



2nd PHASE EVALUATION

of the INTERREG-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme **Hungary-Serbia**

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I. Main results of the evaluation

1 Context of the evaluation

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary as Managing Authority (MA) and the Ministry of European Integration of Serbia as National Authority (NA) scheduled the so-called Second Phase evaluation of the INTERREG-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Hungary-Serbia¹ for 2022. Regarding the schedule, 2nd Phase evaluation follows the 1st Phase of a combined evaluation of 2019. The evaluation will also feed into the next Annual Implementation Report (AIR).

Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) was assigned with the elaboration of the Second Phase evaluation of the programme. CESCI is one of the strategic partners of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary drawing financial support from the Ministry on a yearly basis. Based on this strategic partnership, CESCI was assigned to perform the evaluation of this programme as well.

Considering the **content of the assignment**, it was defined in the evaluation plans in a way that it should improve the quality of the implementation of the programme as well as it should assess its effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

The task was separated into three working phases. The most important **steps of the evaluation procedure** were as follows:

1. **Pooling information:** in order to avoid the risks of misunderstandings and misinterpretation, in the first phase the experts carried out a comprehensive information gathering process.
2. **Producing materials:** based on the massive data and information storage created during the first working phase, the production of materials started. This phase included the evaluations, assessments and analyses of the assignment. During this phase, consultation opportunities were organised in order to ensure a professional control over the progress of the evaluation.
3. **Fine-tuning:** the last, and in this case the next, phase of the work is dedicated to the fine-tuning to be carried out together with the representatives of the programme management. After the delivery of the evaluation documents, the representatives of the programme management have a few weeks to comment them. After that, if necessary, CESCI will introduce modifications in the texts to be presented at the upcoming Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) meeting. This phase ends with a project closing meeting where the lessons learnt and questions still open can be discussed.

The last comprehensive evaluation of the Cooperation Programme (CP) was conducted just before the peak of the implementation of the Programme. Regarding the scheduling of the projects, the peak period covered the fulfilment of the winner projects in the 2nd and 3rd Calls for Proposals' (CfPs), since a massive number of projects ended or started their implementation at that time period (2019-2022). In that case, the cut-off date of the processed data was September 30, 2018, and the final evaluation report was approved on October 7, 2019. Over the last three years, a lot of visible progress

¹ Hereinafter the following expressions and abbreviations will be used: Cooperation Programme, Programme/programme, CP, HUSRB.

has been made in the implementation of the Programme; however, the relatively low level of the approved final reports makes it hard to measure the results and draw a clear picture of the impacts of the Programme. At the current cut-off date (12 April, 2022), the rate of the approved final project reports is under 60%. All findings of this evaluation document should be considered in light of this fact.

2 Overview of the Programme's implementation

The territorial scope of the INTERREG – IPA CBC Hungary-Serbia Programme (hereinafter also referred to as CP, Cooperation Programme or Programme) is the same as in the previous Cooperation Programme (2007-2013) between the two countries. Interreg-IPA CBC Hungary-Serbia is the fourth generation of the cross-border cooperation programmes in the Hungary-Serbia border region.

The following two NUTS (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) level III regions ('vármegye') are covered by the Cooperation Programme in Hungary:

- Csongrád-Csanád county;
- Bács-Kiskun county.

The seven territorial units ('okrug') which are equivalent regions to the Hungarian ones and are covered by the Programme in the non-Member State Serbia are as follows:

- West Bačka District (Zapadnobački upravni okrug)
- North Bačka District (Severnobački upravni okrug)
- North Banat District (Severnobanatski upravni okrug)
- South Bačka District (Južnobački upravni okrug)
- Central Banat District (Srednjobanatski upravni okrug)
- South Banat District (Južnobanatski upravni okrug)
- Srem District (Sremski upravni okrug)

The Programme covers 34 335 km² (larger than that of Belgium) and affects 2.76 million inhabitants (similarly to the population size of Latvia).

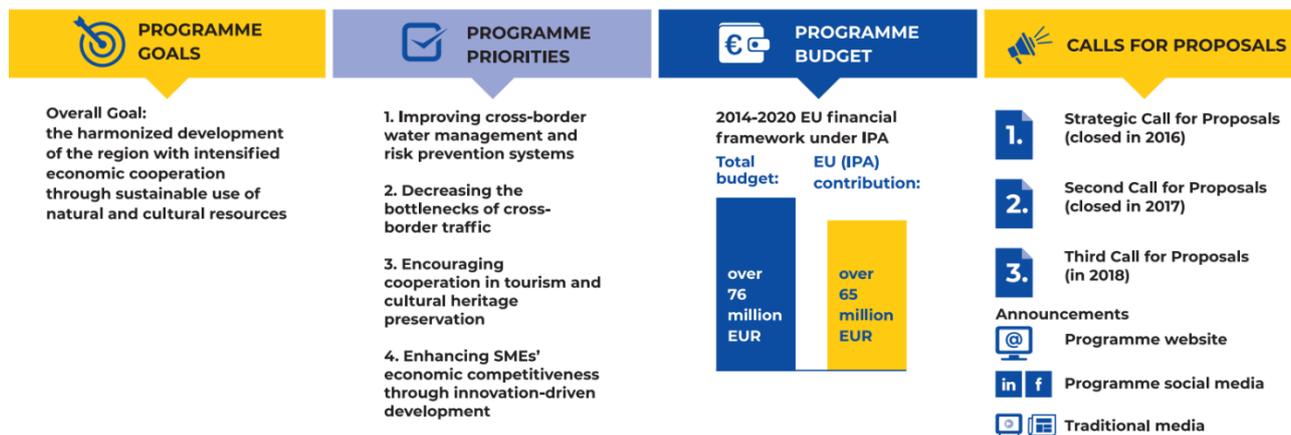
Figure 1: Map of the programme area



Map of the programme area

The total EU contribution to the Interreg-IPA CBC Hungary-Serbia programme (ERDF/IPA-Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) is 65 124 000 EUR. Taking into consideration the national counterpart (including also the own contribution of project partners), the total budget of Programme is 76 616 474 EUR.

Figure 2: Overview of the Programme²



The programme budget was divided among four Priority axes which gathered the applications by thematical focus. During the programme period, the JMC decided three times about the modification of the reallocations between the priorities.

The timeframe of the Programme covers 7 + 3 years, since the eligible starting date was January 1, 2014, while the determined last end date is the last day of 2023. The Programme went through four modifications as summarised in the table below (Table 1). Figure 3 shows the reallocations between

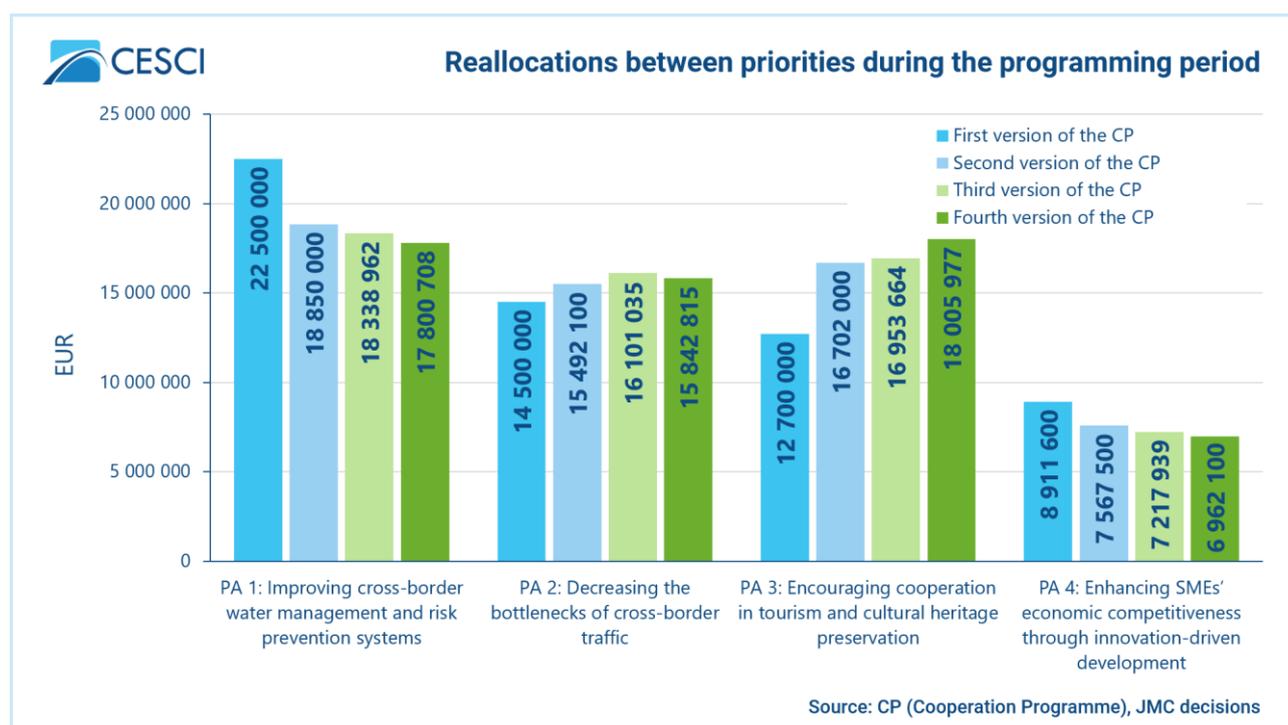
² Source: <http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/file/1323/>

priorities during the programming period. More details about the modifications are provided in the chapter “II. 2 *General features and performance of the programme*”.

Table 1: Details of the different modifications of the Programme

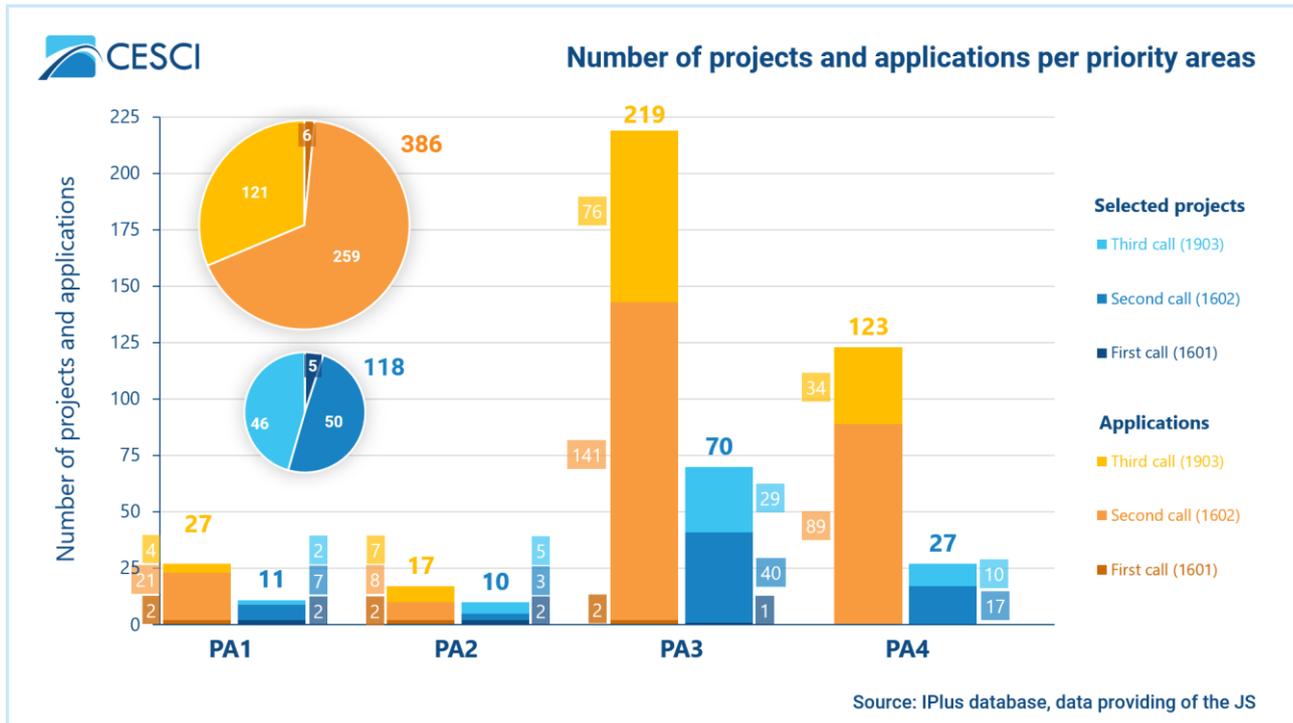
Referred name in the assessment	Justification for amendment
First version	-
Second version	Performance framework was needed to imply in the CP.
Third version	The modification request contains a budget reallocation between priority axes and a technical modification due to an institutional change in the Managing Authority. The budget reallocation is proposed based on JMC decision 45/2017 (November 13, 2017) relating to the allocations for the upcoming 3 rd CfP.
Fourth version	The modification request contains a temporary modification of the co-financing rate to 100% and an update of indicator target values

Figure 3: Reallocations between priorities during the programming period



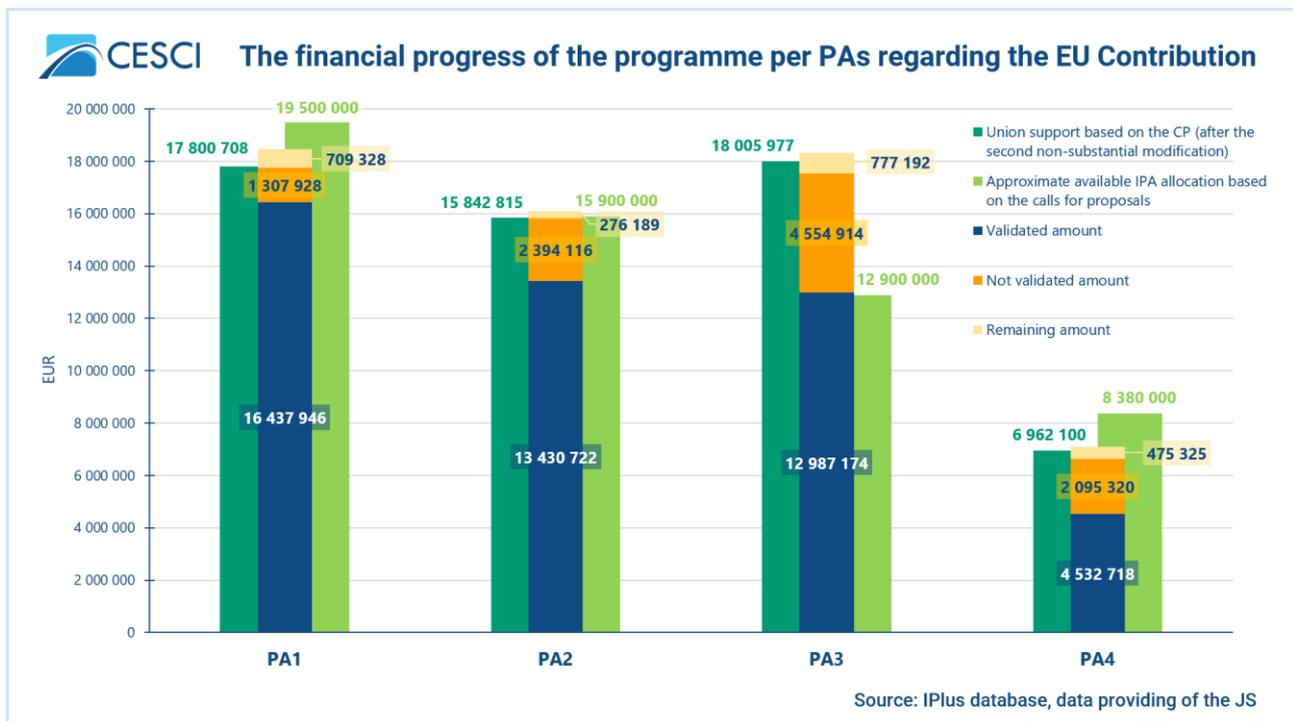
The process of the applications was determined by 3 CfPs which were closed in 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively. The 1st CfP was a restricted one, since it focused on the strategic projects, whereas the 2nd and 3rd CfPs were both open CfPs which provided opportunities for the regular (traditional) projects.

Figure 4: Number of projects per PAs and CfPs



Taking into consideration the **status of project implementation** at the cut-off date (April 12, 2022), 72% of the projects (85 units) had by then been closed and there were only 33 projects (28%) still running.

Figure 5: The financial progress of the programme per PAs regarding the EU Contribution



The following table (*Table 2*) gives an overview of the ongoing implementation of the programme. It summarises all the main features of the process.

Table 2: Overview of the PA's implementation

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
PA1	Improving cross-border water management and risk prevention systems	<p>After the 4th version of the CP, this priority represents 27.33% of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funding allocated for the programme (17 800 708 euros (EUR)).</p> <p>The specific objective (SO) of this Priority axis (PA)³ is to decrease environmental risks (e.g. drought, flood, etc.) and prevent negative effects on quality of water bodies and nature protected areas.</p> <p>The beneficiaries of the PA actions are water management organisations in partnership with the relevant public organisations, local governments, associations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), etc.</p> <p>All three Calls for Proposal included this PA. The number of contracted projects under the 1st CfP (with strategic importance) is 2 projects, under the 2nd CfP it is 7 projects and under the 3rd CfP it is 2 projects.</p> <p>The total number of applications under PA1 was 27. Nearly half of the applications (11 units, 40.7%) were contracted. Out of 11 projects, 8 projects (73%) were technically and administratively closed at the cut-off date (April 12, 2022), while the number of on-going projects is 3 (27%).</p> <p>Regarding the European Union (EU) Contribution, 89% of it (16 437 946 EUR) had been validated until the cut-off date, while 7% of the allocation (1 307 928 EUR) has not been validated yet and currently the remaining sum (709 328 EUR) represents 4% of the total value.</p> <p>In terms of the result indicators (RI), one result indicator (<i>RI/1.1 Water quality (good ecological status) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers and water flows) in the eligible area</i>)⁴ belongs to the PA1, which achieved the target value (Baseline: 2.91; Value of 2021: 2.04; Target value: 2.7). The original result indicator was not selected prudently since it did not consider the availability of data, that is why the redefinition of the indicator was necessary during the programme.</p> <p>Three output indicators (OI) have been assigned to PA1, out of which none of them achieved the target value in 2021, but the fulfilment of the <i>OI/1.1 (Population benefiting from flood protection measures)</i> and <i>OI/1.2 (Length of new or improved water management system)</i> is above 90%. On the other hand, the third indicator (<i>OI/1.3 Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status</i>) achieved only 11.8% of the target value. The potential values based on projects' expectations show that all indicators' fulfilment will be guaranteed, moreover the target values will be overpassed.</p>

³ Priority axis will be abbreviated to PA in the following text. Depending on the Priority axis PA might be used together with the number of the given Priority axis (e.g. PA2).

⁴ In the case of the first appearance of each indicator, the full name of the indicator is given. After that, the indicators' shortened name is used. Find more information about the abbreviations in the Annex (*III. 3 List of the shortened name of the indicators*).

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
PA2	Decreasing the bottlenecks of cross-border traffic	<p>After the 4th version of the CP, this priority represents 24.33% of the IPA funding allocated to the programme (15 482 100 EUR).</p> <p>The specific objective of this PA is to increase the capacities of border crossings and the connected transport lines through promoting development of road transport and the use of sustainable transport modes.</p> <p>The beneficiaries of the PA actions are national, county and regional level bodies and their organisations are responsible for the development of cross-border transport, railway management and development companies, border control and customs administrations, organisations that maintain the transport stations and operating public transport.</p> <p>All three CfPs included this PA. The number of contracted projects under the 1st CfP (with strategic importance) is 2 projects, under the 2nd CfP is 3 projects and under the 3rd CfP is 5 projects.</p> <p>The total number of applications under PA2 was 17. More than half of the applications (10 units, 58.8%) were contracted. Out of 10 projects, half of them (5 projects, 50%) had been technically and administratively closed at the cut-off date (April 12, 2022), while the 5 projects of the 3rd CfP (50%) are on-going.</p> <p>Regarding the EU Contribution, 83% of it (13 430 722 EUR) had been validated until the cut-off date, while 15% of the allocation (2 394 116 EUR) has not been validated yet and the remaining sum (276 189 EUR) represents 2% of the total value.</p> <p>In terms of the result indicators, one result indicator (<i>RI/2.1 Share of border-crossing traffic at smaller border-crossing points within all border-crossing traffic</i>) belongs to PA2. The target value (40%) was already reached in 2019, amounting to 42.66%, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic the value of 2021 (39.22%) slipped slightly below the target value. However, the fulfilment of the expectations will be ensured.</p> <p>Six output indicators have been assigned to PA2, out of which four indicators (<i>OI/2.2 Total length of newly built roads, OI/2.3 Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads, OI/2.4 Total length of newly built bicycle paths and OI/2.5 Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans</i>) achieved the respective target values. The fulfilment of the other two indicators (<i>OI/2.1 Number of improved or newly built border crossing points and OI/2.6 Number of improved public transport services</i>) is ensured by the 3rd CfP since the number of relevant projects under the previous CfPs was really limited. According to the potential values, the fulfilment of all indicators will be guaranteed.</p>
PA3	Encouraging tourism and cultural heritage cooperation	<p>After the 4th version of the CP, this priority represents 27.65% of the IPA funding allocated to the programme (18 005 977 EUR).</p> <p>The specific objectives are the creation of commonly coordinated cross-border tourism destinations based on the complementary local assets to ensure sustainable development of tourism potentials, and also promoting cooperation activities in the fields of culture, leisure, sport, and nature protection.</p>

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
		<p>The beneficiaries of the PA actions are regional tourism organisations with the involvement of local tourism destination-management associations, NGOs, the local county and regional level authorities and bodies, local governments and their organisations, etc.</p> <p>All three CfPs included this PA. The number of contracted projects under the 1st CfP (with strategic importance) is only 1 project, under the 2nd CfP it is 40 projects and under the 3rd CfP it is 29 projects.</p> <p>The total number of applications under PA3 was 219. Nearly one-third of the applications (70 units, 32%) were contracted.</p> <p>Out of 70 projects, 39 projects (56%) were technically and administratively closed at the cut-off date (April 12, 2022), while the number of on-going projects is 31 (44%).</p> <p>Regarding the EU Contribution, 71% (12 987 174 EUR) has been validated until the cut-off date, while 25% of the allocation (4 554 914 EUR) has not been validated yet and the remaining sum (777 192 EUR) represents 4% of the total value.</p> <p>In terms of the result indicators, 2 result indicators belong to the PA3. The target value of <i>RI/3.1 (Number of overnight stays)</i> has already been fulfilled in 2019 and 2021, while the <i>RI/3.2 (Level of cross-border cooperation intensity of the public and non-profit organisations dealing with cultural, leisure sport and nature protection issues)</i> has not achieved the required goal, but the progress of this indicator is also promising.</p> <p>Three output indicators have been assigned to PA3, out of which <i>OI/3.1 (Number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions)</i> and <i>OI/3.3 (Average monthly user entries to online communication tools developed)</i> exceeded the targets. However, the <i>OI/3.2 (Number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised)</i> indicator has also a good progress to complete the target values until 2023.</p>
PA4	Enhancing SMEs' economic competitiveness through innovation driven development	<p>After the 4th version of the CP, this priority represents 10.69% of the IPA funding allocated to the programme (6 962 100 EUR).</p> <p>The specific objective of this PA is to enhance the growth capabilities and employment potential of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through the development and adaptation of new technologies, processes, products or services.</p> <p>The beneficiaries of the PA actions are economic clusters, business and innovation support organisations in cooperation with R&D&I and higher education institutions, vocational and adult training organisations, labour market organisations that coordinate labour flow in the cross-border area, chambers of commerce, public organisations or NGOs, etc.</p> <p>The first CfP was a restricted CfP and did not include this PA. The last two CfPs, however, already included this PA. The number of contracted projects under the 2nd CfP is 17 projects and under the 3rd CfP it is 10 projects.</p> <p>The total number of applications under PA4 was 123. Less than 25% of the applications (27 units, 22%) were contracted.</p> <p>Out of 27 projects, 17 projects (63%) were technically and administratively closed at the cut-off date (April 12, 2022), while 10 projects (37%) of the 3rd CfP are ongoing.</p>

PA ID	PA Name	Key information on the implementation
		<p>Regarding the EU Contribution, 64% (4 532 718 EUR) has been validated until the cut-off date, while 29% of the allocation (2 095 320 EUR) has not been validated yet and the remaining sum (475 326 EUR) represents 7% of the total value.</p> <p>In terms of the result indicators, one result indicator (<i>RI/4.1 Rate of innovative SMEs in the cross-border region</i>) belongs to the PA4, which significantly surpassed the target value.</p> <p>Four output indicators have been assigned to PA4, out of which three indicators (<i>OI/4.1 Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions</i>, <i>OI/4.2 Number of organisations actively participating in the work of the "knowledge platforms"</i>, <i>OI/4.4 Rate of persons from vulnerable groups involved in supported actions</i>) fulfilled the previously determined goals. The slow progress of <i>OI/4.3 (Number of months spent in the institutions and companies on the other side of the border through scholarships)</i> is due to the fact that it was not covered by projects contracted before 2020. Furthermore, <i>OI/4.4 (Persons from vulnerable groups)</i> was misunderstood by many beneficiaries which caused inconsistent and unharmonized data. According to the potential values, all target values will be achieved by the end of 2023.</p>
PA 5	Technical Assistance (TA)	<p>This priority represents 10% of the IPA funding allocated to the programme (6 512 400 EUR).</p> <p>The specific objective of this PA is ensuring the effective management and implementation of the HUSRB CBC Programme.</p> <p>The beneficiaries of the PA actions are the Programme Bodies.</p> <p>Neither the affected CfPs, nor the numbers of applications are relevant in this PA.</p> <p>There are 8 PA5-related projects all of which are on-going until the end of the programme period.</p> <p>10% of the Cooperation Programme budget was allocated to Technical Assistance which was fully contracted within the framework of the TA projects. The amount of validated TA costs (regarding the EU Contribution) is 3 365 897 EUR which is more than half (52%) of the allocated TA budget.</p> <p>There are no result indicators under PA5.</p> <p>Three output indicators have been assigned to PA5 and all of them outperformed the target values.</p>

3 Main findings of the evaluation

3.1 Main findings for PA1

These are the main findings regarding the PA1 based on the above-described evaluation aspects:

- **Intervention logic:** Both the territorial analysis and the general opinion of the stakeholders indicate that the objectives of the PA1 (Improving cross-border water management and risk prevention systems) are a significant field of cooperation; however, based on stakeholder consultation, the PA1 has been too focused on water-related interventions such as flood prevention and water quality. Due to this approach, other essential challenges (air pollution, waste management, soil quality, etc.) were not targeted enough with cross-border projects. In addition, water retention ability, tackling of water scarcity and droughts have to be better addressed as climate change intensifies with the spread of alien species, the emergence of fires, and shrinking water habitats. In spite of these statements, the projects of the PA1, especially the strategic ones, contributed to relevant developments and cooperation in the field of common environmental needs, which would not be possible without cross-border funding such as reconstruction of canals and creation of a water monitoring system. The conservation of key species and their habitats and blocking the spread of invasive alien plants in particular were addressed. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.1 Short introduction of PA1*.
- **CfPs and projects:** Under PA1, three calls for proposals were published during the programming period. The total number of applications under PA1 was 27. Nearly half of the applications (11 units, 40.7%) were contracted. 74.87% of the total PA budget was allocated to two strategic projects: BABECA⁵ carried out a complex development of the regional water management system of the area of Baja-Bezdan, while WASIDCA⁶ improved the water supplies in the region of Domaszék main canal. In the two regular CfPs, five projects were aimed at water related actions, and four at nature protection and conservation. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.2 Performance evaluation (PA1) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Performance:** Out of the 11 contracted PA1 projects 3 projects did not have approved final report at the time of the cut-off date, out of which one project belonged to the 1st CfP and 2 projects belonged to the 3rd CfP. The IPA funding progressed well since 89% of the contracted EU Contribution (16 437 946 EUR) has been certified, 7% (1 307 928 EUR) has not been validated, and the remaining amount is 709 328 EUR (4%). See the chapter: *II. 3.1.2 Performance evaluation (PA1) (Implementation progress)*.
- In relation to the **output indicators**, three indicators have been assigned to PA1. In 2021 none of the indicators achieved the target values, but there were significant differences in the degree of distance from the target values. Although the fulfilment of the first two indicators

⁵ ID: HUSRB/1601/11/0001; Name: The complex water management development of the area of the Baja-Bezdan Canal

⁶ ID: HUSRB/1601/11/0004; Name: Water supply and water infrastructure development in the boundary catchment areas

is above 90% (*OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures*⁷: 94.9%; *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system*: 96.1%), the latest reported value of *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats* is only 11.8% of the target value. However, the potential values based on projects' expectations show that the fulfilment of all indicators will be guaranteed, moreover, the target values will be overpassed. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.2 Performance evaluation (PA1) (Implementation progress)*.

- Regarding the **result indicator** of the PA1, it has to be highlighted that due to the lack of verifiable data, the original result indicator (*RI/1.1 Water quality*) had to be slightly redefined. According to the AIR-2021, the data available have shown improvement since 2015, and reach the goal (Baseline: 2.91; Value of 2021: 2.04; Target value: 2.7). The selection of the result indicators should be carried out more carefully in consideration of the availability of data. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA1)*.
- **Beneficiaries:** The PA tends to prioritize those water management-related actions which require the involvement of larger institutions having the appropriate competencies, institutional and financial capacities. This strongly limits the range of potential applicants; smaller organisations have no real chance to participate. In general water management authorities/bodies and universities are the centrepieces of the partnership network, at the same time no beneficiaries governed by private law have been selected for funding. The partner budget was 571 368 EUR per beneficiary, which is significantly higher than the programme average. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.3 Analysis of the partnerships (PA1)*.
- **Territorial balance:** Considering the EU contribution by countries, the country balance is in favour of Hungary (10.7 million EUR), however the number of Serbian beneficiaries exceeds that of the Hungarians, which resulted in remarkably lower EU contribution per beneficiary on the Serbian side (7.8 million EUR). The reason behind this is the fact that the Lead Beneficiaries (LBs) of both strategic projects are Hungarians. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA1)*.
- The **territorial pattern** of the LBs is highly concentrated in the bigger cities (Novi Sad, Subotica, Baja, Szeged, Kanjiža, Novi Bečej) due to the relatively narrow range of beneficiaries. At the same time, project locations (where detectable infrastructural developments were carried out) cover a significantly wider territory, especially in Hungary, where almost the whole programme area is covered by infrastructural developments. In contrast, the spatial distribution of physical developments on the Serbian side is poorer: only 7 out of the 59 project locations are situated in Serbia, and Severnobačka, Sremska and Južnobanatska have no realized infrastructure developments. This is the most uneven distribution between the two countries considering the 4 PAs, which also means that Serbian beneficiaries tend to implement only soft activities within their project parts. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA1)*.
- The comparison of the **target groups** defined by the programme documents and the target groups defined by the projects show a satisfactory level of harmony which is also in line with

⁷ See the annex for the shortened name of the indicators ().

the intention of the PA. The predefined target groups were typically affected to a similar extent. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.6 Analysis of the impacted target groups (PA1)*.

- **Cross-border relevance** of the implemented projects: Behind two-thirds of PA1's projects, there is long-lasting cooperation. Almost half of the projects developed mirror infrastructure, which doesn't cross physically the border, but in these cases, it doesn't necessarily mean a disadvantage. Despite the fact that the partners had different needs, the projects had common aims, and in the end, through their developments, they built up a joint environmental system. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.7 Analysis of cross-border relevance (PA1)*.
- **Synergies with EU level programmes:** The following three PAs of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) are affected mostly by direct positive impacts from the HUSRB-PA1 projects: 'PA-5 Environmental Risks' (73% of the HUSRB-PA1 projects have direct, while 18% of the projects have indirect, positive impacts), 'PA-6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil' (55% direct positive, 45% indirect positive impacts) and 'PA 4 Water Quality' (36% direct positive, 36% indirect positive impacts). The HUSRB-PA1's projects have only modest contribution to the EU2020 headline targets. It is based mainly on the different scope of the aims. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA1)*.
- **Influence factors⁸:** Among the most important external influence factors of the PA1's impacts are the increasing challenges of climate change; the limited resources for the cross-border environmental investments and the long, unexpected procedures on the two sides of the border for obtaining the permission for the infrastructural developments. As for the positive factors, the long history of cross-border nature protection should be mentioned. The impacts of the PA1 were in line with the INTERREG programme of RO-HU and the Hungarian Environmental and Energy Efficiency Operational Programme (KEHOP). See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.9 Influence factors regarding the impacts (PA1)*.
- **Durability of partnerships:** The PA1 is characterized by long-lasting, professionally well-founded partnerships. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA1)*.
- **Durability of the developments:** The majority of the projects with experienced and competent beneficiaries implemented physical developments, some of which form part of the public water management infrastructure. In terms of durability, it means a guarantee for maintaining the results in the long run. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA1)*.
- **Cost-efficiency:** Within action 1.1 the ratio of internal professional staff cost compared to the expenses of all professional tasks is only 51%. It means that almost half of the professional (core) activities (studies, statistics, databases and research) seem to be outsourced to external contractors, which raises reasonability and sustainability concerns. See the chapter: *II. 3.1.4 Efficiency analysis (PA1)*.

⁸ They are those external and internal factors which have a direct or indirect impact on the implementation of the Programme.

3.2 Main findings for PA2

These are the main findings regarding the PA2 based on the above-applied evaluation aspects:

- **Intervention logic:** The relevance of the PA2 (Decreasing the bottlenecks of cross-border traffic) is indisputable, but its specificity reduced its popularity among the stakeholders, and it led to a low number of applications. However, the relatively high average allocations of the projects within the PA2 indicate a focused and efficient implementation of the Programme. The challenge regarding the absence of good transport connections and few border crossing points was properly addressed. The least successfully addressed challenges include poor transport infrastructure, bicycle routes and water transport in particular. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.1 Short introduction of the PA2's intervention logic*.
- **CfPs and projects:** Under PA2, three CfPs were published during the programming period. The total number of applications under PA2 was 17. More than half of the applications (10 units, 58.8%) were contracted. 48.58% of the total PA budget was allocated to two strategic projects: one of them (Kübekháza-Rabe⁹ border crossing road) aimed to develop a new border crossing opportunity between Kübekháza and Rabe (Rábé) settlements, while the other (Dream Railway¹⁰) developed the technical documentation for the Subotica-Bácsalmás-Baja section (a section formerly not covered by design documentations) of the Szeged-Subotica-Bácsalmás-Baja railway line. Within the two regular CfPs, seven projects were aimed at border crossing point development related actions, and one at improving public transport services and railway lines. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.2 Performance evaluation (PA2) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Performance:** Out of the 10 contracted PA2 projects 5 projects did not have approved final report at the time of the cut-off date and all of these projects belong to the 3rd CfP. The IPA funding progressed well since 83% of the contracted EU Contribution (13 430 722 EUR) has been certified, 15% (2 394 116 EUR) has not been validated, and the remaining amount is 276 189 EUR (2%). See the chapter: *II. 3.2.2 Performance evaluation (PA2) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Output indicators:** Six output indicators have been assigned to PA2, out of which four indicators (*OI/2.2 Newly built roads*, *OI/2.3 Reconstructed or upgraded roads*, *OI/2.4 New bicycle paths* and *OI/2.5 Railway line directly affected by development plans*) achieved the target values. The fulfilment of the other two indicators (*OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* and *OI/2.6 Public transport services*) is ensured by the 3rd CfP since the number of relevant projects under the previous CfPs was really limited. According to the potential values, the fulfilment of all indicators will be guaranteed. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.2 Performance evaluation (PA2) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Result indicator:** One result indicator (*RI/2.1 Border-crossing traffic*) belongs to the PA2. The target value (40%) was already fulfilled in 2019 by 42.66%, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic

⁹ ID: HUSRB/1601/21/0003; Name: Development of a Road Border Crossing at Kübekháza (HU) - Rabe (SRB) area

¹⁰ ID: HUSRB/1601/22/0002; Name: Elaboration of Technical Documentation of Subotica-Baja Railway Line

the value of 2021 (39.22%) slipped slightly below the target value. However, the fulfilment of the expectations will be ensured. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA2)*.

- **Beneficiaries:** The PA obviously focused on transport infrastructure developments which require the involvement of national, regional and local governments, state-level companies having the appropriate competencies, institutional and financial capacities. This strongly limits the range of potential applicants; smaller organisations have no real chance to participate. The average budget per beneficiary is 653 186 EUR, which is the highest considering the 4 PAs. At the same time, it must be noted that 53.3% of the total PA budget has been allocated to 3 beneficiaries, mainly in the framework of strategic projects. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.3 Analysis of the partnerships (PA2)*.
- **Territorial balance:** Considering the EU contribution by countries, the balance is slightly in favour of Serbia. In parallel, the number of beneficiaries is similarly balanced between the two sides of the border. Strategic projects were large projects in terms of EU contribution as they almost reached the total amount allocated to regular projects. More than half of this amount of money was used by the Hungarian partners, even if the majority of the strategic projects' partners is Serbian. Regarding the two LBs of the strategic projects, one of them is Hungarian and the other one is Serbian. This relative balance is not reflected in financial terms, since the Hungarian LB allocated a higher amount of its own contribution than its Serbian counterpart. Regarding the open CfPs, the Serbian partners absorbed the larger amount of the EU contribution, which is more significant in the case of LBs (76%). See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA2)*.
- **Territorial pattern:** Lead Beneficiaries are highly concentrated in the bigger cities on both sides of the border (Novi Sad with 35.8%, Szeged with 28.6% and Subotica with 8.5% of EU contribution, respectively). The territorial distribution of project locations (where detectable infrastructural developments were carried out) is characterised by strong concentration on the border area, to the border infrastructure. Furthermore, the eastern part of the border and its vicinity attracted more projects than the western microregions. Understandably, large inland areas further away from the border lack any concrete investments. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA2)*.
- **Target groups:** The comparison of the target groups defined by the programme documents and the target groups defined by the projects show a satisfactory level of harmony which is also in line with the intention of the PA. The respondents who were implementing a project deemed the success of the different means of communication a bit less successful in reaching the target recipients of the project. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.6 Analysis of the impacted target groups (PA2)*.
- **Cross-border relevance:** Owing to the character of the CfPs and the strategic projects as well, most of the projects were aimed at constructing transport infrastructure with high cross-border relevance. Regarding "physical" materialisation, common cross-border infrastructure represents a very high share (50%) owing to constructed roads, bicycle paths and border crossing infrastructure, in particular. The largest number of projects created cross-border

infrastructure and were based on regular, long-standing forms of cooperation (5 projects, 50%). See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.7 Analysis of cross-border relevance (PA2)*.

- **Synergies with EU level programmes:** Quite obvious synergies can be observed between the PA2 of the HUSRB and the following Priority Areas of the EUSDR: 'PA 1B Rail-Road-Air Mobility' (90% of the HUSRB-PA2 projects have direct, while 10% of the projects have indirect positive impacts), 'PA 11 Security' (70% direct positive, 30% indirect positive impacts). Despite the original objectives of the PA2, no effect on the 'PA 1A Waterways Mobility' can be detected. The highest share of projects contributing positively to the EU2020 headline target can be shown in the case of the employment goal. At some level, all ten projects contributed to an increase in employment by eliminating transport bottlenecks. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA2)*.
- **Influence-factors:** Several external factors had a negative influence on the completion of the targeted impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic restriction rules and their frequent change disrupted cross-border transport services. The migration crisis also affected the different types of border crossings. The long processes of obtaining the various building permissions also caused some delays regarding the infrastructural developments. Regarding the programmes with the highest overall value to support the impact of the PA2 were the Hungarian Integrated Transport Development Operational Programme (IKOP) connected to transport development and the Hungarian Territorial and Settlement Development Operative Programme (TOP) connected to regional and urban development. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.9 Influence factors regarding the impacts (PA2)*.
- **Durability of partnerships:** The PA is characterized by strong, balanced partnerships with common history (ranging from informal to institutionalised forms of cooperation). See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA2)*.
- **Durability of the developments:** projects tend to represent a single stage (i.e. planning or construction) in long-lasting (meaning: over the whole programming period) transport initiatives, where the different stages complement or strengthen each other. This phenomenon has a positive impact on the durability of the results. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA2)*.
- **Cost-efficiency:** The projects have a high need of external services and expertise which is self-evident in this thematic field (i.e. local municipalities do not have the necessary skills and competencies either to plan or to build the infrastructure required), however some cost items (such as obtaining permissions, meeting varying technical standards) caused by the different public administration systems on both sides of the border might be decreased by easing the legal and administrative burdens or removing these obstacles. See the chapter: *II. 3.2.4 Efficiency analysis (PA2)*.

3.3 Main findings for PA3

These are the main findings regarding the PA2 based on the above-applied evaluation aspects:

- **Intervention logic:** The overwhelming interest and good quality of applications received during the last two CfPs for the PA3 (Encouraging cooperation in tourism and cultural heritage preservation) made it quite clear that this PA addresses a wide range of potential applicants. Due to this fact, the PA's allocation was increased by almost one-third compared to the original allocation. Through these modifications, in the end, the Programme better served the stakeholders' interests in line with the fact that PA3 has the genuine scope for the smaller cross-border actions. Due to the relatively high original allocation rate dedicated to the strategic project, the number of small-scale potential projects would have been strongly limited. Out of the challenges of PA3 the biggest change was reached in lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply, lack of integrated regional tourism strategy and contribution to better understanding among people. On the other hand, shortage of quality tourism is still a need to be tackled. Remaining/emerging needs still include organisational development and promotion of networking among stakeholders. In addition, developing quality tourism is still a need to be addressed. Soft projects should be supported in the future as well. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.1 Short introduction of the PA3's intervention logic*.
- **CfPs and projects:** Under PA3, three calls for proposals were published during the programming period. The total number of applications under PA3 was 219. Nearly one-third of the applications (70 units, 32%) were contracted. 17.65% of the total PA budget was allocated to one strategic project: Colourful Cooperation developed a comprehensive cultural strategy for the entire Hungarian-Serbian border region. Within the two open CfPs, 25 projects were aimed at tourist products, services and attractions related actions, 21 projects at cultural, community events, sport, leisure, nature protection related actions, 12 projects at cultural and community events related actions, and, finally, 11 projects at sport, leisure and other minor actions. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.2 Performance evaluation (PA3) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Performance:** Out of the 70 contracted PA3 projects 31 projects did not have approved final report at the time of the cut-off date, out of which 2 projects belonged to the 2nd CfP and 29 projects belonged to the 3rd CfP. The IPA funding progressed well since 71% of the contracted EU Contribution (12 987 174 EUR) has been certified, 25% (4 554 914 EUR) has not been validated, and the remaining amount is 777 192 EUR (4%). See the chapter: *II. 3.3.2 Performance evaluation (PA3) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Output indicators:** Three output indicators have been assigned to PA3, out of which *OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites* and *OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools* overperformed the targets. However, the *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* indicator also has a good progress to meet the target values until 2023. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.2 Performance evaluation (PA3) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Result indicators:** Two result indicators are used in the PA3. The target value of *RI/3.1 Overnight stays* has already been fulfilled in 2019 and 2021, while the *RI/3.2 CBC intensity of public and non-profit organisations* has not achieved the required goal, but the progress of

this indicator is also promising. The data of *RI/3.2 CBC intensity of public and non-profit organisations* can be obtained by online survey (additional research) and these cannot be collected from reliable public registers. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA3)*.

- **Beneficiaries:** Large numbers of various different beneficiaries were listed in the CfPs. Local governments, regional governments as well as NGOs, e.g. civil society organisations dealing with sport, culture, and youth affairs stand out among most frequently addressed potential beneficiaries. Universities and other higher education institutions were not listed directly in the CfPs, but their presence was also outstanding. On the other hand, the involvement and participation of tourist-related organisations and regional and local institutes for the protection of cultural monuments, organisations and institutions responsible for developing and operating cultural information centres was less pronounced as it had earlier been planned. The budget per partner was 123 028 EUR, the second lowest out of the four PAs. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.3 Analysis of the partnerships (PA3)*.
- **Territorial balance:** The country balance is in favour of Hungary compared to Serbia considering EU contribution, although more Serbian partners take part in PA3-related projects than Hungarians. EU contribution for LBs in the case of Serbia is more than two times lower than that of Hungary, but the majority of Hungarian LBs is only of moderate size. Regarding the strategic project, however the LB is Hungarian (but a Euroregion, which is a cross-border structure), the territorial distribution of the EU fund between the two countries is balanced. In terms of the open CfPs, the predominance of the Serbian partners is not observable in the distribution of EU contribution, which means that the allocation per beneficiary is higher on the Hungarian side. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA3)*.
- **Territorial pattern:** It is exceptional in relation to this PA that there are almost equal numbers of both LBs and Bs from a given country, in Hungary in particular. While in Hungary the territorial pattern of LBs is geographically scattered, in Serbia the LBs come from the northern part of Vojvodina. The spatial distribution of EU contribution is notably more dispersed compared to PA1 and PA2. In the frameworks of PA3 even relatively small settlements obtained a relatively significant amount of financial support. The spatial configuration of EU contribution can be characterised by the Kecskemét–Szeged–Novi Sad axis. Regarding project locations, the biggest concentrations of developments are located in the District of Baja and the District of Szeged. Južnobanatska has no location, but Sremska and Južnobačka each possess only one element. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA3)*.
- **Target groups:** The comparison of the target groups defined by the programme documents and the target groups defined by the projects show a satisfactory level of harmony which is also in line with the intention of the PA. The PA is centred on encouraging cooperation in tourism and cultural heritage preservation and consequently the definition of the target groups seems extremely versatile. The projects intended to cover a considerably colourful section of the society, with each project focusing on different social segments. Some projects tailored their activities according to different age groups, while others focused on people practising different professions, but also the disadvantaged, the minorities and the disabled

are mentioned as separate target groups. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.6 Analysis of the impacted target groups (PA3)*.

- **Cross-border relevance:** Regarding the level of cooperation, the loosest type of ad-hoc cooperation gained the highest shares (50%). The high number of people-to-people type of actions tend to require less institutionalised forms of cooperation. Considering the materialisation, the vast majority of projects (69%) can be classified as projects with soft elements where no infrastructural development was realised (i.e. exchange events, joint cultural, artistic and sports programmes). The PA, focusing on cultural, community events, sport, leisure and partly tourism, has a less articulated material character. In line with the frameworks provided by the calls for proposals, the soft materialisation and ad-hoc cooperation projects (43%) represent the highest share owing to the less infrastructure-based character of many tourism and culture related projects carried out. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.7 Analysis of cross-border relevance (PA3)*.
- **Synergies with EU level programmes:** As far as EUSDR is concerned PA 3 Culture & Tourism is understandably the PA which is supported by far by the highest share (direct positive contribution: 76%, positive contribution: 19%) of projects, followed by PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation (direct positive impact: 43%, indirect positive impact: 15%) and PA 9 People & Skills (direct positive: 35%). Considering EU2020 targets, employment increase is supported by the highest share of projects (65% of the projects contribute indirectly, and 1% directly), followed by the reduction of the share of early school leavers and the increase of share of the population having completed tertiary education (indirect positive contribution: 49%, direct contribution: 6%). The third most heavily impacted target area was the decrease of poverty and social exclusion (indirect positive: 44%, direct positive: 6%). On the other hand, R&D, emission of greenhouse gases (GHG), renewable energy and energy efficiency are barely supported positively by any projects. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA3)*.
- **Influence-factors:** In terms of the factors influencing the impacts of the PA COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant role owing to the relatively strong people-to-people character of the PA that is based to a large extent on personal connections. Cross-border tourism, events and cooperating activities suffered severe negative impacts. The progress of projects was slower and significantly more prolonged, a high number of events and other programmes were cancelled. Positive factors include that beneficiaries are now more familiar with other national and EU funded financial sources (e.g. funds operated by the Serbian Ministries, National Cultural Fund in Hungary or the Creative Europe Programme), and people-to-people connections were developed thus potentially long-lasting partnerships have formed which can result in new cross-border projects. Regarding the programmes with the highest overall value supporting the impact of the PA3 are the INTERREG programme of Serbia and Croatia, the Hungarian Human Resource Development Operational Programme (EFOP) focusing on human resources, and the TOP on urban and regional developments. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.9 Influence factors regarding the impacts (PA3)*.
- **Durability of partnerships:** There are some well-founded and long-lasting partnerships, but in general the bonds between the beneficiaries tend to be looser and more ad-hoc compared to the other priority axes. However, it must be noted that the small-scale cultural, sport and

leisure projects are those which can attract newcomers into the programme, as well as lay the basis for future cooperation in any thematic field. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA3)*.

- **Durability of the developments:** Although the durability assessment in case of soft projects can be hardly performed based on the available information, it seems that project beneficiaries rarely have tailor-made, exact plans to ensure long-term sustainability. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA3)*.
- **Cost-efficiency:** Several cultural and tourism related IT tools have been developed, the potential overlap and oversupply of which (i.e. separate mobile applications for touristic products in the same area) might lead to low visiting/downloading rates which makes them hardly sustainable. See the chapter: *II. 3.3.4 Efficiency analysis (PA3)*.

3.4 Main findings for PA4

These are the main findings regarding the PA4 based on the above-applied evaluation aspects:

- **Intervention logic:** The opinions vary about the relevance and success of the PA4 (Enhancing SMEs' economic competitiveness through innovation-driven development). The number of applicants was the second highest in the programme, but some aspects of the intervention logic were not addressed by the applications on an equal level. During the different stakeholder consultations many respondents criticized the specific objective supporting the SMEs stating that this did not fit well into the general frameworks of the programme ('The last priority related to SMEs is not adequate, as the rules of business in different countries are different, as are the problems, and probably the lack of communication'). Vocational education was the least addressed need. Remaining or emerging needs include better knowledge transfer, more institutionalised cooperation forms, mutual knowledge of the Serbian and Hungarian language. Mutual recognition of qualifications is also a need left to be addressed. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.1 Short introduction of the PA4's intervention logic*.
- **CfPs and projects:** PA4 had a specific situation since the actions were not touched by the 1st CfP. The total number of applications under PA4 was 123. Less than 25% of the applications (27 units, 22%) were contracted. In the two open CfPs, 10 projects targeted the action relating to SMEs and research institutions, 12 projects focused on the social entrepreneurship related action, while 5 projects concentrated on the scholarships related action. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.2 Performance evaluation (PA4) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Performance:** Out of 27 contracted PA4 projects, 10 projects did not have an approved final report at the time of the cut-off date, all of which projects belonged to the 3rd CfP. 64% of the IPA funding (4 532 718 EUR) has been certificated, 29% (2 095 320 EUR) has not been validated, and the remaining amount is 475 326 EUR (7%). See the chapter: *II. 3.4.2 Performance evaluation (PA4) (Implementation progress)*.
- **Output indicators:** Four output indicators have been assigned to PA4, out of which three indicators (*OI/4.1 Cooperating enterprises with research institutions*, *OI/4.2 Organisations in knowledge platforms*, *OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups*) fulfilled the determined goals.

The slow progress of *OI/4.3 Months spent on scholarships* is due to the fact that it was not covered by projects contracted before 2020. Furthermore, *OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups* was misunderstood by many beneficiaries which caused inconsistent and unharmonized data. According to the expected values to be generated by the on-going projects, all target values will be achieved by 2023. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.2 Performance evaluation (PA4) (Implementation progress)*.

- **Result indicator:** In terms of the result indicators, one result indicator (*RI/4.1 Innovative SMEs*) belongs to the PA4, which significantly surpassed the target value. The data of *RI/4.1 Innovative SMEs* can be obtained only by separate minor research which causes extra difficulties during the reporting. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA4)*.
- **Beneficiaries: From** among the potential beneficiaries R&D&I support organisations, higher education institutions, chambers of commerce, business development organisations clearly stand out. On the other hand, the involvement and participation of national government, vocational and training institutions and organisations, labour market organisations, social enterprises and especially agricultural organisations were less pronounced than it had been planned previously. The involvement of business-related economic beneficiaries was outstanding, however their potential involvement depended on the actual Actions they intended to support. Action 4.1 invited potential beneficiaries related more to R&D&I stakeholders, labour market organisations, clusters and chambers of commerce. Action 4.2 tried to invite beneficiaries which are more related to government bodies, NGOs and social enterprises. Therefore, PA4 has a specific focus which again limits the opportunities of the smaller municipalities and NGOs to be involved in the implementation of the programme. The average amount of the budget per beneficiary was 101 913 EUR, which is the lowest value out of the four PAs. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.3 Analysis of the partnerships (PA4)*.
- **Territorial balance:** The country balance is in favour of Serbia, since the majority of PA4-related partners are linked to the Serbian side. On the other hand, the bigger number of Serbian LBs received less EU contribution than their Hungarian counterparts. In terms of the beneficiaries, the Serbian predominance is observable also in the distribution of EU contribution. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA4)*.
- **Territorial pattern:** Regarding the territorial pattern of the LBs, the majority of them is located in the direct zone of the border and in the southern part of Vojvodina. Nearly half (48%) of the LBs is seated in two main cities of the Programme area – Szeged and Novi Sad. PA4 is the only PA which gave contribution to all regions concerned including southern Serbian municipalities as well. A territorial concentration of EU contribution with a total share of 56% can be shown around Szeged and Subotica. In the border zone of 30 km 62.8% of the EU contribution is concentrated. Based on the project locations (where detectable infrastructural developments were carried out) in the frameworks of PA4 only very few project locations can be detected, which means that projects mostly focused on soft activities. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA4)*.
- **Target groups:** Given the fact that this PA is intended to enhance SMEs' economic competitiveness through innovation-driven development, the definition of the target groups

seems valid. Most of the projects set as their target groups the young people or students, but parents and schools in general were also targeted. Women, vulnerable people, unemployed, farmers and the Roma were also in the focus of the projects. However, not only private persons, but legal entities, such as organisations, enterprises and SMEs could also be found among the main target groups. The comparison of the target groups defined by the programme documents and the target groups defined by the projects show a satisfactory level of harmony which is also in line with the intention of the PA. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.6 Analysis of the impacted target groups (PA4)*.

- **Cross-border relevance:** Considering the level of cooperation, in the case of PA4 the share of the category of regular, long-lasting cooperation is the highest (56%) among the various categories. Another outstanding value is the high share of projects (37%) known for institutionalised cooperation. This is mainly because economic development and innovation is very much connected to already existing or newly established institutions, forms of cooperation such as incubators or innovation units, even platforms or labs. Considering the materialisation of projects in PA4 the highest share (67%) can be detected in the case of soft elements. The highest concentration can be detected around projects with 1. soft elements realized/no infrastructure and regular, long-standing cooperation (41%, which is uniquely high); and 2. with institutional cooperation in terms of level of cooperation and soft elements/no infrastructure (26%). See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.7 Analysis of cross-border relevance (PA4)*.
- **Synergies with EU level programmes:** The highest share of projects having an impact on the EUSDR priorities are in line with PA 9 People & Skills (direct positive contribution: 52% of projects, indirect positive contribution: 33% of projects), PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises (direct positive contribution: 48%, indirect positive contribution: 33%), and PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation (direct positive: 44%, indirect positive: 30%). Considering EU2020 targets the highest share of projects are having an impact on the employment target (direct positive: 52% of projects, indirect positive: 48% of projects) followed by the education target (direct positive: 33%, indirect positive: 37%) and the target of poverty and social exclusion (direct positive: 30%, indirect positive: 22%). In contrast to the aforementioned targets, environmental issues are in weak connection with the headline targets. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA4)*.
- **Influence-factors:** The most significant factor that impacted the programme was that programme indicator O/I 4.3 had not been covered by projects contracted until the 3rd CfP. Factors included the COVID-19 pandemic, which slowed down the interactions, and raised numerous cautionary issues, like data protection, internet connection and technical knowledge of the representatives. Availability of other funding sources also influenced the realisation of the projects. Regarding the programmes with the highest overall value which supported the impact of the PA4 are the Hungarian Rural Development Programme (VP) on rural development, the Hungarian Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme (GINOP) on economic development, EFOP on human resources, furthermore the Serbia national programme of the Multi-year programmes of the RS Innovation Fund, and the HORIZON Programme. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.9 Influence factors regarding the impacts (PA4)*.

- **Durability of partnerships:** Although there were contradictions between the different data sources in this term, the PA is also characterised by long-lasting, experienced partnerships. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA4)*.
- **Durability of the developments:** Regarding the financial durability of the projects, a more business-oriented approach can be detected compared to the other PAs. In several cases, beneficiaries have intended to generate financially viable results and outcomes (local employment initiatives, on-line web-shops for local products, etc.). See the chapter: *II. 3.4.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA4)*.
- **Cost-efficiency:** It seems that projects within PA4 had difficulties dedicating their expenditures to the budget lines set-up by the programme, which hardened the assessment. In general, the high proportion of out-sourced core activities, like the organization of training courses, the implementation of surveys among target groups, network building, knowledge development and transfer activities, as well as the drafting of policy recommendations raised concerns among the evaluators. The reasonability and quality, as well as the sustainability of these project elements seems to be questionable. See the chapter: *II. 3.4.4 Efficiency analysis (PA4)*.

3.5 Main findings of the evaluation at Programme level

The following list summarises the evaluation's main findings regarding the whole Programme.

- **In a broader sense**, the fundamental objectives of the cross-border programmes are to reduce the borders' barrier effect, and to valorise the border regions' territorial capital. **To estimate the programme's impacts** on these fields, changes in three predefined aspects cross-border cooperation (CBC), people-to-people relations, cross-border flows), generated by several factors has been analysed. (See the chapter: *II. 4.3.7 Aggregated impacts on the borderscape*) Based on the estimated impact vectors regarding these factors, it can be concluded, that:
 - The programme had the strongest positive impact on cross-border cooperation. The implemented projects, and the events organised, played an important role in strengthening the social connections of the border area. In other fields of cross-border cooperation, such as establishing new cooperation agreements, the impacts of the programme were very limited.
 - The programme had somewhat weaker, but still strong positive effects on people-to-people relations. In cross-border terms and perceptions, a significant positive change can be observed with the positive contribution of the programme.
 - Regarding cross-border flows, the programme could make an impact only in certain areas. While the infrastructural conditions of cross-border mobility have definitely improved due to physical investments and planning activities funded by the programme; as far as the other aspects of the cross-border flows are concerned, such as cross-border services, mobility and business activities, the programme has had only weak positive effect or no effect at all.

- To sum up, the Programme has an **outstanding role in building mutual trust**, initiating and deepening/broadening already existing connections across the border. One of its biggest impacts is not exclusively and necessarily the development of cross-border infrastructure but enhancing and encouraging cross-border relations on which future developments can be built.
- Through an online questionnaire, the **beneficiaries evaluated the effects of the Programme in relation to the experienced changes in the border area**.
 - In line with the expert analysis, most of the respondents stated that the quality and number of cross-border connections have been enhanced in the border region, furthermore the cooperation possibilities have also been expanded owing to the programme.
 - Nearly 90% of the stakeholders expressed their view that there are favourable changes in building up mutual trust across the border and in expanding the organisations' cross-border connections. The programme impacts on these positive changes are significant, but there were other beneficial processes indicated which are independent from the programme.
 - The respondents strengthened the evaluators' observations in terms of the progress in the interactions of the locals and in the removal of cooperation obstacles. In these cases, a third of the respondents observed positive changes but only half of them thought the programme has had positive impacts on these fields.
- The programme was able to show some positive signs in calling for and implementing projects with **increased levels of cross-border relevance**. Considering the level of cooperation, the highest share (53%) of projects fell into the category of regular, long-lasting cooperation, more than to that of the ad hoc partnerships. However, there is still room for improvement, especially regarding materialisation, as 67% of projects has a low level of materialisation. See the chapter: *II. 4.3.5 Overall cross-border relevance of the projects*.
- **Influence factors on implementation and impacts:**
 - First of all, it is important to highlight that most of the factors influencing the implementation and the impacts of the programme are similar to the ones noted in the frameworks of the 1st Phase evaluation of the programme. This includes the still weak permeability of the border. The joint border section is still considered as the external border of the Schengen Area, Serbia has not yet joined the EU as a Member State, and there are legal and technical obstacles to initiating more cross-border and integrated projects and tools. Due to the increase in the last decade in traffic volumes, and a few positive changes in building new border crossings, restrictions connected to COVID-19 pandemic also negatively impacted the permeability of borders in general. Long waiting times still hamper all kinds of cross-border cooperation involving personal contacts, especially across the border covering all PAs of the programme. There is still an overarching need for a programme that contributes to decreasing the negative effects of the external border to support a more cohesive and integrated border area.
 - Apart from the aforementioned hard border, other important factors include the positive bilateral connections between Serbia and Hungary that can be a basis for future

cooperation as well including development and projects that are connected directly or indirectly to the programme (e.g. planning of transport infrastructure to be built from national funds). Synergies are worth considering with national programmes, results can be built on each other.

- Rapid and uncontrolled price increase in the construction sector and in the purchase of equipment hardens the planning and implementation of many projects focusing on hard infrastructure in particular.
- As climate change intensifies it negatively affects the frameworks of implementation as well as it has an impact on the whole programme planning process.
- Assessment of **tools** applied by the programme (See the chapter: *II. 4.4.1 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools in terms of the results*):
 - The ratio of allocated money to strategic projects is almost 42% on programme level, but it is different, of course, in case of each PA. The direct impacts of the five projects with strategic relevance to the cohesion of the border region is obviously higher than those of the traditional projects, but some differences can be observed between the strategic projects in this term. It is confirmed by the analysis when we consider their contribution to the fulfilment of the output indicators' target value and the EU contribution allocated to them. The PA1-related strategic projects contracted 74.87% of the total money of PA1, while these projects support only one PA1-related output indicator (OI/1.2 New or improved water management system), where the level of support is lower than 30%. Under PA2, 48.58% of the allocated IPA funding was used by two strategic projects, which selected 3 output indicators. Two of them (OI/2.2 Newly built roads, OI/2.5 Railway line directly affected by development plans) are supported only by strategic projects (100% contribution), while in the case of OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points the contribution of the strategic project is 14%. Regarding PA3, 17.65% of the relevant IPA fund was absorbed by one strategic project (ColourCoop¹¹), which has undertaken the fulfilment of total target value's 15.4%.
 - The programme has not applied the tools of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) or Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). The integrated approach to territorial developments can be detected in case of two strategic projects to some extent, since both the ColourCoop and the BABECA project implemented some actions which complement and strengthen each other (separately, within the single project).
 - Strategic projects have a negative counter-effect, since they diverted a remarkable amount (almost 42% of the total CP budget) from small initiatives. These small-scale projects serve the active participation of local stakeholders (NGOs, smaller municipalities and institutions) and citizens in cross-border interactions, which is a significant aspect in terms of the quality of cooperation and the internal cohesion of a border region.
 - Compared to the previous programming period, the regular projects represent a remarkably higher value (24% increase), and their complexity and embeddedness in the whole programme has also become more pronounced. The latter one can be reasoned

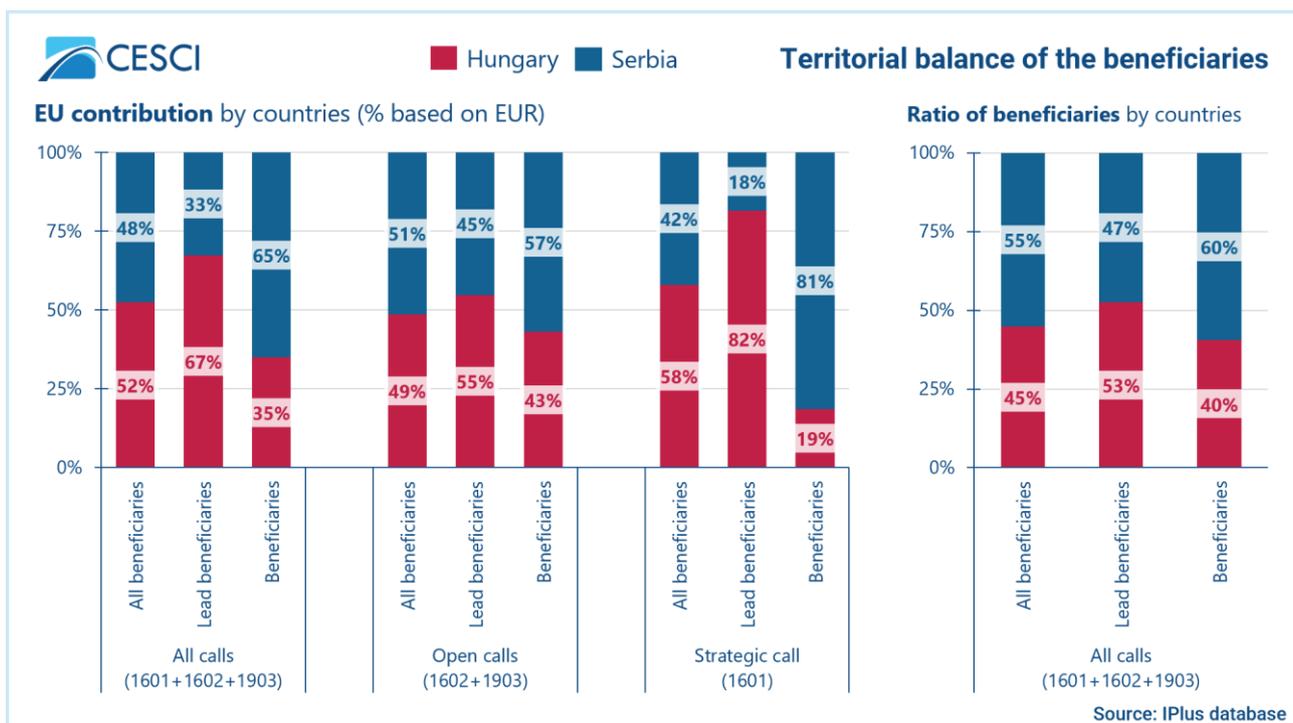
¹¹ ID: HUSRB/1601/31/0005; Name: Colourful Cooperation

by the positive change in the programme criteria and also by the more experienced, stable partnerships.

- Based on the S.M.A.R.T. assessment of the **output indicators** (See the *Table 12: Overview of the output indicators*):
 - From among the output indicators those of the PA2 have been designed in the most successful way. These indicators reflect mostly exact physical results, which have a quite clear methodology for measuring them. The output indicators regarding the PA4 suffer from different kinds of problems. The original target values were not ambitious enough, the *OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups* was easy to misunderstand, which caused inconsistent and unharmonized data. The output indicators of the PA3 were quite adequate, but the original target values were extremely modest and required several adjustments. PA1's indicators had only minor shortcomings.
 - Most of the output indicators are specific, clear and understandable enough. However, in some cases, the character of the requested effects was not well-described (e.g. *OI/1.1. Population benefiting from flood protection measures*).
 - There were only a few problems with the measurability of the indicators, and these were mainly rooted in the specificity of the given indicator.
 - The targets for several output indicators were not ambitious enough.
 - The relevance of the defined output indicators was out of question, only one indicator was slightly horizontal (*OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups*).
 - The year in which the target values should be achieved and the regularity of the measurement were well-defined.
- The S.M.A.R.T. assessment highlighted more issues regarding the **result indicators** (See the tables: *Table 19: Result indicator of PA1 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria*, *Table 33: Result indicator of PA2 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria*; *Table 44: Result indicators of PA3 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria*, *Table 55: Result indicator of PA4 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria*). The target values were extremely modest, and the measurement of the programme's influence was not easy to identify in every case (for example the *RI/4.1 Innovative SMEs*). Most of the problems were in connection with the different sources of information:
 - Different methodology of the countries: In some cases, the required data were from two countries, and it was not sure that the data providers used the same methodology.
 - Necessity of additional research: The *RI/3.2 CBC intensity of public and non-profit organisations* is based on a survey carried out by the programme three times during the programme period. The aim of the survey is quite clear, but its implementation raised the greatest doubts.
 - Lack of available data: The values based on the original definition of the *RI/1.1 Water quality* are available just every sixth year, and the Programme bodies were unable to attain the value already in the first reporting year. Redefinition of the original indicator was necessary.
- The share of the EU contribution between the beneficiaries of the two partner **countries** was programme-wide **quite balanced**; however, between the lead beneficiaries (LB) the

Hungarians were represented in higher ratio. In the case of the strategic CfP, even more significant differences can be observed in this sense. From the five lead partners of the strategic projects, four were Hungarian (one of these is a cross-border structure), and they had almost 82% of the affected EU contribution. This ratio in the case of the open CfPs was more balanced but still not equal, the Hungarian LBs concentrated 67% of total contribution allocated to LBs. There are several reasons behind the low representation of Serbian LBs (e.g. density of financially stable organisations; the Serbian beneficiaries are not provided either with national co-financing or advance payment; differences in competences). See the chapter: *II. 4.3.3 Overall territorial coverage*.

Figure 6: Distribution of the EU contribution between the partner countries



- In the field of **geographical distribution**, 61.4% of the EU contribution was allocated to settlements situated within a 30 km zone to the shared state border. Sremska (0.2%) and Južnobanatska districts (0.5%) from Serbia received little support, and districts of Kunszentmiklós, Tiszakécske and Makó from Hungary got no EU contribution at all. In general, the balance parameter is more respected in Hungary, while in Serbia the border zone and Novi Sad stand out. The programme was successful in allocating EU contribution to the border zone of 50-60 km, and was able to increase organisational, P2P and settlement connections across the border. The density of supported beneficiaries and partnership networks was the highest in the border zone. It is worth focusing the contribution to functional areas of the related PAs. See the chapter: *II. 4.3.3 Overall territorial coverage*.
- There are many well-founded, long-lasting **partnerships** with great experiences in the cross-border cooperation framework. These obviously have a positive impact on the **durability** of the project results and outcomes, but could also mean that it is not easy to involve newcomers in the programme implementation. See the chapter: *II. 4.3.2 Overview of the partnerships*.

- Assessing the **sustainability of the results** and outputs is difficult, because two main reasons. Firstly, some of the projects are still on-going, while some others have just been terminated. Secondly, the programme procedure is designed in a way, which makes the evaluation of durability issues both in the quality assessment and the impact evaluation phases more difficult. Evaluators must rely on the description of institutional and financial sustainability measures of the application forms, which have been approached by the applicants in varying manners. Most of the applicants mentioned some well-known, general issues without any exact steps to be taken, and only a few of them described tailor-made solutions with some details mainly within PA4 (where the practical approach of the business sphere is presented to some extent). At the same time, it seems that applicants and beneficiaries were able to better plan the sustainability measures in case of tangible, infrastructure-related developments, where the ownership and the responsibilities can be determined in a more exact way. When speaking about soft projects, there are less 'one-size fits all' solutions, hence there would be a need for a different mindset with specific skills on behalf of the applicants and beneficiaries in order to generate viable sustainability solutions. In spite of the discrepancies, long-lasting, stable and balanced partnerships between the two sides of the border can definitely guarantee sustainability in the long run to some extent. See the chapter: *II. 4.3.4 Overall durability of the projects.*
- **Horizontal principles** (See the chapter: *II. 4.3.6 Horizontal principles*):
 - The horizontal principles are serving a very important role by putting key issues in the focus and there is a positive tendency as some beneficiaries are becoming more able to fill these sections with content than previously. At the same time, dedicated info days might still prove useful.
 - Overall, there is a visible difference in preference for the different horizontal principles, the "equal opportunities and non-discrimination" being the most popular one, followed by "sustainable development", and then "equality between men and women". Since not every PA can be in line with all the horizontal principles, the current system where the beneficiaries can choose which horizontal principles they commit to is a well-functioning model. Slightly in contrast with this, the order of the horizontal principles is somewhat different when their content and the synergies between them and the projects are assessed: the most successful and well-embedded principle was "sustainable development", the beneficiaries could connect the aims of their projects and their indicators in the best way. In the case of "equality between men and women" the relevance can be strongly justified only in the small-scale people-to-people projects.
 - The set targets were not achieved at a similar level according to the different horizontal principles. In the case of sustainable development, 60% of the projects achieved or exceeded their targets; this share is 56% in the case of equal opportunities and non-discrimination and 51% in the case of equality between men and women. On PA level, some differences can be observed between the underperformance of the projects regarding the different horizontal principles. Whereas under PA1 (100%) and PA4 (55%) the "equality between men and women" principle had the highest underperformed ratio, under PA2 (57%) and PA3 (46%) the "equal opportunities and non-discrimination" principle gave the largest value in this sense. It has to be concluded, that most of the

underperformed targets (almost 80%) belong to the projects of the third CfP, and it means, the goals can be met by the end of the programme.

- **Communication of the Programme and the projects** (See the chapter: *II. 4.2 Programme's communication*):
 - The programme communication strives to follow the principles of transparency, accuracy, timeliness and clarity and it is focused on the exchanges of best practices between INTERREG programmes, between the Programme and its projects, and between the general public and the Programme and its projects.
 - Despite the variety of platforms, the Programme's website still constitutes the main channel of outward communication, thus keeping it up-to-date is of utmost importance.
 - The beneficiaries overall found the Programme's communication user-friendly. The visiting tendencies of the main platforms show a certain cyclicity which might stem from the nature of the Programme; however, a more balanced rate of interest could be upheld through the regular publication of relevant content.
 - Regarding the projects' communication, there is a tendency that those beneficiaries whose developments require the involvement of different target groups into the projects for the sake of achieving the goals (cultural, tourism-, sales-related projects), use to put greater emphasis on marketing and publicity issues including also the obligatory and recommended communication tools. Otherwise, beneficiaries tend to approach both obligatory and other communication tools from the perspective of administrative burden, rather than from that of improving the project visibility.
- **Cost-efficiency of the projects** (See the chapter: *II. 4.4.2 Summary of the cost efficiency assessments*):
 - Procurement of **translation and/or interpretation services** was included in the budget of almost 60% of the projects as a separate cost item, therefore, among other aspects, cost efficiency may also reason the direct support of the reduction of language barriers by the future programmes.
 - During the programming period, a **great number of Information Technology (IT) tools**, like open-source early warning systems, digital event calendars, tourist guide mobile applications, digital exhibition spaces, as well as e-commerce platforms have been developed. From a cost-efficiency point of view, it seems to be questionable to which extent will these tools be able to perform their functions, which expectedly require significant community development, marketing and PR actions not just at the starting, but also at later phases. This needs human resources with adequate skills and dedicated time on the tasks.
 - According to the evaluators, from a cost-efficiency and durability point of view, it is not easy to assess the reasonability and the quality of the **externalized core and/or professional activities**. Similar remarks were made by the quality assessors, together with a proposal on giving more emphasis on the justification of the particular budget items in the application form.
 - Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the **digitalisation measures** together with some changes in the mindset of the beneficiaries (willingness to communicate on-line) led to

an increase in cost-efficiency (cut of travel and accommodation costs). This positive impact should be preserved for the next programming period to some extent, but the importance of face-to-face, on the spot interactions in a cross-border framework must be underlined. It is recommended to find the optimal solution which might vary from one thematic field to another.

- **Programme management** (See the chapter: *II. 4.4.3 Assessment of the technical assistance*):
 - The majority of the programme implementation bodies have appropriate **capacities for the sound implementation of the CP**. It is the Serbian FLC (First Level Control) body that faces serious human resource shortages, which means a bottleneck in the projects' implementation on the Serbian side. Moreover, at the Managing Authority one more staff member would be necessary for making the programme management more efficient.
 - In terms of the cooperation between the programme bodies, the joint work can be assessed as sound and efficient. The management bodies are basically satisfied with the level and form of cooperation also taken into consideration the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are still a couple of issues, which leave room for improvement:
 - The National Authority could be better involved in the risk management of the programme implementation in order to consult the content of the risk management plan. In this manner, the plan might have a wider perspective including e.g. sustainability and ad-hoc external factors besides financial issues. .
 - The role of Joint Secretariat Antenna (JSA) in the programme management framework is not clarified enough because different expectations are formed on behalf of the Serbian National Authority (which JSA is contracted to), and the Joint Secretariat (whom JSA shares tasks with).
 - Because of the lack of direct cooperation between the Serbian and Hungarian First-level Control bodies (CB), there are significant asymmetries in the controlling procedures on the two sides of the border, which directly affects the beneficiaries and the efficiency of the projects' implementation.
- **Programme procedures of the project lifespan** have been mostly judged to be doable by the applicants and beneficiaries. The still high level of bureaucracy both in the application and implementation phases (mainly concerning the reporting, and contract modification procedures), as well as the lengthiness of these procedures (especially FLC on the Serbian side) were highlighted as fields to be improved. Besides the reporting procedure, programme bodies mentioned some potentials for fine-tuning in the field of the quality assessment and selection procedure. See the chapter: *II. 4.4.3.3.2 Assessment of procedures of the project cycle*.
- Several **simplification measures** were introduced during the programming period, which decreased the administrative burdens of all stakeholders. Status of the simplification challenges are the following (See the chapter: *II. 4.4.3.3.3 Results of the simplification*):
 - **Electronic submission system:** 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.
 - **Less/easier submission of supporting documents:** In the application phase the list of mandatory supporting documents is the same as it was in the last programming period.

However, thanks to the IMIS/ INTERREG+, only scanned versions must be uploaded, instead of sending hard copies. During the contracting, the electronic submission of the letters of commitment instead of hard copies was temporarily introduced for the third CfP because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which seemed to remarkably shorten the procedure.

- **Shorter period for administration:** There was no change in the reporting procedure, but partly thanks to the well-functioning INTERREG+ tool and the more optimal capacities at the Joint Secretariat (JS), the actual length of the particular procedures tended to be shorter than the maximum number of days determined by the programme rules.
 - **Advance payment for beneficiaries:** on the Serbian side the low rate (15%) of IPA pre-financing and the lack-of national co-financing cause serious problems during the project implementation not just for the NGOs (since the NGOs did not get easily loan from the bank), but some smaller public bodies too.
 - **Simplified cost options (SCO):** the share of beneficiaries applying the flat-rate option for staff cost has gradually increased from one CfP to the others. The experiences are positive on behalf of both the programme bodies and the beneficiaries.
 - **Involvement of SMEs:** Majority of the stakeholders think that there is no need and room for involving SMEs directly to the programme implementation, because of the legal uncertainty rooted in the IPA status of Serbia on the one hand, as well as the bureaucratic and strict framework of the programme on the other.
- The main **assistance needs of the beneficiaries** have concerned the application and reporting procedure, as well as the administration of the project changes. The **PraG¹² public procurement framework** has been identified as an especially problematic point of the programme implementation. In spite of the fact that 89% of the projects directly allocated more than 1.1 million EUR (more than the average budget of three regular projects) to relevant services, majority of the project prolongations were reasoned by the delays due to the failed or incorrect public procurement for crucial activities. Furthermore, problems of the public procurement procedures also played a great role in financial irregularities. Besides the internal factors, external ones, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, increase of the prices have also emerged, the handling of which required assistance from the programme bodies. Challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic have been successfully tackled by the programme management. While no direct reaction has been given to the problem of increasing prices, the programme used the possibility given by the Commission to request for 100 % EU contribution in order to ensure continuous liquidity. See the chapter: *II. 4.4.3.3.5 External assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies.*
 - The cooperation between the programme management bodies and the beneficiaries is exemplary. The beneficiaries are satisfied with the **assistance provided by the programme**, particularly underlining the availability, helpfulness and efficiency of the Joint Secretariat. See

¹² Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions

the chapter: *II. 4.4.3.3.5 External assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies.*

- Regarding the **cost-efficiency of the assistance** provided by the programme bodies (See the *Table 77: Costs of the TA Priority axis of the current and previous programmes*), the so-called specific administrative cost ratio is expected to be double as much as it was in the previous programming period, which reflects on lower efficiency in theory. However, it should be considered that the cost ratio highly depends on the number of the projects, which is significantly lower than it was in the previous period. At the same time, the strategic projects, as well as the regular projects with increased value and complexity have higher assistance needs on behalf of the management bodies, which partly reasons the rise in the indicator value. Moreover, in the current programming period (unlike the previous one) the budget of the TA includes the costs of the preparation works of the next CP, which also contributes to the increased indicator value. See the chapter: *II. 4.4.3.2 Quantitative analysis of the TA.*
- In terms of the **ownership of the programme**, according to local and regional stakeholders, the programming procedure has been improved in this term compared to the previous period. At the same time, in order to strengthen the bottom-up approach, the better involvement of local actors into the programme implementation would be a preferred option. See the chapter: *II. 4.4.3.3.6 Assessment of ownership, involvement of relevant partners.*

4 Answers to the guiding questions

4.1 Answers to the PA1 related guiding questions

In the tables (*Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, Table 6*) below the related guiding questions are going to be answered:

1. **How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations** of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?
2. **What change was achieved in the programme area** in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?
3. Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the **remaining/emerging needs** of the area at the time of the evaluation.
4. *[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?¹³]* Are there any **unintended impacts**?
5. To what extent has the **programme contributed to those changes**?
6. Do the **impacts vary across the target groups**?

Regarding question 5., the intensity of the contribution of the HUSRB programme to the change observed in the given field is analysed. It is important to distinguish between two different types of changes: 1. those which are strongly related to the programme projects and activities, and 2. those not related to the programme's contribution. After making this distinction, the programme contribution can be analysed. In order to do it, it has to be determined to what extent the achieved change and the unintended impact is the direct result and outcome of the programme itself (or, alternatively, it can be regarded as an impact of some other influence factors). The contribution of the programme is evaluated along the following scale system: 4 = very strong contribution; 3 = strong contribution; 2 = moderate contribution; 1 = weak contribution, 0 = no effect. The same methodology has been used at all the Priority axes.

¹³ This part of question 4. is answered together with the response to question 1.

Table 3: Answers to the PA1 related guiding questions

<p>Methodology of answering →</p> <p>Regional needs/challenges of PA1 ↓</p>	<p>How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?</p>	<p>What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?</p>	<p>Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.</p>	<p><i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts?</p>	<p>To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes?</p>	<p>Do the impacts vary across the target groups?</p>
<p>Missing joint water monitoring system</p>	<p>Missing joint water monitoring system was addressed by a relatively high number of projects. Six projects of PA1 reacted to this need, which is considered as the highest among all needs identified. Furthermore, the strategic project having a bigger impact also contributed to the results. The targeted change will be achieved since the water management system will be widened to the required length.</p>	<p>The projects contributed to a more harmonized water management system by creating monitoring systems in the programme area focusing on drought prevention and water shortages. A database was also created.</p>	<p>Water quality monitoring is still required connected to disaster risk management related to pollution of surface water bodies.</p>	<p>Positive impacts were experienced in relation to water quality and disaster management.</p>	<p>Harmonized water management systems in the cross-border region were supported by other programmes as well, but the contribution of the programme to a harmonized cross-border water monitoring system, which is an integral part of the larger systems, was outstanding.</p>	<p>Intended target groups were impacted by the programme through a more harmonized water management system since itpresumably increases theefficiency of the whole water system which benefits the inhabitants of the cross-border region in short-term, while it also improves the natural environment in the long-run.</p>

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<p>Methodology of answering →</p> <p>Regional needs/challenges of PA1 ↓</p>	<p>How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?</p>	<p>What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?</p>	<p>Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.</p>	<p><i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts?</p>	<p>To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes?</p>	<p>Do the impacts vary across the target groups?</p>
<p>Missing early warning systems for environmental risks</p>	<p>Missing early warning systems for environmental risks was addressed by a relatively high number of projects. Six projects of PA1 reacted to this need, which is considered among the highest of all needs identified. Owing to the implemented flood protection measures the expected number of persons will be resilient against environmental risks.</p>	<p>Improved flood protection was achieved in relation to floods and heavy rainfalls. Capacities for management of environmental risks was improved from the point of floods in particular. Forecasting and warning system was introduced related to rainfalls and flood prone areas.</p>	<p>Among the various risks the ones connected to the uneven distribution of rainfall intensified. This means more frequent storms, hails and flash floods.</p>	<p>One of the unintended indirect impacts was that water drainage hardens tackling water scarcity and battling droughts as climate change intensifies.</p>	<p>Floods and heavy rainfalls were addressed, but given the magnitude of changes and the role of other programmes limited contribution was achieved by the CP.</p>	<p>The inhabitants of the cross-border region are more positively impacted by the programme as the warning systems for environmental risks allow for due preparation and mitigation of potential fatalities and damage control. The natural environment is unfortunately still unprotected by the warning system.</p>
<p>Reconstruction of canals connected to the river Danube is necessary</p>	<p>Not many, only 4 projects (out of which two are strategic and bigger ones, regarding EU contribution and impacts, focusing on mainly this challenge) reacted to the regional need, however all the projects with canal reconstruction were directly aligned with the expectations of the programme. The water management system will reach the targeted length, which is an adequate action to mitigate the regional needs.</p>	<p>Thanks to the reconstruction of the Baja-Bezdan and the Domaszéki Canal and the building of locks, an improved water management system was established. More calculable operational conditions for agricultural enterprises were achieved.</p>	<p>Water retention ability should be improved. Canals need to contribute to tackling water scarcity not just water surplus. The further dredging of other sections of the Baja-Bezdan Canal will have to be resolved at a later date.</p>	<p>An unintended impact is that the canals drain the falling precipitation, thus while the canals serve flood protection or inland water protection (drainage) or agricultural purposes (irrigation), they do not necessarily support water retention which has gained high importance in times of severe drought events across the Great Plain.</p>	<p>The challenge regarding inland water and flood protection was also supported by other programmes, but the reconstruction of canals directly was not supported extensively apart from HUSRB.</p>	<p>The inhabitants of the cross-border region are positively (albeit slightly) impacted by the Programme as the reconstructed canals supported the irrigation and flood protection needs of the inhabitants of the cross-border region. At the same time the natural environment gained water-based flora and fauna habitats.</p>

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<p>Methodology of answering →</p> <p>Regional needs/challenges of PA1 ↓</p>	<p>How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?</p>	<p>What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?</p>	<p>Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.</p>	<p><i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts?</p>	<p>To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes?</p>	<p>Do the impacts vary across the target groups?</p>
<p>Climate change endangers agricultural safety</p>	<p>Not many, only 2-4 projects reacted directly to this regional need. However, another 8 from PA4 also contributed to the fulfilment of this regional need. The safety of agriculture will be improved, as the previously determined surface area's conservation status will reach the required level, and the water management system will be solved.</p>	<p>Capacities for prevention and management of environmental risks were improved, especially in the case of pluvial floods, droughts and inland water connected to climate change. Harmonised monitoring solutions and water management operational plans have been developed, and a joint Drought and Excess Water Management Centre has been set up.</p>	<p>It is important to continue the construction of water retention work. There should be a concrete plan how to mitigate the effects of water shortage. Greater attention should be devoted to other relevant climate change topics apart from agriculture. Increased use of renewables has not been addressed by the projects under PA1.</p>	<p>The projects contributed to improved water management too.</p>	<p>Limited number of projects was realized, while national and other programmes supported better. by a number of various activities, the preparation for climate change.</p>	<p>The most impacted target group was the agricultural producers and enterprises as capacities for prevention and management of environmental risks better prepares these actors to plan ahead their water needing business activities. The inhabitants of the cross-border region and the natural environment are only impacted indirectly.</p>
<p>Negative impacts on the nature conservation areas should be reduced</p>	<p>Six projects addressed this challenge directly, however, an additional seven projects from other PAs affected the programme area. The targeted challenge will have to be met, since the habitats' conservation status will be improved in more than only in the determined area.</p>	<p>Negative impacts have been reduced in relation to the conservation of key species and their habitats and blocking the spread of invasive alien plants in particular. Improved ecological status has been reached in some cases.</p>	<p>Problems to be addressed include the intensifying spread of alien species, the emergence of massive bushfires and forest fires, the climate-change related shrinking of water habitats (e.g. in the form of dried lakes, dry riverside areas, decreasing groundwater levels).</p>	<p>Minimal unintended impacts were reached.</p>	<p>Limited number of projects were realized, while, directly and indirectly, other programmes contributed to the goals and needs of this challenge, especially in terms of water habitats and climate change.</p>	<p>The nature protected areas are benefiting more from the impact as the status of the nature conservation areas has improved, which in turn indirectly benefits the inhabitants of the cross-border region.</p>

4.2 Answers to the PA2 related guiding questions

Table 4: Answers to the PA2 related guiding questions

Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges of PA2 ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts ?	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes ?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups ?
Few available border crossing points, low capacities of existing ones resulting in long waiting times	The second greatest number of projects (a total of 7 projects) addressed the regional need concerned. At the end of the programme, the regional needs will be mitigated, since eight border crossing points will be improved or newly built. In addition, a strategic project of high impact also contributed to the objective.	The regional challenge of few available crossing points as well as the low capacities of existing ones was addressed. The construction of the new Kübekháza–Rabe crossing point was financially supported.	There is still a need for capacity development at border crossings including the introduction of more lanes and the extension of opening hours.	Absence of good cross-border transport connections was improved by supporting planning activities, especially regarding the Szeged-Subotica railway. Road infrastructure leading to border crossings was upgraded partly owing to the project related to this challenge.	The programme had a CfP directly for border crossing points, however little progress was made in the field of waiting times. Despite certain developments the IKOP of Hungary and national projects had a significantly bigger role.	The impacts on the different, quite numerous, target groups are less than ideal. Even though the construction and planning work improves the availability of the border crossing points and reduces waiting times, the change might not be big enough for non-specialised target groups (such as tourists, passengers) to really appreciate it.

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Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges of PA2 ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts?	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups?
Roads, railway and public transport infrastructure in poor condition.	A total number of four projects were realised to address this challenge, which is the lowest number after the challenge of utilised potentials in water transport. Until the closure of the programme, the length of newly built and upgraded roads will be increased, and more than 50 km railway line will be affected by development plans.	Project documentation for the Szeged–Subotica section of the Budapest–Belgrade highspeed railway was prepared. The HUSRB project titled “Dream Railway” supported the elaboration of Technical Documentation of the Subotica–Bácsalmás–Baja railway line. In the vicinity of the Bački Breg–Hercegszántó border crossing the improvement and widening a road took place.	Implementation of the construction of the Subotica–Baja railway line would be necessary in the near future. Tram-train network operating between Szeged and Hódmezővásárhely could integrate Subotica.	There were no unintended impacts reached.	Little progress has been made in this field. A much bigger budget could have been spent on creating better transport integration taking into account its cross-sectoral and cooperation-wide effects, not to mention the high costs of building infrastructure. Still, supporting planning documentation was an important step to address the joint challenges. It is worth noting that operational programmes and (inter)national projects such as the highspeed railway project could provide sufficient contribution not a low-budget CBC programme.	Out of the intended target groups, at the moment the railway companies, the passengers and the tourists only detect a negative, albeit temporary and indirect impact. Due to the building of Budapest-Belgrade railway the old line is out of use making traveling in the region more difficult.

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Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges of PA2 ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts ?	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes ?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups ?
Absence of good cross-border (public) transport connections	The largest number of projects (8) addressed this challenge under PA2. The cross-border transport connections will be improved, since the projects enhance the infrastructural conditions and endowments not just of the cross-border roads, but of the cross-border railway lines and the cross-border bicycle paths as well.	Planning of infrastructure was outstandingly important here. The projects contributed to the change of transport modes from individual travel to railway, but this change could be measured better after the realisation of all project elements and the inauguration of infrastructure. Improved infrastructural conditions such as the increase of speed or electrification improve transport connections and make place for an increased number of various public transport services.	The reconstruction of the Szeged – Subotica railway line and the extension of Hódmezővásárhely – Szeged tram-train track to Subotica will be a vast opportunity to make commuting faster, easier and more comfortable between the two countries. Scheduled, regular (public) transport should be introduced since there are great potentials along both the Danube and the Tisza rivers to launch new services and routes between e.g. Baja and Apatin, or from Szeged to Senta. Acquisition of special boats and the launch of high-speed services would be necessary.	Indirectly the projects here contribute to more sustainable transport modes, easier commuting across the border and the functional integration of Szeged and Subotica in particular.	The contribution of the HUSRB projects are in the elaboration of planning documents which could serve as the basis for future infrastructural and service developments financed by other sources than this programme. The large infrastructural projects are supported by other programmes, national, bilateral and other EU funds.	Good cross-border public transport connection will largely improve the travel conditions of passengers and tourists and thus public and private transport companies can expect to yield a bigger profit, however, at the present stage only the planning documents were prepared which in itself have no real effect on the target groups.

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Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges of PA2 ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts ?	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes ?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups ?
Need for the development of bicycle routes accompanied by rider-friendly infrastructure and services	A total number of five projects were in synergy with the regional need. This number can be regarded as average. The achieved value of newly built bicycle paths was more than 25 km in 2021, which includes the construction of rider-friendly infrastructure. Therefore, the regional challenge has been reduced.	The current and previous CBC programmes supported the Szeged–Novi Kneževac bicycle road construction, and additional biker-friendly infrastructure elements (e.g. resting places) have also been created. HUSRB also contributed to the increased bicycle traffic and network connecting Subotica, Bački Vinogradi, Kelebija, Tompa, Ásothalom and Kelebia. The development of technical documentation for the construction of bicycle paths has also taken place.	Further improvements are needed in order to create a more extensive network by linking bordering elements and to support long(er)-distance biking, not simply short-distance and inland possibilities.	There were no unintended impacts reached.	Minimal contribution took place given that the share of cycling in modal split increased only by 0.1%-point in total border traffic. National programmes and other EU funded projects supported the development of bicycle infrastructure at a much higher intensity,	The development of the bicycle routes had the greatest impact on the general public and tourists and, to some degree, on passengers of public transportation. However, this degree was not big enough to negatively impact public and private transport companies.

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Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges of PA2 ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts?	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups?
Unutilised potentials in water transport	None of the projects originally implemented in the frameworks of CfPs of PA2 supported water transport directly. PA3 projects supported the most this challenge by 3 projects. Owing to this the regional needs will be mitigated by the construction of new port facilities and the procurement of kayak equipment.	No direct change was reached in the frameworks of PA2 projects. However, some projects of PA1 and PA3 affected this regional need.	The Tisza is now an international river for cross-border passenger traffic, but it is not exploited only from tourism point of view minor improvement occurred owing to the programme.	There were no unintended impacts reached.	No relevant change was registered.	Since no relevant change was detected, the target groups also remained unaffected.

4.3 Answers to the PA3 related guiding questions

Table 5: Answers to the PA3 related guiding questions

Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts ?	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes ?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups ?
Lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply	A total number of 34 PA3 projects addressed the regional need, but 7 further projects contributed to the need identified here. This volume is outstanding along with the need tourism needs to contribute to a better appreciation and understanding among people. Owing to the higher number of joint community events and actions, the interconnections amongst individual elements have been increased.	This challenge was addressed by numerous HUSRB projects including development of joint offers, thematic routes, information materials and applications. The promotion of jointly developed products was crucial to create a coherent cross-border supply.	Organisational development and promotion of networking would be necessary in the future to increase the added value of CBC. Not only interconnections among elements of supply but also those among regional stakeholders should receive bigger support in the frameworks of this challenge. Study tours, joint conferences, relationship-building between institutions and individual actors are equally important.	The projects contributed to increased turnovers of touristic service providers and to an increased number of guest nights as well.	Economic and tourism related programmes, national programmes especially on the Hungarian side offered significantly more contribution to support the need. Still, the opportunities to bring stakeholders and potential beneficiaries together in tourism had an important contribution to the programme area.	The impact of the Programme was visible on both sides of the target groups: on the level of tourism service providers which were made to cooperate more and also on the level of tourists and general public who could enjoy the improved, more interconnected supply.
Limited number of joint tourism products with attractiveness for longer stays	A medium number (18 in total) of projects in the frameworks of CfPs under this PA addressed the need, the regional needs have been weakened, since the number of visitors increased and the utilization of online communication tools also became more frequent.	A large number of joint tourism products were developed.	It is of outstanding importance to develop joint complex tourism products but it should not be connected to longer stays, it is rather more useful to link it to employment or guest nights.	The unintended impact of the project is the increase in the frequency of visits and not the appearance of weeks-long stays. The projects contributed to increased turnovers of touristic service providers, to an increased number of guest nights and to the generation of employment in tourism.	Economic and tourism related programmes, national programmes especially on the Hungarian side offered significantly more contribution to support the need. Major changes are not connected to the projects. It is a global trend that overnight stays tend to be cut and, at the same time, the number of visits tends to increase.	The different target groups were affected the same way by the programme and ultimately by the general trends of tourism (i.e. more frequent but shorter stays).

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Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?] Are there any unintended impacts?</i>	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups?
Shortage of quality tourism	Medium level of projects in the frames of CfPs under this PA addressed the need, 17 in total. The increasing number of visitors and the new cultural events and attractions have given the opportunity to evolve quality tourism in the region.	Quality is supported by the programme on a medium level, mostly by introducing new products and services or by improving already existing infrastructure and service provision. Hard infrastructure of tourism attractions was supported in large numbers.	Increasing the quality is even more relevant than increasing the number of tourists, or the number of overnight stays even. There is still a need for comprehensive improvement.	Projects partly contributed also to increased number of guest nights and increased turnovers at tourism providers.	Economic and tourism related programmes, national programmes especially on the Hungarian side offered significantly more contribution to support the need. Major changes are not connected to the projects.	Even though the target groups could have been more directly impacted by the programme, no major changes could be linked to it.
Lack of integrated regional tourism strategy	A relatively low number of projects (only 10 in total) addressed this regional need. The integration of the region's tourism strategies has begun since joint events have been organised and online communication tools have been applied, which created a framework and platform for the development of common tourism.	Joint tourism development strategies were elaborated with regard to projects of HEALTH-TOUR ¹⁴ (development of an integrated marketing strategy and action plan for health and medical tourism), IDENTIS ¹⁵ (preparing a joint tourism development strategy with an action plan) and TisaWaterTours ¹⁶ (joint water tourism development strategy).	Tourism strategy is a good tool but organizational development would be needed first so that someone can implement it.	Projects also supported joint products, longer stays, and the removal of the lack of interconnection amongst elements of supply. However, COVID-19 pandemic got in the way as an unwanted change that hampered cooperation.	Without the financial support of the programme little improvements would have been achieved. Cross-border planning was not supported by other programmes.	Even though without the Programme these tourism strategies would probably not have been prepared at all, the tourists cannot yet enjoy its benefits, however, the other target groups such as tourism service providers, enterprises and local governments can start to cooperate in order to realise these strategies.

¹⁴ ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0084; Health Tourism – Good Tourism: Joint Development of Medical and Health Tourism in the HU-SRB Cross-Border Region

¹⁵ ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0048; Name: Integrated Development of Natural and Cultural Tourism in Tisa River Region

¹⁶ ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0051; Name: Development of a cross-border water tourism destination along the Lower Tisa section

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Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?] Are there any unintended impacts?</i>	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups?
Tourism needs to contribute to a better appreciation and understanding among people	A total number of 35 projects addressed this regional need which makes this an outstandingly addressed need of the whole programme. The level of information and that of mutual appreciation of the people improved, owing, to a great extent, to the fact that the number of the user entries of the developed online communication tools was nearly 900 in 2021, and the opportunities of personal meetings has also risen due to the higher number of events organised.	Development of tourist products, services and attractions based on cultural and natural heritage as well as cooperation in the fields of cultural, community events, sport, leisure, nature protection are undoubtedly among the highlights of the programme. Projects helped understanding the shared, built and intangible, cultural heritage of the programme area, building mutual trust by organising cultural and sports events such as festivals, inter-institutional forms of cooperation.	it is important to enhance the role of creative industry, and also more innovative solutions should be used to speed up the recovery of the tourism sector. The mental change of the population can be achieved only by time-consuming soft projects.	Unintended impacts are very diverse, and include contribution to increased number of guest nights in particular. Furthermore, it is important to stress the relevance of those cultural and tourism projects in building partnerships and social cohesion across the programme area which can be the basis of future projects and interconnections of all kinds.	This challenge has been supported most effectively by the programme itself out of the needs of PA3. In addition, the challenge is supported extensively by various national, regional and grassroots, local initiatives and activities of all kinds as well.	The general public and especially the younger generation could certainly experience the benefits of the programme through the varied and numerous events and initiatives. At the same time, other target groups, not mentioned by the Programme, are also positively affected (such as tourism service providers).

4.4 Answers to the PA4 related guiding questions

Table 6: Answers to the PA4 related guiding questions

Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts?	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups?
Low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results by SMEs	Low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results by SMEs is tackled by 11 PA4 projects in total, which can be regarded as outstanding. The programme has enhanced cooperation between the enterprises and the research institutions resulting in 265 enterprises with R&D activities in 2021.	Increased research collaboration is supported by the programme. The high share of activities is related to agricultural innovation. Social enterprises are also represented. The impact of the programme was relevant in a way that it initiated networking and the creation of the quadruple helix between the two countries.	More institutionalised and regular, established forms of R&D collaborations could be supported to reach a higher level of cooperation in this field. Knowledge and technology transfer and their efficient utilisation could also be better served by the programme.	The projects contributed also to labour force supply. These results include new services and products in particular, but improved education, training and support services and clean and green technologies were also supported.	Networking and collaborations were focused on few partners and thematic fields. The changes facilitated by the programme were very limited. R&D activities have been financed by other programmes by far more sources allocated (e.g. in the frameworks of GINOP of Hungary).	While it is possible that to a low degree some of the enterprises in the region were positively impacted, other groups such as vulnerable people or those unemployed most likely did not feel the benefits.
Labour force supply does not respond to the needs of the local companies	There is an imbalance within PA4 challenges in favour of this need, which is addressed by as many as 16 projects of which two are from PA3. This need was addressed by the largest number of projects in PA4. This regional need stimulated the organizations to take part in knowledge platforms and to encourage the scholars to acquire new forms of knowledge on the other side of the border.	Numerous training courses were conducted with varying results and impacts. The programme was particularly successful in creating institutional cooperation of universities.	There is still a need for an increased number of the labour force with the skills necessary for meeting the requirements of companies and creating better results in R&D. More funds should be appropriated to vocational education. More attention could be paid to mutual knowledge of each other's language.	The projects impacted R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results in an indirect way by supporting educational and research institutions and organisations in this field. The education, training and support services were supported.	For almost all the changes global trends as well as national and other EU funds were responsible. This need was hard to be impacted considering the magnitude and complexity of the problems.	The impact varies across the target groups as those who directly participated in the training courses and other elements of the Programme could benefit from the initiatives a lot more than for instance the general public which would only feel the impact if that impact were of a much larger scale.

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Methodology of answering → Regional needs/challenges ↓	How well are the project objectives, outputs and results aligned with the expectations of the programme as set in the CP (intervention logic)?	What changes were achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?	Identification of the gaps between what was achieved and what are the remaining/emerging needs of the area at the time of the evaluation.	<i>[What changes can be observed in relation to the given specific objective?]</i> Are there any unintended impacts ?	To what extent has the programme contributed to those changes ?	Do the impacts vary across the target groups ?
Obstacles concerning the cross-border recognition of vocational qualifications	This need gained little direct support. Only a single project from both PA3 and PA4 was aimed at contributing to the removal of obstacles to the recognition of vocational qualifications. Owing to the programme, more opportunities of scholarships on the other side of the border have arisen, therefore the number of months spent through scholarships in the neighbouring country will increase to at least 250 until the end of 2023.	Vocational qualifications were addressed by the programme mostly by supporting training courses to less educated people in the field of agriculture and social enterprises.	Changes underline the importance of vocation education and the mutual recognition of various qualifications especially in cross-border commuting from Serbia to Hungary. There is a threat that instead of short-term migration within the programme area the share of emigration and brain drain will increase, thus further aggravating the challenge of insufficient number of qualified workforce.	No real unintended impact was observed.	Almost no real contribution was registered in this field given the very low number of projects. This topic is more of a matter of bilateral agreements, and has a strong legal and administrative angle, for which no contribution was made by the programme.	Since no relevant change was detected, the target groups also remain unaffected.

4.5 Answers to the general guiding questions

In this subchapter, all of the guiding questions defined at the programme level are answered. All answers are based on the in-depth evaluation of the CP and are explained in detail in the given chapters of this document.

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

With regard to PA1, considering water management, flood protection and water quality have been improved by the programme as well as water monitoring. Considering environmental protection, the conservation of key species and their habitats and blocking the spread of invasive alien plants in particular were addressed.

With regard to PA2, considering the achieved change support for the elaboration of various plans and documents for transport infrastructure development was an important achievement. On the other hand, construction of infrastructure, improvements in water transport are still needed in the future.

With regard to PA3, considering achieved change development of joint offers, thematic routes, information materials and applications took place, and the programme successfully contributed to the promotion of jointly developed products. Furthermore, the programme had a great impact on building mutual trust by supporting products, services, events based on joint heritage.

With regard to PA4, considering achieved change, relevant change was achieved in initiating networking and the creation of the quadruple helix model in particular. Other changes include intensified cooperation of universities.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (at PA level): *II. 3.1.3.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (PA1); II. 3.2.3.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (PA2); II. 3.3.3.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (PA3); II. 3.4.3.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (PA4)*
- > Indicator value analysis: result indicators (at PA level): *II. 3.1.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA1); II. 3.2.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA2); II. 3.3.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA3); II. 3.4.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA4)*
- > Main findings for the PAs (at PA level): *I. 3.1 Main findings for PA1; I. 3.2 Main findings for PA2; I. 3.3 Main findings for PA3; I. 3.4 Main findings for PA4*
- > Answers to the PA related guiding questions (at PA level): *I. 4.1 Answers to the PA1 related guiding questions; I. 4.2 Answers to the PA2 related guiding questions; I. 4.3 Answers to the PA3 related guiding questions; I. 4.4 Answers to the PA4 related guiding questions*
- > Overall analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (at Programme level): *II. 4.3.1 Overall analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs*

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 implementation of the CP's aims was supported by three Calls for Proposals. The 1st CfP was a restricted one, since it focused on the strategic projects, whereas the 2nd and 3rd CfPs were open CfPs which provided opportunities for the regular (traditional) projects. The fulfilment of the determined programme goal was supported by 386 applications out of which 118 were developed into projects. Till the cut-off date of the evaluation (April 12,2022) out of the 118 projects only 69 (constituting a mere 58.4%) had been closed with an approved final report.

The achievements regarding the expected results are summarized by the PAs (*I. 4 Answers to the guiding questions*).

Most of the predefined target groups were well-affected by the CP's results; however, in the case of some target groups gaps can be observed (e.g. PA2: NGOs; PA3: young professionals). In general, the direct effects regarding the target groups at the PA1 and PA2 are more unambiguous than in the case of the other two PAs. Most of the projects targeted and, on some level, reached the general public, however, the direct effects on the inhabitants are challenging to measure.

Due to the specificity of the different actions, regarding the beneficiaries, no 'one-size-fits-all' answers can be provided. The CfPs outlined rather well the range of the potential beneficiaries. The involvement and participation of the proposed beneficiaries was in most cases successful; however, in some cases, it fell short of the expectations.

Despite the fact that not all indicators have been fulfilled yet, according to the projects' original expectations, in most cases, they have a high chance of reaching the targets by the end of the programme.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Performance evaluation (at PA level): *II. 3.1.2 Performance evaluation (PA1) (Implementation progress); II. 3.2.2 Performance evaluation (PA2) (Implementation progress); II. 3.3.2 Performance evaluation (PA3) (Implementation progress); II. 3.4.2 Performance evaluation (PA4) (Implementation progress)*
- > Overall performance (at programme level): *II. 2 General features and performance of the programme*

What change was achieved in the programme area in terms of meeting the needs and challenges of the programme area as identified in CP 2014-2020 (considering the scope and characteristics of the programme)?

This question is answered more in detail in the chapter evaluating PAs. (*I. 4 Answers to the guiding questions*).

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Impact evaluation (at PA level): *II. 3.1.3 Impact evaluation (PA1); II. 3.2.3 Impact evaluation (PA2); II. 3.3.3 Impact evaluation (PA3); II. 3.4.3 Impact evaluation (PA4)*

- > Main findings for the PAs (at PA level): *I. 3.1 Main findings for PA1; I. 3.2 Main findings for PA2; I. 3.3 Main findings for PA3; I. 3.4 Main findings for PA4*
- > Answers to the PA related guiding questions (at PA level): *I. 4.1 Answers to the PA1 related guiding questions; I. 4.2 Answers to the PA2 related guiding questions; I. 4.3 Answers to the PA3 related guiding questions; I. 4.4 Answers to the PA4 related guiding questions*
- > Estimated impacts of the programme (at Programme level): *II. 4.3 Programme's impacts on cohesion and convergence*

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

This question is answered more in detail in the chapter evaluating the PAs. The remaining development needs are presented at the end of the evaluation chapters of each PAs regarding all predefined regional challenges. See the tables for the answers to the PA-related guiding questions: *Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, Table 6.*

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Main findings for the PAs (at PA level): *I. 3.1 Main findings for PA1; I. 3.2 Main findings for PA2; I. 3.3 Main findings for PA3; I. 3.4 Main findings for PA4*
- > Answers to the PA related guiding questions (at PA level): *I. 4.1 Answers to the PA1 related guiding questions; I. 4.2 Answers to the PA2 related guiding questions; I. 4.3 Answers to the PA3 related guiding questions; I. 4.4 Answers to the PA4 related guiding questions*

How well did the guiding principles lead the projects towards the aims of the programme?

In general, the guiding principles (see more about them in the chapter *II. 4.1.3 Importance of the guiding principles*) helped selecting those projects which were in harmony with the objectives of the programme. They encouraged potential beneficiaries to send their project proposals for the right CfPs. In this process, making the guiding principles an important basis for the compilation and description of the CfPs played a pivotal role.

It can be concluded that no wrong principle has been defined, but at the same time, some criticism can be expressed. In some cases, the principles were not specific and understandable enough to clearly lead either the applicants, or the quality assessors towards the programme goals. In addition, the application form and the assessment criteria (questions) are not fully in line with the guiding principles, as well as some elements of the assessment procedure have also not facilitated the selection process in this term.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Influx factors of the implementation (at Programme level): *II. 4.1 Overall influence factors of the Programme implementation*

How well was the integrated approach to territorial development followed?

First of all, it should be noted that the integrated approach has been interpreted in different ways by the different stakeholders of the programme. The programme did not contain the tools of CLLD or ITI, in addition there were no actions/projects forming part of an ITI project financed by other

Operative Programmes. It can be reasoned by the fact that the Hungary-Serbia border represents the external frontiers of the EU, where interactions are largely hindered by several legal and administrative obstacles, which limits the scope of implementation of such tools. At the same time, two strategic projects were able to contribute to the impact of the programme by enlarging the timely and thematic horizon of the cross-border projects. ColourCoop has a moderate, while BABECA project has a greater impact on the integrated approach by the implemented activities which not only affected water management and flood protection in the region, but also contributed to the tourism development and nature-revitalisation needs.

Moreover, in the application forms beneficiaries had the opportunity to describe the synergies of their projects with other developments initiated by themselves. According to the descriptions, the integrated approach to territorial development can be detected to some extent in case of PA1 and PA2, but in other cases this approach was mostly missing from the descriptions.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (at PA level): *II. 3.1.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA1); II. 3.2.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA2); II. 3.3.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA3)*
- > Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools in terms of the results (at Programme level): *II. 4.4.1 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools in terms of the results*

How well was the territorial balance respected?

This question is answered in the chapter "*I. 3 Main findings of the evaluation*".

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Analysis of the territorial coverage (at PA level): *II. 3.1.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA1); II. 3.2.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA2); II. 3.3.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA3); II. 3.4.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA4)*
- > Overall territorial coverage (at Programme level): *II. 4.3.3 Overall territorial coverage*

To what extent does the programme add benefits to cross-border regional development and how does it complement and enhance the effect of other related policies or strategies? How does this mechanism work and what can be improved?

Contribution to headline targets employment, R&D and education of EU2020 is relevant, so is PA1B Rail-Road-Air Mobility, 3 Culture & Tourism, 5 Environmental risks, 6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality, 9 People & Skills and 11 Security of EUSDR PAs. Direct positive benefits are hard to identify. EU level plans and policies enhancing and complementing the effect of the programme most frequently are EUSDR, the Europe 2020 Strategy, Horizon 2020, Creative Europe and LIFE+. On national level the programme contributed to the enhancement and completion of the following strategies and concepts: National Development 2030, National Tourism Development Strategy 2030, Territorial Development Concept of Hungary, Development Programme of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Serbia Tourism Development Strategy. The project application contains information on synergic relations but there are no further implications deriving from what is written there.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (at PA level): *II. 3.1.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes; II. 3.2.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA2); II. 3.3.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA3); II. 3.4.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA4)*

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

The programme had a very strong estimated aggregated effect in the eligible area in relation to the number of cross-border institutions, networks and clusters (by direct support from the programme), the number, geographic scope and value of projects implemented jointly across the border (the role of the programme was eminent in the border zone of 40-50 km), and number of citizens participating in cross-border activities and projects (supported directly from the programme). The programme had a strong positive effect on the average distance between border crossing points (by one new crossing built, one upgraded crossing and some road constructions to border crossings), on number and total value of the projects implemented by the cross-border governance entities (by contributing to the number and total value of HUSRB projects) and also on the number of joint cultural events based on the performers' nationality (by direct support to such events).

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Estimated impacts of the programme (at Programme level): *II. 4.3 Programme's impacts on cohesion and convergence*
- > Aggregated impacts on the borderscape (at Programme level): *II. 4.3.7 Aggregated impacts on the borderscape*

Are the programme's outputs and results sustainable in the long run?

This question is answered in the chapter "*I. 3 Main findings of the evaluation*".

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Durability of the projects (at PA level): *II. 3.1.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA1); II. 3.2.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA2); II. 3.3.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA3); II. 3.4.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA4)*
- > Overall durability of the projects (at Programme level): *II. 4.3.4 Overall durability of the projects*

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

It would be worth considering to fine-tune the requirements concerning the presentation of the sustainability aspects by the applicants and beneficiaries in a way, which makes them better explore and contextualise their solutions. During this, it must be taken into consideration, that durability can be interpreted differently in case of an investment in infrastructure compared to small-scale people-to-people actions.

At the same time, the programme should take some role on raising the capacities of the potential beneficiaries in order to make them better design their project proposals both in strategic and

operative terms. This should lead to higher quality projects better reacting to the regional needs and capital, as well as better ensuring sustainability in the long-run.

The aim is not to further narrow the range of potential applicants by increasing the expectations, but also to better assist some of the beneficiaries which shall result in a higher number of more effective programmes with a stronger impact on the cross-border region as a whole.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Main findings of the evaluation: *1.3 Main findings of the evaluation*
- > Recommendations (at Programme level): *1.6 Recommendations*

Are the planned capacities of the programme implementing bodies sufficient? What can be improved?

In general, the capacities of the programme bodies are not at an optimal level, but appropriate enough for the timely and effective implementation of the programme. At the same time, one additional staff member would be beneficial at the MA, while greater improvement would be necessary at the Serbian FLC body, where 4-5 controllers are missing. Further programme authorities did not report any shortcomings in this term, which is also confirmed by the performance indicators of the programme.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Qualitative analysis of the TA > Capacity and lead time assessment: *II. 4.4.3.3.1 Capacity and lead time assessment*

How efficient is the overall management of the programme? What can be improved?

The efficiency of the programme management can mainly be assessed through the performance of the Technical Assistance Priority Axes. The staff cost/budget ratio of the TA is 63.12%, which is similar to those INTERREG A programmes where this aspect has been analysed. At the same time, so called specific administrative cost ratio is expected to be double as much as it was in the 2007-2013 HUSRB CP, which, in theory, reflects lower efficiency. The indicator value highly depends on the number of the projects, which is significantly lower than it was in the previous programming period. On the other hand, the strategic projects, as well as the regular projects with increased value and complexity (compared to the 2007-2013 period) have higher assistance needs on behalf of the programme bodies, which partly explains the rise in the indicator value. Moreover, it should also be considered, that in the current programming period (unlike in the previous one) the budget of the TA includes the costs of the preparation works of the next CP.

One particular field has been identified which could provide room for improvement. The application of the complex public procurement regulation is problematic on beneficiary level. This is confirmed by the significant amount of IPA support dedicated to such advisory services. At the same time, it was noted by the programme bodies that the quality of such external advisory services available in the programme area is often not adequate, hence why the intervention of the programme bodies is necessary for the smooth implementation of the projects. In this sense, it would be worth considering to internalise this advisory service into the programme management structure which would expectedly result in some increase in the efficiency of the programme.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Internal assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies: *II. 4.4.3.3.4 Internal assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies*
- > External assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies: *II. 4.4.3.3.5 External assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies*

To what extent did the programme strengthen the institutional capacity of relevant partners?

The evaluators assessed the capacities of the partners mentioned in chapter '5.7 Involvement of partners' of the Cooperation Programme. The institutional capacities of the programme management bodies have been improved during the programming period, even since the 1st Phase Evaluation approved by the JMC in 2019. The exact extent of the improvement can be hardly identified, because the national level actors tend to provide the management structure of several other INTERREG A programmes (e.g. the MA of the current programme is responsible for all the INTERREG V-A programmes managed by Hungary), and the staff members don't use to be dedicated to the particular programmes, instead, they are dedicated to certain tasks (e.g. a controller may be in charge of the FLC of some projects from different programmes).

Regarding the programme stakeholders including national and regional public bodies, educational institutions, economic and social actors, as well as CSOs, those having a project beneficiary status benefit from the programme in this term. The impact of the IPA programmes of all time can be identified better on the Serbian side, where the central (those not concerned with CBC) local and regional actors tend to have significantly less operational capacities to implement similar (in terms of value and complexity) development initiatives. Evaluators assessed the internal and external management and professional staff cost intensity of the projects, which shows a positive picture: around 70% of the relevant tasks have been delivered by internal staff members.

More information is available in the following chapter(s):

- > Qualitative analysis of the TA: *II. 4.4.3.3 Qualitative analysis of the TA*

5 The Programme's impact on cross-border flows

The table below (*Table 7*) contains information on the different factors analysed in the chapter "*II. 4.3.7 Aggregated impacts on the borderscape*". The related change, role of the CP as well as the estimated impact-vector per each factor are arranged in rows. The change column describes the rate of change that is analysed in this study considering all kinds of changes regardless their source, facilitator or level. The next column, however, is focused exclusively on the Cooperation Programme. Consequently, only the role of the actions and projects of the CBC programme in the respected change will be assessed, the other processes, external influences are not considered.

The impact-vector will measure the programme's role in the change, and has two axes:

- Direction of the impact (negative – positive);
- Strength of the impact in the view of the programme (weak – strong).

Possible impact-vectors:

- 4 very strong positive effect;
- 3 strong positive effect;
- 2 moderate positive effect;
- 1 weak positive effect;
- 0 no effect;
- -1 weak negative effect;
- -2 moderate negative effect;
- -3 strong negative effect;
- -4 very strong negative effect.

Table 7: The programme's impact on the cross-border flows

Factor	Change	Role of the CP	Estimated impact-vector
Infrastructural conditions of cross-border flows	The change in the average distance of border crossing points	The number of newly opened border crossings financed by the programme (1 crossing + upgrade + bicycle connections to crossings)	3
	Average distance between the major regional centres of the border region (travelling time and geographic distance)	Planning	1
	Number of cross-border transport lines	Planning	1
	Volume of cross-border traffic within the programme region	Minor direct role of CP activities & general indirect role	1
Cross-border mobility	Number of commuting students across the border	Indirect role of R&D and training projects	1

Factor	Change	Role of the CP	Estimated impact-vector
	Number of registered residents originating from the other side of the border	No direct role	0
Cross-border business activity	Differences in real estate prices according to the physical distance from the border	No direct role	0
	Registered number of enterprises per 1000 persons	Minimal direct role as few social enterprises were established	1
Cross-border services	Frequency and aims of cross-border service practices	Mainly cultural and touristic services	1
Administrative conditions of cross-border cooperation	Number of interstate agreements	Positive tendencies without direct role of the programme	1
	Number of town-twinning agreements within the programme region	Indirect role of people-to-people actions financed by the programme	1
Cross-border institutions	Number of cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities and their members	No change, no role	0
	Average annual turnover, number of employees of cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities	Indirect employment role through supported applications	3
	Number and total value of the projects implemented by the cross-border cooperation initiatives and governance entities	Contribution to the number and total value of the projects	3
	Number of cross-border institutions, networks and clusters + their projects	Limited change but directly owing to the programme support	3
Cross-border projects	Number, geographic scope and value of projects implemented jointly across the border	The role of the programme was eminent in the border zone of 50 km	4
	Sustainability of the project results	Limited change, generated almost exclusively by the CP	1
	Sustainability of project partnerships	High share of partnerships with prequel. Stability of professional cooperation networks.	3

Factor	Change	Role of the CP	Estimated impact-vector
	Assessment of integrated approach applied in projects and CfPs for tender	On the programme level this tool is not used (IPA consequence). However, more complex projects; the two strategic projects are indirectly relevant from the aspect of integrated approach.	1
Social connectivity	Number of citizens participating in cross-border activities and projects	Limited change but directly owing to the programme support	3
	Number of joint cultural events based on the performers' nationality	Limited change but directly owing to the programme support	3
Perceptions on distance	Level of mutual trust	Significant positive change, moderate effect directly by the programme	2
Perceptions of otherness	Mediascapes of the neighbouring countries	Sustained, established mediascape with an important cross-border development; however, with moderate impact. Change mainly owing to communication tools and the strategic project Colourful Cooperation in particular.	2
Ownership of the shared territory	Reasons and motivations of border crossings	Mainly through tourist information provision and networking activities	2
	Geographic scope of cross-border mobility	Profound change but limited role	1

6 Recommendations

The table below (*Table 8*) contains the recommendations drafted regarding the CP with reference to the detailed analysis where the issues are explained more deeply. The summarising chapters of the evaluation are not listed in this table; however, these chapters are also fundamental to better understand the background of the recommendations:

Table 8: Summary of the recommendations

Recommendations	References to the PA-related analysis	References to the Programme-related analysis
R1 Programme structure and priorities		
R1.1 Select the programme implementation tools in a more thorough way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools • Analysis of the territorial coverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools in terms of the results • Overall territorial coverage
R1.2 Enhancing the specificity, measurability and ambitiousness of the indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantification of the performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General features and performance of the programme
R2 Programme implementation		
R2.1 Enhance the links between the programme's and the projects' intervention logic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short introduction of the given PA • Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs • Qualitative analysis of the TA
R2.2 Broaden the scope of involved applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of the partnerships • Analysis of the territorial coverage • Durability of the projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the partnerships • Overall territorial coverage • Overall durability of the projects
R2.3 Strengthen the ownership of the programme: consider the involvement of local and regional stakeholders into the programme implementation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of ownership, involvement of relevant partners
R2.4 Further enhance the capacity-building of applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of cross-border relevance • Durability of the projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of the communication of the projects • Overall cross-border relevance of the projects • Overall durability of the projects • Horizontal principles
R2.5 Keep and enhance the good practices of communication		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applied communication tools • Difficulties met during the communication activities from the Programme's side • Evaluation of the communication of the projects

Recommendations	References to the PA-related analysis	References to the Programme-related analysis
R2.6 Consider setting up a reserve fund		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert analysis of the influence factors • External assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies
R3 Programme management structure		
R3.1 Compensate missing human capacities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expert analysis of the influence factors • Capacity and lead time assessment • Summary of the cost efficiency assessments
R3.2 Setting up the missing ties in programme management structure		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity and lead time assessment • Assessment of procedures of the project cycle
R4 Programme procedures		
R4.1 Consider the further simplification of the mechanisms		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of procedures of the project cycle • Results of the simplification • External assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies
R4.2 Keep using and fine-tune the INTERREG+ tool		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations of the evaluation • Results of the simplification
R4.3 Broaden the scope of simplified cost options		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results of the simplification
R4.4 Enhance outcome and activity-based project planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quantification of performance • Efficiency analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General features and performance of the programme • Assessment of procedures of the project cycle
R4.5 Fine-tune the assessment procedures		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of the guiding principles • Assessment of procedures of the project cycle
R4.6 Follow-up the project events from a communication point of view		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregated impacts on the borderscape: Aspect 2: Cross-border cooperation • Programme's communication
R4.7 Follow-up the level of contribution to EU and macro-regional targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes 	

Recommendations	References to the PA-related analysis	References to the Programme-related analysis
R5 Project design and implementation		
R5.1 Improve the cross-border character of the projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of cross-border relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall cross-border relevance of the projects
R5.2 Enhance the durability of project results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Durability of the projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall durability of the projects
R5.3 Encourage the beneficiaries to design their contribution to horizontal principles more seriously		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horizontal principles
R5.4 Enhance the cost-efficiency of the projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary of the cost efficiency assessments
R5.5 Enhance the beneficiaries' communication capacities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme's communication

The above-mentioned recommendations are described more in detail below.

