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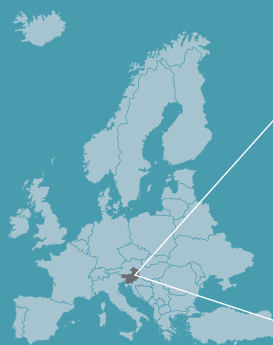
Slovenia – Austria



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INTERREG PROGRAMME SLOVENIA – AUSTRIA 2021-2027



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I. JOINT PROGRAMME STRATEGY: MAIN DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND POLICY RESPONSES

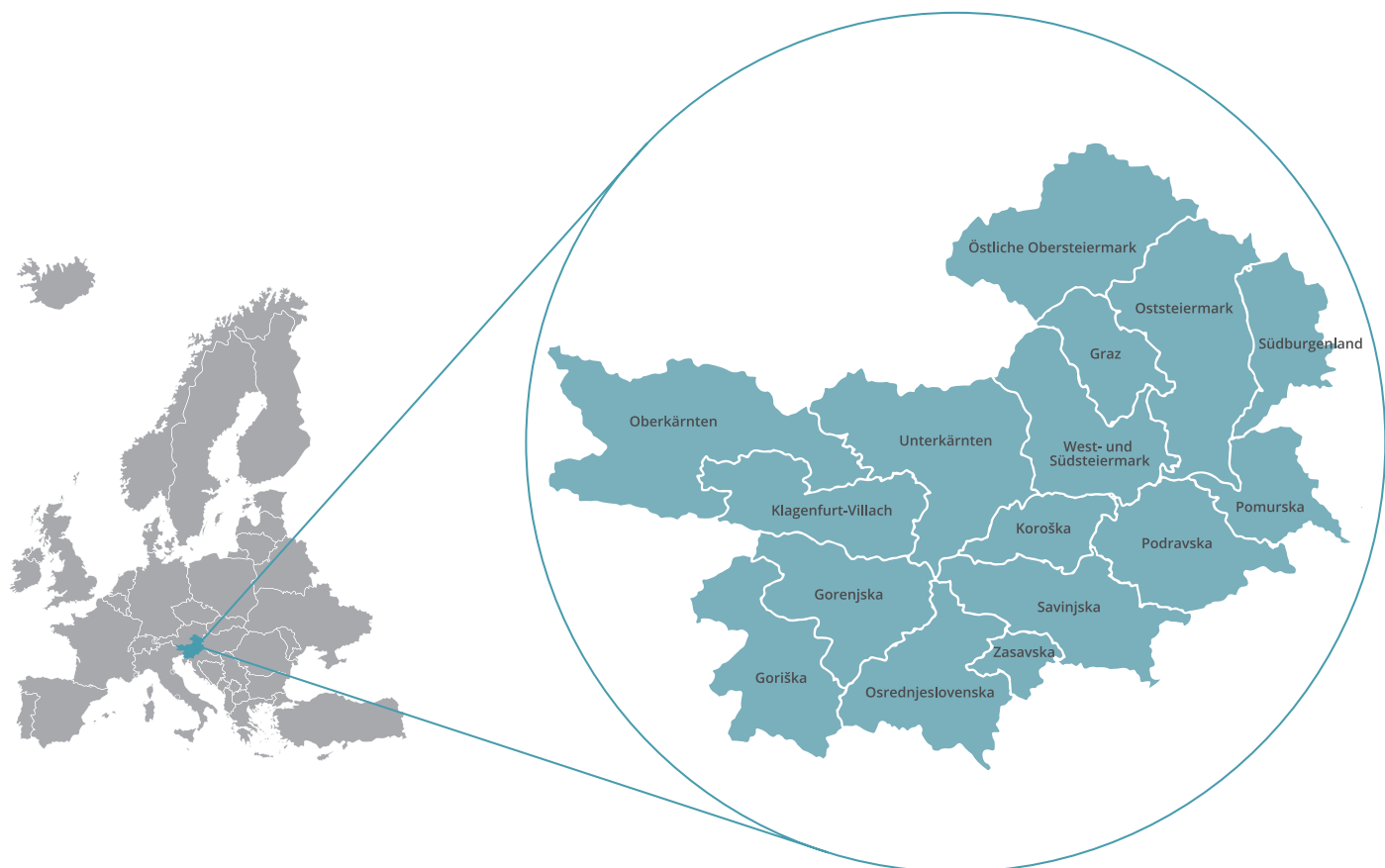
I.1 Programme area

Reference: point (a) of Article 17(3), point (a) of Article 17(9)

The SI-AT **programme area** of the Slovenia-Austria border region **covers 8 Slovenian NUTS 3 regions** (Gorenjska, Koroška, Savinjska, Podravska, Pomurska, Osrednjeslovenska, Goriška and Zasavska) **and 8 Austrian NUTS 3 regions** (Oststeiermark, West- and Südsteiermark, Graz, Östliche Obersteiermark, Unterkärnten, Klagenfurt-Villach, Oberkärnten and Südburgenland). This territory covers an area of 35,156 km² (SI: 14,130 km², AT: 21,026 km²) and a population of 3.4 million inhabitants (SI: 1,69 million., AT: 1,72 million.). 10 of these NUTS 3 regions (5 regions on each side) are directly bordering regions, the other regions are included due to their functional linkages and importance for the cross-border region. In the region there are 5 important urban agglomerations: Ljubljana, Maribor, Graz, Klagenfurt and Villach.

The border between Slovenia and Austria stretches over 310 km and separates the countries from east to west. The western part of the border crosses sparsely inhabited high mountainous Alpine territory that further towards the east changes into more hilly landscapes, following the river Mura/Mur for about 30 km and ending at the tripoint marker of the Austrian, Hungarian and Slovenian borders.

In terms of nature of physical obstacles, both the high alpine mountain range of Karavanke/Karawanken and the river Mura/Mur represent natural barriers between the Slovenian and Austrian territories with only a few mountain passes, tunnels and bridges (mostly road) connecting both countries.





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

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

1.2.1 Introduction

In the preparation phase of the Interreg Programme Slovenia-Austria 2021-2027 a territorial and socio-economic analysis has been carried out, to create a sound basis for the selection of thematic fields where cross-border cooperation may contribute most to overcome border obstacles and regional disparities. The analysis identified the main joint challenges, needs and potentials of the area, as well as strategically relevant fields of actions for cross-border cooperation with the potential for overcoming border obstacles and territorial disparities, taking into account economic, social, environmental and other relevant aspects. The description of the challenges and needs is structured in compliance with the five ERDF policy objectives and the Interreg specific objective 'Better cooperation governance'. In addition to the territorial and socio-economic analysis the main results of the impact evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme, the main directions of development provided by the relevant strategies and stakeholders have been considered in the discussions of the Programming Task Force (PTF) when preparing the strategic thematic orientations.

1.2.2 Brief synopsis of the territorial analysis related to challenges and intervention needs

The area along the border between Slovenia and Austria is characterised by landscape diversity, of which the most characteristic are: Alpine mountainous areas in the West, a hilly countryside in central parts, and the Pannonian Plain in the East. It is characterised by few larger and densely populated urban agglomerations and diverse rural areas with challenging population trends, especially for smaller municipalities.

Both national territories of the Slovenia-Austria Programme area provide a relatively high socio-economic level in national and EU comparison. However, the region is confronted by several challenges on its path to a more dynamic and especially more integrated and prosperous space. These challenges are predominantly in the fields of:

- Sustainable economic development
- Nature protection, environment and climate change
- Skills and competence development
- Governance and coordination.

In each of these thematic fields, coordination and cooperation across the border might bring new impulses and value added to the region.

1.2.2.1 Sustainable economic development

Competitiveness of the programme area

Until 2020 the regions of the programme area have recorded a substantial economic growth in relation to the EU average. However, regions with urban agglomerations indicate higher levels of GDP per capita. These include especially the Austrian regions Graz (177 % of the EU average in 2017), Klagenfurt-Villach (147 % of the EU average in 2017) and Östliche Obersteiermark (139 % of the EU average in 2017). Among the Slovenian regions analysed, only the Osrednjeslovenska region is exceeding the EU average (110 % in 2018), whereas all others remain below the EU average of GDP per capita although they are economically stronger than in previous years.

The most important sectors in creation of regional value added are processing industry, production and goods, trade, transport and tourism. The employment rates of the working population aged 20-64 in the programme area are below national averages. Despite the measures adopted by national governments, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected employment. Recovery processes show that in specific sectors (e.g. tourism) qualified workers are even more difficult to



find as they left the industry during the pandemic.

Regional economic disparities remain a future challenge of the programme area, especially in the view of the economic and social recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for transition to a climate-neutral, digital and sustainable economy.

The above is of particular importance for the programme area's Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In both Member States (MSs), SMEs play a major role, generating over 60 % of overall value added, which is approximately 5 % above the EU average. The environment for business support is relatively well developed with business zones of regional importance and active thematic-specific clusters well spread over the programme area.

Data for the period 2014-2017 indicate that some regions in the programme area are more characterised by a decline in the number of newly established enterprises (Südburgenland, Klagenfurt-Villach, Pomurska) accompanied by a substantial increase in the number of enterprises that ceased to exist (Unterkrännten, Pomurska, Podravska, Koroška and Osrednjeslovenska). Less dynamic economic activity is of particular concern for the rural areas.

There are needs to increase the capacities of SMEs and support their recovery from the Covid-19 outbreak and their transition to a green and digital economy. The capacity of the business support environment could be strengthened through cross-border cooperation to foster innovation and capacities for more sustainable and resilient businesses.

Research and Innovation (R&I)

Research and Development (R&D) and Innovation are a strong driving force of the development of the programme area's economy. According to the Regional Innovation Scorecard (RIS), all border regions in Austria have an innovation performance above the EU average, while both Slovenian cohesion regions are characterized as a moderate innovator regarding their innovative performance and are below the EU average. In terms of the proportion of GDP in gross expenditure on research and development, the regions of East and West Slovenia and Carinthia show a medium level of R&D intensity (1 %-3 % of GDP), while Burgenland has a low share with only 0.5-1 % of GDP. Only Styria is above the EU target of 3 % of GDP (4.3 %). Despite favourable economic development, the investments in research and innovation have lagged behind in recent years.

The R&D and innovation capacities are concentrated in regional centres and do not reach sufficiently into the periphery and bordering areas. There is a strong regional knowledge base in several fields, such as metal processing, wood processing, agriculture, automotive, ICT. There is a need to strengthen cooperation of the existing R&D actors in the programme area with the business and other sectors, especially with the SMEs. Intensification of cross-border cooperation among actors in the field of R&D would provide the environment for networking of stakeholders and competitiveness of SMEs (establishing new partnerships across the border, entering new markets, etc.).

The regional R&D and smart specialisation strategies indicate some thematic overlapping and common areas. Examples of these thematic fields are: smart mobility, health/medicine/social care, sustainable tourism, technology, the tourism industry and cultural heritage management, development of new materials and technologies and processes in relation to the circular economy, as well as digitalisation.

Cross-border cooperation might address such common fields. Specific potentials and needs were identified in the development of a circular economy, where the partnerships could address biomass, alternative raw materials, secondary raw materials, functional materials, processes and technologies, as well as circular business models.

Engagement of local and regional businesses in innovation processes and support for the development of new and more sustainable products and services would be an asset. Activities should focus on complementarities in areas where cognitive proximity exists.

Thus, transition to a more sustainable, green and digital economy, increased transfer of R&D benefits to SMEs and a more dynamic economic development in rural areas could be addressed jointly to add value through cooperation.

A low level of cross-border cooperation along the value chain was identified. The potentials for transferring research and innovation results into regional SMEs has not been sufficiently explored, especially in the field of green and circular economy. Overlapping themes of regional and national smart specialisation strategies offer potential for cross-border cooperation. Research and innovation however are considered a cross-cutting topic of this programme and should support all its priorities.

Digitalisation

Digitalisation is transforming the way people work, learn and interact. It brings a variety of advantages for different groups of



people and sectors, however it also poses challenges in terms of their ability to use digital technologies and services, including those related to safety of use and protection of consumers. According to the digitalisation economy and society index, Austria is slightly above and Slovenia slightly below the EU average.

Within this programme, digitalisation is recognised as a cross-cutting development need. The main challenges of the programme area relate to the overall increase of digital skills of the population and the integration of digital technology by businesses, especially SMEs, as well as the increased use of digital solutions in the preservation of climate, environment, disaster risk management and nature protection.

