy fields of risk/hazard management and climate change adaptation, improving risk and adaptation governance mechanisms in the EUSALP region by enhancing, valorizing and leveraging the existing cooperation structures, identification of good practice solutions in tackling challenges in natural hazard and climate change adaptation policy.

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) and the Czech Climate change strategy. They shall use synergies with related initiatives and projects wherever possible and take into account especially results from previous projects and other EU programmes such as EAFRD, ERDF, LIFE and Horizon 2020.

Main target groups

According to their thematic scope the main target group are local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for environmental issues, infrastructure and (public) service providers, interest groups including NGOs (e.g. international organisation, environmental organisations, voluntary association, schools, etc.), public and private research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, and agriculture and forestry stakeholders (a demarcation to the EAFRD is necessary).

An additional target group is the general public who benefit from cross-border achievements such as policy integration, knowledge transfer and capacity building, concrete solutions in the fields of civil protection and disaster control, climate change adaption in exposed sectors, climate fit communities and cities.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

The entire programme area is targeted.

2.2.1.2. Indicators

Output indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Mile-stone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
2	ERDF SO 2 (iv)	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	No. of organisations	0	2021	0	17
2	ERDF SO 2 (iv)	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	No. of joint strategies and actions plans	0	2021	0	3
2	ERDF SO 2 (iv)	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	No. of solutions	0	2021	0	2

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Milestone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
2	ERDF SO 2 (iv)	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	No. of participations	0	2021	0	608

Result indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Target 2029	Source of data
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
2	ERDF SO 2 (iv)	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	No. of strategies	0	2021	17	monitoring
2	ERDF SO 2 (iv)	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	No. of organisations	0	2021	2	monitoring
2	ERDF SO 2 (iv)	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	No. of participations	0	2021	1	monitoring
2	ERDF SO 2 (iv)	RCR85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	No. of solutions	0	2021	304	monitoring

2.2.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 9: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific object(iv) e	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2 (iv)	58	4 053 791
2	ERDF	SO 2 (iv)	60	4 053 791

Table 10: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific object(iv) e	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2 (iv)	01	8 107 582

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

Priority no	Fund	Specific object(iv) e	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2 (iv)	32	8 107 582,00

2.2.1.4. Planned use of Financial Instruments

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The cross-border cooperation should accelerate the effort to address climate change jointly. Other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results.

The application of financial instruments (Article 59(2)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060) is in this Specific objective not planned as the planned investments in climate change adaptation does not allow sufficient reflows to be expected. The projects will not generate any profit during the support.

2.2.2. Specific objective – nature protection and biodiversity

2.2.2.1. Interventions of funds

Related types of action

The types of action have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since: they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance.

Expected contribution to the specific objective

The cooperation programme will contribute to nature protection and biodiversity by supporting joint action in:

- ecological measures to improve the natural status and water quality of surface waters/ rivers in the border region,
- supporting joint ecological actions to preserve and restore biodiversity in sensitive areas including better control of invasive species and relevant pests,
- sustainable management of nature, natural sites and natural capital,
- increase the awareness of the population on biodiversity issues by environmental awareness raising activities (environmental education is covered in priority 3).

Type of actions

Type of action 2.4 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to improve water management

The aim of the type of action is to enhance the cross-border knowledge and data exchange to support adequate and coordinated water management in the region.

Indicative actions:

- cooperation for the better protection of water resources (e.g.: springs and small watercourses, ground water, joint river basin management, linking water management and nature conservation);
- joint actions to increase the cross-border knowledge base concerning the border area.

Type of action 2.5 joint pilot actions and investments in joint ecological water management solutions

The aim of the type of action is to implement joint projects which should improve the water resource management of the region and increase the preparedness towards unforeseen events such as floods or droughts. The type of actions includes communication and awareness raising measures for wider public.

Indicative actions:

- joint water body restoration (e.g.: re-naturalization of rivers and riverbanks, floodplain restoration).

Type of action 2.6 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to enhance biodiversity

The aim of the type of action is to enhance the cross-border knowledge and data exchange to improve the knowhow of the biodiversity status in the region to enable suitable response measures.

Indicative actions:

- improvement of the data situation and monitoring approaches;
- joint databases;
- joint management plans.

Type of action 2.7 joint pilot actions and joint solutions to improve and protect biodiversity

The aim of the type of action is to implement joint projects which should improve the biodiversity and protect natural habitats.

Indicative actions:

- development of biotope networks;
- wildlife migration corridors;
- joint landscape management;
- control of neophytes and bark beetles;
- re-settling of FFH species;
- biodiversity projects with sustainable and integrated tourism elements (no pure tourism projects);
- joint approaches to restore blue and green infrastructures in urban areas.

Type of action 2.8 awareness raising activities and training for enhanced biodiversity

The aim of the type of action is to increase awareness and understanding in the general public of the richness of the region and its need for better protection. Environmental education is excluded in this type of action and is covered in priority 3.

Indicative actions:

- increase the awareness of the population on biodiversity issues by environmental awareness raising activities;
- biodiversity projects with training activities.

Contribution to the other EU, national and regional strategies

Actions shall contribute to initiatives in the priority areas 4 and 5 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region according to the EUSDR - Action Plan (2020), for example by promoting best management practices, to the implementation of the DRBMP and its Joint Programme of Measures based on the "Joint PA4-PA5-ICPDR Paper on Cooperation and Synergy for the EUSDR Implementation" for the development of the Danube Region, to preventing and reducing water pollution from point and diffuse sources in the Danube Region, 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.

The actions shall contribute to 3rd thematic policy area: environment and energy EU strategy of the alpine region EUSALP, particularly to improve risk management and to better manage climate change, including major natural risks prevention (Action group 8) by stocktaking of relevant actors and interests, mapping and enhancing governance structures and processes in the policy fields of risk/hazard management and climate change

adaptation, improving risk and adaptation governance mechanisms in the EUSALP region by enhancing, valorizing and leveraging the existing cooperation structures, identification of good practice solutions in tackling challenges in natural hazard and climate change adaptation policy.