R1 Programme structure and priorities

R1.1 Select the programme implementation tools in a more thorough way

Strategic projects were applied for the first time in the history of the Hungarian-Serbian cross-border programmes. More than 40% of the total programme budget (which is equal to the value of 76 average-size traditional projects) was allocated for the realisation of 5 projects with strategic relevance bringing together 16 beneficiaries (mostly larger territorial or sectoral actors). These large infrastructure developments are undoubtedly significant when speaking about integrated initiatives and the cross-border impact of the CP, but they also have a negative counter-effect: they decreased the programme's ability to involve a wide range of local stakeholders into the implementation, which factor partly determines the quality of cooperation and the internal cohesion of the border region. In order to prevent this phenomenon in the future, efforts should be taken to enable more smaller project partners (PP) to actively take part in the programme.

As a conclusion, the next programmes should consider the selection of programme implementation tools in a more balanced way, together with ensuring a set of priorities (thematic scope), which does not exclude small stakeholders. (E.g. water management interventions are not open to such stakeholders, whereas environment protection, ecotourism would be.)

The implementation of a higher number of small projects would be beneficial in terms of the enhancement of social interconnectivity and mutual trust, since these small projects tend to result in many local events, actions and initiatives attracting residents under the programme's title. Furthermore, the better involvement of citizens and small organisations in the programme implementation also contributes to the ownership of the programme.

Last, but not least, it must also be noted that the additional administrative burdens of the JS caused by the higher number of projects should also be taken into consideration.

R1.2 Enhancing the specificity, measurability and ambitiousness of the indicators

Regarding the output indicators, clear guidance should be provided for the beneficiaries to clarify the measurement method of the different indicator values with examples. The preparation of the examples could also shed light on issues related to the indicators. Instead of percentage, the usage of absolute values would be more preferable, since they are easier to calculate with. More thorough preparation is necessary to estimate the potential result of the programme. It can include a preliminary survey among the potential beneficiaries, but a conceivable unit cost could also be predefined for the different indicators. Moreover, a clearer linkage between the indicators and the allocation for the relevant professional activities is necessary. Due to the possibility of the selection of more indicators it is hard to estimate the cost of the result at the moment, but the issue could be resolved by enhancing the outcome or activity-based budgeting according to *R4.4 Enhance outcome (and activity-based project planning)*.

In order to avoid the issues concerning the result indicators, the following recommendations can be formulated: result indicators should be more ambitious; the data source should be based on confirmed public registers; and all of the indicators should be specific enough to detect the Programme's effect on the results. The fulfilment of the two last aspects at the same time is quite challenging. As the first phase evaluation of the programme concluded, this problem is rooted in a deeper theoretical conflict between the bottom-up and top-down approaches. While at European level, the cumulated values of the indicators have crucial significance in measuring the progress of the Single Market (or the fulfilment of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth), the local stakeholders have different objectives from these EU level objectives (it is mainly true along the external borders). The conflict can be resolved by selecting indicators reflecting the intensity of cross-border flows and integration. To get, and even more to facilitate the generation of this kind of data, long-lasting cooperation of the affected statistical offices would be needed.

R2 Programme implementation

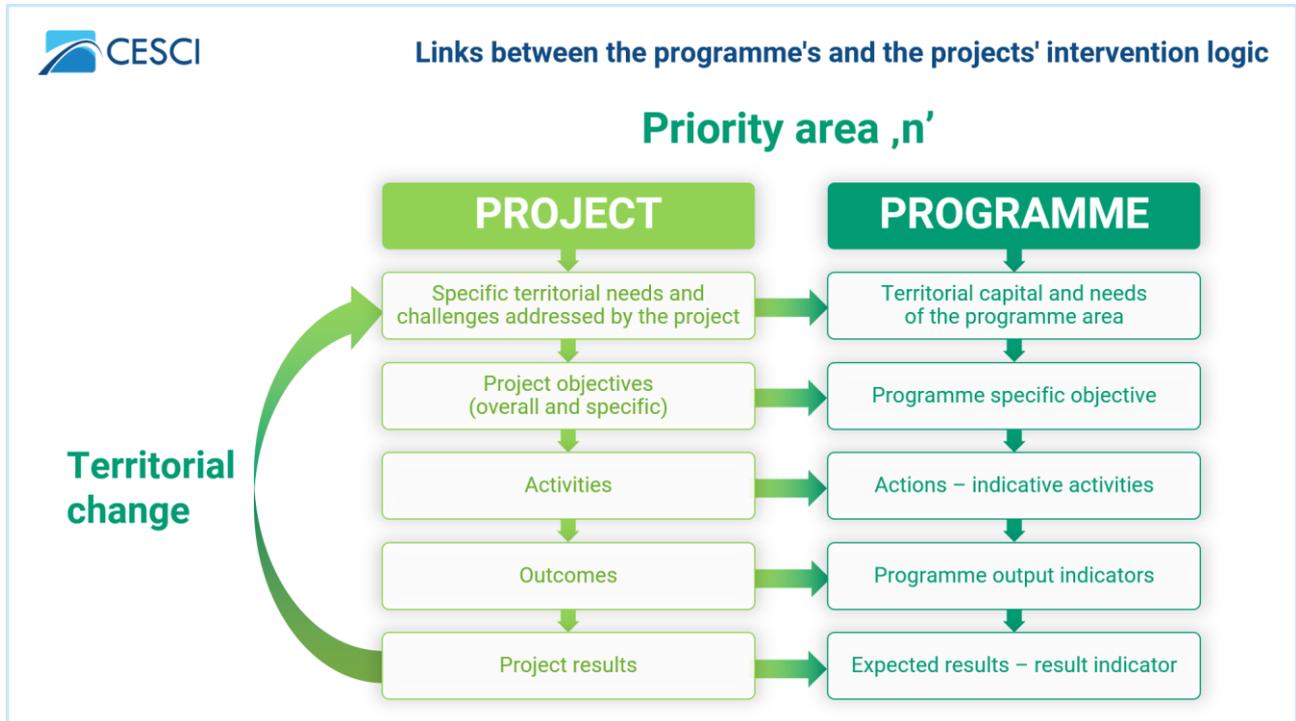
R2.1 Enhance the links between the programme's and the projects' intervention logic

The quality of the cross-border projects designed by the applicants strongly depends on whether the structure of the programme interventions is clear enough. In the current programming period, the intervention logic was described in the CP, in addition the calls for proposals gave textual overviews on the indicative list of eligible activities and target groups, but some crucial pieces of information (like territorial needs to be addressed or the expected results) as well as the interconnections between them were not clearly presented. Moreover, the application form does not necessarily lead the applicants toward structuring the projects in line with the main elements of CP (i.e. how the project objective reacts to the territorial needs, how project activities serve the expected results of both the project and the CP.) In parallel, when analysing the application forms and the INTERREG+ database, evaluators had the impression that applicants reflect on the cornerstones defined by programme documents in a rather heterogeneous manner, the clear presentation of the project's intervention logic and its linkages to the programme intervention logic was missing. This shortcoming was also confirmed by the quality assessors.

It is proposed to bridge this gap in the next programming period through three interventions.

First of all, it would be beneficial to fine-tune the structure of the calls for proposals in order to better present the expected intervention logic, by also adding visual elements (i.e. infographics) to the textual descriptions. See an example below (Figure 7), which might be applied in case of each PA.

Figure 7: Logic of the proposed infographic



Secondly, a minor re-structuring of the application form is also recommended, in order to encourage the applicants to better plan and present their projects' structure in line with the CP's intervention logic.

Last, but not least, it also seems to be important to explain the structure of the intervention logic and the exact definition of its elements (i.e. what is/should be the difference between an output and a result) on the Infodays and/or tutorial videos, etc.

R2.2 Broaden the scope of involved applicants

Both the survey, the analysed application forms and the interviewees' experiences mirrored a high rate of repeating partnerships. These partners have appropriate connections in the cross-border regions, as well as they are familiar with the methodology and technique of designing and implementing CBC projects. On the other hand, newcomers tend to have neither the social capital, nor the experiences on the IPA framework. As a result, their involvement is more difficult to achieve, and that was also reflected in the weakening participation in the programme in certain group of potential applicants (i.e. CSOs, smaller municipalities) and regions (especially Sremska and Južnobanatska districts from Serbia, districts of Kunszentmiklós, Tiszakécske and Makó from Hungary).

In order to achieve a better social and territorial coverage, there is a clear need to attract further stakeholders. To this end targeted communication activities should be carried out on a programme level. On the one hand, the CP should be popularised among the target groups in general, while, on

the other hand. capacity-building info events, easy-to-follow guidelines, face-to-face partner search forums should be organised for the newcomers. Moreover, CfPs for small projects could also mean a solution to this challenge, especially if simplified administration would ease the administrative burdens of the small applicants.

R2.3 Strengthen the ownership of the programme: consider the involvement of local and regional stakeholders into the programme implementation

In general terms, the ownership of the programme has been improved compared to the previous periods: based on the suggestions made by the NUTS III municipalities, NGOs and Chambers take part in the work of the JMC with observer status. Moreover, in line with the 1st Phase Evaluation, local stakeholders (potential applicants and beneficiaries) were involved in the designing process of the next CP. However, further steps can be taken to enhance ownership during the whole life-cycle of the programme implementation.

According to some of the interviewees, local stakeholders' involvement into the programme implementation would be preferred. This could be carried out by further extending the membership of the JMC (not forgetting, at the same time, the conflict of interests) or by organizing regular public consultations before and after the calls for proposals. During these consultations, potential applicants can share their changing needs or reflect on the application and selection procedure both in thematic and administrative terms from time to time.

R2.4 Further enhance the capacity-building of applicants

In the evaluators' point of view, the CP should have a pedagogical mission: through its instruments and CfPs it offers the opportunity to educate the applicants and encourage them to design higher quality projects from several points of view. During the impact assessment, it became clear both according to the databases and the results of the interviews, that key requirements of the programme were not adequately addressed by the applicants. The cross-border character of the projects, approaches toward the durability of the project results, horizontal principles, as well as the design of the communication activities could and should be improved in order to enhance the CP's impact on the border region.

The main tools of building the capacities of the applicants in these terms could be the fine-tuned system of criteria set up by the calls for proposals, as well as the selection procedure. Furthermore, applicants should be assisted in the successful interpretation of these expectations, since the aim is not to (further) narrow the scope of potential applicants. Info events, seminars, on-line digital contents and guides could be the right instruments to achieve this goal.

R2.5 Keep and enhance the good practices of communication

Overall, the programme communication has been operating at a high level of satisfaction, and indicators are not in danger of being unfulfilled. From among the applied communication tools, the official website can be considered as the most crucial communication tool for the programme. Thanks to improvements for the period 2014-2020 Programme's website has a responsive format

enabling the visitors to access it “on the go”, via various mobile devices. Keeping it up-to-date is of utmost importance.

In line with the Communication Strategy the programme tried to focus more on online media. Facebook turned out to be an efficient tool in reaching a greater audience. Other social media platforms could be improved parallel to Facebook communication. In line with the growing trend of visual content, the Programme intently increased, compared to the previous one, the usage of visual tools, such as photography, video material, infographic and the like. These initiatives should be continued.

It was an excellent decision to employ a communication manager around the First Phase evaluation. It is a great loss that there has been no dedicated communication manager in recent times since the former left the job. Hiring a dedicated communications manager would be of paramount importance in the future.

Regarding the beneficiaries' communication, see the '*R5.5 Enhance the beneficiaries' communication capacities*' recommendation.

R2.6 Consider setting up a reserve fund

One of the main challenges considering the second half of the programming period was the price increase, which has been caused by many interlinking external factors (i.e. inflation, lack of building materials, insufficient workforce). The phenomena negatively affected the projects' implementation, especially in those cases where infrastructure development or procurement of equipment had to be carried out. In many cases the technical content of the particular development had to be narrowed down in order to fit into the previously planned financial framework. (See the chapter *4.1.1 Expert analysis of the influences*)

According to some of the interviewees, setting up a reserve fund within the future CP would be advantageous, especially when one considers the still turbulent economic and financial environment. A reserve fund could mean a budgetary framework set aside from the programme budget by the management authorities in order to meet any unexpected future challenges which might risk the smooth implementation, as well as the intended impacts of the programme. It is important to notice, that in the evaluators' point of view, this reserve fund should not offer extra financial support to any projects automatically in case of financial shortages (i.e. caused by underestimated budgets), instead, only those beneficiaries should be compensated who would not be able to achieve the planned project results because of external and unexpected reasons, escalated in the period between the application and the implementation phase, and the missing results would obviously negatively impact the CP. Procedures for the potential use of the reserve fund should be set up by the programme bodies in the beginning of the programming period. In case of no need for such additional funding for the projects' implementation, the remaining EU contribution could be contracted for the implementation of smaller projects at the end of the programming period (considering the n+3 rule).

R3 Programme management structure

R3.1 Compensate missing human capacities

According to the results of the interviews, the programme faces shortages in terms of human capacities. At the Serbian FLC, employment of further 4-5 persons would be necessary for their smooth operation. In turn, it should be also taken into consideration that the workload will be eased because of the further SCOs to be introduced, which is expected to decrease the demand for additional human resources. In addition, at the Managing Authority the employment of one more colleague, to be responsible for monitoring tasks, could lead to a more efficient management.

Last, but not least, the application of the complex public procurement regulation is problematic on the beneficiary level. This is confirmed by the interviewees, the results of the survey, as well as the significant amount of IPA support dedicated to such advisory services (1.1 million € altogether). At the same time, it was noted by the programme bodies that the quality of such external advisory services available in the programme area is often not adequate. Hereby the intervention of the programme bodies used to be necessary for the smooth implementation of the projects, however, they formally do not have the appropriate competencies. In this sense, it would be worth considering to internalise this advisory service into the programme management structure which would contribute to the efficient and timely implementation of the projects and the CP.

R3.2 Setting up the missing ties in programme management structure

The evaluation made it clear that, partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the direct connection between the Hungarian and Serbian FLC bodies has ceased to exist. It is the Joint Secretariat who follows the operation of the controlling system on both sides of the border. At the same time, both the beneficiaries and the programme bodies reported some asymmetry in the FLC procedure: the Hungarian authority assists the beneficiaries in the preparation of the financial reports, while the Serbian one only examines the submitted documentation. As a result, the financial reports of the Serbian beneficiaries tend to contain more mistakes, the correction of which within a formal procedure takes time and leads to difficulties and delays in the project implementation. It is recommended to rebuild the ties between the Hungarian and Serbian parties in order to synchronize the procedures. The additional capacities at the Serbian FLC, described in the previous point, might be also necessary to resolve this problem.

In addition, the colleagues of the JS Antenna experience some discrepancies in the expectations towards them on behalf of the JS and the Serbian National Authority. Hence, the clarification of the JS Antenna's role in the programme implementation would also be beneficial.

R4 Programme procedures

R4.1 Consider the further simplification of the mechanisms

Although the well-functioning electronic application and monitoring system remarkably simplified and shortened, to some extent, all the programme procedures, according to both the programme bodies and the beneficiaries, there is still room for improvement (*See the chapters 4.4.3.3.2*

Assessment of procedures of the project cycle, and 4.4.3.3 Results of the simplification). In the survey, beneficiaries highlighted the wide range of documents to be submitted on-line or in hard copy during the application, contract modification and reporting phases. In addition, the lengthiness of the contracting and the reporting procedures were mentioned as those causing liquidity problems especially for the Serbian beneficiaries.

In terms of the contracting, the possibility to submit the letter of commitment on-line was introduced temporarily because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly shortened and eased the procedure. It is recommended to consider keeping this solution in a way that hard copy versions are still required, but the contracting process can go on when the electronic submission has been made.

Moreover, the length of the controlling procedure could be shortened by decreasing the number of on-the-spot checks (as it is the practice in other European CBC programmes): at the moment, FLC staff has to visit every project at least once, although, ad-hoc sample-based checks would be satisfactory. This measure partly tackled also the human resource shortage at the Serbian FLC body.

Last, but not least, the e-government services tend to expand from time to time on the Hungarian side, which could also provide some room for further simplification (i.e. checking the existence of the legal entities in the official register, instead of calling the applicants to submit an extract from the register).

R4.2 Keep using and fine-tune the INTERREG+ tool

According to the interviews and the questionnaire, all the actors of the programme implementation are mostly satisfied with the newly developed INTERREG+ tool (See the chapter *4.4.3.3 Results of the simplification*), but some remarks were made concerning its fine-tuning:

- Quality assessors criticised the limit on the number of characters at the comment boxes, as well as that they would like to read the proposal and make scores and comments at the same page.
- When reporting staff costs, beneficiaries found the requirements concerning the naming of the uploaded documents too complicated.
- First-level controllers would prefer to have 'download all' buttons for the documents of the Beneficiary Reports, and to be notified via e-mail when beneficiaries upload new documents.
- According to the evaluators, it would be beneficial to specify not only the lot number of the infrastructure locations, but also the municipality concerned.
- See also further recommendations concerning the programme monitoring at recommendation '*R4.4 Enhance outcome (and activity-based project planning)*' and '*R4.6 Follow-up the project events from a communication point of view*'.

To sum up, it is recommended to fine-tune the operating functions of the INTERREG+ tool, as well as to develop and test the relevant functions (i.e. the application function) in order to prepare for the implementation of the next CP.

R4.3 Broaden the scope of simplified cost options

The projects have to be implemented in a transparent way – also in financial terms. At the same time, it should not mean overcomplicated budgeting. Both beneficiaries' and the FLC authorities'

experiences show that the flat-rate option for planning and reporting the staff cost (20% in projects without infrastructure development, otherwise 10%) decrease the workload on both sides (less documentation and less controlling tasks). In parallel, the application of this optional SCO has been extending from one CfP to another (see *Figure 209*). In the 3rd CfP, almost half of the beneficiaries selected this simplified option.

According to the interviews, programme management bodies make efforts to broaden the scope of simplified cost options including obligatory flat-rates for the staff costs, as well as lump sums for some obligatory communication tools and travel and accommodation costs. The results of the current evaluation also confirm the reasonability of these efforts. In addition, the simplification of reporting travel and accommodation costs will be beneficial as well. The assistance provided by the INTERACT, as well as the solutions applied by many European programmes would be a good base for further application.

R4.4 Enhance outcome (and activity-based project planning)

The structure of the project application form calls the applicants to list the planned project outcomes and activities. Outcomes can be defined as the results of certain groups of activities, which should be logically coherent and necessary for developing the outcome. Outcomes must be tangible and measurable that shall be proved by project-level indicators. Project management is a pre-defined group of activities, which cannot be linked to any single outcome, instead, it is a cross-cutting task of the beneficiaries.

On the one hand, evaluators propose to have the project-level (not outcome-related) communication tasks as a mandatory, pre-defined activity group, either within the project management or a separate one.

In addition, based on the experiences of other INTERREG programmes, it would be also beneficial to include further aspects to this outcome-based planning. The estimation of the necessary financial allocation to the outcomes would support the work of the quality assessors (evaluating the necessity and reasonability of the costs). In addition, programme evaluators could also use this additional information, when assessing the fulfilment of the territorial needs or the cost-efficiency of the projects. It won't mean a huge additional burden for the applicants, if the INTERREG+ budget form made it possible to select the relevant outcome from a drop-down list in case of each cost item. Obviously, this requires the further development of the application function of the tool. Furthermore, it might be also advantageous to invite the applicants to reflect on how an outcome contributes to one or more programme-level output indicators. This would also serve the better presentation of the linkages between the programme and projects' intervention logic (see *recommendation 'R2.1 Enhance the links between the programme's and the projects' intervention logic*).

R4.5 Fine-tune the assessment procedures

The quality assessment applied during the programming period was judged to be improvable both by the quality assessors and some programme management bodies. Assessors underlined the asymmetry between the structure of the application form and the assessing questionnaire: in many cases the application form did not give answer to the given question. In addition, it was also

mentioned that the Application Form (AF) does not properly serve the understanding of the projects' intervention logic. These challenges could be handled by fine-tuning the application form as well as the criteria of quality assessment in some cases.

Taking into consideration the significant divergence between the scores given by the different assessors to the same project, it would also be reasonable to better inform the assessors formerly, as well as to hold discussions among the assessors during the assessment procedure with the involvement of JS. In this manner the strategy and the main focuses of the project assessment can be presented and clarified.

In line with this, the increased involvement of the JS into the assessment procedure (in a supporting role) can be also reasoned by the fact that they are in close cooperation with the beneficiaries (especially if we consider the repeating partnerships), and familiar with the different aspects of the project implementation in practice, which could be capitalised during the assessment procedure.

R4.6 Follow-up the project events from a communication point of view

When analysing the impact of the programme, it became clear that the programme supported many thematic and PR/communication events (especially in the frames of PA3) organised by the beneficiaries which targeted those living in the border region. In spite of the fact that it is part of the reporting procedure to create and submit attendance sheets of the project events, there is no programme level monitoring practice concerning the number of events and participants, as well as whether they were able to attract participants from both sides of the border.

Taking into consideration the contribution of these events both to the popularisation and impact of the programme on the cross-border region (see the examination of social connectivity in chapter *4.3.7.2 Aspect 2: Cross-border cooperation*), it seems to be beneficial to gather data via the Interreg+ by adding extra questions/boxes to the reporting form. Again, this requires IT interventions.

R4.7 Follow-up the level of contribution to EU and macro-regional targets

Each programme funded by EU support has to contribute to the all-time EU targets, as well as to the achievement of the macro-regional objectives. In our case, these are the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR: the entire programming area) and the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR: the Serbian part of the programming region). Taking into consideration the current practice of monitoring by the CP, the contribution to the macro-regional strategies is awarded with 1 score during the quality assessment.

In order to better detect the real impacts in these fields, the evaluators propose to follow and assess the achievements on project level on a regular basis in order to intervene if there are remarkable shortages observed.

R5 Project design and implementation

R5.1 Improve the cross-border character of the projects

INTERREG IPA CBC programmes are dedicated to weaken the separating effects of the borders and to contribute to the development of a more integrated cross-border region – in compliance with the EU's Cohesion Policy and its three main pillars (economic, social and territorial cohesion). This integrating factor should be more seriously taken into consideration. The exemplary cross-border projects are those contributing to stronger cohesion and more intensive cross-border cooperation. According to the main conclusions of the analysis, the cross-border character of the programme is stronger than it was in the previous programming period, but there is still more room for further improvement.

In the evaluators point of view, programme bodies should make further efforts to raise the quality of the project proposals in this term. To this end, there would be a need for fine-tuning the calls for proposals and the selection criteria, as well as for additional assistance provided by the Joint Secretariat in the form of seminars, tutorials, handbooks which explain the requirements and promotes best practices from the border region and all over Europe. (See also *recommendation 'R2.4 Further enhance the capacity-building of applicants'*)

R5.2 Enhance the durability of project results

In order to ensure stronger programme impacts on the border region, the projects should have longer perspectives both in terms of results and partnerships. Although the assessment draws a rather positive picture on the length of the partnerships, the interlinkages and synergies between the different projects initiated even by the same partnerships can hardly be detected. In conclusion, the programme should encourage the partners to start long-standing, strategic cooperation and use the CfPs as tools for achieving their long-term strategic goals.

To this end, it would be worth considering to fine-tune the requirements concerning the presentation of the sustainability aspects by the applicants and beneficiaries in a way, which makes them better explore and contextualise their solutions in the application phase. Moreover, the programme should undertake some role in raising the capacities of the potential beneficiaries, in order to make them better design their project proposals both in strategic and operative terms. For instance, the assessment criteria should include factors by which these longer perspectives can be awarded, e.g. the prehistory of the partnership (its length, previous joint projects, events, activities implemented together); future joint plans (regarding the concrete project results and further development of the project; cooperation in other projects, initiatives); tools, activities ensuring the sustainability, further development of the projects and synergies with other initiatives. When fine-tuning the set of criteria, it must be taken into consideration that durability can be interpreted differently in case of an investment in infrastructure compared to small-scale, people-to-people actions.

R5.3 Encourage the beneficiaries to design their contribution to horizontal principles more seriously

Although there is a positive tendency in terms of filling these requirements with content, most of the projects regarded the inclusion of horizontal issues as only a box that had to be ticked. Consequently,

the measures very often just have no real impact. According to some of the interviewees, it is a positive idea to include the currently proposed horizontal principles in the application materials and in some cases, where they organically fit with the nature of the project (i.e. in PA3 or PA4), it is definitely a good requirement.

Obviously, cross-border programmes are not the genuine fields where gender equality or anti-discrimination can easily be implemented. However, these aspects are not insignificant. The applicants should be encouraged to think through these aspects more deeply, e.g. by describing in details, how they intend to overcome the obstacles when disabled people are participating in an event, etc.

The JS should publish a guidance material on horizontal principles elaborated together with an NGO or an expert of the given issues. In addition, dedicated info days might still prove useful.

R5.4 Enhance the cost-efficiency of the projects

Both quality assessors and evaluators experienced that the justification of mostly the costs related to outsourced activities are not always appropriate for assessing their reasonability and proportionality based on the budget plans. This affects the cost-efficiency of the projects, as well as the programme itself.

Even if the main aim is to continue the simplification of the procedures and further decrease the administrative burdens of the beneficiaries, as well as the programme bodies, it is still recommended to encourage applicants to better justify the questionable cost types. This could mean the optimisation of financial planning and reporting in a way, that minor extra tasks are included in case of the allocations to the externalised core activities, while broadening the simplified cost options would mean a significant alleviation on the other side.

R5.5 Enhance the beneficiaries' communication capacities

While the programme is quite well known by the applicants and potential beneficiaries, the general public and national media have no deep knowledge about the achievements or even the existence of the CP – regardless of the efforts made by the JS. At the same time, those are the beneficiaries who actually carry out the majority of measurable communication activities.

The assessment shows that applicants rather see communication activities as forced requirements, in addition they tend to not have the appropriate capacities to design and take efficient communication measures.

In order to improve this, it is recommended to organise communication practice-oriented trainings with the involvement of communication experts.

II. In-depth evaluation

1 Background of the evaluation

1.1 Interpretation of the evaluation task

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 programmes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The three aspects (effectiveness, impact and efficiency) were planned to be assessed together, in a combined way.

Table 9: Timetable of the planned and revised evaluation plan (HUSRB)

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

The evaluation procedure had been designed based on the evaluation plan of the programme and further previous evaluations as models.

Based on the accepted Inception Report, the focus of the evaluation had to be performed in relation among others to

- Impact evaluation of Priority Axes 1-5
- result indicator values in the first half of 2019 and 2021 respectively
- target groups, indicative activities and types of Beneficiaries
- guiding principles
- contribution to the EU 2020 Strategy
- Communication Strategy
- socio-economic analysis of the programme area by the beginning of 2020.

The **scope of the assessment** included three main criteria to be addressed.: effectiveness, efficiency and impact. While effectiveness and efficiency are rather formal criteria of evaluation, impact is much more a matter of content. In the frames of the evaluation the three criteria as follows:

- **Effectiveness** refers to the degree to which set objectives and targets are achieved at the date of evaluation. It refers to the progress made against the planned implementation.
- **Efficiency** refers to the successful use of financial/administrative resources in relation to outputs and results. Successful here means 'optimal' and 'resource-efficient'.

- **Impact** evaluation assesses how the support from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and IPA have contributed to the objectives for each Priority axis (abbreviation: PA). Impact is also referring to the influence that the programme exercises on the internal cohesion of the programming area and the level of cross-border cooperation.

External experts were involved in various ways:

- CESC Balkans was involved, which has an office in Novi Sad, Vojvodina to better channel scientific and professional knowledge and information from the Serbian programme area including, among other, useful information on the influence factors (both implementation and impact) and the regional needs.
- Two experts in relation to Aggregated impacts on the borderscape chapter were involved: Boglárka Kincses and Irén Gábrity Molnár. They helped providing information and analysis on migration, cross-border labour and student mobility and commuting.
- Interviews were carried out with relevant stakeholders, beneficiaries and project partners interested in HUSRB, who have done extraordinary job and gained important experience and lessons learnt.
- Beneficiaries' survey was created and assessed covering various chapters and guiding questions of the evaluation.

The tasks as **deliverables** were defined as follows grouped into the aforementioned phases:

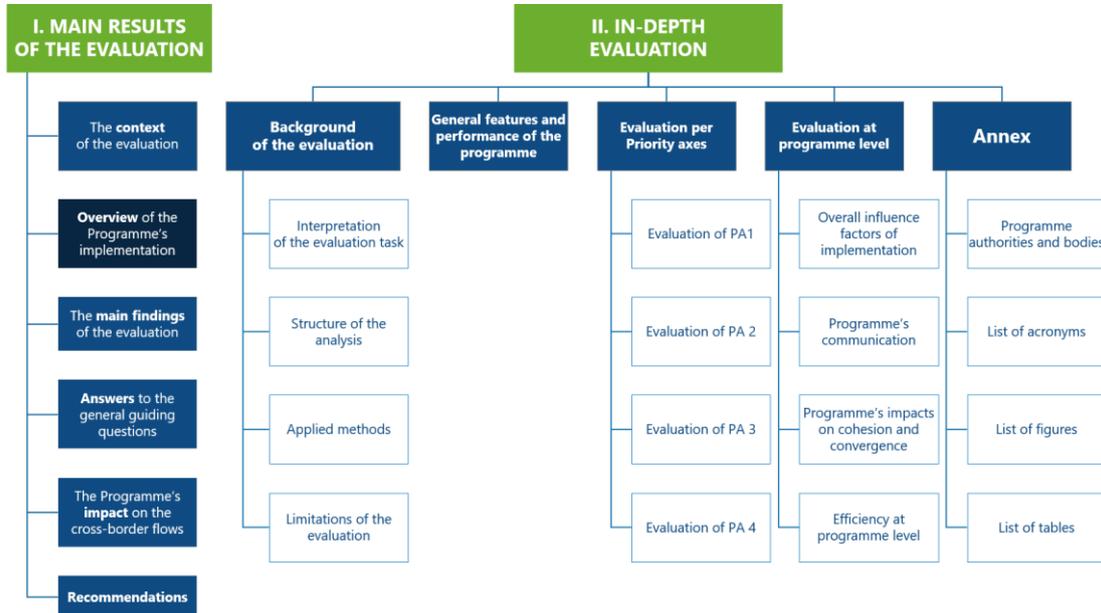
1. Preparation included:
 - a. Drafting of the inception report
 - b. Having the first overall meeting with the partners including the MA and NA
2. Pooling information phase included:
 - a. Gathering and processing data and information from monitoring system
 - b. Face-to-face or online interviews
 - c. On-line survey
 - d. Analysis of territorial statistics
3. Producing materials phase included:
 - a. Carrying out evaluations and analyses
4. Fine-tuning phase included:
 - a. Fine-tuning meetings
 - b. Redaction
 - c. Second overall meeting
 - d. Delivery
 - e. Presentation at the JMC meeting
 - f. Closing overall meeting.

1.2 Structure of the analysis

The document is made up by two main sections: *I. Main results of the evaluation* and *II. In-depth evaluation*. The first section's main purpose is to set the context of the document, offer an overview

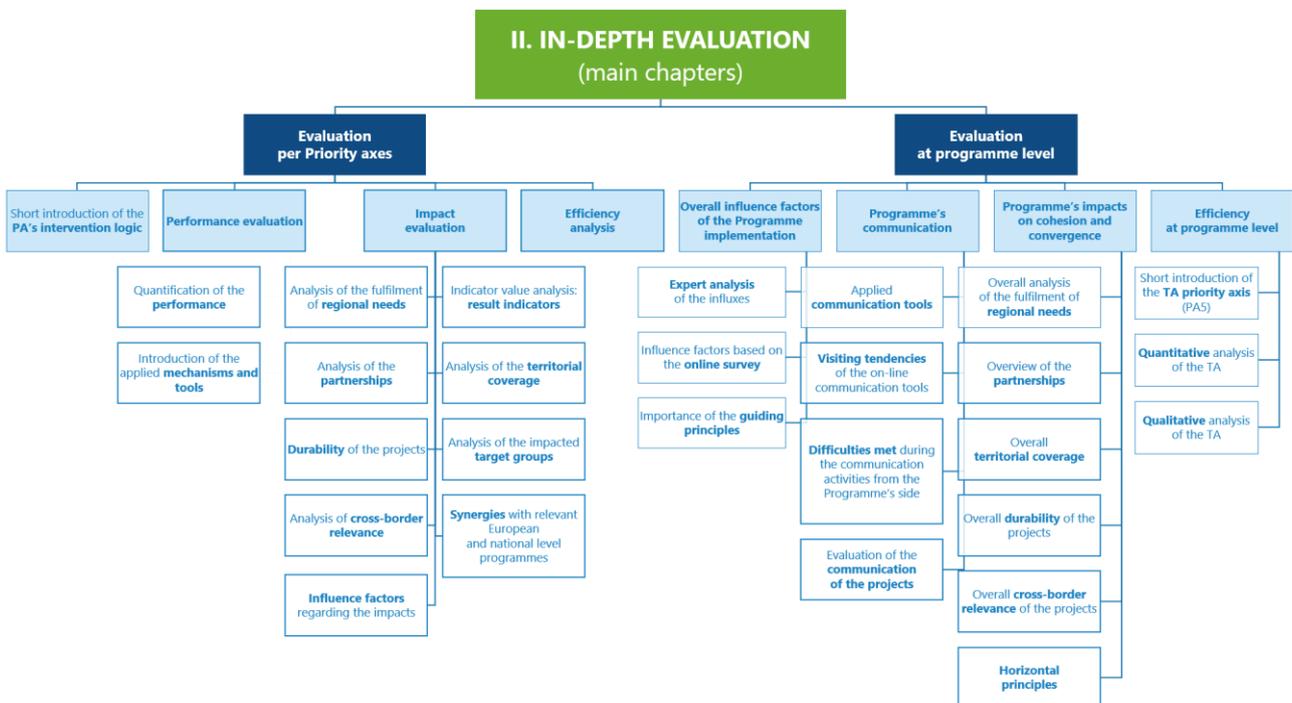
of the Programme's implementation, present the main findings and answers to the guiding questions. Then the second section of the evaluation details the analysis.

Figure 8: Structure of the document



The main chapter of the document, *II. In-depth evaluation*, is divided into two parts. The first offers an evaluation per Priority Axes, which is followed by an evaluation at the programme level.

Figure 9: Structure of the evaluation chapter



The structure of the evaluation per Priority axes is the same for each PA: first the given PA is described, then its performance evaluation is carried out, which is followed by its impact evaluation and the efficiency analysis.

The evaluation at the programme level begins with the analysis of the influence factors based on an expert analysis and the online survey of the beneficiaries then highlights the way the guiding principles influence the implementation. This chapter contains the programme's communication analysis which is extended also to discussing it on the project level. Then the programme's impacts on cohesion and convergence is discussed from various angles. This section also contains a subchapter dedicated to the aggregated impacts on the borderscape which follows CESCO's cross-border territorial impact assessment method to give an estimation about the success of the programme in the sense of the fundamental objectives of the cross-border programmes, such as the reduction of the borders' barrier effect, and the valorisation the border regions territorial capital. The evaluation chapter finished with an efficiency analysis that contains also the assessment of the technical assistance Priority axis (PA5).

The Annex chapter contains those factual lists that are supporting the evaluation process

1.3 Applied methods

Interviews compiled by CESCO based on the guiding questions of the evaluation agreed jointly by the bodies and CESCO were inducted with several relevant stakeholders including programme bodies, beneficiaries covering owners of strategic projects, sectorial experts from the thematical fields of every PA defined in the programme. Several in-depth interviews were done mostly via online platforms such as Zoom. Some other interviews were done more similarly to a written list of questions to which the partners could react in a written form of answers. The types of interviewees were as follows:

- Programme bodies: Joint Secretariat, Joint Secretariat Antenna, Managing Authority, member of the National Authority from Serbia, member of the Programming Committee; member of the Joint Monitoring Committee, member of the First Level Control from Serbia and from Hungary;
- water directorates: Lower Danube Valley Water Directorate, Lower Tisza District Water Directorate;
- economic and business organisations: Hungarian-Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- cross-border development organisations: Danube-Criş-Mureş-Tisa Euroregion (DKMT Euroregion);
- sectorial experts, researchers: experts on cross-border migration, student and labour mobility;
- organisations responsible for tourism development and destination management: from Móra-Tourist and Szeged Tourinform;
- cultural institutions, cultural organisers: Türr István Museum, EXIT Foundation (Exit Festival).

Along with former applications of the beneficiaries, the **INTERREG+ database** was used. It contained detailed information on all the projects regardless their status. The data from it was extracted and an important source in order to gain relevant information on multiple aspects: during the performance evaluation; implementation progress (quantitative data of the performance; projects' communication), the impact evaluation (fulfilling the regional needs; indicator value analysis: result

indicators; factors, that strengthen the cross-border region's cohesion: Territorial coverage; Target groups; Cross-border relevance; Partnerships; Durability of the projects) and Impacts on cohesion and convergence (Overall analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs; Overall territorial coverage; Overview of the partnerships; Overall durability of the projects; Aggregated impacts on the target groups; Contribution to EU2020 targets and EUSDR priorities (negative – neutral – positive / indirect – direct); Results on the field of the horizontal principles (promotion equality between men and women and to promote non-discrimination)); and at the all stages of the efficiency analysis.

The original **quality assessment of the applications** was also used during the evaluation. In certain cases, it was worth taking into consideration what the assessors say about the qualities of the given projects in order to deepen the understanding of project development.

The **online survey** was created in order to channel the opinion of the applicants and beneficiaries of the programme, and gain valuable direct information on their opinion, experience and ideas to help making improvements to the new Programme. the programme. A total number of 82 filled questionnaires were received of which 68 was decided to be useful, while the rest had to be disregarded (mainly due to duplications and data protection issues). The highest number of participants (37) filled the questionnaire in relation to PA3, followed by PA4 (15), PA2 (10) and PA1 (6). Taking into account the distribution of project partners, similar number of Lead Partners (11) and Partners (10) filled in the questionnaire from Hungary. In the case of Serbia, many Partners (28) participated, two times more than of Serbian Lead Partners (19). Overall representation of the Serbian side was significant, 47 persons answered the questions from Serbia in total.

GIS-based territorial analysis was carried out using CESCO's own methodology of cohesion analysis, which takes into account the factors that strengthen or weaken cohesion in a given cross-border area. This method was applied in order to support especially the chapters regarding regional needs and territorial coverage. Various maps were drawn to help understanding and evaluating the impacts achieved within the given PA through giving visualised analysis of fulfilling the regional needs and factors, that strengthen the cross-border region's cohesion. The evaluation process included the data collection, database building and processing phases which helped writing the cohesion analysis and creating all the related maps to give a more comprehensive picture on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme.

At last, but not least, **content analysis of policies and related planning documents** took place. Many different concepts, strategies, action plans and policy priorities were taken into account in the light of the CP. In the frames of the analysis of contribution of a certain project to the Priority Areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) as well as to the headline targets of the EU2020 Strategy, two features of the projects descriptions in particular were analysed: 1. the effects of the projects (negative, neutral, or positive); 2. direct/indirect features of the projects. the synergies between the projects and the related European and national level programmes will be shown. The goal was also to analyse which plans supported the realisation of the related regional needs and challenges and goals of the PA, and how they took place, which subtopics were addressed. Furthermore, the influence effects of the different programmes including INTERREG, national, operational, and other programmes on the impacts of the PAs were also analysed. This method helped answering the question: To what extent does the programme add benefits to cross-border

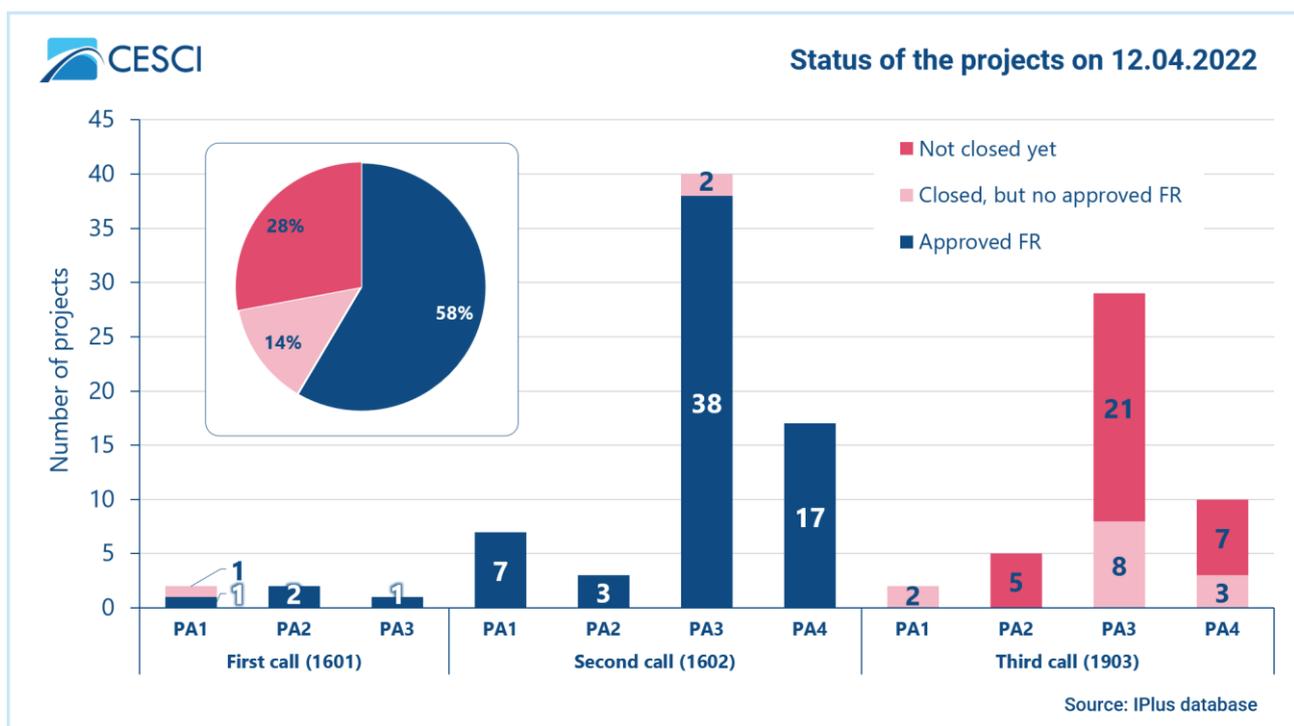
regional development and how does it complement and enhance the effect of other related policies or strategies?

1.4 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 some limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting its results.

Firstly, the cut-off date of the evaluation was set to be 12 April 2022 which has a series of consequences. One of the most serious one being that out of the 118 projects only 69 (constituting a mere 58.4%) has been closed with an approved final report. Even though an additional 16 has been thematically closed at that point, but it was still lacking an approved final report which influenced the amount of data available. Naturally, the 33 still running projects' exact results was problematic to be taken into consideration, thus the conclusions might not necessarily mirror the final status. This problems with the project closures overstretching the cut-off date affect individual PAs differently and are, by definition, closely related to which CfP the project belongs to.

Figure 10: The status of the projects at the cut-off date



Secondly, the switch from IMIS to Interreg+ platform took place during the realisation of the programme which was a development welcomed by all the actors. Despite of this the change was not entirely problem free as the data migration posed some unforeseen challenges (this issue is further detailed in the chapter on 'Results of the simplification') and also the quality of the data depends largely on the beneficiaries' thoroughness (for instance marking the final reports). This caused a need to verify and correct some of the INTERREG+ data based on the JS's offline database.

Furthermore, the inadequate data sources pose in some cases a severe limitation. The lack of relevant statistical data in certain cases made the calculation of complex indexes impossible. This is especially true for the sections on “Borderscape” where in-depth analysis of the different factors such as cross-border flows, cross-border cooperation and people would require the existence of such a broad-scale dataset that reaches far out of the scope of the present analysis. The comparable data collection of the number of cross-border joint ventures, number of their employees and value of their annual turnover; the number of cross-border service contracts between institutions; or the mental maps of the border citizens – to only name a few – would be the coordinated task of national statistical offices and/or academic research groups, nonetheless these data would have made the evaluation more rounded.

Finally, there is one methodological shortcoming that need to also be taken into consideration. In order to make the analysis as thorough as possible, qualitative data collection methods were also used, such as an online survey among the applicants and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with local experts. Even though, these methods ensure that various viewpoints and experiences could be collected, they are not inherently flawless. Since the respondents participated in the survey on a voluntary basis, there might be a self-selection and response bias present in the sample. Also, the respondents were aware that the questionnaire does not influence their current and future projects in any way, which might have caused them to take less care in properly answering the questions, but even with the best intentions, mistaken input could happen.

The other more specific difficulties that are affecting the programme implementation are discussed at the relevant sections of the evaluation.

2 General features and performance of the programme

Concerning the territorial scope of the INTERREG – IPA CBC Hungary-Serbia Programme (hereinafter also referred to as CP, Cooperation Programme or Programme) the same area was delineated as in the frames of the previous Cooperation Programme (2007-2013) between the two countries. Interreg-IPA CBC Hungary-Serbia is the fourth generation of the cross-border cooperation programmes in the Hungary-Serbia border region.

The following two NUTS level III regions ('vármegye') are covered by the Cooperation Programme in Hungary:

- Csongrád-Csanád county;
- Bács-Kiskun county.

Figure 11: Map of the programme area



Map of the programme area

The seven territorial units ('okrug') which are equivalent regions to the Hungarian ones and are covered by the Programme in the non-Member State Serbia are as follows:

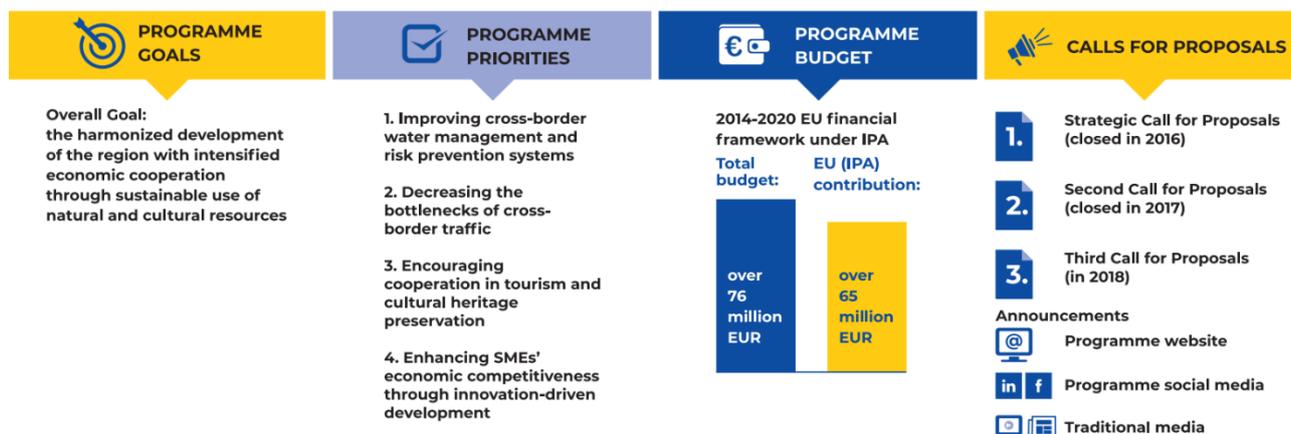
- West Bačka District (Zapadnobački upravni okrug)
- North Bačka District (Severnobački upravni okrug)
- North Banat District (Severnobanatski upravni okrug)
- South Bačka District (Južnobački upravni okrug)
- Central Banat District (Srednjobanatski upravni okrug)
- South Banat District (Južnobanatski upravni okrug)
- Srem District (Sremski upravni okrug)

The Programme covers 34 335 km² (larger than that of Belgium) and affects 2.76 million inhabitants (similarly to the population size of Latvia).

The Programme was approved by the European Commission (EC) by its decision C(2015) 9488 on December 15, 2015. It relies on the Regulation (EC) No 231/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council and the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 447/2014 (IPA II Implementing Regulation).

The total EU contribution to the Interreg-IPA CBC Hungary-Serbia programme (ERDF/IPA-Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) is 65 124 000 EUR. Taking into consideration the national counterpart (including also the own contribution of project partners), the total budget of Programme is 76 616 474 EUR.

Figure 12: Overview of the Programme¹⁷



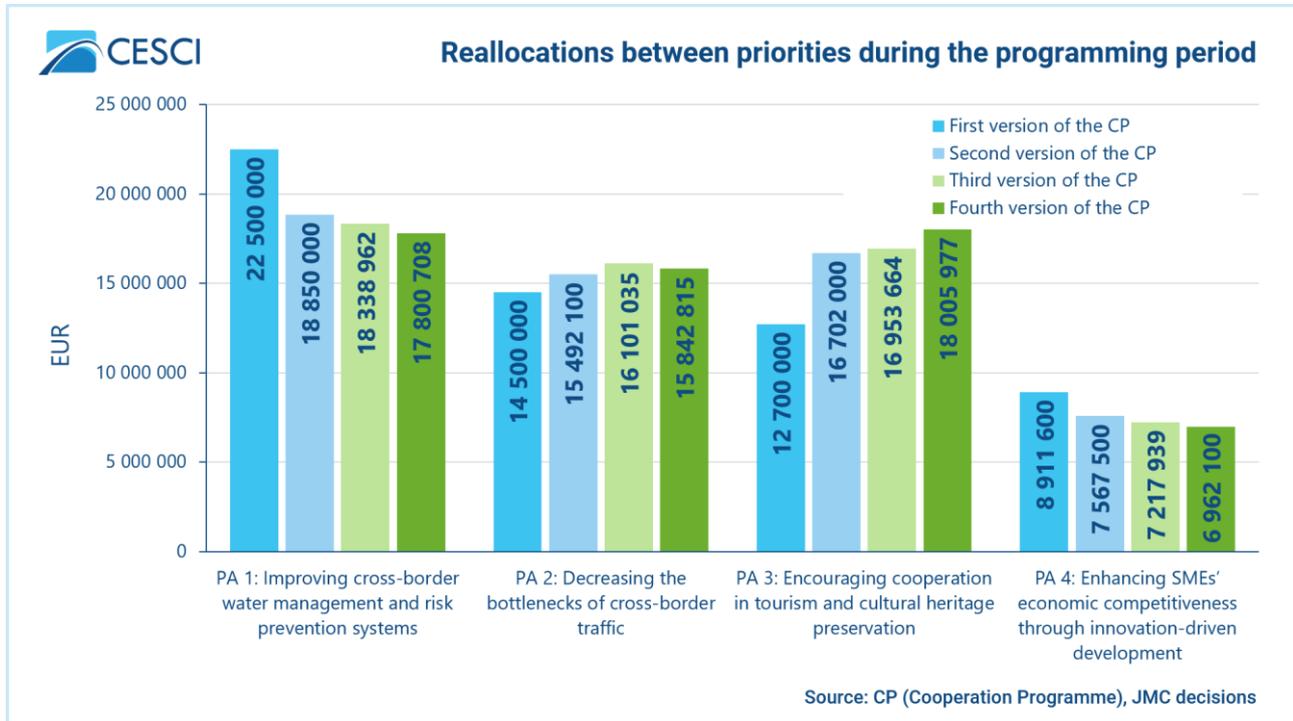
The core of the CP is the programme goal which aims to achieve the harmonized development of the region with intensified economic cooperation through sustainable use of natural and cultural resources. In order to fulfil this expectation, the total allocated money was over 76 million EUR out of which over 65 million EUR was ensured by the EU (IPA contribution). This programme budget was divided among four Priority axes which gathered the applications by thematical focus. The process of the applications was determined by three CfPs which were closed in 2016, 2017 and 2018. The 1st CfP was a restricted one, since it focused on the strategic projects, whereas the 2nd and 3rd CfPs were open CfPs which provided opportunities for the regular (traditional) projects.

Since there was a perceived difference between how the Programme originally allocated the funds to the different PAs and the need and project ideas of the potential beneficiaries, the Programme Bodies exercised flexibility and within the framework of the current rules and regulations redistributed the funds. This reallocation took place in three stages: one substantial and two non-substantial steps. The second version of the CP compared to the original one reduced the funds for PA1 (-3,65 million EUR) and PA4 (-1,34 million EUR) and increased it for PA2 (+992 100 EUR) and PA3 (+4,02 million EUR). This bigger change was followed by two non-substantial one meaning that the managing authority was able to transfer during the programming period an amount of up to 8% of the allocation of a priority and no more than 4% of the programme budget to another priority of the same programme. These changes complied with all regulatory requirements and were approved by the Joint Monitoring Committee in advance. The second non-substantial reallocation has been approved through the Decision No. 126/2021 on May 7, 2021. According to this final state of the

¹⁷ Source: <http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com/en/file/1323/>

budget allocation compared to the first version of the CP PA1 was reduced by 16.22%, PA2 was increased by 6.84%, PA3 was also increased by 31.51% and PA4 was reduced by 15.08%. The evaluation considers these figures.

Figure 13: Reallocations between priorities during the programme period



As it was mentioned before, the applied mechanism of the programme launched restricted CfP to ensure appropriate amount sources for the implementation of higher scale projects with strategic relevance. The aim of this mechanism was to achieve stronger cross-border cooperation and cohesion by higher resource allocation. This higher allocation is observable in the minimum amount of IPA allocations per project, since it was 4 million EUR under PA1 and 2 million EUR under PA2 and PA3. The restriction of the CfP was due to the fact that the scope of eligible applicants was more determined, since only the most competent actors with adequate human and financial capacities could take part in the projects. Additionally, the 1st CfP became the restricted one, because in this case the strategic projects had plenty time for implementation.

The specific objectives (SO) of the different PAs covered a wide range of activity types from nature protection until the operation of SMEs. The PA1 dealt with the improvement of cross-border water management and risk prevention systems. Within the PA, the main topics were the prevention of droughts and floods and to improve the quality of water bodies and nature protected areas in the region. The PA2 targeted to decreasing the bottlenecks of cross-border traffic, which fostered the enhancement of the border-crossing capacities and the usage of sustainable transport modes. The PA3 focused on the better cooperation in tourism and cultural heritage preservation, allowing to create a commonly coordinated cross-border tourism destinations with joint brand and communication tools. In addition, it has provided framework for cultural, sport, leisure people-to-people and institutional cooperation initiatives. Finally, the PA4 was concerned with the enhancement of SME's economic competitiveness through innovation-driven development. This PA promoted the establishments of cross-border scholarships and the growth of SMEs' capabilities and

employment potentials by the usage of new technologies and processes, as well as through social entrepreneurship.

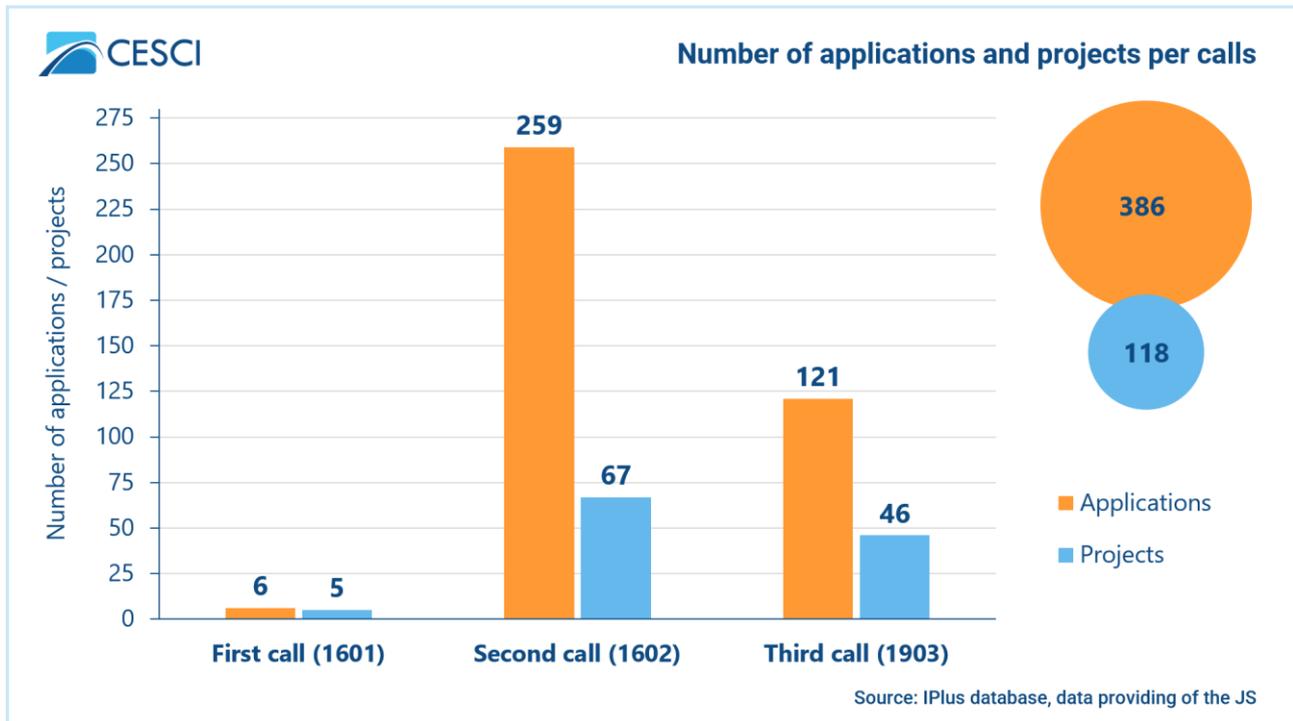
The following table (*Table 10*) indicates the planned available IPA funds by CfPs. As the columns show, during the restricted 1st CfP there were no allocations to PA4, due to this fact there were no strategic project under this PA. The largest value (24.8 million EUR) was assigned to the 1st CfP, which contained 44% of the total IPA fund, since those (strategic) projects that were implemented under this CfP had the greatest volumes with the biggest cross-border effects. Regarding the two open CfPs, 38% of the IPA fund (21.5 million EUR) was linked to the 2nd CfP, whereas the 3rd CfP could provide 10.38 million EUR (18%) at the end of the programme.

Table 10: Planned available IPA funds by CfPs

	Name of the PA	1st restricted CfP (1601)	2nd open CfP (1602)	3rd open CfP (1901)
PA1	Improving cross-border water management and risk prevention systems	13 500 000	5 000 000	1 000 000
PA2	Decreasing the bottlenecks of cross-border traffic	7 900 000	6 000 000	2 000 000
PA3	Encouraging cooperation in tourism and cultural heritage preservation	3 400 000	5 500 000	4 000 000
PA4	Enhancing SMEs' economic competitiveness through innovation-driven development	-	5 000 000	3 380 000

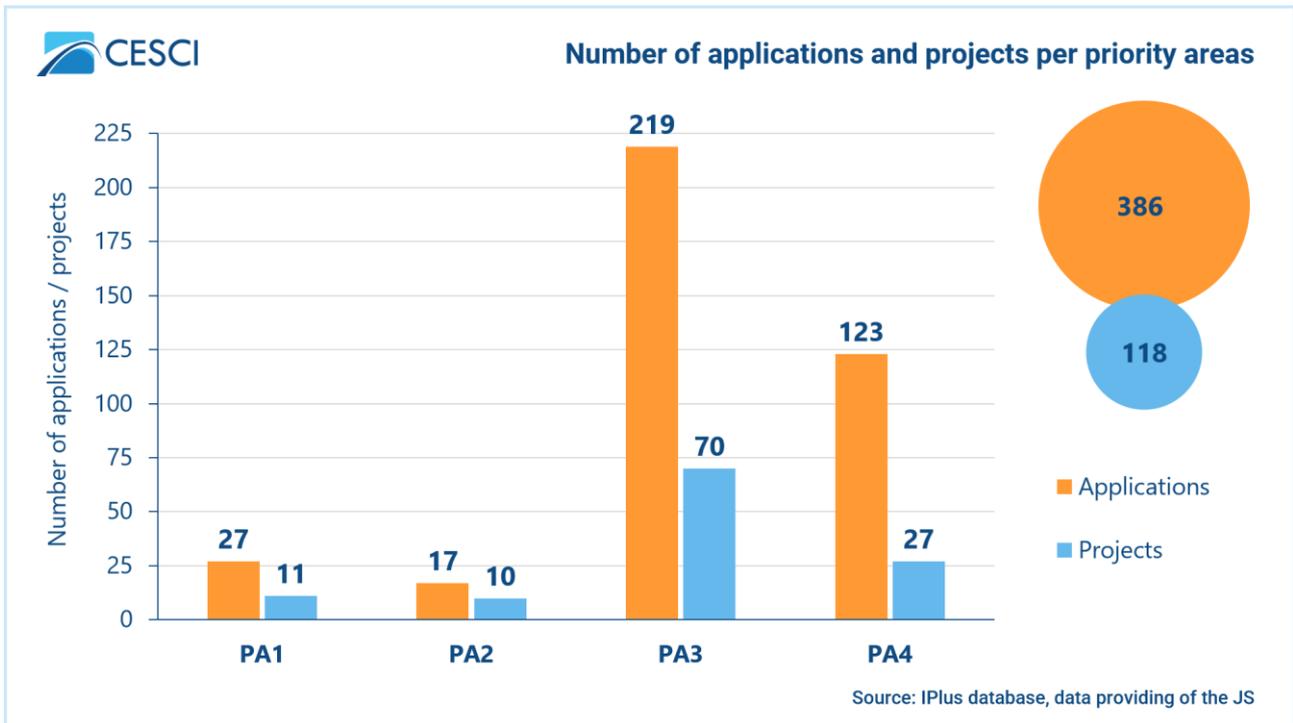
The fulfilment of the determined programme goal was supported by 386 applications out of which 118 became projects, which means nearly 70% of the applications was not realised, at least within the framework of the current IPA programme. The following chart (*Figure 14*) shows the distributions of these **applications and projects by CfPs**. The highest number of applications (259 units) and projects (67 units) was assigned to the 2nd CfP (the first open CfP for proposals of the programme period), and the most considerable difference was registered here too, since the percentage of unchosen application was 74%. This value under the 3rd CfP was 62% with 121 applications and 46 projects. With regard to the first, restricted CfP, 6 applications were submitted and only one could be financed because of quality reasons.

Figure 14: Number of applications and projects per CfPs



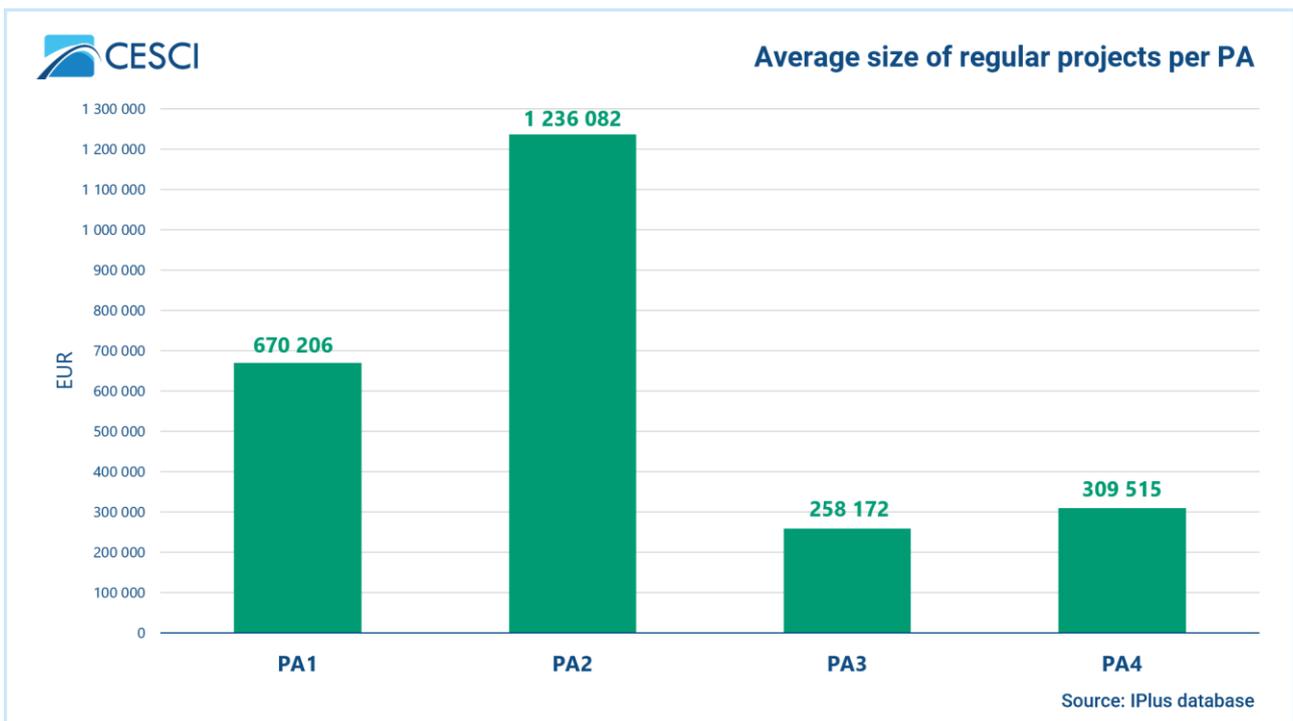
Focusing on the **number of applications and projects by PAs**, it is noticeable that most of the applications and projects belonged to the PA3 (applications: 219 units; projects: 70 units out of which 1 is strategic one) and PA4 (123 units; 27 units), whereas the PA1 (27 units; 11 units including 2 strategic projects) and PA2 (17 units; 10 units including 2 strategic) incorporated less than 30 applications and 15 projects. Owing to this result, the ratio of unchosen applications was the highest in the case of PA3 (68%) and PA4 (78%). The great difference in the number of applications per PA can be reasoned by the varying thematic and financial features of the Priority Axes. Taking into consideration both capacity and competency aspects, the PA3 (tourism, culture, sport) and PA4 (SME, social entrepreneurship) have been open for a wider range of potential applicants, while PA1 and PA2 called for the cooperation of public authorities and some professional actors being active in the fields of water management, environment protection and transport.

Figure 15: Number of projects per PAs



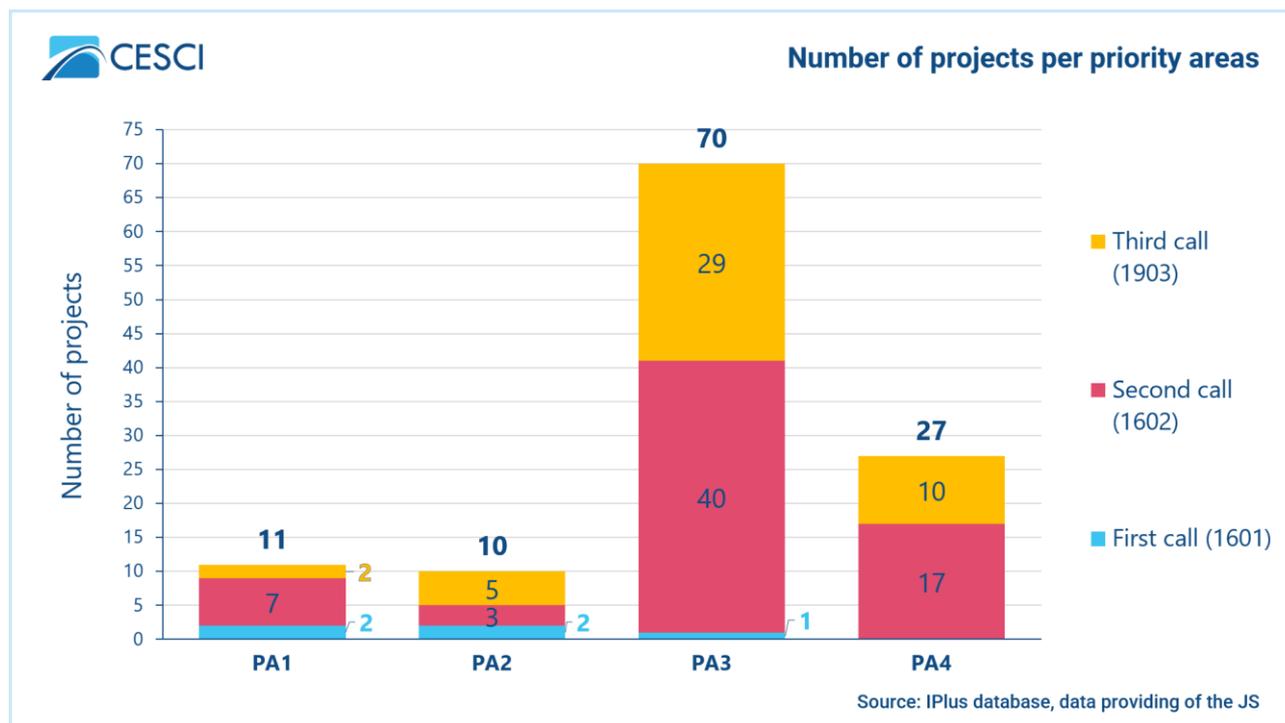
Taking into account only the number of projects, the highest share of the projects belonged to PA3 (59%) and PA4 (23%), meanwhile the ratios related to PA1 (9%) and PA2 (8%) were below 10%. It must be noticed here, that within the open CfPs PA3 and PA4 offered support for smaller-scale, rather soft initiatives, while the other to PAs gave the framework of investments in infrastructure. As a result, PA3 and PA4 are characterised by numerous, projects with lower values (below 300 000 EUR), albeit within PA1 and PA2 the resources are concentrated into a significantly smaller number of projects.

Figure 16: Average size of regular projects per PAs



Comparing the PAs according to the number of projects, the share of strategic projects did not exceed 20%, the share of 2nd CfP-related projects was always at least 30% and the share of 3rd CfP's projects fluctuated between 18% and 50%, in line with the remaining budgetary and the missing performance framework (achievement of the indicators' target value). The highest ratio of strategic projects was under PA2 (20%), the 2nd CfP's projects were the most dominant under PA1 (64%), whereas the 3rd CfP-related project achieved the highest proportion in the PA2 (50%). All in all, the PA3 and PA4-related 2nd and 3rd CfPs implemented the most projects during this programme period.

Figure 17: Number of projects per PAs



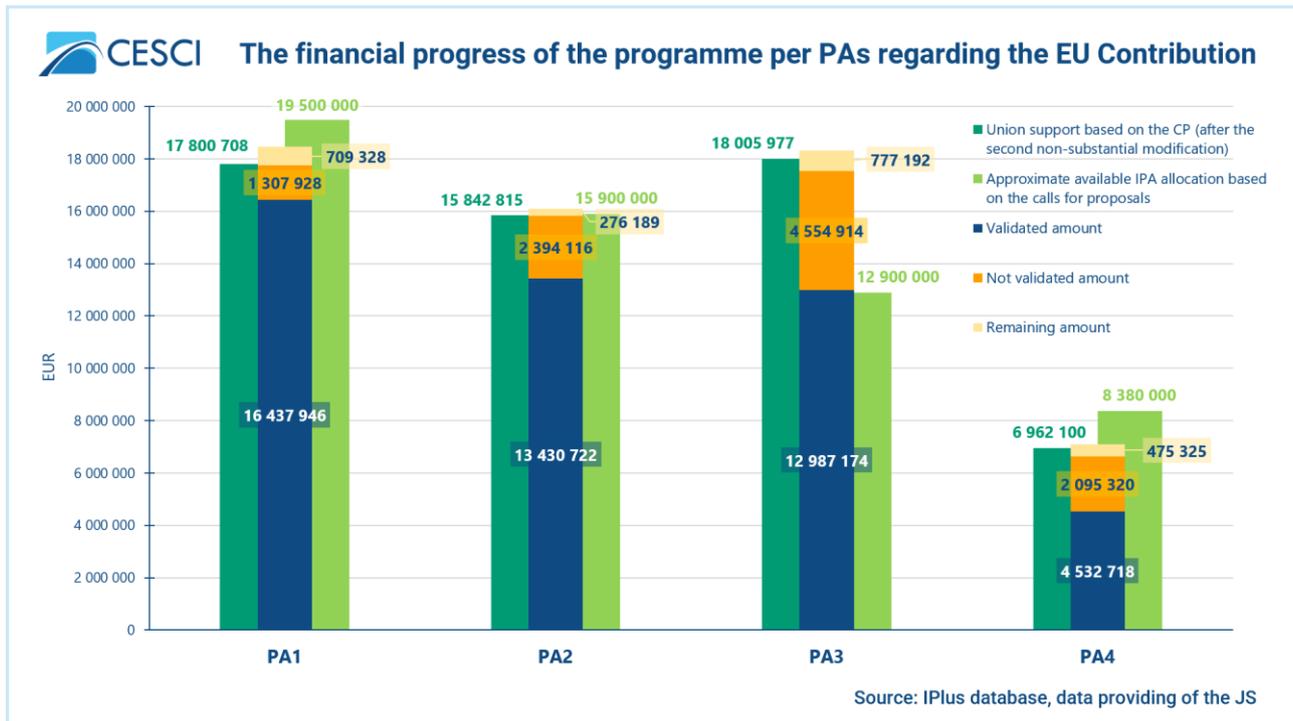
Regarding the evaluation of the **financial allocation**, the evaluators calculated with the new values of the 4th version of the CP (which represents the current condition), but previously there was also a 2nd modification which caused significant reorganisations of the allocations. The 2nd modification was necessary since some specific indicators had not been chosen or the fulfilment of the target values was not satisfactory, but during the modification the interests of applications about the different PAs was also considered. As the already on-going projects of PA1 ensured the achievements of the given indicators, and the quality of the received applications under PA4 was low, the modification of the allocated money of PA1 and PA4 decreased. On the other hand, the value of the allocation was increased in the case of PA2 and PA3. Since there were two indicators under PA2 (O/I 2.1 and 2.6) where the achievement of the targets was not guaranteed by the already existing projects, furthermore PA3 had the highest interest by the applicants and the publicity and awareness of the programme needed to be improved, therefore the increasement of the allocation under these PAs is justified. In the end of 2021, the 4th version appeared which reallocated 1 052 313.03 EUR to PA3 from the other three PAs in order to enable the contracting of the selected projects from the reserve list. Comparing the amount of allocations between the CP and CfPs, in the case of PA1 and PA4 the value of the contribution under CfPs was larger than in the CP by 1.4 million – 1.7 million EUR, while in the case of PA2 the difference was only 57 185 EUR. On the other hand, owing to the modifications,

the allocated money to the PA3 in the CP significantly exceeded (by 5 105 977 EUR) the aggregated value of the CfPs. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the budget under PA1, PA2 and PA3 surpassed 15 million EUR, the allocation of the PA4 was below 7 000 000 EUR.

Taking into consideration the **status of project implementation** at the cut-off date (April 12, 2022), 72% of the projects (85 units) were closed and there were only 33 projects (28%) which had been still running. The projects of the 1st and 2nd CfPs were closed successfully, and only the 3rd CfP's projects were under implementation since the end date of these projects is mostly 2022. However, among the closed projects there were projects which did not have final report and their administrative works were in progress. On programme level, more than half of the projects (58.5%; 69 projects) had approved final report, while 13.6% (16 projects) was closed with remaining administrative works. With this aspect, the proportion of projects with approved final reports was 80% (4 units) under the 1st CfP, 97% (65 units) under the 2nd CfP and zero under the 3rd CfP. It shows that the closed projects without approved final report was not higher than 30% per CfPs (1st CfP 20%; 2nd CfP 3%; 3rd CfP 28.3%) and just the 3rd CfP had non-closed projects (33 units) which gave 71.7% of the last call-related projects.

On PA level, all projects were accomplished under PA1 since these had strategic relevance with early start date. The highest proportion of closed projects was under PA4 (20 projects) which gave 74% of the total PA4-related projects, but under PA3 the ratio of the closed projects achieved 70% too (49 projects). By contrast, under PA2, the share of the closed projects gave only the half of the total projects (5 units). As it was mentioned above, there were closed projects with no approved final report. Taking into account the total projects, the highest ratio of these projects (without approved final report) was registered under PA1 (27%; 3 projects), while this value was lower than 20% in the case of PA3 (14%; 10 projects), PA4 (11%; 3 projects) and PA2 (0%). It represents that the proportion of closed projects with final report gave at least half of the total projects per PA (PA1: 73% and 8 units; PA2: 50% and 5 units; PA3: 56% and 39 units; PA4: 63% and 17 units).

Figure 18: The financial progress of the programme per PAs regarding the EU Contribution



In terms of the **financial progress of the CfPs**, the contracted EU Contribution can be classified into three categories. The first one is the certificated or validated money, where not just the projects' content but the administrative works are also closed. Regarding the non-validated money, the content of the project has been closed, but the administrative tasks has been continuously proceeding after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Finally, the rest of the EU Contribution gives the remaining category. The ratio of validated allocation was the highest in the case of the first two CfPs (PA1 93%; PA2 92%), where the exact sum was 22 627 422.29 EUR under the 1st CfP and 22 171 122.08 EUR under the 2nd CfP. By contrast, this ratio under the 3rd CfP was only 22% (2 590 015.28 EUR). Owing to these proportions, the ratio of not validated sum was especially high in the case of the 3rd CfP (78%; 9 156 406.73 EUR), while under the 1st CfP it was only 4% (871 946.29 EUR) and 1% under the 2nd CfP (323 925.34 EUR). This notable ratio of not validated sum under the last CfP is understandable since the scheduling did not provide enough time yet to validate all of these projects. All in all, the allocations were well absorbed since the ratios of remaining sums did not exceed 6%: it was 4% (701 939.44 EUR) under the 1st CfP, 6% (1 536 094.65 EUR) under the 2nd CfP and zero under the 3rd CfP.

On PA level, the ratio of validated allocations was more than 80% in the case of PA1 (89%; 16 437 945.54 EUR) and PA2 (83%; 13 430 722.33 EUR), but under the other two PAs the ratios were also above 60% (PA3: 71% and 12 987 173.96 EUR; PA4: 64% and 4 532 717.82 EUR). Regarding the non-validated sums, this type of money was below 30% in every PA, but under PA1 (7%; 1 307 928.03 EUR) and PA2 (15%; 2 394 115.88 EUR) it did not exceed 15%, while under PA3 (25%; 4 554 914.31 EUR) and PA4 (29%; 2 095 320.13 EUR) the ratio was above 20%. Focusing on the remaining sums, the ratio of these values did not surpass 10%, since under PA2 it was 2% (276 188.72 EUR), under PA1 and PA3 was 4% (709 328.06 EUR and 777 191.81 EUR), while in the

case of the PA4 it was 7% (475 325.49 EUR). In conclusion, the ratio of validated allocations is decreasing towards the PAs with higher number.

With a special attention to the **strategic projects**, it can be observed, that during the 1st CfP, in 2016, it was envisaged to allocate a 24.8 million EUR, 42.31% of the total financial framework available within CP allocation to the strategic projects. Out of the 6 proposals, five priority projects were selected for a total value of 24.2 million EUR, the implementation of which was closed between the end of 2019 and the middle of 2021. The total budget of the 5 projects verified by the programme authorities was 22.6 million EUR, which meant some decrease in the allocations. This decrease can be reasoned by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and some slight changes in the infrastructure works (see the detailed explanation in the PA-specific chapters¹⁸). In spite of the modifications and limitations, it can be said that all 5 projects reached its original goals according to the plans. It is worth mentioning that one of the strategic projects (WASIDCA) has not submitted final report yet, therefore the validated budget under PA1 will increase, however this change is not enough to eliminate the distinction between the validated and planned allocations.

All in all, it is expected (projects of the 3rd CfP is still on-going) that 41.29% of the available financial framework will be covered by the strategic projects by the end of the programming period.

Table 11: Financial allocation of the strategic projects

Priority axis	Number of strategic projects	Envisaged allocation to strategic projects		Planned allocation to contracted strategic projects		Validated allocation contracted strategic projects	
		IPA support (EUR)	% *	IPA support (EUR)	% **	IPA support (EUR)	% **
PA1	2	13 500 000.00	60%	13 328 123.97	74.87%	12 020 148.35	67.53%
PA2	2	7 900 000.00	54%	7 695 673.83	48.58%	7 471 509.04	47.16%
PA3	1	3 400 000.00	27%	3 177 510.20	17.65%	3 135 764.90	17.42%
Programme level	5	24 800 000.00	42.31%	24 201 308.00	41.29%	22 627 422.29	38.61%

* based on the 1st version of the CP

** based on the 4th version of the CP

Regarding the **duration of the projects**, in the evaluated programme period the average timeframe was less than 2 years (nearly 22 months). Concerning the CfPs, the more the CfP was earlier, the more the average timeframe of corresponding projects was longer. Due to this the average duration of 1st CfP was nearly 3 and a half years (42 months), the same value of the 2nd CfP was a little above the total average (23 months), whereas the 3rd CfP-related projects' average value was approximately one and a half year (19 months). These results are understandable, since the 1st CfP's strategic

¹⁸ See the chapters: *II. 3.1.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA1); II. 3.2.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA2); II. 3.3.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA3).*

projects required the longest implementation period, meanwhile the duration of the 3rd CFP's project needed to be rapid because of the upcoming closure of the programme.

With PA perspective, the PA1 and PA2-related projects average timeframe exceeded the total average, since the scheduling of projects under PA2 was 2 and a half years (30 months) and under PA1 was a little bit more than 2 years (27 months). As these PAs includes notable hard infrastructural works, this scheduling is justified. On the other hand, the PA3 and PA4 realized mostly soft projects or small constructions, that is why the average timeframes of these PAs were lower than 22 months (PA3: 20 months; PA4: 21 months).

The tables below (*Table 12, Table 13*) summarise the used **output and result indicators**. All together 17 output indicators were determined in the CP, but during the modifications one PA1-related indicator ('Area benefiting from modern hail protection measures') was deleted and eventually 16 output indicators were used by the programme. 6 output indicators were assigned to PA2, whereas 4 belonged to PA4 and the remaining 6 were divided equally between PA1 and PA3 (3-3 indicators). The number of result indicators was much less, only 5, out of which the PA3 had 2 units. Currently not all indicators have been fulfilled yet, but in most cases – according to the projects' expectations – it will not be a problem at the end of the programme. However, the most common problem about the indicators was the modest target values, which have been modified, but in many cases, it did not result in ambitious goals.

Regarding the interviews and the programme documents, there are some objections about the current indicators. In terms of the **result indicators**, the target values were extremely modest, and the measurement of the programme's influence was not easy to identify in every case (for example the *RI/4.1 Innovative SMEs*). Another detected problem was the source of information, since the required data were from two countries and it was not sure that the data providers measure exactly the same things. Moreover, it was also a concern that the measurement units of *RI/3.2 CBC intensity of public and non-profit organisations* (rating) and *RI/4.1 Innovative SMEs* (proportion) were hard to calculate with and they were obtained by surveys which was a plus difficulty. The most questionable result indicator was the *RI/1.1 Water quality*, since the programme was unable to attain the values of this indicator, that is why a slightly redefined units was introduced. In terms of the **output indicators**, the definition of the indicators was appropriate, but sometimes the understanding of indicators caused problems for the beneficiaries. For example, *OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools* and *OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups* resulted misunderstandings and the beneficiaries did not provide adequate numbers and did not understand the indicator in the same way. Some indicators were left behind because of its complexity, and the beneficiaries did not dare to select them (for example *OI/4.3 Months spent on scholarships*). Furthermore, the overlapping indicators might be useful to avoid such as the *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures* or the *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats*. Finally, the unambitious target values were another common issue since several target values needed to be updated in the middle of the programme.

In this document, the fulfilment of the S.M.A.R.T criteria will also be evaluated. Based on the European Commission's 'Better regulation' toolbox,¹⁹ the following aspects will be analysed:

- **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 (*Table 12, Table 13*), the fulfilment of the given criteria will be analysed and marked with the following colours:

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

¹⁹ '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

Table 12: Overview of the output indicators

Indicator code	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Target value	Current value (AIR 2021)	Potential value based on projects' expectation	S	M	A	R	T
OI/1.1	Population benefiting from flood protection measures	persons	1 000 000	949 123	1 511 787	B	B	B	A	A
OI/1.2	Length of new or improved water management system	metres	180 000	172 912	180 608	A	A	B	A	A
OI/1.3	Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	hectares	150 000	17 672.32	182 126.35	B	B	B	A	A
OI/2.1	Number of improved or newly built border crossing points	border crossing points	7	2	8	A	A	B	A	A
OI/2.2	Total length of newly built roads	kilometres	4	4.53	5	A	A	B	A	B
OI/2.3	Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads	kilometres	12	14.46	14	A	A	C	A	B
OI/2.4	Total length of newly built bicycle paths	kilometres	25	26.86	27	A	A	C	A	B
OI/2.5	Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans	kilometres	53.43	58	58	A	A	A	A	A
OI/2.6	Number of improved public transport services	services	3	0	3	A	A	A	A	A
OI/3.1	Number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	100 000	189 772	109 811	A	A	C	A	B
OI/3.2	Number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised	events	900	773	1 121	A	A	B	A	A
OI/3.3	Average monthly user entries to online communication tools developed	user entries	84 000	381 560.53	87 250	B	A	C	A	B

Indicator code	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Target value	Current value (AIR 2021)	Potential value based on projects' expectation	S	M	A	R	T
OI/4.1	Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	enterprises	210	232	224	B	B	C	A	B
OI/4.2	Number of organisations actively participating in the work of the "knowledge platforms"	organisations	210	258	249	B	B	C	A	B
OI/4.3	Number of months spent in the institutions and companies on the other side of the border through scholarships	months	250	1.75	389	B	A	B	A	A
OI/4.4	Rate of persons from vulnerable groups involved in supported actions	%	50.00	65.7	no relevant data	C	C	A	B	B

Table 13: Overview of the result indicators

Indicator code	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Annual value (2021)	S	M	A	R	T
RI/1.1	Water quality (good ecological status) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers and water flows) in the eligible area	Weighted average ecological status (average, no unit) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers) in the eligible area	2.7	2.04 ²⁰	C	B	B	A	A
RI/2.1	Share of border-crossing traffic at smaller border-crossing points within all border-crossing traffic	% of persons crossing the border at smaller border-crossing points (with the exception of Röszke-Horgoš motorway crossing station and Kelebia-Subotica railway border-crossing point) within the total number of persons crossing the border (in both directions)	40	39.22	A	A	B	A	A
RI/3.1	Number of overnight stays	overnight stays	1 964 000	1 996 789	A	A	C	A	A
RI/3.2	Level of cross-border cooperation intensity of the public and non-profit organisations dealing with cultural, leisure sport and nature protection issues	rating	3.73	3.58	A	C	A	A	A
RI/4.1	Rate of innovative SMEs in the cross-border region	%	33	47.99	B	C	C	A	A

²⁰ Reformulated measurement unit as “Weighted average quality of key chemical components (average number of components) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers) in the eligible area”

After the overall introduction of Programme's general performance, the detailed analysis of the Programme was carried out in the following chapters, since the actual chapter could not provide profound insight and more information about the PAs and actions. Basically, the following evaluation happened on PA level to indicate the PA specific attributions and outcomes, but in some cases the aspect of the analysis was made on programme level, depending on what the evaluated issue required.

3 Evaluation per Priority axis

In this chapter, each Priority axis (abbreviation: PA) is going to be evaluated along the same process.

3.1 Evaluation of PA1 (Improving cross-border water management and risk prevention systems)

Detailed performance, impact and efficiency evaluation of the PA1.

3.1.1 Short introduction of PA1

In this short subchapter the intervention logic of the PA is presented in order to show at the very beginning of the evaluation what was the aim of the programme with the given PA. The *Figure 19* shows the intervention logic of PA1, whose purpose is to summarise the main features of the PA before understanding the main results and recommendations of the evaluation.

Cross-border natural and environmental resources, especially water bodies, were identified as the regional capital of PA1, which covers the improvement of cross-border water management and risk prevention systems. The programme allocated an amount of 17 800 708 EUR, 27.33% of the total budget to this PA. As a response the PA is connected to the specific objective of decreasing environmental risks and preventing negative effects on quality of water bodies and nature protected areas. In the frames of PA1 and SO/1.1 the programme tries to contribute to five regional challenges, namely:

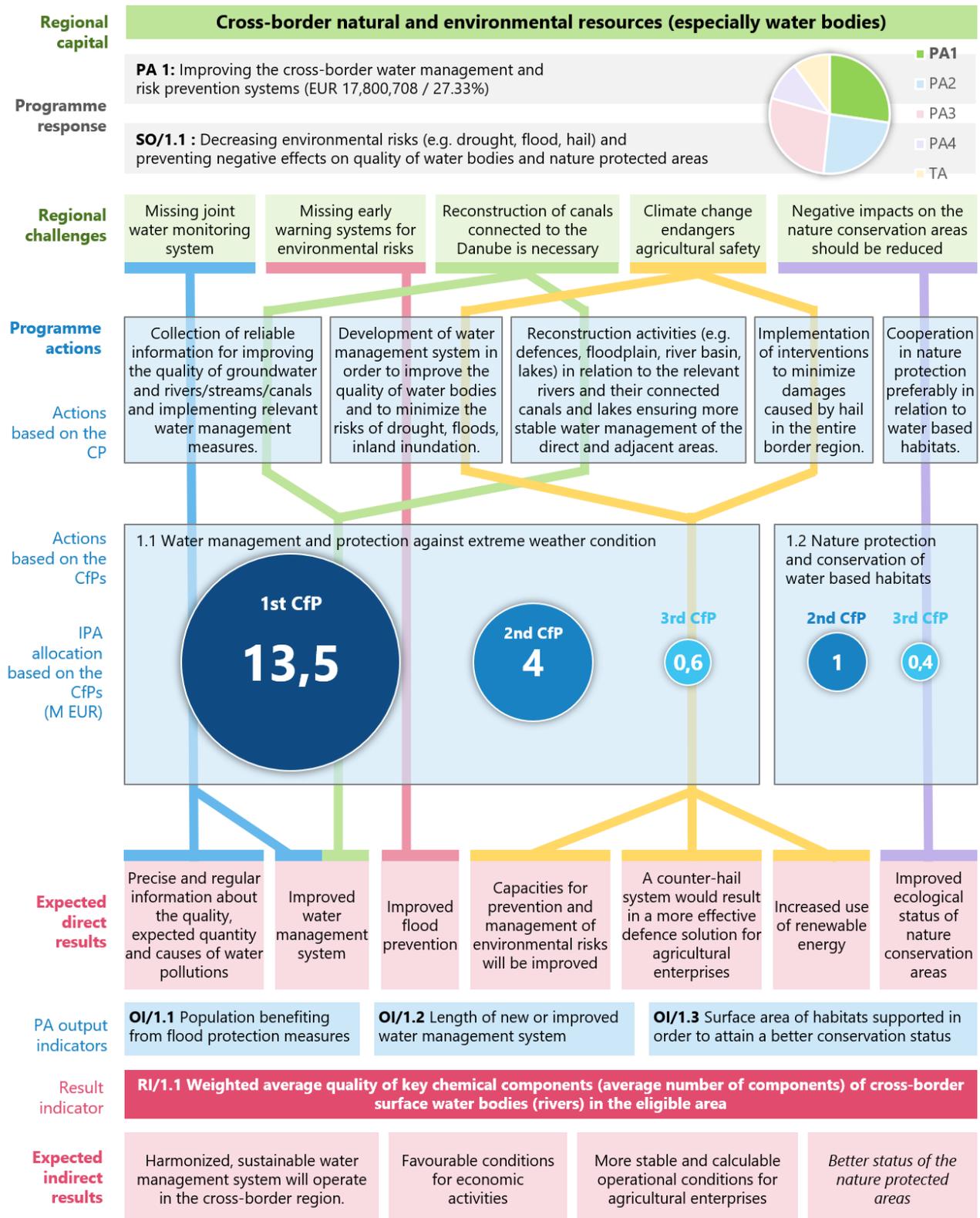
- missing joint water monitoring system,
- missing early warning systems for environmental risks,
- reconstruction of canals connected to the Danube is necessary,
- climate change endangers agricultural safety,
- negative impacts on the nature conservation areas should be reduced.

To tackle the challenges the programme formulated five distinct actions, of which the first four were aggregated within the Calls for Proposals (CfP) into Action 1.1 Water management and protection against extreme weather conditions, and the last one was turned into Action 1.2 Nature protection and conservation of water habitats. Action 1.1 was touched by all three CfPs, with a total budget of 18.1 M EUR, while Action 1.2 allocated money for projects only in the frames of the 2nd and 3rd CfPs. The financial significance of the first action was higher taking into account the size of the budget for Action 1.2 with 1.4 M EUR.

From Action 1.1 the expected results were numerous: precise and regular information about the expected quality and causes of water pollution; improved water management system; improved flood prevention; capacities for prevention and management of environmental risks; counter-hail system; and increased use of renewable energy. From Action 1.2 improved ecological status of nature conservation areas was expected as a direct result. It has to be noted that the originally adopted Programme's objectives regarding the hail-protection system were modified because, in 2016,

Hungary decided to develop its soil generator system for hail protection for the whole country, and Serbia had its hail-protection rocket system.

Figure 19: Intervention logic of the PA1



Three output indicators were named; population benefiting from flood protection measures as well as length of new or improved water management system are connected to Action 1.1, and surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status is related to Action 1.2. A single result indicator was identified to grasp the results of the programme: weighted average quality of key chemical components of cross-border surface water bodies. Apart from direct results, four additional indirect results should be achieved by the identified programme actions such as harmonized, sustainable water management; favourable conditions for economic activities; more stable and calculable conditions for agricultural enterprises; better status of the nature protected areas.

According to the *Figure 19*, the programme actions reacted to all regional needs expressed. Action 1.1 Water management and protection against extreme weather conditions had a bigger importance and more cross-cutting connections among the needs and the supported action and related activities, while Action 1.2 Nature protection and conservation of water-based habitats has simpler connections with the needs and the expected results.

3.1.2 Performance evaluation (PA1) (Implementation progress)

3.1.2.1 Quantification of the performance (PA1)

Under Priority axis 1 (abbreviation: PA1), **three calls for proposals were published** during the programming period, the first of which, as a restricted CfP was dedicated to projects with strategic importance targeting the action 1.1 'Water management and protection against extreme weather conditions'. The indicative maximum IPA allocation of the envisaged strategic projects were 60% of the total budget of PA, amounted 13,5 million EUR. The other two open calls for proposals planned to provide 6 million EUR IPA funding for traditional projects under the two actions of the PA. More than two-third, 77% of this planned amount were allocated to action 1.1. The following table (*Table 14*) contains the details of each CfP.

Table 14: Overview of the CfPs under PA1

CfP identification (ID)	Open or restricted	Open period	Targeted actions	Planned IPA allocation to the projects under the respective action (EUR)	Available IPA grant amount per project (EUR)
HUSRB/1601	restricted	March 29, 2016 – August 26, 2016	1.1 Water management and protection against extreme weather conditions	13 500 000	Minimum of 4 000 000
HUSRB/1602	open	October 3, 2016 – January 31, 2017	1.1 Water management and protection against extreme weather conditions	4 000 000	500 000 – 1 500 000
			1.2 Nature protection and conservation of water based habitats	1 000 000	100 000 – 500 000

CfP identification (ID)	Open or restricted	Open period	Targeted actions	Planned IPA allocation to the projects under the respective action (EUR)	Available IPA grant amount per project (EUR)
HUSRB/1903	open	June 1, 2019 – September 30, 2019	1.1 Water management and protection against extreme weather conditions	600 000	300 000 – 600 000
			1.2 Nature protection and conservation of water based habitats	400 000	100 000 – 400 000

Taking into account the quantification of the performance of PA1, the data show that regardless of the applications' status and CfPs, the total **number of applications under PA1 is 27**. Nearly half of the applications (11 units, 40.7%) were contracted and the same number of applications were rejected because of formal or quality issues. As the figure (*Figure 20*) illustrates, the distinction between the CfPs is significant since more than 77% of the applications (21 units) belongs to the 2nd CfP, whereas in the case of the other two CfPs it does not exceed 4 units. In relation to the status of application, owing to the low project number, the proportion of contracted applications under 1st CfP is 100%. Regarding the 2nd CfP, the percentage of contracted applications is only 33.3% (7 units) which is the lowest value among the CfPs and more than half of the applications (11 units) are rejected (mostly because of quality issues). The 3rd CfP indicates a more balanced picture, as half of the applications is contracted and there are no rejected applications with quality issues. The originally contracted IPA amount under PA1 is 18 455 201.52 EUR, which means that the projects overcontracted by 654 493.52 EUR compared to the 4th version of the CP.

Figure 20: Number of PA1 applications per CfPs

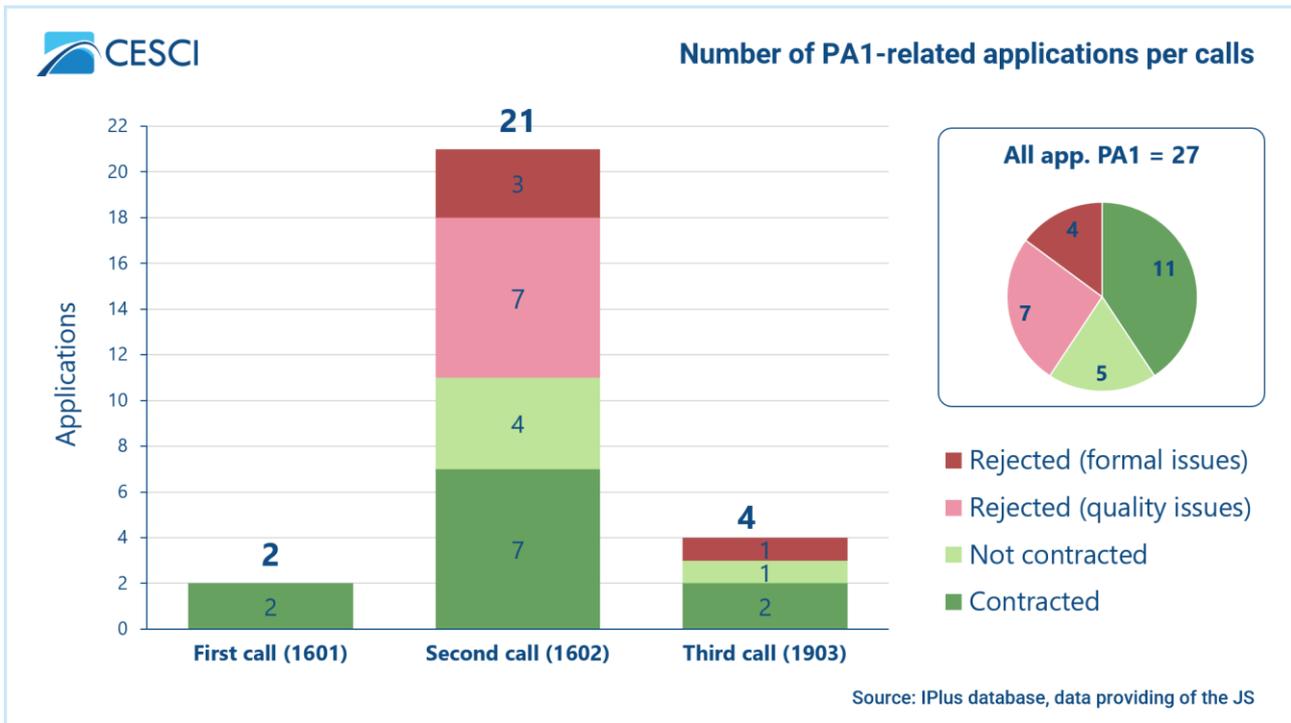
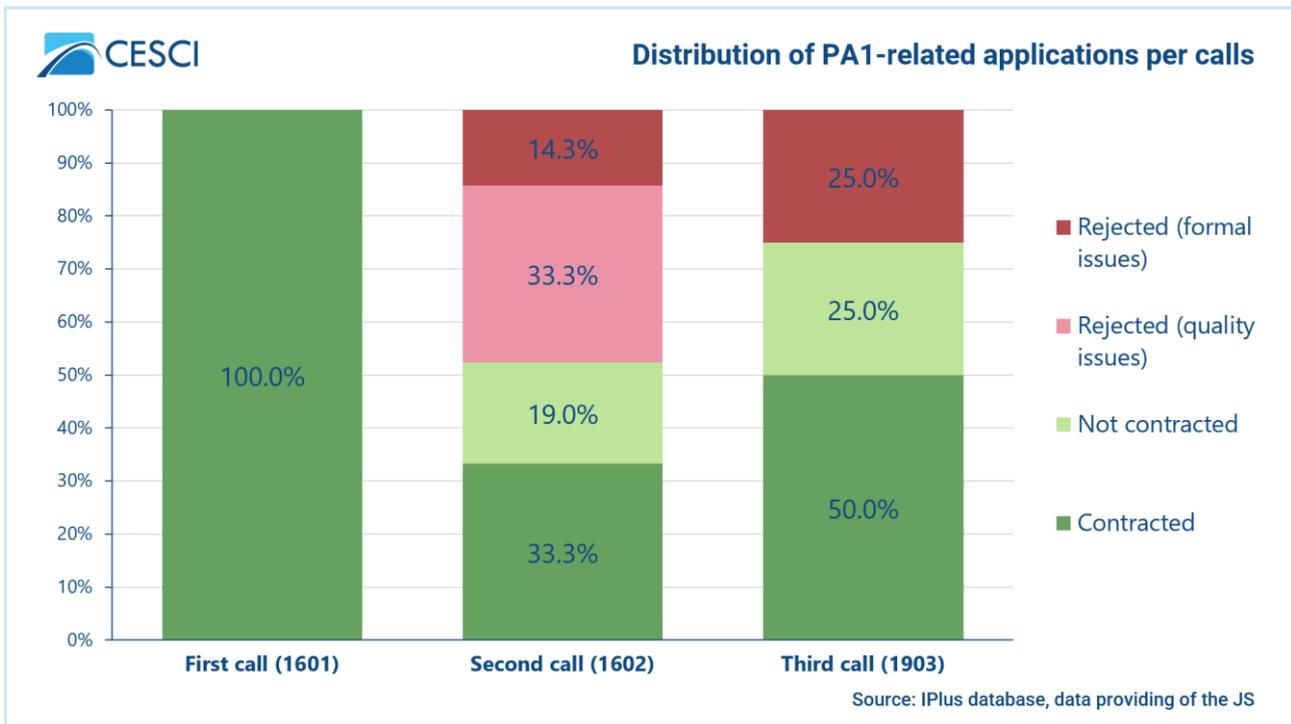


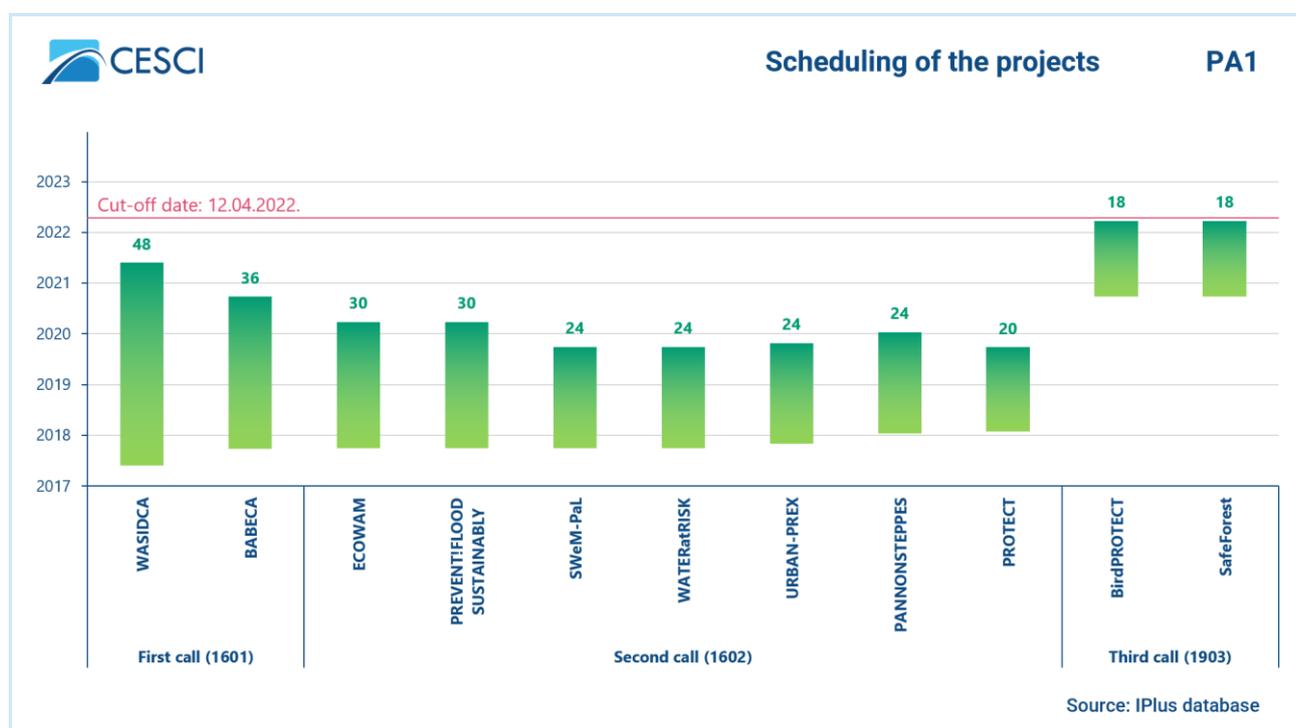
Figure 21: Distribution of PA1-related applications per CfPs



According to the **duration of the projects** – by monthly breakdown – the average duration of the projects under PA1 is nearly 27 months due to the two strategic projects and the low number of projects. Since the strategic projects are under the 1st CfP, this category has the longest average scheduling, more than 3 and a half years (42 months). This great time period is reasonable, as the strategic projects contain massive time-consuming infrastructural works (BABECA took 36 months, WASIDCA took 48 months). The other two CfPs contain only regular projects and that is why the

average timeframes are well below 3 years in line with the requirements of the calls for proposals. The average scheduling of projects under 2nd CfP is slightly more than 25 months, meanwhile the projects of the last CfP take only 18 months. The conclusion of the results is that the implementation of the projects of the 2nd CfP were completed by 2020, and the strategic projects were also ended by the spring 2021. In comparison with these durations, the start dates of the 3rd CfPs' projects were only in 2020 but the implementations were really rapid since until the beginning of 2022 both projects were also completed. Nevertheless, within the contracted projects, there were some projects which still had administrative works after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Out of the 11 contracted PA1 projects 3 projects (27% of the PA1 contracted projects) did not have approved final report at that time, out of which one project belonged to the 1st CfP and 2 projects belonged to the 3rd CfP.

Figure 22: Scheduling of the projects

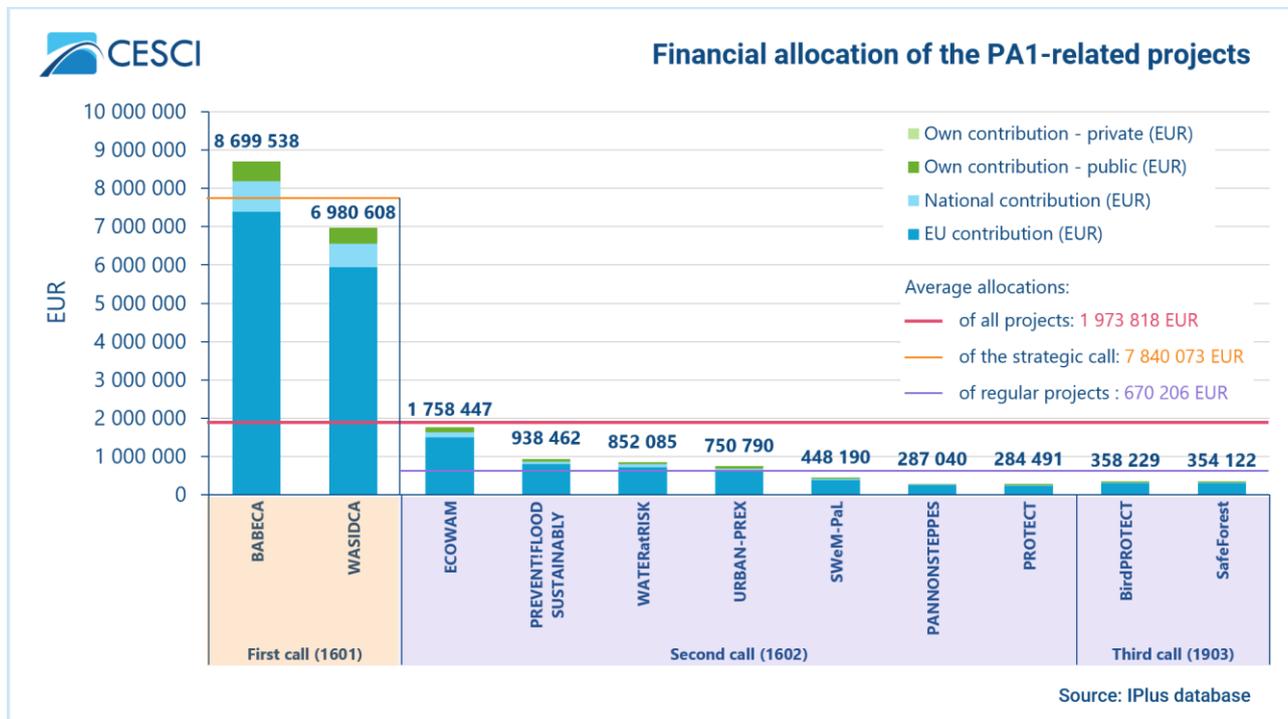


Considering the **financial allocation** to the projects, those with strategic relevance amount more than 6.9 million EUR, whereas the regular projects' total costs – excluding ECOWAM²¹ with its 1 758 447 EUR – are beneath 1 million EUR. The average total allocation to strategic projects is 7 840 073 EUR, while the average size of the regular projects is 670 206 EUR. In terms of the source of the financial allocation of the PA1 related projects, the dominance of EU Contribution (IPA) is evident, since in the case of every project the proportion of this type of financial source was 85%. The IPA support is completed by national co-financing on the Hungarian side, the ratio of which is 10-15% according to the legal status of the partners. The remaining 0-5% in Hungary and 15% in Serbia must be provided by the beneficiaries as own contribution. On project level, the average ratio of national contribution was 9% in the 1st CfP, whereas in case of the 2nd and 3rd CfP-s the own (public) contribution of the beneficiaries was more dominant (8% and 10%). It is also worth mentioning, the

²¹ ID: HUSRB/1602/11/0010; Name: Ecofriendly water management against extreme weather conditions in the cross-border area

highest share of national contribution belongs to BABECA (9.1% with 793 406 EUR), by contrast the own public contribution was the most dominant in BirdPROTECT²² project (10.9%; 39 017 EUR).

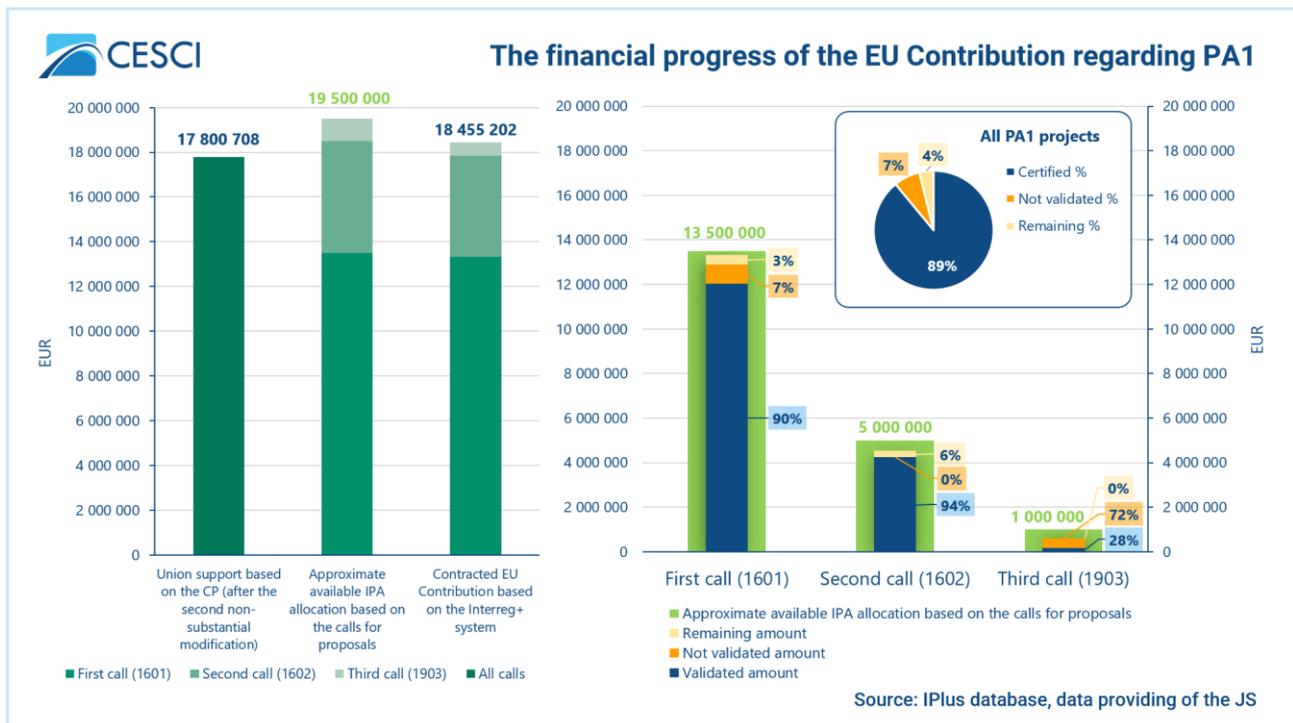
Figure 23: Financial allocation of the PA1-related projects



The following analytical aspect is the **financial progress** of the EU Contribution. With regard to the Cooperation Programme (after the fourth version which represents the current condition), 17 800 708 EUR money was allocated to the PA1, which was 1 699 292 EUR less than the aggregated amount in the CfPs (19 500 000 EUR). The distribution of the CfPs' money allocation was disproportionate due to the great and expensive strategic projects under the 1st CfP which concentrated 69% (13 500 000 EUR) of the total value. The smallest amount was allocated to the last CfP (1 000 000 EUR; 5%), while the second CfP could utilize the 26% (5 000 000 EUR) of the total value. Based on the Interreg+ system, the contracted EU Contribution was more than the value in the CP by 654 494 EUR, since the selected projects absorbed overall 18 455 202 EUR.

²² ID: HUSRB/1903/12/0049; Name: Protect Wild Birds = Protect Habitats = Protect Humans

Figure 24: The financial progress of the EU Contribution regarding PA1



The classification of the contracted EU Contribution can be classified into three categories. The first one is the certificated or validated money, where not just the project's content but the administrative works are also closed. Regarding the non-validated money, the content of the project has been closed, but the administrative tasks has been continuously proceeding after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Finally, the rest of the EU Contribution gives the remaining category.

Under the PA1 the IPA funding progressed well, since 89% of the contacted EU Contribution (16 437 946 EUR) has been certified, 7 % (1 307 928 EUR) has not been validated and the remaining amount is only 709 328 EUR (4%). Regarding the financial progress of the CfPs, the proportion of the certified allocation under the 1st (90%) and the 2nd CfPs (94%) is equal or higher than 90%, while in the case of the last CfP is 28%. In terms of the not validated allocations, this ratio is the highest under the 3rd CfP (72%), while in the case of the other two CfPs it is 7% (1st CfP) and 0% (2nd CfP). Taking into account the previously described projects' closures, these ratios seem understandable, as the 2nd CfP's projects ended first, just before the completion of the strategic projects. In spite of this, the two projects related to the 3rd CfP still have been running until 2022 with less time to certify the allocated costs. Concerning the absorption of the EU Contribution, the 1st (436 029 EUR; 3%) and the 2nd (273 299 EUR; 6%) CfPs represent the highest remaining amounts whereas currently there is no remaining money under the 3rd CfP since these projects technically and administratively have not been closed yet.

On project level the proportion of certificated EU Contribution is relatively high (above 85%), but there are some exceptions. There are only three projects with non-validated allocations, out of which the BirdPROTECT with 93% (284 247 EUR) and the SafeForest²³ with 50% (151 735 EUR) should be

²³ ID: HUSRB/1903/11/0070; Name: Improving Floodplain Forest Management along the Danube in the HU-SRB CBC area

mentioned. Regarding the remaining allocation, the PANNONSTEPES²⁴ is the most notable project with 22% (54 539 EUR), but the ratio of SweM-PAL²⁵ (13%; 48 878 EUR) also exceeds 10%.

In relation to the **output indicators**, three indicators have been assigned to PA1, which have to be reported with yearly frequency. Based on the JMC decision 113/2020, it is also important to highlight the modification of the indicator target values, since during the 3rd modification the target values have been raised significantly. For example, the initial goal of *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures* was just to achieve 100 000 persons until 2023, but it has modified to 1 million persons. Similar processes happened in the case of the other two indicators, since the target value of *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system* has been raised from 6 000 metres to 180 000 metres, and the value of *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats* has been raised from 500 hectares to 150 000 hectares.

Table 15: Indicators of PA1 – Target values

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	3 rd mod. target value (2023)
OI/1.1	Population benefiting from flood protection measures	persons	yearly	1 000 000
OI/1.2	Length of new or improved water management system	metres	yearly	180 000
OI/1.3	Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	hectares	yearly	150 000

The fulfilment of these indicators was ensured by different number of projects, which can be observed in the following table (*Table 16*). Altogether 11 projects belonged to the PA1, but one of them (the SafeForest project) chose two output indicators. The *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats* was targeted by 5 projects which is the highest number among the three indicators, since *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system* had 4, while the *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures* had 3 relevant projects. However, both of the strategic projects targeted only the *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system* indicator which means that the 1st CfP's projects did not promote any other indicators. On the other hand, during the last CfP there were no projects related to *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system*.

²⁴ ID: HUSRB/1602/12/0065; Name: Conservation of key animal species of Pannonian Steppes in a border region between Hungary and Serbia

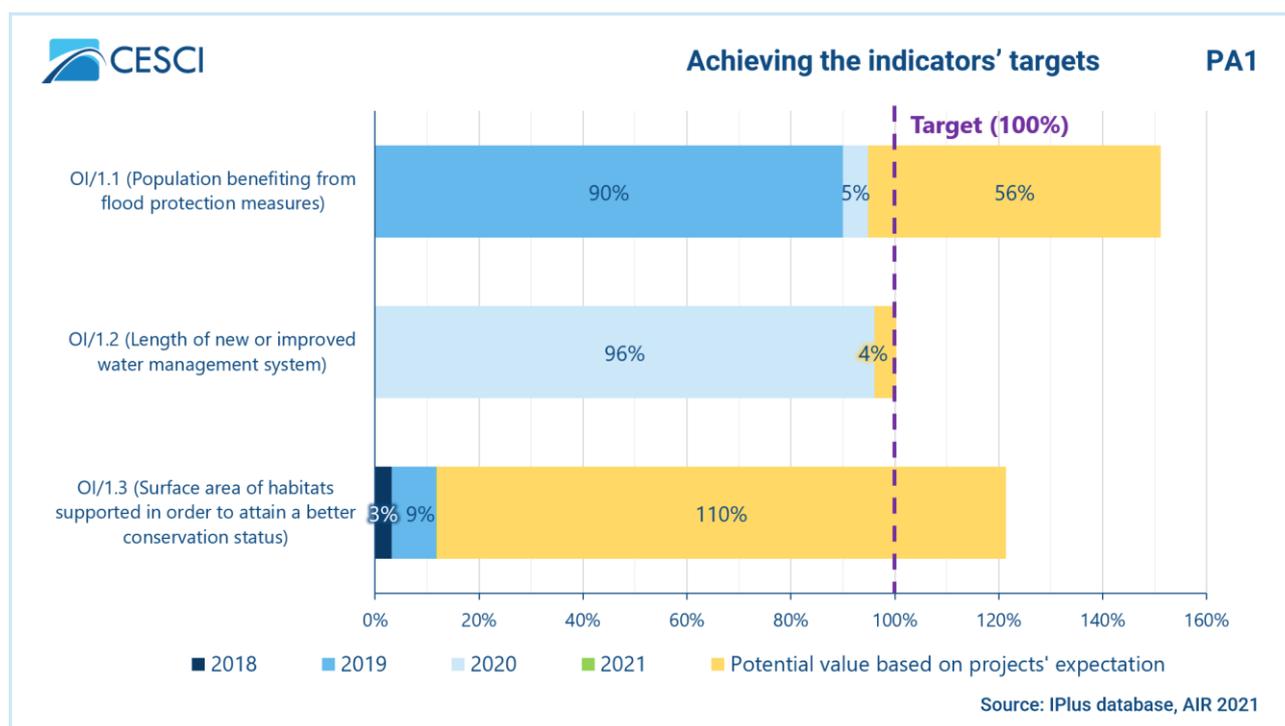
²⁵ ID: HUSRB/1602/12/0014; Name: Sustainable wetland management of the transboundary Palic-Ludas catchment area

Table 16: Indicators of PA1– Number of relevant projects per CfPs

ID	1601	1602	1903	Number of relevant projects
OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures		2	1	3
OI/1.2 Length of new or improved water management system	2	2		4
OI/1.3 Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status		3	2	5

The next figure (*Figure 25*) introduces the yearly progress of the output indicators of PA1. According to the data, it is clear that the first results appeared in 2018 (regarding to *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats*) and in 2020 all of the three indicators could show some kind of achievements. In the case of these indicators, the latest numbers (2021) do not show any increase compared to the year of 2020. In 2021 none of the indicators achieved the target values, but there were significant differences between the degree of distances from the target values. Although the fulfilment of the first two indicator is above 90% (*OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures*: 94.9%; *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system*: 96.1%), the latest reported value of *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats* was 17 672.32 hectares, which is only 11.8% of the target value. It means that the missing values in 2021 were 50 877 persons under *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures*, 7 088 metres under *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system* and 132 328 hectares under *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats*. However, the potential values based on projects' expectations show that all indicators' fulfilment will be guaranteed, moreover the target values will be overpassed by 511 787 persons under *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures*, by 608 metres under *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system* and by 32 126.35 hectares under *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats*.

Figure 25: Achieving the indicators' target (PA1)



As the following table (Table 17) indicates, the output indicators of PA1 are mostly adequate with partially deficiencies. The most commonly observed problem is the modest original target values, which later have been modified. The specificity of *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures* and *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats* was also criticized since the level of the benefits and surface area is not well-described. Owing to the incidental overlapping, the measurability of *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures* is objectionable as well, because it is hard to estimate the net indicator values. This is the same problem in the case of *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats*.

Table 17: Indicators of PA1 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures	The indicator is not specific enough. The level of the benefits is not well-described. Based on the projects, indirect, soft measures count same as direct, infrastructural flood protection investments.	Despite of the issue mentioned at the 'Specific' aspect, the indicator is a quite good measurable, however, the possible overlapping has to be checked to estimate the "net" indicator values.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased tenfold. As a result of this modification, the indicator meets the criterion.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved and the regularity of the measurement are also well-defined.

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
OI/1.2 Length of new or improved water management system	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased thirty times. As a result of this modification, the indicator meets the criterion.	As above.	As above.
OI/1.3 Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	The indicator is not specific enough. The level of the affected surface area is not well-described.	The possible overlapping has to be checked to estimate the "net" indicator values.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased three hundred times. As a result of this modification, the indicator meets the criterion.	As above.	As above.

3.1.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA1)

Restricted CfP

In the examined programming period, the programme launched strategic priority projects, in order to enhance cross-border cooperation and cohesion. In administrative terms, strategic projects mean development initiatives with much higher resource allocation compared to the traditional projects, in addition the scope of eligible applicants was restricted to the professionally most competent and actors with appropriate human and financial capacities. In case of PA1 potential beneficiaries were water management organisations, the relevant local, regional and/or national governments and authorities, as well as their bodies and organisations. The minimum amount of IPA allocation was defined as 4 000 000 EUR.

The strategic approach was assessed in terms of its contribution to stronger cohesion and wider citizens' involvement in cross-border activities. For the qualitative analysis, the evaluators used the results of the interviews, and the project descriptions and reports available in the Interreg+.