Sustainable tourism based on natural and cultural assets

The programme area is rich in natural values and nature protected areas (e.g. Triglav National Park, Hohe Tauern National Park, Biosphere Reserve Nockberge, cross-border UNESCO biosphere reserve on the Mura/Mur river, Karavanke/Karawanken UNESCO Global Geopark and numerous NATURA 2000 sites), diversity of landscapes and shares a common historical and cultural heritage – largely linked to their long common history over the centuries. The network of cultural institutions, organisations and associations is strong in the area, and they provide a rich cultural life. Regions host a range of different cultural events and festivals celebrating music, regional gastronomy, ethnology, performance and visual arts, etc.

Tourism based on the natural and cultural heritage is one of the important economic activities of the programme area, both in its cities and rural parts, however they face several needs and challenges.

Preserving and maintaining the cultural identity and landscape of the programme area, as well as preserving agriculture, especially in high mountainous areas is a common need. It is frequently a challenge to find the right balance between the protection of the natural and cultural heritage and assets and sustainable (tourism) development.

In many destinations, the increase of visitors is becoming an issue. In sensitive mountainous areas this creates the need for defining carrying capacities and more effective management of visitor flows, including the organisation of rescue and emergency services. Areas offering outdoor products are also more sensitive to seasonality and need to diversify. Climate change is showing its effects in particular in winter tourism and ski centres.

Growth in the number of visits and overnight stays has been recorded for about a decade on both sides until a severe downturn caused by the Covid-19 outbreak. Tourism was one of the hardest hit sectors. Lockdowns, closing of borders and services made tourism virtually impossible. This was especially hard for regions depending on tourism. In the recovery process the changed trends will have to be considered. The overall need for the tourism sector of the programme area is to become safer and more sustainable. To achieve this, skills and competences need to be strengthened and new approaches in product development and management need to be identified and applied.

Several projects addressing valorisation of natural and cultural heritage were supported in previous CBC programmes, many of these products are still rather fragmented. More structured and strategic approaches to the development of sustainable tourism in the programme area are needed.

For effective cross-border tourism, sustainable regional mobility is another challenge that needs to be addressed. There is a need for synchronised timetables for rail and bus connections, adapted to the needs of bikers, linking of the cycling and hiking routes.

The programme area should also invest in the development of the potential within its cultural and creative industry which can complement both sustainable tourism development, as well as the creation of new cultural offers and jobs.

Cross-border cooperation can assist the recovery of the tourism and culture sector, especially regarding acquiring relevant skills and competences, supporting the innovation in product development and the transition to a digital and green tourism sector, addressing the challenges of climate change adaptation and sustainable mobility solutions.

1.2.2.2 Nature protection, environment and climate change

Landscape and biodiversity

The programme area is rich in natural heritage and landscape diversity. The biodiversity is among the highest in the Alps due to the geological composition of the soil and the mixing of the impacts of the climate between the Alps and the Mediterranean. The European watershed between the Adriatic and the Black Sea runs through the programme area. Some areas are designated UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, national/regional, nature or landscape parks of different IUCN categories. Thus, the region might be a place for learning about sustainable development, where sites are testing interdisciplinary



approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict prevention and management of biodiversity.

The Karavanke/Karawanken Geopark is at present the only cross-border UNESCO Global Geopark in the border region. It plays an important and active role in the sustainable economic development of the territory through enhancement of a general image linked to the geological heritage and the development of geotourism.

Water bodies

Slovenia and Austria share the river systems of the Drava/Drau and the Mura/Mur. Approximately 41 % of the water flowing through Slovenia comes from Austria. According to the ecological parameters of the Water Framework Directive, most of the surface water in the measuring points on the border sections is of good quality, while 10 % of rivers and streams indicate increased values of organic pollutants and composition of biomass. The outflow of river Mura/Mur (taking into consideration the monitoring point in the border town of Gornja Radgona/Bad Radkersburg) is heavily influenced by the upstream dams in Austria, since the river is one of the major sources of electricity in Styria.

Groundwater too is generally of good quality and is crucial for the water supply. The utilization of nitrate and plant protection products continues to decline due to the effective implementation of the Water Framework Directive and changes in agricultural activities under the Common Agricultural Policy.

Both countries implemented several measures and actions for improving the quality of water, but there is still a lack of coordination of actions and policies. Thus, the challenges refer to improved cross-border management of water bodies and their use, mitigation of pressures on water bodies and ecosystem-based adaptation measures.

Climate change

Considering the landscape of the area, recent events and the data related to the change of climate (precipitation, temperatures, river flows, snow cover, etc.) show that the area, especially its western part, is very sensitive to climate change. This is already reflected in the changes of biodiversity, natural habitats, as well as agricultural activities.

The average temperatures in the Alps have risen by 1.8 °C in the last 150 years, which is much higher than the global average of 0.85 °C. Climate models for the Alps and for the programme area predict a rise in temperature of 1.4 °C by 2050 in the best-case scenario and 2.5 °C – 4 °C by the year 2100. It is forecast that the region will face higher temperatures during the winter season, droughts during the summer season and increased precipitation during autumn and spring (+5 % to +10 % for most areas). For limiting the temperature increase to 1.4°C up until 2050, the national and regional governments in Slovenia and Austria have adopted plans for reducing CO₂ emissions. The main elements of these climate plans envisage the reduction of fossil energy sources in traffic, industry and commerce, households and agriculture (e.g. thermal renovation of buildings, strengthening environmental / climate-friendly production processes & technologies, increasing the attractiveness and thus the share of public transport systems, sustainable forestry), the promotion of renewable energy (solar, geothermal, wind, biomass), as well as energy efficiency and the protection of biodiversity and habitats. In all CO₂ reduction plans measures for increasing the awareness about this topic among the population and R&D activities are important.

An increasing number of natural disasters (e.g. storms, avalanches, landslides, floods, droughts, etc.) call for common immediate response mechanisms and actions. In the long run they raise important questions in the fields of spatial planning, development of infrastructure and joint management. These common challenges can be better addressed on a wider (cross-border) regional level, also seeking linkages with other programmes (national and transnational). In order to address the challenges of climate change, action plans and measures are needed both for reducing CO₂ emissions (in accordance with existing Energy and Climate Plans) and for adapting economic and social processes in the regions to better cope with the effects of climate change (Climate Change Adaptation Strategies).

Transport and mobility

The area is characterised by dynamic transport flows. The dynamic development of settlements and related urbanization in connection with polycentric development represent a challenge for public transport. Generally, the public transport is more developed in Austrian than in Slovenian regions. Mobility plans have been devised at different administrative levels. However, there are gaps in attractive public transport services especially in rural regions and across the border. The vicinity of the border and major employment hubs in Austria create an economic opportunity for many Slovenians living close to the border.

New and innovative mobility solutions such as micro-public transport services, new last-mile solutions, commuters' associations, development of e-mobility and the development and promotion of bicycle mobility both for everyday use and tourist purposes are envisaged as possibilities that could be promoted in the future. A notable challenge is also the integration of sustainable accessibility to protected areas and mobility within them, alongside the management of visitor flows.



Circular economy

The circular economy is a holistic cross-sectoral approach that is needed to address important regional and cross-regional challenges that are shared by all regions in the programme area.

The Slovenian government declared the circular economy and green development as one of the national strategic objectives and adopted the Framework Programme for the Transition to a Green Economy (2016), followed by a Roadmap towards a Circular Economy (2018). The Austrian Bioeconomic Strategy (2019) and the Federal Waste Management Plan (2017) define very detailed strategies and measures for reducing waste and encouraging a transition to a circular economy in order to replace fossil resources with renewable materials in as many areas and applications as possible in Austria. The update of the Slovenian waste management plan is still in progress and will (once adopted) form a basis for future priorities and measures in the area of waste and circular economy.

1.2.2.3 Skills and competence development

Recent economic growth resulted in positive employment trends and reduced unemployment, which however have been affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. A shortage of skilled workers has been identified in several sectors, such as the processing industry, health and social services, tourism and construction. The programme area is characterised by asymmetric cross-border labour mobility from Slovenia to Austria.

Despite a decrease in unemployment, specific groups of people still find it hard to find or maintain a job: the long-term unemployed, low-skilled and older workers, and the young who often lack work experience. In 2020, unemployment rates of long-term unemployed aged 20-64 years was 28.8 % in Austria and 39.3 % in Slovenia. The unemployment rate of the young aged 15-24 years was 10.1 % in Austria and 13.0% in Slovenia. Both are much higher than unemployment rate of 20-64 years (5.3 % AT and 4.3 % SI). Unemployment rates of those with lowest education levels (ISCED 0-2) were 13.9 % in Austria and 10.9 % in Slovenia, what is also higher than of those with upper secondary levels (ISCED level 3 and 4), which was 5.5 % in Austria and 5.6 % in Slovenia. (Source: Eurostat).

Shortage of jobs for a highly educated workforce in rural areas contributes to migration to big employment centres. Such a brain drain from rural areas makes those even more vulnerable.

Ensuring qualified labour for the existing and future jobs needed by the cooperating regions, intergenerational cooperation and adapting of the work processes for elderly workers is needed. Generating jobs in rural and economically less dynamic areas will be critical for sustaining and increasing their vitality and prosperity. Employment is an important fundament of the quality of life, social inclusion and participation in society. Finding new approaches and solutions that will help activate and increase employability of the long-term unemployed and other groups could be supported by strengthening the capacities for social innovation and social economy, a promising field for triggering future development.

Although the programme area has a relatively well-educated population, some differences exist. The attainment of tertiary education is below the average national levels in rural areas and regions with traditional processing industries and agriculture. Education and training institutions are well developed and support the national and regional smart specialisation topics. However, the access to quality education and training is limited its variety in rural areas. The enhanced shift to distance learning caused by the Covid pandemic opens new opportunities to reduce these inequalities.

The transition to a digital and green economy poses new challenges regarding how to ensure appropriate skills and competencies for future jobs. Integration of skills and knowledge regarding circular economy, nature protection, environmental and climate considerations need to be integrated into education and training at all levels.

Many of the future jobs are not known today. Thus, skills intelligence and forecasting will be critical to support the regions to become more sustainable and competitive. The education and training institutions will need to adapt and upgrade their programmes to new needs. Lifelong learning is expected to become increasingly important, especially for those with a lower level of skills. Insufficient digital skills have been recognised as a key challenge which needs to be addressed horizontally. There is also the need for increased inter-cultural and language learning that would facilitate building of trust and cooperation across the border.

1.2.2.4 Governance and coordination

Slovenia and Austria have different administrative structures. In Austria, there are three main levels – central government, the federal administration of the States and the local level of the municipal administration. In Slovenia there are only two levels of



administration – central government and local self-governments at local level.

On the Austrian side, due to a strong federal tradition, many administrative competences are assigned to the federal state level, whereas in Slovenia, administrative competences are more centralized at central government level.

The programme area comprises 599 municipalities, of which a large proportion are rather small-sized and thus with limited capacities for cooperation. Only four cities, Klagenfurt, Graz, Ljubljana and Maribor have a population over 100.000.

These differences in political, legal and administrative framework conditions still hamper cross-border coordination and cooperation on an institutional level and create difficulties for matching competent structures and representatives on both sides of the border.

The dominance of small municipalities with limited resources (personnel, finances, know-how) hinders local administration in getting actively and professionally involved in cross-border projects and activities in addition to their obligatory administrative tasks.

In both countries, several regional and thematic coordination and cooperation structures have been established. These range from area based CLLD/Leader structures and Regional Development Agencies to thematic agencies in the area of energy efficiency, climate change, etc. These agencies have a strong role in intercommunal cooperation and provide strong human capacities for addressing challenges that are beyond the mere local level. These structures have a stronger position on the Austrian side. They also play an important role in the cross-border cooperation between Slovenia and Austria.

However, many of these structures only have a mandate to be active in and for their own territory. In the recent programming period, the stakeholders expressed the need to intensify exchange and to create more stable cooperation platforms/structures, bringing together relevant actors across the border. Relevant topics include all EC Policy Objectives.

The EGTC Karavanke/Karawanken Geopark is a widely recognized structure in the middle of the region where 14 municipalities are cooperating across the border. Initiatives for more EGTCs in the region exist, a good example of which is a bilateral conference of mayors in the eastern part of the programme area. There is a need for further coordination and cooperation, both between local administration structures and with the joint involvement of administrative structures and non-governmental institutions in many thematic areas (mobility, natural hazards, environment and nature protection, climate change mitigation, business support, labour market, education, social services, etc.).