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 National Water Strategy of the Czech Republic.

Actions shall contribute to initiatives in priority area 6 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region according to the EUSDR - Action Plan (2020), for example in improving management of Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas, in strengthening the efforts to halt the deterioration in the status of species and habitats, in reducing the introductions and spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in the Danube Region, in maintaining and restoring Green Infrastructure elements through integrated spatial development and conservation planning, in improving and/or maintaining the soil quality in the Danube Region or in decreasing air pollution in the Danube Region.

Actions shall contribute to 3rd thematic policy area: environment and energy EU strategy of the alpine region EUSALP, particularly to preserve and valorise natural resources, including water and cultural resources (Action group 6) by Spatial development and soil conservation, future oriented farming and forestry, integrated and sustainable water management.

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, as well as the Biodiversity Strategy Austria 2020+ and the Czech biodiversity strategy 2016-2025. They shall use synergies with related initiatives and projects wherever possible and take into account especially results from previous projects and other EU programmes such as EAFRD, ERDF, LIFE and Horizon 2020.

Main target groups

Type of action 2.4, 2.5: According to their thematic scope the main target group comprises of local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for water management and flood risk prevention, environmental issues, national park management, infrastructure and (public) service providers, interest groups including NGOs (e.g. international organisation, environmental organisations, voluntary association, etc.), public and private research and development institutions, universities with research facilities.

Additionally, the general public who benefit from cross-border achievements such as policy integration, knowledge transfer and capacity building, concrete solutions in the fields of ecological water management and flood risk prevention.

Type of action 2.6, 2.7, 2.8: According to their thematic scope the main target group comprises of local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for biodiversity and nature conservation, environmental issues, national park management, interest groups including NGOs (e.g. international organisation, environmental organisations, voluntary association, etc.), public and private research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, education/training centres and schools.

An additional target group is the general public who benefit from cross-border achievements such as policy integration, knowledge transfer and capacity building, concrete solutions in the fields of nature protection and restoration of biodiversity.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

The entire programme area is targeted.
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2.2.2.2. Indicators**Output indicators**

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Mile-stone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
2	ERDF SO 2 vii)	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	No. of joint strategies and actions plans	0	2021	0	4
2	ERDF SO 2 vii)	RCO85	Participations in joint training schemes	No. of participations	0	2021	0	55
2	ERDF SO 2 vii)	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	No. of organisations	0	2021	0	31
2	ERDF SO 2 vii)	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	No. of solutions	0	2021	0	4

Result indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Target 2029	Source of data
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
2	ERDF SO 2 vii)	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	No. of joint strategies and actions plans	0	2021	2	monitoring
2	ERDF SO 2 vii)	RCR81	Completion of joint training schemes	No. of participants	0	2021	38	monitoring
2	ERDF SO 2 vii)	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	No. of organisations	0	2021	31	monitoring
2	ERDF SO 2 vii)	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	No. of solutions	0	2021	3	monitoring

2.2.2.3. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 12: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2 vii	64	2 822 275
2	ERDF	SO 2 vii	79	6 585 307

Table 13: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2 vii	01	9 407 582

Table 14: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2 vii	32	9 407 582

2.2.2.4. Planned use of Financial Instruments

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. Due to the nature of the cooperation level other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results.

The application of financial instruments (Article 59(2)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060) is in this Specific objective not planned as the planned investments in nature protection and biodiversity do not allow sufficient reflows to be expected. The projects will not generate any profit during the support.

2.3. Priority 3 - Education, culture & tourism³

The border region is well-equipped with educational facilities, nevertheless there is a mismatch with the requirements of the labour market. The programme area is rich in natural and cultural sites of distinctive cross-border value but needs a more resilient approach in developing tourism. Thus the cooperation programme considers SO ii and SO vi.

Table 15: Overview of types of action under the respective priority and specific objective

Priority	Specific objective	Types of action
Priority 3 / PO4 (short title "Education, culture & tourism")	ERDF ii) (short title "Education and training")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Types of action 3.1 Cross border cooperation to improve the cross-border education offers of kinder gardens, primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools Type of action 3.2 Joint pilot action and investments to improve the cross-border education offers of primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools
	SO vi) (short title "Culture and tourism")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of action 3.3 Cross border know how and data exchange to foster resilience of the tourism and cultural sector

³ Related to the draft PO4: a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of action 3.4 Joint pilot actions and investments to foster resilience of the tourism and cultural sector
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2.3.1. Specific objective - education and training

2.3.1.1. Interventions of funds

Related types of action

The types of action have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since: they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance.

Expected contribution to the specific objective

The cooperation programme will contribute to the specific objective by

- increasing the quality of the education sector across borders and its interaction with the needs of the labour market and business sector.
- supporting better understanding across borders;
- ensuring that initiatives are also adopted in the structural education landscape.

Type of actions

Types of action 3.1 Cross border cooperation to improve the cross-border education offers of kindergardens, primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools

The aim of the type of action is to enhance the strategical basis for cross border education.

Indicative actions:

- development of joint/bilingual pedagogic/didactic concepts;
- joint education schemes (incl. digitalized tools and methods - learning environments, learning room concepts, didactic measures, learning to search online etc.).

Type of action 3.2 Joint pilot action to improve the cross-border education offers of kindergardens, primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools.

The aim of the type of action is to implement cross border initiatives based on the above mentioned strategies and know how exchange.

Indicative actions:

- joint education actions in topics relevant for cross-border area, esp. environmental education, health and nursing, digital skills and technical education;
- joint actions to adapt skills and knowledge to future job opportunities (e.g. development of cross-border augmented/virtual reality and (social) entrepreneurship as future topics);
- joint actions to support early childhood education;
- joint actions to support primary, secondary, tertiary education;
- joint actions supporting job orientation of young people;
- joint actions to enhance the harmonisation of the vocational education system for meeting the needs of the joint labour market;
- joint actions to enhance the harmonisation of education and qualifications (esp. secondary schools, tertiary education, vocational schools).

