



Interreg VI-A Programme Hungary-Croatia 2021-2027

Programme summary – starting points, scope and objectives

December 2023

The Interreg VI-A Hungary-Croatia (the programme) will support cross-border cooperation between the member states in the upcoming programming period 2021-2027. The last version of the programme was submitted for approval of the European Commission on 8 December 2023. This paper summarises the current version of the Programme providing a brief overview on the strategic orientation. The Programme is a mature Interreg programme entering its fourth consecutive implementing period and will build on the achievements, experiences and lessons learned of 2014 – 2020 and previous programming periods through the implementation of envisaged joint cross-border activities.

1. Starting points (Background information)

The border region covers 31,085 km² and about 1.99 million inhabitants (2019), thereof 47% lives in Hungary and 53% in Croatia. The programme area includes eight Croatian counties (Bjelovar-Bilogora, Koprivnica-Križevci, Međimurje, Osijek-Baranja, Požega-Slavonia, Varaždin, Virovitica-Podravina and Vukovar-Srijem), as well as the three Hungarian ones (Zala, Somogy and Baranya).

The programme area has significant potential and numerous advantages but is also facing different challenges affecting sustainable development such as climate change, environmental degradation, and the transition to a climate-neutral economy. Expected Programme results will contribute to reaching goals set by the **European Green Deal** and underlined by **the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. The Programme is directly linked to the **European Strategy for the Danube Region** (EUSDR).

All actions within the programme will respect the horizontal principles of fundamental rights, gender equality, equal opportunity, non-discrimination, as well as promoting sustainable development and UN sustainable development goals during project preparation, implementation and follow-up period.

2. Programme scope Policy Objective 1 (focusing on research and innovation, digitisation and business support), Policy Objective 2 (focusing on climate change, natural risk, biodiversity and natural resources), Policy objective 3 (focusing on more connected border region by enhancing mobility), Policy Objective 4 (focusing on culture, tourism and education), and the Interreg Specific Objective 1 were considered the most relevant areas for support by the Programme:

Policy Objective 1 (SMARTER EUROPE) - a more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity

Policy Objective 2 (GREENER EUROPE) - 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

Policy Objective 3 (MORE CONNECTED EUROPE) – a more connected Europe by developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility



Policy Objective 4 (MORE SOCIAL AND INCLUSIVE EUROPE) - a more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights

The Programme also decided to support the Interreg-specific objective of 'a better cooperation governance', by the following actions:

(b) enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions

(c) build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions

The selected policy objectives have been translated into five priorities which will enable the programme to become the tool for implementing smart solutions that answer to the programme area needs and challenges. Five priorities, 7 specific objectives indicate specific changes that the Programme anticipates achieving through implementation of specific actions.

Priority axis 1 – Competitive border region

Policy objective "Smarter Europe" (translated into Priority axis 1) is extremely important for the development of the programme area since the majority of the border area is way below EU averages in terms of economic performance figures. The development of the programme area in relation to this Priority axis was recognized through fostering cross-border business cooperation. As driving force of economy of the programme area are local SMEs, special SME supporting scheme is intended to be elaborated and implemented in the border area fostering joint cooperation of SMEs operating on the different sides of the border.

The financial allocation to this priority amounts to 8.630.300 EUR of total programme EU funding.

Projects to be funded under this priority will have to tackle the following specific objective (SO):

SO 1.3. - enhancing sustainable growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs, including by productive investments

This specific objective will be achieved through cross-border cooperation implementing the following indicative list of actions:

1. internal and external human expertise of joint product, technology and service development;
2. activities for entering existing or newly developed products and services on international markets: international market surveys, appearance on events (fairs, seminars, workshops, conferences), development or upgrading of marketing tools and materials, targeted online and offline promotional actions;
3. product and service development in various fields; purchase of equipment for product or service development, moving, packaging and storing of products to be marketed at international level;
4. organisation of trainings, seminars for improving knowledge on product or service development and international market appearance;
5. involvement of business support and R&D organisations in joint innovation of SMEs;

Priority axis 2 – Greener and low-carbon border region



Policy Objective “Greener Europe” (translated into Priority Axis 2) is of the most important for the development of the programme area due to the common challenges on both sides of the border. Protection of natural assets, use of renewable energy resources, energy efficiency and insufficient use of RES are among the main challenges. In the framework of cross-border cooperation, integrated approach should be followed to reduce of greenhouse gas emission and carbon footprint.

