

## BESCHLUSS

des Burgenländischen Landtages vom ....., mit dem die Programme „INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2021-2027“ (Beilage 1), „INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027“ (Beilage 2), „INTERREG DANUBE REGION 2021-2027“ (Beilage 3), „INTERREG EUROPE 2021-2027“ (Beilage 4), „URBACT IV 2021-2027“ und „ESPON 2030“ zur Kenntnis genommen werden

Der Landtag hat beschlossen:

Die Programme „INTERREG ALPINE SPACE 2021-2027“ (Beilage 1), „INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027“ (Beilage 2), „INTERREG DANUBE REGION 2021-2027“ (Beilage 3), „INTERREG EUROPE 2021-2027“ (Beilage 4), „URBACT IV 2021-2027“ und „ESPON 2030“ werden zur Kenntnis genommen.



# INTERREG ALPINE SPACE PROGRAMME 2021-2027

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# 1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

## 1.1. Programme area

*Reference: point (a) of Article 17(3), point (a) of Article 17(9) <sup>1</sup>*

The programme area for the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 comprises the following territories:

- Austria: the whole territory
- France - NUTS 2: Alsace, Franche-Comté, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Rhône-Alpes
- Germany - NUTS 2: Oberbayern, Niederbayern, Oberpfalz, Oberfranken, Mittelfranken, Unterfranken, Schwaben; Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, Freiburg, Tübingen
- Italy - NUTS 2: Lombardia, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto, Provincia Autonoma di Trento, Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano / Bozen, Valle d'Aosta / Vallée d'Aoste, Piemonte, Liguria
- Liechtenstein: the whole territory
- Slovenia: the whole territory
- Switzerland: the whole territory.

In 2015 the Alpine States and Regions gave themselves a common strategy: the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). In order to enable the involvement of relevant partners from the entire EUSALP area in the development of the Alpine Region, the perimeter of the Alpine Space programme 2021-2027 shall be aligned to the perimeter of EUSALP.

This is meant to strengthen the coherence between programme and strategy goals and to support the path towards a carbon neutral and climate resilient territory. The focus of activities and interventions on the functional and geographic specificities of the Alps and peri-alpine areas will be maintained. The programme continues to play a key role in implementing the strategy and facilitating transnational cooperation in the area. Through transnational cooperation, the Alpine Region is striving for joint solutions and exchange in this regard.

In the further document we refer to the programme area as “Alpine region.”

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund. Available [here](#).

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

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

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, present at the time of programming, makes it more difficult than usually to assess current data and derive valid future developments. The following “summary of main joint challenges” is therefore based on currently available data (showing mainly the status before the COVID-19-pandemic) and the best possible estimation of future developments, also against the background and the inclusion of longer-lasting megatrends.

The Alpine Space Programme area consists of both: metropolises of global importance as well as remote rural areas. It spreads across the borders of seven countries. The Alpine states share the geographical and environmental characteristics and challenges of the Alpine region. However, these states differ considerably in terms of their economy and culture. Cultural differences contribute to the wealth of the Alpine heritage. They are embraced and celebrated in the macro-regional, cross-border and transnational dimensions and complement the natural heritage making the Alpine region a particularly attractive destination for tourists. The long history of cooperation as well as the establishment of the Alps as a popular touristic destination is an evidence of cultural and natural wealth and heritage.

Alpine regions are very heterogeneous. This heterogeneity is further intensified by economic and demographic disparities. On the one hand, there are disparities between larger areas as a whole, such as northern and southern Alps, eastern and western Alps. On the other hand, there are disparities between different territorial types such as rural, peri-urban, and urban areas, alpine and peri-alpine areas, or finer socio-economic typologies such as Alpine metropolises, Alpine cities, stable or growing rural areas, declining and shrinking rural areas and tourism areas. Alpine economies are also characterised by different specialisations and economic activities.

The Alpine region is affected not only by issues inherent to its mountainous character, environment and its diverse culture but also by external forces linked to developments at a wider geographical scale. The former, such as remoteness, accessibility, rich, and susceptible biodiversity and environment, economic disparities but also cooperation history are well-known in the region. The latter are emerging developments and mega trends, such as climate change, globalisation, and digitalisation. They pose new opportunities and challenges and impact already existing ones. Both

already established and relatively new challenges closely interact with each other and have social, economic, and environmental consequences.

Of particular note is climate change which is a long-term issue that greatly affects society and economy. Climate change and digitalisation together pave the way towards the next phase of globalisation. Climate change is a global trend with highly relevant but often uncertain impacts on territories, environment, human health, and economy. Mountainous regions, such as the inner Alpine regions, are more affected by climate change than lowlands. Environmental challenges and the phenomenon of climate change pose the most pressing problems on a global scale. Similar to other parts of the world, they impact already existing economic, demographic, and social characteristics and disparities in the Alpine region. This phenomenon challenges us to jointly rethink our economies, societies, and development strategies.

Digitalisation is a global and far reaching technology-driven transition that has been changing life, work structures, businesses, provision of services of general interest (SGIs), mobility, as well as social interaction. This phenomenon offers a considerable range of opportunities in the Alpine region that can be exploited, but possible negative effects (e.g. on CO<sub>2</sub>-reduction) carefully have to be assessed and weighted up towards the overall goal of CO<sub>2</sub>-neutrality. Other relevant trends include urbanisation, demographic change, societal change; focus on knowledge-based economy, and increasing energy consumption. A comprehensive and place-based approach is needed to address the range of these issues.

A more comprehensive and place-based approach to these environmental, economical, and social challenges can be offered by transnational cooperation at different governance levels in the entire Alpine region. In tackling these challenges, it is necessary to acknowledge the underlying and long-term environmental and climate change-related developments as opportunities for a shift to sustainable economies and societies. The Alpine Space Programme aims to exploit these opportunities and fully embrace this innovative and trail-blazing approach which will require commitment and cooperation.

Having that in mind the content of the programme is based on the applicable European Commission`s regulations, as well as on overarching strategies such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal as well as on the Territorial Agenda 2030 “A future for all places” with its two overarching objectives, to achieve a just and green Europe and the New Leipzig Charta.

## **The “mission statement” of the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 therefore states the following:**

### **Why are we here?**

- We are at the forefront of the transition to a unique, carbon neutral and climate resilient European territory: the Alpine region.

### **What do we do?**

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## Alpine Space

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- Through innovative and pioneering ideas, we foster the integration of sustainable economic development, societal wellbeing and the preservation of its outstanding nature.
- We support cooperation projects across borders and facilitate joint trans-national solutions.

### How do we do it?

- We bring together stakeholders from different areas, sectors and levels and create benefit for the citizens in the Alpine region.

## Summary of main joint challenges, opportunities, and relevant territorial, social, and economic disparities

### Environment, biodiversity and climate change, energy

**The Alpine region is a biodiversity hotspot and its territory is more susceptible to climate change.** The Alps are the second largest biodiversity reservoir in Europe after the Mediterranean Sea and one of the most important water towers of Europe. With almost 4500 vascular plants, the Alps represent one of the largest biodiversity centres in Europe as about 500 of these species are endemic. These resources are widely used creating strong competition for land and water for various purposes. Alpine biodiversity and ecological connectivity has been under pressure for many decades especially since the second half of the 20th century. Intensive exploitation of natural resources and the use of land for various purposes like settlements, transport, energy, and touristic infrastructure as well as for agriculture and forestry have caused high losses in biodiversity and the fragmentation of ecosystems in the Alpine area. In addition, the rich natural heritage of the Alpine region is more and more endangered. Climate change is a new threat for Alpine biodiversity.

**As a result of its rich biodiversity** across its different territories (mountainous regions, forelands, valleys ...), the Alpine region has a high potential for **Green Infrastructures (GIs)**. However, the Alpine region is also among regions with the lowest contribution of protected areas to the total area of potential GI. An obstacle to potential multi-functionality of GIs is the presence of bare rock on the surface. This results in low values for most **ecosystem services**. For example, in Austria there is a large network of protected areas; however, they have a low capacity to provide ecosystem services. In Slovenia and part of France there is the highest capacity for multi-functionality for policies. Notwithstanding this, there are possibilities for improvement in better integrating ecosystem services and green infrastructures.

At the same time, urbanised areas play an important role by using ecosystem services. In particularly high demand is given for water, leisure supply (including second homes), tourism (demand), but also clean air and ecological benefits. This requires a particular focus on the use of GIs and ecosystem areas in the urban territories of the Alpine region. In the last decades the Alpine countries together with trans-Alpine organisations and networks have taken high efforts to protect natural hot spots and biodiversity as well as to build up ecological networks in the Alps through numerous activities. It is necessary to continue these efforts in the face of continued environmental threats.



The Alpine region is highly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change, and faces a particularly high risk of floods, landslides, and changes in water resources. Tourism, agriculture, and forestry are among the most vulnerable sectors, directly impacted by global warming and extreme weather events. Given its morphology, less than one fifth of the territory within the Alpine Convention perimeter is suitable for settlements. Most human activities therefore are concentrated in often densely populated valleys where natural disasters can cause considerable damage. However, the damage potential is also high in more rural and mountainous areas, particularly if they are used intensively for tourism. Risk and hazard evolve dynamically, especially because of the changing climate conditions. This may exacerbate the intensity of hazards and contribute to a shift in hazards-prone areas.

The Alpine region has warmed twice as much as the global average since the late 19th century. The temperature increase from the late 19th century to the beginning of the 21st century was already around 2 °C. According to ESPON ALPS 2050, the changes of the (air-) temperature in the Alps 2050 perimeter show several patterns and characteristics: There are higher increases in annual mean temperature in the Inner-Alpine areas than in the area beyond the mountains. This displays a strong correlation with the morphological structure of the Alps: the higher the mountains, the stronger the increase of temperature (even if the relatively lower temperature-rise in the pre-Alpine areas already creates considerable adaptation challenges). The southern side of the Alpine mountain range is characterized by the highest changes in annual mean temperature, in particular in the Western Alps. This observation shows that above all the French-Italian, Swiss-Italian and Austrian-Italian border regions are most severely affected by climate change.

Considering the responsibility not only for the highly vulnerable Alpine region, but also for the planet as a whole, the task in the years to come is to implement regulations triggering greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction in all sectors and to introduce the next step from a low-carbon to a post-carbon society. On the one hand, this includes technical, legal, and organisational measures and instruments in all sectors (mainly energy production, industry, transport, construction and housing, spatial planning and consumption). On the other hand, it requires a paradigm shift that can only be achieved through awareness raising and new narratives. It involves a transition to economic concepts that leave “pure GDP-thinking” behind and make a step forward to integrated economic concepts of societal well-being. In this respect, the Alpine region could play a forward thinking and front-runner role. Making the Alps, and particularly the inner Alpine areas, more resilient with regards to the impacts of climate change is a joint effort of all actors across all sectors and borders.

The Alpine region is a major European crossroad with several transit corridors. Even though it is largely beyond the possibilities of the programme to provide interventions at the appropriate scale in this regard, the related environmental consequences should be highlighted. Various corridors of the road network are close to saturation and cause serious health issues, such as noise and air pollution. Major problems are linked to increasing traffic, the absence of harmonised regulation of transport policies for freight transport and the large proportion of road freight transport. The amount of transported net tons per year has grown at almost all transit corridors, although to different degrees.



**Air quality** is poor in many areas, e.g. this problem is particularly serious in the Po Valley as well as in several alpine valleys. It is therefore needed to bring transport measures into line with regional sustainable mobility plans, regional air quality plans, and national air pollution control programmes to improve coherence between them and increase synergies.

## Energy consumption

**Studies show a generally high level of energy consumption while the use of renewable energy varies greatly across Alpine regions.** In general, there is a high level of final energy consumption for space heating, hot water, and cooling in residential buildings in the Alpine region, although the demand is decreasing. High final electricity consumption for appliances and lightning in the residential sector can be observed in France, Switzerland, Austria, but is lower in Germany, Italy, and Slovenia. The picture for the service sector is rather differentiated. Final energy consumption for road transport is differentiated but high in Western Austria and Slovenia. Final energy consumption for rail is high in Austria, Italy, France, and lower in Germany and Slovenia.

In the Alpine region, the share of electricity generated from renewable sources is 40 percent, the European average is 29 percent (EUSALP Energy Survey, 2017). However, the shares are very unevenly distributed in the individual Alpine countries. The total share of electricity from renewable sources is high in Austria and lower in France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia. The solar energy potential is differentiated; and there is some potential for hydropower across Alpine regions.

Support schemes and European, national and regional policies regarding non-financial barriers to renewable energy and energy efficiency differ across countries and need to be better aligned. The efficiency of existing hydropower plants could be increased and other renewable energy sources could be considered. In order to support low-carbon transformation, there is also a need for integrated solutions which create co-benefits. This includes approaches that explore strategic policy-making in the role of consumption patterns and lifestyles. Furthermore, stronger considerations should be committed to disturbances to ecosystems made by energy-related infrastructure.

Actions that promote energy efficiency are therefore strongly needed in all sectors and at multiple levels. Measures towards energy efficiency should be identified for specific areas and economic sectors. The sources and locations of renewables should also be carefully examined: different sources show different territorial patterns with certain kinds of renewables being more efficient to use in one area than in others (e.g. wind, water, solar power).

The need for increased energy efficiency and sufficiency is also pressured by raising energy prices and accumulating negative effects of climate change. In this context, awareness-raising among actors in regards to the financial benefits as well as benefits concerning economic competitiveness of energy efficiency is an important field of action. Recognizing this, the programme supports actions going beyond efficiency and fosters integrated concepts of well-being, sufficiency, post-carbon lifestyles, and circular economy approaches.



## Demography, population, and society

Overall, the demographic trends in the Alpine Space have different effects and it is therefore not possible to identify a single Alpine-wide trend of population decline, stagnation, or growth.

**Main demographic disparities are linked to territorial types.** Metropolises and larger cities are almost always the centre of growth trends, whereas patterns in the rural areas are more diverse: there are stable and even growing regions (e.g. in the South-western Alps) whereas a decline of population can be observed especially in Eastern Alps, e.g. in Lower Austria and Styria. In addition, better employment and GDP trends can be found in the Northern Alps. These regional differences have impacts on the management of settlement growth, on the response to climate change, on the approach to reducing the fragmentation of ecosystems and the steering of the agricultural transformation.

**The complexity of demographic development patterns is further increased by the combination of diverse and overlapping in- and out-flows of migrants.** In general, there is a highly diversified situation in all parts of the Alpine region. There are bi-directional (and circuit) migratory flows, negative natural trends, the significance of specific age groups and gender differences in migration movements, length and frequency of movements. Metropolitan areas tend to show the most positive values whereas rural patterns are more diverse. Moreover, especially in the Alpine context, the seasonality of tourism leads to season dependent living conditions. In some highly attractive tourist destinations this results in crowding out of local population due to the increase of land- and real estate prices.

**Population densities in the Alpine area may be as high as in some of the European capitals** due to the concentration of people in valley bottoms with limited space. In these limited areas - the Permanent Settlement Areas - the average population density reaches 414 people/km<sup>2</sup>, which is comparable to densely populated areas outside the Alps. Favourable areas may have considerably higher densities such as the regions around Grenoble 6,282 people/km<sup>2</sup>, Lugano 2,097 people/km<sup>2</sup>, Milan with more than 6,000 people/km<sup>2</sup> and Innsbruck with 1,444 people/km<sup>2</sup>. This is comparable to European capitals like Berlin (3,812 people/km<sup>2</sup>) and Vienna (4,025 people/km<sup>2</sup>). The Inner-Alpine perimeter shows clearly lower values of accessibility than the pre-Alpine and more urbanised areas. At the same time, the growth phenomena in urbanised areas lead to increasing environmental pressure and land use conflicts. Prosperous urban areas face the challenge of managing growth, pollution, and increasing competition for land between housing, industry, transport infrastructure, agriculture, and free space. Declining rural areas have to tackle shrinking processes, the vacancy and decay of buildings and other infrastructure as well as the overgrowing of previously cultivated land.

Even though there are some counter-developments in certain places at a small-scale level, this evidence suggests that **spatial polarisation, which is also linked with an economic polarisation**, is increasing. There is an urgent need to counteract the growing gap between urban and rural areas. Often, peripheral rural areas are characterized by difficult geomorphologic conditions and locations, which lower their potential to be connected to larger functional areas. This constitutes a significant obstacle to growth.

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Polarisation leads to challenges concerning the **maintenance of services of general interest (SGIs)**, financial systems, and cultural dynamics in peripheral areas. Accessibility is highly relevant for the provision of SGI, which are a key factor for a good quality of life. SGIs are closely linked to the settlement system: in areas with scattered settlements e.g. in mountainous regions, the provision of SGI is more difficult than in densely settled areas. The uneven demographic situation leads to the thinning out of public services in some places which further perpetuates negative demographic trends leading to departure of the youth and a brain drain. Accessibility of remote and depopulating areas is also a challenge in many areas where public transport needs to be modernised.

In the coming years, particularly remote rural areas with lower grades of SGI-supply and accessibility will face demographic ageing-processes along with enhanced needs of SGI-provision. In other words, there will be a strong need to provide social services that correspond to the change in demographic structures and to ensure their accessibility as a key element of good quality of life. This will be particularly relevant in shrinking regions, where a higher share of elderly people has to be expected. Place-based approaches valorise the potentials of urbanised areas and regional centres as important hubs that spread services at the regional level. In this context, digitalisation will offer a broad variety of options. Essential precondition for their wide-spread use will be the sound knowledge, acceptance, and physical access by the people.

**Societal change goes hand in hand with demographic change.** Demographic trends are linked with emerging and frequently innovative social and cultural developments such as neo-ecology, low-carbon lifestyles, “counter-movement” trends, health and wellness tourism, as well as cross-cultural, cross-generational and cross-regional learning in the areas of protection of nature and voluntary work, including the involvement of tourists. Accelerated by globalisation and digitalisation, the variety of life concepts in combination with changes in professional careers, working and living places, changing gender roles and age concepts, lead to more heterogeneous, pluralistic societies. Single households, patchwork families, mobile teleworkers, people with more than one living place, population shift between day and night in commuter municipalities have changed local societies in urban as well as in rural contexts leading from strong local identities to multiple identities of a multi-local society. This change has also impacts on the environment and economy and requires integrated strategic approaches.

### Sustainable economic development

The further economic developments are difficult to estimate at the time of programming due to the COVID-19-pandemic. National as well as EU-programmes and funding schemes aim to provide strong support for a green recovery, and the Alpine Space programme also follows this approach.

**The economic performance of the Alpine region in the last years was rather strong relative to the EU.** Most indicators, including GDP per capita, have been above European average. A North-South divide however was to be observed: the trends in employment and in GDP have developed more positively on the Northern side of the Alps 2050 space than on the Southern side. This refers to the post 2008 economic crisis that (most regions of) Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Austria mastered quicker and with less frictions than the Italian and Slovenian regions. A similar North-South divide is given in the field of innovation patterns (European Patent Office data). In addition, there

are also smaller-scale disparities to be considered, for example between remote mountainous areas and regional centres or Alpine metropolises and their “hinterland.”

**Employment** in the Alpine area has been generally at a high level compared to the EU. A detailed look at the Alpine Convention area reveals lower employment rates for areas such as the south-eastern French and south-western Italian Alps, as well as the Italian-Slovenian border. The unemployment rate in 2019 ranged from 2.5% in Liechtenstein to 11.2% in the Slovenian Alpine area. With the exception of Slovenia, the average unemployment rate was lower in the Alpine region than in the countries as a whole. In some small inner Alpine areas, unemployment rates exceeded 20%. The youth unemployment rate was higher in the southern fringe of the Alpine Convention area.

The **GDP** distribution per capita in the Alpine Convention area is available at NUTS 3 level and shows disparities particularly between the central parts of the Alps and the eastern and western parts, even within a single country and its regions. The southern parts of the Italian Alps and the central parts of the Austrian and the Swiss Alps have had a relatively high GDP per capita. In plain areas, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) patterns show the highest productivity, tourism the lowest. In peri-alpine areas, the highest productivity is with large high-tech and traditional SMEs.

**The characteristics linked to its territorial specificity pose certain challenges for the economy** in some areas of the Alps. For example, due to limited accessibility from and within the inner Alpine areas to urban centres and to small and remote settlements, there are market barriers for small or new companies, limited availability of knowledge, or a limited supply for consumers.

**Alpine countries differ slightly in terms of shares of economic sectors.** Parts of the German, Italian and Slovenian Alpine areas have a high share in manufacturing and agricultural sectors whereas in Austria construction and retail are dominant. France and Switzerland are close to the EU average with an overrepresentation of public services. The share in the agricultural sector is the highest in Eastern Austrian and in Slovenian regions (in both cases relevant for all regions except capital regions). National differences are relevant, at least on the NUTS3 level. Belonging to a specific nation-state determines the economic level and path to a high extent. The question, if a region is situated in the Inner-Alpine or pre-Alpine area (i.e. AC or EUSALP), seems much less decisive.

**The Alpine region has a relatively strong SMEs and micro enterprises basis.** In Switzerland, Germany and France there is a sectoral focus on knowledge economy and ICT (related to industry and services). Switzerland and Italy show diverse sectoral foci. Slovenia has a strong industrial focus and Austria demonstrates a focus on services and tourism. The employment rate in knowledge-intensive services in the southern part of the Alpine Convention area is lower than in the northern and north-western parts.

**The Alpine region is also home to global key players in the field of research and innovation (R&I), offering a strong potential for further global development.** There are notable concentrations of SMEs in different parts of the region. Many of them are organised in clusters, building up a territorial economy which offers a solid basis for innovation based on smart specialisation strategies and allows companies to become more competitive in areas of particular relevance to the region (such as energy, green technologies, mechatronics and engineering; chemistry and new materials, ICT).

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There are some extremely highly innovative regions lacking qualified human capital which are scattered around-synergic knowledge hubs. E.g. high tech firms are concentrated in southern Germany and some in northern Italy (e.g. Monza, Brianza) as well as in Upper Austria (e.g. Steyr) and Styria. It should be noted that different regions within the programme area face some limitations relating to inter-Alpine research and innovation cooperation and the uptake of existing R&I results. This is due to spatially fragmented local markets, social disparities in innovation, funding opportunities, information and communication technologies, strong migration from rural areas due to poor infrastructure availability and the capitalisation of applied research results.

Furthermore, sustainable economic development should ensure closing gaps and fostering exchange and synergy potentials between urban and rural areas. Products, including regional products and quality products, and services based on agriculture and forestry offer significant potential (e.g. for the bio-economy) throughout the value chain (including for example the pharmaceutical and wooden building sector). Moving higher up in the value chain provides opportunities for rural and urban parts of the region to work together. Fostering urban-rural cooperation and circular economy approaches are key success factor for green economy in Alpine region.

In general, the evidence shows a relatively strong economic performance and high levels of innovation in many parts of the region. **Coupled with the particular environmental conditions and vulnerability to climate change, this strong economic basis predestines the Alpine region to be a pilot area for being a leader in green, sustainable economy characterised by carbon neutrality, resource sensitiveness, and climate resilience.** Among others, decoupling economic growth from throughput of material and energy resources as well as fostering of environmentally friendly technologies, favouring integrated approaches to waste and emission reduction rather than end-of-pipe solutions is a particularly interesting area of experimentation for SMEs. Circular economy approaches as well as bioeconomy can help to pave the way from low carbon to post-carbon economy, from a general “efficiency” approach to approaches that are more oriented on sufficiency. SMEs and innovation actors in Alpine region should be encouraged to benefit from the areas potential in developing green solutions and technologies. Businesses can benefit from resource efficiency and circular economy by cutting input costs and increasing their corporate responsibility. The programme can help strengthen a green economy approach based on key Alpine resources and its rich natural and cultural heritage and fostering integrated approaches in agriculture, forestry, tourism, energy, and the water sectors in order to implement sustainable economic development. It should also be emphasised that sustainable economic development needs to be supported by fostering green skills to answer the green jobs market. The development of green jobs constitutes a considerable potential for sustainable economic development.

## Tourism

**The Alpine region is a global key destination for tourism**, especially in the winter; however, tourists are very unevenly spread across the region. The relative importance of the tourism sector is in general high, even more so in the inner Alpine areas with high altitudes and mountainous regions, which are also more susceptible to environmental threats. A key asset of Alpine tourism and a source of economic activity is the valorisation of natural and cultural heritage.

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Tourism intensity based on overnight stays shows a ‘central-peripheral pattern’: the gradient goes from the (Inner-Alpine) centre to the ‘periphery’. The relative importance of the tourism economy is very high in the inner Alpine areas (comprising destinations like Graubünden, Tyrol, Southern Tyrol, and other international touristic resorts like in Southern and Western Alps ...). This shows the role of the Alpine massive as a touristic hot spot with a lot of economic potential but also many risks. The economy of only 10% of Alpine municipalities is mainly based on tourism.

**Climate change and related environmental issues, including natural hazards, threaten the sustainability and competitiveness of tourism in the Alpine region.** Tourism strategies and solutions should be particularly attentive to environmental and social impact on natural and cultural heritage in general, climate change, natural hazards, biodiversity, and raising environmental awareness and territoriality in particular. The development of the tourism sector could be improved through a concerted approach to sustainable and accessible tourism, involving in particular R&I, SMEs and suitable training for the labour force. Integrated tourism transport options are especially essential and in need of elaboration. Furthermore, tourism can be developed at the local and small-scale level beyond the touristic hotspots, supporting soft tourism in Alpine villages which is strongly based on the rich natural and cultural heritage. This could help improve the geographic and seasonal distribution of the tourism market in the region, while creating growth and jobs. The shift to sustainable and place-based tourism will be accompanied by digitalisation and possibilities in pursuing new lifestyles, marketing, and the information exchange it provides.

On the one hand, effects of over-tourism have already been observed in Alpine regions in the last years. On the other hand, a stronger societal awareness on health, “deceleration” as well as on environmental aspects and low-carbon lifestyles (“flight-shaming”, veganism), a critical view on industrial agricultural practices and more consciousness towards touristic infrastructures can be noticed. Apart from that, the demand for a more pluralistic society will also have its effects on tourism. The growing demand of a diverse society for specific offers, health, and wellness services as well as sustainable and “low-carbon-offers” can be seen as “counter-movement-trends” of recent developments and megatrends (e.g. globalization, acceleration, climate change). These societal changes should be utilized for the further transformation and positioning of sustainable and place based Alpine tourism along related changes in the Alpine community life (e.g.: stronger integration of secondary homeowners etc.).

The COVID-19 pandemic is specifically calling into question some developments in tourism (mass tourism, “après ski” ...). Valid prognoses and assessments in this area are currently very difficult, but the pursuit of sustainable approaches appears to be the order of the day, especially against the background of social change and climate change.

**That is why there is the strong need to further develop and deepen sustainable Alpine tourism and to deal with the current developments.** Alpine regions, due to their outstanding ecological value, rich natural and cultural heritage and the already high standards in tourism, will be able to propose the unique chance to establish healthy, resilient, and sustainable tourism offers.



## Digitalisation

Of particular relevance in the Alpine regions is also the emerging phenomenon of **digital transformation**. Digitalisation is relevant to all actors, not only high-tech SMEs. It affects a range of issues, including business development, SME, innovation as well as education and training of skilled labour force. It can contribute to economic development in the Alpine region by filling the gap created by remoteness and lack of accessibility, thus reducing spatial polarisation and bridging different territorial types across Alpine regions (urban - peri-urban - rural - mountainous, ...). Therefore, taking full advantage of the potentials of digitalisation should also help to reduce the innovation gap between metropolitan innovation hubs and rural areas with low-innovation potentials.

Digitalisation leads to a transformation of market structures, new working conditions, new production processes, focus on individualized products and services, project-based, and temporary cooperation as well as different work structures. It can lead to a higher importance of creativity and innovation in regards to economic and social development. Digitalisation can serve as an instrument for “future proofing” in a knowledge based economy in the Alpine region. Combined with innovation and creativity it can help make the Alpine region more resilient and flexible in adjusting to global trends and shifts from traditional economy and industries to new formats. Thus, digital transformation is linked to a broader approach to **social innovation** with impacts on sectoral policies (tourism, agriculture, nature conservation, etc.) as well as on the general public. Social innovation has a large potential to further develop economic and social structures in the Alpine region and accommodate the societal changes - also including the perspective of citizens as “beneficiaries of digitalisation” - as described above.

The various interactions between urban and rural areas are of special spatial and functional importance in the Alpine region. Similar to migration tendencies from rural to urban areas, they require transnational solutions in order to reduce spatial polarisation and to balance regional development in the Alpine region. The ageing society, the increase of free time and lifestyle trends lead to multi-localism, which could become a new dimension of urban-rural interrelations. Therefore, links between urban and rural areas in the Alpine region have to be further explored and made more sustainable. The potentials between urban centres and Alpine valleys should be explored especially with regards to digital economy which can help establish new development and digital-axes

### Joint investment needs and complementarity and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments

As the summary of the challenges shows, the current and foreseeable developments in the Alpine region result in a variety of different investment needs. Investment needs emerge, for example, in the area of SGIs due to the demographic change and the changing society, in the area of energy infrastructure and mobility for instance due to the climate goals and in the area of information communication technology in order to address the needs of a more and more digitized society - just to name some of the most obvious investments needs.

These investment needs however would by far exceed the financial resources and administrative structures of this transnational Interreg programme.

In this programming period, the Alpine Space programme therefore again focuses on supporting cooperation and collaboration in the whole Alpine region on the various levels of governance (from macro-regional to local level) and on non-investment actions (e.g. development of strategies, solutions, pilot projects). These actions taken by the programme are intended to support transnational, inter-governmental, and cross-sectoral cooperation but are therefore also suitable to prepare the ground for sound cooperation in joint investment initiatives and programmes. In this context, the Alpine space programme would like to make use of synergies and complementarities with:

- Other Interreg programmes (cross-border, transnational, interregional)
- National and regional Cohesion Policy programmes relevant for the Alpine region; as well as
- EU-wide programmes, initiatives, and funds, including Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, the LIFE programme, programmes funded under the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the Connecting Europe Facility 2 (CEF), the Digital Europe Programme, and the like.

The implementation of such synergies will happen throughout the programme lifecycle.

To address the complementarity and synergies with other forms of support it has to be pointed out that the selection of priorities and specific objectives for the Alpine Space programme 2021-2027 is based on the summary of main joint challenges in this chapter, the lessons learnt from past experience as well as on a sound needs analysis. The selected specific objectives therefore address the derived needs as best as possible for the Alpine region in all its diversity for the next seven years. In addition, exchanges took place with programmes that overlap geographically with the ASP (e.g. via Interact, personal overlaps in the programming-TF, exchanges between programme authorities, public consultations - see chapter 4).

The complementarity to other forms of support as e.g. ESI-funds mainstream programmes, cross-border programmes or other funding schemes (e.g. CAP, Horizon Europe and the like) is expressed through the tailor-made selection and design of the programme; the synergies through the connection to overarching strategies like the European Green Deal as well as to the framework given by the EC regulations.

Complementarities and synergies will be assessed during programme implementation in the following ways:

- Project application process: Project applicants must describe in the project application the contribution of the project to transnational cooperation (particular focus) as well as possible synergies and complementarities with other funds. Special attention will be paid to this when assessing the project application. Especially with regard to complementarity with other EU Cohesion Policy programmes or the CAP Funds, the transnational focus of the ASP projects should provide an important distinguishing feature.
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- Other Interreg programmes: There should be a continuous exchange of information with the relevant programme authorities especially during calls and project selection phases. This should promote the exploitation of synergies and minimise the risk of possible double funding.
- Other Cohesion Policy programmes, CAP and other funding schemes: Coordination will mainly be sought through National committees (or equivalent bodies based on national rules) involving representatives of institutions participating in the implementation of national and regional programmes or other funding schemes.

In addition, appropriate control arrangements and anti-fraud measures shall limit the risk of double funding. The procedures for this are laid down in the description of the programme management and control system as well as in the "Programme Manual" with the rules for participation.

Furthermore with the macro-regional strategy for the Alpine region, EUSALP with its action groups and networks, a very suitable framework for on-going coordination and embedding of the different strands of EU-regional funding is given.

### Lessons learnt from past experience

The EU transnational cooperation in the Alpine region has begun in 2000 after an already decades-long cooperation history in the area. The three predecessors of the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 offer valuable experience upon which the current programme will build in addressing both pertaining and emerging challenges and trends, as described above. There are several lessons that should be highlighted to indicate the areas of particular focus for the new Alpine Space Programme.

As current developments show, the Alpine region will have to face a multitude of transformation processes in the next years. Megatrends such as digitalisation and climate change, other joint challenges and opportunities such as demographic change and diversification of societies, transformation towards a knowledge and innovation-based economy, regional disparities and last but not least the impacts of the Covid-19-pandemic will call for firm action.

**The design of the programme enables a holistic, cross- sectoral focus on topics such as digitalisation, economic and social innovation as well as lifestyle changes, low-carbon and environmental aspects.** Important ways to increase the impact of the programme is to further emphasise sustainability and capitalization of project outcomes, territoriality and citizen-orientation as well as a holistic approach characterized by cross- sectoral topics and the flexibility of measures as well as by a stronger inter-linkage between projects.

In that context, the **stronger capitalisation of project results** should increase the impact of projects on the territory, lead towards a stronger involvement of the civil society and possibly a more balanced geographical and type-related distribution of project partners and observers. **Stronger synergies and the complementarity at the level of projects and programmes as well as participation and awareness rising** will be sought.

**It remains important to further ensure that programmes are designed to produce outcomes which are not only short-term effects.** While sustainability of outputs of some projects indeed depends on



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continued funding and institutional stability, it is possible to achieve sustainability in other ways. For example, activities stemming from Interreg projects can be mainstreamed in domestic programmes and by other actors than project partners. It is particularly beneficial when Interreg projects are continued and financed from domestic public sources.

**At the same time, stronger focus on ensuring a link to territorial specificities of the Alpine region and policy-making will allow the programme to be more embedded with public policies in order to address the “implementation gap”** which characterizes incapacity to implement the solutions into policy-making. The projects will be asked to pay particular attention to linking results to policies.

**The ambition to make a stronger impact is not only met in the thematic, cross-sectoral, and integrative set-up of the programme’s priorities, but also within the structures of the new Alpine Space Programme.** In order to keep up with a changing world the programme will address the call for more openness towards innovative projects and experimental action that are currently often impeded by formal requirements. **The administrative set-up of the new programme will reduce the bureaucratic burden** through simplification and harmonization. In order to further explore the programme’s potential in addressing different and cross-cutting thematic areas, **flexibility for experimental approaches will be explored.** This will pave way for more innovative and frontrunner projects.

**Involvement of different types of stakeholders** from different types of territories (e.g. cities, towns, mountainous regions, forelands) and different Alpine regions is of special importance for the programme. The programme will aim to strongly engage under-represented actors and stakeholders, according to its target group’s outreach and communication activities will be better tailored. All together, these approaches should help to bring the programme and its ideas closer to the citizens.

### The Alpine Space Programme and EUSALP

In the 2014-2020 cooperation period, the programme has welcomed the establishment of the EU Strategy for the Alpine region, EUSALP. As a macro-regional strategy (MRS), EUSALP is an integrated framework for addressing common challenges, among others, through ESIF. EUSALP is the “youngest” of the four MRS and it has already managed to bring together new stakeholders across different sectors, government levels, and countries. A major achievement of the EUSALP appears to be the increase of cooperation between the Alpine region and the surrounding metropolitan areas.

In 2019 as well as in 2020, the EC published reports on the implementation of the four MRS (COM (2019) 21 final and COM (2020) 578 final). According to the reports, bridging the gap between the MRS and funding opportunities seems to remain a challenge. The EC highlights that the **Interreg Programmes**, despite their limited amounts of funding, **have played a significant role in supporting MRS implementation.** The other funds at EU-level as well as national and other sources of funding up to now have not been easily available to support the strategies and its projects. The **EC emphasises the importance of cooperation** as a general cross-cutting feature of cohesion policy. Member States and regions are invited to put a stronger focus on that feature in the next phase of national and regional policy planning and programming.

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The **Alpine Space programme contributes to the EUSALP** along all EUSALP action groups. The alignment between the programme and the strategy takes place at different levels: strategic and operational coordination, information exchange, funding, multi-level governance, and capacity building, mobilizing actors, stimulating networks, integration between projects and action groups, coordinated communication and awareness-raising activities. The projects funded by the Interreg Alpine Space Programme contribute to EUSALP at different levels. EUSALP benefits from Alpine Space-funded projects by obtaining access to on-the-ground implementing organisations. Through cooperation with EUSALP, the Alpine Space Programme gains better visibility of its projects, and has a better access to high political levels. Indeed, studies indicate that there is a wealth of good examples of constructive collaboration between Alpine Space Programme and EUSALP, especially related to climate change.

As EUSALP is becoming an established MRS and the programme's relationship with the strategy is maturing, reflection of relationship to date allows further learning. The Alpine Space Programme focuses on further clarifying, deepening, and improving the concrete cooperation structures and financial support. Particular focus is placed on the elaboration of the governance and stakeholder structures as well as concrete administrative cooperation structures. These key-points should contribute towards a higher extent of exploiting synergies and rising the effectiveness and efficiency in the cooperation of the EUSALP and the Alpine Space programme in the programming period 2021-2027 as well as a stronger mutual reinforcement of both approaches.

A stronger integration between projects and action groups is needed for preparing the ground for innovative projects and bringing them closer to the citizens in Alpine regions. In that respect, capitalisation of project results and stronger involvement of the civil society should help to improve the implementation gap and enhance the impact projects show on the territory. Additionally, means of communication play an important role in the governance context. The new programming period offers the possibility to take stock and reflect on the measures undertaken so far. Taking the opportunity to think about new communication solutions will result in making common efforts more visible.

## Summary and outlook

Based on the considerations outlined in section 1.2 and the framework provided by the regulations, the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 defines the following **priorities**:

- **Policy objective 2** - A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility (PO 2) with
  - **Priority 1: “Climate resilient and green Alpine region”**
    - Specific objective “Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches”
    - Specific objective “Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution”



- **Priority 2: “Carbon neutral and resource sensitive Alpine region”**
  - Specific objective: “Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions”
  - Specific objective: “Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy”
- **Policy objective 1: “A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity (PO 1)” with**
  - **Priority 3: “Innovation and digitalisation supporting a green Alpine region”**
    - Specific objective: “Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies”
    - Specific objective: “Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities”
  - **Interreg specific objective 1: “A better Cooperation governance” with**
    - **Priority 4: “Cooperatively managed and developed Alpine region”**
      - Action: “Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea- basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies.”

The **policy objectives** and **specific objectives** are to be chosen from a given and pre-named set, provided by the regulations. The **priorities** and the assignment of the specific objectives to these priorities are determined by the programme, based on the considerations outlined in the programme document.

The programme is well aware of the existence of numerous needs in the Alpine region that might be well addressed by the selection of further policy/specific objectives. But after careful consideration and analyses, the inclusion of a broad spectrum of opinions and comprehensive discussion, the programme consciously agreed to **concentrate on green, CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral, innovative and governance-related topics**. Through cross-sectoral approaches within the selected objectives and a citizen-orientation, the programme aims to contribute to an integrated territorial development of the Alpine Space and to create benefit for the citizens in the Alpine region. With this focus the programme aims at achieving the greatest possible impact against the background of the given resources. The openness and integrativity of the proposed activities as well as the programme structures outlined in the following sections should make it possible to cover needs from other areas within the chosen framework.

To **foster the “green and CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral approach”** of the Alpine Space programme 2021-2027 even more, the programme invites all partners to consciously consider expected and unexpected impacts of their projects or actions on the environment, climate and sustainability, to seek mitigation of possible adverse effects, to strengthen any positive effects and, whenever possible, to incorporate mechanisms or practices that will unleash such positive effects (e.g. “green projects” considering environmental aspects right from the beginning).



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The **mission statement of the programme**, which is cited on page 5, is also an expression of this focus and is intended to make this approach broadly visible.

Furthermore, the following horizontal principles have been considered in the design of the ASP 2021-2027 programme-architecture and they shall further be respected during project preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation: The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, gender equality, non-discrimination including accessibility and sustainable development including the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, the principles of E-cohesion, public procurement, durability and “Do No Significant Harm” shall be complied with.

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 lifestyle cost criteria. When feasible, environmental and social considerations (e.g. green public procurement criteria) as well as innovation incentives should be incorporated into public procurement procedures.

Finally, the New European Bauhaus is an important initiative which the ASP 2021-2027 supports in different ways (for starting points see, among others, approaches supporting cultural heritage, energy efficiency or circular economy). The implementation of these principles and approaches should be examined in the course of the assessment of project applications, then the project implementation reports and evaluations.



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

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

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective		1. A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity
Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
RSO1.1. Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies	3. Innovation and digitalisation supporting a green Alpine region	Transnational cooperation on innovation and the uptake of advanced technologies has a particular potential to foster a climate resilient, green, carbon-neutral and resource sensitive Alpine region, provided that the activities are tailored to the needs of the programme area. For lagging territories, it offers opportunities to overcome territorial imbalances and opens new chances to shape solutions for a more just territorial development during the green transformation process. The Alpine region is heterogeneous with regard to the innovation-based performance. Cooperation on innovation is in place for some years now; however, the EC Orientation Paper states that “the Alpine Space is not (yet) a functional area for RDI”. Some regions are innovation leaders while others are less advanced with regard to innovation performance. Innovation capacities and support services are not evenly distributed in the Alpine region; and they are particularly under-represented in rural areas. At the same time, many Alpine actors in private and public sectors are eager and open to innovative solutions. Thus, stronger cooperation between different types of actors in and between regions and improved access to innovation environment would increase sustainable competitiveness. Supported actions include innovative solutions with a view to increasing the common good and to inclusiveness towards lagging territories and marginalised groups. Many of the previous projects co-funded by the programme in this field focused on strengthening cooperation between private partners and academia as well as on the exchange of knowledge and practices. However, given the low level of involvement of public and policy actors, the impact was limited. This requires projects that go beyond accustomed approaches and enter into fields that strengthen green innovation and place a special focus on testing and implementation in transnational contexts. At the same time interventions under this SO should be targeted at the most pressing needs. They shall contribute to a more just and integrative development while seeking climate resilience, carbon-neutrality, green and resource

		sensitive solutions, thus in complementarity of Priority 1 and 2). Form of support: grants. They are used to support financially non-viable projects.
<b>RSO1.2. Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities</b>	<b>3. Innovation and digitalisation supporting a green Alpine region</b>	Digitalisation is an increasingly relevant phenomenon and a megatrend which affects a wide range of issues. These include business development and innovation, social innovation, work, education and training of skilled labour force, provision of public services, as well as a more efficient transformation to a carbon neutral and climate resilient territory with help of better information flows. Digitalisation potentials are relevant in mountainous contexts such as in the Alps, where many areas are affected by remoteness and lack of accessibility, which are further aggravated by demographic changes and depopulation. Digitalisation in Alpine regions has the potential to contribute to mitigating these problems, leading to a reduced polarisation, and bridging different territorial types through the provision of new solutions and services for citizens and businesses. As such, it can help mitigate negative demographic trends and brain drain by offering new employment solutions and encouraging skilled and young actors to remain in rural and intermediate Alpine territories instead of moving to urban areas. Digital tools can be explored to “future-proof” the knowledge-based and green, resource-sensitive and carbon-neutral Alpine economy by offering new possibilities to pursue goals under Priorities 1 and 2. Combined with innovation and creativity, it can help make the Alps more resilient and flexible in adjusting to global trends and shifts in traditional economy, demographic as well as environmental and climate challenges. Digitalisation has a particularly attractive application potential also with regards to availability and access to SGIs, health, sustainable tourism, new working models and mobility and transport planning. Form of support: grants. They are used to support financially non-viable projects.
<b>Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective</b>		<b>2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</b>
<b>RSO2.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions</b>	<b>2. Carbon neutral and resource sensitive Alpine region</b>	Being part of the wealthiest regions of the world, the Alpine region is affected not only by climate change impacts. They are also highly responsible for the increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Reducing energy consumption is a key success factor to fight the climate crisis. The Alpine countries are committed to achieving the target of the EU Energy Efficiency Directive and respectively the amending directive until 2030 and beyond. Under the amending directive, EU countries will have to achieve new energy savings of 0.8% each year of final energy consumption for 2021-2030. Alpine regions are among the forerunners of promoting energy efficiency measures, but there is still considerable effort needed to achieve these goals. High levels of final energy consumption are still observable by countries in certain areas, as well as in certain sectors such as in the transport, building and residential sector, or the tourism and leisure sector. Promoting energy efficiency measures help to tackle climate change and to reduce its impact in the most affected areas. Energy efficiency measures are needed at local, regional,

		<p>but also transnational level in order to be effective and to unfold a high impact. Efficiency concepts alone most probably will not be sufficient to manage the transition to a carbon neutral or even a to a post carbon society. Innovative steps therefore should go beyond efficiency and foster integrated, transnational concepts of well-being and post-carbon lifestyles that go further than mainstream approaches Due to their topography and geography but as well as to their traditions, societal set-up and state of economic development, the Alpine region poses a particularly suitable laboratory for testing and elaborating innovative, transnational approaches in the field of energy efficiency and sufficiency. Form of support: grants. They are used to support financially non-viable projects.</p>
<p><b>RSO2.4.</b> Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches</p>	<p><b>1. Climate resilient and green Alpine region</b></p>	<p>Due to its topography, climate change affects the Alpine region more than other areas. The annual average temperature will increase in the Alpine arc. Changes in precipitation patterns and a movement of the snow line to higher altitudes are predicted for the Alps. As a result, the Alpine region will have to cope with water scarcity and heat waves in summer and warmer and more humid winters. Both nature and humans will be directly affected by increasing temperatures. Additionally, climate change will lead to an increase in natural risks that pose a threat to settlements, infrastructure, livelihoods, human lives, and nature. Mountainous regions as well as their forelands will be highly affected due to their vulnerability. Key sectors that will have to adapt to climate change and natural risks will be the tourism and leisure sector, agriculture, forestry, water management, spatial planning and landscape planning. Apart from that, the mobility-system and the settlement system will be affected as well, e.g. by an increase in floods or landslides, closed or endangered roads and infrastructures, increase of “red zones.” Climate change will have major impacts on the economic and social system. The consequences of climate change will be manifold and represent a considerable challenge for Alpine nature, economy, and society. These challenges will not be limited to national borders. The exact impacts are not yet clear and its variety is difficult to predict today. This uncertainty is an additional challenge that experts, administrations, and policy makers have to cope with. Making the Alps more resilient with regard to climate change requires a joint effort of key actors in all sectors and across borders. This demands inter-regional and trans-national action leading to comprehensive adaptation measures in the Alpine region. There is no time to waste: the public costs of inaction in the field of climate change adaptation will be significantly higher than the costs invested now. Form of support: grants. They are used to support financially non-viable projects.</p>
<p><b>RSO2.6.</b> Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy</p>	<p><b>2. Carbon neutral and resource sensitive Alpine region</b></p>	<p>The linear orientation of the mainstream economy leads to an enormous consumption of resources and accumulations of waste. In a world where resources are limited, the transition to new approaches such as “circular economy, green economy, and bio-economy are highly important and inevitable. These approaches reduce the overall resource use, energy consumption and the environmental impacts to a minimum and ensure social inclusion. Coordinated efforts will be needed to meet the global and European goals (e.g. “European Green Deal”). The Alpine region</p>

		<p>shows a specifically high share of natural resources, such as wood, other raw materials, or renewable energies. The exploitation and processing requires innovative and environmentally friendly technologies, on the one hand. On the other hand, the natural and renewable resources provided in the Alpine region pose a wide range of opportunities in a sustainable circular, green economy. Additionally, many Alpine key sectors (e.g. tourism, mobility) pose interesting but challenging issues for a “circular economy.” Striking the balance in resource use and resource protection will be a key issue in the Alpine region. Thus, the implementation of circular economy approaches offer high potentials. They promote sustainable development for Alpine key resources and key sectors, the implementation of new innovative and transnational solutions, fostering of value chains and breaking the linkage between economic growth and resource use in the long run. These approaches can also be applied to Alpine tangible and intangible cultural heritage to foster its preservation, use, enhancement, or reuse. Given its environmental sensitivity and innovative potential, the Alpine region should build on its successful base and become a leader in developing and implementing circular economy solutions together with green and bio-economy. This can be achieved through transnational cooperation that would involve various types of actors and stakeholders. Form of support: grants. They are used to support financially non-viable projects.</p>
<p><b>RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure , including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution</b></p>	<p><b>1. Climate resilient and green Alpine region</b></p>	<p>The Alpine region is an important European biodiversity hotspot that defines its environmental sensitivity but also offers significant opportunities for sustainable development. Alpine biodiversity and ecological connectivity have been under pressure for many decades especially since the second half of the last century. Intensive exploitation of natural resources and the use of land e.g. for settlements, transport, energy and touristic infrastructure have caused high losses in biodiversity and the fragmentation of ecosystems and landscapes in the Alpine area. Additionally, air and noise pollution caused by increased transport intensity and the production sector are particularly problematic. Climate change is an additional significant threat for Alpine biodiversity. Not only does climate change have an impact on species and ecosystems, but so do certain climate mitigation and adaptation measures, e.g. in the field of renewable energies (such as wind parks in areas of high biodiversity). Taking into account the outstanding value of Alpine ecosystems, green systems and the current and upcoming threats, a focus must be placed on further strengthening Alpine biodiversity, on the connectivity of Alpine ecosystems as well as multifunctional green infrastructures. In that context, multifunctional green and blue infrastructures offer solutions that can both help to protect biodiversity as well as the sustainable use of ecosystem services. Furthermore, green and blue infrastructure can ensure a better functionality of Alpine cultural landscapes and local economy activities (e.g. tourism, agriculture) and can improve the connection between rural and urban areas. The implementation of transnational green infrastructure solutions can greatly contribute to biodiversity, pollution reduction in all territorial types enhancing territorial potential, possibly by linking rural and urban</p>

		areas and across national borders. Form of support: grants. They are used to support financially non-viable projects.
Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective		6. Interreg Specific Objectives: A better Cooperation governance
ISO6.4. Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies (all strands)	4. Cooperatively managed and developed Alpine region	Fostering transnational cooperation and exchange across borders and governance levels are the “core business” of each transnational programme. Enhancing the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders is a crucial basis and is strongly needed for successful cooperation. The Alpine region is characterised by high quality public administration with a good and long tradition of cooperation. Cooperation in the Alpine region takes place on all governance levels - starting from local to regional, national, bilateral, transnational and with the establishment of EUSALP also on macro regional level. Cooperation activities are implemented through a wide range of formats - be it funding programmes such as EU-transnational or bilateral cooperation programmes, international agreements such as the Alpine Convention and its protocols or regional cooperation frameworks. Current challenges like climate change adaptation and mitigation, impacts of the COVID 19-pandemic or the digital and global transformation strongly underline the need for public administrations to further adapt and develop their services and processes beyond the capabilities of isolated national or regional administrations and to engage in up-to-date multilevel and transnational governance initiatives. Considering this, areas that urgently will require support, are for example communication - (between different governance levels but also communication with stakeholders and the public), capacity building as well as cross-sectoral and -horizontal cooperation. The funding period 2021-2027 with the “Interreg-specific objective” provides a tailor made opportunity for the Alpine Space programme to build on previous experiences and to deepen cooperation and governance within the Alpine region. The activities foreseen for Priority 4 should therefore focus on supporting the efforts to apply the principle of governance in practice and support respective projects. Form of support: grants. They are used to support financially non-viable projects.



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## 2. Priorities

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

### 2.1. Priority 1: Climate resilient and green Alpine region

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

#### 2.1.1 Specific objectives: RSO2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches

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

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

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

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

The Alpine region will be highly affected by climate change in the upcoming years. The annual average temperature will increase, changes in precipitation events and patterns are foreseen and the snow line will move to higher altitudes. The Alpine region will have to face periods of water scarcity and heat as well as of high precipitation, causing floods, landslides, and other natural hazards. The mountainous regions as well as foothills and forelands of the Alps are highly vulnerable zones. Sectors particularly affected will be tourism and leisure time activities, food production (shift in crops and farm management), forestry and water management but also transport and mobility. The consequences of climate change in the Alpine region are expected to be manifold and represent a considerable challenge for alpine nature, economy, and society.

The signs of climate change require urgent action. Adaptation to climate change is one element of a possible reaction, mitigation is another. Within this specific objective (SO), measures that foster the adaptation to climate change, “the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects.” as the IPCC puts it, should be covered. Mitigation measures will be covered in PO2 SO i, and SO iv. Nevertheless it should be pointed out, that actions supported within this SO should have an integrated character, foster co-benefits for mitigation and avoid lock-in-effects by adaptation.

*The following areas seem to be of particular relevance for the implementation of this SO within the Alpine Space Programme 2021 - 2027:*

From a transnational Alpine perspective, the inter-relations within the natural, economic, and societal systems are of special interest. The variety and the extent of the impacts caused by climate

change in the different Alpine regions are yet uncertain in detail (e.g. what will the concrete impacts of an increase in landslides and floods on tourism/leisure activities look like? How can administrations ensure road safety in the case of an increase in landslides or rock fall due to glaciers retreat and permafrost instability?). Precisely because of these uncertainties the adaptive capacity of the Alpine region urgently needs to be strengthened. Solutions should be developed to cope with the impacts of climate change, to establish climate services and to foster the resilience of the Alpine region.

Adaptation measures related to risk prevention and disaster resilience should go hand-in-hand with these adaptation measures. Climate change will lead to an increase in natural hazards that pose an explicit threat to settlements, infrastructure, livelihoods, and human lives in mountainous regions as well as in the forelands of the Alps. Therefore, the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 should support the development of inter-regional and transnational frameworks, joint management approaches and services that foster risk prevention and disaster resilience in a comprehensive and sustainable way. Nature Based Solutions (NBS - solutions inspired and supported by nature like e.g. protective forests) in particular offer great potentials in that respect and should therefore be given special attention.

In the Alpine region, actors generally can look back on traditions of cooperation in climate change adaptation and risk management. But in order to meet the global (UN Agenda 2030, Paris Agreement) and even more ambitious EU climate strategies and goals (e.g. European Green Deal, European Climate Law), increased efforts and a strong focus are the means of choice. Making the Alpine region more resilient with regard to the impacts of climate change requires a huge joint effort of the key actors together with citizens as well as a shift from sectoral to integrated and participatory approaches at a transnational, regional, and local level. This specific objective should therefore be a main focus of the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027.

#### **Related types of action:**

Promote **climate change adaptation-measures** specifically focusing on the inter-relations between the natural, economic, and societal systems in the Alpine region by the following indicative types of action:

- a) Developing solutions and pilots to strengthen the preparedness and adaptive capacity of the alpine society, economy and nature to cope with the impacts of climate change and establish climate services[1] to foster the resilience of the Alpine region (e.g. societal/economic adaptation, health aspects, changes and needs of ecosystem services, water and soil protection, financial aspects);
- b) Organising solutions and pilot actions to bridge the gap between climate research and practical implementation and to integrate new research results into the adaptation practice at different levels and for different types of territories;
- c) Supporting information exchange and knowledge transfer at a transnational/regional/local level to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to raise awareness among experts, policy makers and citizens;

d) Developing methodologies and tools within pilot activities aiming at measuring and monitoring the specific impacts of climate change to the lithosphere-biosphere-hydrosphere-cryosphere.

Promote **risk prevention and disaster resilience** that go hand-in-hand with the aforementioned adaption measures by:

e) Setting-up of preventive, integrative and strategic planning measures in the fields of spatial planning and risk management through the joint development of solutions, tools, interoperable databases; disaster monitoring-, warning- and response- systems at different territorial levels concerning all kind of natural hazards and fostering Nature Based Solutions;

f) Developing solutions and pilot activities for different types of territories in highly affected and exposed regions (e.g. high altitude environment with glacial mass reduction, permafrost degradation, or regions specifically hit by draught) as well as exposed main communications axes (e.g. roads, railways) and human settlements.

g) Improving skills and competences for policy makers and stakeholders at different policy levels to make better use of digitalization in the field of risk prevention, risk management and climate change adaptation, e.g. by harmonizing and sharing data (incl. open data) and implementing innovative digital tools;

h) Developing integrated and participatory concepts and implementing pilot projects in risk management as well as communication measures aiming at raising awareness and preparedness among policy makers at different policy levels as well as among citizens;

i) Developing solutions and pilot activities to set up coordination structures for the sustainable management of multifunctional protective forests and the establishment of Nature Based Solutions, taking into account Green and Blue infrastructure, sustainable water management and ecosystem services.

All types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative impact due to their nature.



## 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.4	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	5	15
1	RSO2.4	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	2	21

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base line	Reference year	Final target 2029	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.4	RRC104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0,00	2021	11,00	JEMS*	

\*JEMS = Joint Electronic Monitoring System



### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Main target groups to specific objective: “Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches” (PO 2, specific objective (iv)):

- National, regional or local public authorities,
- Higher education and research institutions,
- Schools/education and training centres,
- National, regional or local development agencies,
- Interest groups including NGOs and citizen`s associations,
- Sectoral agencies,
- Enterprises (incl. SME),
- Infrastructure and (public) service providers,
- Business support organization, including chambers of commerce, networks and clusters,
- General public/citizens,
- Other public organisations.

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

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

ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools are not planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

There are no financial instruments planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.



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

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	060. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: others, e.g. storms and drought (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	5,815,718.00
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	058. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: floods and landslides (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	5,815,718.00
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	173. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	6,631,434.00
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	059. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: fires (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	5,815,718.00

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	01. Grant	24,078,588.00

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.4	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	24,078,588.00

### 2.1.2. Specific objective: RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

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

Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution.

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

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

The Alpine region marks a transnational biodiversity hotspot; even though it is situated within one of the most densely inhabited and connected areas in Europe. This particular context calls for urgent action. Alpine biodiversity and ecological connectivity have been under pressure for many decades, especially since the second half of the last century. Human activities, land use, exploitation of natural resources and pollution lead to habitat fragmentation and loss of biodiversity and cultural landscapes. Additionally, consequences of climate change (e.g. heat, drought) as well as certain climate mitigation and adaptation measures (e.g. the reinforced use of wind- or hydropower in sensitive regions) pose threats to Alpine biodiversity. The on-going and predicted reduction of living space and biotope fragmentation causes high losses in biodiversity and reduces ecosystem services. The need to reduce biotope fragmentation and loss as well as to foster the connectivity of ecosystems is therefore high.

What particularly distinguishes Alpine biodiversity is the coexistence of zones hardly influenced by people and zones that have been cultivated for centuries. Both are characterized by their high importance for Alpine biodiversity. In untouched areas, specific habitats were able to evolve. However, valuable habitats have also developed in areas used for agriculture and forestry, the so-called “cultural landscapes” of the natural and cultural heritage of the Alps.

Regarding these the following thrusts seem particularly relevant for the implementation of this SO within the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027:

As the need to reduce biotope fragmentation and to strengthen the traditional Alpine landscape, the Alpine Space Programme will put a focus on the joint and strategic development of transnational Green and Blue multifunctional infrastructure-networks. Green and blue multifunctional infrastructures (GBI) offer integrated solutions that protect biodiversity and support the sustainable valorisation of ecosystem services (e.g. water, clean air). Networks of GBI also provide climate services, contribute to the provision of recreational areas close to residential areas and help to reduce negative impacts of pollution and improve air quality e.g. by fresh air corridors. The latter is of particular importance for urban, densely inhabited as well as recreational areas and strongly supports

health aspects (e.g. “One-health-approach”), what came out to be particularly important within the COVID 19-pandemic.

Apart from that, the Alpine region will look more closely at the effects of climate change on biodiversity. Changes in temperature and precipitation have impacts on the phases of growth as well as the composition of the flora and fauna. This implies threats e.g. caused by “invasive species” or diseases but also opportunities for new species. Additionally, certain climate change mitigation and adaptation measures have strong impacts on the Alpine biodiversity and ecosystem services. Therefore, the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 will foster transnational cooperation, knowledge-exchange and reinforced research on the concrete impacts of climate change on Alpine biodiversity, in both protected (e.g. Natura 2000 areas, national parks, all further kinds of sanctuaries) and other areas.

The extraordinary diversity of habitats makes the Alpine region one of the most important areas both for the preservation of biodiversity as well as the sustainable valorisation of ecosystem services. Developments in recent years and predicted future developments connected to climate change call for reinforced action. Cooperation at transnational, regional, and local level as well as inclusive approaches will strongly support these efforts and therefore pose an important focus of this programme, expressed in the following indicative list of types of actions.