Contribution to the other EU, national and regional strategies

The actions shall contribute to initiatives in priority area 9 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region according to the EUSDR - Action Plan (2020), by providing support for actions that contribute to improved educational outcomes, skills and competences, increased quality and efficiency of education, training and labour market systems as well as promote civic competences and lifelong learning opportunities for all in the border region.

The actions shall contribute to 1st objective of the EU strategy of the alpine region EUSALP “fair access to job opportunities, building on the high competitiveness of the Region”. Particularly in improve the adequacy of labour market, education and training in strategic sectors (Action Group 3) by cooperation embracing a variety of economic activities, in the domains of agriculture, industry, commerce, tourism and other services.

All implemented projects shall consider related strategies and action plans on regional and national level, such as the Austrian Lifelong Learning Strategy, the Czech Lifelong Learning Strategy. Actions will be expected to use synergies with related initiatives and projects wherever possible and to take into account especially results from previous projects and other EU programmes such as ESF, ERDF and the Danube and Central Europe transnational Interreg programmes or the Horizon 2020.

Main target groups

According to their thematic scope the main target group comprises of local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for primary, secondary and vocational schools, interest groups including NGOs (e.g. international organizations, voluntary associations, etc.), public and private research and development institutions, tertiary education institutions, education/training centres and schools.

An additional target group is the general public who benefit from cross-border achievements such as policy integration, knowledge transfer and capacity building, concrete solutions in the education sector across borders.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

The entire programme area is targeted.

2.3.1.2. Indicators**Output indicators**

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Mile-stone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
3	SO 4 (ii)	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	No. of organisations	0	2021	0	14
3	SO 4 (ii)	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	No. of solutions	0	2021	0	5

Result indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Target 2029	Source of data
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
3	SO 4 (ii)	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	No. of organisations	0	2021	14	monitoring
3	SO 4 (ii)	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	No. of solutions	0	2021	2	monitoring

2.3.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention**Table 16: Dimension 1 – intervention field**

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 4.(ii)	171	8 739 347

Table 17: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 4.(ii)	01	8 739 347

Table 18: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 4.(ii)	32	8 739 347

2.3.1.4. Planned use of Financial Instruments

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The topic is of public interest and does not generate any profit, other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results.

The application of financial instruments (Article 59(2)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060) is in this Specific objective not planned as the planned investments in education and training do not allow sufficient reflows to be expected. The projects will not generate any profit during the support.

2.3.2. Specific objective – culture and tourism**2.3.2.1. Interventions of funds****Related types of action**

The types of action have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since: they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance.

Expected contribution to the specific objective

The cooperation programme will contribute to boosting the resilience and adaptivity of the cultural and natural heritage and tourism sector in the region in a long-term perspective by

- better embedding tourism in a strategic framework;
- treating tourism as an integrative issue linked to other topics
- revitalization of cross-border tourism after the COVID-19 crisis or any other potential crisis in the future”;
- enhance the digitalisation process in the tourism sector,
- strengthening the capacity to take-up innovation and future oriented business opportunities;
- improving the resilience and adaptivity of the hospitality sector;
- support the economic bailout from the COVID19-crisis in the hospitality sector;
- create new and innovative solutions to better communicate cultural and natural heritage site for new potential visitors.

Within its scope the programme actions aiming to address the objectives of the Green Deal reducing the EU's greenhouse gas emission for 2030 to 55% compared with 1990 levels will be considered.

Type of actions

Type of action 3.3 Cross border know how and data exchange to foster resilience of the tourism and cultural sector

The aim of the type of action is to create a solid base of information on main characteristics of the assets and services of tourism in the border area and to develop the key themes in cultural and natural heritage and tourism based on strategically relevant topics in the cross-border region. Diversification via integrated tourism concepts for well and less known tourist destinations (e.g. for mitigating seasonality, for prolonging the tourism season, for redirecting tourist flows, for avoiding over-tourism).

Indicative actions:

- joint development of strategically embedded key themes in intangible and tangible cultural and natural heritage;
- joint development of key themes for sustainable and green tourism development;
- joint skill development towards green and digital transformation of the sector in order to strengthen the resilience and long-term sustainability of the sector,
- combine the expertise and competencies of national actors (e.g. large national museums) with the expertise of regional actors;
- implementation of joint procedures for systematic visitor monitoring in order to implement joint management plans in a targeted manner.

Type of action 3.4 Joint pilot actions and investments to foster resilience of the tourism and cultural sector

The aim of the type of actions is to prepare and implement joint solutions and pilot actions including investments in cultural and natural heritage sites. Activities should be based on a strategic framework and should not be stand-alone projects in the region without integrative aspects.

Indicative actions:

- joint actions to reconstruct / strengthen the resilience of the hospitality sector in the region to improve better preparedness to future crises and recovery from the Covid-19-crisis;
- joint investment in key themes for sustainable tourism development and in intangible cultural heritage and tangible cultural and natural heritage based on a sound strategic framework;
- joint digitisation of cultural and natural heritage products for dissemination to different target groups;
- joint expansion and adaptation (e.g. in terms of barrier-free access) or maintenance of the tourist infrastructure with focus on quality development and promotion of joint offers to achieve a higher level of resilience in the tourism sector;
- improve cooperation of destination managements and create joint (cross-border) destinations under one label with active mutual promotion with a specific focus on destinations for green tourism and the inclusion of less known tourism locations with high potential;
- implementation of joint training measures for tourism and culture stakeholders;
- joint promotion of joint high-quality tourism marketing which takes into account the requirements of the digital transformation with special focus on a green and sustainable transition of the sector;

The programme will encourage beneficiaries to consider the standards such as the European Quality Principles for EU-funded interventions with potential impact on cultural heritage, the framework of the European Union flagship initiative on the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and the integrated, sustainable and inclusive guiding principles of the New European Bauhaus initiative.

The programme will seek to pay attention to financial sustainability of investments. Contribution to the other EU, national and regional strategies

The actions shall contribute to initiatives in priority area 3 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region according to the EUSDR - Action Plan (2020), by providing support for actions that contribute to the development of sustainable forms of tourism (like green tourist products and sustainable mobility solutions) and ensuring 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.

