ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT – Non-technical summary

Strategic Environmental Assessment of

Interreg Central Europe 2021-2027 Programme

October 2020

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (hereinafter SEA) for the future Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027 Programme (Interreg CE) is conducted in accordance with the EU Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (hereinafter SEA Directive) and the UNECE Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (hereinafter SEA Protocol).

The assignment was performed in an interactive way through regular virtual meetings between the contractor and the Interreg CE MA/JS and two exchanges on the progress of the SEA with the Working Group CE21+ that elaborates the programme.

This SEA is based on the draft programme strategy as outlined in the proposed Interreg Programme (IP) version 1 which may be subject to further consultations and chnages. In particular, Specific Objective 3.1 might be discontinued in the final version of the programme.

The assessment has taken into consideration the fact that the IP primarily focuses on transnational coordination, strategic and operational planning, capacity building and skills improvement, best practice transfer and knowledge exchange. It involves "limited investment" interventions - any supported actions with an "investment character" will be supported for the purpose of the piloting of innovative solutions. This often means that only localized direct impacts can be reasonably expected in case of specific projects and their pilot actions.

INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE PROGRAMME

The Interreg Central Europe (CE) Programme is one of the transnational cooperation programmes established under the European Territorial Cooperation goal in the framework of the EU Cohesion Policy. The programme supports regional cooperation among nine central European countries: Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, as well as parts of Germany and Italy.

The current draft Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027 Programme Version 1 (IP v1) suggests four priorities and 9 specific objectives (SOs):

Priority 1: A smarter central Europe through cooperation

- SO 1.1: Strengthening innovation capacities in central Europe
- SO 1.2: Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship in central Europe

Priority 2: A greener central Europe through cooperation

- SO 2.1: Supporting the energy transition to a climate-neutral central Europe
- SO 2.2: Increasing the resilience to climate change in central Europe
- SO 2.3: Taking circular economy forward in central Europe
- SO 2.4: Safeguarding the environment in central Europe

Priority 3: A more connected central Europe through cooperation

- SO 3.1: Improving transport connections of rural and peripheral regions in central Europe
- SO 3.2: Greening urban mobility in central Europe

Priority 4: A better governance for cooperation in central Europe

- SO 4.1: Strengthening governance for an integrated territorial development in central Europe

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OBJECTIVES AND ISSUES FOR INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027 PROGRAMME

The SEA has assessed the proposed IP v1 of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027 while considering the following relevant environmental policy objectives.

Environmental policy topics	Key issues and concerns
Air	Impacts on human health and well-being
	Impacts on ecosystems
Climate	Mitigation (GHG emission reductions, renewable energy, energy efficiency)
	Adaptation (adaptive capacity and adaptation measures)
Water	Protection of water ecosystems and wetlands
	Hydro-morphological pressures
	Pollution pressures on water and links to human health
	Water abstraction and its pressures on surface- and groundwater
Soil	Ensuring sustainable use of land and soil
	Preventing loss of soil and soil pollution
Biodiversity and Natura 2000	Protection and preservation of biodiversity and natural ecosystems
	Promotion of green infrastructure and ecosystem-based management
	Protection and preservation of Natura 2000 species and habitats
Population and human health	Public health and environmental health
	Noise
Material assets	Resource use and efficiency
	Waste generation and management
	Buildings
Cultural heritage	Protection and preservation of cultural heritage
	Promotion of participatory management of cultural heritage
Landscape	Protection and preservation of landscapes
Resilience	Resilience to economic, social and environmental shocks
	Resilient agricultural and food production systems
	Resilient health systems
	Resilient infrastructure
	Resilience of urban systems

The environmental policies listed above were comprehensively integrated into the proposed programme design. The following table illustrates multiple (mainly positive) linkages of the above EU environmental policy objectives with the proposed specific objectives of the programme.