BABECA

In the project named "The complex water management development of the area of the Baja-Bezdan Canal" (planned total budget: 8 699 537.91 EUR, validated total budget: 8 186 562.21 EUR) a complex development of the regional water management system of the area of the Baja-Bezdan (Ferenc) Canal were carried out. The Canal covers the area of the South Great Plain Region in Hungary, in

addition Bačka and Banat Regions in Serbia. Both water management and technical facilities are with international relevance, the main functions of the Canal are water supply and inland water outlet (also used for sport and recreation). Sections and technical premises of the Canal form parts of the flood prevention system. The water supply capacity has decreased significantly due to non-maintenance, the increased quantity of biomass and mud causing water quality problems. The target area of the strategic project comprised the Baja-Bezdan Canal (both HU and Serbian (SRB) sections of the Canal), the Vrbas-Bezdan Canal on the Serbian side and Bezdan Lock and Šebešfok Lock located on it. The Vrbas-Bezdan Canal is in Bačka, stretching from Bezdan, all the way to Vrbas. Bezdan Lock had been out of use because of its condition of construction and hydro-mechanical machinery. Despite, it was still a significant facility within the Canal Danube-Tisa-Danube Hydro-system, which made its functionality essential. Šebešfok Lock is located where the Baja-Bezdan Canal flows into the Bezdan-Vrbas Canal. The Lock was an industrial facility enabling navigation and the only way of transporting goods in the region. The project aimed at decreasing flood and potential flood hazard of the targeted territory, and at restoring the water runoff capacity of the Canal. Main activities of the project were: dredging of canal sections and building of driftwood removal platforms and boat ramps in Hungary; reconstruction and rehabilitation of Bezdan Lock and Šebešfok Lock; procurement of special equipment for maintenance in HU and in SRB. Interventions in the project have improved cross-border water management and risk prevention system, as well as intended to provide solid basis for further developments (e.g. tourism, agriculture).

The 36-month long project ended on September 28, 2020 as it was determined in the original subsidy contract. According to the project reports, the implementation of the activities went smoothly, following the plans described in the application form. 94.1% of the planned budget were spent and validated by the programme bodies. The decrease in the total costs of the development concerned all budget lines in a similar extent, therefore no major difficulties can be detected. The partnership seems to operate properly, the communication between the three partners have been continuous.

The BABECA project shows strong cross-border characteristic: a larger subregion of the Danube catchment area with small and medium sized urban municipalities from both sides of the border, was involved in joint cross-border infrastructure and service developments, which were realised in a balanced way. Thanks to the applied integrated approach, the implemented activities not only affected water management and flood protection in the region by contributing to the reconstruction of canals connected to the Danube is necessary, but also contributed to the tourism development, nature-revitalisation and water transport needs. As a result, the strong cross-border (integrating) character of the project cannot be questioned.

WASIDCA

In the project "Water supply and water-infrastructure development in the boundary catchment areas" (planned total budget: 6 980 607.96 EUR, validated total budget: 5 954 788.79 EUR) partners aimed to improve the water supplies in the region of Domaszéki main canal. Delivering of the water from the pressure pipe have been accomplished between 19+331 - 20+580 km sections of Domaszéki main canal, and the works involved sediment dredging along 1,249-meter length of the canal and reduction of the canal bottom by 50 cm. A new regulation structure was built in 20+445 km cross-section of Domaszéki main canal, while between the 20+580 – 23+996 km cross-sections of the

Domaszéki main canal dual-purpose channel was reconstructed. Within this section, a new pumping station was set-up (Ivánszéki pump station 20+580 km). A joint water monitoring system has been also developed, to prevent droughts and water shortages that is able to measure the hydrological conditions in the cross-border area. Reconstruction and construction of Kanjiža's local waste management plant has been also carried out. As a result, the population have an access to higher quality drinking water. Another important element of the project was the improvement of the technical and personal resources for flood prevention on both sides of the border through joint actions and procurement of tube barrier for flood protection. The project aimed to improve technical and personal resources for flood prevention on both sides of the border through joint actions and procurement of tube barrier for flood protection. Tube barrier for emergency flood protection is a quick, lightweight and highly effective alternative and it is easily transferable between countries if needed. As a result, the need of measures to tackle climate change effects (particularly droughts) that endangers agricultural safety has been addressed.

The originally 36-month long project ended on May 31, 2021 after two contract modifications with six-month prolongation in each case. The prolongations were mainly reasoned by a failed, then repeated PraG procurement procedure, as well as a delay in the infrastructure planning and construction. 85.30% of the planned budget were spent and validated by the programme bodies, which means that the non-spent EU contribution amounts more than 850 thousand EUR. The decrease in the total budget mainly concerned the travel and accommodation expenses (less than 1% of the planned amount was spent), the external services (43.21%) and the staff cost (70.91%), but the costs of infrastructure was also slightly affected. Despite of the prolongation and the budget reduction, the project achieved its goals.

Regarding the project impact on the cross-border cohesion, despite the implemented water management investments were different on the two sides of the border, and the budget of the partners was also quite unbalanced, the implemented investments were both sides important regarding the water quality improvement. The aim was common, but the different needs of the partners led to different investments. Even though the developments did not physically cross the border, their impacts have absolutely cross-border significance due to the shared groundwater system. Last but not least, the purchased flood protection barrier can be used by all project partners in the future.

3.1.3 Impact evaluation (PA1)

3.1.3.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (PA1)

The following analysis is built upon the figure described in the short introduction of the PA's intervention logic. For the detailed impact model see the introductory chapter (*II. 3.1.1 Short introduction of PA1*). Each regional need and challenge will be analysed in the sense that how the identified actions of the programme could contribute to their tackling and management. In order to assess these and the general changes in the cohesion of the programme area, a territorial analysis and a project assessment takes place to identify the main contributions and changes which help reaching the expected results of the PA. The assessment uses statistical data, maps and figures,

textual analysis as well as desk research to analyse the fulfilment of regional needs emerging in the border region.

Out of all challenges described in the intervention logic, **missing joint water monitoring system** was one of the most frequently impacted one. Some projects directly impacted the challenge of missing water monitoring system by creating local-regional systems. WASIDCA project contributed to the set-up of a monitoring system to prevent droughts and water shortages that will be able to measure the hydrological conditions in the area around the Domaszék Canal. Installation of the hydrological monitoring devices have taken place in the case of the aforementioned canal on both sides. In the case of ECOWAM a joint monitoring and analysis system including a database was introduced to preserve the water quality and biodiversity in the region. The project SWeM-PaL contributed to a sustainable water resources management policy for the transboundary Palić-Ludaš catchment area by supporting the evolution of a hydro-ecologically sound monitoring system. Considering changes, in recent years the water quality of the main rivers tends to deteriorate. This is especially true along the river Tisa/Tisza on both sides. The river sections of the Danube in Serbia have worse quality than of the Hungarian ones. Regarding the chemical status of rivers except for the Mureş/Maroš and the aforementioned Hungarian sections of the Danube the main surface water bodies have a failing good status. The sections of low confidence include lower Serbian sections of the Tisza from the Serbian-Croatian border towards its confluence with the Danube and the Timiș/Tamiš. The river Tisa/Tisza and its tributaries thus still suffer from external effects which are posing threat to water quality. There are unintended impacts of various forms of pollution and contamination including solid household waste, plastic, metal, glass as well as liquid chemicals. Illegal landfills, abandoned factories, warehouses are still potential sources, and their surrounding water bodies therefore should be monitored.

In relation to the challenge of **missing early warning systems for environmental risks**, measures addressing flood risk has been enjoying the biggest support. Interventions in the BABECA project improved the cross-border water management and risk prevention system. An integrated flood forecast system has been introduced in relation to Baja and Novi Bečej. Project SafeForest have tried to give answers to flood risk, especially considering flood prone forests, which is one of the biggest challenges of the whole area given that due to climate change, the frequency and magnitude of floods is expected to increase in the future. As a result, planning of business operations in the flood prone areas (reforestation, logging, game management) and activities of public interest (nature-based tourism, such as hunting and fishing) could become easier thanks to the forecast and warning system developed. The web platform is intended for the end users for timely planning of activities within the forests affected. URBAN-PREX²⁶ project is more connected to heavy rainfalls. It took into account that with climate change the frequency and intensity of precipitation and pluvial flood occurrences have increased in urban areas. The project developed monitoring, forecasting and online public early warning system for extreme precipitation and pluvial floods in urban areas of Novi Sad and Szeged. Early warning is supported by real-time precipitation forecasting model for the whole programme area. Measured and forecasted data provide an early warning to the citizens and public

²⁶ ID: HUSRB/1602/11/0097; Name: Monitoring, forecasting and development of online public early warning system for extreme precipitations and pluvial floods in urban areas in the Hungarian-Serbian cross-border region

authorities in order to protect them and prepare their effective response to these extreme weather and water situations. In recent years changes include the increase of environmental risks concerned. Among the various risks the ones connected to the uneven distribution of rainfall intensified. This means more frequent storms, hails and flash floods. Agricultural lands as well as urbanised built-up areas are getting more and more vulnerable to this change. Unintended impacts include the increasing interconnection of environmental risks, agriculture and climate change in particular. These synergistically amplify each other's effects.

With regard to the need for **reconstruction of canals connected to the Danube**, the Baja–Bezdan Canal has been reconstructed on long section, furthermore two locks have been rebuilt as well. The programme (BABECA project) served to reach one of the basic conditions for the conveyance of excess water: the adequate drainage capacity of the canal. In the related HUSRB project, the most critical sections were dredged from the point of view of the flow in the riverbed. The canal development of the Serbian partner was significant from the point of view of flood and inland water protection. Driftwood removal was another relevant activity that reflected the regional needs. Not directly linked to the Danube, but necessary developments impacted Domaszéki Canal as well as Kurca Canal with the support of the programme. The further dredging of other sections of the Baja–Bezdan Canal will have to be resolved at a later date. In recent years one of the most notable changes was the shift from water surplus (floods) to water scarcity. An unintended impact is that the canals drain the falling precipitation, thus while the canals serve flood protection or inland water protection (drainage) or agricultural purposes (irrigation). Canals do not necessarily support water retention which has gained high importance in times of severe drought events and heatwaves across the Great Plain.

Weather extremities intensified by climate change, can more and more frequently lead to the development of hydrological hazards for agriculture as well. The need to mitigate and adapt to **climate change that endangers agricultural safety** is addressed by two projects. WATERatRISK²⁷ was dealing with drought and inland excess water inundation, which have the largest areal coverage and also the greatest regular impact on the agroeconomic potential of the region. With the help of the project harmonised monitoring solutions and water management operational plans have been developed, and a joint Drought and Excess Water Management Centre has been set up, responsible for the implementation of new monitoring techniques to water management and agriculture.

Regardless these achievements, taking into consideration the recent changes related to this challenge, drought is currently the major water related challenge for the region and it will be one of the greatest threats to the economy, since the production of vegetables and fruits ensures the cost-of-living for many local inhabitants. The water shortage cannot be handled only by the rainfall, as the water demand is higher than the amount of precipitation. The water retention system of the region needs to be developed to utilize the water sources of the Danube and the Tisa Rivers. In favour of this approach, it is important to continue the construction of water retention work to guarantee the accessibility of the rivers' water resource in the territory of the arid Danube-Tisa Interfluve too. This intervention is in line with the result of the survey, since the respondents emphasised that there

²⁷ ID: HUSRB/1602/11/0057; Name: Improvement of drought and excess water monitoring for supporting water management and mitigation of risks related to extreme weather conditions

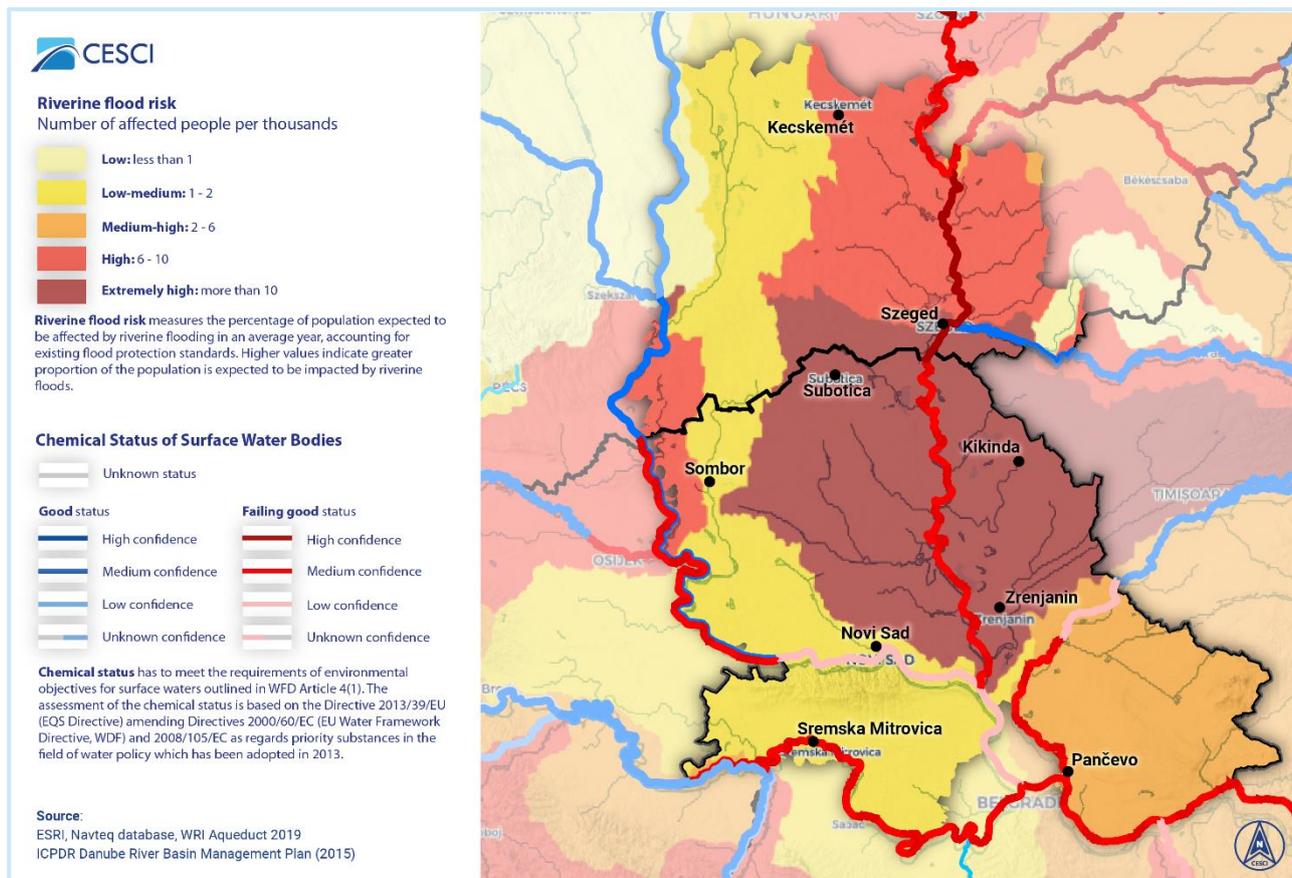
need to raise the awareness of climate change and there should be a concrete plan how to mitigate the effects of water shortage. Although, it was also mentioned that the agricultural angle is dominant in the climate change projects and there should be devoted bigger attention to other relevant climate change topics.

As a result of intensifying climate change impacts, precipitation became less frequent but more intense with heavy rainfalls at once. The dredging of sediment along the Domaszéki Canal helped the better functioning of water drainage of agricultural lands around it to tackle this problem.

With climate change both the frequency and severity of floods have increased. The Tisa and its tributaries are heavily affected by floods. The flood prone areas of Csongrád-Csanád and Northern Bačka and Banat along the Tisa and adjacent waterflows have been partly relieved from devastating, severe flood events thanks to few projects supported by the Programme. The Baja–Bezdan Canal is now a reconstructed inland water outlet and an important flood prevention system. However, the previous flood protection activities have caused several beneficial and effective impacts, but there are still many deficiencies especially in the Serbian side of the Tisa. It worth mentioning, the majority of the canals does not cross the border, but in the case of the exceptions the free flow of the canals' water is also not permitted during the periods of inland inundation. These rules have been secured by transboundary watercourse conventions of the two countries.

Unintended impacts considering climate change actions include the need for restructuring the mainly large-scale agriculture, the whole water management system of the catchment areas of the Danube and its tributaries (especially the one of the Tisa/Tisza). Consequently, all the challenges are interlinked, and comprehensive territorially integrated solutions are more relevant nowadays than before. For example, it is not enough to deal with the floods; there is a need for nature-based complex solutions which can successfully deal with both extreme water levels and frequent droughts in the same year.

Figure 26: Riverine flood risk



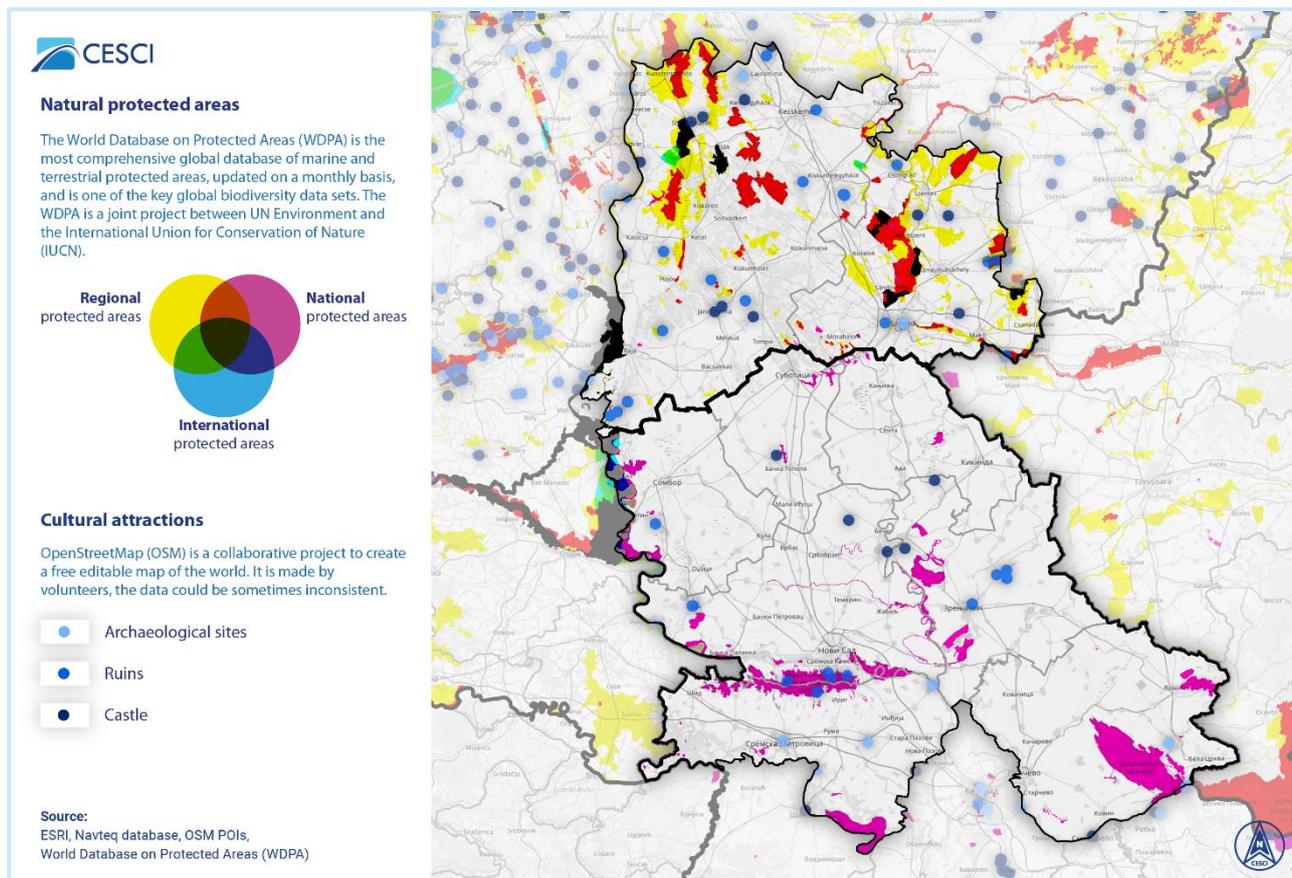
Long-term solutions in ECOWAM project owing to the studies of nature parks against the impacts on ground and surface water has been provided.

Flood prevention and protection in the frames of the project called PREVENT!FLOOD SUSTAINABLY²⁸ has also been addressed directly by supporting the building of technical infrastructure, or by levelling the crown of the embankment and strengthening it.

The border zone has some nature protection areas of transboundary or even Europe-wide importance including water habitats, floodplain meadows and forest, saline lakes and grasslands, sand dunes and loess ridges. There are many similarities and complementarities in the status of the protection and management of these natural values and often cross-border areas.

²⁸ ID: HUSRB/1602/11/0225; Name: Increasing the efficiency of municipal flood protection through smart metering

Figure 27: Natural protected areas



The need to reduce the **negative impacts on the nature conservation areas** is also addressed by relevant projects. With the maintenance and reconstruction of certain sections and locks, dredging, removal of biomass, mud and driftwood the water quality has been improved along the Baja–Bezdan Canal, which is rich in water habitats with reeds, raccoons, aquatic vegetation, reptiles, amphibians and fish. The improve of the water balance of Jegrička river also supported the natural habitat. ECOWAM project provided a database and information which can be used for environmental protection purposes.

PANNONSTEPPE project contributed to the conservation of two key species, Hungarian Meadow Viper (*Vipera ursini rakosiensis*) and Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*), of Pannonian Steppes and, via them, conservation of their habitats, which will give substantial contribution to achieving better conservation status to the remnant natural habitats of Pannonian Steppes on both sides of the border.

The spread of invasive alien plant species is tackled by the project called PROTECT²⁹. The nature protection areas have been partly protected by implementing joint actions in monitoring and mapping invasive species and suppressing ambrosia to reduce the spread and provide better conservation status. Selevenjske pustare, Subotička Peščara, the Ludaš Lake and Palić on the territory of Subotica, areas near Kanjiža and Kiskunság National Park near Kecskemét was impacted positively by the activities.

²⁹ ID: HUSRB/1602/12/0132; Name: Nature Protection from Invasive Plant Species

Climate change negatively impacted nature conservation areas included in the form of spread of different pathogenic agents, among which Avian influenza virus and West Nile virus have major impact on wild birds. Project BirdPROTECT tackled one of the most challenging problems in natural reserves by effective monitoring of the presence of pathogenic and zoonotic viruses in protected water habitats of Vojvodina and Bács-Kiskun. Outcomes include cross-border monitoring of wild birds and analysis resulting in a Risk assessment and feasibility study providing future risk management directions, as well as a geographic information system (GIS) database to serve as bases for nature conservation policy initiatives and further scientific development. The importance of these actions is verified by the survey in which the beneficiaries stressed the need for more financing for environmental protection and nature protection. Recent changes that impacted the regional needs include the intensifying spread of alien species, the emergence of massive bushfires and forestfires, the climate-change related shrinking of water habitats (e.g. in the form of dried lakes, dry riverside areas, decreasing groundwater levels). These all endanger the original flora and fauna and their habitats are getting more challenging to protect and sustain the biodiversity of the programme area. These are unintended impacts along with the protection of only certain small areas despite of larger areas of ecological corridors and network, however the limited financial possibilities of CBC programmes should also be realised.

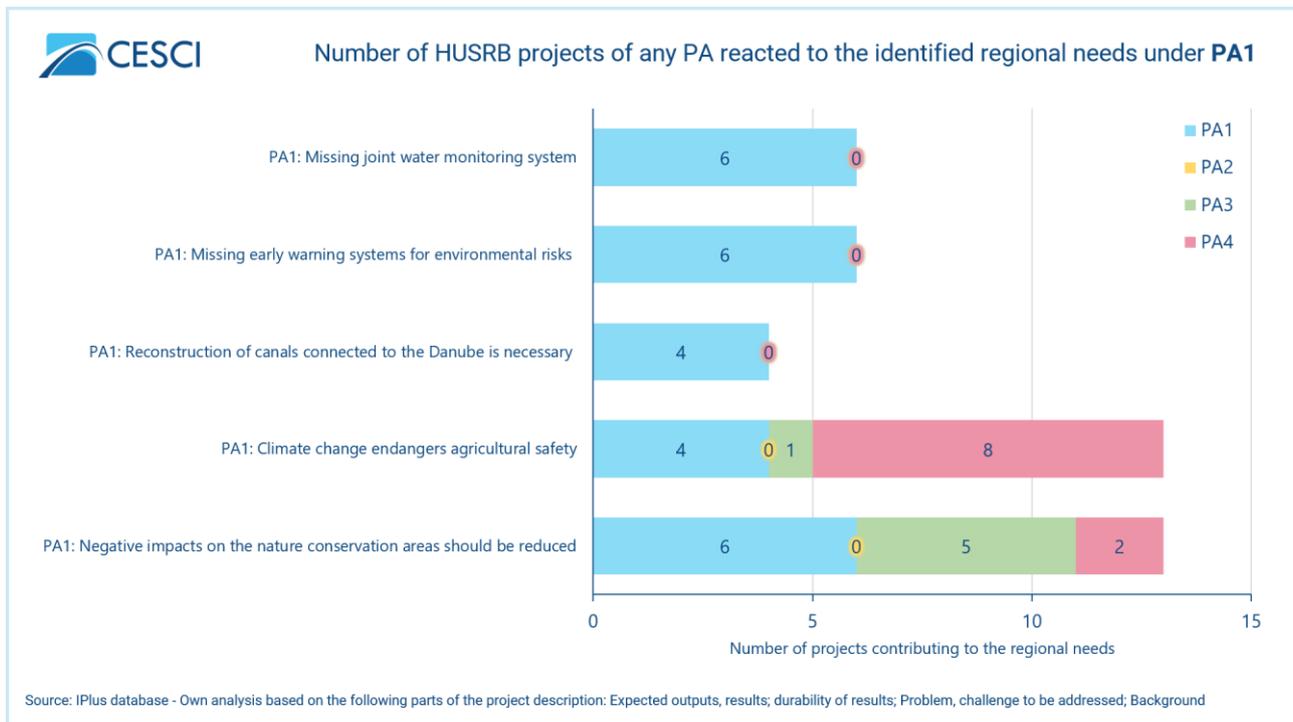
To sum up, today's most important challenges under PA1 are related to water management. The challenges are about mitigating the harmful effects of periods of water shortage and drought, and ensuring adequate water supply in established dry regions. As a result of the gradual change in climatic conditions, the development of extreme precipitation conditions and the increase in hot days, drying processes can also be observed in the border area. In addition, the formation of inland water must also be expected, since the other extreme of extreme precipitation conditions causes exactly this: long periods without precipitation are interrupted by sudden, high-intensity and large amounts of precipitation, when a significant proportion of the annual precipitation falls in a short period of time, which can cause flooding. Due to the persistence of periods without precipitation, the priority within PA1 may have already shifted from water surplus to water shortage protection, drought prevention and water replacement.

Based on the project summaries as well as the objectives of the projects, out of the **identified challenges under PA1** climate change along with the nature conversation related challenge are those which are addressed by the largest number of HUSRB projects of any PAs. To both challenges a total number of 13 projects³⁰ reacted. In relation to climate change the share of projects under PA4 have an absolute majority with 8 projects. This is mainly because of R&D activities and support for climate-friendly economic activities, agricultural developments under PA4. In the case of nature conservation challenge the 5 projects from PA3 mean that improvement of ecotourism serves nature conservation and protection needs as well. In case only the PA1 projects are counted missing water monitoring system, missing early warning systems for environmental risks and negative impacts on

³⁰ The consideration of only the number of projects has some distorting effect because of the big difference between the size of the strategic and traditional projects. The allocated EU contribution to the particular challenges would draw a more realistic picture, but evaluators were not able to handle those cases where a given project reflect to more challenges. The distribution of the budget of these projects between the certain needs were not possible based on the available information.

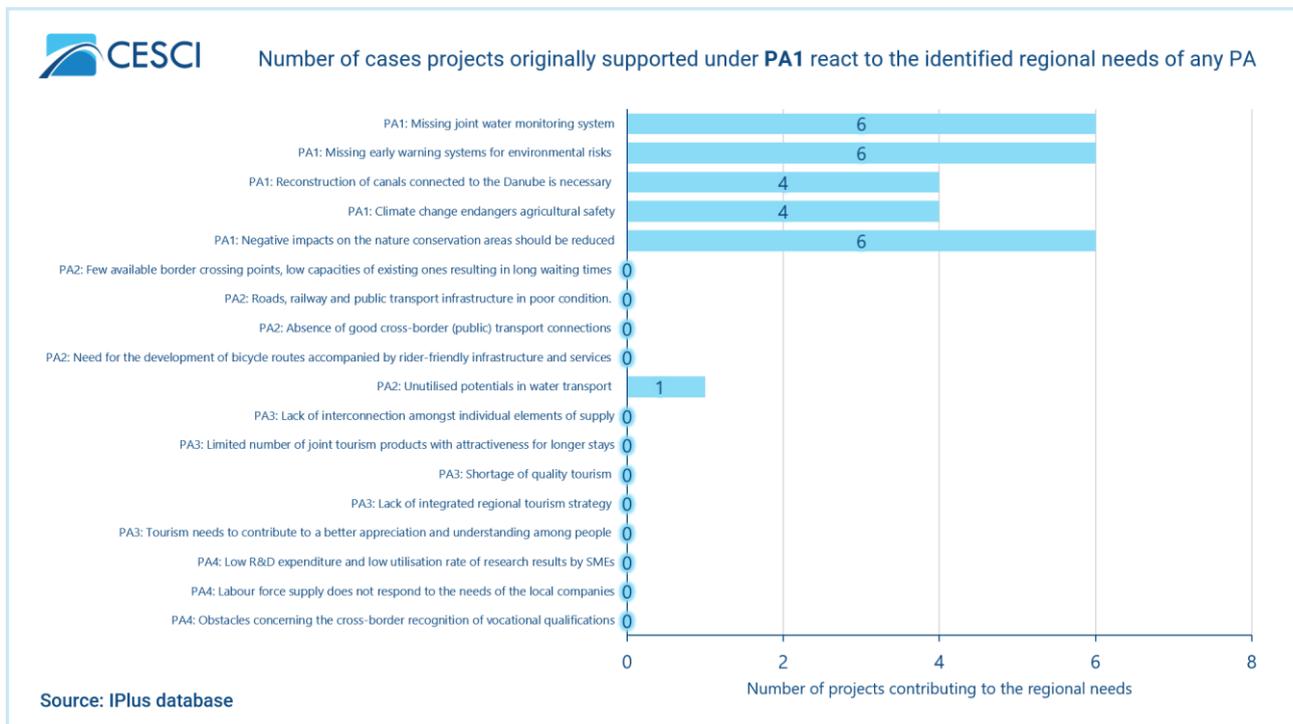
the nature conservation areas have the highest number of projects (6 projects each) which reach to the identified needs under PA1. Reconstruction of canals is supported by only four projects, however due to the elaboration of strategic projects in this field the significance of these few projects is high, owing also to the higher financial support per strategic project.

Figure 28: Number of HUSRB projects of any PA reacted to the identified regional needs under PA1



Taking into account the **number of cases projects originally supported under PA1 react to the identified regional needs of any kind** (from any PAs), challenges of the corresponding PA1 lead the chart, namely missing water monitoring system and risk warning systems, and negative impacts of climate change (6 projects per each). That also means that 54.5-54.5% of all projects under PA1 react to the before mentioned challenges. Reconstruction of canals and the climate change related challenge are tackled by 36.64% of the PA1 projects. The large majority of the cases are supported by the related PA's projects. There is only one exception; the challenge originally belonging to PA2, namely unutilised potentials in water transport, is addressed by a project under PA1. Apart from the challenges of PA1 and the aforementioned challenge, projects of PA1 do not react other challenges (of e.g., PA3 or PA4).

Figure 29: Number of cases projects originally supported under PA1 react to the identified regional needs of any PA



3.1.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA1)

In this subchapter, based on the result indicators, the comparison of the expected and achieved results will be presented. During the evaluation, the evaluators relied on the documentations of the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) and the Cooperation Programme (CP) which were complemented with the observations and suggestions of the interviewees. According to the CP, the reporting frequency of the result indicators' values was planned to take place in every second year: the first report – which gave annual value about the fulfilment of the indicator – was the AIR 2019, and it was followed by the report of 2021. The third and last report will be concerned the year of the target value (2023).

In the frames of PA1, the total number of result indicators is only one (out of 5) which concerns the water quality of cross-border surface water bodies. The indicator (result indicator 1.1) is in line with the specific objective of the PA1 since both of them concentrate on decrease of environmental risk and prevention of quality of water bodies. Owing to the target goals, the measurement unit of the result indicator 1.1 uses weighted average value related to the ecological status of cross-border surface water bodies. The relevance of this indicator is not questionable; however, the availability and measurability have caused significant concerns during the reporting period. The source of the data would have been ensured by the General Directorate of Water Management in Hungary and the Agency for Environmental Protection in Serbia, but these organisations could not provide annual information about the required indicator's value.

The main information about the result indicator 1.1 is summarised in the following table (Table 18):

Table 18: Result indicator under PA1

ID	Specific Objective	Selected result indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	2019 Annual value	2021 Annual value
RI/1.1	SO/1.1: Decreasing environmental risks (e.g. drought, flood, hail) and preventing negative effects on quality of water bodies and nature protected areas	Water quality (good ecological status) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers and water flows) in the eligible area	Weighted average ecological status (average, no unit) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers) in the eligible area	2.91	2012	2.7	N/a	2.04 ³¹

According to the interviews, the interviewees reflected on the eligibility of the result indicator 1.1. The main drawback was the unavailability of the necessary data in 2020 (related to 2019). In the year of the result indicators' planning, the actual values were ensured, but the planners left out of consideration that this indicator will be available just in every sixth year. This problem became clear just in the first reporting year, and the management authority had to replace it with another indicator, but the newer (alternative) one required minor further research too. Due to this unexpected obstacle, the AIR 2019 did not contain any information about the level of the indicator value, but it mentioned that the trend of the wanted change was still negative. The appointed baseline year is 2012 with 2.91 average value, which should be reduced to 2.7 until 2023. According to the 2021 report, the registered value was 2.04 which means that the required expectations have already been realized. However, because of the lack of verifiable data, the original result indicator was slightly redefined, and the fulfilment of the initial measurement unit is not guaranteed.

The problem highlighted above was caused because the planners intended to adjust the indicator to the PA very well, which resulted in a way too specific indicator. This difficulty is observed in the case of other result indicators as well, but it has not caused similar issues such as in relation to PA1. Regarding the interviews, the selection of the result indicators should be made more carefully in consideration of the availability of data. As the given answers show, in order to resolve this problem, the indicators need to be created from public registers or from the own monitoring system. Considering the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time bound), the result indicator 1.1 is too specific, the measurability and achievability are questionable (because of the unfavourable accessibility of the data), however there is no problem with the relevance and the time-bound of this indicator.

³¹ reformulated measurement unit as "Weighted average quality of key chemical components (average number of components) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers) in the eligible area"

Table 19: Result indicator of PA1 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
RI/1.1 Water quality (good ecological status) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers and water flows) in the eligible area	too specific	questionable	questionable	no problem	no problem

3.1.3.3 Analysis of the partnerships (PA1)

The table below (*Table 20*) contains information on the potential involvement (mentioning) of different types of beneficiaries per CfP actions and per targeted activities under CfP actions. It shows which partners were targeted and how many times to be beneficiaries in the three different CfPs of the programme. Water management institutions, hydro-meteorological organisations and agricultural organisations, public utility companies dealing with water supply and sanitation, public institutions, national, regional and local government, nature protection organisations as well as civil society organisations were the main beneficiaries identified by the Cooperation Programme in the frames of its CfPs regarding PA1.

Based on the number of activities a beneficiary type was involved in any CfP (i.e. the filled cells with any information on the potential participation of beneficiaries in CfPs) water management institutions and the national, regional and local governments stand out by potential involvement in 3 activities each. The number of occasions a potential beneficiary was addressed by any CfP (i.e. number of times 1st, 2nd, or 3rd CfP is written in the cells) is high in the case of the three distinct governments (8 occasions each). In line with the different thematic features of the actions, there were no similarities between the two CfP Actions as different partners were named in them. The highest number (5) of potential beneficiaries were listed in relation to the targeted activity of “Implementation of interventions to minimize damages caused by hail in the entire border region”. However, this activity had less importance, due to the situation of the national hail-protection systems.

Table 20: Potential beneficiary types by CfPs

CfP actions	Targeted activities based on CP	Water management institutions	Hydro-meteorological and agricultural	Public utility and waste water companies	Public institutions	National government	Regional government	Local government	Nature protection organisations	Civil soc. organisations
1.1 Water management and protection against extreme weather conditions	Collection of reliable information for improving the quality/quantity of groundwater and rivers/streams/canals and implementing relevant water management measures.	2 nd 3 rd			2 nd 3 rd					

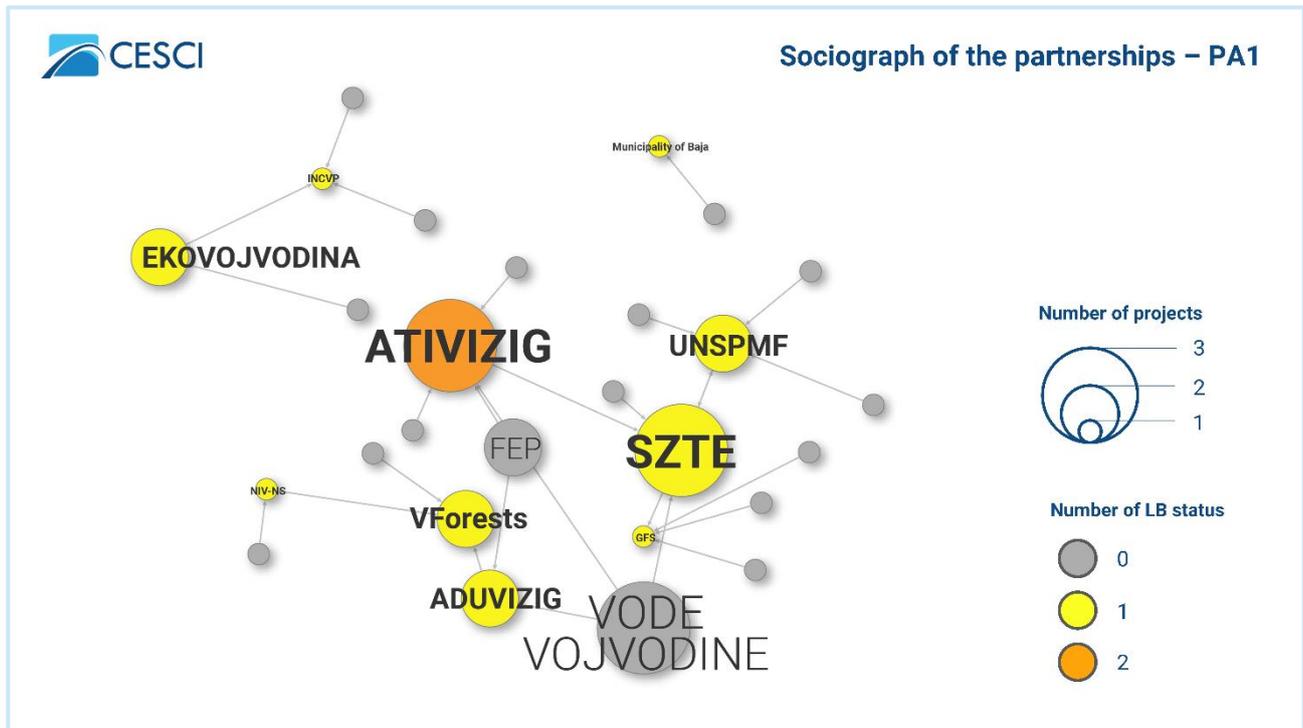
CfP actions	Targeted activities based on CP	Water management institutions	Hydro-meteorological and agricultural	Public utility and waste water companies	Public institutions	National government	Regional government	Local government	Nature protection organisations	Civil soc. organisations
	Development of water management system in order to improve the quality of water bodies and to minimize the risks of drought, floods, inland inundation. Investments should focus preferably on areas affected mostly by droughts.	2 nd 3 rd				2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd		
	Reconstruction activities in relation to the relevant rivers and their connected canals and lakes ensuring more stable water management of the direct and adjacent areas.	1 st 2 nd 3 rd				1 st 2 nd 3 rd	1 st 2 nd 3 rd	1 st 2 nd 3 rd		
	Implementation of interventions to minimize damages caused by hail in the entire border region.		1 st 2 nd 3 rd	1 st 2 nd 3 rd		1 st 2 nd 3 rd	1 st 2 nd 3 rd	1 st 2 nd 3 rd		
1.2 Nature protection and conservation of water based habitats	Cooperation in nature protection preferably in relation to water based habitats, e.g. in species protection programmes, including the operation of rescue centres, ex situ breeding and release programmes, managing protected areas.								2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd

It is worth comparing the potential (planned) beneficiaries of CfPs to the real (actually involved) beneficiaries of the realised projects. The matching of the before and after picture of the beneficiaries, similarities can be detected with regard to water management organisations. On the other hand, the involvement and participation of governments, but partly also the involvement of NGOs and nature protection organisations was less pronounced as it had been planned. Furthermore, it has to be underlined that the universities were not named explicitly in the CfPs regarding potential beneficiaries, but were mentioned in the text the following way: "water management authorities in partnership with public institutions and organisations". It has to be emphasised that the real inclusion of different stakeholders heavily depends on the Guidelines for Applicants since the type of beneficiaries had been defined. The definition of potential beneficiaries was narrow in the case of PA1 compared to PA3 especially.

Considering the **types** of beneficiaries, all the 38 project partners were public ones. Taking into account the **size** of the partnerships, on average a partnership is made up by 2.5 beneficiaries, therefore project of PA1 contains the projects with the largest number of Bs compared to the rest of the PAs. Based on the number of projects and LB status Lower-Tisza-District Water Directorate (ATIVIZIG) has an exceptional role in the partnerships. ATIVIZIG has connection with 5 different partners. Other important partners in the network with outstanding role include University of Szeged

(SZTE) (5 project partners) and University of Novi Sad Faculty of Sciences (UNSPMF) (4 partners). Public Water Management Company „Vode Vojvodine“ Novi Sad (VODE VOJVODINE) had a rather different role as it is involved in three projects but had no LB status. ATIVIZIG and SZTE are involved in the largest number of projects (in three both cases). In general water management authorities/bodies are the centrepieces of the partnership network.

Figure 30: Sociograph of the partnerships – PA1



The partner **budget** was 21 712 002 EUR, 571 368 EUR per beneficiary. This average is significantly higher than the average of all PAs per beneficiary. Among the LBs (based on the total budget in total costs), the largest amount of money – more than 5 million EUR – by far was allocated to Lower Danube Valley Water Directorate (ADUVIZIG) and ATIVIZIG (altogether 10 355 095.48 EUR). The two water directorates were followed by Municipality of Baja (626 510.48 EUR) and by the two faculties (UNSPMF and Faculty of Civil Engineering Subotica) of University of Novi Sad (332 406.88 EUR). Taking into consideration not just the LBs, the Hungarian directorate of water affairs (ATIVIZIG and ADUVIZIG) participated in projects responsible for 49.1% (10 669 301.44 EUR) of the total cost of PA1.

In the frames of the online survey the respondents also had the opportunity to evaluate their partnerships. Altogether 6 responses were received under PA1 that concerns 3 projects since more than one beneficiary filled the questionnaire form the same project. It might cause overlapping in the data; thus, the survey should be regarded as an insight to the main trends, but it is not adequate to introduce the exact situation. According to the given answers, all respondents (6 persons) underlined the fact that the **motivation** of their partnerships are based on previous cooperation and on similar mission and goals. Moreover, two of them referred to the close geographic proximity and there was just one respondent who mentioned the shared language as the basis of the partnership.

The questionnaire also provides answers for the **length** of the partnerships by each partner of the given respondent (For the question as follows: how long is your cooperation with each of your partners?). Most of the project partners said that they (9 out of 24 answers) have 5-10 years long cooperation with the concerned respondents, however another 8 project partners listed are newcomers without any common partnership. With the rest of the partners of the responding beneficiaries 1-5 years long cooperation background was maintained (3 partners of them with 3-5 years, 2 of them with 1-3 years), but there are two partners whose cooperation is more than 10 years long with the respondents.

The **future prospect** of the partnership is favourable since half of the respondents (3 beneficiaries) confirmed that they would like to continue the already existing partnerships with most of the partners, and another 2 have the intention to pursue the work with some of the partners. There is no beneficiary who want to cut off the cooperation with all partners, although one of the respondents still does not know the future of its partnership.

3.1.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA1)

In the beginning of this subchapter the territorial coverage of EU contributions and beneficiaries were analysed by the following two figures. Both of them indicate the values by countries: the first one in relative values, the second one in absolute value. According to the EU contribution, besides the introduction of the result of all CfPs, the open and strategic CfPs were also represented separately, in order to handle the distorting effects of the latter ones. The number of PA1-related beneficiaries is more than 10% out of the total, 323 beneficiaries.

Figure 31: Territorial balance of the beneficiaries [PA1] – Relative values

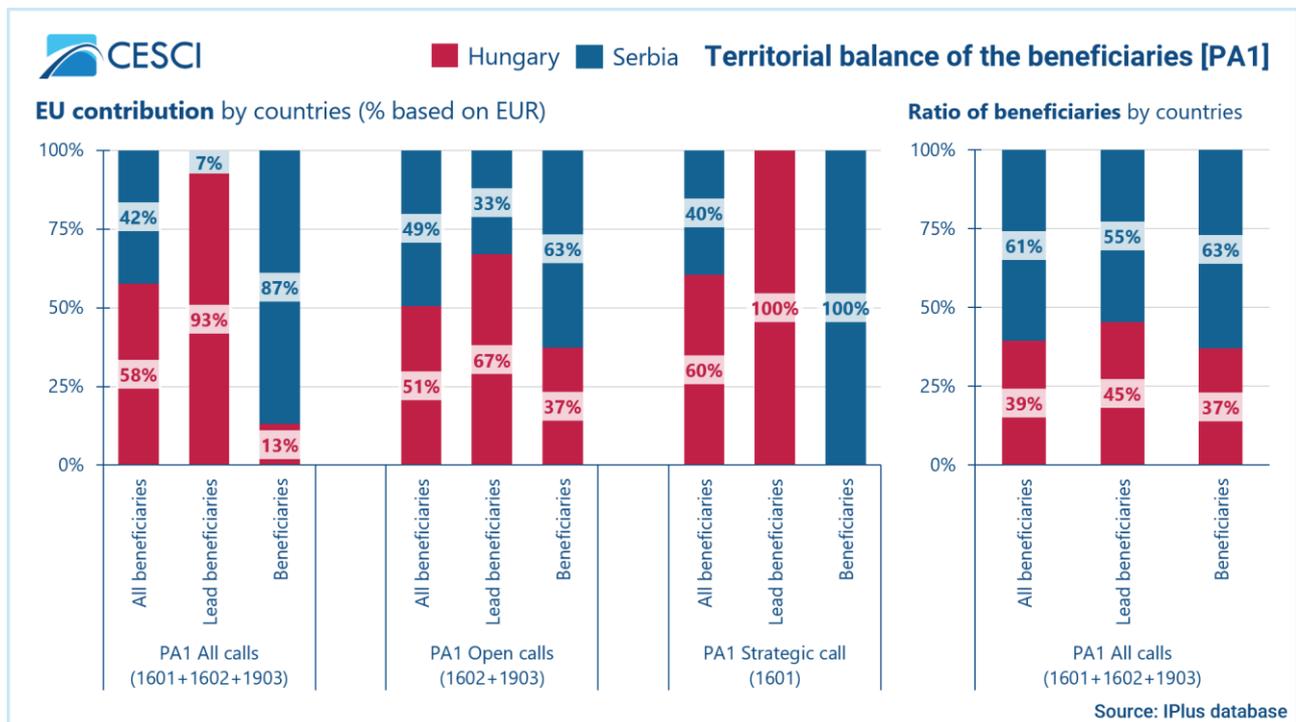
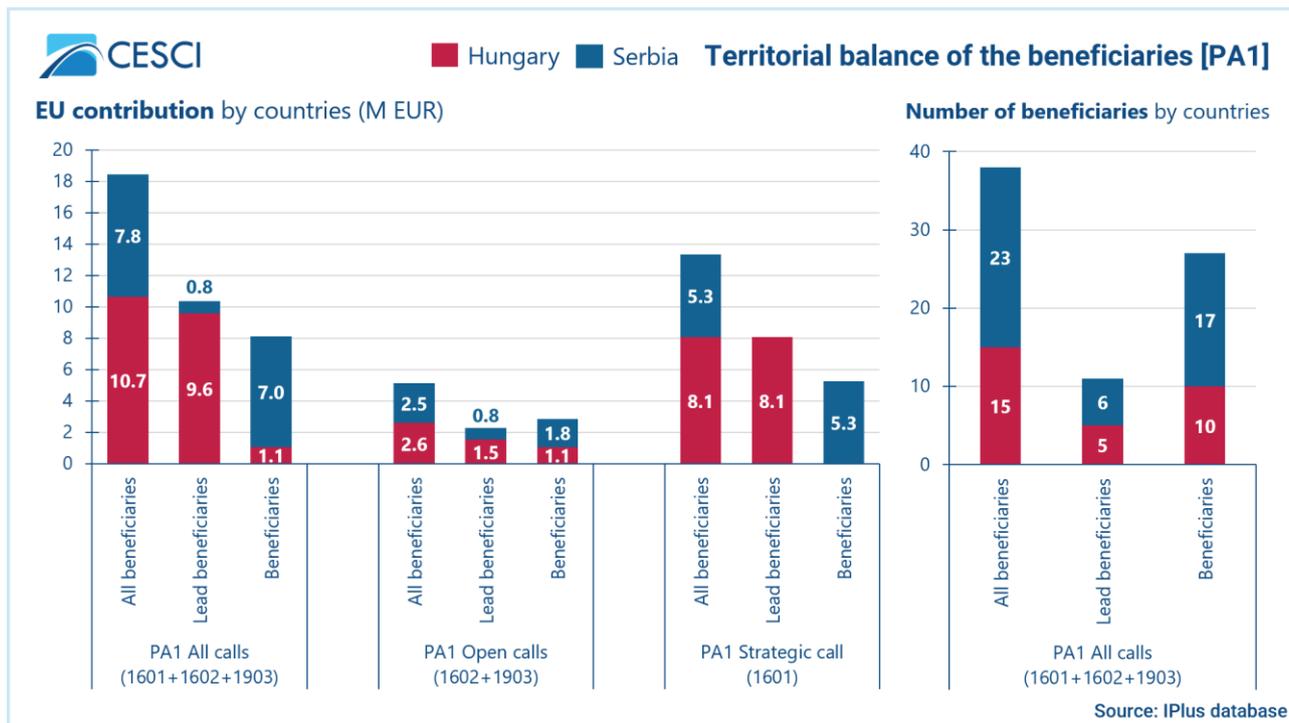


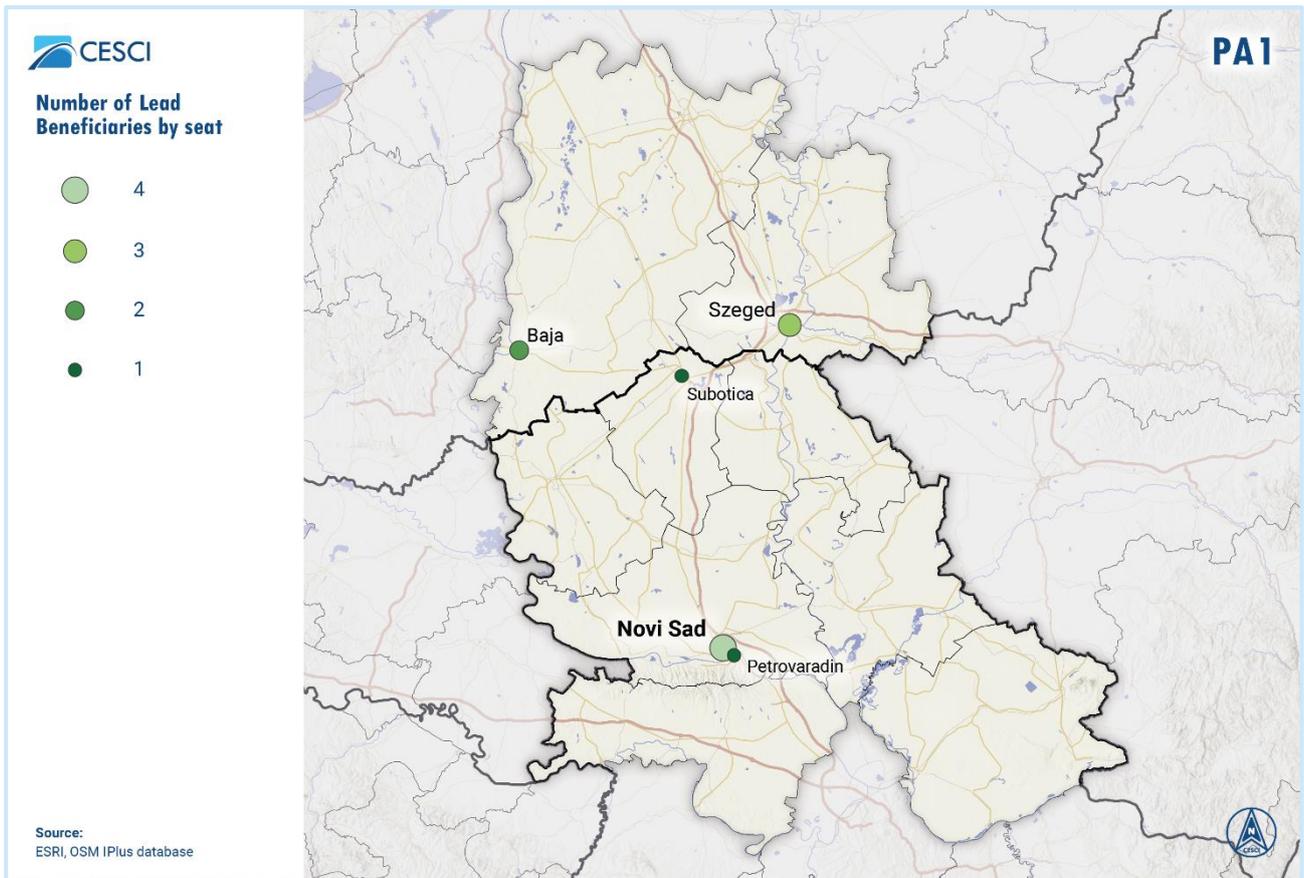
Figure 32: Territorial balance of the beneficiaries [PA1] – Absolute values



Regarding the total EU contribution to the PA, the **territorial balance** between the two countries is in favour of Hungary, however the number of beneficiaries is significantly higher on the Serbian side. It is reasoned by the fact that LB of the two strategic projects is Hungarian, who spent more than half of the total EU contribution. The reason behind this is the expensive infrastructural works which could be implemented only in the frame of strategic projects. In terms of the open CfPs, it is important that altogether smaller amount was dedicated to them as to the strategic one, since the number of PA1-related projects was strongly limited and the predominance of strategic projects was decisive. As the majority of the beneficiaries are Serbian, therefore the number of LBs and Bs are higher on the Serbian side, while the rate of EU contribution dedicated to Hungarian LBs remarkably exceeds those of the Serbians. In case of the Bs, the distribution is in harmony with those of the partners' number.

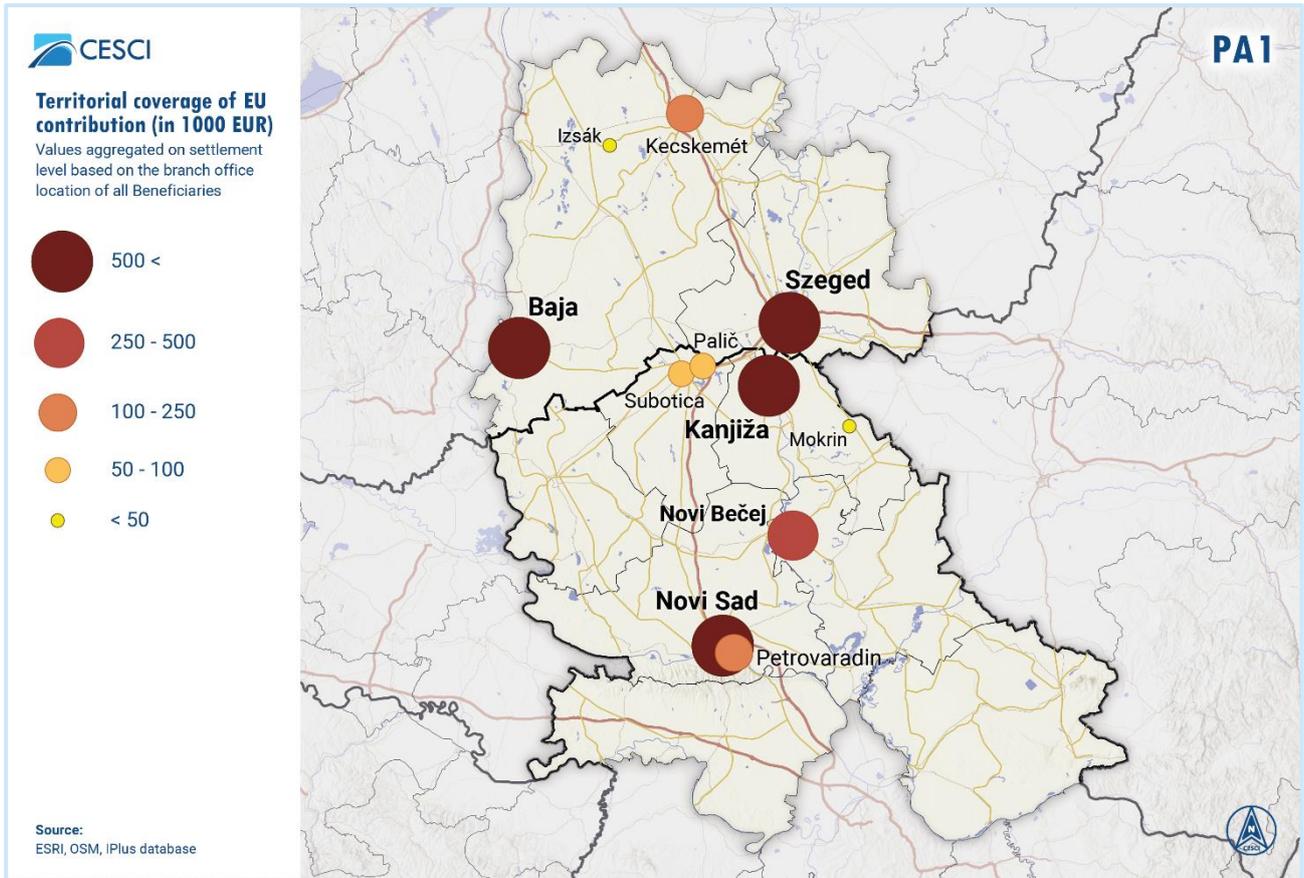
The **territorial pattern** of the LBs is highly concentrated due to the few numbers of beneficiaries compared to other PAs, which can be reasoned partly by the relatively narrow range of eligible applicants (mainly public authorities and universities dealing with water management and environment protection). Furthermore, it has to be noted that in the case of this given PA less emphasis should be given to the results of the pattern of LBs in territorial coverage since the picture heavily depends on the geographical location of competent beneficiaries, which tend to be major cities and regional centres. Regarding the whole evaluated area, the LBs can be found in two main zones: the first is the direct border area and the second one is Novi Sad and its vicinity. In terms of Vojvodina, aside from one LB in Subotica, Južnobačka is the home to all the Serbian LBs (Novi Sad 4 units, Petrovaradin 1 unit) which is the highest number in the whole Programme area, while on the Hungarian side similar disproportion cannot be observed. The two counties (Csongrád-Csanád 3 units, Bács-Kiskun 2 units) possess similar number of beneficiaries who are concentrated to Szeged and Baja.

Figure 33: Territorial pattern of LBs (PA1)



The emphasis of the related evaluation regarding PA1 and PA2 is on the EU distribution and the project locations, which show the most important features of the territorial coverage. The spatial distribution of EU contribution based on the location (settlement) of the branch office is the most uneven in the case of PA1 along with PA2. The sources are highly concentrated to few settlements with city rank. The majority of them are middle-sized or large cities within the settlement network. Except for Mokrin (30 339 EUR, 0.2% of total contribution in the frames of PA1) all financial support went to urban settlements, in descending order: Novi Sad (5 545 205 EUR), Baja (5 336 425), Szeged (5 071 471), Kanjiža (1 615 000), Novi Bečej (265 159), Kecskemét (203 154), Petrovaradin (200 140), Subotica (84 766), Palić (63 808), and Izsák (39 735). The highest density of contribution can be detected in relation to the group incorporating Szeged, Subotica, Kanjiža and Palić. Three cities stand out, which are responsible for 86.4% of the total contribution for PA1: Novi Sad (30%), Baja (28.9%) and Szeged (27.5%).

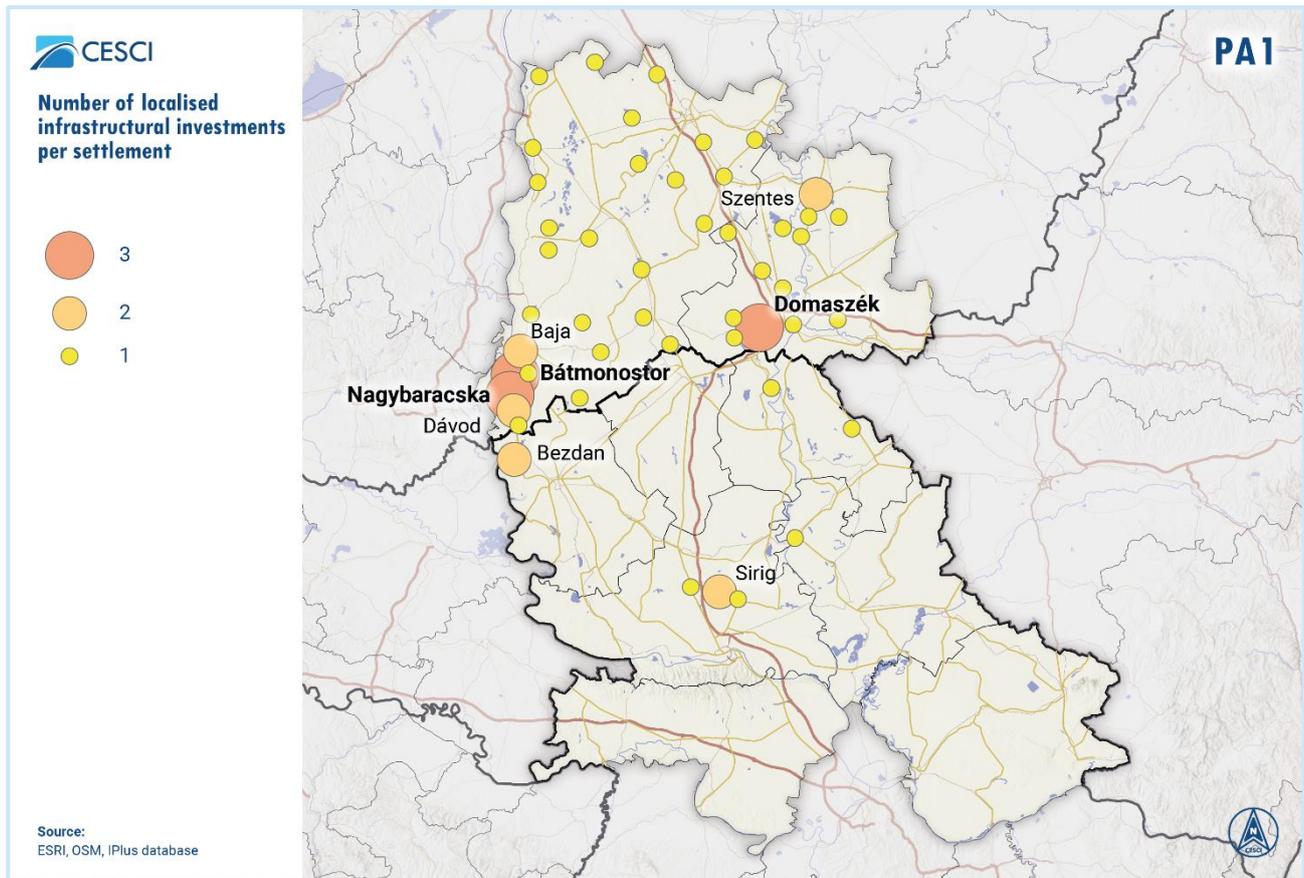
Figure 34: Territorial coverage of EU contribution (PA1)



Based on the **project locations**³² (where detectable infrastructural developments were carried out) in the frames of PA1 Bátmonostor, Domaszék, Nagybaracska stand out by three distinct locations, followed by Baja, Dávod, Szentes from Hungary, and Bezdán and Sirig from Serbia by two locations per settlement. The spatial distribution of project locations is one of the most even, on the Hungarian side in particular, where large areas are covered by realised elements. The uneven distribution is underlined by that fact that out of the 59 project locations 52 are situated on the Hungarian side. A territorial concentration of projects along the bordering sections of the Danube can be shown. High number of infrastructure elements are located in the District of Baja, while Severnobačka, Sremska and Južnobačanska have no realized infrastructure on their territories.

³² More than a single location per project per settlement is possible, as each location was regarded as a separate location even if it located within the territory of the same settlement. Thus, for instance, if there are three locations in a settlement it does not necessarily mean the infrastructure elements were realized from three different CBC projects.

Figure 35: Territorial pattern of localised infrastructural investments



3.1.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA1)

In this subchapter, the durability of the project results and outcomes is evaluated along two main aspects: their institutional and financial sustainability. The evaluators assessed the history and potential future of the projects, the pattern of project's life cycle, their embeddedness into the regional and local structures, in addition the financial conditions for maintaining the projects' results.

The assessment is based on the results of the interviews and the questionnaire, in addition the application forms and the quality assessment of the projects.

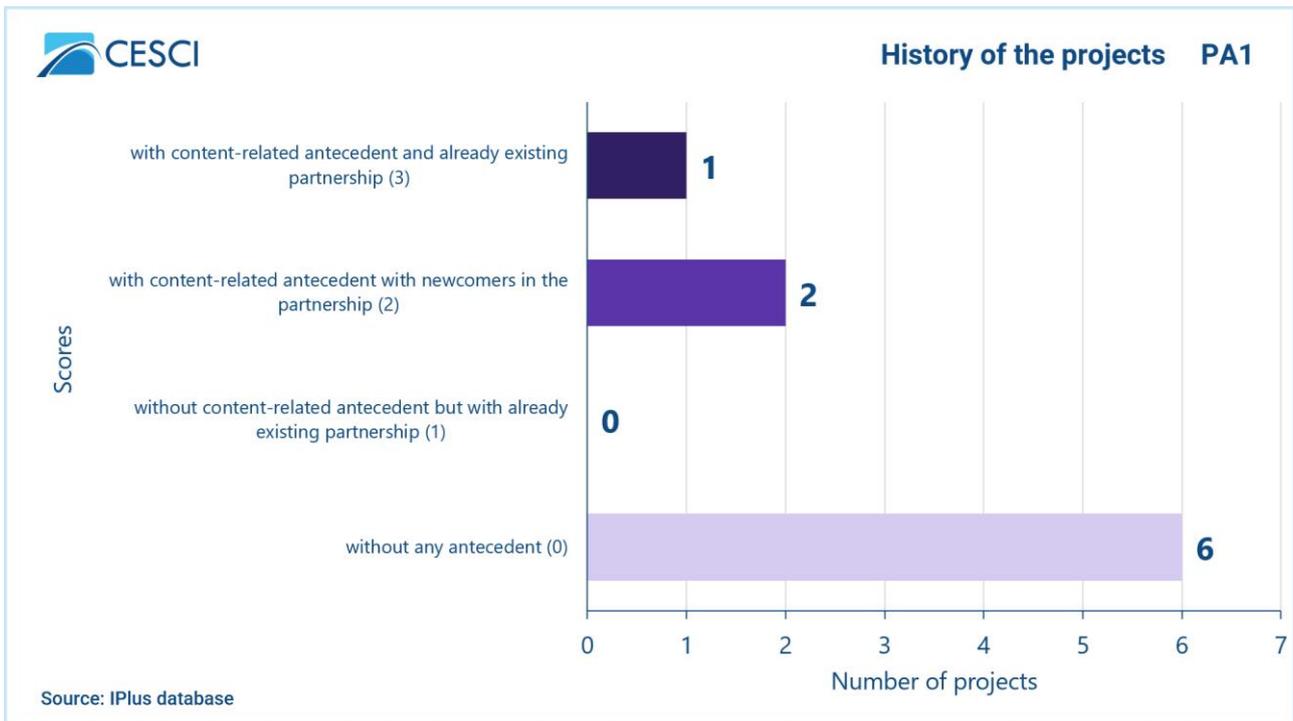
The evaluation of projects' history had been done through analysing the relevant part of all application forms. At the 'description of synergies with other policies, programmes and projects' part of the form, applicants had the possibility to introduce all sorts of previous projects (cross-border, national, transnational, etc.) and partnerships which are connected to their actual development plans. This possibility had been exploited by the applicants in a varying manner, some of them only provided a generic answer, while others explained the matching points in a detailed way. Another barrier of the assessment was that in case of the first (restricted) CfP, this question had not formed part of the application form. Despite of this limitation, evaluators made an attempt to group the selected projects according to the followings:

0. projects without any antecedent;
1. projects without content-related antecedent but with already existing partnership (who had implemented joint project in another thematic field);
2. projects with content-related antecedent with newcomers in the partnership;

3. projects with content-related antecedent and already existing partnership.

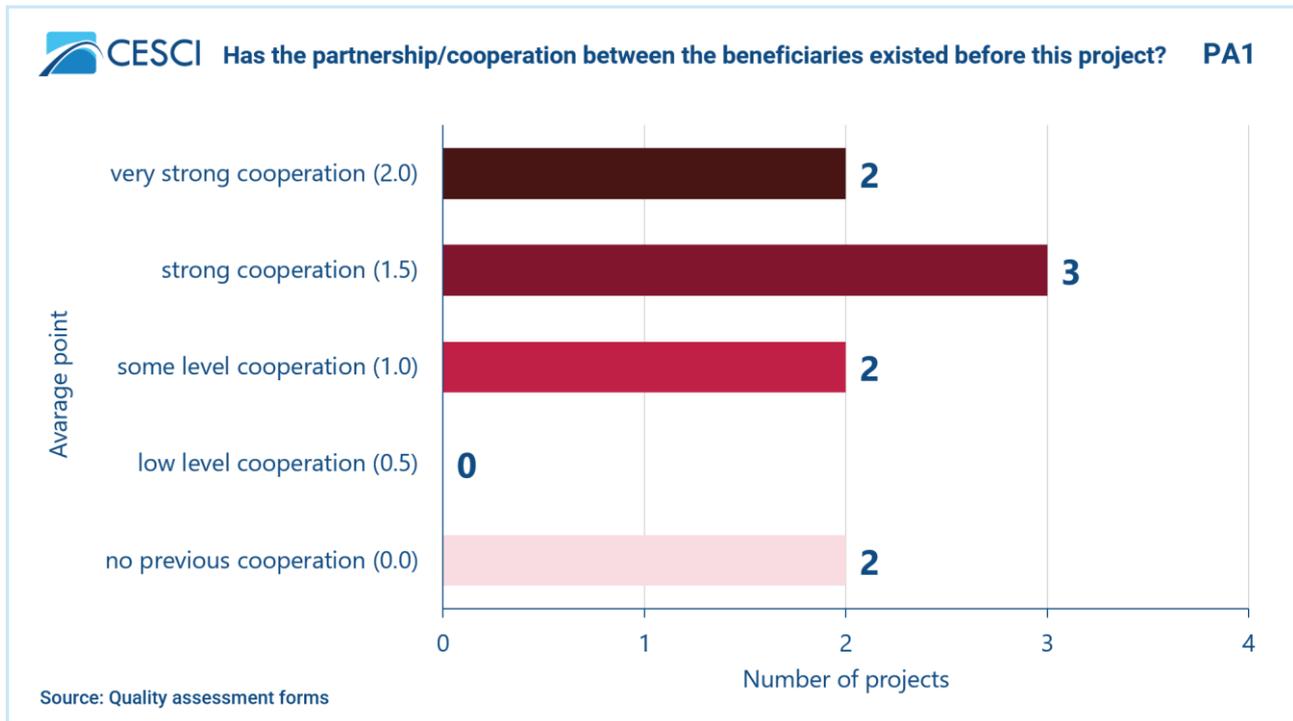
As the following chart (*Figure 36*) shows, two-third of the projects (6 projects altogether) in the field of water management are without any direct antecedent (at least according to the application forms), only 3 out of the 9 have any content wise connections to previous developments. It has to be added to the statistics that within the framework of PA1, the project proposals of such beneficiaries have been selected for funding, as the regional water management bodies or universities who are undoubtedly professionally competent and had been implementing previous developments in the field. This assumes that the selected projects are well-founded and reasonable which obviously contributes to the durability of project results.

Figure 36: History of the projects (PA1)



The related results of quality assessment and the questionnaire also nuance the previous statements. In case of the regular projects (selected at the open CfPs), the two quality assessors evaluated whether the partnership or cooperation between the beneficiaries had existed before on a 3-point scale (0-2). The averages of the points given by the two assessors shows that only two projects had been generated by new partnerships, and more than half of the 9 projects got at least 1.5 points which mirrors that most of the project partners have a common history.

Figure 37: Durability of the partnerships (PA1)



The textual evaluation by the assessors also confirms the relatively high quality of the project partnership. According to the contextual analysis of their description carried out applying the word cloud method, the most frequently used terms were 'balanced', 'adequate' and 'necessary'.

The results of the questionnaire are in line with the quality assessment too. According to the responses concerning 6 projects under PA1, 3 partnerships are based on previous informal cooperation, while 3 other ones, out of which one is institutionalised had been implemented IPA projects together formerly. Only one project collaboration has been newly initiated for the implementation of a certain project in the programming period. This institutional embeddedness means some kind of guarantee for the durability of the commonly achieved results.

Figure 38: Word cloud method visualisation of the partnership aspect (PA1)



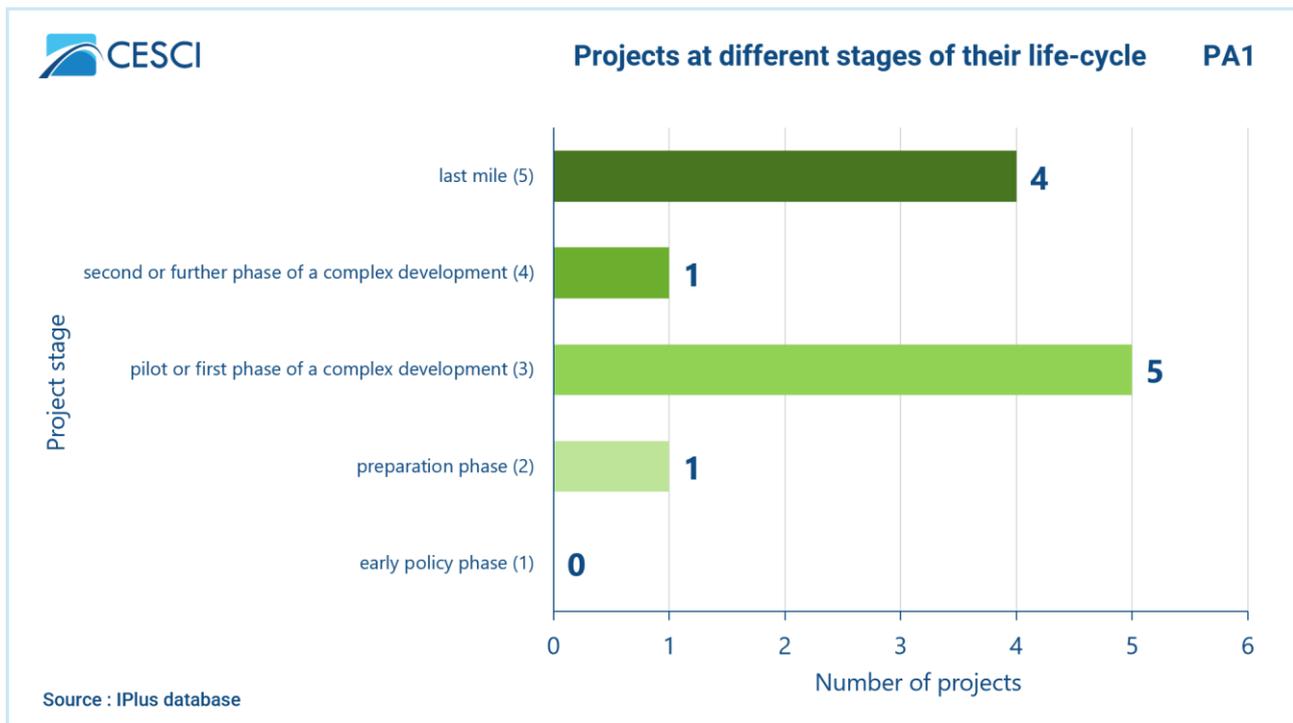
Based on the application forms, the evaluators also assessed the pattern of the projects' life cycle, which means a classification of projects based on the stages of implementation that they lie on. The analysis tends to reflect on the integrated approach, whether the beneficiaries initiate ad-hoc, separate projects or plan and implement long-term, synergic developments step-by-step. This difference in the local actors' mindset basically determines the durability of the projects and programme's results.

On the basis of the project summary written by the beneficiaries in the application phase, projects were categorized into the following 5 groups:

1. early policy phase,
2. preparation phase,
3. pilot or first phase of a complex development,
4. second or further phase of a complex development,
5. last mile.

Taking into consideration that the classification is based on the project summaries which shows some quality differences, there might be some distortions in the results, but some trends are still noticeable.

Figure 39: Life-cycle of the projects (PA1)



The results shows that none of the projects targeted clearly policy measures, and only 1 project seems to be in the preparatory phase with multidisciplinary field measurements laying the basis for hydro-ecologically sound monitoring system. The small number of projects in the lower stages is reasoned by the fact, that according to the requirements and criteria defined by the Cooperation Programme and the CfPs, and sectoral features of the PA, relatively bigger projects with infrastructure developments have been selected for funding. This approach resulted in more complex projects, which contain for example some technical planning or policy measures, but together with the physical infrastructure developments. In case of such complex initiatives, the projects were categorized to the highest possible level on the five-point scale.

5 out of the 11 projects have been evaluated as the first steps of bigger developments with a possibility to continue the joint cross-border work in the future. In addition, both of the strategic projects (BABECA and WASIDCA), together with 2 regular projects were able to implement or close a development package, where there seems to be no need for further developments (therefore evaluated as a last mile projects), but the maintenance and efficient use of the newly built infrastructure.

According to the questionnaire, 5 out of 6 beneficiaries plan to continue to pursue the goals of their project in a different framework after the programme finishes (e.g. in the 2021-2027 programming period). 3 respondents would apply for funding within the framework of other EU programmes such as Interreg Transnational Programmes or the Horizon Europe, while only 2 of the 6 beneficiaries would continue their developments within the framework of the IPA programme. One of them indicated exactly that they would continue their actual project in the next programming period. Regarding the partnerships, 4 of the 6 beneficiaries would continue the cooperation with some partners, while the other 2 respondents are not sure about the future in this term.

The institutional sustainability of the projects, except for the two strategic ones, has been analysed based on the project application forms', where a description on the sustainability and capitalization of project results had been provided by the beneficiaries. In order to identify and analyse the most frequent solutions planned to be applied by the beneficiaries, a contextual analysis was carried out with the word cloud method. The analysis is hardened by the fact that in many cases, only a brief answer had been provided focusing mainly on financial issues. 2 applicants out of the 9 had not dealt with institutional issues at all. However, in the other cases, some trends were still noticeable, as represented also in the word cloud below, according to which there are two distinct solutions applied in this field:

1. sustainability based on the previous or newly established cooperation of the project partners: in the majority of these cases the varying length of the already existing good cooperation between the partners have been put into the focus in terms of institutional sustainability, at the same time the newly established partnerships are also designed to lay the basis for the long-term institutional relations. Some applicants also highlighted the importance of the future continuous communication between the project partners.
2. sustainability based on a certain document: applicants of 2 projects undertook the signature of cooperation agreements to provide the framework of the long-term maintenance of the project results. Furthermore, in one case the municipality applicants had reached an agreement with the relevant water management authorities on both sides of the border before the submission of the proposal, in order to ensure the professional embeddedness of the developments. Another partnership expressed their hope for regulations on the long-term thus providing a legal guarantee for the durability of the results.

Where the institutional aspect of the sustainability was missing, the applicants underlined the professional experience and appropriate capacities of the single project partners, who were planned to be in charge of the capitalization and maintenance of the project outcomes through their everyday operation, thus providing the operational durability.

Figure 40: Word cloud method visualisation of the institutional sustainability aspect (PA1)

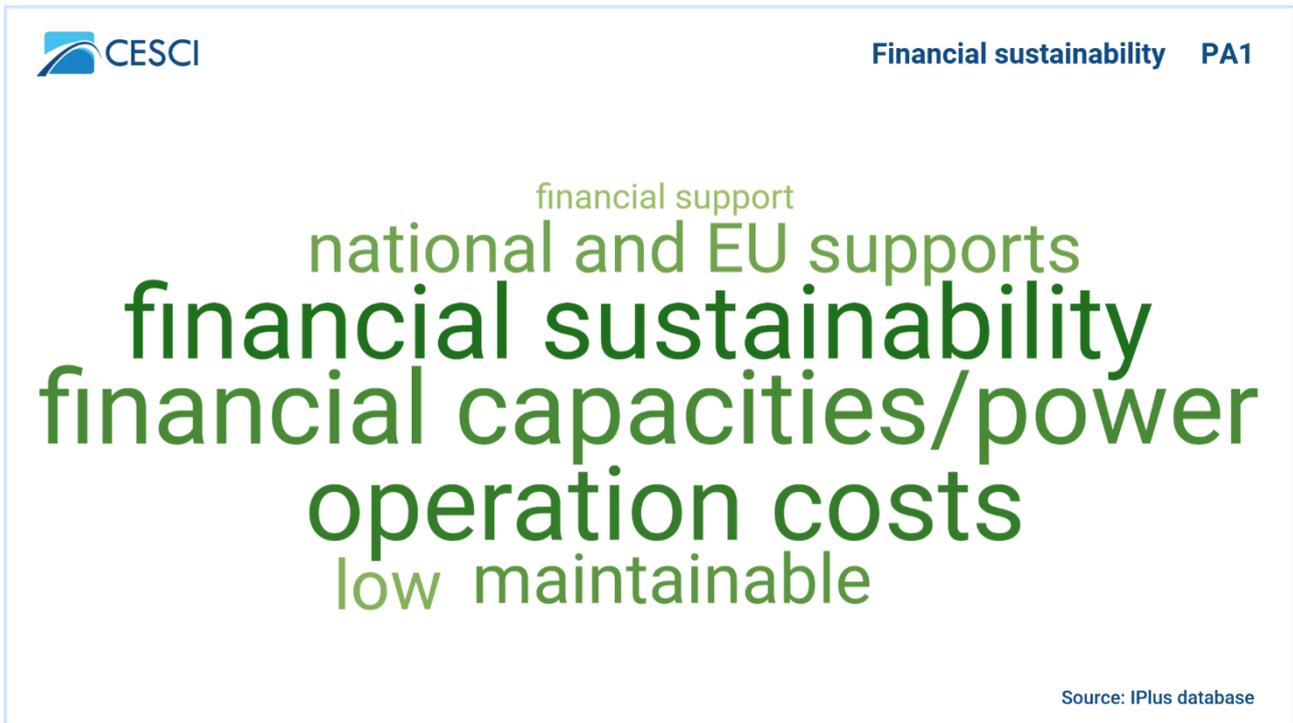


In terms of financial sustainability, the project application forms, as well as the results of the quality assessment and the questionnaire have been provided input for the analysis.

The analysis of the solutions for financial sustainability proposed by the applicants of regular projects gives a rather homogenous image. As it can be seen on the word cloud below (Figure 41), the following features can be identified: 1. financial maintenance ensured individually, by each beneficiary; 2. low level of future maintenance costs.

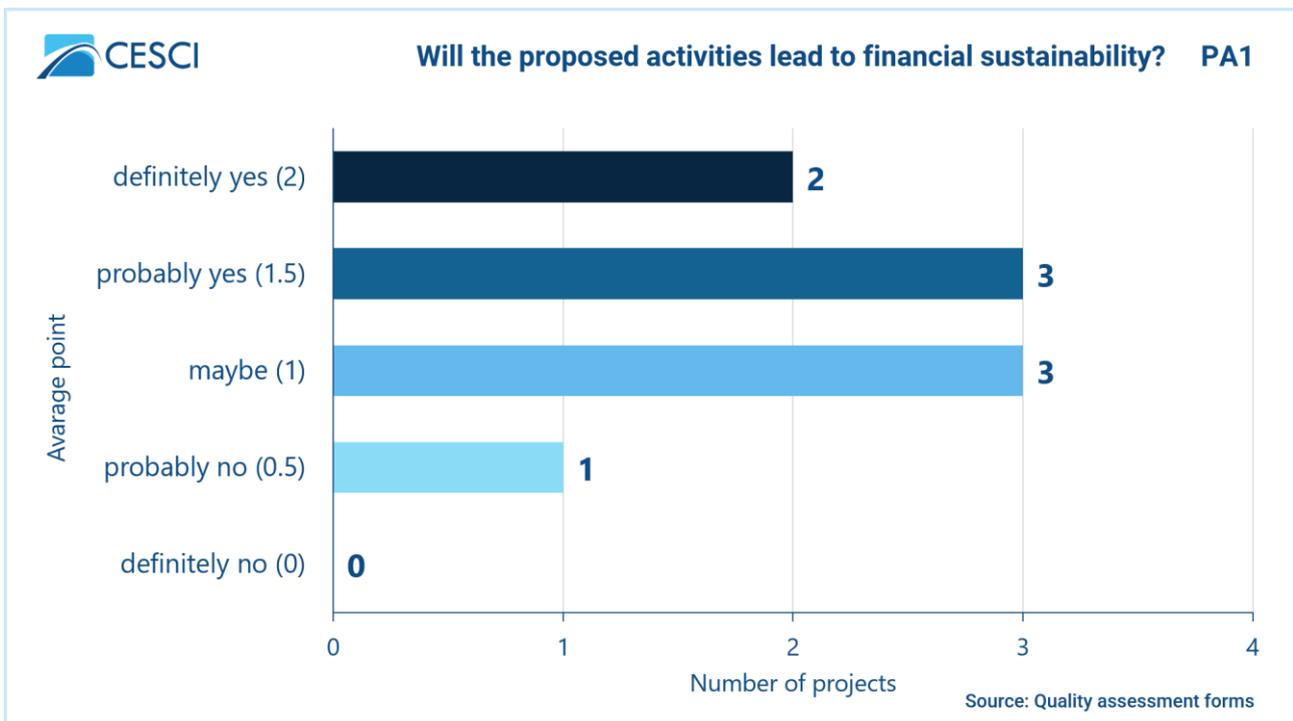
The most often cited solution is to render the task of financial sustainability within the responsibilities of some (in case of 3 projects) or each beneficiary (5 projects) and their financial plans. These plans include mainly own public resources (4 projects) and in one case the involvement of further national and EU resources is planned. This latter solution may assume some financial risks in the maintenance, since the availability of these funds cannot be guaranteed by the beneficiaries. At those projects, where the financial maintenance of any infrastructure or equipment had been undertaken by one or some of the partners, the beneficiaries expressed their exact intention for the joint professional operation of the particular output. The low level of operation and maintenance costs had been highlighted in case of two projects. Last, but not least, it is worth noticing that 2 applicants (of 2 projects) focused on only the mandatory 5-year maintenance period, and only two other applicants mentioned their long-term plans after this 5-year period.

Figure 41: Word cloud method visualisation of the financial sustainability aspect (PA1)



The 6 respondents of the questionnaire also highlighted the role of own organizational resources both in terms of financial and human capacities. Only one respondent mentioned the possible involvement of national resources.

Figure 42: Financial sustainability of the projects (PA1)



Regarding the relevant part of the quality assessment, the assessors evaluated the projects on a 3-point scale (0-2) in terms of whether the proposed activities would lead to financial sustainability. As

the *Figure 42* illustrates beneficiaries of 2 projects were able to offer an answer which fully convince both assessors, while the majority of the projects (6 altogether) are in the 1-1.5 point range. Furthermore, one project had been poorly described its financial plans for the maintenance.

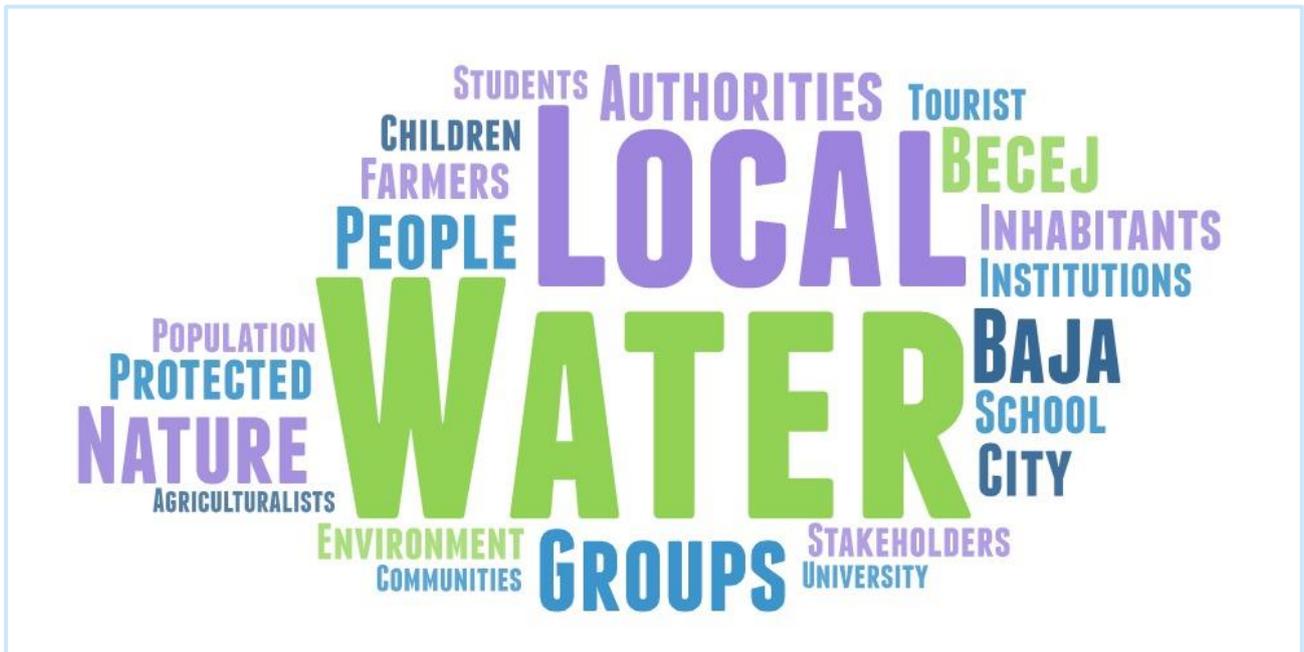
Majority of the projects selected within PA1 contain hard infrastructure development elements, the sustainability of which can be provided based on well-based solutions and methods as the above analyses shows. In parallel, it is easy to monitor the maintenance of the project outputs such as the operation of the constructed buildings, equipment or platforms, the delivery of further water-based measurements or the maintenance of databases and monitoring systems. The Joint Secretariat of the programme has the competency to decide based on a well-defined system of criteria on whether they monitor the maintenance of results of a particular project by requiring project follow-up reports during the 5-year period or not. In case of this PA only 4 of the 11 projects were excluded from the official follow-up period.

3.1.3.6 Analysis of the impacted target groups (PA1)

The main programme documents defined the target groups for the PA1 as the inhabitants of the cross-border region, the enterprises, the natural environment and the nature protected areas. Given the fact that this PA is devoted to improving cross-border water management and risk prevention systems, the definition of the target groups seems logical and suitable.

Although not all the projects filled out the necessary description of the intended target group in the INTERREG+ system, those who did usually structured their answers in a two-tier manner. Firstly, the projects defined their indirect target groups which were mostly the people living in the relevant cross-border area as usually the overarching goal of the projects was the improvement of the environment potential and ensuring its sustainability. Secondly, the direct target group was defined in a way more tailored to the activities of the project, as these could be institutions, schools, or different groups of people such as tourists, farmers or agriculturalists. The word cloud analysis also showed that certain settlements such as Baja or Bečej were mentioned several times.

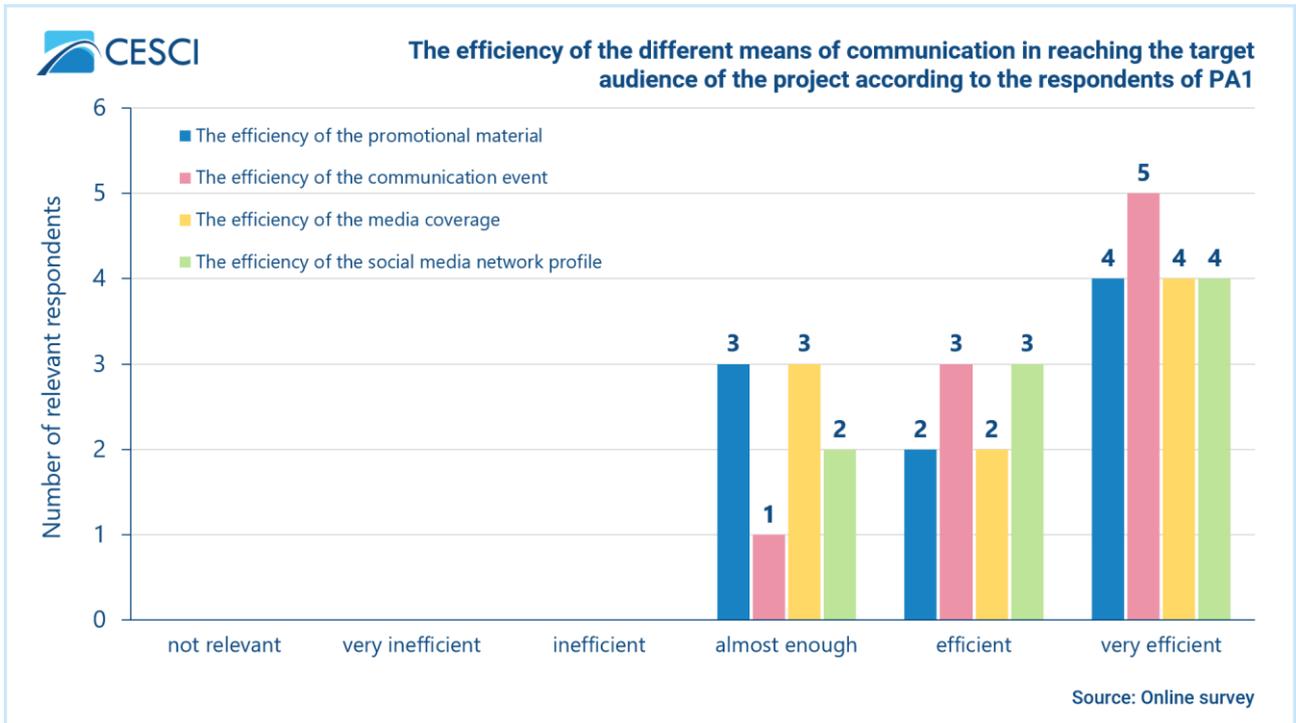
Figure 43: Word cloud visualisation of the target group descriptions provided by the projects in the INTERREG+ system



The comparison of the target groups defined by the programme documents and the target groups defined by the projects show a satisfactory level of harmony which is also in line with the intention of the PA.

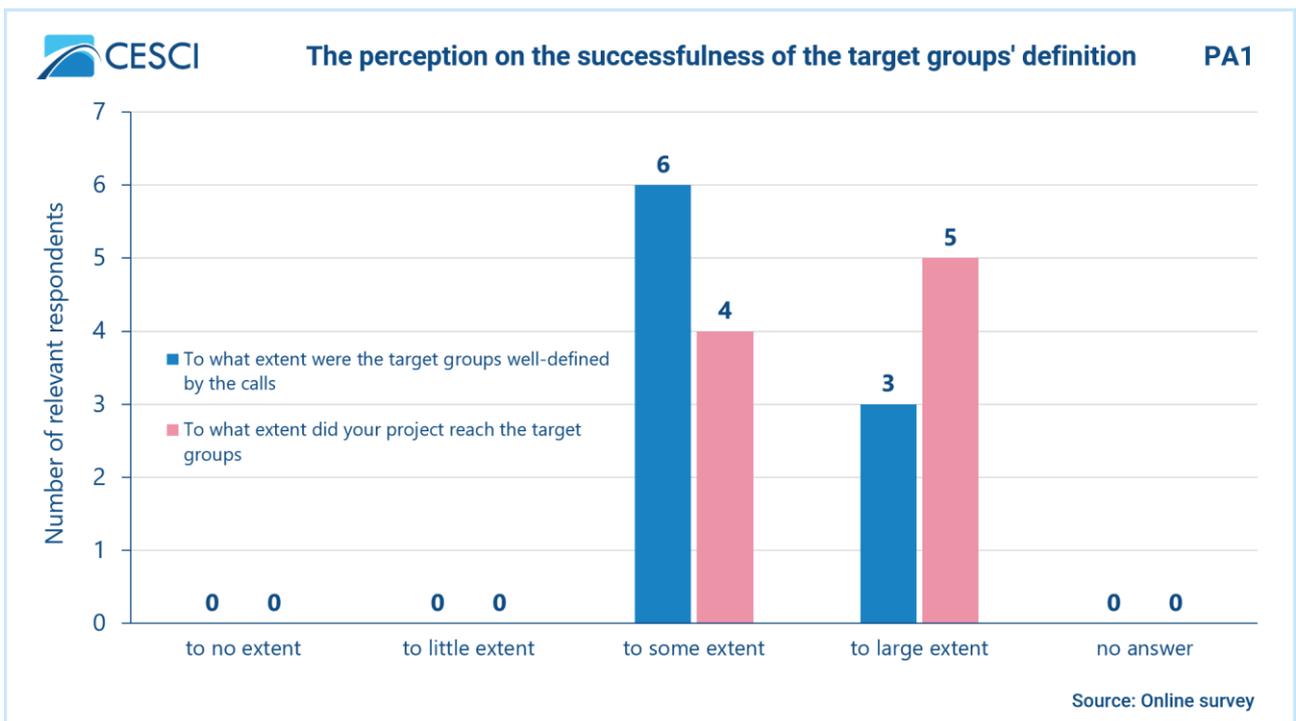
In order to assess how well were the target groups predefined, the online survey referenced above also contained several questions on this topic. Firstly, the efficiency of the different means of communication was assessed in reaching the target audience of the project. According to the respondents of the online survey, none of the used methods were irrelevant, very inefficient or inefficient. The worse ratings were attributed to the promotional material and the media coverage, these being voted the most times as only almost enough. On the other hand, the communication event was deemed by the most respondents as being a very efficient tool in reaching the target audience.

Figure 44: The efficiency of the different means of communication in reaching the target audience of the project according to the respondents of PA1



According to the respondents of the online survey, the CfPs defined the target groups to some or to large extent in a successful way and also the projects were considered to reach their target groups in a rather favourable length; more than half of the respondent rated it the highest and the other to the second highest category.

Figure 45: The perception on the successfulness of the target groups' definition (PA1)



The regional needs and challenges that the Programme strived to solve were not relevant to the defined target groups in the same level. In order to assess how relevant these were to the target groups (which is also indicative on how well were the target groups selected) a benchmark analysis was carried out where 1 means it was not really relevant, 2 means it was relevant to some degree and 3 means that the given regional need and challenge was highly relevant to the given target group (the white squares indicate groups that were not explicitly assigned to the given challenge by the Programme).

Table 21: The short explanation of the benchmark categories

yellow (1)	the given challenge was not really relevant to the given target group
light green (2)	the given challenge was relevant to some degree to the given target group
dark green (3)	the given challenge was highly relevant to the given target group
white	the given target group was not explicitly assigned to the given challenge

Table 22: Benchmark of the level to which the different challenges were relevant to the defined target groups in PA1

Regional needs / challenges	Defined target groups			
	The inhabitants of the cross-border region	Agricultural producers and enterprises	The natural environment	The nature protected areas
Missing joint water monitoring system	2	not a predefined group	3	not a predefined group
Missing early warning systems for environmental risks	3	not a predefined group	2	not a predefined group
Reconstruction of canals connected to the Danube is necessary	2	not a predefined group	2	not a predefined group
Climate change endangers agricultural safety	3	3	2	not a predefined group
Negative impacts on the nature conservation areas should be reduced	2	not a predefined group	not a predefined group	3

3.1.3.7 Analysis of cross-border relevance (PA1)

The main purpose of the analysis is to identify the level at which the programme can be considered cross-border. We analyse in this subchapter the projects' level of cooperation and materialisation in a cross-border sense.

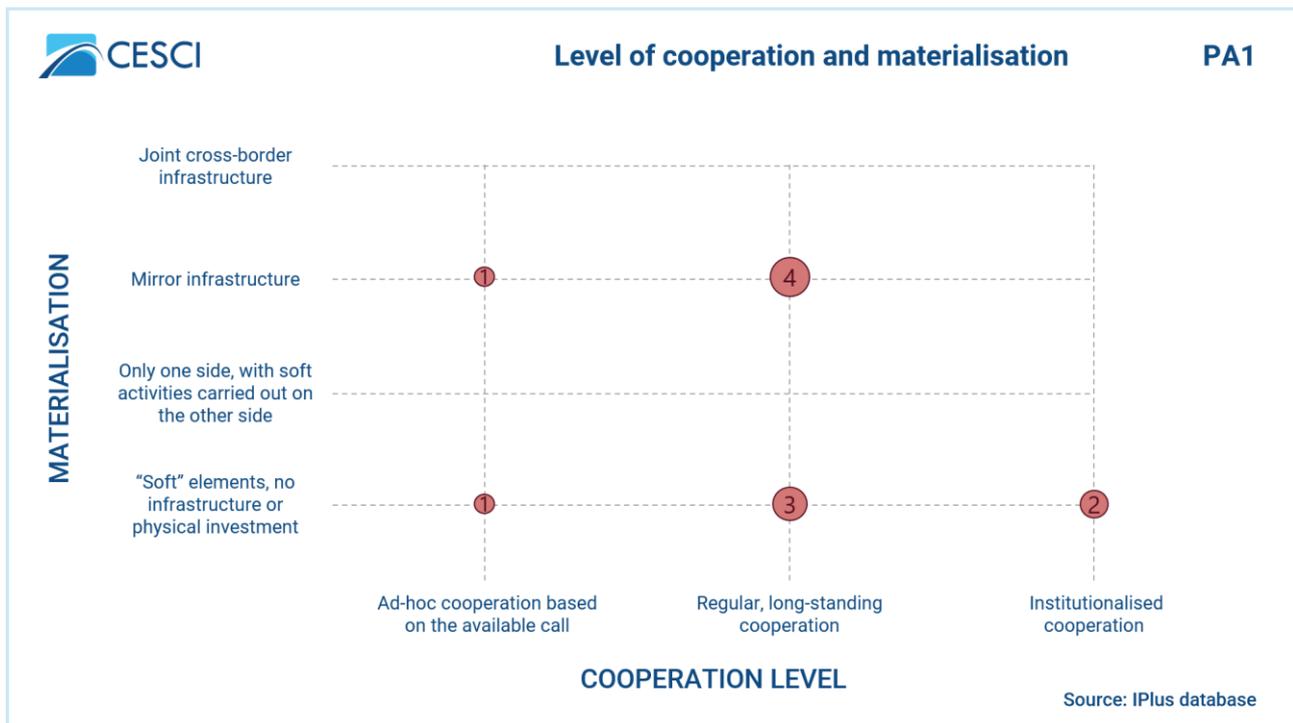
An important aspect of relevance targets the cross-border character of the programme. This character can be justified by the impacts having on a) cross-border territorial, economic and social cohesion and b) the intensity of cross-border cooperation. Obviously, these two factors can hardly be assessed: notwithstanding the definition problems of cohesion itself, it is not self-evident by which criteria can a programme be justified as more cross-border than another. However, cross-border projects can be classified by a 4x3 cell matrix along by two vectors: the *level of cooperation* and *materialisation*.

The different levels of cooperation can be characterised by the *maturity of the relationship*: is there any real cross-border component in the project; whether it is about ad-hoc events (e.g. exchange of experiences); the creation of the conditions for regular and long-standing cooperation (set-up of permanent partnership, development of joint action plans, drafting joint educational curricula, establishment of long-standing cooperation between institutions); or the partners intend to create integrated cross-border services, products or joint institutions? It has to be stipulated that even the highly developed cross-border institutions started with the first steps of exchanges. Still, the long-term objective of the cross-border programmes should be to support the development of partnerships being able to create cross-border institutions and services.

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

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

Figure 46: Level of cooperation and materialisation (PA1)



Taking into consideration the **level of cooperation** of the projects related to PA1, it can be concluded that regular, long-lasting cooperation has been created among various project partners with the help of the projects as well. This Category 2 represents 64% of all projects, 7 in total. The number (and share) of projects regarded either as ad-hoc cooperation or institutionalised are identical; each category consists of 2 projects with a share of 18% out of all projects.

Considering the **materialisation of projects** in PA1 it can be stated that all projects can be distinguished between two categories: projects with soft elements (6 projects), and projects with mirror infrastructure (5 projects). The other two categories or levels are missing in this case. The share of Category 1 is slightly lower than of all projects, while also due to the missing other levels Category 3 has an outstandingly high share (45%), which is more than the sum of the categories of 2, 3 and 4 regarding all projects together (33%), and way higher than the share of the same category on programme level (16%). The result can be understood the way that many projects were about to construct environmental infrastructure, often monitoring systems or reconstruct canals and other blue infrastructure associated with water management.

With regard to PA1 the largest number of projects can be found in mirror infrastructure considering materialisation and long-lasting cooperation (4 projects, 36%). The other notably share here is the category of soft projects with long-lasting cooperation (3 projects, 27%). Together they make up almost the two-third of all related projects. The cross-border relevance of the related projects can be seen as rather good in comparison to PA3 especially. Both of the strategic projects reached relatively high relevance as WASIDCA and BABECA projects represent regular, long-standing cooperation and infrastructure was created in both countries.

3.1.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA1)

In order to show synergies with relevant European and national level programmes i.e. what programmes and how much were supported by the contribution of the HUSRB³³, two methods were applied:

1. First, the application forms (especially the information written about the synergies with other policies, programmes and projects) were analysed in order to know what applicants wrote about the potential synergies. This method was used in order to show synergies in connection with EU level as well as national level plans.
2. Second, an analysis was carried out to find out how (much) the goals of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the EU 2020 Strategy were supported by the project implemented. This method used an expert analysis by CESC based on the project descriptions to show synergies with the related EUSDR PAs and EU2020 headline targets.

Based on what is written in the application forms by the applicants, the **EU level** plans and policies enhancing and complementing the effect of the PA the most frequently are EUSDR (6 projects mentioned it), LIFE+ (3 projects) and the Europe 2020 Strategy (3 projects). Water Framework Directive (2 projects) with its relatively notable share can also be mentioned here. The related policies and strategies and the projects of PA1 contributed the most to the needs concentrated on water management (water monitoring, reconstruction of canals, warning systems), and on environmental protection (climate change, impacts on nature conservation areas).

On **national level** projects of PA1 contributed to the enhancement and completion of the National Water Strategy, National Forest Strategy and the National Climate Change Strategy (2 projects each case) regarding Hungary. The Development Programme of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for the Period 2014-2020 (3 projects mentioned it), the National Sustainable Development Strategy and the Forestry Development Strategy can be highlighted in relation to Serbia (2 projects each). The PA impacted the regional needs described in the documents and policies in the case of water monitoring and climate change. Forests have a special focus, however no clear challenge deal with the topic in the intervention logic of PA1, or in the Programme.

In the frames of the expert analysis, the contribution of the HUSRB projects to the following Priority Areas of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (**EUSDR**) were analysed:

- PA 1A Waterways Mobility;
- PA 1B Rail-Road-Air Mobility;
- PA 2 Sustainable Energy;
- PA 3 Culture & Tourism;
- PA 4 Water Quality;
- PA 5 Environmental Risks;
- PA 6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality;
- PA 7 Knowledge Society;

³³ About the opposite direction, namely about the influence effects of the various other CBC, European, national and regional programmes regarding the regional needs of the border area, can be read in the next chapter on the influence factors.

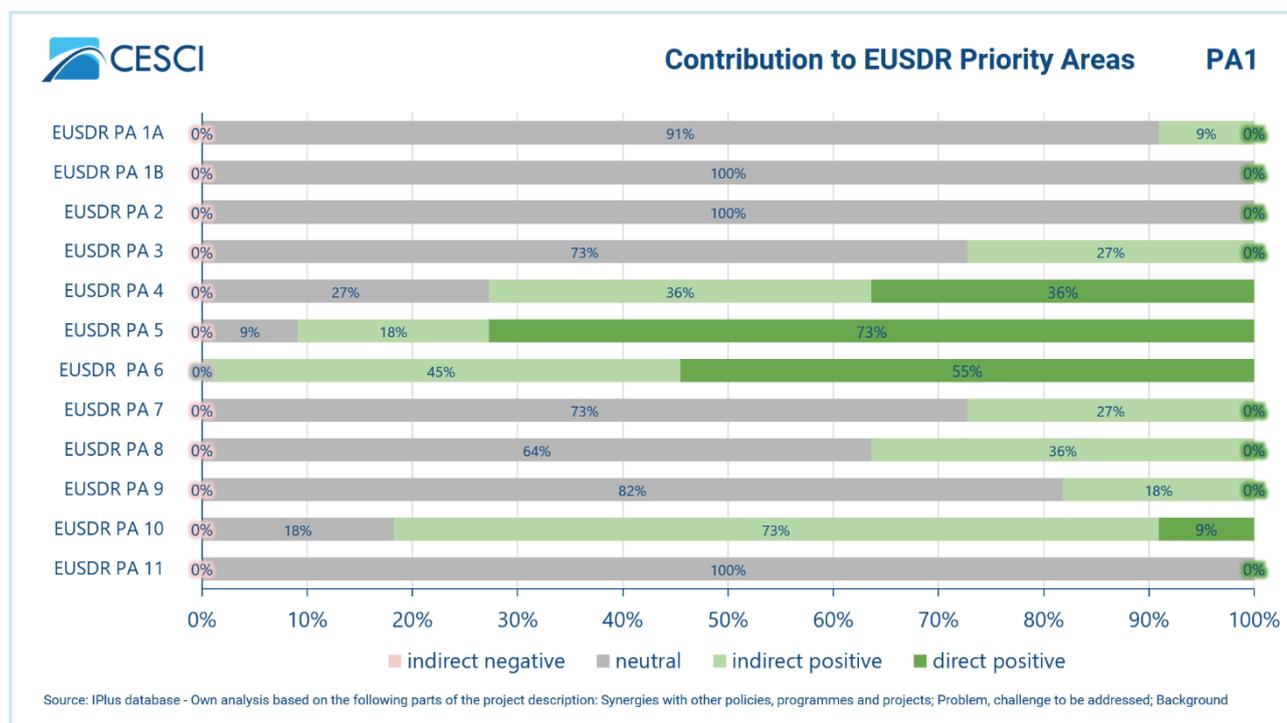
- PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises;
- PA 9 People & Skills;
- PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation;
- PA 11 Security.

Each HUSR B projects were evaluated based on the following two aspects:

1. direction of the given project's effect (negative, neutral, or positive); and
2. character of the given project's effect (direct/indirect) on the EUSDR's PAs.

Using this methodology, based on their effects on the EUSDR PAs, all HUSR B projects were classified into the following four effect-categories: indirect negative, neutral, indirect positive and direct positive. The results of the projects within the PA1 are shown in the following figure (*Figure 47*).

Figure 47: Contribution to EUSDR Priority Areas (PA1)



Considering **PA1** of the HUSR B, PA 5 Environmental Risks is the EUSDR PA which is the most in line with the projects, and vice versa. Almost three-quarters of the projects (73%, 8 projects) have direct positive synergies with the projects concerned. Only 9% of the projects has no positive impact on PA 5. Along with PA 5 it is PA 6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality which has a very strong connection to this HUSR B PA; 55% (6 projects) of the projects have direct, while 45% (5 projects) have indirect impact on the PA meaning that all projects are in line with this EUSDR PA. PA 4 Water Quality has the third highest rate of projects with direct positive impact on the EUSDR priorities. Both projects having direct and indirect effects have equal shares of 36%. Even though the direct positive effect of projects is only 9% in relation to PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation, high share of projects (73%, 8 projects) contributes to this EUSDR PA. Therefore, the role of projects implemented here is important in indirectly supporting inter-institutional cooperation, institutionalised connections as well as joint capacity building.

The Commission proposed the following EU headline targets as part of the **Europe 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**³⁴:

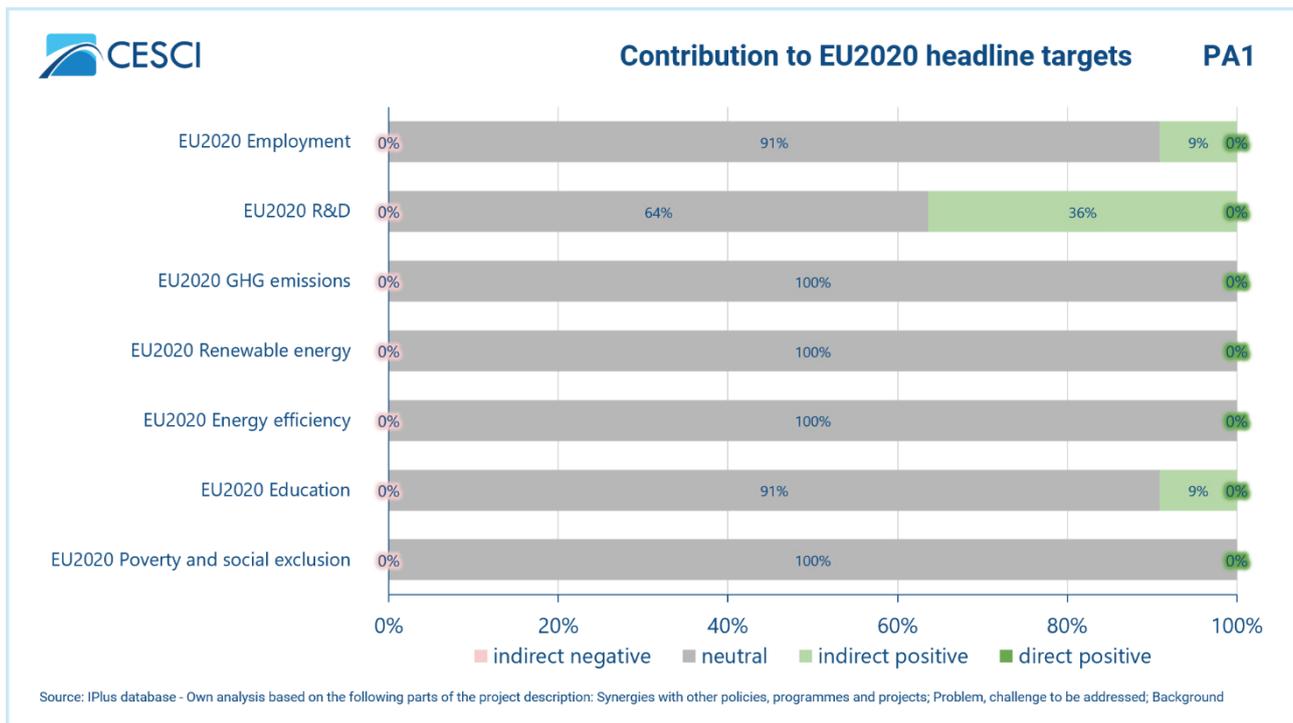
- Raise the **employment** rate of the population aged 20-64 from the current 69% to at least 75%.
- Achieve the target of investing 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in **R&D** in particular by improving the conditions for R&D investment by the private sector, and develop a new indicator to track innovation.
- **Reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels or by 30% if the conditions are right,
- Increase the share of **renewable energy** in our final energy consumption to 20%,
- Achieve a 20% increase in **energy efficiency**.
- Reduce the share of early school leavers to 10% from the current 15% and increase the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary **education** from 31% to at least 40%.
- Reduce the number of Europeans living below national **poverty** lines by 25%, lifting 20 million people out of poverty.

In the frames of the analysis of contribution of a certain project to the EU2020 targets, two features of the projects descriptions in particular were analysed: 1. the effects of the projects (negative, neutral, or positive); 2. direct/indirect features of the projects. In total, four types of projects were delineated: indirect negative, neutral, positive, and direct positive.

With regard to **PA1**, projects formulated in this area helped the most to meet the achievement of investing 3% of GDP in R&D. 36% of the supported projects under this PA have an indirect positive impact on reaching the EU goal. A number of 6 projects support the respective target indirectly. Significantly lower connection can be detected in relation to the employment and to the educational headline target (9% of all related projects, a project per each target).

³⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:en:PDF>

Figure 48: Contribution to EU2020 headline targets (PA1)



3.1.3.9 Influence factors regarding the impacts (PA1)

After the introduction of the achieved results, in this subchapter, the different internal and external factors and the effects of the various other CBC, European, national and regional programmes regarding the regional needs of the border area will be evaluated.

In line with these, the influence factors regarding the impacts of the programme were analysed with the help of two different methods:

- First, the main factors were taken into account which can be considered global, overall and more soft influence factors. Here an influence matrix is provided which summarises these factors in a textual way, giving a short description of the factors themselves and naming their type.
- Apart from this summarizing table, the different (mainstream, other Interreg) programmes were also analysed from the point of their help in fulfilling the regional needs. There a scoring method was used by measuring the value of the support for the realisation of goals and actions expressed under the given PAs. Consequently, the level of effects on the impacts of the PA by the respective programmes is summarised below per each PA.

The following table (*Table 23*) summarizes the most important **external and internal influence factors**.

Table 23: The most important external and internal influence factors on the impacts of the PA1

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type (external, internal factor)
Climate change	Climate change represents a serious challenge for both Hungary and Serbia. This might involve the processes of continuing temperature increases, more frequently prolonged droughts, wildfires, heavy storms, floods and disproportionate rain distribution. The increased number of extreme weather events and variations in precipitation has become more widespread and frequent. Moreover, it might also generate serious impact on nature, including animals and plants. Subsequently, it is highly important to slow down the process in order to make appropriate adaptation and mitigation preparations towards it.	external
Nature protection	Transboundary United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Biosphere Reserve 'Mura-Drava-Danube' was established in 2021 as the world's first 5-country biosphere reserve. The Reserve stretches across Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia. The establishment of the Biosphere Reserve was preceded by more than ten years of preparatory work. The ministers of environment of the five countries committed themselves in a joint declaration under the European Union Presidency in March 2011. The preservation of cross-border ecological environment requires a complex nature management. The cross-border Biosphere Reserve combines more than 13 protected areas of the Mura-Drava-Danube region and it sustainably handles the ecosystem of the rivers and encourages the economic development of the region. In addition to the protection of nature, the cooperation also aims to grasp the attention of tourists towards nature.	external
Nature protection	Hungarian-Serbian border water cooperation covers six decades (since 1955). The framework for joint work is determined by the bilateral convention between Hungary and the Republic of Serbia in the field of sustainable water management, border waters and cooperation on river basins of common interest that entered into force on April 24, 2020 and it replaces the agreement from 1955. It underlines the issue of floods, inland waterways, inland water and ice-breaking controls in areas which are impacted by the border.	external
Financial resource	Apart from the Interreg IPA CBC programme, there are no other options to establish similar cross-border projects in this thematic field. The Danube Transnational Programme might be alternative solutions, but these cannot provide similar investments like the current CBC programme.	external
Permissions	Projects depend on the final permissions for works on water management systems. Delays occurred due to late permissions.	external

It is worth underlying that apart from the projects carried out with the support of the Programme itself, **other "external" programmes also contributed to the goals**, actions and expected results intended to reach by the CP. Therefore, in the upcoming part other Interreg, national, regional and

other programmes are analysed, which had an influence on the impacts realised in the field of the given PAs.

Two aspects were taken into account in assessing the impacts of these programmes on the PAs: thematic connection and intensity of support. The first explains how well thematically the given programme is in line with the actions of the PA, while the latter assesses the strength or intensity of support from the point of territorial and financials contribution. 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, 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 in the actions could be found), and the intensity of support was high (e.g. actions were having regional or even transboundary impacts, the relevant common actions enjoyed great support). The tables explain the scoring system of the value of the impacts of the related programmes. The second table gives a short explanation on the results of the scoring, where the higher the value is, the greater the impact is reached, and vice versa.

Table 24: 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)
Little thematic connection (1)	1	2	3
Medium level thematic connection (2)	2	4	6
Strong thematic connection (3)	3	6	9

Table 25: 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 following table (*Table 26*) shows

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 thematical synergies and similar actions of the analysed programme with the related PA actions;
3. the explanation or 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.

The next table shows (*Table 26*) the programmes which differently influenced the impacts of the PA. With regard to PA1, programmes with the highest overall value which supported the impact of the given PA are the Interreg programme of Romania-Hungary (RO-HU) and the KEHOP.

Table 26: Influence effects of the different programmes on the impacts of the PA1

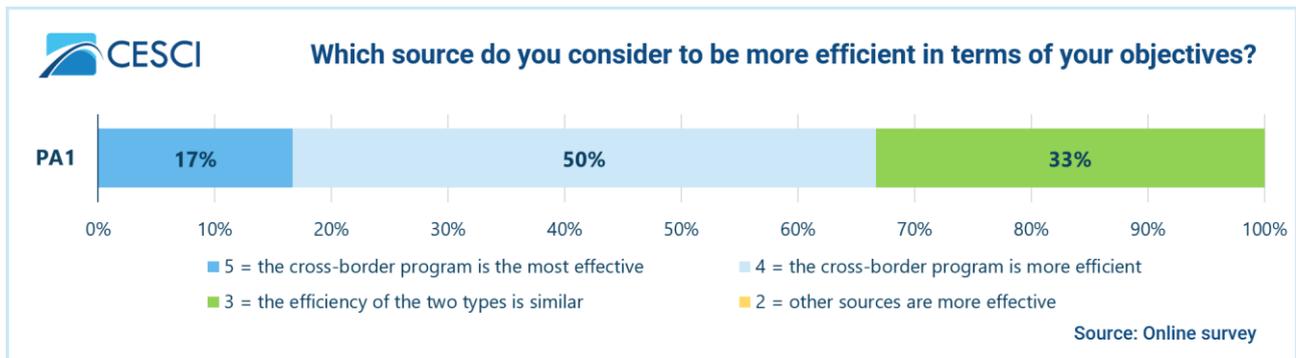
	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
Interreg programmes	RO-HU	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • water quality monitoring, information and data exchange, • rehabilitation of natural waters, • flood-protection, • retention of surface water resources, • agricultural and energy generation use of water • Joint development of the emergency response and disaster management capacity 	High share of support went for water management actions. Two priority axes addressed the related challenges of PA1: 'PA1 Joint protection and efficient use of common values' and 'PA5 Improve risk-prevention and disaster management'. The latter less directly supports the intervention logic of PA1.
	Cross-border Cooperation Programme Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina (RS-BIH)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the management system for emergency Interventions 	Considering the floods that both Serbia and BIH experienced in 2014, a lot of work is being done on the development of joint management of water, floods and risks. Significant progress has been made in this field and there are a large number of projects that touch on this topic within TP2.
	Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia - Serbia (RS-HR)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development integrated cross-border monitoring and management systems for flood risks • monitoring system which determines the chemical and ecological status of water • the impact of agricultural activities on water quality • protection and preservation of aquatic habitats/wetlands 	In the area of Biodiversity Protection through the improvement and protection of wetlands, the greatest impact was made through this programme. Significant cooperation was also achieved on joint flood risk management, as well as on the improvement of water quality, taking into account the release of numerous pollutants used in agriculture. PA2 is compatible with the above activities.
Hungarian operative programmes	KEHOP	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flood protection, water management infrastructure • waste water treatment, waste water purification 	PA1 benefited most from flood protection investments of KEHOP.