The actions shall contribute to 1st objective of the EU strategy of the alpine region EUSALP “fair access to job opportunities, building on the high competitiveness of the Region”. Particularly in improve the adequacy of labour market, education and training in strategic sectors (Action Group 3) by cooperation embracing a variety of economic activities, in the domains of agriculture, industry, commerce, tourism and other services.

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 and the Czech National Tourism Development Strategy. Actions will be expected to use synergies with related initiatives and projects wherever possible and to take into account especially results from previous projects and other EU programmes ERDF, ESF and the Danube and Central Europe transnational Interreg programmes or the Horizon 2020.

Main target groups

According to their thematic scope the main target group comprises of local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for tourist and cultural issues, sectoral agencies, and all other organisations

which are predominantly public such as regional development agencies, tourist operators, tourist information centres (points), regional tourism boards and museums, research and development institutions, tertiary education institutions business support organisation (e.g. chamber of commerce, business innovations centres), education/training centres and schools, NGOs.

Beside visitors also another additional target groups the general public who benefit from cross-border achievements such as policy integration, knowledge transfer and capacity building, concrete solutions in the fields of sustainable tourism, leisure, culture and management and protection of natural resources.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

The entire programme area is targeted.
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2.3.2.2. Indicators**Output indicators**

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Milestone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
3	SO ERDF 4 (vi)	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	No. of organisations	0	2021	0	41
3	SO ERDF 4 (vi)	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	No. of joint strategies and actions plans	0	2021	0	6
3	SO ERDF 4 (vi)	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	No. of solutions	0	2021	0	4
3	SO ERDF 4 (vi)	RCO77	Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	No. of visitors	0	2021	0	16

Result indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Target 2029	Source of data
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
3	SO ERDF 4 (vi)	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	No. of organisations	0	2021	20	monitoring
3	SO ERDF 4 (vi)	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	No. of joint strategies and actions plans	0	2021	3	monitoring
3	SO ERDF 4 (vi)	RCR77	Visitors of cultural and tourism sites supported	No. of visitors/year	280 500	2021	306 350	monitoring
3	SO ERDF 4 (vi)	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	No. of solutions	0	2021	2	monitoring

2.3.2.3. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention**Table 19: Dimension 1 – intervention field**

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 4 (vi)	171	13 146 320
3	ERDF	SO 4 (vi)	166	2 629 264
3	ERDF	SO 4 (vi)	165	2 629 264
3	ERDF	SO 4 (vi)	83	7 887 793

Table 20: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 4 (vi)	01	26 292 641

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

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 4 (vi)	32	26 292 641

2.3.2.4. Planned use of Financial Instruments

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. Other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results. The application of financial instruments (Article 59(2)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060) is in this Specific objective not planned as the planned investments in culture and tourism do not allow sufficient reflows to be expected. The projects will not generate any profit during the support.

2.4. Priority 4 - Cross-border Governance⁴

The cooperation programme considers the ISO ii) ((short title “Legal and institutional cooperation”) and the ISO iii) (short title “People-to-people action for increased trust”) as significant SOs with high needs and potential for joint approaches.

Table 22: Overview of types of action under the respective priority and specific objective

Priority	Specific objective	Types of action
Priority 4 / ISO1 (short title “Cross-border Governance”)	ISO ii) (short title “Legal and institutional cooperation”) ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of action 4.1 joint strategy development and know how exchange Type of action 4.2 joint pilot actions to approach the removal of border obstacles Type of action 4.3 networking and cluster activities
	ISO iii) (short title “People-to-people action for increased trust”) ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of action 4.4 Small projects to improve cultural, social and economic relations in the border area

2.4.1. Specific objective - legal and institutional cooperation

2.4.1.1. Interventions of funds

Related types of action

⁴ Draft ISO1: Interreg-specific objective (ISO) 'a better cooperation governance'

⁵ Definition according to draft ETC regulation (30.10.2020): ISO ii) enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and institutional cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular, with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions

⁶ Definition according to draft ETC regulation (30.10.2020): ISO (iii) build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions

The types of action have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since: they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance.

Expected contribution to the specific objective

- enhancing institutional capabilities in key thematic fields of the further development of the programme area;
- strengthened institutional cooperation and better coordinated strategy development of regional/local bodies for the efficient provision of services of general interest,
- remove obstacles⁷ for cross-border development in the longer-term (beyond the programming period).

Capacity development of the relevant organisations is expected to stabilise and extend current networks of cooperation, to enhance efforts on capitalising the results of previous programmes and to open up further possibilities for a better cross-border cooperation.

Type of actions

Type of action 4.1: joint strategy development and know how exchange

The aim of the type of action is to enhance the information and data exchange across-border to support joint administrative and legal activities addressing for example border obstacles.

Indicative actions:

- Joint strategy development in different areas such as research & technology & innovation (RTI), water management, transport and mobility, natural and cultural heritage, healthy lifestyle, demographic change, health care, regional development, business support services, rescue services (“blue light organisations”);
- Collection and processing of contextual information in the policy areas addressed by the cooperation programme to support strategy development;
- Development of joint strategies, structures and communication platforms for the exchange of experience and know-how in tourism.

Type of action 4.2 joint pilot actions addressing the removal of 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 activities and know-how exchange among public actors in relevant thematic fields, e.g.
 - civil protection and disaster control (e.g. cooperation of fire brigades, rescue services),
 - health care,
 - education,
 - waste and recycling management,
 - environmentally friendly transport concepts.

Type of action 4.3 networking and cluster activities to reduce administrative and legal obstacles

⁷ as described in the EC study “Cross-border obstacles between EU Member States and Enlargement Countries”

The aim of the type of action is to enhance cross border cooperation among administrative bodies to better tackled joint issues in the future.

Indicative actions:

- Joint actions of SME supporting organisations (Chambers of Commerce etc.) Those include also networking, support to cluster initiatives, coordination activities and others;
- Institutional cooperation to reduce administrative and legal obstacles;
- Cooperation between administrative bodies to optimise services to citizens and businesses and to meet the requirements of an open and modern administration.