SEA topics	Environmental (including health) policy objectives & concerns	Interreg Central Europe Programme 2021-2027 - version 1								
	Priority	1		2				3		4
	SO	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	3.1	3.2	4.1
Air	Air quality impacts on human health and well-being									
	Air quality impacts on ecosystems									
Climate	Mitigation (GHG emission reductions, renewable energy, energy efficiency)									
	Adaptation (adaptive capacity and adaptation measures)									
Water	Water ecosystems and wetlands									
	Hydro-morphological pressures									
	Pollution pressures on water and links to human health									
	Water abstraction and its pressures on surface- and groundwater									
Soil	Ensuring sustainable use of land and soil									
	Preventing loss of soil and soil pollution									
Biodiversity and Natura 2000	Protection and preservation of biodiversity and natural ecosystems									
	Promotion of green infrastructure and ecosystem-based management									
	Enabling the necessary transformative change									
	Protection and preservation of Natura 2000 species and habitats									
Population and human health	Public health and environmental health									
	Noise									
Material assets	Resource use and efficiency									
	Waste generation and management									
	Buildings									
Cultural heritage	Protection, preservation and management of cultural heritage									
	Promotion of participatory management of cultural heritage									
Landscape	Protection and preservation of landscapes									
Resilience	Resilience to economic, social, and environmental shocks									
	Resilient agricultural and food production systems									
	Resilient health systems									
	Resilient infrastructure									
	Resilience of urban systems									

Key:
The strength of potential relationships (positive or adverse) determined on the basis of their significance and the territorial magnitude:

- Strong relationship
- Significant relationship
- Weak relationship

ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE TRENDS IN THE INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027 PROGRAMME AREA

Chapter 4 of the Environmental Report offers a detailed analysis of the baseline trends for each of the environment issues that were considered within the strategic environmental assessment. Interested readers can refer to it and obtain information on the overall trends in EU, situation in Central Europe and the expected future trend in each of the assessment issues in the broad programme area.

POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS OF INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027 PROPOSAL ON ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN HEALTH

As evident from the overview provided below, the IP is clearly oriented towards sustainable development and search for green solutions by design. Since all projects and their potential pilot actions with an "investment character" need to be implemented in line with national level legislation and standards, no potentially significant adverse impact is foreseen even for the realistic worst/case scenario of the IP programme implementation.

SO 1.1: Strengthening innovation capacities in central Europe

SO 1.1	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	/	+1	+1	+1	+1	/	+2	+2	/
Risks	/	/	/	/	-1	/	/	/	/
TB	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

SO 1.2: Developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship in central Europe

SO 1.2	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	/	+1	/	/	/	+1	+1	/	/
Risks	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
TB	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

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

SO 2.1	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	+2	+2	/	/	/	+1	+1	/	/
Risks	/	/	-1	/	-1	-1	/	/	-1
TB	T+	T+	/	/	T	/	/	/	/

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

SO 2.2	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	+1	+2	+2	+2	+2	+2	+2	+2	+T

Risks	/	/	-1	/	/	/	/	/	/
TB	/	T+	T+	/	T+	T+	/	/	/

SO 2.3: Taking circular economy forward in central Europe

SO 2.3	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	+1	+1	+2	+1	+1	+1	+2	/	/
Risks	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
TB	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

SO 2.4: Safeguarding the environment in central Europe

SO 2.4	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	+2	+2	+2	+2	+2	+2	/	/	+2
Risks	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
TB	/	T+	T+	/	T+	T+	/	/	/

SO 3.1: Improving transport connections of rural and peripheral regions in central Europe

SO 3.1	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	+1	+1	/	/	/	+1	/	/	/
Risks	-1	-1	/	/	-1	-1	/	/	-1
TB	T	/	/	/	T	/	/	/	T

SO 3.2: Greening urban mobility in central Europe

SO 3.2	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	+2	+2	/	/	/	+2	/	+1	/
Risks	/	/	/	/	/	/	-1	/	/
TB	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

SO 4.1: Strengthening governance for an integrated territorial development in central Europe

SO 4.1	Air	CC	Water	Soil	Bio	Health	Mater.	Cult	Land
Benefits	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1
Risks	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
TB	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

The transboundary effects of the proposed IP are largely positive. The programme creates only few minor risks of potentially adverse transboundary impacts in the case of transboundary policy/strategic frameworks and infrastructure interventions in border areas that would be independently followed up by investments outside of the Interreg CE programme framework. Such risks can be managed by the existing well-established provisions for the transboundary consultations within the respective EIAs or SEAs that would accompany any such intervention.

