



2nd PHASE EVALUATION

Effectiveness, efficiency and impact evaluation
of the INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary
Cooperation Programme

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Abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations	Meaning
AA	Audit Authority
AEBR	Association of European Border Regions
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
ALCOTRA	Alpes Latines COopération TRAnsfrontalière (Interreg programme France - Italy)
ANPI	Aggtelek National Park Directorate (Aggteleki Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság)
AT	Austria/Austrian
ATHU	Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme
BSK	Bratislava Self-Governing Region
CA	Certifying Authority
CB	Cross-border
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
CBRM	Cross-border residential mobility
CCP	Cooperation and coordination
CESCI	Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives
CLLD	Community-led Local Development
COST	European Cooperation in Science and Technology
COVID	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CP	Cooperation Programme
CPR	Construction Products Regulation
CRII	Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative
CZ	Czech Republic/Czech
EC	European Commission
EFOP	Human Resources Development Operational Programme (Emberi Erőforrás Fejlesztési Operatív Program)
EGTC	European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation
EN	English
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ERA	European Research Area
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund

Abbreviations	Meaning
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
ETA	Small Project Fund for Eastern Programming Area
ETC	European Territorial Co-operation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
FLC	First Level Control
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GBER	General Block Exemption Regulation
GINOP	Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (Gazdaságfejlesztési és innovációs Operatív Program)
GIS	Geographic Information System
GYSEV	Győr–Sopron–Ebenfurti Vasút Zrt.
HICP	Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices
HR	Human Resources
HU	Hungary/Hungarian
HUSKROUA	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI Cross-border Cooperation Programme
HUSKUA	INTERREG III-A Neighbourhood Programme Hungary - Slovak Republic - Ukraine
HUSRB	INTERREG-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Hungary-Serbia
ICT	Information and communication technology
ID	Identification
IKOP	Integrated Transport Development Operational Programme (Integrált Közlekedésfejlesztési Operatív Program)
IMIS	IMIS 2014-2020 (Common) Monitoring and Information System
IP	Infopoint
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IROP	Integrated Regional Operational Programme (Integrovaný regionálny operačný program)
IT	Information Technology
ITC	Information and communications technology
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
ITS	Intelligent Transport Systems

Abbreviations	Meaning
JAP	Joint Action Plan
JS	Joint Secretariat
KEHOP	Environmental and Energy Efficiency Operational Programme (Környezeti és Energiahatékonysági Operatív Program)
KÖFOP	Public Administration and Public Service Development Operational Programme (Közigazgatás- és Közszolgáltatás-fejlesztés Operatív Program)
KSH	Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal)
LAG	Local Action Group
LB	Lead Beneficiary
LEADER	Links between the rural economy and development actions (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale)
LIFE	L'Instrument Financier pour l'Environnement
LLC	Limited Liability Company
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MIRRI	Ministry for Investments, Informatization and Regional Development
NA	National Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIF	Hungarian National Infrastructure Development Corporation ¹
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OKFŐ	National Directorate General for Hospitals (Országos Kórházi Főigazgatóság)
OP	Operational programme
OP QE	Operational Programme Quality of Environment (Kvalita životného prostredia)
OP RI	Operational Programme Research and Innovation (Operačný program Výskum a inovácie)
OPHR	Operational Programme Human Resources (Operačný program Ľudské zdroje)
OPII	Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (Operačný program Integrovaná infraštruktúra)
PA	Priority Axis
PIT	Plan intégré transfrontalier
PITEM	Integrated Thematic Plan (Plan intégré thématique)
PITER	Integrated Territorial Plan (Plan intégré territorial)

¹ The legal successor is the Ministry of Construction and Transport as of 01 January 2023

Abbreviations	Meaning
PM	Project manager
PP	Project partner
PR	Public Relations
PUKE	Palóc Út Kulturális Turisztikai Klaszter Egyesület
RDP	Rural Development Programme (Program rozvoja vidieka)
RDV EGTC	Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC
RO	Romania/Romanian
ROHU	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme
SA	Sectorial assessor
SCO	Simplified cost options
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SK	Slovak/Slovakian
SKAT	Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria Programme
SKCZ	Interreg V-A Programme Slovak Republic and Czech Republic
SKHU	Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time bound
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SO	Specific Objective
SP	Small project
SPF	Small Project Fund
SUEN	Special upbringing and educational needs
TA	Technical Assistance
TA_	Territorial assessor
TAPE	Territorial Action Plans for Employment
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
TGARCH	Threshold GARCH Model
TO	Thematic Objective
TOP	Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme (Terület- és Településfejlesztési Operatív Program)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UTTS EGTC	Ung-Tisza-Túr-Sajó EGTC
VAT	Value Added Tax

Abbreviations	Meaning
VEKOP	Competitive Central Hungary Operational Programme (Versenyképes Közép-Magyarország Operatív Program)
VP	Rural Development Programme (Vidékfejlesztési Program)
WETA	Small Project Fund for Western Programming Area

1 OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION

1.1 Introduction to the evaluation document

Context of the evaluation

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary as Managing Authority (MA) scheduled the so-called Second Phase evaluation of the INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme (hereinafter: SKHU) for 2022/2023.

The Second Phase evaluation of the programme has been carried out by the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI). CESCI is a Budapest-based association established according to Hungarian private law aiming to facilitate cross-border cooperation in Central Europe in general and along the Hungarian borders in particular.

Although the original evaluation plan of the programme shows some differences in the timing of the evaluation documents, it was necessary to revise the original plan due to the delays in the implementation of the programme caused by several reasons (especially the delay in the approval of the EU-level regulations and the COVID-19 pandemic). In accordance with the revised evaluation plan, the three aspects (effectiveness, efficiency and impact) have been assessed in this document together, in a combined way.

Table 1: Timetable of the planned and revised evaluation plan (SKHU)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Original Plan			1 st Phase of effectiveness, efficiency evaluation		2 nd Phase of effectiveness, efficiency evaluation		1 st Phase of impact evaluation	
Revised Plan			1 st Phase of a combined evaluation				2 nd Phase of a combined evaluation	

The evaluation procedure has been designed based on the evaluation plan of the programme and further previous evaluations as models. The main aspects of the evaluation were defined in the Inception report as approved at the 12th Monitoring Committee Meeting. As the document was drafted, some changes were made in line with the findings of the evaluation in order to produce a more easily usable document. Despite the restructuring of the evaluation, all pre-defined aspects were analysed.

Structure of the document

The document is made up by three main sections: *1 Overview of the evaluation*, *2 In-depth evaluation* and *3 Annex*. The first section's main purpose is to set the context of the document, offer an overview of the Programme's implementation and present the main findings and answers to the guiding

questions. The second section of the evaluation details the analysis. These first two main parts are strongly interlinked through cross-references, but they can also be read separately. The Annex contains factual information and lists supporting the evaluation process.

Scope of the evaluation

The scope of the evaluation was defined in the evaluation plan. All three predefined aspects of the evaluation plan (effectiveness, impact and efficiency) have been assessed in this document. In addition, the document also evaluates the performance of the programme. For the purposes of this evaluation, these terms are understood as follows:

- **Performance** shows the progress made against the planned implementation.
- **Effectiveness** refers to the degree to which the objectives and targets are achieved at the date of evaluation.
- **Impact** is a very complex term referring to the influence that the programme exercises on the internal cohesion of the programming area and the level of cross-border cooperation. While effectiveness measures the internal success of the programme, the impact rather identifies its external success.
- **Efficiency** refers to the use of financial/administrative resources in relation to outputs and results. Successful here means 'optimal' and 'resource-efficient'.

The evaluation will assess all of these aspects regarding the priority axes and the programme in general through the following chapters:

Table 2: Aspects that will be assessed in the in-depth evaluation

Aspects	Relevant chapters of the evaluation
Performance	<i>2.1.1 Quantification of the performance</i>
	<i>2.1.2 Assessment of the projects' budget framework</i>
	<i>2.1.3 Programme management</i>
	<i>2.1.4 Influence factors of the implementation</i>
Effectiveness	<i>2.2.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs</i>
	<i>2.2.2 Analysis of the impacted target groups</i>
	<i>2.2.3 Communication of the Programme and the projects</i>
	<i>2.2.4 Analysis of cross-border relevance</i>
Impact	<i>2.3.1 Analysis of the result indicators</i>
	<i>2.3.2 Mapping of the territorial coverage</i>
	<i>2.3.3 The Programme's borderscape impact</i>
	<i>2.3.4 Synergies with relevant programmes and strategies</i>
	<i>2.3.5 Horizontal principles</i>
	<i>2.3.6 Influence of further funds</i>
Efficiency	<i>2.4.1 Cost-efficiency of the projects</i>

Aspects	Relevant chapters of the evaluation
	<i>2.4.2 Cost-efficiency of the programme management (PA5)</i>
Applied mechanisms and tools	<i>2.5.1 Involvement of SMEs</i>
	<i>2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)</i>
	<i>2.5.3 Small Project Fund</i>

The evaluation will also feed into the next AIR of 2023. During the preparation of the Inception report, together with JS, the AIR topics to which the evaluation document should contribute were selected. The following table shows for each pre-selected AIR's topic the cross-references to the relevant chapters of the evaluation.

Table 3: The evaluation's relevant chapters for the AIR's preselected topics

AIR's preselected topics	Relevant chapters of the evaluation
1.1. Information in Part A and achieving the objectives of the programme	<i>1.3 Answers to the guiding questions 2.3.1 Analysis of the result indicators 2.2.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs 3.1 Overview of the PAs' implementation</i>
1.2. Specific actions taken to promote equality between men and women and to promote non-discrimination, in particular accessibility for persons with disabilities, and the arrangements implemented to ensure the integration of the gender perspective in the cooperation programme and operations	<i>2.3.5 Horizontal principles</i>
1.3. Sustainable development	<i>2.3.5 Horizontal principles 2.3.4 Synergies with relevant programmes and strategies > Figure 102: Contribution of SKHU projects to SDGs</i>
1.5. Role of partners in the implementation of the cooperation programme	<i>2.1.3.6 Involvement of the relevant partners, assessment of ownership 2.2.4 Analysis of cross-border relevance</i>
3.1. Progress in implementation of the integrated approach to territorial development, including sustainable urban development, and community-led local development under the cooperation programme	<i>2.2.4 Analysis of cross-border relevance</i>
3.3. Contribution to macro-regional and sea basin strategies (where appropriate)	<i>2.3.4 Synergies with relevant programmes and strategies > Figure 104: Contribution of SKHU projects to EUSDR priorities</i>
3.4. Progress in the implementation of actions in the field of social innovation	<i>1.3 Answers to the guiding questions 3.6 Actions implemented in the field of social innovation</i>
5. SMART, SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH – EU2020	<i>2.3.4 Synergies with relevant programmes and strategies > Figure 103: Contribution of SKHU projects to EU2020 targets</i>

Applied methods

During the evaluation exercise, the experts used several sources and applied different methods, traditional and innovative ones as well.

The **official documents of the Cooperation Programme** serve as fundamental sources of the evaluation. To define the basic information on the implementation among others the internal rules, the MC decisions and the documents of the call for proposals were analysed.

Interviews based on the guiding questions defined jointly by the Programme Bodies and CESC were conducted with several relevant stakeholders including the Programme Bodies, beneficiaries of strategic projects and sectorial experts from the thematical fields of every PA. Several in-depth interviews were done mostly via online platforms such as Zoom. Some other interviews were done similarly to a written list of questions to which the partners could respond in a written format. The types of interviewees were as follows:

- **Programme Bodies:** Joint Secretariat, Managing Authority, National Authority, members of the Monitoring Committee, First Level Control Bodies from Slovakia and Hungary.
- **Management organisations of the Small Project Fund:** Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC, Via Carpatia EGTC.
- **Beneficiaries:** Based on several criteria, 10% of the beneficiaries have been selected for interviews. In order to represent a wide sectorial scope and to include the testimonies of the well-experienced beneficiaries, especially the following criteria were applied: the call(s) concerned by the beneficiary's project(s); the role of the beneficiary; the amount of ERDF support. For the territorial balance, a similar sample was defined on both sides of the border. Around 10% of the invited interviewees declined to answer, but the conducted interviews provided valuable information about the projects' implementation. In addition, all the TAPE infrastructural investment locations have been visited, and all TAPE CCP lead beneficiaries have been interviewed.

In addition to the application forms, the **INTERREG+ database** was used containing detailed information on all projects regardless their status (e.g. closed, contracted, under modification). The extracted data were an important source to gain relevant information on multiple aspects. In some cases, the INTERREG+ database had to be harmonised with the data provided by the JS. As the SPF projects do not have a common monitoring system, the raw data provided by the EGTCs had to be processed and incorporated into the database used for the analysis.

To collect the normal calls' applicants and beneficiaries' opinion, an **online survey** was created. A total number of 112 questionnaires were filled out, of which 108 proved to be useful, while the rest had to be disregarded (due to duplication or referring to projects which were not relevant). The number of the filled questionnaires in every PA is correlating with the number of project applications (*Figure 1*). The largest number of answers was received under PA4 (32). A total of 28 questionnaires were filled out by PA1, 22 by PA3 and 5 by PA2 applicants, respectively. Most of the answers either belonged to already completed (42) or still ongoing projects (34), however, it is very important that withdrawn and not-

selected projects were also represented in the sample which were also included in the evaluation due to their specific point of view.

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents per PA (Online survey)

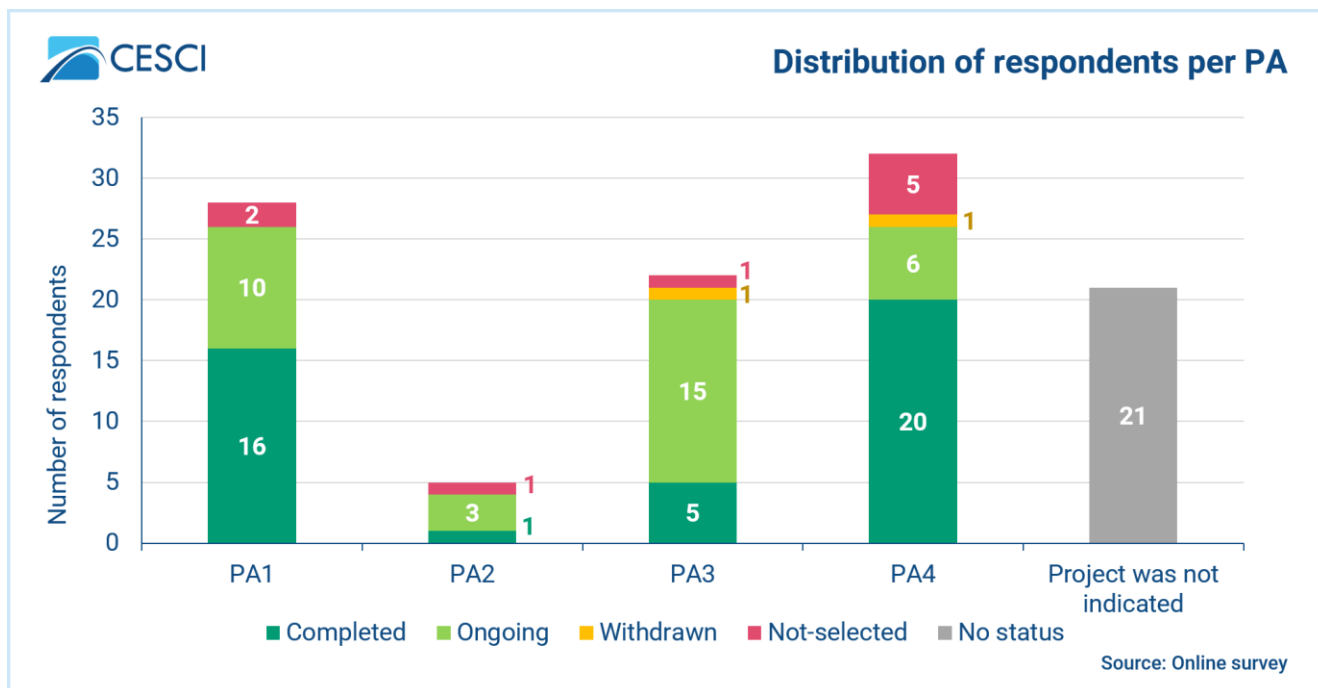
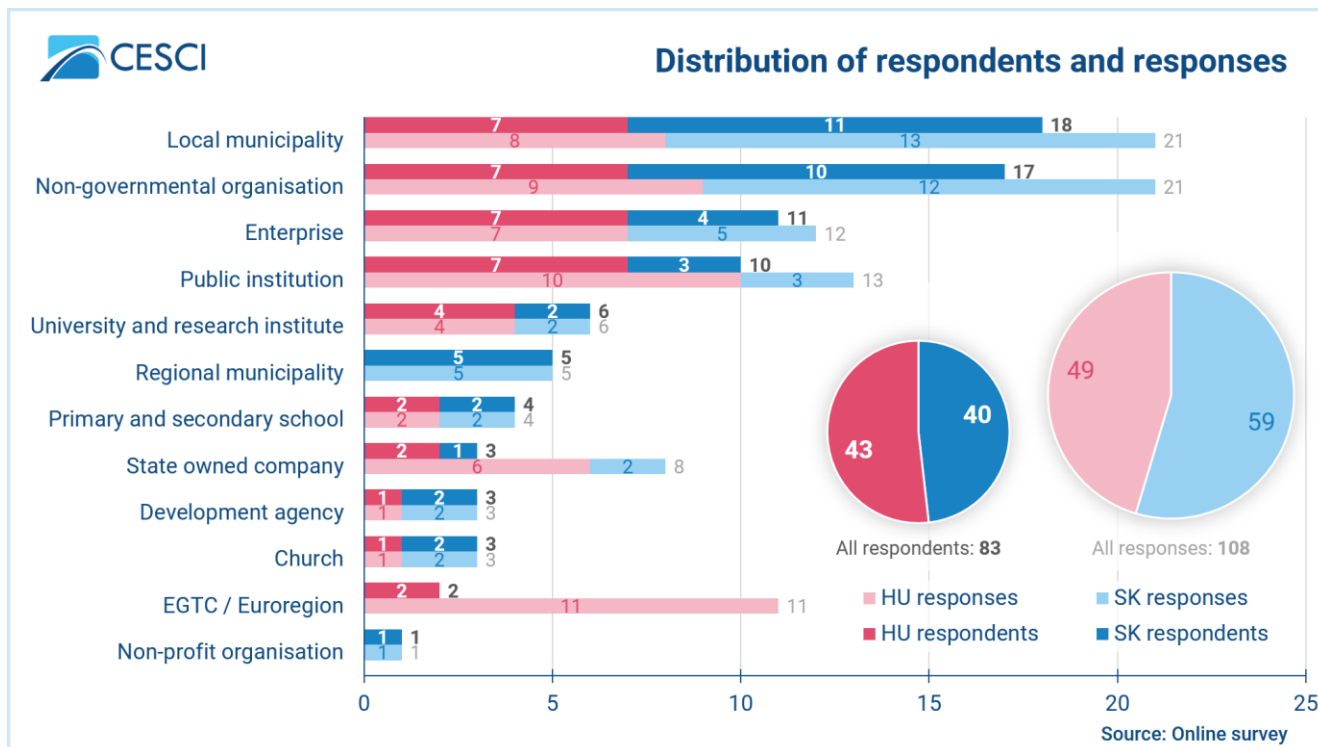


Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by type of organisation they represent (Online survey)



The scope of respondents of the normal projects' survey shows a varied picture as all in all 12 types of organisations were represented in the sample (Figure 2). Local municipalities (18 respondents, 21

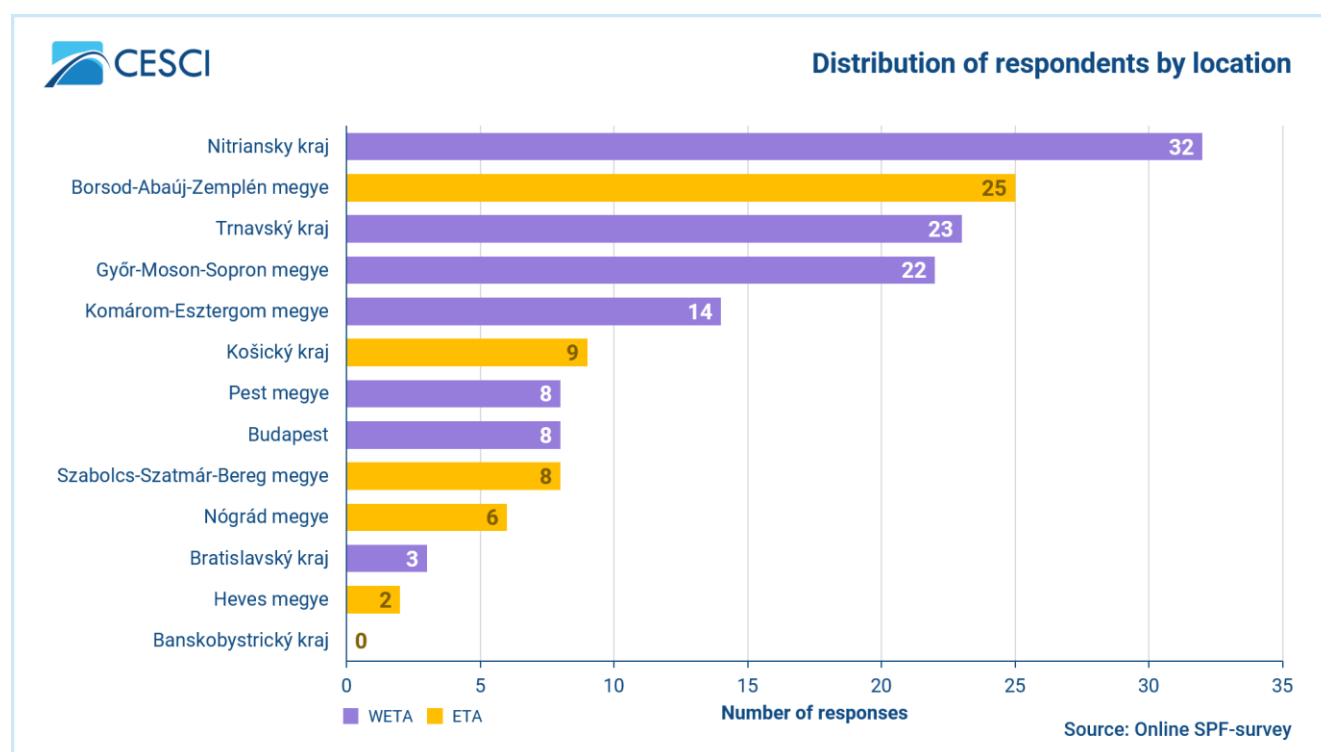
responses²) and non-governmental organisations (17 respondents, 21 responses) were slightly overrepresented, but a relatively high number of enterprises and public institutions also filled out the survey. The distribution between the two countries is fairly balanced (43 Hungarian respondents and 40 Slovakian respondents), only the public institutions on the Hungarian side and regional municipalities on the Slovakian one are overrepresented.

Via Carpatia EGTC conducted an online survey among ETA's applicants and beneficiaries beyond this evaluation exercise. To complete this sample, with the assistance of the RDV EGTC³, CESCO invited the WETA's applicants and beneficiaries to respond to a more or less identical questionnaire. The data harmonisation between the results of the two surveys was carried out by CESCO. The **joint SPF-survey** database contains answers from 160 SP applicants and beneficiaries in total (Figure 3). The following figures show the territorial and organisational distribution of the respondents.

As it can be seen from the figure below, the respondents of WETA's applicants were more numerous (110) while ETA's applicants represented less than one third of the sample (50). In terms of geographical distribution, somewhat more answers arrived from Hungary (93) than Slovakia (67).

Stemming also from the nature of WETA and ETA, by far the most answers arrived from municipalities and cities (77), but non-profit organisations (37) and non-governmental organisations (25) were also satisfactorily represented (Figure 4).

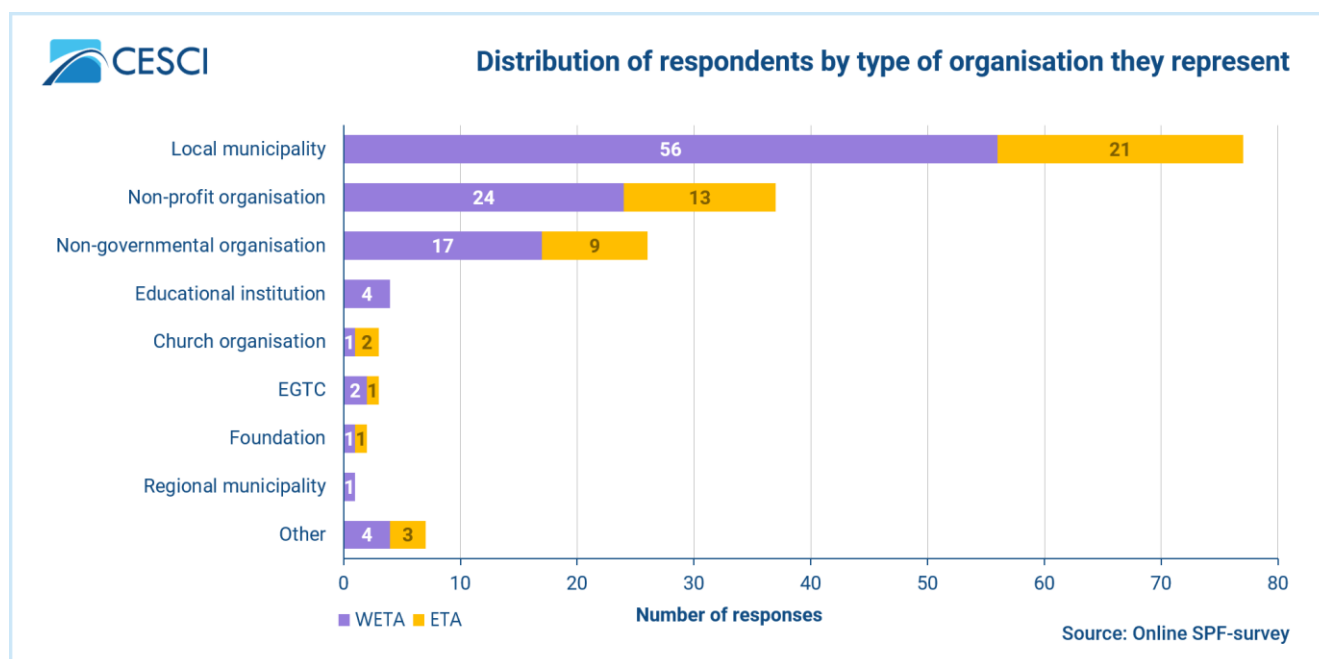
Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by location (Online SPF-survey)



² An organisation could complete several questionnaires for its projects.

³ Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC.

Figure 4: Distribution of respondents by type of organisation they represent (Online SPF-survey)



GIS-based territorial analysis was applied in order to illustrate the regional needs of the programme and the territorial coverage of the projects. Various maps help understanding and evaluating the impacts achieved within each PA. The evaluation process included data collection, database building and processing phases.

Finally, through a **content analysis of policies and related planning documents** many different concepts, strategies, action plans and policy priorities were taken into account with regard to the CP. As part of the analysis, the contribution of the projects to the Priority Areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the headline targets of the EU2020 Strategy and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations were analysed. During the analysis, two features of the projects were evaluated:

1. the direction of the impact (negative, neutral, or positive);
2. direct/indirect nature of the impact.

Besides, the expert team also analysed which plans and strategies responded to the regional needs, challenges and goals of the PA, as well as how they were implemented and which subtopics were addressed. Furthermore, the influence effects of various programmes on the PAs, such as INTERREG, national, operational, and other programmes were also analysed. This method facilitated to answer to what extent the Programme contributed to cross-border regional development and how it complemented and enhanced the effect of other related policies or strategies.

As a unique method, the evaluators analysed the **Programme's impact on the borderscape**.

The ultimate mission of the CBC programmes is to diminish the separating effects of the administrative borders and to convene the citizens living on either side of the border in order to build mutual trust and peaceful coexistence. The elimination of the barrier effects influences the perceptions and the spatial behaviour of the citizens living in the border area. This aspect is addressed by the assessment of borderscape changes which are usually not assessed, due to the methodological difficulties. The term

'borderscape' refers to the way how the everyday citizens perceive, experience, dissolve and (re-)create the state border.

During the last years, CESCO has been developing the methodological background for measuring the *borderscape* and *borderscaping* phenomena. For this purpose, three groups of factors are analysed based on the classification of Henk van Houtum⁴:

- 1) **cross-border flows** refer to the volume and intensity of cross-border flow of goods, persons, services and the business activities in the borderland;
- 2) **cross-border cooperation** factors include the analysis of the administrative conditions for and the quality of cooperation and social connectivity across the border, including (among others) cross-border institutions, projects and the level of bilingualism;
- 3) the so-called **people** factor refers to the border citizens' perception on distance, otherness and territoriality generated and defined by the administrative border.

The three aspects show a strong correlation. The intensification of cross-border flows facilitates the development of cooperation and, *vice versa*, the stronger is the cooperation level between the actors, the more intense is the volume of cross-border flows. Similarly, the perceptions of the border citizens on the border and the other side of the border will gradually be changing based on frequent encounters and, *vice versa*, the changing perception of the border people will facilitate the intensification of cooperation, etc. When assessing the impacts of a CBC programme, the most important aspect is to show how the selected interventions contributed to stronger cross-border integration – which manifested through the intensification of cross-border flows and cooperation – and to a more favourable atmosphere for building mutual trust.

⁴ Houtum, van H. (2000): An Overview of European Geographical Research on Borders and Border Regions, *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 15:1, pp. 57–83.

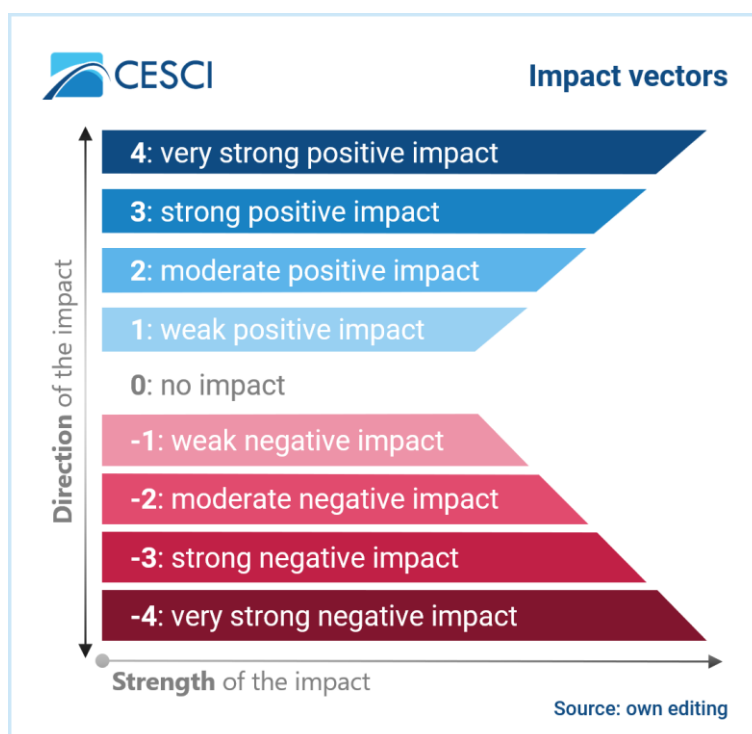
The relevant chapter contains a matrix presenting the estimated impacts of the CP on the different borderscape factors and a summary of the findings related to the borderscape aspect.

The applied impact vector has two axes:

- Direction of the impact (negative – positive);
- Strength of the impact produced by the Programme (weak – strong).

Through this innovative approach the experts intend to make the impacts of the programme on the programming region more intelligible.

Figure 5: Impact vectors

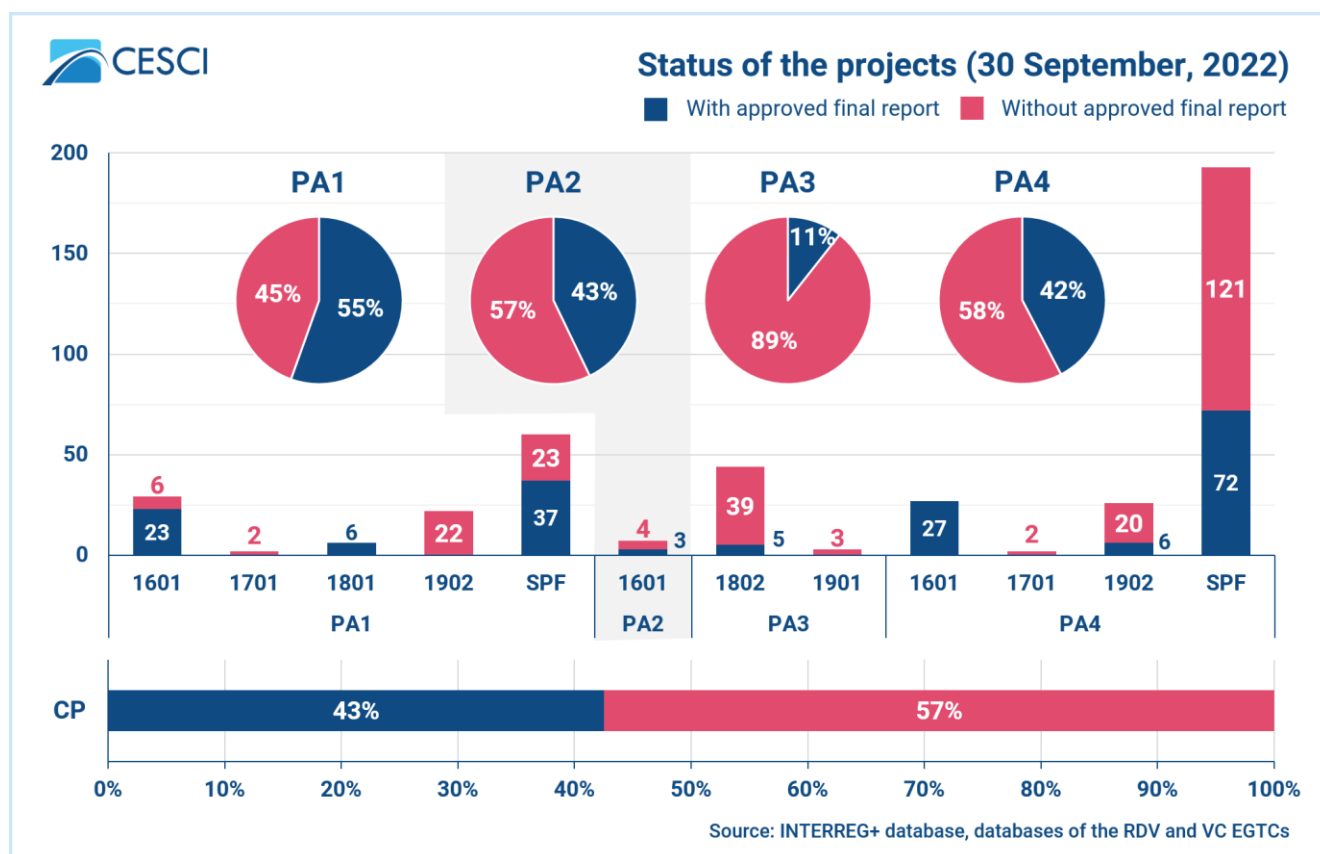


Limitations of the evaluation

Due to the nature and scope of the analysis, as well as the availability of the relevant data, the current evaluation has limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting its results.

Firstly, **the cut-off date of the evaluation was set to be 30 September 2022**, which led to a few restrictions. One of the most serious one being that out of the 421 projects, only 179 (merely 43%) were closed with an **approved final report** (Figure 6). Obviously, it was difficult to take the exact results of the 242 ongoing projects into account, so the conclusions may not accurately reflect the final status of the CP. Accordingly, the impacts were estimated on the basis of information available by the cut-off date. For financial analysis, the experts applied “expected budget” calculations, based on the verified amount of the completed projects, and the planned costs of those projects without an approved final report (being in implementation). In the case of SPF umbrella projects, allocations for small projects were not included in these figures.

Figure 6: The status of the projects at the cut-off date



For the evaluation, one of the **main data sources** was the monitoring system of the CP, called INTERREG+ System. In cooperation with the Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit LLC, a substantial data export was done at the beginning of the work. In some minor cases, it was necessary to harmonise the exported data with the JS database.

The evaluation of **SPF results** required further time-consuming data harmonisation processes. During the evaluation process, it was necessary to build a joint database for the SP projects. This was due to the fact that SP projects are not included in the INTERREG+ monitoring system and the two EGTCs have not yet harmonised the monitoring procedures of these projects. Despite the fact that the evaluators used different automatised solutions for data processing, the harmonisation of the data provided by the EGTCs and the creation of the joint database took months to complete.

There were difficulties in other phases of the SPF evaluation as well. Originally, only the Via Carpatia EGTC conducted an **online survey** among its beneficiaries. For the Western programme area, the survey had to be carried out as part of the current evaluation process. In order to make the responses of the two areas comparable, the questions of the current questionnaire have been adapted to the questions of the previous ETA questionnaire. This also meant that the questionnaire could only include the questions of the evaluators to a limited extent.

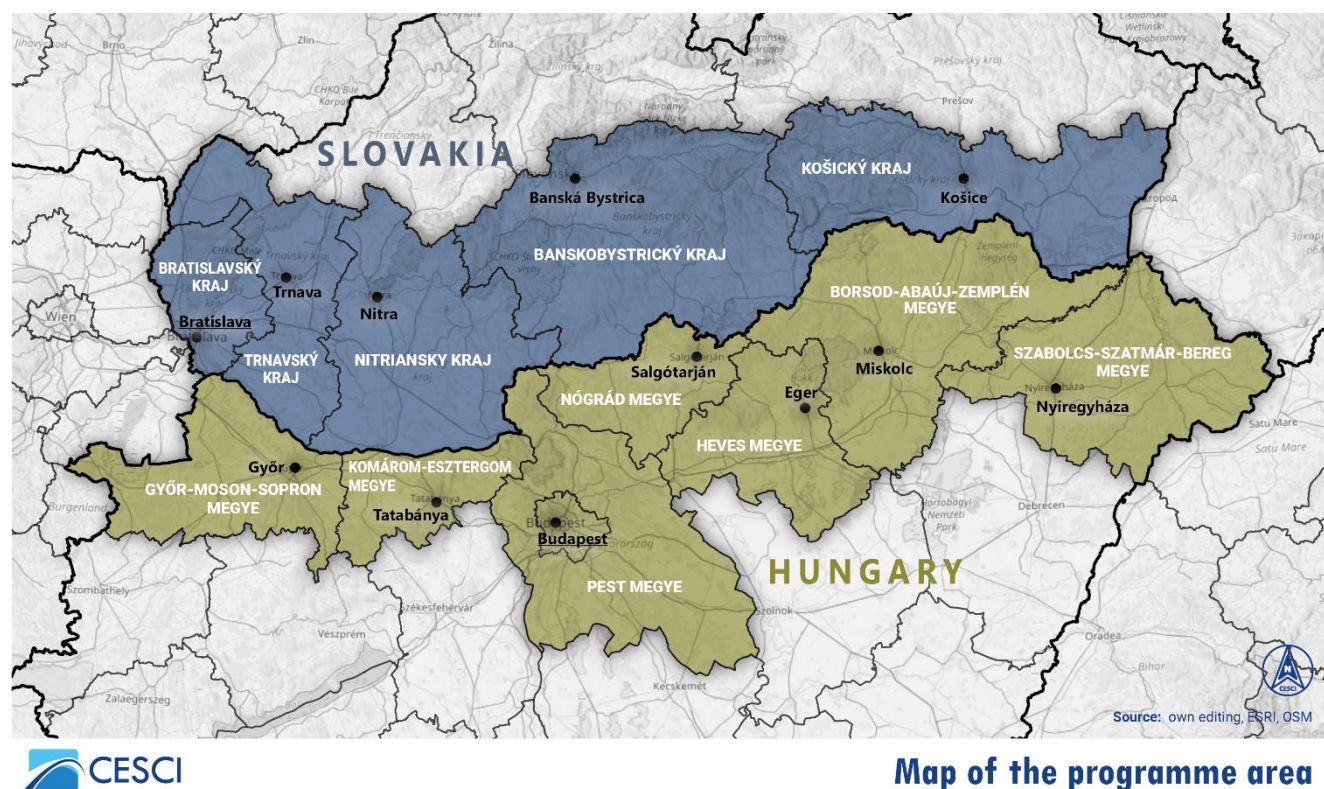
The success **of involving beneficiaries** in the evaluation process varied widely. Some beneficiaries actively participated, while others did not complete the questionnaire and declined the invitation to be interviewed. In addition to the beneficiaries, the **willingness of MC members to participate** also varied, with some members refusing to answer the evaluators' questions either verbally or in a written form.

Furthermore, in some cases, the **inadequate data sources** posed a severe limitation. The lack of relevant statistical data in certain cases made the calculation of complex indices impossible. This is especially true for the sections on “Borderscape” where the analysis of the different factors – such as cross-border flows, cross-border cooperation and people – would have required the existence of such a broad-scale dataset that is far beyond of the scope of the present analysis.

1.2 General features and performance of the Programme

Regarding the territorial scope of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme (also referred to in this document as CP, Cooperation Programme or Programme), the same target area was delineated as in the frames of the previous Cooperation programme (2007-2013). In the context of Hungary and Slovakia this is the fourth generation of cross-border cooperation programmes following the *Phare CBC programmes (between 1996 and 2004)*, the *Hungary-Slovakia-Ukraine (HUSKUA) Programme (2004-2006)* and the *Hungary-Slovakia Cross-border Co-operation Programme (2007-2013)*.

Figure 7: Map of the programme area



The **programme area** covers altogether 61 496 km² (similar size to Latvia) with more than 8.83 million inhabitants⁵ (similar size to Austria) which is divided by a 679 km long, land-locked border (the 5th longest internal land border of the EU). The programme area consists of a total of

⁵ Population on 1 January 2021, source: Eurostat [DEMO_R_PJANGRP3]

13 administrative territorial units (NUTS3) out of which the Slovak side covers 5 NUTS3 regions (so called 'kraj') with more than 3.36 million inhabitants:

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

On the Hungarian side, the programme area incorporates 8 NUTS3 regions (so called 'megye'⁶ and the capital city of Budapest) where more than 5.47 million people live:

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

Two of them (Heves megye and Budapest) do not have direct physical connection with the state border, but their territorial proximity and the border effect justify their participation in the Programme.

The Programme was approved by the European Commission by its decision C(2015) 6805 on September 30, 2015. The **total EU contribution** to the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme (ERDF) is EUR 155 808 987 completed with national co-financing, thus amounting to a total of EUR 183 304 695.

The programme budget was divided among **five Priority Axes**, one of which was dedicated to technical assistance, and the other four were characterised by thematic focuses. *Figure 8* introduces the Priority Axes with their specific objectives, result indicators, financial allocation and progress as well as the applied calls for proposals and mechanisms.

Regarding some aspects (share of ERDF allocation, number of applications and beneficiaries, range of the applied mechanisms), PA1 has some domination among the PAs. PA3, with its innovative TAPE construction, represents around a quarter of the ERDF budget. PA2 and PA3 have a similar share in terms of the ERDF allocation, however, due to the different character of the PAs' objectives, the number of projects and involved beneficiaries show a significant difference.

It is crucial to highlight the innovative character of the Programme. Out of the four thematic Priority Axes, three applied at least one special mechanism. Despite the observed difficulties of the implementation, the stakeholders of the programme aim to implement a programme between 2021 and 2027 with similar innovative tools.

⁶ According to the 11th amendment of the Constitution of Hungary (19th July, 2022) and the Article 4 (which entered into force in 1st January, 2023) the term 'megye' was replaced by 'vármegye'.

Figure 8: Overview of the Programme

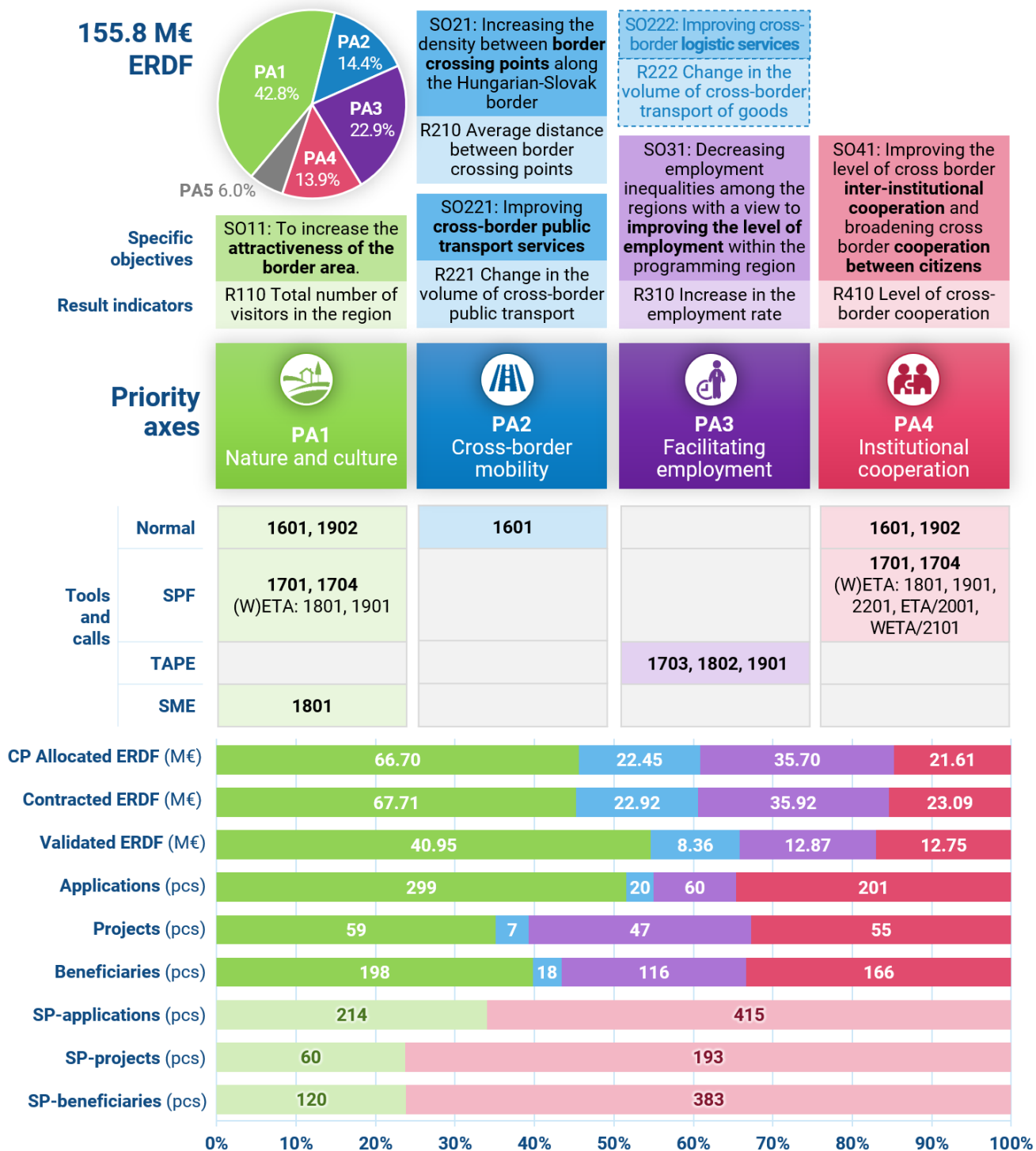
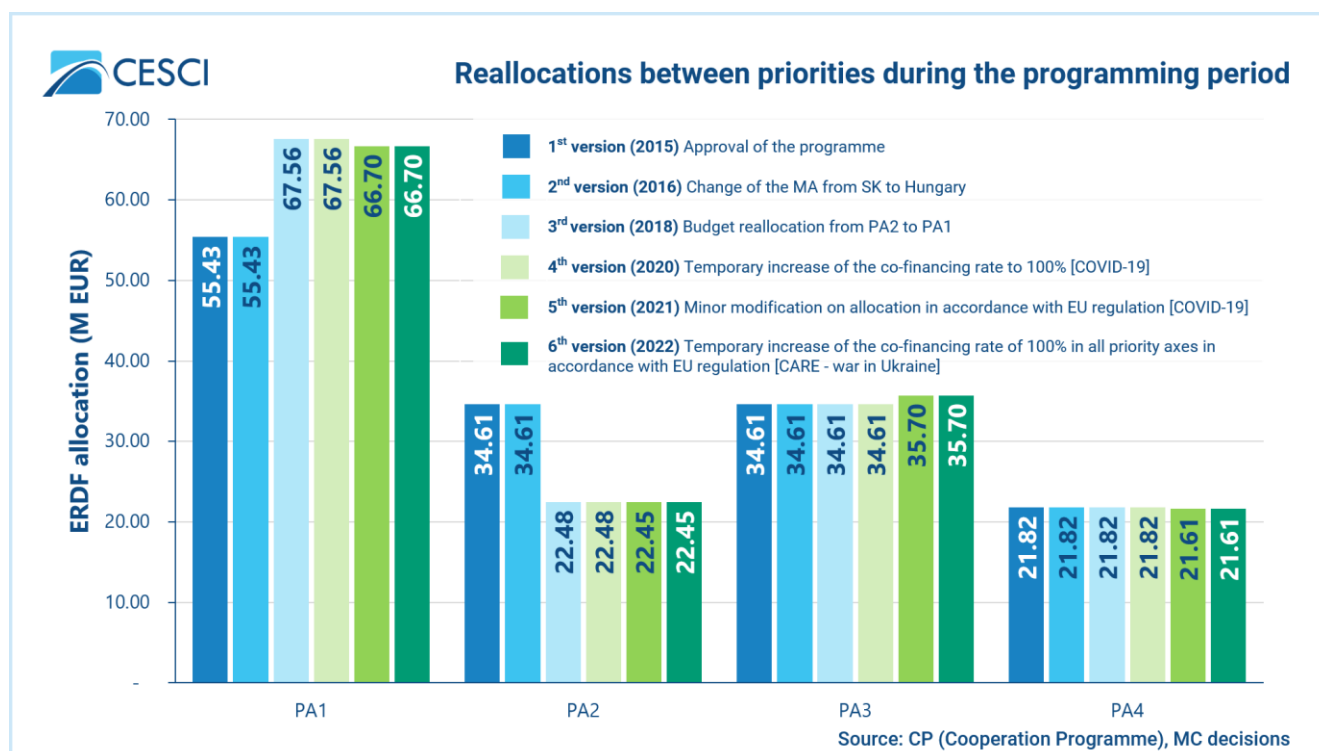


Figure 9: Overview of the CP's modifications



During the programme period, out of the **5 CP modifications**, two resulted in budget reallocation between the priorities. The first took place in 2018 (3rd version) when the third specific objective of PA2 (*SO222 Improving cross-border logistic services*) with its result indicator (*R222 Change in the volume of cross-border good transport*) was cancelled. By that time one project had been approved but due to the unfavourable State Aid conditions, the awarded applicant had withdrawn its proposal. In 2018, it became obvious that the goals of this intervention, thus the relevant indicators (R222) will not be completed within the programme. So, the MC initiated the modification of the cooperation programme at the European Commission, and the remaining funds in PA2 were reallocated to PA1, towards which there was a permanent general interest among the beneficiaries.

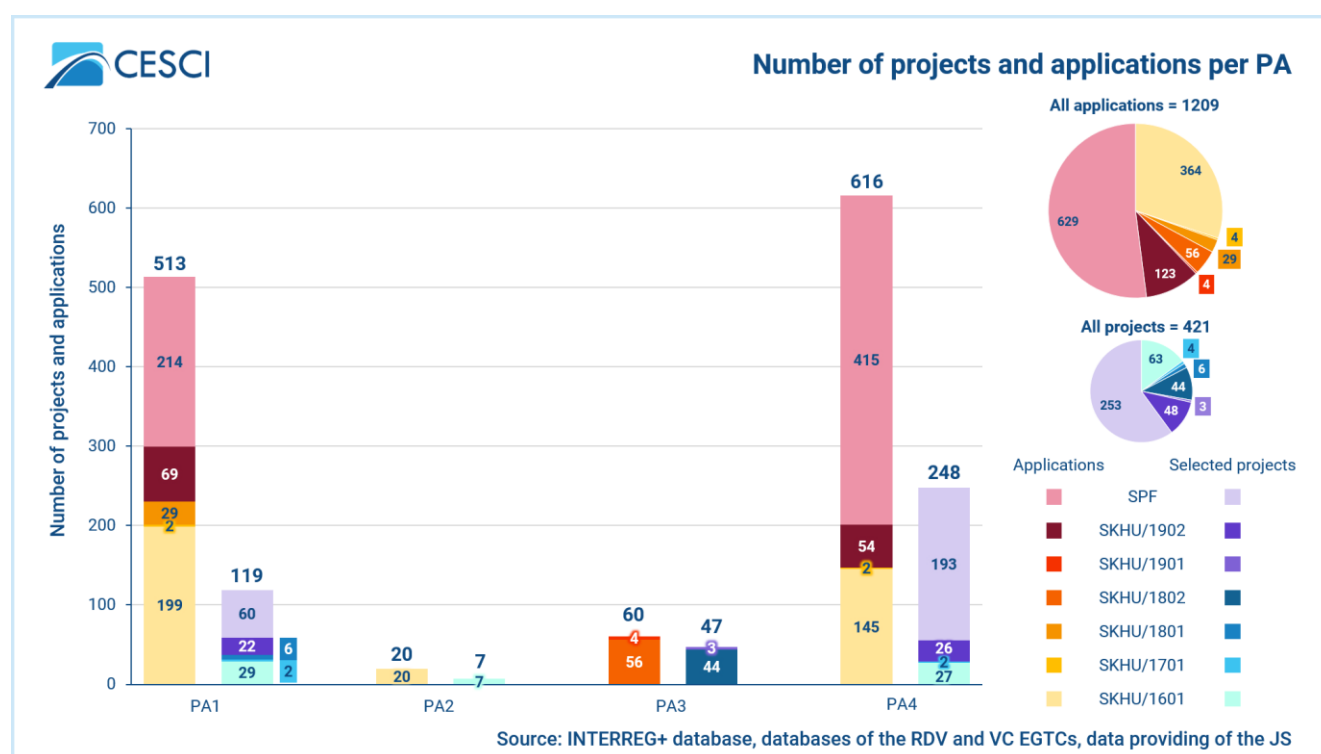
The second budget reallocation (5th version) took place in 2021, as the projects targeting bridge construction required extra allocation. This CP modification was enabled by an EU regulation⁷ to compensate the unexpected expenditures stemming from the COVID-19, which proves the flexibility of the programme. The modifications regarding the 4th and 6th versions meant additional pre-financing from the EU Commission to the programme in order to ensure its liquidity in those periods hardened by external factors (the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine). These modifications also contributed to speed up spending at programme level and reach the pre-defined target values (n+3 target). The reallocations are illustrated by *Figure 9*.

⁷ REGULATION (EU) 2020/460 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 30 March 2020 amending Regulations (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 508/2014 as regards specific measures to mobilise investments in the healthcare systems of Member States and in other sectors of their economies in response to the COVID-19 outbreak (Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative)

The Programme was implemented through **9 Calls for Proposals** out of which 2 were ‘normal’ calls while the other 7 used special mechanisms, namely: 2 SPF-umbrella calls (the second one was restricted), 1 SME call and its predecessor, the unsuccessful B-Light call, as well as 3 TAPE calls (the first targeted the action plan concepts while the two others focused on the projects embedded in the concept). As a result of the SPF umbrella calls, two EGTCs (one in the eastern, another in the western section of the border area) were selected to manage the calls addressing the local actors in the framework of the small project scheme.

Altogether 1 209 applications were submitted to these calls, out of which 421 have contracted for implementation. It means that 34.8% of the applications have been awarded. The success rate was different per priority axis, e.g. under PA3 it was 78% and under PA4 40%. The majority of both the applications (52%; 629 applications) and the realised projects (60%; 253 projects) were generated by the SPF calls. On PA level, the number of PA4 projects stood out, since more than 200 projects (248 projects to be precise) were realised in the frameworks of this PA, out of which 193 were small projects. The majority of 119 projects under PA1 were also small projects (60 in total). The two other PAs – where the mechanisms of small projects were not used – represent a bit more than 50 projects in total (PA2: 7 projects; PA3: 47 projects).

Figure 10: Number of projects and applications per PA



Considering the status of project implementation at the cut-off date (September 30, 2022) of the evaluation, 43% of the projects⁸ (179 projects) were administratively closed and there were 242 projects (57%) without an approved final report. From this point of view, there is no considerable difference between the normal and small projects, as the ratio of closed projects is 42-43%, subsequently. The

⁸ Merged value of normal projects and small projects.

process of administrative closure of the projects was the most advanced under PA1, where 51% of the final reports (66 projects) were already approved. On the contrary, under PA3 this value was only 11%.

Table 4: Overview of the Call for Proposals

Call ID	Tool	Relevant PAs	Planned ERDF allocation (EUR)
SKHU/1601	Normal	PA1, PA2, PA4	67 475 822
SKHU/1701	Small Project Fund <i>1st round of the umbrella projects</i>	PA1, PA4	12 464 719 ⁹
SKHU/1702	B-Light Scheme	PA1	10 000 000 ¹⁰
SKHU/1703	TAPE <i>Territorial action plans</i>	PA3	34 608 080 ¹¹
SKHU/1704	Small Project Fund <i>2nd round of the umbrella projects</i>	PA1, PA4	12 464 719
SKHU/1801	SME	PA1	10 000 000
SKHU/1802	TAPE <i>Territorial action plan projects</i>	PA3	34 608 080
SKHU/1901	TAPE <i>Territorial action plan projects</i>	PA3	34 608 080
SKHU/1902	Normal	PA1, PA4	27 500 000

Initially, the total amount of ERDF defined by the CP was EUR 146.46 million. As not the whole financial frame of the CfPs was covered by the selected projects (e.g. in the SKHU/1801), and some selected projects were withdrawn before or after the contracting procedure, as well as many beneficiaries were not able to absorb the total ERDF subsidy, the residual funds provided flexibility for the CfPs to reallocate the surplus to another CfP. Altogether a total sum of EUR 155.1 million was published by the CfPs, of which 8.8% (EUR 13.6 million) was available for small project applicants. Finally, the total contracted ERDF amounted to EUR 149.6 million including the small projects' share (EUR 11.3 million, 7.5% of the total contracted budget).

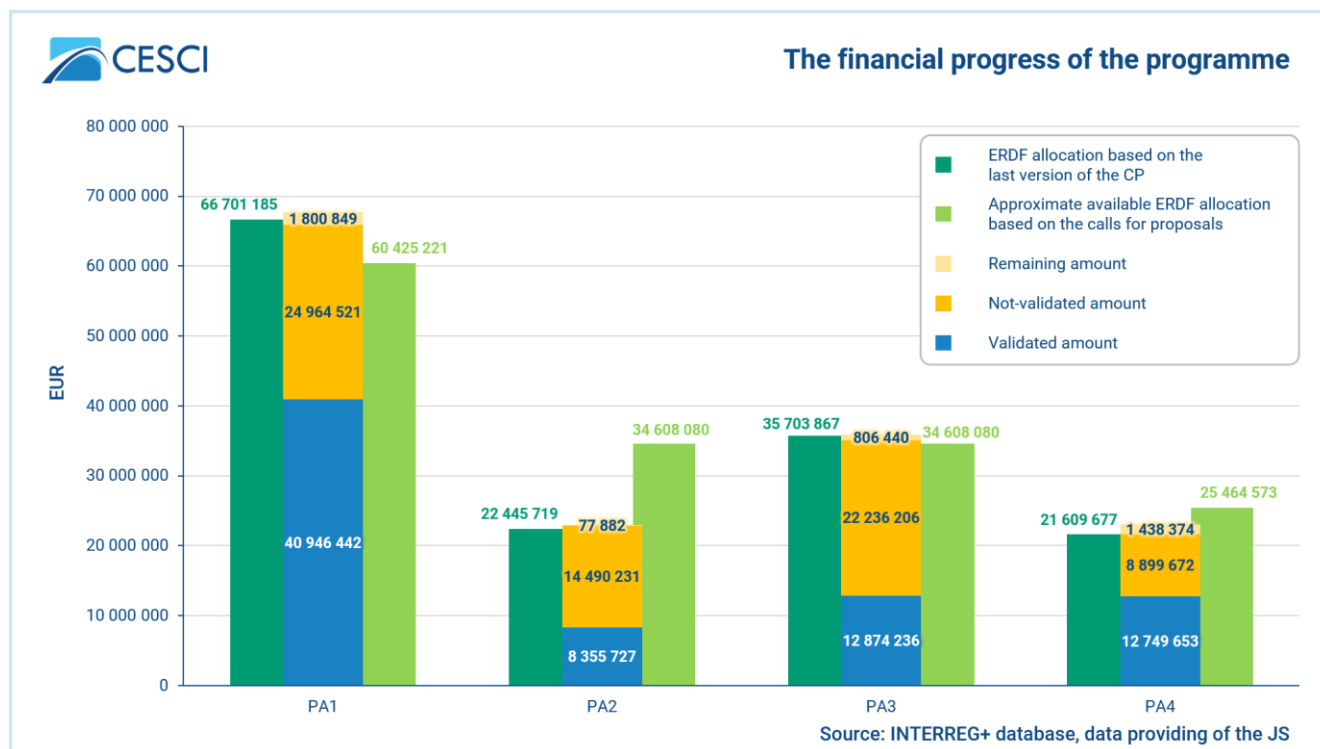
As far as the **financial progress** of the Programme is concerned, 50% of the contracted ERDF amount (almost EUR 75 million) had already been validated and further 47% was before validation (not validated) at the cut-off date. The remaining category (those costs that were rejected during the controlling or were not spent by the project partners) covered only 3% (almost EUR 4.1 million), but, owing to the continuation of the validation process, this value may increase. The ratio of validated funding was over 50% under PA1 (60%) and PA4 (55%); in the other cases it was 36% (PA2, PA3). See *Figure 11*.

⁹ The proposed allocation was the same in the second SPF call.

¹⁰ The budget of B-Light Scheme call was reallocated to the SME call.

¹¹ All the 3 TAPE calls used the same budget frame (EUR 34 608 080 was divided between the relevant three calls).

Figure 11: The financial progress of the programme



The following four figures (*Figure 12 – Figure 15*) give an overview about the thematic PAs of the Programme. All figures visualise the following **features**:

- share of the PA within the Programme's ERDF allocation;
- regional challenges justifying the inclusion of the PA in the CP;
- expected results that the Member States seek to achieve;
- the PA's specific objective(s) and result indicator(s);
- the predefined output indicators;
- overview of the calls launched, the mechanisms used and the actions supported;
- the main features of the PA's implementation progress.

The short description of the PAs is included in the Annex (*3.1 Overview of the PAs' implementation*), while the detailed analysis of the PAs is found in the second part of the document (*2.1.1 Quantification of the performance*).

Figure 12: Overview of PA1

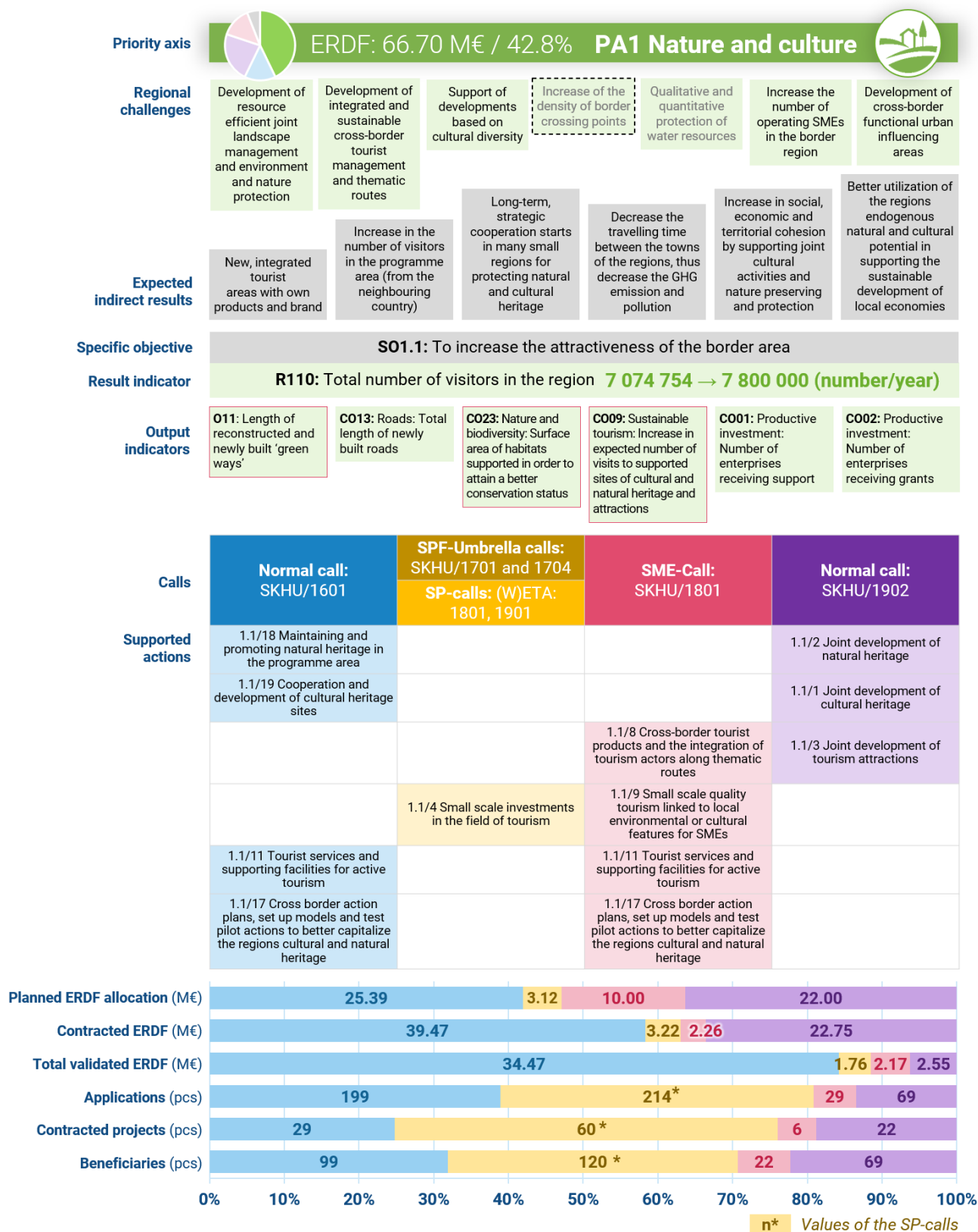


Figure 13: Overview of PA2

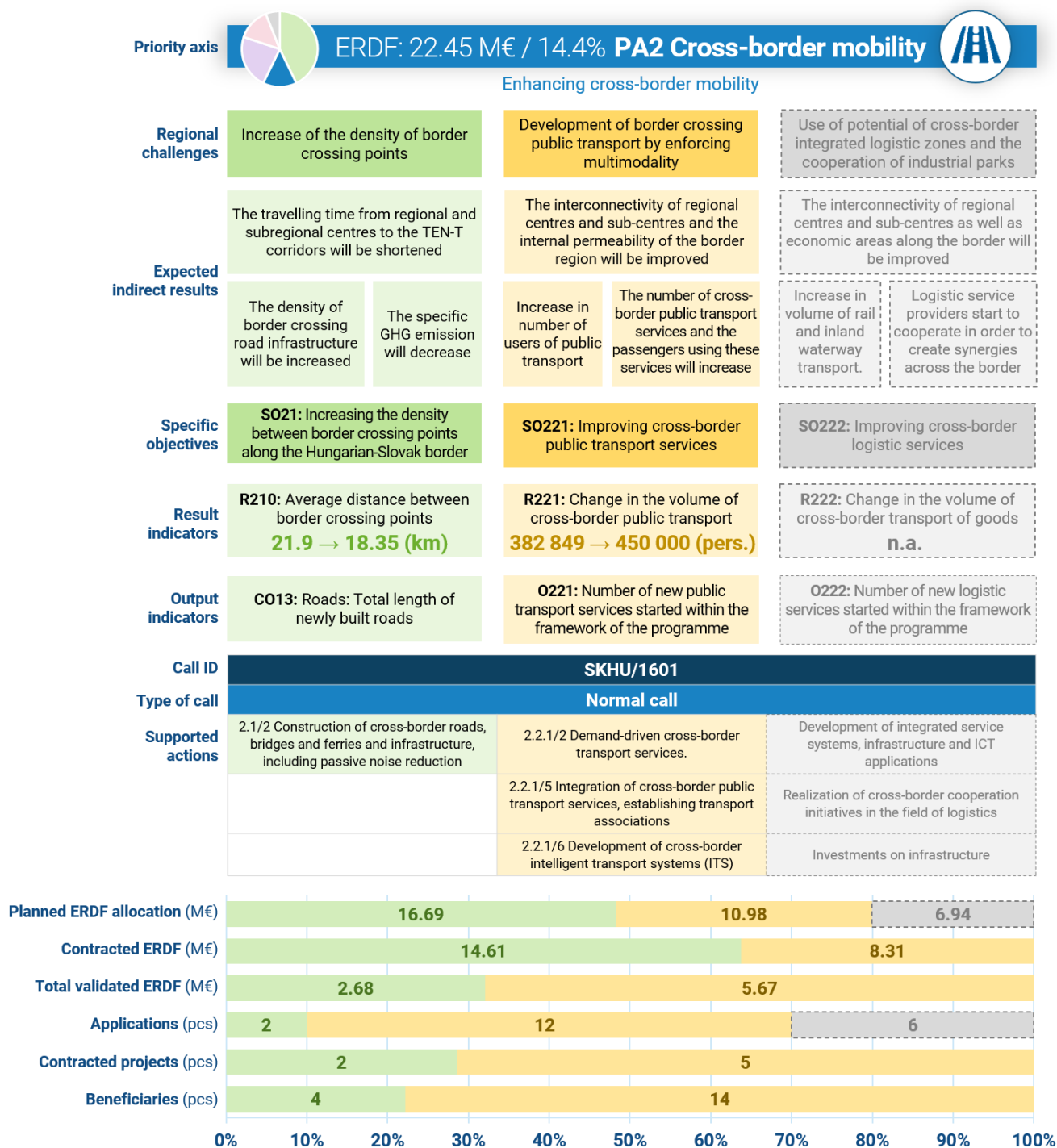


Figure 14: Overview of PA3

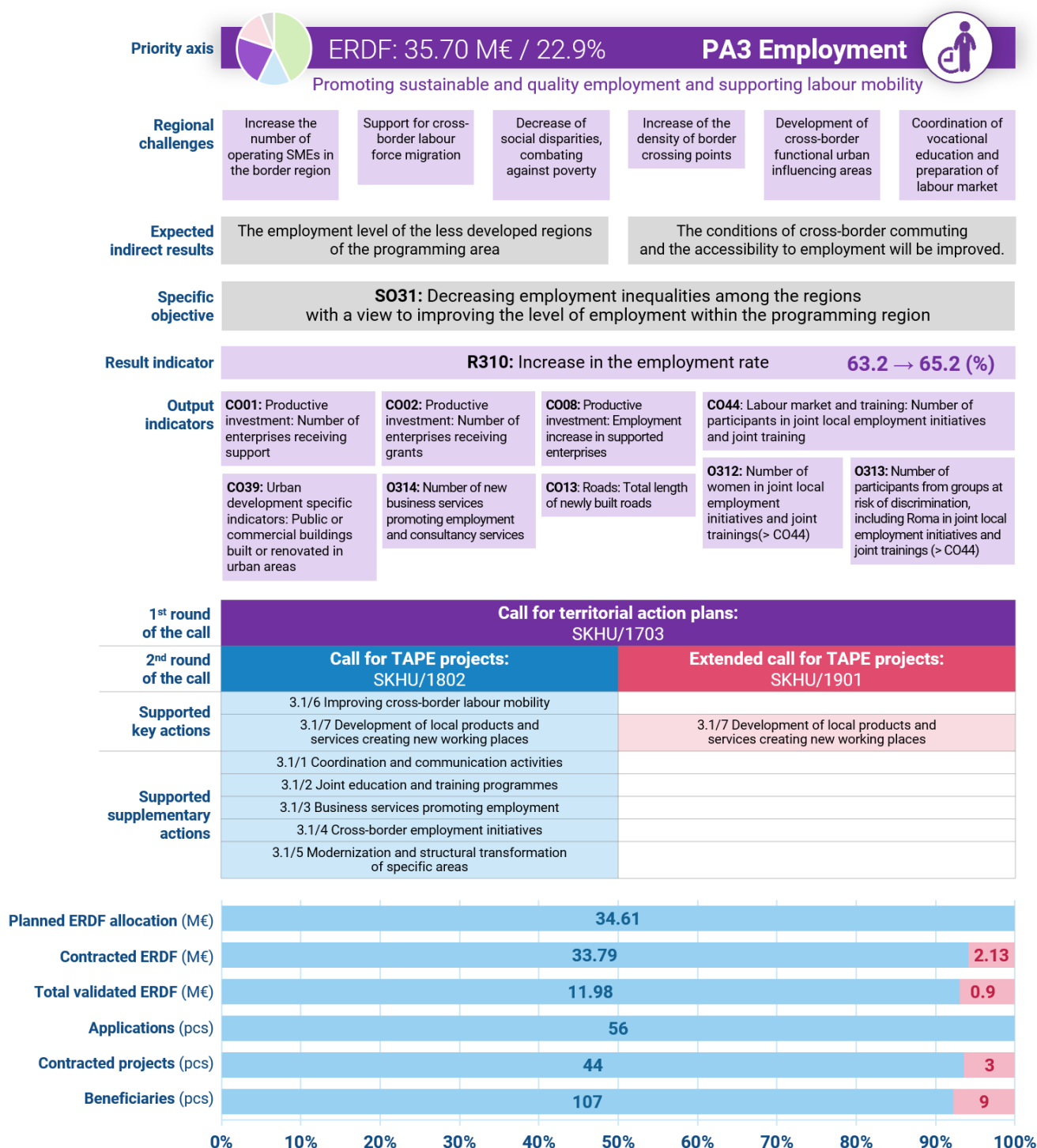


Figure 15: Overview of PA4

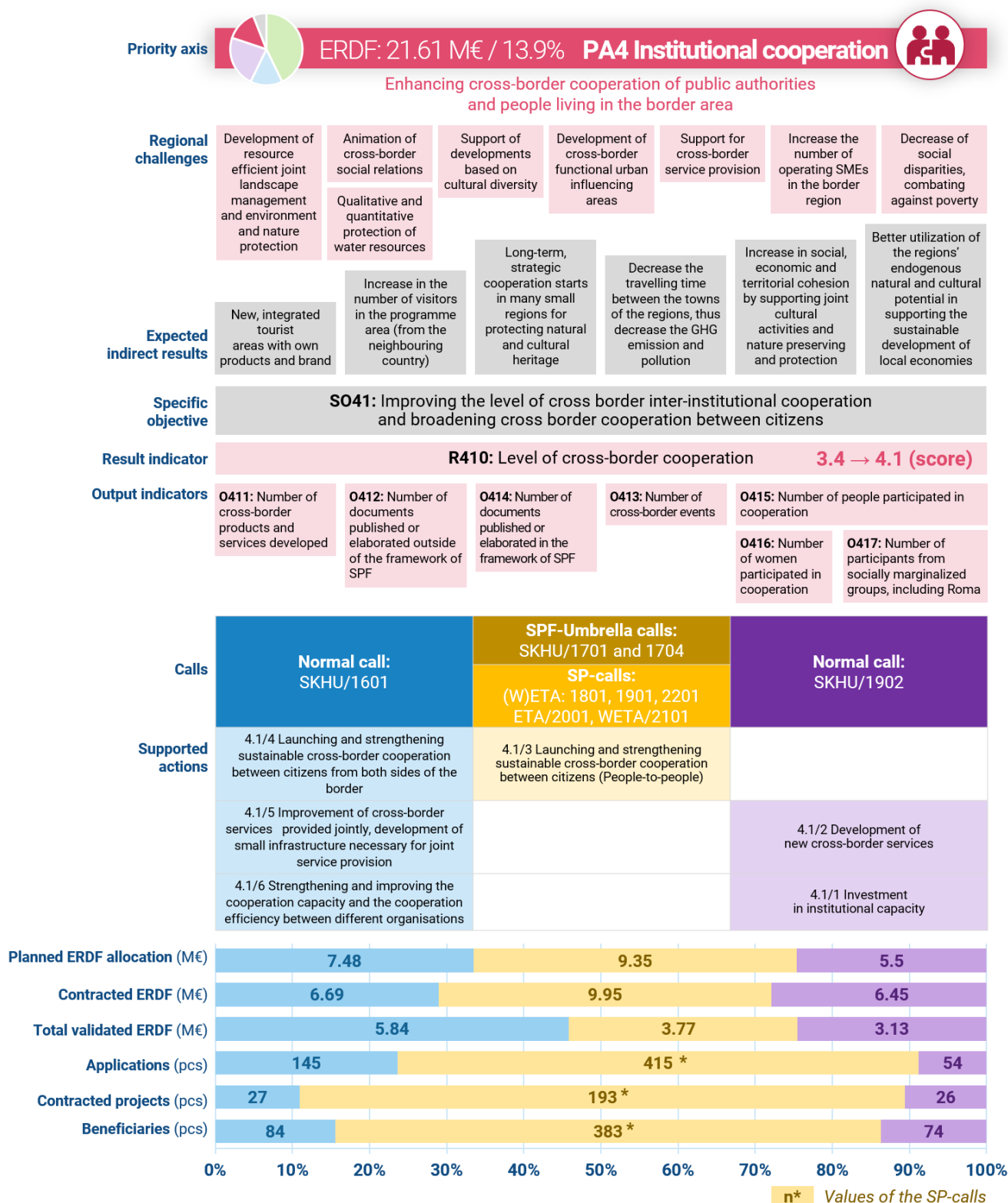


Table 5 and *Table 6* summarise the **output and result indicators of the CP** which identified 22 output indicators altogether (8 common specific and 14 programme specific indicators), but during the implementation of the programme one indicator (*O222 New logistic services*) was cancelled and eventually 21 output indicators are to be reported annually to the Commission. There are three common specific indicators which were selected by more than one PA: *CO01 Enterprises receiving support* and *CO02 Enterprises receiving grants* are fulfilled under two PAs, and three PAs contain the *CO13 Newly built roads*. The number of result indicators was much less, only 6, out of which one was cancelled (*R222 Change in the volume of cross-border good transport*) in accordance with the cancellation of the relevant output indicator. Due to the fact that in 2018 there were no achieved indicator values reported, the evaluation had to be limited to the report of 2020 (the report of 2023 was not yet known by the cut-off date).

In this document, in compliance with the European Commission's 'Better regulation' toolbox¹² the fulfilment of the indicators has been evaluated along the S.M.A.R.T. criteria:

- **Specific:** Indicators should be precise and concrete enough not to be open to varying interpretations by different people.
- **Measurable:** Indicators should define a desired future state in measurable terms, to allow verification of their achievement. Such objectives are either quantified or based on a combination of description and scoring scales.
- **Achievable:** Indicators should be set at a level which is ambitious and at the same time realistically achievable and properly justified.
- **Relevant:** Indicators should be directly linked to the problem and its root causes.
- **Time-Bound:** Indicators should be related to a fixed date or precise time period to allow an evaluation of their achievement.

In the following tables, the fulfilment of the criteria was analysed and marked with the following colours:

- **A – Green:** the indicator is in line with the criteria;
- **B – Yellow:** the indicator is only partially in line with the criteria;
- **C – Red:** the indicator fails regarding the criteria.

¹² 'Better regulation' toolbox (2017): <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/better-regulation-toolbox.pdf>; 'Better regulation' toolbox (2021): https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how/better-regulation-guidelines-and-toolbox_en

2nd PHASE EVALUATION: Effectiveness, efficiency and impact evaluation
of the INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme

Table 5: Overview of the output indicators

Indicator code	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Target value	Current value (AIR 2021)	Potential value 2023 ¹³	S	M	A	R	T
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	enterprises	40	36	36	A	A	A	A	A
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	enterprises	40	36	36	A	A	B	A	B
CO09	Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	30 000	1 042 367	663 035	B	C	C	A	C
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	2.80	3.1	5.34	A	A	B	B	B
CO23	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	hectares	115 100	123 045.18	128 677	A	A	B	A	B
O11	Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	km	120	751.84	800.07	A	A	C	A	B
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	3.15	0	3.2	A	A	B	A	A
O221	Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	piece	10	5	10	A	A	A	A	B

¹³ Based on AIR 2021: Outputs to be delivered by selected operations (forecast provided by beneficiaries).

2nd PHASE EVALUATION: Effectiveness, efficiency and impact evaluation
of the INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme

Indicator code	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Target value	Current value (AIR 2021)	Potential value 2023 ¹³	S	M	A	R	T
O222	Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme	piece	0	n.a.	n.a.	B	A	C	A	C
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	enterprises	10	40	41	A	A	C	A	B
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	enterprises	10	40	41	A	A	C	A	B
CO08	Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	full time equivalents	20	41.34	86	A	A	C	A	B
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	11	1.93	7.25	A	A	C	B	B
CO39	Urban Development: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	square meters	3 000	7 923.72	20 305.33	A	A	C	A	B
CO44	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	persons	100	312	1 533	A	A	C	A	B
O311	Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	number	10	0	9	A	A	C	B	B
O312	Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	persons	50	105	178	A	A	C	A	B

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Indicator code	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Target value	Current value (AIR 2021)	Potential value 2023 ¹³	S	M	A	R	T
O313	Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	persons	25	27	30	A	A	B	A	B
O314	Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	number	15	4	33	A	A	A	A	A
O411	Number of cross-border products and services developed	number	20	159	168	A	A	C	A	B
O412	Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	number	40	140	166	A	A	C	B	B
O413	Number of cross border events	number	400	746	1 079	A	A	C	A	B
O414	Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	number	200	183	259	A	A	A	B	A
O415	Number of people participated in cooperation	number	10 000	50 471	53 125	B	A	C	B	B
O416	Number of women participated in cooperation	number	4 000	27 624	22 064	B	A	C	B	B

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Indicator code	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Target value	Current value (AIR 2021)	Potential value 2023 ¹³	S	M	A	R	T
O417	Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	number	300	5 295	3 285	B	A	C	B	B

Table 6: Overview of the result indicators

Priority Axis	Indicator code	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Target value	Achieved value in 2020 (AIR 2020)	S	M	A	R	T
PA1	R110	Total number of visitors in the region	number/year	7 800 000	12 011 536	A	B	C	C	B
PA2	R210	Average distance between border crossing points	km	18.35	18.35	A	A	A	A	A
	R221	Change in the volume of cross-border public transport	persons	450 000	8 725	A	C	B	A	B
	R222	Change in the volume of cross-border good transport	EUR	0	n.a.	C	B	C	A	C
PA3	R310	Increase in the employment rate	%	65.2	70.2	A	B	A	B	A
PA4	R410	Level of cross-border cooperation	score	4.1	3.4	C	C	A	B	A

In most cases, the specificity, measurability and relevance of the **output indicators** are suitable. However, there are some exceptions that are difficult to measure. For instance, the number of future visits is impossible to measure during the implementation period (*CO09 Expected visits to supported sites*). Further problems stemmed from the ambiguous definition of the indicators. For example, the *CO02 Enterprises receiving grants* and *CO01 Enterprises receiving support* overlap, as the latter category involves the former one. The most well-marked shortcomings are detectable in terms of the achievability and time bounding of the indicators, as most of the indicators have fulfilled the target values ahead of 2023. Striking difference is observed under *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites* (3 375 percentage point¹⁴ (pp) surplus compared to the programme's goal), *O411 Cross-border products and services* (+695pp) and *O417 Participants from socially marginalized groups* (+1 665pp). Further relevant information is available in the Performance chapter (*2.1.1 Quantification of the performance*).

The assessment of the **result indicators** is even more problematic: two of them (*R221 Change in the volume of cross-border public transport*; *R410 Level of cross-border cooperation*) have not fulfilled the target value yet. Some of the indicators (*R110 Total number of visitors in the region*, *R310 Increase in the employment rate*) are not suitable to distinguish the results of external and internal impacts, therefore their relevance is questionable. In some cases, the process of data collecting is slow as the comparability of the necessary information is not ensured and/or they are obtained by time-consuming separate researches (surveys/questionnaires) or external data providers (*R410 Level of cross-border cooperation*; *R221 Change in the volume of cross-border public transport*).

Although no significant objections can be mentioned against the relevance of output and result indicators, as they are in line with the examined topic, the CBC aspect is weak or missing. The indicators were generated according to the CPR, hence this shortcoming was already evident at the preparatory stage.

¹⁴ The surplus is calculated by the following formula: (achieved value/target value*100)-100.

1.3 Answers to the guiding questions

Q1. How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?

Alignment is outstanding with regard to SO4.1 Improving the level of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation and broadening cross-border cooperation between citizens as the CP contributed to people-to-people actions and new partnerships with the help of SPF, TAPE and many other projects. One of the greatest achievements was in relation to the action "Strengthening and improving the cooperation capacity and the cooperation efficiency between different organisations of particular sectors through common professional programmes, trainings, exchange of experiences, capitalisation and know-how transfer, etc.". Especially environmental protection stakeholders, healthcare and educational institutions and NGOs stood out in this field.

The Programme made significant progress in the field of joint development of environmentally friendly tourism products and offers and the development of cross-border infrastructure for eco-tourism and cultural heritage sites (especially regarding infrastructure for eco-tourism along the border and transboundary rivers, thematic routes and bicycle networks).

Construction of cross-border roads, bridges and ferries was another action that met expectations.

Specific Objective 2.2.2. Improving cross-border logistic services could not be fulfilled due to the lack of applicants, and the remaining funds were reallocated to PA1. SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services was more successful, but the three bike sharing system projects obtained support due to the lack of proposals concerning more typical and 'traditional' public transport developments (like train, bus, demand-driven services).

Considering SO3.1 - Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region, employment objectives and outputs were less successful as moderate employment growth was reached. However, TAPE resulted in new products and services and an intensified level of networking.

Q2. What progress did the Programme make towards achieving the targets of the specific objectives in terms of expected results, activities, target groups, types of beneficiaries and indicators?

The planned specific objectives and activities were in line with the regional needs, but the interest therein was not alike. Reallocation of ERDF was necessary from mobility to tourism, since there was no implemented project aiming at the improvement of cross-border logistic services. Consequently, the specific objective of increasing the border area's attractiveness exceeded the expected results, while the achievements of mobility projects were more moderate than it was planned before. In case of facilitating employment and improving institutional cooperation, the previously planned amount of ERDF was sufficiently absorbed, notable difference from the expected results was not observed. The most popular activity was the joint development of cultural and natural heritage sites and projects, but the construction of cross-border roads and the improvement of cross-border labour mobility also utilised a remarkable amount of EU contribution. By contrast, the activities related to cross-border employment

initiatives, business services promoting employment and cross-border intelligent transport systems (ITS) absorbed the smallest amount of contribution.

The programme successfully involved different types of beneficiaries; local municipalities and NGOs were the most represented types of partners owing to the SPF. In terms of the amount of EU contribution, the largest amount of ERDF was absorbed by local municipalities, state owned companies and EGTCs. On the contrary, the participation of chambers of commerce, primary and secondary schools, healthcare facilities and churches fell short of the other target groups.

The main contribution to the increase of the attractiveness of the border area (PA1) was performed by local municipalities, enterprises, non-governmental organizations and public institutions, while the involvement of chambers of commerce, regional and local tourism organisations, universities, research institutes and other educational institutions, development agencies and churches was less frequent. The type of eligible applicants related to mobility projects (PA2) was strongly limited, and mostly the state-owned companies and local municipalities were represented thereby, while the NGOs, regional municipalities, universities, research institutes for transport and development agencies stayed in the background. The specific objective linked to employment (PA3) was successful in involving numerous partners (especially enterprises, local municipalities and NGOs), but the representation of chambers of commerce, universities, research institutes, primary and secondary schools, public institutions and non-profit organisations was relatively weak. In the improvement of institutional cooperation (PA4) mostly the NGOs, local municipalities, non-profit organisations, public institutions, universities, research institutes and EGTCs took part, while the participation of public authorities, church organisations, state owned companies, regional municipalities and enterprises was less pronounced as it could have been.

Q3. What change was achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?

One of the most relevant changes refers to people-to-people connections. Most events and opportunities for local people to get to know each other (better), would not have been provided without the financial support of the Programme. The dissolution of mental borders and the knowledge about those living 'on the other side' is a main added value for the general public as well as for cultural institutions/organisations. Without the Programme a significantly lower amount of partnerships would have come about or intensified since 2014.

A main added value of the CP was the emergence and improvement of cross-border nature park initiatives. The nature protection of riverside and wetland areas was impacted the most. Further added value is connected to environmental education.

The number of border crossings have been successfully increased and the average distance between them got notably lower despite the limited budget.

Health care services and elderly care systems were impacted by knowledge exchange and joint capacity building, partly owing to the TAPE tool. The Programme impacted elderly people through the projects targeting the silver economy and public social services.

The Programme actively contributed to the development of cross-border thematic routes and the creation of bicycle road networks. Partnership building and development of cross-border destinations

especially connected to Szigetköz and Žitný ostrov, areas along the Danube, the river Ipoly and Sátoraljaújhely, Bodrogköz-Hegyköz and Medzibodrožie were successful with clear added value in the fields of ecotourism, active and heritage tourism based on joint built and intangible heritage.

Q4. What is the current and estimated aggregated effect of the programme in the eligible area?

The role of the Programme is outstanding with regard to the improvement of infrastructural conditions of cross-border flows mainly considering new border crossings (new road bridges between Ipolydamásd and Chľaba, Drégelypalánk and Ipeľské Predmostie, Őrhalom and Vrbovka, new bicycle bridge between Dunakiliti and Dobrohošť, ferry service between Neszmély and Radvaň, new road connection between Nagyrosvány and Veľký Horeš), decreased distance between regional centres and the increase of new cross-border transport options.

The role and functions of the regional authorities and the EGTCs as important stakeholders and cross-border institutions have increased. EGTCs have reached a higher level of institutional importance by being responsible for TAPE CCPs, the management of the SPF, and for being successful applicants and often LBs of SKHU projects. The representatives of the regional authorities gained new missions and assumed a more important role in the implementation of the Programme (especially through their involvement in the quality assessment process).

The CP strengthened social connectivity and partnerships of various stages through people-to-people-type activities increasing the number of citizens participating in cross-border activities, involving local municipalities and NGOs. Especially environmental education, environment and tourism-related people-to-people events were promoted. The Programme supported festivals and other events which are well-known and acknowledged by the other side's cultural and civic sphere by now. Cultural life across the border has developed significantly since 2014. Many artists and event organisers of all types of events now know each other significantly better than before.

Capacity building and inter-institutional cooperation were encouraged and facilitated by the Programme, especially covering stakeholders from the fields of environmental protection and tourism, furthermore from healthcare and social care. However, the representation of institutions in the Programme remained below expectations.

Q5. What are the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation?

Gaps can be detected in the development of border crossing public transport lines (especially with regard to bus services and development of passenger information and ticketing systems, establishment of associations); the use of the potential of cross-border integrated logistics zones and the cooperation of industrial parks (however, it must be noted that the CP could hardly have a noticeable influence here given the large infrastructural expenses); and support for cross-border labour force migration (regardless of training and capacity development).

The fulfilment of result indicators corroborates these statements, as the volume of cross-border public transport and the density of border crossing points fall short of the initial goals, while tourism (number of visitors) and the employment rate have exceeded the expected targets. The programme has been

the most successful in the field of tourism, since remarkably more people visited the region than expected.

Remaining needs include:

- qualitative and quantitative protection of water resources (projects can be envisaged effectively in the future in the frames of inter-institutional cooperation where the competent authorities and bodies cooperate with each other);
- increase of the density of border crossing points (especially along the Danube);
- development of cross-border functional urban influencing areas (the suburbanisation of Bratislava and Košice, the twin cities);
- increase of the number of operating SMEs in the border region (with focus on contribution to business networking, involvement of SMEs in projects to reach better sustainability);
- decrease of social disparities, combating against poverty (by counterbalancing of handicaps and disadvantages resulting from the peripheric location of border areas);
- the development of integrated and sustainable cross-border tourism management and thematic routes (exchange of professional knowledge is still needed in this area, and more attention on destination management and sustainability of ecotourism results);
- support of developments based on cultural diversity (support for P2P connections, cultural events, cultural heritage valorisation);
- animation of cross-border social relations (empowering social relations can be regarded as the main added value of the Programme, there is a great need for keeping it).

Emerging needs include elaboration of recommendations concerning legal-administrative obstacles to mobility and cross-border governance and cooperation in general (e.g. in relation to the need of cross-border service provision, coordination of vocational education and preparation of labour market particularly). Further need to be matched is the permanent monitoring of cross-border flows and phenomena without which it is very hard to design the interventions of a CBC programme.

Q6. Are the programme's outputs and results sustainable on the long run?

Sustainability is sometimes hard to interpret, especially in the case of soft activities. For example, the outputs can be cross-border events, training courses, study trips and other meetings that end with the completion of the project, and no continuation is required. The preparation of different documents generates similar problems, since the sustainability of the completed papers is difficult to justify. It might be guaranteed if the publication of these documents is mandatory, they prepare further interventions and the generated values will be available for other actors as well. As one of the greatest achievements of the programme is linked to the tourism sector, a great number of visits needs to be ensured by the maintenance of developed infrastructure and the ability for continuous renewal. In light of the project reports, the project partners intend to follow this principle. Some project outputs and results focus on the development of cross-border products and services, which requires a significant effort from the partners to maintain. However, the introduction of these future steps was not always convincing and detailed.

New community functions have been created through renovation or new investments. A high proportion of these developments serves the physical/economic/social permeability of the border as well. However, their maintenance (especially after the end of the project cycle) is often problematic,

since they are managed by actors who are not equipped with sufficient equity, or the infrastructure's maintenance fails to be for-profit. Consequently, greater emphasis should be put on long-term financial sustainability and maintenance of such infrastructure and functions with "public interest". Results and outputs of cross-border public transport are also problematic to sustain in the long term given the less than sufficient level of demand for them and the changing market conditions.

Q7. How can the future programming be streamlined in order to achieve a higher impact and ensure sustainability of the financial assistance provided?

The current evaluation exercise has been carried out after the adoption of the new programme. However, it enables drawing conclusions on how the new programme could have been designed.

1. Since the very beginning of the first Hungarian-Slovak CBC calls for proposals (in 1995), the biggest interest has been shown towards tourism-related interventions. This is also the topic where the competences are available at local level and these projects do not make it necessary to deliver complicated plans and strategies.
2. The very essence of the CBC programmes is to alleviate the burdens hindering cross-border integration and to facilitate the valorisation of territorial capital in the (frequently peripheral) border areas.
3. The budgetary frames of the CBC programmes favour the implementation of rather small projects through which as many stakeholders can be involved in the cross-border activities as possible.

As a consequence, the new programme should have been concentrating on the following aspects:

1. enable the implementation of integrated tourism programmes with the involvement of numerous relevant stakeholders representing a cross-border tourist destination (application of the TAPE tool);
2. enhance cooperation within cross-border functional areas like agglomerations, natural reserves, water catchment areas, etc., through spatially integrated plans (PO5);
3. facilitate the elimination of cross-border legal and administrative obstacles (OSI1);
4. involve the largest number of institutions and local actors in the programme (SPF).

The new programme partly matches the above recommendations.

Q8. PA 1: To what extent has the programme contributed to utilize the region's endogenous natural and cultural potential and to increase the attractiveness of the border area?

PA1 was the Programme's most popular priority axis attracting the largest number of applications and the largest share of the CP budget.

The projects' main added value was the elaboration and improvement of cross-border nature park initiatives. The nature conservation zones of riverside areas and wetland areas were impacted the most. Other relevant added value is connected to environmental education, which is affected by many projects that primarily support this challenge. Ecotourism received outstanding support along the Danube, the Ipeľ/Ipoly, the Hornád/Hernád. The CP contributed to the extension and creation of cross-border biking and water tourism networks. At the same time, the development of integrated cross-border tourist services or offers and the creation of cross-border destinations are missing from the Programme's results. Cross-border added value of the SP includes the better functional and physical connection of

cultural heritage (sites) and the promotion of cultural events through the SPF scheme which involved many new project partners in cooperation.

The changes in attraction cannot be assessed yet as some projects are still running. However, the number of visitors in the border region exceeded the target value as early as 2020 but the data is not specified in relation to cross-border visitors.

Q9. PA 2: To what extent has the programme contributed to increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border?

The baseline value of 2014 for average distance was 21.9 km, which decreased to 18.35 km in 2020. The original target was 15 km but the CP modification changed it to 18.35, therefore the target has been reached successfully. Except for the Monostori/Monošter bridge and the new highway connection at Tornyosnémeti/Kechnec all the new crossings have and will be established by the support of the CP. The density will be increased significantly along the river Ipeľ/Ipoly. However, there is still a need for new crossings as their territorial distribution is still uneven along the joint border section (e.g. along the Danube the average distance is still over the Western European average).

The Programme had the following direct impacts through the construction of new crossing points: decreasing travelling times, creating shorter routes. This resulted in:

1. better conditions for cross-border movements, cross-border labour mobility and tourism flows particularly;
2. support for cross-border functional integration of urban hinterlands and the microregional settlement network, cross-border service provision;
3. better opportunities for even closer and new interpersonal relations, family and business connections that require in-site, face-to-face interactions.

Q10. PA 3: To what extent has the Programme contributed to the decrease of the employment inequalities among the regions?

The macro conditions for employment and the business sectors have completely changed the environment for labour mobility. The COVID-19 pandemic, inflation (especially in the field of energy costs), the war in Ukraine had deep influence on the labour market. The financial means of the CP cannot be compared with these macro level conditions. Still the TAPE projects have generated more than 150 new jobs which is beyond the expectations (and the indicator target values). At the same time, the region which was affected the most by long-term unemployment, namely the Gömör/Gemer area, did not participate in the PA3 activities which clearly highlights the shortcomings of the TAPE tool.

The experiences show that CBC Programmes are not necessarily the best tools for creating new jobs. The TAPE projects were rather considered by both the beneficiaries and the Programme Bodies as drivers of partnership building across the border. Some projects resulted in strengthening the production capacities of certain SMEs, some others opened new markets for the beneficiaries, and several vocational training schools have been developed facilitating better employability for their pupils, but the real impacts of these interventions are yet to be tested in the future.

To sum up, the CP could not reduce the employment inequalities among the subregions of the programme area but it has created new opportunities for cross-border business cooperation which might have similar effects in the long run.

Q11. PA 4: To what extent has the programme contributed to improving the level of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation?

The main mission of the CBC programmes is to create and enhance cross-border ties between as many actors as possible. This mission has been fulfilled by the CP, especially thanks to the SPF scheme and the soft activities realised thereunder.

The CP affected positively the cooperation among museums, primary and secondary educational institutions, elderly care institutions as well as twinning settlements. Cooperation between certain hospitals (Balassagyarmat, Salgótarján, Lučenec, Veľký Krtíš, Miskolc and Kráľovský Chlmec) also developed among the projects. Capacity building, knowledge exchange generated results in partnership building and laying down the basis for more intensified future cooperation.

However, the involvement of the national and regional authorities by which legal and administrative obstacles to cooperation could be eliminated, was missing. The CP failed to attract these institutions in cross-border cooperation. What is more, compared to previous programmes, even the water management authorities were missing from the beneficiaries.

It is a real challenge for the Programme Bodies to involve these institutions in the new programme.

Q12. What kind of results can be observed in the field of social innovation?

Based on the analysis of the relevant projects, in the field of social innovation, people aged 60 and over, the Roma and the unemployed were the main target groups. The innovative tool of the TAPE played an important role in social innovation. The services developed by the RE-START (social services for elderly people) and the Szép Cserehát (using local products as a tool for re-activating unemployed persons) TAPes, as well as the training courses addressing the most vulnerable social groups (e.g. by the REWO project) contributed to the development of social innovation. Some relevant improvement could be detected with regard to volunteering and circular economy. Development of social enterprises was not the focus area of the supported actions.

1.4 Overview on the application of the 1st phase recommendations

Recommendations	Short reference	Management of the problem
1. CP planning		
1.1 Strategic frames of the programme		
R_1.1 Clearer and unambiguous rules and timely delivered regulation are necessary from EU level	Next regulations should be drafted earlier facilitating more accurate programming and launching of the programme in due time.	The recommendation targeted the EU level decision making procedures. Unfortunately, the problems have even been further aggravated during the adoption of the new Cohesion Policy package and the approval of the CBC programmes.
R_1.2 Territorial relevance should further be strengthened	In each case a control group should be involved in the selection procedure of the priorities. The control groups should comprise of experts of the given priority area and experts who are familiar with the border region. This control group could be a testing body of the proposed priorities. This way the set of priorities may be better aligned to the real needs and opportunities.	In the analysed programming period (2014-2020), the recommendation has not been adapted but the involvement of the territorial actors (regions and EGTCs) has been achieved through other solutions. During the programming period of 2021-2027, stakeholders were widely involved in the preparation of the territorial analysis and during the PO selections. Also, several workshops were held to 'hear the voice' of the local stakeholders of the programme area.
R_1.3 Differentiation between West and East is recommended	It is advised to consider the split of the priorities by the needs of the two major parts of the programming region. Alternative solutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The division of the CP into two independent programmes. • The selection criteria are based on territorial indicators. (unemployment level, purchasing power of the households, rate of early school leavers, etc.) • Announcement of calls for proposals under different PAs in different regions (within the same priority area, the applicants can focus on different activities which are relevant for their special territorial endowments). 	It was not applied at the programme level, but the management of the small project fund was provided by two EGTCs according to regional principles (Western part: RDV EGTC; Eastern part: Via Carpatia EGTC).

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Recommendations	Short reference	Management of the problem
R_1.4 The flexibility of modification of the CP should be increased	The threshold of own intervention of the MC regarding the programme budget should be increased to 10%.	During the COVID, flexibility rules have broadly been adapted.
2. Programme management		
2.1 Programme structure and capacities		
R_2.1 Compensate missing capacities as soon as possible	To sum up, the MA lacks 5 experts, the JS lacks 2 employees and due to the non-systematic decision made on the 1601 call (PA1) shortages at the Slovak FLC can occur.	The capacity shortages at the Slovak FLC prevailed. In the case of the JS communication tasks have been outsourced reducing the capacity needs (the fluctuation of the team members caused difficulties). Although at the MA 2-3 staff members were missing for a while (one programme manager, and horizontal experts to be in charge of the financial, legal and strategic management for all programmes managed by Hungary), the lack of capacity was managed by the last phase of the programme period.
R_2.2 Keep the involvement of the EGTCs in SPF management	The Small Project Fund is managed by two EGTCs.	Adapted.
2.2 Communication		
R_2.3 Keep and enhance the right direction	The programme has exceptional (and awarded) on-line appearance. The average responding time at the programme's Facebook site is 1 hour.	The CP's communication is evaluated very good by the end-users.
R_2.4 Improve the beneficiaries' communication capacities	Beneficiaries' capacities should be reinforced to carry out better communication with the media and the press, as well as to use more adequate and effective communication tools. It is recommended to organise communication trainings for the beneficiaries with the involvement of communication experts.	The JS invited the Beneficiaries to fine-tune the project level communication plans together after the selection. The renewed visibility guideline which better reflects on the mandatory and the recommended tools is considered efficient by the JS and the applicants, but the diverse versions of the document published in the programming period made the beneficiaries confused. The SP beneficiaries did not get enough assistance concerning the

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Recommendations	Short reference	Management of the problem
		visibility requirements which led to serious problems during the first-level control (clarified after the project closure!). For the next programme (2021-2027), the document 'Guidelines on project promotion' has been simplified as much as possible to give a clearer guidance to the partners. As for the SPF Beneficiaries, the communication requirements are also communicated and regulated in their subsidiarity contract.
R_2.5 Simplify project communication and make it more fit-to-purpose	On the one hand, during the designing phase, the applicant would be provided with an automatic lump-sum amount (e.g. defined in ratio of the total sum of the project) without the obligation of detailing the communication activities. On the other hand, these activities would be defined during the contracting phase by selecting the most appropriate tools fit-for-purpose and fit-for-content (project specific communication measures). The mandatory components determined by the EU Regulations would be excepted from the above procedure (they still stay mandatory) but the unit-cost approach would be kept in these cases, as well.	Adapted.
R_2.6 Promote the best practice examples in order to improve the knowledge and understanding of cross-border aspects	A regular publication (similar to the professional materials published both on-line and printed by the LEADER programme, e.g. guides, fact sheets, compilation of best practices), with explanations in both languages; more field trips and local presence; and project fairs can be applied.	The JS, the SPF EGTCs and the info-points offered many consultation opportunities.

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Recommendations	Short reference	Management of the problem
3. Programme implementation		
3.1 Project selection		
3.1.1 Calls for proposals		
R_3.1 Restrict the thematic scope of the calls	<p>The quality assessment is complicated because of the differences between the topics of the projects. Potential solutions might be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the priorities are wide by scope but the calls are more restricted focusing on smaller fields; • the TAPE model is implemented in other calls as well since the integrated approach inspires the beneficiaries to a more careful, more intensive, better-based preparatory activity; • the continuously open calls are closed when the total cost claims of the proposals submitted reaches a certain level (e.g. three times higher than the dedicated amount): this way the last-minute projects can be excluded. 	<p>In contrast to the previous model, the JS assesses all project proposals from a strategic point of view, during which the benchmark of different proposals can be carried out.</p> <p>The proposal on thematically restricted calls was adapted in the 1902 call and by the selected SOs of the new programme which are better (or rather excessively) focused.</p> <p>According to the JS the integrated approach not necessarily results in good quality CBC projects.</p> <p>The proposal on continuous calls was adapted only for the 1801 SME call, not applied for the design of the 2021-2027 CP.</p>
R_3.2 Strengthen the cross-border character of the projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The JS can issue a guide on how the cross-border character of a project can be ensured; • a joint preparation matrix is advised to be applied which includes information on the cross-border components of the planned activities and by its cells it orientates the beneficiaries to pursue higher level of integration; • the factors of the quality assessment can be changed in a way that the beneficiaries are encouraged to exceed their conventional methods of developing cross-border projects (more detailed description of cross-border character with different aspects and with higher total score). 	<p>The recommendations could be considered during future CfP of the 2021-2027 programme.</p>

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Recommendations	Short reference	Management of the problem
R_3.3 Apply the two-round selection procedure also in other calls than PA3	The two-round selection procedure enables the applicants to specify and more deeply think through their intentions and goals.	The recommendation could be considered during future CfPs of the 2021-2027 CP.
3.1.2 Specific tools		
R_3.4 Re-design the SME call	Instead of publishing the same call for SMEs, it is worth considering to involve SMEs in the next PA1 call within the framework of integrated interventions similar to PA3.	Adapted.
R_3.5 Apply the TAPE model also for other priorities in the next programme		Not applied within 2014-2020, adapted within 2021-2027.
R_3.6 Keep the Small Project Fund		Adapted.
R_3.7 Promote the horizontal integration of the projects	The horizontal integration of projects cross-cutting the different PAs is missing. Assessment grids could award this aspect with additional scoring.	Not applied but within the 2021-2027 programme the territorial and sectorial aspects are also assessed. (The planned strategic project might have such an impact.)
3.1.3 Assessment procedure		
R_3.8 Apply the three-level quality assessment model to the entire programme	The three-level quality assessment model of the TAPE proved to be very beneficial. Considering that the cross-border and the territorial aspects are assessed separately, the invited external experts can represent directly the professional field of the submitted projects.	Adapted, the method has been used and further developed during the last calls of the Programme.
R_3.9 Involve the MC more actively in the selection of the proposals	The model of the TAPE presentations provides a new and more decisive role for the MC which does not only „administer“ the final decision but can make recommendations regarding the projects and can discuss potential disputed issues with the project holders. In parallel, the application of the solution can enhance the commitment of the MC members to setting the conditions and making recommendations at MC meetings more actively.	Adapted. The MC members have been better involved in the preparation of the call for proposals. The success factor was limited by the lack of capacities and competencies at NUTS3 level, and also by the language barriers.

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Recommendations	Short reference	Management of the problem
3.2 Project implementation		
R_3.10 Eliminate the differences between the two (national) financing systems	Due to the differences in national legislations, the financing conditions of the projects are fundamentally different in Slovakia and in Hungary.	Not applied, due to the different national legislations.
R_3.11 Enhance the sustainability of cross-border partnerships and the project results	The assessment of the prehistory of the partnership and the joint prospects for the future can give this perspective, especially in case of TO11. In these terms, it is interesting to see, how long the partnerships are. Integration can be guaranteed either in time (the current project can be considered as the continuation of a previous one) or by synergies (the project results will be built into a larger context created by other projects and interventions). The latter factor can partly be evaluated through territorial assessment applied in the case of the TAPE call.	The proposal has been partially applied. The first open call for the 2021-2027 period requires the Project Part Concept to address the future sustainability of the project, but the sustainability aspect only influences less than 10% of the final assessment result.
4. Performance on programme level		
4.1 The IMIS system		
R_4.1 Fine-tune the IMIS and train the beneficiaries on how to use it	In order to enable the applicants to draft better quality proposals in due time, the JS should organise Info Days on the use of the IMIS (uploading the application). In addition, beneficiaries would welcome the IMIS handbook in national languages.	Adapted: the new system has been presented at the Info Days and a new User Manual was published.
R_4.2 Modify the IMIS system with a view to enabling its users to import and export data in a more compiled and structured way	Provide an opportunity to upload the Excel sheets the data of which could be re-arranged automatically by the system.	Partly adapted through the use of the Interreg+ system.
4.2 Procedures		
R_4.3 Eliminate or diminish the reasons of delays		The COVID overwrote this recommendation.

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Recommendations	Short reference	Management of the problem
R_4.4 Harmonise the FLC procedures in order to ensure equal treatment	The rules concerning the FLC in Slovakia are stricter than those in Hungary. In the former case, there is a 2% rule of failed checks and the Ministry of Finance always performs very strict control on FLC team. As a consequence, the Slovak FLC is stricter against the beneficiaries than the Hungarian.	Not applied (ruling falls under national competences).
R_4.5 Involve the beneficiaries in the preparation of the calls	The involvement of the TAPE beneficiaries in the preparation of the second-round call through a consultation event proved to be useful and much appreciated by the participants. This procedure could be adapted to other calls as well, mainly if the calls follow the two-round selection model.	Not applied within 2014-2020, partly adapted within 2021-2027: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two-round selection procedure is kept in the case of the tourist territorial action plans • on-line consultation was held before the 1st CfP.
R_4.6 Consider the implementation of continuously open calls	The application of the continuous model would make the peak periods more balanced as the Management Bodies would be exempt of creating new and new calls.	The continuous model was not applied. At the beginning of the programme period 2021-2027, the JS published the planned schedule of the calls for proposals for the whole new programme. It can serve not only the time management of the JS, but beneficiaries can also plan their capacity better.
5. Recommendations related to the extended AIR		
R_5.1 Create the follow-up solution of EU2020 contribution	The JS is invited to develop an equivalence matrix, how the CP indicators feed into the system of the EU headline indicators.	Not applied yet.
R_5.2 Create the follow-up solution of macro-regional contribution	The JS is invited to develop an equivalence matrix where the objectives of the EUSDR and the indicators of the DTP correspond to the actions taken by the beneficiaries.	Not applied yet.

1.5 Main findings and recommendations of the 2nd phase evaluation

The table below contains the overview of the main findings of the evaluation and adequate recommendations coupled with the references to the chapter of detailed analysis. A short interpretation of the findings and recommendations can be found right after the table.

Table 7: Overview of the findings and recommendations

Findings	Recommendations	Relevant chapters
F_1 Substantive aspects		
F_1.1 The achievements and shortcomings of the programme		
F_1.1.a Definition of interventions and indicators	R_1.1 Develop a cross-border territorial monitoring system R_1.2 Publish a guide on the application of horizontal principles	Quantification of the performance, Horizontal principles
F_1.1.b Weakness of territoriality	R_1.3 Improve the cross-border character of the programme R_1.4 Target the underrepresented subregions R_1.5 Promote the involvement of the territorially relevant actors	Cross-border relevance, Territorial coverage, TAPE
F_1.1.c Partnership failures	R_1.6 Attract the national and regional institutions and authorities R_1.7 Keep the feasibility plans to ensure sustainability R_1.8 Require the elaboration of a stakeholder analysis for the TAPE-type partnerships	Analysis of cross-border relevance, TAPE
F_1.2 The innovative character of the CP		
F_1.2.a Re-invention of the Small Project Fund	-	Performance, SPF
F_1.2.b Involvement of the SMEs in the programme	R_1.9 Analyse the possibility of the use of Financial Instruments R_1.10 Consider the application of one-sided SME projects	Performance, Involvement of SMEs, TAPE
F_1.2.c Application of a self-developed integrated tool: the TAPE	-	TAPE, SME
F_2 Procedural aspects		
F_2.1 Major factors hardening the programme implementation		
F_2.1.a Relocation of the MA	-	Influence factors of the implementation, Programme management
F_2.1.b The COVID-19 pandemic	R_2.1 Consider the establishment of financial reserves per priority axis	Influence factors of implementation
F_2.1.c Delays of the Small Project scheme	R_2.2 Include the SPF projects in the electronic application system	SPF

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Findings	Recommendations	Relevant chapters
	R_2.3 Revise the inclusion of infrastructural projects in SPF R_2.4 Expand the use of simplified cost options under SPF	
F_2.1.d Financial constraints	R_2.5 Facilitate balanced set-up of financial rules R_2.6 Revise the ceiling of management costs	Influence factors of the implementation, TAPE
F_2.2 Interventions of the Programme Bodies in order to improve the quality of the procedures		
F_2.2.a Simplification of the administrative burdens	R_2.7 Expand the use of SCO under each priority axis R_2.8 Facilitate the alleviation of administrative burdens R_2.9 Provide assistance to the preparation of the public procurement calls	Assessment of procedures of the project cycle, Results of the simplification
F_2.2.b Introduction of the electronic application system	R_2.10 Develop further the e-application system	Results of the simplification
F_2.2.c Upgraded programme communication	R_2.11 Keep the system of consultations R_2.12 Extend the scope of SPF consultations	Communication of the programme, Assistance provided by the Programme Bodies, TAPE, SPF
F_2.2.d Challenges and solutions of project level communication	R_2.13 Analyse the impacts of the communication tools R_2.14 Involve external experts to improve the effects of project level communication	Communication of the projects, Programme management
F_2.2.e The 3-stage quality assessment	R_2.15 Keep the new quality assessment system	Assessment of the procedures of the project cycle, TAPE
F_3 Structural aspects		
F_3.1 Programme management level		
F_3.1.a Excellent cooperation between the Programme Bodies	-	Capacity and lead time assessment, Programme management
F_3.1.b Capacity shortages	-	Capacity and lead time assessment
F_3.1.c Active regions	R_3.1 Extend the decision-making competences of the JS	Programme management
F_3.1.d Active EGTCs	R_3.2 Keep the active role of the EGTCs in the Programme R_3.3 Provide stronger influence to the JS in the SPF implementation	SPF, TAPE, Programme management
F_3.2 Project management level		
F_3.2.a The role of the CCP in the TAPes	R_3.4 Keep the CCP projects in the territorial action plans	TAPE

F_1 Substantive aspects

F_1.1 The achievements and shortcomings of the programme

The Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Programme triggered cross-border interventions in four priority areas:

- PA1 – Nature and culture
- PA2 – Cross-border mobility
- PA3 – Facilitating employment
- PA4 – Institutional cooperation.

Due to its modest budgetary frames (EUR 183 million including ERDF and national co-financing), the CP could not generate ground-breaking developments in the border area whose surface is twice bigger than that of Belgium. At the same time (as the borderscape analysis points it out) the impact of the programme on the borderland is not neglectable. Especially its intercultural, interpersonal and social relations (PA4), the tourism-based cross-border developments (PA1) and the field of cross-border transport infrastructure and services are the subjects where the CP has no concurrence. Between 2014 and 2023 the Slovak and Hungarian authorities have been opening 8 new border crossing points and two upgraded links from among which 7 new links (5 public road and 2 cycle connections) have been constructed with the aid of the CP. Thanks to the programme 3 new cross-border bicycle sharing services have been inaugurated. There is no further funding opportunity through which the Hungarian and Slovak municipalities, civil associations, NGOs and SMEs could start or boost their cooperation. In addition, under the umbrella of these initiatives, many old buildings have been renovated and re-utilised.

Accordingly, the most outstanding indicators where the Programme had an important role cover mostly two aspects, namely, infrastructural conditions of cross-border flows and cross-border cooperation:

- Change in the average distance of border crossing points,
- Average annual turnover, number of employees of cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities,
- Number and total value of the projects implemented by the cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities,
- Number of cross-border institutions, networks and clusters + their projects,
- Number, geographic scope and value of projects implemented jointly across the border,
- Sustainability of project partnerships,
- Number of citizens participating in cross-border activities and projects,
- Number of joint cultural events based on the performers' nationality.

At the same time, however, the programme suffered from a number of shortcomings. Below, both the achievements and shortcomings will be briefly analysed with references to the relevant (detailed) descriptions and (when adaptable) with recommendations.

F_1.1.a Definition of interventions and indicators

The CP included interventions and indicators which proved to be inadequate within an Interreg programme. The specific objective targeting the development of cross-border logistics services

completely failed due to the lack of interest and the restrictive State Aid rules to be applied (the only one partnership withdrew their proposal).

The support system of the TAPE projects was based on the creation of new jobs. Due to the volatile and profit-oriented nature of the business realm, the creation of these jobs needed a lot of costs to cover.

The burdensome adaptability of the EU horizontal principles is a recurrent problem of the CBC programmes. Due to the complexity of the cross-border projects, the implementation of these principles lacks self-evidence and the responses given by the beneficiaries are rather artificial ones.

The definition of the indicators and the timing also proved to be inaccurate. For instance, the number of future visits is impossible to measure during the implementation period (*CO09 Expected visits to supported sites*). In some cases, the process of data collecting is slow as the comparability of the necessary information is not ensured and/or they can be obtained through time-consuming researches (surveys/questionnaires) or through external data providers (*R410 Level of cross-border cooperation; R221 Change in the volume of cross-border public transport*). The biggest problem is that the indicators hardly reflect the cross-border character of the programme. The indicator registering the number of visits does not differentiate between domestic, international and cross-border visitors; the number of participants at an event, the number of women and people from the most vulnerable societal groups participating in training activities do not give information on the share of the cross-border participants, etc.

Similarly, the indicator values proved to be designed without a solid basis. For instance, in four cases (*O411 Cross-border products and services, O415 People participated in cooperation, O416 Women participated in cooperation and O417 Participants from socially marginalized groups*) the target value of 2023 has already been completed in 2018. In the following year, two further indicators (*O412 Documents elaborated outside SPF and O413 Cross-border events*) achieved the final goals, which means that the target values were defined in a too moderate and easy-to-fulfil way. The number of participants is one of the most underestimated indicators, as in 2021 the 3 relevant indicators exceeded the final values by more than +400pp (*O415 People participated in cooperation* by +405pp, *O416 Women participated in cooperation* by +591pp, *O417 Participants from socially marginalized groups* by +1 665pp) – regardless of the mobility restrictions introduced during the COVID pandemic.

Relevant chapter: *2.1.1 Quantification of the performance, 2.3.5 Horizontal principles*

R_1.1 Develop a cross-border territorial monitoring system

The failures of the programme design stem from the lack of a systematic and permanent monitoring of cross-border movements and phenomena. There are no reliable datasets on cross-border labour, educational, residential mobility, on the volume of cross-border flows within the programme area, on the legal and administrative obstacles hindering cross-border integration, on the existing cross-border interinstitutional and B2B contacts, etc. Without having a clear picture on the above phenomena, the programme designers are not able to provide a correct diagnosis on the territorial processes and they draw failed conclusions.

Accordingly, a territorial monitoring system should be created targeting the Slovak-Hungarian border area which can monitor not only the cross-border movements and obstacles, but it may also include the outcomes of the CBC programmes implemented so far, i.e. their quantifiable results and the

documents, studies and publications, e-learning materials, guides, etc. developed with the financial aid of the programmes. These developments could lay the basis for more reliable planning processes and re-use the hidden or forgotten results of the previous periods.

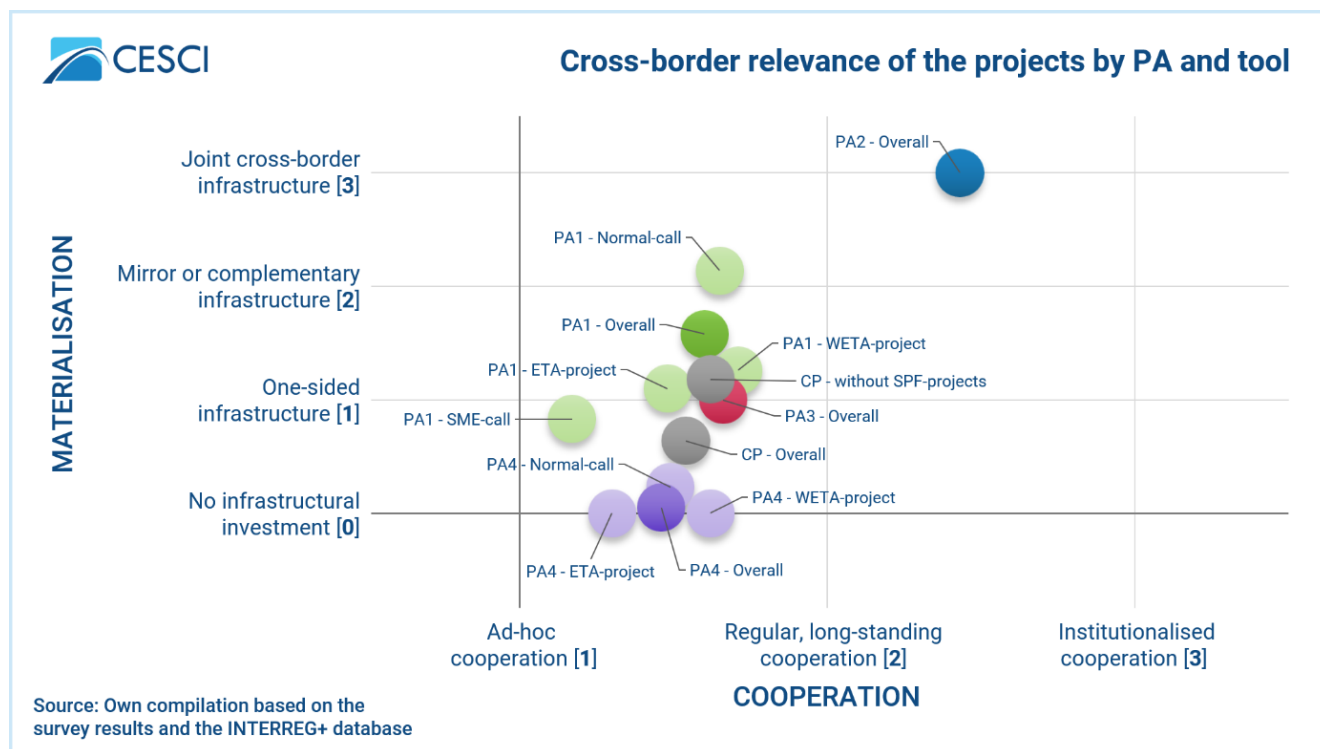
R_1.2 Publish a guide on the application of horizontal principles

The JS has a special, educational mission in terms of the horizontal principles. In order to ensure the real and relevant interventions to be triggered by the beneficiaries, the JS should publish a guidance document including targeted questions and best practice examples referring to the different aspects of equality and sustainability. For this purpose, the European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews released by JRC in 2020 can be used as a guide¹⁵.

F_1.1.b Weakness of territoriality

The CP has a modest cross-border character. However, there are remarkable differences between the results of the priority axes and the tools: PA2 and PA1 stand out while the SPF projects pull the average value down (see the figure below).

Figure 16: Cross-border relevance of the projects per PA and tool



If we disregard the SPF projects, the average value is at a higher position. Neglecting the SPF projects can be justified by the specificity of the SPF call which is to involve as many stakeholders in cooperation as possible. In these terms, the maturity of the partnership plays a much less significant role than in the case of the so-called 'normal' projects. But the average value is still modest – even without the SPF projects. Even the territorial tool applied by the CP, namely the TAPE, missed to impact upon a cross-

¹⁵ See: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC129381>

border subregion. Due to the limited financial frames (EUR 40 million in total) the TAPE beneficiaries could not have a remarkable effect on the economy of the borderland. At the same time, the action plans themselves were designed in a superficial way which prevented the realisation of effective and territorially integrated interventions.