Contribution to the other EU, national and regional strategies

The actions shall contribute to initiatives in priority area 10 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region according to the EUSDR - Action Plan (2020), for example by establishing law enforcement cooperation to ensure information security and counter hybrid threats, align the regulatory framework and improve governance in the energy sector, support better cooperation governance and more effective cooperation between administrations, by providing support for actions that contribute to the strengthening the institutional capacities to improve decision-making and administrative performance in the border region in the specified topics 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.

The actions shall contribute to 4th objective of the EU strategy of the alpine region EUSALP “Improving cooperation and the coordination of action in the Alpine Region”.

Main target groups

According to their thematic scope the main target group comprises local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, intermediary organizations, EGTC, non-governmental organisations.

An additional target group is the general public who benefit 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.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

The entire programme area is targeted.

2.4.1.2. Indicators

Output indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Mile-stone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
4	ISO 1 ii)	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	No. of joint strategies and actions plans	0	2021	0	5
4	ISO 1 ii)	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	No. of solutions	0	2021	0	3

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Milestone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
4	ISO 1 ii)	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	No. of organisations	0	2021	0	20
4	ISO 1 ii)	RCO 117	Solutions for legal and administrative obstacles across border identified	No. of legal or administrative obstacles	0	2021	0	2

Result indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Target 2029	Source of data
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
4	ISO 1 ii)	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	No. of joint strategies and actions plans	0	2021	3	monitoring
4	ISO 1 ii)	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	No. of solutions	0	2021	2	monitoring
4	ISO 1 ii)	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	No. of organisations	0	2021	14	monitoring
4	ISO 1 ii)	RCR82	Legal or administrative obstacles across borders alleviated or resolved	No. of legal or administrative obstacles	0	2021	1	monitoring

2.4.1.3. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention**Table 23: Dimension 1 – intervention field**

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO ii	173	8 514 335

Table 24: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO ii	01	8 514 335

Table 25: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO ii	32	8 514 335

2.4.1.4. Planned use of Financial Instruments

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The further development and strengthening of cooperation between the authorities and in the administration, despite the different structures, is an ongoing challenge to which the cooperation programme can contribute, as far as the legal competence situation allows. The funding should trigger the establishment of sustainable collaborations and best meets the needs of the stakeholders. There is no investment and no infrastructure funding, other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results.

The application of financial instruments (Article 59(2)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060) is in this Specific objective not planned as the planned investments in Cross border Governance do not allow sufficient reflows to be expected. The projects will not generate any profit during the support.

2.4.2. Specific objective - people-to-people action for increased trust

2.4.2.1. Interventions of funds

Related types of action

The types of action have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since: they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF DNSH technical guidance.

Small projects are a specific tool that can help to lower barriers to cooperation in order to foster the involvement of the local civil societies. In comparison to preceding funding periods, a more strategic approach is applied for the period 2021-2027, building upon a strategy development process specifically dedicated to the SPF. The implementation model will be based also on the structures as established during the preceding funding periods. However, the actual territorial and system-related configuration is subject to the aforementioned strategy-development process and the accompanying decision-making process at programme level. This also applies to the actual embedding in the programme, as the SPF could potentially partially be also implemented in another priority.

Furthermore, simplification in terms of SPF administration and implementation is a major goal. Hence, a wide use of simplified cost options shall reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries and administrative bodies. The use of SCOs is mandatory for small projects in a SPF.

Small projects mainly focus on people-to-people activities and are intended to contribute to increased intercultural understanding in the border regions, diminishing cross-border (mental) barriers on many levels, and reach as many citizens as possible in the border regions. They may also serve as pilots for larger projects.

Expected contribution to the specific objective

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

- bottom-up cooperation among citizens in the border region;
- small project with the aim to reduce mind-sets and draw people across-border together.

Type of actions

Type of action 4.4 Small projects to improve cultural, social and economic relations in the border area

The aim of the type of action is to improve the local interaction between citizens across-border and to reduce negative mind-sets and improve communication among people in the border area. Only small- investments are possible, if duly justified:

Indicative actions:

- people to people activities for improving cultural, social and economic relations in the border area with a clear cross border focus, particularly for supporting building of trust and capacity building
- jointly explore and develop solutions at local level, e.g. for overcoming obstacles in the fields of public administration or facilitating exchange between associations, e.g. in the fields of education or natural and cultural heritage, in the social, economic or health-care sector.

Contribution to the macro regional strategies

The actions shall contribute to initiatives in priority area 3 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region according to the EUSDR - Action Plan (2020), with supporting local initiatives related to social and cultural activities.

Main target groups

According to their thematic scope the main target group among others are individual citizens of the cross-border region, visitors, local public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, intermediary organisations, EGTC, who can contribute to a common understanding and a common identity in the border region.

Specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

The entire programme area is targeted.

2.4.2.2. Indicators

Output indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Milestone 2024	Target 2029
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
4	ISO 1 iii)	RCO81	Participations in joint actions across borders	No. of participations	0	2021	0	8 208
4	ISO 1 iii)	RCO115	Public events across borders jointly organised	No. of events	0	2021	0	108

Result indicators

Priority	SO	Indicators		Unit	Baseline		Target 2029	Source of data
		Code	Name		Value	Year		
4	ISO 1 iii)	RRC85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	No. of participations	0	2021	821	monitoring

2.4.2.3. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

Table 26: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO iii	171	6 493 693

Table 27: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO iii	01	6 493 693

Table 28: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	ISO iii	32	6 493 693

2.4.2.4. Planned use of Financial Instruments

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes the form of a grant. The funding should trigger the establishment of sustainable collaborations and best meets the needs of the stakeholders. There is no investment and no infrastructure funding, other forms of support in this area are therefore not suitable to stimulate the desired results

The application of financial instruments (Article 59(2)(a) and (b) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060) is in this Specific objective not planned as the planned investments in people to people actions do not allow sufficient reflows to be expected. The projects will not generate any profit during the support.