The different administrative systems and also the different languages still represent obstacles for a stronger integration of the region. Both socio-economic activities and cultural orientation of population, businesses and institutions on both sides are predominantly oriented towards the national and regional centres. The potentials for establishing more intense contacts and initiatives across the border have not yet been effectively seized, especially with regard to cooperation at local levels. These factors limit the exploitation of potentials that may arise from a more intense perception of and acting in a larger and integrated space. There is a need to increase people-to-people activities in the programme area.

1.2.3 Lessons learnt

Within the programming period 2014-2020, the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Austria supported 52 projects that cooperated in strengthening cross-border competitiveness, research and innovation, protecting the environment, promoting resource efficiency, enhancing institutional capacity and efficient public administration.

The analysis carried out within the Impact Evaluation shows that the highest number of partners, lead partners, allocated funds and participating projects was in the regions of Graz (Austria) and Osrednjeslovenska (Slovenia), thus reflecting the absorption capacity of both regions. Furthermore, a certain dominance of project activities is found in the more eastern part of the programme area (especially South-East Styria, Podravska, Pomurska) and around the central towns of the cross-border region (Ljubljana, Graz, Klagenfurt, Villach, Maribor, Murska Sobota, etc.). On the other hand, smaller municipalities on the Slovenian side and those at a greater distance from the border on both sides show less involvement in cross-border cooperation initiatives.

The impact evaluation highlighted several cooperation experiences and future needs. There is a need to better engage in cross-border cooperation actions within the bordering regions, in particular along the border. In the period 2014-2020 it was evident that the highest concentration of ERDF funds was allocated to Osrednjeslovenska and Graz, adjacent regions with the highest absorption capacity. However, looking at the density of project activities, the evaluation showed more dynamic cooperation in the eastern part of the programme area. Activities were relatively less dense in central Slovenia and on the outskirts of the programme area.



There is a common interest in finding arrangements to foster cooperation of actors with small-size projects primarily focusing on building trust and cooperation among people living in the area. Topics for cooperation include culture, school initiatives and sustainable tourism, but also nature conservation initiatives and disaster response. Such projects are believed to make an important contribution to the outreach and visibility of the programme among the general public.

Further efforts should be made to strive for better sustainability of projects and enhancing their networking capacity, thus contributing to better use of available funds and avoiding duplication of common activities. Also, interlinking with other (notably Interreg) programmes should be intensified.

Some cooperation potentials have not yet been sufficiently seized; e.g. regarding civil protection and nature management, there is interest in an exchange in spatial planning; due to the lack of regular exchanges between the regional structures, some of the potentials for cooperation have not yet been analysed and discussed.

1.2.4 Complementarity and synergies with strategies and other funding opportunities (including coherence with macro-regional strategies)

The quality and impact of project results may be significantly greater when the projects are building on the capitalization of results of previous projects and networking with others, i.e. creating synergies. Such scaling up of projects may occur with projects of different scales, funded by regional and national programmes, other Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes or Interreg transnational and other EU funded programmes.

Complementarity and potential synergies of European, national and regional strategies and programmes with the Interreg Programme Slovenia-Austria 2021-2027 have been taken into account in the programming process. Parts of the programme area overlap with other Interreg cross-border programmes (Austria-Italy, Austria-Hungary, Italy-Slovenia, Slovenia-Hungary and Slovenia-Croatia) and transnational programmes (Alpine Space, Danube and Central Europe). Therefore, an exchange of information was established among MAs/JSs of these programmes, whereas in some cases the experiences and orientations were exchanged by members of the PTF Group who participate in the Programming Committees of other Interreg programmes.

During programming synergies and complementarities also were sought with EU macro-regional strategies (MRSs). The most important MRSs covering the territories analysed are the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR).

The Alpine region is one of the largest economic and productive regions in Europe and faces several challenges – economic globalisation requires the territory to distinguish itself as competitive and innovative. Demographic trends, climate change and its effect on biodiversity and living conditions of the inhabitants, as well as energy are key joint challenges to be addressed. The strategy focuses on competitiveness and innovation, environmentally-friendly mobility and sustainable management of energy, natural and cultural resources, and a cross-cutting policy area – governance, including institutional capacity. The Western part of the programme area belongs to the Alps and shares many of the challenges addressed also by EUSALP.

EUSDR covers territories of 14 countries in the basin of the Danube. The territory shares several challenges, comprising environmental threats, insufficient energy connections, uneven socio-economic development, uncoordinated education, R&I systems and shortcomings in safety and security. The strategy and its action plan focus on 4 pillars – Connecting the region, Protecting the Environment, Building prosperity and Strengthening the Region, each of them with several key themes. The eastern part of the Slovenian – Austrian programme area opens up towards the Pannonian basin, however it represents only a tiny territory of EUSDR.

The Interreg Programme Slovenia-Austria is in line with the intervention focus of these two macro-regional strategies as described in Chapter 2 under each Specific Objective. The MA and JS have also taken part in the yearly events of the macro-regional strategies (e.g. EU Macro-Regional Strategies Week) which aimed at embedding the MRS priorities in EU programmes.

It will be even more important to also seek synergies and complementarities during the implementation phase. In the application form project applicants will be requested to describe the coherence and complementarity of their projects with EU, national and regional programmes, as well as with EU macro regional strategies which will be subject to assessment. The exchange of information will be established between the MAs/JSs of these programmes to exclude the risk of double funding and ensure anti-fraud measures as well as to promote synergies between projects and highlight the added value which can be achieved through capitalisation. In addition, the MA/JS will also participate in cross-programme coordination and synergies events in Central and South East Europe organised by INTERACT.



On the Austrian side, the coordination between the various IBW/ERDF Programmes, Macro-Regional Strategies and the Interreg Programmes is invested within ÖROK (the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning). The relevant platforms regarding this coordination are the Sub-Committee for Regional Economy (UA Regionalwirtschaft) and the ARGE CBC. This coordination platform ensures information exchange about interventions in the various Programmes between the relevant bodies on the Austrian side, the coordinated utilisation of the various funds, the observation of synergies between the individual interventions and Programmes and the avoidance of overlapping.

In general, it is envisaged that the Austrian IBW/ERDF Programme funds interventions with mainly sectoral thematic focus and investments mainly concentrating on the Austrian territory whereas the Interreg Programmes are supporting involvement of and the networking among stakeholders and the coordination of policies and strategies across borders.

In line with the Partnership Agreement for Slovenia the Interreg programmes will focus mainly on challenges and opportunities of border regions and transnational cooperation areas, addressing mainly joint priorities in the field of innovation, green transition to a low-carbon society and circular economy, as well as in cooperation governance. During the elaboration of the Interreg Programme Slovenia-Austria 2021-2027 it was not possible at that time to assess the synergies between the Interreg programme and the Slovenian European cohesion policy programme.

In Slovenia the MAs of cohesion policy programmes are centralised within one institution, i.e. the Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Development and European Cohesion Policy. The MA of IP SI-AT 2021-2027 participates in internal coordination meetings at the highest level on a weekly basis and is a member of the Monitoring Committee of the European cohesion policy Operational Programme. This coordination mechanism is planned to be maintained also in the future.

1.2.5 Programme vision and mission

The programme area between Slovenia and Austria has identified several potentials, needs and challenges expressed by the actors in the programme area that clearly show that the territory is ahead of important transitions that can be jointly addressed. The programme is focusing on a limited number of thematic areas and will pool resources to drive the change and take opportunity for increased level of cooperation capacity, new development and common solutions to challenges identified. The overall aims of the programme are to reduce territorial disparities in the cross-border region, to drive change and take opportunity of new development trends by pooling resources across national borders in order to be better prepared for the future and to alleviate border obstacles to better cooperate across national borders in specific areas.

Based on these aims the following programme vision has been defined, namely: “Together we are safeguarding and developing our common region for the future”, which is underlined with the mission of the programme “Improving coordination and cooperation in the SI-AT border area to reduce border obstacles and unleash the potentials for a resilient and competitive region.”

1.2.6 Horizontal principles

In all phases of the programme cycle, the horizontal principles of equal opportunities, non-discrimination, gender equality, accessibility for persons with disabilities and environmental sustainability will apply. The programme authorities have and will through the entire life cycle of the programme (preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation) ensure that the horizontal principles are respected.

No project that could potentially harm the environment will be supported. The project applicants will have to meet the requirements related to protection of the environment and/or health. Moreover, they will be encouraged to promote climate neutrality and sustainable development.

In implementing the programme, the managing authority will promote the strategic use of public procurement to support strategic objectives (including professionalisation efforts to address institutional capacity gaps). Beneficiaries should be encouraged to pay more attention to quality and life-cycle cost criteria. Where possible, environmental (e.g. green public procurement criteria) and social aspects and incentives for innovation should be included in public procurement procedures.

Actions planned in the programme, in particular those related to specific objective 2.2 Sustainable economic development based on culture and tourism potentials, should be seen in the contexts of the New European Bauhaus initiative, building enriching, sustainable and inclusive places.



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

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

Table 1: Justification for selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>PO2 – A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>RSO2.4 – Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and disaster resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches</p>	<p>Priority 1 - A more resilient and sustainable region</p>	<p>The programme area is rich in natural heritage and its biodiversity of habitats and species is among the highest in Europe. This is reflected in a dense network of protected areas, nature parks, biosphere reserves, NATURA 2000 sites, as well as in valuable and protected plant and animal species.</p> <p>However, recent events and the available data related to climate change (precipitation, temperatures, river flows, snow cover, etc.) show that the area is very sensible to climate change. An increasing number of natural disasters (i.e. storms, landslides, floods, droughts, sleet, etc.) are highly noticeable effects of climate change in the region. Air pollution (with traffic as the main contributor to GHG), land intake, water quality and biodiversity loss reduce the ability of essential ecosystem services that would mitigate the effects and immediate consequences of climate change.</p> <p>Addressing climate change, risk prevention and disaster resilience in a cross-border manner can lead to the mutual benefit of both countries, bringing synergy and common actions in the implementation of national and EU strategies. Joint and coordinated measures combined with the transfer of best practices can lead to relevant and tangible results in the programme area for the benefit of the population in the region.</p> <p>The programme area is increasingly popular for leisure visitors, since the picturesque landscapes offer many outdoor activities. However, the substantial increase of such activities raises challenges for the management of natural areas (i.e. related to mobility, visitor management, pressure on ecosystems, natural resources, etc.). In order to seek solutions to current threats and upcoming challenges, cross-border cooperation could bring added value in finding joint actions in addressing the following needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing measures to reduce effects of human activities on CO₂ emissions; • Joint approaches to strengthening resilience to climate change effects on natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity; • Strengthened resilience of businesses and local communities to the consequences of climate change; • Improved capacity and readiness of joint response mechanisms and measures in relation to disasters. <p>The specific objective will be implemented in the form of grants (a more detailed justification is provided in section Planned use of financial instruments).</p>



Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>PO2 – A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility</p>	<p>RSO2.6 – Promoting the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy</p>	<p>Priority 1 - A more resilient and sustainable region</p>	<p>The utilization of the existing potentials of sustainable business models in the circular economy is underdeveloped in the programme area. Considering the strong R&D and the variety of well-established industry sectors and fields, the capacity to develop innovative solutions is considerable. Sustainable use of natural raw materials, their further utilization and recycling is a welcome approach in tackling regional (and cross-regional) challenges of resource efficiency. Efforts should now be directed to the implementation of actions envisaged as part of existing and emerging national and regional development strategies. Building on the capitalisation of existing solutions and seeking synergies among the regions within the programme area will substantially contribute to the enhanced capacities of different stakeholders.</p> <p>Resource efficiency still has a strong potential to be better exploited. Adoption of circular approaches such as recycle, reuse, repair and return of materials in order to (re)make a new product are necessary in order to make the transition to a responsible economy reality and thus support the Green Deal.</p> <p>A circular economy provides a wide field of opportunities for co-operation and represents an intervention field interlinking R&D with regional innovation potentials of SMEs, consumers and local-regional-national governmental institutions also across the border. The potential exists in addressing the following needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient use of resources; • Building of capacities for introducing circular economy models and concepts; • Supporting innovative local communities and businesses to become green and circular; • Stimulation of green employment opportunities; • Increasing local added value. <p>The specific objective will be implemented in the form of grants (a more detailed justification is provided in section Planned use of financial instruments).</p>



PO4 -
A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights

RSO4.2 – Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training

**Priority 2 -
A more competent and competitive region**

A skilled workforce is an essential asset of the programme area. Economic sectors on both sides are similar and share common smart specialisation topics, e.g. wood and metal processing, new materials and technologies, food technologies and sustainable tourism. Similar skills shortages exist on both sides in the fields of industry, tourism, social and health care, as well as at the vocational education level. A transition to a green and digital economy will require new skills to remain competitive.