**Related types of action:**

- a) Implementing pilot projects that support multifunctional Green and Blue infrastructure-networks (“TEN-G”), Nature Based Solutions (NBS) and innovative planning methodologies in order to strengthen Alpine biodiversity and ecosystem services, targeting to develop tailor-made solutions for different territorial needs (urban, rural, peri-urban and their interlinkages) and taking into account their impacts on social, cultural and economic systems (e.g. health related issues like the “One-health-approach” integrated and sustainable approaches of system integration and valuation, reduction of pollution);
- b) Developing transnational solutions and implementing pilot projects on sustainable land use management, climate-friendly settlement development, soil protection and the sustainable valorisation of natural and cultural heritage, including cultural landscapes to reduce biotope fragmentation and to support the connectivity of ecosystems
- c) Supporting transnational cooperation, knowledge-exchange and reinforced research on the concrete impacts of climate change on Alpine biodiversity as well as the impacts of mitigation and adaptation measures for different types of territories and ecosystems, as well as in and for urban regions (e.g. to fight urban heat islands);
- d) Developing integrated solutions and pilot activities to cope with the impacts of energy management, hydro power, and energy grids on ecosystems and biodiversity;



Supporting measures of communication and awareness raising among different political levels and citizens concerning the valorisation of ecosystem services as well as Green and Blue infrastructure strategies across borders and their integration into regional and local planning.

All types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative impact due to their nature.



### 2.1.2.2. Indicators

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

**Table 2 - Output indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO2.7	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	3	9
1	RSO2.7	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	1	13

**Table 3 - Result indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base line	Reference year	Final target 2029	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO2.7	RRC104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	7.00	JEMS	

### 2.1.2.3. Main target groups

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

Main target groups to specific objective: “Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution” (PO 2, specific objective (vii)):

- National, regional and local public authorities,
- Higher education and research institutions,
- National, regional or local development agencies,
- Interest groups including NGOs and citizen`s associations,
- Schools/education and training centres,
- Sectoral agencies,
- Enterprises (in particular SMEs),
- Business support organisations, including chambers of commerce, networks and clusters,
- Infrastructure and (public) service provider,
- General public/citizens,
- Other public organisations.

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

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

ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools are not planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

### 2.1.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

There are no financial instruments planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	078. Protection, restoration and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites	4,496,150.00
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	079. Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	5,994,867.00
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	173. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	4,496,150.00

Table 5 - Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	01. Grant	14,987,167.00

Table 6 - Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO2.7	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	14,987,167.00



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## 2.2. Priority: 2 - Carbon neutral and resource sensitive Alpine region

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

### 2.2.1. Specific objective: RS02.1. Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions

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

Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions

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

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

The European Union aims at becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 with no net greenhouse gases in 2050 and economic growth decoupled from resource use. By 2030, greenhouse gas emissions are to be reduced by at least 55 % below the 1990 level. The ambitions with respect to carbon-neutrality have been reflected in different strategies (e.g. the Alpine Climate Target System 2050) as well as in implementing various measures in the Alpine region in the last years. However, in order to reach the global and European targets, the efforts must be increased in the next years.

In the first place, the need to implement energy efficiency and sufficiency measures, i.e. measures to use less energy but to perform the same tasks or services, will be necessary in order to achieve these goals. Energy efficiency measures reduce the amount of energy needed - which is extremely important against the background of still increasing energy consumption - and help lowering greenhouse gas emissions, thereby contributing to carbon neutrality. Energy efficiency in the long run also lowers costs for households as well as the economy and society due to the total reduction of energy needed for the production of heat, electricity, transport etc.

The two sectors currently showing the highest per capita end-use of energy in Europe are mobility and transport and the building sector. Mobility and transport is one of the sectors that is highly relevant in the Alpine region. Although progress towards energy efficiency has been made throughout the Alpine region and in different sectors, high levels of final energy consumption are still observable in certain areas. Road transport, next to the residential or the tourism and leisure sector, remains one of them. Efficiency concepts alone most probably will not be sufficient to manage the transition to a carbon neutral or even a post carbon society. Innovative steps therefore should go beyond efficiency and foster integrated, sufficiency-oriented concepts of well-being and post-carbon lifestyles. This should be coupled with the use of renewable energy sources broadly available within the Alpine region (e.g. water, wind, solar power).

The promotion of energy efficiency measures is closely linked to tackle climate change, as well as to implement circular economy-approaches. In this context, this specific objective should be seen as a “supporting objective” to SO iv “Promoting climate change adaption” and SO vi “Promoting the



transition to a circular economy.” The interventions in this specific objective should be complementary but not overlapping with these SO’s.

The following areas seem to be of particular relevance for the implementation of this SO within the Alpine Space Programme 2021 - 2027:

Due to its topography and geography as well as its joint traditions, societal set-up and state of economic development, the Alpine region is a particularly suitable laboratory for the elaboration and testing of innovative, cooperative approaches in the field of energy efficiency and the road towards sufficiency. Energy efficiency is tightly knitted to the need for economic development and competitiveness. Decoupling economic growth from resource consumption remains a huge challenge and hence is needed to be addressed in conjunction with energy efficiency targets and the further transition to low energy consumption and circular economy approaches. Lessons from the EU initiatives for coal regions in transition should be taken into account in this context.

To go a step further, the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 will contribute to establishing a paradigm shift and transformation to focus on developing post-carbon and sufficiency-oriented solutions in the transnational context of the Alpine region, e.g. in the following fields and thereafter expressed indicative types of actions:

- Building/housing/residential sector (see connection to the focus of SO vi - circular economy with a focus on existing buildings), the potential of waste heat recovery, district heating systems or heat storage;
- Green/clean/soft mobility and transport e.g. connected to tourism and leisure time activities as well as specifically public passenger and freight transport (see connection to SO vi - circular economy)
- Integrative land-use-policies and energy-based spatial planning solutions to support efficient and synergetic use of energy (see connection to the focus of SO iv - risk prevention and SO vii - enhancing biodiversity).

**Related types of action:**

a) Supporting innovative solutions as well as concrete pilot actions that foster sufficiency-oriented-post-carbon lifestyles as well as cross- sectoral approaches for different types of territories, e.g. in the planning/ building/ housing/ residential/ tourism /mobility & transport/ energy sector(s) that take into account the sustainable implementation of new energy-resources (e.g. GNV, hydrogen, bio GNV, electric mobility);

b) Improving skills and competences for policy makers and stakeholders at different policy levels as well as energy communities to support the transition from efficiency to sufficiency and post-carbon oriented approaches, e.g. in the planning/ building/ housing/ residential/ tourism/ mobility & transport/ energy sector(s) also taking into account renewable energy sources;

c) Supporting solutions, the exchange of knowledge, good practices and R&D activities focussing on the transition from energy efficiency to sufficiency-oriented approaches and to support the transition

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towards a post carbon economy and society in the Alpine region considering Multi-Energy-System-Integration and the sustainable use of renewables;

d) Developing cooperative and sustainable solutions to improve energy poverty policies concerning adequate and healthy heating, cooling, lighting and energy-to-power-appliances to enhance social inclusion, social innovation and encourage common policies for the Alpine region;

e) Supporting knowledge transfer, pilot activities, as well as communication measures in order to raise awareness among different policy levels and the citizens/consumers using approaches like behaviour economics, transformation management, and political framing in order to foster the paradigm shift towards sufficiency- and post-carbon approaches.

All types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative impact due to their nature.



### 2.2.1.2. Indicators

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

**Table 2 - Output indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
2	RSO2.1	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	2	5
2	RSO2.1	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	1	7

**Table 3 - Result indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base line	Reference year	Final target 2029	Source of data	Comments
2	RSO2.1	RRCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	4.00	JEMS	

### 2.2.1.3. Main target groups

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

Main target groups to specific objective “Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions”:

- National, regional and local public authorities,
- Higher education and research institutions,
- Schools/education and training centres,
- Business support organisations, including chambers of commerce, networks and clusters,
- National, regional or local development agencies,
- Interest groups including NGOs and citizen’s associations,
- Sectoral agencies,
- Enterprises (in particular SMEs),
- Social organisations,
- Infrastructure and (public) service providers,
- General public/citizens,
- Other public organisations.

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

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

ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools are not planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

### 2.2.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

There are no financial instruments planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.



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

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

**Table 4 - Dimension 1 - intervention field**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.1	ERDF	038. Energy efficiency and demonstration projects in SMEs and supporting measures	1,712,820.00
2	RSO2.1	ERDF	173. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	3,425,638.00
2	RSO2.1	ERDF	046. Support to entities that provide services contributing to the low carbon economy and to resilience to climate change, including awareness-raising measures	3,425,638.00

**Table 5 - Dimension 2 - form of financing**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.1	ERDF	01. Grant	8,564,096.00

**Table 6 - Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.1	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	8,564,096.00



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## 2.2.2. Specific objective: RSO2.6. Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

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

Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy

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

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

Fostering circular economy is one of the main thrusts of the European Green Deal. Circular economy refers to sustainable systems that treat resources as particularly valuable and attempt to close the resource loop. The principles of avoiding “waste” and trying to keep resources in use for as long as possible are relevant for the entire production-cycle. In this regard, circular economy is a far broader approach than just recycling or waste management. It strongly supports sustainable development, the mindful use of resources, climate-neutrality and both climate change mitigation and adaptation. Concerning the situation with COVID 19, circular economy is also widely assumed to be a suitable approach to tackle the crisis, strengthen resilience, and support a “sustainable restart” of the social and economic system. In this global crisis, the importance of regional and local value chains became clearly visible. Circular economy approaches appear to be very suitable for supporting the needs of sustainable economic development, climate-protection, and social adaptation in the Alpine region.

Regarding the concept of circular economy, the following directions seem particularly relevant for the implementation of this SO within the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027:

The Alpine region is characterized by a high potential for natural resources. The exploitation and processing is mostly linked to (highly) material intensive sectors. Circular-economy-approaches will show great impact and foster the reduction of the overall material use as well as the implementation of innovative solutions and new technologies (e.g. green hydrogen). The Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 will take a step further and link the circular economy approach with bio-economy and other green economy-concepts. Examples supported might be:

- “Cradle to cradle building”-concepts as advance of “sustainable building” (concerning key sectors such as construction and housing, energy, incl. renewable energy);
- (Trans-) regional material cycles and value-chains regarding resource efficient exploitation, processing and production, transport and use, recycling or up-cycling (e.g. production of sustainable materials and goods, sustainable handicraft and manufacturing, sustainable timber processing, building materials processing, recycling of batteries), also taking into account sharing approaches and renewables (e.g. bioenergy from agricultural and food waste).

Further sectors with great importance for the Alpine region are tourism, leisure time activities, and related sectors (e.g. food production, mobility). Here the programme will support the development

of concepts regarding closed material cycles in Alpine tourism, mobility, and related sectors. This might be achieved by:

- Fostering the use of high quality biological, indigenous and regional products (e.g. “farm to fork-approach”, regional and local craftsmanship as material and immaterial heritage);
- Reducing the total use and consumption of materials and resources in tourism and leisure time activities, including mobility;
- Fostering approaches in waste recycling (e.g. “plastic free” Alpine region, reducing food waste) and valorisation of waste (e.g. wood and agro-food chains, urban waste).

Furthermore, consumer- and social innovation-oriented processes play an important role. To support the transformation towards circular economy, green economy and bio-economy as well as more eco-sufficiency, consumers and their behaviours have to be addressed. The existing awareness of consumers, stakeholders, and citizens should be strengthened and joint solutions towards circular economy-approaches considering behaviour economics should be developed.

Regarding the different territorial types, circular economy-approaches strengthen the economic development in rural as well as in urban regions:

- The concept poses specific opportunities for rural and mountainous regions with high potentials of renewables with regard to their sustainable valorisation as well as the exploration of the opportunities of bio-economy and bio-tourism.
- Additionally, regional material cycle solutions are particularly appropriate for mountainous areas with constricted transport routes. These solutions can have additional positive environmental impacts like a reduction of pollution and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions due to reduced transport needs.
- Alpine cities and towns might be specifically well suited to embark on innovative waste management solutions, taking into account digitalization (e.g. “smart solutions”).

This specific objective (PO2, SO vi) and the indicative types of actions specified below will represent a focus of the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027. It has strong inter-linkages with PO2, SO i. Further important framework documents that support circular economy are the new “Industrial Strategy and Circular Economy Action Plan,” the “Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable food” and proposals for a pollution-free Europe prepared by the European Commission.

#### **Related types of action:**

- a) Setting-up circular/green/bio-economy-solutions to facilitate the development and implementation of circular and green economy-approaches among different actors with a focus on the Alpine key resources and key sectors above mentioned and implement innovative (pilot)projects and processes;
  - b) Exchanging good practices and implementing pilot activities supporting inter-regional circular economy approaches that promote bio-economy, the use of indigenous biological and regional
-

products and that support waste reduction specifically in the above mentioned key sectors (including e.g. refurbishment activities, enhancing supply chains, regional and local value chains);

c) Developing and implementing "transnational value chain"- solutions based on regional assets and resources, competences and needs referring to the EU-key-concept of "strategic value chains", supporting industrial and innovation stakeholders in the Alpine region;

d) Improving skills and competences of stakeholders at all policy levels and in the relevant business sectors to pave the way towards the implementation of circular, green economy as well as bio-economy approaches including the set-up of indicators and monitoring systems;

e) Supporting solutions and pilot activities dealing with communication, capacity building, political framing approaches and awareness raising for stakeholders at different policy and implementation levels (e.g. including SMEs, start-ups etc.) as well as citizens/consumers using approaches like behaviour economics and political framing concerning the concept of "circular economy", "green economy" as well as "bio-economy" to support a better understanding for the needed transformation processes.

f) Developing solutions and pilot activities supporting the development of clusters specialized in circular and green economy as well as circular bio-economy that foster research, innovation, implementation and cooperation particularly in the in the above mentioned key sectors.

All types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative impact due to their nature.



### 2.2.2.2. Indicators

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

**Table 2 - Output indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
2	RSO2.6	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	4	12
2	RSO2.6	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	2	17

**Table 3 - Result indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base line	Reference year	Final target 2029	Source of data	Comments
2	RSO2.6	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	8.00	JEMS	

### 2.2.2.3. Main target groups

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

Main target groups to specific objective “Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy”:

- National, regional and local public authorities,
- Higher education and research institutions,
- Schools/education and training centres,
- Business support organisations, including chambers of commerce, networks and clusters,
- National, regional or local development agency,
- Interest groups including NGOs and citizen’s associations,
- Enterprises (in particular SMEs),
- Sectoral agencies,
- Infrastructure and (public) service provider,
- Social organisations,
- General public/citizens,
- Other public organisations.

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

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

ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools are not planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

### 2.2.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

There are no financial instruments planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

## 2.2.2.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

**Table 4 - Dimension 1 - intervention field**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.6	ERDF	071. Promoting the use of recycled materials as raw materials	5,812,880.00
2	RSO2.6	ERDF	075. Support to environmentally-friendly production processes and resource efficiency in SMEs	6,812,880.00
2	RSO2.6	ERDF	173. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	6,750,505.00

**Table 5 - Dimension 2 - form of financing**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.6	ERDF	01. Grant	19,376,265.00

**Table 6 - Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.6	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	19,376,265.00

## 2.3. Priority: 3 - Innovation and digitalisation supporting a green Alpine region

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

### 2.3.1. Specific objective: RSO1.1. Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies

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

Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies

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

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

Cooperation on innovation capacities is a transversal activity that can strengthen the programme's impact in particular thematic fields by increasing the innovation potential of Alpine actors. Enhancing research and innovation capacities in the Alpine region should effectively be fostered by cooperation between actors and stakeholders in different regions.

However, it should be ensured that its implementation takes place according to the present needs and lessons learnt from the past. Traditional approaches that focus on cooperation between private actors and academia can have an even stronger impact with the involvement of policy-makers. Creating a stronger link to innovation policies can safeguard the provision of policy solutions to strengthen actors' capacity to innovate and jointly develop and implement innovative solutions. Better alignment and coordination of policy-making in the transnational context is necessary in order to help regions overcome barriers in cooperation on innovation and uptake of advanced technologies. This will lead to establishing and strengthening existing synergies and functional links, reducing polarisation between urban and rural regions, for example by diffusing innovation services, capacities, linking key actors, and fostering resilience.

At the same time, the programme should further ensure involvement of diverse actors from research, innovation, academia, private sectors, public sector, and civil society. Its focus should not only be result-oriented innovation seeking particular solutions, but also innovation with regards to processes and with a view to reducing territorial imbalances. This can be done by encouraging an open and inclusive culture, contributing to bottom-up development of joint solutions by involving wide a range of actors (including also citizens, students of all ages next to academic and economic actors). This approach additionally should also support social innovation and its application in relevant fields, such as SGIs, sustainable tourism or mobility. Clusters and innovation hubs can continue to benefit from transnational cooperation as key players supporting the concrete deployment of innovation services, leading to innovation diffusion and increased innovation capacities of the regional ecosystems.

It is important to observe that the innovativeness of solutions sought in the programme refers not only to the objective of making business actors more competitive, but to making other actors, such as public bodies and other organisations, more capable of applying innovative solutions and technologies. Given by the programme's mission (such as priority 1 and 2), innovation includes a "green" character of activities, impacts of projects as well as methods and practices of project management. Project partners are asked to consider expected and unexpected impacts of their projects on the environment and sustainability, to seek mitigation of possible adverse effects of the implementation of innovations and technologies, to strengthen any possible positive effects and, whenever possible, to incorporate mechanisms or practices that will unleash such positive effects.

Regarding these considerations the following thrusts seem particularly relevant for the implementation of this SO within the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027:

Activities can address a range of joint challenges which are either persistent or emerging, such as those linked to the COVID-19 health crisis. The interventions under this specific objective should be complementary but not overlapping with activities in other specific objectives. Thus, an effective implementation of joint policy solutions shall directly and indirectly, with relation not just to their objective but also the process, lead to improved transnational framework conditions for innovation and uptake of advanced technologies, especially with a view to increasing the common good. Pursuing these topics should consider above-mentioned principles such as creating links with the policy level, fostering process innovations and greening practices, open, inclusive cultural and social innovation and links to policy level and greening aspects.

In the mountainous Alpine context, other topics (such as access and provision to SGIs, including health care and medical innovations, sustainable tourism and social innovation or mobility) have particular relevance and can be addressed. These thematic fields have also increased relevance due to dangers of health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the same time, cooperation should focus on reducing innovation disparities between different regions and diffusing innovation support services, including clusters and innovation hubs and linking relevant actors, as specified in the indicative types of actions below.

#### **Related types of action:**

a) Developing or testing **joint solutions** (e.g. policy instruments and management tools) and **joint actions** to support innovation and uptake of advanced technologies. These activities should involve policy-level actors and have an open and inclusive character, for example in the following areas:

- Shaping an innovation ecosystem that builds on the natural and the cultural heritage of the area, supporting the development of sustainable and innovative value chains that go beyond mainstream approaches and that involve the relevant actors, including individuals and social stakeholders, promoting and exploring solutions for social innovation, eco-innovation and green economy as a trigger for regional development;
- Fostering the innovation capacities, addressing innovation gaps on a transnational level in non-urban areas, reinforcing urban-rural as well as rural-rural-linkages in the field of



innovation, fostering access of rural businesses to the urban innovation support services and diffusion of innovation support services;

- Supporting clusters and innovation hubs-cooperation in different territories, as well as transnational value chains relevant for regional smart specialisation strategies (“S3”), focusing particularly on urban-rural links;
- Supporting experimental models and “green” start-ups to better address innovation topics in the Alpine region, involving greening practices building upon the natural and cultural heritage and knowledge of the actors in the Alpine region;
- Testing ideas for transnational innovation activities and entrepreneurship with a view to reducing territorial imbalances in all sectors, processes and ecosystems in the Alpine region, as well as solutions for identifying and mitigating adverse social and environmental impacts;
- Promoting and exploring application of social innovation to SGIs, improve mobility with advanced technologies (such as green hydrogen), health and medical innovations, sustainable tourism with particular consideration of bottom-up and open, inclusive approaches such as co-creation and living labs;
- Develop and test transnational training programmes to improve skills for green and digital transition and contributing to broaden innovation capacities.
- Support the development and adaptation of business models, products, services, and processes that strengthen the resilience and adaptation of businesses to climate change in urban and rural areas and promote a low carbon economy.

b) Testing and implementing transnational **networking activities, networking tools, advisory services and exchange platforms** to (for example)

- foster social and process innovation based on the natural and cultural heritage of the Alpine region.
- connect regional innovation ecosystems (e.g. to develop joint solutions for innovation diffusion)

c) Supporting the **coordination between innovation activities and policies and other policy domains** of highest relevance in the Alpine region.

All types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative impact due to their nature.



### 2.3.1.2. Indicators

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

**Table 2 - Output indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO1.1	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	2	8
3	RSO1.1	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	1	8

**Table 3 - Result indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base line	Reference year	Final target 2029	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO1.1	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	4.00	JEMS	



### 2.3.1.3. Main target groups

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

Main target groups to specific objective “Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies”:

- National, regional, local national authorities,
- Sectoral agencies,
- Business support organisations, including chambers of commerce, networks and clusters,
- Higher education and research institutions,
- Enterprises (in particular SMEs),
- Infrastructure and (public) service providers,
- General public/citizens,
- Interest groups including NGOs and citizen`s associations.

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

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

ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools are not planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

### 2.3.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

There are no financial instruments planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.



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

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

**Table 4 - Dimension 1 - intervention field**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	012. Research and innovation activities in public research centres, higher education and centres of competence including networking (industrial research, experimental development, feasibility studies)	1,525,768.00
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	010. Research and innovation activities in SMEs, including networking	1,525,768.00
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	029. Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, research centres and universities, focusing on the low carbon economy, resilience and adaptation to climate change	1,805,768.00
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	030. Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, focusing on circular economy	1,270,511.00
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	173. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	1,525,768.00
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	138. Support for social economy and social enterprises	1,525,768.00
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	152. Measures to promote equal opportunities and active participation in society	1,525,768.00

**Table 5 - Dimension 2 - form of financing**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	01. Grant	10,705,119.00

**Table 6 - Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO1.1	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	10,705,119.00



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### 2.3.2. Specific objective: RSO1.2. Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities

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

Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities

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

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

Digitalisation offers opportunities to address joint challenges which are particularly prominent in mountainous areas such as the Alpine region. New digital tools can be developed to increase resilience and mitigate the impacts of accessibility problems and remoteness coupled with negative demographic situations in many regions. Such increased flexibility can be particularly attractive in the context of the territorial specificity of the Alps as well as its ambition to become climate resilient, carbon neutral, green, inclusive and resource sensitive. Due to the emergence of COVID-19, the need to support digital transition in these fields in an inclusive way in all regions became even clearer. Individual lives as well as working modes in both public and private sector have been transformed as more location-flexible. This has created a “window of opportunity” for strengthening and making use of digitalisation to support life and work of citizens to enforce sustainable development even in the face of external challenges.

Application of digital solutions can pave a way to a more open, inclusive, and participative society and citizen-empowerment that is based on cooperation between different actors such as authorities, citizens, and businesses. Digitalisation can be used to support social changes and behaviour, lifestyle, and leisure shifts that support more sustainable communities. However, in order to fully unlock its potential, cyber-security and privacy risks need to be appropriately addressed. An active role of policy makers in developing standards and raising awareness of citizens, as well as responsibility of economic actors is to be emphasised.

Next to increased social sustainability and social innovation, digitalisation also provides opportunities for businesses. Strengthening sustainable economic development in terms of new working structures, product and service provision, innovativeness as well as improved information flows are only a few examples.

Digitalisation can contribute to finding solutions for more efficient, innovative, and effective solutions that support a shift to climate resilience, carbon-neutrality, greening, and resource sensitivity. In the context of the private sector, it also facilitates the implementation of greening practices by businesses and associations as well as ensuring consideration concerning the exclusion of negative impacts of digitalisation on the environment. Principles that should be pursued in these activities are

the inclusion of appropriate groups, such as policy-makers or the civil society, as well as safeguarding that any activities have a positive environmental impact.

Regarding these considerations the following thrusts seem particularly relevant for the implementation of this SO within the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027:

There are diverse ways in which territorial cooperation can bring about the benefits of digitalisation which are relevant to the Alpine region. Projects can explore new and flexible opportunities for working and provision of products and services, new working conditions and working structures, new production-processes, a focus on individualised private, public, and personal products and services. Activities can also focus on customised solutions and services, focus on production processes and services with low material input and a high service component, or the sharing and creative economy. The programme can empower different actors to develop experiment and implement such solutions in various contexts via transnational cooperation. This can also involve advanced innovative digital solutions such as AI, machine learning, IoT, Alpine-wide interoperability of data for private and public purposes. This requires the involvement of different actors including the civil society - also aiming at the “next generation” - as well as policy-makers in order to ensure the uptake of solutions.

A particular focus on the digital divide and on regions that are lagging behind in terms of digital innovation, territorial cooperation will ensure the cohesion of the Alpine region. It is particularly important that activities tackle the digital divide between less and more advanced regions as well as between fluent users and people without sufficient knowledge and/or physical access to information and communication technologies. This constitutes a general policy challenge to digital transformation that affects all age and social groups as well as urban, intermediate, or rural regions and aspects of cultural heritage. It is essential to ensure that policy actors are well-equipped to address these joint needs. In order to ensure ultimate effectiveness in implementing digital solutions, the involvement of policy-level in such activities should also be geared towards ensuring their safety in cyberspace and protection of privacy.

#### **Related types of action:**

a) Developing or supporting pilot projects or activities as well as joint solutions (e.g. policy instruments and management tools) to support reaping the benefits of digitalisation in different fields to bring about socially and environmentally sustainable change, for example:

- Developing and testing solutions that better address the response to sustainable development efforts, and to contribute to solutions for climate resilience, resource sensitivity, green and carbon neutrality as well as ensuring inclusiveness and social accessibility to these solutions for a just transition;
- Developing and testing solutions to support flexible SGI provision in all types of areas and for all types of users with regards to e-health/smart health, e-government as well as telemedicine, to be applicable in general and not only in times of health crises;
- Developing and testing solutions to support e-learning, new working structures (home-office and other forms of flexible working) in order to provide more attractive living possibilities in remote areas to different social groups;



- Developing and testing solutions to support business development opportunities, product and service development, strengthening of regional value chains and regional marketing, with a view to reducing territorial imbalances;
- Contributing to elaboration and implementation of Smart Villages and Smart Cities concepts;
- Implementing pilot projects or other activities to accompany SMEs and associations in their digital transformation, with the overarching aim to increase environmental sustainability (e.g. using digitalisation to showcase carbon positive integrated solutions that reduce their carbon footprint and increase competitiveness).

b) Promoting integration of digitalisation as a transversal policy issue: supporting **coordination between digitalisation activities and policies and other policy domains** of highest relevance in the Alpine regions and in response to sustainable development efforts, demographic trends and increase in well-being, particularly focusing on the following policy issues:

- Developing and testing solutions and policies to mitigate digitalisation-related security risks such as cyber security, privacy, data-protection;
- Developing and testing solutions and policies to closing the digital divide between regions (including explore synergies between rural and urban areas through digital solutions), as well as between more and less fluent users.

c) Implement activities to facilitate **networking activities, networking tools, advisory services and exchange platforms** in order to increase territorial cohesion and/or social inclusion in the Alpine region, for example by:

- Setting up or supporting transnational network structures and platforms for sharing exchange of good practices and knowledge with regards to policy solutions supporting digitalisation;
- Setting up or supporting Digital Innovation Hubs.

d) Developing common data collection, indicators and monitoring systems harmonized across borders, ensure the update and sustainability of data collection and monitoring systems.

All types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, as they are not expected to have any significant negative impact due to their nature.



### 2.3.2.2. Indicators

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

**Table 2 - Output indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO1.2	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	2	8
3	RSO1.2	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	1	8

**Table 3 - Result indicators**

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base line	Reference year	Final target 2029	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO1.2	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	4.00	JEMS	



### 2.2.2.3. Main target groups

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

Main target groups to specific objective “Reaping the benefits of digitisation for citizens, companies, research organisations and public authorities”:

- National, regional and local authorities,
- Sectoral agencies,
- Higher education and research institutions,
- National, regional or local development agencies,
- Other public organisations,
- General public/citizens,
- Social organisations,
- Business support organisations, including chambers of commerce, networks and clusters,
- Enterprises (in particular SMEs),
- Interest groups including NGOs and citizen`s associations.

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

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

ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools are not planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

### 2.3.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

There are no financial instruments planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.



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

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

**Table 4 - Dimension 1 - intervention field**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO1.2	ERDF	015. Digitising SMEs or large enterprises (including e-Commerce, e-Business and networked business processes, digital innovation hubs, living labs, web entrepreneurs and ICT start-ups, B2B) compliant with greenhouse gas emission reduction or energy efficiency criteria	2,676,280.00
3	RSO1.2	ERDF	017. Government ICT solutions, eservices, applications compliant with greenhouse gas emission reduction or energy efficiency criteria	1,000,000.00
3	RSO1.2	ERDF	019. e-Health services and applications (including e-Care, Internet of Things for physical activity and ambient assisted living)	1,605,768.00
3	RSO1.2	ERDF	016. Government ICT solutions, e-services, applications	2,211,535.00
3	RSO1.2	ERDF	018. IT services and applications for digital skills and digital inclusion	3,211,536.00

**Table 5 - Dimension 2 - form of financing**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO1.2	ERDF	01. Grant	10,705,119.00

**Table 6 - Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO1.2	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	10,705,119.00

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## 2.4. Priority: 4 - Cooperatively managed and developed Alpine region

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

### 2.4.1. Specific objective: ISO6.4. Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies (all strands)

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

Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea- basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies.

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

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

The Alpine region is characterised by a long tradition of international and inter-regional cooperation on governmental and non-governmental level. Cooperation in this sense takes place on a wide variety of levels and in a wide variety of formats, ranging from local to macro regional level, from international to regional agreements, or from professional funding programmes to voluntary work. Cooperation activities are implemented through a wide range of formats, e.g. by funding programmes such as EU-transnational or bilateral cooperation programmes, as well as by international agreements such as the Alpine Convention and its protocols or regional cooperation frameworks. This shows the wide range of governance stakeholders involved at different levels, but at the same time reveals the challenge of addressing these actors adequately and in an innovative and appealing way.

In order to take governance and multi-level-cooperation in the Alpine region to a new level, an important step has been taken in recent years: With the establishment of the EUSALP (European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region) a new perspective for governance cooperation at macro regional level was launched. EUSALP is the “youngest” of four European Macro-regional strategies and forms an integrated governance framework and strategic approach for addressing common challenges and bringing together stakeholders in the Alpine region. EUSALP was adopted by the European Commission in 2015 and endorsed by the European Council in 2016. Despite its “youth” it has already managed to bring together new stakeholders across sectors, government levels, and countries and therefore has contributed towards a new perspective of professional governance in the Alpine region. In this regard the Alpine Space programme 2014-2020 supported the deepening of governance-structures with EUSALP specifically within two projects (AlpGov I and II) which provided a good basis for further development steps.

Current challenges like climate change adaptation and mitigation, impacts of the COVID 19-pandemic or the digital and global transformation strongly underline the need for public administrations to

further adapt and develop their services and processes beyond the capabilities of isolated national or regional administrations and to engage in up-to-date multilevel and transnational governance initiatives. Areas that urgently will require support before this background are for example the further professionalization of communication and stakeholder involvement (between different governance levels but also communication with stakeholders and the public), digitalisation, capacity building as well as cross-sectoral and -horizontal cooperation.

Multilevel-governance in the Alpine region therefore further has to be evolved and institutional capacities of public authorities and stakeholders have to be enhanced accordingly. To this end, the Interreg specific objective represents a tailor-made possibility to deepen and evolve cooperation and governance structures in the Alpine region.

To meet the above mentioned needs, the Alpine Space Programme aims on further clarifying, deepening, supporting, and improving cooperation structures, with placing a particular focus on the professionalization of governance and stakeholder structures as well as on preparing the ground for innovative projects and stronger involvement of the civil society.

These key-points should contribute towards a higher extent of exploiting synergies, supporting EUSALP in developing an appropriate and tailor-made governance system as well as towards a stronger mutual reinforcement of both approaches.

Furthermore, the actions of the Interreg specific objective are also aimed at addressing and involving further relevant cooperation frameworks within the Alpine region - starting from professional structures like the Alpine Convention and reaching until Alpine wide governance initiatives interested in the further enhancement of Alpine regions` governance structures, as specified in the indicative types of actions below. The programme partners are ready to taking and triggering actions by programme management and projects that aim at continuing the well-established close coordination with the Alpine Convention in thematic fields addressed by both, working programmes resp. protocols.

**Related types of action:**

- a) Setting up transnational frameworks, platforms, networks and mechanisms in the field of governance to enhance cooperation between Alpine stakeholders including the mapping of resources, potentials and processes as well as defining innovative implementation pathways and structures;
  - b) Developing and implementing solutions to enhance cooperation and organisation processes within the EUSALP governance structure;
  - c) Developing solutions and pilot projects for communication measures and tools to support multi-level governance, reaping the benefits of digitalization;
  - d) Supporting capacity building and trainings for public authorities and stakeholders at different policy and governance-levels in order to adapt to new challenges (e.g. mitigation and adaptation to climate change, digitalisation, professionalization, process-innovation);
-

- e) Developing tailor-made strategies and solutions for the integration of and communication with stakeholders at different policy and governance-levels, as well as with the civil society - also including “the next generation” (youth) - and non-institutional actors;
- f) Fostering and implementing knowledge transfer, exchange and capitalisation activities addressing the major governance aspects and key stakeholders of the Alpine region;
- g) Fostering the use of available funding instruments for governance support and EUSALP implementation;
- h) Developing and implementing joint solutions for monitoring, reporting and evaluating multilevel and transnational policy instruments;
- i) Implementing joint pilot projects for the design, testing, up-scaling, comparison and evaluation of innovations in the field of public administration;
- j) Developing mechanisms for the uptake and implementation of multilevel and transnational governance.

All types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative impact due to their nature.



### 2.4.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
4	ISO6.4	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	1	6
4	ISO6.4	RCO118	Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macroregional strategies	organisations	13	42

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base line	Reference year	Final target 2029	Source of data	Comments
4	ISO6.4	PSR 1	Organisations with increased institutional capacities due to their participation in cooperation activities across borders	organisations	0.00	2021	21.00	Survey	
4	ISO6.4	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021	3.00	JEMS	



### 2.4.1.3. Main target groups

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

Main target groups to action: “Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea- basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies.”:

- National, regional, local national authorities,
- Higher education and research institutions,
- Schools/education and training centres,
- National, regional or local development agencies,
- Other public organisations,
- Interest groups including NGOs and citizen's associations,
- Business support organization, including chambers of commerce, networks and clusters,
- Sectoral agencies,
- General public/citizens.

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

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

ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools are not planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.

### 2.4.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

There are no financial instruments planned to be used within the transnational Alpine Space programme 2021-2027.



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

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

**Table 4 - Dimension 1 - intervention field**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.4	ERDF	170. Improve the capacity of programme authorities and bodies linked to the implementation of the Funds	4,282,048.00
4	ISO6.4	ERDF	173. Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	4,282,048.00
4	ISO6.4	ERDF	171. Enhancing cooperation with partners both within and outside the Member State	2,141,023.00

**Table 5 - Dimension 2 - form of financing**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.4	ERDF	01. Grant	10,705,119.00

**Table 6 - Dimension 3 - territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus**

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.4	ERDF	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	10,705,119.00



## 3. Financing plan

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

### 3.1 Financial appropriations by year

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

Table 7

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF	0.00	18,287,573.00	18,581,327.00	18,880,956.00	19,186,577.00	15,898,393.00	16,216,362.00	107,051,188.00
<b>Total</b>	0.00	18,287,573.00	18,581,327.00	18,880,956.00	19,186,577.00	15,898,393.00	16,216,362.00	107,051,188.00



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

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

Table 8

Policy Objective	Priority	Fund (as applicable)	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries (for information)
					without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)	for TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)			
2	1	ERDF	Total	42,191,015.00	39,065,755.00	3,125,260.00	14,063,671.00	13,576,722.00	486,949.00	56,254,686.00	75.00	2,049,424.00
2	2	ERDF	Total	30,175,589.00	27,940,361.00	2,235,228.00	10,058,529.00	9,710,257.00	348,272.00	40,234,118.00	75.00	1,465,776.00
1	3	ERDF	Total	23,123,056.00	21,410,238.00	1,712,818.00	7,707,685.00	7,440,809.00	266,876.00	30,830,741.00	75.00	1,123,200.00
6	4	ERDF	Total	11,561,528.00	10,705,119.00	856,409.00	3,853,843.00	3,720,405.00	133,438.00	15,415,371.00	75.00	561,600.00
	Total	ERDF		107,051,188.00	99,121,473.00	7,929,715.00	35,683,728.00	34,448,193.00	1,235,535.00	142,734,916.00	75.00	5,200,000.00
	Grand total			107,051,188.00	99,121,473.00	7,929,715.00	35,683,728.00	34,448,193.00	1,235,535.00	142,734,916.00	75.00	5,200,000.00



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

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

The programming process for the Alpine Space Programme 2021-2027 officially started in spring 2019. The programme established a **task force (TF)** consisting of delegates from all partner states as well as observers from the European Commission, the Alpine Convention and the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP). The task force was responsible for drafting the cooperation programme 2021-2027 and was chaired by the chair of the programme committee. Representatives of the Managing authority (MA) and the Joint secretariat (JS) also took part in the TF-meetings, prepared, and supported the meetings.

External experts had been contracted to support the drafting of the Interreg programme (IP) and the accompanying strategic environmental assessment (SEA):

- Drafting of the Cooperation Programme: Rosinak & Partner ZT GmbH / ÖIR
- SEA: University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU)

Both documents were elaborated in parallel, the programme trying to take up the recommendations given by the SEA as well as possible.

The TF met 19 times, moving mainly to online meetings from April 2020 until July 2021 due to the restrictions related to the COVID-19-pandemics. In its meetings the TF-members firstly discussed an analysis and needs-assessment prepared by the experts and then turned to the discussion of the drafts of the IP (geography of the programme, strategy, justification of selection of priorities, policy objectives and specific objectives, specific objectives and actions, intervention logic, financial resources,...).

The **programming process** in its central parts was completed by July 2021. Changes in the general conditions were addressed accordingly as well as the general time schedule for programming had to be adapted to current developments (e.g. timeframe due to Corona-crisis, multiannual financial framework, agreement upon legal frame-work).

The mandate of the TF will be finished after the official adoption of the programme by the European Commission. A programme committee will be set up to support the implementation of the programme.

Furthermore, the following opportunities for the involvement of relevant partners according to Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 were provided:



**Focus group-workshop on structures and procedures:** In order to obtain input and feedback from project partners, a targeted focus-group-workshop on project structures and procedures was held in Munich in September 2019. In this workshop around 20 projects partners (mainly experienced lead partners) took part and in depth discussed proposals and shared learnings on the set up of programme procedures, working tools, simplification of structures and procedures as well as possible “experimental approaches.” The outcomes of this workshop were taken up for the development of the programme structure and implementation.

**EUSALP annual forum 2019:** The Alpine space programme 2021-2027 reserved a session in the EUSALP annual forum on 29 November 2019. The MA, JS and experts provided an input on the current stage of the drafting-process and after that participants were invited to discuss and feedback the first proposals of the programme draft (possible orientations of selected POs and SOs). The outcomes of this discussion were documented and the feedback was integrated in the next drafting steps of the programme. The session at the EUSALP annual forum aimed at informing interested stakeholders. Participants had no further formal role in the drafting process, but were invited to closely follow the drafting and implementing process of the programme (e.g. via taking part in calls for project proposals etc.).

**Stakeholder consultation May 2020:** In order to involve interested stakeholders yet at an early stage, around 6-7 stakeholder workshops had been planned in the partner states from March - May 2020. These consultations had been planned as physical workshops, carried out by the partner states, and supported by the experts. But due to the COVID-19-pandemic all the already planned workshops had to be cancelled. Instead the MA, JS, and experts set up a first online consultation, providing a first draft of the IP for broad feedback among interested stakeholders. Partner states were asked to distribute the invitation among stakeholders and the online consultation was opened from beginning until end of May 2020. 334 persons took part in this consultation and submitted their feedback on the first draft (e.g. selected SO´s, proposed actions). The experts integrated the outcomes and prepared a revised draft of the IP. The outcomes as well as the revised draft was discussed in detail in the TF and helped to develop a next draft of the IP.

**Official online consultation summer 2020:** Based upon the above mentioned drafting and feedback steps, a revised draft of the IP was prepared for the official consultation of the IP together with the SEA. Both documents were subject to broad online consultation from mid-July until mid-September 2020. 204 persons took part in the consultation. The information about this consultation was disseminated through websites, newsletters, and other forms of online communication. Again the outcomes - together with the recommendations of the SEA - were taken up and discussed in the TF. Based on that, the final draft of the IP was developed.

With these two rounds of online consultations, the Task Force tried to involve as many interested stakeholders and relevant partners as possible. The participants had the opportunity to provide feedback on the drafts, but were also generally informed about the drafting process, the Alpine space programme as a whole and were invited to further contribute in the course of the programme implementation (e.g. via submitting projects proposals, taking part in calls or events).



The programme partners commit themselves to the partnership-principle laid down in Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 [CPR] and will therefore involve relevant partners not only in the preparation phase as laid down above, but also in the programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation.



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

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

The programme's approach to communication and visibility aims at demonstrating the core value of the Interreg Alpine Space programme: the programme shall be seen as an enabler, long-term partner, and source of inspiration for a better quality of life in the Alpine region through cooperation.

Based on the programme's mission statement, the **communication objectives** are:

- To build capacities for an effective implementation and communication of the projects and the programme: enhance the communication capacities of programme bodies, support applicants, and beneficiaries in an effective project implementation, increase the capacity of project partners to communicate their project achievements.
- To bring the programme and its achievements closer to citizens: increase awareness of potential applicants about the programme's funding opportunities, promote the projects' achievements and foster their capitalisation by policy-makers and potential applicants, promote the benefits of European territorial cooperation for the Alpine Space.
- To position the programme at the forefront of the transition towards an innovative, climate-neutral Alpine region: support applicants and beneficiaries to reduce the carbon footprint of their activities (internal communication), profile the Interreg Alpine Space as an environmentally friendly and responsible programme (external communication).

The **target audiences** of the programme communication include: (potential) beneficiaries, (potential) end users and citizens concerned with the challenges tackled by the programme, in particular young people who are less involved in policy making processes, multipliers of project results, including programme bodies, Alpine Organisations, EUSALP members and stakeholders, EU institutions including the EC, INFORM network, other thematically relevant national and European networks, other Interreg programmes, etc.

The programme will make a differentiated use of a range of **communication channels**, depending on the target groups addressed and the messages to spread. Events will be dedicated to the information and training of programme bodies, applicants and beneficiaries. Thematic events will encourage synergies between projects, foster innovation, as well as the capitalisation of project achievements. Some of these events might be organised as public events or embedded in larger, external events



(e.g. Alpine, European or EUSALP events) in order to further promote the programme and its impact to European citizens. Events will be green certified or in online format whenever relevant.

The communication of the programme will be mainly digital and based on various formats e.g. short stories, digital publications, online campaigns, videos or other audio-visual productions. The programme website, newsletter, and social media channels form a coherent ecosystem for the digital communication of the programme. The programme website is the main entry to inform (potential) beneficiaries on the programme functioning and news. It is interactive, accessible, and easy to navigate for its different users. It hosts the project websites to support the promotion of their own achievements and increase their visibility. The programme social media channels bring the programme closer to citizens and will be crucial to build a community among its followers. Messages and formats are tailored to the social media channels (e.g. Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook), which mix may evolve depending on the latest trends. The citizens or end users of the project results will also be involved through awareness-raising or participatory measures.

Following the recommendation of the European Commission, the total **communication budget** of the Interreg Alpine Space 2021-2027 programme is at least 0.3% of the total programme budget. The indicative financial plan for communication activities amounts to €650.000 covering the following categories: basic communication activities (€20.000), website and other digital communication channels (€130.000), publications and online campaigns (€100.000), events (€350.000) and a reserve (€50.000).

All communication activities are monitored and evaluated on a regular basis, using external or internal evaluators. Data will be collected through surveys, internal statistics, or website analytics. The programme will use a detailed set of indicators to follow and evaluate all communication activities and improve their performance on an on-going basis. Indicators will include: satisfaction of applicants and beneficiaries, number of visits/downloads on programme website, ranking of the programme website in search engine results, outreach of the social media accounts, number of participants to events and specific activities, level of engagement on specific newsletter and social media posts, number of followers of the projects' social media accounts, number of projects implementing sustainable management practices.



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

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

Already since several programming periods the programme implements the policy cycle concept. It is a precious support for a result oriented approach, is well known by the stakeholders and potential project partners and offers a great opportunity for projects to help position their activities in the policy context, at the same time offering clarity to the programme on what can be expected by projects. Projects can tackle a wide range of challenges, and position themselves in the policy cycle, depending on the maturity of the topic addressed and the type of activities. Three phases are identified in the policy-cycle: (1) strategic policy development, (2) explorative and piloting activities and (3) policy implementation.

The classic projects that the programme has been financing the past years usually tackle two phases of the policy cycle. To create impact they require a certain duration, budget, and size of partnership.

Experience with the Alpine Region Preparatory Action Fund (ARPAF) has shown that smaller projects with smaller budget and partnership and more focussed actions are of added-value and relevance in the Alpine Space context. For this reason the Alpine Space programme will also fund small-scale projects with shorter duration, smaller partnership, and budget than the classic projects in all funding priorities. Small-scale projects will be an easy entry door to the programme for actors for whom classic projects were out of reach so far. Due to their limited size and duration small-scale projects will by nature only be able to work in one single phase of the policy cycle. To classic projects they will be connected in two ways: they can give the opportunity for a spin-off of a classic project (an idea generated there will be taken to another level) or they can provide expertise and inspiration for a classic project. Their objectives and activities will depend on the theme tackled, its maturity, and the knowledge already available. For instance they can “explore a theme,” enable a test drive of new topics and prepare the ground for a classic project, test on the ground the validity of a “specific output” of a classic project, support transfer and “roll-out” of main achievements of a classic project, sort of “add-on” or “spin off” with strong result-orientation.

## 7. Implementing provisions

### 7.1. Programme authorities

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

Table 9

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	E-mail
Managing authority	Land Salzburg represented by the Government Office of the Land Salzburg, department 1 for Economy, Tourism and Municipalities, unit 0/1	Christina Bauer	alpine.space@salzburg.gv.at
Audit authority	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism	Markus Köb	Efre_finanzkontrolle@bmlrt.gv.at
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Land Salzburg represented by the Government Office of the Land Salzburg, department 1 for Economy, Tourism and Municipalities, unit 0/1	Christina Bauer	alpine.space@salzburg.gv.at

### 7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

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

After consultation of the Member States and third countries participating in the programme, the MA will set up a JS (Article 46 (2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 [Interreg]) with staff taking into account the programme partnership. The JS will assist the MA and the PC in carrying out their respective functions and undertake the day-to-day implementation of the programme.



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

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

Without prejudice to the Member States' responsibility for protecting the Union budget and applying financial corrections by cancelling all or part of the ERDF support to an operation when expenditure declared to the EC is found to be irregular (Article 103 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 [CPR]) and in accordance with Article 52 (1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 [Interreg], the MA shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the lead partner. Partners shall repay the lead partner any amounts unduly paid.

Where the lead partner does not succeed in securing repayment from a project partner or where the MA does not succeed in securing repayment from the lead partner, the Member State on whose territory the project partner concerned is located (in case of an EGTC where it is registered) shall reimburse the MA the amount unduly paid to that project partner (Article 52 (3) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 [Interreg]). The MA is responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union, in accordance with the appointment of liabilities among the participating member states as laid down below.

The MA will reimburse the funds to the Union once the amounts are recovered from the lead partner/project partner/member state.

The apportionment of liabilities among the participating Member States shall be as follows:

Each Member State bears liability for possible financial consequences of irregularities caused by a beneficiary located on its territory.

In case of a systemic irregularity or financial correction (decided by programme bodies or the European Commission) the Member State bears the financial consequences in proportion to the relevant irregularity detected on the territory of the respective Member State. Where the systemic irregularity or financial correction cannot be linked to a specific Member State territory, the liability shall be jointly borne by the Member States in proportion to the ERDF-contribution allocated to beneficiaries of the programme on their territory.

The liability principles set out above for project-related expenditure and systemic irregularities and financial corrections will be applied to technical assistance as they are a direct consequence of corrections related to project expenditure.



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

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

Table 10: 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 the priority according to Article 94 CPR	<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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



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## Appendix 3<sup>2</sup>: List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable - Article 22(3) CPR

In the period 2021-2027, the programme will provide funding to support EUSALP governance and implementation through the technical support structure (TSS) under priority 4, which has been initially set-up and financed by the EC from December 2021 to October 2022.

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that appendix 1 and 2 do not apply to the programme.



**Interreg**  
CENTRAL EUROPE



Co-funded by  
the European Union

# INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE PROGRAMME 2021-2027

Interreg Programme (IP) Adopted by the  
European Commission on 23 March 2022



Version 1.2





## TEMPLATE FOR INTERREG PROGRAMMES<sup>1</sup>

<b>CCI</b>	2021TC16RFTN003
<b>Title</b>	Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027
<b>Version</b>	1.2
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<b>Last year</b>	2027
<b>Eligible from</b>	01.01.2021
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<b>Commission decision number</b>	C(2022) 1694 final
<b>Commission decision date</b>	23.03.2022
<b>Programme amending decision number</b>	
<b>Programme amending decision entry into force date</b>	
<b>NUTS regions covered by the programme</b>	See Appendix 1
<b>Strand</b>	B

<sup>1</sup> Annex to Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments



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# 1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

## 1.1. Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(a), Article 17(9)(a)*

*Text field [2 000]*

The Interreg CE programme area stretches across nine EU Member States. It covers all regions of Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, and selected regions in Germany and Italy. Germany participates with Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Berlin, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen and the Braunschweig region within Niedersachsen. Italy participates with Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta, Liguria, Lombardia, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna and the autonomous provinces of Bolzano/Bozen and Trento.

The area consists of 81 NUTS-2 regions and is home to roughly a third of the EU population (148m inhabitants in 2019). It covers around 25% of the whole EU territory. There are seven cities with more than 1m inhabitants, i.e. Praha, Milano, München, Budapest, Warszawa, Wien and Berlin. Around 33% of people in the area live in bigger cities, 37% in intermediate regions and 30% in rural areas.

Economically, the area is an industrial core of the EU. Its economy generates 30% of EU GDP and its industrial development is a key factor for the global competitiveness of the EU. However, it is characterised by structural differences between urban/industrialised areas and rural/peripheral areas.

The programme area is at the heart of Europe and connects its North and South and East and West. It provides a cultural bridge all the way from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean Sea. It also brings together countries from both sides of the former Iron Curtain, with all the socio-economic and political implications this conveys. Despite major progress, economic and social differences between 'Eastern' and 'Western' countries in central Europe are still visible.

Finally, the area is a highly functional one. It is marked by strong interactions and linkages regarding economies (e.g. trade), cooperation and governance structures (e.g. Visegrád group), the environment (e.g. the European Green Belt) and cultural and historical ties.



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

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

Text field [50 000]

## Sustainable economic development

Three decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain, **economic disparities** remain evident in central Europe despite strong growth in once centrally planned economies. In the 10 most developed NUTS-3 regions, average GDP per capita (at purchasing power standards) is about nine times higher than in the 10 least developed regions (see Figure 1 in Annex 2). Gaps not only exist across countries but also between urban and rural regions.

Closing these gaps will require time and continuous political efforts that have become even more challenging through the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative socioeconomic effects (see dedicated COVID-19 section in this chapter).

Central Europe is a **functional economic area** and a major industrial centre of the EU. Despite their economic disparities, central European countries are strongly linked to each other. They share **value chains** in many manufacturing industries such as the automotive industry. The ESPON CE-FLOWS targeted analysis (VVA et al., 2020) shows that the area is home to globally important **manufacturing hubs** in e.g. Lombardy, Upper Bavaria and Stuttgart. Beyond these hubs, manufacturing plays a key role in most regions in the programme area. However, the degree of specialisation and regional interlinkages varies. In particular, manufacturing hubs in northern Italy, southern Germany and central Poland are highly specialised. These hubs add substantial economic value, feature very high productivity levels and contribute to key value chains with their surrounding regions.

Keeping or further expanding this strong global position in the manufacturing industry is a major challenge. The 4th industrial revolution and EU-wide momentum for a **green and digitised economy** require a transition towards advanced technologies and a digitally skilled workforce. Value chains need to be reviewed, revised and newly created.

The combination of technological progress and global competition implies that governments, businesses and citizens have to adapt in order to harness the potential benefits and not fall behind. This affects **key business areas** that are highly relevant for central Europe such as manufacturing, but also other smart specialisation (S3) technology priority areas and policy sectors such as:

- a) energy and environment;
- b) public health, medicine and life sciences;
- c) agro- and bio-economy;
- d) advanced materials and nanotechnology;
- e) transport and mobility;
- f) advanced manufacturing systems; or
- g) ICT and electronics.

Another sector affected is the **services sector**, especially knowledge intensive services (KIS) in:

- a) high-tech services (telecommunications, computer programming);
- b) market services (legal activities, architectural and engineering activities);



- c) financial services; and
- d) other services (e.g. health and education).

This important sector remains less developed in central Europe compared to other EU countries and not only needs to be modernised but further expanded. Its share in total gross value added is for example around 29%, while the average in other EU regions is 32% (wiiw, 2020).

The challenge is to make use of local strengths, to incorporate them into S3 policies and expand existing or developing new economic activities. The **tourism industry** and the **creative and cultural industries** are positive examples. They are catalysts for using local knowledge to develop new activities. Tourism is well developed in coastal and mountainous areas of central Europe and important for local economies by providing up to 14% of total employment (based on 2017 NUTS-2 regional employment). In more remote rural regions, tourism and cultural industries offer an untapped economic potential, for example by combining sustainable tourism with local crafts. To develop such activities, policy needs to support local stakeholders to set up coordinated and sustainable tourism strategies.

The **European Green Deal and the Territorial Agenda 2030** highlight the ecological dimension of the economic transformation and emphasise the role of the **circular economy**. Even though circularity is increasing in central Europe, many territories are still lagging behind the EU average. Catching up will require major efforts especially in Croatia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary (Annex 2, Figure 2 - wiiw, 2020). Circular design and production and circular economy-related innovations and investments need to be supported. Change could also be achieved through fostering bio-economy, when supporting the economic development of rural areas.

A central condition for the transformation to a digital and green economy is research and innovation. The ESPON CE-FLOWS targeted analysis (VVA et al., 2020) concludes that cooperation between areas with different levels of research and innovation capabilities is essential to overall improve **R&I potentials**. In central Europe, there are huge differences in this regard (wiiw, 2020). Only few regions primarily in Austria and Germany exceed the EU benchmark of 3% of GDP for R&I expenditure (Figure 3 in Annex 2). R&I activities and related human capital are mostly concentrated in highly urbanised western regions of the programme area. In countries like Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland or Slovakia this spatial clustering of R&I activities increased over time to the disadvantage of rural regions. R&I activities are also dominated by large companies, which account on average for 50-60% of commercial R&D expenditures.

To tackle R&I-related challenges, policy needs to support networks of different innovation actors in and across countries. Better **transfer of technology, policy learning and the sharing of best practices** is necessary to **improve innovation governance**. A focus should be on SMEs to enable them to take up innovative methods such as key enabling technologies and prototyping, or to get access to financing, e.g. via venture capital. Technology and innovation transfer are still too limited to urban areas, where universities and research institutions are main drivers (ESPON CE-FLOWS, VVA et al., 2020). It will be key to overcome the urban-rural divide and to establish **functional urban areas**, which physically connect urban cores with their (rural) hinterlands. Fields for cooperation are interregional partnerships along value chains, green economy and cross-sector cooperation.

**Skills** are also essential for a successful transition to a sustainable and inclusive high-employment economy. The skill supply in central Europe is suited to support this transition, with more than 80% of people having received upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary **education**, which is at least six percentage points higher than the EU average in 2019 (Eurostat). Nevertheless, highly skilled people are concentrated mainly in urban regions (Figure 4 in Annex 2). Intermediate and rural regions have a high share of people who completed secondary education and that are typically the backbone of the manufacturing industry. This reinforces central Europe's need to connect urban and rural regions and tap their combined potential.

The ongoing transformation of labour markets and the cross-country division of labour has increased



demand for work flexibility and decreased job stability. **Training and education** are needed to meet new skills requirements. However, rates in education and training vary from 2% in Polish, Slovak and Croatian regions to around 20% in other countries. Overall, participation in education and training is significantly higher in urban than in rural regions. In Eastern Slovakia, North-Eastern Hungary, Piedmont (IT), Severozápad (CZ) or Berlin (DE) this partly correlates with challenges concerning early leavers from education and training.

Furthermore, **informal learning activities** play a role for the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and soft skills. Participation in informal learning is generally above EU average levels in central Europe, except for Hungary, Germany and Poland. **Digital skills**, which are vital for smart specialisation processes (EC, 2019) are also unevenly distributed. Poland, Hungary, Croatia and Italy experience a particularly high share of individuals without any computer experience, not least in rural regions.

## Environment, energy and climate change

Given its rich natural heritage, biodiversity and variety of landscapes there are many environmental challenges in central Europe. These relate to climate change, a decline in biodiversity, green infrastructure, the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and environmental pollution. There is also the need to increase energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.

Because of the many different ecosystems - from the coastal areas at the Mediterranean Sea and the Baltic Sea, to the mountainous Carpathian and Alpine areas and to the densely urbanised or highly rural areas - central Europe is subject to many **climate change**-related challenges.

As identified in the environmental report of the strategic environmental assessment (SEA - Integra, ZaVita, 2021), **heat extremes and heat waves** in central Europe have increased considerably and are projected to become even more frequent and longer lasting. A specific problem is the urban heat island effect, i.e. cities facing higher temperatures (up to 12° C) than their surroundings, with the consequences such as:

- a) increasing peak energy demand for cooling;
- b) air conditioning costs;
- c) air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions;
- d) heat-related health challenges for vulnerable groups; and
- e) decrease of available water resources and reduction of water quality.

Furthermore, changing rainfall patterns in central Europe suggest two **extreme rainfall scenarios**. First, heavy rain events are projected to increase by 35% until 2070 and will lead to higher risks of frequent rain-related floods and flash floods in particular in north western and central western regions. At the same time, **decreased summer precipitation and meteorological droughts** are expected in southern Europe (EEA, 2019). Northern Italy, Croatia and Slovenia may be particularly affected by meteorological droughts especially during summer periods.

Accelerating and increasingly visible climate change requires ambitious **mitigation and adaptation actions** well integrated with other environmental policies and actions (Integra, ZaVita, 2021). There is the need to improve the capacities and knowledge of the policy and other sectors for increased **resilience of eco-systems** towards climate change impacts and **environmental risk management**. “Green” nature-based adaptation measures should be focused on, such as more resilient crop and tree species as well as a sustainable floodplains management, which allow room for rivers to naturally flood onto floodplains and restoring wetlands restricting their use for commercial purposes.

Furthermore, the changing climate affects also a wide range of economic sectors and human activities, including agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water management, coastal and flood



protection, energy, transport, tourism, construction, and human health and wellbeing. Adaptation policies and other environmental policies therefore need to be connected to **economic considerations**, such as sustainable tourism development, which includes the protection and conservation of historic buildings and cultural heritage sites.

Central Europe covers a **variety of biogeographical regions** such as the Pannonian, the Continental, the Alpine, the Carpathian and the Mediterranean regions (EEA EU Biogeographical Regions, 2016). These regions are highly differentiated and include large areas of forested and agricultural land, mountainous areas, watercourses, coasts with specific landscapes, the sea, plains, lakes and urbanised areas.

Many central European countries exceed EU averages for terrestrial protected area. In Croatia and Slovenia **Natura 2000 designations** are highest and cover over 35% of their land area. About 30% of Slovakia's territory is under Natura 2000 protection, while in Hungary, Italy and Poland it is about 20%. Only Austria, Czech Republic and Germany score below EU averages with only 15% of land area under Natura 2000 (EEA, 2020). However, there is a lack of comprehensive information on how well Natura 2000 sites are managed (Integra, ZaVita, 2021).

Furthermore, central Europe has witnessed decreasing trends and ongoing **losses in biodiversity** due to increasing pressures from land use, pollution, natural resources extraction, climate change and invasive alien species (Integra, ZaVita, 2021). With the exception of Hungary, the 'Common farmland bird index' indicates for example that biodiversity dropped strongly in all central European countries between 2008 and 2018, while it stabilised in the EU on average in the same period (wiiw, 2020).

In line with the **new EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030** this trend needs to be reversed. Clear commitments and actions are needed to preserve **beneficial functions of the various ecosystems** such as climate regulation, food, fresh water, air quality, soil fertility, habitats as well as recreational and cultural services.

The provision of **green infrastructure** can provide many social, economic and environmental benefits. In line with the Territorial Agenda 2030, the greening of city roofs or walls could be particularly valuable for cities with a low amount of green space, like Bratislava, Praha or Budapest. On a more general level, green infrastructure can contribute to mitigate effects of land take and soil sealing and to alleviating urban heat island effects. Making use of green infrastructure needs to be considered more widely as an alternative to grey infrastructure, i.e. single-purpose, built approaches. Integrated policies and upscaling of green infrastructure solutions is needed for **restoring natural capital** such as rivers, wetlands, contaminated sites etc.

