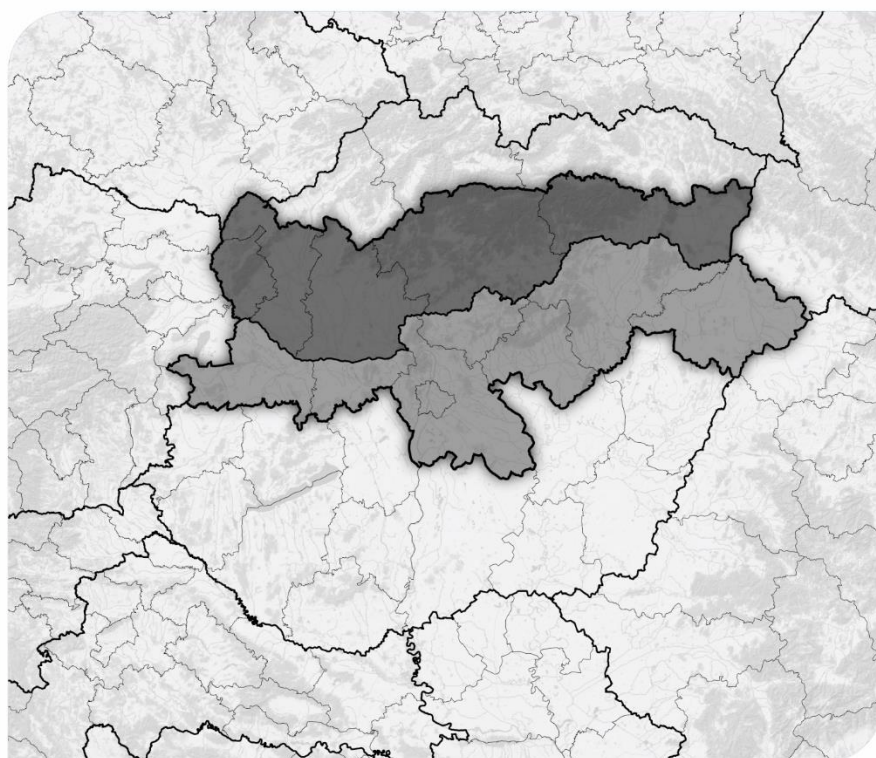


DECEMBER 2018



Corrected version

First Phase Evaluation of the CBC programmes managed by Hungary

Slovakia-Hungary INTERREG V-A Programme



1406 Budapest, Pf. 7.



www.cesci-net.eu



cesci@cesci-net.eu

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The context

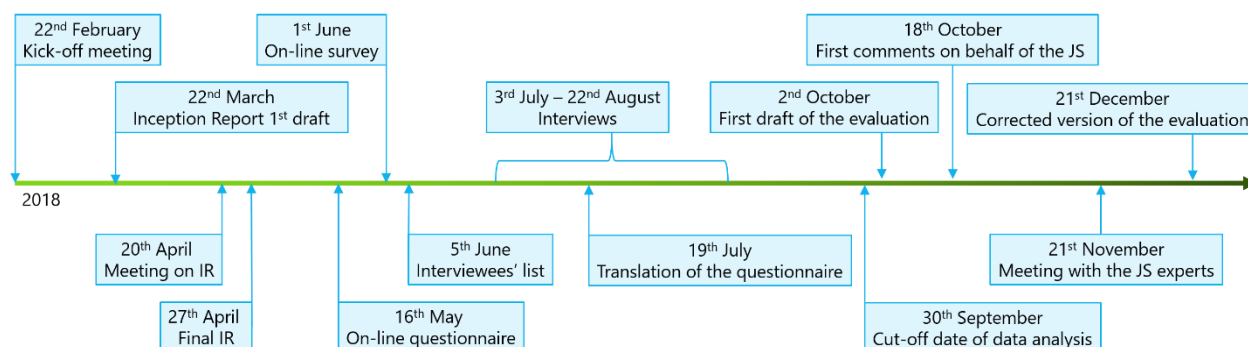
2018 is the year of First Phase (earlier: mid-term) evaluation of the cooperation programmes. In February, the Managing Authority of the INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme (operated that time in the Prime Minister's Office) invited the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) to carry out the evaluation of the present programme.

Within the framework of the current evaluation assignment, the effectiveness, the efficiency and the impact of the cross-border programme were assessed. In line with the evaluation plan of the programme, the present document focuses on

- programme management and implementation,
- Call for Proposals, project application and selection procedures,
- Communication Strategy of the programme,
- specific types of calls and projects: Small Project Fund, SME call, Territorial Action Plans for Employment, infrastructural projects (roads and bridges)
- performance framework indicators,
- feeding the extended AIR 2018.

The evaluation has been proceeded in line with the Inception Report approved by the MA at the end of April 2018 including the following methods: statistical analysis of the regional data and the data of the CP, interviews, on-line survey among the applicants. The cut-off date of the data analysis was 30th September while the institutional and administrative developments have been examined until the end of November according to the figure below.

Figure I: Milestones of the evaluation



The key findings of the evaluation

(1) The time factor

The implementation of the programme started with remarkable delay. The delay stemmed from the late approval of the relevant EU legislations and the relocation of the Managing Authority from the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office at the end of 2015. The old-new MA, together with the JS with the effective support provided by the NA carried-out the preparatory works with exemplary speed and the first call was published in the summer of 2016. Still, it was 2,5 years later compared to the starting date of the CP. Besides, the electronic system of the programme (IMIS) was not launched but in the spring of 2018, what resulted in further delays in reporting and monitoring.

Until the evaluation ended, the following calls have been published:

- 1st Call for Proposals (SKHU/1601)
- Call for Small Project Fund – Umbrella Projects (SKHU/1701) + (SKHU/1704) (two rounds)
- Call for Proposals for Territorial Action Plan for Employment (SKHU/1703) + (SKHU/1802) (two rounds)
- Call for Proposals for Small and Medium Enterprises (SKHU/1801)
- Call for small projects (East) (SKHU/ETA/1801)
- Call for small projects (West) (SKHU/WETA/1801)

Due to the late start of the programme implementation, at the cut-off date of the evaluation, no more than 10 reports were uploaded in IMIS causing remarkable difficulties when assessing the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme. Taking into account the limited number of approved reports the established trends should be considered with reservation.

Regardless of the delay, there is a consensus at programme management level that the completion of the programme in due time is not in danger. It is promising that the MA paid attention to the time needs of larger projects (i.e. infrastructure, TAPE, SPF umbrella projects), so the decision on these was a priority, the frameworks of them have been created at an early stage in order to ensure the timely implementation. Thanks to this approach, remarkable developments are expected in 2019 ensuring the timely realisation of the programme. However, the support offered to the beneficiaries of TAPes, SME and small projects should be kept provided in order to ensure the smooth implementation of the programme (the fulfilment of the indicators). For this purpose, the opportunity of permanent consultation would be offered. In the case of systematic problems, the organisation of info-days is advised.

(2) The achievements

The programme has 4 priority axes from which PA1 (Nature and culture) is the most popular: the financial claims of the applications were 10 times larger than the preliminary budget frames

published in the first call. Finally, the MC allocated almost the total amount dedicated to PA1 already within the first call, awarding 29 projects in total.

At the same time, the initial attempt of involvement of the SMEs (the so-called B-Light scheme) was not successful, therefore the MA proposed a new solution, the SME call which included crucial differences compared to the B Light scheme. Thanks to this new solution, some SME projects could be selected for realisation in 2018.

PA2 (Enhancing cross-border mobility) has no achieved indicator values by the data processing cut-off date. From the interviewees' point of view, the original setup of PA2 wasn't successful, the contribution of the applications to the objectives was very limited, the interest in the call was low and a modification was necessary. Taking into account the lack of interest in the priority axis, at its 8th meeting held on 26 April 2018 in Bratislava, the Monitoring Committee decided on the modification of the programme by transferring the remaining amount from PA2 to PA1. The decision guarantees the timely implementation of the programme. At the same time, the road and bridge construction projects can generate further problems (due to technical, administrative obstacles and the changes of construction prices).

The indicator values of PA3 (Promoting sustainable and quality employment, and supporting labour mobility) are also zero at the moment. Due to the complexity of the TAPE model, the preparation (e.g. of target values) required more time and more work but the N+3 targets are still reachable. The call was successful, the MC allocated the total amount for the realisation of 9 TAPES. Regardless of the fundamental changes on the labour markets of the two countries since 2013, the targets designed conservatively and cautiously seem to be reachable without difficulties. At the same time, the TAPE is in its initial phase, so it is hardly predictable how successful the implementation will be.

PA4 (Enhancing cross-border cooperation of public authorities and people living in the border area) is the priority axis of the programme which has already achieved – at least – some indicator values. The majority of the 28 projects selected will be completed until the middle of 2019. The second call targeting PA4 is expected to be published in the spring of 2019.

In both cases of PA1 and PA4, the Small Project Fund will contribute to a significant increase of involved beneficiaries and implemented projects.

(3) Exemplary communication at programme level

The communication of the programme is among the best ones in Europe. The establishment of the position of a communication manager at the JS proved to be very beneficial and the communication activities addressing third parties, as well as, the appearances and the communication with the beneficiaries are managed at a high standard.

The communication could be further developed at the level of the projects addressing the wider audience and by sharing the good examples and innovative methods.

Furthermore, the communication activities should have a territorial aspect taken into account the imbalanced share of the projects and the beneficiaries so far. The most active programme area is situated in the West, between Tatabánya and the Austrian border. However, weak project activity can be detected at few border sections, mainly in the middle part of the border area.

(4) High quality performance at programme level

The programme implementation meets high standards. Based on the outcomes of the interviews the vast majority of the procedures are delivered at a high quality due to the extended experiences of the participating entities. However, there are still a couple of problematic points which leave room for improvement. The most often mentioned difficulties are connected to the limited human resource capacities and to the IMIS system. (See the recommendations 2.1, 4.1, 4.4.)

(5) Good results in simplification

The simplification test shows that the vast majority of the recommendations drafted at the end of the previous programming period have been taken into consideration and there are many fields where the simplification is advanced.

Table I: Results of the simplification test

Recommendation	Response
Too much paperwork on project level	The IMIS as on-line application and reporting tool was launched for both the management bodies and applicants in the first half of 2018. As a result, no paper-based documents have to be submitted to the calls. In addition, in order to reduce the amount of paper-based documents, the JS communicates with the Lead Beneficiary through fully or partially electronic way.
Communication barriers between the FLC and the JS	There are different IMIS modules available for the first level control actors and for the JS, which makes the communication easier and quicker. Communication is made easier through building direct pathways for the different functions the platform users having distinct competencies. The structures of both modules are designed in accordance with their tasks and responsibilities as well as taking into account rights as well.

Recommendation	Response
Inefficiency of IMIS	A new background solution has been developed for the current programming period, however the users still face technical difficulties.
Delay in the reporting procedures and transfers on management side	The problem is intended to be addressed by the re-establishment of the IMIS system, the revision of management rules of procedure and the simplified submission procedure (scanned documents instead of hard copy versions).
Lack of process differentiation in projects types	The programme applies different supporting schemes (Small Project Fund for P2P projects, TAPE for integrated cross-border developments, SME support) with different implementation rules and procedures.
Differences in national legislation (technical standards, public procurement)	It is out of the programme competency, therefore it still applies for the related national rules. However there are initiatives on European level to overcome the administrative burdens.
Unnecessary feasibility studies	The cost of feasibility studies are eligible only in case if the project contains infrastructure and works cost and the preparation of feasibility study is obligatory for the organisation. Otherwise these studies are excluded from eligible expenditures.
Time-consuming building permits	In order to speed up the application phase and save financial resources, in case the building permissions are not available at the time of submission of the application, PPs are invited to submit only the proof of the request for building permits with the application form. (Afterwards the applicants must submit the building permissions during the contracting period.)

However, some steps still could be made as it is summarised in the recommendations 2.5, 3.1, 3.10, 4.6, 4.7.

(6) Enhanced ownership

The programme has achieved significant results in the field of the enhancement of ownership by involving the regional actors in quality assessment, by enabling the MC members to get a deeper picture on the project proposals (TAPE), by involving two EGTCs in the management of the programme, by involving the TAPE beneficiaries in the preparation of the second-round call, etc.

(7) New priorities are emerging

The regional analysis justifies the selection of the four priorities of the programme. However, at least two new challenges have been emerging since the approval of the programme.

On the one hand, the massive depopulation of extensive (mostly) rural areas of the programme region (the outmigration of mostly young, skilled, working-age population and the massive ageing) has never been more crucial to tackle.

On the other hand, during the most recent years the importance of R&D in generating Gross Domestic Product has been increasing notably in the border region.

These new dimensions should be taken into account when starting the programming of the new CP.

(8) The innovation factor

The present programme is one of the most innovative CPs in Europe. Furthermore, the innovative tools applied by the programme are brand new developments within the framework of the programme itself. Obviously, this innovative character creates great challenges to respond and raises serious risks against the accurate programme implementation. The innovative factors are:

- direct involvement of the SMEs
- involvement of EGTCs in the implementation of the programme (small project fund) considered as a best practice in Europe (see the new draft ETC Regulation)
- involvement of the EGTCs in the work of the MC with observer status
- the TAPE tool considered as a model in Europe
- the three-level quality assessment model applied in the case of the TAPE with strong territorial dimension.

The above innovative solutions make difficult the administration of the programme therefore the application of these new tools should be permanently surveyed in order to avoid potential damages. However, through these tools, the SKHU programme fulfils better the mission of the INTERREG programme regarding the enhanced territorial, economic and social cohesion.

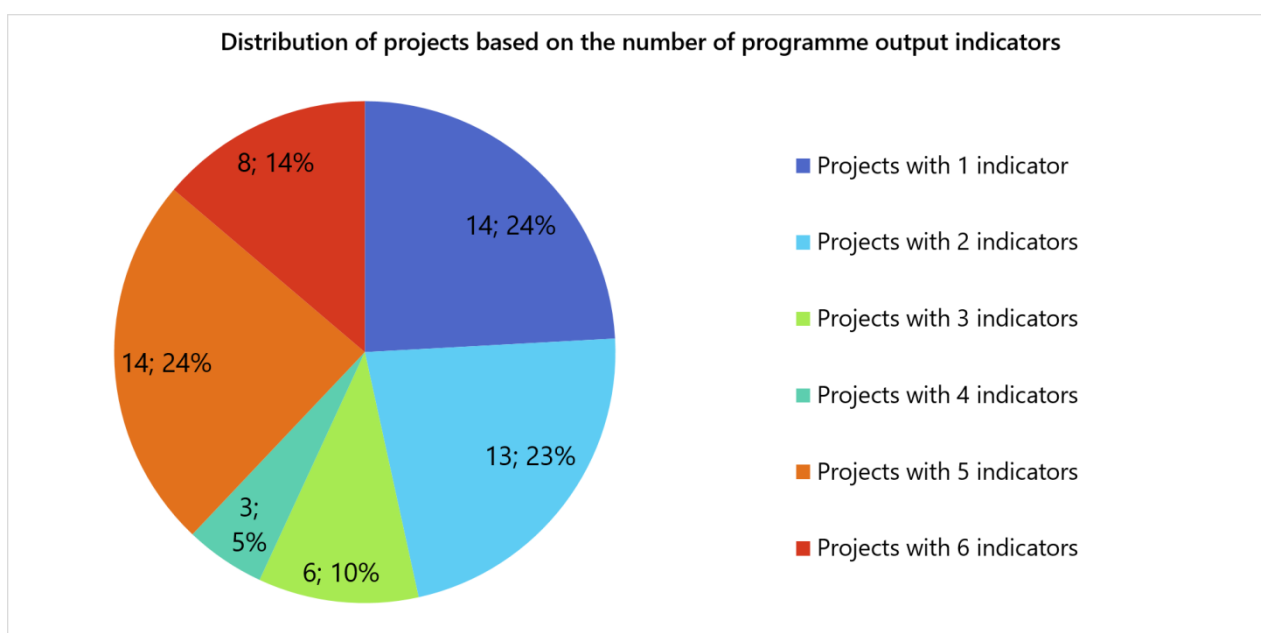
(9) Modest improvements in cross-border factor

According to the analysis, only a few (5) SKHU projects selected so far meet the highest requirements against cross-border integration and cooperation (see Recommendation 3.2), the programme itself is 'top-heavy' of soft-and-ad-hoc projects, very similarly to transnational and interregional programmes. There are a few partnerships which are able to develop real cross-border products and infrastructure while the majority of the beneficiaries – regardless of the two-decade history of the Slovak-Hungarian programmes – are still focusing on ad-hoc, simple partnerships in order to realise their own, local developments. These results must be improved once the realisation of the TAPes is completed since the activities and investments have real synergic and complementary cross-border character.

(10) Improved strategic approach

The size of the projects in financial terms is increased by the current period in comparison with the previous one. The average project size in € (nominal value) is almost 1,5 times higher than it was in the 2007-2013 period. In parallel, these larger projects contribute to the fulfilment of several indicators.

Figure II: Distribution of projects based on the number of programme output indicators¹



At the same time, it has to be underlined that the low number of approved projects limitates the scope of the potential conclusions. The expected high number of small projects will modify this picture.

¹ Data source: IMIS

Regarding the average number of beneficiaries involved in CBC projects, an increase from 2,65 to 3,19 can be detected. It means that the complexity of the partnerships has increased. Both indices imply a stronger strategic approach compared to the previous programme. Furthermore, quite remarkable rate of the projects (more than 40%) contributes to the achievement of 4 or more indicators what clearly indicates a more comprehensive, more strategic approach.

Summary of the recommendations

The table below contains the recommendations drafted regarding the present status of the CP with references to the detailed analysis where the raised issues are elaborated more deeply.

Table II: Summary of the recommendations

Recommendations	References to the detailed analysis
1. CP planning	
1.1 Strategic frames of the programme	
R_1.1 Clearer and unambiguous rules and timely delivered regulation are necessary from EU level	3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
R_1.2 Territorial relevance should further be strengthened	1.2 Introduction of the cooperation programme M 3.1 Analysis of regional needs
R_1.3 Differentiation between West and East is recommended	M 3.1 Analysis of regional needs
R_1.4 The flexibility of modification of the CP should be increased	3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
2. Programme management	
2.1 Programme structure and capacities	
R_2.1 Compensate missing capacities as soon as possible	M 6.2 Capacity assessment M 6.3 Lead time assessment M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures 3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
R_2.2 Keep the involvement of the EGTCs in SPF management	M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools M 6.2 Capacity assessment 3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
2.2 Communication	
R_2.3 Keep and enhance the right direction	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects
R_2.4 Improve the beneficiaries'	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the

Recommendations	References to the detailed analysis
communication capacities	programme M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects
R_2.5 Simplify project communication and make it more fit-to-purpose	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects
R_2.6 Promote the best practice examples in order to improve the knowledge and understanding of cross-border aspects	M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects
3. Programme implementation	
3.1 Project selection	
<i>3.1.1 Calls for proposals</i>	
R_3.1 Restrict the thematic scope of the calls	1.2 Introduction of the cooperation programme
R_3.2 Strengthen the cross-border character of the projects	M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance
R_3.3 Apply the two-round selection procedure also in other calls than PA3	M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach
<i>3.1.2 Specific tools</i>	
R_3.4 Re-design the SME call	M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools 3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
R_3.5 Apply the TAPE model also for other priorities in the next programme	M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach 3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
R_3.6 Keep the Small Project Fund	M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach
R_3.7 Promote the horizontal integration of the projects	M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach
<i>3.1.3 Assessment procedure</i>	
R_3.8 Apply the three-level quality assessment model to the entire programme	M 6.7 Assessment of ownership
R_3.9 Involve the MC more actively in the selection of the proposals	M 6.7 Assessment of ownership
3.2 Project implementation	
R_3.10 Eliminate the differences between the	M 6.6 Simplification test

Recommendations	References to the detailed analysis
two (national) financing systems	3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
R_3.11 Enhance the sustainability of cross-border partnerships and the project results	M 5.1 Sustainability analysis – project results M 5.2 Sustainability analysis – project partnership M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach
4. Performance on programme level	
4.1 The IMIS system	
R_4.1 Fine-tune the IMIS and train the beneficiaries on the use of it	M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures M 6.5 Assessment of the assistance provided by the JS M 6.6 Simplification test
R_4.2 Modify the IMIS system with a view to enabling its users to import and export data in a more compiled and structured way	M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures 3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing
4.2 Procedures	
R_4.3 Eliminate or diminish the reasons of delays	M 1.2 Indicator value analysis M 6.3 Lead time assessment
R_4.4 Harmonise the FLC procedures in order to ensure equal treatment	M 6.2 Capacity assessment M 6.3 Lead time assessment
R_4.5 Involve the beneficiaries in the preparation of the calls	M 6.7 Assessment of ownership
R_4.6 Consider the implementation of continuously open calls	M 6.3 Lead time assessment M 6.6 Simplification test
5. Recommendations related to the extended AIR	
R_5.1 Create the follow-up solution of EU2020 contribution	M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals
R_5.2 Create the follow-up solution of macro-regional contribution	M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CP planning

1.1 Strategic frames of the programme

R_1.1 Clearer and unambiguous rules and timely delivered regulation are necessary from EU level

The delays (November 2013) of approving the EU Regulations ensuring the frameworks for programming generated many difficulties to the programme management. The CP was approved by the Commission among the first ones, in October 2015 but it meant a delay of almost 2 years. Next regulations should be drafted earlier facilitating more accurate programming and launching of the programme in due time.

Besides, it was a basic experience during the programming that the legal frames were not self-evident. It was a permanent challenge to request unambiguous interpretation from the EU institutions. The desk officers of the different cross-border programmes interpreted the same rules differently what caused uncertainties and failed interventions. Therefore, the rules should be more evident and interpreted in the same way. For this purpose longer preparatory time is necessary.



3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

R_1.2 Territorial relevance should further be strengthened

The CP is built upon the results of a deep regional analysis focusing on the factors of territorial, economic and social cohesion of the border area what is in the heart of the EU cohesion policy. At the same time, the adequateness of the programme to the territorial needs suffers of remarkable shortages.

On the one hand, thematic concentration necessitated the selection from among 11 thematic objectives and the investment priorities narrowed further the thematic scope of the potential interventions. Taking into account that Slovak-Hungarian is one of the longest internal landborders of the EU with fundamentally diverse territorial characteristics, this limitation did not favour to the exploitation of territorial capital, to the implementation of integrated developments and to correct response of different challenges. From this perspective, thematic concentration had an unfavourable impact on the cooperation programme.

On the other hand, regardless of the deep analysis, the final selection of the priorities was not thoroughly successful. While PA1 is really popular among the applicants (ten times more popular than the dedicated resources forecasted), the CP had to be modified because of the lack of interest toward cross-border transport and logistics investments. What is more, the projects selected under the SO 2.2.1 rather address the development needs in the field of cycling instead of public transport. The lessons learnt from the programme implementation have shown that PA2 should have merely been focusing on cross-border transport infrastructure development – without including public transport and logistics. From this point of view, it is recommended to better align the regional analysis with the real territorial needs.

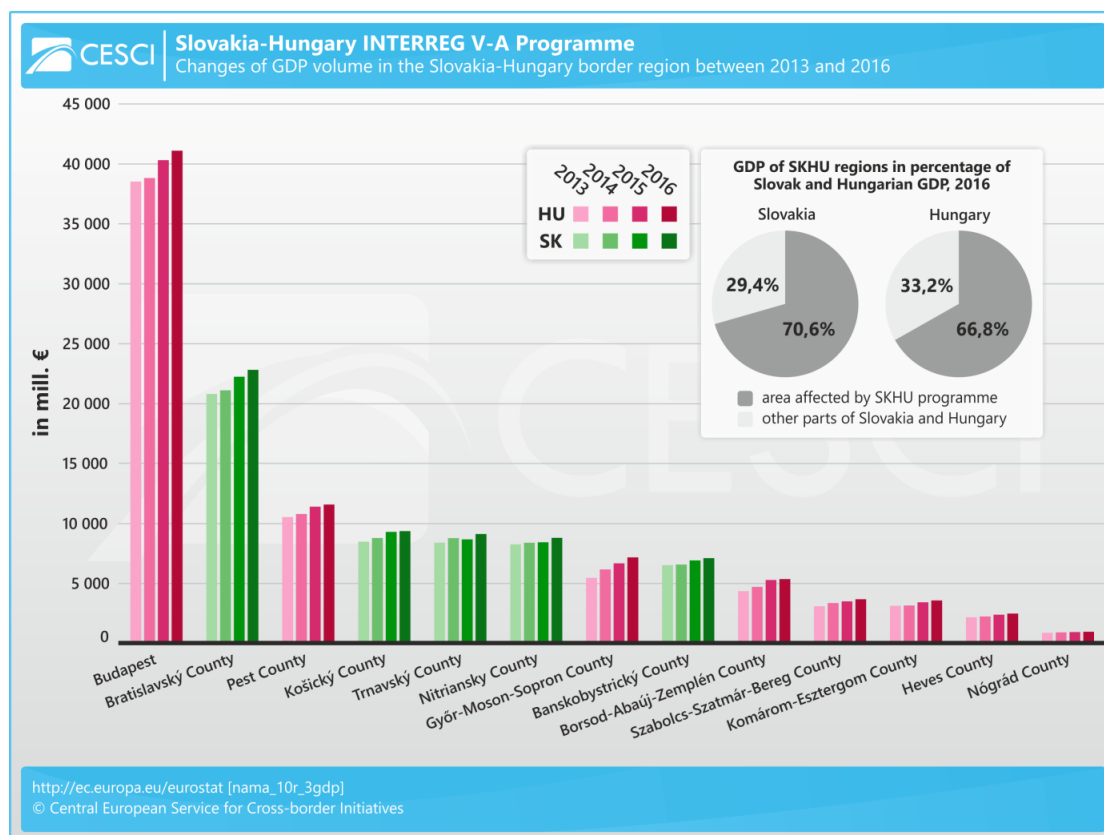
In the current CP, the establishment of the priorities has been made with full respect of the EU rules (80% rule). However, the EU sets thresholds between which the stakeholders can define their own model. The majority (52%) of the CBC programmes (2014-2020) have identified four priority axes. However, it is not a mandatory rule, 31% of them have selected more (5 or even 6), the remaining ones less (from 1 to 3) priorities. Both ways can be followed (according to the changing rules on thematic concentration) beyond 2020. What is very important: in each case a control group should be involved in the selection procedure of the priorities. The control groups should comprise of experts of the given priority area and experts who know well the border region. This control group could be a testing body of the proposed priorities. This way the set of priorities may be better aligned on the real needs and opportunities.



M 3.1 Analysis of regional needs

R_1.3 Differentiation between West and East is recommended

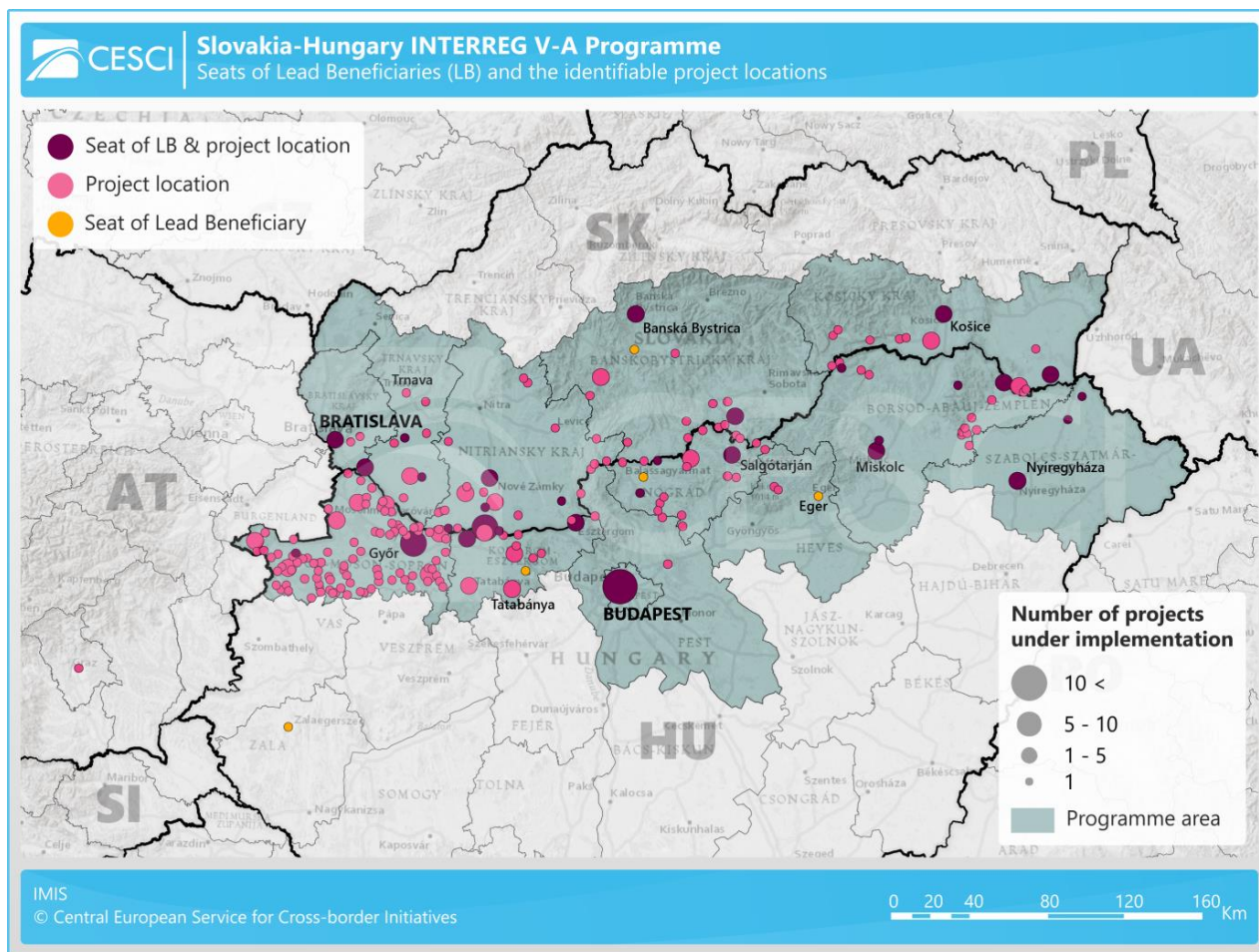
Figure III: Changes of GDP volume between 2013 and 2016



As the regional analysis shows, differences between the eastern and western side of the programming region still persist or even may have increased (it is worth benchmarking the indicators of Budapest and Nógrád region!).

The geographic setting of the selected projects indicate a bigger density of tourism activities in the West, while the majority of the TAPE projects will be implemented in the less developed sub-regions along the central and eastern border sections.

Figure IV: The territorial setting of the LBs and the planned activities



Furthermore, based on the results of the first calls, the financial capacities of the eastern beneficiaries seem to be more modest than those of the West – which is understandable taking into account the more modest economic indicators of the eastern region.

EU contribution (in 1 000 €)

- 2 000 <
- 1 000 - 2 000
- 500 - 1 000
- 250 - 500
- < 250

Programme area

IMIS
© Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives

0 20 40 80 120 160 Km

This approach can be applied in different ways.

- a) *The division of the CP into two independent programmes.* The model is not without example (see the regional-based programmes between France and Switzerland, France and Italy or Germany and the Netherlands; NB! these borders are much shorter than the Slovak-Hungarian one and the regional disparities are much lower than here). The main advantages of this solution are the stronger territorial embeddedness and stronger ownership. Its main disadvantages are the doubled need for administrative capacities and the difficulties erected to cooperation between stakeholders located in the two different programme areas (East/West, e.g. Košice and Budapest). However, the separation of the territorially well-based priorities can easily be ensured.

- b) *The selection criteria are based on territorial indicators.* This solution puts emphasis on the regional differences mirrored by different indicators (unemployment level, purchasing power of the households, rate of early school leavers, etc.) and allows for submitting application according to the different values of these indicators. The main advantage of this solution is that there is no need for parallel calls and parallel systems, the selection between the beneficiaries is made by independent criteria within the given call. The disadvantage of the model is that regions with the same characteristics can lie in a distance from each other what hinders the implementation of territorially relevant integrated interventions.
- c) *Announcement of calls under different PAs in different regions.* This model enables the MC to launch calls better based on different territorial characteristics. It means that within the same priority area, the applicants can focus on different activities which are relevant for their special territorial endowments (e.g. employment calls in the East, urban functional development calls in the West). The disadvantage of the system comprises of the potential overlaps and the potentially higher territorial distance between the beneficiaries. The main advantage of the model is that the territorial differentiation can be enforced within the same call. In parallel, the two last models can be favour of integrated tools to be applied in line with the regional needs – with diverse thematic focus.



M 3.1 Analysis of regional needs

R_1.4 The flexibility of modification of the CP should be increased

Currently, 5% of the budget can be transposed without the approval of the EC. This restriction is too strict taking into account the changes occurring during a 7+3-year period of time. As it can be seen from the regional analysis, since 2013/2014 remarkable developments have happened within the Slovak-Hungarian programme region (see e.g. the changes in employment level). The threshold of own intervention of the MC regarding the programme budget should be increased to 10%.



3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

2. Programme management

2.1 Programme structure and capacities

R_2.1 Compensate missing capacities as soon as possible

The missing capacities at programme level will cause critical problems very soon.

The Managing Authority is operating within the framework of a separate department with 3 units in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Hungary. The mission has been taken from the Prime Minister's Office according to Gov. Decree 94/2018. (V.22). 17 persons in total are employed at the department who are responsible for the management of 7 cross-border cooperation programmes. In general, the involvement of 5 more people would be necessary for legal, monitoring and evaluator positions.

Regarding the National Authority on the Slovak side 3 departments of the Ministry of Agriculture are dedicated to the CBC programmes:

- 1) Department responsible for the implementation and management of the programmes with 3 employees dedicated to SKHU programme (director and 2 programme managers);
- 2) Department for CBC control: 5 FLC controllers in charge of SKHU programme (approx. 24 controllers are employed for the purposes of the 5 CBC programmes in total, and there is a possibility to shift a part of the staff from the programmes where is not „implementation peak” to those programmes where in the moment the amount of work is enormous);
- 3) Department of methodology and coordination.

At the Joint Secretariat in Budapest 9 people are employed, but out of them 4 are on maternity leave and only two of them are substituted.

Currently, the Hungarian party can mobilise additional capacities for FLC if this is necessary. The SZPI includes a staff which is dedicated to different CBC programmes around Hungary without exclusiveness. It means that the same people can be involved in the FLC of the SKHU, ROHU, HUHR, etc. programmes and the major capacities can always be redirected in the interest of the programme which is in danger considering the n+3 rule.

To sum up, the MA lacks 5 experts, the JS lacks 2 employees and due to the non-systematic decision made on the 1601 call (PA1) shortages at the Slovak FLC can occur when the monitoring process of the projects selected in the first call, the larger infrastructure projects and the TAPE projects have to be carried-out in parallel with the preparation of the new programme. Under PA1 there are 29 projects and 56 Slovak beneficiaries, in PA2 there are 7 projects and 8 Slovak beneficiaries, while in PA4 there are 28 projects and 40 Slovak beneficiaries. It means that 104 Slovak partners will start their projects in parallel instead of a phased-in realization, divided by several calls.

The JS made interventions and the positions will be filled from the beginning of 2019. However, in the case of the Slovak FLC, serious capacities have to be transferred from other programmes in order to ensure the timely administration of the project reports. Taking into account that outsourcing would bring much more complications (in procedures and money) than now is being, this challenge has to be responded based on the human capacities available at the Ministry of Agriculture.



M 6.2 Capacity assessment
M 6.3 Lead time assessment
M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures
3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

R_2.2 Keep the involvement of the EGTCs in SPF management

According to the CP, the MC mandated two EGTCs with the management of the small project fund (SPF). The preparation of the commission has required extra efforts on behalf of the JS but it is expected that the burdens of coordination of the tendering and monitoring related to some 200-250 small projects can be shared between the JS, the MA and the NA and the two EGTCs. Otherwise, it would mainly be the charge of the JS to coordinate the whole process. By making the decision on the involvement of the groupings in the management of the programme, the programme bodies launched a PILOT scheme and gave a model for other European border regions.

The draft ETC Regulation² defines the potential management bodies of the small project funds in INTERREG programmes beyond 2020 ((2) par. Art. 24) as it follows: “The beneficiary of a small project fund shall be a cross-border legal body or an EGTC.”

The above proposal gave rise to controversies among the Member States; therefore, it is expected that the final wording of the Regulation will be more permissive. However, the draft Regulation underlines that the way of management selected by the SKHU MC was correct and worth following. What is more, according to the EC Report on the application of the EGTC Regulation³ published on 17 August 2018, the model of the SKHU INTERREG V-A Programme is identified as being worth following.

At the same time, it needs to be stated that at the current phase the results of this innovative model cannot be assessed (we are at the very beginning of its application). But, taken into account the EU-wide awareness of the innovativeness of the SKHU programme, the EU level policy recommendations and the hard preparation works which are not needed to carry out

² Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments. (COM(2018) 374 final)

³ REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on the application of Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as amended by Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings

again beyond 2020, it is recommended to keep the model of SPF management by involving the two EGTCs and sharing so the management burdens related to many small projects.



M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools
M 6.2 Capacity assessment
3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

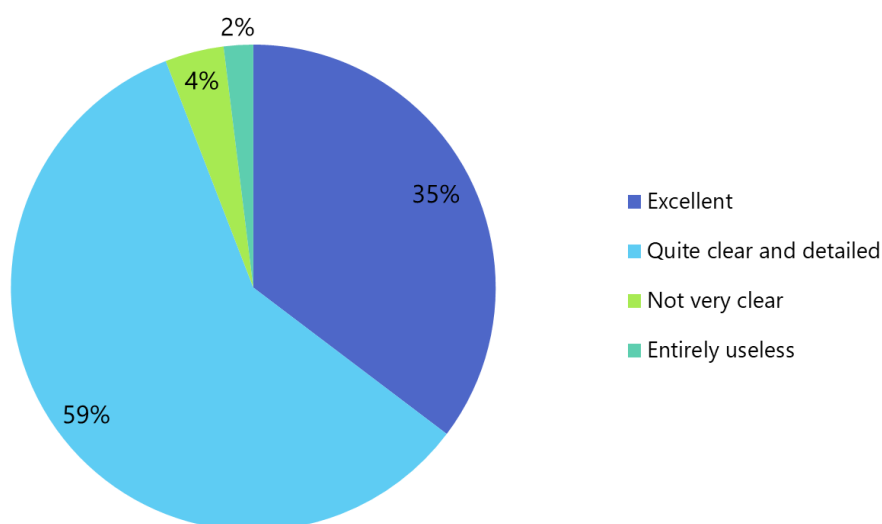
2.2 Communication

R_2.3 Keep and enhance the right direction

The programme has exceptional (and awarded) on-line appearance. Not only the basic information on the actual calls, events and results are available but the web page also includes statistics on the priorities, the beneficiaries, the budget; and an event calendar through which the programme and project events can be published. The average responding time at the programme's Facebook site is 1 hour. The programme owns an exemplary photo collection (as PR tool) – based partly on the results of the photo contest published for the European Cooperation Day and the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018. In general, the communication of the programme is of outstanding quality compared to other cross-border programmes, thanks to the the communication manager employed full-time.

Figure VI: The results of the on-line survey on the availability of information provided by the JS

The respondents' view on the availability of the information

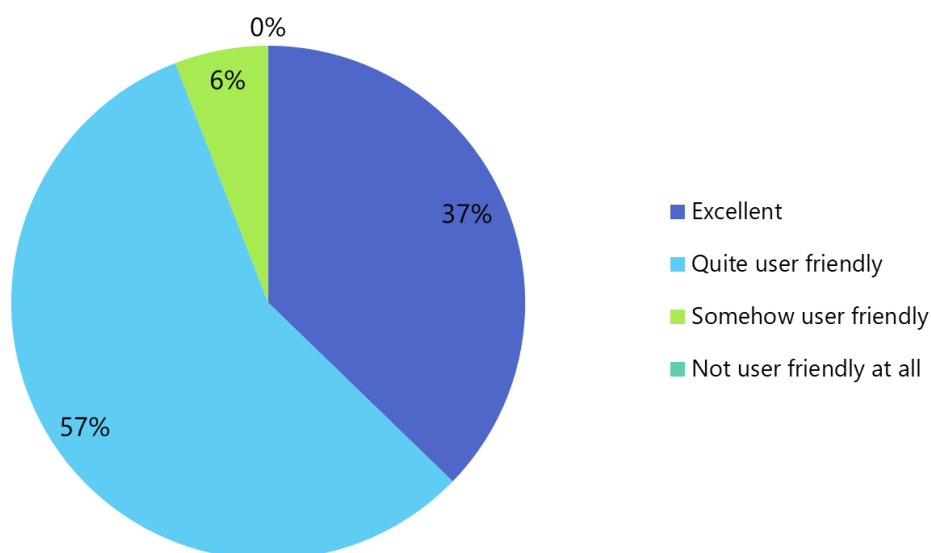


Regarding transparency, it is an exemplary practice that the programme publishes online the minutes of the MC meetings.

Taking into account the opinion of the beneficiaries, it can be highlighted that they are satisfied with the communication of the CP, both in terms of availability and user friendliness of information.

Figure VII: The results of the on-line survey on the user-friendliness of information provided by the JS

The respondents' view on the user friendliness of the information



Since weaker project activity can be detected so far at border sections between Komárom–Komárno and Esztergom–Štúrovo, between Salgótarján–Filákovo and Aggtelek–Domica, furthermore between Tornyosnémeti–Milhost' and Sátoraljaújhely–Slovenské Nové Mesto and because only a few projects can be found in Pest, Heves and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Counties, promotional activities should be enhanced in these regions.

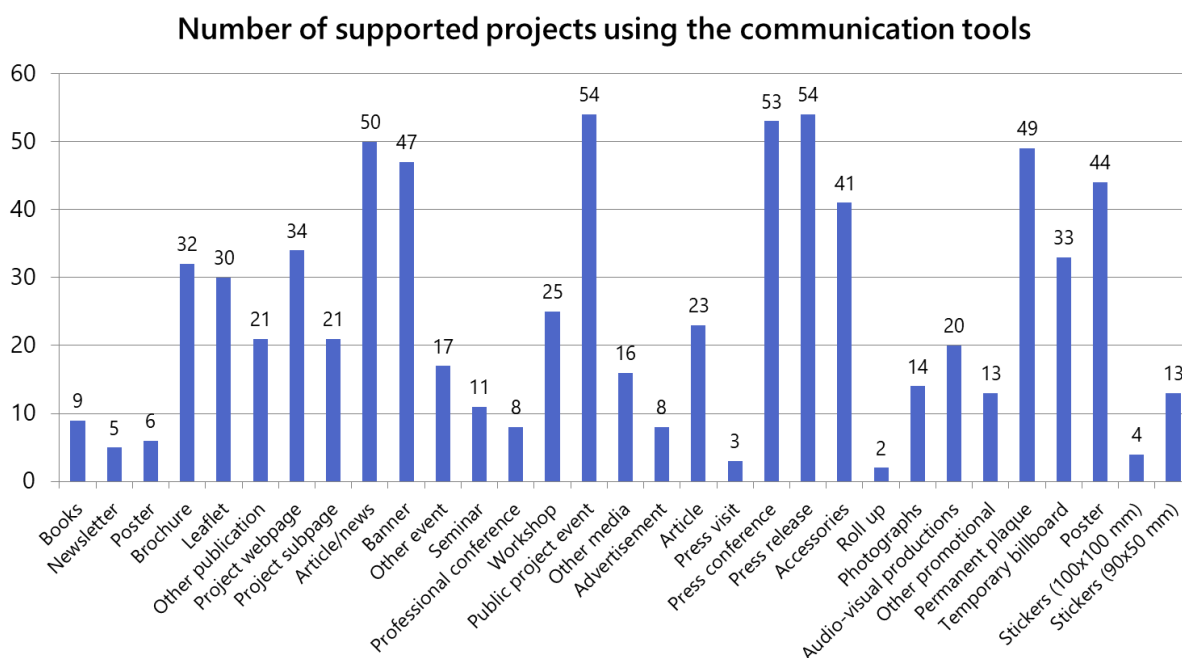


M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

R_2.4 Improve the beneficiaries' communication capacities

While the programme is well known by the applicants and potential beneficiaries, regardless of the efforts made by the JS, the general public and media has no deep knowledge on the achievements or even the existence of the CP. Since the ones who actually carry out the majority of measured communication activities are the beneficiaries themselves, their capacities should be reinforced to carry out better communication with the media and the press, as well as to use more adequate and effective communication tools. Currently, the most popular communication tools among publications are brochures and leaflets while the most popular online tools are articles/news.

Figure VIII: The communication tools applied by the partners



The most common promotion materials are pens, t-shirts, bags and notebooks. However, it is very difficult to measure the real impact and cost-efficiency of accessories like notebooks, pens, bags, t-shirts and so on. Instead, the project events and results should rather be communicated in on-line forms, e.g. through YouTube videos, Twitter, Instagram, etc. In addition, the beneficiaries could be obliged to contact at least local and regional media during the implementation of the project.

It is recommended to organise communication trainings for the beneficiaries with the involvement of communication experts in order to improve the quality and the effectiveness of the projects' communication. It is very important that the trainings should not focus on theoretical but practical contents.



M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

R_2.5 Simplify project communication and make it more fit-to-purpose

It is very complicated to monitor the project level communication activities and their impact. At the same time, the programme has an obligation to perform their monitoring and report the results to the EC. Very often, the project documents contain clear and measurable communication activities but finally, at the realisation phase, the outputs are different.

Therefore, the best solution would be to simplify and fine-tune the whole process. On the one hand, during the designing phase, the applicant would be provided with an automatic lump-sum amount (e.g. defined in ratio of the total sum of the project) without the obligation of detailing the communication activities. On the other hand, these activities would be defined during the

contracting phase by selecting the most appropriate tools fit-for-purpose and fit-for-content (project specific communication measures).

Besides, the mandatory components determined by the EU Regulations would be excepted from the above procedure (they still stay mandatory) but the unit-cost approach would be kept in these cases, as well.

The main advantages of the proposed procedure of defining project specific communication measures are that (1) the project owners have to think through more deeply, how they want and how they can promote their project; (2) the communication tools and measures are not selected according to an automatism, routinely but better aligned to the real needs and objectives of the project; (3) and this way, the communication measures can be much more easily detected and reported.



M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

R_2.6 Promote the best practice examples in order to improve the knowledge and understanding of cross-border aspects

The general quality and the cross-border aspects of the projects can be improved by sharing the experiences of best and most cross-border type projects. For this purpose, delivery of a regular publication (similar to the professional materials published both on-line and printed by the LEADER programme, e.g. guides, fact sheets, compilation of best practices), with explanations on both languages; more field trips and local presence; and project fairs can be applied. The main aim is to better communicate the most successful (i.e. successfully completed) cross-border projects with a view to transferring the knowledge to as wide public as possible. This way, more integrated proposals can be expected.



M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

3. Programme implementation

3.1 Project selection

3.1.1 Calls for proposals

R_3.1 Restrict the thematic scope of the calls

As a common experience, quality assessment is complicated because of the differences between the topics of the projects. E.g. in PA1 the beneficiaries can apply for funding their cultural, nature protection, environment protection, historic site management, tourism, forestry, creative industry etc. proposals. It is very hard to find universal solution for assessing these proposals in a comparable way. Some applicants reclaimed in the survey that the remarks of the assessors had just been irrelevant. This phenomenon can also be resulted from the extreme divergence of the PA. Furthermore, the diversity of potential topics extremely increases the number of submitted applications causing heavy peak periods for programme administration.

The problem can be solved in different ways e.g.

- if the priorities are wide by scope but the calls are more restricted focusing on smaller fields, like forestry (it means that more calls have to be published (in parallel) but the projects will be more comparable and the quality assessment can be performed in a more accountable way);
- if the TAPE model is implemented in other calls as well since the integrated approach inspires the beneficiaries on more careful, more intensive, better-based preparation work which results in more focused project proposals – and less in total number;
- if the calls are closed when the total cost claims of the proposals submitted reaches a certain level (e.g. three times higher than the dedicated amount): this way the last-minute projects can be excluded (at the same time, the conditions of the call should be published earlier facilitating the preparation for submission – this way more elaborate projects would be submitted).

The last version can cause problems because it makes difficult the design of the human capacities. Continuously open calls can offer a solution for this shortage (see Recommendation 4.6).

To sum up, as a lesson learnt, during the designing the next CP, it is worth defining more focused priority axes (see the Recommendation 1.2).



R_3.2 Strengthen the cross-border character of the projects

INTERREG CBC programmes are commissioned to weaken the separating effects of the borders and to contribute to the development of a more integrated cross-border region – in line with the EU's Cohesion Policy and its three main pillars (economic, social and territorial). This integration factor should be taken more seriously. The exemplary cross-border projects are those contributing to stronger cohesion and more intensive cross-border cooperation.

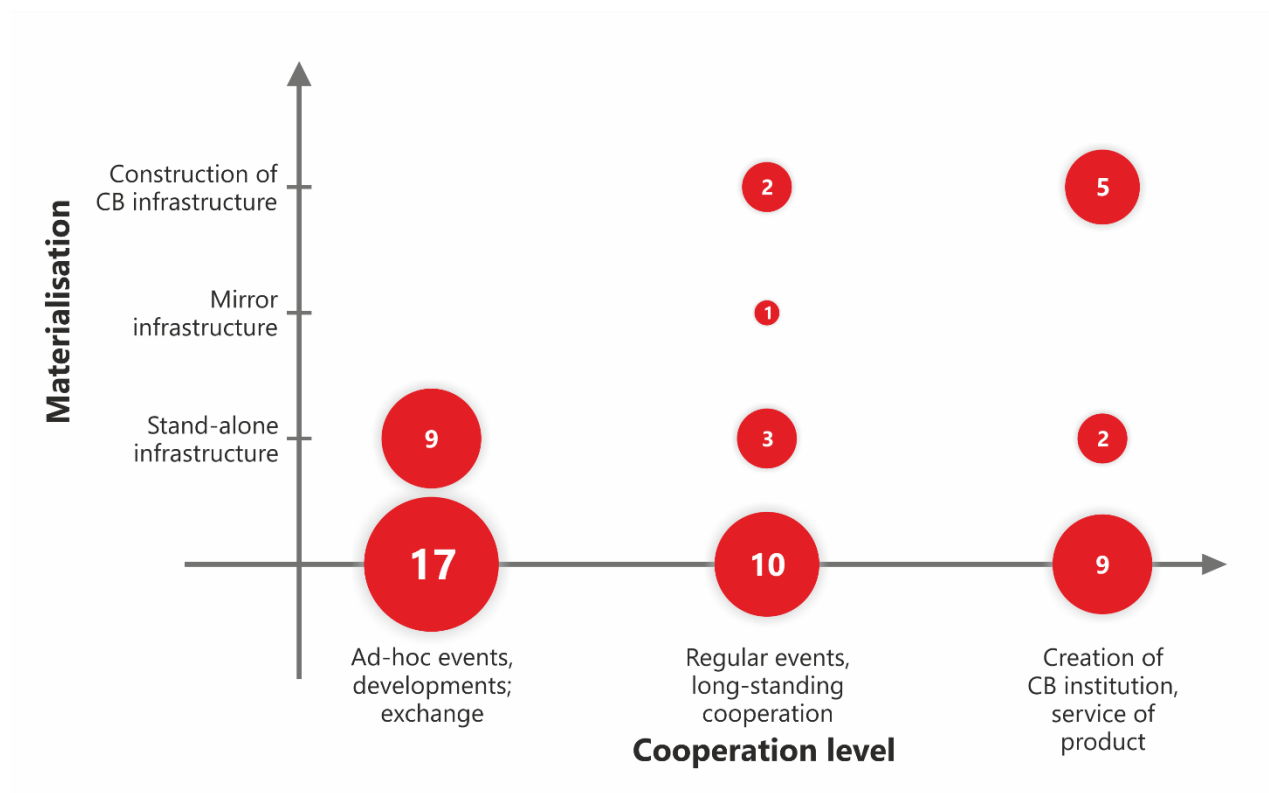
Based on the above mission, cross-border projects can be classified by a 3x3 cell matrix defined by two vectors: the *level of cooperation* and *materialisation*.

When identifying different levels of **cooperation** one can focus on the deepness and penetration of the planned activities. In these terms, the following phases/milestones of maturity can be differentiated: ad-hoc events (e.g. exchange of experiences); the creation of the conditions for regular and long-standing cooperation (set-up of permanent partnership, development of action plans, drafting educational curricula, establishment of long-standing cooperation between institutions); creation of integrated cross-border *services, products or joint institutions*. Every partnership cannot be at the highest level of maturity; furthermore, even the history of highly developed cross-border institutions started with the first steps of exchanges. At the same time, the long-term objective of the cross-border programmes should be to support the development of partnerships being able to create cross-border institutions and services reducing separating effects of the border.

When speaking about materialisation, we concentrate on tangible results and long-term sustainability which can enhance the internal cohesion. At the „zero level“, we can find genuinely soft projects without constructing permanent infrastructure. Then, there are projects which contain infrastructure development but without direct cross-border impact. At third level, there are mirror-typed projects when the partners implement activities or carry out construction works in parallel - accompanied with some simple cross-border content where only the long-term impacts can justify the support. The most advanced, real, integrated cross-border projects are where the implementation of the project-part on one side is impossible or ineffective without the realisation of the project-part on the other side.

The projects which contain the construction of joint cross-border infrastructure and create the relevant services or also even the institutions, can be considered as the „most cross-border“ ones. The cross-border character of the programme can be justified by the high number of this type of projects.

Figure IX: Cohesion and cooperation level of the SKHU projects



As it can be seen, the majority of the approved projects have no strong cross-border character and only 5 projects can be mentioned which fulfil the highest requirements of “cross-borderness”.

From this perspective, the CP has a pedagogical mission: through its instruments and calls it has the opportunity to educate the applicants and encourage them to start develop cross-border ties. Let us mention some opportunities to apply.

- The main lesson learnt from the first round call of the TAPE model is that the partners are invited to identify the common territorial needs and to design the common future of a cross-border subregion. This way, the beneficiaries have to create a common interpretation horizon and jointly plan interventions representing a higher level of cross-border cooperation. The expanded application of the TAPE model will obviously enhance the cross-border character of the projects and the programme. Of course, it is a time-consuming process where the first PILOTs should be assessed first.
- The JS can issue a guide on how the cross-border character of a project can be ensured. This guide can make differences between soft and hard interventions and can include best practice examples from other regions of Europe. The guide can be considered as an example of those new communication materials suggested in Recommendation 2.6
- The calls themselves can contain some requirements going beyond the two minutes registering the joint preparation of the proposal. Instead, a joint preparation matrix is advised to be applied which includes information on the cross-border components of the

planned activities and by its cells it orientates the beneficiaries to pursue higher level of integration.

- Finally, the factors of the quality assessment can be changed in a way that the beneficiaries are encouraged to exceed their conventional methods of developing cross-border projects (more detailed description of cross-border character with different aspects and with higher total score). In parallel with the further strengthening of the three-level quality assessment model (see Recommendation 3.8), this solution can guarantee more intensive cross-border cooperation within the programming area.



3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance

R_3.3 Apply the two-round selection procedure also in other calls than PA3

Unlike the unfavourable experiences gained during the previous programme, the example of the TAPes show how the two-round selection procedure can be used in an accurate way. This model is appropriate for the applicants to specify and more deeply think through their intentions and goals. During the second round, along by the formal coordination of the JS, every selected beneficiary had the opportunity to fine-tune their projects and the TAPE as a whole. This way, the second-round projects are more elaborate and more sophisticated than those drafted in the first round. In addition, the longer preparation period creates stronger ties between the partners facilitating sustainability of the projects.

At the same time, substantial changes of the criteria between the two rounds should be avoided (e.g. the change of the co-financing rate of De minimis projects within TAPE calls). Furthermore, the application of the model in the last phase of the programme implementation needs cautious approach taken into account the time-consuming character of the two-round selection process. (It is worth considering the solution to apply more generally in the next CP.)



M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach

3.1.2 Specific tools

R_3.4 Re-design the SME call

According to the preliminary intentions, similarly to the HUHR INTERREG V-A programme, also SKHU programme intended to apply the so-called B-Light scheme generated from the PP Light model of the Dutch-German cross-border programme. The model to be applied in PA1 facilitates the involvement of SMEs by creating a first-level partnership with the participation of two professional organisations experienced in economic and SME development and the SMEs from both sides of the border can join later to this partnership as new beneficiaries. This way, the

model diminishes the risks generated by the Lead Beneficiary principle by which one of the SMEs should undertake the responsibility for the activities carried-out by another SME operating on the other side of the border. From the point of view of the successful implementation of the programme, it is also important to take into account that it is the first case when SMEs are directly involved in a Slovak-Hungarian programme. Since the first call addressing the professional organisations was not successful, the MC made the decision to publish a modified model where pre-defined types of public bodies had to involve SMEs in a cross-border partnership. The experiences with the proposals were mixed; the total amount dedicated to the SME call could not be allocated yet.