In terms of promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the cooperation, knowledge and experience exchange in energy efficiency of building stock (public, enterprises, households) should be promoted, as well as promotion of renewable energy sources. While on the other hand, in terms of promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, and resilience, the cooperation in projects of green and blue land use, improvement of the status of waterbodies, protection of the environment and nature, habitat connectivity and restoration application of nature-based solutions, natural water retention measures and management of invasive species will be promoted.

The financial allocation to this priority amounts to 13.300.000 EUR (5.300.000 EUR for SO 2.1. and 8.000 000 EUR for S.O.2.4.) of total programme EU funding. The size of the allocation reflects the needed investments in the areas of sustainable energy/renewable energy, climate change adaptation and risk management. Projects to be funded under this priority will have to tackle the following specific objectives (SO):

SO 2.1 - promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions

This specific objective will be achieved through cross-border cooperation implementing the following indicative list of actions:

1. research, data collection and elaboration of joint cross-border territorial analyses and studies for the purpose of fostering energy efficient refurbishments and utilisation of various renewable energy sources and low carbon investments in public and private facilities;
2. cross-border knowledge and experience exchange activities for optimal ways of energy efficiency of building stock (public, enterprises, households) and for sustainable utilisation of renewable energy sources; development of joint databases, innovative tools and methodologies for sustainable energy management focusing on different target groups, energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives;
3. preparation of documentation (studies and technical documentation) for the purpose of using various energy sources in particular fields (tourism, industry, agriculture, buildings etc.) and transfer of knowledge and infrastructural activities in the field of renewable energy sources
4. elaboration of joint educational curricula and materials, organisation of trainings tailor-made for different target groups focusing on different fields of reduction of greenhouse gas emission;

SO 2.4 - Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches

This specific objective will be achieved through cross-border cooperation implementing the following indicative list of actions:

1. Adoption of a strategy for the development of the civil protection system due to the occurrence of disasters, pandemics and other threats to human health, procurement of equipment, organization of joint field exercises, education of key stakeholders and education of civil society to raise awareness of these risks.



2. Cross-border strategic planning activities, preparatory actions of restoration interventions (also as stand-alone activity), including ecological status survey, research, monitoring, data collection, environmental impact assessment and planning documentation at various levels, e.g. joint sustainable energy and climate action plans
3. Jointly tailored measures and pilot actions targeting ecosystem-based climate change adaptation and mitigation, based on risk and vulnerability analysis of the project area.
4. Implementation of strategic documents and pilot actions for improvement and development of green infrastructure (e.g. water retention, wetlands and peatlands restoration and management, restoration of natural infiltration to groundwater) within the cities in the target area.
5. Small scale investments in the infrastructure and equipment in order to reduce and promote resilience to the negative consequences of climate change, e.g. revitalization and construction of rain gardens, green areas and parks.

Priority Axis 3 – Connected border region

Policy Objective “More connected Europe” (translated into Priority axis 3) is of substantial importance for the development of the programme area since the border area is situated in the triangle of three TEN-T network elements (corridors Vb, X and Vc). Due to peripheral situation of these axes, middle of the border area is suffering from severe isolation and lack of cross-border infrastructure. Road connection should be supported to provide linkages in isolated peripheral areas, in order to connect neighbouring communities, providing improved and quicker access to TEN-T and other major road/rail infrastructure, generating time savings in cross-border mobility.

The financial allocation to this priority amounts to 9.500.000 EUR of total programme EU funding. Projects to be funded under this priority will have to tackle the following specific objective (SO):

SO 3.2. - Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility

This specific objective will be achieved through cross-border cooperation implementing the following indicative list of actions:

1. Elaboration of technical documentation in terms of main project design for licensing, including all related documents and plans defined by law of the partner countries;
2. Elaboration of technical documentation, in terms of executive plan, including all related documents and plans defined by law of the partner countries;
3. Implementation of road construction works (new infrastructure or upgrading), including all related elements defined by the technical plans, in line with the law of the partner countries.
4. Obtaining of relevant permits, according to legislation of the partner countries.



Priority Axis 4 – Inclusive border region

Policy Objective “More Social and inclusive Europe” (translated into Priority axis 4) is of significant importance for the Programme area due to two main challenges detected: Development of sustainable nature and culture-oriented tourism of international relevance and implementation of Joint educational initiatives.