3. Financing Plan

3.1. Financial appropriations by year

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF (territorial cooperation goal)	0,00	14.831.672,00	15.069.914,00	15.312.919,00	15.560.785,00	12.893.987,00	13.151.871,00	86.821.148

Impact of a delayed adoption of the programmes 2021-2027 on the financial plans (EGESIF_21-0024-00 21/09/2021)

Art.7 Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 of 17 December 2020 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021-2027

3.2. Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

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)
					without TA pursuant to Article 2 7(1) (a1)	for TA pursuant to Article 2 7(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)		
PO1	Priority 1	ERDF	Total eligible cost	19.265.968	18.005.578	1.260.390	4.816.492	1.597.328	3.219.164	24.082.460	0,80
PO2	Priority 2	ERDF	Total eligible cost	17.515.164	16.369.313	1.145.851	4.378.791	1.447.005	2.931.786	21.893.955	0,80
PO4	Priority 3	ERDF	Total eligible cost	35.031.988	32.740.177	2.291.811	8.757.997	2.924.388	5.833.609	43.789.985	0,80
ISO1	Priority 4	ERDF	Total eligible cost	15.008.028	14.026.195	981.833	3.752.007	1.255.917	2.496.090	18.760.035	0,80
Total		ERDF		86.821.148	81.141.263	5.679.885	21.705.287	7.224.638	14.480.649	108.526.435	0,80

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

The programme Interreg Austria-Czechia is built upon a partnership basis, due to its nature as a cooperation programme. Based on this fundamental principle, measures for securing an appropriate involvement of relevant stakeholders are foreseen throughout the whole programme cycle – thus, during the phase of programme preparation, implementation, monitoring as well as programme evaluation.

Programme preparation

The main reasons for involving a comprehensive range of stakeholders in all steps of the programming process, which started in 2018, were to identify mutual interests and needs, to secure commitment and ownership for the programme and to ensure its practical implementation. Thus, also in the sense of CPR Art. 8, several measures were taken for ensuring a broad participation of relevant stakeholders of different background:

The programming group (PG) was initiated in 10/2018 and constituted the core strategic body and decision making body for jointly preparing the programme. The programming group consisted of:

- Managing Authority
- Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic (MMR)
- Representatives of the 3 Czech *Kraje*
- Representatives of the 3 Austrian *Länder*
- Czech Embassy in Austria (as observer)
- European Commission

A Technical working group accompanied the programming in order to discuss technical topics.

The Monitoring Committee was periodically informed about the programming process.

In general, the programming process was designed in a participatory manner, pursuing a place-based approach, thus starting from needs gathered via multi-faceted layers. By this means, tribute was paid to the territorial dimension as well as to the social and economic dimensions of cooperation. As a first step, by intertwining statistical evidence and expert inputs of the PG members, a socio-economic analysis was elaborated until the end of 2019. This analysis basically targeted at identifying needs and potentials in the programme region, hence, allowing the identification of thematic fields possibly relevant for being tackled in the framework of the programme 2021-2027. Furthermore, for also building upon historic experience, lessons learned from the accompanying evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme were taken into account. The latter was also based upon surveys and interviews; thus, aiming at obtaining feedback from a broad range of stakeholders.

The consultation process was threefold, starting with thematic stakeholder workshops in the course of 2020 (within the ConnReg project), which addressed social, economic partners, local, regional and national public authorities as well as NGOs and agencies. Furthermore, one bilateral workshop on health took place virtually. In total 277 stakeholders were involved in the workshops. The aim was to understand the needs, interests and possible actions of stakeholders in the region and to reflect on potential future projects. In total, 9 workshops (in AT and CZ separately) were held to all specific objectives of the programme. The ConnReg stakeholder workshops formed the basis for the programme design and the choice of the specific objectives.

The second step in the consultation process was the stakeholder consultation via an e-survey from 22 December 2020 until 15 February 2021. The survey was distributed via the programme newsletter and social media, in parallel it was actively distributed by the regional coordinators as well as multipliers, for reaching out optimally to relevant stakeholders. A total of 258 participants took part in the survey - balanced on both sides of the border (129 AT and 129 CZ). As expected, the most frequent respondents according to the focus of their activities were public administration entities (especially municipalities). Furthermore, research institutions, educational organisations and organisations involved in tourism activities were strongly represented in the survey. In addition, responses of other actors were gathered, such as rescue organisations, entities related to sports and leisure activities, actors dealing with health care or environmental issues as well as other regional or supra-regional actors. The responses revealed a strong interest in research, education and tourism. Therefore, related specific objectives were more strongly incorporated in the programme strategy.

Finally, as a third step, a public consultation process took place with publishing a short version of the programme including the priorities and specific objectives. Similarly to the aforementioned stakeholder consultation, the public consultation targeted at involving all relevant actors in the region, such as regional, local, urban and other public authorities; economic and social partners; relevant bodies representing civil society and research organisations as well as universities. Therefore, this consultation was again widely distributed, inviting all these actors to react on the future programme strategy. In total, 7 responses were received. The results of the public consultation were incorporated and facilitated reshaping the programme strategy, for instance in the field of research and innovation.

In December 2020, a strategy building process for the Small Project Funds (SPF) 2021-2027 was launched, aiming at rendering the SPF more strategic by building upon the identification of regional needs and potentials. This process was designed in a participatory manner, aiming at involving actors directly acting in the region, particularly at the local level. Furthermore, the SPF is clearly dedicated to enabling people-2-people activities and is intended to contribute to an increased intercultural understanding in the border region, to diminish cross-border (mental) barriers on many levels, and reach as many citizens as possible in the border regions. Small projects often reach out towards associations, NGOs and citizens, thus usually triggering great visibility in situ.

Finally, in accordance with Directive 2001/42/EC, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) accompanying the programming process involving environmental authorities and PG members. Thus, again within the aforementioned public consultation, a wider interested public in the Czech Republic and in Austria had another opportunity to comment on the programme strategy, particularly taking into account the expected environmental impacts of the programme. The comments were taken into account in the environmental report.