	Programmes	Impact on PA1	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reconstruction and rehabilitation of wetlands 	The protection of water quality was achieved more at the local level, thanks to the improvement of local wastewater treatment.
	TOP	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> preservation and presentation of protected natural areas adapting to the effects of climate change (stormwater drainage solution, internal water management) Green City Developments Energetic modernization of public institutions 	Within the framework of the TOP, there were several relevant CfPs on the topic, their regional utilization was low, and the majority of the projects had a strong local impact. The regional impact of protected areas is relatively large, not only at the local level.
	VP	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition to ecological, sustainable farming Water protection Investments related to climate change and for the prevention of weather risks 	A significant number of CfPs were made. The main profile of the VP is not the protection of protected areas, the issue of adapting to climate change is more prominent.
	Hungarian Fisheries Operational Programme (MAHOP)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature protection services 	Small-value projects, implemented with local impact.
Serbian national programmes	Annual program of the Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> construction, rehabilitation, reconstruction and preparation of technical documentation of water facilities in public ownership and preparation of design and technical documentation of faecal sewage facilities arrangement of the canal network in the function of agricultural land drainage 	Actions are mostly localized. Actions that are a continuation of previous projects are often financed for several years in a row, and which, due to insufficient financial resources, were not completed in one year. During one year, one CfP for two measures is published.

Several KEHOP projects supported the realisation of water management related projects, especially the strategic projects titled WASIDCA and BABECA of the water directorates were impacted. The synergetic relations are strong between the programme and the Hungarian national and operational programmes, and there is a systematic project development in relation to water management and water quality (e.g. reconstruction of canals and locks, creating water monitoring and environmental risk prevention system). Inland, very one-focused KEHOP projects can supplement the more comprehensive and thematically colourful cross-border (strategic) projects targeting larger (cross-border) water systems.

In the followings the survey will be analysed from the point which programmes contributed and how to the impacts of the CP. The question that will be analysed: which source do you consider to be more efficient in terms of your objectives? With regard to answers saying that the cross-border program is the most effective the share for PA1 is the lowest, only 16.7%. Every second respondents expressed that the CBC programme is more efficient than other programmes. No answers were received that would say other sources are more effective.

Figure 49: Which source do you consider to be more efficient in terms of your objectives?



3.1.4 Efficiency analysis (PA1)

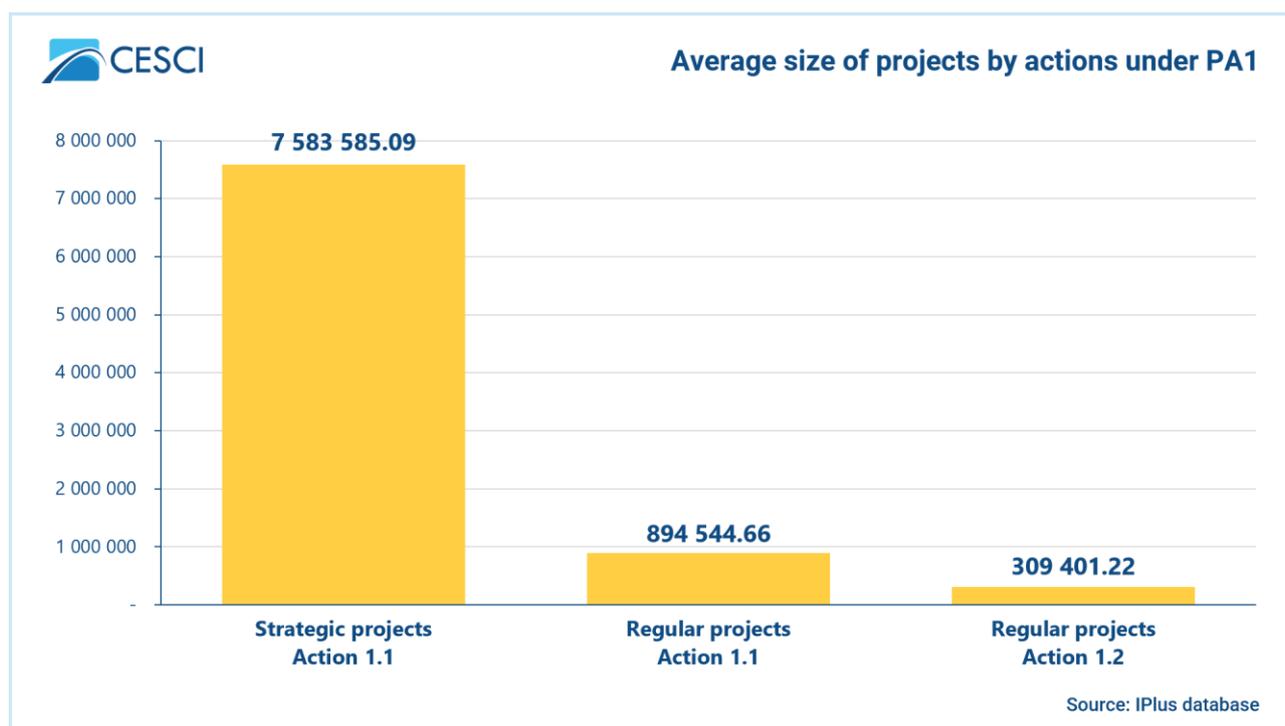
This chapter aims to give an overview on the cost efficiency of reaching the objectives and target values of the selected indicators by analysing the projects' budget and the specific features of budget allocations. Within the framework of PA1, evaluators have conducted the examination by actions³⁵ defined by the CfPs and by project type in order to avoid the distortion effect of the strategic projects.

The average size of the projects was assessed from a financial point of view. There are significant differences between the average size of the strategic projects and the regular projects under action 1.1. and 1.2. which are reasoned by the specific features of the project types and actions determined by the CfPs. In the previous 2007-2013 programming period, the average project size on programme level was 281 535.88 EUR which is significantly lower than those of the projects under PA1. Considering also the low number of projects (9 regular ones under the two actions and two strategic ones) compared to the 204 projects in the previous period, the difference seems to be reasonable.

³⁵ Actions under PA1:

- 1.1 Water management and protection against extreme weather conditions
- 1.2 Nature protection and conservation of water based habitats

Figure 50: Average size of projects by actions under PA1



The cost efficiency of the achievement of the targeted and achieved indicator values have been assessed based on the aggregated amount of the allocated EU funding. The table below (*Table 27*) aims to indicate what have already been and can be achieved by the end of the programming period from the programme support in terms of the project output indicators. Regarding the methodology of the analysis, since the projects selected during the third CfP are still in progress, the evaluators aggregated both the achieved and targeted value of the output indicators and the total budget (the validated amounts of the closed projects and the planned ones for the on-going) of the related projects. Then we calculated the cost of achievement of one measurement unit of the certain indicators.

In line with these, in case of *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures* the achieved ratio means that 1.77 EUR ERDF funding needed for providing improved flood protection measures for one person, which is expected to be decreased to 1.11 € by the end of the programming period.

Table 27: Achieved and target indicator values by output indicators under PA1

Indicator ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Aggregated achieved value (AIR 2021)	Aggregated target value	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures	Population benefiting from flood protection measures	persons	1 677 762.16	949 123.00	1 511 787.00	1.77	1.11

Indicator ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Aggregated achieved value (AIR 2021)	Aggregated target value	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
OI/1.2 Length of new or improved water management system	Length of new or improved water management system	metres	15 016 147.28	172 912.00	180 608.00	86.84	83.14
OI/1.3 Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	hectares	1 352 967.50	17 672.32	182 126.35	76.56	7.43

Under PA1 there is only one project which targeted two output indicators, the *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures* and *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats*. In the application phase, applicants briefly described their approach towards the achievement of the indicated values. According to this explanation, the project directly targets *OI/1.3 Supported area of habitats*, while the contribution to *OI/1.1 Population benefiting from flood protection measures* is a quasi-indirect effect of the developments. In line with this, evaluators were not able to divide the budget between the two indicators, instead we calculated with the total ERDF fund allocated to the project in both cases. This obviously leads to some distortion in the results, but we cannot see the possibility to set-up a sounder methodology for handling this issue.

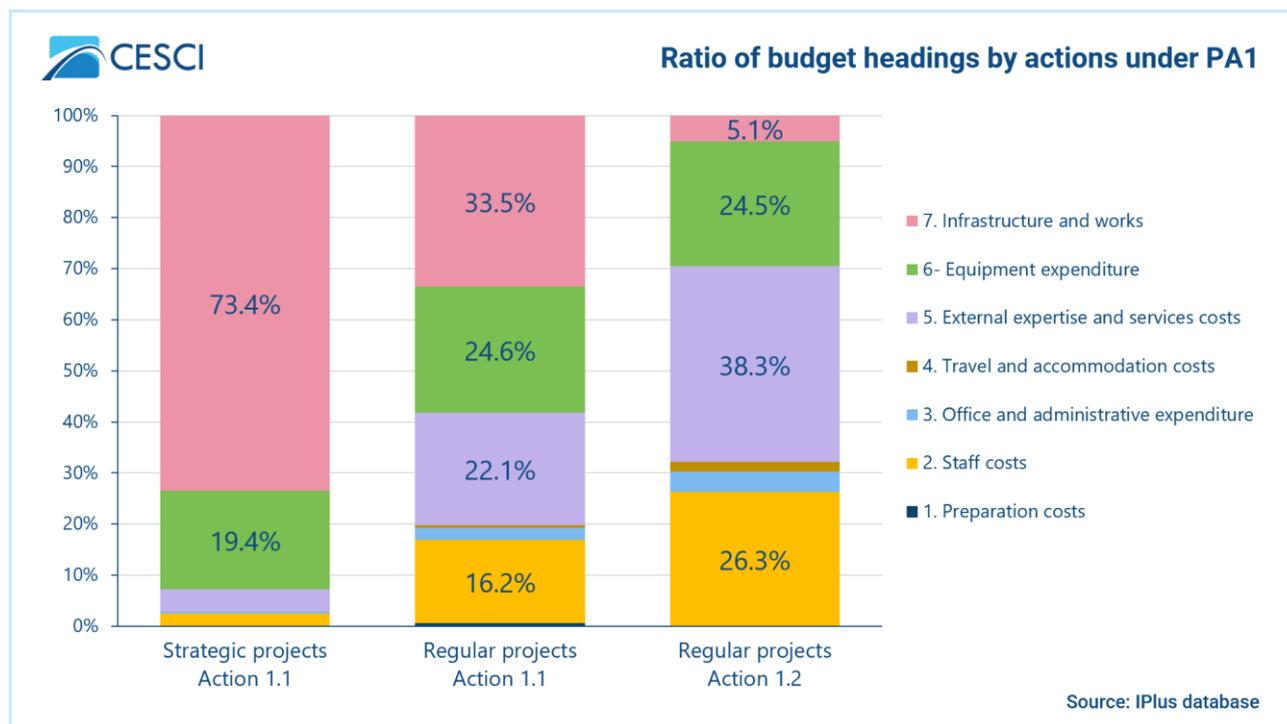
The calculated specific values of the indicators can be hardly evaluated in absolute term, instead it is worth comparing them to the results of the same or similar calculations from the previous programming periods of other CBC programmes. Since this approach had not been applied in the 2007-2013 or any previous period in the Hungary-Serbia Interreg Framework, we made an attempt to use the results of other programmes during the comparison.

However, in case of the Slovakia – Hungary and Hungary – Croatia Interreg V-A Programmes, the same methodology was applied for the first phase evaluation of the programmes, only one output indicator, the ‘Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status’ have been targeted by at least two programmes. The calculated values are 4 107.4 and 12 665.8 EUR/hectares in the order of listing above, which are extremely higher than 76.56 and 7.43 EUR/hectares of the HUSRB programme. These significant differences are rooting in the fact the first phase evaluations were elaborated in the middle of the programming period, when only some parts of the total programme budgets were allocated. Instead of the mid-term values, offering only a

snapshot on the achievements, the results of the second phase evaluations should be compared with actual, quasi-final values, but these have not been available yet.

The next aspect of the cost efficiency assessment is the analysis of the share of budget allocations to the particular budget headings. Considering the different status of the projects, in case of the administratively closed ones the validated budgets were taken into account, while for the on-going projects evaluators used the planned amounts for the calculation.

Figure 51: Ratio of budget headings by actions under PA1

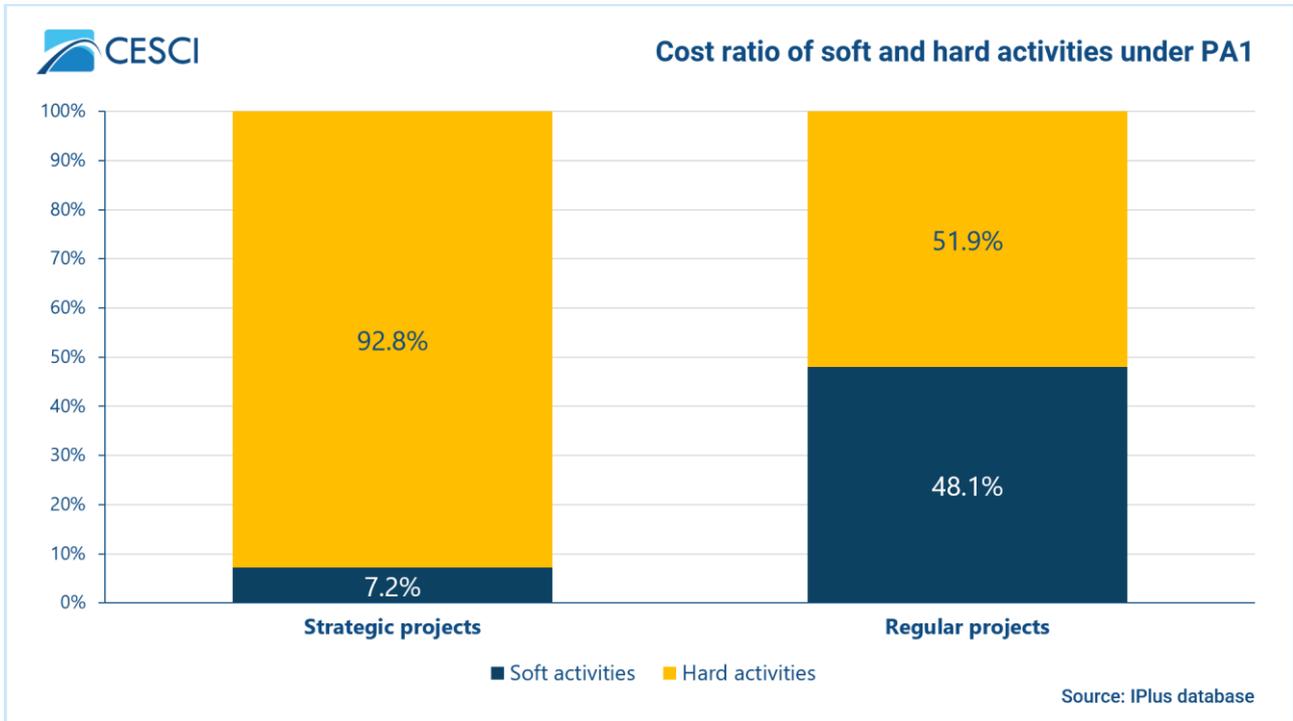


The chart (Figure 51) shows that the ratio of the expenditures dedicated to the procurement of equipment is similar in all categories, but there is a significant divergence in terms of the share of staff and infrastructure development costs. Taking into account the sectoral specificities of the PA and the nature of the strategic approach, the high share of the expenditure dedicated to construction works in the two strategic project is self-evident. In the projects under action 1.1 investments to smaller water management infrastructure together with soft scientific and policy activities were in the focus. In addition, under action 1.2 a greater emphasis was put on the soft elements, which reasons the staff-cost intensity of these projects.

Taking into consideration only the projects containing infrastructure developments, the ratio of soft and hard activities is illustrated by the following chart. (Figure 52) According to the applied methodology budget headings of 'Equipment expenditure', 'Infrastructure and works', as well as out of the 'Preparation costs' the budget line 'Purchase of land' were taken into consideration as costs of hard activities. All the remaining budget lines forms part of the cost ratio of soft activities. Regarding the figures, it can be stated that under PA1, that applicants implementing construction works allocated more than two-third of their budgets to infrastructure-related activities. Comparing this value to the all projects (not just with infrastructure development) under PA1, the share of hard

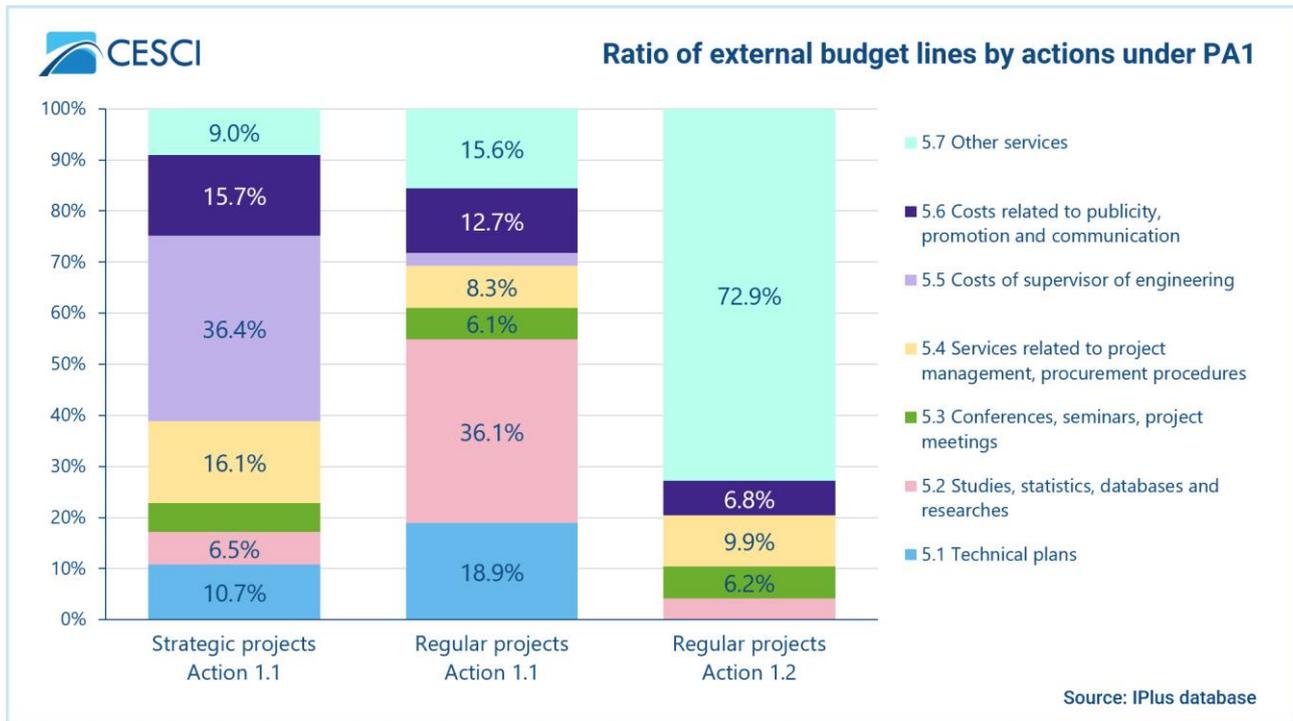
activities is also above 50%, since there are only 3 regular projects without infrastructural work. However, two of them possess equipment expenditures.

Figure 52: Cost ratio of soft and hard activities under PA1



Going back to the share of budget headings, in terms of cost-efficiency it is also crucial to analyse the tendency of budget allocation to external expertise and services. Within all actions of the PA, these allocations are higher than those to internal staff cost, the ratio is the highest in case of action 1.2 by exceeding one-third of the total budget. Taking into consideration the external service needs of the project activities, such as communication, event organization and translation/interpretation, which are partly and unavoidably generated by the cross-border approach itself, it is worth examining the details of outsourced activities.

Figure 53: Ratio of external budget lines by actions under PA1



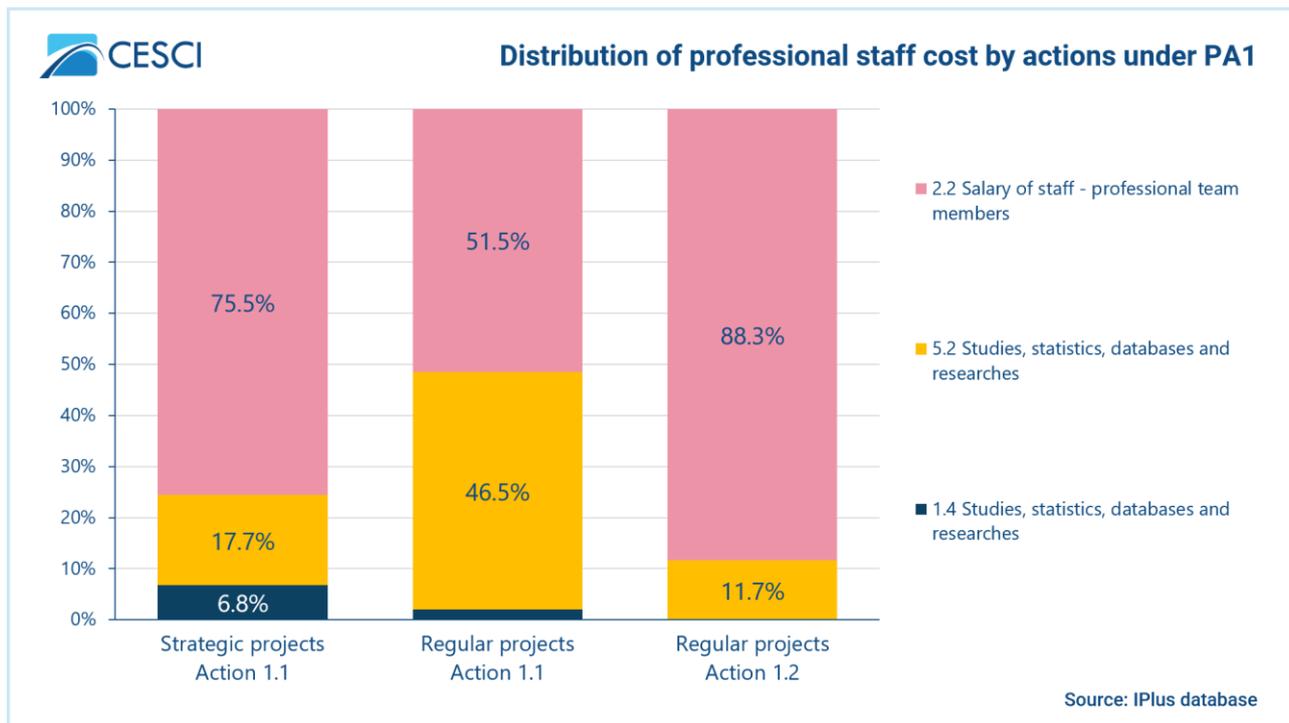
The main point of the examination is whether the project activities can be performed internally by the applicants or by sub-contractors in a more cost-efficient way. High share of external expertise and service cost items questions the competency and the availability of the adequate capacities of the applicants, at the same time the risk of losing the necessary expertise after the project closure lead to the unsustainability of the results.

As for the strategic projects, the costs of supervisor of engineering forms the highest share of the procured external services, which sounds logical in terms of the great infrastructure developments. Regarding action 1.1 the same is valid for the technical plans, these documentations are necessary for the reconstruction works.

In case of the regular projects under action 1.1., the extremely high ratio of sub-contracted studies, statistics, databases and researches obviously raises the concerns mentioned above. According to the detailed budget of the applicants, these cost items include smaller surveys and researches (in the value of 3 000-4 000 EUR), at the same time 3 projects out of the 5 contains the procurement of modelling services and forecast study and system valuing 30 000-90 000 EUR. The reasoning of their necessity cannot be evaluated as clear according to the available information.

Focusing on the distribution of professional staff cost between internal and external staff members, the chart below (Figure 54) confirms that in case of the regular projects of action 1.1., almost half of the core activities were outsourced to external contractors before (budget line 1.4 of the 'Preparation costs') or during the project implementation (budget line '5.2 Studies, statistics, databases and researches'). In case of the other two project categories, more than two-third of the relevant expenses was allocated to internal staff cost.

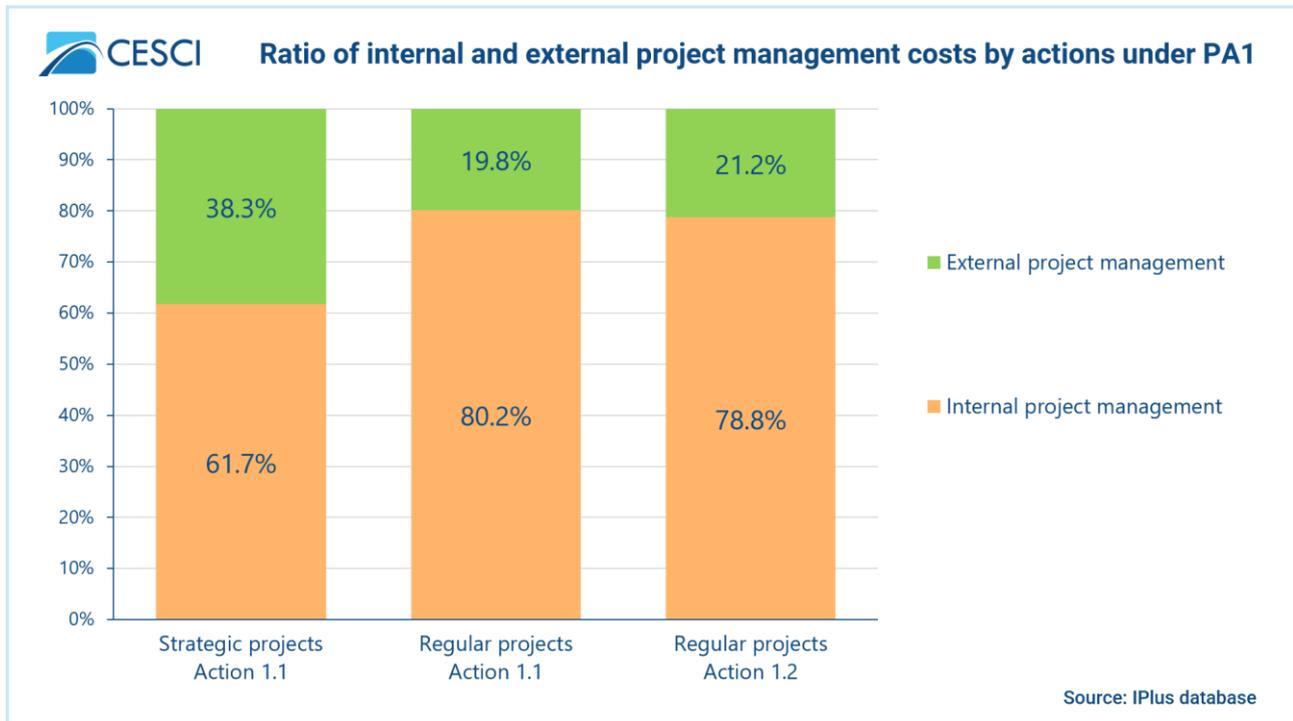
Figure 54: Distribution of internal and external professional staff cost by actions under PA1



Turning back to the examination of the share of external expertise and services, in the case of the projects under action 1.2, the procurements of other services have been worth analysing. On the one hand, translation and interpretation services are included in this cost category, which is self-evident in a CBC context. On the other hand, the majority of the procurements directly targets the core professional activities of the projects. Some of them are clearly related to deconstruction (e.g. fence deconstruction in PANNONSTEPPEs project) or land preparation and management activities, which obviously out of the applicants competency, similarly to the (re)construction works in other projects. In the contrary, the outsourcing of such core activities as analysing and mapping invasive species or sampling (e.g. of soil) seems to be questionable since the beneficiaries should possess those competences which make them eligible to perform the aforementioned activities. In addition, in one case some maintenance expenses of an already existing building were financed from the project, the reasonability of which was not clear.

The share of communication and publicity expenses seems to be proportionate considering the mandatory measures determined by the programme.

Figure 55: Ratio of internal and external project management costs by action under PA1



Regarding the services related to project management and procurement procedure the ratios are ordinary, but evaluators also analysed this aspect from another point of view which is the share of budget allocation to internal and external management activities. As the figure shows (*Figure 55*), the highest share of external management is around one-third of the total value for the strategic projects, while in the case of the regular ones the value is close to 20%. Both of them can be evaluated as proportionate. The share of internal and external project management costs compared to the total budget are under 20% in each three categories (1.5% for strategic projects, 9.23% for regular projects under action 1.1, and 17.9% for regular projects under action 1.2).

3.2 Evaluation of PA 2 (Decreasing the bottlenecks of cross-border traffic)

Detailed performance, impact and efficiency evaluation of the PA2.

3.2.1 Short introduction of the PA2's intervention logic

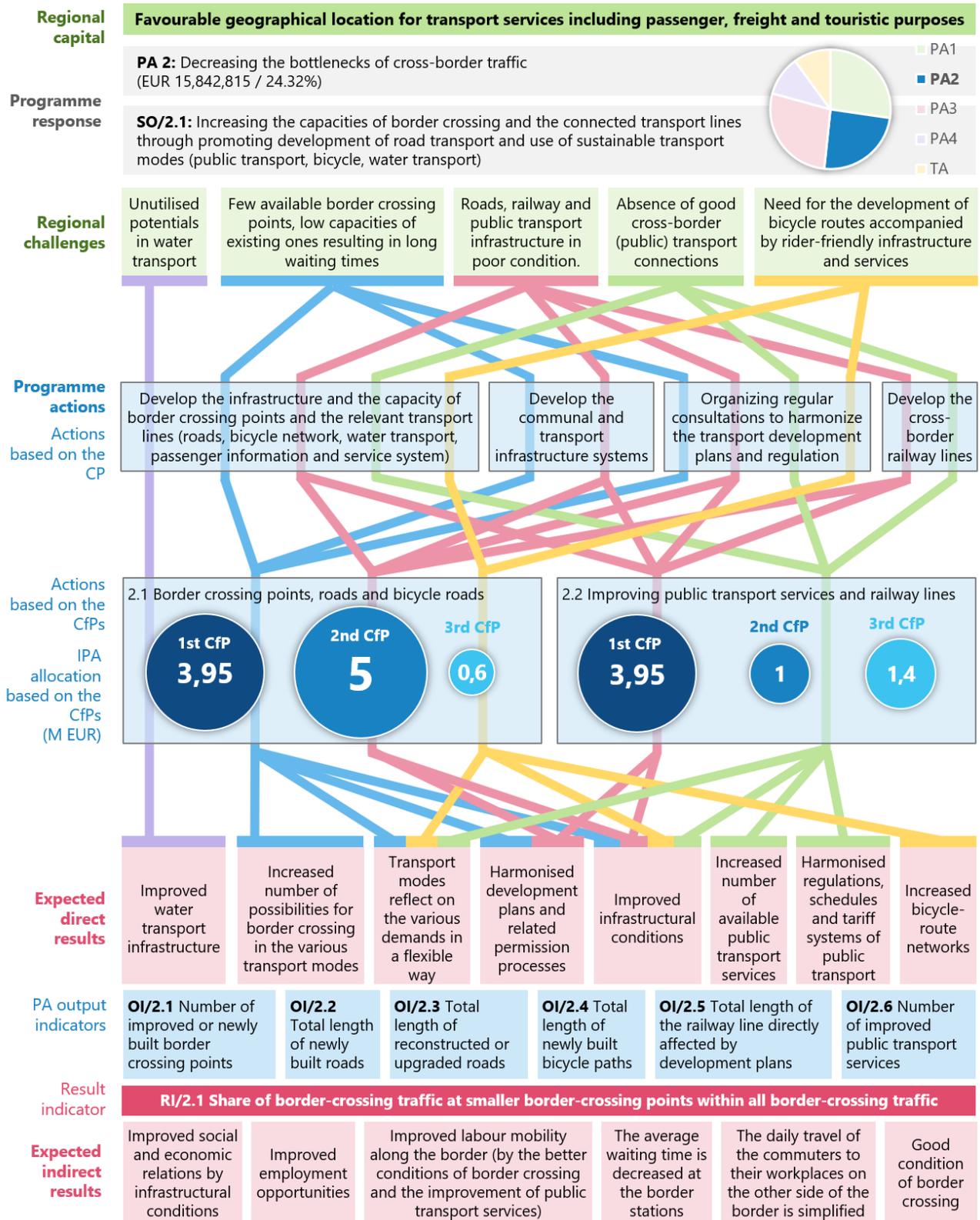
In this short subchapter the intervention logic of the PA is presented in order to show at the very beginning of the evaluation what was the aim of the programme with the given PA. The following figure (*Figure 56*) shows the intervention logic of PA2, whose purpose is to summarise the main features of the PA worth being aware of before understanding the main results and recommendations of the evaluation.

Favourable geographical location for transport services including passenger, freight and touristic purposes was identified as the regional capital of PA2, which covers the decreasing of bottlenecks of cross-border traffic. The programme allocated an amount of 15 892 815 EUR, nearly 24.32% of the total budget to this PA. As a response the PA is connected to the specific objective named increasing the capacities of border crossings and the connected transport lines through promoting development of road transport and use of sustainable transport modes. In the frames of PA2 and SO/2.1 the programme tries to contribute to five regional challenges, namely:

- few available border crossing points, low capacities of existing ones resulting in long waiting times,
- roads, railway and public transport infrastructure in poor condition,
- absence of good cross-border (public) transport connections,
- need for the development of bicycle routes accompanied by rider-friendly infrastructure and services,
- unutilised potentials in water transport.

To tackle the challenges the programme formulated four distinct actions. It is worth emphasizing that the identified actions based on the Cooperation Programme are cannot be broken down to separate actions exclusively. The actions can be integral part of the CfP actions, based on the actual CfPs and projects. Thus, such actions can be included in both actions formulated within this PA: Action 2.1 Border crossing points, roads and bicycle roads, and Action 2.2 Improving public transport services and railway lines (e.g. railway line developments can appear at both CfP actions). Both actions were touched by all three CfPs; Action 2.1 received a total budget of 9.55 M EUR, while Action 2.2 got an allocation of a smaller amount, 6.35 M EUR.

Figure 56: Intervention logic of the PA2



From Action 2.1 the expected direct results included six aspects: increased number of possibilities for border crossing in the various transport modes; transport modes reflect on the various demands in a flexible way; harmonised development plans and related permission processes; improved infrastructural conditions; increased bicycle-route networks; and improved water transport

infrastructure. Action 2.2 supported direct results in terms of transport modes reflect on the various demands in a flexible way; harmonised development plans and related permission processes; improved infrastructural conditions, which are common expected results with the first action. In addition, Action 2.2 also has a direct connection with increased number of available public transport services; and harmonised regulations, schedules and tariff systems of public transport. As many as six output indicators were named; number of improved or newly built border crossing points, total length of newly built roads, total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads, and total length of newly built bicycle paths are more connected to Action 2.1, while total length of railway line directly affected by development plans, number of improved public transport services are more related to Action 2.2. A single result indicator (*RI/2.1 Border-crossing traffic*) was identified to grasp the results of the programme: share of border-crossing traffic at smaller border-crossing points within all border-crossing traffic. Apart from direct results, six additional indirect results should be achieved by the identified programme actions such as improved social and economic relations; improved employment opportunities; improved labour mobility along the border; decreased average waiting time at border stations; simplified daily travel of the commuters to their workplaces; good condition of border crossing.

According to the figure (*Figure 56*) strong interconnections can be shown among the challenges, actions and results with regard to the first four challenges. A much simpler intervention logic can be detected in the case of water transport, where the challenge is only addressed by a single programme action and CFP action, and where the related action supports a single result: improved water transport infrastructure. This related result is the only one which is in connection with a single challenge and programme action exclusively.

3.2.2 Performance evaluation (PA2) (Implementation progress)

3.2.2.1 Quantification of the performance (PA2)

Within PA2, three calls for proposals were published, the first of which, as a restricted CFP were dedicated to projects with strategic importance targeting the action 2.1 'Border crossing points, roads and bicycle roads' and 2.2 'Improving public transport services and planning railway lines. The indicative maximum IPA allocation of the envisaged strategic projects were 55% of the total budget of PA, amounted 7,9 million EUR. The other two open calls for proposals planned to provide another 8 million EUR IPA funding for traditional projects under the two actions of the PA. 70% of this planned amount were dedicated to action 2.1, mainly within the 2nd CFP. In case of action 2.2, the budget frames were much lower, but more balanced between the 2 open CFPs. The following table contains the details of each CFP.

Table 28: Allocations of the targeted actions under PA2

CfP ID	Open or restricted	Open period	Targeted actions	Planned IPA allocation to the projects under the respective action	Available IPA grant amount per project
HUSRB/1601	restricted	March 29, 2016 – August 26, 2016	2.1 Border crossing points, roads and bicycle roads	7 900 000 EUR	Minimum of 2 000 000 EUR
			2.2 Improving public transport services and planning railway lines		
HUSRB/1602	open	October 3, 2016 – January 31, 2017	2.1 Border crossing points, roads and bicycle roads	5 000 000 EUR	500 000 – 3 000 000 EUR
			2.2 Improving public transport services and railway lines	1 000 000 EUR	100 000 – 500 000 EUR
HUSRB/1903	open	June 1, 2019 – September 30, 2019	2.1 Border crossing points, roads and bicycle roads	600 000 EUR	300 000 – 400 000 EUR
			2.2 Improving public transport services and railway lines	1 400 000 EUR	100 000 – 400 000 EUR

Taking into account the quantification of the performance of PA2, the data indicate that the total **number of applications under PA2 is 17**. More than half of the applications (10 units, 58.8%) were contracted and only 5 applications were rejected because of formal or quality issues. In point of the distribution of applications among the CfPs, it is clear that there is a notable distinction between the 1st and the other two CfPs. Whereas there are only two applications with strategic relevance under the 1st CfP, the number of applications related to the other two CfPs are 7 or more. Considering the distribution of applications by status, the 1st CfP with 100% contracted applications is an outstanding result, which was caused by the low number of applications. In the case of the 2nd CfP, half of the applications were rejected and only 37.5% (3 units) of the applications were contracted. The 3rd CfP has a more favourable picture since 71.4% (5 units) of the applications were contracted and only one was rejected because of formal issues. The originally contracted IPA amount under PA2 is 16 101 026.88 EUR, which means that the projects overcontracted by 258 211.88 EUR compared to the 4th version of the CP.

Figure 57: Number of PA2-related applications per CfPs

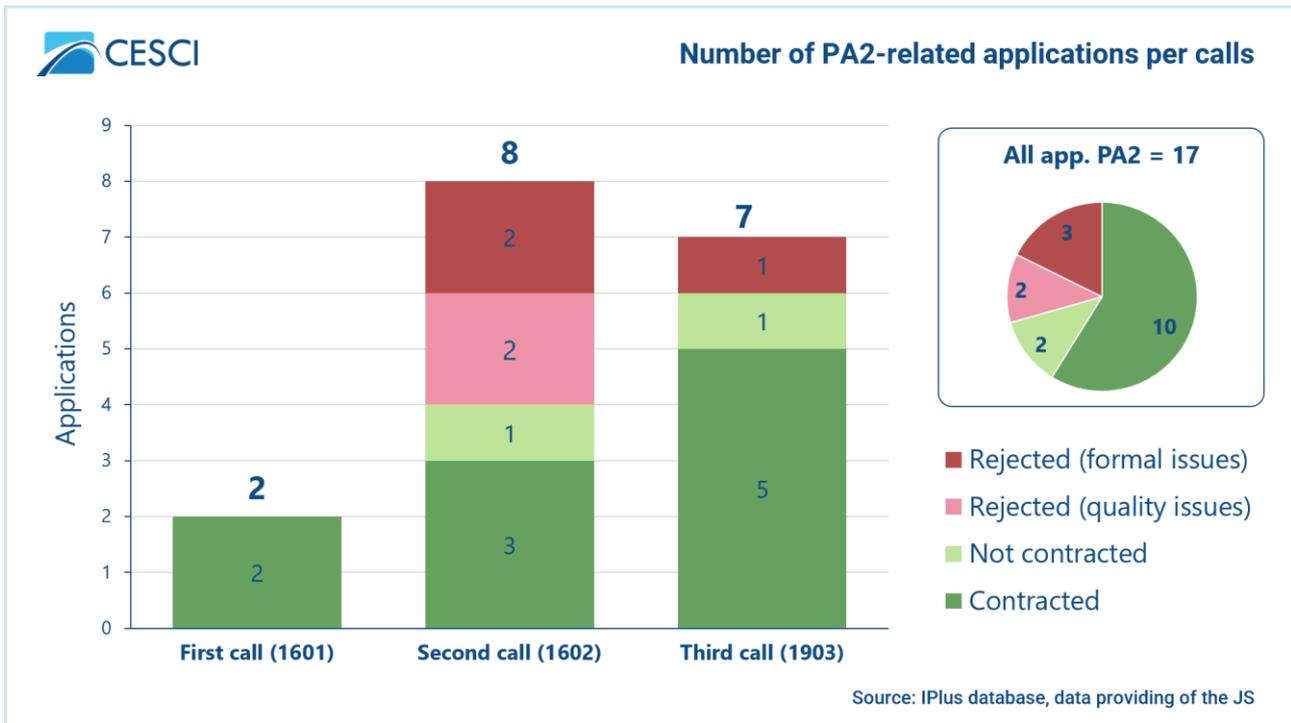
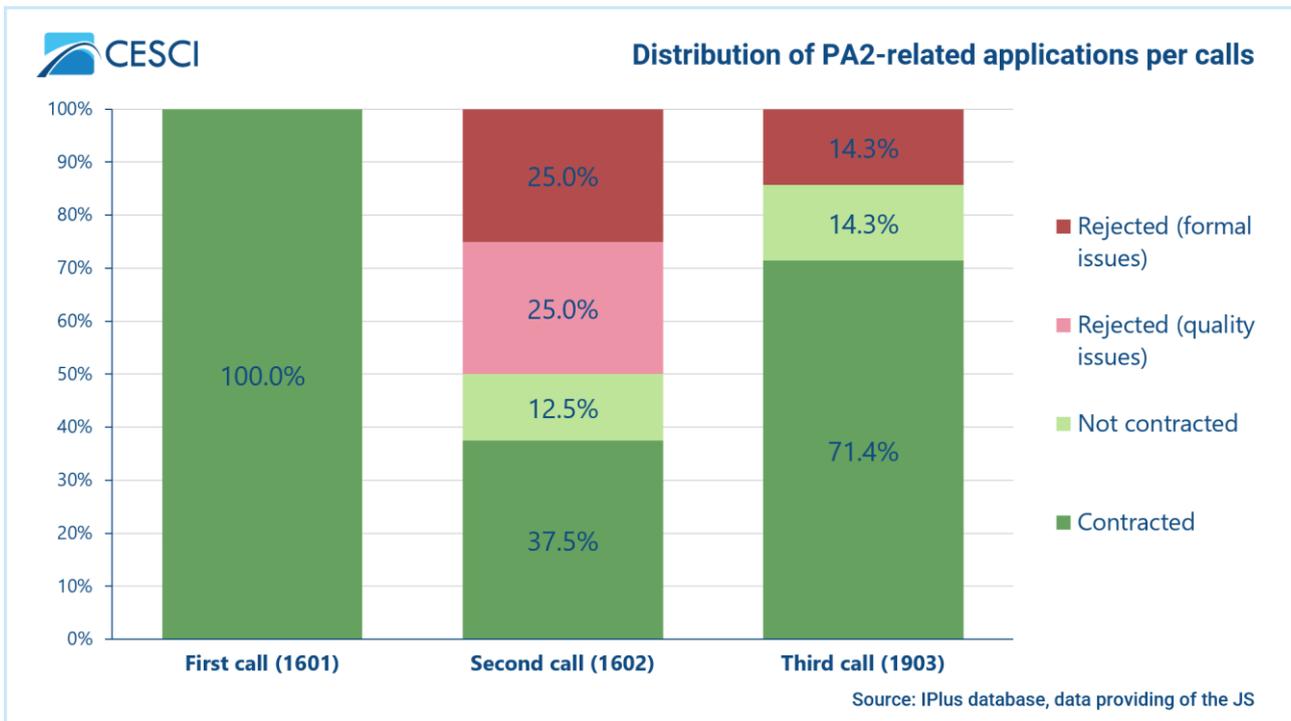


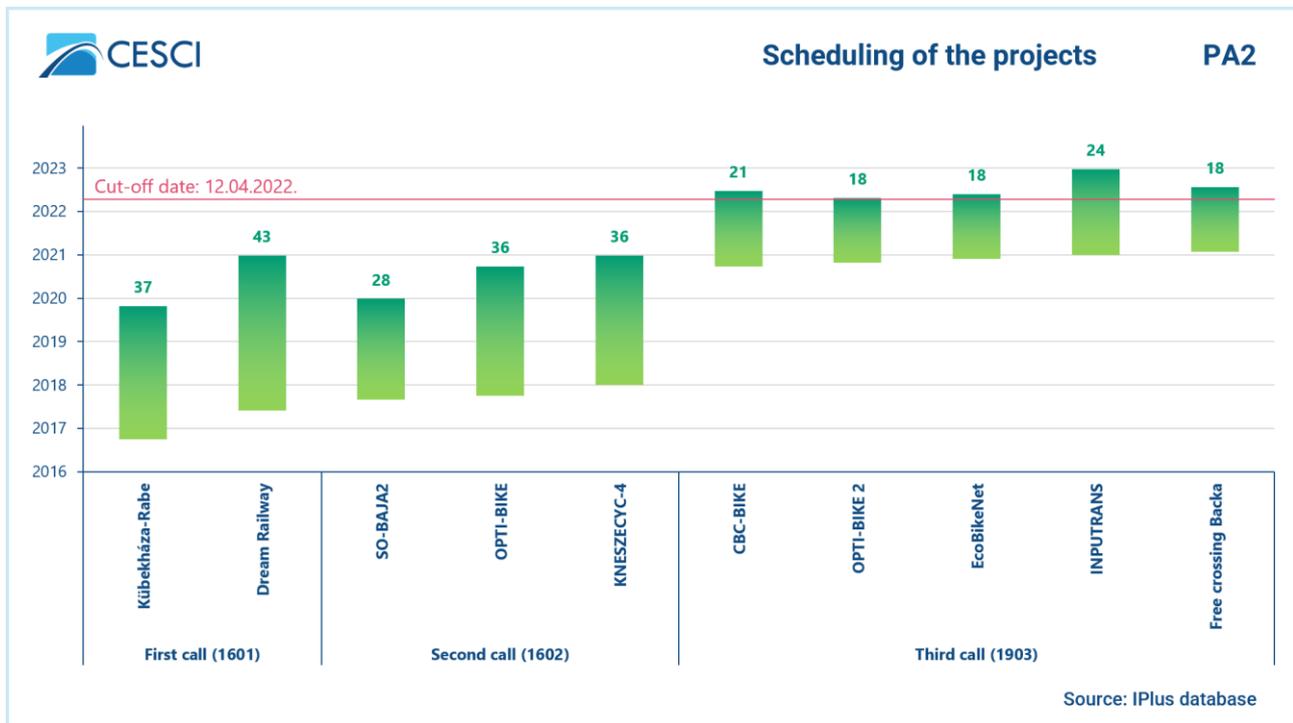
Figure 58: Distribution of PA2-related applications per CfPs



According to the **duration of the projects** – by monthly breakdown – the average duration of the projects under PA2 is nearly 28 months due to the two strategic projects and the low number of projects. Because of the strategic relevance of the 1st CfP's projects, these have the longest implementation timeframes with average 40 months (Dream Railway took 43 months, Kübekháza-Rabe took 37 months). Since the specific objective of the PA2 concentrated on the increasement of border crossing transports' capacities and on the usage of sustainable transport modes, the relatively

long scheduling is understandable. Although, the 2nd and the 3rd CfPs include only regular projects, some of these projects also have 3 years' timeframe such as the OPTI-BIKE³⁶ and the KNESZECYC-4³⁷. Owing to these projects the average scheduling of the 2nd CfP's projects is 33 months, whereas in the case of the 3rd CfP, the implementation period of the projects did not exceed 2 years (20 months). Regarding the starting and ending dates of the projects, it is observable that the Kübekháza-Rabe project had started first in 2016 and only a year later the Dream Railway and the 2nd CfP's projects began the implementation. These projects ended in the end of 2020 when the projects related to the 3rd CfP could start the developments. Due to the tight timeframe, the last CfP's projects will finish the implementation in 2022. Nevertheless, within the contracted projects, there were some projects which still had administrative works after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Out of the 10 contracted PA2 projects 5 projects (50% of the PA2 contracted projects) did not have approved final report at that time, out of which all projects belonged to the 3rd CfP, and the projects of the 1st and 2nd CfPs closed successfully with approved final report.

Figure 59: Scheduling of the projects



Considering the **financial allocation** to the projects, the budget of the strategic projects was more than 3.5 million EUR per projects (Kübekháza-Rabe: 5 468 717 EUR; Dream Railway: 3 585 017 EUR), but the expenses of two regular projects from the 2nd CfP also exceeded 2 million EUR (SO-BAJA2³⁸: 3 122 670 EUR; OPTI-BIKE: 2 566 613 EUR). The average total allocation to strategic projects is 4 526 867 EUR, while the average size of the regular projects is 1 236 082 EUR. Taking into account the source of the financial allocation of the PA2 related projects, the dominance of EU Contribution

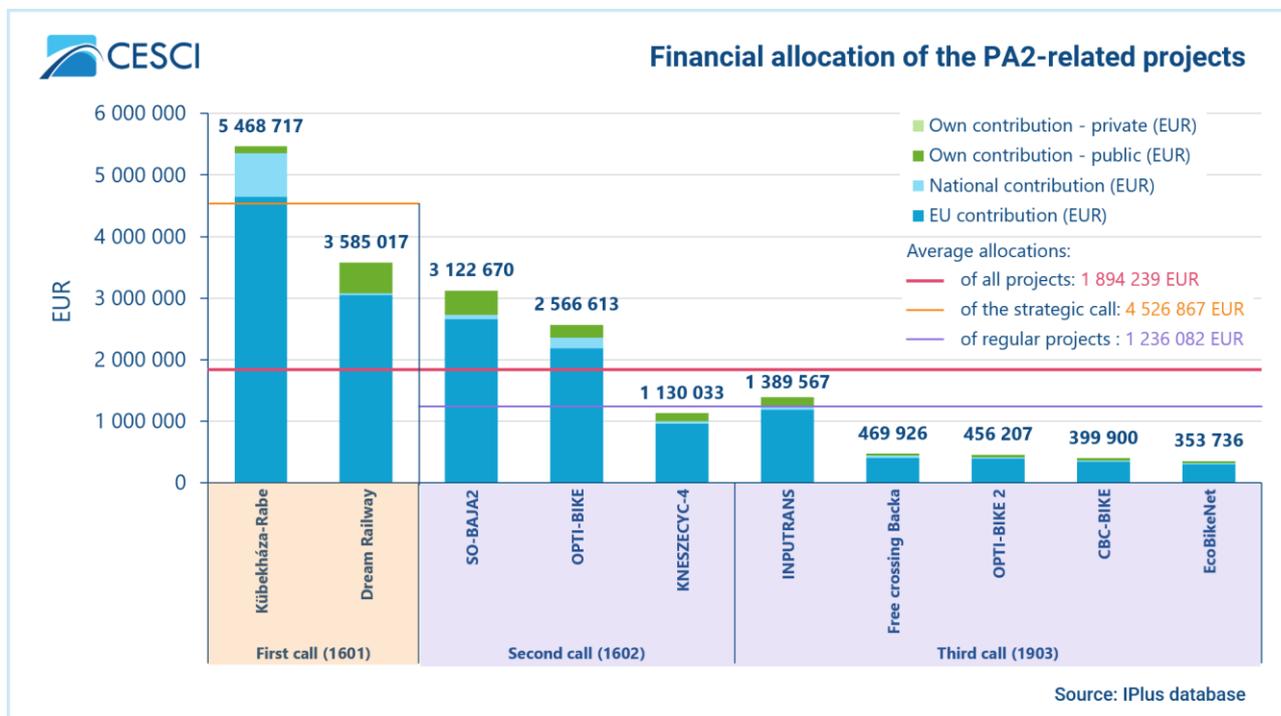
³⁶ ID: HUSRB/1602/21/0102; Name: Optimising traffic in the border zone, planning and construction of bicycle paths

³⁷ ID: HUSRB/1602/21/0186; Name: Szeged (Szőreg) - Novi Knezevac Bicycle Road Construction (Phase 4)

³⁸ ID: HUSRB/1602/21/0061; Improving cross border road between Baja and Sombor part II

is evident, since in the case of every project the proportion of this type of financial source was 85%. The IPA support is completed by national co-financing on the Hungarian side, the ratio of which is 10-15% according to the legal status of the partners. The remaining 0-5% in Hungary and 15% in Serbia must be provided by the beneficiaries as own contribution. Within the CfPs, the ratio of own public contribution was the second highest in the case of the 2nd (11%) and 3rd CfPs (9%), whereas in terms of the 1st CfP (8%) the national contribution was on the second place. Own private contribution was used only in one case, the Dream Railway strategic project had 16 452 EUR from this financial source. In point of the contribution type, the largest amount of EU and national contributions were spent to the Kübekháza-Rabe strategic project (EU: 4 648 409 EUR; national: 703 190 EUR), but the largest amount of own public contribution was absorbed by the Dream Railway strategic project (488 395 EUR). With regard to ratios between the contribution types, after the EU contribution the second highest share of national contribution belonged to Kübekháza-Rabe (13%), while the own public contribution was the most dominant in the case of Dream Railway project (14%).

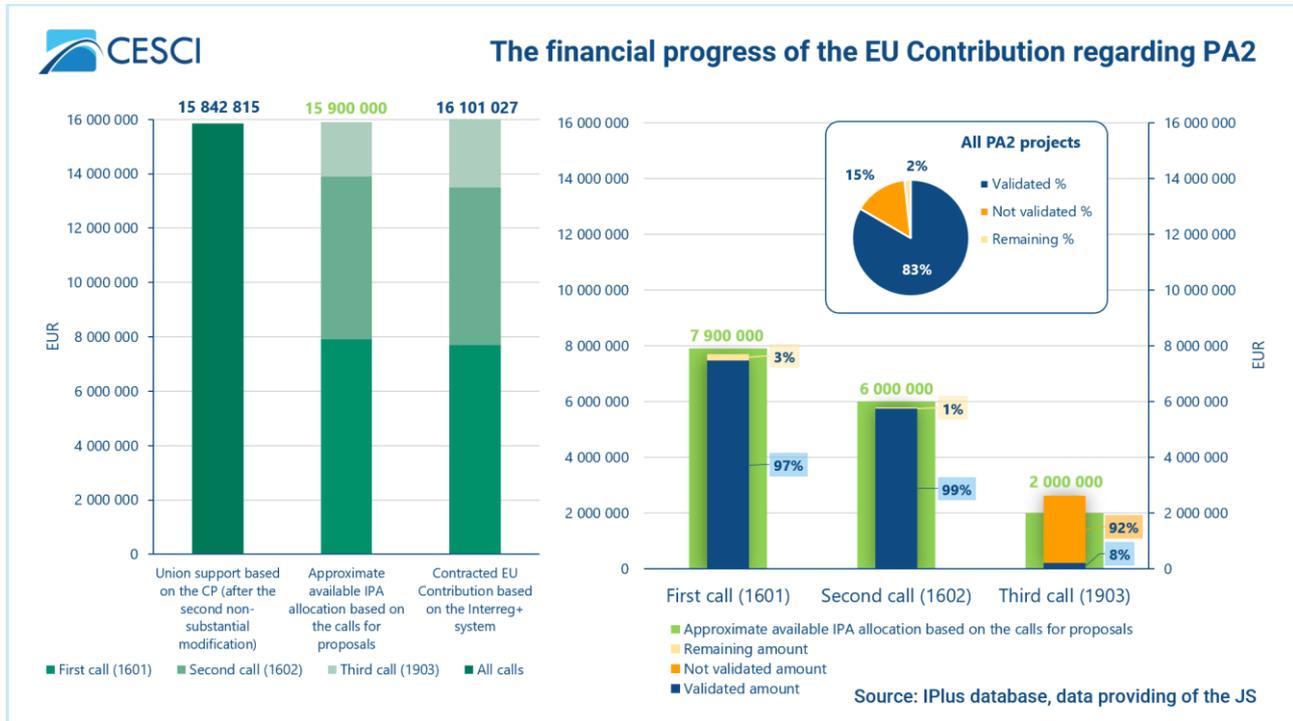
Figure 60: Financial allocation of the PA2-related projects



The following analytical aspect is the **financial progress** of the EU Contribution. With regard to the Cooperation Programme (after the fourth version which represents the current condition), 15 842 815 EUR was allocated to the PA2, which was 57 185 EUR less than the aggregated amount of available IPA allocations in the CfPs (15 900 000 EUR). The distribution of available allocated money between the CfPs was disproportionate due to the costly strategic projects under the 1st CfP. Half of the aggregated money (7 900 000 EUR) of the Calls for Proposals was available under the 1st CfP, while the 2nd CfP represents the 38% (6 000 000 EUR) and the 3rd CfP the 13% (2 000 000 EUR) of the whole budget. Regarding the selected projects, the contracted EU Contribution (16 101 027 EUR) was higher by 201 027 EUR than the aggregated available allocations in the three CfPs. The share of the contracted EU contribution among the CfPs did not change significantly from the previously described distribution. The ratio of the 3rd CfP's money raised to 16% (2 608 935 EUR),

whereas the proportion of the 1st CfP reduced to 48% (7 695 674 EUR) and the 2nd CfP to 36% (5 796 418 EUR).

Figure 61: The financial progress of the EU Contribution regarding PA2



The classification of the contracted EU Contribution can be classified into three categories. The first one is the certificated or validated money, where not just the project's content but the administrative works are also closed. Regarding the non-validated money, the content of the project has been closed, but the administrative tasks has been continuously proceeding after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Finally, the rest of the EU Contribution gives the remaining category.

Under the PA2 the IPA funding progressed mostly well, since 83% of the contracted EU Contribution (13 430 722 EUR) has been certified, 15% (2 394 116 EUR) has not been validated and the remaining amount is only 276 189 EUR (2%). Regarding the financial progress of the CfPs, the projects under the 1st (97%) and the 2nd CfPs (99%) have almost certified all of the EU Contribution since the value of ratios are nearly 100%. However, in the case of the 3rd CfP's projects, the percentage of certified money is really low, only 8%, but they have not had as much time to certify the allocated costs as the projects of the previous CfPs. The proportion of non-validated money corroborated this statement, since this value is 92% under the 3rd CfP, while in the case of the first two CfPs it is zero. Concerning the absorption of the EU Contribution, the 1st (224 165 EUR; 3%) and the 2nd (52 024 EUR; 1%) CfPs represent the highest remaining amounts whereas the 3rd CfP utilized the all budget since there is no remaining money under this CfP.

On project level the proportion of certificated EU Contribution is relatively high (more than 90%) among the first two CfPs' projects, and there is no non-validated money. This indicates the fact that the closure of the projects under the 1st and 2nd CfPs could successfully happen. However, in the case of the projects under the 3rd CfP, the proportion of non-validated money is the decisive category since here it is more than 85% under every project (for example it is 99% under the Free crossing

Backa³⁹ project with 396 317 EUR). The ratio of remaining money is low, only 1% or 0%, except the Dream Railway strategic project with its 7% (210 826 EUR). Considering the scheduling of the projects under PA2, the certification of the allocated money does not cause any concern.

In relation to the **output indicators**, six indicators have been assigned to PA2, which have to be reported with yearly frequency. As the following table (*Table 29*) illustrates the measurement units of four projects are the same. The 'Total length of newly built roads', the 'Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads', the 'Total length of newly built bicycle paths' and the 'Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans' are measured in kilometres. Beside these, the 'Number of improved or newly built border crossing points' is measured by the number of border crossing points, whereas the measurement unit of 'Number of improved public transport services' is the number of services. The currently valid target values are mostly not the same with the original ones. Those projects where the measurement units are in kilometres, the target values were modified twice: the *OI/2.2 Newly built roads* from 3 km to 4 km, the *OI/2.3 Reconstructed or upgraded roads* from 2 km to 4 km, the *OI/2.4 New bicycle paths* from 5 km to 25 km and the *OI/2.5 Railway line directly affected by development plans* from 50 km to 53.43 km. The target value of *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* was changed only in the 3rd modification (from 3 border crossing points to 7 border crossing points), whereas the *OI/2.6 Public transport services* indicator has preserved its original value.

Table 29: Indicators of PA2 – Target values

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	3 rd mod. target value (2023)
OI/2.1	Number of improved or newly built border crossing points	border crossing points	yearly	7
OI/2.2	Total length of newly built roads	kilometres	yearly	4
OI/2.3	Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads	kilometres	yearly	12
OI/2.4	Total length of newly built bicycle paths	kilometres	yearly	25
OI/2.5	Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans	kilometres	yearly	53.43
OI/2.6	Number of improved public transport services	services	yearly	3

The fulfilment of these indicators was ensured by different number of projects, which can be observed in the following table (*Table 30*). All together 10 projects belonged to the PA2, but two of them (the Kübekháza-Rabe and SO-BAJA2 projects) chose two indicators. It is worth mentioning that only the *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* and the *OI/2.4 New bicycle paths* indicators had more than one relevant project, and the former one outstood with its 6 projects. The projects with strategic relevance supported only 3 indicators, two of them did not have other projects

³⁹ ID: HUSRB/1903/21/0092; Name: Development of Hercegszántó-Backi Breg cross-border crossing with the necessary duties for freight transport facilities

during the later CfPs. The *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* was the only indicator which had relevant projects in every CfP, however the fulfilment of four indicators' targeted values (*OI/2.2 Newly built roads*, *OI/2.3 Reconstructed or upgraded roads*, *OI/2.5 Railway line directly affected by development plans* and *OI/2.6 Public transport services*) was ensured only by one project. After the 2nd CfP, the Programme Bodies observed the problem that the fulfilment of the *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* and *OI/2.6 Public transport services* indicators were not satisfactory since no projects selected these indicators. Therefore, the relevant projects were selected and implemented within the 3rd CfP (with given advantage).

Table 30: Indicators of PA2– Number of relevant projects per CfPs

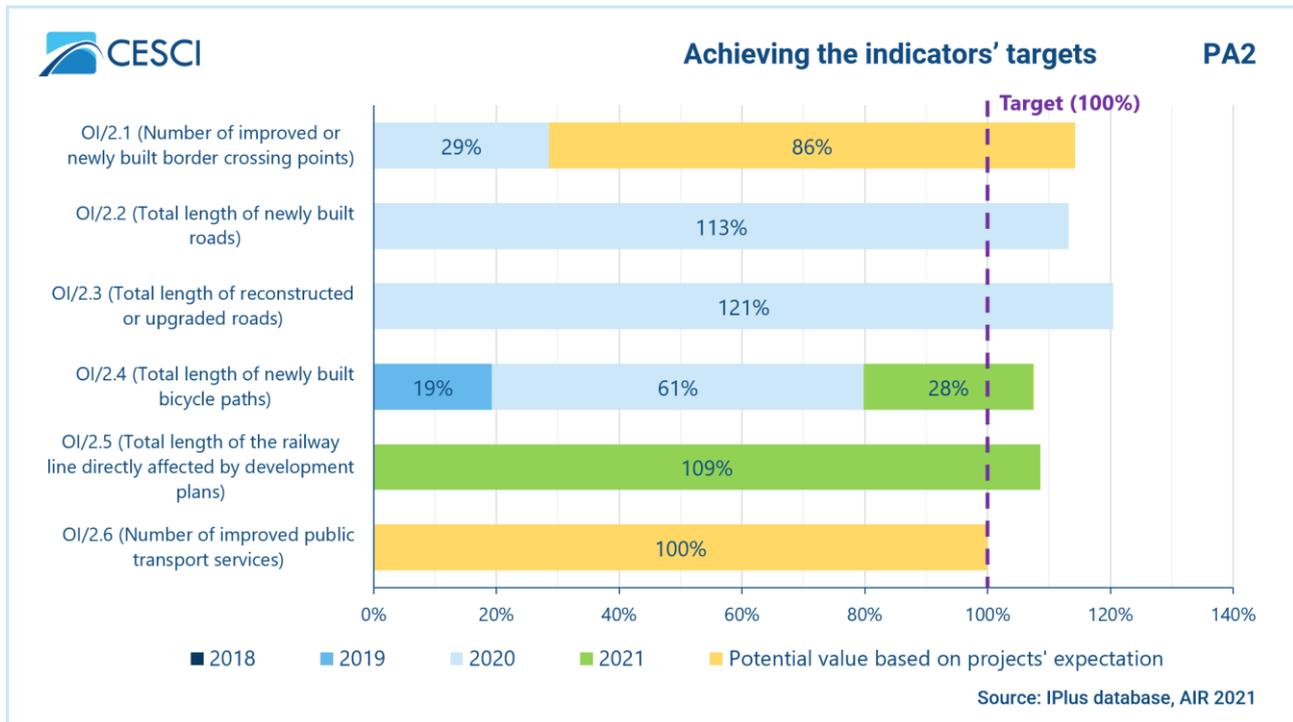
ID	1601	1602	1903	Number of relevant projects
OI/2.1 Number of improved or newly built border crossing points	1	1	4	6
OI/2.2 Total length of newly built roads	1			1
OI/2.3 Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads		1		1
OI/2.4 Total length of newly built bicycle paths		2		2
OI/2.5 Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans	1			1
OI/2.6 Number of improved public transport services			1	1

The next figure (*Figure 62*) introduces the yearly progress of the output indicators of PA2. The first achievement was registered in 2019 under *OI/2.4 New bicycle paths*, but in the next year the other first three indicators also showed some kind of results. As the target values were very modest, in 2020 the outcomes already fulfilled the original target values, which were replaced by the 3rd modification. In 2021, three indicators achieved and exceeded the current target values (*OI/2.2 Newly built roads*: 125%; *OI/2.3 Reconstructed or upgraded roads*: 117%; *OI/2.4 New bicycle paths*: 108%), whereas the *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* fulfilled only 29% of it and the last two indicators (*OI/2.5 Railway line directly affected by development plans* and *OI/2.6 Public transport services*) did not generate any results. In the case of *OI/2.6 Public transport services* this fact is understandable, because it is supported only by the INPUTTRANS⁴⁰ project, which will be concluded

⁴⁰ ID: HUSRB/1903/22/0121; Name: Improvement of the public transport services in the CBC region through the integration of public transport modes, development of railway infrastructure, and harmonization of transport procedures

in the end of 2022. In 2021 the distances from the targets were 5 border crossing points under *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* and 3 services under *OI/2.6 Public transport services*. In spite of this, the potential values (based on the projects' expectations) show that in 2023 all indicators' fulfilment will be guaranteed, moreover the target values will be overpassed, except the last indicator which will 'just' achieve the determined goal. On the following figure (*Figure 62*), – regarding the *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* and *OI/2.6 Public transport services* – the importance of the 3rd CfP is conspicuous as it was mentioned previously.

Figure 62: Achieving the indicators' targets (PA2)



After the quantitative analysis of the indicators, the fulfilment of the S.M.A.R.T criteria will be evaluated. As the following table (*Table 31*) indicates, the output indicators of PA2 are in line with the criteria in terms of the specificity and measurability, but the achievability causes concerns. The modest target value is the most common problem according to the indicators of PA2. Even if the

modification has happened, but the new target values were also easily achieved. This caused an inadequate time bound, since three indicators have fulfilled the target goals three years earlier.

Table 31: Indicators of PA2 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
OI/2.1 Number of improved or newly built border crossing points	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased 2.3 times. As a result of this modification, the indicator meets the criterion.	The indicator is in line with the intervention logic of the PA.	The year in which the target values should be achieved and the regularity of the measurement are also well-defined.
OI/2.2 Total length of newly built roads	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased 1.3 times. As a result of this modification, the indicator meets the criterion.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the regulatory of the measurement is adequate.
OI/2.3 Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased sixfold. Despite of the modification the indicator is still modest.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the regulatory of the measurement is adequate.

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
OI/2.4 Total length of newly built bicycle paths	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased fivefold. Despite of the modification the indicator is still modest.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the regulatory of the measurement is adequate.
OI/2.5 Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The target value was in line with the strategic aim of the CP.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved and the regularity of the measurement are also well-defined.
OI/2.6 Number of improved public transport services	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value is enough ambitious.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved and the regularity of the measurement are also well-defined.

3.2.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA2)

Restricted CfP

In the examined programming period, the programme launched strategic priority projects, in order to enhance cross-border cooperation and cohesion. From administrative terms, strategic projects mean development initiatives with higher resource allocation, in addition the scope of eligible applicants was restricted to the professionally competent actors with appropriate human and financial capacities. In case of PA2, potential beneficiaries were national and regional level bodies and their organisations, as well as railway management and development companies, road management and development companies; border control and customs offices. The minimum amount of IPA allocation was defined as 2 000 000 EUR.

The strategic approach was assessed in terms of its contribution to stronger cohesion and wider citizens' involvement in cross-border activities. For the qualitative analysis, the evaluators used the results of the interviews, and the project descriptions and reports available in the IMIS.

The Kübekháza-Rabe border crossing road

Within the project named "Development of a Road Border Crossing at Kübekháza (HU) - Rabe (SRB) area" (Kübekháza-Rabe; planned total budget: 5 468 716.52 EUR, validated total budget: 5 453 023.81 EUR), a new border crossing between Kübekháza and Rabe (Rábé) settlements was opened on October 11, 2019. On the Hungarian side the nr. 4302 and nr. 43112 national byways; on the SRB side the nr. 302 national IIB category road provides a link to the location of the new crossing. The project consisted of the building of new connecting roads and the renewal of existing ones as follows: the length of new road in Hungary is 2309 m with 5.5 m width, while the length of upgraded road is 844 m in Hungary and 1 365 m in Serbia. On the Hungarian side, a new border crossing station was established, which is jointly used by the two countries. The border crossing point is open between 7 am to 7 pm for up to 3.5-tons vehicles, as well as for cyclists and pedestrians. The main objective of the project was to help the economic, social, and cultural cooperation and integration of Serbia and Hungary.

The originally 36-month long project ended on October 31, 2019, after a slight one-month delay. According to the project reports, the implementation of the project elements went smoothly, following the plans described in the application form. The one-month delay was reasoned by the change in the date of the official opening ceremony attended by high-level political actors from both countries. 99.71% of the planned budget were spent and validated by the programme bodies, therefore no major financial problem arose during the implementation. The partnership seems to operate properly, the communication between the partners have been efficient and continuous.

The Kübekháza-Rabe cross-border road should be considered as an important pre-condition of strengthening cohesion in the affected border section. Its territorial cohesive aspect is obvious, thanks to its contribution to the resolution of a missing link problem. The territorial impact of the project is local or micro-regional, because the neighbouring crossings are not so far (15 and 71 km) and the capacities of the new crossing is limited, but the magnitude in this micro-region is high (e.g. from Kübekháza to Rabe, the distance will be 3 km, instead of 50). Furthermore, by facilitating cross-border mobility through the hoped new border crossing between Kübekháza and Beba Veche, all the three border regions would be opened toward each other (the access asphalt road is ready on the Hungarian side but no construction works has started on the Romanian side). This improvement of local accessibility enables the neighbouring settlements in the micro-region to develop their social and economic relations in a substantive way.

Dream Railway

The project named "Elaboration of Technical Documentation of Subotica-Baja Railway Line" (Dream Railway; planned total budget: 3 585 017.40 EUR, validated total budget: 3 336 986.83 EUR) aimed to develop the technical documentation for the Subotica-Bácsalmás-Baja section (a section formerly not covered by design documentations) of the Szeged-Subotica-Bácsalmás-Baja railway line on the basis of the existing feasibility study, and with the same technical content as the Szeged-Subotica section. Currently, there is no traffic conducted on the Subotica-Bácsalmás section, and therefore the urban development plans of the towns and villages affected by the railway line had to be created. The technical documentations were handed over to the relevant authorities and institutions, who are

concerned with the reconstruction of the railway connection, as main benefit of the initiative, in order to eliminate the anomalies of crossing the border and improve the mobility of persons and goods.

The originally 36-month long project ended on December 31, 2020, after two prolongations (a 4-month and 3-month one) because of delays in the core activities. 93.08% of the planned budget were validated by the programme bodies, the majority of the reduction is reasoned by an irregular spent on external services (6.2% of the amount originally planned for the budget heading). In addition, the decrease in the total budget mainly concerned the travel and accommodation expenses, since less than 20% of the planned amount was spent because of the COVID-19 pandemic border closure. Despite of the prolongation and the budget reduction, the project achieved its goals as it was planned in the application phase. The partnership seems to operate properly, the communication between the partners have been efficient and continuous despite of the missing personal meeting opportunities.

The Dream Railway project should have a strong impact on cross-border mobility – especially once Serbia joins the EU. Furthermore, the planned new infrastructure effectively could facilitate the catching-up process of Subotica, since the new railway line would render a central position to the city and strengthen Subotica's role of a transport hub. The project itself prepared these developments by providing the technical plans for the future realisation, therefore the project's real cross-border integrating power depends on the continuation. At the same time, this continuation is impossible without the implemented joint planning project.

3.2.3 Impact evaluation (PA2)

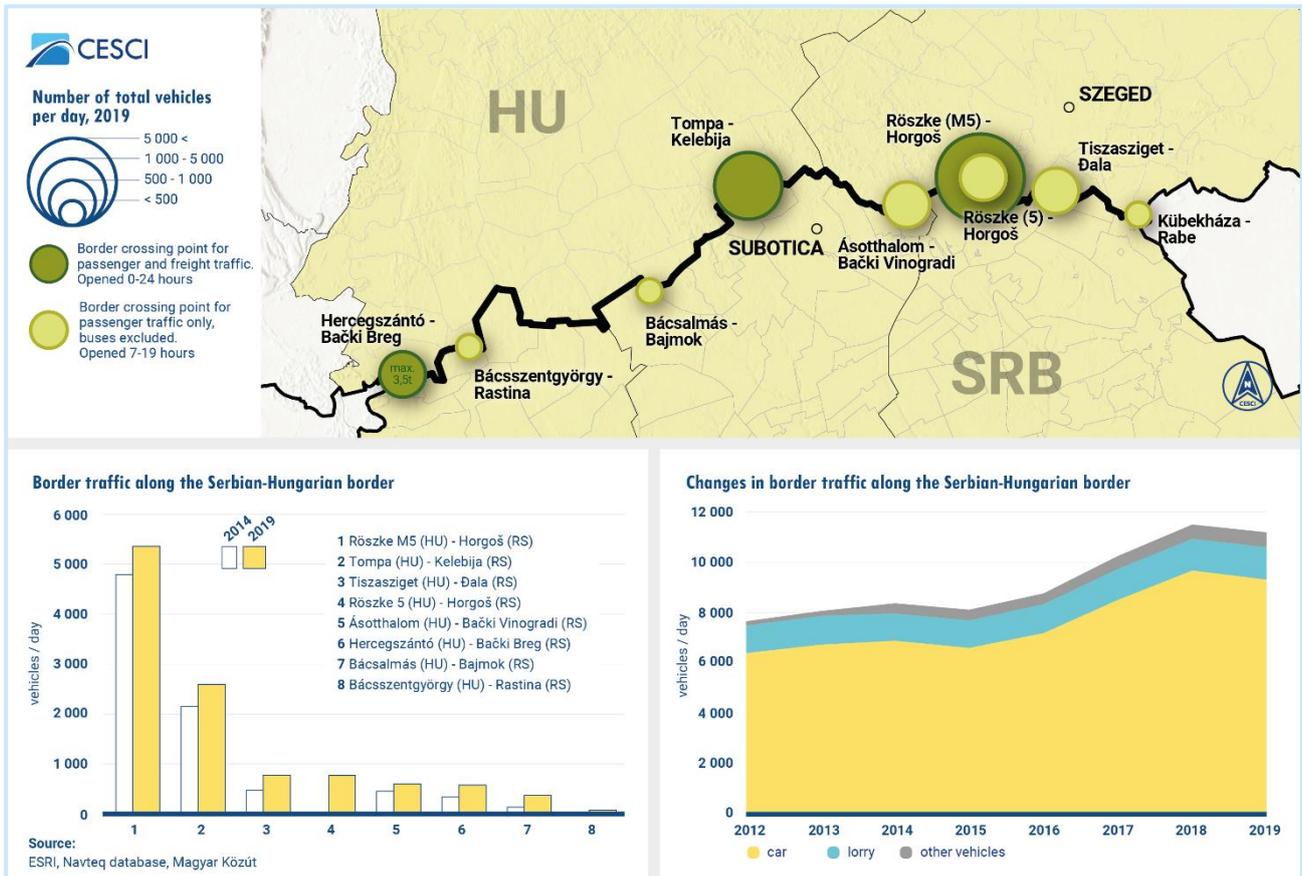
3.2.3.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (PA2)

The following analysis is built upon the figure (*Figure 56*) described in the short introduction of the PA's intervention logic. For the detailed impact model see the introductory chapter (*II. 3.2.1 Short introduction of the PA2's intervention logic*). Each regional need and challenge will be analysed in the sense that how the identified actions of the programme could contribute to their tackling and management. In order to assess these and the general changes in the cohesion of the programme area, a territorial analysis and a project assessment takes place to identify the main contributions and changes which help reaching the expected results of the PA. The assessment uses statistical data, maps and figures, textual analysis as well as desk research to analyse the fulfilment of regional needs emerging in the border region.

Based on the Programme document one of the most relevant challenges is the **few available border crossing points, and the low capacities of existing ones which result in long waiting times**. While in 2014 only 6 border crossing points secured mobility across the Serbian-Hungarian joint border section, by 2019 the number increased to 9 crossings. Consequently, increased number of possibilities for border crossing can be observed. This regional need is served by the re-opening of the Rösztke (5) – Horgoš crossing, which had been temporarily out of service between 2006 and 2015, furthermore by the construction of new border crossings at Bácsszentgyörgy–Rastina (inaugurated in 2018) and Kübekháza–Rabe (2019). Regarding the recent changes, I latter construction was

supported by the HUSR Program. In addition, the Röske (M5) – Horgoš point is under development, and is planned to provide additional capacities in 2023.

Figure 63: Territorial distribution and change of traffic regarding border crossings along the Serbian-Hungarian border



Speaking of low capacities as the second part of the complex challenge, however, crossing is limited both infrastructurally and by border management. Out of the 9 crossings mentioned Röske (M5)–Horgoš, Röske (5)–Horgoš, Tompa–Kelebija, and Hercegszántó–Bački Breg border crossing points allow all kinds of international traffic to cross, the remaining 5 are limited to citizens of Serbia, the EU, the European Economic Area and Switzerland. Another bottleneck is that opening hours are restricted to the timeframe from 7AM to 7PM at all crossings except for Röske (M5)–Horgoš, Tompa–Kelebija and Hercegszántó–Bački Breg. Freight limit also hinders the free movement of people; at Hercegszántó–Bački Breg vehicles below 3.5 tonnes can cross. Owing to these problems, the process of border-crossing for trucks is time-consuming that can cause 10-20 km long truck queue with 10-15 waiting hours at the border-crossing points during peak periods. With regard to recent changes with the help of the Programme, plans such as detailed regulation plan (urban plan), Preliminary Design and the Construction Permit design will be elaborated in order to upgrade the Hercegszántó–Bački Breg border crossing. Furthermore, the improvement of roads leading to the crossing point has enabled freight traffic above capacity of 3.5 tonnes axle loads.

Taking into account the change in border traffic between 2012 and 2019, the total traffic volume increased steadily from 7671 to 11181 vehicles per day, by 46%. The volume increased the most in relation to Bácsalmás–Bajmok (by 373%), but Tiszasziget–Đala (by 142%), and Hercegszántó–Bački

Breg (by 86%) also managed to intensify the traffic flows. All border crossing points which had been operating in 2019 experienced increase including Röske (M5) –Horgoš (by 15%) as well as Tompa–Kelebija (by 14%). By transport modes⁴¹ the biggest increase took place in relation to vehicles with very low base values: motorcycle (from 7 to 78, +1014%) and slow vehicle (from 1 to 3 vehicles per day, +300%). In decreasing order, the changes of the rest of the types were as follows: bicycle (from 67 to 102, +52%), car (from 6 396 to 9 311, +46%), small truck (from 125 to 177, +42%), bus (from 160 to 226, +41%), and lorry (1091 to 1285, +18%). In 2019 Röske (M5)–Horgoš (5 364 vehicles/day) and Tompa–Kelebija (2 599) were the two most frequently used crossings, therefore special attention should be paid to increase their capacities and to introduce measures that would increase the time needed for border control.

It can be said that the increase of number of border crossings has been partially solved by the introduction of new crossings. This challenge is addressed the best out of all formulated in the intervention logic of PA2. Due to changes in the last decade in traffic volumes as explained above, few available crossings and their limited capacities are persisting challenges together. These changes negatively impacted the permeability of borders since in general the border traffic got significantly larger in parallel with limited advancement in easing the crossings and introducing additional lanes at border stations. It means that problems and future needs are more connected to the extension of the opening hours and the increase of freight limits. Furthermore, it is still crucial to increase the capacity of already existing points by quicker border control mechanisms and technologies, by higher number of controller staff and by providing more lanes to decrease waiting times at the border. It is also crucial to develop the already existing border-crossing points' quality, equipment and facilities since currently there is no opportunity for the drivers of parked vehicles to spend their waiting times comfortably. Thanks to the improvements at some crossings and some periods of time long waiting times were tackled at least partially. Nevertheless, during summer breaks, national and religious holidays, mass guest worker movements between the Balkans and Western Europe still create long, sometimes hours-long time loss. This challenge along with the below-mentioned opening hours hampers all sorts of cross-border interactions that would require personal connections from CBC partner meetings through business relations to jointly visited cultural and sports events.

The challenge concentrated around the need for **increased bicycle-route networks and bicycle friendly infrastructure** was partly addressed, given that in modal split the share of bikes crossing the border increased slightly by 0.1%-point. New types of vehicles and transport modes are now being used compared to 2012-2014; biking and especially motorbikes gained popularity in border crossings. Thanks also to the developments of cycle roads and path, partly financed by the CBC Programme, transboundary mobility based on biking has intensified. Bicycle represented 6.9% of all vehicles a day at Tiszasziget–Đala (with an average of 54 bikes a day). This is a crossing which is situated along an important bike tourism route: with the help of the current and previous CBC programmes the Szeged–Novi Kneževac bicycle road construction increased traffic thanks to as many as four phases during the years, and additional bike-friendly infrastructure elements (such as resting places, training court for pupils) have been created. The other two relevant crossings in cycling

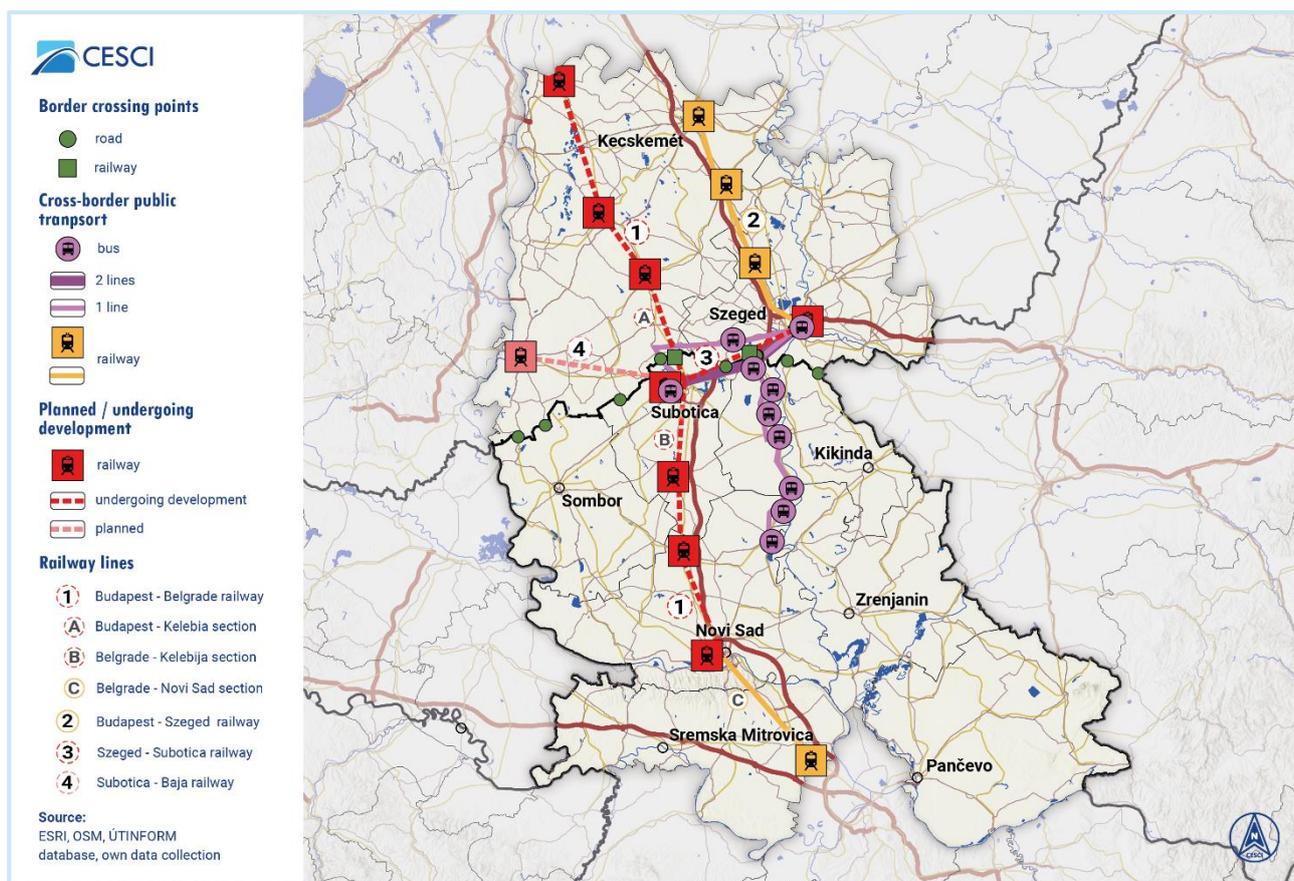
⁴¹ In relation to small truck, bicycle and slow vehicle data of 2014 was used as base value, not 2012.

tourism and transport are the Hercegszántó–Bački Breg (35 per day, 6% of total traffic) and Tompa–Kelebija (13 per day, 0.5% of total traffic) crossings.

HUSRB also contributed to the increased bicycle traffic and networking involving and connecting Subotica, Bački Vinogradi, Kelebija, Tompa, Ásotthalom and Kelebia. The development of technical documentation for the construction of bicycle paths have also taken place in recent years encouraging cycling across the region, however there is still place for improvement (e.g. in terms of EuroVelo11). Another part of cycling infrastructure where a network and a continuous cross-border network is formulating is between Szeged and Horgoš. Thanks to the construction of bicycle roads in recent years, the needs are partly addressed, however further improvements are needed in order to create a more extensive network by linking bordering elements and to support long(er)-distance biking not simply short-distance and inland possibilities. There were no unintended impacts of the programme except that increase in bicycle traffic would require additional improvements and network-building across the border.

Historically, one of the main challenges has been the **absence of good cross-border public transport connections**. Therefore, it is worth taking into consideration the number of available public transport services. In the last years many changes have occurred regarding public transport services. First, it has to be underlined that the general process of improvement has been interrupted and halted by factors such as the migration crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures taken in the case of these lead to (temporal) suspension of services and unwanted changes and delays. For better understanding, the main changes, impacts and programme contributions will be divided by the distinct sections and services offered.

Figure 64: Public transport lines and services across the Serbian-Hungarian border



The Ivo Andrić train was operated from 2009 by the Hungarian State Railways (MÁV) between the two countries between Budapest and Belgrade across Kiskőrös, Kiskunhalas, Kelebia, Subotica, Bačka Topola, Vrbas and Novi Sad. From 2010 a train run a day each direction. With a change in Kelebia, Belgrade as well as Subotica was accessible. The service between Budapest and Novi Sad stopped its operation in December 2021. For a while cross-border connection was maintained as a passenger train. There was a period when the train only ran domestically (in Hungary) and then for a while to Subotica only, with a transfer at Kelebia.

Considering the Szeged–Subotica railway connection owing to the migration crisis and the following border lock on the railway crossing point, since 2015 the service is suspended. Before the closure due to migration crisis and reconstruction, two passenger trains were launched each direction a day.

Regarding bus transport, the bus service between Szeged and Subotica is provided on a daily basis by Subotica Trans. The bus, which is provided once a day per each direction, stops in Szeged, Hajdukovo, Palić and Subotica.

Partly because of the reconstruction of the railway track between Subotica and Szeged, there are two bus lines in the schedule in 2022. Line 600 runs with stops in Szeged and Subotica, once a day each direction. Line 605 stops in Szeged, Horgoš, Hajdukovo, Palić and Subotica. It runs twice a week, each direction. The operator for both lines is Volánbusz from Hungary. Bus line 603 with stops in Szeged, Horgoš, Kanjiža, Adorjan, Senta, Ada, Bačko Petrovo Selo and Bečej was suspended from January 21, 2022, originally provided by Volánbusz.

Provided by Terra Travel, a Serbian private company, a bus connecting the two capital cities departs and arrives to Belgrade once a day with stops in Novi Sad and Subotica apart from Budapest. Flixbus runs a bus or two each day from Budapest to Belgrade, with a single stop in Novi Sad.

There is still room for improvements, thus the challenge has not been solved totally but addressed. Currently the zone of cross-border commuting extends up to 60 km. Due to the inadequate cross-border public transport, the process of commuting is complicated that is why the commuters choose cars instead of train or bus service. It is a daily practice to leave the car in the border to cross the checkpoint on foot – which is an easier mode of border-crossing – and take another vehicle on the other side of the border. The reconstruction of Szeged – Subotica railway line and the extension of Hódmezővásárhely – Szeged tram-train track until Subotica will be a vast opportunity to make faster, easier and comfortable the commuting between the two countries.

The challenge stating that **roads, railway and public transport infrastructure are in poor condition** has been partly addressed by the national authorities and the CBC programme itself. Significant improvements in the quality of the service and infrastructure are being taken place on both sides of the border in the frames of the so-called Belgrade-Budapest highspeed railway. Prior to the renovation, the maximum speed allowed on the track was 60-80 km/h in the border area. The construction of high-speed line of 160-200 km/h between Belgrade, Subotica and Budapest has started to which the Programme also contributed with project documentation for the Szeged–Subotica section. The design and construction of the railway is being done in stages. Works on the Belgrade–Stara Pazova railway line have been ready, as well as on the Stara Pazova–Novi Sad railway section (officially inaugurated in March 2022). The Novi Sad–Subotica–Kelebija section is planned to be ready by 2024, while the Hungarian sections are planned to be ready by 2025.

Regarding the Szeged-Subotica railway line not only the railway track will be renewed, but also the legal and technical conditions for the stations, including the system for checking travel documents by technical means. Originally the renewed infrastructure was planned to be given back to traffic by autumn, 2022, but due to delays only freight trains will be allowed to use the track. 2023 is more likely to be the year of reopening for passenger transport. Trains will be able to run at 80-120 km/h on the current 60 km/h section. The line will be electrified, and train control, remote control and interlocking equipment will be installed.

The Subotica–Bácsalmás–Baja railway, on which in some cases even the tracks are missing, has been another important railway connection in a long a systematic progress of reestablishment. The design documentation on the basis of the existing feasibility study serves the future potential construction of the line, supposedly after the completion of the Szeged–Subotica connection. The HUSRB project titled “Dream Railway” supported the elaboration of Technical Documentation of the railway line. The building permit was issued in 2020, though no construction works are expected to begin until the respective national governments and railway companies allocate investment funds for this purpose.

Regarding road infrastructure, the most relevant one was supported by the programme as no new speedways were constructed in the last seven-eight years. In the vicinity of the Bački Breg–Hercegszántó border crossing the improvement and widening a road in Sombor from 6.0 m to 7.2m+1.5 m shoulders was the aim of the project called SO-BAJA2.

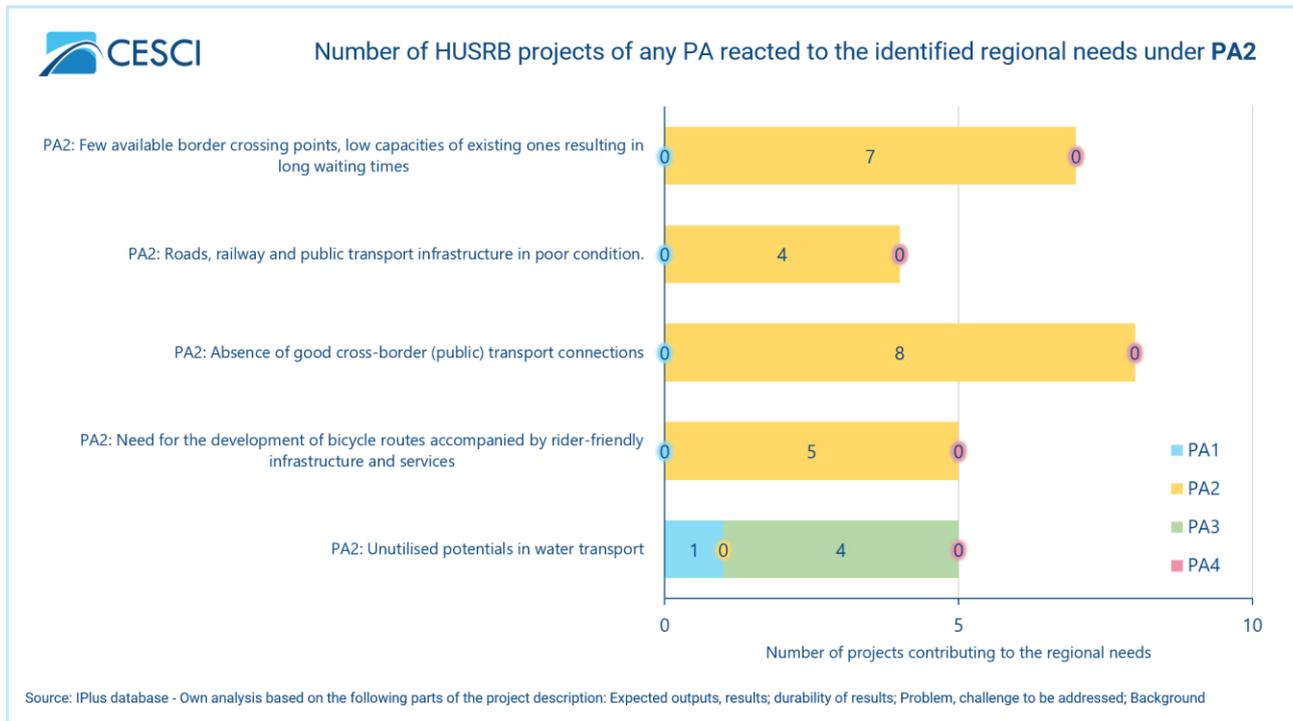
The need connected to the **unutilised potentials in water transport** has been barely addressed by the Programme, and little improvements took place in general. Among all challenges identified in PA2 this has remained the most unsolved. Scheduled, regular (public) transport should be introduced since there are potentials along both the Danube and the Tisza to launch new services and routes between e.g. Baja to Apatin, or from Szeged to Senta. Acquisition of special boats and launch of high-speed services would be necessary. The Tisza is now an international river for cross-border passenger traffic, but this is not exploited only from tourism point of view minor improvement occurred owing to the programme.

To sum up, under PA2 the challenges connected to either border crossings or the cross-border connections can be underlined, which were impacted the most. On the other hand, water transport got little attention. It is worth noting here that given its high importance and impact, much more budget could have been spent on creating better transport integration taking into account its cross-sectoral and cooperation-wide effects, not to mention the high costs of building infrastructure. Still, supporting planning documentation was an important step to address the joint challenges.

Based on the project summaries as well as the objectives of the projects, out of the **identified challenges under PA2**, two challenges are addressed by outstanding number of projects⁴², namely absence of good cross-border (public) transport (8 projects) and few available border crossing points, low capacities of existing ones resulting in long waiting times (7 related projects). In addition, these two challenges were addressed not simply by the largest number of projects but the related two strategic projects of greater impacts. The rest of the identified challenges are supported by similar number of projects (4 or 5 projects). All the related challenges identified in the case of PA2 are solely addressed by PA2 projects except for the water transport. The challenge "Unutilised potentials in water transport" is in connection with 5 projects but none of these projects are under PA2 but PA1 and PA3 respectively. This is mainly because the weak direct contribution of PA2 projects to water transport itself. The related projects support water transport from the point of either nature conservation and environmental protections (reconstruction and revitalisation of dykes, channels, one related PA1 project) or more profoundly by water tourism developments (4 projects by PA3) that involve water transport, e.g., harbours, piers, kayak-canoe, boats and smaller ships.

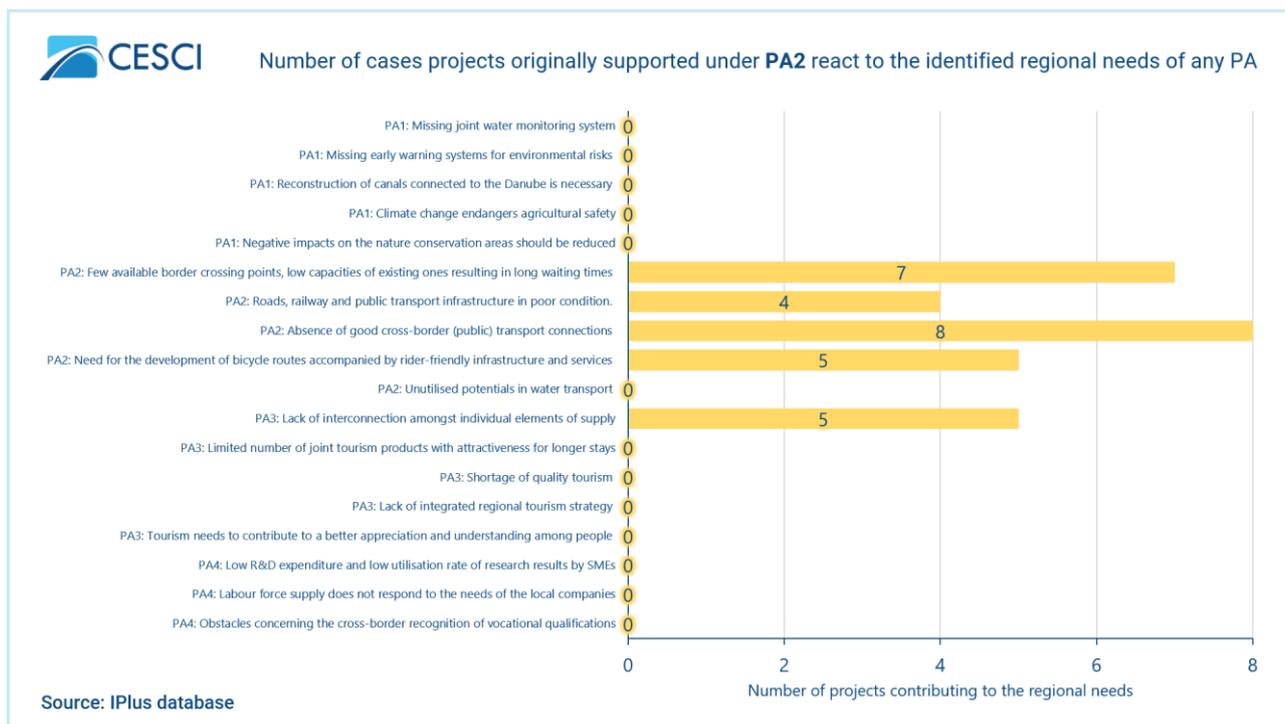
⁴² The consideration of only the number of projects has some distorting effect because of the big difference between the size of the strategic and traditional projects. The allocated EU contribution to the particular challenges would draw a more realistic picture, but evaluators were not able to handle those cases where a given project reflect to more challenges. The distribution of the budget of these projects between the certain needs were not possible based on the available information.

Figure 65: Number of HUSRB projects of any PA reacted to the identified regional needs under PA2



Taking into account the **number of cases projects originally supported under PA2 react to the identified regional needs of any kind** (from any PAs), “few available border crossing points, low capacities of existing ones resulting in long waiting times” (7 projects), and “absence of good cross-border (public) transport connections” (8 projects) are the two most addressed challenges. Furthermore, notable number of times the challenge of lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply from PA3 is addressed by PA2 projects (5 cases). It can be said that apart from the interconnections amongst elements of tourism supplies, the projects elaborated under PA2 are highly focusing on challenges of the given PA. What also has to be underlined is that certain challenges are addressed by large share of projects supported in the frames of PA2. In descending order, the shares are as follows: absence of good cross-border (public) transport connections (80%); few available border crossing points, low capacities of existing ones resulting in long waiting times (70%); lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply (which is a challenge of P3, 50%), need for the development of bicycle routes accompanied by rider-friendly infrastructure and services (50%). As it is said in the previous part of the analysis, unutilised potentials in water transport are not directly addressed by any PA2 projects but by PA1 and PA3 projects.

Figure 66: Number of cases projects originally supported under PA2 react to the identified regional needs of any PA



3.2.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA2)

In this subchapter, based on the result indicators, the comparison of the expected and achieved results will be presented. During the evaluation, the analysts relied on the documentations of the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) and the Cooperation Programme (CP) which were complemented with the observations and suggestions of the interviewees. According to the CP, the reporting frequency of the indicators' values was planned to take place in every second year: the first report – which gave annual value about the fulfilment of the indicator – was the AIR 2019, and it was followed by the report of 2021. The third and last report will be concerned the year of the target value (2023).

As the previous PA, the PA2 incorporates only a single result indicator (result indicator 2.1), which shows the share of border-crossing traffic at smaller border-crossing points within all border-crossing traffic. The relevance of this indicator is guaranteed since it meets the specific objective of PA2: to increase the capacities of border crossing and the connected transport lines through promoting development of road transport and use of sustainable transport modes. The measurement unit of the result indicator 2.1 is expressed in percentage and shows the share of persons crossing the border at smaller border-crossing points within the total number of persons crossing the border in both directions. According to the methodology, only the Rösztke-Horgoš motorway crossing station and Kelebia-Subotica railway border-crossing point are out of this (small size) category. This required information is provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) which is a public register, that is why the availability of data is ensured.

In contrast with PA1, there has not been problem with the compilation of AIRs during the reporting years. The set baseline value is 35.4% – which is connected to the year of 2014 – and it should be

raised to 40% until 2023. According to the AIR 2019, this expectation was already fulfilled in 2019 by 42.66%, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic – periodical closure of the small border-crossing points – the value of AIR 2021 (39.22%) descended slightly below the target value. Despite this negative trend, the target value presumably will be surpassed in 2023 since there has been an increase since 2020 (37.11%) and the volume of traffic will be normalized until the publication of AIR 2023. These details can be observed in the following table (*Table 32*):

Table 32: Result indicator under PA2

ID	Specific Objective	Selected result indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	2019 Annual value	2021 Annual value
RI/2.1	SO/2.1: Increasing the capacities of border crossing and the connected transport lines through promoting development of road transport and use of sustainable transport modes (public transport, bicycle, water transport)	Share of border-crossing traffic at smaller border-crossing points within all border-crossing traffic	% of persons crossing the border at smaller border-crossing points (with the exception of Röszke-Horgoš motorway crossing station and Kelebia-Subotica railway border-crossing point) within the total number of persons crossing the border (in both directions)	35.4	2014	40	42.66	39.22

Regarding the interviews, – compared to the rest of the result indicators – the assessment of the result indicator 2.1 was positive since it fits to the SMART terminology: it is specific, measurable, easily achievable, relevant and time-bound. However, some of the interviewees mentioned that instead of percentage the absolute value would be more preferable (since it is easier to calculate with), and other respondent stressed the lack of ‘heavy’ or ‘physical’ indicators such as the amount of newly built roads etc. Additionally, the target value should be more ambitious, since the determined goal was achieved in 2019.

Table 33: Result indicator of PA2 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
RI/2.1 Share of border-crossing traffic at smaller border-crossing points within all border-crossing traffic	no problem	no problem	modest target value	no problem	no problem

3.2.3.3 Analysis of the partnerships (PA2)

The table below (*Table 34*) contains information on the potential involvement (mentioning) of different types of beneficiaries per CfP actions and per targeted activities under CfP actions. It shows which partners were targeted and how many times to be beneficiaries in the three different CfPs of the programme. Railway management and development companies, road management and development companies, public transport companies, shipping organisations, utility companies, national, regional and local governments and bodies, border control and customs administrations were the main beneficiaries identified by the Cooperation Programme in the frames of its CfPs regarding PA2.

Table 34: Potential beneficiary types of the PA2 by Call for Proposal

CfP actions	Targeted activities based on CP	Railway management and development	Road management and development	Public transport companies	Shipping	Utility companies	National government bodies	Regional government bodies	Local government	Border control and customs
2.1 Border crossing points, roads and bicycle roads	Develop the cross-border railway lines	1 st					1 st	1 st		
	Develop the communal and transport infrastructure systems	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd			2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	
	Develop the infrastructure and the capacity of border crossing points and the relevant transport lines (roads, bicycle network, water transport, passenger information and service system)		1 st 2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd		1 st 2 nd 3 rd			
2.2 Improving public transport services and planning railway lines	Organizing regular consultations to harmonize the transport development plans and regulation						2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	
	Develop the cross-border railway lines	2 nd 3 rd					2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	
	Develop the infrastructure and the capacity of border crossing points and the relevant transport lines (roads, bicycle network, water transport, passenger information and service system)		2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd		2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd

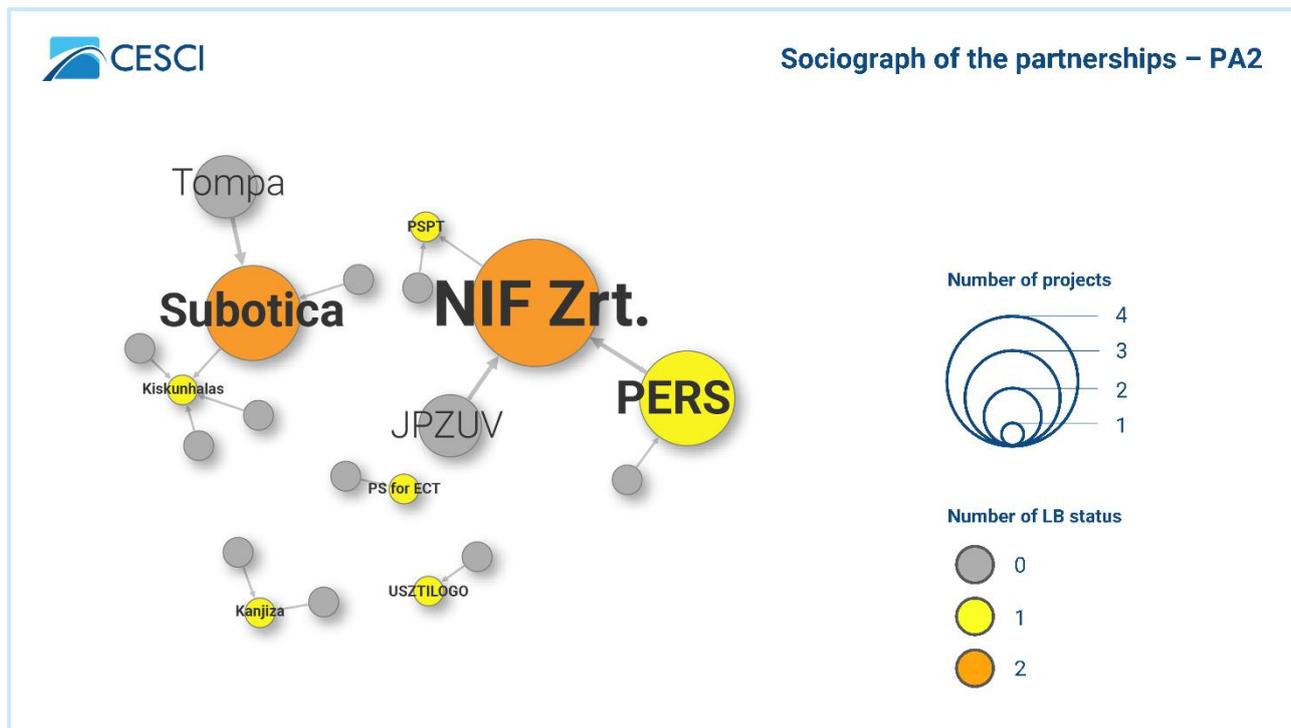
Based on the number of activities a beneficiary type was involved in any CfPs (i.e. the filled cells with any information on the potential participation of beneficiaries in CfPs) national and regional

governments (all 6 activities) and local governments (5) stand out. The number of occasions a potential beneficiary was addressed by any CfPs (i.e. number of times 1st, 2nd, or 3rd CfP is written in the cells) is high in the case of national and regional governments (12 occasions each) and local governments (11). The highest number (7) of potential beneficiaries were listed in relation to the targeted activity of "Develop the infrastructure and the capacity of border crossing points and the relevant transport lines (roads, bicycle network, water transport, passenger information and service system)."

It is worth comparing the potential (planned) beneficiaries of CfPs to the real (actually involved) beneficiaries of the realised projects. The matching of the before and after picture of the beneficiaries, similarities can be detected with regard to national governments and state-level companies responsible for road developments. On the other hand, the involvement and participation of transport companies, shipping organisations, border control and customs administrations were less pronounced as it had been planned. Regional and local governments were also involved with a medium intensity. It has to be underlined that the related CfPs did not allow many very distinct beneficiaries to apply. That is why transport-related bodies enjoyed special emphasis in projects. Compared to PA3 in particular the system was significantly more focused regarding beneficiary types.

Considering the **types** of beneficiaries, there were only one beneficiary which was governed by private law (329 049 EUR), while the rest 28 were all public. With regard to the **size** of the partnerships, on average a partnership is made up by 1.9 beneficiaries. which is only slightly above the programme average (1.8). The partnership network is characterised by the National Infrastructure Development Corporation (NIF) from Hungary and the Municipality of Subotica from Serbia. They both play LB status in two PA2 projects, and they both created three project partner connections. Apart from these, Public Enterprise "Roads of Serbia" Belgrade (Zvezdara) (PERS) should be mentioned as it was involved in three projects and has LB status in a project. Based on the **sociography**, NIF and Subotica has a rather distinct role and position in the network as they created two separate partnerships. The rest of the partners have a rather limited role in the built-up of the partnership network. In general municipalities along with national/regional companies responsible for transport infrastructure developments play a main role in organising partnerships.

Figure 67: Sociograph of the partnerships – PA2



The partner **budget** for the single beneficiary governed by private law was as low as 1.7% of the total cost. The average total cost per all beneficiaries was 653 186 EUR, while per public beneficiary it accounted for 664 762 EUR, which is by far higher than the average cost per beneficiary on programme level. Compared to PA3 and PA4 the average size of projects was relatively large in terms of total cost. The largest amount of budget was allocated to NIF Zrt. among the LBs (4 987 804.02 EUR taking into account the total costs) followed by Provincial Secretariat for Energy, Construction and Transport (3 255 968 EUR) and Public Enterprise Roads of Serbia (2 147 670 EUR) from the Serbian partners. Altogether they are responsible for 53.3% of the total cost in the frames of PA2.

In the frames of the online survey the respondents also had the opportunity to evaluate their partnerships. Altogether 10 responses were received under PA2 that concerns 9 projects since more than one beneficiary filled the questionnaire form the same project. It might cause overlapping in the data; thus, the survey should be regarded as an insight to the main trends, but it is not adequate to introduce the exact situation.

Regarding the given responses, 8 beneficiaries out of 10 stated that the main **motivation** of their partnerships was the similar mission and goals, but only 6 respondents could build on the previous cooperation. Owing to the specific feature of the PA2 – which is based on road building and different transport and traffic network development – the close geographical proximity is higher than usual, as half of the beneficiaries (5 respondents) referred to this reason. The shared language is also a firm link between the partners, however only 1 beneficiary highlighted this motivation.

In terms of the composition of the partnerships, the majority (6 out of 10) of the respondents have 3 project partners, and there is just one beneficiary with more than 3 partners. The rest of the respondents (3 persons) have a small-size partnership, basically with one partner. Focusing on the **length** of the partnerships (taking into account the responses for the question as follows: how long

is your cooperation with each of your partners?), out of the mentioned 20 partners there are 9 actors whose cooperation is 1-3 years long with the given respondents. The group of partners with more than 10 years cooperation is also significant under PA2, since 7 partners belong to this cluster, however there is no partners with 5-10 years partnerships. The rest of the partners have 3-5 years long relations and in the case of 2 partners the cooperation is new without any earlier contact.

Considering the **future prospects** of the partnerships, they are quite positive since 7 respondents would like to keep alive the current composition of the partnerships and the other 3 respondents would also continue the already started cooperation with some of the partners. It shows there is no respondent who intend to quit from a partnership or who has not decided yet about the future cooperation.

3.2.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA2)

In the beginning of this subchapter the territorial coverage of EU contributions and beneficiaries were analysed by the following two figures (*Figure 68, Figure 69*). Both of them indicate the values by countries, the first one in relative values, the second one in absolute value. According to the EU contribution, besides the introduction of the result of all CfPs, the open and strategic CfPs were also represented separately, in order to handle the distorting effects of the latter ones. The number of PA2-related beneficiaries is less than 10% out of the total, 323 beneficiaries.

Figure 68: Territorial balance of the beneficiaries [PA2] – Relative values

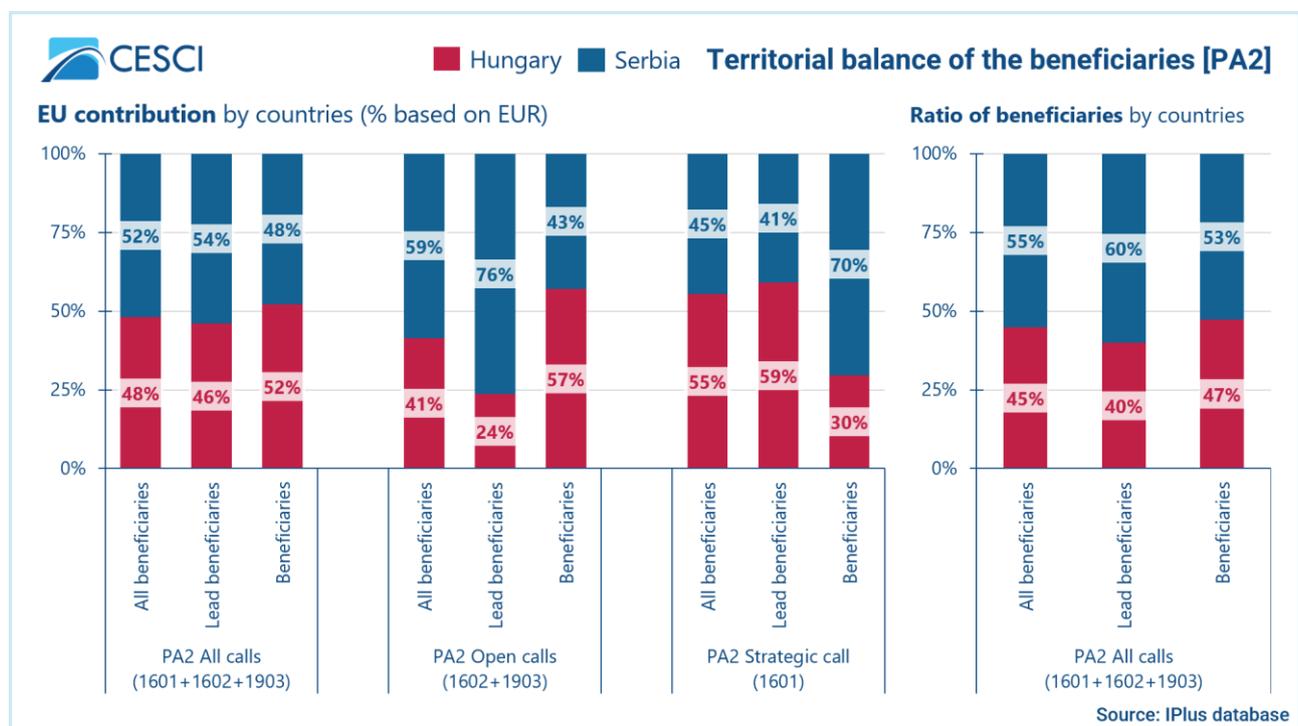
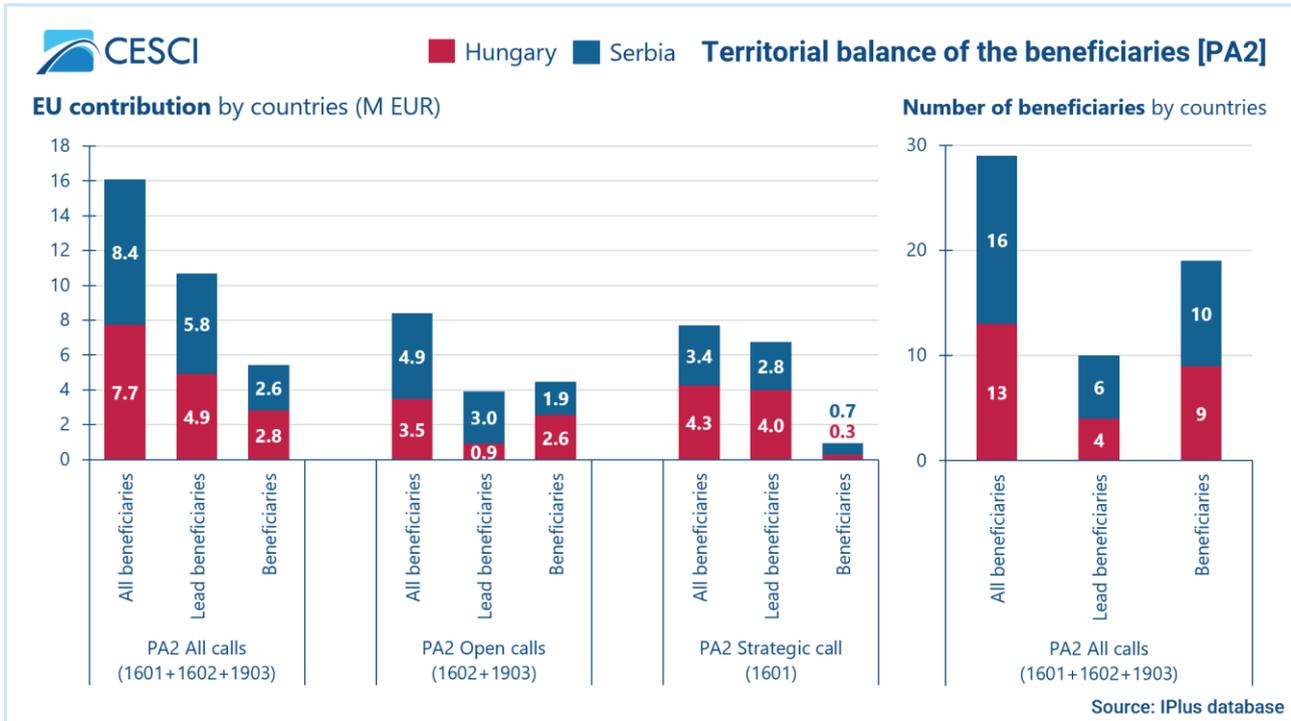


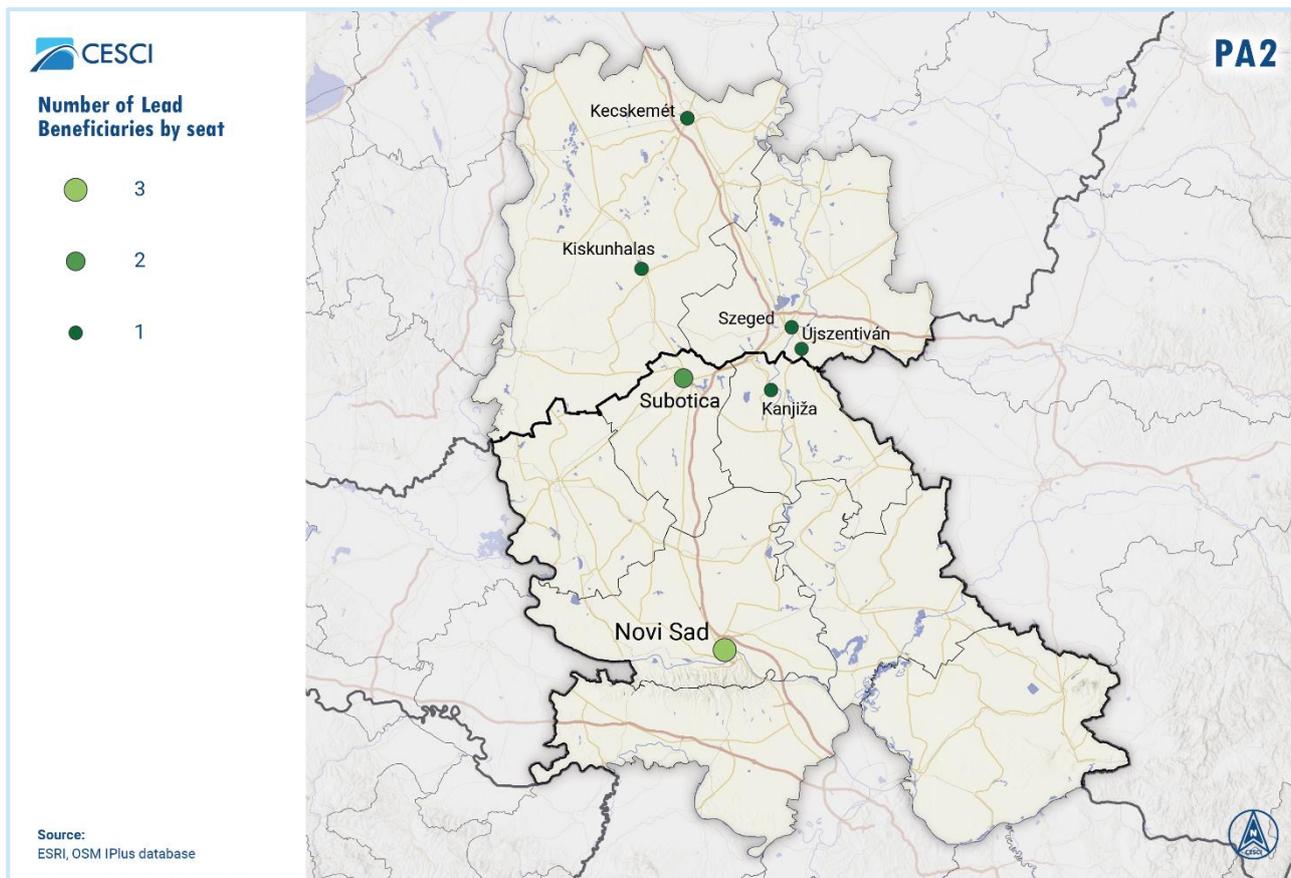
Figure 69: Territorial balance of the beneficiaries [PA2] – Absolute values



Both the distribution of the EU contribution and the number of partners is balanced between the two countries with a slight Serbian majority in both cases. Regarding the two strategic projects, they are led by a Serbian and a Hungarian LB, but the ratio of the allocated contribution to them is remarkably higher on the Hungarian side. This can be reasoned by the difference in the nature of the projects: the Kübekháza-Rabe focused on the (re-)construction of a border crossing infrastructure which had higher financial needs than the other project delivering the technical plans of a cross-border railway line. In addition, there is a significant difference in the allocations to LBs and Bs in both strategic projects, because neither the planning, nor the construction of a cross-border infrastructure can be hardly splitted at the border, one of the partners must undertake the majority of the tasks in order to provide the technical continuity of the infrastructure. As the number of beneficiaries is higher on the Serbian side, the allocated money to them is also higher than in the case of the Hungarian partner.