Central Europe faces significant challenges regarding **environmental pollution** especially in more urbanised and industrialised regions. To a significant degree, these are located in structurally more developed regions. However, given the high degree of interconnectedness of river basins, forests and other environmental features, pollution produced in one region may be driving environmental impacts in another (VVA et al., 2020).

**Low air quality** and high concentrations of particles are an issue in central European cities. Central Europe is the area most heavily affected in Europe by particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>) and nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>). Particularly high PM-concentrations were measured in Poland, Northern Italy and partly in Hungary. The burning of wood, coal and other solid fuels in domestic stoves, leads to locally or regionally high emissions of fine particulate matter. Transport is a significant source for NO<sub>x</sub> emissions. Strong air pollution and resulting human health related risks are also an issue for many cities in central Europe, such as Budapest, Bratislava or Košice and for those located in the "Po Valley" area.

Another major issue is **soil contamination** due to e.g. abandoned military, industrial and storage sites or agriculture. Most frequent contaminants include heavy metals and mineral oil. Remediation



has begun but progress is slow so that there is the clear need for further rehabilitation measures and a reduction of soil sealing. Soil erosion remains a problem throughout many regions, even in regions with otherwise lower environmental degradation (VVA et al., 2020).

**Water quality** in central Europe is affected by nutrient enrichment, chemical pollution and altered habitats due to morphological changes. Better urban wastewater treatment and industrial pollution will deliver improvements in pollution control, but diffuse pollution is expected to remain problematic. It is likely that pressures from newly emerging pollutants and mixtures of chemicals will intensify (EEA, 2019). To reduce impacts on human health and ecosystems, there is a need for improved and integrated policies to reduce air, soil and water pollution, emissions in agriculture, industry and households.

**Energy efficiency and the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions** are particular challenges for central Europe. Between 2005 and 2018 final energy consumption (per unit of GDP) decreased in most, and energy intensity in all, programme countries (per unit of GDP) but average consumption is still considerably higher than the EU average (Eurostat). This is reflected in the final **energy consumption** per square metre in the residential sector. Even though it decreases in all central European countries, except for Italy, consumption in 2018 was still up to 47% higher than the EU average (Figure 5 in Annex 2).

Linked to energy efficiency is the challenge of reducing **GHG emissions**. EU countries in the eastern programme area still operate more GHG intensive economies than the EU average, despite their achievements in climate change mitigation following the demise of emission-heavy economies after the collapse of socialism. Poland and the Czech Republic are significantly below the average EU performance in both GHG emissions per GDP unit and GHG emissions per capita. The economy of Germany is also less GHG efficient than the EU average in both GDP and per capita indexes. Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia generate higher than EU average GHG emissions per GDP unit but their GHG emissions per capita are better than the EU average. Austria faces the opposite situation: its per capita GHG emissions are higher than the EU average but it scores better in terms of GHG emissions per GDP unit. Within the region, only Italy performs better than EU averages on both indicators (Integra, ZaVita, 2021).

Despite the fact that all programme countries made progress in reducing their GHG emissions since 2000, policy needs to take further action in order to achieve EU energy efficiency targets. The **energy performance of buildings** needs to be improved including energy efficient heating and cooling solutions (e.g. smart buildings). Policies also need to address energy demand in all sectors, including transport, and consider synergies with challenges related to circular economy, e.g. by supporting the optimisation of industrial energy use and processes, and energy recovery processes.

Central Europe's carbon footprint could be reduced also by increasing **renewable energy** usage. The share of renewables in gross final energy consumption in 2018 differs across central Europe, from 13% in Czech Republic to 33,5% in Austria. Although some programme countries outperformed their self-defined 2020 renewable energy targets already in 2018, further policy efforts are needed to increase the uptake of renewable energy sources in all sectors. This includes the industry and the residential sector, e.g. by facilitating decentralised production and empowering renewable energy self-consumers and renewable energy communities.

## Sustainable transport and connectivity

Central Europe connects Europe from east to west and from north to south. The area is closely linked to and home of many of the **main European transport corridors**. Seven of all nine TEN-T corridors cross at least two central European countries, i.e. the Baltic-Adriatic, Rhine-Danube, Orient-East-



Med, Mediterranean, Scandinavian-Mediterranean, North Sea-Baltic and Rhine-Alpine corridor. The programme area thus connects some of the main European harbours like Hamburg or Trieste and hosts road, rail and waterways infrastructure for the free movement of goods and people within Europe. Hence, central Europe plays an important role in the physical integration in the EU.

The area is also heavily integrated in economic terms internally. The provision of sustainable transport infrastructure and services is essential for effective and inclusive functional relationships between programme countries and regions, as well as between urban and rural areas.

**Rail accessibility** varies strongly in the programme area. The ESPON CE-FLOWS targeted analysis (VVA et al., 2020) highlights that more populous regions in the western parts of central Europe have significantly better rail coverage. While connections between major urban hubs (and to a lower extent between minor urban centres) are usually ensured, the same cannot be said when it comes to peripheral areas. Here, accessibility is often a key issue and the periphery challenge of most border regions in central Europe continues. This results also in a significant bottleneck for **commuting patterns and labour mobility** because these regions generally feature lower rates of commuting, too. Overall, issues of **transport interoperability** and bottlenecks persist in central Europe and are particularly apparent at cross-border sections. Gaps in the cross-border passenger rail network are not necessarily caused by missing elements of infrastructure. In many cases there is a lack of cross-border passenger services even on operational railway infrastructure (EC, 2018a). Changing this requires a transport network and services, ensuring high **regional and local accessibility** connecting rural and urban areas. There is the need for policies to remove existing bottlenecks within and across countries that stem from missing trans-border links or services outside the core TEN-T network. This includes the need for supporting the integration of various transport modes and ensuring interoperability and adequate infrastructure capacities.

Another challenge is the shift to **intermodal and intelligent mobility and freight transport**. Before the COVID-19 pandemic with its dramatic but temporary reduction in transport flows, expectations were that the market share of combined rail-road transport in Europe will grow strongly, with strong repercussion on central Europe given its geographic location. To handle these transport flows, there is the need to establish efficient transnational, national and local traffic management systems, which should contribute to reducing traffic congestion and emissions and improving transport safety.

Furthermore, transport in the programme area is currently not **environmentally sustainable or climate neutral**. Between 2010 and 2018 the share of the transport sector in total GHG emissions increased in all programme countries, most significantly in Slovenia, Croatia and Poland (Figure 6 in Annex 2). This means that increasing the sustainability of transport requires the shift from predominantly fossil fuel-based road transport to more sustainable modes. Since 2018, more than 65% of freight throughout central Europe has been transported via roads. Road transport is responsible for 72% of the transport sector's GHG emissions in CE (wiiw, 2020).

**Sustainable, multimodal mobility** is particularly important for urban areas, amongst other for reducing high levels of **air and noise pollution** in cities like Bratislava, Budapest, Praha and Warszawa. These cities have high rates of car ownership, which coincides with major problems related to traffic congestion and air pollution. In turn, medium and small cities in central Europe often lack an adequate provision of public transport opportunities. This leads again to an extensive use of cars as the main means of transport.

Changing transport patterns and **mobility behaviour** requires actions that address urban planning, safe cycling and walking paths, clean local public transport, introducing new delivery technologies such as drones, or car and bike sharing services. In addition, urban transport needs to be viewed in a **functional urban area** context that encourages cities to think beyond their borders and incorporate needs and mutual relationships with their hinterlands. This is particularly relevant for a smoother commuting.



## Horizontal challenges

### Demographic change and equal opportunities

Large differences in prosperity and related outlooks in central Europe are a multidimensional phenomenon. Regional disparities concern income levels, job opportunities, innovation potential, connectivity, accessibility, employment opportunities or quality of life. The direct consequences are differences in **demographic trends**, caused by migration and natural population developments (ESPON, 2018). In central Europe, net migration rates differ greatly, with some regions suffering from large emigration flows, while others are faced with challenges caused by inflows.

This **migration pattern** has an east-west trajectory, with large net-emigration rates in Croatia, eastern Hungary and eastern Poland. Strong immigration, in turn, is recorded in Berlin, Bratislava and Vienna, around Budapest and most of southern Germany. In addition, central Europe faces a strong trend of urbanisation and sub-urbanisation, i.e. people leaving peripheral rural regions and moving to or close to larger cities (Figure 7 in Annex 2).

At the same time, **natural population developments**, i.e. the difference between the number of live births and deaths, are largely negative in central Europe. In over 75% of regions natural population rates decline, particularly in eastern Germany, southern Hungary, north-western Italy and Croatia.

The combination of population decline and outward migration is a particular challenge for **rural regions**. Often it is young, well-educated people that leave, which erodes the productive basis and potential source of economic development of these regions. It also leads to their **shrinking and ageing**, because the population declines and the average age of people increases. This creates **social challenges** in form of **unequal opportunities** depending on the region a person lives in. In many cases, unemployment, poverty and material deprivation trigger a vicious circle and reduce the opportunities to take part in society.

This is a particular problem in less prosperous regions of the programme area with long-term **unemployment**, including eastern Germany and peripheral Polish regions, Slovakia or Croatia. Youth unemployment and involuntary part-time employment due to the lack of adequate full time jobs are also challenging some central European regions (wiiw, 2020). For example in Slovakia and Hungary, this is in particular true for women, where parenthood has a substantial negative impact on female employment, which points to difficulties in the **labour market integration of women**.

Differences in employment and training opportunities often translate into further social challenges such as **social exclusion** and an unequal access to public **services of general interest** (e.g. health care services). The risk of poverty and social exclusion remains an important issue in most programme countries, particularly in the rural regions of Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. However, also comparably high-income areas like Vienna and Berlin have a high share of population with incomes below the Austrian or German median income (Figure 8 in Annex 2). This comes simultaneously with high rates of young people not in employment, education or training in regional clusters in Italy, Croatia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland.

The challenge for **social policies** is not only to treat negative consequences of lower levels of economic development but also to address their causes. Synergies with other policies need to be sought, which explicitly support economic and territorial development. This asks for example for integrated policies that address social innovation and (digital) skills development. Such policy actions need to involve local stakeholders from both the private and public sectors as well as citizens to work together to fulfil local needs and thereby exploit local knowledge. This is particularly important for rural regions.



Furthermore, policy needs to add a territorial component to European social policies by internalising the priority of a just Europe from the Territorial Agenda 2030. There is the need to strengthen local and regional **governance structures** and processes for improving working and living conditions. This could be supported by the creation of a polycentric network of urban and rural areas and considering functional (urban) areas, both within countries and across borders.

### Digitalisation

Digitalisation is one of the biggest changes to the global economic and social system since the industrial revolution. It changes the every-day lives of people, e.g. in health (e-health), education (e-learning), culture (e-entertainment), leisure and sports (e-sports), communication, mobility (self-driving vehicles), interactions with the government (e-government) and shopping (e-commerce). Digitalisation has a high growth potential but also brings challenges including the need for structural adaptation of both firms and the labour force, for developing and/or adopting new technologies to stay competitive and for seizing innovative potentials to be at the forefront of **digital transformation**.

A digitalisation of the business sphere is key for central Europe given the strong role of and up- and downstream linkages of its manufacturing industries. The integration of digital technologies is a necessity to retain or expand their position on European and global markets and to provide jobs and incomes. Digitalisation is important for SMEs, especially in rural areas, to get access to new markets and to develop their products and put them on a large marketplace.

Policies need to focus on improving the currently underdeveloped **digitalisation of businesses** in central Europe, which except for Austria and Germany is below the EU average (wiiw, 2020). A particular need is the support of SMEs to take up digital technologies because often the financial and knowledge capacities are limited. This includes improving **digital skills** as well as **digital connectivity**, especially in rural areas. Although 89% of all households in the programme area have access to the internet, there are sizeable differences across and within countries. With the exceptions of Austria, Germany and Slovenia (except for its rural areas), the digital accessibility of all programme countries is below EU average. Urban-rural differences exist in all countries, particularly in Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia and Slovakia (Figure 9 in Annex 2).

Outside the business sphere, digital technologies need to be supported and spread in order to improve citizens' lives. According to the EU Web Accessibility Directive (Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of 26.10.2016), all online contents of public sector bodies should be better accessible to all people, including persons with disabilities. However, **digital public services**, including e-government and e-health, are still less developed in central Europe. Actions to improve e-government and modernise public administration could focus on capacity building, developing cross-border digital public services or facilitating digital interactions between public authorities and the private sector. Such services may benefit people with limited access to physical public services and increase the overall efficiency of services provided by local, regional or national governments.

Digitalisation can also support central European cities to become **smart cities** that manage their resources, assets and services efficiently and in alignment with citizen needs. Hence, digitalisation policies will indirectly contribute to other policy needs, such as reducing pollution and GHG emissions by efficiently managing transport flows, or providing public e-services e.g. in the health sector. Other areas that benefit citizens include e-culture, i.e. the digitalisation of cultural heritages and the media and news sector.

In a transnational context and to further strengthen the functionality of the programme regions, **cross-border digital connectivity** needs to be improved in close coordination with relevant programmes, which may include the introduction of common standards and increasing the trust in and the **cybersecurity** of cross-border digital systems.



## Cooperation and governance

Central European countries and people share a **common identity** based on **cultural and historical ties** (wiiw, 2020). Some of these ties trace back to centuries of a common history, while others are founded in the recent history of sharing a common economic and political system and a common border draped by the Iron Curtain. Right from the fall of that borderline it was evident that the neighbouring countries shared many interests and challenges. To facilitate joint actions, the need for better **cooperation** is evident.

An early consequence of this was the establishment of the Central European Initiative (CEI) in 1989 that supported European integration through cooperation among its Member States and the EU, as well as with other interested public institutions, private and non-governmental organisations, and international and regional organisations. Two years later in 1991, the Visegrád Group (V4) - comprising of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia - was established. The backbone of this cooperation are mutual contacts at all levels: from the highest-level political summits to expert and diplomatic meetings that cover the activities of non-governmental associations, think-tanks and research bodies, cultural institutions and numerous networks of individuals. In recent years, institutionalised cooperation was also established through the Green Belt Initiative in 2014. It aims at harmonising human activities with nature and the environment and wants to increase opportunities for the socio-economic development of local communities along the former Iron Curtain. In 2015, the Commission Initiative on Central and South-Eastern European Energy Connectivity was launched. It aims to strengthen solidarity and enable a safer energy supply for citizens and businesses across the region in the fields of gas, electricity, renewables and energy efficiency. Central European countries participating in this initiative include Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Slovenia. Further cooperation structures include the EURegions as well as 34 European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

In addition to growing political and personal ties, central European countries established strong **functional relationships**, based on geographic proximity, historical and cultural similarities and a common economic perspective. These relationships include among others economic, industrial value chains and labour markets as well as mutual tourism or cross-border health services. Hence, in many ways, cooperation has always been central to the area.

Persisting challenges, like economic and social disparities, and the emergence of new challenges like digitalisation or the shift to a greener economy as foreseen by the European Green Deal, reinforce the need for cooperation in central Europe. The key challenge in view of cooperation is the coordination of different systems and levels of governance across and within countries. As demonstrated above, the economic and social challenges are multidimensional. This requires interdisciplinary initiatives as particularly emphasised in the New European Bauhaus initiative (COM/2021/573 final), which aims combining art, culture, social inclusion, science and technology for an effective implementation of the EU Green Deal. To tackle this challenge effectively, different institutions need to collaborate within and across countries. These reach from central government ministries to regional and local governments, to national and regional interest groups, businesses and citizens. There is a constant need for the policy level to support these coordination efforts and to strengthen **multi-level and multi-sectoral governance** in the area as highlighted by the Territorial Agenda 2030. This includes **integrated approaches** involving local and regional non-governmental stakeholders including citizens, which not only better address local needs but will also increase **trust** in and the **accountability** of governance.

## COVID-19 pandemic effects

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was a major shock to central Europe as it was for the entire world. The **economy** declined strongly in all nine countries, particularly in Italy and Croatia, where GDP is expected to decline by more than 10% in 2020 (wiiw, 2020). **Unemployment** increased everywhere, although at least at the beginning of the pandemic most labour-shedding was avoided



through furlough schemes and a reduction of working hours.

In many cases, people started to work from home, particularly in Austria, Germany and Italy, while in Hungary, Croatia and Slovakia a smaller share of the population took this option. The extent to which “home office” was applied depended amongst others also on digital connectivity, which is still very different in central Europe. Nevertheless, the pandemic-induced need for more digital services is an opportunity to explore new solutions, especially in the supply of e-solutions by the public sector.

The COVID-19 induced lock-downs had devastating effects on **tourism**, with tourism nights spent in the programme area dropping between 80% and 95% depending on country and region. Strongly hit regions included the coastal regions in the South and North of CE as well as the Alpine regions, all of which economically heavily depend on tourism.

The COVID-19 consequences for central Europe currently remain rather unclear. If the pandemic is longer lasting, described challenges will be overshadowed by **economic and social effects** of the pandemic. Particularly for central Europe, the effects on the functional relationships and cooperation in the public and private sphere will be detrimental. The pandemic has shown especially how quickly countries turn to national solutions when facing a global crisis. Especially during its first wave the flow of people, goods and services across borders was partly interrupted, since also some businesses stopped working.

However, a **coordinated approach** across European countries in general and Interreg CE countries seems more promising and obvious for addressing the challenges of this “borderless” pandemic. COVID-19 has shown that cooperation and coordination concepts are highly necessary, yet still largely missing (wiiw, 2020). In case the pandemic takes longer to be resolved, governments and public authorities need to find coordinated ways to deal with it, to ensure the free movement of people and goods within Europe, while at the same time offering the best possible protection against the virus.

## Lessons learnt

In the programming period 2014-2020, Interreg CE supported 138 projects that cooperated on innovation, low carbon, environment and culture as well as transport topics. Experiences of these projects as well as knowledge gained in the 2007-2013 programming period provide a number of lessons learnt for this programme (wiiw, 2018).

The operational evaluation of Interreg CE 2014-2020 (Spatial Foresight, t33, 2019) confirmed that the programme generated a **high interest of stakeholders** and had a fairly even distribution of applicants in terms of country and institution coverage. Amongst others, this could be told from a high share of **private partners** (41%) in the projects and also a high share of **newcomers** (24%) to Interreg.

**Capacity-building and policy learning** is a major result of the projects. They improve capacities of local, regional and national administration and policy makers as well as of private businesses, especially SMEs. Their cooperation involved a critical mass of actors, who addressed joint challenges together. This allowed stakeholders to improve their knowledge as well as to develop and implement tools and strategies regarding innovation, energy, environmental, culture or transport related challenges.

**Pilot actions** have proven to be a successful way to implement and exchange experiences on state-of-the-art methods and technologies. They also allowed to test and consequently implement **new technologies and solutions**. Thereby, pilot actions had valuable demonstration effects, which



contributed to their roll out and a significant **leverage of funds** in various projects.

More generally, the direct **involvement of stakeholders** such as policy makers on all governance levels or the business sector helped the projects to tailor their results according to specific **territorial needs**. It thus supported their efforts to further capitalise on project results, e.g. by rolling-out of solutions in the participating territories and beyond. As a result, **project results became more sustainable** and visible long after the projects were completed. This was also confirmed by a stakeholder survey conducted in the impact assessment of Interreg CE 2007-2013 (wiiw, 2018).

This assessment has also shown that Interreg CE can successfully:

- Reduce barriers between policy makers, the business and research sphere, local and regional administrations and planners, and other stakeholders both within countries and across borders;
- Ensure high sustainability of cooperation and the establishment of new cooperation;
- Improve the coordination of policy makers and local authorities, by setting up specific governance structures to tackle common problems;
- Increase public (and private) management capacities through the creation and exchange of knowledge fuelled by studies, the collection of best practice, pilot actions, trainings, etc.;
- Produce a considerable value added, by contributing both to wider EU strategies and policies as well as to economic, social and territorial development.

## Complementarity and synergies (including contribution to macro-regional strategies)

The impact of transnational cooperation depends, amongst others, on the extent to which Interreg project results can be transferred to and scaled up by other, financially bigger European or national programmes and initiatives. Therefore, coordinating and cooperating with other funding instruments creates opportunities to capitalise on project outputs and results, and consequently to multiply their territorial impact.

Interreg CE aims to make use of synergies and complementarities with:

- a) other transnational and cross-border Interreg programmes;
- b) regional and national Cohesion Policy programmes relevant for CE regions; and
- c) EU-wide programmes, initiatives and funds, including Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe (also considering the Seal of Excellence initiative), the LIFE programme, programmes funded under the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) including the Connecting Europe Facility 2 Digital, Creative Europe, Erasmus +, the new European Bauhaus initiative and the like.

The implementation of such synergies will happen throughout the programme lifecycle.

During **programming**, special attention was paid to six transnational Interreg programmes that partially overlap geographically with Interreg CE (Alpine Space, Adriatic-Ionian, Baltic Sea, Danube, Med, North Sea, North-West). When involving partners in the programming process, authorities of these programmes were addressed specifically (see also chapter 4). This allowed to discuss synergies and complementarities as well as to collect feedback on the Interreg CE draft intervention logic. More generally, the Interreg CE programming process benefited from the fact that some members of the programming committee (Working Group CE21+) are simultaneously involved in programming committees of other transnational Interreg programmes, thus facilitating exchanges between



committees.

Most synergies will be sought during **programme implementation** along the following principles:

- **Overall**, when submitting project proposals, applicants will have to describe the coherence and complementarity with EU, national and regional programmes, within an ad-hoc section in the application form. This information will be subject to assessment.
- **Overlapping Interreg programmes**: continuous exchange of information with the concerned MAs/JSs, especially during project assessment and monitoring. This will allow to proactively promote synergies between projects and limit the risk of double financing. Furthermore, capitalisation actions set by the programme (e.g. targeted calls) will allow to activate synergies and complementarities between Interreg CE projects and projects funded by other Interreg programmes.
- **EU centrally managed programmes**: experiences with capitalisation of Interreg CE 2014-2020 results will support the capitalisation of Interreg CE 2021-2027 results in coordination with other EU programmes.
- **Other Cohesion Policy programmes**: coordination will be sought through National committees (or other mechanisms/bodies set by national rules) involving representatives of institutions participating in the implementation of national and regional programmes. Furthermore, adequate control arrangements and fraud-fight measures will allow to limit the risk of double financing.

Detailed procedures for the implementation of the above measures will be defined in the description of the programme management and control system as well as in the “Programme Manual” setting the rules for participation to Interreg CE.

Interreg CE also plays an important bridging function between the four **EU macro-regional strategies (MRS)**, namely the EUSDR, EUSALP, EUSAIR and EUSBSR. It is the only Interreg programme that shares parts of its cooperation area with all of them. Interreg CE therefore becomes a quasi-natural hub, with the potential to facilitate cooperation across the four MRS. The use of the geographical flexibility, as provided for in Article 22(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (Interreg Regulation), will allow to involve partners beyond the programme area, thus establishing links, and activating synergies within and across macro-regions and corridors. The programme has also the potential to enhance cooperation of the Carpathian countries.

This approach is further justified by the fact that, during the partner involvement process (see chapter 4) thematic fields and actions foreseen by the CE Programme were considered as highly important by stakeholders from the four MRS for implementing their respective MRS action plans.

## Programme vision, mission and delivery principles

### Programme vision and mission

The above territorial analysis indicates that central Europe is in a time of transition with regions and cities facing numerous challenges that know no borders and cannot be solved alone. The analysis clearly reinforces the relevance of the newly revised “Territorial Agenda 2030” (TA 2030), in which policy makers recognise that inequalities are growing between places and people and that unsustainable developments have reached a critical level.

The TA 2030 therefore calls for more concerted action at all geographical and governance levels, to ensure better perspectives for all people, communities and places in Europe. It urges policy makers to better understand and adequately address territorial impacts of sector policies in an integrated



way, and demands that future actions need to contribute to sustainable development and to keeping Europe together.

Interreg CE addresses the most urgent common challenges at the heart of Europe in line with these political demands. The programme vision is a united central Europe that cooperates - to become smarter, greener and better connected together. Based on shared needs and a common identity in an area long divided by the “Iron Curtain”, the programme aims for a trustful culture of cooperation beyond administrative borders.

The programme mission is to bring regions and cities together beyond borders to find fitting solutions for their citizens in a fair and equal way everywhere. It encourages and supports transnational cooperation to make regions more resilient to common challenges that know no borders and which cannot be solved alone. These challenges include among others economic transition processes, climate change, and the long-term socioeconomic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Based on shared needs and a common identity, the programme aims for a common culture of cooperation. Cooperation is central for cities and regions to become more resilient and attractive places to live and work in.

In practical terms, the programme brings together public organisations, the private sector and civil society. It finances transnational projects, which develop, test and implement solutions that are urgently needed to make central Europe more resilient and attractive. The programme supports these partnerships also with guidance and knowledge.

The **types of results** achieved by these projects can be classified as follows:

- Improved policy development, learning, and change;
- Increased knowledge and capacity, including the knowledge transfer and exchange;
- Better coordinated cooperation and enhanced governance at different levels;
- Reduced barriers;
- New or better services;
- Behavioural change;
- Leverage of public and private funds, including the preparation for follow-up investments.

### Horizontal principles for the delivery

Cooperation actions that lead to the above types of results will all respect the fundamental rights and ensure compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01). Furthermore, actions shall respect the horizontal principles of **equal opportunity, non-discrimination, gender equality and sustainable development including environment protection** during project design and implementation.

In particular, all actions financed by the programme will follow an “**environmental sustainability by design**” approach. This implies that environmental or broader sustainability considerations including human health effects are no longer treated as “after-thoughts”. Instead, they are integrated from the beginning into all activities. Partnerships are strongly encouraged to identify and consider any potentially significant environmental and health issues during project design and consequently choose available options for implementing projects that do not adversely affect the quality of the environment. Rather, projects should ideally contribute to the regeneration of the environment and ecosystem functions and services, climate neutrality as well as the sustainable management and



enhancement of cultural landscapes.

Projects should make available datasets resulting from the actions as open data under the conditions defined in the Open Data Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1024 of 20.6.2019), where relevant. In addition, online contents should be made accessible to all people, including persons with disabilities as foreseen in the EU Web Accessibility Directive (Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of 26.10.2016).

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



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

Reference: Article 17(3)(c)

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p><b>PO1 -</b> <b>A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation</b></p>	<p>(i) Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies</p>	<p><b>Priority 1 - Cooperating for a smarter central Europe</b></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of PO1</u></p> <p>Central Europe is a key economic area in the EU with a robust industrial core. Long-lasting cooperation on trade, investment and industry issues have resulted in strong functional ties across the programme area.</p> <p>To remain competitive, territories have to manage the <b>ongoing transition to a more digitalised, greener and more resilient economy</b>. They have to achieve this in a socially inclusive and just way. This is in full alignment with the Territorial Agenda 2030 and its objective of “A just Europe”, which is aiming for a balanced territorial development.</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of ERDF SO (i)</u></p> <p>A key challenge is that R&amp;D activities and technology and innovation transfer show still substantial imbalances between eastern and western regions in central Europe and that they tend to be mostly limited to urban areas. Activities need to be further strengthened, diversified and adapted in line with new economic and societal challenges. <b>Access to R&amp;I results</b> needs to be improved for innovation actors especially in territories lagging behind, such as peripheral and rural regions. <b>Cooperation along value chains</b>, green and digitised economy and cross-sector cooperation remain a critical need for many companies, in particular SMEs.</p> <p>Transnational cooperation offers a clear added value in addressing, among others, the following specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p>



			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the transition towards a more resilient, digitalised and green economy</li> <li>• Improving access to R&amp;I and enhancing technology transfer for SMEs, in particular in non-urban areas</li> <li>• Improving linkages among more and less advanced territories (e.g. innovation champions) and supporting their spill-over to surrounding territories</li> <li>• Fostering transnational industrial partnerships in order to establish sustainable value and supply chains</li> <li>• Facilitating the transformation of research results into marketable products</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
<p><b>PO1 - A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation</b></p>	<p>(iv) Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurs hip</p>	<p><b>Priority 1 - Cooperating for a smarter central Europe</b></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of PO1</u> see above</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of ERDF SO (iv)</u> It is essential to successfully shape the workforce transformation in central Europe to a more digitised and resource-efficient economy, including the shift towards Industry 4.0 considering the relevant national and regional smart specialisation strategies. This requires to strengthen and improve the related skills and entrepreneurial competences of workers, employees and entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Even though central Europe has a highly skilled workforce that, among others, is an important backbone of the manufacturing industry, it is distributed in an <b>unequal pattern</b>. Skilled people are mainly concentrated in urban areas and less in intermediate and rural regions. In addition, several territories are lagging behind regarding <b>novel technological and digitalisation as well as entrepreneurial skills</b>.</p> <p>Transnational cooperation offers clear added value in addressing, among others, the following</p>



			<p>specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing and implementing skills policies for an efficient entrepreneurial discovery process and the preparation or updating of smart specialisation strategies</li> <li>• Improving digital and green skills, especially of work forces in technology priority areas that are linked to regional smart specialisation strategies</li> <li>• Fostering entrepreneurship and strengthening related skills</li> <li>• Counteracting the loss of skilled workforce due to outward migration and brain drain, especially in rural and peripheral areas</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
<p><b>PO2 -</b> <b>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</b></p>	<p>(i) Promoting energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions</p>	<p><b>Priority 2 -</b> <i>Cooperating for a greener central Europe</i></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of PO2</u></p> <p>Central Europe is an area rich in <b>natural heritage resources and biodiversity</b>. This represents an important location factor, which is however threatened by <b>climate change, industrial activities and unsustainable consumption and mobility patterns</b>.</p> <p>In line with the <b>EU Green Deal</b>, territories have to respond to the challenges of environmental degradation and climate change, by boosting the efficient use of resources, protecting and restoring biodiversity as well as cutting pollution.</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of ERDF SO (i)</u></p> <p>One of the main challenges regarding the transition towards a low-carbon economy is related to <b>climate change mitigation</b> measures and <b>increasing energy efficiency</b>. Overall, energy consumption and GHG emissions in most central European countries are still beyond the EU average. Furthermore, in many regions there is still a <b>high use of carbon-intensive energy sources</b> and the transition towards the use of energy from renewable sources is slower than EU</p>



			<p>average. This puts at risk the aim of reaching EU climate neutrality goals by 2050.</p> <p>Transnational cooperation offers clear added value in addressing, among others, the following specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy to reduce GHG emissions</li> <li>• Improving the energy performance of buildings</li> <li>• Fostering the uptake and roll-out of energy efficient technologies and solutions in all sectors</li> <li>• Strengthening policies for integrated low carbon planning</li> <li>• Fostering behavioural changes for reducing energy consumption</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
<p><b>PO2 -</b> <b>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</b></p>	<p>(iv) Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster, risk prevention and disaster resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches</p>	<p><b>Priority 2 -</b> <i>Cooperating for a greener central Europe</i></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of PO2</u> see above</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of ERDF SO (iv)</u> Climate change is seriously affecting central Europe. <b>Extreme weather events</b>, such as heat waves or heavy rain events have already considerably increased over the last years. Even more frequent and severe floods, droughts etc. are expected. The changing climate is affecting a wide range of economic sectors and human activities as well as human health and well-being. This concerns, among others, heat-related challenges in urban areas which pose a particular risk for vulnerable groups.</p> <p>In order to increase the <b>resilience to climate change and natural disasters</b> of the territories, there is the clear need for <b>tailored adaptation actions</b> and a better <b>risk preparedness and management</b>.</p> <p>Transnational cooperation offers clear added value in addressing, among others, the following</p>



			<p>specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing resilience of territories to climate change and natural disasters</li> <li>• Fostering integrated climate change adaption policies at local and region level</li> <li>• Enhancing the implementation of tailored climate change adaptation measures across sectors</li> <li>• Increasing risk awareness, preparedness and forecasting methods</li> <li>• Improve the coordination and cooperation in risk management between territories and beyond borders</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
<p><b>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</b></p>	<p>(vi) Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy</p>	<p><b>Priority 2 - Cooperating for a greener central Europe</b></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of PO2</u> see above</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of ERDF SO (vi)</u> <b>Increasing resource efficiency, preventing waste generation and using waste as a resource</b> are central for the transition to a circular economy. This is a key challenge for central Europe. It will have positive impacts not only on the environmental sustainability and carbon-neutrality but it is also a decisive factor for the competitiveness of national and regional economies.</p> <p>Even though the circular economy is growing in central Europe, overall it is still rather at a <b>primary development stage</b>. For example, there are large differences between countries in material consumption and recycling rates of municipal waste. This shows the clear necessity for further efforts in order to reach the relevant European targets (e.g. 65% recycling rate by 2035).</p> <p>Transnational cooperation offers clear added value in addressing, among others, the following</p>



			<p>specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting circular economy policies at all territorial levels</li> <li>• Increasing resource efficiency and waste recycling across sectors</li> <li>• Strengthening circular value added chains and the deployment of resource efficient solutions and technologies</li> <li>• Inducing behavioural changes and stimulate the generation of new business models</li> <li>• Strengthening circular economy skills in the private and public sector</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
<p><b>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</b></p>	<p>(vii) Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban environment areas, and reducing all forms of pollution</p>	<p><b>Priority 2 - Cooperating for a greener central Europe</b></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of PO2</u> see above</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of ERDF SO (vii)</u> The pristine nature and rich natural heritage and biodiversity in central Europe represent important resources and location factors. This richness is also due to the <b>large diversity of biogeographic regions, landscapes and eco-systems</b> which can be found in central Europe, ranging from large areas of forested and agricultural land, to mountainous areas, watercourses, coasts, the sea, plains, lakes and urbanised areas. The central Europe area covers important eco-systems and ecological corridors that are stretching across borders (e.g. Green Belt).</p> <p>Yet, there is a continuous <b>loss of biodiversity</b> witnessed in central Europe due to land use changes, extraction of natural resources, climate change and invasive alien species. <b>Unsustainable economic activities</b> lead to pollutions of air, water and soil, which is especially high in the industrial areas of central Europe. This further leads to a deterioration of the ecosystem conditions, which will further reduce their ability to provide <b>essential eco-system services</b>.</p>



			<p>Transnational cooperation offers clear added value in addressing, among others, the following specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventing biodiversity loss and ensuring ecological connectivity</li> <li>• Preserving and strengthening eco-systems services for the benefit of the population</li> <li>• Protecting natural resources and supporting their sustainable use</li> <li>• Reducing air, water and soil pollution</li> <li>• Expanding green infrastructure that connects habitats and ensure their recreational potential</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
<p><b>PO2 -</b> <b>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</b></p>	<p>(viii) Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility, as part of transition to a net zero carbon economy</p>	<p><b>Priority 2 -</b> <i>Cooperating for a greener central Europe</i></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of PO2</u> see above</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of ERDF SO (viii)</u> Promoting and ensuring a more efficient and more sustainable urban mobility is a key challenge for central Europe. In fact, one third of the central European population lives in bigger cities and additionally 37% in intermediate regions. Commuting patterns require the consideration of mobility flows at the level of functional urban areas, thus considering both urban cores and their hinterlands. Consequently improving urban mobility and at the same time reducing the negative externalities of transport, has a tremendous impact on a very large share of the central European population (e.g. health, quality of life) and its economy (e.g. traffic congestions).</p> <p>The greening of urban mobility significantly contributes to <b>improving the air quality</b> which is often low in central European cities. In addition, sustainable urban mobility is essential in view of</p>



			<p>successfully <b>reducing the greenhouse gas emissions</b> of central Europe territories.</p> <p>Transnational cooperation offers clear added value in addressing, among others, the following specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting sustainable and smart urban mobility solutions</li> <li>• Promoting multi-modal urban mobility approaches</li> <li>• Improving sustainable mobility planning at functional urban area level</li> <li>• Reducing transport related externalities in urban areas and greenhouse emissions</li> <li>• Improving the air quality in central European cities</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
<p><b>PO3 -</b> <b>A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility and regional ICT connectivity</b></p>	<p>(ii) Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility</p>	<p><b>Priority 3 - Cooperating for a better connected central Europe</b></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of PO3</u></p> <p>Central Europe is an important <b>junction for European north-south and east-west connections</b> beyond its own borders. Since centuries, many trade and transport routes cross the area on transnational rivers, roads and railways. This makes central Europe a hub for European key corridors to which many regions are physically or socio-economically connected. <b>Connectivity between and within regions</b> is an important location factor ensuring the economic prosperity and cohesion of central Europe. In alignment with the “EU Green Deal”, there is the clear need for sustainable transport solutions. The CE Programme will not finance transport infrastructure, but it can significantly contribute to these aims by building synergies with other (larger) funds and play a catalyst role in the preparation of larger investments.</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of ERDF SO (ii)</u></p> <p>The main challenge for central Europe is to ensure a <b>better accessibility and connectivity of its</b></p>



			<p><b>peripheral and cross-border areas.</b> There is the clear need to better link them to the nodes of the TEN-T core network corridors (CNC), to <b>remove bottlenecks</b> and to <b>bridge missing transport links</b>. This is in line with the Territorial Agenda 2030 goals of a Just and Green Europe in terms of a balanced territorial development and sustainable connectivity of places.</p> <p>Transnational cooperation offers clear added value in addressing, among others, the following specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering better connections of rural and peripheral areas to the main transport corridors and nodes, focussing on public transport</li> <li>• Improving transport across borders and reducing barriers and bottlenecks, especially in peripheral areas</li> <li>• Promoting modal shift towards greener solutions</li> <li>• Strengthening logistic chains in rural and peripheral areas</li> <li>• Improving accessibility of and mobility in rural and peripheral areas to foster territorial cohesion and social inclusion</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
<p><b>ISO 1: A better cooperation governance</b></p>	<p>6. Other actions to support better cooperation governance</p>	<p><b>Priority 4 - Improving governance for cooperation in central Europe</b></p>	<p><u>Justification for the selection of ISO1</u></p> <p>Central Europe shares a <b>common identity</b> that is rooted in longstanding <b>cultural and historical ties</b> between its cities and regions. It is an intangible but crucial asset for addressing challenges in a cooperative approach.</p> <p>Central Europe, despite many functional ties, is rather heterogeneous in socio-economic and territorial terms. The area faces numerous challenges and barriers for regional development</p>



		<p>that do not stop at borders or administrative units.</p> <p><u>Justification for the selection of objective 6 “other actions to support better cooperation governance”</u></p> <p><i>The programme will address several ISO1 specific objectives, therefore objective (6) has been chosen.</i></p> <p>In line with the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the New Leipzig Charta, <b>integrated policies and multi-level governance processes</b> are crucial for strengthening regional development and cohesion beyond borders. This is in particular due for <b>complex territorial challenges</b> such as demographic change, climate change, digitisation, health or common crisis situations which affect central European regions in similar ways. They are best addressed by <b>integrated and cross-sectoral approaches</b> and require the provision of and equal access to <b>public services</b>.</p> <p>Transnational cooperation offers clear added value in addressing, among other, the following specific needs (for types and examples of actions please refer to chapter 2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering place-based, integrated policy making, addressing complex societal challenges</li> <li>• Strengthening territories with functional links or historical ties</li> <li>• Reducing administrative and legal barriers to cooperation beyond administrative borders</li> <li>• Enhancing multi-level governance and strengthening citizen and stakeholder involvement</li> <li>• Supporting high-quality public services of general interest, equally for all citizens</li> <li>• Fostering digital governance and better digital public services</li> </ul> <p>Form of support: grants. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-economic nature of transnational projects. Furthermore, the complexity of transnational programmes makes the setting up of a financial instrument across nine Member States technically not feasible.</p>
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## 2. Priorities

*Reference: Article 17(3)(d) and (e)*

### 2.1. Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(d)*

*Text field: [300]*

#### Priority 1: Cooperating for a smarter central Europe

### 2.1.1. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

#### **PO1 -(i) Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies**

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

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

*Text field [7000]*

#### **SO 1.1: Strengthening innovation capacities in central Europe**

##### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

Innovation capacities bear high relevance for the future economic development of central Europe and its economic resilience. Economic transition challenges the strong position of central European regions in the secondary, manufacturing sector, which includes e.g. the automotive, textile and food industries. Better innovation capacities will be central to adapt regions to the growing importance of the tertiary, services-oriented sector, which includes e.g. the cultural and creative industries, health and tourism. In line with the EU Green Deal and Territorial Agenda 2030, it is important to balance economic, social and ecological aspects in all support activities.

Currently, regions in central Europe do not equally benefit from research and innovation (R&I). Knowledge and technology transfer thus remains a critical need especially for SMEs along transnational value chains. These SMEs are often local suppliers that do not operate on global markets like larger companies.

Tackling innovation-related challenges will help to reduce territorial disparities between regions that might otherwise lead to unequal opportunities and a social disintegration.



### **Transnational cooperation actions**

In this SO, Interreg CE will support transnational cooperation to improve SME competitiveness. The aim is to improve policy learning, strengthen the capacities of innovation stakeholders and to increase collaboration in and between regional innovation systems. Where applicable, actions supported should be coherent with the relevant smart specialisation strategies of the participating regions. Possible cooperation actions include the development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, training, pilot actions and related solutions. All actions should strive for better economic resilience of CE regions, emphasising greening and sustainability aspects and considering the low carbon economy as well as climate change adaptation.

Actions should push the uptake of novel technologies and solutions. They should foster cross-sector linkages by improving cooperation among innovation stakeholders with similar challenges. Actions should establish and strengthen regional and transnational central European structures (e.g. clusters, innovation networks) and value chains, which will reduce dependency on foreign suppliers. Cooperation of companies in interregional partnerships is in particular encouraged if these are part of value chains related to smart specialisation strategies of the participating regions.

More concretely, Interreg CE will fund actions in the following fields (non-exhaustive list):

- Green economy, bio-economy
- Industry 4.0, robotisation, mechatronics, digital technologies, key enabling technologies
- Cultural and creative industries and tourism
- Health (care) innovation
- Silver economy
- Social innovation
- Technology and innovation transfer
- Interregional partnerships along value chains
- Innovative schemes for financing innovation

### **Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Improving capacities of and cooperation among innovation stakeholders at different governance levels (e.g. public, private, national, regional) to help SMEs to better integrate digitalisation in their sustainable transition to industry 4.0
- Exchanging good practices on green economy trends and standards and implementing pilot actions to support SMEs in taking these up
- Fostering technology and innovation transfer from research to business and new cooperation along value chains in order to support the roll out of innovative solutions
- Enhancing support services for SMEs and entrepreneurs to improve their access to research and technological innovations
- Strengthening transnational innovation networks and clusters and enhancing cooperation among innovation hubs in different territories



- Enabling cross-sectoral cooperation to help businesses (e.g. from traditional economic sectors, cultural and creative industries, tourism, health care or silver economy) to sustainably integrate digital technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, Internet of Things) into product and service development
- Improving collaboration along value chains of sustainable innovative products and services in coherence with smart specialisation strategies
- Enhancing transfer and upscaling of proven green solutions to open up business opportunities
- Developing and implementing transnational value chain concepts based on regional potentials and resources. Concepts should strengthen sustainability and reduce external dependency of value generation (e.g. by strengthening regional competences for lost/new value creation or introducing short food supply chains). They should also help increase regional resilience to external impacts such as ruptures of supply chains
- Fostering innovation strategies to reduce the environmental footprint of production processes, e.g. by facilitating decentralised and demand-responsive production systems
- Reducing innovation gaps in non-urban areas by e.g. making villages smarter and improving access to innovation support services for rural businesses focused on smart specialisation and technology priority areas
- Strengthening linkages between the public and private sector and finance institutions to encourage the design and setup of structures and services that facilitate access to innovation financing
- Promoting innovative actions that make the economy more just and help the economic and social integration of disadvantaged population groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, migrants, elderly, youth)
- Supporting the establishment of Living Labs, test-beds and ecosystems that bring together the demand and supply sides to promote the development and actual use of innovative solutions for public sector needs, including pre-commercial procurement (PCP) and public procurement of innovative solutions (PPIs)

Actions that might involve genetic modifications have to be compliant with the *acquis communautaire* for genetic engineering, including provisions of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

Actions might benefit from coordination with other EU funding instruments including Horizon Europe, the Interregional Innovation Investment (I3), ERDF mainstreaming programmes or national innovation funds. In this context, key strategic orientations defined in the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan and related partnerships could be reference points for complementarities. Supported actions are encouraged to contribute to the objectives of the European Research Area (ERA), by also fostering the deployment of R&I results. Such synergies allow to achieve wider territorial impacts in central Europe, e.g. through the uptake of research results and their rolling-out in the regions, as well as take into account action plans of macro-regional strategies. Actions could link with InvestEU and the new Strategic Investment Facility, which aim at building stronger European value chains and economic resilience. This could support the mobilisation of future investments in next generation technologies (e.g. through preparation of follow up projects or regional knowledge exchanges on good practices in the use of these instruments).



The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

**Expected results**

Transnational cooperation actions will result in strengthened innovation capacities. They will improve policy learning and implementation, encourage policy changes towards a green and digitalised economy in lagging regions and help these with catching up with front-runner regions. Actions will lead to improved framework conditions for innovation and foster the sustainable uptake of advanced technologies. Improved cross-sector cooperation, technology transfer and coordination will contribute to reducing innovation barriers, in particular for SMEs.

**For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:**

Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)

Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Text field [7000]

N/A

**2.1.1.2. Indicators**

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	SO 1.1	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	5	30
1	SO 1.1	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	12	80
1	SO 1.1	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	210	300
1	SO 1.1	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	12	80



Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base-line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	SO 1.1	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/ action plan	0	2021	23	Programme monitoring system	
1	SO 1.1	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	150	Programme monitoring system	
1	SO 1.1	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	60	Programme monitoring system	

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

*Text field [7000]*

Target groups of funded actions include all public and private stakeholders and population groups that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. They should be stimulated to take up solutions that lead to an improved innovation eco-system. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors of the quadruple innovation helix system such as enterprises including creative industries and cultural heritage institutions and their employees (especially SMEs), cluster organisations, public authorities, regional development agencies, chambers of commerce and industry technology transfer institutions, NGOs, innovation agencies, technology and industrial parks, sectoral and business networks, business incubators, financing institutions, education and training organisations, private and public research institutions, social networks.

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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(iv)*

*Text field [7000]*

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories. Actions should address territories with deficiencies in their innovation systems, who will benefit from exchanges with advanced regions and learn from them. In turn, cooperation should also improve connections among advanced territories (e.g. innovation champions - highly successful regions in a certain sector) and support their spill-over to surrounding territories in order to become



more competitive on the global market. Even though innovation system stakeholders are mostly located in urban areas, needs of rural areas should also be addressed.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial characteristics of targeted areas and, where applicable, be coherent with the relevant smart specialisation strategies.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

Text field [7000]

N/A

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

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	10	1.559.888
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	12	1.559.888
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	13	1.559.888
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	19	1.559.887
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	21	1.559.888
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	24	3.119.775
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	25	1.559.887
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	26	3.119.775
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	27	1.559.888
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	28	1.559.887
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	29	9.359.325
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	30	3.119.775



Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	01	31.197.751

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO 1.1	33	31.197.751

## 2.1.2. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

### **PO1 - (iv) Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship**

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

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

*Text field [7000]*

#### **SO 1.2: Strengthening skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship in central Europe**

##### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

Central Europe relies on skilled workers and employees for sustaining its strong industrial and economic base. SMEs are the largest employers in central Europe. To meet their needs it is important to improve and modernise skills of people locally, especially in view of challenges like digitalisation, the transition to Industry 4.0, climate change and the green economy as highlighted in the EU Green Deal. Up-to-date skills are a pre-requisite for exploiting technological innovation and the potentials offered by smart specialisation in different sectors and technology priority areas. Skills are also key to encouraging entrepreneurship. Finally yet importantly, place-based development of skills is crucial for reducing urban-rural disparities. Overall, there is the need for a just transition process that is socially responsible.

##### **Transnational cooperation actions**

Under this SO, Interreg CE will support transnational cooperation that improves knowledge and capacities necessary for an efficient entrepreneurial discovery process and the preparation or updating of smart specialisation strategies, in particular regarding digital skills and industrial transition as well as climate change mitigation and/or adaptation. This will strengthen the most promising areas for sustainable economic development based on the regions' distinctive structures



and knowledge base and encourage the introduction and strengthening of sustainable and innovative products, services or processes especially by SMEs. Actions supported should be coherent with the relevant smart specialisation strategies of the participating regions. Possible cooperation actions include the development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, trainings, pilot actions and related solutions. Cooperation shall support the development and implementation of solutions for vocational excellence as well as for technology diffusion and skills building in national and regional innovation ecosystems in order to achieve the goals of the smart specialisation strategies of the targeted territories.

More concretely, the programme will fund actions in the following thematic fields (non-exhaustive list):

- Skills for sectors of relevance for smart specialisation, e.g. Industry 4.0, digitalisation, green economy, bio-economy, silver economy, health and life sciences, cultural and creative industries, sustainable tourism
- Capacity-building and institutional learning for smart specialisation
- Matching skills to labour market needs of regions in industrial and digital transition
- Competences for innovation management in SMEs and entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship
- Counteracting regional (urban-rural) disparities of human capital and brain-drain

**Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Improving capacities and competences of policy makers and other stakeholders to develop forward looking approaches to adapt regional skills development to industrial transition (especially to make more sustainable use of digitalisation in different sectors and to support the digital transition of SMEs)
- Fostering skills of employees and entrepreneurs to implement innovative and green economy business concepts, also considering climate change mitigation and/or adaptation
- Improving skills of the public and private sector as well as strengthening entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship, coherently with priorities set in relevant national or regional smart specialisation strategies
- Developing and fostering knowledge hubs and innovative learning systems contributing to the technology priority areas of relevant national or regional smart specialisation strategies
- Developing and implementing strategies and solutions that build on different business cultures and on all levels of education to improve entrepreneurial mind-sets and frameworks
- Improving innovation management in SMEs as well as developing support services for SMEs and entrepreneurs to improve their access to research and technological innovations
- Fostering regional and local initiatives to support human capital and skills development in regions coping with brain drain, and challenges of industrial transition and digitalisation, especially in rural and shrinking areas
- Strengthening capacities of the public and private sector to ensure a just and socially inclusive economic transition



Actions should seek synergies and avoid overlaps with initiatives funded by other EU instruments such as ESF+, Erasmus+, the Digital Education Action Plan and the Just Transition Fund (which partly focuses on skills development for vulnerable groups) and initiatives from national and regional funds, as well as take into account action plans of macro-regional strategies. The use of such complementarities should aim at the upscaling of results and leveraging of further funding and investments.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

**Expected results**

Transnational cooperation actions will build capacities of and empower public authorities, intermediate bodies and other institutions, to create framework conditions that help improve skills of employees and entrepreneurs in view of challenges like green economy, digitalisation and industrial transition. This will result in policy learning for the delivery of new and better services for skills development. It will help to increase the regions` competitive advantage by enhancing capacities necessary for an efficient entrepreneurial discovery process and the preparation or updating of smart specialisation strategies. The framework conditions will also have to be inclusive, to allow actors from all territories to benefit from the transition process. Actions have to take into consideration the specific territorial challenges and disparities.

**For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:**

*Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)*

*Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A
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**2.1.2.2. Indicators**

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
1	SO 1.2	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	5	30



1	SO 1.2	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	12	80
1	SO 1.2	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	210	300
1	SO 1.2	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	12	80

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	SO 1.2	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/ action plan	0	2021	23	Programme monitoring system	
1	SO 1.2	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	150	Programme monitoring system	
1	SO 1.2	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	60	Programme monitoring system	

### 2.1.2.3. Main target groups

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

*Text field [7000]*

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors such as enterprises and their employees (especially in SMEs), (future) entrepreneurs, cluster organisations, public authorities, intermediaries, education and training organisations, private and public research institutions, regional development agencies, chambers of commerce, technology transfer institutions, NGOs, innovation agencies, business incubators, tourism operators, financing institutions, social partners and labour market-related institutions and civil society organisations. Target groups include also all population groups, which will benefit from improved skills development measures at regional and local level.



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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(iv)*

*Text field [7000]*

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories. Actions could address territories with deficiencies in skills development (e.g. peripheral and structurally weak regions, regions facing industrial decline, shrinking regions, brain drain affected regions) as well as more advanced regions. This will allow exchanges and learning from each other. In turn, cooperation will also allow advanced regions to further improve (digital and green) skills of their workforce to become more competitive on the global market. For this, possible actions need to consider the specific territorial characteristics and, where applicable, be coherent with the relevant smart specialisation strategies.

#### 2.1.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(v)*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A

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

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	13	3.119.775
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	16	1.559.888
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	18	6.239.550
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	19	3.119.775
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	21	3.119.775
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	23	7.799.437
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	24	3.119.775
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	25	3.119.775



Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	01	31.197.750

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	SO 1.2	33	31.197.750



## 2.2. Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(d)*

*Text field: [300]*

### Priority 2: Cooperating for a greener central Europe

#### 2.2.1. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

#### **PO2 - (i) Promoting energy efficiency measures and reducing greenhouse gas emissions**

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

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

*Text field [7000]*

#### **SO 2.1: Supporting the energy transition to a climate-neutral central Europe**

##### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

Many regions of central Europe are still highly dependent on fossil fuels and their GHG emissions are above EU average. Significant regional disparities exist in view of energy efficiency performance as well as the use of renewable energies, making it difficult for them to meet EU 2030 energy targets and climate objectives of the European Green Deal. To become climate neutral by 2050, central Europe needs to transform its energy system. This is addressed by several climate-related policies, among others, the EU Hydrogen Strategy which promotes clean hydrogen production.

Energy efficiency improvements can also deliver clear economic benefits. Consequently, regions and cities need to increase efforts and improve policies to address energy-related matters in all sectors, including the industrial and residential sectors. There is the need to boost energy system integration and promote integrated energy approaches, combining energy efficiency improvements and the use of renewable energy. Renewable energy production can also offer new development opportunities for rural and peripheral areas. Transnational cooperation aims to play a central role in supporting and coordinating the societal and economic transformation to climate-neutral regions and cities in central Europe.

##### **Transnational cooperation actions**

In this SO, Interreg CE will support transnational cooperation to increase energy efficiency, reduce energy consumption and develop framework conditions for the sustainable production and use of renewable energies across the programme area. Possible cooperation actions include the joint development and implementation of strategies and action plans, tools, trainings, pilot actions and related solutions. Actions should improve energy-related policies and capacities and help central



European regions and cities to implement affordable sustainable energy solutions that fit their specific territorial settings.

Actions which are related to the promotion of renewable energy production should consider in particular their contribution to climate neutrality policies and potential environmental impacts e.g. on biodiversity and Natura 2000 species and habitats, hydro-morphology, water-use, noise, vibrations and electromagnetic impacts as well as cultural landscape protection and regional specific concerns as addressed within relevant international conventions (e.g. Alpine Convention).

Furthermore, circular solutions, use and reuse of sustainable materials, and the integration of nature-based solutions should be considered, where appropriate.

More concretely, the programme will fund actions to improve the situation in the following thematic fields (non-exhaustive list):

- Smart integration of carbon-neutral solutions across sectors
- Renewable energy sources
- Energy efficiency of buildings and public infrastructures
- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from industry and other sectors
- Energy planning at local and regional levels
- Energy demand management and behavioural change
- Financing schemes for energy efficiency and renewable energy investments
- Energy poverty

**Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Supporting the development of coherent policy frameworks at local and regional level for the transition towards a climate-neutral economy and society in central Europe
- Improving capacities of relevant stakeholders and fostering the exchange of knowledge and good practices on climate change mitigation at local and regional levels, especially between regions with similar territorial characteristics regarding the practical implementation of climate action plans
- Supporting cost-effective measures and pilot actions that increase energy efficiency and improve the integration of sustainable renewable energy sources in SMEs and in different sectors (e.g. in the building and construction sector, industry, agriculture, forestry)
- Implementing pilot actions to test innovative and climate-neutral solutions through e.g. taking up and exploiting R&D results for the energy efficient renovation and heating and cooling of buildings (including cultural heritage buildings)
- Developing and implementing smart city and smart regions approaches, including energy efficiency improvements of district heating networks (e.g. waste heat recovery, heat storage), to foster carbon-neutral societies and territories
- Pilot testing the production of decentralised renewable energy, and supporting the empowerment of renewables self-consumers and communities, especially in rural areas, considering, for example, the sustainable management of end-of-life solar panels



- Improving energy demand management and fostering behavioural changes of consumers for reducing energy consumption and a resource-efficient and sustainable use of energy
- Promoting the production and use of advanced biofuels, notably the second (produced from non-food crops, such as cellulosic biofuels and waste biomass) and third generation biofuels (algal biomass)
- Supporting policies and strategies to overcome barriers for deploying carbon capture, utilisation and storage solutions in order to reduce GHG emissions
- Developing and introducing new or improved incentive schemes that encourage the reduction of industrial GHG emissions on local and regional level and strengthen the sustainable usage of renewable energy sources (including hydrogen) and energy storage solutions
- Fostering the introduction of corporate climate change mitigation targets and embedding them into existing business management tools (e.g. analytics) and decision-making (e.g. product development)
- Mobilising investments, in particular private funds, to implement energy efficiency measures and make use of renewable energy sources in different sectors, including the industrial, service and residential sectors
- Fostering the collection of integrated data on energy management and the interoperability of data through digital technologies and the coordination of standards and regulatory aspects

Actions should seek synergies with other European instruments, in particular linked to the EU Green Deal. They should build on research results and innovative technologies developed in programmes like Horizon Europe, LIFE etc. and lever infrastructure investments through the private sector and EU financing instruments as e.g. national and regional ERDF programmes, Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), InvestEU, the Just Transition Fund or the EIB. If relevant, also synergies and complementarities with the ESF+ should be considered, e.g. linked to the development of green skills and green jobs, and the EAFRD, regarding the increase of efficiency in energy use in agriculture.

Furthermore, actions should take into account action plans of macro-regional strategies as well as relevant EU and EC initiatives such as the Central and South Eastern Europe energy connectivity (CESEC), the EU Initiative for coal regions in transition, the Green City Accord and the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy and the Urban agenda of the EU. It is also encouraged to participate in already existing regional cooperation fora for the Energy Union Governance and to join the energy dialogue on the optimisation of energy and climate policies.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

### **Expected results**

Transnational cooperation actions will result in increased capacities of central European regions and cities for implementing improved energy efficiency policies and measures within different sectors. Pilot actions will demonstrate the viability of energy efficiency solutions, which will lead to behavioural changes, reduce implementation barriers and lever further investment for their



wide deployment within central Europe. This will ultimately result in lower GHG emissions on the path to carbon-neutrality and help to mitigate climate change.

**For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:**

Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)

Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Text field [7000]

N/A

### 2.2.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	SO 2.1	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	3	20
2	SO 2.1	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	6	39
2	SO 2.1	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	137	195
2	SO 2.1	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	6	39

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base-line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	SO 2.1	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/ action plan	0	2021	15	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.1	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	98	Programme monitoring system	



2	SO 2.1	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	29	Programme monitoring system	
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### 2.2.1.3. Main target groups

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

*Text field [7000]*

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that lead to improved energy efficiency, an increased use of renewable energies and a more climate-neutral central Europe. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors such as, policy makers and planners, energy agencies, operators and distributors, infrastructure providers and other local and regional energy actors, as well as different economic sectors including SMEs. Target groups include also all population groups, which will benefit from an improved regional and local energy performance.

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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(iv)*

*Text field [7000]*

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories, i.e. both urban and rural areas. Actions could address territories which show a lower performance in energy efficiency and renewable energy use, or which have deficiencies regarding climate-neutral actions as well as more advanced regions. This will allow exchanges and learning from each other. Cooperation will also allow the more advanced regions to strengthen further their energy performance.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial characteristics of targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

### 2.2.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(v)*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A



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

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	38	4.159.700
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	41	1.039.925
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	44	7.279.475
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	47	1.039.925
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	48	1.039.925
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	49	2.079.850
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	51	1.039.925
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	52	1.039.925
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	53	1.039.925
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	54	1.039.925

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	01	20.798.500

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.1	33	20.798.500



## 2.2.2. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

### **PO2 - (iv) Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and disaster resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches**

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

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

*Text field [7000]*

#### **SO 2.2: Increasing the resilience to climate change risks in central Europe**

##### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

Central Europe is facing significant challenges related to climate change. Extreme weather events like heat waves and heavy rainfalls are increasing considerably and lead to river flooding, landslides and more frequent heat and drought periods. In view of significant environmental, socio-economic and human health-related impacts, central European regions need to improve their resilience to climate change. According to the Joint Research Center (JRC) conceptual framework on resilience, it is defined as the ability to face shocks and persistent structural changes in such a way that societal well-being is preserved, without compromising the heritage for future generations (Manca, Benczur and Giovannini, 2017).

The impact of climate change varies substantially between different regions and sectors. Therefore, adaptation actions need to take into account specific territorial aspects. Measures have to be tailored at the local level in order to set up viable integrated solutions, which could then be replicated in other regions of the central Europe area having similar characteristics. There is a strong need to integrate climate change concerns into risk-based strategic planning and measures enhancing resilience. This relates to a wide variety of natural hazards such as urban heat, floods, urban floods, landslides, wild fires and droughts including water scarcity.