The territorial coverage of the project activities is very unbalanced within the programme area. Especially the Gömör/Gemer region remained almost intact of the programme. This shortage is the most salient in the case of the TAPE tool whose main target area was exactly this region suffering from the highest unemployment rates.

Several tourism related projects lack the territorial contiguity without which it is very hard to ensure the development of a real cross-border destination. In these cases, the dot-like investments do not facilitate the cross-border integration of the tourist services.

Relevant chapter: *2.2.4 Analysis of cross-border relevance, 2.3.2 Mapping of the territorial coverage, 2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)*

R_1.3 Improve the cross-border character of the programme

The very mission of the CBC programme is to connect partners across the border and stabilise their partnerships for a long run. Accordingly, boosting the cross-border character of the CP is an essential interest of the Programme Bodies. This mission can be fulfilled by selecting specific objectives, interventions and indicators of strong cross-border character. Cross-border relevance can also be strengthened through the application of integrated tools (like the TAPE) and functional interventions: when supporting the development of cross-border functions and functional areas, the cross-border relevance is unquestionable. Especially, the urban centres located along the shared border can play an integrating role which cannot be supported but by the CBC programme. On the one hand, there are 10 cross-border urban agglomeration zones which self-evidently have a cross-border character. On the other hand, there are geographically, naturally, culturally or economically strongly interlinked areas (like water catchment areas, nature parks along the borders, tourist destinations, etc.) whose integrated development may fulfil the CP's mission. Furthermore, the action plans in the new programming period should more strictly be directed towards clear territorial delineation.

R_1.4 Target the underrepresented subregions

Based on the results of the territorial coverage analysis, the MC should identify those subregions of the programme area which were underrepresented during the last two budgetary periods, and start a communication campaign and a capacity building action targeting the local and regional stakeholders, as potential applicants through which these regions can also be involved in the programme.

R_1.5 Promote the involvement of the territorially relevant actors

By adopting the recommendation R_3.5 of the 1st Phase Evaluation, tourism will be the field of application of the territorial action plan tool during the new programming period. In order to enhance the territoriality of the tourism-based projects, the Programme should require the involvement of the tourist destination management (or equivalent) organisations of the targeted subregion and the design

of cross-border interdependent and territorially integrated interventions. The evaluation criteria should give a special emphasis to these factors.

F_1.1.c Partnership failures

One of the most salient failures of the programme is the non-participation of those institutions (especially national and regional authorities) for whom PA4 was designed. This shortcoming is a problem in itself as without inter-institutional cooperation, the impact of the programme cannot be guaranteed. Furthermore, the cooperation of these authorities can identify those procedural and administrative barriers which hinder the development of a stronger integration across the border; and the active beneficiaries oftentimes meet legal obstacles whose elimination requires the positive attitude of the national authorities. Without being involved in cross-border activities, these authorities will hardly be persuaded about the significance of the solutions of the problem in question.

In other cases, the maintenance of the project results is in charge of a non-adequate partner: they miss the financial means for and the interest in long-term sustainability of the project results. The JS reacted promptly to this phenomenon, when, by the 1902 CFP introduced a new annex to be attached to the application form: those applicants who planned to set up new services had to elaborate and submit a 'Market research'; and those planning infrastructure developments were instructed to set up a 'Utilisation and maintenance plan'. These documents encouraged the project partners to better design the sustainability of their project results (resulting in better-based partnership building). In addition, they helped the assessors evaluate the long-term viability of the planned developments.

Concerning the territorial action plans, nearly half (46.81%) of the projects were implemented by ad-hoc partnerships (based on the acquaintanceship of the lead beneficiaries) which means that the original aim of the tool, i.e. to generate territorially relevant and integrated interventions, missed real, territorially well-based networking – at least in the above cases.

Relevant chapter: *2.2.4 Analysis of cross-border relevance, 2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)*

R_1.6 Attract the national and regional institutions and authorities

The participation of the national and regional institutions in the CBC programme is of utmost importance and potential. The new programme should facilitate their involvement through the planned strategic project and a communication campaign addressing them. For this purpose, the JS should develop a partnership map including the authorities from both countries and their departments whose activities have a relevance from the point of view of the CP. These departments should regularly be informed about the Programme's goals and achievements in order to raise awareness at the relevant institutions.

R_1.7 Keep the feasibility plans to ensure sustainability

The practice of the JS regarding the above-mentioned mandatory 'feasibility plans' should be extended to every infrastructural project under each PA in the future.

R_1.8 Require the elaboration of a stakeholder analysis for the TAPE-type partnerships

When designing the TAPE partnerships, deeper justification of their set-up and a stakeholder analysis should also be included in the template. Through these, the applicants can give an overview on the potential actors to be involved and justify their choices. Especially, in the case of the SMEs, only those undertakings should be invited in the partnership which can justify their previous experiences in the sector and market in question.

F_1.2 The innovative character of the CP

The CP has a very strong innovative character generating huge but well-managed challenges to the Programme Bodies. Out of the four thematic Priority Axes, three applied at least one special mechanism which is a unique feature both in the history of the Slovak-Hungarian CBC programmes (since 1995) and in the context of the CBC programmes in Europe implemented between 2014 and 2020. These innovative tools have generated special added-value but also risks, difficulties and (sometimes) failures to the CP.

F_1.2.a Re-invention of the Small Project Fund

After a long period, the CP applied again the small project scheme in order to intensify cooperation among local actors across the border. The small-scale interventions were implemented under two priority axes, namely PA1 and PA4. Through the 8 calls (4 in each side of the border region) EUR 11.3 million was contracted to 253 small projects altogether. The financial volume of one project amounted to EUR 20 000 – 50 000, and the project duration was limited to 12 months.

Through the tool, the main objective of the Programme Bodies was to involve as many small actors as possible in the cooperation programme. The Small Project Fund achieved this goal, as the calls involved 503 beneficiaries in total, 79% of whom had not participated in the previous (2007-2013) programme; and the 42 events organised by the partners attracted 1106 participants from the programme area. In addition, as an unintended leverage effect, the SPF highly contributed to the popularisation of the programme all over the programme area.

The SPF scheme managed to bring the Programme closer to the citizens; it offered visibility thereto and it generated real local initiatives even in small municipalities and rural communities. It is the tool which has mostly involved areas and settlements further away from the border and settlements where the capacities of the applicants were limited to carry out larger infrastructural investments (municipalities with small budget to pre-finance or provide own contribution, lack of SMEs with strong equity, etc.). Thus, the SPF slightly compensated the shortages of territorial coverage.

The 1st Phase Evaluation included the recommendation on keeping the SPF scheme in the upcoming programme as well (R_3.6) with the involvement of EGTCs (R_2.2), which has been adopted by the Programming Committee.

Relevant chapter: *2.1 Performance, 2.5.3 Small Project Fund*

F_1.2.b Involvement of the SMEs in the programme

First time in its history, the CP directly involved SMEs into the programme implementation within the framework of PA1 (nature, culture and tourism) and PA3 (employment) through special tools: the B-Light Scheme and the TAPE. The direct involvement of small and medium sized enterprises was reasonable in both PAs. The initiative is not unprecedented on European level: in the 2007-2013 programming period 8% of the programmes offered support to SMEs, while 33 out of the 60 INTERREG V-A 2014-2020 cooperation programmes targeted enterprises as potential beneficiaries. However, the use of direct financial support to SMEs is very rare in this type of programmes. Previous SKHU programmes supported the sector indirectly, through the chambers of commerce or foundations assisting SMEs but the results of these subventions are hardly detectable and the services generated by the projects mostly disappeared.

The inclusion of the SMEs as direct beneficiaries involved several risks. The B-Light scheme of PA1 developed following the Dutch-German PP Light model was not successful as the selection of the two management bodies failed. The dedicated budget of EU 10 million was transformed to a new tool, the so-called SME-call. This new instrument, proposed by the Managing Authority, contained crucial changes compared to the B-Light Scheme: pre-defined types of public bodies had to involve SMEs in a cross-border Partnership. These public bodies (one per each project) had to undertake the management and communication activities of the projects, while SMEs (up to 3 per project) were responsible for the core development activities. The thematic focus was strictly determined. This model was very similar to the TAPE, where SMEs were involved in the implementation of project packages (action plans) coordinated by public and private bodies (an EGTC or development agency, etc.) in charge of integrated territorial development. According to both models, the coordinating bodies played an important role in targeting and engaging the SMEs (as a new target group), as well as in the easing of their administrative and management burdens by taking over or assisting the implementation of the related tasks.

The experiences are mixed in both cases.

1. The designated coordinating bodies achieved limited success in addressing the most appropriate SMEs with high quality development ideas. Instead, the easiest options (i.e. the closest partners of the lead beneficiaries) were selected. This obviously resulted in less relevant, less effective and less efficient cross-border projects.
2. The assistance of the coordinating bodies was not enough to reach an optimal level in the administrative procedures carried out during the implementation of the SME projects. SMEs found the application and reporting procedures too bureaucratic and lengthy, which made the schemes less attractive.

Due to the low quality of the proposals, not more than EUR 2.3 million could be contracted within the SME tool and even the quality of the supported projects can be questioned.

As a response to the aforementioned challenges and in line with the recommendation of the 1st Phase Evaluation (R_3.4), the Programme Bodies decided to pilot a third model for involving enterprises during the last (SKHU/1902) call for proposals. SMEs were allowed to join standard partnerships (but their participation was not obligatory) according to the needs of the development concepts. This approach left room for the standard beneficiaries to find appropriate SME partners, therefore enterprises and their

activities formed a more integral part of the projects. At the same time, the administrative problems were not addressed. Through this call further EUR 3.5 million was allocated to for-profit beneficiaries.

Besides, SMEs' participation in the programme meant an additional burden and risk to the Programme Management Bodies. First of all, the adoption and application of the State aid rules were not evident, the authorities had to dedicate significant capacities to deal with the related tasks. They regard these efforts as an investment to be returned in the long run, since the support of SMEs is not terminated at the end of the programming period. Second, SMEs bear a risk in a cross-border partnership, since they follow the market logic and their financial interests are potentially forcing them to make quick decisions and to move against long-term partnerships. In addition, SMEs may easily cease to exist without any legal successors at any moment of the implementation or follow-up period.

The experiences pointed out the fact that the SKHU programme is not necessarily the best instrument for providing dedicated, grant-based support for the SME sector, but opening the doors to involve them as much as the development ideas require definitely has a positive impact on the sustainability of the programme results.

Relevant chapter: *2.1 Performance, 2.5.1 Involvement of SMEs, 2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)*

R_1.9 Analyse the possibility of the use of Financial Instruments

The targeted development of the SMEs of the border region might also be effectively and efficiently carried out through the application of Financial Instruments with repayable options such as loans, guarantees, etc. This kind of support could be provided by the INTERREG A programme itself, and/or by national mainstream programmes. In order to have a cross-border effect in the latter option, a cross-border harmonisation of the programmes is necessary¹⁶.

R_1.10 Consider the application of one-sided SME projects

Due to their nature, the SMEs do not like being involved in larger partnerships where their expected profit depends on a partner whose activities cannot be influenced by the entrepreneur. Accordingly, the SMEs should be supported outside the bilateral project logic which can be ensured through the cross-border synergetic character of the TAPE model. The SMEs should be linked to the overall cross-border partnership individually, without the involvement of a cross-border partner within their individual project.

¹⁶ In 2018, the European Investment Bank, which supports cross-border infrastructural projects as well commissioned the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) and CESC with a study analysing the utilisation of the Bank's financial instruments for the sake of bundled or larger integrated cross-border projects whose lessons can be used by CBC programmes, too. See: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/news/news/news/show/etude-pour-la-bei-identifier-les-projets-dinvestissement-transfrontaliers-en-europe/>

F_1.2.c Application of a self-developed integrated tool: the TAPE

The CP applied an integrated territorial tool, following the model developed by the French-Italian ALCOTRA CBC programme between 2007 and 2013¹⁷. The territorial action plan for employment (TAPE) tool enabled the subregional actors of the border area to compile a regional development action plan designed to improve quality employment and cross-border labour mobility. An action plan included 2 to 7 more or less interdependent employment projects and 1 coordination and communication project (CCP) designed to keep the large partnerships together and to facilitate smooth project implementation. From among the 60 Interreg CBC programmes, only four applied an integrated tool which underlines the CP's innovative character. In order to avoid the complicated bureaucratic procedures connected to the territorial tools suggested by the Cohesion Policy regulations, the rules of the action plans were defined by the Programme Bodies themselves.

The place-based planning model is an undisputed value and a unique character of the TAPE tool which enabled the local actors to think about the future of their cross-border living area together, and to go beyond the ad-hoc project-based logic. The partners needed to discuss their development aims and design together the TAPE concept with the involvement of the business sector. They had to identify those complementary and synergetic aspects ensuring the cohesion and coherence of their proposal. Accordingly, the TAPes had diverse thematic focuses from the automotive industry and food production to hemp industry and silver age services – in compliance with the diverse territorial endowments and needs.

The CP provided financial support for 28 SMEs in total (2 SMEs were partners in two-two projects, further SMEs participated in projects as associated partners, sometimes ensuring the mandatory indicator on new workplaces without EU financing). The total value of the direct contracted financial support amounted to more than EUR 7 million representing 19.5% of the total PA budget, which was completed by the SMEs' own contribution of more than EUR 2.5 million, and they created more than 150 new jobs, which clearly underlines the significance of the SMEs in the achievement of the CP's goals.

For the SMEs the interdependent projects opened new markets and some of them decided to start business on the other side of the border. Others have found partners for their production goals in the neighbouring country. The TAPE was a good marketing tool also for the CCP partners enhancing their visibility and embeddedness in the cross-border regional society and business realm.

Finally, the tool had a strong trust-building character fuelled by the co-creation process of the concept, the effective coordination, the sense of belonging and shared ownership. As a result of the TAPE projects, two regional self-governments started deeper cooperation, other partners raised their cooperation to a higher level, and, in some cases, real friendships were born. First and foremost, the tool unites efforts and enhances mutual trust – as the survey respondents evaluated it.

At the same time, the introduction of the new tool has not gone through without problems.

The novelty of the tool resulted in many uncertainties both during the preparation and the implementation of the projects. The time dedicated to the design of the concept notes proved to be too short to generate well-based proposals. Those TAPes were the most successful whose preparation started far before the call and were the results of an organic, long-term design process.

¹⁷ The tool was named 'plan intégré transfrontalier' (*PIT, cross-border integrated plan*).

Another success factor was the involvement of the most relevant partners (SMEs included) in the partnership. In reality, the most TAPE initiatives have been built around one or two initiator organisations and composed of the closest partners instead of the most relevant ones. The participation of the SMEs in certain TAPes was even artificial: their role was limited to ensure the mandatory indicator but they were not involved/interested in the team and the mission of the action plan.

The First Phase Evaluation included a recommendation to enlarge the scope of implementation of the TAPE tool (R_3.5) which has been adapted to the Interreg VI-A CBC programme. The fact that the tool will be further applied justifies its success.

Relevant chapter: *2.5.1 Involvement of SMEs, 2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)*

F_2 Procedural aspects

The implementation of the CP was hardened by many external and internal factors.

F_2.1 Major factors hardening the programme implementation

F_2.1.a Relocation of the MA

The Programme was approved by the European Commission by its decision C(2015) 6805 on September 30, 2015. Due to the hardly adaptable Slovak rules, at the end of that year, the Managing Authority has been relocated from Bratislava to Budapest. The amended programme entered into force on 16 June, 2016. The Programme Bodies reacted on the change with exemplary speed but the first CfP could not be published but earlier than 29th July 2016. The 2.5-year delay generated time constraints and capacity shortages for the programme authorities.

Relevant chapter: *2.1.4 Influence factors of the implementation, 2.4.2 Cost-efficiency of the programme management (PA5)*

F_2.1.b The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic which broke out at the beginning of 2020 (3.5-years after the kick-off of the programme), influenced the programme implementation in many ways.

As a result of the national level measures leading to a dramatic reduction of cross-border movements, the implementation of many projects became impossible. Especially those projects were influenced in a negative way which included events to be organised and encounters, meetings to set up. Many in-person activities had to be moved into the online space – when it was possible. This switch was extremely harmful for those projects with indicators referring to the number of participants of diverse events. Some events (e.g. joint events of chanting choirs, gastronomy festivals, encounters of the kindergartens, sports events, etc.) were impossible to organise online. Furthermore, the uncertain conditions prevented citizens from crossing the border, because upon their return, they might have been obliged to spend 14 days in quarantine.

The realisation of the infrastructural projects was also affected as in some cases the workers could not cross the border; in other cases, the civil servants in charge of issuing the permits and other certificates were ill; but the same phenomenon characterised also the FLC authorities.

The pandemic has profoundly changed the fulfilment conditions of the indicators related to the SMEs. PA3 targeted the increase of cross-border labour mobility, which was significantly more difficult due to the economic recession generated by the pandemic: the entrepreneurs faced solvency problems limiting their capacities to hire new employees, etc.

The Management Bodies made extreme efforts in order to keep the CP moving. They established and applied the rules of *solidarity* ('the Programme must not lose any beneficiaries') and *urgency* ('always concentrate on the most urgent problems'). Accordingly, the management dealt with every project individually, and made practical recommendations facilitating the accomplishment of the project in question – with an extreme flexibility. The approvals were made by written procedure in an accelerated way. If it was necessary, it was even allowed to change the project partners. The events and the administrative tasks were moved into the online world. The requested amendments were approved with high urgency, etc.

The European Commission also facilitated the realisation of the programmes, adapting the Corona Response Investment Initiative (CRII) Regulation of 30 March 2020, and the CRII+ Regulation of 23 April 2020. The Member States were given the exceptional possibility to request, for Cohesion Policy programmes, a co-financing rate of 100% to be applied for the accounting year of 2020-2021, as well as 2021-2022, in accordance with budget appropriations and subject to available funding. The programme requested the temporary increase of the co-financing rate to 100% in all priority axes to ease the burden caused by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and later, the war in Ukraine. This helped reaching the planned financial targets.

Thanks to the COVID-related measures, the recommendation of the 1st Phase analysis on the flexibility of the CP's modification (R_1.4) has broadly been adapted temporarily.

Relevant chapter: *2.1.4 Influence factors of the implementation*

R_2.1 Consider the establishment of financial reserves per priority axis

As a lesson to learn from the pandemic, it is worth considering the creation of a financial reserve under each PA in order to guarantee enough flexibility for ad-hoc changes in the CP.

F_2.1.c Delays of the Small Project scheme

The CfPs for the umbrella projects inviting the two EGTCs were published in 2017 and the set-up of the SPF management structure was also time-consuming, which resulted in the relatively late launch of the SPF, in 2018. As a grant scheme under umbrella projects, the SPF became a 'programme within the programme', which led to the duplication of the administrative processes burdening both the Programme Bodies and the SP beneficiaries. The reporting procedure needed to be performed on both small project and umbrella project level (4-level reporting) which resulted in extremely long waiting time (344 days in average) for reimbursement of the SP beneficiaries, but the longest reimbursement process lasted one and a half years (575 days). Due to the lack of pre- and co-financing, these delays

caused serious liquidity problems for many of the beneficiaries resulting in reluctance to take part in future SPF calls.

Further problems were generated by the SP beneficiaries who lacked experiences with cross-border projects. This resulted in many administrative difficulties to be solved. The paper- and pen drive based bilingual administrative procedures further aggravated the situation.

Finally, the closure of the umbrella projects was hardened by those problems which became clear at the very end of the process as the beneficiaries had to submit one project report only, upon the accomplishment of their project. Many further problems were not yet seen by that time.

Relevant chapter: *2.5.3 Small Project Fund*

R_2.2 Include the SPF projects in the electronic application system

Inclusion of the SPF projects in the online application system seems to be a must in the future as it eases the implementation and reporting of the projects and enables the management authorities to closely survey the implementation. This way, the newly emerged problems at the ending phase of the implementation can be solved in due time.

R_2.3 Revise the inclusion of infrastructural projects in SPF

It is worth revising the inclusion of infrastructural works in the SPF scheme as these activities require disproportionate administrative burdens compared to the small budgetary frames. By eliminating the infrastructural components, both the administrative burdens can be alleviated and the scheme implementation process can be simplified.

R_2.4 Expand the use of simplified cost options under SPF

The SPF applied simplified cost options for staff and administrative costs (15% flat-rate), which were effective solutions to decrease the administrative tasks of both the FLC Bodies and the beneficiaries. It is advised to extend the use of SCOs in order to simplify the reporting of travel expenses and equipment procurement.

F_2.1.d Financial constraints

The rapidly rising rate of inflation from 2020 onwards generated dramatic challenges to many beneficiaries, especially for those implementing infrastructural investments. The prices in the construction sector doubled in one year resulting in numerous failed procurement procedures, revisions of technical parameters and request for extra financial support. Oftentimes, the JS advised the beneficiaries to keep only the most significant professional elements of the projects 'in the scheme' – which are compulsory to fulfil the indicators – and when the cost reduction did not solve the problem, extra financial resources were allocated partly from the CP.

The difficulty was even more serious for the Slovak beneficiaries as their Hungarian counterparts had the possibility to apply for (50 to 100%) ERDF pre-financing and they got the amount of national co-financing right after the subsidy contract had been signed. It was a recurrent claim of the Slovak

applicants that they would need similar alleviation in terms of the financial burdens. It is not a coincidence that the Lead Beneficiaries used to come from the Hungarian side.

Another aspect was the cost ceiling rule in the case of the management costs which did not take the real burdens into account. Due to the shortages of language skills and the lacking experiences with CBC programmes, the managers very often had to undertake extra duties (translation, compilation of explanatory documents, coordination of the partner's activities, managing the procurement, etc.). In the case of the TAPes, the coordination tasks meant an overburden to the tune of 20-30% for the CCP partner(s) compared to the forecasted capacities.

Relevant chapter: *2.1.4 Influence factors of the implementation, 2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)*

R_2.5 Facilitate balanced set-up of financial rules

Since the recommendation R 3.10 (Eliminate the differences between the two (national) financing systems) has not been adopted since the 1st Phase Evaluation, it is still advised to apply the ERDF pre-financing model also in Slovakia in order to ensure more balanced partnerships.

R_2.6 Revise the ceiling of management costs

The ceiling of the management costs should be based on a deeper analysis and a survey among the most skilled project managers. Not only the rate of inflation but also the complexity of the duties should be taken into consideration when defining the ceiling.

F_2.2 Interventions of the Programme Bodies in order to improve the quality of the procedures

F_2.2.a Simplification of the administrative burdens

During the 1st Phase Evaluation, the simplification test showed that a great progress had been made in terms of recommendations drafted at the end of the previous programming period. Since 2018, further steps have been made to decrease the administrative burdens of the applicants and the Programme Bodies. The development of the well-functioning INTERREG+ system and lowering the number of mandatory annexes during the application phase resulted in a real simplification.

The JS remarkably reduced and simplified the list of the mandatory annexes: only those documents had to be submitted as annexes of the application which were necessary for the evaluation. For example, instead of building permits, applicants had to submit a technical plan and a visual design of their infrastructure development, which helped the assessors in the understanding of the project concept. In addition, the two-round completion procedure further eased the applicants' task.

Relevant chapter: *2.1.3.2 Assessment of procedures of the project cycle, 2.1.3.3 Results of the simplification*

R_2.7 Expand the use of SCO under each priority axis

In compliance with the new EU Regulations, the Simplified Cost Options (SCO) are expected to be applied in a broad range. The solutions should also be implemented by the Interreg VI-A Hungary-Slovakia programme as wide as possible.

R_2.8 Facilitate the alleviation of administrative burdens

The administrative burdens can further be alleviated through the utilisation of available e-government databases as it is the case at the Operational Programmes. Other certificates (e.g. on the VAT status) would be enough to submit during the contracting procedure and the beneficiaries should not continuously report it but only if there is a change in their status. SMEs proposed to reduce the reports to the cases when milestones are achieved. Especially, the administrative burdens of the SPF calls need to be eased. The double reporting system, the applicants' administrative requirements being identical with the normal call projects generate extra difficulties for both the Programme Bodies and the beneficiaries. These difficulties deprive the tool from its attractiveness.

R_2.9 Provide assistance for the preparation of the public procurement calls

In line with the recommendation R_4.4 (Harmonise the FLC procedures in order to ensure equal treatment) of the 1st Phase Evaluation, the FLC Bodies could still extend their services towards the beneficiaries. In Hungary, the controllers offer the possibility to check the public procurement call prior to its publication and the project reports before their submission. Similar services are expected on the other side of the border as well where a double-check control system is already operational at national level. This way, perhaps those difficulties could be diminished which stem from the inadequate documents submitted by the beneficiaries which today slow down the controlling process.

F_2.2.b Introduction of the electronic application system

At the time of the First Phase Evaluation, the expectations concerning the IMIS 2014-2020 from both the programme management and the beneficiaries' sides were high, but due to the significant delay in its set-up, as well as its continuous malfunctioning at the beginning, the first experiences were rather negative. It was seen as an overcomplicated system, which generated problems with its operation from time to time. After a longer error management period, its functionality could not be consolidated, the number of software errors was still higher than expected. As a result, in line with the recommendations of the 1st Phase Evaluation concerning the on-line monitoring system (R_4.1 and R_4.2), in 2019 the Managing Authority of all four Interreg programmes using the IMIS decided to launch a new procurement procedure on the development of a new IT solution. In 2020, the so called INTERREG+ system started gradually replacing the IMIS 2014-2020. Further delay was caused by the migration of data from IMIS to INTERREG+ and the test phase of the new instrument.

The online application system was successful as prior to its implementation the beneficiaries had to provide their documents electronically on a CD/DVD or a pen-drive which was not only an outdated format but also contrary to the horizontal principles of the programme.

The beneficiaries are highly satisfied with the new system (they gave 3.39 points out of 4 in the survey).

Relevant chapter: *2.1.3.3 Results of the simplification*

R_2.10 Develop further the e-application system

The online system provides opportunities for further simplification of the application and reporting procedures e.g. by using an online application template instead of excel sheets. The system also allows for continuous reporting, i.e. to upload the documents directly after the activity has been carried out, not only during the mandatory reporting periods (see the problems with the SPF project reports). This would enable the JS to closely follow the implementation and identify the risk factors in due time.

At the same time, from a monitoring and evaluation point of view, it would be also important to continuously keep the system up-to-date and consequent e.g. in terms of the CP's indicators, the project locations or the main milestones of the project cycle instead of having separate excel sheets.

F_2.2.c Upgraded programme communication

The JS applies a wide range of means of communication, in line with the recommendation R_2.3 of the 1st Phase Evaluation. In 2016, the website was awarded 3rd place in the ranking of websites at the Interreg Annual Meeting. The trilingual accessibility of information, the special section dedicated to the visually impaired, user-friendly platform and the transparent and updated information content were mentioned as the best quality factors of the website. The infographics and the easily searchable project data base are also featured among its special values.

The daily communication of the programme is performed through social media sites managed by an external expert company. This form of communication replaced the former newsletters which proved to be less effective than the most popular online platforms of communication.

Beside the online presence, the JS and the EGTCs managing the SPF paid a lot of attention to personal consultation. The JS organised 61 communication events between 2015 and 2022, the two EGTCs realised 33 information days attracting 924 participants in total. Beside the info days, the EGTCs organised seminars for the SP beneficiaries to facilitate the project implementation process. In order to facilitate the set-up of relevant partnerships, the EGTCs established partner search databases and held forums, where the potential project partners could easily find their future partners on the other side of the border. At the same time, however, the beneficiaries did not make full use of the opportunity of personal consultations.

During the contracting procedure, the JS invited all beneficiaries for consultations. Although these personal meetings were really time-consuming from the JS side, but significantly contributed to the smooth implementation of the projects later on. Under PA3, the selected TAPE consortia were given the opportunity to participate in consultations where the details of the planned projects were discussed. What is more, two information days were dedicated to channel the remarks and suggestions of the beneficiaries regarding the second-round call which is an exemplary initiative being in line with the recommendation R_4.5 of the 1st Phase Evaluation. The project owners highly appreciated the assistance provided by the JS through the whole project cycle, without which the introduction of this complex tool would have resulted in a remarkable failure in terms of the indicators and financial frames of the programme.

Relevant chapter: *2.2.3.1 Communication of the Programme, 2.1.3.5 External assessment of the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies, 2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE), 2.5.3 Small Project Fund*

R_2.11 Keep the system of consultations

Keep the system of regular consultations in order to improve the quality of the project proposals and their implementation, and to enhance the ownership of the beneficiaries over the CP.

R_2.12 Extend the scope of SPF consultations

The EGTCs organised seminars for the SP beneficiaries before the launch of their projects, but these events were poorly attended by the target group. Similarly to the traditional projects, it is advised to introduce contracting meetings for the SP beneficiaries with the EGTCs in order to better support them in meeting the administrative requirements of the CP. By doing this, the numerous administrative problems generated by the SP beneficiaries can be prevented.

F_2.2.d Challenges and solutions of project level communication

In line with the recommendation R_2.5 drafted during the 1st Phase Evaluation, the JS published a visibility guide which clarified the use of the mandatory visibility components and standardised the communication activities. The beneficiaries were invited to plan their communication activities in a more detailed and better-based format after the decision on the support had been made. These consultations enabled the beneficiaries to think through their future communication activities and to adapt the most adequate means for their messages.

At the same time, the realisation of these activities has not always fulfilled the aims. Numerous projects produced promo videos whose number of views per video is low (often below 10 in total). This means that these promo films cost more than the value added by them. Compared to classic media contents online and digital options still seem to be underutilised. At the same time, the use of the CCP under PA3 resulted in much more massive communication packages referring to a larger set of activities of several parallelly implemented projects.

To communicate in English is a recurrent challenge for the beneficiaries.

Relevant chapter: *2.2.3.2 Communication of the projects, 2.1.3 Programme management*

R_2.13 Analyse the impacts of the communication tools

In order to improve the quality and effectiveness of the communication of the projects, a comprehensive analysis should be drafted benchmarking the traditional and on-line means of communication under the CBC programmes.

R_2.14 Involve external experts to improve the effects of project level communication

As it was recommended in the 1st Phase Evaluation (R_2.5), in order to improve the capacities of the beneficiaries in the field of communication, external experts could be involved through training sessions provided for the applicants. The consultation preceding the contracting should also be kept.

F_2.2.e The 3-stage quality assessment

Since the 1st Phase Evaluation, according to its recommendation R_3.8, a major change has been introduced in the field of quality assessment. According to the new model, a 3-step evaluation is carried out by different actors (the JS, territorial and sectorial experts) which aims to ensure a more focused, more objective assessment, as well as the possibility to benchmark the proposals by an expert of the Joint Secretariat (this latter aspect was completely missing before).

According to the new approach, after the administrative (formal and eligibility) assessment, the JS conducts a strategic assessment whether the project objectives are logically linked to the relevant priority axis and the project activities are in line with the list of supported activities and the cross-border character of the Programme (awarding up to 43 points). The second part of the quality assessment is undertaken by territorial experts delegated by the counties and higher territorial units forming the programme area. This means that the recommendation R_3.9 of the 1st Phase Evaluation has been adopted. The primary aim of this phase is to investigate whether the project objectives are in line with the relevant regional development plans and local initiatives (up to 20 points). The third part of the quality assessment is performed by external assessors selected from a pool of experts previously approved by the Managing Authority in agreement with the National Authority. The primary goal of this phase is to assess whether the project objectives are in line with sectorial trends, the expected results can be achieved, the expenditures are in line with market prices and the project outcomes are durable (37 points). The new assessment model is an innovation of the CP and it had such a positive acceptance from the Programme Management Bodies that it has been standardised under subsequent 'normal' calls for proposals. The division of the strategic aspects according to different competences, and, especially the involvement of the territorial authorities in the evaluation process remarkably strengthened the 'relevance' and 'embeddedness' factors of the projects and, accompanied with the presentations at the MC meetings, it contributed to an enhanced ownership of the programme and the TAPE concepts on behalf of the MC members,

Relevant chapter: *2.1.3.2 Assessment of procedures of the project cycle, 2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)*

R_2.15 Keep the new quality assessment system

The new assessment method is a major innovative solution of the CP which should not only be kept for the new programme but it has to be popularised within the Interreg community as a whole as both the 'sensation of ownership' and the professionalism of the Programme can be improved by its application.

F_3 Structural aspects

The strong innovative character of the programme indicates the existence of high-level trust and commitment of the partner authorities – at the same time, the risks related to innovation also require high level trust and close cooperation. From this point of view, the SKHU Programme is operated in an exemplary way.

F_3.1 Programme management level

F_3.1.a Excellent cooperation between the Programme Bodies

The representatives of the Programme Bodies assess their cooperation mostly 'confidential', 'open', 'satisfactory', 'adequate' and 'supportive'. The JS has daily cooperation with the MA, and the NA. Owing to the informal connections, the communication is smooth and continuous, which results in rapid responses to challenges. This close cooperation enabled the successful speeding up of the programme after the complicated start and the handling of the difficulties posed by the pandemic and the rapid rate of inflation.

Similarly, all the MC members find the cooperation with the Programme Bodies satisfactory, all of them highlighted the high quality of the assistance that the JS provided to the decision-making bodies; and more than 60% of the respondents of the beneficiary survey assessed that the Programme Bodies ensured excellent assistance to tackle the emerging challenges and altogether 90% of the respondents were satisfied with it.

Relevant chapter: *2.1.3.1 Capacity and lead time assessment, 2.1.3 Programme management*

F_3.1.b Capacity shortages

At the Managing Authority 2-3 staff members (who should be in charge of the management of the SKHU Programme and horizontal duties (considering more INTERREG A Programmes managed by Hungary), i.e. financial, legal and strategic management) were missing for a while. The missing staff generated heavy burdens during the peak periods of the programme, especially due to the series of external challenges (such as the late approval of the CP, the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, the war in Ukraine). Unfortunately, the TA budget is not sufficient to cover the costs of more controllers which would speed up the reimbursement procedures, thus the recommendation R_2.1 of the 1st Phase Evaluation has not been adopted. In the meantime, the lack of capacity was managed by the last phase of the programme period.

Relevant chapter: *2.1.3.1 Capacity and lead time assessment*

F_3.1.c Active regions

The CP was extremely successful in enhancing the ownership of the regional authorities over the programme. Previously, the role of the MC members was mostly limited to the MC meetings and the decision-making taken place there, but they were rather passive or reactive stakeholders of the whole process – partly due to the frequently missing language skills.

During the recent programming period, the national authorities and the JS managed to actively involve them in the assessment of the projects through the 3-stage assessment procedure and the presentations of the TAPE proposals at the MC meetings.

Relevant chapter: *2.1.3 Programme management*

R_3.1 Extend the decision-making competences of the JS

The biggest challenge to the MC members is the use of English. Especially the written procedures mean an unsurmountable difficulty for them as the MC meetings are held in Hungarian and Slovak but the written procedures' language is English. In parallel with the involvement of the regional authorities in the project evaluation process, the JS should be authorised to make decisions in technical and administrative matters (e.g. prolongation) of the projects' implementation, because it would significantly accelerate the whole process. The MC should be involved in the modifications which have thematic relevance, thus keeping and preserving their decision-making role.

F_3.1.d Active EGTCs

The Slovak-Hungarian CBC programme is exemplary in terms of involving the EGTCs being present along the shared border. The SPF is managed by two EGTCs (ensuring the proximity to the local level), 5 TAPes of the 9 selected action plans were managed by EGTCs (exercising their territorial integrating role), and the representatives of these groupings were invited to the MC meetings with an observer status (playing an advisory role on behalf of the cross-border subregions). According to the decision of the MC, this invitation was issued to the EGTCs based on a rotation principle which was the main reason why this initiative failed. From among the 16 groupings established along the Slovak-Hungarian border, 5 have never shown signs of their existence, their representatives were invited to the MC meeting in vain. Their absence from the MC meetings interrupted the rotation system which led to a gradual emptying of the solutions. At the same time, the representatives of the Programme Bodies regularly inform the EGTCs at their regular joint workshops on the CP, its calls and the lessons learnt.

Relevant chapter: *2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE), 2.5.3 Small Project Fund, 2.1.3 Programme management*

R_3.2 Keep the active role of the EGTCs in the Programme

The active involvement of the EGTCs in the programme is a unique and exemplary character of the CP which should be kept. The new programme will include the SPF tool and it is expected to be managed by the EGTCs, according to the recommendation of the 1st Phase Evaluation. The MC membership should also be provided to them but not along a rotation principle but based on delegation.

R_3.3 Provide stronger influence to the JS in the SPF implementation

The major problems with the SPF scheme resulted from the fact that regardless of the good cooperation frames, the JS had moderate overview and influence on the implementation of the umbrella projects. This shortage could be handled by giving larger competence to the JS in the two regional MCs in order to be able to prevent procedural and bureaucratic problems that occurred during the programming period.

F_3.2 Project management level

F_3.2.a The role of the CCP in the TAPes

The Coordination and Cooperation Projects ensured professional coaching and quality assurance over the TAPE project cycle. They provided a uniform design for the TAPE and took off remarkable administrative and management burdens from the project partners, especially from the SMEs which lacked proper capacities and knowledge about project administration and managing a public procurement procedure. The mandatory use of English generated problems for many partners; the CCP could also compensate for these shortcomings.

A side-effect of the CCP activities was the enhanced trust between the partners and the development of their networking capacities. The CCP generated ownership over the TAPE, mirrored in the commitment and extra efforts done by the CCP partners.

Relevant chapter: *2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)*

R_3.4 Keep the CCP projects in the territorial action plans

The CCP solution of the TAPE proved to be useful especially in those cases when the commitment was ensured on behalf of the CCP partners. The model should be kept for the new programming period as well. At the same time, the CCP partners could be invited to the MC meetings in order to regularly report on the achievements of the action plan through which not only the transparency of the activities can be guaranteed but, at the same time, structural connections between the different stakeholders can be enhanced.

2 IN-DEPTH EVALUATION

2.1 Performance

This chapter gives an overview on the performance of the Programme, including the calls, the applications, the budget allocation, the projects' duration, the financial progress and the fulfilment of the output indicators until the cut-off date, the budget headings per PA; the different aspects of programme management and the factors influencing the implementation of the Programme.

2.1.1 Quantification of the performance

The general quantification of the CP's performance is placed in the first part of the evaluation, it can be found in the chapter "*1.2 General features and performance of the Programme*". This current chapter contains the PA-based analysis of the CP's performance.

2.1.1.1 Quantification of the PA1's performance

Under PA1 six **calls for proposals** were published, out of which two were normal calls (SKHU/1601 and SKHU/1902) and the other four related to different tools with limited thematic focuses. Two of them were connected to the set-up of the Small Project Fund's management structure (SPF) (SKHU/1701 and SKHU/1704), whereas the rest two calls concentrated on the involvement of SMEs with different approaches. The B-Light Scheme call (SKHU/1702) was not successful, so the dedicated budget has been distributed through another, the SME call (SKHU/1801)¹⁸. The normal calls were open in the second half of 2016 (SKHU/1601) and on the autumn and early winter of 2019 (SKHU/1902). The calls targeting the so-called SPF umbrella projects were opened in 2017, the first (SKHU/1701) mostly in February and the second (SKHU/1704) in August. In the same year, the B-Light Scheme call was opened what was available between April and November. In order to compensate the failed SKHU/1702 call, the SME call was published and opened in the following year between April and September.

Table 8: Overview of the calls under PA1

Call ID	Tool	Open period	Planned ERDF allocation to the projects under the respective action (EUR)	Maximum available ERDF grant amount per project (EUR)
SKHU/1601	Normal	29/07/2016 – 3/11/2016	25 386 977	200 000 – 3 000 000
SKHU/1701	Small Project Fund ¹⁹	13/02/2017 – 3/03/2017	2 648 753	1 324 376.5

¹⁸ Further information about the used tools can be found in the "*2.5.1 Involvement of SMEs*" chapter.

¹⁹ SKHU/1701 and SKHU/1704 umbrella CfPs incorporate the management costs (EUR 467 427) and small project costs (EUR 2 648 753) as well.

Call ID	Tool	Open period	Planned ERDF allocation to the projects under the respective action (EUR)	Maximum available ERDF grant amount per project (EUR)
SKHU/1702	B-Light Scheme	6/04/2017 – 29/11/2017	10 000 000	n.a.
SKHU/1704	Small Project Fund	1/08/2017 – 31/08/2017	2 648 753	1 324 376.5
SKHU/1801	SME	6/04/2018 – 20/09/2018	10 000 000	220 000 –660 000
SKHU/1902	Normal	12/09/2019 – 17/12/2019	22 000 000 (1.1/1 Action: 9 000 000 1.1/2 Action: 8 000 000 1.1/3 Action: 5 000 000)	Maximum size: 1.1/1 Action: 1 500 000 1.1/2 Action: 2 000 000 1.1/3 Action: 1 000 000

Within the first normal call, the available ERDF allocation was more than EUR 25 million under PA1, out of which a partnership could apply for up to EUR 3 million. Within SKHU/1902 EUR 22 million was planned to be allocated to PA1 that was divided between 3 well-defined actions. The biggest amount (EUR 9 million) was allocated for the development of cultural heritage (Action 1.1/1), EUR 8 million for natural heritage (Action 1.1/2), and EUR 5 million to tourism attractions (Action 1.1/3). The available maximum ERDF grant per project was also diverse per action (see [Table 8](#)).

Under the B-Light Scheme call aiming to involve SMEs, the indicated amount of ERDF was EUR 10 million which contained not just the SMEs' (Beneficiary Lights) but also the managing partner's costs. Since this call could not close with results, its EUR 10 million was shifted into the SME call (SKHU/1801). Under this new call, the financial allocation was connected to the number of involved enterprises. (If 3 SMEs took part in the project, the total project budget could reach EUR 660 000). For further information please refer to the "[2.5.1 Involvement of SMEs](#)" chapter.

Regarding the thematic focus of the calls, 12 actions were defined over the programming period, but some of them show notable similarities (see the colour-coding in [Table 9](#)). For instance, Action 1.1/18 and Action 1.1/2 are about natural heritage, while Action 1.1/19 and Action 1.1/1 focus on cultural heritage. There is also coherence between the Action 1.1/4, Action 1.1/8, Action 1.1/9 and Action 1.1/3, which address tourism infrastructure development by different actors (SMEs, small beneficiaries, etc.). Moreover, the Action 1.1/11 and Action 1.1/17 are included simultaneously into two calls (SKHU/1601 and SKHU/1801).

The first normal call focused on environmentally sound tourism development without significant differentiation between the cultural and natural heritages. The call enabled the development of cultural heritage sites and the maintenance of natural heritages which were complemented with promotion of heritages, construction of local access roads, development of environmentally friendly tourism products and cross-border infrastructure for eco-tourism. The call determined the eligible actions in a loose manner and left significant room for the applicants to define the focus of their interventions. As a result, the submitted applications were very heterogenous, that hardened the quality assessment process, since comparison had to be made between varied development approaches and topics.

The second normal call (1902) was in line with the thematic frame of the first call, but in a more focused way. Three actions²⁰ were defined covering core (basically infrastructural works, like maintenance and restoration) and supplementary (tourism services and promotion) activities. This new approach facilitated the improvement of the applications' quality, as well as eased the quality assessment procedure.

SME related calls focused on those aspects of the tourism product and service development, as well as the capitalisation of natural and cultural heritage, which might be effectively performed by SMEs. Last, but not least the Small Project Fund aimed to support small-scale tourism infrastructure.

Table 9: Supported actions per calls under PA1

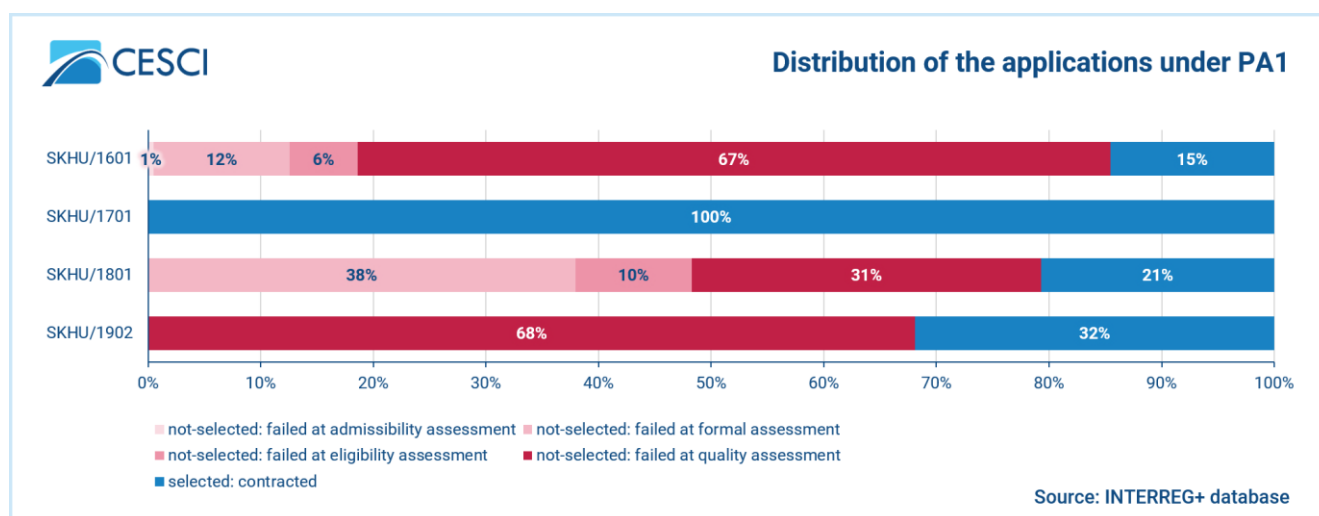
Call ID	Short name of actions	Number of projects	Total cost of actions (EUR)
SKHU/1601	1.1/11 Tourist services and supporting facilities for active tourism	7	11 434 270.52
	1.1/17 Cross-border action plans, set up models and test pilot actions to better capitalize the regions cultural and natural heritage	3	5 660 330.93
	1.1/18 Maintaining and promoting natural heritage in the programme area	9	10 326 805.35
	1.1/19 Cooperation and development of cultural heritage sites	10	19 016 266.79
SKHU/1701	1.1/4 Small scale investments in the field of tourism	2	3 666 093.40
SKHU/1801	1.1/8 Cross-border tourist products and the integration of tourism actors along thematic routes	1	657 350
	1.1/9 Small scale quality tourism linked to local environmental or cultural features for SMEs	3	1 244 251.49
	1.1/11 Tourist services and supporting facilities for active tourism	1	394 900
	1.1/17 Cross border action plans, set up models and test pilot actions to better capitalize the regions cultural and natural heritage	1	365 129.60
SKHU/1902	1.1/1 Joint development of cultural heritage	9	10 730 047.27
	1.1/2 Joint development of natural heritage	6	10 132 340.33
	1.1/3 Joint development of tourism attractions	7	5 907 867.82

Altogether more than half of the PA1 **applications** (61%; 199 applications) belong to the first normal call. It implies a huge interest about the first call, what the budget limit could not completely satisfy (the requested amount was EUR 250 million of ERDF which was ten times higher than the allocated amount).

²⁰ Action 1.1/1 Joint development of cultural heritage
Action 1.1/2 Joint development of natural heritage
Action 1.1/3 Joint development of tourism attractions

Due to this high interest, in 2017 the MC raised the indicative financial allocation of PA1 to EUR 40.2 million of ERDF (the pre-published value of the call was EUR 25.3 million). By contrast, the number of received applications under the second normal call was much lower (69 applications, 23%), meanwhile the SME call encompassed only 29 project proposals which was complemented by the 2 SPF applications. Owing to the lower number and focused project proposals, the share of contracted projects is more favourable in the second normal call (32% by 22 projects) than in the previous one (15% by 29 projects). Based on the MC's decision, all SPF applications were contracted, but under the SME call – because of the low quality of the projects – only 6 applications (21%) were selected for funding.

Figure 17: Distribution of the applications under PA1



The ratio of failed applications is relatively high under the first normal call (85%; 170 applications) and under the SME call (79%; 23 applications), but more than half of the project proposals (68%; 47 applications) were not selected under the second normal call, either. The selection process contains several evaluation steps. The first is the admissibility check, which requires the timely submission of the signed project proposal. Under SKHU/1601 only one proposal missed this criterion. The administrative shortages of the applications were revealed during the formal and eligibility check. As many project proposals did not meet the expectations, this assessment step gave opportunity to submit missing documents in the frame of one or more completion rounds. Under the first normal call 88% (176 applications) of the total (PA1) applications, while under the second normal call 83% (102 applications) of the total (PA1+PA4) applications were requested to submit missing documents, which indicates that the administrative criteria caused significant difficulties for the applicants. As several completion rounds gave enough time to complete the requests, no application failed in this assessment step under the SPF and the second normal calls. Although, in the first normal call 12% of the applications failed at the formal and 6% at the eligibility assessments. This ratio is much higher under the SKHU/1801, where 38% of the applications could not comply with the formal requirements and 10% fell short at the eligibility check.

The last step of the selection procedure is the quality assessment, where 63% of the total PA1 applications failed. The ratio of failed project proposals is the highest under the first (67%) and the second (68%) normal calls.

Overall, 299 applications were submitted under PA1 out of which 240 applications (80%) failed during the selection process, while the rest 59 were implemented (20%). According to the number of projects and total costs per actions, most of the projects supported the development of cultural heritages (19 projects) and the development of natural heritages (15 projects), absorbing the biggest share from the total PA budget (the former one: 37%; EUR 29.7 million and the latter one: 26%; EUR 20.4 million). Altogether 10 projects supported the development of tourist attractions with EUR 10.2 million (13%) and other 8 projects promoted the improvement of tourist services and active tourism with EUR 11.8 million (15%). The action about cross-border plans for better capitalisation of cultural and natural heritages (EUR 6 million; 8%) and the promotion of small-scale quality tourism for SMEs (EUR 1.2 million; 2%) received less than EUR 10 million through 4 and 3 projects, subsequently.

The average **budget** of a PA1 project under normal call was more than EUR 1.4 million (SKHU/1601: EUR 1.6 million; SKHU/1902: EUR 1.2 million). Under the first normal call, three projects (*MONUMENTIS*²¹, *CULTPLAY*, *DANUBE BIKE&BOAT*²²) had a budget of more than EUR 2.8 million, while in the case of the second normal call, there was only 1 project (*Bike Paradise*) with a budget over EUR 2 million. The two SPF umbrella projects' budget was EUR 1.8 million, whereas the SME projects' value was EUR 443 000 in total.

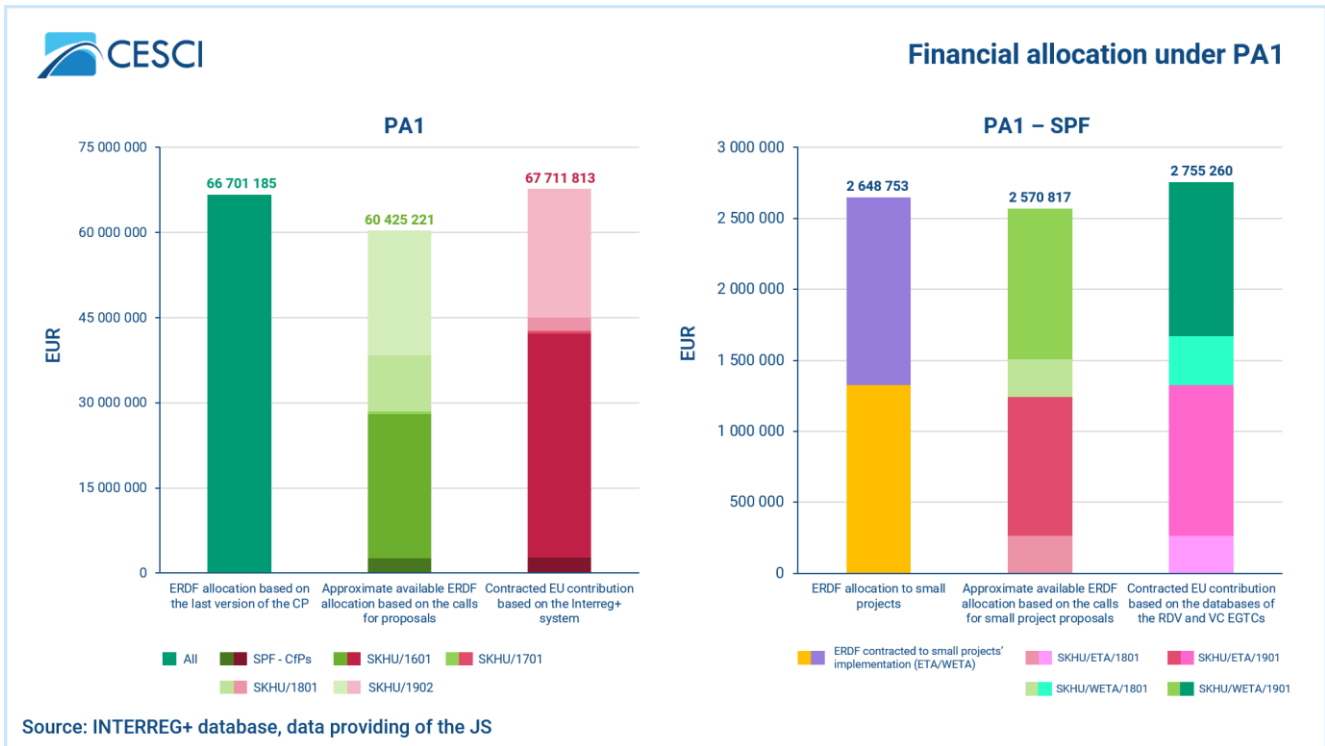
The ERDF support based on the CP was EUR 66.7 million, but the total planned allocation of the call for proposals was altogether EUR 60.4 million. Finally, the contracted EU contribution was EUR 67.7 million, which exceeded both previously determined amounts: the surplus was EUR 1 million compared to the CP and EUR 7.2 million compared to the sum of the planned allocation of the calls. The reason of this difference is the reallocation of funds among CfPs. Since the PA1 generated great interest, reallocation was needed from other PA. Furthermore, the withdrawn projects also produced additional funds to be used.

In case of the normal calls, the number of submitted applications considerably surpassed the previous expectations. In the SKHU/1601 call almost EUR 39.5 million was contracted, which means more than 150% allocation rate compared to the CfP plan, while in the SKHU/1902 call the rate was 103%. At the same time, notable decrease is observable in the SME call, since instead of the allocated EUR 10 million, less than EUR 2.3 million was contracted owing to the low-quality project proposals. As a result, 58% of the EU contribution was contracted in the SKHU/1601 CfPs, 34% in the SKHU/1902. The SPF absorbed nearly 5% of the total EU allocation (4% by the small projects and 1% by the SPF management), while 3% was contracted to the projects of the SME call.

²¹ SKHU/1601/1.1/060, Touristic Development of Franciscan Cultural Heritage Sites of the Border Area by the Cooperation of the Two Provinces

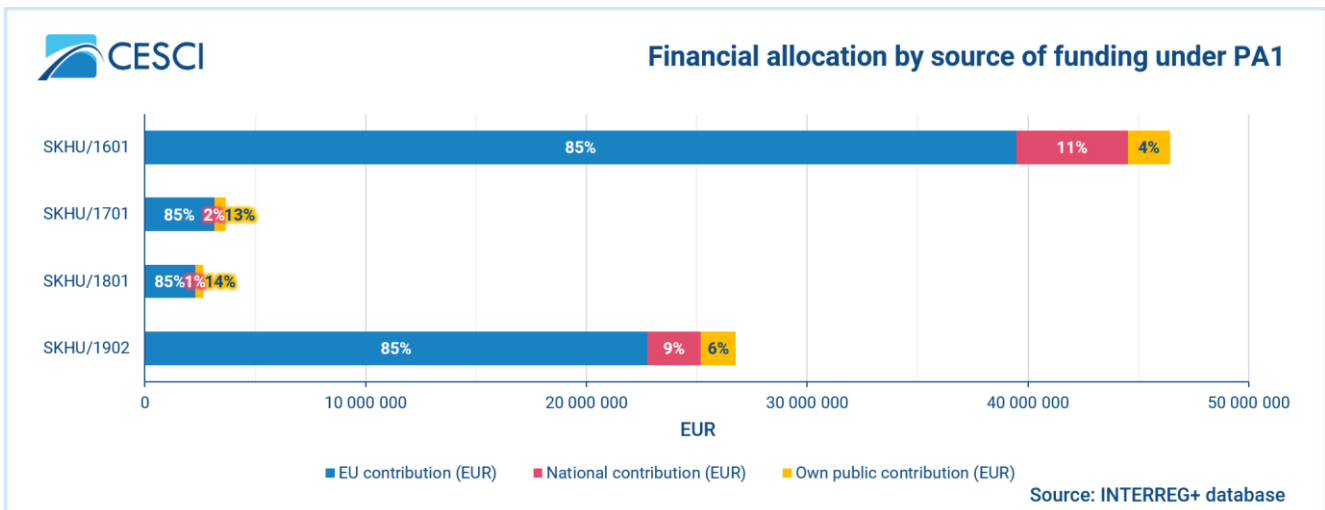
²² SKHU/1601/1.1/014, Discover the Small & Moson Danube by bike and boat

Figure 18: Financial allocation under PA1



According to the financial allocation by source of funding²³, in compliance with the EU Regulations, the rate of ERDF contribution was 85%. Within the 15% co-financing, the national contribution predominated at PA level (10%, nearly EUR 12 million), while beneficiaries bore only 5% of the costs (EUR 4.4 million).

Figure 19: Financial allocation by source of funding under PA1



By calls, the national contribution was around 10% of the budget of the two normal calls, while in the case of the SME call it was only 1%, covering the national contribution to the non-SME beneficiaries. Under the SKHU/1801, the economic activities were supported under the *de minimis* scheme, where the

²³ SKHU/1701 represents the umbrella call on programme level.

ERDF contribution was 85%, but SMEs were not entitled to national co-financing. In absolute value, the amount of national contribution was around EUR 5 million under the SKHU/1601 and EUR 2.4 million under the SKHU/1902, while the SKHU/1701 (EUR 57 000) and SKHU/1801 (EUR 24 000) were below EUR 60 000.

In terms of the **SPF**, the goal of the first umbrella call was to identify and select the management organisations, while in the second round, the applicants had the opportunity to further develop their proposals and deliver guiding documents related to the management of the Small Project Fund. The planned ERDF allocation of the umbrella calls (SKHU/1701 and SKHU/1704) was more than EUR 3.1 million contracted entirely (100% allocation rate) to the implementation of the two umbrella projects. The division between the two projects was equal.

Table 10: Overview of the calls for small projects under PA1

Management organisations	Call ID	Open period²⁴	Planned ERDF allocation to the projects (EUR)	Maximum available ERDF grant amount per project (EUR)
RDV EGTC	SKHU/WETA/1801	03/09/2018 - 2/11/2018	264 875.30	20 000 – 50 000
	SKHU/WETA/1901	Start date: 1/04/2019 Closure of 1st round: 30/06/2019 Closure of 2nd round: 30/09/2019 Closure of 3rd round: 28/02/2020 Closure of 4th round: 30/04/2020	978 153.54	
Via Carpatia EGTC	SKHU/ETA/1801	1/06/2018 - 31/07/2018	264 875.30	
	SKHU/ETA/1901	Start date: 1/04/2019 Closure of 1st round: 30/06/2019 Closure of 2nd round: 30/09/2019 Closure of 3rd round: 28/02/2020 Closure of 4th round: 30/04/2020	1 062 913.18	

After the establishment of the SPF management structure, the fund operators, the Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC and the Via Carpatia EGTC, the sole beneficiaries of the two umbrella projects launched the calls for small project proposals. Within the framework of 4 CfPs, more than EUR 2.5 million ERDF contribution was published, the remaining more than half million euro covered the costs of the fund management.

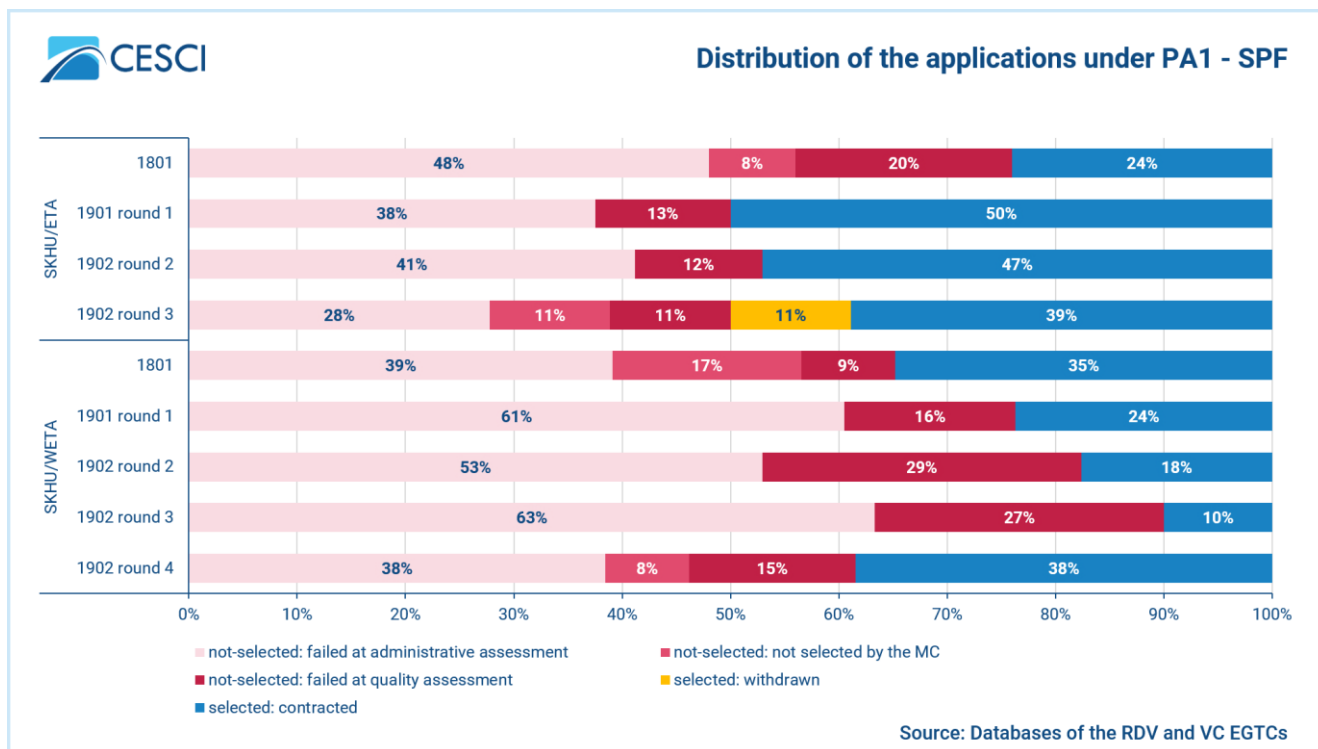
There was a remarkable difference between the 1801 and the 1902 SPF CfPs, as the previous ones were the so-called pilot CfPs covering not more than EUR 300 000 each, while both continuously open calls of 2019 included nearly EUR 1 million. The available ERDF grant per project was between EUR 20 000 and 50 000.

The process of the project selection under the small projects was very similar to the normal ones. The applications of the continuously open calls' assessment were handled in four rounds. The results of

²⁴ The SKHU/ETA/1901 and SKHU/WETA/1901 were open continuously from April 1st, 2019. The received applications were assessed continuously after each evaluation round.

these rounds are also illustrated at the chart. The data used for the purposes of the assessment were generated by the two EGTCs.

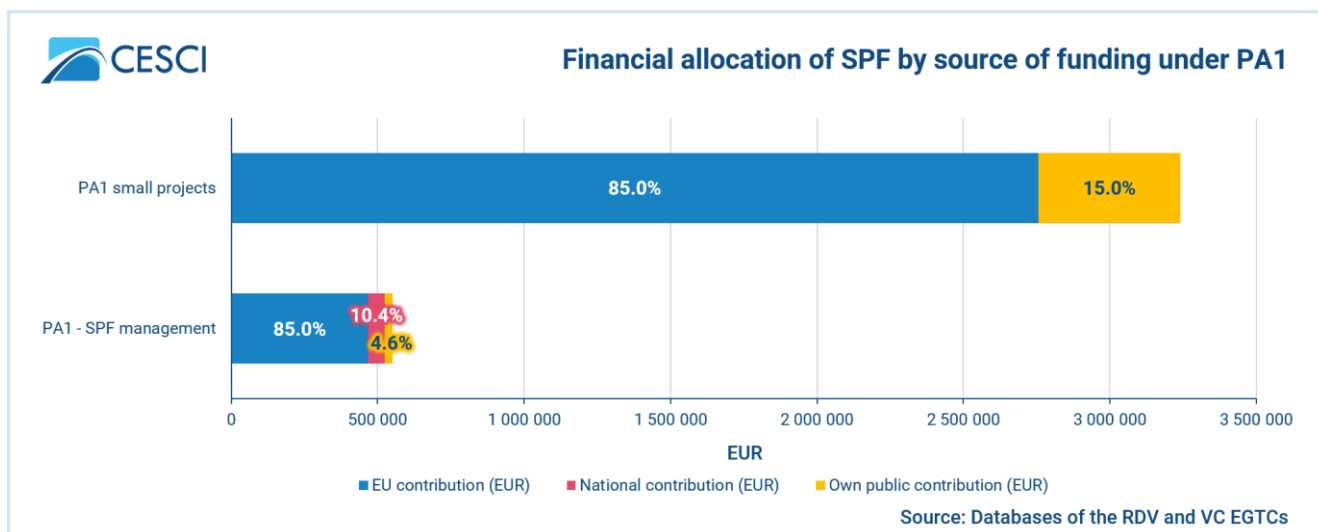
Figure 20: Distribution of the applications under PA1 SPF



Nearly half of the applications (49%; 104 applications) were rejected because of administrative problems, while 18% (39 applications) could not meet the requirements of quality assessment. There were only 9 applications which could successfully comply with the expectations, but owing to the limited number of points they were not selected for implementation by the Monitoring Subcommittee. The ratio of not selected applications was 78% (107 applications) in the western border region (WETA), while in the eastern side (ETA) it did not achieve 60% (59%; 45 applications). On SPF level, the aggregated values of 2018 and 2019 are equal, 29% of the applications were selected in both cases. Altogether 152 applications (71%) failed during different stages of the assessment.

To sum up, in the frame of the PA1 SPF, 214 applications were submitted out of which 29% were selected for funding (60 contracted and 2 withdrawn). The total amount of EU contribution was EUR 2.7 million (EUR 1.4 million for WETA and EUR 1.3 million for ETA), which slightly exceeded the total planned allocation of the CP (EUR 2.64 million).

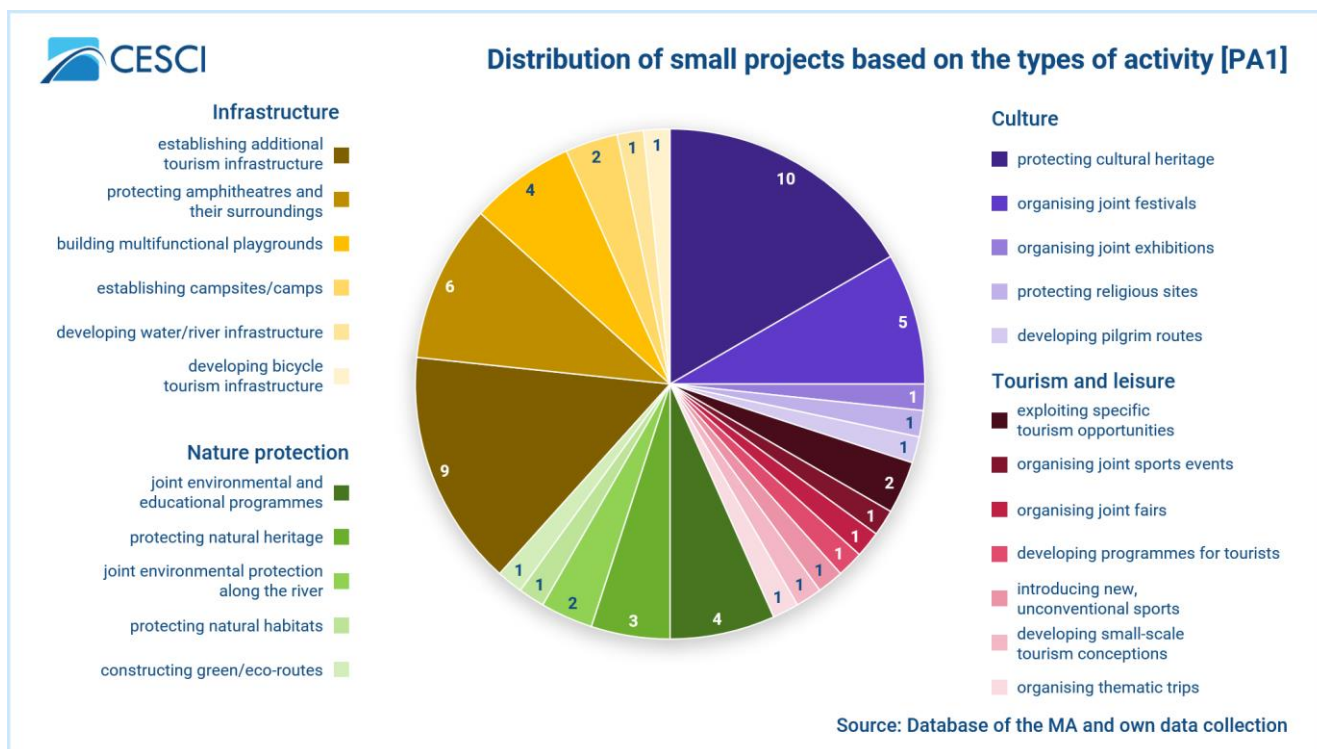
Figure 21: Financial allocation of SPF by source of funding under PA1



In terms of co-financing, only the beneficiaries of the umbrella projects were entitled to national co-financing. Altogether more than EUR 57 000, around 10% of the total management cost was allocated to SPF umbrella beneficiaries as national contribution. At the same time, beneficiaries of the small projects (SP beneficiaries) were not entitled to national co-financing, due to the huge administrative burden of contracting between the National Authorities and the more than 500 SP beneficiaries. As a result, SP beneficiaries had to compensate the lack of national financing from their own budget. In case of the PA1 small projects, this meant more than EUR 413 000 in total, which meant EUR 4 055 by average on beneficiary level. The average size of the projects was approximately EUR 52 000.

The contracted small projects addressed a wide range of actions defined by the calls for proposals (see *"Table 79: Supported SPF actions by calls under PA1"* in the Annex). Most popular topics were the protection of cultural heritage, development of small-scale additional tourist infrastructure (e.g. information signs along already existing thematic routes), (re-)construction of amphitheatres, or the organisation of joint events including festivals, sports events and fairs.

Figure 22: Distribution of small projects based on the types of activity



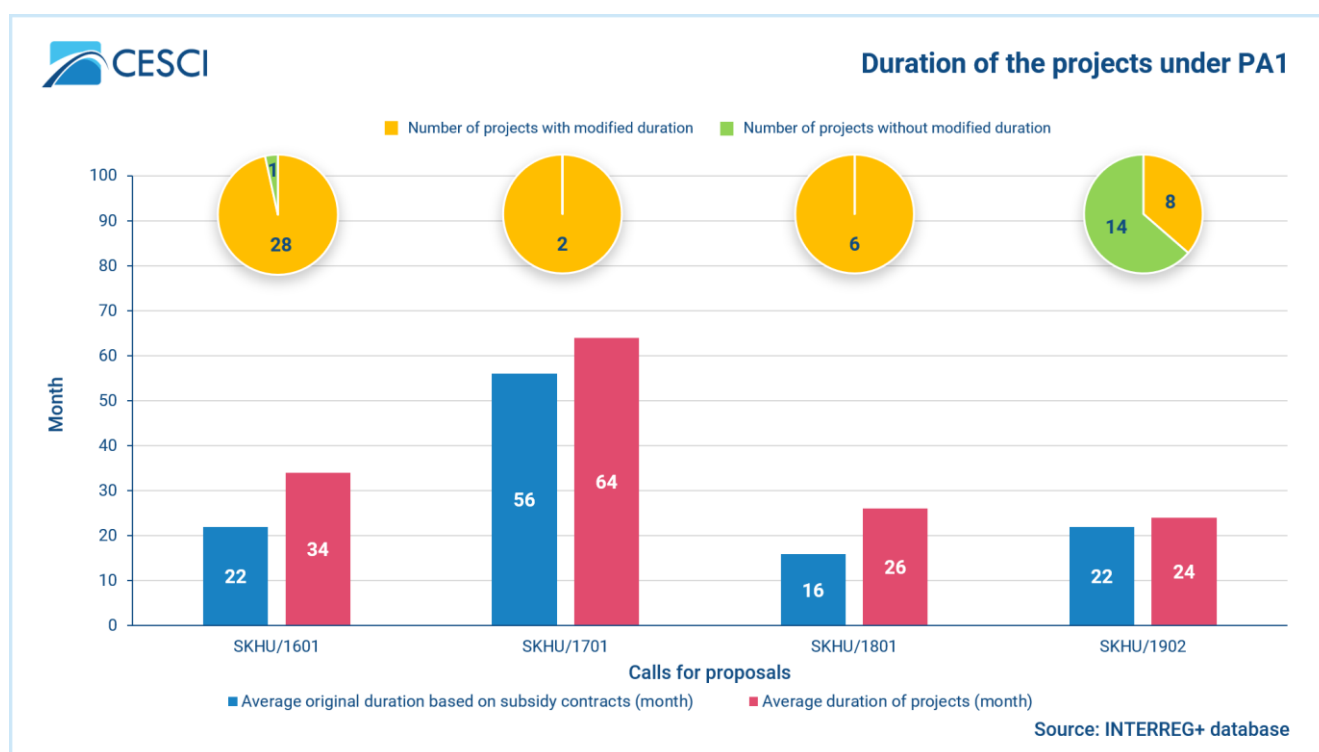
As many unexpected external and internal factors affected the implementation of the projects, in some cases the **timing of the projects** needed modification. Altogether three quarters (44 projects) of the normal PA1 projects have used the opportunity of prolongation which caused 8 months longer timeframe by average. Due to this extended duration, the average implementation period of a project increased from 23 to 31 months.

Under the first normal call 28 projects (97% of the total SKHU/1601 projects) requested modification, as the implementation of the soft activities was greatly hindered by the pandemic. What is more, 100% of the SPF (2) and SME (6) projects needed amendments. During the second normal call 8 projects requested modifications which account for 36% of the total SKHU/1902 PA1 related projects. The average prolongation was 12 months in the case of first normal call, 10 months at the SME call, 8 months at the SPF umbrella projects and 2 months at the second normal call. Regarding the maximum and minimum duration of the changes – aside from the average values –, the first normal call stands out with 35 months (*CULTPLAY*²⁵ project). The maximum prolongation is more than a year in the case of the SME and second normal calls, while one of the SPF umbrella projects was extended with 9 months. The minimum change fluctuates between 0 (normal calls) and 6 months (SPF umbrella call). Owing to these modifications the average timeframe of a project is the highest under the SPF call by its 64 months, but all PA1 related calls lasted at least two years. The average duration of projects under the first normal call was nearly three years (34 months), while the second projects of normal and SME calls lasted 24-26 months by average.

²⁵ SKHU/1601/1.1/209, CULTPLAY - Interactive Thematic Parks - Innovative Use of Cultural Heritage

The announcement of the calls greatly determined the projects' scheduling, generating four bigger waves. Under the first normal call, the implementation of the first 16 projects started in September 2017. The rest of the SKHU/1601 projects started the implementation until March 2018. Only the *GREX*²⁶ project is an exception since its start date was the beginning of November 2018 (when the first 1601 projects were already closed). The majority of the SKHU/1601 projects (69%; 20 projects) closed the implementation phase in 2020 and 2021. In terms of the SPF umbrella call, it was the ETA project which started earlier (April 2017) and lasted longer (until March 2023). The 6 SME projects began within 3 months (April-June 2019) and ended in July 2021. In the case of the second normal call, 77% of the projects (17 projects) incepted the implementation until the beginning of 2021 (first start date was in October 2020), but *Bike Paradise*²⁷ project started the work only in the first day of 2022. Taking into account the closing dates, the first SKHU/1902 project was accomplished in the end of June 2022 and more than half of the projects (59%; 13 projects) closed before 2023. Expectedly, until the end of June 2023 all SKHU/1902 projects will be finished. All in all, 23 PA1 projects (39%) have not closed the implementation by the cut-off date of the evaluation.

Figure 23: Duration of the projects under PA1



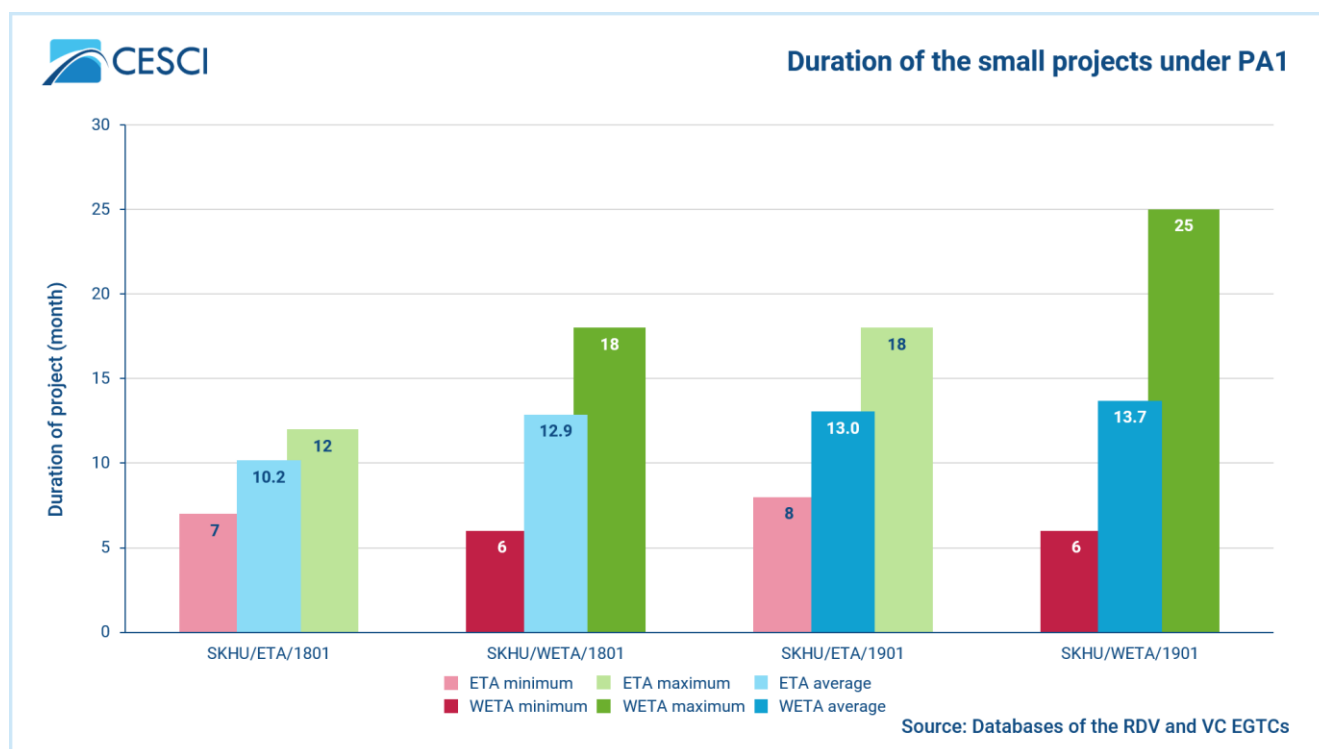
The average duration of the PA1 small projects was more than a year (nearly 13 months), but the end dates were ranged between 6 and 25 months. In all CfPs the WETA projects covered longer timeframe than the eastern side's projects. The shortest and longest project durations were also registered under the WETA CfPs, since there were projects – under SKHU/WETA/1801 and SKHU/WETA/1901 – where the timeframe was limited to 6 months, but there was one WETA project which lasted more than 2 years.

²⁶ SKHU/1601/1.1/198, ABA GREENWAY – „GREEN EXPERIENCE” Realization of Hidasnémeti, Perin-Chym, Kechnec, Abaújvár, Telkibánya cross-border greenway

²⁷ SKHU/1902/1.1/082, Bike Paradise

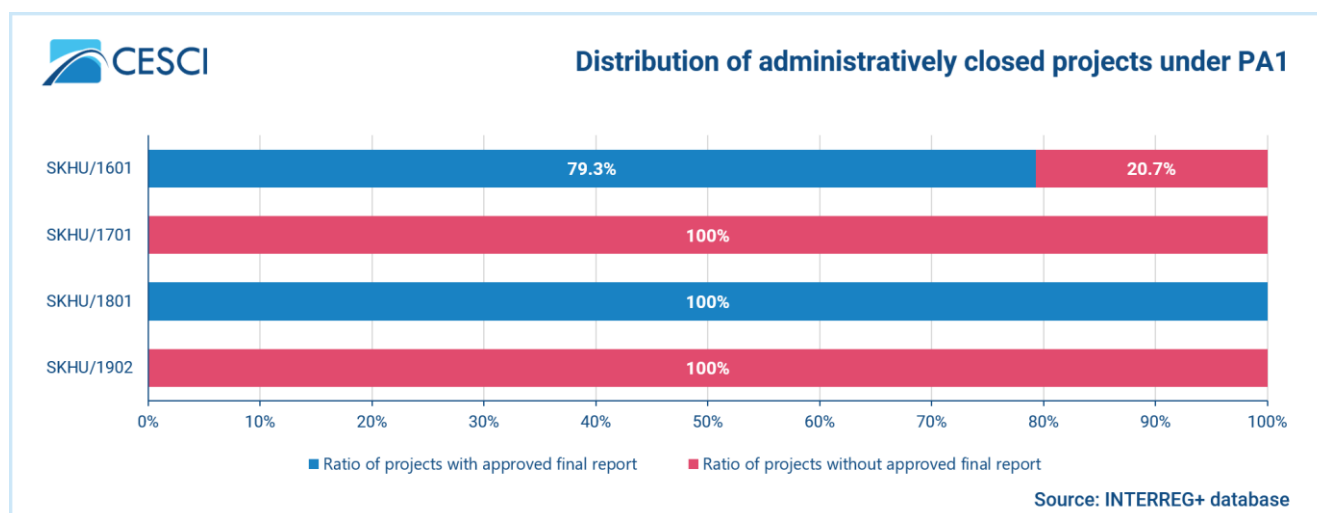
The scheduling of the projects was linked to the publication year of the related CfPs. The first small projects started in March 1st, 2019 (SKHU/ETA/1801 and SKHU/WETA/1801), while the last start date under the CfPs of 2018 was at the beginning of May 2020 (SKHU/WETA/1801). Until the end of the summer in 2021, every small project closed their implementation under CfPs of 2018. Under the CfPs of 2019 the first small projects started in February 1st, 2020 and the last closure was at the end of September 2022.

Figure 24: Duration of the small projects under PA1



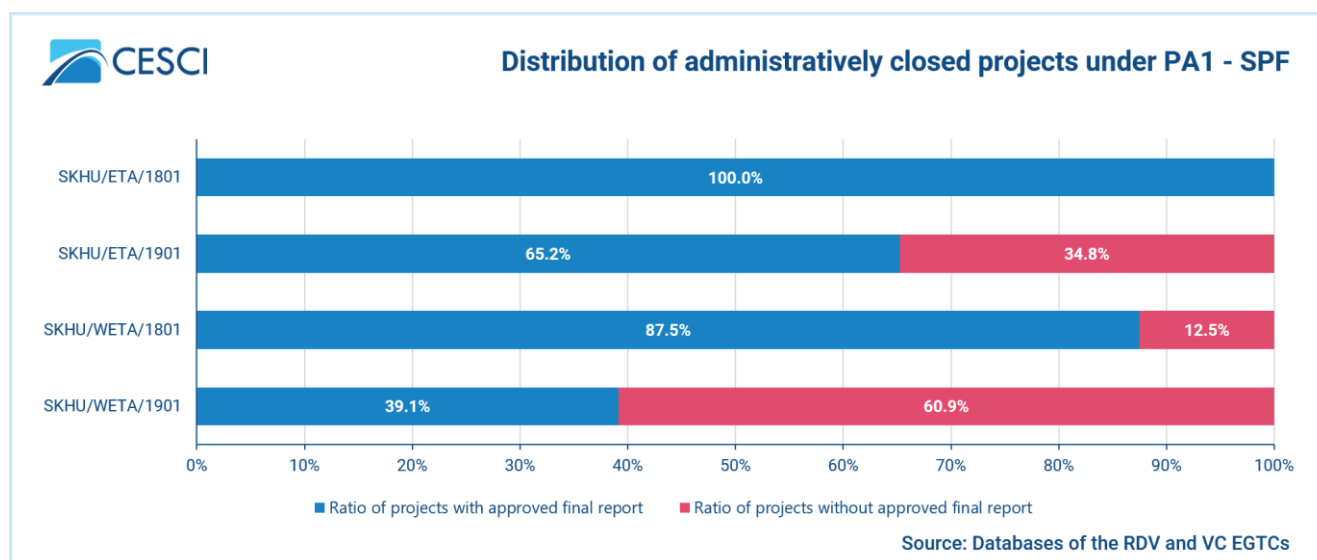
Nearly half of the normal projects (49%; 29 projects) had already submitted their final reports at the cut-off date, while the other half (51%; 30 projects) were still in progress from an administrative point of view. The ratio of projects with an approved final report was high under the first normal call (79.3%; 23 projects) and under the SME call (100%; 6 projects). Since the implementation of the Small Project Fund was still in progress, therefore no final report had been delivered by then. The situation was similar in the case of the second normal call, with 0% rate of final reports.

Figure 25: Distribution of administratively closed projects under PA1



The administrative closure of the small projects was also going slow, since only 62% (37 projects) of them had submitted their final report, whereas the number of missing reports was 23 (38%). As the following figure illustrates, the administrative closure of the first ETA projects was more advanced than the WETAs, since in the case of the CfPs of 2018 all the 6 ETA projects submitted their final report, while there was 1 WETA project still running. Concerning the CfPs of 2019, 65% (15 projects) of ETA projects were already completed, while this ratio was mere 39% (9 projects) in the western border area.

Figure 26: Distribution of administratively closed small projects under PA1



Under PA1, more than half of the EU contribution²⁸ (60%; EUR 40.9 million) was validated, and 37% of total ERDF funding (EUR 24.9 million) was before the validation process. The amount of unused money dropped to EUR 1.8 million (3%).

The **financial progress** was the most advanced in the case of SKHU/1801, where 96% (EUR 2.1 million) of the contribution was validated. The ratio of validated money was similarly high under the first normal

²⁸ SKHU/1701 includes the management costs and implementation costs as well.

call (87%; EUR 34.4 million) and the SPF umbrella call (55%; EUR 1.7 million), while in the case of the second normal call (EUR 2.5 million) the ratio was 11%. The ratio of the not validated allocation was the highest under the second normal call (89%; EUR 20.2 million) and SPF call (38%; EUR 1.2 million), where the reporting procedures progressed extremely slow. Since all SME call's projects and the majority of the first normal call's projects had already submitted the final report, the ratio of non-validated money was zero under SKHU/1801 and 9% (EUR 3.5 million) under SKHU/1601. The second normal call did not have remaining money, while under the first normal call (EUR 1.4 million) and SME call (EUR 90 000) it accounted for 4%, under the SPF call (EUR 231 000) 7%. The quantity of the unused amount may increase due to the accounting and certification of further projects.

On project level, the ratio of validated money was 80% or above under the first normal call. Four prolonged projects (*CULTPLAY*, *CtoC*²⁹, *GREX*, *TreeJoy*³⁰) represented the exception. Furthermore, the highest value of unused money was 15-16% under the *NATUR/DANUBEPARKS*³¹ and *SacraVelo*³². Under SKHU/1801, the *FEBO*³³ project utilised the EU contribution at the highest (the ratio of validated money is 99%), on the other hand the remaining contribution was 10% under the *SKHU XP centres*³⁴. In terms of the second normal call, the ratio of validated ERDF was below 50% – expect *TWO-ONE*³⁵ project by its 78% – since the majority of the projects were still on-going.

²⁹ SKHU/1601/1.1/206, Castle to castle

³⁰ SKHU/1601/1.1/217, Common heritage, joint future - Trees without borders

³¹ SKHU/1601/1.1/258, Taste of Danubian Nature

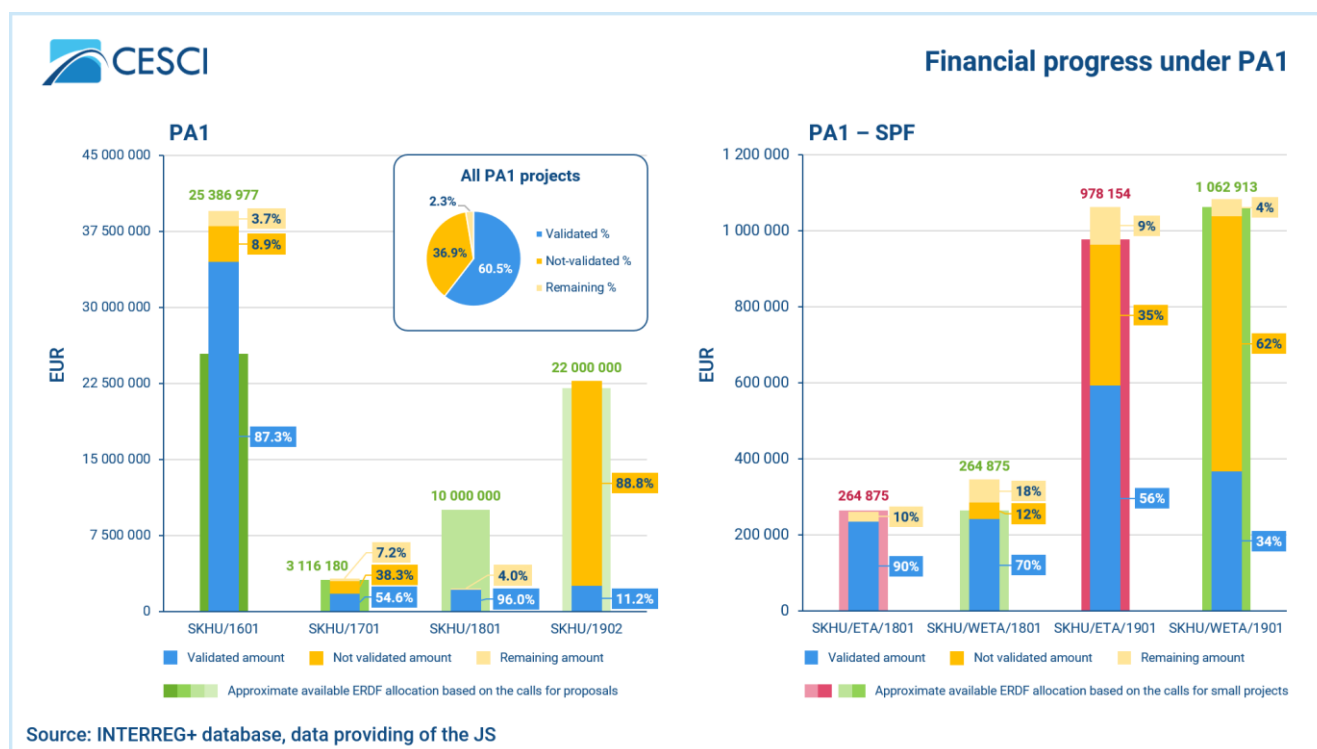
³² SKHU/1601/1.1/013, SacraVelo – Network of cross-border bicycle pilgrim routes in the Danube area

³³ SKHU/1801/1.1/005, Festival without borders

³⁴ SKHU/1801/1.1/022, Establishing experience centres in the Slovakian-Hungarian border regions

³⁵ SKHU/1902/1.1/021, Two temples, one heritage

Figure 27: Financial progress under PA1



The total amount of contracted ERDF of small projects was more than EUR 2.7 million, out of which only 52% (EUR 1.4 million) had already been validated by the cut-off date. The rate of not validated allocation was 39% (EUR 1 million), the remaining ERDF accounted for 8% (EUR 231 000), which was relatively high and was reasoned by the complex administrative procedures especially for new beneficiaries. Focusing on the CfPs, the validation process was the most advanced under the SKHU/ETA/1801 where the ratio was 90% (EUR 235 000) and all the rest ERDF belonged to the remaining category (10%; more than EUR 25 000). By contrast, in the case of SKHU/WETA/1801 the validated amount was 70% (EUR 241 600) and the ratio of non-validated allocation made up 12% (nearly EUR 43 000). At 2019 CfPs, the ratio of validated money was 34% on the west (EUR 367 000) where the majority of the ERDF had not been validated (62%; more than EUR 671 000).

The total management cost under PA1 was around EUR 467 000, divided equally between the two border areas (ETA and WETA). The financial progress of management cost was more advanced under ETA, as 76% (EUR 177 000) of the ERDF (secluded to management) was validated, while under WETA it was 61% (EUR 143 000).

In relation to the **output indicators**, six indicators (5 common specific and 1 programme specific) have been assigned to PA1, which are reported with yearly frequency. As the following table illustrates, the indicators give information about the productive investment (CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support, CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants), sustainable tourism (CO09 Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions), built roads (CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads), nature and biodiversity (CO23 Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain

a better conservation status) and green ways (O11 Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways')³⁶. Regarding the target values, the originally set goals were modified in three cases. The initial goal of CO13 Newly built roads was to achieve 7 km until 2023, but it has been modified to 2.8 km. Similar modification happened in the case of CO23 Supported area of habitats (from 100 549 hectares to 115 100 hectares) and O11 Green ways (from 89 km to 120 km).

Table 11: Output indicators of PA1 – Target values

ID	Name of indicator	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	Last modified target value (2023)
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	enterprises	annually	40
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	enterprises	annually	40
CO09	Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	annually	30 000
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	annually	2,8
CO23	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	hectares	annually	115 100
O11	Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	km	annually	120

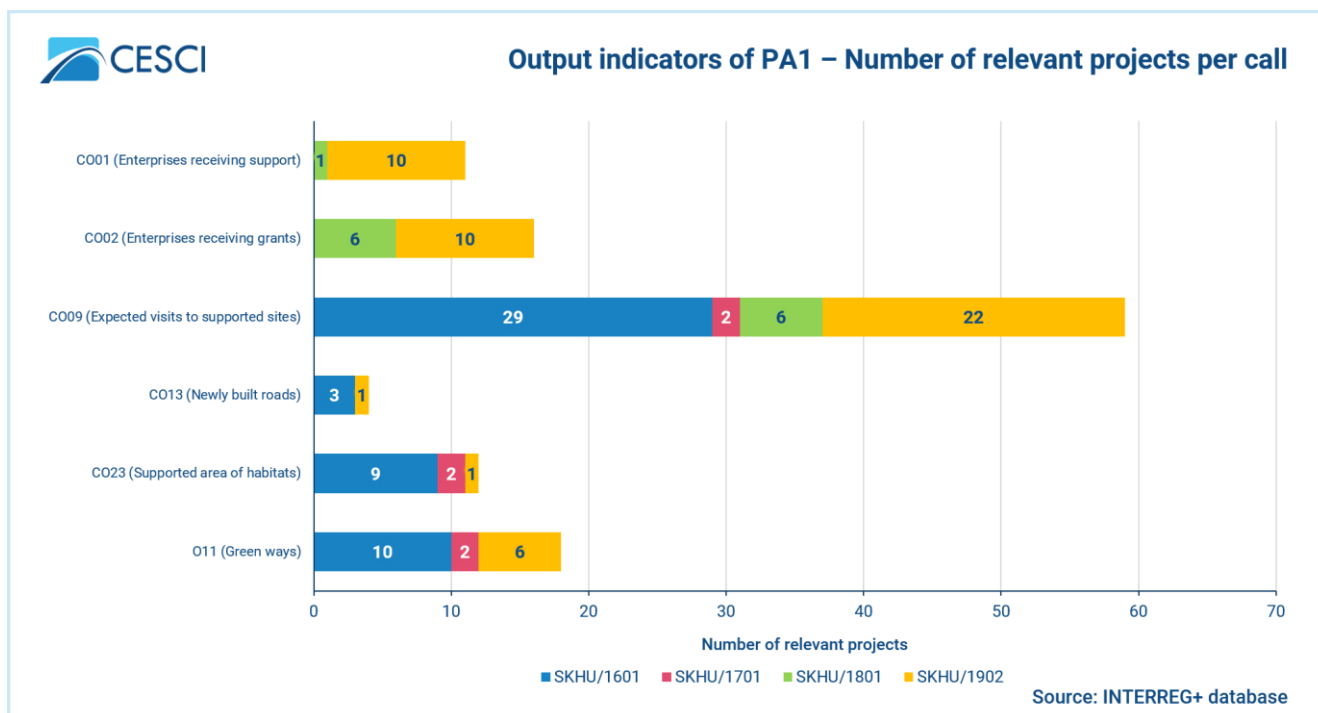
The fulfilment of these indicators is ensured by different number of projects presented on the following figures. Altogether 59 projects (the 2 SPF umbrella projects included) belong to PA1; most of them chose more than one indicator. In average, the number of indicators per project is 2 under the normal calls (SKHU/1601, SKHU/1902) and 3 under the SPF and SME calls (SKHU/1701, SKHU/1801). Altogether 2 projects (*WineCellars*³⁷, *Bird Tour*³⁸) have chosen 4 indicators and there is no project that has selected all the six indicators at the same time.

³⁶ In the following part of the analysis the indicators' shortened name is used. Find more information about the methodology of abbreviation in the Annex.

³⁷ SKHU/1902/1.1/051, The Development of Wine Tourism with Service Spaces - Historic Wine Cellars of Hercegkút and Malý Horeš

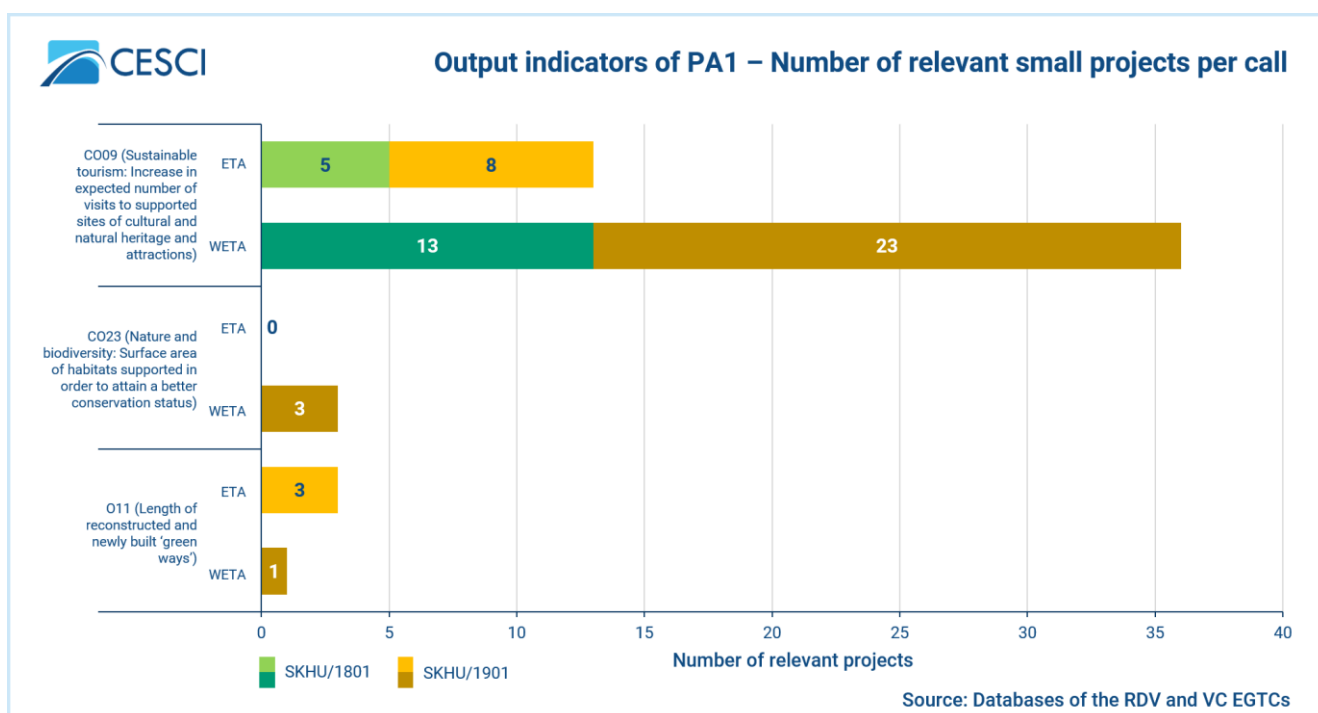
³⁸ SKHU/1902/1.1/060, Cross border development of bird watching based ecotourism in Special protection areas

Figure 28: Output indicators of PA1 – Number of relevant projects per call



In the following chart, the number of small projects per indicator is introduced. Out of the 6 relevant PA1 indicators, only 3 are targeted by small projects. The most frequented indicator is *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites* with 49 projects (63% of them belong to the western border area), whereas the *CO23 Supported area of habitats* is selected by 3 projects only. The average number of indicators per small project is nearly 1 (0.9), but 11 small projects have selected no indicators. This value is 0.7 under the ETA projects and 1.1 under the WETA projects. The highest number of indicators per project is 3, but there is only 1 project which achieved this value.

Figure 29: Output indicators of PA1 – Number of relevant small projects per call



In terms of the yearly progress of the output indicators of PA1, the first achievements were registered in 2018, which was a milestone year for 4 indicators. Two of them (*CO02 Enterprises receiving grants*, *CO13 Newly built roads*) had a 'zero target' in 2018, while in the case of the other two indicators (*CO23 Supported area of habitats*, *O11 Green ways*) the initial data were 62 percentage point and 16pp: higher than the expected values by that milestone. Moreover, in the case of *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites* the target value of 2023 was already completed in 2018, and in the following year the goal of *O11 Green ways* was also achieved. After that, in 2020 the *CO23 Supported area of habitats* indicator, in 2021 the *CO13 Newly built roads* indicator achieved the final goal. At the cut-off date two indicators (*CO01 Enterprises receiving support*, *CO02 Enterprises receiving grants*) did not accomplish the final targets, but the deficiency was only 10pp (4 enterprises). Nonetheless, according to the potential information given by the beneficiaries, this 10pp will not be fulfilled by 2023.

In 2021³⁹, the *O11 Green ways* and *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites* were the most moderate and feasible indicators, since their achieved values exceeded the final goals by +527pp and +3 375pp. In the case of *CO23 Supported area of habitats* and *CO13 Newly built roads* the overperformance was only +7pp and +11pp. Taking into consideration the projects' target values – based on INTERREG+ system –, the rate of overperformance is higher than the aforementioned values (except *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites*), and the fulfilment of *CO01 Enterprises receiving support* is also guaranteed.

The remarkable overperformance of *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites* is based on the fact that the estimation of the target values was quite problematic since it measures the 'estimated increase in number of visits to a site in the year following project completion'. Although, some of these sites did not have previous tourism activity and the multiple visits of one visitor could not be excluded. Therefore, the estimation cannot be realistically transferred to actual achievements. Owing to the synergies between the projects or the outstanding natural or/and cultural heritage, there are some projects which significantly overperformed the programme's planned achievements. For instance, in the framework of *ZOO4NAT*⁴⁰, the planned number of visitors (9 000 visitors) at Budapest Zoo greatly lagged behind from the achieved values (209 253 visitors). Under the *SK-HU FOR FORESTS II*⁴¹ the forestry educational path was visited by 71 603 visitors, contrary to the planned 1 500, but the *RailGate*⁴² should also be mentioned which attracted nearly 15 000 additional visitors (instead of the planned 1 500). Furthermore, the fulfilment of *CO23 Supported area of habitats* was greatly ensured by the project *NATUR/DANUBEPARKS*, while the *O11 Green ways* was strongly supported by *DANUBE BIKE&BOAT* (created 250 km green ways) and *Bodrog Active tourism*⁴³ (developed 213.22 km green ways).

³⁹ Due to the discrepancy between the magnitude of the values reported in 2021 (see AIR 2021) and the 2022 data registered in INTERREG+ at the cut-off date, the data of the most recently published AIR have been used to assess the performance of the indicators, that reflects the situation of 2021.

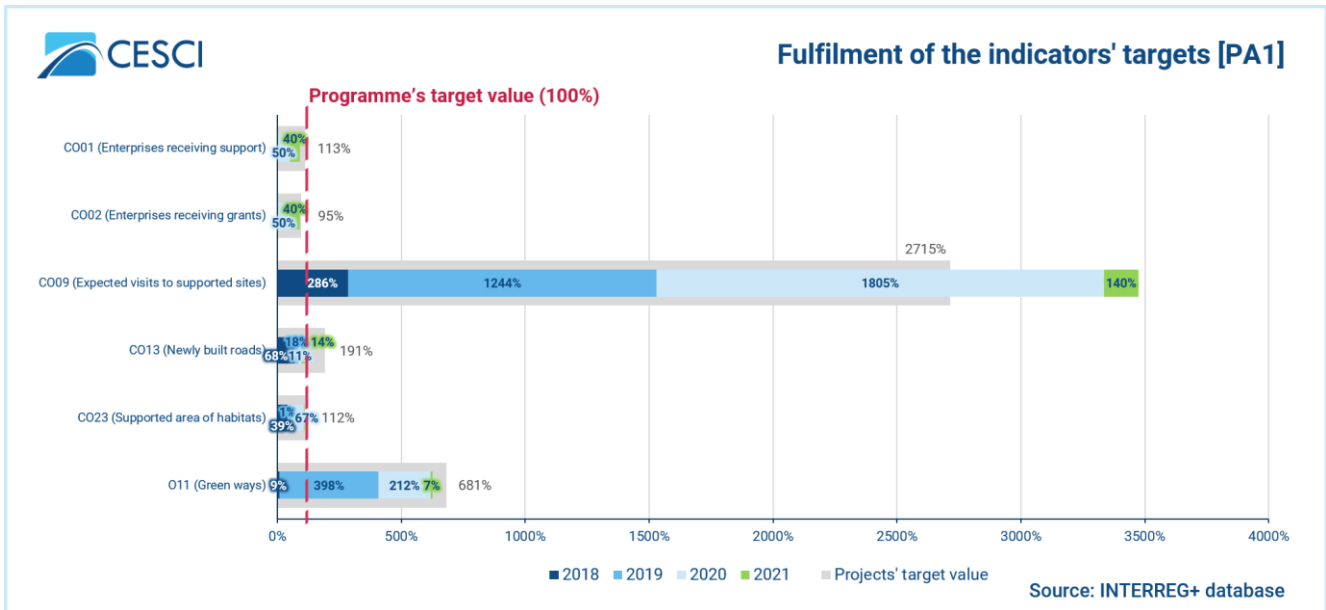
⁴⁰ SKHU/1601/1.1/051, Slovakian and Hungarian Zoos for the Conservation of Native Fauna along the border regions

⁴¹ SKHU/1601/1.1/010, Helping natural forests together

⁴² SKHU/1601/1.1/031, Narrow gauge railways as attractions and gates to nature

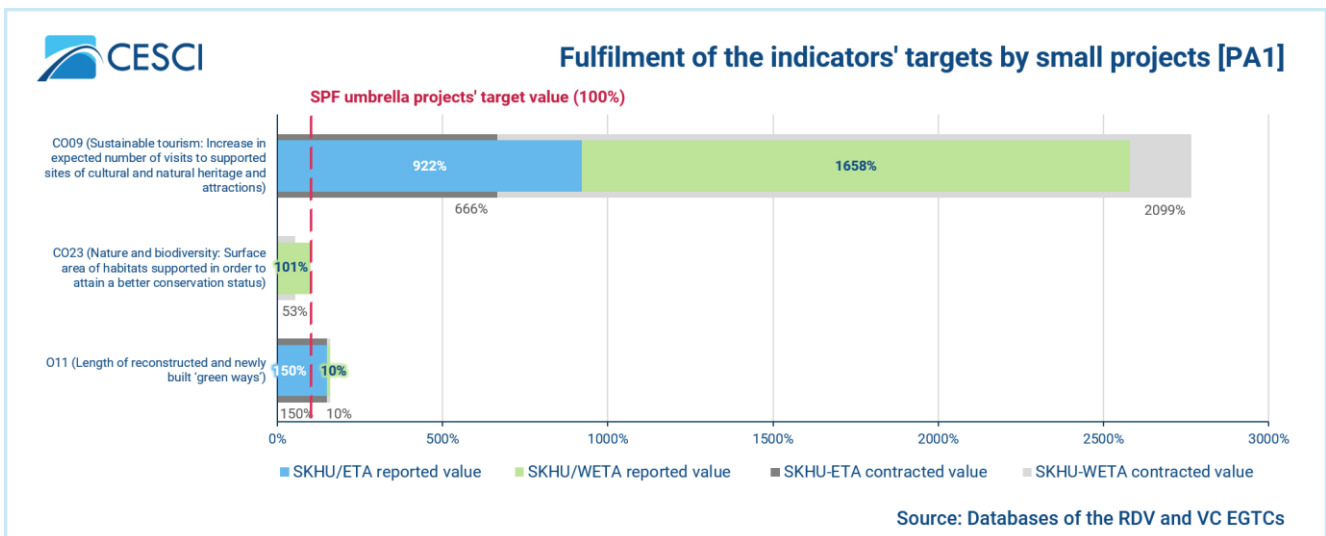
⁴³ SKHU/1601/1.1/038, Creation of a water amusement trail on the river Bodrog and its tributaries

Figure 30: Fulfilment of the indicators' targets (PA1)



With regard to the small projects, the programme's target values are achieved under PA1. There is a great difference among the values of outperformance since the *CO23 Supported area of habitats* has exceeded the programme's target only by +1pp (by 29 hectares), while the *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites* has surpassed the programme goal by +2 480pp (99 189 visits). On PA level, the indicator of *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites* – which greatly outperformed the programme target – has not fulfilled the project goal yet, since 7pp (7 422 visits) is still missing. In the case of the other two indicators, the projects' target values are achieved with +88pp (*CO23 Supported area of habitats*) and zero (*O11 Green ways*) surplus. Comparing the performance of ETA and WETA projects, the only notable difference can be observed under *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites*, where the ETA projects fulfilled its project goal by +38pp (by 10 235 visits), while the WETA projects fell short by -21pp (17 657 visits).

Figure 31: Fulfilment of the indicators' targets by small projects (PA1)



In terms of S.M.A.R.T. criteria, the specificity, measurability and relevance of the indicators are mostly suitable, except for *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites*, as the number of expected future visits is impossible to measure in the present. Although, most of the indicators has fulfilled the target values prior to 2023, but there are two indicators (*CO09 Expected visits to supported sites*, *O11 Green ways*) where the achieved value is two times higher than the target goal. This early fulfilment of aims puts the time bounding into question. The accomplishment of *CO02 Enterprises receiving grants* is not ensured by 2023 which impairs the results of achievability.

Table 12: Output indicators of PA1 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is achievable and ambitious.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target value should be achieved and the frequency of the measurement are also well-defined.
CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is ambitious but the achievability is not guaranteed.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target value should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
CO09 Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	The indicator is specific, but the interpretation and calculation require more attention from the beneficiaries' side.	The number of future visits is impossible to measure in the present. The JS should provide a methodological explanation to ensure that the data are properly measured.	The target value proved to be not ambitious enough. The achieved value is more than thirty-five times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The indicator measures a future commitment, so the achievement of the indicator cannot be measured at the end of the project.
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is not so ambitious since it was achieved in 2021.	The relevance of the indicator is questionable, as the newly built roads can endanger the natural heritage.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
CO23 Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is not so ambitious since it was achieved in 2020.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
O11 Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable.	The target value proved to be not ambitious enough. The achieved value is six times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.

2.1.1.2 Quantification of the PA2's performance

Under PA2 only one **call for proposals** was published which was a normal, continuously open call (SKHU/1601). The call was published in the end of July 2016 and closed in February 2018 after four deadlines announced (3 November 2016, 15 February 2017, 3 November 2017 and 19 February 2018).

The SKHU/1601 is in line with the intervention logic of PA2, since the 3 specific objectives definitely contribute to the enhancement of cross-border mobility. The first objective aims to increase the density of border crossing points by preparations of investments (elaboration of studies, analyses, feasibility studies etc.) and construction of cross-border infrastructure (roads, bridges, ferries or noise reduction facilities). These measures are designed to developing direct links to the TEN-T network. The goal of the second specific objective is to improve the cross-border public transport services. This objective encompasses activities such as development of cross-border intelligent transport systems, integration of cross-border public transport services, investments in infrastructure, development of demand-driven cross-border transport services, preparation of investments (elaboration of studies) or reduction of noise pollution. The third objective ensures opportunity to improve the cross-border logistic services. The eligible actions include the realisation of cross-border cooperation initiatives in the field of logistics, development of integrated service systems, investments in infrastructure (stations, ports etc.) and preparation of investments (studies, analyses etc.). Out of these three specific objectives, the *SO2.2.2 Improving cross-border logistic services* was withdrawn in 2018 due to the lack of interest.

Table 13: Overview of the calls under PA2

Call ID	Tool	Open period	Focus	Planned ERDF allocation to the projects under the respective action (EUR)	Maximum available ERDF grant amount per project (EUR)
SKHU/1601	Normal	Start date: 29 July 2016 Open continuously with deadlines of 3 November and 15 February in every year Final closure: 19 February 2018	SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border	16 690 000	not specified
			SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services	10 980 000	100 000 – 1 000 000
			SO2.2.2 Improving cross-border logistic services	6 938 080	200 000 – 2 000 000

Under the first normal call, the total planned ERDF allocation was EUR 34.6 million which was divided between the three **specific objectives**. The biggest amount of contribution (nearly EUR 16.7 million) was allocated to the first specific objective (*SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border*), where the value of available ERDF grant per project was not specified. By contrast, under the second objective (*SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services*) almost EUR 11 million was allocated, from which 1 project could receive maximum EUR 1 million support. The third (withdrawn) objective (*SO2.2.2 Improving cross-border logistic services*) covered nearly EUR 7 million, where the project limit could fluctuate between EUR 200 000 and EUR 2 million. Due to the cancellation of SO2.2.2 and the relatively low interest towards PA2, the residual money (EUR 12.1 million ERDF) was reallocated to PA1.

Table 14: Supported actions per calls under PA2

Call ID	Short name of actions	Number of projects	Total cost of actions (EUR)
SKHU/1601	2.1/2 Construction of cross-border roads, bridges and ferries and infrastructure, including passive noise reduction	2	17 188 841.22
	2.2.1/2 Demand-driven cross-border transport services.	1	921 155
	2.2.1/5 Integration of cross-border public transport services, establishing transport associations	3	7 878 271.92
	2.2.1/6 Development of cross-border intelligent transport systems (ITS)	1	980 954.7

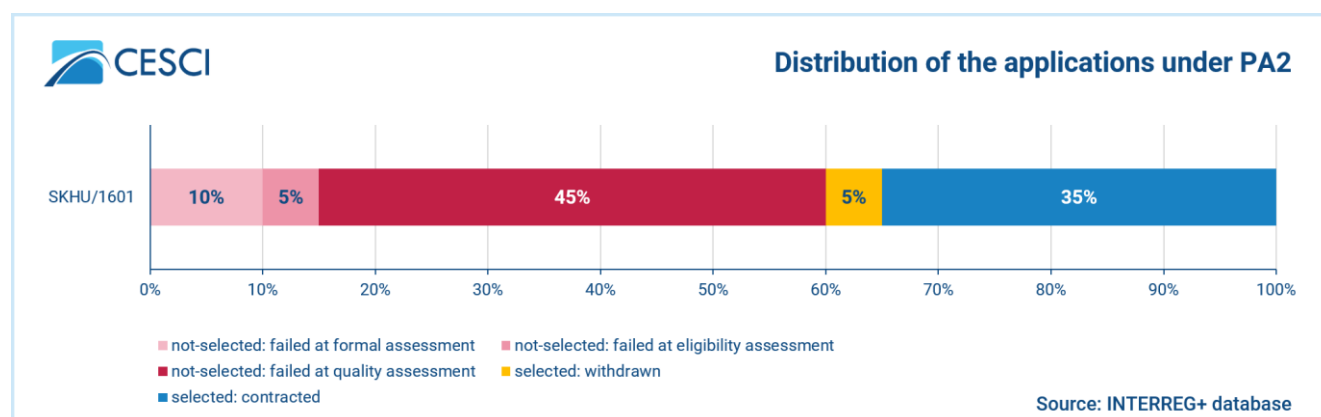
Altogether, **20 applications** were submitted under PA2 out of which 7 were implemented (35%) while the rest 13 applications (65%) failed during the selection process. Due to the continuously open call system, in the first period the potential applicants were not motivated to quickly prepare their proposals. In order to intensify the project development process, the JS launched personal consultations and

communication actions, which directly encouraged the interested partners to submit their development ideas.

More than half of the PA2 applications (60%; 12 applications) were submitted under the *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services*, while the number of received applications under *SO2.2.2 Improving cross-border logistic services* was 6 (30%) and the rest 2 applications (10%) belonged to the *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border*. It implies that the development of cross-border public transport services generated the biggest interest. Out of the 7 implemented projects, 2 were linked to the density increasement of border crossing points, and 5 to the cross-border public transport services. One logistics project was selected for funding but the state aid conditions were unfavourable for the applicant, therefore the proposal has been withdrawn. 12 applications (7 in the field of public transport, 5 under the logistics objective) did not meet the selection criteria.

Considering the evaluation process, every PA2 proposal met the admissibility criteria. During the formal and eligibility checks 16 applications out of 20 (80% of the applications) needed to submit completion request. Finally, 2 applications failed at formal and 1 application at eligibility assessment while 17 applications got into the quality assessment where 7 of them became selected.

Figure 32: Distribution of the applications under PA2



During the implementation period some unexpected (external and internal) factors emerged what influenced the **duration of the projects**. All the 7 PA2 projects have used the opportunity of prolongation which caused averagely 17 months longer timeframe. Consequently, the average duration of a project increased to more than three and a half year (43 months).

The average change of duration was 19 months under *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border* and 16 months under *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services*. Among the projects, the greatest duration change was more than two years (25 months) under the *KOMBI*⁴⁴ project, but the timeframe of *Bridge Dobrohošť - Dunakiliti*⁴⁵ project has also been changed at least by 24 months. The smallest modification of the implementation period is

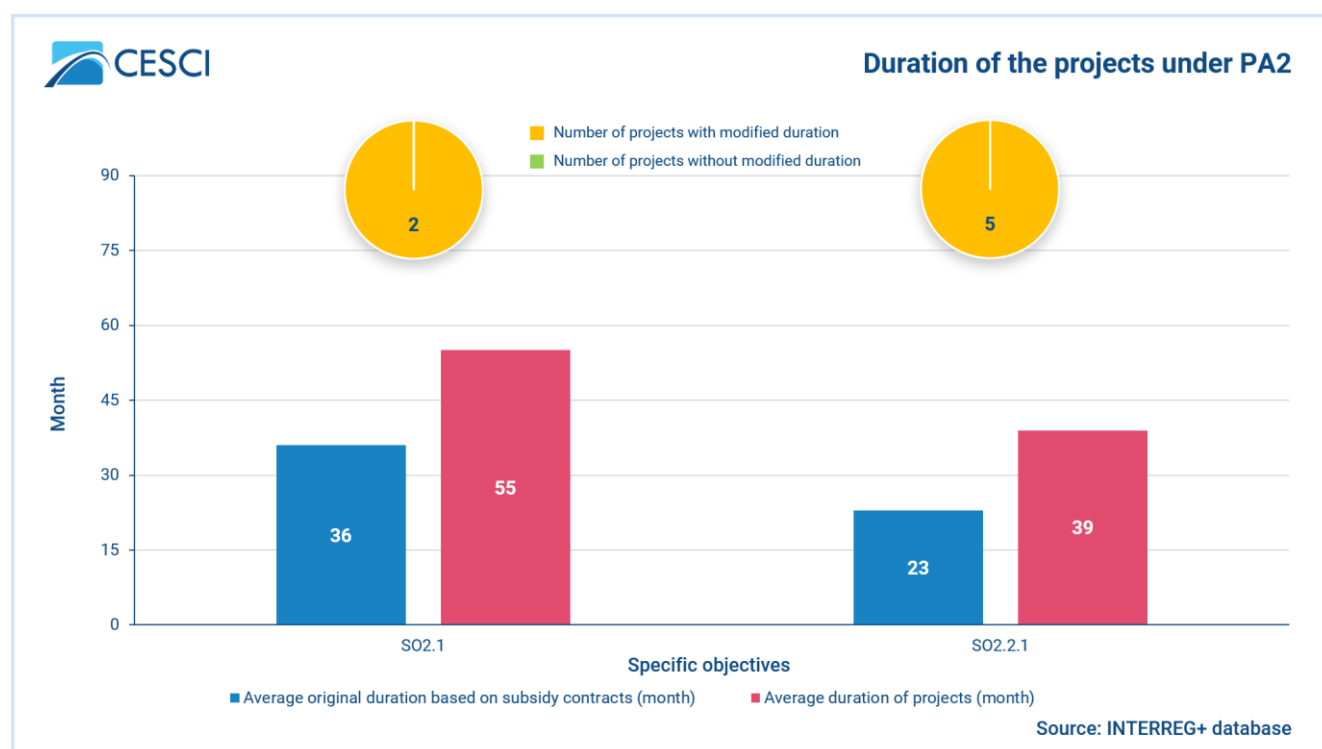
⁴⁴ SKHU/1601/2.2.1/109, KOMBI - Cross-border integrated bike sharing system

⁴⁵ SKHU/1601/2.1/361, Výstavba mosta pre peších a cyklistov Dobrohošť – Dunakiliti/Doborgaz - Dunakiliti gyalogos- és kerékpáros híd építése

10 months (under *Cross-Bike*⁴⁶). Regarding the average duration of the projects, in the case of *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border* is nearly four and a half year (55 months), while under the other specific objective is 39 months. The *Bridge Dobrohošť - Dunakiliti* project should be highlighted out from the averages, since its implementation period is extended to five years (60 months).

The first project started in November 2017 (*Mária Valéria Bike*⁴⁷) which ended also firstly in the end of March 2020. The project launched the latest was the *Ipolydamásd – Chl'aba bridge*⁴⁸ (beginning of February 2019), but it is the *Bridge Dobrohošť - Dunakiliti* which will be completed the last, at the very end of 2023.

Figure 33: Duration of the projects under PA2



Considering the **financial allocation** under PA2, the value of the union support is evaluated through the comparison of CP, CfP (SKHU/1601) and INTERREG+. The available ERDF sum based on the original version of the CP was EUR 34.61 million which was fully allocated to the SKHU/1601 call. Around half of the allocation (48%; EUR 16.7 million) concentrated on *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border*, one third (32%; EUR 11 million) was designed to the *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services*, and 20% (EUR 6.9 million) to the *SO2.2.2 Improving cross-border logistic services*. As the *SO2.2.2* has been withdrawn because of the lack of

⁴⁶ SKHU/1601/2.2.1/360, Establishing a Cross-border Community Bicycle Transport System on the settlements of Sátoraljaújhely, Zemplén, and Szőlőske

⁴⁷ SKHU/1601/2.2.1/127, Public cross-border bicycle-sharing system in Esztergom and Štúrovo

⁴⁸ SKHU/1601/2.1/357, Building Ipoly-bridge between Ipolydamásd - Chl'aba

interest on the applicants' behalf, the contracted EU contribution within PA2 has decreased to EUR 22.9 million.

The total cost dedicated to Action 2.1/2 (*Construction of cross-border roads, bridges and ferries and infrastructure, including passive noise reduction*) is more than EUR 17 million, which has been spent for the realisation of 2 projects. The Action 2.2.1/5 (*Integration of cross-border public transport services, establishing transport associations*) also owns significant amount of money (more than EUR 7.8 million) absorbed by 3 projects. The rest of the two actions cumulate more than EUR 920 000 subsequently, as both of them incorporate only 1-1 project.

The average budget of a PA2 project was more than EUR 3.8 million. The total cost of 4 projects was between EUR 920 000 and EUR 1 million; there were 2 projects (*Ferry in Neszmély-Radvaň*⁴⁹ and *Ipolydamásd - Chl'aba bridge*) whose budget was around EUR 6-7 million. The project of *Bridge Dobrohošť - Dunakiliti* stands out from other projects with its EUR 10.4 million funding.