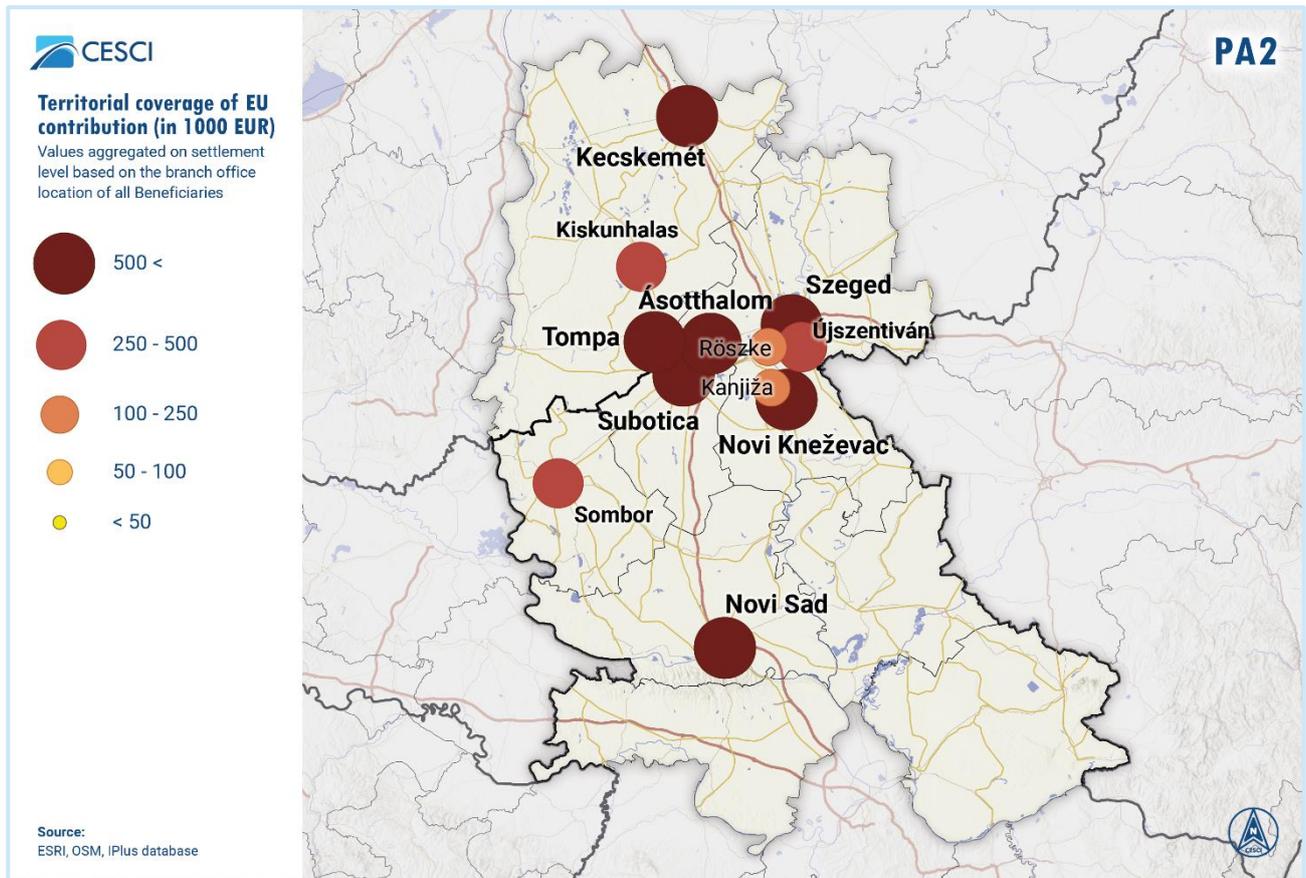
In terms of the open CfPs, both the number of LBs and the allocated EU contribution to them is higher on the Serbian side, while the number of Bs are the same on both sides, but the distribution of the EU contribution is slightly in favour of Hungary. Although the number of projects under this PA is also low, the money absorbed by regular projects altogether is slightly higher than under the strategic projects.

Figure 70: Number of Lead Beneficiaries by seat (PA2)



The emphasis of the related evaluation regarding PA1 and PA2 is on the EU distribution and the project locations, which show the most important features of the territorial coverage. The spatial distribution of EU contribution is unbalanced in the case of PA2, similarly to PA1. The largest cities dominate in gaining contribution: Novi Sad (5 767 954 EUR, 35.8%), Szeged (4 599 642 EUR, 28.6%) and Subotica (1 370 895 EUR, 8.5%) lead the chart. Together the aforementioned settlements concentrate 72.9% of the total EU contribution. The money was allocated to as few as 11 settlements underlying the high concentration. On the Hungarian side the southern part of Csongrád-Csanád (District of Szeged and District of Mórahalom: 37.2%) stand out, while the same applies to the city of Novi Sad. A smaller concentration can be found in Severnobanatska (5.6% of the total EU contribution). The pattern of contributions has a rather unique character: high share of branch offices and allocated sources went to the central and eastern border sections. Except for Kecskemét and Novi Sad, all support was allocated to the vicinity of the border. The branch offices situated within the 30-33 km zone to the state border (in descending order: Szeged, Subotica, Ásotthalom, Tompa, Novi Kneževac, Sombor, Kiskunhalas, Újszentiván, Kanjiža and Röske) received 60% of the financial resources.

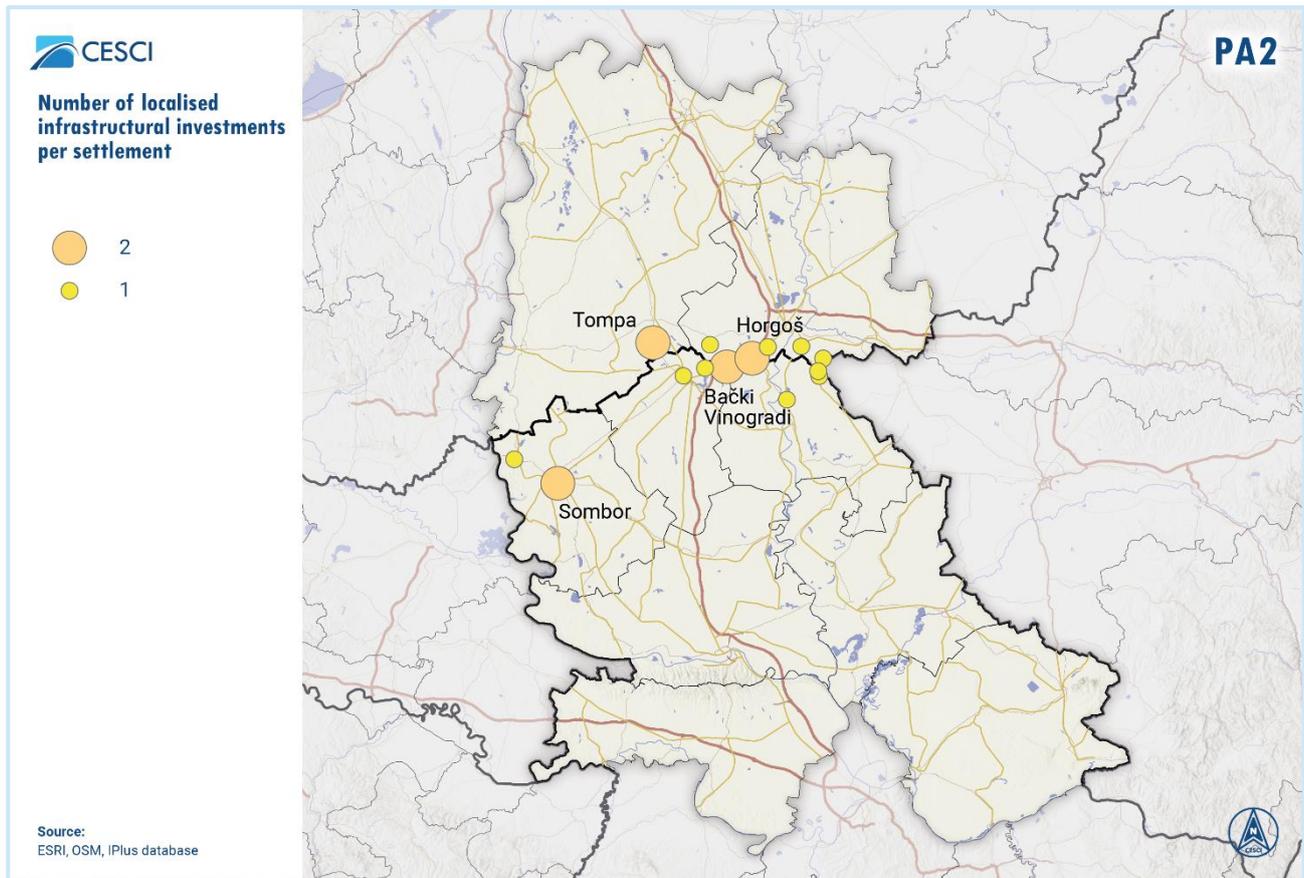
Figure 71: Territorial coverage of EU contribution (in 1000 EUR) – PA2



Based on the **project locations**⁴³ (where detectable infrastructural developments were carried out) in the frames of PA2 Tompa from Hungary and Bački Vinogradi, Horgoš and Sombor from Serbia stand out by two project locations in each settlement. Other settlements with location include Ásotthalom, Kübekháza, Rösztke, Újszentiván from Hungary, and Bezdan, Majdan, Novi Kneževac, Palić, Rabe and Subotica from Serbia with a single location. The territorial distribution is characterised by strong concentration to the borderline, to the border infrastructure. Based on the map created the eastern part of the border and its vicinity concentrates more projects than the eastern microregions. Understandably, large inland areas further away from the border lack any concrete investments.

⁴³ More than a single location per project per settlement is possible, as each location was regarded as a separate location even if it located within the territory of the same settlement. Thus, for instance, if there are three locations in a settlement it does not necessarily mean the infrastructure elements were realized from three different CBC projects.

Figure 72: Number of localised infrastructural investments per settlement (PA2)



3.2.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA2)

In this subchapter, the durability of the project results and outcomes is evaluated along two main aspects: their institutional and financial sustainability. The evaluators assessed the history and potential future of the projects, the pattern of project's life cycle, their embeddedness into the regional and local structures, in addition the financial conditions for maintaining the projects' results.

The assessment is based on the results of the interviews and the questionnaire, in addition the application forms and the quality assessment of the projects.

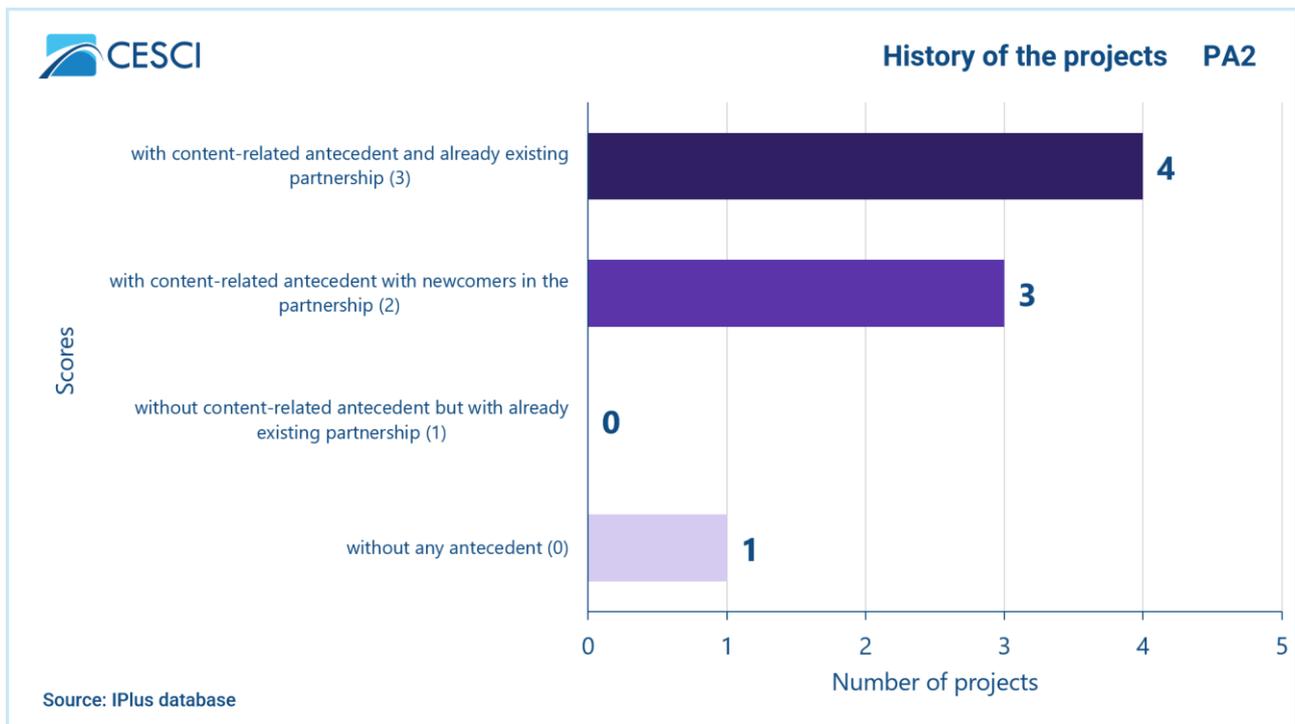
The evaluation of **projects' history** had been done through analysing the relevant part of all application forms. At the 'description of synergies with other policies, programmes and projects' part of the form, applicants had the possibility to introduce all sorts of previous projects (cross-border, national, transnational, etc.) and partnerships which are connected to their actual development plans. This possibility had been exploited by the applicants in a varying manner, some of them only provided a generic answer, while others explained the matching points in a detailed way. Another barrier of the assessment was that in case of the first (restricted) CfP, this question had not formed part of the application form. Despite of this limitation, evaluators made an attempt to group the selected projects according to the followings:

0. projects without any antecedent;
1. projects without content-related antecedent but with already existing partnership (who had been implemented joint project in another thematic field);

2. projects with content-related antecedent with newcomers in the partnership;
3. projects with content-related antecedent and already existing partnership.

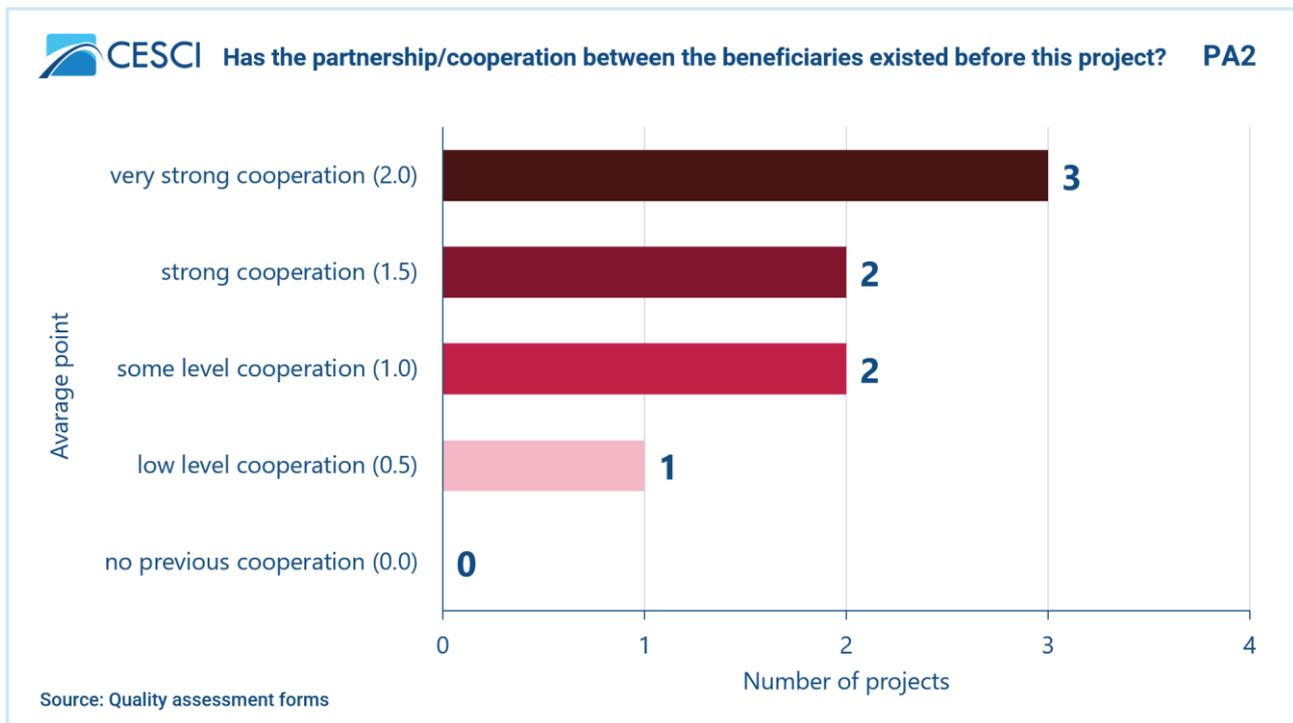
According to the chart (Figure 73), altogether 7 projects have content-related antecedent, which account for more than 80% of the total value of the regular projects in the field of cross-border traffic. 4 projects out of 8 have an already existing partnership and the other 3 content-related projects build up their partnerships with newcomers. The rest of the projects, only one is without any previous history and – as the application form states – there is no project which is implemented by an already existing partnership who possesses joint project in another thematic field. Taking into account that the implementation period of the traffic projects is longer than other regular projects, where the planning and implementation phase(s) tend to be separated sometimes across different programming periods, that is why these projects have a deeper history than others. Mostly the current projects are based on previous planning procedure (feasibility study, design documentation etc.) or on already existing transport network what the currents projects just complement and extend with other sections.

Figure 73: History of the projects (PA2)



The outcomes of the quality assessment confirm the main message of the application form. In the case of the regular projects, the two quality assessors evaluated on a 3-point scale (0-2) whether the partnership or cooperation between the beneficiaries had existed before. The averages of the given points indicate that the majority of the projects (7 projects of the 8) has already been in a partnership before the analysed project, since the given points are above from the value 1. It is worth mentioning that 3 of them got the highest value which proves the strong bonds between the project partners in the field of traffic development. According to the quality assessment, there is no new partnership in this PA since the lowest given point is above zero, which is a small contradiction compared to the result of the application form.

Figure 74: Durability of the partnerships (PA2)



Furthermore, the word cloud method helps to analyse the textual evaluation of the assessors. The most commonly used words in the descriptions were 'balanced', 'adequate', 'similar' and 'reasonable' that confirm the existence of the close bond between the project partners.

Another evaluation asset is the questionnaire which was submitted by the beneficiaries. Within the framework of PA2, 10 beneficiaries filled the online survey who are concerned with 9 projects. Since the number of beneficiaries and the projects are not equal, there is an overlapping in the data. The conclusion of the aggregated responses strengthens the above-mentioned statements of the quality assessment, as 8 beneficiaries considered that their projects possess cooperation with (some kind of) history. Half of the respondents (5 beneficiaries) has a formal or institutionalised cooperation, while the other 3 beneficiaries built on previous informal cooperation and the rest of the respondents (2 beneficiaries) took part in a new initiative. Since the overrepresented project does not belong to the category of institutionalised cooperation, the distortion on this highest level is not significant.

Figure 75: Word cloud method visualisation of the partnership aspect (PA2)



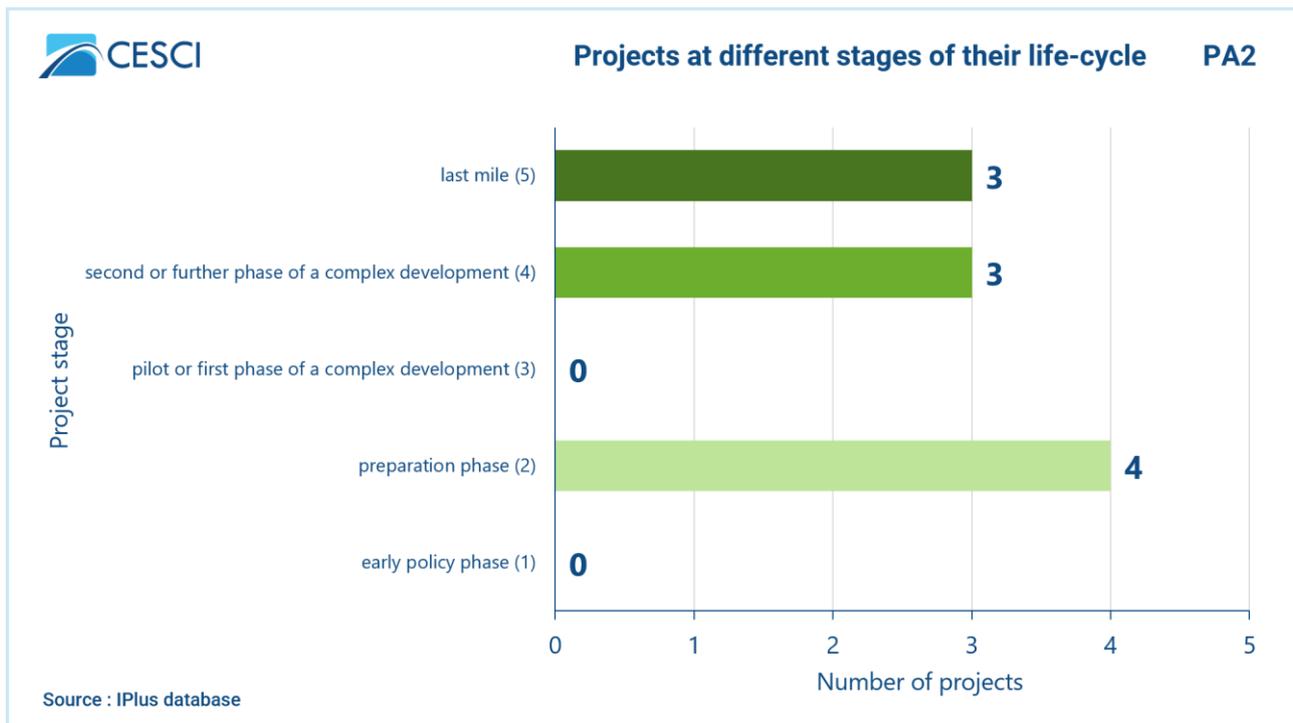
Based on the application forms, the evaluators also assessed the pattern of the **projects' life cycle**, which means a classification of projects based on the stages of implementation that they lie on. The analysis tends to reflect on the integrated approach, whether the beneficiaries initiate ad-hoc, separate projects or plan and implement long-term, synergic developments step-by-step. This difference in the local actors' mindset basically determines the durability of the projects' and programme's results.

On the basis of the project summary written by the beneficiaries in the application phase, projects were categorized into the following 5 groups:

1. early policy phase,
2. preparation phase,
3. pilot or first phase of a complex development,
4. second or further phase of a complex development,
5. last mile.

Taking into consideration that the classification is based on the project summaries which shows some quality differences, there might be some distortions in the results, but some trends are still noticeable.

Figure 76: Life-cycle of the projects (PA2)



According to the project summaries, it is evident that the projects (related to PA2) can be split into two main groups. The first one contains those projects which are in or close to the last phase of the implementation, while the second one includes the preparatory projects. The majority of the projects exceeds the third project stage, since 3 of them are in the last mile, while another 3 projects are in the second or further phase of the implementation. On the other hand, there are 4 projects which focused on the planning process and the construction has not started yet. The importance of these projects is great, since they lay the basis for future cross-border infrastructure developments. When analysing the lengthiness of these projects, it must be noted that applicants may face several legal and administrative obstacles (such as varying environmental and technical requirements, as well as authorizations procedures, etc.) rooted in the cross-borderness, which could make both the planning and implementation phases complex and time-consuming.

In regard to the strategic projects, the Kübekháza-Rabe project is in the last mile and ready to close the development package, while the Dream Railway project dealt with the planning tasks of a cross-border railway connection, the future construction of which would have a great impact on the cross-border region.

In the questionnaire 9 respondents (out of 10) stated that they plan to continue to pursue the goals of their project in a different framework after the programme finishes (e.g. in the 2021-2027 programming period). 8 beneficiaries responded to how they are planning to continue the further works, but 5 of them did not mention the name of the framework (programme) just the target actions. The other 3 respondents named the future IPA programme. Considering the partnership, 7 beneficiaries (out of 10) have the intention to continue their cooperation with most of the partners, while the rest of the respondents (3 beneficiaries) would pursue their work just with some of the partners. In summary, the projects of PA2 are basically long-term projects, which require durable cooperation between the partners. Owing to the prolonged processes of preparation and

implementation, the majority of the respondents are committed to achieve their previously determined common goals.

The application form also provides data to evaluate the **institutional sustainability** of the projects since the beneficiaries had the chance to describe their projects' sustainability in the section of 'Sustainability and capitalization of project results'. However, the two strategic projects do not have similar description and – according to the regular projects – the content relevance of the introductions are not appropriate in every case. For instance, sometimes the descriptions are confined to financial sustainability and there is no mention about the institutional sustainability (there are just 3 projects which dealt significantly with the institutional sustainability). Another problem was the quality of the introductions with a brief overview, which does not contain enough information about the institutions. Aside from these difficulties, the word cloud method could provide a proper asset to analyse the given texts, which highlights expressions such as 'local governments', 'technical documentation', 'secretariat' and 'professional sustainability'. The outcome of the contextual analysis identified three main solutions which were applied by the beneficiaries:

1. the methods based on the cooperation of the project partners: in this case, the institutional sustainability is provided by the strong (future) cooperation of the partners. It is confirmed by statements such as 'sustainability will be assured with relevant authorities', 'professional relationship network', 'regular exchange of experience' and 'the parties committed themselves to the long-term cooperation', which refers to the close bond between the partners.
2. the methods based on a certain document: in this case, the institutional sustainability is ensured by legal documents such as agreements, strategies, contracts etc. which provides a firm framework for implementation and preservation of the outcomes. For example, a cooperation agreement has been signed by two townships in favour of the long-term maintenance of the project results, but there are also many technical plans and documentations which are good bases for the continuation of the joint work.
3. the methods integrating the sustainability responsibilities into the partners' daily tasks: In other cases – when the sustainability of the project is not described well –, the capitalization and maintenance of the project results are ensured by the daily operation of the partners. For instance, even the bicycle paths in Subotica and Tompa are parts of a border crossing infrastructure, but the two road sections are maintained separately by the local governments.

Figure 77: Word cloud method visualisation of the institutional sustainability aspect (PA2)



In the case of **financial sustainability**, not just the projects' application forms provide usable information, but the quality assessment and the questionnaire too. However, the quality of the given answers sometimes is not appropriate, because many descriptions are too brief and their contents does not concentrate fully to the sustainability of the finance. The contextual analysis of the beneficiaries' answers – concerns only the regular projects – identifies the major methods and solutions for financial sustainability. According to the results of the word cloud, there are expressions among the highlighted words such as 'annual budget', 'cost efficiency', 'annual programmes', 'effective management' and 'maintenance costs', which help to determine the main methods:

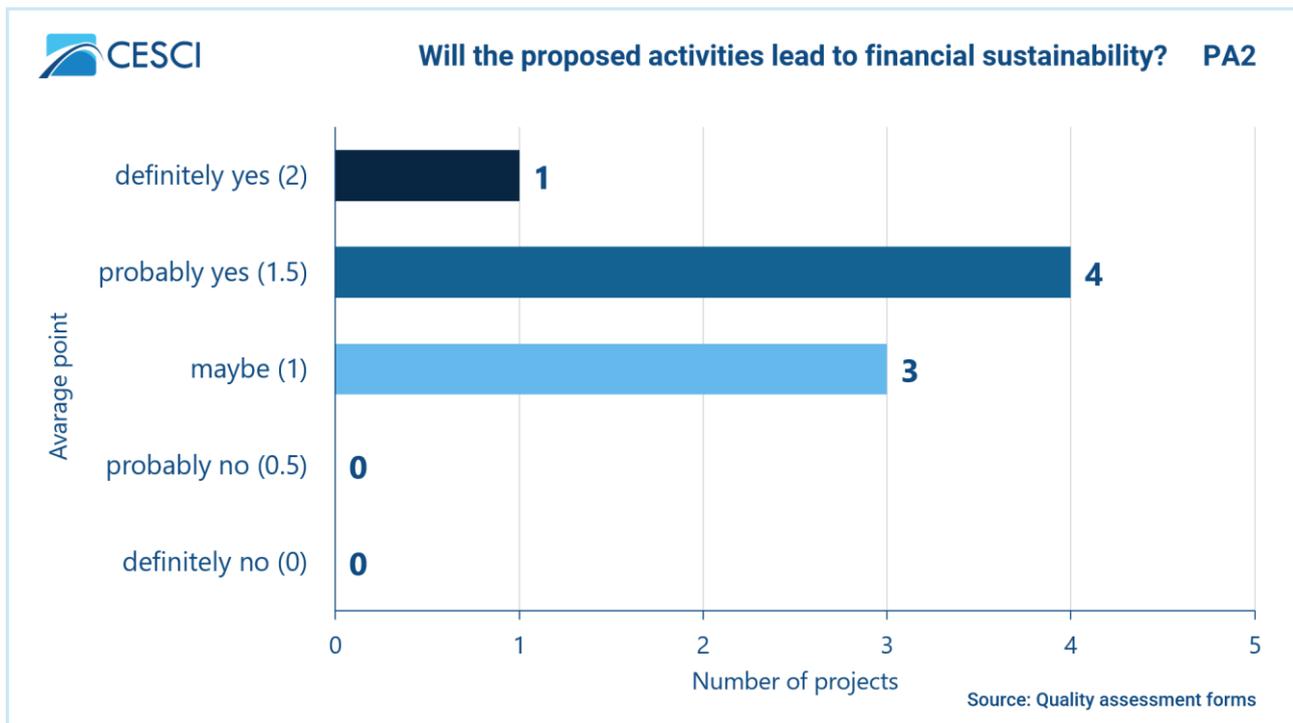
1. the sustainability is ensured individually by each or some beneficiary: in this case, each or some beneficiary's task to implement and maintain financially the projects and activities. This is the most common solution within this PA with similar expressions such as 'municipalities' annual budget', 'costs of the maintenance of the bike road charge the participating local governments' and 'local governments and their local public utility companies'.
2. the sustainability is ensured by outsourcing the financial responsibility: in this case, the beneficiaries externalise the financial burdens to national/international level, organisations, institutions and others actors.

Figure 78: Word cloud method visualisation of the financial sustainability aspect (PA2)



Regarding the questionnaire, 8 respondents (out of 10) stated that their own project results were financially viable after the programme's closure. The responses of these 8 applicants confirm the above-mentioned statement, as the role of own resources among these beneficiaries are relatively high. 5 of them underlined that their financial sustainability is ensured by this way ('self-financing resources', 'own financial source of municipality', 'own resources') after the programme's closure. Only 3 beneficiaries mentioned the state funding ('national bodies'), but two of them complemented it with own funds.

Figure 79: Financial sustainability of the projects (PA2)



Besides the beneficiaries, quality assessors also evaluated the regular projects from a financial point of view on a 3-point scale (0-2). In light of the data, only one project was evaluated financial sustainable by both assessors, but half of the projects (4 projects) 1.5 point. In the case of the rest of the other 3 projects, the descriptions given by the applicants did not meet fully with the assessors' expectations. As the figure (Figure 79) illustrate, there is no project in the range of 0-0.5 point, which means that the financial sustainability of the PA2 projects is good or acceptable, and the description of the financial plans fulfil the requirements.

In favour of the monitoring of the maintenance of the project's results, some selected projects have to provide **follow-up reports** to the Joint Secretariat. As the majority of the PA2 projects contains hard infrastructural developments – mostly bicycle paths and road constructions –the majority of the already closed projects (4 out of 5) have been obliged to submit follow-up reports during the 5-year period.

3.2.3.6 Analysis of the impacted target groups (PA2)

The main programme documents defined the target groups for the PA2 as the passengers, the public and private transport companies, the NGOs, the railway companies, the tourists, as well as the manufacturing and logistics enterprises. Since the PA is focusing on decreasing the bottlenecks of cross-border traffic, the definition of the target groups seems legitimate and reasonable.

Based on the target group descriptions provided by the projects in the INTERREG+ system, the projects had a variety of target groups in mind at the design of their initiatives. They either approached the intervention from the point of view of the users and thus their main target groups are the tourists, inhabitants, passengers, customers, or communities, or from the point of view of the service providers as in enterprises, infrastructure companies, border-crossings in a way etc. Based on

the word cloud analysis the connection between the economy, labour market and territorial development as well as the bottle-necks of cross-border traffic became highly visible.

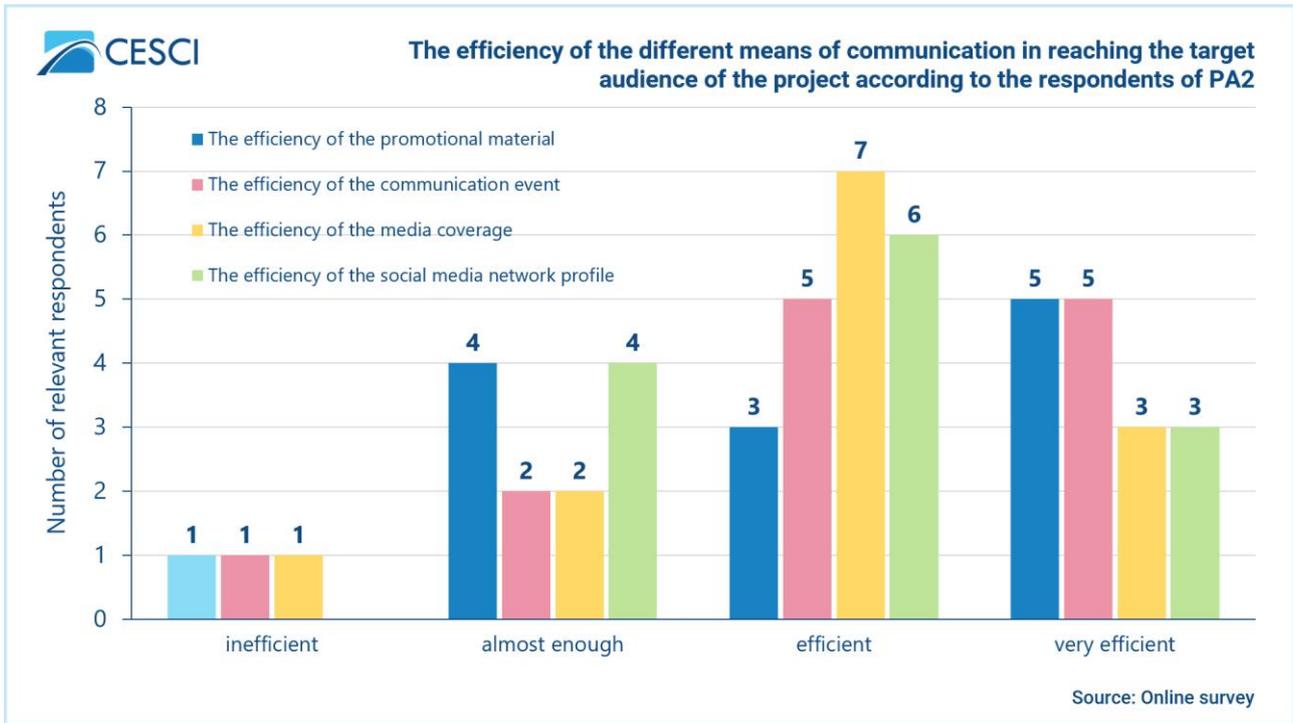
Figure 80: Word cloud visualisation of the target group descriptions provided by the projects in the INTERREG+ system



The comparison of the target groups defined by the programme documents and the target groups defined by the projects show a satisfactory level of harmony which is also in line with the intention of the PA.

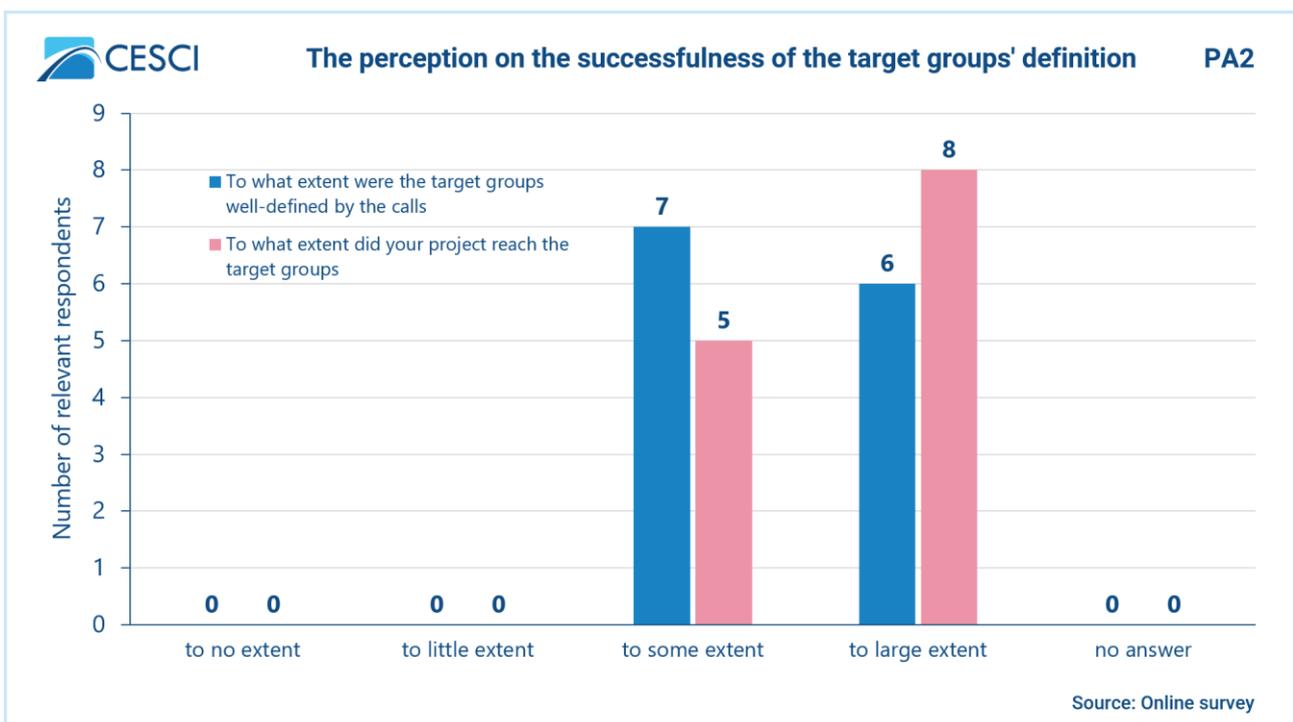
In order to assess how well were the target groups predefined, the online survey referenced above also contained several questions on this topic. The respondents who were implementing a project within the PA2 deemed the successfulness of the different means of communication a bit less successful in reaching the target audience of the project than those working within the PA1. There was one respondent who found all the methods inefficient except the social media network profile which was left unmarked. The promotional material and the social media profile was deemed less efficient, while the media coverage and the communication event were more praised all in all.

Figure 81: The efficiency of the different means of communication in reaching the target audience of the project according to the respondents of PA2



According to the respondents of the online survey, the CfPs defined the target groups to some or to large extent in a successful way and also the projects were considered to reach their target groups in a rather favourable length; more than half of the respondent rated it the highest and the other to the second highest category, which is an almost identical result to that at the PA1.

Figure 82: The perception on the successfulness of the target groups' definition – PA2



The regional needs and challenges that the Programme strived to solve were not relevant to the defined target groups in the same level. In order to assess how relevant these were to the target groups (which is also indicative on how well were the target groups selected) a benchmark analysis was carried out where 1 means it was not really relevant, 2 means it was relevant to some degree and 3 means that the given regional need and challenge was highly relevant to the given target group (the white squares indicate groups that were not explicitly assigned to the given challenge by the Programme). (See the table: Table 21.)

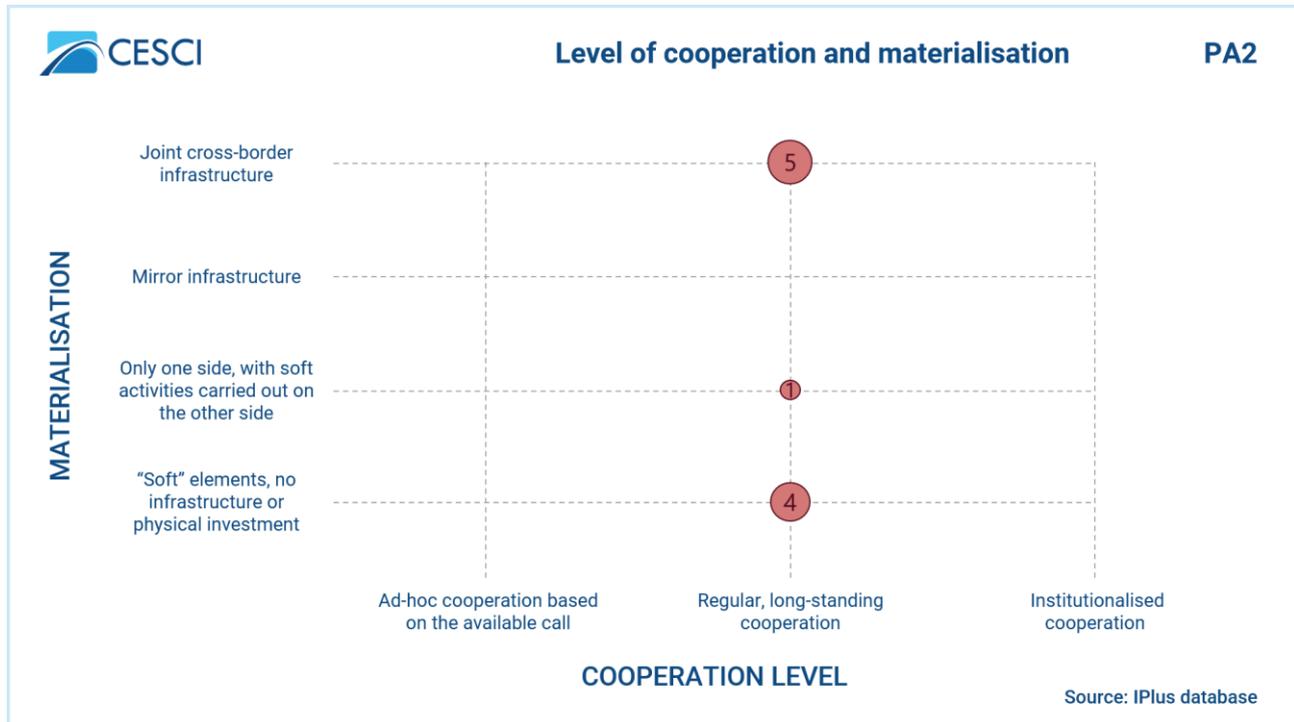
Table 35: Benchmark of the level to which the different challenges were relevant to the defined target groups in PA2

Regional needs / challenges	Defined target groups						
	Passengers	Tourists	Transport companies	NGOs	General public	Enterprises	Railway companies
Few available border crossing points, low capacities of existing ones resulting in long waiting times	3	3	3	1	2	2	not a predefined group
Roads, railway and public transport infrastructure in poor condition	3	3	3	not a predefined group	2	not a predefined group	3
Absence of good cross-border (public) transport connections	2	3	3	not a predefined group			
Need for the development of bicycle routes accompanied by rider-friendly infrastructure and services	2	2	1	1	1	not a predefined group	not a predefined group
Unutilised potentials in water transport	1	1	3	1	1	not a predefined group	not a predefined group

3.2.3.7 Analysis of cross-border relevance (PA2)

The main purpose of the analysis is to identify the level at which the programme can be considered cross-border. We will analyse in this subchapter the projects' level of cooperation and materialisation in a cross-border sense. (The applied methodology is presented in the same chapter at the PA1.)

Figure 83: Level of cooperation and materialisation (PA2)



Regarding **the level of cooperation**, in the case of PA2, given its character which required closer than ad-hoc cooperation on a cross-border level, all the 10 projects can be classified as a regular, long-standing cooperation. In the case of these projects the project partners have been cooperating for a long time, a long-term formalized or informal co-operation relationship has developed between them (for example elaboration of feasibility study, technical and construction plan), and the aim of the projects were to establish or strengthen this.

Considering the **materialisation of projects** in PA2 with 5 projects Category 4 represents the highest share (50%) Every second project (5 projects in total) can be considered to be a highly materialised one, namely common cross-border infrastructure was created in many cases in the form of roads, bicycle paths and border crossing infrastructure in particular. This rate of Category 4 represents a twelve times higher value compared to the overall average of such mirror infrastructure projects (6%). Owing to the character of the CfPs and the actions formulated within this PA, most of the projects aimed at constructing transport infrastructure with high cross-border relevance (e.g., a cross-border bicycle road, a public road supporting better connection to and across crossing points, or contributions border infrastructure). The share of soft elements (40%) is below the Programme level average, just like the share of infrastructure created on one side of the border (10%). Category 3, namely the mirror infrastructure had no projects since those projects which could have been characterised level 3 ended up in the rest of the categories, mostly in the category of the highest materialisation.

With regard to PA2 the largest number of projects can be shown in relation to cross-border infrastructure and regular, long-standing cooperation (5 projects, 50%). Jointly with projects with soft elements and long-standing cooperation (4 projects, 40%) that category has by far the highest shares. Both strategic projects can be described by regular, long-lasting cooperation. Out of the two the Kübekháza-Rabe project reached higher relevance as it has created a common cross-border infrastructure (border crossing). Dream Railway was also an important project, however since it contained mainly planning activities of infrastructure it can be concluded that “soft” elements were realized, and there is no physical investment. This PA can be regarded as one if not the most relevant from the point of cross-border relevance thanks to the high share of common cross-border infrastructural investments.

3.2.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA2)

In the frames of this chapter the contribution of the related PA2 HUSRB projects to the relevant European and national level plans will be analysed. For further details on the applied methodology please read the explanation at the same chapter of PA1.

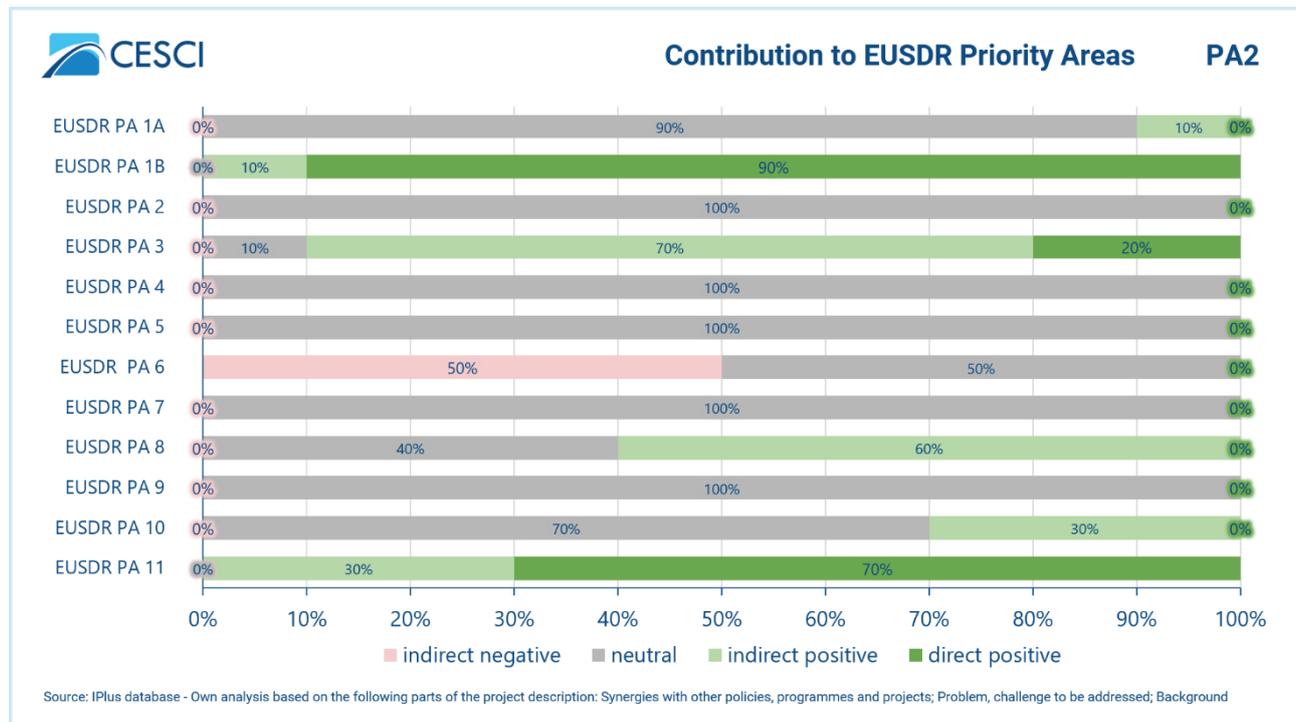
Based on what is written in the application forms by the applicants, on **EU level** the most notable documents in terms of impact by PA2 projects are EUSDR (2 projects mentioned it), EUSAIR (2 projects) and the EU Cycling Strategy (2 projects). Out of the regional needs identified in the intervention logic of the PA the need for the development of bicycle routes can be identified as the most addressed one, followed by road transport related challenges.

On **national level** projects of PA2 contributed to the enhancement and completion of the National Development 2030 – National Development and Territorial Development Concept (3 projects), the TOP (operational programme on regional and urban development, 2 projects), and the Rural Development Programme (2 projects) from Hungary. The Development Programme of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for the Period 2014-2020 (2 projects) can be underlined in the case of Serbia. On national level no clear reference can be detected, therefore there is no direct impact that can be shown. A rather general and overall interconnection can only be mentioned.

Based on the expert analysis, considering PA2, there are four outstanding results in the case of **EUSDR** Pas. PA 1B Rail-Road-Air Mobility is supported directly and positively by as many as 90% of the PA2 projects. Together with the 10% of indirect positive effects, all projects contribute to PA 1B. This share of 90% (which equals 9 projects in total) is outstanding taking into account all four PAs of the Programme. Another outstanding result can be seen in relation to PA 11 Security owing to the elimination of bottlenecks at border crossings. Consequently, 70% of the projects in PA2 has a direct positive impact on the EUSDR priority (7 projects). Together with the 30% of the projects with indirect positive impact, every project in the frames of PA2 supported the realisation of EUSDR PA 11. The third highly relevant PA is PA 3 Culture & Tourism since a couple of projects support tourism flows and cultural exchanges as forms of mobility within the Programme area. 70% of the projects (7 projects) indirectly, while 20% of them directly (2 projects) contribute to the respective EUSDR priority. The fourth most notable information regarding PA2 is the relatively high share (50%, 5 projects) of indirect negative impacts with regard to PA6 Biodiversity, Landscapes and Air & Soil Quality. The explanation includes that some projects imply creation of artificial surfaces, indirect increase in motorised traffic with new travel options. In addition, PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises

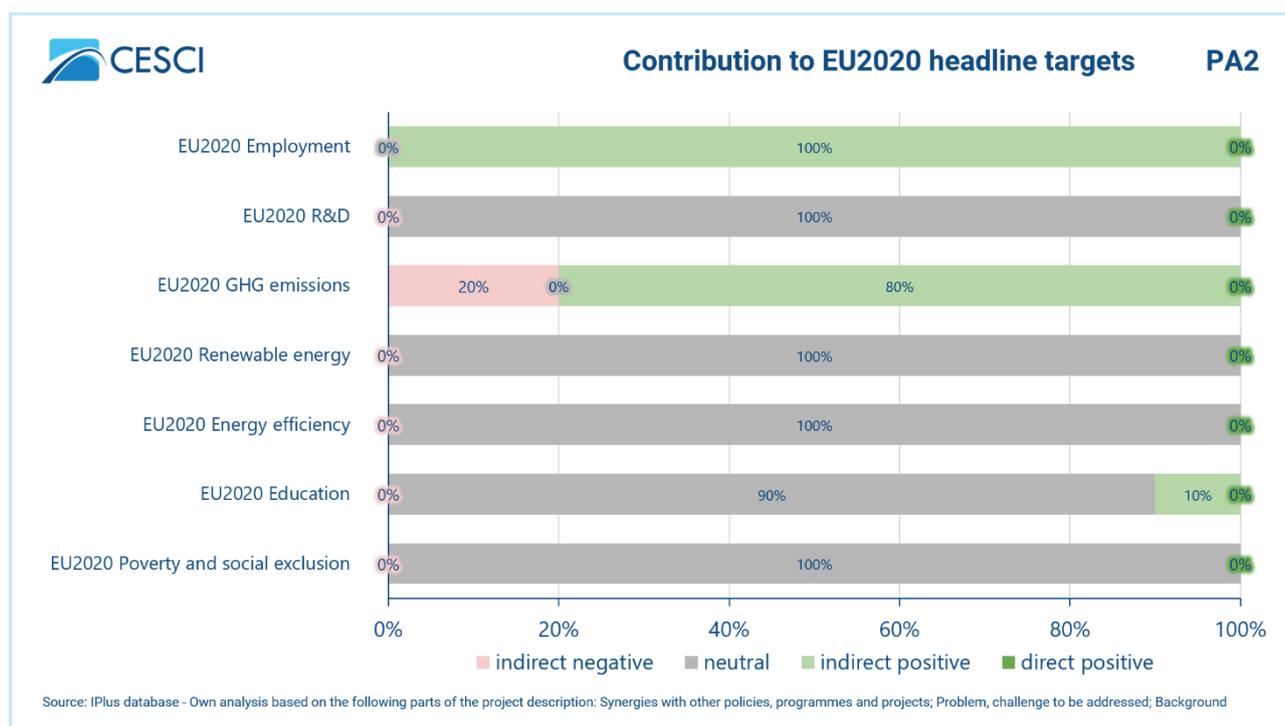
can be underlined among the rest of the PAs with a share of 60% (6 projects) for projects having indirect impacts on the EUSDR priorities. This high value is thanks to the expanding business opportunities in trade, decreasing travel times and transport costs, increasing the so-called MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) tourism.

Figure 84: Contribution to EUSDR Priority Areas (PA2)



With regard to PA2, the highest share of projects contributing positively to the **EU2020** headline target can be shown in the case of the employment goal. All the 10 projects contributed to employment increase in an indirect and positive way by eliminating transport bottlenecks, supporting border crossing infrastructure and by improving road and bicycle connections across borders as well. On the other hand, it is in the case of PA2 only where projects with negative impact can be clearly mentioned. These two projects (20% of projects which impact GHG emissions) result in indirect negative impacts regarding greenhouse gas emission because of the potential increase in motorised traffic owing to the improved access. Many times, new infrastructure could lead to increased mobility by cars in particular. Thus, it is worth bearing in mind that while new roads support cross-border integration and cohesion in many fields from employment through tourism and people-to-people interactions, some unwanted side-effect and consequences might appear in the longer term. Beside the employment target, high share of the projects carried out supported under PA2 have indirect positive effect on GHG emission since the established shorted routes and less waiting times at border could cut back certain amount of fuel consumption. It can be said that all projects have a clear impact on emission levels too, but in a more dual way.

Figure 85: Contribution to EU2020 headline targets (PA2)



3.2.3.9 Influence factors regarding the impacts (PA2)

After the introduction of the achieved results, the main influence factors will be evaluated. Besides the qualitative analysis, also a so-called influence matrix will be drafted. It will analyse the estimated contribution of different (mainstream) programmes to the fulfilment of regional needs. The applied methodology is described in the influence analysis regarding PA1.

Table 36: The most important external and internal influence factors on the impacts of the PA2

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type (external, internal factor)
Bilateral relations	Infrastructural cooperation has great importance. The project of reconstruction of the railway Subotica – Szeged (originally expected to be completed by the end of 2022), which is in the phase of replacing the old track with a new one, with the expectation that the Belgrade-Budapest railway will be completed by 2025.	external
COVID-19 pandemic	COVID-19 pandemic generated serious border closures that disrupted the daily border crossings, thus mobility of people and workers across the borders was seriously hardened. On the basis of the border crossing data, the number of passenger cars fell with 46% between Hungary and Serbia in 2020. However, exceptions were given later, e.g. in case of transit, in case of commuting to work (in range of 50 kilometres), in case of agricultural works (in range of 50 kilometres).	external

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type (external, internal factor)
COVID-19 pandemic	The COVID-19 pandemic restriction rules and their frequent change disrupted also the cross-border transport services. In cases of some states, the transport service was fully closed down, while the transport service between Hungary and Serbia suffered only significantly reduction instead of full closure. The transport service normalized after some time and the Belgrade train was restarted in June 2021; however, the passenger needed to get off the train at Tompa and they needed to transfer to a train on the Hungarian side.	external
Migration	During the migration crisis, Hungary launched the installation of the southern border barrier (four feet high fence) with the aim to ensure border security by preventing illegal immigrants from entering and enabling the option to enter through official checkpoints and claim asylum in Hungary in accordance with international and European law. After the incident at the Röszke-Horgoš border crossing on September 16, 2015, Hungary temporarily closed down the Röszke-Horgoš road border crossing and the highway border crossing for 30 days. Nevertheless, the latter was released on September 20, 2015 in order to ensure international transit, economic cooperation and movement of people who live in the border area.	external
Migration	Only very limited development was achieved in in the area of linkage across the borders by water transport, especially because the migration crisis severely affected the borders (many migrants tried to cross the border across the river Tisa and Danube).	external
Permissions	Projects depend on the final permissions for road building; hence the indicator cannot be partly achieved within a project.	external
Financial resources	Other financing sources can be ensured by IKOP, and TOP (operational programme on regional and urban development) from the Hungarian side, and mostly national and regional sources from the Serbian one.	external

With regard to PA2, programmes with the highest overall value which supported the impact of the given PA are the Hungarian operational programmes of IKOP connected to transport development and TOP connected to regional and urban development.

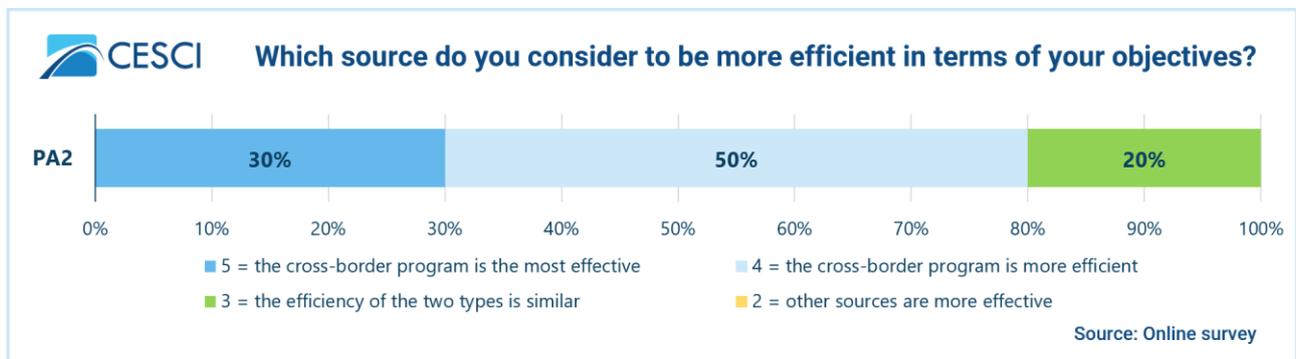
Table 37: Influence effects of the different programmes on the impacts of the PA2

	Programmes	Impact on PA2	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
Interreg programmes	RO-HU	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of particular investment: elaboration of studies, analyses, feasibility studies, technical plans, obtaining necessary authorisations / certificates / permits / licences. • Construction, upgrading / modernization of roads with cross-border impact, providing or improving direct access of secondary and tertiary nodes to Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) core or comprehensive network and related infrastructure • Development of key conditions of cross-border bicycle transport • development of key railway lines connecting major cities in the eligible area (preparation phase) 	The thematic connection is strong with the HUSRB in relation to cross-border transport services and improvement of road and railways. However, the financial support can be regarded only medium level. More attention was paid on development of cross-border intelligent transport system and innovative solutions.
	RS-BS	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bicycles path 	Connection only in terms of creation and development of tourist routes with already existing infrastructure
Hungarian operative programmes	GINOP	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • logistics developments 	Minor connection can be found in relation to the border or the border zone. Logistics are less of a concrete challenge and action identified in the CP.
	IKOP	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing axle load, casing reinforcement, • Development of Baja port • tram-tain developments • railway line developments • development of local roads reaching the TEN-T network 	IKOP has an outstanding role in supporting the CP's actions and regional needs both thematically and territorially. Border elements are involved.
	TOP	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bicycle path development 	The topic is highly relevant, however the developments were inland and local, and not part of a wider cross-border network.

	Programmes	Impact on PA2	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
	VP	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of outlying local public roads 	This thematic field is not so relevant in the CP, while the developments had a very local character. Low intensity occurred.
Serbian national programmes	Annual programs of the Provincial Secretariat for Energy, Construction and Traffic	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reconstruction of the border crossing improvement of railway infrastructure rehabilitation and construction of roads 	Projects are of great national importance and with large financial investments, but with little impact on a specific PA. Reconstruction of the Horgoš border crossing.

In the followings the survey will be analysed from the point which programmes contributed and how to the impacts of the CP. The question that will be analysed: which source do you consider to be more efficient in terms of your objectives? Regarding the PA2, out of the four PAs the second highest value (30%) for the answers saying that the cross-border programme is the most effective was given. The share for the answers saying the cross-border programme is more efficient is the highest (50%) along with PA1. There were no answers to the category of other sources are more effective.

Figure 86: Which source do you consider to be more efficient in terms of your objectives?



3.2.4 Efficiency analysis (PA2)

This chapter aims to give an overview on the cost efficiency of reaching the objectives and target values of the selected indicators by analysing the projects' budget and the specific features of budget allocations. Within the framework of PA2, evaluators have conducted the examination by actions⁴⁴ defined by the CfPs and by project type in order to avoid the distortion effect of the strategic projects. It is also worth mentioning that due to the limited number of the projects under the PA2, there is only one project in the category of the strategic projects of actions 2.1 and 2.2, and also in the cluster of the regular projects of action 2.2.

The average size of the projects was assessed from a financial point of view. As the figure (*Figure 87*) shows, there are significant differences between the average value of the regular projects and the strategic projects which are obviously reasoned by the specific features of the project types and actions. Apart from the strategic projects, the inequality between the regular projects is not considerable since both of the values are in the 1 200 000 – 1 400 000 EUR range. However, notable difference can be observed between the average size of the strategic projects which is caused by the distinct activities of the projects since the 2.1 focuses mostly on construction, while the 2.2 concentrates on the preparation of technical plans and feasibility studies.

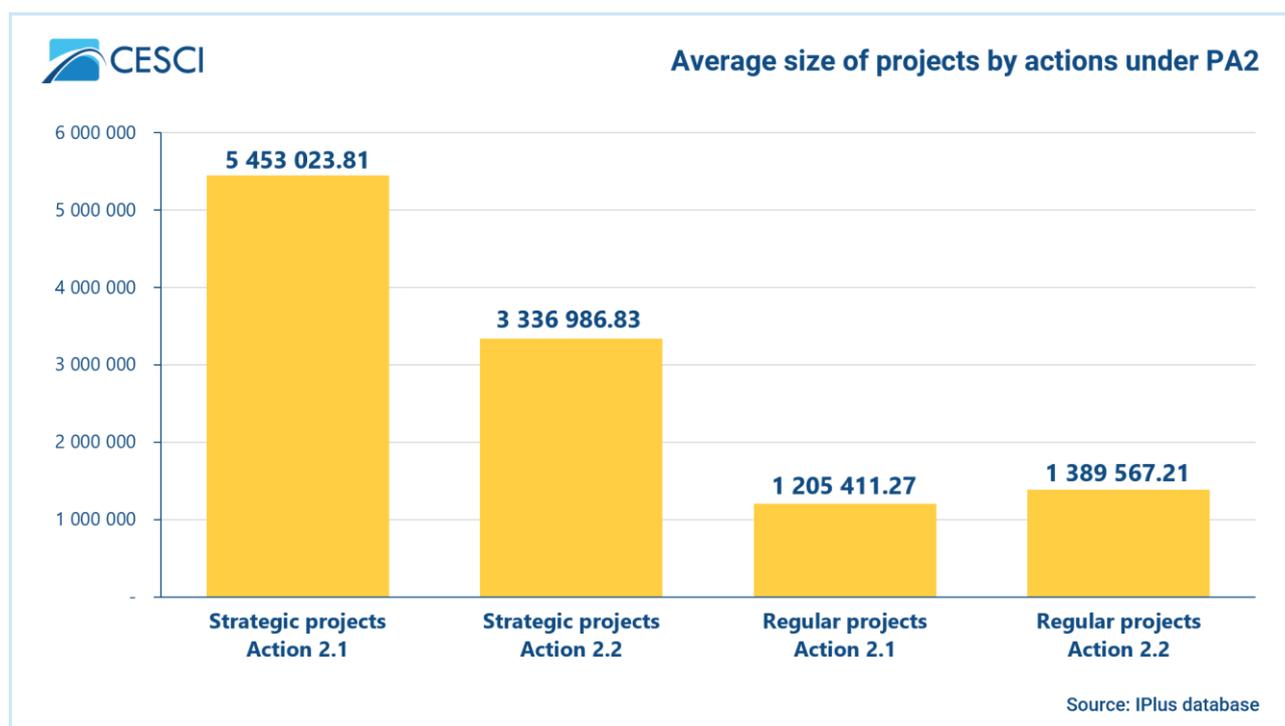
In terms of the previous 2007-2013 programming period, the average project size (on programme level) was 281 535.88 EUR which lags behind not just from the strategic projects, but from the regular projects of PA2 too. The gap between the average sizes can be reasoned by the specific, infrastructure development focus of the projects under PA2, which needs higher financial allocations.

⁴⁴ Actions under PA2:

2.1 Border crossing points, roads and bicycle roads

2.2 Improving public transport services and railway lines

Figure 87: Average size of projects by actions under PA2



The cost efficiency of the achievement of the targeted and achieved indicator values have been assessed based on the aggregated amount of the related EU funding. The table below (*Table 38*) aims to indicate what have already been and can be achieved by the end of the programming period from the programme support in terms of the project output indicators. Regarding the methodology of the analysis, since the projects selected during the third CfP are still in progress, the evaluators aggregated both the achieved and targeted value of the output indicators and the total budget (the validated amounts of the closed projects and the planned ones for the on-going) of the related projects. Then we calculated the cost of achievement of one measurement unit of the certain indicators.

In line with these, in case of *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* the achieved value means that 4 345 185.51 EUR ERDF funding needed for an improved or newly built border crossing point, which is expected to be decreased to 1 086 296.38 € by the end of the programming period.

Table 38: Achieved and target indicator values by output indicators under PA2

Indicator ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Aggregated achieved value (AIR 2021)	Aggregated target value	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
OI/2.1	Number of improved or newly built border crossing points	border crossing points	8 690 371.02	2	8	4 345 185.51	1 086 296.38

Indicator ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Aggregated achieved value (AIR 2021)	Aggregated target value	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
OI/2.2	Total length of newly built roads	kilometres	4 635 070.24	4.53	4.53	1 023 194.31	1 023 194.31
OI/2.3	Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads	kilometres	2 627 498.06	14.46	14	181 708.03	187 678.43
OI/2.4	Total length of newly built bicycle paths	kilometres	3 116 896.26	26.86	26.87	116 042.30	115 999.12
OI/2.5	Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans	kilometres	2 836 438.81	58	58	48 904.12	48 904.12
OI/2.6	Number of improved public transport services	services	1 181 132.13	0	3	0.00	393 710.71

Within the PA2 there are two projects which targeted two output indicators. In order to avoid distortion, evaluators attempted to split the total amount of the EU funding between the indicators according to the detailed budget and brief description of the contribution to the indicators written by the applicants. Since most of the activities and cost items concerned both indicators, the evaluators were not able to divide the budget items. For instance, infrastructure cost allocations were not directly connected to the road construction and the border-crossing infrastructure, which would serve the basis for the division. In line with this, the evaluators undertook the distortion effect, and calculated with the total ERDF fund allocated to the project in the case of each targeted indicator.

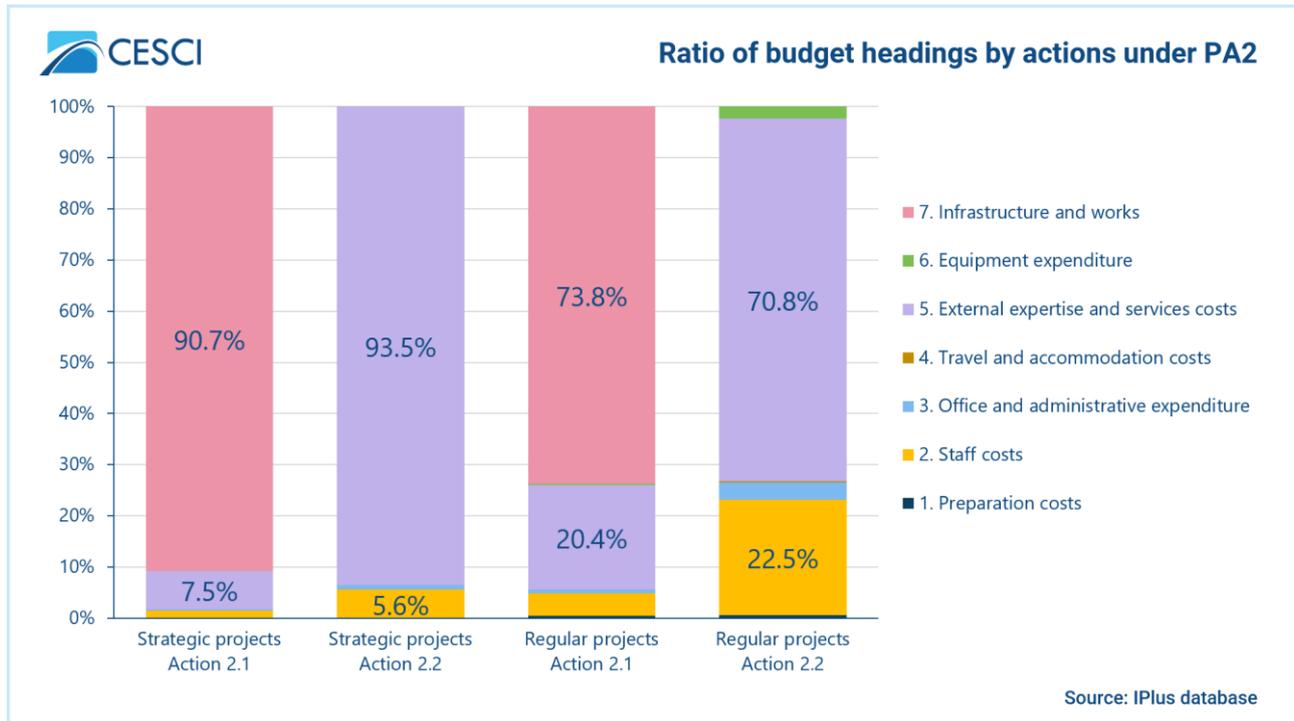
The calculated specific values of the indicators can be hardly evaluated in absolute term, instead it is worth comparing them to the results of the same or similar calculations from the previous programming periods or of other CBC programmes. Since this approach had not been applied in the 2007-2013 or any previous programming period in the Hungary-Serbia Interreg framework, we made an attempt to use the results of other programmes during the comparison.

In case of the Slovakia – Hungary and Hungary – Croatia Interreg V-A Programmes, a similar methodology was applied for the first phase evaluation of the programmes, however the only one of the above listed output indicators was selected by another programme, namely the Slovakia – Hungary Programme. This indicator was the ‘Total length of newly built roads’ the related specific value of which is 1 868 923.28 EUR/km. It exceeds the calculated values of the Hungary – Serbia Programme (1 023 194.31 EUR/km), but it must be noted that higher value was calculated in the mid-term evaluation, while the latter ones reflect on the achievement of the whole programming period.

Currently there is no chance to avoid this obstacle since the results of the second phase evaluations have not been available yet.

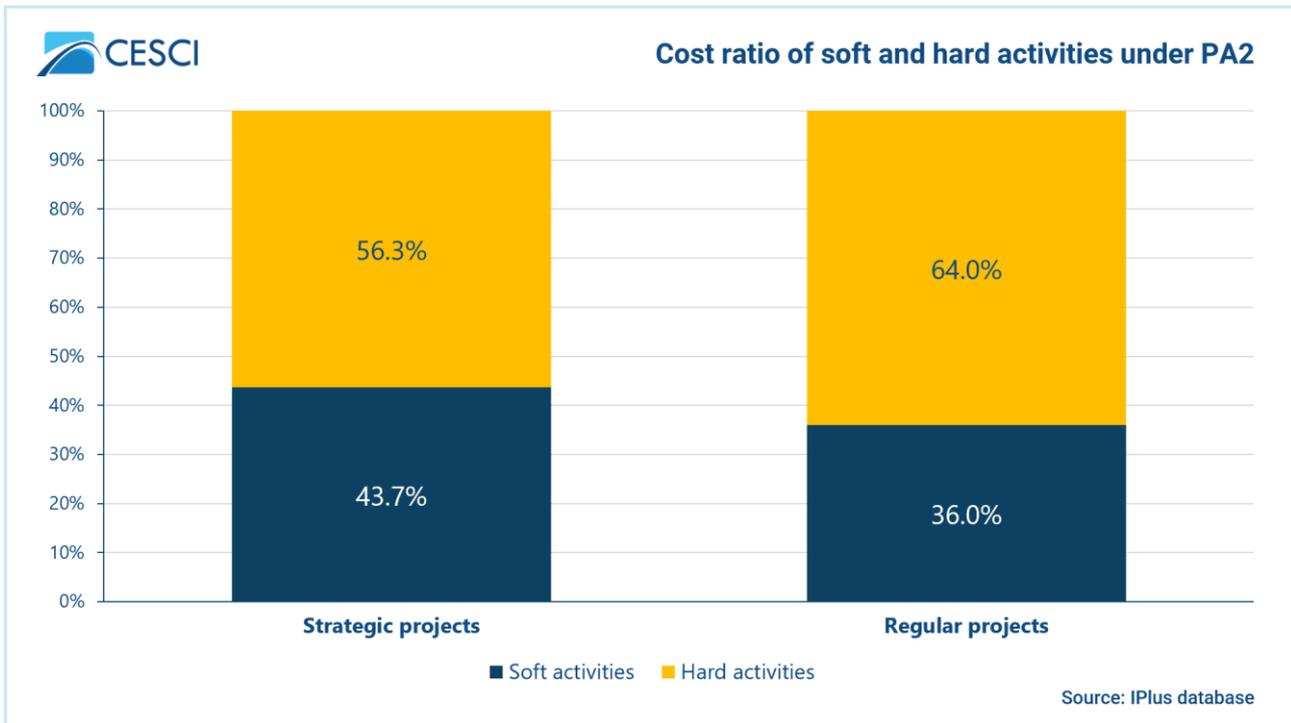
The next aspect of the cost efficiency assessment is the analysis of the share of budget allocations to the particular budget headings. Considering the different status of the projects, in case of the administratively closed ones the validated budgets were taken into account, while for the on-going projects evaluators used the planned amounts for the calculation.

Figure 88: Ratio of budget headings by actions under PA2



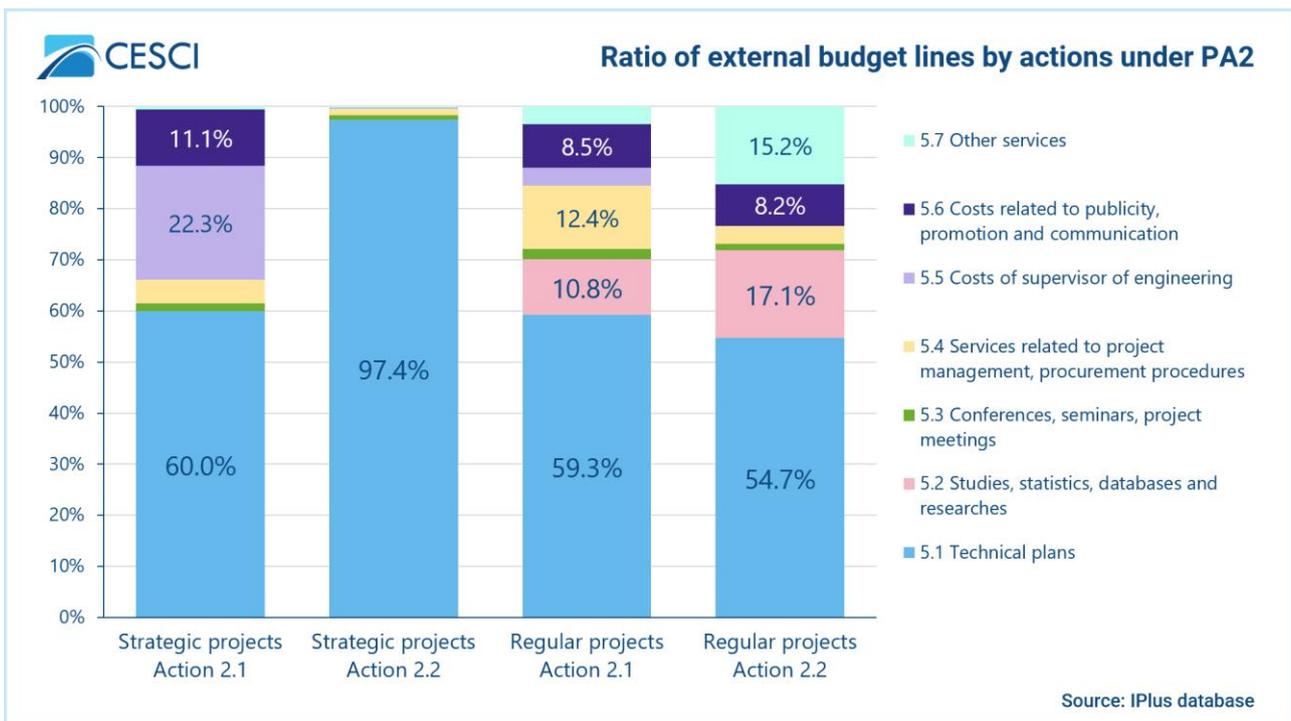
According to the chart (Figure 88), there is a significant difference in the share of the certain budget headings by actions. Under action 2.1 the infrastructure development costs dominate (more than 70% of the total budgets), whereas in the case of action 2.2, the external expertise and services costs give the greatest proportion (more than 70%). This notable divergence is reasonable and self-evident, since the targeted activities of action 2.1 concentrates on the development of border crossing points, relevant transport lines and communal and transport infrastructure system, meanwhile the action 2.2 is concerned with soft topics such as organization of regular consultations, harmonization of the transport development plans and the related regulation, preparation of technical plans and development of passenger information and service system.

Figure 89: Cost ratio of soft and hard activities under PA2



Taking into account the soft and hard activities regarding to all projects under PA2 (where the value of hard activities is generated from the sum of 'Infrastructure and works', 'Equipment expenditure' and 'Purchase of land'), the ratio of hard activities is above 55% in the case of strategic projects (56.3%) and regular projects (64%) too. The bigger dominance of hard activities in the case of regular projects is due to the fact that there are only two projects without any infrastructural work, and the remaining six projects compensate their impacts.

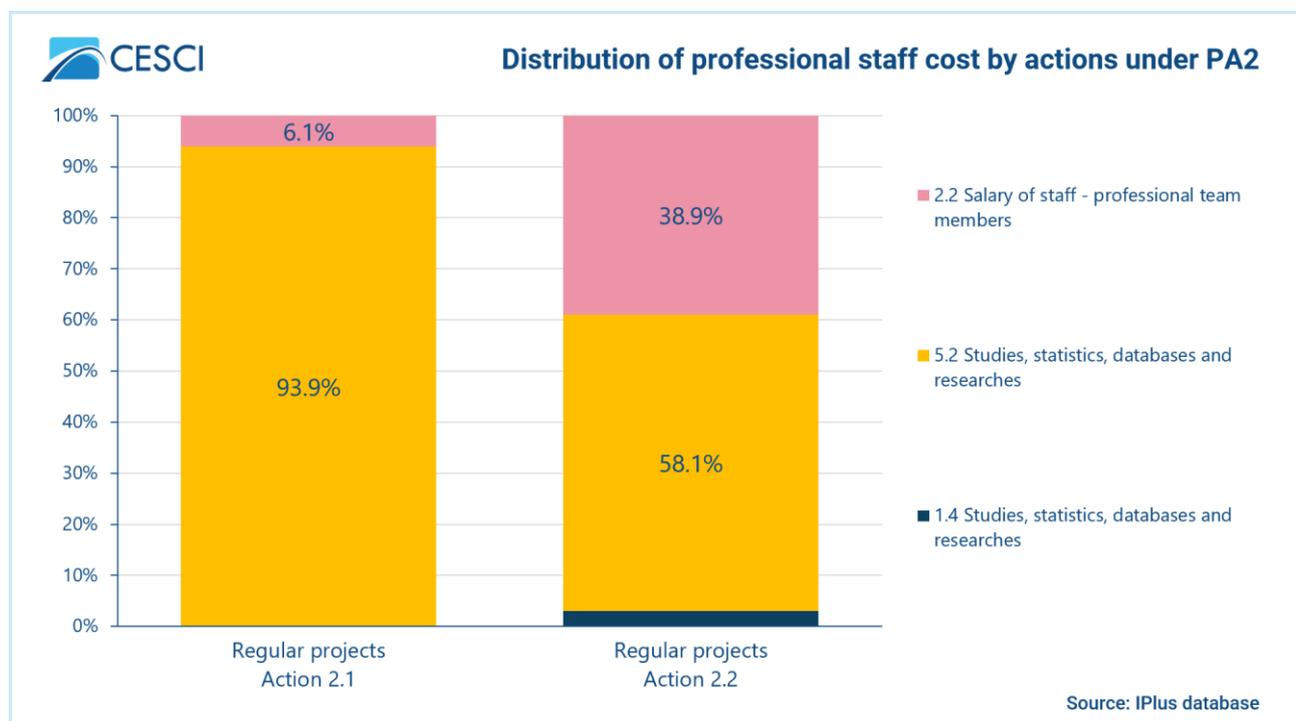
Figure 90: Ratio of external budget lines by actions under PA2



Regarding the external services and expenditures budget heading, as the chart (*Figure 90*) illustrates, more than the half of the external expenditures of the actions under PA2 is allocated to technical planning which is justified because of the great infrastructural development and reconstruction works. In the case of the strategic project under action 2.2 (Dream Railway), delivering the technical plans of a significant cross-border railway development were in the focus. The project was led by the DKMT Euroregion, as an important cross-border actor in the region, but without any professional-technical capacity, the extremely high ratio of this external budget line (97% of the total budget) is still reasonable. In contradistinction to the Dream Railway, the strategic project under action 2.1 (Kübekháza-Rabe) incorporates both planning activities and infrastructure works, due to which, the costs of supervisor of engineering are the second biggest item after the technical planning.

In terms of the regular projects, the share of the sub-contracted studies, statistics, databases and researches is the second or the third among the items of the external budget lines by 17.1% and 10.9%. Comparing the distribution of internal (budget line 2.2) and external professional staff costs (budget lines 1.4 and 5.2), according to the figure below (*Figure 91*) the more than half of the professional staff cost was outsourced. The proportion of external professional cost was especially high in the projects under action 2.1 (93.9%). According the detailed budget of the applicants, the majority of these budget items cover the elaboration of feasibility studies, geodesy study, environmental impact study, conceptional plan, action plans and execution plans amounting between 20 000-100 000 EUR. Taken into consideration that these partnerships incorporate mostly local governments (municipalities) which do not possess appropriate capacities and skills to deliver these tasks, the ratios are not surprising.

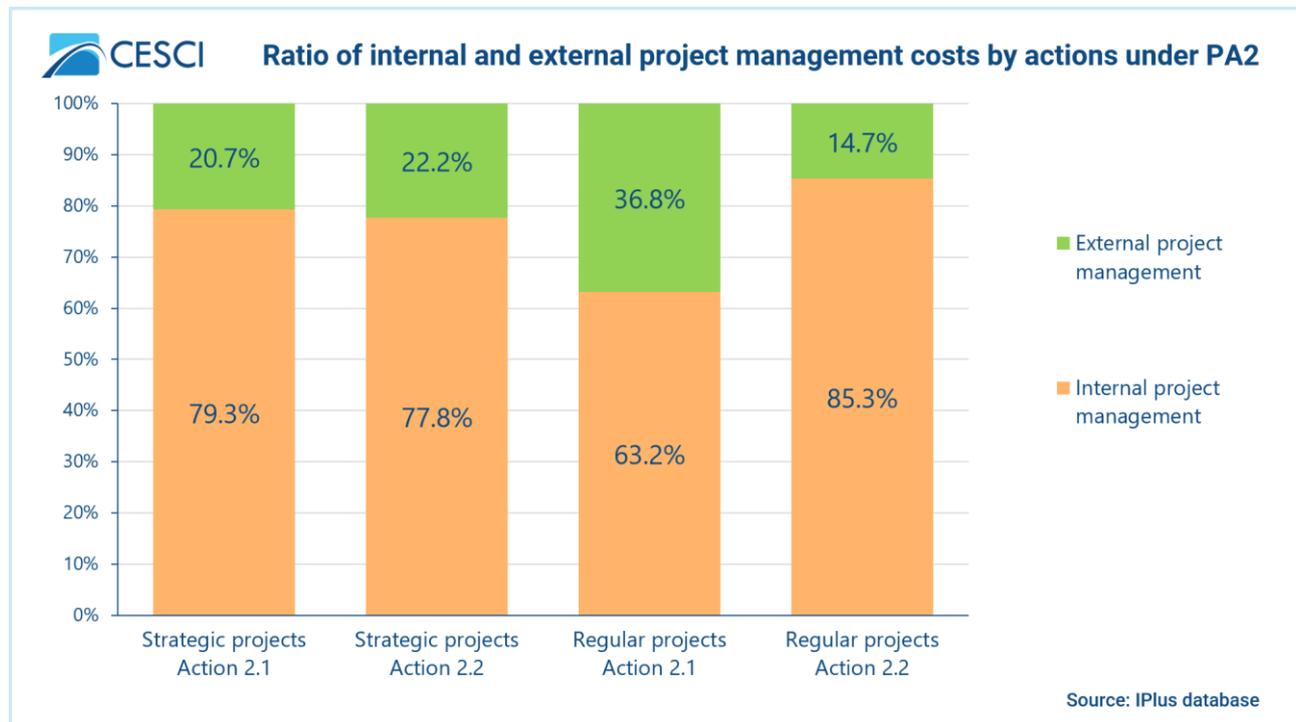
Figure 91: Distribution of internal and external professional staff cost by actions under PA2



Considering the regular projects, the budget line of other services (5.7) is also worth to examine. According to the regular project under the action 2.2 (INPUTRANS), the share of this category is more than 15%, which incorporates the translation and the daily communication with the partners – these

are essential expenditures in a cross-border cooperation –, as well as it includes the development of a web portal and image materials or ordnance removal. The other projects also mentioned the translation, and the editing and printing of publications, but additionally they referred to permission fees, travel organization, development of GIS platform.

Figure 92: Ratio of internal and external project management costs by action under PA2



Focusing on the services related to project management and procurement procedure, the ratio of this budget line within the external services is significantly lower than in the other PAs. The regular projects under action 2.1 are exceptions (12.4%), but in the case of the other categories the value of the proportions is below 5%. In addition, the evaluation concerns the share of budget allocation to internal (budget line 2.1) and external management activities (budget line 5.4) too. As the figure (Figure 92) shows, the ratio of the external management costs is around 20% for the strategic projects, 36% for other projects under action 2.1 and 15% for the project under action 2.2. According to the detailed financial items related to project management cost, it is apparent that the strategic projects used external expert only for public procurement (PraG experts), while the financial manager, project managers (PM), construction engineer expert, technical manager and monitoring engineer or public relations (PR) and communications manager were ensured by internal resources. Regarding the regular projects, the majority of the external experts were also PraG experts, but sometimes the legal consultancy, project management and financial administration were outsourced too. However, in most of the cases the project and financial managers, the administrative officers and other coordinators were financed from intern resources.

The proportion of internal and external project management costs compared to the total budget are under 20% in each four clusters (1.7% for strategic projects under action 2.1, 5.5% for strategic projects under action 2.2, 6.9% for regular projects under action 2.1, 16.8% for regular projects under action 2.2).

3.3 Evaluation of PA 3 (Encouraging cooperation in tourism and cultural heritage preservation)

Detailed performance, impact and efficiency evaluation of the PA3.

3.3.1 Short introduction of the PA3's intervention logic

In this short subchapter the intervention logic of the PA is presented in order to show at the very beginning of the evaluation what was the aim of the programme with the given PA. The following figure (*Figure 93*) shows the intervention logic of PA3, whose purpose is to summarise the main features of the PA worth being aware of before understanding the main results and recommendations of the evaluation.

High potential for tourism based on its natural and cultural assets also serving good basis for bringing people from the two sides of the border closer was identified as the regional capital of PA3, which titled as encouraging tourism and cultural heritage cooperation. The programme allocated an amount of 18 008 977 EUR, almost 27.65% of the total budget to this PA. As a response the PA is connected to two different specific objectives. SO/3.1 is connected to tourism (Creation of commonly coordinated tourism destinations based on the complementary local assets in order to ensure sustainable development of tourism potentials), while SO/3.2 is more in connection with people-to-people type of activities (Promoting co-operation activities in the field of culture, leisure, sport, and nature protection). In the frames of PA3 and SO/3.1 and SO/3.2 the programme tries to contribute to five regional challenges, namely:

- lack of integrated regional tourism development strategy.
- lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply.
- limited number of joint tourism products with attractiveness for longer stays,
- shortage of quality tourism,
- tourism needs to contribute to a better appreciation and understanding among people.

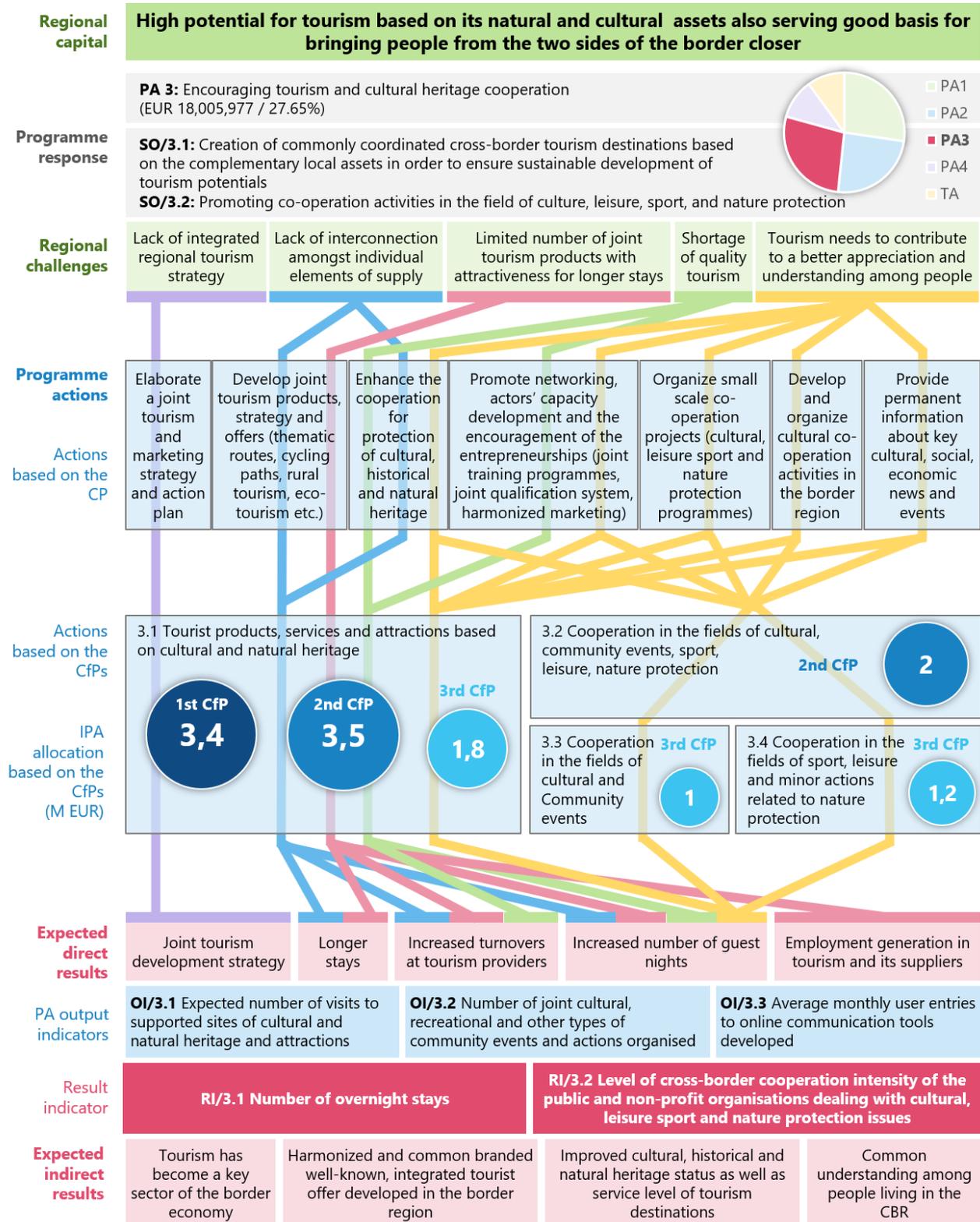
To tackle the challenges the programme formulated as many as seven distinct actions, of which the first two were aggregated exclusively during the CfPs into the tourism-centred action (Action 3.1), while the rest are shared between actions. People-to-people type of programme actions are more concentrated on CfP Action 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4, which show high similarities with each other. The last few programme actions in the CP are more directly in line with Action 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

Action 3.1 was touched by all three CfPs, with a total budget of 8.7 M EUR, which was not the case with the rest of the identified actions. Action 3.2 had been left out from the 1st CfP, and money was allocated to it during the 2nd CfP. At the 3rd CfP the action was not formulated since it was divided into two other actions based on the thematic fields: Action 3.3 focused on cultural and community events, while in parallel to this, Action 3.4 concentrated on sport, leisure and minor actions related to nature protection (the latter was a new elements). Action 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 were smaller actions in terms of allocated budget since 3.2 had 2 M, 3.3 had 1, and 3.4 had 1.2 M EUR of budget to spend.

The expected direct results from Action 3.1 were numerous: joint tourism development strategy, longer stays, increased turnovers at tourism providers and employment generation, of which

increased number of guest nights was expected from the rest of the actions too. Action 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 had no direct results exclusively attached to their support. Joint tourism development strategy was connected solely to Action 3.1 understandably.

Figure 93: Intervention logic of the PA3



Three output indicators were named; expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions; number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised; average monthly user entries to online communication tools. The indicators can all be relevant to all the four actions, but the first is more in line Action 3.1, and the second is more relevant for the other three actions. Two result indicators were identified to grasp the results of the programme. The number of overnight stays describes all actions but the tourism-related better, while the level of cross-border cooperation intensity of the public and non-profit organisations tries to grasp people-to-people actions. Apart from direct results, four additional indirect results should be achieved by the identified programme actions as follows: tourism has to become a key sector of the border economy; harmonized and common branded well-known, integrated tourist offer developed in the border region; improved cultural, historical and natural heritage status as well as services level of tourism destinations; common understanding among people living in the border region.

According to the figure (*Figure 93*) the tackling of all challenges is secured by programme actions, and especially the last challenge is widely supported by CfP and Programme actions. There are more actions which support the realisation of the last regional challenge. Programme action named elaborate a joint tourism and marketing strategy and action plan has only one direct connection with the related challenge, and it supports the realisation of a single result. Action 3.1 is related to the realisation of various results including tourism-related ones, while Action 3.2, 3.3. and 3.4 are more connected to cultural and sports cooperation.

3.3.2 Performance evaluation (PA3) (Implementation progress)

3.3.2.1 Quantification of the performance (PA3)

Within PA3, three calls for proposals were published during the programming period, the first of which, as a restricted CfP was dedicated to projects with strategic importance targeting the action 3.1 'Tourist products, services and attractions based on cultural and natural heritage'. The indicative maximum IPA allocation of the envisaged strategic projects was 27% of the total budget of PA, amounted 3.4 million EUR. The other two open calls for proposals planned to provide 9.5 million EUR IPA funding for regular projects under the four actions of the PA. 56% of this planned amount were dedicated to action 3.1, mainly within the 2nd CfP. The remaining 44% of the available funds have been allocated within 3 partly overlapping actions during the second and third CfPs. The following table (*Table 39*) contains the details of each CfP.

Table 39: Allocations of the targeted actions under PA3

CfP ID	Open or restricted	Open period	Targeted actions	Planned IPA allocation to the projects under the respective action	Available IPA grant amount per project
HUSRB/1601	restricted	March 29, 2016 – August 26, 2016	3.1 Tourist products, services and attractions based on cultural and natural heritage	3 400 000 EUR	Minimum of 2 000 000 EUR
HUSRB/1602	open	October 3, 2016 – January 31, 2017	3.1 Tourist products, services and attractions based on cultural and natural heritage	3 500 000 EUR	100 000 – 500 000 EUR
			3.2 Cooperation in the fields of cultural, community events, sport, leisure, nature protection	2 000 000 EUR	40 000 – 200 000 EUR
HUSRB/1903	open	June 1, 2019 – September 30, 2019	3.1 Tourist products, services and attractions based on cultural and natural heritage	1 800 000 EUR	100 000 – 600 000 EUR
			3.3 Cooperation in the fields of cultural and community events	1 000 000 EUR	75 000 – 200 000 EUR
			3.4 Cooperation in the fields of sport, leisure and minor actions related to nature protection	1 200 000 EUR	75 000 – 200 000 EUR

Taking into account the quantification of the performance of PA3, the data show that the **total number of applications under PA3 is 219**. From these applications 105 units were rejected since in most cases they could not fit to the quality requirements. This represents nearly half (48%) of the submitted applications, meanwhile the number of contracted ones was only 70 units (32%). According to the distributions of applications between the CfPs, the dominance of the 2nd CfP is prominent, since more than half of the applications (64%; 141 units) of PA3 belonged to this CfP. The 3rd CfP comprised 35% (76 units) of the applications, whereas the 1st CfP had only 2 applications which meant just 1%. Considering the type of applications by CfPs, the ratio of contracted applications was the highest in the case of the 1st CfP (50%) due to the low number of applications. In the second CfP, 28.4% (40 units) of the applications were contracted – which was the lowest value among the CfPs – and nearly half of the applications (47%; 66 units) was rejected. Although the ratio of contracted applications was higher under the 3rd CfP (38.2%; 29 units), the ratio of rejected applications also increased to 50% (38 units). The originally contracted IPA amount under PA3 is

18 319 279.8 EUR, which means that the projects overcontracted by 313 302.8 EUR compared to the 4th version of the CP. Furthermore, according to the JMC decision in 2021, 1 725 950.24 EUR was used from the remaining sum to implement 9 projects from the reserve list.

Figure 94: Number of PA3 applications per CfPs

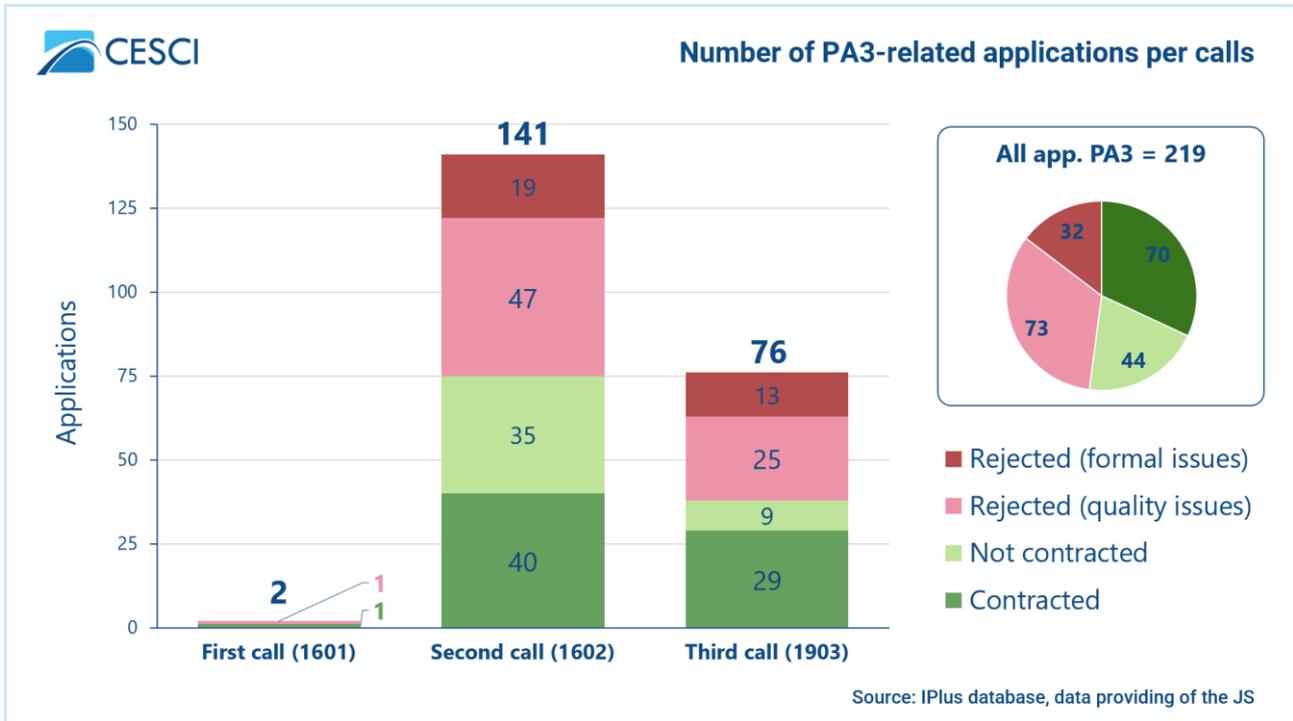
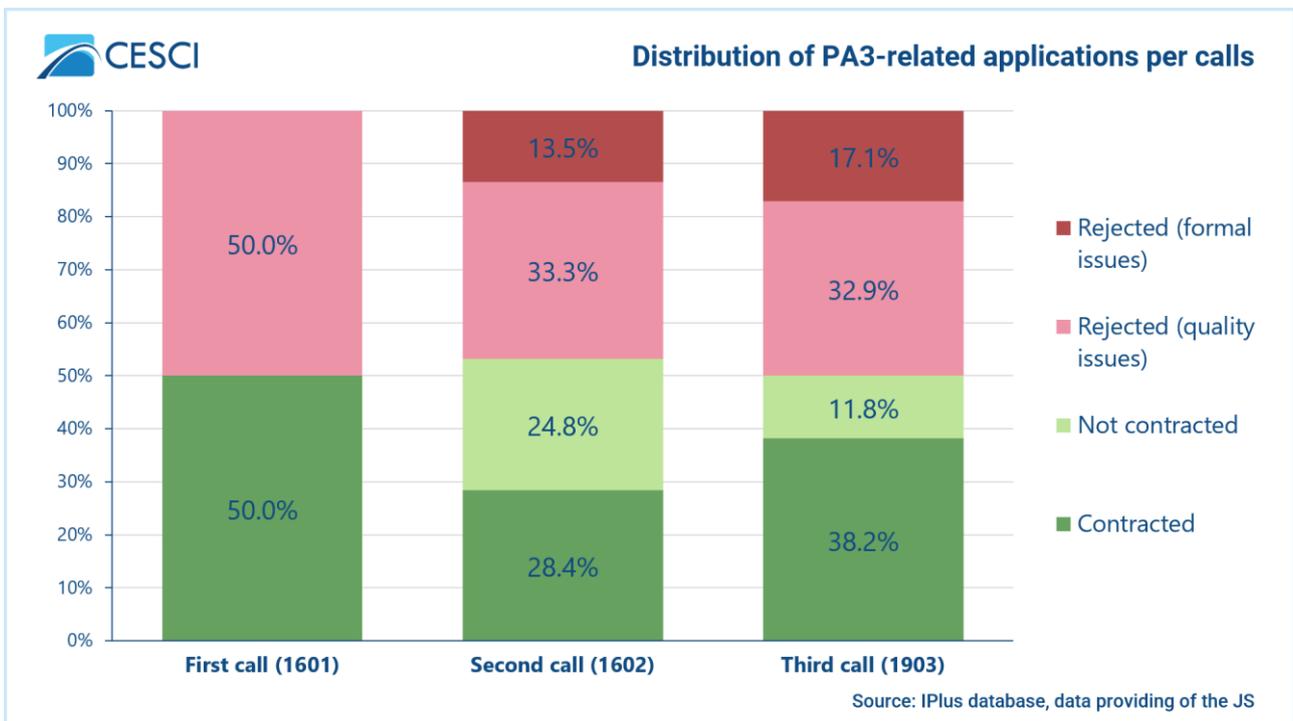


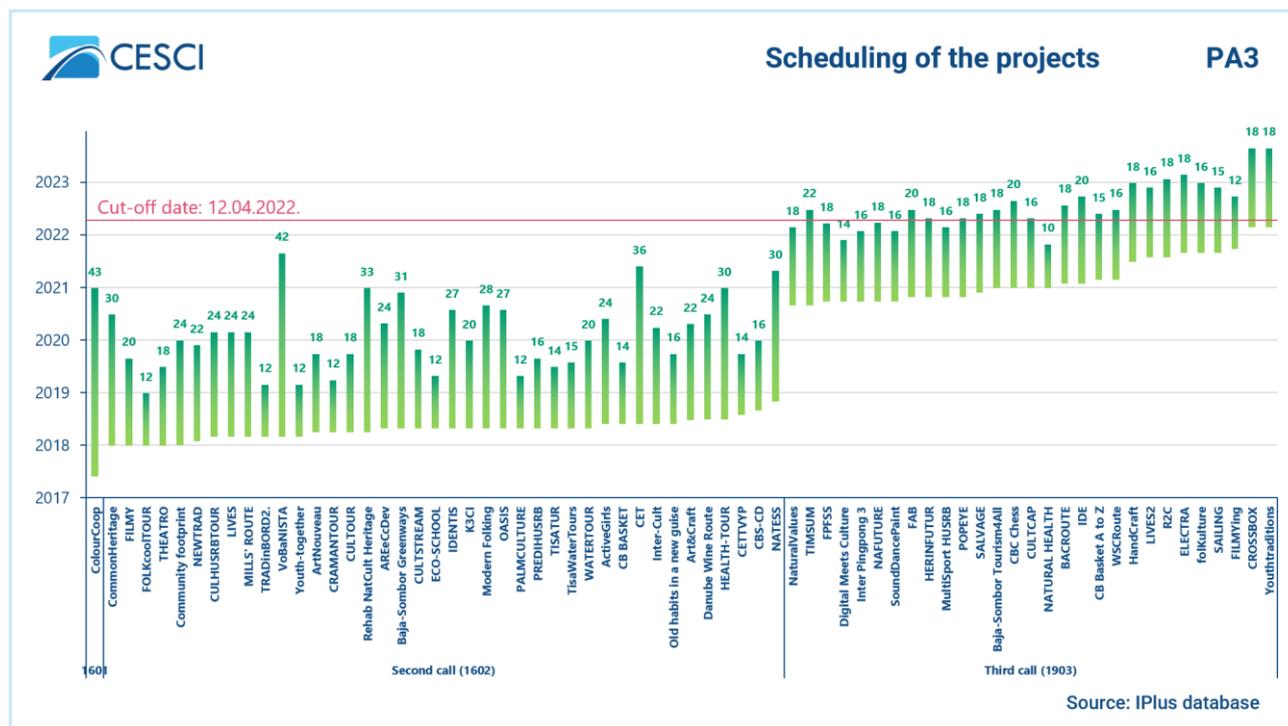
Figure 95: Distribution of PA3-related applications per CfPs



According to the **scheduling of the projects** by monthly breakdown, the average duration of the projects under PA3 is nearly 20 months due to the large number of regular projects, which could

compensate the time-consuming strategic project (ColourCoop) of the 1st CfP. However, the implementation period of ColourCoop was nearly three and a half years (43 months) long, the average timeframe of the other CfPs' projects did not exceed 2 years (2nd CfP: nearly 22 months; 3rd CfP: 17 months). Nevertheless, there are some exceptions among regular projects, as the VoBaNISTA⁴⁵ (42 months) or CET⁴⁶ (36 months) projects had at least 3 years duration. The average short implementation period of regular projects is understandable since the specific objectives of the PA3 concentrated on creation of commonly coordinated cross-border tourism destinations and activities in the fields of culture, sport and nature protection, less regard to hard infrastructural constructions. In terms of the start date of projects, it is clear that the strategic project had started first in 2017 and just a year later followed the 2nd CfPs' regular projects which ended at latest in 2021. Some of the projects of the 3rd CfP began the implementation in the end of 2020, but there are two projects which started the work only in 2022 and will end in 2023. Nevertheless, within the contracted projects, there were some projects which still had administrative works after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Out of the 70 contracted PA3 projects 31 projects (44% of the PA3 contracted projects) did not have approved final report at that time, out of which 2 projects belonged to the 2nd CfP and 29 projects belonged to the 3rd CfP.

Figure 96: Scheduling of the projects (PA3)



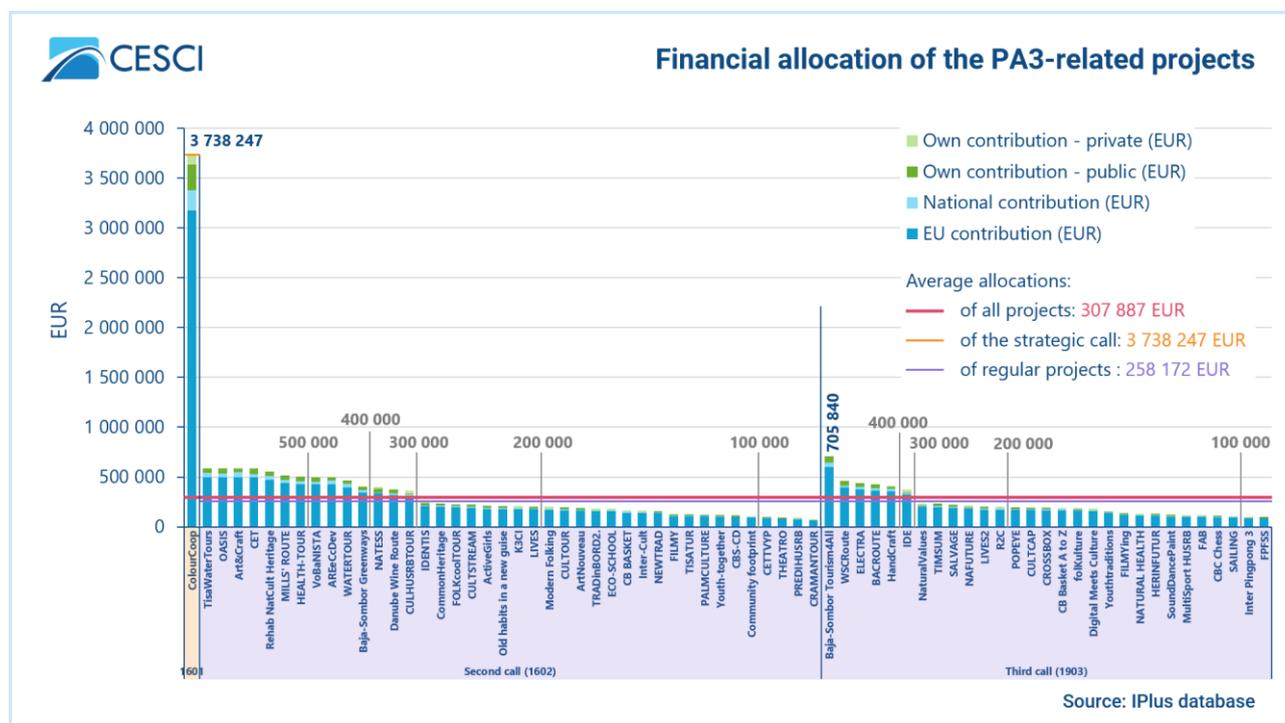
Considering the **financial allocation** to the projects, the total project cost of the strategic project (ColourCoop) was more than 3 million EUR (3 738 247 EUR), however the budget of regular projects did not reach 600 000 EUR. The average size of the regular projects was 258 172 EUR. In terms of the source of the financial allocation of the PA3 related projects, the dominance of EU Contribution is evident, since in the case of every project the proportion of this type of financial source was 85%.

⁴⁵ ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0197; Name: Vojvodina and Bács-Kiskun Night Sky as a Novel Touristic Attraction

⁴⁶ ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0081; Name: Common efforts for tourism

The IPA support is completed by national co-financing on the Hungarian side, the ratio of which is 10-15% according to the legal status of the partners. The remaining 0-5% in Hungary and 15% in Serbia must be provided by the beneficiaries as own contribution. Regarding the CfPs, the second largest source type was the own public contribution (1st and 2nd CfPs: 7%; 3rd CfP: 6%), meanwhile the ratio of own private contribution was the smallest in every CfPs. Due to the distortion between the strategic and regular projects, the strategic project used the greatest amount of money in every contribution type. Taking into account the ratio of sources, the proportion of national contribution was the second highest in Art&Craft⁴⁷ (8.1% with 47 698 EUR) and WATERTOUR⁴⁸ (7.8% with 36 262 EUR) projects, whereas in the case of THEATRO⁴⁹ (11.9% with 10 911 EUR) and POPEYE⁵⁰ (11.9% with 23 594 EUR) the own public contribution was the second largest. With regard to own private contribution, only half of the projects used this type of financial source from which the FAB⁵¹ project outstood with its 10.6% (12 473 EUR).

Figure 97: Financial allocation of the PA3-related projects



Taking into consideration the **financial progress** of the EU Contribution under PA3, the union support based on the Cooperation Programme (after the fourth version which represents the current condition) was 18 005 977 EUR. This amount of money was 5 105 977 EUR more than the approximate available IPA allocation in the CfPs (12 900 000 EUR). The distribution of the available IPA allocation between the CfPs was proportionate, since the strategic project (1st CfP) did not

⁴⁷ ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0050; Name: Tracing our common artistic heritage

⁴⁸ ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0204; Name: Development of water tourism on waterways connecting Hungary and Serbia

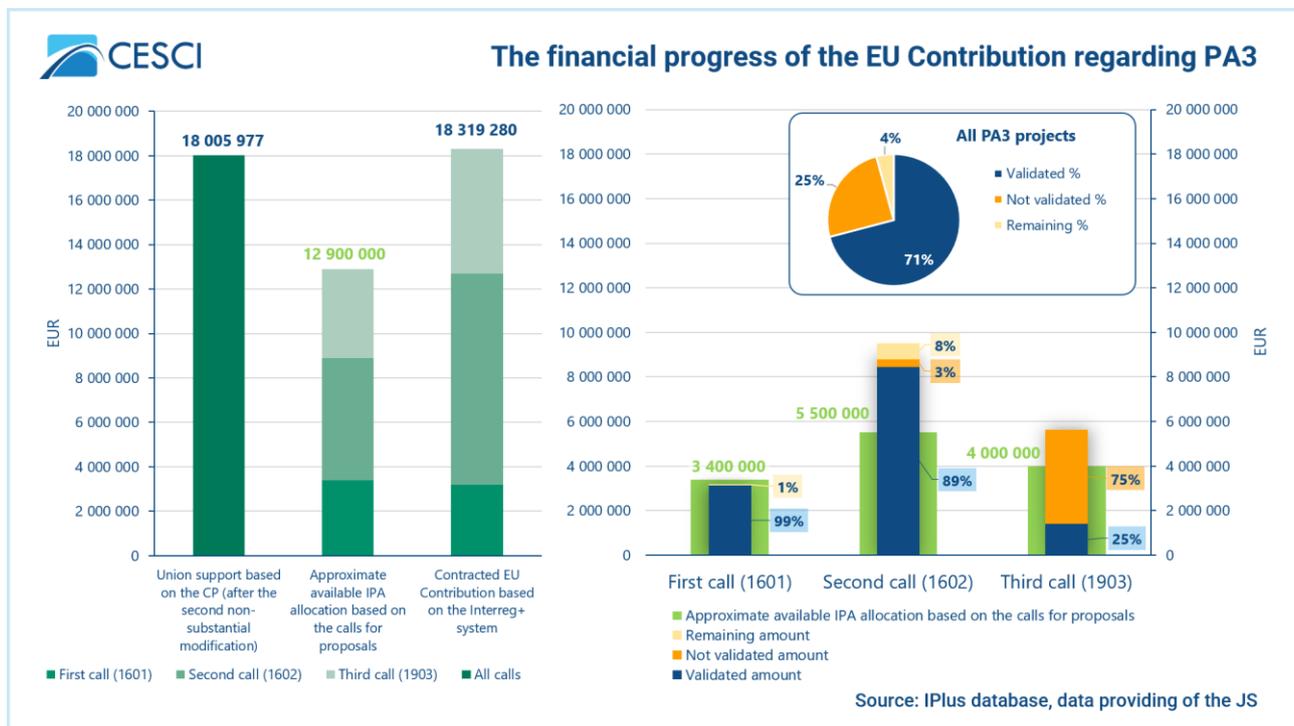
⁴⁹ ID: HUSRB/1602/32/0106; Name: Theatre art as a regional hub for children's socialization

⁵⁰ ID: HUSRB/1903/33/0004; Name: Program Of Physical Education and healthy Eating

⁵¹ ID: HUSRB/1903/34/0020; Name: Football across border

concentrate huge amount of allocations (3.4 million EUR; 26%). Moreover, the biggest allocations were order to the 2nd (5.5 million EUR; 43%) and the 3rd CfPs (4 million EUR; 31%). Based on the Interreg+ system, the contracted EU Contribution surpassed the estimated amounts in the CP and in the CfPs as well, since the selected projects absorbed overall 18 319 280 EUR. The difference between the contracted contribution and the CfP's sum was 5 419 280 EUR. Since the strategic project was balanced by the large number of regular projects, the distributions between the CfPs differed from the other PAs. The highest amount of EU Contribution was absorbed by the 2nd CfP's projects, altogether 9 515 501 EUR which was more than the half (52%) of the total contracted contribution. The projects of the 1st CfP incorporated 3 177 510 EUR (17%), whereas the 3rd CfP's projects could utilize 5 626 269 EUR (31%).

Figure 98: The financial progress of the EU Contribution regarding PA3



The classification of the contracted EU Contribution can be classified into three categories. The first one is the certificated or validated money, where not just the project's content but the administrative works are also closed. Regarding the non-validated money, the content of the project has been closed, but the administrative tasks has been continuously proceeding after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Finally, the rest of the EU Contribution gives the remaining category.

Under the PA3 the financial progress of the EU Contribution is adequate, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic there were some delays in the implementations of the 2nd CfP's projects since several events and trips were cancelled. Moreover, many projects belong to the 3rd CfP which has not been closed yet. This is the reason why the ratio of certificated money is only 71% (12 987 174 EUR), the ratio of non-validated money is 25% (4 554 914 EUR) and the amount of remaining contribution is 777 192 EUR (4%). According to the CfPs, the 1st CfP with strategic relevance has the most favourable value, since the ratio of certificated money is 99% and the remaining costs are only 41 746 EUR (1%) with no non-validated sum. Similarly high the ratio in the case of the 2nd CfP (89%) – where the remaining costs are 735 447 EUR (8%) and the non-validated costs are 323 925 EUR (3%) –, since

these projects had enough time to certify the allocated money. On the other hand, the 3rd CfP (25%) lagged from the others, because some of these projects administratively are still in progress and the certification could not happen completely. For this reason, the amount of non-validated money is more than 4 million EUR (4 230 989 EUR; 75%) but the proportion of remaining costs are zero.

On project level the proportion of certificated EU Contribution is relatively high (more than 80-90%) in the case of the first two CfPs, but there are some exceptions where the remaining costs are outstanding (more than 25%). There are two projects under the 2nd CfP with remarkably unfavourable ratio – which are the CULTOUR⁵² (27%; 44 259 EUR) and the Modern Folking⁵³ (47%; 80 311 EUR) –, since these projects have been closed at the cut-off date with no non-validated money and with relatively high remaining costs. According to the 3rd CfP, the high proportion of non-validated money is reasonable, since these projects have not had enough time to certify the costs. For example, in the case of the CROSSBOX⁵⁴, FILMYing⁵⁵, folKulture⁵⁶ and Youthtraditions⁵⁷ projects, the ratios of non-validated money are 100%, but it is understandable since all of them are from the reserve list.

Focusing on the **output indicators**, three indicators have been assigned to PA3, which have to be reported with yearly frequency. As the following table (*Table 40*) shows, among measurement units there are number of visits (by yearly breakdown), number of events and user entries (by monthly breakdown), since the indicators focus on the visitors of cultural and natural heritage and attractions (*OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites*), on the organised community events and actions (*OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events*) and on the user entries to the developed online communication tools (*OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools*). Based on the JMC decision, the target values of these indicators have been modified, as the initial targets were really modest and in 2019 all indicators were fulfilled. The 30 000 visits/year target of *OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites* has been replaced by 100 000 visits/year, and the 200 events target of *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* has been modified to 900 events. The largest (nearly seventeenth times) increase happened in the case of *OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools*, where 84 000 user entries are demanded instead of 5 000.

Table 40: Indicators of PA3 – Target values

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	3 rd mod. target value (2023)
OI/3.1	Number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	yearly	100 000

⁵² ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0176; Name: Development of tourism based on local cultural and natural values

⁵³ ID: HUSRB/1602/32/0230; Name: Strengthening multicultural relations by youth events organization in the border region

⁵⁴ ID: HUSRB/1903/34/0096; Name: Sport-improvement of box in cross border region

⁵⁵ ID: HUSRB/1903/33/0102; Name: Film art connects cross-border region

⁵⁶ ID: HUSRB/1903/33/0011; Name: We travel in culture

⁵⁷ ID: HUSRB/1903/33/0112; Name: Youth's keeping up with traditions

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	3 rd mod. target value (2023)
OI/3.2	Number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised	events	yearly	900
OI/3.3	Average monthly user entries to online communication tools developed	user entries	yearly	84 000

The fulfilment of these indicators was ensured by different number of projects, which can be observed in the following table (*Table 41*). All together 70 projects belonged to the PA3, but more than 30 projects chose more than one indicator. For instance, the projects such as TisaWaterTours, CET, VoBaNista, Inter-Cult⁵⁸, LIVES2⁵⁹ and Digital Meets Culture⁶⁰ contributed simultaneously to the fulfilment of all PA3 related output indicators. More than half of the projects (54%; 59 projects) fostered the fulfilment of *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* indicator, whereas the other two indicators were supported by 24 (*OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites*; 22%) and 26 projects (*OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools*; 24%). Since the strategic project contributed only to the *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* indicators, the realization of *OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites* and *OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools* indicators could start just after the 1st CfP.

Table 41: Indicators of PA3 – Number of relevant projects per CfPs

ID	1601	1602	1903	Number of relevant projects
OI/3.1 Number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions		16	8	24
OI/3.2 Number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised	1	33	25	59
OI/3.3 Average monthly user entries to online communication tools developed		15	11	26

Regarding the yearly progress of the output indicators under PA3, the first achievements appeared in 2018 and after that there were always some kinds of increasement in every year. In 2021, only the *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* indicator did not reach the target value, but it was really close to it (86% of the required results were ensured and there were only 127 missing events). On the other hand, the *OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites* and *OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools* indicators have already achieved the target values of 2023 with significant surplus. The first indicator achieved 189 772 visits per year, which overpassed the target value by

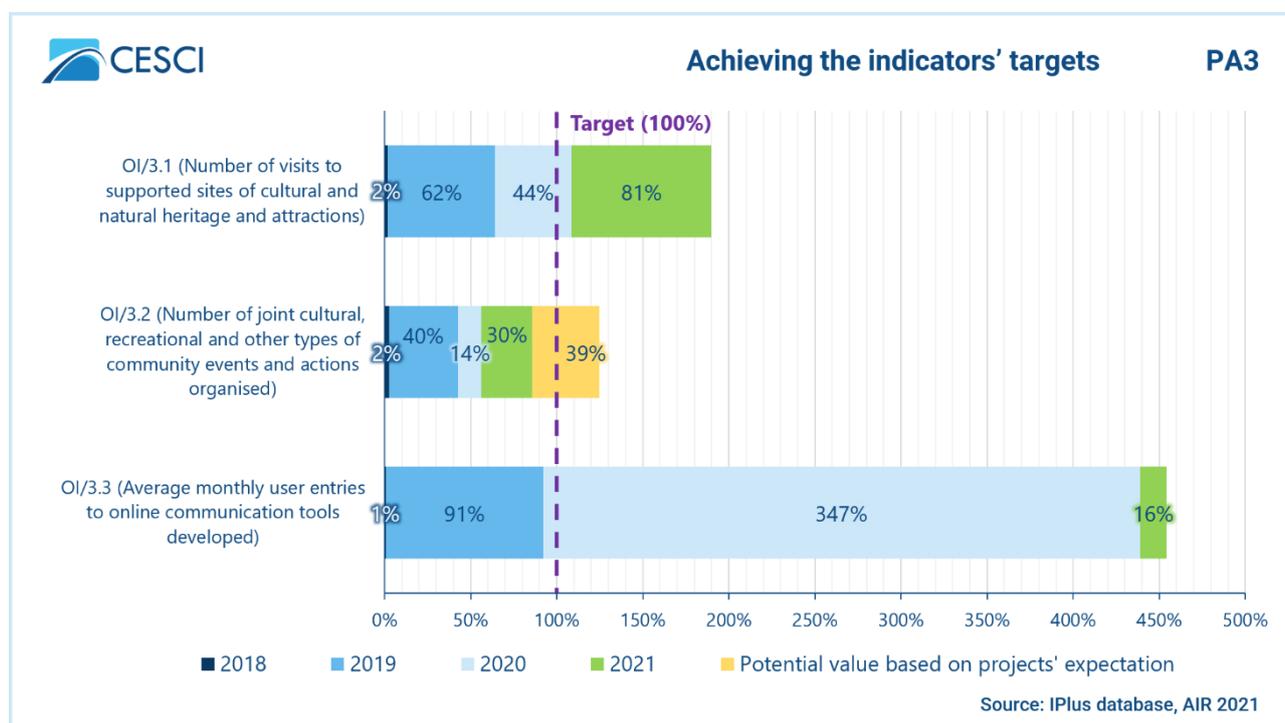
⁵⁸ ID: HUSRB/1602/32/0164; Name: Intercultural youth cooperation mosaics in the cross-border region

⁵⁹ ID: HUSRB/1903/33/0003; Name: LIVING ARCHIVES – Remembering our past for our future

⁶⁰ ID: HUSRB/1903/33/0094; Name: Digital Meets Culture: Promotion of the Cross-Border Heritage through Digital Prism

89 772 units (nearly twofold increasement), meanwhile the last reported achievement of the third indicator was 381 560.5 units which was higher than the determined value by 297 560.5 units (more than fourfold increasement). However, based on the projects' expectations, the potential values of *OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites* and *OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools* indicators are more moderate than the represented ones in 2021. In conclusion, the fulfilment of all indicators will be guaranteed, since the number of events will reach 1 121 units under *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events*. Moreover, the target values will be overpassed by 9 811 visits/year under *OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites*, by 221 events under *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* and by 3 250 user entries under *OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools*.

