

Annex 2. Reports on the Evaluation of the Strategy Document

***Interreg VI-A Slovakia-Austria cross-border Cooperation
Programme 2021-2027***

Evaluation of the fulfilment of individual points of the specified scope of evaluation in the Report on the Evaluation of the Strategy Paper: Interreg Slovakia - Austria cross-border Cooperation Programme 2021 - 2027 (hereinafter referred to as the "Programme").

CHAPTER:

1 Basic data on the contracting entity

1.1 Designation, 1.2 Address of registered office, 1.3 Name, surname, address, telephone number and other contact details of the contracting authority's authorized representative

Rating: Chapter I. and the individual points are marked fully and correctly in the Report to the prescribed extent.

2 Basic data on the strategy paper

2.1 Title, 2.2 Territory, 2.3 Municipalities concerned, 2.4 Authorities concerned, 2.5 Authorising Authority, 2.6 Content and main objectives of the strategy paper and its relationship to other strategy papers

Rating: Chapter II and the individual points are marked fully and correctly in the Report to the prescribed extent. The content and main objectives are taken from the Programme, they are sufficiently clear and sufficiently declared. The report also identifies the most important relations with other important strategic documents, extended by the requirements of point 2.1.2 of the specific requirements of the scope of the evaluation.

3 Basic data on the state of play of the environment of the territory concerned

3.1 Information on the state of play of the environment, including health, and its likely development if the strategy paper is not implemented

Assessment: Chapter III, point 3.1, is the basis for a "zero variant" in the transferred meaning of the term. The report describes in detail the most important aspects of the environment in the structure that aptly characterizes its state of affairs at present, namely:

Territorial-administrative division of the region

Components of environment (air, water, soil, fauna and flora)

Technical infrastructure of the region

Demographics + health data

In the two self-governing regions of Slovakia (Bratislava and Trnava) and in the regions of Austria (Nordburgenland, Niederösterreich-Süd, St. Pölten, Waldviertel, Weinviertel, Wiener Umland/Nordteil, Wiener Umland/Südteil and Vienna).

The basis for processing the condition of the environment for the Slovak Republic was mainly the documents:

- *Regional Integrated Strategy of the Bratislava Region (RIÚS BOD),*
- *Regional Integrated Strategy of Trnava region (RIÚS TA),*
- *Bratislava region in numbers (2020),*
- *Trnava region in numbers (2020),*
- *Interim evaluation report of the Interreg SK-AT cross-border Cooperation Programme (2020).*

The basis for processing the state of the environment for Austria was mainly the documents: Border orientation paper AT-SK (2019); The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (2018). Bratislava and Vienna: Twin Cities with big Potentials (Authory: Hanzl-Weiss, Holzner & Römisch).

The documents for the processing of this chapter are up to date and therefore fully acceptable.

The report foresees that the non-implementation of the programme (allocation of funds) will affect the state of the environment. While this would avoid the negative impact of part of the activities linked to investments in e.g. transport infrastructure (see Opinions, Annex 1.

- *limiting progress in improving the state of nature conservation in the region,*
- *limiting investments in adaptation means responding to climate change (e.g. soil erosion, floods, storms, etc.),*
- *non-improvement of local air quality in areas with intensive housing,*
- *limiting investments in so-called 'green infrastructure',*
- *restricting residents' access to leisure industry infrastructure, such as cycle paths.*

Assessment: *To sum up, it can be said that, with regard to the natural environment and with regard to social and economic factors, it is advantageous to move towards the implementation of the objectives of the Programme while maintaining the principles of sustainable development.*

From the Report it is necessary to implement in individual Activities - challenges of future projects for individual Priorities to accept conclusions and recommendations and draft environmental criteria for evaluation of projects proposed for implementation from Chapter 3.1 of the Report.

3.2 Information in relation to environmentally particularly important areas, such as proposed protected bird areas, areas of Community importance, a coherent European network of protected areas of conservation (NATURA 2000), protected water management areas, etc.

In the introduction, the Report describes the continuous protected areas within NATURA 2000 in Slovakia and further elaborates in detail the cultural and natural heritage of the individual regions concerned, as written in individual chapters (National Parks and Protected Landscape Areas).