Table 15: Source of funding based on SKHU/1601

Country	Beneficiary	Rate of ERDF contribution	Rate of national co-financing	Rate of own contribution
SK	State administration organisations	85%	15%	0%
	Other public administration organisations	85%	10%	5%
	Higher territorial units and their budgetary and contributory organisations			
	Municipalities and their budgetary and contributory organisations			
	NGOs/NPOs	85%	5%	10%
	Private sector out of state aid schemes			
HU	Central budgetary organisation	85%	15%	0%
	Other organization	85%	10%	5%

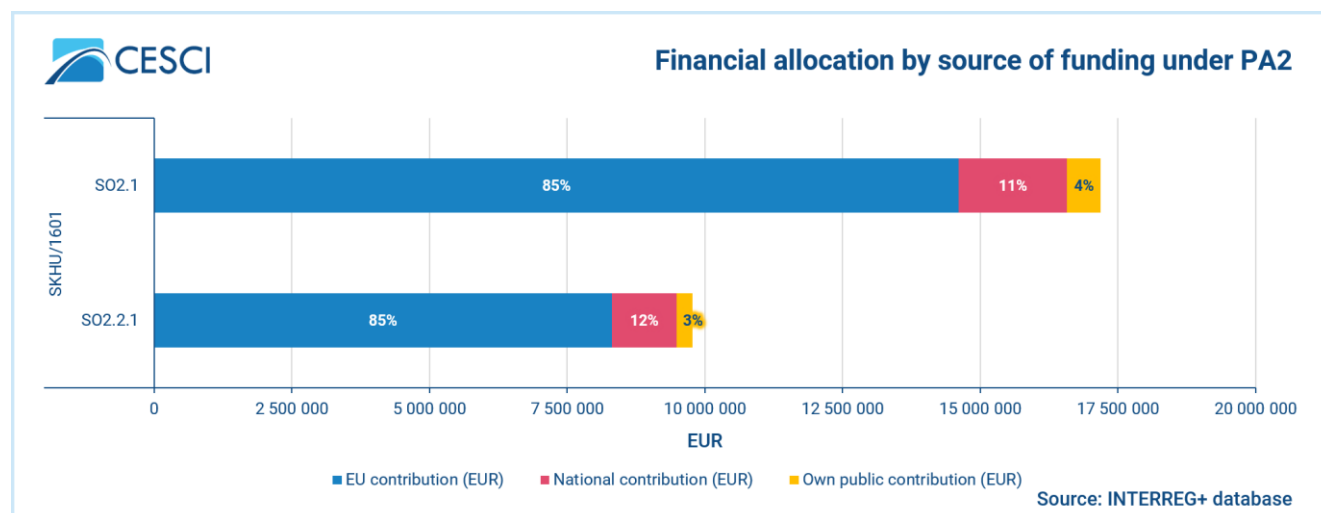
With regard to the financial allocation by source of funding under PA2, the available total ERDF contribution is EUR 22.9 million. The rest EUR 4 million is divided between national co-financing (EUR 3.1 million) and the beneficiaries' own resources (EUR 902 000). Within the 15% co-financing, the national contribution predominates (12%), while beneficiaries pay only 3% of the costs by average.

In the case of *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border*, the EU contribution is over EUR 14.6 million, the national contribution is nearly EUR 2 million (11%) while the own contribution is more than EUR 600 000 (4%). In comparison, the *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services* includes moderate values: the EU contribution is EUR 8.3 million,

⁴⁹ SKHU/1601/2.2.1/362, Building cross border ferry connection and necessary infrastructure between Neszmély and Radvaň nad Dunajom

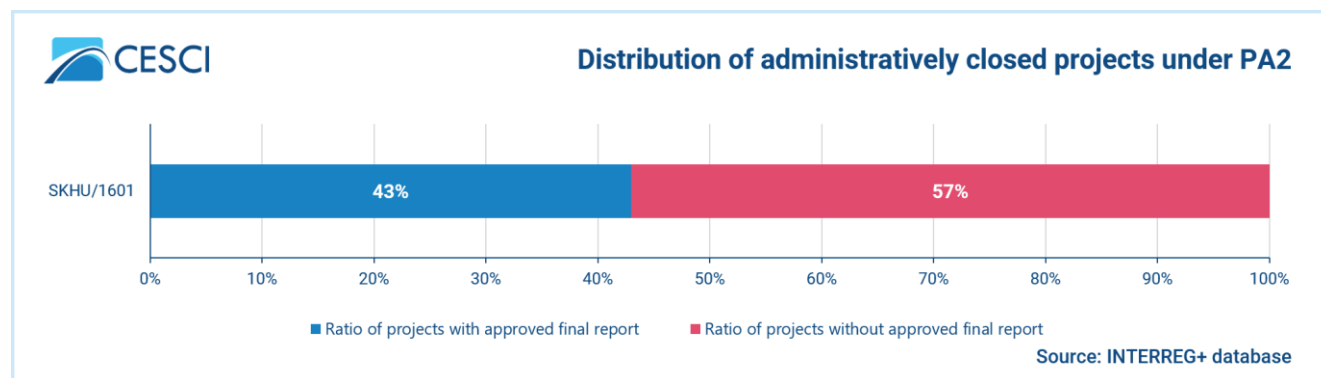
the national contribution is less than EUR 1.2 million (12%) and the own contribution does not reach EUR 300 000 (3%). It is worth mentioning, that the own contribution is of public by origin in the case of 6 projects, whereas in the project of *Bridge Dobrohošť – Dunakiliti* the 5% of own contribution is financed from private funding.

Figure 34: Financial allocation by sources of funding under PA2



By the cut-off date 4 projects out of 7 have not submitted their final report. The 3 final reports belonged to the *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services*.

Figure 35: Distribution of administratively closed projects under PA2



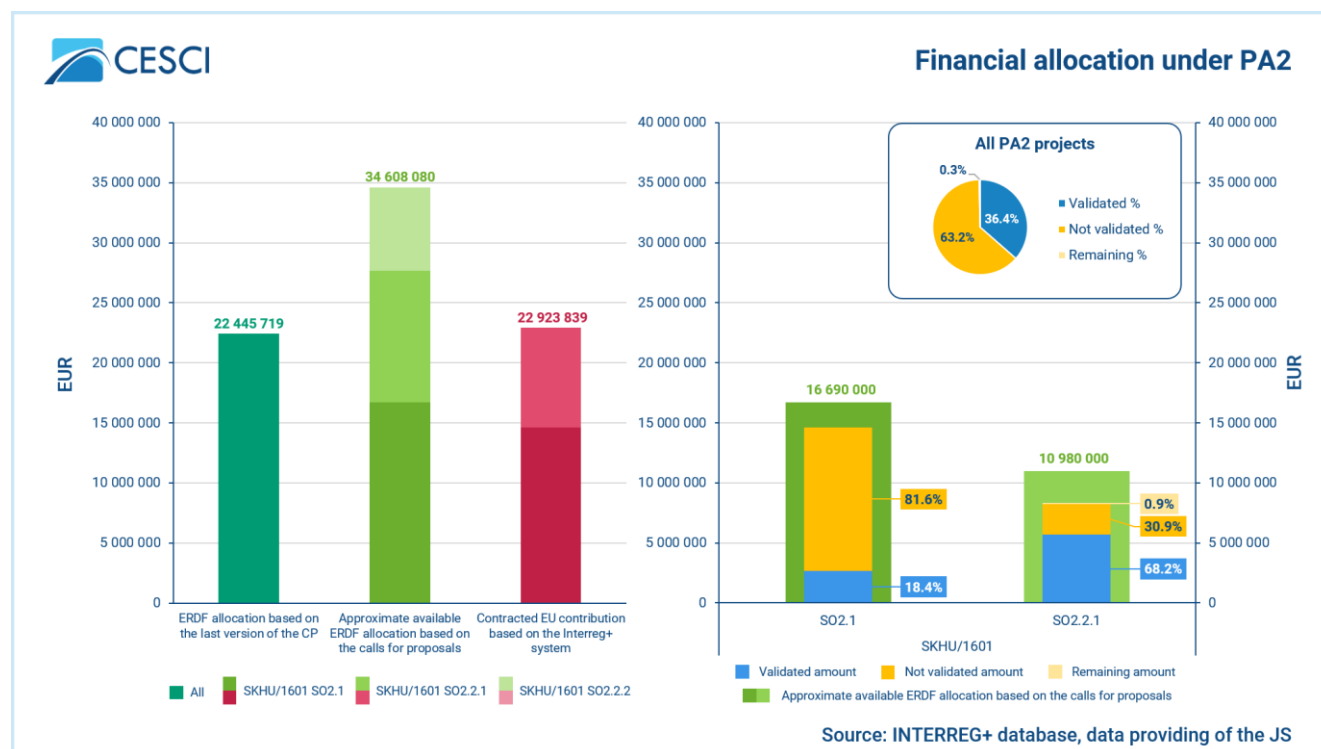
Accordingly, more than half of the ERDF contribution was not validated (63%; EUR 14.5 million) and only 37% (EUR 8.4 million) had gone through the validation process.

The financial progress was the most advanced under the *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services*, as 68% of the contribution was validated (EUR 5.7 million). Furthermore, its remaining allocation did not exceed 1% (EUR 78 000). In the case of the other SO the validation process was in an initial phase as 82% of the total allocated fund (EUR 12 million) had not been validated, and only 18% (EUR 2.7 million) of the ERDF had been reported with no remaining allocation.

On project level, the ratio of validated money was at least 90% in the case of 4 projects under *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services*. The ratio of validated spending was around 45-51% under *Ipolydamásd - Chl'aba bridge* and the *Ferry in Neszmély-Radvaň*, whereas the financial progress

dramatically lagged behind in the case of the *Bridge Dobrohošť – Dunakiliti* (1%). Regarding the remaining amount, currently 3 projects (*Mária Valéria Bike, KOMBI and Cross-Bike*) reported remaining items with a maximum of 4% which does not surpass EUR 34 000 (*KOMBI*).

Figure 36: Financial allocation under PA2



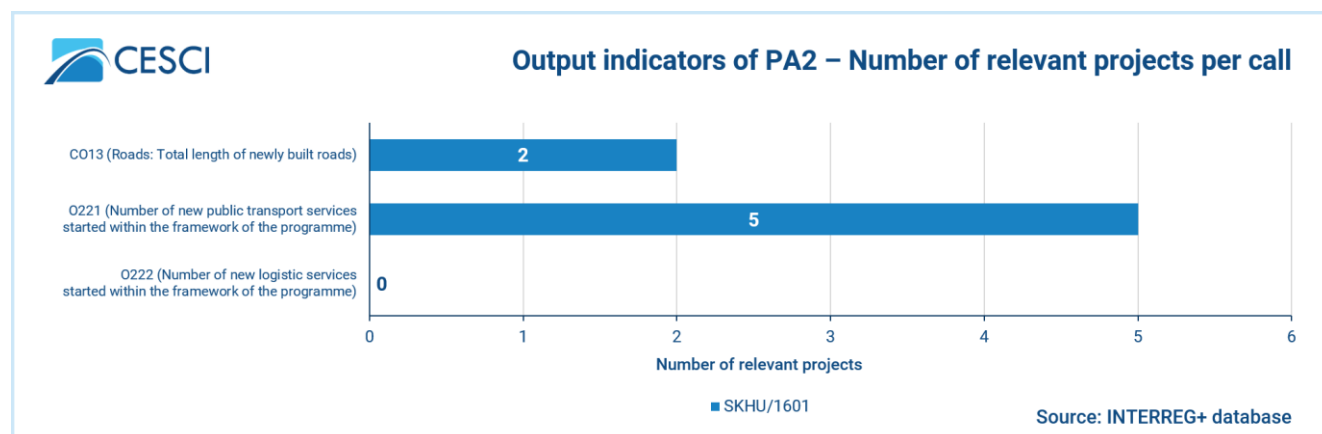
Altogether 3 **output indicators** belong to PA2 out of which 1 is a common specific and 2 are programme specific indicators. These indicators provide information about the newly built roads (*CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads*), new public transport services (*O221 Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme*) and new logistic services (*O222 Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme*). All of them should have been reported by annual frequency, but the indicator of logistic services cannot be reported due to its cancellation. The target value of 2023 has changed only under the common specific indicator since the initial goal (9 km) was reduced to 3.15 km.

Table 16: Output indicators of PA2 – Target values

ID	Name of indicator	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	Last modified target value (2023)
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	annually	3.15
O221	Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	piece	annually	10
O222	Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme	piece	annually	n.r.

The fulfilment of these indicators is ensured by different number of projects. The indicator of newly built roads is supported by 2 projects, while the indicator of public transport services is targeted by 5 projects. In comparison with other PAs, under PA2 every project chose only one indicator, therefore the average number of indicators per project is 1.

Figure 37: Output indicators of PA2 – Number of relevant projects per call



Regarding the yearly progress of the output indicators of PA2, the first achievements were registered in 2018, which was a milestone year for the 3 indicators. The milestone target value of the common specific indicator was 'zero', as the operations were selected in the 2nd quarter of 2018. In the case of the O221 *Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme* indicator the milestone that should have been achieved was 2 public transport services. By 2018, there was fulfilled one. Due to the CP modification in 2018, the indicator of logistic services was left out from reporting. Until 2021 only one indicator showed achievements, and none of them have achieved the target values. Regarding the potential values of the programme and the beneficiaries, both indicators will be fulfilled by 2023, out of which the common specific indicator will slightly exceed the goal (by less than 2 percentage point). The fulfilled indicators are achieved by KOMBI and Mária Valéria Bike projects.

Figure 38: Fulfilment of the indicators' targets (PA2)

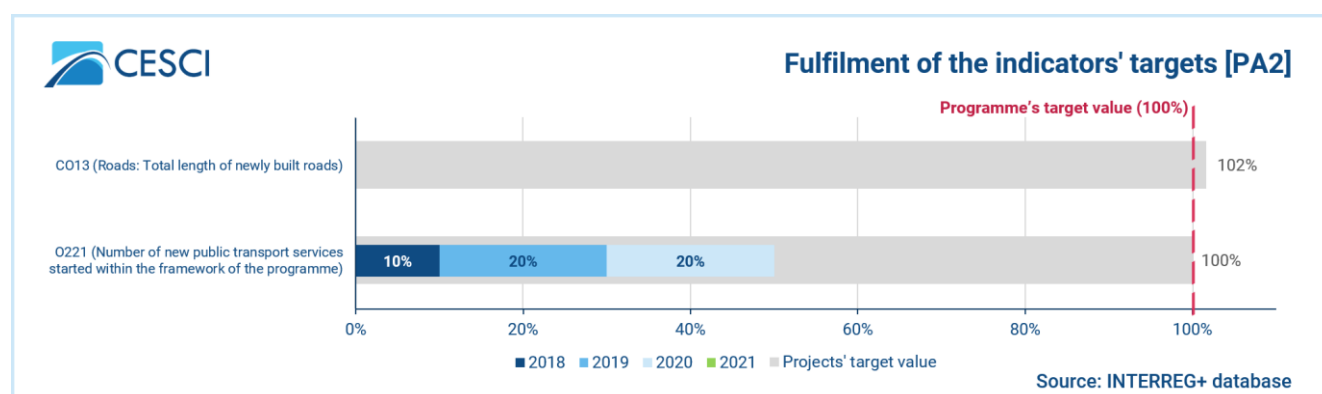


Table 17 refers to the fulfilment of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria of the indicators. Excluding the indicator of new logistic services, the progress and the fulfilment of the indicators are adequate, serious problems cannot be mentioned. The indicators are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound.

Table 17: Output indicators of PA2 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is achievable and ambitious. However, the value prior to modification was even more ambitious.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA	The year in which the target value should be achieved and the frequency of the measurement are also well-defined.
O221 Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is achievable and ambitious.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA	The year in which the target value should be achieved and the frequency of the measurement are also well-defined. However, the achievements are presented only in the very late phase of the implementation.
O222 Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme	The indicator is specific, but no projects have been realised thereunder.	The indicator is measurable	The target value is achievable and ambitious, but due to the absence of projects, it won't be fulfilled.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA	Due to the absence of projects, it cannot be evaluated.

2.1.1.3 Quantification of the PA3's performance

Altogether three **calls for proposals** were published within PA3, out of which all of them were TAPE (Territorial action plan for employment) calls. The first one (SKHU/1703) was an open call, while the two other ones (SKHU/1802 and SKHU/1901) were restricted. The first TAPE call opened in the end of 2017 (from 8th of September until 15th of December), which aimed to select the most suitable complex development action plans (concepts). The first round filtered the action plans. During the second round (SKHU/1802), the beneficiaries of the selected TAPes were requested to elaborate and develop their previously drafted-only project proposals. The timeframe of this second TAPE call covered the period between 10th of August and 12th of November in 2018. Those applicants having failed the eligibility assessment had the opportunity to apply for the third TAPE call. This call was open from 11th of June until 8th of July in 2019.

There is a strong correlation between the intervention logic of PA3 and the published calls which included two key actions focusing on development of local products and services (to create new working places) and improvement of cross-border labour mobility. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the

key actions, supplementary actions were also published in the calls. These eligible actions addressed the modernisation and structural transformation of specific areas, launching of integrated cross-border employment initiatives, fostering of business services (that promoting employment) and facilitating joint education and training programmes.

Table 18: Overview of the calls under PA3

Call ID	Tool	Open period	Planned ERDF allocation to the projects under the respective action (EUR)	Maximum available ERDF amount per TAPE (EUR)
SKHU/1703	TAPE	8/09/2017 – 15/12/2017	34 608 080	above 9 000 000 (based on the number of workplaces)
SKHU/1802	TAPE	10/08/2018 – 12/11/2018	34 608 080	above 9 000 000 (based on the number of workplaces)
SKHU/1901	TAPE	11/06/2019 – 8/07/2019	2 300 803.42	above 9 000 000 (based on the number of workplaces)

Under the TAPE calls, the available **ERDF allocation** was altogether EUR 34.6 million from which the SKHU/1901 call was published for projects covering the remaining allocation of EUR 2.3 million (which had not been allocated within SKHU/1802). The maximum available ERDF amount per project was linked to the number of workplaces to be created by the TAPE. The higher was the number of new planned working places, the larger was the budget of the TAPE. For instance, creation of 20 or more new workplaces enabled the TAPE project to receive more than EUR 9 million.

PA3 supported 7 different actions (see [Table 19](#)).

Table 19: Supported actions per calls under PA3

Call ID	Short name of actions	Number of projects	Total cost of actions (EUR)
SKHU/1802	3.1/1 Coordination and communication activities	9	1 632 743.17
	3.1/2 Joint education and training programmes	7	1 119 863.54
	3.1/3 Business services promoting employment	2	327 282.76
	3.1/4 Cross-border employment initiatives	1	187 991.53
	3.1/5 Modernization and structural transformation of specific areas	6	9 386 454.51
	3.1/6 Improving cross-border labour mobility	4	15 991 083.92
	3.1/7 Development of local products and services creating new working places	15	12 270 678.81

Call ID	Short name of actions	Number of projects	Total cost of actions (EUR)
SKHU/1901	3.1/7 Development of local products and services creating new working places	3	2 610 007.39

Under the SKHU/1703 call 9 **action plan concepts** from among the submitted 16 were awarded. The 16 TAPes included 98 project proposals in total (6 project by average) with a total budget claim of EUR 53 million. The selection process was divided into two main steps: admissibility and quality assessments. The former one targeted the fulfilment of administrative requirements (all proposals completed this evaluation part), while the quality assessment procedure included further 3 evaluation steps carried out by the JS, the NUTS III regions and sectorial experts, subsequently. At the end of the JS and regional assessments, the proposals received joint scores based on which 3 proposals were failed, while the sectorial assessment filtered out further 4 proposals. This innovative assessment procedure was tested first at this call⁵⁰.

Since the second TAPE call was a restricted call, only the previously selected TAPes could submit their detailed applications. Altogether 56 **applications** requested support under SKHU/1802 (47 of them were approved) which exceeded the available ERDF budget by more than EUR 240 000. Every application completed the requirements of the first two steps (admissibility and completeness criteria), however 87.5% of the applications (49 project proposals) needed to provide complements (missing documents) within multiple completion rounds. The eligibility assessment filtered 4 project proposals (7%) out. Under the quality assessment the 52 remaining project proposals were classified into 5 main categories. 18 applications (32%) were *recommended for approval with no conditions*, 17 projects (30%) were *recommended for approval with conditions* and 5 were *recommended for rejection* (9%). The rejection did not mean the deletion of the project activities: the relevant beneficiaries could be moved into further project partnerships within the same TAPE. These project proposals (4 applications; 7%) were awarded by the title of *recommended for approval with condition (extended partnership)*. The rest 8 projects (14%) were classified as *recommended for approval with conditions (and suspension)*, since they belonged to two specific TAPes, where one project in each TAPE was rejected during the eligibility check but they were fundamental in reaching the original goals of the given TAPE. Later on, 3 selected projects (*PACT*⁵¹, *Pilot Employment Actions*⁵², *Supplier*⁵³, each of them included by the R2 and M3 TAPE) were withdrawn.

Table 20: Result of quality assessment under SKHU/1802

Suggestions of JS regarding the 52 project proposals	Number of project proposals
Recommended for approval	18
Recommended for approval with conditions	17

⁵⁰ For further details, please, refer to Chapter *2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)* Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)

⁵¹ SKHU/1802/3.1/029, Realisation of a cross-border employment and territorial development pact

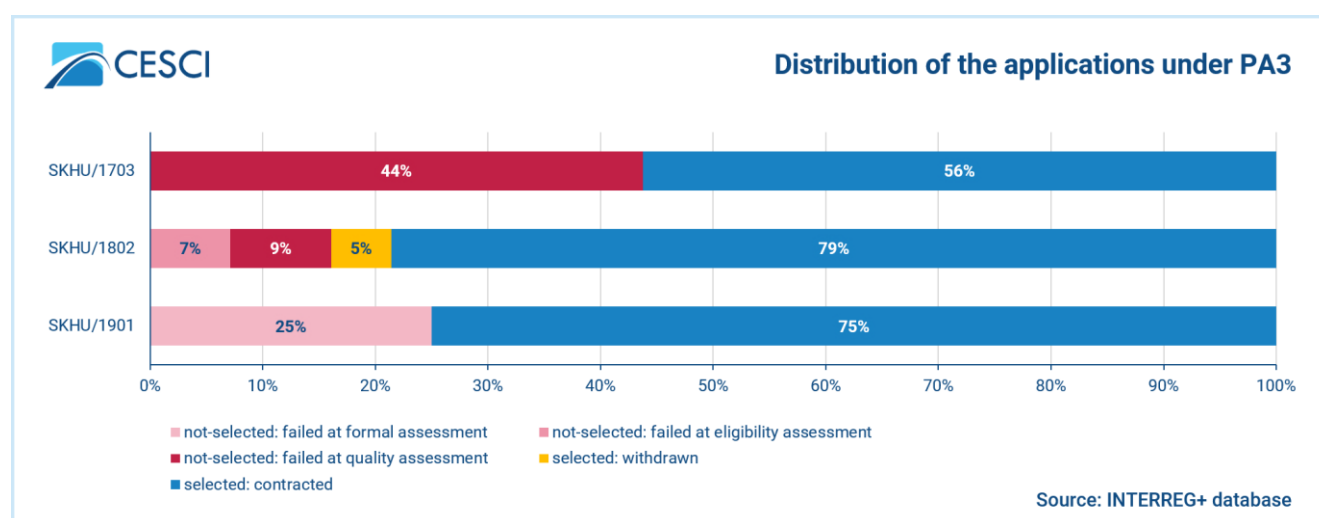
⁵² SKHU/1802/3.1/055, Pilot Employment Actions

⁵³ SKHU/1802/3.1/034, R2 and M3 - Implementation of a supplier supporting program

Suggestions of JS regarding the 52 project proposals	Number of project proposals
Recommended for rejection	5
Recommended for approval with condition (extended partnership)	4
Recommended for approval with condition (and suspension)	8

Those 4 project proposals, which had been rejected after the eligibility assessment of SKHU/1802, could be submitted again in the frame of the third TAPE call. Out of the 4 applications 1 could not fulfil the admissibility and completeness criteria, therefore 3 (*FUTURE IN HEMP - FIBER*⁵⁴, *Wine_LAB*⁵⁵, *LPP*⁵⁶) were selected.

Figure 39: Distribution of the applications under PA3



As many unexpected external and internal factors affected the implementation of the projects, in some cases the **timing of the projects** had to be modified. Altogether more than half (62%; 29 projects) of the PA3 projects were prolonged which resulted in an averagely 5 months longer timeframe. Due to this extended duration, the average implementation period of one project prolonged to 30 months. The maximum duration change was 12 months. In the frame of SKHU/1802, 59% (26 projects) of the projects have modified their implementation period, while under SKHU/1901 all the 3 projects needed for modification. Regarding the average duration change, the SKHU/1901 (9 months) remarkably surpassed the second TAPE call (4 months), but the maximum duration change did not exceed the period of one year in any of the cases. The projects of the third TAPE call (33 months) exceeded the SKHU/1802 call average (30 months) by 3 months. As a consequence of their specific character, the CCP (Cooperation and coordination) projects which were designed to coordinate all the activities of every TAPE project,

⁵⁴ SKHU/1901/3.1/001, FUTURE IN HEMP - Manufacturing development based on the processing of hemp fiber

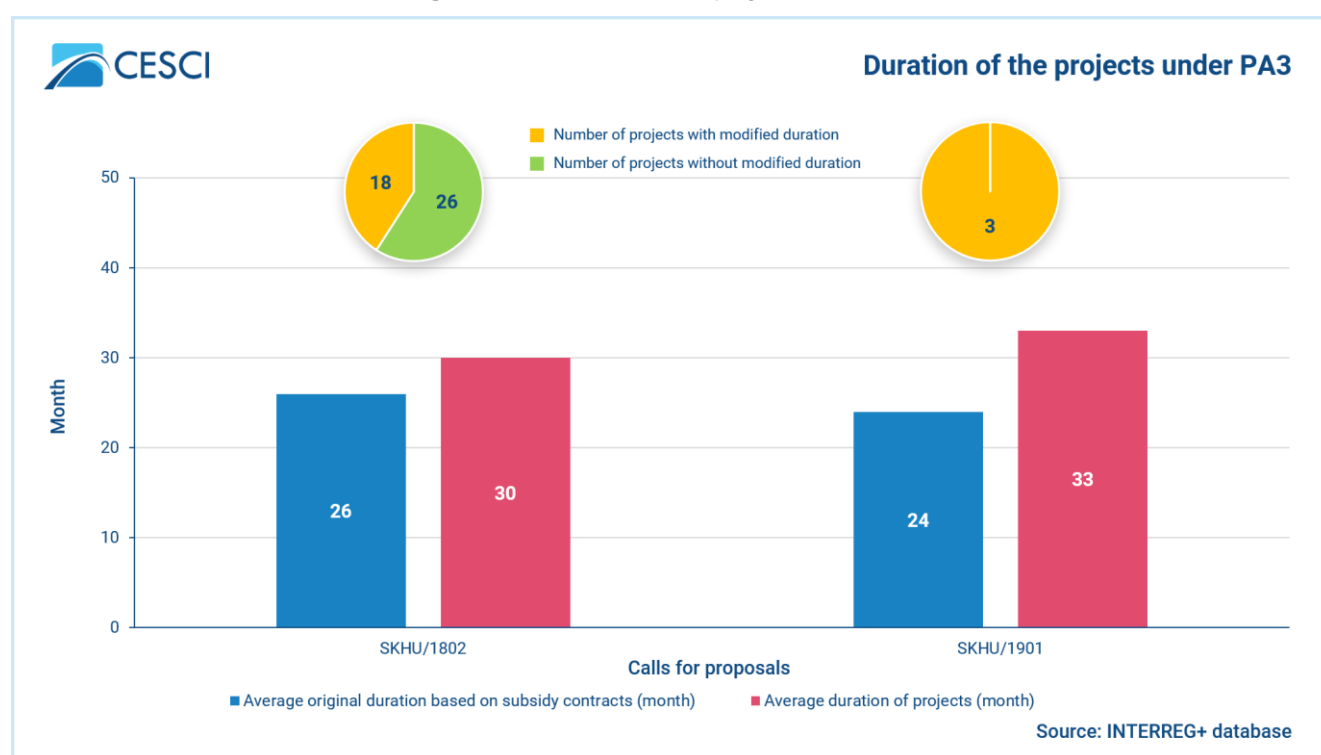
⁵⁵ SKHU/1901/3.1/002, Development of services supporting local wine makers in the region

⁵⁶ SKHU/1901/3.1/003, Local Product Processing

lasted the longest (more than 4 years). Apart from the CCP projects, the most time-consuming project was the *Ride Up!*⁵⁷ implemented in 3 years.

There are no considerable differences between the scheduling of the PA3 projects. 13 projects (28%) began in 2019. The earliest date was the 1st of July in 2019 (two CCP projects). The *Renovate & Educate*⁵⁸ was the first employment project which started in the beginning of September 2019. Most of the projects (45%; 21 projects) were launched in 2020, while in 2021 11 projects (23%), in 2022 only 2 projects (4%) started. The *MANU_IP*⁵⁹ project started the latest, in 1st of November 2022. It was also the *Renovate & Educate* project which was first accomplished at the end of 2020. In the following year only 2 projects (4%) could finish the implementation, while vast majority (29 projects; 62%) ended in 2022. 15 projects (32%) are still being realised in 2023 and presumably all of them will terminate by the end of October 2023. For example, this is the end date of *MANU_IP*, *Ride UP!* or *Hit the road!*⁶⁰ projects.

Figure 40: Duration of the projects under PA3



In terms of the **financial allocation** under PA3, the ERDF allocation based on the CP was EUR 35.7 million, which exceeded the call's approximate available ERDF allocation (EUR 34.6 million). The amount of contracted EU contribution is EUR 35.9 million that is more than the CP's (by EUR 213 000) and the calls' (by EUR 1.3 million) previously determined frames. 94% of this budget was allocated under the SKHU/1802 call (EUR 33.8 million); the remaining 6% under the SKHU/1901 call (EUR 2.1 million).

⁵⁷ SKHU/1802/3.1/010, Borderless Nature - Ipel'/Ipoly Bridge (JOBS)

⁵⁸ SKHU/1802/3.1/007, Through renovation to the education

⁵⁹ SKHU/1802/3.1/032, ORG EMP - Development of manufacturing capacities in Ipeľské Predmostie

⁶⁰ SKHU/1802/3.1/009, Bridge construction between Drégelypalánk and Ipeľské Predmostie - ORG-EMP

When considering the types of actions, most of the projects contributes to the development of local products and services (18 projects) and to the promotion of coordination and communication (9 CCP projects) activities. In average one action was supported by 6-7 projects, and there is only one action (cross-border employment initiatives) which was performed by only one project. The largest amount (EUR 16 million; 37% of the total costs) promoted the improvement of cross-border labour mobility. The value of the total costs is also more than EUR 1 million in the case of actions such as development of local products and services (EUR 14.9 million; 34%), modernisation and structural transformation of specific areas (EUR 9.3 million; 22%), promotion of coordination and communication (EUR 1.6 million; 4%) and development of joint education and training programmes (EUR 1.1 million; 3%). The actions of 3.1/3 *Business services promoting employment* (EUR 327 000; 1%) and 3.1/4 *Cross-border employment initiatives* (EUR 188 000; 0%) cover less than half a million euros.

In terms of the total cost, the average budget of a PA3 project was nearly EUR 989 000, (EUR 998 000 under SKHU/1801 and EUR 870 000 under SKHU/1901). The total budget of 13 projects (28% of the total) exceeded EUR 1 million. The largest budgets account for more than EUR 4 million, which are linked to 3 projects (*Hemp road*⁶¹, *Ride Up!* and *Hit the road!*). All of them target the construction of roads and bridges.

Table 21: Source of funding based on SKHU/1703, SKHU/1802 and SKHU/1901

Eligible actions		Applicable state aid	Size of the total budget per project	
Key actions projects	Development of products and services	Development of local products and services	De minimis aid Regional aid – Article 14 of GBER Investment aid to SMEs – Article 17 of GBER	Not specified
		Improvement of public services on the field of education, health and social services providing better access to urban functions	Not relevant	200 000 – 500 000
	Improving cross-border labour mobility	Construction of cross-border roads, bridges and ferries	Not relevant	Not specified
		Development cross-border transport services	De minimis aid Regional aid – Article 14 of GBER Investment aid to SMEs – Article 17 of GBER	Up to 1 000 000
		Development of accommodation facilities for commuting workers	Regional aid – Article 14 of GBER Investment aid to SMEs – Article 17 of GBER	400 000 – 1 000 000

⁶¹ SKHU/1802/3.1/008, Road links development between Nagyrozvagy (HU) and Velký Horeš (SK) – FUTURE IN HEMP

Eligible actions		Applicable state aid	Size of the total budget per project
Supplementary projects	Modernization and structural transformation of specific areas	Aid for local infrastructures – Article 56 of GBER	400 000 – 2 500 000
	Integrated cross-border employment initiatives Business services promoting employment Joint education and training programmes Other	De minimis aid (if relevant)	100 000 – 200 000
	Communication and coordination project	De minimis aid (if relevant)	Up to 6% of the total budget of the TAPE but not more than 75 000 EUR/year

Under the TAPE calls, the economic activities could be supported by different schemes. The De Minimis Aid provides small amount of financial assistance that is unlikely distort fair competition. The amount of De Minimis Aid per country cannot exceed EUR 200 000 for a single undertaking (in case of freight transport the maximum is EUR 100 000), which means a support of overall EUR 400 000 in the Slovak-Hungarian context. The own contribution rate under this state aid was 15%. The founding rules of further economic activities were ruled by the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), covering aid types such as regional investment aid, SME investment aid and investment aid for local infrastructures.

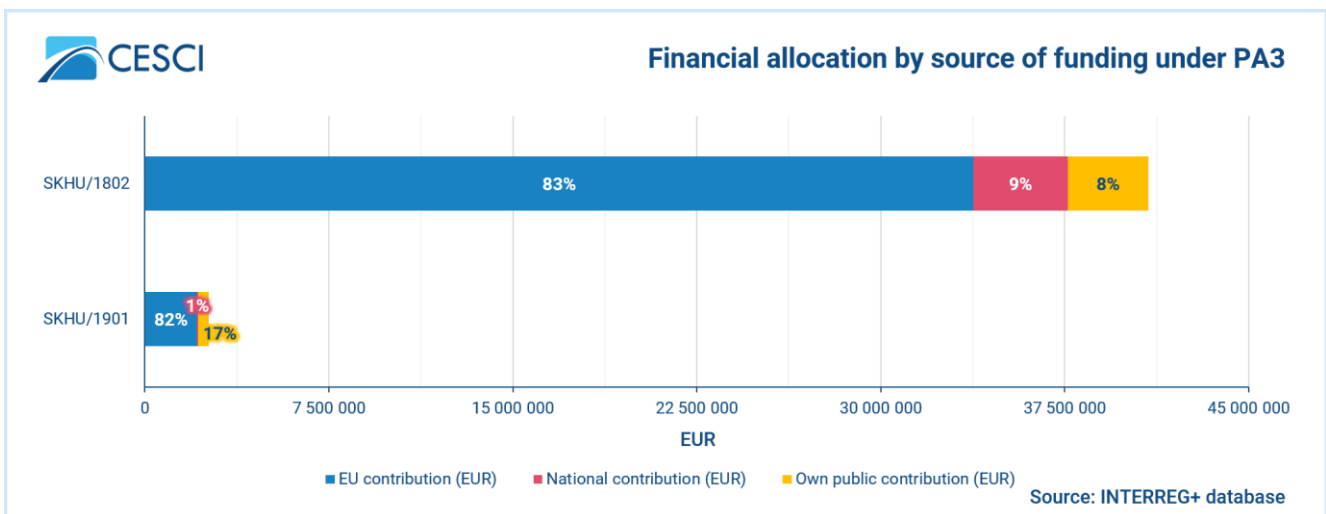
Table 22: Source of funding of non-economic activities based on SKHU/1703, SKHU/1802 and SKHU/1901

Country	Type of beneficiary	Community contribution (ERDF)	State co-financing	Own contribution
Hungary	Central budgetary organisations	85%	15%	0%
	Other organisations	85%	10%	5%
Slovakia	State administration organisations	85%	15%	0%
	Other public administration organisations	85%	10%	5%
	Higher territorial units and their budgetary and contributory organisations			
	Municipalities and their budgetary and contributory organisations			
	NGOs/NPOs			
Private sector out of state aid schemes	85%	5%	10%	

Above the total ERDF contribution EUR 7.6 million was used for the implementation of the project which was divided nearly equally between the national budget (around EUR 3.9 million; 9%) and the beneficiaries' own resources (more than EUR 3.7 million; 9%).

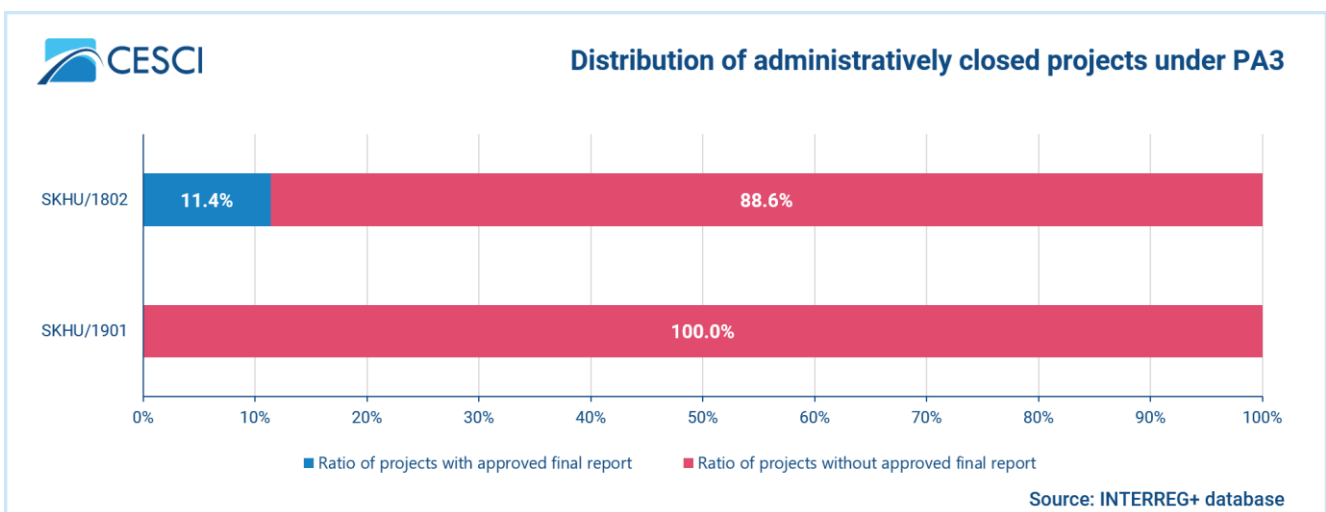
The distinction among the calls is notable, since 94% of the ERDF (EUR 33.8 million) was utilised by SKHU/1802 while the third TAPE call's projects received the rest 6% (EUR 2.1 million). The ERDF ratio was less than 85% (SKHU/1802: 83%; SKHU/1901: 82%). The ratio of national contribution within the SKHU/1802 (9%; EUR 3.3 million) was slightly bigger than the own contribution (8%; EUR 3.3 million), while under the SKHU/1901 the ratio of own contribution (17%; EUR 450 000) exceeded the value of national contribution (1%; EUR 31 000).

Figure 41: Financial allocation by sources of funding under PA3



Under PA3, most of the projects (89%; 42 projects) had not submitted their final reports by the cut-off date: in the case of the second TAPE call, 39 projects out of 44 (89%) and 100% in the case of the third TAPE call.

Figure 42: Distribution of administratively closed projects under PA3

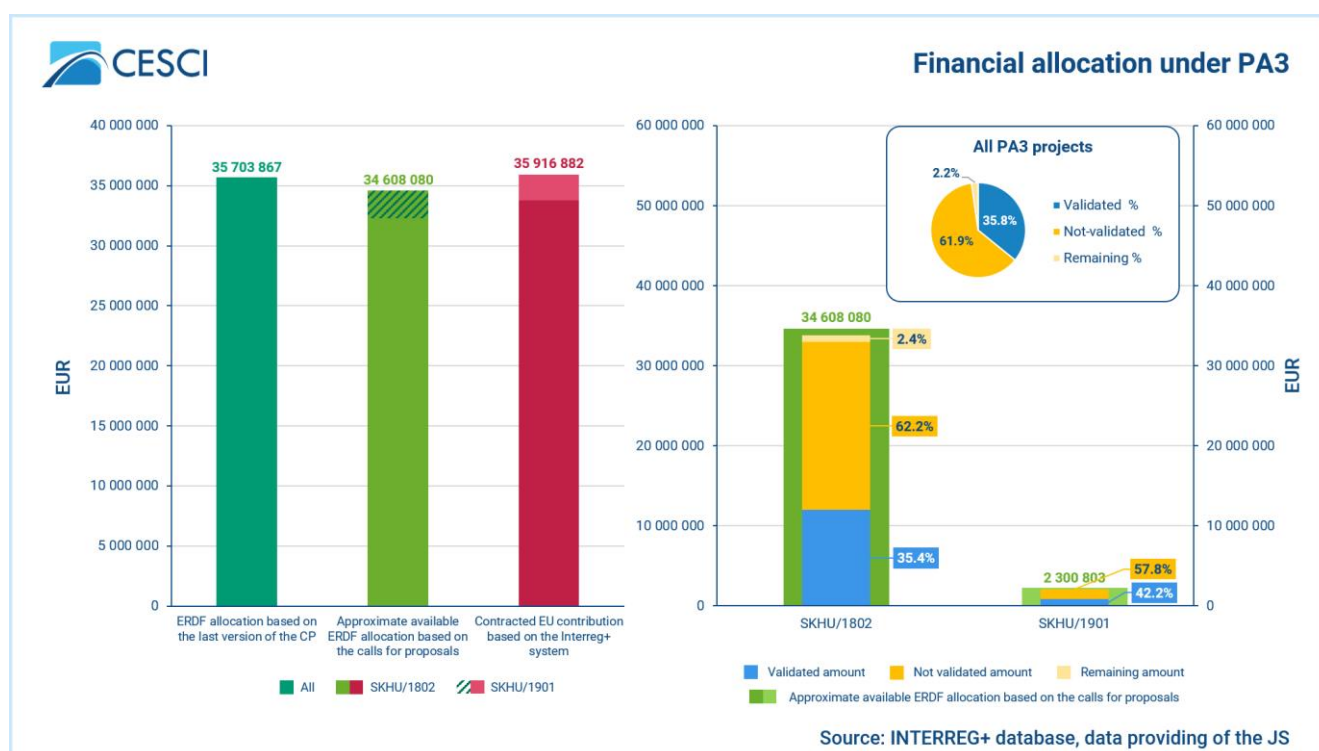


Under PA3, more than half of the EU contribution was before the validation process (62%; EUR 22.2 million), 36% (EUR 12.8 million) was validated and the remaining not utilised amount (EUR 806 000) was 2%. These values may considerably change as implementation progresses.

By calls, the financial progress was more advanced in the case of SKHU/1901, where 42% (EUR 898 000) of the contribution had been validated and the ratio of spendable (not validated) allocation was 58% (EUR 1.2 million). Under the SKHU/1802, the ratio of validated allocation was 35% (more than EUR 11.9 million) and nearly EUR 21 million ERDF (62%) had not been utilised. The total amount of not used allocation of PA3 belonged to this Cfp (2%; EUR 806 000).

On project level, the ratio of validated EU contribution was more than 70% in the case of 14 projects (30%) out of which *RE-BOOT*⁶², *KNOW-HOW*⁶³ and *Renovate & Educate* projects were at the forefront of financial progress (the ratio of validated money was nearly 100%). By contrast, the ratio of not validated contribution was more than 70% under 12 projects (26%). This value accounted for 100% under *RE-BIRTH*⁶⁴, *RE-CREATION*⁶⁵ and *Ride Up!* projects. Remaining allocation had been reported under 5 projects, out of which the biggest ratio and amount related to *SKHU Local+ 1*⁶⁶ (13%; EUR 60 000).

Figure 43: Financial allocation under PA3



In relation to the **output indicators**, 10 indicators (6 common specific and 4 programme specific) have been assigned to PA3, which are to be reported with annual frequency. As the following table illustrates,

- ⁶² SKHU/1802/3.1/053, Project 2 RE-BOOT: Social Service & Network Development for Elderly
- ⁶³ SKHU/1802/3.1/012, Processing and employment knowledge sharing program
- ⁶⁴ SKHU/1802/3.1/040, RE-BIRTH: Active Ageing
- ⁶⁵ SKHU/1802/3.1/045, RE-CREATION: portfolio of new services
- ⁶⁶ SKHU/1802/3.1/005; Development of Local+ products 1

the indicators give information about productive investment (CO01 *Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support*, CO02 *Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants*, CO08 *Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises*), roads (CO13 *Roads: Total length of newly built roads*), urban development (CO39 *Urban Development: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas*), labour market and training (CO44 *Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training*), action plans (O311 *Number of (integrated territorial) action plans*), number of participants (O312 *Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings*, O313 *Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings*) and new business services (O314 *Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services*)⁶⁷. The original target values of these indicators were not modified during the implementation of the projects.

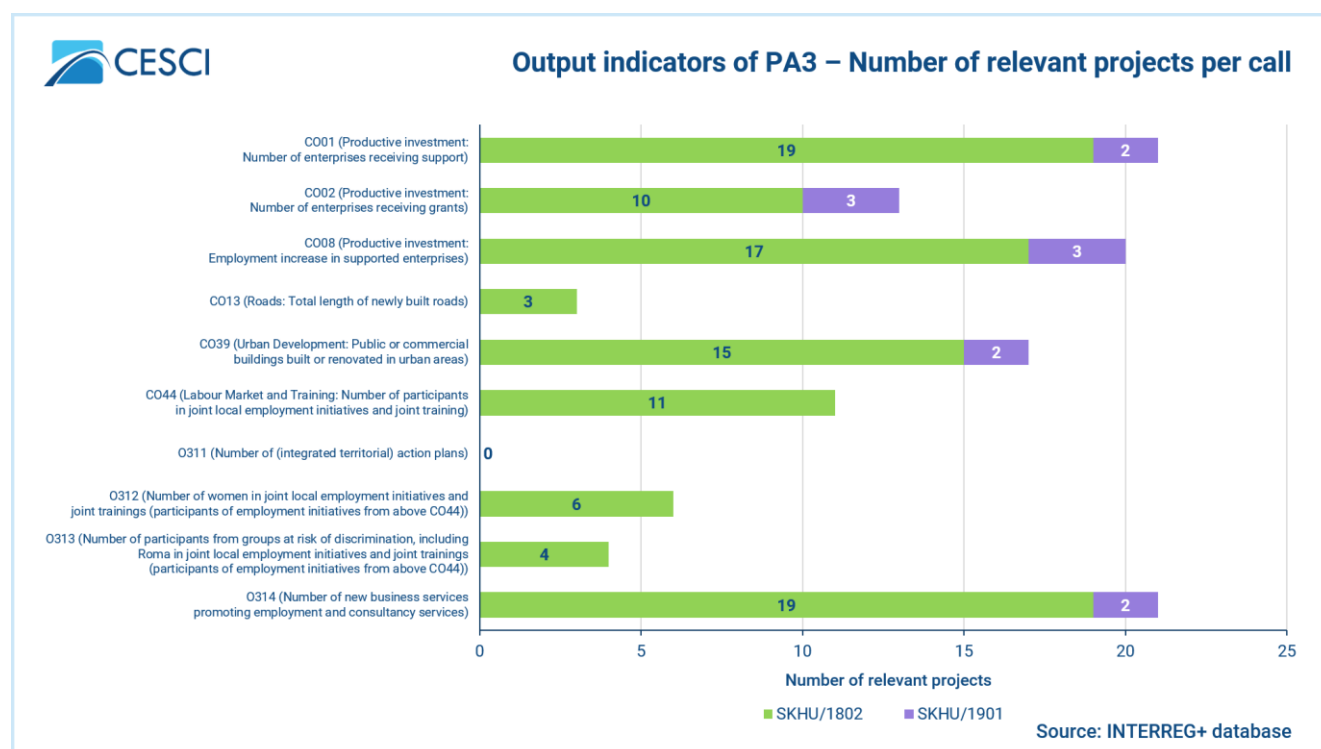
Table 23: Output indicators of PA3 – Target values

ID	Name of indicator	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	Last modified target value (2023)
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	enterprises	Annually	10
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	enterprises	Annually	10
CO08	Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	full time equivalents	Annually	20
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	km	Annually	11
CO39	Urban Development: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	square meters	Annually	3 000
CO44	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	persons	Annually	100
O311	Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	number	Annually	10
O312	Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	persons	Annually	50
O313	Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	persons	Annually	25
O314	Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	number	Annually	15

⁶⁷ In the following part of the analysis the indicators' shortened name is used. Find more information about the methodology of abbreviation in the Annex.

The fulfilment of these indicators is ensured by different number of projects, presented on the following figures. Altogether 47 projects belong to PA3, but most of them chose more than one indicator. In average, the number of indicators per project is nearly 3. Comparing the two TAPE calls, the average number of indicator is 2 under SKHU/1802 while it is more than 4 under SKHU/1901. The maximum number of indicators per project is 5, that was achieved almost by 3 projects (AUTOTECH INFRA⁶⁸, INNOCENTRE⁶⁹, Wine_LAB).

Figure 44: Output indicators of PA3 – Number of relevant projects per call



In terms of the yearly progress of the output indicators of PA3, the first achievements were registered only in 2019, therefore the 3 milestone targets were not achieved in 2018. According to this milestone year, the interim goals were 30 persons under *CO44 Participants in joint initiatives and trainings*, 5 services under *O314 New business services* and zero action plans under *O311 Action plans*. The absence of achievements is due to the complexity of the TAPE tool and its application system, hence the previously determined implementation time was not enough to fulfil the interim goals. The target value of 2023 was completed firstly in 2020 by *CO01 Enterprises receiving support*, *CO02 Enterprises receiving grants* and *CO44 Participants in joint initiatives and trainings*. In the following year further 4 indicators (*CO08 Employment increase in enterprises*, *CO44 Participants in joint initiatives and trainings*, *O312 Women participants in joint trainings*, *O313 Participants from groups at risk of discrimination in joint initiatives and trainings*) reached the planned values, while the rest 3 indicators (*CO13 Newly built*

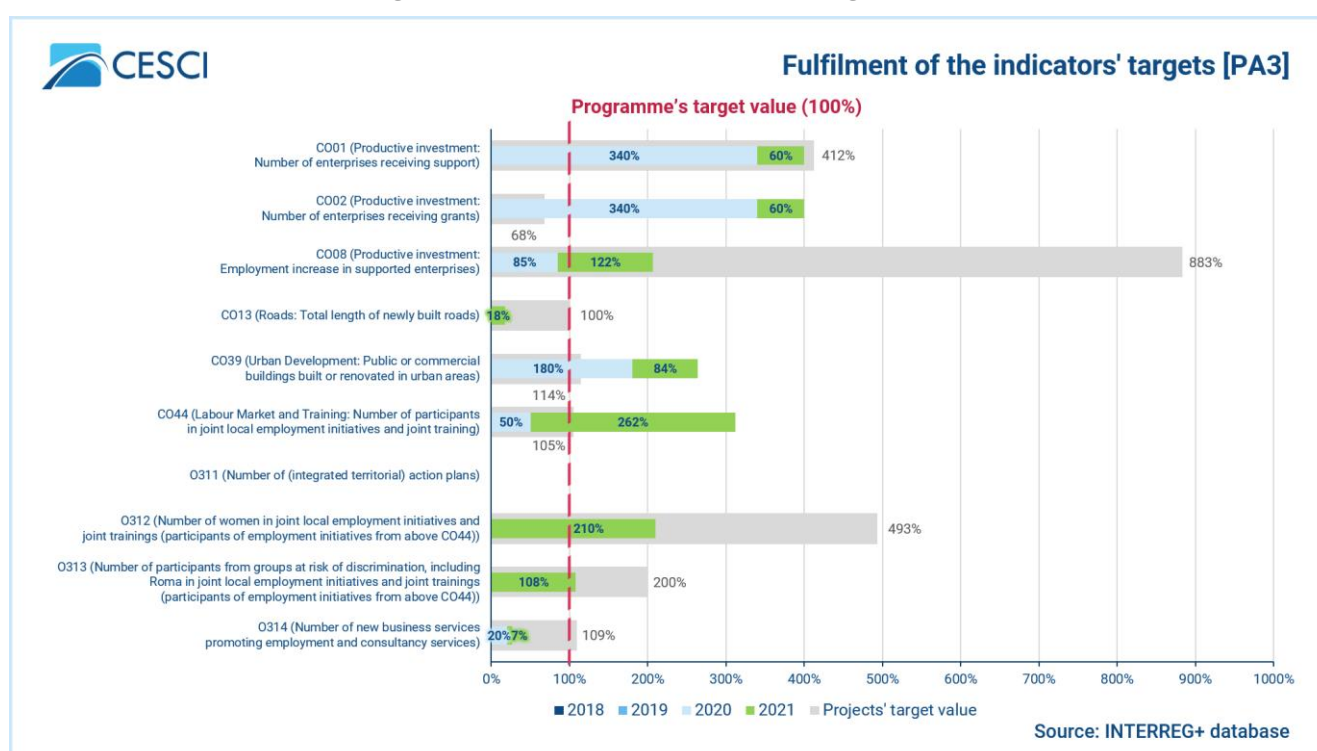
⁶⁸ SKHU/1802/3.1/015, Infrastructure development for key automotive suppliers and technology companies of the Pons Danubii Region (NOVUM DANUVIUM)

⁶⁹ SKHU/1802/3.1/017, Complex Innovation Centre for automotive & technology companies and education institutions of the Pons Danubii Region (NOVUM DANUVIUM)

roads, O311 Action plans, O314 New business services) are still far from the completion. Taking into account the potential values of the programme and the projects' target values – based on INTERREG+ system –, fulfilment of the indicators O314 New business services and O311 Action plans are guaranteed, while the CO13 Newly built roads completed only 18% of the target.

Regarding the achieved values of 2021, the CO01 Enterprises receiving support (+300 percentage point), CO02 Enterprises receiving grants (+300pp) and CO44 Participants in joint initiatives and trainings (+212pp) proved to be the most moderate and feasible indicators, since they have already exceeded the final values with more than +200pp. The overperformance is also outstanding under the indicators of O312 Women participants in joint trainings (+110pp) and CO08 Employment increase in enterprises (+107pp). The seventh indicator which completed the target of 2023 in 2021 is the O313 Participants from groups at risk of discrimination in joint initiatives and trainings by +8pp.

Figure 45: Fulfilment of the indicators' targets (PA3)



In terms of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria in most cases the specificity, measurability and relevance of the indicators are suitable. The overperformance of the indicators makes the time bounding factor questionable. Moreover, the accomplishment of CO13 Newly built roads and O311 Number of integrated territorial plans have not been ensured by 2023 which impairs the results of achievability.

2nd PHASE EVALUATION: Effectiveness, efficiency and impact evaluation
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Table 24: Output indicators of PA3 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is four times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is four times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
CO08 Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is two times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is too ambitious and will not be fulfilled until 2023.	The relevance of the indicator is questionable, as the construction works were not based on the thematic focus and the territorial relevance of the TAPes.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
CO39 Urban Development: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is nearly three times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
CO44 Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is three times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.

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ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
O311 Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value will not be achieved.	The relevance of the indicator is questionable.	The achieved value will be reported only in 2023.
O312 Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is two times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
O313 Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value has slightly exceeded the final goal in 2021.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
O314 Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	The indicator is specific	The indicator is measurable	The target value is achievable and ambitious.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.

2.1.1.4 Quantification of the PA4's performance

Under PA4 four calls for proposals were published: two normal and two SPF calls targeting umbrella project proposals⁷⁰. The open period of the normal calls concentrated on the second half of 2016 (SKHU/1601) and on the autumn and early winter of 2019 (SKHU/1902). Both of the SPF umbrella calls were open in 2017, the first (SKHU/1701) mostly in February and the second (SKHU/1704) in August.

The first normal call focused on the improvement of cooperation capacity and efficiency between the organisations (Action 4.1/6), the improvement of cross-border services (Action 4.1/5) and people to people connections across the border (Action 4.1/4). The second normal call had a very similar thematic focus (see the colour-coding in *Table 25*). Additionally, it enhanced the bilingualism within the programming region and the mutual understanding among the ethnic groups. Similarly to PA1, eligible activities were better focused by the call: core (e.g. joint development of operational infrastructure) and supplementary activities (e.g. promotional activities) were determined by actions, which meant a limited thematic focus compared to the first normal call.

Table 25: Overview of the calls under PA4

Call ID	Tool	Open period	Planned ERDF allocation to the projects under the respective action (EUR)	Maximum available ERDF amount per project (EUR)
SKHU/1601	Normal	29/07/2016 – 3/11/2016	7 480 765	100 000 – 500 000
SKHU/1701	Small Project Fund ⁷¹	13/02/2017 – 3/03/2017	7 946 258	3 973 129
SKHU/1704	Small Project Fund	1/08/2017 – 31/08/2017	7 946 258	3 973 129
SKHU/1902	Normal	12/09/2019 – 17/12/2019	5 500 000 (4.1/1 Action: 3 500 000 4.1/2 Action: 2 000 000)	Maximum size: 4.1/1 Action: 400 000 4.1/2 Action: 200 000

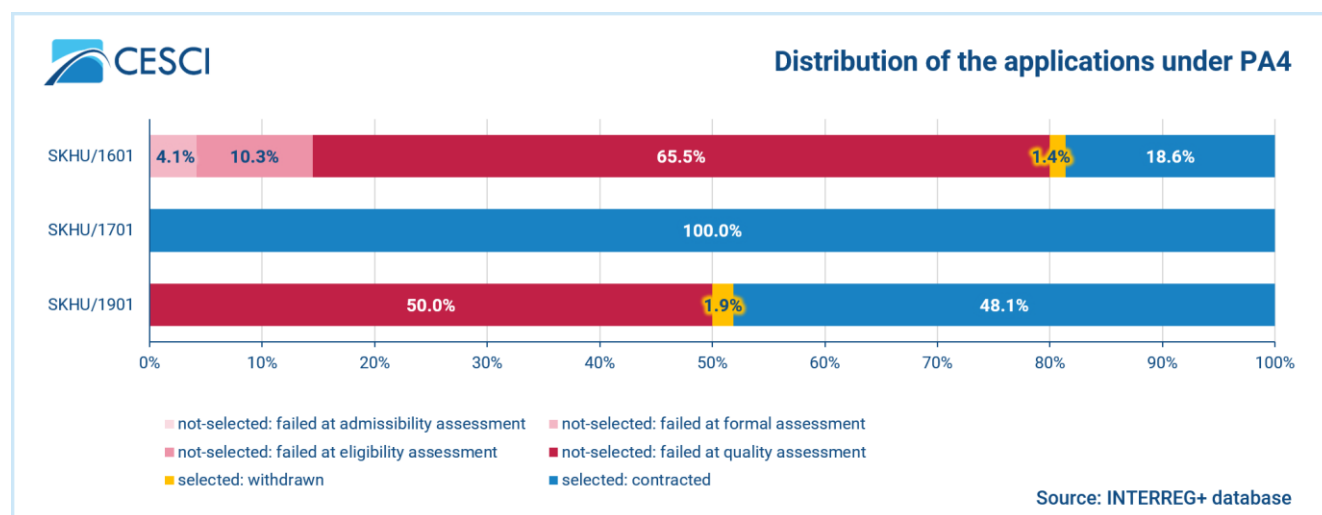
Within the first normal call (SKHU/1601), the available allocation from the ERDF was nearly EUR 7.5 million, and the amount of allocation per project could not be more than EUR 500 000. In the second normal call, the planned ERDF (EUR 5.5 million) was divided between two actions: more than half of the sum (EUR 3.5 million) was allocated to the development of institutional capacity (Action 4.1/1), while EUR 2 million was available for setting-up new services (under Action 4.1/2). The determined maximum size of financial support per project was also different, EUR 400 000 under Action 4.1/1 and EUR 200 000 under Action 4.1/2.

⁷⁰ Further information about the used tools can be found in the “2.5.3 Small Project Fund” chapter, where the tools will be detailed.

⁷¹ SKHU/1701 and SKHU/1704 umbrella CfPs incorporate the management costs (EUR 1 402 281) and small project costs (EUR 7 946 258) as well.

The distribution of applications between the calls was very diverse. A very high interest was shown towards the first normal call with 145 project proposals. Under the second normal call the proposed projects were nearly 90 applications less (54 applications). Owing to the lower number and more focused project proposals, the share of contracted projects was higher in the second normal call (48.1% by 26 projects) than in the first one (18.6% by 27 projects). Regarding the SPF call, two applications were submitted and both of them were contracted.

Figure 46: Distribution of the applications under PA4



Altogether three approved projects were withdrawn, two within the first normal call, and one within the second one (it has become a part of a TAPE). Regarding the SKHU/1902, 8 projects were put on reserve list, out of 3 projects could be financed from the savings of closed projects.

Under the first normal call 112 PA4 projects (77%), under the second normal call 102 PA4+PA1 projects (83%) were requested to submit missing documents, which indicates that the administrative burdens caused significant difficulties for the applicants. In the first normal call 4% of the applications failed at the formal and 10% at the eligibility assessments. At the quality assessment phase 66% of the first normal call's applications and 50% of the second normal call's applications have failed.

All in all, 201 applications were submitted to the PA4 calls, out of which more than 70% were not selected (143 applications), 1.5% of the projects were withdrawn after selection and 55 were implemented (27.5%). More than half of the projects (29 projects) targeted capacity building, one-third (19 projects) concerned the development of cross-border services, while the rest of them (7 projects) were people-to-people projects. Nearly half of the PA budget (46%; EUR 12 million) supported people-to-people projects (the two umbrella projects of the Small Project Fund included), 39% of the budget (EUR 10 million) was utilised for capacity building and only 15% (EUR 4 million) was allocated to cross-border services.

Table 26: Supported actions per call under PA4

Call ID	Short name of actions	Number of projects	Total cost of actions (EUR)
SKHU/1601	4.1/4 Launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens from both sides of the border	5	1 134 414.40
	4.1/5 Improvement of cross-border services provided jointly, development of small infrastructure necessary for joint service provision	7	1 757 353.23
	4.1/6 Strengthening and improving the cooperation capacity and the cooperation efficiency between different organisations	15	4 974 265.89
SKHU/1701	4.1/3 Launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens (People-to-people)	2	10 998 279.72
SKHU/1902	4.1/1 Investment in institutional capacity	14	5 329 192.36
	4.1/2 Development of new cross-border services	12	2 263 300.93

The average budget of a PA4 project under normal call was more than EUR 290 000, while the two SPF umbrella projects' total budget were roughly EUR 5.5 million. Under the normal calls, three projects' (*Circular Economy*⁷², *Nat-Net Duna/Dunaj 2*⁷³, *KIP ON LEARNING*⁷⁴) budgets exceeded EUR 460 000, all of them were selected under the first normal call.

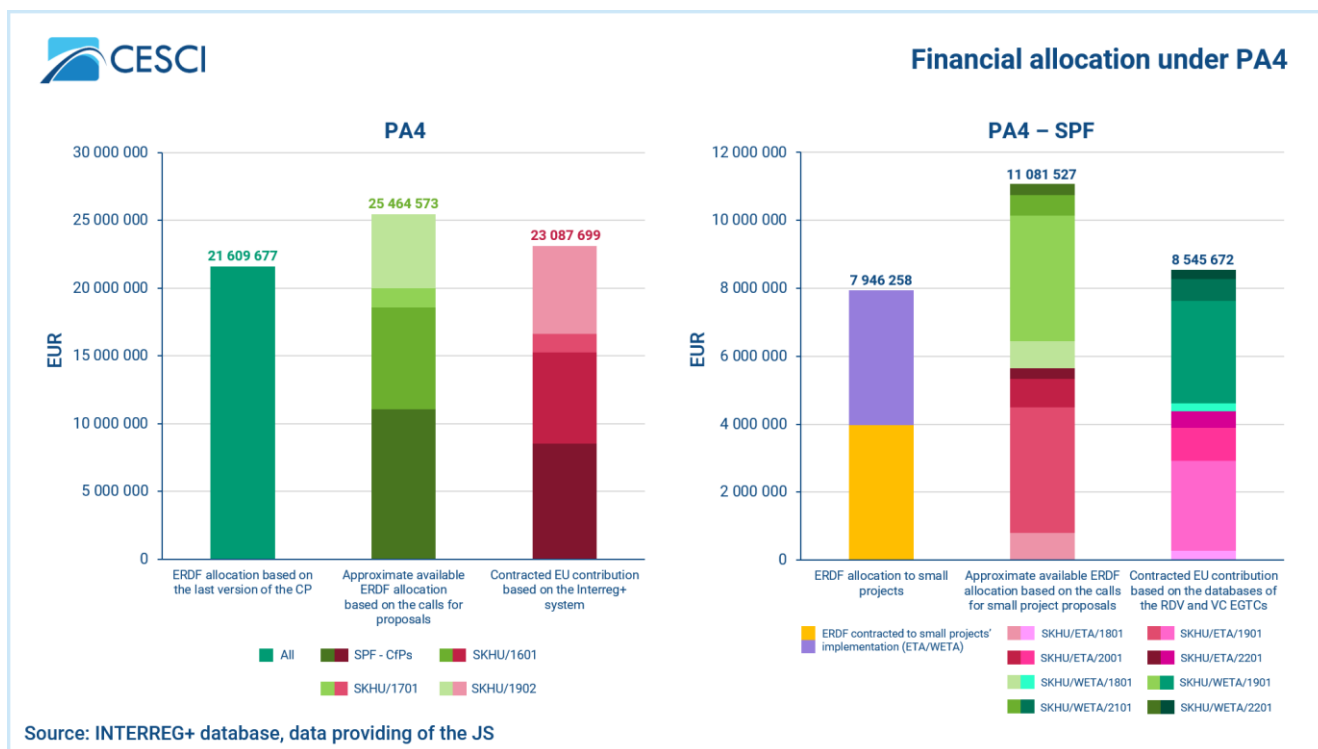
Under PA4, the ERDF allocation based on the CP was EUR 21.6 million which was EUR 3.8 million lower than the approximate available ERDF allocation of the calls for proposals (EUR 25.4 million; EUR 7.4 million under the first and EUR 5.5 million under the second call). The allocation under the SPF call covered nearly half of the PA4 budget (49%; EUR 12.4 million). The total contracted ERDF was around EUR 23 million (107% allocation rate) out of which 43% (EUR 9.9 million) was absorbed by the SPF projects (37% by the small projects and 6% by the SPF management) and nearly 28% (around EUR 6.5 million) by the two normal calls. This distortion between the three categories (CP, CFP and contracted ERDF) is due to the reallocation of funds among the CFPs, and the re-utilisation of the ERDF contribution of the withdrawn projects.

⁷² SKHU/1601/4.1/290, Circle of Circular economy

⁷³ SKHU/1601/4.1/121, Preparation Activities of the Szigetköz-Žitný Ostrov Nature Park and Further Joint Nature Protection Initiatives

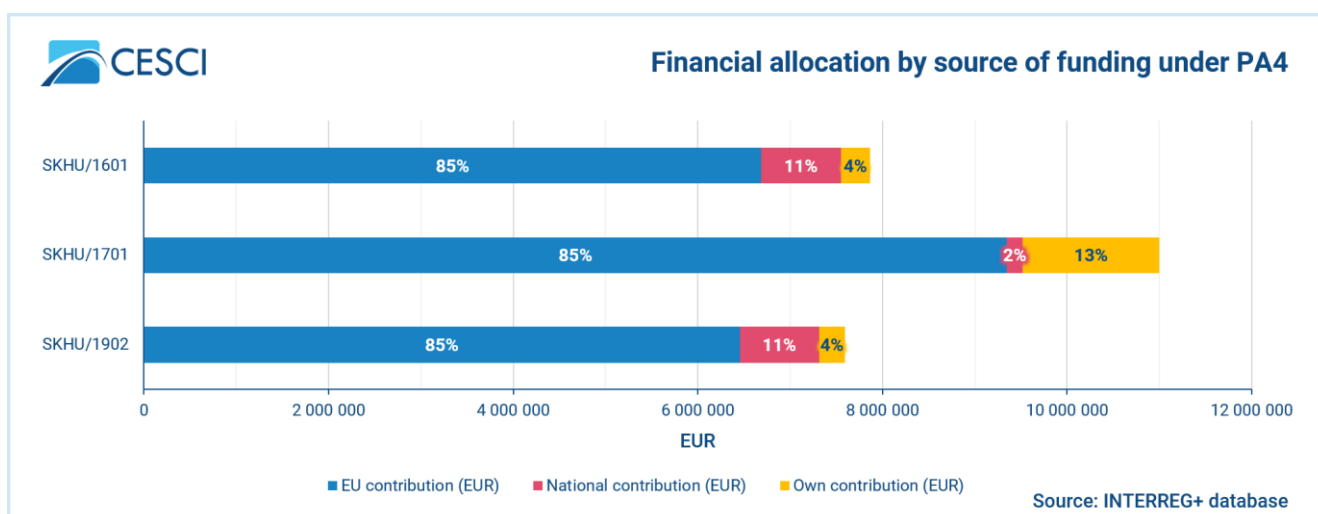
⁷⁴ SKHU/1601/4.1/172, Schools in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective teaching and learning - crossborder exchange of knowhow

Figure 47: Financial allocation under PA4



The rate of the absorbed ERDF contribution was 85% (nearly EUR 22.5 million). EUR 4 million was ensured from the national budget (EUR 1.9 million) and by the beneficiaries' own resources (EUR 2.1 million). As the absolute values indicate, the share of the co-financing is nearly equal between the Member States (7.2%) and the beneficiaries (7.8%). The distribution of national co-financing of the normal calls is the higher (nearly 11%, EUR 860 000), the own resources are minimal (around 4%, approximately EUR 300 000).

Figure 48: Financial allocation by sources of funding under PA4



In terms of the SPF⁷⁵, the goal of the first umbrella call was to identify and select the management organisations, while in the second round of the SPF call the applicants had the opportunity to further develop their proposals and deliver guiding documents related to the management of the Small Project Fund. The planned ERDF allocation of the umbrella calls (SKHU/1701 and SKHU/1704) was more than EUR 9.3 million, and the total amount was contracted (100% allocation rate) for the realisation of the two umbrella projects. The division between the two projects were equal. Around 15% (EUR 1.4 million) of the total amount covered the costs of the fund management, while almost EUR 8 million was dedicated to small projects.

Table 27: Overview of the calls for small projects under PA4

Management organisations	Call ID	Open period ⁷⁶	Planned ERDF allocation to the projects (EUR)	Maximum available ERDF grant amount per project (EUR)
RDV EGTC	SKHU/WETA/1801	03/09/2018 - 2/11/2018	794 625.80	20 000 – 50 000
	SKHU/WETA/1901	Start date: 1/04/2019 Closure of 1st round: 30/06/2019 Closure of 2nd round: 30/09/2019 Closure of 3rd round: 28/02/2020 Closure of 4th round: 30/04/2020	3 696 740.47	
	SKHU/WETA/2101	3/11/2021 - 3/12/2021	618 176.52	
	SKHU/WETA/2201	24/05/2022 - 24/06/2022	328 618.38	
Via Carpatia EGTC	SKHU/ETA/1801	1/06/2018 - 31/07/2018	794 625,80	
	SKHU/ETA/1901	Start date: 1/04/2019 Closure of 1st round: 30/06/2019 Closure of 2nd round: 30/09/2019 Closure of 3rd round: 28/02/2020 Closure of 4th round: 30/04/2020	3 699 074.18	
	SKHU/ETA/2001	1/12/2020 - 15/02/2021	840 665.95	
	SKHU/ETA/2201	17/05/2022 - 17/06/2022	309 000.00	

The contracted management organisations (EGTCs) published 4 CfPs per border section (altogether 8 CfPs) which cover jointly more than EUR 11 million (ETA: EUR 5.6 million; WETA: EUR 5.4 million), that exceeds the CP's value by nearly EUR 2 million. The reason behind this phenomenon is the relatively high number of projects withdrawn before or even after the contracting, in addition the high rate of ERDF contribution which was not spent by the projects of the first couple of selection rounds.

The greatest amount of contribution was published in the year of 2019 (nearly EUR 3.7 million per border section), while the other CfPs including also the pilot one in 2018 contained up to EUR 800 000.

⁷⁵ SKHU/1701 represents the umbrella call on programme level.

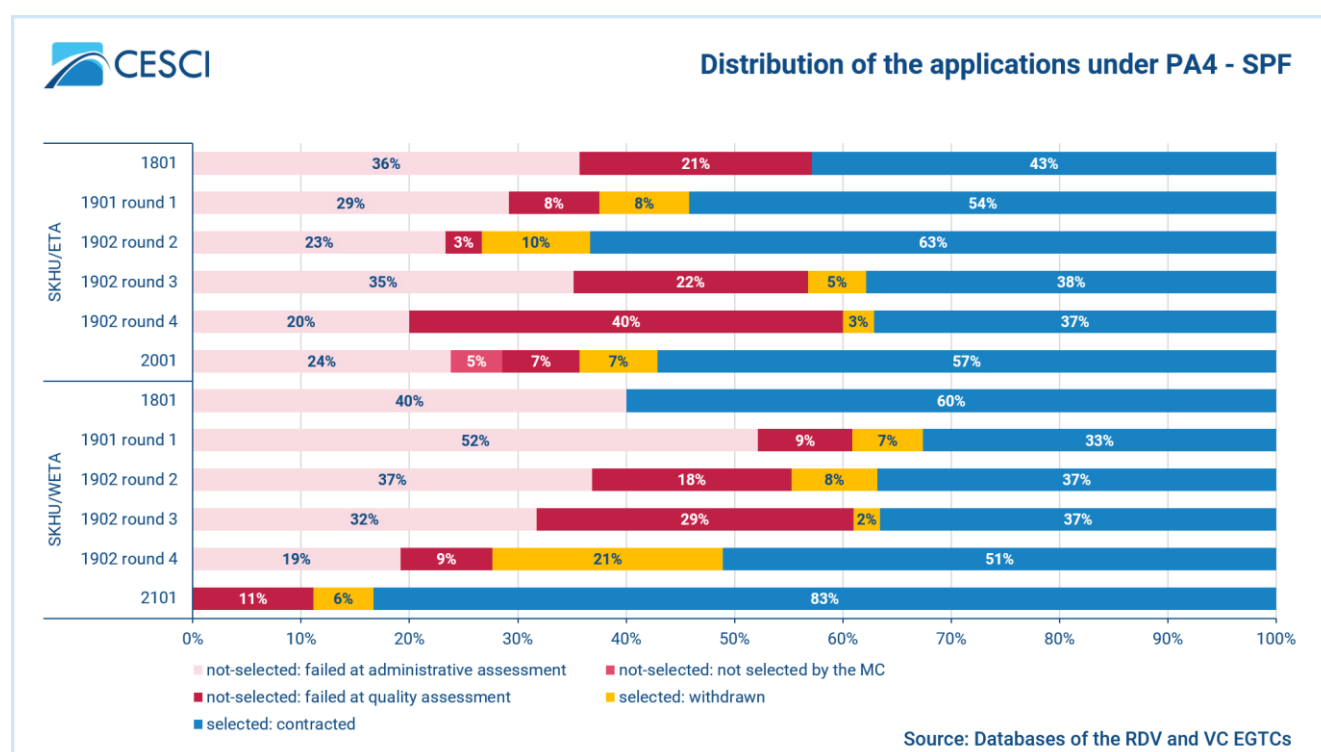
⁷⁶ The SKHU/ETA/1901 and SKHU/WETA/1901 were open continuously from April 1st, 2019. The applications were assessed continuously after each evaluation round.

According to small project calls, along with the improvement of service provision, professional cooperation of public institutions and bilingualism, the small projects needed to contribute to mutual understanding, mobility and people to people connections across the border. The available ERDF grant per project was between EUR 20 000 and 50 000.

The process of the project selection under the small projects was very similar to the normal calls. The assessment of applications of the continuously open calls was handled in four rounds. The results of these rounds are illustrated at *Figure 49*, but information on the recent calls (SKHU/ETA/2201 and SKHU/WETA/2201) was not available by the cut-off date. The database of the evaluation was received from the JS that was filled out by the two EGTCs.

Altogether 382 small project applications⁷⁷ were submitted under PA4, out of which 175 failed (46%) at the different stages of the selection process. It is notable, that the rate of applications failing during the administrative assessment was relatively high, at least 20% in each call except for the CfP WETA/2101. In terms of the territorial differences, the picture is quite balanced: comparing the applications of the two sides (182 ETA and 200 WETA applications), more than half of the project proposals have been selected (ETA: 55%, 100 applications; WETA: 54%, 107 applications).

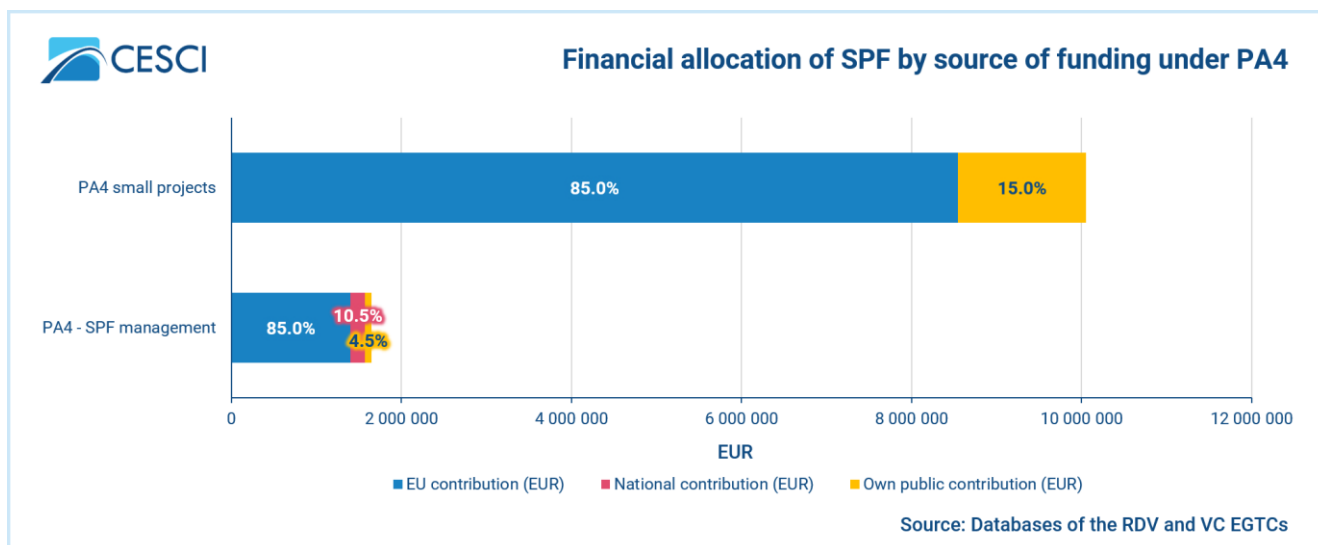
Figure 49: Distribution of the applications under PA4 SPF



Altogether 207 small projects (54%) were selected, the total contracted ERDF contribution of which amounts to EUR 8.5 million (ETA: EUR 4.3 million; WETA: EUR 4.2 million) slightly exceeding the total allocation of the CP (by EUR 500 000).

⁷⁷ The 33 small project applications under SKHU/ETA/2201 and SKHU/WETA/2201 are not included.

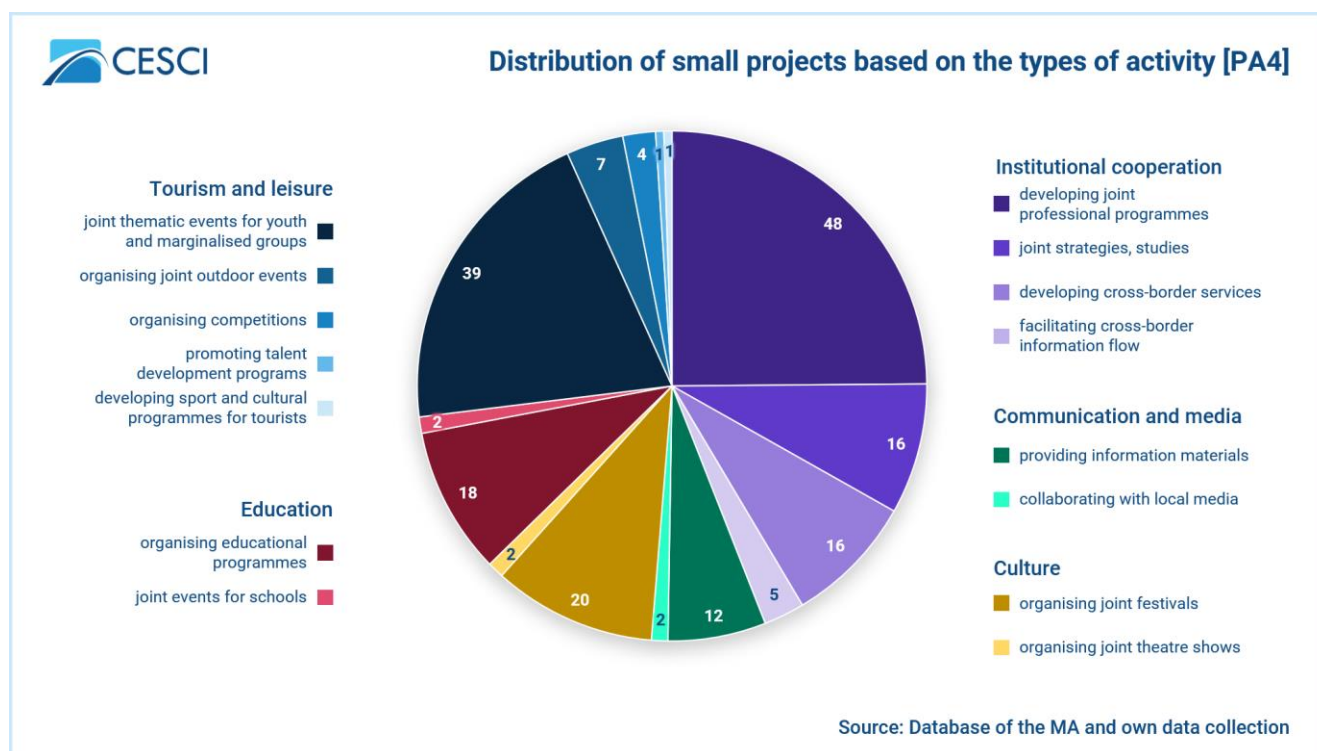
Figure 50: Financial allocation to SPF by source of funding under PA4



Under SPF, only the beneficiaries of the umbrella projects were entitled to national co-financing according to the country specific rules. Altogether more than EUR 57 000, around 10% of the total fund management costs was allocated to SPF umbrella beneficiaries as national contribution. At the same time, beneficiaries of the small projects (SP beneficiaries) were not entitled to national co-financing, which is reasoned by the huge administrative burden that the contracting procedure between the National Authorities and the more than 500 SP beneficiaries would have meant. As a result, SP beneficiaries had to compensate the lack of national financing from their own budget. In case of the PA4 small projects, this meant nearly EUR 1.3 million altogether, and EUR 3 938 average on beneficiary level. The average size of the projects was around EUR 53 000.

The contracted small projects addressed a wide range of actions defined by the CfPs (see “*Table 80: Supported SPF actions by call under PA4*” in the Annex). Most of the small projects focused on joint professional programmes of local organisations in the field of education, culture, tourism, environmental protection, but the organisation of joint events for youths and marginalised groups, festivals and educational programs and further thematic events were also highly popular, as well as the elaboration of joint documents or the publication of information materials.

Figure 51: Distribution of small projects based on the types of activity

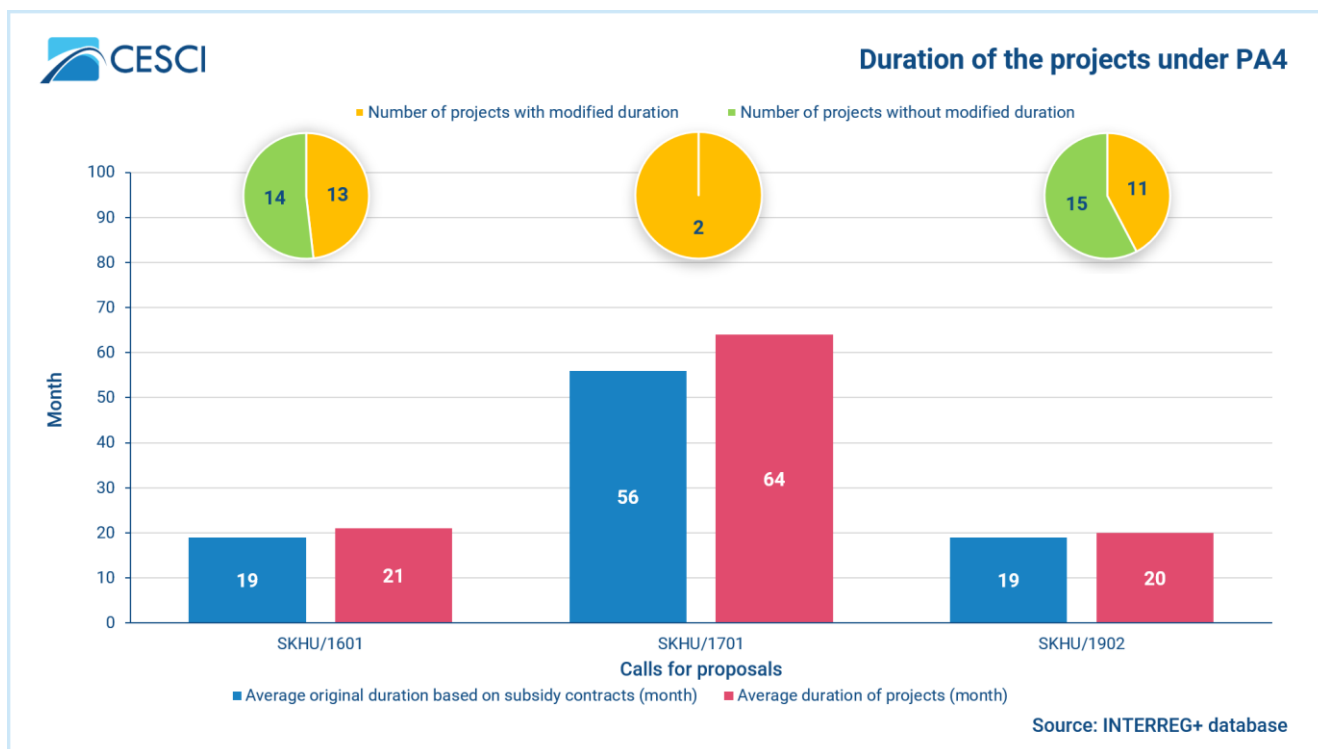


Due to the unexpected external and internal factors, many normal and small project beneficiaries were compelled to request the prolongation of the implementation period. Nearly half of the normal projects (47%, 26 projects) had to modify the original duration averagely by 2 months (from 20 months to 22 months).

The number of modified projects is the highest under the first normal call (13 projects; 48%), but the second normal call had also more than 10 prolonged projects (11 projects, 42%) and there were further modification requests which were in progress at the cut-off date. Regarding the SPF call, both umbrella projects have been prolonged, since the implementation of the small projects are in a delay. The value of average change was 2 months in the case of the normal calls, whereas the SPF projects needed additional timeframe longer than averagely 8 months. Due to these modifications, the average duration of SPF umbrella projects increased to 64 months (more than 5 years), while the average timeframe of the normal calls' projects was more than 1.5 years (21-20 months). The maximum duration change was 8 months under the two normal calls.

Under the first normal call the earliest start date was in May 2017 and most of the projects (96%) started within 2017 (there was one project that began in 2018). Four projects have already finished the implementation in the end of 2018, but all projects closed the process until the end of October 2019. In the case of the second normal call, the majority of the projects (62%) kicked off the implementation by the end of 2020 (earliest start date was the beginning of September 2020) and closed it by the end of 2022 (85% of the projects). There are only four projects whose planned end date is in 2023. The two SPF umbrella projects overarch the timeframe of the two normal calls. The earliest start date (April 2017) and the latest end date (March 2023) are linked to the ETA. The western project opened in the middle of 2018, and closed in the end of 2022.

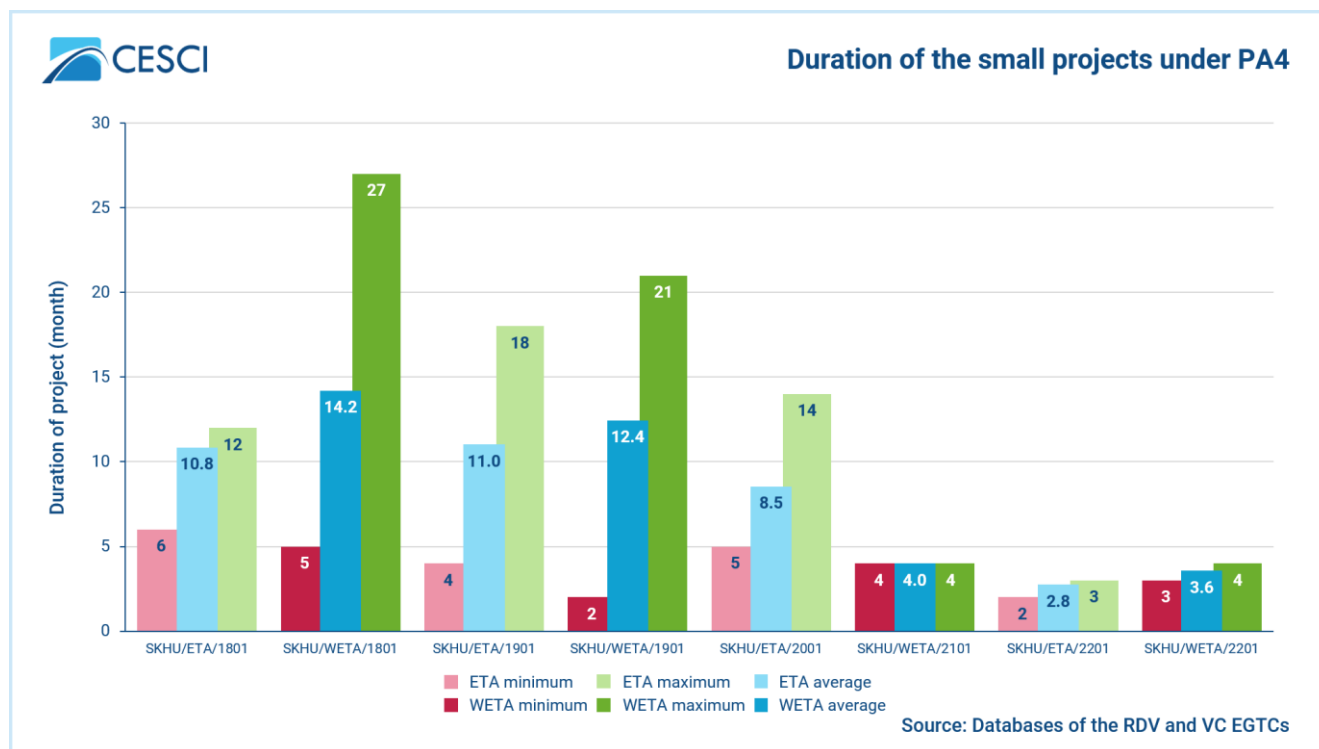
Figure 52: Duration of the projects under PA4



In the case of PA4 small projects, the average duration was nearly 10 months, but the divergence among the small projects is conspicuous. There are projects accomplished within 2 months, but one of the projects under SKHU/WETA/1801 required more than two years (27 months). Shortest average duration belonged to SKHU/ETA/2201 (2.7 months) and SKHU/WETA/2101 (4 months). On the contrary, the implementation period of projects was more than a year under SKHU/WETA/1901 (12.4 month) and SKHU/WETA/1801 (14.2 months), and the maximum duration under these CfPs was 27 and 21 months subsequently.

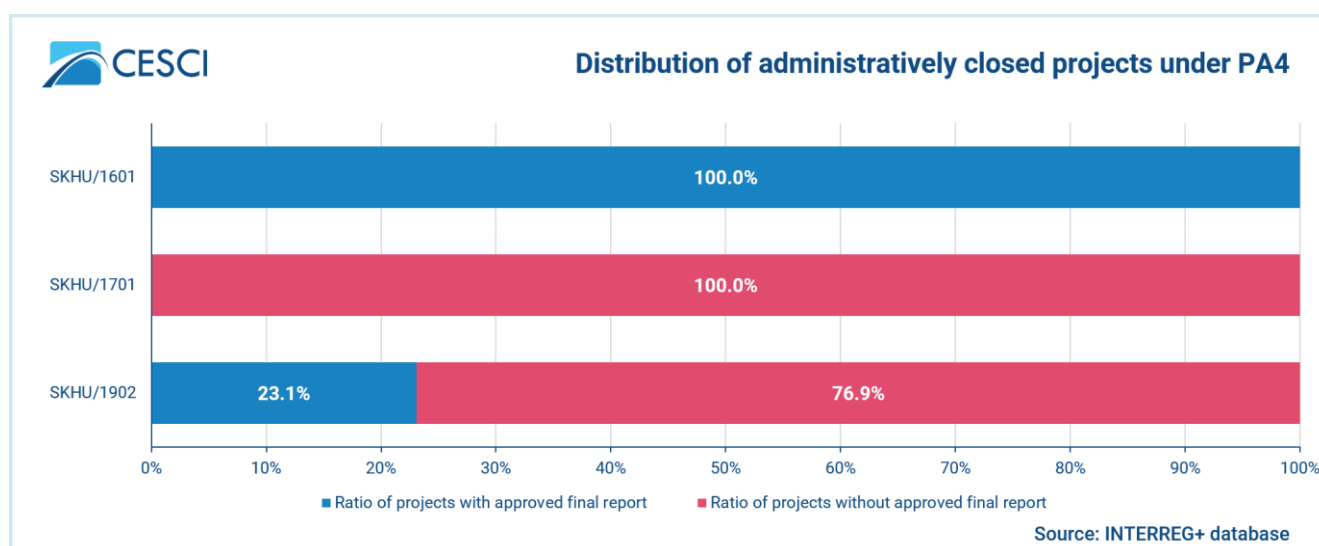
The first small projects started in February 1st, 2019 (SKHU/WETA/1801), and all small projects under the CfPs of 2018 finished their implementation by the end of March, 2022. The next CfPs were published in 2019 with a timeframe lasting from June 15th, 2019 to the end of June 2022. The CfPs of the last three years were more intense, since all projects were completed in less than a year (CfP of 2020: September 1st, 2021 – March 31th, 2022; CfP of 2021: January 1st, 2022 – April 30th, 2022; CfP of 2022: June 1st, 2022 – September 30th, 2022).

Figure 53: Duration of small projects under PA4



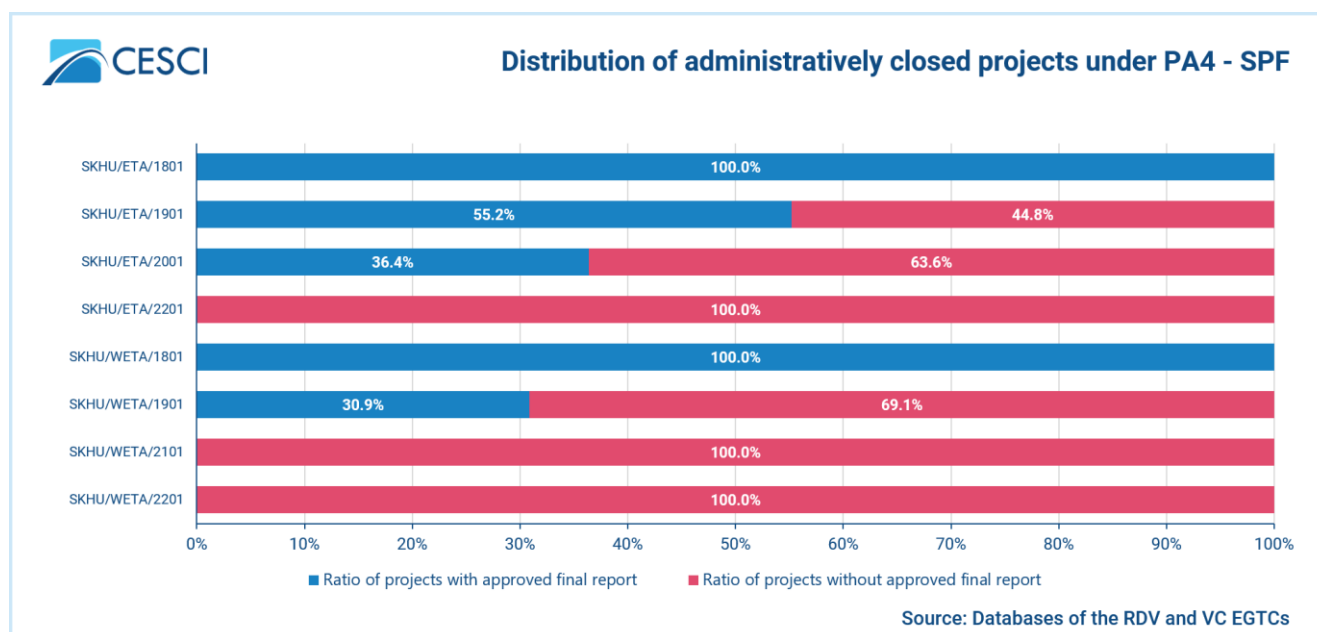
Under PA4, 60% of the normal projects (33 projects) possessed their final report at the cut-off date. Due to the scheduling of the projects (and the opening period of the calls) all the 27 projects under the first normal call had their final report, meanwhile in the case of the second normal call 76.9% of the projects (20 projects) had not submitted this document.

Figure 54: Distribution of administratively closed projects under PA4



In the case of the small projects, the progress of administrative closure was still moderate as more than half of them (63%; 121 small projects) had not submitted their final report. It means that only 72 small projects (37%) accomplished their implementation. The reason behind this shortage is that the implementation procedures are lengthy, as well as the CfPs were published at the ending phase of the programming period. ETA projects are at an advanced stage compared to WETA.

Figure 55: Distribution of administratively closed small projects under PA4



Under PA4, more than half of the EU contribution⁷⁸ (55%; EUR 12.7 million) was validated, and 39% of the ERDF allocation (almost EUR 8.9 million) was before the validation process, while the remaining amount was EUR 1.4 million (6%). The financial progress was the most advanced in the case of the first normal call: the rate of the validation was 87% (more than EUR 5.8 million). This value did not exceed 50% under the SPF umbrella projects (38%) and the second normal call (49%). As all projects under SKHU/1601 were administratively closed, the remaining contribution was nearly EUR 843 000 (13% of the total allocation). The projects under SKHU/1902 were partially closed, consequently the rate of non-validated funding was 50% (more than EUR 3 million) and the 1% remaining ERDF will increase until the closure of the programme.

On project level the ratio of validated money was more than 70% under the first normal call, however in the case of the projects *Without borders and barriers*⁷⁹ (37%) and *KIP ON LEARNING* (36%) the rate of remaining money was relatively high. Regarding the second normal call, there were significant differences in the projects' validation process. The rate of validated ERDF was nearly 100% under *LILI*⁸⁰, *VITALITA* and *PAMOK*⁸¹, and *STOP BULLYING*⁸², meanwhile under *CrossCoop*⁸³, *RoRehab*⁸⁴ and *IpOLD*⁸⁵ the validation of the costs did not started by the cut-off date.

⁷⁸ SKHU/1701 includes the management costs and implementation costs as well.

⁷⁹ SKHU/1601/4.1/239, Without borders and barriers

⁸⁰ SKHU/1902/4.1/069, LIVE FOR LIFE

⁸¹ SKHU/1902/4.1/010, Inter-institutional health care cooperation between hospitals VITALITA and PAMOK

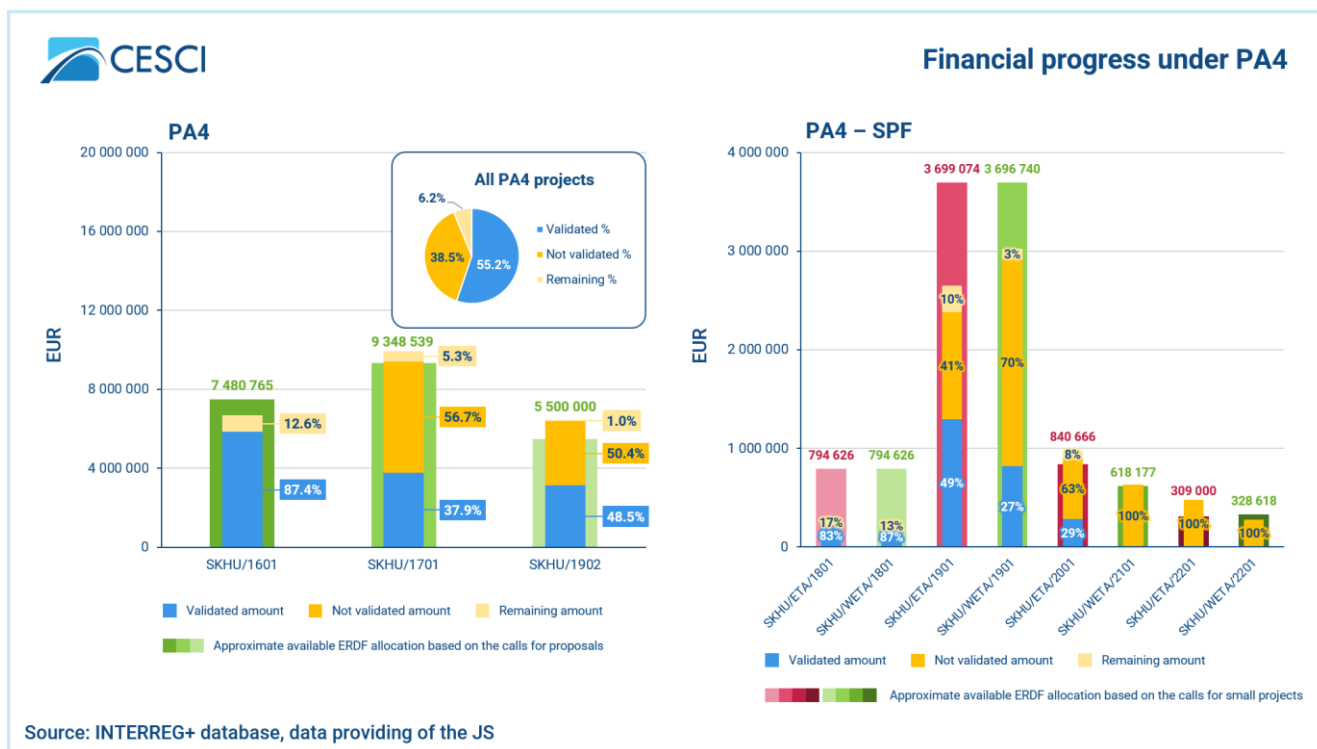
⁸² SKHU/1902/4.1/105, STOP BULLYING - NO BULLYING

⁸³ SKHU/1902/4.1/111, Cross-border Cooperation in Healthcare between the Hospitals of Balassagyarmat and Velký Krtíš

⁸⁴ SKHU/1902/4.1/112, Robot-assisted Therapy in Stroke Rehabilitation

⁸⁵ SKHU/1902/4.1/076, Developing an integrated age-friendly region within the area of the Ipoly-Völgye EGTC

Figure 56: Financial progress under PA4



Regarding the small projects, out of the total contracted ERDF (EUR 8.5 million) only 33% (EUR 2.8 million) had been validated, while the non-validated amount accounted for 61% (nearly EUR 5.2 million). 6% (EUR 529 000) belonged to the remaining category. On CfP level, the ratio of validated amount of money was the highest in the case of SKHU/ETA/1801 (83%; more than EUR 226 000), SKHU/ETA/1901 (49%; nearly EUR 1.3 million) and SKHU/WETA/1801 (87%; more than EUR 199 000), while under the other 5 CfPs the not validated category had the largest values.

For the umbrella projects, the total cost of fund management under PA4 is around EUR 1.4 million. The ratio of validated ERDF was higher in the ETA project (74%; EUR 518 000), but the value of WETA project was also above 60% (62%; nearly EUR 435 000).

Seven output indicators have been assigned to PA4, which are to be reported yearly. As the following *Table 28* illustrates all measurement units are given in 'number' and the listed indicators give relevant information about the cross-border products and services (*O411 Number of cross-border products and services developed*), published documents (*O412 Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF*, *O414 Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF*), cross-border events (*O413 Number of cross border events*) and participants of the projects (*O415 Number of people participated in cooperation*, *O416 Number of women participated in cooperation*, *O417 Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma*)⁸⁶. Regarding the target values, the originally set goals have not been modified under the implementation period.

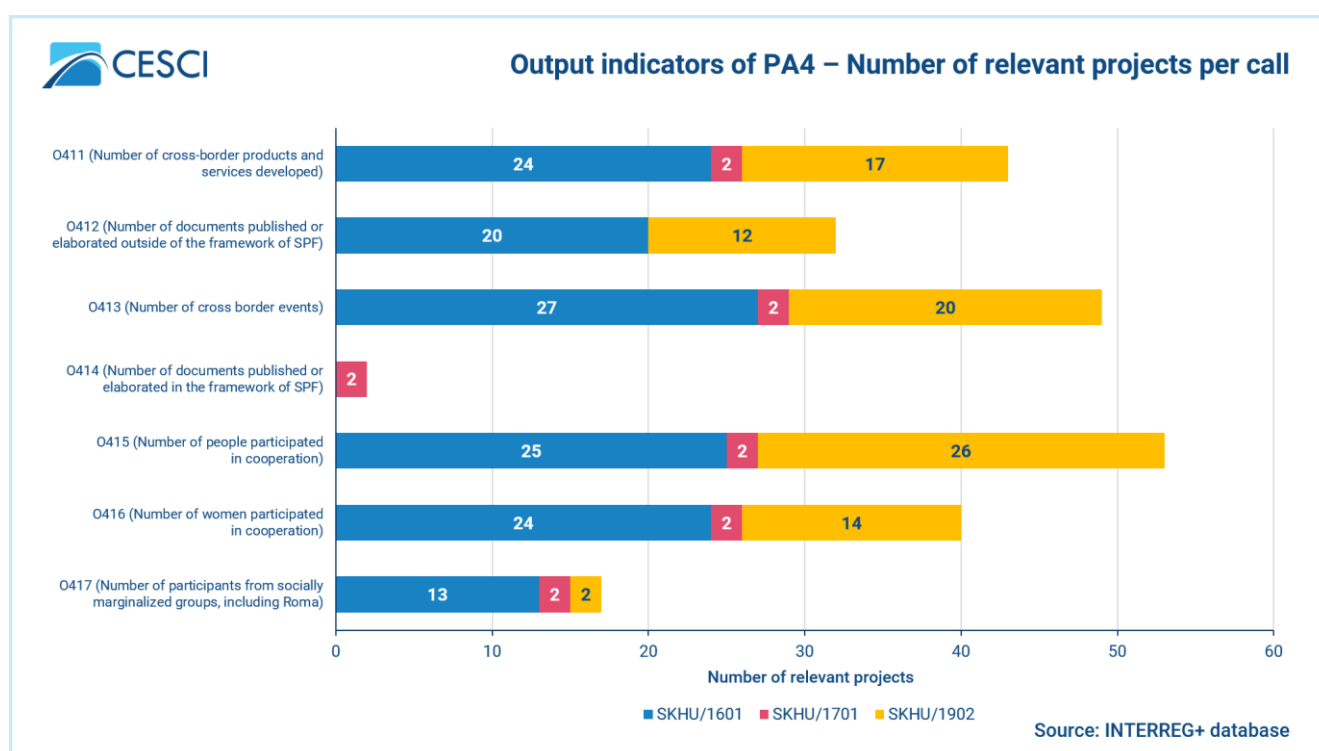
⁸⁶ In the following part of the analysis the indicators' shortened name is used. Find the list of the shortened indicators in the Annex (*Table 81: Shortened names of the indicators*).

Table 28: Output indicators of PA4 – Target values

ID	Name of indicator	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	Last modified target value (2023)
O411	Number of cross-border products and services developed	number	annually	20
O412	Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	number	annually	40
O413	Number of cross-border events	number	annually	400
O414	Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	number	annually	200
O415	Number of people participated in cooperation	number	annually	10 000
O416	Number of women participated in cooperation	number	annually	4 000
O417	Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	number	annually	300

The fulfilment of the indicators is ensured by different number of projects (see *Figure 57*). Most of the 55 PA4 projects chose more than one indicator. In average, the number of indicators per project was 5 under SKHU/1601, 6 under SKHU/1701 and 4 under SKHU/1902. Altogether 11 projects (9 normal, 2 SPF umbrella projects) chose 6 indicators – which is the maximum due to the contradiction of *O412 Documents elaborated outside SPF* and *O414 Documents elaborated in SPF* –, through which the comprehensive and strategic approach of the indicators is ensured.

Figure 57: Output indicators of PA4 – Number of relevant projects per call



6 output indicators have been chosen by small projects and all of them were supported by more than 40 projects per each. The most frequent indicators were *O416 Women participated in cooperation* (126 cases) and *O415 People participated in cooperation* (123 cases) where the number of small projects per indicator was more than 100 (74% of them belong to the western border area). On the contrary, the indicator *O411 Cross-border products and services* was selected by only 42 small projects, hence this was the least popular indicator under PA4. The average number of indicators per small projects was 3.2 under PA4 (more than 4 under WETA and nearly 2 under ETA projects). 29 small projects have selected no indicator.

Figure 58: Output indicators of PA4 SPF – Number of relevant small projects per call

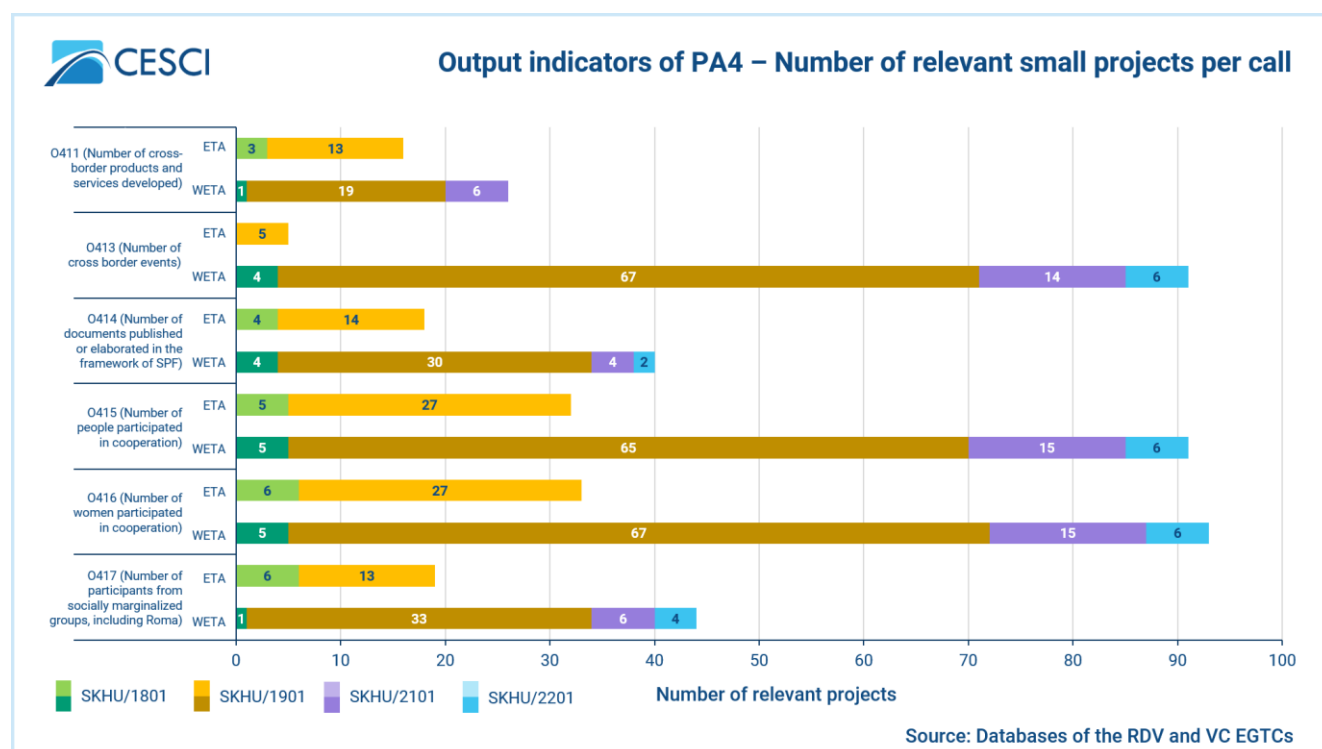
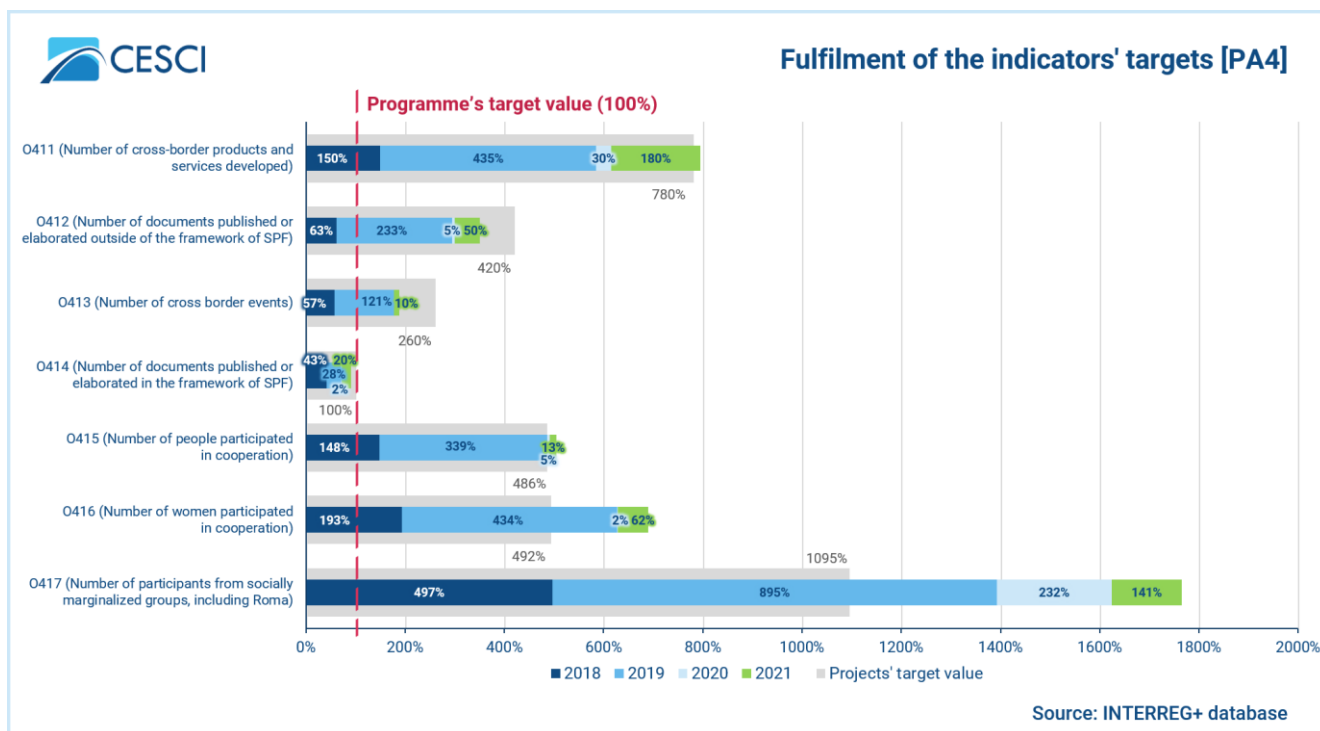


Figure 59 introduces the yearly progress of the fulfilment of the PA4 output indicators. The first achievement was registered in 2018, which was a milestone year for the first four indicators. The achieved values in 2018 were at least 70percentage point higher than the expected values. Moreover, in four cases (*O411 Cross-border products and services*, *O415 People participated in cooperation*, *O416 Women participated in cooperation* and *O417 Participants from socially marginalized groups*) the target value of 2023 has already been completed in 2018. In the following year, two other indicators (*O412 Documents elaborated outside SPF* and *O413 Cross-border events*) achieved the final goals, which means that the target values were defined in a too moderate and easily feasible way. By the time of the assessment *O414 Documents elaborated in SPF* indicator is the only one which is not met, but the deficiency is only 8pp (17 documents), which will be compensated in 2023.

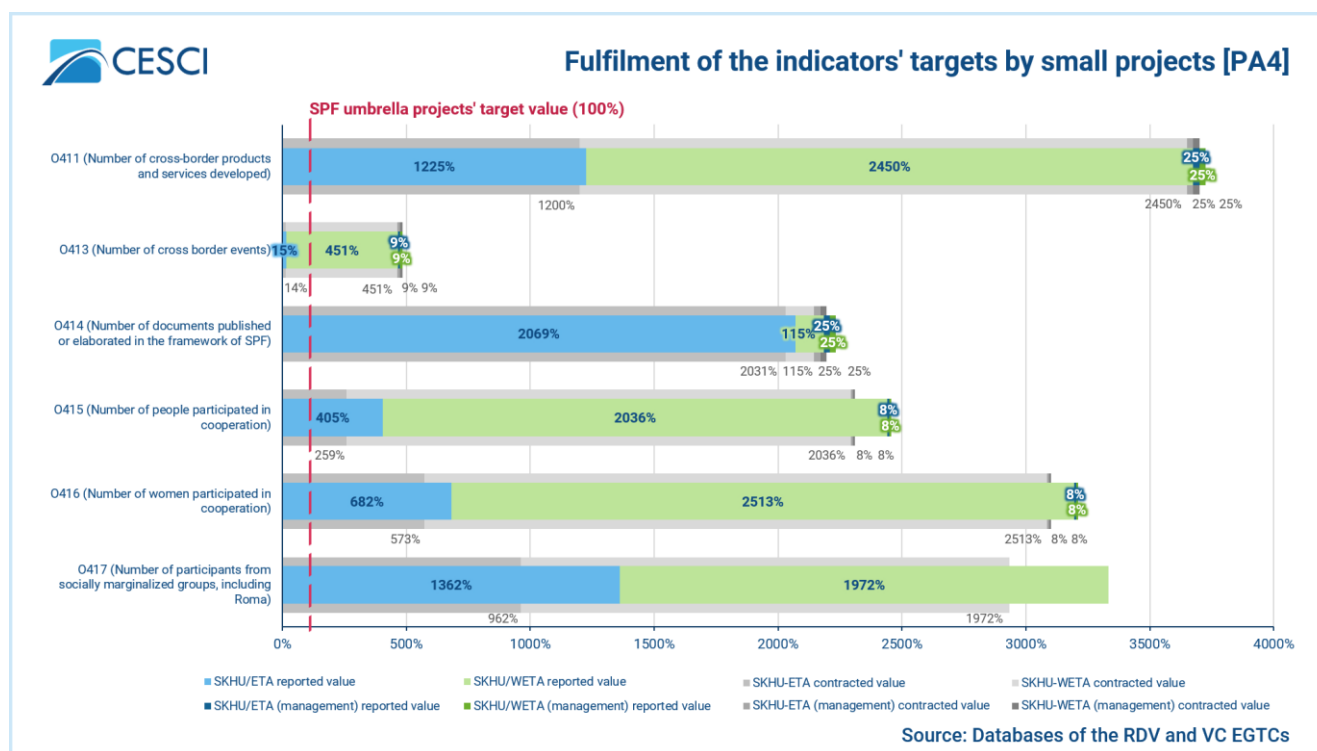
The number of participants is one of the most underestimated indicators, as in 2021 the 3 relevant indicators exceeded the final values by more than +400pp (*O415 People participated in cooperation* by +405pp, *O416 Women participated in cooperation* by +591pp, *O417 Participants from socially marginalized groups* by +1 665pp).

Figure 59: Fulfilment of the indicators' targets (PA4)



In case of the small projects, the programme indicator values proved to be too conservative, the degree of overperformance is more than +2 000pp (*O413 Cross-border events* represents the exception with +366pp overperformance referring to 311 events). The most significant surplus is measured in the case of *O411 Cross-border products and services*, where the achieved value exceeds the programme goal by +3 575pp (143 services). From this perspective territorial differences can be detected: while the WETA projects completed their project targets without surplus, the ETA projects exceeded them by up to 57pp (*O415 People participated in cooperation*). At the same time, the project targets have also been achieved but with lower surpluses (not more than +15pp). The indicators of the four umbrella projects have also been fulfilled by the cut-off date.

Figure 60: Fulfilment of the indicators' targets by small projects (PA4)



As the following *Table 29* indicates, the PA4 output indicators are in line with the S.M.A.R.T. criteria in terms of specificity and measurability, but achievability raises concerns due to the very conservative design of the target values (especially under *O411 Cross-border products and services* and *O417 Participants from socially marginalized groups*). Despite of the moderate goals, the target values have not been modified during the implementation period. This generated inadequate time bound phenomena, as six indicators have fulfilled the target values three years earlier. As far as relevance is concerned, the CBC perspective is missing especially from the event-related indicators (such as *O415 People participated in cooperation*, *O416 Women participated in cooperation* and *O417 Participants from socially marginalized groups*), since the number of participants does not give information about the cross-border participants. Therefore, the measurement unit of 'number of CB participants of the events' should have been used.

Table 29: Output indicators of PA4 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
O411 Number of cross-border products and services developed	The indicator is specific.	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is eight times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target value should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.

2nd PHASE EVALUATION: Effectiveness, efficiency and impact evaluation
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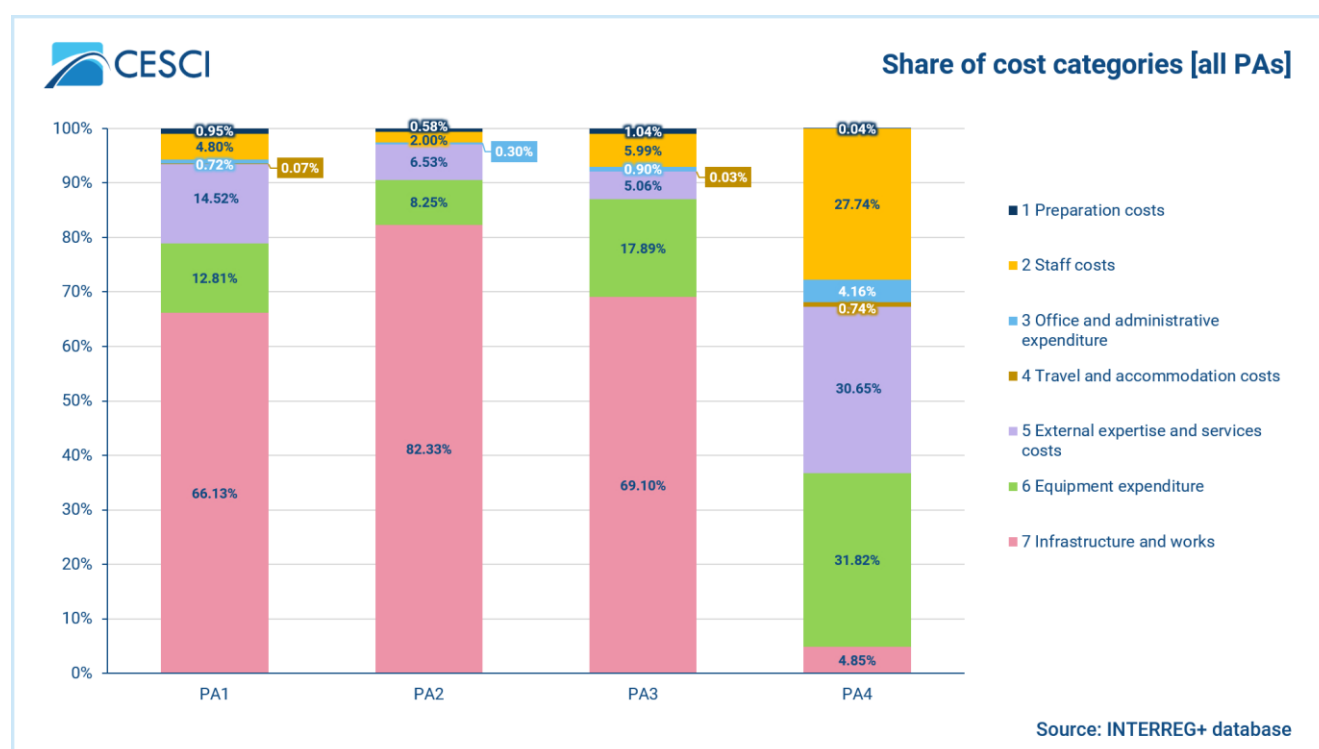
ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
O412 Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	The indicator is specific.	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is three and half times higher.	The indicator is moderately in line with the intervention logic of the PA, since it does not measure any aspect of CBC.	The year in which the target value should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
O413 Number of cross border events	The indicator is specific.	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is two times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target value should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
O414 Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	The indicator is specific.	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is achievable and ambitious.	The indicator is moderately in line with the intervention logic of the PA, since it does not measure any aspect of CBC.	The year in which the target value should be achieved and the frequency of the measurement is also well-defined.
O415 Number of people participated in cooperation	The indicator should focus on the CB participants.	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is five times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA, but the CBC aspect is missing	The year in which the target value should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
O416 Number of women participated in cooperation	The indicator should focus on the CB participants.	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is seven times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA, but the CBC aspect is missing.	The year in which the target value should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.
O417 Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	The indicator should focus on CB participants.	The indicator is measurable.	The target value is not ambitious enough. The achieved value is more than seventeen times higher.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA, but the CBC aspect is missing.	The year in which the target value should be achieved is not well-defined, but the frequency of the measurement is adequate.