Figure 99: Achieving the indicators' targets (PA3)



After the quantitative analysis of the indicators, the fulfilment of the S.M.A.R.T criteria will be evaluated.⁶¹

As the following table indicates, the output indicators of PA3 are mostly adequate with partially deficiencies. The measurability and relevance of the indicators are adequate, but there are some problems regarding to the achievability, since the initial target values were extremely modest and the third modification has not created ambitious targets. Due to this fact, the timing of the indicators is not proper since the target values of 2023 has already been achieved in 2021 with significant surplus. Based on the interviews, the specificity of *OI/3.3 Entries to online communication tools* caused problems, since the indicator was too specific and the beneficiaries interpreted differently the required data.

⁶¹ Further information is available in the same chapter of PA1.

Table 42: Indicators of PA3 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
OI/3.1 Number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased threefold. Despite of this modification, the target value is still modest.	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 regulatory of the measurement is adequate.
OI/3.2 Number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised	The indicator is quite specific.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased nearly fivefold. As a result of this modification, the indicator meets the criterion.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved and the regularity of the measurement are also well-defined.
OI/3.3 Average monthly user entries to online communication tools developed	The interpretation of the indicators is not obvious, which caused misunderstanding among the beneficiaries.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased nearly seventeenth times. Despite of this modification, the target value is still modest.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the regulatory of the measurement is adequate.

3.3.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA3)

Strategic CfP

In the examined programming period, the programme launched strategic priority projects, in order to enhance cross-border cooperation and cohesion. In administrative terms, strategic projects mean development initiatives with much higher resource allocation compared to the traditional projects, in addition the scope of eligible applicants was restricted to the professionally most competent and actors with appropriate human and financial capacities. In case of PA3 potential beneficiaries were regional/county level tourist organizations, local governments, NGOs, regional/county level public bodies (if applicable). The minimum amount of IPA allocation was defined as 2 000 000 EUR.

The strategic approach was assessed in terms of its contribution to stronger cohesion and wider citizens' involvement in cross-border activities. For the qualitative analysis, the evaluators used the results of the interviews, and the project descriptions and reports available in the Interreg+.

ColourCoop

The objective of the project named "Colourful Cooperation" (planned total budget: 3 738 247.30 EUR, validated total budget: 3 689 135.18 EUR) was to develop a comprehensive cultural strategy for the entire Hungarian-Serbian border region; to launch an online, information and news centre in Hungary and Serbia, to set up Serbian and Hungarian cultural centres in Mórahalom and in Palić, and to integrate Novi Sad, the 2022 European Capital of Culture and its surrounding region into the cultural and touristic life of the Hungarian-Serbian border region. The Kolo Serbian Cultural Centre opened in Mórahalom at the end of March 2019 and (because of additional repairs and administrative issues) the Hungarian Cultural Centre in Palić at November 2019, but the latter one was out of operation between October 2020 and February 2022. The pause of operation was caused by a legal obstacle which was solved in 2022 by a lease agreement as a result of which the City of Subotica leased out the centre to Palić Hungarian Cultural Organisation for 10 years. The great number of exhibitions, cultural programmes and creative workshops offered by the newly created cultural and tourist centres, or organised in Novi Sad, are intended to help members of the different ethnic communities find out about each other's cultural values, and to boost the development of cultural cooperation and tourism in the Hungarian-Serbian border region by a well-aimed, detailed and comprehensive cultural and tourist information and news campaign.

The originally 36-month long project ended on December 31, 2020 after three contract modifications with seven-month prolongation. The first modification was reasoned by beneficiary change – the City of Novi Sad was replaced by the City of Novi Sad - the City Administration for Culture – which induced the pause of public procurement, while the other two prolongations were realised due to the effect of the pandemic situation (to have more time for safer event organization activities). 98.69% of the planned budget was spent and validated by the programme bodies. The decrease in the total budget mainly concerned the preparation costs (51.92%) which were mainly caused by the translation and interpretation costs (43.65%). Despite of the prolongation and the difficulties caused by COVID-19 pandemic, the partnership seems to operate properly, the communication between the partners have been continuous and the project achieved its goals.

Finally, the ColourCoop project will contribute to a key factor of mutual trust building. During the recent years and after a long pre-history of mutual suspect and threat characterised by many historic injuries, Serbia and Hungary started building up a strategic partnership – at high-political level. In order to deliver this message to the local stakeholders and every-day people, the ColourCoop project became able to ensure the infrastructural and organisational background. The two cultural centres were constructed in two municipalities frequented by the other country's citizens, but it became clear, that Palić does not have the right capacities to make the infrastructure operational. The several dozens of cultural events aimed to facilitate cultural understanding and network building of the two nations, but the restrictive measures because of the COVID-19 pandemic, including border closure obviously hinder the achievement of these goals. Furthermore, the developed joint platform gathering the cultural programmes and events of the whole cross-border region in one database intends to fill an existing gap, but at the moment the complete implementation of this target has not been realized yet, because of the lack of mechanisms being able to gather information from many different sources. However, the lead beneficiary of this strategic project is engaged to solve this problem in the framework of a next project. Despite of all the mentioned limiting factors, the cross-border character of the project is still strong, which could be further strengthened in the future.

3.3.3 Impact evaluation (PA3)

3.3.3.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (PA3)

The following analysis is built upon the figure (*Figure 93*) described in the short introduction of the PA's intervention logic. For the detailed impact model see the introductory chapter (*II. 3.3.1 Short introduction of the PA3's intervention logic*). Each regional need and challenge will be analysed in the sense that how the identified actions of the programme could contribute to their tackling and management. In order to assess these and the general changes in the cohesion of the programme area, a territorial analysis and a project assessment takes place to identify the main contributions and changes which help reaching the expected results of the PA. The assessment uses statistical data, maps and figures, textual analysis as well as desk research to analyse the fulfilment of regional needs emerging in the border region.

It has to be mentioned here that a regional challenge is usually having more than a single expected result. Therefore, a single or two indicators of an expected result will only be analysed once, at the regional need most suitable for it/them. However, it will be noted that the given indicator(s) can be used to describe the impact and the changes took place during the analysed years in the case of which challenges/needs.

Considering the regional need described as **limited number of joint tourism products with attractiveness for longer stays**, employment generation in tourism and its suppliers is an indicator to be used (and can be used in the case of shortage of quality tourism as well). Employment generation has been outstandingly changed in recent years. Employment increase can be observed in relation to accommodation and food service activities throughout the programme area. On the level of the programme area as many as 16 860 additional employees started working in tourism. At both sides and in all regions significant increase took place between 2014 and 2019 (to eliminate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the previous year before COVID-19 pandemic was taken into

account): the biggest increase in volumes took place in Južnobačka (+7042 employees in the activities) by far, followed by Sremska (2141) and Južnbanatska (1838). The smallest increase in numbers was realised in the case of Severnobačka, Severnbanatska (809 each), and Csongrád-Csanád (814). Regarding Csongrád-Csanád the change was limited due to its relatively high level of employment in the sector, while in the case of the two Serbian districts the low basis value were the main reasons of limited improvements.

When it comes to the need for increased number of guest nights as an expected result of the same challenge (and for challenges of “Shortage of quality tourism” and “Tourism needs to contribute to a better appreciation and understanding among people”), taking into account foreign guests including Serbian (in Hungary) and Hungarian (in Serbia) tourists, in all respective regions notable change was observed between 2010 and 2019. Most of the regions excluding Srednjobanatska district (increase by 19%), Bács-Kiskun (+59%) and Severnbanatska district (+60%) in all units the number of guest nights per 1000 inhabitants increased by higher rate than of the average of Hungary (+67%). The leaders in change were Južnbanatska (+602%) and Sremska districts (+426%), which means in these regions the rate multiplied greatly. The former value at least doubled in the following units as well: Csongrád-Csanád (+177%), Zapadnobačka (+109%), Severnobačka (+106%) and Južnobačka district (+104%). There is still a potential in increasing foreign tourists considering that in most regions the increase was below the national average of the given country, and the amplitude of change in domestic guest nights. It is only Južnobačka district where the foreign guest nights exceed the domestic figures.

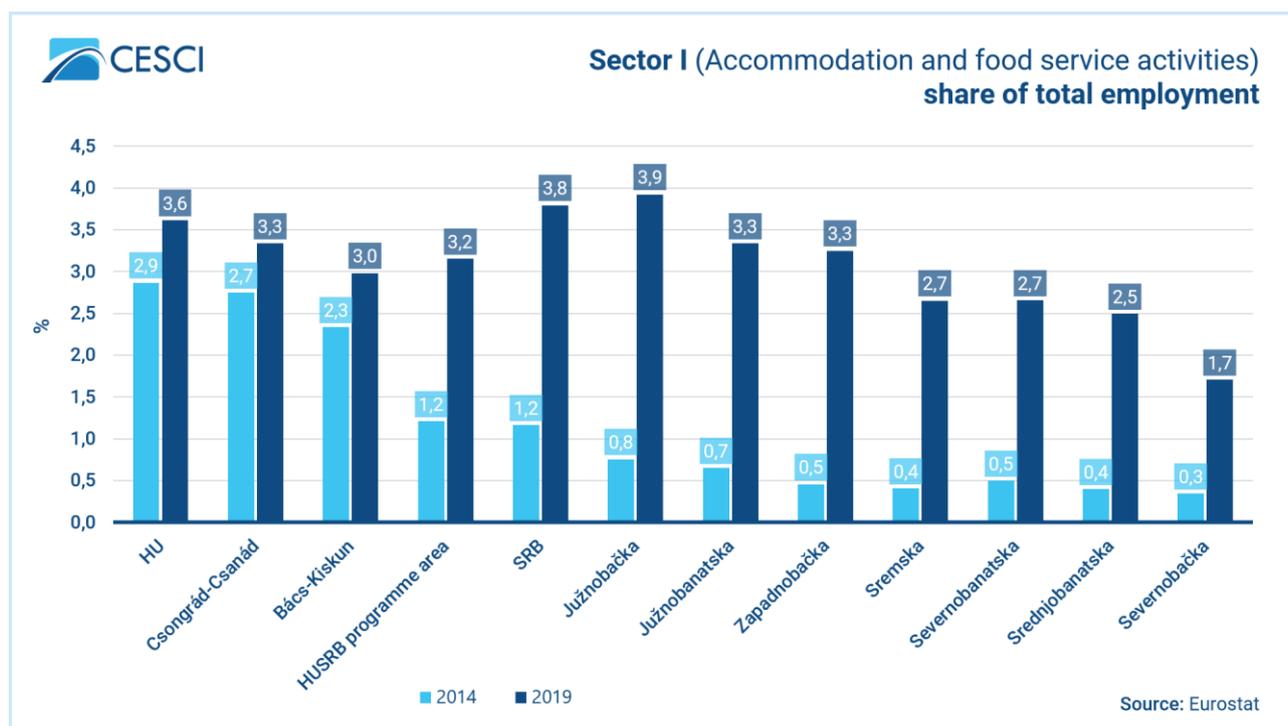
Considering the change between 2010 and 2019 in the number of total guest nights per 1000 inhabitants (domestic and foreign visitors included), Južnbanatska district (+259% mainly because of foreign guests) and Csongrád-Csanád (+146%, mainly thanks to domestic increase) are the two outstanding regions. The rate doubled in the case of Sremska (+125%), Južnobačka (+103%) and Zapadnobačka (+99%). Both Hungarian regions overperformed the national average (+65%), furthermore only Srednjobanatska district (+11%) had lower rate of increase than of Serbia (+59%).

As a result of the aforementioned processes, Csongrád-Csanád (1 780 overnight stays per 1000 people) secured its leading role in receiving guest. The next group of regions are Severnbanatska (1154), Bács-Kiskun (1076) and Severnobačka (1055), followed by Južnobačka district (830) and Sremska (750). There is still a need for increase especially in the case of Južnbanatska (639), Zapadnobačka (579) and Srednjobanatska district (447), which still have very low values. The need for increased number of guest nights is also underlined by the below national average (HU: 3228; SRB: 1451) values for all regions (Csongrád-Csanád is ahead of the national average of Serbia only).

Considering the share of tourism in employment by 2019 Južnobačka (3.9% in total employment) took over the lead position from Csongrád-Csanád. This is the only region which surpasses the Serbian (3.8%) and the Hungarian (3.6%) national averages from the border area. The Serbian district is followed by Csongrád-Csanád (3.3%), the previous number one considering shares. Apart from these, Južnbanatska (3.3) and Zapadnobačka (3.25%) were able to perform better in terms of employment role compared to the average of the programme area (3.2%). The areas with the lowest rate of employees registered in tourism are situated in Vojvodina: Severnbanatska (2.7%), Sremska (2.65%), Srednjobanatska (2.5%), and Severnobačka (1.7%). Between 2014 and 2019 employment generation managed to be the most successful in Južnobačka district (+3.2%-points, improved by 5

positions compared to the analysed regions plus the two countries), followed by other Serbian regions, namely Zapadnobačka (2.8%-points, up by 3 positions), Južnobańska (2.7%-points, moved up 2 places), Sremska (2.2%-points, no change in place), Severnobańska (2.2, down by 1 place), and Srednjobańska district (2.1%-points, no change). On programme area level (+1.9%-points) the significance of accommodation and food service activities increased. However, regarding Severnobačka oblast (1.4%-points, no change in position), Bács-Kiskun (0.6%, down by 5 places), and Csongrád-Csanád (0.6%-points, down by 2 places) the positive change was very limited, and in the case of the latter two they stayed below the national average (+0.7%-points). As it can be seen on the related figure (*Figure 100*) notable changes took place in the examined period on the Serbian side in particular; in the case of regions from Vojvodina the change exceeded the national average of 3.3 times increase. 4-7 times higher shares describe the role of tourism across Vojvodina compared to the situation of 2014. Zapadnobačka district (7 times higher share) and Sremska district (6.5 times higher) are two outstanding examples for employment growth, but even in areas (mainly of Hungary) which had been described by high shares increase was manageable by 2019.

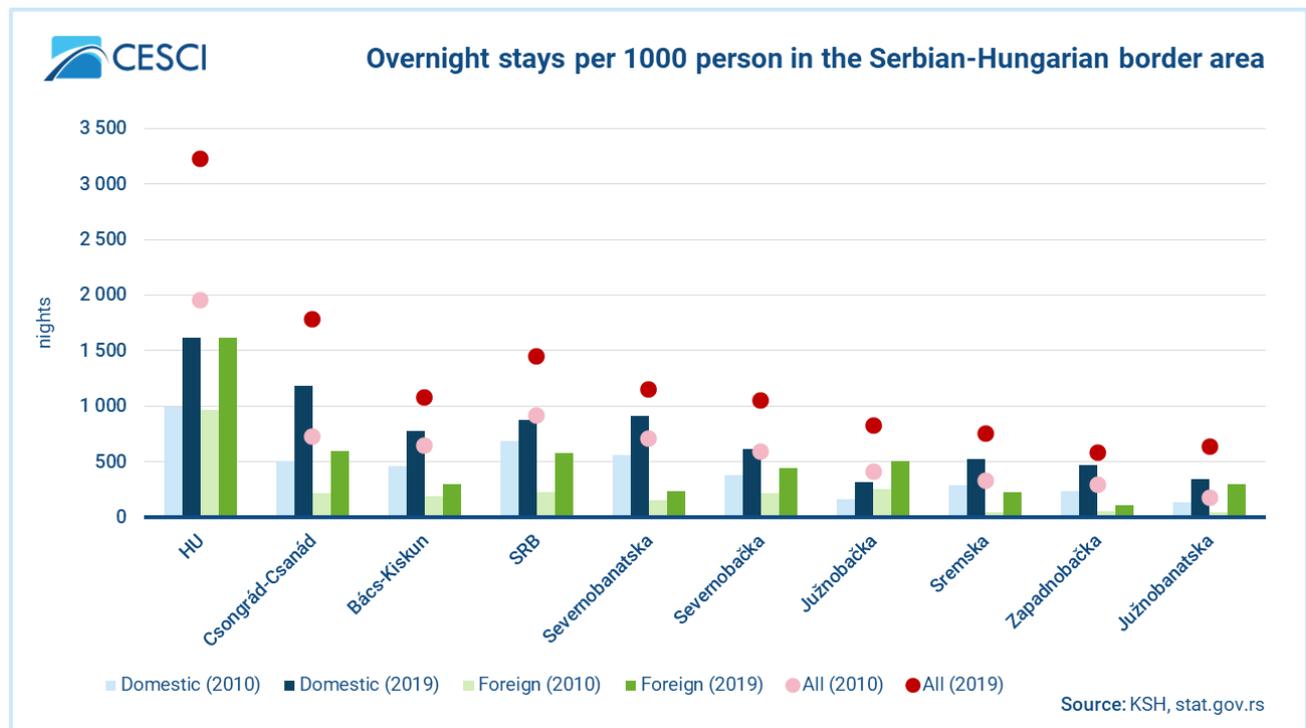
Figure 100: Sector I (Accommodation and food service activities) share of total employment



Relatively many projects deal with this challenge, especially under Action 3.1. It is not the quantity of tourism products created what is problematic but the effect of them on longer stays. In recent years changes took place in the tourism industry so does in the programme area i.e. it is not the length but the number of tourist stays which increased. In other words, the Serbian and Hungary tourists in line with the global trend, tend to stay in the neighbouring country for a 24 hours-stay, not longer than 2-3 days in general. Because of this shift to one-day trips and long weekends the original challenge described was hard to be “tackled”, rephrasing might be necessary as the expected result of longer stays was difficult to reach. The unintended impact of the project is the increase in the frequency of visits and not the appearance of weeks-long stays. It also has to be said that the overall number of overnight stays is on a record level, and further potentials lie in further increasing the

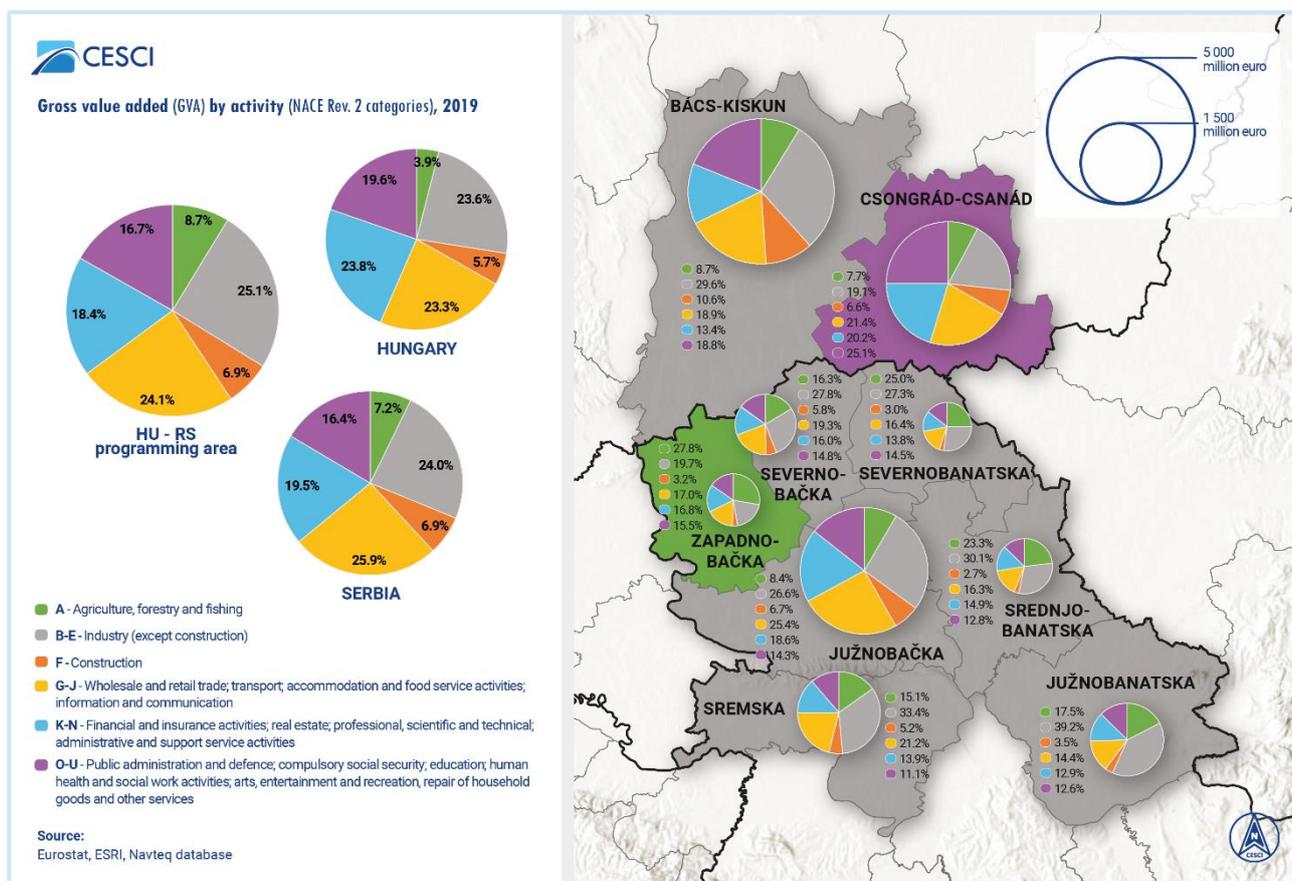
quantity of overnight stays. Still, it is worth remembering that the large number of stays could add up from short(er) stays than expected. Furthermore, it is of outstanding importance to develop joint complex tourism products but it should not be connected to longer stays, it is rather more useful to bind it to employment or guest nights.

Figure 101: Overnight stays per 1000 person in the Serbian-Hungarian border area



The regional need concentrated on the **shortage of quality tourism** (as well as Lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply) can be analysed by increased turnovers at tourism providers at the first place (and also by increased number of guest nights). It can be grasped through Gross Value Added (GVA) by the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (NACE) categories G to I, which includes accommodation and food service activities (the result should be treated with reservations due to the involvement of other sectors such as wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, transporting and storage). Comparing the GVA volumes of 2014 and 2019 it can be said that in the case of all NUTS 3 (and equivalent) regions managed to have significant increase. The biggest improvement was reached by Bács-Kiskun (+39%), the second was Csongrád-Csanád (+29%), while Vojvodina (+24%) was the third. While in Hungary and in the Hungarian counties the change of the respective sectors stayed below the GVA growth of all sectors altogether, in Vojvodina the amplitude of change (+24%) was higher than of all sectors in total (+19%). This, the tourism sector in terms of income managed to grow, however the share of tourism and the added sectors did not improve much. In relation to Bács-Kiskun (from 18.6% to 17.7, by decrease by 0.9%-points) and Csongrád-Csanád (from 18.2 to 17.7%, decrease by 0.4%-points) slight decrease was observed in the given period, but in Vojvodina a slight increase was realised (from 17.1 to 17.8%).

Figure 102: Gross value added by activity, 2019



Based on recent changes there is a growing need for quality tourism. Quality offer have grown in the last decade but there is still a need for comprehensive improvement. Many local experts and practitioners agree that increasing the quality is even more relevant than increasing the number of tourists, or the number of overnight stays even. Quality is supported by the programme on a medium level, therefore further developments are possible in this field given its high relevance.

Lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply can be described by expected results in relation to increased number of guest nights, increased turnovers and longer stays (the analyses can be read above regarding this). Significant improvement has taken place owing to the programme. This challenge was addressed by numerous HUSRB projects understandably including development of joint offers, thematic routes, information materials and applications (e.g. see CommonHeritage, TisaWaterTours projects). This challenge was regarded as one of if not the most important in relation to tourism development across the border. It is important to build partnerships, networks, bring stakeholders of tourism together, to initiate information exchange, share joint marketing tools on a daily basis. The promotion of jointly developed products is crucial to create a coherent cross-border supply since the insufficient funds do not allow such activities for many beneficiaries on a longer term. Organisational development and promotion of networking would be necessary in the future as well to increase added value of CBC. Not only interconnections among elements of supply but also among regional stakeholders should receive bigger support in the frames of this challenge. Study tours, joint conferences, relationship-building between institutions and individual actors are equally important. There were no unintended impacts relevant for this analysis.

Lack of integrated regional tourism strategy is a challenge which has not been tackled thoroughly. Without the financial support of the programme little improvements would have been reached. In the frames of the programme joint tourism development strategies were elaborated with regard to projects of HEALTH-TOUR (development of an integrated marketing strategy and action plan for health and medical tourism), IDENTIS (preparing the joint tourism development strategy with an action plan) and TisaWaterTours (joint water tourism development strategy). Based on interviews and lessons learnt in the given period, tourism strategy is a good tool but Tourism strategy: good, but organizational development would be needed first so that someone can implement it. It is difficult to carry out a comprehensive strategy because of lack of funding, therefore sometimes it is does not worth planning together. Some other partners had a tourism development strategy created, but COVID-19 pandemic got in the way as an unwanted change that hampered cooperation.

The regional challenge connected to **tourism that needs to contribute to a better appreciation and understanding among people** has been supported extensively by various national, regional and grassroot, local initiatives and activities of all kinds. This is especially true in case cultural tourism is taken into account with its numerous events, programmes and exchanges across borders. This regional need is difficult to be addressed directly using statistics but based on interviews and the INTERREG+ project information this challenge has been supported most effectively by the programme itself. Development of tourist products, services and attractions based on cultural and natural heritage as well as cooperation in the fields of cultural, community events, sport, leisure, nature protection should be highlighted here from the programme actions. Related projects helped understanding the shared built and intangible cultural heritage of the programme area (e.g. ColourCoop, ArtNouveau⁶²), building mutual trust by organising cultural (e.g. FOLKcoolTOUR⁶³) and sports events (e.g. CB BASKET⁶⁴) such as festivals, inter-institutional forms of cooperation with various exchanges. According to the interviews, the main cross-border challenge – related to cultural and touristic dimension – is based on the fact that the cross-border cooperation does not concentrate enough on the involvement of young population. It needs to create new cross-border cooperation with innovative solutions in order to avoid the recycling of the already existing partnerships. Another emerging challenge is to bring back the favourable number of visitors of cultural events which was common in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic). Regarding this goal, it is important to enhance the role of creative industry, and also more innovative solutions should be used to recover the tourism sector. Even if the hard projects with infrastructure development provide the highest measurable results, but the mental change of the population can be achieved only by time-consuming soft projects. That is why it is so crucial to stress the relevance of cultural and tourism projects in building partnerships and social cohesion.

Based on the project summaries as well as the objectives of the projects, out of the **identified challenges under PA3**, by far there are two leading challenges addressed by the highest number of

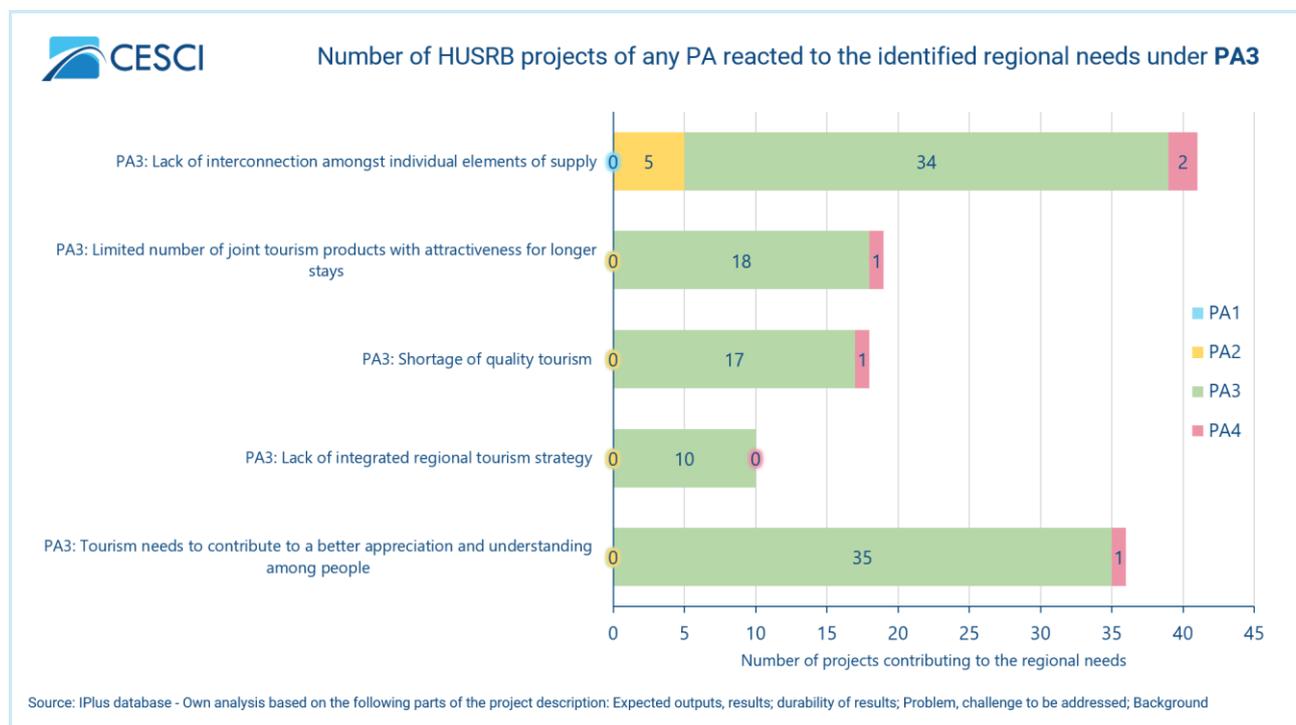
⁶² ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0111; Our Borderless Art Nouveau Culture

⁶³ ID: HUSRB/1602/31/0154; Folklore and Culture as Touristic Attractions - Hidden Values and Treasures

⁶⁴ ID: HUSRB/1602/32/0004; Name: Cross-border basket games

projects⁶⁵: lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply (41 projects), and “tourism needs to contribute to a better appreciation and understanding among people” (36 projects). The least number of projects which are in line with the challenges is connected to the lack of integrated regional tourism strategy (10 projects), while the rest of the two challenges have average support with 17 and 18 projects. The strategic project of Colourful Cooperation, which had the biggest impact considering its total budget, contributed to all regional needs except shortage of quality tourism. The formulated challenges are mostly addressed by projects from PA3, there is only one exception worth mentioning with significant number of projects from other PAs. Namely, in the case of lack of interconnections 5 projects from PA2 (through road, border and bicycle infrastructure developments) and 2 projects from PA4 also contribute to the tackling of this challenge.

Figure 103: Number of HUSRB projects of any PA reacted to the identified regional needs under PA3

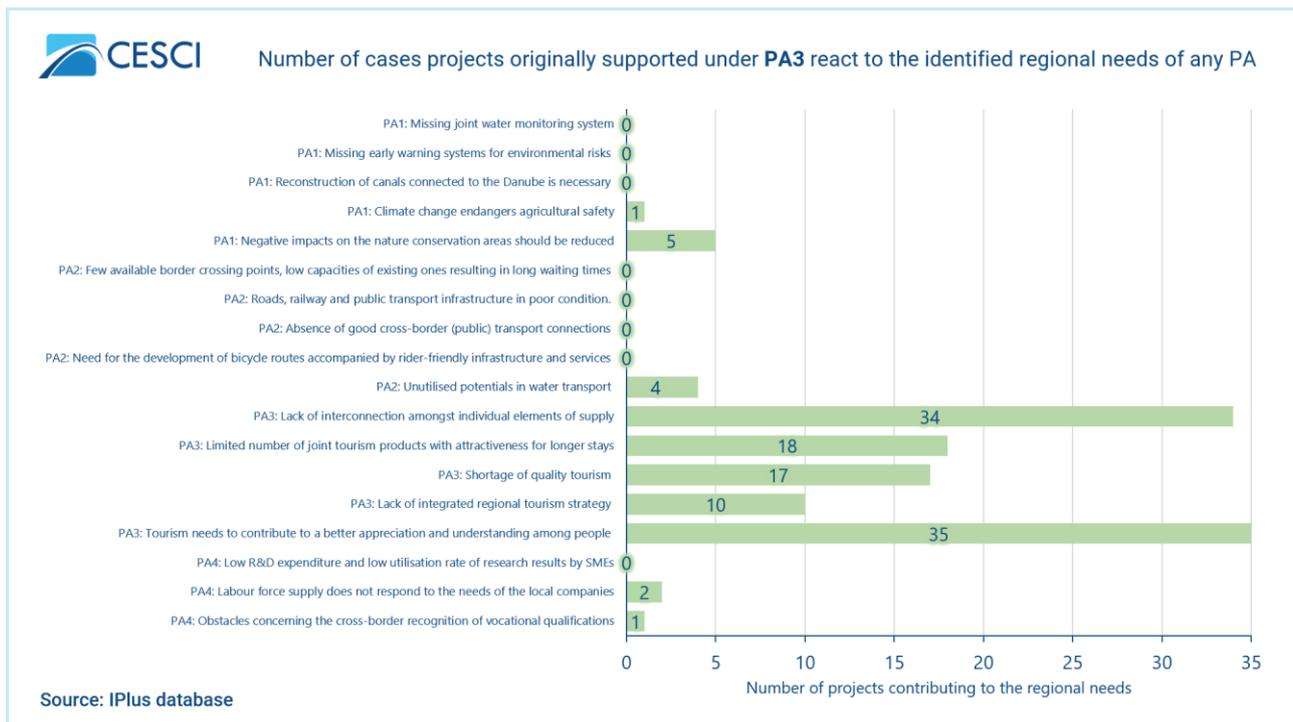


Taking into account the **number of cases projects originally supported under PA3 react to the identified regional needs of any kind** (from any PAs), apart from challenges of PA3, few challenges from the rest of the PAs can be mentioned as addressed challenges by PA2 projects. Negative impacts on the nature conservation areas (5 projects of PA3) and unutilised water transport (4 projects) are the two challenges on which the PA3 projects have relevant impact. In relation to this PA, elaborated projects have a slightly more widespread or diffuse impact on the challenges meaning that the share of projects supporting the overcome of the challenge is relatively low. The challenges which are the most addressed are as follows: tourism needs to contribute to a better appreciation

⁶⁵ The consideration of only the number of projects has some distorting effect because of the big difference between the size of the strategic and traditional projects. The allocated EU contribution to the particular challenges would draw a more realistic picture, but evaluators were not able to handle those cases where a given project reflect to more challenges. The distribution of the budget of these projects between the certain needs were not possible based on the available information.

and understanding among people (49%); lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply (47% of PA3 projects); limited number of joint tourism products with attractiveness for longer stays (25%), but even the third highest given rate can be considered low in overall. These mediocre or low values are partly due to the complex nature and the large number of various projects supported under this PA. PA3 is both the priority for addressing tourism related challenges and people-to-people type of cultural and sports activities.

Figure 104: Number of cases projects originally supported under PA3 react to the identified regional needs of any PA



3.3.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA3)

In this subchapter, based on the result indicators, the comparison of the expected and achieved results will be presented. During the evaluation, the analysts relied on the documentations of the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) and the Cooperation Programme (CP) which were complemented with the observations and suggestions of the interviewees. According to the CP, the reporting frequency of the indicators' values was planned to take place in every second year: the first report – which gave annual value about the fulfilment of the indicator – was the AIR 2019, and it was followed by the report of 2021. The third and last report will be concerned the year of the target value (2023).

In the frame of PA3, the total number of result indicators is two (out of 5) which rely on tourism and border-crossing cultural cooperation. However, the differences between the two indicators are quite significant. The result indicator 3.1 (*RI/3.1 Overnight stays*) represents the number of overnight stays since the related specific objective concentrates on the creation of commonly coordinated cross-border tourism destinations based on the complementary local assets. The measurement unit to demonstrate the development of tourism potentials is expressed in absolute value (overnight stays). The source of the required data is provided by the two countries' national statistical offices

(Hungarian Central Statistical Office and Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia) which ensure the easy availability of the necessary information. On the other hand, the measurement unit of the result indicator 3.2 (*RI/3.2 CBC intensity of public and non-profit organisations*) is based on rating which was elaborated by the programme⁶⁶ and does not belong to a public register. This indicator tries to present the level of cross-border cooperation intensity of the public and non-profit organisations dealing with cultural, leisure sport and nature protection issues. It is strongly related with the specific objective that promotes cooperation in the previously mentioned fields. Due to the own rating system, the required data can be collected only by (online) surveys, which demands new research in every above-mentioned reporting year. This prolongation of the procedure of data collection, and the provability of the results is questionable.

As the following table (*Table 43*) shows, the fulfilment of the two indicators under PA3 significantly differs from each other. The baseline value of result indicator 3.1 is 1 835 757 overnight stays which belongs to the year 2013 and it should be increased to 1 964 000 units until 2023. This goal was surpassed outstandingly in 2019 (2 612 040 unit) that implies the concern of using too moderate (low) target value. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic a modest decrease happened, but the value of the result indicator in 2021 (1 996 789 unit) was already above the target value. Considering the other result indicator, the baseline value was set in 2015 at 3.24 unit. In contrast with the result indicator 3.1, the target value (3.73 unit) has not been achieved yet, but the current value of the indicator has been showing a constant increase (3.44 unit in 2019 and 3.58 unit in 2021) which is a promising progress to fulfil the required target.

Table 43: Result indicator under PA3

ID	Specific Objective	Selected result indicators	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	2019 Annual value	2021 Annual value
RI/3.1	SO/3.1: Creation of commonly coordinated cross-border tourism destinations based on the complementary local assets in order to ensure sustainable development of tourism potentials	Number of overnight stays	overnight stays	1835757	2013	1964000	2612040	1996789

⁶⁶ The elaboration of the rating is in Annex 5A of the CP.

ID	Specific Objective	Selected result indicators	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	2019 Annual value	2021 Annual value
RI/3.2	SO/3.2: Promoting co-operation activities in the field of culture, leisure, sport, and nature protection	Level of cross-border cooperation intensity of the public and non-profit organisations dealing with cultural, leisure sport and nature protection issues	Rating	3,24	2015	3,73	3,44	3,58

In terms of the interviews, these indicators raise different problems. As it was mentioned above, the result indicator 3.1 was planned with minimum change and the target value is absolutely not ambitious. Moreover, it is not certain that the fulfilment of the result indicator was influenced mainly by the programme. In the case of the result indicator 3.2, the online survey and the rating methodology raise the greatest doubts. The values are obtained only by additional research and these cannot be collected from reliable public registers. In order to avoid these issues, the result indicators should be more ambitious and based on confirmed public registers. Regarding the SMART criteria, both of the indicators are specific, the measurability of the *RI/3.2 CBC intensity of public and non-profit organisations* is problematic, the achievability is ensured (because of the low target value especially in the case of *RI/3.1 Overnight stays*), while the relevance and time-bound character of them are also provided.

Table 44: Result indicators of PA3 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
RI/3.1 Number of overnight stays	no problem	no problem	too modest target value	no problem	no problem
RI/3.2 Level of cross-border cooperation intensity of the public and non-profit organisations dealing with cultural, leisure sport and nature protection issues	no problem	separate researches	no problem	no problem	no problem

3.3.3.3 Analysis of the partnerships (PA3)

The table below (*Table 45*) contains information on the potential involvement (mentioning) of different types of beneficiaries per CfP actions and per targeted activities under CfP actions. It shows which partners were targeted and how many times to be beneficiaries in the three different CfPs of

the programme. State-owned organisations and institutions, national, regional, local governments and bodies, local tourist destination management organisations, tourist attraction management organisations, NGOs, sport clubs, museums, regional and local institutes for the protection of cultural monuments, cross-border cooperation organisations and institutions responsible for developing and operating cultural information centres were the main beneficiaries identified by the Cooperation Programme in the frames of its CfPs regarding PA3.

Based on the number of activities a beneficiary type was involved in any CfPs (i.e. the filled cells with any information on the potential participation of beneficiaries in CfPs) local governments (7 occasions), regional governments (6) as well as NGOs, e.g. civil society organisations dealing with sport, culture, and youth affairs (6) stand out. The number of occasions a potential beneficiary was addressed by any CfPs (i.e. number of times 1st, 2nd, or 3rd CfP is written in the cells) is high in the case of local governments (14 occasions), NGOs and regional governments (12 each). The highest number (7 each) of potential beneficiaries were listed in relation to the targeted activities of “Promote networking, actors’ capacity development and the encouragement of the entrepreneurships (joint training programmes, joint qualification system, harmonized marketing”, “Organize small scale co-operation projects (cultural, leisure, sport and nature protection programmes)”, and “Provide permanent information about key cultural, social, economic news and events”.

Table 45: Potential beneficiary types by Call for Proposals

CfP actions	Targeted activities based on CP	National government	State-owned organisations and institutions	Regional government	Local government	Local Tourism Destination Management Organisation	Tourist attraction management organisation	NGOs	Sport clubs	Museums	Regional and local institutes for the protection of cultural monuments	CBC organisations and institutions
3.1 Tourist products, services and attractions based on cultural and natural heritage	Elaborate a joint tourism and marketing strategy and action plan	2 nd		2 nd	2 nd	2 nd		2 nd				
	Develop joint tourism products, strategy and offers (thematic routes, cycling paths, rural tourism, eco-tourism etc.)	2 nd 3 rd		2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd		2 nd 3 rd					
	Promote networking, actors’ capacity development and the encouragement of the entrepreneurships (joint training programmes, joint qualification system, harmonized marketing				2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	
	Organize small scale co-operation projects (cultural, leisure sport and nature protection programmes)	3 rd	3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd		3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd			

CfP actions	Targeted activities based on CP	National government	State-owned organisations and institutions	Regional government	Local government	Local Tourism Destination Management Organisation	Tourist attraction management organisation	NGOs	Sport clubs	Museums	Regional and local institutes for the protection of cultural monuments	CBC organisations and institutions
3.2 Cooperation in the fields of cultural, community events, sport, leisure, nature protection + 3.3 Cooperation in the fields of cultural and community events + 3.4 Cooperation in the fields of sport, leisure and minor actions related to nature protection	Develop and organize cultural co-operation activities in the border region			2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd			2 nd 3 rd				
	Provide permanent information about key cultural, social, economic news and events	2 nd 3 rd		1 st 2 nd 3 rd	1 st 2 nd 3 rd	1 st	1 st	1 st 2 nd 3 rd				2 nd 3 rd
	Enhance the cooperation for protection of cultural, historical and natural heritage		2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd			2 nd 3 rd				

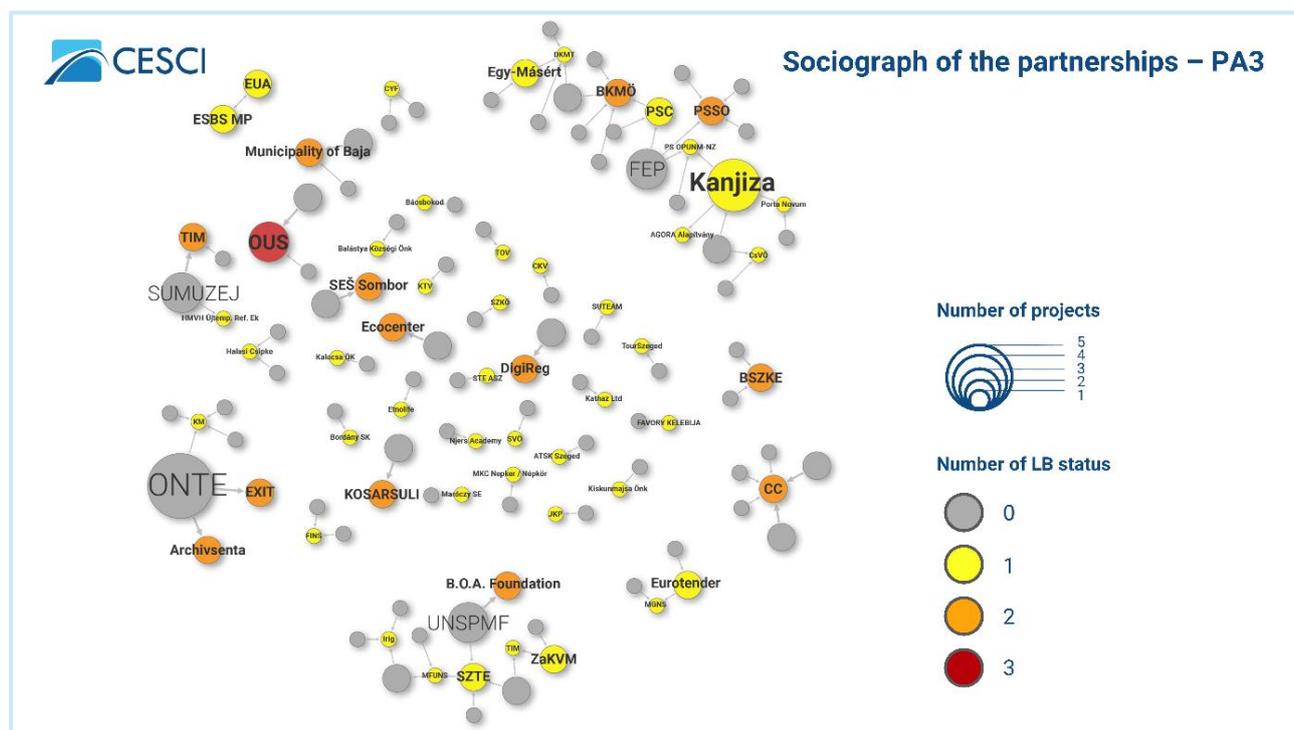
It is worth comparing the potential (planned) beneficiaries of CfPs to the real (actually involved) beneficiaries of the realised projects. The matching of the before and after picture of the beneficiaries, similarities can be detected with regard to local and regional government bodies and DKMT Euroregion, NGOs, sport clubs and museums. On the other hand, the involvement and participation of tourist-related organisations and regional and local institutes for the protection of cultural monuments, organisations and institutions responsible for developing and operating cultural information centres was less pronounced as it had been planned. Universities and other higher education institutions were not listed directly in the CfPs, but their presence was also outstanding. It has to be noted here that in the frames of PA3 various different beneficiaries were listed in the CfPs especially when it comes to other PAs, PA1 and PA2 particularly, and thus high number of the listed ones fall to both categories of frequently and less frequently involved potential beneficiaries.

Considering the **types** of beneficiaries, almost one third of the beneficiaries (54) were those that are governed by private law, which is a high second highest share (30%) of all PAs after PA4. In parallel to this, the share of public beneficiaries (124) is low (70%). However, because of the large number of beneficiaries, the number of both types (governed by public and private law) are higher than in the case of the rest of the PAs.

Considering the **size** of the partnerships, on average a partnership is made up by 1.5 beneficiaries only. The value is the lowest and is below the average level. Based on the number of project partner connections Bács-Kiskun County (5), Association Cinema City (CC) (5), DKMT Euroregion (4), Municipality of Kanjiža (4 connections), Provincial Secretariat for Sports and Youth (PSSO) (4), Kiskun Museum (KM) (4) and SZTE (4) stand out as centrepieces of the partnership network. Based on the number of projects with LB role a slightly different picture can be seen as along with the

mentioned PSSO, Bács-Kiskun County Council (BKMÖ) and CC many other partners can be highlighted with at least two projects in which they enjoyed LB status: Open University Subotica (3 projects), Municipality of Baja (2), Türr István Museum (2), Exit Foundation (2), Senta Archive (2), Ecocenter (2), Hódmezővásárhelyi Kosársuli Egyesület (2), Secondary Economic School in Sombor (SEŠ Sombor) (2), DigiReg (2), Observatory Foundation of Baja (2), "Banat" Serbian Cultural Association (BSZKE) (2). In the frames of PA3 the inter-connections are rather weak between some parts of the partnership structure. The network is fragmented. In addition, high share of small networks consisting of only two partners and one or two direct connections can be detected on the graph.

Figure 105: Sociograph of the partnerships – PA3



The **budget** per partner was 123 028 EUR which is the smallest amount taking into account all PAs. The total cost for partners governed by private law accounted for 4 169 514 EUR (19% of total budget), while the public beneficiaries received 17 729 477 EUR. The average budget per public partner was 142 980 EUR, and was notably lower, 77 213 EUR, per those that were governed by private law. The average total cost per beneficiary reached 123 028 EUR, which became the PA with the second smallest projects in terms of budget. The largest amount of budget based on total cost of projects was allocated to LBs from Hungary as follows: Municipality of Baja (678 400.25 EUR), Observatory of Baja (500 000 EUR), Hódmezővásárhely-Újtemplomi Református Egyházközség (476 975 EUR) and Türr István Museum (368 124 EUR). On the Serbian side EXIT Foundation received the largest of support (431 803.80 EUR), followed by beneficiaries with similar total cost, namely Provincial Secretariat for sport and youth (205 624.80 EUR), Open University Subotica D. o. o. 201 837.70 and High Economy School (189 879.08 EUR).

In the frames of the online survey the respondents also had the opportunity to evaluate their partnerships. Altogether 37 responses were received under PA3 that concerns 32 projects since more

than one beneficiary filled the questionnaire form the same project. It might cause overlapping in the data; thus, the survey should be regarded as an insight to the main trends, but it is not adequate to introduce the exact situation.

Owing to the survey, the motivation of the partnership is easily demonstrable. According to the results of the questionnaire the main **motivation** of the partnerships – similarly to other PAs – is the similar mission and goals which was mentioned by 78.4% of the respondents (29 persons out of 37). The second dominant reason is the previous cooperation which was responded by 24 beneficiaries (64.9%). The close geographical proximity (11 beneficiaries) and the shared language (3 beneficiaries) do not play remarkable role under PA3 since less than 30% of the respondents stressed this type of motivation. Furthermore, there are 3 beneficiaries who mentioned the 'other' option, referring to the same cultural heritage, the twin school relation and the complementing resources.

Regarding the composition of the partnerships, the majority of respondents (22 beneficiaries, 59.5% of all) has only one project partner which indicates the small-size of the PA3 projects. The number of respondents with 2 partners are only 6, and the other categories (with three or more partners) incorporate just 5 respondents. Taking into account the **length** of the partnerships (based on the answers for the question as follows: how long is your cooperation with each of your partners?), it is clear that the biggest share of the partners – who were mentioned by the respondents – has taken part in a new cooperation (26 partners out of 75, 34.7% of all). The project partners with 3-5 (18 partners, 24%) and 5-10 (14 partners, 18.7%) years old cooperation is in the same level, whose accumulated amount would provide the biggest cluster of the partners. However, the 1-3 years and more than 10 years old partnerships are less usual, the number of respondents with these partners is less than 10.

It is worth mentioning that the majority of the respondents' partnerships is ensured in the **future** since 67.6% of them (25 respondents) would like to continue the cooperation with most of the partners and another 8 beneficiaries would keep the joint work with some of the partners. The number of uncertain respondents is 4, who have not decided yet about the future of their current partnerships.

3.3.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA3)

In the beginning of this subchapter the territorial coverage of EU contributions and beneficiaries were analysed by the following two figures (*Figure 106, Figure 107*). Both of them indicate the values by countries, the first one in relative values, and the second one in absolute value. According to the EU contribution, besides the introduction of the result of all CfPs, the open and strategic CfPs were also represented separately, in order to handle the distorting effects of the latter one. The number of PA3-related beneficiaries is more than half of the total, 323 beneficiaries.

Figure 106: Territorial balance of the beneficiaries [PA3] – Relative values

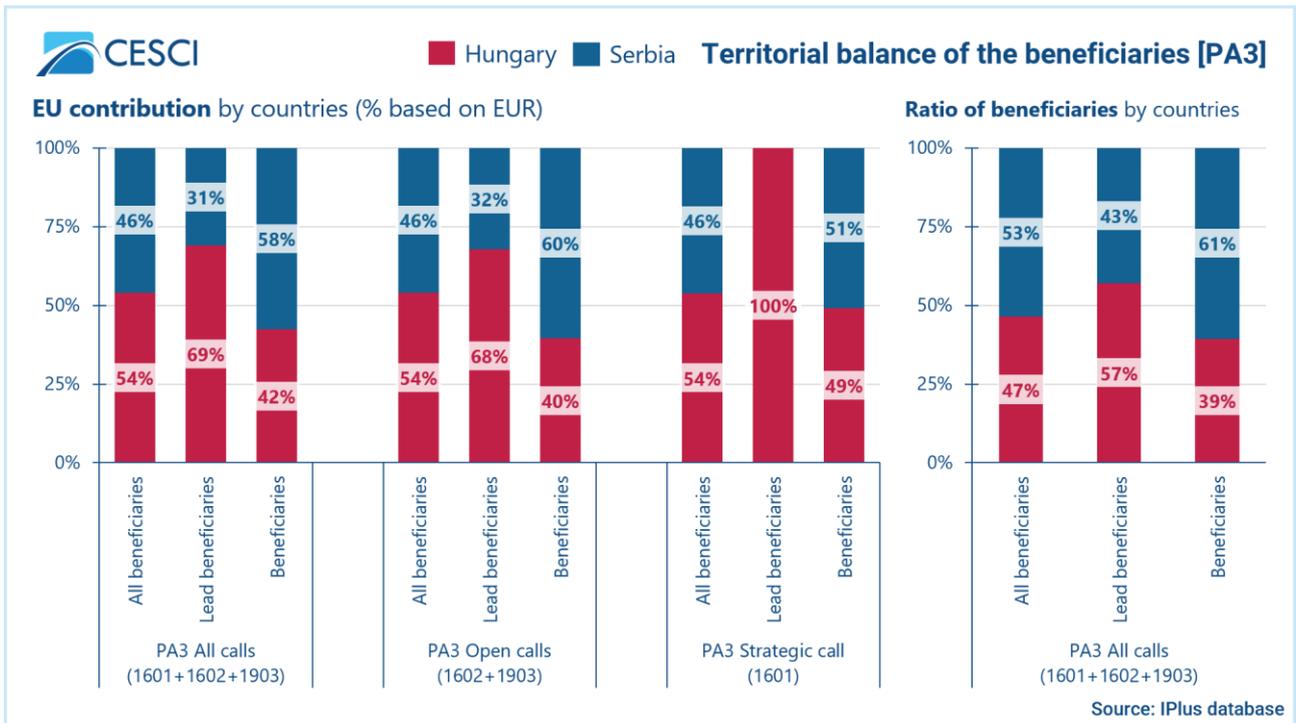
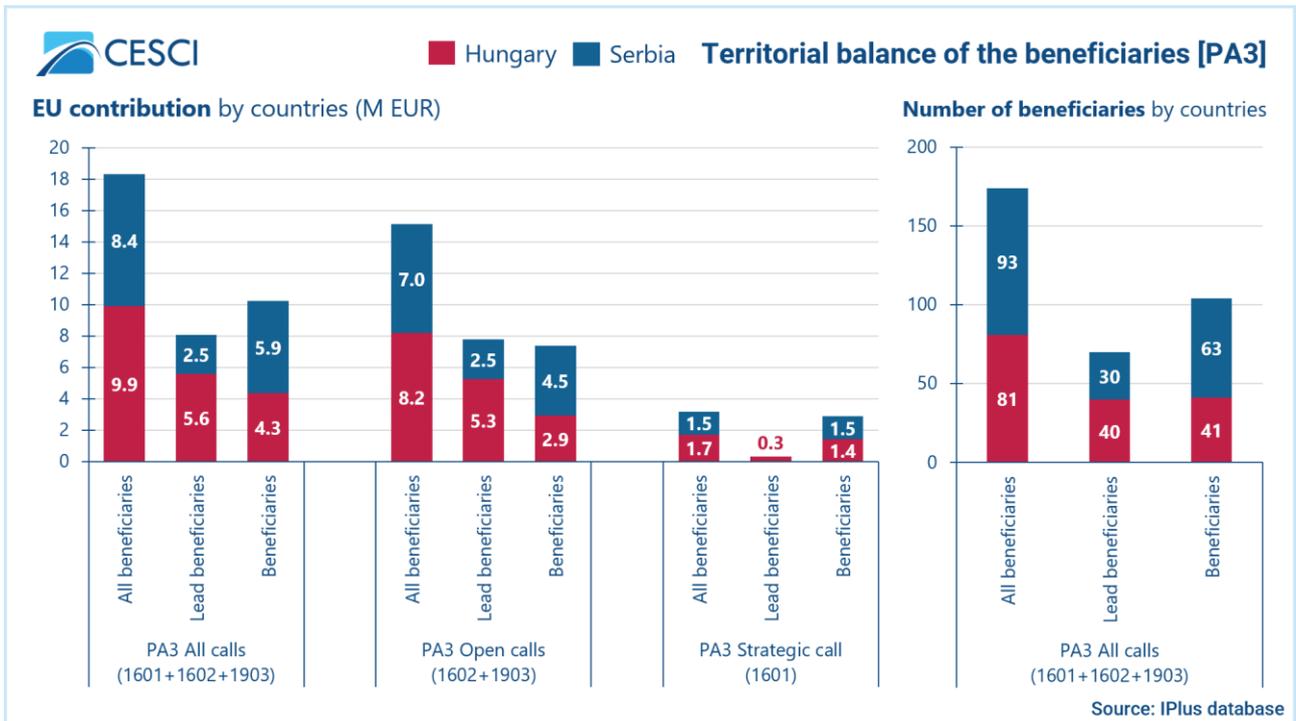


Figure 107: Territorial balance of the beneficiaries [PA3] – Absolute values

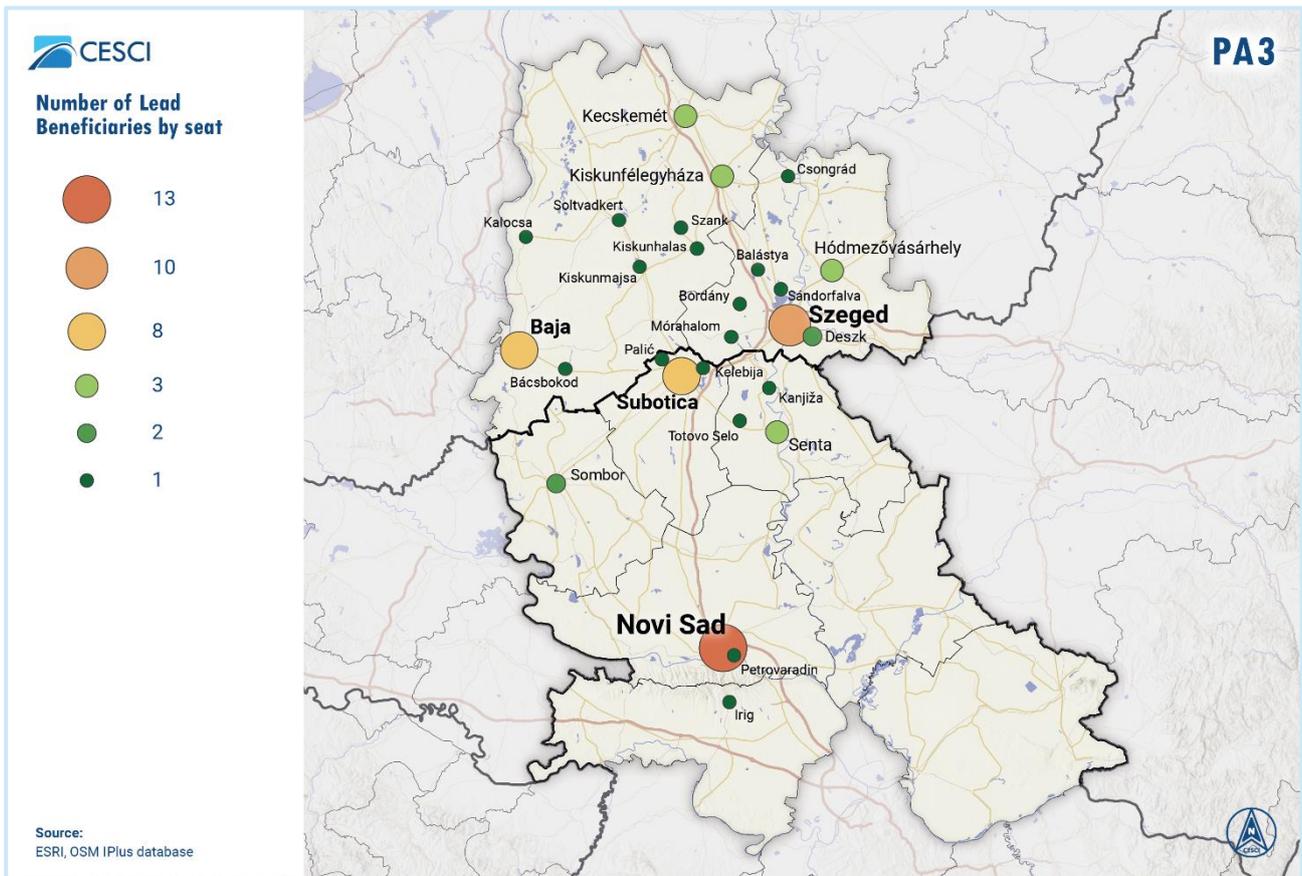


There is a balance between the two countries regarding the distribution of the EU contribution and the number of partners, however the Serbian side provides slightly more partners and the Hungarians allocated a bigger amount of EU contribution. Regarding the strategic project of PA3, more Serbian partners are involved but the Hungarian side gives the LB. Owing to this, a little bit more EU contribution was absorbed by the Hungarians, but the Bs received more money than the LB. Moreover, the total value of the strategic project does not achieve the quarter of the total EU

contribution. Due to the lower share of the strategic project's lead partner, no significant territorial difference can be detected in the EU contributions related to the strategic project in this PA. This also indicates that the partners on both sides of the border have made infrastructure investments on a broadly similar scale.

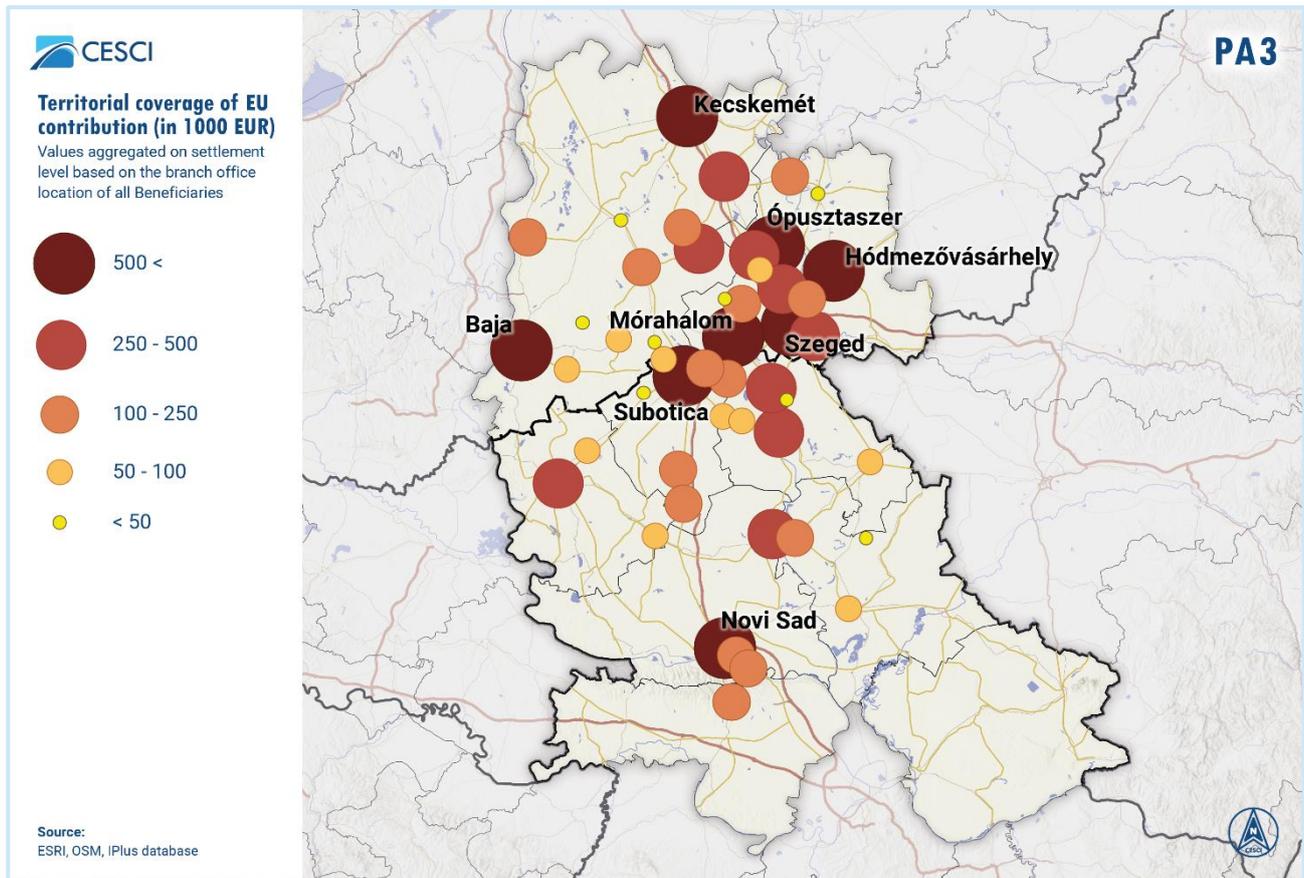
In terms of the open CfPs, there are more Serbian Bs with proportionally higher allocations. Regarding the LBs, the Hungarian side provides the majority of them, with even higher EU contribution, which means that the Hungarian LBs tend to get higher support.

Figure 108: Number of Lead Beneficiaries by seat (PA3)



The spatial distribution of EU contribution is notable more dispersed compared to PA1 and PA2. The contribution was divided to 49 places on the map. The branch office settlement with the highest share here is only 14.8%. In the case of 25 settlements the shares do not even reach 1% of total contribution. Only less than the half (24) of the settlements received 1% or higher shares from the budget for PA3. The chart is again lead by the largest settlement in population size: Novi Sad (2 761 783 EUR, 14.8%), Subotica (2 349 893 EUR, 12.6%) and Szeged (2 329 971 EUR, 12.5%) but altogether their share stays at 40%. In the frames of PA3 even relatively small settlements got significant amount of support such as Mórahalom (1 551 772, 8.3%), Ópusztaszer (548 754 EUR, 2.9%) or Deszk (387 577 EUR, 2.1%). The spatial configuration can be characterised by the Kecskemét–Szeged–Novi Sad axis (especially the line of highway M5 and the Tisza River). Also, there is a high concentration of sources allocated to the area bordered by Subotica, Kecskemét, Hódmezővásárhely, Deszk and Senta.

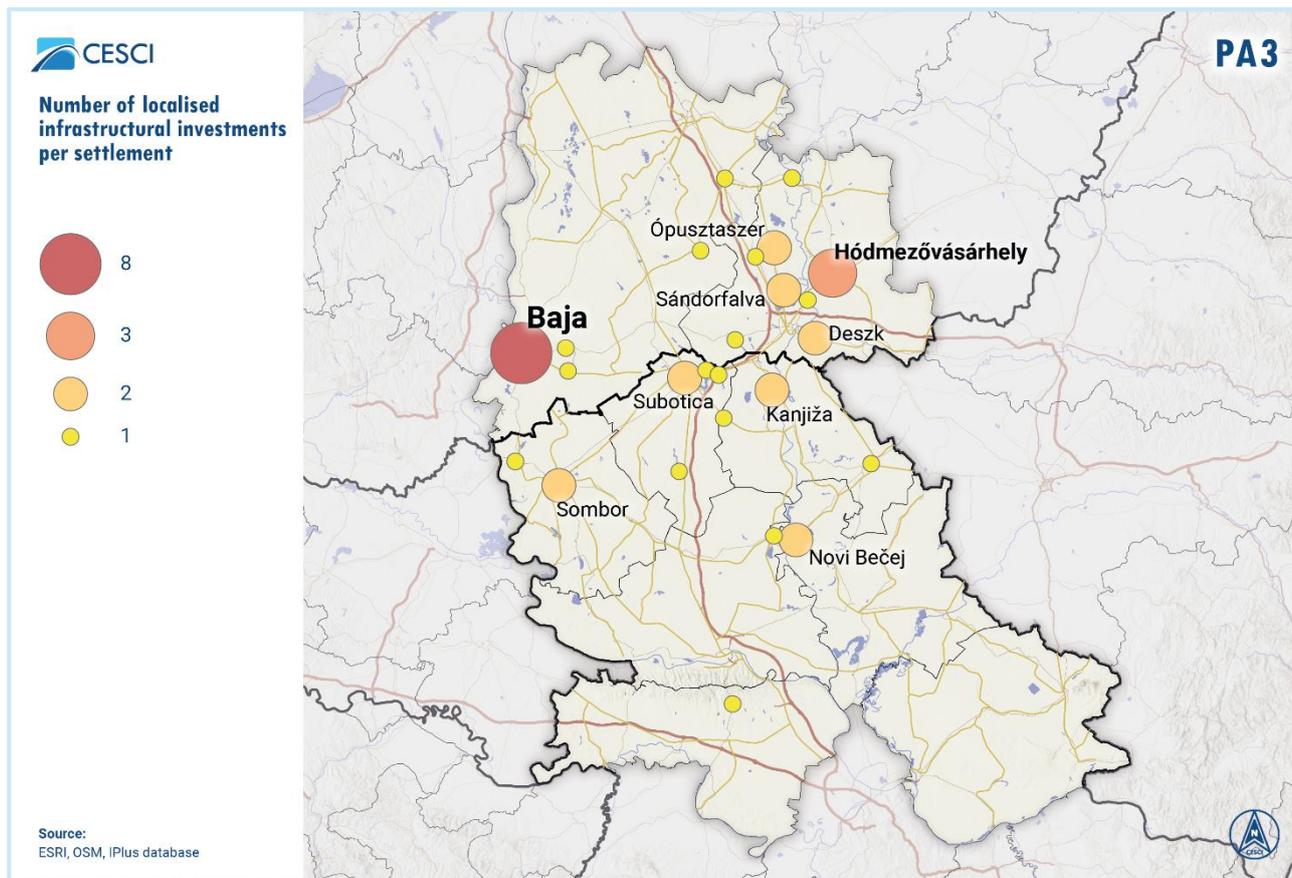
Figure 109: Territorial coverage of EU contribution (in 1000 EUR) – PA3



Based on the **project locations**⁶⁷ (where detectable infrastructural developments were carried out) in the frames of PA3 Baja (8 locations) stand out, followed by Hódmezővásárhely (3 locations), while the settlements having two locations include Deszk, Ópusztaszer, Sándorfalva from Hungary, and Kanjiža, Novi Bečej, Sombor and Subotica from Serbia. The biggest concentrations of developments are located in District of Baja (9) and District of Szeged (5). Južnobanatska has no location, but Sremska and Južnobačka each possess only one element. On the Hungarian side uncovered areas can be found at extensive areas in the north-western parts of the county in particular.

⁶⁷ More than a single location per project per settlement is possible, as each location was regarded as a separate location even if it located within the territory of the same settlement. Thus, for instance, if there are three locations in a settlement it does not necessarily mean the infrastructure elements were realized from three different CBC projects.

Figure 110: Number of localised infrastructural investments per settlement (PA3)



3.3.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA3)

In this subchapter, the durability of the project results and outcomes is evaluated along two main aspects: their institutional and financial sustainability. The evaluators assessed the history and potential future of the projects, the pattern of project's life cycle, their embeddedness into the regional and local structures, in addition the financial conditions for maintaining the projects' results.

The assessment is based on the results of the interviews and the questionnaire, in addition the application forms and the quality assessment of the projects.

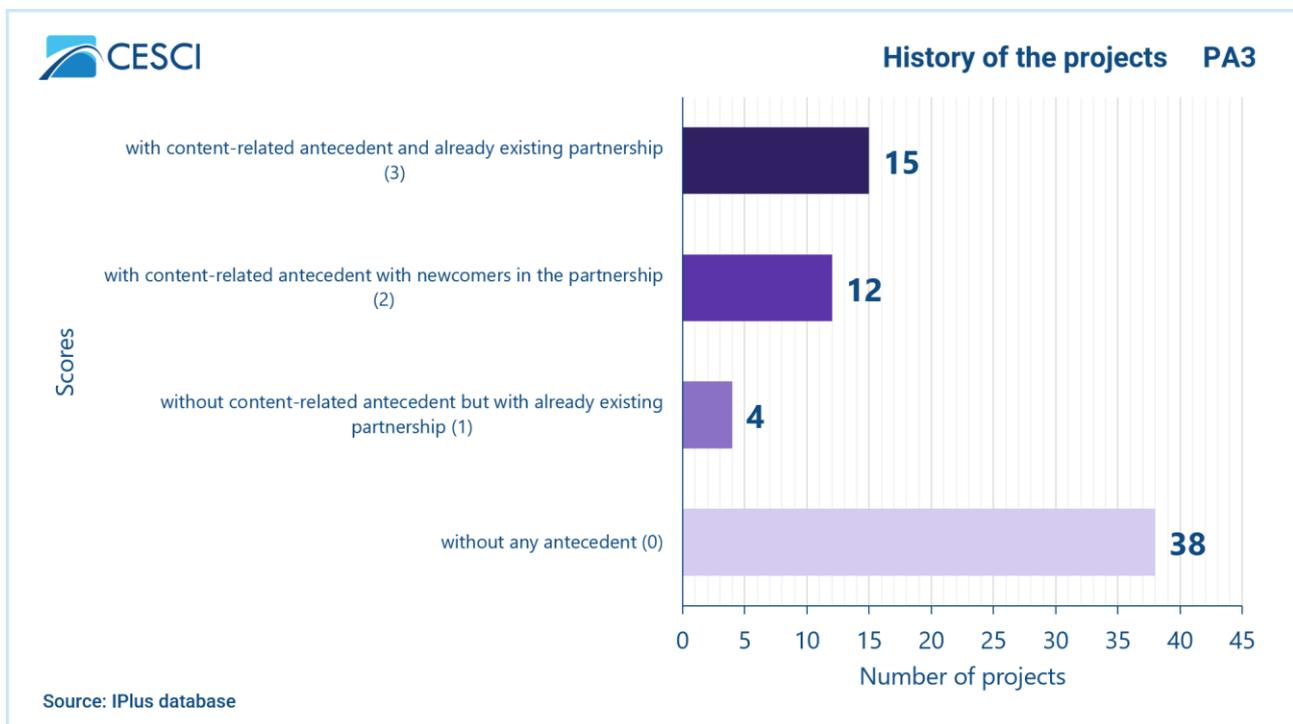
The evaluation of projects' history had been done through analysing the relevant part of all application forms. At the 'description of synergies with other policies, programmes and projects' part of the form, applicants had the possibility to introduce all sorts of previous projects (cross-border, national, transnational, etc.) and partnerships which are connected to their actual development plans. This possibility had been exploited by the applicants in a varying manner, some of them only provided a generic answer, while others explained the matching points in a detailed way. Another barrier of the assessment was that in case of the first (restricted) CfP, this question had not formed part of the application form. Despite of this limitation, evaluators made an attempt to group the selected projects according to the followings:

0. projects without any antecedent;
1. projects without content-related antecedent but with already existing partnership (who had been implemented joint project in another thematic field);

2. projects with content-related antecedent with newcomers in the partnership;
3. projects with content-related antecedent and already existing partnership.

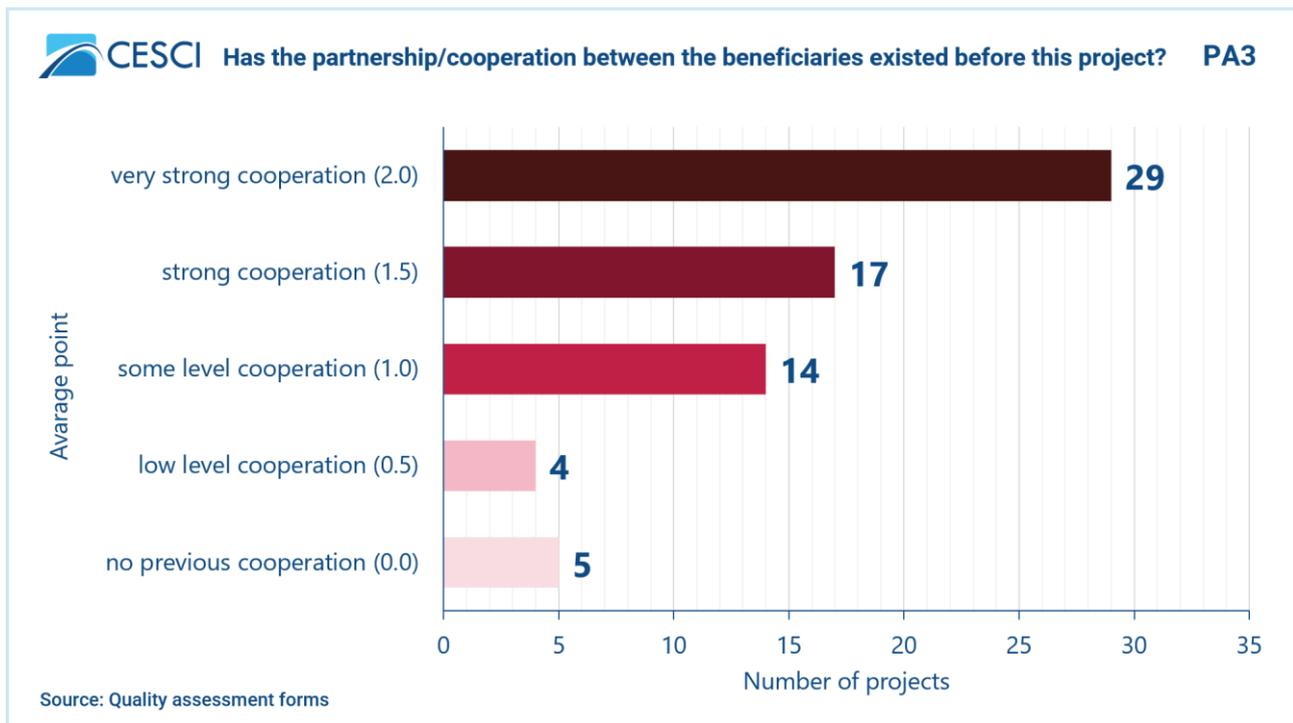
As the figure (Figure 111) illustrates, more than half of the projects (55%, 38 projects out of 69) do not have any direct antecedent, in addition there are further 4 projects which have already existing partnership without similar project in the field. The number of projects with content-related antecedent is 27 (out of 69) that provides nearly 40% of the total number within PA3. The modest majority (15 units) of these have an already existing partnership, but in the case of the other 12 projects, there are newcomers too. Considering that the cooperation in the field of tourism and cultural heritage with mainly soft projects with lower values compared to the hard ones, does not necessarily require previous long-term collaboration, the remarkable proportion of projects without relevant history is not a surprise.

Figure 111: History of the projects (PA3)



On the other hand, the results of quality assessments alter the outcomes of the analysis above in some degree. In the case of the regular projects, the two quality assessors evaluated on a 3-point scale (0-2) whether the partnership or cooperation between the beneficiaries had existed before. Assessors found that the majority of the projects, 47 out of the 69, scored at least 1.5 point, which reflects that these have a notable common history. There are further 14 projects, who have previous cooperation, though their partnerships' history and strength are not as deep and firm as the previous ones. The rest, 9 initiatives at all – which belong to the range of 0-0.5 points – are based on new partnerships without any significant historical background.

Figure 112: Durability of the partnerships (PA3)

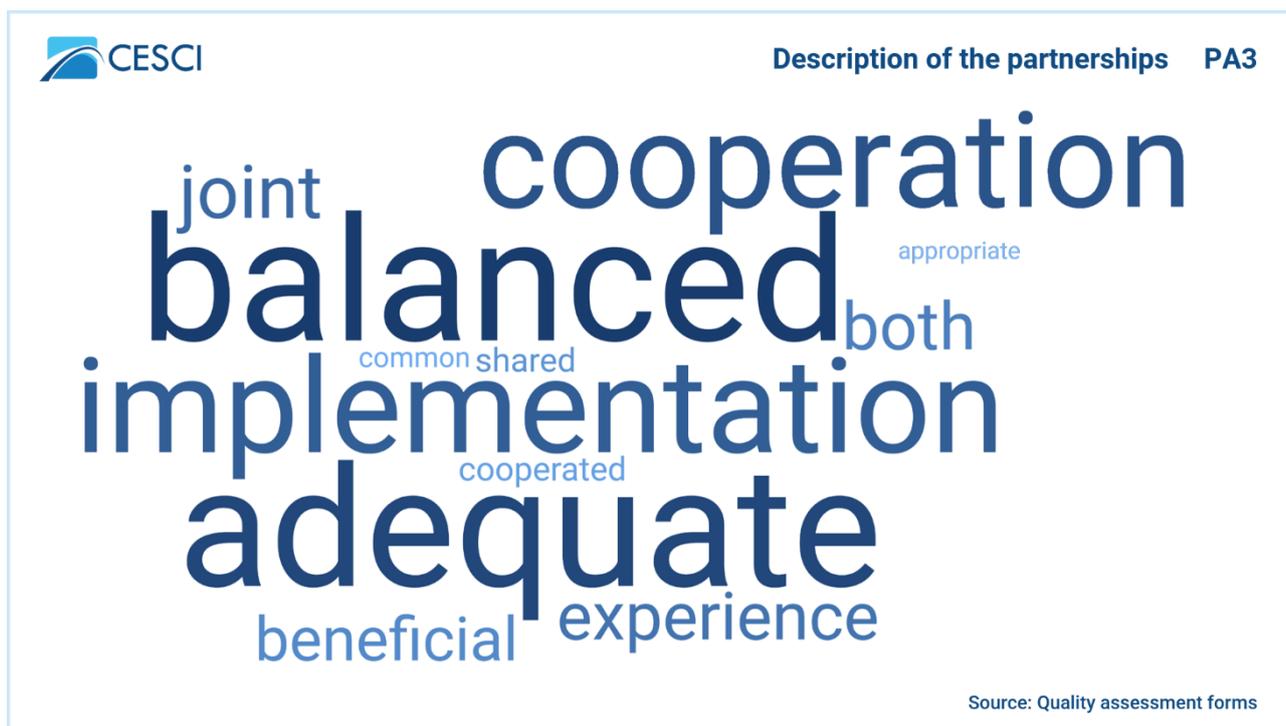


Regarding the partnership, the quality assessment comprises textual evaluation too, which were analysed by word cloud method. The output of the assessment reflects the above-introduced scores since it incorporates words such as 'balanced', 'adequate', 'beneficial', 'joint' and 'appropriate'. As partly addressed before, these expressions indicate the balanced cooperation among the partners.

The results of the questionnaire partly explain the contradiction between the outcomes of the quality assessment and the application form. In terms of the PA3, the questionnaire was filled by 37 beneficiaries concerning 32 projects, which causes some overlapping and distortion of data. 11 beneficiaries (out of 37) stated that the partnership of their projects is a new initiative without any background, while the number of respondents, who took part in a previous informal cooperation is 10. Furthermore, 12 other beneficiaries were involved in a previous IPA project, but only 4 partners are part of an institutionalised cooperation.

In conclusion, despite of the higher proportion of new cooperation initiatives compared to the first two PA, it can be stated that the quality of partnerships does not seem to risk the sustainability of the results achieved under the PA in a general term. What is more, the actions 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 supporting smaller-scale, soft projects in order to strengthen cross-border interactions, partly aims to broaden the circle of project promoters actively participating in the implementation of the programme.

Figure 113: Word cloud method visualisation of the partnership aspect (PA3)



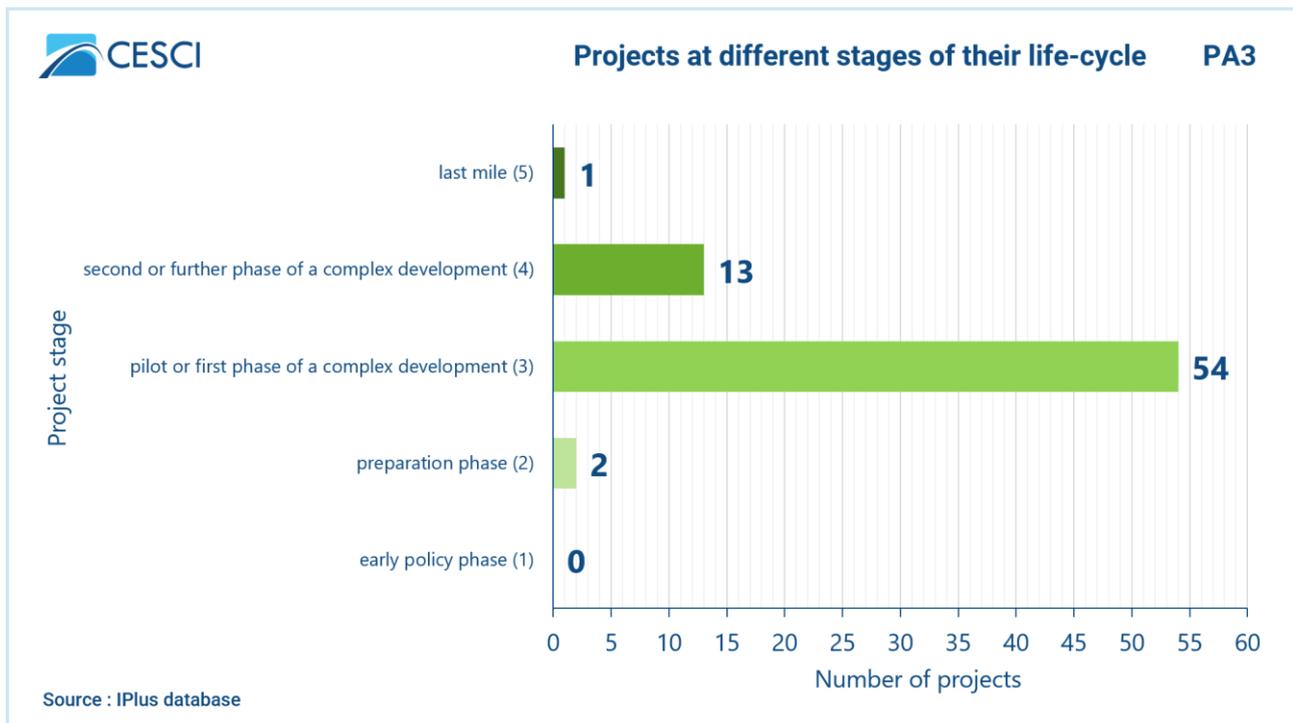
Based on the application forms, the evaluators also assessed the pattern of the **projects' life cycle**, which means a classification of projects based on the stages of implementation that they lie on. The analysis tends to reflect on the integrated approach, whether the beneficiaries initiate ad-hoc, separate projects or plan and implement long-term, synergic developments step-by-step. This difference in the local actors' mindset basically determines the durability of the projects' and programme's results.

On the basis of the project summary written by the beneficiaries in the application phase, projects were categorized into the following 5 groups:

1. early policy phase,
2. preparation phase,
3. pilot or first phase of a complex development,
4. second or further phase of a complex development,
5. last mile.

Taking into consideration that the classification is based on the project summaries which shows some quality differences, there might be some distortions in the results.

Figure 114: Life-cycle of the projects (PA3)



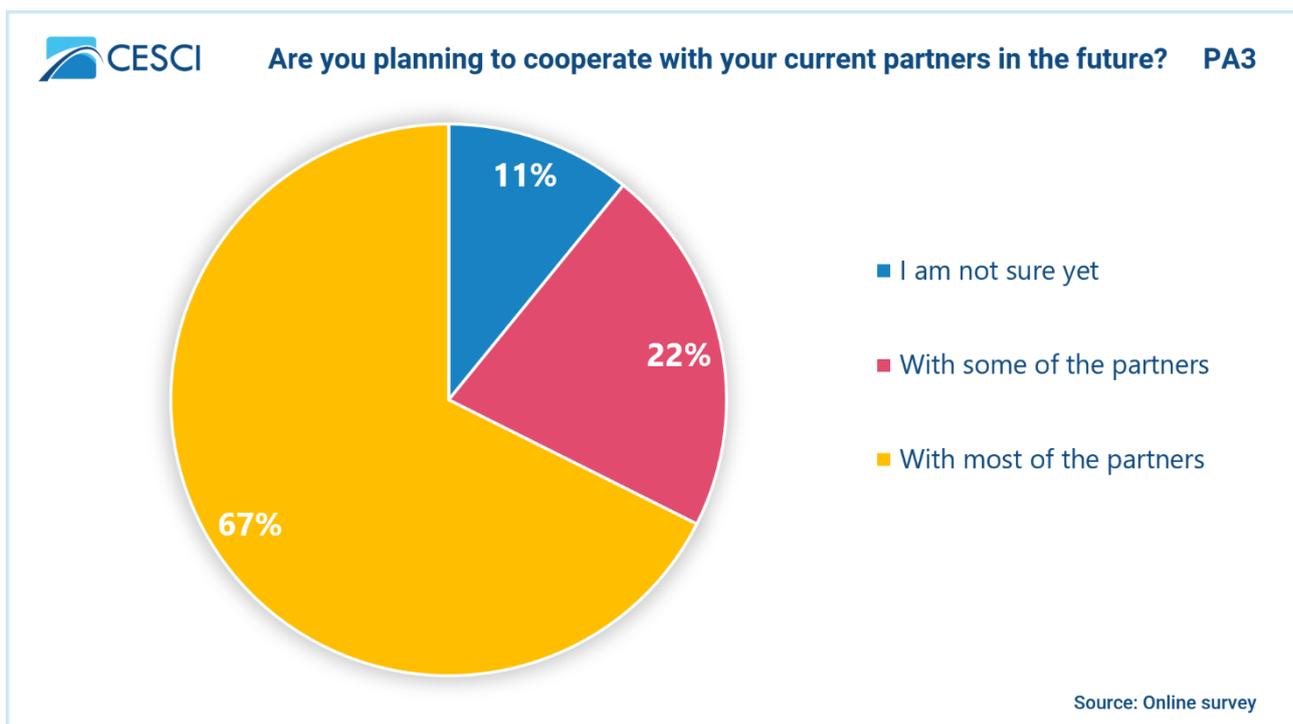
As the figure (Figure 114) shows, vast majority of the projects (54 out of the 70) were evaluated as a first phase development. At the same time, only 2 projects were found to implement only preparatory steps. These results can be mostly reasoned by the specific nature of the projects which are determined by sectoral features and the framework provided by the CfPs. On the one hand, the policy and technical preparation of even a bigger cultural and tourism development with infrastructure works do not require long preparatory phase, instead these steps can be implemented within the framework of one single project or more projects within one programming period. Furthermore, the CfPs also strengthen this time, at the same time cost-efficient feature, by requiring a complex approach integrating different kind of project elements into one project. This means for example, that the development of a cultural product must be combined with market research, and also a testing phase. As a result, the first three categories of the scale above can be covered by one project. There are several such projects and all of them were categorized to the highest possible level on the five-point scale.

Regarding the higher stages of projects' life cycle (categories 4 and 5), the smaller-scale people-to-people projects tend to be fulfilled by the mere implementation of an event, which does not absolutely necessitate to organize another event or action at a later stage. Otherwise more complex touristic or cultural developments implemented mainly under action 3.1 reached higher phases of implementation. 14 out of 70 projects are in the second or further phase, while only one was found to be in the last mile.

In the light of the questionnaire, 34 respondents out of 37 would like to continue to pursue the goals of their project in a different framework after the programme finishes (e.g. in the 2021-2027 programming period). However, the description of the manner of continuation is really diverse, since many respondents did not mention the exact financial resources only the planned activities. Altogether 8 beneficiaries underlined the importance of the IPA programme, at the same time, there

are 6 beneficiaries who mentioned the potential usage of other financial resources, for example the Creative Europe programme. The majority of these respondents do not want to substitute the IPA programme, just to complement it. According to the question about the future of the current partnership, more than half of the respondents (67%, 25 beneficiaries) intend to keep most of their partners, and only 12 beneficiaries would like to have some kind of change in the current structure of the cooperation. 22% of the respondents (8 beneficiaries) would continue the partnership only with some of the partners, while 4 respondents (11%) are not sure about the further existence of the actual cooperation.

Figure 115: Future cooperation of the beneficiaries (according to the questionnaire related to the PA3)



According to the project application forms, the **institutional sustainability** is described by the beneficiaries in the section of 'Sustainability and capitalization of project results'. However, in some cases the given answers are not fully appropriate since they are brief and not content-relevant. Furthermore, the strategic project is out of this evaluation, because this question did not form part of the application form. The contextual analysis of the descriptions was made by word cloud method which underlines the importance of partnership, communication and cooperation in favour of institutional sustainability. Among the highlighted words there are 'project partners', 'network', 'future cooperation', 'partnership', 'joint organization', 'partner institutions' and 'social media'. In terms of the descriptions three solutions are observed:

1. the methods based on the cooperation of the project partners: the durability is guaranteed by the regular activities of the involved partners and the strong cooperation between the beneficiaries (local governments, non-profit associations, tourism organisations, companies, NGOs, cultural institutions, universities and other operators and organizations). The 'network of the stakeholders', the 'high quality links', the 'cooperation between the partner institutions', the 'involvement of the partners', the 'orderly working relations', the 'common

- interest' and the 'high-standard organizational operations' make it possible to achieve the sustainability.
2. the methods based on a certain document: the creation of a certain document can be another option to preserve the project results, provide the institutional sustainability and develop a long-term professional cooperation. An official agreement can be a strong link between the partners to keep the common work and framework forward. Three projects proposed to create protocol of cooperation which can be a 'reliable platform for effective partnership' and enable to 'work closer together', while other three projects created cooperation agreement (or memorandum of cooperation) in order to strengthen the partnership and 'define the ownership of the project'. In one case the partner municipalities signed a twinning charter, but there are examples for strategic plans, marketing plans and other strategic documents as well.
 3. the methods based on certain tools: the promotion can be another solution to maintain the achieved outcomes, since the spread of the project's results make it possible to gather more actors, visitors, buyers and participants. According to the description of the application form, some beneficiaries mentioned the creation of marketing platform which remains active and permanent after the project implementation. The concept of marketing plan, branding portal, project brand, website, database, event management and tourism product development were suggested by more beneficiaries.

In some cases, the institutional sustainability was not described properly, although the texts contain some additional information about the maintenance of the results. The applicants noted the existing experience, the enough professional staff member and the voluntary work.

Figure 116: Word cloud method visualisation of the institutional sustainability aspect (PA3)



The evaluation of **financial sustainability** is supported by not just the application form, but by the questionnaire and the quality assessment too. However, the application form should provide the

main source of information, in some cases the given information is really brief and generic. There are only 18 projects which mention literally the concept of 'financial sustainability'. The word cloud method gives an overview about the most common used words in the application form, which include expressions such as 'other funds', 'financial resources', 'project partners', 'institutional structure', 'general costs', 'financial support' and 'income'.

As a result of the evaluators' examination, five approaches for providing financial sustainability were identified:

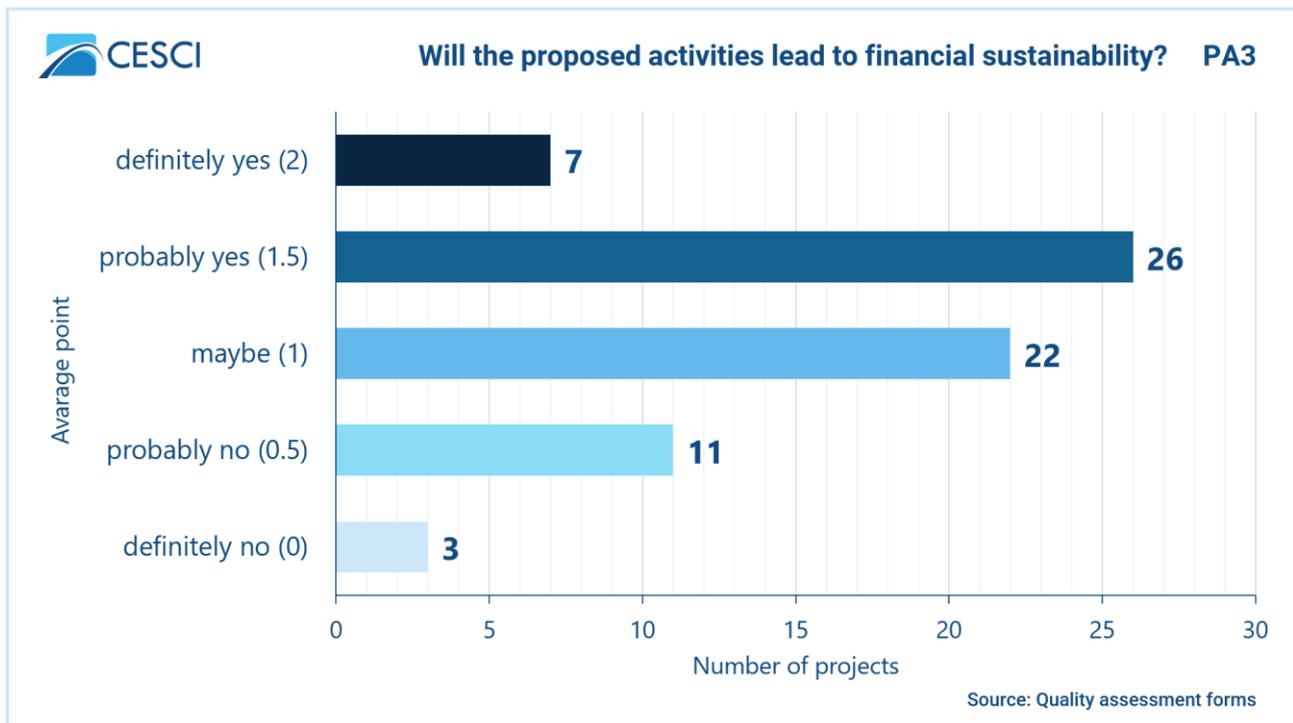
1. the sustainability is ensured individually by each or some beneficiary from own resources: the most common solution is the involvement of own public resources. The given answers are quite homogeneous as the majority of the applicants used the following formulas and phrases: 'own funding of the project partners', 'financial sustainability is assured by the local government's financial background', 'stable financial position of partners', 'own institutional budget' and 'partners are in possession of sufficient financial resources'. Two projects underline the fact that the financial sustainability is guaranteed by the lead beneficiaries and do not split it between the partners.
2. generating revenue: 11 projects highlighted that the extra incomes (from the entry tickets etc.) have a special role in the financial maintenance, since the increasing number of visitors can significantly contribute to the sustainability. This solution is one of the firmest ways to ensure the financial background of the achieved results as the development of a marketable service and/or product reduces the project's dependency from the external money.
3. involvement of other funds: In case of 8 projects, the further (future) project applications were mentioned. Besides the continuous applying, the involvement and seeking of other funds were also included in the description in order to 'continue the successful cooperation'. However, the exclusive application of this solution implies notable risk since the achievable other funds are not guaranteed that threatens the sustainability and raises the financial uncertainty. On the other hand, this approach tends to be combined with one of the other solutions listed here.
4. the sustainability is ensured by outsourcing the financial burdens: only 5 projects indicated that (instead of/beside own financial background) external financial resources have been involved. The following citations confirm this statement: 'local, provincial and state governmental funds', 'maintained by the government', 'seeking of donors and programs which supports small scale actions'.
5. the sustainability is ensured by low (or no) additional expenses: regarding the descriptions, 4 projects took note that the financial sustainability is not a concern because of the low maintenance expenditures. The cost efficiency of the output of these projects has improved due to the new energy-saving technologies – which were installed in the timeframe of the project. Additionally, there are 6 other projects which stated that no additional expenses are expected to come up during the future operation.

Figure 117: Word cloud method visualisation of the financial sustainability aspect (PA3)



In terms of the questionnaire, more than 2/3 of the respondents (25 persons out of 37) stated that their project results are financially viable after the programme closure, while 8 of the evaluated projects are not sustainable and the question is not relevant in case of 4 respondents. According to the further question – which ask the manner of the financial sustainability – only 23 answers have been received, which include 8 responses without proper description. Overall, 13 respondents achieved the financial sustainability by own resources and only 2 with external (national or EU) support. One of the applicants underlined that the financial maintenance by own resources is not a huge burden since the operation cost – owing to the lack of new infrastructure and valuable new equipment – is relatively low. However, other respondent stressed that ‘it is difficult to maintain the financial sustainability after the closure of the programme as the achieved results cannot be inverted into money, since we cannot claim rents and other charges but the usage and maintenance of the equipment generate further expenses’.

Figure 118: Financial sustainability of the projects (PA3)



Besides the applicants, the assessors also evaluated the financial sustainability of the 69 regular projects on a 3-point scale (0-2). As the figure (Figure 118) illustrates, there are only 7 projects which convinced both of the assessors and received the maximum score. The majority of the projects takes place in the middle of the scale (26 projects with 1.5 point; 22 projects with 1 point), but there are 14 projects which got 0 point from one of the assessors. It is worth mentioning, that 3 projects' sustainability was not described well and both of the assessors evaluated it by 0 point.

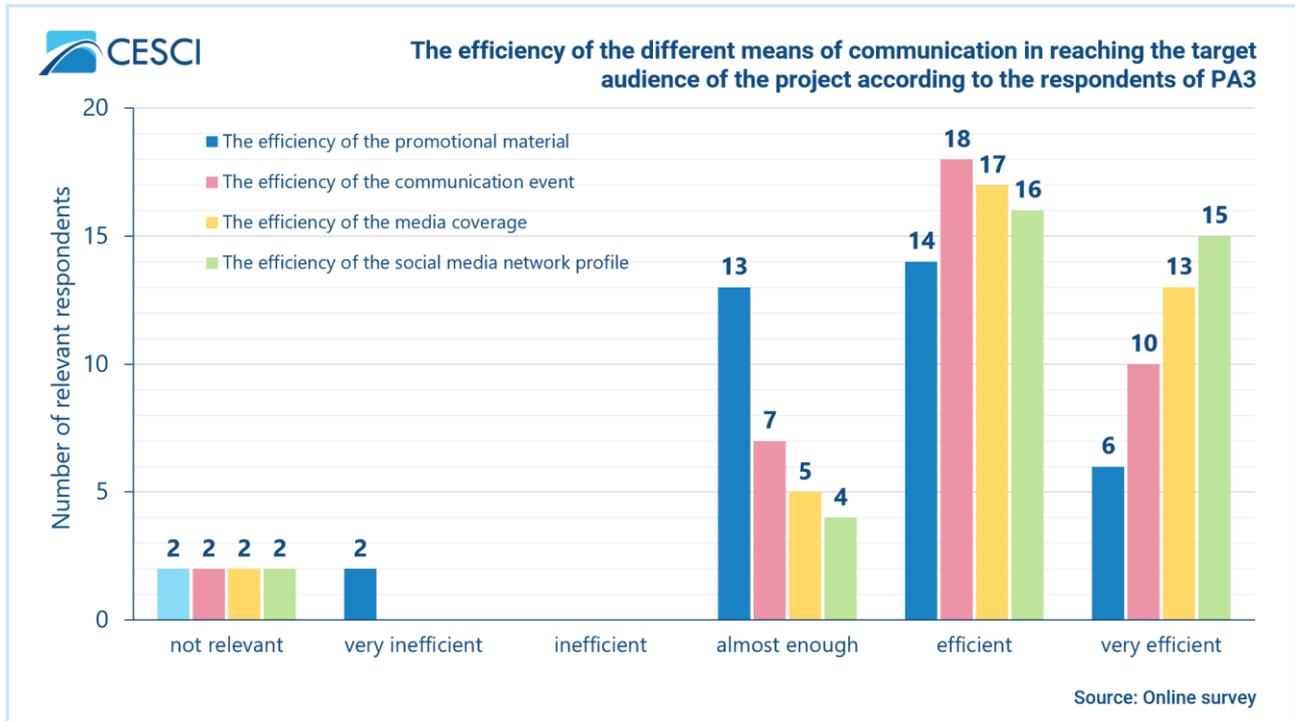
Regarding the official project follow-up period, the Joint Secretariat has a detailed criteria system taking into consideration e.g. the value of the construction/works and of equipment, to decide which projects should be chosen to provide follow-up reports in the following 5 years. Within the PA3, 15 projects (out of 41 closed ones) are obliged to prepare these reports and one of them is the strategic project.

3.3.3.6 Analysis of the impacted target groups (PA3)

The main programme documents defined the target groups for the PA3 as the tourist attraction management organisations, the enterprises interested in tourism sector, the local governments, the tourism service providers, the tourists, the inhabitants (especially young people and more specifically those who are interested in news, cultural, sport and any similar programmes and information from the border region). This PA is centred on encouraging cooperation in tourism and cultural heritage preservation and consequently the definition of the target groups seems extremely versatile.

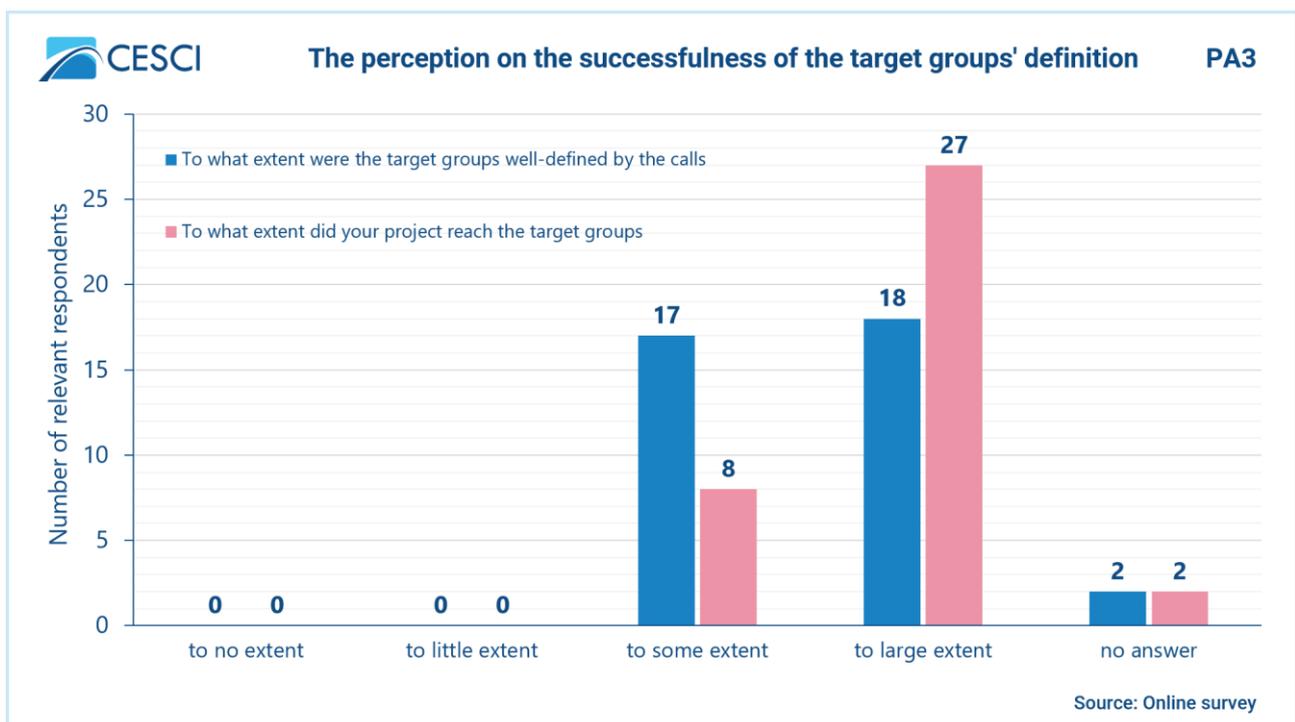
Based on the target group descriptions provided by the projects in the INTERREG+ system, the projects intended to cover a considerably colourful section of the society, with each project focusing on different segments. Some tailored their activities according to different age groups, mostly focusing either on children and young people or the elderly, other focusing on people practicing

Figure 120: The efficiency of the different means of communication in reaching the target audience of the project according to the respondents of PA3



According to the respondents of the online survey, the CfPs defined the target groups to some or to large extent in a successful way and also the projects were considered to reach their target groups in a rather favourable length; more than half of the respondent rated it the highest and the other to the second highest category, which is an almost identical result to that at the PA1 and PA2.

Figure 121: The perception on the successfulness of the target groups' definition - PA3



The regional needs and challenges that the Programme strived to solve were not relevant to the defined target groups in the same level. In order to assess how relevant these were to the target groups (which is also indicative on how well were the target groups selected) a benchmark analysis was carried out where 1 means it was not really relevant, 2 means it was relevant to some degree and 3 means that the given regional need and challenge was highly relevant to the given target group (the white squares indicate groups that were not explicitly assigned to the given challenge by the Programme). (See the table: Table 21.)

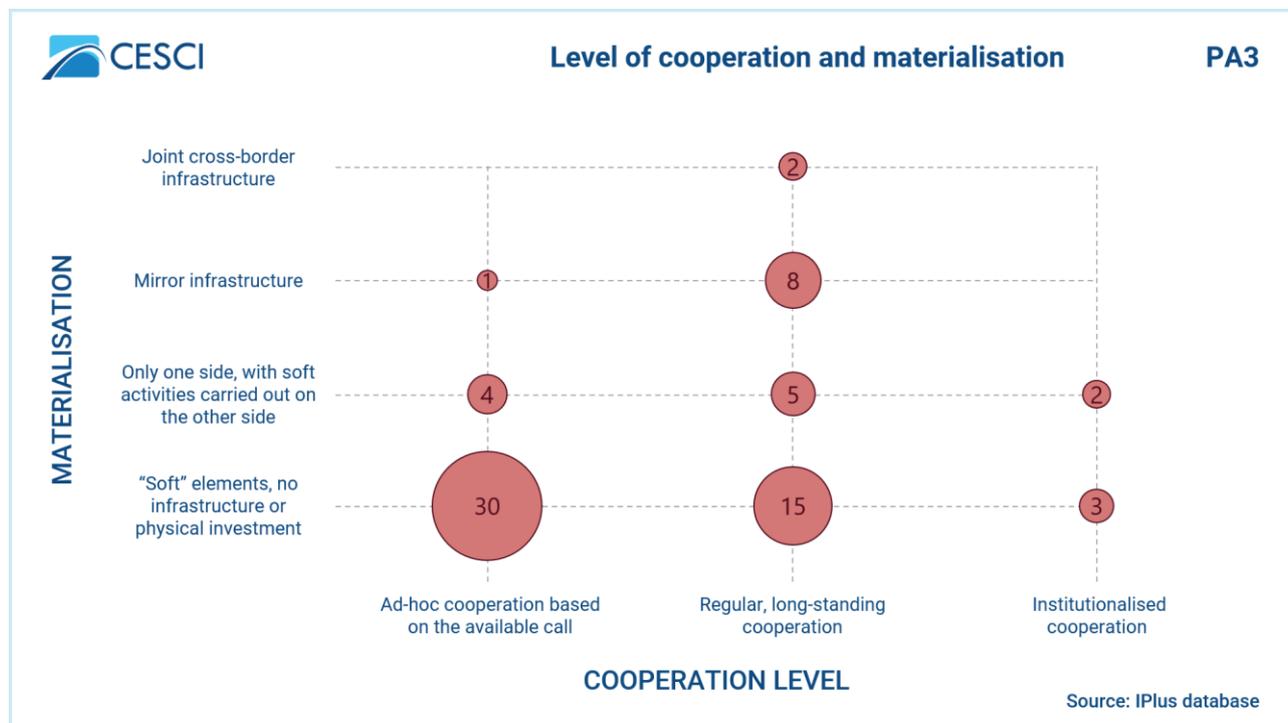
Table 46: Benchmark of the level to which the different challenges were relevant to the defined target groups in PA3

Regional needs / challenges	Defined target groups						
	Tourists	General public	Tourist attraction man. org.	Tourism service providers	Local gov.	Enterprises	Young professionals
Lack of interconnection amongst individual elements of supply	2	2	not a predefined group	1	not a predefined group	not a predefined group	not a predefined group
Limited number of joint tourism products with attractiveness for longer stays	2	2	1	not a predefined group	not a predefined group	not a predefined group	not a predefined group
Shortage of quality tourism	3	1	not a predefined group	3	not a predefined group	not a predefined group	not a predefined group
Lack of integrated regional tourism strategy	1	1	not a predefined group	2	3	2	not a predefined group
Tourism needs to contribute to a better appreciation and understanding among people	not a predefined group	2	not a predefined group	not a predefined group	not a predefined group	not a predefined group	1

3.3.3.7 Analysis of cross-border relevance (PA3)

The main purpose of the analysis is to identify the level at which the programme can be considered cross-border. We will analyse in this subchapter the projects' level of cooperation and materialisation in a cross-border sense. (The applied methodology is presented in the same chapter at the PA1.)

Figure 122: Level of cooperation and materialisation (PA3)



Regarding **the level of cooperation**, in the case of PA3 the loosest type of cooperation gained the highest shares. Almost half of the projects (35 projects) are grouped into this first category. In contrary, the strongest cooperation category has only 5 projects to be listed, which is very few. The share of Category 3 is low (7%), only the half of the share of all projects. The share of the regular, long-lasting cooperation is relatively low (43%) compared to the overall share of all projects of this Category 2. The results can be in line also with the type of actions supported in the frames of the CfPs. The high number of people-to-people type of actions tend to have less institutionalised cooperation where exchange events, joint cultural, artistic and sports programmes tend to dominate many projects formulated.

Considering the **materialisation of projects** in PA3 the values gained are rather polarised. The vast majority of projects (48 projects) can be classified as projects with soft elements where no infrastructure was realised. Their outstandingly high share (69%) is considerably above the Programme average (55%). Beside Category 1 the materialisation of the projects concerned are rather low. In descending order, the categories are as follows: Category 2 (11 projects, 16%), Category 3 (9 projects, 13%), and Category 4 (2 projects, 3%). The share for common cross-border infrastructure is half of what was measured in relation to the Programme level average. The results can be understood in the light that this PA is "inherently" less infrastructure-based. It has a less articulated material character owing to the fields of cultural, community events, sport, leisure and partly tourism. Cooperation in the field of cultural heritage does not necessary support the

construction of actual buildings and other facilities but the creation of a jointly shared border area, cultural identity and mutual trust.

With regard to PA3 soft materialisation and ad-hoc cooperation projects (30 projects, 43%), represent the highest shares owing to the less infrastructure-based character of many tourism and culture related projects carried out. This high representation of project with the lowest cross-border relevance is underlined by that the Programme level share of such project types is significantly lower, 28%. The second largest number of projects (15 projects, 21%) was carried out in the frames of soft projects by materialisation and regular, long-standing cooperation by cooperation level. The third most notable number (8 projects, 11%) of projects can be grouped into the category of mirror infrastructure with regular, long-lasting cooperation. The strategic project of Colourful Cooperation can be said that it is in the categories of 2. regular, long-standing cooperation and 3. mirror infrastructure.

3.3.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA3)

In the frames of this chapter the contribution of the related PA3 HUSRB projects to the relevant European and national level plans will be analysed. For further details on the applied methodology please read the explanation at the same chapter of PA1.

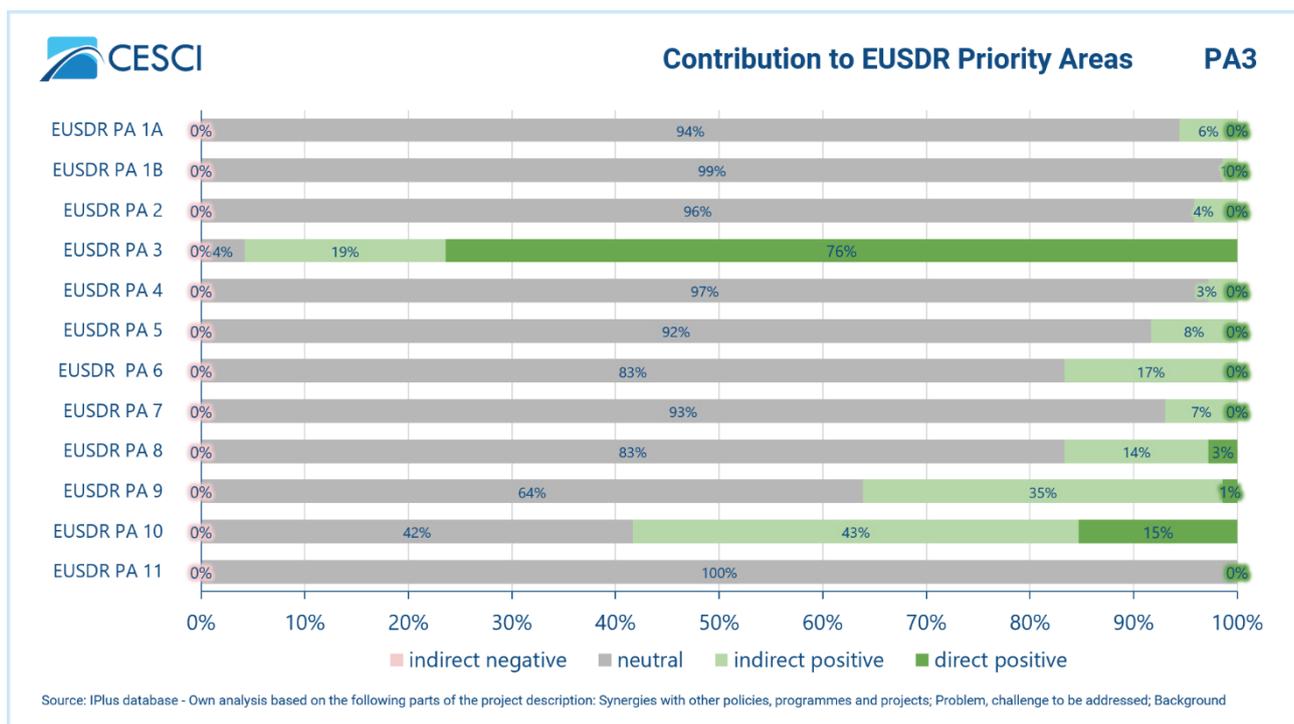
Based on what is written in the application forms by the applicants, on **EU level** numerous interconnections can be mentioned. The most frequent connections are with the Europe 2020 Strategy (17 projects mentioned it), the Horizon 2020 (6 projects), the European Disability Strategy (4 projects) and the Creative Europe (4 projects). The strongest estimated contribution can be detected in relation to culture and cultural tourism (e.g. challenge described as tourism needs to contribute to a better appreciation and understanding among people).

On **national level** projects of PA3 projects contributed to the enhancement and completion of several plans and policies from both sides. From Hungary National Tourism Development Strategy 2030 (16 projects), National Sports Strategy (7 projects), Social Renewal Operative Programme, TÁMOP, (6 projects) can be highlighted, while from Serbia Tourism Development Strategy (21 projects), the Development Programme of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (10 projects), the National Youth Strategy (7 projects) and the Marketing Strategy for Tourism of Vojvodina (7 projects) can be underlined as the most frequently mentioned ones. PA3 projects contributed to the regional needs described in the documents and policies in the case of tourism related challenges. Limited number of joint tourism products and shortage of quality tourism is addressed by the programmes and policies of national interest, as well as the lack of integrated tourism strategy. The related plans and documents also contributed to sports and youth directly, which are not associated with a direct program-named challenge. However, the documents contributed to the better appreciation and understanding among people through support for sports in Hungary in particular.

Based on the expert analysis, considering PA3, the picture is very clear taking into account the outstanding results for **EUSDR** PA 3 in particular, but also for PA 10 and partly PA 9. The rest of the non-mentioned PAs contribute to the EUSDR priorities only by small share of projects and mostly in an indirect, positive way. PA 3 Culture & Tourism is understandably the PA which is supported by far the highest share of projects. 76% of the projects (55 projects) have direct positive and 19% (14 projects) have indirect positive contribution to the EUSDR priority. The related rate is the second

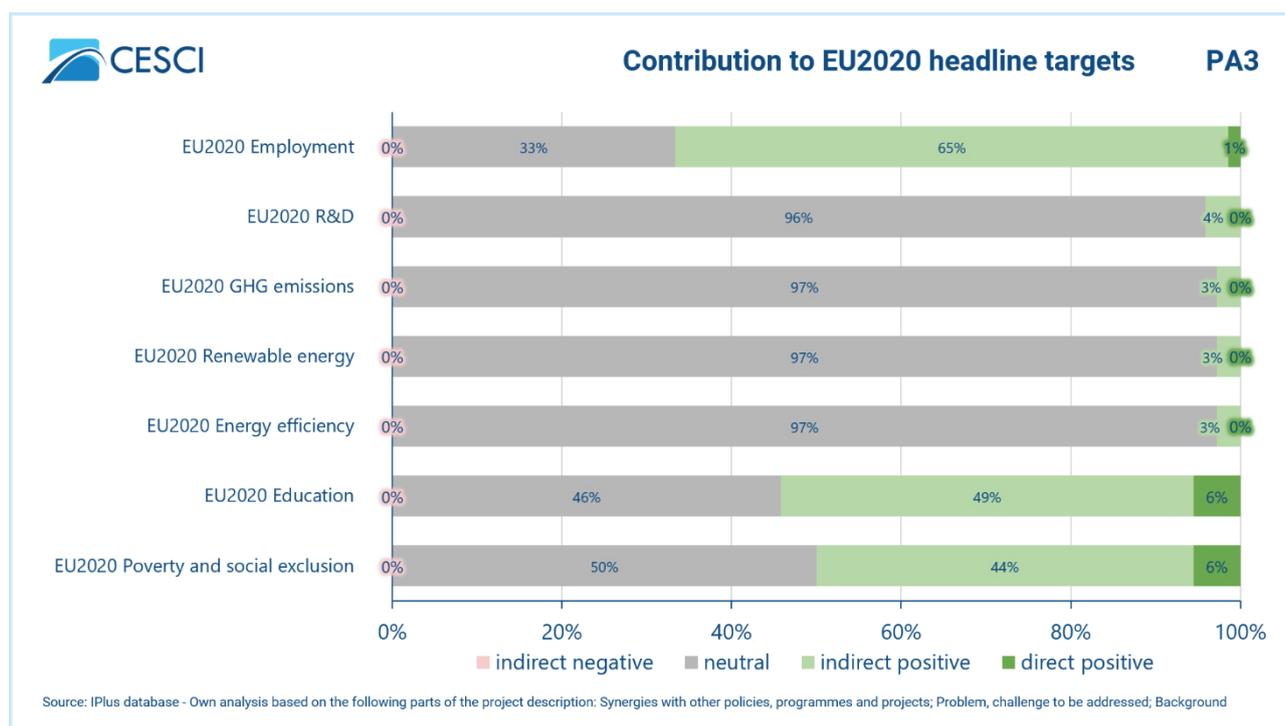
highest direct positive impact taking into account all the PAs of the Programme. PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation is supported by the second highest share of projects (58% in total) under this PA. Out of all related projects 43% (31 projects) have indirect positive, while 15% (11 projects) have direct positive impact on the EUSDR PA. The third PA worth listing here is PA 9 People & Skills, 35% of the projects (25 projects) are in line with the PA in an indirect and positive way. This relatively high share is mainly because of the projects connected to supported activities which tried to create knowledge transfer, trainings and upskilling of tourism as well as cultural stakeholders involved and targeted.