##### **Transnational cooperation actions**

In line with EU Green Deal objectives, under this SO Interreg CE will support transnational cooperation to enhance policy learning and regional capacities on climate resilience across the programme area. Actions should emphasise sustainable ecosystem-based solutions and approaches to climate change adaptation and consider potential infrastructure upgrades as a last resort option. If applicable, adaptation measures should avoid potential hydro-morphological impacts on water bodies. Possible cooperation actions include the development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, training, pilot actions and related solutions. Actions should address the challenges of the territories to alleviate environmental and socio-economic impacts of climate change and related risks, through the cooperative development of approaches. This will help central European regions and cities to implement climate change adaptation measures that are tailored to their specific territorial settings.

More concretely, the programme will fund actions in the following thematic fields (non-exhaustive list):

- Climate change resilience and adaptation measures



- Climate-proof landscape and urban planning
- Resilience to weather extremes and related hazards (rainfall events, floods, landslides, heat, droughts, water scarcity, wildfires etc.)
- Risk awareness, prevention and management
- Socio-economic and health-related impacts of climate change

**Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Increasing awareness and information of policy makers about local and regional implications of climate change, in order to foster a better understanding and integration of climate change concerns into policy design and implementation
- Developing integrated strategies and solutions to improve central European capacities for preparing and adapting to climate change and its negative impacts on society, economy and the environment (e.g. by addressing different aspects of resilient eco-systems)
- Exchanging knowledge and good practices on eco-system based climate change adaptation measures and implementing pilot actions for restoration towards resilient eco-systems, e.g. rivers and wetlands, transnational connectivity of habitats, agro-forestry, biodiversity, landscapes, climate proofing, modelling and forecasting
- Developing and implementing integrated strategies and climate action plans that improve the risk awareness and resilience of central European cities and regions (e.g. regarding urban heat islands, flash floods, wildfires, greening)
- Testing integrated climate-adaptation solutions in pilot actions, which combine technological, ecological, social, cultural, governance and financial aspects. The pilot actions should build on good practices available at local, regional, national or European level
- Improving digital competences of and coordination among relevant stakeholders to manage climate-induced risks (e.g. by harmonizing and sharing data, forecasting and early warning systems, modelling, climate proofing)
- Increasing climate resilience of critical infrastructures and cultural/natural heritage sites through improved risk preparedness and risk management plans
- Integrating climate change aspects into water management strategies on local, regional and interregional level (considering e.g. water quality, flooding, rainwater management and water retention, water scarcity, drinking water supply including smart water pricing, ground water, forecasting)
- Sharing knowledge and developing solutions for climate proofing the agricultural and forestry sectors to increase their resilience towards e.g. droughts, outbreaks of pests
- Developing integrated strategies and solutions for strengthening eco-system services for human health and wellbeing in order to support social resilience and counteracting socio-economic impacts of climate change

Actions should seek synergies with European and national instruments, in particular related to the EU Green Deal. They should take into account available results from other programmes like Horizon Europe, LIFE etc. and contribute to lever investments from e.g. national and regional ERDF programmes, the Just Transition Fund. Where applicable, actions should aim at mainstreaming



results across all relevant cohesion policy investments, ensuring that they are resilient to the impact of climate change and natural disasters.

Furthermore, actions should take into account existing initiatives to create added value on all levels (e.g. transnational adaptation strategies or action plans developed in the frame of macro-regional strategies). Participation is also encouraged in well-established international initiatives such as Making Cities Resilient (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction) or 100 Resilient Cities (Rockefeller Foundation) which will contribute to increasing the visibility of the CE region in the climate change adaptation agenda.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

### Expected results

Transnational cooperation actions will result in increased capacities and policy learning to improve resilience and timely counteract unfavourable climate change impacts in central Europe. They will also improve the coordination of adaptation and risk prevention measures and lead to a broader deployment of novel solutions which have been tested and demonstrated in pilot actions. Actions are also expected to leverage funds for climate change adaptation and resilience measures throughout central Europe.

### For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:

Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)

Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Text field [7000]

N/A

### 2.2.2.2. Indicators

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	SO 2.2	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	3	20
2	SO 2.2	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and	Pilot action	6	39



			implemented in projects			
2	SO 2.2	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	137	195
2	SO 2.2	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	6	39

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	SO 2.2	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/ action plan	0	2021	15	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.2	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	98	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.2	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	29	Programme monitoring system	

### 2.2.2.3. Main target groups

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

Text field [7000]

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions that improve the implementation of climate change resilience and adaptation measures in Interreg CE regions. More concretely, target groups include the public sector including local, regional and national authorities, policy makers, research institutions, infrastructure operators, regional development agencies, associations, special interest groups, rescue organisations, NGOs, education and training organisations, financing institutions and the private sector. Target groups are also all population groups, which benefit from an improved climate change resilience at regional and local level.



#### 2.2.2.4. Identification of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

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

Text field [7000]

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and in all types of territories (both urban and rural areas). Territories that are most vulnerable and affected by climate change impacts should however be in the focus. They will benefit most from exchanging with and learning from other regions with similar pressures.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial characteristics of targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

#### 2.2.2.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

Text field [7000]

N/A

#### 2.2.2.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.2	58	7.279.475
2	ERDF	SO 2.2	59	2.079.850
2	ERDF	SO 2.2	60	7.279.475
2	ERDF	SO 2.2	61	2.079.850
2	ERDF	SO 2.2	64	2.079.850



Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.2	01	20.798.500

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.2	33	20.798.500



### 2.2.3. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

#### **PO2 - (vi) Promoting the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy**

##### 2.2.3.1. Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

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

*Text field [7000]*

#### **SO 2.3: Taking circular economy forward in central Europe**

##### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

Circular economy is defined as an economy “where the value of products, materials and resources is maintained for as long as possible, and the generation of waste minimised” (EC, 2015). It is also understood as a development strategy that “entails economic growth without increasing consumption of resources, deeply transform production chains and consumption habits and redesign industrial systems at the system level” (EC, 2014, Annex I).

Both understandings are reflected in the new EU Circular Economy Action Plan (2020), which announces initiatives along the entire life cycle of products, targeting for example their design, promoting circular economy processes and fostering sustainable consumption. The concept has considerable potential for reducing environmental pressure and offers new, green business and job opportunities, thus bringing economic benefits for the regions.

Central Europe is moving closer to European targets for waste reuse and recycling but several of its regions are still lagging behind. For an overall more resource-efficient and competitive economy, it is necessary to further develop and scale up circular approaches that are tailored to the specific needs of urban and rural areas. Such transformation will require a policy framework for sustainable products, a re-arrangement of key value chains and material flows (including energy and water), an improved waste management as well as the creation of new business models.

##### **Transnational cooperation actions**

In this SO, Interreg CE will support transnational cooperation to increase the deployment of circular economy approaches across the programme area. This will contribute to strengthening regional added value, especially in rural and peripheral regions. Possible cooperation actions include the joint development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, trainings, pilot actions and related solutions. Actions should be in line with the EU Green Deal and the EU Circular Economy Action Plan and therefore improve product life cycles, promote circular economy processes and foster sustainable consumption (refuse; rethink; reduce; reuse; repair; refurbish; remanufacture; repurpose; recycle; recover). In this context, emphasis should be put on household waste management, commercial waste management and environmentally friendly production processes and resource efficiency in SMEs. Transnational cooperation should push the transition to a circular economy by increasing knowledge, improving policy learning as well as practically testing good practices.

More concretely, the programme will fund actions in the following thematic fields (non-exhaustive list):



- Waste prevention and management, recycling and recovery of resources and raw materials
- Repair and re-use
- Circular economy value chains
- Clean production processes and closed loop systems
- Sustainable product design (e.g. eco-design) and product development processes
- Behavioural changes of producers, consumers, public buyers etc.

**Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Increasing awareness of policy makers and stakeholders about environmental and economic opportunities of a circular economy and improving their capacity for the practical implementation of circular economy approaches
- Supporting policy frameworks for deploying and scaling up circular economy approaches, e.g. through developing and implementing integrated circular economy strategies and action plans at the local and regional levels, including related regional innovation schemes
- Improving waste management policies and competences of the public and private sector, including the prevention, processing and recycling of communal (e.g. recovery of organic waste, including nutrients from municipal wastewater) and industrial waste
- Fostering approaches for limiting landfilling of all types of waste and retaining their value (as future resources) in the economic cycle
- Developing and testing solutions that support the recovery and reuse of raw materials (e.g. setting up local markets for secondary raw materials, creating transnational central European market places for recycling/up-cycling products)
- Pilot testing of repair, reuse and refurbish approaches in pilot actions that closely involve citizens
- Developing and putting into practice industrial symbiosis concepts at territorial level and fostering resource efficient economic networks and business ecosystems
- Setting up policy frameworks for sustainable products and supporting local and regional governance structures that encourage circularity, eco-innovation and eco-design approaches in the entire life cycle of products
- Exchanging knowledge and good practices on solutions for clean production processes, in particular in SMEs, that consider regenerative circular economy approaches in different sectors (such as electronics, construction and buildings, textiles, plastics, packaging, food, agriculture) and testing them in pilot actions
- Strengthening cooperation of actors along key value chains to reduce barriers for circular economy approaches (by considering also market- and globalisation-related aspects)
- Fostering and testing digital solutions for the circular economy including applications and services (such as product passports, resource mapping, tracing systems and consumer information)



- Fostering public-private cooperation to design financial instruments and sustainable business models that help the introduction of innovative circular economy solutions and cleaner production processes
- Developing and testing approaches that lead to behavioural changes and higher acceptance of more sustainable products (e.g. through the promotion and uptake of schemes such as EMAS, EU Ecolabel or Green Public Procurement) and resource-efficient consumption and production patterns (e.g. integrated approaches for reducing food waste)
- Developing and testing approaches that enhance market demand for recycled materials and products (e.g. sustainable public procurement)

Actions in this SO should specifically aim at policy learning and a wide deployment and rollout of circular economy solutions in the CE territories. This is different from actions expected in SO 1.1, which might also contribute to a more circular economy, but more generally addressing R&I aspects to foster a greener and smarter economy including the circular economy transition, in line with smart specialisation priorities.

Actions are particularly encouraged to seek synergies with national and EU instruments to take up innovative results and technologies (e.g. from Horizon Europe) and thematic existing networks and initiatives such as the Circular Plastic Alliance or the Bio-based Industries Consortium, as well as take into account action plans of macro-regional strategies. Actions are also expected to contribute to the leverage of investments from e.g. national and regional ERDF programmes, the Joint Transition Fund.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

### **Expected results**

Transnational cooperation actions will result in increased capacities of central European public and private stakeholders to implement circular economy policies and to exploit innovative solutions in practice. Actions will lead to improved policy frameworks, changes in the production chain leading to more sustainable products and behavioural change of consumers. They will also help to reduce implementation barriers and lever investment for the deployment of circular economy measures both in the public and private sectors. Such integration and deployment of circular economy approaches, should address mainstream economic players and not only front-runners.

***For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:***

*Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)*

*Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A
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### 2.2.3.2. Indicators

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	SO 2.3	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	2	15
2	SO 2.3	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	6	40
2	SO 2.3	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	105	150
2	SO 2.3	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	6	40

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base-line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	SO 2.3	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/action plan	0	2021	11	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.3	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	75	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.3	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	30	Programme monitoring system	

### 2.2.3.3. Main target groups

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

Text field [7000]

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions leading



to an improved circular economy framework and more sustainable and resource-efficient production processes. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors at local, regional and national level, covering a wide range of different sectors and levels of governance such as policy makers, industry including SMEs, urban and rural planners, waste operators and facilities, infrastructure owners and operators as well as other organisations such as intermediaries, regional development and innovation agencies, environmental institutions, NGOs, financing institutions, education and training organisations as well as universities and research institutes. Target groups include all population groups including consumers, which will benefit from circular economy solutions.

#### 2.2.3.4. Identification of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(iv)*

*Text field [7000]*

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories, i.e. both urban and rural areas. Actions could address territories which are lagging behind regarding the deployment of circular economy solutions as well as more advanced regions. This will allow exchanges and learning from each other. Cooperation will also allow more advanced regions to strengthen further their resource efficiency.

All actions need to consider the specific territorial characteristics and needs of the targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

#### 2.2.3.5. Planned use of financial instruments

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(v)*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A



### 2.2.3.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.3	65	779.944
2	ERDF	SO 2.3	67	6.239.550
2	ERDF	SO 2.3	69	2.339.832
2	ERDF	SO 2.3	71	779.944
2	ERDF	SO 2.3	75	5.459.606

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.3	01	15.598.876

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.3	33	15.598.876



## 2.2.4. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

### **PO2 - (vii) Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution**

#### 2.2.4.1. Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate

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

*Text field [7000]*

### **SO 2.4: Safeguarding the environment in central Europe**

#### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

Pressures such as land use, pollution, the extraction of natural resources, and invasive alien species increasingly endanger the rich variety of landscapes, natural assets, ecosystems and biodiversity in central Europe. Coordinated approaches are necessary to counteract this trend and to valorise and protect the environment as well as to ensure ecological connectivity, which is also one of the policy areas of the EU Green Deal and is highlighted in the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. This requires integrated approaches for air, water and soil protection and to involve different sectors and stakeholders such as environmental and spatial planning authorities, water facilities, industry and tourism.

#### **Transnational cooperation actions**

Under this SO, Interreg CE will support transnational cooperation actions such as the development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, trainings, pilot actions and related solutions that protect nature more efficiently and make environmental management more sustainable. Actions should focus on the development and implementation of better environmental policies as well as on the joint development of approaches that are tailored to specific local conditions. Ecosystems that are stretching across borders (e.g. river basins, ecological corridors etc.) should benefit from transnational cooperation such as already existing multilateral initiatives, like the Green Belt Initiative.

More concretely, the programme will fund actions in the following thematic fields (non-exhaustive list):

- Biodiversity conservation and recovery, including urban green spaces
- Protection of natural heritage, ecosystems and valuable areas incl. Natura 2000 sites
- Reduction of environmental pollution (air, water, soil, noise, light etc.) and their human health impacts
- Integrated environmental management and sustainable use of natural resources
- Sustainable land management and landscape planning that optimize human activities with biodiversity protection and enhancement measures
- Ecosystem services (e.g. production of food and water, clean air, recreational benefits)
- Restoration of degraded ecosystems



- Sustainable tourism and the valorisation of natural heritage

**Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Improving policy frameworks for biodiversity and implementing strategies at local, regional and transnational level to conserve and restore ecosystems and to protect wildlife
- Improving skills and competences of stakeholders on all policy levels through the exchange of knowledge and best practices to foster the integrated management of natural resources such as air, water and soil as well as nature based solutions for infrastructure investments
- Fostering the implementation of policies and strategies for the protection of cultural landscapes and integrating biodiversity protection interests into landscape management
- Linking green and blue infrastructures in a coordinated way to create and strengthen ecological corridors and protected sites at local, regional and transnational level, which will help to reduce landscape fragmentation and improve the transboundary connectivity of habitats
- Testing in pilot actions innovative technical solutions for the restoration of degraded ecosystems (e.g. rivers, high-diversity landscapes, forests) and upscaling these approaches at a wider territorial level
- Fostering and testing solutions to evaluate and enhance ecosystem services and to raise the awareness of policy makers on the local and regional value of ecosystems, considering also their function for improving public health and well-being through e.g. nature access, outdoor sports and recreation
- Strengthening the transnational coordination of environmental management and nature protection in the frame of multilateral cooperation initiatives and structures such as the Green Belt Initiative
- Developing transnational approaches to sustainable land use in order to prevent urban sprawl and testing through pilot actions novel approaches for the remediation and reuse of polluted brownfield sites as well as the regeneration of degraded peri-urban areas
- Promoting innovative solutions, considering also applicable regulatory arrangements and incentives, to avert soil degradation (including soil compaction) and enhance the soil properties, e.g. increasing the organic matter content of the soil
- Developing and testing integrated environmental action plans (e.g. on monitoring and reducing pollutants) on the local and regional level as a basis for pollution prevention and remediation measures
- Building capacities for an integrated management of water ecosystems (e.g. by harmonising the implementation of water management plans to improve transboundary water quality in transnational river basins, or by applying innovative water treatment technologies)
- Sharing good practices and applying innovative solutions that address, among others, invasive alien species, and strengthen sustainable environmental management practices (e.g. for agriculture and forest management, lakes, pollinator-friendly management, sustainable food chains)



- Developing and implementing strategies and solutions for sustainable tourism that valorises central Europe’s natural heritage (e.g. protected areas, wetlands, landscapes) through participatory approaches and that avoids usage conflicts

Actions should seek synergies with European and national instruments, in particular related to the EU Green Deal. They should take into account available results from other programmes like Horizon Europe, LIFE etc. and contribute to lever investments from e.g. national and regional ERDF programmes, InvestEU and the Just Transition Fund. Where relevant, synergies and complementarities with the ESF+ should be considered, e.g. linked to the development of green skills and green jobs, and the EAFRD, e.g. regarding water management and biodiversity conservation in rural areas.

Furthermore, actions should take into account existing initiatives and institutionalised cooperation settings to create added value on all levels (e.g. European Green Belt Initiative, Environmental Conventions, Carpathian Convention, Alpine Convention) as well as relevant action plans of macro-regional strategies.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

#### **Expected results**

Transnational cooperation actions will contribute to policy learning at all governance levels and improve capacities for better managing the cross-sectoral interdependence of ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as the socio-economic impacts of their deterioration. Transnational actions will help reducing policy gaps, in order to ensure a comprehensive and coherent policy framework for safeguarding and improving central Europe’s environment. The piloting of new solutions and the transfer of good practices will reduce barriers for implementation of environmental protection and rehabilitation measures. It will also unlock financial resources and lever additional funds for green infrastructure.

***For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:***

*Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)*

*Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A
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#### **2.2.4.2. Indicators**

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



Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	SO 2.4	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	4	24
2	SO 2.4	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	7	48
2	SO 2.4	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	168	240
2	SO 2.4	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	7	48

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base-line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	SO 2.4	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/action plan	0	2021	18	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.4	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	120	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.4	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	36	Programme monitoring system	

### 2.2.4.3. Main target groups

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

Text field [7000]

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations involved in or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will improve the environmental management in central Europe. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors covering a wide range of different sectors and levels of governance, such as regional and national public authorities, policy makers and planners, regional development agencies, enterprises including SMEs, associations, NGOs, financing institutions, education and training organisations, universities and research institutes and other organisations that are active in the environmental field. Target groups include



also all population groups, which will benefit from an improved environmental management at regional and local level.

#### 2.2.4.4. Identification of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(iv)*

*Text field [7000]*

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories, i.e. both urban and rural areas. Territories with valuable natural assets and regions that are much affected by environmental pressures including mass-tourism or that have a significant potential for environmental rehabilitation (e.g. urban industrial areas, brownfields, degraded rivers) should however be in the focus. Furthermore, regions which are lagging behind regarding the implementation of environmental policies will profit most from knowledge exchanges with more advanced regions, which will in turn also be able to strengthen further their environmental management practices. For pushing implementation on local and regional level, place-based approaches should respect the specific territorial settings of the targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

#### 2.2.4.5. Planned use of financial instruments

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(v)*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A



#### 2.2.4.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	62	1.299.906
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	64	3.899.718
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	65	1.299.906
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	73	2.599.813
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	77	3.899.719
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	78	3.899.719
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	79	9.099.344

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	01	25.998.125

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.4	33	25.998.125



## 2.2.5. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

### **PO2 - (viii) Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility, as part of transition to a net zero carbon economy**

**2.2.5.1. Related types of action and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, where appropriate**

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

*Text field [7000]*

#### **SO 2.5: Greening urban mobility in central Europe**

##### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

Reducing transport emissions is a crucial challenge for greening central Europe`s economy and also a major goal of the EU Green Deal. In particular, urban mobility requires an integrated response. Smart and green solutions have to be introduced in functional urban areas (FUA), taking account of interactions between “urban cores” and their “hinterlands”. In central Europe, many FUAs face similar challenges when greening their mobility. They need integrated approaches to address the vast diversity of territorial aspects (from e.g. energy demand, air pollution, congestion and urban logistics to public transport services, mobility behaviour and good governance) and to achieve net zero GHG emissions. In all this, digitalisation and novel technologies show significant potentials to help greening the future of urban mobility.

##### **Transnational cooperation actions**

Under this SO, Interreg CE will support transnational cooperation for the development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, trainings, pilot actions and related solutions that aim at better policy learning and increased capacities for sustainable urban mobility. Actions should foster an integrated and smart green mobility in FUAs by considering governance aspects and improving coordination among relevant stakeholders and policies. In line with the EU “Urban Mobility Package”, actions should develop and deploy integrated strategies (e.g. Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans - SUMP). They should also test and introduce new green approaches and technologies for delivering solutions for urban mobility challenges. Furthermore, actions should balance out disparities between territories that are less advanced and more advanced in terms of green urban mobility.

More concretely, the programme will fund actions to improve the situation in the following thematic fields (non-exhaustive list):

- Sustainable urban mobility planning
- Quality and efficiency of green, urban public transport services
- Smart traffic and mobility management, including commuting solutions
- Sustainable multimodal connections between urban and peri-urban areas
- Sustainable multimodal urban freight and logistic solutions (including the “last mile”)



- Reduction of greenhouse gases and other air pollutants from urban transport
- Accessibility of urban public transport for everyone, especially for elderly and frail people

**Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Improving skills and capacities of urban planners and decision makers on integrated sustainable and green mobility planning (SUMP) at the level of functional urban areas
- Exchanging knowledge, experiences and good practices on smart traffic management to improve aspects such as parking, congestion, GHG and other transport-related emissions, considering among others Urban vehicle access regulations (UVAR)
- Testing and implementing solutions for harmonised and integrated ticketing, fostering efficient and broadly accepted public transport at the level of functional urban areas
- Testing and rolling out Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) solutions and other digital business models for sustainable urban mobility and smart logistic solutions
- Fostering and implementing integrated urban mobility concepts including e.g. zero-emission transport including cycling and monitoring strategies that contribute to improved air quality management for reducing exposure of the population to transport-related emissions (air and noise pollution) based on the applicable WHO guidelines and EU Directives
- Sharing experiences and approaches for sustainable fleet management (e.g. hydrogen and electric buses) as well as use of end-of-life batteries in urban electro-mobility systems
- Designing and setting up better governance solutions for sustainable mobility at the level of FUAs, including e.g. the coordination of stakeholders on various governance levels to improve urban and peri-urban connectivity and green commuting solutions
- Testing and deploying green urban logistic solutions and testing new approaches for multimodal transport of goods at the level of FUAs (e.g. multi-modal hubs)
- Designing and deploying strategies to green the “last mile” of urban deliveries and logistics, including preparation and implementation of Sustainable Urban Logistics Plans (SULP)
- Triggering behavioural changes towards more sustainable urban mobility through innovative approaches (e.g. “pop-up” measures accompanied by digital campaigning)
- Developing and implementing strategies and action plans to improve barrier-free accessibility to public transport systems, especially for elderly and disabled people

Actions should seek synergies with EU instruments to take up innovative approaches and technologies such as from Horizon Europe and with existing networks and initiatives, e.g. CIVITAS - the European Platform on Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans, ELTIS - the Urban Mobility Observatory and the Urban agenda of the EU, as well as take into account action plans of macro-regional strategies. Actions are also expected to contribute to the leverage of investments from e.g. national and regional ERDF programmes, the Just Transition Fund.

The design of actions under this SO should consider in particular the following issues: reducing the need for transport, reducing or optimizing the transport flows, promoting least emission-intensive transport systems; and reducing the impacts of the transport systems on air and noise pollution, public health and cultural heritage.



The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

**Expected results**

Transnational cooperation actions will result in improved capacities and policy learning at all governance levels for implementing multimodal sustainable mobility in functional urban areas. This will lead to greener urban mobility services, behavioural change and contribute to substantially reducing transport-related pollution and GHG emissions. Less congested central European cities will bring economic benefits and create public spaces for a higher quality of life for citizens. Finally, supported actions will unlock financial resources for scaling up developed solutions and help the deployment of innovative and green urban mobility technologies at a wider territorial level.

**For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:**

Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)

Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Text field [7000]

N/A

**2.2.5.2. Indicators**

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	SO 2.5	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	3	20
2	SO 2.5	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	6	39
2	SO 2.5	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	137	195



2	SO 2.5	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	6	39
2	SO 2.5	RCO 120	Projects supporting cooperation across borders to develop urban-rural linkages	Project	9	13

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base-line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	SO 2.5	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/ action plan	0	2021	15	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.5	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	98	Programme monitoring system	
2	SO 2.5	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	29	Programme monitoring system	

### 2.2.5.3. Main target groups

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

Text field [7000]

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors such as public transport operators, local, regional and national public authorities, policy makers and planners, regional development agencies, infrastructure providers, mobility service providers, mobility interest groups, other local and regional transport actors, enterprises including SMEs, NGOs, financing institutions, education and training organisations as well as universities and research institutes. Target groups also include all population groups, which will benefit from improved, greener public transport systems in functional urban areas.



#### 2.2.5.4. Identification of the specific territories targeted, including the planned use of ITI, CLLD or other territorial tools

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(iv)*

*Text field [7000]*

Actions can be implemented throughout the cooperation area. Due to the importance of interactions between cities and their hinterlands (e.g. commuters) urban mobility challenges are thereby to be considered at the level of functional urban areas. According to the OECD, European Commission and Eurostat (OECD, 2012), a functional urban area is defined, as a functional economic unit characterised by densely inhabited “urban cores” and “hinterlands”, whose labour market is highly integrated with the cores. Functional urban areas with high emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> or air pollutants from the transport sector should however be in the focus. They will profit most from knowledge exchanges with regions which are more advanced in the deployment of low carbon urban mobility solutions. In turn, cooperation will also allow more advance regions to improve further their implementation capacities for green urban mobility.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial characteristics of the targeted functional urban areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

#### 2.2.5.5. Planned use of financial instruments

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(v)*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A

#### 2.2.5.6. Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.5	77	4.159.700
2	ERDF	SO 2.5	81	7.279.475
2	ERDF	SO 2.5	82	3.119.775
2	ERDF	SO 2.5	83	4.159.700
2	ERDF	SO 2.5	85	2.079.850



Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.5	01	20.798.500

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	SO 2.5	27	20.798.500



## 2.3. Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(d)*

*Text field: [300]*

**Priority 3: Cooperating for a better connected central Europe**

### 2.3.1. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

**PO3 - (ii) Developing and enhancing sustainable, climate resilient, intelligent and intermodal national, regional and local mobility, including improved access to TEN-T and cross-border mobility**

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

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

*Text field [7000]*

#### **SO 3.1: Improving transport connections of rural and peripheral regions in central Europe**

##### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

The programme area is a central junction at the heart of Europe. Seven of the nine core network corridors (CNC) of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) cross central Europe and it also connects the Baltic and the Mediterranean seas. This territorial setting has made central Europe since centuries an important hub for many trade and transport routes to which many regions are physically or socio-economically connected. A better accessibility throughout the entire area could strategically facilitate central Europe's participation in EU-wide and global trade and improve regional competitiveness.

However, for some regions, especially rural and peripheral regions including those that cross borders, the accessibility to the main transport corridors and nodes is still limited. There is the need to introduce sustainable and smart transport services to bridge missing connections and to remove bottlenecks in order to ensure good accessibility across central Europe. Furthermore, and in line with the EU Green Deal, transport emissions need to be reduced by 90% by 2050. This calls for smart and sustainable approaches to regional mobility, inter-modality as well as the introduction of IT-supported solutions for mobility management.

##### **Transnational cooperation actions**

Under this SO, Interreg CE will support transnational cooperation to improve the mobility in and accessibility of rural and peripheral regions, especially in view of their linkages to main EU transport corridors and nodes, and in particular regional economic centres. Sustainable solutions such as improved digital connectivity will also help to reduce transport-related pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and positively affect socioeconomic developments. Possible cooperation



actions include the joint development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, training, pilot actions and related solutions. Actions should improve transport-related policies and increase capacities for a coordinated, integrated planning of sustainable transport and mobility systems making use of digital solutions to the possible extent.

More concretely, the programme will fund actions in the following thematic fields (non-exhaustive list):

- Demand-responsive and flexible regional passenger transport
- Accessibility of rural and remote areas and their connectivity to main EU transport corridors
- Removal of transport barriers and bottlenecks across borders and beyond
- Strategic regional transport and spatial planning
- Multi-modal freight transport and logistic chains in rural and peripheral areas and connections to transport nodes

**Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Developing and implementing integrated and multi-modal mobility strategies fostering effective and sustainable connections within rural and peripheral regions and their connection to the main transport nodes and corridors
- Designing and testing integrated, demand-responsive and sustainable transport solutions to better connect rural and peripheral areas to major transport nodes
- Identifying and supporting the removal of transport barriers and bottlenecks through e.g. improved cooperation among transport stakeholders and coordinated planning of strategic investment
- Improving the coordination between regional transport operators across borders (including e.g. the harmonisation and integration of ticketing information and services and the setting up of interregional partnerships of transport operators)
- Exchanging good practices and developing standards and sustainable solutions to improve regional mobility services in the public interest and to increase their resilience in times of crisis
- Developing and testing smart concepts for regional mobility (including e.g. digital solutions and traffic management systems)
- Improving the strategic and sustainable planning of freight transport and logistics to better align regional planning with central European value chains and TEN-T investments
- Improving transport management and navigation (including e.g. multi-modal logistics to better use existing waterway and rail transport infrastructure)
- Testing the optimisation of logistic chains in rural and peripheral areas through pilot actions based on innovative technological solutions (e.g. digitalisation)
- Developing and implementing green solutions for an efficient “last mile” transport of goods in peripheral, rural and sparsely populated areas

The programme will only support actions that reduce the need for transport, reduce or optimize the transport flows and promote the switch to least emission-intensive transport systems. Actions supported should also contribute to reducing the impacts of the transport systems on air and noise



pollution, public health; biodiversity and Natura 2000 species and habitats, landscape fragmentation, hydro-morphological impacts, land take and cultural and archaeological heritage and consider relevant international conventions (e.g. Alpine Convention, Carpathian Convention).

Under this SO, the Interreg CE Programme will complement and act as a catalyst to lever further investment for large-scale transport infrastructure. Actions should therefore seek synergies and coordinate with other European instruments and national funds, including e.g. ERDF mainstream programmes, the CEF and the EIB financial instruments, Interreg cross-border programmes as well as consider relevant action plans of macro-regional strategies.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

**Expected results**

Transnational cooperation actions will result in increased capacities of central European regions to develop and implement better sustainable transport and mobility services in rural and peripheral including cross-border areas. This will also improve the coordination between transport stakeholders and the access of regions to the main transport corridors and nodes. Pilot actions will demonstrate the feasibility of novel approaches. Investment preparation actions are expected to lever investment from other financing instruments, ultimately leading to a wide deployment of transport solutions across central Europe.

**For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:**

*Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)*

*Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A

**2.3.1.2. Indicators**

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
3	SO 3.1	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	3	18



3	SO 3.1	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	5	36
3	SO 3.1	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	126	180
3	SO 3.1	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	5	36
3	SO 3.1	RCO 120	Projects supporting cooperation across borders to develop urban-rural linkages	Project	8	12

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base-line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	SO 3.1	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/ action plan	0	2021	14	Programme monitoring system	
3	SO 3.1	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	90	Programme monitoring system	
3	SO 3.1	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	27	Programme monitoring system	

### 2.3.1.3. Main target groups

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

Text field [7000]

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be stimulated to take up solutions for improved transport and mobility, and a better accessibility of peripheral regions. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors covering a wide range of different sectors and levels of governance, such as local, regional and national public authorities and other institutions dealing with planning and managing transport services and networks, regional development agencies, enterprises, regional associations and innovation agencies, NGOs, financing institutions, education and training organisations, universities and research institutes. Target groups include also all population groups, which potentially benefit from improved regional passenger transport services (e.g. commuters, tourists).



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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(iv)*

*Text field [7000]*

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area. They should however primarily address rural and peripheral regions including cross-border regions which are suffering from low accessibility. They will profit most from knowledge exchanges with already well connected regions which in turn will also be able to further improve the sustainability of their regional mobility services.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial challenges and settings of the targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

#### 2.3.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(v)*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A



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

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	100	1.039.925
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	101	4.159.700
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	104	1.039.925
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	108	4.159.700
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	109	7.279.475
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	114	1.039.925
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	116	1.039.925
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	120	1.039.925

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	01	20.798.500

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	SO 3.1	33	20.798.500



## 2.4. Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(d)*

*Text field: [300]*

### Priority 4: Improving governance for cooperation in central Europe

#### 2.4.1. Specific objective (repeated for each selected specific objective)

*Reference: Article 17(3)(e)*

##### **ISO 1 - A better cooperation governance (objective 6 “other actions to support better cooperation governance”)**

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

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

*Text field [7000]*

##### **SO 4.1: Strengthening governance for integrated territorial development in central Europe**

###### **Territorial needs for central Europe**

Central Europe is highly heterogeneous in both territorial and socioeconomic terms. An East-West divide is still recognisable along the former Iron Curtain and the area faces a multitude of complex challenges and barriers that do not stop at borders or administrative units and that hinder economic, social and territorial development. However, a common identity, rooted in strong historic and cultural ties, link central European regions closely together. This intangible “central European identity” is the starting point for addressing common opportunities and challenges together. In line with the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the New Leipzig Charta, integrated policies and multi-level governance processes are crucial for strengthening regional development and cohesion beyond borders. However, such integrated and place-based approaches are often not sufficiently enforced in central Europe. Consequently, disparities and gaps persist between thriving regions and less advanced ones. Better governance will help to change this. There is the particular need for exchanging good practices between actors of multi-level governance systems. It will lead to more spatially and socially equitable public services and ultimately increase territorial and social cohesion as well as promote the principle of equal opportunities across the programme area.

###### **Transnational cooperation actions**

Under this SO, Interreg CE will support transnational actions aimed at improving multi-sectoral governance processes on all territorial levels, in particular in view of complex challenges related to digitalisation, demographic change, climate change, public services of general interest (such as health, education, social services) and tourism including culture. Actions should follow a cross-sectoral approach and foster the horizontal and vertical cooperation of relevant actors of the public and, where appropriate, the private sector. Furthermore, actions should also strengthen capacities of public authorities to prepare integrated territorial development strategies.



Possible cooperation actions include the joint development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, training, pilot actions and related solutions. Actions should focus on improving governance processes by better integrating policy sectors, by building consensus among relevant institutions, by better involving citizens and other stakeholders and by making use of digital tools.

More concretely, the programme will fund actions in the following thematic fields (non-exhaustive list):

- Reduction of administrative barriers, better policymaking and cooperation beyond borders
- Participatory decision-making processes (e.g. citizen involvement)
- Multi-level and multi-sector governance among areas with functional ties beyond borders
- Integrated territorial development strategies, e.g. addressing demographic change, climate change, public services of general interest (such as health, education, social services) and tourism and culture
- Digital governance

**Examples of actions supported (non-exhaustive list):**

- Identifying and reducing barriers to cooperation in territories with functional ties (e.g. improving cooperation between stakeholders across administrative units and sectors to implement joint solutions)
- Exchange of experiences and building capacities of authorities to prepare territorially integrated initiatives such as Community-led local development (CLLD) strategies and Integrated territorial investments (ITI) by fostering cooperation between urban-rural partnerships or on sustainable urban development (SUD)
- Fostering and testing participatory governance models at local and regional level to increase participation of citizens in decision-making and to strengthen civic engagement and equal opportunities in public governance
- Exchanging knowledge and good practices on managing participatory approaches, including the testing of digital solutions for further rollout at territorial level
- Developing and implementing integrated development strategies for territories with functional ties addressing demographic change challenges and including high quality public services of general interest (such as health, education, social services)
- Developing and implementing integrated tourism strategies beyond borders, based on the shared central European identity and joint historical and cultural heritage
- Fostering new territorial governance models by e.g. a better integration of new biodiversity governance frameworks based on the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy (through, for example, more effective stakeholder dialogues)
- Strengthening cooperation and policy integration in cross-border and transnational territories with functional ties, especially across the former Iron Curtain, by establishing new or capitalising on existing structures for cooperation governance (e.g. EGTCs, EUREGIOs, macro-regional initiatives), including joint decision making processes and coordinated action plans as well as by supporting cross-border public services



- Developing smart city and smart region strategies and supporting their integration into local and regional policies and governance systems
- Further strengthening digital governance solutions to create efficient public services that facilitate interaction between administrations and citizens and businesses (e.g. e-governance solutions, digital public services, e-participation)
- Testing, adapting and deploying smart digital services for better cooperation and coordination beyond administrative borders (e.g. in the health sector)

Actions should seek synergies with other European instruments and initiatives such as the ERDF mainstream programmes, the Rural Programmes (including LEADER) cross-border Interreg programmes, as well as existing transboundary and transnational governance structures (e.g. EGTCs and EUREGIOS). Actions should also take into account relevant international initiatives and platforms, which aim at better coordinating governance processes in specific thematic areas and in particular the EU macro-regional strategies.

The types of actions have been assessed as compatible with the Do No Significant Harm principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

**Expected results**

Transnational cooperation actions will result in improved capacities of public authorities and other stakeholders for implementing coordinated and cooperative territorial governance processes, based on policy learning and policy change. This will ultimately improve territorial and social cohesion and reduce development barriers. It will also contribute to achieving the priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (e.g. a balanced Europe, functional regions and integration across borders). For citizens, it will concretely result in better public services.

*For INTERACT and ESPON programmes:*

*Reference Article 17(9)(c)(i)*

*Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure*

*Text field [7000]*

N/A
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**2.4.1.2. Indicators**

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

Table 2: Output indicators



Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
4	SO 4.1	RCO 83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	Strategy/action plan	4	28
4	SO 4.1	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot action	2	14
4	SO 4.1	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisation	147	210
4	SO 4.1	RCO 116	Jointly developed solutions	Solution	2	14

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base-line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
4	SO 4.1	RCR 79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	Joint strategy/ action plan	0	2021	21	Programme monitoring system	
4	SO 4.1	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	105	Programme monitoring system	
4	SO 4.1	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	11	Programme monitoring system	

### 2.4.1.3. Main target groups

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

*Text field [7000]*

Target groups of funded actions can be both individuals and organisations that will be involved or positively affected by the actions. As a result, they will be more capable to implement integrated governance processes at various territorial levels. More concretely, target groups include both public and private actors covering a wide range of different sectors and levels of governance, such as local, regional and national public authorities, policy makers, urban and spatial planners, operators, infrastructure providers, regional development agencies, EGTCs, social and health care institutions, service regulators, tourism operators, intermediaries, education and training organisations, international organisations and associations, enterprises including SMEs, NGOs, financing



institutions, as well as universities and research institutes. Target groups include also all population groups, which will benefit from improved local and regional governance processes.

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

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

Text field [7000]

Actions can be implemented throughout the programme area and address all types of territories. Cooperation is particularly encouraged to improve governance structures and processes within and between territories that are sharing functional ties (e.g. metropolitan regions, adjacent or neighbouring cities and their rural hinterlands, cross-border regions). The exchanges of knowledge and experiences between more and less advanced regions will strengthen further their implementation capacities.

All possible actions need to consider the specific territorial settings and existing governance systems of targeted areas and be aligned to the relevant territorial strategies at the respective governance level (local, regional, national).

#### 2.4.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

Text field [7000]

N/A

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

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 - intervention field

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	SO 4.1	171	20.798.500

Table 5: Dimension 2 - form of financing

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	SO 4.1	01	20.798.500



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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ERDF	SO 4.1	33	20.798.500



### 3. Financing plan

Reference: Article 17(3)(f)

#### 3.1. Financial appropriations by year

Reference: Article 17(3)(g)(i), Article 17(4)(a)-(d)

Table 7

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF (territorial cooperation goal)	0	38.372.525	38.988.903	39.617.609	40.258.886	33.359.347	34.026.532	224.623.802
IPA III CBC <sup>2</sup>								
NDICI CBC <sup>3</sup>								
IPA III <sup>4</sup>								
NDICI <sup>5</sup>								
OCTP <sup>6</sup>								
Interreg Funds <sup>7</sup>								
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>38.372.525</b>	<b>38.988.903</b>	<b>39.617.609</b>	<b>40.258.886</b>	<b>33.359.347</b>	<b>34.026.532</b>	<b>224.623.802</b>

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

Reference: Article 17(3)(f)(ii), Article 17(4)(a)-(d)

<sup>2</sup> Interreg A,, external cross-border cooperation

<sup>3</sup> Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation

<sup>4</sup> Interreg B and C

<sup>5</sup> Interreg B and C

<sup>6</sup> Interreg B, C and D

<sup>7</sup> ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C



Table 8<sup>o</sup>

Policy Objective No	Priority	Fund (as applicable)	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a)=(a1)+(a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU Contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries (for information)	
					Without TA pursuant to Article 27 (1) (a1)	For TA pursuant to Article 27 (1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)				
1	Priority 1	ERDF	Total eligible cost	67.387.141	62.395.501	4.991.640	16.846.785	12.666.965	4.179.820	84.233.926	80%	0	
		IPA III CBC <sup>8</sup>	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		NDICI- CBC <sup>9</sup>	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		IPA III <sup>10</sup>	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		NDICI <sup>11</sup>	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
			N/A										
		OCTP <sup>12</sup>	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

<sup>8</sup> Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation

<sup>9</sup> Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation

<sup>10</sup> Interreg B and C

<sup>11</sup> Interreg B and C

<sup>12</sup> Interreg B, C and D



		Interreg Funds <sup>13</sup>	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Priority 2	ERDF	Total eligible cost	112.311.901	103.992.501	8.319.400	28.077.976	24.812.492	3.265.484	140.389.877	80%	0
		IPA III CBC	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		NDICI- CBC	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		IPA III	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		NDICI	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		OCTP	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Interreg Funds	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Priority 3	ERDF	Total eligible cost	22.462.380	20.798.500	1.663.880	5.615.595	4.744.799	870.796	28.077.975	80%	0
		IPA III CBC	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		NDICI- CBC	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		IPA III	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		NDICI	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		OCTP	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Interreg Funds	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ISO1	Priority 4	ERDF	Total eligible cost	22.462.380	20.798.500	1.663.880	5.615.595	5.484.976	130.619	28.077.975	80%	0

<sup>13</sup> ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, where as single amount under Interreg B and C



		IPA III CBC	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		NDICI- CBC	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		IPA III	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		NDICI	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		OCTP	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Interreg Funds	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>All funds</b>	<b>Total eligible cost</b>	<b>224.623.802</b>	<b>207.985.002</b>	<b>16.638.800</b>	<b>56.155.951</b>	<b>47.709.232</b>	<b>8.446.719</b>	<b>280.779.753</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>0</b>
		ERDF	Total eligible cost	224.623.802	207.985.002	16.638.800	56.155.951	47.709.232	8.446.719	280.779.753	80%	0
		IPA III CBC	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		NDICI CBC	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		IPA III	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		NDICI	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
			N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		OCTP	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Interreg Funds	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>All funds</b>	<b>Total eligible cost</b>	<b>224.623.802</b>	<b>207.985.002</b>	<b>16.638.800</b>	<b>56.155.951</b>	<b>47.709.232</b>	<b>8.446.719</b>	<b>280.779.753</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>0</b>



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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(g)*

*Text field [10 000]*

In line with regulatory requirements laid down in Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (Common Provisions Regulation - CPR), the MA/JS of Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE has involved a broad range of relevant partners in preparing the new transnational cooperation programme for 2021-27.

When considering the involvement of partners, it is important to take into account also continuous measures taken on the national level. Qualified stakeholders and experts are regularly involved in all programming and implementing decisions through national committees or other mechanisms and bodies. Measures outlined in this chapter are therefore complementary to these well-established activities.

Altogether, the comprehensive Interreg CE partner involvement process added much value to the programming process by collecting feedback and inputs to:

- Define and validate transnational cooperation needs in view of key territorial challenges
- Define and validate strategic choices taken in view of thematic concentration
- Collect feedback on and ideas for possible actions and target groups to be supported
- Coordinate with neighbouring Interreg programmes and other territorial instruments
- Validate possible environmental impacts of the new programme

The partner involvement process was divided into three phases at different development stages of the new programme. Additional phases will follow later during programme implementation to ensure the programme's continuous relevance and increase its effectiveness and efficiency.

Across all involvement phases, a dedicated landing page was available on the programme website. It ensured that partners stayed informed about the programming process and that preparatory documents and involvement outcomes were published at [www.interreg-central.eu/CE21-27](http://www.interreg-central.eu/CE21-27).

### Involvement phase 1: Territorial challenges and programme strategy

From autumn 2019 to spring 2020, the following transnational measures involved over 500 relevant partners from across central Europe in the development of the new programme:

- Survey on territorial needs and challenges (September to October 2019):  
National committees and thematic experts were targeted with this survey to collect primarily quantitative data about thematic fields with the highest need for transnational cooperation. More than 300 replies were received from all nine programme countries.
- Participatory session at EU Regions Week (9 October 2019):  
This session was organised in Brussels at the EU Week of Regions and Cities 2019. Thematic discussion groups were formed to collect ideas and opinions on all policy objectives and to brainstorm about more detailed inputs for the intervention logic. Outcomes of the session with around 50 participants were documented in mind maps and informed an expert report with policy recommendations for the WG CE21+.
- Strategy and consensus-building workshop (13 November 2019):



In addition to members of the Interreg CE programming committee, thematic experts from the national and regional levels were invited to discuss strategic preferences and to build transnational consensus on policy choices. The workshop also collected initial inputs regarding potential thematic fields, actions and target audiences from around 50 participants. Outcomes of the debate informed an expert report with policy recommendations.

- Questionnaire to collect national feedbacks on strategy (March 2020):  
This questionnaire addressed qualified national and regional stakeholders to collect national feedback on the draft programme strategy prior to a meeting of the Interreg CE programming committee.

Despite drastic event and travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Interreg CE was committed to take its involvement activities forward to collect more concrete ideas on thematic fields, transnational actions and target groups.

#### Involvement phase 2: Programme intervention logic

In June 2020, the programme launched a two-step consultation process, which built on thematic discussions and preliminary decisions taken by the WG CE21+ in May 2020. The aim was to collect feedback on an early draft version of the future programme, which already included a sketch of transnational programme priorities, specific objectives and topics that gave direction to the funding of cooperation actions in central Europe. Partners could also provide inputs and ideas on additional topics, transnational cooperation actions and target groups.

In a first step, a transnational survey invited stakeholders from across central Europe to provide feedback and inputs on the draft IP between 10 and 24 June 2020. 556 respondents from relevant national, regional and local stakeholders had participated to the survey. They ranked the relevance of transnational topics per programme specific objective and provided several qualitative inputs.

In a second step, a joint effort of the programme's national contact point (NCP) helped to further deepen dialogue with 490 public and private partners from across central Europe. In coordination with the MA/JS, consultation measures were organised in all countries in June, July and August, despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

National partner dialogues (NPDs) took place in online formats such as webinars and direct mailings. They helped to collect information on actions and target groups, to consolidate inputs from the survey and to gather additional qualitative feedback.

The two measures complemented each other in the following way:

- The survey collected quantitative feedback about the relevance of transnational topics per SO. In addition, respondents could include qualitative inputs on additional topics, potential transnational actions and target groups.
- NPDs collected and discussed qualitative inputs from national experts to complement primarily quantitative inputs received in the survey.

Outcomes of both the transnational survey and NPDs were documented in a comprehensive stakeholder involvement report and published on the programme website at [www.interreg-central.eu/CE21-27](http://www.interreg-central.eu/CE21-27). It provided an analytical overview of feedback and inputs received and was as such a valuable source of information for further fine-tuning the programme strategy and the programme intervention logic.



### Involvement phase 3: Coordination with other Interreg programmes and EU cooperation instruments

In a final involvement phase, Interreg CE involved implementers of geographically overlapping and neighbouring Interreg programmes as well as EU macro-regional strategies (MRS) and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs). The objectives were to:

- Raise awareness on the programme and its future priorities
- Collect additional inputs for the programme intervention logic
- Strengthen coordination and identify potential synergies with Interreg programmes and territorially relevant instruments as well as MRS action plans

In October 2020, two surveys were launched to collect feedback from a qualified group of stakeholders at MRS and EGTCs. Interreg CE received replies from 25 thematic or national coordinators from all MRS (EUSALP, EUSAIR, EUSBSR and EUSDR) and from six implementers of EGTCs located in central Europe. The programme's thematic fields and planned actions were all considered as highly important.

A dialogue-oriented approach was taken to involve the management of overlapping and neighbouring transnational Interreg programmes and Interreg Europe. In a focus group on 21 October 2020, these programmes exchanged on the programming state of play and their draft strategies and intervention logics. The group also looked into potential synergies and complementarities.

This involvement phase then concluded with an exchange with geographically overlapping cross-border Interreg programmes in the frame of the Interact online conference "Cooperation and synergies in Central and South Eastern Europe" on 3-4 November 2020. The event was dedicated to discussions on cooperation between programmes in central and southeast Europe, including their contributions to the local macro-regional strategies EUSDR, EUSAIR and EUSALP.

All outcomes of this involvement phase were documented in an updated, comprehensive stakeholder involvement report, which was published at [www.interreg-central.eu/CE21-27](http://www.interreg-central.eu/CE21-27).

### Planned involvement during the implementation of Interreg CE 2021-27:

The continuous involvement of relevant partners in the implementation of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme is envisioned for two reasons:

- To enhance ownership of the programme among partners, in order to make use of their knowledge and expertise and to increase transparency in decision-making processes
- To improve the coordination with other ESI Funds as well as with relevant funding instruments and MRS

While specific measures will be organised to involve specific audiences with more specific objectives, the continuous involvement of relevant partners in the Interreg CE monitoring committee (MC) will be secured primarily through national committees or similar mechanisms and bodies. Like in the programming phase, these represent platforms in which relevant national partners (including MRS stakeholders) can voice their positions on strategic matters concerning the implementation of the programme.

During implementation, they support MC members in the execution of MC tasks, including the preparation of calls for proposals and programme progress reports as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the programme. They will be organised in compliance with applicable national requirements concerning their composition, functioning and management of obligations on data protection, confidentiality and conflict of interest.



Where relevant, national committees or similar mechanisms and bodies established in compliance with national rules, will strive for coordination with Cohesion Policy programmes and other national funding instruments, for example by inviting representatives of institutions participating in the implementation of relevant national and/or regional programmes.

The programme might also involve, upon invitation, relevant EU umbrella institutions and organisations, such as the Committee of the Regions, with an observer role in the MC.



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

Reference: Article 17(3)(h)

Text field [4 500]

Communication goes beyond transmission of information or awareness raising. It focuses also on creating communities, increasing ownership and deepening dialogue with partners to increase programme efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

### Objectives and audiences

Communication is a management function that touches on all aspects of the programme life cycle. It influences what the target audiences as defined in IP chapters 2 and 4 know about the programme and how they think or act towards it. Based on programme and management objectives, communication objectives are the following:

#### Set-up phase

- Involve partners in defining calls and other interventions
- Increase knowledge of all programme bodies to better support stakeholders
- Strengthen commitment of all programme bodies to new processes and working culture

#### Application phase

- Raise awareness on calls among relevant applicants (including newcomers) in all territories
- Increase knowledge of applicants to submit better applications

#### Implementation phase

- Increase knowledge of beneficiaries to better implement projects
- Involve beneficiaries in Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE community for better peer-learning

#### Capitalisation phase

- Improve attitude of target groups as defined in IP chapters 2 and 4 towards (taking up) results

Annual work plans will further define detailed annual objectives.

### Tactics, channels and messages

A close attachment to the established Interreg umbrella brand will increase visibility and aid synergies with other programmes. It will help to improve the attitude of all audiences and their behaviour towards the programme due to the “*mere-exposure effect*”, by which people tend to develop a preference for things merely because they are familiar with them.

Based on consistent branding, main tactics will be “*cross-channel content marketing*” and campaigning. This practice integrates the use of multiple channels to flexibly connect to and engage with stakeholders. It combines digital and offline channels, often in a hybrid way. Target audiences like applicants, beneficiaries and other stakeholders will be reached primarily through owned media channels. The interested public and policy makers will be reached through earned and paid media



channels. Owned channels will comprise of a web portal, direct mails, social media (incl. LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter), print products (incl. plaques), public events and meetings. Information will also be included on national single web portal(s) in coordination with national contact points.

Transparency and reliable content will be crucial. Issues that the programme wants to communicate to reach an objective have to be broken down into messages. Messages will be rooted in the programme narrative (see IP chapter 1). They will guide the development of thematic content in flexible formats, from text and data visualisations to videos, to fit various channels while maintaining coherence.

Regarding user experience, the programme will provide content in both browsable (interactive and personal) and structured formats (aggregated and searchable) to meet varying needs of applicants, beneficiaries and stakeholders. Often, these formats will be complementary as e.g. on the website: a list of operations will provide structured information for media and institutional stakeholders, while multimedia storytelling features will allow for browsing by the interested public.

The programme will also make use of “*community-based ambassador marketing*”. Using their local anchorage, project beneficiaries will reach out on (social) media to citizens and end-users with the community hashtag #*cooperationiscentral*.

Annual work plans will further define details on the implementation of channels, messages and content.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

The following outcome and result indicators will measure progress and achievements.

#### Set-up and application phase

- Outcome: Web traffic and conversions, social media engagement, event participation (statistics)
- Result: Applicant satisfaction with information & support provided by programme (survey)

#### Implementation phase

- Outcome: Web traffic and conversions, social media engagement, event participation (statistics)
- Result: Beneficiary satisfaction with information and support provided by programme and positive attitude towards the programme community (survey)

#### Capitalisation phase

- Outcome: Web traffic and conversions, social media engagement, event participation (statistics)
- Result: Satisfaction of stakeholders with programme results and impact (survey)

Annual work plans will further define indicators incl. baselines and targets.

### **Budget and resources**

Communication is a horizontal management task coordinated by the JS communication and capacity-building unit. Implementation will be supported by all programme bodies and the national contact point network in particular. The communication budget, excluding staff costs, will be at least 0.3 percent of the total programme budget with a major share to be allocated to digital measures.

Annual work plans will further define the budget and resources needed.

### **Communication Officer**

The appointed communication officer is the JS Head of Unit for Communication and Capacity Building.



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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(i), Article 24*

*Text field [7 000]*

Interreg CE covers nine EU Member States and 81 NUTS2 regions. This vast area is characterised by a wide range of common challenges which are affecting all CE regions. These challenges and respective needs can be tackled properly only if addressed by project partnerships which show a wide geographical scope, thus going clearly beyond the minimum requirements for transnational cooperation set in the regulatory framework.

According to historical data from the previous programming period 2014-20, CE projects are implemented by project partnerships bringing together on average 11 partners from six countries, with an average budget of 1,8 mEUR ERDF.

The above considered, for the 2021-2027 period the large majority of programme funds will be allocated to projects with up to around 12 partners and a total budget of approximately 2 mEUR.

In addition, Interreg CE will also support projects that are of smaller size. These projects could have approximately 3 to 6 partners and a total budget ranging from about 400.000 to 800.000 EUR. Such projects will test concrete and highly innovative solutions through pilot actions on a small scale. Furthermore, these projects will focus on new approaches to integrated territorial development, e.g. on improving multi-level governance processes by better integrating policy sectors and better involving citizens (e.g. within Priority 4). Those projects will make use of existing tools and methods in order to limit preparatory work, which will shorten their duration to around 12 to 18 months. This will ultimately allow for a modular project approach, in which successful projects could be taken up for capitalisation.

Please note: Support to small projects under Small Project Funds as defined in the Article 2(10) of the CPR and Article 25 of the Interreg Regulation, is not planned by the Interreg CE Programme. Such projects are not relevant in view of the transnational cooperation character, the nature of supported activities and the wide geographical scale of project partnerships funded by the Interreg CE Programme.



## 7. Implementing provisions

### 7.1. Programme authorities

Reference: Article 17(6)(a)

Table 10

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-mail [200]
Managing authority	City of Vienna Department for European Affairs	Christiane Breznik	<a href="mailto:christiane.breznik@wi-en.gv.at">christiane.breznik@wi-en.gv.at</a>
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries, if appropriate)			
Audit authority	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism Department of ERDF Audits	Markus K�ob	<a href="mailto:markus.koeb@bmlrt.gv.at">markus.koeb@bmlrt.gv.at</a>
Group of auditors representatives	Agency for Audit of European Union Programmes Implementation System Croatia	Neven �prlje Zvonko �iri�	<a href="mailto:neven.sprlje@arpa.hr">neven.sprlje@arpa.hr</a> <a href="mailto:zvonko.siric@arpa.hr">zvonko.siric@arpa.hr</a>
	Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic Audit Body Department Czech Republic	Milan Puzzkailer Michaela Kotal�ikov�	<a href="mailto:Milan.Puzzkailer@mfcz.cz">Milan.Puzzkailer@mfcz.cz</a> <a href="mailto:Michaela.Kotalikova@mfcz.cz">Michaela.Kotalikova@mfcz.cz</a>
	Thuringian Development Bank (TAB) EU-Audit Department ERDF Internal Auditing Division Germany	Marcus Schlegel	<a href="mailto:Marcus.Schlegel@aufbaubank.de">Marcus.Schlegel@aufbaubank.de</a>
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	Ministry of Finance Department for Audit of Public Funds	Katarzyna Kwieci�nska-Gruszka	<a href="mailto:Katarzyna.kwiecinska-gruszka@mf.gov.pl">Katarzyna.kwiecinska-gruszka@mf.gov.pl</a>



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Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	City of Vienna Department for European Affairs	Petra Wallner	<a href="mailto:petra.wallner@wien.gv.at">petra.wallner@wien.gv.at</a>

## 7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

Reference: Article 17(6)(b)

*Text field [3 500]*

In accordance with Article 17(6)(b) of the Interreg Regulation and considering the successful implementation of the two predecessor programmes in the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods, the Managing Authority will ensure continuity of the Joint Secretariat by maintaining the basic structural and implementation arrangements already in place.

The Joint Secretariat will continue supporting and assisting:

- The Managing Authority and the Monitoring Committee in carrying out their functions.
- Applicants and beneficiaries in effectively participating in the programme.

The Joint Secretariat will be in Vienna and it will remain as part of EU-Förderagentur GmbH, a subsidiary body of the City of Vienna.



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

Reference: Article 17(6)(c)

Text field [10 500]

The arrangements related to irregularities and the apportionment of liabilities, in principle, will continue from the 2014-2020 programming period. In the eventuality that the managing authority suspects or is informed about an irregular use of granted funds, it shall undertake the necessary follow-up actions, such as suspending the reimbursement of the financing related to the lead partner (LP) or project partner (PP) as well as withdrawing or recovering the irregular amounts.

Without prejudice to the Member States' responsibility for detecting and correcting irregularities and for recovering amounts unduly paid in accordance with Article 69 (2) of the CPR, as stated in Article 52 (1) of the Interreg Regulation, the Managing Authority shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the LP. The PPs shall then repay the LP any amounts unduly paid. In line with Article 52 (2), the Managing Authority will not recover an amount unduly paid if it does not exceed EUR 250 ERDF (not including interest) paid to an operation in a given accounting year.

If the LP does not succeed in securing repayment from a PP or if the Managing Authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the LP, the Member State on whose territory the LP or PP concerned is located (in the case of an EGTC where it is registered), shall reimburse the Managing Authority the amount unduly paid to that PP 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 as laid down below. The MA will reimburse the funds to the Union once the amounts are recovered from the LP/PP/Member State.

Should the Managing Authority bear any legal expenses for recovery recourse proceedings - initiated after consultation and in mutual agreement with the respective Member State - even if the proceedings are unsuccessful it will be reimbursed by the Member State hosting the LP or PP responsible for the said procedure.

Since Member States have the overall liability for the ERDF support granted to LPs or PPs located on their territories, they shall ensure that any financial corrections required will be secured and they shall seek to recover any amounts lost as a result of an irregularity or negligence caused by a beneficiary located on their territory. Where appropriate a Member State may also charge interest on late payments.

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

Should the Member State not reimburse the Managing Authority, in accordance with Article 52 (5) the amounts shall be subject to a recovery order by the European Commission that, where possible, will be executed by offsetting with amounts due to the Member State. Such recovery shall not constitute a financial correction and shall not reduce the support from the ERDF to the respective Interreg programme. The offsetting shall concern subsequent payments to the same Interreg programme. In such an eventuality, the Managing Authority will start bilateral discussions with the concerned Member State until a joint solution is found 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:



- Each Member State bears liability for possible financial consequences of irregularities caused by LPs and PPs located on its territory.
- 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 to the European Commission (for expenditure of beneficiaries located on the Member States' territories) during the period which forms the basis for the systemic irregularity or financial correction.

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

As stated in Article 69 (12) of the CPR, irregularities shall be reported by the Member State. The Member State shall also inform the Managing Authority who will in turn inform the Audit Authority. Specific procedures in this respect will be part of the description of the programme management and control system to be established in accordance with Article 69 of the CPR.