2.1.2 Assessment of the projects' budget framework

The following paragraphs introduces the composition of budgets by PA to present the similarities and dissimilarities among the Priority Axes. Apart from PA4, the infrastructure development was the most dominant cost category as it represented more than half of the budgets (PA1: 66%; PA2: 82%; PA3: 69%). The outstanding value of PA2 was due to its thematic focus since it contained dominantly hard infrastructural works such as bridge construction. Regarding PA4 the three largest – and approximately equal size – cost categories were the equipment expenditures (32%), external expertise costs (31%) and staff costs (28%), as this PA contained mostly soft projects with less infrastructural work (5%).

Taking into account the aggregated values of small projects under both relevant PAs, the most dominant types of costs were: the external expertise and services costs (51%) and equipment expenditure (24%). Furthermore, only the staff cost (12%) and infrastructure work (10%) achieved 10%. While the most dominant budget categories within PA1 were infrastructure development (44%) and external expertise (30%), within PA4 57% of the budget was spent on external expertise and 26% on equipment (and 0% to infrastructure).

Figure 61: Share of cost categories



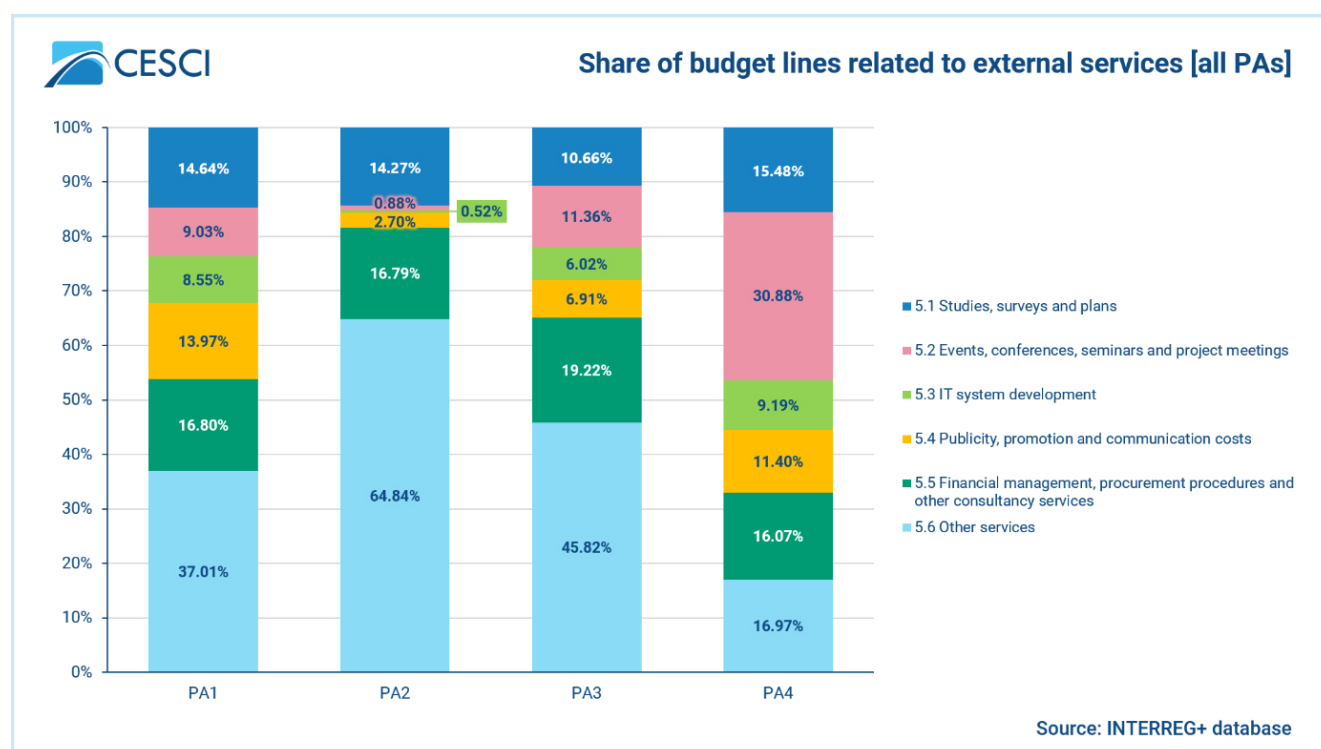
Focusing on the external services, the category of other services was the most dominant among the first three PAs (PA1: 37%; PA2: 65%; PA3: 46%), while under PA4 it did not achieve 20%. Beside marketing and translation (latter was less than EUR 150 000 under all PAs) the most significant components of other services were:

- study tour, catering, transportation, legal service and technical support under PA1;
- engineering, archaeological research and development of a bicycle-sharing system under PA2;
- expert and technology services, event coordination, training and mentoring under PA3;

- web editing, printing of catalogues, field working, travelling, trainings, catering and branding under PA4.

Under PA4 the biggest external budget item was the costs of events, conferences, seminars and project meetings (31%), that was around 10% under the rest PAs. 16-19% of the PAs' budgets (the second largest external budget item under PA1, PA2 and PA3) were spent on financial management, procurement procedures and other consultancy services, while 11-15% were used for drafting studies, surveys and plans. The publicity, promotion and communication costs represented more than 10% under PA1 and PA4, but none of the PAs spent more than 10% of their external budget on IT system development.

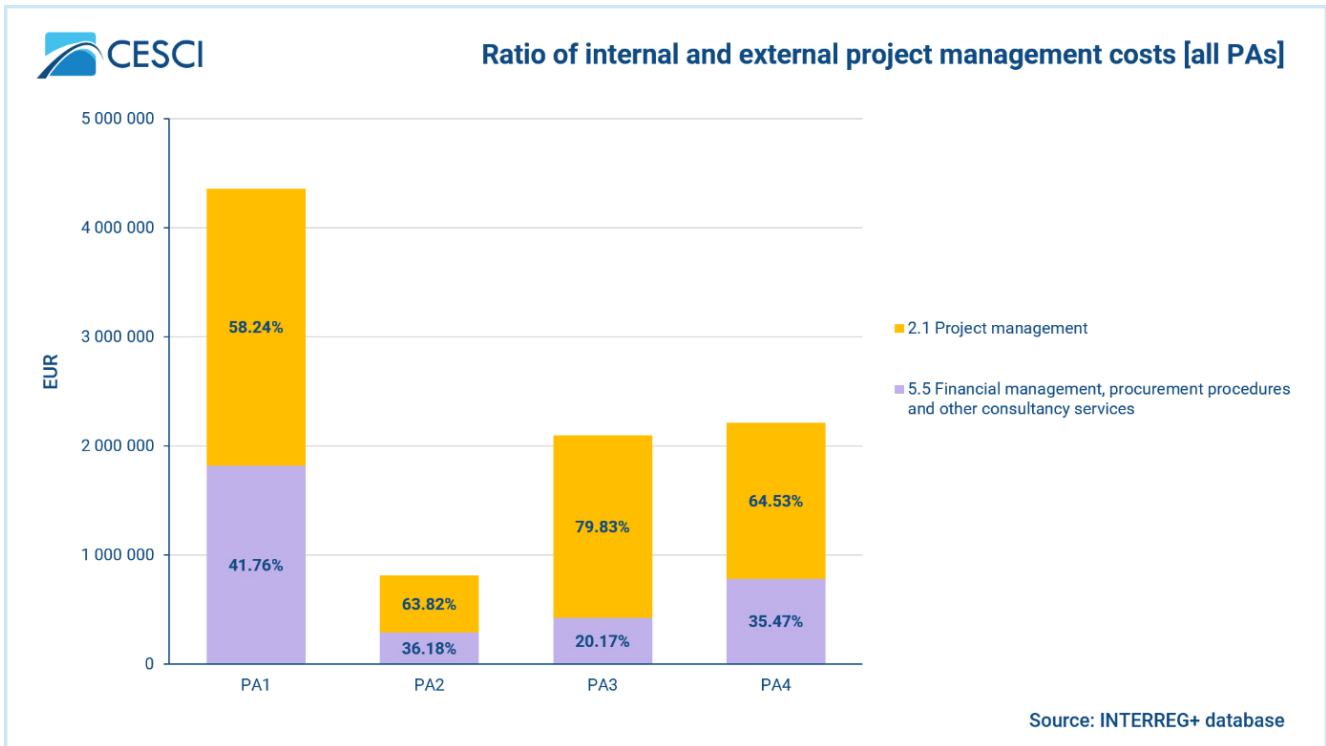
Figure 62: Share of budget lines related to external services



Considering the distribution of project management costs, PA1 projects spent the biggest amount of money on it (more than EUR 4.3 million), while PA3 and PA4 a bit more than EUR 2 million, and PA2 less than EUR 1 million. Comparing the internal and external management costs, the management was ensured mostly by inner resources. The ratio of internal management costs was the highest under PA3 (80%), while it was around 64% under PA2 and PA4, and 58% under PA1.

The internal professional staff cost accounted for 45% of the total staff cost. PA4 was the only exception, where more than half of the staff cost was spent for internal experts (68%). Under PA1 and PA3, this value was around 30-35%, while under PA2 less than 4% of the professional staff was ensured by internal sources. Overall, 83 projects did not spend on internal professional staff, out of which 38 belonged to PA1 (PA3: 27 projects; PA4: 12; PA2: 6).

Figure 63: Ratio of internal and external project management costs



For a more detailed analysis by PAs, please refer to the chapter “3.3 Analysis of the cost categories” in the Annex.

2.1.3 Programme management

2.1.3.1 Capacity and lead time assessment

The management structure of the programme has not changed significantly since the elaboration of the 1st Phase Evaluation (related chapter: 3.3.1 *Performance management*)⁸⁷. The list of authorities and bodies taking part in the implementation of the Cooperation Programme and their role are presented in the Annex (3.4 *Table of the authorities and bodies of the Programme*). Since then, one major change occurred: from October 1st, 2020 all duties and competences were transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic to the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic. The following table contains the members of the Monitoring Committee for 6th September 2022.

Table 30: List of MC members

Type of membership	Hungarian members	Slovakian members	EU members
Voting members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Managing Authority) Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy State Secretariat for Regional and Cross-Border Economic Cooperation, Department for Cross-border Cooperation Programmes (Managing Authority) Ministry for Innovation and Technology Ministry of Finance Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megye Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megye Heves megye Nógrád megye Pest megye Komárom-Esztergom megye Győr-Moson-Sopron megye 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (National Authority) Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic Bratislavský kraj Trnavský kraj Nitriansky kraj Banskobystrický kraj Košický kraj 	
Non-voting members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directorate General for Audit of European Funds (Audit Authority) Hungarian State Treasury (Certifying Authority) Flora and Fauna of North-Hungary Foundation Equal Treatment Authority Ministry of Agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office of the Slovak Republic Deputy Prime Minister for Investment and Informatisation Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Commission

⁸⁷ First Phase Evaluation of the INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme

Type of membership	Hungarian members	Slovakian members	EU members
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prime Minister`s Office, State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, National minorities And The Aid of Persecuted Christians • Directorate General for Social Affairs and Child Protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association of Cities and Municipalities of the Slovak Republic • Slovak Chamber of Commerce and Industry • National Centre for Equal Opportunities 	
Observer with advisory capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budapest Danube Contact Point • National Coordinator of Danube Strategy • Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit Ltd. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC • Via Carpatia EGTC
Supportive function		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Info Point Bratislava • Info Point Košice • Info Point Nitra 	

The present chapter introduces the Programme Bodies' available capacities and skills, professional experiences and development needs; the way of utilisation of these capacities, how they can exploit the existing assets, and how they can compensate the missing elements from their workforce. Besides the capacities, the evaluation also incorporates the assessment of the efficiency of the applied procedures and the timing aspects of implementation (lead time assessment). This chapter also gives insight into the operation of the particular bodies and the nature of the cooperation among them.

The 1st Phase Evaluation pointed at that the employees of the Programme Bodies should have multi-dimensional and complex skills. Moreover, the jobs in the ministries are not financially attractive compared to business sphere jobs. Hence, the vacant positions are appealing for rather career entrants, than experienced ones.

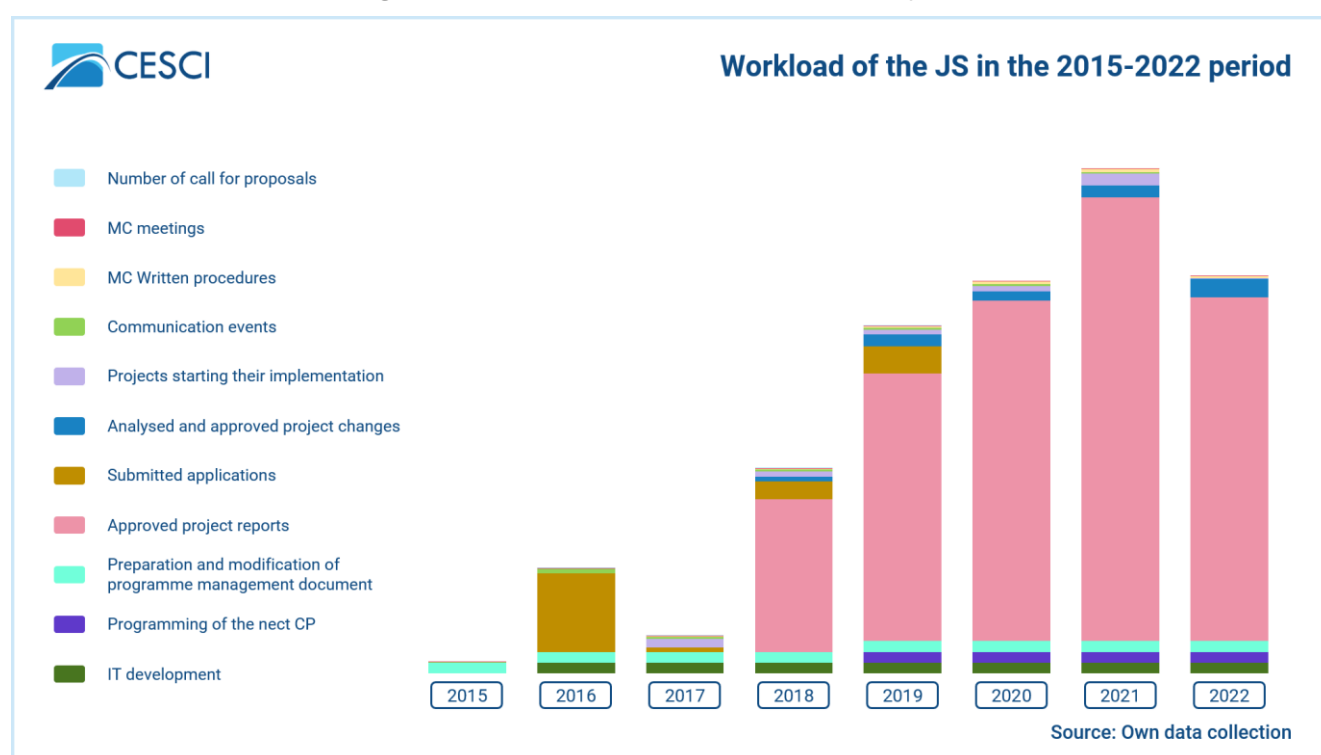
The structure of the JS is horizontal, all 9 staff members are programme managers, but two of them holds leading positions as head and deputy head of the JS. The programme managers are not entitled to one PA. In terms of the capacities, the interviewees indicated that they have been able to deal with the tasks during the programming period, however the fluctuation because of the maternity leaves made them face challenges. During the programming period, some communication tasks have been outsourced to an external expert, but the main webpage of the programme is still handled internally. In addition, there would be a demand for another colleague for dealing with the planning and monitoring of the Technical Assistance. The work of the JS is supported by 3 Info Points on the Slovakian side (Bratislava, Košice and Nitra) with 1 staff member by each. They are the employees of the relevant county councils and work only part time for the programme.

The work of the Management Authority is not limited to the CBC programme of the Hungarian-Slovakian border area, since they also play the MA and NA roles in other CBC programmes concerning Hungary. Altogether 3 persons are devoted in the quarter of their worktime to the SKHU programme complemented by 1 person who works as a programme manager in full time, and 1 executive who deals with all seven CBC programmes. Nevertheless, there are further employees who work on horizontal issues, such as financial and legal assignments. Altogether there are 2-3 full-time employee at the MA,

but in optimal case there ought to be one more programme manager and further horizontal experts to be in charge of the financial, legal and strategic management. Based on the interviews, even if the staff of the MA is overburdened, they can provide smooth and efficient operation. Regarding the NA, similar deficiencies were not reported, since 8.85 fulltime employees work within the Ministry.

Regarding the FLCs, the Hungarian Bodies (Budapest, Mátészalka and Sopron), similarly to the MA, deal with more programmes, which means that controllers tend to not focus on only one CP. According to the interviewees, the capacities of the Hungarian FLC are basically ensured (8-9 full time employees), but the numerous small projects caused difficulties in their workload. By contrast, the Slovak FLC team consist of one office in Bratislava with 8-9 full time employees. In light of the interview with the Slovak FLC, they do not see any problem with their capacities and the experienced accidental delays occurred for external reasons.

Figure 64: Workload of the JS in the 2015-2022 period



According to the JS, it is hard to define the peak periods in advance, but mostly they happen during the project contracting phases and when the reporting and modification procedures are overlapped. *Figure 64* shows that the workload of the JS was the most challenging in the second half of the programming period, especially between 2020 and 2022 when the project implementations were on their peaks heavily affected by the consequences of the COVID-19, and the programming of the next CP has started in parallel. In 2021, the number of approved project reports was more than 2 000, the number of analysed and approved project changes was above 50 and at the same time 55 projects started. The involvement of SMEs caused temporary challenges for the JS which, at the beginning, was not familiar with the State aid rules. However, during the implementation of the projects, the JS acquired the necessary experiences, in this way it will no longer cause problems in the next programme period.

The main workload of Info Points stems from the preparation of applications and info days (in cooperation with the JS), and also from the administrative assessment of the applications. The

involvement of SMEs induced high interest from the beneficiaries' side: they wanted to get a clear picture about the rules, opportunities and requirements. Furthermore, one of the most frequent requests was to find a proper project partner or to explain the details of public procurement procedures. These requests were arisen usually when a new CfP was published. Basically, the workload of the Info Points depends on the number of individual requests.

The interviewee of one of the Info Points would prefer to be involved in the on-the-spot checks, thereby they could actively complete the work of the JS and the FLCs. Furthermore, one of the MC members indicated that it would be useful to establish Info Points on the Hungarian side of the border, since the regional info points would be able to better react on the needs of the local actors, especially in terms of finding the appropriate project partners.

Considering the MA, one of the main obstacles was the insufficient number of staff, which caused difficulties in the peak periods. Further difficulty used to be generated by the modifications of the national institutional structure (as a result of the elections) what always causes huge uncertainty regarding the conditions of the work. The NA highlighted the timing as the main problem of the workload, since the confluence of different tasks and the multiple processes require extra efforts. In spite of this, they stated that the workload was manageable.

From the Hungarian FLC – concerning the workload and the capacities – no significant concern was reported. The detected peak periods are on the second half of the implementation when the necessity to enforce the n+3 rule requiring close cooperation of the Programme Bodies, emerges. Thanks to the joint coordination, the target numbers were achieved and slightly surpassed. However, problems were registered related to the small projects, since – comparing to the normal projects – the SP beneficiaries are less experienced and they submitted many inaccurate reports, the correction of which was extremely time-consuming. On the side of the Slovak FLC, it was indicated that they did not manage to perform controls on time because of the insufficient quality of documents submitted by the beneficiaries and because of the large number of budget items. On the other hand, they also underlined that the TA budget is not enough to cover the appropriate number of controllers, which may also lead to delays in the peak periods. In line with the above, the respondents of the survey and beneficiary interviews highlighted that the slow control procedure of the Slovak FLC meant a bottleneck in the implementation of the projects in many cases.

Concerning the assessment of the cooperation between the Programme Management Bodies, the mostly used terms are 'confidential', 'open', 'satisfactory', 'adequate' and 'supportive'. The JS has daily cooperation with the MA, and the communication with the NA is also ensured (especially in the programming period). Owing to the informal connections, the communication is smooth and continuous, which results in rapid reactions. The NA, in general, considers the communication between the Programme Bodies satisfactory, that enables the effective work. It was also mentioned that communication seems to be more regular on the Hungarian side than across the border.

The atmosphere between the JS and the FLCs is supportive. The JS organised professional meetings for the FLCs, which were found beneficial by all parties. The joint events made possible the bilateral exchange of experiences between the Hungarian and Slovak authorities.

Similarly, all the MC members find the cooperation with the Programme Bodies satisfactory, all of them highlighted the high quality of the assistance that the JS provided to the decision-making. At the same time, majority of them criticised the use of English during the meetings and the written procedures.

According to them, they are not able to express themselves in an appropriate manner which hinders the exchanges on strategic issues. For some of them, the understanding of the professional documents also caused problems. As a consequence, sometimes the active involvement of the MC members into the conversation was not easy and the MC members hardly took part in the written procedures. This implies that the JS should be authorised to decide in these issues, i.e. the technical and administrative changes (e.g. prolongation) of the projects' implementation. The MC should be involved in the modifications which have thematic relevance.

2.1.3.2 Assessment of procedures of the project cycle

The Cooperation Programme is implemented through calls for proposals (CfP), subsequently, the selected beneficiaries implement their projects with the assistance of the Programme Bodies. The main steps and the responsible entities of this process within the programme are the following ones:

- Partner search (Potential Beneficiaries)
- Calls for Proposals published by the JS
- Development of the proposal (Potential Beneficiaries)
- Submission of the project proposals (Potential Lead Beneficiary)
- Formal Assessment of the projects (JS)
- Quality Assessment of the projects (JS, territorial experts, sectorial experts)
- Decision-making (MC)
- Contracting process (MA, JS, FLC, Lead Beneficiary and Beneficiaries)
- Project implementation (Lead Beneficiary, Beneficiaries, JS, FLC)
 - Reporting via Progress Reports in every 4 months and reimbursement of expenditures (Lead Beneficiary, Beneficiaries)
 - Implementing publicity requirements (Lead Beneficiary, Beneficiaries)
 - On-the-spot checks (FLC)
 - Monitoring visits (JS)
 - Validating the expenditures (FLC)
- Presenting the results (Lead Beneficiary, Beneficiaries, JS).

The utilisation of e-application has been introduced in this programme period that remarkably alleviated the burdens of the beneficiaries. The SKHU/1801 was the first CfP which prescribed the utilisation of the IMIS system. Previously, the submission was possible only in paper format and electronically on a CD/DVD (on pen-drive in the case of SKHU/1703). In order to increase the number of appropriate applications, the JS strove to minimise the administrative burdens of the beneficiaries. The JS required less annexes or it was enough to submit the supplementary documents in a later phase. The main goal was to reduce the number of those applications that are rejected due to formal incompleteness. The JS organised two completion rounds which made it possible to submit all sufficient annexes until the contracting. The two rounds were important, as certain potential beneficiaries did not understand every detail of the first completion letter.

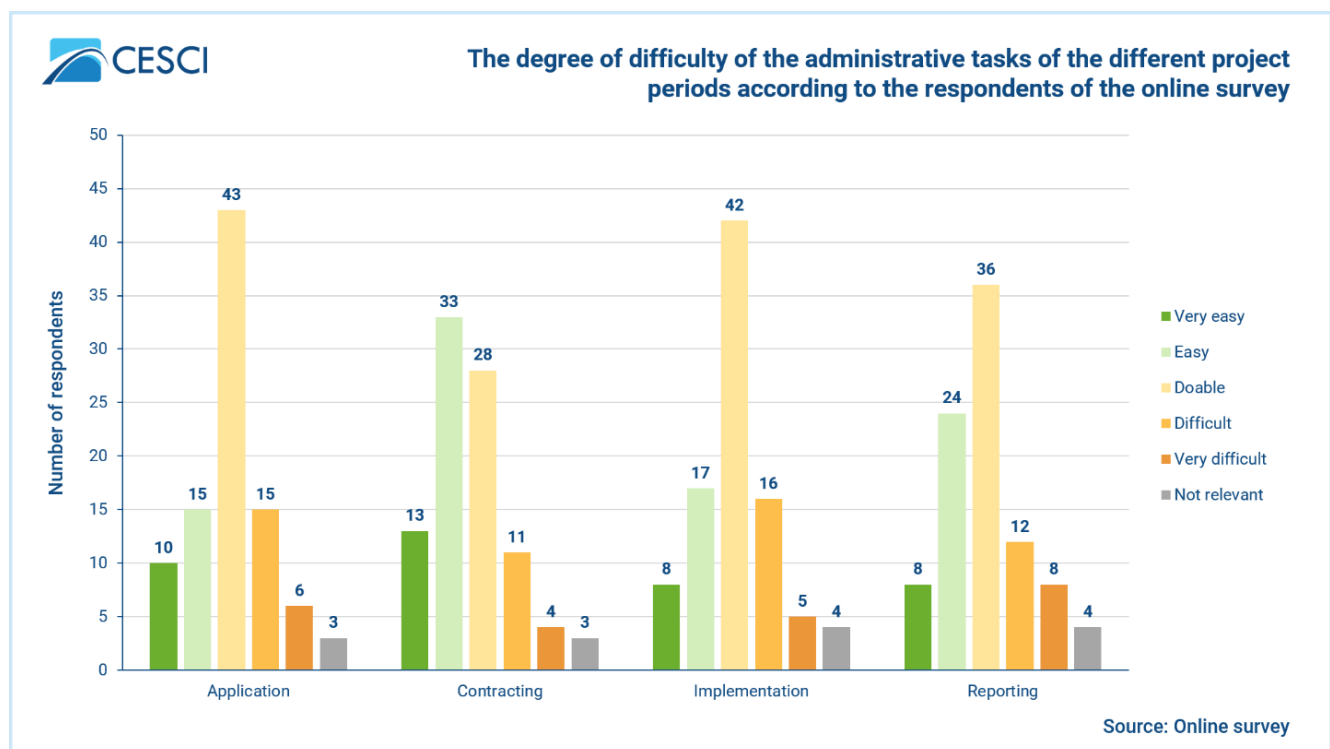
Another modification in the procedures was introduced in 2017, when the traditional administrative assessment made by the JS and the quality assessment done by external experts were replaced by a 4-step procedure in order to enhance the objectivity of the procedure. In the previous system, the application was assessed by independent external experts and the ranking lists were made based on

their scores. According to the new approach, after the administrative (formal and eligibility) assessment, the JS conducts a strategic assessment whether the project objectives are logically linked to the relevant priority axis and the project activities are in line with the list of supported activities (up to 43 points). The second part of the quality assessment is undertaken by territorial experts delegated by the counties and higher territorial units forming the programme area. The primary aim of this phase is to investigate whether the project objectives are in line with the relevant regional development plans and local initiatives (up to 20 points). The third part of the quality assessment is performed by external assessors selected from a pool of experts previously approved by the Managing Authority in agreement with the National Authority. The primary goal of this phase is to assess whether the project objectives are in line with sectorial trends, the expected results can be achieved, the expenditures are in line with market prices and the project outcomes are durable (37 points). The project proposals given 65 points at least were proposed for approval without conditions. The final decision was made by the MC.

During the contracting procedure, the JS invited all beneficiaries for consultations. Although these personal meetings were really time-consuming from the JS side, but it significantly contributed to the smooth implementation of the projects later on, and resulted in more durable project results.

In the survey, the beneficiaries had the chance to express their opinion about the difficulties caused by the administrative tasks of the different project periods. Based on the received answers, most of these tasks were manageable, while the contracting process was considered easy to implement. Altogether 8 respondents stated that the reporting was a very difficult process, however most of the beneficiaries (21 votes per task) declared that they had experienced a certain level of difficulty in application and implementation during the project cycle.

Figure 65: The degree of difficulty of the administrative tasks of the different project periods according to the respondents of the online survey



Most of the beneficiaries criticised the huge amount of paperwork and the difficulties met during filling the administrative documents. The bureaucracy harms the quality of implementation and causes extra irrational burdens for the beneficiaries. For instance, some of the respondents considered the continuous reporting (especially in the case of SMEs) unnecessary, since they were compelled to report even there was no change in the achieved values.

The beneficiaries also reclaimed greater consistency between the scope of mandatory documents, e.g. under the normal and SPF calls, as well as in the control procedures when verifying the expenditures. According to the respondents, more clarification would be beneficial regarding the visibility and communication elements, including direct and clear descriptions (complemented by schemes and examples) about the communication requirements. Due to the opaque description and the lack of experience of the beneficiaries, it took a lot of time and energy to cope with the communication requirements. The visibility guide is useful, but the several modifications during the programming period hindered the smooth implementation of the requirements according to the respondents. Furthermore, the beneficiaries confirmed that personal consultations were useful during the implementation.

The interviewees several times referred to the (even of one year length) delayed performance of the Slovak FLC rooted in capacity shortages. At the same time, the representative of the Slovak FLC reclaimed the low quality of documents submitted by the beneficiaries. This delay had negative impact also on the Hungarian partners. Apart from this aspect, the beneficiaries' opinion on the FLC's work was positive: the communication with the two FLCs was correct and smooth, especially the Hungarian FLC created positive and supportive relations, and in most of the cases the beneficiaries accepted the decisions of the FLC (even though the beneficiaries have the opportunity to make a complaint at the NA). This firm and professional relationship between the FLC and the beneficiaries is owing to the extra activities undertaken by the FLC (prior and midterm info days, personal consultations).

2.1.3.3 Results of the simplification

This chapter, similarly to the First Phase Evaluation, is analysing:

- how the recommendations on simplification of the previous programme period and the 1st phase evaluation have been taken into account,
- the implementation rules of the current CP, including the scope of eligible expenditures, simplified cost options, procurement and state aid rules, reporting and e-application processes, from the perspective of administrative burdens.

Since evaluators do not intend to replicate the findings of the previous assessment, here the focus is on those aspects which have changed since 2018. The assumptions are based on the results of the interviews with the Programme Bodies and the beneficiaries, and of the online survey.

The following table lists the relevant recommendations drafted by the on-going evaluation of the Hungary-Slovakia Cross Border Programme 2007-2013, and identifies the responses given by the current programme by the time of the First and the Second Phase Evaluations. Regarding the colour coding, green means that the action is fully implemented, yellow shows that it is in progress or partially addressed, while the red coloured matters have not been addressed yet or are not expected to be tackled at all.

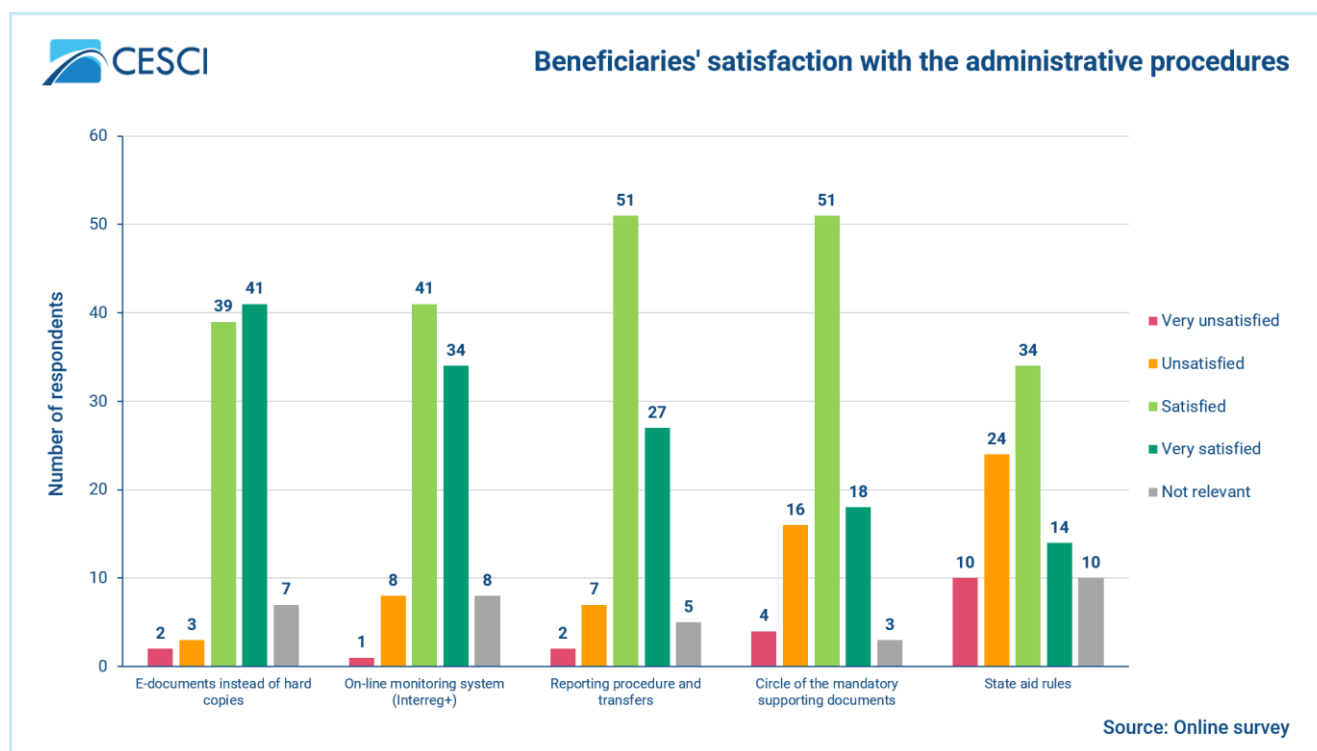
Table 76: List of the relevant recommendations and the identified responses

Recommendations	Response	
	1 st Phase Evaluation	2 nd Phase Evaluation
Too much paperwork on project level	The IMIS as on-line application and reporting tool was launched for both the Management Bodies and applicants in the first half of 2018. As a result, no paper-based documents have to be submitted to the calls. In addition, in order to reduce the number of paper-based documents, the JS communicates with the Lead Beneficiary through fully or partially electronic way.	The IMIS system was changed to the INTERREG+, which made the procedures even smoother. In the contracting phase, the electronic submission of the necessary documents instead of hard copies was temporarily introduced for the third call for proposals because of the pandemic.
Communication barriers between the FLC and the JS	There are different IMIS modules available for the first level control actors and for the JS, which makes the communication easier and quicker. Communication is made easier through building direct pathways for the different functions the platform users having distinct competencies. The structures of both modules are designed in accordance with their tasks and responsibilities as well as taking into account their rights as well.	The IMIS system was replaced by the INTERREG+, without generating problems.
Inefficiency of IMIS	A new background solution has been developed for the current programming period; however, the users still face technical difficulties.	The malfunctioning IMIS tool has been changed to the INTERREG+ system in 2020, which is a more user-friendly and reliable online application and monitoring tool.
Delay in the reporting procedures and transfers on management side	The problem is intended to be addressed by the re-establishment of the IMIS system, the revision of management rules of procedure and the simplified submission procedure (scanned documents instead of hard copy versions).	There was no change in the reporting procedures, but partly thanks to the well-functioning INTERREG+ tool and the more optimal capacities at the Programme Bodies, the actual length of the particular procedures tended to be shorter than the maximum number of days determined by the programme rules. In terms of the Small Project Fund, such delays still exist, which is addressed by "2.5.3 Small Project Fund" chapter of this document.

Recommendations	Response	
	1 st Phase Evaluation	2 nd Phase Evaluation
Lack of process differentiation in projects types	The programme applies different supporting schemes (Small Project Fund for P2P projects, TAPE for integrated cross-border developments, SME support) with different implementation rules and procedures.	No change. The details of the different implementation rules and procedures are described in the <i>"2.5 Evaluation of the mechanisms and tools applied by the Programme"</i> chapter.
Differences in national legislation (technical standards, public procurement)	It is out of the programme's competencies; therefore, it still applies for the related national rules. However, there are initiatives on European level to overcome the administrative burdens.	The problem could not be solved in the current programming period, but it was considered during the programming of the next CP. It aims at tackling such legal and administrative obstacles within the framework of the Interreg Specific Objective 1.
Unnecessary feasibility studies	The cost of feasibility studies is eligible only in case of the project contains infrastructure and works and the preparation of feasibility study is obligatory for the applicant. Otherwise, these studies are excluded from eligible expenditures.	In the 1902 call, additional annexes have been introduced: utilisation and maintenance plans for the beneficiaries developing infrastructure, and market research for those establishing new services. Both documents aim to guarantee the durability of the project results.
Time-consuming building permits	In order to speed up the application phase and save financial resources, in case the building permissions are not available at the time of submission of the application, PPs are invited to submit only the proof of the request for building permits with the application form. (Afterwards the applicants must submit the building permissions during the contracting period.)	In the application phase the submission of building permission was not required from the applicants, it was enough to send the technical plan and the visual design of the planned investment.

Most of the challenges of the previous programming period were partly or fully addressed by the time of the First Phase Evaluation in 2018, and some further simplification measures have been introduced since then, but there are still room for improvement according to the Programme Bodies and the beneficiaries.

Figure 66: Beneficiaries' satisfaction with the administrative procedures



INTERREG+ system

At the time of the First Phase Evaluation, the expectations concerning the IMIS 2014-2020 from both the programme management and the beneficiaries' sides were high, but due to the significant delay in its set-up, as well as its continuous malfunctioning at the beginning, the first experiences were rather negative. It was seen as an overcomplicated system, which showed problems with its operation from time to time. After a longer error management period, its functionality could not be consolidated, the number of software errors was still higher than expected. As a result, in 2019 the Managing Authority of all four Interreg programmes using the IMIS decided to launch a new procurement procedure on the development of a new IT system. In 2020, the so called INTERREG+ system started gradually replacing the IMIS 2014-2020 and the data of all projects of the 2014-2020 programming period were at least partly migrated to the INTERREG+. The administration of the projects of the later calls for proposals have already started in the new system. The system has still not been completed, there are missing modules which were not necessary for this programming period (e.g. application module). Since it is planned to keep the system for the 2021-2027 period, the IT development will continue.

The programme managers and all the representatives of the programme authorities positively evaluate the introduction of the new e-application and monitoring system. The new system alleviated the administrative burdens of both the beneficiaries and the Programme Bodies.

The beneficiaries are highly satisfied with the new system (3.39 points out of 4 in the survey), only one respondent experienced malfunction of the INTERREG+, and two other comments were made concerning the not user-friendliness of the system (referring to the naming of the click buttons).

E-submission

As a result of introducing the new on-line monitoring systems' (both the IMIS and the INTERREG+), the electronic submission of the documents instead of hard copy versions became possible through the whole project cycle, from the application to the reporting procedures. Majority of the documents are allowed to be signed, scanned and submitted on-line, but in the contracting phase, some hard copy versions are still mandatory. The period of the COVID-19 pandemic was an exception even in these terms, when electronic submission was allowed. Furthermore, a study is under elaboration, which tries to define the opportunities and requirements of e-signature's utilisation. Presumably, those actors who are able to use e-signature, will also have the opportunity to manage the contracting in electronic way.

According to the on-line survey, this simplification measure is appreciated the most (3.44 points out of 4) by the respondents. Many of the beneficiaries within the framework of both the interviews and the survey underlined that the electronic submission means a real simplification in practice, however, some of them encouraged the Programme Bodies to further simplify the contracting procedure and the application form (template module instead of excel tables).

Mandatory and supporting documents

The Programme Bodies asked for only those annexes for applications, which contributed to the quality assessment of the projects and were indispensable for checking the capacities of the applicants. For example, instead of building permits, applicants had to submit a technical plan and a visual design of their infrastructure development, which helped the assessors in the understanding of the project concept.

Although, these initiatives were welcomed by the beneficiaries during the interviews, the results of the on-line survey show, that there is still a demand on the beneficiaries' side to further simplify the system (2.98 points out of 4). For instance, those pieces of information which are defined by a law or regulation should not be checked by the Programme Bodies; the declaration on VAT should be enough for the contracting procedure, and the beneficiary should be asked to report the change in its status instead of submitting it for each report. A Slovak beneficiary proposed to eliminate the obligation to prove the payments of staff costs and the related taxes by bank statements in case of local municipalities. Despite of these criticisms, beneficiaries tend to be rather satisfied with the reporting procedure than not (3.25 points out of 4).

The management side indicated that they are not able to further decrease the number of annexes because it would be impossible to evaluate the capacities of the applicants and the quality of the proposal or the implemented activities. Nevertheless, it seems that there are possibilities for further simplification, for instance by having access to the e-government databases of both countries or simplified justifying documentation similarly to the mainstream Operational Programmes.

Eligible expenditures

In terms of the eligibility of expenditures, difficulties were poorly mentioned by the interviewees and the respondents of the survey. Some of the beneficiaries indicated that many organisations and institutions from the border region do not have the appropriate capacities to deal with project management tasks, therefore they need to involve external experts. The experiences show that the ceiling for project management cost set-up by the programme, do not provide enough room for

covering all the work carried out in the field of project management, thus beneficiaries asked for increasing the maximum amount for the budget category.

Language concerns

In general, using English during the whole project cycle is problematic for the beneficiaries, as well as for the members of the Monitoring Committee. Many of them indicated that they are not able to perfectly understand either the detailed strategic, or the technical information, and express themselves in English. These lead to misunderstandings hindering the smooth planning and implementation of the projects and make the involvement of external project managers necessary (see the problem related to the external management in point 'Eligible expenditures').

The Programme Bodies took note of the problem, and the JS agrees that the programme need to facilitate the strategic planning of the projects in native languages by providing briefs on the thematic information of the future Call for Proposals. In addition, key rules of the programme and national regulation will be published in Hungarian and Slovak similarly to the current programming period. However, English is planned to kept for all the technical and administrative procedures (i.e. application, reporting, etc.).

Advance payments

The vast majority of the survey respondents and the interviewees indicated that the lack of pre-financing in Slovakia means a problem, especially in the case of the small projects. In this way, many, mainly smaller beneficiaries, need to take a loan, which means extra administrative burden, as well as makes the project implementation more expensive, since interests must be paid until the project expenses are reimbursed. In this regard, the time for project costs reimbursement is way too long.

Public procurement

During the programming period public procurement caused the major difficulties for the beneficiaries. The problem mainly rooted in an external factor: due to the increase in prices, public procurement procedures became time-consuming as no or not adequate bids (financial offers exceeding the budget ceilings) were submitted to the calls. This led to the extension of many projects' duration and decrease in the technical content of the planned development (in order to fit into the planned budget). Another aspect of public procurements is the different legislation on the two sides of the border, which causes information gaps among the beneficiaries. The programme dealt with this problem by providing guidelines in national languages. However, it does not mean a solution for the development of joint infrastructure, where the split of the construction at the borderline is not possible, thus the beneficiaries should manage the public procurement jointly. Because of the legislative asymmetry, the programme offered unique solution for these developments (e.g. one of the beneficiaries were responsible for procuring the construction works for both sides of the border).

Last, but not least, according to some respondents, the eligible financial frames for public procurement are too low, especially in terms of the general price increase, which results in unnecessary administrative burdens.

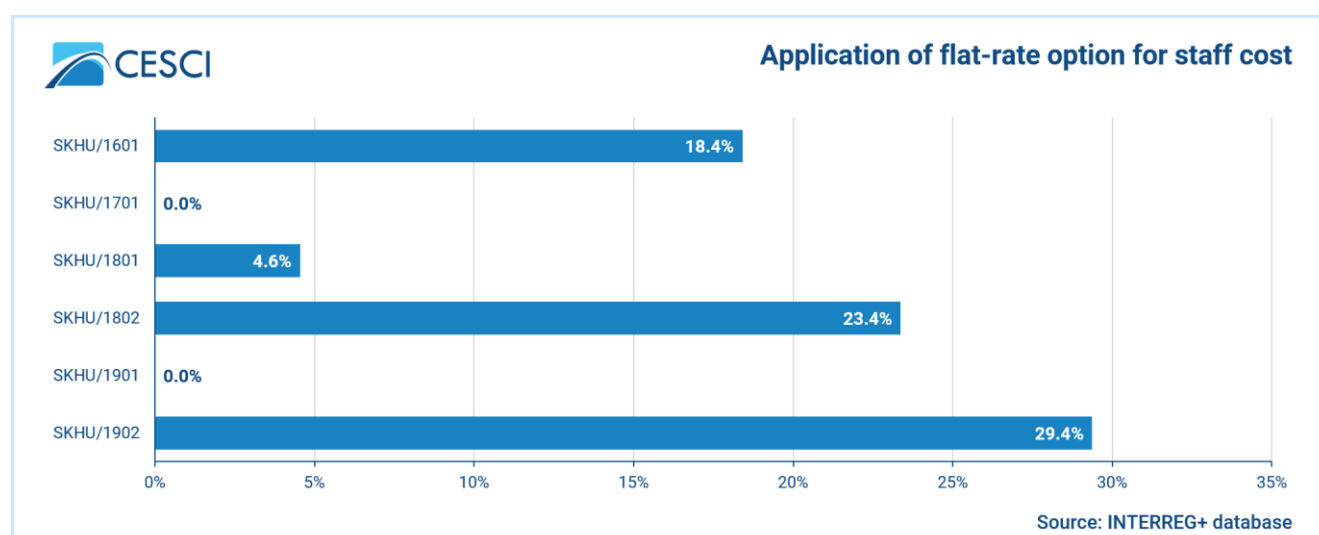
State aid rules

State aid rules are among the most problematic elements of the programme according to the respondents of the on-line survey (2,62 points out of 4). Some respondents of the survey and the interviews urged exemptions in several cases. Others mentioned that state aid rules hinder the sustainability of the projects. On programme management side it was stated that the related rules were not only complicated but it was very hard to make them understandable for the applicants. As this phenomenon was common in several ETC programmes, the Commission has amended the EU Regulation No 651/2014 introducing alleviations for them⁸⁸.

Simplified cost options

According to the programme rules, there is a mandatory flat-rate for covering the administrative expenditures of the beneficiaries (15% of the staff cost) and applicants may select the flat-rate option for reporting their staff costs (10% or 20% of the direct costs). Both the Programme Management Bodies and the beneficiaries welcome these simplified cost options (SCO) as they ease their administrative burdens and accelerate the project implementation procedures.

Figure 67: Application of flat-rate option for staff cost



As the figure shows, the optional flat-rate for staff cost was barely applied in the first calls for proposals, and the rates are still moderate at the later stages of the programme implementation too, but the positive tendency is noticeable. Regarding the whole programming period, there are no significant differences between the beneficiaries selecting flat-rate in terms of their nationality or legal status, but those with infrastructure development tend to be more open for the SCO than those without construction.

In line with the positive experiences, the already applied SCOs will be kept for the next programming period, in addition the JS works on the extension of the available simplified cost options.

⁸⁸ See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02014R0651-20210801&from=EN>

2.1.3.4 Internal assessment of the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies

The internal assessment of the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies is prepared based on the programme documents, the databases provided by the JS and the interviews.

The JS has assisted the applicants and the project beneficiaries during the whole project cycle including, among others, the publication of the CfPs, different guidelines, handbooks and information materials. Although, the main and official communication channel between the beneficiaries and the JS is the INTERREG+ system, the JS is available for the beneficiaries not only online (e-mail), but also via phone and in person. In-person meetings used to be held at the beginning of the contracting procedure, where the details of the projects' implementation were discussed. Furthermore, the staff of the Secretariat held on-the-spot checks to examine the pace of project implementation. Owing to the online format, the JS could meet with the partners more frequently what strengthened the bonds and improved the communication flows between the Programme Bodies and the project partners.

The JS is in charge of the programme's communication. Its main platform is the official website of the programme but the beneficiaries find up-to-date information on the CP's Facebook site too. The Secretariat organised altogether 61 communication events between 2015 and 2022 to provide opportunity for discussion. As a lesson learnt from these events, it would be useful to organise thematic forums where the beneficiaries can describe their goals and problems as well as search partners and create new bonds.

Regarding the performance of the JS, more than 7 100 project reports were approved and 265 project changes were carried out. The *Table 31* introduces the indicators of the JS's performance regarding the peak years of the programme.

Table 31: Performance of the JS

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of projects starting their implementation	0	0	40	25	21	25	55	3
Number of analysed and approved project changes	0	0	1	20	57	45	55	87
Number of approved project reports	0	0	0	708	1 241	1 579	2 060	1 595
Number of communication events	2	21	7	8	7	8	8	0

Table 32: Features of the duration of the contracting procedure (under the whole programme period)

	Length of the contracting procedure (calendar days)	Duration set in the Manuals (calendar days) ⁸⁹
Average	233	120
Minimum	128	

⁸⁹ The exact duration is 4 months.

	Length of the contracting procedure (calendar days)	Duration set in the Manuals (calendar days) ⁸⁹
Maximum	654	

The start date of the contracting procedure is the day of sending the notifying letter on approval to the beneficiaries, while it ends when the LB signs the contract. *Table 32* shows the length of the contracting procedures, i.e. the timeframe between the MC decision and the signature of the contract by the LB. The average duration of the contracting procedure was 233 days, which significantly exceeded the timeframe set-up by the CP rules. The reasons behind the phenomenon are not homogenous, however the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic obviously hardened the in-person administration, which was necessary for the mandatory annexes. It is worth mentioning, that the evaluators omitted the PA3-related projects from the calculation, since in this case the contracting did not necessarily start immediately after the MC decision.

Table 33: Features of the duration of the reporting procedure (under the whole programme period)

	Duration of the approval of the project reports (calendar days)	Duration set in the Manuals (calendar days)
Average	19	60 (30+30)
Minimum	0	
Maximum	176	

According to the Subsidy Contract, the beneficiaries had to report on the implementation of their project part and apply for reimbursement along by 4 months periods. The reporting procedure was built up from two phases: (1) 'national' part based on the Member States (NA and FLC) and the beneficiaries; (2) joint part based on the joint institutional structure (MA and JS) and the LB. After the approval of the beneficiary report, the LB summarised the received information and prepared the Project Report and the Application for Reimbursement in the name of the consortium to the JS. The verification of the documents had to be carried out in 30 calendar days from the submission (if completion was needed, further 30 calendar days were available). The average duration of the acceptance of the project reports was 19 days (far within the duration set in the manuals), and there was no CfP where the average value of reporting surpassed 30 days.

2.1.3.5 External assessment of the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies

In order to further evaluate the assistance of the Programme Bodies, the applicants and beneficiaries were also given the opportunity to express their views. In the framework of an online survey and the interviews two main relevant topics were explored: (1) the quality of assistance provided by the Programme Bodies during the project cycle and (2) the availability, clarity and user-friendliness of the programme information.

In the survey, the beneficiaries had the chance to indicate their concerns and opinion about the obstacles they faced during the project cycle. The obstacles mentioned most often reflected the bureaucracy and financial challenges. Under the slogan of 'less bureaucracy' the respondents referred

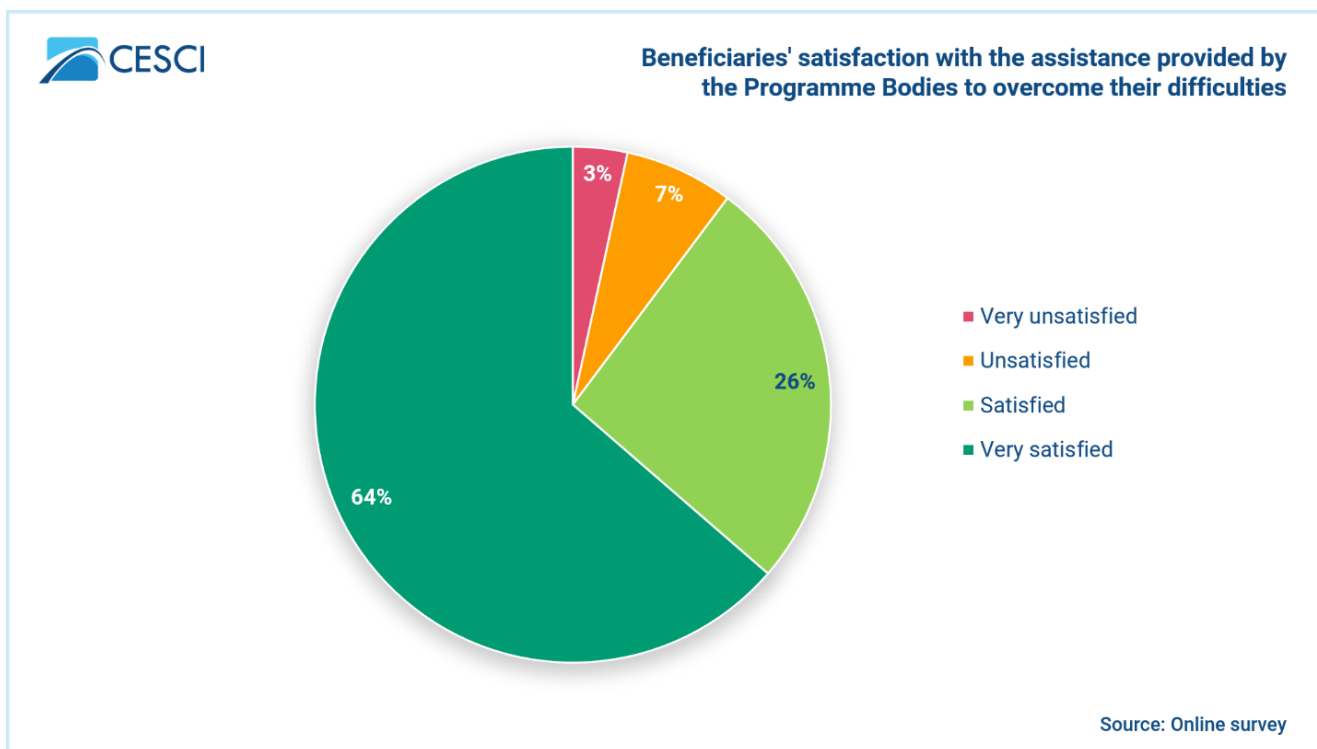
to the simplification of the (financial) reporting system and the administration, but some of them objected the long and sometimes ambiguous guides as well. The financial system was another field to be improved in the next programming period. Primarily, the prefinancing should be permitted in the Slovakian side too (at least for NGOs, smaller municipalities and small businesses) and the complexity and uncertainty of the public procurement should be reduced. The control of the public procurement process is too long and it would be useful to monitor the public procurements by the FLC during the preparation, before the contracting, especially in the Slovak side (in Hungary the controllers have already provide such service). The time-consuming control procedure by the FLC risked the implementation of some projects.

Other beneficiaries required more joint physical events and seminars on challenges and more visible marketing. Interestingly, the easy modification was also objected by a respondent, since the partners tend to submit modification requests in less justified cases, too, leading to project delays. An online meeting should be held before the submission of the modification request.

From the JS's point of view, the assistance needs of the beneficiaries are diverse, but some recurring topics can be observed. For instance, the problem concerning the prolonged public procurement processes because of the inflation (there was no bid fitting into the budget framework planned at the application phase) was confirmed on the JS's side, too. Oftentimes, the JS advised to keep only the most significant professional elements of the projects in – which are compulsory to fulfil the indicators – and when the cost reduction did not solve the problem, extra financial resources were allocated partly from the CP's resources. The role of the JS was also important in the prolongation of the projects. Due to the COVID-19 and inflation, many projects were not able to adhere to the previous (financial and timing) project frames, therefore modification was necessary.

Figure 68 indicates the beneficiaries' satisfaction with the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies to overcome their difficulties. The majority of the respondents highlighted that they are satisfied and thankful for the already achieved simplifications, for the clarity of the minimum required procedures and for the flexibility in problem solving (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic). It is confirmed by more than 60% of the respondents that the Programme Bodies ensured excellent assistance to tackle the given challenges and altogether 90% of the respondents were satisfied with the received assistance. Nevertheless, the rest 10% declared that it was not sufficient. It was especially high under PA2 and PA4, where 20% and 8% of the respondents chose the very unsatisfied category. In order to handle this dissatisfaction, the above-described deficiencies should be compensated.

Figure 68: Beneficiaries' satisfaction with the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies to overcome their difficulties



The beneficiaries also assessed the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies during the project cycle (Figure 69). The result of the answers represents a clear picture, since the majority of the respondents evaluated the assistance excellent in each phase of the project cycle. The appreciation is especially high under the implementation, where 43 respondents gave excellent ranking. At the same time there are some periods (e.g. the application) where the support might be improved as there were some unsatisfied voices.

The evaluators were also curious to know the beneficiaries' satisfaction with the programme's official website (Figure 70). Almost three quarter of the respondents thought that the online platform of the programme was excellent or good, which justifies the statement that the website is user-friendly and informative. However, 10% of the respondents gave negative or less satisfied feedback, therefore the further development of the website seems to be necessary.

The rate of the responsiveness of the Programme Bodies shows an even more positive picture, since more than half of the respondents thought that their performance was excellent, and the voice of the unsatisfied beneficiaries was less than 5%.

Figure 69: The assessment of the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies during the project cycle

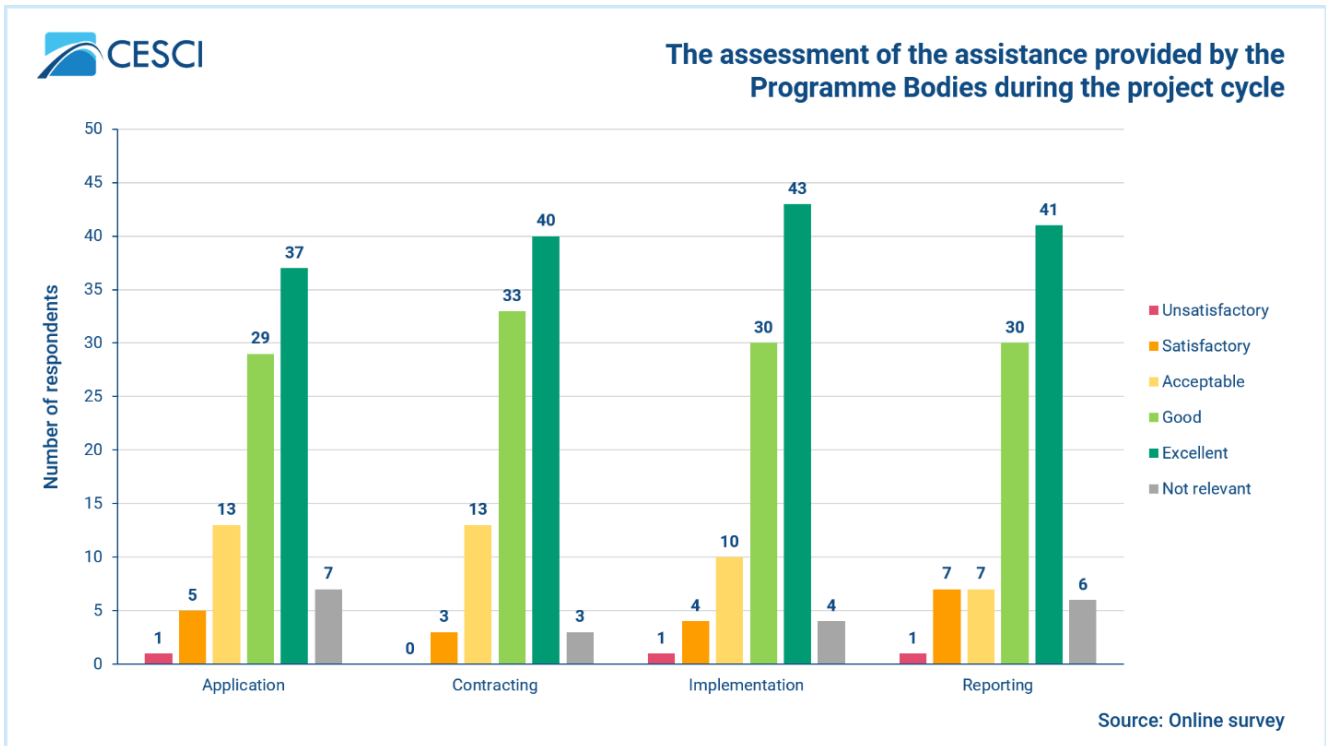
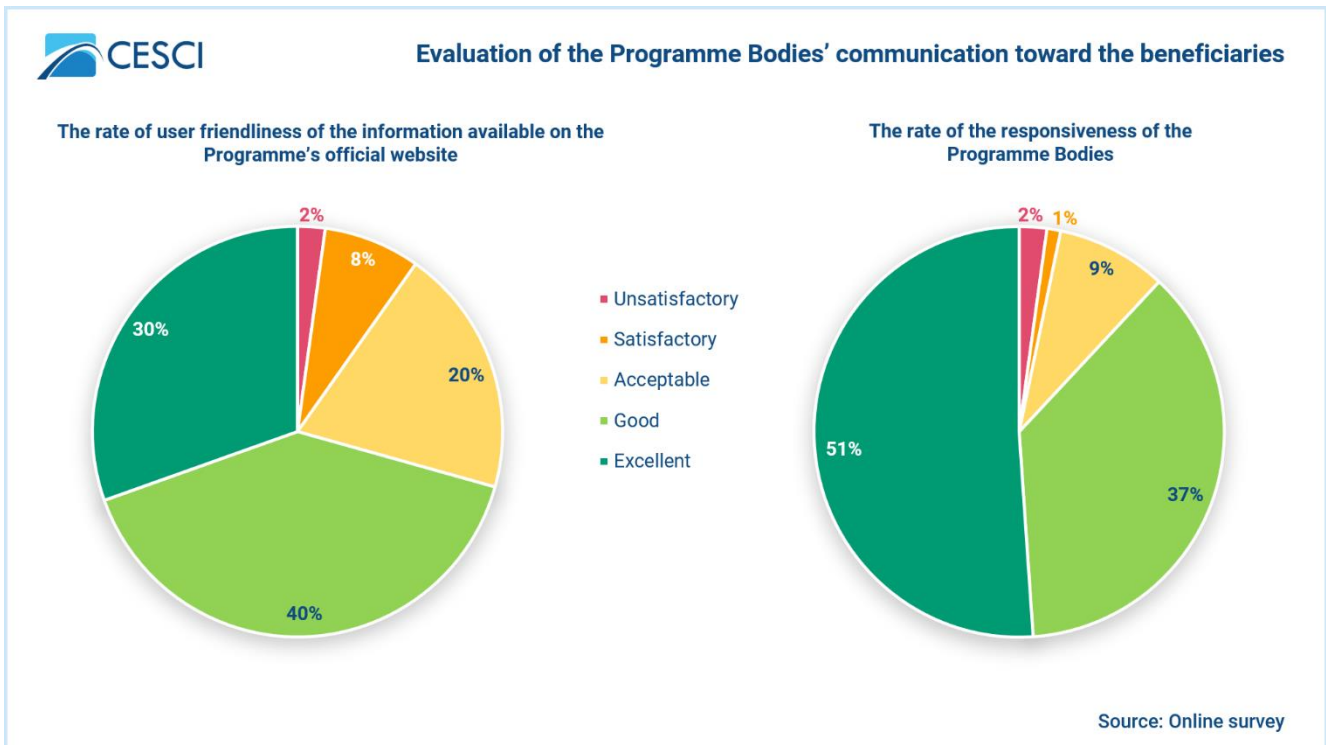


Figure 70: Evaluation of the Programme Bodies' communication toward the beneficiaries



2.1.3.6 Involvement of the relevant partners, assessment of ownership

According to the European Commission's ownership principle, CBC programmes should be a tool for integration and cohesion, as well as for democratisation by involving the relevant stakeholders into the decision-making processes. The feeling of ownership may be improved at local level, if stakeholders are allowed to influence the programme's implementation during its whole lifecycle.

The main information source to conduct the ownership assessment was the interviews.

In general, both the programme authorities and the stakeholders from different level reflected on the question of ownership by mentioning the positive tendency, that different stakeholders (local municipalities, regional development agencies, professional bodies, CSOs, etc.) used to be invited to take part in the programming procedure both in the current and previous programming period. It seems that the different actors are satisfied with this kind of involvement.

In terms of the implementation phase of the CP, the picture is more heterogenous. The Monitoring Committee consists of ministries and NUTS3 level regional municipalities who have voting rights, while NGOs, associations of local actors and sectorial actors have supportive or advisory functions. The consideration of their views and opinions depends on the voting members of the MC.

The regional actors with voting rights were also asked about their opinion on the possibility of representing the regional and local interests in the Monitoring Committee, and all of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with the status quo. On the other side, some Programme Management Bodies highlighted that the approach of regional governments from this perspective is rather changing: some of them proactively take part in the programme implementation and are able to or intend to effectively be the voice of the local actors, while others tend to 'go with the flow'. This difference was also experienced by the evaluators, since 4 Hungarian and 2 Slovak regional governments could not be answered this question.

As a good practice, Heves county recognised that they were not familiar with the specific ideas and needs of the local communities and stakeholders at all, thus they have started to contact the local actors, informed them about the new CP and offered assistance for the project applications free of charge. At the same time, other actors admitted that they do not have the capacity to deal with local issues. It was also added that in some cases EGTCs could better perform this task. The Programme Bodies made an attempt to better involve the groupings in the work of the MC: as the Hungarian-Slovak is the border frequented by the largest number of EGTCs, their representatives were invited to take part in the MC meetings following the rotating principle. Unfortunately, some EGTCs were regularly absent from these meetings and the initiative died out.

On the programme management's side, delegating the operation of the Small Project Fund to the regional level enhances the ownership feeling. The two regionally embedded EGTCs (Via Carpatia EGTC and RDV EGTC) are closer to the local actors and communities, they are in a good position to hear and react on the needs of the local stakeholders, as well as to channel them to higher levels of the programme implementation.

Furthermore, the renewed selection procedure is also evaluated as a positive change. In the three-level assessment system, the representatives of the territorially affected NUTS III regions assess whether the project objectives are in line with the relevant regional development plans and initiatives. The maximum points given by the territorial experts are 20 points out of the 100. In addition, in case of the TAPes the

final TAPE proposals were presented at an MC meeting where the members had the opportunity to provide further recommendations for the beneficiaries. These measures are definitely had a positive impact on the ownership.

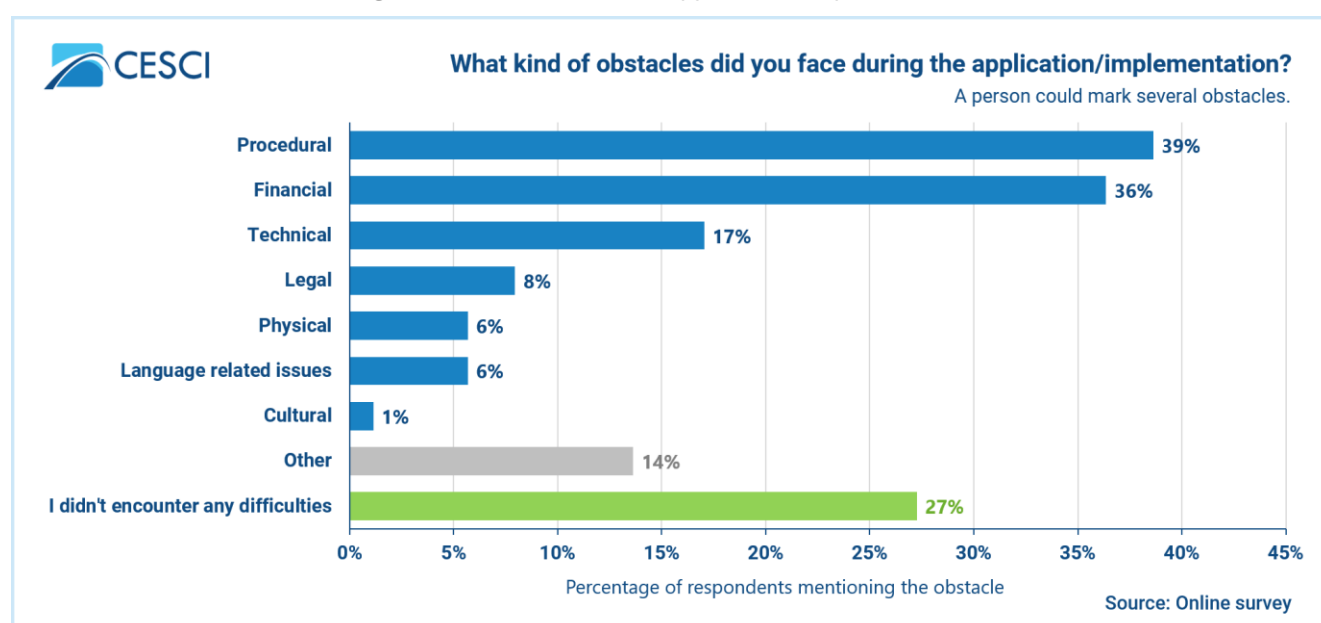
In addition, beyond the regional level, before the publication of the SKHU/1802 call of the TAPE, the representatives of those selected in the SKHU/1703 CfP were invited to consult on the next round. In line with this an interviewee proposed to conduct surveys before each call for proposals in order to better reflect on the needs of the stakeholders within the framework that the CP provides. This would also be an exemplary solution to strengthen the beneficiaries' ownership, especially in case of the Small Project Fund.

2.1.4 Influence factors of the implementation

In this subchapter, the different internal and external factors will be evaluated. The main factors that were taken into account, can be considered global, comprehensive and less direct influence factors. To identify and describe the various factors, an online survey was conducted among the applicants and beneficiaries of the Programme. Furthermore, interviews were carried out with the beneficiaries and the Programme Bodies too. The results were supplemented with desk research information on various topics such as economic processes or regulatory frameworks.

Within the framework of the **online survey**, the participants were asked what kind of obstacles they faced during the application/implementation. The implementation was heavily influenced by three types of obstacles: procedural, financial, and technical obstacles.

Figure 71: Obstacles to the application/implementation



The specific frequently listed obstacles include the increasing prices in the construction sector, general inflation, lack of pre-financing and advance payment on the Slovak side, exchange rate fluctuations, time-consuming and complicated public procurement processes, long and differing control procedures, great administrative burdens related to accounting, technical problems during construction works, and the need for modification of original technical parameters.

An **influence matrix** is provided below, which summarises these factors in a textual way, giving a short description of the factors themselves and defining their type. The following table summarises the most important external and internal influence factors.

Table 34: The most important external and internal influence factors on the implementation of the programme

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
COVID-19 pandemic	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the border regime</p> <p>Hungary (499.85 deaths per 100 thousand people) has suffered the most, while Slovakia (381.66) was hit the 5th most by the COVID-19 pandemic across the European Union, based on fatalities per capita.⁹⁰ The pandemic affected many regions of the two countries, including border regions. Based on data from 2020, Eastern Slovakia experienced high risk and exposure to COVID-19 pandemic.⁹¹</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic and the first, uncoordinated national responses have affected the border communities, especially because they limited the four freedoms along the Schengen borders of two Member States. Slovakia introduced border controls with Hungary on 13 March 2020. Hungary closed its borders on 17 March 2020. Later on, the reinforcement of border controls, the removal of restrictions and border checks changed one after the other.⁹² Coronavirus tests and the presentation of the vaccination certificates disrupted border crossings, and a limited number of border crossing points were designated for Hungarian and Slovak citizens who were allowed to move within a 30-kilometer strip of the border. Detours had to be made as not all the crossings were open to public, not to mention cross-border public transport, which was suspended. Unregistered cross-border workers of Slovak origin could not take the opportunity to commute between their residence in Hungary and their workplace in Slovakia.⁹³ As border control became regular, persons commuting to work in the territory of Slovakia from the frontier area had to identify themselves with their ID card/passport, residence card and confirmation from the employer/work contract.</p>	external

⁹⁰ John Hopkins University. Mortality analyses: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>

⁹¹ Böhme, K. and F. Besana (2020), Understanding the Territorially Diverse Implications of Covid-19 Policy Responses, Spatial Foresight Brief 2020:13

⁹² For detailed chronology of border closures and openings check CESCO (2021): Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Hungarian border regime. https://legalaccess.cesci-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/JOGa5_Covid-tanulmany_CESCO.pdf

⁹³ Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) and European Union, 2021. The effects of COVID-19 induced border closures on cross-border regions. An empirical report covering the period March to June 2020. <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/The%20effects%20of%20COVID-19%20induced%20border%20closures%20on%20cross-border%20regions/COVID-19%20induced%20border.pdf>

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
	<p>According to CESCI's online survey, 82% of respondents expressed that COVID-19 pandemic reduced their cross-border movements, and 58% indicated that the reduction was significant.</p> <p>All sorts of activities were held off, including events, meetings, and services that would normally require in-site, personal contacts.</p> <p>The effects of the pandemic on cross-border projects</p> <p>Most of the public events organised by municipalities had to be cancelled or postponed. Tourism-related events were particularly affected, as tourism is one of the most popular areas of cooperation. Countries saw a 93-95% decline in tourism nights between April/May 2019 and April/May 2020.⁹⁴ Many in-person activities had to be moved into the online space - when it was possible. This switch was extremely harmful for those projects with indicators referring to the number of participants of diverse events. Some events (e.g. joint events of chanting choirs, gastronomy festivals, encounters of the kindergartens, sports events, etc.) were impossible to organise online. Furthermore, the uncertain conditions prevented citizens from crossing the border, because upon their return, they might have been obliged to spend 14 days in quarantine. These circumstances dramatically reduced the number of project events and their participants.</p> <p>Oftentimes, employees of the construction company, subcontracted within the project, fell ill or were banned to cross the border (cross-border workers!) and the company was not able to continue the construction works. In the case of small beneficiaries, where the worker dealing with the project went on sick leave, the whole implementation process was suspended – even for months. Likewise, the authorities issuing the building or event permits had to reduce their opening hours, partly due to the central restrictions, partly due to the high number of absent (sick) employees. These phenomena also affected the work of the FLC authorities, whose experts were not able to organise the site controls, without which, the beneficiaries could not apply for reimbursement. At the very beginning of the pandemic, even the international postal services were suspended: the programme authorities could not deliver the subsidy contracts to the beneficiaries and <i>vice versa</i>. All these difficulties have generated severe delays in project implementation.</p>	

⁹⁴ Römisch, R. (2020): Covid-19 effects on Central Europe: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/discover/COVID-19-effects-on-Central-Europe.pdf>

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the value chains, which led to shortages in the purchasable materials and equipment, resulting in higher prices. (See the next row of the table.) A group of researchers, using the TGARCH model, managed to justify a positive and significant correlation between the number of reported COVID-19 cases and the exchange rates, implying that the pandemic has resulted in the depreciation of the Hungarian currency.⁹⁵ This made products, materials and services more expensive for the Hungarian beneficiaries, who needed to take measures such as requesting budget modification (including reallocation between budget lines, extra financial resources) and prolongation of the project implementation period. Numerous local municipalities and NGOs faced newly occurring financial problems, which jeopardized the realisation of their project. The COVID-19 pandemic seriously endangered the cash flow of the Programme as the reimbursements were not as high as planned, which put the n+3 target at risk.</p> <p>The pandemic has profoundly changed the fulfilment conditions of the indicators related to the SMEs. PA3 targeted the increase of cross-border labour mobility, which was significantly more difficult due to COVID measures. The economic collapse, accompanying the pandemic, made it questionable to create new jobs: the SMEs had to fight for survival and keeping their workers. To create new jobs, extra efforts were needed.</p> <p>Measures taken by the Programme Bodies in order to mitigate the difficulties generated by the pandemic</p> <p>The Programme showed flexibility and quick reaction to the challenges of the beneficiaries regardless of the quickly and frequently changing external conditions. In accordance with the Audit Authority, the Managing Authority introduced provisional procedures for both the projects and the cross-border programme, as early as 16 March 2020, and the alleviations were constantly prolonged as it was required by the situation. It is worth noting, that this attitude was not common among the CBC programmes at that time.</p> <p>The package of the new procedures was further fine-tuned in compliance with the Corona Response Investment Initiative (CRII)</p>	

⁹⁵ Czech, K., Wielechowski, M., Kotyza, Benešová, I. and Laputková, A.: Shaking Stability: COVID-19 Impact on the Visegrad Group Countries' Financial Markets: <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/15/6282>

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
	<p>Regulation⁹⁶ of 30 March 2020, and the CRII+ Regulation⁹⁷ of 23 April 2020. In order to keep the programme in motion, the Management Bodies established and applied the rules of <i>solidarity</i> (the Programme must not lose any beneficiaries) and <i>urgency</i> (always concentrating on the most urgent problems). Accordingly, the management dealt with every project individually, and made practical recommendations facilitating the accomplishment of the project – with an extreme flexibility.</p> <p>The contracting process was performed half-digitally (printing, signing, scanning). The beneficiaries were allowed to organise the project events online or to postpone their events to be held in person. Smaller amendments did not need to be permitted through the official procedures: the approvals were made by written procedure in an accelerated way. If it was necessary, it was even allowed to change the partners. The Commission reimbursed the applications for payment by 100%, allowed the reallocation of resources between the priority areas without prior authorisation, and prolonged the submission deadline for AIRs.</p> <p>All these measures facilitated the (even prolonged) realisation of the projects, the fulfilment of the majority of the indicators and the accomplishment of the interventions – notwithstanding a few exceptions in the field of infrastructural investments.</p>	
Inflation	<p>Based on the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) published by Eurostat⁹⁸, inflation rate has steeply increased in the given countries. The annual change from 2013 remained low (below 6%) until 2018 both in Slovakia and Hungary. The annual change increased from 2.8% of 2017 to 19% in Hungary by 2021, and from 1% to 11.5% in Slovakia. Since 2019, the change has been higher in both economies than the average of the EU27 (9.3% in 2021). According to HICP monthly data (annual rate of change) in October 2022, the rate reached 14.5% in Slovakia and was as high as 21.9% in Hungary, which means the two states are much more exposed to high inflation compared to the EU27 average (11.5%).⁹⁹ Various</p>	external

⁹⁶ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2020.099.01.0005.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2020:099:TOC

⁹⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1588165247288&uri=CELEX:32020R0558>

⁹⁸ HICP - annual data (average index and rate of change):
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/prc_hicp_aind/default/table?lang=en

⁹⁹ HICP - monthly data (annual rate of change)
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/prc_hicp_manr/default/table?lang=en

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
	<p>activities have been affected negatively by the sharp increase in prices (for instance, the extremely high prices of energy, electricity, gas and other fuels, transport, food, restaurants and hotels in particular).¹⁰⁰</p> <p>The increasing prices are a result of high demand due to national and EU contributions in the economy, especially in the construction sector, low supply due to COVID-19 pandemic, low stocks of strategic and basic materials, interrupted value chains and trade relations. Later on, the energy crisis and the war in Ukraine affected the prices as well.</p> <p>Because of the general price increase, beneficiaries experienced difficulties in delivering the planned project outputs from the budget framework planned in the application phase. In many cases, the public procurement processes were unsuccessful because all the bids were higher than expected, which needed interventions from both the beneficiaries and the programme management side. (See the next row of the table.)</p> <p>The Programme Bodies showed the same flexibility in terms of the difficulties generated by the inflation as in the case of the pandemic. In order to guarantee the accomplishment of the (mainly infrastructural) projects, the JS permanently consulted with the beneficiaries and was looking for specific solutions for each case.</p> <p>The Beneficiaries were able to provide additional funding from other resources than the CP. These contributions were either from other development programmes (such as the mainstream OPs) or national sources (e.g. in case of the bridges across the Ipoly/Ipel'). In Hungary, the financial support was guaranteed by the Government Decree no 1936/2020. (XII. 17.). These additional financial contributions did not form part of the ERDF subsidy contracts.</p> <p>The technical content of the infrastructure development was reduced in those projects where this measure did not risk the achievements of the indicator targets. (E.g.: a certain section of a bicycle route was not made of concrete, but gravel, which decreased the total cost of the construction works.)</p> <p>Especially the budget of the large infrastructural projects needed to be amended. The MC responded these needs through the</p>	

¹⁰⁰ HICP - contributions to EA annual inflation (in percentage points):
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/prc_hicp_ctrb/default/table?lang=en

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
	reallocation of the funds (e.g. when abandoning the logistical services call).	
Public procurement	<p>Public procurements are often seen complicated, bureaucratic, and time-consuming, with rules and regulations hard to follow and understand.</p> <p>National regulations differ on the two sides of the border. According to the beneficiaries, in Hungary, public procurement tends to be simpler and faster. In Slovakia, the procedure is time-consuming, thus, in many of the cases, the public procurement procedure must be launched even before the signature of the subsidy contract.</p> <p>In general, the lengthy selection procedures of the programme also cause difficulties in the procurement processes. Applicants need to plan the budget of their developments to be implemented 1-2 years later, which makes the financial planning uncertain. The problem, together with the significant price increase, hit hard the projects containing developments that are concerned with public procurement. During the tendering, beneficiaries tended to receive bid which did not fit into the planned budget framework. This led to major delays in the implementation, especially in case of larger infrastructure developments.</p>	external
Financial reporting and control	<p>Many stakeholders consider the controlling processes bureaucratic. According to the online survey, the settlement of invoices was perceived slow by many beneficiaries. Especially the Slovak partners had to wait a longer period for reimbursement. On the Hungarian side, the first-level expenditure control process tends to be faster (according to the beneficiaries, the documentation of costs is less strict and less demanding). More detailed information provision was missed regarding the processes, requirements and exact formal and technical needs for reporting.</p> <p>There are differences in the functioning of the FLC units on the two sides of the border that cause difficulties during the project implementation. In Hungary, the FLC body offers informal consultation possibility before the official submission of the beneficiary reports, which helps preventing mistakes in the documentation. Completion in the official procedure is definitely more time-consuming than preliminary corrections.</p> <p>For further information, please refer to the <i>2.1.3 Programme management</i> chapter.</p> <p>Furthermore, the headquarters and the correspondence address of the National Authority and the National Controller body of Slovakia</p>	external

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
	<p>changed from 16 November 2022. This might also lead to some delay in the procedures.</p>	
Pre-financing	<p>There is no pre-financing for Slovakian beneficiaries, unlike in Hungary in the traditional projects. Within the framework of the SPF, none of the beneficiaries are entitled to pre-financing. They receive the EU contribution after the implementation, in case all the costs are verified in their reports by the Control Bodies and the JS.</p> <p>The lack of pre-financing is especially problematic for those (e.g. smaller municipalities and NGOs) being unable to pre-finance their project activities for months. Pre-financing can be ensured through loans but the assessment procedure also takes time and the refund requires extra financial sources later (interests). The usual waiting time for reimbursement was 6-12 months, but there are beneficiaries of mainly the small projects who had to wait one and a half year to receive funds from the SPF.</p>	external
n+3 target	<p>Due to a serious delay in the programme implementation until 2018-2019, and the several projects asking for prolongation, meeting the n+3 target was at risk. The total amount of Application for Reimbursements from the EU Commission was only EUR 21 108 496.28 as of 15 May 2020, which was only 60% of the cumulative n+3 target.</p> <p>The Member States were given the exceptional possibility to request, for Cohesion Policy programmes, a co-financing rate of 100% to be applied for the accounting year of 2020-2021, as well as 2021-2022, in accordance with budget appropriations and subject to available funding. The programme requested the temporary increase of the co-financing rate to 100% in all priority axes to ease the burden caused by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and later, the war in Ukraine. This helped reaching the planned financial targets.</p> <p>In addition, the Programme Bodies have made great efforts to reach the target value with rescheduled transfers and favoured the spending of projects with larger budget. Meeting the n+3 target has been one of the highlighted tasks since 2020, which required a close cooperation of the MA, NA, FLCs and the JS. Due to the joint coordination certification, the reporting and monitoring of costs were speeded up.</p> <p>By the end of 2021, the pace of ERDF spending seemed to have been reached. Taking into account the Application for Payment (cut-off date: 18 October 2021) EUR 58 586 024.34 was registered, which is 96% of the n+3 target cumulatively for 2021. The programme exceeded the cumulative decommitment target for 2021 by 4,4%.</p>	external

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
Relocation of the Managing Authority of the Programme	<p>The Managing Authority was planned to set-up in Bratislava, Slovakia. In 2015, following the parliamentary elections in the Slovak Republic, a ministerial decision handed over the Managing Authority role and functions to Hungary. In line with this decision, the MA functions started to be performed by Hungary. Based on partly the Common Provision Regulation and the agreement between the Member States, the Audit Authority function is provided by the Directorate General for Audit of European and the Certifying Authority function by the Hungarian State Treasury. The Joint Secretariat remained in their position in Budapest. The change was adopted by the European Commission on 1 September 2016, and the amended programme entered into force on 16 June 2016.</p> <p>As a consequence, after the late approval of the relevant EU legislation in this regard, the removal process of the MA further pushed the programme implementation in a delay.</p> <p>The old-new MA, together with the JS, and the effective support provided by the NA, carried-out the preparatory works with exemplary speed and the first call was published in the summer of 2016. Still, it was 2.5 years later compared to the starting date of the CP. This delay caused problems in reaching the originally planned spending targets.</p>	internal
INTERREG+ system	<p>INTERREG+ gradually replaced IMIS 2014-2020. The new system has been developed to ease the user's daily activities. Since the application procedures were managed in the old system, migration of data from IMIS to INTERREG+ for the implementation phase of the projects caused delay in reporting procedures.</p>	internal
Innovative tools	<p>The Programme has incorporated several new tools and mechanisms (Small Project Fund, TAPE, SME Call) which had not been applied in the previous programmes. The Small Project Fund Scheme was designed on the basis of the subsidiarity principle by inviting the EGTCs into the management role of the SPF Umbrella Projects. The decision on the composition of the management system of the SPF-umbrella projects took more time than initially planned, hence, the kick-off of the Call for Proposals for the SPF umbrella projects was postponed to 2017. Then, the set-up of the SPF management structure was also time-consuming, which resulted in the relatively late launch of the SPF, in 2018.</p> <p>In addition, the preparation of the framework for the territorial action plans and the direct involvement of SMEs also led to extra workload at the programme management side. In spite of the efforts made by the Programme Management Bodies, the preparatory works needed some time, as a result of which, the first TAPE call was</p>	internal

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type
	launched in 2017, while the SME call was postponed to 2018. In case of the latter, the originally planned B-Light Scheme concept was unsuccessful, thus, the Management Bodies needed to deal with the modification of the whole concept as well.	

In addition to the obstacles listed in the table, according to the survey conducted, a limited number and share of respondents perceived cultural, physical or legal obstacles. Furthermore, language-related issues (mostly considering the lacking use of national languages of the application document) were also minor challenges. The only slightly problematic PA with this regard was PA2. Cultural type of obstacles was mentioned only by 4% of responses to PA4, while it was not mentioned at any other PAs.

2.2 Effectiveness

Under the effectiveness factor, this document interprets how successfully the Programme has achieved its objectives, namely whether

- the interventions responded the regional challenges and needs?
- the target groups were selected and reached properly?
- the programme and project level communication were effectively implemented in order to reach the target groups?
- the Programme had a real cross-border character?

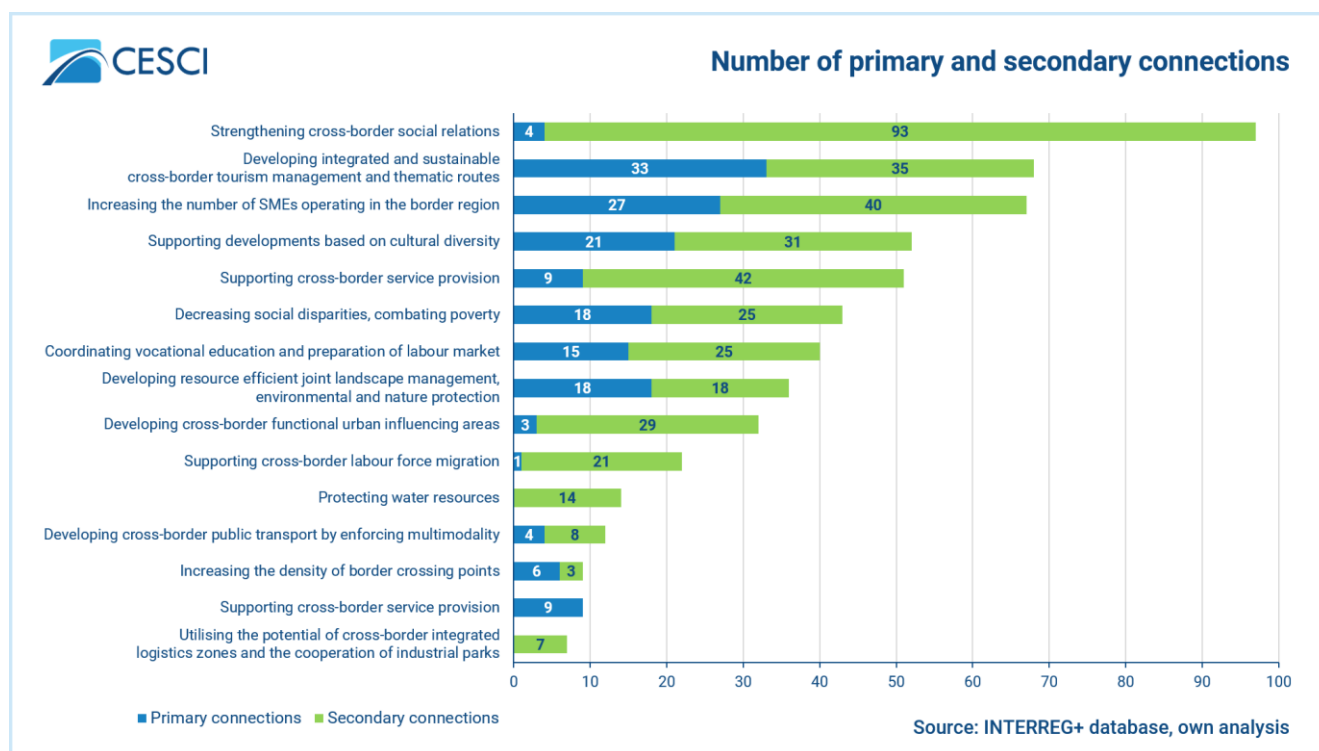
2.2.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs

In this chapter the main question to be answered is as follows: how successfully addressed the Programme the development needs identified during the programming exercise?

In order to draw conclusions, the challenges included in the annex of the CP were taken into account. These challenges were identified based on the territorial analysis of the CP, and all of the challenges were connected to the relevant Thematic Objectives (TOs). Based on these connections, the relevance of the PAs can be analysed.

Each project of the Programme was assessed in terms of the **number of connections to the given main challenges** (regional needs). In order to understand the contribution to the goals and the impact of the projects on the regional cohesion, every project description and the activities carried out were analysed. In accordance with the regional needs three types of connections were identified: "0" – No connection to the challenge; "A" – primary connection; "B" – secondary connection. The primary connection means that the project addressed or tackled a unique challenge. Each project has one primary connection. Secondary connection means all the possible and relevant – other than primary – challenges that are connected to the project. This might mean zero to fourteen additional challenges which are tackled at a certain level by the project. The category "A" was given only once per project, to the most addressed challenge, whereas category "B" was given to several other challenges that did not fall under the "A" category.

Figure 72: Number of primary and secondary connections



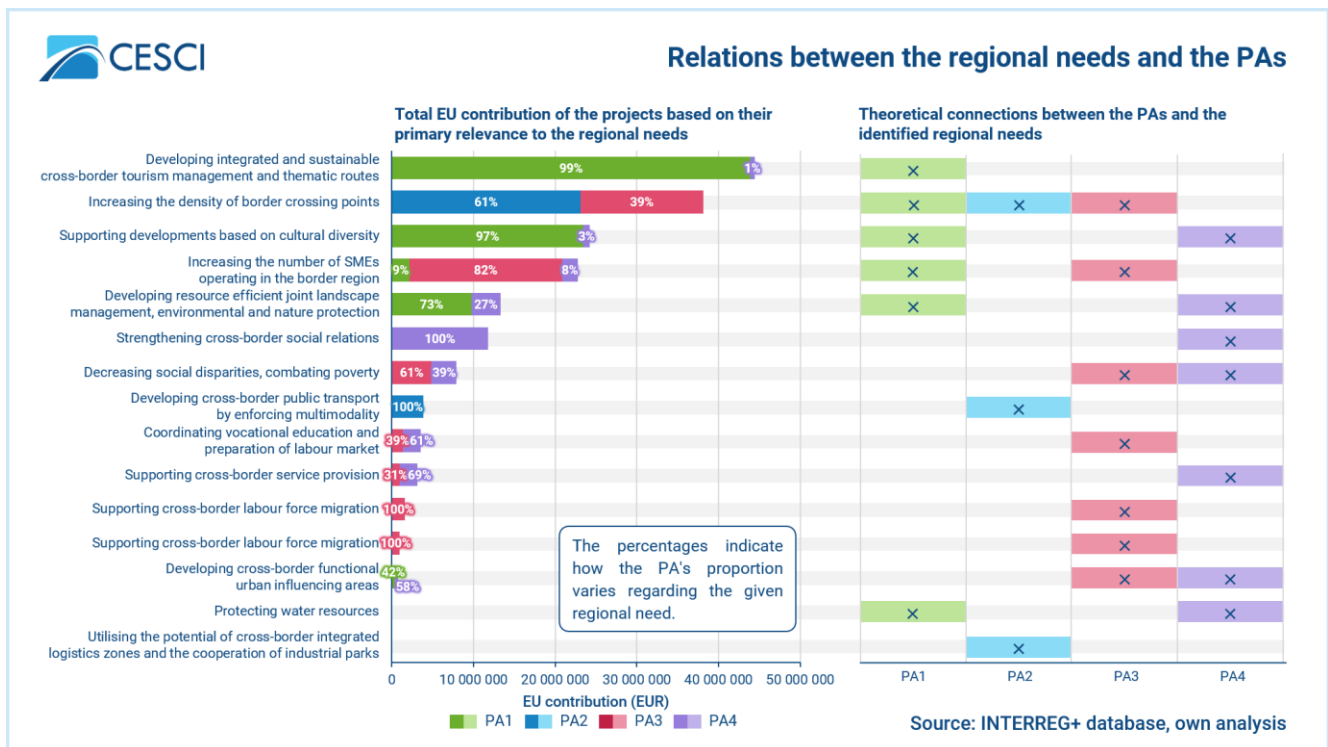
Numerous projects addressed more than one challenge, especially the promotion of social relations, cross-border service provision, urban influencing areas, labour force migration, water resources.

The challenges addressed by the project the most, are as follows:

- Increasing the number of SMEs operating in the border region;
- Developing integrated and sustainable cross-border tourism management and thematic routes;
- Supporting developments based on cultural diversity;
- Decreasing social disparities, combating poverty;
- Developing resource efficient joint landscape management, environmental and nature protection;
- Supporting cross-border service provision;
- Strengthening/improving cross-border social relations.

9 of the 15 identified challenges were addressed by more than one PA. Border crossings are not supported by PA1 projects, and cultural diversity is not supported primarily by PA4. SMEs were limitedly supported by PA1 and P4, while water resources and logistics zones were not supported by any primarily connected projects. In practice, sometimes a PA was involved in financing, despite the lack of theoretical connections (e.g. PA4 in labour market, PA3 in service provision).

Figure 73: Relations between the regional needs and the PAs



Regarding **EU contribution based on the primary connections**, tourism leads the chart, followed by border crossings. Other outstandingly supported challenges include cultural diversity and SME development. Taking into account the total costs of projects with primary connection to the challenges cross-border service provision and combating poverty are less highlighted. Increasing the density of border crossing points would become one of the most impacted by the Programme, as large amounts of sources are allocated to extensive infrastructural developments.

Developing resource efficient joint landscape management, environmental and nature protection

The challenges were addressed under PA1 with a focus on heritage protection and tourism (*Designing cross border action plans, setting up models and test pilot actions to better capitalize the regions' cultural and natural heritage and to combine tourism with the promotion and protection of the regions' natural and cultural heritage by performing creative and artistic actions*), and under PA4 emphasising service development (*Supporting activities focusing on the improvement of cross-border services provided jointly, development of small infrastructure necessary for joint service provision*).

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

The Programme significantly enhanced the level of cooperation between forest management bodies, forestry stakeholders (e.g. SK-HU FOR FORESTS II, SK-HU FORESTERS AND BEES), nature park initiatives (e.g. NATUR/DANUBEPARKS) and crisis management actors in particular. As significant added value, joint capacity building, knowledge exchange, and networking can be mentioned.

The Programme impacted nature park initiatives to apply ecosystem-based approaches within the context of sustainable development especially in the areas around Komárno, Győr, Tata, Gerecse Hills and Szigetköz – Žitný ostrov. Important preparatory steps have been taken for the coordination of nature preservation, environmental education and ecotourism initiatives along the border (e.g. Nat-Net Duna/Dunaj 2, ESD Duna/Dunaj projects).

Environmental education was another field, where significant cross-border activities were carried out to increase awareness regarding the values of natural heritage and their protection (e.g. by FORBEST, Ecoregion SKHU, ESD Duna/Dunaj). Moreover, many tourism-related projects helped learning more about nature conservation zones and the importance of their sustainable management.

Finally, cooperation was enhanced in the fields of natural hazards and crisis management. The exchange of experiences was also intensified regarding floods, water-related disasters, wildfires and extreme storms (e.g. CODESIC, RISKHUB projects).

Protecting water resources

The challenges were addressed with respect to water as a heritage under PA1 (*Maintaining and promoting natural heritage in the programme area*) and with respect to capacity building of the relevant organisations under PA4 (*Strengthening and improving the cooperation capacity and the cooperation efficiency between different organisations of particular sectors through common professional programmes, trainings, exchange of experiences, capitalisation and know-how transfer, etc.*).

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

The Programme had little direct impact on this regional need. None of the projects contributed primarily to this issue. The biggest impact was reached through raising awareness to preserve the quantity and quality of waters, mainly rivers. The added value of the Programme can be examined through two main activities. First, it highlighted watercourses as common values to be protected jointly. Second, it carried out joint cross-border activities, which supported the cross-border networking of relevant stakeholders.

Real impacts can be detected in three main fields. First, one of the greatest impacts was raising awareness to nature conservation and environmental education (e.g., Nat-Net Duna/Dunaj 2, Ecoregion SKHU projects). Second, rehabilitation works were carried out, such as water route and water surface reconstructions, and wetland cleaning along the Danube and the Bodrog (eg. Bodrog Active tourism, Bird of paradise). Third, steps were taken towards the joint water management of nature parks. Stakeholders cooperated on both sides of the Danube to maintain organic integrity and wetland habitats (e.g. NATUR/DANUBEPARKS).

Increasing the density of border crossing points

The PAs' answers to the challenges were present in three different PAs. Under PA1, the design and construction of local roads linked to sites of cultural and natural heritage (*Preparation of investments*) was supported. Under PA2, the construction of cross-border roads, bridges, ferries and infrastructure, investments contributing to a better accessibility of urban functions, and passive noise reduction were supported. Within the framework of PA3, TAPes could support activities that were in connection with

infrastructural investments contributing to modernisation, structural transformation and sustainable development of specific areas and resulting in measurable improvement in terms of labour mobility

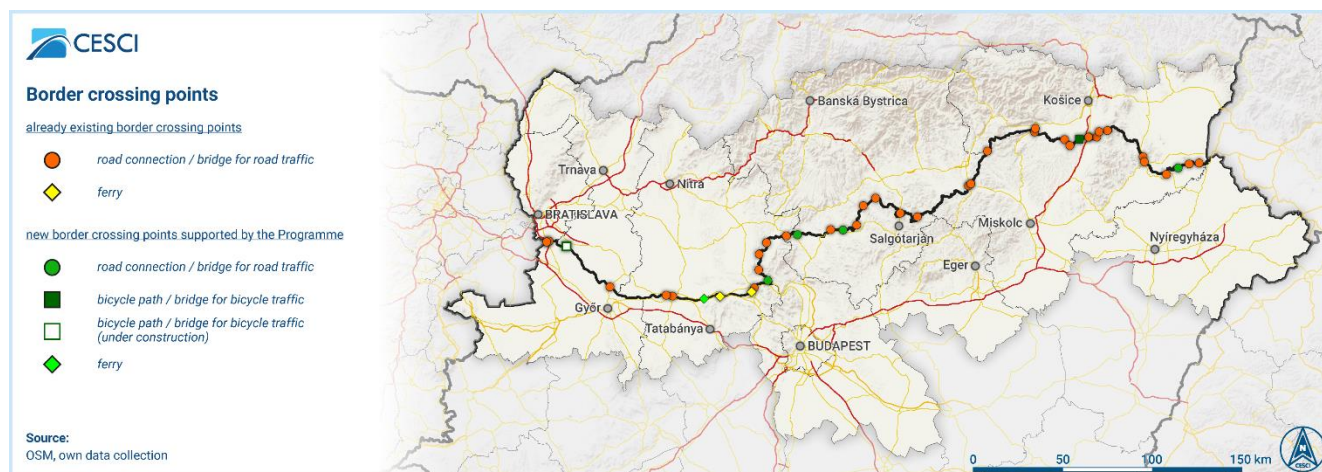
What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

The number of border crossing points was increased in the programme area by creating six new crossing points. Due to the nature of the CBC Programme, the financial contribution is limited (it does not enable large infrastructural investments, but there are other tools available for that goal). At the same time, building new bridges, a ferry and a new inland road connection received support. The density will be increased significantly along the river Ipeľ/Ipoly. The projects titled *Ipolydamásd–Chľaba bridge*, *Bridge Dobrohošť–Dunakiliti* (construction of a pedestrian and bicycle bridge), *Ferry in Neszmély–Radvaň nad Dunajom* are supported in the framework of mobility objectives of PA2 and SKHU/1602. Meanwhile, *Hemp road* (road link between Nagyrozvágy and Veľký Horeš), *Hit the road!* (Bridge construction between Drégelypalánk and Ipeľské Predmostie), and *Ride Up!* (Őrhalom–Vrbovka bridge) were supported within the framework of PA3 and SKHU/1802 as part of TAPes. The project titled *GREX* supported a new bicycle connection at Hidasnémeti and Perín-Chym along the new so-called Aba Greenway.

Through these investments, not only the travelling times have been decreased but also

1. better conditions for cross-border movements, cross-border labour mobility and tourism flows particularly;
2. support for cross-border functional integration of urban hinterlands and the microregional settlement network, cross-border service provision;
3. better opportunities for even closer and new interpersonal relations, family and business connections that require in-site, face-to-face interactions have been provided.

Figure 74: Change in the territorial distribution of border crossing points



Developing cross-border public transport by enforcing multimodality

The challenge was addressed under PA2 solely. The supported actions included various elements: preparation of investments (elaboration of studies, analyses, concepts; recommendations concerning legal-administrative barriers hindering cross-border mobility); development of cross-border intelligent transport systems (ITS), passenger information systems, online schedules, e-ticketing, mobile apps,

common tariff systems; preparation of investments on infrastructure; development and integration of cross-border public transport services, establishment of transport associations; and development of demand-driven cross-border transport services.

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

Regarding non-motorised traffic, bicycle transport plays an important role in supporting tourism (PA1), labour mobility (PA3), the functional integration of twin Cross-border bicycle rental service was set up in Komárom, Tata, Oroszlány Kisbér, Komárno, Nové Zámky, Kolárovo, Hurbanovo and Nesvady, with 13 bike stand points (KOMBI). Similar network has been established with 6 stations in Štúrovo and with 8 stations in Esztergom (Mária Valéria Bike). The implemented cross-border eKKK rental system contains 8 rental stations in Sátoraljaújhely, and one each in Zemplín and Viničky (Cross-Bike). Within another project the beneficiaries purchased 8 e-bikes with a docking station in Sátoraljaújhely and in Borša. Further renting centres in Báč and Szil were established within the SacraVelo project.

Regarding motorised transport, the new bus service between Komárom and Komárno can be highlighted (Kn-Kn ImproTrans), which also contributed to a cleaner and greener transportation.

Developments had an added value of strengthening cross-border services and infrastructural networks, resulting in a higher number of new users and passengers for the otherwise inland areas as well. The Programme enabled the partners to establish new modes of cross-border transportation in the form of new bus, ferry (between Neszmély-Radvaň nad Dunajom) and bike connections.

Some projects supported passenger information, which may enforce multimodality by showing alternative and sustainable options to car transport: a mobile application for water, biking and horse-riding tourists (e.g. Bodrog Active tourism) was developed, and boards, signs and displays (e.g. Kn-Kn ImproTrans) were settled.

Use of potential of cross-border integrated logistics zones and the cooperation of industrial parks

The challenge was targeted by PA2 including: implementing cross-border cooperation initiatives in the field of logistics; developing integrated service systems, infrastructure and ICT applications; investing in infrastructure; and preparing investments with the elaboration of studies, analyses, and concepts.

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

This challenge was one of the least affected by the Programme. None of the projects contributed primarily to this need.

A CBC Programme is not the most effective tool for tackling such big challenges and needs. The low interest in the specific objective resulted in the cancellation of the call. Consequently, the projects, which contributed to the need, had rather indirect impacts, and some of them are more connected to innovation ecosystem and R&D facilities (e.g. InnoService, DevInvestEnviro). Other impacts are concentrating around the TAPes, and their developments increasing cross-border capacities of production, storage and sales infrastructure (e.g. AUTOTECH INFRA, FUTURE IN HEMP - PROD).

Cross-border integration was supported by new border crossings, decreasing travel distances and giving options for new and increased trade connections, market opportunities.

Supporting cross-border service provision

The challenge was addressed under PA3 and PA4. The activities included supporting activities focusing on the improvement of cross-border services provided jointly, and developing small infrastructure necessary for joint service provision.

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

The most articulated areas are the social and health care services in this case. The cross-border cooperation between certain hospitals (Balassagyarmat, Salgótarján, Lučenec, Veľký Krtíš, Miskolc and Kráľovský Chlmec) affect the development of professional capacities, exchange of experiences and the implementation of the latest knowledge in practice, for instance, in the fields of gastroenterology and radiology. Various professional meetings and exchange events enabled a better cooperation between Slovak and Hungarian doctors, nurses, medical assistants and health care facilities. Projects to be highlighted here are *Teleradiology*, *Access2Health*, *Healthcare cooperation*, *CrossCoop*, and *RoRehab*. Within the framework of *CrossCoop* project, important steps were taken to support a wider, bilateral cooperation between the Hungarian and the Slovak sides. Partners planned to jointly organise cross-border training and workshops to facilitate the establishment of a cross-border healthcare mechanism. First versions (drafts) of local cross-border protocols were intended to be harmonised and finalised by joint effort. The harmonisation of newly designed patient route designs was carried out as well.

Elderly care was supported by individual projects and by the *RE-START TAPE* of the PONTIBUS EGTC. A new transformed elderly approach (the Active Actor Elderly Care Model developed by the Hungarian partner) was introduced to the regions' elderly care systems, as well as the techniques and social strategies for healthy ageing. Owing to the Programme, cross-border impact includes new innovative collaboration among the elderly care institutions and other concerned organisations (e.g. LILI), and the cross-border regional integration of public catering (*IpOLD*). Consequently, the quality of life and the level of social inclusion of seniors improved on both sides.

Furthermore, direct cross-border impacts can be detected in the field of tourism by introducing new cross-border services, or at least improved POIs, attractions and inland products and services which indicates cross-border movement and use. Projects brought about certain level of integration in relation to ecotourism where the physical connections were also supported to increase tourist mobility (e.g. DANUBE BIKE&BOAT, REJOICE, Sacra Velo, ESD Duna/Dunaj).

Developing cross-border functional urban influencing areas

The challenge was targeted by PA3 and PA4. As part of PA3, the focus was on labour mobility (*Infrastructural investments contributing to modernization, structural transformation and sustainable development of specific areas resulting in measurable improvement in terms of labour mobility*). Within the framework of PA4, cross-border services were the main elements (*Supporting activities focusing on the improvement of cross-border services provided jointly, development of small infrastructure necessary for joint service provision*).

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

Cross-border integration has increased particularly regarding the following functions: cultural heritage sites, POIs of shared significance (such as the fortress system of Komárom – Komárno in the KOMFORT project), health care facilities (e.g. Healthcare cooperation projects), and sports (LC-ST SPORTS AND LEISURE). In addition, the impact of TAPes should also be underlined, where, through labour mobility, the influencing areas of cross-border production, processing and sales possibilities have maintained or expanded. New border crossings and public transport services, in the frames of PA2 and PA3, contributed to better integration and cross-border enlargement of some influencing areas (around Győr, Komárom and Komárno, Esztergom and Štúrovo, in the territory of Arrabona, Pons Danubii and Ister–Granum EGTCs).

Cooperation in urban planning (TP LAB) and urban management (BUILCOGREEN) has also been supported.

Increasing the number of SMEs operating in the border region

The challenge was indirectly addressed by the CP in terms of the development of small-scale quality tourism linked to local environmental or cultural features for SMEs; the establishment of business services promoting employment and the establishment of their infrastructural conditions; initiatives and services aimed at improving cross-border labour mobility; as well as targeted actions strengthening employment through the development of products and services based on local assets.

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

One of the most relevant added values is the cross-border networking in terms of increasing awareness towards the stakeholders and their products, and building various business partnerships. Networking and partnership building was significant in relation to the TAPE, and it was based on the cooperation of multiple partners, SMEs, municipalities and EGTCs in particular.

Projects directly impacted the implementation and extension of regional product systems (see IG Heritage or Cserehát AP), which managed to involve SMEs as well. Several projects of the TAPes, and some other projects, helped local producers to become successful entrepreneurs by facilitating their entry to the cross-border market in agribusiness mostly. Other group of projects targeted the developments related to innovation, automotive and hi-tech industries (projects such as CORD, ProVocEnt or the TAPE called Novum Danuvium). New enterprises were supported less directly; mostly entrepreneurial skills and physical infrastructure was provided with shared facilities (such as the Tata Innovation Laboratory or the Innovation Centre in Komárno).

Projects connected to PA1 and SKHU/1902 also created added value by impacting the tourism sector with support for related economic activities to establish new services in hospitality mainly. Supported activities created new catering units and accommodation. Apart from agriculture and tourism, it were the silver economy and the circular economy which was supported to create cross-border services and products, and indirectly, new enterprises.

Supporting cross-border labour force migration

The challenge was the primary field of interventions under PA3 with special focus on employment (*Launching and implementing joint integrated cross-border employment initiatives*) and labour mobility (*Infrastructural investments contributing to modernization, structural transformation and sustainable development of specific areas, resulting in measurable improvement regarding labour mobility*).

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

Notwithstanding the interventions creating new jobs available for cross-border citizens, the TAPE beneficiaries organised training programmes for unemployed, less educated, elderly and Roma people, and further disadvantaged groups (e.g. WORKFORCE PIPELINE, RE-HABILITATION projects). Some of them targeted cross-border career orientation, joint stimulation of cross-border employment through job fairs, site visits (e.g. WORKFORCE PIPELINE, where job seeking skills and traineeship cooperation also took place). ACCO_EMP was unique in a sense that it aimed to build a worker hostel to accommodate employees from the cross-border region.

Less direct effect was provided by the help of site visits and joint training of vocational schools. Pupils and SMEs had a chance to get to know each other as well as the cross-border educational and labour market better. Moreover, their training programmes and curricula could be improved, therefore, they made a step forward to have students with skills that are more in line with cross-border labour market needs.

Another less direct contribution is expected from the border crossing points (planned to be) built under PA2 and PA3. Some cross-border public transport developments were also (partly) targeting the commuters (e.g. Mária Valéria bike, Kn-Kn ImproTrans, the bike sharing network in Sátoraljaújhely in Cross-Bike or KOMBI in Pons Danubii EGTC).

Coordination of vocational education and preparation of labour market

The challenge was targeted by PA3 projects including the common use of expert and consultancy services; joint education and training programmes as well as launching and implementing joint integrated cross-border employment initiatives. PA4 cooperation projects also contributed to the achievement of the goals.

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

Among others, relevant impacts include joint (e-learning) courses, bilingual learning curricula (e.g. ProVocEnt), education and teaching methods which can be implemented and multiplied in both countries (ProVocEnt, EYES). Moreover, teachers have the possibility to gain up-to-date knowledge at vocational schools that can be transmitted to partner teachers and schools (e.g. TALENTED LIFE, INTERSKILL 2021).

The Programme impacted the labour market locally, on a microregional level, for instance by facilitating the reintegration of disadvantaged people to the labour market who lack competitive skills and knowledge, are long-term unemployed or face negative discrimination (e.g. SKHU Marketsm, SAD,

REWO). Certain projects targeted a specific sector to provide trained staff, for example, for the construction industry (Education).

The projects contributed to joint educational facilities and services at a limited level. For example, the INNOCENTRE will be used also as a dual education facility for students of secondary vocational schools in the area, and the Saint Stephen's house constructed within the SKHU Markets will host educational programmes too. The Tata Dual Education Workshop will be serving as a new traineeship venue for the Bláthy Vocational School and other vocational education institutions of the target area.

Project titled '*Find your way*' has been one of the most comprehensive interventions in terms of fulfilling labour market needs: it aimed at improving the level of education and increasing the chances of reintegration of long-term unemployed citizens to the labour market through the implementation of joint education and training programmes. Within other relevant projects, for example *ProVocEnt*, entrepreneurial skills were improved.

Decreasing social disparities, combating poverty

The challenge was addressed under PA3 (*Common use of expert and consultancy services; joint education and training programmes*) and PA4 (*Launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens from both sides of the border and strengthening social cohesion of the programme area resulting in improved cross-border services*).

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

Some projects more indirectly supported the tackling of the challenge by improving skills and providing knowledge for better employability, in order to meet labour market needs and to support (re)integration (e.g. SMARTER). Some of these projects more directly addressed the improvement of skills of disadvantaged groups, mainly the Roma and the elderly whose social care needs have been targeted (e.g. Silver economy, IpOLD, LILI, SKHU Ambassadors).

Another effect was the increased employment of less educated and, thus, disadvantaged people (e.g. Herband, and many projects of the TAPes e.g. Find your way), but it was rather moderate. The most comprehensive project in relation to education and employment was the TAPE titled *RE-START*.

Few projects specifically aimed to improve health and social conditions of multiple disadvantaged local residents (e.g. HEALTH4ALL, SAD). Few projects supported the strengthening of cross-border civil society through the development of a joint volunteer exchange system (Volunteer). Social innovation has been increased too (e.g. Smart Communities), in connection with education and social services.

Developing integrated and sustainable cross-border tourism management and thematic routes

The challenge was the most popular one promoted under PA1 by a single but very clear action, namely: joint development of environmentally friendly tourism products and offers along with the development of cross border infrastructure for eco-tourism.

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

Large number of projects and activities supported this challenge, which justifies the significance of the real regional need. Cross-border thematic routes and tourism products and services have been developed, including cultural and natural heritage sites mostly around Sátoraljaújhely and Borša (RákócziTourism), Salgótarján, Terény, Gyöngyös-Mátrafüred and Hrušov (THEMATIC ROUTE FOR AGES 0-100), Vanyarc, Mátraderecske, Detva, Hrušov, Dolná Strehova (Palócland – Hont – Podpolanie), Sátoraljaújhely and Kráľovský Chlmec (Connecting Heritages). Furthermore, a less pronounced thematic connection has been initiated around Žitný ostrov and Szigetköz, along some parts of the Danube, the Mosoni and Little Danube (e.g. Nat-Net Duna/Dunaj 2, DANUBE BIKE&BOAT), along the river Ipeľ/Ipoly (e.g. Rowing in one river), along the Bodrog (Bodrog Active Tourism), the Hornád/Hernád (REJOICE), and between Filákovo, Bátonytereny, Salgótarján and Šiatorská Bukovinka. The extended cross-border biking networks – developed in the framework of the new bridge construction at Dunakiliti and Dobrohošť, in the territory of Arrabona, Pons Danubii and Ister-Granum EGTCs and around Sátoraljaújhely – can be seen as special routes of active tourism. *SacraVelo* is one of the most relevant projects in cycling with its 648-kilometre-long network. The *Bike Paradise* project of Ister-Granum is creating a 16.88-kilometre-long cycle route that pass through Štúrovo, Kamenica nad Hronom, Chľaba on the Slovak side and through Ipolydamásd, Szob and Letkés on the Hungarian side. The Programme thus contributed to the systematic efforts of creating extensive cross-border cycling networks including the construction of dedicated roads, stops and bike services (e.g. renting).

Management capacities have been improved in relation to ecotourism and cultural tourism, particularly better connecting distinct natural (riverside areas, nature protection areas, nature parks) and cultural heritage sites (castles, mansions).

Cross-border impacts include networking and building partnerships among certain stakeholders. The Programme contributed to numerous newly established and extended partnerships and (future) longer term cooperation forms, especially with regard to water, cycling and cultural tourism based on joint historical sites.

Supporting developments based on cultural diversity

The challenge was targeted by PA1 in the form of supporting the cooperation and development of cultural heritage sites, and PA4 (*launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens from both sides of the border and to strengthen social cohesion of the programme area resulting in improved cross-border services*).

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

By far, the most comprehensive contribution took place by the introduction of the Small Project Fund, followed by projects applied through the SKHU/1902 call targeting better inter-institutional cooperation. Cross-border added value also includes the better functional and physical accessibility of cultural heritage (sites). Another added value is the organisation of cross-border cultural events such as festivals (e.g. FEBO, InnoCult projects). Most events of this kind provide the opportunities for local

people to get to know each other which would not have been guaranteed in the absence of financial support from the Programme.

Professional connections have also been developed, such as partnerships of researchers and museologists working in the cultural sphere (e.g. CONIN, Milling projects). Better cooperation involving castles (e.g. INTERCASTLES, RákócziTourism) and sacral heritage (e.g. Modern Monasteries) and knowledge exchange in the field of exhibitions and event organisation were relevant aspects, too.

Certain developments resulted in introducing and enhancing bilingualism in the cultural tourism sector (see LingLand project).

Another important aspect of the Programme was providing additional sources to restore certain infrastructure, facilities, buildings, owned by the churches, municipalities or NGOs which otherwise would have stayed in bad condition and/or unused, abandoned (e.g. LIVIN HERITAGE project, MONUMENTIS). With their reconstruction, urban/rural rehabilitation of settlements, additional public spaces and cultural functions could be (re)integrated in the given settlements.

The dissolution of mental borders and the knowledge on the other side is a main added value for general public and for cultural institutions/organisations. In the field of culture, new partnerships were built, and existing ones were reaffirmed.

Strengthening cross-border social relations

The challenge was addressed under the complex action of PA4 named "strengthening and improving the cooperation capacity and the cooperation efficiency between different organisations of particular sectors through common professional programmes, trainings, exchange of experiences, capitalisation and know-how transfer, etc".

What is the added value of the Programme regarding the given challenge? What are the real impacts of the Programme on the challenge?

This regional need is the most affected by the Programme. The Programme managed to boost cross-border relations in two ways particularly: 1. through interpersonal relations, 2. through inter-institutional cooperation. In particular, projects, resulting in partnership built by the staff and the institutions like museums and other exhibition centres (e.g. CoME-in or Milling), hospitals (e.g. CrossCoop, Access2Health), primary and secondary schools (e.g. WORKFORCE PIPELINE, Promoting Entrepreneurship in the Vocational Education), nature protection (e.g. ESD Duna/Dunaj), and among twin cities and settlements have contributed to this goal.

It is important to underline, that, for smaller municipalities and local communities, the Programme provided a great opportunity for networking and partnership building as well as for avoiding isolation and social disintegration. Moreover, the related projects have created the necessary basis for future cooperation and any cooperation through folk events, expos, markets, study visits, joint trainings and other opportunities of many kinds. Obviously, without the Programme, much less partnerships would have emerged or have been intensified since 2014.

2.2.2 Analysis of the impacted target groups

This subchapter is addressing the analysis of the target groups of the Interreg V-A Slovakia – Hungary Cooperation Programme, which supported the implementation of projects in four priority axes in the programming period 2014-2020.

As a first step, evaluators assessed how relevant the activities of the calls for proposals were in relation to the target group defined by the CP and the CfPs, which also indicates how well the target groups were selected. To this end a benchmark analysis was conducted, where the colour-coding and numbering can be interpreted as follows.

Table 35: The short explanation of the benchmark categories

yellow (1)	the activity was not relevant to the given target group
light green (2)	the activity was relevant to some degree to the given target group
dark green (3)	the activity was highly relevant to the given target group
white	the given target group was not explicitly assigned by the activity

As a next step, evaluators also made an attempt to evaluate to what extent were the target group selection of the beneficiaries in harmony with the CP's intention. The analysis is based on the projects' application forms available in the INTERREG+ system.

Last, but not least an analysis concerning the effectiveness of reaching the selected target groups were conducted based on the survey.

Priority axis 1: Nature and culture

The aim of the priority axis is to increase the tourism attraction power of the border region. Those projects gained support, which addressed the protection, development and promotion of natural and cultural heritage, as well as tourism in the border area. Target groups defined by the CP and the CfPs are the **population of the eligible region, local communities, entrepreneurs, tourists, non-profit organisations**.

Table 36: Relevance of actions in PA1 in terms of the target groups

Short name of the actions	CB population	Local communities	Entrepreneurs	Tourists	NGOs
1.1/01 Joint development of cultural heritage	3	2	2	3	-
1.1/02 Joint development of natural heritage	3	2	2	3	-
1.1/03 Joint development of tourism attractions	3	2	2	3	1
1.1/04 Small scale investments in the field of tourism	3	2	2	3	-

Short name of the actions	CB population	Local communities	Entrepreneurs	Tourists	NGOs
1.1/08 Cross-border tourist products and the integration of tourism actors along thematic routes	3	2	3	3	1
1.1/09 Small scale quality tourism linked to local environmental or cultural features for SMEs	3	3	3	3	2
1.1/11 Tourist services and supporting facilities for active tourism	3	2	3	2	-
1.1/17 Cross border action plans, set up models and test pilot actions to better capitalize the regions cultural and natural heritage	3	3	3	2	-
1.1/18 Maintaining and promoting natural heritage in the programme area	3	2	1	3	2
1.1/19 Cooperation and development of cultural heritage sites	3	2	2	3	3

As the table shows, the majority of the actions were mostly relevant to the selected target groups, except for NGOs and SMEs in one action per each.

Based on the application forms of the projects, the beneficiaries approached to answer the question concerning the target group from two points of view. They defined the citizens living in the impacted cross-border area as an indirect target group. When defining the direct target groups, they tailored their selection to specific activities in accordance with the priority axis the project was implemented in.

The definition of the target groups based on different types of actions seems to be logical, suitable, and relevant in terms of the specific objective of the PA. Most of the project activities in PA1 targeted cross-border residents, local community and tourists. More detailed description based on the activity was also provided in most of the projects, i.e. students, families with small children, those who are keen on active tourism (cycling, hiking, equestrian tourism), basic school students etc. As indirect target groups, tourism-related service providers, NGOs, DMOs or tour operators were listed. Their role shall be promoting or offering activities related to cultural or natural sites.

Figure 75: Word cloud visualisation of the target group descriptions provided by small projects within PA1



Figure 75 based on information provided the application forms shows that the target groups of the small projects are in line with the intentions of PA1. In most projects the target group was defined in a tailored way. Since high ratio of small projects implemented in PA1 are related to cultural and tourism events, the target groups listed frequently are local people and communities, tourists and visitors, students, families with children.

Priority axis 2: Enhancing mobility

The aim of the priority axis is to enhance cross-border mobility by increasing the number of border crossing points and to decrease the travelling time. Those projects were supported, which improved the conditions for community and public transport, developed bridge and ferry connections. Target groups are: **people crossing the border regularly (students, workers, entrepreneurs, etc.), enterprises interested in Hungarian-Slovak cross-border transport.**

Table 37: Relevance of actions in PA2 in terms of the target groups

Short name of the actions	People crossing the border regularly	Enterprises
2.1/2 Construction of cross-border roads, bridges and ferries and infrastructure, including passive noise reduction	3	3
2.2.1/2 Demand-driven cross-border transport services.	3	2
2.2.1/5 Integration of cross-border public transport services, establishing transport associations	3	3
2.2.1/6 Development of cross-border intelligent transport systems (ITS)	3	3

The number of applications submitted within the Priority axis 2 was lower than expected. The selected projects aimed at the construction of cross-border bridges, roads and ferries, improvement and integration of cross-border transport services and development of cross border intelligent transport systems. The target groups addressed by the projects were primarily the people crossing the border and enterprises relying on Slovak-Hungarian cross-border transport. The selected target groups were tailored to the activities of the projects. In case of some projects of the actions 2.2.1/2 and 2.2.1/5 tourists were also mentioned as a target group besides those defined by the CP.