3.3 The resurgence of environment, including health in areas that will be significantly affected

Evaluation: These facts may be the main motive for listing the individual challenges of the Programme, in particular in Priorities 2.1. More innovative borders, 2.2. Greener borders, etc. through the following priority steps:

1. Protection and sustainability of the use of natural resources, taking into account climate change.
2. Development of human resources in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights.
3. Development of cultural potential and appreciation of the cultural capital of the regions.

3.4 Environmental problems, including health problems, which are relevant to the strategy paper

The basis for dealing with environmental problems was documents for the territories concerned, presented at the beginning of the chapter with appropriate commentary to the extent necessary.

Evaluation: The report assesses the overall situation of environmental problems in Slovakia and in detail after individual regions and their characteristics to a clear and sufficient extent. Environmental problems, including health problems, are currently significantly affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, proportionally and alternately affected regions in Slovakia, but also in Austria **with an unmistakable cross-border impact. Priority 2.3 A more social border provides scope for supporting the socially weaker sections of the population of both countries to eliminate the cost of food and energy.**

3.5 Environmental objectives , including health objectives identified at international, national and other level, which are relevant to the strategy paper, as well as how they have been taken into account during the preparation of the strategy paper

The environmental objectives in this chapter focus primarily on the document: **Europe 2030: A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth.**

This strategy was adopted in 2020 in order to emerge from the crisis and prepare the European Union's economy for the next decade. The strategy presented key objectives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, of which the impacts of climate change are mainly related to the impacts of climate change for the economy and transport sectors.

In the event of non-implementation of the Programme contained in the strategic document under consideration, the following could realistically occur:

- jeopardising the achievement of the objectives of the 2030 Agenda,
- lower efficiency in the use of public resources due to their incoordination,
- to slow the direction of the Slovak economy towards an innovative and sustainable circular economy,
- to fulfill negative forecasts of demographic development in the Slovak Republic,

- *threatening the competitiveness of the Slovak and Austrian economies, increasing their sensitivity to external shocks to degress as a result of them,*
- *lower efficiency in addressing fundamental environmental, social and economic problems.*

The report describes the seven flagship initiatives taken below to support progress in each priority area. The flagship initiative is 'A resource-efficient Europe' 3, which aims to create a framework for policies to support the shift towards a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy. This shift will help:

- *improve economic performance while reducing the use of resources,*
- *identify and create new opportunities for economic growth and greater innovation and increase the EU's competitiveness;*
- *ensure security of supply of essential resources,*
- *combat climate change and limit the environmental impact of resource use.*

Evaluation: *The objectives in this chapter are processed on the basis of current EU criteria: to recycle 75% of packaging waste by 2030, to reduce CO and other pollutants, to create economic incentives for manufacturers to market more environmentally sound products, and to support recovery and recycling systems (e.g. packaging, batteries, electronics, vehicles).*

4 Basic Data on the Anticipated Impacts of the Strategy Document, including health

The Report commented on the basic impact of the Programme on the environment and health in its entirety, among the most important being:

1. *Likely significant environmental and health impacts (primary, secondary, cumulative, synergies, short-term, medium-term, long-term, permanent, temporary, positive and negative).*

The projected significant environmental impacts were analysed in the Report within the framework of the Programme's content in the structure of individual priority actions and interventions implemented through individual activities. This structure makes it possible to provide a basic picture of the expected impacts, corresponding to the degree of accuracy of the statements in the Programme, as an overarching strategy, which will then be reflected in the strategies of the affected regions and implementation documents, which will be subject to individual environmental evaluation. Therefore, the assessment of cumulative and synergistic impacts within the framework of the integrated development programmes in the structure of the programme's specific challenges is crucial. They themselves build on integration and the effects of the interaction of a range of activities fulfilling individual priority actions, which should guarantee the achievement of the defined objectives. The likely significant environmental and health impacts are assessed separately in the report for each Priority, impacts are elaborated in detail, for each priority there are recommendations in the proposal interventions to complement their wording.

Here are the most important:

Priority 2.1: More innovative borders

Assessment of the effects of the priority

The Slovak education system with standardised types of education systems is a one-structure model with atypical outflow of pupils throughout education to other types of schools. The aforementioned atypicalness of the education system, and in particular the outflow of some pupils to different types of schools during lower secondary education, contributes to its overall segregation (by draining talented pupils or pupils with better social backgrounds) and also to the structural inconsistency between education and labour market demand (by postponing the decision on pupils' professional orientation and reducing the initial cohort for secondary vocational education).