Disparities in the **access to education and training** exist between rural and urban areas. Participation in lifelong learning is lower among specific groups such as the lower educated, elderly, and migrants, and more inclusive ways of acquiring work and life skills are needed.

Small businesses play an important role in the regional economy and many suffered from the effects of Covid-19 measures. They need knowledge and skills to adapt to new challenges, to innovate and to become more resilient and competitive. Transfer of R&D findings to SMEs is still poor.

A large number of institutions in the areas of education, training, R&D, labour market and economic and social partners are active in both countries. However, coordination among them is low and language barriers and a low level of intercultural skills are still obstacles that are recognized for more intense cooperation.

Cross-border cooperation can add value in addressing the following common needs:

- Making the education, training and lifelong learning services and actors better prepared to address the skills' needs of regional economies and their transition to a green and digital economy;
- Addressing the digital divide related to work and life;
- Supporting SMEs in developing innovation and R&D skills and competences;
- Improving participation in lifelong learning, including vulnerable groups;
- Activating people's innovative and entrepreneurial potentials
- Fostering inter-cultural and language skills.

The specific objective will be implemented in the form of grants (a more detailed justification is provided in section Planned use of financial instruments).



Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
PO4 - A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights	RSO4.6 – Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation	Priority 2 - A more competent and competitive region	<p>The programme area shares a common historical and cultural heritage, which along with distinct nature values provide strong assets for sustainable tourism. Outdoor activities, wellness, food and wine, hiking, biking, rural, city and cultural tourist products create a significant share in the regional economy on both sides.</p> <p>The tourism sector has been growing for a decade and faced a severe downturn in 2020/21 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Regional economic systems need to adapt to the changed situation. Increased health and safety measures, a shift to low-touch and digital, and greater resource efficiency are new demands that are especially challenging for small family businesses and rural areas.</p> <p>Preservation of natural and cultural values remains a challenge. Visits to nature (protected areas) even increased during the pandemic. Some regions depend much on seasonal tourism, which is already affected by climate change.</p> <p>Culture plays an important role not only in shaping the area identity and its social fabric, but also has an economic potential. Cultural creation and distribution, access to a diverse audience across the border changed and digital shift have become more important. Culture and creative industries were also badly hit by Covid-19 measures and need to recover and become more resilient. The potential for creation of new jobs and services, also in rural areas, has not yet been sufficiently tackled. Innovative solutions and new more sustainable business models in the sector should be explored.</p> <p>Cross-border cooperation can add value in tackling the following needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making tourism environmentally and economically more sustainable;• Valorising and capitalising on tourist products based on natural and cultural heritage;• Promoting sustainable mobility solutions in tourism and adapting to climate change challenges;• Developing the economic potentials of cultural and creative industries. <p>The specific objective will be implemented in the form of grants (a more detailed justification is provided in section Planned use of financial instruments).</p>



<p>ISO1 - A better cooperation governance</p>	<p>ISO6.2 – Enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens, civil society actors and institutions, in particular, with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border</p>	<p>Priority 3 - A better cooperation governance</p>	<p>The geographic features and the state border between Slovenia and Austria are not only physical obstacles dividing the two territories, but also mark a demarcation between different administrative and regulatory systems, cultures, languages, spatial and cultural orientations and of social, economic and cultural activities.</p> <p>Many relevant topics for sustainable socio-economic development (e.g. in spatial planning, business support, intra and interregional mobility, health and social care), climate change mitigation and adaptation and public administration and policy planning require considerations, coordination and involvement of stakeholders beyond administrative and national borders. However, the differences in political, legal, administrative and socio-economic framework conditions in the programme area still hamper a more dynamic cross-border cooperation on an institutional level and a more integrated socio-economic space.</p> <p>Small-size municipalities are those that dominate by far in the region. These municipalities have very limited resources (financial, personnel) for addressing development challenges in many thematic fields. SMEs in the region frequently lack cross-border business cooperation and market access and capacities for digitalisation and applied R&D.</p> <p>Cross-border cooperation could create value added in addressing the following needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jointly addressing a wide range of joint challenges and overcoming obstacles resulting from the different administrative, legal and regulatory frameworks by promoting sustainable cooperation structures; • Strengthening the competitiveness and cooperation capacities of the subjects in the region’s economy. <p>The specific objective will be implemented in the form of grants (a more detailed justification is provided in section Planned use of financial instruments).</p>
<p>ISO1 - A better cooperation governance</p>	<p>ISO6.3 – Build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to- people actions</p>	<p>Priority 3 - A better cooperation governance</p>	<p>The development of an integrated development space requires a multitude of linkages among people and civil society structures in a region and across borders. However, the historical division of the region by state borders for many decades, different languages and different administrative regimes have led to both people and activities being oriented towards regional and national territories and centres. Thus, apart from formal and institutionalised cooperation structures and procedures on an administrative level, also numerous contacts and connections between local people and institutions across the border are important for the socio-economic integration of the region.</p> <p>A multitude of small scale cross-border cooperation initiatives could create value added in addressing the needs of creating awareness, trust and a culture of cooperation between the population and public and civil society institutions on both sides of the border.</p> <p>The specific objective will be implemented in the form of grants (a more detailed justification is provided in section Planned use of financial instruments).</p>



2. PRIORITIES

2.1 Priority I - A more resilient and sustainable region

2.1.1 Specific objective 1.1 – Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience (RSO 2.4)

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

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

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

The aim of the specific objective is to improve resilience of ecosystems, businesses and communities to the effects of climate change and enhance cross-border risk prevention and response mechanisms. Projects implemented within this SO should therefore introduce applicable approaches and solutions regarding climate protection, biodiversity loss and adaptation to the effects of climate change. Thus, actions related to reduction of CO₂, joint management of water bodies, safeguarding biodiversity, nature protection, risk prevention and disaster resilience are needed.

The actions implemented should be in line with the EU Green Deal objectives, thus paving the way towards climate neutrality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Projects implemented must be a result of joint cooperation and interaction between relevant institutions, provide tangible and applicable solutions and enhance capacities of stakeholders involved for implementation actions that are envisaged in the adopted regional and national strategies (i.e. National Energy and Climate Plans).

Types of activities (indicative):

- Development and implementation of strategies, action plans and pilot actions
- Know-how exchange and capacity building
- Strengthening of research and innovation capacities
- Awareness raising
- Digital solutions

Actions should originate from the challenges of the area and strengthen the resilience of the environment (nature as well as socio-economic factors) to the effects of climate change.

Thematic fields to be addressed:

- **Climate change: climate protection, resilience, adaptation and mitigation measures**
Joint development, implementation and scaling up of solutions that improve capacities of relevant stakeholders and resilience of communities and businesses to climate change.
- **Management of water bodies**
To ensure long-term sustainable cross-border water management for preservation of freshwater-dependent ecosystems and management of flood risks.
- **Biodiversity and nature protection**
Protect biodiversity and nature by developing, implementing and enhancing joint nature-based solutions and management measures in order to restore, improve and preserve the ecosystem services of the natural environment with regard to climate change (including NATURA 2000 sites and other categories of conservation).
- **Disaster prevention, mitigation and response**
To develop and put into practice cross-border response and rescue protocols and mechanisms for disaster mitigation and response.

Types of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Coordinated joint research and innovation actions, development of strategies, models and pilot actions to reduce man-made CO₂-emissions and to improve adaptive capacities in the programme area to cope with the impacts of climate



change;

- Initiatives for joint monitoring actions of climate change effects related to landscape, nature, ecosystems and citizens in the border region;
- Capacity development for climate change mitigation and adoption services (e.g. enhancing climate research, setting-up of preventive planning measures and risk management related to natural hazards brought on by climate change, joint development of innovative actions and tools, interoperable databases, disaster monitoring, warning- and response systems at different territorial levels);
- Joint management of water bodies (e.g. shared drainage and groundwater basin management, coordinated flood prevention measures, monitoring of quality and quantity of surface and groundwater bodies, measures for improving the ecological and chemical status and quantity of water bodies) stimulating use of innovative approaches and digitalisation
- Development of cross-border strategies, measures and implementation of pilot projects to prevent biodiversity and landscape diversity loss and enhancement of nature management, sustainable land use management, climate-friendly settlement development and soil protection, preservation of ecosystem services and cross-border ecological connectivity
- Innovative and digital solutions and practices addressing biodiversity loss, air pollution, water management, increased number of disaster risks, etc.
- Development and implementation of cross-border rescue protocols and mechanisms to do with natural hazards related to climate change (harmonized response protocols, coordination of responsible institutions related to risk governance, joint trainings of rescue teams, capacity building, etc.)

The actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF guidelines.

Expected results

The actions of cross-border cooperation that are implemented will enhance the capacity and readiness of local, regional and national actors for coping with the challenges of climate change and improve the resilience of the cross-border region to the effects of climate change.

Contribution to Macro-Regional Strategies

Actions supported within this priority are in line with the 3rd Thematic Policy Area of the EUSALP Strategy for the Alpine region – ‘A more inclusive environmental framework for all and renewable and reliable energy solutions for the future’. The priority 1 of the IP SI-AT 2021-2027 is strongly interlinked with Objective 3 (preserving the Alpine heritage and promoting a sustainable use of natural and cultural resources). The actions implemented will also contribute to achieving the targets of the EUSDR – EU Strategy for the Danube region, namely Priority Area 5 – ‘To manage environmental risks’ and Priority Area 6 – ‘To preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the quality of air and soils.’

2.1.1.2 Indicators

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

Table 2: Output indicators SO 1.1

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
1	1.1 (RSO2.4)	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot actions	0	17
1	1.1 (RSO2.4)	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	35

Table 3: Result indicators SO 1.1

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	1.1 (RSO2.4)	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	15	Jems	
1	1.1 (RSO2.4)	RCR 84	Organizations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	24	Jems	

2.1.1.3 The main target groups

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

Target groups of the actions supported are organisations and individuals that will be involved or positively affected by the actions, including:

- Local, regional and national public authorities and sectoral agencies, especially those active in the field of nature conservation, water management, mobility and civil protection and other relevant fields
- Interest groups including NGOs, especially those concerned with safeguarding biodiversity, awareness-raising regarding climate change
- Higher education and research organisations
- Education/training centres and schools
- Enterprises including SMEs
- EGTCs
- General public

2.1.2 Specific objective 1.2 - Promoting the transition to a circular economy (RSO 2.6)

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

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

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

The aim of this specific objective is to stimulate the potentials of the cross-border region in implementing solutions related to the circular economy and resource efficiency.

The actions implemented should support awareness-raising, improve knowledge and skills and support networking of different stakeholders operating at local level (private-public partnerships, R&D, SMEs, public institutions, etc.) across the border to identify, develop and test joint circular economy solutions. The projects supported should aim to establish new value chains according to the economic principles of closed material flows (design, production and processing, distribution, use, reuse and repair, collection and recycling, responsible handling of waste remains), and other activities related to circular economy. Activities, thematic fields and actions should focus on topics that could achieve the highest impact, offering cross-border support by the programme in the transition of the programme area towards a circular economy. Actions should have an impact at regional/local level and by this means contribute to the EU and national and regional environmental and climate objectives.

Types of activities (indicative):

- Development and implementation of strategies and action plans and pilot actions
- Building/establishing cross-sectoral cross-border networks
- Innovative and applicable solutions on resource efficiency that would stimulate the transition to a circular economy and effective use of natural resources



- Strengthening of research and innovation capacities
- Identifying legal barriers and proposing their removal
- Digital solutions
- Awareness-raising and exchange of know-how

Thematic fields to be addressed:

- Circular and climate-friendly business models
- Processes, technologies and services that enhance and support a circular economy and climate-friendly concepts
- Functional and sustainable materials
- Greening of the economy

Types of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Joint development and implementation of innovative circular business models, processes and technologies;
- Actions to support (short) loops in circular economy and cross-border material flow models (reuse, repair, recycle, return);
- Actions related to the research and development of sustainable materials, resource efficiency (e.g. water reuse and energy efficiency), processes, technologies, services, business models and products that lead the way towards the transition to a low carbon economy;
- Quadruple/triple helix cooperations of institutions within the border regions on the concepts of circular economy;
- Applied research models and demonstrative projects on resource efficiency in order to streamline the roadmap to a resource-efficient border region;
- Initiatives that support actions that contribute to industrial symbiosis, waste reduction, improved waste management and promote resource efficiency (reform, reduce, recycle);
- Enhancing the capacities of SMEs for transition to a circular economy and the use of ICT tools;
- Initiatives to raise awareness among the general public regarding resource efficiency.

The actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF guidelines.

Expected results

Cross-border actions implemented will provide solutions and starting points that serve as best practice and have the potential to transfer successful cooperation between different stakeholders (R&D institutions, SME's, communities, etc.) and give impulses to the circular economy and resource efficiency.

Contribution to Macro-Regional Strategies

The circular economy is becoming one of the priorities of EU programmes and strategies in the 2021-2027 programme period.

Actions supported within this priority are in line with the 1st Thematic Policy Area of the EUSALP Strategy for the Alpine region – 'Economic growth and Innovation'. Priority 2 of IP SI-AT 2021-2027 is strongly interlinked with Objective 1 (Fostering sustainable growth and promoting innovation in the Alps – from theory to practice, from research centres to enterprises) and also partly with Objective 3 (preserving the Alpine heritage and promoting a sustainable use of natural and cultural resources).

Actions supported will also contribute to achieving the targets of the EUSDR – EU Strategy for the Danube region, namely Priority Area 7 – 'To develop the Knowledge Society' and Priority Area 8 – 'To support the competitiveness of enterprises'.

2.1.2.2 Indicators

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

Table 4: Output indicators 1.2

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
1	1.2 (RSO2.6)	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot actions	0	15
1	1.2 (RSO2.6)	RCO 87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	30



Table 5: Result indicators 1.2

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
1	1.2 (RSO2.6)	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	8	Jems	
1	1.2 (RSO2.6)	RCR 84	Organizations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	20	Jems	

2.1.2.3 The main target groups

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

Target groups of the actions supported are organisations and individuals that will be involved or positively affected by the actions, including:

- Local, regional and national public authorities and sectoral agencies
- Interest groups including NGOs
- Providers of infrastructure and public (communal) services
- Higher education and research organisations
- Education/training centres and schools
- Enterprises including SMEs
- EGTCs
- General public

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

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

The Priority concerns the entire programme area.

2.1.4 Planned use of financial instruments

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

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes a form of a grant. The main focus of the programme is put on fostering cooperation and reducing CB obstacles, promoting sustainable and green solutions. The programme will therefore support projects that will have sector and territory wide influence. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-profit-oriented nature of cross-border projects.



2.1.5 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

Table 6: Dimension 1 – intervention field for Priority 1

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.1 Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience	060 Adaptation to climate change measures and prevention and management of climate related risks: others, e.g. storms and drought (including awareness-raising, civil protection and disaster management systems, infrastructures and ecosystem- based approaches)	6,300,000
1	ERDF	1.1 Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience	064 Water management and water resource conservation (including river basin management, specific climate change adaptation measures, reuse, leakage, reduction)	3,150,000
1	ERDF	1.1 Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience	079 Nature and biodiversity protection, natural heritage and resources, green and blue infrastructure	3,150,000
1	ERDF	1.2 Promoting the transition to a circular economy	029 Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, research centres and universities, focusing on the low carbon economy, resilience and adaptation to climate change	4,250,000
1	ERDF	1.2 Promoting the transition to a circular economy	030 Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises, focusing on the circular economy	2,975,000
1	ERDF	1.2 Promoting the transition to a circular economy	071 Promoting the use of recycled materials as raw materials	1,275,000

Table 7: Dimension 2 – form of financing for Priority 1

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.1	01	12,600,000
1	ERDF	1.2	01	8,500,000

Table 8: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus for Priority 1

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
1	ERDF	1.1	33	12,600,000
1	ERDF	1.2	33	8,500,000



2.2 Priority 2 - A more competent and competitive region

2.2.1 Specific objective 2.1 - Developing skills and competencies for work and life (RSO 4.2)

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

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

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

The aim of this specific objective is to support local and regional actors in providing competences needed for strengthening the competitiveness of the programme area and its transition to a green and digital economy. Furthermore, the specific objective aims to improve intercultural and language competences to advance cross-border cooperation.

Types of activities (indicative)

- Development and implementation of concepts, models and tools at all levels of education and training
- Pilot actions
- Development of curricula and training contents and tools
- Education and training activities, knowledge exchange
- Mentoring, internships
- Teacher/student/worker mobility and exchanges
- Establishing of cross-border networks and cross-border and cross-sectoral partnerships and exchanges
- Awareness-raising and skills promotion

Activities should aim at introducing solutions into sustainable practices and therefore one-off events or single courses are not supported. Also, learning and training opportunities should be fully accessible to persons with disabilities, whether these are onsite or online. Where appropriate, digital awareness training should be included in training offers.

Thematic fields to be addressed:

- Actions should primarily facilitate the development and pilot testing of innovative system solutions for promoting skills and competences in the following fields:
- Competitiveness of regional economies
- Greening of regional economies
- Digitalisation for work and life
- Entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation
- Social innovation and social economy
- Cross-cultural and language learning.

Types of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Identification of existing and future regional market skills and development and testing of related forecasting models and tools;
- Development and piloting of innovative approaches for the promotion of skills sets and vocations needed by local/regional economies, especially concerning vocational education and lifelong learning;
- Development and pilot implementation of new programmes and tools focusing on upskilling and reskilling of workers and unemployed; focusing on competitiveness and greening of the economy;
- Supporting the development of competences and skills promoting the revitalization of heritage (protection, preservation, management, presentation) and CCI, also by stimulating inter/multi-generational cooperation across the border;
- Development of competences for implementation of innovative digital solutions into products and services (Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, Internet of Things, interoperability of data, cyber security, etc.);
- Supporting competence development of SMEs for their digital transformation with the overall goal of greening of the economy and improving regional competitiveness;
- Supporting the development of digital skills of people facing exclusion due to the digital divide (e.g. improving digital skills to work with new technologies, skills development for the elderly and other groups to use and benefit from digitalisation);
- Improving competences of local and regional business support systems to foster entrepreneurship and start-up initiatives, especially in rural areas, in particular in the green economy;



- Cooperation of R&D, education and training organisations and businesses to develop and test support services, which enable access to and application of research findings into local/regional SMEs, especially regarding greening concepts, digitalisation, recovery and resilience building (e.g., through knowledge exchange platforms, networks or hubs);
- Actions supporting the development of competences of local and regional actors to promote social innovation and social economy/entrepreneurship;
- Development of innovative and system solutions to increase cross-cultural and language competences of different target groups.

The actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF guidelines.

Expected results

The capacity of local and regional actors to equip businesses and the general population with skills for green and digital transition will increase. SMEs will strengthen their capacity for innovation and intensify cooperation with research and innovation institutions. The capacity of business support organisation for supporting (cross-border) entrepreneurial initiatives will improve. Local and regional actors will be offered new models and solutions to build cross-cultural and language competences.

Contribution to Macro-Regional Strategies

A contribution of this priority to the macro-regional strategy EUSALP is expected primarily towards Objective 1: Fostering sustainable growth and promoting innovation in the Alps through the advancement of quality of education and training systems and improved competences for innovation. The contribution to the EUSDR is envisaged especially to Priority Area 9: People and Skills and Priority Area 8: Competitiveness of enterprises by improving skills and competences, quality of education and training and promotion of lifelong learning and entrepreneurial skills.

Cross-border cooperation actions will empower education and training organisations, labour market institutions and economic actors to improve or develop new products and services for effective provision of skills and competences needed by the regional economy in the areas of smart specialisation and transition to green and digital. Attaining digital competencies and solutions will help improve access to training and education, especially in rural areas, and to services of public interest. Provision of opportunities for intercultural and language learning will help build trust and strengthen the potentials for cross-border cooperation.

2.2.1.2 Indicators

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

Table 9: Output indicators SO 2.1

Priority	Specific objective	ID [5]	Indicator	Measurement unit [255]	Milestone (2024) [200]	Final target (2029) [200]
2	2.1 (RSO4.2)	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot actions	0	10
2	2.1 (RSO4.2)	RCO 85	Participations in joint training schemes	Participations	0	35

Table 10: Result indicators SO 2.1

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.1 (RSO4.2)	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2021	10	Jems	
2	2.1 (RSO4.2)	RCR 81	Completion of joint training schemes	Participants	0	2021	28	Jems	



2.2.1.3 The main target groups

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

Target groups of the actions supported are organisations and individuals that will be involved or positively affected by the actions, including:

- Local, regional, and national public authorities and sectoral agencies, especially those active in the field of education and training, labour market, entrepreneurship, economic development and competitiveness, digitalisation, social and health and other relevant fields
- Higher education and research organisations
- Education/training centres and schools, providing formal and non-formal education and training
- SMEs and enterprises
- Business support organisations, such as start-up centres, business incubators, innovation hubs
- EGTCs
- Interest groups including NGOs, especially those concerned with the training and education in the areas of smart specialisation, greening the economy, digitalisation, care economy, cluster organisations and networks, organisations representing economic and social interests of employees/employers
- General public

2.2.2 Specific objective 2.2 – Sustainable economic development based on culture and tourism potentials (RSO 4.6)

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

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

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

The aim of this specific objective is to increase sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of tourism based on sustainable use of local, natural and cultural assets. It aims to activate potentials of the culture, cultural heritage and creative industries (CCI) for economic development and strengthening of the identity of the programme area.

The focus should be put on developing tourism in a sustainable manner, considering all protection regimes and providing sustainable solutions for visitor management as well as considering climate change risks.

The inclusion and cooperation of small family businesses and the development of tourism and culture in rural and directly bordering regions is to be promoted.

Interventions that have an impact on cultural heritage should be in line with best practices on compliance with the “European Quality Principles for EU-funded interventions with potential impact on cultural heritage” developed by ICOMOS on behalf of the European Commission and in the framework of the European Union flagship initiative on the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018. These reflect the integrated, sustainable and inclusive guiding principles of the New European Bauhaus initiative.

The programme encourages the inclusion of revenue-generating measures to support the activities in the renovated cultural heritage or cultural sites, e.g. through diversification of use of the site or indirectly as an economic gain to the cross-border region.

Types of activities (indicative)

- Development and implementation of longer-term cooperation strategies, concepts, action plans
- Development and implementation of new cooperation models and tools
- Development and implementation of pilot actions
- Development of curricula, training contents and tools
- Education, training, mentoring, counselling, exchanges of students/staff/workers
- Joint promotion activities
- Awareness-raising activities



Thematic fields to be addressed:

- Development of innovative and sustainable cross-border tourism products and services
- Competence for tourism and culture and creative industries (CCI)
- Sustainable cross-border mobility solutions in tourism
- Adaptation of tourism systems¹ to climate change and greening of tourism products and services
- Cooperation in product and service development in culture and creative sectors

Types of actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Establishment of cross-border (CB) cooperation networks and pilot actions promoting local development striving for innovative, sustainable and inclusive use of culture, cultural heritage and tourist potentials also through CCI of the border regions;
- Elaboration and implementation of common CB concepts, strategies and action plans based on specific territories (e.g., Alpine, regional/rural, Karavanke-Karawanken area, Mura/Mur), including territories specifically vulnerable to climate risks, or along specific themes or products in the field of natural and cultural heritage and landscape diversity;
- Integration and capitalisation of existing tourist products into sustainable CB thematic routes, products or destinations (e.g., biking, hiking, cultural routes, food, nature values...) and their further advancement (quality, diversity, visibility, accessibility...);
- Capacity building for innovation in tourism and cultural heritage, focusing on sustainable development of new or upgrading of existing CB tourism products (e.g., improved contents, processes, technologies and digital services, quality management, interpretation, authenticity, eco innovation, environmentally friendly technologies in tourism), product diversification (e.g., for new target groups), piloting of new cooperation models among actors in tourism systems;
- Skills development for tourism and/or culture workers to support the recovery and resilience of the sectors and adapt to new trends and needs (upskilling, reskilling, digital skills development, skills regarding health requirements and safety of visitors, understanding market trends, communication, etc.) and building up mutual trust and common knowledge about trends, services and sustainable offers across the border;
- Qualification measures and professional training to improve skills and competences in CB tourism services and cultural offers (e.g., leisure travel and tourism knowledge, management and language skills, handicraft, culture-specific knowledge, etc.);
- Actions supporting CB management of tourist/visitors flows by defining appropriate preservation actions based on the identified carrying capacity of nature areas;
- Development and testing of innovative cross-border off-season tourism offers (e.g. specific environmentally friendly offers that contribute to extending the tourism seasons and promote lesser-known destinations).
- Provision of sustainable intermodal mobility solutions within and to nature or cultural protected areas, provision of last mile solutions;
- Building capacities of local and regional tourist product providers to adopt green concepts and standards in cross-border tourist products and services, considering the vulnerabilities and potentials of cultural heritage, nature and landscape protected areas;
- Activation of cultural potentials of the border area for new bilateral CB product development and implementation with the aim of opening up opportunities for job creation in CCI, e.g., support to start-ups in CCI, opening possibilities for CB exchanges and co-creation in culture, expanding cultural markets across the border and creating impact on local communities;
- Development and testing innovative solutions for presentation and promotion of cultural activities and cultural heritage across the border, primarily focusing on digital solutions and use of ICT tools.

The actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF guidelines.

Expected results

Increased capacity of local and regional actors to develop competitive and more resilient products and services based on sustainable use of natural and cultural assets. Capacity of actors in culture and creative industries for creation of CB products and services will be increased. The access to cross-border cultural offers in the programme area will be increased, creating a positive impact on local communities and its inhabitants as well strengthened identity of the programme area.

Contribution to the Macro-Regional Strategies

A contribution of this priority to the macro-regional strategy EUSALP is expected primarily towards Objective 1: Fostering sustainable growth and promoting innovation in the Alps through promoting innovation and sustainable concepts in tourism and towards Objective 3: Ensuring sustainability in the Alps by promoting sustainable use of natural and cultural values and diversity of cultures. The contribution to the EUSDR is envisaged especially towards Priority Area 3: Culture and Tourism by promoting green tourist products and the sustainable valorisation of cultural heritage.

¹ In this case the system is understood as a range of actors (enterprises, institutions and organisation) engaged in tourism and its enabling environment, for example, education, administration, marketing, licencing & standards, health and security, etc.



Cross-border cooperation actions are expected to strengthen capacities of the tourism and culture ecosystems to jointly address issues related to recovery and the transition to green and digital, especially in rural areas. The innovation, quality and diversity of culture and tourism products and services adapted to specific target groups will improve. Skills and competences of small businesses and other actors for cross-border cooperation and provision of services will be enhanced, including the awareness and knowledge of the area's tourism potentials and culture across the border. Capacities to preserve natural and cultural values and adapting to specific climate change effects on culture and tourism will be increased.

2.2.2.2 Indicators

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

Table 11: Output indicators SO 2.2

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
2	2.2 (RSO4.6)	RCO 84	Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects	Pilot actions	0	20
2	2.2 (RSO4.6)	RCO 85	Participations in joint training schemes	Participations	0	25

Table 12: Result indicators SO 2.2

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
2	2.2 (RSO4.6)	RCR 81	Completion of joint training schemes	Participants	0	2021	16	Jems	
2	2.2 (RSO4.6)	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solutions	0	2021	10	Jems	

2.2.2.3 The main target groups

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

Target groups of the actions supported are organisations and individuals that will be involved or positively affected by the actions, including:

- Local, regional, and national public authorities and sectoral agencies, especially those active in the field of tourism, culture and nature protection, rural development
- Interest groups including NGOs, especially those operating in the field of tourism, culture, nature, training and education, greening and digitalisation, rural development, cluster organisations
- Higher education and research organisations
- Education/training centres and schools, especially those engaged in culture and tourism
- SMEs, especially those in the field of tourism and culture and creative industries
- Business support organisations, such as start-up centres, business incubators, innovation hubs
- EGTCs
- General public

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

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

The Priority concerns the entire programme area.



2.2.4 Planned use of financial instruments

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

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes a form of a grant. The main focus of the programme is put on fostering cooperation and reducing CB obstacles, promoting sustainable and green solutions. The programme will therefore support projects that will have sector and territory wide influence. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-profit-oriented nature of cross-border projects.

2.2.5 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

Table 13: Dimension 1 – intervention field for Priority 2

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1 Developing skills and competences for work and life	140 Support for labour market matching and transitions	2,125,000
2	ERDF	2.1 Developing skills and competences for work and life	151 Support for adult education (excluding infrastructure)	2,125,000
2	ERDF	2.1 Developing skills and competences for work and life	145 Support for the development of digital skills	1,700,000
2	ERDF	2.1 Developing skills and competences for work and life	146 Support for adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change	2,550,000
2	ERDF	2.2 Sustainable economic development based on culture and tourism potentials	166 Protection, development and promotion of cultural heritage and cultural services	3,400,000
2	ERDF	2.2 Sustainable economic development based on culture and tourism potentials	167 Protection, development and promotion of natural heritage and eco-tourism other than Natura 2000 sites	5,100,000

Table 14: Dimension 2 – form of financing for Priority 2

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1	01	8,500,000
2	ERDF	2.2	01	8,500,000

Table 15: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus for Priority 2

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
2	ERDF	2.1	33	8,500,000
2	ERDF	2.2	33	8,500,000



2.3 Priority 3 - A better cooperation governance

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

2.3.1 Interreg-specific objective 3.1 - Enhancing coordination and cooperation among institutions (ISO 6.2)

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

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

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

Aim of this specific objective

Under this specific objective, cooperation and coordination activities (of local and regional public administrations, institutions and initiatives) in thematic areas that are mentioned below should be supported. The aim of these cooperation and coordination activities should be:

- to address and reduce border obstacles,
- to enhance and intensify the cooperation and coordination among administrations, economic and civil society institutions for developing joint and harmonized policies, frameworks and measures in areas of shared interest and interdependencies,
- to create favourable framework conditions for releasing economic potentials and reducing regional socio-economic disparities in the border area.

The interventions of this specific objective should seek to support and develop strategic and more formalised cross-border structures, cooperation, coordination and policies of competent stakeholders in the programme area. A long-lasting and structural impact throughout a common socio-economic space across the border is expected. The Programme's cross-cutting issues (awareness-raising, exchange of know-how, research and innovation, capacity development and digitalisation) are important aspects of actions within this specific objective.

Infrastructure and works are not the subject of this specific objective. Purchase of equipment or small investments of a minor, complementary nature are possible in cases where it is demonstrated that this specifically contributes to the objectives of this priority.

Types of activities (indicative):

- Organisation of joint meetings, workshops and events
- Exchange of experience (to share solutions and increase their impact)
- Transfer of good practices
- Trainings, peer reviews and staff exchanges (to enhance institutional capacity)
- Data collection and studies (e.g. to better understand border obstacles and processes)
- Identification of legal barriers and proposals for eliminating them
- Development and implementation of strategies and action plans in the thematic areas addressed
- Drawing up cooperation agreements, administrative and legal provisions
- Elaboration of publications and campaigns

All activities should have the aim of producing tangible and sustainable results that have real relevance for the thematic area addressed.

Actions addressing the following fields will be supported:

- a) Establishing cross-border (CB) coordination structures and supporting networking and exchange among local and regional administrations and institutions for addressing common challenges and finding harmonized approaches in cross-border relevant thematic areas, specifically:
 - labour market (e.g. exchange between labour market (LM) institutions, businesses and educational institutions on LM situation, promotion of vocations for which shortages exist on both sides ...);
 - health and social services (collaboration of health system institutions, local authorities and public health institutes; capacity building of relevant actors to address common challenge, such as health promotion and capacity building, exploring potentials for cross-border provision of social and health services; ...);
 - sustainable mobility (e.g. development of joint cross border mobility concepts, research on market demand on CB



- mobility services, establishing of CB structures to promote and develop CB public transport solutions, development of CB / regional mobility plans ...);
- spatial planning (e.g. development of CB concepts and strategies for potential functional or geographical areas sharing common needs, challenges and potentials; preparation of and digitalisation for overcoming spatial separation and enhancement of the cooperation of different sectors (nature protection, cultural heritage protection, tourism, water management, forestry, agriculture, etc.);
 - administration (e.g. creating or further development of cooperative administrative and/or coordinating structures of local administration units, ...).
- b) Harmonizing administrative, organisational and legal frameworks for overcoming obstacles resulting from the existence of state borders and different legal and regulatory systems in all sectors of socio-economic development, specifically:
- labour market (e.g. labour mobility issues, mutual recognition of competences ...);
 - health and social services (e.g. exploring potentials for cross-border provision of social and health services, ...);
 - mobility (e.g. coordination and harmonization of public transport services, enhancement / introduction of cross-border public transport on short distances (daily mobility of workers, students and tourists, sustainable 'last mile' solutions), promotion of CB mobility and harmonization of timetables and tickets, elaboration of coordinated pricing policies, ...);
- c) Cross-border economic development, applied R&D and business support initiatives, specifically in creation and further development of (existing) business networks, platforms and value chains within the regions and across the border (both for existing SMEs and start-ups); collaboration among business support agencies and institutions for providing support to start-ups (especially in less dynamic, rural areas) and to SMEs in internationalisation, cross-border business activities (entering / extending business activities to the Slovenian or Austrian market) and innovation. The activities should seek to enhance the ecosystem for CB cooperation in the different thematic fields.

Support for infrastructure investments is not envisaged under this Priority.

The actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF guidelines.

Expected results

This priority seeks to create joint formal structures, procedures and strategies for addressing obstacles, creating favourable framework conditions and implementing solutions for a common socio-economic space across the border.

Contribution to the Macro-Regional Strategies

This specific objective relates to the cross-cutting Policy Area of EUSALP "Governance, including Institutional Capacity" which has the objective of improving cooperation and the coordination of action in the region and across borders. The contribution to the EUSDR is envisaged especially in Priority Area 10 "Institutional Capacities & Cooperation". Specifically, it relates to Action 1: "To improve institutional capacities in order to provide high-quality public services", Action 2: "To facilitate the administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions" and Action 7: "To strengthen the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube Region".

2.3.1.2 Indicators

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

Table 16: Output indicators SO 3.1

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
3	3.1 ISO1 (ii)	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	0	20
3	3.1 ISO1 (ii)	RCO116	Jointly developed solutions	Solutions	0	9



Table 17: Result indicators SO 3.1

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	3.1 ISO1 (ii)	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisation	0	2021	10	Jems	
3	3.1 ISO1 (ii)	RCR 104	Solutions taken up or up-scaled by organisations	Solution	0	2021	7	Jems	

2.3.1.3 The main target groups

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

Target groups of the actions supported are organisations and individuals that will be involved or positively affected by the actions, including:

- Local, regional and national public authorities and sectoral agencies
- Civil society structures and interest groups including NGOs
- Providers of infrastructure and public (communal) services
- Higher education and research organisations
- Education/training centres and schools
- Enterprises including SMEs
- Business support organisations, such as start-up centres, business incubators, innovation hubs
- EGTCs
- General public

2.3.2 Interreg specific objective 3.2 - Enhancing trust and cooperation among people (ISO 6.3)

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

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

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

Aim of this specific objective

Under this specific objective, joint activities and cooperation initiatives of people and civil society institutions and initiatives should be supported.

Infrastructure and works are not the subject of this specific objective. Purchase of equipment or small investments of a minor, complementary nature are possible in cases where it is demonstrated that this specifically contributes to the objectives of this priority.

Types of activities (indicative):

- Organisation of joint meetings, workshops and events, etc.
- Exchange of information, know-how and staff
- Creation of common structures and interventions in the thematic fields addressed.

Actions addressing the following fields will be supported:

People-to-people projects for information exchange, network development, joint initiatives, innovative pilot activities, awareness-raising, trust building, etc. in areas such as education, cultural heritage, culture, social initiatives, social economy, local development, nature and environment protection. Support for infrastructure investments is not envisaged under this specific objective.

The actions have been assessed as compatible with the DNSH principle, since they have been assessed as compatible under the RRF guidelines.



Expected results

This specific objective seeks to create multi-layered linkages and joint actions of people and civil society institutions across the border.

Contribution to the Macro-Regional Strategies

This specific objective relates to the cross-cutting Policy Area of EUSALP “Governance, including Institutional Capacity” that has the objective of improving cooperation and the coordination of action in the region and across borders. The contribution to the EUSDR is envisaged especially to Priority Area 10: “Institutional Capacities & Cooperation”. Specifically, it relates to Action 2: “To facilitate the administrative cooperation of communities living in border regions” and Action 7: “To strengthen the involvement of civil society and local actors in the Danube Region”.