Instead of publishing the same call for SMEs, it is worth considering to involve SMEs in the next PA1 call within the framework of integrated interventions similarly to PA3. Although, it is more time-consuming than stand-alone calls, the involvement of relevant SME projects (e.g. tourist services) contributing to the success of public investments (e.g. tourist routes) can more easily be guaranteed. In addition, stronger integration can justify the larger project size.



M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools
3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

R_3.5 Apply the TAPE model also for other priorities in the next programme

The TAPE model has shown how the territoriality and the place-based approach can be applied in a cross-border programme. It is not a coincidence that the tool raised EU-wide attention and interest. TAPE can be considered as a kind of answer to the question: *'How cross-border integration and long-term sustainability can be ensured in cross-border projects?'* The TAPE provides long-term, strategic perspective instead of ad-hoc partnerships and merely local interventions. For sure, the results are not known yet since the implementation of the TAPes did not start. What we can conclude on now, it is that

- in the majority of the TAPes, the submission of the proposals has been preceded by comprehensive designing process including the situation analysis of the identified sub-region (bottom-up planning) and the inclusion of the stakeholders (participative methods);
- based on the regional needs assessments, the activities of the TAPes are very colourful from investments in production capacities through the development of business centres until marketing and training activities: earlier, all these activities were funded by different calls and different programmes and if one of the activities could not receive funding, the impacts of the other supported projects were lower; by the TAPE, these uncertainties can be eliminated: the project activities supporting each other in a synergic way can be implemented in parallel;
- the stakeholders had to work with each other for a longer period of time and they had to harmonise their development needs and plans with other stakeholders which is a crucial

criterion against long-term partnerships (compared to still „fashionable“ „alibi partnerships”);

- the partnership structure of the TAPes is more comprehensive, involving different sides of the quadruple helix model, creating thus cross-sectorial integration;
- thanks to the supporting attitude of the JS, the project owners had the opportunity to fine-tune and re-design their projects between the two rounds resulting in higher-profiled and better designed projects;
- the assistance provided by the JS was more easily channelled since the development topics of the TAPes were clearly defined and harmonized; it means that the thematic focus of the set of projects was easily detectable and was facilitated to conduct the beneficiaries in improving their proposals.

Obviously, the TAPE bears bigger risks than stand-alone projects: the parallel implementation of several projects, including even larger infrastructural ones, the direct involvement of SMEs who function along by different rules and timings, the size of the TAPes by financial terms that harms the successful completion of the CP itself, etc. raise the questions against the applicability of the tool. However, when the programming of the next programme starts, some of these experiences will be known, so the Task Force can make the decision on whether to apply the TAPE model more generally.



M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools
M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach
3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

R_3.6 Keep the Small Project Fund

As the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the largest association of borderlands' stakeholders laid down in one of its publications⁴, “the experience with ‘best practice’ shows that from the beginning of INTERREG (1990) on the A programmes with the best evaluation results (in the meantime also many other programmes) have worked with ‘people-to-people-projects’ (small projects).” P2P projects can mobilise larger groups of the society and numerous smaller activities can enhance mutual socio-cultural understanding. The smaller is the project size, the more stakeholders can be involved and the more small activities can be realized across the border. Consequently, the decision on the re-launching of small project fund in SKHU programme was right. Unlike the previous programme where P2P projects amounted to 100 000 EUR the smaller-scale perspective is much more attractive and result-oriented. Since the smaller size is more affordable for many beneficiaries, it is expected that the number of applications will be high involving many new actors in cross-border cooperation. At the same time, the assessment has to ensure the real cross-border character for these small projects instead of supporting

⁴ https://www.aebr.eu/files/publications/130416_Argumente_Kleinprojekte_EN.pdf

stand-alone activities. (1) Paragraph of Article 24 of the new draft ETC Regulation⁵ establishes the limits for small project funds (within the total budget of the CP) in 15% or 20 M EUR. It is advisable to utilize the full allocation frame in the next programme for this purpose.



M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools
M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach

R_3.7 Promote the horizontal integration of the projects

Chapter 4 of the CP (*Integrated approach to territorial development*) identifies two forms of project integration: the vertical and the horizontal ones. While vertical integration is applied under PA3, horizontal integration cross-cutting the different PAs is missing. Assessment grids could award this aspect with additional scoring.



M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach

3.1.3 Assessment procedure

R_3.8 Apply the three-level quality assessment model to the entire programme

The three-level quality assessment model of the TAPE proved to be very beneficial. On the one hand, the JS is more deeply involved in the quality control of the submitted projects. It is advantageous because the JS has the widest knowledge on the necessity and the criteria of the projects' cross-border character. The professional assessors very often evaluate proposals with high scores if the professional content is correct regardless of that these have no real cross-border character (the project can be recommended to be selected regardless of the total lack of cross-border character since the points awarding this factor have small weight). These anomalies can be tackled by the involvement of the experts of the JS concentrating on the cross-border aspects and the potential administrative or legal obstacles hindering the realization although good quality projects. Besides, this practice enables the JS members to meet and get familiar with the proposals earlier than the implementation phase what makes the implementation itself more reliable and foreseeable.

On the other hand, the participation of the counties (NUTSIII level entities) in the assessment of the projects can guarantee the enforcement of the territorial aspects and the harmonization of the proposals with the regional strategies. Furthermore, the active participation obviously enhanced the territorial actors' commitment to and ownership of the CP. At the same time, here again, the conflict of interest should be avoided: the assessment of the county representatives should be limited to the regional factors.

⁵ Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments. COM(2018) 374 final. 2018/0199 (COD)

The model can be developed further by re-considering the scoring rates between the three actors and strengthening the weight of the territorial and cross-border aspects but this amendment is not necessary.

The above model can have beneficial influence also to the selection of the quality assessors. Taking into account that the cross-border and the territorial aspects are assessed separately, the invited external experts can represent directly the professional field of the submitted projects (e.g. forestry). This solution can further improve the professional quality of the projects – mainly in parallel with the thematic narrowing of the calls (see the Recommendation 3.1).



M 6.7 Assessment of ownership

R_3.9 Involve the MC more actively in the selection of the proposals

According to the current model, the MC members are informed about the projects two weeks before the MC meeting where the decisions thereon should be made. The MC members are provided by an excel sheet containing the basic information and the scores of the quality assessment by each project. Based on the list, they are used to start negotiations at national level and occasionally together with the neighbouring counties on the proposed final list. The TAPE can show a new way of decision making in this perspective, too. Upon the request of some MC members, the TAPes will be presented to the MC by the LB of the coordination and communication project (CCP). The presentation enables the MC members to get deeper view on the objectives and the planned activities of the project, as well as, on the preparedness of the beneficiaries. The model provides a new and more decisive role for the MC which does not only „administer” the final decision but can make recommendations regarding the projects and can discuss potential disputed issues with the project holders. In parallel, the application of the solution can enhance the commitment of the MC members to setting the conditions and making recommendations at MC meetings more actively.



M 6.7 Assessment of ownership

3.2 Project implementation

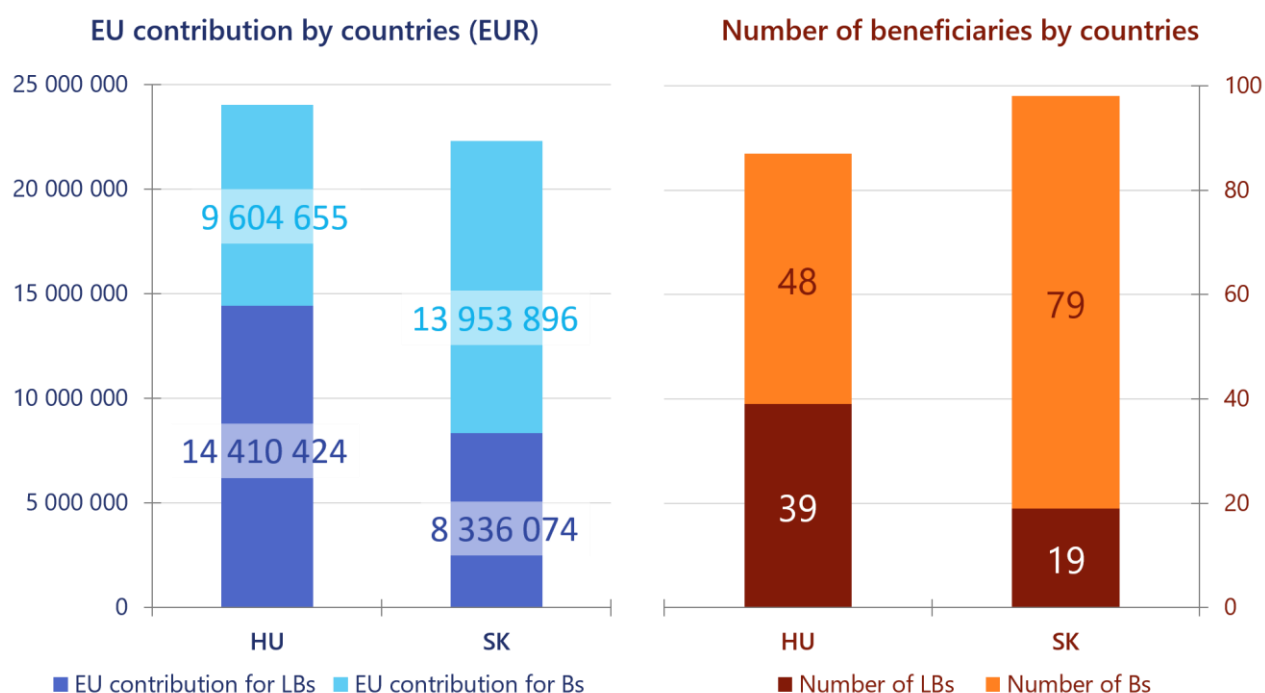
R_3.10 Eliminate the differences between the two (national) financing systems

Due to the differences in national legislations, the financing conditions of the projects are fundamentally different in Slovakia and in Hungary. On the one hand, the Hungarian beneficiaries obtain the national-contribution (10%) in two weeks after the signature of the relevant subsidy contract. On the contrary, the Slovak beneficiaries have to report the timely absorption of the same title that is re-imbursed afterwards. On the other hand, Hungarian

beneficiaries can apply for advance payment of their ERDF support (50 or 100% thereof depending on the status of the applicant) while the Slovak partners cannot.

The fact that the Hungarian authorities ensure the national contribution as advance payment and that there is an opportunity to apply for further pre-financing while these opportunities are not available for the Slovak applicants generated remarkable imbalances in the share of the Lead Beneficiaries, with an overweight in Hungary. Furthermore, while the Hungarian beneficiaries could start implementing their activities earlier, their Slovak counterparts have often to apply for bank loans. This takes time and increases the costs of the project (the beneficiaries pay the interests until the project costs are re-imbursed and later on). Finally, the situation of the CSOs and other financially weaker applicants is better on the Hungarian side than in Slovakia: they can take part in the programme with stronger motivation being aware of that they will earn 60% of the total financial support in advance. On the Slovak side, financially stronger applicants are in an advantageous situation because they are able to pre-finance their activities.

Figure X: EU contribution and number of beneficiaries by countries



Taking into account that the Slovak rules being in effect do not make possible advance payments, the system can be modified only in the next programming period. For this modification, the lessons learnt from the current CP should be utilised.



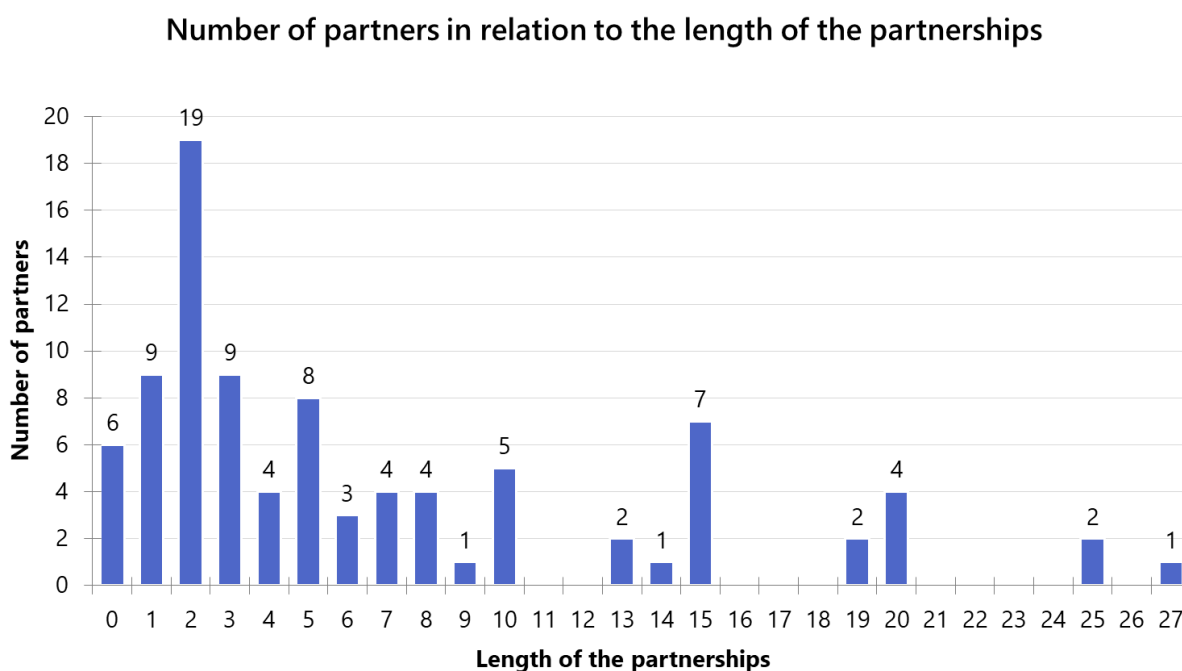
M 6.6 Simplification test
3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

R_3.11 Enhance the sustainability of cross-border partnerships and the project results

One of the main challenges of the cross-border projects is the guarantee for longer-term sustainability of both the project results and the partnership. Although, the programme budget and the legal and administrative obstacles hinder the fulfilling of this mission, the programme still has the adequate instruments for enhancing this aspect at project level.

On the one hand, in terms of the partnership, while the joint planning of the project has to be justified, the timely perspectives of the cooperation are not to be presented. The assessment of the prehistory of the partnership and the joint prospects for the future can give this perspective, especially in case of TO11. In these terms, it is interesting to see, how long the partnerships are in the case of the projects participated in the survey. 38% of the partners started their cooperation 2 years ago, at maximum. It is very rare that a partnership has a history longer than a decade.

Figure XI: The history of the partnerships by years



On the other hand, regarding the content and the results, the more integrated the project is, the bigger is the chance for sustainability. Integration can be guaranteed either in time (the current project can be considered as the continuation of a previous one) or by synergies (the project results will be built into a larger context created by other projects and interventions). The latter factor can partly be evaluated through territorial assessment applied in the case of the TAPE call.

These two aspects should be assessed with bigger emphasis. Obviously, the assessors cannot ignore the professional content of the proposals. However, the main mission of the INTERREG A programmes is to facilitate long-term cross-border partnerships which are able to implement activities that diminish the separating effects of the border. The assessment should rather concentrate on this sustainability criterion of cross-border activities. Further possibilities are to

put more attention on the implementation phase: how the partners try to ensure sustainability; or to provide best practice examples (see Recommendation 2.6) and concrete recommendations.



M 5.1 Sustainability analysis – project results
M 5.2 Sustainability analysis – project partnership
M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach

4. Performance on programme level

4.1 The IMIS system

R_4.1 Fine-tune the IMIS and train the beneficiaries on the use of it

The IMIS system has been put into service with remarkable delay that not only caused delay in the introduction of the electronic submission of the proposals in the calls there are some minor technical shortcomings therefore the system needs further development.

In order to enable the applicants to draft better quality proposals in due time, the JS should organise Info Days on the use of the IMIS (uploading the application).

In addition, beneficiaries would welcome the IMIS handbook in national languages.



M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures
M 6.5 Assessment of the assistance provided by the JS
M 6.6 Simplification test

R_4.2 Modify the IMIS system with a view to enabling its users to import and export data in a more compiled and structured way

At the moment, every component and piece of information related to the proposal has to be typed into the system separately what is very time-consuming. It especially hardens the financial design of the project: the budget plans are usually prepared on Excel sheets and every item has to be copied to the IMIS what raises the opportunity of typos and misunderstanding. The IMIS could provide an opportunity to upload the Excel sheets the data of which could be re-arranged automatically by the system.

Similarly, during the evaluation, the lack of access to data in a structured form caused difficulties. When preparing the annual implementation reports, the JS will face the same problem. The opportunity of downloading information (e.g. a given cell of every application) into excel sheets would ease the evaluation.



M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures
3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

4.2 Procedures

R_4.3 Eliminate or diminish the reasons of delays

Due to the late approval of the Cohesion Policy Regulations and, later on, the relocation of the Managing Authority from Bratislava to Budapest caused serious delays in programme performance. While these factors fall beyond the control of the programme bodies and thanks to the smooth cooperation between them, the problems were tackled very fast, some factors hindered the implementation of the programme.

At its 7th meeting the Monitoring Committee (17th of July 2017, Budapest) approved to increase the overall ERDF allocation dedicated to PA1 under 1st Call for proposals up to 40,351,153.20 EUR. The decision did not ease the problems of the management structure since instead of a more balanced loading, many projects have to be monitored in parallel now. It is not very hard to foresee that this factor will cause further delays, mainly once the designing procedure of the next programme starts requiring further resources from the management bodies.

Another factor was the launching of several new innovative tools introduced by the programme (TAPE, SPF, SME call). Since the MA, the NA and the JS had no previous experiences in these cases, the design procedure lasted longer and the establishment of the new tools needed more careful work, the programme suffered of further delays. The difficulties with the first SME call should be considered as a typical phenomenon of this type of problems stemming from the lack of experiences.

The management structures should pay special attention to these difficulties and obstacles and tackle them with considerations in order to avoid further delays in implementation.



M 1.2 Indicator value analysis
M 6.3 Lead time assessment

R_4.4 Harmonise the FLC procedures in order to ensure equal treatment

The rules concerning the FLC in Slovakia are stricter than those in Hungary. In the former case, there is a 2% rule of failed checks and the Ministry of Finance always perform very strict control on FLC team. As a consequence, the Slovak FLC is stricter against the beneficiaries than the Hungarian. The differences of flexibility between the two countries can cause uncertainties and interpretation disputes. Taking into account that thanks to the SPF the number of the projects will be much higher than during the previous programming period, this strictness will create further delay in programme implementation. Since the procedures are ruled by national level legislation, the system can only be harmonised in the next programme period. Therefore, at the moment, the careful design of monitoring activities and their human capacity needs is a proposed solution.



M 6.2 Capacity assessment
M 6.3 Lead time assessment

R_4.5 Involve the beneficiaries in the preparation of the calls

The coordination of the TAPes has generated several good practices. One of them was the involvement of the beneficiaries in the preparation of the second round call through a consultation event. This procedure could be adapted to other calls, as well, mainly if the calls follow the two-round selection model (see Recommendation 3.3). The solution has several advantages:

- the beneficiaries (selected in the first round) can get a deeper view on the programme's main objectives, its management procedures and the legal and administrative frameworks of the call before deepening their project proposals (it is a common experience that by getting deeper knowledge on the realisation and management procedures of the programme, the beneficiaries become more conscious in shaping their ideas, setting their objectives and respecting the programme's needs in terms of indicators – but when preparing their proposals based on on-line information and info-days, their knowledge necessarily stays superficial);
- the beneficiaries can better understand the logic and the content of the call and thus they become more prepared to the tasks to do;
- the beneficiaries can enrich the call and make it more accurate by their own experiences and recommendations;
- the involvement strengthens the ownership of the programme.



M 6.7 Assessment of ownership

R_4.6 Consider the implementation of continuously open calls

During the programming, the option of continuously open calls had already been raised. The option was rejected except for PA2. However, the case of the first call shows the advantages of this solution. Due to the financial broadening of the call, many projects are implemented in parallel causing serious work load problems for the management bodies.

At the same time, the application of the continuous model would make the peak periods more balanced since the MC could decide on the currently arrived projects with the perspective of further opportunities later on. Another advantage of the model is that the management bodies are exempt of creating new and new calls during the implementation of the programme. However, slight modifications can be necessary.

Let us add that the closer is the termination of the programme, the smaller is the chance for implementing this model.



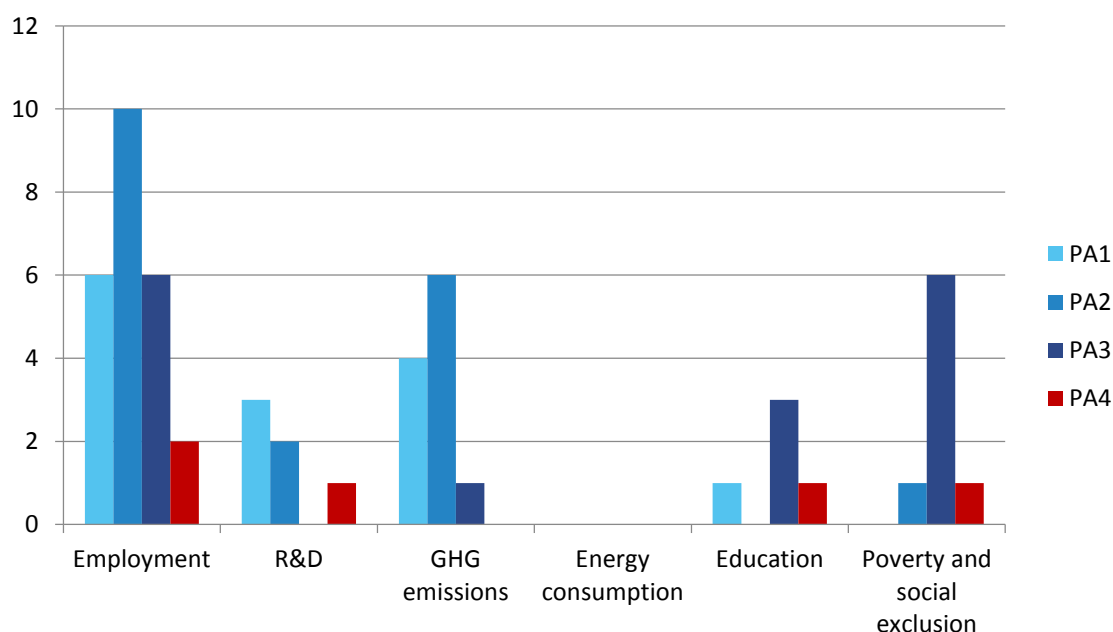
M 6.3 Lead time assessment
M 6.6 Simplification test

5. Recommendations related to the extended AIR

R_5.1 Create the follow-up solution of EU2020 contribution

As it has been assessed, each PA of the CP contributes to the EU2020 targets⁶. The strongest representation of these targets can be detected in terms of employment and social inclusion. Due to the thematic concentration principle, the CP cannot reflect all the targets; for instance, the targets related to energy consumption are not addressed by the indicators and the actions of the programme.

Figure XII: The contribution of the CP's actions to the EU2020 targets



In order to monitor the concrete ways and level of contributions, the JS is invited to develop an **equivalence matrix**, how the CP indicators feed into the system of the EU headline indicators. The matrix could ease the follow-up of this feeding-in process through the generation programme level values from project level indicators. The results can be used for drafting an assessment on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the programme region. This solution is proportionate considering the modest financial and administrative resources of the CP.



M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_headline_indicators

R_5.2 Create the follow-up solution of macro-regional contribution

The programming region forms part of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). The EUSDR has 11 priority areas (one of them is split into two sub-priorities) creating the framework for joint activities. All priorities have their own roadmap identifying the joint objectives and fields of intervention. Besides, the integration of the EUSDR and the Danube Transnational (INTERREG B) programme (DTP) is stronger and stronger. DTP has its own priority axes with a system of indicators.

Slovakia-Hungary INTERREG V-A Cooperation Programme should contribute to the achievement of above objectives and indicators. Accordingly, the beneficiaries are requested to identify their actions by which their project contributes to the macro-regional goals and this contribution is awarded by additional points.

According to the assessment, PA1 has the most broaden influence on the fulfilment of the goals of EUSDR: it contributes to the objectives of 6 EUSDR PAs while PA4 feeds into 4.

Table III: Contribution of the programme to the EUSDR objectives

EUSDR Priority Areas and actions	Programme priorities			
	PA1 Nature and Culture	PA2 Cross-border mobility	PA3 Employment, labour mobility	PA4 Cross-border cooperation
1) Connecting the Danube Region				
To improve mobility and multimodality	+	+	+	
To encourage more sustainable energy				
To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts	+			+
(2) Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region				
To restore and maintain the quality of waters	+			
To manage environmental risks	+			+
To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils	+			
(3) Building Prosperity in the Danube Region				
To develop the knowledge society through research, education and information technologies				
To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development	+		+	
To invest in people and skills			+	+

EUSDR	Programme priorities			
(4) Strengthening the Danube Region				
To step up institutional capacity and cooperation				+
To work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime				

The follow-up of the contribution (which must be symbolic due to the financial limits of the CP) can be improved by the development of an equivalence matrix where the objectives of the EUSDR and the indicators of the DTP are corresponded to the actions taken by the beneficiaries. For this purpose, the application of a down scroll list from which the beneficiaries can select relevant activities makes possible the permanent monitoring of the contribution.



M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals

III. ANNEX 1. - DETAILED ANALYSIS

1. Introduction

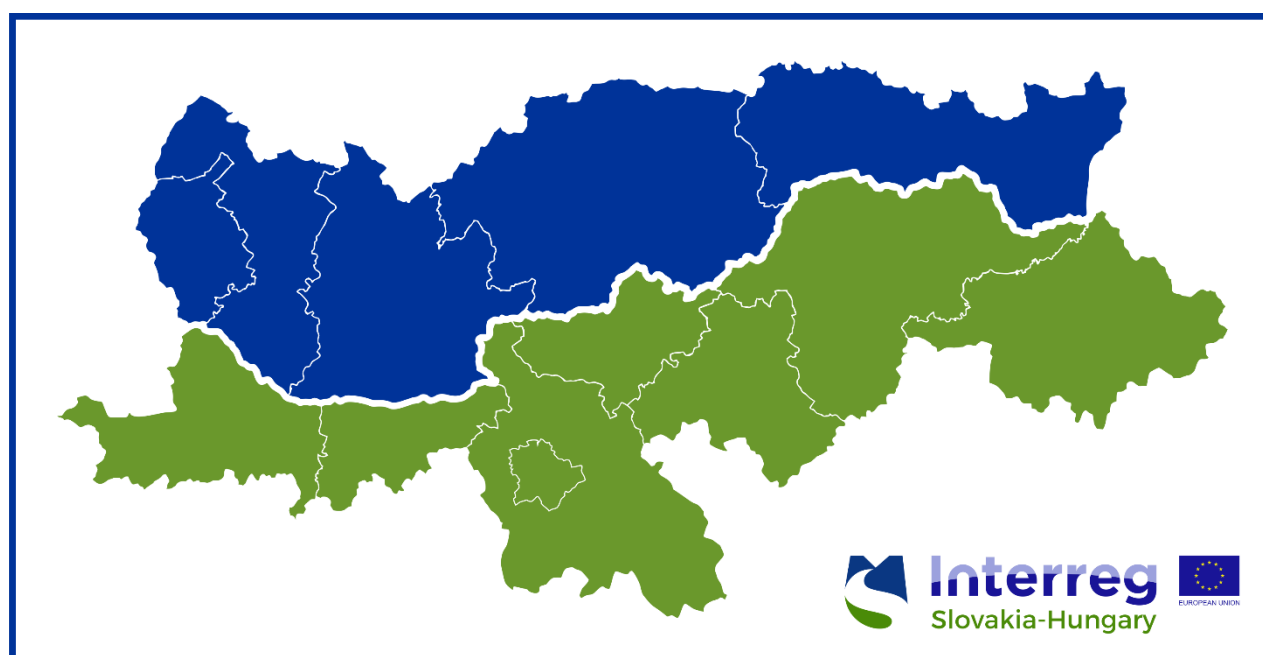
1.1 Background of the evaluation

1.1.1 Identification of the deliverable

Table 1: General data of the programme

The operational programme concerned	INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme
Programming period	2014-2020
Reporting year	2018
Cut-off date of data processing	30 September 2018
Type of the evaluation	First Phase (earlier: mid-term) evaluation

Figure 1: Programme area



(Source: <http://www.skhu.eu/upload/5924548b1ce4b/58e60fde7c0c8/571f2ec3904e5.png>)

1.1.2 Context

2018 is the year of First Phase evaluation of the cooperation programmes. In February, the Managing Authority of the programme (operated that time in the Prime Minister's Office) invited the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) to carry out the evaluation of the present programme. CESCI is a Budapest-based association established according to Hungarian private law aiming to ease cross-border cooperation along the Hungarian borders and in Central Europe. That time, the organisation was one of the strategic partners of the Prime Minister's Office which offered financial support to the CESCI on a yearly basis. Based on this strategic partnership, CESCI was committed to perform the evaluation of the programme. During the evaluation, the Managing Authority has been moved into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The evaluation procedure has been designed in harmony with the evaluation plan of the programme and further previous evaluations as models. The objective of the evaluation is to provide the actors of programme management and implementation with appropriate information on the results achieved, the potential risks identified and the potential interventions needed for the successful and smooth completion of the programme.

1.1.3 The scope of the assessment

Within the framework of the current evaluation assignment, the effectiveness, the efficiency and the impact of the cross-border programme were assessed. While effectiveness and efficiency are rather formal criteria of evaluation, impact is much more a matter of content.

Effectiveness means the level of the objectives what the programme has achieved at to date of evaluation. It refers to the progress made against the planned implementation.

Impact is a very complex term referring to the influence that the programme exercises on the internal cohesion of the programming area and the level of cross-border cooperation. While effectiveness measures the internal success of the programme, the impact rather identifies its external success.

Efficiency refers to the successful use of the financial and human resources of the programme. Successful here means 'optimal' and 'resource-efficient'.

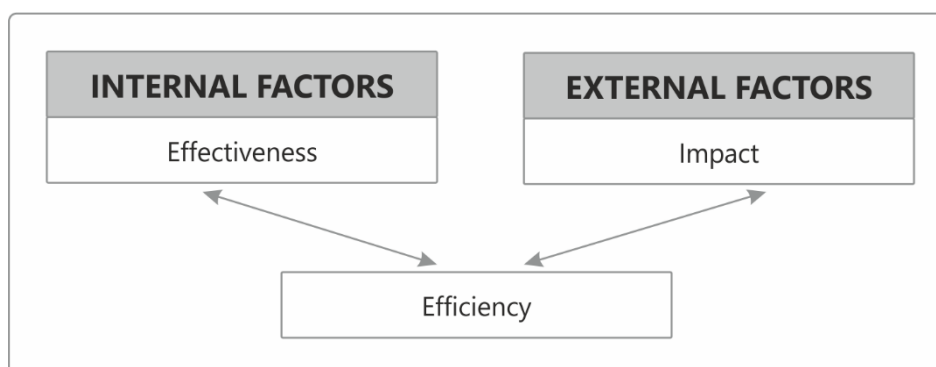
In terms of the impact we have to stipulate two things with major significance:

- Impact is the most important aspect of the evaluation since it refers to the tangible and intangible results created by the programme – in line with its the strategic objectives. Effectiveness and efficiency should be assessed in relationship with the achieved impacts. The programme is effective if the achieved impacts are in harmony with the targets set during the programming. The programme implementation is efficient if the resources are exploited so that the targets set are achieved in an optimal way.

- Impacts can be identified and assessed in a long term perspective. Taking into account the short period of time spent since the first calls were published and the small progress the project partners could made so far, at the moment we miss the relevant information on real impacts. Consequently, we tried to measure the impact of the programmes exercising on the programming region in a very preliminary phase. These impacts will be measurable in a later phase of programme implementation with a much higher effectiveness.

Efficiency of the programme will be analysed in relationship with the effectiveness and the impact of the programme. It means that we analyse the effectiveness first (i.e. in which level the programme has been progressing so far); then the impact (i.e. in which level the programme made a measurable effect on the programming region); and finally, we assess the efficiency (i.e. how efficient way the programme managed to achieve the identified level of internal and external effects).

Figure 2: The internal logic of the evaluation



When applying this approach, we can avoid a typical mistake of programme evaluation documents i.e. the purely formal assessment of the achievements, based on quantification of the results and their comparison with the performance framework: the formal and topical aspects should have the same significance. Accordingly, in this document, all three aspects are assessed with the limitations regarding the data availability regarding the impact.

In line with the evaluation plan of the programme, the present document focuses on

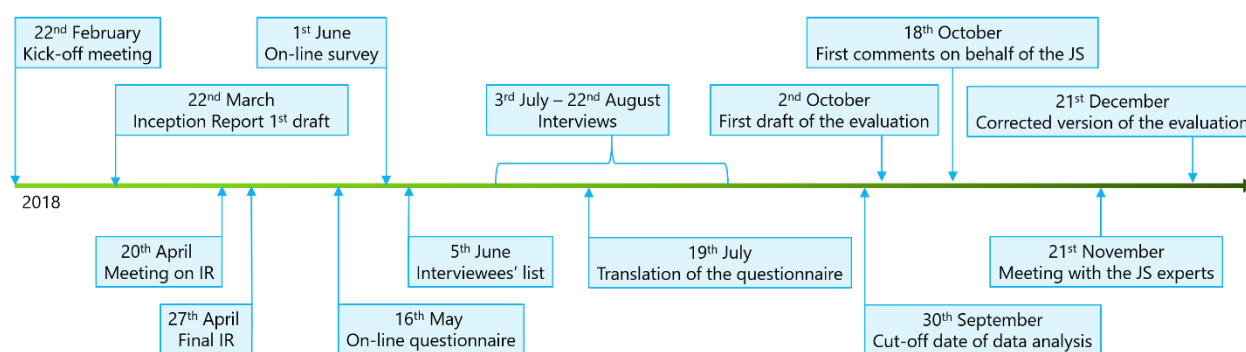
- programme management and implementation,
- Call for Proposals, project application and selection procedures,
- Communication Strategy of the programme,
- specific types of calls and projects: Small Project Fund, SME call, Territorial Action Plans for Employment, infrastructural projects (roads and bridges)
- performance framework indicators,
- feeding the extended AIR 2018.

1.1.4 Performance of the evaluation

The evaluation was carried out along by the following steps and milestones:

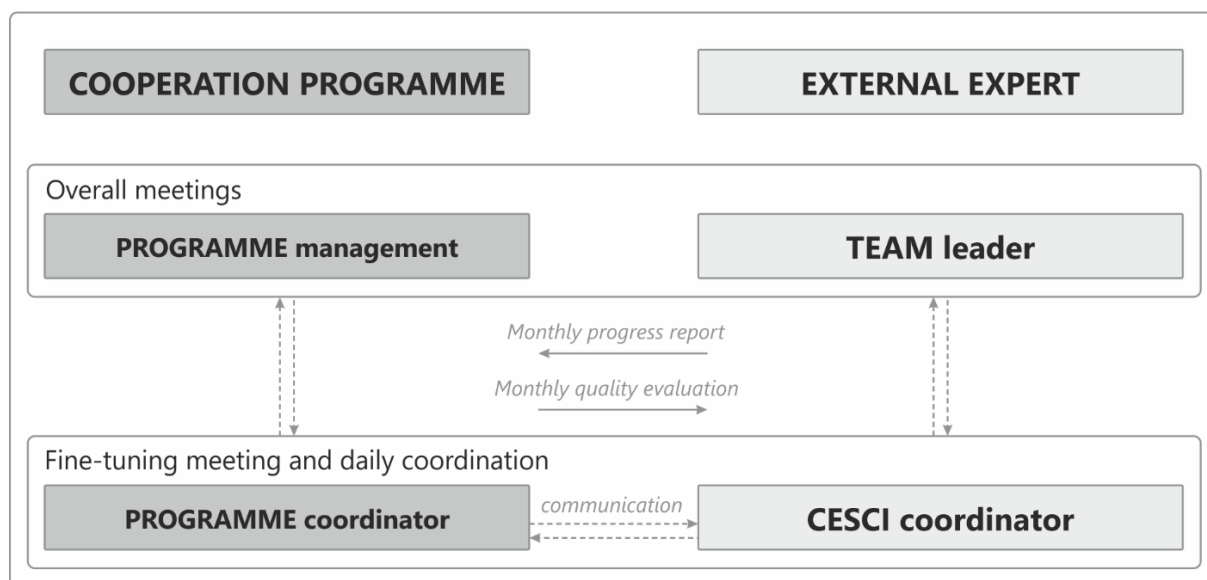
- 22nd February – Kick-off meeting
- 22nd March – Delivery of the first draft of the Inception Report
- 20th April – Meeting on the draft Inception Report
- 27th April – Delivery of the final Inception Report
- 16th May – Delivery of the on-line questionnaire targeting the programme beneficiaries
- 1st June – Information on sharing the link of the on-line questionnaire
- 5th June – Identification of the list of interviewees
- 3rd July – Interview with Mr Tamás Molnár
- 4th July – Group interview with the representatives of the Slovak National Authority and Mr Martin Hakel
- 10th July – Group interview with the JS team
- 19th July – Delivery of the on-line questionnaire translated to Hungarian and Slovak
- 2nd August – Interview with Ms Tünde Erényi
- 22nd August – Interview with Ms Ildikó Sándor
- 30th September – Cut-off date of data analysis
- 2nd October – Delivery of the first draft of the evaluation
- 18th October – First comments on behalf of the JS and a proposal on re-structuring of the document
- 21st November – Meeting with the JS experts on the finalisation of the document
- 21st December – Corrected version of the evaluation

Figure 3: Milestones of the evaluation



In line with the measures set by the Inception Report, coordination mechanism has been created with a view to ensuring permanent communication.

Figure 4: The coordination mechanism of the evaluation process



Besides, CESCI provided the representatives of the programme with a monthly progress report accompanied by a quality assessment sheet by which the programme coordinators were enabled to add comments and requests.

In addition, CESCI has developed a website dedicated to the evaluation containing the following information:

- *Evaluation document*: it is a Google Drive Word document where the elaboration of the evaluation text can be followed;
- *Background analyses*: results of the on-line survey; (checked) summaries of the interviews; regional analysis;
- *Administration*: inception report, monthly progress reports, templates applied.

1.2 Introduction of the cooperation programme

The cooperation programme (CP) between Hungary and Slovakia is one of those European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes which aim to connect the given regions, to protect the environment, to build prosperity and to strengthen the concerned regions in a cross-border manner. The Interreg V-A SK-HU programme which started in 2014 and is due to end in 2020 covers the following NUTS regions in Slovakia:

- SK010 - Bratislavský kraj
- SK021 - Trnavský kraj
- SK023 - Nitriansky kraj
- SK032 - Banskobystrický kraj
- SK042 - Košický kraj

and in Hungary:

- HU101 - Budapest
- HU102 – Pest county
- HU212 - Komárom-Esztergom county
- HU221 - Győr-Moson-Sopron county
- HU311 - Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county
- HU312 - Heves county
- HU313 - Nógrád county
- HU323 - Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county.

Aims

The Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary programme takes its two general aims from the overall objectives of all ETC programmes namely: (1) they have to strengthen territorial, economic and social cohesion as well as (2) to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth of the region and the European Union (EU 2020 Strategy). Having taken this and the results of the territorial analysis into account, the programme is aiming to elicit change through the following types of interventions:

- Supporting the harmonised protection, development and utilisation of the common natural and cultural heritage of the border region (protection of biodiversity; assuring the conditions for common water management and risk management; renovation of cultural, built heritage sites; development of cross-border tourist products and services) (TO 6).
- Increasing the density of border crossing points (TO 7); and strengthening the harmonisation of public and environment-friendly transport and multimodality within the region and improving the quality of the services (TO 7).
- Contributing to the improvement of the social conditions by increasing the rate of employment in the region and by improving the conditions of cross-border labour force mobility (creation of new jobs, development of labour force information systems, development of the training and transport conditions of cross-border labour force migration).The priority gives emphasis on the social inclusion of people living in deep poverty and Roma in case of the employment initiatives (TO 8).
- Strengthening the social cohesion by supporting inter-institutional, inter-municipal and people-to-people cooperation (TO11).

Interventions and tools

The Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary programme defined four main interventions each with their own set of tools and indicators. These interventions – which are in line with the priority axes of Europe 2020 – are the following:

- Priority axis 1: Nature and culture;
- Priority axis 2: Enhancing cross-border mobility;

- Priority axis 3: Promoting sustainable and quality employment, and supporting labour mobility;
- Priority axis 4: Enhancing cross-border cooperation of public authorities and people living in the border area.

The priority axis 5 which is the technical assistance is analysed separately in subchapter 6.5.

PA1: Nature and Culture

The specific objective of this PA is 'To increase the attractiveness of the border area.'

The indicators attached to this PA are the following.

Table 2: Indicators of the PA1

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
R110	Total number of visitors in the region	Number / year	7,074,754.00	2012	7,800,000.00	national statistical data (ŠUSR, KSH)	2018, 2020, 2023
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises	n/a	n/a	40.00	Beneficiaries	annually
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enterprises	n/a	n/a	40.00	Beneficiaries	annually
CO09	Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	Visits / year	n/a	n/a	30,000.00	Beneficiaries	annually
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	n/a	n/a	7.00	Beneficiaries	annually
CO23	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	Hectares	n/a	n/a	100,549.00	Beneficiaries	annually
O11	Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	km	n/a	n/a	89.00	Beneficiaries	annually
F0001	Total amount of submitted expenditure	EUR	n/a	n/a	65,209,186.00	Certifying authority,	n/a

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
	for validation					monitoring system	
K0001	Number of calls for SMEs	number	n/a	n/a	1	JS	n/a
K0002	Elaborated technical documentation for road construction	NA	n/a	n/a	4.00	Bene-ficiaries	n/a

PA2: Enhancing cross-border mobility

The specific objectives of this PA are:

- 'Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border.'
- 'Improving cross-border public transport services'.

The indicators attached to this PA are the following:

Table 3: Indicators of the PA2

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
R210	Average distance between border crossing points	km	21.90	2014	15.00	Beneficiaries	in 2018, 2020, 2023
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	n/a	n/a	9.00	Beneficiaries	annually
R221	Change in the volume of cross-border public transport	persons	382,849.00	2013	450,000.00	service providers	in 2018, 2020, 2023
R222	Change in the volume of cross-border good transport	EUR	8,565,130,424.00	2013	10,000,000,000.00	national statistical offices	in 2018, 2020, 2023
O221	Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	piece	n/a	n/a	10.00	Beneficiaries	annually
O222	Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme	piece	n/a	n/a	10.00	Beneficiaries	annually
F0001	Total amount of submitted expenditure for validation	EUR	n/a	n/a	40,715,389.00	Certifying authority, monitoring	annually

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
						system	
K0002	Elaborated technical documentation for road construction	NA	n/a	n/a	3.00	Beneficiaries	annually

PA3: Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility

The specific objective of this PA is: 'Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region'.

The indicators attached to this PA are:

Table 4: Indicators of the PA3

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
R310	Increase in the employment rate	percentage	63.20	2013	65.20	Eurostat	in 2018, 2020, 2023
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enter-prises	n/a	n/a	10.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enter-prises	n/a	n/a	10.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
CO08	Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	Full time equivalents	n/a	n/a	20.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	n/a	n/a	11.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
CO39	Urban Development: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	Square metres	n/a	n/a	3,000.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
CO44	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	Persons	n/a	n/a	100.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
O311	Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	Number	n/a	n/a	10.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
O312	Number of women in	persons	n/a	n/a	50.00	Beneficiaries	Annually

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
	joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)						
O313	Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	persons	n/a	n/a	25.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
O314	Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	number	n/a	n/a	15.00	Beneficiaries	Annually
F0001	Total amount of submitted expenditure for validation	EUR	n/a	n/a	40,715,389.00	Certifying authority, monitoring system	n/a
K0003	Selected action plans	number	n/a	n/a	10.00	Beneficiaries	Annually

PA4: Enhancing cross-border cooperation of public authorities and people living in the border area

The specific objective of this PA is: 'Improving the level of cross border inter-institutional cooperation and broadening cross border cooperation between citizens.'

The indicators attached to this PA are the following:

Table 5: Indicators of the PA4

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
F0001	Total amount of submitted expenditure for validation	EUR	n/a	n/a	25,666,448.00	Certifying authority, monitoring system	n/a
O411	Number of cross-border products and	Number	n/a	n/a	20.00	Beneficiaries	n/a

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Source of data	Frequency of reporting
	services developed						
O412	Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	Number	n/a	n/a	40.00	Bene-ficiaries	n/a
O413	Number of cross border events	Number	n/a	n/a	400.00	Bene-ficiaries	n/a
O414	Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	Number	n/a	n/a	200.00	Bene-ficiaries	n/a
R410	Level of cross-border cooperation	score	3.40	2015	4.10	Bene-ficiaries	in 2018, 2020, 2023
O415	Number of people participated in cooperation	Number	n/a	n/a	10,000.00	Bene-ficiaries	Annually
O416	Number of women participated in cooperation	Number	n/a	n/a	4,000.00	Bene-ficiaries	Annually
O417	Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	Number	n/a	n/a	300.00	Bene-ficiaries	Annually

2. The methodology of the evaluation

2.1 Factors of the analysis

For the purposes of the analysis the following factors have been selected to analysis:

Table 6: Factors of the analysis

Factors	Explication	Assessment topics	Components
Effectiveness	When assessing the effectiveness of the programme, we focus on the achievements and the progress the programme has made to date. The evaluation should show where we are and where we were planned to be in 2018 at the time of the approval of the programme.	The actual progress of the programme	Quantification of the results
			Indicator value analysis
			Scheduling
			Financial progress analysis
		Effectiveness of the communication	Evaluation of the communication plan
			Evaluation of the communication of the programme
			Evaluation of the communication of the projects
Impact	Impact assessment measures how the programme was successful in terms of cross-border cooperation and cohesion; in other words, whether the programme can be reasonably justified in its existence.	Relevance	Analysis of regional needs
			Analysis of cross-border relevance
			Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools
			Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals
		Territorial impact	Mapping of the territorial coverage
			Assessment of strategic approach
		Permanency	Sustainability analysis – project results
			Sustainability analysis – project partnership
			Assessment of the integrated approach

Factors	Explication	Assessment topics	Components
Efficiency	This evaluation aspect measures how, with what efficiency the human and financial capacities and resources have been utilised.	Performance management	Institution assessment
			Capacity assessment
			Lead time assessment
			Assessment of the procedures
			Assessment of technical assistance
			Simplification test
		Costs of operation	Assessment of ownership
			Cost efficiency assessment

2.2 Applied methods

During the implementation of the evaluation project, the following methods were applied:

Table 7: Applied methods

Identification of the method	Explanation	Remarks
Document review and analysis	Analysis of the programme documents (cooperation programme document, ex-ante evaluation report, strategic environment assessment, communication strategy, final evaluation report of the previous programme, Annual Implementation Reports, minutes of the MC meetings at their background documents); the documents related to programme implementation (documents of calls for proposals, background documents of the special tools implemented, rules of procedures, internal rules of the programme bodies, job descriptions); and the relevant EU documents (EU2020 Strategy, the Cohesion Policy Regulations of 2014-2020, the basic documents of the EUSDR; guides and background documents of evaluation).	The document analysis aimed at getting an overall picture on the frameworks of the programme and the achievements reached. Consequently, the documents analysed within a desk research were targeted by textual analysis. Based on the collection, the team created a large information basis.
Structured in-depth interviews	The interviews addressed the representatives of the programme implementation bodies (MA: 1, NA: 4, JS: 6, IP: 1, MC: 2; total: 14 persons). The objective of the interviews was to get deeper knowledge on the way of functioning of the programme and on the achievements made.	Originally, face-to-face and phone call interviews were planned but finally face-to-face interviews were made, exceptionally. It was one of the reasons of the delay in performing the evaluation. Group interviews were made with the representatives of the NA and the JS

Identification of the method	Explanation	Remarks
		which proved to be very useful since the participants could complement each other's views and knowledge.
On-line survey	The aim of the survey was to gather information and experiences from the lead beneficiaries of both selected and rejected proposals. The lead beneficiaries of the projects (both selected and rejected) were requested to answer the questionnaire covering many small details of project development and implementation.	<p>We received 53 questionnaires filled-in by the beneficiaries. 2 of them were filled-in partly. The share of selected and not-selected proposals was 38/15. Among the 38 selected proposals, 3 addressed PA3 where the final number of selected projects is not known yet. The remaining 35 projects represented 55% of the total number of selected projects (64 projects in total, including those submitted to the call of PA2 from which 5 are not uploaded yet into the IMIS because they are currently under contracting).</p> <p>It is to be highlighted that the heterogeneity of the set of answers and the language problems of the beneficiaries made the survey usable in a limited way.</p> <p>In order to get higher rate of answers, CESCI created Hungarian and Slovak versions which were published by the programme in July. As a result, 4 further questionnaires were filled-out compared to the English version.</p>
Collection and analysis of data and information on the programme	The primary information source on the progress of the programme was the IMIS system. The available information was analysed with different quantitative and qualitative methods including indices, scaling, benchmark, word cloud method, contextual analysis, etc.	<p>It has to be highlighted that the scope of the information collected from the IMIS and processed with different methods was limited due to the late start of its implementation. (Consequently there were projects the content of which has not been uploaded yet, the application form is available only as the annex of the Subsidy Contract, as a picture what made difficult to analyse the particular projects.) Due to this fact, the results of the analyses should be considered cautiously since the evaluators were able to assess the information only which was available through the IMIS system. As a consequence, the information related to those decisions made but not registered in the IMIS could not be taken into consideration.</p> <p>In this perspective, document analysis</p>

Identification of the method	Explanation	Remarks
		and interviews provided very important contribution with a view to completing the information available in the IMIS.
GIS based territorial analysis	The evaluation team gathered and processed statistical data in order to assess the relevance of the programme priorities in terms of the changing territorial needs. In order to measure the relevance of the current performance framework and the intervention logic of the programmes; and to identify the necessary modifications of (financial, common and programme specific) indicators, the starting and the current socio-economic situations of the programming region were benchmarked.	

3. Results of the evaluation

3.1 Effectiveness

When assessing the effectiveness of the programme, we focus on the achievements and the progress the programme has made to date. The evaluation should show where we are and where we were planned to be in 2018 at the time of the approval of the programme.

3.1.1 Actual progress

The actual progress of the programme will be measured through:

- the quantification of the achievements made
- the analysis of the indicators
- the analysis of the time schedule; and
- the analysis of the financial progress.

M 1.1 Quantification of the results

In this chapter we intend to have an overall picture on the progress made so far. For this purpose we gather the following data: number of calls, number of project proposals submitted, number of selected projects, number of projects completed; number of project activities implemented and reported; number of indicators achieved.

The implementation of the Slovakia-Hungary programme was launched through four calls.

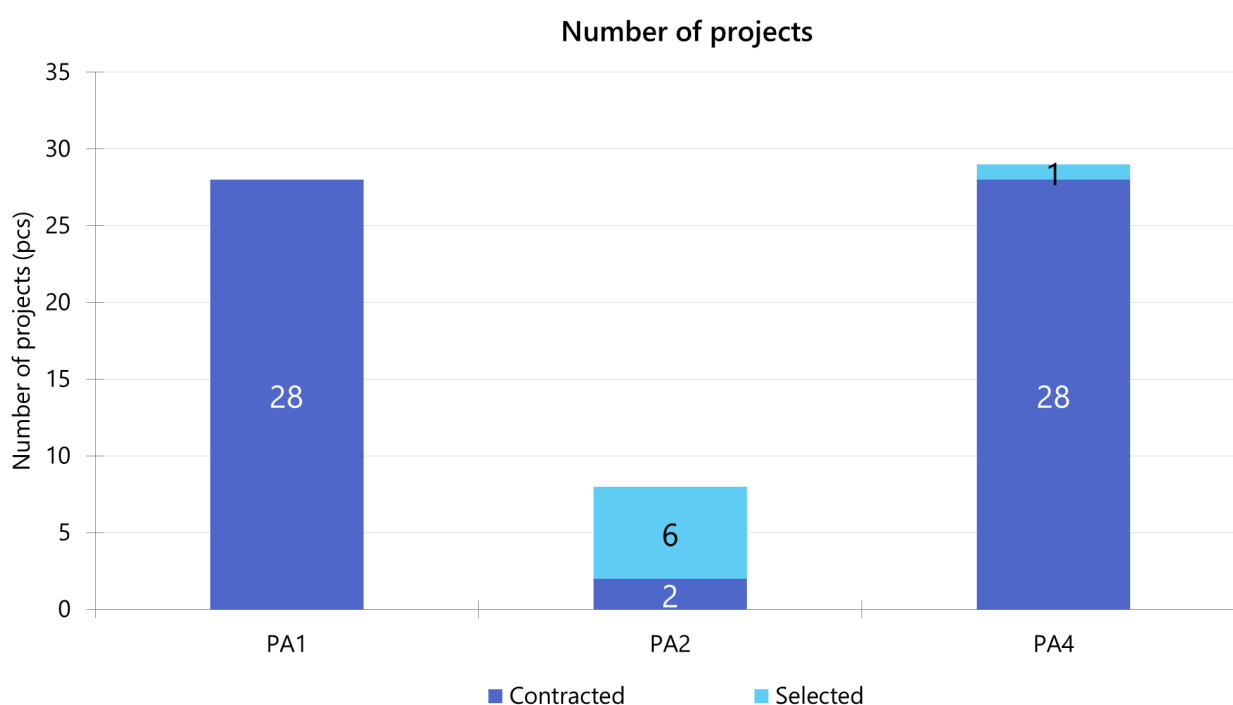
- **Call for Proposals – 1st Call for Proposals (SKHU/1601):** within the framework of the project, three priority axis (PA1, PA2, PA4) could be applied for. The applications connected to the PA1 and PA4 axes had to be submitted until November 3, 2016, while in relation to the PA2, applications could be submitted until February 19, 2018. Out of the 355 received applications, the MC awarded 66, out of which 58 are available in the IMIS.
- **Call for Small Project Fund – Umbrella Projects (SKHU/1701) + (SKHU/1704):** the objective of the call that is related to the PA1 and PA4 axis is to strengthen social cohesion across the border by supporting local level cooperation and to establish and improve long-term collaboration between actors on both sides of the border through the support of local/regional projects. In the two-round selecting system, those two organisations were selected, which are managing the application system of small projects. The first small project fund call of the eastern umbrella organisation (Via

Carpatia EGTC) was closed on July 31, 2018, the first small project fund call of the western umbrella organisation (Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC) was closed at 5th November, 2018.

- **Call for Proposals for Territorial Action Plan for Employment (SKHU/1703) + (SKHU/1802):** the objective of the two-round call under PA3, is the promotion of sustainable and quality employment and cross-border labour mobility. The Monitoring Committee of the programme selected 9 action plans at the end of the first round. In the second round, only applications that are included in an accepted action plan can be submitted. The invitational second round lasted until November 12, 2018.
- **Call for Proposals for Small and Medium Enterprises (SKHU/1801):** the objective of the call related to the PA1 axis is to involve the SMEs in tourist service development coming from both member states. The first call targeting the management of the B-Light scheme was not successful. The second, modified call was opened on April 6, 2018. The planned financial allocation of the received applications (a total amount of 29) reached the specified 125%, thus the call was suspended on July 2, 2018. The following six proposals have been selected for funding⁷: THEMATIC ROUTE FOR AGES 0-100; CastleExPo; InnoCult; FEBO; CBC Tours; SKHU XP centres. The reopening of the Call for Proposal is planned for the first quarter of 2019.

The number of the projects selected within the framework of the SKHU/1601 call and contracted can be seen on the following figure.