Priority axis 3: Facilitating employment

The aim of the priority axis is to create new and sustainable workplaces by facilitating labour mobility. In the programming period 2014-2022, territorial action plans for employment (TAPE) were supported, which contributed to the competitiveness of SMEs and improved the cross-border infrastructure. Target groups defined by the CP: **the region's population, local communities, entrepreneurs.**

Table 38: Relevance of actions in PA 3 in terms of the target groups

Short name of the actions	CB population	Local communities	Entrepreneurs
3.1/1 Coordination and communication activities	1	3	3
3.1/2 Joint education and training programmes	3	3	3
3.1/3 Business services promoting employment	3	3	3
3.1/4 Cross-border employment initiatives	3	3	3
3.1/5 Modernization and structural transformation of specific areas	2	3	3
3.1/6 Improving cross-border labour mobility	3	2	3
3.1/7 Development of local products and services creating new working places	3	3	3

In case of certain actions, further target groups were defined by the calls for proposals. Under action '3.1/3 Business services promoting employment' training centres, regional and public authorities, and governmental offices were also listed, while within action '3.1/7 Development of local products and services creating new working places' visitors and tourists were also expected to be addressed by the projects.

The most important target groups of the TAPE projects defined by the beneficiaries were the followings: long-term unemployed, SMEs, local producers, people from socially disadvantaged groups, people in deep poverty or the Roma minority. In some of the projects, where the activity was linked to training programmes in schools or job fairs, the scope of the target group was broadened with students or university graduates. From the perspective of CCP projects ensuring the communication and management of the whole TAPE, the target group included all partners of the consortium, residents of the affected regions, national and regional authorities in Hungary and Slovakia, as well as SMEs.

The projects' target group selection is in line with the specific objective, even more, in some cases, beneficiaries intended to address a wider range of target groups than it was expected by the programme. Thanks to the intervention logic of the tool and the design process preceding the implementation of the TAPE projects, PA3 well caught the relevant target groups: the entrepreneurs creating jobs, the vocational training schools educating future workers, the NGOs enabling marginalised groups to work and the local municipalities which aimed to improve the investment conditions locally.

Priority axis 4: Institutional cooperation

The aim of the priority axis is to facilitate the cooperation of institutions in the cross-border area and the exchange of knowledge and information. Those projects received support that contributed to the improvement of institutional capacities and initiated knowledge exchange, sharing of best practices, as well as those enhancing people to people connections. Target groups defined by the CP and the CfPs: **regional and local organisations, public and private institutions providing cross-border services, institutions of governmental sector, the eligible region's population, local communities, entrepreneurs, NGOs.**

Table 39: Relevance of actions in PA4 in terms of the target groups

Short name of the actions	Regional and local organisations	Public and private institutions providing cross-border services	Institutions of governmental sector	CB population	Local communities	Entrepreneurs	NGOs
4.1/1 Investment in institutional capacity	2	3	3	2	2	1	1
4.1/2 Development of new cross-border services	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
4.1/3 Launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens (People-to-people)	2	2	2	3	3	-	-
4.1/4 Launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens from both sides of the border	2	1	1	3	3	1	2
4.1/5 Improvement of cross-border services provided jointly, development of small infrastructure necessary for joint service provision	3	3	3	3	3	-	1

Short name of the actions	Regional and local organisations	Public and private institutions providing cross-border services	Institutions of governmental sector	CB population	Local communities	Entrepreneurs	NGOs
4.1/6 Strengthening and improving the cooperation capacity and the cooperation efficiency between different organisations	3	3	3	2	2	1	-

The defined target groups of the implemented projects are in line with the objective of the PA4 (cross-border population, local community). Some of the projects defined more specific target groups (i.e. elderly, pensioners, school children, disadvantaged children or students, research professionals) based on the activities implemented. Entrepreneurs as a target group gained less attention, since knowledge exchange or sharing of good practices mainly concerned public and some private institutions.

Figure 76: Word cloud visualisation of the target group descriptions provided by small projects within PA4



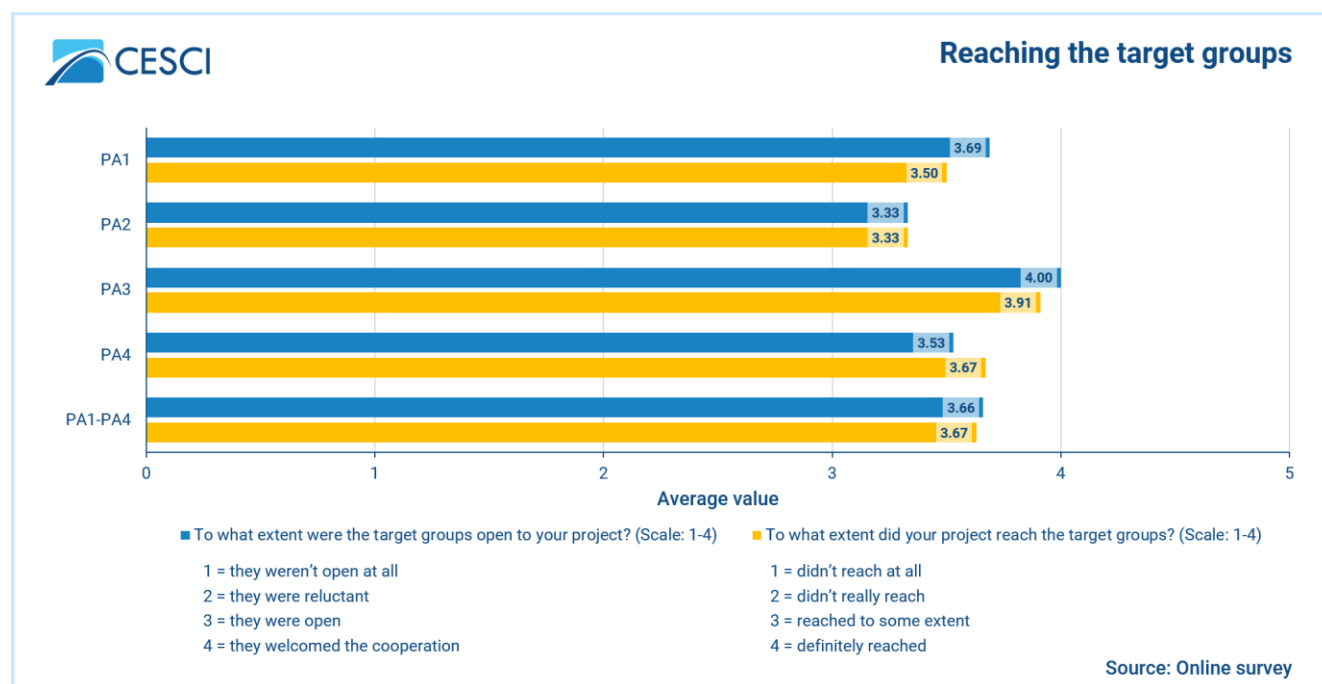
Within the Small Project Fund, the implemented small projects aimed at strengthening the cooperation between citizens, lively cross-border exchange of experience, increasing the number of long-term institutionalised partnerships, as well as joint sustainable events and actions covering the programming area. Less projects addressed the improved level of bilingualism. The cloud visualisation shows that

specific groups affected by the small projects are mainly the local population and communities and organisations, but visitors, tourists, youngsters, students were also addressed.

Results of the questionnaire survey

In order to assess how well were the target groups predefined, the beneficiaries responding the questions of the online survey were requested to evaluate the results from two points of view: the openness of the target groups to the projects and the effectiveness of their involvement. The picture gained is balanced: those target groups were involved in the project implementation which were open to participate therein. The number of projects concerned by the responses were 28 in PA1, 5 in PA2, 22 in PA3 and 32 in PA4. The highest values were reached in PA3 (4,00 and 3,91), which can be explained by the fact that the territorial action plans (TAPE) were focusing on achieving an impact on a larger territory with multiple and different types of beneficiaries involving the SME sector. The lowest value in reaching the target group was achieved by the PA2 projects, which can partly be explained by the late kick-off of the construction investments (preventing the assessment of the outcomes), and partly by the fact that the implementation of these projects was in progress during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the measures introduced by the national governments restricted cross-border movement. The overall results show that the target groups were successfully determined and they were reached by the projects.

Figure 77: Reaching the target groups



2.2.3 Communication of the Programme and the projects

2.2.3.1 Communication of the Programme

This chapter evaluates the implementation of the communication strategy based on the interviews with the Management Bodies, information from the annual communication plans and the results of the online questionnaire sent to the beneficiaries with a view to assess the effectiveness of programme level communication.

Overview of the programme's communication activities

Through this assessment, the evaluators aim to get an overall picture on the communication activities of the Programme what is first intended to be analysed based on the realised activities.

The communication of the Programme is based on transparency, clarity, accuracy and focus on the projects. The applied communication tools during the implementation are the Programme's

- website,
- social media pages,
- electronic newsletter,
- events, and
- media channels.

The **website** of the Programme was already operational in 2016. Bugs that appeared during the daily use have been tackled in time. As a result of early successful communication work, the website was awarded by a 3rd place on the Interreg Annual Meeting by the European Commission on 6 June 2016 in the Best Interreg V website competition. The three language versions, the special section for the visually impaired, the user-friendly platform and the transparent and updated information content were mentioned as the best qualities of the website. The site became fully operational in 2018 with the introduction of a new and innovative menu item (Funded projects – Infographics). Main functions include also News, Calendar, CfP, FAQ, and Calendar. However, the partner-search tool did not attract many people. The website can be considered up-to-date thanks to the work of the Joint Secretariat. The website turned out to serve mainly as information and document source for the beneficiaries implementing projects. Applicants only rarely visit the site, and when they do, it is due to finding CfPs before applying, and finding documents after a successful application procedure. These two options also determine the content of the website, which is therefore not really intended for external random visitors. Communication about the results has been transferred to the Facebook page.

The communication mix of the Cooperation Programme has not changed significantly during the programming period, the effectiveness of the communication increased and has become more targeted. Since 2021 an external expert group has been responsible for communicating the results of the implemented projects and the actual programme-related events in **social media**. The content published provides an added value, Facebook posts are published regularly (twice a week, a post is published on current news). The Facebook page can be regarded as a well-performing information source. The Programme managed to maintain and further broaden the audience of the page, especially during 2020 and 2021. Ads, financed posts were also useful in reaching a bigger audience and get involvement. Through the social media activity, the programme and the projects get an extra visibility. For instance,

for a three months' trial period (November 2021 - January 2022) a small amount was allocated to advertisement on Facebook to see how much bigger audience the Programme can reach with the posts. These ad funds were used for those posts whose topic concerned a large population (for example how to stop bullying in school, call for proposals, public consultation of the new Programme). Consequently, it turned out to be an effective tool to finance certain content via Facebook.

Table 40: The main statistics of the Programme's Facebook page

Facebook	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Likes	354	474	646	742	882	N/A
Followers	354	483	665	787	915	1065

To name some posts that reached high visibility on Facebook are connected to the flipbook (29 864 individuals), the last Call for Proposals in the Small Project Fund in the Western programming area (23 117 reaches, with advertisement help), Unique Forest School Project (5 703 views), post about the CoME-in project (4 754) and the promotion of the first Call for Proposals (5 428 reaches). Consequently, those posts were the most popular which communicated and displayed programme-related news (e.g. new CfPs, approved projects) and the results of certain projects. Financed posts could have their own contribution to increase the visibility of the Programme.

LinkedIn community Programme page was also launched, but its promotion was not strong enough. However, the number of connections has improved over time: it was 190 in 2017, 224 in 2018, 307 in 2019, 381 in 2020. The page has many connections in its network but the partner search forum did not attract many people, and discussion within the group did not start. It turned out to be more effective to use an alternative partner search tool (e.g.: event) parallel with this site. LinkedIn profile should be primarily used to show the results of the programme. Consequently, it is a tool for publishing content that showcases the results of the programme to the international audience.

Considering Instagram, a dedicated page was launched in September 2021, and 19 posts were published on it collecting altogether 18 followers by the end of 2021. The target group of this channel was planned to be different from Facebook. The aim was to reach the younger generation and get them familiarized with the Interreg SKHU programme. However, this platform proved not to be the main communication channel of the Programme, thus its updating is not a priority anymore. It is worth popularising the Facebook page first, and then focus later on the younger generations who tend to use Instagram. It is worth noting also that Instagram was not used by many of the age groups of the applicants.

Since the social media presence is established, the JS decided to use these online platforms, and the **newsletters** proved to be less efficient and were replaced by the mentioned online platforms. Therefore, it is worth reconsidering the content and validity of the newsletter in the future, especially regarding the need for English version beside the Slovak and Hungarian versions. The Programme did not send any newsletters in 2016 as this feature built in the website did not work properly then. From 2017 four different newsletters per year were sent out. No newsletters were issued starting from 2021 due to the shift to social media.

Based on the Communication Report 2016, related to the 1st CfP, the Joint Secretariat organised 14 **info days** for more than 700 interested potential applicants in both countries. Related to the Call for

proposals for Territorial Action Plans seven info days were conducted with 119 participants in total. The Slovak FLC organised three info days in 2018, two Info days related to SMEs (SKHU/1801) and four related to TAPes (SKHU/1802). In 2019 seven Info days about the SKHU/1902 were held. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the events were organised online from 2020 while the number of personal events including info days decreased to zero. Based on the experience gained from monitoring of the needs of the project beneficiaries, new types of thematic information days will be introduced in 2023. The **Thematic Information Day** is focusing on providing professional content with the involvement of experts. They will have interactive nature and will be organised in the form of small workshops, where the applicants are presented and an opportunity is provided to get information about each other, establish partnership and discuss the goals and problems. These type of Info days will replace the Info days held until 2022, where more formal questions about the calls and the implementation process were discussed.

The Programme was represented at various **events**. The European Cooperation Day stood out from the events which managed to contribute to the visibility of the Programme and to awareness-raising concerning CBC. For instance, the Programme was kick-ed off at the fifth anniversary of the European Cooperation Day. The Programme was also present at events of some outstanding SKHU-projects (such as Silver economy), where the Programme itself gained visibility and media appearance. The Programme and the JS in particular tried to attend to and present at conferences of cross-border nature (e.g. the "Cross-border developments in a spirit of Visegrad Cooperation" conference in 2017). On the occasion of the European Cooperation Day and the European Year of Cultural Heritage the Programme organised a photo contest to address the citizens of the two partnering countries which turned out to be a successful tool in reaching audience. In 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of online events increased while the European Cooperation Day and such events of personal contacts were reduced to zero.

Regarding the **media channels**, the Programme tried to create a pool of media partners. Based on the experiences it was successful mainly on project level, with the help of the financed projects. The Programme tried to spread information and news via the regions, too. It turned out it is more effective to address local stakeholders and potential applicants through the local and regional newspapers. However, it has to be noted that it is costly and can be time-consuming to appear and advertise in widely read and bought journals.

The Programme decided to establish a **small project fund** under PA1 and PA4. The management of the SPF was delegated to two EGTCs, the RDV EGTC in the western side and the Via Carpatia EGTC in the eastern side of the programme area. The two EGTCs were in charge of the following communication activities:

- to carry out PR and communication activities (e.g. press conferences, media events, advertisements, press releases, articles);
- to organise workshops, info days, conferences and other events providing information on the SPF;
- to participate in the preparation of the website, promotion materials, leaflets, brochures, etc.

Based on the strategic documents of the EGTCs, the two groupings organised 33 information days for the applicants (18 in the western and 15 in the eastern region) in the local centres. The 18 western info days took place in Győr, Komárom, Tatabánya, Budapest in the Hungarian side, and Bratislava, Dunajská

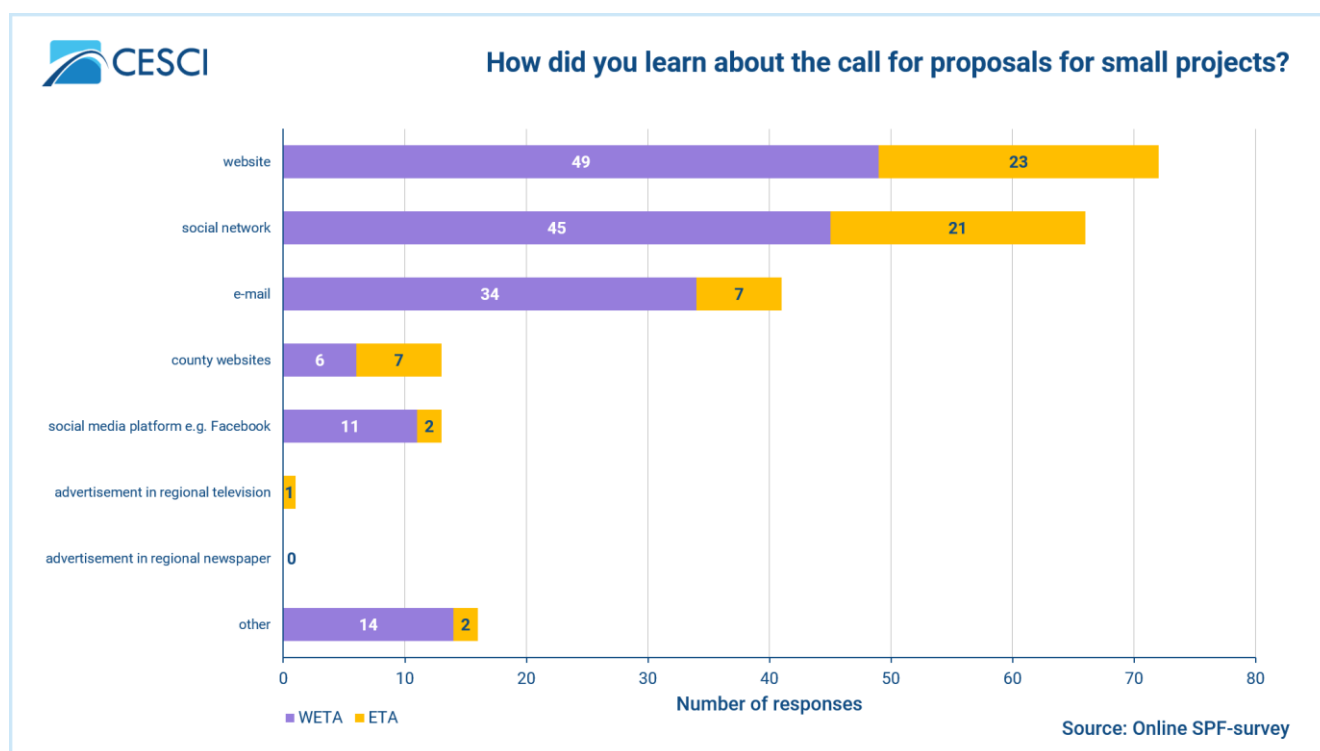
Streda, Komárno, Štúrovo with 548 participants in total. The 15 eastern info days were organised in Miskolc, Eger, Nyíregyháza, Salgótarján in Hungary and Košice, Banská Bystrica, Veľký Kapušany, Moldava nad Bodvou, Lučenec in Slovakia, which were attended by 376 participants in total.

Before and during the implementation of the small projects, the EGTCs, in some cases together with the FLC Bodies, organised orientation days for the SP beneficiaries. In the western region, 1 in-person and four on-line seminars took place for the beneficiaries. On the eastern side, four on-the-spot seminars were organised, three in Košice and one in Miskolc with the participation of 90 SP beneficiaries. Furthermore, two in-line events were held, which attracted only 17 participants. The Via Carpatia EGTC also organised Awarding Ceremonies for the small projects with the participation of local decision-makers, small project beneficiaries and the representatives of the press. Altogether 5 events were held (3 in Košice and 1 in Miskolc), which attracted 92 people.

Both EGTCs developed an SPF project site (<https://rdvegtc-spf.eu/> and <http://www.viacarpatia-spf.eu/>), where all relevant information were published. In addition, the groupings used their already existing Facebook pages for reaching the target groups.

In addition, the EGTCs also applied the communication channels listed on *Figure 78*, which illustrated the effectiveness of these tools based on the result of the SPF survey.

Figure 78: The ways to get to know the calls for small projects



Websites and social networks of the EGTCs seem to reach the highest number of respondents, although, the number of e-mail enquires was also significant, especially in the western region. The “other” category includes information from project managers and management companies, exchanging information between twin municipalities and visiting the EGTC, concerned in the region. Advertisements in regional newspapers and television were completely unsuccessful in promoting the call for proposals.

Fulfilment of the communication objectives

In this subchapter the Communication Strategy of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme will be assessed.

The Communication Strategy has two objectives:

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

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

Apart from the number of newsletter subscriptions all indicators have been performing well. The value of newsletters is also low because of the deletion of fake subscriptions. Especially the number of media appearances of projects and number of downloads of key documents (application package, rules) have exceeded the target values significantly. However, the repositioning and redesigning of the newsletter have already been touched upon by the Programme. Social media, Facebook in particular can act as a great substitute or counterpart of the newsletter since the “**SO 1.1:** Promote the funding opportunities offered by the programme and by disseminating its results” is met mostly with the help of Facebook. In addition, the most important leverage effect of the Small Project Fund was the significant contribution to communication SO 1.1. Thanks to the efforts made by the two EGTCs, the Programme were able to target many new local stakeholders.

The modified Visibility Guide has helped a lot in addressing “**SO 1.2:** Facilitate project communication” . The original target value was a bit way too unambitious. Furthermore, it has to be noted that the originally designated indicators are not necessarily the most suitable to measure the communication of the Programme and its effectiveness. It is difficult to provide useful indicators for the whole programming period, and chose the right target values (to avoid under- or overachievements). For instance, with regard to “**SO 2.1:** Ensure the adequacy among the publicity measures, the target groups and the objectives”, the number of downloaded files was a misleading aspect. Its measurement is also problematic not to mention the multiple downloads by a single user. Regarding “**SO 2.2:** Ensure the proper quality of information” valuable feedback has been given to the Programme Bodies.

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Table 41: Communication indicators and their realisation

Objectives	Name of indicator	Unit of measurement	Base number	Target number	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Current result
SO 1.1 Promote the funding opportunities offered by the programme and by disseminating its results	No. of newsletter subscriptions	pc	0	2000	140	31	167	129	142	N/A		-
	No. of public events organized by the programme	pc	0	10	1	0	2	1	9	0		13
SO 1.2 Facilitate project communication	No. of media appearances of projects	pc	0	500	0	0	373	203	106	229		9531
SO 2.1 Ensure the adequacy among the publicity measures, the target groups and the objectives	No. of events (info days, seminars, public events)	pc	0	30	15	7	9	8	1	1		411
	No. of downloads of key documents (application package, ruling documents)	pc	0	3000	0	1326	6609	9314	2097	4 555		23 9011
SO 2.2 Ensure the proper quality of information	Satisfactory level based on event feedback form relevant questions	score	n/r	4	4.3	4.37	4.45	4.55	4.75	4,62↓		4,62

2.2.3.2 Communication of the projects

Visibility guide

A great change compared to the previous programming period is that a new visibility guide has been created, which describes the mandatory visual elements to be used and those elements that are optional. The Visibility Guide for projects, prepared by the Joint Secretariat of the Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme, approved by the Monitoring Committee of the Programme is designed to provide support and guidance for beneficiaries whose projects received funding from the Programme. The project beneficiaries have an obligation to promote the visual identity of the cooperation programme and the EU. The Visibility Guide was published together with the 1st Call for Proposals on 29 July, 2016 (v2-00). After four partial revisions (v3-00, v3-01, v3-02, v3-03), a complete version was published on 22 February, 2021 (v4-00). This document made many misunderstandings clear, and standardised the previously very heterogeneous project communication practices. The visibility guide of the programme has become more transparent and user-friendly. The following table lists the versions of the visibility guide.

Table 42: Overview of the visibility guide versions

Version	Date of publishing	Description
v2-00	29 July, 2016	Visibility guide published with the 1 st Call for Proposals
v3-00	3 May, 2017	Revision of Chapter 1.1, 2.7, 4.1 and 4.2
v3-01	22 May, 2018	Revision of Chapter 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, Annex 1 and 2
v3-02	13 May, 2018	Revision of Chapter 2.6 and 2.7
v3-03	12 September, 2019	Revision of Chapter 2.1,4.1 and 4.2
v4-00	22 February, 2021	Complete revision

The following tables present the modifications made to the document compared to the complete revision made in 2021.

Table 43: Changes made to Visibility Guide – Mandatory visibility measures, tools

Tools	Visibility guide: v4-00	Visibility guides: v2-00, v3-00, v3-01, v3-02, v3-03
Poster	total budget below 300 000 EUR + soft project, where total budget is over 300 000 EUR	total budget below 500 000 EUR no infrastructure investment
	placed 90 days before after the project start date until the end of the follow up period	no specific time interval set
	shall be made from plastic in A2 size	at least A3 size poster (material the poster is made from not determined)
Billboard	infrastructure project with budget over 300 000 EUR	infrastructure project with budget over 500 000 EUR (temporary billboard)

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Tools	Visibility guide: v4-00	Visibility guides: v2-00, v3-00, v3-01, v3-02, v3-03
Plaque	infrastructure project with budget over 300 000 EUR	infrastructure project with budget over 500 000 EUR (temporary billboard)
Marking	total budget over 300 000 EUR (soft + infrastructure projects), projects with total budget under 300 000 EUR	stickers used on purchased equipment in accordance with the Visibility Guide

Table 44: Changes made to Visibility Guide – Mandatory communication measures, tools

Tools	Visibility guide v4-00	Visibility guides: v2-00, v3-00, v3-01, v3-02, v3-03
Press release	beneficiary with total budget below 300 000 EUR + beneficiary with total budget over 300 000 EUR in case of soft and infrastructure projects	beneficiaries regardless to amount of project budget
	90 days after the project start date and one press release within 30 days after the project end date	2 press releases (one at the beginning of the project, second at the end of the project)
	language variants: SK, HU	language variants: SK, HU, EN
Photo documentation	beneficiary with total budget below 300 000 EUR + beneficiary with total budget over 300 000 EUR in case of soft and infrastructure projects	beneficiaries regardless to amount of project budget
	beneficiary is obliged to supply a minimum of 20 pieces of high quality, professional images to the JS PM within 30 days after the project end date	high quality images, minimum amount is not determined
Project webpage /Beneficiary website	beneficiary with total budget below 300 000 EUR + beneficiary with total budget over 300 000 EUR in case of soft and infrastructure projects	beneficiaries regardless to amount of project budget 1. subpage on the Beneficiary's own website, banners may be used 2. only articles on the Beneficiary's website 3. new website created in language variants SK, HU, EN
	Beneficiary is obliged to present its project part on its own website within 90 days after the project start date until the end date of the follow-up period.	1. subpage on the Beneficiary's own website, banners may be used 2. only articles on the Beneficiary's website 3. new project website
	language variants: SK, HU	language variants of new website: SK, HU, EN
Closing event	beneficiary with total budget below 300 000 EUR + beneficiary with total budget over 300 000 EUR in case of soft projects	regardless to the amount of project budget closing event is to be organised

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Tools	Visibility guide v4-00	Visibility guides: v2-00, v3-00, v3-01, v3-02, v3-03
		the size of the event must comply with the size of the project budget
Handover ceremony	beneficiary with total budget over 300 000 EUR in case of infrastructure projects	-

Table 45: Changes made to Visibility Guide – Optional communication measures, tools

Tools	Visibility guide v4-00	Visibility guides: v2-00, v3-00, v3-01, v3-02, v3-03
Press conference	beneficiary with total budget below 300 000 EUR + beneficiary with total budget over 300 000 EUR in case of soft and infrastructure projects	all beneficiaries regardless to project budget
	beneficiary may organise press conference at any stage of the project implementation	1 pcs of press conference at the beginning of the project
Sponsored article	beneficiary with total budget below 300 000 EUR + beneficiary with total budget over 300 000 EUR in case of soft and infrastructure projects	paid and non-paid articles, their number was determined only for TAPE, press book for quantitative and qualitative follow up was necessary to reporting
	beneficiary may publish sponsored articles during the implementation	

Table 46: Changes made to Visibility Guide – Marketing measures, tools

Tools	Visibility guide v4-00	Visibility guides: v2-00, v3-00, v3-01, v3-02, v3-03
Communication plan (optional)	Beneficiary project budget exceeds 300 000 EUR	Communication plan appeared first in case of TAPE
	predefined template, part of the contracting documentation, prepared within 60 days after the project start date, JS approval needed	
	language variant: EN	
Social media campaign (optional)	undertaken by the Beneficiaries themselves or by an external company, compulsory visibility elements are used in accordance with the Visibility Guide	optional communication tool, undertaken by the Beneficiary, visibility elements determined
	language variants: HU, SK	language variants: HU, SK
Leaflets, advertisements, audio-visual productions, publications (optional)	visibility elements are used in accordance with the Visibility guide, approval of JS needed	optional communication tool, visibility elements determined
	language variants: HU, SK	language variants: HU, SK

Tools	Visibility guide v4-00	Visibility guides: v2-00, v3-00, v3-01, v3-02, v3-03
Promotional products	visibility elements are used in accordance with the Visibility Guide, products are made from natural materials, can be re-used or recycled	visibility elements on promo products used in accordance with the Visibility Guide

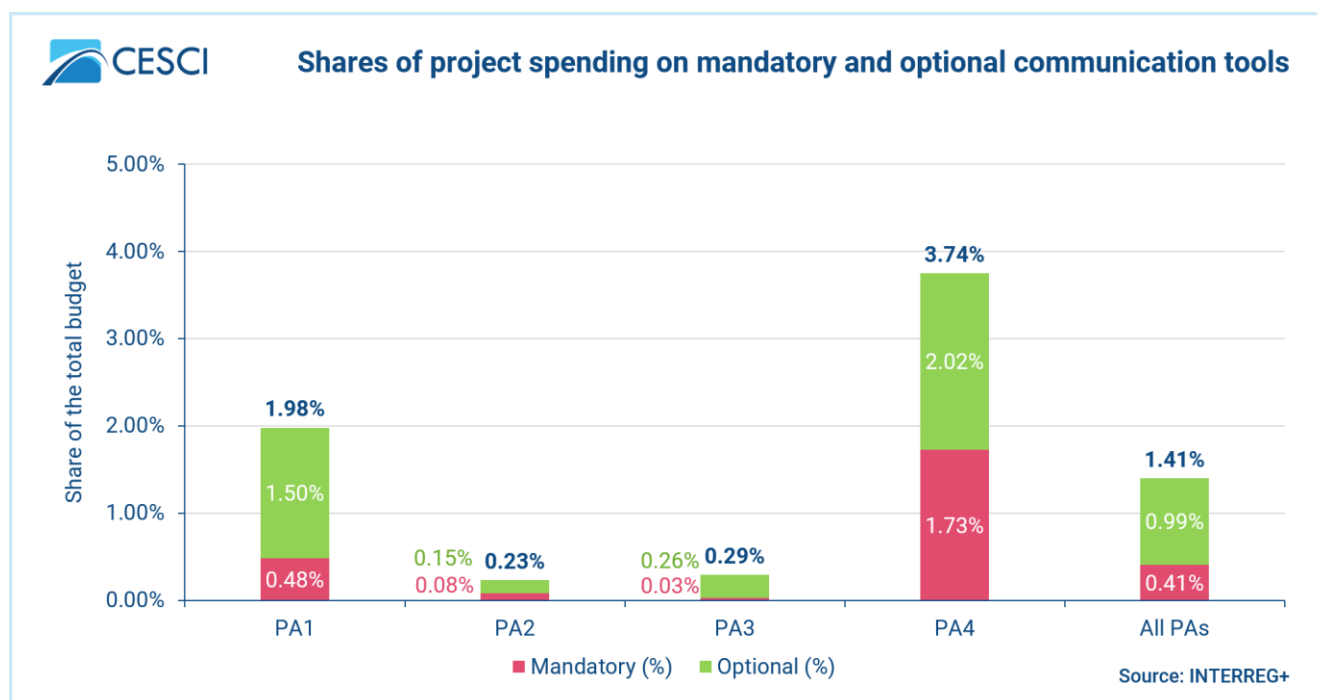
For the small projects the minimum requirement includes a temporary or permanent poster, a new webpage for each beneficiary or a new website, and one public project event.

Applied communication tools

The assessment of mandatory and optional communication tools used by the beneficiaries is based on the data obtained from the programme's monitoring system¹⁰¹, the results of the on-line questionnaire survey and the interviews. The overall spending both for mandatory and optional communication tools was around 2 3000 000 EUR while the amount spent on **mandatory communication tools** was lower, around 670 000 EUR. The highest share of spending is detected in the case of PA1 (0.48%) and PA4 (1.73%). A relatively low spending on mandatory communication tools can be detected in PA3 (0.03%). In the case of Territorial Action Plans (TAPE), the Coordination and Communication Projects (CCP) were responsible for elaborating the communication plan of the whole action plan and to ensure the fulfilment of the mandatory visibility tasks for each project. The programme introduced minimum requirements in means of communication. The projects had the opportunity to use different kinds of publicity measures, but the costs had to be planned prior to the implementation. Since most of the action plans realised large-scale infrastructural developments, a significant share of communication budget was spent on optional tools to promote the achieved outputs.

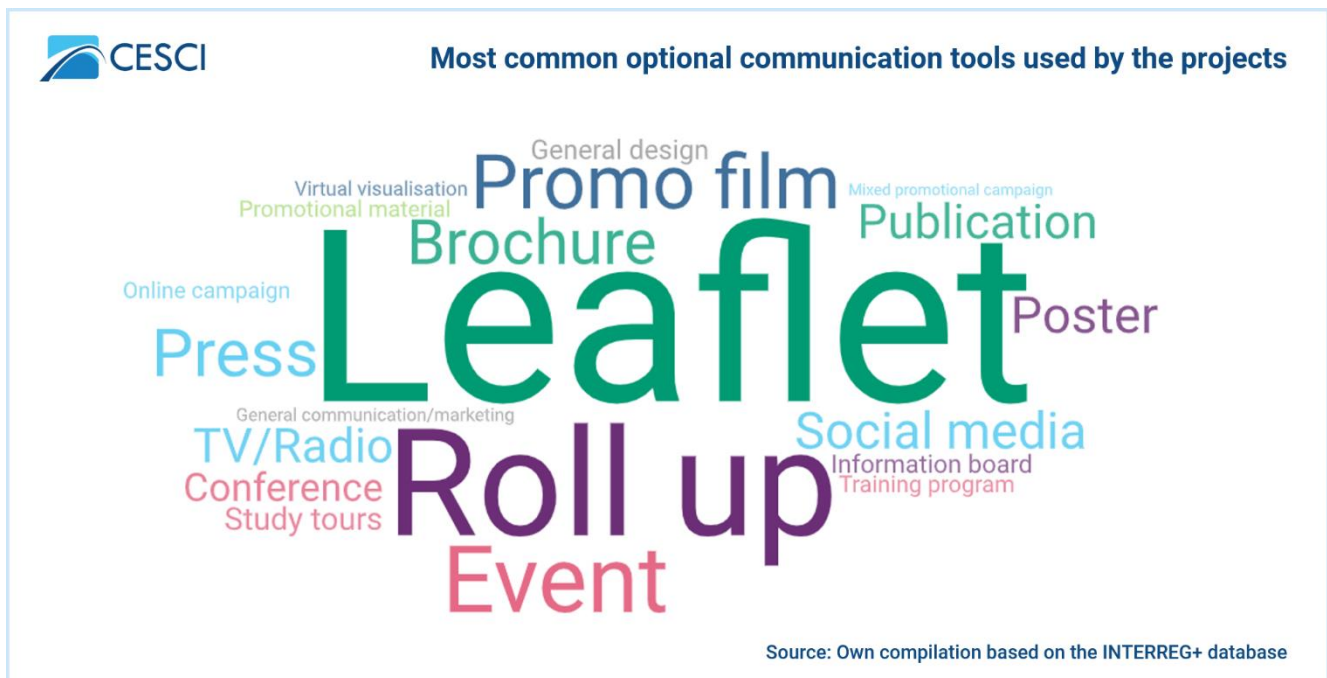
¹⁰¹ The analysis and the chart below contain the values of the budget lines "Events, conferences, seminars and project meetings" and "Publicity, promotion and communication costs". The distinction between the mandatory and the optional tools is based on the description of the budget items. It has to be noted, that in some cases the descriptions contain both mandatory and optional communication tools, but the value of these is marginal.

Figure 79: Shares of project spending on mandatory and optional communication tools per PA



The overall spending on **optional communication tools** was around 1 600 000 EUR. The highest total value is detected in **PA1**, but the share of these expenses (1.5%) is lower than in the case of PA4. The most popular optional communication tools were the brochures, sponsored and non-sponsored articles (online/offline media), social media and leaflets. The obtained information is interesting, since the project implementation fell into the pandemic period, when in-person meetings, conferences, workshops were prohibited, most of the information sharing shifted to online, especially social media. It would be interesting to see, whether the printed material (leaflets and brochures) reached the target group or their production was only a project activity to be ticked. In **PA2** data were obtained on 7 projects, which corresponds with the budget share of optional communication activities (0.15%). It is difficult to present transparent data about the utilisation of communication tools. Most of the projects prepared leaflets, promo videos, brochures and used the social media. The budget share of optional communication materials in **PA3** was 0.26%. In the case of Territorial Action Plans for Employment (TAPE), the Coordination and Communication Projects (CCP) were responsible to ensure the communication activities of the projects in accordance with the pre-defined Communication Plan. Most of the action plans are in progress, which means that the communication of the project results is not finished, higher spending level is expected. Based on the obtained data, it is difficult to specify which optional communication tools were popular as they are indicated as "TAPE publicity", "popularisation of the TAPE" or "publicity package". All of these cover different types of communication activities, which are not listed in details. "Awareness raising events, TV news, roadshow, publication of good practices, roll-ups" can be found on the list and some mandatory communication tools. The share of spending on optional communication tools in **PA4** was the highest (2.02%). The most popular communication tools were leaflets, social media and press. The higher spending in this priority axis can be explained by the projects realised in the framework of SPF ETA and WETA. The activities are indicated as a package of promotional materials (e.g. pen, notebook, articles for personal /office use, printed materials, etc.).

Figure 80: Most common optional communication tools used by the projects



Overall, the most common optional communication tools were the leaflets and roll ups followed by events and promo films, however tools such as social media, press, TV/radio, poster, publication, conference are also frequently used by the beneficiaries.

Roll-ups together with posters and information boards form an important offline group of communication tools. There is a clear demand for some sort of physical installation apart from online and digital tools to be used. Partners need these kinds of communication elements to introduce and promote themselves in the physical reality.

Numerous projects tend to produce promo videos, however, the number of views per video is low, often stay below 10 in total. This means that these promo films cost more than the value added by them. At the same time, targeted online and social media campaigns designed by professionals would expectedly increase the number of access.

The different events are used not just to support the project partners' activities and professional work but to increase visibility. (Some project events were hindered by COVID-19 (e.g. bike event, bike tour, cycling camp – SKHU/1601/1.1/013 SacraVelo)). The use of classic promotional materials (e.g. cups, pens, bags) have decreased significantly, this was reflected in the answers given to the survey.

Compared to classic media contents online and digital options still seem to be underutilised. It would be interesting to monitor and benchmark the effectiveness of both traditional and on-line communication tools. However, its realisation in practice seems to be problematic, especially in case of the traditional media contents. For online tools measurement would be easier (e.g. how many people reached the posts in the social media, what was the ratio of sponsored social media adverts), as well as it is expected to be more effective and efficient in terms of reaching the target groups. (Since there is a significant shift to online platforms, the information is easier to get for the target audience if the social media post is appropriately targeted.)

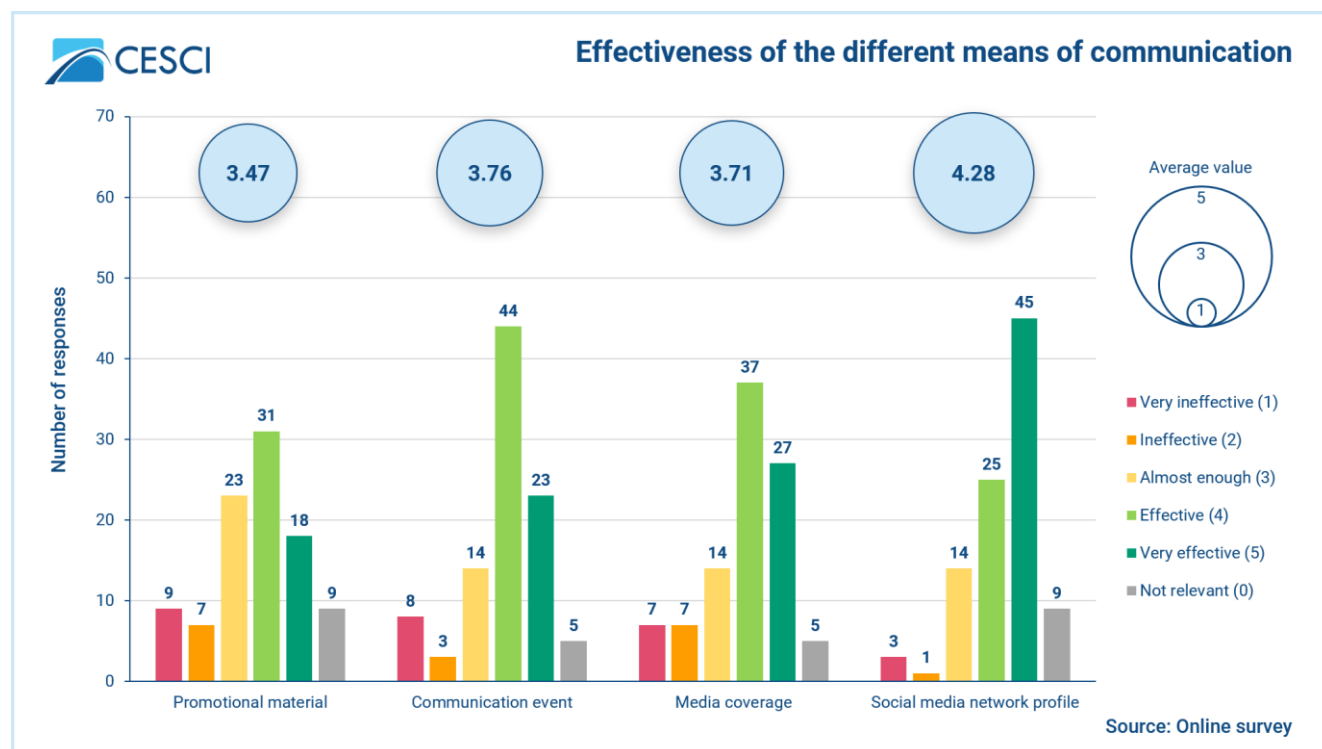
Furthermore, a creative trend is detected in choosing communication tools targeting specific audience, which are closely related with the project activity e.g. SKHU/1601/1.1/002 FORESTERS AND BEES – Beekeeping Day, SKHU/1601/1.1/014 BIKE&BOAT – Green Week at the Danube Inland Delta.

Many times, external general communication, marketing as well as design experts are involved. This is not by accident, given that the majority of the project owners and partners do not necessarily have the skills and knowledge for carrying out these activities at a highly professional level. In case beneficiaries do not possess these skills, training, workshops would be needed for the project partners. The visibility guide could also support knowledge transfer for the applicants to educate them.

The tendency that the Beneficiaries whose developments or activities require to reach different target groups in order to fulfil the project objectives (culture, tourism, cross-border traffic, employment, institutional cooperation) put great emphasis on marketing and publicity issues through using both the mandatory and optional communication tools during the implementation of their projects.

The effectiveness of different communication tools was also assessed by the **online questionnaire** in terms of reaching the target audience of the project. The respondents had to evaluate the communication tools on a scale of 0 to 5, how effective they feel the listed tools (promotional material, communication event, media coverage, social media profile). Based on the responses, neither of the communication tools were irrelevant or ineffective.

Figure 81: Effectiveness of communication tools



The most effective communication tool proved to be the social media (4.28), such as a Facebook page. This was followed by the communication event, which means that the in-person contacts and meetings are still important (3.76). Media coverage is the third, not far behind the communication event (3.71). The lowest ratio was achieved by promotional materials (3.47), which also represent a change i.e. the shrinking importance of physical promotion. Owing also to the communication approach used in the

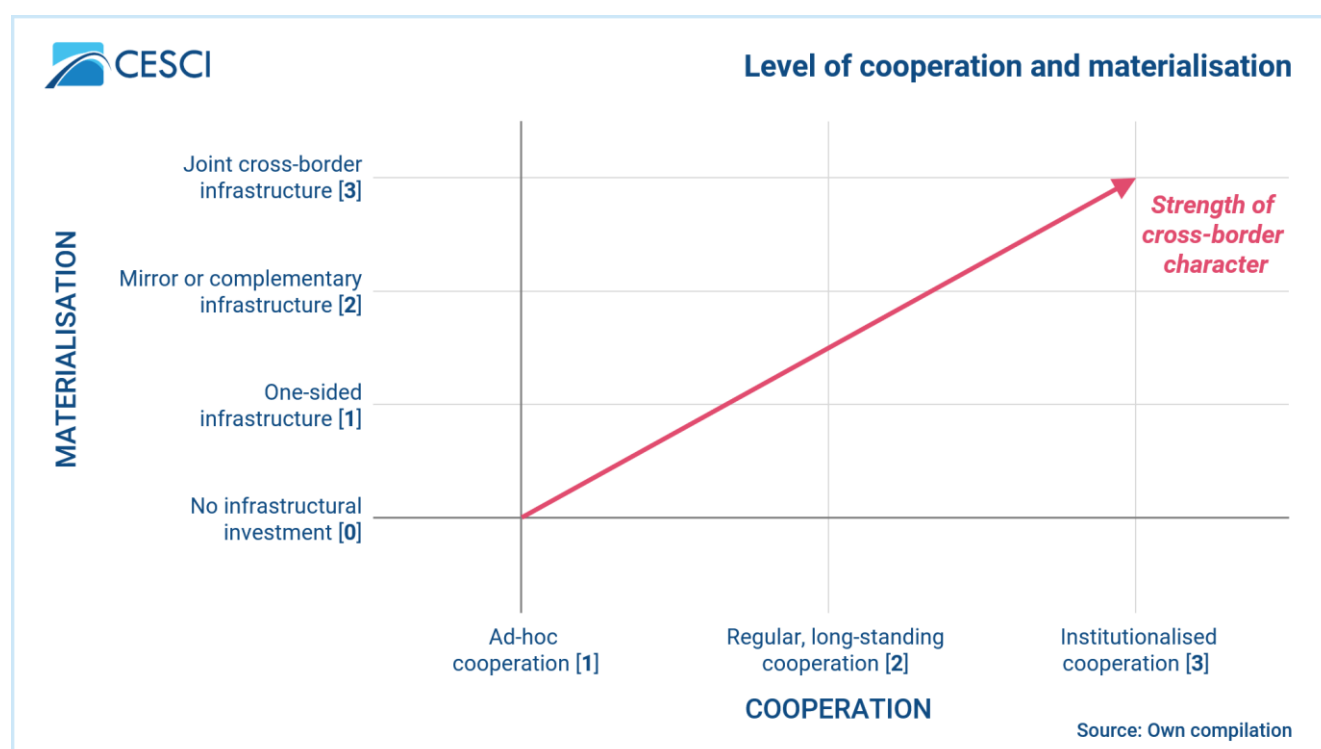
TAPE tool, PA3 gained the best results. The role of the communication event is relatively outstanding at PAs (especially PA2) where larger infrastructural investments were realised. Soft projects require more attention to media coverage and social media. As the results obtained different tools of communication, it can be summed up that a balanced mix of communication tools was used, which contributed to reach the target audience.

2.2.4 Analysis of cross-border relevance

It is a recurring problem of the cross-border programmes that the beneficiaries use these funds for realising their local investments and for compensating their failure at the national calls. As a consequence, the cross-border character of these projects is rather weak. The Management Bodies of the Slovakia-Hungary Interreg V-A programme made remarkable efforts to reduce the share of this type of projects. However, the programme itself still suffers from this phenomenon.

At EU level, there are no widely-acknowledged methods to evaluate the cross-border character of the projects and the programmes. In 2018, during the implementation of the 1st phase evaluation of the SKHU programme, the experts of CESCO have developed a two-dimensional model for measuring this aspect. The two dimensions refer to the key factors of real cross-border interventions, namely the levels of (1) cooperation and (2) materialisation (see *Figure 82*).

Figure 82: Theoretical model of measuring cross-border relevance



2.2.4.1 Level or intensity of cooperation

The stronger are the relations between the Slovak and the Hungarian beneficiaries, the stronger is the impact of the project on the barrier effects of the border. If the majority of the projects are based on

ad-hoc partnerships generated by the relevant call, it means that the programme has a strong motivating character to start cooperating. But if these new contacts do not persist, the one-off interventions will not reach the goal of the CP, namely the enhancement of cross-border cohesion/integration, to reduce the barrier effects of the state border and to permanently fuel the building process of mutual trust. Accordingly, there is a need to ensure the continuation of the partnership and make it as solid as possible – independently from the changing personal and managerial conditions of the involved institutions.

In compliance with the above principles, the ‘cooperation’ dimension of the model includes three stages.

- (1) **Ad-hoc** level means that the partnership has no pre-history and the continuation of the project is not clearly demonstrated. Pre-history might be justified by either previous or parallelly implemented joint projects; the existence of a partnership agreement signed outside the scope of the Cooperation Programme (e.g. twinning agreement); events or interventions realised earlier together in the field, etc.) Concerning continuation, it does not suffice to insert the statement in the application form that “the partners intend to cooperate in the future”. The follow-up should be demonstrated by an agreement, a plan of a new project or the development of a strategic document providing a long-term perspective to the interventions carried out within the framework of the project. If these two factors are missing, the partnership should be considered ad-hoc.
- (2) **Regular or long-standing** cooperation characterises those partnerships which have pre-history and/or the continuation of the project outcomes/results is formally guaranteed (see above).
- (3) The highest level of cooperation can be demonstrated when the partners establish a joint cross-border institution, launch and maintain a joint cross-border service or generate a cross-border product. This stage is called ‘**institutionalised** cooperation’ which exceeds the model of regular or long-standing partnership and refers to the partners’ shared responsibility over the assets and the population’s well-being in a certain cross-border area or in a sector – with a cross-border aspect. Institutionalisation may guarantee the sustainability of the results, as the driving actors of institutions, municipalities and organisations may change over time: local elections may result in chilled-out partnerships. On the contrary, a joint institution has the potential to survive these personal changes.

The three stages can be seen as stations of an evolving process: no institutions of different nationalities start creating joint services without mutual trust. The building process of mutual trust needs time, and every partnership starts with the first encounter. Accordingly, the projects which involve new beneficiaries in cross-border activities have their own (very important) role in the cooperation programme: the more people and the more institutions take part in cross-border activities, the larger is the programme’s impact – from a point of view of quantity. At the same time, the change in the frequency and the intensity of cross-border mobility and cooperation presupposes the durability of the contacts – neglecting timely changes.

In order to identify the cooperation level, the assessors used the project descriptions available at INTERREG+ database, the web sites and the social media sites of the projects, the online survey (where the beneficiaries were asked about the ways of ensuring the institutional and the financial sustainability of the project), the online information sources related to the project in question and the partnership in general (e.g. the twinning contracts, the joint projects and events realised by the beneficiaries prior to

the current project, etc.). During the process, the assessors applied a critical approach taking the fact into consideration that even if a partnership dates back to an earlier period, it does not guarantee that the project in question has been implemented by a real cross-border partnership: in some cases, the old partners were involved in a superficial way only. This became clear from the project descriptions and the project news. Similarly, the fact that an EGTC implemented a project (either alone or in partnership with other entities) did not necessarily generate institutionalised cooperation.

It is worth noting that the JS preferred the creation of new partnerships instead of cementing older and institutionalised ones. They considered that without newly initiated partnerships the Programme would have turned to be way too internal and closed. It was one of the reasons of applying the SPF scheme which enabled many local actors to enter the cross-border cooperation world. Likewise, between 2014 and 2020 the SMEs were given the opportunity to directly take part in the CBC programme for the first time. As a result, new partnerships gained a large share among the projects. This phenomenon was mirrored by the survey results as the largest share (32%) of the answers regarding pre-history of the partnership expressed that it had been new, or it had been based on previous informal cooperation (25%). In particular PA1 was in favour of initiating new partnerships (46%). On the contrary, in line with the intervention logic and the CfPs it was PA4 (16%) that supported the formal, institutionalised cooperation the most. Institutionalised cooperation (Programme average: 11%) as well as the continuation of a previous (INTERREG) project answers (Programme average: 13%) got the lowest shares on CP level.

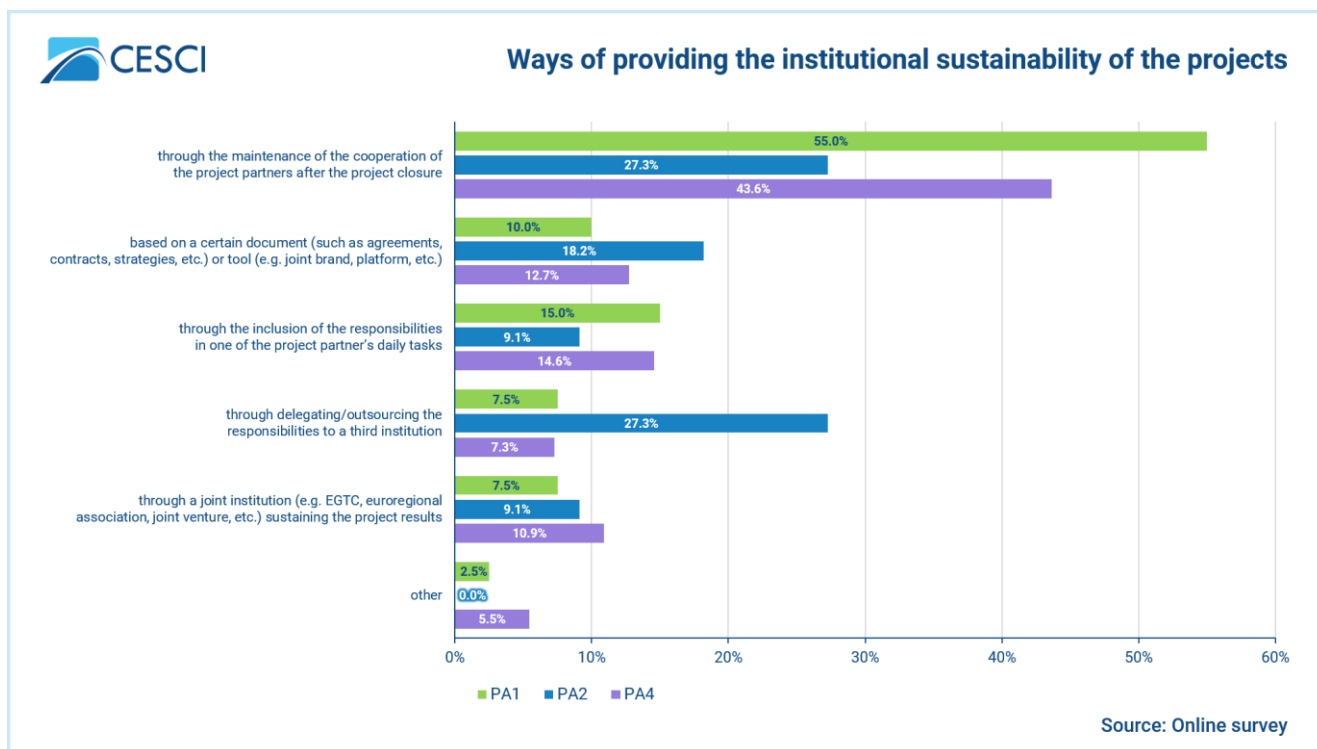
When assessing the main reasons for selecting the partners, the survey respondents most frequently opted for *similar mission and goals* (80%) and *geographical proximity* (64%), while *previous cooperation* (57%) was ranked at the third place only. It was PA4 where this option was mentioned by the largest number of beneficiaries (72%).

The survey also addressed the issue of follow-up. The role of PA4 in facilitating long(er) term cooperation is reflected also in the share of those answers which indicate their preference for continuing the project with all of the partners (28.1%, which is the second highest result after PA1 with 32.1%). Furthermore, this PA produced the lowest share of responses (21.9%) claiming uncertainty of continuation. Due to the specific character of the priority axis, 80% of the PA2 project respondents were unsure if they want to continue their (rather ad-hoc) partnership.

Regarding the survey results, the most popular way of providing “institutional” permanency was to maintain the cooperation of the project partners after the project closure. At the same time, maintaining the results through a joint cross-border institution, which means the highest level of integration was hardly selected: half of these responses were given by the RDV EGTC in the context of their own projects (apart from the SPF umbrella project). The respondents had the opportunity to select multiple solutions of sustainability (see *Figure 83*)¹⁰².

¹⁰² Due to the unique pattern of the partnerships, the PA3 beneficiaries were addressed with a separate questionnaire. From among the 21 respondents, 5 (24%) was not sure that they want to continue the cooperation, 8 (38%) plans to continue the cooperation with some, 4 (19%) with the most and 4 (19%) with all the partners.

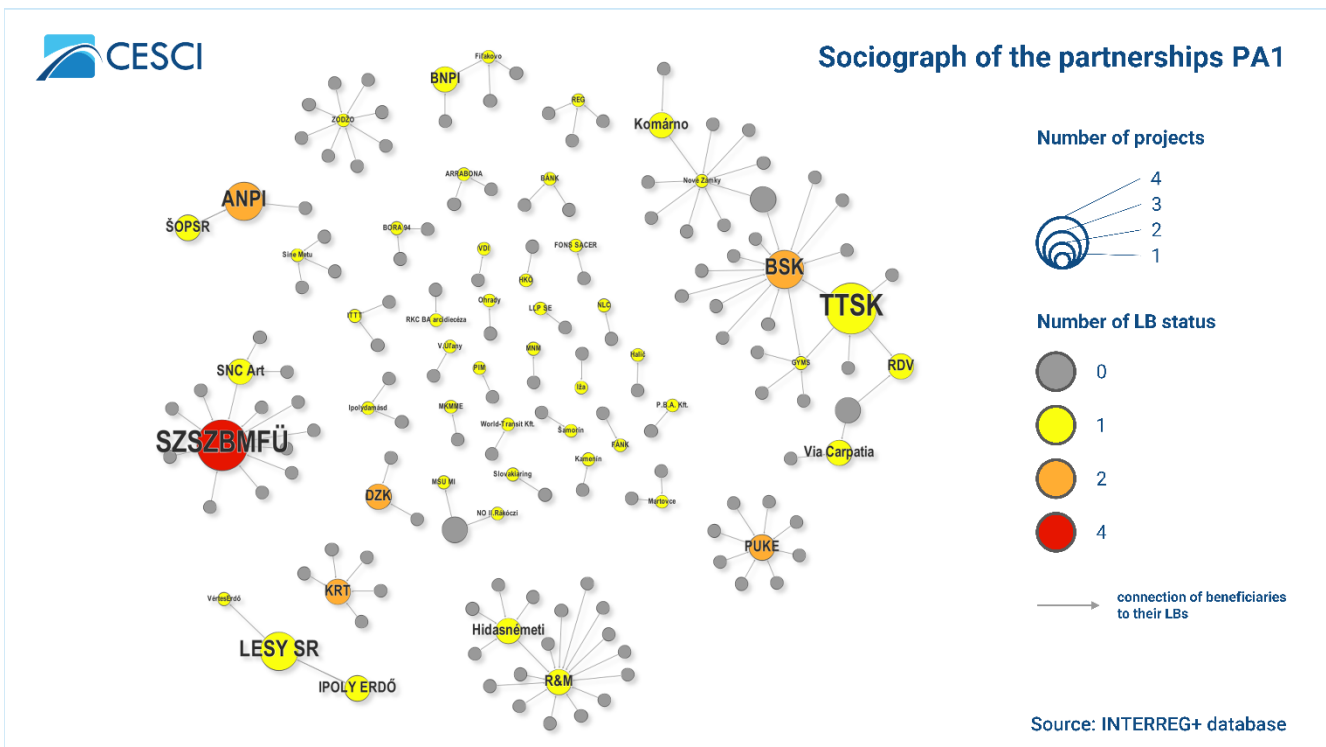
Figure 83: Solutions to provide institutional sustainability



For the transport-related investments (PA2), delegating the operation of the developed infrastructures or services to third institutions (not participating in the implementation of the project) seems to be reasonable, which often means the signature of a document (e.g. an operational contract). For example, the cross-border bike sharing system established within the framework of the Mária Valéria Bike project (SKHU/1601/2.2.1/127) is operated by a private company which has the appropriate capacity, as well as the economic interest to successfully manage the new service. Under PA1 and PA4 the application of similar measures is rather moderate.

These results point at the importance of the intensity factor. The stronger is the intensity of the cooperation, the higher is the integration level across the border. Institutional sustainability always induces the development and valorisation of relational capital and the intensification of cross-border partnerships. Under each PA certain beneficiaries participated in several projects, and played an integrating role across the border as Lead Partners.

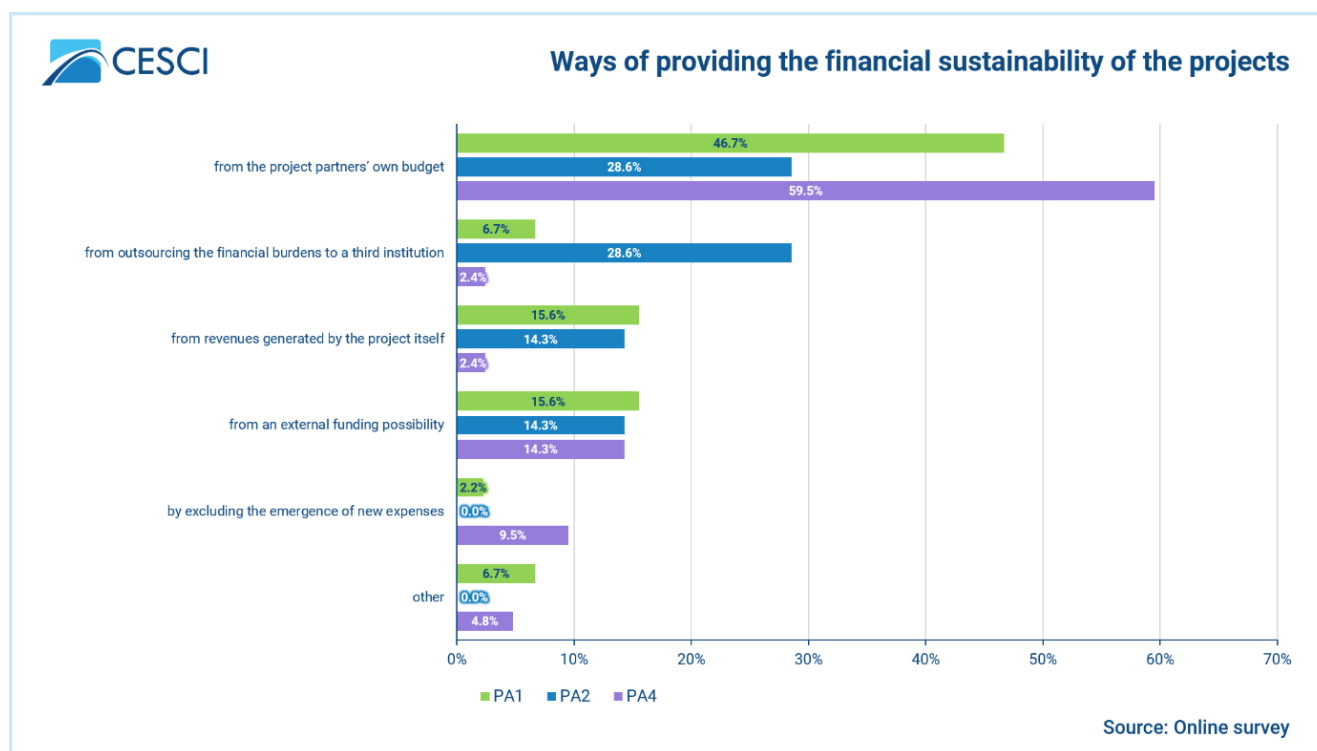
Figure 84: Sociograph of the partnerships (PA1)



Under PA1 and PA4 there were several beneficiaries which undertook this central role. In this regard the development agency of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Regional Council, the public institution of ANPI (Aggteleki Nemzeti Park Igazgatóság), the regional municipality of BSK, the enterprise responsible for the destination management of Košice region (Košice Región Turizmus) and the NGO of PUKE, the EGTCs stood out (Via Carpatia, RDV) along with the Fertő-Hanság National Park Directorate and certain economic partners (chambers, foundations).

It was also PA4 where many stakeholders of similar status cooperated with each other. Connections were heavily based on jointly recognised interests and needs as well as similar profiles which always increase the probability of continuation of the partnership.

Figure 86: Solutions to provide financial sustainability



The low number of 'other' options implies that the beneficiaries rather stick to the general, well-known solutions, instead of elaborating new, innovative, tailor-made ones. In general terms, this phenomenon negatively affects the durability of the developments as the solutions do not go beyond the business-as-usual partnerships where the follow-up of the project is not applied or tackled in a superficial way.

In order to go beyond this approach, by the 1902 CfP the JS introduced a new annex to be attached to the application form: those applicants who planned to set up new services had to elaborate and submit a 'Market research'; and those planning infrastructure developments a 'Utilisation and maintenance plan'. These documents encouraged the project partners to better design the sustainability of the results. In addition, they helped the assessors evaluate the long-term viability of the planned developments. This new practice and the mandatory annex, the so-called 'feasibility plan' are planned to be introduced for each beneficiary of the future projects financed by the next CP.

2.2.4.2 Materialisation of the results

The 'materialisation' dimension has four levels.

- (1) The **soft projects** have no materialised outputs in the sense of built infrastructure. The lack of infrastructure endangers the durability of the project results and the partners' interest in follow-up of the activities.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Procurement of tools and equipment has not been considered infrastructural investment during the assessment unless the procured equipment has been fixed on the ground (e.g. by concrete foundation) or on water (e.g. smaller ports fixed to the river bank).

- (2) Some projects include infrastructural development components on one side of the border, while the cross-border partner realises soft activities. This level is called **'one-sided' infrastructure**. In these cases, the durability of the outputs is ensured in an unbalanced way, which weakens the cross-border character of the development.
- (3) The most common phenomenon is that the partners **develop mirror or complementary infrastructure**. In the former case the infrastructural components perform similar or even identical functions on both sides. In the latter case the developments complement each other either by function or by content.
- (4) Finally, the strongest level of cohesion is ensured through **jointly developed and maintained infrastructure**, like a cross-border bridge.

Materialisation refers to cross-border relevance through the production of the tangible outputs of the projects which have a long-standing perspective in time, reaching beyond encounters and events. Similarly to the cooperation axis, strongest cross-border character can be attributed to the projects where joint cross-border infrastructure is developed.

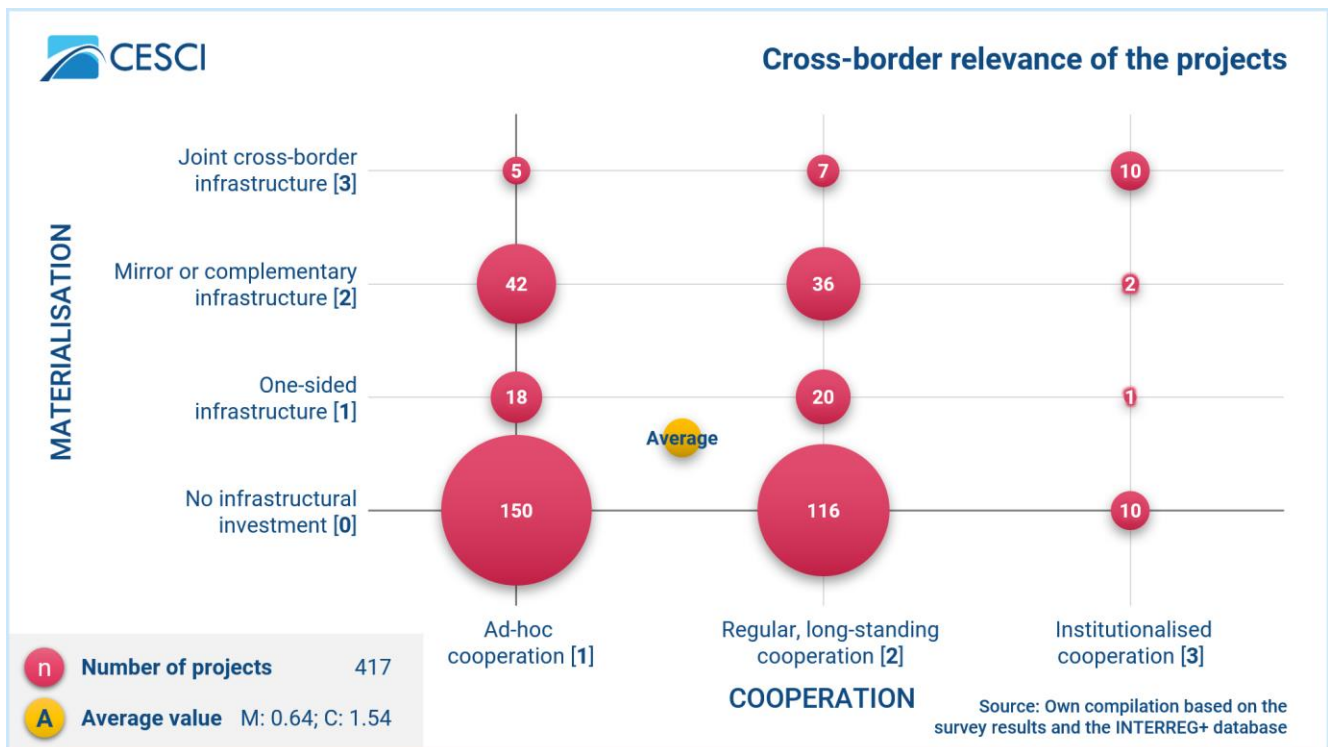
The materialisation level was analysed based on the project descriptions and the budget lines of the projects.

2.2.4.3 Cross-border relevance of the programme

As a result of the two-dimensional approach, those projects bear the highest value which result in the development of joint institutions/services/products and the infrastructure promoting the provision of these services. The cooperation programme is of strong cross-border character if the majority of the projects target this ideal goal.

Figure 87 shows the share of 417 projects of the CP. It does not contain the four umbrella projects of the SPF scheme which, from this point of view, were considered as a grant mechanism. The figure also indicates the average value of the CP in terms of cross-border relevance.

Figure 87: Cross-border relevance of the projects

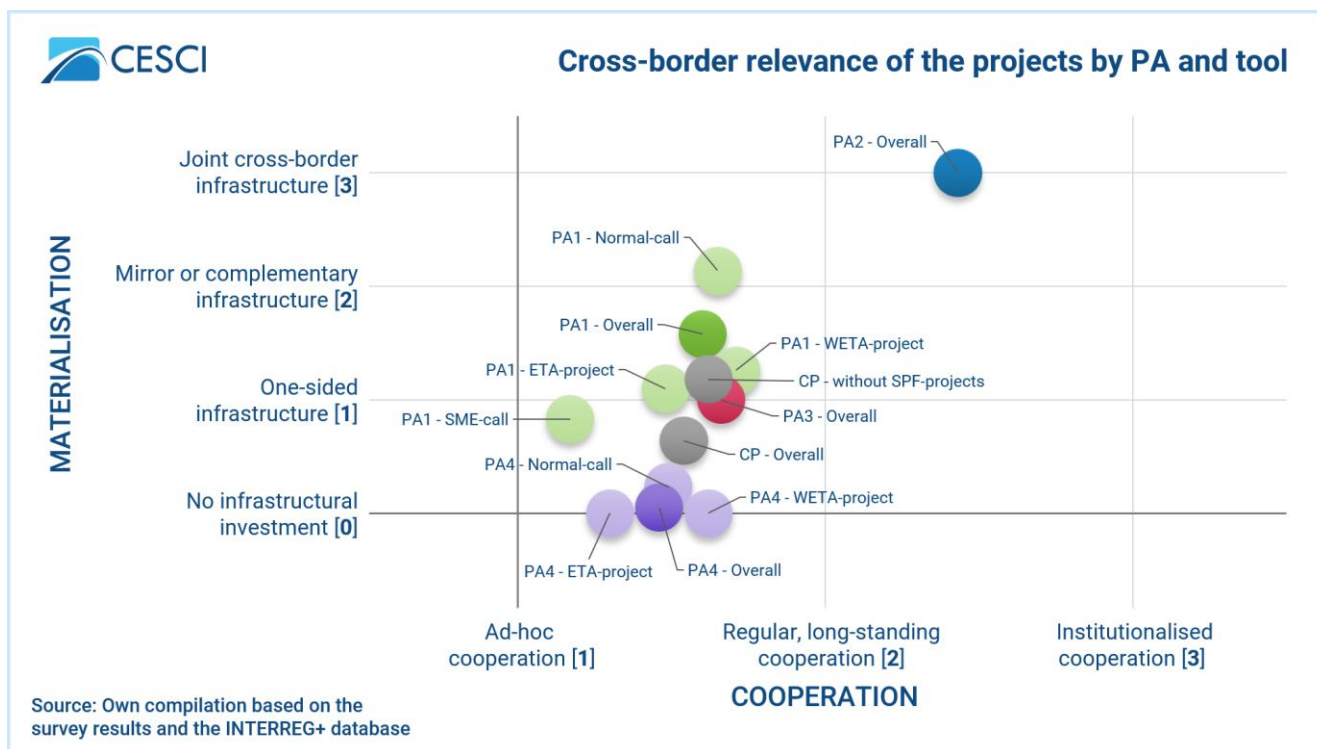


Two thirds (66,18%) of the projects (276 in total) have not produced new infrastructure. In addition, 150 soft projects (54%) were based on an ad-hoc partnership. The first cooperation level represents more than half of the sample (51,6%, 215 projects). These values are thought-provoking in the light of that the first Hungarian-Slovak cross-border call was published in 1996, more than 25 years ago and the majority of the partnerships of today are still in their embryonic phase. The phenomenon can be approached from another point of view as well: Where are the partnerships developed during the last quarter of a century? Why are they under-represented among the selected projects?

Obviously, the high number of ad-hoc soft small projects distorts the general picture of the CP. These projects undoubtedly have a cross-border character by their existence. At the same time, the 55 projects (13%) classified in the upper-right corner of the matrix represent the highest value of cross-border relevance.

Figure 88 helps us identify the priority axes and tools determining the overall picture through the average values of the relevant projects.

Figure 88: Cross-border relevance of the projects per PA and tool

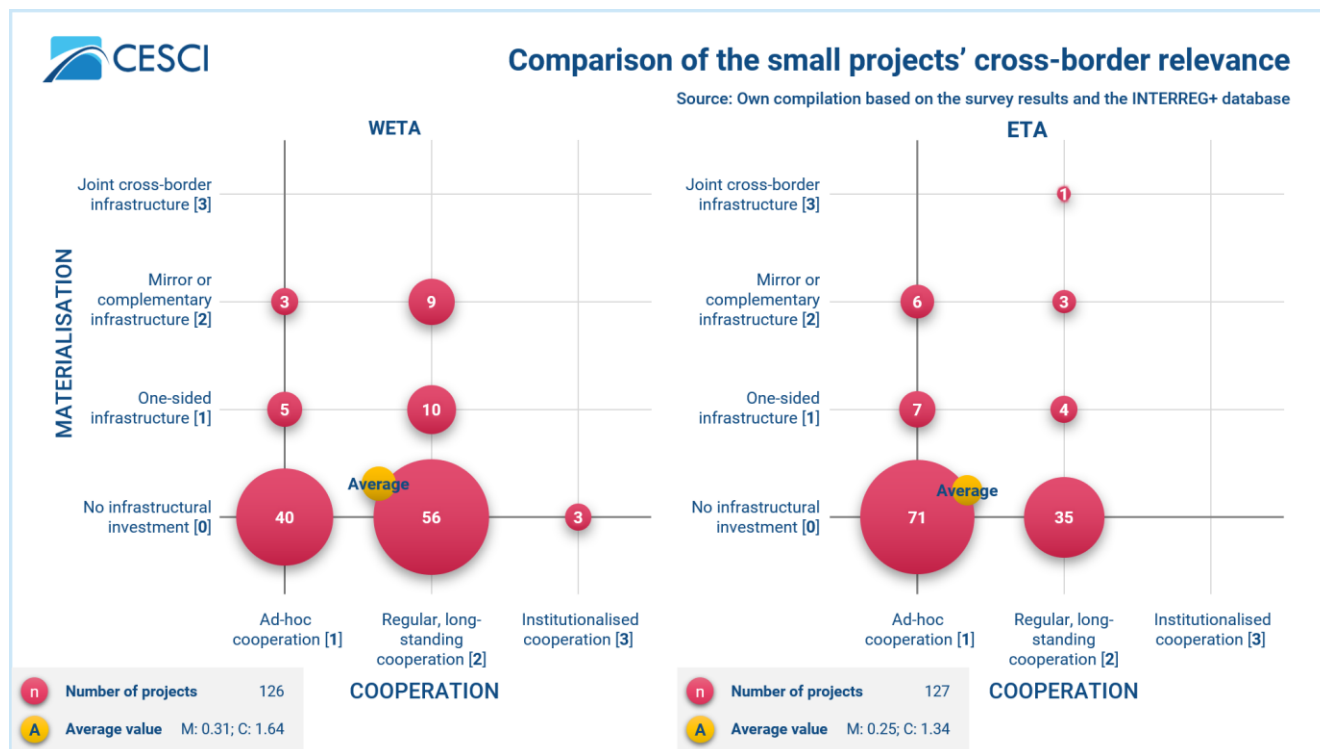


PA2 had an outstanding performance which is not an accident: the priority axis aimed at constructing joint cross-border infrastructure (bridges between Ipolydamásd and Chľaba - SKHU/1601/2.1/357 – and between Dunakiliti and Dobrohost' - SKHU/1601/2.1/361); furthermore, the majority of these projects have generated new services, too: the ferry between Neszmély and Radvaň nad Dunajom - SKHU/1601/2.2.1/362; the development of the cross-border public transport system between Komárom and Komárno (SKHU/1601/2.2.1/359), and the three cross-border bike sharing systems (the KOMBI Bike around Komárom and Komárno - SKHU/1601/2.2.1/109; the Mária Valéria Bike inaugurated in Esztergom and Štúrovo - SKHU/1601/2.2.1/127; and the Cross-Bike system connecting Sátoraljaújhely, Zemplín and Viničky - SKHU/1601/2.2.1/360). Further projects resulting in joint infrastructure [3] and a joint service (institutionalised partnership) can be identified under PA1, namely the projects developing cross-border water tourism infrastructure along the River Ipoly/Ipeľ (SKHU/1601/1.1/160) and a similar system along the Hernád/Hornád (SKHU/1902/1.1/114), an integrated cycle tourism network within the Ister-Granum EGTC (SKHU/1902/1.1/082); and the joint development of the fortress system of Komárom and Komárno which has previously been a candidate for the World Heritage label as an integrated heritage site (SKHU/1902/1.1/107). One further project can be found at the edge of the matrix, under PA3, which targets the development of a cross-border wine quality assessment and meteorological forecasting system in Mužla and Keszölc (SKHU/1901/3.1/002).

According to the above introduced model, these are the projects which can be considered genuinely cross-border as the beneficiaries have constructed cross-border infrastructure (tangible and durable outcomes) which will be utilised through an integrated cross-border service system. Maybe it is worth mentioning that 80% of these projects were realised in the western part of the border area which became eligible during the first Phare CBC calls in the 1990s – earlier than the eastern part, and the proximity of the two capital cities favours the development of stronger cross-border integration.

At the other end of the scale, one can find the ad-hoc soft projects implemented under PA4, especially within the framework of the SPF calls.

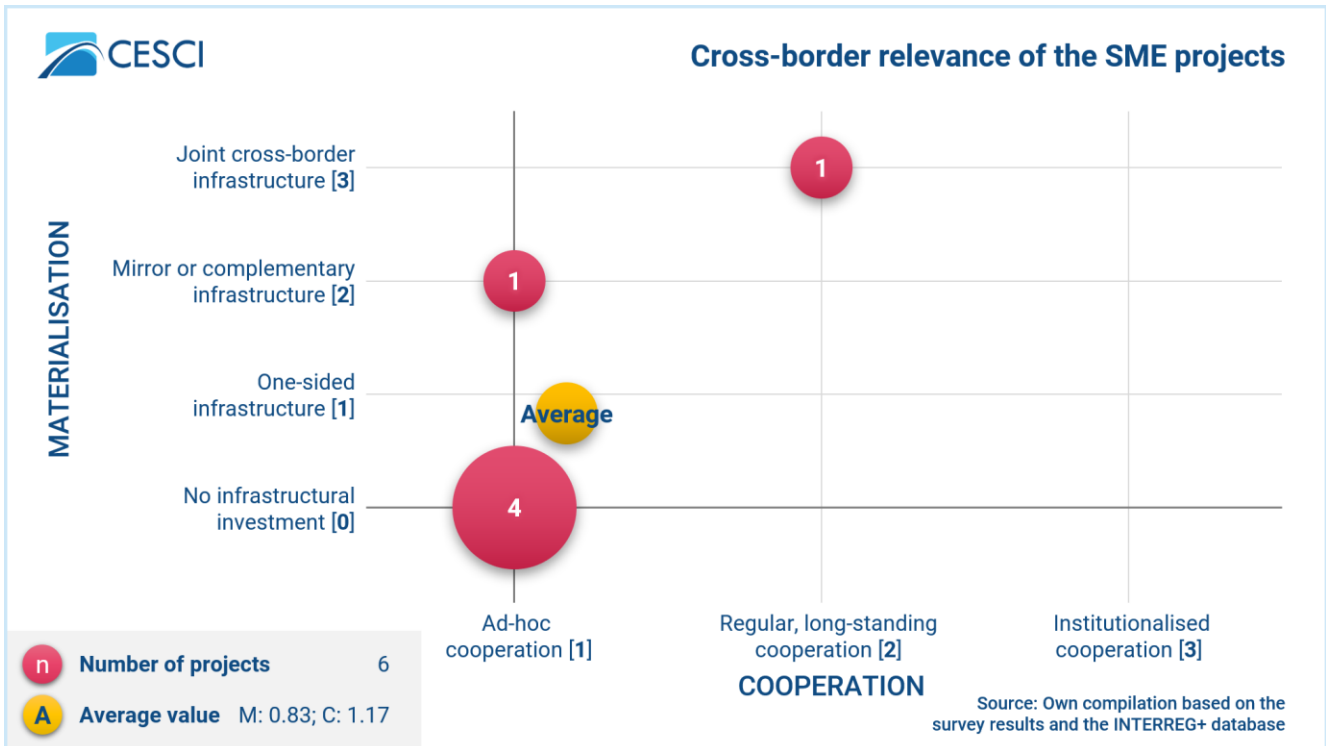
Figure 89: Comparison of the two SPF schemes



The two SPF schemes awarded similar quantity of projects (see *Figure 89*). However, the soft projects with ad-hoc partnerships represent much larger share (55.91%) within ETA than WETA (31.75%). Furthermore, in the western part of the programme area 3 SPF projects have generated joint services and one project resulted in joint infrastructure – which were missing in the eastern border area. Altogether, 81.03% of the SPF projects were of soft nature which is a consequence of the idiosyncrasies of the small project fund tool. However, the differences between above values refer to different levels of integration across the border.

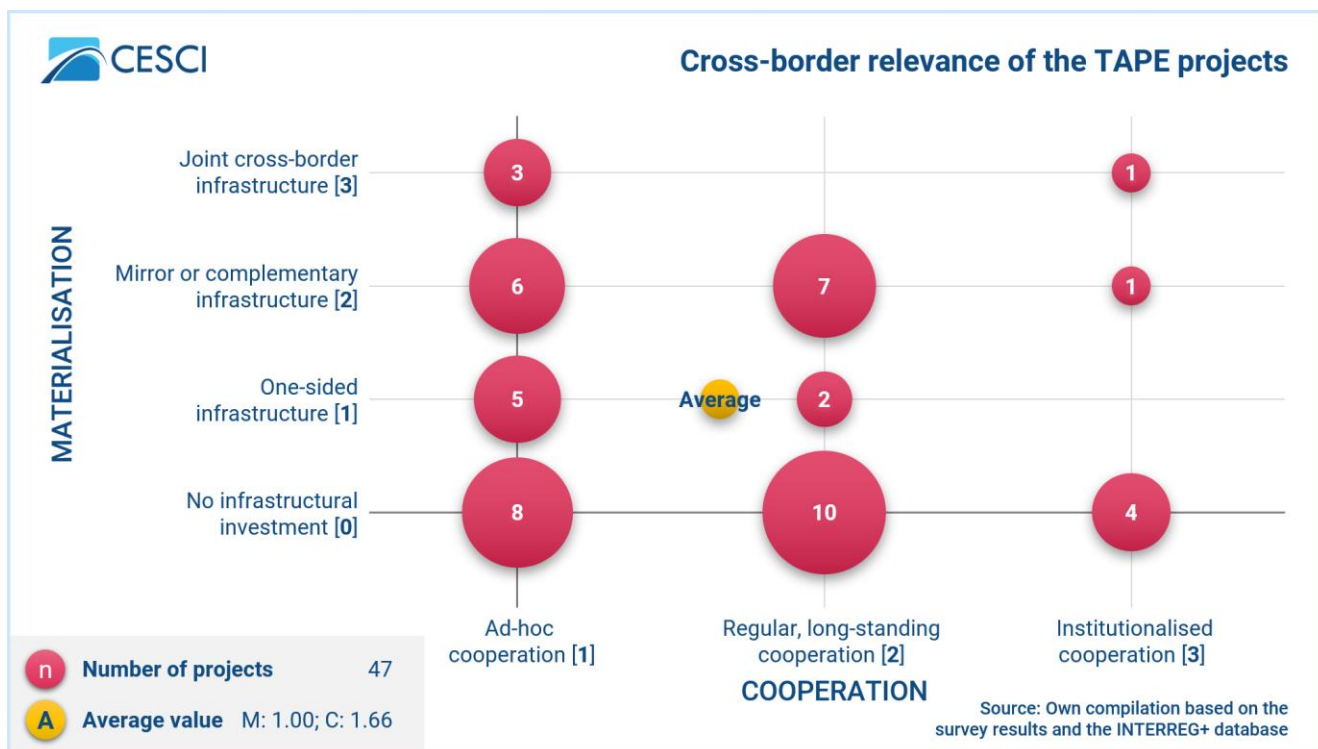
The SME call and the TAPE tool were designed to enhance the two aspects of cross-border relevance. Business interest was expected to improve the sustainability of the SME project results. Experiences show that the entrepreneurs lived up the expectations, regardless of that (1) due to the accelerating inflation rate, the technical scope of the investments had to be reduced; and (2) the programme procedures were unfavourable for the speed of the business life. Still, the services and the production capacities resulted from the SME projects are operational. However, in both cases, the entrepreneurial activities were built into a broader net of activities and these inter-institutional ties are rather weak – with some exceptions within PA3. In fact, 4 SME call projects from the total of 6 were based on ad-hoc partnerships and only one produced joint (tourist) infrastructure (SKHU/1801/1.1/026, Thematic Route for ages 0-100) (see *Figure 90*).

Figure 90: Cross-border relevance of the SME projects



Concerning the territorial action plans, nearly half (46.81%) of the projects were implemented by ad-hoc partnerships which means that the original aim of the tool, i.e. to generate territorially relevant and integrated interventions, missed the real, territorially well-based foundation – at least in the above cases (see *Figure 91* and the Chapter “2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)”). The share of the projects which had tangible outcomes is a bit higher (53.19%) but only one project resulted in joint infrastructure facilitating the provision of joint services (see above). All this means that both the SME call and the TAPE tool fell short of their original objective and they lagged behind the traditional infrastructural and tourist projects.

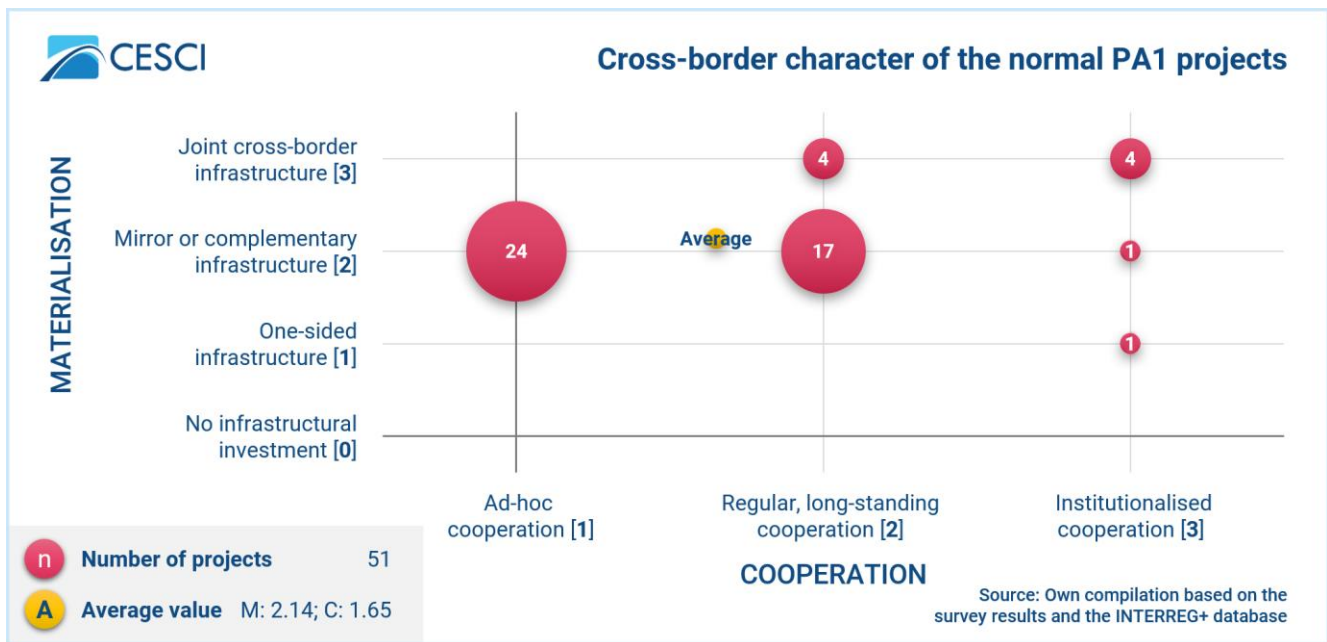
Figure 91: Cross-border relevance of the TAPE projects



At the same time, compared to other PAs and tools, thanks to its multiple character, the TAPE allows the implementation of one-sided projects as well, because the cross-border synergistic effects are to be ensured at the level of the TAPE (and not of the projects), which opens an opportunity to evaluate the projects by their complementary features.

Apart from the PA2 projects, the strongest cross-border character can be detected under PA1, at the normal projects (Figure 92). 8 of them developed joint infrastructure and 42 resulted in mirror-type or complementary tourist infrastructure. It is worth mentioning, that there was only one single normal project characterised with one-sided infrastructure investments and there were not any of soft nature. It also means that the normal and the SPF calls successfully complemented each other and it is worthwhile to keep this parallelism. Furthermore, the PA1 results justify the decision of the Task Force preparing the next Slovakia-Hungary Interreg A programme on the application of territorial action plans in the field of tourism. Obviously, this is the topic where the cross-border relevance can be guaranteed the easiest way.

Figure 92: Cross-border character of the normal PA1 projects



To conclude, the cooperation programme has a modest cross-border character. However, there are remarkable differences between the results of the priority axes and the tools: PA2 and PA1 stand out while the SPF projects pull the average value down. If we disregard the SPF projects, the average value is at a higher position, closer to the centre of the figure. Neglecting the SPF projects can be justified by the specificity of the SPF call which is to involve as many stakeholders in cooperation as possible. In these terms, the maturity of the partnership plays a much less significant role than in the case of the so-called 'normal' projects. The small projects can prove their evidence by the large number of beneficiaries and the width of the target audience taking part in the joint activities. This is the first step which lays down the way towards integrated cross-border services.

2.3 Impact

Impact means the effects that the Programme has exercised on the programme area. Impacts have a lasting timely perspective unlike direct outputs. Accordingly, this chapter provides analysis

- on the achievements in terms of the result indicators,
- on the territorial scope of the results and impacts,
- on the impacts of the Programme on cross-border flows, cooperation and the border people's spatial behaviour,
- on the contribution of the Programme to global, EU level and macro-regional goals, and
- the horizontal principles.

2.3.1 Analysis of the result indicators

The modified version of the Programme includes 5 result indicators. The modification was justified by the lack of approved projects under *SO222 Improving cross-border logistic services*. Accordingly, the target value of *R222 Change in the volume of cross-border good transport* was reduced to zero in 2018. In parallel, the target value of *R210 Average distance between border crossing points* was also modified (the planned average distance increased by 3.35 km).

To measure the results, the national statistical databases are envisaged to be used. However, in the case of two indicators (*R210 Average distance between border crossing points* and *R410 Level of cross-border cooperation*) the progress is based on the beneficiaries' report, and under the *R221 Change in the volume of cross-border public transport* the service providers are the key data providers. Furthermore, the rest two indicators (*R110 Total number of visitors in the region*, *R310 Increase in the employment rate*) – which obtain the data from statistical offices – used the same methodology but with different timing (data refer to regional data from 2019 on Hungarian side and from 2020 on Slovak side).

The detailed information of the result indicators (such as the names, related SOs, measurement units, baseline values and years, as well as the target values) are listed in the following table:

Table 47: Brief introduction of the result indicators

PA	ID	Name	Specific Objective	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Target value (2023) modified in 2018 ¹⁰⁴
PA1	R110	Total number of visitors in the region	SO11: To increase the attractiveness of the border area.	number/year	7 074 754	2012	7 800 000	7 800 000
PA2	R210	Average distance between border crossing points	SO21: Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border	km	21.9	2014	15	18.35

¹⁰⁴ Modification of the CP approved by COM on 29 October 2018.

PA	ID	Name	Specific Objective	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	Target value (2023) modified in 2018 ¹⁰⁴
	R221	Change in the volume of cross-border public transport	SO221: Improving cross-border public transport services	persons	382 849	2013	450 000	450 000 ¹⁰⁵
	R222	Change in the volume of cross-border good transport	<i>R222 Change in the volume of cross-border good transport</i>	EUR	8 565 130 424	2013	10 000 000 000	0
PA3	R310	Increase in the employment rate	SO31: Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region	%	63.2	2013	65.2	65.2
PA4	R410	Level of cross-border cooperation	SO41: Improving the level of cross border inter-institutional cooperation and broadening cross border cooperation between citizens.	score	3.4	2015	4.1	4.1

The frequency of reporting is restricted to three years (2018, 2020 and 2023) out of which only the achieved values of the year 2020 are available, since in 2018 there were no registered results. Therefore, in 2021 data regarding result indicators could not be collected. According to AIR 2020, three indicators have already fulfilled the target values of 2023. The surplus was +54 percentage point under *R110 Total number of visitors in the region* and +7.7 percentage point under *R310 Increase in the employment rate*, meanwhile the *R210 Average distance between border crossing points* achieved the target value but did not exceed it. The *R410 Level of cross-border cooperation* was also close to the goal's accomplishment (83% of the required score level was achieved), but the *R221 Change in the volume of cross-border public transport* was far from the aim: out of the required cross-border passenger increase (67 151 persons) only 13% (8 725 persons) was realised. It is worth mentioning, that this result indicator includes the main types of cross-border public transport (bus and train), but it should have been complemented with the data relating to the three cross-border bike sharing systems developed within the Programme, since only one project was awarded for improving the condition of public transport by bus lines and another one by a new ferry connection.

¹⁰⁵ The value represents the required number of cross-border passengers. For matching this aim, 67 151 new passengers should be served.

Table 48: Milestones regarding the result indicators

PA	ID	Name	2018	2019	2020 (based on the AIR 2021)	Target value (2023) modified in 2018 ¹⁰⁶
PA1	R110	Total number of visitors in the region	0	nr	12 011 536 ¹⁰⁷	7 800 000
PA2	R210	Average distance between border crossing points	0	nr	18.35	18.35
	R221	Change in the volume of cross-border public transport	0	nr	8 725	450 000 ¹⁰⁸
	R222	Change in the volume of cross-border good transport	0	nr	nr	0
PA3	R310	Increase in the employment rate	0	nr	70.2 ¹⁰⁹	65.2
PA4	R410	Level of cross-border cooperation	0	nr	3.4 ¹¹⁰	4.1

Measuring the result indicators generates multiple challenges. On the one hand, there is not a territorial observatory regularly collecting data on cross-border flows and phenomena. National Statistical Offices are assigned to survey the socio-economic processes within the national confines. Their interest towards cross-border flows is restricted to the periods of a census and to dedicated projects or calls. In addition, the methods followed, the administrative units concerned, the time frames of data gathering and processing might differ country by country. It results in the limited comparability of territorial datasets. Consequently, when assessing the result indicator values, there is a need to carry out desk research and to contact the relevant organisations and institutions affected by the project activities. Under PA2, the direct contacts of the beneficiaries and the public transport companies can be used for this purpose, while under PA4 these are the beneficiaries who can provide data.

In the latter case, methodological concerns may also be raised. The changes in inter-institutional cooperation level are measured through a survey targeting the institutions acting in the border area. The results of the questionnaires are benchmarked by using a ranking between 1 and 7. This methodology is quite complicated and time-consuming, additionally, the credibility of the results is questionable.

On the other hand, several not-foreseeable factors have influenced the achievement of the indicators. Not only the COVID-19 pandemic restricted cross-border mobility (see the indicators of visitors and the level of cooperation) but it had serious impacts upon the economic performance of the national

¹⁰⁶ Modification of the CP approved by COM on 29 October 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Data refer to regional data from 2019 on Hungarian side and from 2020 on Slovak side.

¹⁰⁸ The value represents the required number of cross-border passengers. For matching this aim, 67 151 new passengers should be served.

¹⁰⁹ Data refer to regional data from 2020 on Hungarian side and from 2019 on Slovak side.

¹¹⁰ Data refer to a survey among the awarded projects from SKHU/1802, SKHU/1901 and SKHU/1902 (all PAs excluding PA2 according to Methodology for the R410 result indicator "Level of cross-border cooperation").

economies which were further aggravated by the effects of the war in Ukraine. These changes affected the wealth of the citizens and the budgetary frames of the institutions – both having influence on cross-border integration. Accordingly, the final values of the result indicators might have met a lower standard in 2023.

Taking into consideration the relations between the result indicators and expected results, the conformity and coherence in most cases are ensured. Exception might be *R410 Level of cross-border cooperation*, since it is questionable that the indicator is appropriate to show clearly the level of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation. However, it is worth mentioning that this uncertainty is due to the hard and complex measurability of PA4-related expected results. Furthermore, *R110 Total number of visitors in the region* and *R310 Increase in the employment rate* cannot indicate the exact impact of the programme, as they do not decouple the external factors. Further paradox is that the increase in the number of the visitors may be a useful indicator for tourism economy, but it might be endangering for nature and environment (see the topics of PA1).

Based on the European Commission's 'Better regulation' toolbox the result indicators are assessed by S.M.A.R.T. criteria as well.

Table 49: SMART assessment of the result indicators

ID	Name	General findings	S	M	A	R	T
R110	Total number of visitors in the region	The source of data is based on statistical offices, but (due to the different years of reference) the comparability of the results of different national statistics is not guaranteed. The achieved value was one and a half times higher than the goal, therefore the target value proved to be not ambitious enough. The relevance of the indicator (regarding tourism) might be justified, however in terms of the natural objectives, the indicator is counterproductive, and the real (own) impact of the programme cannot be demonstrated.	A	B	C	C	B
R210	Average distance between border crossing points	The indicator is specific and easily measurable. The achievability is ensured, and the modified target value has been fulfilled in 2020.	A	A	A	A	A
R221	Change in the volume of cross-border public transport	The indicator is sufficiently specific, but the measurability is problematic since the main data source is the service providers (external actors). Therefore, the data are not available immediately. The progress of the fulfilment lags behind, the timing raises concerns.	A	C	B	A	B

ID	Name	General findings	S	M	A	R	T
R310	Increase in the employment rate	The indicator is specific and understandable. The data are provided by statistical offices, but the comparability of values – due to the different years of reference ¹¹¹ – is problematic. The relevance is objectionable, as the indicator cannot provide sufficient information about the exact impact of the programme. The achievability is ensured, and the modified target value has been fulfilled in 2020 with 7.6 percentage point surplus.	A	B	A	B	A
R410	Level of cross-border cooperation	The measurability and specificity of the indicator are questionable, as an own methodology (survey) was developed. Accordingly, the survey has to be repeated in every reporting period, which is time-consuming and it is not guaranteed that the results of the survey give a direct and clear picture about the expected result. However, the progress of the indicator is in line with the expectations.	C	C	A	B	A

2.3.2 Mapping of the territorial coverage

The evaluation of the programme's effectiveness has a territorial dimension referring to the geographic distribution of the activities and the partnerships. The list of locations of investments was accessible via INTERREG+, on settlement/local municipality (LAU2) level. At the same time, the locations of soft activities was much harder to identify as it depended from the approach used by the applicants. They sometimes used rather vague definitions ("Hegyköz", "programme area").

The maps below illustrate the geographic pattern of the project locations. Every location is counted once per project. If further projects affected the same location, it is indicated with the size and the colour of the spot. Regarding SPF it has to be noted that the location of soft project activities is linked in the analysis to the seat of the beneficiaries. In the case of soft activities, the non-dot-like locations (such as a geopark, counties) are missing from the maps in order to facilitate the overview. Furthermore, virtual locations (digital, electronic ones) are not included either, however the overall territorial distribution of activities is not really modified by them.

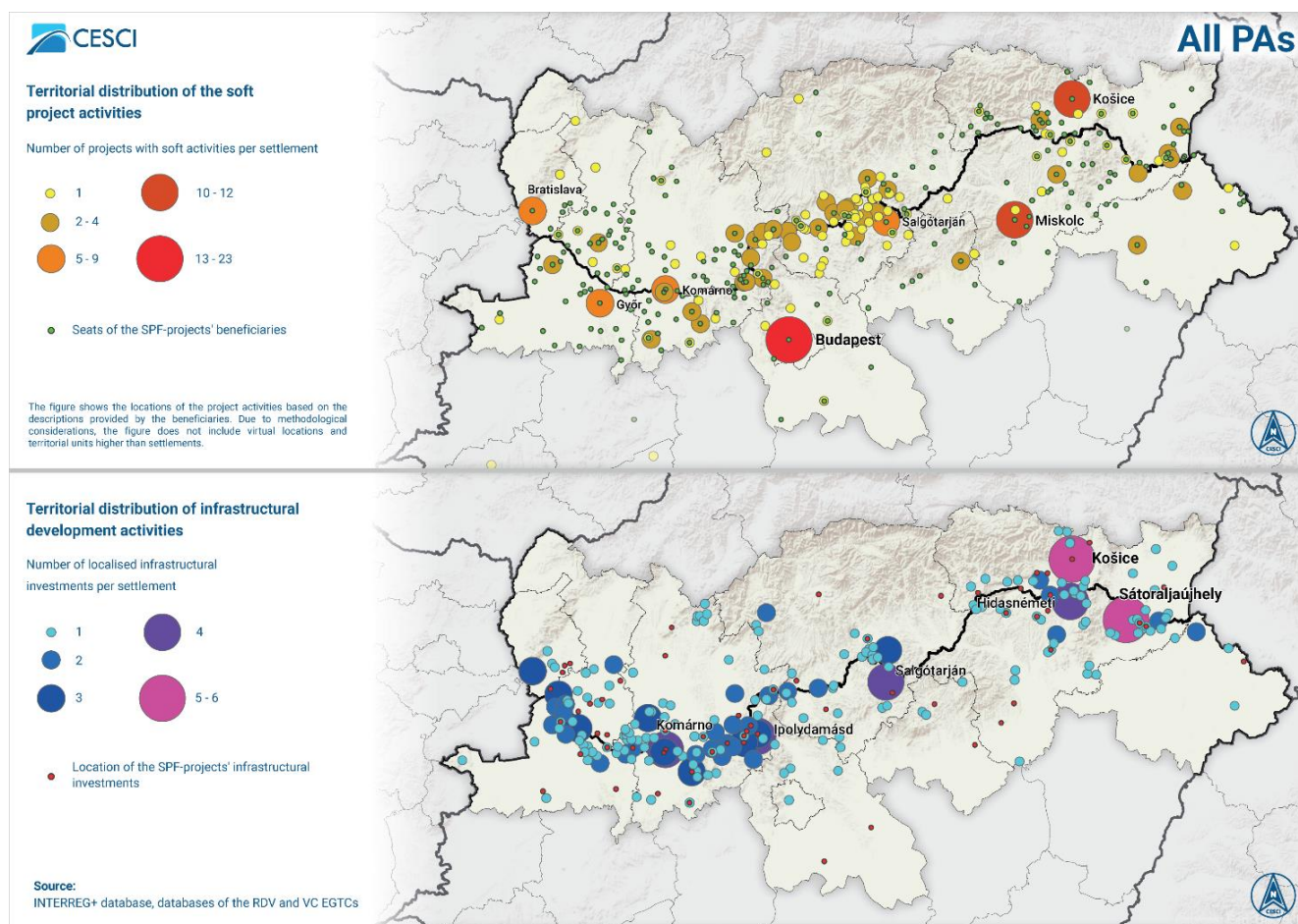
A total number of 214 settlements are affected by 283 normal **infrastructural projects**. Outstanding number of locations are situated in Nitriansky (23.7%), Košický (14.1%) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (12.4%) regions while Budapest (0.4%), Heves (1.1%) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1.8%) are underrepresented. Regarding SPF a total number of 61 settlements were affected by 47 projects that contained infrastructural component. These settlements especially concentrated in Košický (16.4%) and Nitriansky (18%) regions, followed by Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Győr-Moson-Sopron and Trnavský

¹¹¹ Data refer to regional data from 2020 on Hungarian side and from 2019 on Slovak side.

regions (9.8% each). Taking into account the distribution of projects with infrastructural content Košický (25.5%), Nitriansky (23.4%) and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (17%) regions stand out. At the same time, the shares are low in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (2.1%), Heves (4.3%) and Nógrád (4.3%) regions. It is worth mentioning that higher share of contracted ERDF was dedicated to infrastructure in WETA territories (64.7% of total allocation to WETA regions) compared to ETA (43% of total allocation). Košický (14.8%) and Nitriansky (19.4%) regions are overrepresented with regard to share in total ERDF for SPF-related infrastructure. Regions with low share of infrastructural allocation compared to their total allocations including soft activities are Budapest (zero), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (21% of the allocation for the region) and Heves (34.8%) especially. In most regions the share of allocation for infrastructural activities reaches at least 40%, and exceeds 70% in Nógrád, Bratislavský, Nitrianský and Trnavský regions.

Regarding **soft normal projects**, a total number of 131 settlements are affected by 257 soft project activities. Soft activities are mostly localised in Nógrád (17.1%) despite its small size, furthermore in Banskobistrický (13.6%) and Košický (12.5%) regions. Areas with little impact are Heves (1.6%), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (2.7%) and Trnavský (3.5%) regions. Some larger cities, such as Budapest, Miskolc, Košice have important role in soft project activities. ETA Small Project Fund was able to slightly decrease the unbalance generated by normal projects by involving the Slovakian side of the Abaúj/Abov, Cserehát, Zemplén/Zemplín, Hegyköz, Bodrogköz/Medzibodrožie microregions. The subregion which has saliently underperformed is the region which would need assistance the most, namely the Gemer/Gömör region. It was again the ETA SPF scheme which slightly compensated this shortage.

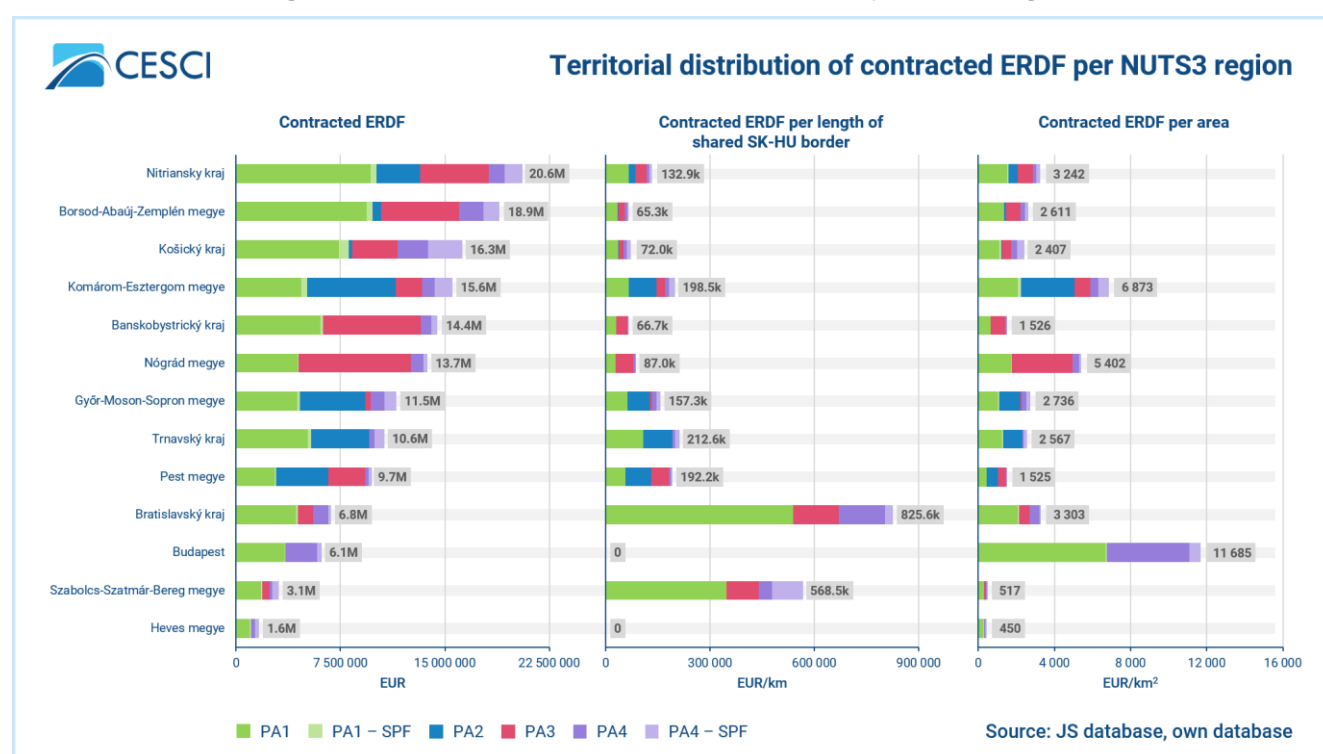
Figure 93: Territorial distribution of the project activities (All PAs)



The Programme financially covered the regions at different levels. Based on **the volume of the contracted ERDF**¹¹² Nitriansky (13.8%), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (12.7%), Košický (12.9%) and Komárom-Esztergom (10.4%) regions surpass 15 million EUR EU contribution, and altogether they almost make up half of the total contracted budget (47.9%). SPF played an important role in Košický (19.8%) and Komárom-Esztergom (11.3%) regions. ETA SPF successfully compensated the lower normal project rates in regions like Heves (22.2%) and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (19%).

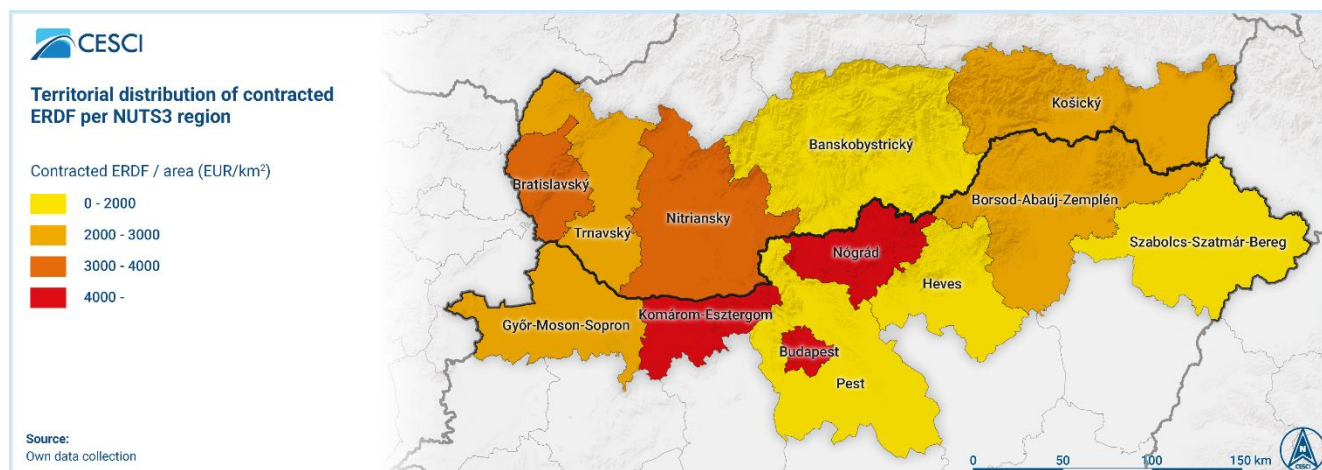
The specific values can be benchmarked by **the length of the joint border section where** Bratislavský and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg regions stand out, and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Banskobystrický perform poorly. Based on **the geographic extent of the regions** Komárom-Esztergom performed well, along with Budapest, but compared to its total surface Nógrád also was among the leading regions. The contracted ERDF per area is very low with regard to Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Heves, counties which are known for low quantity of total EU contribution too. From Slovakia the worst-performing region in this regard was Banskobystrický region.

Figure 94: Territorial distribution of contracted ERDF per NUTS3 region



¹¹² Apart from normal projects, SPF projects are added, SPF umbrella projects are taken into consideration in regard to the management costs only.

Figure 95: Territorial distribution of contracted ERDF per NUTS3 region



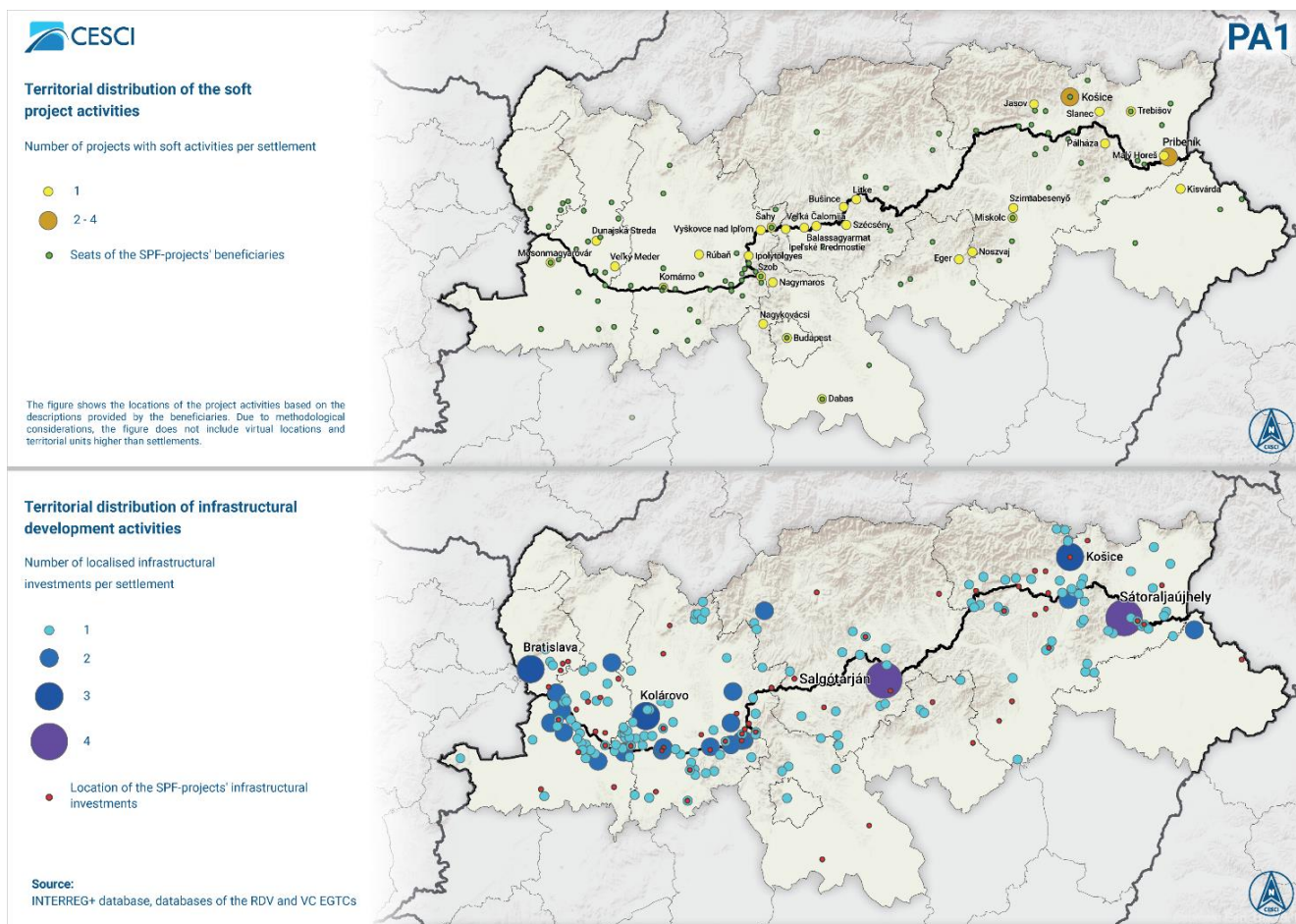
Under PA1, 174 settlements were impacted by 206 **infrastructural project activities**. The interventions concentrated in the Nitriansky (24.3%) region, which, together with Košický (14.6%) and Győr-Moson-Sopron (14.1%) regions included more than half of the locations (52.9%). The share of locations is low in Budapest (0.5%), Heves (0.5%), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (1.5%), Pest (2.9%) and Bratislavský (3.4%) regions. Regarding SPF the spatial distribution is more balanced, however, the border section between Šahy and Rožňava is less frequented by projects.

Regarding **soft projects**, a total number of 28 settlements were affected by 30 soft project activities. The territorial coverage of the soft projects is more unbalanced than in the case of the infrastructural ones. Bratislavský and Komárom-Esztergom regions as well as Budapest have not been impacted by soft activities, and only one activity per NUTS3 region in Győr-Moson-Sopron, Heves and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg could be detected. Košický (8 locations, 26.7%) and Pest (5, 16.7%) regions stand out with relatively high shares.

The territorial distribution of SPF projects shows weaker concentration compared to the rest of the project locations since many of the seats of LBs can be found further away from the borderline.

To conclude, in the case of soft elements the Ipeľ/Ipoly valley, while in the case of infrastructure the border strip in the vicinity of the Danube were the most impacted by the Programme. However, the areas east to the Esztergom–Banská Štiavnica axis are less impacted, especially the microregions within the Salgótarján–Miskolc–Košice triangle, i.e. the Gemer/Gömör region. The nature protection areas accompanied with stronger tourism potential like Szigetköz, Žitný ostrov, Podunajsko/Dunamente, the lower Ipoly/Ipeľ, the Novohrad–Nógrád Geopark, and the Zemplén/Zemplín, Bodrogeköz/Medzibodrožie received remarkable support.

Figure 96: Territorial distribution of the project activities (PA1)

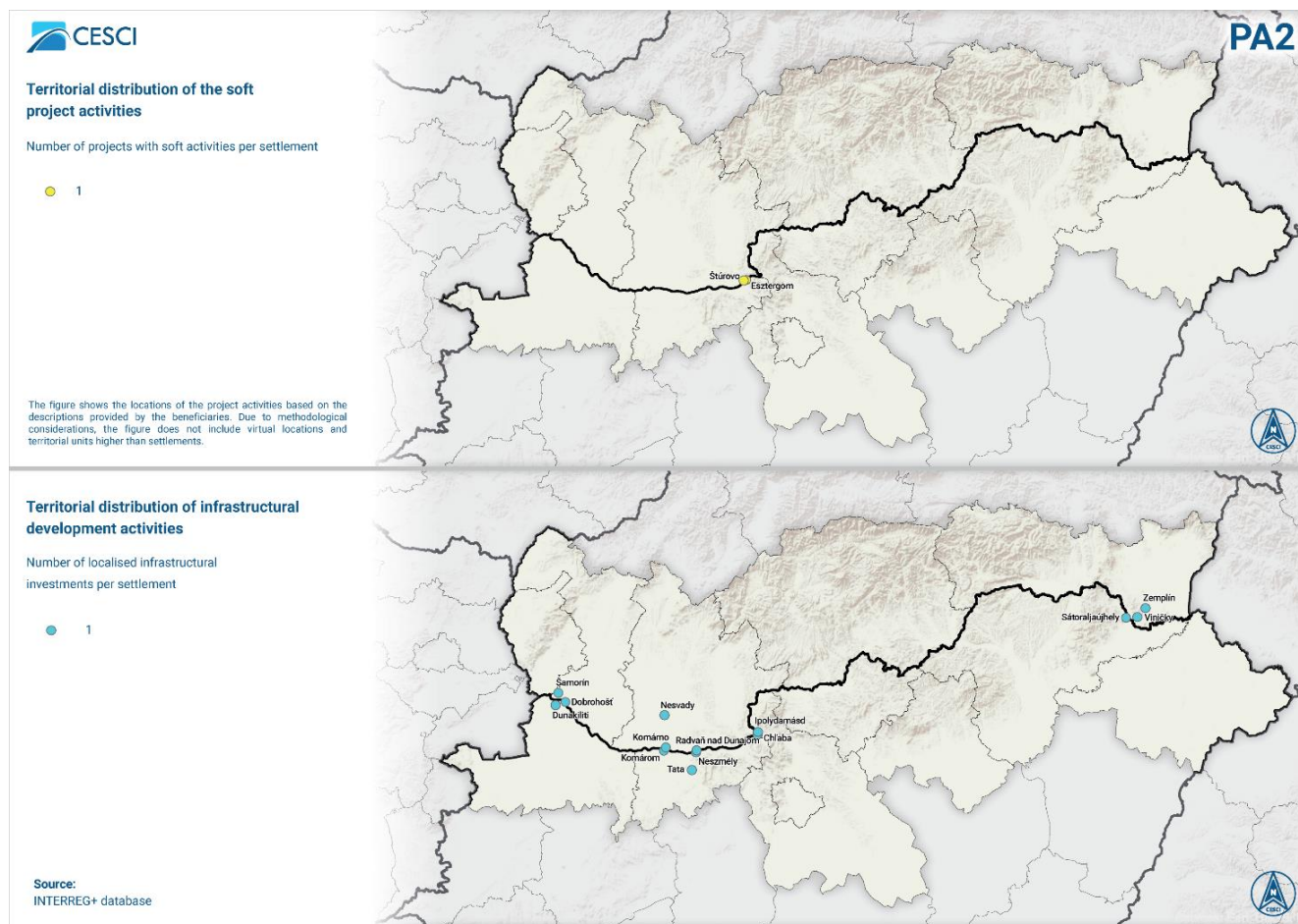


PA2 mostly induced **infrastructural activities** at 14 locations situated near the border. 4 of them (28.6%) form part of the Nitriansky region.

The two **soft activities** took place in Esztergom and Štúrovo.

Within the limited financial frames of the CP, the PA2 projects cover those areas which suffered from low density of border crossings, and where in terms of (urban) functions and transport connections investments were needed. The result of the investments is an extremely unbalanced geographic pattern which has been compensated by further infrastructural investment support by PA1 and PA3.