In the SEA environmental report no significant negative impacts have been identified in the Interreg programme Austria-Czechia 2021-2027, thus no mandatory monitoring measures are necessary to implement. As in general primarily negligible negative environmental impacts

have been identified, the nature of which varies widely depending on the types of projects, no supplementary monitoring measures from SEA side are suggested.

The interested public was informed on the programming process via the programme-specific newsletter as well as via a section on the programme website, specifically dedicated to 2021-2027.

Furthermore, coordinative and discursive formats were also applied by the programme partners at regional level, such as:

- In Upper Austria the relevant stakeholders were informed about the latest developments in setting up the new Interreg programme by the Regional coordinator. Additionally, in autumn 2020, thematic meetings with key stakeholders of the topics relevant for the future programme were organised. Those meetings helped to inform about the new programme and to discuss the need for cooperation in the specific areas.
- In Vienna, the regional coordinators mapped 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 as well as to record the topics relevant for Vienna. With 161 completed questionnaires, the response rate was 31 %. Due to the Covid-19 crisis, online bilateral meetings with key stakeholders took place. In six meetings, the RC discussed with 20 participants possible future topics.
- In Lower Austria the regional body, the Office of Lower Austria, informed the relevant stakeholders about preparing the new Interreg programme frequently. Two workshops with stakeholders were held additionally in 2020 and 2021. Analogous to Vienna a survey was made together with NÖ Regional to record the topics for the new Interreg programme.
- All participating CZ regions with their Regional Bodies are contact points for regional stakeholders. In this coordinative function, the relevant stakeholders in all three CZ regions were continuously informed about the latest developments in setting up the new Interreg programme, they were invited to all events, workshops and surveys and so had the opportunity to discuss the thematic concentration and cross border cooperation potential.

Programme implementation

The constitutive first meeting of the Monitoring Committee 2021-2027 is envisaged to take place in the first half of the year 2022. An appropriate partnership composition will be strived for by prospectively involving representatives of national and regional authorities as well as of economic or social partners, and non-institutional partners. The MC will play the crucial role in monitoring the programme's appropriate and efficient implementation and progress.

The programme's framework itself aims at securing an appropriate involvement of a broad range of stakeholders or experts at several levels. Local, regional and national authorities are foreseen as potential beneficiaries in almost all priorities. The programme bodies and partners will strive for establishing continuous exchange with relevant stakeholders of different background at all kinds of occasions, e.g. in the framework of partner seminars or thematic events.

As another measure, a format for consulting the interested wider public will be implemented in the course of the prospective evaluation, which will be embedded in the future programme's evaluation plan. The methodological approach will be conceptualised and communicated jointly with the programme partners. The goal of the evaluation is to identify new potential partners to take part in the programme and implement cross-border projects.

The programme actors plan to allocate a certain percentage of resources to support administrative capacity building, e.g. of social partners and civil society organizations. This will seek to enlarge the representativeness of relevant partners in the programme, such as regional and local authorities, urban and public authorities, economic and social partners, environmental partners and bodies promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination. The administrative capacity of non-governmental partners will be supported through seminars, consultations and methodological advice for applicants / beneficiaries, focused mainly on administration of project application and implementation and proper promotion of project outputs.

It is envisaged to pursue a continuous dialogue with the programme and project partners, multipliers as well as other actors being active in the field of regional policy, ETC, EUMRS, EU agendas or in further related contexts. Cross-programme coordination will be strived for continuously, particularly in the framework of established coordination platforms (see chapter 1.2.8) and formats offered via Interact. Adjustment measures can be derived, if necessary, which will facilitate a proper, collaborative and adaptive programme implementation.

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)

Communication represents an essential element for achieving the programme objectives. Securing appropriate transparency, communication and visibility measures are of fundamental importance to make the EU's activities more visible. Thus, the programme's communication measures are conceptualized as transparent and interactive, reacting flexibly to emerging adaptation requirements, e.g. arising from the accompanying evaluation of stakeholder involvement formats.

A JS staff member is appointed as communication officer and is responsible for coordinating communication activities, in close coordination with the MA. Relevant partners and bodies are representations of the EC and of the EP as well as Europe Direct and other networks. This also implies continuous coordination with the National Communication Coordinators, with Interact and other programmes, as well as with stakeholders being active on EUMRS level of or on EU level.

Communication objectives

The programme will set up a Communication Strategy, where the main communication goals and activity measures to promote the programme will be defined. The strategy will be approved by the MC, which will be informed about the progress made in implementing the communication strategy as well as about the planned measures to be carried out in the subsequent year.

The communication goals are linked to the programme goals and contribute to their achievement. Communication and programme visibility will also be integrated in the accompanying evaluation.

The communication budget is at least 0,3% of the total programme budget (incl.proportionate costs for staff).

Target groups relevant for achieving the programme objectives:

- Potential applicants
- Applicants
- Beneficiaries
- Programme bodies
- Broad public and stakeholders in the programme area

External communication

The programme aims to create positive awareness of cross-border cooperation in the general public in the programme area. The external communication will be further homogenized, again in close coordination with the programme partners as well as multipliers. The communication measures are intended to inform potential applicants about funding opportunities, with the aim of generating high-quality project applications. The project applicants are guided through the preparation and application process via diverse, target-group specific channels.

They will be used in a complementary manner for accompanying project partners during project implementation. By safeguarding the information flow towards all project partners,

projects shall run smoothly in terms of compliance with programme and EU rules. For the sake of enhancing capitalisation, project partners will be motivated to regularly share information on project progress and results with the general public.

In addition to the publicity guidelines on the programme website, capacity building seminars for beneficiaries will be held regularly, e.g. dedicated to communication, media relations and capitalisation – substantiating seminars on project and financial management. The aim is to facilitate project partners to pursue active communication on project activities and results for generating communication measures, in close cooperation with the programme partners.

General media strategy

The programme website is the most important communication channel and offers relevant information for the target groups. It will offer a section with core information on the programme: objectives and priorities, geographical and thematic scope, total amount allocated, submission deadlines / calls as well as a section on results showcasing data and examples of projects.