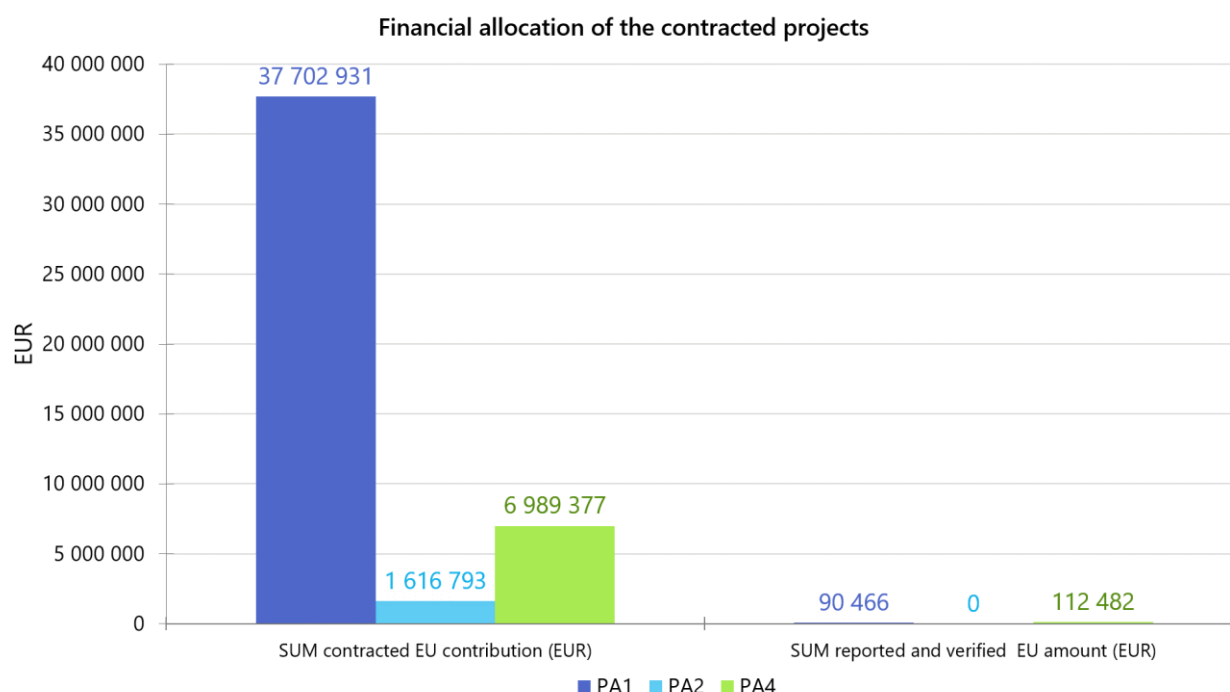
Figure 5: Number of projects



⁷ The 9th Monitoring Committee for the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 20th of September 2018, Győr

The applicants' interest in the PA1 and PA4 call was considerably higher compared to the forecasted resource allocation, while the resource demand of the applications toward PA2 was significantly less than expected. The latter results will be slightly improved by the projects that were selected in 2018 but which are not in the IMIS yet. At its 7th meeting the Monitoring Committee⁸ approved to increase the overall ERDF allocation dedicated to financing project proposals submitted in the PA1 within the 1st Call for proposals up to 40,351,153.20 EUR. At the 8th Meeting the Monitoring Committee⁹ discussed a possible modification of the Cooperation Programme. The aim of the change was reallocating the remaining amount from PA2 to PA1.

Figure 6: Financial allocation of the contracted projects¹⁰



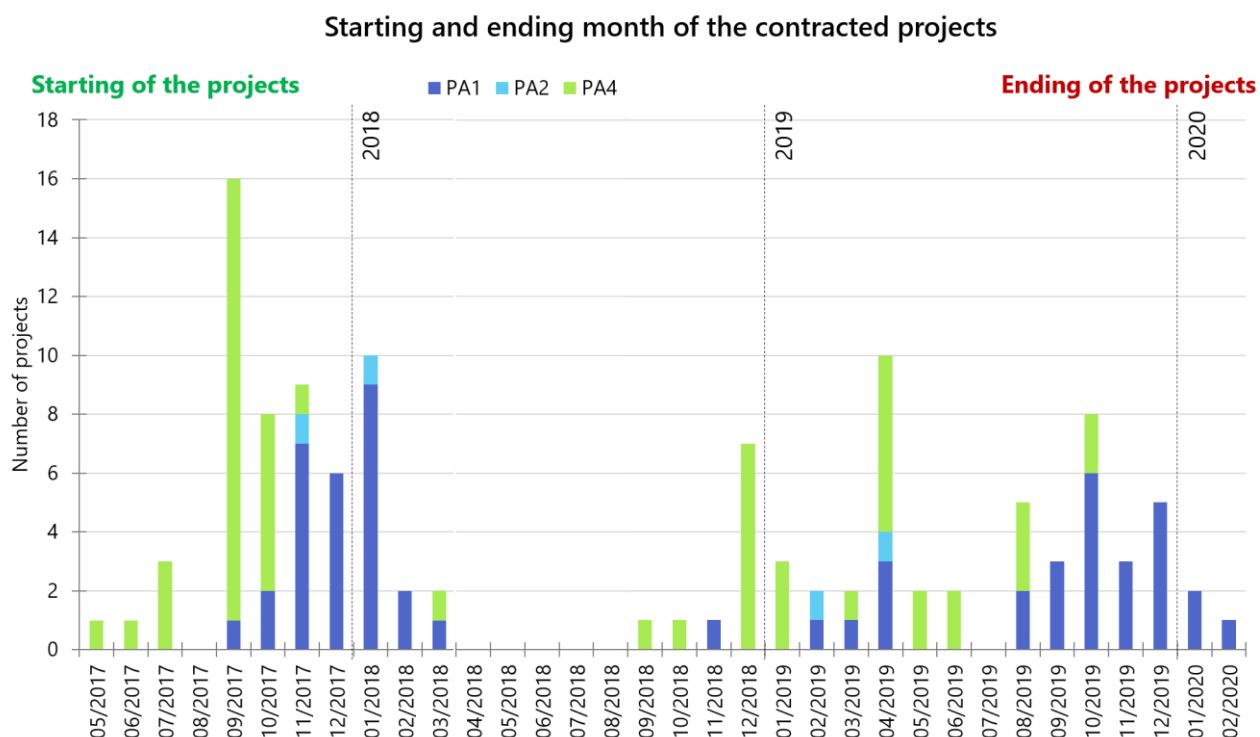
The figure below foresees that the implementation phase of the projects has been started by March 2018, the majority of the projects will be closing after the end of 2018. The last contracted projects will be completed in February 2020. The PA4's projects have a few months advantage over the PA1's projects. Deriving from the timing of the calls, there are peak periods in terms of project starts and closings. With a more balanced call-timing, these peak periods would be consequently more manageable. The average of project duration is 20.5 months. Up to now, one project has been implemented, its end date was September 30, 2018.

⁸ The 7th Monitoring Committee Meeting for the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 17th of July 2017, Budapest

⁹ The 8th Monitoring Committee Meeting for the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 26th of April 2018, Bratislava

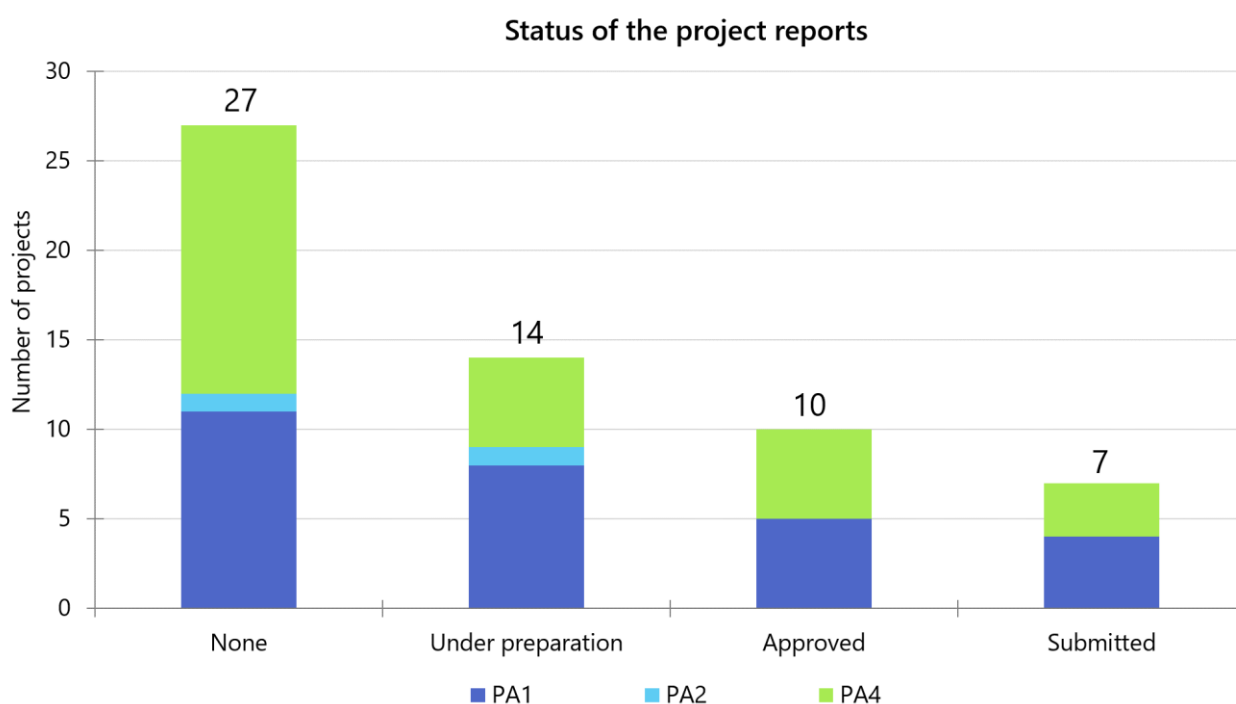
¹⁰ The graph based on data of the IMIS. JS remark on the values: Contracted ERDF PA1: 40 222 351,92; Contracted ERDF PA4: 6 985 325,09.

Figure 7: Starting and ending month of the contracted projects



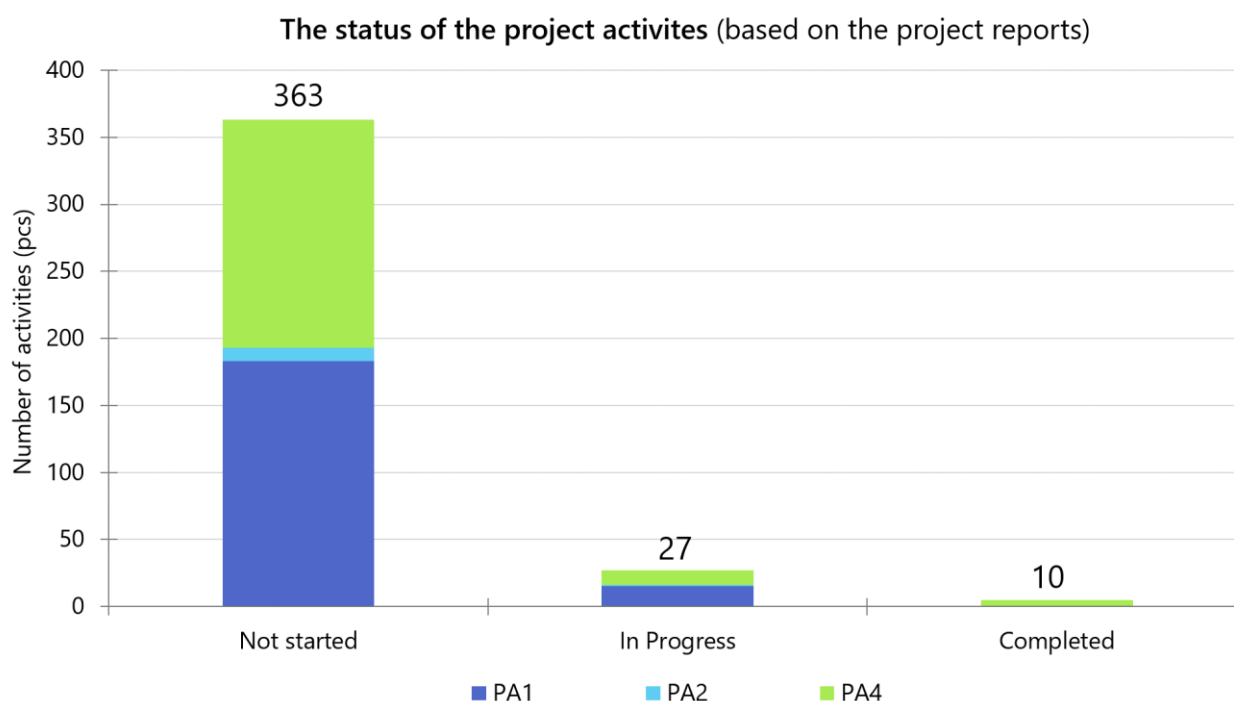
To correctly evaluate the results of the projects is greatly complicated since although the first period of implementation of a significant majority of the projects have already been reported in IMIS, at the cut-off date of the evaluation only 10 of these project reports are approved. It means that the results necessary for evaluation were not available for the evaluators in the time of assessment.

Figure 8: Status of the project reports



Based on the data gained from IMIS, the projects related to the SKHU/1601 call, targeted a total of 395 activities, of which, however, only 10 were reported and accepted as completed, by the end of September 2018. Due to the low number of project reports available, more than 90% of the activities are in a status of “not started”.

Figure 9: The status of the project activities



Based on the project data in the IMIS, in respect of the following indicators, the following progress can be identified:

Table 8: The progress of the realisation of common and programme specific output indicators

Common and programme specific output indicators	CP Target value	Projects Target value [forecast provided by beneficiaries]	Projects Actual value [actual achievement]
CO09 Sustainable tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	30 000	212 230	-
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA1)	7	3	-
CO23 Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	100 549	1 703	-
O11 Length of reconstructed and newly built 'greenways'	89	736	-

Common and programme specific output indicators	CP Target value	Projects Target value [forecast provided by beneficiaries]	Projects Actual value [actual achievement]
O221 Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	10	5	-
O411 Number of cross-border products and services developed	20	115	3
O412 Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	40	108	-
O413 Number of cross-border events	400	590	11
O415 Number of people participated in the cooperation	10 000	32 803	2 586
O416 Number of women participated in the cooperation	4 000	16 416	1 568
O417 Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	300	3 035	197

For the sake of programme implementation four calls have been announced. A total number of 65 projects have been accepted to be financed. Due to low number of approved projects available in the IMIS the progress of activities and the realisation of indicators are difficult to assess properly.

M 1.2 Indicator value analysis

In this subchapter we tried to evaluate the implementation from the perspective of the indicator values. The main purpose of the analysis is to benchmark the indicators of different priorities planned during the programming and those met during the implementation. We analyse the absolute values as well as the reasons of the differences between the planned and realised values. For this analysis we used the programme documents, the data available in the IMIS and data of the National Statistical Offices, plus – for the purposes of reasoning – the relevant parts of the interviews conducted.

Table 9: Indicator values of the Programme

Priority axis	Indicator	CP Target value	Projects Target value	Projects Actual value	Actual project rate	Actual CP rate
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Priority axis	Indicator	CP Target value	Projects Target value	Projects Actual value	Actual project rate	Actual CP rate
1	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support (PA1)	40	-	-	-	-
	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants (PA1)	40	-	-	-	-
	Sustainable tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	30 000	212 230	0	0,00%	0,00%
	Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA1)	7	3	0	0,00%	0,00%
	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	100 549	1 703	0	0,00%	0,00%
	Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	89	736	0	0,00%	0,00%
2	Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA2)	9	-	-	-	-
	Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	10	5	0	0,00%	0,00%
	Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme	10	-	-	-	-
3	Labour market and training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	100	-	-	-	-
	Urban development specific indicators: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	3 000	-	-	-	-
	Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA3)	11	-	-	-	-
	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support (PA3)	10	-	-	-	-
	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants (PA3)	10	-	-	-	-
	Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	20	-	-	-	-
	Number of (integrated territorial)	10	-	-	-	-

Priority axis	Indicator	CP Target value	Projects Target value	Projects Actual value	Actual project rate	Actual CP rate
	action plans					
	Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	50	-	-	-	-
	Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	25	-	-	-	-
	Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	15	-	-	-	-
4	Number of cross-border products and services developed	20	115	3	2,61%	15,00%
	Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	40	108	0	0,00%	0,00%
	Number of cross-border events	400	590	11	1,86%	2,75%
	Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	200	-	-	-	-
	Number of people participated in cooperation	10 000	32 803	2 586	7,88%	25,86%
	Number of women participated in cooperation	4 000	16 416	1 568	9,55%	39,20%
	Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	300	3 035	197	6,49%	65,67%

It is a general opinion among the respondents of the interviews that the final implementation of the programme is not in danger; although there are some delays compared to the planned progress, these all might be handled without serious problems. Because of the structural changes of the Managing Authority the start was a bit uneasy; the first call was open only during the summer of 2016.

Some respondents think that the contracting procedure is too slow (7-8 months), but real chances cannot be seen to make it faster. It is promising that the MA paid attention to the time needs of larger projects (i.e. infrastructure, TAPE, SPF umbrella projects), so the decision on these was a priority in order to ensure the timely implementation. It is also a challenge to successfully implement the new tools and mechanisms. From the interest's point of view, there

is a shift between the significance of PA2 and PA1 (PA2 was less popular than expected vs. PA1 more popular than expected), and this should probably affect the financial frames of PAs and the related indicators as well – the modification of the Programme is in progress, the approval from the EC arrived at the end of October.

Regarding the indicators of PA1 there are no achieved values so far. However, taking into account the high value of the allocated amount and the indicators undertaken by the selected projects, the achievement of the indicators is not in danger.

PA2 has no achieved indicator values. From the interviewees' point of view, the original setup of PA2 wasn't successful, the number of applications was very limited, and a modification was necessary. In addition, the larger infrastructural projects of the priority area require longer preparatory phase.

The values of indicators in PA3 are also zero at the moment. Due to the complexity of TAPE model, the preparation (e.g. of target values) needed more time, but the N+3 performance is still reachable.

PA4 is the only priority in the Programme which has already achieved – at least – some indicator values. The indicators measuring the number of participation are at a promising level, while the other indices are still very low. The results of PA4 are not satisfying the respondents so far but they are optimistic in terms of the continuation.

This section of the document offered a benchmark for the indicators of different priorities planned during the programming phase and those met during the implementation period. Based on the absolute values as well as the reasons of the differences between the planned and realised values it was found that PA4 is the only priority in the Programme which has already achieved some indicator values.

M 1.3 Scheduling

In this subchapter, we tried to give an overview on the differences between the planned and the realised schedule of implementation and the reasons thereof. The main purpose of the analysis is to benchmark the foreseen and real timing of the fulfilment of the indicators. The analysis will identify the prominent risks related to timely implementation. For this analysis we used the programme documents and the data available in the IMIS.

Table 10: Schedule of indicator values

Priority axis	Indicator	Target value (2018) ¹¹	Actual value ¹²	Difference
1	Productive investment: Number of enterprises	0	0	

¹¹ by the Performance Framework

¹² by the data in IMIS (cut-off date 31th August 2018)

Priority axis	Indicator	Target value (2018) ¹¹	Actual value ¹²	Difference
	receiving support (PA1)			
	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants (PA1)	0	0	
	Sustainable tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	0	0	
	Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA1)	0	0	
	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	28 000	0	-28 000
	Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	9	0	-9
2	Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA2)	0	0	
	Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	2	0	-2
	Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme	1	0	-1
3	Labour market and training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	30	0	-30
	Urban development specific indicators: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	0	0	
	Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA3)	0	0	
	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support (PA3)	0	0	
	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants (PA3)	0	0	
	Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	0	0	
	Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	0	0	
	Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	0	0	
	Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	0	0	
	Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	5	0	-5
4	Number of cross-border products and services developed	4	3	-1

Priority axis	Indicator	Target value (2018) ¹¹	Actual value ¹²	Difference
	Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	5	0	-5
	Number of cross-border events	100	11	-89
	Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	50	0	-50
	Number of people participated in cooperation	0	2 586	
	Number of women participated in cooperation	0	1 568	
	Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	0	197	

When summing up the results of the analysis we have to be aware of the fact that the cut-off date of data processing was the end of September 2018. Therefore, the conclusions have to be drawn carefully. What is expected: in PA4 some of the targeted indicators, in addition, some indicators not targeted to 2018 will surely be achieved. However, it is expected that the majority of the indicators of PA2 and PA3 will not meet the value expected for 2018. Bigger changes are expected at the beginning of 2019 until when numerous projects will end increasing the values of the indicators.

M 1.4 Financial progress analysis

In parallel with the indicator analysis we assessed the current financial progress of the programme against the planned one. The progress is described by three indices:

- allocation rate: the ratio of the aggregated allocated sum (the contracted amount per each selected project) and the planned financial frame by priority, expressed in percentage;
- absorption rate: percentage of funds paid to the beneficiaries compared to allocated funds;

Table 11: Allocation and absorption rates of the Programme

Priority axis	Target value (2023)	Target value (2018)	Allocated EU amount	Reported and verified EU amount	Allocation rate (2018)	Allocation rate (2023)	Absorption rate
1.	65 209 186	4 207 597	40 222 437	90 466	896,07%	57,82%	2,15%
2.	40 715 389	2 627 144	1 616 793	0	61,54%	3,97%	0,00%
3.	40 715 389	2 627 144	-	-	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%
4.	25 666 448	1 656 117	6 989 377	112 482	422,03%	27,23%	6,79%

Priority axis	Target value (2023)	Target value (2018)	Allocated EU amount	Reported and verified EU amount	Allocation rate (2018)	Allocation rate (2023)	Absorption rate
Total	172 306 412	11 118 002	46 309 101	202 947	416,52%	26,88%	1,83%

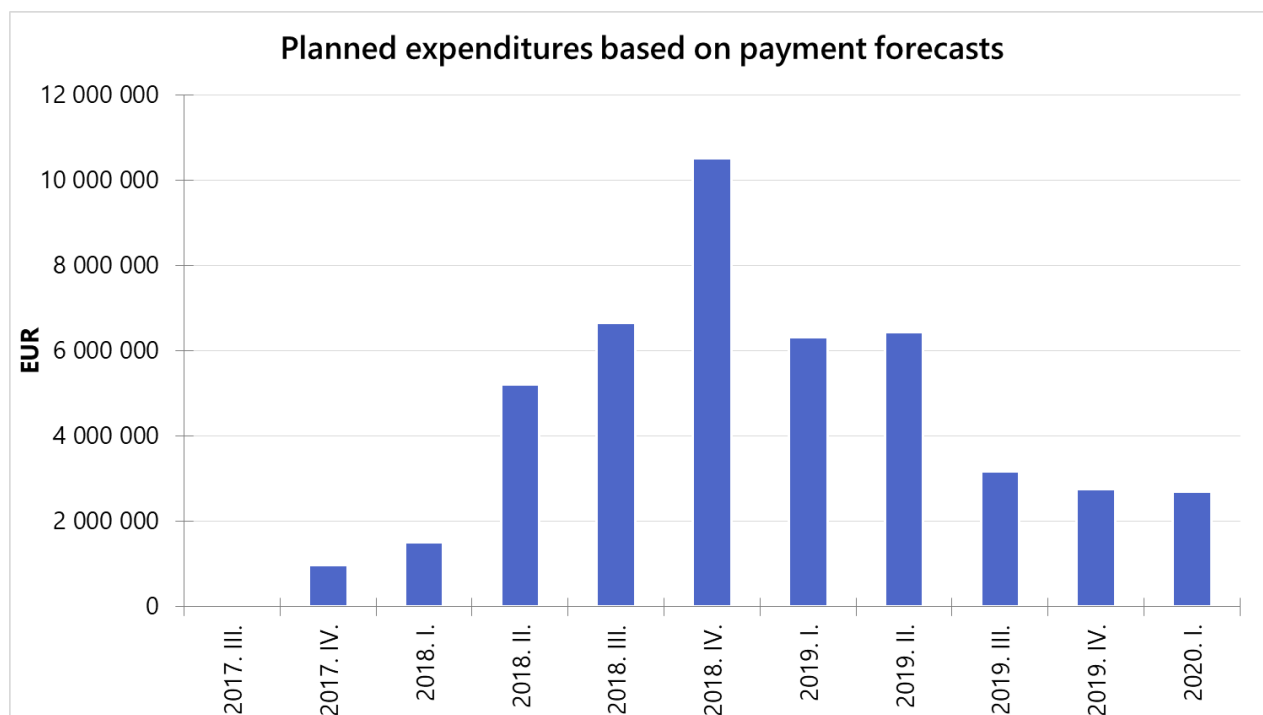
For the sake of evaluation, we used programme documents and the data available in the IMIS, plus – for the reasoning – the relevant parts of the interviews conducted.

In the table above we've summarized the target values (target for 2023 and 2018), the allocated and approved amounts, allocation rate (2023 and 2018) and absorption rates, by priority axis and in total.

Allocation rate in PA1 is quite high, there is almost 9 times much amount covered by the contracts than it was targeted for 2018. Although, the reported and verified amount is minimal since project implementations are just started. PA2 is problematic, allocation is lower than the planned target for the period and there is no absorption at all so far – this target is in danger making necessary the modification of the programme. There are neither contracted nor approved amounts regarding PA3, but the evaluation process is on-going, the delay is mainly resulting from the application of a new tool (the territorial action plan for employment, the TAPE), reaching the target is feasible. Allocation in PA4 is in line with the plans, however, the process is far from the final target. There is more than 4 times much fund covered by the contracts than it was targeted for 2018. Absorption rate is the highest in this priority. In total, the allocation rate is just above the quarter of the planned sum (2023), while the absorption rate is minimal.

Next figure shows the changes of the planned expenditures based on the payment forecasts across the programme period. According to this data, in the first two reporting periods the expenditures showed the smallest amount, not reaching 2 million euros. In contrast in the fourth reporting period in 2018 it is expected to be higher than 10 million euros. The following two periods will see well-balanced but smaller amounts while the last three periods will be kept under the 4 million threshold.

Figure 10: Planned expenditures based on payment forecasts



In summary, referring to the interviews, taking into account the modification, there are no unmanageable risks harming the financial completion of the programme. However, support should be offered to the beneficiaries of TAPes, SME and small projects. For this purpose, the opportunity of permanent consultation would be offered. In the case of systematic problems, the organisation of info-days is advised. The opening of further calls is also needed as soon as possible.

3.1.2 Effectiveness of communication

M 2.1 Evaluation of the communication plan

By this evaluation we would like to get an overall picture on the communication activities of the programme what we first intend to analyse independently of the activities made in reality. In this subchapter the Communication Strategy of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme (Date of modification: 17/01/2018; Date of publishing: 09/03/2016) will be assessed.

Communication objectives

The Communication Strategy has two objectives:

- Communication objective 1: Raise awareness about the INTERREG SKHU programme and
- Communication objective 2: Ensure the adequacy of project level information.

The Programme separates its goals based on the target groups and the level of intervention and communication. The first one is focused on the programme level communication while the second one is about the project level. Every objective has two specific objectives. Target groups, tools to be used (both digital platforms and offline platforms) and relevant output indicators are listed in the frames of the description of every specific objective.

Communication objective 1 Raise awareness about the INTERREG SKHU programme

Objective 1 is based on a finding of the previous programme that cross-border cooperation is still unknown for many potential applicants, as well as to the citizens living in the programme area. The objective has two specific objectives.

Specific objective 1.1: Promote the funding opportunities offered by the programme and by disseminating its results

The target groups of Specific objective 1 are the general public, the potential and final beneficiaries and the media/press organisations. The online tools applied include the programme website, social media, newsletter, online publications, media and branding. Considering offline platforms, events (info days, promotion events), publications (books, leaflets), promotional materials, personal consultations and branding are mentioned.

Specific objective 1.2: Facilitate project communication

Since projects should be considered as the 'faces' of the programme, most of the attention should be given to their achievements. The target group of the SO is identical with the final beneficiaries. Online tools to be used are the same as under previous specific objective but offline tools are slightly different; beside publications (books), personal consultations and branding there are also training events.

Communication objective 2 Ensure the adequacy of project level information

According to the strategy, it is necessary to provide information effectively to the right target audience and manage high quality at the same time. These two key factors strongly contribute to receive good quality applications, help partners successfully implement their projects, and reach the goals of the programme.

Specific objective 2.1: Ensure the adequacy among the publicity measures, the target groups and the objectives

The strategy divides its communication according to the life cycle of the programme. The three different phases with different target groups and tools are: call-focus, the implementation-focus and the result-focus phase.

Call-focus phase concentrates on potential beneficiaries and media/press organisations, the implementation-focus phase concentrates on final beneficiaries while the result-focus phase

concentrates on various groups from the general public through beneficiaries and media to programme, government and EU related bodies and organisations.

With regard to digital tools, call-focus phase uses website, social media, newsletter and media tools, the implementation-focus uses only website, while the result-focus phase is similar to the first phase except for online publications as an additional tool.

With regard to offline platforms, call-focus phase is concentrated on events (info days, application seminars), publications (leaflets), promotional materials and personal consultations, the implementation-focus phase uses events (namely trainings and Lead Beneficiary seminars) and personal consultations similarly to the previous phase, while the result-focus phase uses events (promotion events), publications (books) and promotional materials similarly to the first phase.

Specific objective 2.2: Ensure the proper quality of information

The strategy aims at supporting the better understanding of texts and communication in general by applying the national languages of Slovak and Hungarian within the programming area if it is not stated otherwise. The communication with the exterior partners and groups is supposed to be in English also for better and proper quality of communication.

Target groups include potential and final beneficiaries. The digital tool used here is the website, while offline tools are events (trainings, Lead Beneficiary seminars) and personal consultations.

Tools

Tools of the programme include branding, website, social media, newsletter, events, promotional materials, publications, media and consultations. In the followings the unique characteristics of the programme tools will be discussed.

The new **logo** symbolizes the two participating countries with geographic elements. The wording of 'Interreg' in the logo is a new element, and symbolizes its belonging to the European frames of cross-border cooperation. The programme slogan 'Building partnership' expresses the aim of the cooperation programme.

A new **website** has been developed which tries to take into consideration the needs of all the target groups. The website was created to provide relevant information thematically.

The strategy states that **social media** has more and more impact. It is worth considering it as a complementary tool for the publicity and information activities of the programme for disseminating results even to those target groups who are not involved in the implementation (e.g. not beneficiaries or public bodies). It is expected to make the programme more known among Facebook users in the eligible area. The social media platforms are also promoted at official programme events. Platforms are used to enhance interactions among people and to create a network or community.

The main purpose of the **Newsletters** is to give a glimpse at the latest relevant news on a regular basis.

The programme includes various types of **events**. Programme events are: European Cooperation Day event, promotion events, kick-off conference, Monitoring Committee meetings, closing conference, other internal or external meetings. Thematic events to enhance project implementation include Info days and application seminars during call for proposals and training on application of the monitoring system; Lead Beneficiary seminars to get beneficiaries familiar with the reporting requirements and the reporting module of the monitoring system; communication workshop for beneficiaries (as part of the Lead Beneficiary seminar); other events based on the needs of the partners and the programme. Although it is not mentioned namely, **photo contest**, a sort of an event can be mentioned as an innovative tool to raise awareness regarding the programme and the border region.

Promotion materials are used at events with the main aim at promoting the programme.

Publications such as leaflets, brochures, handbooks, studies and reports are produced to spread information about the programme and its projects. Their content is adjusted to the programme's life cycle and needs.

Media is a tool used to raise awareness towards the programme. Media attention should rather be focused on the achievements.

Regarding **consultations**, the operative staff of the programme shall be available for consultation for all participants and stakeholders. These consultations on the phone, in the office or on site enhance open communication, build trust and contribute to the effective and successful implementation of the programme. Apart from the support given from the office the communication manager shall visit the beneficiaries on site. One of the tools the programme use is storytelling.

Target groups and key messages

Annex 2 of the strategy identifies the main target groups which are the general public, the potential and final beneficiaries, the programme bodies, the government department and agencies, the EU-related institutions and the media/press organisations in European, national, regional and local levels.

Regarding **general public** (citizens from the programme area, citizens from Slovak Republic and Hungary, citizens from the EU) the main goal is to inform them about the Programme.

Regarding **beneficiaries** (regional and local authorities, trade and professional associations, business, economic and social partners, non-governmental organisations and associations, bodies promoting equal opportunities and environmental sustainability, project operators and promoters) the main goal is to inform them about funding and the process of project implementation.

Regarding **programme bodies** (Monitoring Committee, Managing Authority, National Authority, Audit Authority, Certifying Authority, Joint Secretariat and Info Points, Control bodies, Other bodies): they should be informed about the current status of the programme.

Government departments and agencies (national ministries and policy makers) should also be informed about the current status of the programme

Regarding **EU- institutions** (European Commission, DG Regio and other European institutions) the goals are similar to the tasks should be carried out in relation to government departments and agencies.

Regarding **media/press organisations** on different territorial levels easily accessible information has to be provided on the programme and its achievement in national languages.

Tasks of the responsible bodies

Annex 3 is describing the tasks of the bodies responsible for the objectives of the Communication Strategy. In the followings those tasks will be highlighted which are connected to the communication of the programme directly and to the activities required to be taken in order to guarantee public awareness and the implementation of the Strategy.

Managing Authority

The Member State and the Managing Authority shall ensure that the information and communication measures are implemented in accordance with the communication strategy and that those measures aim for the widest possible media coverage using various forms and methods of communication at the appropriate level. The JS is responsible for organizing one major information activity a year which promotes the funding opportunities and the strategies pursued and presents the achievements of the operational programme or programmes, including, where relevant, major projects, joint action plans and other project examples. It is also responsible for updating information about the operational programme's implementation, including, when appropriate, its main achievements, on the single website or on the operational programme's website that is accessible through the single website portal.

Joint Secretariat

JS is responsible for performing information and promotion activities in line with the EU regulations and the Communication Strategy for the Programme (including drawing up a communication strategy, establishment and the maintenance of the programme's website) and for the content and update of the programme's official website.

Monitoring Committee

MC is responsible for the implementation of the communication strategy (approval and amendments).

Info Points

IPs are responsible for contributing to information and publicity actions within the respective territory; collecting and systematising information from newspapers, any electronic media of the respective territory about the programme, projects (information from bigger events); the preparation of database on projects under implementation for communication activities (project database at the internet etc.); doing occasional translation tasks related to communication activities (e.g.: newsletters); participating in opening, closing and other main project conferences to get the story behind the projects for further publicity purposes (does not apply the technical articles).

We gave an overall picture on the Communication Strategy. The strategy has two objectives 1. Raise awareness about the INTERREG SKHU programme and 2. Ensure the adequacy of project level information. Tools include logo, website, social media, newsletters, events, promotion materials, publications, media and consultations. Target groups are as follows: general public, beneficiaries, programme bodies, EU-related institutions, media/press organisations. The tasks of the responsible bodies are also discussed in the strategy.

M 2.2 Evaluation of the communication of the programme

In this chapter, we evaluate the implementation of the communication strategy: the communication tools applied, the frequency of communication on the programme, the indicators fulfilled related to communication activities and the estimated impact on public awareness on the programme. In order to do that interviews were conducted with the management bodies, indicators from the annual communication plans were collected and an on-line questionnaire was created and sent to beneficiaries.

In general, **based on data and experience of management bodies the communication of the programme has been performing well.** The only main reason of relatively low values reached is owing to the slow start of the programme and the first calls. Many indicators connected to the implementation phase have not been progressing significantly so far.

Communication among the programme bodies is very good which facilitates successful implementation. The Joint Secretariat has been more open in relation to the former programme both towards Info Points and general public. The accessibility of the management bodies, JS especially, is outstanding. The programme can be reached with the help of personal meetings and also via phone, e-mail, and all questions are planned to be answered within limited time. According to the experience of beneficiaries, the officers are helpful with the potential beneficiaries and applicants. **A general problem of the communication of the programme is that many beneficiaries consider communication activities as a burden, extra effort, a compulsory challenge.**

JS and Info Point stand out in carrying out tasks related to the communication of the programme. Regarding Joint Secretariat the main tasks are as follows:

- general management of the communication of the programme; monitoring of the implementation of communication objectives;
- elaboration of the Communication Strategy and the annual communication plans;
- drafting the annual report on communication activities of the programme;
- harmonizing the communication activities of the programme with the implementation phases (call focused phase, implementation phase, follow up phase);
- maintenance of the official website as the main information source of the programme;
- maintenance of the two social media sites, namely Facebook and LinkedIn;
- content management of the official website and the two social media sites;
- following media appearances of the programme;
- availability for direct contacts with (potential) beneficiaries or any other interested parties via phone, e-mail;
- personal consultations in case of request;
- promotion of call for proposals, events and results;
- providing information and reports to the stakeholders of programme even on ad hoc basis;
- co-organisation of professional events:
 - internal events for facilitating internal communication: Monitoring Committee meetings, technical meetings, First Level Control meetings, IP meetings;
 - external events: Information Days, Lead Beneficiary seminars, public consultations, or promotional events like European Cooperation Day, opening/closing conferences;
- monitoring of the communication activities of the beneficiaries related to the projects;
- managing the information input by the beneficiaries (project events -> Calendar, project news-> News section);
- pooling information on communication events;
- participation in programme and project promotional events.

The main communication tasks of the Info Point are as follows:

- helps organise the European Cooperation Day in the border region;
- improves the quality of applications: facilitation, coordination of the communication between the professionals and the applicants;
- participates in the preparation of proposals; it can communicate internally;
- promotion of calls, organisation of Information Days from TA resources;
- organisation of regional information events;
- implements strategic considerations (e.g. facilitates the involvement of professional partners, establishes link between regional stakeholders and PPs);

- translates project ideas and forwards them to the other side's partners, interprets at project meetings;
- Co-organise events connected to implementation;
- gives information on IMIS and controls;
- checks the visibility elements of the projects.

With regard to printed materials, it can be stated that there is a demand for them. Leaflets, brochures and other tools should be short and should focus on the brief and effective introduction of the projects, the dissemination of expected results and benefits. It is a general observation that **long and heavy communication materials are not cost-efficient**. The materials need to be full of colourful pictures and filled with short texts which highlight the improvement reached with the help of the programme. Formerly important data storage tools such as CDs and DVDs are not really used anymore. Furthermore, **it is very difficult to measure the real impact and cost-efficiency of accessories** like notebooks, pens, bags, t-shirts and so on.

The website is the major information source and has great importance as a tool. The web page is constructed for both the beginners who want to be familiar with the programme and for those who know what they want to find on the website. The latter section is called 'What would you like to do?'. The goal was to ensure easy access to relevant information in a user-friendly way. The webpage contains a calendar where the frequency of events can be followed. The calendar contains all the basic information regarding the given event so website visitors can decide which one they intend to visit. The relevant information is gathered from event organisers using a form to fill in. The management of the programme has already told the audience to go up on the webpage, it has been communicated as the most relevant platform. FAQ includes many pieces of information on various issues which are useful for both application and implementation. The presentations of the Info Days are uploaded on the webpage. All the relevant information connected to application and implementation can be reached easily. A useful part of the page includes the "funded projects" menu where spectacular infographics can be seen. The visualisation of basic data such as supported projects per counties and number of beneficiaries can be searched. These are useful for the media and the stakeholders of the programme, as well. The webpage is frequently checked; 23.4% of the webpage visitors are returning visitors. Since September 2016 the age group targeted most effectively were the group of 18-24 ages (27.5% of the total number) and 25-35 ages (33.5%). The efforts put in the online appearance and presence of the programme finally paid out. 3rd place was awarded to the programme on the Interreg Annual Meeting 2016 by the European Commission on 6th June 2016 in the Best Interreg V website competition. **The three language versions, the special section for the visually impaired, the user-friendly platform and the transparent and updated information content were mentioned as the best qualities of the website.** As assessors, we can confirm the relevance of the very positive opinion on the online appearance of the programme which is one of the best ones in the EU. There have been only minor problems with the webpage communication.

Beneficiary manual and public procurement rules for the Slovak partners became available a bit too late because of the late start of the actual programme.

The Programme uses social media to facilitate the process of partner-search as well, and through its LinkedIn profile it provides a professional platform to directly connect the potential project partners. **Taking into account social media, Facebook is by far the most popular platform.** The Facebook profile is used mainly to disseminate results and to communicate the latest news on the programme. **Communication is more and more focused on social media since it is easy and efficient to reach larger audiences.** There is a very clear circle of users who follow the current updates of the programme on Facebook. The users frequently like and share the posts of the Facebook account of the programme. The total number of likes has increased from 13 284 to 21 600, meanwhile the number of followers has increased from 281 to 618 since September 2016. The most frequent posts include the photo contest (21 500 reaches), calls, list of beneficiaries and job positions. The posts with at least one thousand reaches are as follows: 1st Call of Assessors, first official results of the evaluation for the 1st CfP, Another results for 1st CfP, The first projects are approved in the Programme – list of winners, Assessors wanted for B-Light Scheme, Monitoring Committee Meeting in Košice in 27th June 2017, Winning list of PA1-PA2, Best Website Award 2016, European Cooperation Day 2017 SKHU serving public interest, Next TAPE Info Day (in Balassagyarmat, Nitra, Košice, Miskolc, Banská Bystrica), New calls announced.

Since the above mentioned photo contest is an important and innovative communicational tool, it will be briefly presented here. On the occasion of the European Cooperation Day and the European Year of Cultural Heritage the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme organized a photo contest to encourage the citizens of Hungary and Slovakia to take an active part in the celebration of the European Cooperation Day by showing a piece of the many natural and cultural heritages of the Hungarian and Slovak border area. The submission deadline was 20th of August 2018. The 12 best photos were exhibited in Győr and Košice and are included in the programme website's photo inventory thus reaching even more people than the contest itself.

The Facebook communication was only slightly criticized. Therefore, to increase visibility of events organised by LBs the given events need to be uploaded as a post every time. The post could contain registration link to the event, event invitations.

The programme has no Instagram and Twitter, but a LinkedIn profile. The LinkedIn site has also been improved over time. At the end of 2017 it had 190 followers. Its community is more international and less targeted – experts and project managers, representatives of other Interreg programmes from all around Europe follow the page. At the moment, the YouTube profile (Interreg V-A SKHU Cooperation Programme, 1 subscriber) has three uploaded videos. These are the Slovak (3 views), Hungarian (12 views) and English (14 views) versions of the video named “Past and Present – Values of Upper-Bodroghöz and Ung-vidék.”, all uploaded in 30th May 2017. The activity of the programme on YouTube is very low, almost non-existing, and compared to the previous programme it has not been improved significantly.

The programme has a **newsletter** which is sent out when there are sufficient information worth sharing. The number of subscribers are 171, from which 94 is sent out in English, 50 in Hungarian and 27 in Slovak language.

In relation to events the success of Info Days has to be underlined. **Information Day is especially useful and designed for reaching (potential) beneficiaries.** There are many returning visitors, guests at these events, the satisfactory level is high regarding events (co)-organised by the JS. **The 2017 European Cooperation Day was also successful** since it was heavily based on the introduction of local cooperation, the local communities, target groups were involved and the slogan was also uniting ("To go far, go together"). However, **all the other events in spite of high quality do not attract as many participants as possible.** In event organisation there are difficulties in being authentic and trustworthy if the organiser is from far distance, e.g. from an office in Budapest. **Much closer and efficient relations can be created and maintained if there are local people involved in the realisation of the events.** In this perspective, the IPs can play an important role.

In relation to public awareness, the communication of LBs and PPs responsible for application elaboration and project implementation should be supported. Based on the findings of interviewees **soft projects are much harder to communicate effectively.** The visibility of the programme in terms of soft project is low, on the other hand such projects can reach many people. The case is the opposite regarding larger infrastructural investments; the visibility is high but they can reach limited population.

Those who have applied before or have the intention to apply on a future call find the programme and all the information relevant to them. In general, there is sufficient number of communication channels and tools to inform stakeholders. **The problem is not with the number of applicants and potential beneficiaries reached but the reach of the general public and media,** thus the communication of existence, benefits and positive impacts of the programme to the citizens of the two countries.

It is important to keep the regulation that local media has to get invitation from the project partners to the partners' events.

The self-governing regions and counties could improve the awareness of the programme. For the sake of this, the documents, banners etc. should be at their disposal, and stronger ties should be established with the local governments.

Since the ones who actually carry out the majority of measured communication activities are the project partners, their capacities should be reinforced to carry out better communication with the media, the press.

The programme needs to better get in touch with state PR agencies and regional media. Currently there are very limited numbers of articles about the activities of the programme. The

programme gains less attention than the main stream programmes which are more strongly in the forefront of everyday politics.

Apart from prescribed billboards, plaques, logos and so on the visibility of the programme personal verbal communication should be enhanced further. On the one hand, more active regional presence is needed to gain higher popularity along with the obligatory communication tools. **More field work, field trips would be well advised since those create opportunities to better explain the benefits of the programme and to gain interest among people and local media.** Info Days are useful tools in this perspective. **The success of the communication of the programme is heavily depending on creating stronger connections with the locals.** To reach border people and organisations, the key is to establish frequent and intensive communication with those who have outstanding social and relationship capital.

Small Project Found can be regarded as an effective communication tool of the programme as it generates greater media attention than other programme activities because of its regional / local embeddedness. To sum up, **the development of in-site and project level communication are well advised as complementary components of the programme level communication** which is well arranged, though.

Indicators fulfilled

In order to assess the achievements of the programme in the field of communication indicators, the Annual Communication Plans, namely the Communication Plan for year 2016 and the Communication Plan for year 2017¹³ were analysed. In the case of each indicator the focus is on the trends and on the realisation of the target value. The progress or trend is shown by change of the indicator in percentage, while the realisation of the target value is measured by the achievement of the given year in percentage of the target value. Along with comparing data on a timeline (2016, 2017 and 2023), cross-sectional analysis is carried out too when the status of implementation is measured by comparing the indicators and their achievements to each other. Furthermore, it is also analysed that compared to the target value how the achieved value (see column projected achievement 2017) should look like assuming that the targeted value is being reached by the same pace every year (e.g. in the middle of the programming period the achievement should be about 50% in relation to the target value). Thus, it is a prorated, calculated value to assess the pace of realisation. In the case of all types of indicators, the total numbers, shares and the overall average values are calculated. The main aim is to detect how the Programme performed in reaching the planned values and to point out potential under-average and above-average performances.

¹³ To be specific the two main sources were: The results of the information and publicity measures of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme carried out under the Communication Strategy in 2016 and The results of the information and publicity measures of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme carried out under the Communication Strategy in 2017.

First of all, it has to be underlined that communication targets are in strong correlation with the Calls for Proposals, their announcement time. Due to the late start of the implementation phase of the Programme, the indicator values for 2016 were very low.

Table 12: Communication indicators and their realisation¹⁴

Objectives	Target group	Activity type	Name of indicator	Unit of measurement	Base number	Number, 2016	Number, 2016 (% of target value)	Change between 2016 and 2017 (%)	Number, 2017	Number, 2017 (% of target value)	Projected achievement, 2017	Target number, 2023
SO 1.1 Promote the funding opportunities offered by the programme and by disseminating its results	General public Potential and final beneficiaries Media/press organizations	Digital platforms: website; social media; newsletter; online publications; media; branding / Offline platforms: events (info days, promotion events); publications (books, leaflets); promotional materials; personal consultations; branding	No. of newsletter subscriptions	pc	0	140	7	1,55	171	8,55	667	2000
			No. of public events organized by the programme	pc	0	1	10	0	1	10	3	10
SO 1.2 Facilitate project communication	Final beneficiaries	Digital platforms: website; social media; newsletter; online publications; media; branding / Offline platforms: events (trainings); publications (books); branding; personal consultations	No. of media appearances of projects	pc	0	0	0	0	0	0	167	500
SO 2.1 Ensure the adequacy among the publicity measures, the target groups and the objectives	Final beneficiaries General public Potential and final beneficiaries Programme bodies Government departments and agencies EU related organizations Media/press organizations	Digital platforms: website; social media; newsletter; online publications; media / Offline platforms: events (info days, application seminars); publications (leaflets); promotional materials; personal consultations	No. of events (info days, seminars, public events)	pc	0	15	50	23,3	22	73,3	10	30
			No. of downloads of key documents (application package, ruling documents)	pc	0	0	0	44,2	1326	44,2	1000	3000

¹⁴ Source: Communication Plan for year 2016, Communication Plan for year 2017

Objectives	Target group	Activity type	Name of indicator	Unit of measurement	Base number	Number, 2016	Number, 2016 (% of target value)	Change between 2016 and 2017 (%)	Number, 2017	Number, 2017 (% of target value)	Projected achievement, 2017	Target number, 2023
SO 2.2 Ensure the proper quality of information	Potential and final beneficiaries	Digital platforms: website / Offline platforms: events (trainings, Lead Beneficiary seminars); personal consultations	Satisfactory level based on event feedback form relevant questions	score	n/r	4,3	107,5	1,8	4,37	109,3	not relevant	4

Owing to the very low numbers of 2016, the rates of increase in initial numbers from 2016 to 2017 were significant in the case of No. of newsletter subscriptions, No. of events (info days, seminars, public events) and No. of downloads of key documents (application package, ruling documents). However, No. of public events organized by the programme and No. of media appearances of projects are indicators which produced very low numbers with no real improvements. **It also has to be highlighted that the activities supporting the realisation of the numbers for 2023 are heavily depending on the progress of the programme in general.** To be specific, many events and media appearances cannot be reported until the calls are announced (e.g. newspaper articles on some results of the projects, project kick-off event, press conferences). Regarding No. of events (info days, seminars, public events) and No. of downloads of key documents (application package, ruling documents) the programme is already performing well; there is no real risk of failure. Satisfactory level based on event feedback increased to an even higher level thus this indicator shows outstanding results.

Taking into account the current status of the indicators by specific objectives, Specific Objective is characterized by still low numbers. Specific Objective 1.2 cannot be assessed due to late project realization. **The zero numbers here tell more about the technical and management background of the programme than the efficiency of its communication.** In the case of Specific Objective 2.1 the percentage of the 2017 values (73.3% and 44.2%) compared to the targets is relatively high; and the values are above the projected numbers. **It can be stated that Specific Objective 2.2 is very promising, the only goal here for the future phase is to maintain the current score high.**

Results of the on-line questionnaires

During the evaluation process, also beneficiaries were asked about the communication activities through an on-line survey. In the followings 51 distinctive answers (some respondents did not answer the relevant questions) which have been recorded will be analysed in relation to the

quality of communication of the programme. The answers connected to communication will be grouped around the type of questions.

From where were you informed about the call?

The majority of applicants claimed that they were informed via internet (57%). Other relevant information platforms included programme events (12%) and external experts (10%), together with internet making up 79% of the responds.

What is your opinion on the tools and ways of the communication of the programme?

The opinion on the communication tools and the ways of communication can be considered very good. Only 2% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction. As many as 78% said that the communication was well organised, the information was easy to get and the frequency of information provision was appropriate. Just one-fifth experienced small problems.

If you think, that the communication of the programme isn't well organised, please describe why do you think so.

Only few problems were listed, the most common ones were as follows:

- Joint Secretariat is not always reachable, and occasionally the recipient has to call the JS several times to get the requested information;
- Most of the seminars are generally oriented, more attention should be given to specific problems, and particular applicants;
- Problem with the visibility of an event which was organised by the beneficiary. Regardless it was informed several times JS did not upload the post about the event on Facebook.
- Few documents are uploaded in Hungarian language;
- Long waiting for some downloadable materials.

Do you have any recommendations how the programme implementation could be improved?

- Organisation of some kind of event for beneficiaries to share experience and/or present their proceedings in an informal way would be useful (e.g. on what obstacles they had, how they managed to cope with them or how they could fix things in case of problems);
- Publishing of a best practice project example information material for the current applicants/beneficiaries would be a very useful tool to support successful project implementation with helpful explanations, notes from MA, NA, JS based on presented successful projects.

To sum up, first of all it has to underline that based on interviews, indicators and responses of the applicants the communication of the programme is performing well. The target values are expected to be reached due to the effectiveness of the communication and since the targets were set rather at a low level. For the next programming period even more ambitious target

values and objectives could be set. Other positive factor is that the communication among management bodies, applicants and beneficiaries has been problem-free.

Taking into account the modified information consumption practices it is advisable to strengthen the already started tendency which favours the promotion of digital materials. Especially so as it is quite problematic to measure the real impact of accessories such as pens, bags, t-shirts etc. In addition, the project level communication activities should be more fit-for-purpose, more individual.

Regarding information sources the website has to be highlighted. It is a useful, award-winning platform which is user-friendly and contains some innovation too e.g. the infographics of funded projects.

The programme focuses its online communication on Facebook along with the official website. Facebook is a useful, popular platform to reach wide audiences in an effective way.

Regarding the events, Information Day and Cooperation Day are useful and outstandingly successful ones.

The general public and media are difficult to reach.

The capacities of project partners should be reinforced to carry out better communication with the media, the press. The programme needs to get in touch with state PR agencies and regional media better.

It is of outstanding importance to realise the whole communication in a more place-based, more bottom-up manner. Communication with the public needs to be simple and clear.

The main information platform regarding calls is by far the internet.

The whole communication of the programme is heavily depending on creating stronger connections with the locals; it might implicate more field trips and better connections with those in the specific regions who have widespread networks and influence on the regional communication. The development of in-site and project level communication would be well advised to gain trust and raise awareness regarding the programme.

Further suggestions include organisation of some kind of event for beneficiaries to share experience and/or present their proceedings in an informal way, furthermore publishing of a best practice project example information material for the current applicants/beneficiaries to support successful project implementation with helpful explanations, notes from MA, NA, JS based on presented successful projects.

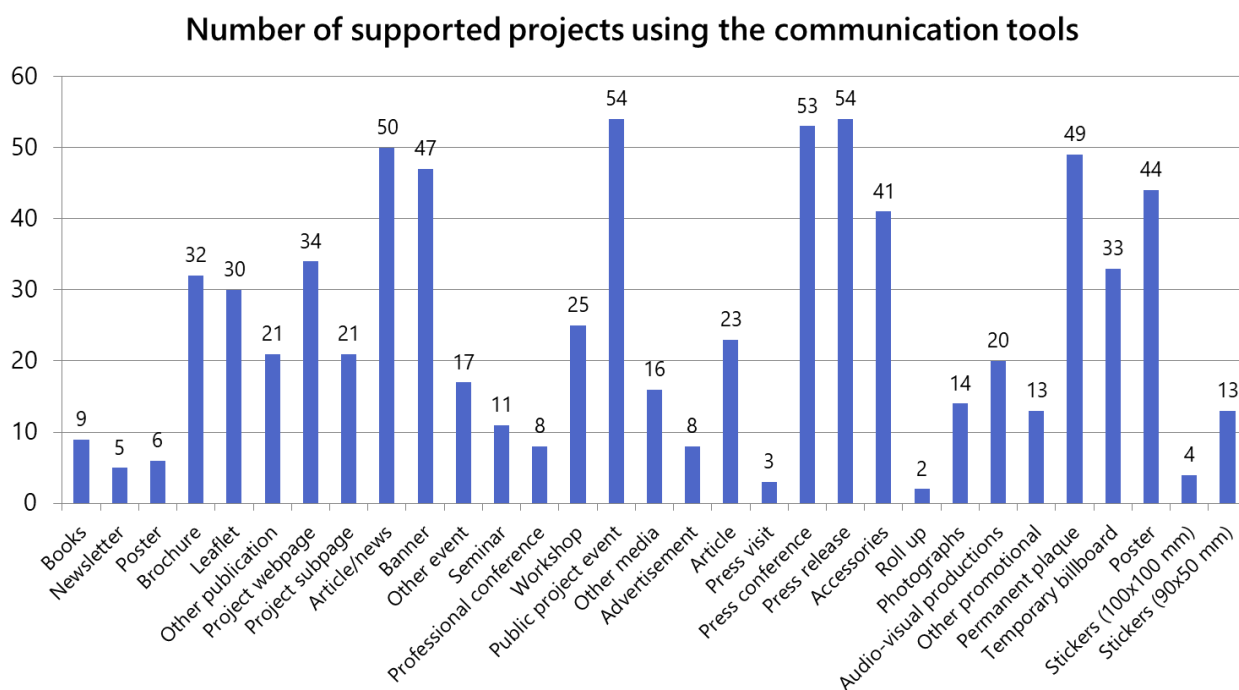
M 2.3 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

Communication tools used – IMIS

In order to assess the communication tools applied, the project database of IMIS was used accompanied with analysis of the results of the interviews and the on-line questionnaires. Quantitative and qualitative information was gained from the so-called “information and publicity” submenu from every single project as many as 58 (total number of contracted projects). The extracted data was inserted into an Excel table to get detailed and comparable information and a full picture of the tools applied.

Due to lack of data in IMIS, total number of communication tools used (e.g. pieces) cannot be provided.

Figure 11: Number of supported projects using the communication tools



The most popular communication tools among publications¹⁵ were the brochures (32 projects chose to use this tool) closely followed by leaflets (30 projects). However, it might be a mistyping that in project MONUMENTIS 671 000 leaflets are indicated in the IMIS. The number of brochures to be created per project ranges from 600 to 44 500. According to the available data, the total value of brochures is 67 100 based on the information of 6 projects (due to missing data the total number of brochures regarding the majority of projects is unknown). The sum of leaflets, which ranges from 500 to 12 000, is lower, 25 300 based on the data of 7 projects (due to missing data the total number of leaflets regarding the majority of projects is unknown). The third most popular tool is the “other” category which is very diverse in terms of its content and

¹⁵ Publications include the followings: Books; Newsletter; Poster; Brochure; Leaflet; Other.

format (the most common are invitation cards, different guides, studies). Books (9 mentions), posters (6) and newsletters (5) are rarely used tools.

The most popular online tools¹⁶ are the articles/news, as many as 50 projects use them which means 144 appearances in total. This tool is followed by banners (47 projects, 125 reported in total). Creation of individual project webpages (34 times) is more common than subpages (21).