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

Reference: Articles 94 and 95 CPR

**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 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 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"/>



## APPENDICES

- Appendix Map: Map of the Programme area
- Appendix 1: Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates
- Appendix 2: Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs
- Appendix 3: List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable

## ANNEXES

1. Bibliography
2. Charts and maps of chapter 1.2



## Appendix 1: Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

(Article 94 CPR)

Date of submitting the proposal	
Current version	

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



**A. Summary of the main elements**

Priority	Fund	Specific Objective	The amount covered by the financing not linked to costs	Type(s) of operation		Conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Corresponding indicator name(s)		Unit of measurement for the conditions to be fulfilled/results to be achieved triggering reimbursement by the Commission	Envisaged type of reimbursement method used to reimburse the beneficiary or beneficiaries
				Code <sup>14</sup>	Description		Code <sup>15</sup>	Description		
<b>The overall amount covered</b>										

<sup>14</sup> This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex I to the CPR and Annex IV to the EMFAF Regulation.

<sup>15</sup> This refers to the code of a common indicator, if applicable



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

Types of operation:

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



beneficiaries take the form of financing not linked to costs? [Y/N] <sup>16</sup>	
1.11 Arrangements to ensure the audit trail Please list the body(ies) responsible for these arrangements.	

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>16</sup> The Council's partial mandate added point 1.10a, which was amended to improve clarity.



## Appendix 2: Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission

(Article 95 CPR)

Date of submitting the proposal	

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



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

### Text field [2 000]

During programme implementation the MC develops strategically targeted calls for proposals that, within the framework given by the programme intervention logic, put particular emphasis on strategic features considering:

- The progress of already funded projects towards the achievement of programme objectives;
- Recent developments of social, economic and territorial challenges in the CE regions.

The strategically targeted calls of Interreg CE include the so-called “**capitalisation calls**” that encourage the bottom-up development of projects specifically supporting the uptake of existing Interreg CE project results into policies or the roll-out of results to new stakeholders or new regions. **Capitalisation projects** are tailored to the specific needs of the programme regions and stakeholders, according to strategic addresses given by the MC at the time of launching the call. Capitalisation projects become a strategic umbrella to projects approved within regular calls, offering the opportunity to widen their impacts in the regions. Furthermore, capitalisation projects might also support coordination on-the-ground with projects funded by other EU instruments (building on experiences from the “capitalisation through coordination” call of the 2014-2020 Interreg CE Programme).

A high visibility of strategically targeted calls and their resulting projects will be ensured through devoted programme communication measures (in line with IP chapter 5).

A call specifically targeted to capitalisation is expected to be launched indicatively in 2025.

## SFC2021 INTERREG Programme

CCI	2021TC16FFTN004
Title	(Interreg VI-B) Danube
Version	1.1
First year	2021
Last year	2027
Article 17(4)(b) choice	Single amount for 'Interreg Funds'
Fund(s) concerned in single amount	ERDF IPA III NDICI
Eligible from	1 Jan 2021
Eligible until	31 Dec 2029
EC decision number	C(2022)8878
EC decision date	29 Nov 2022
NUTS regions covered by the programme	<p>HU - Magyarország</p> <p>HU1 - Közép-Magyarország</p> <p>HU11 - Budapest</p> <p>HU110 - Budapest</p> <p>HU12 - Pest</p> <p>HU120 - Pest</p> <p>HU2 - Dunántúl</p> <p>HU21 - Közép-Dunántúl</p> <p>HU211 - Fejér</p> <p>HU212 - Komárom-Esztergom</p> <p>HU213 - Veszprém</p> <p>HU22 - Nyugat-Dunántúl</p> <p>HU221 - Győr-Moson-Sopron</p> <p>HU222 - Vas</p> <p>HU223 - Zala</p> <p>HU23 - Dél-Dunántúl</p> <p>HU231 - Baranya</p> <p>HU232 - Somogy</p> <p>HU233 - Tolna</p> <p>HU3 - Alföld és Észak</p> <p>HU31 - Észak-Magyarország</p> <p>HU311 - Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén</p> <p>HU312 - Heves</p> <p>HU313 - Nógrád</p> <p>HU32 - Észak-Alföld</p> <p>HU321 - Hajdú-Bihar</p> <p>HU322 - Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok</p> <p>HU323 - Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg</p>

HU33 - Dél-Alföld  
HU331 - Bács-Kiskun  
HU332 - Békés  
HU333 - Csongrád  
HUZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 1  
HUZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 2  
HUZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 3  
BG - България  
BG3 - Северна и Югоизточна България  
BG31 - Северозападен  
BG311 - Видин  
BG312 - Монтана  
BG313 - Враца  
BG314 - Плевен  
BG315 - Ловеч  
BG32 - Северен централен  
BG321 - Велико Търново  
BG322 - Габрово  
BG323 - Русе  
BG324 - Разград  
BG325 - Силистра  
BG33 - Североизточен  
BG331 - Варна  
BG332 - Добрич  
BG333 - Шумен  
BG334 - Търговище  
BG34 - Югоизточен  
BG341 - Бургас  
BG342 - Сливен  
BG343 - Ямбол  
BG344 - Стара Загора  
BG4 - Югозападна и Южна централна България  
BG41 - Югозападен  
BG411 - София (столица)  
BG412 - София  
BG413 - Благоевград  
BG414 - Перник  
BG415 - Кюстендил  
BG42 - Южен централен  
BG421 - Пловдив  
BG422 - Хасково  
BG423 - Пазарджик  
BG424 - Смолян  
BG425 - Кърджали  
BGZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 1  
BGZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 2  
BGZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 3  
CZ - Česko  
CZ0 - Česko  
CZ01 - Praha  
CZ010 - Hlavní město Praha  
CZ02 - Střední Čechy  
CZ020 - Středočeský kraj  
CZ03 - Jihozápad

CZ031 - Jihočeský kraj  
CZ032 - Plzeňský kraj  
CZ04 - Severozápad  
CZ041 - Karlovarský kraj  
CZ042 - Ústecký kraj  
CZ05 - Severovýchod  
CZ051 - Liberecký kraj  
CZ052 - Královéhradecký kraj  
CZ053 - Pardubický kraj  
CZ06 - Jihovýchod  
CZ063 - Kraj Vysočina  
CZ064 - Jihomoravský kraj  
CZ07 - Střední Morava  
CZ071 - Olomoucký kraj  
CZ072 - Zlínský kraj  
CZ08 - Moravskoslezsko  
CZ080 - Moravskoslezský kraj  
CZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 1  
CZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 2  
CZZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 3  
DE1 - Baden-Württemberg  
DE11 - Stuttgart  
DE111 - Stuttgart, Stadtkreis  
DE112 - Böblingen  
DE113 - Esslingen  
DE114 - Göppingen  
DE115 - Ludwigsburg  
DE116 - Rems-Murr-Kreis  
DE117 - Heilbronn, Stadtkreis  
DE118 - Heilbronn, Landkreis  
DE119 - Hohenlohekreis  
DE11A - Schwäbisch Hall  
DE11B - Main-Tauber-Kreis  
DE11C - Heidenheim  
DE11D - Ostalbkreis  
DE12 - Karlsruhe  
DE121 - Baden-Baden, Stadtkreis  
DE122 - Karlsruhe, Stadtkreis  
DE123 - Karlsruhe, Landkreis  
DE124 - Rastatt  
DE125 - Heidelberg, Stadtkreis  
DE126 - Mannheim, Stadtkreis  
DE127 - Neckar-Odenwald-Kreis  
DE128 - Rhein-Neckar-Kreis  
DE129 - Pforzheim, Stadtkreis  
DE12A - Calw  
DE12B - Enzkreis  
DE12C - Freudenstadt  
DE13 - Freiburg  
DE131 - Freiburg im Breisgau, Stadtkreis  
DE132 - Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald  
DE133 - Emmendingen  
DE134 - Ortenaukreis  
DE135 - Rottweil

DE136 - Schwarzwald-Baar-Kreis  
DE137 - Tuttlingen  
DE138 - Konstanz  
DE139 - Lörrach  
DE13A - Waldshut  
DE14 - Tübingen  
DE141 - Reutlingen  
DE142 - Tübingen, Landkreis  
DE143 - Zollernalbkreis  
DE144 - Ulm, Stadtkreis  
DE145 - Alb-Donau-Kreis  
DE146 - Biberach  
DE147 - Bodenseekreis  
DE148 - Ravensburg  
DE149 - Sigmaringen  
DE2 - Bayern  
DE21 - Oberbayern  
DE211 - Ingolstadt, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE212 - München, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE213 - Rosenheim, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE214 - Altötting  
DE215 - Berchtesgadener Land  
DE216 - Bad Tölz-Wolfratshausen  
DE217 - Dachau  
DE218 - Ebersberg  
DE219 - Eichstätt  
DE21A - Erding  
DE21B - Freising  
DE21C - Fürstfeldbruck  
BA001 - Brčko District  
BA002 - Municipalities  
ME - Црна Гора  
ME0 - Црна Гора  
ME00 - Црна Гора  
ME000 - Црна Гора  
MEZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 1  
MEZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 2  
MEZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 3  
RO - România  
RO1 - Macroregiunea Unu  
RO11 - Nord-Vest  
RO111 - Bihor  
RO112 - Bistrița-Năsăud  
RO113 - Cluj  
RO114 - Maramureș  
RO115 - Satu Mare  
RO116 - Sălaj  
RO12 - Centru  
RO121 - Alba  
RO122 - Brașov  
RO123 - Covasna  
RO124 - Harghita  
RO125 - Mureș  
RO126 - Sibiu

RO2 - Macroregiunea Doi  
RO21 - Nord-Est  
RO211 - Bacău  
RO212 - Botoșani  
RO213 - Iași  
RO214 - Neamț  
RO215 - Suceava  
RO216 - Vaslui  
RO22 - Sud-Est  
RO221 - Brăila  
RO222 - Buzău  
RO223 - Constanța  
RO224 - Galați  
RO225 - Tulcea  
RO226 - Vrancea  
RO3 - Macroregiunea Trei  
RO31 - Sud-Muntenia  
RO311 - Argeș  
RO312 - Călărași  
RO313 - Dâmbovița  
RO314 - Giurgiu  
RO315 - Ialomița  
RO316 - Prahova  
RO317 - Teleorman  
RO32 - București-Ilfov  
RO321 - București  
RO322 - Ilfov  
RO4 - Macroregiunea Patru  
RO41 - Sud-Vest Oltenia  
RO411 - Dolj  
RO412 - Gorj  
RO413 - Mehedinți  
RO414 - Olt  
DE21D - Garmisch-Partenkirchen  
RO415 - Vâlcea  
RO42 - Vest  
RO421 - Arad  
RO422 - Caraș-Severin  
RO423 - Hunedoara  
RO424 - Timiș  
ROZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 1  
ROZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 2  
ROZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 3  
RS - Srbija/Србија  
RS1 - Србија - север  
RS11 - Београдски регион  
RS110 - Београдска област  
RS12 - Регион Војводине  
RS121 - Западнoбачка област  
RS122 - Јужнобанатска област  
RS123 - Јужнобачка област  
DE21E - Landsberg am Lech  
DE21F - Miesbach  
DE21G - Mühlendorf a. Inn

DE21H - München, Landkreis  
DE21I - Neuburg-Schrobenhausen  
DE21J - Pfaffenhofen a. d. Ilm  
DE21K - Rosenheim, Landkreis  
DE21L - Starnberg  
DE21M - Traunstein  
DE21N - Weilheim-Schongau  
DE22 - Niederbayern  
DE221 - Landshut, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE222 - Passau, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE223 - Straubing, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE224 - Deggendorf  
DE225 - Freyung-Grafenau  
DE226 - Kelheim  
DE227 - Landshut, Landkreis  
DE228 - Passau, Landkreis  
DE229 - Regen  
DE22A - Rottal-Inn  
DE22B - Straubing-Bogen  
DE22C - Dingolfing-Landau  
DE23 - Oberpfalz  
DE231 - Amberg, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE232 - Regensburg, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE233 - Weiden i. d. Opf, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE234 - Amberg-Sulzbach  
DE235 - Cham  
DE236 - Neumarkt i. d. OPf.  
DE237 - Neustadt a. d. Waldnaab  
DE238 - Regensburg, Landkreis  
DE239 - Schwandorf  
DE23A - Tirschenreuth  
DE24 - Oberfranken  
DE241 - Bamberg, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE242 - Bayreuth, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE243 - Coburg, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE244 - Hof, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE245 - Bamberg, Landkreis  
DE246 - Bayreuth, Landkreis  
DE247 - Coburg, Landkreis  
DE248 - Forchheim  
DE249 - Hof, Landkreis  
DE24A - Kronach  
DE24B - Kulmbach  
DE24C - Lichtenfels  
DE24D - Wunsiedel i. Fichtelgebirge  
DE25 - Mittelfranken  
DE251 - Ansbach, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE252 - Erlangen, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE253 - Fürth, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE254 - Nürnberg, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE255 - Schwabach, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE256 - Ansbach, Landkreis  
DE257 - Erlangen-Höchstadt  
DE258 - Fürth, Landkreis

DE259 - Nürnberger Land  
DE25A - Neustadt a. d. Aisch-Bad Windsheim  
DE25B - Roth  
DE25C - Weißenburg-Gunzenhausen  
DE26 - Unterfranken  
DE261 - Aschaffenburg, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE262 - Schweinfurt, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE263 - Würzburg, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE264 - Aschaffenburg, Landkreis  
DE265 - Bad Kissingen  
DE266 - Rhön-Grabfeld  
DE267 - Haßberge  
DE268 - Kitzingen  
DE269 - Miltenberg  
DE26A - Main-Spessart  
DE26B - Schweinfurt, Landkreis  
DE26C - Würzburg, Landkreis  
DE27 - Schwaben  
DE271 - Augsburg, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE272 - Kaufbeuren, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE273 - Kempten (Allgäu), Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE274 - Memmingen, Kreisfreie Stadt  
DE275 - Aichach-Friedberg  
DE276 - Augsburg, Landkreis  
DE277 - Dillingen a.d. Donau  
DE278 - Günzburg  
DE279 - Neu-Ulm  
DE27A - Lindau (Bodensee)  
DE27B - Ostallgäu  
DE27C - Unterallgäu  
DE27E - Oberallgäu  
DE27D - Donau-Ries  
HR - Hrvatska  
HR0 - Hrvatska  
HR02 - Panonska Hrvatska  
HR021 - Bjelovarsko-bilogorska županija  
HR022 - Virovitičko-podravska županija  
HR023 - Požeško-slavonska županija  
HR024 - Brodsko-posavska županija  
HR025 - Osječko-baranjska županija  
HR026 - Vukovarsko-srijemska županija  
HR027 - Karlovačka županija  
HR028 - Sisačko-moslavačka županija  
HR03 - Jadranska Hrvatska  
HR031 - Primorsko-goranska županija  
HR032 - Ličko-senjska županija  
HR033 - Zadarska županija  
HR034 - Šibensko-kninska županija  
HR035 - Splitsko-dalmatinska županija  
HR036 - Istarska županija  
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HR05 - Grad Zagreb  
HR050 - Grad Zagreb  
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AT1 - Ostösterreich  
AT11 - Burgenland  
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AT12 - Niederösterreich  
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AT122 - Niederösterreich-Süd  
AT123 - Sankt Pölten  
AT124 - Waldviertel  
AT125 - Weinviertel  
AT126 - Wiener Umland/Nordteil  
AT127 - Wiener Umland/Südteil  
AT13 - Wien  
AT130 - Wien  
AT2 - Südösterreich  
AT21 - Kärnten  
AT211 - Klagenfurt-Villach  
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AT22 - Steiermark  
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AT3 - Westösterreich  
AT31 - Oberösterreich  
AT311 - Innviertel  
AT312 - Linz-Wels  
AT313 - Mühlviertel  
AT314 - Steyr-Kirchdorf  
AT315 - Traunviertel  
AT32 - Salzburg  
AT321 - Lungau  
AT322 - Pinzgau-Pongau  
AT323 - Salzburg und Umgebung  
AT33 - Tirol  
AT331 - Außerfern  
AT332 - Innsbruck  
AT333 - Osttirol  
AT334 - Tiroler Oberland  
AT335 - Tiroler Unterland

AT34 - Vorarlberg  
AT341 - Bludenz-Bregenzer Wald  
AT342 - Rheintal-Bodenseegebiet  
ATZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 1  
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RS216 - Расинска област  
RS217 - Рашка област  
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RS222 - Браничевска област  
RS223 - Зајечарска област  
RS224 - Јабланичка област  
RS225 - Нишавска област  
RS226 - Пиротска област  
RS227 - Подунавска област  
RS228 - Пчињска област  
RS229 - Топличка област  
RSZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 1  
RSZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 2  
RSZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 3  
SI - Slovenija  
SI0 - Slovenija  
SI03 - Vzhodna Slovenija  
SI031 - Pomurska  
SI032 - Podravska  
SI033 - Koroška  
SI034 - Savinjska  
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SIZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 2  
SIZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 3  
SK - Slovensko

	SK0 - Slovensko SK01 - Bratislavský kraj SK010 - Bratislavský kraj SK02 - Západné Slovensko SK021 - Trnavský kraj SK022 - Trenčiansky kraj SK023 - Nitriansky kraj SK03 - Stredné Slovensko SK031 - Žilinský kraj SK032 - Banskobystrický kraj SK04 - Východné Slovensko SK041 - Prešovský kraj SK042 - Košický kraj SKZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 1 SKZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 2 SKZZZ - Extra-Regio NUTS 3 UA002 - Chernivtsi oblast UA003 - Ivano-Frankivisk oblast UA015 - Zakarpatska oblast UA017 - Odesska oblast
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## 1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

### 1.1. Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

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

The programme area consists of a total number of fourteen countries making the macro-region with the highest number of participating countries out of all the transnational programmes of the EU: Member States (MS): Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bayern), Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; accession countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, Neighbouring Countries: Moldova and Ukraine (Chernivetska Oblast, Ivano- Frankiviska Oblast, Zakarpatska Oblast, Odessa Oblast). There are some special “Danubian” transnationally related territorial features that are major factors in the cohesion of the whole macro-region. Geographically, the area overlaps with the territory addressed by the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), comprising also the Danube River Basin and the mountainous areas (such as the Carpathians, the Balkans and part of the Alps), making up one fifth of the EU’s territory and being inhabited by approximately 114 million people. The variety of natural environment, the socio-economic differences and cultural diversity of the various parts of the area may be perceived as major challenges but actually represent important opportunities and unexploited potential. Territorial, economic and social cohesion features create transboundary (functional) areas to be managed and developed jointly on macro-regional level. One of the most decisive is related to the Danube’s river system which calls for joint water, risk and habitat management within transnational river basins. Low share of renewables despite of energy dependency is a joint feature that unites the region. Along with high biodiversity the outstanding cultural diversity with ethnic, religious and language groups build strong intercultural links and people-to-people bridges across nations and countries creating a shared “Danubian” space. The weak inclusiveness and social innovation causes socio-economic challenges on transnational level.

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

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

### **Sustainable economic development**

Danube Region is characterised by large competitiveness gaps between the old, the new Member States and the non-EU countries, including their status within the regional innovation ecosystem. In this context, large social and professional categories have been left out from current flows of information and knowledge exchange (e.g. students, researchers, teachers, businessmen etc). Across Danube Region, there is a low share of technology and knowledge-intensive activities (map 1). The Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) activities are overly concentrated within the western regions or the major urban hubs, including capital cities or university towns and the non-matching innovation profiles of the DR countries still exists e.g. there are heavily unbalanced RDI expenditures and knowledge management capacities (map 2). Current scientific and technological transnational cooperation is hindered by factors such as different levels of knowledge transfers and innovations capacities meaning that the ability to implement knowledge-based and technology-intensive policies and activities is still weak in the region. In addition, the spatially and structurally fragmented human resources and financial expenditures for innovation keep the transnational ecosystem badly functioning. Thus, the current system is still characterised by lack of joint and designated management, scientific research and valorisation environs. There is a need for strengthening the synergies and cross-relationships between quadruple innovation stakeholders in order to facilitate the uptake of innovative technologies across the region. Therefore, promoting RDI cooperation, experience exchanges and capacity building among innovation actors, hubs and RDI centres is of great significance for creating a well-functioning innovation ecosystem. In addition, the RDI sector, including its capacity to offer a functional environment for the valorisation and uptake of development technologies, is lagging behind in many states and regions (map 3). Thus, apart from research, it is of great significance to improve the speed of up-taking innovative technologies across the DR. Furthermore, considering the overall entrepreneurial sector and, in particular, the SMEs, the innovation levels are substandard which results in a share of innovative enterprises below the EU average (map 4). Consequently, the added value generated is unsatisfactory e.g. product and technological development and advancement of SMEs is below expectations. Because of this, structural problems arise, especially with regard to the development of hi-technology economic sectors or to the level of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) employment (below the targets –map 5). To overcome such bottlenecks, transnationally coordinated policy support for producing higher value-added products and services is needed, especially in the quest for intensifying the innovation uptake process. Also, generating support for transnational cooperation and capacity building within supplier networks and cluster policies in order to integrate the SMEs into vertical and horizontal value chains can be seen important, especially towards the process of adopting new/advanced technologies across the macro-region.

Transport is one of the areas where the adoption of advanced technologies can benefit the region. The introduction of alternative fuels, next generation lithium-ion batteries, safer autonomous navigation systems or Internet of Things (IoT) - route planning, accident prevention - are just few examples which could contribute to the advancement of the region in terms of transport innovation. There is also a need for supporting smart regions/cities solutions as well as advanced technologies regarding circular economy. Therefore, there is space for supporting innovation partnerships and regional and urban platforms for regional research and technological development.

However, in other social and economic aspects e.g. developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition, entrepreneurship and competitiveness, DR is still characterised by large cohesion gaps (map 6). The macro-region consists of various sub-regions of transnational importance in specific fields of actions such as agricultural (e.g. the Hungarian Great Plain, Wallachian Plain), industrial (e.g. Moravian-Silesian Region), service (e.g. Tyrol, Adriatic Croatia) and technology (e.g. Upper Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg).

This is crucial also since the macro-region could capitalise from acting as a transit(ion) zone and a region of interaction for trans-European business relations including trade, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and technology transfer etc. To this end, solutions to the above cohesion gaps can be delivered through digitization and digitalization, industry 4.0 processes and or smart specialisation strategies and policies (S3) – with a special focus on SMEs. It is a real challenge that there are still insufficient measures to capitalize from comparative advantages and economic peculiarities on a transnational level in order to support more robust catching-up policies. There are large differences in S3 in terms of field of specialisation, sectors and territorial coverage. While some participating states have their own national plans as well as their regional economic administration, in some it is still considered as a new, emerging topic. Therefore the lack of related planning and management is quite common. Subsequently, support for transnational alignment of S3 strategies is of great importance.

The employment in hi-tech sectors is very uneven across the Danube Region (map 1). High-technology sectors represent more sustainable, crisis-proof employment opportunities and the employment of highly qualified, skilled labour, furthermore potential for a technology-intensive economy in an era of growing uncertainties resulting from deepening lack of manual labour. With regard to ‘The Skills Composite’ of advanced industrial technologies, that captures the share of professionals with advanced technology skills within EU, the share of STEM graduates and firms with ICT skills, the value can be considered low across the macro-region (map 7). Only the westernmost and the metropolis regions tend to stand out in having sufficient people with adequate skills to be employed in advanced technological fields. By comparing the Danube Region average to the rest of the EU average, one may notice that there has been a decreasing - but still visible competitiveness gap - in favour of the European Union, especially in relation to the added value of SMEs. The share of the SME sector is lower compared to both EU15 and EU28 (map 8).

In the very recent times the situation of entrepreneurship is heavily affected by COVID-19. With regard to the economic sentiment indicator, economic actors had a positive view in 2019. Due to the pandemic, the confidence of economic actors decreased seriously in 2020. The value of the economic sentiment indicator dropped by 11.2% (from 101.3 to 90) between September 2019 and September 2020 in the EU28. Based on the changes in the values of the above-mentioned indicator, the Danube Region was particularly affected by the negative economic effects of the pandemic. Except for Germany (-2.9%) and Slovenia (-9.7%), all countries of the Danube Region have suffered a significantly higher decrease in terms of economic confidence. Montenegro (-44.1%) has suffered an extraordinary decline, furthermore the values of the economic sentiment indicator have significantly dropped in the case of Croatia (-21.9%), Serbia (-19.2%), Hungary (-17.0%), Romania (-13.7%) and Slovakia (-13.6%) as well. The Danube Region was particularly affected by the economic consequences of the pandemic, thus the recovery of the region’s economy requires increased attention.

All described challenges should be seen in the broader context of existing strategic frameworks such as the EUSDR (especially with regards to PA7, PA8 and partly PA9), the Territorial Agenda 2030, the New Leipzig Charter, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Green Deal.

### **Environment, energy and climate change**

In the Danube Region the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption (map 9) is low, and has never reached 50% in any countries. Notable shares can be mentioned in Montenegro (40%), Austria (32.6%) and Croatia (27.3%), while in Slovakia (11.5%), Hungary (13.3%), the Czech Republic (14.8%) and Germany (15.5%) renewables play minor role compared to traditional fossil fuels as well as nuclear energy. In the majority of the countries the shares of renewables were stagnating (e.g. Austria, Bulgaria) or even significantly decreased (Montenegro, Hungary). Increase occurred only in Germany, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic.

Considering the EU2020 targets, the Member States are performing heterogeneously; in some countries the target was set low and thus it has already been reached (see Czech Republic or Hungary), while some countries still have to take steps to realise the targets set for 2020 (e.g. Slovenia, Germany).

Thus Danube Region still heavily relies on fossil fuels in relation to both production (map 10) and consumption (map 11). Despite of significant favourable changes in many states, the energy sector is very far from being a low-carbon economic field. Sustainable production and consumption would require significant shift to renewables in all states since the share of fossil fuels in production is generally between

80 and 65%. The majority of the Danube Region still heavily relies on uncertain supply of fossil fuels from Russia and this exposure to non-renewable sources results in energy dependency and lack of energy security.

In spite of having a large variety of renewable energy sources (RES) across the macro-region, which could potentially contribute to safeguarding security of supply, with a few similar and complementary endowments from region to region, the utilisation level of renewables is still low compared to fossil fuels. The production and consumption of renewables have similarities across the macro-region given that biofuels and hydropower are having significant shares, and solar energy, wind, geothermal energy have changing utilisation levels, the thermal power plant network is facing inefficient technology and infrastructure.

Another reason for a greener energy sector is the high and steadily increasing level of energy consumption paired with a low level of diversification of energy sources. Therefore, the support for harmonised actions and transnational cooperation on renewable energy is required in order to decarbonise the energy and the related transport and building sector, especially considering the heating and cooling systems of buildings. The still relatively high greenhouse gas (GHG) and air pollutants emission by the transport sector within the territory of the EU, documented in the European Union emission inventory report 1990-2019 (LRTAP 1990 2019) published by the European Environment Agency (EEA), calls for increasing utilisation of alternative fuels and new technologies, which could be a field of joint measures and policies. High GHG emission is caused also by the heating and cooling sector (e.g. burning of fossil fuels, especially coal), which is still characterised by low utilisation of RES, requiring a profound shift to a more environmentally friendly energy production and consumption. The use of e.g. non-combustible RES, biogas and bioLPG together with actions towards sustainable transport should additionally contribute to better air quality. The identified challenges and actions are in line with the key commitments of the European Green Deal in terms of supplying clean, affordable and secure energy, with the Recovery and Resilience Facility by aiming to support green transition and environmental sustainability and with Territorial Agenda 2030, as well as EUSDR, especially of PA2.

Despite of the recognised negative impacts of climate change, insufficient adaptation can be observed regarding many effects of climate change (e.g. floods, droughts, decreasing biodiversity). Low climate change adaptation abilities call for the propagation of best practices in climate change adaptation methods and strategies and for supporting macro-regional initiatives that aim to reduce the negative effects and impacts of climate change by transnational actions (e.g. researches, policy recommendations, joint actions, territorial action plans, development/ improvement of forecasting tools, as well as operational cooperation), which is also in line with the aims of the EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change, the European Green Deal, or the EU Territorial Agenda 2030. High risk of flood damage is a major challenge across the Danube River Basin, in particular along the Tisa river and its tributaries, but also the Danube, the Mura-Drava and the Sava River Basins are flood prone areas (map 12). Along these transnational rivers flood management need coordinated measures among the countries, in contribution also to the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan, in line with the EU Floods Directive. Besides severe floods, the increasing frequency and intensity of heat waves and of heavy precipitation events can have strong direct impacts on human health and wellbeing, society, ecosystems and agriculture. Increasing surface temperature (map 13) supplemented by rain deficiency cause soil moisture drought, affecting plant and crop growth, which can deepen sometime into a hydrological drought affecting watercourses, water resources and groundwater-influenced natural ecosystems. The frequency and severity of droughts showed significant increases in recent decades in case of many Danube Region countries. Based on regional climate change models the potential forest fire risk will increase seriously, especially in the Mediterranean and Central Europe, affecting also many Danube Region countries. Besides the climate change induced environmental disasters various sources of accidental pollution of rivers can lead also to major, transnational scale disasters along the Danube and its tributaries. Operational industrial sites producing, or storing chemicals, as well as old contaminated sites, including landfills and dumps, in potentially flooded areas are widespread across the macro-region, causing major risk of accidental pollution. Although the Accident Emergency Warning System is established and coordinated by ICPDR along the main transboundary rivers of the Danube River Basin, still, it is important to further coordinate and work on preventing accidental pollution, as well as on improving the response capabilities in the region. The

above-mentioned climate change-related disasters and accidental pollution of rivers carry high risk at transnational level in the countries of the Danube Region, therefore, activities encouraging cooperation in integrated environmental risk management, research, forecasting, adaptation and mitigation are of paramount significance. Transnational risk management plans for areas exposed to climate change-related environmental risks, or accidental pollution disasters are also important to be developed and implemented. These challenges and actions are also in line and contributing to the EUSDR, especially PA5.

Danube Region covers the water system of the Danube and its tributaries. Transboundary water bodies link the related regions and connect the given upstream and downstream countries. The complex functional areas of river basins create joint challenges and requires joint solutions, calling for territorially integrated actions in relation to negative changes in water quantity and quality parameters, water habitats as well as environmental, water and risk management activities. From quantity point of view, the increasing water use across the region, decreasing ground water levels and shrinking supplies call for urgent measures for sustainable management of transboundary water abstraction together with innovative solutions on water-saving retention and reuse in agriculture and industry, and reducing groundwater overexploitation. Due to climate change the periods of low water on the main rivers of the DRB affect sediment transport, navigation, hydropower management and ecology, which call for cooperation of key stakeholders of the affected countries. Transboundary contamination and water pollution diffusion is also a transnational challenge (map 14). Support for joint transboundary water management initiatives linked to joint water catchment areas including joint actions in monitoring, prevention and reduction of water pollution (organic, nutrient, hazardous substances, pharmaceutical, plastics) is therefore a very much needed field of cooperation, contributing also to the EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil', as well as the Danube River Basin Management Plan, which is defining the main transnational challenges and proposed measures, in line with the EU Water Framework Directive. The disturbed sediment transport and balance along the Danube and its tributaries affects river morphology, potentially increasing flood risk, reducing groundwater level, deteriorating river ecosystems, negatively affecting navigation and hydropower plant operation, therefore joint efforts of riparian countries needed to ensure balanced sediment regime and undisturbed continuity. Weakening connections between wetland habitats can be considered as a challenge to extensive transboundary areas, so revitalisation and rehabilitation of transboundary water streams and water systems in the Danube River Basin is considered also important which can at the same time reactivate a more natural sediment transport as well. The identified challenges of the Danube Region and the related proposed actions are responding also to the aims of the European Green Deal aiming for zero pollution and preserving and restoring ecosystems that provide essential services such as fresh water, the objectives of the Horizon Europe Mission 'Restore our ocean and waters by 2030' like preventing and eliminating pollution of our ocean, seas and waters; as well as the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 that stands for sustainably accessible water sources and contributing also to the objectives of EUSDR PA4.

In Danube Region there are extensive habitat types with transboundary nature, many of those are unique and valuable, facing different problems and potentials to protect and valorise their biodiversity. The macro-region is rather a colourful mosaic of different biogeographical regions like the Pannonian, or the Alpine regions, that unite many areas across the countries. The ecological picture of the Danube Region is heterogeneous and this transboundary diversity gives special attention to the transnational protection and management of the ecological regions of the Danube Region (map 15).

Fragmentation of transnational habitats and ecosystems, as well as insufficient measures to secure biodiversity of the macro-region can be considered key challenges of the Region (map 16). This calls for support for the improvement of ecological connectivity between habitats, nature protection areas along transnationally relevant ecological corridors. The Danube Region is rich in different categories of protected areas including transboundary regions of high biodiversity (map 17). There are territories with significant natural values which could be protected transnationally due to their exceptional flora, fauna and/or landscape shared by neighbouring countries. However, the management of nature protection of these areas is challenged by the still low level of joint management and protection initiatives and the notable differences in the regulations, competences, human and financial resources of the protected areas. Despite of some good examples of cooperation networks, borders are usually still barriers to effective nature protection on a transnational level. Weak management capacities and skills for ecological regions

of transnational relevance raise the need for developing transnational management schemes. Joint conservation and preservation techniques and planning schemes are needed. Institutionalised, long-term management network(s) of ‘Danubian’ transboundary ecological regions would create real transnational impact. Wetland habitats are of great significance in the Danube Basin and in order to reduce their fragmentation and to preserve and improve their ecological status, revitalisation and rehabilitation of transboundary water habitats and adjacent green infrastructure are very much needed in the macro-region. Invasive species endanger the ecological balance in many transboundary ecological area, in particular water habitats (map 18). This urges nature protection stakeholders to come up with joint solutions combating the spread of invasive species. Furthermore, the valorisation and sustainable economic utilisation of natural heritage and protected areas should be supported instead of irreversible exploitation of areas with high biodiversity. Due to the transboundary nature of their habitats, the successful protection of transnationally relevant flagship (umbrella) species, like for example sturgeon species, or the large carnivores of the Danube Region require transnational cooperation keeping in mind the shrinking population of these species of great environmental value. The identified challenges and actions are in line with the key commitments of the European Green Deal, of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and its EU Nature Restoration Plan, the objectives of the Horizon Europe Mission ‘Restore our ocean and waters by 2030’, the EU Territorial Agenda 2030, as well as objectives of EUSDR PA6 and the protocols of the Carpathian Convention to reduce the loss of biodiversity as well as protect and restore (riverine) ecosystems, the integration of ecological corridors, to promote green and blue infrastructure; effective management of all protected areas and their networks, combatting invasive alien species, as well as sustainable soil management.

The types of Programme actions are also compatible with the Do No Significant Harm Principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

### **Inclusive Labour Markets and Human Capital**

The Danube Region’s continuing socio economic progress is contingent on a well-functioning labour market, which is fundamental to providing employment and regional growth and which is rooted in society. By inclusive labour markets we refer to a concept whereby everyone of a working age can participate in paid work, with a focus on the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Connected to this but also having a wider social and cultural value is the role of human capital seen as the knowledge, skills and experience possessed by an individual or population.

High inequalities can be detected in terms of employment in the DR, which characterizes an imbalanced labour market on a macro-regional scale. In the majority of the countries of the programme area there are relatively low unemployment rates of under 5% (post 2018) but there remain, despite an improving trend, higher rates, particularly in parts of the West Balkans with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia at over 10% (Map 19). Despite the majority of countries improving there remain outlying disadvantaged regions in which there are persistent high rates of unemployment e.g. all EU countries of the DR apart from the German part of the programme area and the Czech Republic, have individual regions or counties with unemployment above 8% e.g. Austria, Vienna; Bulgaria, North West Region; Croatia, Split-Dalmatia; Hungary, Szabolcs-Szatmár; Romania, Buzau; Slovakia, Eastern Slovakia. A common underlying feature across the EU and the DR is the high share of long term unemployed (LTU) within unemployment rates, this with the range in the DR of 28.9-61.8 (Map 20). LTU disproportionately affects the disadvantaged and vulnerable, workers with low qualifications; migrants; people with disabilities; disadvantaged ethnic minorities such as the Roma; the aged and those from disadvantaged regions. Excluding parts of Germany and Austria, employment rates are usually higher in cities. In Germany the employment rate is 78.9% for the rural areas but this compares to 58.8% in Bulgaria, Hungary 67%, Slovakia 64.6%, Romania 63%, Croatia 56.3% and Serbia 59.9% (Map 24). These rates for rural areas in the DR are lower in comparison with the EU average. Ongoing accessibility, demography and migration challenges in rural areas and smaller settlements are often compounded by crisis vulnerable local mono-functional employment structures, employing large numbers of vulnerable employees. Positive restructuring and diversification of employment along with re-skilling to meet skills gaps, including those that are or will be needed for the transition to a low carbon economy, can be developed by the implementation of territorially integrated action plans for employment, with a special focus on enhancing the spread of innovative structures targeting mono-functional regions. New developments

could also find alignment with the European Green Deal.

The integration of ethnic minorities presents an ongoing challenge for the DR, both in terms of migrants and national minorities. A large ethnic minority in the DR at disadvantage is the Roma community and although there is generally a lack of data on economic integration across the region very low rates of employment are in evidence (Roma Inclusion Index - ten year period the EU (2016)); the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (2017), Roma which indicated (self-declared) unemployment rates for 5 of the DR EU countries at between 23% and 62%. In every country the employment rate of women is lower than men and in many countries there is a significant percentage point (pp) difference. In the Czech Republic (14.2 pp), Hungary (14 pp), Slovakia (12.7 pp), Romania (17 pp), Serbia (13.7 pp) and Montenegro (12.6 pp). The gap is significant also in comparison with the EU average (10.5 pp). The largest minority in the Danube Region is the disabled community and employment is a challenge across the EU and DR with significantly higher unemployment rates in evidence compared to non-disabled. In the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2018, unemployed individuals with limitations in 7 of the 8 EU DR countries ranged from 15.4%-33%. In considering groups at disadvantage a deeper understanding, new models (including social economy approaches), supportive working structures including accessibility and equality considerations are needed along with non-standard forms of working e.g. part-time working; remote working (apart from Austrian and Germany, low levels in region Map 27) are needed.

An important consideration for employability is the level of education, training and vocational skills that individuals possess. The less educated with low attainment levels correlates with the widest strata of vulnerable groups on the labour market. Those of working age with lower secondary educational attainment suffer not only from higher unemployment but also low income and risk of poverty. In all countries of the DR the highest employment rates are for the most educated active age population. Germany (60.7%) is the only country where the employment rate of people with lower secondary education at most exceeds that of EU28 (56.1%) (map 26). A significant contributory factor to low attainment rates is the incidence of early school leaving. Early school leaving is a challenge across the DR. From the western border of Hungary towards the east, the value of early school leavers is in excess of 10%. In Germany, Austria and Czech Republic along with the Balkan Peninsula with Slovenia and Croatia the ratio is lower, averaging around 7.5-10%. There are outlier regions around DR for example Karlsruhe (10.1%); Severozápad (17.1%); Bucharest (8%). In order to build human capital, accessible and inclusive education should be further developed, along with vocational education and training and life-long learning opportunities which add value to the economy and society. In significant parts of the DR the currently applied learning structures tend to be rather rigid, with accessibility issues, a lack of flexibility and responsiveness to learner and labour market needs. Along with innovative participation and retention development, the use of proven labour market learning and training structures, models and processes can efficiently contribute to human capital development and increased employment.

At the same time as a low attainment and vocational challenges there exist high levels of inequalities in terms of tertiary qualified individuals and employees in the DR, with the western part of the macro-region stronger in this respect and with increasing opportunities. Along with the east to west migration dynamic we also see a rural to urban dynamic. Capital regions tend to be the main centres where the more educated population concentrates e.g. Bratislava (60%), Prague (57%), Budapest (55%), Bucharest (51%) and Vienna (48%) (Map 23). The migration processes are resulting in regions with high depopulation levels, particularly affecting rural areas and an ageing demographic, along with a lack of skilled labour. Skill gaps in particular regions and settlements are exacerbated by the missing match between the workers needed in particular fields for example manufacturing and ICT and the subjects studied at tertiary education institutions. There is a need for innovative policies and inter-regional initiatives to retain skilled labour, develop skills and to encourage a more sustainable migration of populace (Map 24). At the same time as the migration dynamic one of the most universal challenges for the DR and the EU is the ageing demographic.. Apart from Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and some outlying regions the proportion of working-age population (ages between 15 and 64) is now lower than 70% in the vast majority of the analysed regions. Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian and Croatian regions suffer the most from a low share of working-age population but the problem is acute for many areas within the overall DR (Map 21).

The Coronavirus pandemic has affected the labour market to differing degrees in the DR during its phases,

and according to the exposure of different sectors e.g. high exposure of tourist sector. Initial impacts on the labour market were dramatic in 2020 but employment related statistics have improved across the DR in 2021 pointing to a more cyclical type challenge as with a time of recession. The DRP focus is intended to support disadvantaged regions and vulnerable individuals in relation to the labour market and the approach is intended to address more structural type challenges. At the time of writing it is too early to understand if the effects of Coronavirus will lead to structural change but responses should be flexible to this and also cohere with labour market related initiatives for example: New Generation EU; National ESF+ Programmes; Erasmus+; Green Employment Initiative; Horizon Europe; The Digital Education Plan 2021-2027 and national and regional level initiatives. Consideration is also recommended towards the aims and benchmarks of the developing European Education Area as a new strategic framework. The overall Programme approach strongly aligns with the The European Pillar of Social Rights, in particular Chapter 1, Equal Opportunities and Access to the Labour Market and Chapter 3, Social Protection and Inclusion.

### **Heritage & Cultural Tourism and Community**

Based on Eurostat findings, high tourist activity couples with lower regional unemployment rates. In Danube Region countries the role of tourism is essential to employment as for example in Croatia (23%) and Austria (16%). The share of tourism in employment is relatively high in Slovenia (13%), Germany (12%) and Bulgaria (11%), and moderate in the case of Hungary (9%), Czech Republic (9%), Slovakia (6%) and Romania (6%).

Up until Covid-19, tourism was a largely successful sector for the macro-region though the concentration on a relatively few traditional resorts limited cohesion and opportunity. There are insufficient interconnections and level of cooperation between destinations, services, products and stakeholders, and tourist infrastructure displays large inequalities within the macro-region. The Danube Region has developed good facilities but typically in capital cities, the Alps, the Adriatic, the Black Sea and a limited number of renowned destinations in each country. Based on overnight stays the most popular tourist destinations are the high mountainous regions (Eastern Alps) and the seaside resorts (e.g. Dalmatia in Croatia, Sunny Beach in Bulgaria) as well as metropolitan regions (e.g. Prague, Vienna). There exist substantial differences in the distribution of tourist nights, with a strong east-west divide.

The involvement of local heritage, culture, and communities in the development of existing tourism hubs can add to the existing local offer and in addition there also remains a vast array of heritage and culture throughout the region that can be recognised, understood, developed and valorised as part of the tourism sector offer. Connections to existing or new tourist routes have proved increasingly popular and in the Danube Region several cultural routes of the Council of Europe have been designated and certified in order to better connect the cultural and natural heritage sites and tourist attractions of Europe. These can be regarded as development tools to support the transnational interconnection and management of the tourism products and services. Cultural tourism policies, recommendations and guidelines drafted in the framework of Routes4U also need to be implemented.

According to the designated Roadmap for the Danube Region the management structures of successful cultural routes in the Danube Region should be analysed to compile and share best practices on management structures and implementation of activities in the Danube macro-region. The main need in this respect includes creation of cultural tourism products requiring the involvement at the local destination and a wide range of private and public stakeholders from the cultural and tourism sectors.

Social innovation can be a driver for new approaches and can lead to diversification, thus securing and creating jobs and alternative additional income sources in areas where there is a lack of employment opportunity because of weak economic structures or poor accessibility. Furthermore, areas hit by depopulation can gain a new development impetus by (re)integrating them to the socio-economic networks of tourism and cultural spheres. Innovative solutions can open up new opportunities for people with disabilities, the elderly, and excluded minorities. Often the local regions and their populations possess outstanding cultural and natural heritage on which to innovate.

With the expansion of heritage and cultural tourism through the Danube Region, much of the knowledge will lie with the local communities and tourism management structures should be developed which recognise community involvement and are inclusive in terms of composition and of being community led.

There is a strong need for capacity building in innovative management schemes in relation to the enhancement of the role of tourism in economic development.

This approach can be connected with the Recovery and Resilience Facility and potentially the European Green Deal and the New European Bauhaus initiative.

### **Governance**

The whole Danube space is suffering from its highly fragmented political and administrative feature with different roles and responsibilities given to the participating regions in distinct state models. This is a real hindering factor to cooperation and implies the need for better governance solutions and territorial strategies within the macro-region. The most striking challenges include demographic developments such as shrinking local work forces due to internal (labour) migration and ageing or a growing urban-rural divide leading to a shortage of basic public service provision and weak accessibility in rural or deprived urban and sub-urban areas. Furthermore, the Danube Region is characterized by a low institutional integration along transboundary functional (sub-) areas and a lack of institutional capacities for developing and/or implementing integrated territorial development strategies (e.g. the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, the Territorial Agenda 2030, the New Leipzig Charter). In general, the involvement of citizens and civil society organisations into decision making on all levels is lagging behind as compared to other regions in Europe, leading to a perceived democratic deficit and detachment of public institutions from the lives of average Europeans. Owing to low fertility and high emigration one of the most common characteristic of the Danube Region is ageing (excluding some north-eastern territories). The increase share of the elderly population compared to the young population has resulted in a state where there are almost no regions where the population under 15 years outnumber the population over 65 years (map 28). In the most aging regions of Bulgaria, Serbia and Germany the indexes indicate that more than two time larger elderly people population is living in the most ageing part of the macro-region. The extreme level of ageing results in challenges which need to be solved in relation to population retention, local employment, social and health care services, silver economy since radical change in demographics has not been foreseen.

Concerning migration patterns, it has to be noted that a large proportion of relocations takes place within the territory of the macro-region, though the directions and the results of migration are unbalanced. Regions with positive migration balance are typically of two types of geographic areas; they are either the western(most) regions of the given countries or the whole Danube Region (e.g. Győr-Moson-Sopron County (Hungary), Timiș County (Romania), Istria County (Croatia) or capital regions (Bratislava, Budapest, Bucharest, Vienna, Prague especially). Thus, there are huge differences in migration patterns within the Danube Region. In general, Germany and Austria has the highest share of regions with strong immigration, and the rest of the regions (except the capital regions) on macro-regional scope are areas with strong emigration. Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic stand out owing to the low number of regions affected by negative migration balance. Almost all the regions with significant immigration are from Germany.

In contrast, large parts of Croatia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro have to cope with strong emigration (Croatia being in the worst situation in terms of emigration, except for Teleorman County (Romania) and Smolyan County (Bulgaria)). Migration processes have led to the intensification of spatial disparities resulting in decreasing economic and social cohesion among Danube Region states in many ways. Because of long-term emigration several extensive peripheries have been emerging on the map of Europe characterised by low population retention force and weak economic structures. This all results in a massive depopulation, and fast ageing as well as lack of qualified workforce capable of acting as the basis of prosperity. On the other hand, in regions of high positive balance the integration of such large number of immigrants with various cultural and educational backgrounds can be challenging. Since high inequalities in labour market, income, quality of life is going to be present in a long run, it is of major importance to tackle the challenges deriving from strong migration flows and changing population distributions. The majority of the macro-region has to tackle with the intensifying westward and urban directions of migration. In the frames of the discussed movement of people both target and source areas are strongly interconnected to each other, thus the management of the given flows cannot be separated from either population loss or population gain regions.

There has been an increasing urban-rural divide in many aspects of cohesion (functions, economic growth, employment etc.) within the macro-region. When it comes to the degree of urbanisation, the Danube Region has been characterised by a strong urban-rural duality. This polarisation of the ‘Danubian’ settlement network has emerged in the form of two distinct development paths, which is reflected in various elements of economic and social cohesion as well calling for different transnational cooperation needs. This divide can be detected and is having demographic, migration, economic competitiveness, and environmental, etc. implications. Generally, urbanised areas have a wide range of public and private functions to offer, are often the core areas of socio-economic development as engines of growth, characterised by population increase, and are also targets to major business investments and migrants (including highly skilled and younger/active age population, labour and student migrants from the Danube Region), and have special challenges such as pollution, traffic congestions, urban sprawl, challenges of social integration etc. Rural areas are often having a small range of functions for public provision, emigration of intellectuals, young generations, depopulation effects, less educated, but more ageing and deprived population thus weak competitiveness as well as accessibility, less favourable situation for economy of scale and deploying new functions and institutions.

Urbanisation is not necessarily connected to administrative boundaries, and in the last years urbanisation processes created even more towns and suburbs as well as reinforced twin cities, created transboundary suburban areas (e.g. around Bratislava or Košice), transboundary (polycentric) functional urban areas as well (e.g. around Vienna, Bratislava, Brno and Győr) with special problems and potentials. Nowadays, transnational answers should be given to the challenges of the much urbanised as well as to the largely rural areas of the macro-region owing to many similarities and emerging urban structures across the borders.

The functional effects of urban agglomerations are crossing administrative boundaries especially in the ‘Danubian’ urban space which is fragmented by multiple state borders. The macro-region is covered by lots of urban hinterlands of transboundary (or even transnational) character overlapping each other and the state borders. Monocentric inland urban networks can be supplemented by the other side’s urban centres. The state borders that became more open as a result of European integration created an opportunity for networking of bordering settlements that in many case had been almost hermetically separated from each other for decades. The spatial organizing power of cities can be re-established by organizing transboundary metropolitan areas, agglomerations, twin cities and town twinning cooperation. With the transformation of spatial organization, the provision of public services and other central functions of the cities will result in newly strengthening types of functional urban areas and settlements. The coordinated development of urban functions based on joint and complementary features and the management of the centres and their hinterlands creates a new situation in terms of international city competition. Thus, encouraging transnational cooperation between municipalities in functional urban areas separated by state borders should be supported especially in terms of policy co-ordination for the planning and operational efficiency of these zones and functional developments (preparation of integrated development plans, joint transboundary management and governance).

Apart from the aforementioned governance challenges of transnational character also relate to the field of transport and accessibility. The lack of sufficient institutional cooperation, missing forms of governance and planning has led to extensive areas of weak accessibility. Therefore, there is a need for capacity building for better embedding transport and accessibility aspects into integrated transnational governance schemes.

All described challenges are to be seen in the broader context of existing strategic frameworks such as the EU Strategy for the Danube Region Action Plan (especially with regards to Priority Area 10), the Territorial Agenda 2030, the New Leipzig Charter, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Green Deal.

### **Covid-19 pandemic effects in the Danube region**

The Danube Region Programme (DRP) brings together 14 countries with different cultures and different economic development levels. The current covid-19 pandemic put a huge pressure on the budgets of these countries creating massive cash-flow and liquidity problems. Nevertheless countries are still putting significant effort in ensuring sustainable socio-economic and green recovery. In addition, the pandemic

directly impacted on people's professional and personal life due to repeated lockdowns, remote working or soaring unemployment. Since it is unlikely that these negative effects will instantly disappear once the pandemic is over there is a need to develop new/ innovative solutions to be implemented in various socio-economic sectors. For example, tourism, culture and creative industries, transport (especially air transport) have been heavily hit by the pandemic. Many employees lost their jobs and their income and entire supply and logistic chains were disturbed. Also many entrepreneurs had to be closed or severely limited their activities and lost sources of income and a chance to grow and to develop on the market

In practical terms, the Danube Region Programme is facing an increase in project partners withdrawing due to liquidity problems. Moreover, it is expected that also in the following years cash-flow problems will hamper the participation of partners in DRP projects Furthermore, restrictions and lockdowns make impossible the implementation of certain type of activities that cannot be done remotely in front of a computer (e.g. pilot actions, study visits, field measurements etc.). All these elements have an impact on the general performance of the programme.

### **Lessons learned**

Transnational cooperation in the Danube Region started in 2014, after more than a decade cooperation history in the area (from CADSES and continuing with South East Europe transnational programme).

The predecessor programme as well as the other transnational programmes that cover partly the region offer valuable achievements based on which the current programme is addressing both existing and emerging challenges and trends. DRP continues the cooperation in innovation, water management, biodiversity, cultural and natural heritage and governance themes building on the results already achieved and making use of the partnerships and networks that have been set up. Despite the valuable projects financed in this fields (such as eco-innovation, bio-economy, cluster policies, technology transfer, flood risk prevention, sediment management, eco-corridors and network of green infrastructures in the Danube Region, promotion of tangible and intangible heritage for economic development, migration, inclusion of vulnerable groups etc.) that developed and tested solutions, strategies and tools, there are still challenges that need to be tackled in order to close the disparities between eastern and western countries, as well as urban and rural and peripheral regions: huge inequalities in terms of economic development persist, creating manoeuvres for better integration, there are shared water bodies and water catchment areas with transnational importance which connect the given upstream and downstream countries, the large heterogeneity of distinct habitat types is in danger across the region because of weak adaptation techniques as well.

Furthermore, new challenges emerge in the region where action is needed such as climate change, accessible and inclusive labour markets and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning.

One of the lessons learned is that involvement of the right partners is, on one side maximising the impact and on the other ensure that the projects' results are used in practice, this being the reason the programme aims to involve not only the local and/ or regional level but also national decision makers, civil society and practitioners.

### **Complementarity and synergies**

Danube Region Programme would be one of the financing instruments of the EUSDR and strong cooperation with other programmes/ financing instruments existing in the Danube Region is of utmost importance.

Cross-programme cooperation and coordination was implemented already from the programming process in order to create synergies, but also during implementation. However, this is not meant to avoid overlaps in terms of topics since the specificity, common needs and challenges of the territories to be covered by the programmes is at the core of the programming process.

Each EU programme has its own specificity for its whole area and, on the other hand, the territory of TNC programmes also includes parts which overlap with one or more other EU programmes. DRP fully overlaps with a high number of future ERDF/ESF/CE programmes run by the EU MS and a large number of cross-border programmes between EU Member State regions, and between these and IPA and NDICI countries to be set up in each border region of the Danube area. Additionally, partial overlaps also exist with several transnational programmes (Adriatic and Ionian, Alpine Space, Central Europe, Mediterranean

and North West Europe). The specificity of each programme is visible in the types of beneficiaries, areas and projects. The challenge during the programming phase is to make these specificities as distinctive as possible, compared to the programmes with which an overlap exists. It may take the form of ‘comparative strengths or programme niches’. Additionally, where applicable, the programme will create complementarities with ITI and CLLD (e.g. ITI Danube Delta).

Danube Region Programme (DRP), since it shares the core values of the New Bauhaus Initiative, will promote and mainstream the new initiative and will create synergies when the calls for proposals are launched.

Nevertheless the complementarities and synergies are implemented starting with the programming process by involving the relevant institutions of the Danube area in the stakeholders’ consultations (National Committees through partner states representatives, EUSDR NCs, PACs and stakeholders, mainstream programmes through the Partner States representatives etc.). Furthermore direct contact with other programmes was kept exchanging information their chosen SOs/ focus/ indicators (either during Interact events or events organised by other programmes). DRP TF members are participating in the programming committees of other programmes and are organising their national committees thus ensuring synergies not only with ETC programmes but also mainstream ones. During implementation phase of the programme synergies and complementarities are observed already at the application phase (when applicants are asked to describe the synergies with other EU, regional, national initiatives/ programmes/ projects), to assessment and implementation phase where DRP works in close cooperation with other programmes overlapping from a territorial point of view (e.g. with Central Europe JS there is a long history of cooperation in sense of double checking with the applications submitted in the programmes on a certain similar topic, joint meetings on with complementary projects etc.). The national committees of the programme participating countries will facilitate the coordination with other ESIF programmes. Stronger link between mainstream programmes and DRP will be ensured by the MA/ JS (through participation in the Partnership Agreement MCs). The NCPs may participate in the relevant national committees according to the rules of the countries.

During implementation the managing authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support policy objectives (including professionalization efforts to address capacity gaps). Beneficiaries will 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.

## **European Union Strategy for the Danube Region**

Danube Region Programme, through the potential topics to be addressed will fully contribute to the EUSDR Action Plan. This stems also from the fact that the Strategy covers a much larger spectrum of topics compared to the ones a transnational programme could cover. The involvement of the EUSDR governance bodies in the programming process proved to be a success, since in both rounds of stakeholders’ consultations the rate of answer from the PACs was very high, proving the importance of the programme for the EUSDR. Furthermore, EUSDR facilitated also the involvement in the consultation process of the steering group members and their professional networks. All the challenges identified by the Territorial Analysis are coherent and in line with the EUSDR Action Plan.

### **Programme mission statement**

***“From a region of barriers to a region of flows”***

*Mission Statement of the Danube Region Programme*

**The Danube macro-region is a region of barriers, due to its highly fragmented status in political, socio-economic and administrative aspects as well. The effects of such fragmentation are decisive for the development of the whole region; therefore, the related border effects should be tackled and mitigated.** This fragmented status of the Region, besides being a weakness, offers at the same time the opportunity for stronger cooperation and coordinated actions across these countries to overcome these

barriers in the field of innovation, environment, governance and social issues.

The whole Danube space is suffering from its highly fragmented political and administrative character, which is further complicated by the extreme economic diversity of its countries and regions. The European measures for a stronger cohesion along with the accession and neighbourhood policies create a new, unique historic situation for the better integration of the Danube space. Creating a better institutional platform and transnational cooperation environment for the territorial, economic and social integration should be the main mission of the DRP.

The main focus of the new programme should be along those thematic areas where the overall measures for better integration could be linked to those relevant and specific needs, which can be effectively addressed by transnational projects (e.g. depopulation, migration, economic inequalities, energy dependency, climate change). In this very heterogeneous and diverse region, a specific emphasis is to be given to ensure that the different needs of the countries (given their different political and economic status) are considered in a fairly balanced and well-integrated manner.

### **Horizontal principles**

Projects financed by the programme must respect the horizontal principles of equal opportunity, non-discrimination (including based on national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age or mental or physical disability), gender equality, sustainable development and accessibility (green public procurement, nature-based solutions, lifecycle costing criteria, standards going beyond regulatory requirements, avoiding negative environmental impacts, climate proofing and 'energy efficiency first principle') during project design and implementation and will embed them in the work plan. Already in the application phase the Lead partners will be requested to explain in the Application Form how horizontal principles are followed and how they are integrated in the activities (and this is subject to assessment), while during implementation the partnership has to report in each progress report how the horizontal principles have been applied in practice providing evidence in this respect and the MA/ JS is assessing the information as part of their checklists. Furthermore during the preparation and implementation the programme will take into account the EU Charter of Fundamental rights.

DRP is not financing large infrastructure or productive investment, nevertheless the durability of the outputs and results is part of the project preparation, assessment and implementation. In the project preparation phase the applicants are requested to demonstrate that the outputs and results of the projects are durable, replicable and transferable and also these elements are embedded in their projects (e.g. by proposing concrete measures to ensure the durability). All these elements are part of the assessment process and specific assessment criterion is applied and are monitored during the project implementation.

In implementation the responsible project partners are requested to carry out SEA procedure in accordance with their respective national regulations in case a cooperation project supported by the Programme intends to develop a strategy or plan at transnational, national or local level in a thematic field with potential significant impact on the environment including nature, as well as on health, which falls into the scope of the SEA Directive and/or that of the UN Protocol on strategic environmental assessment of the Espoo Convention. The responsible project partners shall also follow their respective national regulations on the environmental impact assessment within the environmental licensing procedure in case a cooperation project intends to plan, implement investments with potential significant adverse environmental impacts, on nature and protected areas falling into the scope of the EIA Directive and/or that of the UN Espoo Convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context.