2.3.2.2 Indicators

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

Table 18: Output indicators SO 3.2

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Milestone (2024)	Final target (2029)
3	3.2 ISO1 (iii)	RCO87	Organisations cooperating across borders	Organisations	20	60

Table 19: Result indicators SO 3.2

Priority	Specific objective	ID	Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline	Reference year	Final target (2029)	Source of data	Comments
3	3.2 ISO1 (iii)	RCR 84	Organisations cooperating across borders after project completion	Organisations	0	2021	40	Jems	

2.3.2.3 The main target groups

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

Target groups of the actions supported are organisations and individuals that will be involved or positively affected by the actions, including:

- Associations, civil society structures and interest groups including NGOs
- Higher education and research organisations
- Education/training centres and schools
- Enterprises including SMEs
- General public

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

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

The Priority concerns the entire programme area.

2.3.4 Planned use of financial instruments

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

In accordance with Article 17(3)(c) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, support for projects takes a form of a grant. The main focus of the programme is put on fostering cooperation and reducing CB obstacles, promoting sustainable and green solutions. The programme will therefore support projects that will have sector and territory wide influence. The chosen form of support is the most suitable for achieving programme goals, in light of the size and the non-profit-oriented nature of cross-border projects.

2.3.5 Indicative breakdown of the EU programme resources by type of intervention

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

Table 20: Dimension 1 – intervention field for Priority 3

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	3.1 Enhancing coordination and cooperation among institutions	171 Enhancing cooperation with partners both within and outside the Member State	2,040,000
3	ERDF	3.1 Enhancing coordination and cooperation among institutions	173 Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders to implement territorial cooperation projects and initiatives in a cross-border, transnational, maritime and inter-regional context	1,020,000
3	ERDF	3.1 Enhancing coordination and cooperation among institutions	169 Territorial development initiatives, including preparation of territorial strategies	340,000
3	ERDF	3.2 Enhancing trust and cooperation among people	171 Enhancing cooperation with partners both within and outside the Member State	846,915

Table 21: Dimension 2 – form of financing for Priority 3

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	3.1	01	3,400,000
3	ERDF	3.2	01	846,915

Table 22: Dimension 3 – territorial delivery mechanism and territorial focus for Priority 3

Priority no	Fund	Specific objective	Code	Amount (EUR)
3	ERDF	3.1	33	3,400,000
3	ERDF	3.2	33	846,914.02

3. FINANCING PLAN

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

3.1 Financial appropriations by year

Table 23: Financial appropriations by year

Fund	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
ERDF (territorial cooperation goal)	0	7,831,915	7,957,719	8,086,039	8,216,924	6,808,714	6,944,887	45,846,198
Total	0	7,831,915	7,957,719	8,086,039	8,216,924	6,808,714	6,944,887	45,846,198



3.2 Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

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

Table 24: Total financial appropriations by fund and national co-financing

Policy objective No.	Priority	Fund	Basis for calculation EU support	EU contribution ((a)=(a1)+(a2))	Indicative breakdown of the EU contribution		National contribution (b)=(c)+(d)	Indicative breakdown National counter-part	Total (e)=(a)+(b)	Co-financing rate (f)=(a)/(e)	Contributions from third countries (for information)	
					Without TA Art. 27(1)(a1)	For TA Art. 27(1)(a2)						National public (c)
2	Priority 1	ERDF	Total eligible cost	22,843,572	21,100,000.00	1,743,572	5,710,893	4,397,388	1,313,505	28,554,465	80%	0.00
4	Priority 2	ERDF	Total eligible cost	18,404,774	17,000,000.00	1,404,774	4,601,194	3,542,919	1,058,275	23,005,968	79,99%	0.00
ISO1	Priority 3	ERDF	Total eligible cost	4,597,852	4,246,915	350,937	1,149,465	988,540	160,925	5,747,317	79,99%	0.00
Total	ERDF		Total eligible cost	45,846,198	42,346,915	3,499,283	11,461,552	8,928,847	2,532,705	57,307,750	79,99%	0.00



4. ACTION TAKEN TO INVOLVE THE RELEVANT PROGRAMME PARTNERS IN THE PREPARATION OF THE INTERREG PROGRAMME AND THE ROLE OF THOSE PROGRAMME PARTNERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

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

The Interreg Programme Slovenia-Austria was elaborated by a bilateral PTF in partnership with competent regional and local authorities and stakeholders from both countries according to the CPR Regulation Article 8. The PTF held 13 meetings between July 2019 and September 2021. A team of external Austrian and Slovene experts supported the PTF in this process.

The PTF was established based on the decision of the Programme's Monitoring Committee in April 2019. The PTF consisted of representatives from the Austrian side (the Regional Authorities of Styria, Carinthia, and Burgenland), representatives from the Slovenian side, representatives of the MA and the JS.

Stakeholders involved included representatives from the relevant national and regional administration departments, local administrations, Local Action Groups, Regional Managements / Regional Development Agencies, Universities, EGTC, Social Partners, Sectoral/Thematic Agencies (environment and nature protection, research and innovation, mobility, labour market, business support, education, health and social services, culture, youth and tourism) with relevance for the Programme area.

These stakeholders were identified and contacted (by direct mails) based on the Programme's database (contacts from beneficiaries and applicants as well as interested persons of the general public that participated in activities of the Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 and local administrations of the Programme area and recognised thematic institutions). The Slovene National Authority and the Austrian Regional Authorities also informed and contacted relevant institutions in their spheres directly by mail. Information about the programming process and invitations for participation in the consultation process were published on the Programme website (<http://www.si-at.eu/en2/ip-si-at-2021-2027/>) in English, Slovene and German language. In activities of the Programme period 2014-2020 the outreach of electronic communication of the JS to Slovene stakeholders was twice that to Austrians. National/Regional Authorities put in a special effort to increase the active involvement of stakeholders by using different communication channels (publication on websites, direct mailing, newsletters) to mobilise stakeholders in their territories for getting involved in the programming process.

The programming was an interactive process and consisted of two phases:

Phase 1: Territorial and Socio-Economic Analysis

Phase 2: Defining the strategic orientation of the future programme and drafting the contents of the programme document

An important element of this process was the information and involvement of a broad range of competent local and regional stakeholders and experts throughout the entire programming process. To achieve this, information regarding the programming process together with the invitation to participate in the consultation process and draft documents were made accessible on the Programme's website in English, Slovene and German language.

Phase 1: Territorial and Socio-Economic Analysis

- exploratory interviews (49) were held with representatives of different key organisations in the regions of the programme area with both a territorial and a sectoral focus (May-June 2020). The members of the PTF (and especially NA, RAs and JS) proposed stakeholders who might provide a substantiated opinion both thematically and territorially relevant on the potential thematics of the future IP and assure a balanced regional coverage. Interview partners from institutions that had a stronger territorial rather than a mere technical-thematic focus of their work (Regional Agencies, Local Development Agencies, EGTC, Business Support Agencies, Labour Market Agencies) were prioritized, in order to consider a competent coverage of all potential thematic areas of the future IP.
- In these interviews the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as key trends, main disparities between the sub-regions, common challenges and cooperation potentials regarding the potential thematic areas of the future



programme were discussed.

- The preliminary findings of these explanatory interviews were distributed via email to the interview partners and additional regional stakeholders and thematic experts (covering public authorities, economic and social partners, civil society organisations, R&D institutions and higher education institutions) with the invitation to comment on them via an e-survey (June 2020). The comments of 9 respondents were documented and discussed by the expert team and the PTF and they were integrated where appropriate into the final version of the Territorial and Socio-Economic Analysis representing a strong bottom-up design of the document.
- The final version of the Territorial and Socio-Economic Analysis was published on the Programme website (October 2020).

Phase 2: Defining the strategic orientation of the future programme and drafting the contents of the programme document

- Based on the previous steps of the programming process, the expert team prepared an overview of potential interventions and arguments for each of the specific objectives that might become part of the Interreg Programme Slovenia-Austria 2021-2027. This document was published on the Programme website (October/November 2020).
- In the framework of public consultation for the strategic orientation of the programme, regional stakeholders and the general public were invited to participate in an online survey to provide their feedback, comments and arguments regarding these potential contents of the future Interreg Programme (November 2020).
- More than 900 persons were personally invited for that online survey via direct mails (composition of mailing lists as in Phase 1) and information about the discussion papers and invitations for providing comments on them were published on the websites of the Programme and other national/regional channels. 228 respondents provided their comments.
- In this context of public consultation on the future orientation of the Programme, separate webinars in German and Slovene language were organized (99 participants, November 2020).
- During these webinars an overview of the potential thematic orientation was provided, first comments discussed with the participants and further statements on the document invited to be provided on the Programme website.
- Six thematic expert workshops were held for each of the potential policy objectives of the programme (November 2020 / January 2021).
- These workshops served to have a substantiated discussion with thematic experts for the selection and potential interventions within the selected policy objectives.
- A draft Interreg Programme document (IP) was drawn up by the programming team on the basis of this process and was discussed by the PTF (February - May 2021).
- This draft IP was published on the Programme website for information and feedback by the general public (1st-30th of June, 2021). Additionally, all persons contacted from the first public consultation process were directly contacted for their feedback. 22 persons provided their comments. These were documented and discussed by the PTF and relevant adaptations introduced into the final draft of the IP document. The information of this consultation process was published on the Programme website.
- During the entire programming process, the members of the PTF consulted with experts from other regional and national government departments on the progress of the programming process and the contents of the programme and assured their considerations would be integrated into the document.
- Accompanying the IP drafting process, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been conducted to provide information about the potential effects of the programme on the environment (October 2020 to September 2021). Environmental authorities played an important role and were consulted at several stages to provide input to the assessments. Two workshops with the environmental authorities were organised (December 2020/April 2021) and an additional written feedback round with the environmental authorities on the SEA report was conducted (June/July 2021). Furthermore, the SEA was published for public consultations on the programme's website (September 2021) containing a summary in both national languages as well as the full report in English. The public consultation was open to anybody, i.e. not only public authorities but also NGOs, interest groups and also individuals were invited to give their opinion on the assessments made. Any comments received in this process were considered in drafting the final SEA report. Throughout the programming process, the SEA team provided input to the programming process through informal discussions, as well as through presentation and participation in PTF meetings.

The role of the programme partners in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme

The information from the general public and the proper involvement of competent programme partners is considered to be crucial for a successful programme implementation. The regular information of the general public about the programme is needed to assure ownership of the Programme and its outcomes.

The continuous involvement of programme partners in the implementation of the programme is envisaged for two reasons:

- To enhance ownership of the programme among partners, to make use of their knowledge and expertise and to increase transparency in decision-making processes;



- To improve the coordination with other programmes as well as with MRSs to capitalise on project and programme results, as well as to increase synergies and complementarities.

Programme partners will be involved in steering and monitoring of programme implementation to make their voice heard in consultation and the decision-making process.

5. APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY FOR THE INTERREG PROGRAMME (OBJECTIVES, TARGET AUDIENCES, COMMUNICATION CHANNELS, INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH, WHERE APPROPRIATE, PLANNED BUDGET AND RELEVANT INDICATORS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION)

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

The programme's approach to communication and visibility is developed more in detail in a dedicated communication strategy. The communication focuses on transmission of information, awareness-raising, creating cooperation communities, attracting applicants from all programme areas to apply for funding with relevant good quality applications, creating a positive working culture internally within the programme bodies etc. The general objective of the programme's communication is to enhance the public awareness of the EU support for projects in the CB area through the effective use of communication instruments.

Communication objectives

The following communication objectives support the programme implementation:

- to promote the programme's funding opportunities by providing information on all programme-related issues and motivating potential beneficiaries to use the possibilities the EU Funds represent;
- to support programme bodies, applicants and beneficiaries in effective project implementation by ensuring well-functioning internal communication between the programme bodies to make the programme function effectively, providing applicants and beneficiaries with high-quality and timely support in all phases of the project implementation;
- to enhance the public awareness about the programme by providing the general public/media with understandable, easy to follow information on co-financed projects, promoting the benefits of CB cooperation and funding opportunities in the programme area and beyond, and underline the benefits of CBC for the general public in the programme area, promoting projects' achievements and capitalisation activities;
- to cooperate with other Interreg programmes by sharing information and best practices to enhance inter-programme cooperation;
- to increase the project's capacities to communicate their own achievements by supporting and encouraging beneficiaries in communication activities, enhancing inter-project cooperation and promoting capitalisation activities.

The communication activities touch on all aspects of the programme life-cycle. Therefore, the intensity of certain communication activities will depend on the implementation phase of the programme.