Out of the communication events¹⁷ the most frequent tools are the mandatory public project events (e.g. project opening events), as many as 54 projects mentioned such events with a total number of 140. **Workshops** (25 projects, 30 in total) **enjoy high popularity**, while other tools are not widely used. Regarding “other” communication (17 projects), it includes study visits, networking events etc.

Taking into account media coverage¹⁸ press release (54 projects, 150 in total) and press conferences (53 projects, 129 in total) can be found at almost all project descriptions uploaded into IMIS. Regarding other tools, advertisements (28 projects, 228 in total) are also quite popular, but also different social media campaigns (mostly Facebook), PR articles etc. are mentioned.

Promotion materials¹⁹ are very popular. The most common giveaways of the 41 projects affected are pens, t-shirts, bags and notebooks. Audio-visual productions have outstanding numbers as well (20 projects).

Visibility tools²⁰ are applied very frequently since some of them are obligatory in the case of infrastructural developments. Permanent plaques (49 projects) and posters (44) are widespread but temporary billboards (33) are also quite common.

Results of the on-line questionnaires

In the followings the 51 distinctive answers recorded will be analysed in relation to the quality of communication of their projects (project-level communication). The answers connected to communication will be grouped around the type of relevant questions.

Please evaluate the effectiveness of your communication activities! (How effective was your communication during the project? Did you manage to reach your target groups? What was the reason if not? Were your target groups representing both sides of the border?)

There were some difficulties in answering these questions since the majority of the beneficiaries have just launched implementing their projects and thus little communication has been carried out during the projects. Those who could assess the communication and report on implementation said that the communication activities had been effective. As beneficiaries

¹⁶ Web appearance includes as follows: Project webpage; Subpage; Article/news; Banner.

¹⁷ Communication events include: Other communication; Seminar; Professional conference; Workshop; Public project event

¹⁸ Media coverage includes: Other; Advertisement; Article; Press visit; Press conference; Press release.

¹⁹ Promotion materials include: Accessories; Roll up; Photographs; Audio-visual productions; Other promotional.

²⁰ Visibility elements include: Permanent plaque; Temporary billboard; Poster; Stickers (100x100 mm); Stickers (90x50 mm)

experienced the feedback given by the participants of events were generally good. Reaching the target groups has been successful. Communication has been effective on both sides of the border.

Please describe what kind of difficulties you met during the project implementation!

No major problems were mentioned. The two smaller ones were: organizing all the professional events requires more time in reality than in the plans so time management has to be planned more correctly in this regard. Furthermore, sometimes the communication with external services can be problematic.

To sum up, due to the lack of data the total number of communication tools used (e.g. pieces) cannot be provided.

The most frequently used communication tools of the projects include brochures, leaflets, , web articles/news , workshops as communication events, press release and press conferences, accessories, furthermore plaques, posters, billboards as mandatory visibility elements.

The communication activities have been effective, in some cases even more satisfactory than expected before. The feedback given by the participants of events and persons informed are generally good. Reaching the target groups is successful.

There is a further development perspective by simplifying and making more fit-for-purpose the design of project level communication tools and activities. Notwithstanding the mandatory visibility elements, these tools and activities could be better designed. On the one hand, during the designing phase, the applicant would be provided with an automatic lump-sum amount (e.g. defined in ratio of the total sum of the project) without the obligation of detailing the communication activities. On the other hand, these activities would be defined during the contracting phase by selecting the most appropriate tools fit-for-purpose and fit-for-content (project specific communication measures).

3.2 Impact

Impact assessment is the other pillar of effectiveness but from an external point of view: it measures how the programme was successful in terms of cross-border cooperation and cohesion; in other words, whether the programme can be reasonably justified in its existence.

3.2.1 Analysis of the relevance

The first aspect to be taken into consideration in terms of impacts is the relevance of the programme. Relevance means that

- the programme has still relevant priorities taking into account the changeable socio-economic conditions since 2013/2014, when the regional analysis was drafted – this will be discussed in the subchapter *M3.1 Analysis of regional needs*;
- the programme has a relevance from a cross-border perspective: it contributed to the enhancement of the cross-border cohesion and it improved the level of cross-border cooperation – this will be discussed in the subchapter *M3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance*;
- the programme has launched new mechanisms and tools in order to enhance cross-border cooperation and cohesion – the relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools will be discussed in the subchapter *M 3.3*;
- the programme has a relevance from the supporter side, i.e. the European Union: it contributed to the achievement of the pan-European (EU2020 Strategy) and macro-regional (the objectives of the EUSDR) goals – this will be discussed in the subchapter *M 3.4. Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals*.

M 3.1 Analysis of regional needs

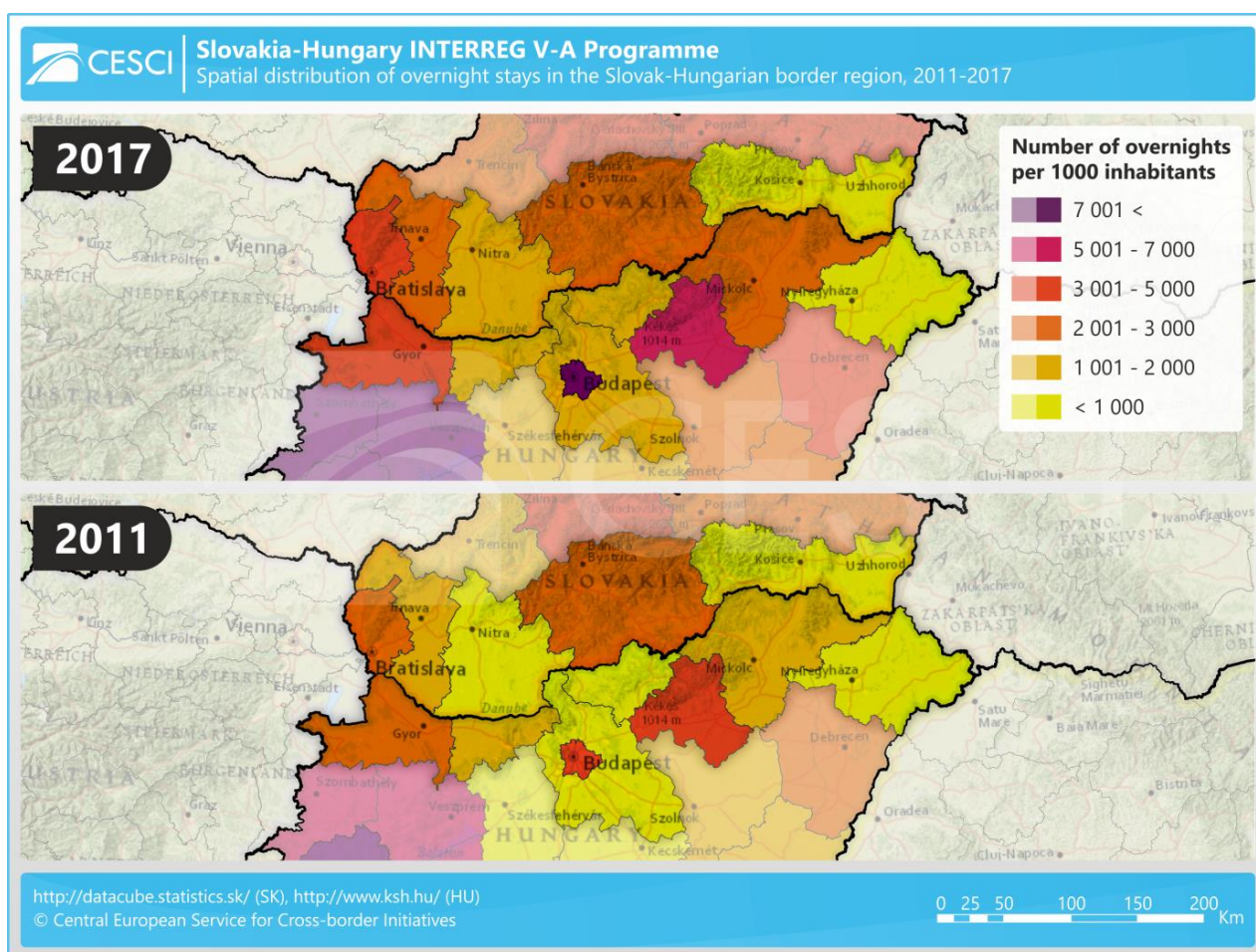
In this subchapter the analysis aims at unfolding whether the objectives drawn from the original regional analysis of the programme are still relevant or the socio-economic changes would justify some modifications which can have effect on the intervention logic of the programme, as well. The regional analysis is arranged according to the priority axes. In all cases the original justification for the choice of investment priorities are taken into account and compared to the current situation of the border area whether the original statements are still valid or not.

In order to do that, collection of information and data was carried out mainly using sources of national statistic offices; then the relevant ones were used for visualisation and comparative analysis. Thus, maps, tables were created to better detect the changes and processes took place in recent years.

Priority Axis 1: Nature and culture

Significant positive changes took place in tourism sector taking into account the increase in number of overnights. So the use of the potential of the border region's cultural and natural heritage has had great favourable economic impacts throughout the region excluding the easternmost territories, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and Košický County in particular. Thus, **6c investment priority in terms of promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage is expected to be impactful in supporting positive changes, and is still relevant.**

Figure 12: Spatial distribution of overnight stays

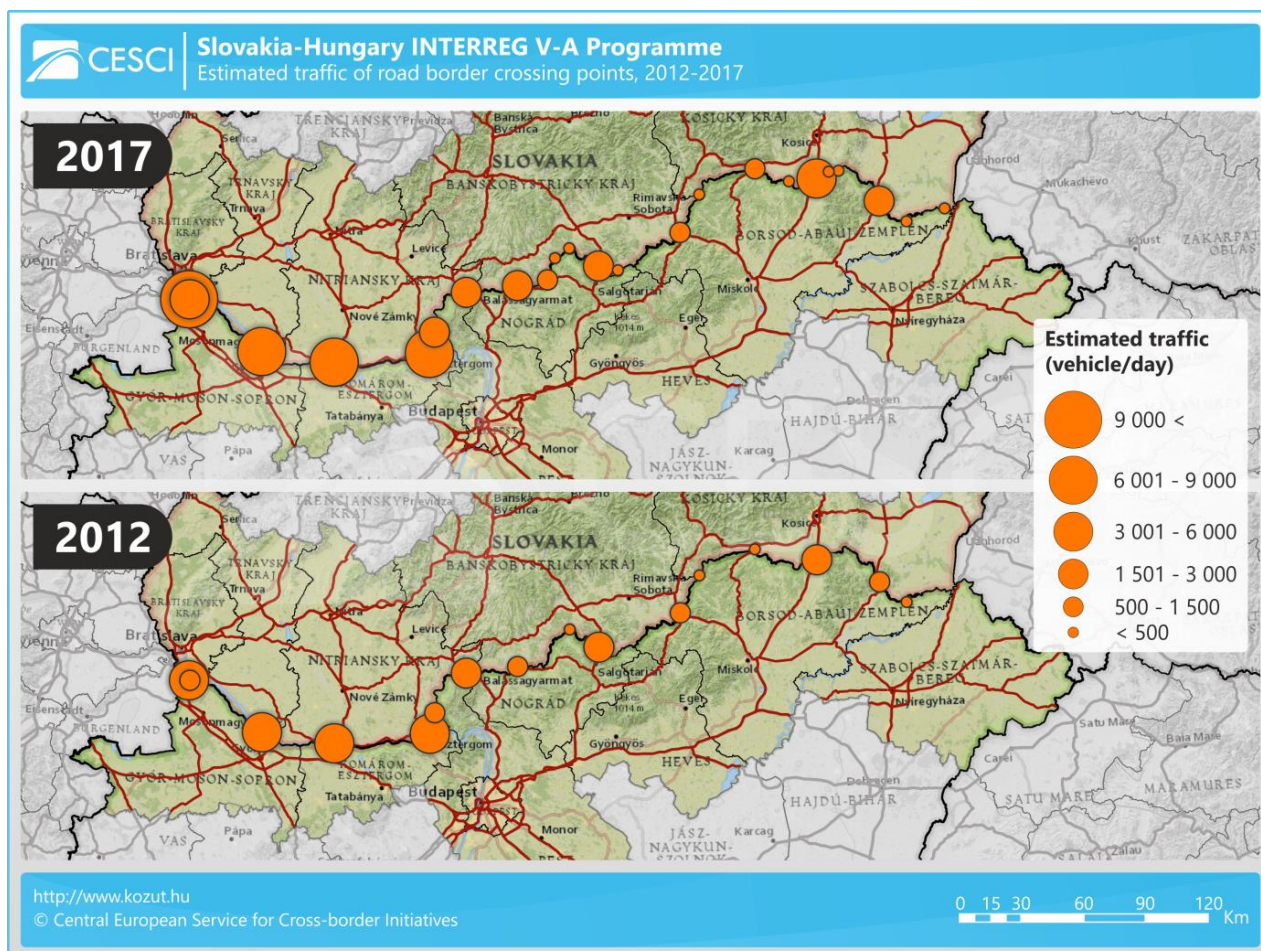


Priority Axis 2: Enhancing cross-border mobility

The number of cross-border border crossing points with passenger traffic has been increased from 29 to 35 (including two passenger ferries). If the Esztergom-Štúrovo freight ferry inaugurated in 2016 is also counted the number of crossings is 20% higher present day compared to 2012. The average distance between passenger border crossings has dropped from 22.6 to 18.7 kilometres. With the on-going construction and already decided border infrastructure projects (e.g. Komárom-Komárno Danube bridge financed by CEF and the Ipolydamásd-Chľaba Ipeľ/Ipoly bridge financed by the current INTERREG programme) the density of border crossings

will be further increased. Still, the Western European value of border crossings proximity is far to be reached with the help of the current programme, thus **further financial support will be needed** in the upcoming programming period as well to catch up. Therefore, from this point of view, **the justification of investment priority 7b found in the programme document is still valid.**

Figure 13: Estimated traffic of road border crossing points



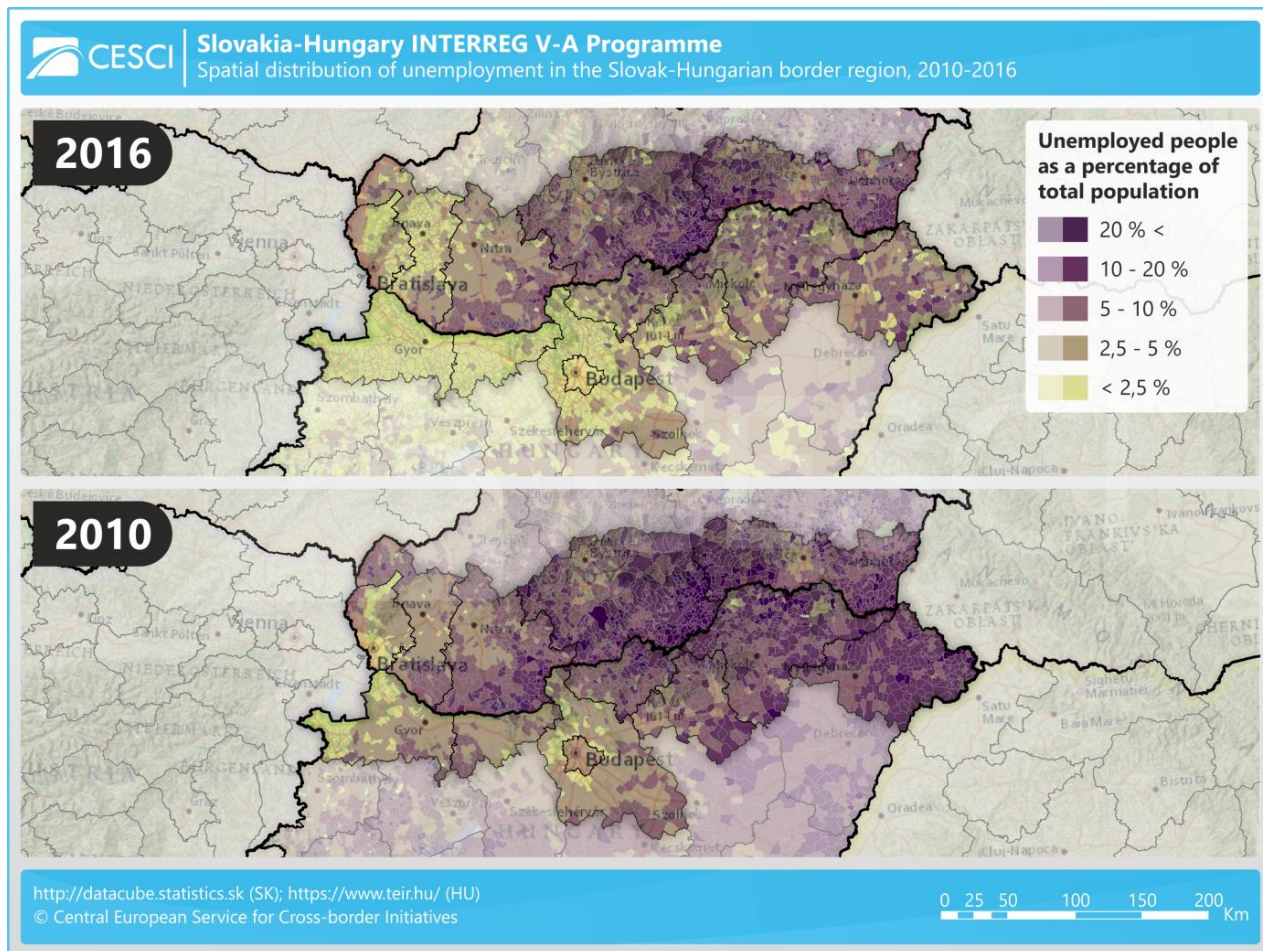
The growing traffic volumes also underline that cross-border mobility has increased within the border region; it is still a relevant issue in the border region. The increased traffic needs to be tackled in the next period too. **The growing road and freight transport and therefore the growing environmental impact put emphasis on the justification of investment priority 7c.**

Priority Axis 3: Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility

High unemployment and severe inequalities were identified among the major characteristics of the border area in 2010. By 2016, unemployment has decreased in large areas. That led to a completely new situation where in the capital and westernmost regions unemployment ceased to exist as a major problem. Rather, as a new phenomenon, labour shortage appeared in most areas west to the Budapest–Nitra zone. However, unemployment remained as a challenge of major importance in relation to many areas in the eastern side of the border region. Long-term

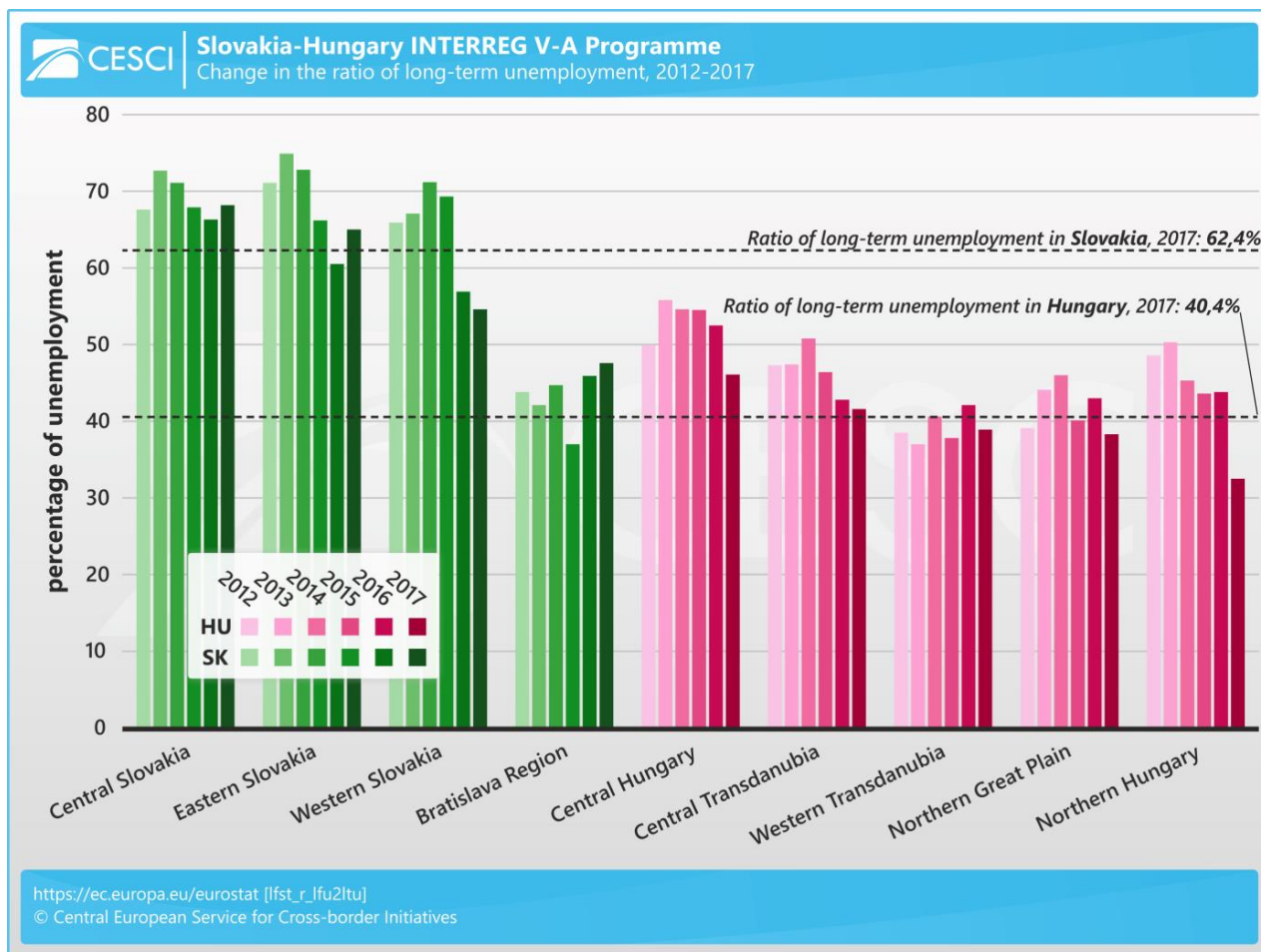
high unemployment characterises large and spatially continuous zones (e.g. Gemer/Gömör region, Medzibodrožie) especially in Banská Bystrica County and Košice County.

Figure 14: Spatial distribution of unemployment



Decreasing of unemployment has become less relevant in the last few years since the ratio of long-term unemployment has decreased or has been stagnating in the vast majority of regions. However, from the aspect of lack of workforce the integration of unemployed people in some parts of the programme region is still highly important, the support of their re-qualification and mobility is therefore needed. Furthermore, territorial complementarities along the border are still remarkable: the administrative border marks in parallel a border between regions with different level of unemployment. This phenomenon is favourable for cross-border labour mobility.

Figure 15: Change in the ratio of long-term unemployment



One of the most severe anomalies on the labour market is the recently unbalanced supply and demand. **In the last years labour shortage has appeared and became relevant in many parts of the border region**, especially on the Hungarian side. Capital regions and economically most developed regions are experiencing worsening situation, the registered unfilled job vacancies are getting extremely high in the aforementioned labour market centres. However not just the employment centres lack proper supply but some least developed regions too where it is due to outmigration of local workforce and the unsuccessful reintegration of the local unemployed. The Hungarian side has been experiencing a much worse situation compared to the Slovak counties except for Bratislava County. The territorial inequalities in supply and demand have been causing notable problems not just only on the job market. The mobility of workforce is still relatively low across the region, thus equalizing differences on a low level seems to be hard to reach by current measures.

Figure 16: Labour force supply and demand

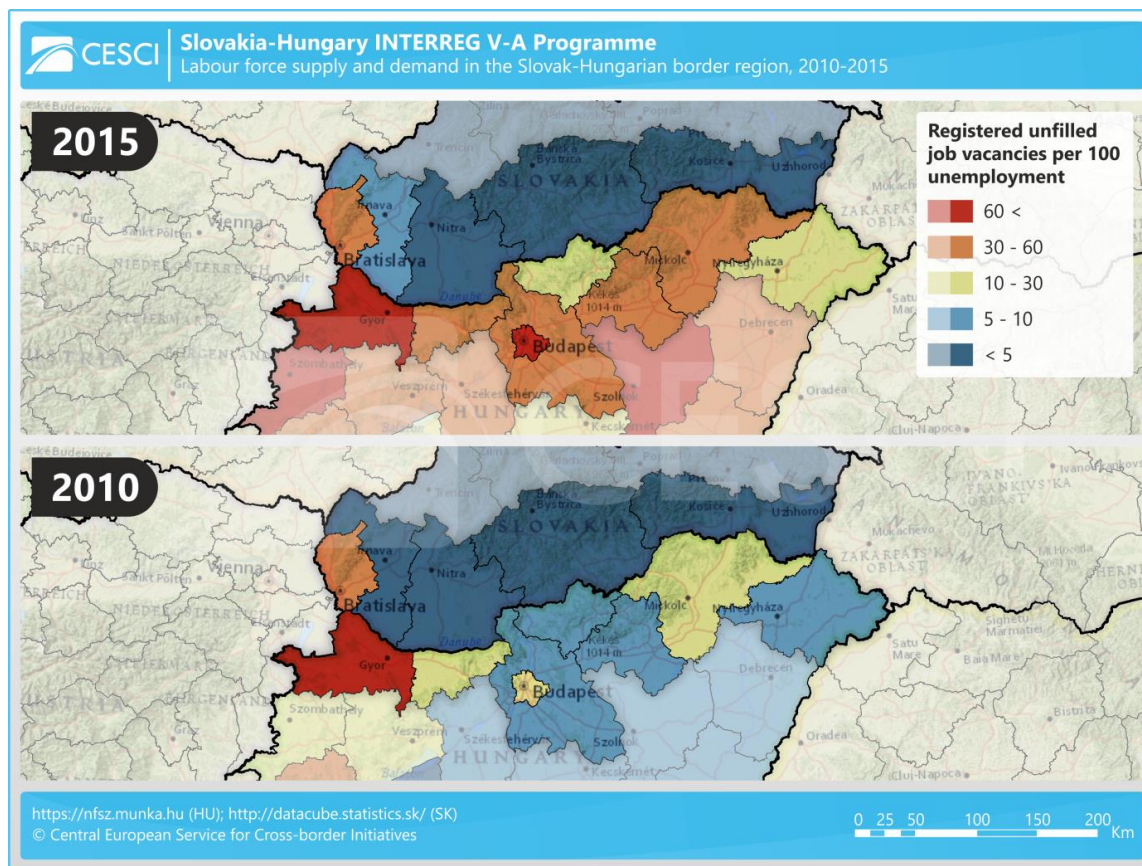
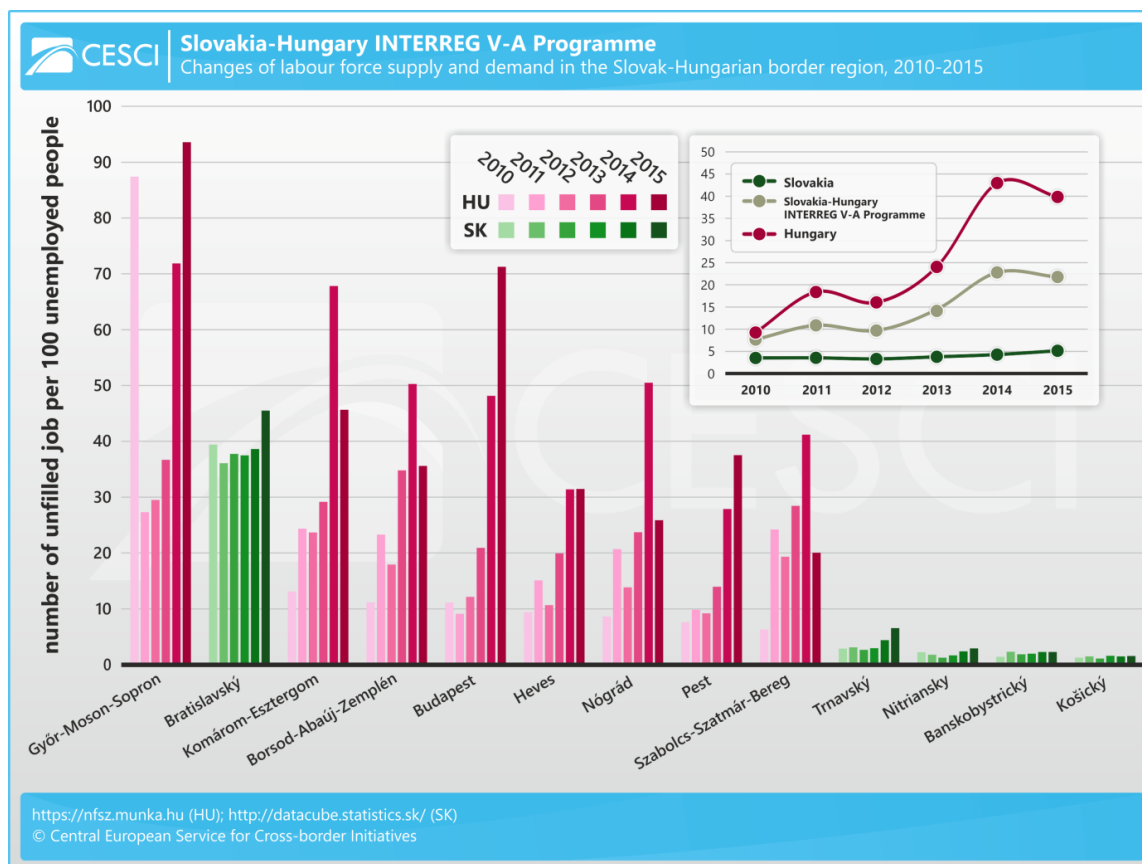
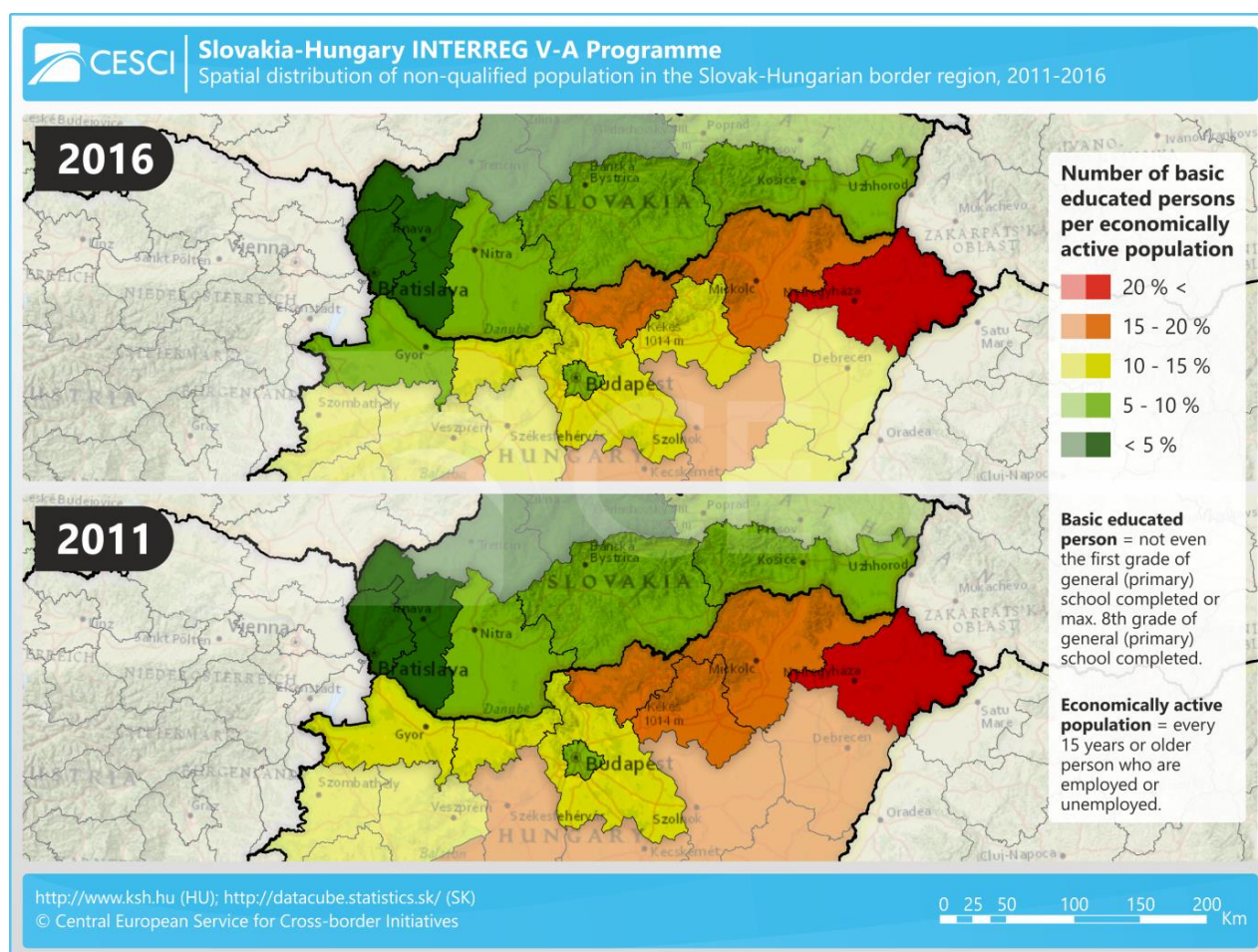


Figure 17: Changes of labour force supply and demand



In the Slovak-Hungarian border region the rate of non-qualified population decreased in the examined period. At the same time, in spite of the improving situation especially taking into consideration Győr-Moson-Sopron County and Heves County, the main territorial pattern remained the same. The major north, northwest – south, southeast differences prevail, and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg has not caught up. High portion of low educated people on the labour market can further be identified in the eastern and Hungarian parts of the border region. Thus, **the development of the capacities of the people with lower education is still needed as investment priority 8e was justified in the programme.** However, it also need to be underlined that persons with basic education only can be found in high portions mostly on the Hungarian side and not widely across the programme area.

Figure 18: Spatial distribution of non-qualified population



Regardless the apparent development in education level, significant inequalities can be found in terms of spatial distribution of population with tertiary education. The most skilled labour force is still concentrated to capital city regions while Trnava Region, Košice Region from Slovakia and Nógrád and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Counties are still lagging behind.

Figure 19: Spatial distribution of population with tertiary education

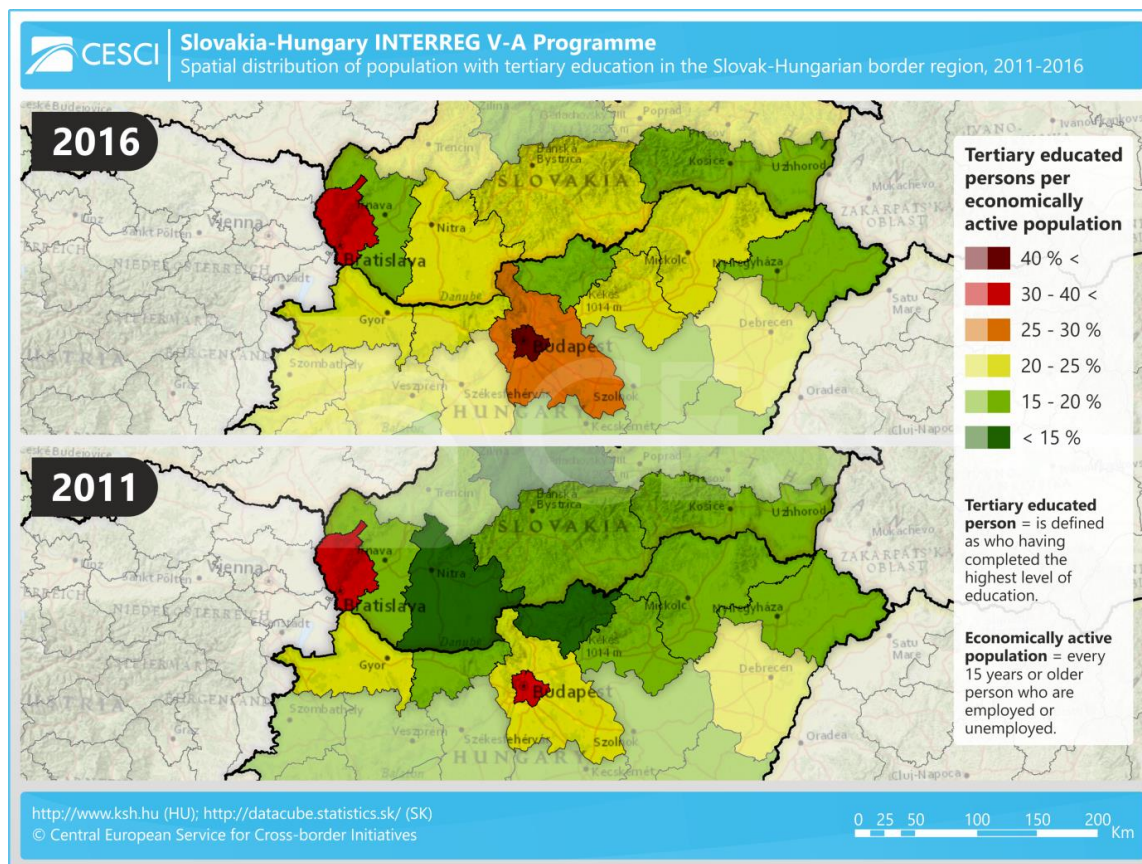
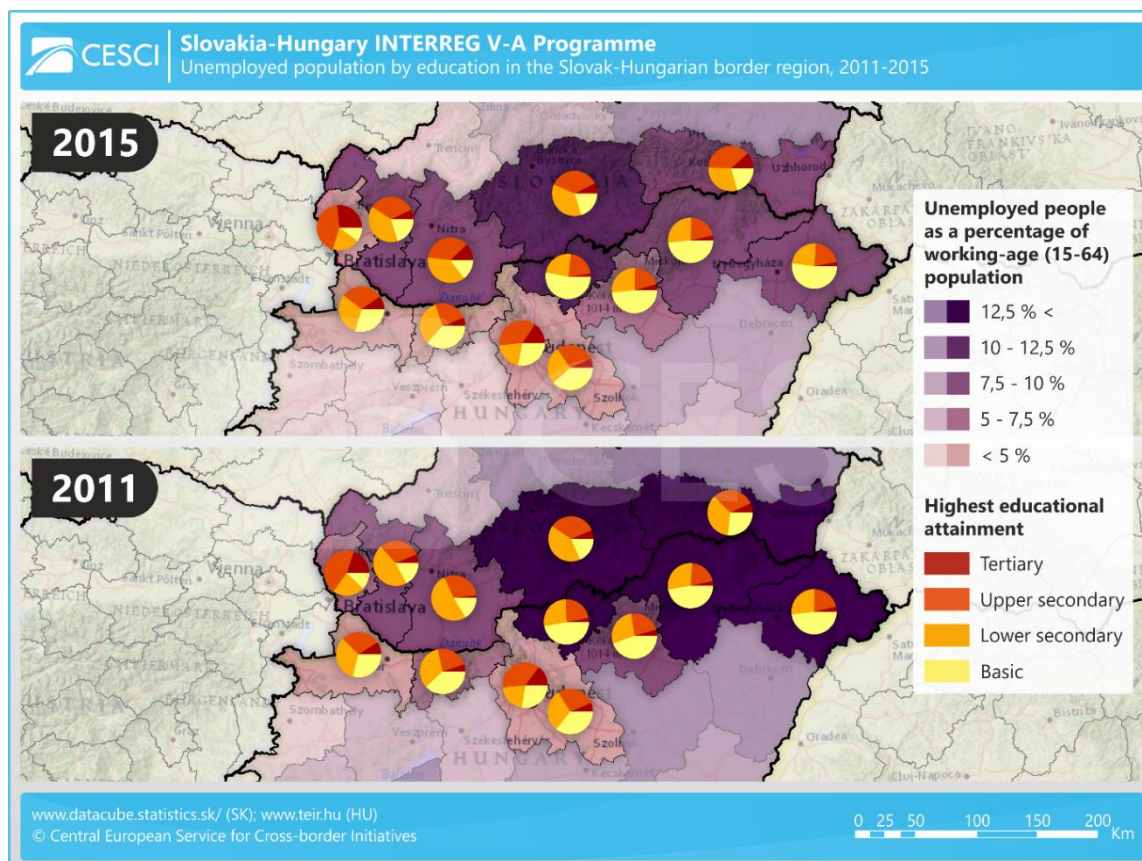
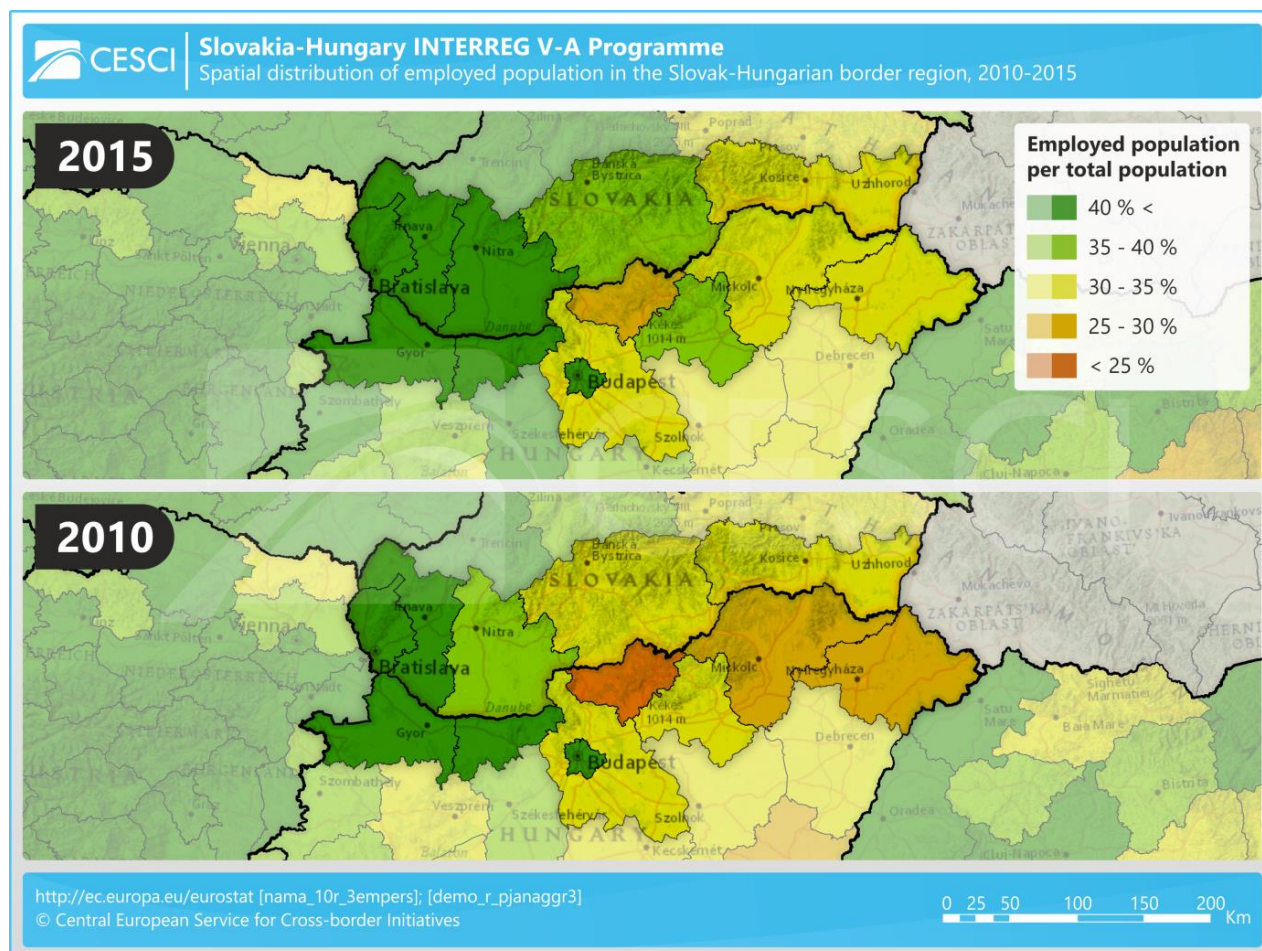


Figure 20: Unemployed population by education



The share of highly educated people among the unemployed has increased, making working age population with tertiary educational degree a significant factor in shaping the future of labour markets. Their share is outstanding in the capital regions, and increased notably in many counties (e.g. in Nitra County).

Figure 21: Spatial distribution of employed population

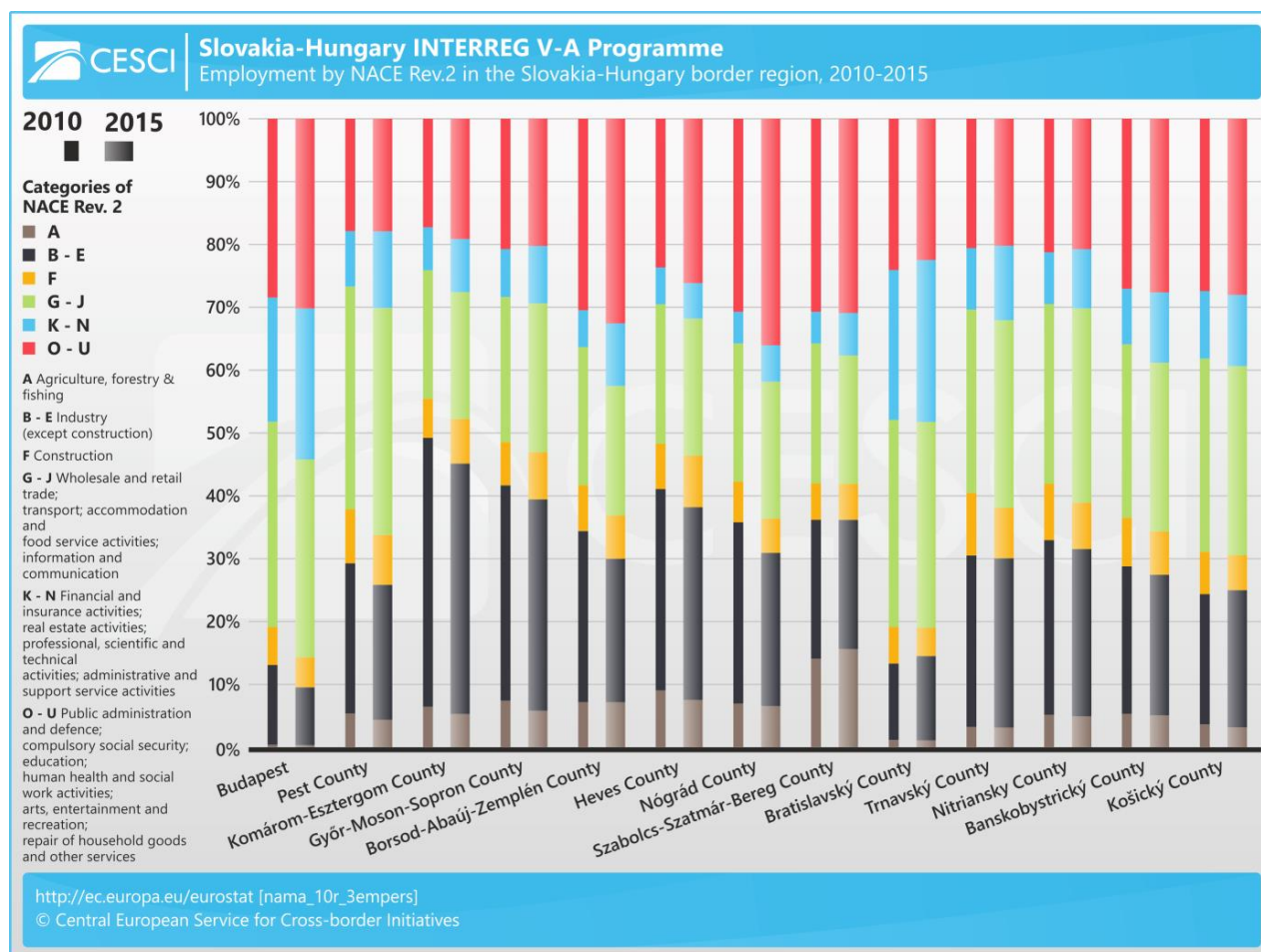


In line with decreasing number of the unemployed, share of employed population got higher. In the western counties of Slovakia and Hungary employment is very high while despite of some positive changes, the easternmost counties and Nógrád County is still lagging behind. Therefore obstacles to employment might be supported more efficiently.

The territorial and structural problem behind the reasoning of PA3 is much more complex than it was in 2013: there are still regions with high unemployment rates, but at the same time there are wide territories with a massive lack of workforce as well. The general topic is still relevant, but the its handling is needed to be more specific, region to region.

The figure below underpins this justification: it shows how the employment rates changed between 2010 and 2015 in the programming region. At the same time, the figure also differentiates between the various NACE Rev. 2 categories. According to this figure, to 2015, the employment rate has become lower in almost every county compared to the level of 5 years before.

Figure 22: Employment by NACE Rev.2



Further statistics analysed in the original programme

The border economy has been characterised by massive inequalities. These differences show a strong east-west divide in favour of the western regions. The majority of the NUTS3 level regions has been able to develop but the Hungarian counties of Nógrád and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg are lagging behind and have been unable to catch up. The highest concentration of GDP production can be found in the capital regions.