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

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

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
1. A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity	RSO1.1. Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies	1. Priority 1 - A more competitive and smarter Danube Region	The majority of the Danube Region is still considered a technology-follower area characterised by large gaps between the old and the new Member States as well as the associated countries in relation to innovation ecosystem. This is reflected in indicators including intramural RDI expenditure (GERD), RDI share in GDP, patent applications, share of ICT in employment. The Danube Region consists of both RDI leaders and followers, which gives potential to breaking down the hindering factors in knowledge production and transfer (most innovative regions of Europe including Austria (GERD per capita: 1279.6 EUR) and Germany (1121.7), the “transition zone” of East-Central European countries (Slovenia 393.4, Czech Republic 280.8, Hungary 139.5, and Slovakia 118.1) and economies with low investment in knowledge and technology advancement (Bosnia and Herzegovina 9.4, Ukraine 10, Montenegro 20.6, Romania 41.4, Serbia 43.6). Thus, mostly the westernmost economies are well integrated into the European level of RDI, while the latter group of countries are almost excluded from effective RDI cooperation. Knowledge-intensity shows large territorial differences, while there are uncoordinated profiles and capacities, overly concentrated RDI activities. The mediocre performance is partly owing to the weak knowledge links bringing stronger

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>cohesion across the macro-region. Consequently, RDI activities represent a high potential in joint knowledge management and valorisation initiatives covering joint knowledge production and transfer. The uptake of innovative technologies is moderately slow. Considering employment in ICT, compared to European-scale changes, the Danube Region exceeded (increase by 0.31% point between 2008 and 2018) the growth of the EU15 (increase by 0.26% point) but failed to catch up with the development pace of the EU28 (0.36% point). The reason behind this is the low advancement in non-Member States in particular. It is expected that by supporting actions dedicated technological and non-technological transfer and the uptake of technologies the programme will contribute to addressing the hindering factors in knowledge production and transfer. Form of support: grants (since the programme does not finance financially viable operations)</p>
<p>1. A more competitive and smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation and regional ICT connectivity</p>	<p>RSO1.4. Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship</p>	<p>1. Priority 1 - A more competitive and smarter Danube Region</p>	<p>The macro-region consists of economies with many common and complementary features related to economic structure to be utilised jointly. The Danube Region is still characterised by large gaps in relation to economic competitiveness and catching-up and could capitalise from acting as a transit(ion) and interaction zone for trans-European business relations owing to its geographic position. The macro-region is built from diverse economies with different fields of excellence and specialisation. Large inequalities (calculated by the shares of the added value of the given activities in GDP) lie in all sectors including agriculture (e.g. Moldova 10.2%, Ukraine 10.1% and</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>Montenegro 6.8% against Germany 0.7%, Austria 1.2%, Slovenia 1.9%, or the Czech Republic 2%) or services (e.g. Austria 62.7%, Germany 61.5%, Croatia 58%, and Moldova 53.3%, Ukraine 51.3% and Serbia 51% on the other hand). With the implementation of this specific objective the programme is to enhance the complementing economic and thematic features through skills development for smart specialization and entrepreneurship. Industry has larger proportion (28.25% in 2018) in the related economies compared to EU28 (21.9%). Unpreparedness for the challenges related to Industry 4.0 can cause severe loss in competitiveness since many economies are heavily based on industry (e.g. Czech Republic 32.7%, Germany 28%, Slovakia 31.3%, Romania 29%, Slovenia 28.9%). Slow transition is a common problem. Except for capital city regions mostly (e.g. Budapest, Bratislava Region 10.2% of total employment) hi-tech sectors are weakly developed (e.g. in Sud-Vest Oltenia 1% from Romania, Šumadija and Western Serbia 1.1%, Yugoiztochen 1.1% from Bulgaria). Weak entrepreneurship is reflected in that while in the EU28 47.6 SMEs per 1000 inhabitants are operating, the Danube Region had 39.2. The share of the SME sector in the value added of enterprises (53.8%) is lower compared to EU28 (55.5%). Except for Germany and Austria low proportion of enterprises are innovative in terms of organisation/marketing and product/process type of innovation. In this context, the programme aims at offering support for supporting the ongoing transition towards i4.0. Form of support: grants (since the programme does not finance financially viable operations)</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>RSO2.2. Promoting renewable energy in accordance with Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001[1], including the sustainability criteria set out therein</p>	<p>2. Priority 2 - A greener, low-carbon Danube Region</p>	<p>All power systems are based on fossil fuels which reach at least 60% in each country. The efficiency of thermal power stations is low since only Austria (64.6%) surpasses the EU average (50.5%) significantly. The energy dependence in several countries is higher than the EU average (53.6%), such as in Germany (63.5%), Austria (62.5%), Slovakia (59%) and Hungary (55.6%). Apart from Slovenia (-2.8% points) and Austria (-2% points) the rate has not decreased notably, or even increased between 2012 and 2016. The share of renewables in gross final energy consumption is low, and has never reached 50% in any countries. In the majority of the countries the share was stagnating (e.g. Austria +0.2% points, Bulgaria -0.3% points) or significantly decreased (Montenegro -3.7% points, Hungary -2.9% points). Increase worth mentioning occurred only in Germany (3.1%), Slovakia (1.4% points), and the Czech Republic (1% points). Notable shares can be mentioned in Montenegro (40%), Austria (32.6%) and Croatia (27.3%), while in Slovakia (11.5%), Hungary (13.3%), the Czech Republic (14.8%) and Germany (15.5%) renewables play minor role compared to fossil fuels and nuclear energy. There is a huge variety in the energy mix of the macro-region by region and source. Biofuels responsible for more than 50% in all countries except for Germany (36%, while EU28 average is 49%), and represent the highest rates in Hungary (87%) and Ukraine (79%). Hydropower (EU28 11%) in Serbia (41%), Austria (34%), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia (32% each) and Montenegro (29%) is by far the second most utilised source. Wind, solar energy, municipal waste and</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			geothermal energy are less preferred, but altering DR countries have specialised in them. As a result of underutilised renewables, energy dependency, lack of high energy safety characterises the DR that still heavily relies on fossil fuels. An increased use of RES for energy production and sustainable transport may contribute to a better air quality. Thus, the shift towards renewables is crucial. Form of support: grants (since the programme does not finance financially viable operations)
2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility	RSO2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches	2. Priority 2 - A greener, low-carbon Danube Region	CC adaptation can be regarded as a horizontal issue that should be taken into consideration in any actions within SO iv. The transnational Continental and Carpathian/Alpine Mountain bio-geographical regions covering multiple countries in the Danube Region both have to tackle with increasing extremities in relation to environmental disasters caused by climate change. Out of these, extreme amount of water as well as intensifying water scarcity, droughts are considered the main challenges. Owing to having both upstream and downstream areas with a transboundary character, the Danube Region experiences frequent floods risking large transboundary riverside areas. Neighbouring regions with high number of floods (over 16 between January 1985 and September 2019) are part of the catchment area of the Upper Tisa and the Dniester in particular. These regions incorporate the joint border areas of Ukraine (e.g., Zakarpattia Oblast), Romania (e.g., Maramureş County) Slovakia (e.g., Prešov Region), Hungary (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County) and Moldova. Other highly flood hazardous regions with extreme flood levels from the last ten years can be found on the Tisa and its

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>tributaries, the Sava, the Mura-Drava as well as the Danube river. There is a need for a more efficient coordination of river basin management with emphasis on flood risk, and joint actions in disaster prevention, forecast and response. Given the basin and transnational character of the river system within the Danube Region, apart from natural disasters such as floods, risk prevention, emergency response and disaster management especially concerning the water-related man-made catastrophes (e.g. cyanide, heavy metal or salt pollution) should also be better addressed. Climate change related environmental risks and disasters like droughts, forest fires or heat waves are becoming more frequent issues season after season in many different parts of the Danube Region. Although these phenomena don't have transnational impacts, it is important to harmonise and standardise the preparation of response authorities and organisations and their related procedures at transnational scale for a more effective preparedness and response in case of emergency situations. Form of support: grants(since the programme does not finance financially viable operations).</p>
<p>2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>RSO2.5. Promoting access to water and sustainable water management</p>	<p>2. Priority 2 - A greener, low-carbon Danube Region</p>	<p>One of the specific features of the macro-region is that the Danube Region covers the water system of the Danube and its tributaries, i.e. the Danube Basin. There are shared water bodies and water catchment areas of transnational importance. Joint river sections, surface and underground water bodies also mean that both the quantity and the quality of such waters, e.g. contamination and water pollution or increasing water use, decreasing ground water levels, shrinking supplies across borders, increase of low water periods</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>in rivers, disturbed sediment transport and balance are real threats to tackle jointly. Climate change is forecasted to affect both the quantity, as well as quality of transnational water bodies in the Danube River Basin that requires joint solutions. Regarding the chemical status of the Danube Region rivers, transnational intervention would be needed in the case of Tisza and many of its transboundary tributaries (Someş, Körös) in particular. The chemical status of the Danube is failing on long shared border sections in Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria. The chemical status requires joint measures on the east of the Budapest–Sarajevo line. There is a need for better coordination between water management and certain economic activities such as agriculture, navigation, hydropower and flood protection, which are strongly influencing water quantity and quality quite often. Transnational coordination in the field of water supply management in the frames of a river basin management system is required in relation to surface and groundwater. Groundwater bodies cover almost the same size of area as Bulgaria (106 883 km<sup>2</sup>). As many as 11 groundwater bodies exist which have a transnational relevance. The protection and usage of these water bodies are relevant since many of them act as major source for e.g. drinking, agriculture or industry. SOiv SOv and SOvii are needed to manage territorially integrated and therefore effective actions within transnational functional areas of catchment areas, river basins. Form of support: grants(since the programme does not finance financially viable operations)</p>
2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning	RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and	2. Priority 2 - A	The macro-region is high in biodiversity, which is in

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>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>preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution</p>	<p>greener, low-carbon Danube Region</p>	<p>danger also because of weak adaptation techniques to climate change that comes with e.g. invasive species or fragmenting habitats. All the 7 biogeographical regions within the Danube Region have a transboundary nature, including Continental as the most widespread region. The Pannonian region unites many regions of Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia, while Alpine covers various territories in Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria. Out of the 13 ecological regions formed in the Danube Region all of them are transboundary in character. Pannonian mixed forests are autochthonous in as many as 10 countries. Other ecological regions with strong transboundary feature include Carpathian montane coniferous forests (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania), Dinaric Mountains mixed forests and Illyrian deciduous forests (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro) and East European forest steppe (Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria). The high diversity is reflected in high number of transboundary protected areas from wetland habitats (e.g. the Danube Delta) to hilly and mountainous landscapes (e.g. Carpathians, Dinaric Alps, Czech Forest-Bavarian Forest). Nature protection is challenged by the still low level of joint management and protection initiatives, furthermore by notable differences in the policies, competences, and human and financial resources of the given protected areas. Despite of some cooperation (e.g. Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve), borders are barriers to effective nature protection on transnational</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>level. Apart from the ecological corridors and regions, the protection of umbrella species is also of great significance. Therefore enhanced transnational cooperation is needed with regard to safeguarding the transboundary habitats of indigenous animal population including e.g. wild sturgeons. The ratio of Natura 2000 areas in the Danube Region is significantly higher in almost all states compared to the EU average (18%) with the exception of Germany (15%), Austria (15%) and Czech Republic (14%). Form of support: grants - the programme does not finance financially viable operations</p>
<p>4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights</p>	<p>RSO4.1. Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy</p>	<p>3. A more social Danube Region</p>	<p>The justification for this specific objective comes firstly from the understanding of a shared labour market in the Danube Region (DR). A collection of interdependent labour markets in which human capital provides the labour for institutions and commerce, whose connections and value chains cover every part of the Danube Region. Within the Region there has developed a persistent North West and South East spatial inequality in which the pull and push factors from the North West and South East respectively contribute to depopulation, ageing demography; skills gaps and declining social cohesion in significant parts of the Danube Region. DRP projects can develop a better understanding of migration within the Region with shared information and systems, capacity building, bringing stakeholders together, understanding impact and creating the basis for shared solutions. In considering the labour market in the Region there are underlying challenges which cut across the DR. One of these is long-term unemployment, which, despite generally improving</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>unemployment figures in the DR has proved particularly difficult to address. Evident within long-term unemployment rates are high proportions of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups which include minorities, disabled, the aged, migrants and those with a rural disadvantage. The programme can provide innovative and coordinated planning which builds on good practice in the DR to support the integration of disadvantaged groups and vulnerable groups, particularly in the most affected regions. There are also opportunities for DRP projects to develop innovative employment schemes to encourage the tertiary educated to remain in regions affected by brain drain and also schemes which can generate increased employment levels e.g. for women. Whilst as noted migration can be a cause of an ageing demographic, this is a wider trend which is affecting the majority of the DR. Danube Region Programme projects can lead to a more coordinated policy and planning to encourage and develop active ageing solutions and build on good practice in the DR. Form of support: grants (since the programme does not finance financially viable operations)</p>
<p>4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights</p>	<p>RSO4.2. 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</p>	<p>3. A more social Danube Region</p>	<p>The justification lies in understanding the crucial role of human capital, in developing a balanced, highly employed, competitive and socially cohered DR. In all countries of the DR the highest employment rates are for the most educated active age population. Quality employment for those of a working age with lower secondary educational attainment can be difficult often with the continuous risk of unemployment. Germany (60.7%) is the only Danube country where the employment rate of people with</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>lower secondary education at most exceeds that of EU28 (56.1%). A significant contributor to low educational attainment is the high ratio of early leavers from education with most parts of the DR failing to meet the EU 2020 targets. A deteriorating tendency is observable especially in eastern regions, which contain rural areas with a high share of disadvantaged populace and a weak integration of children into the school system. The underrepresentation of minority groups and the rural disadvantaged is also apparent at the tertiary level. Projects can maximise the use of existing knowledge and experience to develop best practices in inclusive and accessible education policy and, models and contribute to policy reform. The DR needs to be responsive to labour market need. The applied learning structures tend to be rigid with educational infrastructure and services lacking flexibility, competence, orientation, openness and adequate governance structures. Projects can encourage the development of a more harmonised vocational education and training (VET) approach meeting the needs of business and society with proven innovative, inclusive and accessible labour market VET structures that contribute to socio-economic development and cohesion. The pandemic has led to a surge in innovative digital and remote education and the DRP can take advantage of these developments in supporting e-solutions to mitigate rural disadvantage and to provide relevant employment related training. Understanding brain drain and how this challenge can be addressed at the regional level is missing and DRP projects can fill a gap with the development or improvement of scientific and educational networks.</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			Form of support: grants since the programme does not finance financially viable operations
4. A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	3. A more social Danube Region	<p>The macro-region incorporates a large number of transnational cultural and natural heritage sites on which the development of joint tourism, destination management and cultural products and services can be based on for job creation in areas with vulnerable populations and areas of depopulation. High potential lies in the cultural diversity. Valorisation, such as the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of creative industries can have direct positive socio-economic impacts. The outstanding diversity is underlined by the coexistence of 30 ethnic groups, many as national minorities. Groups can function as connecting links. Inter-ethnic and P2P relations can counter xenophobia, and Euroscepticism across the whole Danube Region. 7 EuroVelo routes and 19 Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe have been certified to better connect heritage sites from the Iron Curtain across Roman and Jewish heritage to Art Nouveau and viniculture which can be built upon. Tourism is one of the most relevant economic activities which significantly contributes to employment and added value in many regions, but it is concentrated on a few mountainous and seaside resorts (Eastern Alps, Dalmatia, Sunny Beach in etc.). both having strong macro-regional tourist flows. There are severe differences in attractiveness based on tourist nights (E.g. Adriatic Croatia 59.005, Tyrol 50065, Prague 14.100 or Yugoiztochen 9.529 compared to Sud-Muntenia 681, Severozapaden 728, Republika Srpska 689 or Moldova 545). Weak connectivity and management of destinations hinders</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>a more balanced and synergic development in the Danube Region. Valorisation of joint heritage can support job creation, which can support anti-poverty measures and better integration of vulnerable groups, the elderly, people with disabilities and Roma. Social innovation, offering new solutions, has an important role owing to the fact that the macro-region incorporates several regions with a high share of population at risk of poverty (e.g. Nord-Est 33.4%, Sud-Vest Oltenia 33.4%, Serbia 25.7%, Severozapaden 32.8%, and Montenegro 23.6%). Form of support: grants (since the programme does not finance financially viable operations)</p>
6. Interreg: A better Cooperation Governance	ISO6.4. Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies (all strands)	4. A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region	<p>Danube Programme is a unique tool for facilitating overarching territorial and macro-regional frameworks, especially with regard to EUSDR. Through the targeted support for the governance of EUSDR, the programme can add significant momentum to the smooth and effective functioning of EUSDR structures and bodies, in view of successful implementation of EUSDR action plan. Form of support: grants (since the programme does not finance financially viable operations)</p>
6. Interreg: A better Cooperation Governance	ISO6.6. Other actions to support better cooperation governance (all strands)	4. A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region	<p>The Danube Region is a macro-region of borders: 44.7% of its territories are situated closer than 30 km to at least one state border. Consequently, no major developments can be carried out without having at least indirect transboundary impacts covering several national territories. The Danube Region is heterogeneous in terms of level of European integration. It consists of old and new Member States, candidate countries, a potential candidate and</p>

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
			<p>countries targeted by mostly the Eastern Partnership. There is still a lot of room to cooperate in breaking down administrative and legal obstacles within the Danube Region to serve the four freedoms. Good governance and regional policy can also function as a prime tool for increasing the level of trust towards the EU. DRP can support the EU integration; strengthen the visibility and close-to-people character of the Regional Policy. Except for Germany (E-Government Development Index: 0.88), Austria (0.83) and Slovenia (0.77) the macro-region has less developed e-governance structures compared to the European average of UN states (0.77). The countries differ in their political-administrative systems. Subsequently, there is no homogeneity between the countries which can render regional cooperation challenging and at the same time offer room for enhancing legal harmonisation. Hence, high diversity in public administration and governance can be challenging to overcome, and efficiency of public administration regarding cooperation on a transnational level. The political fragmentation and the challenges of transnational character (e.g. aging, transport bottlenecks) calls for better and new models of governance, inter-institutional cooperation and transnational institutions to manage functional areas (e.g. cross-border functional urban areas, areas affected by labour migration). Form of support: grants (since the programme does not finance financially viable operations)</p>

## 2. Priorities

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

### 2.1. Priority: 1 - Priority 1 - A more competitive and smarter Danube Region

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

#### 2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO1.1. Developing and enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies

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

Enhancing innovation and technology transfer in Danube region

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

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

Based on the territorial findings, the Danube Region (DR) innovation performance is characterised, to a large extent, by outdated labour-intensive, technology-follower type of workflows and processes. Additionally, Danube Region is affected by large economic competitiveness and social gaps among old, new Member States and the non-member states part of the DR area (NDICI and IPA countries), with direct impact on the region's capacity to cooperate, especially when it comes to RDI developments such as the uptake of innovation, being technological or non-technological innovation. Thus, joint measures to support the better share of innovation capacities and the joint uptake of innovation and advanced technologies are of high relevance. Such actions should result from new, RDI related policies and furthered through quadruple helix approaches. Therefore, promoting RDI cooperation, exchanging experiences and capacity building between innovation actors such industrial and technological hubs and parks, private enterprises, professional clusters, universities, RDI centres, NGOs, local, regional and national policy makers (e.g. administrations, agencies) is of great significance for creating a well-functioning DR innovation ecosystem and increasing regional capacity for absorbing innovation. Complementary, support for transnational cooperation able to stimulate vertical and horizontal development of thematic value chains across DR is important. Direct actions in regard to circular economy or environment-friendly and low-carbon transport systems are needed. Circular economy interventions should focus on the sectors that use most resources and where the potential for circularity and transnationality is high: electronics and ICT, batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food and nutrients. Transport related interventions should strive for proposing and developing smart, sustainable and green transport technologies and networks, as well as e-mobility solutions e.g. the introduction of alternative fuels, next generation lithium-ion batteries, safer autonomous navigation systems (route planning, accident prevention, electrified highways). Furthermore, slow integration of innovative regional and urban technologies in the planning, management and development of DR regions and cities can be addressed by stimulating partnerships among regions and cities coming from countries with different innovation performance levels (see the annual EC Innovation Scoreboard). For all the above, digitalisation and digitisation should act as RDI cross-sectoral, horizontal enablers. Within this specific objective, future interventions must prove their capacity to act as territorial catalyst by capitalizing on past thematic experiences and achievements. In addition, the future interventions should be aligned to NextGenerationEU plan that aims to repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the **Coronavirus** pandemic. **Post-COVID-19** Europe will be greener, more digital, more resilient and better fit for the current and forthcoming challenges. Actions might benefit from coordination with other EU funding instruments, such as Horizon Europe, Interregional Innovation Investment (I3), ERDF mainstreaming programmes or national innovation funds. Key strategic orientations defined in the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan, in the "Restore our Oceans and Waters" mission and related partnerships could be reference points for complementarities. Supported actions are encouraged to contribute to the objectives of the European Research Area (ERA), by also fostering the deployment of R&I results. Such synergies allow wider territorial impacts in DR. Moreover, future projects should consider the targets and actions of EUSDR PA7 and PA8 or other relevant EUSDR PAs as described in the Territorial Strategy and to the other policy documents mentioned there e.g. Territorial Agenda 2030, EU Green Deal, etc. The

objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle. To conclude with, the focus of the proposed intervention should be on the followings:

*Focus 1.* RDI related transnational policies and processes for closing innovation gaps and towards the uptake of innovation and advanced technologies e.g. artificial intelligence, nanotechnologies, advanced materials, advanced manufacturing and processing (production technologies) and biotechnology.

*Focus 2.* Transnational RDI related activities for capacity building along thematic value chains.

*Focus 3.* Technology transfer and technology uptake towards and from SMEs and improved access to quadruple transnational research and innovation infrastructures with macro-regional significance.

*Focus 4.* Circular economy policies and processes in specific related domains e.g. electronics and ICT batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food and nutrients.

*Focus 5.* Developing smart, sustainable and green transport technologies and networks, as well as e-mobility solutions.

*Focus 6.* Integration of smart cities and smart regions solutions in the planning, management and development of DR regions and cities.

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Improving transnational cooperation to support joint technology generation, uptake and upscaling in the following fields: nanotechnologies, advanced materials, advanced manufacturing and processing (production technologies) and health industry (establishing joint medicine research clusters/centres, usage of digitalisation and artificial intelligence in medicine/health care, analysing big data sets in medicine, biotechnology).

- Support for transnational uptake of technologies alongside thematic value chains: specialisation in transnational Danube Region clusters for emerging industries, support for a higher level and new forms of collaboration within the quadruple helix to encourage co-inventions and innovation cooperation as well.

- Support for transnational circular economy collaboration forms, harmonisation of related policies and uptake of technologies in specific related domains (e.g. electronics and ICT batteries and vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles, construction and buildings, food and nutrients);

- Support for technology generation and uptake of related technologies regarding smart, sustainable and green transport technologies and networks, as well as e-mobility solutions in relation to transnational transport networks and transboundary functional urban areas;

- Support for the uptake of advanced technologies in relation to smart infrastructure in Danube Region cities: integration of smart cities and smart regions solutions in the planning, management and development of the Danube Region cities and regions.

The implementation of transnational cooperation projects, which focus on the thematic fields and carry out such actions that are defined within this SO, will equip the stakeholders with the skills necessary to advance policies for closing innovation gaps, in the field of smart, green, circular and low-carbon economy, also supporting technology transfer and uptake of new technologies.

### **Expected results:**

Transnational cooperation actions will lead to increased capacity at the level of relevant stakeholders to innovate, being technological or non-technological innovation, and move past outdated labour-intensive, technology-follower type of workflows and processes. Supported actions will improve policy learning and implementation, encourage policy changes towards a green and digitalised economy in lagging behind regions and help these catching up with innovation leader regions. Actions will lead to improved framework conditions for innovation and foster the sustainable uptake of advanced technologies.

Improved cross-sectoral cooperation, technology transfer and coordination will bring substantial contribution to the general effort of reducing innovation barriers and closing the innovation gap across the Danube Region.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO1.1	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	33
1	RSO1.1	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	132
1	RSO1.1	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	33
1	RSO1.1	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	44

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO1.1	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	33.00	Monitoring system	
1	RSO1.1	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	33.00	Monitoring system	
1	RSO1.1	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	132.00	Monitoring system	The indicators is semi-qualitative

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies.

Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for research, innovation, technology transfer institutions, sectoral agencies and regional development agencies, networks, clusters and associations, research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, business support organisation (e.g. chamber of commerce, business innovations centres, technology information centres), higher education, education/training centre and school, NGOs, private enterprises including SME, or industrial and technological hubs and parks.

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

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

Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the DRP supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. In practice the programme will facilitate the cooperation between advanced and lagging behind regions in the programme areas in order to overcome the large disparities of the region.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	012. Research and innovation activities in public research centres, higher education and centres of competence including networking (industrial research, experimental development, feasibility studies)	937,262.78
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	026. Support for innovation clusters including between businesses, research organisations and public authorities and business networks primarily benefiting SMEs	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	030. Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, focusing on circular economy	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	010. Research and innovation activities in SMEs, including networking	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	028. Technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, research centres and higher education sector	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	015. Digitising SMEs or large enterprises (including e-Commerce, e-Business and networked business processes, digital innovation hubs, living labs, web entrepreneurs and ICT start-ups, B2B) compliant with greenhouse gas emission reduction or energy efficiency criteria	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	017. Government ICT solutions, eservices, applications compliant with greenhouse gas emission reduction or energy efficiency criteria	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	018. IT services and applications for digital skills and digital inclusion	937,262.78
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	029. Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, research centres and universities, focusing on the low carbon economy, resilience and adaptation to climate change	5,623,576.64

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	18,745,255.50

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO1.1	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	18,745,255.50

### 2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO1.4. Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship

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

Development of skills for advancing smart specialisation strategies, industrial transformation and transition towards industry 4.0, including cross-sectorial collaborations

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

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

Danube macro-region is characterised by countries with different economic and social development paths, performance convergence potentials or links to the European economic market. More exactly, in spite of the notable elements of convergence across some national level economies, one may notice that the spatial pattern is quite fragmented, especially due to growing gaps between urban regions as engines of growth and rural regions as peripheries. The latter, in most cases, are lagging behind. Whilst some regional economies of the Danube Region are heavily industrialised (or significant reindustrialisation has taken place), most economies seem to be unprepared for the challenges arising from transitioning to industry 4.0. (i4.0). Such developed vs undeveloped, integrated versus isolated, urban versus periphery, industrial vs non-industrial (or deindustrialised) clivages can be mitigated by implementing i4.0 processes (including skills) and working towards harmonised smart specialisation strategies (S3) and policies. Within this specific objective, future interventions must prove their capacity to act as territorial catalyst by capitalising on past thematic experiences and achievements. Support for transnational knowledge transfer, S3 and policy harmonisation and i4.0 technologies testing is needed in order to restore and gain competitiveness both at transnational and national level. This calls for a tighter cooperation in the framework of S3 and policies with a special focus on SMEs, industrial transition and related professional skills. It has to be noted that there are large differences among S3 and policies in terms of field of specialisation, sectoral focus or territorial outreach. While some states have their own national S3 and policies, including alignment of regional economic administration, in some countries it is still considered as a new, emerging topic. Therefore, the lack of related S3 and policies transnational planning and management is a common thing. Consequently, support for transnational alignment of S3 and policies is of great importance. A smart networking combination of business, educational, scientific knowledge and infrastructure is fundamental for creating products and services with transnational impact. For all the above, digitalisation and digitisation should act as cross-sectorial, horizontal enablers. In addition, the future interventions should be aligned to NextGenerationEU plan that aims to repair the immediate economic and social damage brought about by the **Coronavirus** pandemic. **Post-COVID-19** Europe will be greener, more digital, more resilient and better fit for the current and forthcoming challenges. Moreover, future projects should consider the targets and actions of EUSDR PA8, partially PA9 or other relevant EUSDR PAs and to the other policy documents mentioned there e.g. Territorial Agenda 2030, EU Green Deal, etc. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle. To conclude with, the focus of the proposed intervention should be on the followings:

*Focus 1.* Skills development for and of joint advancement of smart specialisation strategies and policies including a special focus on less advanced regions.

*Focus 2.* Skills development and cross sectorial collaborations between smart industries and traditional type of industries for industrial transformation and transition towards industry 4.0, robotisation, mechatronics, digital technologies (including internet of things, artificial intelligence and creative industries).

*Focus 3.* Skills development for delivering products and services with transnational impact.

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Enhancing cooperation related to entrepreneurial skills in advanced technologies, industries of high Danube Region importance (i.e. owing to social impacts, market needs) to better combine existing capacities and competences;
- Building cooperation structures to obtain innovation capacity needed to be competitive at regional and EU level, identify niches within the EU market and become attractive as a partner within the Danube Region or towards other EU regions;
- Establishing platforms enabling transfer of knowledge and skills and building inter-regional synergies for the development of regional smart specialisation strategies and policies with a special focus on the involvement of entrepreneurial actors and existing networks in discovering and exploiting promising areas of specialisation;
- Setting up and piloting measures for regions allowing for exchange of experience on implementation of smart specialisation strategies, e.g. networking of regions specialised in the field of industry 4.0 and related professional skills, support for related knowledge exchange between model regions and regions lagging behind in terms of elaborating and implementing industry 4.0 planning schemes.

The implementation of transnational cooperation projects, which focus on the thematic fields and carry out such actions that are defined within this SO, will equip the main stakeholders with the skills necessary to develop and implement smart specialisation strategies, preparing the Danube Region for transition to industry 4.0 while fulfilling sustainability, circular and low-carbon economy aspects.

#### **Expected results:**

Transnational cooperation actions will enhance skills and capacities of the stakeholders for harmonised advancement of S3 and will also set up the much needed tools, methods and processes for ensuring a smooth transitioning towards industry 4.0. Transnational cooperation actions will build capacities of and empower public authorities, intermediate bodies and other institutions to create framework conditions that help improve skills of employees and entrepreneurs in view of challenges like green economy, digitalisation, artificial intelligence related skills and industrial transition. This will result in policy learning for the delivery of new and better services for skills development. It will help to increase the regions' competitive advantage by enhancing capacities necessary for an efficient entrepreneurial discovery process and the preparation or updating of smart specialisation strategies. The framework conditions will also have to be inclusive to allow actors from all territories to benefit from the transition process. Actions have to take into consideration the specific territorial challenges and disparities. By doing so, these actors are expected to bring substantial contribution to the general effort of closing the innovation gap and fostering the economic development across the Danube Region.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
1	RSO1.4	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	33
1	RSO1.4	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	132
1	RSO1.4	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	33
1	RSO1.4	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	44

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	RSO1.4	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	33.00	Monitoring system	
1	RSO1.4	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	33.00	Monitoring system	
1	RSO1.4	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	132.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative.

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies.

Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others both public and private actors such as enterprises, (future) entrepreneurs, cluster organisations, public authorities, intermediaries, education and training organisations, private and public research institutions, regional development agencies, chambers of commerce, technology transfer institutions, NGOs, innovation agencies, business incubators.

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

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

Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the DRP supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. In practice the programme will facilitate the cooperation between advanced and lagging behind regions in order to overcome the deficiencies in skills development (e.g. periphery regions, shrinking territories etc.).

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO1.4	Interreg Funds	027. Innovation processes in SMEs (process, organisational, marketing, co-creation, user and demand driven innovation)	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.4	Interreg Funds	023. Skills development for smart specialisation, industrial transition, entrepreneurship and adaptability of enterprises to change	7,498,102.19
1	RSO1.4	Interreg Funds	013. Digitising SMEs (including e-Commerce, e-Business and networked business processes, digital innovation hubs, living labs, web entrepreneurs and ICT start-ups, B2B)	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.4	Interreg Funds	016. Government ICT solutions, e-services, applications	1,874,525.55
1	RSO1.4	Interreg Funds	018. IT services and applications for digital skills and digital inclusion	2,811,788.33
1	RSO1.4	Interreg Funds	021. SME business development and internationalisation, including productive investments	2,811,788.33

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO1.4	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	18,745,255.50

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	RSO1.4	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	18,745,255.50

## 2.1. Priority: 2 - Priority 2 - A greener, low- carbon Danube Region

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

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.2. Promoting renewable energy in accordance with Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001[1], including the sustainability criteria set out therein

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

Support greening the energy and transport sectors in the Danube Region by enhancing the integration of renewable energy sources

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

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

The DR still heavily relies on fossil fuels in relation to both production and consumption. Despite significant favourable changes in many related states, the energy sector is very far from being a low-carbon economic field. In line with European Green Deal, a shift to renewables in all states is necessary since the share of fossil fuels in production is generally between 80 and 65%. The need for shift to renewables is also underlined by the inefficient technology and infrastructure related to the thermal power plant network, which has not been reconstructed, thus no major positive changes have taken place in recent years. The majority of economies still heavily relies on uncertain fuels from Russia (and by track Ukraine). This brings up the question of lack of energy security. This exposure to non-renewable sources results in energy dependency of the vast majority of the Danube Region to energy sources of external markets. Security of supply is not safeguarded, for which regional renewables available in the macro-region could contribute for in transnational cooperation. In spite of having a large variety of renewable energy sources across the macro-region with a few similar and complementary endowments from region to region, the utilisation level of renewables is still low. Apart for some countries, the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption is low in the Danube Region, and has never reached 50% in any country. The production and consumption of renewables have similarities across the macro-region given that biofuels and hydropower are having significant roles, and solar energy, wind, geothermal energy have changing utilisation levels. Another reason for a greener energy sector is the high and steadily increasing level of energy consumption paired with a low level of diversification in energy sources. .

Recovery and Resilience Facility as well as the EUSDR with PA1a- Water Mobility, PA1b-Rail-Road-Air Mobility and PA2-Sustainable Energy, just like the given SO support green transition and environmental sustainability. There is the goal to commit to green priorities, environmental objectives in relation to flagship areas of power up (generation and use of renewable sources) and renovate (energy efficiency of buildings) as well as innovative approaches for sustainable transport, such as alternative fuels with respective propulsion systems and related technology in accordance to the rules stated under the Taxonomy Delegated Act (including taking into account the DNSH principle also at the project submission stage), **the NEC and RED II Directives**. Non-combustible RES, biogas and bioLPG create benefits for air quality and contribute to the zero pollution ambition of the European Green Deal. Therefore, the support for harmonised actions and transnational cooperation is required in order to decarbonise the energy and the related transport and building sector, especially considering the heating and cooling systems of buildings' heating and cooling systems. The SO focus is fully in line with the Territorial Agenda 2030 also which highlights the need for sustainable and resilient solutions such as renewable energy, greener, decarbonised economic activities. Also, the still relatively high GHG and air pollutants emissions by the transport sector calls for increasing the utilisation of renewables. Introduction of alternative fuels and new technologies in transportation could be a field of joint measures and policies. High GHG and air pollutants emission is not caused only by transport, but

also by the heating and cooling sector (e.g. burning of fossil fuels, especially coal), which is a significant factor in creating a greener energy mix. The sector is still characterized by low utilisation of RES, thus the sector requires a profound shift to a more environmentally friendly energy production and consumption **to reduce both GHG and air pollutants' emission and to improve air quality**. Submitted projects should comply with the EU Directives on air quality and on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants, as well as taking into account the DNSH principle. This is in line with Territorial Agenda 2030 according to which renewable energy should be seen as a sustainable and resilient solution to support to reach a healthy and green Europe thus increasing energy efficiency and diversifying energy production are important measures to take. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle.

The programme main goal is to contribute to the reduction of region's dependency on imported fossil fuels by facilitating a better integration of renewable energy sources and consequently greening the energy and transport sectors.

Supported projects shall take into consideration the fact that Danube Region Programme is not financing infrastructure type of projects, nevertheless preparation of infrastructure projects can be financed by the programme, including environmental studies necessary for the implementation of the infrastructure.

*Focus 1:* Increasing the share of renewable energy in the Danube region

*Focus 2:* Decreasing carbon intensity in the power and transport sectors

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Strategy making and policy support in reaching low-carbon energy production and supporting the decrease of energy dependency in countries and regions most dependent on fossil fuels and resources from external (non-macro-regional) energy markets;
- Capacity building for sustainable energy planning especially in regions with high share of non-RES energy production or consumption;
- Support for harmonized, cost effective actions and transnational cooperation in the buildings' heating and cooling sector (e.g. decreasing carbon intensity in heating, RES integration in building sector combining it with storage solutions) with special attention to countries and regions where heating and cooling sector has outstanding share in energy consumption;
- Reduction of GHG and air pollutants emissions in the transport sector: introduction of alternative fuels and new technologies (e.g. electric vehicles) in transportation and innovative mobility solutions, support shift to more environmentally friendly means of transportation, especially in public transport and freight transport on waterways, rails and roads, coordination between energy providers in relation to infrastructure elements of Danube Region relevance;
- Promoting the production and use of advanced biofuels, notably the second (produced from non-food crops, such as cellulosic biofuels and waste biomass) and third generation biofuels (algal biomass);
- Pilot testing of solutions for the production of decentralized renewable energy, and supporting the empowerment of renewables self-consumers and communities, especially in rural areas;
- Joint planning of solutions for the utilisation of RES with the facilitation of knowledge exchange between regions of the lowest and the highest share of RES in the energy mix;
- Development of incentive schemes to encourage the renewable energy production based on the Danube Region available resources and to strengthen the sustainable usage of RES and energy storage solution.

Joint strategies, solutions developed, capacity building actions developed by transnational projects will lay the ground for increasing RES share in the Danube region as well as raise awareness on environmental friendly solution in transport as well as building heating and cooling sector, contributing also to the actions and targets of EUSDR PA2.

**Expected results:**

Enhanced capacities of the relevant stakeholders to plan and develop innovative solutions for advancing renewable energy and support greening of energy and transport sectors. Support the development of innovative solutions, strategies and action plans towards a diversification of energy source including joint testing of their viability (leading to decrease the DR's dependency on fossil fuels and on imports). Transferable pilot activities shall develop good practice examples to boost the share of RES in energy production and in transport on the long run.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
2	RSO2.2	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	26
2	RSO2.2	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	104
2	RSO2.2	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	35
2	RSO2.2	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	26

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	RSO2.2	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	104.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative
2	RSO2.2	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	26.00	Monitoring system	
2	RSO2.2	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	26.00	Monitoring system	

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies.

Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and related entities, regional development agencies, energy suppliers, energy management institutions and enterprises, regional associations, regional innovation agencies, NGOs, financing institutions, education and training centres as well as universities and research institutes.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. The actions under this specific objective address the challenges and opportunities of the whole Danube region. Different actions are focused to the needs of specific areas: urban and rural territories, areas with different local sources for production of renewable energy. Applying solutions for renewable energy production in different territories requires adaption in the approach and involvement of specific target groups.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	049. Renewable energy: biomass	1,738,967.71
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	041. Energy efficiency renovation of existing housing stock, demonstration projects and supporting measures	1,304,225.79
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	046. Support to entities that provide services contributing to the low carbon economy and to resilience to climate change, including awareness-raising measures	2,608,451.57
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	047. Renewable energy: wind	1,738,967.71
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	048. Renewable energy: solar	1,738,967.71
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	052. Other renewable energy (including geothermal energy)	2,608,451.57
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	042. Energy efficiency renovation of existing housing stock, demonstration projects and supporting measures compliant with energy efficiency criteria	869,483.87
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	050. Renewable energy: biomass with high greenhouse gas savings	1,738,967.71
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	044. Energy efficiency renovation or energy efficiency measures regarding public infrastructure, demonstration projects and supporting measures	1,304,225.79
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	045. Energy efficiency renovation or energy efficiency measures regarding public infrastructure, demonstration projects and supporting measures compliant with energy efficiency criteria	1,738,967.71

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	17,389,677.14

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.2	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	17,389,677.14

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.4. Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention, resilience taking into account eco-system based approaches

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

Promoting climate change adaptation capacities in the Danube Region and disaster management on transnational level in relation to environmental risks (taking into account ecosystem-based approaches)

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

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

The Danube Region is forecasted to be exposed to climate change greatly by increasing annual mean temperatures, the wet regions becoming wetter, the dry regions drier in general, as well as increase in the intensity and frequency of heat waves, dry periods, and of heavy rainfalls on local, regional level. The frequency and severity of environmental disasters like floods, droughts, or forest fires are predicted to increase in the next decades. As the impacts of the changing climate and of the more frequent and extreme related disasters affect the ecosystem, economic sectors and human life in the Danube Region, climate change adaptation in general shall be a horizontal issue to be taken into consideration in each Priority of the Danube Region Programme, while the limited resources of PO2 / SO2.2 (iv) is to be focused on harmonised, joint capacities in forecasting and vulnerability assessment to support policy making and awareness; transboundary disaster management, emergency response in relation to floods, droughts, forest fires and accidental pollution along main transnational river(-basin)s of the region. Water scarcity aspect of CC adaptation, low water periods affecting the balanced use and the quality of water, avoiding overexploitation is to be addressed in SO2.3 (v), while biodiversity related CC adaptation, especially in relation to their effects on habitats, protected areas and forestry are to be addressed in SO2.4 (vii). Flood risk, droughts and the related disasters are major challenges across the Danube Region. The main transboundary river basins, the Tisa in particular, but the Danube, the Mura-Drava, and the Sava River Basins as well are flood prone areas that emphasise the necessity of transnational cooperation in joint, integrated flood risk management and preparedness for disasters, including application of nature-based solutions (exploring the potentials of floodplain restoration measures can fit SO 2.2, if specifically focusing on flood management). Actions to be supported by the programme can have relevant contribution to the implementation of the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan (DFRMP), developed and adopted by the member countries of the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), a policy platform coordinating water related issues, including floods, of the Danube River Basin countries, being great value for the Danube Region. The potential impact and damage that accidental pollutions can cause along these major transboundary rivers across countries make also necessary of coordinated, harmonised approaches of emergency response. Flood and accidental pollution management actions supported in the frame of SO 2.2 (iv) shall focus on the main transboundary river(-basin)s of the DRB, following a territorially integrated, cross-sectoral approach. Climate change related environmental risks and disasters like droughts, forest fires or heat waves are becoming more frequent issues in many different parts of the Danube Region. Although these phenomena don't have transnational impacts, it is important to harmonise and standardise the procedures of response authorities and organisations at transnational scale for a more effective preparedness and response in case of emergency situations. Socio-economic impacts of Climate Change can also be tackled under this SO by improving the preparedness and adaptation capacities of the society, economy and the environment.

Supported projects shall take into consideration the existing mechanisms (e.g. EU Civil Protection Mechanism; or Accident Emergency Warning System of ICPDR, etc.), solutions in the targeted thematic fields in order to gain synergies and avoid duplication of the efforts, as well as that no major infrastructures

can be financed by the DRP. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle

*Focus 1:* Supporting harmonised, joint capacities and data availability in Danube Region scale climate change forecasting and vulnerability assessment to support policy making and awareness raising

*Focus 2:* Supporting harmonised, coordinated, joint disaster prevention, preparedness and response activities on environmental risks, on floods, droughts, or accidental pollution of rivers on transnational river(-basin) scale and climate-change related other disasters (e.g. wildfires, heat waves)

*Focus 3:* Strengthen the preparedness and adaptive capacity of the society (including also disaster management organisations, volunteer rescue teams), economy and nature to cope with impacts of climate change and establish climate services to foster the resilience

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Harmonised, joint solutions and measures for climate change modelling, forecasting and vulnerability assessment on Danube Region / River Basin scale ensuring their application at policy and, or operational level;
- Integration of new research results into climate change adaptation practice for different types of territories in targeted thematic fields (e.g. floods, droughts) and improving skills and competences for policy makers and stakeholders;
- Coordinated, harmonised efforts on transnational river(basin) scale to prevent flood risks, or drought, with a preferred option of nature-based solutions;
- Harmonised, joint planning, monitoring and alert systems, accident hot-spot inventories on industrial, mining and contaminated sites, improving operational cooperation, interoperability, institutional and technical capacities of emergency response authorities and non-governmental organisations to combat environmental risks, such as flood, drought or accidental pollution of transboundary river(-basin)s, or wildfires and climate-change related other disasters;
- Developing and implementing regional level climate change, environmental risks related disaster preparedness activities and establish standardised minimum requirements for disaster responders to achieve better and more effective transnational disaster response in the region.

The implementation of transnational cooperation projects, which focus on the thematic fields and carry out such actions that are defined within this SO, will ensure that climate change adaptation, disaster risk prevention and resilience is well promoted within the Danube Region and at the same time will also contribute to the EUSDR, especially to the actions and targets of PA5.

### **Expected results:**

Transnational cooperation actions will result that the society, economy and nature of the Danube Region is better prepared for and more resilient to the potential impacts of climate change and the related environmental risks (like floods, droughts, wildfires, heat waves or accidental pollution of rivers) through the improved, harmonised human and technical capacities, data availability, strategic and operational cooperation and broader application of pilot tested, innovative solutions in the field of climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster management.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
2	RSO2.4	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	120
2	RSO2.4	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	40
2	RSO2.4	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	30
2	RSO2.4	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	30

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	RSO2.4	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	30.00	Monitoring system	
2	RSO2.4	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	120.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative
2	RSO2.4	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	30.00	Monitoring system	

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies.

Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others of public sector including local, regional and national authorities, policy makers, research institutions in the field of water-flood management, hydro-meteorological services, disaster management, regional development agencies, associations, special interest groups, professional and volunteer civil protection and rescue organisations, NGOs, education and training organisations, financing institutions and the private sector.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. The actions under this specific objective address the challenges and opportunities of the whole Danube region and encourage approaches at the macro-regional scale. Territories that are most vulnerable and affected by climate change impacts should however be in the focus in order to benefit most from exchanging with and learning from other regions with similar pressures.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.4	Interreg Funds	058. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: floods and landslides (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	10,024,271.79
2	RSO2.4	Interreg Funds	059. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: fires (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	2,004,854.36
2	RSO2.4	Interreg Funds	060. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: others, e.g. storms and drought (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	7,016,990.25
2	RSO2.4	Interreg Funds	061. Risk prevention and management of non-climate related natural risks (for example earthquakes) and risks linked to human activities (for example technological accidents), including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches	1,002,427.18

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.4	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	20,048,543.58

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.4	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	20,048,543.58

### 2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.5. Promoting access to water and sustainable water management

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

Sustainable, integrated, transnational water and sediment management in the Danube River Basin ensuring good quality and quantity of waters and sediment balance

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

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

One of the basic features of the Danube Region that it covers almost the entire water system of the Danube River Basin (DRB). Beyond the Danube River there are shared water bodies and water catchment areas of transnational importance, like the Tisa (TRB), Sava (SRB), Mura-Drava River Sub-basins. Pressures affecting the water quantity quality and sediment balance of these transboundary river(basin)s, surface and underground water bodies like contamination and water pollution or increasing water use, decreasing ground water levels, shrinking supplies, increasing periods of low water in transnational river systems can have serious impacts beyond country borders that make necessary the cooperation of key actors from upstream and downstream countries. It is a great advantage of the region that the policy framework for transboundary cooperation in the field of water management exists for many years and facilitated on the DRB level by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR), on the SRB by the International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC), or on the TRB by the Tisza Group of ICPDR. These platforms elaborated and regularly update the respective transnational river basin management plans (RBMP), identifying the Significant Water Management Issues and the necessary measures on transnational level. Actions to be supported by the programme can have relevant contributions to the implementation of the DRBMP and of the other sub-basin RBMPs. Despite the improvements achieved in previous years by the coordinated efforts of these countries, for good chemical and ecological status of the transnational water bodies of DRB, further cooperation is needed to tackle pollution (organic, nutrient, hazardous substances, pharmaceuticals, plastics) affecting quality of water in transboundary river systems and groundwater bodies. Emergency response to accidental pollution of these river systems are however to be addressed in connection to SO2.2 (iv). Hydromorphological alterations, including interruptions of river continuity and sediment balance alterations, may impact the status of transboundary surface and ground water systems. Support can be made for integrated, transnational river(-basin) scale efforts for harmonising management practices between water management, agriculture and forestry, environment, navigation, hydropower and flood protection to improve the quality and quantity of water and sediment in relevant river systems. Exploring the potentials of floodplain restoration can fit SO 2.3 (v) if its focus is on improving water quality, or reactivating a more natural sediment transport (if the focus is on flood protection, then projects shall address SO 2.2 (iv) and reconnection of flood plains and wetlands in relation to ecological corridors and biodiversity shall be addressed in the context of SO2.4 (vii)). Due to climate change the periods of low water in river systems are increasing in the DRB, affecting the quantity and quality of its waters. Transnational coordination in the field of water supply management in the frames of a river basin management system, including basin-wide importance of groundwater bodies, is required. Integrated, transnational approaches are needed also to address low water periods along the main rivers of the DRB, affecting sediment transport, navigation, hydropower operation, ecology, as well as the quality of these waters. Water management actions supported in the frame of SO2.3 (v) shall focus on the main transboundary river(-basin)s of the DRB, following a territorially integrated, cross-sectoral approach and shall take into consideration the potential negative effects of climate change, as well as that the DRP is not financing investments of major infrastructures. Actions should seek synergies with European and national instruments, in particular related to the EU Green Deal, taking into account results from programmes like LIFE, Horizon Europe, or its specific initiative the Danube River Basin lighthouse. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant

harm” principle.

*Focus 1:* Strengthening capacities for prevention and mitigation of water pollution or for restoration of good quality of transnational water bodies

*Focus 2:* Harmonising management practices between water management, agriculture, environment, navigation, hydropower and flood protection to improve the quality and quantity of water and sediment in transnational river systems, taking into consideration the potential impacts of climate change.

*Focus 3:* Transnational coordination of water supply management, especially in relation to basin-wide importance of groundwater bodies.

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Ensuring harmonised data availability by more effective monitoring and modelling systems for improving transnational water management measures ;
- Strengthening institutional, management and technical capacity to prevent and mitigate water pollution or to restore good quality of water with special regard to hazardous and emerging substances pollution, agriculture and waste water management, taking also into account the possible impacts of climate change on the quality of water;
- Improving sediment balance and related morphodynamics, or exploring the potentials of reconnection of adjacent floodplains / wetlands in order to improve water quality, in transnational water bodies;
- Developing harmonised, joint monitoring and modelling system(s) in order to better understand the transboundary groundwater systems of Danube River Basin;
- Defining joint strategies and harmonised measures, elaborating and adopting innovative solutions (e.g. water reuse best practices) in relation to water exploitation and protection ensuring balanced use of water, taking also into account the impacts of climate change for future water demand;
- Ensuring harmonised data availability, adaptation of integrated strategies, plans and solutions in connection to climate change induced increase of low water periods on the main transnational rivers of DRB, affecting sediment transport, navigation, hydropower management and the ecosystem.

The strengthened institutional capacities, harmonised monitoring tools, integrated solutions on transnational level with the involvement of key actors and sectors for reducing water pollution, improving quality, quantity and balanced use of water, ensuring sediment balance in transnational river systems, addressing also the related challenges of climate change will strongly contribute to the objective of sustainable water management within the Danube River Basin and the EU, to the objectives of EUSDR, especially to the actions and targets of PA4.

#### **Expected results:**

Through the transnational cooperation actions the key stakeholders will gain improved capacities, integrated strategies and harmonised, joint solutions, which will enable them to better prevent and mitigate pollution of transnational water bodies. Transnational actions will improve cross-sector management practices contributing to improvement of the quality and balanced use of water, as well as the sediment balance in transnational river systems. Harmonized approaches and jointly tested solutions will improve capacities, data availability and allow better preparedness to adapt to the changing climate affecting transnational rivers of the Danube River Basin.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
2	RSO2.5	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	23
2	RSO2.5	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	92
2	RSO2.5	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	31
2	RSO2.5	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	23

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	RSO2.5	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	92.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative
2	RSO2.5	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	23.00	Monitoring system	
2	RSO2.5	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	23.00	Monitoring system	

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies. Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for water management, or environmental issues, hydro-meteorological services, infrastructure and (public) service providers (e.g. for water supply, waste water treatment, hydro power plants), interest groups including NGOs (e.g. international organisation, environmental organisations, farmer associations, voluntary association, etc.), research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, higher education, education/training centre and school.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. The actions under this specific objective address the needs and challenges of the entire Danube river basing (including shared bodies and water catchment areas of transnational importance).

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.5	Interreg Funds	064. Water management and water resource conservation (including river basin management, specific climate change adaptation measures, reuse, leakage reduction)	15,262,584.99

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.5	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	15,262,584.99

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.5	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	15,262,584.99

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO2.7. Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

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

Protecting and preserving the biodiversity in ecological corridors and eco-regions of transnational relevance in the Danube Region

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

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

The Danube Region is a colorful mosaic of different biogeographical regions resulting in high biodiversity, the Danube River and its tributaries being the veins of the region with its riverine and wetland habitats (e.g. the Danube and its Delta, the Mura-Drava-Danube TBR) while mountainous landscapes (e.g. Carpathians, Dinaric Alps, Czech Forest-Bavarian Forest) framing the territory. The major rivers and mountain ranges are also important transnational ecological corridors providing connectivity between key habitats. This richness of the region is also reflected by the high number of protected areas. However this rich biodiversity is endangered by many factors, human interventions, spreading of invasive alien species and the climate change impacting the conditions of ecosystems, which need solutions often on a broader territorial level in which transnational cooperation can be essential. One of the main challenges is related to the fragmentation of transnational habitats and ecosystems, which calls for supporting the improvement of ecological connectivity, tackling fragmentation between habitats, nature protection areas along transnationally relevant ecological corridors. This can include exploration of the potentials of restoration and reconnection of floodplains, wetlands and their adjacent areas as well as forest ecosystems for improving ecological connectivity and enhancing biodiversity, (floodplain restoration initiatives focusing on flood protection shall address SO 2.2, while those focusing on water quality issues fit SO 2.3). Despite of existing cooperation frameworks of ecological regions and protected areas (DANUBEPARKS, Carpathian Network of Protected Areas, Mura-Drava-Danube Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, European Green Belt Initiative) weak management capacities and skills for ecological regions of transnational relevance (e.g. Carpathian Mountains, Pannonian landscapes, transnational river habitats, European Green Belt) raises the issue of development of transnational management schemes, establishing and strengthening cooperation frameworks in relation to ecological regions and protected areas in an integrated territorial approach involving other key sectors (e.g. transport, agriculture, forestry, navigation, water management, spatial planning, tourism, fishery). Joint conservation and preservation techniques and planning schemes are needed, including protecting the quality of soils to enhance biodiversity of the targeted eco-regions. Institutionalised management network(s) of transboundary ecological regions would create real transnational impact. The ecological balance of ecosystems in the Region, the protected areas are endangered also by invasive alien species. This calls for joint solutions in prevention and control of IAS and management of their priority pathways within targeted ecological regions of transnational relevance. Joint and harmonised measures for preserving and restoring the dynamics of key habitats of umbrella species of the transnational ecological regions are also very important as such measures can contribute to the protection of many other species as well within that territory. As climate change is more and more affecting the biodiversity, efforts shall be made to address such risks by coordinated and harmonised measures within transnationally relevant ecological regions and plan activities that can ensure stronger resilience and adaptation to the changing conditions. Projects in general are expected to address transnationally relevant geographic areas, distinct biogeographic regions, ecological corridors, ecoregions and depending on the thematic focus, they shall strive for an integrated territorial approach involving other key sectors beyond environmental and nature protection relevant in the specific context and area, taking also into consideration that major infrastructural investments cannot be financed from DRP. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle.

*Focus 1:* Transnational cooperation for the improvement of ecological connectivity between habitats, nature protection areas along transnationally relevant ecological corridors of the Danube Region and for transnational conservation and restoration measures for endangered umbrella species as well.

*Focus 2:* Creation and strengthening of networks of cooperation in relation to the ecological regions and among protected areas

*Focus 3:* Coordinated and harmonised measures within transnationally relevant ecological regions ensuring resilience and adaptation to climate change to reduce its impacts on biodiversity

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Harmonised, joint efforts to improve, restore, manage and monitor ecological connectivity along transnationally relevant ecological corridors, including examination of the potentials of green and blue infrastructure developments and solutions for effective defragmentation;
- Actions in revitalisation and rehabilitation of water habitats along major transnational river (systems), exploring the potentials of restoration and reconnection of floodplains, wetlands and their adjacent areas;
- Establishing (institutionalised) management and cooperation network(s) of ‘Danubian’ transboundary ecological regions, harmonised management strategies and solutions, conservation and preservation techniques, toolkits ensuring also sustainable use of natural resources;
- Increasing the resilience of habitats and ecosystems of transboundary ecological regions and their ability to adapt to climate change impacts by development of eco-friendly land use systems, landscape management and soil protection and restoration measures;
- Coordinated, joint solutions in prevention and control of IAS and management of their priority pathways.
- Joint and harmonised development and implementation of transnational monitoring, conservation and restoration and management plans for endangered umbrella species (e.g. sturgeons, large carnivores) of the Danube Region.

The transnational activities will contribute to the improvement of ecological connectivity along transnational ecological corridors, to the strengthening of cooperation networks in ecological regions, the enhancement of conditions for umbrella species, combating IAS and reducing impacts of climate change on biodiversity that together will enhance protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity, and green infrastructure in the Danube Region and the EU, contributing at the same time to the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 (e.g. at least 30% of the land ... should be protected in the EU; restoring freshwater ecosystems) and of EUSDR, especially to the actions and targets of PA6.

### **Expected results:**

Transnational cooperation actions will improve policy development and increase knowledge and capacities leading to more effective protection and preservation of the nature and biodiversity in ecological corridors and eco-regions of transnational relevance in the Danube Region. Transnational actions will contribute to new and better coordinated cooperation networks and improved governance of protected areas and ecological regions. Pilot tested, innovative solutions will provide better preparedness ensuring resilience and adaptation to climate change to reduce its impacts on biodiversity of the Region.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
2	RSO2.7	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	33
2	RSO2.7	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	25
2	RSO2.7	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	98
2	RSO2.7	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	25

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	RSO2.7	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	25.00	Monitoring system	
2	RSO2.7	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	98.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative
2	RSO2.7	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	25.00	Monitoring system	

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies. Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for environmental and nature protection issues, agriculture (farming, forestry, fishery), spatial planners, infrastructure and (public) service providers (e.g. water management, transport, hydropower), interest groups including NGOs (e.g. international organisation, environmental organisations, voluntary association, etc.), research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, higher education, education/training centre and school.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. The actions under this specific objective address the transnational ecological corridors of the Danube region as well as ecological regions.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.7	Interreg Funds	078. Protection, restoration and sustainable use of Natura 2000 sites	2,454,099.19
2	RSO2.7	Interreg Funds	079. Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	9,816,396.78
2	RSO2.7	Interreg Funds	060. Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: others, e.g. storms and drought (including awareness raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem based approaches)	4,090,165.32

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.7	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	16,360,661.29

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	RSO2.7	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	16,360,661.29

## 2.1. Priority: 3 - A more social Danube Region

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

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.1. Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy

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

Accessible, inclusive and effective labour markets

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

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

The Danube Region (DR) is affected by the interconnected challenges of persistent long-term unemployment, profound income inequalities, intensifying westward labour migration and a weak social economy. Employment is a field in which increasing socio-spatial disparities in the DR can be found causing severe weakening of cohesion.

Prior to the pandemic there had been significant improvements in overall national employment rates in parts of the DR, particularly in large urban conurbations. However, there exist patterns of entrenched long term unemployment throughout the DR which have not changed significantly. It can be observed that these patterns are mostly evident amongst vulnerable groups, which include ethnic minorities (e.g. Roma), the aged and those persons with disabilities. It is also generally observed that the vulnerability is enhanced in rural areas and amongst those with relatively low levels of education; a disadvantage which begins at a young age. This is compounded in certain regions which have historically relied on employment in mono functional industrial and agricultural production facilities which over time have been subject to closure, downsizing or re-purposing. In every country of the DR women's employment rate is less than men which needs to be understood to improve integration and develop potential opportunities.

The persisting north-west versus south-east divide in spatial inequalities on the labour markets is resulting in depopulation, ageing, unfavorable economic structures, low population retention, and transboundary peripheries. The DR is a part of Europe where large shares of the population are currently living abroad partly because of differences in employment conditions. Since high inequalities are going to be present in the medium/long run, it is of major importance to tackle the challenges deriving from westward migration flows. The challenge is exacerbated in rural areas with migration internally to the larger conurbations.

It can be observed that the social economy is relatively weak in significant parts of the region and the development of the social economy alongside traditional employment support measures can potentially provide innovative approaches in tackling the long term unemployment challenge. In addition, capacity building across the region towards producing and managing information flows on employment, vulnerability and migration trends can help guide understanding towards the development of effective policy, planning and initiatives.

It is important that measures towards accessible, inclusive and effective labour markets take a holistic approach in considering both the demand side needs of employers and the supply side needs of labour. The current context and potential impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on employment should also be an important consideration.

*Focus 1:* The integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market, with special attention on regions that display high proportions of disadvantaged.

*Focus 2:* Retaining skilled labour and developing a more sustainable migration of educated people.

*Focus 3:* Capacity building for employment support bodies (information and data systems; coordination; training e.g. in social economy).

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Joint coordination of policies and planning aimed at integrating disadvantaged groups (elderly people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, rural people, women, youth etc.) to support accessible and inclusive employment in regions that display high proportions of disadvantaged populace;
- Support for designing innovative policies and planning to retain skilled labour and a more sustainable migration of educated people (e.g. by introducing transnational study and RDI programmes, promoting innovative employment schemes suitable for the needs of the tertiary educated living in rural regions or regions significantly affected by this type of migration);
- Creation of an information system and support for the provision of information and data about life events connected to periodic and permanent migration of workforce, caused by labour market inequalities; between the eastern and the western parts of the macro region;
- Coordinated policies and strategies to tackle active ageing (e.g. by social entrepreneurship) in regions and cities of the macro region affected by a high level of ageing;
- Developing cooperation and innovative planning between bodies responsible for labour market integration and the private sector towards enhancing the inclusion of the disabled in the labour market;
- Build-up of a “Danube observatory system” about labour migration and its impacts on cohesion; involving public bodies responsible for monitoring & evaluation, academia and civil society;
- Developing models to explore and demonstrate the effectiveness of remote working towards developing employment inclusiveness and meeting regional social and economic goals;
- Restructuring and diversification of employment by the implementation of territorially integrated action plans for employment with a special focus on enhancing the spreading of innovative structures targeting mono-functional (e.g. agricultural, industrial) regions. This could include green jobs development.