Figure 123: Contribution to EUSDR Priority Areas (PA3)



In the case of the **EU2020** targets, with regard to PA3, employment increase is supported by the highest share of projects under this PA; 65% of the projects (47 projects) contribute indirectly, and 1% (a single project) contribute directly to the employment headline target. Reduction of share of early school leavers and the increase of share of the population having completed tertiary education is supported by 49% (35 projects) of all the related projects indirectly and positively. 6% of projects directly contributed to education (4 projects). Education target is followed by the share of projects which contributed to the decrease of poverty and social exclusion; 44% of the projects (32 projects) indirectly while 6% of them (4 projects) directly positively impacted the education target. On the other hand, R&D, GHG emission, renewable energy, and energy efficiency are barely supported positively by any projects concerned.

Figure 124: Contribution to EU2020 headline targets (PA3)



3.3.3.9 Influence factors regarding the impacts (PA3)

After the introduction of the achieved results, the main influence factors will be evaluated. Besides the qualitative analysis, also a so-called influence matrix will be drafted. It will analyse the estimated contribution of different (mainstream) programmes to the fulfilment of regional needs. The applied methodology is described in the influence analysis regarding PA1.

Table 47: The most important external and internal influence factors on the impacts of the PA3

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type (external, internal factor)
COVID-19 pandemic	Crossing the borders became more difficult, more expensive and more time-consuming because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and regulations, thus cross-border tourism and cooperating activities were severely impacted in negative ways.	external
COVID-19 pandemic	The COVID-19 pandemic questioned some of the basic tenets of the open and cooperative international order. Global exchanges, international communication, cross-border interactions have all seen a vast decrease. Curfew measures and restrictions led to a forced modification or even cancelation of public events and this deeply influenced cooperation activities.	external
COVID-19 pandemic	Progress is slower than anticipated. A number of projects have been prolonged for various reasons. These projects would have required numerous events and travels; therefore, this was the PA which was mostly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.	external

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type (external, internal factor)
P2P connections	Positive impact on the connection between the local people have been realized, and this benefit seems to be preserved on a longer term. Participated organisations and groups of people have well-functioning, long-lasting partnerships by now, which can result in new cross-border projects and more cohesive people-to-people relations.	internal
Financial resource	The Serbian beneficiaries are familiar with financing sources from both national (Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue of the Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development) and provincial level (the Provincial Secretariat for Culture and Information of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, support from the Provincial Secretariat for Finances of Vojvodina). The Hungarian beneficiaries also know the resources from national level mostly apart from EU funded operational programmes: namely Bethlen Gábor Fund, National Cultural Fund (NKA). Apart from these, some mentioned the role of Creative Europe too.	external

With regard to PA3, programmes with the highest overall value which supported the impact of the given PA are Interreg programme of Serbia and Croatia, the Hungarian operational programmes of EFOP focusing on human resources, and of TOP on urban and regional developments.

Table 48: Influence effects of the different programmes on the impacts of the PA3

	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
Interreg programmes	RO-HU	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of thematic routes built around natural, historic and cultural values • Preparation of studies, strategies, plans etc. in the field of preservation, development and utilisation of cultural/natural heritage • Setting up new cross-border platforms, groupings and networks • Preservation, promotion and development of intangible cultural heritage, • Development, reconstruction and promotion of cultural facilities • Digitisation and bringing online cultural heritage, reusing the digitised cultural heritage 	RO-HU supports mainly the tourism-related needs of HUSRB. Joint products and supply were outstandingly supported. The value given reflects however the low level of support for people-to-people type of activities that would bring citizens closer together.

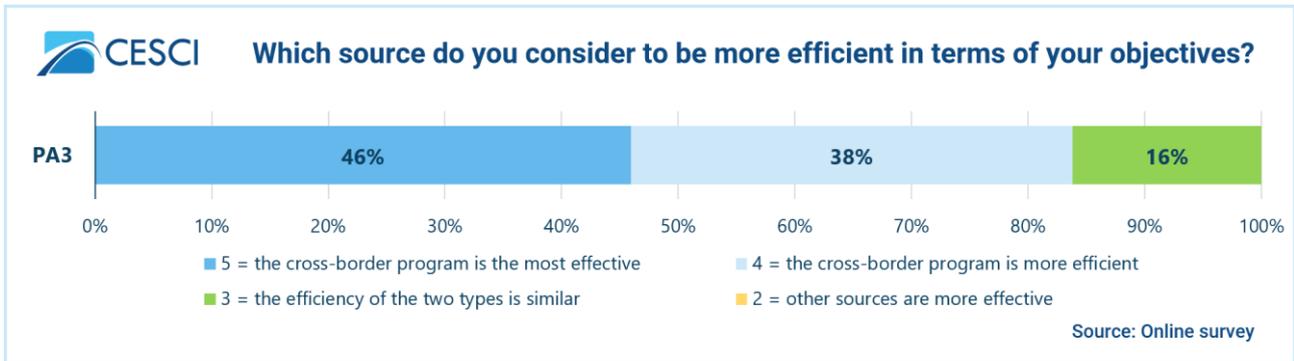
	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
	RS-BS	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preservation of cultural and historical heritage • development of local identity 	TP3 meets the needs of the population of the program region, but a smaller number of projects that are implemented include Srem (Autonomous Province of Vojvodina). They support cooperation among stakeholders and nurture cross-border culture and historical heritage. Positive impact on the inclusion of vulnerable population groups in cultural events.
	RS-HR	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing new wildlife and ecotourism programs • development of cultural facilities and services • inclusion of persons with visual impairment and blindness • development of rural tourism products and services • promoting traditional food and handicrafts • improving the knowledge and skills of service providers in tourism 	PA3 (TP4) it greatly contributed to connecting people, culture and tradition. Created numerous businesses, improved the quality of life of residents. Additional values of tangible and intangible heritage were created.
Hungarian operative programmes	EFOP	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • youth programmes • cooperation between generations • strengthening of family ties • learning foreign languages • integration of the Roma people • development of cultural facilities and services 	EFOP turned out to be an important programme. Many CFPs of it reflected the identified regional needs and need CESC analysed newly. Little attention was paid on tourism-related matters.
	GINOP	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of water tourism 	Only water tourism was addressed. Despite the theme of GINOP, only few projects were realized which supported tourism within the programme area in Hungary.
	KEHOP	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of solar energy systems • energetic modernization of buildings 	Sources were allocated to the given projects, but weak thematic connection with the intervention logic of the PA can be found.

	Programmes	Impact on PA3	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
	Public Administration and Public Service Development Operational Programme (KÖFOP)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attitude formation related to energy awareness 	Sources were allocated to the given projects, and they supported PA3-relevant actions and needs of cooperation in nature protection.
	TOP	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of cultural facilities and services complex programmes on social cooperation development of local identity elderly care, day care 	Various actions and needs are tackled by TOP, however the intensity of support is high only in the case of development of culture. Development of identity had a regional aspect too.
	VP	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of rural tourism products and services 	The development has high thematical relevance, but it could have been more intense. Local developments were common.
Serbian national programmes	Annual program of the Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> support for non-agricultural activities, rural tourism development of local identity 	A small number of projects with insignificant budget. One Cfp is published annually.
	Annual program of the Provincial secretariat for economy and tourism	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of rural tourism products and services development of tourist potential through the acquisition of equipment 	Lack of strategic management of the region's tourism potential. Individual projects are implemented, without any form of association and joint performance on the market (except maybe wine tourism).
Other programmes	ERASMUS +	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> learning foreign languages exchange of best practices in working with young people reconciliation in the region 	A significant number of realized projects, but many of them represent the implementation of activities in cooperation with countries that are not neighbouring ones (e.g. Germany, Spain, France, Malta)

In the followings the survey will be analysed from the point which programmes contributed and how to the impacts of the CP. The question that will be analysed: which source do you consider to be

more efficient in terms of your objectives? PA3 projects received the highest shares for the joint categories of 5 and 4. It means 83.8% of the respondents agreed that the CBC programme is definitely more effective than any other sources in supporting the actions and activities concerned. PA3 received outstanding results in terms of category 5, therefore this PA got the best results out of the four. 45.9%. Understandably no answers expressed that other sources are more effective.

Figure 125: Which source do you consider to be more efficient in terms of your objectives?



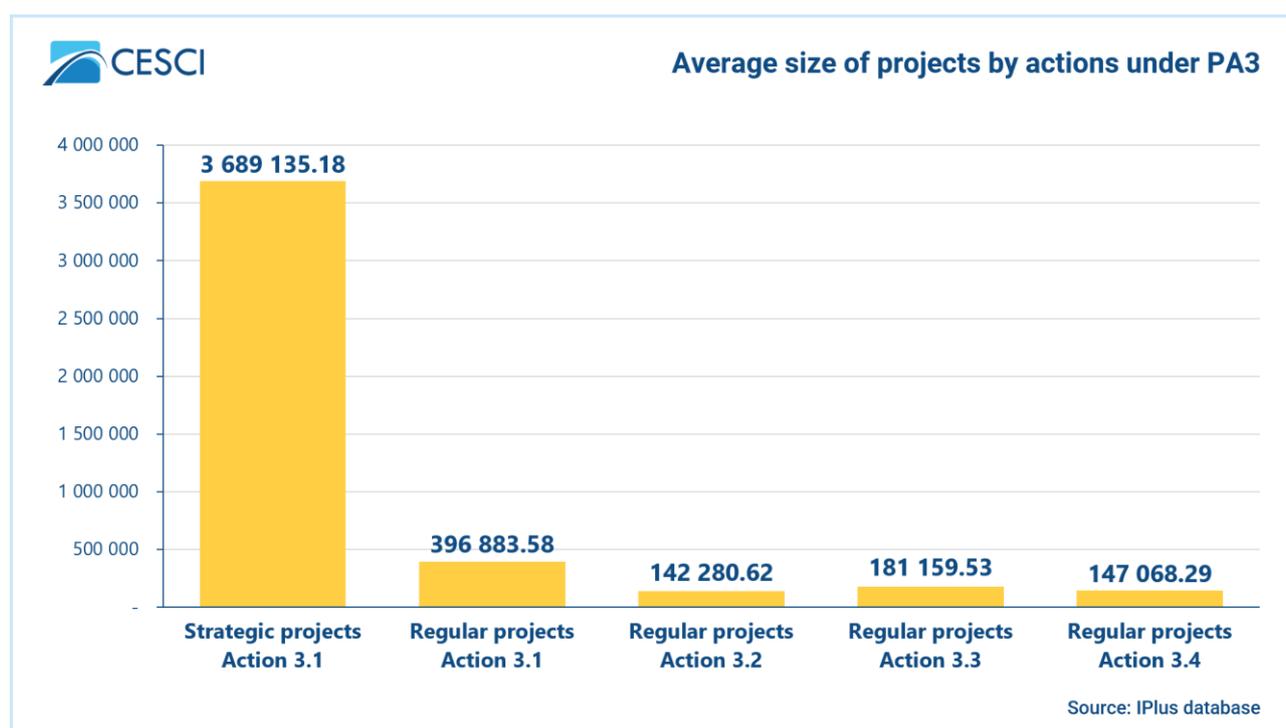
3.3.4 Efficiency analysis (PA3)

This chapter aims to give an overview on the cost efficiency of reaching the objectives and target values of the selected indicators by analysing the projects' budget and the specific features of budget allocations. Within the framework of PA3, evaluators have conducted the examination by actions⁶⁸ defined by the CfPs and by project type in order to avoid the distortion effect of the strategic projects.

The average size of the projects was assessed from a financial point of view. Apart from the one strategic project, there is also a significant difference between the average value of the regular projects under action 3.1 and those under the other three actions. This can be reasoned by the fact that actions 3.2-3.4 have focused on cross-border activities with similar, relatively simple features (mainly event organisation), while action 3.1 called for more complex developments with both hard and soft elements.

Taken into account the previous 2007-2013 programming period, the average project size on programme level was 281 535.88 EUR which is very close to that of the regular projects under PA3 (238 231.33).

Figure 126: Average size of projects by actions under PA3



The cost efficiency of the achievement of the targeted and achieved indicator values have been assessed based on the aggregated amount of the allocated EU funding. The table below (*Table 49*)

⁶⁸ Actions under PA3:

- 3.1 Tourist products, services and attractions based on cultural and natural heritage
- 3.2 Cooperation in the fields of cultural, community events, sport, leisure, nature protection
- 3.3 Cooperation in the fields of cultural and community events
- 3.4 Cooperation in the fields of sport, leisure and minor actions related to nature protection

aims to indicate what have already been and can be achieved by the end of the programming period from the programme support in terms of the project output indicators. Regarding the methodology of the analysis, since the projects selected during the third CfP are still in progress, the evaluators aggregated both the achieved and targeted value of the output indicators and the total budget (the validated amounts of the closed projects and the planned ones for the on-going) of the related projects. Then we calculated the cost of achievement of one measurement unit of the certain indicators.

In line with these, in case of *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* the achieved value means that 12 509.1 EUR ERDF funding needed for organizing one cross-border event, which is expected to be decreased to 8 594.38 EUR by the end of the programming period.

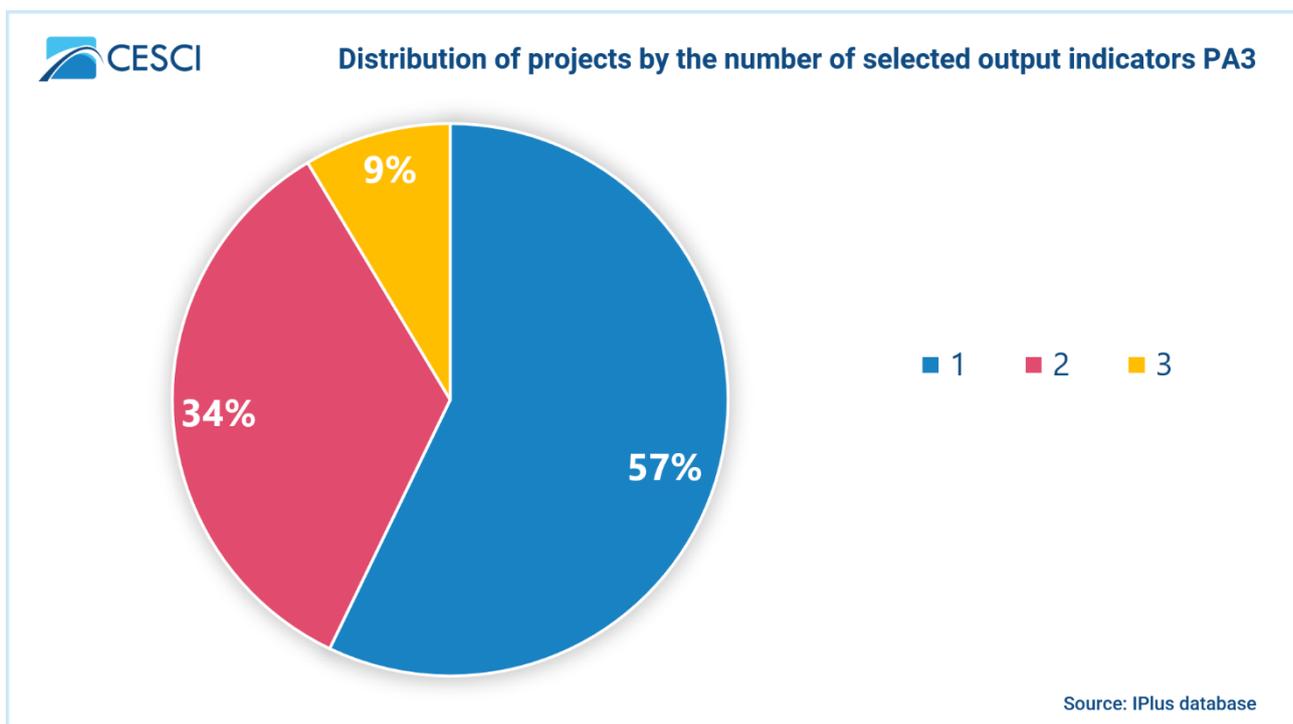
Table 49: Achieved and target indicator values by output indicators under PA3

Indicator ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Baseline value	Aggregated achieved value (AIR 2021)	Aggregated target value	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
OI/3.1	Number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	visits/year	6 285 639.5	36 748.00	189 772.00	109 811.00	41.08	86.03
OI/3.2	Number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised	events	9 556 955.42	9.00	773.00	1 121.00	12 509.1	8594.38
OI/3.3	Average monthly user entries to online communication tools developed	user entries	1 235 280.08	500.00	381 560.53	87 250.00	3.24	14.24

Within the PA, 24 projects targeted 2, while 6 projects did 3 output indicators. In these cases, in order to avoid distortion, evaluators made an attempt to divide the total amount of the EU funding between the indicators. The division was carried out based on the explanation of the applicants concerning the way of targeting the particular indicators in the application phase and the detailed budget of the projects uploaded to the Interreg+. In the case of the activities targeting *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* and 3.3, the main budget items (e.g. costs of event organization or those of IT development and social media campaign) were allocated to the external

budget lines which make them relatively easily identifiable. In addition, the directly related costs of public procurement, internal staff cost (staff dedicated to PR, event organization or database development for IT purposes), travel and accommodation expenses of the events' participants, communication costs, as well as equipment costs (e.g. server for IT tool) were also taken into consideration as far as the description of the budget items, made by the applicants, made this possible. In case of 7 projects altogether, the evaluators could not find the way for any division, therefore in these cases calculations were made for each targeted indicator based on the total amount of EU funding.

Figure 127: Distribution of projects by the number of selected output indicators PA3



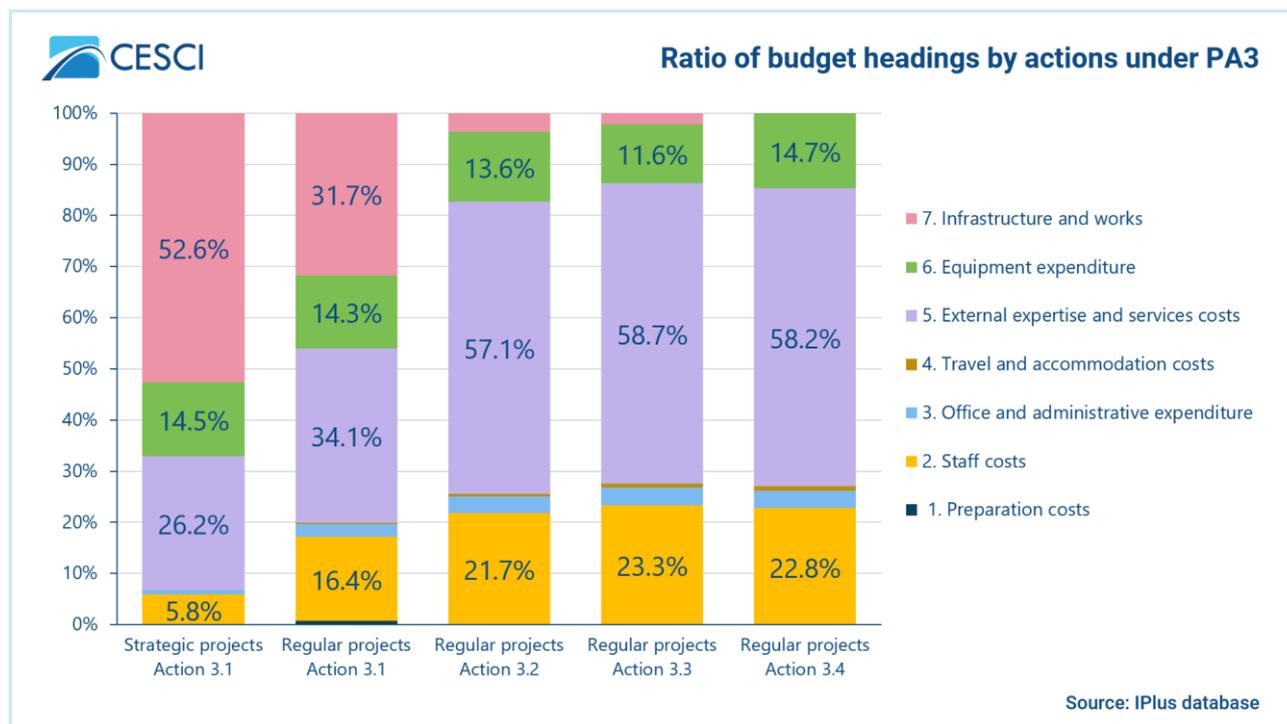
The calculated specific values of the indicators can be hardly evaluated in absolute term, instead it is worth comparing them to the results of the same or similar calculations from the previous programming periods or of other CBC programmes. Since this approach had not been applied in the 2007-2013 or any previous programming period in the Hungary-Serbia Interreg framework, we made an attempt to use the results of other programmes during the comparison.

In case of the Slovakia - Hungary and Hungary – Croatia Interreg V-A Programmes, a similar methodology was applied for the first phase evaluation of the programmes. *OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites* was targeted by both programmes, in addition *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events* did by the Slovakia – Hungary Programme. For *OI/3.1 Visits of supported sites*, the calculated values are 94.76 EUR and 561.49 EUR per visit/year in the order of listing above compared to the 32.53 EUR achieved value of the HUSRB programme. Regarding *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events*, the cost of one cross border event was calculated as 11 846 EUR in case of the Slovakia-Hungary border region, which is close to the achieved value of the analysed programme (12 742.09 EUR), but significantly higher than the targeted one (8 786.47 EUR). When assessing the varying extent of differences, it should be considered that the values of the other programmes were calculated in the middle of the programming period, when only some parts of the

total programme budgets were allocated. However, the results of the second phase evaluations have not been available yet.

The next aspect of the cost efficiency assessment is the analysis of the share of budget allocations to the particular budget headings. Considering the different status of the projects, in case of the administratively closed ones the validated budgets were taken into account, while for the on-going projects evaluators used the planned amounts as the basis for the calculation.

Figure 128: Ratio of budget headings by actions under PA3



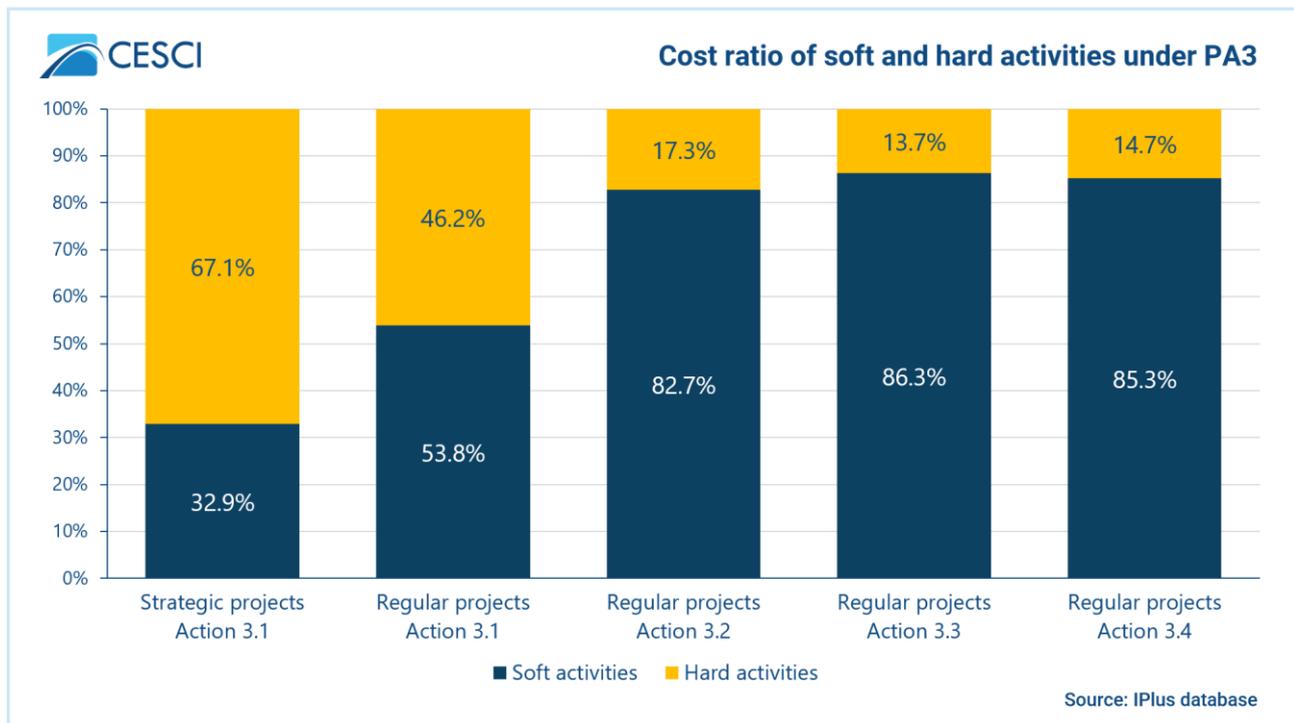
The chart (Figure 128) confirms the similar nature of projects under actions 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4, at the same it reflects on the different features of the projects targeting action 3.1 compared to them. Under action 3.1 much greater emphasis are given to infrastructure developments, which is extremely valid for the strategic project. In this latter case, the high share of hard elements can be reasoned by the special features of the strategic approach.

Taking into consideration only the projects containing infrastructure developments, the ratio of soft and hard activities is illustrated by the following chart (Figure 129). According to the applied methodology budget headings of 'Equipment expenditure', 'Infrastructure and works', as well as under the 'Preparation costs' the items on budget line 'Purchase of land' were taken into consideration as costs of hard activities. All the remaining budget lines forms part of the cost ratio of soft activities. Regarding the figures, it can be stated that under action 3.1, applicants implementing construction works allocated vaguely two-third of their budgets to infrastructure-related activities either in case of the strategic or regular projects. On the other hand, it should be noted that only 9 out of the 25 regular projects dealt with (re-)construction works, the further ones focused on soft activities. In addition, action 3.4 did not support infrastructure related measures, while in the case of action 3.2 and 3.3, two and three projects out of the 21 and 12 contained such hard activities, where the value of the related budget items form about one-third of the total budget.

In line with the aims of the CfPs, these projects basically give priority to those soft activities which strengthen the people-to-people and professional relations across borders.

Comparing this value to that considering all projects (not just with infrastructure development) under PA3, the share of soft activities is more significant, since there are many regular projects which do not have any infrastructural work, even if they possess notable amount of equipment expenditure. Under action 3.1 more than half of the allocated money (53.8%) was spent to soft activities, and in the case of the other three actions the ratio of the soft activities is above 80%.

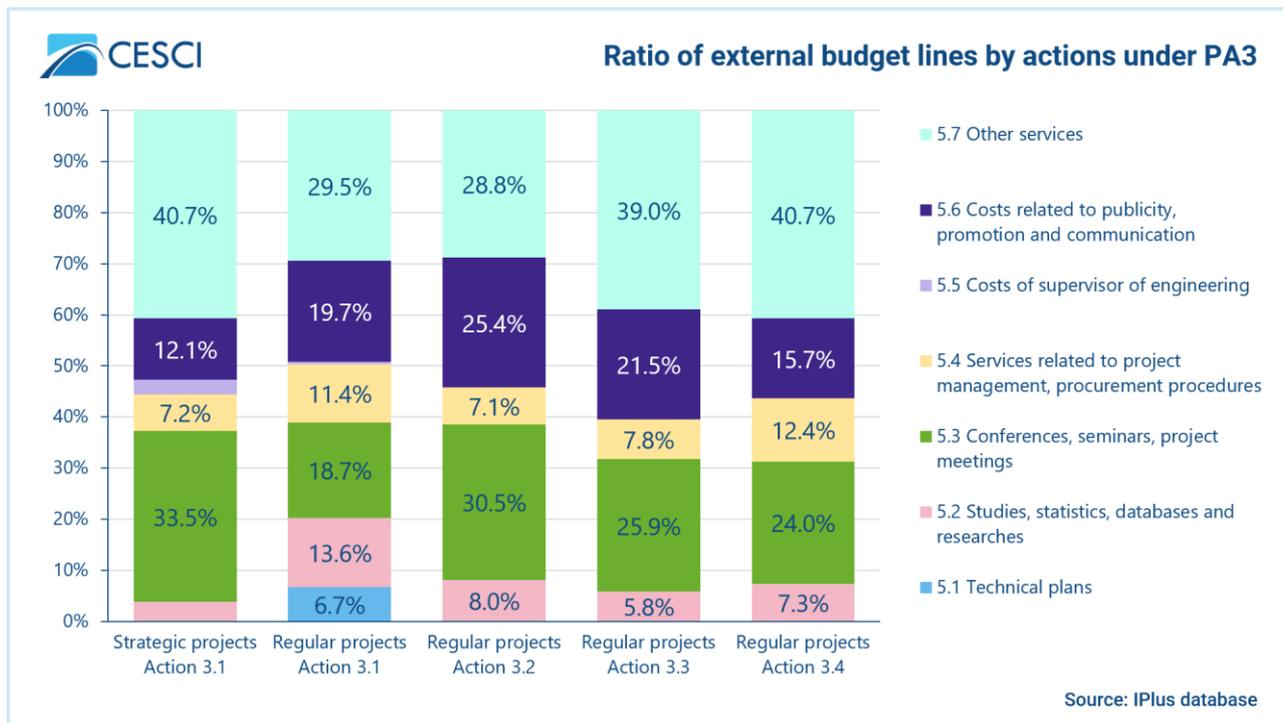
Figure 129: Cost ratio of soft and hard activities under PA3



In general, the share of equipment expenditure even in case of the mentioned softer actions is notable. Under actions 3.2-3.4, the related costs items basically cover the procurement of such equipment which are necessary to the organization of cultural, leisure, sport community events. This approach of the programme lead to the capacity-building of local stakeholders, which could provide the long-term framework for their role in building and strengthening cross-border relations and interactions in the field.

Regarding the ratio of soft budget headings (*Figure 129*), the highest shares are allocated to external services and staff cost. In terms of cost-efficiency it is crucial to analyse the details of outsourced activities, taking into account the external service needs of the project activities, such as communication, event organization and translation/interpretation, which are partly and unavoidably generated by the nature of the cultural, tourism, sport sectors and the cross-border approach itself.

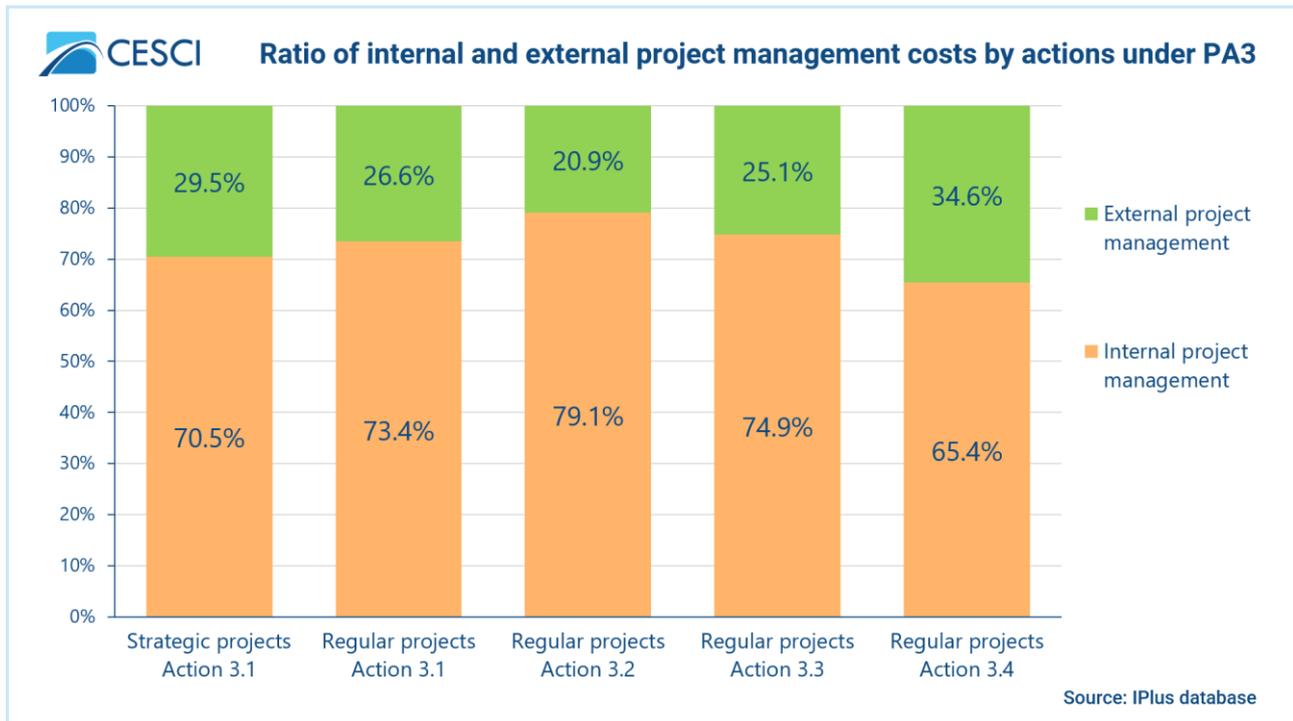
Figure 130: Ratio of external budget lines by actions under PA3



The high share of event organization (above 18%) and publicity costs (above 12%) seems to be reasonable in light of the requirements of the CfPs, but the figure (*Figure 130*) shows that the highest amounts are dedicated to the 'Other services' budget line. Further analysing the cost items on this budget line, IT expenditures (development websites, platforms, mobile apps, etc.), translation and interpretation costs related to professional events and the IT tools have a major share, together with photography services and the fees of artists and speakers. At the same time, there are several projects which allocated funding to costs of event organization and program development, which may question the appropriate human capacity of the concerned applicants and raise the risk of losing the necessary expertise after the project closure, leading to the unsustainability of the results. 'Studies, statistics, databases and researches' budget lines cover mainly the expenses of surveys among the target groups, market analysis and databases for the IT tools, which intend to corroborate the durability and social sustainability of the project results.

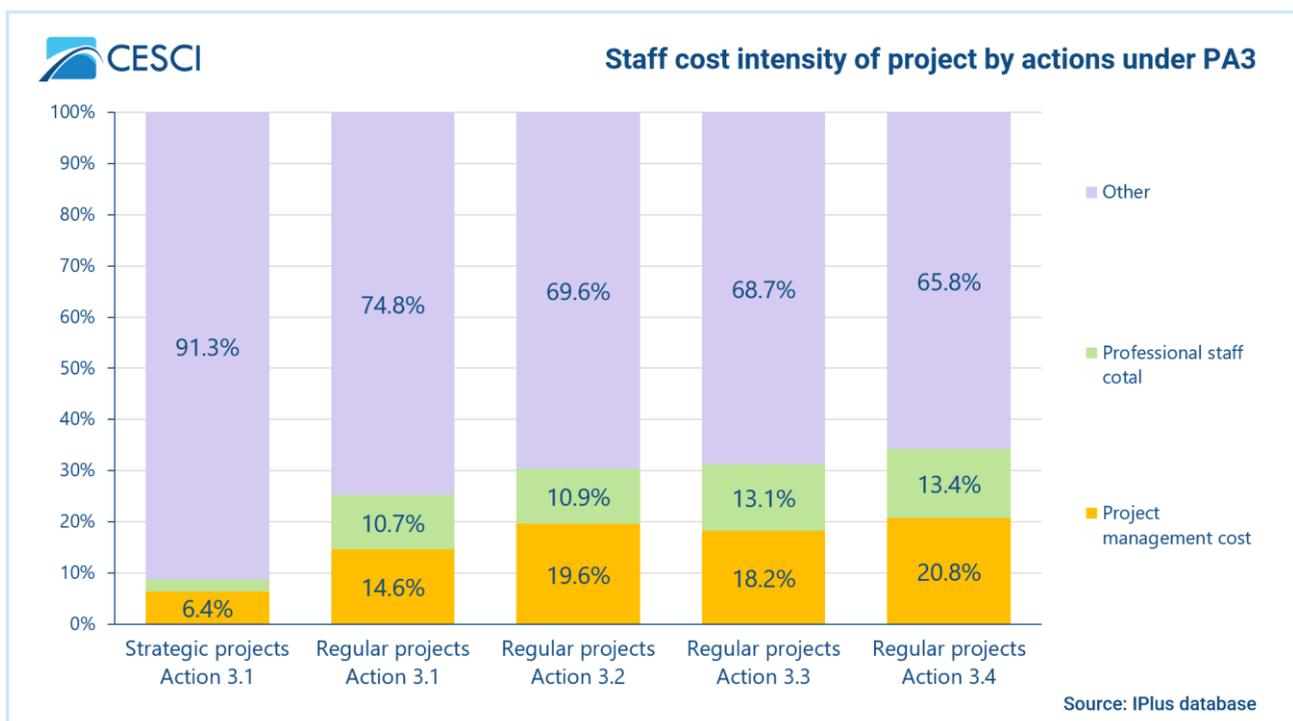
In terms of the budget line 5.4, 'Services related to project management, procurement procedures', the majority of the budget allocations cover the expertise on the obligatory PraG procedure, which – considering the complexity of the related rules and the high share of procured services and goods – seems to be reasonable.

Figure 131: Ratio of internal and external projects management costs by action under PA3



Analysing this aspect from another point of view, the chart below illustrates the ratio of internal and external project management cost allocations. As the figure (*Figure 131*) shows, the ratios of external management range between 20% and 35%, which can be evaluated as proportionate. The share of project management costs (including both internal and external items) compared to the total budget are 6.4% for the strategic project and around 20% for the regular ones which are ordinary.

Figure 132: Staff cost intensity of projects by actions under PA3



When analysing the budget allocation to the certain budget lines, evaluators experienced that in most of the cases, applicants tend to not demarcate the project management and professional tasks from each other as clearly as it was done in the projects of the PA1 or PA2. Therefore, evaluators assessed the total staff cost intensity of the projects, which is illustrated on the figure above (*Figure 132*). In the strategic project less than 10% of the total budget was allocated to internal (budget heading 2. 'staff cost') and external staff cost (budget lines 1.4, 5.2 both standing for 'Studies, statistics, databases and researches' and 5.4 'Services related to project management, procurement procedures'), while regarding the four regular projects' categories, the share of external and internal staff costs is between 25% and 35%.

3.4 Evaluation of PA 4 (Enhancing SMEs' economic competitiveness through innovation-driven development)

Detailed performance, impact and efficiency evaluation of the PA4.

3.4.1 Short introduction of the PA4's intervention logic

In this short subchapter the intervention logic of PA4 is presented in order to show at the very beginning of the evaluation what was the aim of the programme with the given PA. The following figure (*Figure 133*) shows the intervention logic of PA4, whose purpose is to summarise the main features of the PA worth being aware of before understanding the main results and recommendations of the evaluation.

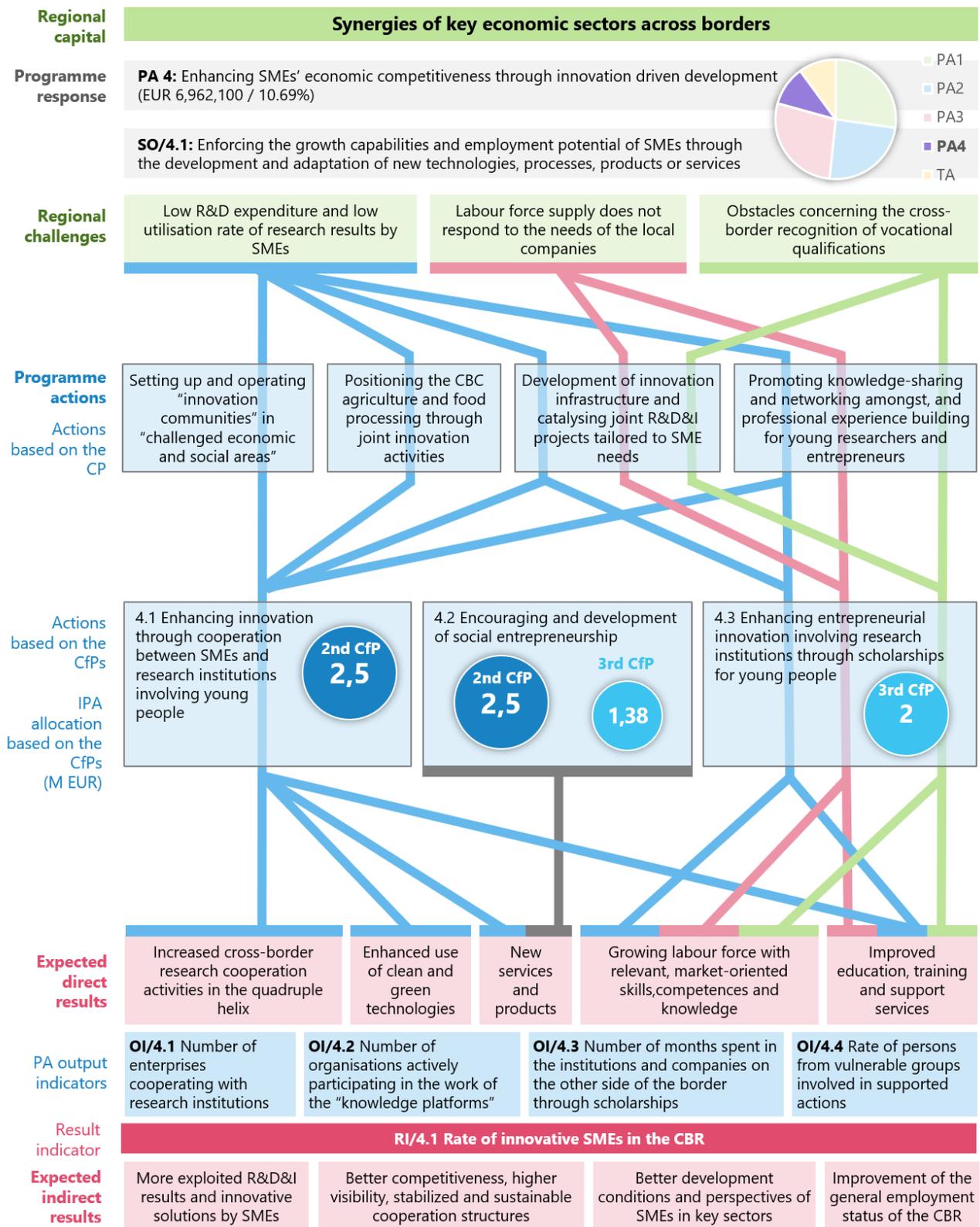
Synergies of key economic sectors across borders, were identified as the regional capital of PA4, which covers the enhancement of SME's economic competitiveness through innovation driven development. The programme allocated an amount of 6 962 100 EUR, 10.69% of the total budget to this PA. As a response the PA is connected to the specific objective of enforcing the growth capabilities and employment potential of SMEs through the development and adaptation of new technologies processes, products or services. In the frames of PA4 and SO/4.1 the programme tries to contribute to three regional challenges, namely:

- low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results by SMEs,
- labour force supply does not respond to the needs of the local companies,
- obstacles concerning the cross-border recognition of vocational qualifications.

To tackle the challenges the programme formulated four distinct actions, of which the first two was aggregated within the Calls for Proposals into Action 4.1 Enhancing innovation through cooperation between SMEs and research institutions involving young people. The latter two programme actions based on the CP were divided between the aforementioned Action 4.1 and Action 4.3 Enhancing entrepreneurial innovation involving research institutions through scholarships for young people. Action 4.2 Encouraging and development of social entrepreneurship was not deriving from the programme actions clearly. PA4 had a specific situation since the actions were not touched by the 1st CfP. In the frames of the 2nd CfP Action 4.1 with a total budget of 2.5 M EUR and Action 4.2 with 2.5 M EUR was touched. The 3rd CfP had supported actions connected to Action 4.2 and Action 4.3 with 1.38 M and 2 M EUR contributions. The largest action based on the total IPA allocation was 4.2 with a total amount of 3.88 M EUR.

From Action 4.1 expected direct results included all the expectations set up: increased cross-border research cooperation activities in the quadruple helix; enhanced use of clean and green technologies; new services and products; growing labour force with relevant, market-oriented skills, competences and knowledge; improved education, training and support services, of which the first two expected exclusively from Action 4.1. The rest are shared with other actions, the new services and products is shared with Action 4.2, while the last two are common with Action 4.3.

Figure 133: Intervention logic of the PA4



Four output indicators were named; the first two are related to Action 4.1 and 4.3, the third one is in line with Action 4.3, and the last one is connected to Action 4.2. A single result indicator was identified to grasp the results of the programme: rate of innovative SMEs in the cross-border region. Apart from direct results, four additional indirect results should be achieved by the identified programme

actions such as more exploited R&D&I results and innovative solutions by SMEs; better competitiveness, higher visibility, stabilized and sustainable cooperation structures; better development conditions and perspectives of SMEs in key sectors; and improvement of the general employment status of the cross-border region.

According to the figure (*Figure 133*) especially the challenge about R&D is addressed more widely by numerous Programme actions. There is an exceptional part of the intervention figure; Action 4.2 Encouraging and development of social entrepreneurship is not directly linked to any Programme actions and no such related challenge was pointed out.

3.4.2 Performance evaluation (PA4) (Implementation progress)

3.4.2.1 Quantification of the performance (PA4)

Within PA4, only two calls for proposals were published, since the first (strategic) CfP did not concern the SME development. The 2nd and 3rd CfPs planned to provide 8.38 million EUR IPA funding for traditional projects under the three actions of the PA. 46% of this planned amount were dedicated to action 4.2 'Encouraging and development of social entrepreneurship' – which was embedded into both of the mentioned calls for proposals –, mainly within the 2nd one. The budget frames of the other actions were balanced, both of them were around 2 million EUR. The following table (*Table 50*) contains the details of each CfP.

Table 50: Allocations of the targeted actions under PA4

CfP ID	Open or restricted	Open period	Targeted actions	Planned IPA allocation to the projects under the respective action	Available IPA grant amount per project
HUSRB/1602	open	October 3, 2016 – January 31, 2017	4.1 Enhancing innovation through cooperation between SMEs and research institutions involving young people	2 500 000 EUR	200 000 – 400 000 EUR
			4.2 Encouraging and development of social entrepreneurship	2 500 000 EUR	50 000 – 200 000 EUR
HUSRB/1903	open	June 1, 2019 – September 30, 2019	4.2 Encouraging and development of social entrepreneurship	1 380 000 EUR	75 000 – 200 000 EUR
			4.3 Enhancing entrepreneurial innovation involving research institutions through scholarships for young people	2 000 000 EUR	200 000 – 750 000 EUR

Regarding the quantification of the performance of PA4, the total **number of applications under PA4 was 123**, from which only 27 applications (27%) were contracted and the biggest part of the applications (90 applications; 73%) fell into rejected status. Most of the rejected applications were dismissed because of quality issues (69 applications; 56%), whereas 21 applications (17%) had some kind of formal problems. Taking into account the applications per CfPs, it is apparent that under the 1st CfP there were no PA4-related applications, since this PA did not contain any strategic projects. The majority of the applications (72%; 89 units) belonged to the 2nd CfP, meanwhile the 3rd CfP covered 34 applications (28%). According to the distribution of the applications by status, in the relevant CfPs the ratio of contracted applications was below 30% (1st CfP: 19.1%; 2nd CfP: 29.4%). On the other hand, the ratio of rejected applications because of quality issues was above 40% (1st CfP: 61.8%; 2nd CfP: 41.2%) and those with formal issues less than 25% (1st CfP: 14.6%; 2nd CfP: 23.5%). The originally contracted IPA amount under PA4 is 7 103 363.37 EUR, which means that the projects overcontracted by 141 263.37 EUR compared to the 4th version of the CP.

Figure 134: Number of PA4 applications per CfPs

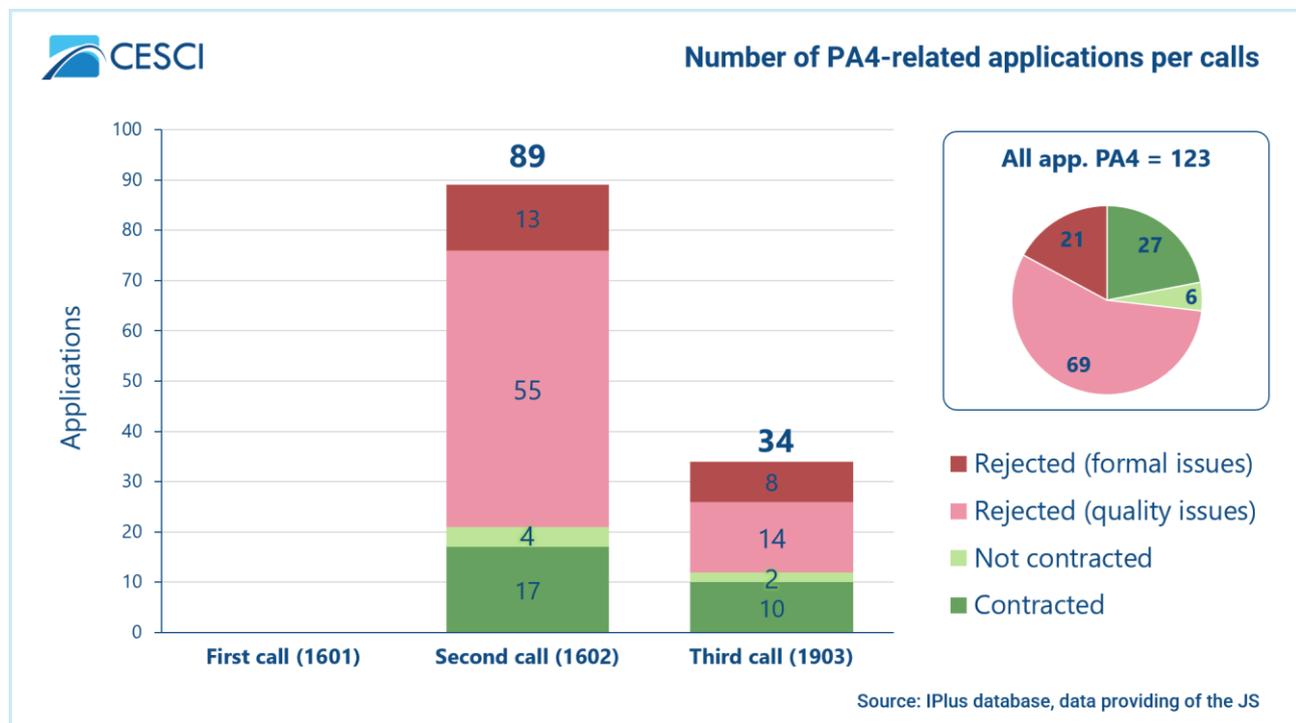
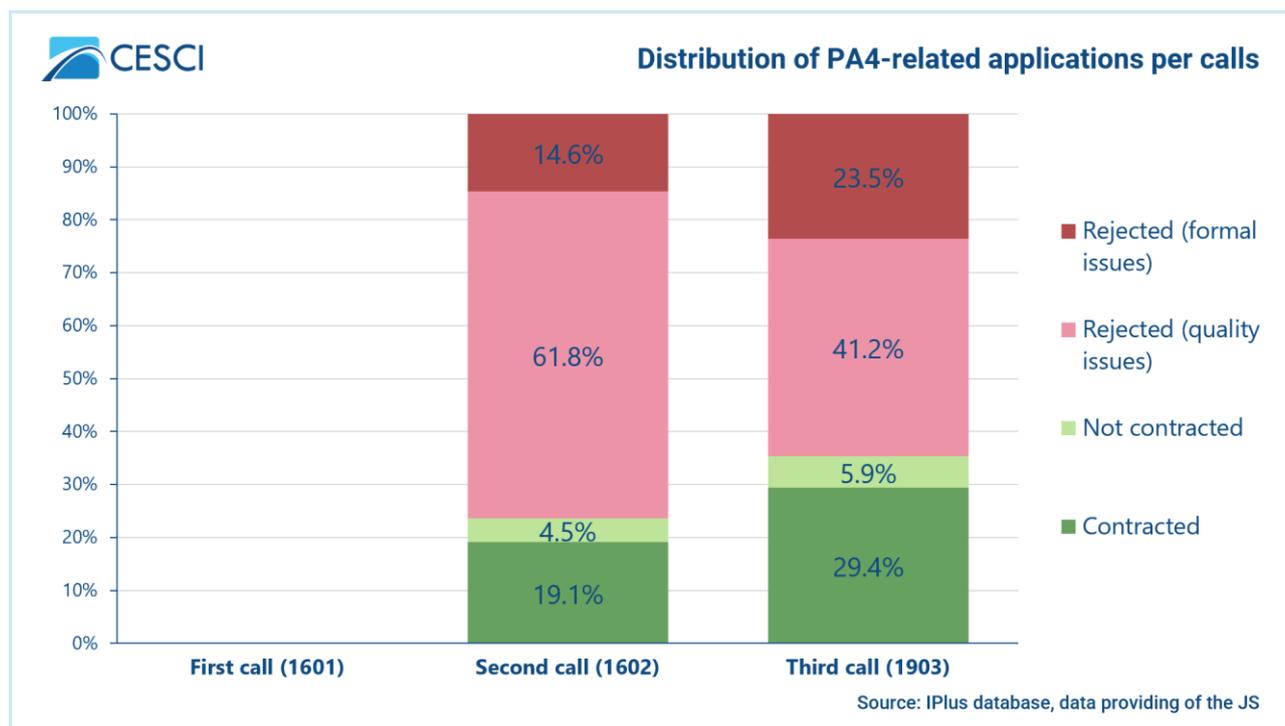


Figure 135: Distribution of PA4-related applications per CfPs

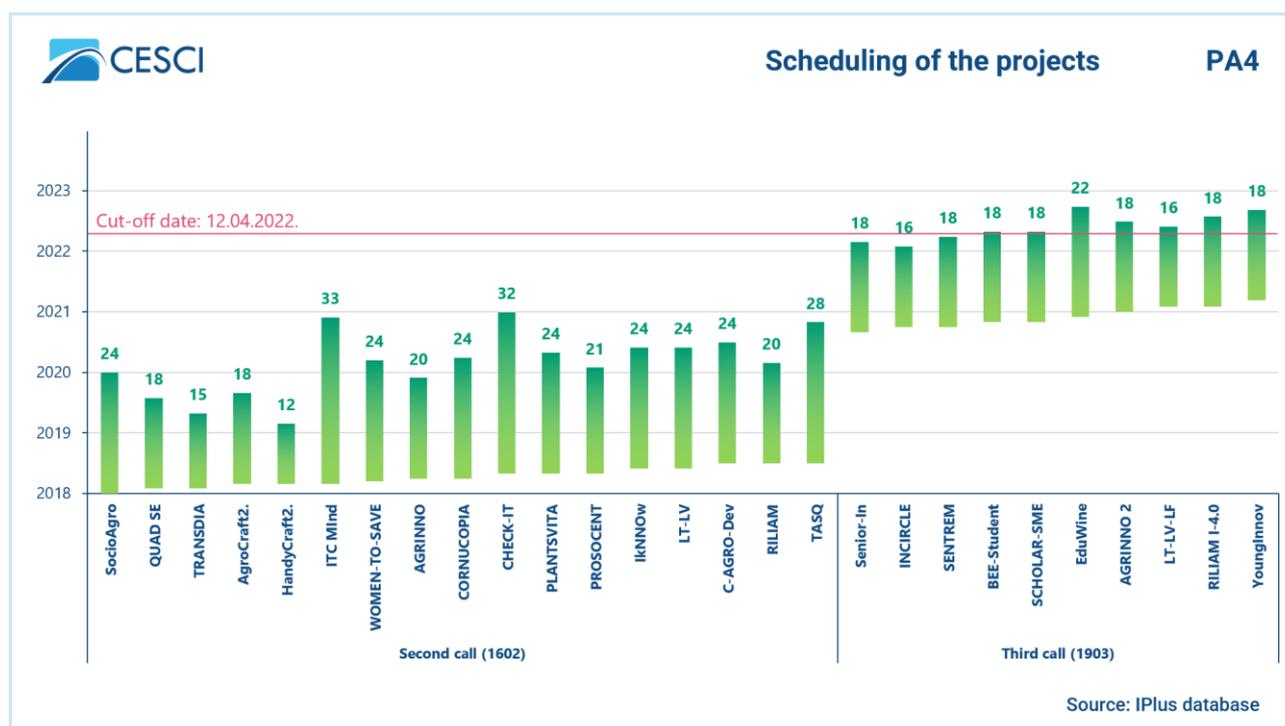


According to the **duration of the projects** by monthly breakdown, the average duration of the PA4-related projects was nearly 21 months, which means that most of the projects were implemented within two years. This short average implementation period was due to the lack of strategic projects which usually expands the average timeframe of the scheduling. Additionally, the specificity of this PA did not require long timing since most of the projects did not include significant infrastructural works (which could lengthen the scheduling). However, there were also some PA4-related regular projects where the project timing was more than two and a half years. For instance the scheduling of the CHECK-IT⁶⁹ project was 32 months and of the ITC MInd⁷⁰ was 33 months. Comparing the two CfPs under PA4, the 2nd CfP's projects took a bit longer (nearly 23 months), whereas in the 3rd CfP the average timing was one and a half year (18 months). Focusing on the start and end dates of the projects, the following chart (Figure 136) indicates the distinction between the two CfPs. All of the projects under the 2nd CfP were started in the year of 2018 and ended in 2019 or in 2020, whereas the 3rd CfP's projects could start the implementation just in the end of 2020 or in the beginning of 2021 and all of them will be concluded in 2022, which required a more rapid implementation. Nevertheless, within the contracted projects, there were some projects which still had administrative works after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Out of the 27 contracted PA4 projects 10 projects (37% of the PA4 contracted projects) did not have approved final report at that time, out of which all the 10 projects belonged to the 3rd CfP.

⁶⁹ ID: HUSRB/1602/41/0190; Name: Establishing innovation-technology platform "Checkpoint IT the Community" in cooperation of Szeged-Subotica-Novi Sad

⁷⁰ ID: HUSRB/1602/41/0172; Name: Innovation and Technology Center for Metal Industry

Figure 136: Scheduling of the projects



Considering the **financial allocation** to the projects, the SCHOLAR-SME⁷¹ project outstands with its 862 363 EUR, since the total project cost of the other regular projects does not exceed the threshold of 500 000 EUR and the average size of the regular projects is 309 515 EUR. Focusing on the source of the financial allocation of PA4-related projects, the dominance of EU Contribution is evident, since in the case of every project the ratio of this type of financial source was 85%. The IPA support is completed by national co-financing on the Hungarian side, the ratio of which is 10-15% according to the legal status of the partners. The remaining 0-5% in Hungary and 15% in Serbia must be provided by the beneficiaries as own contribution. Within the CfPs, the second highest contribution type was the own public source (2nd CfP: 6%; 3rd CfP: 8%), whereas the least used contribution was the own private source (2nd CfP: 4%; 3rd CfP: 3%). The dominance of SCHOLAR-SME is observable in the breakdown of contribution types too, as in every category – except own private contribution where the CHECK-IT project absorbed the biggest sum – this project used the largest amount of contribution. However, it is worth mentioning that the dominance of SCHOLAR-SME is due to the lack of strategic project, because the difference between the regular projects would not be as great as between the strategic and regular ones. Concerning the proportion of contribution types, the IkNNOW⁷² project used the highest share of national contribution (9.9%; 40 451 EUR), whereas the WOMEN-TO-SAVE⁷³ project allocated the highest share of own public contribution (13.6%; 28 070 EUR). In addition, the financial source of own private contribution was used by more than half

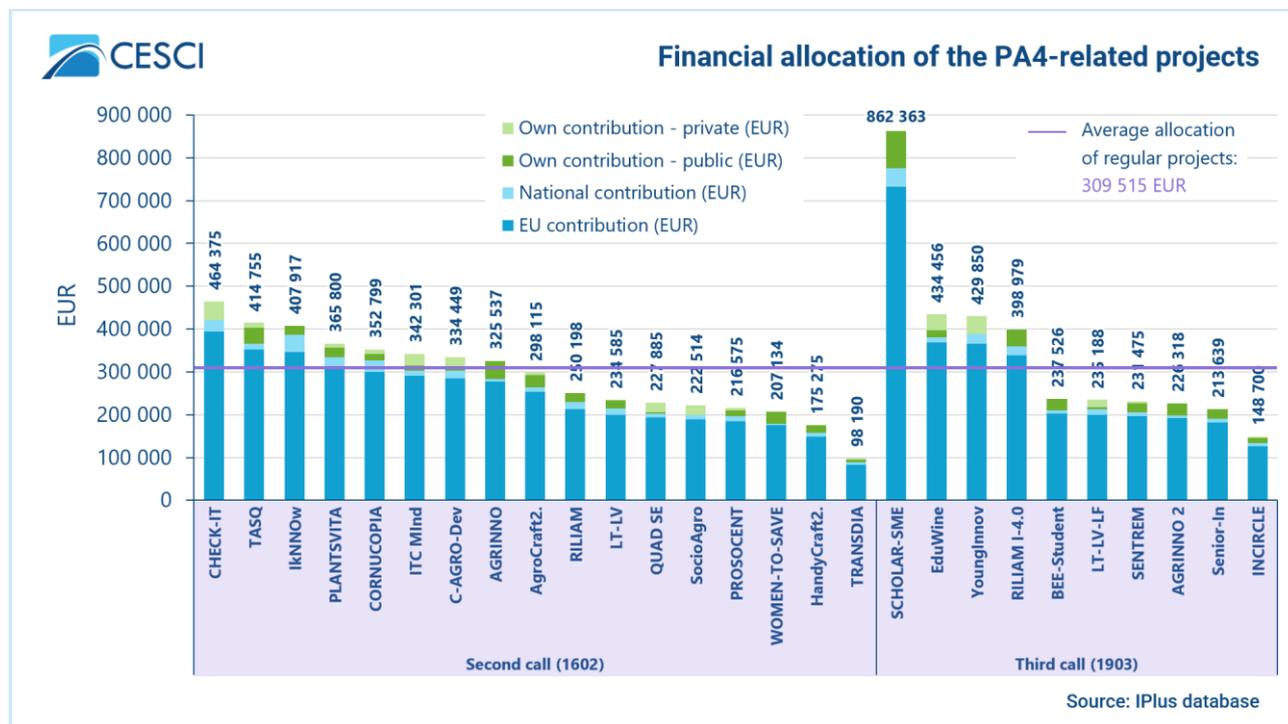
⁷¹ ID: HUSRB/1903/43/0008; Name: Increasing the Economic Competitiveness and Innovative Development of SMEs through Young People's Scholarships in the Mórahalom-Zrenjanin Program

⁷² ID: HUSRB/1602/41/0158; Cross-border Knowledge and Technology Transfer Platform to support young researchers and innovative SMEs and to catalyze their business-academia type cooperation

⁷³ ID: HUSRB/1602/42/0073; Name: Social entrepreneurship for women in rural areas

of the projects (59%; 16 projects), which was the most dominant contribution type in SocioAgro⁷⁴ project (10%; 22 244 EUR).

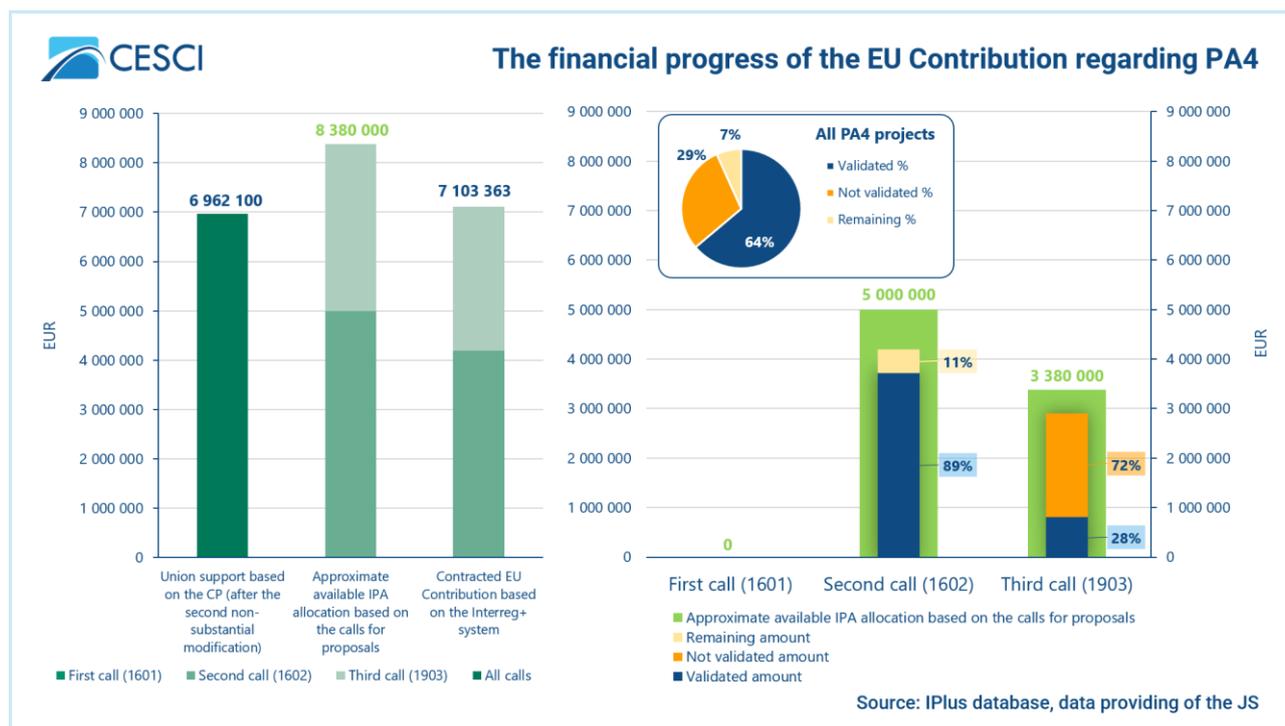
Figure 137: Financial allocation of the PA4-related projects



The following analytical aspect is the **financial progress** of the EU Contribution. In the case of the Cooperation Programme (after the fourth version which represents the current condition), the marked allocation was 6 962 100 EUR which was 1 417 900 EUR less than the approximate available IPA allocation based on the calls for proposals (8 380 000 EUR). The distribution of this amount of money among the CfPs was not balanced well, since 5 million EUR (60%) was allocated to the 2nd CfP and the rest 40% (3 380 000 EUR) went to the 3rd CfP. According to the Interreg+ system, the contracted EU Contribution was 7 103 363 EUR which was 1 276 637 EUR less than the aggregated IPA allocation in the CfPs and 141 263 EUR more than the marked sum in the CP. However, the distribution within the contracted EU contribution did not differ significantly from the previous ratios, since 59% of the money (4 197 643 EUR) was absorbed by the 2nd CfP's project, and 41% of the money (2 905 720 EUR) was absorbed by the 3rd CfP's projects.

⁷⁴ ID: HUSRB/1602/42/0152; Name: Social entrepreneurship and community agriculture for combating long-term unemployment

Figure 138: The financial progress of the EU Contribution regarding PA4



The classification of the contracted EU Contribution can be classified into three categories. The first one is the certificated or validated money, where not just the project's content but the administrative works are also closed. Regarding the non-validated money, the content of the project has been closed, but the administrative tasks has been continuously proceeding after the cut-off date (April 12, 2022). Finally, the rest of the EU Contribution gives the remaining category.

Since the projects under PA4 does not belong to the 1st Cfp, the certification of the EU Contribution could not evolve as well as in the case of other PAs. Taking into account the lack of strategic projects, the IPA funding progressed well since 64% of the contracted EU Contribution has been certified (4 532 718 EUR), 29% (2 095 320 EUR) has not been validated and the remaining amount is 475 325 EUR (7%). Due to the different scheduling of the 2nd and 3rd CfPs, the advancement of certification is not the same. The financial progress of 2nd Cfp's projects is favourable, as 89% of the allocated money has been certified (3 722 318 EUR), and the remaining amount is only 475 325 EUR (11%) with no non-validated sum. On the other hand, in the case of the 3rd Cfp, slightly more than the quarter of the whole allocation is certified (28%; 810 400 EUR) and the non-validated amount exceeds 2 million EUR (72%; 2 095 320 EUR), while the remaining costs are zero. After all, this value is understandable since the closure of the 3rd Cfp's projects occur in 2022, and there has not been enough time to certification yet.

On project level the proportion of certificated EU Contribution is relatively high in the case of the 2nd Cfp's projects (more than 80%), but there are two projects from this Cfp where the ratio of remaining money is high (more than 20%). One of them is the ITC MInd⁷⁵ with 37% (106 662 EUR) and the other one is WOMEN-TO-SAVE with 24% (42 550 EUR). Both of them have been closed at the cut-off date administratively (since there are no non-validated money). Regarding the 3rd Cfp, the progress of

⁷⁵ ID: HUSRB/1602/41/0172; Name: Innovation and Technology Center for Metal Industry

certification is in an initial condition since these projects have not ended yet. Owing to this late ending, the ratio of non-validated EU Contribution is still high, for example in the case of SENTREM⁷⁶ (93%; 183 366 EUR) and the Senior-In⁷⁷ (100%; 181 593 EUR) projects.

Taking into account the indicators, four **output indicators** have been assigned to PA4, which have to be reported with yearly frequency. The PA4-related indicators correspond to the specific objective of the PA, which concentrated on the enhancement of growth capabilities and employment potential of SMEs. Owing to the indicators, the evaluators can get to know the number of enterprises which cooperate with research institutions (*OI/4.1 Cooperating enterprises with research institutions*), or those organisations which participate in the work of knowledge platforms (*OI/4.2 Organisations in knowledge platforms*). Furthermore, indicators show how many months were spent by scholars in institutions and companies on the other side of the border (*OI/4.3 Months spent on scholarships*), or the rate of persons from vulnerable groups who were involved in supported actions of the programme (*OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups*). The measurement units fit to the indicators, therefore indicate the number of enterprises, number of organisations, number of months and rate of persons. Based on the JMC decision, during the 3rd modification the original target values have been modified, since the initial goals were not so ambitious. The amendments of target values concerned the first three indicators, out of which the *OI/4.1 Cooperating enterprises with research institutions* has changed most markedly, since the increase was sixfold (from 35 enterprises to 210 enterprises). Similar enlargement happened in the case of the other two indicators: the value of *OI/4.2 Organisations in knowledge platforms* has been raised from 60 organisations to 210 organisations, and the value of *OI/4.3 Months spent on scholarships* has been raised from 200 months to 250 months.

Table 51: Indicators of PA4 – Target values

ID	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Frequency of reporting	3rd mod. target value (2023)
OI/4.1	Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	enterprises	yearly	210
OI/4.2	Number of organisations actively participating in the work of the “knowledge platforms”	organisations	yearly	210
OI/4.3	Number of months spent in the institutions and companies on the other side of the border through scholarships	months	yearly	250
OI/4.4	Rate of persons from vulnerable groups involved in supported actions	%	yearly	50

The fulfilment of these indicators was ensured by different number of projects, which can be observed in the following table (*Table 52*). All together 27 projects belonged to the PA4, but many of them chose more than one output indicators. For example, the ITC MInd project facilitated

⁷⁶ ID: HUSRB/1903/42/0036; Name: Development of inovative social entrepreneurship model for vounerable groups in border region

⁷⁷ ID: HUSRB/1903/42/0078; Name: Cross-border Senior Entrepreneurship Incubator

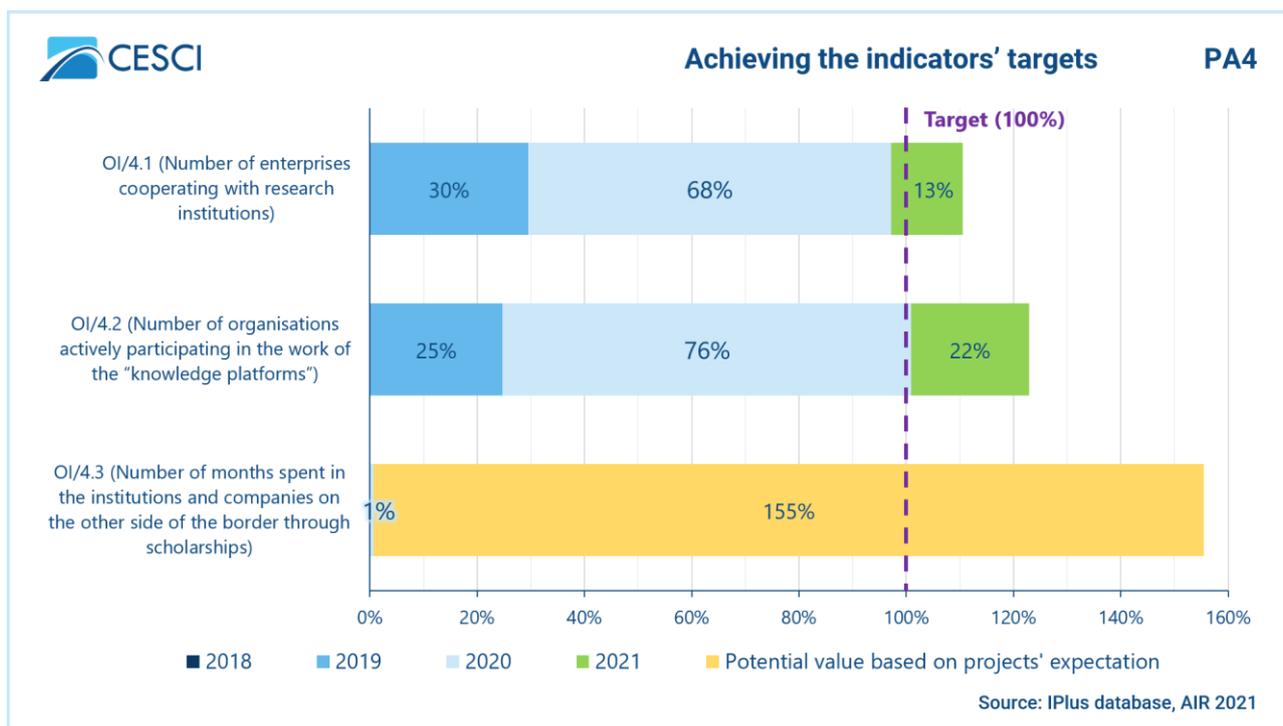
simultaneously three indicators' fulfilment. Most of the projects (15 projects) were linked to the *OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups* indicator, whereas the *OI/4.1 Cooperating enterprises with research institutions* and *OI/4.2 Organisations in knowledge platforms* were targeted by 8-8 projects and the *OI/4.3 Months spent on scholarships* had 6 projects. Since the PA4 did not contain any strategic projects, there were no relevant projects in the 1st CfP. Moreover, there were no *OI/4.1 Cooperating enterprises with research institutions* related projects in the 3rd CfP, but it was not a problem, since 8 projects were devoted to this indicator in the previous CfP. More significant problem was the *OI/4.3 Months spent on scholarships*, which was not covered by enough projects during the first two CfPs. The problem was solved by the 3rd CfP, since 5 projects were subordinated to the problematic indicator.

Table 52: Indicators of PA4– Number of relevant projects per CfPs

ID	1601	1602	1903	Number of relevant projects
OI/4.1 Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions		8		8
OI/4.2 Number of organisations actively participating in the work of the "knowledge platforms"		6	2	8
OI/4.3 Number of months spent in the institutions and companies on the other side of the border through scholarships		1	5	6
OI/4.4 Rate of persons from vulnerable groups involved in supported actions		10	5	15

As the following figure (*Figure 139*) indicates, the yearly progress of PA4-related output indicators has been evolving well, however the effect of COVID-19 pandemic considerably affected this PA, since it was difficult to implement the required movements such as the cross-border scholarships. However, the cooperation between the SMEs and institutions continued online without significant trouble. According to the data, the first results appeared in 2019, and in 2020 all indicators could show some kind of achievements. The yearly progress was detected in every indicator, and in 2021 two of them (*OI/4.1 Cooperating enterprises with research institutions*, *OI/4.2 Organisations in knowledge platforms*) achieved the target values. The number of enterprises was more by 22 units, the number of organisations was more by 48 units. In spite of these achievements, the *OI/4.3 Months spent on scholarships* indicator completed only 0.7% of the target value, as there were 248 months distinction between the goal and the current performance. . With regard to the potential value – based on projects' expectation – the fulfilment of these indicators will be guaranteed.

Figure 139: Achieving the indicators' targets



The case of *OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups* is different from the others. It was not possible to present the results for this indicator in the graph, both because it is a percentage and therefore not cumulative, and because there were reporting problems with this indicator. At the end of the programme, the values will be measured using a methodology to be defined, as not all beneficiaries understood this indicator in the same way.

After the quantitative analysis of the indicators, the fulfilment of the S.M.A.R.T criteria will be evaluated.⁷⁸

Considering the S.M.A.R.T. criteria, the output indicators of PA4 are mostly in line with the requirements. The modest original target values are common problem in this PA too, and in some cases the newly determined targets are still modest. This causes problems in the timing of the projects, since some of them already fulfilled the new target values in 2020. Another issues are the cooperation of enterprises and participation of organisations, since there might be some overlapping between the newly developed and the already existing relations. Based on the interviews, the specificity of 4.3 and 4.4 caused problems for the beneficiaries, since the *OI/4.3 Months spent on scholarships* was too complex which deterred the beneficiaries to select this indicator, while the *OI/4.4 Persons from vulnerable groups* misled the beneficiaries, since they interpreted this indicator differently and it caused inadequate and incomparable data

⁷⁸ Further information is available in the same chapter of PA1.

Table 53: Indicators of PA4 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
OI/4.1 Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	The indicator is not specific enough. The level of cooperation is not well-described. Based on the projects, indirect cooperations count same as direct newly developed cooperations.	Despite of the issue mentioned at the 'Specific' aspect, the indicator is a quite good measurable, however, the possible overlapping has to be checked to estimate the "net" indicator values.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased sixfold. Despite of this modification, the indicator is still modest.	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 regulatory of the measurement is adequate.
OI/4.2 Number of organisations actively participating in the work of the "knowledge platforms"	The indicator is not specific enough. The level of participation is not well-described. Based on the projects, indirect (already existing) participations count same as direct newly developed participations.	Despite of the issue mentioned at the 'Specific' aspect, the indicator is a quite good measurable, however, the possible overlapping has to be checked to estimate the "net" indicator values.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased three and a half times. Despite of this modification, the indicator is still modest.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the regulatory of the measurement is adequate.
OI/4.3 Number of months spent in the institutions and companies on the other side of the border through scholarships	The indicator is too complex, the beneficiaries did not dare to select it in the beginning.	The indicator is quite measurable.	The original target value was not enough ambitious, but it has been increased. As a result of this modification, the indicator meets the criterion.	As above.	The year in which the target values should be achieved and the regularity of the measurement are also well-defined.

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
OI/4.4 Rate of persons from vulnerable groups involved in supported actions	The indicator is not obvious enough, and the beneficiaries misunderstood the required data.	The measurement unit (ratio) is misleading.	The indicator meets the criterion, but the target value is a bit modest.	This indicator has a strong horizontal aspect, that is why the relevance is questionable.	The year in which the target values should be achieved is not well-defined, but the regulatory of the measurement is adequate.

3.4.3 Impact evaluation (PA4)

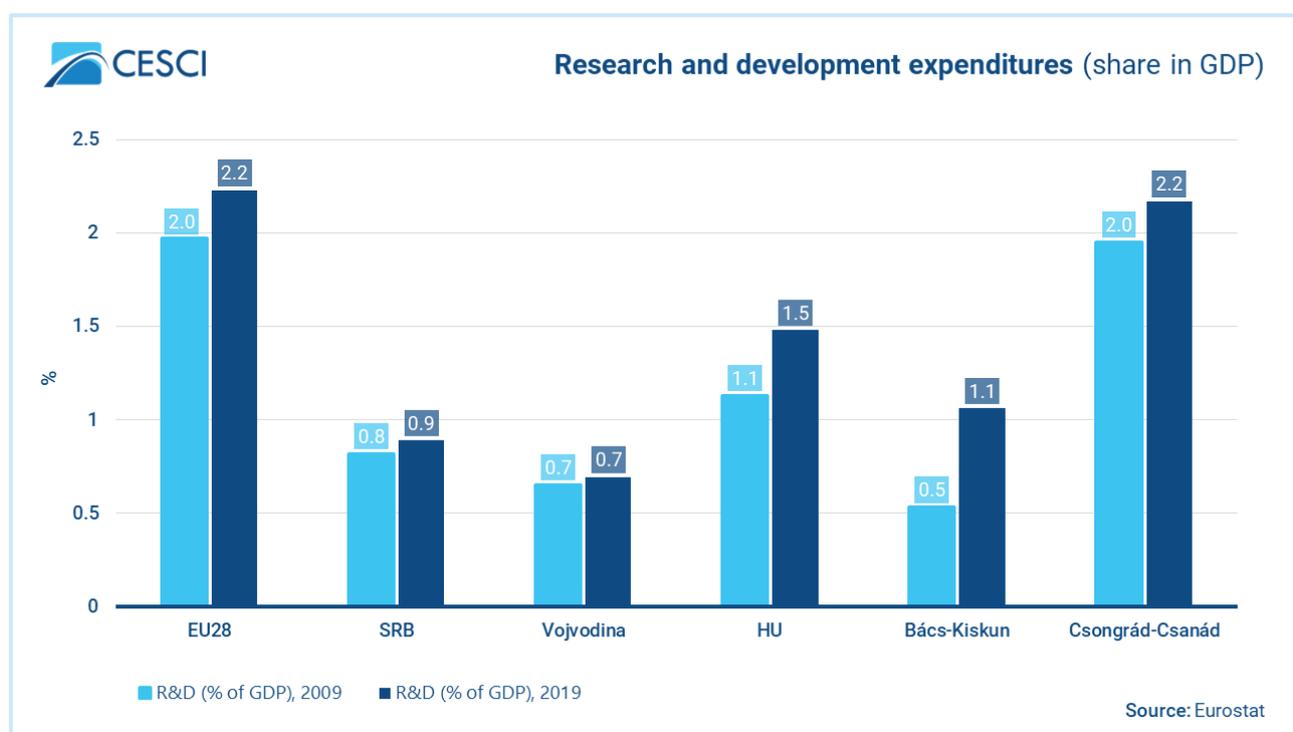
3.4.3.1 Analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs (PA4)

The following analysis is built upon the figure (*Figure 133*) described in the short introduction of the PA's intervention logic. For the detailed impact model see the introductory chapter (*II. 3.4.1 Short introduction of the PA4's intervention logic*). Each regional need and challenge will be analysed in the sense that how the identified actions of the programme could contribute to their tackling and management. In order to assess these and the general changes in the cohesion of the programme area, a territorial analysis and a project assessment takes place to identify the main contributions and changes which help reaching the expected results of the PA. The assessment uses statistical data, maps and figures, textual analysis as well as desk research to analyse the fulfilment of regional needs emerging in the border region.

Low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results by SMEs is discussed first. In order to do that the expected results can be grasped by using data that reflect the topic directly or indirectly. The expected result of increased cross-border research cooperation activities in the quadruple helix can be touched upon statistically by analysing expenditures on R&D expressed in GDP (mill EUR). In all the three regions the expenditures increased between 2014 and 2019; by 31 mill EUR in Vojvodina, by 30 in Bács-Kiskun and by 19 mill EUR in Csongrád-Csanád. The order of the regions did not change taking into account the percentage of R&D in GDP, but Bács-Kiskun managed to intensify its activities the most successfully (from 0.53 to 1.06%, by 0.53%-points). This doubling rate of change is notable higher than of Vojvodina (increase by 0.04%-points), Serbia (+0.07%-points) or Csongrád-Csanád (+0.22%-points). The Hungarian side performed better than the Serbian counterpart, where stagnation was observed. From the point of PA4 the unsuccessful catching-up of Vojvodina and Serbia hampers their economic cohesion. The still low shares of R&D expenditure of the Serbian side in particular (Vojvodina: 0.69%), but also the below the EU average (2.23%) levels of spendings excluding Csongrád-Csanád (2.17%) underlines that there is still a need across the programme area for growing labour force with relevant, market-oriented skills, competences and knowledge as well as for improved education, training and support services. The share of the NACE

category G-J, which includes activities such as information and communication, in GVA production has low shares on the Serbian side compared to the national average (28.1%) meaning that except for Južnobačka (31.3%) none of the districts exceed this threshold value. On the Hungarian side the values are also below the national average (27.3%). The shares are very low, thus the need to increase share in GVA in these activities is still valid for many regions (eg. for Severnobańska 21.7%, Srednjobanatska 22.1%). In relation to business services, financial, scientific and technical activities, and administrative activities apart from Južnobačka district (12.6%) all shares are below the national levels (HU: 14.7%; SRB: 12.2%). The activities add to GVA production little in Severnobańska (5.2%), Sremska (6.3%), Severnobačka (6.8%), Srednjobanatska (6.9%), but Bács-Kiskun (7%) also performs quite badly. These data also underline the need for promoting R&D activities and sectors with higher added value.

Figure 140: Research and development expenditures (share in GDP)



Increased research collaboration is supported by the HUSRB programme in the form of relatively numerous projects out of PA4. Projects include CHECK-IT, IkNNOW or C-AGRO-Dev⁷⁹, and the latter indicate that high share of activities are related to agricultural innovation. Social enterprises are also represented. New services and products have also been supported (e.g. PLANTSVITA⁸⁰) but on a limited level. It is also important to highlight that the establishment of joint undertakings is not so recommended in the evaluated region, since this economic formation does not have long existence and rapidly fall apart because of problems deriving from financial accounting in a differing Serbian and Hungarian financial regulatory systems. For instance, the accounting and distribution of income and costs could be complicated among company owners. It causes that the majority of enterprises

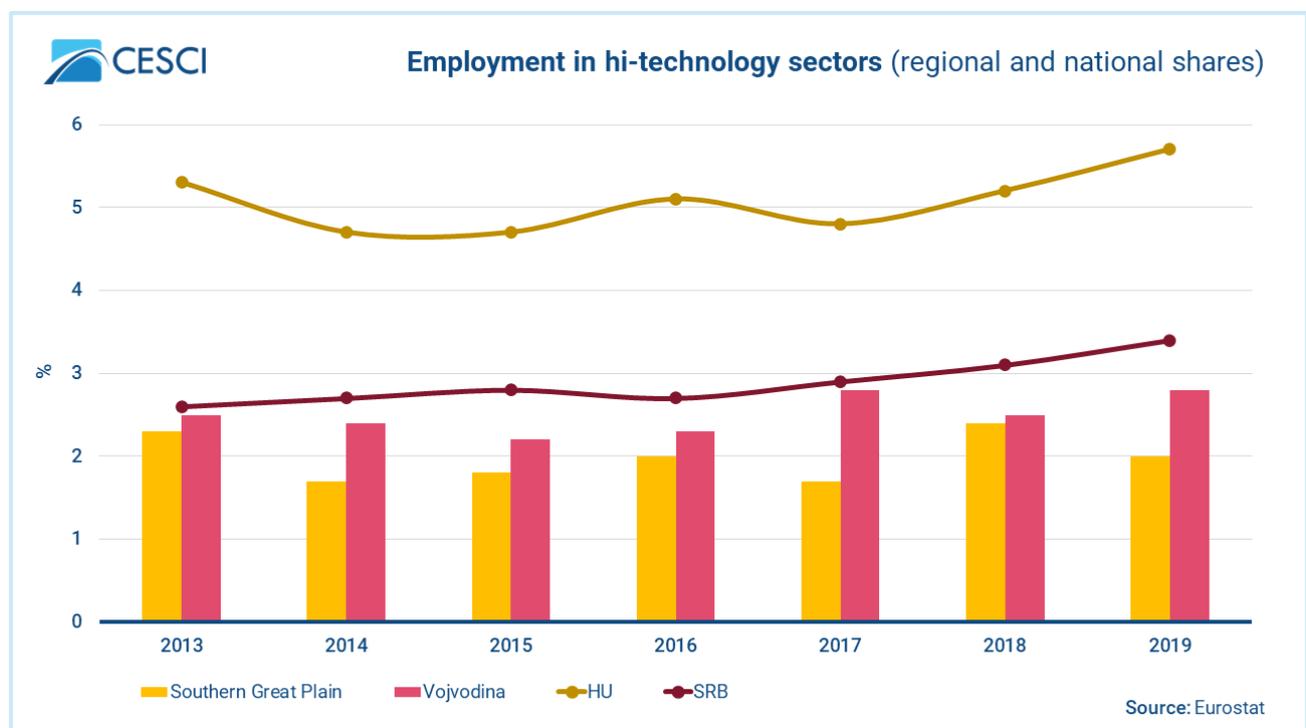
⁷⁹ ID: HUSRB/1602/41/0167; Name: Cross-border Agrobusiness Development Program

⁸⁰ ID: HUSRB/1602/41/0031, Name: Development of Soil Type Adapted Microbiological Products Promoting Ecological Pest Management

are independently Serbian or Hungarian, carefully avoiding the joint form because of the different legal and administrative background, which hinders the competitiveness of the joint undertakings. The impact of the programme was relevant in a way that it initiated networking and the creation of the quadruple helix between the two countries, however these types of collaborations are still at an early stage of development. Without the programme even less cross-border R&D activities would have been carried out in the programme area.

Considering the challenge that **labour force supply does not respond to the needs of the local companies**, among others, the index on employment in hi-technology sectors (%) can be helpful for the analysis (and also for the previous challenge). As a result of growing labour force with relevant, market-oriented skills, competences and knowledge along with improved education, the shares across the programme area should have increased. Taking into account the shares of 2013 and 2019, no major changes can be observed. In relation to Dél-Alföld NUTS 2 region (which includes Békés County as well) even a minimal decrease took place (from 2.3% to 2%, decrease by 0.3%-points). The share of Vojvodina increased (from 2.5% to 2.8%, by 0.3%-points), but it remained less notable than the change across Serbia (0.8%-points). In 2019 on both sides the values stayed below the national averages, especially compared to Hungary (5.7%). In general, there is still a need for increased number of labour force with the skills necessary for meeting the needs of companies and creating better results in the field of R&D.

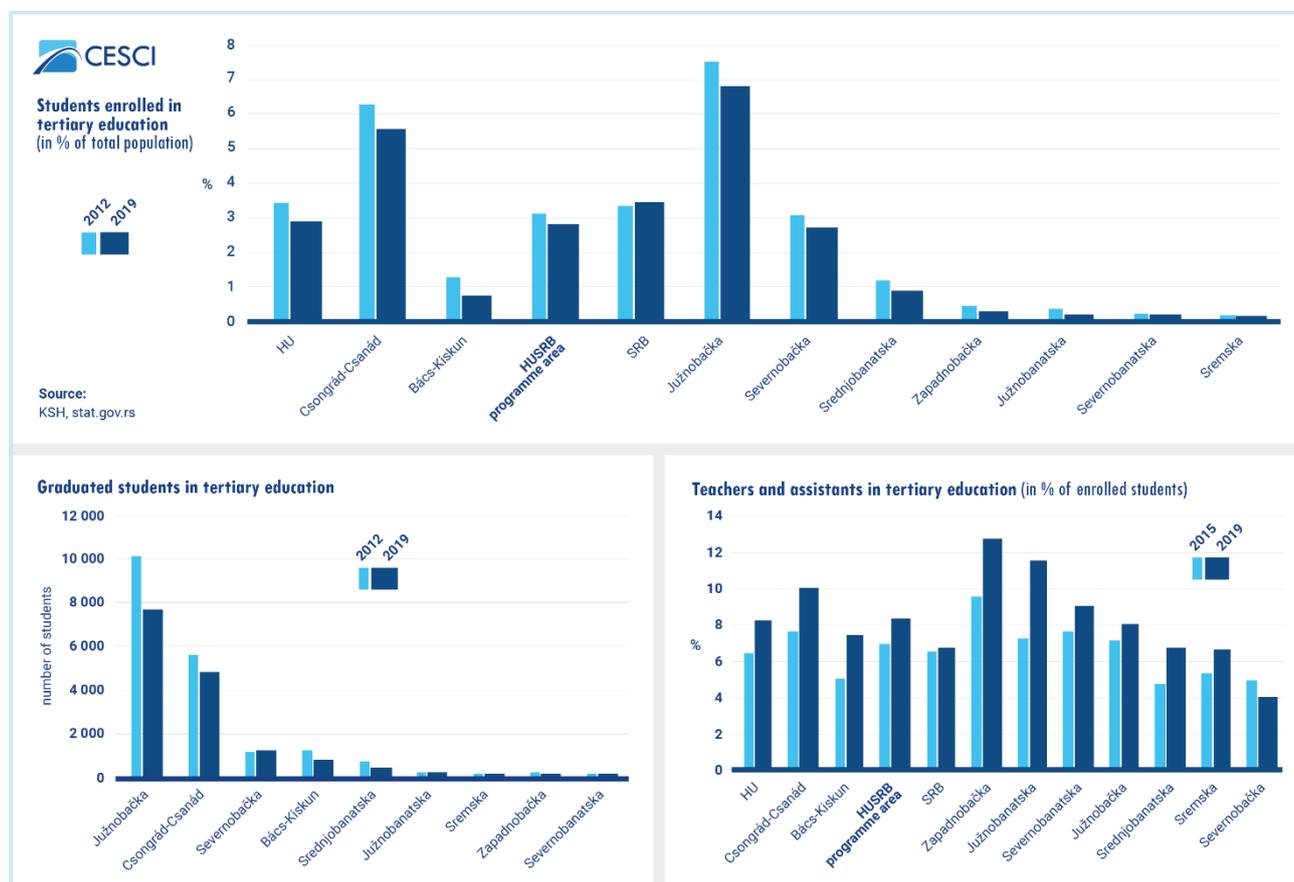
Figure 141: Employment in hi-technology sectors (regional and national shares)



Apart from the aforementioned index, students enrolled in tertiary education (in percentage of total population) can tell a lot about the labour force of the present and future. There is still a need for increasing the number of enrolled students since only in Južnobačka (6.8%) and in Csongrád-Csanád (5.6%) the values are relatively high compared to the national averages (Hungary: 2.9%; Serbia: 3.5%). Owing to their multidisciplinary tertiary educational supply thanks to university towns such as Szeged

and Novi Sad, these two regions stand out by far. Especially the rest of the Serbian regions, excluding Severnobačka (2.7%), have unfavourable numbers 10-20 times lower than of the best-performing neighbouring regions. In the case Sremska (0.2%), Severnobanatska (0.2%), Južnobanatska (0.2%) and Zapadnobačka (0.3%) the shares are extremely low. In general, the rates are more favourable on the Hungarian side, however Bács-Kiskun (0.8%) also suffers from weak tertiary educational profile, and Kecskemét, its biggest such centre, is situated on the northern edge of the programme area. Between 2012 and 2019 in the case of any change in shares, the change was negative. The biggest change happened in Csongrád-Csanád (decrease by 0.7%-point) and Juňobanatska (decrease by 0.7%-point). In most regions stagnating or slightly decreasing figures were observed. During the analysed years the regions failed to perform better than the two countries therefore no real improvement in their relative position was reached. The programme area itself had decreasing value from 3.1 to 2.8% the share got lower.

Figure 142: Change of statistics related to students enrolled, graduated students and number of teachers in education



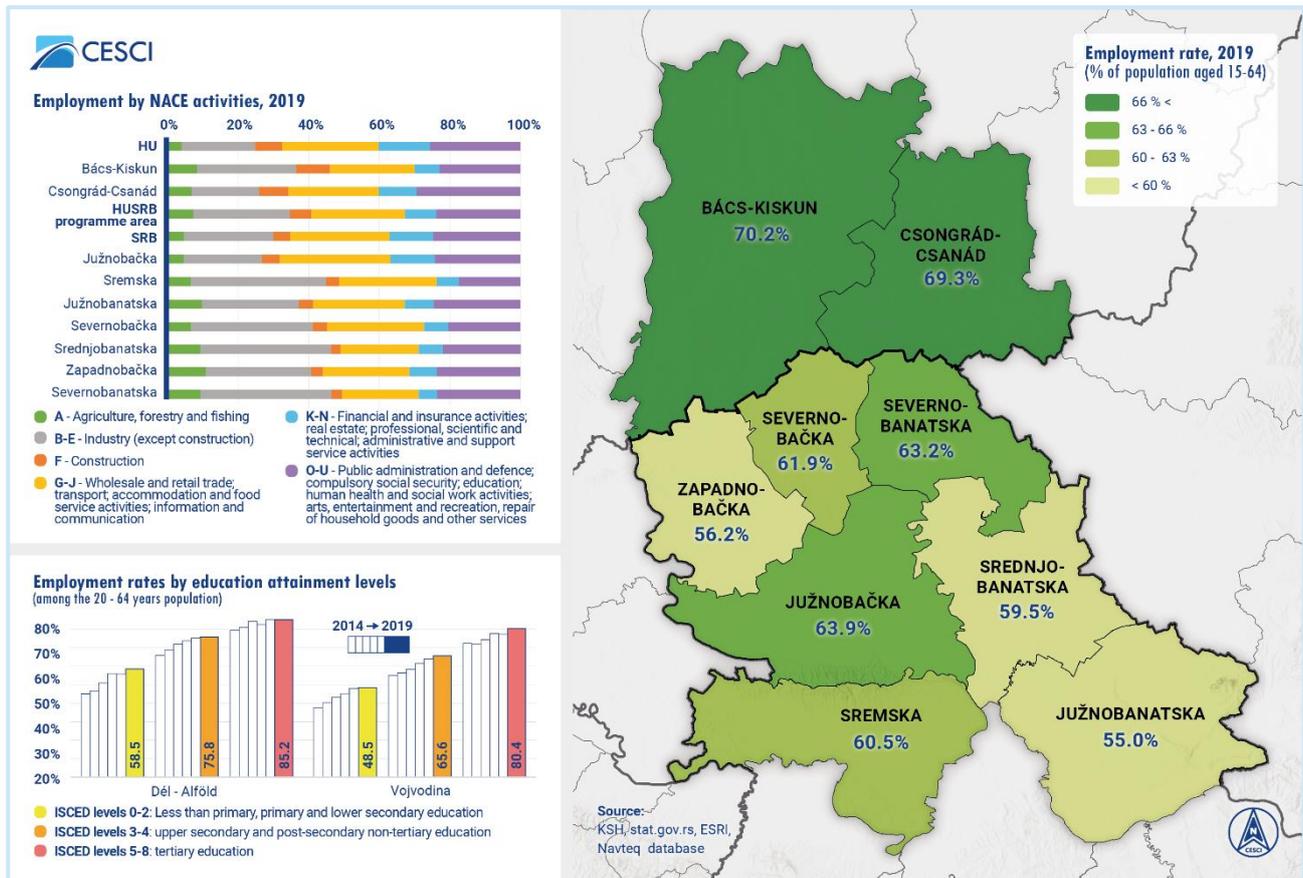
Share of graduated students in tertiary education is another index worth using to analyse the fulfilment of regional needs of this PA (especially the first two described here). First, it has to be underlined the number of graduated significantly shrunk in the latest years across the whole analysed area. Going back to the shares: some areas managed to improve the graduation rate, while in the case of others decrease was observed. The biggest changes include Južnobanatska (+7.2%), Severnobanatska (+4.3%-points) and Severnobačka (+3.6%-points), and considering shrinkage Srednjobanatska (-8%) and Južnobačka (-4.6%-points). The Hungarian side produced more stable

numbers, while in Serbia more turbulent changes occurred. The programme area performs worse than before (-2.4%-points), worse than Hungary (22%) but better than Serbia as a whole (17.6%). The best-performing regions are from Vojvodina exclusively, namely Severnobańska (43%), Južnobańska (29.3%) and Srednjobańska (25.8%). From this point of view finishing tertiary education would be worth supporting, on the Hungarian side in particular, while enrolment should be supported more on the Serbian side to have growing skilled labour force.

In order to have an improved education and training services sufficient number and share of teachers and assistants in tertiary education are needed. Taking into account the stock of human resources (in % of enrolled students) again the territorial inequalities are higher on the Serbian side as the regions with the highest (Zapadnobańska: 12.7%; Južnobańska: 11.5%) and the lowest values (Severnobańska: 4%; Sremska: 6.6%; Srednjobańska: 6.7%) are all situated in Vojvodina. Most regions on the Serbian side perform better than Serbia (6.7%). The programme area as a whole has better index compared to Hungary (8.2%) and well as to Serbia. Considering the change between 2015 and 2019, all regions managed to increase the percentage except for Severnobańska (decrease by 1%-point), but there are large differences throughout the programme area. In general, the amplitude of change was more notable in the given regions than of their respective countries (Hungary: +1.8%-points; Serbia: +0.1%-point). The biggest increase was observed in Južnobańska (+4.2%-points), Zapadnobańska (+3.2%-points), followed by the two counties from Hungary (+2.4%-points). The smallest increase characterised Južnobańska (+0.9%-point), Severnobańska (1.4%-point) and Sremska (1.3%-point).

The unemployment rate is also in connection with the mismatch between labour market supply and demand. The rates are significantly higher in Serbia. Even in the best-performing Južnobańska district (7.5%) the rate is more than three times higher than in Csongrád-Csanád County (2.3%), which has the lowest figure. The labour market is the most disadvantaged in the southern part of Vojvodina, namely in Južnobańska (11.9%) and Sremska (11.8%). Even though the majority rates are lower compared to the Serbian average (10.9%), all districts exceed the Hungarian average (3.5%) and counties concerned. The favourable situation of the Hungarian counties is underlined by that their rates (Bács-Kiskun: 3%) are below the national average (3.5%) even.

Figure 143: Pattern and structure of employment in the programme area

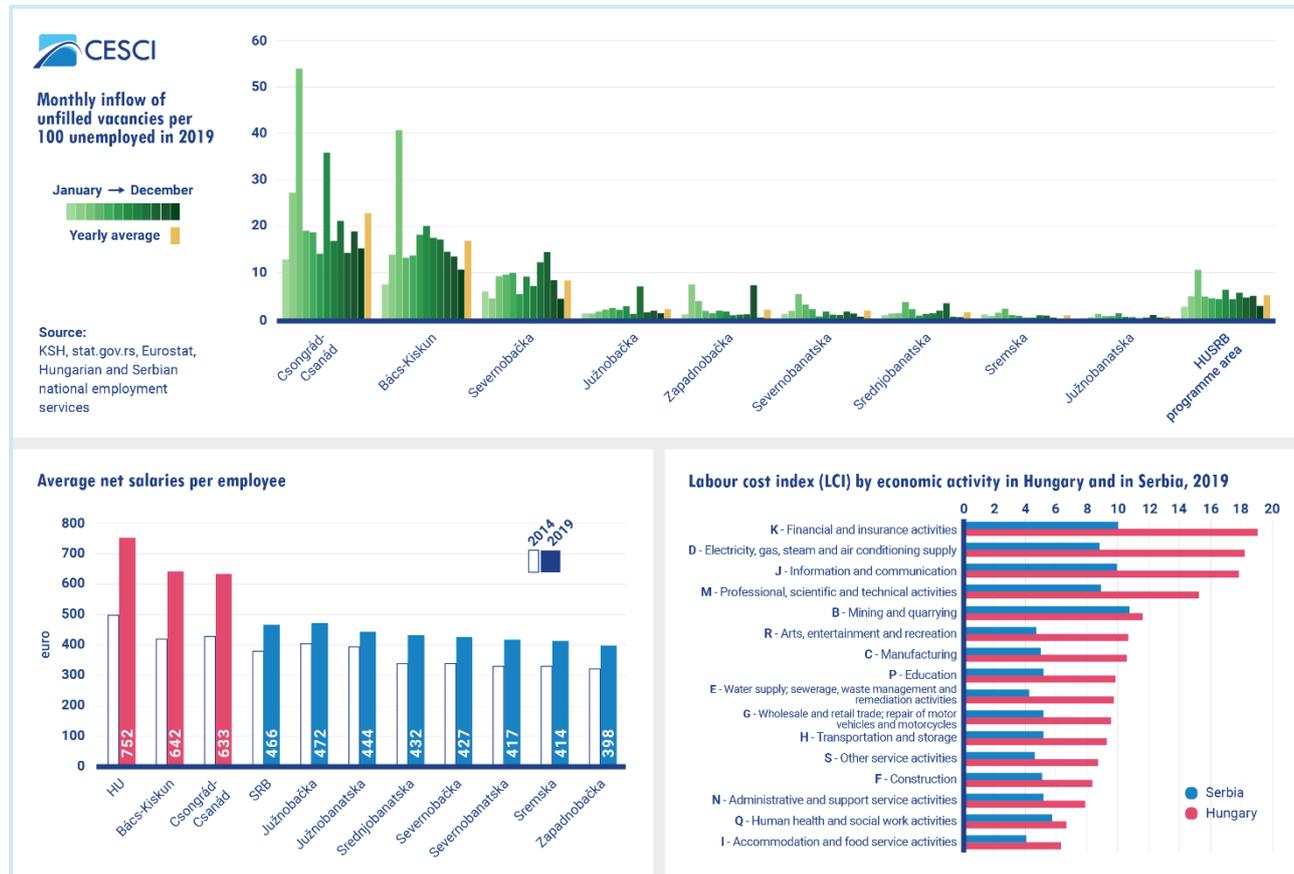


Low GVA and labour market problems are partly deriving from the still insufficient levels of educational attainment of high share of people. In general, the higher the attainment level is, the higher the probability of employment. The employment rate for the ones with advanced, or first stage of tertiary education, is very high on both sides of the border (Dél-Alföld: 85.2%; Vojvodina: 80.4%) especially compared to those with no or basic education. In Vojvodina the share of International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 0-2 is as low as 48.5%, which is just above the half of the best rates. It also means that there is still potential in increasing the educational attainment of the population, and it would result in more skilled people with the necessary attainment to be employed. The education of people is not only important from the point of meeting labour market needs but is necessary to provide human capital to increase the share of R&D activities. Employment rates of 20-64 years population by education attainment levels have changed positively the most in relation to the least educated of Dél-Alföld (+20%-points), followed by the same group of people with lower secondary or second stage of basic education at most of Vojvodina (+15.6%-points). On the other hand, improvement was the lowest in terms of the highly educated people of ISCED 5-8 categories (Dél-Alföld: +8.6%-points, Vojvodina +13.2%-points).

The mismatch between the supply and demand sides can be shown with the help the stock of job vacancies. While the unemployment rate is rather low on the Hungarian side, still notable number of jobseekers cannot find jobs suitable to their professions and skillsets. 68.9% of the monthly inflow of unfilled vacancies was registered in the two Hungarian counties, and only 31.1% in Vojvodina. The average number of unfilled vacancies was 2112 in Bács-Kiskun and 1543 in Csongrád-Csanád. On the Serbian side Severnobačka suffers from high stock (634), while Severnobanatska (126) and

Sremska (115) has low figures. According to the online survey, in order to improve the next cross-border programme (2021-2027) higher attention should be paid to the research network building and more funds should be appropriated to vocational education.

Figure 144: Differences in unfilled vacancies, net salaries and labour costs in the programme area



There are significant inequalities in terms of labour costs (EUR) within the Programme area. In many areas such as manufacturing (10.6 and 5 EUR), information and communication (17.8 and 9.9 EUR), the costs in Hungary are significantly higher than in Serbia. This is also owing to the labour shortages as well as the insufficient educational and training systems which unable to provide the needed skilled labour.

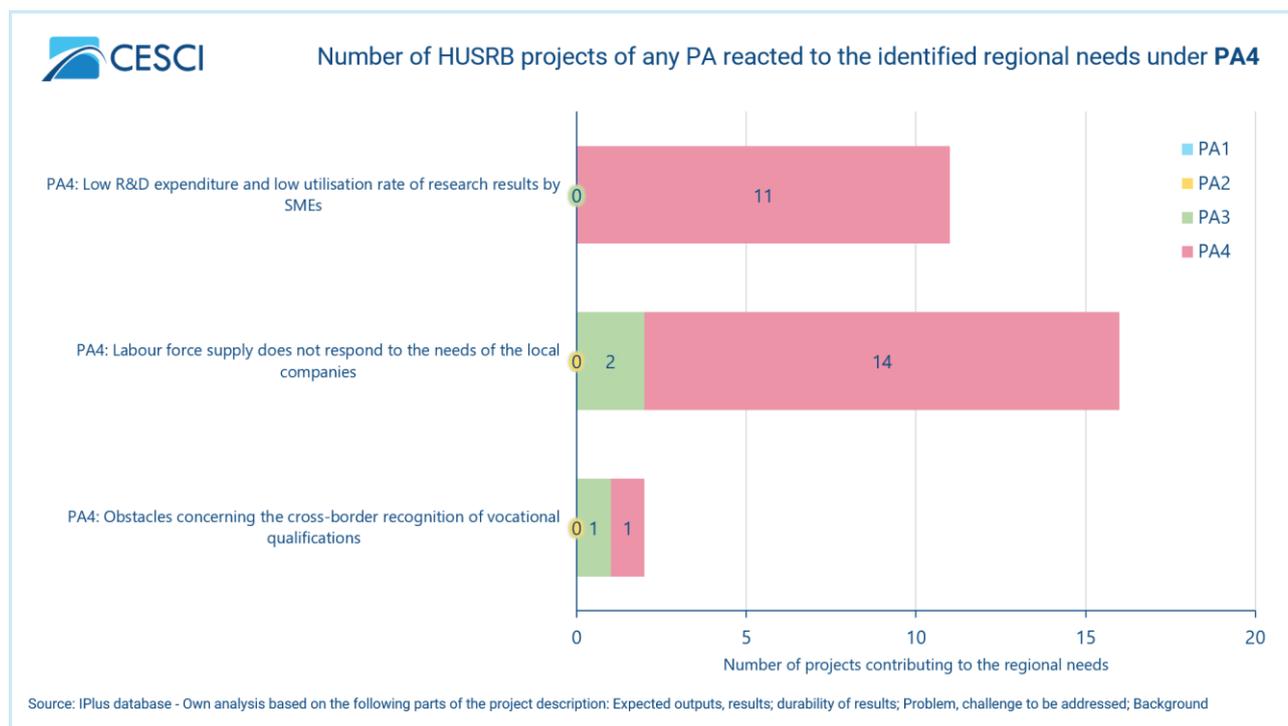
To sum up, this regional need was tackled the most by the programme. Various trainings were conducted with varying results and impacts. The programme was successfully impacted the creation of institutional cooperation of universities in particular. However, the programme has limited success in changing the skills levels, competences and knowledge of border people and SMEs. In the future more attention could be paid on mutual knowledge of each other's language which would boost economic relations as well as social ones.

At last, but not least, out of the regional need of **obstacles concerning the cross-border recognition of vocational qualifications** has to be discussed. As it could be seen, the data on employment rate by educational attainment clearly shows that improved (vocational) education, training and support services have great positive impact of the Programme area. In recent years changes underline the importance of vocation education and the mutual recognition of various qualifications. This is especially true when it comes to cross-border commuting from Serbia to

Hungary. In construction industry but in other fields of economy as well there is a great need for simpler recognition. Vocational qualifications were addressed by the programme mostly by supporting trainings to less educated people in the field of agriculture and social enterprises. In the frames of Action 4.1 various training were carried out but not many targeted vocational education. Unintended impact regarding of the programme were not registered, but there is a threat that instead of short-term migration within the programme area the share of emigration and brain drain to distant countries (Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom etc.) will increase further deepening the challenge of insufficient number of qualified workforce.

Based on the project summaries as well as the objectives of the projects, out of the **identified challenges under PA4**, there is a very strong unbalance in favour of challenges related to labour force supply, and research and development. "Labour force supply does not respond to the needs of the local companies" is addressed by as many as 16 projects of which two is from PA3, while "low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results by SMEs" is tackled by 11 PA4 projects. The third challenge, namely "obstacles concerning the cross-border recognition of vocational qualifications" gained little direct support. Only a single project from both PA3 and PA4 contribute to the tackling of obstacles on the recognition of vocational qualifications. The challenge here seems to be slightly addressed by any projects.

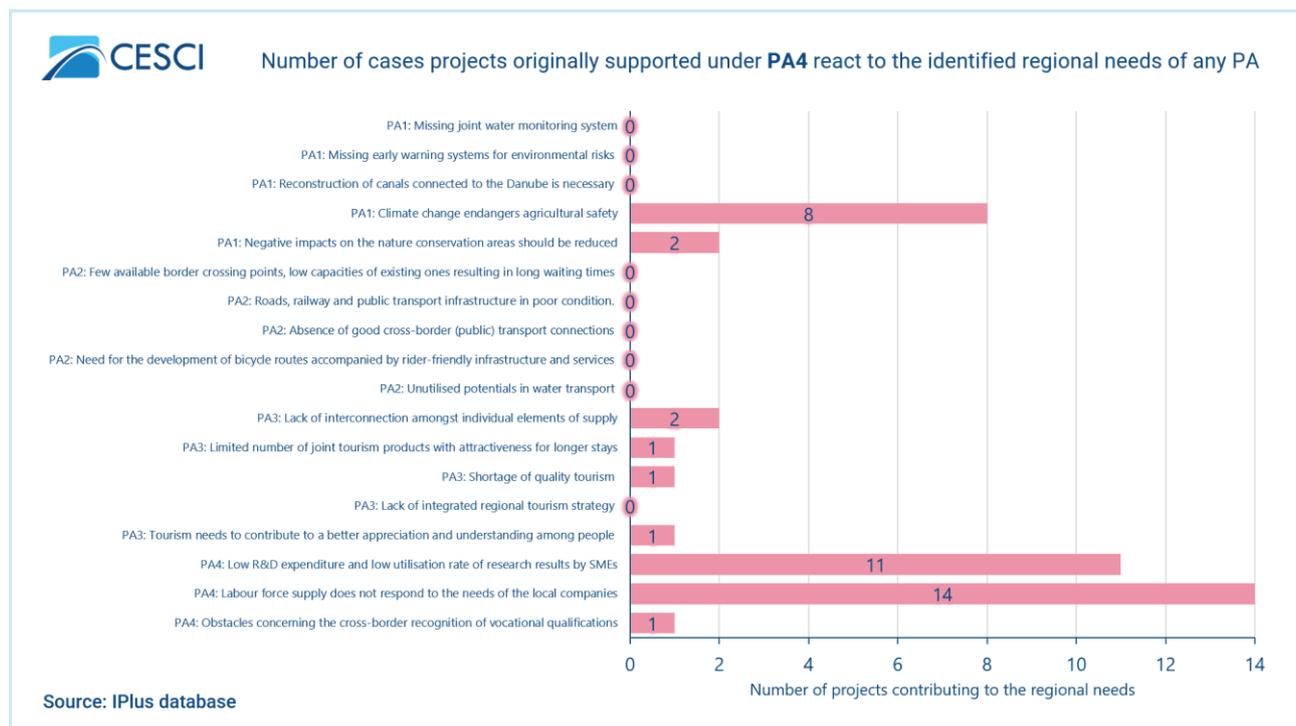
Figure 145: Number of HUSRB projects of any PA reacted to the identified regional needs under PA4



Taking into account the **number of cases projects originally supported under PA4 react to the identified regional needs of any kind** (from any PAs), labour force supply leads the chart by 14 projects followed by low R&D expenditure by 11 projects concerned. PA4 projects are slightly more diverse thematically than most of the other PAs. It means PA4 projects support PA1 and PA3 projects as well in notable number of times. Climate change is addressed by as many as 8 projects, while negative impacts on nature conservation areas and lack of interconnections amongst elements of supply are addressed by two PA4 projects each. The impacts in relation to PA1 is relatively strong

since R&D projects and knowledge transfer in agricultural themes have an important role in PA4 activities. High share (at least 30% of all concerned) of the projects under PA4 are in line with the following challenges of all PAs: labour force supply does not respond to the needs of the local companies (52%); low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results by SMEs (41%); and climate change endangers agricultural safety (30%). Less than 4% of the projects of PA4 support the tackling of the challenge connected to vocational training, mainly due to its very narrow and specific description in the intervention logic.

Figure 146: Number of cases projects originally supported under PA4 react to the identified regional needs of any PA



3.4.3.2 Indicator value analysis: result indicators (PA4)

In this subchapter, based on the result indicators, the comparison of the expected and achieved results will be presented. During the evaluation, the analysts relied on the documentations of the Annual Implementation Reports (AIRs) and the Cooperation Programme (CP) which were complemented with the observations and suggestions of the interviewees. According to the CP, the reporting frequency of the indicators' values was planned to take place in every second year: the first report – which gave annual value about the fulfilment of the indicator – was the AIR 2019, and it was followed by the report of 2021. The third and last report will be concerned the year of the target value (2023).

There is only one result indicator in the frames of PA4 that shows the rate of innovative SMEs in the cross-border region. The selected result indicator is in line with the specific objective, since the latter concentrates on the enforcement of growth capabilities and employment potential of SMEs through the development and adaptation of new technologies, processes or services. The measurement unit is expressed in percentage which has been provided by official surveys carried out by the national statistical offices according to the methodology of EUROSTAT.

The similarity between the result indicator of PA4 and the first result indicator of PA3 is considerable since both of them possess low target values. Regarding the result indicator 4.1 the baseline value was 32.94% in 2015 and the appointed target is only 33%. Owing to this under-planning, the target value was already fulfilled in 2019 (37.06%) and the extent of this divergence has been constantly raising (2021: 47.99%). According to the observation of AIR 2019, the cause of the target values cautious planning was due to the unpredictability of the markets, thus the result indicator was tuned to the achievable minimum change.

Table 54: Result indicator under PA4

ID	Specific Objective	Selected result indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Baseline year	Target value (2023)	2019 Annual value	2021 Annual value
RI/4.1	SO/4.1: Enforcing the growth capabilities and employment potential of SMEs through the development and adaptation of new technologies, processes, products or services	Rate of innovative SMEs in the cross-border region	%	32.94	2015	33	37.06	47.99

In terms of the interviews, the main problem was caused by the modest target value since the expected change is smaller than 0.1%-point. Moreover, the availability raises other concerns as the source of information can be obtained just by separate minor researches which are made by the national statistical offices. Although these institutions provide public registers, but the required data are not available in every year and the unification of the separately collected information pieces can generate distortion since it is not sure that the two countries measure by the same methodology. One of the interviewees also mentioned that the measurement unit should rather be absolute value instead of percentage which burden the process of counting and data collection. To sum up these notes, the result indicators should be more ambitious and based on joined and confirmed public registers. According to the SMART criteria system, this result indicator is less specific (way too broad) and hard to be measured (because of the availability), but the indicator is definitely achievable, relevant and time-bound.

Table 55: Result indicator of PA4 – Analysis of the S.M.A.R.T. criteria

ID	Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time bound
RI/4.1 Rate of innovative SMEs in the cross-border region	less specific	separate researches	too modest target value	no problem	no problem

3.4.3.3 Analysis of the partnerships (PA4)

The table below (*Table 56*) contains information on the potential involvement (mentioning) of different types of beneficiaries per CfP actions and per targeted activities under CfP actions. It shows which partners were targeted and how many times to be beneficiaries in the three different CfPs of the programme. National government and related bodies, regional government and related bodies, local government and related bodies, Regional Development Agencies, R&D&I support organisations, higher education institutions, vocational and training institutions and organisations, chambers of commerce, clusters and local business associations, labour market organisations, business development organisations, NGOs, social enterprises, organisations operating in agriculture and food processing were the main beneficiaries identified by the Cooperation Programme in the frames of its CfPs regarding PA4.

Based on the number of activities a beneficiary type was involved in any CfPs (i.e. the filled cells with any information on the potential participation of beneficiaries in CfPs) NGOs (5 times), R&D&I support organisations (4), Higher education institutions (4), chambers of commerce (4), clusters and local business associations (4) stand out. The number of occasions a potential beneficiary was addressed by any CfPs (i.e. number of times 1st, 2nd, or 3rd CfP is written in the cells) is high in the case of NGOs (9), higher education institutions (8), R&D&I (7), chamber of commerce (7), clusters and local business associations (7). The highest number of potential beneficiaries were listed in relation to the targeted activity of "Positioning the CBC agriculture and food processing through joint innovation activities" (11) and "Development of innovation infrastructure and catalysing joint R&D&I projects tailored to SME needs" (9).

Table 56: Potential beneficiary types by Call for Proposals

CfP actions	Targeted activities based on CP	National gov. + bodies	Regional gov. + bodies	Local gov. + bodies	RDAs	R&D&I support org.	Higher education inst.	Vocational and training inst., organisations	Chambers of commerce	Clusters and local business associations	Labour market org.	Business dev. org.	NGOs	Social enterprises	Agriculture and food processing org.
	Setting up and operating "innovation communities" in "challenged economic and social areas"	2 nd	2 nd			2 nd			2 nd	2 nd		2 nd	2 nd	2 nd	
	Development of innovation infrastructure and catalysing joint R&D&I projects tailored to SME needs			2 nd	2 nd	2 nd	2 nd	2 nd		2 nd	2 nd	2 nd	2 nd		

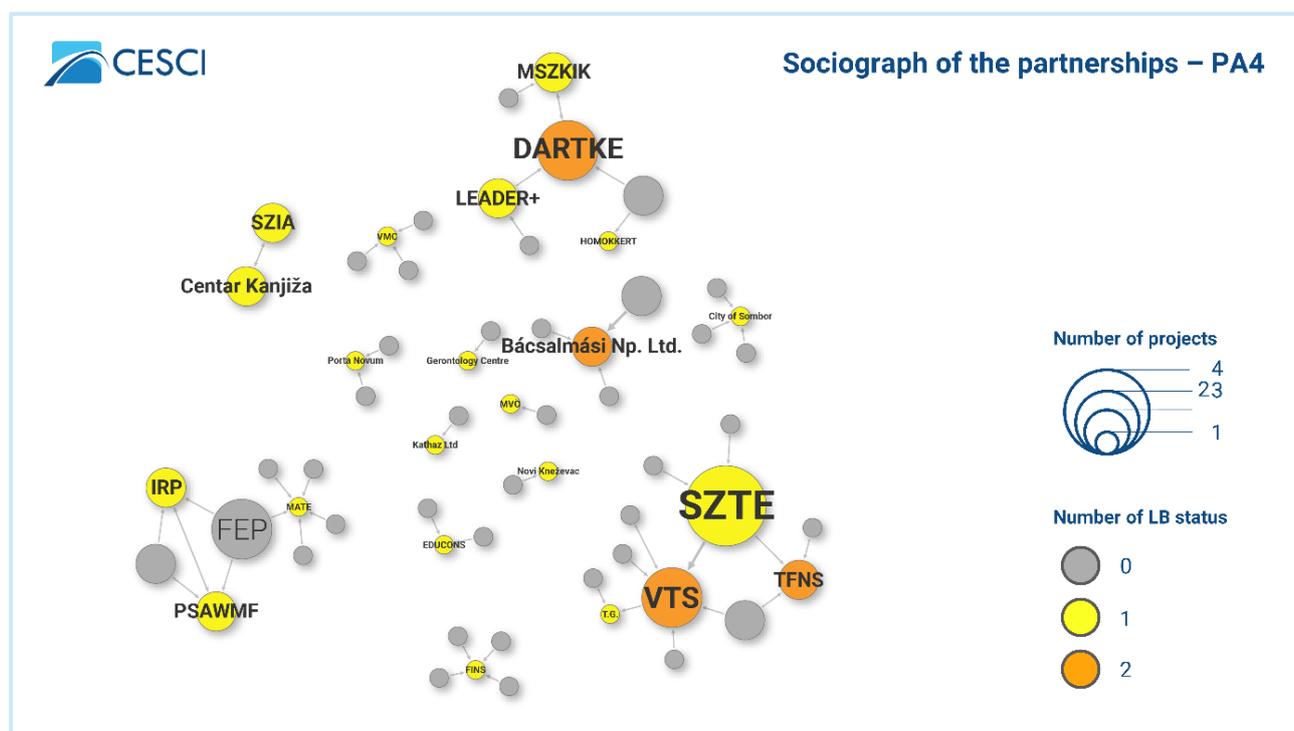
CfP actions	Targeted activities based on CP	National gov. + bodies	Regional gov. + bodies	Local gov. + bodies	RDAs	R&D&I support org.	Higher education inst.	Vocational and training inst., organisations	Chambers of commerce	Clusters and local business associations	Labour market org.	Business dev. org.	NGOs	Social enterprises	Agriculture and food processing org.
4.1 Enhancing innovation through cooperation between SMEs and research institutions involving young people > 4.3	Positioning the CBC agriculture and food processing through joint innovation activities			3 rd	3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	3 rd		2 nd 3 rd	3 rd	2 nd 3 rd
4.3 Enhancing entrepreneurial innovation involving research institutions through scholarships for young people	Promoting knowledge-sharing and networking amongst, and professional experience building for young researchers and entrepreneurs					2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd		2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd		2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd		
4.2 Encouraging and development of social entrepreneurship	Supporting the activities of social entrepreneurs	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd			2 nd 3 rd		2 nd 3 rd				2 nd 3 rd	2 nd 3 rd	

It is worth comparing the potential (planned) beneficiaries of CfPs to the real (actually involved) beneficiaries of the realised projects. The matching of the before and after picture of the beneficiaries, similarities can be detected with regard to higher education institutions, R&D&I institutions, development agencies (RDAs), chamber of commerce, business development organisations. On the other hand, the involvement and participation of national government, vocational and training institutions and organisations, labour market organisations, social enterprises and especially agricultural organisations were less pronounced as it had been planned. As it can be seen, in the case of PA4 the involvement of business-related economic beneficiaries was outstanding, however their potential involvement depended on the actual Actions they intended to support. Action 4.1 invited potential beneficiaries related more to R&D&I stakeholders, labour market organisations, clusters and chamber of commerce. Action 4.2 tried to invite beneficiaries which are more related to government bodies, NGOs and social enterprises.