Inequalities expressed in GDP volumes are extremely high. The capital regions generate the majority of gross domestic product solely. Also due to their size, the Hungarian counties concentrate only small shares of the total GDP production. It also has to be stated that the border region is the economic powerhouse of the given countries since more than the two-third of the national GDP is produced in the given counties. **Thus, economy represents and has to be kept as a major issue in the programme.**

Figure 23: Regional disparities

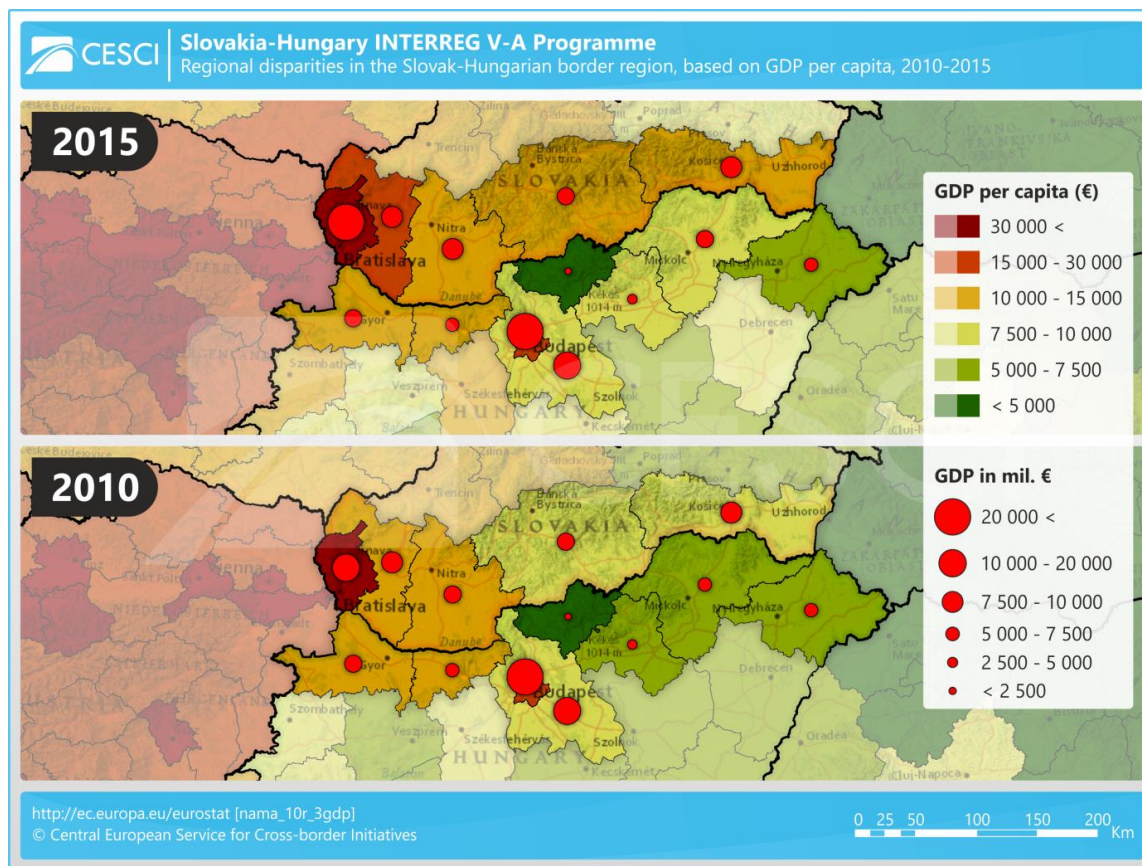


Figure 24: Changes of GDP volume

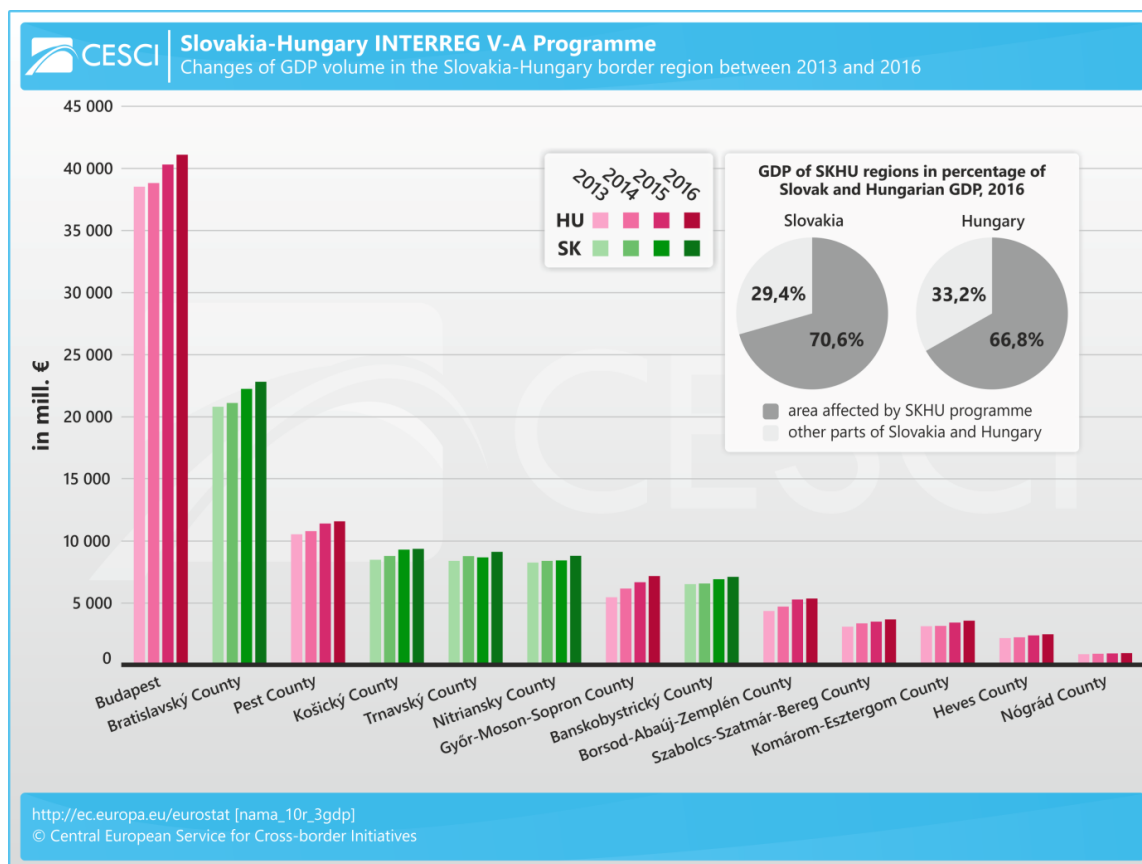
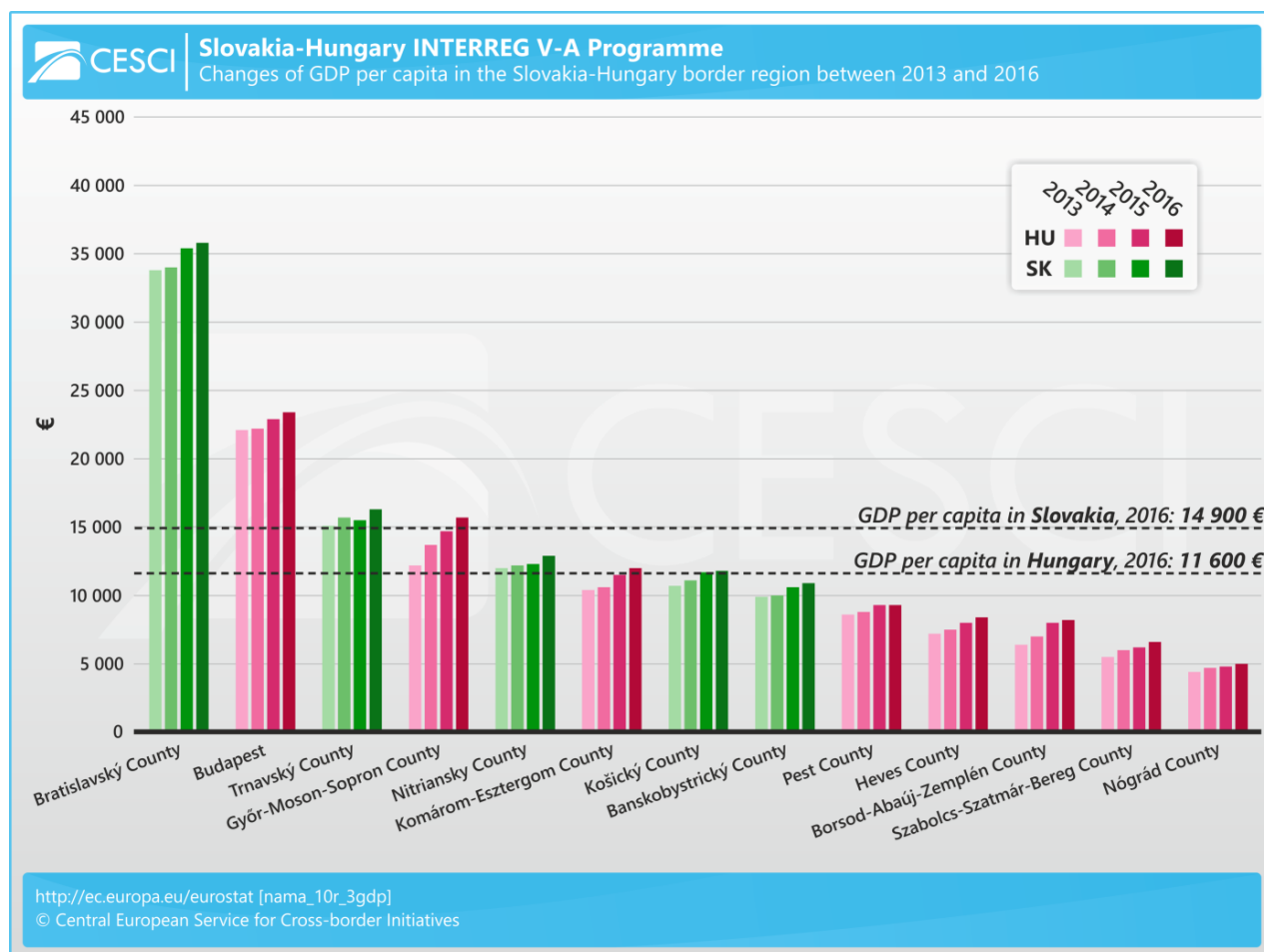
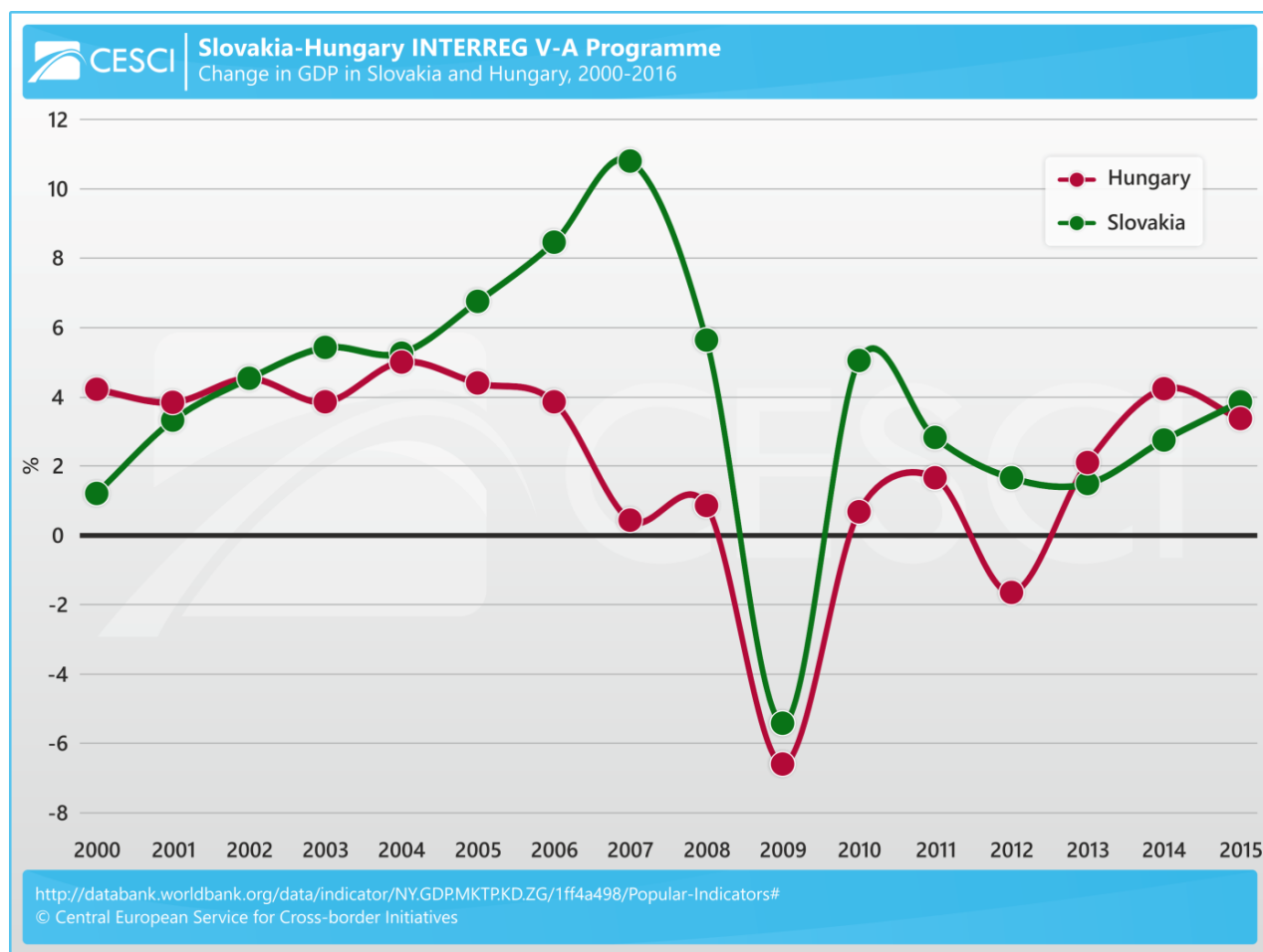


Figure 25: Changes of GDP per capita



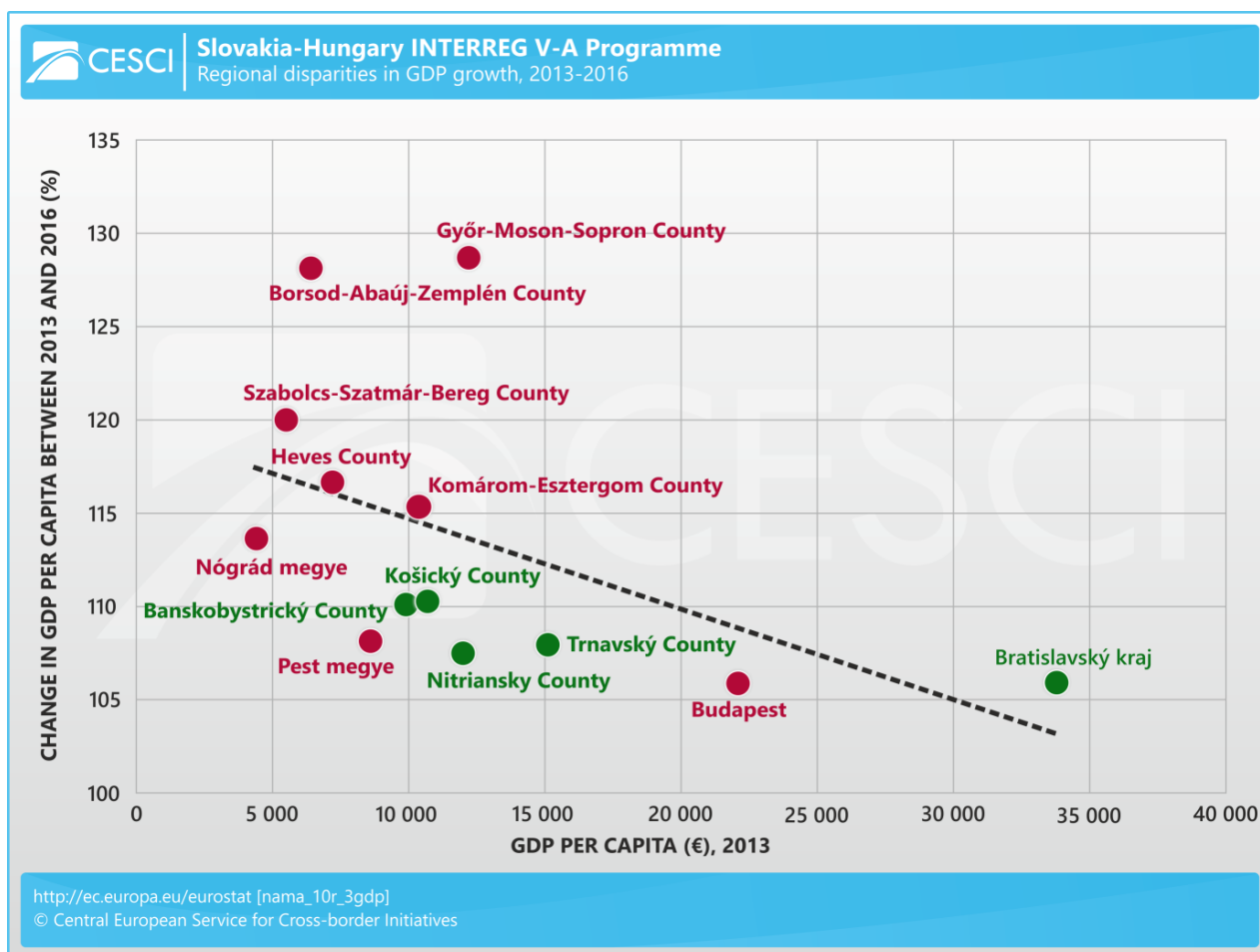
The western side of the border region, namely Bratislava County, Trnava County and as a result of new investments Nitra County from Slovakia and Budapest, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Komárom-Esztergom counties are economically performing well. The majority of the remaining regions have under average GDP per capita levels compared to national values. Only the capital region and the neighbouring Trnava County from Slovakia and Budapest, Győr-Moson-Sopron County and Komárom-Esztergom County have higher GDP levels than the respective national values. The regions lagging behind the most are all from Hungary except for Banská Bystrica County.

Figure 26: Change in GDP



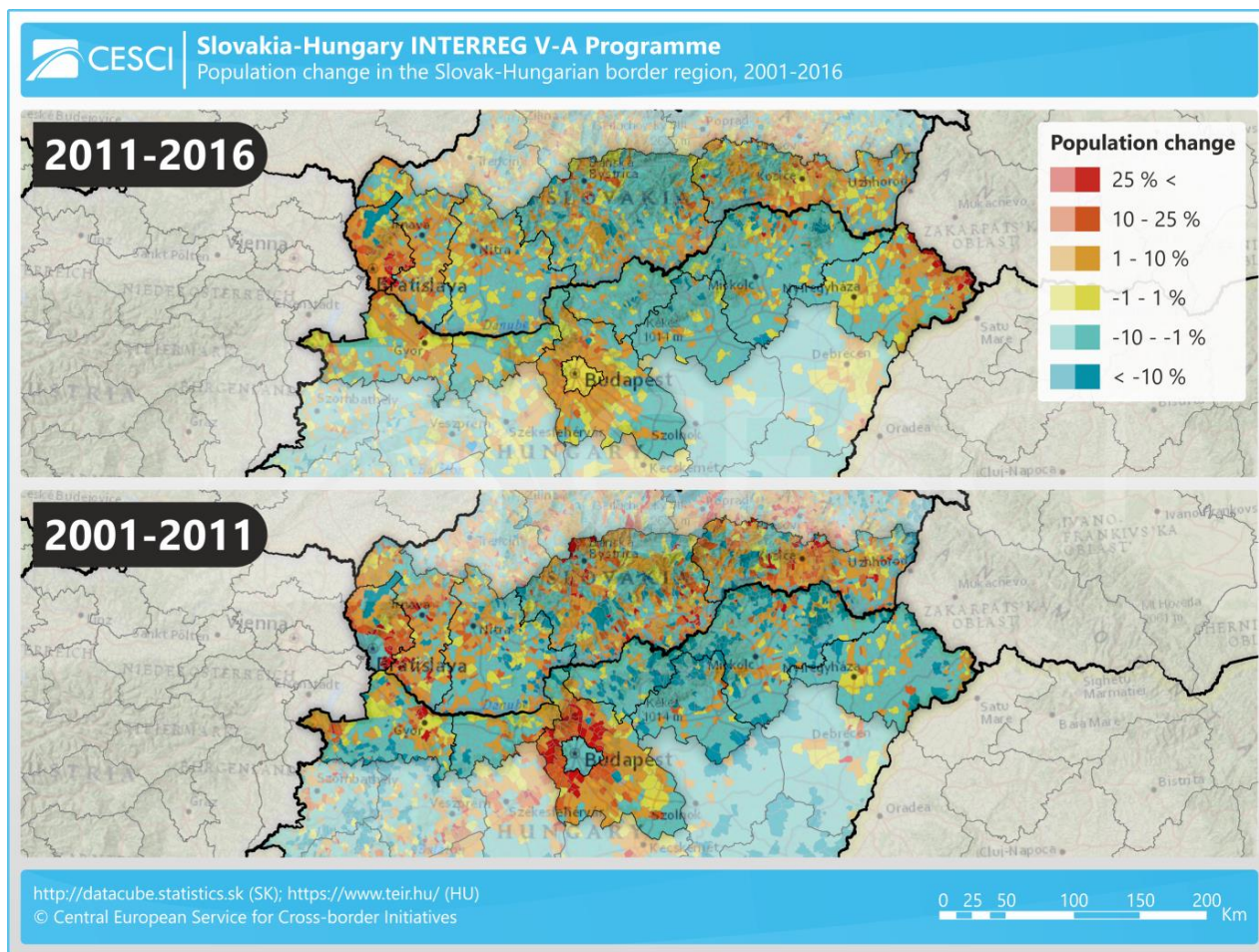
Taking into account the change in GDP, it can be stated that the Slovak GDP were increasing steadily from 2004 until 2007 and remained significant until 2009 when both countries experienced massive recession. Thus Slovak GDP growth rate and GDP per capita exceeded the Hungarian one, right before the crisis the rate was as many as above 11%. The recovery from the financial and economic crisis happened quicker in the case of Slovakia while for Hungary growth was stabilised late in 2013. As the new programming period started in 2014 both countries were out from the shock and experienced economic growth of 2-4%. Ever since the two states have been performing well, being among national economies with the highest growth rates in the EU.

Figure 27: Regional disparities in GDP growth



Regarding the change in GDP per capita between 2013 and 2016 and the GDP level of 2013 it can be stated that there are still four different groups of counties within the border region. Bratislava County, Budapest and Trnava County are developed regions characterised by low economic growth. The second group consists of those counties which are relatively developed but had outstanding growth (best example is Győr-Moson-Sopron followed by Komárom-Esztergom County). These counties were able to take off from their previous level and catch up partly to the elite. The third group of counties consists of those which had relatively high GDP per capita but managed to grow with a slower pace (Nitra County, Košice County, Banská Bystrica County, Pest County). Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén had low GDP level but was developing significantly, while Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg is also similar to it (Heves is on the edge of being able to catch up). Nógrád County was the only county which has remained a region lagging behind. The Slovak regions excluding the capital region form a relatively united convergence club while the Hungarian counties are performing rather heterogeneously from Budapest to Nógrád County.

Figure 28: Population change



In the Slovak-Hungarian border region one of the most significant demographic trends is the widespread population loss which is affecting more settlements than ever before considering the analysed time frame. The decrease of population became a general phenomenon, even the rates of population growth decreased with some exceptions. The formerly very strong suburbanisation processes got weaker and the re-urbanisation of capital cities and some major cities appeared. The rural settlements far from major urban and employment centres are characterised by massive population decrease. Exceptions include areas inhabited by large Roma communities in Gemer/Gömör, Abov/Abaúj or Bereg (the latter one is also affected by the exodus and dual citizenship of ethnic Hungarians from Zakarpattia, Ukraine). **The massive depopulation of extensive mostly rural areas has never been more crucial to tackle in the frames of the programme.**

Population change is also affected by migration. Immigration and outmigration are still important factors in demographic changes in the border region. The spatial pattern of net migration has not changed significantly; the most developed regions (except for Budapest in 2016) are experiencing the highest influx of people while backward and lagging behind regions are having severe outmigration resulting in population loss. The population retention force of the border region is therefore weak, especially on the east to the Budapest–Nitra line. There is a general movement of people from east to west and from villages to cities which needs to be tackled.

Figure 29: Net migration

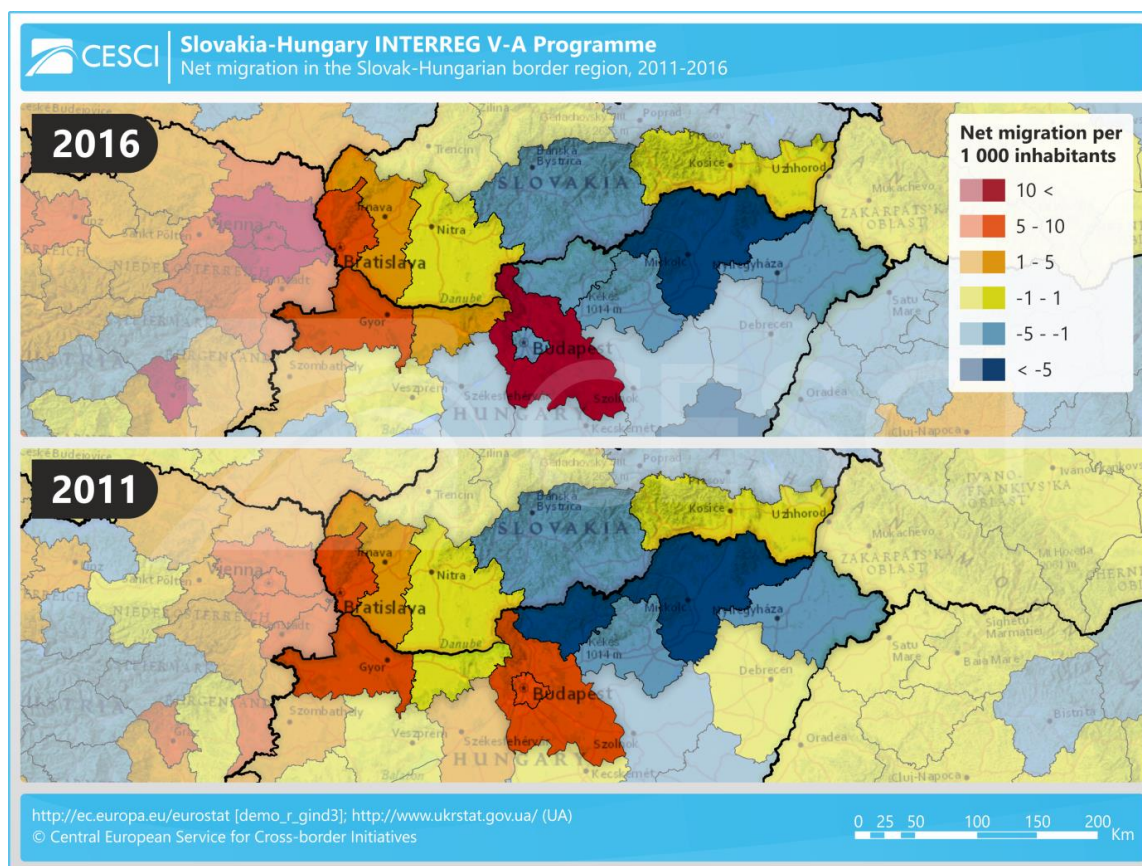
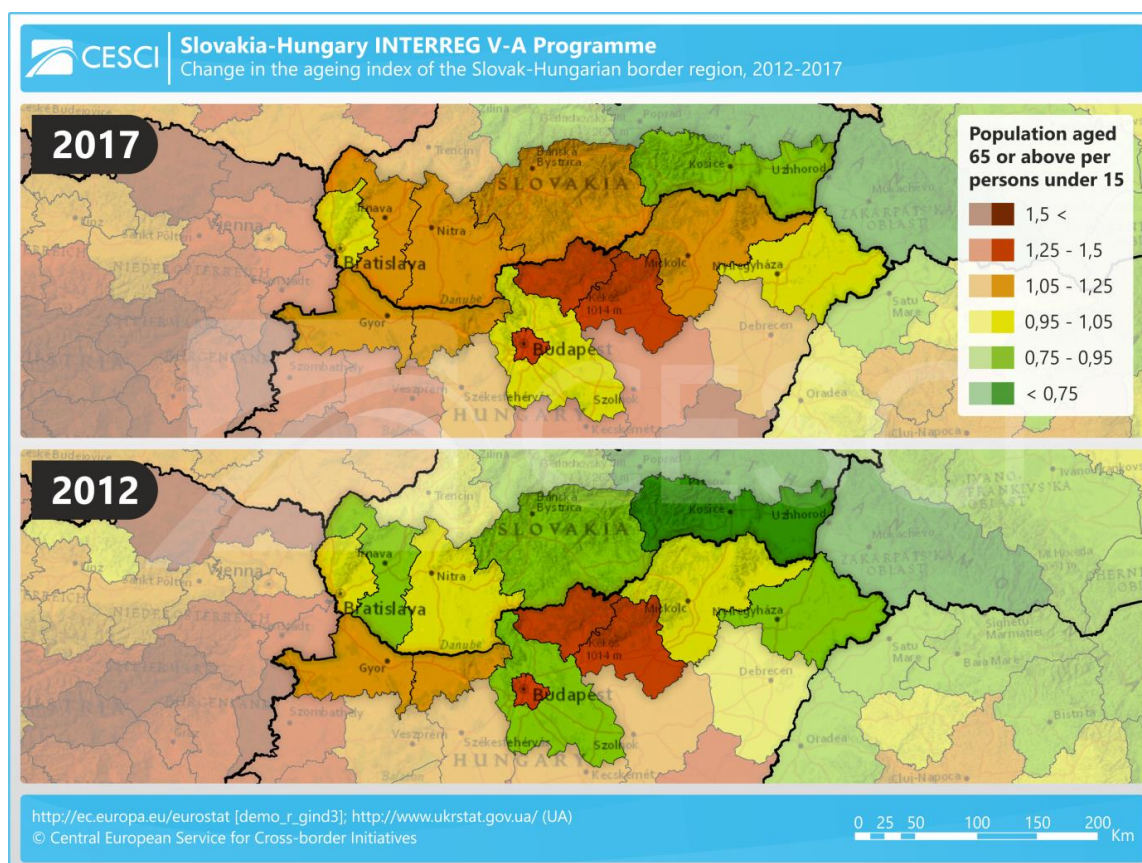
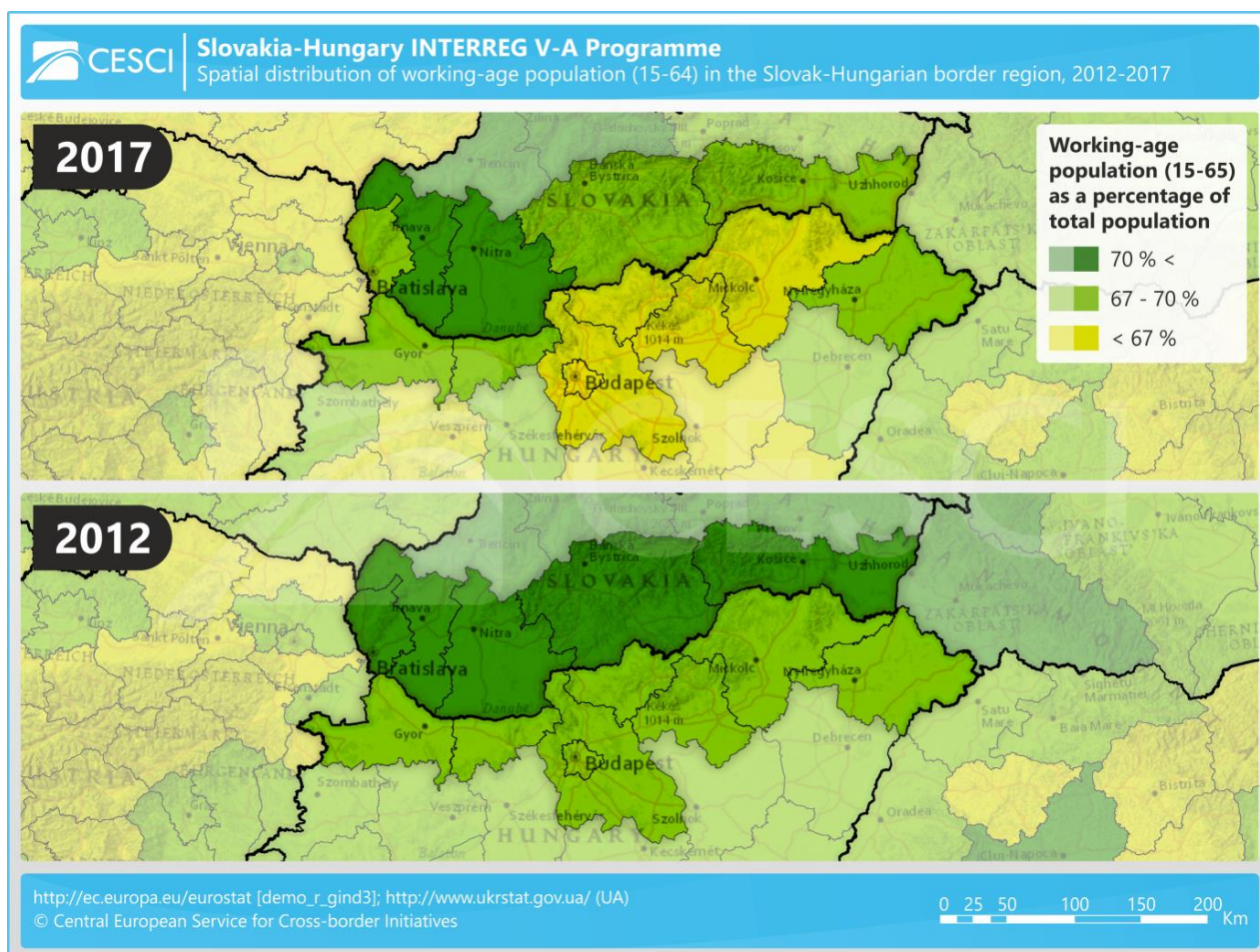


Figure 30: Change in the ageing index



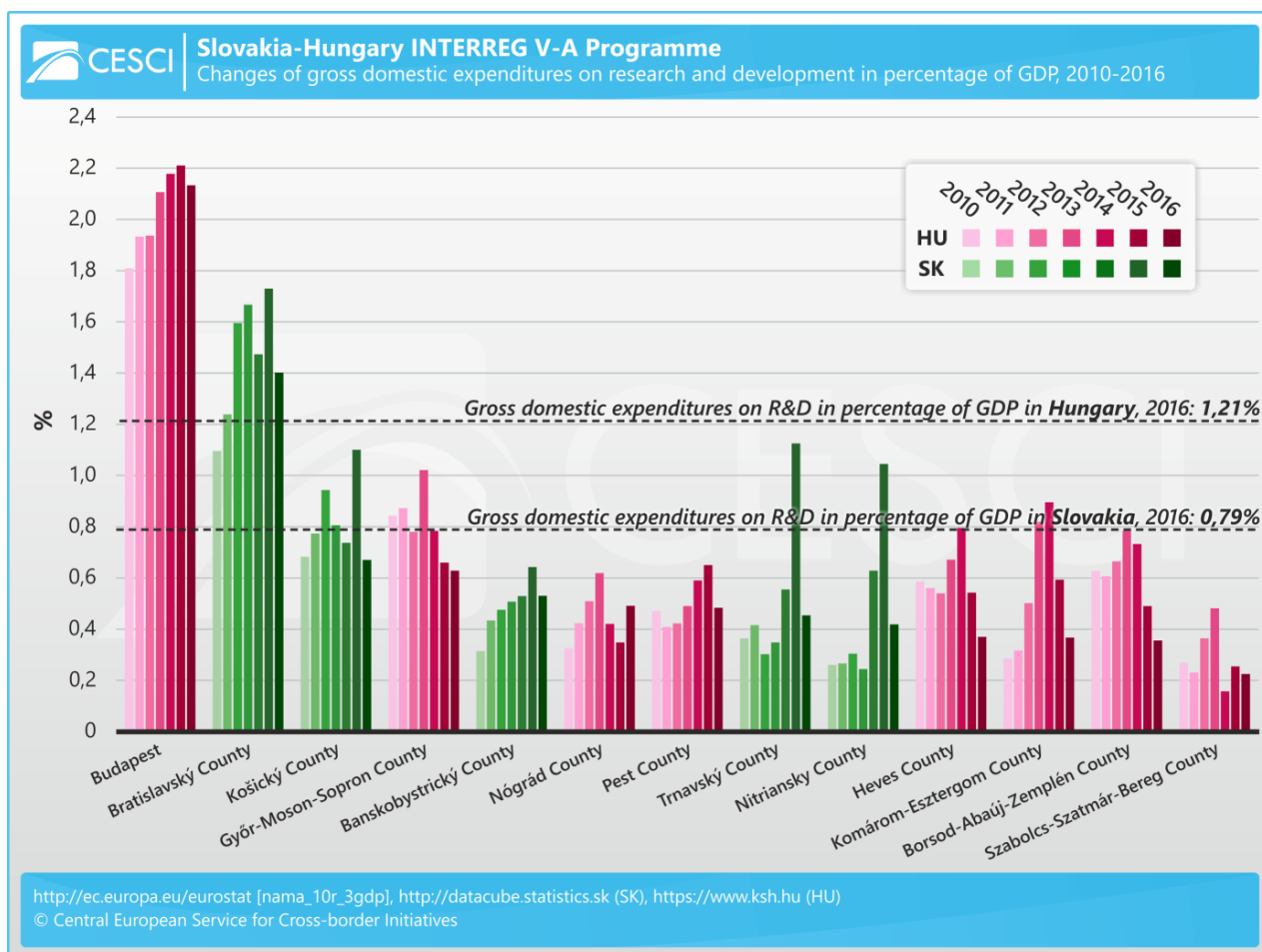
It is not by an accident that due to outmigration (or even as a relatively new trend emigration to Western European countries with better living conditions and higher wages) of young working age population, and low fertility rates, the share of people above 65 years has been increasing. Except for Košice County the aging index is rather unfavourable meaning the number of old people has outnumbered the young generations. Ageing is of great impact across the border region and will play even more significant role thus preparing and adjusting to this challenge needs to be addressed.

Figure 31: Spatial distribution of working-age population (15-64)



Working age population has been shrinking on both sides of the border. Its share became low, in Hungary its share is below 67% in Budapest and in four counties out of the seven border counties but in Slovakia its share is notably lower notwithstanding Nitra and Trnava Counties.

Figure 32: Changes of gross domestic expenditures on research and development



The importance of R&D in Gross Domestic Product has changed notably in the border region. Knowledge production is increasingly concentrated to major excellence centres such as Budapest and Bratislava County. Only Nógrád County have been able to increase R&D in Hungary, while in some counties significant backwardness can be detected. The development of Banská Bystrica County and Nitra County was outstanding in the examined period suggesting that there is still a great development potential in R&D. Despite of some improvement compared to the capital regions almost all other region still has low shares.

Regarding Priority Axis 1 Nature and culture, 6c investment priority in terms of promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage seems to be impactful and still relevant.

Regarding Priority Axis 2 Enhancing cross-border mobility, the justification of investment priority 7b found in the programme document is still valid mainly due to still low density of road crossings. The growing road and freight transport and therefore the growing environmental impact put emphasis on the justification of investment priority 7c.

Regarding Priority Axis 3 Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility, it has to state that unemployment decreased in wide areas. This development led to a completely new situation where in the capital and westernmost regions

unemployment ceased to exist as a major problem. In the last years labour shortage has appeared and became relevant in many parts of the border region.

The capacity development of low educated people is still needed therefore the investment priority 8e is justified. The share of highly educated people among the unemployed has also increased, making working age population with tertiary educational attainment a significant factor in shaping the future of labour markets.

Furthermore, economy represents and has to be kept as a major issue in the programme. Although, the focus could shift from crisis management to maintaining and enhancing sustainable development.

Beside the priority axis PA4 focusing on cross-border inter-institutional and interpersonal cooperation which are the core targets of the CP, further developments can be detected within the programme region forecasting new topics for the next programme.

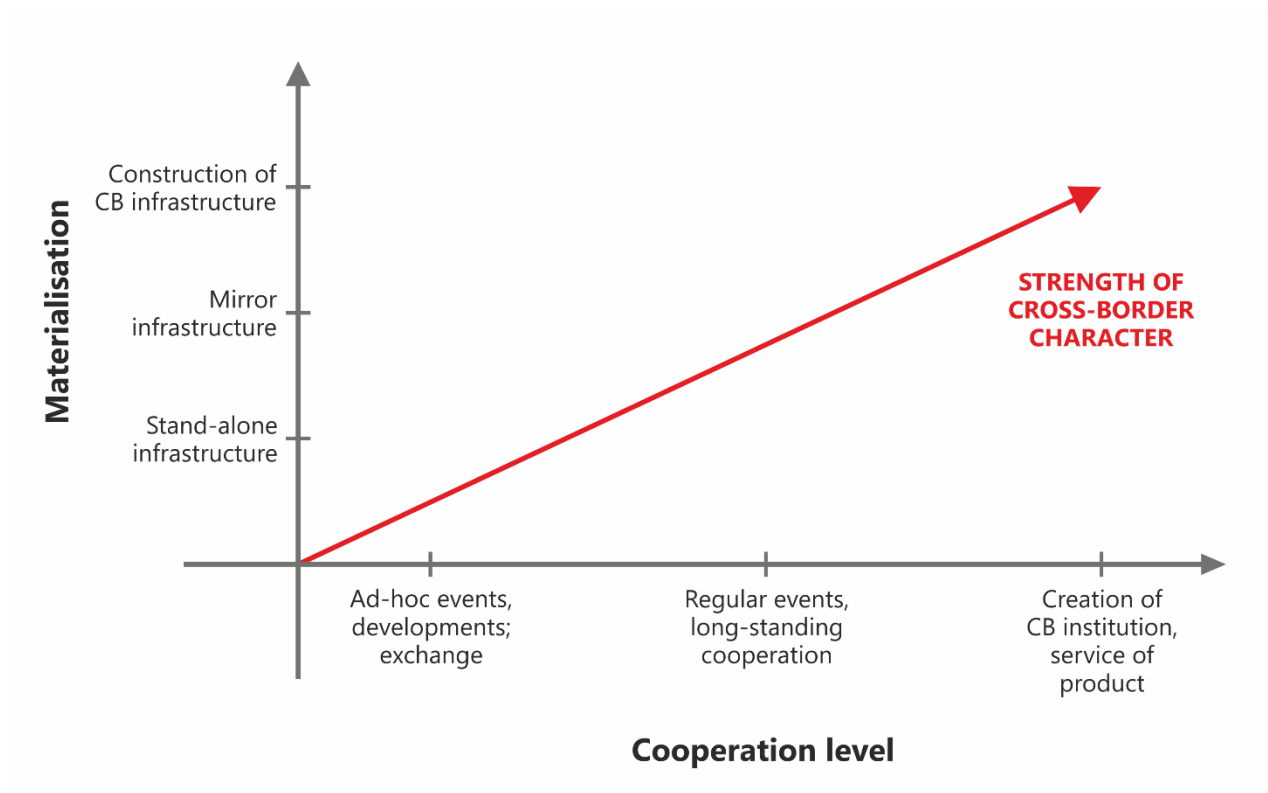
(1) On the one hand, the massive depopulation of extensive (mostly) rural areas of the programme region (the outmigration of mostly young, skilled, working-age population and the massive ageing) has never been more crucial to tackle.

(2) On the other hand, during the most recent years the importance of R&D in generating Gross Domestic Product has been increasing notably in the border region.

M 3.2 Analysis of cross-border relevance

The second aspect of relevance targets the cross-border character of the programme. This character can be justified by the impacts having on cross-border territorial, economic and social cohesion and the intensity of cross-border cooperation. Obviously, these two factors can hardly be assessed: notwithstanding the definition problems of cohesion itself, it is not self-evident by which criteria can a programme be justified as more cross-border than the other. However cross-border projects can be classified by a 3x3 cell matrix along by two vectors: the *level of cooperation* and *materialisation*.

Figure 33: Level of cooperation and materialisation



The different levels of **cooperation** can be characterised by the maturity of the relationship: is there any real cross-border component in the project; whether we are speaking about ad-hoc events (e.g. exchange of experiences); the creation of the conditions for regular and long-standing cooperation (set-up of permanent partnership, development of action plans, drafting educational curricula, establishment of long-standing cooperation between institutions); or the partners intend to create integrated cross-border services, products or joint institutions? Every partnership cannot be at the highest level of maturity; furthermore, even the highly developed cross-border institutions started with the first steps of exchanges. At the same time, the long-term objective of the cross-border programmes should be to support the development of partnerships being able to create cross-border institutions and services reducing separating effects of the border.

Along the vertical axis, the projects can be characterised by their **materialisation** (see tangible results and sustainability). At the „zero level“, we can find genuinely soft projects without constructing permanent infrastructure. Then, there are projects which contain infrastructure development but without direct cross-border impact. At third level, there are mirror-typed projects when the partners implement activities or carry out construction works in parallel - accompanied with some simple cross-border content where only the long-term impacts can justify the support. While the most advanced, real, integrated cross-border projects are where the implementation of the project-part on one side is impossible or ineffective without the realisation of the project-part on the other side.

The projects which contain the construction of joint cross-border infrastructure and create the relevant services or even the institutions as well, can be considered as the „most cross-border” ones. The cross-border character of the programme can be justified by the high number of this type of projects.

In this chapter, the evaluators analysed from this perspective the information gained from the interviews, the questionnaires and (unlike the preliminary plans drafted in the IR) also the selected projects, in a qualitative way.

Results of the interviews

According to the opinion of the interviewees, the programme is characterised rather by stand-alone or mirror-typed projects. Compared to the previous programme (2007-2013), slight improvements can be detected but there are still many „alibi partnerships”. Even more, there are examples of partnerships where the partners are not able even to talk to each other.

When comparing the Slovakia-Hungary programme to the Austrian CBC programmes, it is striking, how the projects of the latter one are more complex and more complementary than the present programme is. The reason behind is that the border area with Austria is more integrated.

Besides, the cooperation between the neighbouring regions across the border is rather superficial or artificial regardless of the existing county-level EGTCs which represent a higher level of institutionalisation and a longer term perspective. At the same time, the CBC programme is one of the instruments strengthening the relationships between them.

Finally, one of the interviewees underlined the length of the shared border which makes necessary the effectiveness of cross-border character of the programme.

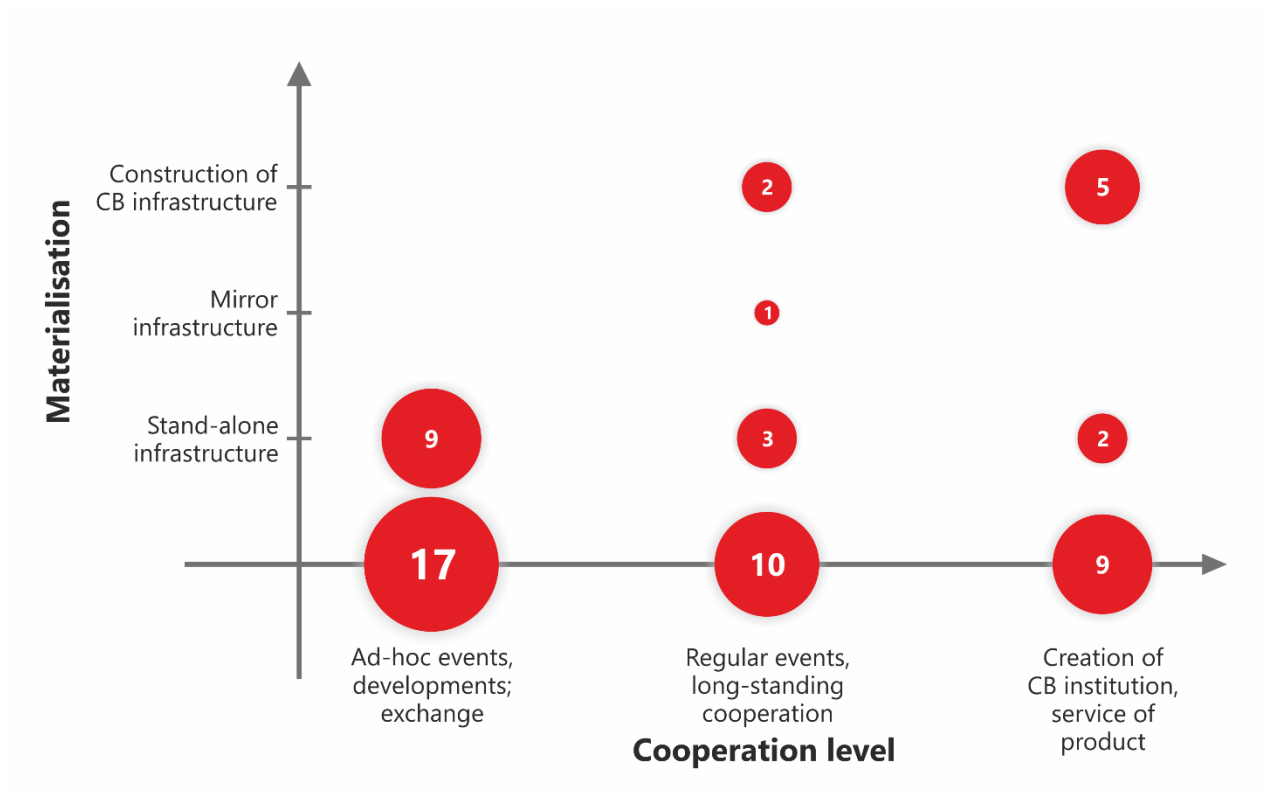
The picture described by the representatives of the different management bodies shows us a less advanced programming region in terms of cross-border integration.

Analysis of the selected projects and the questionnaires

The analysis of the descriptions of the selected projects (with a special focus on the answers responding the question on „cross-border impact”) provides a more differentiated, more detailed view.

According to the analysis, only a few (5) SKHU projects meet the highest requirements against cross-border integration and cooperation, the programme itself is ‘top-heavy’ of soft-and-ad-hoc projects, very similarly to transnational and interregional programmes. At the same time, 28% (16) of the total projects aim at creating cross-border services or products what is not a negligible ratio. The biggest rate (29%; 17 beneficiaries) is represented by soft projects without long-term cross-border character and the projects including stand-alone infrastructure development components are also strong enough in representation (9, 3 and 2 subsequently). It has to be mentioned that the results of the analysis have been drawn based on the first call. The overall picture will surely be modified by the projects to be implemented later on.

Figure 34: Cohesion and cooperation level of the SKHU projects

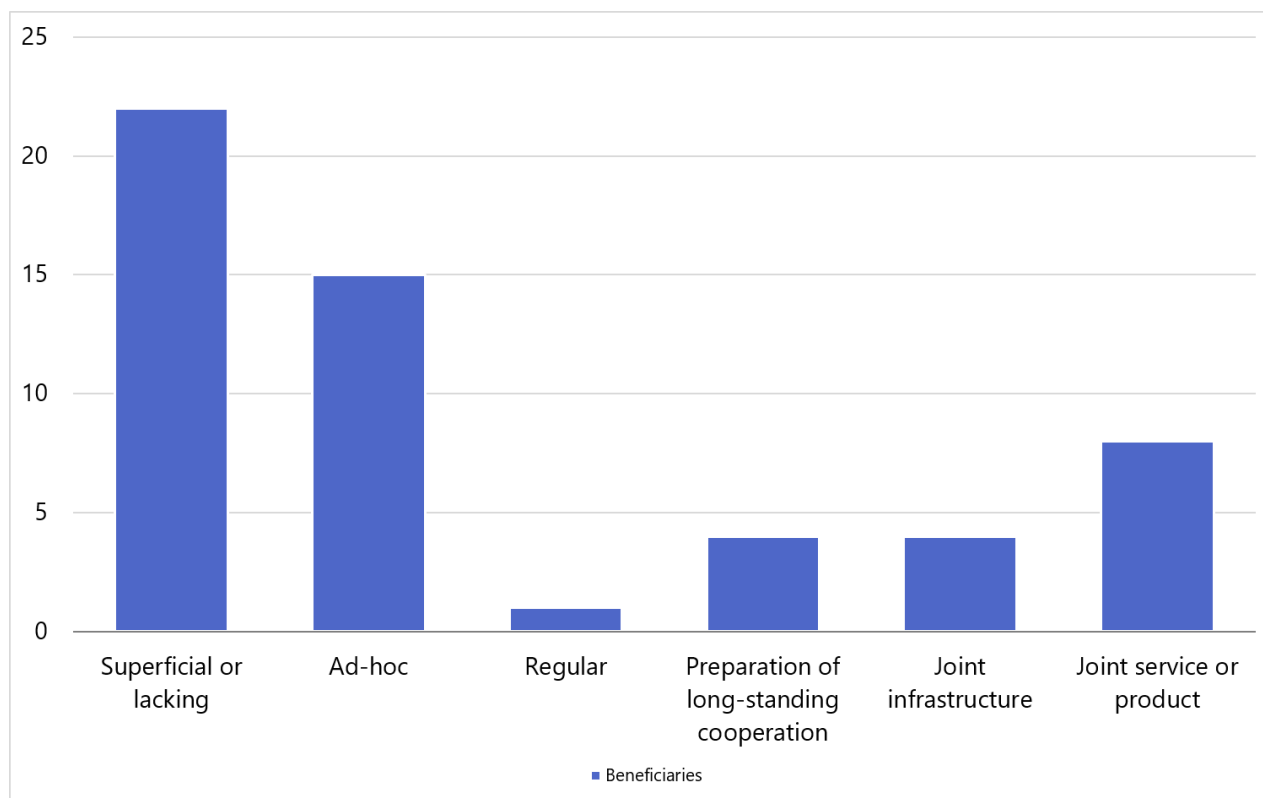


This picture is mirrored in the results of our contextual analysis. Although the expressions of cooperation and mutual belonging (like „common, similar, joint, mutual“) are mentioned very often, when speaking about the cross-border impact of the project, we can meet typical soft activities behind, like „exchange“ (28 allusions), „event“ (18), „workshop“ (9), „camp“ (9), „training“ (8). At the same time, higher level of institutionalisation is also represented by (cross-border) „service“ (30!), „destination“ (11), „product“ (8), „infrastructure“ (8) what is a good direction to be strengthened further.

Figure 35: Word cloud on the cooperation level of the SKHU projects



Figure 36: Maturity of cross-border cooperation of the beneficiaries



In the case of the on-line questionnaires, the lead beneficiaries were asked about the inevitable necessity of the cross-border programme for reaching their goals. The answer had to be justified by the cross-border activities of the project. According to the answers, we gained a very similar picture to the former ones what means that numerous projects don't have cross-border character at all (let us remind that the questionnaires were filled-in also by beneficiaries whose proposal has not been selected). This all means that there have been project applications which are performing weak with this regard. The weak cross-border character of such projects could be improved however the assessors never really live with the option of recommending alterations to have projects with higher cross-border relevance. The assessments written often contain positive feedback in relation to the approval and support of projects with weak cross-border activities. Furthermore, a lot depends on the communication towards applicants, to make the cross-border character understandable for them. It would be worth considering not selecting projects which lack this character and gets zero point. As of 31th August 2018, the practice is that projects despite of having no such points could be selected. JS should assess cross-border aspects by approximately 20 points.

To sum up, there are a few partnerships which are able to develop real cross-border products and infrastructure while the majority of the beneficiaries – regardless of the two-decade history of the Slovak-Hungarian programmes – are still focusing on ad-hoc, simple partnerships in order to realise their own, local developments. The CP should encourage the development of real cross-border actions through

- the application of integrated tools (like TAPE),
- the publication of guides on cross-border aspects (including best practice models),
- putting more emphasis on detailed information regarding the cross-border character of the applications (e.g. by applying a matrix instead of submitting two minutes on joint preparation),
- amending the application form and the quality assessment grid in a way that cross-border character is to be detailed more deeply on a contextual basis.

M 3.3 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools

In the current programming period the programme launched new tools and mechanisms (TAPE – Territorial Action Plan for Employment; SME call & SPF – Small Project Fund), in order to enhance cross-border cooperation and cohesion. The tools were assessed in terms of their contribution to stronger cohesion and wider citizens' involvement in cross-border activities. The SME and SPF tools are interesting from the perspective of broadening the scope of beneficiaries involved in cross-border cooperation. Regarding TAPE, two aspects will be analysed based mainly on qualitative information: level of contribution to a stronger internal cohesion of the region; and cohesive role of the tool in strategic partnership building. For the analysis we used the results of the interviews, the on-line survey, the background documents related to the use of the tools, as well as territorial statistics.

Territorial Action Plan for Employment

TAPE is a new instrument of cross-border integrated developments, similar to the ITI tool launched by the EU and the PIT or PITER (integrated territorial plan) of the ALCOTRA programme where applicants have to identify territorial needs of the target area and propose interrelated group of projects with an overall view to create new jobs and enhancing cross-border labour mobility. Each TAPE has to contain minimum three, maximum eight project proposals that are in synergic or complementary relation and are absolutely necessary for the overall success of the TAPE. Project proposals within the TAPE shall be designed in line with the list of eligible actions.

Regarding the TAPes, a second CfP is on-going in the frame of PA3 – Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility. The ERDF financial allocation for the present Call is 34 608 080 EUR.

In the first round (SKHU/1703), applicants were invited to elaborate and submit complex development plans called Territorial Action Plan for Employment. The list of the successful applications was approved in 26th April, 2018 by the Monitoring Committee. The second Call (SKHU/1802) opened in August, 2018 is restricted only to projects that are incorporated into an approved action plan.

Since the results are not known yet, we had to evaluate the tool based on the lessons of the interviews and the CfP documents. It is a general opinion among the respondents that the

approach applied in the TAPE model is of the heart of the Cohesion Policy and contributes remarkably to an enhanced integration of the border area. Some of the interviewees think that if the mechanism works, it should be adapted in other PAs as well. Nevertheless, there are risks concerning the successful completion of the TAPes. On the one hand, the situation of the labour market in the border region has completely changed since the launching of the programme (that time, the region was characterised by lack of jobs, now there is a lack of workforce). On the other hand, the complexity of the tool carries serious risks of implementation including the potential of demolishing partnerships caused by the failure of the particular TAPE. At the same time, there is an interest in the instrument on behalf of the European Institutions what underlines the role the TAPE can play in the development of more cohesive borderlands.

SME call

The SME Call for proposals in the frame of PA1 – Increasing the attractiveness of the border area has been inhibited, because the 125% of the Call's financial allocation (10 000 000 EUR) was reached by the submitted applications. The call aims to involve SMEs coming from both member states in the development of cross-border tourist products. The main novelty of the mechanism is its attempt to directly involve the representatives of the SME sector into cross-border cooperation. As an initial intention, the Cooperation Programme envisaged the application of the so-called B Light scheme known from the Hungary-Croatia INTERREG V-A Programme. Unfortunately, in 2017, the call launched addressing the potential main beneficiaries of the solution was not successful. As a consequence, the MA decided on the modification of the instrument creating a new model: a restricted scope of public institutions had to involve minimum one further SME from the other side of the border in the realisation of a cross-border economic development project within the framework of PA1. The selection procedure of the projects officially has not ended yet but according to the first reactions of the programme management, the results give a mixed picture: some proposals were very weak, others were satisfactory for being supported.

Concerning the new tool, most respondents of the interviews told that the idea of the involvement of SMEs was good, but their support in practice was too complicated within an INTERREG programme. Even more, several interviewees think that the involvement of SMEs is not really relevant for CBC programmes. However, the justification of their introduction was based on the one hand on the lessons learnt from previous indirect support models which had been really artificial without real impacts; and, on the other hand on the level of integration of the Slovak-Hungarian border area what has been developing a lot during the recent years. The latter factor made reasonable to enlarge the scope of the actors involved in cross-border activities. Some actors consider the modified solution more appropriate than the B Light scheme, but it also has its delimitations – some experts think that the LBs are not prepared to ensure the safe implementation. Compared to other solutions, the B Light scheme “imported” from the Dutch-German borderland, has a great advantage: the SMEs are involved in cross-border activities without the administrative burdens of CB projects. The new model of SME call

attempted to guarantee the effectiveness of this aspect by the inclusion of different public institutions undertaking the responsibility of the LB in the consortium. To conclude, there are many risks related to the SME call and its novelty but it is hard to deny that it contributes to a stronger economic cohesion of the border area. Hence we should consider it as a positive innovation of the programme.

Small Project Fund

The overall objective of the Small Project Fund (SPF) is to strengthen social cohesion across the border by supporting local level cooperation and to establish and improve long-term collaboration between actors on both sides of the border. The Small Project Fund will be implemented under two priority axes of the Programme and must contribute to their priority objectives:

- Priority Axis 1: Nature and Culture; Specific objective 1.1: To increase the attractiveness of the border area
- Priority Axis 4: Enhancing cross-border cooperation of public authorities and people living in the border area; Specific objective 4.1: Improving the level of cross border inter-institutional cooperation and broadening cross border cooperation between citizens.

Table 13: The milestones of the SPF scheme

Time frames	Identification of the call
13 February 2017 - 3 March 2017	Call for proposals addressing the umbrella projects – 1 st round of the Call for SPF Umbrella Project Proposals
1 August 2017 - 31 August 2017	Call for proposals for detailed mechanisms of the SPF scheme – 2 nd round of the Call for SPF Umbrella Project Proposals
1 June 2018 - 31 July 2018	First call for SPF projects in the eastern target area of the programme
3 September 2018 - 3 November 2018	First call for SPF projects in the western target area of the programme

First, two intermediary bodies have been selected for managing the implementation of the small project fund. For this purpose, a call for umbrella projects was published in February, 2017. As a result, two management organizations (European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation) were designated: Rába-Danube-Váh EGTC on the western part of the programming area (Bratislava Self-Governing Region, Trnava Self-Governing Region, Nitra Self-Governing Region, Budapest capital, Pest County, Komárom-Esztergom County, Győr-Moson-Sopron County) and Via Carpatia EGTC on the eastern part of the programming area (Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, Košice Self-Governing Region, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, Heves County, Nógrád County, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County).

The main objective of this decentralised model is to bring the programme closer to the local stakeholders. The two EGTCs have launched their first calls. While for the eastern call 39 proposals were submitted, out of which 25 for PA1 and 14 for PA2 (13 were disqualified for formal reasons), the western call was closed on the 3rd of November 2018 with 33 submitted proposals. In both cases 20% of the available funds were opened. According to the financial frames, it is expected that the two umbrella projects will increase the total number of the CBC projects with a few hundreds of proposals.

Since final results are not known yet we concentrated during the evaluation in the opinions of the interviewees which were two-sided. On the one hand, they unanimously agree on the usefulness of SPF; they think it is very important for the cross-border programme that this kind of “people-to-people” actions are supported; also as the ideas with small funding need; and its beneficiary-circle broadening and visibility effects are also important. On the other hand, some respondents concerned about the experiences and capacities of the EGTCs due the task.

From a cohesion point of view, both decentralisation and “people-to-people” aspect of this call is definitely beneficial.

The Programme applies innovative tools and is rich in new mechanisms. Originally these tools are aiming at a broader involvement of beneficiaries and stronger cross-border cohesion. The potential of these tools is high; TAPE seems to be a good tool for promoting cohesion, real cross-border relevance and integration at the same time. Regarding the attempts of broadening the scope of the programme from the side of involved participants, SPF seems to be a more promising tool in general, than the SME call, however both broaden the scope of beneficiaries within the cross-border programme.

M 3.4 Analysis of the programme's contribution to European goals

In this chapter the (Interreg V-A) Hungary-Slovakia cross-border operational programme's contribution to the European goals is analysed. Firstly, the three main contributions that are identified in the programme document is presented. Then the macro-regional relevance of the programme is analysed in detail and finally, the horizontal principles' contribution to the European goals is presented.