These type of activities contribute to this SO through developing more effective employment support structures in the Danube Region, promoting inclusion of the disadvantaged, working to enhance the social economy and providing the understanding of and direction towards a more balanced socio economic development. The approach 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights are the beacon guiding us towards a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunity. There is a strong contribution to PA9 of the EUSDR with the approach to tackling the challenge of unemployment but also PA10 with the capacity building direction. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle.

**Expected results:**

Transnational cooperation actions will lead to the developed capacity of regions to facilitate the integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market, to understand and promote sustainable migration in the Danube Region and to be proactive and innovative as part of region wide information flows, joint knowledge development and shared innovative practice. Regional imbalance will be reduced and regions will be better prepared and more resilient to face changing labour market dynamics.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO4.1	RCO82	Participations in joint actions promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion	participations	0	200
3	RSO4.1	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	34
3	RSO4.1	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	26
3	RSO4.1	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	26
3	RSO4.1	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	103

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO4.1	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	26.00	Monitoring system	
3	RSO4.1	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	26.00	Monitoring system	
3	RSO4.1	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	103.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative
3	RSO4.1	RCR85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	participations	0.00	2021-2027	100.00	Monitoring system	

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies. Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities, social services providers, labour market organisations, non-governmental organisations, research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, higher education, education/training institutions.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. The actions under this specific objective address the challenges and opportunities of the whole Danube region and encourage approaches at the macro-regional scale. The different actions should address the needs of e.g. disadvantaged, remote regions.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.1	Interreg Funds	135. Measures to promote access to employment of long-term unemployed	2,308,626.18
3	RSO4.1	Interreg Funds	146. Support for adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change	1,539,084.12
3	RSO4.1	Interreg Funds	139. Measures to modernise and strengthen labour market institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and to ensure timely and tailor-made assistance	3,847,710.30
3	RSO4.1	Interreg Funds	147. Measures encouraging active and healthy ageing	1,539,084.12
3	RSO4.1	Interreg Funds	154. Measures to improve access of marginalised groups such as the Roma to education, employment and to promote their social inclusion	4,617,252.36
3	RSO4.1	Interreg Funds	138. Support for social economy and social enterprises	1,539,084.12

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.1	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	15,390,841.20

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.1	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	15,390,841.20

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.2. 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

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

Accessible and inclusive quality services in education, training and lifelong learning

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

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

The integration of an individual into the labour market, their socio-economic well being, ongoing development and value to their society and region is highly dependent on their education and skills, vocational education and training and lifelong learning. There are good education models within the Danube Region to facilitate this but at the same time there are many regions that lack effective structures and models to develop their human capital which contributes to regional imbalances and negative trends e.g. out migration. It is fundamental therefore that the provider systems are accessible and inclusive and tailored to the level and background of individuals whilst at the same time providing relevant and recognised training and qualifications for the Danube Region and beyond.

The ratio of early leavers from education is significant through most parts of the region, with the majority failing to meet the EU 2020 targets. A deteriorating tendency is observable especially in the eastern regions, which usually contain rural areas with a high share of disadvantaged population and with a weak integration of the children into the school system. Underrepresented minority groups and rural disadvantaged are also apparent in terms of those benefitting from a tertiary education.

The currently applied and running learning structures tend to be rather rigid, and the majority of the educational infrastructure and services lack flexibility (in terms of responsiveness to labour market needs), competence, orientation and openness (e.g. acknowledgement of informal education) and adequate governance structure. Non-harmonised demand and supply concerning vocational education and training and vocational schools cause frictions in the labour market that result in exclusion. The development of proven inclusive labour market vocational education and training structures can efficiently contribute to inclusion, cohesion and long-term unemployment reduction.

Though more difficult in rural areas organised vocational education and training has an established history in the region which can be built upon. However, supportive independent lifelong learning is below the EU average in all countries of the region but Austria and Slovenia.

*Focus 1:* Developing innovative educational models, programs, practical tools and materials for disadvantaged learners, including early school leavers

*Focus 2:* Maximising the use of existing knowledge and experience to develop best practices in inclusive education policy and advancing education and policy reform

*Focus 3:* Innovative approaches to encourage and improve inclusive vocational education and training and and life long learning

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

· Development of joint innovative educational models, programs, practical tools and materials to support accessible and inclusive education for disadvantaged learners. The expected approach to develop on from model regions within the Danube region and with mutual learning developed from pilot

regions;

- Developing best practices in education policy, gathering and disseminating knowledge and advancing education and policy reforms at the national and regional level across the Danube Region;
- Establishment or development of existing scientific and educational networks to combat brain drain, whereby educated and skilled individuals leave regions for better prospects. Networks should bring existing knowledge and research together and develop concrete outputs;
- Innovative digital and remote education with e-solutions to mitigate rural disadvantage, provide employment related training and combat brain drain;
- Knowledge exchange and the sharing of experience in elaborating and developing accessible and inclusive vocational education and training models and systems. This should lead to concrete outputs e.g. the development of work based training schemes which better support relevant skills development to match the needs of the labour market.

The above direction will contribute to the specific objective through using the strengths within the region to develop a more connected, balanced and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning provision for disadvantaged regions and individuals. The approach links closely to the PA9 and PA10 of the EUSDR with the inclusive education and training approach, the link to employment needs and the capacity building aspects. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle.

**Expected results:**

The transnational cooperation actions will result in capacity developed to improve regional human capital for the benefit of society, the economy and regional balance. Regions will complement their existing models of education with dedicated best practice and innovative models to address disadvantaged learners which will result in a more inclusive education system and an expanded and more attractive potential workforce. Participating organisations will provide regions with the opportunity, perhaps for the first time, to feel part of a wider network within the Danube Region dedicated to inclusive education and opportunity.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO4.2	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	26
3	RSO4.2	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	26
3	RSO4.2	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	34
3	RSO4.2	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	103
3	RSO4.2	RCO82	Participations in joint actions promoting gender equality, equal opportunities and social inclusion	participations	0	200

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO4.2	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	26.00	Monitoring system	
3	RSO4.2	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	103.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative
3	RSO4.2	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	26.00	Monitoring system	
3	RSO4.2	RCR85	Participations in joint actions across borders after project completion	participations	0.00	2021-2027	100.00	Monitoring system	

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies. Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities, social services providers, labour market organisations, non-governmental organisations, research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, higher education, education/training institutions.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. The actions under this specific objective address the challenges and opportunities of the whole Danube region and encourage approaches at the macro-regional scale.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.2	Interreg Funds	149. Support for primary to secondary education (excluding infrastructure)	3,078,168.24
3	RSO4.2	Interreg Funds	150. Support for tertiary education (excluding infrastructure)	1,539,084.12
3	RSO4.2	Interreg Funds	151. Support for adult education (excluding infrastructure)	4,617,252.36
3	RSO4.2	Interreg Funds	152. Measures to promote equal opportunities and active participation in society	1,539,084.12
3	RSO4.2	Interreg Funds	154. Measures to improve access of marginalised groups such as the Roma to education, employment and to promote their social inclusion	4,617,252.36

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.2	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	15,390,841.20

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.2	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	15,390,841.20

2.1.1. Specific objective: RSO4.6. Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

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

Socio-economic development through heritage, culture and tourism

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

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

The Danube Region is characterised by an outstanding cultural diversity that over the centuries has left a rich legacy of intangible and tangible heritage that is often not recognised for its potential towards economic development, social inclusion and social innovation. Generally, major cities have, to varying degrees, acknowledged and sought to use this value, whilst smaller communities in rural and remote areas have not, even though they have a great potential in valorising their diverse heritage towards increasing the well-being of their communities.

Many of the remote, rural areas and smaller settlements are confronted with a lack of in depth recognition of the heritage and cultural assets value potential that they have and miss inclusive strategic planning to guide and coordinate its valorisation. Furthermore, even where initiatives exist, their implementation is often hindered by the skepticism of the local communities.

Part of the problem lies in the historically limited access to cultural and heritage assets and initiatives, both in a geographical and a socially inclusive sense in the Danube region. Efforts should therefore be made to make these assets and initiatives available to all, even if this can be a challenging process for minorities and rural and remote areas. With experience across 14 countries, transnational cooperation can support this with jointly developed valorisation and touristic models and solutions in rural, remote areas and smaller cities. This based on the existing heritage and culture and underpinned from the strong involvement of all parts of the local community.

The consideration of heritage and culture, its valorisation and inclusive accessible development is multifaceted and necessitates the bringing together of partnerships of public and private actors along with social, cultural actors and local communities. Such partnerships can create strategic frameworks and planning towards sustainable valorisation of the heritage and culture, creating and sustaining in particular, community led tourism. Understanding the potential of existing assets will require the consideration of supportive infrastructure, and partnerships may consider how to maximise the use of existing supportive infrastructure but also to plan future investments which support accessibility for all. Social innovation is strongly encouraged, which can provide a more inclusive and effective approach in meeting the needs of local communities and provide sustainable impact.

Digitisation, digitalisation, artificial intelligence and the internet of things are spurring innovative approaches in all industries and tourism is no exception. Accessibility, valorization and community led culture and heritage based tourism can all be enhanced by these developments. Such approaches can also contribute towards initiatives such as Europe's Digital Decade and Europe's digitization targets for cultural heritage assets.

During the course of planning and implementation the principles of sustainable development and sustainable and responsible tourism are expected to be in focus. Approaches towards socio-economic development through heritage, culture and tourism initiatives should, as a standard, takefull account of their of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts.

*Focus 1:* Valorisation of local cultural and natural heritage for the development of sustainable tourism products and tourism services in order to increase

regional added value and employment

*Focus 2:* Improvement of accessibility of cultural and natural heritage for all, amongst others youth and vulnerable groups in order to promote social inclusion.

*Focus 3:* Promoting community led natural and cultural heritage management and associated nature based and cultural tourism in rural areas and small cities

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Improving the accessibility of tourism and culture infrastructure, products and services for vulnerable groups, such as minorities, people with disabilities, the elderly and youth in regions with low levels of accessibility and high levels of vulnerable groups. Innovative approaches involving digitization, digitalization, artificial intelligence and the internet of things are encouraged;
- Valorisation of joint natural and cultural heritage and cultural activities through the elaboration of new or improved thematic initiatives for example cultural, hiking, cycling or other thematic routes and initiatives across the macro-region with a special focus on rural or less visited areas;
- Capacity building and development of innovative models for community based tourism to better secure the engagement of host communities by involving them in the planning, management and implementation tourism development in their respective regions;
- Capacity building in social innovation to better support valorisation of joint cultural and natural heritage, in particular for tourism and their heritage management schemes (study, collection, preservation, digitalization, exhibition and re-interpretation of joint tangible and intangible elements);
- Promoting quality products, services and transnational infrastructure in the tourism and culture sector to support the social inclusion of disadvantaged people via new employment forms and job opportunities. This especially in relation to regions with a high share of ethnic minorities and areas with a large share of population at risk of poverty including the youth, elderly or disabled;

Promote sustainable and slow tourism concepts, planning methodologies, model regions, and management tools in the Danube Region, in regions of mass tourism as well as in regions having a weakly developed tourism sector, including those at risk due to climate change. Actions should promote and safeguard employability and employment possibilities to vulnerable groups of host communities, and capitalise on EUSDR projects in the interconnected areas of culture, nature and tourism. The above contributes to the specific objective with its socio-economic approach which develops inclusivity and economic opportunity in the frame of sustainable tourism which connects the local to the wider Danube Region. The approach also coheres with the EUSDR, particularly PA3 with the valorisation and sustainable tourism and also with the employment, skills and capacity building of PA9 and PA10 respectively. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle.

### **Expected results:**

The transnational cooperation actions will result in new and widened understandings of the value of local nature, cultural heritage and the local community and how this connects more widely in the Danube Region. Concepts, plans and models will result in accessible natural and cultural heritage and community involved valorisation of this through tourism. The existing touristic offer will be strengthened, widened and more sustainable and the offer will be expanded with new initiatives finding the understanding and space to develop. The foundation will be provided for social inclusion through new and expanded community involvement in planning and with capacity built to support employment opportunities including social enterprises and SMEs.



2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
3	RSO4.6	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	46
3	RSO4.6	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	137
3	RSO4.6	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	34
3	RSO4.6	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	34

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	RSO4.6	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	34.00	Monitoring system	
3	RSO4.6	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	34.00	Monitoring system	
3	RSO4.6	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	137.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies. Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities responsible for environmental, tourist and cultural issues, sectoral agencies, regional development agencies, social enterprises, employment organisations, tourist operators, tourist information centres (points), regional tourism boards/ destination management organisations and museums, research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, business support organisation (e.g. chamber of commerce, business innovations centres), higher education, education/training centre and school, NGOs, private enterprises including SME.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. The actions under this specific objective address the challenges and opportunities of the whole Danube region and encourage approaches at the macro-regional scale. The different actions should address the needs of e.g. remote, rural areas and smaller settlements.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	Interreg Funds	137. Support for self-employment and business start-ups	4,104,224.32
3	RSO4.6	Interreg Funds	134. Measures to improve access to employment	5,130,280.40
3	RSO4.6	Interreg Funds	154. Measures to improve access of marginalised groups such as the Roma to education, employment and to promote their social inclusion	5,130,280.40
3	RSO4.6	Interreg Funds	138. Support for social economy and social enterprises	4,104,224.32
3	RSO4.6	Interreg Funds	146. Support for adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change	2,052,112.16

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	20,521,121.60

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	RSO4.6	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	20,521,121.60

## 2.1. Priority: 4 - A better cooperation governance in the Danube Region

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

2.1.1. Specific objective: ISO6.4. Enhance institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies, as well as other territorial strategies (all strands)

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

Support for the governance of the EUSDR

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

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

Danube Programme support to the EUSDR shall contribute to ensuring continuity, stabilization and further evolvement of the EUSDR governance in view of successfully implementing the EUSDR Action Plan. A support scheme for EUSDR PAs shall strengthen the internal governance PAs and enable the effective functioning of PA Steering Groups under active involvement of non-EU member states. It shall, furthermore, pave the way for a more strategic and comprehensive approach with regard to horizontal coordination among PAs, other EUSDR key-stakeholders, other macro-regional strategies and relevant Managing Authorities of funding programmes (“embedding”).

There is a need for funding a support structure (Danube Strategy Point) in charge of facilitating and coordinating the activities of EUSDR bodies and main actors and for carrying out horizontal EUSDR-level tasks in relation to EUSDR evaluation, monitoring, capacity building for specific target groups and communication, including support to the organization of EUSDR Annual Fora.

A seed money facility (SMF) shall serve as tool to kick-start strategic projects and for initiating and preparing of large-scale initiatives. The set-up of a SMF shall ensure effective ownership through EUSDR PAs and shall be fully aligned to the EUSDR Action Plan.

All support measure shall consider horizontal challenges such as the better involvement of non-EU states into the EUSDR framework or bringing the EUSDR closer to civil society and citizens. At the same time the link between the political level and the EUSDR shall be strengthened through an intensified involvement of political key-actors, more targeted lobbying for and implementation of EUSDR topics at legislative levels. Finally, the programme support to the EUSDR shall consider major political frameworks such as the green deal pact, the Western Balkan Enlargement Process or the Territorial Agenda 2030 and shall ensure the adequate coordination between EUSDR actions and post pandemic programmes. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle.

Main objectives of the Danube Region Programme support to EUSDR governance

- Strengthening capacities and technical support to facilitate coordination, monitoring, evaluation and communication of the EUSDR in view of the successful implementation of the EUSDR action Plan.

- Strengthening the transnational coordination and cooperation within the EUSDR PAs thus facilitating the strategy implementation and enabling the active participation of all the EUSDR Partner States, with special attention to the non-Member States.

·Strengthening the capacity for the development of transnational strategic projects that contribute to the EUSDR Action Plan.

**Expected result:**

Improved effectiveness of well-functioning EUSDR governance structures and strengthened capacities of the EUSDR key stakeholders to implement and communicate the EUSDR.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
4	ISO6.4	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	4
4	ISO6.4	RCO118	Organisations cooperating for the multi-level governance of macroregional strategies	organisations	0	84
4	ISO6.4	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	4

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
4	ISO6.4	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	4.00	Monitoring system	
4	ISO6.4	RCR84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	organisations	0.00	2021-2027	84.00	Monitoring system	

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include EUSDR governing bodies, all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies. Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities, research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, business support organisation (e.g. chamber of commerce, business innovations centres), higher education, education/training centre and school, civil society organizations, expert bodies or networks (in fields such as urbanism) private enterprises including SME.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. Moreover the content of the programme is steaming from the territorial analysis and territorial strategy developed for the Danube Region.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.4	Interreg Funds	171. Enhancing cooperation with partners both within and outside the Member State	13,810,929.26

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.4	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	13,810,929.26

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.4	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	13,810,929.26

### 2.1.1. Specific objective: ISO6.6. Other actions to support better cooperation governance (all strands)

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

Increased institutional capacities for territorial and macro-regional governance

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

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

Comprising 14 countries - old and new Member States, candidate countries, a potential candidate and neighbourhood countries - the Danube Region is characterized by distinct administrative fragmentation and low level of institutional integration. Lagging behind legal harmonization and limited capacities of public bodies, especially on sub-national levels, are substantially hindering integrated territorial developments along shared functional ties.

Strengthening multi-level governance in the Danube Region is, therefore, much more than in other parts of Europe a precondition for enabling sectorial developments and territorial cohesion as such.

*Focus 1:* Transnational cooperation is needed to address major territorial governance-challenges like demographic change, severe urban-rural discrepancies or fostering the close-to-people character of regional policy. For achieving a high leverage effect a clear focus should be put on promoting truly integrated approaches under strong involvement of civic and local actors, fostering inter-institutional relations along functional areas and strengthening capacities of public bodies in selected fields. The integrative character shall be reflected not only by the integration of different administrative levels but also through connecting sectorial aspects like transport or accessibility to major territorial governance challenges. The improved provision of public services of general interest and digitalization are to be considered as horizontal elements. All measures shall substantially take into account, moreover, existing main territorial/spatial development frameworks such as the Territorial agenda 2030 or the New Leipzig Charter.

Examples of related types of possible actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Integrated governance models for addressing challenges arising from demographic change (e.g. aging, depopulation, brain drain);
- Integrated urban-rural governance models including specific territorial development strategies for rural/remote areas as well as accessibility aspects and transport bottlenecks;
- Support for more and stronger inter-institutional relations for the integrated development of transboundary functional areas;
- Capacity building considering especially a better involvement of local and regional public bodies as well as civic actors in transnational policy making, territorial development frameworks and governance models;
- Support for the monitoring and analysis of territorial processes affecting the cohesion and cooperation of the Danube Region to assist capacity building and institutional capacity.

The implementation of transnational projects in fields such as described above will contribute to this Specific Objective by strengthening capacities in relation to territorial challenges and functional areas where institutional cooperation across borders is low or insufficiently coordinated. Capacity building measures shall also target the digital transformation of public authorities (e.g. language technologies for improving citizens' access to public services). The

bottom-up involvement of local and civic actors will be actively promoted. This Specific Objective is offering direct contributions especially to actions and targets defined under the EUSDR Action Plan for PA10. The objectives of the programme take into account the “do no significant harm” principle.

**Expected results:**

Increased institutional capacities for intensified and better coordinated transboundary interaction along functional areas and main territorial challenges, leading to new or improved transnational multi-level governance schemes based on an intensified involvement of local actors, a more homogenous territorial development of the cooperation area and better access of citizens’ to improved public services.

2.1.1.1b. Definition of a single beneficiary or a limited list of beneficiaries and the granting procedure

Reference: point (c)(i) of Article 17(9)

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### 2.1.1.2. Indicators

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

Table 2 - Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Target (2029)
4	ISO6.6	RCO84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	pilot actions	0	55
4	ISO6.6	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	organisations	0	165
4	ISO6.6	RCO83	Strategies and action plans jointly developed	strategy/action plan	0	41
4	ISO6.6	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	solutions	0	41
4	ISO6.6	RCO120	Projects supporting cooperation across borders to develop urban-rural linkages	projects	0	5

Table 3 - Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
4	ISO6.6	RCR104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	solutions	0.00	2021-2027	41.00	Monitoring system	
4	ISO6.6	RCR79	Joint strategies and action plans taken up by organisations	joint strategy/action plan	0.00	2021-2027	41.00	Monitoring system	
4	ISO6.6	ISI	Organisations with increased institutional capacity due to their participation in cooperation activities across the borders	No. of organisations	0.00	2021-2027	165.00	Monitoring system	The indicator is semi-qualitative

### 2.1.1.3. Main target groups

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

Target groups of funded operations include all public and private institutions and stakeholders that will be involved or use/ benefit from the project outputs/ results. Target groups are according to their legal form local, regional and national public authorities/institutions, bodies governed by public law, EGTC, international organisations and private bodies. Target groups comprise according to their thematic scope among others local, regional and national public authorities and organisations established and managed by public authorities, research and development institutions, universities with research facilities, business support organisation (e.g. chamber of commerce, business innovations centres), higher education, education/training centre and school, civil society organizations, expert bodies or networks (in fields such as urbanism) private enterprises including SME.

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

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

The Danube Region Programme will not use specific instruments for integrated territorial development offered by the EU regulations such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). However, the programme supports an integrated territorial approach which is mainly understood as a comprehensive and coordinated approach to planning and governance and territorial coordination of policies in specific territories. The actions under this specific objective address the challenges and opportunities of the whole Danube region and encourage approaches at the macro-regional scale as well as the urban-rural cooperation level.

#### 2.1.1.5. Planned use of financial instruments

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

*The programme does not plan to use financial instruments.*

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

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

Table 4 - Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.6	Interreg Funds	171. Enhancing cooperation with partners both within and outside the Member State	27,452,677.74

Table 5 - Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.6	Interreg Funds	01. Grant	27,452,677.74

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

Priority	Specific objective	Fund	Code	Amount (EUR)
4	ISO6.6	Interreg Funds	33. Other approaches - No territorial targeting	27,452,677.74

### 3. Financing plan

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

#### 3.1. Financial appropriations by year

Table 7

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

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
Interreg Funds	0.00	38,097,187.00	37,018,409.00	37,600,945.00	38,229,557.00	31,655,886.00	32,445,873.00	215,047,857.00
Total	0.00	38,097,187.00	37,018,409.00	37,600,945.00	38,229,557.00	31,655,886.00	32,445,873.00	215,047,857.00

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

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

Table 8

Policy objective	Priority	Fund	Basis for calculation EU support (total eligible cost or public contribution)	EU contribution (a)=(a1)+(a2)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries
					without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)	for TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)			
1	1	Interreg Funds	Total	40,489,751.00	37,490,511.00	2,999,240.00	10,122,438.00	9,110,194.00	1,012,244.00	50,612,189.00	79.9999996048%	0.00
2	2	Interreg Funds	Total	74,586,383.00	69,061,466.00	5,524,917.00	18,646,596.00	16,781,936.00	1,864,660.00	93,232,979.00	79.9999997855%	0.00
4	3	Interreg Funds	Total	55,407,028.00	51,302,804.00	4,104,224.00	13,851,757.00	12,466,581.00	1,385,176.00	69,258,785.00	80.0000000000%	0.00
6	4	Interreg Funds	Total	44,564,695.00	41,263,607.00	3,301,088.00	11,141,174.00	10,027,057.00	1,114,117.00	55,705,869.00	79.9999996410%	0.00
	Total	Interreg Funds		215,047,857.00	199,118,388.00	15,929,469.00	53,761,965.00	48,385,768.00	5,376,197.00	268,809,822.00	79.9999997768%	0.00
	Grand total			215,047,857.00	199,118,388.00	15,929,469.00	53,761,965.00	48,385,768.00	5,376,197.00	268,809,822.00	79.9999997768%	0.00

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

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

The programming process of the Danube Region Programme has been underpinned with the broad involvement of public and civic society actors through the multi-level governance and bottom-up approach.

The programme introduced a number of platforms for effective communication with relevant partners and stakeholders throughout the entire programming process and in line with regulatory requirements laid down in Article 8 of the CPR.

Online consultations with the stakeholders played an important and decisive role in the programming process. The involvement and consultation of relevant national stakeholders was one of the key elements in the preparations of the DRP. The first round of consultations was conducted in two steps: a transnational consultation at programme level by the MA/ JS done through the programme website and addressed to the general public, as well as any institution that would have been interested to give a feedback on the programme and a separate one at national level addressed to the relevant national stakeholders identified by the Partner States. Before starting the stakeholders' consultations, the MA/ JS with the support of experts, developed a guideline document for the stakeholders consultations together with an on-line questionnaire. Due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic face to face consultations were not possible; therefore online consultations have been conducted. The transnational public consultation has been advertised on the programme website, social media and through the partner states in order to reach a high number of respondents. The responses have been analysed by the experts and the feedback was included in the programme document.

The national consultations, destined to the national stakeholders, were launched in May 2020. In accordance with it, each Partner State identified and selected the relevant territorial stakeholders in its country (regional, local, urban and rural authorities), including economic and social partners, relevant bodies representing civil society (environmental organisations, bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination, universities and research. Online questionnaire (prepared and managed by the external experts) was sent to those indicated stakeholders and their inputs were analysed by the external experts and introduced in the Territorial Strategy and the IP. The selection of the relevant stakeholders has been done in a transparent way, in line with the programme themes and the thematic competences of the institutions involved in the consultations.

In order to carry out this stakeholder survey first the delineation of the recipients took place. Recipients were grouped into two groups of relevant stakeholders. To ensure consistency with the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and find synergies between the transnational programme and the macro-regional strategy of the Danube area the EUSDR experts (Steering Group members and Priority Area Coordinators) were targeted as a starting point. Apart from them, the national level was also addressed to participate in the survey. The survey was sent to those whose contacts were given by the National Contact Points, i.e. to the national stakeholders in role of relevant national experts in their respective countries as an addition to the EUSDR level recipients.

The number of recipients reached more than 1400 on national level (number of respondents 229) and almost 430 (number of respondents 164) on EUSDR level, while the total number of addressees who received the survey questions exceeded 1800.

These valuable inputs served as a basis for the document Analysis of territorial relevance and stakeholders' consultation which provided some interim evidence for the programming process of DRP. The analysis, in its finalised form, is an integral part of the Territorial Strategy. Thanks to these efforts in involving the broad area of relevant national stakeholders, the programming actions managed to connect the two main factors (territoriality and stakeholder opinions), with special attention being paid to cases that are of vital importance from the side of both territoriality and stakeholders.

The second online stakeholder consultation (from the transnational perspective) was launched in the

period of 1st February till 19th February 2021. In view of the COVID-19 global crisis, the 2nd stakeholders consultations were conducted online, through the DRP website, based on a short questionnaire to be answered by the relevant stakeholders. Additionally the consultations addressed directly certain international organisations of the Danube Region (e.g. ICPDR, etc.) as well as the EUSDR PACs. The online survey was accessible on the DRP website, with its wide promotion on social media. The aim was to gather the feedback on a draft version of the IP DRP, which already included the description of transnational programme priorities, specific objectives and topics. 157 inputs were provided by stakeholders as part of the public consultation procedure. The stakeholders' input gave relevant contribution to the programming process providing better understanding if and how the logical link between the programme strategy, focus of the specific objectives, types of actions proposed in connection to the specific objective and the target groups are appropriate and further directions to be considered.

In all programme consultations the stakeholders have been given sufficient time to respond (between 3 – 4 weeks). The draft Interreg programme was available on the programme website and the outcomes of the consultations have been published on the programme website as well, together with the updated Interreg Programme document.

Danube Programme covers 14 countries of the Danube Region being the largest transnational programme in terms of geography. All countries are represented in the programme Monitoring Committee with a limited number of members nominated (up to 3 representatives per country) representing national and regional level. Nevertheless each country is organising national committees (or other mechanisms/bodies as provided for by the respective national rules) which are consulted in relation to the programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These national committees are the ones bringing together thematic experts, local/ regional/ national institutions, civil society (including gender equality bodies), environmental organisations, academia, research and innovation community.

Bearing in mind the above mentioned, in the implementation and evaluation of the Programme, different representatives of relevant state administration and regional/local authorities as well as other socio-economic partners, including gender equality organisations from the Partner States will be actively involved through different mechanisms. Planned involvement during the implementation of Danube Region Programme is intended to ensure the continuous participation of relevant partners / stakeholders in the implementation of the Programme. This is important in order to ensure the ownership of the programme among partners, as well as to exploit their knowledge and expertise and to increase transparency in decision-making processes. The relevant stakeholders will be involved in the evaluation of the programme both as recipients of the surveys/ interviews/ focus groups and also in the analysis of the results of the evaluation exercises through the national committees (or other mechanisms/bodies as provided for by the respective national rules). The administrative level of all participating Partner States will be represented in the Monitoring Committee (MC), which among other tasks is responsible for approval of appraisal and selection criteria and selection of operations to be funded from the cooperation programme. The partnership principle will be ensured by the MC representatives through the prior involvement of relevant partners in national coordination committees (or other mechanisms/bodies as provided by the respective national rules) in preparation of the MC meetings. National coordination committees support the MC members in the execution of MC tasks, including the preparation of calls for proposals and programme progress reports as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the programme. National coordination committees will be organised in compliance with applicable national requirements concerning their composition, functioning and management of obligations on data protection, confidentiality and conflict of interest. National coordination committees represent the platforms in which relevant national stakeholders can voice their positions on strategic matters concerning the implementation of the programme. Moreover national committees (or other mechanisms/bodies as provided for by the respective national rules) will facilitate the coordination with mainstream programmes, other ETC programmes and national funding instruments through involving representatives of institutions participating in the implementation of relevant national and/or regional programmes.

Project lead partners and their project partners complement the overall Programme management structure. Most of the projects try to involve, as well, the most relevant regional, local stakeholders who give strong policy profile and may influence shaping and further implementation of policy recommendations, etc. All those partners can/shall be contacted for future evaluation of the programme implementation and its

outreach and thus provide a deep, insiders' understanding.

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

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

Main role of communication: to support the Programme's overall objective of creating better transnational cooperation environment for the territorial, economic and social integration of the Region. It focuses on building shared understanding among all the Programme stakeholders, ensuring transparency of all operations, and contributing to effective participation of project partners, collaboration of Programme bodies and engagement of target audiences.

#### Objectives and target audiences:

- Attracting relevant applicants: relevant target groups as defined for each SO in the Programme as well as multipliers receive clear and timely information about the new Programme; focusing on awareness raising on calls for funding & assisting with the application process - with at least 1% of applications per each specific objective (statistics)
- Supporting the partners: easy access to information, tools and assistance to project partners in all phases of project implementation; involving all Programme bodies in supporting stakeholders - with at least 85% satisfaction with the programme support among implementing projects (survey)
- Making achievements visible: project outputs and results are collected and used for increasing the awareness of the Programme among Partner States, EU Commission, EUSDR governing bodies and stakeholders and relevant stakeholder groups with interest in Programme priorities; disseminating the results through thematic newsletters, events, brochures and other forms of targeted communication - with average number of visitors to website increasing by 5% each year after 2026 (website statistics) and a minimum of 100 media appearances in media (project reporting) by 2029

Target groups for communication are set according to their thematic scope as defined in each SO.

The implementation of communication will be carried out through detailed annual work plans.

#### Communication channels:

A diverse range of communication channels and messages, all aligned to a consistent, centralized brand identity will be used as means of achieving communication objectives. New graphic elements, reinforcing the distinct regional character of the Danube area, will create better brand recognition in relation to other strands of the Interreg.

Relying mainly on digital communication platforms, the Programme's website will be used as the main gateway to information linked to national website portals of all Partner States. Direct mails and social media channels as well as public events, and print will be used to reach out to various target groups, build relations with the stakeholders, increase website traffic and boost brand awareness. MA/ JS and NCPs will closely cooperate to communicate the Programme especially to national and local audiences. Common physical events & limited amount of print materials to support Programme visibility might be foreseen.

The messages that will be communicated will be aligned to the Programme mission statement and adopted for specific audience. Content for dissemination through thematic campaigns will be produced in various formats, including videos, digital storytelling, infographics and data visualization design.

#### Budget:

A budget planned for communication, from 2024 until 2029, is expected to be EUR 702,000 or 4.3 % of the total TA budget.

#### Monitoring and evaluation:

Communication activities will be evaluated annually with both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Digital tools (Google analytics for the website, or analytics for social media platforms) will be used next to other quantitative indicators (number of participants in events or applications received). On-line surveys and questionnaires will be used to evaluate communication activities quality and to get feedback

on usefulness and satisfaction of applicants/stakeholders/project partners for future planning.

Proposed indicators (will be further elaborated in annual work plans, including also for the NCPs):

Output indicators: participation in events, web traffic, social media engagements, analytics for communication campaigns.

Project communication:

The communication of projects resulting from the Seed Money Facility calls, prepared in cooperation with the EUSDR to address the targets of the strategy, will be implemented in close cooperation with the beneficiaries. These activities will include dedicated public relations actions and networking to promote the projects among representatives of partner states, EU and other relevant institutions.

As for other projects, communication requirements for implementation are to be defined in the Implementation Manual prepared by the MA/JS (which will integrate, among others, the specific Interreg elements in terms of: obligation to have a project website and display the information about the project on the project partners' organisations websites/ social media; publicly displaying at least one poster/ durable plaque or billboards in line with EC Regulation).

The communication officer of the DRP has already been nominated. Since the programme is a continuation of the 2014-2020 one, the same communication officer will take over the responsibilities.

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

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

Danube Programme will not make use of small project funds, nevertheless smaller size projects – e.g. preparation projects - may be supported including through the seed money facility. This instrument is part of the EUSDR governance support and aims at preparing projects that contribute to the EUSDR. The target group of these projects are the EUSDR stakeholders that are seeking to develop projects addressing the EUSDR action plan. The Monitoring Committee of the programme will decide on the financial allocation for such projects but, if the practice of 2014-2020 will be kept, the maximum amount would be no more than 50.000 euro. The framework for these projects development, application and implementation will be developed during the programme implementation in cooperation with the MC, and with potential involvement of the EUSDR governing bodies.

## 7. Implementing provisions

### 7.1. Programme authorities

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

Table 9

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	Position	E-mail
Managing authority	Ministry of Finance	Imre Janos Csalagovits	Head of Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat	imre.csalagovits@pm.gov.hu
Audit authority	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds (DGAEF)	Balázs Dencső	Director General	balazs.dencso@eutaf.gov.hu
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Directorate for European Integration of the Council of Ministers of BiH	Nada Bojanić	Head of Division for Territorial Cooperation Programmes	nada.bojanic@dei.gov.ba
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building; Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action	Dr. Daniel Meltzian; Bernd Kloke (Bernd.Kloke@bmwi.bund.de)	Head of division	Daniel.Meltzian@bmi.bund.de
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management Directorate-General III – Forestry and Sustainability Directorate III/6 - Coordination Regional Policy and Spatial Planning in Austria	Jutta Moll-Marwan	Desk officer	jutta.moll-marwan@bml.gv.at
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Foreign Assistance Department, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Moldova	Iulia Ciumac	Head of Foreign Assistance Department	iulia.ciumac@mf.gov.md
National	Government	Nadja Kobe	Monitoring	nadja.kobe@gov.si

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	Position	E-mail
authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Office for Development and EU Cohesion Policy, Slovenia		Committee member	
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine	Ivan Lukeria	Deputy Minister	LukeriaIM@minregion.gov.ua
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic	Jiří Horáček	European territorial cooperation Unit	Jiri.Horacek@mnr.cz
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration	Maria Magdalena Voinea	Head of National Authority	magdalena.voinea@mdlpa.ro
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry of European Affairs	Jovana Marovic	Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Policy, European Integration and Regional Cooperation and Minister of European Affairs	jovana.marovic@mep.gov.me
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry of European Integration – Government of the Republic of Serbia	Mihajilo Dašić	Acting Assistant Minister	mihajilo.dasic@mei.gov.rs
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic	Michal Blaško	Director of Department of Transnational Cooperation Programmes	michal.blasko@mirri.gov.sk
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds	Mislav Kovač	Head of Sector for coordination of European	mislav.kovac@mrrfeu.hr

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	Position	E-mail
participating third or partner countries)			Territorial Cooperation programmes and Macro-Regional strategies	
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works, Bulgaria "Territorial Cooperation Management" Directorate	Desislava Georgieva	Head of the Bulgarian National Authority	D.G.Georgieva@mrrb.government.bg
National authority (for programmes with participating third or partner countries)	Prime Minister's Office, Department for International Territorial Development Co-operation	Zsuzsanna Drahos	Head of Department	zsuzsanna.drahos@tfm.gov.hu
Group of auditors representatives	Accounting Chamber of Ukraine	Victor Bohun	Member of Accounting Chamber of Ukraine	Bohun_VP@rp.gov.ua
Group of auditors representatives	Agency for the Audit of European Union Programmes Implementation System	Neven Šprlje, Ana Srdinić Kovačić (substitute)	Director	neven.sprlje@arpa.hr
Group of auditors representatives	Audit Authority	Nataša Simonović; Stana Gačević (substitute) stana.gacevic@revizorskotijelo.me	Deputy Auditor General	natasa.simonovic@revizorskotijelo.me
Group of auditors representatives	Bavarian State Ministry for Economic Affairs, Regional Development and Energy	Dr. Kai Vahrenkamp	Head of audit authority	Kai.Vahrenkamp@stmwi.bayern.de
Group of auditors representatives	Court of Accounts of the Republic of Moldova	Teodorina Goriuc	Head of Professional Training Department within the General Directorate on Methodology, Planning and Reporting	t_goriuc@ccrm.md
Group of auditors representatives	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds	Ágnes Riskó; Piroska Szántó (substitute) piroska.szanto@eutaf.gov.hu	Director	agnes.risko@eutaf.gov.hu

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	Position	E-mail
Group of auditors representatives	Executive agency “Audit of European Union Funds”, Ministry of finance, Bulgaria	Ludmila Rangelova	Executive Director	aeuf@minfin.bg
Group of auditors representatives	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management Secretary General – Department “EU Financial Control and Internal Auditing” – Unit “EU Financial Control ERDF” in Austria	Bernhard Fleischer; Diane Muntean (substitute)	Desk officer	Bernhard.fleischer@bml.gv.at
Group of auditors representatives	Governmental Audit Office of EU Funds – Government of the Republic of Serbia	Ljubinko Stanojević, Svetlana Novaković	Director, Head of Audit Group for Regional and Territorial Cooperation	ljubinko.stanojevic@aa.gov.rs
Group of auditors representatives	Ministry of Finance and Treasury of BiH	Katarina Puljić; Dana Šarčević (substitute)	Senior Specialist for Financial Control in the National Fund; Adviser for Financial Control in the National Fund	kpuljic@mft.gov.ba
Group of auditors representatives	Ministry of Finance of the Czech Republic	Milan Puzskailer; Michaela Kotalíková	Audit Authority Unit	Milan.Puzskailer@mfcz.cz
Group of auditors representatives	Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic	Alena Vidová	Head of Division of other Programmes	alena.vidova@mfsr.sk
Group of auditors representatives	Ministry of Finance, Budget Supervision Office	Ms. Mirjam Novakovič	Head of Department	mirjam.novakovic@gov.si
Group of auditors representatives	Romanian Court of Accounts - Audit Authority	Lucian Dan Vlădescu	President	dan.vladescu@rcc.ro
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Hungarian State Treasury	Szabolcs Jakab	Head of Department	jakab.szabolcs@allamkinostar.gov.hu

## 7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

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

The participating countries agreed to have an integrated management structure combining managing authority and joint secretariat functions to be set up at the premises of the Ministry of Finance of Hungary in Budapest. Being integrated into a single department of the Ministry, the Managing Authority and Joint Secretariat (hereinafter referred to as 'the MA/JS') is a functionally independent body guaranteeing the impartiality of the project application and evaluation process as well as of transnational programme implementation. General employment conditions (no of positions, salary ranges, recruitment procedure) for the MA/JS will be presented in the Programme Complement (hereinafter referred to as 'PC') as agreed at programme level. Operation of the MA/JS is financed through the Technical Assistance budget (TA) of the Programme, including all staff costs.

The employees of the MA/JS will be employed according to the applicable Hungarian legislation, however, principal decisions regarding the personnel of the MA/JS are to be agreed by the participating countries as well. Each non-administrative position shall be filled in based on a call announcement which - depending on the position - can be open or restricted and which is in accordance with the preliminary job description agreed by the Recruitment Committee. The MA/ JS staff is international. The Recruitment Committee should be set up by the MC in order to support the recruitment process of the MA/JS staff.

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

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

In line with the **principles of shared management** referred to in Article 16(1) and Article 55 (2) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 (hereinafter referred to as the Interreg Regulation), Member States and partner countries (hereinafter referred to as ‘Partner States’ or ‘PS’) and the European Commission shall be responsible for the management and control of the DRP.

The programme language is **English**. PSs agreed that all communication between the PSs, the MA/JS, the audit authority (AA) and the project lead partners (LP) are concluded in English.

Detailed provisions on the **implementation structures and arrangements of the DRP** will be included in the PC, the Programme Manual (comprising the Applicants’ Manual, the Implementation Manual and the Eligibility Manual), the Call Announcements, the Control Guidelines, the Evaluation plan to be endorsed by the MC.

These **common set of rules laid down in the above documents** setting out mutual rights and obligations with regard to the implementation and financial management of the DRP shall be applicable equally to all PSs of the programme. All **PSs will bear ultimate responsibility** for the recovery of amounts unduly paid to beneficiaries located on their territories and jointly assume liability for irregularities deriving from their common decisions. Responsibilities of the PSs (including the list of responsible authorities) in accordance with Article 69 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (hereinafter referred to as the CPR) are presented in details in the PC.

In accordance with Article 112(4) of the Financial Regulation, a **Financing Agreement** shall be concluded between the Commission and each participating partner country to be also signed by the MA/JS of the DRP. Financing Agreements ensure that the whole regulatory framework related to the implementation of the programme is applied directly in the concerned PS also covering the final recovery of funds by the EC on behalf of the MA/JS.

Without prejudice to the provisions of the respective Financing Agreement, the provisions of the CPR and of the Interreg Regulation as well as of acts based on these two Regulations shall apply.

In accordance with Article 69(2) of the CPR, PSs shall take all required actions to **prevent, detect, correct and report on irregularities including fraud**. PSs shall report on irregularities to the Commission, to the MA/JS and AA in accordance with the criteria for determining the cases of irregularity to be reported, the data to be provided and the format for reporting set out in Annex XII of the CPR.

In case an investigation has been initiated in relation to a possible irregularity affecting the expenditure of a project partner, the **MA/JS may interrupt the payment deadline** referred to in point (b) of Article 74(1) of the CPR. The LP concerned shall be informed in writing of the interruption and the reasons for it. Detailed procedures on the recovery of funds from the project partnership will be described in the PC, the Programme Manual and in the Subsidy Contract.

Without prejudice to the PSs’ responsibility for detecting and correcting irregularities and for recovering amounts unduly paid as referred to in Article 69(2) and Article 74(1) (d) of the CPR, and in accordance with Article 52 of the Interreg Regulation the **MA/JS shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the LP**. The project partners shall then repay the LP any amounts unduly paid. In line with Article 52 (2), the MA/JS will not recover an amount unduly paid that does not exceed EUR 250 (not including interest) in contribution from the Interreg funds paid to an operation in a given accounting year.

If the LP does not succeed in securing repayment from a project partner or if the MA/JS does not succeed in securing repayment from the LP, **the PS on whose territory the project partner concerned is located** shall reimburse to the MA/JS the amount unduly paid to that project partner. The MA/JS is responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned (once recovered from the LP/Member State) to the general budget of

the Union as referred to in Article 52(3).

In accordance with Article 103 of the CPR, the PSs shall protect the Union budget and apply **financial corrections** by cancelling all or part of the support from the Funds to an operation where expenditure declared to the Commission is found to be irregular. Financial corrections (amounts to be withdrawn, deducted or recovered) required in connection with individual or systemic irregularities detected in projects of the DRP will be monitored by the certifying authority and included in the subsequent payment applications to be submitted to the Commission.

Since PSs have the overall liability for the Community support (ERDF/IPA/NDICI) granted to LPs or PPs located on their territories, they shall ensure that – prior to certifying expenditure – any financial corrections required will be secured and they shall seek to recover any amounts lost as a result of an irregularity/fraud or negligence caused by a beneficiary located in their territory. Where appropriate, a PS may also charge interest on late payments.

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

Article 52 (5) of the Interreg Regulation will apply for amounts unduly paid to a partner which any of the PSs have not reimbursed to the MA/JS.

The irregular expenditure which has been subject to financial corrections applied by the MA/JS in respect of any individual irregularities detected by the PSs or the AA shall be deducted from the accounts submitted to the Commission. Systemic errors at the programme level might be detected by the AA and/or the GoA or the European Commission and might lead to **financial corrections imposed by the European Commission** based on Article 104 of the CPR.

Irregularities shall be reported by the PS to the MA/JS in the form of **summary reports or irregularity reports** attached to the verification report to be submitted quarterly in accordance with the format set out in the PC.

The **PSs will bear liability** in connection with the use of the programme ERDF/IPA/NDICI funding as follows:

- Each PS bears liability for possible financial consequences of irregularities caused by the LPs and PPs located on its territory and its own control system (e.g. one-off irregularity or systemic irregularity attributable to the national control system);
- For a systemic irregularity or financial correction on programme level that cannot be linked to a specific PS (i.e. grounded on the decisions of the MC), the liability shall be jointly borne by the PSs in proportion to the expenditure claimed to the European Commission for the period which forms the basis for the financial correction.
- If there is a need for a financial correction on programme level because the residual error rate from the audits of operations exceeds the 2 % materiality level, the PSs together shall be liable for the payment of such correction in proportion to the expenditure claimed to the European Commission for the period which forms the basis for the extrapolated correction.

The above liability principles also apply to corrections to Technical Assistance calculated in compliance with Article 27 of the Interreg regulation, since such corrections would be the direct consequence of project related irregularities (whether systemic or not). The MA/JS will keep the PSs informed about all irregularities and their impact on TA. The MA/JS will carry out a reconciliation to verify if there is a remaining balance of irregularities that have affected the TA budget and could not be reused. In case of a remaining balance the MA/JS will inform and request the respective PS to reimburse the corresponding ERDF/IPA/NDICI amount to the DRP Bank Account. Detailed procedures are set in the PC.

**Responsibilities of the main programme bodies** listed below are presented in details in the PC.

The **MC** set up in accordance with Article 28 of the Interreg Regulation – consisting of representatives of each participating country – supervises the implementation of the DRP and selects projects to be financed. Its overall task is to ensure the quality and effectiveness of programme implementation as referred to in Article 30 of the Interreg Regulation, assisted by the MA/JS.

The **MA/JS** is responsible for the overall programme implementation; carrying out the functions laid down in Articles 72, 74 and 75 of the CPR as well as Article 46 of the Interreg regulation. The Managing Authority will set up an electronic data exchange system which will ensure that all exchanges of information are carried out between beneficiaries and the programme authorities electronically in accordance with Annex XIV of the CPR.

The counterparts for the MA/JS with the coordination role on the territory of the participating countries will be the **MC members representing the national authorities** of the concerned PSs responsible for the DRP. The institutions of the responsible national authorities and the procedure for nominating MC members are defined in the PC. The **Certifying Authority (CA)** will carry out the accounting function in accordance with Article 47 of the Interreg regulation consisting of the tasks listed in points (a) and (b) of Article 76(1) of the CPR; in particular, the CA is responsible for drawing up and submitting payment applications to the Commission and receiving payments from the Commission.

The **Audit Authority** will carry out the functions laid down in Article 77 of the CPR and Article 48 and 49 of the Interreg Regulation in the whole of the territory covered by DRP. The AA will be assisted by a Group of Auditors (GoA) comprising of representatives from responsible bodies of each PS.

**National Contact Points** will be set up by each participating country to complement transnational activities of the MA/JS by involving stakeholders from the national level.

**Controllers** will be designated by each PS to carry out management verifications in order to ensure the compliance of expenditure incurred by the project partners with Community and national rules within the meaning of Article 74(1) of the CPR and in accordance with Article 46(3) of the Interreg Regulation. Controllers shall be nominated in line with the national administrative provisions of each PS in accordance with Article 46(9) of the Interreg Regulation. Each country participating in the DRP will be responsible for verifications carried out on its territory.

The **process of verification** within the meaning of point (a) of Article 74(1) and Article 74(2) of the CPR carried out at national level includes administrative verifications in respect of payment claims made by beneficiaries and on-the-spot verifications of operations. Management verifications shall be risk-based and proportionate to the risks identified ex ante.

In order to provide assurance that the accounting functions are respected, the MA/JS operates a **verification reporting system**. Before drawing up payment applications to the European Commission by the CA, the MA/JS submits a programme level verification report on the procedures and management verifications carried out in relation to expenditure included in the payment applications.

The procedures put in place for the **resolution of complaints** are differentiated according to the subject of the complaint and will formally be regulated in the PC and the Programme Manual. In particular, specific procedures apply with regard to complaints related to the assessment and selection of applications, to the decisions made by the MA/JS during project implementation or related to the work of the national controllers.

In case of appeal to the judiciary system against the decisions of the programme authorities including the MA/JS or the MC related to the project selection, the court of Hungary has the jurisdiction of the matter. Appeals against the decisions of national authorities with regard to the work of controllers or the functioning of the national control system shall be lodged to the national court of the concerned PS.

**In case of implementation difficulties**, the PSs concerned shall support the MA/JS to clarify the individual cases and help to lift potential sanctions imposed to the DRP, to a LP or to a Project Partner.

Rules applicable to **non-respect of provisions agreed among PSs** are included in the PC.

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

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

Table 10: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95 CPR	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 the priority according to Article 94 CPR	<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	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix 1

### A. Summary of the main elements

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

(1) This refers to the code for the intervention field dimension in Table 1 of Annex 1 CPR

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

Appendix 1

B. Details by type of operation

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

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

--

2. Please specify why the proposed method and calculation based on Article 94(2) is relevant to the type of operation:

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

--

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

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

--

## Appendix 2

### A. Summary of the main elements

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

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

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

## B. Details by type of operation

Danube Region Programme's thematic content is developed based on the territorial analysis which constituted an extensive exercise to define the needs and challenges of the Danube Region complemented by a further analysis of the actual needs and challenges that can be best addressed by transnational cooperation and the specific type of interventions that the Programme is financing. The second call for proposals, to be launched in for 2023-2024, is planned to address the strategic needs of the Danube region in line with the thematic content of the programme, including sub-territories and strengthening the programme support for preparation of EU-accession of non-EU countries of the programme area.

From a strategic point of view the Seed Money Facility is supporting the EUSDR in development of strategic transnational projects addressing the targets of the strategy. The Seed Money Facility is a tool that can kick off cooperation in the region in different sector and thematic fields. The call is prepared in close cooperation with the Strategy who provides the strategic direction and priorities. Also this call is planned to be launched in 2024-2025.

## DOCUMENTS

Document title	Document type	Document date	Local reference	Commission reference	Files	Sent date	Sent by
Danube Region Programme Area map	Map of Programme Area	22 Jul 2022		Ares(2022)6675876	Danube Region Programme area map	28 Sept 2022	Marczis, Beáta
Programme snapshot 2021TC16FFTN004 1.1	Snapshot of data before send	28 Sept 2022		Ares(2022)6675876	Programme_snapshot_2021TC16FFTN004_1.1_en.pdf	28 Sept 2022	Marczis, Beáta



# **INTERREG EUROPE 2021-2027**

Cooperation Programme document

Final version

February 2022

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# 1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

## 1.1 Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

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

The programme area covers the whole territory of the EU 27 as well as Norway and Switzerland, referred to as Partner States (PS) in this document and corresponding to 255 regions in total (242 regions at NUTS 2 level in the EU27, 6 regions in Norway and 7 regions in Switzerland).

## 1.2. Summary of main joint challenges

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

### 1.2.1. Context of the programme, including EU major strategic orientations

The European Union (EU) is committed to deliver results on several strategies over the coming decades, and the cohesion policy will have a key role to play.

The rapid rise of digital technologies is making science and innovation more open, collaborative and global. The European Commission's policy priorities reflect this through its three goals for EU research and innovation policy, summarised as **Open Innovation, Open Science and Open to the World**. Europe needs to become more inventive, reacting more quickly to changing market conditions and consumer preferences if it is to become an innovation-friendly society and economy. The key drivers of research and innovation are most effectively addressed at the regional level.

To overcome climate change and environmental degradation, the **European Green Deal** provides a roadmap for making the EU's economy sustainable with action to boost the efficient use of resources by moving to a clean, circular economy, restoring biodiversity and cutting pollution. It outlines the investments needed and financing tools available and explains how to ensure a just and inclusive transition.

The EU is committed to becoming climate-neutral by 2050. To achieve this, the European Climate Law proposes to turn this political commitment into a legal obligation and a trigger for investment. The strategy shows how Europe can lead the way to climate neutrality by investing in innovative technological solutions, empowering citizens, and aligning action in key areas such as industrial policy, finance, or research – while ensuring social fairness for a just transition.

The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 is another major objective for the EU. Adopted in 2015, this Agenda is a commitment to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development worldwide by 2030, ensuring that no one is left behind. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda was a landmark achievement, providing for a shared global vision of sustainable development for all. The Agenda's scale, ambition and approach are unprecedented. One key feature is that its 17 Sustainable Development Goals are global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account national realities, capacities and levels of development and specific challenges. All countries, regions and cities, have a shared responsibility to achieve the SDGs, and all have a meaningful role to play locally, nationally as well as at the global scale.

The recent crises faced by the EU have increased inequalities in many areas. Working for social fairness and prosperity as part of the EU priority "An economy that works for people" and the European Pillar of Social Rights also appear as key drivers for this programme. Individuals and businesses in the EU, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, can only thrive if the economy works for them. The EU's unique social

market economy allows economies to grow and to reduce poverty and inequality. With Europe on a stable footing, the economy can fully respond to the needs of the EU's citizens.

The implementation of all EU strategies needs to fully consider the territorial dimension and limit their potentially negative differentiated impacts. The aim of the **Territorial Agenda 2030** is to strengthen territorial cohesion in Europe. This means ensuring a future for all places, by enabling equal opportunities for citizens and enterprises, wherever they are located. Territorial cohesion reinforces cooperation and solidarity and reduces inequalities between better-off places and those with less prosperous outlooks. Cohesion benefits Europe as a whole and each individual territory. To strengthen cohesion, the Territorial Agenda provides strategic orientations for spatial planning and for strengthening the territorial dimension of relevant policies at all governance levels. The Territorial Agenda 2030 outlines two overarching objectives: (i) a Just Europe that offers future perspectives for all places and people; (ii) a Green Europe that protects our common livelihoods and shapes societal transition processes. These objectives are broken down into six priorities for the development of the European territory.

Interreg Europe may be able to support the response to any form of crisis (e.g., humanitarian, climatic with heat waves for instance, pandemic) should one emerge during its lifetime.

In this respect, at the start of the 2021-2027 programming period, Europe is facing an unprecedented health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which took hold in spring 2020. This is set to have very severe and long-lasting effects on many economic sectors (e.g., tourism, the cultural and creative sector) and probably on other issues such as people's choice of transport mode, consumer habits, ways of life, health, etc. in Europe's regions. Over the coming decades, the EU must address the challenges arising from these effects, along with the ecological transition, the digital transitions and demographic change. All these challenges will have strong impacts on a wide range of policy fields at EU, national, regional and local levels.

Public policies will undoubtedly be needed to help Europe's economy and the wider society to recover from the crisis. In this regard, the EU's cohesion policy remains essential for supporting the economic and social recovery in EU regions. With this policy, the EU contributes to the harmonious development across the Union by strengthening its economic, social and territorial cohesion in all EU regions and Member States. Interreg Europe continues to be one instrument of this policy with the potential to accelerate harmonious development by promoting a large-scale exchange and transfer of experience, peer-learning and benchmarking across Europe.

*The programme strategy is based on the following key sources of information: a) Seventh report on economic, social and territorial cohesion. My Region, My Europe, Our Future – 2017; b) State of the European Territory – Contribution to the debate on Cohesion Policy post 2020 - ESPON – 2019; c) Territorial Agenda 2030 - 2019; d) Synergies between IE and Smart Specialisation', JRC Technical Report 2018; e) Evaluation reports – Interreg Europe 2014-2020 programme – 2020; f) EC website.*

## **1.2.2. Disparities and inequalities across Europe and challenges for regions**

The characteristics, situation and prospects of European regions in regard to the challenges and strategic orientations described above are very diverse. As in the previous programming periods, regional diversity in terms of opportunities and needs across the EU calls for tailor-made policies. It calls for a place-based approach that gives regions the ability and means to deliver policies that meet their specific needs. The uniqueness of each region is also of enormous added-value for other regions in Europe through various forms of mutual learning. It lays the foundation for the programme's role in Europe's push for a smarter Europe, a greener, climate-neutral and resilient Europe, a more connected Europe, a more social Europe and a Europe closer to citizens.

The triennial report on economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe provides a valuable insight on major trends at work. The 8<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report released in February 2022 highlighted key trends that are relevant for the 2021-2027 programming period. These include the narrowing of regional disparities and

yet the stagnation in southern and south-western areas, especially in non-urban areas. The Report acknowledges the asymmetric impact of the COVID-19 effects on EU regions, and the sectors that were most negatively affected, such as tourism.

Other general trends in the Report point to the fact that further investment in innovation, skills, governance and digitalisation is needed to keep closing the GDP gap. In addition, the need to invest in environmental protection and clean energy remains as a key driver to ensure sustainability, competitiveness and quality of life. The Report also highlights the transformation that the green transition will bring to the economy. i.

Key economic, social and territorial disparities for each of the five EU policy objectives are described below, as well as some crucial policy challenges for European regions, in particular those that are governance-related.

In the following descriptions, references are made to large areas across Europe based on the compass points, but the reality is rarely so simple and existing disparities within each large area should be kept in mind.

### ***A more competitive and smarter Europe***

Innovation in the EU remains highly concentrated in a limited number of regions. In the southern and eastern Member States, innovation performance is poorer and regions close to innovation centres – mainly capitals – do not benefit from their proximity. It is therefore necessary to develop policies that support technological and non-technological innovation in less developed regions and regions with low diversification and that connect businesses, research centres and specialised services to businesses in different regions. Cultural and creative assets are considered important and unique inputs for these innovation processes.

Despite being drivers of economic development, the concentration of business activities in knowledge economies also contributes to widening the development gap between regions. Regions differ in terms of the intensity and mix of their knowledge and innovation activities, which means they have different capacities to innovate and innovation processes of various levels of sophistication. Each territorial innovation pattern can be reinforced by knowledge acquisition from outside the region. Achieving positive regional economic development based on research and innovation depends on ability of regions to capitalise on their assets.

A clear core-periphery polarisation exists as a result of the current mechanisms of knowledge production. Regional specialisation patterns by technology use reveal that technology regions (i.e., sectors that actively produce technological solutions) are mainly capital city regions. The increased adoption of 4.0 technologies and processes based on cyber-physical systems and the internet of things (IoT), which requires new patterns of technology production, shows that “islands of innovation” can emerge in less advanced regions. From a societal perspective, a specific emphasis needs to be put on the acquisition of digital skills to limit the risk of excluding certain groups, such as the elderly, who may not be well prepared for this rapid transformation.

SMEs in the EU represent 99% of all enterprises, 57% of the value added, and employ 66% of the EU labour force. SMEs are considered to be the backbone of the European economy. However, regions provide different enabling conditions, challenges, opportunities and threats with respect to SME growth. Local and regional governance is increasingly important for economic development and competitiveness, as it can support companies in many ways. The role of quality governance systems is therefore crucial and is defined as providing two benefits (i) ensuring transparency in decision making and stability and (ii) fostering entrepreneurship and SME creation.

The development of the digital economy and society is uneven across EU Member States. Rural and peripheral regions are vulnerable in the shift towards the digital economy. The digitally more developed regions of northern and central Europe overlap with the knowledge and innovation regions. Considering the high cost of digital infrastructure in territories with geographic challenges, outermost regions, and rural

areas, digital connectivity could be supported through local measures aimed at increasing demand through the promotion of ICT use and dematerialisation of services.

Larger, more developed cities provide more digital services than small and medium- sized cities, towns and rural communities. The interoperability of public services is thought to be an important factor for reducing digital gaps between countries and regions. Public institutions, civil society and companies should cooperate and exchange knowledge, as this will help to boost the local digital ecosystem and foster the co-creation and delivery of new types of services.

Interregional cooperation can contribute to a smarter Europe by enabling European regions to improve their innovation and R&D policies and programmes, particularly their smart specialisation strategies. The exchange of experience and policy learning will enable regions to accelerate and improve the implementation of their regional development policies in key areas, such as: skills development for smart specialisation and entrepreneurship, digitalisation of the economy and society, digital connectivity, the uptake of advanced technologies, innovation in SMEs, and non-technological innovations (organisational, social, etc.).