The abundance of natural and cultural values in the Programme area presents an asset for local development in the field of tourism. The Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the only protection area in the world spreading through 5 countries, is mainly located in the border region. Particular element of the region’s cultural heritage is the crossover of various cultures rich in different assets. Therefore, sustainable tourism should play an important role in the economy, significantly contributing to employment and added value.

On the other hand, labour productivity is lagging behind the EU average in the border area, and there is a strong mismatch between skills and demand on the labour market. To overcome identified educational barriers including pandemic impacts and enhance cooperation in education for all generations in line with border region needs, this intervention is to develop means which promote specific local knowledge base as well as exploit development opportunities of cross-cultural cooperation.

The financial allocation to this priority amounts to 19.700.000 EUR (17.000.000 EUR for SO 4.6. and 2.700.000 EUR for SO 4.2) of total programme EU funding. Projects to be funded under this priority will have to tackle the following specific objectives (SO):

SO 4.2. - improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training

This specific objective will be achieved through cross-border cooperation implementing the following indicative list of actions:

1. Implementation of activities aiming at popularisation of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), including activities of construction or establishment of STEM centres and parks, implementation of education, camps and procurement of necessary equipment;
2. Development and implementation of joint curricula/courses by regional higher education institutions; Developing and delivering joint incentive schemes (internships, placements, hired students) and adult education programmes and workshops
3. Developing joint educational activities and strengthening the capacities of the centres of excellence (e.g. educational activities for potentially high ability students);
4. Incentives to create networks for schools, or twin-schools aiming at knowledge transfer based on good practices;

Specific actions will be implemented in order to help integrate marginalised groups of the society, such as people living in poverty and, especially, the Roma. Indicative actions may include:

1. Design and operation of a mentoring system to help the participation of the individuals belonging to the marginalised groups in the designed schemes;



2. Design and operation of a mentoring system for specific tailor-made training of teachers working in schools in lagging behind areas;
3. Specific local information events that aim at encouraging the participation of schools with high proportion of the Roma.

SO 4.6 - Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

This specific objective will be achieved through cross-border cooperation implementing the following indicative list of actions:

1. Infrastructure development of existing and new tourism attractions; Investment in small scale nature and culture interpretation infrastructure, in line with European quality principles;
2. Development of infrastructure related to hiking paths with touristic signage and water tourism;
3. Joint promotion of the border area at the relevant target markets, organisation of promotional events, participation at various events with cross-border relevance and beyond; Education and awareness raising among tourism workers and target groups;
4. Supporting digitalisation of tourism offer.

Priority Axis 5 – Cooperating border region

Due to the low level of territorial integration between the two sides, thematic cooperation of territorial governance actors (public or private non-profit) is needed in various domains, with the aim of identifying obstacles (legal and administrative), exchange of experiences, providing solutions for existing gaps, fostering digitalisation, transfer of good practices and generation and preparation of future projects. In order to build mutual trust, the promotion of cultural exchange and dialogue support is essential to civil organisations, operating in the following fields: cultural organisations, sport and youth associations, minority organisations etc.

The financial allocation to this priority amounts to 3.140.825 EUR of total programme EU funding. Projects to be funded under this priority will have to tackle the following specific objectives (SO):

In terms of fostering governmental cooperation, the Programme translated Interreg Specific Objective ISO 1 – a better cooperation governance into PA 5 – Cooperating border region and Specific Objective, and:

- Action 1: ISO 1b (Enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions) and
- Action 2: ISO 1c (Build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions).

Indicative actions to be supported in open call supporting scheme for ISO 1b are:

- Identification of legal and administrative obstacles relevant for cross-border cooperation, provision of solutions for existing gaps, fostering digitalisation, transfer of good practices, generation and preparation of future joint projects;
- Organising meetings and seminars for the exchange of experiences, information in order to identify common development issues, ideas, structures;



- Joint development of common approaches to identified common problems;
- Joint improvement of basic services;
- Joint development of databases;
- Promotion of multi-lingualism.

Indicative actions to be supported in open call supporting scheme for ISO 1c are:

- setting up and implementation of cooperation agreements of civil organisations;
- organisation of various events with involvement of the target groups and the general public;
- development of offline and online publications.