The programme should contribute to the achievement of the EU2020 targets, it should serve a stronger cohesion at macro-regional level and it should take measures towards realizing the EU horizontal principles. All of these will be analysed in this subchapter. We will shed light on how the achieved indicators met can contribute to the pan-European goals and how the project beneficiaries identified the relevance of their project on the horizontal principles.

The main methodology of this chapter is comparison and document analysis. We have analysed the programme's indicators in relation with the different European goals, and after that also the project's application documents have been carefully analysed. Furthermore, this source of

information was supplemented by the interviews conducted with the representatives of the programme bodies.

Europe 2020

The EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (hereinafter referred to as EU2020) is the EU's agenda for growth and jobs for the period of 2010-2020. The EU2020 strategy is used as a reference framework for activities at EU and at national and regional levels when designing interventions. The main aim of the strategy is to turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

In general, the Slovakia-Hungary INTERREG V-A programme document identifies the following contributions to the EU2020 main goals:

- *smart growth* which is supported by facilitating cooperation and joint developments of SMEs partly through a strong cooperation between SMEs and local high education institutions;
- *sustainable growth* is supported by the preservation and sustainable exploitation of the regions' rich natural heritage while further stabilizing the existing ecosystems;
- *inclusive growth* is promoted through a strengthened institutional environment which is geared towards future collaborations and cooperation through joint educational and training programmes and by the TAPE projects targeting challenges in the field of employment.

According to the main aims of the EU2020 the following headline indicators at EU and at national level were established²¹:

Table 14: EU2020 headline indicators (EU-28, HU, SK)

EU/Member State	EU-28	Hungary	Slovakia
Employment rate	Increasing the employment rate of the population aged 20-64 to at least 75%	75%	72%
Gross domestic expenditure on research and development	Increasing combined public and private investment in R&D to 3% of GDP	1.8%	1.2%
Greenhouse gas emissions	Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels	10%	13%

²¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4411192/4411431/Europe_2020_Targets.pdf

EU/Member State	EU-28	Hungary	Slovakia
Share of renewable energy	Increasing the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption to 20%,	13%	14%
Energy efficiency	Moving towards a 20% increase in energy efficiency (equalling a reduction to 1 483 Mtoe of primary energy consumption)	24.1	16.4
Early leavers from education and training	Reducing school drop-out rates to less than 10% (of the population aged 18 to 24)	10%	6%
Tertiary educational attainment	Increasing the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education to at least 40%	34%	40%
Poverty and social exclusion	Lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion (compared to 2008)*	- 450 000 persons	Reduce to a rate of 17.2% the number of persons living in poverty or social exclusion (compared to 20.6% in 2008)

As we can see, the targets of the two concerned member states (Hungary and Slovakia) are more moderate than the targets at EU level. In some cases the Hungarian, while in other cases the Slovakian targets undertaken are closer to the common EU values.

Considering the CP's common and programme specific indicators, we analysed the level of contribution by main target topics (we combined the categories of energy and education). In each case if the programme indicator has an (even weak) influence on the achievement of the EU2020 indicators, we assessed it as a positive impact (marking with a sign "+") without specifying and classifying the strength of this impact.

Based on our analysis, the strongest contribution can be detected in the field of **employment** while contribution is very weak in the case of **education, energy and R&D** targets.

Table 15: Contribution of the programme's indicators to EU2020 targets

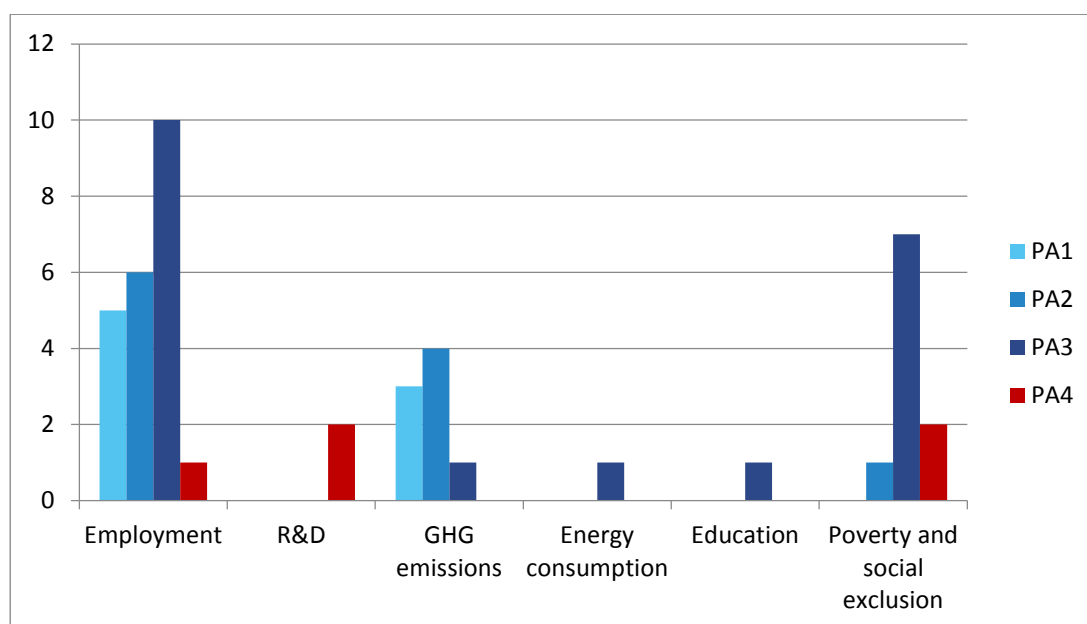
Common and programme-specific output indicators				EU 2020 Topics					
ID (Priority axis)	Name of the indicator	Measurement unit	Final target for 2023 (Milestone)	Employment	R&D	GHG emissions	Energy consumption	Education	Poverty and social

Common and programme-specific output indicators				EU 2020 Topics					
			for 2018)						exclusion
R110 (PA1)	Total number of visitors in the region	Number / year	7,074,754.00	+					
CO01 (PA1)	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises	40	+					
CO02 (PA1)	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enterprises	40	+					
CO09 (PA1)	Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	Visits/year	30 000	+					
CO13 (PA1)	Total length of newly built roads	km	7	+		+			
CO23 (PA1)	Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	Hectares	100 549			+			
O11 (PA1)	Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	km	89			+			
SO21 (PA2)	Average distance between border crossing points	km	15	+		+			
CO13 (PA2)	Total length of newly built roads	km	9	+		+			
R221 (PA2)	Change in the volume of crossborder public transport	Persons	450 000	+		+			+
R222 (PA2)	Change in the volume of crossborder good transport	EUR	10 000 000 000	+					
O221 (PA2)	Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	piece	10	+		+			
O222 (PA2)	Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme	Piece	10	+					
CO44 (PA3)	Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	Persons	100 (30)	+					+
R310 (PA3)	Increase in the employment rate	%	65,2	+					+
CO01 (PA3)	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises	10	+					
CO02 (PA3)	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enterprises	10	+					
CO08 (PA3)	Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	FTE	20	+					+
CO13 (PA3)	Total length of newly built roads	km	11	+		+			
CO39 (PA3)	Urban Development: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	m ²	3 000				+	+	+
CO44 (PA3)	Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	Persons	100	+					+
O311 (PA3)	Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	Number	10	+					

Common and programme-specific output indicators				EU 2020 Topics					
O312 (PA3)	Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	Persons	50	+					+
O313 (PA3)	Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	Persons	25	+					+
O314 (PA3)	Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	Persons	15	+					+
R410 (PA4)	Level of cross-border cooperation	Score	4,1						
O411 (PA4)	Number of cross-border products and services developed	Number	20	+	+				
O412 (PA4)	Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	Number	40		+				
O413 (PA4)	Number of cross border events	Number	400						+
O414 (PA4)	Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	Number	200						
O415 (PA4)	Number of people participated in cooperation	Number	10 000						
O416 (PA4)	Number of women participated in cooperation	Number	4 000						
O417 (PA4)	Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	Number	300						+

PA1 and PA2 has the biggest influence on employment and GHG emission. PA3 has the strongest cross-cutting character, contributing to the most EU2020 targets through the improvement of employment conditions – at the same time, this is also the most powerful priority axis in terms of EU2020 matching with 20 “plus” signs.

Figure 37: Contribution of the PAs to the EU2020 targets - indicators



Considering the actions to be supported within the framework of the programme, the same method was followed. Again, **employment** is the most supported EU 2020 topic; almost every single supported action of the programme is in line with it. **GHG emission** and **poverty and social exclusion** are also among those targets which the actions explicitly contribute to. Another interesting conclusion is that when identifying concrete actions, there are more and stronger connections with the EU2020 topics than in the case of the indicators. It highlights the fact that indicators never can detect impacts so promptly than actions can.

In the case of the SKHU INTERREG V-A programme, **energy** is the least preferred topic, while there is more support for **R&D**, **education** and **poverty and social exclusion**. PA3 obviously supports employment activities and topics. PA2 is in line with employment and it aimed at improving GHG emission targets.

Table 16: Contribution of the CP's selected actions to EU2020 targets

Specific objectives and actions to be supported	EU 2020 Topics					
	Employment	R&D	GHG emissions	Energy consumption	Education	Poverty and social exclusion
PA1 Nature and Culture						
SO11 To increase the attractiveness of the border area						
Supporting the cooperation and development of cultural heritage sites (e.g. heritage renewal strategies, studies and plans, reconstruction, building of small complementary infrastructure to site signage, visitor centres, etc.)	+					
Maintaining and promoting natural heritage in the programme area (e.g. such as floodplain restoration, wetlands, renaturalising rivers and river banks, projects aimed at non-productive functions)	+	+	+			

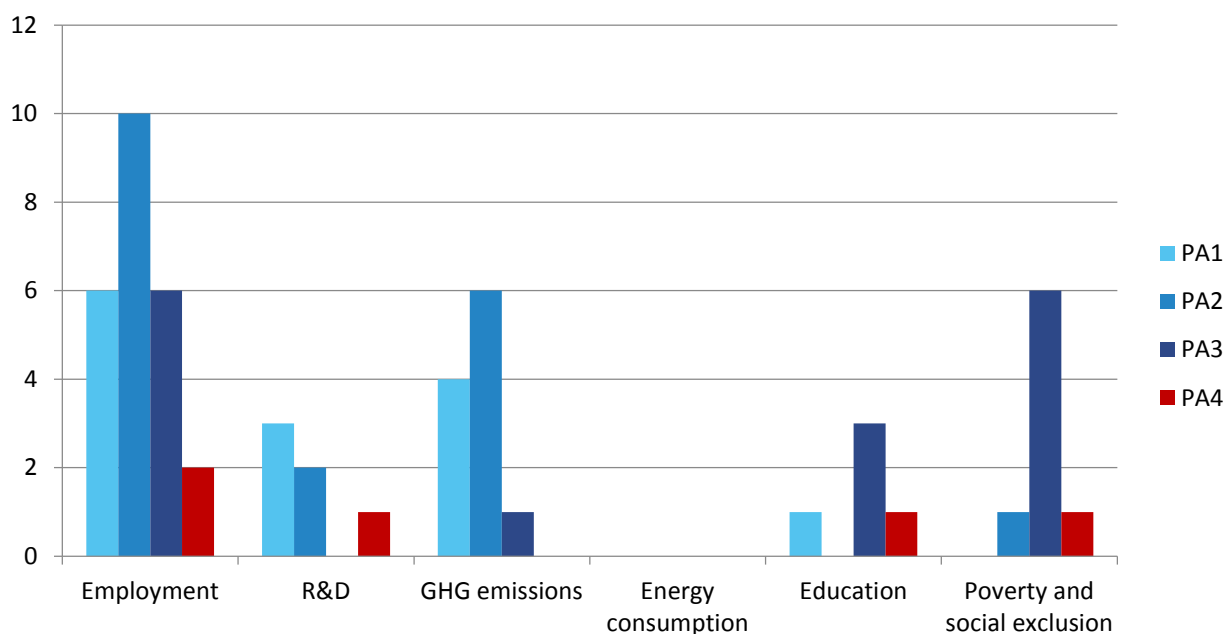
Specific objectives and actions to be supported	EU 2020 Topics					
of forests - ecological, environmental and public functions, integrated cross-border strategic plans for the restoration and conservation of green infrastructure, environmental awareness raising activities, landscape and species protection activities, etc.)						
Design cross border action plans, set up models and test pilot actions to better capitalize the regions cultural and natural heritage and to combine tourism with the promotion and protection of the regions natural and cultural heritage by performing creative and artistic actions (e.g. destination management, joint marketing strategies, exchange of experiences, mutual learning, pilot activities)	+	+	+		+	
Developing small scale quality tourism linked to local environmental or cultural features for SMEs (product and service innovation, applying innovative solutions and ICT uptake, developing high value added tourism in niche markets - cultural and environmentally friendly tourism, gastronomy tourism, sports tourism, etc. clustering activities involving tourism industries)	+	+				
Design and construction of local access roads linked to sites of cultural and natural heritage, preparation and construction of cross-border road infrastructure which on the one hand decrease the travelling time between the towns of the regions, thus decrease the GHG emission (environment); on the other hand these new connections increase the number of visitors (culture and tourism). As the planned roads and bridges will be constructed with weight limit, heavy traffic will not be allowed, the pollution will decrease	+		+			
Joint development of environmentally friendly tourism products and offers and development of cross border infrastructure for eco-tourism (e.g. support for planning and building safe and sustainable small vessel cross-border water trails and infrastructure like watercourse access and egress facilities, parking, and craft loading and unloading spaces, route and hazard signage on the watercourse, etc. and support for planning and building safe and sustainable cross border shared 'green ways' and infrastructure like pre-development of green-ways including feasibility and planning studies, trail service facilities like car parking, toilets, showers, bike wash, shelters, information centres, etc	+		+			
PA2 Enhancing cross-border mobility						
SO21 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border						
preparation of investments: elaboration of studies, analyses, feasibility studies, technical plans, purchase of permissions (these activities can be supported exceptionally as preparatory activities of realised construction projects)	+					
Construction of cross-border roads, bridges and ferries and infrastructure, including passive noise reduction (noise barriers, protecting trees) solutions with clear and direct link to the TEN-T network	+		+			
SO221 Improving cross-border public transport services						
preparation of investments: elaboration of studies, analyses, concepts; elaboration of recommendations concerning legal-administrative bottlenecks hampering cross-border mobility (e.g. allowance of cabotage, ease of international transport rules between the two states etc.);	+		+			
development of cross-border intelligent transport systems (ITS), passenger information systems, on-line schedules, e-ticketing, mobile apps, common tariff systems	+	+	+			
development and integration of cross-border public transport services, establishing transport associations	+		+			

Specific objectives and actions to be supported	EU 2020 Topics					
investments on infrastructure (e.g. vehicles – buses, ferries, boats - , bus and railway stations, ferry ports)	+		+			
investments contributing to a better accessibility of urban functions complementing the actions implemented under PA3 but not overlapping activities targeted by that PA	+					+
development of demand-driven cross-border transport services			+			
in case of activities related to road constructions passive noise reduction (noise barriers, protecting trees) solutions						
SO221 Improving cross-border public transport services						
preparation of investments: elaboration of studies, analyses, concepts	+					
realization of cross-border cooperation initiatives in the field of logistics, development of integrated service systems, infrastructure and ICT applications	+	+				
investments on infrastructure (e.g. railway stations, ferry ports and roads linking new ports to the existing transport network)	+					
PA3 Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility						
SO31 Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region						
targeted actions strengthening employment by the development of products and services based on local potential (e.g. development of local product markets; revitalising rust belts and declining industrial zones by ensuring new ways of utilisation; improving the conditions of tourism; improving the access to urban functions; development of social economy mainly in the regions with high level of poverty and habited by Roma people etc.);	+		+		+	+
initiatives and services aimed at improving cross-border labour mobility	+				+	+
infrastructural investments contributing to modernization, structural transformation and sustainable development of specific areas and resulting in measurable improvement in terms of labour mobility (in case of activities related to road constructions passive noise reduction (noise barriers, protecting trees) solutions included)	+					+
launching and implementation of joint integrated cross-border employment initiatives	+					+
establishment of business services promoting employment and the creation of infrastructural conditions thereof	+					+
joint education and training programmes	+				+	+
setting up and operation of a supportive management function for the term of the implementation of the action plan, for fulfilling the tasks of the common management, coordination of the projects, outreach the disadvantaged groups, preparation and update of the action plans, elaboration of reports and perform communication activities						
PA4 Enhancing cross-border cooperation of public authorities and people living in the border area						
SO41 Improving the level of cross border inter-institutional cooperation and broadening cross border cooperation between citizens						
Strengthening and improving the cooperation capacity and the cooperation efficiency between different organisations (public authorities) of particular sectors (e.g. education, health care, social		+			+	+

Specific objectives and actions to be supported	EU 2020 Topics					
care, risk prevention, water management, culture etc.) through common professional programmes, trainings, exchange of experiences, capitalisation and know-how transfer, etc.						
Support of activities focusing on the improvement of cross-border services provided jointly, development of small infrastructure necessary for joint service provision included...	+					
Launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens from both sides of the border and to strengthen social cohesion of the programming area resulting in improved cross-border services.	+					

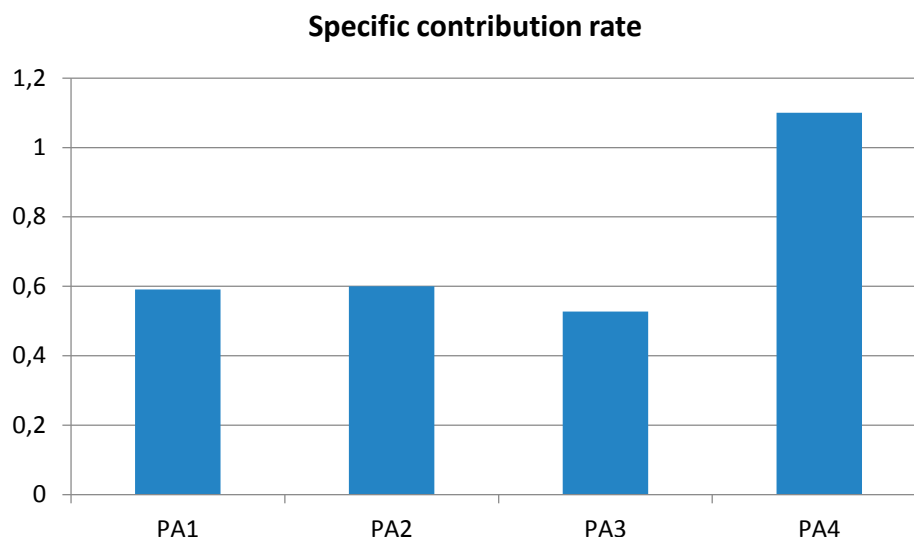
The overall picture is more balanced than in the case of the indicators: e.g. PA1 and PA2 contribute more effectively and to more targets. The weakest contribution is produced (here again) by PA4 what is a typical ETC priority axis. Here we can underline the weakness of the thematic concentration principle regarding its relevance of territorial objectives. The new draft ETC Regulation already reflects this aspect better.

Figure 38: Contribution of the PAs to the EU2020 targets - actions



At the same time, in order to compensate the differences between the numbers of indicators and actions per PAs, we also calculated the specific contribution rate. In these terms, PA4 got a much better evaluation since this PA contains much less actions than the others and the specific contribution rate is higher since the number of indicators is at the same level than at other PAs.

Figure 39: Specific contribution rate of the programme's PAs to the EU2020 targets



The model of the counting of specific contribution rate:

$$\frac{Np}{Ni + Na}$$

where Np = total number of contributions

Ni = number of indicators per PA

Na = number of actions per PA.

This way, the distortion resulted from different numbers of actions and indicators could be eliminated.

To sum up, the CP has a strong impact on the achievement of employment and poverty related targets of the EU2020 strategy within the programming region. It has a weaker impact on GHG emission, education and R&D and it has no real impact on energy policy of the Union. At the same time, we have to highlight that due to thematic concentration principle, no INTERREG V-A programmes can equally contribute to every EU2020 target.

The above tables can also be applied for quantifying the contributions through the relevant indicators at the ending phase of the programme implementation.

Macro-regional relevance

The programming area of the SK-HU INTERREG V-A Programme is totally included in the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). The strategy was launched in 2011 it is built on 4 pillars and divided into 11 priority areas (Priority Area, PA). The pillars are the following:

- Connecting the Danube Region with other regions
- Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region
- Building prosperity in the Danube Region
- Strengthening the Danube Region.

As stated in the CP the SK-HU INTERREG V-A Programme can contribute to the interventions of the EUSDR in three different ways:

- 1) through planning and organisation of events facilitating the preparation of larger projects to be implemented at transnational / macro-regional level;
- 2) through the implementation of projects complementing those to be realised within the framework of transnational Danube Programme (e.g. common management of water bases or common catchment areas; joint interventions in the field of transport, environment protection, etc.);
- 3) through the implementation of projects tackling one territorially understood element of a problem appearing at transnational level.

The macro-regional matching is awarded with additional 2 points during quality assessment of the projects.

The following table shows the thematic connections between the EUSDR's priority areas and actions and the CP's priority areas. The "+" signs show explicit contributions.

Table 17: Table of thematic connections between the EUSDR and the SK-HU INTERREG V-A Programme

EUSDR Priority Areas and actions	Programme priorities			
	PA1 Nature and Culture	PA2 Cross-border mobility	PA3 Employment, labour mobility	PA4 Cross-border cooperation
1) Connecting the Danube Region				
To improve mobility and multimodality	+	+	+	
To encourage more sustainable energy				
To promote culture and tourism, people to people contacts	+			+
(2) Protecting the Environment in the Danube Region				
To restore and maintain the quality of waters	+			
To manage environmental risks	+			+
To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils	+			
(3) Building Prosperity in the Danube Region				
To develop the knowledge society				

EUSDR	Programme priorities			
through research, education and information technologies				
To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development	+		+	
To invest in people and skills			+	+
(4) Strengthening the Danube Region				
To step up institutional capacity and cooperation				+
To work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime				

In general terms, it can be stated that by content, the CP is well aligned with the main objectives of the EUSDR. There are only 4 priority areas where direct connection cannot be detected. Nevertheless, some indirect coherence would be identified even in these cases (e.g. PA3 or PA4 can have an influence on knowledge society; and within PA4 institutions involved in state security and law enforcement have the opportunity to start knowledge sharing activities across the border). However, the above table represents direct contributions to the macro-regional targets. Based on the table, one can assume that PA1 has the most complex intervention logic that refers several EUSDR priority areas while PA2 has the lowest influence on the achievement of macro-regional objectives.

At the same time, thematic concentration narrows down the potential thematic scope of each programme which means that the SKHU INTERREG V-A programme cannot contribute to every 12 priority areas of EUSDR.

The concrete contribution can be quantified after the completion of the programme implementation through an indicator analysis focussing on the main objectives of the macro-regional strategy. At the same time it has to be noted that the EUSDR Action Plan will be renewed in 2019 setting new objectives what are to be taken into consideration when assessing the coherence between the CP and the macro-regional strategy.

Horizontal principles

There are three horizontal principles that (in harmony with the relevant EU rules) the Hungary-Slovakia cross-border operational programme 2014-2020 includes: **(1) sustainable development, (2) equal opportunities and non-discrimination and (3) equality between men and women**²².

²² The horizontal principles to be respected by the programmes are defined by the Articles 7 and 8 of REGULATION (EU) No. 1303/2013.

The fulfilment of these principles can be assessed from three different aspects: **(1) the content and objectives of the programme; (2) the application and assessment procedures applied in programme implementation; (3) the implementation of the projects.** For the first two aspects, we analysed the programme documents and the calls while the last issue has been assessed based on the on-line survey (case number: 53) of the First Phase evaluation.

Horizontal principles in the programme

Sustainable development

The CP contains objectives and actions which are in harmony with the principle of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic sustainability). PA1 focuses on the sustainable use of natural and built heritage with a special emphasis on environmentally friendly and eco tourist developments. Besides, it supports the rehabilitation of habitats and the protection of natural values. PA2 is dedicated to decrease air pollution (GHG emission) by increasing the number of border crossings and reducing travelling times and distances, as well as, by supporting cross-border public transport connections. The CP gives special emphasis to resource efficiency and smart solutions. PA3 aims at supporting developments based on endogenous assets and potentials and the revitalisation of rust belts. Finally, PA 4 supports the improvement of the quality of services which has an impact on social and environmental sustainability as well.

In case of construction works, the CP foresees investments fulfilling the requirements of the Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU). In case of road constructions it requires the application of noise reducing and anti-pollution solutions.

The programme specific measures of sustainable development are:

- reduction of greenhouse gas emission by reduced usage of hazardous material for the environment;
- reduction of the consumption of energy, water and limited resources and increase of the usage of renewable energy;
- energy efficiency and usage of recycled materials,
- efficiency and rational approach to funds and resources beyond cost-optimal levels according to Directive 2010/31/EU.

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

The CP pays particular attention to the geographic differences between the western and eastern part of the border area. Especially PA3 concentrates on the improvement of the employment and living conditions of marginalised, Roma population, the permanent unemployed and the young entrants. By promoting social innovation and employment initiatives, the CP aims at tackling the problems of the most vulnerable groups. The CP is in harmony with the Hungarian Inclusion Strategy and the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for the integration of Roma up to 2020. Besides, PA2 improves the conditions of cross-border labour mobility through

infrastructure development and the development of cross-border transport services. PA4 can strengthen cross-border institutional cooperation in the field of education and vocational training, social and other public services.

Programme specific measures are:

- transparency and application of non-discrimination principles;
- accessibility of people with disabilities to newly developed services;
- preference given to the social inclusion and advantage in employment projects to Roma people and to people living in deep poverty.

Equality between men and women

The CP promotes this horizontal principle through the activities of PA3 and PA4. The developments designed under PA3 include social economy and traditional local jobs where women are overrepresented. When selecting the indicators, the programmers put an emphasis on the employment of women.

PA4 supports activities enhancing cross-border institutional cooperation where women could play an eminent role. This factor is mirrored in the set of indicators applied.

Programme specific measures are:

- access to employment opportunities for women and support for flexible working hours;
- promotion of female entrepreneurship and self-employment of women;
- minimum 50% in number of women or disadvantaged persons participating in joint education and training activities, events;
- equal pay initiatives at the workplace.

Horizontal principles in programme implementation

The **HUSK/1601 call** prescribes the application of the “Polluter pays” principle and the projects receive support in order to be able to attain their climate change objectives. In principle all the selected projects of the programme need to (1) contribute to the requirements of environmental protection, (2) focus on resource efficiency and climate change mitigation, (3) provide ways to adapt to climate change (4) promote resistance towards disasters, (5) avoid risks and (6) enable shift towards the quality prevention of environmental resources.

The Applicant’s Manual specifies measures related to the three affected priority areas. In case of PA1, the call focuses on environmental and cultural awareness, conservation and low energy use. PA2 projects have to pay attention to better accessibility of jobs, while PA4 promotes the projects focusing on disabled persons, cross-border education, social and other public services and mutual understanding.

The same criteria have been applied in the case of the **SPF Umbrella project call**, the **B-Light Scheme** and the **SME calls**.

The **PA3 call** has a special focus on social cohesion, integration and equality between men and women. Accordingly, every TAPE proposal submitted to the HUSK/1703 and HUSK/1802 calls had to select one of the most affected social groups to target:

- people living in deep poverty and Roma,
- long-term unemployed people,
- tertiary educated unemployed people.

In the case of the **Small Project calls**, if the project's objectives are not in harmony with the horizontal principles, it is an exclusion criterion. Every small project must respect three criteria related to mitigation of damages, climate friendly construction and water protection (in harmony with the 2000/60/EC Regulation). The projects have to support environmental protection, resource efficiency, the mitigation of climate change effects, resilience towards catastrophes; and risk prevention (sustainability). The requirements related to the other two fields of horizontal principles repeat the CP.

The above criteria were assessed by quality assessors according to the followings:

Table 18: Assessment rules of horizontal principles by calls

ID number of the call	Assessment criterion	Scoring (points)
SKHU/1601, SKHU/1701, SKHU/1702, SKHU/1801	The project contributes to horizontal principles: sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination and equality between men and women.	0-3 (0-2: SME call)
	The project contributes to the specific horizontal measures defined for each Priority Axis.	0-2
SKHU/1703, SKHU 1802	TAPE creates working places for people living in deep poverty and Roma or for long term unemployed people or for tertiary educated people.	0-2
SKHU/ETA/1801, SKHU/WETA/1801	Exclusion criteria	not relevant

To sum up, the programme management pays special attention to the enforcement of the horizontal principles by including the requirements in the calls and by awarding the measures with several scores.

Horizontal principles in project implementation

Compared to the cautious way of tackling the issue by the programme management bodies, the picture is more nuanced when speaking about project implementation.

Sustainable development

This principle has been tackled with a considerable sensitivity and depth in almost all of the project materials. The approaches mentioned can be classified into three different groups: measures applying renewable energy solutions, initiatives regarding sustainable tourism and measures for disseminating knowledge.

Measures to be taken in connection with **renewable energy** resources are mentioned in the case of almost one third of the projects. The most popular way to include this measure is the use of different renewable energy sources during the realization of the projects. Solar energy is a suitable and sustainable solution that has been built in a number of projects for instance like in this project: *'After completion the new entry station building in Kosice will be operated with very low energy operating costs.'*

Some of the projects saw an opportunity to grasp sustainability through **sustainable tourism**. Since a lot of projects are geared towards tourism this type of solution could be regarded as a logical and operable method. A number of projects stated that they wish to promote sustainable tourism through developing bicycle route infrastructure as environmentally friendly means of transport. This point is somewhat connected to the idea of the importance of dissemination of information and knowledge when it comes to sustainability. Several projects realized this and reflected upon including appropriate measures in their respective projects.

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

The approach mentioned the most is the one dealing with the measures to be taken to mitigate the potential discrimination on the basis of **nationality and ethnic origin**. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the project owners state only general statements expressing that they will do *'everything in their capacity to provide equal opportunities for everyone regardless of their nationality.'*

Furthermore, there are cases where the measure proposed to bring the project and the horizontal principles closer together are **linguistic**. According to some of the projects the key to providing equal opportunities for everybody regardless of their nationality lies within language-accessibility.

Disability is the second most widely touched aspect of the first horizontal principle. However, the vast majority of the answers are so general that no actual planned measure can be identified. What is visible though is that several projects committed themselves to organize the different project activities in a venue that is easily accessible. Thus, most of the input submitted through the application forms are along the lines of the following one: *'Both training facilities will have access to the training classrooms for physically handicapped participants and provide relevant services to create barrier free environment.'*

Age is another attribute that can give space for discrimination, thus additional attention has to be paid in order to avoid this and provide equal opportunities for everyone regardless of their

age. Some of the projects approached the issue from the point of view of reduced physical abilities caused by old age and tried to compensate this through different technical solutions.

Equality between men and women

The third horizontal principle is ensuring **equality between men and women**. In many cases the projects did not approach the issue with a content-rich solution or idea for the implementation of this horizontal principle. The most often repeated inputs provided are fairly general and express more a broad ideological commitment than actual measures to be taken in accordance with the horizontal issues.

A frequent type of answer was to link the gender aspect of equal opportunities with the **composition of the project staff**. A considerable number of projects cited that their project management offers opportunities for women as well, for example: *'The project manager and financial manager are women.'*

As it can be seen, in many cases the answers lack a solid basis as one of the interviewed experts of the First Phase evaluation claimed. Some interviewees also claimed that in the projects the horizontal principles are not dealt with in a complex way but rather as an artificially included *must* that is thus left without considerable and measurable impact. At the same time, most of the interviewees emphasized that it was a positive idea to include the horizontal principles in the application materials and in some cases – where they organically fit with the nature of the project – it was definitely a good exercise for the project partners on how to apply principles going beyond merely project implementation.

The (Interreg V-A) Hungary-Slovakia cross-border operational programme 2014-2020 is in line with the Europe 2020 objectives, the European horizontal policies as well as the concerned macro-regional strategies. Certain relations between the Programme's PA-s and the EUSDR's actions can be observed. The performance framework of the programme is connected to the EU2020 targets only in a few points. Most of the crossing points are about employment and two about reduction of GHG emission in an indirect way, but nothing about energy consumption, education, poverty and social exclusion. However, it does not mean, that the programme would completely ignore these issues.

3.2.2 Territorial impact

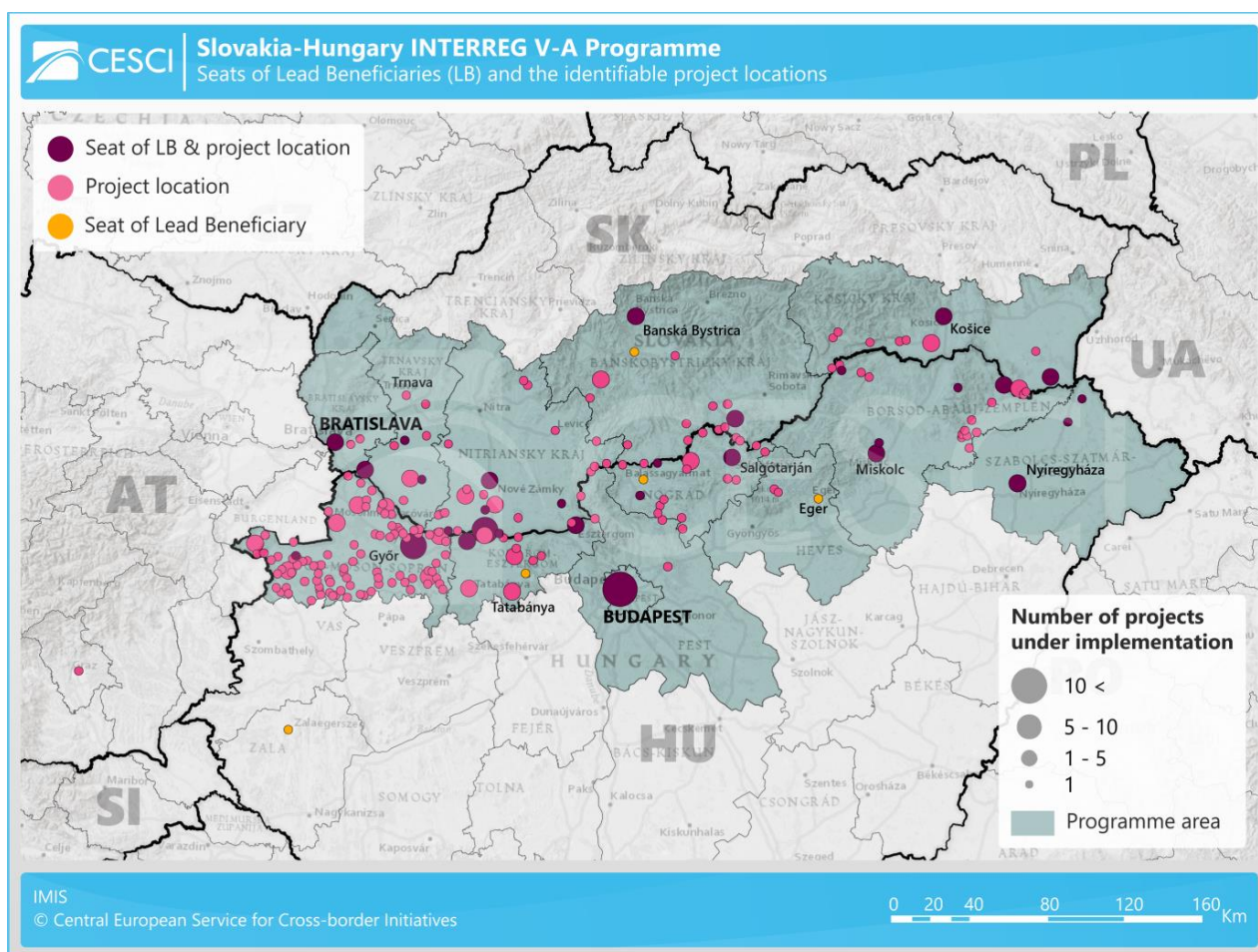
At this phase of the programme implementation it is hard to assess the territorial impacts of the programme. However, the progress of the projects make possible to draft some preliminary evaluations. For this purpose we will identify the

- territorial coverage of the projects and
- the level of the use of strategic approach.

M 4.1 Mapping of the territorial coverage

In order to evaluate the territorial coverage of the cooperation programme two maps were plotted from the available information in IMIS (similar information is available in an on-line form on the site of the programme itself). In order to illustrate territorial impact, first the location of the seats of LBs and the location of the selected projects were collected, then mapped.

Figure 40: Seats of Lead Beneficiaries and the identifiable project locations



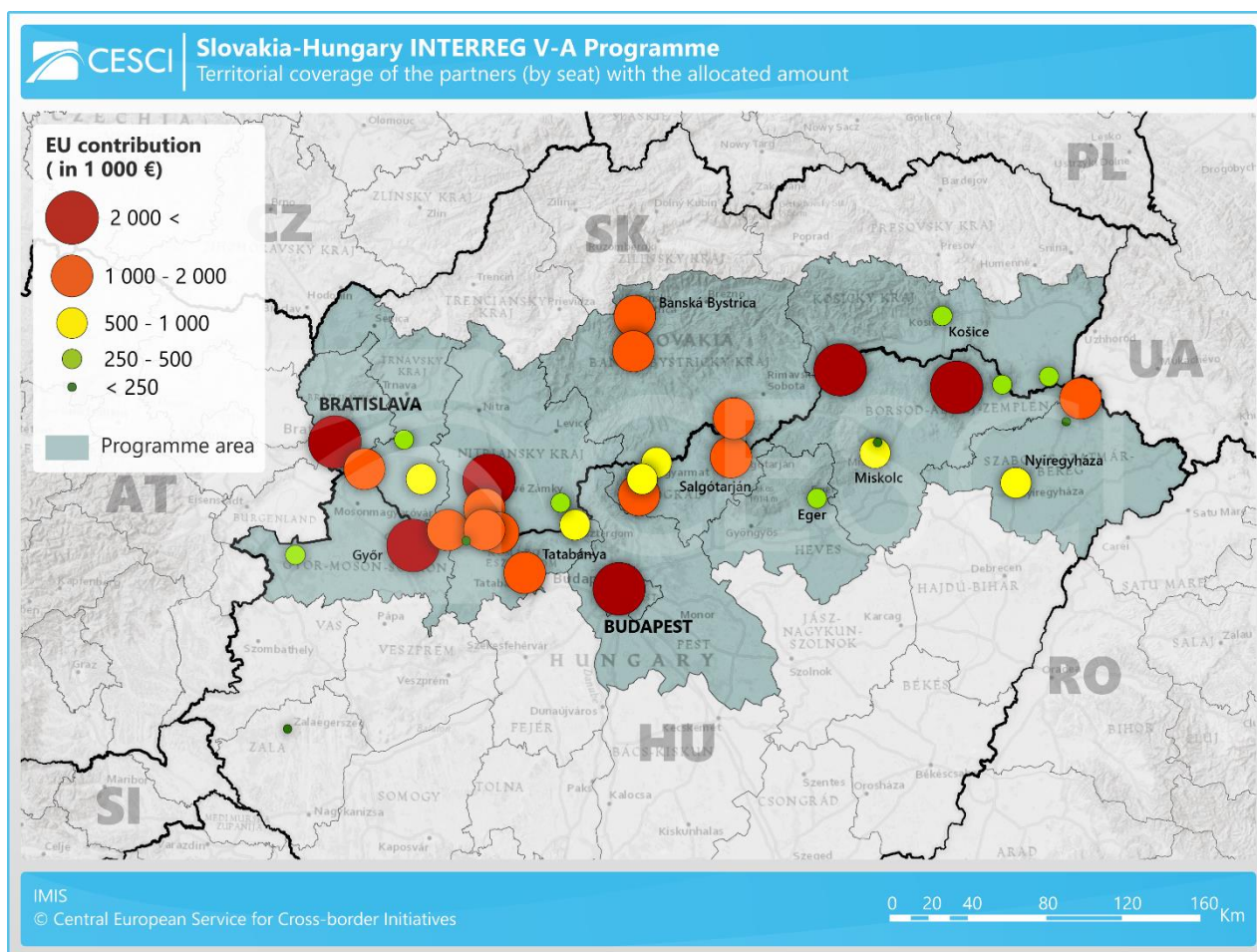
The most active programme area is situated in its western part, between Tatabánya and the Austrian border. On a county level numerous projects are located in Győr-Moson-Sopron County. In terms of distance from border the majority of locations and seats (excluding e.g. Banská Bystrica, Nyíregyháza) are situated in the proximity of the state border, usually within a 60-kilometer wide range calculated in road distance. A large share of projects is concentrated along the Danube and river Ipeľ/Ipoly.

However, it is striking, how larger territories from the eastern part of the programming region are missing from the list. Weak project activity can be detected at border sections between

Komárom–Komárno and Esztergom–Štúrovo, between Salgótarján and Aggtelek–Domica, furthermore between Tornyosnémeti–Milhosť and Sátoraljaújhely–Slovenské Nové Mesto. Only few projects can be found in Pest, Heves and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Counties. The picture will be shadowed by the expected results of the current calls. The TAPE tool has been applied more successfully in the eastern counties and the launching of the small project fund will create a more balanced view due to its clear territorial division.

The second map describes the territorial coverage of the partners (by seat) together with the allocated amount. The dominance of the western border region can be detected here too. In the case of the applicants of the western settlements the allocated EU contributions are considerably higher.

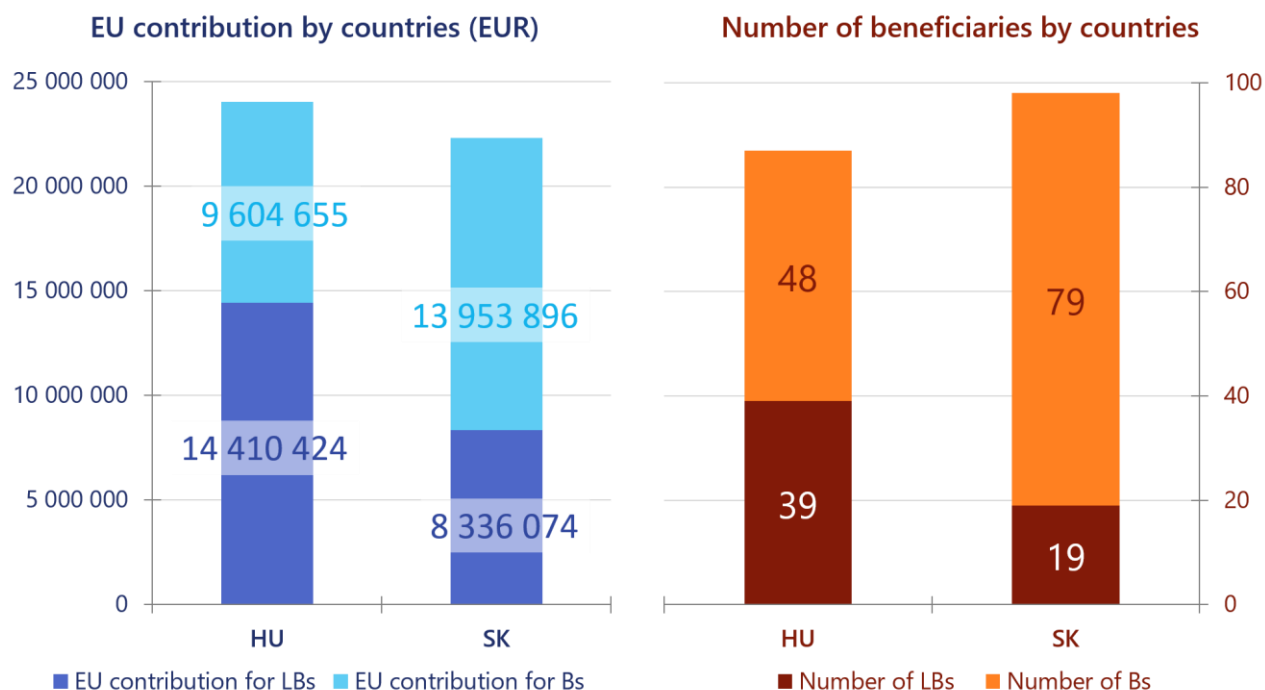
Figure 41: Territorial coverage of the partners (by seat) with the allocated amount



Important additional information in relation to territorial coverage can be gained by analysing the distribution of beneficiaries by countries. The following figure shows that, although both the number of LBs and the value of EU contributions received are higher on the Hungarian side, the situation considering the two sides is much more balanced in terms of all beneficiaries. Taking into account the financial allocation the Hungarian side has only 7.2% surplus compared to

Slovakia. Furthermore, altogether more Slovak beneficiaries can be found of the programme area than Hungarian.

Figure 42: EU contribution and number of beneficiaries by countries



The territorial coverage of the programme shows some balance and homogeneity regarding the east-west direction. The most active programme area is situated in its western part, between Tatabánya and the Austrian border. Weak project activity can be detected at few border sections. Analysing the coverage in relation to the two countries, it can be stated that considering LBs the Hungarian side dominates, however considering all beneficiaries their distribution is much more balanced between the two states.

M 4.2 Assessment of strategic approach

Within the framework of this chapter the wider impacts of the approved projects are analysed. For this purpose we are evaluating the average project size by financing and the number of involved beneficiaries in comparison with the previous project period. In addition we are analysing the specific value of indicators with the aim of reflecting on potentials of the cooperation programme. At the end of the chapter it is also studied how the applicants try to align their project descriptions to planning documents (e.g. strategies) of higher territorial levels.

The following table summarizes the average size of the (already) approved projects in the 2007-2013 and in the current project period.

Table 19: Average size of projects by financing and the number of project partners²³

	2007-2013	2014- 2018 September
Number of approved projects	321	58 ²⁴
Value of total project budgets (€)	202 018 246.44	54 134 363.19
Average project size in €	629 340.33	933 351.10
Aggregated number of project partners	850	185
Average project size by number of partners	2.65	3.19²⁵

It is obvious that the size of the projects in financial terms is increased by the current period in comparison with the previous one. The average project size in € is almost 1,5 times higher than it was in the 2007-2013 period.

Regarding the average number of beneficiaries involved in CBC projects, an increase from 2,65 to 3,19 can be detected. It means that the complexity of the partnerships has increased. Both indices imply a stronger strategic approach compared to the previous programme.

Finally, the scope of the projects can be assessed against the number of affected indicators.

Table 20: Specific indicator values based on the approved projects²⁶

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value by approved projects	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Specific value of indicator (indicator/thousand €)
Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	km	736	10 392 554,27	0,07
Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	hectares	1 703	6 994 996,48	0,24
Number of cross-border events	number	590	6 989 376,91	0,08
Number of cross-border products and services developed	number	115	6 185 934,22	0,02
Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	number	108	5 379 829,47	0,02
Number of new public transport services started within the	piece	5	1 616 793,23	0,00

²³ Data source: IMIS, Final Implementation Report of Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013

²⁴ Under PA3, the TAPES can contain at minimum 3, at maximum 8 projects.

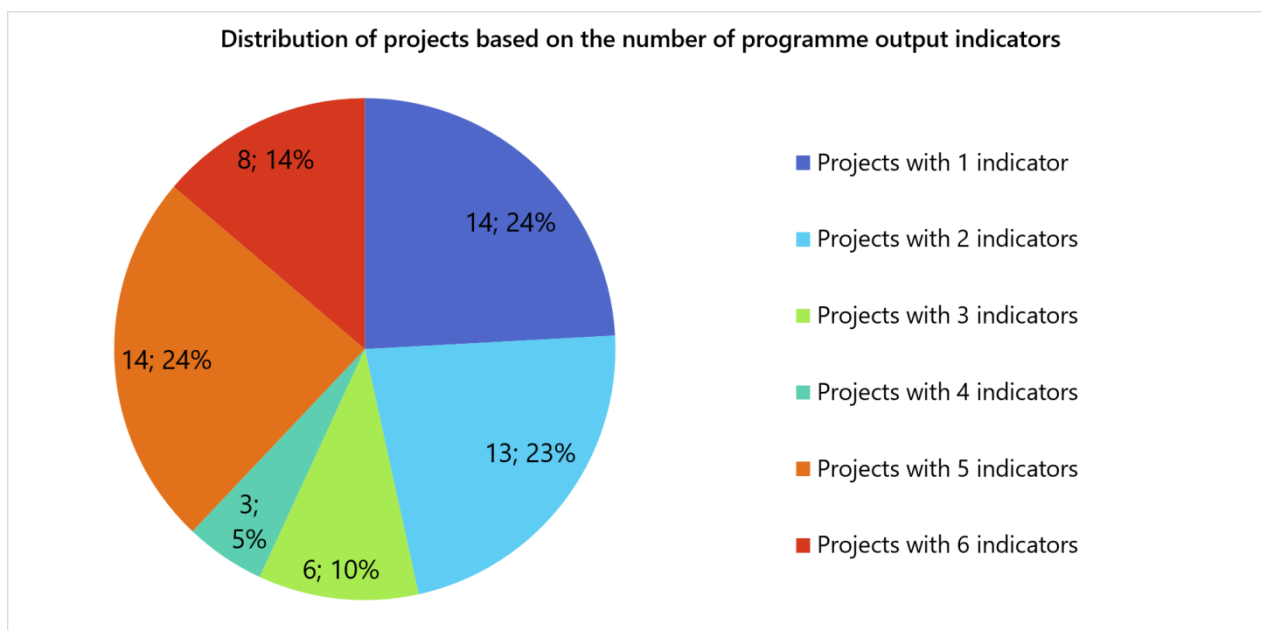
²⁵ There was no Associated Beneficiaries involved

²⁶ Data source: IMIS

Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value by approved projects	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Specific value of indicator (indicator/thousand €)
framework of the programme				
Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	number	3 035	2 798 254,70	1,08
Number of people participated in cooperation	number	32 803	6 569 077,20	4,99
Number of women participated in cooperation	number	16 416	6 450 298,20	2,54
Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA1)	km	3	5 606 769,84	0,0005
Sustainable tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	212 230	20 111 128,31	10,55
Sustainable tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	212 230	20 111 128,31	10,55

The table above aims to indicate what can be achieved by the programme support in terms of the project output indicators. Regarding the methodology of the analysis, based on the already approved projects' data, we calculated how many measurement units of the particular indicators can be performed from one thousand €. In line with these, the first value of the ratio means that 0.07 km of greenways can be built or reconstructed from an amount of 1000 € ERDF Fund. The results should be treated with reserves since there is some distortion because of the fact that a particular project may undertake the completion of more indicator target value than one. However, in case of these projects (please see the figure below), we were not able to allocate an exact amount to the concerned indicators, therefore we took into consideration the whole amount in case of each relevant indicator.

Figure 43: Distribution of projects based on the number of programme output indicators²⁷



According to this last figure, it can be seen that quite remarkable rate of the projects (more than 40%) contribute to the achievement of 4 or more indicators what clearly indicates a more comprehensive or more strategic approach.

Another way of analysing the strategic approach is to assess how the projects embedded themselves in their strategic environment. Based on the application forms, a number of marks of connection with previous programmes, current strategies and other points of reference had been found which can be classified into three groups:

- those cited strategies, policies, programmes and projects that define the legal, societal and economic context of the given project;
- those that establish a certain continuity of the project and
- those that define a certain relationship with other projects that the given project is in accordance with.

The first group contains those strategies, policies, programmes and projects that are mentioned by the given project in order to set the scene for its aims and interventions. These referenced documents are not necessarily strongly linked to the project and often are not used in order to implement its specific points but rather to convey a certain mission or ideology along the lines which the given project wishes to represent its own activity. For instance one beneficiary mentions that their *'project is in line with Europe 2020 Strategy targets in climate and energy'*. Another points out the contextual synergy between their project and other entities this way: *'[t]he project is complementary to local and regional economic and social development plans as it addresses the set priorities.'*

²⁷ Data source: IMIS

The second group is composed by those documents that are referenced in order to establish certain continuity for the given project. These form a temporal synergy as in most of these cases the referenced strategy or policy has already been concluded, however, together with the given project they create continuity, a continuous synergy. A prime example for this could be the project that positions itself as the direct continuation of an already finished programme: *'[t]he project is in line with the aims of INTERREG IV (2007-2013) too'*.

The third (probably most frequented) group consists of those strategies, other policies, programmes and projects that are mentioned because they are in a certain relationship with the given project. This relationship could be of supporting (for example: *'the project supports to the country-specific strategies like the Hungarian Ops (2014-2020)'*); contributing to (for example: *'The project is a contribution to the NEW CORK declaration from 6th September 2016 and its vision for 'A Better Life in Rural Areas', which is also a community-led bottom-up approach'*) or simply being in accordance with (for example: *'The project is in accordance with 'The priority Area 06 Biodiversity, landscapes, quality of air and soils'*).

It also has to be mentioned that not every project gave the same amount of depth to their answers relating to the strategic synergies. Even though the vast majority of the projects mentioned at least three points of reference and linked them coherently to their own vision, there were cases where a mere list of strategies and policies were given without any contextual explanation (for example: *'- Danube Region Strategy; - Strategy for the Sustainable Tourism Development of the Carpathians 2014-2020; - Hungarian National Tourism Development Concept 2014-2024.'*).

Since the size of the projects in financial terms as well as the average number of beneficiaries involved in CBC projects has increased a stronger strategic approach compared to the previous programme can be detected compared to the previous period. Quite notable rate of the projects contribute to the achievement of 4 or more indicators what reflects to a more strategic approach. There is still high number of projects which slightly embed themselves in their strategic environment taking into consideration their project descriptions. The descriptions are quite varied, and can be grouped in terms of synergies with the planning environment as follows: 1. those cited strategies, policies, programmes and projects that define the legal, societal and economic context of the given project; 2. those that establish a certain continuity of the project; and 3. those that define a certain relationship with other projects that the given project is in accordance with.

3.2.3 Permanency

M 5.1 Sustainability analysis – project results

The Hungary-Slovakia cross-border operational programme 2014-2020 places a great emphasis on ensuring the sustainability of the project results. In order to analyse the ways thereof, a contextual analysis was carried out: with the help of the word cloud method the most frequent solutions were identified and analysed. This had been done through collecting all the application forms available in IMIS and reviewing the methods and tools the winning projects planned to use in order to ensure the sustainability of their results.

In the case of the SK-HU programme the different methods regarding ensuring the sustainability of the project results can be categorized into three different groups:

- 1) those that aim to ensure institutional sustainability;
- 2) those that intend to protect financial sustainability and
- 3) those that were proposed in order to help keep social sustainability.

The analysis will follow the logic of this categorization.

Institutional sustainability

Institutional sustainability is an essential aspect of the sustainability analysis. In these terms, it can be said that the project beneficiaries took the time to think through this aspect and to come up with evaluable answers. At the same time, even from the word cloud below it is visible that the range of the measures proposed by them are not very wide; they could be grouped into three different categories:

- 1) measures based on project partners;
- 2) measures based on public institutions and
- 3) measures based on other institutions.

Undoubtedly, the vast majority of the projects transferred the responsibility of ensuring the institutional sustainability into the realm of the project partners claiming that *‘every partner is responsible for their project and investment’*. Most likely those beneficiaries who gave this answer felt that this is so self-explanatory that they do not need to engage in lengthy descriptions and explanations thus the general trend among them was to formulate their view in a highly compact manner. For instance this way: *‘Institutional sustainability will be provided by the beneficiaries and project partners themselves.’*

Figure 44: Word cloud method visualization of the institutional sustainability aspect



The second type of solution is to use the different public institutions as the guardians of institutional sustainability of the project results. Since the existence and operation of these institutions are mostly secured and not influenced by the political, economic and social context of the global or local environment, it can be considered as a good solution to entrust them with continuity. These public institutions can be of many types. The most often referred are the municipalities (for example *'there will be responsible people appointed at the municipalities who will be responsible'*). Other such examples are state companies, Disaster Management Authority, municipal forest companies, National Integration and Carpathian Basin Network Development Directorate etc.

Furthermore, in the application forms projects had mentioned all sorts of different institutions, organisations and other stakeholders that can fulfil the role of safeguarding the institutional sustainability of the project results. These were for example European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (the Arrabona EGTC), zoos, schools and universities as well as individuals such as teachers who apply a certain teaching methodology developed in the framework of the project and make sure to use the given method even after the conclusion of the programme this way providing a tangible continuation of the project's result.

Financial sustainability

The analysis of measures proposed to reach a high level of financial sustainability, the solutions exposed a high level of homogeneity across the different projects. Furthermore, in this section almost no general answer had been submitted which shows a considerable level of commitment from the side of the selected beneficiaries in terms of ensuring financial sustainability. As it is visible from the word cloud below, the solutions proposed can be categorized into four different groups:

- 1) means based on the project partners' own budget;

- 2) means based on an external entity;
- 3) means based on revenues from the project itself and
- 4) means ensuring that no further cost will appear.

Figure 45: Word cloud method visualization of the financial sustainability aspect



The analysis of the relevant sections in every projects' application form revealed that the vast majority of the applicants envisaged to ensure the financial sustainability of their project through the project partners' own budget. Since the project partners are committed to sustain the results financially, they can in fact be expected to be responsible for the financial sustainability and implementation of the activities after the project ends.