Figure 97: Territorial distribution of the project activities (PA2)

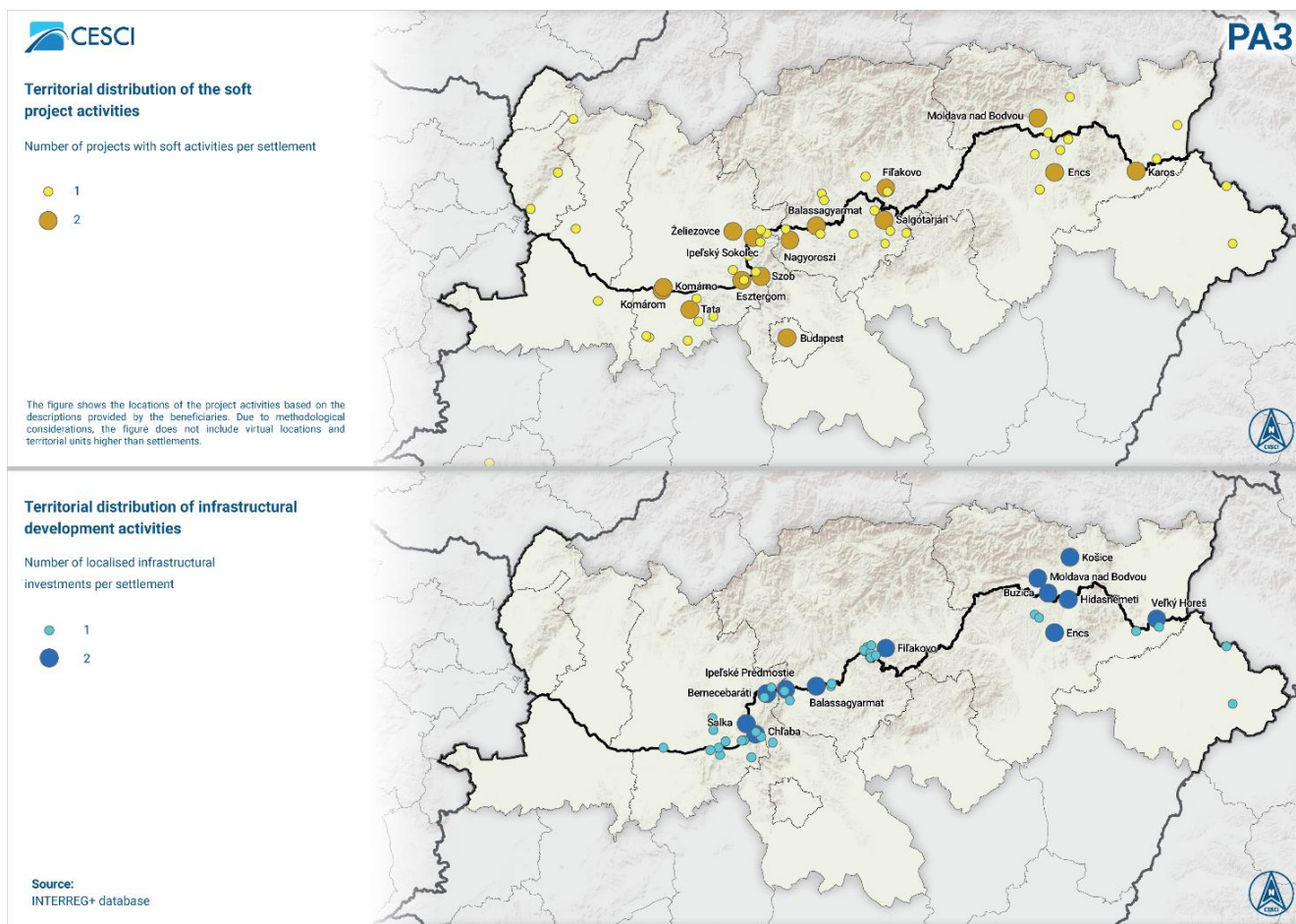


56 activities of the TAPE **infrastructural projects** supported under PA3 affected a total number of 44 settlements altogether. Banskobistrický (19.6%) Nitrianský (19.6%), Košický (14.3%) and Pest (10.7% each) regions contain almost two-thirds of the locations (64.3%). In the territory of Bratislavský Budapest, Győr-Moson-Sopron, Heves and Trnavský regions no activities took place. The share of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg can also be considered low (3.6%).

Besides, a total number of 56 settlements were affected by 74 soft project activities. Komárom-Esztergom (14.9%) and Nitrianský (14.9% each) regions stand out. The highest frequency of activities can be detected in the border area along the Danube and the Ipoly/Ipeľ between Komárom and Balassagyarmat. In Heves county no soft activities have been realised. The shares of Bratislavský and Győr-Moson-Sopron (1.4% each) as well as Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Trnavský regions (2.7% each) are low.

The TAPE projects covered nine microregions along the shared border with a stronger concentration in the middle section. The territorial impact of the tool in the westernmost part of the programme area was moderate which stems from the unemployment reducing aims of the PA. At the same time, the subregion suffering the most by high and long-term unemployment, i.e. the Gömör/Gemer region is missing from the map which can be considered the failure of PA3.

Figure 98: Territorial distribution of the project activities (PA3)

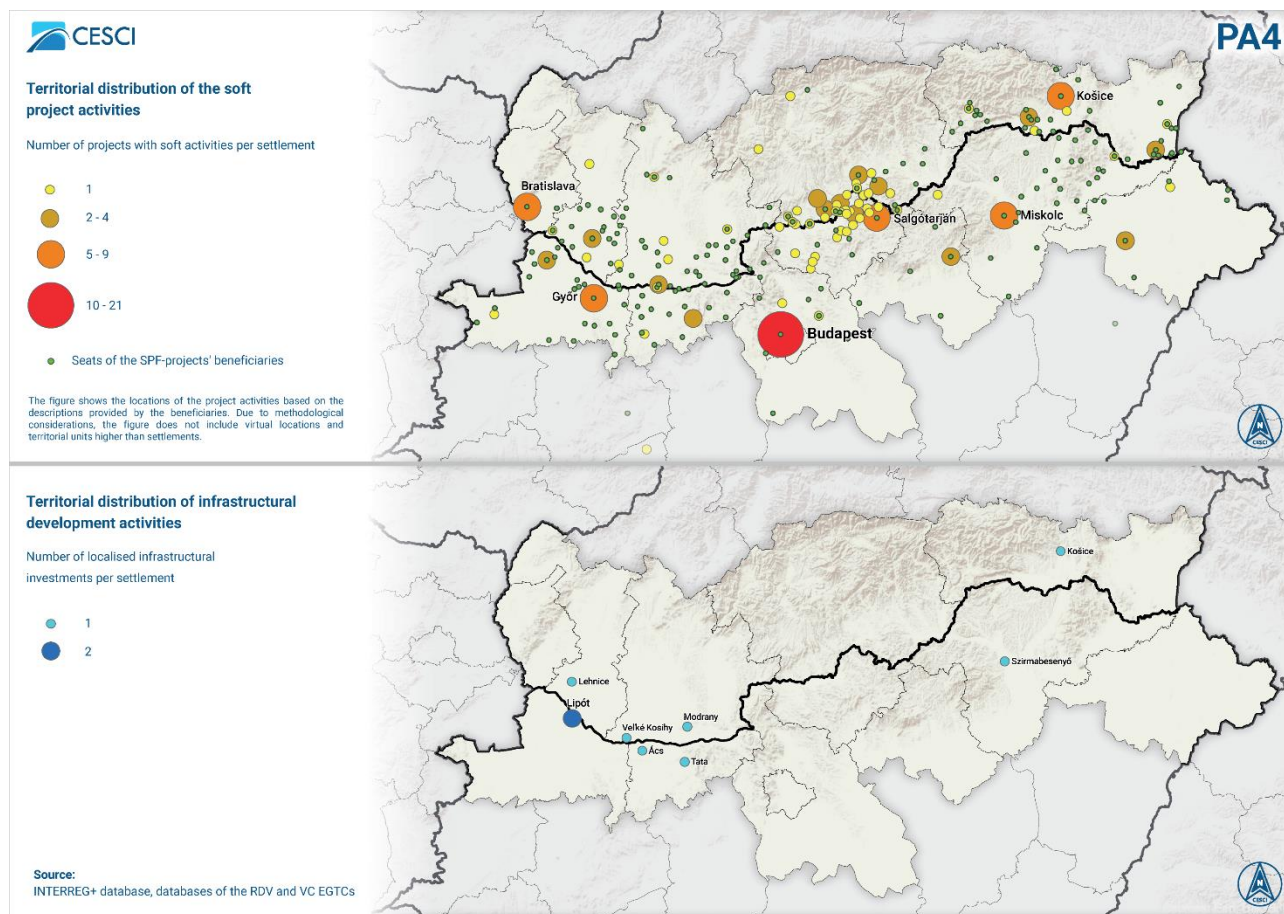


PA4 has a soft character as it promotes interinstitutional and people-to-people cooperation. This tendency was further enhanced by the fact that SPF calls did not support infrastructural investments under PA4. Altogether 9 infrastructural activities affected 8 settlements. The territorial coverage is one-sided since apart from a single location in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Košický regions, all developments were completed in the western part of the programme area.

149 normal **soft project activities** were carried out at 79 locations. Large number of projects concentrated in Nógrád (18.8%) and Banskobystrický (16.8%) regions. Budapest also stood out (14.1%). The shares are low in Pest (1.3%), Heves (1.3%), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (2.7%) and Komárom-Esztergom (2.7%) regions. The SPF activities have shown weaker concentration and more balanced distribution.

Major conclusion is that SPF and soft projects helped a lot in creating a more balanced coverage of activities in the programme area. PA4 was thematically broad enough to involve settlements further away from the border. It is again a thought-provoking phenomenon that the Gömör/Gemer subregion is underrepresented. The projects promote the development of functional relations between partner towns, twin cities, certain urban networks including Bratislava, Dunajská Streda and Győr; Komárom, Komárno, Kolárovo, Hurbanovo, Tatabánya; Košice and Miskolc; Sátoraljaújhely and Kráľovský Chlmec. The share of Budapest-based seats of the beneficiaries is very high that could have been decreased in favour of local-regional stakeholders, however it is also due to the centralised character of governance of Hungary.

Figure 99: Territorial distribution of the project activities (PA4)



The **Programme** impacted mostly the border zone of 20-30 km, where the interactions are generally more vivid. This is especially true in the case of infrastructural investments concentrating along the Danube and the Ipoly/Ipeľ, around the urban hinterlands of Bratislava, Győr, Komárom and Komárno, Esztergom and Štúrovo, Salgótarján, Filakovo and Lučenec, furthermore around Košice and Sátoraljaújhely. On regional level Heves, Pest (apart from the District of Szob), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and some areas of Banskobystrický regions are less integrated parts of the border area. Poorly covered areas include the historical Gemer/Gömör region, the border strip between Salgótarján and Moldava nad Bodvou. Even urban centres such as Ózd, Putnok, Kazincbarcika, Rimavská Sobota, Tornaľa almost entirely left unimpacted by the programme. This unbalanced picture could not but slightly be compensated by SPF calls. This phenomenon can be a lesson being worthwhile to be drawn for the next programme: the JS should find the way and means of communication and professional assistance by which these subregions can be involved in the Programme. Regional administrations, development agencies of public interest have an important role in generating interest toward the Programme and in supporting the application procedure free of charge. An option for the future can be to charge them with the project implementation. Sometimes the employment of an expert responsible for information provision, project development and management could also be a solution. The use of English was also a factor deterring certain eligible applicants from the participation in the Programme.

The SPF scheme managed to bring the Programme closer to the citizens; it offered visibility thereto and it generated real local initiatives even in small municipalities and rural communities. It is the tool that mostly integrated areas and settlements further away from the border and settlements where the

capacities of the applicants are limited to carry out larger infrastructural investments (municipalities with small budget to pre-finance or provide own contribution, lack of SMEs with strong equity, etc.).

Concerning the **geographic proximity** of the partners (see *Figure 100*), PA2 has produced the lowest values both in terms of average and maximum distances. This is due to the fact that, especially on the Slovak side, local authorities played an important role in transport infrastructure development realised across the border.

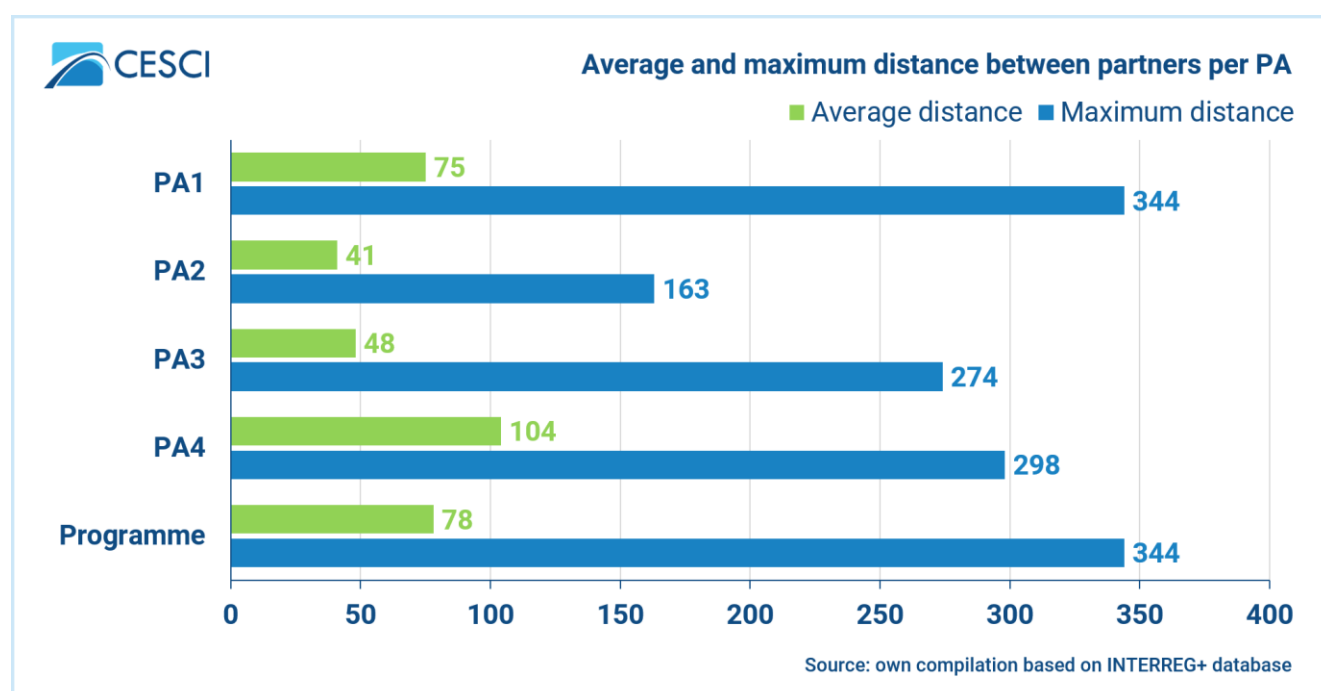
The low average distance of the PA3 beneficiaries is justified by the methodological features of the TAPE tool which aims at involving the relevant actors from a well-defined subregion of the programme area. The anomaly of the maximum distance stems from the unique location (capital city) of some (mostly national) institutions (e.g. the NIF Zrt. in Budapest or the University of Economics in Bratislava).

PA1 and PA4 are characterised with higher values due to the fact that these partnerships tend to be based on a common topic, a field of interest and shared goals of the applicants and less on geographic proximity. Another reason is the administrative system of the two countries that delegates competences to central institutions (e.g. in Hungary the Budapest-based National Healthcare Service Centre, the OKFÖ is responsible for managing CBC health projects).

On the contrary, SPF proved to be the most useful tool for promoting short-distance partnerships, not least thanks to the geographic (west-east) shift of its management. In both cases of PA1 (58 km) and PA4 (67 km) the average and the maximum distances are much shorter than at other projects.

From this perspective the role of the EGTCs is specific as they can realise projects by their own, without involving further partners. It results in the strongest proximity (in fact, identity).

Figure 100: Average and maximum distance between partners per PA



In order to improve the quality and intensity of the partnerships, under the last CfP, SKHU/1902 (e.g. during the Infodays) the JS made efforts to better communicate how to build successful and proper partnerships.

2.3.3 The Programme's borderscape impact

This subchapter gives an overview on the results of the analysis, how the programme has shaped the borderscape within the programming region.

The table below gives an overview on the analysed factors (presented vertically) by providing a short definition of the indicators, the impacts attributed to the Programme and its activities; and the impact vector of change.

Table 50: The Programme's impact on cross-border flows

Factor	Indicator	Role of the CP	Estimated impact vector
Aspect 1: Cross-border flows factors			
Infrastructural conditions for cross-border flows	The change in the average distance of border crossing points	Planning and construction of border crossing points: new road bridges between Ipolydamásd and Chľaba, Drégelypalánk and Ipeľské Predmostie, Ŏrhalom and Vrbovka, new bicycle bridge between Dunakiliti and Dobrohošť, ferry between Neszmély and Radvaň nad Dunajom, new road connection between Nagyrozvágy and Veľký Horeš and a new cycle path between Hidasnémeti and Perín Chym.	4
	Average distance between the major regional centres of the border region (travelling time and geographic distance)	The planning and construction of border crossings, upgrade of a CB bus service.	2
	Number of cross-border transport lines	The upgrade of the Komárom-Komárno bus line, construction of the Neszmély–Radvaň nad Dunajom ferry and the development of the 3 CB bicycle renting systems.	2
	Volume of cross-border traffic within the programme region	The upgrade of the Komárom-Komárno bus line, launch of the bicycle renting systems, construction of border crossings and cycle paths in the border area; development of tourist attractions and services; organisation of cultural and tourist events.	1
Cross-border mobility	Number of commuting students across the border	Events involving students for short-term commuting, R&D related projects, indirect role of transport developments at border crossings and in twin cities.	1
	Number of registered residents moved from the other side of the border	Cultural and tourist events attracting visitors from the other side of the border.	0

Factor	Indicator	Role of the CP	Estimated impact vector
Cross-border business activity	Differences in real estate prices according to the physical distance from the border	Investments in transport, health and tourist infrastructure, as well as in economic facilities strengthens integration across the border.	-1
	Registered number of enterprises per 1000 persons	Limited role, mostly with regard to TAPE projects, the SME call, support for start-ups and young entrepreneurs, plus indirect role in relation to tourism services developed within the Programme.	1
	B2B relations, joint ventures	Development of TAPE partnerships.	1
Cross-border services	Frequency and aims of cross-border service practices	Cross-border services initiated in the field of health and social care, public transport, furthermore in relation tourist information.	1
Aspect 2: Cross-border cooperation factors			
Administrative conditions for cross-border cooperation	Number of interstate agreements	Positive tendencies without real direct role of the Programme.	0
	Number of town-twinning agreements within the programme region	Indirect role of people-to-people actions, activities realised in twin cities, the tool of SPF in encouraging new and intensified links.	1
Cross-border institutions	Number of cross-border cooperation initiatives, governance entities and their members	Newly established institutionalised cooperation structures and services (e.g. the new ferry, the CB wine laboratory, the integrated water tourism system along the Hornád/Hernád and the Ipoly/Ipeľ, etc.)	1
	Average annual turnover, number of employees of cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities	Remarkable increase in the average annual turnover and the number of employees at the EGTCs participating in the Programme.	3
	Number and total value of the projects implemented by the cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities	Significant contribution to the number and total value of the projects implemented by the EGTCs and long-lasting CB structures (e.g. Hídverő Társulás/Združenie most priateľstva). Role of the EGTCs in SPF management and TAPes (CCPs in particular).	4
	Number of cross-border institutions, networks and clusters + their projects	Relatively high number of projects implemented by CB structures and consortia (e.g. under PA3).	2

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Factor	Indicator	Role of the CP	Estimated impact vector
Cross-border projects	Number, geographic scope and value of projects implemented jointly across the border	SKHU which is the most popular platform for CBC projects, largely covers the microregions situated at the shared border.	3
	Sustainability of the project results	Moderate progress, generated almost exclusively by the CP.	2
	Sustainability of project partnerships	The CP has an outstanding role in maintaining existing partnerships.	3
	Assessment of integrated approach applied in projects and calls for tender	The CP applied innovative solutions for strengthening the integrated approach (e.g. through the involvement of the SMEs under PA1, and piloting the territorial action plan tool).	2
Social connectivity	Number of citizens participating in cross-border activities and projects	Great impact largely owing to SPF tool. Outstanding impacts involving local municipalities and NGOs. At the same time, the CP is characterised by a weak representation of educational institutions and youth organisations.	2
	Number of joint cultural events based on the performers' nationality	Limited change but the results are directly generated by the Programme.	3
Bilingualism	Number of students studying the neighbouring country's official language	Very limited change, limited role. Only very few projects seeking for change. Some indirect projects supporting bilingualism were supported but not through the educational systems.	0
Aspect 3: People factors			
Perceptions on distance	Level of mutual trust	Outstanding indirect activities, however moderate effect caused directly by the Programme. Especially, PA4 and partly PA3 (in the economic sector) contributed to a higher level of trust.	2
Perceptions of otherness	Mediascape of the neighbouring countries	The news and reports as well as the posts at social media related to the CP projects have broadened the scope of mutual understanding.	1
Ownership of the shared territory	Reasons and motivations of border crossings	Positive change mainly through tourism related projects. The impacts of the Programme are concentrated around the new border crossing points.	2

Aspect 1: Cross-border flows

Infrastructural conditions for cross-border flows

The infrastructural conditions for flows have been improved at a moderate level, but it is the Programme which had the greatest impact on the border area by remarkably decreasing the **average distance between border crossings** through the support of the construction of new ones (5 road and 2 cycle crossings in total). Apart from the projects financed by the Programme, two new border crossings were opened during the programming period, namely the new bridge between Komárom and Komárno (2020) and the new highway connection between Miskolc and Košice (M30) (2021). In addition, the highway M15 was enlarged with two new lines in 2019. Considering the volume of cross-border flows, these three projects generated a much greater impact than the ones carried out with the assistance of the CP. However, the three large projects especially promoted the increase in transit flows. On the contrary, the new small crossings of the CP will enhance direct cross-border interactions, mobility and cooperation, and will decrease the travelling time between subregional urban centres like Štúrovo and Vác, Kisvárdá and Kráľovský Chlmec, Šamorín and Mosonmagyaróvár as well as it will diminish the length of detours within smaller border areas.

Very similarly, the new and upgraded **cross-border transport services** rather have a local-subregional role. During the budgetary period, the bus line No 801 connecting Bratislava with its Hungarian vicinities terminated its operation in 2020 and only two new services were launched by GYSEV in 2017 (train between Hegyeshalom and Bratislava) and Košický kraj (the bus line No 802 818 between Košice and Hidasnémeti) – beyond the frames of the CP. Unlike the previous decades, when the majority of cross-border services disappeared, the Programme managed to upgrade an existing one (between Komárno and Komárom), and to launch four new services, namely the ferry between Neszmély and Radvaň nad Dunajom; and the bike sharing systems of the Pons Danubii EGTC (KOMBI Bike), between Esztergom and Štúrovo (Mária Valéria Bike) and between Sátoraljaújhely, Zemplín and Viničky (Cross Bike).

To measure the changes in the volume of cross-border traffic resulting from the CP projects the evaluators lack adequate data. On the one hand, by the cut-off date, the new bridges, roads and services have not been inaugurated yet, except for the Komárno-Komárom bus line (which does not generate remarkable numbers of travellers) and the three bike sharing systems. Data are available in the case of the Mária Valéria Bike project: between February 2020 and December 2021 nearly 3 200 cross-border trips were generated by the system (representing a bit more than 10% of the total rentals).

Cross-border mobility

Cross-border mobility includes different forms of cross-border movements, such as cross-border commuting to work or school and the mobility of cross-border residents (who moved to the neighbouring country). Notwithstanding the COVID era, the intensity of cross-border mobility has increased within the programme area. However, exact and up-to-date numbers are not available on these movements. Several thousands of people commute every day to **work** across the border to the factories of AUDI in Győr, the companies located in Komárom and the Suzuki factory in Esztergom. On the contrary, in the eastern section of the border, Košice has a strong pulling power for Hungarian labour force. Due to the lack of systematic data collection, exact numbers are not available. PA3 of the CP targeted the promotion of cross-border labour mobility but the TAPE projects have not increased

cross-border labour mobility: the investments (like the enlargement of the capacities in Nagyoroszi at the Fespizz Ltd., or the new factory halls constructed in Filakovo) will have indirect and longer-term impacts on this phenomenon.

According to a study¹¹³, in 2016/2017, a total number of 1 119 Slovakian pupils attended Hungarian schools and kindergartens while in 2020, 411 students commuted every day from Hungary to the Selye University in Komárno¹¹⁴. The CP had almost no influence on these phenomena as **educational** institutions played a symbolic role therein. Projects which had moderate effect are connected to environmental education (e.g. FORBEST, ESD Duna/Dunaj projects; cross-border summer camp involving both Slovak and Hungarian children; daily training programmes for schools; educational activities utilising interactive exhibitions involving local schools and students; organisation of one-day workshops for elementary school students; and eco-mobile guided tours for elementary school students (Financ-eco education, etc.)).

Since the accession of the two countries to the Schengen zone, the dynamically spreading cross-border **residential** areas have been dispersing around Bratislava and Košice. Here again, the exact quantity of cross-border residents is not known. Based on the official statistics of KSH, the number of foreign citizens residing in Hungary with Slovak citizenship increased significantly from 8 275 of 2014 to 16 040 of 2022.¹¹⁵ According to the statistics of the National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing, during the COVID closures, between May 2020 and December 2021, more than 7 400 Slovakian citizens applied for residence permit in Hungary. These citizens moved to the vicinities of Bratislava and Košice from 2007 onwards, but previously, they were not registered residents in the municipalities of Rajka, Dunakiliti, Tornyosnémeti, Hidasnémeti, Abaújvár, Felsőkéked, etc. The COVID restrictions made it necessary to register themselves in order to be authorised to cross the border during the pandemic.

The Programme had almost no direct effect on CBRM processes. The new border crossings may increase the level of cross-border mobility but not in the cross-border functional zones of the two largest Slovakian towns (with the exception of the new cycle paths connecting Hidasnémeti and Telkibánya through Perín-Chym and Kechnec). In addition, those projects had indirect effects on these phenomena, which attracted many visitors from the other side of the border. These visits can result in change of residence.

Cross-border business activities

The Programme had a moderate effect on the **real estate** prices through the investments in transport, tourist, health and economic infrastructure which may increase the value of real estates (e.g. once a new bridge is open) on the less developed border areas. The differences between the prices and the availability of cheaper real estates have a stimulating effect on cross-border business activities.

¹¹³ Pregi L. (2018). A magyarországi közoktatásban részt vevő szlovák állampolgárok területi megoszlása, *Területi Statisztika*, 58:2, pp. 151–176.

¹¹⁴ 'Výročná správa o činnosti Univerzity J. Selyeho za rok 2020'. Komárno: Univerzita J. Selyeho, 2021.

¹¹⁵ Sources: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/nep/hu/nep0023.html

According to national statistics, between 2014 and 2021, the specific **enterprise density** indicator increased by 30.9% in Slovakia and by 11% in Hungary. Outstanding results were detected in the districts of Dunajská Streda (19.7%), Piešťany and Trebišov (18.6% both). As a result, the gap between the Hungarian and Slovak values decreased, but the difference is still of 6 to 8 fold¹¹⁶. The Programme contributed to increasing the number of registered enterprises per 1000 persons by various actions. These actions supported the development of joint tourism products, transport and other service provisions, infrastructural investments facilitating the modernisation, structural transformation and sustainable development of specific areas. Similar positive indirect impacts can be detected in the case of projects supporting start-ups and young entrepreneurs (e.g. in the form of cross-border competitions for students, trainings for entrepreneurs like in CORD, EYES and ProVocEnt projects; or by developing services supporting the SMEs, like in the case of the Co-innovation and INNOCENTRE projects), and the involvement of the SMEs under PA1 and PA3.

The integration of a border area can also be measured through the **B2B** connections and the number of joint ventures – however, information on these achievements is not systematically collected. According to statistical data, 10 900 Hungarian companies had interest in Slovakia, and slightly more than 10 000 Slovakian ones in Hungary¹¹⁷. The Programme contributed to the development of business contacts especially through the SME call and the TAPE projects where entrepreneurs from the two sides of the border had the opportunity to cooperate. In some cases, these contacts have generated even longer, strategic partnerships and even new business contacts were made (e.g. within the IG Heritage and Szép Cserehát TAPes).

Cross-border services

One of the main conclusions of the analysis on cross-border relevance is that the share of institutionalised cooperation projects producing new **services that attract** clients from the other side of the border is very low, and they are concentrated under PA2 (transport). Further services rather have a one-sided character. In the field of health, cross-border medical consultation and diagnostic mechanisms (teleradiology, cardiology, neurology and gastroenterology) particularly were developed, which did not result in permanent cross-border services. The TAPE project called RE-START aimed at creating cross-border elderly care services, but this is not possible under the current legislative frameworks. Accordingly, the contribution of the Programme to this factor was quite weak. This is a field that the future CBC programmes should put more weight on.

Aspect 2: Cross-border cooperation

Administrative conditions for cross-border cooperation

The two governments signed or amended 12 **bilateral agreements** between 2014 and 2021. Almost all of them had a relevance with the Programme. The latest Treaty on the State Border was signed in 2016,

¹¹⁶ Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office TEIR: <https://www.oeny.hu/oeny/teir/#/tablok>, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic DATAcube: <https://datacube.statistics.sk/#!/lang/en>

¹¹⁷ Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade presentation: <https://exporthungary.gov.hu/download/7/9f/b2000/Szlov%C3%A1kia%20V3.pdf>

including the adjustments of the borderline along the River Ipoly/Ipeľ. These modifications enabled the construction of the new cycle path between Letkés and Ipolydamásd on the Hungarian side ('Bike Paradise' project). Before the adjustments, some plots of the river on the Hungarian side belonged to Slovakia, which made it impossible to procure the building permits. In 2017, the two parties agreed on the operation, maintenance and reconstruction of road border bridges and border road sections on the common state border which was amended in 2021. 6 further agreements targeted the new border crossings between Abaújvár and Kechnec (previous Programme), Ipolydamásd and Chĺaba, Drégelypalánk and Ipeľské Predmostie, Őrhalom and Vrbovka, Dunakiliti and Dobrohost'. In total, 9 agreements were generated by the Programme's projects and, *vice versa*, the realisation of several projects was enabled by these agreements.

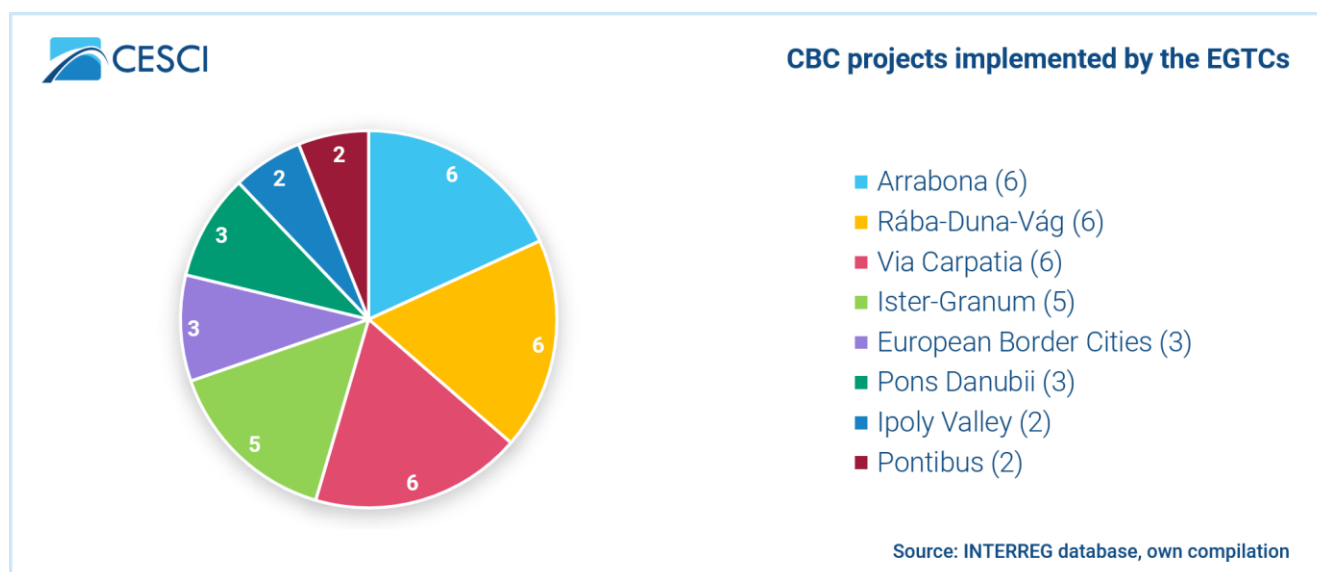
According to the regional analysis of the CP, in 2013 there were approximately 300 **twinning relations** within the programme area. The two SPFs were especially effective in strengthening inter-municipal relations and generating new ones. The Programme supported 51 projects implemented by twin municipalities, especially within the SPF scheme, but PA3 also supported the investments involving twin partners. Furthermore, three projects resulted in the establishment of new inter-municipality partnerships between Záhony and Malé Trakany, Bátka and Hollókő, as well as between Modrany and Ács. Obviously, the Programme played a decisive role in generating and maintaining twinning relations.

Cross-border institutions

Since 2014, the number of cross-border institutionalised structures has been decreasing. The **Euroregional** cooperation bodies flourished in the years of 2000, and the still existing ones (i.e. the Váh-Dunaj-Ipeľ euroregión with 2 CBC projects, the Ipeľský euroregión with 1 CBC project) perform activities on one side of the border, without permanency, in an ad-hoc way¹¹⁸. This means that these structures no longer have a decisive impact on the cohesion of the cross-border region. On the contrary, the Slovak-Hungarian is the EU border which is frequented by the largest number of **European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation** (EGTC). Since 2008, 16 groupings were established there, two of them (the Pontibus in 2016 and the Ipoly Valley in 2017) were registered during the programming period. At the same time, three were dissolved (the Kras-Bodva in 2016, the UTTS in 2018, and the Novohrad-Nógrád in 2021). The Abaúj-Abaújban EGTC, which was very active in the previous CBC Programme, became silent, and further 4 groupings (the Torysa, the Svinka, the Slaná-Rimava and the Bodrogekőzi EGTCs) do not show signs of activity. On the contrary, the total number of the members of the 8 active EGTCs has increased from 130 to 159, which clearly justifies their attractiveness. The most salient increase is detectable at the Arrabona (from 4 to 39), while the Ister-Granum officially lost 4 members (from 86 to 82). These 8 EGTCs realised 33 CBC projects in total.

¹¹⁸ The Sajó-Rima/Slaná-Rimava Euroregion and the Carpathian Euroregion did not participate in the implementation of the Programme.

Figure 101: CBC projects implemented by the EGTCs



Altogether, the implementation of these projects was supported with an aggregated ERDF amount of EUR 8 335 033.45, representing 5.35% of the total ERDF budget of the CP. Besides their projects, the groupings played further roles in the realisation of the CP. The Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC managed the WETA, the Via Carpatia EGTC the ETA SPF calls, and five of the nine TAPE CCPs were managed by one of the groupings. The EGTCs were invited along to the MC meetings by a rotating principle. Such a strong role of the EGTCs in CBC programmes is unprecedented in the EU. Furthermore, similarly to other less institutionalised structures, like the Hídverő Falvak Társulása / Združenie most priateľstva, the groupings also promoted the development of partnerships between their members.

At the same time, through its subsidies, also the Programme significantly promoted the consolidation of these new institutions. The active EGTCs had 24 employees in 2014 and 51 at the end of 2021, despite that some Hungarian-Slovak EGTCs are non-existent or inactive today. The two umbrella and the CCP projects remarkably provided longer term perspective for the employees of the groupings: predictable financial frames attracted new workers to RDV and Via Carpatia. The value of aggregated annual expenditure of the Slovak-Hungarian EGTCs increased from EUR 407 260 to EUR 2 408 220 between 2014 and 2020, greatly due to the CP and its projects.¹¹⁹

Apart from the EGTCs, further beneficiaries endeavoured to generate permanent operational contacts and bodies. Project partners managed to strengthen the cooperation between the Slovak and Hungarian state forest management, beekeeping, and environmental protection (for indigenous species, against invasive species). Few projects also supported the development of innovative ecosystems and the cooperation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry. In the field of media, the project 'From the Tatras to Tisza' facilitated networking and creating a joint website and joint content for the media actors. BUILCOGREEN aimed to support networking in the field of public services by

¹¹⁹ Further information on the performance of the EGTCs is available at the EGTC Monitor. See *Snapshot of the EGTCs with Hungarian participation. Overview of the situation and performance of the EGTCs with Hungarian participation*. <https://egtcmonitor.cesci-net.eu/en/literature/egtc-snapshot-2022/>

optimising the use of related machinery with the help of a joint interface, etc. These projects may also result in permanent joint structures in the future.

Cross-border projects

The intensity of cross-border integration is reflected in the volume of cross-border projects. Compared to the previous programming period (in spite of the decrease in terms of EU funding), the number of projects has increased from 321 to 421 in total (168 normal, 253 SPF projects). The growth is due to the re-launch of the small project fund. Through the small projects, also the scope of the beneficiaries involved in cross-border cooperation has remarkably broadened.

In the Slovak-Hungarian context, it is the CBC Programme which generates the largest number of joint projects and the largest amount spent for these projects. The *International Visegrad Fund* promotes CBC activities too, but the value and the number of these initiatives is very low. Usually, the total budget of these projects does not exceed the amount of EUR 6 000. Exceptional cases were the projects aiming to promote the preparedness of the fire fighters of Komárom and Komárno districts in 2016 (EUR 26 980), the strengthening of the cooperation between nature protection CSOs in the Ipoly/Ipeľ Valley in 2017 (EUR 9 993), and the development of the cross-border cultural route in Palócland in 2020 (EUR 20 800). The *Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENPI and ENI programmes* have also supported cross-border activities, but the main focus of these projects has always been on the external border with Ukraine. Slovak and Hungarian citizens, institutions and organisations take part in *further European calls* (at the transnational and interregional INTERREG, the LIFE, the Horizon and the Erasmus+ programmes, etc.) usually as members of a larger, international consortium, but the direct impact of these projects on cross-border integration is symbolic¹²⁰. Not only the CP is the most effective instrument to generate cross-border contacts, but also the Programme has the widest **territorial coverage** and the largest **budget** dedicated to Slovak-Hungarian bilateral cooperation. What is more, the Programme has a pioneering role even at EU level in applying **integrated territorial tools** like the TAPE, the SME call and the involvement of the EGTCs in the implementation of the CP (see the relevant chapters).

Social connectivity

The mission of the Programme is summarised in its slogan: "Building Partnership". By the cut-off date, the CP supported the organisation of 899 cross-border events, and **involved 71 147 persons in cross-border activities** (see the indicator data in the Cost-efficiency Chapter) representing 1.3% of the total population of the programme area. Accordingly, the impact of the CP is rather symbolic. However, apart from the Programme, there are only neglectable funding opportunities like the Gábor Bethlen Fund and the National Cooperation Fund in Hungary as well as the funds supporting the cultural activities of the ethnic minorities in both countries, which may involve participants from both sides of the border with a strong ethnic character. Mono-ethnicity can also be documented within the CP, especially in the case of the SPF projects. However, the projects rather convene Slovak and Hungarian stakeholders.

¹²⁰ For instance, the total Erasmus+ budget of the two countries dropped to EUR 66.4 million between 2014 and 2020, and Hungary was not among the top 3 target countries selected by the Slovak students and teachers, and *vice versa*.

Civic organisations and municipalities have created lively connections through many forms (invitation of guest artists, joint appearance at fairs, joint workshops, host of events etc.). The biggest impact may have been reached in relation to **culture**, environmental education, environment and tourism-related events (e.g. family days on water, workshops for pupils, summer and tourist camps, concerts and other programmes for children, like the Hernád Day and Hornád fest organised within the REJOICE project, the choir festival of the Modern Monasteries, the pilot actions of the CULTACROSS, "For all the folks" Road Shows and "For all the folks" Gala Show of the LiTE projects, etc.)¹²¹. Besides, the scope of the connections has gone beyond the traditional cultural sphere as e.g. TAPE projects involved local farmers, SMEs, and vocational training institutions. Projects, such as SK-HU FOREST SCHOOLS, LiTE, FEBO, InnoCult, and IpOLD, managed to encourage the participation of three different parts of the society: pupils and children in general, artists especially from folk arts, and elderly people. The latter societal group was also targeted by the RE-START TAPE.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is a key factor of improving cross-border social connectivity. Compared to other border areas, the Slovak-Hungarian is characterised by high level of bilingualism thanks to the Hungarian minority living in Southern Slovakia as well as the Slovak minority and the cross-border residents living in Hungary. Approximately 10% of the total population of the programme area possesses a certain degree of bilingualism which is rarely experienced in the EU. At the same time, the CP has not contributed to the further increase of this level.

A few projects with training activities provided opportunities to learn each other's language. For instance, ProVocEnt aimed at creating bilingual learning curricula for vocational educational purposes; the Fragments of nature (a camp where students were able to mutually learn both languages), SAD (education of drug clients and family members) and Silver economy (multilingual course) contributed to bilingualism with limited impact. The only project which explicitly aimed at developing the level of bilingualism was the LingLand project (Linguistic Landscape: innovative methodologies strengthening bilingualism in the Hungarian-Slovakian border region), which promoted measures to strengthen bilingualism through trainings in three target areas: tourism, hospitality industry and commerce. The topic was also supported by bilingual passenger information systems developed by new public transport services. At the same time, the CP had no direct effect on this aspect¹²².

¹²¹ Unfortunately, the fulfilled indicators do not make reference to the nationality of the participants, which hardens the identification of the cross-border character of these events (!).

¹²² E.g. the municipality of Esztergom offered financial support to the local restaurants for providing menu lists in Slovak and to hire staff speaking both languages – outside the Programme.

Aspect 3: People¹²³

Perceptions on distance

The factors of the 'People' aspect are the hardest to detect as these need to be assessed through surveys addressing the everyday citizens, which necessitates capacities and resources reaching beyond the frames of the current evaluation practice.

The citizens' perception on distance refers to (1) the knowledge of the neighbouring region across the border that presupposes regular crossings (*cognitive distance* by van Houtum, 2000); (2) the estimation of distances and differences by country (usually, a municipality located on the other side of the border is estimated to be farther than a municipality located in the observer's home country, even if the physical distance is the same) (*mental distance* by van Houtum); (3) the feeling of otherness or strangeness of the neighbouring region (*cultural distance* by van Houtum), and (4) the sentiments connected to this otherness (*affective distance* by van Houtum). All these factors are summarised and reflected in the level of mutual trust of the border people, which is a principal feature of cooperation between the countries and it is determined by many factors from everyday experiences gained e.g. in shopping malls and cross-border working places to the media appearances of the neighbouring country and the official statements of the leading politicians. The CP has contributed to the development of mutual trust through many activities. The joint cultural, sports and scientific events of small projects provided the opportunities for encounters as a prerequisite of trust building; the newly built cross-border bridges, roads and the ferry have physically reduced travelling distance (both geographically and in time) which motivates the citizens to cross the border and to gain experiences about the neighbours' life. Furthermore, the TAPE tool promoted the designing of joint cross-border development plans with the involvement of representatives of diverse sectors, which resulted in deeper knowledge of the other side of the border and the beneficiaries' way of thinking. The development of joint tourism products and the valorisation of shared cultural, natural heritage, had a similar effect. The support provided for the partnerships involving the Slovak and Hungarian stakeholders of the same sector (e.g. the hospitals, the elderly homes, the schools, the chambers, nature parks, etc.) promoted the establishment of professional connections and the exchange of knowledge, which all had an impact on mental and affective distances.

Perceptions of otherness

Perceptions of otherness are partly connected to the official and social media sources which depict people of fellow citizens and foreigners, and give opportunities for self-expression of the given ethnic groups of the border area. These pieces of information contribute to the so-called 'mediascape' which, in our case, refers to the appearance of Hungary in the Slovakian media and *vice versa*. As a result of the mandatory visibility rules, each beneficiary had to regularly publish the activities and their results (e.g. promo videos, documentaries, social media usage, TV ads). Oftentimes the national media were also present at certain events and published articles, TV news and interviews on the projects. Apart from this comprehensive indirect impact, only one project (*From the Tatras to Tisza*) targeted the development of a cross-border virtual news agency producing a web site for regional news and TV

¹²³ These factors are very hard to evaluate within the framework of the current assignment.

programmes on both languages covering the easternmost part of the border area. The topics of broadcasting included culture, public affairs, recreation, social and medical care, religious life, as well as nature protection, education and water management issues. The exact number of reached people is unknown. However, this type of projects could contribute the most to the development of a shared mediascape.

Ownership of the shared territory

Ownership of the shared territory can be analysed through the main reasons for and motivations of crossing the state border. When people feel home abroad, they start considering the border area a joint, united territory where borders play a less significant role. The sign of a truly shared territory is the rising number of border crossings of multiple motivations (shopping, working, living, doing business, recreation, etc.). The CP has contributed to these developments by different interventions, e.g. construction of cross-border transport infrastructure and services, enabling the increase of cross-border mobility, which facilitates the development of the shared ownership feeling (especially the bike sharing systems contributed to the building up of joint ownership thereover); the joint events, festivals convening the people from both sides of the border creating the feeling of belonging; the projects generating cross-border tourism products and tourist routes (e.g. REJOICE, DANUBE BIKE&BOAT, Bodrog Active tourism, ESD Duna/Dunaj); enhancing the recognition of the joint cultural and natural heritage, etc. The shared ownership may also be strengthened through regular encounters between the representatives of similar institutions (nature parks, chambers, water management directorates, etc.) and cities located close to each other (e.g. Komárom and Komárno, Šahy and Balassagyarmat, Lučenec and Salgótarján, etc.). Although the CP has limited means for remarkably enhancing the development of the shared ownership, there are no further initiatives which could better fulfil this function.

Conclusions of the borderscape analysis

The shortages of the borderscape analysis are evident: due to the lack of systematic gathering and processing of data and information on cross-border flows and processes, it is hard to assess the direct and well-defined impacts of the CP on the programme area. Without a cross-border observatory, nothing but approximate estimations can be stated. One of the main lessons of this analysis is that the future Programme should ensure the conditions for systematic data collection along the Slovak-Hungarian border.

The most outstanding indicators where the Programme had important role cover mostly two aspects: infrastructural conditions of cross-border flows and cross-border cooperation. The factors which stood out include:

- Change in the average distance of border crossing points,
- Average annual turnover, number of employees of cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities,
- Number and total value of the projects implemented by the cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities, Number of cross-border institutions, networks and clusters + their projects,
- Number, geographic scope and value of projects implemented jointly across the border,
- Sustainability of project partnerships,

- Number of citizens participating in cross-border activities and projects,
- Number of joint cultural events based on the performers' nationality.

The Programme contributed to the levelling up of EGTCs with complex institutional roles (TAPE, SPF, as LBs, project managers and developers, cross-border service providers); supporting missing border crossings despite of limited budget; and strengthening social connectivity and building partnerships at various stages through people-to-people type of activities.

2.3.4 Synergies with relevant programmes and strategies

In order to demonstrate the synergies with relevant European and other international programmes, the results of the implemented projects are compared with the targets of three high-level international strategies. The first is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, which builds on a global partnership to promote actions supporting peace and prosperity for people and the planet. The other two strategies are linked to European level. One of them is the EU2020, which is the EU's ten-year strategy to develop a competitive and sustainable Europe that is able to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century. The third document is the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), which embeds the analysed border area. The goal of this macro-regional strategy is to address common challenges through the coordination of the existing initiatives and policies within the Danube Region.

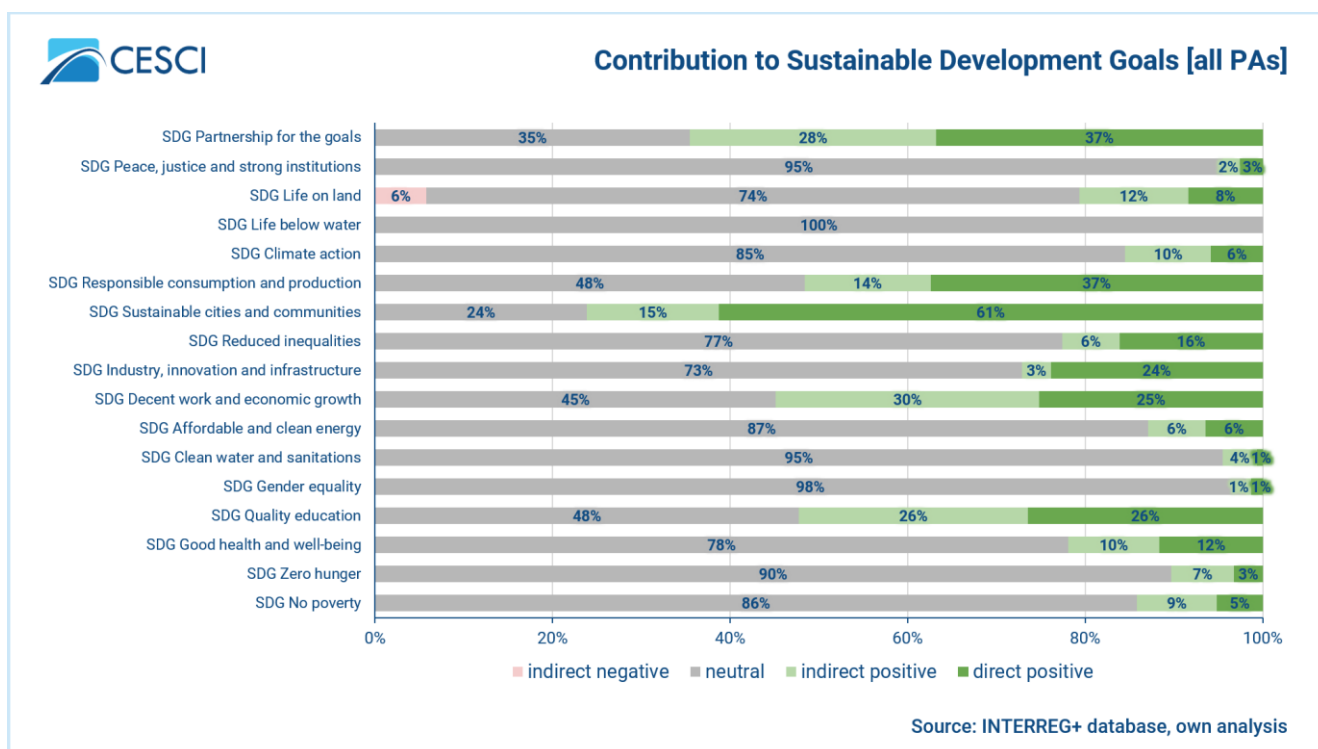
The methodology of estimating the synergies is based on two aspects: (i) by the direction (negative, neutral, positive) and (ii) the character of the project's impact (direct/indirect). As a result of the applied methodology, a four-scale classification was created, as there were no direct negative effects detected. The evaluation process is based on the project summaries and the activity descriptions, but it does not contain the SPF projects and the CCP projects of the TAPes (accordingly, altogether 155 projects were involved in the evaluation).

With regard to the contribution of the SKHU projects to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (*Figure 102*), 9 of them are supported by more than 20% of the projects. The greatest synergy can be observed in the case of 5 goals, where more than half of the projects are in line with the SDGs. These goals are the *Sustainable cities and communities* (76% of the projects are in synergy with the SDGs), *Partnership for the goals* (65%), *Decent work and economic growth* (55%), *Quality education* (52%) and *Responsible consumption and production* (51%). The outstanding values of these categories are due to the high interest in local tourism, local product development, training, employment improvement and capacity building of workplaces. On the contrary, the level of synergies is low (less than 5%) in the case of *Life below water* (0%) and *Gender equality* (2%). This can be explained by the fact that the Programme region does not include seaside areas, and the themes of the projects does not concentrate on gender equality (as projects consider gender equality a cross-thematic, horizontal principle rather than a main activity). Negative indirect effect was measured only under the *Life of land* (6%), since some infrastructural developments reduced the extent of natural habitats.

Due to the thematic focus of the PAs, each PA contributed differently to the SDGs. PA1 projects are mostly in line with the *Sustainable cities and communities* (93%), *Responsible consumption and production* (73%) and *Partnership for the goals* (66%), as these projects facilitate the conservation, protection and development of the local natural and cultural heritages. Under PA2 – improvement of cross-border mobility – all projects contributed directly to the *Industry, innovation and infrastructure*

(100%) and to the *Sustainable cities and communities* (100%) goals. The impact of the increased mobility on employment is also remarkable, since all PA2 projects have indirect positive effect on the *Decent work and economic growth* (100%). Furthermore, many mobility developments foster the use of clean energy and cycling (*Climate action* 71%). However, the construction of new lines and routes impaired biodiversity, therefore, the indirect negative effect is 29% in case of the *Life on land* goal. As for PA3, 81% of the projects are in line with the *Decent work and economic growth*, and 79% with the *Sustainable cities and communities*, since these projects concentrate on the support of labour mobility and sustainable employment. The synergy between the SDGs and the PA4 projects – with the enhancement of cooperation between citizens and institutions – is especially high in the case of the *Quality education* (87%) and *Partnership for the goals* (79%).

Figure 102: Contribution of SKHU projects to SDGs

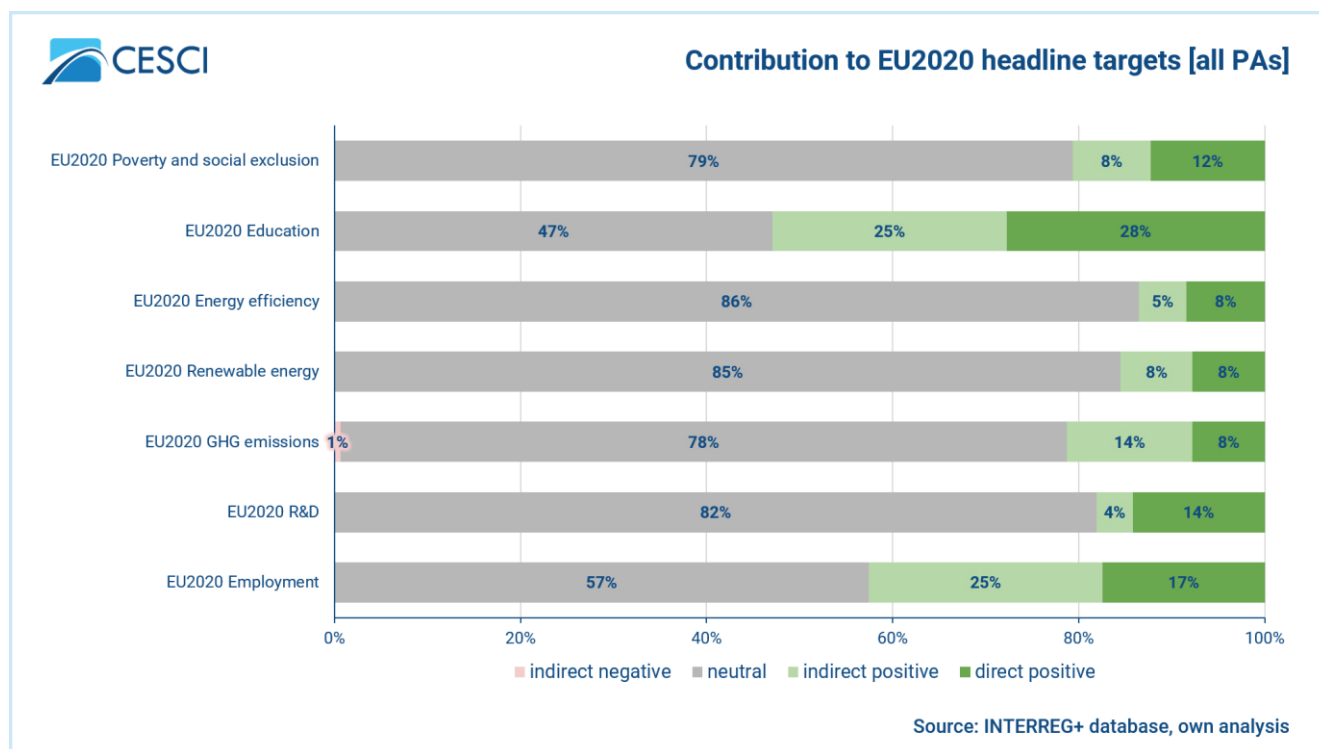


Out of the 7 targets of EU2020 strategy (Figure 103), there are 2, which show high synergies with the SKHU projects. More than 40% of the projects have a positive effect on the *Education* (53%) and *Employment* (42%) targets. The level of contribution is the lowest for the *Energy efficiency* (13%) and *Renewable energy* (16%), but it is also under 20% for the *R&D* (18%) target.

According to the different PAs, the synergies between the EU2020 and the SKHU projects are the weakest under PA1. The predominantly natural and cultural heritage preservation actions – due to the new bicycle routes and training programmes – contributed mostly to the *Education* (32%) and *GHG emissions* (33%) goals. The implemented projects under PA2 – mostly the construction of cross-border infrastructure and the procurement of e-bicycles – highly supported the *GHG emissions* (100%), the *Renewable energy* (57%) and the *Energy efficiency* (43%) targets, as the travelling time of cross-border travels was reduced and the available alternative modes of transportation were broadened. Moreover, the *Employment* (43%) target is positively affected by PA2 projects, since the improvement in mobility expanded the number of accessible workplaces. With respect to the PA3 projects, the creation of new

jobs and improved skills brought about significant contribution to the target of *Employment* (81%), *Poverty and social exclusion* (56%) and *Education* (47%), meanwhile PA4 triggered progress in the field of *Education* (87%), *Employment* (36%) and *R&D* (34%) targets.

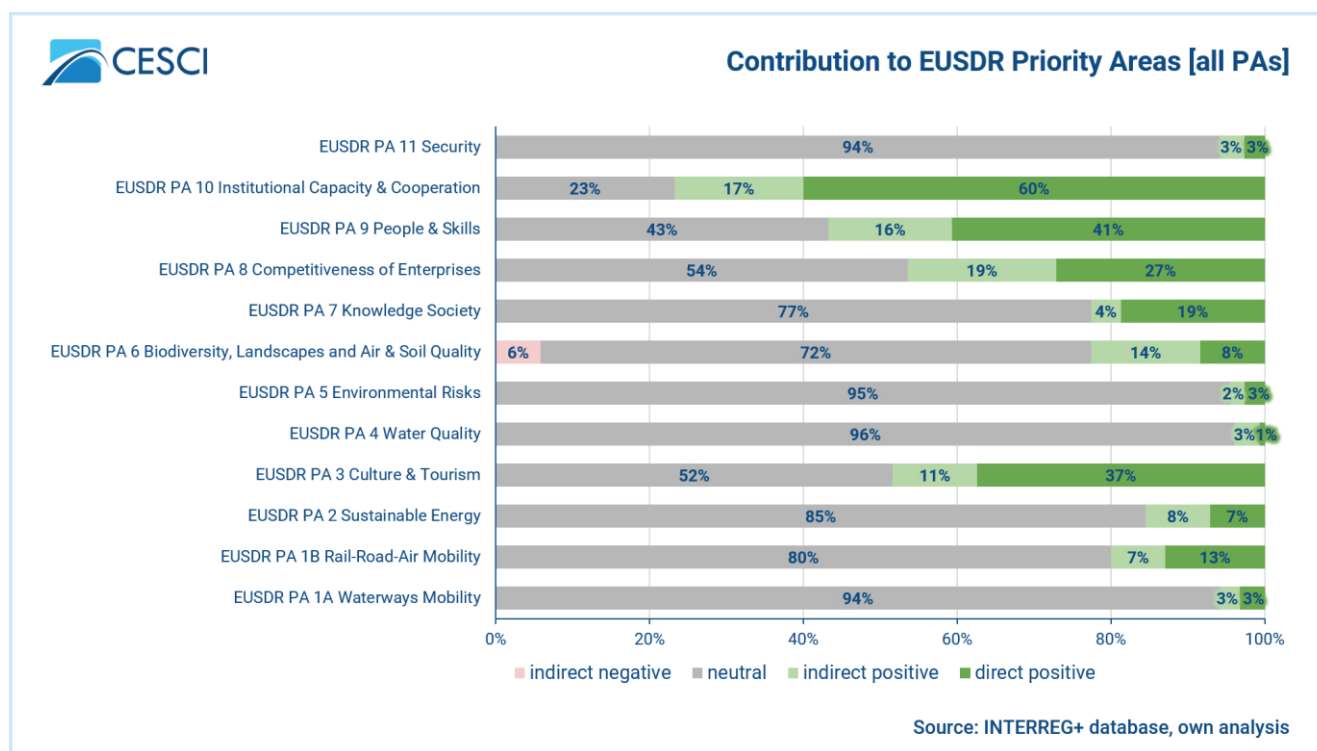
Figure 103: Contribution of SKHU projects to EU2020 targets



The EUSDR consists of 12 Priority Areas (*Figure 104*), 7 out of which are in line with the SKHU projects (20% of the projects have a positive effect on them). Owing to the efficient education and trainings, the capacity building of workplaces, the support of SMEs and local tourism, the synergies are especially high for the *Institutional Capacity and Cooperation* (77%), *People and Skills* (57%), *Culture and Tourism* (48%) and *Competitiveness of Enterprises* (46%) targets. However, there are some priority areas, which are weakly promoted by the SKHU projects. The thematic fields of *Waterways mobility* (6%), *Security* (6%), *Environmental risks* (5%) and *Water quality* (4%) are only partially affected by the SKHU projects. The previously mentioned 6% of indirect negative effects – caused by the repercussions of the infrastructural works – is also observable under the *Biodiversity, landscapes, air and soil quality* target.

Taking into account the different profile of the PAs, the level of contribution is also dissimilar. The *Culture and Tourism* (100%) and the *Institutional capacity and cooperation* (68%) are the closest EUSDR priorities to the interventions of PA1, whereas under PA2, the *Rail-road-air mobility* (100%), *Sustainable energy* (57%) and *Institutional capacity and cooperation* (57%) show the greatest consistency with the projects. Considering themes that have limited or negative effects, 29% of the PA2 projects had an indirect negative effect on biodiversity, while 71% of them indirectly enhanced the improvement of local tourism. The positive effects of PA3 projects are the most remarkable under the capacity and cooperation building (77%), competitiveness improvement of SMEs (74%) and education and training (58%). This shows similarity with PA4, where the synergies are the greatest under the *People and skills* (96%) and the *Institutional capacity and cooperation* (89%).

Figure 104: Contribution of SKHU projects to EUSDR priorities



All in all, the synergies between the SKHU projects and the previously introduced strategies are the most apparent and direct in the case of the thematic fields of employment, economic growth, tourism, education and capacity building. Considering topics of low synergies, only few projects are concerned about energy efficiency, renewable energy, waterways mobility and water quality. Furthermore, more emphasis should be placed on the environmental risks, since the climate change demands higher resilience and better adaptive capacities to natural disasters.

2.3.5 Horizontal principles

In compliance with the EU regulations and recommendations for INTERREG Programmes, horizontal principles were an integral part of the Programme and, consequently, the projects. The Interreg V-A Slovakia-Hungary Cooperation Programme (2014-2020) includes three horizontal principles: **(1) sustainable development, (2) equal opportunities and non-discrimination and (3) equality between men and women.** In the followings, the principles will be evaluated both at Programme and project levels. Emphasis will be placed both on the applicable horizontal principles regardless of the PA, as well as on the measures selected by the Programme that are only applicable in the context of the selected PA.

2.3.5.1 Horizontal principles at Programme level

At Programme level, a short summary was created to show how the Programme intended to respect and integrate cross-thematic principles. Therefore, in the followings, we provide an analysis on how the

principles were addressed through the various measures, and what principle-related specificities and focal points could be detected.

Sustainable development

The basic pillars of sustainable development include environmental, economic and social sustainability. The Calls for Proposals contain actions and objectives that should respect the principle of sustainable development. PA1 is supporting actions focusing on the better utilisation of natural and cultural assets, while supporting the sustainable development of the local economies. Special emphasis is placed on environmentally friendly developments. Projects implemented in PA1 should contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the border area. PA2 increases the number of border crossing points and, consequently, through the reduction of travel distances, it tends to decrease the greenhouse gas emission. PA4 is aimed at strengthening social cohesion within the programme area, and improving the quality of services affecting social sustainability.

The Programme-specific measures regarding 'Sustainable development' are the following:

- Projects shall contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emission by reducing the usage of environmentally hazardous materials.
- Projects shall reduce the consumption of energy, water and limited resources and increase the usage of renewable energy.
- Projects shall increase the energy efficiency and usage of recycled materials.
- Projects shall pay attention to efficiency and rational approach to funds and resources, moreover, they shall go beyond cost-optimal levels according to Directive 2010/31/EU.
- In case projects involve purchasing of products, the requirements set out in Annex III of the Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU) shall be respected.

Equality between men and women

This horizontal activity is promoted through the activities in PA3 and PA4. All the projects implemented under PA3 should take into account the gender perspective, and promote it throughout the preparation and implementation phases of the projects. PA4 is focusing on enhancing cross-border cooperation between public authorities and citizens. The project partners seek to achieve long-term institutionalised partnerships, and an increased number of joint sustainable events or high level of social participation in cross-border activities. Women can play an important role in these activities. Their participation in the project implementation and project activities is reflected in the output indicators '*O312 Number of women in joint local employment initiatives*' and '*O416 Number of women participated in cooperation*'.

Programme-specific measures regarding 'Equality between men and women' are the following:

- Projects shall increase access to employment opportunities for women and support flexible working hours.
- Projects shall promote female entrepreneurship and self-employment of women.
- Projects must ensure that minimum 50% of the participants of joint education and training activities and events are women or disadvantaged persons.
- Projects shall support equal pay initiatives at the workplace.

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

PA3 aims at improving the employment conditions of the border area, with a special focus on less developed regions and the most disadvantaged groups. The Programme focuses on the integration of vulnerable groups of people – such as people living in deep poverty, long-term unemployed or the Roma minority – by providing job opportunities for them. PA2 improves the conditions of cross-border mobility through infrastructure development, thus, improving the conditions for commuters. PA4 aims at strengthening cross-border institutional cooperation in the field of social and public services, education and training, therefore, providing equal opportunities for different disadvantaged groups. The output indicators 'O313 Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including the Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings' and 'O417 Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including the Roma' intends to measure the projects' achievements in this field.

Programme-specific measures regarding the 'Equal opportunities and non-discrimination' are as follows:

- Projects shall apply transparency and application of non-discrimination principles.
- Projects shall encourage the accessibility of people with disabilities to newly developed services.
- Projects shall prioritise the Roma minority regarding social inclusion and employment projects.
- Projects shall provide support for people, especially for those living in deep poverty.

2.3.5.2 Programme-specific horizontal principles in project implementation

In the followings, the applied methodology will underline how the principles have been reflected, and what types of measures have been identified to better address the horizontal principles at project level. All the project descriptions and project activities available in the INTERREG+ system have been analysed from the point of view of the application of the designated horizontal principles. Furthermore, to assess the implementation, the output indicators – in line with the relevant principles – were also taken into account.

The following table summarises the principles and the way in which they should have been integrated in the supported projects based on the Calls for Proposals.

Table 51: Assessment rules of horizontal principles in Programme implementation

ID number of the call	Assessment criteria
SKHU/1601 SKHU/1701 SKHU1702 SKHU/1801	The project contributes to horizontal principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sustainable development • equality between men and women • equal opportunities and non-discrimination The project contributes to specific horizontal measures defined for each PA.
SKHU/1703 SKHU/1802	TAPE (Territorial Action Plan for Employment)/PA3 PA3 aims at improving the employment conditions of the border area with a focus on less developed regions and marginalized groups of people. The following disadvantaged groups have to be targeted in the related actions directly or indirectly: people living in deep poverty, the Roma minority, long-term unemployed, tertiary educated and unemployed people.

ID number of the call	Assessment criteria
SKHU/ETA/1801 SKHU/WETA/1801	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If project objectives are not in line with the horizontal principles, it is an exclusion criterion. • Obligatory requirements relating to HPs: investments negatively affecting nature have to be accompanied by compensatory measures or damage mitigation; in case of construction or renovation works, climate friendly solutions have to be used, Directive 2010/31/EU has to be respected.

Sustainable development

The approaches mentioned by the beneficiaries in relation to sustainable development fall into the following categories: energy efficiency and using **renewable energy resources, enhancing cross-border green transport and reducing CO₂ emissions**, and a smaller proportion of projects focused on the **dissemination of knowledge/raising awareness about environmental issues**.

In the case of those projects that involved the purchase of equipment or products, the partners approached the issue in terms of cost-effectiveness, economic feasibility, and energy-efficiency, respecting the requirements set in Annex III of the Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU). The most popular way of issuing **energy efficiency and renewable energy** sources in the projects, including the reconstruction of buildings, were tackled by using renewable fuel, such as heat pump, natural gas or wood; building/window insulation (BUILCOGREEN, HEALTH4ALL), and the application of LED lights both in buildings as well as in public lighting systems (VIRTOUR).

Some of the projects approached the issue of sustainability from the perspective of **enhancing cross-border green transport and reducing CO₂ emissions**. The aim of these projects was to enhance eco-mobility by purchasing eco-friendly means of transportation: e-bikes, traditional bikes, e-bus that can be used by commuters, locals or tourists crossing the border. All of these activities are contributing to the promotion of sustainable tourism as well.

Awareness raising activities were approached, among others, by organising training for schools, but a cross-border „green“ festival was also organised.

The **small projects** also contributed to sustainable development goals by supporting nature protection, joint environmental and education programmes and the protection of natural heritage sites in particular.

Considering output indicators, 'CO23 Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status' has already managed to reach the target (122% of the original target value of 2015) with 123 058.82 hectares by the cut-off date. Considering small projects, no underperformance can be detected either, however, there are great differences, as 'O11 Green ways' has no surplus, 'CO23 Supported area of habitats' has exceeded the target by 1%, while 'CO23 Supported area of habitats' performed with the greatest positive difference (+88%).

Equality between men and women

When approaching the horizontal principle 'Equality between men and women', the inputs provided are rather general, repeating the measures set in the Application Manual regarding gender equality. These are as follows: increasing the employment opportunity for women by promoting flexible working hours at workplaces; at least 50% of participants on joint project events and training activities shall be women; supporting equal pay initiatives or atypical employment forms. A frequent answer by the respondents

was to set up the project management by female employees or to ensure flexible working hours to achieve a healthy work-life balance. There were 2 projects, *EYES* and *CORD*, targeting the promotion of female entrepreneurship, where project partners have significant experience on this field. More indirectly, some small projects also supported equality, mostly in connection with education and joint thematic events for youth and marginalised groups.

Considering the output indicators, '*O312 Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings*' has by far exceeded the originally set target value of 2015 (by almost 6.7 times) with 333 persons by the cut-off date. The value was not modified during the course of the implementation; thus, such values could be set to a higher and more ambitious level in the next programming period. Regarding '*O416 Number of women participated in cooperation*', the difference between the original target value and the status of the value at the cut-off date (938%) is extremely high with 37 516 persons. Considering the small projects, the degree of overperformance is also outstanding in the case of O416 (+3095%).

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

Disability was aspect mentioned the most often by the beneficiaries in terms of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. Most of the buildings and venues reconstructed in the framework of the projects are barrier-free and accessible for people with physical disability (e.g. *MONUMENTS, FORESTERS AND BEES*).

The second most popular aspect was **social inclusion**, promoting the prioritisation of the Roma minority and people living in deep poverty regarding employment initiatives. This aspect was emphasised in the projects implemented in target areas with relevant representation of the Roma minority (e.g. *REWO*). *HEALTH4ALL* project mentions concrete measures taken, such as conducting regular health screenings of socially disadvantaged in their homes, providing conflict solving training, and giving job seeking advice. Further disadvantaged groups were also addressed for instance by *TaMPeD* (talent management for gifted students), and *Nat-Net Dunaj2* (workshops for people with Down syndrome and ASD disorder). Some of the projects focusing on web or application development approached the issue from the perspective of reduced physical ability, for example the accessibility of services for visually impaired.

Small projects also contributed to this principle by organising joint events for marginalised groups, promoting talent development and educational programmes in particular.

Considering the output indicators, in the case of '*O313 Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including the Roma, in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings*' the value at the cut-off date is 48 persons, which is almost two times higher (192%) than the original target value. Considering '*O417 Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including the Roma*', the original target was exceeded multiple times (2168%) by 6505 persons as of the cut-off date. Considering the small projects, O417 far exceeded the target (by 3234%).

Obviously, it is still difficult for the beneficiaries to fill these sections with relevant content. In most of the cases, they still perceive it as an artificially included element of the project. It was also emphasised by the JS that clear questions have to be attached to horizontal goals which the applicants can answer. The interpretation of EU directives is difficult on project level. The analysis conducted clearly shows that there is a difference in preference for the horizontal principles. The most popular one is the sustainable

development, where the applicants may identify the goals of their projects and their indicators on the most adequate level, while the rest receives medium support/relevance in their current forms.

2.3.6 Influence of further funds

The identified impacts should not be exclusively attributed to the CP, as other “external” programmes also contributed to the goals designed by SKHU. Therefore, in the upcoming part other Interreg and national operational programmes are analysed, which had an influence on the impacts realised in the field of the given PAs. The different (mainstream, other Interreg) programmes were analysed from the point of view of their role in fulfilling the regional needs. The value of the support was measured through scoring per PA. In addition, to give a more comprehensive picture, an online questionnaire addressing the applicants and the beneficiaries was created with questions in relation to the programmes that influenced the implementation of the SKHU.

The national operational programmes (OP) which were taken into account are as follows: Human Resource Development OP (EFOP), Economic Development and Innovation OP (GINOP), Integrated Transport Development OP (IKOP), Environmental and Energy Efficiency Operational Programme (KEHOP), Spatial and Urban Development OP (TOP), Competitive Central Hungary OP (VEKOP), Rural Development Programme (VP), Public Administration and Public Service Development OP (KÖFOP) from Hungary, and Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP), Operational Programme Quality of Environment (OP QE), Rural Development Programme (OP RDP), Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (OP II) from Slovakia. In 2019 Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (OP II) was merged with the Operational Programme Research and Innovation (OP RI). INTERREG Cross-border Cooperation (CBC) Programmes taken into consideration included Romania-Hungary CBC Programme (RO-HU), Austria-Hungary CBC Programme (AT-HU), Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine CBC Programme (HUSKROUA), Slovakia-Austria CBC Programme (SK-AT), Slovakia-Czech Republic CBC programme (SK-CZ).

The programmes were assessed along their thematic connection and intensity of support. The first aspect refers to the way how the programme in question is in line with the actions of the PA, thematically; while the latter aspect assesses the strength or intensity of support from the point of view of territorial and financial contributions. The lowest values were given when thematically weak connection between the programmes were detected (e.g. only a single action was affected by the programme), and the intensity of the support by those programmes were weak (e.g. only a little part of the programme area was supported; the actions remained way too local in terms of impacts; or only limited sources were allocated). High values were given when the opposite was true; i.e. there was a strong thematic connection (e.g. numerous similarities could be found), and the intensity of support was high (e.g. actions were having regional or even transboundary impacts, or the relevant common actions enjoyed great support).

Table 52: Factors to define the value of impact on the PA

	Weak intensity of support (1)	Medium intensity of support (2)	High intensity of support (3)
Weak thematic connection (1)	1	2	3
Medium strong thematic connection (2)	2	4	6
Strong thematic connection (3)	3	6	9

Table 53: Short explanation of the overall value considering the impact on the PA

1	Hardly any impact
2	Little impact
3	Medium level impact
4	Medium level impact
6	Great impact
9	Extra great impact

Based on the methodology expressed above, the influence analysis of the relevant programmes is summarised in the following table (*Table 54*). The table containing the detailed analysis of the connections is found in the annex (*3.5 Additional tables to the "Influence of further funds" chapter*), where the following aspects are explained:

1. the impact of the given programme on the related priority axis (PA) by giving an exact value for measuring the impact level;
2. the textual explanation of thematic synergies and similar actions of the analysed programme with the related PA actions;
3. the explanation or the comment section, where the reasons of the overall value given to the programme is further explained highlighting the factors which increased or decreased the overall value.

Table 54: Influence of other programmes

Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Impact on PA2	Impact on PA3	Impact on PA4
Interreg programmes	Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme (AT-HU)	3	3	2	1
	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI Cross-border Cooperation Programme (HUSKROUA)	2	2	1	1
	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme (RO-HU)	2	2	2	1
	Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria Programme (SK-AT)	4	2	3	3

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Impact on PA2	Impact on PA3	Impact on PA4
	Interreg V-A Programme Slovak Republic and Czech Republic (SK-CZ)	3	2	2	2
Hungarian operative programme	Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EFOP)			4	
	Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (GINOP)	9		6	
	Integrated Transport Operational Programme (IKOP)		4		
	Environmental and Energy Efficiency Operational Programme (KEHOP)	3			
	Public Administration and Civil Service Development Operational Programme (KÖFOP)				2
	Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme (TOP)	9	3	4	
	Competitive Central-Hungary Operational Programme (VEKOP)	4	2	3	1
	Rural Development Programme (VP)	4		2	1
Slovak operative programmes	Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP)	4	4	6	
	Operational Programme Human Resources (OPHR)			6	
	Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (OPII)		6	3	1
	Operational Programme Quality of Environment (OP QE)	4			
	Rural Development Programme (RDP)	3		3	

With regard to **Interreg programmes**, the influence of the CBC Programmes SK-AT and SK-CZ in PA1 and AT-HU in PA1 and PA2 are relatively significant. These CBC Programmes aimed at conserving, protecting and promoting cultural and natural heritage sites, while strengthening the attractiveness of the cross-border area. The programmes show common approaches in developing shared policy framework and cooperation in coordinated management of areas of natural significance. Several actions focused on the protection and restoration of biological diversity especially within the Natura 2000 network. Attention is dedicated to the development of cross-border portfolio of tourism products. The weakest connection is detected with HUSKROUA and RO-HU.

With regard to the **Hungarian programmes** (programmes supporting Hungarian regions from the programme area exclusively) extra great impact on PA1 topics can be detected in relation to GINOP and TOP. Special attention was paid on tourism-related activities, leisure and ecotourism in particular.

Support for regional tourism product packages and thematic routes, development of attractions based on cultural and natural heritage, turning them into products and attractions, organising them into a regional network are the main intervention areas. Furthermore, the development of tourism and nature protection in relation to Natura 2000 and other nature protection and heritage sites are also represented in these programmes.

Lower but still great level of synergy can be found between GINOP and PA3. GINOP contributed to the increase of employability and thus employment growth. There was a focus on the (long-term) unemployed, the marginalised people and skills development. Furthermore, strong support can be detected in relation to the establishment of business services promoting employment and the creation of their infrastructural conditions. Support for new SMEs as well as for the growth of already existing ones are among the main fields of intervention. Synergies between PA3 and TOP and EFOP can be detected with regard to improving the accessibility of workplaces and promoting the mobility of employees, improving employability and support for employment cooperation. Special attention is paid on disadvantaged people. Much weaker synergies can be shown regarding VEKOP, KÖFOP and KEHOP with regard to the topics of PA4 in particular, to which all related programmes have little or very little impact. Development of cross-border services and people-to-people, institutional cooperation is much less stressed in the programmes compared to SKHU. The synergies are relatively weak with regard to PA2 since in the related programmes cross-border crossings and logistics are less pronounced than in SKHU.

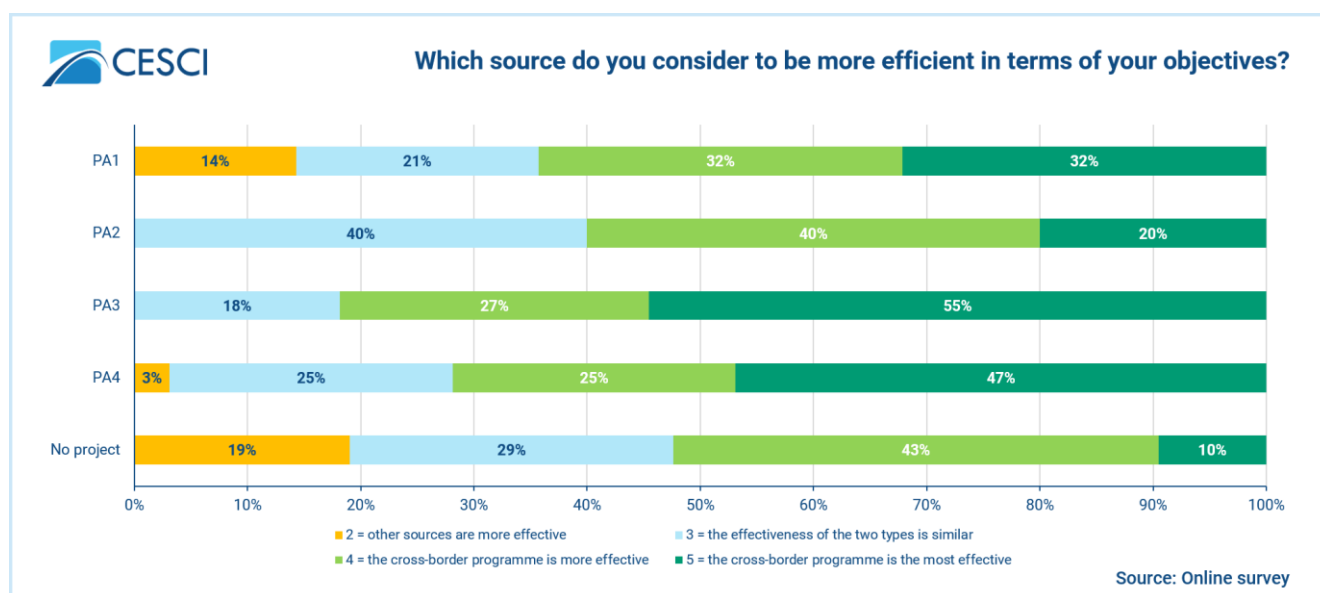
With regard to the **Slovak programmes**, significant synergy between PA2 and IROP, OP II can be detected in terms of the development of bicycle roads and enhancing of regional mobility through connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure. The programmes on national level supported the investment into the improvement of sustainable transport systems and the improvement of accessibility between the regions. Development of public passenger transport systems and building intelligent transport systems were prioritised. The most affected areas of intervention cover the modernisation and development of transport infrastructure and promotion of sustainable local/regional transport systems which guarantee the accessibility of urban functions. High level of synergy with PA3 is shown in the case of OPHR and IROP. Both national programmes are targeting the improvement of employment level, development of human capital and the contribution to job creation. Special emphasis is put on vulnerable segments of society, namely the integration of Roma people and long-term unemployed to the labour market. OP QE and RDP show moderate synergy with the SKHU programme, affecting mostly the SKHU programme area with an emphasis on environmental protection and development of cycling routes. Thematic areas with high significance are the conservation, protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage sites, protection and restoration of biodiversity or increasing of the accessibility of cultural and natural heritage sites.

With lower impact, the development of new business models in the SME sector contributing to competitiveness of the sector and internationalisation of business activities can also be mentioned. Weak synergies of SKHU and RDP are found, which mainly supported the investment in the recreational infrastructure, small-scale tourism infrastructure for public use in a limited territory. Certain priority axes of OP II also show weak synergy with the SKHU programme, e.g. *Information society – strengthening the ICT in state administration, education, culture and healthcare*. Weak synergies can be detected with regard to PA4, that most of the programmes have very little impact on. Development of cross-border services, institutional cooperation or knowledge transfer/exchange activities are not stressed in these

programmes. The synergies are relatively weak or indirect impact can be detected in the field of research and development, and innovation. PA 9 of OPII is aimed at supporting the participation of Slovak entities in ERA projects and initiatives (Horizon 2020, specific European activities e.g. European technology platforms, Eureak, COST, Eurostars 2).

To obtain a more comprehensive picture, an **online questionnaire** was created including a question on factors, programmes and processes that influenced the implementation of the SKHU project. According to the results of the survey in all cases the majority of applicants including those with no selected projects think that the cross-border programme is more effective or it is the most effective in reaching the goals of the given applicants (respondents). It has to be underlined that in the case of PA2 the share of category 5 is low, where larger infrastructural and transport/logistics developments had been envisaged. The share of those who assume other sources are more effective is relatively high in the case of those who had no project, and in relation to PA1 (especially regarding tourism and culture-related topics).

Figure 105: Which source do you consider to be more efficient in terms of your objectives?



2.4 Efficiency

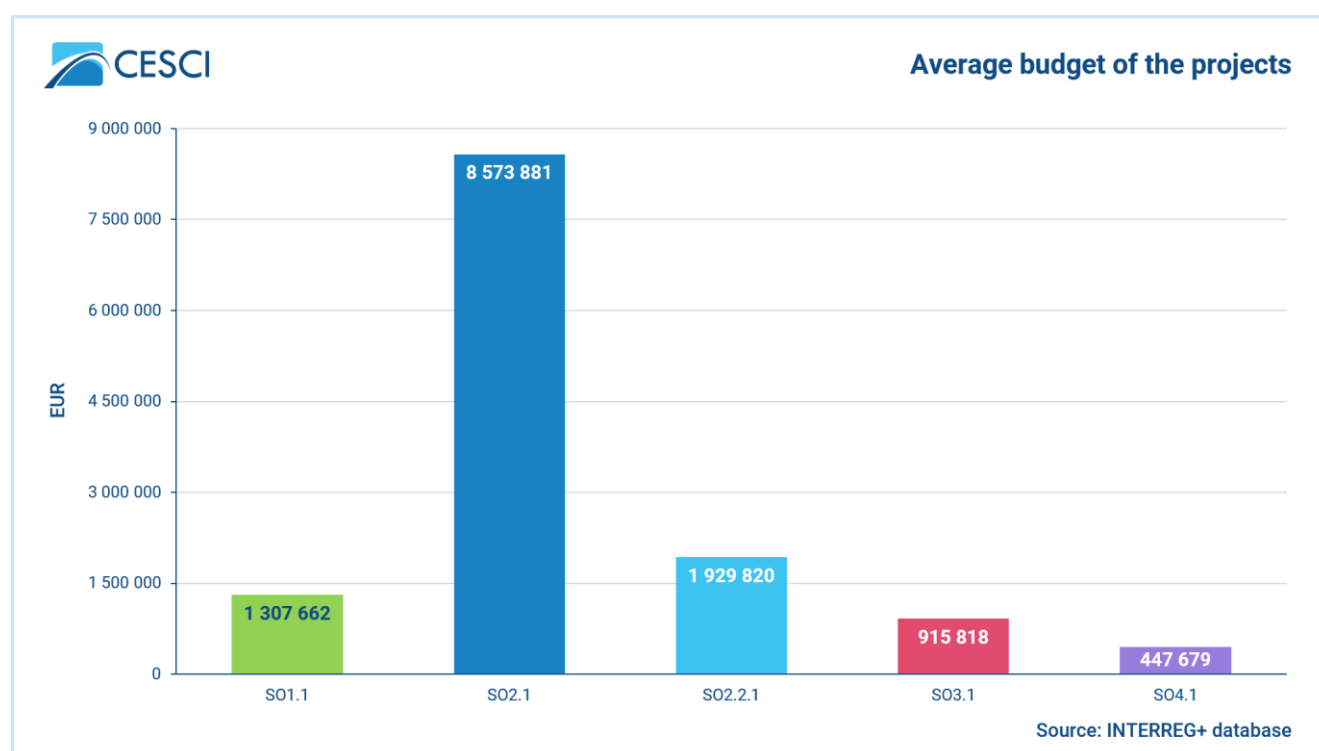
Efficiency analysis shows how successfully the resources of the Programme have been used when effectively achieving the Programme's objectives and generating wider impact on the programme area.

This chapter analyses the cost-efficiency of the projects, as well as the programme management.

2.4.1 Cost-efficiency of the projects

This chapter aims to give an overview on the cost-efficiency related to the objectives and target values of the selected indicators by analysing the projects' budget and the specific features of budget allocation. The evaluators have analysed the average project budget by SO¹²⁴ in order to indicate the differences even within PA2 which covers more than one SO.

Figure 106: Average budget of the projects



The most outstanding values are linked to PA2-related SOs. As the number of projects is not more than 5, the average budget is around EUR 8.6 million under *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border* and EUR 1.9 million under *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-*

¹²⁴ SO1.1 To increase the attractiveness of the border area

SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border

SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services

SO3.1 Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region

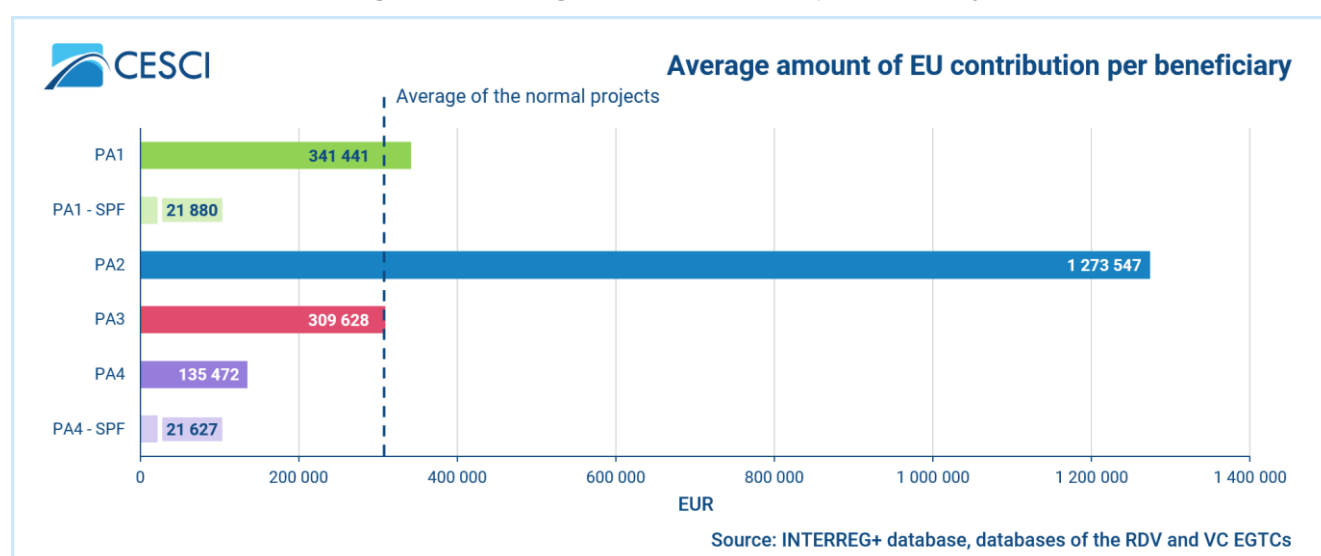
SO4.1 Improving the level of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation and broadening cross-border cooperation between citizens

border public transport services. In the case of the other 3 SOs under PA1, PA3 and PA4, the average budget is between EUR 447 000 and EUR 1.3 million, where the number of projects is significantly higher (47-59 projects) than under PA2.

The average size of contribution per beneficiary is high in PA2 as in this case a low number of competent beneficiaries carried out relatively cost intensive larger developments such as new border crossings and transport links (e.g. the bridge between Dobrohošť and Dunakiliti with planned ERDF of EUR 8 864 729.23, or the ferry between Neszmély and Radvaň nad Dunajom with EUR 5 007 276.55).

PA4 distinctly differs from other PAs in the average EU contribution per beneficiary. SKHU/1601 (EUR 79 596.77) and SKHU/1902 (EUR 87 211.07) calls supported projects with relatively low average budget. Without the SKHU/1701 SPF umbrella call (EUR 1 168 567.22) the value would be even lower. Both PA1 and PA4 SPF projects represent small contribution per beneficiary, significantly lower than their respective "normal" counterparts from the same PA.

Figure 107: Average size of contribution per beneficiary



Cost-efficiency related to the targeted and achieved indicator values have been assessed based on the aggregated amount of total project costs. *Table 55* indicates what have already been and what can still be achieved by the end of the programming period in terms of the project output indicators. The evaluators aggregated the achieved value of the output indicators, and the total validated budget related to them. Then the cost of the achievement of one measurement unit of the indicators were calculated. In order to handle the discrepancy caused by ongoing projects with no or incomplete achievements, the specific target value of indicator was introduced. In the case of projects with no final report, the planned project budget and the target value were taken into account. Regarding the projects with final report, the validated amounts and achieved indicator values were used.

In case of *O413 Cross-border events* the specific achieved value means that EUR 10 139 were provided for one cross-border event until the cut-off date, which might change EUR 13 173.26 by the end of the programming period, since there are still many on-going projects where the fulfilment of the indicators is in progress.

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Table 55: Achieved and target values of output indicators

Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated base value	Aggregated target value	Aggregated achieved value	Expected total cost (EUR)	Total validated cost (EUR)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support (PA1)	enterprises	0	47	25	6 663 554.66	2 833 230.91	141 777.76	113 329.24
CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support (PA3)	enterprises	0	169	48	16 906 959.70	8 780 442.95	100 041.18	182 925.89
CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants (PA1)	enterprises	0	38	16	6 663 554.66	2 833 230.91	175 356.70	177 076.93
CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants (PA3)	enterprises	0	28	10	9 716 933.26	3 966 125.02	347 033.33	396 612.50
CO08 Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	FTE	0	92	46	18 210 429.39	9 485 952.38	197 939.45	206 216.36
CO09 Sustainable tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	103 887	1 466 889	1 250 821	76 454 239.88	48 403 600.93	52.12	38.7
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA1)	km	0	5.4	3.1	3 910 272.22	3 410 924.12	724 795.59	1 102 075.64
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA2)	km	0	3.2	0	17 188 841.22	3 159 287.81	5 371 512.88	0
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA3)	km	0	7.24	1.93	15 052 093.92	2 210 848.56	2 079 018.50	1 148 492.76
CO23 Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	hectares	0	128 681.59	123 058.82	8 392 612.825	7 961 991.625	65.22	64.7

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Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated base value	Aggregated target value	Aggregated achieved value	Expected total cost (EUR)	Total validated cost (EUR)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
CO39 Urban development specific indicators: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	square meters	0	23 157.79	10 132.59	17 942 562.67	8 378 785.38	774.80	826.91
CO44 Labour market and training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	persons	0	1 618	800	1 871 835.85	1 347 150.24	1 156.88	1 683.94
O11 Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	km	0	817.17	747.28	12 723 772.05	6 403 038.564	15 570.61	8 568.52
O221 Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	piece	0	10	8	9 688 756.03	6 670 979.69	968 875.60	833 872.46
O311 Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	number	0	9	9	43 433 656.29	15 524 351.36	4 825 961.81	1 724 927.93
O312 Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	persons	0	886	333	868 698.02	560 048.83	980.47	1 681.83
O313 Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	persons	0	62	48	889 490.42	688 193.24	14 346.62	14 337.36
O314 Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	number	0	36	5	9 340 521.24	3 053 943.01	259 458.92	610 788.60
O411 Number of cross-border products and services developed	number	0	154.5	228.5	14 007 697.72	10 528 112.22	90 664.71	46 074.89

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Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated base value	Aggregated target value	Aggregated achieved value	Expected total cost (EUR)	Total validated cost (EUR)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
O412 Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	number	0	183	171.5	3 651 140	2 883 897.62	19 951.58	16 815.73
O413 Number of cross-border events	number	0	1 105	899	14 556 454.73	9 115 565.78	13 173.26	10 139.67
O414 Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	number	0	200	804	4 223 849.83	2 170 944.11	21 119.25	2 700.18
O415 Number of people participated in cooperation	number	20	61 264	71 147	21 694 058.64	13 684 789.56	354.11	192.35
O416 Number of women participated in cooperation	number	0	26 706	37 516	18 223 634.46	12 505 482.42	682.38	333.34
O417 Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	number	0	4 582	6 505	6 416 587.44	4 551 196.96	1 400.39	699.65

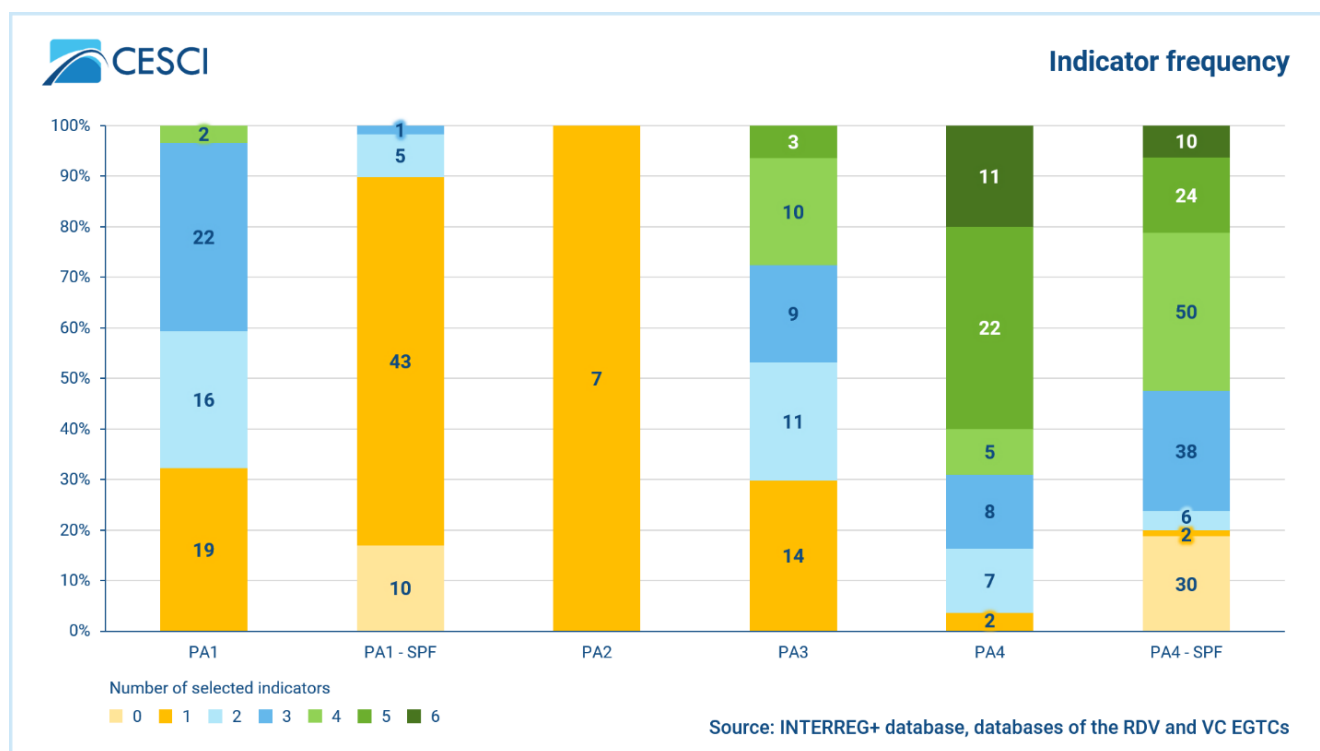
Since one project can target more than one output indicator in parallel, the calculation of the budget per indicator is problematic. During the evaluation three categories have been defined:

1. The first category refers to those projects, where the **disaggregation is unnecessary or not feasible**. For example, under PA2 or CO13 *Newly built roads* under PA3 every project contributes to but one indicator. Furthermore, this category also includes those projects, where the evaluators were not able to divide the budget between the indicators. In these cases, the total budget was calculated for both indicators. For instance, the correlation between the indicators of the SME call (CO01 *Enterprises receiving support*, CO02 *Enterprises receiving grants*.) is really strong, consequently, the division was omitted. In the cases of CO09 *Expected visits to supported sites* and CO08 *Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises* the division seemed to be unreasonable, since these indicators are explicitly measuring the relevant specific objectives.
2. In other cases, the disaggregation was feasible: the project **activities** clearly **identified the budget** spent for the indicators. This approach was used under the PA1-related CO23 *Supported area of habitats* and O11 *Green ways*.
3. The **budget can be broken down by partners** if the partner's field of activity is clearly defined. The second normal call (SKHU/1902) with involved SMEs and the TAPE projects provide good examples for this category.

As the SPF umbrella projects and the small projects granted by them also selected indicators, the evaluators took into consideration these data as well. However only those small projects' budgets were included into the calculation which possess contracted and marked indicators (40 small projects did not select any output indicators). Due to the latest update of the two EGTC's databases (which are in charge of the management of the small projects) made in May 2022 these data lag behind from other databases. The SPF umbrella projects and small projects are also affected by the problem of multiple indicators within one project, but these obstacles cannot be handled by the method introduced above. Due to the lack of data, the small projects' budgets have not been divided between the indicators. This obviously generated distortions in the results.

Regarding the frequency of indicators, the PA4 projects cover the most indicators (in average, more than 4 per each), while the PA1 and PA3 related projects target averagely 2 indicators. The only exception is provided by the PA2 projects, where every project selected only one indicator. The highest number of indicators which has been chosen by a project is 6 (11 projects under PA4), but the number of projects with 5 indicators is also remarkable (22 projects under PA4; 3 projects under PA3). Considering the SPF, under PA4 the number of small projects with 4 or more indicators is significant (50 small projects with 4 indicators; 24 small projects with 5 indicators; 10 small projects with 6 indicators), although under PA1 there is no small project with more than 3 indicators.

Figure 108: Indicator frequency

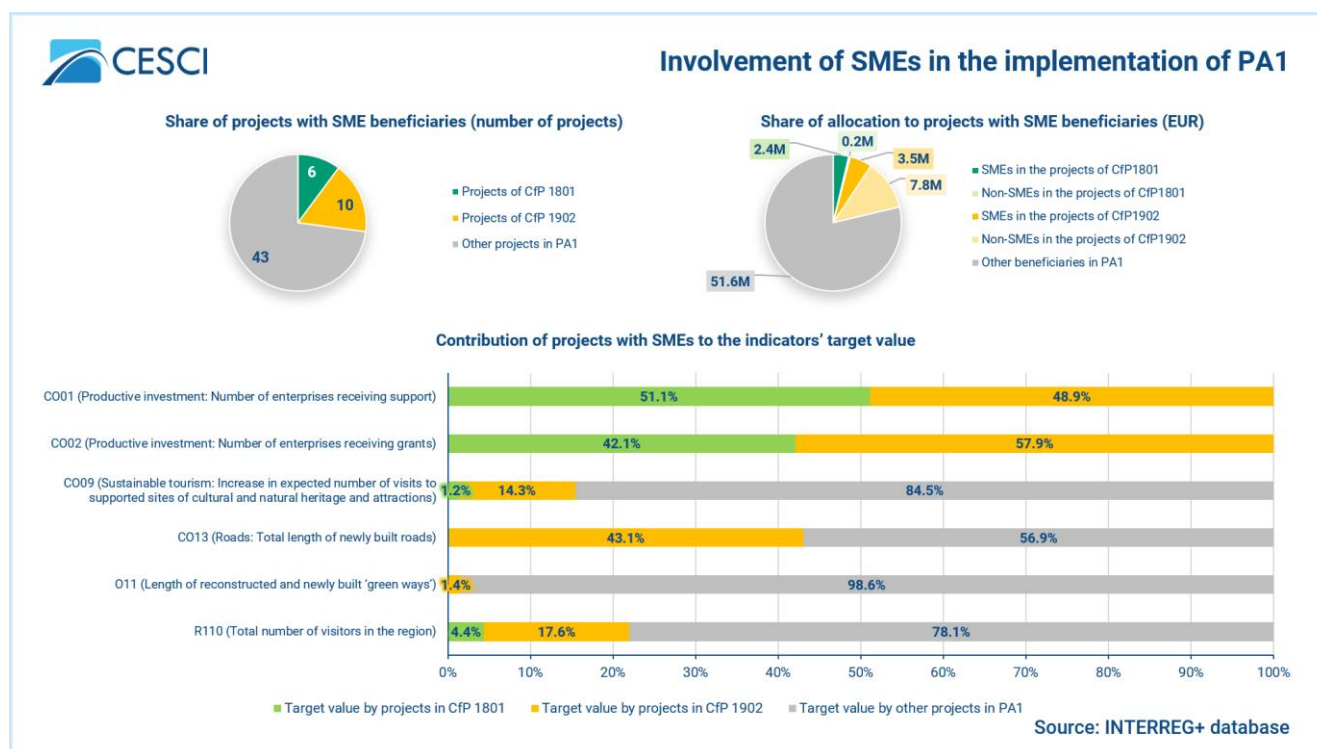


It is worth observing the calculated specific values of the indicators, in comparison with other border areas' CBC programmes. The 2nd Phase Evaluation of the INTERREG-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Hungary-Serbia has already used this methodology, therefore the comparison is feasible. For example, the 'Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status' indicator appeared in both CBC Programmes and resulted nearly the same specific target value (SKHU: 65.22 EUR/hectares; HUSRB: 76.56 EUR/hectares). The 'Total length of newly built roads' gives another good base for comparison, where the Hungarian-Serbian CBC programme's value (1 023 194.31 EUR/km) mostly lags behind the Slovakia-Hungarian counterpart (PA1¹²⁵: 724 795.59 EUR/km; PA2: 5 371 512.88 EUR/km; PA3: 2 079 018.50 EUR/km).

The projects of the SME Call (SKHU/1801) poorly contributed to the relevant indicators' target value (except for the CO01 Enterprises receiving support and CO02 Enterprises receiving grants, which are rather technical indicators than thematic ones) compared to their relative budget frame. For instance, in the case of CO09 Expected visits to supported sites, the projects of the SME calls have achieved 1.2% of the indicator value, but 5% of the PA1 budget were allocated to them. The projects of the SKHU/1902 call involving SMEs into the partnerships performed better in this term.

¹²⁵ The specific achieved value of indicator is 1 102 075.64 EUR/km.

Figure 109: Involvement of SMEs into the implementation of PA1



Based on the contracted values, the SPF umbrella projects tend to undertake modest contribution to the indicator values compared to the share of the ERDF funding allocated to them. Within PA1 the share of EU contribution is 4.61%, while indicator targets do not reach 1% in case of *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites* and *O11 Green ways*. For *CO023 Supported area of habitats* the picture is more balanced. In the case of PA4, the ERDF allocation is more than 40%, while the planned contribution to the indicator target values range between 3.5-15.5%. Only the *O414 Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF* represents an exception.

Table 56: Contribution of the SPF to the indicators' target value

	(A) Total value for the PA	Umbrella projects		Small projects		
		(B) Total value	(B/A) Ratio	(C) Total value	(C/A) Ratio	
PA1	Contracted ERDF allocation (EUR)	67 605 305	467 426.39	4,6%	3 172 741.73	4.7%
	CO09 (visits/year)	814 422	4 000	0.5%	110 611	13.6%
	CO23 (hectares)	128 677.41	5 630	4.4%	3 004.4	2.3%
	O11 (km)	816.95	5	0.6%	8	1%
PA4	Contracted ERDF allocation (EUR)	22 488 285	1 402 279.763	41.57%	8 218 992.06	36.55%
	O411 (number)	156	8	5.1%	148	94.9%
	O413 (number)	1 041	170	16.3%	411	39.5%
	O414 (number)	200	200	100%	2196	1098%

		(A) Total value for the PA	Umbrella projects		Small projects	
			(B) Total value	(B/A) Ratio	(C) Total value	(C/A) Ratio
	O415 (number)	58 550	4 000	6.8%	46 211	78.9%
	O416 (number)	19 694	1 700	8.6%	26 266	133.9%
	O417 (number)	3 285	120	3.7%	1 760	53.6%

During the implementation of the SPF, small project applicants were invited to plan the indicator targets for their projects. Evaluators aggregated these undertakings, as well as those of the management part of the umbrella projects. It is important to note that the database of the Via Carpatia EGTC does not contain the data on the small projects selected in the SKHU/ETA/2001 and SKHU/ETA/2201 calls for proposals. In order to make the comparison, the contracted ERDF allocation to the concerned projects were also summed up. From this point of view, the cost-efficiency of the SPF is more advanced, because the indicator target values of the small projects significantly exceed the expectations of the umbrella projects. Within PA4, the share of planned contribution to the indicator targets is higher than that of the ERDF contribution in each case. For PA1, the same is valid for *CO09 Expected visits to supported sites*, but in the other cases the share of contribution to the indicator values is lower than the ERDF contribution. In general, it is worth mentioning that in the light of the SPF objectives, the PA1 indicators were less relevant than those of PA4.

Cost-efficiency of the territorial action plan projects can be assessed along three aspects:

- the contribution of the projects to the CP targets,
- the fulfilment rate of the indicators undertaken by the beneficiaries, and
- benchmarking the efficiency of the indicators which were commonly targeted with other PAs.

In average, the 47 TAPE projects overperformed the indicator values set in the CP by 553.05% which means that the TAPes are expected to generate more than five times higher results by the end of the programming period than it had been expected during the programme design.

The picture is less favourable when considering the indicator values already achieved by the beneficiaries: nearly half (56.35%) of them have been met by the projects until the cut-off date. The only indicator which has been fulfilled thoroughly is the number (9) of territorial action plans.

Regardless of the above shortages, the cost-efficiency of PA3 is remarkably better than as the CP envisaged it. This tendency will be even favourable after the closure of the relevant projects (see specific target values of the indicator at project level in *Table 57*). For instance, in the case of the indicator *CO01 Number of enterprises receiving support*, the value foreseen by the CP was 10. In reality, altogether 48 enterprises were awarded by the programme, consequently, the total expected cost (EUR 16 906 959.70) is shared among 48 beneficiaries resulting in an average cost of EUR 100 041.18 – instead of EUR 1 690 695.97 forecasted by the CP which means nearly 17 times better cost-efficiency level. Altogether two indicators have manifested weaker efficiency compared to the programme design expectations: *CO13 Total length of newly built roads* (152%), and *O311 Number of (integrated territorial) action plans* (111%). On the contrary, by the accomplishment of the TAPE projects, 80% of the output indicators will produce remarkable level of cost-efficiency compared to the CP.

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Table 57: Contribution of PA3 to the indicators target value

Indicator name	A - Indicative value designed by the CP (sum)	B – Projects' aggregated target value (sum)	C – Projects' aggregated achieved value (sum)	Contribution rate to pre-defined project indicators (C/B)	Contribution rate to programme indicators (B/A)	Total expected cost (EUR)	Specific value of the indicator at CP level (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of the indicator at project level (EUR/indicator unit)
CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	10	169	48	28.40%	1690.00%	16 906 959.70	1 690 695.97	100 041.18
CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	10	28	10	35.71%	280.00%	9 716 933.26	971 693.33	347 033.33
CO08 Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	20	92	46	50.00%	460.00%	18 210 429.39	910 521.47	197 939.45
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads	11	7.24	1.93	26.66%	65.82%%	15 052 093.92	1 368 372.17	2 079 018.50
CO39 Urban development specific indicators: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	3 000	23 157.79	10 132.59	43.75%	771.93%	17 942 562.67	5 980.85	774.80
CO44 Labour market and training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	100	1 618	800	49.44%	1 618.00%	1 871 835.85	18 718.36	1 156.88
O311 Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	10	9	9	100%	90%	43 433 656.29	4 343 365.63	4 825 961.81

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Indicator name	A - Indicative value designed by the CP (sum)	B – Projects' aggregated target value (sum)	C – Projects' aggregated achieved value (sum)	Contribution rate to pre-defined project indicators (C/B)	Contribution rate to programme indicators (B/A)	Total expected cost (EUR)	Specific value of the indicator at CP level (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of the indicator at project level (EUR/indicator unit)
O312 Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	50	886	333	37.58%	1 772.00%	868 698.02	17 373.96	980.47
O313 Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	25	62	48	77.42%	248%	889 490.42	35 579.62	14 346.62
O314 Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	15	36	5	13.89%	240%	9 340 521.24	622 701.42	259 458.92

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Table 58: Benchmark of commonly adapted indicators per PA

Indicator name	A - Indicative value designed by the CP (sum)	B – Projects' target value (sum)	C – Projects' achieved value (sum)	Contribution rate to pre-defined project indicators (C/B)	Contribution rate to programme indicators (B/A)	Total expected cost (EUR)	Specific value of the indicator at CP level (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of the indicator at project level (EUR/indicator unit)
CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support (PA1)	40	47	25	53.19%	117.50%	6 663 554.66	166 588.87	141 777.76
CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support (PA3)	10	169	48	28.40%	1 690.00%	16 906 959.70	1 690 695.97	100 041.18
CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants (PA1)	40	38	16	42.11%	95.00%	6 663 554.66	166 588.87	175 356.70
CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants (PA3)	10	28	10	35.71%	280.00%	9 716 933.26	971 693.33	347 033.33
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA1)	2.8	5.4	3.1	57.41%	192.86%	3 910 272.22	1 396 525.79	724 795.59
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA2)	3.15	3.2	0	0%	101.59%	17 188 841.22	5 456 774.99	5 371 512.88
CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads (PA3)	11	7.24	1.93	26.66%	65.82%	15 052 093.92	1 368 372.17	2 079 018.50

In compliance with the objectives of the priority axis (PA3), the most important output indicator was *CO08 Employment increase in supported enterprises*. The CP was planned in a very conservative way as the increase in jobs was designed with a value of 20 FTE. It would have meant a total amount of EUR 2 035 769.45 spent for the creation of one new job¹²⁶. The directly created 46 new jobs reduced this amount to EUR 885 117.15. However, as evidenced by the interviews, the action plan projects have indirectly generated further 123.5 jobs meaning almost 10 times stronger cost-efficiency as it had been expected during the design of the Programme (EUR 240 208.78 per one job).

There were 3 indicators (CO01, CO02, CO13) which were targeted in parallel by more PAs (PA1, PA2 and PA3) (see [Table 58](#)). Obviously, the comparison of the PA level cost-efficiency is hindered by multiple factors, e.g. the diverse technical and technological conditions of infrastructural projects, the different conditions established by the calls, the sectorial differences between the entrepreneurs, etc. However, these factors do not make irrational the benchmark.

The project beneficiaries involved in the implementation of the SME projects under PA1 designed their budget more cautiously than those participating in the action plans within PA3: both (CO01 and CO02) indicator values defined by the PA1 beneficiaries were achieved by a smaller amount than within the TAPes. The moderate values of the SME projects could be attributed to the conditions of the SME call, where the only-adaptable *de minimis* option determined and limited the financial frames for the enterprises. At the same time, at CP level, the PA3 projects were much more efficient meaning that the specific cost level designed by the programme was several times higher than the realised values. This result is not independent from the failure of the PA1 B-Light scheme which was incorporated in the CP (with 40 enterprises foreseen) but, finally, it was not applied. The SME call replacing the B-Light scheme could not reach the same values, therefore, PA3 performed better than PA1.

Transport infrastructure development was an eligible activity under three PAs which are hardly comparable because every project is still under realisation and their budget was modified several times. According to the contracted amounts, PA3 seems to be the most efficient one but the final value of the subsidies will be much higher.

The JS has paid extra attention to cost-efficiency when reviewing the budgets and reducing the surplus expenses before contracting (this process has generated the differences between the approved and contracted ERDF amounts). In most cases, the main reason for the reduction was cost saving, but there could also be other reasons behind the budget change. (The reduction is not evident, since in some cases the JS decided on budget increase). Altogether 71 projects (42% of the projects) were affected with reduction out of which nearly 50% (33 projects) belonged to PA1. By contrast the greatest average (EUR 36 820) and absolute value (EUR 464 809) of reduction was registered under PA3. Consequently, the greatest average ratio of reduction within the approved ERDF also related to PA3 (34%). [Table 59](#) represents further data about the reduction of expenses.

¹²⁶ The F0001 financial indicator (Total amount of submitted expenditure for validation) of the CP referred to a total amount of EUR 40 715 389 to be spent for PA3.

Table 59: Reduction of expenses before contracting

PA	Number of projects with reduction	Average value of reduction	Lowest value of reduction	Highest value of reduction	Average ratio of reduction (compared to approved ERDF)
PA1	33	11 773.24	0.01	85 459	12.67%
PA3	25	36 820.19	0.04	464 809.18	34.17%
PA4	13	1 641.05	0.01	10 434.6	1.58%

Another measure of providing cost-efficiency initiated by the Programme Bodies is the ceiling or price standards for certain type of cost items (see *Table 60*). These cost limits were defined jointly by the JS and the FLC, who took into account the acquired experiences of project implementation.

Table 60: Price ceilings of visibility elements and external expertise under normal, SME and TAPE CfPs

Cost types of visibility elements and external expertise	Unit	Price standard or ceiling
Opening press conference	pcs/Beneficiary	EUR 300
Website	pcs/project	EUR 2 000
Poster	pcs/implementation scene	EUR 50
Billboard	pcs/investment scene	EUR 400
Permanent explanatory plaques	pcs/implementation scene	EUR 100
Promotional materials	package/Beneficiary	EUR 2 000
Closing ceremony and press conference/public project event	pcs/project	EUR 4 000
External management	partner/year	EUR 30 000
Public procurement	pcs/Beneficiary	1.5%

Under the SPF umbrella CfPs, the visibility elements and expertise costs differ from the aforementioned price standards. The costs of the domain, design and maintenance of website (per project) cannot exceed EUR 500 and the costs of promotional materials are maximised also below the previous (normal projects') value (EUR 1 000). The ceiling cost of public events is determined at the level of EUR 300 per events, while the translation cost (SP lead beneficiary per SP beneficiaries) EUR 500. By contrast, the maximised value of public procurement (1.5%) and poster (EUR 50) are in line with the other CfPs' similar cost types.

According to the JS and the FLC, these price categories effectively contribute to the projects' cost-efficiency. In addition, beneficiaries did not articulate any criticism in this aspect.

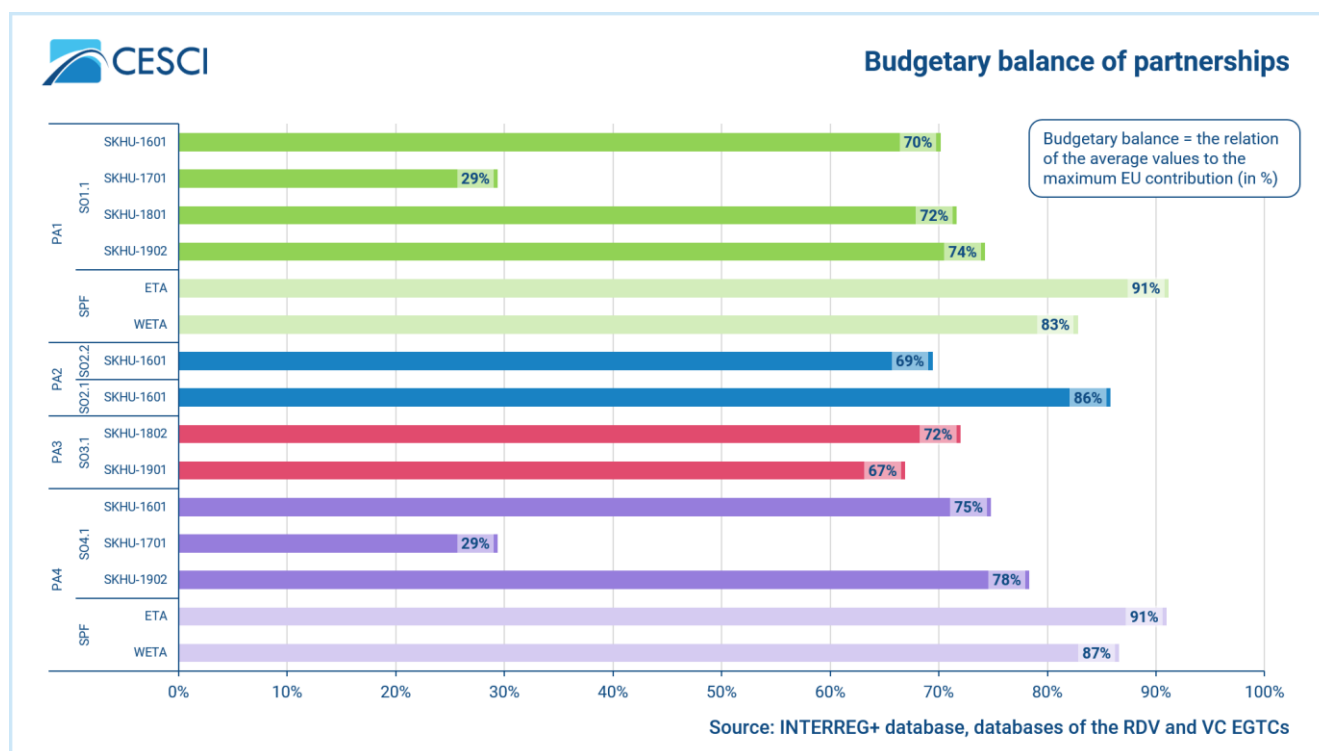
Apart from these price ceilings, the types of eligible expenditures were strictly determined by the Programme Bodies in the SKHU/1902 call. For example, under *Action 1.2 Joint development of natural heritage*, expenditures of small and medium sized enterprises were eligible related to construction works and purchase of equipment only. In addition, within *Action 4.1 Investment in institutional capacity*

(SKHU/1902) minimum 60% of the total project budget needed to be appropriated to construction works and purchase of equipment. From the evaluators point of view, these restrictions tend to not to give enough flexibility for the beneficiaries to spend the awarded fund, which might lead to deprivation of fund from other, reasonable activities, thus hinders cost-efficiency.

Evaluators assessed the project's budget by budget headings and lines, too. The only aspect, where respecting the cost-efficiency principle seem to be questionable is promotion and publicity. In case of some commonly used tools, such as promo movies and traditional media (local TV and radio channels) are not pretend to be efficient enough. Evaluators checked the statistics of the publicly available films, which shows that they were not able to reach the target groups (many of them have some 10 views since their publication). Regarding the traditional media, it is hard to measure the results of the advertisements, but according to the experiences these channels tend to be the less effective ones. According to the SPF survey, advertisements in regional television and radio stations reached only 1 respondent out of the 160. If these tools are not adequate to reach the target groups, they also cannot ensure cost-efficiency.

Budgetary balance between the project partners was ensured the best under PA4 and PA2. PA2 financed especially "mirror-like" projects, with almost identical technical requirements on both sides of the border. During later CfPs the Programme Bodies tried to encourage applicants to build partnerships where the balance is better reached compared to previous ones. Considering SPF, the budgetary balance was successfully maintained, especially regarding the eastern part of the programme area (ETA). Due to the cross-border character of the programme, it is not always the balance which ensures cost-efficiency: instead, the cross-border functions and their geographic patterns should have a decisive role therein. At the same time, the different national financing rules generate imbalances between the beneficiaries' capacities which has a distorting impact upon cost-efficiency: the Slovak partners cannot exercise their territorial advantages and valorise their territorial capital due to their unfavourable financial conditions. *Figure 107* presents the level of the balance in percentage where 100 means equal budget.

Figure 110: Budgetary balance



2.4.2 Cost-efficiency of the programme management (PA5)

In the current programming period, similarly to the previous one, the technical assistance, as the fifth priority axis of the CP was implemented according to a project-based approach. It means that each programme management body submitted a project proposal presenting their operation plan for the seven-year period which were approved by the Monitoring Committee. The details of the TA projects are illustrated by the following table (Table 61).

Table 61: Detailed information about the TA projects

Project ID	Name of the project	Beneficiary	Start date	End date	Total budget (EUR)	EU contribution (85%) (EUR)
SK-HU-TA/01	Establishment and operation of the Joint Secretariat (JS) in Budapest	Széchenyi Programme Office Consulting and Service Nonprofit Limited Liability Company (HU)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	5 274 509.42	4 483 333.00
SK-HU-TA/01_1	Establishment and operation of the Joint Secretariat (JS) in Budapest	Széchenyi Programme Office Consulting and Service Nonprofit Limited Liability Company (HU)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	495 000.00	420 750.00
SK-HU-TA/03_1	Operation of the Certifying Authority (CA) in Budapest	Hungarian State Treasury (HU)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	100 000.00	85 000.00
SK-HU-TA/04	Operation of the National Authority (NA) in Budapest	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (HU)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	150 726.00	128 117.10

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Project ID	Name of the project	Beneficiary	Start date	End date	Total budget (EUR)	EU contribution (85%) (EUR)
SK-HU-TA/05	Establishment and operation of first level control system and other national activities in Hungary (FLC)	Széchenyi Programme Office Consulting and Service Nonprofit Limited Liability Company (HU)	01/01/2015	31/12/2023	1 946 050.00	1 654 142.50
SK-HU-TA/06	Multi-annual framework for Technical Assistance (TA)	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (SK)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	2 302 995.77	1 957 546.40
SK-HU-TA/07	Establishment and operation of the Infopoint in Košice	Košice Self-governing Region (SK)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	93 000.00	79 050.00
SK-HU-TA/08	Establishment and operation of the Infopoint (IP) in Nitra	Nitra Self-governing Region (SK)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	93 000.00	79 050.00
SK-HU-TA/09	Establishment and operation of the Infopoint in Bratislava	Bratislava Self-Governing Region (SK)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	93 000.00	79 050.00
SK-HU-TA/10	Audit tasks of Audit Authority (AA) in Budapest	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds (HU)	01/01/2016	31/12/2023	450 000.00	382 500.00
Total					10 998 281.19	9 348 539.00

In line with the Article 17 of Regulation (EU) no 1299/2013 6% of the total ERDF amount (EUR 9 348 539) was allocated to Technical Assistance which was fully contracted within the framework of the TA projects (100% allocation rate). At the same time the national co-financing rates were different in case of TA beneficiaries: in Hungary, the average rate of national co-financing was 15%, while in Slovakia it was 11.25%.