Intervention: *For this activity, it is necessary to use the experience of the management and structure of Austrian education, especially in the regions concerned. It is necessary to analyse why Slovak students study in Austria. Improving the adaptability of human settlements and countries in relation to advances in science and research.*

Priority 2.2: Greener border

Assessment of the effects of the priority

Improving the adaptability of human settlements and landscapes to the adverse effects of climate change. The value of natural and cultural heritage is an integral part of the socioeconomic, cultural and natural capital of each country. In addition to the material cultural heritage, which has been digitised in recent years and will be made available to the general public, cultural heritage objects represent also localities in the country. These places play an important role in the sustainable development of the rural and urban cultural landscape. Very rarely, these cultural heritage objects consist exclusively of natural ecosystems. It is usually a summary of semi-natural and cultural ecosystems, the diversity of which is influenced by the management of the territory in the past. Many natural and semi-natural landscapes are made up of different types of cultural heritage, including archaeological monuments, historical landscape features, architectural elements, but also values of an intangible nature such as traditions, stories and customs.

Intervention: *Protecting, developing and exploiting natural and cultural potential, including creative industries, at cross-border, regional and local level.*

Priority 2.3: A more social border

Assessment of the effects of the priority

Improving and streamlining human capital adaptation not only brings significant benefits with regard to the development of the regional economy and stabilises qualified strength in the local labour market, but last but not least improves cooperation links and supports the creation of information-sharing platforms, which are one of the key prerequisites for the participation of a broad or so-called critical mass in the areas of environmental protection. Cooperation and

awareness-raising leads to greater sensitivity of stakeholders to environmental issues and possible solutions to current challenges in this area, such as climate change, sustainable forms of resource management and more.

Intervention:

Priority gives way to support the socially weaker populations of both countries to eliminate food and energy making it more expensive. Taking into account the above, it is not possible to carry out a final assessment as regards the possibility of cross-border activity during the strategic evaluation phase of the programme, but it may prove necessary during the environmental impact assessment phase of individual activities.

Priority 2.4: Cooperation between border institutions and residents

Assessment of the effects of the priority

The implementation of the Programme falling within the scope of the Interreg priority area must be guided for the priority Institutional cooperation by the basic principles, i.e. 'no new structures' and 'no new competences'.

Intervention: *Results should be achieved by finding and exploiting synergies between existing activities, transferring experience and supporting new projects with each other.*

However, the approval of projects by the Steering Group may strengthen its chances of applying for funding from resources managed from Interreg programmes. Consequently, it is necessary to discuss the areas of cooperation endorsed by the European Council in the SEUDR Implementation Action Plan/SEUDR.

5 Proposed measures to prevent, eliminate, minimise and compensate for environmental and health impacts

The Report commented on the basic impact of the Programme on the environment and health in its entirety, among the most important being:

The purpose of the proposed measures in the Report is the proposal to make effective use of the territorial potential of the regions, the key prevention is the creation of a mutually harmonised system of public policy management to ensure joint intervention of all levels of public administration (from municipalities to VÚC to the national level) in the territory of the regions concerned of Slovakia and Austria, which represent a broader level of economic and social development management with interregional and local level, with the participation of all stakeholders Actors.

These measures will be achieved through the following steps:

- 1. Prevention of environmental and health impacts of the territory concerned.*
- 2. Elimination of environmental and health impacts of the territory concerned.*
- 3. Minimisation of environmental and health impacts of the territory concerned.*
- 4. Compensation for environmental and health impacts of the territory concerned.*

These are detailed in the Report in detail and to a sufficient extent.

5.1. Measures to avert, reduce or mitigate any significant negative impacts on the environment, including health, that could result from the implementation of the strategy paper.

Evaluation: The report pays particular attention to the position of this chapter "Specific measures to avert, reduce or mitigate any significant negative impacts on the environment, including health, are assessed sufficiently in the structure of the programme's individual priorities.

6 Reasons for selecting the alternatives under consideration, taking into account the objectives and geographical dimension of the strategy paper, and a description of how the evaluation has been carried out, including difficulties in providing the necessary information, such as technical deficiencies or uncertainties.