PROPOSED MITIGATION MEASURES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERREG CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-2027 PROGRAMME

In order to minimize the potential environmental risks of the proposed programme, the SEA process suggested the following mitigation measures:

Programme proposal	Recommended mitigation measures for the programme
Cross-cutting recommendation for the entire programme	The IP should encourage all applicants to use 'environmental sustainability by design' approach. This approach implies that environmental or broader sustainability considerations are no longer treated as "afterthoughts" and instead become the core part of decision-making processes ranging from e.g. the business management tools (such as analytics and product development) public sector planning and programming. To promote such thinking in the actual project applications, the CE programme is advised to: • encourage the prospective applicants to identify and consider any potentially significant environmental and health issues of concern during their project design; consider available options for implementing projects that do not adversely affect the quality of the environment and ideally contribute to regeneration of the environment and ecosystem functions and services; and prepare arrangements for environmentally sound project implementation; and • explain all of the above considerations in the project application (e.g. in the dedicated section of the project application form templates). The project selection process should recognize and appreciate good practices in environmental sustainability-by-design.
SO 1.1: Strengthening innovation capacities in central Europe	With regard to the programme's potential support to bio-economy, any supported innovation that involve genetic modifications (e.g. synthetic biology) should be supported only if they prove compliance with the related *acquis communautaire* for genetic engineering, including the relevant provisions of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030.
SO 2.1: Supporting the energy transition to a climate neutral central Europe	The project selection process should ensure that proposals for the production of renewable energy consider their potential impacts on biodiversity and Natura 2000 species and habitats, hydro-morphology, water-use, landscape, noise, vibrations and electromagnetic impacts.
SO 2.2: Increasing the resilience to climate change in central Europe	The project selection process should ensure that proposals for climate change risk (e.g. floods) adaptation measures consider their potential hydro-morphological impacts.
SO 3.1: Improving mobility and accessibility of	Should the programme support the preparation of transport infrastructure plans and programmes that would fall under the scope of the SEA Directive or SEA Protocol, it needs to ensure that the relevant activities include the required strategic environmental assessments.

rural and peripheral regions in central Europe	The programme should encourage all applicants to use 'environmental sustainability by design' approach, that considers, particularly in the SO 3.1, whether and how the proposed transport actions: • reduce the need for transport; • reduce or optimize the transport flows; • promote switching to least emission-intensive transport systems; • reduce or optimize fragmentation of habitats and • reduce the impacts of the transport systems on air and noise pollution; public health; biodiversity and Natura 2000 species and habitats, landscape fragmentation, hydro-morphological impacts, land take and cultural and archaeological heritage.
	Should the IP fund the preparation of transport infrastructure projects in border regions that would fall under the scope of the Espoo Convention and the Article 7 of the EIA Directive, it needs to ensure that the activities consider the relevant requirements for transboundary consultations.
SO 3.2: Greening urban mobility in central Europe	As mentioned in the case of SO 3.1, the IP should encourage all applicants to use 'environmental sustainability by design' approach, that is particularly relevant to also for the SO 3.2. This approach should enquire whether and how the proposed transport actions: • reduce the need for transport; • reduce or optimize the transport flows; • promote switching to least emission-intensive transport systems; and • reduce the impacts of the transport systems on air and noise pollution; public health; and cultural heritage

Addiitonally, the SEA process has generated 11 suggestions for the enhancement measures which are detailed in Chapter 6.

MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

The SEA process has not encountered any difficulties and is not constrained by limitations that would restrict the validity of the assessment outcomes.

Considering the fact that the proposed Interreg CE programme 2021-2027 does not have any potentially significant adverse impacts on the environment that could not be easily managed with the proposed mitigation measures, the SEA team does not have any specific recommendations for the monitoring arrangements under the SEA Directive.