According to those who concerned, the implementation of the Programme, as well as the TA projects are going smoothly. The absorption rate of the PA was 64.39% by the cut-off date, which seems to be a bit low taking into consideration that the programming period terminates approx. in one year.

Table 62: Absorption rates of TA projects

Project acronym	Contracted TA budget (EUR)	Amount of validated TA costs (EUR)	Absorption rate (%)
SK-HU-TA/01 SKHU JS	5 274 509.42	3 005 116.04	57
SK-HU-TA/01_1 SKHU JS	495 000.00	338 035.00	68
SK-HU-TA/03_1 SKHU CA	100 000.00	76 630.84	77
SK-HU-TA/04 HU NA	150 726.00	20 085.72	13
SK-HU-TA/05 HU FLC	1 946 050.00	1 150 058.92	59
SK-HU-TA/06 SK NA/SK FLC	2 302 995.77	2 097 460.78	91

Project acronym	Contracted TA budget (EUR)	Amount of validated TA costs (EUR)	Absorption rate (%)
SK-HU-TA/07 Info point Košice	93 000.00	47 443.31	51
SK-HU-TA/08 Infopoint Nitra	93 000.00	60 521.41	65
SK-HU-TA/09 Infopoint Bratislava	93 000.00	35 635.74	38
SK-HU-TA/10 SKHU AA	450 000.00	250 889.10	56
Total	10 998 281.19	7 081 876.84	64.39

Spending has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, since many events and meetings (e.g. on-the-spot checks) had to be delayed or to be realised on-line, as well as the contracting of external expertise was also in a delay. In the next programming period, the technical assistance will not follow this project-based approach, instead a flat-rate is defined for financing the operation of the programme management structure. Besides lower administration, it also means that ERDF allocation to the Programme Bodies will be transferred according to the spendings to the projects of the thematic Priority Axes, which led to a financial gap in the first years of the 2021-2027 period. In order to compensate this gap, the TA budget of the current period is partly going to be used for preparing the next CP. The Managing Authority, together with the Joint Secretariat continuously monitor the spendings and reallocations between the TA projects, and the budget lines have been performed according to the principles of economy and sound financial management.

In spite of the delay of the financial progress, the TA output indicators' target values are already outperformed by the cut-off date according to the approved project reports. The JS organised many publicity events, including infodays for the applicants or seminar for the beneficiaries. In addition, training initiatives organised by the JS targeted the Infopoints, the quality assessors, the territorial and sectorial assessors, the FLC staff members, while the staff of the Joint Secretariat participated at INTERACT training occasions. In the case of PA3, the project partners had the opportunity to make proposals regarding the call of the second round via a consultation process and each TAPE consortium was closely coordinated by the JS which needed extra efforts.

Table 63: Performance of TA indicators

ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Target value	Achieved value
O511	Number of employees (FTEs) whose salaries are co-financed by technical assistance	FTE	0	11.5	11.5
O512	Number of publicity events	Number of events	0	10	38
O513	Number of studies and evaluation documents	Finished studies and evaluation documents	0	1	2
O514	Number of training initiatives for the management bodies	Training initiatives	0	7	22

The efficiency of the Programme Bodies' operation can be assessed through the analysis of the costs of the Technical Assistance PA. Similarly to the First Phase Evaluation, two indicators are applied for the

assessment: the **staff cost/budget ratio** quantifies the labour intensity of the programme implementation, while the **administrative cost ratio** indicates the unit cost of 1 projects' administration.

The staff cost/budget ratio was calculated based on the data of the approved TA project reports. The total allocated staff costs for the whole programming period are EUR 7 413 524, which represents 67.4% of the total TA and 4.04% of the total Programme budget. When the validated amounts are taken into consideration, the values are as follows: 75% and 2,93%. However, it is expected that the absorption rate will be close to 100% both at CP and TA levels, hereby the final values are expected to be around the planned ones.

Regarding the previous programming period, the evaluators were not able to calculate the indicator for 2007-2013 due to lack of data. However, comparing the values to those of the INTERREG-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Hungary-Serbia 2014-2020 (63.12% and 6.31% subsequently), they seem not to be strikingly different.

The specific administrative cost ratio was calculated based on both the allocated and validated TA costs for the 2014-2023 period (considering the n+3 rule) and the actual number of supported projects (closed and on-going) according to the INTERREG+ at the cut-off date including those of the TA. The indicator values were compared to that of the 2007-2013 programming period.

Table 64: Specific administrative cost ratio in the current and previous programmes

	2007-2016 (n+3)	Expected values for the 2014-2023 period (n+3)	Actual values
TA budget (EUR)	10 394 443.43	10 998 281.19	7 081 876.84
Number of closed and on-going projects	321	168 + 10 TA projects	168 + 10 TA projects
Specific administrative cost ratio (EUR/project)	32 381.44	61 788.10	39 785.82

As a result, the validated TA cost per project (EUR 39 785.82) is quite similar to the value calculated for the last programming period (EUR 32 381.44), but considering the low absorption rate of the TA and applying the expected value for the contracted TA budget, the specific administrative cost ratio for the 2014-2020 period (EUR 61 788.10) is almost double as much as it was in the previous period, and is very close to the same indicator of the Hungary – Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 (EUR 60 806.73).

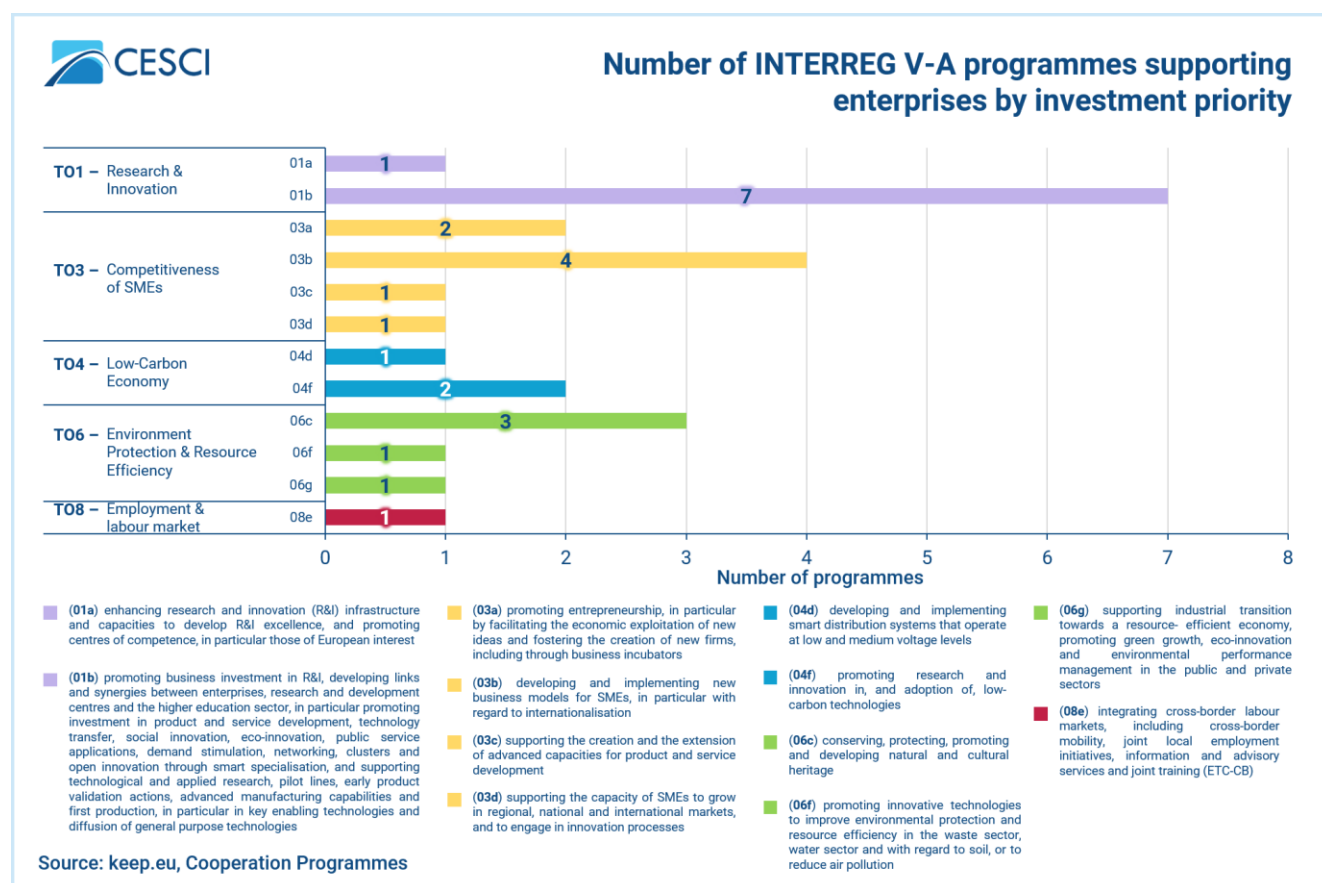
The significant increase compared to the previous programming period seems to be reasonable not only due to the number of the projects, but also the features of these projects. In parallel with the normal CBC projects, the Programme introduced three new innovative tools: the Small Project Fund (SPF), the Territorial Action Plans for Employment (TAPE) and the SME call. The establishment and operation of these tools were definitely time-consuming and HR-intensive tasks which have lasted all over the programming period.

2.5 Evaluation of the mechanisms and tools applied by the Programme

2.5.1 Involvement of SMEs

In the 2014-2020 programming period, first time in its history, the Programme made an attempt to directly involve SMEs into cross-border developments. The initiative is not unprecedented on European level: in the 2007-2013 programming period 8% of the programmes offered support to SMEs¹²⁷, while according to our research 33 out of the 60 INTERREG V-A 2014-2020 cooperation programmes targeted enterprises, as potential beneficiaries. Some of them offered an opportunity to invite enterprises, as a group of the relevant stakeholders, to implement sector-specific developments in the field of tourism, transport, environment or cultural heritage, etc., which basically serve the general interest. In many cases, the involvement of the business sphere has been rather an option than a mandatory criterion. In other programmes, the support for enterprises, mainly SMEs has been put into the focus within the framework of Thematic Objective (TO) 3 (Competitiveness of SMEs) and TO1 (Research and Innovation).

Figure 111: Number of INTERREG V-A programmes supporting enterprises



¹²⁷ INTERACT (2020) - How do Interreg programmes attract SMEs? Repository of Interreg programme management practices, <https://www.interact-eu.net/download/file/21476>

The evaluators analysed the ‘keep.eu’ database on those INTERREG CBC programmes of the 2014-2020 period, which offered direct financial support to enterprises. The database was filtered according to 3 relevant output indicators:

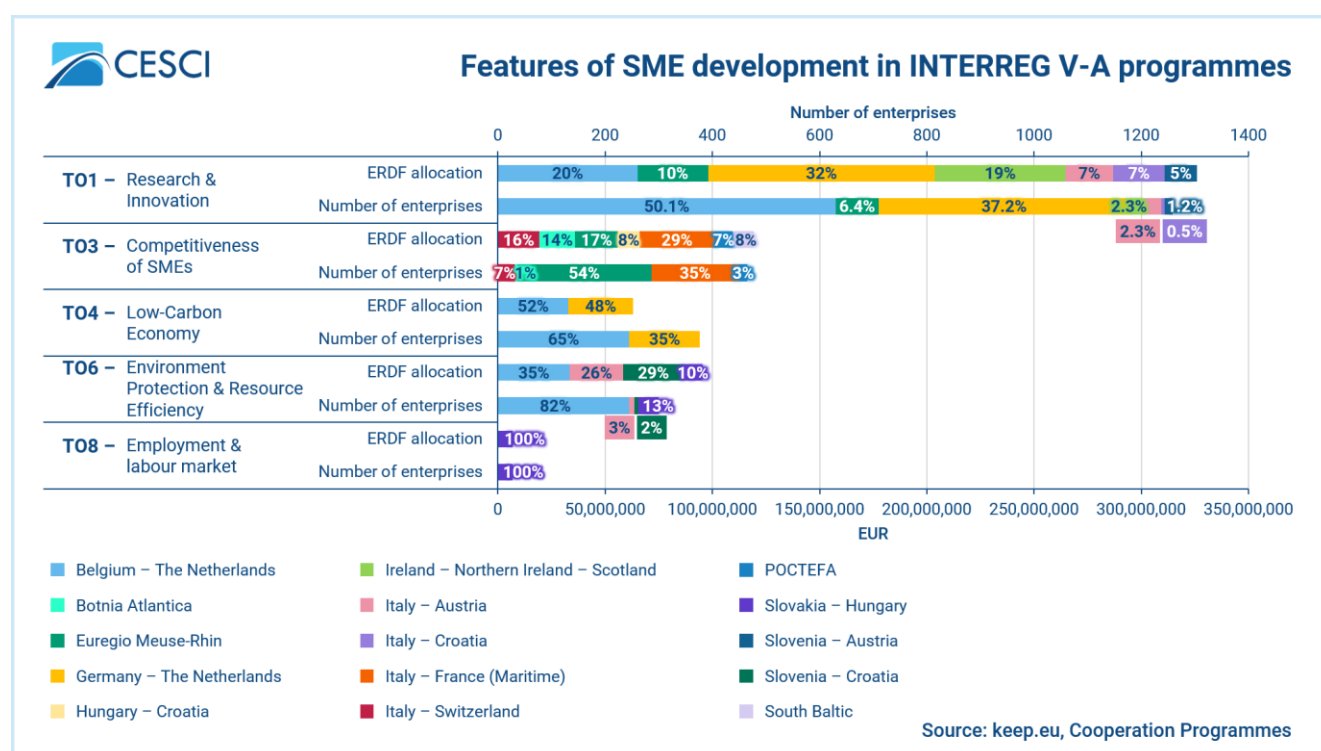
1. Number of enterprises receiving grants (Enterprises)
2. Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants) (EUR)
3. Number of enterprises receiving financial support other than grants (Enterprises)

It must be noted, that the accuracy of the database is questionable, as data provision is the responsibility of the programmes. As a result, the database does not contain the relevant output indicator (Number of enterprises receiving grants) for the Slovakia – Hungary Programme, thus it was not listed during the filtering, but the missing data were completed by the evaluators. Such mistakes might occur in case of other programmes too.

In order to have a clearer picture, CESCİ conducted research through an online survey on the topic between 2 and 12 May 2013: all the INTERREG V-A programmes were invited to report on their activities concerning direct support to enterprises (of any kind). Out of the 60 programmes, the representatives of 10 responded the invitation, out of 3 pointed at further mistakes in the keep.eu database.

After integrating the data coming from different sources, the results show, that altogether 18 programmes selected the aforementioned indicators within the framework of 5 TOs and 12 investment priorities. Based on the Cooperation Programme documents, 17 CPs (in case of the INTERREG V-A Poland - Denmark - Germany - Lithuania – Sweden the indicator was not included into the CP) aimed at the involvement of 2 543 enterprises, which means an average of 150 per programme. It must be noted, that 2 programmes (the INTERREG V-A Belgium - Germany - The Netherlands and the INTERREG V-A Belgium - The Netherlands) undertook to offer grants to 1 450 enterprises, and the other 15 programmes intended to involve 1 093 SMEs altogether.

Figure 112: Features of SME development in INTERREG V-A programmes



The highest ERDF allocation of the concerned programmes targets TO1, where besides the SMEs many other actors of the quadruple helix may have been funded through the projects. In addition, 8 programmes allocated almost EUR 126 million (meaning an average of EUR 14 million per programme, and EU 201 thousand per enterprise) to the competitiveness of SMEs (TO3). Within the framework of this thematic objective, the share of SME beneficiaries is expected to be higher than in the other 3 TOs.

Due the State Aid rules of the EU, as well as the complex set of criteria and procedures of the INTERREG framework the way of involving the SMEs into the CBC programmes is not self-evident.

On the one hand, enterprises as beneficiaries mean an additional burden and risk to the Programme Bodies:

- application of the 'de minimis'¹²⁸ and 'GBER'¹²⁹ rules;
- new target group that is not easy to address and missing experiences with CBC programmes;
- as a specific legal feature, SMEs may cease to exist without legal successor.

On the other hand, SMEs mean a sensitive target group. The most important attributes of the CBC programmes, which lower their attractiveness to enterprises are the following:

- lead partner principle,
- mandatory cooperation criteria,
- pre-financing requirement in regions with significant structural credit market failures,
- restricting rules on revenue generation,
- multi-lingual environment,
- long-lasting and heavy administrative procedures (including the application, selection and reporting, public procurement, etc.) for actors operating in quickly changing markets.

In spite of these burdens, the participation of enterprises in cross-border developments is still reasonable, because business actors may effectively contribute to more sustainable, cost-efficient, innovative developments and their up-scaling, hereby creating greater impact in the border regions. In light of all these factors, the management bodies of some programmes made additional efforts to facilitate and ease the SME's involvement from an administrative point of view, at the same time decreased the aforementioned risks.

In an INTERACT study¹³⁰, 3 solutions were identified:

1. Sub-partner scheme: the so-called sub-partners (without having the financial capacity to be a beneficiary or for having limited involvement of 1-2 activities) must join to the project through one particular beneficiary. The so-called responsible partners sign agreements with each sub-partner and guarantee the sub-partner's financial contribution to the project. Sub-partners can claim for cost reimbursement through their responsible partners.

¹²⁸ Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid

¹²⁹ Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty

¹³⁰ INTERACT (2020) - How do Interreg programmes attract SMEs? Repository of Interreg programme management practices, <https://www.interact-eu.net/download/file/fid/21476>

2. Voucher schemes: Voucher may be distributed from beneficiaries to recipients, including (SMEs) and can be used to pay for services such as taking part in training, using advisory services of external experts or partners' staff, using a partner's infrastructure.
3. Open projects / Beneficiary Light Scheme: according to the model, a small key partnership with open light partner positions and a budgetary framework for SMEs is set-up in a single project. At later stages, during the project implementation, light partners are selected for funding by the key beneficiaries. Through the light partner position, SMEs are not or only partly burdened with administrative issues, all administration and reporting tasks are carried out by the key partnership.

The SKHU Programme planned to follow the so-called Beneficiary Light model. Within the framework of PA1, the main idea was that SMEs could efficiently contribute to the Specific Objective 1.1 'To increase the attractiveness of the border area' by developing tourist services and products. At the same time, it was expected that SMEs will be able to enhance the sustainability of the project results thanks to their market-oriented business approach.

The so-called **B-Light Scheme** tool, set-up based on the PP Light model of the Dutch-German Interreg V-A Programme, was launched in 2017 (SKHU/1702). Considering the special technical-administrative framework for the tool, the B-Light Scheme tried to simplify the original INTERREG application procedures for the SMEs. Its name derived from this initial idea, namely to have "light" projects in terms of administration and application process. The scheme technically could be envisaged as one single project implemented by a partnership with the participation of two professional organisations (from each side of the border) experienced in economic and SME development. The aim of the SKHU/1702 (launched in on 6th April 2017) call was to identify and select these professional organisations. These partners were expected to submit the B-Light Scheme project proposal and, after the approval by the Monitoring Committee, LB would have signed the Subsidy Contract with the Managing Authority. After that, following a specific selection procedure, SMEs would have entered the project as B-Light Partners (beneficiary lights) through signing the Partnership Agreement with the LB previously chosen. The professional organisation would have overseen managing the Scheme and providing business support and consultancy services to the selected SMEs. At least 40 SMEs were planned to enter the partnership.

In this way, the administrative burdens coming from the INTERREG rules could have eased for the enterprises. At the same time, the risks generated by the Lead Beneficiary principle could have been decreased: instead of an SME, the professional organisation would have undertaken the responsibility for the activities carried-out by another SME operating on the other side of the border.

As the call was not successful, the MC decided on cancelling the call for B-Light Scheme Project Proposals in a written procedure on 29th November 2017, as well as to publish a modified model, the so-called SME tool.

This new instrument, proposed by the Managing Authority, contained crucial changes compared to the B-Light Scheme: pre-defined types of public bodies had to involve SMEs in a cross-border Partnership. These public bodies (one per each project) had to oversee only the management and communication activities of the projects, while SMEs (up to 3 per project) were responsible for the core development activities. The thematic focus was strictly determined in the so-called **SME call** as it identified core actions as follows:

- Cooperation and development of cultural heritage sites;

- Renovation of smaller cultural heritage sites;
- Creation and operation of forest schools with a cross-border approach;
- Development of cross-border tourist products;
- Development of small-scale quality tourism linked to local environmental or cultural features for SMEs;
- Joint development of environmentally friendly tourism products and offers and development of cross-border infrastructure for eco-tourism;
- Development of cross-border tourist services and supporting facilities for active tourism;
- Planning and building safe and sustainable cross-border shared “green ways” and infrastructure.

The thematic focus was also narrowed by listing ineligible activities such as investments into already existing cultural houses, visitor centres, sightseeing towers or hotel and restaurant services and accommodation facilities.

The SME call was published in 2018 (SKHU/1801) with an ERDF allocation of EUR 10 000 000¹³¹. It was planned as a continuously open call to be closed when the aggregated value of the applications reaches 125% of the planned allocation. This threshold was reached after the submission of 29 project proposals; thus, the call was suspended on July 2, 2018. Altogether 6 project proposals were selected for funding by the Monitoring Committee, the total ERDF allocation to which was EUR 2.3 million meaning only 23% allocation rate. The size of the projects was determined by the CP based on the number of involved SMEs, the average project value was EUR 443 000. The average number of SMEs in the partnerships was 2.67. According to the interview with the Programme Bodies, due to the strictly focused thematic scope of the SME call, many potential activities were excluded in which for-profit enterprises could have been interested being involved in. As a result, quality developments could take place to a limited extent, and projects with less cross-border relevance and partnership were remained to gain support. In addition, it was also mentioned that the Programme could not successfully reach and attract the SMEs as the target group of the SME Call. Those were mainly the chambers of commerce who managed to involve enterprises from their own, existing network, which meant a preliminary filtering. It led to the phenomenon that not necessarily the most suitable and professional SMEs were involved into partnerships, but the easily reached ones. In most projects the cooperation with SMEs remained one-sided, and cross-border business cooperation remained limited.

Considering the mixed experiences, instead of the same SME call, another approach has been piloted in the SKHU/1902 call. SMEs could join normal project partnerships, without applying a special technical and administrative framework designed for them. SMEs could be involved in creating tourism services in the field of accommodation, catering, sports, culture, or recreation of the supported sites. In addition, joint capitalisation and promotion activities targeting the supported sites aiming to increase the number of visitors and the cooperation efficiency were expected to be improved by the enterprises.

The total ERDF contribution to the SKHU/1902 call (for all type of beneficiaries including SMEs) was EUR 22 000 000. Altogether 10 projects with SME(s) in the partnerships were selected with a total value of EUR 11 million, out of which almost EUR 3.5 million was allocated to the enterprises.

According to the Programme Bodies, thanks to the changes in the approach, the involvement of SMEs was better achieved at the 2nd normal call (SKHU/1902). The call allowed for supporting the development

¹³¹ It was the total amount designed to be used by the B-Light scheme.

of accommodation and catering services, which made the whole model more feasible. In addition, local stakeholders (not necessarily professional organisations, but municipalities, owners of the tourist sites) were able to find and attract the SMEs in the projects. Based on the experiences, not all activities can be profitable and not all activities could attract SMEs, therefore the carefully chosen core and supplementary eligible activities may be crucial in the future.

Considering quantitative data on the **involvement of SMEs in the implementation of PA1**, out of the 59 projects implemented, a total number of 16 projects are concerned by the SME tool of which 6 are from SKHU/1801 and 10 are from SKHU/1902. Taking into account the allocation to projects with SME beneficiaries, the SME Call projects (2 661 631.09 EUR altogether) represent relatively low share (10.2%) within PA1 compared to the projects with SME involvement in the frames of the 2nd normal call (11 301 097.43 EUR and 17% of the total allocation to PA1).

Table 65: Overview on the SME support within PA1

Number of contracted SMEs	31
ERDF support for SMEs (aggregated value in EUR)	5 006 985.92
Average ERDF support per SME in EUR	161 515.6
Own contribution of the SMEs (aggregated value in EUR)	878 656.59
Average own contribution per SME in EUR	28 343.76
Total value of the SME support in EUR	5 890 571.73

According to the interviewees, in general, tourism turned out to be an area where SMEs could create added value and are willing to cooperate and contribute. SMEs have created useful supplementary services (e.g. by reconstructing a historical building suitable for a café or to attract visitors who could spend guest nights next to the accommodation facility constructed by the enterprise) in particular that was also useful for the longer-term sustainability and attractiveness of the points of interest and other locations.

The SMEs found the administrative processes (including the application and reporting) too bureaucratic and complex; the long waiting times and bureaucracy made the whole concept less useful for them. At the same time, setting-up the framework for involving SMEs was also a challenge for the JS due to the State Aid rules, but the concept is ready to kept for the next programming periods.

Other interviewees mentioned that SMEs tend to follow the market logic and income interests thus creating project partnerships and sustaining them on a long run can be challenging. The instability and fluctuation of the business world reduce the cooperation potential of the SMEs – compared to the relative stability of stakeholders such as regional municipalities or public institutions.

The **Territorial Action Plans for Employment** (TAPE) could not be implemented without the involvement of SMEs as the main output indicator of the call referred to the new workplaces created by SMEs¹³².

¹³² For more details about the TAPE tool, its implementation and results, please refer to Chapter “2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)”!

Table 66: Overview on the SME support of the TAPE tool

Number of contracted SMEs	28
ERDF support for SMEs (aggregated value in EUR)	7 007 619.45
Average ERDF support per SME in EUR	250 272.12
Own contribution of the SMEs (aggregated value in EUR)	2 507 588.43
Average own contribution per SME in EUR	89 556.73
Total value of the SME support in EUR	9 515 207.88

The CP provided financial support for 28 SMEs in total (2 SMEs were partners in two-two projects, further SMEs participated in projects as associated partners, sometimes ensuring the mandatory indicator on new workplaces without EU financing). The total value of the direct contracted financial support amounted to more than EUR 7 million representing 19.5% of the total PA budget, which was completed by the SMEs' own contribution of more than EUR 2.5 million.

Obviously, the representativeness of the SMEs within PA3 designed to support mainly SMEs was rather modest. As it is demonstrated in Chapter 2.5.2 on the TAPE tool, the involved SMEs were not necessarily the most adequate ones regarding the territorial and thematic scopes of the action plans. In many cases, those enterprises which were accessible in the easiest way were invited to take part in the partnership.

At the same time, as a testing bed, the TAPE tool proved to be useful with a view to involving the business sector in cross-border cooperation and the results show that even the mere participation in the CBC programme has made the entrepreneurs more open to enlarge the geographic scope of their activities beyond the state border. Previous programmes supported the sector indirectly, through the chambers or foundations supporting SMEs but the results of these subventions are hardly detectable and the services generated by the projects mostly disappeared. On the contrary, the TAPE tool resulted in new production capacities whose maintenance is in the interest of the entrepreneurs which predicts longer durability of the outcomes. It is also worth noting that the TAPE construction enabled the entrepreneurs to concentrate on their business activities as the CCP took the administrative burdens off their shoulders.

2.5.2 Territorial Action Plan for Employment (TAPE)

One of the main findings of the territorial analysis of the Programme concerned the salient differences between the western and eastern border sections in terms of economic development also mirrored in the employment inequalities. The Programme addressed this challenge through Priority Axis 3, Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility. The Specific Objective targeted the "Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region". In order to ensure the sustainability of the interventions, the CP introduced an integrated territorial tool, i.e. the territorial action plan for employment, the TAPE which provided vertical integration of the projects aiming to improve employment conditions and cross-border labour mobility and exploiting their potential synergetic

effects. By doing this, the Slovak-Hungarian is one of the four Interreg CBC programmes which applied an integrated territorial tool between 2014 and 2020.

2.5.2.1 Snapshot on the integrated territorial tools applied by Interreg CBC programmes in Europe

Articles 32-25, 36 and 104-109 of the ETC Regulation¹³³ enabled the ETC Programmes to apply the integrated territorial tools of

- the Community-led Local Development (CLLD) uniting the capacities of regional public, private and civil society actors following the LEADER methodology;
- the integrated territorial investment (ITI) facilitating the concentrated utilisation of different ESIF funds or different PAs of the same programme for the sake of the development of a designated territory; and
- the Joint Action Plan (JAP) designed for the realisation of larger, territorially defined development programs. The JAP instrument was not utilised by any of the CBC programmes.

The only programme applying the **ITI tool** was the Italy-Slovenia INTERREG V-A programme – within the confines of the CBC programme, meaning that no further (external mainstream or central EU) funds were involved. Two ITI projects have been implemented by the EGTC GO, each amounting to EUR 5 million: the Isonzo-Soča Cross-Border Park project aimed at constructing an integrated network of cycle and walking paths including a new pedestrian and cycling bridge; the Salute-Zdravsto project resulted in an integrated health and social service system with a thematic focus on mental health, autism, physiological pregnancy and the share of social services through a joint booking system. Both projects' beneficiaries were the funding members of the EGTC GO¹³⁴ appointed as the intermediary body of the ITI.

The **CLLD tool** was applied by the Italy-Austria Interreg CBC programme. Four Local Action Groups (LAGs) have been selected by the programme to implement four CLLDs. The LAGs have drafted a regional analysis and a strategic document including the subregional objectives, the application, selection and monitoring procedures of funds managed by them. Although, the LAGs owned regional strategies but their function was rather to manage subregional small project schemes in which the trilateral model defined by the LEADER methodology (i.e. the participation of public bodies, undertakings and civil society actors in the LAG) was not fully respected¹³⁵.

In both above cases, the possibilities granted by the EU Regulations were partly exploited: the Italian-Slovenian ITI was not a multi-fund tool due to the administrative burdens coupled with the instrument

¹³³ Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal. L 347/259.

¹³⁴ They are: Gorizia from Italy, Nova Gorica and Šempeter Vrtojba from Slovenia.

¹³⁵ The Dolomiti Live LAG included the Regional Management of South Tyrol region, the subregion of Pustental and a LAG from the Italian side; the HEurOpen LAG involved three LEADER LAGs; the Terra Raetica two regional management organisations and a subregional association of municipalities, while the Wipptal LAG a regional management organisation and a subregional association of municipalities.

(i.e. the mandatory inclusion of the description of coordination mechanisms between the involved funds in the Partnership Agreements of both countries); the Italian-Austrian CLLD did not meet the LEADER-based requirements because the inclusion of the SMEs in the programme was not ensured.

In order to avoid the difficulties generated by the complex EU rules, two further CBC programmes followed a different logic applying a tool developed internally.

The ALCOTRA France-Italy CBC Programme introduced the **Integrated Cross-Border Plan** (Plan intégré transfrontalier, PIT) between 2007 and 2013 which was used as the model for the TAPE tool. The PIT enabled a group of local and regional actors to provide a regional diagnosis and to draft an integrated cross-border plan (strategy) including 2 to 7 mutually interdependent projects and another one ensuring coordination between the projects and project owners and the overall communication of the PIT. Altogether seven PITs were selected for funding through a two-round selection procedure (letter of intent first, the plan in the second phase) with diverse thematic focuses¹³⁶, mostly involving local municipalities while regional authorities and civil associations were poorly included. The for-profit sector was not represented in the PITs. The Joint Secretariat provided its assistance to the elaboration of the regional plans to be implemented within 4 years.

After 2014, the ALCOTRA programme has developed further the PIT tool by introducing the **Integrated Thematic Plan** (Plan intégré thématique, PITEM) including several projects focusing on the same topic, and implemented in different parts of the programme region; and the **Integrated Territorial Plan** (Plan intégré territorial, PITER) following the PIT's territorial logic (interdependent projects of different topics to be implemented in a pre-defined area). Both tools could include at maximum 10 partners and 5 projects (the coordination and communication project included). Six-six PITEM and PITER plans were implemented within a period of 4 years.

Similarly to the PIT tool, the **Territorial Action Plans for Employment** (TAPE) included 2 to 7 interdependent projects targeting the improvement of employment conditions in a well-defined subregion, and another project ensuring the coordination and communication activities of the entire project partnership (the CCP). 9 TAPEs were implemented within at maximum 4 years after a two-round selection procedure: during the first phase, the partners had to deliver a territorial analysis identifying the specific territorial needs and capacities characterising the selected border area. Those action plans selected after the first round were invited to elaborate the TAPE projects in detail. The TAPE followed the quadruple helix model as the partnership could include local and regional authorities or state institutions (public sphere), civil society associations (civil sphere), small and medium sized enterprises generating the new jobs as the main indicators of the TAPEs (private sphere), as well as, educational, vocational or tertiary educational and research institutions (academic sphere). Each TAPE had to respond the specific challenges of the targeted subregion. Accordingly, the topics of the action plans were diverse (construction industry, automotive innovation, local products, social services, etc.).

¹³⁶ These were: tourism and economic development, environment protection, rural development, culture, education and transport.

Table 67: Benchmark of integrated tools applied by the four CBC programmes

Interreg CBC Programme	The name of the tool	Number of selected integrated projects	Total budget dedicated to the tool (EUR)	Share of the tool within the programme budget (%)	Average budget of one tool (ERDF contribution) (EUR)
Italy-Slovenia	ITI	2	10 million	10.90	5 million
Italy-Austria	CLLD	4	20.6 million	20.96	not relevant
France-Italy	PITEM, PITER	12	80.47 million	40.46	6.7 million
Slovakia-Hungary	TAPE	9	35.91 million	24.00	3.85 million

It was the ALCOTRA programme which ensured the largest amount for the integrated tool both in terms of the maximum value and the share within the programme budget. At the same time, the Slovak-Hungarian CBC programme was the only one which directly involved small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) having the capacities to contribute to the total dedicated budget with a larger amount of money (in compliance with the State Aid rules). Accordingly, the final value of the TAPE tool is expected to increase. The larger is the budget, the higher is the impact of the tools on cross-border territorial integration. At the same time, the two ITI had a larger budget than the average value of the TAPE plans.

Table 68: Overview on the budget components of Priority Axis 3 of the CP (employment)

ERDF funding	National contribution (SK+HU)	Own contribution (public)	Own contribution (private)	TOTAL sum
35 916 882.27	3 859 620.09	1 076 730.98	2 672 872.29	43 526 105.63

Compared to the ITI and the CLLD the ALCOTRA tools and the TAPE instrument were free of the administrative burdens established by the EU Regulations: their implementation rules were defined by the Programme Bodies providing solid frames which were, at the same time, flexible enough to ease the implementation and making the instruments attractive for the local actors. Unlike the CLLD model which was a grant scheme (even if based on a subregional strategy), the ITI, the PITER and the TAPE were real integrated territorial tools addressing the development needs of a defined cross-border area. In this perspective, the Programme cannot be considered a pioneer, especially due to the adaptation of an existing tool. However, it was one of the four pioneers.

2.5.2.2 Assessment of the TAPE tool

The assessment is based on the information provided by the Interreg+ database; the survey (23 project owners answered the questionnaire, one of them was an owner of a non-selected project, another one answered the questions targeting the non-TAPE projects); and the interviews made with 40 project partners and two experts of the Programme Bodies. Every CCP was interviewed. The assessors visited the locations of the investments.

Assessment of the procedures

The TAPE projects were selected through a two-round process. The first-round call (SKHU/1703) inviting TAPE concept holders was opened on the 8th September 2017 for a period of 98 days. The concepts had to

- give a comprehensive overview on the cross-border, geographically continuous target area and its socio-economic characteristics with a special focus on the employment and labour market conditions;
- present the territorial needs and the endogenous potential of the target area that the development concept had been built upon;
- draft the TAPE strategy, its objectives and its embeddedness in regional strategies, the expected results and impacts, including the identification of the new workplaces to be created by the TAPE;
- to introduce the partnership and to provide basic information on the projects included in the TAPE (with a special focus on the coordination and communication project), their complementary and synergetic effects, as well as, their planned budget.

Accordingly, during the first phase the focus was given to the main mission of the tool, namely the definition of the territorial needs and assets of a well-defined cross-border area with a purpose of improving the employment level. This place-based approach resulted in a colourful thematic diversity of the proposals including construction industry, automotive innovation, development of local product systems, logistics, elderly care, etc., - in compliance with the specific territorial endowments.

The place-based approach of the two-round selection model

The place-based planning model is an undisputed value and a unique character of the TAPE tool which enabled the local actors to think about the future of their cross-border living area together, and to exceed the ad-hoc project-based logics. The two-round selection process was positively considered by the project owners as it made possible and necessary to build their territorial strategy on a deep analysis and on the results of a co-creation process strengthening shared ownership. The separate projects were elaborated in detail in the second phase.

16 TAPE concepts were submitted and were assessed along a 3-level strategic evaluation procedure¹³⁷ including two JS experts (maximum scores: 20 points), the representatives of the NUTS III regions affected by the TAPE (maximum scores: 14 points) and two external sectorial experts (maximum scores: 66 points). Those proposals which did not reach the threshold of 20 points after the two first assessment round (JS and territorial experts) have been excluded from further sectorial assessment.

¹³⁷ See the evaluation matrix in the Annex (*3.7 Additional table to the evaluation of the TAPE*).

Table 69: Results of the assessment of the TAPE proposals (1st round)

TAPE / assessors	JS_1	JS_2	TA_SK	TA_SK/HU ¹³⁸	TA_HU	SA_SK	SA_HU	TOTAL
ORG-EMP	15	13	14		14	60	62	89,00
RE-START	17	17	14		14	57	49	84,00
JOBS	15	15	14		11	60	53	84,00
IG Heritage	14	14	13	14	14	54	56	82,67
Future in Hemp	17	16	14	14	8	58	50	82,50
Cserehát AP	20	17	14		14	51	48	82,00
Novum Danuvium	11	11	14		14	48	58	78,00
R2 and M3	14	13	14		14	45	48	74,00
Food industry	10	12	13	13	14	42	51	70,83
Ready4i4.0	13	12	9	6	14	38	45	63,67
LogEMPLOYMENT	9	10	13		14	38	30	57,00
CARE TAPE	11	10	12		12	33	35	56,50
Ipoly Bridge 21	14	13	5		11	37	28	54,00
Healthy Economy	8	8	7		14			18,50
LEPONT	10	10	2		10			16,00
MEDVES	9	9	8		4	0	0	15,00
Average	12,94	12,50	11,25	11,75	12,25	44,36	43,79	62,98

No proposals below the threshold of 70 points were selected for funding, and the Ready4i4.0 TAPE was the single non-selected proposal which had been scored above the average¹³⁹. The CCP partners had the opportunity to present their TAPE concept at the MC meeting and to answer the questions of the MC members. As an interviewee highlighted: this was the first time when an MC member met a beneficiary and entered a discussion with him/her.

¹³⁸ Red coloured numbers indicate an additional Hungarian, the blue ones an additional Slovak territorial assessor (involved in compliance with the territorial scope of the TAPE).

¹³⁹ No proposals were rejected due to failed rejection criteria (minimum number of projects; inclusion of a key action project: labour mobility or creation of new products and services; minimum 1 SME involved; budget compliance: EUR 500 000 / 1 workplace; every project identified at least one output indicator).

The three-partite assessment system of the TAPE concepts

The assessment model is an innovation of the CP and it had such a positive acceptance from the Programme Management Bodies that it has been standardised under subsequent normal calls. The division of the strategic aspects according to different competences, and, especially the involvement of the territorial authorities in the evaluation process remarkably strengthened the 'relevance' and 'embeddedness' factors of the projects and, accompanied with the presentations at the MC meetings, it contributed to an enhanced ownership of the programme and the TAPE concepts on behalf of the MC members, too.

However, *Table 69* draws the attention to the shortages of the procedure: a) the high correlation between the scores of the JS assessors questions the relevance of their parallel assessment; b) the territorial assessors tend to award "their" TAPE concepts with the highest values which clearly distorts the final results.

The CCP partners of the selected TAPE proposals (26th April, 2018) were invited to further elaborate their TAPE projects which were scheduled according to their interdependencies within the time-frame of 4 years at maximum. It means that the projects had to be designed and submitted in one package but they could start by different timing – in compliance with the internal logic of the TAPE. The second-round call (SKHU/1802) was published on 10th August 2018 and it was open for a period of 94 days. Due to the shortcomings of certain projects, a third call (SKHU/1901) needed to be published (being open between 11th June and 8th July of 2019) because these projects were necessary to achieve the indicators of the already-approved TAPE concepts. This call enabled the partners of 3 projects to re-design their partnership or the project content with the assistance of the JS.

The JS has provided unprecedented assistance for these steps by operating a permanent help desk, organising two workshops where the project partners had the opportunity to make proposals regarding the second-round call, and offered consultancy for each TAPE including the fine-tuning of the budget, the re-design of the partnership and the planned interventions, re-scheduling of the projects, etc. What is more, the JS actively participated in the re-structuring of certain TAPES (RE-START, ORG-EMP, R2 and M3). Following the on-site meetings and the suggestions of the JS, several projects have been deleted, merged or replaced, as the original partners proved to be incompetent or financially unstable. These modifications have been accompanying the whole implementation phase, as well: the largest infrastructural project of the R2 and M3 TAPE in Bátónytereny had to be rejected due to the unreliability of the entrepreneur, and a new infrastructural project had to be developed; the partners of two further soft projects in this TAPE were not able to credibly explain the outcomes of the planned project activities, so they were excluded; the SME involved in the preparation of the ORG-EMP TAPE has realised the investment before the second round – a new investment had to be planned in Ipel'ské Predmostie; a research institute in Bratislava intended to realise activities which belong to the competences of the state authorities which became clear at the MC meeting; the inflation required the re-design of many infrastructural investments; etc. All these types of challenges made necessary the permanent coaching of the TAPES by the JS.

The permanent assistance (coaching) of the TAPE projects

The project owners highly appreciated the assistance provided by the JS¹⁴⁰ through the whole project cycle, without which the introduction of this complex tool would have resulted in a remarkable failure in terms of the indicators and financial frames of the programme. The TAPE has generated favourable conditions for experimentation, and, as it was a *terra incognita*, the strict control and gold-plating could be replaced by a very flexible and adaptive approach. The replacement of the partners and even some projects generated conflicts within the programme management as this intervention was unprecedented and it was not ruled before. However, the outcomes of the TAPE projects justified this flexibility.

Assessment of the structural aspects of the tool

The main structural specificity of the TAPE tool consists of its multi-project character involving numerous partners with different experiences and knowledge in one interdependent multi-sectorial partnership coordinated by one or two further partners. Accordingly, the TAPES involved a much broader partnership than the traditional CBC projects. The average size of the partnerships was nearly 11 but RE-START involved 19 partners in total. What is more, in order to comply with the requirements of the call, the partnerships had to include SMEs (4 in average, 34 in total¹⁴¹) ensuring the fulfilment of the main criterion of funding: the number of newly created workplaces by SMEs.

Table 70: Overview on the TAPE partnerships

TAPE	Number of projects	Number of partners	Number of enterprises in the partnership
Novum Danuvium	4	9	6
Food Industry	3	8	5
IG Heritage	6	10	2
RE-START	7	19	5
ORG-EMP	5	9	2
JOBS	4	7	2
R2 and M3	5	10	3
Cserehát	7	15	5
FUTURE IN HEMP	6	10	5
TOTAL	47	97	35
AVERAGE	5.22	10.78	3.89

¹⁴⁰ Here, we have to underline the commitment of and extra efforts made by the deputy-head of the JS, Mr Silvester Holop.

¹⁴¹ One SME participated in two TAPES.

The complexity of the partnership made it necessary to appoint one or two partners being in charge of the coordination and communication tasks of the TAPE. According to the survey respondents' and interviewees' opinion, this tool proved to be important and useful.

Table 71: Coordination and communication tasks of the CCP partners

Coordination tasks	Communication tasks
Administration of the TAPE (project development, contracting, reporting)	Communication tasks of the TAPE (delivery of a uniform TAPE design, mandatory visibility of the projects, organisation of dissemination events, invitation of high-level decision-makers to these events)
Coordination of the partnership (organisation of partner meetings and consultations; scheduling the project activities at TAPE level; assisting the project level administration – e.g. listing and preparing the mandatory documents)	Communication with the authorities on behalf of the entire partnership (in English), partner meetings with the JS
Quality assurance and risk management (permanent help desk for the project partners; surveying, preparation and management of public procurement procedures and the external service contracts; early warnings on the upcoming activities; training on the use of the Interreg+ system; use of English in everyday communication which meant a challenge for many project partners)	Communication within the partnership (partnership level meetings, information provision on the progress and the delays of the projects, on the difficulties met, as well as on the next tasks to be done)
Extra assistance (full-service management tasks of the SME projects, compensation of the project manager's quit)	

The role of the CCP

The CCP projects ensured a professional coaching and quality assurance over the TAPE project cycle. They provided a uniform design for the TAPE and undertook remarkable administrative and management burdens from the project partners, especially from the SMEs which lacked proper capacities and knowledge about project administration and managing a public procurement. The mandatory use of English generated problems for many partners; the CCP could compensate also these shortcomings. 5 interviewees considered the CCP as a tool guaranteeing effectiveness during the very complex implementation process.

A side-effect of the CCP activities was the enhanced trust between the partners and the development of their networking capacities. The CCP generated an ownership over the TAPE mirrored in the commitment and extra efforts done by the CCP partners.

5 of the 9 TAPes were managed by single beneficiary EGTCs which have recognised their real regional development role in the action plans¹⁴².

The interviewees mentioned a few critics as well: some CCP partners assisted only the project partners coming from one side of the border; some partners reclaimed that they were not supported or informed in a proper way which generated difficulties for them; others complained about overall meetings involving all the partners which had been held at the beginning of the TAPE only. The more superficially the partnership was created, the more similar difficulties occurred during the implementation.

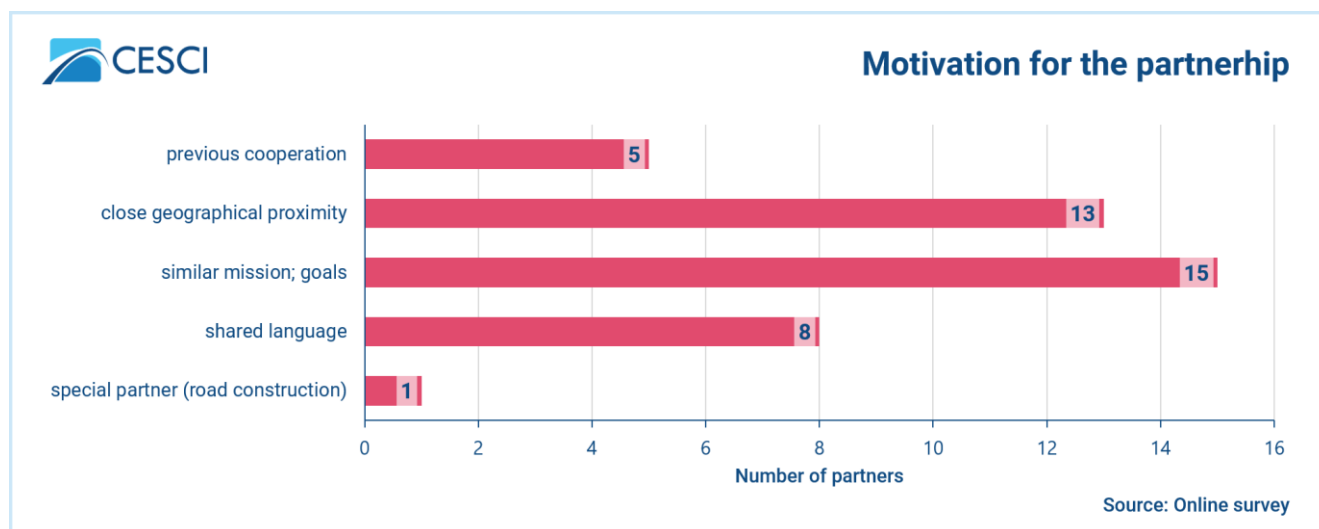
Notwithstanding these critics, the inclusion of a CCP project in the structure proved to be a good decision even if in some cases, the coordination tasks meant 20-30% overburden for the CCP partner(s) compared to the forecasted capacities (financial frames included).

The composition of the partnership has shown a colourful pattern. Some action plans (e.g. the RE-START, the IG Heritage, the JOBS) were designed and implemented by partners who knew each other for long time. One of the interviewees underlined the importance of this factor: "it is essential to work together with partners whom we know well and whom we rely on". In other cases, the partnerships were constructed in an ad-hoc way, sometimes permanently modifying even the list of the partners (e.g. Food Industry, R2 and M3). Systematised partnership building could be observed at the Cserehát AP where a broad group of potential partners were invited in the consortium 2 years before the call was published, and, through an incremental partnership building process, this group has been reduced to the scope of the final partnership. In the case of the ORG-EMP and JOBS, the main motivation of the TAPE was given by the need for constructing two new border crossing bridges overshadowing the territorial and sectorial aspects of partnership building. Similarly, the eminent role of the municipality of Veľký Horeš in the Future in Hemp TAPE was justified by the new road connection planned to be constructed there.

¹⁴² As one interviewed EGTC director highlighted: "So far, we had no experiences of working together with so many partners. So, it meant a challenge, but it is what an EGTC is established for, and we learned a lot from it."

The survey results show that the selection of the partners was not primarily based on previous relationships but it was rather defined by geographic and thematic proximity (Figure 113).

Figure 113: Motivation of selecting TAPE partners



The partners' experiences were mixed regarding the cohesion of the partnerships. The strongest ties have been developed within the Cserehát AP and the Future in Hemp; and the TAPE further intensified the relationships between the stakeholders of the RE-START, the IG Heritage, and, among certain partners of the ORG-EMP. The weakest relationships were detected at R2 and M3, Novum Danuvium and Food Industry TAPES.

The TAPE partnerships

The TAPE philosophy is in favour of partnerships well-based both from territorial and sectorial points of view, involving those regional partners which can the most effectively respond the territorial challenges. In reality, the TAPE concepts were not preceded by a stakeholder analysis. In most cases, the partners known by the CCP partners were involved. In other cases, partners were invited through ad-hoc networks.

At the same time, the development of joint ownership and team spirit guaranteeing sustainability did not depend on the pre-history of the partnership or a well-based stakeholder analysis but on the commitment and conscientiousness of the CCP partners (regular meetings, cautious care of each partner, networking activities reaching beyond the mandatory requirements, etc.). The strongest partnerships produced close relations and the spirit of belonging and interdependence. In two cases even the TAPE budget has been re-allocated between the two rounds in order to enable all partners to realise their activities.

The main task of the action plans was to create new workplaces through the involvement of at least one SME, and the volume of the financial support (ERDF) was linked to the number of these new workplaces

(EUR 500 000 / 1 workplace¹⁴³). In reality, regardless of the multiple crises between 2018 and 2022, the SMEs (directly and indirectly) have created almost twice more workplaces than forecasted in the concepts (the Cserehát AP was the most effective with an overperformance of 400%). In addition, nearly 1400 persons were trained and the new investments cover areas of more than 20 000 m² altogether (notwithstanding the new cross-border transport infrastructure).

Table 72: Performance of the SME projects

TAPE	Total number of new jobs (planned)	Total number of new jobs (realised)	Overperformance of jobs	Total number of trained persons	Total surface of investments (construction and reconstruction) /m2
Cserehát	11	44	400.00%	153	9 138.90
Food Industry	7	7	100.00%	150	0.00
FUTURE IN HEMP	13	18	138.46%	76	1 853.66
IG Heritage	6	7	116.67%	40	2 532.50
JOBS	8	14	175.00%	30	1 060.00
Novum Danuvium	6	13,5	225.00%	481	571.00
ORG-EMP	16	18	112.50%	104	2 270.24
R2 and M3	8	8	100.00%	78	1 362.90
RE-START	19	40	210.53%	268	1 618.34
TOTAL	94	169.5	180.32%	1 380	20 407.54
AVERAGE	10.44	18.83	180.32%	153.33	2 267.50

The participation of the SMEs

The participation of the SMEs in certain TAPES were artificial: their role was exclusively to ensure the mandatory indicator but they were not involved/interested in the team and the mission of the action plan. As one CCP partner stated: "One should not even expect that entrepreneurs focusing on their own business are interested in territorially integrated initiatives." However, the Cserehát AP and the Future in Hemp successfully motivated their SMEs towards their partners. In the last case, a business model has been developed which created interdependencies between the enterprises' portfolios. The Food Industry TAPE was successful in connecting the R&D&I agents with undertakings interested in innovation but missing the capacities for that.

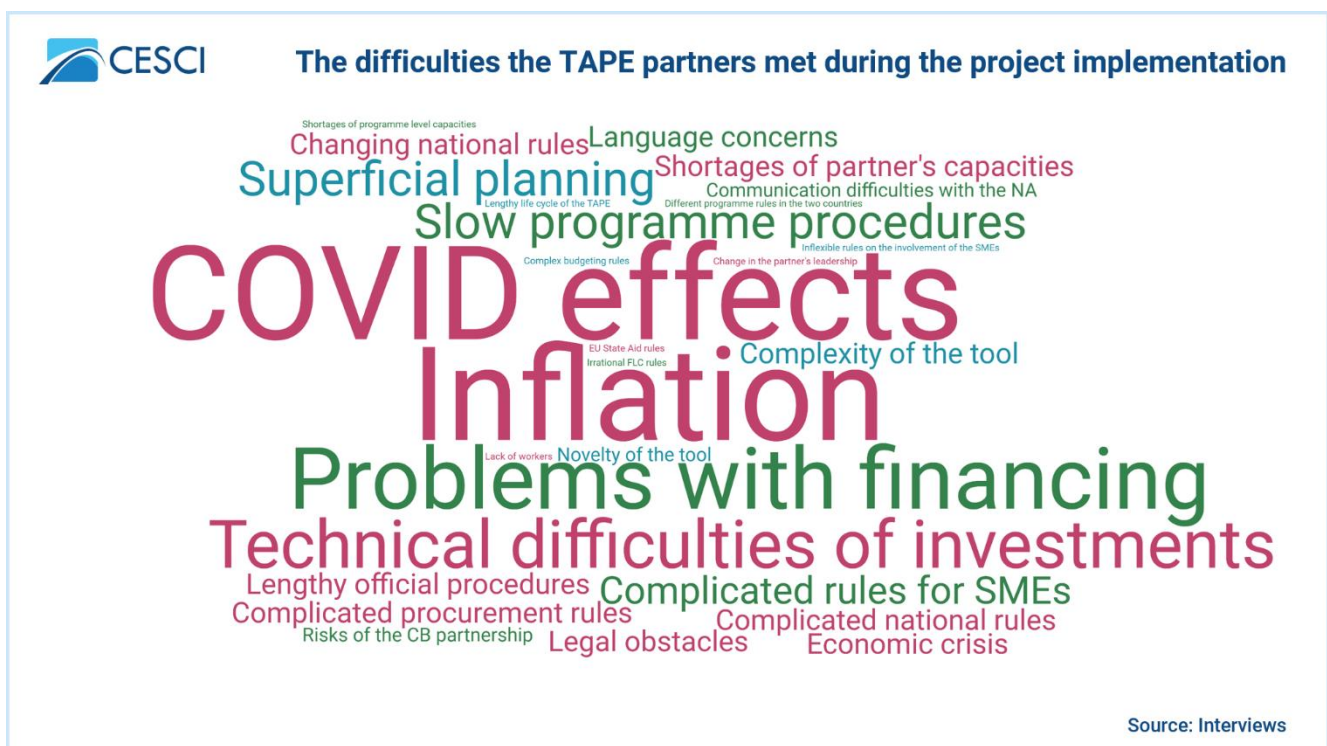
From a practical point of view, the picture is mixed. The lengthy application procedure of the CBC programmes is not favourable for the businessmen who have to decide on their investments when the ad-hoc conditions promote these decisions. The formal frames of the call not only postponed the starting date of the production but also made the investments much more expensive – due to the

¹⁴³ The high financial value indicates the cautious approach of the MC to the new tool.

suddenly emerged inflation. As one entrepreneur put it: “Without the funding, we could have built a two times larger production hall – two years earlier than this way. I will never apply for funding within this programme again.” On the contrary, other SMEs stated that without the support of the programme, they would not be able to realise their investments or with reduced parameters only.

The difficulties of the realisation mentioned by the interviewees partly referred to external factors which were common for every call (see the chapter “2.1.4 Influence factors of the implementation”); they were partly linked to the specificities of the CP, and partly to the specific rules of the TAPE tool. *Figure 114* summarises these difficulties, from which here only the problems linked to the cross-border TAPE tool are briefly analysed.

Figure 114: The difficulties the TAPE partners met during the project implementation¹⁴⁴



Apart from the common problems of the beneficiaries regarding co- and pre-financing, the use of English, the differences of the applied rules in the two countries, etc., five interviewees mentioned superficial design of the TAPE at the first place which caused further difficulties during the implementation. The novelty (unusual character) and the complexity (many partners in several projects), the complicated budgeting rules (i.e. the prohibition of reallocation between the partners within the TAPE), the length of the TAPE (generating risks in time) and the strict rules regarding the involvement of the SMEs (the requirement of producing new workplaces resulted in the involvement of SMEs which had capacities to develop their staff instead of those SMEs representing better the TAPE thematic logic) were also mentioned. Superficial planning points at one of the main structural shortcomings of the tool.

¹⁴⁴ The pink terms refer to external difficulties, the green ones to the problems stemming from the specificities of the programme, and the blue ones to the hurdles generated by the TAPE tool.

The problem of superficial planning

Not only the set of the partnership but also the territorial foundations of the TAPE concepts was rather superficial. The time span for the design was too short to develop real, organically built action plans. In certain cases, the TAPE had antecedents:

- the BOKARTISZ initiative (financed by the HUSKUA CBC programme) dates back to 2006/2007 which aimed at developing an integrated, cross-border soft landscape management system based on the endogenous natural resources of the Bodrogköz-Medzibodrožie region which can be considered as the predecessor of the Future in Hemp project partly involving the initiators of the previous project in the partnership;
- the Ister-Granum EGTC started to develop its cross-border local product system as early as 2012 and has implemented several projects with the same goal by 2018;
- the development concept of silver economy targeting the Lower Ipoly Valley was incorporated in the development strategy of Pest county in 2016 and the stakeholders have been working together for decades;
- the integration and the environmentally sound place-based development of the border area in the Cserehát Region was initiated in 1989 and, since then, many attempts have been made to reach this goal;
- action plans targeting the less developed regions in Slovakia were drafted in parallel with the TAPE design process facilitating the identification of the main challenges and the potential SME partners on the Slovak side.

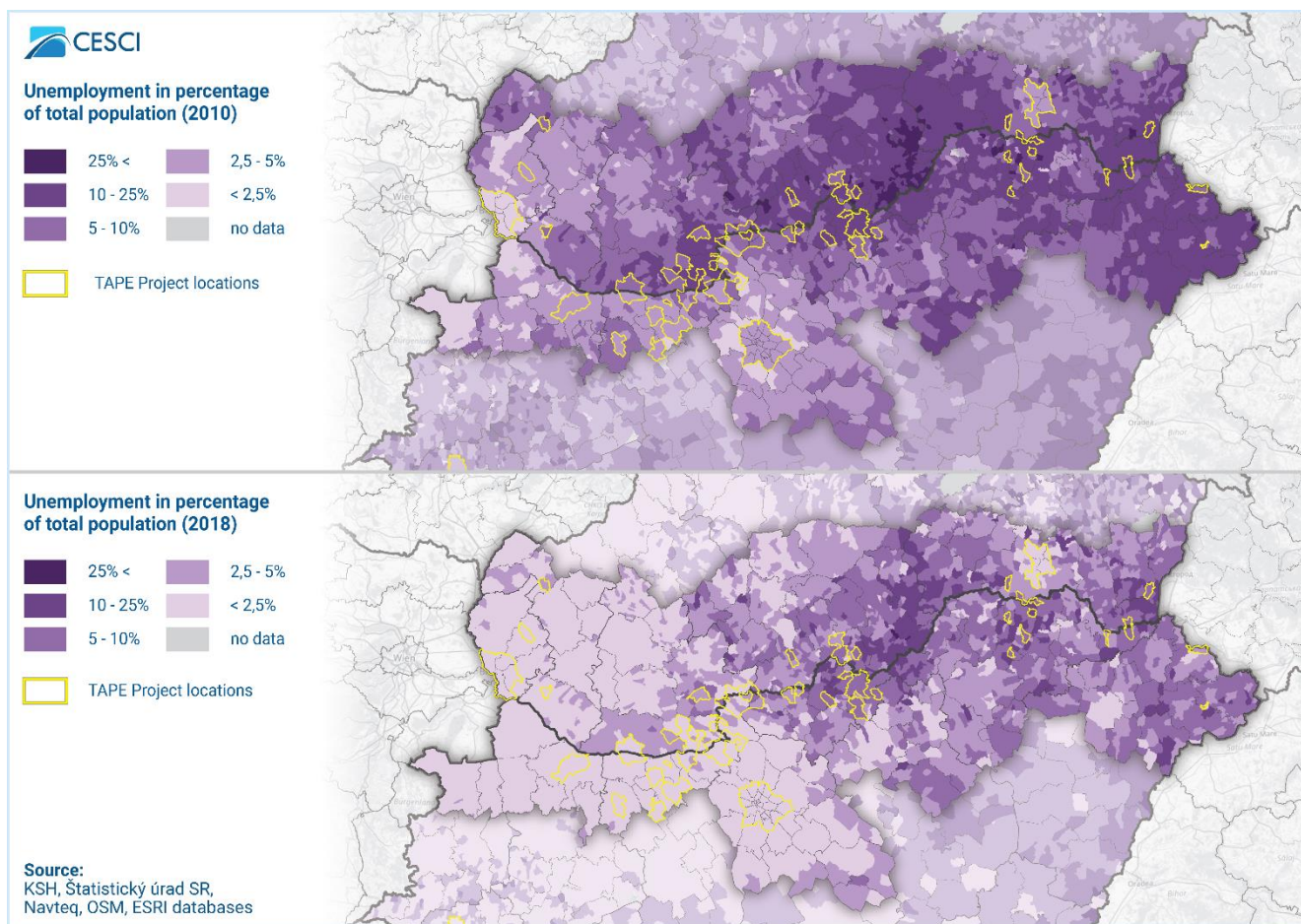
In other cases, no similar initiatives can be detected. Experiences show that those action plans were the most successful which had been developed in an organic, strategic way – even if the group of beneficiaries was defined in a rather ad-hoc manner.

Results and added value of the tool

The TAPE tool was designed to valorise the territorial capital and boost the economy of subregions of the programme area delineated by the local actors with the aim of improving employment conditions. Obviously, the tool met these requirements at a very modest level only.

The employment conditions have fundamentally changed between the time of programming (employment data of 2011 were used for the design) and the realisation period of the TAPE concepts (2018-2023) (see Figure 3).

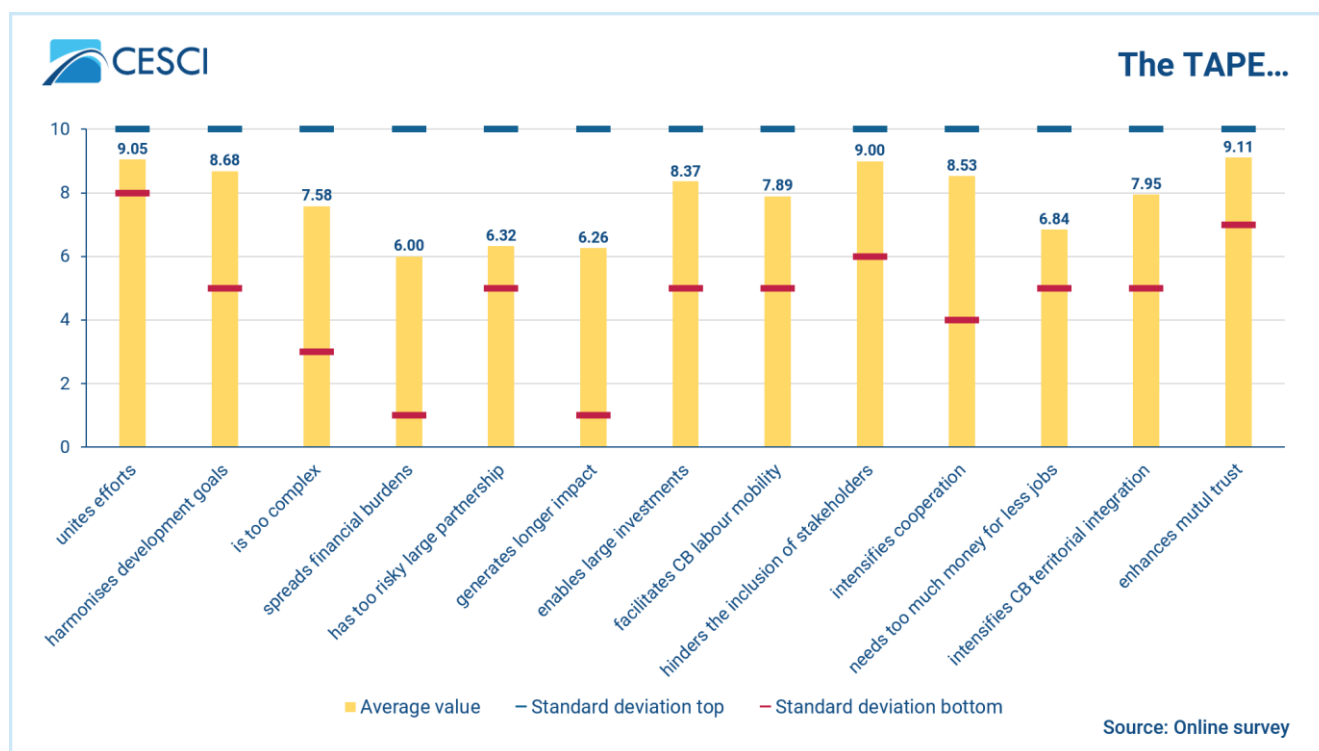
Figure 115: The locations of the TAPE projects and the change of employment conditions between 2010 and 2018



In 2010, the border area (especially its eastern part) was characterised with high unemployment rates reaching sometimes 40% in certain Slovak districts. In 2018, when the TAPE projects started, in the major part of the programme area, the same rate was below 5% which made it difficult to hire appropriate workers and to improve the employment level. The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis following it reduced the financial capacities of the SMEs obliged to create the new jobs – according to the PA3 calls. Among these conditions, the number of new workplaces indicates a great success. However, the contribution of the TAPE tool to the employment level is still symbolic. Taking into account its territorial coverage, the main failure of the tool is that no TAPE has been developed in the subregion effected by unemployment the most, namely, the historic Gömör/Gemer region.

Similarly, hard to interpret the TAPE as an effective regional development tool. Due to the limited financial frames (EUR 40 million in total targeting the programme region covering a two-times larger area than the territory of Belgium) the TAPE beneficiaries could not have a remarkable effect on the economy of the borderland. The action plans themselves were designed in a superficial way which prevented the realisation of effective and territorially integrated interventions. As both the experts and the beneficiaries consider, the TAPE is not a tool for boosting employment and promoting territorial development.

Figure 116: The definition of the beneficiaries on the TAPE tool¹⁴⁵



First, the TAPE has **improved the capacities** of the beneficiaries. Numerous new partners were involved in cross-border cooperation who had no previous experiences on this field. Some of them have learnt the CBC logics and project development under the coaching of skilled CCP partners, and they intend to apply for CBC funding during the new budgetary period. Furthermore, the TAPE forced the partners to thinking out of the box of traditional CBC projects reflecting on the local needs only. The partners needed to discuss their development aims and design together the TAPE concept with the involvement of the business sector. They had to identify those complementary and synergetic aspects ensuring the cohesion and coherence of their proposal. As one interviewee put it: "The employment aspect is not so important as the share, acceptance and explanation of the new way of thinking."

Second, the tool **promoted networking**. According to the representative of the JS the TAPE "did not make sense as a territorial plan [...], but it functioned as a partnership building tool better than any other constructions, the SPF included. And it is the slogan of our programme: 'Building Partnership.'" New contacts have been developed between the TAPE partners (reaching beyond the frames of the individual projects as in one TAPE there were many partners). Thanks to the greater visibility accompanying the larger scope of the tool, the beneficiaries could start cooperation with sectorial and regional partners. For the SMEs the interdependent projects opened new markets and some of them decided to start business on the other side of the border during the implementation of the action plan. Others have found partners for their production in the neighbouring country during the project. The TAPE was a good marketing tool also for the CCP partners enhancing their embeddedness in the cross-border regional society and business realm. An EGTC director summarised these phenomena as it follows: "The

¹⁴⁵ The survey respondents were invited to define the mission of the TAPE by scoring the statements included in the figure. The scaling included values from 1 to 10. In the case of the inverse ranking, the results were re-arranged.

fact that we want to start developments in an integrated territory, reaches beyond a traditional one-topic project. It generates sociological processes.”

Finally, the tool has a **strong trust-building character** fuelled by the co-creation process of the concept, the effective coordination and the sense of belonging and shared ownership. As a result of the TAPE projects, two regional self-governments started deeper cooperation, other partners raised their cooperation to a higher level, and, in some cases real friendships were born. First and foremost, the tool unites efforts and enhances mutual trust – as the survey respondents evaluated it.

2.5.3 Small Project Fund

One of the innovative tools applied by the Programme is the Small Project Fund, the overall objective of which is to broaden the scope of the beneficiaries involved in long-term cross-border cooperation on the local level, hereby strengthening cohesion across the border.

2.5.3.1 Snapshot on the tools supporting cross-border small projects in Europe

The tool is not a standalone initiative in Europe, many INTERREG A programmes of the current and previous programming periods included such instruments. According to the Association of European Border Regions' (AEBR) publication¹⁴⁶, since the launch of the INTERREG in 1990, those programmes have the best evaluation results which have worked with 'people-to-people-projects' (P2P). The logic behind the tool is that the smaller is the project size, the more local stakeholders can be attracted to implement joint initiatives, which contributes to the decrease of the borders' separating effect by promoting direct relations and mutual trust between the citizens of the border regions and mitigating the feeling of 'otherness' towards the other side.

Based on the official website of the INTERREG (<https://interreg.eu/>) and those of the single INTERREG A programmes, 24 CPs (out of the 60 INTERREG V-A Programmes) applied instruments supporting projects with lower size (small and micro project funds, P2P actions, etc.). 9 of them supported small and/or P2P projects in the same way as normal ones, with the only distinction that their financial value was limited. 15 programmes applied by at least a partly separate **institutional and management structure**. In most cases certain management and decision-making tasks have been delegated to mainly Euroregions (in 7 cases), cross-border partnerships (6), Eurodistricts (1) or EGTCs (2, including the SKHU programme) mostly within the framework of umbrella projects, however the range of the delegated tasks varies case by case. In some cases, the entire **responsibility of fund management** is born by the cross-border partnership (e.g. in the case of the INTERREG Austria - Czech Republic Programme) or a Euroregion (i.e. the INTERREG Germany/Saxony - Czech Republic Programme), while other local and regional bodies undertake some of the following tasks:

- management of the call for proposals;
- assessment of the submitted project proposals;

¹⁴⁶ Bergfeld, A., Gross, I-B., Jeřábek M., Lauterbach, P (2017) – Kleinprojekte der grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit

- selection of the projects,
- monitoring of the implementation of the projects,
- consultancy and assistance for the applicants and beneficiaries,
- promotion of the funds.

The small projects of the Interreg Italy – Austria CBC programme are implemented within the framework of a Community-led Local Development (CLLD) scheme enabled by the Cohesion Policy Regulations of 2013.

Regarding the **territorial coverage** of the tools with both direct and indirect management solutions, many of them cover the whole programme area (in 4 cases no information was available on this aspect).

The **thematic coverage** also shows similarities: the most popular topics were culture, nature and environment (selected by 8 tools), but health and social developments, economy, interpersonal and institutional cooperation and education were also supported by 6 tools. Tourism (3), energy (3), transport (2) and SMEs (1) were poorly addressed.

In terms of the **financial framework**, most of the tools (15) offer ERDF contribution up to EUR 50 000, out of which 9 apply a EUR 25 000 ceiling. In one case, the EU support is between EUR 51 000 and EUR 100 000, while 3 schemes allow for applying more than EUR 100 000 per project. The EU contribution rate ranges between 30% and 100%; in most cases it is 85%, but 4 tools offer lower, and 2 higher ERDF support. The only programme that offers 100% ERDF contribution to small projects is the INTERREG France – Wallonie CP.

All these initiatives across Europe prove that there is a need for supporting small, P2P projects. The European Commission also acknowledged the importance of these initiatives and encourage the application of such schemes in the next programming period. In addition, it was also recognised that the regular INTERREG framework requires such amount of administration, which is excessive and not reasonable for small projects, thus specific provisions have been introduced for the small project funds. The ETC Regulation¹⁴⁷ rules the following aspects of implementation (*Article 25*) for the next programming period:

- Share of SPF within the CP budget (*paragraph 1*): shall not exceed 20% of the total allocation of the CP;
- Form of management (*paragraph 1*): final recipients of the small project shall receive ERDF support through the beneficiary/beneficiaries of an umbrella project;
- Fund manager (*paragraph 2*): beneficiary of the umbrella project shall be a cross-border legal body or an EGTC or a body which shall have legal personality¹⁴⁸;
- Selection of the small projects (*paragraph 2*): beneficiary of the umbrella project shall select the small projects (further requirements are set in *paragraph 3*)

¹⁴⁷ Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments

¹⁴⁸ The original proposal included EGTCs, exclusively. The amendments were made following the concerns of those member states which do not use the EGTC tool but do have alternative solutions for managing cross-border developments.

- Costs of fund management (*paragraph 5*): Staff and other costs corresponding to the management of the small project fund shall not exceed 20% of the total eligible cost of the small project fund;
- Simplification measures (*paragraph 6*): where the public contribution to a small project does not exceed EUR 100 000, the ERDF contribution shall take the form of simplified cost options (e.g. unit costs, flat rate).

For the 2021-2027 programming period, evaluators identified 33 CBC programmes that aims to offer financial support to small-scale projects, 27 of which is planned to be implemented as a small project fund (with indirect management) according to the respective rules of the ETC Regulation. This implies that the popularity of the tool is emerging and that the solution applied during the previous Programme is worth being kept.

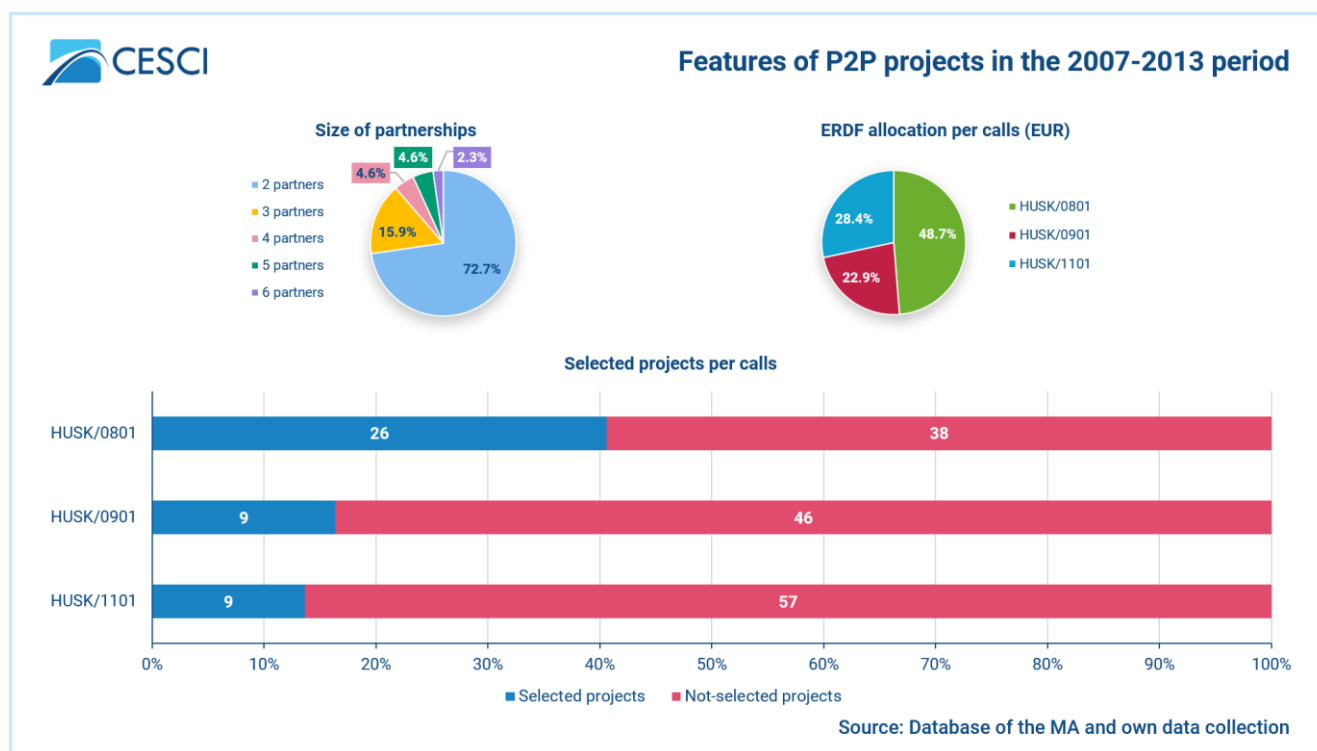
2.5.3.2 The Small Project Fund in the SKHU Programme

In the 2007-2013 programming period, the CP supported people to people actions (Intervention 1.7) within the framework of Priority 1 - Economy and society to encourage people to accept and understand each other and work together. Key activities of the intervention were the following:

- organisation of joint innovative and sustainable events,
- organising workshops, conferences, seminars, scholarships, and exhibitions on a local and regional level,
- support for activities sustaining identity and traditions of local communities: support for cultural institutions; protection of cultural, art and ethnic values particularly targeting marginalised ethnic groups like the Roma population.

The intervention was targeted by 3 calls for proposals (out of the 5), during which 185 applications were submitted to the Programme Bodies. 24% of the project proposals (44 altogether) were selected for funding with a value of EUR 3.2 million ERDF support. Most of the projects aimed to organise events in the fields of culture, arts, sports, environment protection and social issues. The ERDF contribution did not exceed EUR 130 000, while the average size of the projects was approx. EUR 72 000. The majority of the projects (77%) brought together 2 partners from the two sides of the border, but there was one initiative with the participation of 6 project partners.

Figure 117: Features of P2P projects in the 2007-2013 period



The high number of applications mirrors the demand for small-scale P2P actions on the ground. At the same time, due partly to the changing quality of the project proposals, partly to the exponential growth of administrative burdens related to the small-sized proposal, the financial value of the projects had been gradually increased during the programming period. As a result, the Programme Bodies decided to re-launch¹⁴⁹ a fund for small projects in the 2014-2020 programming period, but within a different framework.

Main features of the Small Project Fund (2014-2020)

According to the CP, the Small Project Fund (SPF) is implemented under two priority axes:

- Priority Axis 1: Nature and Culture, and
- Priority Axis 4: Enhancing cross-border cooperation of public authorities and people living in the border area.

The MC decided to delegate the management of the Small Project Fund to two EGTCs, as manager organisations. In 2016, even before the ETC regulation for the 2021-2027 period, this was a unique and innovative solution all over Europe, since only one other programme (the Interreg Rhin Supérieur) involves an EGTC in the implementation of a small project fund.

A call for umbrella projects was published in February, 2017, as a result of which, in a two-round procedure (CfPs SKHU/1701 and SKHU/1704), 4 umbrella projects (2 per PA referring to the geographic distribution of the programme area, namely: east and west) were selected. Within the framework of this

¹⁴⁹ The SPF scheme was applied during the Phare CBC programme.

procedure, the EGTCs elaborated detailed strategies for the implementation of the SPF in close cooperation with each other.

Table 73: Umbrella projects of the SPF

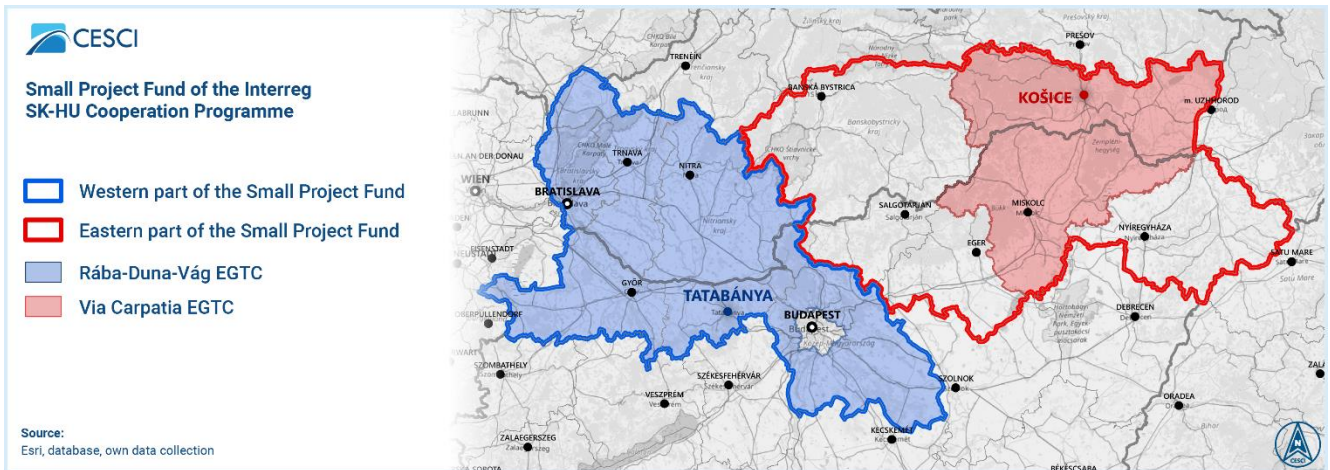
	Eastern side	Western side
PA1	SKHU/1701/1.1/001	SKHU/1701/1.1/002
PA4	SKHU/1701/4.1/003	SKHU/1701/4.1/004

The lead beneficiaries of the umbrella projects were responsible for the operation of the Small Project Fund:

1. the Via Carpatia EGTC on the eastern part of the programming area, covering:
 - a. Bratislavský kraj;
 - b. Košický kraj;
 - c. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megye;
 - d. Heves megye;
 - e. Nógrád megye;
 - f. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megye.
2. the Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC on the western part of the programming area, covering:
 - a. Bratislavský kraj;
 - b. Trnavský kraj;
 - c. Nitriansky kraj;
 - d. Budapest;
 - e. Győr-Moson-Sopron megye;
 - f. Komárom-Esztergom megye;
 - g. Pest megye.¹⁵⁰

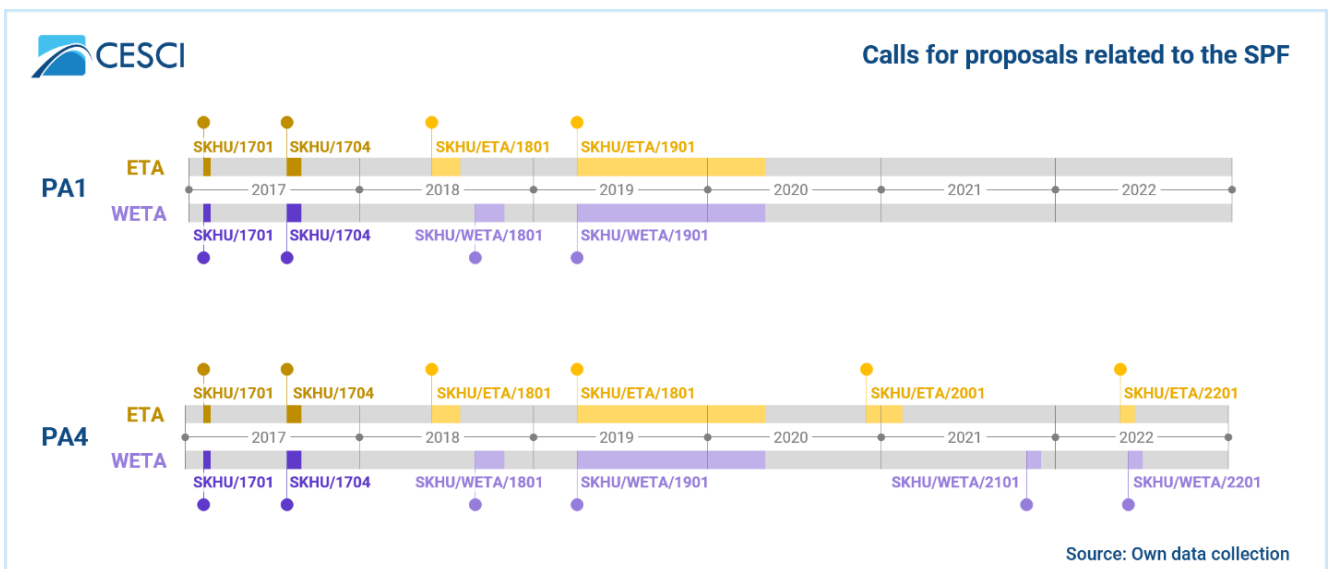
¹⁵⁰ The RDV EGTC covers the whole area of the western part of the Small Project Fund, while the territory of the Via Carpatia EGTC is limited to two territorial units out of the 6.

Figure 118: Territorial partition of the SPF



The main objectives of this decentralised model were to ease the administrative burdens of the JS, as well as to bring the programme closer to the local stakeholders. By making the decision on the involvement of the groupings in the management of the programme, the Programme Bodies introduced a scheme, which is unique all over Europe. According to the EC Report on the application of the EGTC Regulation, the model of the SKHU INTERREG V-A Programme is identified as being worth following¹⁵¹. Furthermore, the model is in line with the new ETC Regulation for the 2021-2027 period, that makes it possible to apply the same solution during the implementation of the next CP, which makes the re-launch of the grant scheme time- and resource efficient.¹⁵²

Figure 119: Calls for proposals related to the SPF



¹⁵¹ REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on the application of Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as amended by Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings

¹⁵² The detailed evaluation of the management structure is described in subchapter “*Institution assessment*”.

After having been contracted, the two EGTCs launched their first pilot calls for small project proposals in 2018 both within PA1 and PA4. The scheduling of these CfPs were different, but both were open for two months. Based on the first experiences gained from the pilot calls, the application procedures were fine-tuned. The 1901 CfPs targeting both PA1 and PA4 were launched at the same time and they were continuously open for 13 months. Assessment and selection of the small project proposals were performed on a 3-month basis. The 3rd and the 4th calls for small project proposals addressed only PA4 and were open for about one-two months. These quick CfPs aimed at filling the gaps in terms of the type of actions and output indicators pre-defined by the CP. It means that there were thematic fields, such as the professional cooperation of public institutions which were poorly targeted in the previous CfPs, therefore the fund operators focused the CfPs to these topics.¹⁵³

The total ERDF allocation to the SPF was nearly EUR 12.5 million, out of which EUR 3.1 million (25%) was entitled to PA1, and EUR 9.4 million (75%) contributed to the objectives of PA4. 15% of the total allocation have covered the costs of the fund management, which is completely in line with the new ETC regulation. Furthermore, within the 8 calls (4 in each side of the border region) EUR 11.3 million was contracted to small projects, which means a 107% allocation rate. The overspending concerned both PA1 and PA4 which can be reasoned by the relatively high rate of remaining ERDF amounts at small projects. This means, that SP beneficiaries were not able to spend the total amount according to the programme rules, and the remaining amount were contracted to the implementation of new small projects during the later CfPs.¹⁵⁴ Considering the validated amount for the already closed small projects and the planned amounts for the on-going ones (EUR 10 540 115.98 altogether), the allocation rate (compared to the CP allocation, EUR 10 595 010.97) is 95.3% in PA1 and 100.1% in PA4.

Altogether 290 small projects were selected for funding out of which 37 (13%) were withdrawn either before or after the contracting procedure. 60 small projects have concerned the PA1 (29 on the eastern, and 31 on the western side), and 193 the PA4 (98 on the eastern and 95 on the western side).

Main features of the small projects

The main mission of the small Project Fund is to strengthen the social cohesion of the border region by promoting people-to-people and institutional cooperation at local level and enhance long-term cooperation between actors from the two sides of the border. Small projects must contribute to the following specific objectives:

- Specific objective 1.1: To increase the attractiveness of the border area;
- Specific objective 4.1: Improving the level of cross-border interinstitutional cooperation and broadening cross-border cooperation between citizens.

Eligible activities are mainly of soft nature:

- joint programmes and events targeting local residents, tourists and professionals of public institutions;
- preparation of joint documents (studies, plans, etc.) and public services;

¹⁵³ For further information on the calls for small project proposals, please refer to the Performance chapters ("*2.1.1.1 Quantification of the PA1's performance*" and "*2.1.1.4 Quantification of the PA4's performance*").

¹⁵⁴ For further information, please, refer to the "*Assessment of the procedures*" subchapter.

- procurement of equipment necessary for the implementation of the soft activities;
- small-scale investments within the framework of PA1, as complementary activities¹⁵⁵.

Activities may target many fields including culture, leisure, sports, education, social issues, tourism or environment protection.¹⁵⁶

The financial volume of a small project is amounted to EUR 20 000 – 50 000, and the project duration is limited to 12 months. In terms of the partnership, the minimum requirement is to have one partner from each side of the border (except for EGTCs, that may act as sole beneficiaries), but the number of partners with ERDF support is limited to two.

The average size of the awarded small projects (ERDF support) was nearly EUR 45 000, and there were no significant differences between the PAs and the two sides of the border. Regarding their thematic scope, highly popular topics were the organisation of joint events, like festivals, fairs, sports and educational programs. In addition, within PA4 joint professional planning and programs of local organisations in the field of education, culture, tourism or environmental protection have been carried out. Within PA1, the topics of protection of cultural heritage and the development of small-scale additional tourism infrastructure (e.g. information signs at already existing thematic routes) were also highly addressed. 48 small projects (out of the 61) implemented infrastructure development, the majority of which (54%) have meant one side infrastructure or mirror development (43%). Only one small project has resulted in joint infrastructure.

According to the Managing Authority, small-scale cross-border cooperation do not require construction of 'concrete', soft actions could better serve strengthening the connections across the border. In addition, the infrastructure works make the project administration too complicated, since the procurement rules of the CP must be applied – even if the project is of small-scale nature.

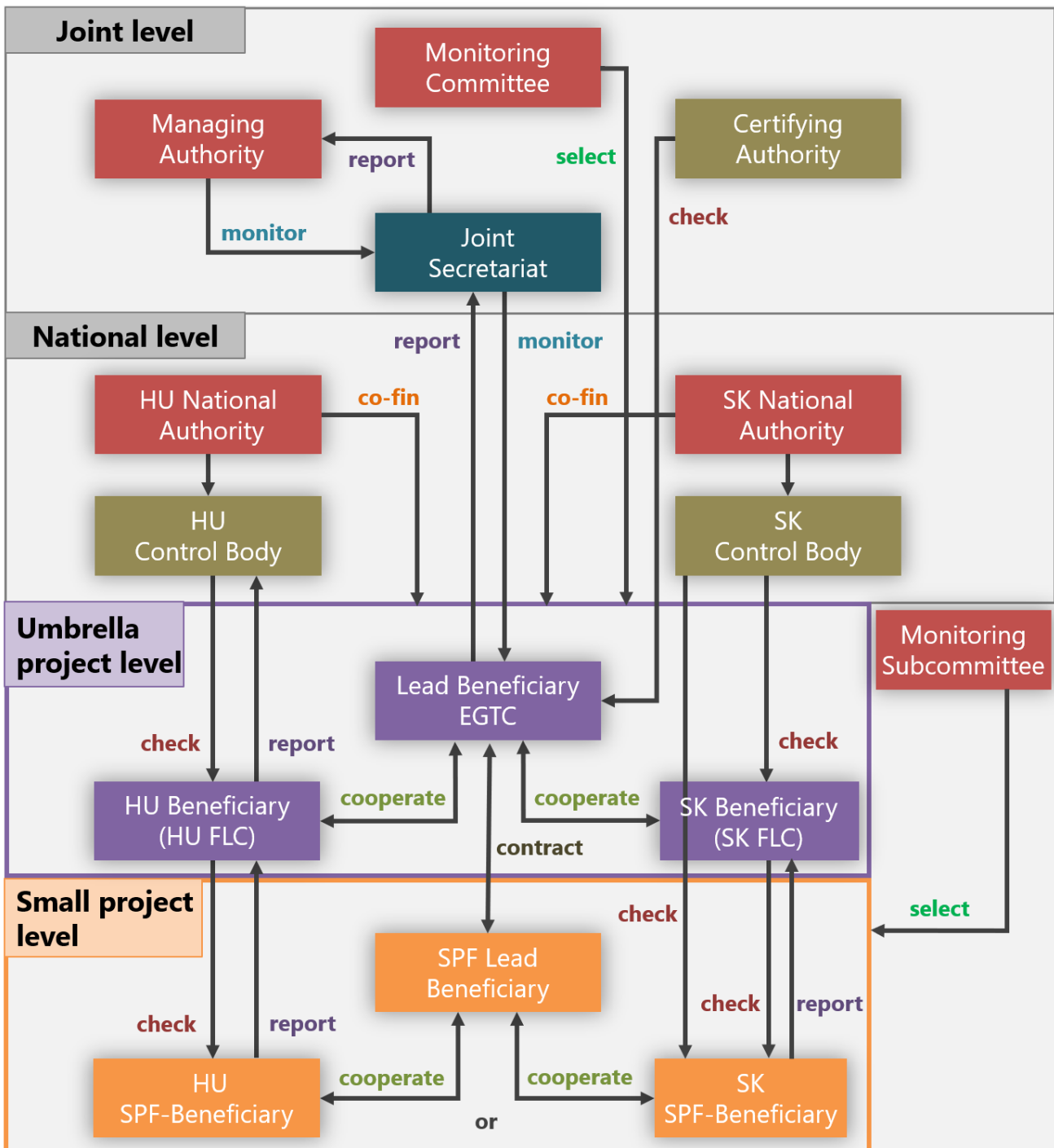
Institution assessment

The operators of the Small Project Fund are two EGTCs (the RDV EGTC and Via Carpatia EGTC) as the Lead Beneficiaries of the umbrella projects implementing them in partnership with those Bodies who are responsible for the first level control of the small projects: in Hungary, it is the Széchenyi Programiroda Nonprofit Kft., in Slovakia 2 regional authorities (Košický samosprávny kraj and Trnavský samosprávny kraj) bear this function.

¹⁵⁵ Investment cannot be the sole or main objective of implementing a small project.

¹⁵⁶ For further information on the assessment of the intervention logic and performance of the small project, please refer to the Performance chapters ("*2.1.1.1 Quantification of the PA1's performance*" and "*2.1.1.4 Quantification of the PA4's performance*").

Figure 120: Management structure of SPF system



Beneficiaries of the umbrella projects had the same tasks as the normal beneficiaries during the whole implementation process: they submitted their project proposals to a restricted call, which was selected by the MC, they have reported on the progress to the JS on a four-month basis, etc. At the same time, EGTCs played similar role in the SPF, as the Joint Secretariat at programme level: they were responsible for the preparation and publication of the calls for small project proposals, they carried out the administrative assessment of the proposals, contracted the small project LBs and assisted the applicants and small project beneficiaries all over the project cycle, etc.

Within the framework of the umbrella projects, two Monitoring Subcommittees were established, one in each side (eastern and western) of the programme area. The Monitoring Subcommittees were the decision-making bodies of the SPF, similarly to the MC of the main programme (CP). The members represented the NUTS3 regions geographically covered by the SPF, the National Authorities and the Joint Secretariat, as an observer). (See the list in the *Table 74*)

Table 74: List of Monitoring Subcommittee members

Country	RDV EGTC	Via Carpatia EGTC
SK	Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic (National Authority)	Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatisation of the Slovak Republic (National Authority)
	Bratislavský kraj	Košický kraj
	Trnavský kraj	Banskobystrický kraj
	Nitriansky kraj	
HU	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Managing Authority)	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Managing Authority)
	Pest megye	Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén megye
	Komárom-Esztergom megye	Heves megye
	Győr-Moson-Sopron megye	Nógrád megye
		Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megye
Joint level	Joint Secretariate (observer status)	
	Széchenyi Programme Nonprofit Office LLC. (observer status)	

The cooperation between the JS and the EGTCs concerning the monitoring of the SPF implementation is ensured and appropriate, but the JS is not satisfied with its observer status. It would prefer to have a greater influence on the implementation in order to be able to prevent such procedural and bureaucratic problems that occurred during the programming period.

Assessment of the procedures

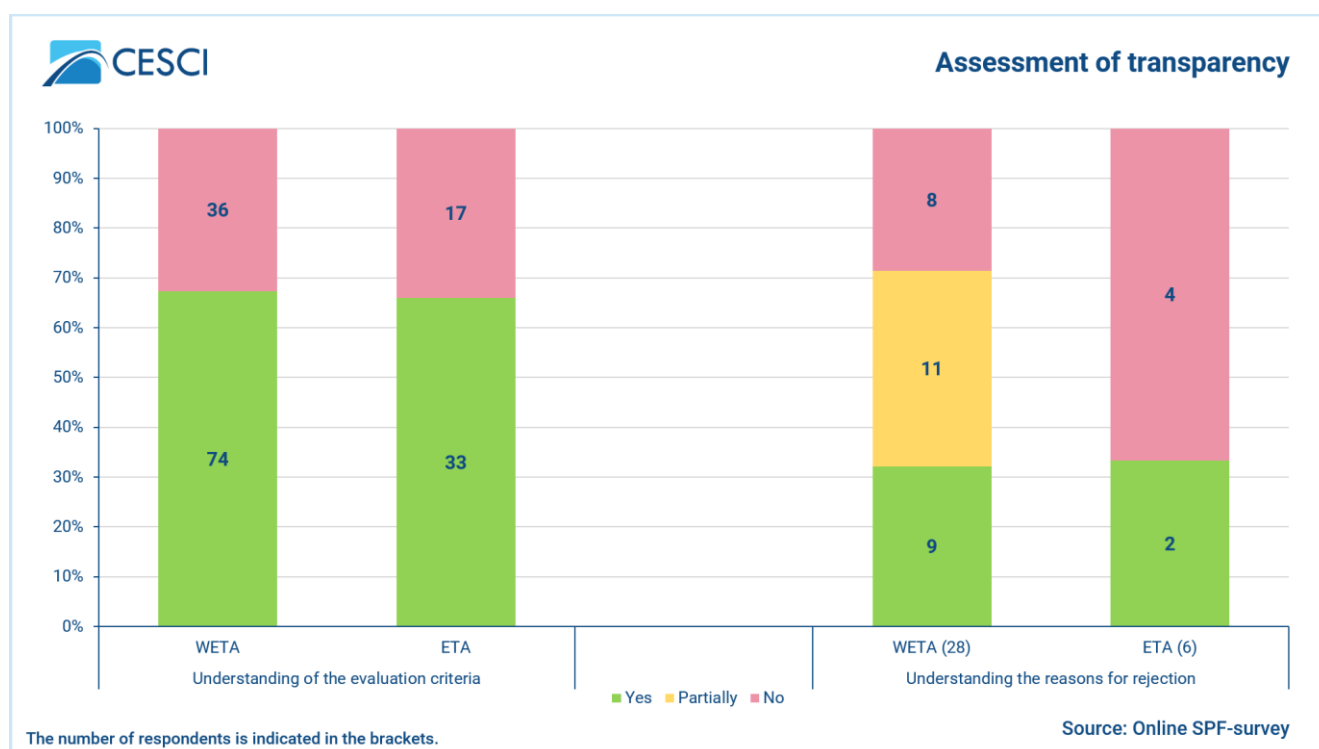
As *Figure 120* illustrates, the implementation of the SPF is performed at four levels. As the umbrella projects are considered as normal projects whose procedures are set-up at programme level, this sub-chapter focuses on the small project level. When launching the SPF tool, the MA and the JS provided room for the EGTCs (as SPF Management Bodies) to establish their own procedures, however they worked in close cooperation. As a result, the framework was the same on the eastern and western sides of the programme area.

The processes of application and assessment were similar to those of the normal calls. The Management Bodies published the call for small project proposals, and the applicants submitted their proposals by the set deadline, but not in the INTERREG+ system, instead in paper format and on data carriers (e.g. USB). The first step of the assessment procedure was the administrative check done by the internal project managers of the EGTC (within 30 days). After that, the management body provided 7 days for completion before the quality assessment began. The 30-day long quality assessment was ensured by

one external expert and one internal evaluator delegated by the EGTC. The final decision about the project selection was made by the Monitoring Subcommittee within 40 days. After the decision of the Monitoring Subcommittee the EGTC had 5 days to notify the applicants about the results.

The beneficiaries of the small projects were asked about the transparency of the assessment procedure in the survey. 67% of the respondents stated that they had been aware of the evaluation criteria (no difference between the two border sections), while the understanding of the reason for rejection generated mostly negative results (39% partially, 29% did not understand it, at all). Those SP applicants, who knew the main reasons of the rejection, reported that the causes of the refusal were the shortage of financial sources, the existence of another small project (the applicant would have been LB again within two years) or technical mistakes made in the application.

Figure 121: Assessment of transparency



Furthermore, they also raised some concerns about the requirements for bilingualism (Slovak, Hungarian), defining the group of applicants, and the description of the procedure for filing missing documents.

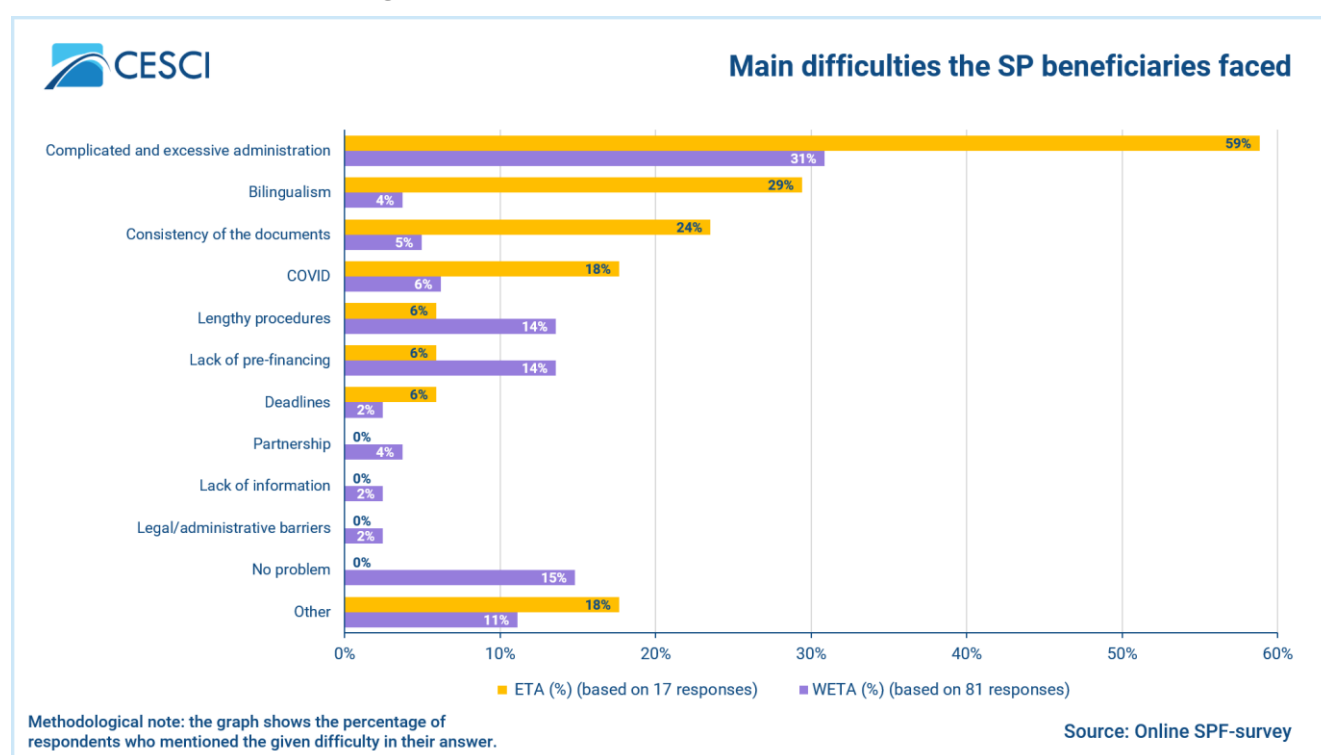
In general, the respondents criticised the inappropriate quality of the documents' translation, which could cause misunderstanding on the SP beneficiaries' side. In the eastern side, mainly the Hungarian documents were problematic according to the beneficiaries.

After having been selected, the 60-day long contracting procedure began. In practice, this timeframe was not complied, since the average duration of the contracting was almost 109 days. The greatest excess was registered on the western side, where the contracting covered averagely 124 days, while the ETA small projects needed "only" 95 days. Focusing on the extremities, the shortest contracting period was 20 days, however there was a project where even 450 days were not enough to sign the contract.

The majority of the delays can be reasoned by the late submission of the mandatory documents for contracting by the SP beneficiaries.

The survey respondents were asked to describe the difficulties they had encountered during the implementation of the small projects. The responses can be grouped into the categories illustrated by *Figure 122*, namely the complicated and excessive administration, bilingualism, inconsistent documents and difficulties stemmed from COVID-19 pandemic. The latter was predominantly mentioned by the respondents located in the eastern region. The western region's beneficiaries encountered difficulties due to lengthy processing time and post-financing, but a relatively high rate of respondents did not report problems. The "other" category in the western region includes the excessive number of indicators and complications in submitting paper-based applications. The latter was named in the eastern region as well.

Figure 122: Main difficulties the SP beneficiaries faced

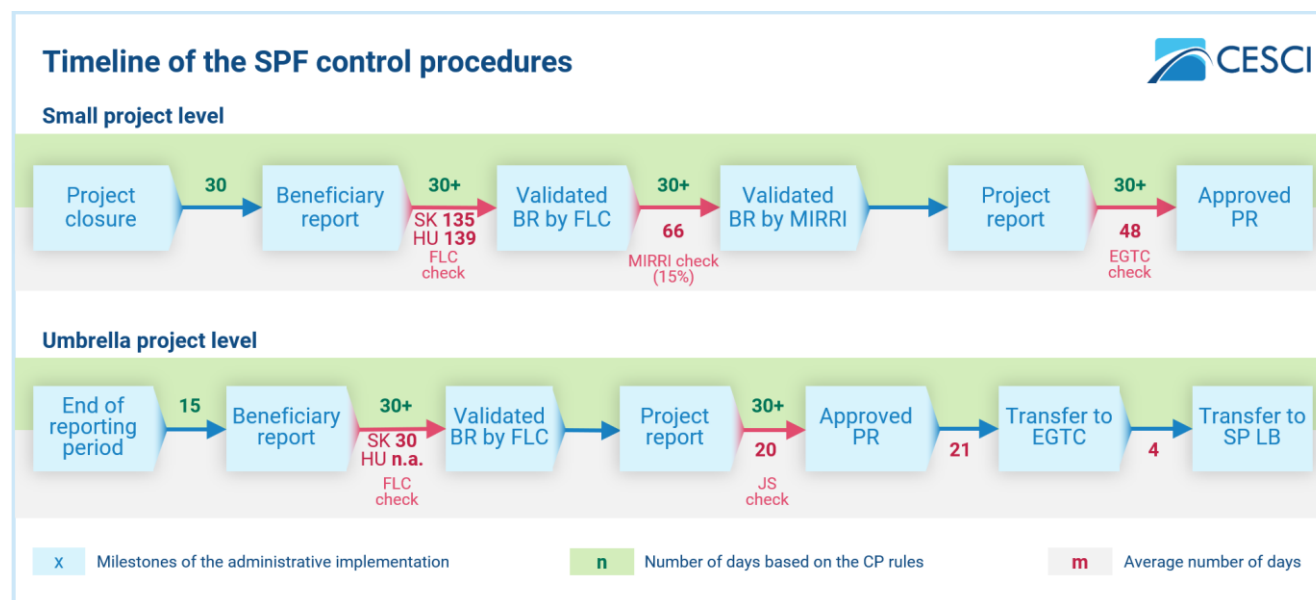


Small project owners were obliged to submit their beneficiary and project reports only once, at the end of the project implementation. As *Figure 123* shows it, beneficiaries had 30 days to submit their beneficiary report to the FLC Bodies, which performed the check within 30 days (+15 days for completion). On the Slovak side, after the FLC, the MIRRI also checked 15% of the beneficiary reports, that had to be awaited by the Hungarian beneficiaries as well. This means, that not only one, but a two-level control procedure was applied, which should not have been longer than 90 days (including the two completion rounds). At the same time, in practice, none of the checks were managed in time: the FLC check was carried out averagely within 137 days (the longest validation process lasted 457 days), while the duration of the MIRRI's check was averagely 66 days (with a maximum of 117 days). The whole process lasted averagely 271 days (nine months!).

After the validation process, the SP lead beneficiaries finalised and submitted the project reports (in national languages) to the relevant EGTC. The EGTCs also had 60 days coupled with the compliment

period (8 days) to approve the project report, which prolonged to 48 days in average (maxima were 320 days). By this step, the final reports got out of the small project level, and the programme level control of the small projects started.

Figure 123: Timeline of the SPF control procedures



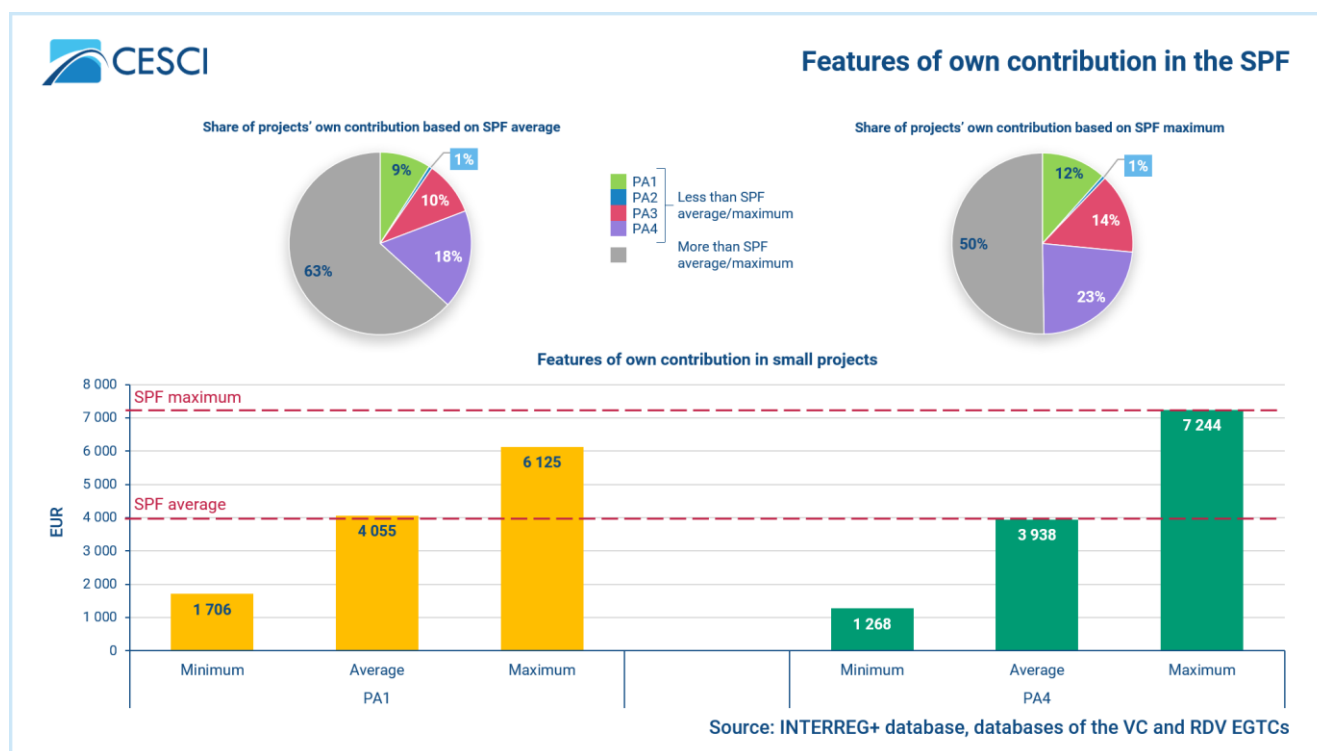
Within 4 months, the EGTCs needed to submit the beneficiary reports to the programme level FLCs, where the controlling lasted 30 days. According to the average duration, the programme level FLC was able to keep the deadline. After the FLC control, the EGTC also submitted the project report to the JS, where the programme body had 30 days (plus the completion period) to approve the received report. Based on the average duration, the JS approved the reports ahead of time (20 days). After the approval, the Treasury Department transferred the EU contribution to the EGTCs, which transferred the sum further to the SP LBs. Averagely, the SP beneficiaries needed to wait 344 days for reimbursement (calculated from the submission date of their beneficiary report), but the longest reimbursement process lasted one and a half year (575 days).

To sum up, it seems that every step of the reporting procedure has been at least doubled, which extremely prolonged the implementation of the small projects. These significant delays in the reporting procedure are rooted in the inappropriate designing of the management structure on the one hand, but the experiences of the EGTCs and the FLC authorities shows that SP beneficiaries tended to not have the capacities and experiences to deal with the administrative burdens of the SPF, on the other. Obviously, it was expected that the administrative burdens of the small projects would be symbolic which has not been proved to be so.

The delays in the reimbursement process have caused liquidity problems for the SP beneficiaries, i.e. small organisations and institutions in a shortage of own resources. This means, that the SP beneficiaries needed to finance the implementation of their project parts from their own budget or in many cases from loans, after which they needed to wait several months, sometimes years to be reimbursed.

The problem seems to be more serious, if we take into consideration that no pre-financing and national co-financing were available to the SP beneficiaries, because of the potential huge additional administrative burdens that they would have caused to the Programme Bodies.

Figure 124: Features of own contribution in the SPF



The average own contribution of SP beneficiaries was approximately EUR 4 000, which was higher than the own contribution of at least one partner in case of 65 normal projects (37% of all normal projects). If we consider the maximum of the SP beneficiaries' own contribution (EUR 7 244), half of the normal projects include at least one beneficiary which needed less own contribution. This phenomenon made the SPF less attractive.

By the cut-off date 8.17% of the reported amount was not approved by the Control Bodies. Considering that 57% of the small projects do not have approved final report, this amount might be significantly higher by the end of the programming period. Many of the SP beneficiaries made serious mistakes during the project implementation, which only became clear after the project closure (when the single project report was checked), during the FLC validation, when corrections were not easy to perform.

Table 75: Reduced reported amount by the Control Bodies

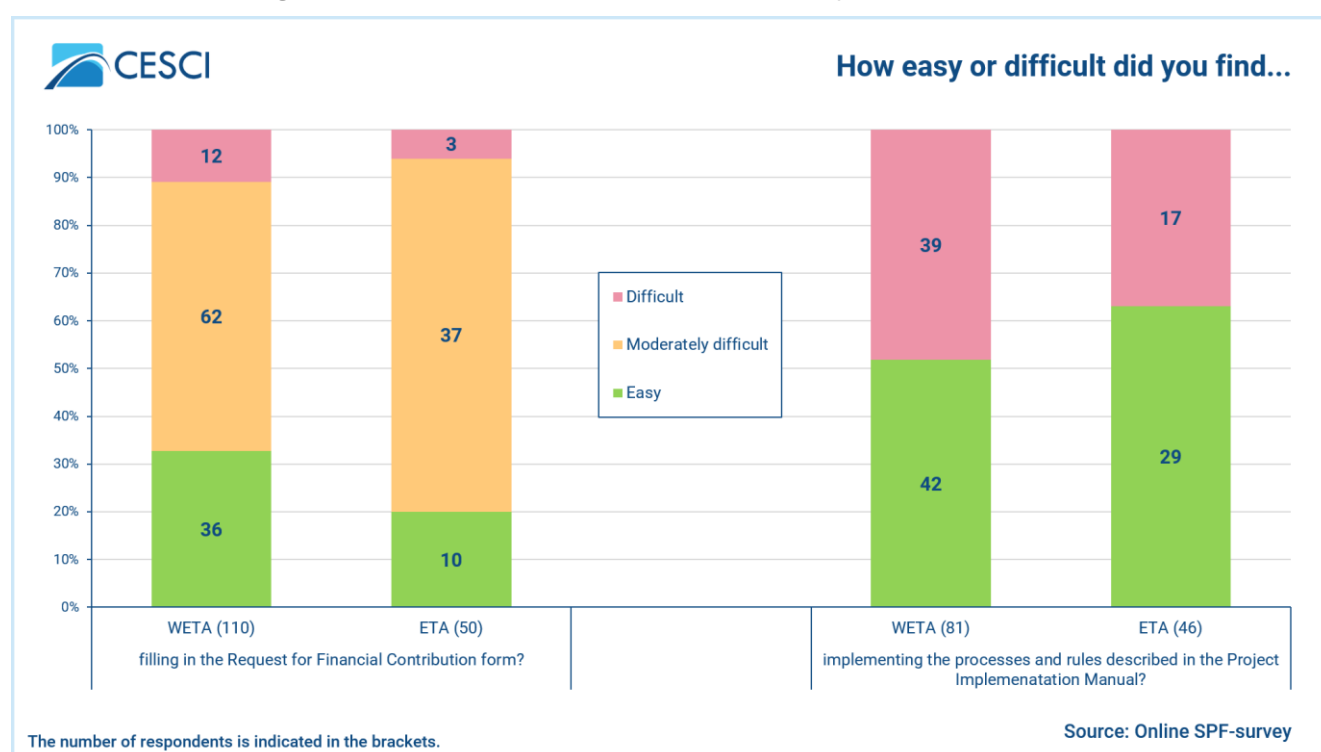
PA	ETA/WETA	Reduced ERDF amount during the FLC (EUR)	Percentage of the ERDF amount submitted in the Beneficiary Reports
PA1	ETA	66 957.40	7.48%
	WETA	58 789.69	5.92%
	Total PA1	125 747.09	6.66%
PA4	ETA	127 422.93	6.74%
	WETA	232 575.46	10.72%
	Total PA4	359 998.39	8.87%
Overall		485 745.48	8.17%

Simplification

Since the SPF tool offer small-scale support (EUR 20 000 – 50 000) to small organisations and institutions, the simplification of the administrative and financial burdens is essential. In reality though, nearly the same administrative requirements have been applied also to the small projects as to the normal ones.

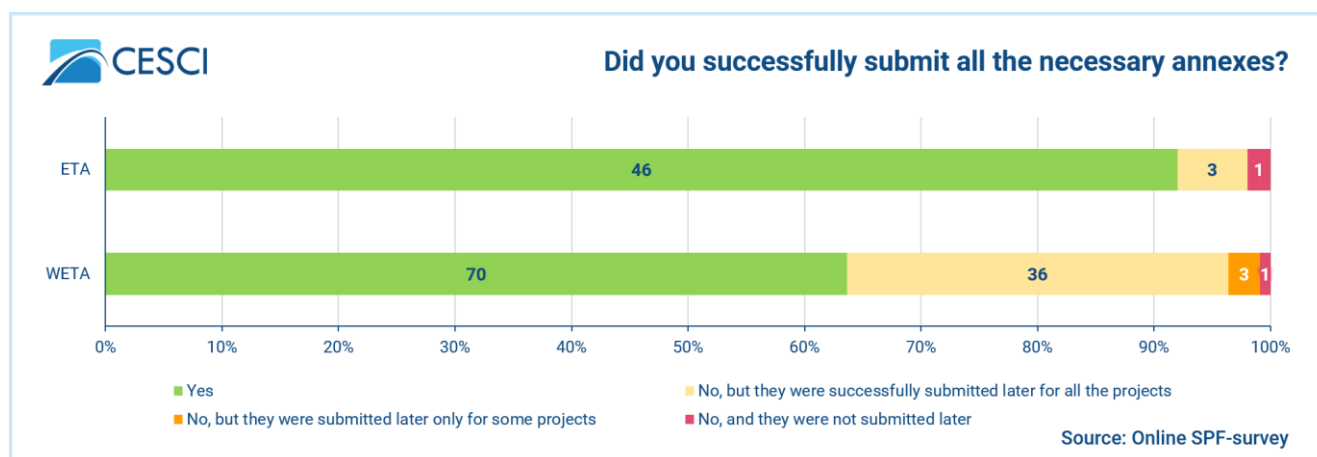
During the first calls for small project proposals, a **simplified application form** (the so-called Request for Financial Contribution) was used. At the later stages on the western side, the Monitoring Subcommittee decided to use a more complex form (similarly to the normal projects), which obviously meant an extra administrative burden to the SP applicants. The updated form required the detailed description of several aspects, which seems to be less relevant in case of the small projects (e.g innovative aspect of the project). According to the SP survey, however most respondents found the application form (Request for Financial Contribution) understandable (see *Figure 127*), only a few of them found it easy to complete (see *Figure 125*). The most problematic aspects concerned the indicators and the budget plan.

Figure 125: User-friendliness of the administrative procedures of the SPF



Regarding both the application and reporting procedures, many **mandatory annexes** (declarations, market value certification, etc.) were required by the Management Bodies. *Figure 126* illustrates whether the respondents had any project proposals with missing (mandatory) annexes in the application phase. In the western region, more than 35% of the respondents were not able to submit all the mandatory annexes until the deadline, but the majority of them were able to make the completion at a later stage. The respondents with missing annexes were mostly the ones who found the Request for Financial Contribution difficult to understand.

Figure 126: Submission of the necessary annexes



Both regions' beneficiaries reclaimed the tight deadlines and confusing administration as the reasons for the missing annexes. Respondents mentioned that the administrative requirements were not always clear and it also happened that they were not able to receive the documents in time (which was possible during the time of the restrictions due to the COVID-19).

All the application forms and the project reports needed to be submitted to the EGTCs in Hungarian and Slovak, which meant additional administrative burden to the SP beneficiaries. However, the interviews testified that using the English was not an option, as many small organisations had not proper capacities for doing that. In light of this, the possibility to select one of the native languages would be the solution to the problem – however, it would put another burden on the EGTCs' shoulders, namely, the translation.

The **lack of a joint on-line monitoring system** meant another extra burden to both the EGTCs and the applicants. The SPF-beneficiaries needed to send their documents in paper format and on electronic data carriers (CD/DVD/pen drive) as well. Apart from the cumbersome management of the printed documentation, the delays caused by the postal service made the administrative processes even more sluggish. Furthermore, printing the huge number of documents is not in line with the horizontal principles of the CP. The survey also confirms this statement, since 104 respondents out of 110 (94.5%) would prefer filing the Request for Financial Contribution electronically, mainly due to speed, practicality, simplicity and environmental protection. From an evaluation point of view, it is worth mentioning that after a longer data collection period the project descriptions can be explored, but no information is available on the realised activities.

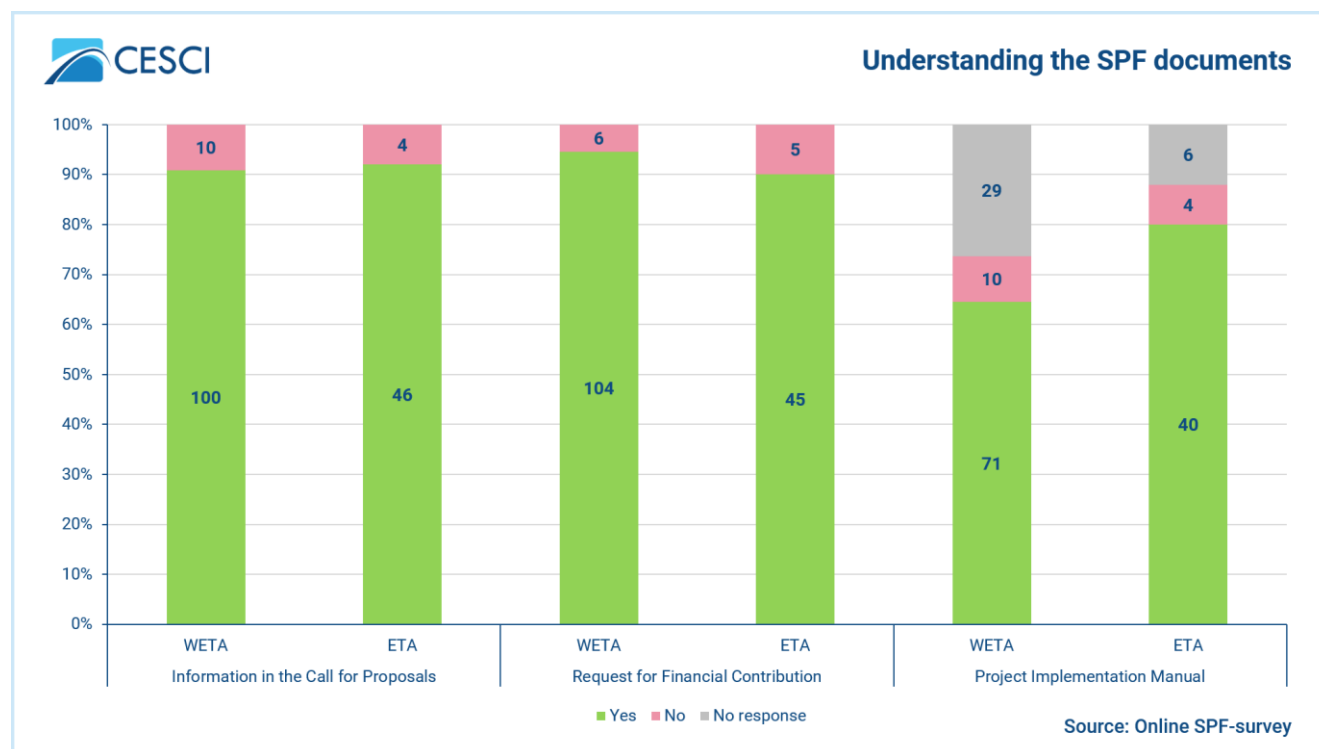
The SPF applies **simplified cost options** for staff and administrative costs (15% flat-rate), which are effective tools to decrease administrative tasks of both the FLC Bodies and the beneficiaries. It would be beneficial to extend the use of SCOs in order to simplify the reporting of travel expenses and equipment procurement. In this way, the difficult procurement rules set-up by the CP could be lightened for the SP beneficiaries in the future.