The secondly most often applied method was to find a way to somehow externalize the financial burdens of the project to an institution or organisation that is able to take up the role of the financer. By far the most often cited such institutions are the municipalities that can dedicate a fraction of their budget in order to ensure the financial sustainability of the project's results. However, apart from the municipalities, higher level of public institutions appear as well such as the Slovakian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development or the Hungarian Ministry of Human Resources.

Furthermore, there is a relatively high ratio of those projects that aim to generate enough income and revenues due to the realization of the project itself that would be sufficient for keeping the activities even after the closure of the project period. Different projects envisage the execution of this idea in versatile ways. One for instance claims that it could be '*ensured by the created economic advantages thanks to bilingualism*', another sees the key to self-sustainability in the '*diffusion of best practices as well as crowd-funding*'. For projects geared towards boosting tourism it might be easier to realize this as one project puts it aptly: '*health tourism development shall be self-sustaining as income due to the developments shall cover costs.*'

The fourth type of options for ensuring that no financial trouble will burden the projects is to make sure that no additional expenses will appear during and after the realization of the project. For instance, one project states that *'the schools will have the methods and equipment, so no further cost shall appear'*, meaning that the financial sustainability of the project is by definition not endangered by the possibility that the project beneficiaries will not be able to fund their activities after the closure of the project.

Social sustainability

The analysis of the projects' relevant input in the application forms resulted in the conclusion that many projects might have struggled to find a suitable method for ensuring social sustainability. This is deducted from the fact that many projects simply have not reflected on this aspect in any way or, if they did, they expressed themselves they did it very briefly and in general terms. However, some trends could be still observed, which are represented also on the word cloud below. According to these trends there are two distinct categories: those projects that focused on

- 1) methods related to event organisation and
- 2) those related to dissemination of information.

Figure 46: Word cloud method visualization of the social sustainability aspect



Firstly, several of the projects regard the organisation of different cross-border events, festivals and educative school programs as prime opportunities for maintaining those social bonds that had been created during the project implementation period and are regarded as one of the outcomes of the whole project. This is aptly put by a beneficiary saying that *'continuing the tradition of CB events and education school programmes form an informal working group for further development.'* Others pledged to continue to organise museum pedagogy programmes, joint events, trainings for the students in the region, camps, nature-olympics etc. each according

to the profile of their project. Subsequently, it can be said that annual, cross-border community building events represent an efficient way of ensuring that the social sustainability of the projects' results are longer than the project itself.

Secondly, a large number of projects pointed out the importance of dissemination of information in various shapes and forms in the pursuit of ensuring social sustainability. One way to do so is to publish those documents that were made in the framework of the project and can be useful for other local stakeholders too. As one project owner wrote: *'the joint strategy will be shared with decision makers to help them similarly to the educational materials which will be made available for schools and professionals.'* In some cases the know-how transfer is also backed up by the creation of certain platforms as in this case where *'with the creation of best-practice and experience sharing online platform among entrepreneurs more and more people will be involved.'* Finally, there is also a strand of knowledge sharing processes as in the case of the project that based its strategy to ensure the social sustainability on *'the secondary target group which will participate in prevention presentations and community programmes [and so] will pass on the information to more people.'*

The sustainability of the project results is a key aspect of the Programme's evaluation. Based on the information provided by the beneficiaries in their application form, it was found that the institutional sustainability is based on the cooperation of the project partners; on public institutions; on other institutions or stakeholders. Furthermore, the financial sustainability is mostly viewed to be ensured individually; by external entities; through the revenues from the project itself or through ensuring that no further cost will appear. Finally, the social sustainability is secured through events or on the dissemination of the collected information.

M 5.2 Sustainability analysis – project partnership

One of the key components of long-lasting success of the programme lies in the sustainability of the project partnerships. Previous empirical cases prove that if a partnership is formed on an ad-hoc, hurried way lacking a proper foundation, that will have an adverse effect on the sustainability of the partnership. Subsequently, when it comes to the evaluation of the programme, it is essential to shed light on how permanent the current partnerships are, what kind of historic background they have and what future prospects do they claim to envisage for themselves. In order to be able to paint a detailed image about these issues, first we analysed the partnerships in the IMIS according to the type of organisations; legal status of the beneficiaries and the sociogram of the partnership while at the same time First the partnerships registered in the IMIS were analysed according to the viewpoints as follows: type of organisations; legal status of the beneficiaries; sociogram of the partnerships. In parallel the applicants had been asked to fill out an on-line questionnaire where the following questions were asked from them:

- What was the reason of selecting the partner?

- How long is the partnership with the beneficiary (in years)?
- Give examples of previous joint projects or project proposals together with the beneficiary.
- Give examples of joint events held with the beneficiary.
- What kind of joint prospects for the future do you foster with the beneficiary?
- How do/did you want to guarantee the sustainability of the partnership after the completion of the project?

The answers to these open-ended questions resulted in a detailed rich qualitative database that is analysed below, as well as, completed with some statistical statements deducted from those answers that were quantifiable. All in all, 51 respondents answered the relevant questions, their answers are analysed below.

Analysis of the partnerships based on the IMIS

There are 185 beneficiaries accounted for in the IMIS, 53% of which are from Slovakia and 47% from Hungary. The analysis of the type of the organisations was somewhat problematic because the entries in the IMIS differed across the two countries even if in reality they were the same. For instance while in the case of the Slovak beneficiaries the settlements belong to the category of „Municipalities and their budgetary and contributory organizations”, in Hungary they belong to the category of “Other than central budgetary organization”. A further complication was that certain entities were enlisted to different categories in different partnership such as the RDV EGTC which is in one case labelled as an “EGTC” and in another case as “Other than central budgetary organization”.

Table 21: Summarizing table of the types of institutions

Type of institution	Hungaria n	Slovakia n	Total
Other than central budgetary organization	64	-	64
NGOs/NPOs	-	36	36
Municipalities and their budgetary and contributory organizations	-	34	34
Central budgetary organization	20	-	20
State administration organizations	-	9	9
Higher territorial units and their budgetary and contributory organizations	-	7	7
Other public administration organizations	-	6	6
Private sector out of state aid schemes	-	5	5
EGTC	3	1	4
Total	87	98	185

Analysing the legal status of the beneficiaries it can be observed that in both countries the public institutions are overrepresented. At the same time it is worth noted that the presence of the private sector is 10% higher on the Slovak side than on the Hungarian side.

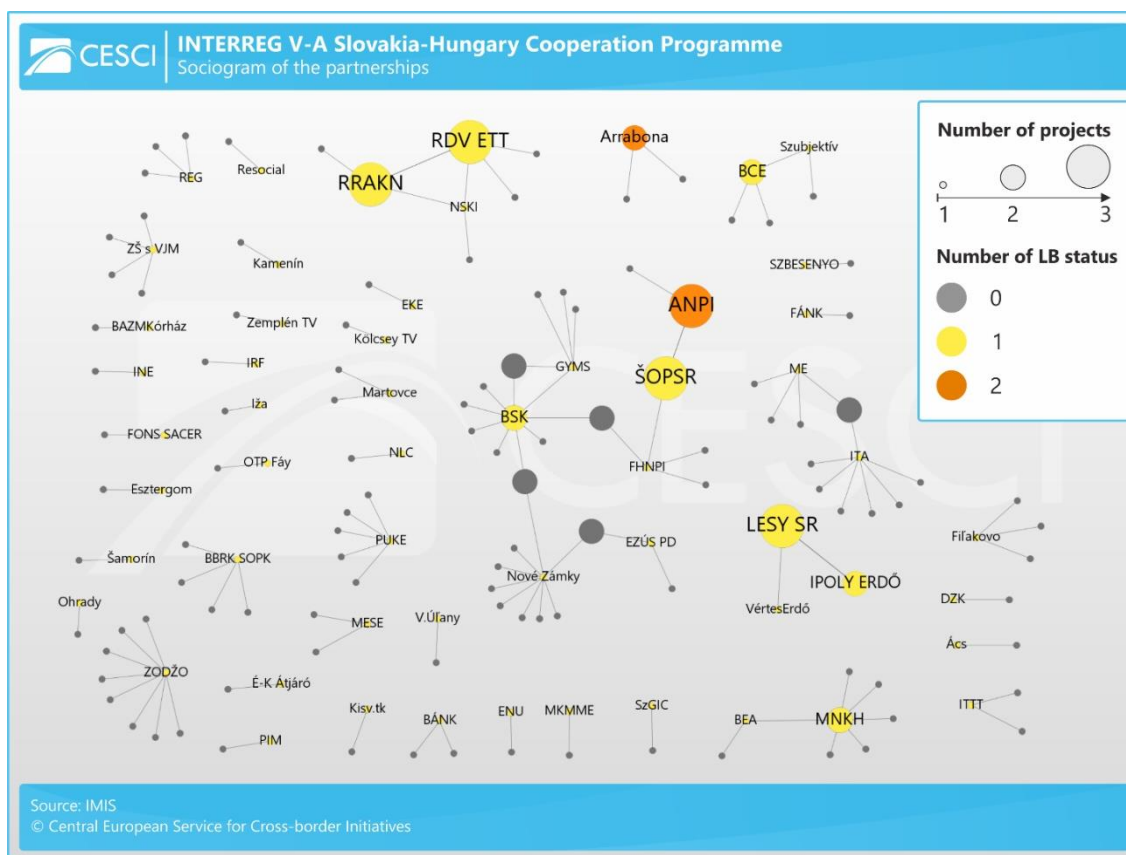
Table 22: Summarizing table of the legal status

Legal status	Hungarian	Slovakian	Total
Private	25	39	64
Public	62	59	121
Total	87	98	185

By drawing a sociogram a comprehensive image can be gained on the complexity of the partnerships. The figure below shows that only few beneficiaries participate in more than one project. As it can be seen, most of the partnerships are made up by only two project beneficiaries, but there is also a considerable number of partnerships with three partners. Extended partnership (with over 8 involved partners) were only established in a few cases. The BUILCOGREEN is the only project where there is only one beneficiary. There are only two beneficiaries (Aggteleki Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság, Arrabona EGTC) who implement two projects as lead beneficiary.

The guiding force for establishing partnerships is typically thematic (for example nature protection) or territorial. A chain of partnerships can only be observed in a few cases which can mean that the majority of the beneficiaries exclusively focus on their own project, but it can also mean that in the cross-border region only a limited number of organisations has access to an extended partnership network.

Figure 47: Sociogram of the partnerships



Reasons for selecting the partner (on-line questionnaire)

The first aspect to be assessed is what the respondents consider to be the reason for selecting the given partner. The respondents were asked to answer this question in relation to each partner they are working with which meant that 101 (for the first partner: 52, for the second partner: 26, for the third partner: 13 and for the fourth partner: 10) answers had been collected and interpreted. According to these answers four distinct reasons are identified as playing an important role in the selection of the project partners, these being:

- 1) Previous good experiences;
- 2) Compatibility of their vision;
- 3) Geographical location and
- 4) Personal connections.

The majority of the respondents assessed that their partnership with the given partner has a **longer pre-history** what could be a good basis for future cooperation. They consider these experiences good enough to continue the work together. Answers of this kind were the most frequent: *'for a long time, the two villages have had a cultural relationship with each other.'* There was also a good proportion of respondents who claimed that they based their decision on the previous relationships such as twin cities and twin municipalities.

The second type of answer is attributing the basis of partnership to the **compatibility of their vision and plans**. If the two stakeholders have shared interests and ideas on how to pursue them that should mean a solid basis for cooperation. For instance, one respondent explained that their partner *'had cooperation initiatives and project proposals fitting our territorial action plan for employment'*. Another simply stated that *'we have common interests, common goals'*. In yet another case a combination of this and the previous point resulted in the establishment of partnership: *'The partner was chosen on the basis of previous successful cooperation and also the main reason for selecting this Hungarian partner was many years of experience of this partner with the operation of forestry visitor centres for the purposes of spreading forest education.'*

The third most important reason was the **geographical location**, it completely makes sense that for certain types of development it is essential that the partners are from relevant, affected geographical areas which are preferably not too far from each other. Most respondents who referred to this aspect did not feel the need to elaborate, they just said *'geographical location'*, but one respondent explained aptly why this is an important point of consideration: *'Well qualified folklore teams on both sides can achieve great goals especially if these goals are for preserving our common heritages. These partners are working for this every day in their home country. Thanks for this project, they can work together, they share common ideas, they are not so far from each other, the territory where they are researching (in a meaning of geographical and theoretical) is also common.'*

The fourth type of answer's validity is to some degree more problematic since they attribute the basis for cooperation to **personal connections**. On the one hand, this can show that in the region there is a high level of cooperation on the level of the individuals which is advantageous like in this case where they are able to help each other based on their previous good experiences: *'For both of us is a challenge to develop and improve ideas which bring new opportunities and create possibilities at the market. We are encouraged for creating applications and new ways of making things better. We have known each other (personally) for years and we cooperated together in projects related to education, social care, sport movement and ecology.'* But on the other hand, it can cause also problems if it leads to biases; if the selection is made on the basis of friendships and not professional reasons that can jeopardize the overall efficiency and success of the project.

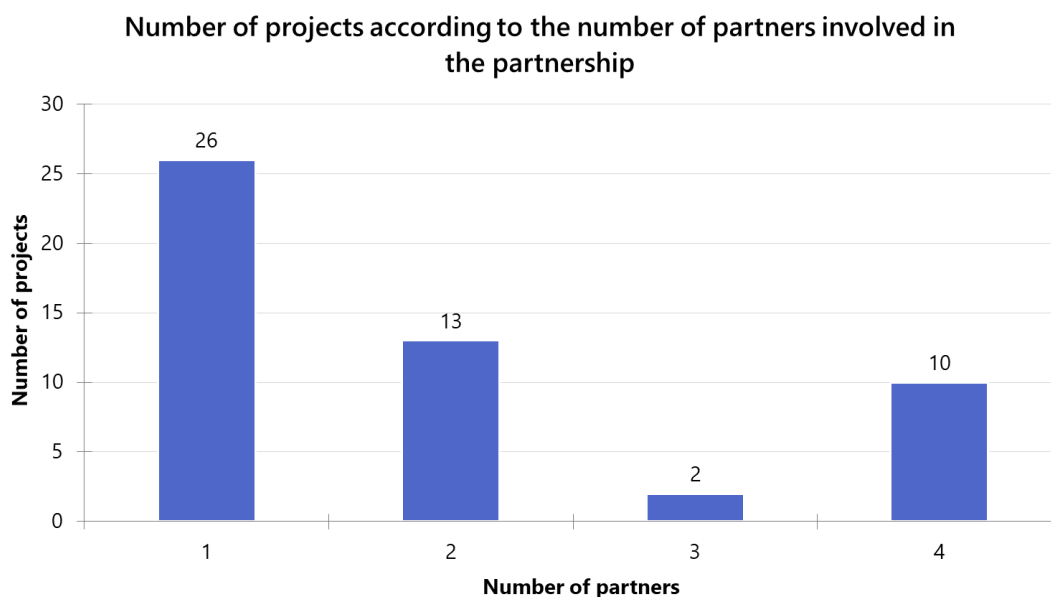
Historic background (on-line questionnaire)

In order to assess the sustainability of the partnerships, it is important to know how old is the partnership with the given beneficiary which was the next question posed to the respondents. Even though the results might be to some degree biased as the respondents might not regard the on-line questionnaire an official document thus might have taken less care in providing absolutely exact data, it is a reasonable expectation that they know fairly well the answer to this question. Consequently, the results can be informative on the general trends of the length of the partnerships²⁸.

²⁸ Partnership means a unique link or relationship between 2 entities.

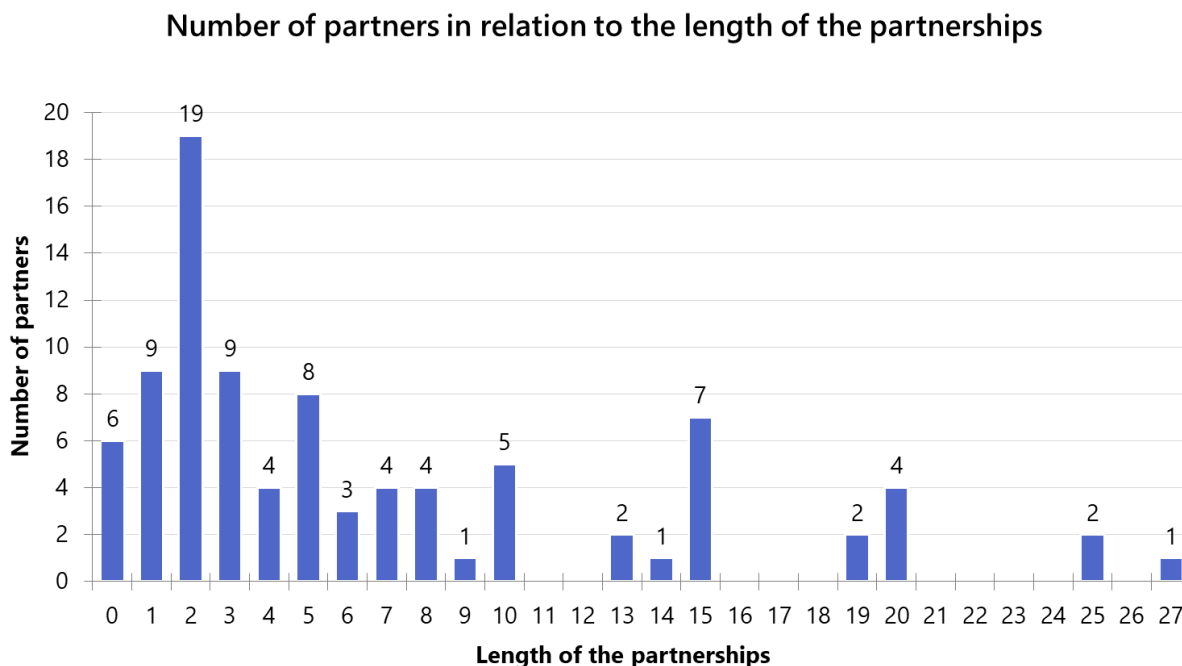
First of all, the number of projects according to the number of partnerships had been counted and represented on the diagram below. According to the data provided by the beneficiaries, 51% of the projects contained only one additional partner and 25% of the projects had two partners. The maximum number of partners is four and proportionately the least number of projects have 3 partners. This data refers to those beneficiaries who filled out the on-line questionnaire thus cannot be considered as representative.

Figure 48: Number of projects according to the number of partners involved in the partnership



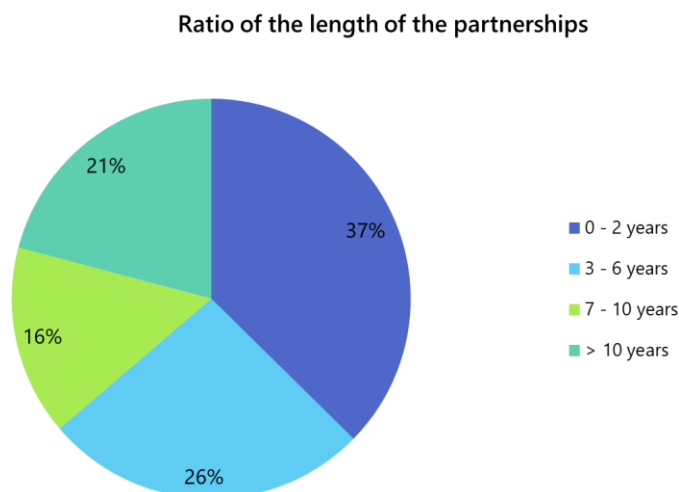
Moreover, the number of partners had been also assessed in relation to the length of the partnerships. As it is visible from the diagram below, by far the most frequently reported length of partnership is of 2 years, a total of 19 partnerships fall into this category.

Figure 49: Number of partners in relation to the length of the partnerships



The majority (63%) of the partnerships are younger than 6 years. As it can be seen from the diagram below, 37% is 0-2 years old, 26% is 3-6 years old and 17% is 7-10 years old. Those partnerships that are reported to be functional for more than 10 years represent the 20% of the total partnerships assessed, what is a remarkable permanency in cooperation.

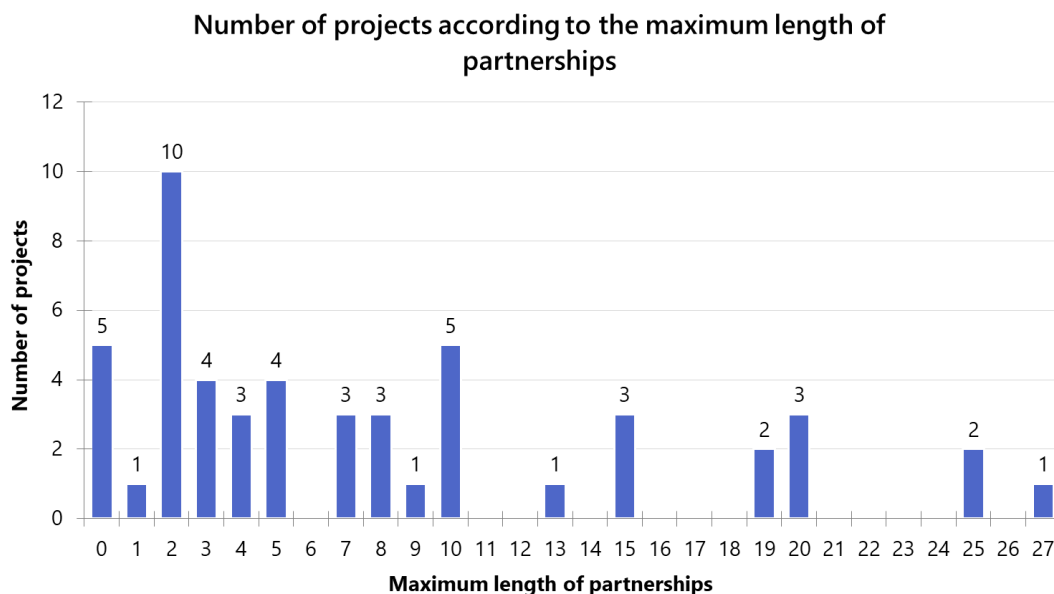
Figure 50: Ratio of the length of the partnerships



Finally, it also can be informative to analyse the maximal length of partnership within a given project. Since most of the projects have more than one partners, for each project the most permanent partnership had been selected and assessed in order to see how the trends are affected if – in this way – the totally new partnerships and the less permanent partnerships are eliminated. As it is clear from the diagram below, even though the distribution of the project

lengths are more even, no real change is visible, meaning that the trend-setter are not the oldest, lengthiest partnerships.

Figure 51: Number of projects according to the maximum length of partnerships



In the pursuit of assessing the sustainability of the project partnerships and to shed light on the history of their previous cooperation, the beneficiaries had been asked to give examples of previous joint projects of project proposals. Out of the 91 answers received, 36 expressed that they had not had any joint project or project proposal before. The rest, however, gave examples of a wide range that is collected in the table below, published in an unchanged way:

Table 23: Examples of previous joint projects or project proposals together with the beneficiary

Project plans for tourism and economic development.
Climate Park - HUSK/1101/2.2.1/0158
Joint projects were implemented within the Neogradiens Euroregion including more settlements.
Informal cooperation.
cultural and social events in both town and the region, regional sport competitions, trips for children...
joint cultural tenders
We cooperated in cultural, heritage saver, social care, sport and ecological projects.
Visegrad Fund
HUSK/1001/2.1.2/0009 Floodlog
Villages of Örös Tohether, Villages od Örös Tohether Again (Bethlen Gábor Fund)
Europe for Citizens - Alea iacta est, HUSK CBC 2007-2013 - Discovering nature
Open gates, open hands
CROSS3D Project, HUSKROUA ENPI-CBC Programme
Ipolydamasd-Chlaba, Vámosmikola - Ipolypásztó

Project plans for tourism and economic development.
Every year we have joint projects but this is our first joint cross-border project.
CULTPLAY, WORKMARKET (HU-SK 2013-2017) INSIGHTS (Interreg Danube), SWARE (Interreg Europe), ETT projects
TransHUSK, Transhusk Plus
A joint EU project has not been implemented until the submission of the application.
Novohrad - Nógrád UNESCO Global Geopark, Palóc Út Klaszter Egyesület
Nat-Net Duna/Dunaj
2 common national projects with the goal of experience exchange and taking part on a football tournament organized for therapeutic communities in Italy.
We have realised 2 joint projects already. "Értékteremtő módszerek határok nélkül" (project code: IFJ-GY-13-D) in 2014 and "Értékteremtő közösségek" (project code: IFJ-GY-15-B-24346) in 2016. In both projects we have changed experience and organized common cultural and sport events with the goal of drug prevention and resocialisation.
SK-HU FOR FORESTS
HU-SK CBC programme 2007-2013: HU-SK PARK code: HUSK/1101/2.2.1/0355,
HU-SK CBC programme 2007-2013: HU-SK FOR WILDLIFE, code: HUSK/1101/2.2.1/0352
HU-SK CBC programme 2007-2013: HUSK/1001/1.1.2/0022
As Vértess Erdő Zrt. this is our first cooperative project.
HUSK 0801/029 Opened gates, opened arms in Gemer and Kishont
Europe for citizens 2014-2020, Town twinning - Project was called TOGETHER WE ARE EU, realized in May 2018
Project plans for tourism and economic development.
external help in project Climate Park HUSK
In project preparation, Arrabona have cooperated with the city of Győr previously.
Cycle tracks without borders - 1. phase of construction
Floodlog
European Charter for Sustainable tourism
InnoService
We are together, we will be together, we have to cooperate HU-SK 09/01 / 1.1.2 / 0122
Donauregionen, Donauregionen+, others
We have managed together a HUSK project together. We have also submitted Erasmus+ project together,
Educational and cultural events were organized jointly by our organization and participated in the center of our region, Kisvárdai City and Kráľovský Chlmec township projects.
Novohrad - Nógrád UNESCO Global Geopark
Nat-Net Duna/Dunaj
HUSK/0801/1.3.1/0071 - Palóc Route joint conceptual route - complex, visitor-focused development

Project plans for tourism and economic development.
In the past two years we have been working together with Corvinus University on a research of volunteering at Sziget Festival.
Examples of previous joint projects or project proposals together with the beneficiary.
Cycle tracks without borders - 1. phase of construction
Floodlog
InnoService
Work at home HUSK / 1101 / 1.6.2 / 00018
Novohrad - Nógrád UNESCO Global Geopark, Euroregion Neogradensis
Nat-Net Duna/Dunaj
Hernád-bridge project (Abaújvár-Kechnec). Project plans for tourism and economic development.
Cycle tracks without borders - studies and plans
Floodlog
Let us clean Danube, Europe!, For the cleaner Europe, Danube!

Similarly, the respondents were asked to give examples of the joint events that they had held with their partners. Out of the 103 received responses, 41 said they did not have any or the question was not relevant for them. The rest of 62 answers displayed a wide range of joint events such as conferences, workshops, preparatory discussions, cultural activities, press conferences etc. The table below shows these events in details.

Table 24: Examples of joint events held with the beneficiary

Discussions for preparatory projects several times.
regional development
Conferences, workshops
excursion, musem visits
Cultural activities as Wine festival, village days, training camps for sportsmen,...
project meeting
Ohrady attends the municipal events organized by Erdőkürt and vice versa
There were already project related events held with the beneficiary. The opening conference and all the project related events were held together.
cultural and social events in both town and the region, regional sport competitions, trips for children...
culural events
At the educational field we realised a training for "fresh" school leavers to bring them up at practical field in retail business. Our social programme cares on adults who are close to pension age to prepare them for new social status - how to become satified retiree at the modern age. Intercultural project were realised throughout visiting places of our cultural heritage at both side of Danube (Visegrád -

Discussions for preparatory projects several times.
Esztergom - Párkány, Komárno - Komárom and its fortress system, in Gemer, Malohont region as well as in Sopron county and Burgenland. We organised an amateur strong man competition with an exhibition show to popularize sport activities between adults and children and to prevent civilisation diseases.
Dobó days at Ruszkán, participation in Dobó commemorations
Visegrad Fund events (startup program)
Floodlog Closing conference 25/03/2014
cultural events, town twinning events
Europe for Citizens - Alea iacta est
Joint cultural and sport events, joint cross-border events
CROSS3D Project partners meeting, InnoService 3. partners meeting és 2. tematikus workshopok
business missions, B2B meetings, educational activities, and so on.
Events in the framework of projects
Opening conferences of INSIGHTS, workshops of INSIGHTS and SWARE, thematic working groups of the Pons Danubii EGTC etc.
Workshops, Conferences
We organized a joint cultural event where the local cultural associations were guest stars.
press conference, cultural events, turism events
Joint conferences, sport- cultural and public events.
Joint press events.Organisation of joint environmental education initiatives involving students from Szigetköz and Žitný ostrov, including the organisation of workshops for disabled persons from both sides of the border.
The partners organised two preparaty meetings and were in contact by electronic means and telephone. The joint development resulted in defining the specific and global objectives of the project.
Community development training in 2016.
2 workshops for the experts of the both organizations, experience exchange and common therapies for the clients, football tournaments in Hungary.
Beside the above mentioned events we took part in the therapeutical football tournament "La testa nel pallone" in Italy in 2016 and Winter Classics Futsal Tournament for therapeutic communities in Hungary in 2017.
Opening press conference in Levice
Opening and closing conferences within all three joint projects, Conference - Historical parks and their restoration in the territory of Hungary and Slovakia,
Opening press conference in Topolčianky
The aim of the project was to strengthen common roots with joint cultural, sport and art events and to encourage new cooperation between cultural institutions and local communities in Tisovec and Putnok.
The city of Levice and the city of Érde are long-established partner cities, meeting annually on various

Discussions for preparatory projects several times.
joint events, celebrations, meetings. Good relationships have been built between school pupils, seniors and self-government representatives
Discussions for preparatory projects several times.
presentation of village - wooden church of UNESCO
Connected to the project there were already events held together.
conferences, seminars
Floodlog Closing conference
2. partner event and 1. thematic workshop (InnoService)
business missions, B2B meetings, educational activities, and so on.
Meetings, Conferences, projects
We had previous joint project event in the project implementation.
press conference, work-shop, thematic conference, developed documents
Joint press events. Elaboration of the Environmental Study and the Management Plan of the Nature Park based on several workshops aiming at the involvement of all local stakeholders.
environmental events in DROPIE centre
Project meetings in 2010.
Corvinus University also took part in the joint planning workshop with TANDEM. Similarly, the our experience was positive with them, and gave basis for our mutually successful collaboration.
Discussions for preparatory projects several times.
conferences, seminars
Floodlog Closing Conference
4. partner event and 3. thematic workshop InnoService
business missions, B2B meetings, educational activities, and so on.
press conference, thematic conference, educational and cultural events, cultural and natural heritage development
Joint press events. Development of a Geocaching Greenway by placing 20 new geocaching spots and creating a geocaching app including 15 geocaching routes on foot, by bike and by canoe.
Discussions for preparatory projects several times.
conferences, seminars
Floodlog Closing conference
business missions, B2B meetings, educational activities, and so on.
Joint press events. Developing Eco-Mobility.
cleaning of the regions, tourist actions

Future prospects (on-line questionnaire)

When asked about the future prospects with the given partners, the beneficiaries did not display a high level of creativity. The answers were mostly along the lines of expressing their desire and commitment to continue the given partnership along the lines of: *‘to continue the common activities, the joint projects implementation for the region development’*.

Others are envisaging the enlargement of the scope of their cooperation: *‘We hope that the cooperation will go on after the end of the current project and we will work on other ones together. We know much more from each others’ abilities, expectations, plans, experience, facilities so it gives the chance to propose further projects.’*

A smaller number of respondents proved that they have already actively thought about joint prospects as they were able to specify exactly what they would like to work on together in the future. For example: *‘Common efforts in strengthening the Hatvan-Lucenec economic axis through the implementation of a 4-year Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE), and generating new projects for the 2021-2028 period’* or *‘The common objective is to utilise the cultural traditions and natural values of the border region, to develop and connect new and current attractions and thematic routes, to create sustainable and family friendly tourism product sets, and the organisation necessary to manage the „Palócföld - Hont - Podpol’anie – Cultural Heritage Thematic Route’*.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked about how they plan to guarantee the sustainability of the partnership after the completion of the project. Here the most frequent answer was that the project’s motivation is the guarantee of the sustainability of the partnership; since the partners have joined their resources in order to attain a goal that is important for them for a number of reasons, they will not cease to be interested in the issue after the conclusion of the project. For instance one project beneficiary explained this argument aptly: *‘The Aba-Greenway is more than just a road. It showcases the local natural and cultural values, attracts visitors, facilitates tourism and the use of local services, and due to its ecological perspective, it fundamentally promotes responsibility for each other, our environment and our future - on both sides of the border. All partners are interested in maintaining the greenway, thus ensuring long-term cooperation.’*

Others have pointed out that their shared history – presented above – makes it very likely that the cooperation will survive the closure of the project. One respondent simply claimed that *‘Our past is the guarantee for the future. We have got a good cooperation for 10 years so with big certainty we continue in this way.’* This opinion is nicely completed by the input of another beneficiary who said that *‘the established human and cultural ties between the settlements continue to exist’* guaranteeing the necessary sustainability of the partnership.

As about the exact way how they plan to maintain these connections, some said that through sharing news and circulating relevant information among each other would result in a strong and lively network that has a value and resiliency in itself, independent from the project and its time restrictions. Others committed themselves to continue to organize a wide variety of events, meetings, festivals in order to facilitate the process of nurturing these personal and professional

relationships that are necessary for keeping the partnerships functional in the present and in the future too.

In conclusion, the analysis of the sustainability of the project partnerships showed an overall optimistic image. This is due to the fact that the partnerships are typically not formed on an ad-hoc basis but on previous positive shared experiences, compatibility of the partners' vision and expertise, geographical closeness as well as similar future prospects. Furthermore, the composition of the partnerships showed an overrepresentation of the public institutions, while partnerships made up by only two or three partners are significantly more numerous than those with an extended partnership network (with 8 or more involved partners).

M 5.3 Assessment of the integrated approach

Integrated approach is assessed considering the obligations of Regulation No 1303/2013 and Regulation No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council.²⁹ The analysis is based partly on the programme documents where the tools are designed and the calls where the tools are implemented (technical description); partly on the information gathered from the programme management (interviews) and the lead beneficiaries (on-line survey). The assessment focuses on the impact of the designated tool on territorial integrated approach. First the integrated approach in the given cooperation programme then the main findings are discussed.

Integrated approach in the cooperation programme

Integrated approach to territorial development

In the cooperation programme document pages 78-80 are dedicated to the integrated approach under Section 4 called integrated approach to territorial development. This three pages long section mostly **deals with the vertical and the horizontal integration of projects furthermore with the contribution of planned interventions towards macro-regional and sea basin strategies**. According to the decisions made by the Task Force tools of **community-led local development (CLLD) and integrated territorial investment (ITI) defined by the CPR are not applied**.

According to the CP, integrated territorial approach was planned to apply in two ways:

²⁹ REGULATION (EU) No 1303/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006; REGULATION (EU) No 1299/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal

1. **Vertical integration of projects:** vertically integrated projects are focussing on a particular, mainly sectorial problem (e.g. in rust belts the utilization of real estate left off can be managed in an integrated way with a focus on new jobs; the integrated management of natural resources can be resolved by following a territorial strategy etc.). Vertical integration of projects means the use of synergies between projects under one common PA. In case of PA3, action plans unites different activities of different stakeholders in a border region with a view to creating new jobs and decreasing unemployment rate. Similarly, under PA1, projects suitable to existing territorial strategies approved on either side of the border and small projects deserving the fulfilment of the objectives of larger projects of PA1 can be awarded by additional scores during the evaluation. In each case when cross-border road or bridge construction is needed for the fulfilment of tourist, environment protecting or employment aims justification of that need should be provided with through the use of integrated approach. In these cases matching of the construction works the investments realized within the framework of national OPs can be approved.
2. **Horizontal integration of projects:** horizontal integration means the use of cross-cutting approach. In this way a higher level of concentration of resources and a stronger impact can be achieved. E.g. projects improving the tourist infrastructure under the PA1 and those increasing the employment level in tourist sector under PA3 can mutually strengthen each other. Similarly, institutional cooperation under PA4 can contribute to the accessibility of urban functions within PA3; SPF projects of PA1 (small infrastructure developments) and those of PA4 (series of actions or events) can complement each other. The main aim of horizontal integration is to guarantee sustainability and synergies between different actions.

PA 3 Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility

The most clear signs of integrated approach can be found in the programme document in the frames of Priority Axis 3, investment priority aiming at integrating cross-border labour markets, including cross-border mobility, joint local employment initiatives, information and advisory services and joint training (8e), under specific objective *Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region* (SO31). According to the programme 10 (integrated territorial) action plans are planned as target value of 2023.

As a result of the **integrated projects implemented** within the framework of the PA, the employment level of the less developed regions of the programming area is expected to grow. The conditions of cross-border commuting and the accessibility to employment will be improved.

Types and examples of actions to be supported

All the actions shall be implemented as part of an **integrated territorial action plan**. Action plan means the implementation documentation of projects for a midterm period. In the action plan, the relation of the planned activities with existing strategies should be described.

Eligible actions which can be implemented within the framework of a project are the followings:

1. targeted actions strengthening employment by the development of products and services based on local potential (e.g. development of local product markets; revitalising rust belts and declining industrial zones by ensuring new ways of utilisation; improving the conditions of tourism; improving the access to urban functions; development of social economy mainly in the regions with high level of poverty and habited by Roma people etc.);
2. initiatives and services aimed at improving cross-border labour mobility;
3. infrastructural investments contributing to modernization, structural transformation and sustainable development of specific areas and resulting in measurable improvement in terms of labour mobility (in case of activities related to road constructions passive noise reduction (noise barriers, protecting trees) solutions included);
4. launching and implementation of joint integrated cross-border employment initiatives:
 - joint employment initiatives (including facilitating the employment of persons leaving the labour market),
 - labour market cooperation initiatives,
 - innovative employment projects (with emphasis on the employability of Roma people);
5. establishment of business services promoting employment and the creation of infrastructural conditions thereof:
 - background services promoting employment, such as databases, consultancy services, websites, etc.,
 - development of new business services, cross-border co-operation of business support structures, o initiatives facilitating the cross-border spread of business information,
 - development of IT systems, networks to support employment;
6. joint education and training programmes:
 - exploration and preparation of training needs, with the aim of determining the training directions necessary for the labour market (and with a view on life-long-learning actions and green jobs),
 - awareness raising among employers (business associations, enterprises, in particular SMEs) in the area of preventing and combating discrimination
 - common use of expert and consultancy services:
 - legal counselling for people experiencing discrimination in the labour market
 - monitoring and fighting against discrimination on the labour market,

- incentives for employers;
- 7. setting up and operation of a supportive management function for the term of the implementation of the action plan, for fulfilling the tasks of the common management, coordination of the projects, outreach the disadvantaged groups, preparation and update of the action plans, elaboration of reports and perform communication activities.

Actions from No.3-7. alone are not eligible, only as additional supportive actions completing the activities No.1-2. Clear connection between the supportive actions and major actions should be presented. Direct or indirect contribution of the planned actions to the creation of employment possibilities should be presented.

Guiding principles for the selection of operations

All the actions shall be implemented as part of a territorial action plan. The integrated territorial action plans **must contain actions addressing the full thematic scope of the specific objective**, and reflecting to the requirements of specific territories, sectors or functions, present strategic approach.

Operations will be selected through open calls for proposals in two-round selection procedure. In the first round, the proposals contain the action plan, without the detailed description of the projects. An action plan should provide **detailed justification on the contribution of the actions to the specific objective of the priority axes**. Beside others, the following elements should be sufficiently developed to form a **basis for evaluation criteria in the first round with regard to the integrated approach**:

- content of interlinked actions
- cross-border impact
- reference and link to other major investments (within the frame or beyond the Cooperation Programme)
- The projects are expected to be integrated; within the framework of an action plan 3-8 projects should be implemented. One of the projects should cover the activities related to coordination among different projects
- All operations must have a clear cross-border aspect

Territorial Action Plans for Employment – in implementation

Integrated approach in the programme can be clearly detected in the following calls for proposals, both connected to the Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE) introduced in the programme document:

- Call for proposals in the frame of the INTERREG V-A SLOVAKIA-HUNGARY COOPERATION PROGRAMME Reference number: SKHU/1703 Date of publishing: 08/09/2017
<http://www.skhu.eu/upload/58e60d30430b1/59b281cce85a0/59b28208872cd.pdf>

- Call for Proposals in the frame of the INTERREG V-A SLOVAKIA-HUNGARY COOPERATION PROGRAMME Reference number: SKHU/1802 RESTRICTED CALL
<http://www.skhu.eu/upload/58e60d30430b1/5b6d588a8cf8c/5b6d58b7670a9.pdf>

First Call

The first call was open from 8th of September until 30th of November 2017. The complexity of the specific objective determined **comprehensive development plans which induce integrated projects** including infrastructural elements and soft activities. Since expected results required **complex interventions**, applicants – as a first step – were invited to create complex development plans called Territorial action plan for employment (TAPE).

The aim of the action plan was to

- thoroughly analyse the target area and identify the change needed on,
- match territorial needs with the eligible actions of the PA,
- set adequate objectives, clarify the target groups and the expected results,
- define appropriate steps for the implementation, accompanied with necessary inputs and
- identify the outputs that will be used by the relevant target groups.

The target area of the TAPE had to be geographically continuous and had to include territories of both member states. According to the call, applicant had to propose **interrelated group of projects** with an overall view to create new jobs and enhancing cross-border labour mobility. Each TAPE had to contain minimum three and maximum eight **project proposals that are in synergic or complementary relation**. Project proposals which had no remarkable synergic or complementary relationship with other projects within the TAPE or which are not indispensable part of the TAPE were not be supported.

Each TAPE had to include at least one project proposal [the so-called ‘Key action project’] that was supposed to be developed in line with one of the following key actions:

1) Development of local products and services creating new working places:

- development of local products and services built on endogenous potentials;
- improvement of public services on the field of education, health and social services providing better access to urban functions.

2) Improving cross-border labour mobility:

- construction of cross-border roads, bridges and infrastructure for ferries;
- development transport services supporting labour mobility;
- development of accommodation facilities for commuting workers (e.g. hostels).

The TAPE could also include projects that are developed in line with supplementary actions [so-called ‘Supplementary projects’]. Supplementary projects shall ensure or exceed the

effectiveness of key action projects. TAPE could include projects reflecting on the following supplementary actions:

1. Modernization and structural transformation of specific areas: in the frame of the action 'renovation and modernization of specific areas contributing to structural transformation ensuring new ways of utilisation and sustainable development' were supported.
2. Launching integrated cross-border employment initiatives:
 - a. concluding cross-border employment pacts;
 - b. facilitating employment of permanently unemployed persons;
 - c. harmonization of labour demand and supply;
 - d. promoting cross-border employment possibilities and labour-market cooperation initiatives;
 - e. implementing of innovative employment projects;
3. Business services promoting employment:
 - a. providing background employment services reducing administrative burdens;
 - b. initiatives facilitating cross-border spread of business information;
 - c. development of joint IT systems, networks to support cross-border employment;
4. Joint education and training programmes:
 - a. exploration and preparation of training needs, with the aim of determining the training directions necessary for the labour market;
 - b. awareness raising among employers (business associations, enterprises, in particular SMEs) in the area of preventing and combating discrimination;
 - c. common use of expert and consultancy services:
 - i. legal counselling for people experiencing discrimination in the labour market,
 - ii. monitoring and fighting against discrimination on the labour market,
 - iii. incentives for employers.

Considering project development, the TAPE is realized through interrelated group of projects. The TAPE must contain the so-called '**Coordination and communication project**' and at least one Key action project is mandatory.

Considering partnership requirements, **the TAPE required broad partnership of local actors from many sectors coming from both member states**. Eligible type of institutions include local, county or regional municipalities, non-governmental organisations, European groupings of territorial cooperation (EGTC), private institutions serving public interests, local action groups (LAG), social partnerships, development agencies, social enterprises, public institutions, state owned companies, universities and colleges, small and medium sized enterprises, chambers. The consortium can include maximum 24 beneficiaries and 8 associated partners. Each Consortium has to include minimum one enterprise as Beneficiary of a specific project proposal.

Second Call

The Territorial action plans for employment had to be submitted for the Call for proposals SKHU-1703. The list of the successful applications was approved by the Monitoring Committee on 26th April 2018 in its meeting held in Bratislava as it follows:

Table 25: Approved Territorial Action Plans for Employment

Project ID	Acronym	Lead Beneficiary	Approved ERDF funding (EUR)
SKHU/1703/3.1/080	ORG-EMP	Ipoly-Táj Területfejlesztési Társulás	5 419 073.93
SKHU/1703/3.1/010	RE-START	PONTIBUS European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Limited Liability	4 148 889.64
SKHU/1703/3.1/160	JOBS	Regionálna rozvojová agentúra pre rozvoj regiónu Stredného Poiplia	3 828 767.38
SKHU/1703/3.1/070	IG Heritage	Ister-Granum Korlátolt Felelősségű Területi Együttműködési Csoportosulás	2 758 541.40
SKHU/1703/3.1/040	FUTURE IN HEMP	Nemzetstratégiai Kutatóintézet	5 855 340.75
SKHU/1703/3.1/150	Cserehát AP	Európske zoskupenie územnej spolupráce Via Carpatia s ručením obmedzeným	3 546 610.62
SKHU/1703/3.1/050	Novum Danuvium	Pons Danubii Európai Területi Együttműködési Csoportosulás	2 504 968.96
SKHU/1703/3.1/090	R2 and M3	Nógrádi Fejlesztési Ügynökség Nonprofit Kft.	4 373 585.90
SKHU/1703/3.1/110	Food industry	Rába-Duna-Vág Európai Területi Társulás	2 172 301.41

The second round of the selection procedure started with the second Call for proposals on 8th August 2018. The submission deadline of the call is 12th November 2018. This Call is restricted only to projects that were incorporated into an approved action plan. The ERDF financial allocation for the Call is 34 608 080 EUR.

Main findings of the integrated approach

Based on the programme documents, the calls of TAPE, furthermore interviews and experience of applicants the main findings can be summarised as follows:

- To make real impacts it would be suggested making potential beneficiaries more prepared to better understand the logic of integrated developments (e.g. by consultations, workshops);
- To reach higher territorial impact the involvement of stakeholders from various spheres and sectors, the heterogeneity of involved eligible institutions is one of the most important aspects – from this point of view the solutions of SME call and Small Project Fund (outside of the TAPE tool) are indirectly strengthen the general integrated manner of the programme;

- When it comes to integrated approach synergies between projects are crucial in successful application and implementation;
- Integrated approach should be based on bottom-up initiatives harnessing the territorial capital of the given area, thus territorially coordinated project activities are welcomed;
- At the same time, the TAPes should be better aligned with further territorial initiatives implemented within the framework of main stream or national programmes;
- There might be complications and frictions due to the involvement of SMEs especially during the implementation phase when the non-realisation of one of their projects jeopardizes the realisation of the other and because of the lower interest in public good;
- Integrated approach has gained significant attention in the form of TAPes thus awareness of potential beneficiaries connected to such methodology has been raised – this could result in even better applications and thus better planned results and impacts;
- Communication regarding TAPE should be consequent and the initial call, rules and procedures should not be altered later to avoid threats to successful projects;
- It is of outstanding importance to help applicants and PPs in creating long-term strategic partnerships in relation to the thematic focus of the given TAPE or other integrated investment;
- TAPE as an instrument would be worth considering to implement in PAs outside the Priority Axis 3 too (e.g. in the case of tourism-focused projects);
- Innovative tools similar to TAPE would help sustaining the project results, even after the closure of the given action plan (e.g. number of jobs created or increased production capacities);
- TAPE philosophy would be useful to create integrated strategic projects;
- The acceptance of TAPE has been positive among responsible management bodies of the programme.

The results of the TAPE tool cannot be seen yet since at the time of the evaluation, the second call was still open. However, the structure of the tool ensures a high and very advanced level of multidimensional integration. On the one hand, the TAPE is territorially based what means that it integrates different stakeholders representing the economic development of a given cross-border area. The fact that these territories are cross-border, strengthen further the integration perspective of the instrument. On the other hand, the TAPE involves stakeholders representing different corners of the quadruple helix, creating thus a cross-sectorial integration. Finally, the activities to be carried-out by the partners represent a colourful picture, from concrete investments in production through the development of business centres until marketing and training activities. Earlier, all these activities were funded by different calls and different programmes. If one of the activities could not receive funding, the impacts of the other supported projects were lower. By the TAPE, these uncertainties can be eliminated: the project activities supporting each other in a synergic way can be implemented in parallel.

All the above factors underline the value added by the new tool. At the same time, its success highly depends on the maturity of the partnerships, the preparedness of the beneficiaries and the professional support provided so far by the JS with a view to eliminating the high risks accompanying a such complicated model.

The main integrated tool in the programme is the TAPE, but the tools of SME call and Small Project Fund are also contributes to integration in an indirect way, mainly by the involvement of different actors to the cooperation.

Regardless of including horizontal integration of the CP, no examples are known yet on this type of integration.

3.3 Efficiency

Third pillar of the evaluation will be the analysis of efficiency of the programme. Efficiency is relevant factor in both terms of effectiveness and impact: it measures how, with what efficiency the human and financial capacities and resources have been utilised. Efficiency includes two major factors: the operational level of the programme management and the efficiency of the use of the financial sources.

3.3.1 Performance management

The aspect of performance management refers to the:

- institutional setup and capacities of the programme;
- the procedures applied;
- and the promotion of ownership.

These factors give an overall picture on how efficiently the programme is managed.

M 6.1 Institution assessment

In this chapter we will assess the institutional background of the programme (MC, NA, NCP/IP, JS): the system of tasks and responsibilities, the organisational structure. This assessment is a rather descriptive chapter in the evaluation.

Management structure

In the Cooperation Program the following authorities and bodies were determined:

Table 26: Authorities and bodies of the programme

Authority/body		Name of authority/body	This authority/body is responsible, among others for...
Managing Authority ³⁰	MA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade/ Budapest, Hungary Department for Cross-border Cooperation Programmes ³¹	... the successful and lawful implementation of the Programme. It represents the Programme towards the European Commission (EC), and reports to the EC about the progress of the Programme on a yearly basis. Although the MA bears overall responsibility for the Programme, certain horizontal tasks were delegated to the JS.
National Authority	NA	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic.	... performing relevant activities in Slovakia in order to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the programme.
Certifying Authority	CA	Hungarian State Treasury	... drawing up and submitting payment applications to the Commission, and transferring the contribution from the programme single bank account directly to the Lead Beneficiaries.
Audit Authority	AA	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds	... verifying the expenditures. The declared expenditure shall be audited based on a representative sample and, as a general rule, on statistical sampling methods.
Control Bodies (First Level Control)	FLC SK	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic	... controlling and validating the costs of the project partners emerging during the project implementation.
	FLC HU	Széchenyi Program Office NLLC	
Joint Secretariat	JS	Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit Llc.	... administrative and technical tasks regarding the implementation of the Programme. The JS is also contributing to the work of both the Managing and the National

³⁰ The Managing Authority's Certifying Authority's and Audit Authority's functions were officially transferred from Slovakia to Hungary by 16th of June, 2016.

³¹ In 2018 this department was transferred from the Prime Minister's Office to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Authority/body		Name of authority/body	This authority/body is responsible, among others for...
			Authority.
Info Points		Regional Info Point in Bratislava Regional Info Point in Nitra Regional Info Point in Košice	... providing information at regional level and supporting the Slovak beneficiaries.
Monitoring Committee	MC	<i>See the list of MC members at the end of the chapter</i>	... reviewing the implementation of the programme and progress towards achieving its objectives. It is also responsible for the selection of the projects financed by the cooperation programme.
Small Project Fund	SPF	Western programming area: Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC	... the overall implementation of the Umbrella Project including the activities of the Umbrella Projects Beneficiaries, the Monitoring Committees for SPF as well as the actors involved in the evaluation of the small project proposals.
		Eastern programming area: Via Carpatia EGTC	

The different authorities/bodies have their own procedure manuals.

Project cycle description

The cooperation programme is implemented through calls (CfP), subsequently, the selected beneficiaries implement projects. The main steps and the responsible subjects of this process within the programme are the following ones:

- Announcing the Call for Proposals (MA, with the support of the NA and the JS)
- Provision of information on the Programme and consultations (JS, NA and Info Points)
- Submission of project applications (Applicants submit their project proposals to the JS)
- Set up the general principles of projects assessment (Detailed rules and project selection criteria is approved by the MC)
- Formal and eligibility assessment (JS and Info Points)
- Quality assessment (The quality assessment is conducted by the JS and a team of experts specialized in particular themes and subjects)
- Assessment summary (JS) and decision on selection of projects (MC)
- Legal commitment of ERDF resources (The MA informs the applicants about the MC decisions and the JS prepares the ERDF Subsidy Contract. The ERDF Subsidy Contract is signed between the MA and the project's Lead Beneficiary.)
- Implementation of projects (Lead Beneficiary and partners)

- Monitoring and control (check) of projects (Beneficiaries, FLC, JS)
- Payments to beneficiaries (Payments of funds to beneficiaries are performed by the CA from the funds received from the EU budget)

List of MC members

Voting members of Hungary

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department for Cross-border Cooperation Programmes (MA)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department for Regional and Cross-Border Development
- Ministry of Innovation and Technology
- Ministry of Finance
- Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County
- Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County
- Heves County
- Nógrád County
- Pest County
- Komárom-Esztergom County
- Győr-Moson-Sopron County

Voting members of the Slovak Republic

- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic (NA)
- Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic
- Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic
- Košice county
- Banská Bystrica county
- Nitra county
- Trnava county
- Bratislava county

Non-voting members of Hungary (observers)

- Directorate General for Auditing European Funds (AA)
- Flora and Fauna of North-Hungary Foundation
- Equal Treatment Authority
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Prime Minister`s Office, State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, National Minorities and the Aid of Persecuted Christians
- Directorate General for Social Affairs and Child Protection

- Hungarian State Treasury (CA)

Non-voting members of the Slovak Republic (observers)

- Office of the Slovak Republic Deputy Prime Minister for Investment and Informatisation
- Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic (member of the Group of Auditors)
- Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic
- Association of Cities and Municipalities of the Slovak Republic
- Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- National Centre for Equal Opportunities

Other non-voting member (observer)

- European Commission

Observers with advisory capacity in ad hoc basis based upon request:

- Széchenyi Programme Office Non-profit Ltd.
- Budapest Danube Contact Point
- Beneficiary Light Scheme project holders
- Small Project Fund project holders
- National co-ordinators of Danube Strategy
- EGTCs (EGTCs are invited on rotation basis through one representative.)

The management structure and the programme implementation processes are well established. Regionality appears both in the way of information provision (regional Info Points) and in the involvement of regional actors in the management (regional MC members and observers; regional management of the Small Project Fund by two selected EGTCs) as well.

M 6.2 Capacity assessment

Within the framework of the chapter we are analysing one of the main factors of efficiency: the use and design of capacities. The capacity assessment has two dimensions: one is about the description of the available capacities and their needs in terms of skills, professional experiences and development; while the other focusses on the way of utilisation of these capacities.

The Managing Authority is operating within the framework of a separate department with 3 units in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Hungary. The mission has been taken from the Prime Minister's Office according to Gov. Decree 94/2018. (V.22.). 17 persons in total are employed at the department who are responsible for the management of 7 cooperation programmes. In general, the involvement of 5 more people would be necessary for legal, monitoring and evaluator positions.

Regarding the National Authority on the Slovak side 3 departments of the Ministry of Agriculture are dedicated to the CBC programmes where Slovakia is involved:

- 1)** Department responsible for the implementation and management of the programmes with 3 employees dedicated to SKHU programme (director and 2 programme managers);
- 2)** Department for CBC control: 5 FLC controllers in charge of SKHU programme (approx. 24 controllers are employed by CBC programmes);
- 3)** Department of methodology and coordination.

The persons involved in CBC programme implementation should have multi-dimensional, complex skills: English is a base-line, Hungarian /Slovak is an advantage; further skills needed: ability to see in perspective; to understand the project cycle; to be committed to CBC and responsible by mentality. By qualification: geography, politics, public administration; economics are the best ones. To sum up, the complexity of the jobs at the authority is similar to that of business sphere positions.

Skilled persons are available in the capital region but the jobs in the ministry are not financially attractive compared to business sphere jobs. In addition, the CBC programmes and its job opportunities are not known by the wide public regardless of that the vacant positions are published.

The TA budget limits the number of people to hire. Taking into account the capacity needs, the National Authority has appropriate staff both by number and qualification.

At the Joint Secretariat in Budapest 9 people are employed, but out of them 4 are on maternity leave and only two of them are substituted. The positions in the JS are the followings: head and deputy head of Joint Secretariat, programme manager, programme manager with financial tasks, programme and communication manager. Although, well-experienced people work at the JS who are able to perform the actual tasks, the substitution of the remaining two maternity leaves shall be beneficial taking into consideration the increased number of projects from future calls.