Furthermore, it will include a list of operations selected for funding. In addition, all approved projects will be published in the project database KEEP.EU.

The programme's social media channels are regularly updated for keeping the target groups informed. Press officers and journalists will be proactively informed about programme achievements.

Reference to the programme will be included in the single web portal in Austria (www.oerok.gv.at) and in Czechia (www.dotaceeu.cz)

Communication indicators

Output indicators will measure the outputs produced by communication actions (e.g. no of participants events, visitors, etc.); output indicator data will be collected with project reports, internal statistics and web analysis.

Result indicators will measure the specific changes achieved in response to communication outputs (perception of participants -/ beneficiaries, communication quality, quality of the guidelines, efficiency in project implementation, visibility of project results, etc.); Result indicators will be collected via interviews and surveys during the process evaluation of the programme.

The definition of the target values, the data collection and data sources for the indicators as well as their frequency of reporting, will be laid down in the evaluation plan.

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

The Interreg programme Austria-Czechia will support projects with a small financial volume within the framework of a small project fund in accordance with Article 25 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059.

There will be a small project fund in priority 4, ISO 1. Further possible topics for the implementation of small projects in other priorities of the program result from the elaboration of the Euroregional Strategy AT-CZ 2021+ within the framework of the Interreg AT-CZ programme 2014-2020. The financial volume of projects in priority 4, ISO1 should be up to € 30,000 in total costs. Should the elaboration of the Euroregional Strategy prove the need of small infrastructure projects in other priorities of the programme, then the financial volume of these projects should have a financial volume of up to € 50,000 in total costs.

The small projects must contribute to the achievement of the program objectives from which they are funded. The content of the projects is based on the priorities and specific goals (see Chapter 2) in which they are implemented.

The selection of the small projects will take place in a transparent process in which the representatives of the Austrian and Czech sides take part.

The financial allocation for the SPF, including the costs for administration, shall not exceed 20 % of the total allocation of the Interreg program AT-CZ 2021-2027.

For the small project fund, the simplified cost options will be applied in accordance with Article 25 (6) Regulation (EC), 2021/1059.

7. Implementing provisions

7.1. Programme authorities

Table 29:

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-Mail [200]
Managing authority	Office of the Government of Lower Austria, Dept. International and European Affairs, LAD4; A-3109 St. Pölten	Kathrin Huber	kathrin.huber@noel.gv.at
Audit authority	Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, Dept. Finance Control ERDF; A-1020 Wien	Markus Köb	markus.koeb@bmlrt.gv.at
Group of auditors	Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism, Dept. Finance Control ERDF; A-1020 Wien Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic, Unit 5202 – ETC Audits; CZ-118 10 Praha 1	Markus Köb Milan Puszkaier	markus.koeb@bmlrt.gv.at milan.puszkaier@mfcz.cz
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Managing authority (accounting function)	Lucie Bruckner	lucie.bruckner@noel.gv.at

7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

The Managing Authority in agreement with the programme partners from Austria and the Czech Republic considering the good experience, will secure the continuity of the structure and implementation arrangements already in place. The MA will set up the Joint Secretariat (JS) for the programme in compliance with the Art. 46 (2) and 17(6)(b), Reg.(EU) 2021/1059.

The Joint Secretariat supports the Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee to effectively support the proper implementation of the programme. Tasks of the JS are usually delegated from the MA. The JS is in charge of the day-to-day implementation of the programme. The JS is usually specialized in all communication “down” to the project level and in processing the reporting information received from the projects. The JS shall also provide information to potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under the Interreg programme. During project implementation, the JS shall accompany beneficiaries and project partners for securing a smooth implementation of operations.

For taking into account the programme partnership, the JS office will be located both in the Czech Republic, Brno, and in Austria, in St. Pölten, together with the MA. Activities of the JS during the programme period will be financed from TA resources.

E-cohesion:

The programme will use JEMS (Joint Electronic Monitoring System) for data exchange between programme authorities and beneficiaries (see also Performance Framework Methodology - Data quality assurance methods).

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

The arrangements related to 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 preventing, detecting and correcting irregularities and for recovering amounts unduly paid according to Article 69(2) of the CPR, the Managing Authority 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 or sole partner. The project partners shall 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 lead partner does not succeed in securing repayment from a project partner or if the Managing Authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the lead partner or sole partner, the Member State responsible for the control of the project partner concerned, shall reimburse the Managing Authority the amount unduly paid to that project partner according to Article 52(3) of the Interreg Regulation.

In accordance with Article 52(3) of the Interreg Regulation, the Managing Authority 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. The MA will reimburse the amounts concerned to the Union once the amounts are recovered from the lead partner /project partner / sole partner/ Member State.

Pursuing Article 52(5) of the Interreg Regulation, where a Member State has not reimbursed the Managing Authority any amounts unduly paid to a partner pursuant to Article 52 (4), those amounts shall be subject to a recovery order issued by the Commission which shall be executed, where possible, by offsetting to the respective Member State. Such recovery shall not constitute a financial correction and shall not reduce the support from the ERDF to the Interreg programme.

With regard to this fact, the offsetting shall concern subsequent payments to the same Interreg programme. In such a case, bilateral discussion between the Member State and the Managing Authority will be held to find a solution on how and from where to offset the amount deducted by the European Commission.

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

- For a financial correction that cannot be assigned to a particular project partner, the liability is borne by the Member State, which caused the irregularity that is the source of the financial correction
- 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 Member State is responsible) to the European Commission for the period which forms the basis for the financial correction.

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

Table 11: 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"/>

Map 1: Programme area



9. Planned strategic projects

The Interreg programme Austria-Czechia will support projects with a small financial volume within the framework of a Small Project Fund in accordance with Article 25 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059.

(see chapter 6)

It is planned to start the implementation of the SPF after the approval of the programme document. The submission of the SPF project is planned for the first Monitoring committee and will be implemented throughout the whole programme period.

The programme will strive for streamlining and inter-twining communication measures dedicated to SPF with measures dedicated to usual cooperation projects.