Target audiences

The programme defines four fundamental types of target audiences which are further detailed in the communication strategy of the programme. These types include applicants or beneficiaries for the co-financing from the ERDF, programme bodies, the expert sphere (the EC, the members of the Monitoring Committee, the programme partners from both Member States) and political sphere (the political public in both Member States and beyond), the general public (especially citizens of the cross-border area/final recipients of products and services co-financed by the Interreg programme) and the media, which fundamentally influences awareness-raising of the EU Funds mostly connected to the general public, but also with the political sphere.



Communication channels and tools

The programme considers the following communication channels and tools as an instrument to convey the content to the target audience: the programme website (accessible, easy to navigate for different users, up-to-date), social media (e.g. Facebook); public events (annual events, workshops for applicants/beneficiaries/programme structures, informational thematic and networking events, synergy events for capitalisation), online or printed publications (e.g. a programme newsletter, info sheets), online campaigns including the production of visual elements (e.g. videos, infographics) especially for the promotion (capitalisation) of project results, articles and other contributions in the media.

Much of the programme visibility comes through the projects. The programme will provide constant support to standard and small-scale projects through events and via the programme web-site and social media.

Monitoring, evaluation and indicators

All communication activities will be evaluated on a regular basis using external or internal evaluators. Data will be collected through surveys, internal statistics and website analytics. The programme will use a detailed set of indicators to follow and evaluate the communication activities and improve their performance on an ongoing basis. The output indicators that are foreseen refer to the satisfaction with the quality of guidance and the engagement of the general public in programme activities. The communication goals are planned to be measured by several result indicators, e.g. number of active regions, number of applications received and approved, satisfaction of the applicants or beneficiaries with the information provided, guidelines and support, number of participants in events and specific activities, level of engagement in the programme newsletter, outreach of the social media account(s), number of events and participants in events other than workshops (e.g. annual events). The programme foresees an estimated communication budget (excl. staff costs) of at least 0.3 percent of the total programme budget.

The programme has appointed a communication officer, who is a member of the JS.

6. INDICATION OF SUPPORT TO SMALL-SCALE PROJECTS, INCLUDING SMALL PROJECTS WITH-IN SMALL PROJECT FUNDS

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

The cross-border cooperation between Slovenia and Austria has a long history. In the past two programme periods a lot of projects of medium-size financial volume were implemented (from EUR 500,000.00 to EUR 2,500,000.00). The evaluations of the programme revealed the need for simpler projects in the border region which would allow for less demanding administrative procedures, thus enabling also smaller institutions to participate. Therefore, the new programme will also implement projects with limited financial volume, so-called small-scale projects.

Small-scale projects will be an important tool in the new Interreg programme Slovenia-Austria. They will be designed to initiate and promote contacts and interaction between people on both sides of the border. They will have a smaller budget and a limited duration. The activities of small-scale projects will contribute to the programme output indicators and result indicators specified in the Interreg-Specific Objective 3.2: Enhancing trust and cooperation among people. The programme plans to earmark an indicative 2 % of the funds for small-scale projects of this kind.

The added value of small-scale projects will be felt in the increased mutual trust among people across the Slovenian-Austrian border, opening up new cooperation possibilities between neighbours and allowing the cross-border region to grow closer. The inclusion of small institutions such as NGOs, schools, SMEs and small municipalities in cross-border activities via small-scale projects will connect a lot of people in the border region and also increase the visibility of the new Interreg programme Slovenia-Austria.

Support to small projects under a Small Project Fund as defined in Article 2(10) of the CPR and Article 25 of the Interreg Regulation is not planned to be included in the Interreg programme Slovenia-Austria.

7. IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS

7.1 Programme authorities

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

Table 25: Programme authorities

Programme authorities	Name of the institution	Contact name	Position	E-mail
Managing authority	Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Development and European Cohesion Policy (GODC) European Territorial Cooperation and Financial Mechanisms Division Cross-Border Programmes Management Section	Tanja Rener	Head of the Managing authority	tanja.rener@gov.si
Audit authority	Republic of Slovenia Ministry of Finance Budget Supervision Office	Patricija Pergar	Head of the Audit authority	patricija.pergar@gov.si
Group of auditors representatives	Republic of Austria, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism Financial Control of the ERDF	Diane Muntean		diane.muntean@bml.gv.at
Body to which the payments are to be made by the Commission	Public Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Regional Development and Development of Rural Areas (Slovenian Regional Development Fund)	Uroš Klopčič		uros.klopcic@srrs.si ozp@srrs.si
Body other than the managing authority entrusted with the accounting function	Public Fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Regional Development and Development of Rural Areas (Slovenian Regional Development Fund)	Uroš Klopčič	Head of the accounting function	uros.klopcic@srrs.si ozp@srrs.si

7.2 Procedure for setting up the joint secretariat

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

The MA, after consultation with the Member States/programme partners, sets up the JS for the programme in compliance with Article 17(6)(b) and Article 46(2) of the Interreg Regulation.

Based on the successful implementation of the two previous programmes in the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods, the MA ensures a smooth transition and institutional stability by maintaining the basic organisational, structural and implementation arrangements already in place which will ensure that a highly experienced, professional and bilaterally composed JS team will support the Programme in the future, too. Taking into account the good programme partnership approach, all JS members are selected in a transparent manner by both Member States and are bilingual/trilingual, possessing representative linguistic competence and relevant programme area knowledge.

The JS will continue to be located in Maribor, Slovenia, within the official structure of the GODC (Cross-border Programmes Section). The structural and implementation arrangements within the hosting organisation will be kept. The JS is set up within the same Section as the MA. A clear separation of tasks will be ensured within the description of single positions. The JS will



work in close cooperation with the MA related to programme coordination and implementation in such a way as to ensure its cooperation on one hand, and its independence from national structures on the other.

The JS will continue to assist the MA and the Monitoring Committee in carrying out their respective duties and ensuring that all operational implementation tasks of the programme are fulfilled. The JS will provide support to potential applicants by providing them information on funding opportunities and give beneficiaries assistance in the efficient implementation of operations.

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

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

The arrangements related to the irregularities which lead to financial corrections and apportioning of liabilities among MSs will follow the already established, well-functioning principles from the programming period 2014-2020.

Without prejudice to the MSs' responsibility to take all required actions for preventing, detecting and correcting irregularities and reporting on irregularities including fraud, according to Article 69 (2) of the CPR, the MA shall in accordance with Article 52 (1) of the Interreg Regulation ensure that any amount paid as a result of an irregularity is recovered from the Lead Partner (LP). The project partners (PPs) shall then repay the LP any amounts unduly paid.

In line with Article 52 (2) of the Interreg Regulation the MA will not recover an amount unduly paid if it does not exceed EUR 250 ERDF (not including interest) paid to an operation in a given accounting year.

If the LP does not succeed in securing repayment from a PP or if the MA does not succeed in securing repayment from the LP, the MS on whose territory the LP or PP concerned is located (in case of an EGTC where it is registered) shall, in accordance with Article 52 (3) of the Interreg Regulation, reimburse the MA the amounts unduly paid to that partner. The MS of Austria is represented by three regions involved in the programme: the Federal States of Burgenland, Kärnten and Steiermark. The MS of Slovenia is represented by the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy. The final decision on financial liability is taken by the Monitoring Committee on a case-by-case basis. The MA is responsible for reimbursing the amounts recovered to the general budget of the Union, in accordance with the apportionment of liabilities among the participating MSs as laid down below. The MA will reimburse the funds to the Union once the amounts are recovered from the LP/PP/MS.

Should the MA bear any legal expenses for recovery recourse proceedings – initiated after consultation and in mutual agreement with the respective MS – even if the proceedings are unsuccessful, they will be reimbursed by the MS hosting the LP or PP responsible for the said procedure.

Since MSs have the overall liability for the ERDF support granted to LPs or PPs located on their territories, they shall ensure that any financial corrections required will be secured and they shall seek to recover any amounts lost as a result of an irregularity or negligence caused by a beneficiary located in their territory. Where appropriate, a MS may also charge interest on late payments.

In accordance with Article 52 (4) of the Interreg Regulation, once the MS has reimbursed the MA any amounts unduly paid to a partner, it may continue or start a recovery procedure against that partner pursuant to its national law.

Where the MS has not reimbursed the MA any amount unduly paid to a partner, in accordance with Article 52 (5) of the Interreg Regulation, those amounts shall be subject to a recovery order by the European Commission (EC) which shall be executed, where possible, by offsetting to the MS. Such recovery shall not constitute a financial correction and shall not reduce the support from the ERDF to the respective Interreg programme. The offsetting shall concern subsequent payments to the same Interreg programme. In such an eventuality, the MA will start bilateral discussions with the concerned MS at fault so as to find a joint solution on how and from where to offset the amount deducted by the EC.

As stated in Article 69 (12) of the CPR, MSs shall report on irregularities in accordance with the criteria for determining the cases of irregularity to be reported, the data to be provided and the format for reporting set out in Annex XVII of the CPR. Irregularities shall be reported by the MS in which the irregular expenditure is incurred by the LP/PP and paid in implementing



the project. The reporting MS shall at the same time inform the MA and the Audit Authority (AA) of the programme.

The MSs will bear liability in connection with the use of the Interreg programme ERDF funding as follows:

- Each MS bears liability for possible financial consequences of irregularities caused by the LPs and PPs located on its territory.
- In case of a systemic irregularity or financial correction (decided by the programme authorities or the EC), the MS will bear the financial consequences in proportion to the relevant irregularity detected on the respective MS's territory.
- For a systemic irregularity or financial correction on programme level that cannot be linked to a specific MS, the liability shall be jointly borne by the MSs in proportion to the ERDF claimed for LPs and PPs (located on MS's territories) to the EC for the period which forms the basis for the financial correction.

The liability principles described above shall also apply to financial corrections to Technical Assistance (TA) calculated in compliance with Article 27 of the Interreg regulation, since such corrections would be the direct consequence of project-related irregularities (whether systemic or not) if they cannot be reused. The MA will keep the MSs informed about all irregularities and their impact on TA. At the end of the programming period, the MA will carry out a reconciliation to verify whether there is a remaining balance of irregularities that have affected the TA budget. In case of a remaining balance, the MA will inform and ask the respective MS/MSs and ask MS to reimburse the corresponding ERDF amount.

8. USE OF UNIT COSTS, LUMP SUMS, FLAT RATES AND FINANCING NOT LINKED TO COSTS

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

Table 26: Use of unit costs, lump sums, flat rates and financing not linked to costs

Intended use of Articles 94 and 95	YES	NO
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on unit costs, lump sums and flat rates under priority according to Article 94 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 1)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
From the adoption the programme will make use of reimbursement of the Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs according to Article 95 CPR (if yes, fill in Appendix 2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



Appendix 1: Union contribution based on union costs, lump sums and flat rates

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission
(Article 94 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (CPR))

Not applicable.

Appendix 2: Union contribution based on financing not linked to costs

Template for submitting data for the consideration of the Commission
(Article 95 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 CPR))

Not applicable.

Appendix 3: List of planned operations of strategic importance with a timetable - article 22(3) CPR

As set out in article 17(3) of Regulation (EC) 2021/1059 and article 22(3) of Regulation (EC) 2021/1060 the Member State shall ensure that the programme submitted is accompanied for information purposes by a list of planned operations of strategic importance and a timetable.

The Interreg Programme Slovenia-Austria 2021-2027 is planning to select all operations via Open Calls for Proposals. Therefore, no pre-identified operations of strategic importance have been embedded in the Programme. Nevertheless, operations of strategic importance contributing considerably to the visibility of the Programme may be identified in the course of implementation of the programme. A separate call will be launched for small-scale projects value under Specific Objective 3.2. The programme intends to implement such projects via open call for proposals, with special assessment criteria set to trust building and visibility of the programme. Open calls for small-scale projects will be most likely published within 6 months after the call for standard projects.

The member States decided to support projects of limited financial value (small-scale projects) within the priority 3 (SO 3.2) of the programme in order to increase visibility and trust among people living in the programme area and beyond. The added value of small-scale projects will be felt in the increased mutual trust among people across the Slovenian-Austrian border, opening up new cooperation possibilities between neighbours and allowing the cross-border region to grow closer. The inclusion of small institutions such as NGOs, schools, SMEs and small municipalities in cross-border activities via small-scale projects will connect a lot of people in the border region and also increase the visibility of the new Interreg programme Slovenia-Austria.

Taking all this into consideration people-to-people projects are trust-building projects, which are of high importance in cross-border area and will highly contribute to programmes visibility.



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