Evaluation: The strategy paper is not presented in alternatives. The "Programme" relies primarily on the Interreg Programme submitted to the European Commission on: 09.2021, The Vision and Strategy for The Development of Slovakia to 2030 and on the consensual definition of priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the process of a broad participatory process and is open as a document that will be updated and detailed in the follow-up strategy papers of the affected regions. The difficulties in drawing up the evaluation report consisted mainly of the structure of the content of the report on the evaluation of the strategy paper under Annex 4, to Act no. 24/2006 Coll., which at no point respects the nature of the Interreg Programme, i.e. cross-border cooperation, its cross-border impact, the participation of the cross-border partner in the evaluation, or its contribution to the content of the report. We are in favour of drawing up a handbook for administration processors, but also expert opinion for strategy papers involving cross-border cooperation.

7 Proposal for Monitoring Environmental Impacts, including health impacts

On the basis of the environmental health analyses carried out, it is possible to identify the environmental criteria that should be met by projects implemented under the Interreg programme.

Meeting the criteria should ensure that projects implemented under the Programme are pro-ecological, set up to minimise impacts with negative impacts on the environment and human health or projects that have a direct positive impact on the environment.

The environmental criteria proposed for application under the Programme can be divided into two groups:

- *general criteria,*
- *detailed criteria - defined for the given project type.*

The report describes in detail and sufficiently the individual criteria in the structure of:

GENERAL CRITERIA

Formal - legal criteria

Planning and strategic criteria

Technical and technological criteria

Social and health criteria

Natural criteria: Environmental management criteria

DETAILED CRITERIA

Use of renewables

Criteria for educational projects

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is assessed that the Programme as a whole has a positive impact on the environment and supports the resolution of some of the problems related to the improvement of the state of the environment, but that some areas of support will also have a negative impact on individual environmental components. Detailed conclusions in this area are presented in the relevant chapters of the evaluation report.

8 Likely significant transboundary environmental impacts, including health impacts

As a strategy document and its implementation, the Programme does not have directly identifiable partial cross-border environmental impacts, including health impacts. Meeting the priorities and objectives of the 2030 Agenda is an important global commitment and contribution to addressing global environmental and social challenges, which fully fulfils the objectives of the Programme. Of the possible current risks for cross-border impacts, it can be specified:

- *Direction of prevailing winds Slovakia - Austria,*
- *Traffic intensity Slovakia - Austria,*
- *Floods at the Slovakia-Austria border,*
- *Transmission of infections (COVID-19, etc.) on the Slovakia-Austria interface.*

Assessment: *The report shall identify all additional information on possible cross-border impacts, including health, in particular in Chapter. 3.4.*

9 Non - technical summary of the provided information

The summary of the information used has non-technical effects:

- *high added value by linking the academic, industrial and public sectors to the development of innovation,*
- *exploiting the internal potential of regions and diversifying economic activities,*
- *intensifying the economy and changing the life cycle of products supporting the circular economy,*
- *to improve the quality of life for all social groups in the various strategic planning regions and to ensure the availability and quality of public services, work and equal opportunities to exploit the potential of each individual, regardless of their socio-economic background or disadvantage, to make public affairs more effective and accessible to citizens by building multi-level integrated development management at national, regional and local level.*

Subsequently, the report defines key strategies for achieving the priorities of the 2030 Agenda, looking for ways to use all available resources effectively on the basis of integrated approaches in cooperation between Slovakia and Austria.

Evaluation: *The chapter is processed in the sense customary for non-technical information.*

10 Information on economic difficulty (if the nature and scope of the strategy paper allows)

The proposal for the Interreg Slovakia-Austria cross-border Cooperation Programme 2021-2027 contains the amount of funds earmarked for its successful implementation. It is clear from the strategy that the implementation of integrated cross-border activities will bring not only environmental or social, but also economic benefits. The resources needed to implement public interventions to ensure the implementation of the strategy should be understood as investments with a high social return, provided for truly integrated and integrative approaches, including within the framework of the proposed funding system for the implementation of the Programme. The return on the deposited funds will be able to be assessed after the end of the Programme after 2027 and beyond, which will not be easy given the breadth of the project's priorities, but also distorting facts such as the pandemic, the deterioration in the standard of living of the inhabitants of the area concerned due to the increase in food and energy, etc. However, it is optimistic to believe in the overall benefit and good return on the funds used.

Evaluation: *For Interventions in Chapters 4 and 5, the report makes a proposal to complement economic data.*