### ***A greener, climate-neutral and resilient Europe***

Climate change has different impacts on each of Europe's biogeographical regions. Observed impacts include changes to the environment, to ecosystems, and to the food, water and energy systems. Vulnerability to climate change varies considerably from region to region. Climate change is increasingly causing environmental damage, is adversely impacting well-being and health, and is generating economic losses.

In regard to energy, increased efforts will be necessary to make a success of the European Green Deal, the European Climate Pact, and the upcoming 'Fit for 55' package and its target to reduce emissions by at least 55% in 2030. With a view to showing global leadership on renewables, the EU has set an ambitious, binding target of 32% for renewable energy sources in the EU's energy mix by 2030.

Reaching the EU's climate-neutral objectives requires infrastructure investments targeting geographically specific renewable energy potentials, increased energy efficiency in regions where resources are scarce, regional cooperation, and an increased focus on bottom-up governance. Rural regions in Southern and Eastern Europe, most of Eastern Europe, and outermost regions are the most vulnerable to energy poverty. Many of these regions have the potential to develop renewable energy, but lack the administrative capacity, the vision or the financial resources. Regional and interregional cooperation can support the development of stakeholder networks, the transfer of knowledge and practices of sustainable energy supply and consumption across regions, and the alignment of action in support of the energy transition across the different governance levels.

The circular economy is making an increasing contribution to meeting the EU's environmental and climate objectives. It is also a stimulus to local and regional development. The region is a relevant scale at which to organise sustainable economic ecosystems, but the regulatory frameworks at regional and local levels should be adapted to the principles of a circular economy. Implementation and diffusion of circular business models (CBMs) is favoured by agglomerations (both economic and urban) in proximity to knowledge hubs. Circular economy material providers play a particularly predominant role in rural regions.

The transport sector is one of the main contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. Public action to support the decarbonisation of transport is therefore more important than ever. The supported actions should be inspired by the European strategy for low-emission mobility, which aims at ensuring a regulatory and business environment that is conducive to meeting the competitiveness challenges that the transition to low-emission mobility implies.

In addition, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is also an important part of the European Green Deal. It aims at protecting the natural world and reversing the degradation of ecosystems. EU regions have an

important role to play by ensuring effective protection of a significant proportion of the land and sea and integrating ecological corridors as part of a true Trans-European Nature Network. The EU Nature Restoration Plan, which is a key part of the Strategy, has the potential to make EU regions not only more nature-friendly, but also offers opportunities to increase their resilience to climate change and other environmental risks. Implementing the Strategy will require, however, unlocking substantial funding from regional/cohesion funds and other sources, as well as the involvement of actors at all levels of decision-making.

Blue economy is also a pillar of the green transition and will contribute to the sustainable development of the oceans and coastal resources. A number of sectors are key in the blue economy such as marine living resources, marine non-living resources, marine renewable energy, port activities, shipbuilding and repair, maritime transport and coastal tourism.

Finally, the potential area covered by green infrastructure (GI) at the regional level is relevant to multiple policy frameworks (e.g., biodiversity, water management, climate change, digitalisation). Regions with low potential GI network coverage in north-western Europe need to improve the connectivity of existing GI. Regions with high potential GI network coverage should be supported through policies promoting sustainable land use and increased biodiversity. The development of GI can be facilitated by collaboration between local and regional stakeholders, awareness and capacity building, and knowledge exchange between professionals operating at different implementation stages and scales.

Interregional cooperation can support European regions to deliver a greener, climate-neutral and resilient Europe, in line with the European Green Deal, by enabling them to integrate successful experiences and policies from other regions into their own regional programmes in areas such as promoting the transition to a circular economy, climate change adaptation, water management, pollution prevention, risk prevention and disaster resilience, energy efficiency measures, biodiversity restoration, nature-based solutions and green infrastructures, and sustainable urban mobility. Where relevant, the Interreg Europe programme can promote and enrich the activities and outputs of regional programmes.

### ***A more connected Europe***

Good accessibility is a precondition for economic development. By 2030, the accessibility potential of mountain, rural areas and coastal regions by road or rail will barely reach 80 % of the European average. Sparsely populated places and islands (including outermost regions) will remain below 20 %. Overall, there are significant disparities in accessibility at the regional and local levels.

Interregional cooperation can contribute to a more connected Europe by supporting policy learning and capacity building in relation to regional policies promoting sustainable, intelligent and multimodal mobility.

### ***A more social and inclusive Europe***

As a result of the 2008 financial crisis, the unemployment rate in the EU reached a record high of 11% in 2013, dropping to 6.2% in late 2019. But the situation is set to deteriorate markedly in the early 2020s.

There are large and long-lasting gaps between regions in terms of employment and unemployment rates, with significantly higher unemployment rates in the countries of southern Europe and in the outermost regions. Youth unemployment varies widely from around 6 % in the countries of central Europe to over 30 % in southern European countries. The employment situation of workers over 50s also remains an issue of concern in most countries. The data also shows that the employment rate of 35–49-year-olds is worsening.

Overall, the average employment rate was 74% in the more developed regions in 2016, while in less developed regions, the average rate was only 65%.

The ability of regions to withstand economic shocks and address high unemployment is determined by a combination of factors, including the structure of the economy, labour market flexibility, the level of skills

and education, and place-based characteristics, in particular the quality of governance and other specific societal challenges.

For example, regional economies dominated by sectors heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis, such as tourism or the cultural and creative sectors, may experience more severe and prolonged negative socio-economic impacts compared to regions with more diversified economies. In this context, it will be important to consider how recovery plan budgets and corresponding packages will be used and coordinated at European, national and regional levels.

Working conditions are also of growing interest, with aspirations for a better work-life balance, equal opportunities, the inclusion of vulnerable groups (e.g., people with disabilities, migrants, Roma population and other minorities or marginalised groups), and more flexible forms of work. Moreover, the role and place of pensioners in society should be better addressed in light of the ageing society.

As for migration, the specific measures at EU level taken during the most critical years, around the mid-2010s, need to be evaluated and extended where relevant. Among the key lessons, the positive economic impact of the presence of refugees is largely determined by the success of their integration into the labour market. Urban and rural contexts require different policies for the socio-economic integration of migrants. When considering the social dimension, the important role of local authorities and NGOs in the successful integration of migrants should be emphasised.

Europe faces increasing and territorially different demographic challenges. Among these challenges, ageing and depopulation or high-density population may affect many regions, including rural and peripheral areas. At the same time, many metropolitan/urban areas are facing growing populations, with possible severe impacts on social and territorial cohesion, public service provision, labour markets and housing, among others.

Access to services of general interest, education, training, healthcare, social care and social protection and inclusion, appears to be especially difficult for vulnerable groups and for people living in specific types of territories, such as rural areas with low accessibility or areas with geographical specificities, including mountains, islands, sparsely populated areas, coastal areas and outermost regions. Cohesion Policy governance and implementation mechanisms at the national level, and the regional level where relevant, should support capacity building among local stakeholders and multilevel partnerships ('policy making ecosystem' approach), interregional networking and cooperation.

*In line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, Interregional cooperation can contribute to a more social Europe by supporting policy learning and the transfer of experience on regional policies that will get people back into employment and enhance the effectiveness of labour markets and the integration of migrants and disadvantaged groups. Other key fields of action are, for instance, ensuring sufficient and equal access to health care through developing infrastructures, including primary care and specialised health services and enhancing the role of culture and tourism in economic development, well-being, social inclusion and social innovation.*

### **A Europe closer to citizens**

Good territorial governance and cooperation are preconditions to meeting current social, economic, connectivity and environmental challenges across the European territory. The diversity of the European territory in terms of geography, administrative and governance settings, and political differences across regions, underlines the importance of tailored, place-based approaches.

To ensure no places or citizens are left behind, stronger cooperation between places across territorial boundaries is needed, as well as across sector-based policies. This requires high-quality governance as well as capacity building and the empowerment of the various actors involved.

*Interregional cooperation can contribute to a Europe closer to citizens by supporting key areas for the development of effective integrated place-based strategies and policies, which could cover issues like local cooperative digital platforms, bottom-up/local green deal strategies dealing for instance with energy poverty, among other themes. The support could facilitate better spatially adapted governance, as governance for collective action requires capacity for consensus building and long-term commitment. Moreover, experimentation in terms of building governance networks and structures is an important aspect of efficient cooperation structures, and capacity building is a key precondition for efficient territorial policies. Interreg Europe could help to ensure that integrated territorial strategies are concretely implemented on the ground.*

### **1.2.3. Complementarity and synergies with other funding programmes and instruments**

The complementarity of Interreg Europe with other forms of support is found in the added value of this cooperation programme against other sources of funding. In some cases, the complementarity may lead to coordination and synergetic action. In other cases, only the added value of Interreg Europe is indicated in the sections below. Complementarity has therefore a larger scope than coordination. The complementarity and connections that can be established by Interreg Europe with other sources of funding are as follows:

#### ***The complementarities with the Investment for Jobs and Growth (IJ&G) goal programmes***

IJ&G programmes are related to ERDF, ESF+, and the Cohesion and Just Transition Funds. The complementarities with these programmes are indicated in Article 3 of the ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on European territorial cooperation (Interreg) and lead to a direct link between Interreg Europe and the IJ&G programmes, both at project and platform levels.

Coordination will be ensured at the project level via the link to IJ&G. This link will be established in all projects, as at least one IJ&G programme will need to be addressed by each project. At platform level, the MA of the IJ&G programmes are one of the main target groups.

Furthermore, in the event that an IJ&G programme envisages interregional cooperation actions (Article 22(3)d(vi) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR), the complementarity exists automatically. So far, the regions opting for this type of cooperation had specific thematic or geographic aims that could not be covered by any of the existing Interreg programmes. As in the past, these regions will need to define and design their own cooperation rules. This is where INTERACT can help, by drawing inspiration from existing Interreg programmes. Beyond defining the rules, Interreg Europe can also help to implement this form of cooperation when regions are looking for relevant partners or for experience on relevant themes.

#### ***The complementarity with the Interregional Innovation Investment Instrument (I3)***

The Interregional Innovation Investment Instrument (I3) is included in the ERDF Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 and consists of two main strands. The first strand focuses on investments in interregional projects for mature partnerships and the second supports the development of value chains in less developed regions. This latter strand is complemented by dedicated capacity building for less developed regions. Under both strands, the participation of innovation actors from both more and less developed regions is mandatory. The I3 Instrument and Interreg Europe do not overlap, as their objectives and scopes differ.

Nonetheless, synergies between the I3 Instrument and Interreg Europe could be anticipated and could further contribute to the successful implementation of interregional innovation projects. The results achieved by the new I3 Instrument may offer a valuable source of learning for Interreg Europe's projects and Policy Learning Platform in terms of sharing knowledge, policy improvements and strengthening the impact of Interreg Europe. Reciprocally, Interreg Europe projects focusing on innovation may set the basis for future Interregional Innovation Investments depending on the lessons learnt from the cooperation and the possible identification of areas for joint investments.

In the framework of the 5-step methodology defined to support the cooperation in S3 thematic Platforms, Interreg Europe can support interregional cooperation in the Learn and Connect phase, while I3 will focus on the support to the Demonstrate, Commercialise and Upscale phase of the investment. Using S3 as coordination principle for interregional cooperation can mobilise complementary assets and unlock the

innovation potential within European value chains. Interregional cooperation facilitated by Interreg Europe and place-based innovation ecosystems, can build the bases for successful interregional innovation investments.

### ***The complementarities with other Interreg programmes***

The complementarities among all Interreg programmes are set out in Article 3(3) of the ETC Regulation. In the case of strands A, B and D, both the geographical coverage and the approach of each strand reveal the added value of strand C and of Interreg Europe in particular. Whereas strands A, B and D focus on solutions to solve the cross-border or transnational challenges, Interreg Europe allows for interregional capacity building to improve regional development policies. Cooperation among all Interreg strands is furthermore ensured by the INTERACT programme in the various programme management areas.

As for strand C, Article 3 defines the aims and the added value of each interregional (or Pan-European) programme. The dividing lines [and complementarities] between Interreg Europe, INTERACT, URBACT and ESPON are clarified by the ETC Regulation. Interreg Europe focuses on policy objectives to identify, disseminate and transfer good practices into regional development policies, whereas INTERACT focuses on the implementation of Interreg programmes and capitalisation of their results. The area of intervention of Interreg Europe therefore covers regional development policies in a wider sense, whereas INTERACT's area of intervention remains in the domain of cooperation.

In particular, INTERACT's and Interreg Europe's respective platforms (KEEP and the platform) have two different objectives, serve two different needs and have different target groups. Whereas KEEP includes data on Interreg, ENI CBC and IPA CBC programmes and projects, Interreg Europe's database gathers data on regional development practices. The regular exchanges between INTERACT and Interreg Europe also ensures close coordination on subjects of common interest, such as the implementation of Investment for Jobs and Growth programmes.

The dividing line between Interreg Europe and URBACT is the specific nature of URBACT's thematic focus (integrated and sustainable urban development). Finally, ESPON analyses development trends, a distinctive focus among all strand C programmes. The provision of territorial data on recent European development trends can inform the development of Interreg Europe projects and Interreg Europe programme activities. At the same time additional knowledge demand arising from Interreg Europe cooperation might be addressed through targeted analysis by the ESPON programme.

The four Pan-European programmes hold regular meetings (coordinated by INTERACT) and bilateral meetings to define the areas of cooperation and collaboration, both at the programming and at the implementation stages. Among other actions, the four programmes have worked together to clarify their respective types of intervention and target groups in order to ensure both complementarity and the identification of synergies. At the implementation stage, synergies refer to the mutual promotion of the programme activities, the exchange of information for the benefit of each programme activities, and the joint organisation of activities.

### ***The complementarities with other EU instruments and EU policies***

A number of other EU instruments and policies can benefit from the interregional policy learning opportunities offered by Interreg Europe's operations (projects and the platform). This is, for instance, the case with the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

On research and innovation, complementarities with some Horizon Europe actions can be established. Interreg Europe operations can support in the policy learning process leading to improved skills for: smart specialisation and entrepreneurship, the digitalisation of the economy and society and the uptake of advanced technologies. Knowledge on mature R&I results from H2020 and Horizon Europe can be shared within Interreg Europe to contribute to policy making and to be further capitalised within the regions, in line with the Horizon Europe Dissemination & Exploitation Strategy and the exploitation of R&I knowledge.

In addition, policy changes emerging from Interreg Europe could be linked with the Feedback to Policy Framework of Horizon Europe.

Turning to innovation in SMEs, policy learning support can be envisaged towards relevant parts of the Single Market programme and Horizon Europe (notably the European Innovation Council, European Innovation Ecosystems and the Start-Up Europe initiative). Moreover, policy learning support could be envisaged for industrial ecosystems approach highlighted in the EU's industrial strategy.

In respect of Europe's goal for a greener, climate-neutral and resilient Europe, Interreg Europe support could benefit the European Green Deal's specific instruments: the Resource Efficient Europe Flagship Initiative, the Circular Economy Package, the Zero Pollution Ambition, the Life Programme, the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Strategy on Green Infrastructure, the Knowledge and Innovation Community on Climate and the new approach on Sustainable Blue Economy. The Knowledge Hub of the European Climate Pact is also a relevant initiative which could further contribute to the dissemination of good practices and policy successes. In addition, the link to the Horizon Europe mission on adaptation and societal transformation offers opportunities to address climate change challenges.

The EU's Urban Mobility Package could also benefit from interregional policy learning on sustainable multimodal urban mobility, while the Connecting Europe Facility and Digital Europe Programme could similarly benefit from learning on energy, transport and digital connectivity.

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is a creative and interdisciplinary initiative situated at the crossroads between art, culture, social inclusion, science and technology. Through its cross-cutting priority dedicated to capacity building, Interreg Europe would be able to cover all issues relevant to regional development and Cohesion policy, including integrated territorial strategies aligning different agendas (e.g., from Cultural and creative sectors and European Green Deal) and therefore would also have the potential to contribute to the NEB.

There may also be complementarities on healthcare between Interreg Europe and the EU Health Programme and Horizon Europe programmes. Similarly, on employment, complementarities are possible with the EU's Employment and Social Innovation programme.

Erasmus+ could offer fruitful complementarities in the particular fields of education and training.

Finally, complementarities could be established with the Common Agricultural policy (CAP) and LEADER, as their approach inspired CLLD.

### ***The complementarities with smart specialisation strategies (S3) and its Platform***

In 2014-20, Interreg Europe operations (platform and projects) were coordinated with the S3 Platform. Constant contact between the S3 Platform and the Interreg Europe JS has led to efficient coordination and joint actions. This coordination also enhanced awareness on the approach and possibilities of each instrument, as the target groups were partly coincident. In addition, a number of Interreg Europe projects address smart specialisation.

In 2021-27, this operational coordination will be followed-up as innovation has always been a popular topic in interregional cooperation. At a strategic level, Interreg Europe's 2021-27 contribution to smart specialisation could be regarded as a space for experimentation, learning and generation of good practice in this area that can serve broader purposes. In addition, the interregional policy learning process helps to build capacities for implementing S3 and exploiting synergies between S3/ERDF and other EU Funds (for example, the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund), including Horizon Europe and in particular its European Innovation Ecosystems Work Programme. Interreg Europe projects can complement Horizon Europe priorities such as the missions and partnerships.

### ***The complementarities with the Territorial Agenda 2030***

The aim of the Territorial Agenda 2030 is to ensure balanced development across Europe, and a future for all places, by enabling equal opportunities for citizens and enterprises, wherever they are located. Interreg Europe is part of Cohesion Policy, and aims at reducing disparities between European regions. It is the only Interreg programme that enables cross-European policy learning. Its complementarities with the Territorial Agenda 2030 are clear. On the project level, especially under the Interreg specific objective “a better cooperation governance” and under the thematic fields related to “A Europe closer to citizens”, the exchange of good practices, capacity building and policy learning on integrated territorial strategies will contribute to the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030. At the same time, on the programme level, Interreg Europe can ensure awareness of the territorial settings of project partnerships and thereby reinforce cooperation and solidarity as well as reduce inequalities between better-off places and those with less prosperous outlooks.

#### **1.2.4. Lessons-learnt from past experience**

##### ***Lessons on operational aspects of cooperation projects and the platform***

All programme evaluation reports have confirmed the efficient and effective support provided by the programme to projects.

In the 2014-2020 period, the programme introduced a new structure for interregional cooperation projects with 2 phases and a mid-term review. The action plan at the end of phase 1 and the possibility of running pilot actions in phase 2 have been appreciated. However, the final evaluation highlighted the importance of further supporting pilot actions and the learning process in phase 2.

A second main aspect in project implementation is the link to European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) programmes, which was a requirement for all Interreg Europe projects. The 2014-20 programme encountered obstacles in establishing an effective link, especially related to the implementation timing gap between the ESIF and Interreg Europe projects. It would be sensible therefore to ease the obligation of linking projects to the ESIF programmes. The final evaluation also points to the need to involve the organisations that are directly responsible for the addressed policy instruments as project partners.

Turning to the platform, to make it more effective, its structure underwent significant adjustments during the 2014-20 period. This was the first time that such an innovative service has been developed by an Interreg programme. The overall results of this initiative have been largely positive, as is reflected in the high satisfaction rate of its users.

##### ***Lessons on policy change and impacts***

The high potential of Interreg Europe to directly or indirectly influence the implementation of regional development policies, including European Structural and Investment Funds programmes, has been demonstrated for years now and was confirmed by the impact evaluation.

Projects primarily address three levels of learning (individual, organisational and stakeholder). At partner and stakeholder levels, policy learning processes increase the professional capacity of individuals and organisations. The final evaluation indicates that the scope of project-level learning could be better monitored in the future programme. It also recommends that the indicator system should capture the increased capacity at organisational level.

Regarding the platform, the qualifications of thematic experts and the involvement of projects are key to the quality of its services. The platform allows the programme to address the fourth level of learning (external) directly. This is about creating learning opportunities for individuals and organisations not involved in projects. In this regard, the peer review tool has been one of the most successful services.

In the future, the learning process needs to be more demand-driven. In this respect, the target groups should be more stimulated by awareness-raising actions as early as possible, performed by the programme and at national level.

The evaluation carried out in the 2014-2020 period confirmed the significant impact of the Interreg Europe programme. By May 2021, the amount of funds influenced by projects had already exceeded 1 billion euros (through the funding of new initiatives or new calls in the regions inspired by interregional cooperation; further information on [www.interregeurope.eu/projectresults](http://www.interregeurope.eu/projectresults)).

### **1.2.5. Macro-regional strategies and sea-basin strategies where the programme area as a whole or partially is covered by one or more strategies**

Given the pan-European nature of the Interreg Europe programme, it is not opportune to introduce a specific focus on, or give priority to Interregional Cooperation Projects or activities that target a specific macro-regional strategy or a sea-basin strategy (or initiative). However, proposals for Interregional Cooperation Projects that include issues related to one or more macro-regional strategies and/or sea-basin strategy, as part of the practice sharing and policy learning among regional actors from different parts of Europe, will be welcomed by the programme, as long as the proposal includes a geographical balance in terms of countries represented in the partnership.

### **1.2.6. Strategy of the programme**

Interreg Europe is part of the interregional cooperation strand of European territorial cooperation (Interreg strand C), which supports interregional cooperation to reinforce the effectiveness of cohesion policy.

The ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, Article 3(3)(a), states that the aim of the Interreg Europe programme is to promote the exchange of experience, innovative approaches and capacity building focusing on policy objectives, in relation to the identification, dissemination and transfer of good practices into regional development policies, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes.

This statement positions Interreg Europe as the programme dedicated to supporting cooperation between regional policy actors from across Europe so they can exchange and learn from each other's practices in the implementation of regional development policies. It emphasises the importance of focusing this cooperation on policy objectives as well as on process-related issues covered by the Interreg-specific objective "a better cooperation governance", to enable regional policy actors to learn and adopt novel approaches and increase their capacities for the design and delivery of regional policies of shared relevance.

The rationale for this form of interregional cooperation is that by increasing capacities, regional policy actors become more effective and successful in the implementation of regional development policies, which in turn will increase the territorial impact of these policies. This rationale is a continuation of the approach implemented by the Interreg Europe programme in the period 2014-2020.

#### **Overall objective of the Interreg Europe 2021 – 2027 programme**

Based on the objective laid down in the European territorial cooperation regulation and the rationale described above, the Interreg Europe programme's overall objective is as follows:

*To improve the implementation of regional development policies, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes, by promoting the exchange of experience, innovative approaches and capacity building in relation to the identification, dissemination and transfer of good practices among regional policy actors.*

#### **The Interreg-specific objective 'a better cooperation governance' as single programme objective**

In view of the rationale and the overall objective of the programme presented above, the programme is structured on the basis of the Interreg-specific objective 'a better cooperation governance' (ETC Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, Articles 14 and 15) - as the single and overarching objective of the programme.

This Interreg-specific objective enables Interreg programmes to support actions to enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities and relevant stakeholders involved in managing specific territories and implementing territorial strategies.

The choice of this Interreg-specific objective is based on the following considerations:

- It reflects the focus of the Interreg Europe programme on the exchange of experience and capacity building among regional policy actors to improve their capacity for the design, management and implementation of their regional development policies. This focus on capacity building contributes perfectly to the definition of the Interreg-specific objective on governance;
- It is in line with the type of results that can be expected from the Interreg Europe programme, which are increased capacities of regional policy actors and improvements in the (implementation of) regional policy instruments;
- It does justice to the diversity of regional policy challenges across the European territory. Under the umbrella of this Interreg-specific objective, regional policy actors can work together on all policy issues of shared relevance in line with their regional needs, as long as this falls within the scope of cohesion policy;
- It offers the programme a certain flexibility to adapt to emerging policy developments - again, within the scope of cohesion policy.

### **Scope of the programme**

As indicated above, the focus on the Interreg-specific objective 'a better cooperation governance' implies that beneficiaries can cooperate on all topics of shared relevance in line with their regional needs, as long as this falls within the scope of cohesion policy. From a thematic perspective, this scope is defined by the policy objectives and specific objectives of cohesion policy as presented in Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR), Article 5 and Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 on ERDF, Article 3. At the same time, the programme recognises the need to concentrate resources on those policy areas that are most relevant and urgent for regions in Europe.

To strike a balance between the need to accommodate interregional cooperation on a broad range of topics and the need for thematic concentration, the programme will concentrate the largest share of the programme budget (80%) on thematic areas covered by a selection of specific objectives ('group 1'). The remaining 20% of the programme budget can be allocated to the thematic areas included in the other specific objectives of cohesion policy ('group 2').

The composition of these two groups is presented below:

- Group 1- Thematic areas covered by:
  - all SOs under PO 1 - Smarter Europe
  - all SOs under PO 2 - Greener Europe
  - under PO 4 - More social Europe, SOs related to labour markets (i), health care (v) and culture and sustainable tourism (vi)
- Group 2- Thematic areas covered by:
  - all SOs under PO 3 - More connected Europe
  - all SOs under PO 5 - Europe closer to citizens
  - under PO 4 - More social Europe, SOs related to education (ii), socioeconomic inclusion (iii), integration of third country nationals (iv)

The topics included in group 1 above reflect the continued importance of the Smarter Europe and Greener Europe policy objectives, which were also at the heart of the Interreg Europe 2014-2020 programme. At the same time, this selection also reflects the emerging urgency at the time of programme development of addressing new fields of regional policy in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular related to labour market and health care challenges under the More Social Europe objective.

The composition of and allocations to these groups are indicative and may be subject to modifications during the programme lifetime depending on the internal rules or procedures defined by the Monitoring Committee.

Additionally, in line with the selection of the Interreg-specific objective 'a better cooperation governance', Interreg Europe may also support cooperation on issues directly related to implementing policy instruments such as state aid, public procurement, territorial tools, financial instruments, and the evaluation of public policies (without focussing on a specific thematic area). These issues are directly linked to Interreg-specific objective 'a better cooperation governance'.

### **Operationalising the strategy**

To achieve its overall objective, the Interreg Europe programme strategy consists of two complementary actions, building on the approach adopted by the Interreg Europe 2014-2020 programme.

On one hand, the programme will support interregional cooperation projects between regional policy actors, dedicated to exchange, capacity building and transfer of good practices and innovative approaches with the specific aim of preparing the integration of the lessons learnt from cooperation into regional policies and actions.

On the other hand, the programme will continue to facilitate policy learning services and capitalisation of good regional policy practices on an ongoing basis – in line with the policy learning platform approach – to enable regional level actors from across the EU to tap into relevant experiences and practices whenever they need them to strengthen their policies.

These two actions are applicable to all the specific objectives supported by the programme.

As specified in the overall objective above, Interreg Europe targets **regional policy actors**. This target group includes national, regional and local authorities as well as other relevant bodies responsible for the definition and implementation of regional development policies. The composition of this target group is quite diverse, reflecting the diversity in institutional and geographical conditions in the Partner States. A more detailed description of these actors is provided in the target groups' description in section 2 of this document.

As a general rule, the **beneficiaries of the programme** are public bodies and bodies governed by public law. Private non-profit bodies may also be beneficiaries under certain conditions (see also Section 2 of this document). Detailed provisions will be outlined in the programme manual.

Private companies, especially **SMEs**, are an important target group in the context of several supported specific objectives and when relevant they are encouraged to participate in the activities of Interreg Europe actions. They can benefit from the exchange of experience, although they cannot receive EU funding directly as a beneficiary.

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



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

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

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection <i>Text field: [2 000 per objective]</i>
Interreg-specific objective (ISO) 'a better cooperation governance'	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;	1	<p>The choice of the Interreg-specific objective is based on the following considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• European regions are facing serious economic, environmental and social challenges;</li> <li>• The potential of and opportunities for cooperation between public institutions and stakeholders in European regions to promote the exchange of experiences, innovative approaches and capacity building on policy objectives and on issues directly related to implementing policy instruments, are insufficiently developed and exploited in relation to the identification, dissemination and transfer of good practices into regional development policies, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes;</li> <li>• The focus of the Interreg Europe programme on the exchange of experience and capacity building among regional policy actors to improve their capacity for the design, management and implementation of their regional development policies fits perfectly with the definition of the Interreg-specific objective on governance;</li> <li>• It is in line with the type of results that can be expected from the Interreg Europe programme, which are increased capacities of regional policy actors and improvements in the (implementation of) regional policy instruments;</li> <li>• It does justice to the diversity of regional policy challenges across the European territory. Under the Interreg-specific objective, regional policy actors can work together on all policy issues of shared relevance in line with their regional needs, as long as this falls within the scope of cohesion policy;</li> <li>• It offers the programme a certain flexibility to adapt to emerging policy developments - again, within the scope of cohesion policy.</li> </ul> <p>Interreg Europe will support actions that contribute to this objective by means of grants.</p>

## 2. Priorities

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

### 2.1. Title of the priority (repeated for each priority)

Reference: Article 17(3)(d)

Text field: [300]

#### Priority 1: Strengthening institutional capacities for more effective regional development policies

This is a priority pursuant to a transfer under Article 17(3)

**2.1.1. Specific objective** (repeated for each selected specific objective, for priorities other than technical assistance) - Reference: Article 17(3)(e)

**Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders.**

**2.1.2 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate** - Reference: Article 17(3)(e)(i), Article 17(9)(c)(ii)

Text field [7000]

#### Introduction

Interreg Europe aims to improve the implementation of regional development policies, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes. It will do this by promoting the exchange of experience, innovative approaches and capacity building in relation to the identification, dissemination and transfer of good practices among regional policy actors to strengthen their institutional capacities for a better implementation of their policies.

The focus on the Interreg-specific objective ‘a better cooperation governance’ implies that beneficiaries can cooperate on all topics of shared relevance in line with their regional needs, as long as this falls within the scope of cohesion policy. From a thematic perspective, this scope is defined by the policy objectives and specific objectives of EU cohesion policy 2021-2027.

However, the programme will concentrate its resources on a restricted number of topics, as described in section 1.2.6. To achieve its objectives, Interreg Europe supports two complementary types of action: interregional cooperation projects and a Policy Learning Platform.

The types of actions supported by the programme have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they are not expected to have any significant negative environmental impact due to their nature.

#### 1. Interregional cooperation projects

The programme will support *interregional cooperation projects* between regional policy actors. The objective of these projects is to improve the implementation of participating regions’ regional development policies, including their *Investment for jobs and growth goal (IJ&G) programmes* – in line with the programme mission as described in the ETC regulation (EU) 2021/1059, Article 3(3)(a).

The programme translates this mission by applying a requirement to all supported projects that at least one of the regional policy instruments addressed by the partnership must be an IJ&G programme.

Projects have two phases.

In principle, the core phase lasts a maximum of three years and is dedicated to improving policies through learning. It therefore involves learning **activities** to support the exchange of experience, capacity building, the transfer of good practices, and innovative approaches. These activities contribute to increasing the professional capacity of the people and institutions participating in projects with the ultimate goal of integrating the lessons learnt from cooperation into regional development policies.

As part of the 'innovative approaches', activities can also include, in justified cases, pilot actions to test new and promising approaches. Pilot actions shall be part of the learning process contributing to achieving the project objectives. Pilot actions can be approved from the start of a project. This may happen when the partnership is already aware during the project preparation phase of an innovative approach worth testing. Pilot actions can also be requested later during the implementation of the project, based on lessons learnt from the project.

Each project will be subject to a midterm review before the end of the core phase. The review's purpose is to check the progress achieved toward the project's objectives and prepare the ground for the follow-up phase. This will also be the last moment for the project to request a pilot action.

Partner regions that do not improve a policy during the core phase must, by the end of this core phase, produce an **action plan for policy improvement**: this will be in the form of a document explaining how the partner region will improve its policy using what it has learnt from the project.

After the core phase, the follow-up phase constitutes the final year of the project. This is primarily dedicated to **monitoring** the first effects of the policy improvements and whether additional policy improvements are achieved. More specifically, partner regions having already improved policies in the core phase monitor the effects of these improvements in their territories. The other partner regions, which will have produced a policy improvement action plan, are required to monitor whether the improvements envisaged in their plans are being achieved. The programme reporting system will be designed to ensure a proper monitoring of this phase.

During the follow-up phase, partners can also continue to learn from the implementation of the policy improvements and from the finalisation of the possible pilot actions.

Throughout the project, partners shall engage a **regional stakeholder group** to ensure that the relevant actors in each region are actively involved in policy learning and in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of policy improvement.

Projects are also expected to contribute to the content and activities of the Policy Learning Platform (see point 2 below) to ensure that relevant lessons learnt from projects can reach other regional policy actors in Europe.

More detailed requirements, conditions and practical provisions for the interregional cooperation projects will be provided in the programme manual.

## 2. Policy Learning Platform

Interreg Europe will support a **Policy Learning Platform** (from here on: platform) to facilitate policy learning and capitalise on good practices on an ongoing basis. The platform will enable regional policy actors from across Europe to tap into relevant experience and practice whenever needed to strengthen their

institutional capacity in view of improving their regional development policies, including programmes for Investment in jobs & growth.

The platform offers a range of activities and services to the European regional policy community. The thematic coverage of the platform activities will reflect the thematic concentration of the programme, cf. section 1.2.6. It supports networking and exchange of experience among relevant regional policy actors. The platform primarily builds on the results of the interregional cooperation projects of the previous and present programming periods and makes them available to a wider audience of regional policy actors across Europe. The projects' contribution to the platform activities is therefore essential. The platform also contributes to the development of policy learning and to synergies with other relevant initiatives, in particular other existing platforms addressing similar topics and target audiences.

The services offered by the platform build on the experience gained in the 2014-2020 period and will consist in particular of:

- *Expert support* for policy learning (e.g., policy helpdesk, peer reviews);
- *Good practice database*;
- *Community of peers* - networking opportunities between regional policy actors;
- *Knowledge hub* - access to knowledge on specific policy areas (e.g., policy briefs, webinars, reports, other platforms).

These different services are developed in close cooperation with the JS which contributes to the platform activities through its deep knowledge of the projects. The platform's services are also accessible to people with disabilities and can be adapted to meet specific needs when necessary. The beneficiary of the Platform is the GEIE GECOTTI (i.e., the body entrusted by the Managing Authority to implement the Interreg Europe programme). More detailed arrangements regarding the activities and services as well as the organisational structure of the platform will be detailed in the programme manual, based on the 2014-20 experience and the evaluation recommendations.

### 2.1.3 Indicators

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

Table 2: Output indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
<b>1</b>	<i>Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;</i>	<b>RC081</b>	Participations in joint actions across borders	Participants	0	14 000
<b>1</b>	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;	<b>RC087</b>	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	12 000
<b>1</b>	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;	<b>RC084</b>	Pilot actions jointly developed and implemented in projects	Pilot actions	0	180
<b>1</b>	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;	<b>O14</b>	Policy instruments addressed	Policy instruments	<b>0</b>	1 600

ü

Table 3: Result indicators

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Base-line	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;	RI1	<i>People with increased capacity due to their participation on platform events</i>	Participants	0	2022	4 200	<i>Programme monitoring system &amp; survey</i>	
1	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;	RI2	<i>Organisations with increased capacity due to their participation in interregional cooperation</i>	Organisations	0	2022	7 900	<i>Programme monitoring system &amp; survey</i>	
1	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders;	RI3	<i>Policy instruments improved thanks to Interreg Europe</i>	Policy instruments	0	2022	800	<i>Programme monitoring system</i>	

ü

## 2.1.4 The main target groups

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

Text field [7000]

### Target groups

The Interreg Europe programme's core target group is any organisation responsible for regional development policy. This includes national, regional, local public authorities and other relevant bodies responsible for developing and/or implementing regional development policies, including IJ&G programmes, in the thematic fields addressed by the programme.

The programme also targets other types of relevant organisations provided that their relevance and competence in regional development policy can be demonstrated. These include for instance (not exhaustive):

- Business support organisations (e.g., development agencies, innovation agencies, chambers of commerce, clusters);
- Environmental organisations (e.g., environmental agencies, energy agencies, NGOs);
- Education and research institutions (e.g., universities, research centres);
- Other organisations of relevance to regional development policies (e.g., Local Action Groups; social partners).

Some specific programme activities, in particular of its Policy Learning Platform, may focus on a sub-set of these target groups, in particular the core target groups. Further details on the nature of the involvement of these target groups in projects and in platform activities will be specified in the programme manual.

### Regional stakeholder group

As described in 2.1.2. point 1, project partners must set-up and work closely with a regional stakeholder group. Members of these stakeholder groups could come from the target groups mentioned above (provided they are not partner in the project) as well as from other relevant categories, including SMEs and other relevant private sector bodies.

### Eligible beneficiaries

The following categories of beneficiary will be eligible to receive funding from Interreg Europe:

- **Public authorities**
- **Bodies governed by public law** (this definition comes from Article 2.4 of Directive 2014/24/EU of the European Parliament and the Council on Public Procurement), this means any body:
  - a) established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character;
  - b) having legal personality; and
  - c) financed, for the most part, by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law; or are subject to management supervision by those authorities or bodies; or have an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law.
- **Private non-profit bodies.** In Interreg Europe, this means any body:
  - a) not having an industrial or commercial character;
  - b) having a legal personality; and
  - c) not financed, for the most part, by the State, regional or local authorities, or other bodies governed by public law; or are not subject to management supervision by those bodies; or not having an administrative, managerial or supervisory board, more than half of whose members are appointed by the State, regional or local authorities, or by other bodies governed by public law.

Private non-profit bodies cannot take on the role of a lead partner in Interreg Europe projects.

## Guiding principles for selection of projects

Interregional cooperation projects will be selected using regular calls for proposals addressing either the full scope of the programme or specific topics, subject to the approval of the Monitoring Committee. Their terms of reference may take into account developments and results of previous calls, policy trends and other new circumstances, as well as any guidance from the policy learning platform.

Applicants will be asked to specify which thematic area of the Interreg Europe programme (as presented in section 1.2.6) is the main focus of their project. Projects having cross-cutting synergies among different topics are also welcome as long as the main issue they address remains clear.

In order to ensure that the programme contributes to territorial cohesion, a balanced combination of regions of varying development levels will be encouraged in the project partnerships. In this respect, a broad geographical coverage, spanning different parts of the programme territory would also be desirable in each partnership. This implies that partnerships must in principle go beyond cross-border and transnational areas. In line with Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the guiding principles also take into consideration the characteristics of outermost regions and the possibility of cooperation among these regions.

The Programme Manual will provide a detailed description of the criteria used for selecting the projects. In terms of quality, the criteria will cover core issues such as the overall relevance of the proposal, the quality of the expected results and the quality of the proposed partnership.

Finally, horizontal principles (compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, sustainable development, gender equality, equal opportunities and equal treatment) in accordance with Article 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR) will be duly taken into consideration in the application, selection, monitoring and evaluation procedures. The particulars on how these principles will be applied in practice will be set out in the programme manual.

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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(iv)*

Text field [7000]

Interreg Europe aims to improve the implementation of regional development policies, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes, by promoting the exchange of experience, innovative approaches and capacity building among regional policy actors across the programme territory.

The sheer diversity of Europe's regions, with their vastly different characteristics, opportunities and needs, means going beyond 'one-size-fits-all' policies. It calls for place-based approaches that give regions the ability and means to deliver policies that meet their specific needs. At the same time, this diversity is an asset allowing each region to develop to its strengths while benefitting from other regions through various forms of interaction. Interreg Europe can contribute to the integrated territorial development of regions across Europe by enabling them to improve the implementation of their regional development policies by learning from the experience and practices of other regions.

Given its objectives and geographical scope, Interreg Europe targets all the regions of the programme territory, with no particular focus on specific territories. As a result, the programme has no plans to use specific territorial tools such as community-led local development or integrated territorial investments.

However, the implementation of such territorial tools could be addressed by Interreg Europe projects. Regional policy actors from different regions may indeed be interested in improving the implementation of such tools through exchanging and transferring their experiences in this matter.

### 5.1.7 Planned use of financial instruments

Reference: Article 17(3)(v)

Text field [7000]

The Interreg Europe programme has no plans to use financial instruments due to the nature of the activities it supports, which mainly involve exchanging experience, building capacity, transferring good practices and testing innovative approaches.

However, the use of financial instruments at regional level could be addressed by Interreg Europe projects. Regional policy actors across Europe may be interested in improving their use of financial instruments through exchanging and transferring their experiences in this matter.

### 5.1.7 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

Table 4: Dimension 1 – intervention field

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	Enhance the institutional capacity of public authorities, in particular those mandated to manage a specific territory, and of stakeholders.	132	351,372,842.59

Table 5: Dimension 2 – form of financing

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF		Grant	351,372,842.59

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

Priority No	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF		33	351,372,842.59

### 3. Financing plan

Reference: Article 17(3)(f)

#### 3.1 Financial appropriations by year

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

Table 7

<b>Fund</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>2027</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>ERDF (territorial cooperation goal)</i>	0	64,827,095	65,868,412	66,930,555	68,013,941	56,357,757	57,484,910	379,482,670
<i>IPA III CBC<sup>1</sup></i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>NDICI- CBC<sup>2</sup></i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>IPA III<sup>3</sup></i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>NDICI<sup>4</sup></i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>OCTP<sup>5</sup></i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Interreg Funds<sup>6</sup></i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	0	64,827,095	65,868,412	66,930,555	68,013,941	56,357,757	57,484,910	379,482,670

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

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

Table 8<sup>2</sup>

PO No or TA	Priority	Fund (as applicable)	Basis for calculation EU support (total or public)	EU contribution (a)	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart		Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Cofinancing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from the third countries (for information)
					Without TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a1)	For TA pursuant to Article 27(1) (a2)		National public (c)	National private (d)			

0	Priority 1	ERDF <sup>1</sup>	Total	379 482 670.00	351,372,843.00	28,109,827.00	94 870 667.50	86,670,667.50	8,200,000.00	474 353 337.50	80%	2,930,000.00
		IPA III CBC <sup>2</sup>		0			0	0	0	0		
		NDICI- CBC <sup>3</sup>		0			0	0	0	0		
		IPA III <sup>4</sup>		0			0	0	0	0		
		NDICI		0			0	0	0	0		
		OCTP <sup>9</sup>		0			0	0	0	0		
		OCTP		0			0	0	0	0		

		<i>Interreg Funds</i>		0			0	0	0	0		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>All funds</b>	Total	379,482,670.00	351,372,843.00	28,109,827.00	94,870,667.50	86,670,667.50	8,200,000.00	474,353,337.50	80%	2,930,000.00

1 When ERDF resources correspond to amounts programmed in accordance with Article 17(3), it shall be specified.

2 Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.

3 Interreg A, external cross-border cooperation.

4 Interreg B and C.

5 Interreg B and C.

6 Interreg B and C.

7 Interreg C and D.

8 ERDF, IPA III, NDICI or OCTP, whereas single amount under Interreg B and C.

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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(g)*

Text field [10 000]

### 4.1. Action taken to involve the relevant programme partners in the preparation of the Interreg programme

#### Programming Committee

The Interreg Europe programme's preparation process started in December 2019 in Helsinki with the setting up of a Programming Committee (PC) with the specific task of preparing the interregional cooperation programme for the 2021-2027 period. The PC was composed of up to three representatives per Partner State (27 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland). Where applicable, these representatives came from both national and regional levels of the States represented to ensure efficiency and broad representation, respecting their administrative systems and institutional organisations. The European Commission participated in an advisory capacity. The Committee of the Regions (CoR) was also an advisory member of the Programming Committee.

The PC met frequently during the preparation process to discuss and decide on the subsequent steps of the programming process. Partner States followed their own arrangements in order to prepare their input to the discussions. Most of these meetings were organised online due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Two online surveys, the first one on the programme structure and the second on the actions to be supported and the target groups, were launched in spring 2020 and in summer 2020 respectively. They were widely distributed on the national levels in order to obtain feedback from all relevant national and regional key players.

Where applicable, the national committees were also regularly consulted under the aegis of the relevant national authority.

The Interreg Europe programme's Joint Secretariat acted as secretariat of the current PC. As mentioned above under section 1.2.3., the JS engaged in the discussions with the other Pan-European programmes to clarify their dividing lines and synergies.

With a view to completing a draft Cooperation Programme by mid-2021, the Programming Committee took several actions to consult a wide array of partners all over Europe on their views and proposals for the programme.

#### Public consultation

A continuous online consultation process was initiated during the preparation phase of the CP giving all relevant stakeholders the opportunity to comment on the different draft versions of the CP. The following draft versions of the CP were published on the Interreg Europe website:

- the first draft version on 25 September 2020 with the first strategic orientations;
- the second draft version on 18 December 2020 with the operational arrangements for projects and the platform;
- the final draft version of the CP was put out for a formal public consultation over a prolonged period of five weeks from 15 March to 16 April 2021. Participation in this public consultation, which took the form of an on-line survey, was open to all interested actors across Europe. Representatives of

the Partner States actively communicated on the possibility of participating in this consultation to the relevant stakeholders in their country. This online public consultation survey was consulted by 554 people, of whom 158 completed the questionnaire. All the participating countries were represented in these responses. These contributions included more than 250 individual comments and suggestions for modification or clarification of the programme. Public authorities (local, regional and national) represented 45% of the respondents, education and research institutions 18% and business support organisations 9%. A list of all responding organisations is provided in appendix 4 of this document.

Partner States disseminated the public consultation to the relevant stakeholders in their countries, sometimes in national languages.

### **Stakeholders workshop**

In order to promote the online public consultation process, a dedicated online 'stakeholders workshop' was organised on 24 March 2021 to consult any interested partners in Europe. Out of the 1,000 registered people, 647 participated in this webinar. Participants were able to raise questions both at the registration phase and during the webinar via the chat. They were invited to contribute to the official consultation to have their comments and suggestions taken into consideration.

The main questions and/or requests for clarification were related to the following topics: a) the choice of one single priority for the future programme and its presentation as 'cross-cutting' several thematic areas; b) the lighter focus on improving Structural Funds related programmes, c) the links to other relevant EU policies or instruments ; d) the new possibilities open for pilot actions; e) the use of simplified cost options (SCOs). A final report as well as the recording of the workshop were published on the Interreg Europe programme website.

### ***Integration of partners' feedback in the cooperation programme***

The process for integrating the partners' contributions into the final version of the cooperation programme can be summarised as follows.

For the joint programme strategy (section 1): the description of the overall context was improved. Specific references or more detailed texts were included, for instance, on the link between biodiversity and climate change, on the combination of green and digital technologies, on equal opportunities and role of people with disabilities in employment, and on the well-being dimension under a more social Europe.

In response to the need to reinforce the coordination with other funding sources: the possible synergies to the Interregional Innovation Investments instrument as well as other relevant EU instruments (e.g., Horizon Europe) were further detailed. Finally, several references to outermost regions were included to better recognise the unique character of their situation.

For priority (section 2): no major and recurring questions were received. On the contrary, the additional flexibility with regards to the scope of the programme or the two phases were often recognised as a positive development. The suggestions to further clarify the operations' features will also be addressed in the programme manual.

For the financing plan (section 3): a few requests were related to the need for a higher co-financing rate to secure the full involvement of specific categories of actors/territories. The co-financing rate in the programme financing plan is an average rate at programme level and takes into consideration the reduction of the maximum average rate at programme level to 80% in line with the new regulation.

On the involvement of partners: the description was also improved based on several contributions. In particular, the composition of the monitoring committee as well as the way the consultation of relevant stakeholders was and will be ensured were clarified.

On communication, described in section 5, the results of the public consultation led to minor specifications related for instance to the role of transnational networks and platforms as important multipliers, or referring to progress reports as key documents for evaluation.

Finally, the contributions related to the programme's implementation arrangements (mainly sections 7 and 8) will be taken into consideration in the programme manual.

The list of all comments received as well as the analysis of the public consultation results were published on the Interreg Europe programme website.

### **Strategic Environmental Assessment**

Due to its core focus on capacity building, the Interreg Europe programme will not have a direct impact on the environment. Interreg Europe was therefore not subject to a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) as confirmed by the French Decree No. 2021-1000 of 30 July 2021.

### **4.2. Role of those programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation**

The programme bodies comply with the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the European Structural and Investment Funds. This relates in particular to the « main principles and good practices concerning the involvement of relevant partners in the preparation of the partnership agreement and programmes » (Articles 8 and 9) and the « good practices concerning the formulation of the rules of membership and internal procedures of monitoring committees » (Articles 10 and 11).

The Interreg Europe Monitoring Committee includes up to three representatives from each Partner State at the appropriate governance levels. The MC meets on a regular basis, in principle twice a year (*see detailed list of MC members on the programme website*).

Representatives of the Commission shall participate in the work of the monitoring committee in a monitoring and an advisory capacity in line with Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 Article 39 and Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 Article 29.

In addition, the involvement of the CoR will be continued. This pan-European body participates in the Monitoring Committee in an advisory capacity. This will ensure that the perspective of the regional and local authorities will be represented throughout the life of the programme.

Each Partner State has in principle one or several national or regional representative(s) (National Points of Contact) who can provide programme information in local languages (*see detailed list of National Points of Contact on the programme website*).

All Partner States agreed to support the programme's implementation with:

1. Checking the eligibility of partner status, based on the information provided and on the national legal framework;
2. Checking the relevance of the letter of support's signatory (if applicable and further specified in the programme manual);
3. Supplying national specific information;
4. Establishing a point of contact for potential applicants;
5. Disseminating programme information widely, including about the Platform's services;
6. Organising national/ regional events for information and dissemination, including promoting the Platform's services.

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

Reference: Article 17(3)(h)

Text field [limitation 4500]

### 5.1. Objectives

The programme's ambition is to use communication and visibility actions as a tool for achieving the programme's objective of better cooperation governance. We want to reach that objective with high community ownership of the programme. In order to do so, we set the following objectives:

1. To ensure wide awareness about the programme's funding opportunities, with applicants from at least 90% of eligible NUTS2 regions by 2026 (*call applicant statistics*)
2. To ensure efficient support to beneficiaries with implementing and communicating their project results and positive impact of EU support to their target audiences, including the general public, with at least 85% satisfaction with the programme support tools, such as seminars, tutorials, in-person/written guidance, templates (*project partner surveys*)
3. To contribute to a wide awareness about the policy learning platform's services, with beneficiaries (events/helpdesk) from at least 50% of eligible NUTS2 regions by 2026 (*platform monitoring system*)
4. To increase Interreg Europe's profile, especially vis-à-vis EU institutions and the Partner States with a minimum of 100 dedicated communication actions (e.g., speakers at events, dedicated publications and events) by 2027 (*programme statistics*).

The Policy Learning Platform also significantly contributes to the programme's objectives and opens access to policy learning to all programme's target groups. It is therefore considered as an operation of strategic importance.

### 5.2. Target audiences

The programme's communication and visibility actions will reach out to a large audience from the programme's eligibility area, both geographically and thematically. We will target:

- 1) (Potential) beneficiaries (see 2.1.4 – Main target groups)
- 2) Community users (online community member – from institutions listed in 2.1.4, their stakeholders, our multipliers, general public – attracted via our communication channels to engage with the programme's information and services)
- 3) Multipliers (Partner States, their points of contact, European Commission, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, elected officials, national/transnational networks/platforms, regional Brussels' offices in Brussels, other Interreg programmes, OECD, other relevant institutions)
- 4) Governance (Partner States, DG Regio, managing authority)

The general public will be engaged through actions organised online or locally, whenever relevant.

### 5.3. Communication channels

Channels to reach our target audiences and achieve our objectives:

- a. **A website**, striving towards EN 301 549 standard for accessibility, with a dedicated space for project websites ensuring their harmonised visibility, and the Policy learning platform, with an active and engaged online community
- b. **Social media** (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram) for constant communication with our audiences and targeted campaigns (the mix can change to follow new IT trends)
- c. **Public relations**, including formal partnerships and/or networking activities, to foster relations and build synergies with the programme's multipliers
- d. **Events** and meetings (online/ hybrid/ in-person), organised by the programme or third parties, to inform/engage/train our audiences
- e. **Publications** (online/ print), and audio-visual products in support of the programme's communication and visibility actions.

The programme will appoint a communication officer to be in charge of the implementation of harmonised communication and visibility actions and to work closely with the national communication coordinator in France (in compliance with the CPR, Article 48), as well as with the Interreg representative in the INFORM EU network.

#### **5.4. Planned budget**

A total planned budget for communication and visibility purposes, from 2021 until 2029, is expected to be at least MEUR 2.09, which is in line with EC recommendation. Annual communication budgets will follow the programme's developments (calls, results), allocating funds to each communication channel indicatively as follows: up to 23% website, at least 2% social media, 15% public relations, 55% events, and 5% publications.

#### **5.5. Monitoring and evaluation**

All communication and visibility actions will be regularly evaluated by external or internal evaluators. Data for the evaluation of the communication objectives will come from surveys, internal statistics, project reports, and website analytics. The result indicators are defined in the four objectives above.

The programme will have a more detailed set of indicators to follow and evaluate all communication and visibility actions and improve their performance on an ongoing basis.

Evaluation of the communication strategy will be part of the overall programme's evaluation measures.

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

*Reference: Article 17(3)(i), Article 24*

*Text field [7 000]*

Although this section does not apply to Strand C Interreg programmes, Interreg Europe will still support smaller scale cooperation initiatives through the Policy Learning Platform and the participation of smaller scale organisations in projects (e.g., through the stakeholder groups). It will not use small project funds (as defined in Article 25 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on ETC), which are not adapted to the programme's overall objective, types of supported actions and geographical scale of project partnerships.

## 7. Implementing provisions

### 7.1. Programme authorities

Reference: Article 17(6)(a)

Table 9

Programme authorities	Name of the institution [255]	Contact name [200]	E-mail [200]
Managing authority	Hauts-de-France Region	Anne Wetzel Directrice Direction Europe	anne.wetzel@hautsdefrance.fr
National authority (for programmes with participating third countries, if appropriate)	to be communicated by NO + CH with the Agreement		
Audit authority	Interministerial Commission for the Coordination of Controls - in France	Martine Marigeaud, Présidente de la CICC  Anne-Chrystel Guiochon, adjointe au chef de pôle et chef de mission d'une commission interministerielle indépendante  Caroline Ly, chargée de mission	<a href="mailto:Martine.marigeaud@finances.gouv.fr">Martine.marigeaud@finances.gouv.fr</a>  <a href="mailto:Anne-chrystel.guiochon@finances.gouv.fr">Anne-chrystel.guiochon@finances.gouv.fr</a>  caroline.ly@finances.gouv.fr
Group of auditors representatives	<i>info to be collected with the agreement</i>		
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	POM Oost-Vlaanderen	<a href="mailto:Dieter.Geenens@pomov.be">Dieter Geenens (General Director)</a> <a href="mailto:Vanessa.Verheire@pomov.be">Vanessa Verheire (Policy Officer)</a>	<a href="mailto:dieter.geenens@pomov.be">dieter.geenens@pomov.be</a> ; <a href="mailto:vanessa.verheire@oost-vlaanderen.be">vanessa.verheire@oost-vlaanderen.be</a>

### 7.2. Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

Reference: Article 17(6)(b)

Text field [3 500]

Arrangements are already in place at the time of programme submission because implementation arrangements have been retained from the 2014-2020 programming period. The joint secretariat is set up after consultation with the Partner States under the responsibility of the managing authority. Staff recruitment takes into account the programme partnership; the recruitment procedures follow the principles of transparency, non-discrimination and equal opportunities. The location of the joint secretariat is in Lille, France.

The joint secretariat assists the monitoring committee and the managing authority, in carrying out their duties. It cooperates closely with the body in charge of the accounting function. In accordance with the e-cohesion principle and Annex XIV of the CPR, all exchanges between Interreg Europe and all the programme authorities are carried out by means of electronic data exchange.

Where appropriate, it also assists the audit authority. The assistance provided by the joint secretariat to the audit authority is strictly limited to administrative support, such as the provision of relevant data for the drawing of the audit sample by the EC, the organisation and follow-up of the group of auditors meetings and written procedures, ensuring the communication flow between the different bodies involved (EC, audit authority, group of auditors members, external audit firm if applicable) and keeping an up-to-date list of the members of the group of auditors. This support does not interfere with the tasks of the audit authority as defined in Article 77 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR) and in Article 48 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on ETC.

The joint secretariat is funded from the technical assistance budget.

Based on Article 46(3) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on ETC, the programme Partner States decided that the management verifications ("First level control" or FLC) will not be done by the MA/JS, but through the identification by each Partner State of a body or person responsible for this verification in their country.

Should the MC decide to reimburse part of the project costs through simplified cost options in line with Articles 51 and 53 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR), the MC could decide on alternative FLC arrangements, which will be laid down in the management and control system description.

The JS will also provide the necessary assistance for the preparation of the subsequent interregional cooperation programme 2028-2034, if renewed, until the new Managing Authority is designated.

### 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

Reference: Article 17(6)(c)

Text field [10 500]

#### **Reduction and recovery of payments from beneficiaries**

The managing authority shall ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the project via the lead partner. Project partners shall repay the lead partner any amounts unduly paid. The managing authority shall also recover funds from the lead partner (and the lead partner from the project partner) following a termination of the subsidy contract in full or in part based on the conditions defined in the subsidy contract.

If the lead partner does not succeed in securing repayment from another project partner or if the managing authority does not succeed in securing repayment from the lead partner or sole beneficiary, the EU Member State on whose territory the beneficiary concerned is located or, in the case of an EGTC, is registered, shall reimburse the managing authority based on Article 52 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on ETC. In accordance

with Article 52 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on ETC, “once the Member State or third country reimbursed the managing authority any amounts unduly paid to a partner, it may continue or start a recovery procedure against that partner under its national law”.

Details of the recovery procedure will be included in the management and control system description to be established in accordance with Article 69 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR).

The managing authority shall be responsible for reimbursing the amounts concerned to the general budget of the Union in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the participating Member States as laid down in the cooperation programme and in Article 52 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on ETC.

With regard to financial corrections imposed by the Managing Authority or the Commission on the basis of Articles 103 and 104 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR), financial consequences for the EU Member States are laid down in the section “liabilities and irregularities” (see below). Any related exchange of correspondence between the Commission and an EU Member State will be copied to the managing authority/joint secretariat. The managing authority/joint secretariat will inform the accounting body and the audit authority/group of auditors where relevant.

### ***Liabilities and irregularities***

For the use of the programme ERDF, Norwegian, and Swiss funding, the Partner State will bear liability as follows:

- For project-related expenditure granted to project partners located on its territory, liability will be born individually by each Partner State;
- In case of a systemic irregularity or financial correction (decided by the programme authorities or the Commission), the EU Member State will bear the financial consequences in proportion to the relevant irregularity detected on the respective Member State territory. Where the systemic irregularity or financial correction cannot be linked to a specific EU Member State territory, the Member State shall be responsible in proportion to the ERDF contribution paid to the respective national project partners involved in the programme;
- For the technical assistance expenditure (calculated as a flat rate in accordance with Article 27 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 on ETC), the above liability principles applicable for project-related expenditure and systemic irregularities / financial corrections may also be applied to TA corrections as they are the direct consequence of project expenditure related corrections.

If the managing authority/joint secretariat, the accounting body, any EU Member State or Norway becomes aware of irregularities, it shall without any delay inform the liable EU Member State or Norway and the managing authority/joint secretariat. The latter will ensure the transmission of information to the liable EU-Member State or Norway (if it has not already been informed directly), the accounting body and audit authority or group of auditors, where relevant.

In compliance with Annex XII referred to in Article 69 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR), each EU Member State is responsible for reporting irregularities committed by beneficiaries located on its territory to the Commission and at the same time to the managing authority. Each EU Member State shall keep the Commission as well as the managing authority informed of any progress of related administrative and legal proceedings. The managing authority will ensure the transmission of information to the accounting body and audit authority.

If a Partner State does not comply with its duties arising from these provisions, the managing authority may suspend services to the project applicants/partners located in this Partner State. The MA will send a letter to the Partner State concerned requesting them to comply with their obligations within 3 months. If the concerned Partner State’s reply is not in line with the obligations, then the MA will propose to put this issue on the MC agenda for discussion and decision.

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

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

Table 10: 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 programme will make use of reimbursement of eligible expenditure 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 programme will make Use of financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## Map of the programme area

Not applicable to Interreg C programmes

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates

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

Not applicable

### Appendix 2. Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs

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

Not applicable

### Appendix 3. List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable – *Article 17(3).*

Interreg Europe's overall objective is to improve "regional development policies, including Investment for jobs and growth goal programmes". Therefore, Interreg Europe is of strategic character by definition, and all operations supported by the programme are of strategic importance.

Nevertheless, the Policy Learning Platform is identified as an operation of particular strategic importance due to its objective, duration and scope of intervention. By capitalising on all projects good practices, it offers a range of services to strengthen the institutional capacity of any interested regional development policy practitioners across Europe. In particular, these services can complement the Commission's action on administrative capacity building for practitioners of the Investment for jobs and growth goal's programmes. The Policy Learning Platform should also significantly contribute to the visibility and outreach of the programme to all regions in Europe. This operation is implemented from 2023 until the end of the programming period.