Assessment of the assistance provided by the EGTCs

Both groupings made efforts to provide the stakeholders with the necessary information concerning the SPF requirements. First of all, they published information documents, which guide the project

partners through the administrative procedures. *Figure 127* illustrates whether the applicants and beneficiaries participating in the survey had any difficulties with understanding the documents used throughout the project cycle.

Figure 127: Understanding the SPF documents



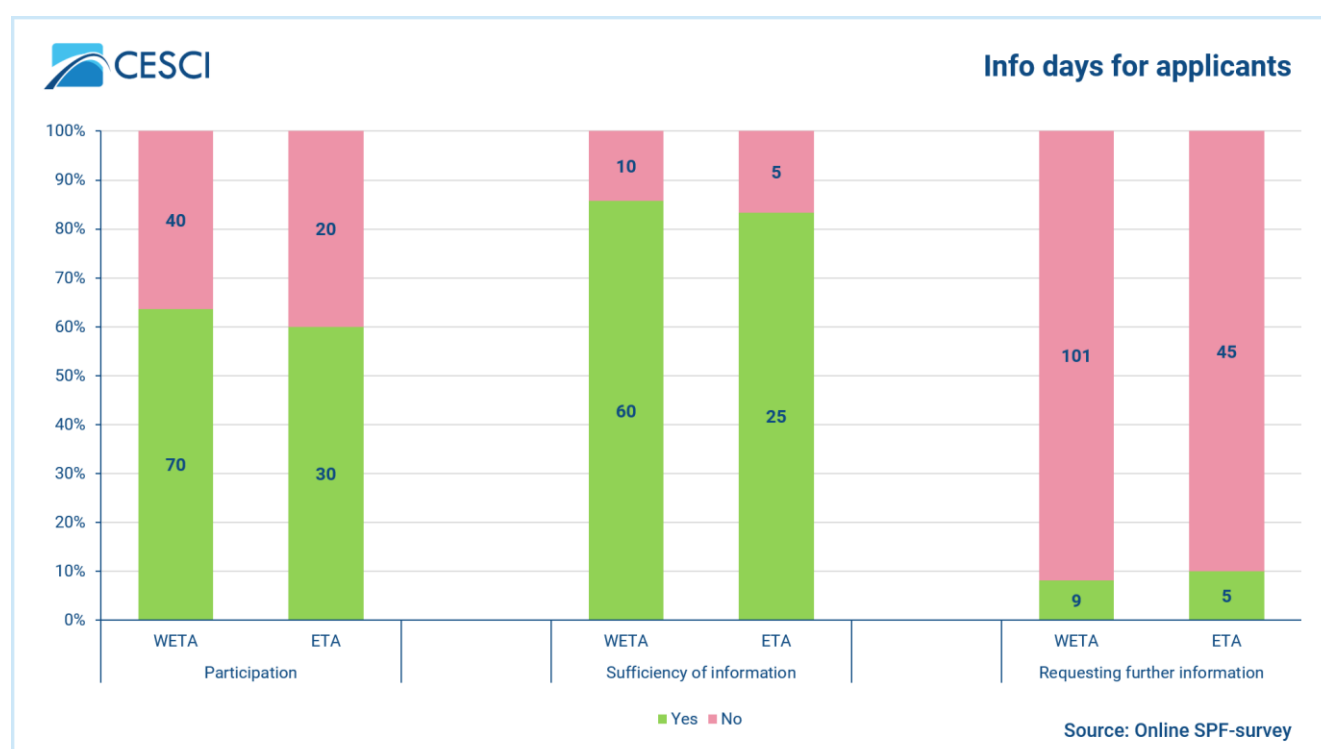
Respondents found the information on the calls for proposals and the application form understandable. In spite of this, the most common mistakes that were made by the potential SP beneficiaries during the application process, belonged to mainly administrative and technical issues. The following list incorporates the most common reasons of rejections by the RDV EGTC:

- the absence of the signature of the legal representative of the SP LB and the official stamp from the first page;
- the list of the annexes was not attached;
- missing electronic data carrier;
- not the original application form was submitted;
- the scanned form of the signed application was not submitted;
- the missing documents were not submitted during the completion period;
- the absence of the Excel file from the application form;
- deficient number of programme indicators;
- the selected indicators did not fulfil the minimum requirements, or not the PA-relevant indicators were selected;
- the project did not meet the minimum requirements of horizontal principles;
- the application did not achieve at least 65 points under the quality assessment;
- the application did not meet the criteria of efficiency, effectiveness and economy.

The respondents were also generally satisfied with the 'Manual', but they also criticised it due to the insufficient information on the controlling procedure and the required documents.

In order to provide the partners with the necessary information, the EGTCs also organised info days all over the programme area. These events provided the opportunity to give a clearer picture about the basic conditions of the CfPs and the eligibility rules. At these events the EGTC experts gave information for the SP beneficiaries how to fill in the application form and which annexes were required to submit. In light of *Figure 128*, nearly two thirds of the respondents, from both the western and eastern regions, attended this type of events. Participants generally considered the information provided at the events to be sufficient and useful, which is also supported by the low number of requests for further information on payment processes and controlling. Moreover, further assistance for completing the Request for Financial Contribution was solicited.

Figure 128: Info days for SP applicants

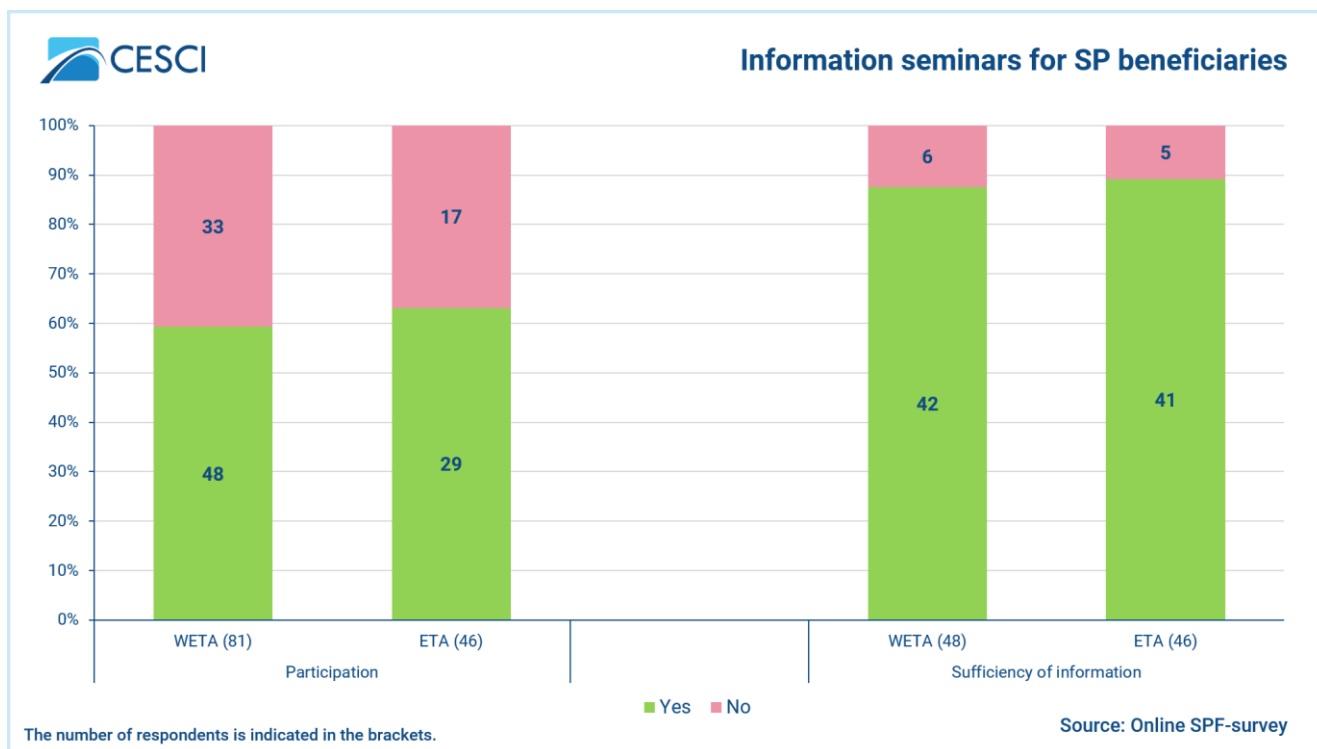


Beside the info days, the EGTCs organised seminars for the SP beneficiaries to facilitate the project implementation process. Owing to these events, the cooperation between the EGTCs and the attended beneficiaries has evolved well, and the opportunity of asking was continuously open for them.

The *Figure 129* shows the proportion of respondents who attended the information seminars (approx. two thirds). The primary reason for being absent was the lack of time for both the eastern (41%) and the western regions (58%). Furthermore, some participants found the location of the event being too far from their home (24% in the eastern, 15% in the western region) or had already participated therein and did not find it useful (12% and 1%). In addition, in the western side, sometimes external project managers were delegated to attend the event.

Most of the participants stated that they had received sufficient amount of information during these seminars (88% and 89%), however, they also expressed some missing aspects. For example, in the western region, more information was reclaimed on controlling and payments. In the eastern region, respondents would have been interested in information on the procedures, such as the assessment of incomplete applications.

Figure 129: Information seminars for SP beneficiaries



According to the EGTCs, the potential applicants needed assistance to build out firm partnerships, where the partners fitted to each other not just thematically, but geographically, professionally and financially as well. To facilitate this, the EGTCs established partner search databases and forums, where the potential project partners could easily find their future partners on the other side of the border.

The project managers of the EGTCs were continuously in contact with the potential SP beneficiaries. According to the EGTCs, the communication channels were already in place by the time of the pandemic and it was significantly valorised and intensified at that time of the programme period. The following chart (*Figure 130*) shows the level of satisfaction with the assistance provided by the EGTC project managers. A high proportion of respondents stated that they were provided with clarifications and that they were satisfied with the project managers' communication and with the information they provided on project implementation and the completion of application forms. At the same time, some of the SP beneficiaries had the feeling that they did not possess enough information to meet the programme's expectations.

Figure 130: SP beneficiaries' satisfaction with the assistance provided by the project managers

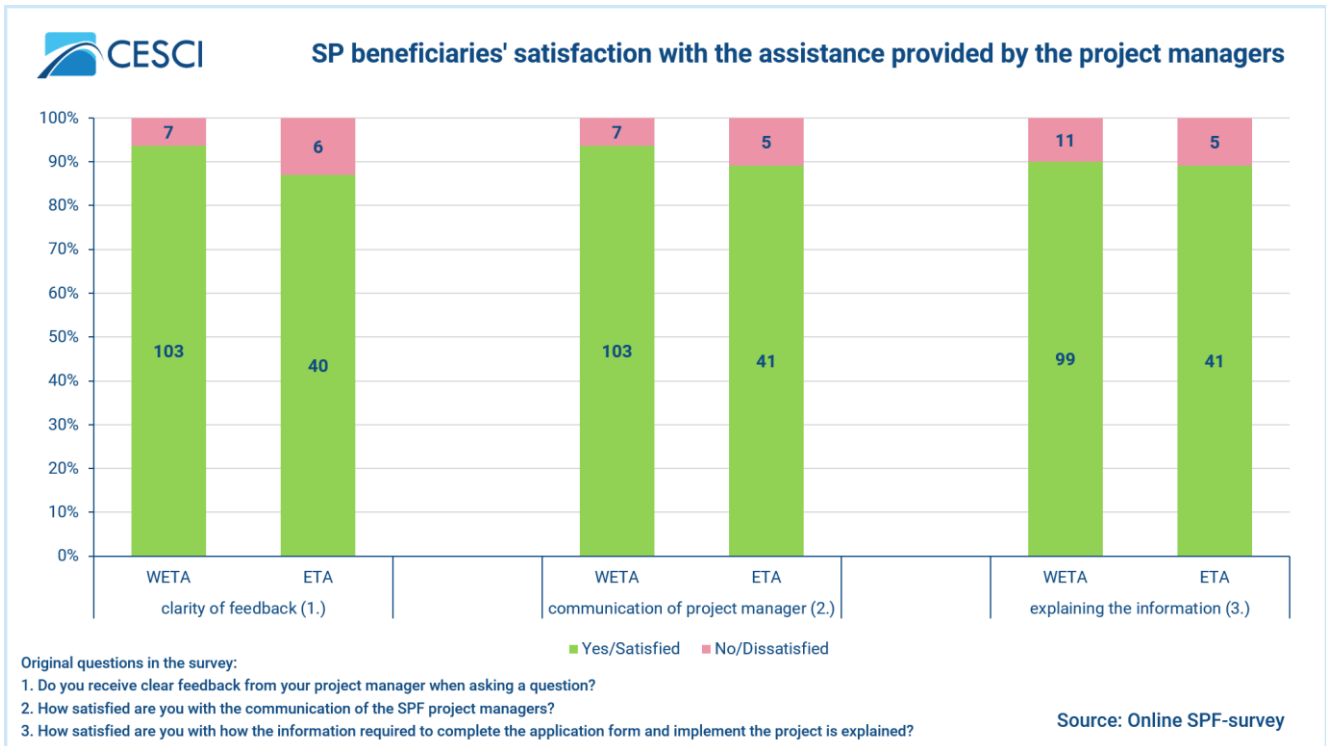
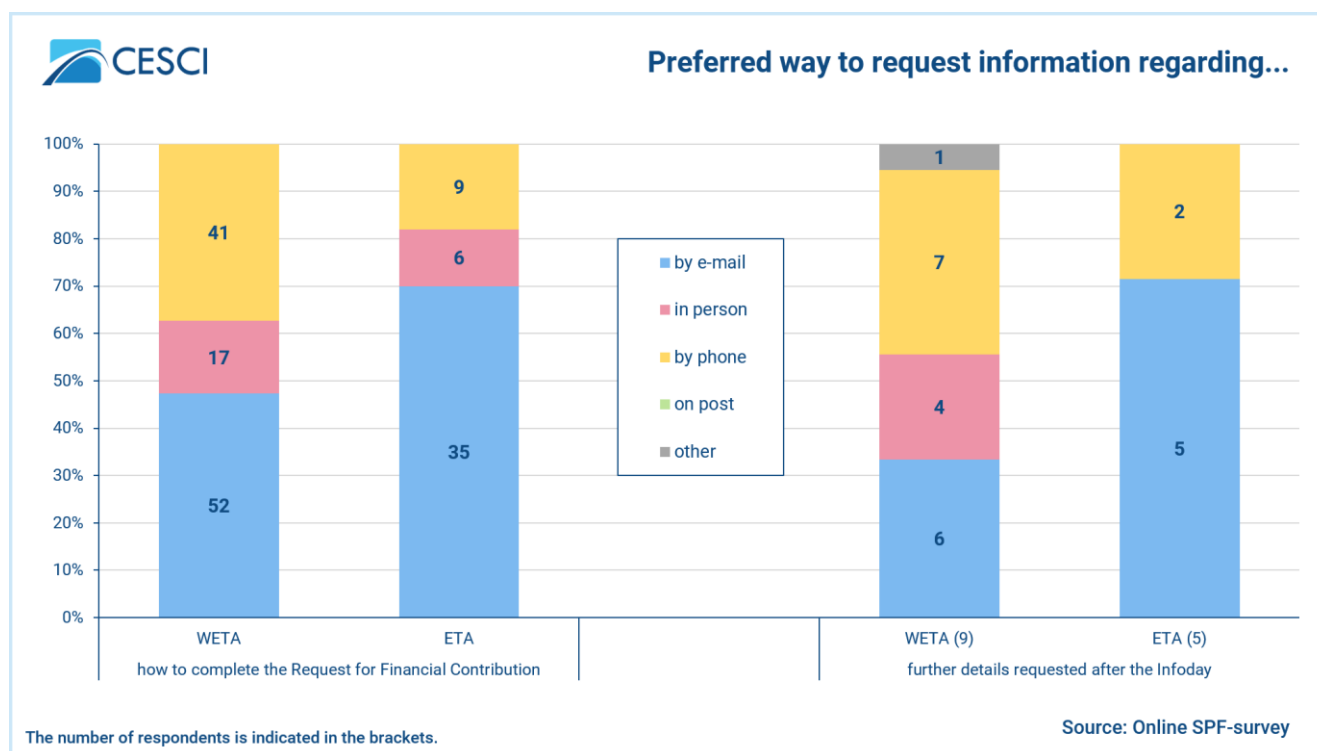


Figure 131 illustrates which form of contact was preferred when requesting more information. E-mail was the most preferred method, mainly in ETA (here 70%, while 47% in WETA), followed by phone and in-person communication. Postal enquiries were not preferred in either case. The staff of the RDV EGTC mentioned that SPF beneficiaries did not exploit the opportunity of personal consultation, and only a small number of beneficiaries visited the EGTC's office, what caused insufficient applications and many theoretically avoidable mistakes. The same phenomenon was also reported by the Hungarian FLC body.

Figure 131: Preferred way to request information



Regarding the assessment of the EGTCs' capacity, there were unexpected difficulties. The RDV EGTC underlined that the late or incorrect performance of small projects required more resources from the EGTC and the FLC than it had previously been expected. The Via Carpatia EGTC pointed out the fact that many new SP beneficiaries participated in the programme with less knowledge about administrative requirements and CBC aspects, generating extra assistance needs. Additionally, the personal changes within the Via Carpatia EGTC resulted in further difficulties, and it was a little bit complicated to handle the tasks with the new colleagues.

Conclusions

In general, both the interviewed Programme Management Bodies (including the EGTCs) and the stakeholders expressed that they still support the idea of the Small Project Fund, as there is a need for supporting the vivid small-scale cooperation across the border. This is confirmed by the local stakeholders' high interest towards the calls for small project proposals: altogether 596 applications were submitted to the EGTCs. Regarding the success of the mission on the involvement of newcomers into the programme implementation, 79% of the SP beneficiaries did not participate in the previous programme (2007-2013) according to the database of the Managing Authority. Consequently, the tool has met the expectations: it managed to involve many new beneficiaries in cross-border activities. At the same time, these newcomers lacked the appropriate experiences which generated many unexpected difficulties and problems for the Management Bodies. This is a lesson which should be responded by the upcoming CBC programmes.

From the JS perspective, the SPF is an innovative tool to create people-to-people projects and to enhance the CBC aspect on local level, however the small projects also inherited the drawbacks of the programme. Especially the bureaucracy has doubled as the reporting procedure needed to be

performed on both small project and programme levels. In order to shorten the reporting process, integrated controlling would have been needed. Albeit the JS outsourced the management of small projects to the EGTCs, one of the members of the JS is still in charge of small projects (although not as profoundly as in the case of normal projects). The preparation of the task delegation definitely required extra efforts on behalf of the JS, but it seems that the coordination and monitoring of the 250 small projects' tendering and implementation far exceeds this workload. The documentation of the small projects was quite hectic, therefore the unification of the administrative requirements is desirable. It is currently not clear that the INTERREG+ system will include these data, but the main goal should be to reduce the administrative burdens of SP beneficiaries.

According to the MA, due to the administrative obstacles, the SPF system does not work as efficiently as planned before. The involvement of EGTCs caused temporary difficulties, as the limited capacities of the EGTCs and their lack of experiences hardened the smooth operation, but it is a learning process and hopefully the EGTCs will improve their deficiencies. Compared to the fact that the main target groups of the SPF are those actors who own scarce financial capacity, the absence of pre-financing is a great challenge. This problem is more severe in the light of prolonged reimbursement, and it can put the SP beneficiaries in financial difficulty.

All in all, the implementation of the Small Project Fund was burdened by many difficulties, it is still an innovative way to provide opportunity for beneficiaries with small-scale budget.

3 ANNEX

3.1 Overview of the PAs' implementation

The following table gives an overview on the status of programme implementation by the cut-off date, summarising all the main features of the process.

Table 76: Overview of the PA's implementation

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
PA1	Nature and culture	<p>PA1 represents 46% of the ERDF allocation of the programme (EUR 66.7 million). The contracted amount of PA1 is EUR 67.7 million. 4.7% of this contracted budget frame (EUR 3.2 million) is dedicated to the SPF umbrella projects from which 85.5% represent the costs of small projects (EUR 2.75 million) and 14.5% the management costs (more than EUR 467 000).</p> <p>The specific objective of this priority axis is to increase the attractiveness of the border area. It is expected that the number of visitors coming from the neighbouring country will significantly grow on each side of the border and long-term, strategic cooperation starts in many small regions for protecting natural and cultural heritage.</p> <p>The main beneficiary types are local municipalities, enterprises (SMEs), and non-governmental organisations. The total number of beneficiaries is 198, which is complemented by 120 SP beneficiaries.</p> <p>Under PA1 six CfPs were published. The number of projects under the first normal call is 29, under the SPF call 2, under the SME call 6 and under the second normal call 22. Regarding the Small Project Fund, 2-2 CfPs were published on each border section¹⁵⁷: 14 small projects belong to SKHU/1801 and 46 to SKHU/1901.</p> <p>299 applications were submitted under PA1, 20% of the applications (59 projects) were contracted. Out of 59 projects, 29 (49%) were technically and administratively closed by the cut-off date, while the number of on-going projects was 30 (51%). Beside the programme level applications, 214 small project proposals were received, 28% of them were contracted (60 small projects). The administrative closure has already taken place in the case of 37 small projects (62%), the remaining 23 (38%) are still on-going.</p> <p>More than half of the EU contribution (60%; EUR 40.9 million) is validated, and 37% of the ERDF funding (EUR 24.9 million) is before the validation</p>

¹⁵⁷ Eastern and western border regions (see the chapter "2.5.3 Small Project Fund").

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
		<p>process. By now, the amount of remaining money is EUR 1.8 million (3%). On small project level, 52% of the ERDF is validated (EUR 1.4 million), 39% is not validated (EUR 1 million) and 8% is remaining (more than EUR 231 000).</p> <p>One result indicator (<i>R110 Total number of visitors in the region</i>) belongs to PA1, which already achieved the target value in 2020. What is more, the achieved value is one and a half times higher than the goal designed to be achieved in 2023. Although the source of data is based on statistical offices, but (due to the different years of reference) the comparability of different national statistics is not guaranteed. The indicator does not introduce the exact impact of the programme, as the external factors are not filtered out. Regarding the nature and environment, the tourism-related indicator is problematic.</p> <p>Six output indicators (5 common specific and 1 programme specific) have been assigned to PA1, out of which four of them achieved the programme target value in 2021, but the two remaining ones (<i>CO01 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support</i> and <i>CO02 Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants</i>) fulfilled 90% of the goal. According to the project's target values, only the latter one will not achieve the target by 2023. The most significant overperformance is expected under <i>CO09 Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions</i>. On small project level, three indicators were determined under PA1, out of which all of them achieved the target values before 2023.</p>
PA2	Enhancing cross-border mobility	<p>PA2 represents 15% of the ERDF allocation of the programme (EUR 22.4 million). The contracted amount of PA2 is EUR 22.92 million.</p> <p>The specific objectives of this PA are to increase the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border by preparation of investments and construction of cross-border infrastructure. The goal of the second specific objective is to improve cross-border public transport services. The third (withdrawn) objective would have ensured opportunity to improve the cross-border logistic services.</p> <p>The beneficiaries of the PA actions are mainly local municipalities and state-owned companies, followed by EGTCs, regional municipalities and non-profit organisations. The total number of beneficiaries is 18.</p> <p>Under PA2 one CfP (SKHU/1601) was published. This normal call awarded altogether 7 projects from among the 20 applications submitted. 3 of them (43%) were technically and administratively closed by the cut-off date, while the number of on-going projects was 4 (57%).</p>

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
		<p>More than half of the EU contribution is not validated (63%; almost EUR 14.5 million) and only 36% of the contribution (EUR 8.4 million) went through on the validation process. The value of the remaining ERDF is nearly EUR 78 000 (less than 1%) that will grow during the implementation.</p> <p>Three result indicators belonged to PA2, one (<i>R222 Change in the volume of cross-border good transport</i>) was withdrawn. Although the <i>R210 Average distance between border crossing points</i> achieved its target value in 2020, the <i>R221 Change in the volume of cross-border public transport</i> is far from its goal (only 13% of the required value has been realised). Under <i>R221 Change in the volume of cross-border public transport</i> the source of data is based on external actors, that limits the availability of data.</p> <p>Three output indicators (1 common specific and 2 programme specific) belonged to PA2, but no projects can be assigned to <i>O222 Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme</i> (withdrawn indicator). So far none of the indicators have met the target: under <i>O221 Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme</i> 50%, under <i>CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads</i> 0% of the target values were realised. According to the projects' target values, all goals will be achieved by 2023.</p>
PA3	Facilitating employment	<p>PA3 represents 24% of the ERDF allocation of the programme (EUR 35.7 million). The contracted amount of PA3 is EUR 35.9 million.</p> <p>The specific objective of this PA is decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region. The projects of this PA shall improve the conditions for cross-border commuting and the accessibility to employment. For this purpose, the PA applied a specific tool, the territorial action plan for employment (TAPE).</p> <p>The main beneficiary types of the PA actions are enterprises, local municipalities, and non-governmental organisations, furthermore EGTCs, development agencies, non-profit organisations, public institutions, etc. The total number of beneficiaries is 116.</p> <p>Under PA3 three CfPs were published. The number of the awarded projects is 44 under SKHU/1802 and 3 under SKHU/1901.</p> <p>60 applications were submitted under PA3, 78.3% of the applications (47 projects) were contracted. Out of 47 projects, 5 (10.6%) were technically and administratively closed at the cut-off date, while the number of on-going projects is 42 (89.4%).</p> <p>Only 36% of the EU contribution (EUR 12.8 million) is validated and more than half of it (62%; EUR 22.2 million) is before the validation process, while</p>

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
		<p>the remaining value is 2% (EUR 806 000). These values will change considerably as the implementation progresses.</p> <p>One result indicator (<i>R310 Increase in the employment rate</i>) belongs to PA3 and it already fulfilled the target value by 7.7 percentage point surplus in 2020. The measurement unit and the source of data are adequate (based on statistical offices), but different years of reference were used. The exact impact of the programme cannot be determined because the indicator is a bit general.</p> <p>Ten output indicators (6 common specific and 4 programme specific) have been assigned to PA3, out of which two indicators (<i>CO13 Roads: Total length of newly built roads</i>, <i>O314 Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services</i>) have not fulfilled their target values (less than 30% of their goals were achieved) and no achievement was reported under <i>O311 Number of integrated territorial plans</i>, as the action plans have not been accomplished yet.</p>
PA4	Institutional cooperation	<p>PA4 represents 15% of the ERDF allocation of the programme (EUR 21.6 million). The contracted amount of PA4 is EUR 23 million. 43% of this contracted budget frame (almost EUR 9.95 million) is utilised by the SPF umbrella projects: 86% is covered by the costs of small projects (EUR 8.5 million); 14% are the management costs of the two managing EGTCs (more than EUR 1.4 million).</p> <p>The specific objective of this PA is to improve the level of cross border inter-institutional cooperation and broaden cross-border cooperation between citizens. Projects under PA4 shall strengthen the internal social cohesion of the programming area.</p> <p>The main beneficiary types of the PA actions are non-governmental organisations, universities and research institutes, local municipalities, EGTCs, and chambers, etc. The total number of beneficiaries is 549 (383 SP-beneficiaries).</p> <p>Under PA4 four CfPs were published. The number of projects under the first normal call is 27, under the SPF umbrella call 2 and under the second normal call 26. Regarding the small projects, 4-4 CfPs were published on each border section (altogether 193 small projects: 11 of them belong to SKHU/1801, 126 to SKHU/1901, 22 to SKHU/2001, 15 to SKHU/2101 and 19 to SKHU/2201).</p> <p>201 applications were submitted under PA4, 27% of them (55 projects) were awarded. Out of these 55 projects, 33 (60%) were technically and administratively closed by the cut-off date, while the number of on-going projects is 22 (40%). Apart from the normal call applications, 415 small</p>

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
		<p>project proposals were received, 46.5% of them were contracted. Administratively 37% of the small projects have been closed and 63% are still on-going.</p> <p>More than half of the EU contribution (55%; EUR 12.7 million) is validated, and 39% of the ERDF (nearly EUR 8.9 million) is before the validation process, while the remaining value is currently EUR 1.4 million (6%). On small project level, 33% of the ERDF is validated (EUR 2.8 million), 61% is not validated (nearly EUR 5.2 million) and 6% is remaining (almost EUR 530 000).</p> <p>One result indicator (<i>R410 Level of cross-border cooperation</i>) belongs to PA4. Its achieved value is close to the target (83% of the required score was fulfilled in 2020). An own methodology (survey) was developed to measure the progress of the indicator, but its application is time-consuming and does not give direct and clear picture about the expected results.</p> <p>Seven output indicators belong to PA4, all of them are programme specific. Only one (<i>O414 Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF</i>) has not fulfilled its target value (92%). The other six significantly surpassed the targets. According to the projects' target values, all indicators will meet the expected level by 2023. In terms of small projects, six output indicators were assigned to PA4, all of them achieved their target values prior to the milestone with notable overperformance.</p>
PA5	Technical assistance	<p>6% of the total ERDF (EUR 9.35 million) was allocated to Technical Assistance which was fully contracted within the framework of the TA projects (100% allocation rate).</p> <p>The specific objective of this PA is ensuring the effective management and implementation of the SKHU Programme.</p> <p>The beneficiaries of the PA actions are the Programme Bodies.</p> <p>The affected calls and number of applications are not relevant in this PA.</p> <p>There are 10 PA5-related projects all of which is on-going until the end of the programme period.</p> <p>The amount of validated TA costs (regarding the EU contribution) is EUR 6 million which is more than half (64.4%) of the allocated TA budget.</p> <p>There are no result indicators under PA5.</p> <p>Four output indicators have been assigned to PA5, all of them achieved the target values by the cut-off date.</p>

3.2 Additional tables to the “Performance” chapter

Table 77: Source of funding based on SKHU/1601, SKHU/1701, SKHU/1801, SKHU/1902

Country	Beneficiary	Rate of ERDF contribution		Rate of national co-financing		Rate of own contribution	
		1601+701	1902	1601+1701+1801	1902	1601+1701+1801	1902
SK	State administration organisations	85%		15%		0%	
	Other public administration organisations	85%		10%		5%	
	Higher territorial units and their budgetary and contributory organisations						
	Municipalities and their budgetary and contributory organisations						
	NGOs/NPOs	85%		5%		15%	
	Private sector out of state aid schemes						
HU	Central budgetary organisation	85%		15%		0%	
	Other organisation	85%		10%		5%	

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Table 78: Source of funding based on SKHU/1801 and SKHU/1902

Economic activities						
Type of state aid	Call	Country	Beneficiary	Rate of ERDF contribution	Rate of national co-financing	Rate of own contribution
De Minimis Aid	SKHU/1801	Hungary	Organisations according to national legislation	85%	15%	0%
			Other organisations		10%	5%
			Micro and small sized enterprises		0%	15%
			Medium sized enterprises			
		Slovakia	State administration organisations	85%	15%	0%
			Other public administration organisations		10%	5%
			NGOs/NPOs		0%	15%
			Micro and small sized enterprises			
	Medium sized enterprises					
	SKHU/1902	both Member States	Small and medium sized enterprises	85%	0%	15%
GBER	SKHU/1902	Hungary	Small and medium sized enterprises	80%	0%	20%

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Table 79: Supported SPF actions by calls under PA1

Name of the supported actions	ETA/1801	WETA/1801	ETA/1901	WETA/1901
Renovating or building additional infrastructure (marking sites, visitor centres, etc.).	x	x	x	x
Developing the concept of small-scale tourism linked to local environmental protection or cultural aspects through product or service innovation.	x	x	x	x
Preserving and promoting cultural heritage in the programming area.	x	x	x	x
Exploiting high added-value tourism in specific segments: cultural and environmental tourism; culinary tourism; sports tourism; conference tourism; agro-tourism; spa/health tourism (spas, thermal baths); religious tourism, etc.	x	x	x	x
Developing and implementing programmes for cleaning and improving natural habitats.	x	x	x	x
Preserving and promoting natural heritage in the programming area.				
Sharing experiences on environmental protection in the riverside areas.	x	x	x	x
Renovating and building amphitheatres and their surroundings.	x	x	x	x
Preserving and renovating religious sites belonging to cultural heritage.	x	x	x	x
Establishing campsites/camps.	x	x	x	x
Renovating and marking cycle routes (not public roads) and tourism infrastructure.	x	x	x	x
Developing water/river infrastructure (building pontoons, etc.).	x	x	x	x
Organising joint festivals.	x	x	x	x
Organising joint exhibitions and side events.	x	x	x	x
Developing and implementing joint environmental campaigns and education programmes.	x	x	x	x
Organising joint sports events.	x	x	x	x
Organising joint fairs to promote local products.	x	x	x	x
Developing sports and cultural programmes for tourists.	x	x	x	x
Organising thematic trips (castles, palaces, stories, myths, etc.).	x	x	x	x
Building multifunctional playgrounds.	x	x	x	x

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Name of the supported actions	ETA/1801	WETA/1801	ETA/1901	WETA/1901
Introducing new, unconventional branches of sport.	x	x	x	x
Developing and marking pilgrimage routes.	x	x	x	x
Constructing greenways and eco-roads.	x	x	x	x
Developing and implementing programmes for children in the field of forestry.	x	x	x	x
Creating community gardens.	x	x	x	x
Developing strategies, studies, plans or conducting researches in order to promote natural heritage renewal.	x	x	x	x
Organising joint cycling tours.	x	x	x	x
Establishing communities for renting bicycles, boats, etc.	x	x	x	x
Applying innovative information and communications technologies (ICT solutions).	x	x	x	x
Creating educational programmes for craftsmen.	x	x	x	x
Preparing and presenting joint theatre performances.	x	x	x	x
Organising joint pilgrimages.	x	x	x	x
Establishing cross-border cultural ensembles (theatre troupe, musical band, dance ensemble etc.).	x	x	x	x
Promoting cooperation between existing educational institutions in the programming area in the field of music/theatre.	x	x	x	x
Developing and implementing talent scouting and supporting programmes in various fields of arts.	x	x	x	x
Organising joint cultural events in twin towns/settlements.	x	x	x	x
Digitising documents for libraries.	x	x	x	x
Establishing joint sports leagues.	x	x	x	x
Organising competitions in the framework of various sporting activities.	x	x	x	x
Organising sporting activities for disadvantaged and marginalised groups.	x	x	x	x

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Table 80: Supported SPF actions by call under PA4

Name of the supported actions	ETA/1801	WETA/1801	ETA/1901	WETA/1901	ETA/2001	WETA/2101	ETA/2201	WETA/2201
Jointly planning and developing cross-border services provided by public institutions.	x	x	x	x	x			
Developing and implementing programmes for marginalised communities.	x	x	x	x	x			
Organising joint events for primary and secondary schools.	x	x	x	x	x			
Publishing and making brochures, books, DVDs, short films, etc. (e.g. to preserve and promote cultural heritage).	x	x	x	x	x			
Developing cross-border services in the fields of health care, education, social services, security, administration (e.g. providing data, connecting systems, etc.).	x	x	x	x	x			
Collaboration among local media (e.g. information exchange, joint training programmes, etc.).	x	x	x	x	x			
Applying innovative information and communications technologies (ICT solutions).		x	x		x			
Organising trainings, exchanges (e.g. training courses, summer schools, universities, competitions).	x			x				

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Name of the supported actions	ETA/1801	WETA/1801	ETA/1901	WETA/1901	ETA/2001	WETA/2101	ETA/2201	WETA/2201
Developing strategies, studies, concepts (e.g. developing the concept of small-scale tourism linked to local environmental protection or cultural aspects through product or service innovation), research or plans with significant cross-border impact.	x	x	x	x	x			
Planning and organising joint professional programmes and services between public institutions in the fields of education, sport, culture, environmental protection, health and social care.						x		x
Organising joint festivals.		x	x		x		x	
Developing and implementing joint campaigns and educational programmes.		x	x		x			
Organising joint cycling tours, camps, thematic trips, pilgrimages, fairs, exhibitions and side events.		x	x		x		x	
Developing joint professional programmes in the fields of education, research, culture, tourism, environmental protection (e.g. exchange programmes).	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Organising educational programmes, trainings, exchanges (e.g. summer schools, summer universities, competitions).		x	x		x			
Developing legal instruments and ICT solutions to improve cross-border services (strengthening information flows, e-governance, m-governance and others).	x	x	x	x	x			

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Name of the supported actions	ETA/1801	WETA/1801	ETA/1901	WETA/1901	ETA/2001	WETA/2101	ETA/2201	WETA/2201
Developing and implementing programmes for children, tourists, disadvantaged and marginalised groups.		x	x		x			
Organising events between local governments to develop cooperation between young people and young people with disabilities.	x	x	x	x	x			
Developing sports and cultural programmes for tourists.								
Developing and implementing talent scouting and supporting programmes.		x	x		x			
Developing and implementing programmes for cleaning and improving natural habitats.		x	x		x			
Organising competitions with various activities.		x	x		x			
Implementing programmes promoting bilingualism (brochures, books, DVDs, short films).						x	x	x
Developing a comprehensive bilingual workshop on the safe use of ICT tools and the mapping of the participating regions' cultural values (e.g. bilingual tools, digitisation of documents for libraries, ICT tools - cultural services, archives, research, etc.).	x	x	x	x	x			
Developing cross-border media.	x	x	x	x	x			
Establishing cross-border cultural ensembles (theatre troupe, musical band, dance ensemble etc.).		x	x		x			
Establishing and implementing joint activities on environmental awareness and educational programmes.				x				

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Name of the supported actions	ETA/1801	WETA/1801	ETA/1901	WETA/1901	ETA/2001	WETA/2101	ETA/2201	WETA/2201
Preparing and presenting theatre performances and cultural events strengthening cross-border partnerships.		x	x		x	x		x
Sharing knowledge and experience between public institutions and other organisations, and developing joint action plans to facilitate effective organisational functioning and successful adaptation to the epidemic situation.						x		x

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Table 81: Shortened names of the indicators

ID	Full name of the indicators	Shortened names of the indicators
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises receiving support
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enterprises receiving grants
CO09	Sustainable Tourism: Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	Expected visits to supported sites
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	Newly built roads
CO23	Nature and biodiversity: Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	Supported area of habitats
O11	Length of reconstructed and newly built 'green ways'	Green ways
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	Newly built roads
O221	Number of new public transport services started within the framework of the programme	New public transport services
O222	Number of new logistic services started within the framework of the programme	New logistic services
CO01	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving support	Enterprises receiving support
CO02	Productive investment: Number of enterprises receiving grants	Enterprises receiving grants
CO08	Productive investment: Employment increase in supported enterprises	Employment increase in enterprises
CO13	Roads: Total length of newly built roads	Newly built roads
CO39	Urban Development: Public or commercial buildings built or renovated in urban areas	Public or commercial buildings built or renovated
CO44	Labour Market and Training: Number of participants in joint local employment initiatives and joint training	Participants in joint initiatives and trainings
O311	Number of (integrated territorial) action plans	Action plans
O312	Number of women in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	Women participants in joint trainings

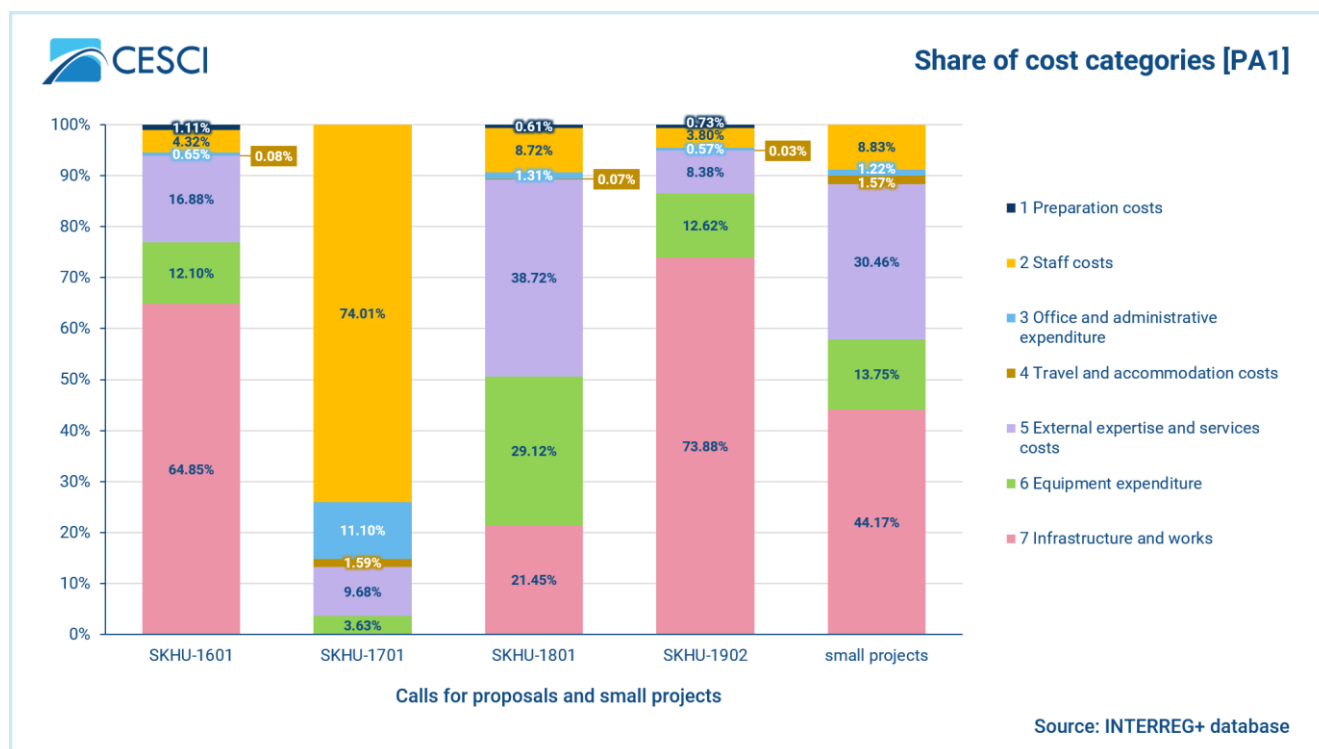
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ID	Full name of the indicators	Shortened names of the indicators
O313	Number of participants from groups at risk of discrimination, including Roma in joint local employment initiatives and joint trainings (participants of employment initiatives from above CO44)	Participants from groups at risk of discrimination in joint initiatives and trainings
O314	Number of new business services promoting employment and consultancy services	New business services
O411	Number of cross-border products and services developed	Cross-border products and services
O412	Number of documents published or elaborated outside of the framework of SPF	Documents elaborated outside SPF
O413	Number of cross border events	Cross-border events
O414	Number of documents published or elaborated in the framework of SPF	Documents elaborated in SPF
O415	Number of people participated in cooperation	People participated in cooperation
O416	Number of women participated in cooperation	Women participated in cooperation
O417	Number of participants from socially marginalized groups, including Roma	Participants from socially marginalized groups
SO1.1	To increase the attractiveness of the border area	To increase the attractiveness of the border area
SO2.1	Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border	Increasing the density between border crossing points
SO2.2.1	Improving cross-border public transport services	Improving cross-border public transport services
SO3.1	Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions with a view to improving the level of employment within the programming region	Decreasing employment inequalities among the regions
SO4.1	Improving the level of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation and broadening cross-border cooperation between citizens	Improving the level of cross-border inter-institutional cooperation

3.3 Analysis of the cost categories

Within the framework of PA1, evaluators have analysed the results by CfP in order to clearly demonstrate the differences within the PA (in case of other PAs, the used categories – instead of CfPs – are the SOs and the actions). According to the INTERREG+ database, the Programme determined 7 types of budget headings, out of which the infrastructure development was the most dominant as it absorbed more than half of the budget (66%). This predominance of infrastructure development is due to the two normal CfPs (SKHU/1601 and SKHU/1902), where this budget heading also exceeds 60% (65%; 74%). By contrast, the infrastructural expenses are below 25% under the SME CfP (SKHU/1801), since the external (39%) and equipment (29%) costs are the most relevant. The SPF umbrella CfP (SKHU/1701) shows a totally different budget share, as the staff costs (74%) are the determining factor. Regarding the aggregated values of small projects, the most dominant types of costs are: the infrastructural development (44%) and external expertise and services (30%). The infrastructural works cover more than half of the costs (53%) under WETA projects (ETA: 36%), while the external costs are nearly the same under ETA (35%) and WETA (25%) projects.

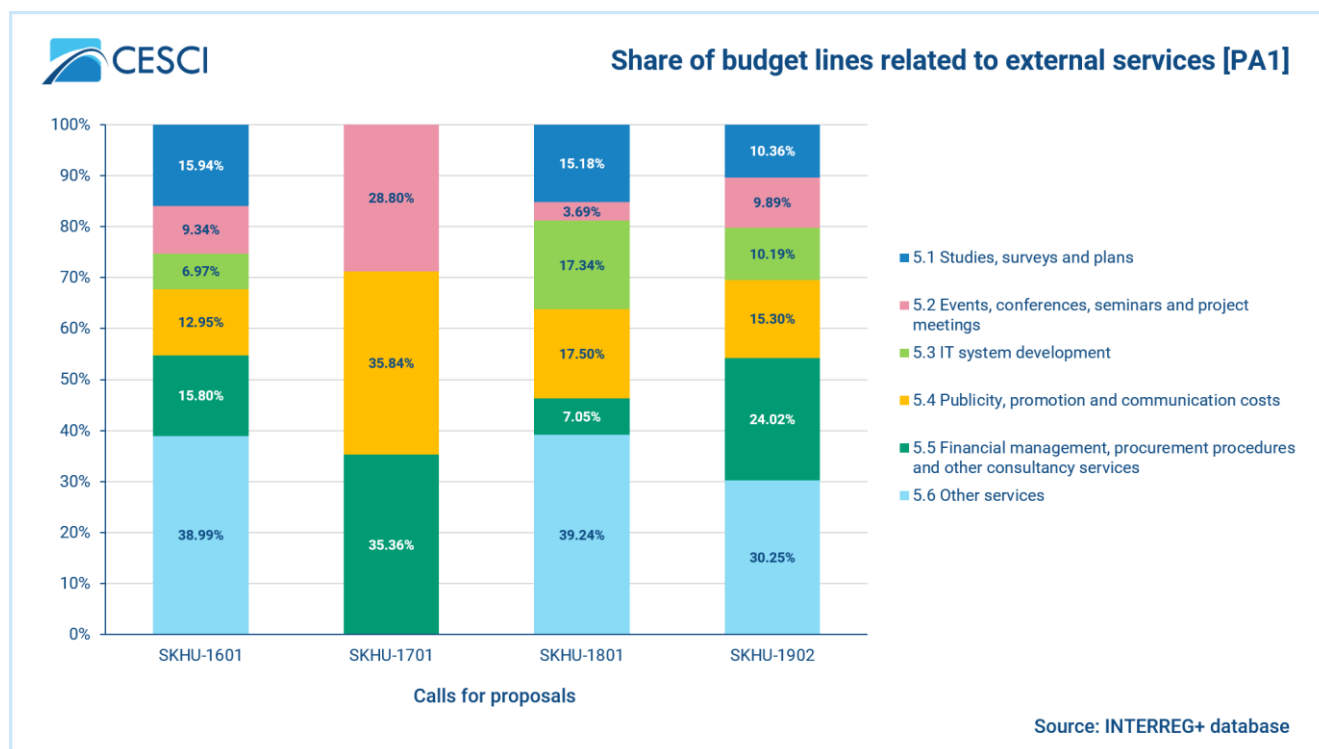
Figure 132: Share of cost categories of PA1



In terms of external costs of PA1 projects, the most significant component is the other services which account for 37% of the outsourced activities (the share of this component – except the SPF umbrella CfP – does not fall below 30%). This category implies such services as translation, study tour, catering, transportation, promotional video, technical supervisor, or legal service. Comparing to other programme areas, the cost of translation is remarkably low, it does not exceed EUR 140 000. More than 10% of the external costs were utilised for financial management (17%), studies and surveys (15%) and

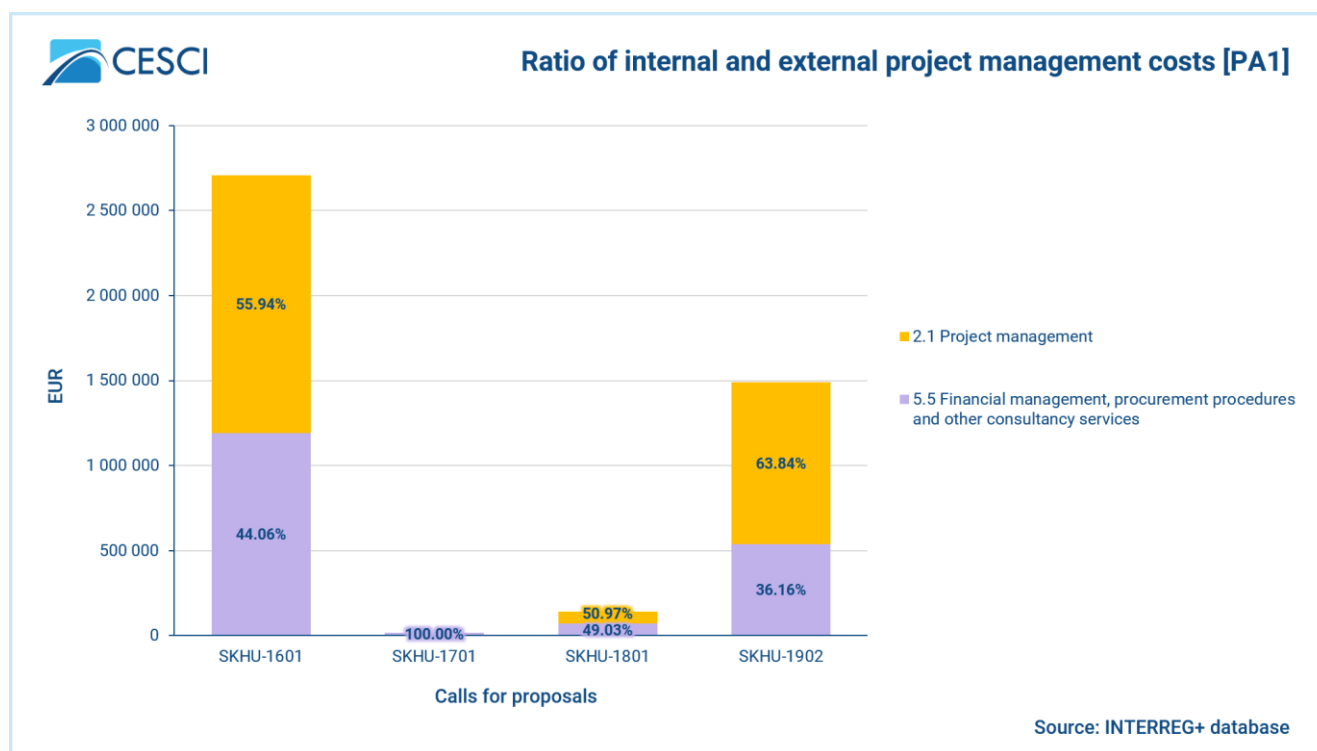
publicity (14%). Other services prevail in most CfPs, only the SPF CfP is an exception, where the share of publicity (36%), financial management (35%) and the events (29%) are the main factors.

Figure 133: Share of budget lines related to external services of PA1



Considering the distribution of project management costs under PA1 (Figure 134), it is evident that the internal cost is the most decisive with 58% (more than EUR 2.5 million). Excepting the SPF CfP (where the total management cost is provided by external actors), the share of internal costs gives more than half of the management budget. This phenomenon is absolutely remarkable under the second normal CfP with its 64%. Focusing on the internal professional staff, the ratio of this element – within the total staff cost (more than EUR 3.5 million) – is 29% (EUR 1 million). More than half of the staff cost is spent for internal experts within the SPF CfP (100%) and SME CfP (67%), but it is minimal under the two normal CfPs (SKHU/1601: 22%; SKHU/1902: 6%). Overall, 38 projects did not spend on internal professional staff, out of which 37 belong to normal CfPs (SKHU/1601: 18 projects; SKHU/1902: 19 projects).

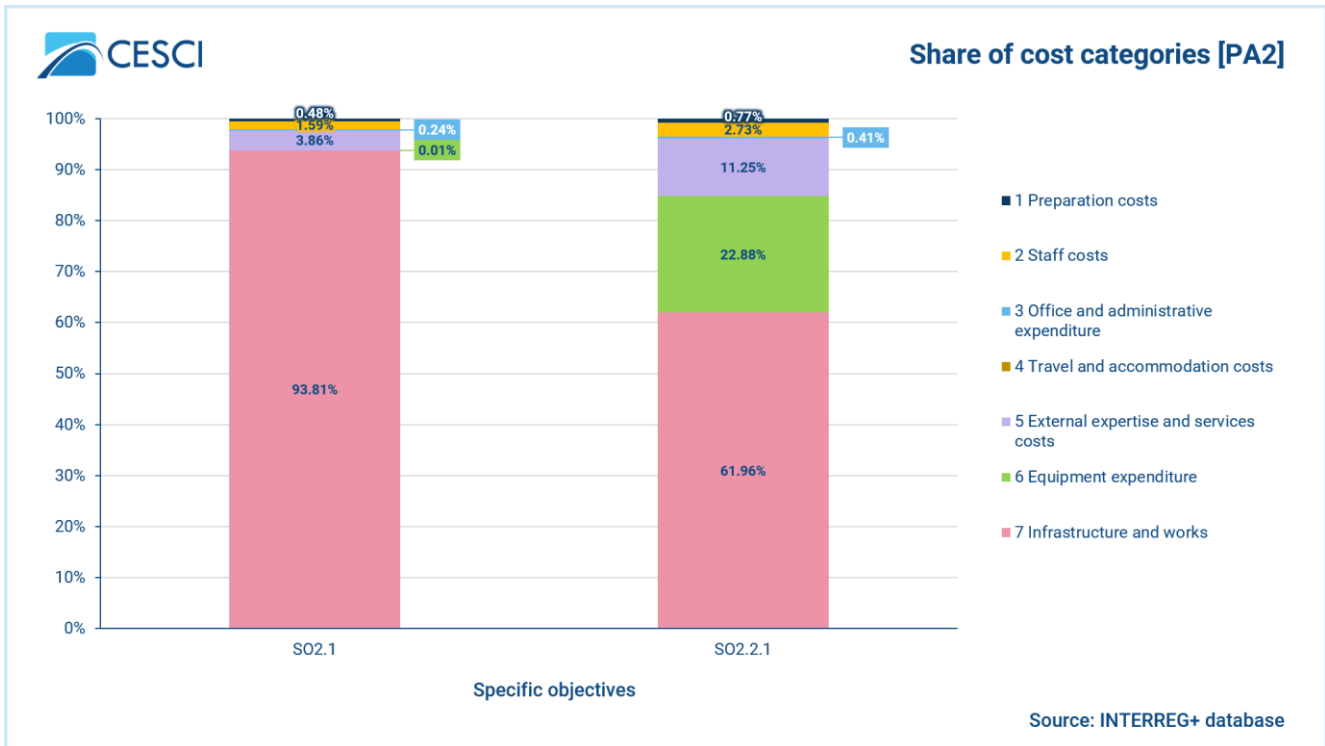
Figure 134: Ratio of internal and external project management costs of PA1



Regarding PA2, the budget evaluation is based on the specific objectives¹⁵⁸, as this methodology could reveal the inner differences of the PA. Since the main goal of this PA is the enhancement of cross-border mobility, therefore the pivotal role of infrastructural development is evident (82% of the total budget of PA2) and the share of other budget categories is less than 10%. This dominance is more remarkable under *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points* (94%) than in the case of the *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services* (62%), where the equipment expenditure is more than 20%. The cost of external expertise should also be mentioned *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services* (11%), but in PA perspective it achieves only 7%.

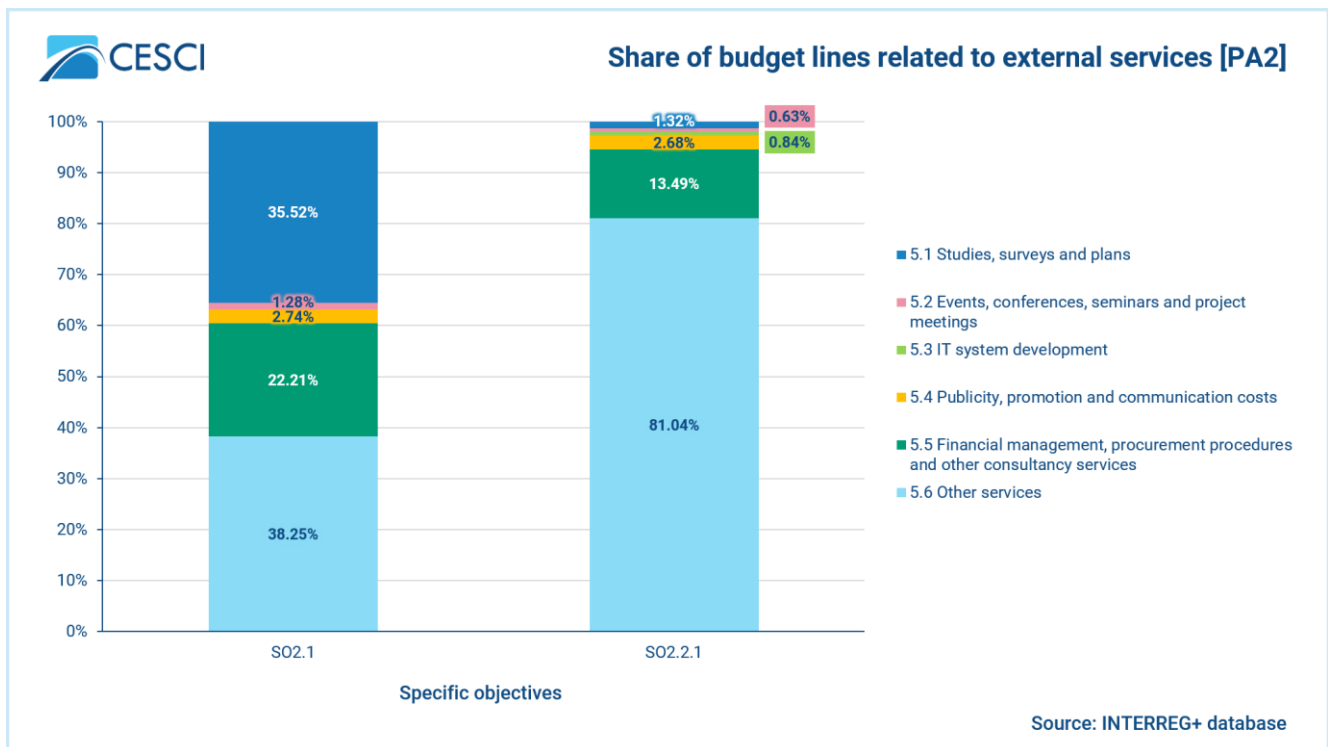
¹⁵⁸ SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points along the Hungarian-Slovak border;
SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services

Figure 135: Share of cost categories of PA2



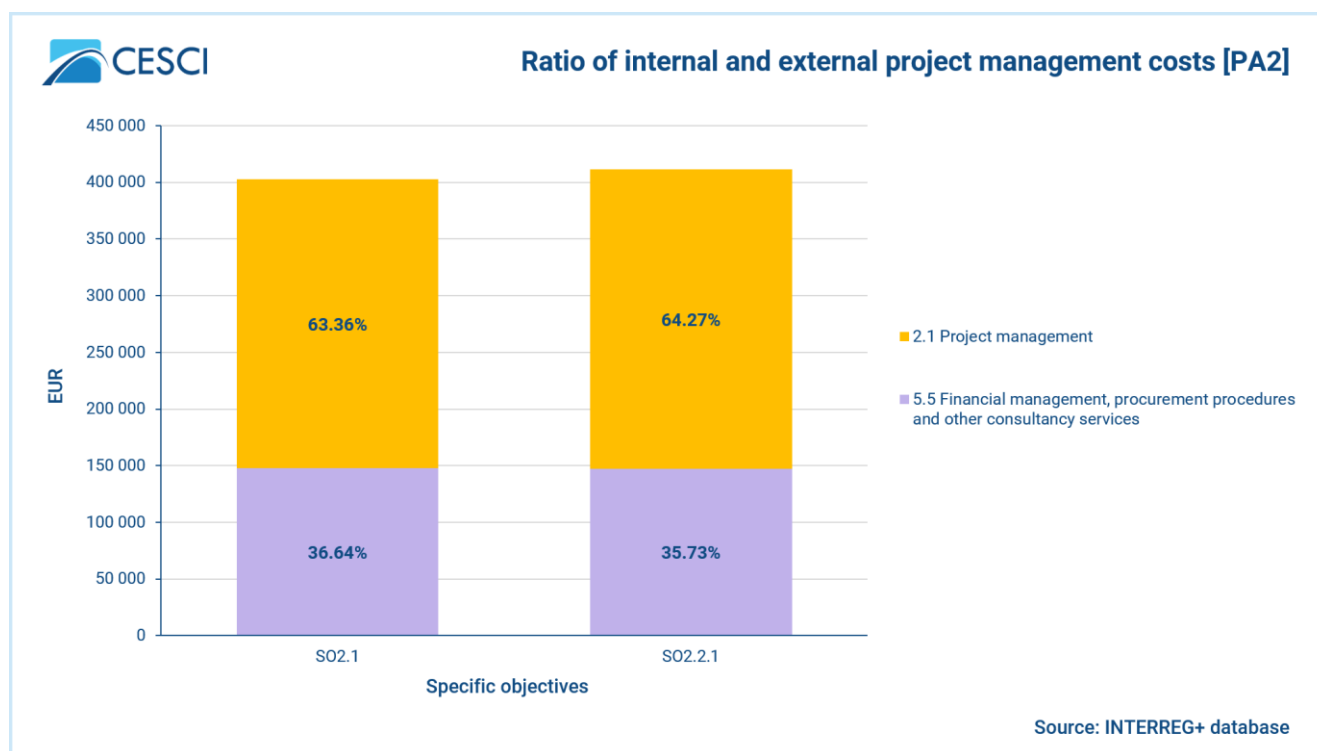
Focusing on the external elements of budget headings, the role of other services notably stands out. More than half (65%) of the external costs were spent on these services, which represented 81% under *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services* (and 38% under the other SO). The main items within the other external cost of PA2 are engineering, control labour, translation, archaeological research, development of a bicycle-sharing system or marketing. The translation costs are remarkably low, they account for nearly EUR 32 000. The share of financial management (17%) and studies (14%) also exceeds 10%, but while the former one accounts for a significant proportion of both SOs (13-22%), the latter focuses only on *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points* (36%).

Figure 136: Share of budget lines related to external services of PA2



As the following chart represents, with regard to internal and external project management costs, there are no significant differences within PA2. The major part of PA2 management costs (64%; more than EUR 500 000) were spent on inner actors, while the share of external management costs is 36%. Taking into account the staff cost (nearly EUR 540 000), only 3.5% were absorbed by internal professional staff (only the *SO2.1 Increasing the density between border crossing points* has internal staff costs that cover 7% of the related staff budget). Altogether 6 PA2 projects do not have internal professional staff elements (5 of them belong to *SO2.2.1 Improving cross-border public transport services*).

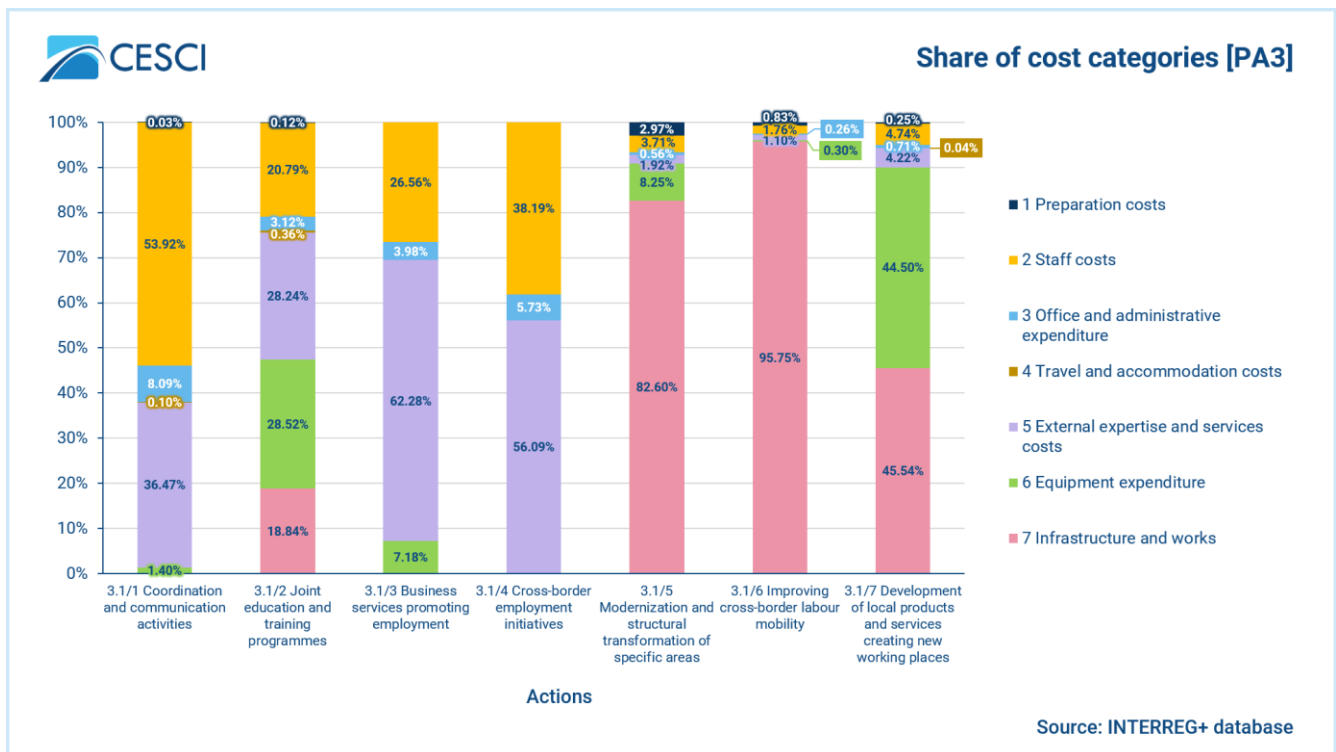
Figure 137: Ratio of internal and external project management costs of PA2



Within the framework of PA3, the budget evaluation is carried out by actions¹⁵⁹. Overall, infrastructural development represents the main budget heading of PA3, with a share of 69% of the total budget. The share of equipment expenditure (18%) is the second largest, while other cost categories do not exceed 10%. The actions can be grouped into three main clusters. The first one includes the 3.1/1 *Coordination and communication activities*, 3.1/3 *Business services promoting employment* and 3.1/4 *Cross-border employment initiatives*, where the infrastructural expenses are zero and the most significant budget headings are the external services (36%; 62%; 56%) and staff costs (54%, 27%; 38%). The second cluster is where the infrastructural works exceed the other budget items' level. The three relevant categories are the 3.1/5 *Modernization and structural transformation of specific areas* (83%), 3.1/6 *Improving cross-border labour mobility* (96%) and 3.1/7 *Development of local products and services creating new working places* (46%). The third cluster contains only one cost item (3.1/2 *Joint education and training programmes*) where the equipment expenditure (29%), external costs (28%), staff costs (21%) and infrastructural costs (19%) represent similar share.

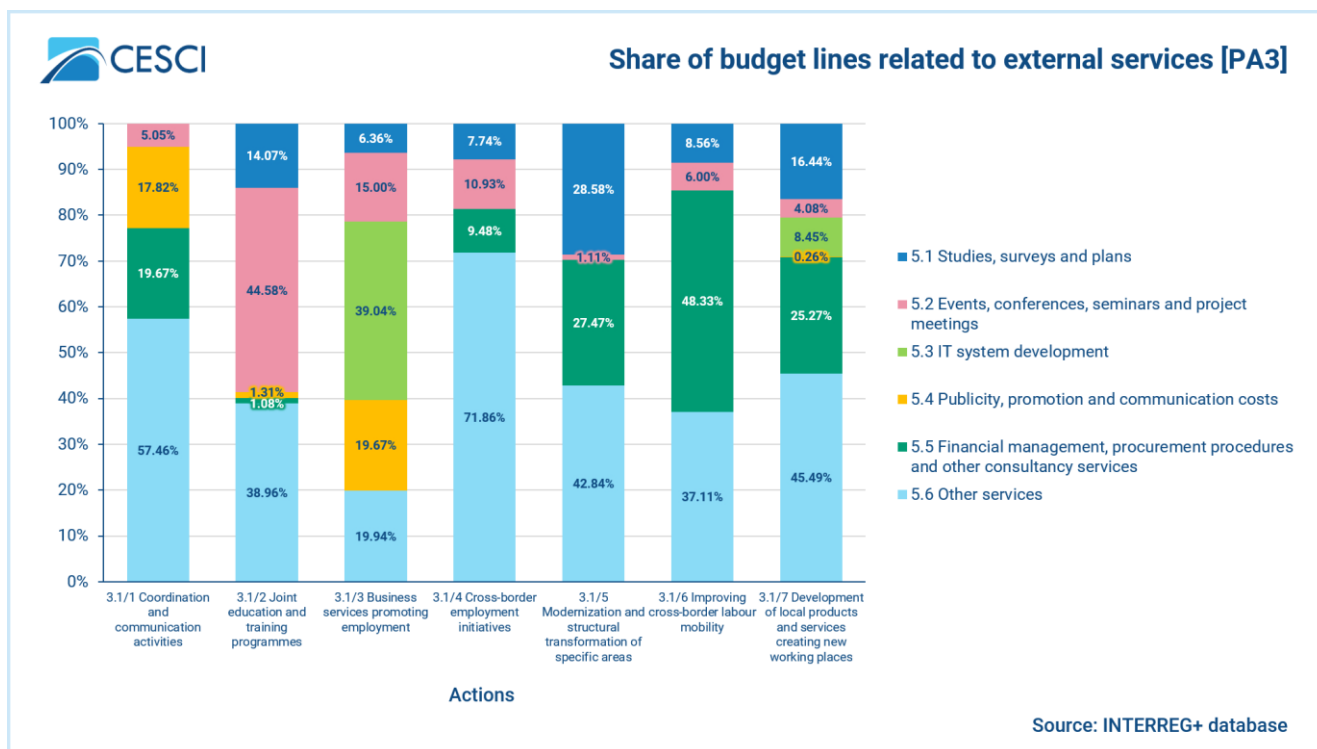
¹⁵⁹ 3.1/1 Coordination and communication activities;
3.1/2 Joint education and training programmes;
3.1/3 Business services promoting employment;
3.1/4 Cross-border employment initiatives;
3.1/5 Modernization and structural transformation of specific areas;
3.1/6 Improving cross-border labour mobility;
3.1/7 Development of local products and services creating new working places

Figure 138: Share of cost categories of PA3



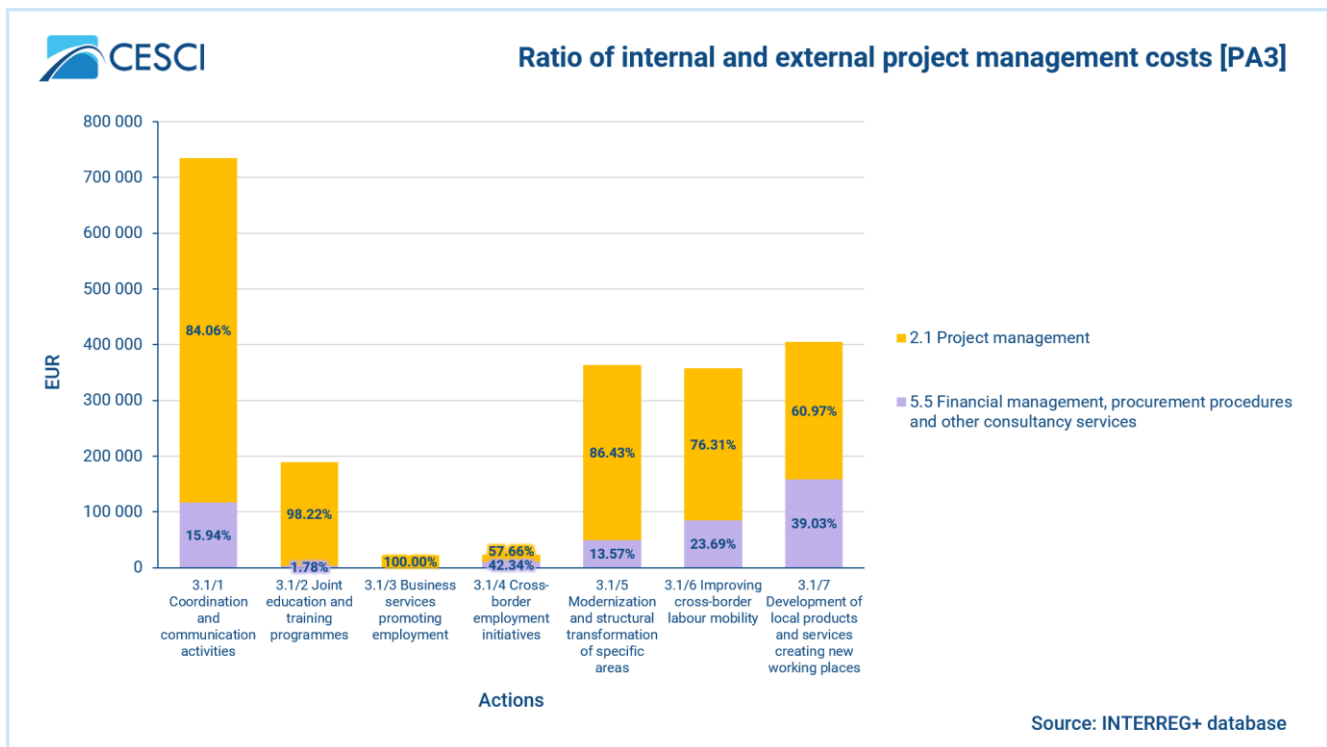
Among the external costs, the share of other services is not as dominant as in other PAs, but constantly the largest one (it covers 46% of the external costs) including expert and technology services, translation, communication and marketing activities, event coordination, training and mentoring. The overall amount (within PA3) spent on translation is less than EUR 22 000, which is the smallest one among the PAs. Unlike other services, the composition of external costs is very diverse, as the financial management covers 19%, the events and the studies 11% per each. Focusing on the actions, the share of other costs is the highest under *3.1/4 Cross-border employment initiatives* (72%), the finance management costs under *3.1/6 Improving cross-border labour mobility* (48%), the IT system development costs and publicity costs under *3.1/3 Business services promoting employment* (39%; 20%), the events cost under *3.1/2 Joint education and training programmes* (45%) and the studies costs under *3.1/5 Modernization and structural transformation of specific areas* (29%). Further data about the share of external services can be found in the following figure. (Figure 139)

Figure 139: Share of budget lines related to external services of PA3



Regarding project management, internal expenses represent 80% (more than EUR 1.6 million) of the total management costs (EUR 2 million). In the case of actions, in every category the ratio of internal project cost exceeds 50%. The lowest value is registered under 3.1/4 *Cross-border employment initiatives* (58%), while under 3.1/3 *Business services promoting employment* the total project management costs are internal. The share of internal professional staff costs is 36% (nearly EUR 930 000) within the total of EUR 2.6 million staff costs. On action level, there are great differences since the lowest value is 3% (3.1/6 *Improving cross-border labour mobility*) and the largest one is 75% (3.1/3 *Business services promoting employment*). Altogether 27 projects do not have expenses related to internal experts, out of which 14 projects belong to 3.1/7 *Development of local products and services creating new working places*. In these cases, the project management tasks were carried out by the CCP partner(s).

Figure 140: Ratio of internal and external project management costs of PA3



As in the case of PA3, the evaluation of PA4 has been made by actions. Since the similarity of the 6 PA4-related actions¹⁶⁰ is considerable, therefore the actions can be aggregated into 3 groups (institutional capacity, new services, citizens' cooperation). The three main budget items under PA4 are the equipment expenditure (32%), the external expertise costs (31%) and the staff costs (28%). Regarding the aggregated actions, the share of equipment expenditure (45%) is the highest under the category of institutional capacity, while the external expertise and staff costs are 26% and 18%. By contrast, the external expertise costs (44%) are dominant under the development of new services, and the staff costs item (55%) is the most significant within the category of citizens' cooperation. Focusing on the aggregated value of small projects, more than half of the budget (57%) is spent on external expert costs and more than 20% is secluded to equipment expenditure, while the staff costs item covers 13% of the whole budget. Significant difference between the ETA and WETA projects is not observable.

¹⁶⁰ 4.1/1 Investment in institutional capacity
4.1/2 Development of new cross-border services
4.1/3 Launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens (People-to-people)
4.1/4 Launching and strengthening sustainable cross-border cooperation between citizens from both sides of the border
4.1/5 Improvement of cross-border services provided jointly, development of small infrastructure necessary for joint service provision
4.1/6 Strengthening and improving the cooperation capacity and the cooperation efficiency between different organisations

Figure 141: Share of cost categories of PA4

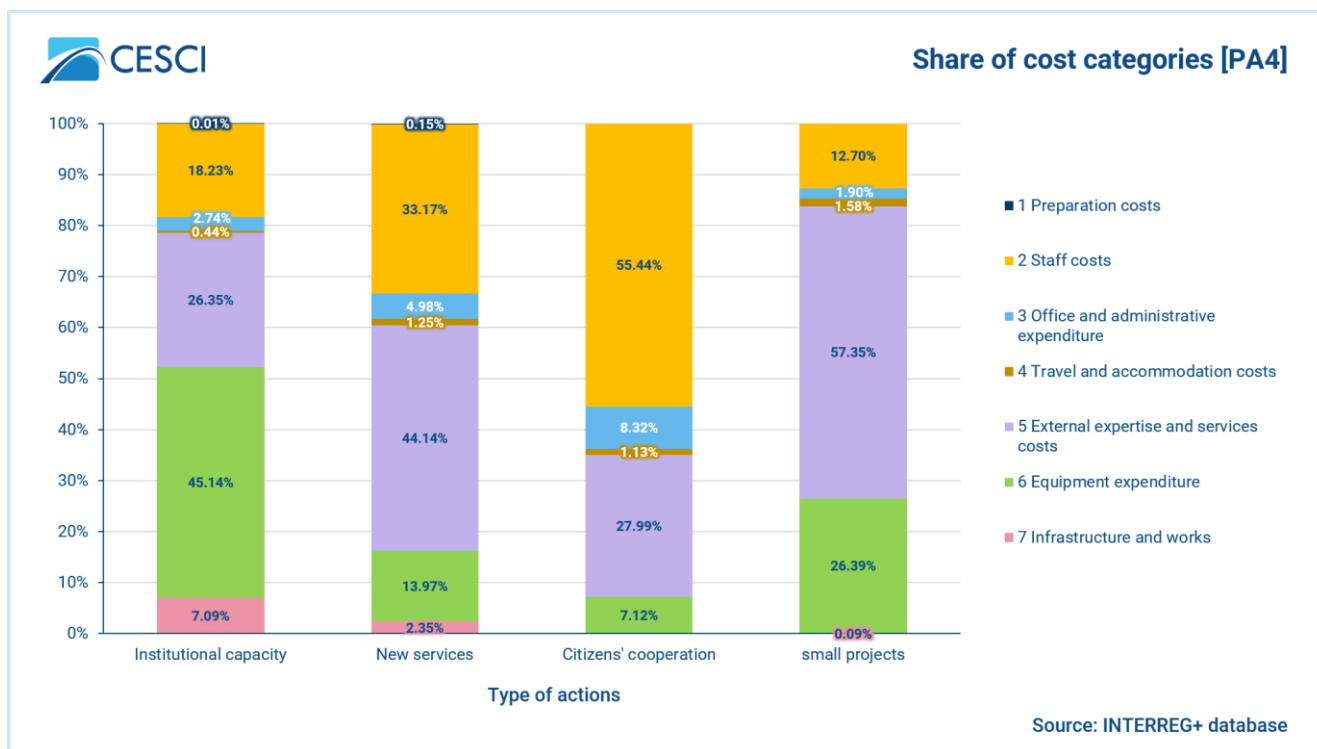
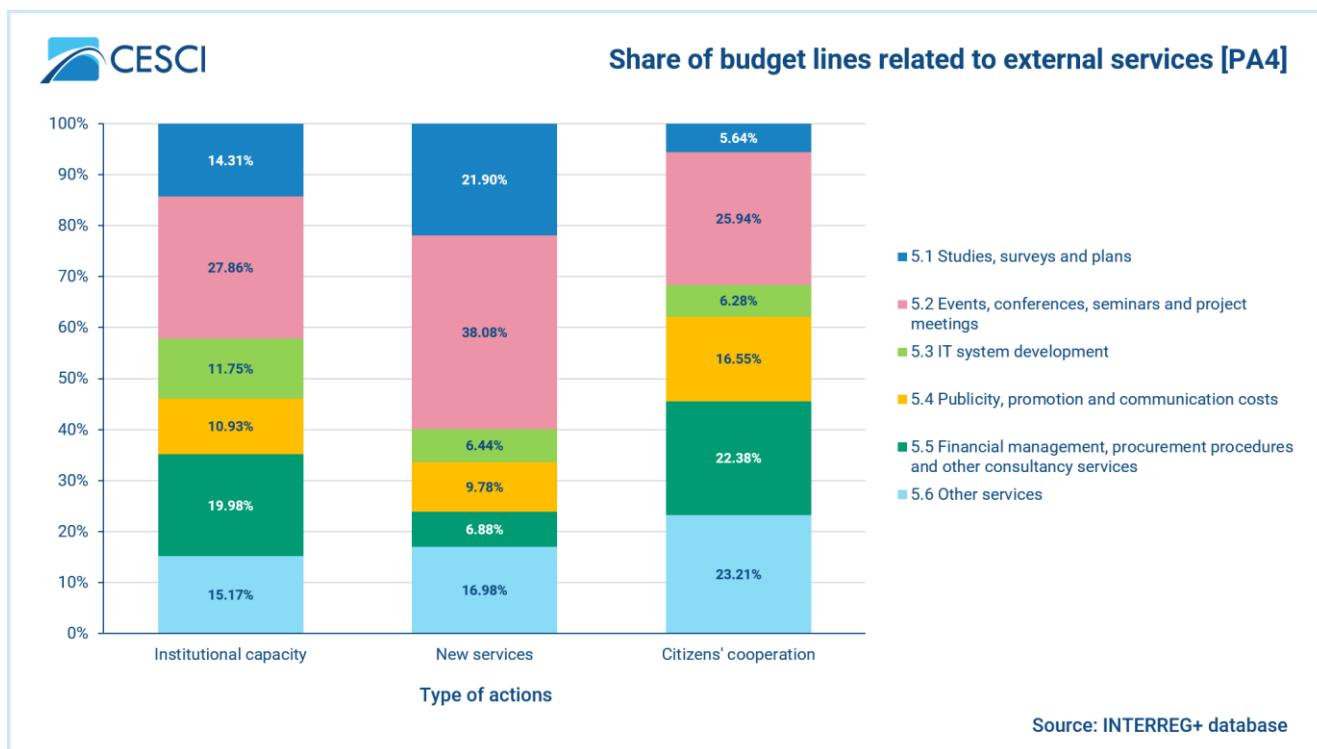


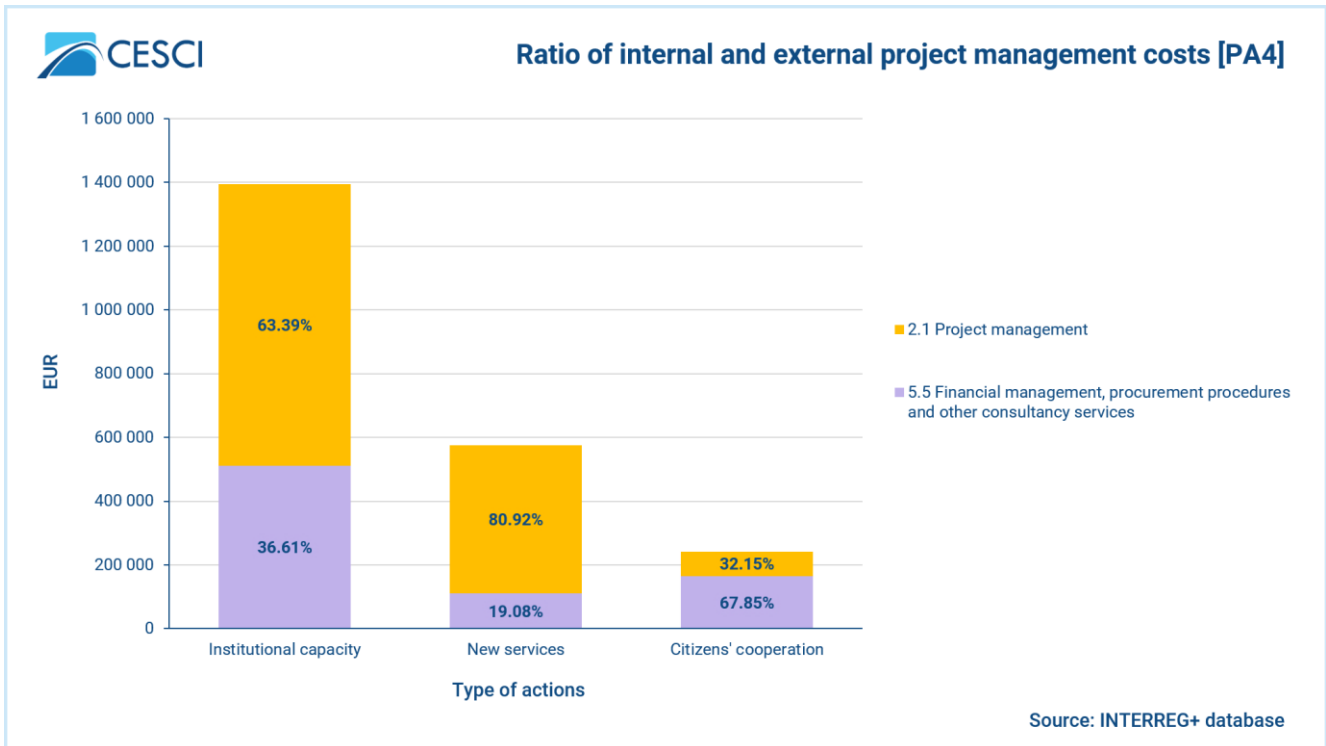
Figure 136 summarises the external expenditures under PA4. Among the marked items the events, conferences, seminars and project meetings costs represent the highest rate, financially (31%) and the other five budget headings utilised less than 20% of the total external expenditures. On action level, the costs of events are the most dominant under every action cluster (more than 25%), and this category is the highest under the development of new services (38%). However, the ratio within the improvement of citizens' cooperation is more balanced since the financial management (22%) and other services (23%) costs are also above 20%. The PA4 is the only PA, where 'other services' do not play a prominent role among external expenses. Within PA4, this category includes such activities as translation (altogether less than EUR 130 000), web editing, printing of catalogues and magazines, field working, travelling, trainings, branding or catering.

Figure 142: Share of budget lines related to external services of PA4



Under the 'project management costs' category the internal costs possess 65% (more than EUR 1.4 million), whereas 35% of the expenses (nearly EUR 800 000) are spent for external services. Among the three action types, the internal management costs are the highest under the development of new services (81%), while under the improvement of citizens' cooperation do not achieve 35% (see *Figure 143*). Focusing on the internal staff costs, the ratio of professional staff costs is above 50% under every action (68% under PA4). The most outstanding ratio belongs to the improvement of citizens' cooperation (95%), but the value of development of new services is also above 60%. All in all, there are 12 projects, where no money has been allocated to internal professional staff (9 of them belong to institutional capacity improvement).

Figure 143: Ratio of internal and external project management costs of PA4



3.4 Table of the authorities and bodies of the Programme

Table 82: Authorities and bodies of the Programme

Programme Body		Name of authority/body	This authority/body is responsible, among others for...
Managing Authority ¹⁶¹	MA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade/ Budapest, Hungary Department for Cross-border Cooperation Programmes ¹⁶²	... the successful and lawful implementation of the Programme. It represents the Programme towards the European Commission (EC), and reports to the EC about the progress of the Programme on a yearly basis. Although the MA bears overall responsibility for the Programme, certain horizontal tasks were delegated to the JS.
National Authority	NA	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic Section of Cross-border Cooperation Programmes ¹⁶³	... performing relevant activities in Slovakia in order to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the programme.
Certifying Authority	CA	Hungarian State Treasury	... drawing up and submitting payment applications to the Commission, and transferring the contribution from the programme single bank account directly to the Lead Beneficiaries.
Audit Authority	AA	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds	... verifying the expenditures. The declared expenditure shall be audited based on a representative sample and, as a general rule, on statistical sampling methods.
Control Bodies (First Level Control)	FLC SK	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic	... controlling and validating the costs of the project partners emerging during the project implementation.
	FLC HU	Széchenyi Program Office Nonprofit LLC	

¹⁶¹ The Managing Authority's Certifying Authority's and Audit Authority's functions were officially transferred from Slovakia to Hungary by 16th of June, 2016.

¹⁶² In 2018 this department was transferred from the Prime Minister's Office to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

¹⁶³ As of 1 October, 2020 all duties and competencies of the National Authority of the Interreg V-A SK-HU Cross-border Cooperation Program have been transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic to the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic

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Programme Body		Name of authority/body	This authority/body is responsible, among others for...
Joint Secretariat	JS	Széchenyi Program Office Nonprofit LLC	... administrative and technical tasks regarding the implementation of the Programme. The JS is also contributing to the work of both the Managing and the National Authority.
Info Points		Regional Info Point in Bratislava Regional Info Point in Nitra Regional Info Point in Košice	... providing information at regional level and supporting the Slovak beneficiaries.
Monitoring Committee	MC	See the list of MC members at the core text of the chapter	... reviewing the implementation of the programme and progress towards achieving its objectives. It is also responsible for the selection of the projects financed by the cooperation programme.
Small Project Fund	SPF	Western programming area: Rába-Duna-Vág EGTC	... the overall implementation of the Umbrella Project including the activities of the Umbrella Projects Beneficiaries, the Monitoring Subcommittees for SPF as well as the actors involved in the evaluation of the small project proposals.
		Eastern programming area: Via Carpatia EGTC	

3.5 Additional tables to the “Influence of further funds” chapter

Table 83: Influence effect of the different programmes on the impacts of the PA1

Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
Interreg programmes	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme (RO-HU)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable use of natural, historic, and cultural heritage within the eligible area 	RO-HU supports only Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. Action in line with SKHU is the rehabilitation, conservation and promotion of natural, as well as cultural and built heritage.
	Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme (AT-HU)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the protection, promotion and development of natural and cultural heritage through common approaches to sustainable tourism Improving the ecological stability and resilience of landscape and ecosystems 	AT-HU supports actions solely in Győr-Moson-Sopron County. Supported actions that are in strong synergy with SKHU contain: preparation and implementation of joint strategies and action plans, capacity building and pilot investments regarding sustainable utilization of cultural and natural heritage; preservation, reconstruction, development and utilization of cultural and natural heritage sites in order to use it for sustainable tourism and community purposes, such as ecotourism; support of know-how transfer and development of common standards for products and services. Management and protection of nature protection areas is another field where connections can be found.
	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI Cross-border Cooperation Programme (HUSKROUA)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting local culture and historical heritage along with tourism functions Sustainable use of the environment in the cross-border area - preservation of natural resources, actions to reduce GHG emission and pollution of rivers 	HUSKROUA covers only Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and Košice Region as core regions and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén as an adjoining one from the programme area of SKHU. In the frames of Priority 1 preservation and restoration of cultural heritage sites, development of thematic routes, packages and related services are supported. Under Priority 2 preservation of and sustainable use of natural values is supported.

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
	<p align="center">Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria Programme (SK-AT)</p>	<p align="center">4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil and promoting ecosystem services, including Nature 2000, and green infrastructure • Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing cultural and natural heritage • Purposeful cooperation of tourism representatives and creation of cross-border offer for those interested in tourism • Common approaches to develop joint products guided by a shared policy framework (e.g. in the area of ecotourism, cycling, agritourism, etc.). 	<p>This programme affected only 2 regions of the SKHU programme area: Bratislava Region, Trnava Region. Supported actions that are in line with the SKHU programme are joint activities and investments regarding the conservation, protection and promotion of cultural and natural heritage, cooperation of tourism actors and creation of cross-border tourism products guided by a shared policy framework. It also strengthened the common approaches to valorise the cultural and natural heritage in a sustainable way to further develop the programme area as an attractive tourist destination.</p>
	<p align="center">Interreg V-A Programme Slovak Republic and Czech Republic (SK-CZ)</p>	<p align="center">3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining and promoting cultural and natural heritage • Increasing the attractiveness of cultural and natural heritage for residents and visitors of the cross-border regions • Protection of the biodiversity of the cross-border area through cooperation in the field of protection and coordinated management of naturally significant areas 	<p>This programme affected only one region in the SKHU programming area (Trnava Region). The programme primarily focused on improving the unfavourable condition of cultural and natural heritage values. Within PA2 (Quality Environment) many projects supported the preservation, protection and restoration of biological diversity and supported ecosystem services including the Natura 2000 network and the green infrastructure.</p>

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
Hungarian operative programme	Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (GINOP)	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing domestic and international tourist revenues at cultural and natural heritage sites 	It supports the integrated management of environmentally friendly leisure activities in nature. The programme covers five modes of transportation to create the possibility of leisure tourism in Hungary: on foot, by bicycle (EuroVelo), on horseback, by sail, by canoe. The programme targets heritage sites: monuments of national importance (castles, palaces, etc.), UNESCO World Heritage Sites, geoparks, national parks in particular. Sacral heritage, pilgrimage routes, religious tourism is also targeted. The programme contributes to thematic (cultural and other types of) routes and intermodal leisure tourism opportunities. The networking approach is strong.
	Environmental and Energy Efficiency Operational Programme (KEHOP)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The development of green infrastructure and the restoration of degraded ecosystems in order to improve the nature conservation situation and condition of protected and community-important natural values and areas 	KEHOP is connected to SKHU through protection and enhancement of biodiversity, nature protection and green infrastructure. Creation of the basic infrastructure for the presentation of the results of the target area and the relevant development, related attitude-shaping actions could be highlighted. Protection and maintaining of natural heritage are supported especially at nature protection areas, Natura2000 areas, geological areas.

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
	Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme (TOP)	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the endogenous potential inherent in tourism's territorial characteristics in order to promote employment • Development of the economic environment of county towns in order to increase employment • Encouraging entrepreneurial activities and retaining the population through urban development interventions 	<p>TOP is completely in synergy with the SKHU. Support for regional tourism product packages and thematic tourism developments, for the tourism utilization and development of the cultural, built and natural heritage that is a tourist attraction is implemented. Development of attractions based on cultural and natural heritage, turning them into products and attractions, organizing them into a regional network is a main field of intervention. Primarily local ecotourism developments, cultural attractions, and sections of bicycle paths for tourist purposes can be implemented with the help of TOP. In addition, maintaining natural heritage is supported with the help of environmental protection investments, reduction of pollution, that ensure more efficient and sustainable urban management.</p>
	Competitive Central-Hungary Operational Programme (VEKOP)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing tourism spending at cultural and natural heritage sites • Improving the nature conservation situation and condition of protected and community-important natural values and areas in order to create conditions for their long-term preservation 	<p>VEKOP concentrated only on Central Hungary region. VEKOP supports sustainable tourism products, network developments, thematic routes, which take into account the principles of preserving and presenting cultural and natural heritage. Leisure tourism, bicycle tourism, ecotourism is supported to make them accessible for foreign tourist as well. Also, it is in synergy with the SKHU in relation to the improvement of nature protection areas, the Natura2000 network, habitats of EU level significance.</p>
	Rural Development Programme (VP)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the public welfare and tourism potential of forests • Support for non-productive investments related to the fulfilment of objectives related to agri-environmental protection and climate change 	<p>VP targets the whole programme area. It contributes to tourism by increasing the attraction force of attractions and their accessibility. Special attention is paid to forests. Habitat reconstruction and rehabilitation, developments with focus on Natura2000 territories is one of the activities foreseen.</p>

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for non-agricultural activities to launch • Implementation of Local Development Strategies 	Another goal is to promote the economic growth of agricultural micro-enterprises in rural areas by starting non-agricultural activities, as well as the promotion of the start-up of micro-enterprises producing goods or providing services serving other local needs in rural areas.
Slovak operative programmes	Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of cycle paths and cycling infrastructure • Newly built access roads to the sites of cultural and natural heritage • Supporting the sustainability and resilience of cultural institutions 	The programme affected the whole SKHU programme area. The programme shows stronger synergy with the PA2 in SKHU programme, which is focusing on development of green transport. Stronger synergy with the programme is reflect in supporting the sustainability of cultural institutions.
	Operational Programme Quality of Environment (OP QE)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil and promoting ecosystem services • Improving conservation status of habitats and species, as well as strengthening biodiversity in Natura 2000 network. 	This programme affected the whole SKHU programme area. The programme shows synergy with the SKHU programme in the field of preserving and protecting the environment. Implemented actions focused on the protection and restoration of biological diversity in the Natura 2000 network.
	Rural Development Programme (RDP)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining and promoting natural and cultural heritage • Construction and reconstruction of natural trails, cycling paths and construction of additional infrastructure (e.g. resting places) 	This programme affected the whole SKHU programme area. RDP mainly supported the investment in the recreational infrastructure, small scale tourism infrastructure for public use. The programme shows correlation with the SKHU programme in investment in tourism services.

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Table 84: Influence effects of the different programmes on the impacts of the PA2

Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA2	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
Interreg programmes	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme (RO-HU)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved cross-border accessibility through connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure Increased proportion of passengers using sustainable – low carbon, low noise – forms of cross-border transport 	RO-HU supports only Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. Areas which are in line with SKHU include the improving the access of inhabitants of the cross-border region to core and comprehensive TEN-T network; development of cross-border public transport services; development of key conditions of cross-border bicycle transport.
	Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme (AT-HU)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving cross-border connectivity of regional centres to the TEN-T network Enhancing sustainable mobility on the local and regional level 	At-HU supports only Győr-Moson-Sopron County. The developments are focused on bilateral connections, not on connections with Slovakia. Synergies include actions that improve the coordination of the regional public transport services and bicycle transport. The supported actions encompass physical investment in cross-border roads/rail tracks and investments to providing faster and better connections between the tertiary nodes and the TEN-T network.
	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI Cross-border Cooperation Programme (HUSKROUA)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of transport infrastructure to improve the mobility of persons and goods 	It covers only Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and Košice Region as core regions and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén as an adjoining one from the programme area of SKHU. Development of cross-border public transport initiatives, harmonisation of systems, building and upgrading border crossings, bicycle path can be underlined here.
	Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria Programme (SK-AT)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve joint planning, coordination and practical solutions for environmentally friendly, low-carbon and safer transport network and services Improvement of regional mobility by building cycling routes to connect 	Only 2 regions (Bratislava, Trnava) were affected in the SKHU programme area. The projects were implemented within PA3 – supporting sustainable transport solutions, better inter-connectedness of cross-border transport information systems. Synergies include the development and support of sustainable transport solutions in the cross-border area.

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA2	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
			municipalities as a part of developing the integrated transport.	
	Interreg V-A Programme Slovak Republic and Czech Republic (SK-CZ)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building bike routes and bridges • Investment activities to increase the accessibility of locations with natural and cultural heritage sites. 	The programme affected only Trnava Region from the SKHU programme area. The synergy with the SKHU programme can be detected in active support of ecological transport with emphasis on construction of bicycle routes. The specific goal of the projects implemented was to increase the attractiveness of cultural and natural heritage for visitors and residents in the cross-border region.
Hungarian operative programmes	Integrated Transport Operational Programme (IKOP)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the road accessibility of cities with county status • Preservation of rural urban-suburban public transport performance 	The activities in line with the SKHU are about supporting public transport services within urban influencing areas, hinterlands, furthermore the support for accessibility of border crossings as well as major cities. Mostly road accessibility can be underlined. Almost no direct support for logistics is emphasized in the programme. The connection is weak since IKOP focuses mostly on TEN-T networks, and little is envisaged for border crossing points and cross-border infrastructure development.
	Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme (TOP)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the accessibility of workplaces and promoting the mobility of employees by improving traffic conditions • Promoting sustainable mobility • Development of the economic environment of county towns in order to increase employment 	The programme supports the whole programme area. TOP mainly contributed to the actions with regard to bicycle road networks, urban and suburban public transport services. TOP support the development of industrial areas, industrial parks, technology parks, incubators, innovation centres, and logistics centres, with a particular focus on service development. It provides an opportunity for the qualitative development of existing capacities and services, the construction of the still necessary infrastructural background, the creation of new business infrastructure.

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA2	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
	Competitive Central-Hungary Operational Programme (VEKOP)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting sustainable multimodal mobility 	VEKOP focuses solely on Central Hungary region. It supports suburban and regional bicycle and public transport networks.
Slovak operative programmes	Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting sustainable local/regional transport systems, based on improvement of public passenger transport and sustainable forms of transport. 	The target territory was the entire SKHU programme area. Many projects were implemented to enhance regional mobility through connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure. However, little attention was paid to cross-border connections and border infrastructure.
	Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (OPII)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of TEN-T infrastructure Enhancing regional mobility by developing transport infrastructure Development of public passenger transport systems Building intelligent transport systems 	The programme affected the entire SKHU area. Several regional projects were implemented aimed at developing regional mobility through modernization of roads. Improving the quality of services provided on the Danube waterway played an important role in OPII (via projects supporting the navigability of the Danube waterway, modernization and construction of public ports in Bratislava and Komárno, introduction of regular passenger ship transport on the Danube). It was relevant in terms of connecting the border area and increase the mobility, which is in line with the PA2 of Interreg CBC SKHU programme.

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Table 85: Influence effects of the different programmes on the impacts of the PA3

Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
Interreg programmes	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme (RO-HU)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased employment within the eligible area 	RO-HU affects only Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. It is in synergetic relation with preparation of integrated development strategy and action plans, and with improving cross-border accessibility to employment related facilities.
	Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme (AT-HU)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening regional entrepreneurship, the performance of start-ups and the innovation capacities of SMEs with a focus on the development of (internationally) competitive products Strengthening intercultural capacities and labour mobility of the border population by supporting cross-border education initiatives and vocational training 	AT-HU affects only Győr-Moson-Sopron County. The focus is on development of new or improved products, services or supply chains, and on labour mobility. Furthermore, another area of coherence is the harmonisation of vocational education systems, and skills developments.
	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI Cross-border Cooperation Programme (HUSKROUA)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of transport infrastructure to improve the mobility of persons and goods 	It covers only Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and Košice Region as core regions and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén as an adjoining one from the programme area of SKHU. Outstanding actions supported include preparation activities and/or building, modernisation and upgrading of transport infrastructures leading to and crossing the border to improve the opportunities for transboundary mobility. Limited role can be detected given the limited topical and regional scope.

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
	<p align="center">Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria Programme (SK-AT)</p>	<p align="center">3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration and preparation of training needs, with the aim of determining the training directions required by the labour market 	<p>The programme within a specific objective SO1.2 (Improving higher education and lifelong learning to provide competent and skilled workforce) supported better cooperation between the educational institutions and the economic sector. The OP backed also the establishment and development of joint platforms for effective cooperation between the secondary schools and the employers. Many projects resulted in improved cooperation between the institutions of tertiary education for targeted high-quality education offers. The implemented projects also supported the elaboration and upgrade of the joint education and training schemes reflecting the changes in skills and competences required on the labour market.</p>
	<p align="center">Interreg V-A Programme Slovak Republic and Czech Republic (SK-CZ)</p>	<p align="center">2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the training system and the level of employment by developing better educational programmes • Developing the workforce capabilities of the cross-border market • Supporting cooperation between the research, development and innovation institutions and the businesses (particularly the SME sector) 	<p>It covers only the westernmost part of the programme area. The goal of the programme is to create excellent educational programmes, attractive for participants in the educational process, as well as develop a relevant content of educational programmes tailored to the needs of the cross-border labour market.</p>

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
Hungarian operational programmes	Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EFOP)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing the entry of persons permanently excluded from the labour market into the labour market programme Reduction of peripheral life situations and human factors causing disengagement and service gaps Increasing the participation of disadvantaged persons, especially Roma, in the social economy 	The programme supported the whole programme area. EFOP mainly contributed to increase of employment for the disadvantaged population and regions. Areas with high and long-term unemployment is addressed. The reintegration and inclusion of the disadvantaged (e.g. the Roma) is supported by access to trainings, education and to the employment market. Labour mobility is less pronounced that in the SKHU.
	Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (GINOP)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dissemination of competitive entrepreneurial skills Creating growth opportunities for SMEs Creating a marketable and cooperative SME sector Increasing labour market integration of job seekers, especially those with low education The employment capacities of social purpose enterprises are growing The number of inactive and unemployed people participating in labour market programs organized by non-state organizations is increasing The participation of young people in internship and entrepreneurship programs is increasing Internal and external labour market flexibility is increasing 	The programme supported the whole programme area. GINOP contributed to the increase of employability and thus employment growth. There was a focus on the (long-term) unemployed, the marginalised people to reintegrate them. Furthermore, strong support can be detected in relation to the establishment of business services promoting employment and the creation of infrastructural conditions thereof. New SMEs as well as the growth of already existing ones are the among the main fields of intervention in relation to the SKHU. However, labour mobility was not supported with high intensity.

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
	Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme (TOP)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the accessibility of workplaces and promoting the mobility of employees by improving traffic conditions • Encouraging entrepreneurial activities and retaining the population through settlement development interventions • Development of the economic environment of county towns in order to increase employment • Improving employability and increasing the number of people employed locally by local and regional economic operators 	<p>TOP supports commuting and the improvement of accessibility of labour market attraction centres, which can serve as a basis for employment developments. It also supports growth and business development by strengthening economic, trade, and service functions of settlements. Furthermore, TOP also contributes to the development of business infrastructure and connected supportive services. Employability, employment cooperations are encouraged in and around cities. Trainings and skills development is less explicitly covered by TOP. TOP focuses on the local, urban-suburban level.</p>
	Competitive Central-Hungary Operational Programme (VEKOP)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The labour market integration of the growing number of jobseekers, especially those with low education, is realized • The participation of young people in internship and entrepreneurship programs is increasing • The participation of the working-age population, especially the low-skilled, in formal training courses that improve labour market competences is increasing • The prevalence of competency-based training is increasing • Spreading competitive entrepreneurial knowledge • Strengthening the growth potential of companies • Strengthening the foreign market presence of companies and their participation in the cooperations that support this 	<p>VEKOP concentrated solely on Central Hungary region. It supports the reintegration of unemployed to the labour market, complex employment programmes, training programmes. Furthermore, it supports business infrastructure, the use of expert and consultancy services, joint education and training programmes, capacity-enhancing developments of enterprises as well as activities necessary for businesses to prevail in the foreign market (e.g. marketing, brand building, breaking into the market, establishing business contacts, participation in foreign fairs and exhibitions).</p>

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
	Rural Development Programme (VP)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge transfer and information activities • Consulting services, plant management and replacement services 	Synergies can be detected in relation to use of expert and consultancy services, and organization of education and training programmes. The focus is mostly on agricultural and rural areas, while tourism and culture are not in the forefront of developments.
Slovak operative programmes	Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (OPII)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of IT systems and networks to support employment • Strengthening the research, educational and innovative and entrepreneurial capacities of research institutions • Strengthening the competitiveness and growth of SMEs • Increasing the internationalization of SMEs • Improving digital skills and inclusion of disadvantaged in the digital market 	The target area was the entire SKHU programme area. OPII aimed at supporting the research, development and innovation activities of SMEs in order to increase their competitiveness on international markets.. Further goal was to strengthen the cooperation between research institutions and the business sector.
	Operational Programme Human Resources (OPHR)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the level of employment • Improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems • Enhancing the attractiveness of vocational education • Supporting the partnership of schools with employers and professional organizations • Integration of students with special upbringing and educational needs (SUEN) – including members of marginalized groups e.g. Roma minority • Supporting the development of key competencies, especially language and ICT skills • Sustainable integration of young people into the labour market 	The target area was the entire SKHU programme area. The target area of OPHR is the development of human capital. Synergy of the programme with Interreg SKHU is detected in the field of integration of marginalized group of Roma minority in the SKHU programme area. Supporting links between the education and labour market needs in the programme is a priority, as well as support of vocational education. Further objective of the programme is to increase the participation of young people on the labour market (creating effective tools to increase employment and employability of young people under 29).

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to employment for job seekers and inactive people, including the long-term unemployed; local employment initiatives, support for labour mobility 	
	Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investment into education, training and vocational training, skills and lifelong learning by developing education and training infrastructure 	The target area was the entire SKHU programme area. IROP partly supported the strengthening of the system of vocational education and preparation and enhancement of its attractiveness in the context of lifelong education by developing a regionally/locally specifically focused offer of education. IROP also helped improving conditions of vocational education and training graduates for the labour market needs, improving the material-technical equipment of secondary vocational schools, school management centres, vocational practice centres, where shows synergy with the Interreg SKHU programme.
	Rural Development Programme (RDP)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening employment by the development of products and services based on local potential. 	The target area was the entire SKHU programme area. The synergy with the SKHU programme is found in common objective of promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development of rural areas via diversification of SMEs and job creation. The programme also allowed the development of accommodation facilities (capacity of 5 to 30 beds) in connection with investments in development of recreational and relaxation activities.

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Table 86: Influence effects of the different programmes on the impacts of the PA4

Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA4	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
Interreg programmes	Interreg V-A Romania-Hungary Programme (RO-HU)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved preventive and curative health-care services across the eligible area. 	RO-HU support solely Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County from Hungary. Focus of interventions in relation to SKHU are health care infrastructure and equipment investments, know-how exchange and joint capacity development. Very limited role can be seen given the regional and topical scope of RO-HU.
	Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme (AT-HU)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving institutional cross border cooperation in order to strengthen the integration. 	AT-HU supports only Győr-Moson-Sopron County. Synergies are strong in relation to support for cross-border cooperation of public administration, governance capacities. Furthermore, implementing and strengthening people-to-people activities as well as new and existing networks and cooperation platforms, joint services and activities are supported. Special focus is given to the fields of public services.
	Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENI Cross-border Cooperation Programme (HUSKROUA)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support of the development of health. 	It covers only Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and Košice Region as core regions and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén as an adjoining one from the programme area of SKHU. HUSKROUA is in synergy with SKHU in relation to exchange of know-how, joint training programmes, joint prevention programmes, joint support services, cooperation between institutions. The synergy is minimal since only few regions are included from the programme area and the supported topic is narrow.

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA4	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
	Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria Programme (SK-AT)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the capacity of cross-border educational system to provide human resources knowledge and skills demanded by the regional innovation system Strengthening the institutional cooperation in the cross-border area through mobilizing stakeholders, building the capacities for planning and acting in the framework of multi-level territorial governance. 	Only 2 regions of the SKHU programme area were affected (Bratislava and Trnava). Projects implemented in PA1 and PA4 show synergy with the SKHU programme: PA1-contributing to a smart cross-border region, PA4 – strengthening cross-border governance and institutional cooperation. In Interreg SK-AT programme, the stakeholders have long tradition and growing need for cooperation in the field of technology, innovation and improving skills.
	Interreg V-A Programme Slovak Republic and Czech Republic (SK-CZ)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation and digitalization in vocational education and training Preparation and introduction of educational online outputs for certain fields: increasing the employability of graduates on the labour market in different fields Increasing the relevance of the educational content to the needs of the labour market. 	Only Trnava region in the SKHU programme area was affected. The correlation with the SKHU Programme is detected in the field of PA1 (Utilization of innovation potential) of the Interreg SKCZ programme – increasing the relevance of educational content for the needs of the labour market with the aim of improving applicability on the labour market.
Hungarian operational programmes	Public Administration and Civil Service Development Operational Programme (KÖFOP)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An integrated and customer-oriented information base of public services containing settlement-level data will be developed and put into use High-level and modern public administration e-administration solutions (which can be used by citizens, state administrations and businesses) will be introduced, which will increase the number of cases that can be handled electronically. A human resource management system that provides the necessary competences for the performance of tasks with a service provider 	Weak direct synergies can be detected. The support focuses on the internal support and improvement of local and national government, public administration bodies. Indirect support for the SKHU actions can be found only.

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Type of the programme	Programmes	Impact on PA4	Actions in synergy with SKHU	Explanation/Comment
			approach and is in line with the career model will be introduced in key areas of public administration	
	Competitive Central-Hungary Operational Programme (VEKOP)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An integrated and customer-oriented information base of public services containing settlement-level data will be developed and put into use High-level and modern public administration e-administration solutions (which can be used by citizens, state administrations and businesses) will be introduced, which will increase the number of cases that can be handled electronically. A human resource management system that provides the necessary competences for the performance of tasks with a service provider approach and is in line with the career model will be introduced in key areas of public administration 	VEKOP supports almost identical actions as KÖFOP, but is focused on one single region, Central Hungary. This operational programme has a very weak connection to SKHU.
	Rural Development Programme (VP)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for investments in the creation, development or expansion of local essential services for the rural population, including those related to leisure and cultural activities, and related infrastructure Implementation of Local Development Strategies 	VP has very weak connection to SKHU. Actions and activities in line with SKHU include service development. In addition, it strengthens the individual activity, responsibility and cooperation skills of members of local communities.
Slovak operative programmes	Operational Programme Integrated Infrastructure (OPII)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of technologies and networks supporting digital economy Development of ICT products and services, e-commerce Strengthening ICT in state administration, education, culture and healthcare 	PA 7 of OPII has weak connection to SKHU. The priority axis is targeting activities that include service development and introduction of ITC, which will improve the access of the members of local communities to improved services.

3.6 Actions implemented in the field of social innovation

The regional needs of the border region make it necessary to analyse the results of the Programme in the field of social innovation. For this analysis, we will use the following definition: *“Social innovations are new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships and form new collaborations. These innovations can be products, services or models addressing unmet needs more effectively.”*¹⁶⁴

The Programme supported several projects, whose aim was to tackle a social challenge in the border region through cooperation.

The project *IpOLD*¹⁶⁵ tried to give innovative solutions to the challenges deriving from the lack of assistance for ageing, elderly population of small settlements and weak accessibility to public social and healthcare services. Within the project a permanent elderly care platform was set up by the Ipoly Valley EGTC involving municipalities, social service providers, churches, potential employers and NGOs, associations operating at local level, folk groups, associations employing and coordinating social workers. A joint strategy has been elaborated with interventions in the field of the development of integrated cross-border social services, silver economy and active ageing. Transboundary service integration was one of the main goals of the platform. Cross-border regional integration of public catering has been improved.

In the frames of the project *LILI*¹⁶⁶ the project partners aim to transform the obsolete, institution-centred elderly care system by initiating paradigm shift in the field. A new transformed elderly approach called Active Actor Elderly Care Model was introduced to the regions' elderly care systems.

In the frames of the *SKHU Ambassadors*¹⁶⁷ project so-called Active Age Centres were set up with services to the 60+ people in Košice and Miskolc. A new trilingual website was created for the elderly by which dedicated services can be accessed in order to improve their quality of life. The platform includes a favour bank that consists of active seniors who wish to help others/registered organisations with their expertise/with specific tasks (caring for a child, helping families with cooking, housework, gardening, teaching some craft activities) on a voluntary basis. On the other hand, the database includes organisations (institutions, NGOs, businesses) that want to offer volunteer services.

¹⁶⁴ Caulier-Grice, J. Davies, A. Patrick, R. Norman, W. (2012) Defining Social Innovation. A deliverable of the project: “The theoretical, empirical and policy foundations for building social innovation in Europe” (TEPSIE), European Commission – 7th Framework Programme, Brussels: European Commission, DG Research. The definition is widely used by the European Commission, for instance when it comes to European Social Innovation Competition. Link: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/industry/strategy/innovation/social_en

¹⁶⁵ IpOLD: SKHU/1902/4.1/076, Developing an integrated age-friendly region within the area of the Ipoly-Völgye EGTC

¹⁶⁶ LILI: SKHU/1902/4.1/069, LIVE FOR LIFE

¹⁶⁷ SKHU Ambassadors: SKHU/1902/4.1/101, Active ageing - Create a cross border team of ambassadors in order to improve the quality of life for Slovak and Hungary seniors

The project *Volunteer*¹⁶⁸ aimed at supporting civil society and social participation mainly by creating a joint volunteer exchange system. Needs and potentials have been analysed involving NGOs and a volunteer exchange programme has been developed including an online database of volunteers and receiving organisations.

Project *Silver economy*¹⁶⁹ initiated the exchange of best practice examples in 4 main subjects: ageing and employment (work and income), ageing and innovation (new technology versus independent life), ageing and competitiveness (adopting companies, senior intern strategy), wellness and healthy ageing (related products, services).

Other projects worth mentioning include *Circular economy*¹⁷⁰ which called for social innovation, however concrete new service or product has not been realised. Some projects aimed at increasing the employment rate and income of less educated and disadvantaged people. *Herbaland*¹⁷¹ supported an educational and information service provision system in order to reach the aforementioned goals, i.e. to support social integration through the involvement in herbal industry.

The project *SKHU Markets*¹⁷² of the TAPE called *Cserehát AP*¹⁷³ managed by the Via Carpatia EGTC supported the establishment of a multipurpose centre for educational programmes, trainings and other events that facilitate the reintegration to the labour market of those disadvantaged people who lack competitive skills and knowledge, are long-term unemployed or face negative discrimination due to their ethnicity or gender. *Find your way*¹⁷⁴ was a project in the frames of the same TAPE that focused on social enterprises, their legislative framework and on how to establish them. The related workshop focused on social farming. The activity also included the creation of the Workbook on Social Entrepreneurship as a tool for all interested parties who want to establish a social enterprise.

The *RE-START*¹⁷⁵ TAPE managed by the PONTIBUS EGTC had a special focus on silver economy and tried to give answers to the challenges of ageing and unemployment. The objective was job creation based on new services, social care and silver employment. The achievements included the creation of a social service network and a remote healthcare monitoring centre, reaching almost 400 elderly people by social services, new supporting services such as a social kitchen, laundry services and a bilingual database on social services. The TAPE initiated activities to foster silver employment through a mentor programme and employment at SMEs, shared support services to optimise the functioning of the social institutes, new types of recreational services, an offer of places for service providers, infrastructural transformation of buildings into social care institutes as well as to launch trainings to raise employability in social care. Through these activities the TAPE intended both to improve the living standards of the

¹⁶⁸ Volunteer: SKHU/1601/4.1/155, Strengthening cross-border civil society through the development of a joint volunteer exchange system

¹⁶⁹ Silver economy: SKHU/1601/4.1/164, Silver economy

¹⁷⁰ Circular economy: SKHU/1601/4.1/290, Circle of Circular economy

¹⁷¹ Herbaland: SKHU/1601/4.1/150, Cross-border network cooperation of stakeholders in herbal industry

¹⁷² SKHU Markets: SKHU/1802/3.1/004, Meet the Local Needs

¹⁷³ Cserehát AP: SKHU/1703/3.1/150, Employment Cross-border Action plan of the Cserehát micro- region

¹⁷⁴ Find your way: SKHU/1802/3.1/002, Find your way to the labour market

¹⁷⁵ RE-START: SKHU/1703/3.1/010, Creating Needs Based Employment in the Lower Ipel Valley

elderly people of the Lower Ipoly/Ipeľ Valley and to create jobs for the active population of a peripheral border area.

3.7 Additional table to the evaluation of the TAPE

Table 87: The system of the 3-level assessment of the TAPE concepts

Main aspects	Ancillary aspects	JS assessors	Maximum score	Territorial assessors	Maximum score	Sectorial assessors	Maximum score
Operational evaluation	Management capacities	Members of the CCP are experienced and have proper capacities to provide management support for the Consortium.	2				
		Members of the CCP are experienced and have proper capacities to provide communication support for the Beneficiaries.	2				
		TAPE assesses the potential risks and impediments to the TAPE implementation and management gives proposal to their mitigation or elimination.	2				
	Project working schedule	Timing of the TAPE implementation is deliberate but agile considering the available financial and human resources.	2				
		The implementation of the TAPE can be started in 2018. (n+3)	2				

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Main aspects	Ancillary aspects	JS assessors	Maximum score	Territorial assessors	Maximum score	Sectorial assessors	Maximum score
	Horizontal principles	TAPE creates working places for people living in deep poverty and Roma or for long term unemployed people or for tertiary educated people.	2				
	Feasibility					The proposed projects are indispensable parts of the TAPE and are absolutely necessary for the overall success of the TAPE.	3
						Project activities and the expected results are well-defined, feasible and ensure the achievement of the project objectives.	3
						Project proposals are in synergic or complementary relation with other projects implemented within the TAPE.	3
	Requested financial resources					The overall budget of the TAPE is realistic and is in line with sound financial management principles.	2
						Budgets of the project proposals are realistic and are in line with the sound financial management principles.	2

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Main aspects	Ancillary aspects	JS assessors	Maximum score	Territorial assessors	Maximum score	Sectorial assessors	Maximum score	
Strategic evaluation	Project environment and coherence	Target area is located in one of the less developed regions	3	Territorial needs are described well and relevant for the target area	4	Identification of the target area - Target area is cross-border	2	
						Identification of the target area - Target area is functionally relevant	2	
	Relevance	Mission of the TAPE is well defined and it is in line with the specific objective of the PA3	5	Specific objectives of the TAPE reflect on territorial needs of the target area.	2	Specific objectives of the TAPE reflect on territorial needs of the target area	3	
				Specific objectives of the TAPE are in line with the development strategy of the relevant county.	6	Specific objectives are well designed and measurable	3	
	Integration			Other employment initiatives are integrated into the TAPE on intervention level	2	Other employment initiatives are integrated into the TAPE on strategic level	4	
	Socio-economic analysis						The analysis is understandable and relevant in the scope of the target area	2
							The analysis is focusing on essential factors of the employment and the cross-border labour mobility of the target area	2
							Endogenous potentials of the target area are clearly identified	4

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Main aspects	Ancillary aspects	JS assessors	Maximum score	Territorial assessors	Maximum score	Sectorial assessors	Maximum score
	Identification of territorial needs					Territorial needs reflect on the result of the analyses and the identified endogenous potentials	2
	Level of cross-border cooperation					Results of the TAPE has real cross-border impact	4
						Implementation of the TAPE increases the level of cross-border integration of the target area	4
	Added value					Expected results reflect on overall and specific objectives and are clearly described and measurable	4
						Amount of new working places are ambitious and realistic. New working places reflect on key factors of the employment described in analyses and are sustainable.	4
Partnership					Members of the consortium are experienced and their professional profile is in line with the role and activities described in the TAPE	2	

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Main aspects	Ancillary aspects	JS assessors	Maximum score	Territorial assessors	Maximum score	Sectorial assessors	Maximum score
						Project partnerships are balanced and the members of the projects have professional profile in line with the role and activities described in the project	2
	Sustainability					Target groups of each project proposal are defined well and are relevant from the point of view of sustainability	3
						Professional sustainability of each key action and supplementary project is ensured	3
						Financial sustainability of each key action and supplementary project is ensured	3
TOTAL			20			14	66