The work of the Joint Secretariat is supported by regional Infopoints in Bratislava, Nitra and Košice with 1 staff member by each. The Small Project Fund within the framework of PA1 and PA4 is managed by two regional EGTCs on the western and eastern border section, but experiences on the management side cannot be established yet.

In general, staff members of the JS must have knowledge and experience with project management and regional development; they must speak English and (at least) one of the programme languages and should be dynamic, have good communication skills and understand the cross-border context. In terms of experiences, the head must have at least 5 years, while the others 2 years in the relevant field.

The Hungarian FLC is organized in a way that the employees' capacities are divided between the different programmes (for instance they allocate their time evenly between the HU-SK, HU-HR and other programmes). This system renders the whole structure quite flexible as they can move

more freely between the programmes if certain circumstances require that. In Hungary the following three SZPI offices are operating: Budapest FLC, Mátészalka FLC and Sopron FLC.

The Slovak FLC team is exclusively dedicated to the Slovakia-Hungary INTERREG V-A programme. It means that sometimes their capacities are not used at all (e.g. at the beginning of the programme when the projects have not started yet), other time, they are overloaded.

The Slovak FLC cannot be outsourced because of the System of Financial Management which is mandatory for each of the Slovak programmes. In addition, there are no skilled Slovak companies which could take over the responsibility of FLC and the Ministry of Finance always performs very strict controls. By allowing outsourcing and implementing sample-based controls (subject to available capacities on the market), the work load of the staff could be better balanced.

In summary, in this chapter the main factors of efficiency were analyzed. It was found that while the complexity of the jobs is similar to that of business sphere positions, their financial remuneration is not comparable to the competitive sphere. In terms of human capacity needs, it seems that the National Authority has appropriate staff both by number and qualification, whereas at the Joint Secretariat two substitutes of employees on maternity leave are missing which might cause some problems in the future. Moreover, the FLC are organized differently on the two sides of the border the Hungarian model leaving more room for flexibility.

M 6.3 Lead time assessment

The lead time assessment aims to analyse the efficiency of programme management in terms of the logic frame of the procedures applied and the model of timing of these procedures. The operation of the particular management bodies and the relevant consequences of their cooperation will be examined.

The Managing Authority of the programme is operating in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Hungary being also the MA/NA of other CBC programmes. Since the concerned department in the Ministry is responsible for 7 programmes in total and the implementation of each programme is at a different progress level, the workload is constantly high. In line with the closure of the 2007-2013 programmes, the situation is getting better, but after the allocation of the actual budget the process will turn back because of the accounting process and the planning for the next period carried out in parallel.

The workload of the National Authority mainly depends on the tasks performed by the Managing Authority. Concerning the peak periods, the programme managers have a permanent workload (calls; contracting phase; preparation of the MC; preparation of the next programme; etc.).

In the Joint Secretariat, the workload is constantly high (permanent peak) because of the low number of staff members, which is caused by the processes happening in parallel in case of the different call for proposals. The JS is intent on preparing the call for proposals in a way that the number of submitted application be less, hereby decreasing the specific workload. In addition,

during the quality assessment the professional matters such as the evaluation of technical parameters could be outsourced. In the next two years new calls for proposals and intense contracting procedures are expected which requires the handling of the current challenges.

The burdens could be decreased by the application of the continuously open call solution and facilitating further the system of submitting the annexes (this option is applicable mainly in the case of two-round selection procedures, like TAPes).

In case of the Infopoints, the workload seems to be optimal, smaller peaks are experienced in the periods before the project submission. These peaks could be made more even by establishing a yearly schedule for information activities related to the different calls. This way the Infopoints would be able plan their activities better.

The FLC controllers will be overloaded after the project implementations starting. From this perspective, it was not a very lucky decision when the MC allocated almost the entire budget of PA1. It will mean that the FLC controllers must check several thousands of invoices in parallel. This overload will mainly cause problems in Slovakia where the controllers have a 2% rule of failed checks which will be in danger.

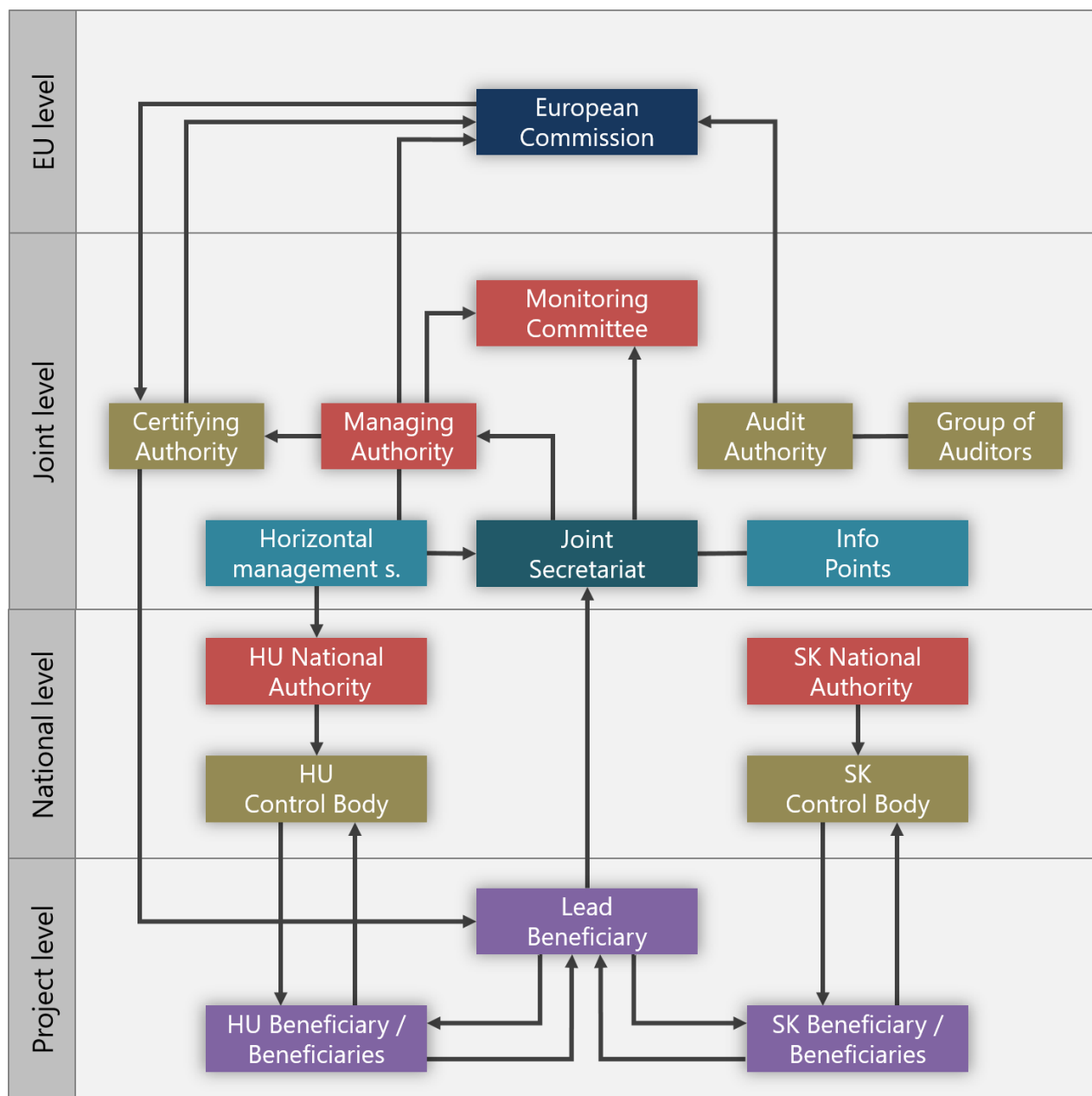
In summary, the chapter analysed the operation of the particular management bodies and the relevant consequences of their cooperation. Overall it can be seen that the workload is constantly high at most bodies except of the Infopoints where the workload – regardless of the experienced smaller peaks – is seemingly optimal.

M 6.4 Assessment of the procedures

A further point to be considered when evaluating the efficiency of the SK-HU programme is the assessment of the programme's performance procedures especially from the point of view of fine-tuning. Subsequently, the analysis attempts to shed light on the clear share of responsibilities; management of procedures; handling of disputes; quality assurance of the procedures: handling of feedback, self-monitoring methods; transparency of the evaluation and selection processes. The main sources of information for this sub-chapter are the Description of the Management and Control System, the interviews and the relevant sections of the online survey.

The flow chart below shows the organisational relations between authorities and bodies already introduced in chapter M 6.1. The processes took place during the programme implementation phase are regulated by the different documents of "Rules of procedure".

Figure 52: Management and control structure



The most important outcome of the interviews was that the vast majority of the procedures are delivered in a high quality due to the extended experiences of the participating entities. Especially it seems from the interviews that frequent and efficient communication among the interested parties is a reality to which many respondents attribute the smooth operation. However, there are still a couple of problematic points which leave room for improvement. The most often mentioned difficulties are connected to the human resource capacities and to the IMIS system.

The problem with the **human capacities** lies in the low number of employees working on the different aspects of the programme procedures. More additional employees would render the distribution of workload manageable.

The other problem point often mentioned by the interviewees is the **IMIS system** which is a complex platform designed to facilitate the different procedures. The problem is that the start of its operation was fairly belated causing several troubles resulting in significant delays. This delay is viewed as a real risk factor in the timely completion of the whole programme. According to the interviewees the IMIS system should have been functional already before the first round of call for applications.

Another important aspect of evaluating the procedures regards the project partners' view on the level of **transparency of the evaluation and selection procedures** of the programme. In order to gain insight into this issue, the beneficiaries had been asked about it in an online survey. The results show a high level of satisfaction since more than two thirds of the respondents said that they had found the procedures to be transparent and the information on the evaluation criteria and the selection procedures provided to be correct and easily available. Furthermore, an addition quarter of the respondents were a bit more critical and stated that the procedures had been not transparent enough but the information had been provided in due time (as forecasted) and the lack of transparency did not harm the fair process. There were about 14% of the respondents who considered either that the procedures had hardly been transparent (the evaluation criteria were fairly published and easy to find but the applicants were not informed in the steps taken and the progress of the evaluation) or the procedures had been unfair and the decisions had been made in an ad-hoc and not transparent way.

The respondents were further prompted to give more detailed explanations for their evaluation of transparency. Here, most of them reiterated that they were satisfied with the level of transparency of the procedures and the quality of information they had received. Regarding communication 68% gave the best possible answer, which means 38 persons think the information on the evaluation criteria and the selection procedures provided are correct and available. 17% voted for the answer which states that the procedures are not transparent enough, and 13% think even worse meaning that the procedures are hardly transparent; the evaluation criteria are fairly published and easy to find but the applicants are not informed in the steps taken and the progress of the evaluation. There were a few observations that should be taken into consideration. One such suggestion is that the manual for the evaluators should be more specified and consistent scrutiny of the evaluation sheets should be ensured, for example *'to minimize the copy and paste, evaluation of the evaluator's linguistic competence, verbal and punctual assessment compliance, compliance of the evaluation and requirements of the Program.'* The high rate of answers indicating some sort of failures in transparency may indicate changes in the communication of the programme too.

The procedures of the programme implementation are well regulated. Based on the outcomes of the interviews the vast majority of the procedures are delivered in a high quality due to the extended experiences of the participating entities. However, there are still a couple of problematic points which leave room for improvement. The most often mentioned difficulties are connected to the human resource capacities and to the IMIS system. The respondents of

the online survey were in general satisfied with the transparency of the evaluation and selection procedures of the programme. However, there were a few observations that should be taken into consideration (e.g. consistent scrutiny of the evaluation sheets should be ensured).

M 6.5 Assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies

The technical assistance is the fifth priority axis of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary programme and its attributes are defined in line with the Article 17 of Regulation (EU) no 1299/2013 which limits the Technical Assistance (TA) at a maximum of 6% of the total ERDF amount allocated to the programme, although the national co-financing rates may be different in case of TA beneficiaries, Hungary may apply higher rate of national contribution in PA5.

The main aim of the PA is to help the implementation of the programme, to involve all the relevant partners and to increase the capacity of the stakeholders necessary for the cross-border actions. Subsequently, the TA's specific objective is to ensure the effective management, implementation, control and audit of the Interreg V-A SK-HU.

In practice this is done through six different measures:

- measures related to human resource management of bodies responsible for the implementation, control and audit of the programme;
- measures related to office/facility management of bodies responsible for the implementation of the programme;
- measures related to the overall management, control and audit of the programme;
- strengthening the institutional capacity of relevant partners limited to the public sector and primarily directed to the administrations and services directly engaged in the implementation of ERDF including capacity development;
- visibility and publicity of the programme;
- actions to reduce administrative burden for beneficiaries.

The table below shows the output indicators expected to contribute to the results:

Table 27: TA relevant output indicators

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data
O511	Number of employees (FTEs) whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	FTE	30.00	Internal registry
O512	Number of publicity events	Number of events	15.00	Joint Secretariat
O513	Number of studies and evaluation documents	Finished studies and evaluation documents	2.00	Joint Secretariat

ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Source of data
O514	Number of training initiatives for the management bodies	Training initiatives	15.00	Joint Secretariat

The major task of the PA is carried-out by the programme bodies and it concerns the professional support offered to the applicants and potential beneficiaries.

In order to authentically assess this support, the project beneficiaries were asked about their experiences related to the level of assistance provided by the relevant programme implementation bodies. The main aspects of the inquiry were the following: clarity, availability and user friendliness of the provided information; assistance offered to project and partnership development, project implementation and monitoring.

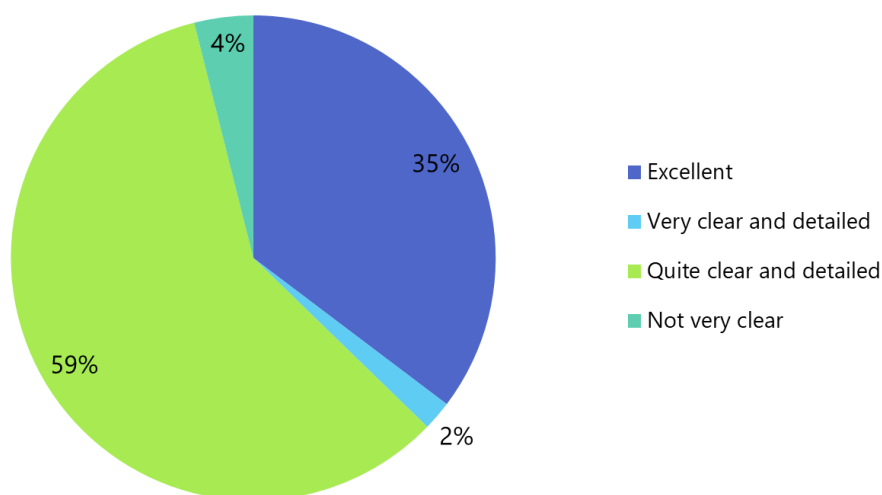
The beneficiaries of the approved projects were asked about their experiences related to the TA (11 questions were closely connected to the implementation of the priority. In the case of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary programme 54 valid answers arrived. These answers are analysed in the followings.

Clarity

The first question was about the clarity of the information on the calls available on the programme website. The results show quite a diverse image: more than one third (36%) of the respondents claimed that they found the clarity of the information on the calls to be excellent, but then after a dramatic drop, only 2% said it was very clear and detailed. The majority of the respondents opted for the *'quite clear and detailed'* answer which shows that the information available is quite clear but also there is room for improvement. This is further supported by the fact that 3% of the respondents said that the information had not been very clear which was the most negative answer that they could choose. Taking into account other aspects of the questionnaire, the most probably, the lack of language versions can result in critical comments: the specific language of the programme can be foreign even for those speaking English.

Figure 53: The respondents' view on the clarity of the information on the calls

The respondents' view on the clarity of the information on the calls

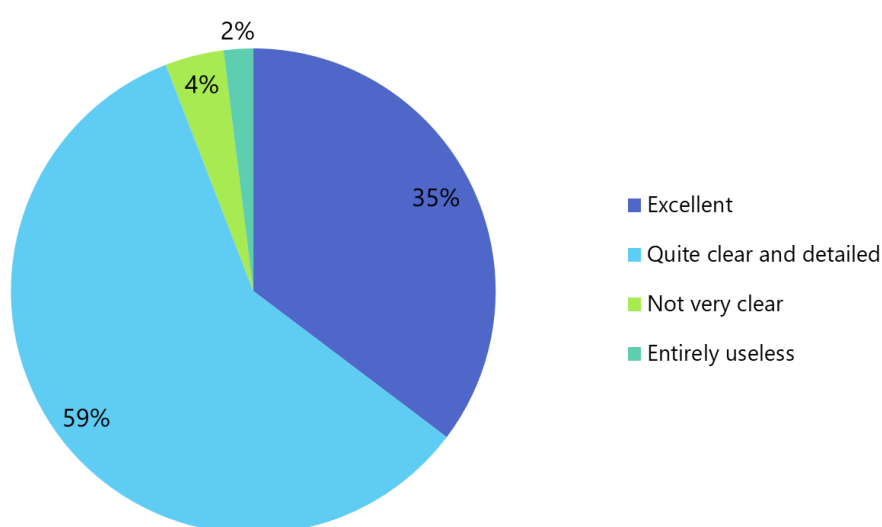


Availability

The trends in the received answers about the availability of the information are very similar to the answers given on the aspect of clarity. 35% considered that the availability of the information on the rules of application had been excellent, 59% thought it had been quite clear and detailed, while 4% chose the *not very clear* option and 2% found the information to be entirely useless.

Figure 54: The respondents' view on the availability of the information

The respondents' view on the availability of the information



On the other hand, several ones of the respondents pointed out that it would have been more advantageous if the language barriers were overcome differently. As they put it: *'the application was processed in three languages, what bring language difficulties.'* However, others stated that

it had been a problem that not every document had been made available in Hungarian, another saying that *'it's a shame that it's not all three languages'* the way how information was disseminated. As a beneficiary put it clearly: *'the applicants manuals is only available in one language, English, so we had to translate it to Hungarian because not everybody is able to understand English'*.

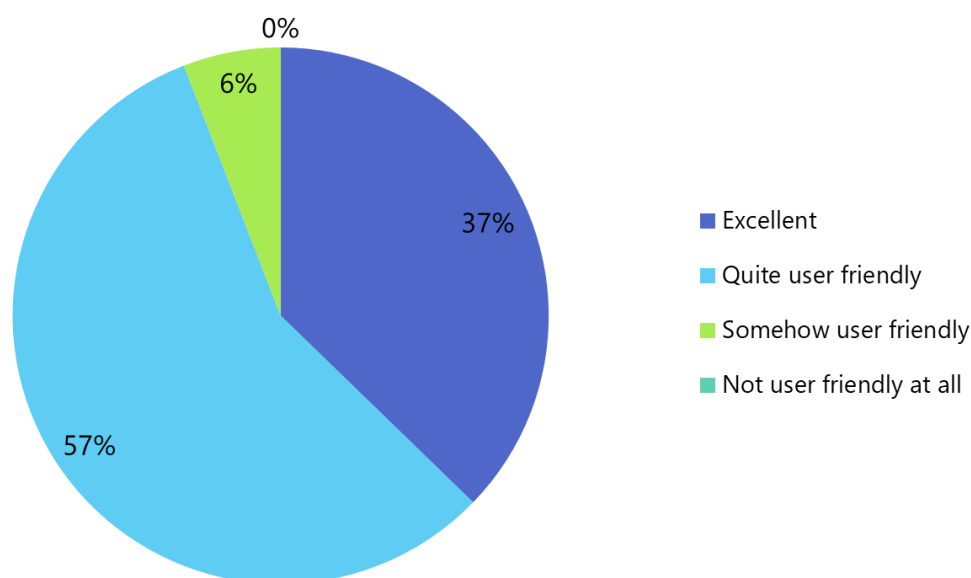
Finally, several of the respondents – among which some were first time applicants – say that they did not have any problem deciphering the guidelines but if something was not entirely clear then they could contact the provider and ask for a personal meeting to clarify the given issue.

User friendliness

The third topic is the evaluation of the user friendliness of the information on the calls available at the programme website. Here almost everyone expressed a positive opinion and experience, 37% of the respondents rated the user friendliness of the website to be excellent and 57% as quite user-friendly. While nobody thought the layout of the information was not user-friendly at all, there was a 6% portion of the respondents who did not share the exclusively or mostly favourable experiences of the majority and said that the information on the website was presented only in a somehow user-friendly manner.

Figure 55: The respondents' view on the user friendliness of the information

The respondents' view on the user friendliness of the information



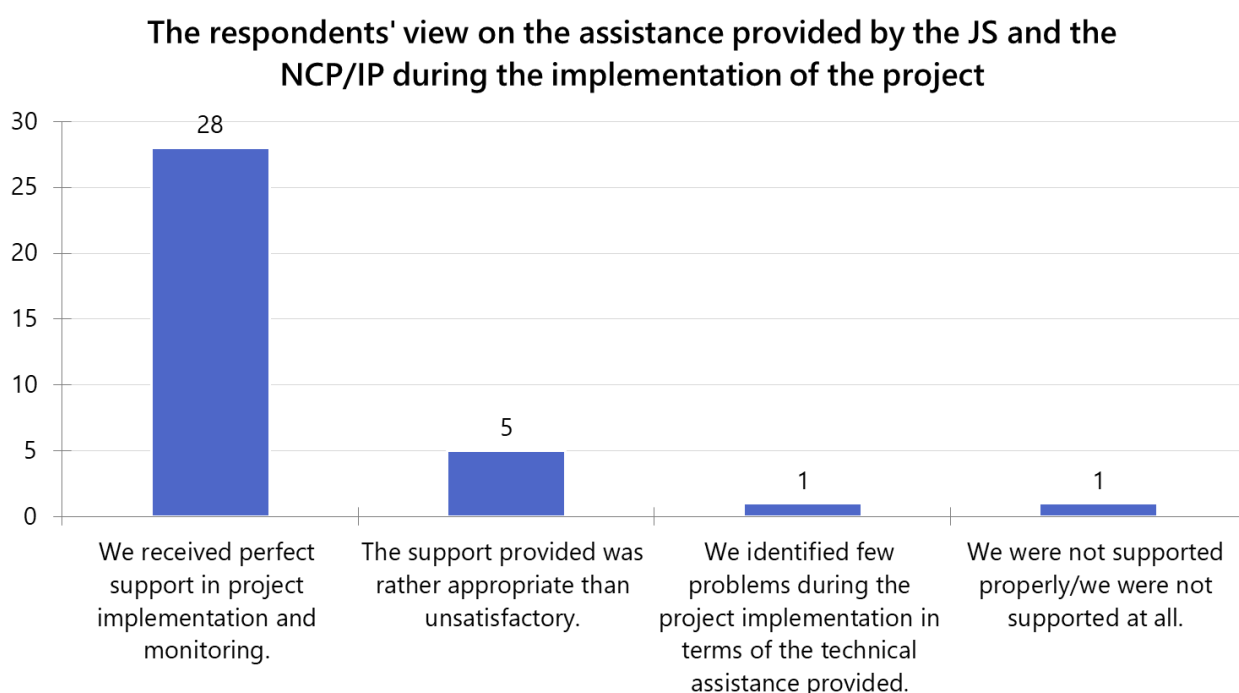
Support

A very important question addressed whether the responding beneficiaries got any support on behalf of the programme implementation bodies (Joint Secretariat, Information Point) during the project development. Proportionately, there are exactly twice as many respondents who got

such support compared to those who did not, which is a favourable result, however, further thought and exploration should be dedicated to find out what happened to those 12 respondents who felt that they did not get any support.

Another approach to the same topic was the effort made to assess the quality of the support given to those who claimed that they had a share in such services. Among those who gave a response to this question, nobody considered that the support being unsatisfactory, and more than two thirds said it had been excellent, while one third of the respondents thought that the support they received had been quite good.

Figure 56: The respondents' view on the assistance provided by the JS and the NCP/IP during the implementation of the project



When asked about their personal experiences, the respondents display a great level of unanimity. Most respondents speak in very high terms about the programme managing bodies and praise them for their quick, kind and informative support. The beneficiaries claim that whenever they approached these institutions, they were met with efficiency, professionalism and good will which manifested in useful advice and guidelines delivered in a friendly and clear way.

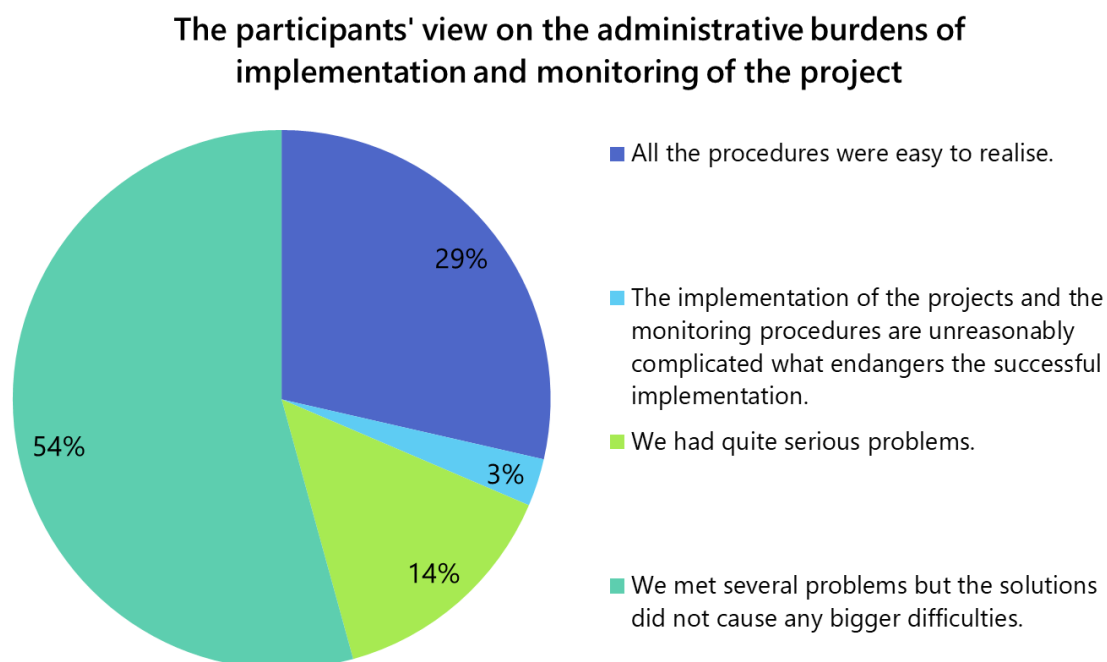
Similar trends can be observed when the responding beneficiaries were asked specifically about the assessment of the assistance provided by the JS and the IP during the implementation of the project. 80% of the respondents said that they had received perfect support in project implementation and monitoring. Only one respondent said that they had not been supported properly or at all and another one said that they had identified few problems during the project implementation in terms of the technical assistance provided. The rest of the respondents

positioned themselves on the most neutral option which was that the support was *rather appropriate than unsatisfactory*.

Those respondents who identified problems were asked to specify those. Unfortunately, no comments had been sent referring to actual problems. Most of the respondents iterated again that the answers and help they got were quick and clear all the time while others said that they received '*sufficient guideline from the JS in time, negotiation, maxim synergy*'. Two of the answers alluded to the fact that their project was not at the stage at where this question could be relevant thus they had no first hand experiences.

When asked about their opinion on the administrative burdens of the implementation and monitoring of the project, 54% selected probably the most diplomatic answer which stated that they had encountered several problems but the solutions had not caused any bigger difficulties. The distribution among the other three answers are much more balanced: 21% of the responding beneficiaries said that all the procedures had been easy to realize, 14% claimed that they had quite serious problems while another 3% said that the implementation of the projects and monitoring procedures had been unreasonably complicated which could possibly endanger the successful implementation of the projects.

Figure 57: The participants' view on the administrative burdens of implementation and monitoring of the project



Finally, respondents were asked about the specific serious problems that they have faced. A large number of respondents said that the problems linked to the malfunction of the IMIS system were multifold. Firstly, it might cause liquidity problems at a later stage of the project. Secondly, the long waiting time for the IMIS 2014-2020 and the relatively short period of opening window for uploading the beneficiary report have caused remarkable stress for the stakeholders which could only be resolved through an extensive cooperation. The third difficulty mentioned was in

relation with the estimation value of the contract and submission of supporting documentation. Since the law does not specify a concrete procedure, the recipient is determining the procedure itself. However, not all goods / services are normally available and therefore the determination of the estimated value of the contract on the basis of catalogue prices is not possible. Addressing potential suppliers to identify estimated value of the contract is also highly inefficient; to this problem a solution is yet to be found.

In summary, the analysis on the assistance provided by the programme showed that in general those beneficiaries who filled out the questionnaire were quite satisfied by the assistance they have received in terms of clarity, availability and user friendliness of the information provided. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents claimed that despite of the fact that they have encountered several problems considering the administrative burden, these did not impede them severely.

M 6.6 Simplification test

Within the framework of the chapter the way was analysed of how the recommendations on simplification of the previous programme period have been taken into account, together the actual implementation rules, including the eligible expenditures, simplified cost options, procurement and state aid rules, reporting and e-application processes, from the perspective of administrative burdens.

In the on-going evaluation of the Hungary-Slovakia Cross Border Programme 2007-2013, the following challenges were targeted:

- 1) Too much paperwork on project level
- 2) Communication barriers between the FLC and the JTS
- 3) Inefficiency of IMIS
- 4) Delay in the reporting procedures and transfers on management side
- 5) Lack of process differentiation in projects types
- 6) Differences in national legislation (technical standards, public procurement)
- 7) Unnecessary feasibility studies
- 8) Loss of time by waiting for valid building permissions in the application phase.

In the following table we are examining the responses given by the current programme to the challenges listed above. Regarding the colour coding, green means that the action is fully implemented, yellow indicates that it is in progress or partially addressed, while the red coloured issues have not been addressed yet or not expected to be addressed on programme level.

Table 28: Recommendations and responses in terms of simplification

Recommendation	Response
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Recommendation	Response
Too much paperwork on project level	The IMIS as on-line application and reporting tool was launched for both the management bodies and applicants in the first half of 2018. As a result, no paper-based documents have to be submitted to the calls. In addition, in order to reduce the amount of paper-based documents, the JS communicates with the Lead Beneficiary through fully or partially electronic way.
Communication barriers between the FLC and the JS	There are different IMIS modules available for the first level control actors and for the JS, which makes the communication easier and quicker. Communication is made easier through building direct pathways for the different functions the platform users having distinct competencies. The structures of both modules are designed in accordance with their tasks and responsibilities as well as taking into account rights as well.
Inefficiency of IMIS	A new background solution has been developed for the current programming period, however the users still face technical difficulties.
Delay in the reporting procedures and transfers on management side	The problem is intended to be addressed by the re-establishment of the IMIS system, the revision of management rules of procedure and the simplified submission procedure (scanned documents instead of hard copy versions).
Lack of process differentiation in projects types	The programme applies different supporting schemes (Small Project Fund for P2P projects, TAPE for integrated cross-border developments, SME support) with different implementation rules and procedures.
Differences in national legislation (technical standards, public procurement)	It is out of the programme competency, therefore it still applies for the related national rules. However there are initiatives on European level to overcome the administrative burdens.
Unnecessary feasibility studies	The cost of feasibility studies are eligible only in case if the project contains infrastructure and works cost and the preparation of feasibility study is obligatory for the organisation. Otherwise these studies are excluded from eligible expenditures.
Time-consuming building permits	In order to speed up the application phase and save financial resources, in case the building permissions are not available at the time of submission of the application, PPs are invited to submit only the proof of the request for building permits with the application form. (Afterwards the applicants must submit the building permissions during the

Recommendation	Response
	contracting period.)

As it can be seen, most of the challenges of the previous programming period were partly or fully addressed when planning the current programme. However it is worth analysing how the results of these programming intentions are perceived on the ground/in practice. To this end we have examined the implementation rules from administrative perspective by an on-line survey among the beneficiaries and face-to-face interviews conducted with the representatives the programme management bodies.

Eligible expenditures

In terms of the eligibility of expenditures, 12% of the respondents indicated their dissatisfaction and made remarks on the issue. These were about increasing the ceiling for the various cost categories including project management, per diems, website development. In general the main problem is that there have been significant costs which are still not eligible. An applicant thought that all kind of costs which are necessary for successful implementation could be integrated into the budget, especially the low level of eligible costs set by evaluators regarding project management was criticised. According to another applicant, the financial support did not cover all the work carried out in the field of project management.

In addition, the eligibility of charges for national financial transactions to improve the cross-border environment was proposed to be considered.

As an additional conclusion of the interviews, the meaninglessness of the preparation cost category can be mentioned since this category can only be justified from the point of view of the timing of the project implementation but it is not a separate cost category.

Simplified cost option

From the side of the programme management bodies and beneficiaries, there is a need for applying simplified cost options (e.g. flat-rate), however it seems that the possibility in case of the staff cost is barely exploited by the Beneficiaries. 41% of the respondents welcomes the flat rate options, however they apply it only in case of the administrative and office costs (where it is mandatory). An applicant suggest keeping the simplified reporting for the budget item “office and administration”. The problem was that recipients, however, did not have experience with this kind of reporting and flat rate.

In addition, it was mentioned that the 15% rate of administrative cost was lower than it should have been; and applying the amount of eligible staff cost as baseline amount was inaccurate because the administrative capacities of an organization could be used by those staff members who worked on the project without accounting their personnel costs within the project, as it was stated in an answer to the related question in the survey.

Advance payments

The vast majority of the respondents indicated that the lack of pre-financing in Slovakia meant a major problem. Based on an applicant's answer, no advance payments in Slovakia is accepted, which complicates the project implementation. Recommendations by respondents of the survey include advance payment on the Slovakian side to be provided. The implementation is more expensive this way as most of the Slovak beneficiaries need to take a loan and pay the interests until the project costs are reimbursed. The time for project costs reimbursement is way too long in case the beneficiary took a loan. Thus, it is not supporting cost effectiveness. Advance payments would accelerate the drawing process, at the start of the project in particular, while allowing the beneficiaries modify their finances more effectively.

The members of the management bodies told that as a result of the differences effective on the two sides of the border in terms of advanced payments, the project budgets were imbalanced in territorial term which hindered the implementation of real cross-border developments. In addition, the financial system on the Slovak side favours the wealthy applicants against the smaller civil society organisations (CSOs).

Public procurement

Regarding the public procurement processes, it seems that there are information shortages concerning the application of the national rules which root in language issues, the related specific nomenclature. In addition, Beneficiaries call for specific templates for the required documentation and annexes. According to the respondents, the value range is too low, which results in unnecessary administrative burdens. As one of the answers suggested, public procurement guideline should be always in the national language. The handbook should be available right from the start of the project implementation, this is the area where delay has appeared. Text and tables are not always compatible, therefore the respondent recommended unifying in the nomenclature. However, it has to be concluded that the public procurement rules are bound to the national legislation of both member states.

State aid rules

A respondent said exemption would be needed in more cases. More explicit description in the related handbook is what another applicant recommended. Despite of that the majority of the respondents have not experienced problems concerning the state aid rules, on programme management side it was stated that the related rules were not only complicated but it was very hard to make them understandable for the applicants. Beside simplification, also clarity is important. Furthermore, taking into account the low economic impact of the whole programme, it is re-considerable to leave state aid rules out of future INTERREG A programmes.

E-application and reporting

There was a delay in the development of the IMIS system, it was launched both for application and reporting in parallel with the SME call for proposals in 2018. It is expected on both

management and beneficiary sides that the integrated system will make the administrative procedures easier, quicker and paperless, however technical failures must be eliminated first. In addition, beneficiaries would welcome the IMIS handbook in national languages.

Going beyond the e-submission, the respondents of the survey mentioned that the administrative procedures should be simplified; in addition, the amount of supporting documents and annexes should be decreased as much as possible. The management side indicated that they are not able to further decrease the number of annexes because it would be impossible to evaluate the capacities of the applicants and the quality of the proposal or the implemented activities. On the other hand, it seems that there are possibilities for further simplification, for instance by having access to the e-government database of the concerned countries for general annexes or simplified justifying documentation similarly to the mainstream Operational Programmes.

Regarding the application procedure, the revised template for the current programme allows the evaluators to better understand the project. However the order of formal check and quality assessment should be exchanged hereby saving time and resources (Within PA1 10% of the formally approved projects were selected for funding based on their qualities.) This option would however mean more significant impact on the financial resources of the TA.

Continuously open calls

During the programming phase, permanently open call option was one of the issues treated the most. The solution was applied in the case of PA2 (published under the SKHU/1601 call on 29th July 2016) where the proposals could be submitted twice a year before along by the pre-decided deadlines of 15 February and 3 November, each year. The call was open until the final deadline of 19th February 2018. Continuously open call eases the work of both the applicant (the time pressure is much smaller than in other cases since the next deadline is pre-set) and the JS (their work is better envisaged). The model contains clear influence on the simplification of the procedures.

Language issues

In general, using English during the whole programme implementation process leads to several misunderstandings and ambiguous statements even within the level of the management bodies. The formal and informal clarification of these issues is highly time-consuming. At the same time, the choice of English as the official language of the calls was made because of the serious translation and interpretation problems stemming from the Hungarian-Slovak language use during the previous programme.

In summary, this chapter analyzed the way the recommendations on simplification of the previous programme period have been taken into account. The analysis found that most of the challenges of the previous programming period were partly or fully addressed when planning

the current programme. Moreover, the implementation rules were also analysed from administrative perspective by an on-line survey among the beneficiaries and face-to-face interviews conducted with the representatives the programme management bodies. This resulted in the identification of certain problem points where further considerations should be made relating to the eligible expenditures, the simplified cost option, the advance payments, the public procurement, the state aid rules, the e-application and reporting and the language issues.

M 6.7 Assessment of ownership

One of the main aims of the European Commission in respect of cross-border programmes is to strengthen the effectiveness of their ownership principle. It means that the programmes should not only be the tools of cross-border integration and cohesion but also those of democratisation. Although direct target group of the programming and decision making are the NUTS III level municipalities (and the relevant ministries) creating the frames for regional ownership, there is a clear effort to open the gate for further stakeholders. In harmony with this tendency, different stakeholders (local municipalities, regional development agencies, professional bodies, CSOs, etc.) used to be invited to take part in the programming as it was the case with the current CBC programme as well. At the same time, when speaking about programme implementation, the situation is different.

To carry out the assessment of ownership interviews were made and the related answers from our on-line survey were used as well.

According to the interviewees' opinion, the involvement of local municipalities, civil associations and other regional level entities into the decision making is a preferred option. There are a number of actors (for instance NGOs) who regularly live with the possibility to take the floor and express their views at the MC meetings – without having voting rights.

Some interviewees also mentioned that according to them – even though there is no abiding rule about this – the JS takes on board as much as they can from these expressed opinions what is a good feedback for the participating, non-voting members of the monitoring committee. Based on the information of the interviews it seems that the territory where the local stakeholders were the most active is the programming Task Force. It is not the activeness of local stakeholders what makes a major problem, it is satisfactory. An interviewee expressed that when MC members decide on the applications, the opinion of non-voting stakeholders including those of different levels and background, are not really relevant anymore, and thus it can be a negative effect on ownership (acceptance of the decisions and the feel of ownership).

Some interviewees felt that the timing of the collection of the opinions and feedback are not perfectly set. Most of the stakeholders have a chance to voice their views at the phase where decisions are made on the concrete project applications, however, this is a bit too late to exercise influence on the general, structural aspects of the programme.

When asked about the involvement of local stakeholders, most of the interviewees pointed out that it should not be the job of the programme management but rather each county as they are much better placed to handle all the different issues relating to the involvement of the local stakeholders. As a good example, Austria has been mentioned where the regional actors has a much wider and deeper understanding and knowledge about the specific needs of the local communities and stakeholders. This practice could be taken up by the current programme as well since the members of the monitoring committee are 'too far' to have a complete overview of the local situation. It was suggested that a system should be created which ensures that the local projects would be better known at NUTS III level. There are some regions, counties which are performing well in introducing the programme to the local levels but some are lagging behind.

To draw some conclusion regarding the involvement of local actors it can be stated based on the interviews that the involvement heavily depends also on how the NUTS III levels, the regional governments reach out for the local partners and how the CBC Programme is disseminated by the counties and other non-local levels. However, the programme is not seen as the joint development plan of border self-governing regions and counties making the involvement of local actors more difficult. NUTS III regions could play a more significant role in mediating between the different levels and to support local stakeholders within their respective territory. However, an interviewee expressed the concert of losing flexibility by involving many locals in programme implementation.

Another important outcome of the interviews regarding the question of the ownership was that there should be more time allocated for presenting each project as there is a visible lack of information about them, especially after their acceptance. Sharing the progress of the projects would also strengthen the feeling of ownership.

The question of ownership was raised in the on-line questionnaire, too. From among the 51 respondents three were members of the MC, five of them used to participate in the meetings with an observer status, further two beneficiaries were involved in the programming but not in the work of the MC. Especially the low representation in the programming is worth thinking about since 55% of the selected projects' beneficiaries filled-in the questionnaire. It means that they are the real owners of the programme but they did not take part in its shaping what is an important lesson to learn for the next programming period. The selected beneficiaries should be addressed directly during the designing procedure in order to strengthen the ownership of the programme.

The implementation of the TAPE can be considered as an innovation also in the field of ownership. On the one hand, within the TAPE, a three-level assessment procedure has been established involving the JS experts and the representatives of the NUTS III regions territorially affected by the planned interventions. Not only the solution enabled the regions to assess the territorial relevance of the action plans but also they have been more deeply involved in the management of the programme what enhanced their ownership. In addition, the final TAPE proposals will be presented at an MC meeting where the MC members will have the opportunity

to provide further recommendations for the beneficiaries. The model has got a very good feedback from the regions what makes its application advisable for other calls, as well.

On the other hand, before the publication of the 2nd call of the TAPE, the representatives of the TAPE proposals selected in the 1st round were invited to consult on the 2nd call. This exemplary solution strengthened the beneficiaries' ownership.

As a result, TAPE model should be followed in order to enhance the ownership of both local and regional actors.

In summary, there were considerable efforts made to raise the ownership of the local stakeholders which resulted in some important positive outcomes. However, from the interviews it can be seen that there is further scope for improvement with regard to the ownership especially regarding the timing and the involvement of the more passive stakeholders.

3.3.2 Costs of operation

In this chapter we will analyse also another aspect of efficiency: and it is the topic of the financing.

M 7.1 Cost efficiency assessment

Within the framework of the cost efficiency assessment, costs related to the Technical Assistance priority axis of the programme of the previous (2007-2013) and current (2014-2020) period are analysed in two aspects.

In general, the TA priority axis aims to support the implementation and audit of the cooperation programme itself, to ensure its visibility and to strengthen the institutional capacity of the involved partners from the border regions.

Both in the previous and current programming periods, the Technical Assistance priority axis has been managed according to a project-based approach. All programme management activities reimbursed by TA shall be prepared in the form of “TA project proposals” to be approved by the Monitoring Committee. The TA budget covers the operation costs of all programme management bodies including the Joint Secretariat, the National, the Managing and the Certifying Authorities, the Infopoints and the first level control system.

For the assessment two indicators are applied:

- the *staff cost/budget ratio* gives the rate in terms of staff cost in relationship with the total budget of the programme,
- the *specific administrative cost ratio* indicates the unit cost of the programme level administration of the implementation of one project.

1. Staff cost/budget ratio

Regarding the staff cost/budget ratio, the programme intends to spend 4% of the total budget, and 67% of the TA budget for covering the personnel cost concerning all TA activities. In case if only the already prepared or reported data³² are taken into consideration, the rates are 0.1% and 84% which indicates a delay in the spending or at least in the reporting processes. This can be partly reasoned by the delay in the programme kick-off, in the publication of the call for proposals and in the establishment of the IMIS as reporting tool. The values are also in harmony with the completion of the related indicator according to which only the salaries of 11 employees have been co-financed by the TA instead of the planned 30 by 2023. Due to the previous programme 2007-2013, the ratio was 37.5% compared to the total TA budget.

³² Sources: IMIS and the Annual Implementation Report 2017

2. Specific administrative cost ratio

The specific administrative cost ratio can be calculated and evaluated by using the data of the Annual Implementation Report 2017 considering the number of selected operations and that of the IMIS regarding the already prepared TA costs. As a result, the TA cost per operation/project including those of the Technical Assistance is 1 154,27 € which is extremely low compared to the ratio of the previous programming period which was 32 381,44 €. This extremity is rooted in the mentioned delay in the reporting and spending processes. In order to handle the distortion, we also calculated the ratio by using the proportional TA cost for the first 4 years of the programme implementation (considering the n+3 rule) and the actual number of supported operations which resulted in a value of 63 758,15 € being almost two times higher than in the last programming period.

Table 29: Specific administrative cost ratio in the previous and the current programme³³

	2007-2013	2014-2020	Actual values for 2014-2017	Estimated values for 2014-2017
TA budget (€)	10 394 443.43	10 998 281.19	79 644.96	4 399 312.48
Number of projects	321*	n.d.	69	69
Specific administrative cost ratio (€/project)	32 381.44	-	1 154.27	63 758.15

As a conclusion, the assessment of the cost efficiency can hardly performed because of major shortages in appropriate data. In case of the staff cost/budget ratio the baseline value is missing, while the value of the specific administrative cost ratio is highly distorted in each calculation way.

³³ Sources: Final implementation report of Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013, Annual Implementation Report 2017, IMIS

3.4 Prognosis and risk assessment

In this chapter we summarised and assessed the major risks, the programme management is facing and we drafted a prognosis in line with the steps recommended to be taken.

3.4.1 Major risks the programme is facing

Delays in performance

As it was presented in the sub-chapters 1.2–1.4 the programme implementation is delayed compared to the planned situation for 2018. Both the absorption rate and the performance of the indicators represent very low values. The allocation rate is a bit higher but from the perspective of the completion of the programme, it is still low.

The delays are stemming from different reasons.

- 1) First of all, the late approval of the EU Regulations (November 2013) resulted in serious delays in programming procedure. Although the consultant consortium was contracted in August 2013, the conditions defined by the draft Regulations were still changing that time what slowed down the progress. Finally, the cooperation programme was approved by the Commission among the first ones, in October 2015 but it meant a delay of almost 2 years.
- 2) Secondly, the biggest problems were caused by the change of the Managing Authority. Although the two governments previously agreed on the transfer of the MA from Budapest to Bratislava, the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development could not make the arrangements necessary for taking over this responsibility. Consequently, the Slovak party had to return the MA functions to Hungary at the end of 2015. This change made necessary fast modifications in the programme management structure, in the rules of procedures, etc. However, it is a widely shared view that the Hungarian party managed the structural changes in a remarkable way and in a very short period of time. The first call was open in the springtime of 2016 what can be seen as a kind of record – but still, it was 2,5 years later than the programme should have started officially.
- 3) Further reason of the delay can be identified in the low attractiveness regarding the calls of cross-border public transport and logistics (PA2). To sum up, in this respect, the programmers identified the needs wrong. As a consequence, the amount not absorbed had to be transferred to the PA1 where the interest was 10 times larger than the financial capacities. At the same time, the transfer needed the approval of the EC what took several months.
- 4) The slowness of the procedures is partly stemming from the new innovative tools introduced by the programme (see below). The novelty of these tools makes the preparatory phase longer and the decision making procedure slower. If the programme

lacked these tools, the implementation would be faster. Another factor is the simplification. While the projects can be submitted with simplified content with less annexes than before, the contracting procedure became longer because the annexes have to be delivered after the selection procedure. It causes again delays in the progress (see the differences between the allocation and absorption rates). Similarly, the decision made by the MC on the enlargement of the list of selected projects under PA1 does not ease the problems of the management structure since instead of a more balanced loading, many projects have to be monitored in parallel. It is not very hard to foresee that this factor will cause further delays – mainly once the designing procedure of the next programme starts.

Table 30: Major risks – Delays

The impact of the risk	Clarification	Handling
High	The complexity of the reasons predicts that the delay of today will not be overcome during the next period. Taking into account the human capacity problems of the JS (7 jobs filled instead of 9) and the Slovak FLC, it is expected that there will be no further capacities facilitating the catching up. The current delay can be multiplied endangering the implementation of the CP.	First of all, the fine-tuning of the IMIS is a short-term must. The application of the electronic system will accelerate the procedures and simplify the document management but for this purpose, the errors of the system have to be corrected very fast. Secondly, the beneficiaries should be trained on the use of the IMIS in order to facilitate the reporting and the modifications. This way, the lag can be shortened.

The innovation factor

The programme contains three innovative solutions the parallel introduction of which caused difficulties for the JS team. These innovative solutions are:

- the territorial action plan for employment (TAPE) which unites several projects and numerous project partners under one joint umbrella;
- the transfer of the management tasks related to the small project fund (SPF) to two EGTCs which have no experiences in this field;
- the eligibility of the SMEs which have never been supported by the programme before.

These three forms of innovation burdened the programme at a critical level and bears further risks to tackle. One can conclude on that three such burdensome innovative solutions should not be launched in one programme in parallel.

At the same time, there is a European wide professional interest towards the integrated instrument of the TAPE what is in the heart of the new ETC policy of the EU. The draft ETC

Regulation makes obligatory to mandate EGTCs with the management of cross-border SPFs. Finally, without the eligibility of the SMEs, the TAPes cannot reach their objectives. Therefore, the burdensome stream of innovation is in line with the efforts of the EC in order to make the CBC programmes more cross-border, more territorial. Finally, let's mention that the strong inclusion of the territorial aspects in the implementation of the TAPes resulted in a stronger commitment on behalf of the territorial actors what was enhanced further when involving them into the quality assessment.

Nevertheless, this „innovation overdrive” bears several risks.

- 1) The involvement of the SMEs create a brand new environment for the programme where both the rules and the behaviour of the beneficiaries are fundamentally different compared to the tendering systems addressing the public and civil sphere. The State Aid regime of the European Union is extremely complicated what carries the risk of mistakes and disinformation on behalf of the JS and (unintentional) irregularities on behalf of the beneficiaries. There was an unfortunate factor in designing the call that the B Light scheme (what has successfully been launched within the Hungary-Croatia INTERREG V-A Programme) was just not attractive enough for the professional organisations while the modified SME call brought (at least) dubious results. The allocated amount is not very high but the risk of failure is still quite big. All these factors can endanger the completion of the programme.
- 2) The complexity of the TAPes (the higher number and complex set of the partners, the involvement of the SMEs, the large infrastructure components, the timing difficulties, etc.) can cause both foreseeable and unexpected failures. It is very important that the implementation frames of the TAPE are very flexible since the tool represents an untried path with many risks. It is hardly predictable how the TAPes will meet the criteria related to the indicators and the financial frameworks. The failure of one project (e.g. a large infrastructure project because of the increase of construction costs) can endanger the success of the TAPE as a whole.
- 3) The involvement of the two EGTCs created many difficulties when designing the umbrella project call. Later on, the western EGTC was not able to catch up to the eastern one, even the set-up of its management caused serious problems. While the managers of the two EGTCs are skilled and experienced experts, when defining common rules for the SPF management, two very different organisations with very different capacities have been interconnected. Obviously, this will carry potential risks in implementation.

Table 31: Major risks – Innovative solutions

	The impact of the risk	Clarification	Handling
SPF	High	Although the dedicated amount of the SPF is low, thanks to the small project size, many beneficiaries will meet the CBC programme through	The implementation of the SPF is an experimentation of a more place-based governance in two centralised countries. Consequently,

	The impact of the risk	Clarification	Handling
		the SPF call, exceptionally. Considering the relatively high number of the projects and the beneficiaries, the success of the SPF system is of joint interest because of its visibility and popularity.	independent work of the EGTCs should be assured and the whole project should be followed cautiously by both the MA, the NA and the JS. The whole procedure should be considered as a PILOT project what can lay the basis for the next programme.
TAPE	High	The expected number of the selected projects is higher than the total number of the contracted projects so far. Furthermore, these projects should be implemented in parallel, in a synergic way, hand-in-hand. In the centre of the partnerships, there are the SMEs with their completely different logic of operation with weak interest in public goods. In addition, the large infrastructural projects can cause further problems taking into account also the unsecure financing background of the Slovak beneficiaries. Since the PA3 represents 21% of the total programme budget, it is highly preferred to ensure the safe implementation thereof.	The consultation practice and the new set of procedures established by the JS is the only and the most effective way to tackle the high risks stemming from the complexity of the tool. Similarly to the preparatory phase, the thorough involvement of the JS in the monitoring and supporting activities, as well as clear assessment rules for SMEs during the implementation are necessary.
SME call	Medium	Compared to the first two examples, the SME call has a lower impact on the programme implementation. The circle of the potential beneficiaries and the expected effects of the interventions is much weaker than in the first two cases. However, the indicators related to the tool shall be reached.	It is recommended to re-think the call, once again and change the conditions in order to ensure a higher and better based participation of the SMEs.

Risks related to the indicator values

- 1) The Slovakia-Hungary INTERREG V-A Programme is the only cross-border programme managed by Hungary what needed the approval of the European Commission so far, for transposing some amount of money from one PA to another. Without the approval, the programme could hardly reach the indicators set.

- 2) In this phase of the implementation of the programme, it is clear that the originally planned values of the newly constructed roads and bridges cannot be fulfilled. The target value was nearly 9 km. Instead, it is expected that less than 3 km is reachable – if everything goes according to the plans. Behind this change there are several reasons from which the two most important are the differences between the ownership of the cross-border infrastructure in Hungary and Slovakia and the differences between the financing systems of the two countries. These differences resulted in a reduced number of cross-border infrastructure projects.

Table 32: Major risks – Indicators

The impact of the risk	Clarification	Handling
Medium	Thanks to the expected approval, the absorption of the amount is not in danger, since the interest in PA1 is extremely high. At the same time, the road and bridge construction projects can generate problems due to the lack of satisfactory coordination of planning and contracting.	On the Hungarian side, the cross-border road and bridge constructions are managed by the NIF ZRt. which has an experienced team dedicated to this mission. At the same time, on the Slovak side, the beneficiaries are both financially and professionally very weak. This difference is due to the fact that while in Slovakia the local actors and municipalities are responsible for the road constructions, in Hungary a centralized system is put in place with adequate financial background and executive rights in making such investments. Consequently the programme management bodies should survey and support the Slovak applicants, involving the MFA of Hungary which provided its assistance in the case of previous projects, as well.

3.4.2 Prognosis

Regardless of the complexity of the problems the programme management is facing, the completion of the programme is not in danger but this necessitates deeper surveillance and assistance than other programmes – taking into account the frequency of the new tools.

Based on the approval of the modification request, the next call under PA1 and PA4 can be published in springtime of 2019 when the decisions will be made on the second round TAPE projects. In parallel, the implementation of the SPF and SME projects will start while the first TAPE projects can be launched in the autumn. All these mean that the programme can be completed in due time nearly reaching its indicators.

IV. ANNEX 2. – ACRONYMS

The table does not contain the project acronyms.

AA	Audit Authority
AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
ALCOTRA	Alpes Latines COopération TRAnsfrontalière Programme
AP	Action plan
CA	Certifying Authority
CB	Cross-border
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CESCI	Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives
CLLD	Community-led local development
CP	Cooperation programme
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
DG	Directorate-General
DTP	Danube Transnational Programme
EC	European Commission
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro (currency)
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
FLC	First Level Control
FR	France (French Republic)
FTE	Full-time equivalent

GDP	Gross domestic product
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GIS	Geographic information system
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
HUHR	Interreg V-A Hungary-Croatia Co-operation Programme 2014-2020
HUSK	Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013
HUSKROU A	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ID	Identification Data
IMIS	IMIS 2014-2020 (Common) Monitoring and Information System
IP	Info Point
IR	Inception Report
IT	Information Technology
ITI	integrated territorial investment
JS	Joint Secretariat
JTS	Joint Technical Secretariat
KSH	Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (Hungarian Central Statistical Office)
LAG	Local action group
LB	Lead beneficiary
LEADER	LEADER programme (Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale / Links between actions for the development of the rural economy)
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary
NA	National Authority
NACE	Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne (Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community)
NCP	National Contact Point
NIF	Nemzeti Infrastruktúra-fejlesztő Zrt. (National Infrastructure Developing Private Company Limited)
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PA	Priority area

PIT	Piani Integrati Territoriali / les Plans Intégrés Territoriaux (Integrated territorial plan)
PITER	Piani Integrati Territoriali / les Plans Intégrés Territoriaux (Integrated territorial plan)
PP	Project Partner
PR	Public relations
RO	Romania
ROHU	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme 2014-2020
SK	Slovakia
SKHU	INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme 2014-2020
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SO	Specific objective
SPF	Small Project Fund
ŠUSR	Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic)
SZPI	Széchenyi Program Office Nonprofit Ltd.
TA	Technical Assistance
TAPE	Territorial Action Plan for Employment
TO	Thematic objective
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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