Considering the **types** of beneficiaries, the share of beneficiaries governed by private law is the highest of all PAs; the 28 beneficiaries make up 34% of all Bs. Consequently, the share of public beneficiaries is low (66%), which is understandable given the guidelines on potential beneficiaries. Talking about the **size** of the partnerships, on average a partnership is made up by 2 beneficiaries, which is slightly above the average. University of Szeged (SZTE) (4) and Southern Great Plains Region Social Research Association (DARTKE) (3) stand out since the rest of the beneficiaries usually participated in a single project or two. Among the LBs DARTKE (2 projects as LB), Bácsalmási

Önkormányzati Közszolgáltatási Közhasznú Nonprofit Kft. (2), Subotica Tech - College of Applied Sciences (VTS) (2) and University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technology (TFNS) could be mentioned as important partners in the system. As centrepieces of the whole network VTS (6 connections), Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Science (MATE) (5), SZTE (4), Institute of Food Technology in Novi Sad, University of Novi Sad (FINS) (4), Institute of field and Vegetable Crops (IRP) (3), Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry (PSAWMF) (3), European Affairs Fund of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (FEP) (3), DARTKE (3), TFNS (3), Vojvodina Metal Cluster (VMC) (3), Bácsalmási Ltd. (3) and City of Sombor (3) developed the highest number of project connections. To sum up, the sub-networks are characterised by SZTE, VTS, TFNS, furthermore by DARTKE as well as by the group of IRP, PSAWMF and FEP together. Beside these central elements and concentrations with the participation of Research Development and Innovation (RDI) institutions, development agencies and economic groupings/alliances the other parts of the network are rather fragmented and isolated with limited connections to the rest of the partnership landscape.

Figure 147: Sociograph of the partnerships – PA4



In relation to partner **budgets** the share for beneficiaries governed by private law was understandably the highest in PA4 with 2 796 147 EUR (33.5%), while the public budget reached 5 560 751 EUR. The average partner budget for partners governed by private law was 99 862 EUR, while for public was 102 977 EUR with regard to total costs. 101 913 EUR was the average budget per beneficiary, which is the lowest value out of the four Pas.

Taking into account the total costs of projects the largest amount of budget to any Lead Beneficiary was allocated to Municipality of Mórahalom (426 186.47 EUR). On the Hungarian side SZTE (269 670 EUR) and Porta Novum Nonprofit Kft (262 407.38 EUR) managed to manage larger amount of financial support. In Serbia University of Novi Sad stands out (428 278.00 EUR), and the second is also a higher education institution, EDUCONS University (206 886.06 EUR).

In the frames of the online survey the respondents also had the opportunity to evaluate their partnerships. Altogether 15 responses were received under PA4 that concerns 11 projects since more than one beneficiary filled the questionnaire form the same project. It might cause overlapping in the data; thus, the survey should be regarded as an insight to the main trends, but it is not adequate to introduce the exact situation.

According to the online survey, the main **motivation** of the partnerships under PA4 is the similar mission and goals, since 86.7% of the respondents (13 beneficiaries) named this option. Approximately half of the beneficiaries stated that the previous cooperation (8 persons, 53.3%) and the close geographical proximity (7 persons, 46.7%) are the frame of the partnership. Additionally, only one respondent highlighted the importance of shared language, and another two persons chose the 'other' option which refers to the similar mentality and way of thinking or the complementarity of skills and expertise.

Considering the **length** of the partnerships (taking into account the responses to the question as follows: how long is your cooperation with each of your partners?), they are based on young cooperation, since the history with 32 project partners(out of 36 partners) does not exceed 5 years. Most of them are 1-3 years old (14 project partners) and 3-5 years old (10 project partners) partnerships, but the other 8 partners of the respondents are newcomers.

The **future** prospects of the partnerships are quite favourable since 8 respondents (out of 15) would like to continue the partnerships with most of the partners, and other 6 respondents have the intention to keep the cooperation with some of the partners. All in all, only one beneficiary is not sure that the already existing partnership will remain in the future.

3.4.3.4 Analysis of the territorial coverage (PA4)

In the beginning of this subchapter the territorial coverage of EU contributions and beneficiaries were analysed by the following two figures (*Figure 148, Figure 149*). Both of them indicate the values by countries, the first one in relative values, the second one in absolute value. The number of PA4-related beneficiaries is a quarter of the total, 323 beneficiaries.

Figure 148: Territorial balance of the beneficiaries [PA4] – Relative values

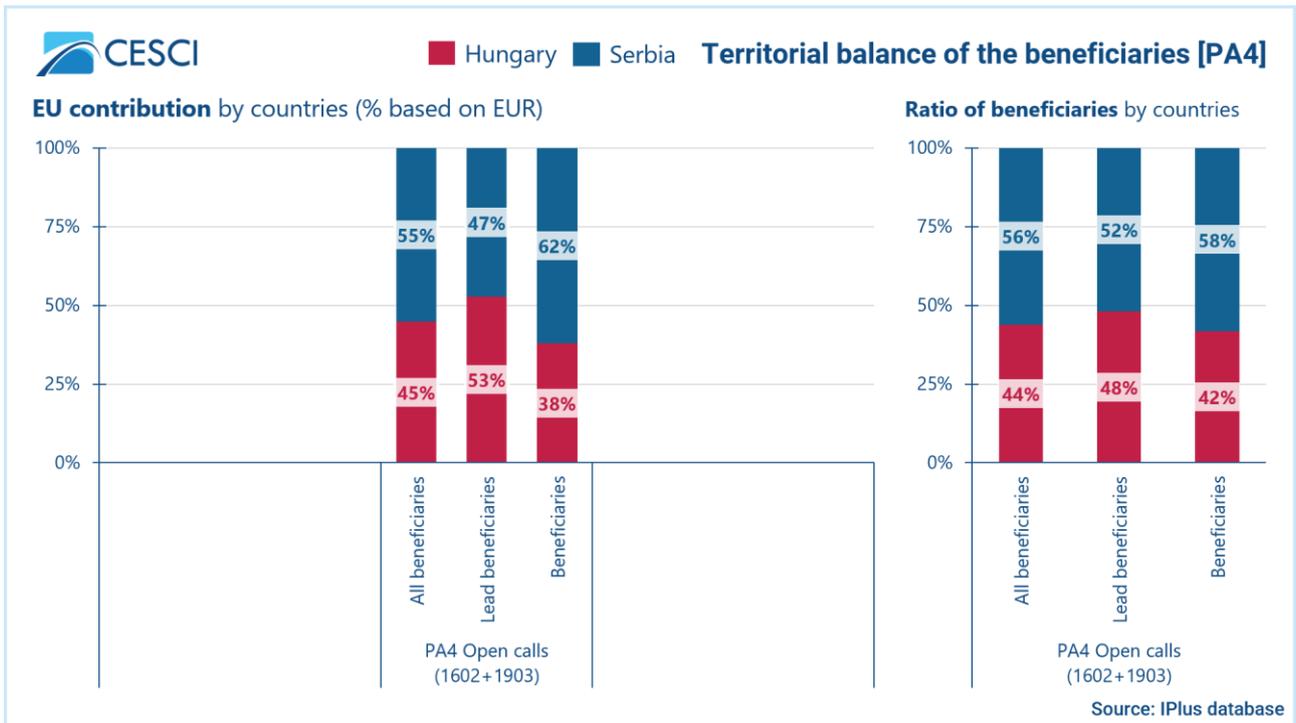
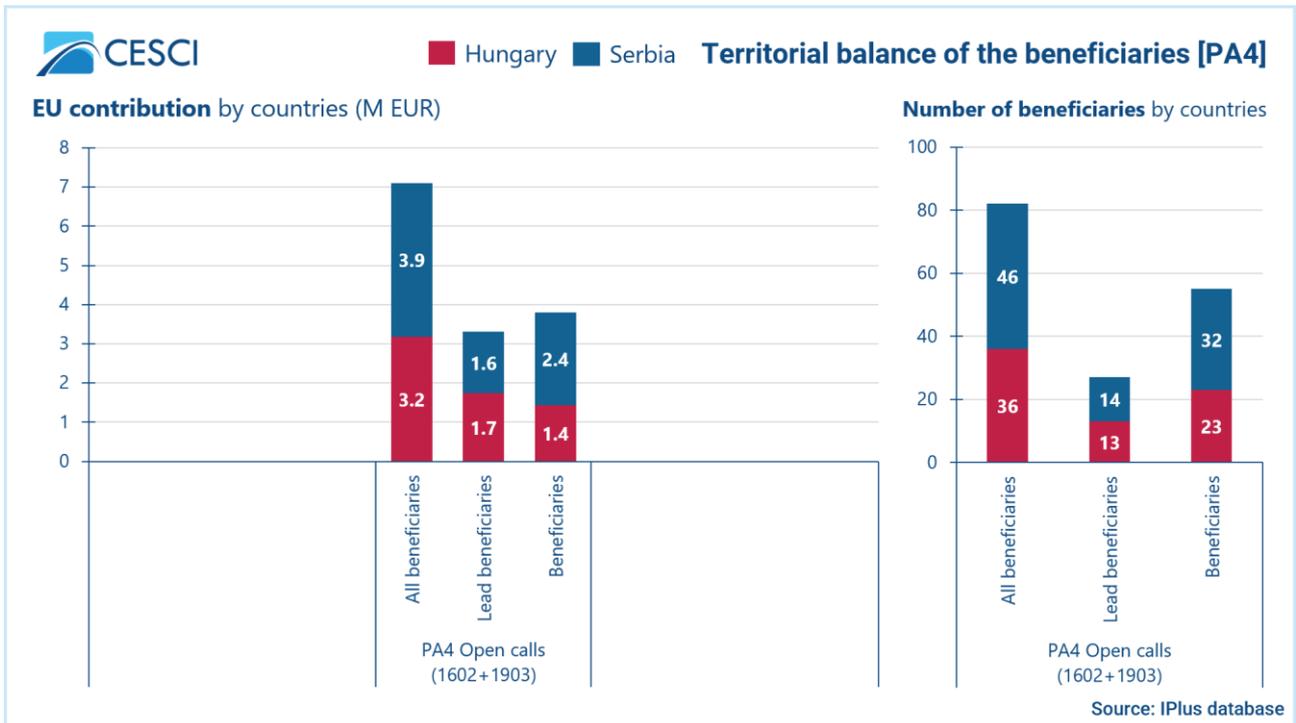


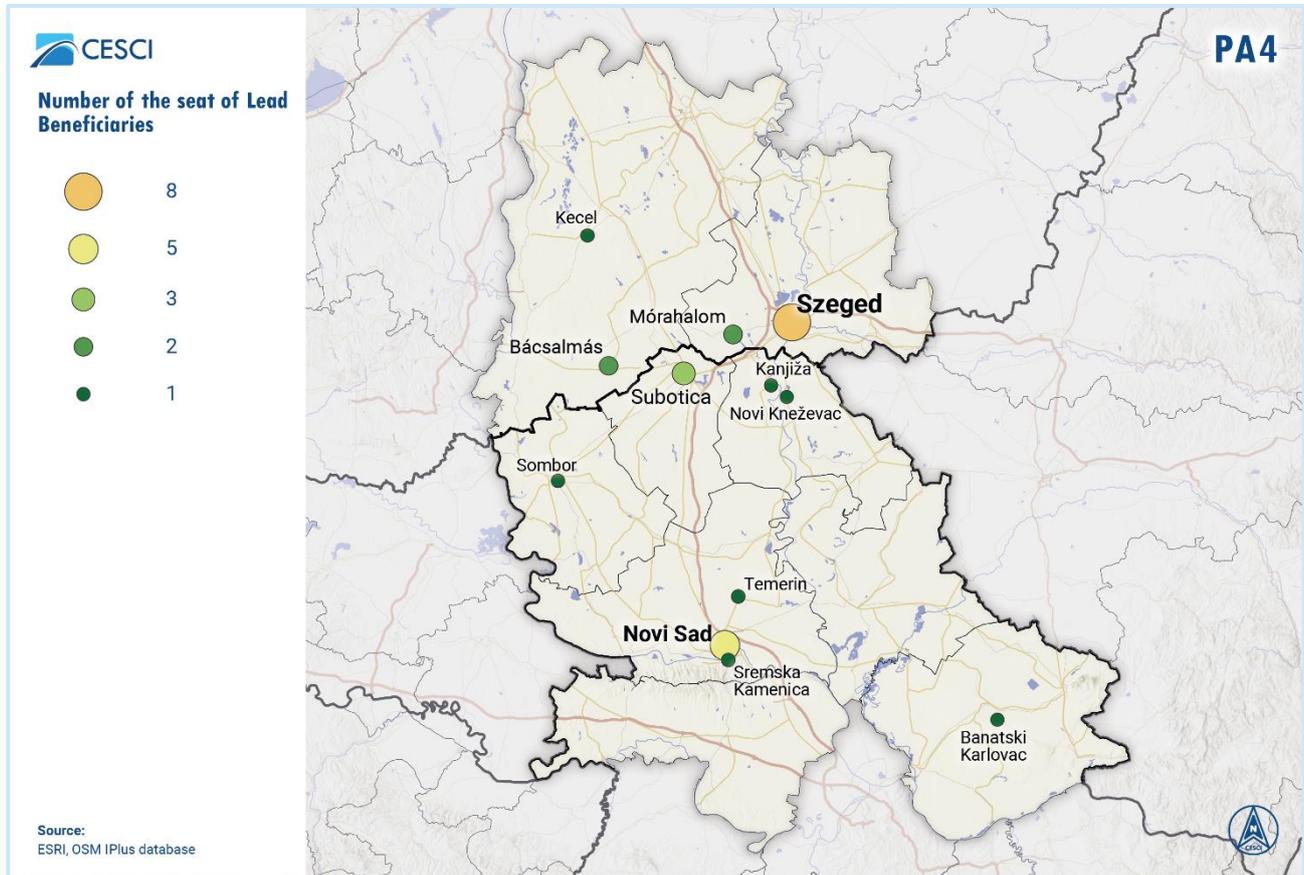
Figure 149: Territorial balance of the beneficiaries [PA4] – Absolute values



Without a strategic CfP and large infrastructural investments, it is the most balanced PA in the sense of the territorial distribution of the EU contribution and the number of beneficiaries. Therefore, none of the relative and absolute values shows any huge differences between the two countries. Regarding the LBs, the number of them is quite the same, as the number of Serbian LBs is ahead of the Hungarians only by one partner, however this slight advantage is not noticeable in the distribution of EU contribution, which means that the Hungarian LBs tend to get higher support. In terms of the

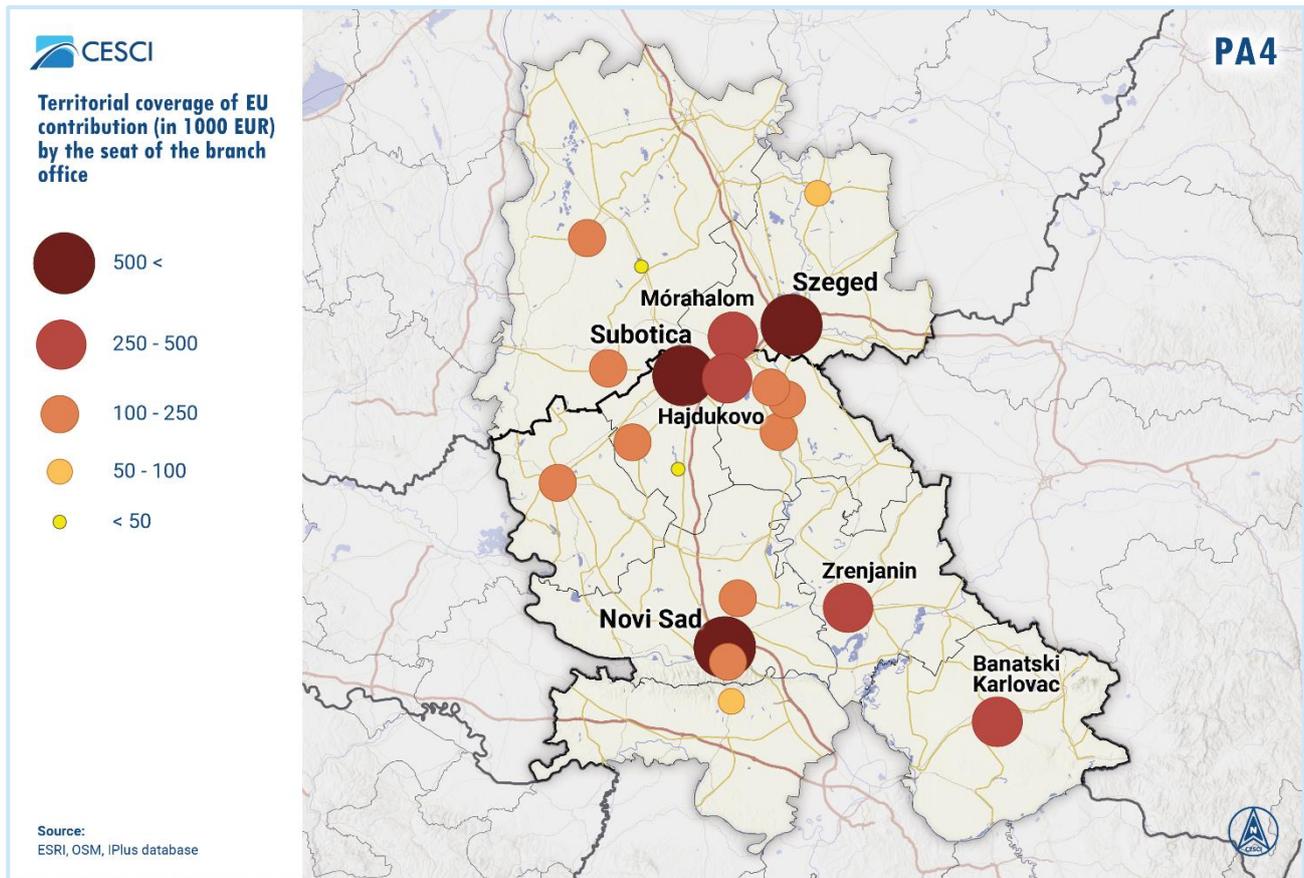
beneficiaries, more than half of the EU contribution and that of beneficiaries concern the Serbian side.

Figure 150: Number of Lead Beneficiaries by seat (PA4)



The spatial distribution of EU contribution is more even than in the case of PA1 or 2, however is less balanced when it comes to PA3. Still, PA4 is the only PA which gave contribution to all regions concerned including southern Serbian municipalities as well. The highest amount of financial support went to Szeged 14 212 732 EUR (31.1%), Novi Sad (15 328 180 EUR, 17.6%), Subotica (4 317 182 EUR, 7.2%), Mórahalom (2 046 290 EUR, 7%) and Zrenjanin (449 868 EUR, 5.2%). The leading three cities is responsible for 56% of all contribution. This is the only PA where money was allocated to a branch office (Banatski Karlovac) in Južnobanatska region. In addition, along with PA3 PA4 allocated financial resources to Sremska (Sremski Karlovci). This PA distributed the highest level of contribution to Srednjobanatska (Zrenjanin). A territorial concentration with a total share of 56% can be shown around Szeged and Subotica involving Mórahalom, Hajdukovo, Senta, Novi Kneževac and Kanjiža. In the border zone of 30 km 62.8% of the EU contribution concentrates (branch offices in Szeged, Subotica, Mórahalom, Hajdukovo, Bácsalmás, Senta, Pačir, Novi Kneževac, Sombor, Kanjiža, Kiskunhalas).

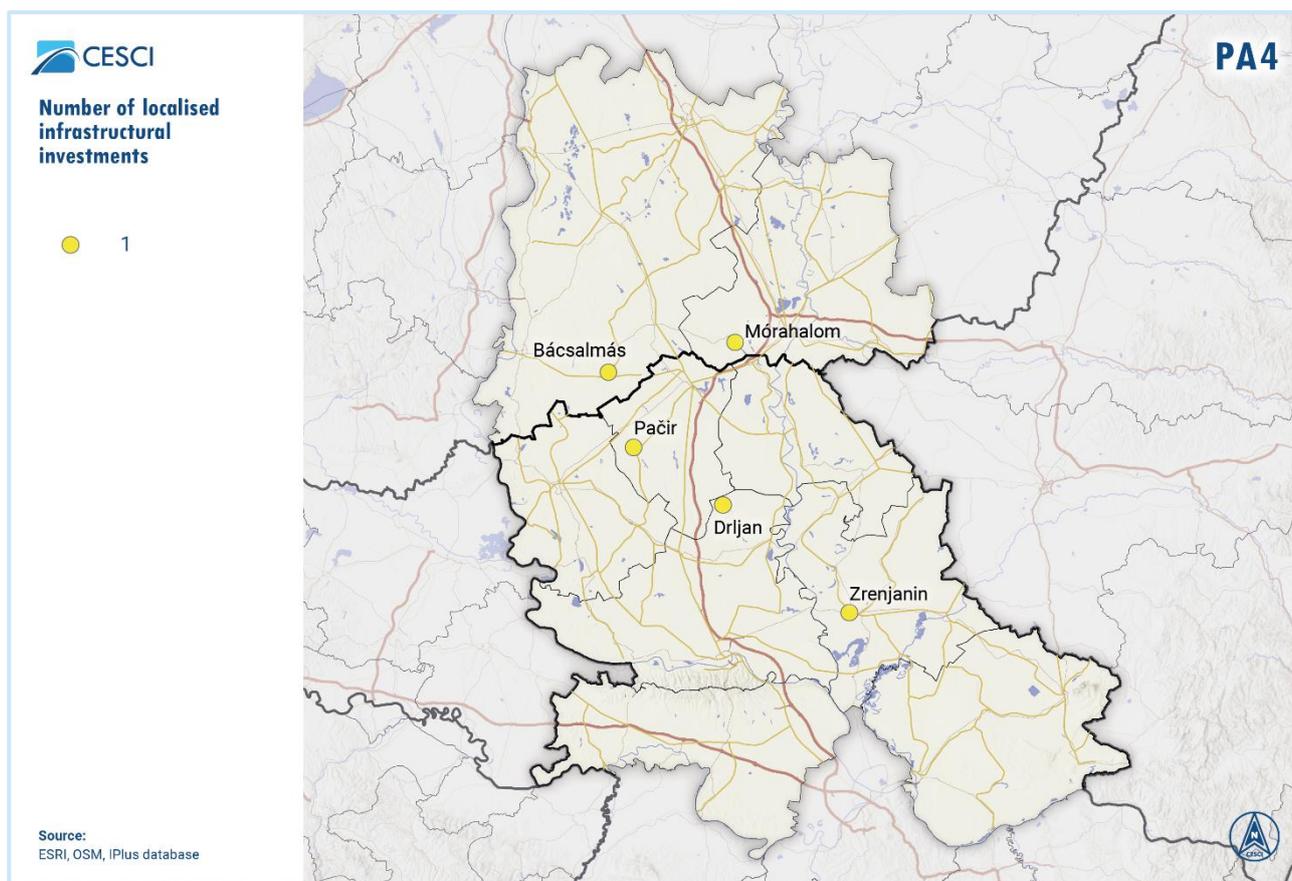
Figure 151: Territorial coverage of EU contribution (in 1000 EUR) – PA4



Based on the **project locations**⁸¹ (where detectable infrastructural developments were carried out) in the frames of PA4 only very few project locations can be detected. The five locations are made up of elements in Bácsalmás and Mórahalom from Hungary, and Zrenjanin, Pačir and Drljan from Serbia. Owing also to the low number of concrete physical realizations large areas lack locations. In Hungary only two settlements close to the border are affected, and none from the northern municipalities. In Serbia Sremska, Južnobanatska, Severnobanatska and Zapadnobačka have zero project locations.

⁸¹ More than a single location per project per settlement is possible, as each location was regarded as a separate location even if it located within the territory of the same settlement. Thus, for instance, if there are three locations in a settlement it does not necessarily mean the infrastructure elements were realized from three different CBC projects.

Figure 152: Number of localised infrastructural investments per settlement (PA4)



3.4.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA4)

In this subchapter, the durability of the project results and outcomes is evaluated along two main aspects: their institutional and financial sustainability. The evaluators assessed the history and potential future of the projects, the pattern of project's life cycle, their embeddedness into the regional and local structures, in addition the financial conditions for maintaining the projects' results.

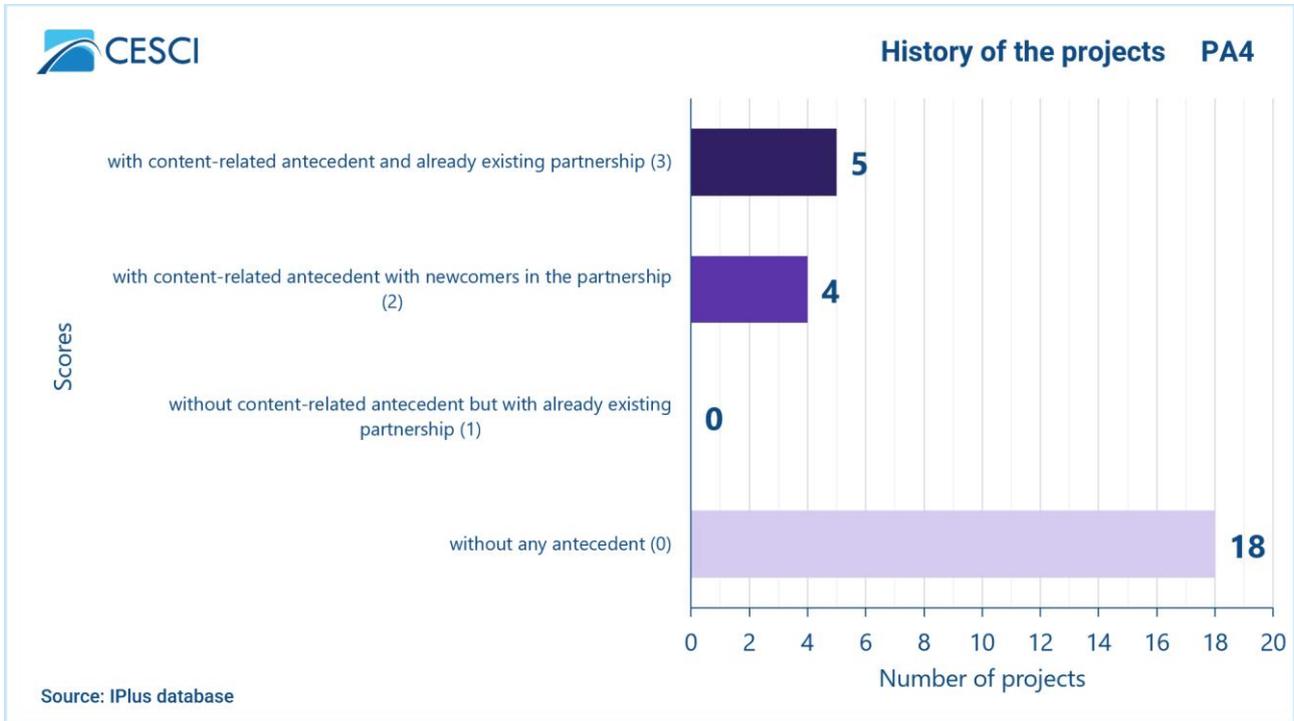
The assessment is based on the results of the interviews and the questionnaire, in addition the application forms and the quality assessment of the projects.

The evaluation of projects' history had been done through analysing the relevant part of all application forms. At the 'description of synergies with other policies, programmes and projects' part of the form, applicants had the possibility to introduce all sorts of previous projects (cross-border, national, transnational, etc.) and partnerships which are connected to their actual development plans. This possibility had been exploited by the applicants in a varying manner, some of them only provided a generic answer, while others explained the matching points in a detailed way. Another barrier of the assessment was that in case of the first (restricted) CfP, this question had not formed part of the application form. Despite of this limitation, evaluators made an attempt to group the selected projects according to the followings:

0. projects without any antecedent;
1. projects without content-related antecedent but with already existing partnership (who had been implemented joint project in another thematic field);

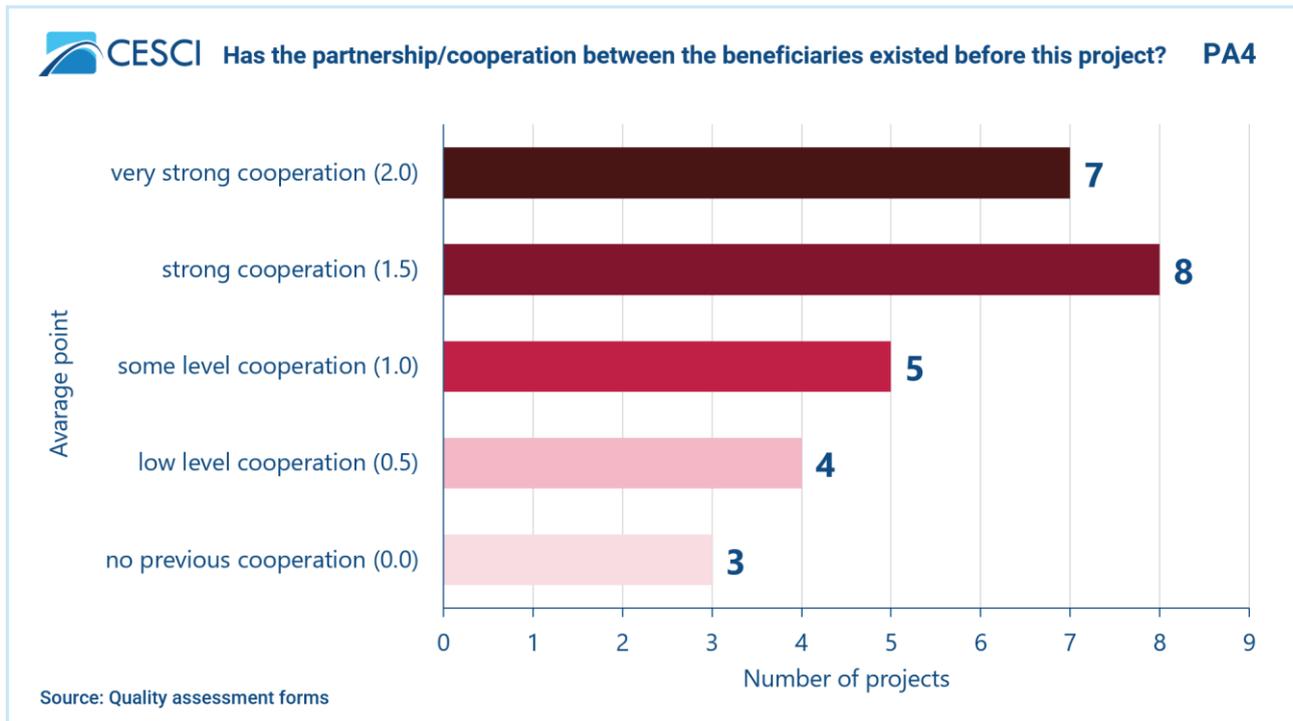
2. projects with content-related antecedent with newcomers in the partnership;
3. projects with content-related antecedent and already existing partnership.

Figure 153: History of the projects (PA4)



As the figure above (*Figure 153*) shows, the two-third of the projects (18 out of the 27) in the field of SME development are without any direct antecedent (at least according to the application forms), which is reasonable taking into consideration that this is the first time that the programme directly deals with the topic. At the same time there are also 9 projects with content-related antecedents, out of which 5 have been implemented in an already existing partnership. All these means that the vast majority of the projects are new initiatives, but there are also some which seems to be embedded into the long-term vision of some local actors.

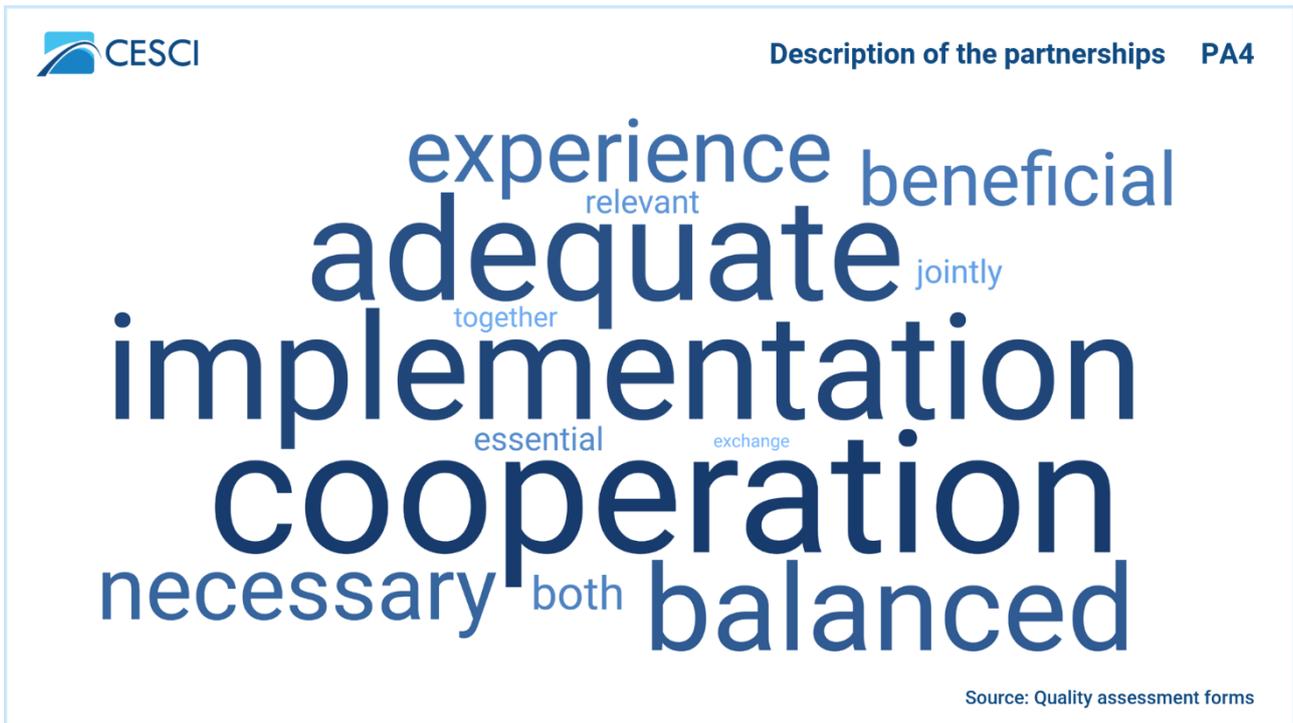
Figure 154: Durability of the partnerships (PA4)



Regarding the history of the partnerships, the evaluators assessed the results of the quality assessment and the questionnaire. The two quality assessors evaluated whether the partnership or cooperation between the beneficiaries had existed before on a 3-point scale (0-2). In case of PA4, the averages of the points given by the assessors move on a wide scale. Comparing to the results with those of the previous analysis, it is interesting that 25% of the project got less than 1 point, which means that most of the projects' applicant convinced the assessors about the existing (strong) partnership. According to the contextual analysis of the assessors' description, the most frequently used expressions were 'adequate', 'balanced' and 'beneficial' in terms of the partnership.

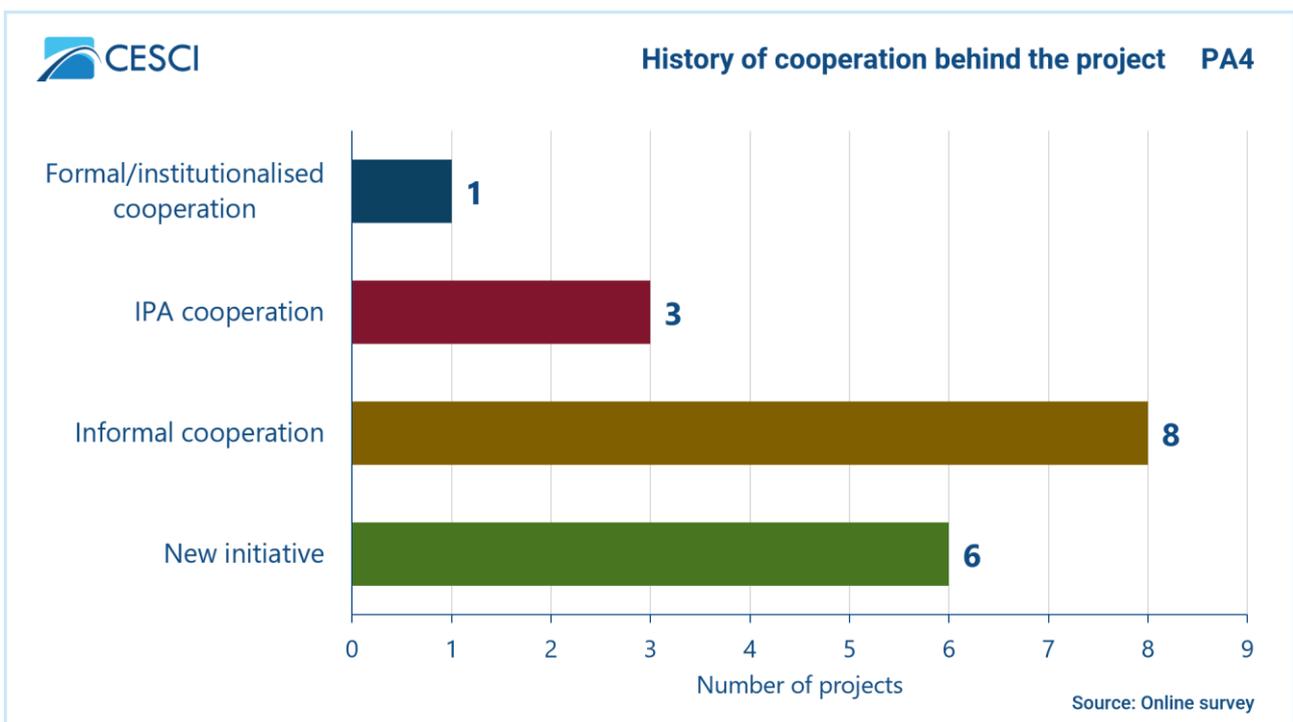
The results of the questionnaire rather confirm the outcomes of the application forms; however the low response-rate may distort the picture to some extent. The respondents reported on 6 brand new initiatives and 8 informal relations to their project partners. Only three partnerships have already implemented joint projects, at least within the framework of the IPA programme and 1 further formalised relation was indicated by the respondents.

Figure 155: Word cloud method visualisation of the partnership aspect (PA4)



All in all, taking into consideration all the distorting effects in case of the certain data sources, it seems that there are some longer-run cross-border cooperation initiatives in the field of SME development in the region, but the partnerships are looser than in case of the other three PA, which obviously means some risks in terms of the durability of the project results.

Figure 156: History of cooperation behind the project (according to the questionnaire related to the PA4)



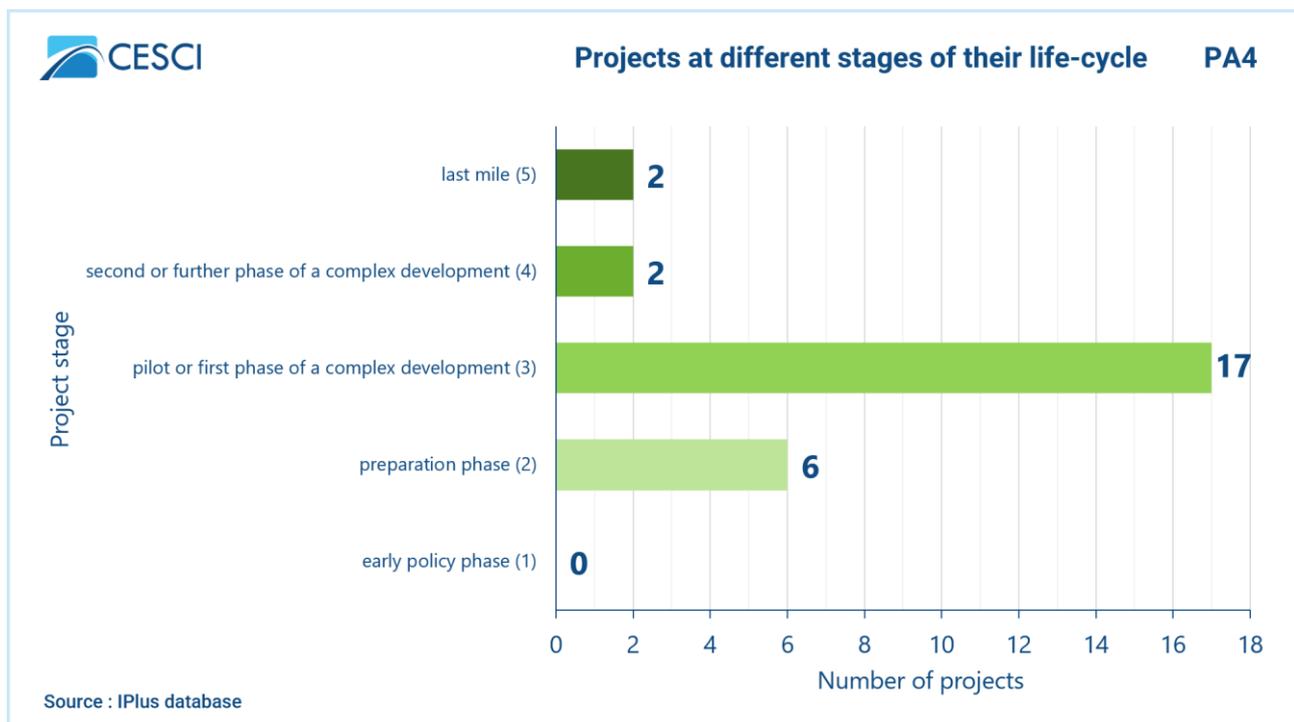
Based on the application forms, the evaluators also assessed the pattern of the projects' life cycle, which means a classification of projects based on the stages of implementation that they lie on. The analysis tends to reflect on the integrated approach, whether the beneficiaries initiate ad-hoc, separate projects or plan and implement long-term, synergic developments step-by-step. This difference in the local actors' mindset basically determines the durability of the projects' and programme's results.

On the basis of the project summary written by the beneficiaries in the application phase, projects were categorized into the following 5 groups:

1. early policy phase,
2. preparation phase,
3. pilot or first phase of a complex development,
4. second or further phase of a complex development,
5. last mile.

Taking into consideration that the classification is based on the project summaries which shows some quality differences, there might be some distortions in the results, but some trends are still noticeable.

Figure 157: Life-cycle of the projects (PA4)



As the figure (Figure 157) shows, vast majority of the projects (17 out of the 27) were evaluated as a first phase measures, which might be continued in the future. This can be explained by that the CfPs require such, mainly soft projects which combines the policy and technical preparatory steps (market research, surveys, development of networks, feasibility studies, etc.) together with at least the first step of certain development. This means that most of the projects implemented actions covers the first three points of the scale above, and all of them were categorized to the highest third level. According to the applicants' summary six projects were found to implement only preparatory steps.

In practice, these means research with a promotion campaign of the results expected to be uptake and used by SMEs on the one hand, in addition a methodology development and establishment of a network (institutional framework) for strengthening the innovation potential in a given sector. The projects categorized to the fourth level are the predecessors of IPA projects with the same thematic focus implemented in the previous programming period. Two projects were categorised to the highest level since these initiatives contain complex developments which outstand from the remaining projects.

According to the questionnaire, the majority of the projects (12 out of 15) are planned to be continued in the future. 5 respondents indicated their intentions to initiate a new joint project, out of which some would like to broaden the partnership and territorial coverage in order to be able apply for other funding than IPA too. In addition, 2 respondents have already submitted their applications to the Danube Transnational and Erasmus+ Programme, while one other partnership had the chance to continue their work within the framework of the 2014-2020 IPA Programme. In terms of the partnerships, only one respondent is not sure about the continuation, the other 14 beneficiaries would maintain the connections with some or most of the partners.

The institutional sustainability of the projects has been analysed based on the project application forms, where a description on the sustainability and capitalization of project results had been provided by the beneficiaries. In order to identify and analyse the most frequent solutions planned to be applied by the beneficiaries, a contextual analysis was carried out with the word cloud method. Under this PA, beneficiaries provided high-quality description in most of the cases, according to which the following solutions can be identified:

1. sustainability based on the future cooperation of the project partners: 10 of the beneficiaries mentioned that the extended cooperation after the project closure will provide the sustainability of the projects' results. More than half of them mentioned that all the tasks concerning the cooperation and the joint activities will be integrated into the everyday operation of the partners. In case of the equipment and infrastructure-related parts of the projects, one of the beneficiaries undertake the operation of these elements.
2. sustainability based on a separate organizational structure: 3 applicants undertake the establishment of some kind of organizational structure, such as a 'cluster', a professional 'network' or 'social enterprises' which will be in charge of the maintenance of the results, by offering sectoral services or producing goods to be sold on the market.
3. sustainability based on a certain document: beneficiaries of 3 projects undertook the signature of 'cooperation agreements' to provide the framework of the long-term cooperation. Furthermore, marketing, business, sales and other strategies and action plans were designed for sustainability goals. Another partnership focused on the change of some sectoral regulations during the project implementation, thus providing a legal guarantee for the durability of the results.
4. sustainability based on certain tool: within the framework of 4 projects different 'platforms' (e-commerce, knowledge sharing, etc.) have been developed which will ensure the durability and capitalisation of the results. Other beneficiaries intend to achieve the same goal by applying a well-designed 'marketing system' or offering 'joint branding opportunities' to the target groups.

Figure 158: Word cloud method visualisation of the institutional sustainability aspect (PA4)



Beneficiaries within the PA also emphasized the importance of the policy-level embeddedness of the results in order to ensure their durability. Several projects have dealt with these issues by involving the relevant policy actors from regional, national or EU level to the project implementation.

In terms of financial sustainability, the project application forms, as well as the results of the quality assessment have been provided input for the analysis.

The analysis of the solutions for financial sustainability proposed by the beneficiaries in the application forms gives a heterogenous image, but in line with the sectoral mindset, the economic self-sustainability of the generated outputs got much more emphasis than in case of the other PAs. As it can be seen on the word cloud below (Figure 159), the following solutions of financial sustainability can be identified:

1. financial maintenance guaranteed by beneficiaries from their own resources: The most often cited solution (in case of 10 projects) is to render the task of financial sustainability partly within the responsibilities of some or each beneficiary and their financial plans. Majority of the cases, this solution is complemented by one of the further ones.
2. involvement of external financial resources: 2 applicants indicated their intentions to apply for national and/or international financial resources after the project closure in order to be able to financially maintain the outcomes, while others expect external resources from the market (e.g. 'investors' or 'donors'). Both approaches obviously mean some sustainability risks.
3. revenue generation: 3 projects have been planned to have some contribution from the target groups, for example in the form of 'membership fee', while 5 applicants have 'aimed to provide and present economically sustainable and profitable solutions', by development services (e.g. marketing and certification) and goods (e.g. lavender, local products) to be sold on the market. One project introduced an interesting solution: 'The produced products will

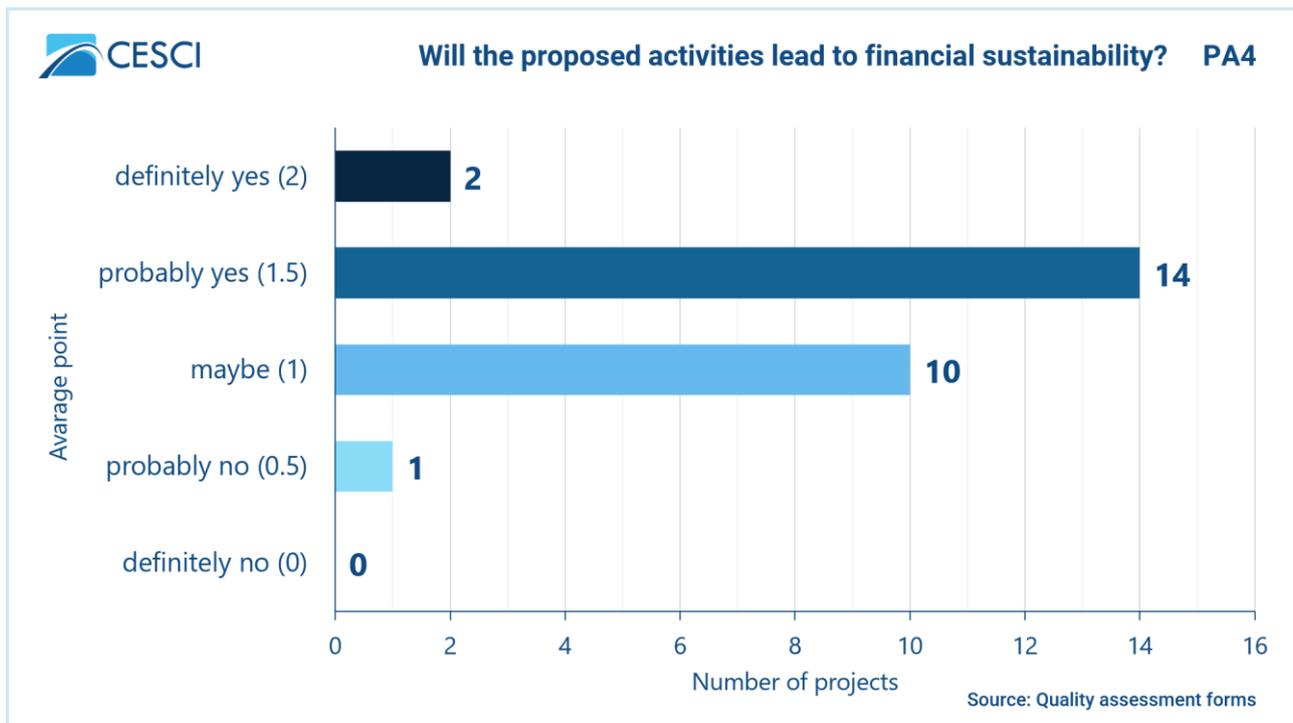
be used in the kitchen of the PP. They operate 3 houses, taking care around 80 children. We contacted a local company who is able to take over the surplus which cannot be used by the PP and instead of paying for the products they will give seedlings and fertilizers for the next production period.'

Figure 159: Word cloud method visualisation of the financial sustainability aspect (PA4)



In spite of the market-oriented approach described by the applicants, the results of the quality assessment in terms of financial sustainability are not better compared to the other Pas. This can be reasoned by the fact, that projects under PA4 contain mainly soft elements, the maintenance of which could not lay on such traditional and simple measures as infrastructure development projects do. The assessors evaluated the projects on a 3-point scale (0-2) in terms of whether the proposed activities would lead to financial sustainability. As the figure below (*Figure 160*) illustrates beneficiaries of 2 projects were able to offer an answer which fully convince both assessors, while the majority of the projects (24 altogether) are in the 1-1.5 point range. Furthermore, one project had been poorly described its financial plans for the maintenance.

Figure 160: Financial sustainability of the projects (PA4)



Last, but not least taking into consideration the follow-up obligations determined by the Joint Secretariat, 10 out of the 17 already closed projects were asked to submit follow-up reports during the 5-year period after the project closure. This value is higher than expected by the evaluators, but it can be reasoned by mostly the value of the procured equipment which forms important part of the criteria system applied by the JS.

3.4.3.6 Analysis of the impacted target groups (PA4)

The main programme documents defined the target groups for the PA4 enterprises (especially SMEs), young professionals, students, unemployed persons (especially young people who are seeking jobs in the border region), local/county/regional governments and their specialized institutions, public organisations, knowledge (research) institutions, NGOs, agricultural producers, production and sales cooperatives and food processing enterprises, young professionals/graduates, young entrepreneurs. Given the fact that this PA is intended to enhance SMEs' economic competitiveness through innovation-driven development, the definition of the target groups seems valid.

The way the projects interpreted the pre-defined target groups are largely in line with the above cited exhaustive list. Most of the projects set as their target groups the young people or students, but parents and schools in general were also targeted. Women, vulnerable people, unemployed, farmers and the Roma were also put in the focus of the projects. However, not only private persons, but legal entities, such as organisations, enterprises and SMEs could also be found among the main target groups.

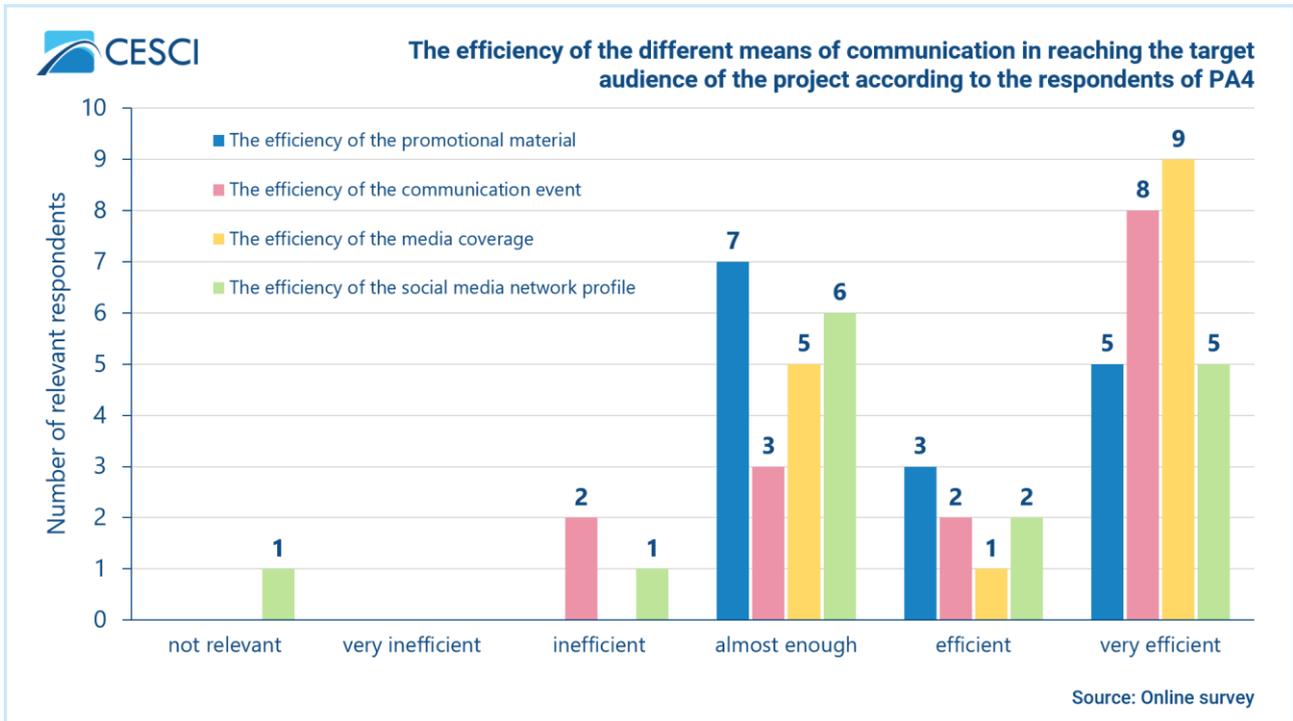
Figure 161: Word cloud visualisation of the target group descriptions provided by the projects in the INTERREG+ system



The comparison of the target groups defined by the programme documents and the target groups defined by the projects show a satisfactory level of harmony which is also in line with the intention of the PA.

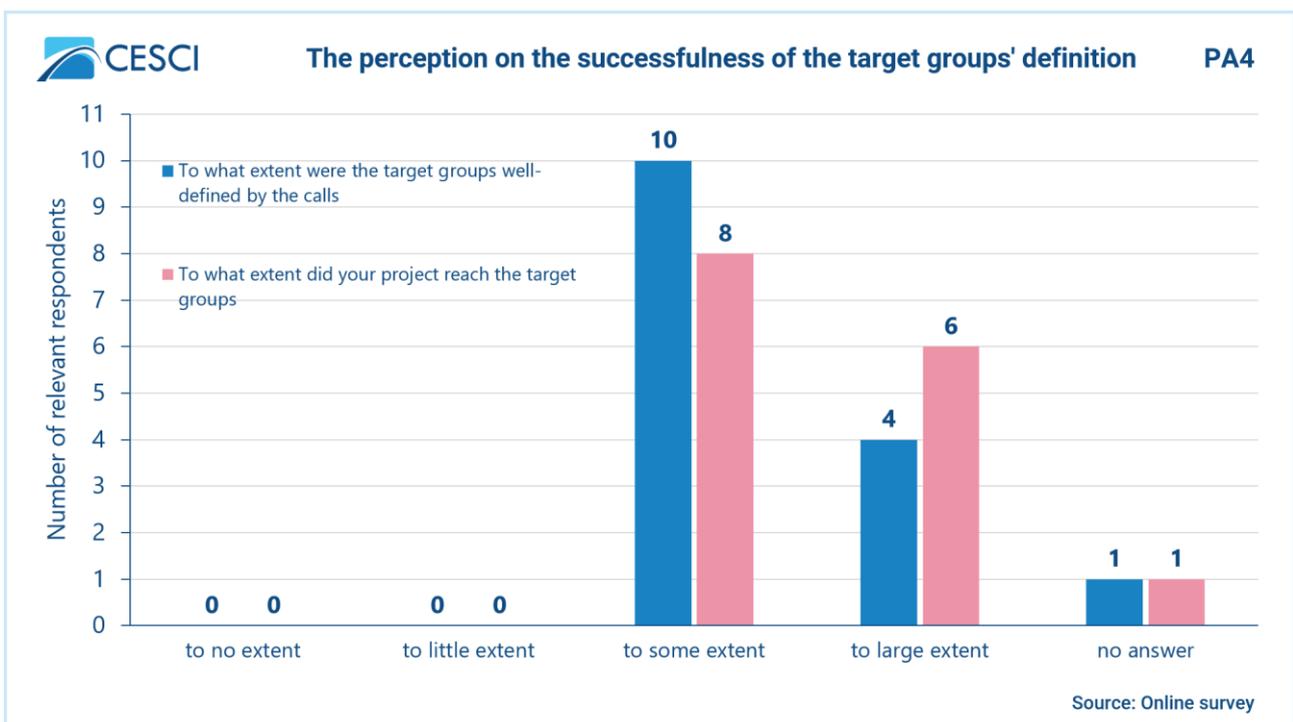
In order to assess how well were the target groups predefined, the online survey referenced above also contained several questions on this topic. The respondents who were implementing a project within the PA3 deemed the successfulness of the different means of communication quite balanced. Only in a small degree did they find inefficient two methods, the communication event and the social media network profile, but the majority was mostly satisfied (though in less degree than in the case of the other PAs). The media coverage seemed the most popular one among these respondents.

Figure 162: The efficiency of the different means of communication in reaching the target audience of the project according to the respondents of PA4



According to the respondents of the online survey, the CfPs defined the target groups to some or to large extent in a successful way and also the projects were considered to reach their target groups in a rather favourable length; a bit less than half of the respondent rated it the highest and the other to the second highest category, which is an almost identical result to that at the PA1, PA2 and PA3.

Figure 163: The perception on the successfulness of the target groups' definition – PA4



The regional needs and challenges that the Programme strived to solve were not relevant to the defined target groups in the same level. In order to assess how relevant these were to the target groups (which is also indicative on how well were the target groups selected) a benchmark analysis was carried out where 1 means it was not really relevant, 2 means it was relevant to some degree and 3 means that the given regional need and challenge was highly relevant to the given target group (the white squares indicate groups that were not explicitly assigned to the given challenge by the Programme). (See the table: *Table 21*.)

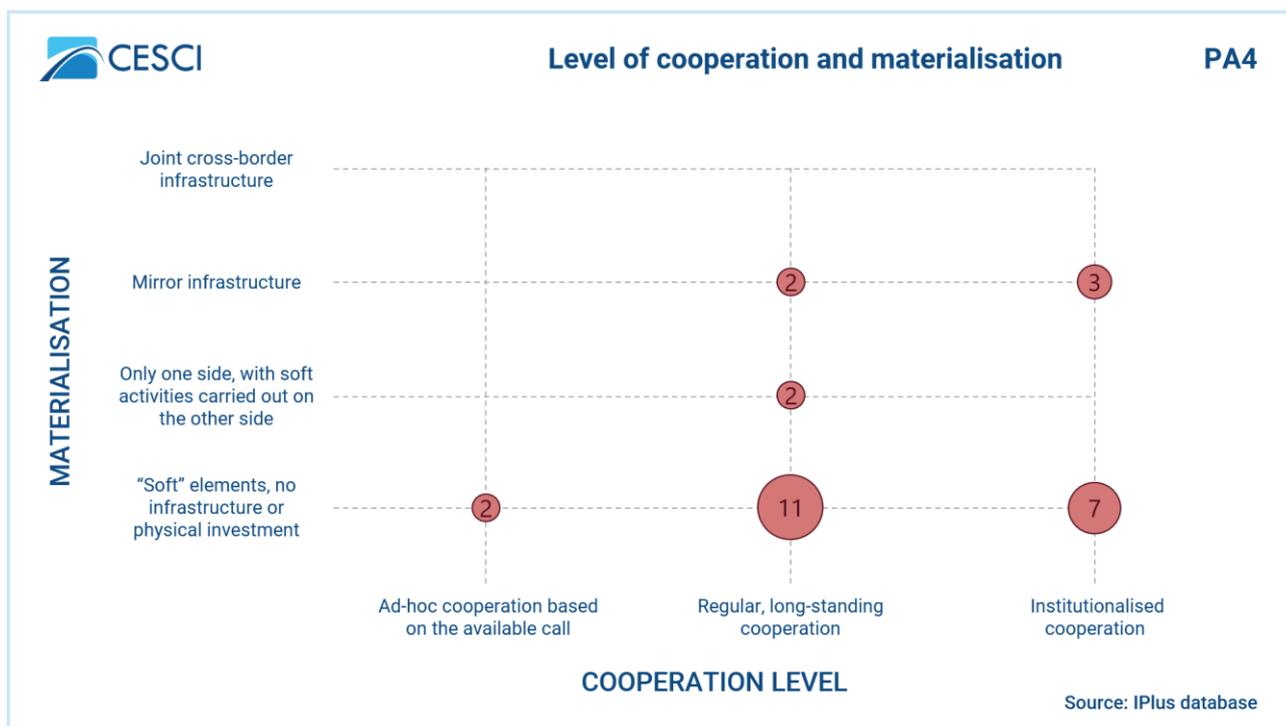
Table 57: Benchmark of the level to which the different challenges were relevant to the defined target groups in PA4

Regional needs / challenges	Defined target groups					
	General public	Enterprises	Young professionals	Students	Unemployed persons	Vulnerable groups
Low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results by SMEs	not a predefined group	3	2	1	1	1
Labour force supply does not respond to the needs of the local companies	2	3	3	2	3	2
Obstacles concerning the cross-border recognition of vocational qualifications	1	2	2	1	2	1

3.4.3.7 Analysis of cross-border relevance (PA4)

The main purpose of the analysis is to identify the level at which the programme can be considered cross-border. We will analyse in this subchapter the projects' level of cooperation and materialisation in a cross-border sense. (The applied methodology is presented in the same chapter at the PA1.)

Figure 164: Level of cooperation and materialisation (PA4)



Considering the **level of cooperation**, in the case of PA4 the share of Category 2 of regular, long-lasting cooperation is the highest among the categories (15 projects). This share (56%) exceeds the overall share of this level of cooperation. With regard to the ad-hoc cooperation, this low level of cooperation is not common in this PA; namely there are only two projects to name here (7%). For Category 1 this is the lowest of all shares, and stays way below the overall average share. Another outstanding value here is the high share of projects (10 projects, 37%) known for institutionalised cooperation. This is mainly because economic development and innovation is very much connected to already existing or newly established institutions, cooperation forms such as incubators or innovation units, platforms or labs even.

Considering the **materialisation of projects** in PA4 the highest share (67%) can be detected in the case of soft elements with 20 projects. This share is slightly above the Programme average even. One-sided infrastructural investments took place in the case of only two projects; thus, the share (7%) is significantly below the Programme average. Regarding mirror infrastructural projects the share (5 projects, 19%) is slightly above the average. No real common cross-border infrastructure was created as part of these related projects under PA4. The results can be understood the way that many projects were set to create non-material innovation, research, and when it came to infrastructural investments those took place either on one side of the border or parallel to each other but not necessarily jointly.

With regard to PA4 the highest concentration can be detected around projects with 1. soft elements realized/no infrastructure and regular, long-standing cooperation (11 projects, 41%), and 2. with institutional cooperation in terms of level of cooperation and soft elements/no infrastructure (7 projects, 26%). This PA has an outstanding share of the previous type, and the two aforementioned categories together dominate the relevance picture. Besides it all, the projects which created mirror infrastructure and established institutionalised cooperation also have some weight in the overall

situation. The results are in connection with the PA's ability to create partnerships, inter-institutional cooperation including joint analysis, innovation, research and development.

3.4.3.8 Synergies with relevant European and national level programmes (PA4)

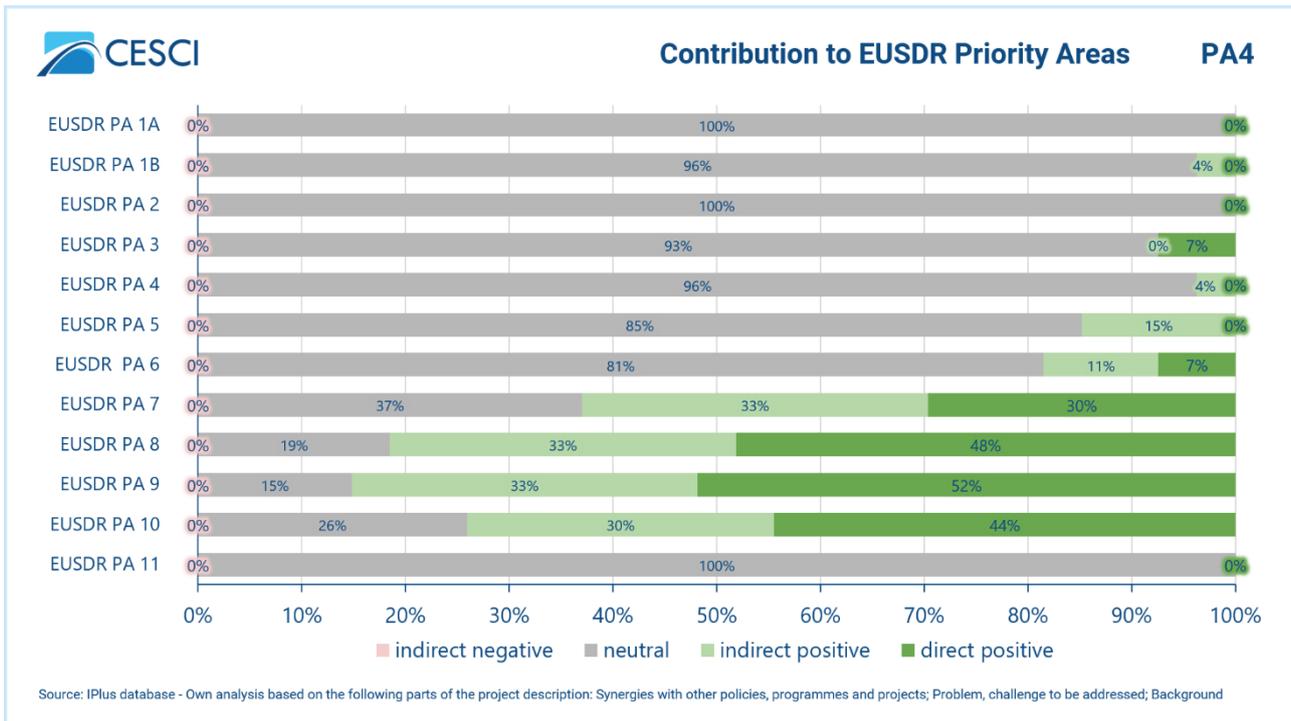
In the frames of this chapter the contribution of the related PA4 HUSRB projects to the relevant European and national level plans will be analysed. For further details on the applied methodology please read the explanation at the same chapter of PA1.

Based on what is written in the application forms by the applicants, on **EU level**, Europe 2020 (14 projects mention it), EUSDR (12 projects) stand out, and Horizon 2020 (2 projects) and the EU Framework for Rural Development Policy (2 projects) can also be listed. The related policies and strategies and PA4 have the strongest interconnections with regard to Low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results by SMEs, but in general there are almost no clear connections possible to be shown.

The estimated contribution of different (mainstream) programmes to the fulfilment of regional needs on **national level** is notable in the case of Rural Development Programme (4 projects) from Hungary, and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development from Serbia (5 projects). From Serbia the Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development (3 projects), the National Employment Strategy (3 projects), and the Development Programme of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (3 projects) can also be listed. The strategies and policies mostly contributed to the challenge concerning low R&D expenditure and low utilisation rate of research results through e.g, technology development, scientific and technology research and innovation, smart specialisation. The topic of agriculture got special attention through direct rural, agricultural initiatives or through smart specialisation strategies. Much less attention was paid on regional needs in terms of labour force supply or qualifications.

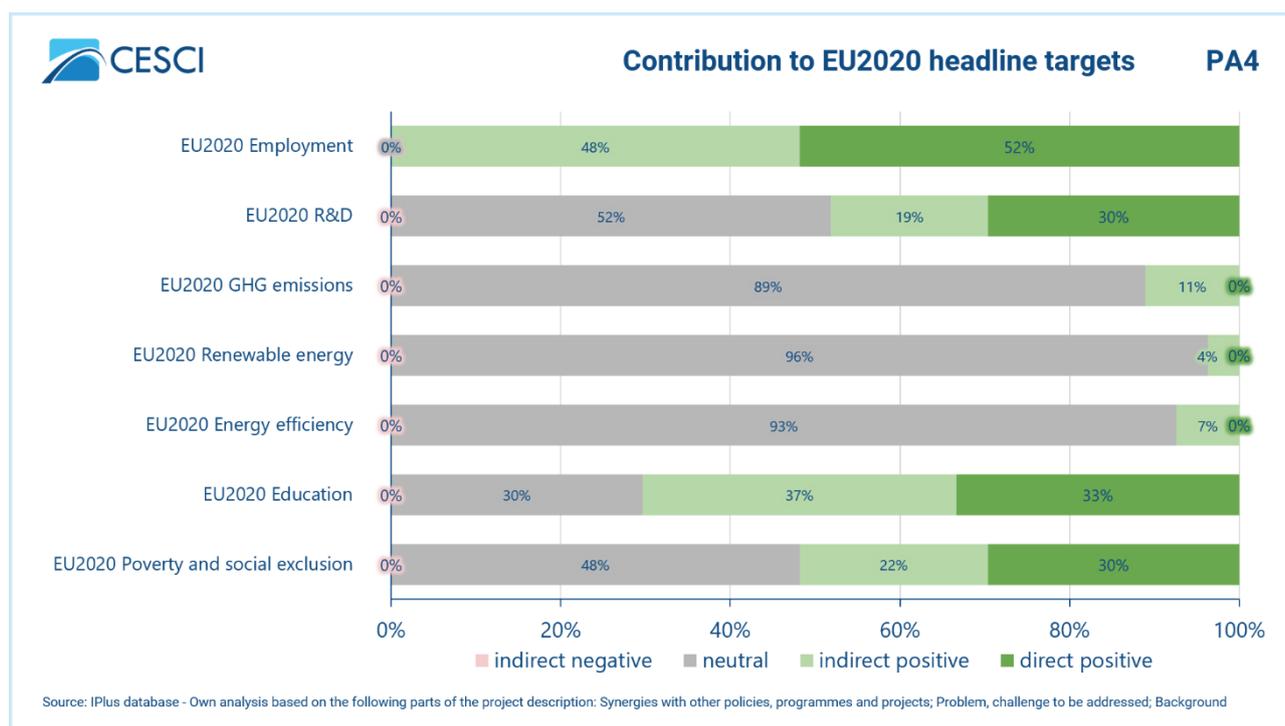
Based on the expert analysis carried out, considering PA4, there are four **EUSDR** Pas which are in strong connection with the projects under PA4. The highest share of projects having an impact on the EUSDR priorities are in line with PA 9 People & Skills; 52% (14 projects) support it in a direct and positive way, while 33% of the projects have an indirect positive impact on the given PA (9 projects). This PA is followed by PA 8 Competitiveness of Enterprises; 48% of the projects contribute directly and positively to the PA (13 projects), while 33% of the projects contribute indirectly but also positively to the PA (9 projects). The third most supported PA is PA 10 Institutional Capacity & Cooperation given that many projects tried to create knowledge and innovation platforms, R&D units for joint cooperation. Out of all projects, a total number of 8 projects (44%) are in line with the EUSDR priority in an indirect and positive manner, and 10 projects (30%) support the realisation of goals directly as well as positively. The fourth most relevant EUSDR PA in the frames of PA4 is not surprisingly PA 7 Knowledge Society, which is the third economic development related PA; 30% of the projects are in a direct positive connection with the PA (8 projects), while 33% are in an indirect relation to the given PA (8 projects).

Figure 165: Contribution to EUSDR Priority Areas (PA4)



With regard to PA4, all related projects have either a direct or indirect positive impact on the **EU2020** headline target called employment. This headline target enjoys the highest share of projects having direct positive impacts (52%, 14 projects). Even the share of the indirect positive projects can be considered significant (48%, 13 projects). Employment is followed by educational impacts with 33% of projects contributed directly (9 projects) and 37% indirectly (10 projects) to educational targets. The projects under this PA supports the realisation of the headline target connected to poverty and social exclusion with a relatively high share; 30% directly (8 projects) and 22% (6 projects) indirectly. In addition, research and development targets are also notably supported by the projects; 30% directly (8 projects), 19% (5 projects) indirectly contribute. In contrast to the beforementioned EU2020 targets, environmental issues are in weak connection with the headline targets.

Figure 166: Contribution to EU2020 headline targets (PA4)



3.4.3.9 Influence factors regarding the impacts (PA4)

After the introduction of the achieved results, the main influence factors will be evaluated. Besides the qualitative analysis, also a so-called influence matrix will be drafted. It will analyse the estimated contribution of different (mainstream) programmes to the fulfilment of regional needs. The applied methodology is described in the influence analysis regarding PA1.

Table 58: The most important external and internal influx factors on the impacts of the PA4

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type (external, internal factor)
COVID-19 pandemic	Epidemic regulations opened space for online events, via apps and platforms. However, these online events raised numerous cautions, like data protection questions, appropriate internet connection and technological knowledge of the representatives. All these cautions had the ability to slow down the interactions.	external
Projects contracted	The most significant problem of the PA4 priority was that one programme indicator (O/I 4.3) had not been covered by the projects contracted until the 3 rd CfP. This problem was addressed by the 3 rd CfP and the JS and the MA had been confident that projects which were selected in 2020 filled the gap later on.	internal
Financial resources	The most frequent used other financial resources were the different national and, in the case of Vojvodina, Serbian sources. Out of the non-national financing sources the Horizon Europe and the Danube Transnational Programme were the most preferable financial resources.	external

With regard to PA4, programmes with the highest overall value which supported the impact of the given PA are the Hungarian operational programmes of VP on rural development, GINOP on economic development, EFOP on human resources, furthermore the Serbia national programme of the Multi-year programs of the RS Innovation Fund, and the HORIZON Programme can be listed as well.

Table 59: Influence effects of the different programmes on the impacts of the PA4

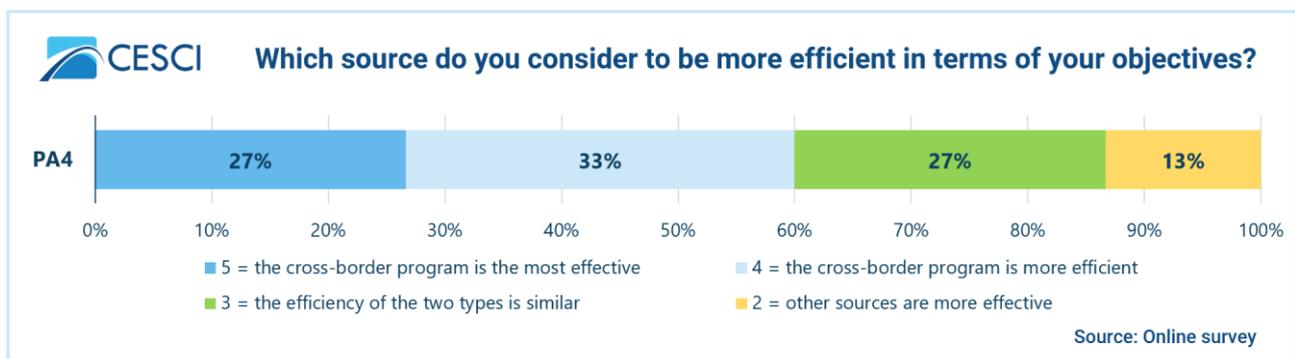
	Programmes	Impact on PA4	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
Interreg programmes	RO-HU	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> measures aiming to promote matching of labour market needs and supply, the development of training and employment programmes focusing on the disadvantaged people so as to promote employment in a more inclusive way 	The focus was on balancing supply and demand in the labour market and enhancing the mobility of workforce, furthermore employment growth and mobility of workforce were also pronounced. R&D and innovation was not addressed at all.
	RS-HR	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created innovative and competitive business and research environment trainings and improvement of skills establishment of educational programs and online platforms intended for the unemployed 	Activities improve the entrepreneurial environment, develop new knowledge and skills that are adapted to the new requirements of the labour market, include vulnerable categories of residents in the labour market.
Hungarian operative programmes	EFOP	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development of social enterprises career orientation integration and skills development of Roma students infrastructural development of educational facilities lifelong learning smart specialisation lifelong learning 	EFOP supports mainly two aspects, namely social economy and serving labour market needs.
	GINOP	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> industrial incubators production technology development, technology modernisation support for RDI activities at companies for innovative technologies prototype development, product development adaptive technological innovation 	Especially in relation to innovation GINOP has high thematic connection. All actions are addressed by GINOP. The financial intensity is also outstanding compared to the other Hungarian Ops.

	Programmes	Impact on PA4	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on-the-job trainings • Spreading flexible employment • development of social enterprises • Internship programmes 	
	KEHOP	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • energetic modernization of buildings • development of solar energy systems 	The topic is less relevant, though the financial intensity is rather high in KEHOP.
	TOP	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incubator houses • Social catering, elderly care • Farmer's markets and farming • Employment agreements involving education and entrepreneurs 	Incubators are very relevant here as well as the employment agreements. The latter had a strong territorial and thematic relevance when it comes to training and labour market mismatches. Still, TOP allocated funds to many other topics, thus the intensity is not so outstanding here.
	VP	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of added value of agricultural products • Supporting the product development and resource efficiency of the wine industry • Support for precision developments related to the digital transition of agriculture • Study tours, exchange programmes in agriculture • Agrarian innovation groups • Trainings in agriculture 	VP is strongly in line with the CP's actions and needs. Innovation-related activities and projects supported are especially outstanding. Innovation and labour market have high relevance here. The financial intensity is high in relation to added value.
Serbian national programmes	Multi-year programs of the RS Innovation Fund	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encouraging the development of innovations • mentoring program • connecting key actors in business development 	A significant number of innovative models are encouraged to develop with sufficient initial capital. There are several different programs and most often invitations within each program are published up to three times a year.

	Programmes	Impact on PA4	Synergies with actions	Explanation/Comment
	Annual program of the Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of added value of agricultural products • Supporting the product development and resource efficiency of the wine industry • Training in agriculture 	The program annually supports a small number of individual producers, which represents an insignificant percentage compared to the number of active producers.
Other programmes	HORIZON	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innovations in the agricultural sector • digitization of agriculture 	A small number of projects with a high budget, which are visible and recognized at the world level. Several scientific institutions with high international recognition of quality in the development of innovations and improvement of the economic status of the country work in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

In the followings the survey will be analysed from the point which programmes contributed and how to the impacts of the CP. The question that will be analysed: which source do you consider to be more efficient in terms of your objectives? PA4 received the second lowest share of answers (26.7%) expressing that the cross-border programme is the most effective. Another outstanding result is that this is the only PA where answers saying other sources are more effective was given (13.3%). Furthermore, the share of category 3 can also be considered relatively high (26.7%).

Figure 167: Which source do you consider to be more efficient in terms of your objectives?



3.4.4 Efficiency analysis (PA4)

This chapter aims to give an overview on the cost efficiency of reaching the objectives and target values of the selected indicators by analysing the projects' budget and the specific features of budget allocations. Within the framework of PA4, evaluators have conducted the examination by actions⁸² defined by the CfPs.

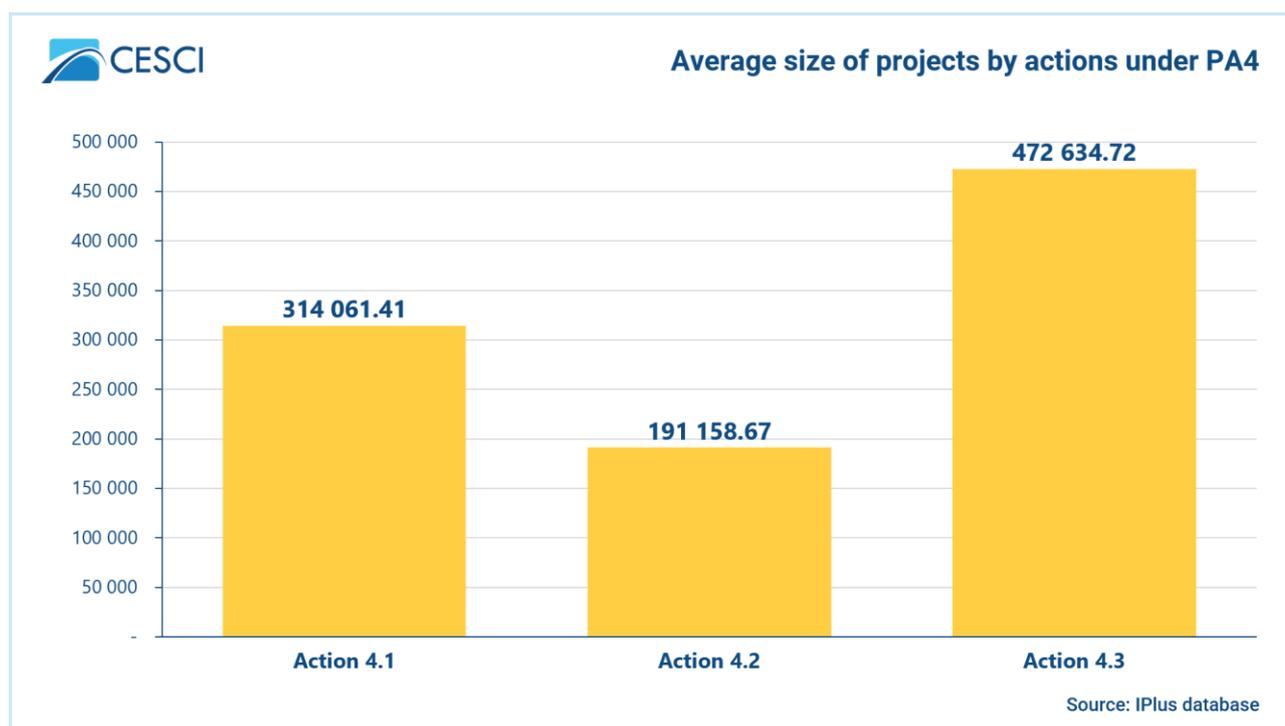
The average size of the projects was assessed from a financial point of view. As the figure (*Figure 168*) shows, there are notable differences between the values calculated for the different actions, which are obviously rooted in the varying budgetary frames determined by the CfPs. However actions 4.1 and 4.3 targets similar fields and actions (such as development of the innovation infrastructure, joint R&D&I activities, knowledge-sharing and networking), the maximum available funding under the first action was defined as 400 000 EUR, while for action 4.3 this number is 750 000 EUR. The action 4.2 can be clearly demarcated from the others, since it supports social entrepreneurship through a limited scope of eligible activities and within limited budgetary framework.

Taken into account the previous 2007-2013 programming period, the average project size on programme level was 281 535.88 EUR which is very close to the average size of projects under the PA4 (288 803.4 EUR).

⁸² Actions under PA4:

- 4.1 Enhancing innovation through cooperation between SMEs and research institutions involving young people
- 4.2 Encouraging and development of social entrepreneurship
- 4.3 Enhancing entrepreneurial innovation involving research institutions through scholarships for young people

Figure 168: Average size of projects by action under PA4



The cost efficiency of the achievement of the targeted and achieved indicator values have been assessed based on the aggregated amount of the allocated EU funding. The table below (*Table 60*) aims to indicate what have already been and can be achieved by the end of the programming period from the programme support in terms of the project output indicators. Regarding the methodology of the analysis, since the projects selected during the third CfP are still in progress, the evaluators aggregated both the achieved and targeted value of the output indicators and the total budget (the validated amounts of the closed projects and the planned ones for the on-going) of the related projects. Then we calculated the cost of achievement of one measurement unit of the certain indicators.

In line with these, in case of *OI/4.1 Cooperating enterprises with research institutions* the achieved value means that 10 318.86 EUR ERDF funding needed for involving one enterprise into cooperation with a research actor.

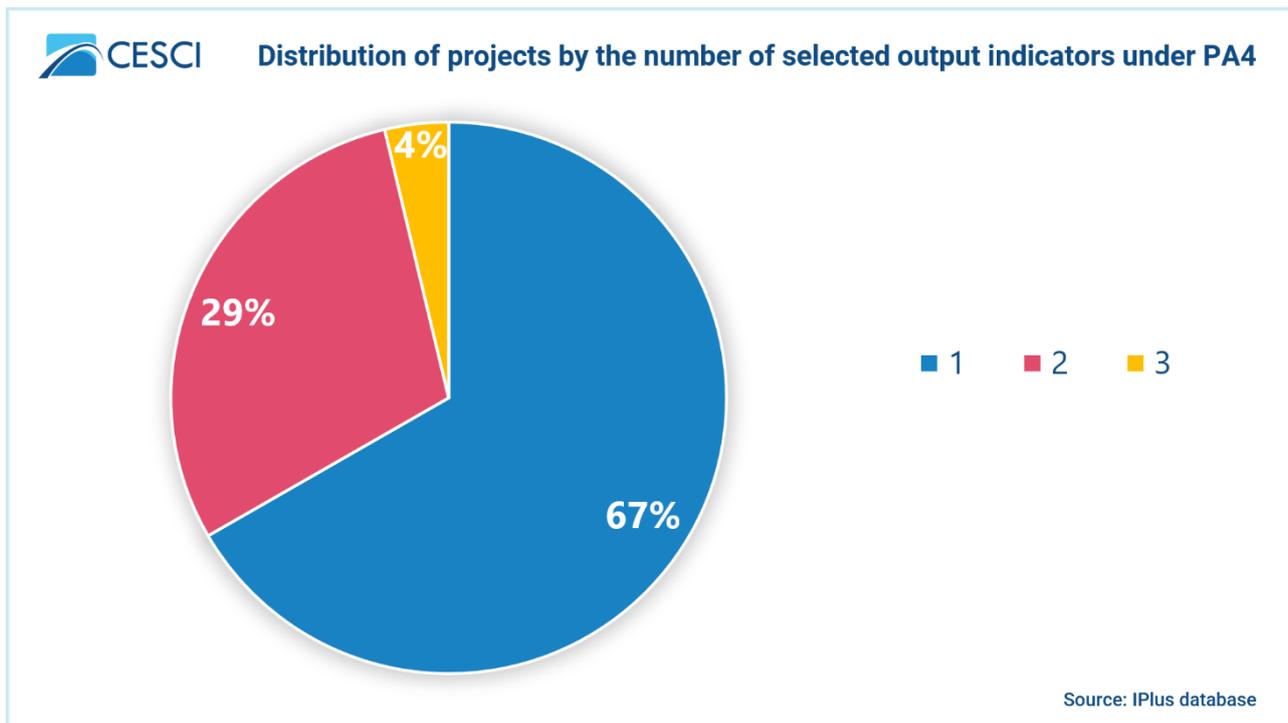
Table 60: Achieved and target indicator values by output indicators under PA4

Indicator ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Baseline value	Aggregated achieved value (AIR 2021)	Aggregated target value	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
OI/4.1	Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	enterprises	2 053 452.98	33	232	224	10 318.86	10 751.0

Indicator ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Aggregated amount of EU contribution of the concerned project	Baseline value	Aggregated achieved value (AIR 2021)	Aggregated target value	Specific achieved value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)	Specific target value of indicator (EUR/indicator unit)
OI/4.2	Number of organisations actively participating in the work of the "knowledge platforms"	organisations	1 729 220.09	0	258	249	6 702.4	6 944.66
OI/4.3	Number of months spent in the institutions and companies on the other side of the border through scholarships	months	2 014 354.75	0	1.75	388.75	1 151 059.86	5 181.62
OI/4.4	Rate of persons from vulnerable groups involved in supported actions	%	2 692 958.22	10	65.7	50.4	46 834.06	66 657.38

Within the PA, 8 projects targeted 2, while 1 project did 3 output indicators. In these cases, in order to avoid distortion, evaluators made an attempt to divide the total amount of the EU funding between the indicators. Unlike PA3, in the majority of cases the division cannot be performed in a sound manner, because of the specific nature of the indicators. For example, it seemed to be impossible to demarcate the cost items targeting the involvement of enterprises into research cooperation and those for involving organisation to participate in knowledge platforms, because most of the activities and cost items concerned both indicators. In line with this, in case of 8 projects, evaluators, undertaking the distortion effect, calculated with the total ERDF fund allocated to the projects in case of each targeted indicator. Division was possible in only one case, which was carried out based on the explanation of the applicants concerning the way of targeting the particular indicators in the application phase and the detailed budget of the projects uploaded to the Interreg+.

Figure 169: Distribution of projects by the number of selected output indicators under PA4

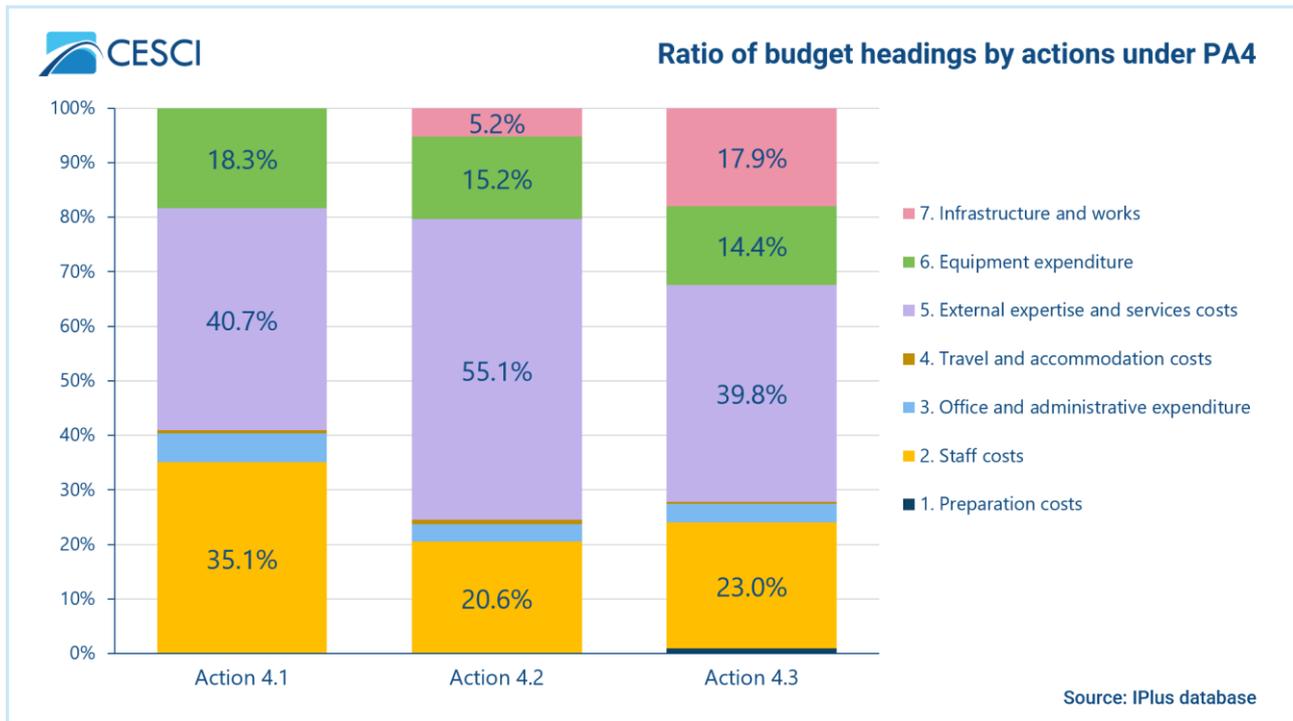


The calculated specific values of the indicators can be hardly evaluated in absolute term, instead it is worth comparing them to the results of the same or similar calculations from the previous programming periods or of other CBC programmes. Since this approach had not been applied in the 2007-2013 or any previous period in the Hungary-Serbia Interreg framework, we made an attempt to use the results of other programmes during the comparison.

However, in case of the Slovakia – Hungary and Hungary – Croatia Interreg V-A Programmes, a methodology was applied for the first phase evaluation of the programmes, none of output indicators are targeted by the other two programmes.

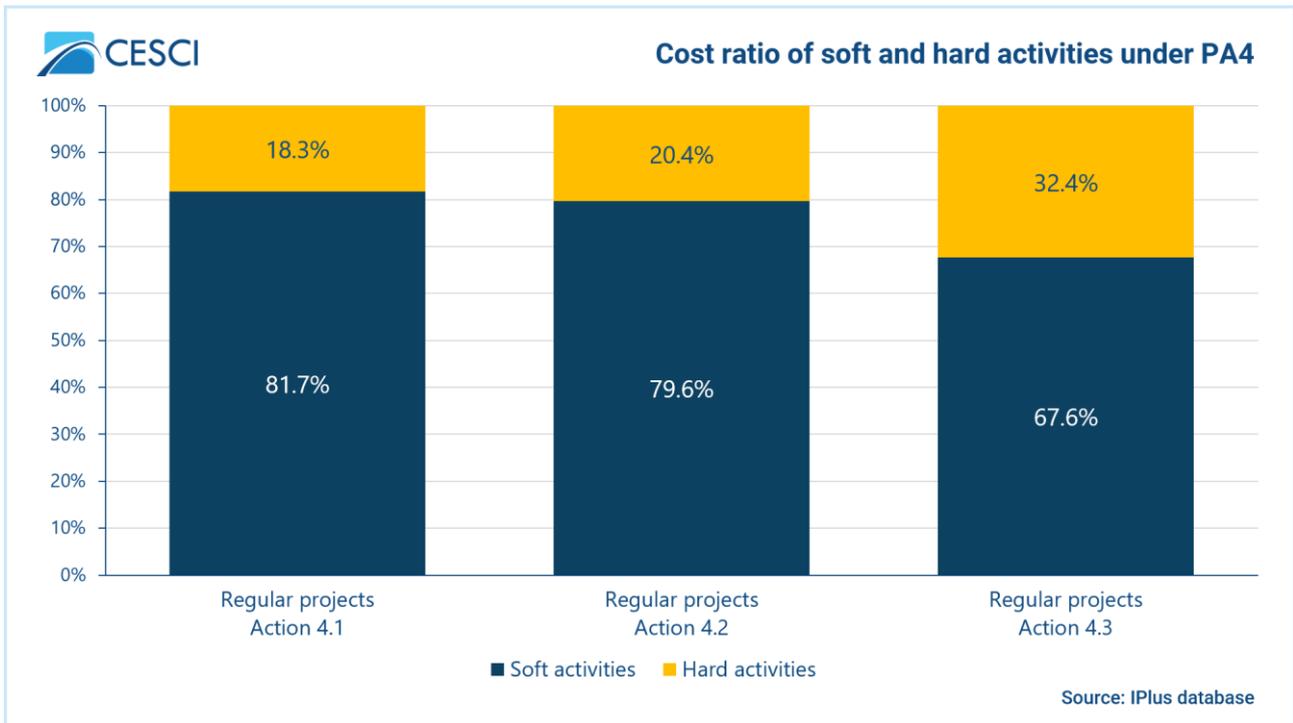
The next aspect of the cost efficiency assessment is the analysis of the share of budget allocations to the particular budget headings. Considering the different status of the projects, in case of the administratively closed ones the validated budgets were taken into account, while for the on-going projects evaluators used the planned amounts for the calculation.

Figure 170: Ratio of budget headings by actions under PA4



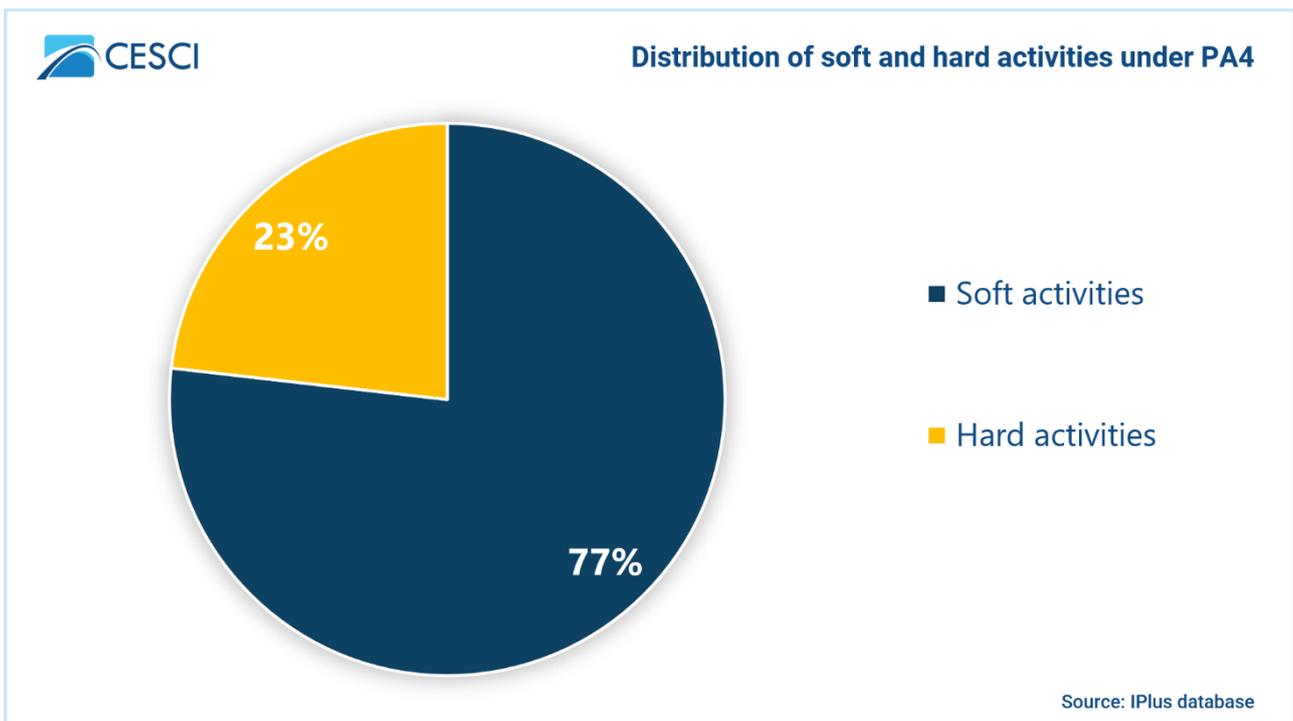
The chart (Figure 170) shows that infrastructure development works have been poorly involved in projects, despite of the fact that the CfPs allowed these type of activities (until the 50% of the total budget). Only three projects (two under action 4.2 and one under action 4.3) have implemented construction measures, but in these cases more than half of the total budget was allocated to hard project elements. (According to the applied methodology budget headings of 6 'Equipment expenditure', 7 'Infrastructure and works', as well as out of the 1 'Preparation costs' the budget line 1.3 'Purchase of land' were taken into consideration.) Taking into account all projects, similar ratios of the expenditures were dedicated to the procurement of equipment in all actions, covering mainly the laboratory, agricultural, food processing and packaging and IT tools, as well as educational equipment and special vehicles (e.g. for disadvantaged groups or for sustainable transportation).

Figure 171: Cost ratio of soft and hard activities under PA4



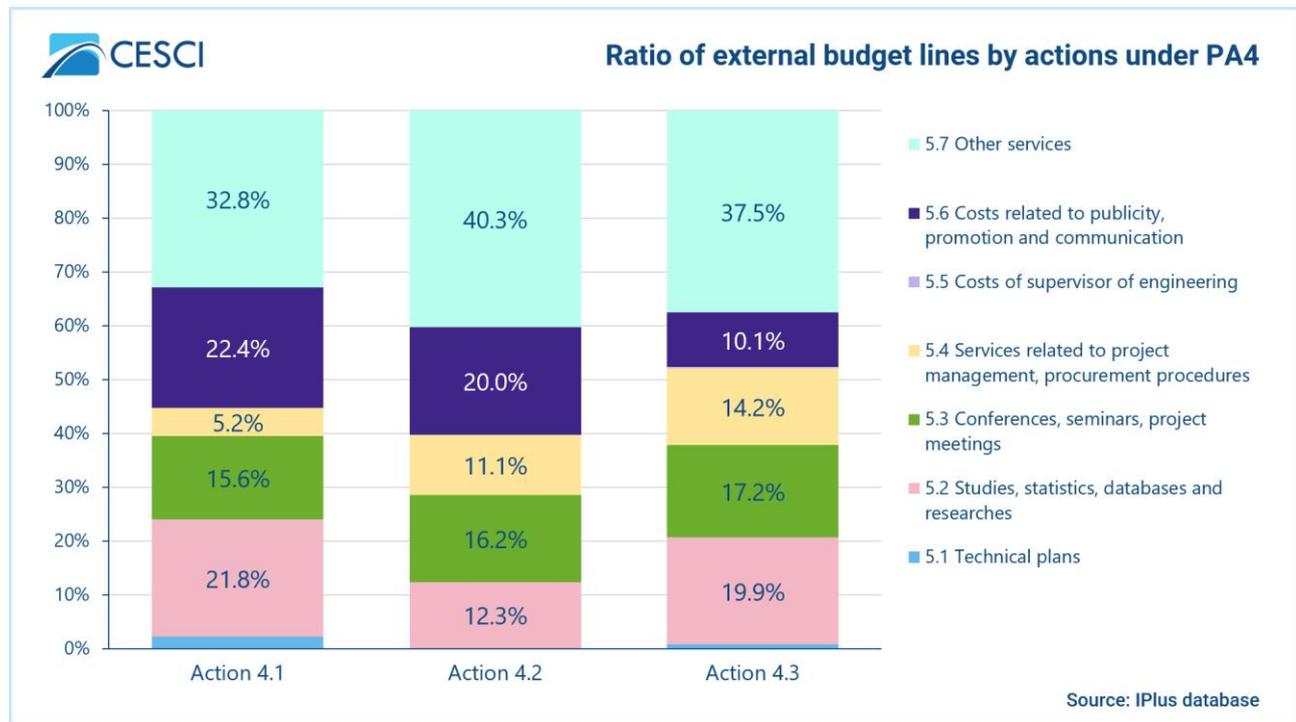
However, if we taking into account all projects (not just with infrastructure development) under PA4, the share of hard projects reduces under 25%. The reason behind this remarkable decrease is the fact that there are only 3 projects with infrastructural work, which is just a small part of the total projects. Although there are other 22 projects with equipment expenditures, these costs cannot compensate the soft elements.

Figure 172: Cost ratio of soft and hard activities under PA4



As the figure above (*Figure 170*) illustrates, the highest share of cost allocations in case of each action covers sub-contracted activities. Two ratios are around 40%, but in case of action 4.2 more than 55% of the projects' total budget were dedicated to external services. All of the ratios seem to be unreasonably high, even taking into account the mainly soft nature of the projects.

Figure 173: Ratio of external budget lines by actions under PA4



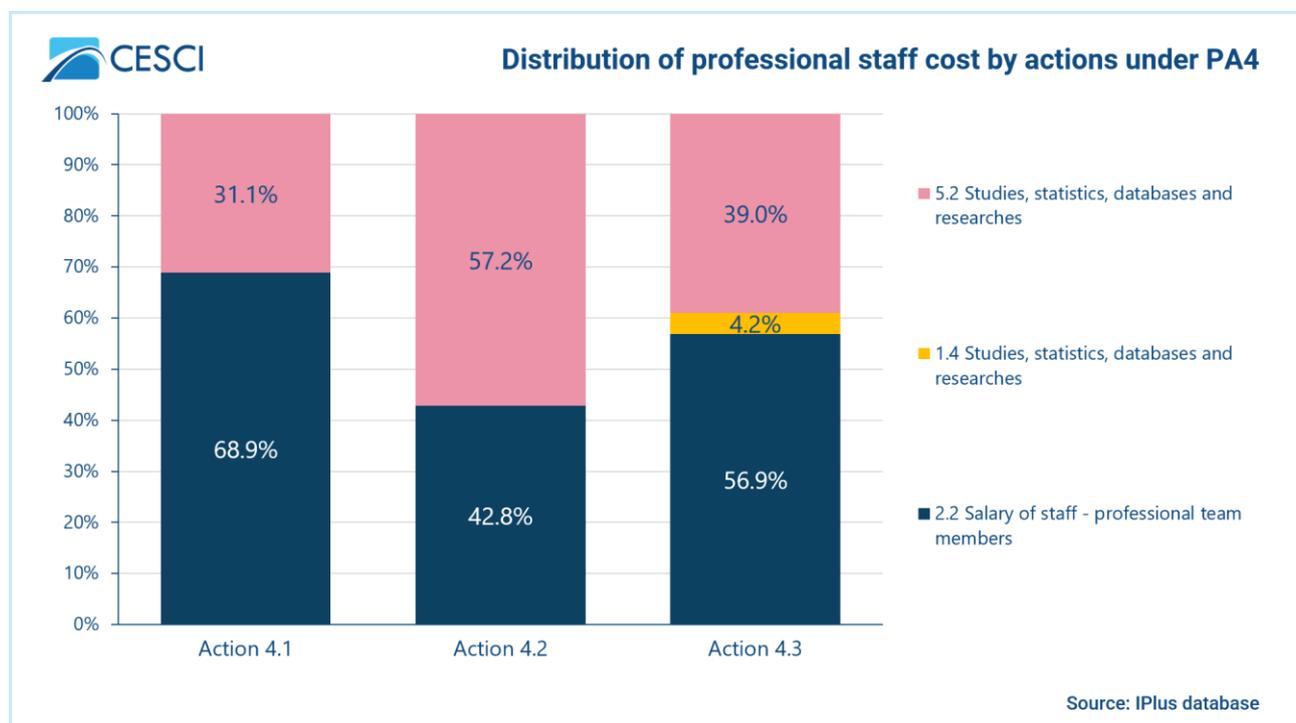
The main point for the examination of the sub-contracted activities, is whether the project activities can be performed in a more cost-efficient way internally by the applicants or by external service providers. High share of external expertise and service cost items questions the competency and the availability of the adequate capacities of the applicants, at the same time the risk of losing the necessary expertise after the project closure, leading to the unsustainability of the results, raise.

As a result of the detailed analysis, it can be said that translation and interpretation, as well as designing, digitalisation (e.g. e-learning materials, videos) and printing services, development of IT tools (e-learning and e-commerce platforms) with related services, in addition expenditures covering event organization (travel and accommodation of participants and fee of speakers at conferences, workshops, trainings) and participation (travel and accommodation to business fairs, exhibitions, study tours) are very often. In the case of event organization costs like hall rent or catering services, the allocation to this 5.7 budget line, Instead of the 5.3 line (standing for event organization) seems to be incorrect. Furthermore, similar doubts arise concerning the external services concerning studies, databases and surveys, as well as reconstruction works such as demolishing, wall removal and painting, equipment renting (e.g. sound system) or procurement of goods like raw materials, seedlings. All of these items might be better to allocate other budget lines and headings. Besides, sector-specific services, such as business mentoring, legal advisory (e.g. concerning intellectual property) or marketing and brand development services for start-ups and social enterprises have been procured in several cases, as well as the expenses of scholarships for students and young adults have been funded through the 5.7 budget line. On the other hand, within some projects core

activities like development of training materials and the organization of trainings, implementation of surveys among target groups, network building, knowledge development and transfer activities, as well as the drafting of policy recommendations have been sub-contracted. In the evaluators' point of view, the outsourcing of these core activities questions the capacities of the applicants and raise the question of durability.

The externalisation of direct professional or core activities of the projects could be carried out through money allocation to budget line 5.2 and 1.4. ('Studies, statistics, databases and researches'). As it can be seen on the figure above (Figure 173), budget line 5.2 values at least one fifth of the external services, which is notable compared to the other priority axes. Furthermore, evaluators analysed this aspect by comparing the allocations to 'Studies, statistics, databases and researches' with those dedicated to internal professional staff costs.

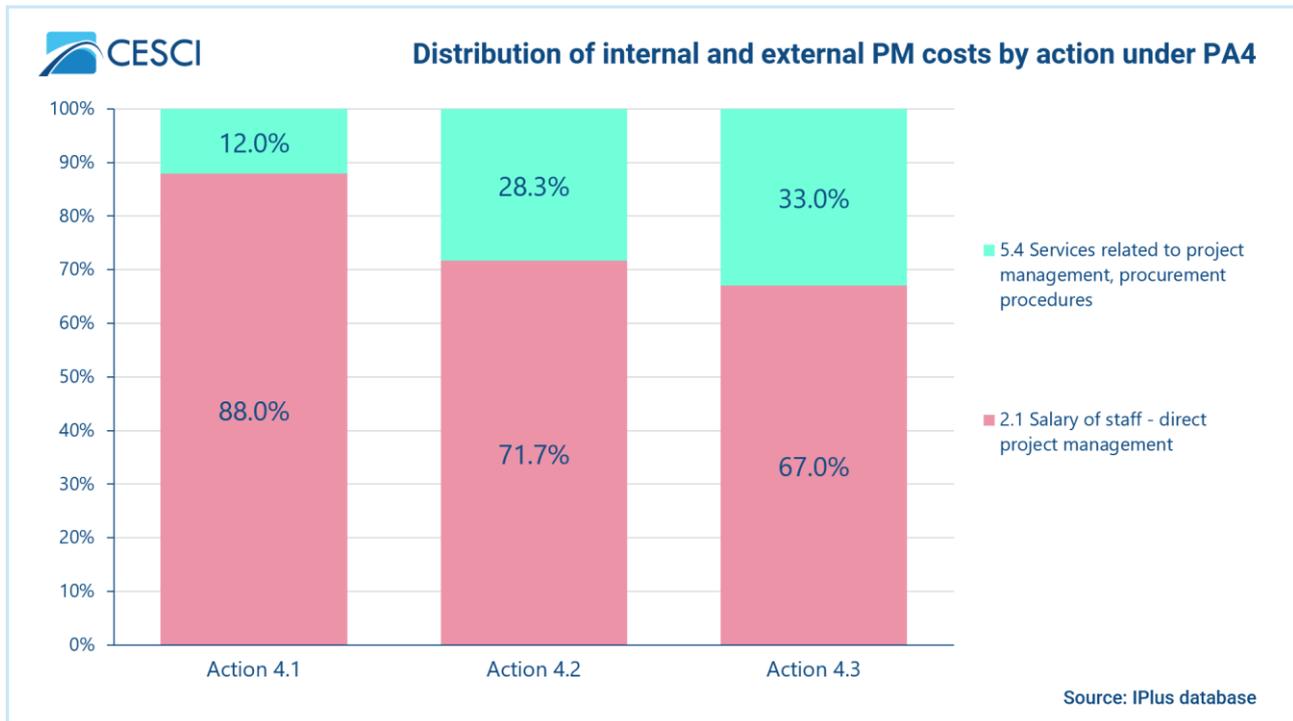
Figure 174: Distribution of internal and external professional staff cost by actions under PA4



From this perspective, internal the ration of professional staff cost (budget line 2.2) is only exceeded by that of the externalised ones in the case action 4.2, which nuances the situation detailed above toward the preferred direction. Still, it should be noted, that in order to have the full picture, all the relevant cost items from the budget line 5.7 shall be included in this analysis, but evaluators were not able to perform this task, because of the information shortages.

Regarding the project management costs, allocation ratio to external services (budget line 5.4) the ratios are ordinary, but evaluators also analysed the cost distribution between internal and external management activities.

Figure 175: Distribution of internal and external PM costs by actions under PA4



As the figure (Figure 175) shows, the share of internal management costs is at least two-third of the total project management expenditures, which confirms that applicants have the right capacities and skills to implement cross-border cooperation projects in a sound way.

The share of communication and publicity, as well as event organization expenses within the external budget heading seems to be proportionate considering the nature of the projects. In terms of publicity expenses, the ratio seems to be a bit higher compared to the other priority axes, but it is important to take into consideration, that the efficient involvement of the target groups, such as SMEs, disabled groups or food producers have been crucial in order to achieve the projects' goals and output indicators, which logically could require extra communication efforts and budget.

4 Evaluation at the programme level

The evaluation conducted at the programme level include some special evaluations which are only possible at programme level.

4.1 Overall influence factors of the Programme implementation

The aim of this part of the assessment is to analyse the external and internal factors that influenced the implementation of the PAs' objectives. This part consists of three main parts: 1. an expert analysis that assesses the influences of the implementation process (mainly using desk research); 2. influence factors based on online survey; 3. and the importance of guiding principles.

4.1.1 Expert analysis of the influences

It is important to take a closer look at why and how the influence factors can be and should be taken into consideration as an integral part of the assessment. For the sake of the analysis the used sources include interviews with programme bodies, Annual Implementation Reports and desk research by CESC. The implementation of the Programme is heavily influenced by couple of internal and external factors. Even if the programme reflects well on regional needs, the indicators are met, the applied mechanisms and tools are well designed, and the projects elaborated are of high quality, still there is a chance that the results differ from what was planned during the project development and application phase. The various different influences on the programme can alter the original overall background or environment the Programme implementation either in a positive or negative way enhancing or weakening the impacts of the Programme itself. It is important to underline that most of the factors have had an influence on most or all of the PAs set up by the programme, depending on the type of the factor. That is why the influence factors on impacts are described in this overall part of the analysis, and not separately, divided under each PA, to avoid duplications and to ensure the provision of the bigger picture.

During the research couple of different categories of factors that influenced the implementation was identified, which can be listed as follows: COVID-19 pandemic, bilateral relations, monitoring and information system, delayed performance, political reconciliation, programme implementation risks, lack of resources and capacities, Schengen borders, construction works, stable exchange rates, parliamentary elections, Russo-Ukrainian War, procurement, migration, and administrative burdens.

Regarding the **direction (negative or positive)** of the identified influence factors, most of the categories negatively changed the original or predictable/intended impacts of the programme as a whole. Parliamentary elections, stable currency exchange rate, political reconciliation and bilateral relations are exceptions. There are also some factors with mixed influences such as programme implementation risks and lack of resources and capacities, where some factors both helped and hindered the implementation. COVID-19 pandemic and the former IMIS were the two most frequently occurring problem causing impact loss based on CESC's analysis. Furthermore, the increasing construction and purchasing prices should also be highlighted which have been still

growing given the high inflation rates and the frictions in the supply chains. In addition, the still persisting external Schengen border is a profound external problem hard to be tackled by the programme. The most effected PA, if one has to be picked, despite of the overall effects of the factors, is probably PA4. The aforementioned most decisive factors very negatively influenced the implementation of the related infrastructure, buildings, the people-to-people interactions and personal contacts crucial for reaching high impacts in PA4.

The **type (internal or external)** of the factors was also analysed. Internal factors are factors which are dependent on the programme bodies, applicants and beneficiaries responsible for any part in the implementation process, while external ones are factors which cannot be changed by the partners themselves, thus these are either global or national-level factors, which are out of the competences of the stakeholders thus they cannot be altered by the programme and its partners. The last seven factors in the table below (*Table 61*) starting from administrative burdens are considered internal factors. The following table shows the classification and descriptions and the influence factors. It is an important methodological note that the real impact of the factors varies, and the number of times a factor is listed in the table is not necessarily in connection with the level of these impacts.

Table 61: Classification and description of influence factors on overall programme implementation

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type	Direction	Most affected PA
Bilateral relations	Hungary and Serbia regularly carry out bilateral meetings and negotiate at international forums. An outstanding level of political relations is the fact that the Hungarian and the Serbian governments has been carrying out annual summit at the highest diplomatic level. At the annual summit, the two governments negotiate about economic, infrastructure, energy, national policy, education, scientific, cultural, internal affairs cooperation and about EU affairs.	external	positive	PA2, PA3, PA4
Bilateral relations	Hungary supports the EU membership of Serbia. This support involves a political support on the one side and a Hungarian expert helps (with advisory quality) the process toward the EU membership on the other side. The EU negotiations with Serbia have been launched in 2014. Hungary supports the EU membership of Serbia as soon as possible.	external	positive	all

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type	Direction	Most affected PA
Bilateral relations	Hungary and Serbia have close geographical connections; hence they have vivid foreign trade turnover between each other. This foreign trade turnover has been experiencing a steady increase. Hungary is the sixth most important trade partner of Serbia (once Hungary was only the 13 th most important trade partner), i.e. Hungary is the third from the European Union countries. The bilateral economic relations are constantly evolving and the Hungarian investments in Serbia show a dynamic growth. Subsequently, this process supports the need for permeability of borders (the removal of administrative barriers in rail, road and/or waterway transport).	external	positive	PA4
Bilateral relations	Hungary and Serbia maintain Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation that aims to provide institutional support to the business environment, to identify and to remove possible obstacles and enable business communities on both sides to optimize their business potentials. The latest Joint Commission (the 12 th) was held in March 2022 and the two sides defined further steps to improve cooperation, while Hungary underlined the importance of establishing so-called green corridors at border crossings, noting that customs authorities are in constant contact.	external	positive	PA2, PA4
Bilateral relations	Hungary continues with the development programme in Vojvodina, within which 16 Hungarian companies received support in the form of more than 56 million EUR.	external	positive	PA4
Bilateral relations	Hungary profoundly encourages foreign investments of Hungarian companies in Serbia and Serbia has a very important role in this context. This means that Hungarian companies, operating in Serbia, are on constant increase path and this underlines the fact that the two economies are more and more connected and economic cooperation is intensified. In Serbia, there are three leading Hungarian companies, namely MOL Hungarian Oil and Gas Company, OTP Bank, and the UBM Group which is a feed producer.	external	positive	PA4
Bilateral relations	Owing to the European integration of Hungary and the achieved results in the transparency of economy (usage of new cash-registers, Banking Act), the Hungarian progress is exemplary for Serbia. It is strengthened by the broad relationship system and constant cooperation between the main bodies of the two countries (such as the Customs and Finance Guard or the police).	external	positive	PA4

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type	Direction	Most affected PA
Bilateral relations	Beside the English, Hungarian language can be partially used in the business due to the large size of Hungarian minority and persons from mixed marriages where one parent is a Hungarian speaker. Multilingualism is a huge advantage for the economy since the enterprises can utilize the language skills of the labour force of the neighbouring region.	external	positive	PA4
Stable exchange rate	Due to the reliable dinar – euro exchange rate (for four years), the stability of the economy is guaranteed that enhances the further economic investments.	external	positive	PA4
Schengen borders	The external Schengen border hampers the activities and initiatives of all kind related to people-to-people interactions, daily commuting and one-day trips on the other side of the border due to long waiting times.	external	negative	PA2, PA3, PA4
Schengen borders	The waiting time of trucks can be lengthened along the border due to the lingering control process. The National Tax and Customs Administration does not provide enough controllers to ensure the continuous and fluent interoperability of the border. Moreover, the infrastructure of border-crossing points does not provide sufficient infrastructure for the truck drivers to spend their waiting in a comfortable environment with adequate infrastructure time in comfortable environment.	external	negative	PA4
COVID-19 pandemic	Project team members were prevented from participating to implementation activities, due to mandatory self-quarantine. This self-quarantine measures (being infected or having in contact with an infected person) led to significant delays of an uncontrollable and unpredictable extent.	external	negative	all
COVID-19 pandemic	The tourism sector was specially hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The cultural and live events could not be kept which hinders the fulfilment of the cultural and people-to-people projects. It is also a challenge to bring back the events and festivals' number of visitors where there were in 2019.	external	negative	PA3
COVID-19 pandemic	Human resources and money had to be allocated in order to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Worsening of the economic indicators has led many private entities to the verge of inability to operate and/or bankruptcy.	external	negative	PA4

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type	Direction	Most affected PA
COVID-19 pandemic	For the public opinion, the COVID-19 pandemic has been so overwhelming that implementing projects for anything that does not concern the public health seems to be unimportant, while for others, using the CBC opportunity to implement a project idea appears to be the main, if not the only, feasible option, as all the focus of funding goes to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects.	external	negative	all
COVID-19 pandemic	The programme showed flexibility and quick reaction to the challenges of the beneficiaries, which resulted in most projects reaching their indicators and producing all other outputs in time, or were given more time to reach their goals. The objective difficulties were understandable and the programme bodies were on the one hand, tolerant in case of possible changes, on the other hand, they expected the beneficiaries to reach their redefined goals as agreed. In all cases, trust and tolerance was awarded with fulfilment of agreements and tangible results despite the challenges.	external	positive	all
COVID-19 pandemic	There was a temporary change in the work of the FLC during the on-the-spot visits. As a result, the check took place online and, after the restriction period, the sites were visited by the controllers (now on site, in the field), mainly for larger projects including infrastructure developments and equipment procurement. Working in the first period (quarantine) was difficult, not enough laptops, but eventually the problem was solved. They are now prepared for a similar situation at FLC.	external	negative	all
COVID-19 pandemic	Shortages in staff of the Serbian FLC: there were difficulties introducing new colleagues during the COVID-19 pandemic (new staff without experiences, started working from home). Many people left the FLC, which had effects on the workload and the deadlines. Reason behind it: better conditions in other workplaces. It was hard to find experienced colleagues for the vacancies, because FLC tasks are special. There is a need (month or in more complex cases a year) for mentoring the newcomers.	external	negative	all
COVID-19 pandemic	Because of the restrictions due to the pandemic, costs of events in the application phase, could not been spent. On the other hand, the general price increase of equipment and construction materials lead to a need for additional financial resources.	internal	negative	all

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type	Direction	Most affected PA
COVID-19 pandemic	Smaller stakeholders with limited personnel or a single person assigned with project development and management tasks had to face serious delays, no replacements during illness (e.g., small local municipalities, sport clubs, cultural organisations).	internal	negative	all
Monitoring and Information System	Problems related to the IMIS 2014-2020 included slow developments and unpredicted system errors slowing down processes of all system users.	internal	negative	all
Monitoring and Information System	Until IMIS was used as the monitoring system issues emerged. Limited functionality of the monitoring system was affecting the performance. Late introduction of the IMIS 2014-2020 delayed implementation processes.	internal	negative	all
Monitoring and Information System	Switching to the new INTERREG+ system required some time to get acquainted with it by project partners.	internal	negative	all
Monitoring and Information System	INTERREG+ gradually replaced IMIS 2014-2020, it was being developed with a view on the requirements of the 2021-2027 period as well. IT transition took place, which made it easier to operate.	internal	positive	all
Parliamentary elections	Elections were held in Serbia and Hungary in 2018. There was no major political change either in Serbia or in Hungary as the governing parties retained their majority, thus no dramatic alterations impacted the related open call, except for the reasonable delays due to the pre-election period (e.g., signing of bonding agreements should be postponed, decision-makers might temporarily change etc.).	external	positive	all
Political reconciliation	Serbia abolished the legislation (accepted in 1944-1945) that introduced the collective guilt of people with Hungarian nationality living in municipalities like, Čurug, Žabalj and Mošorin. This abolishment of the collective guilt is a road to build up mutual confidence and trust and it lays down appropriate path towards inter-state and cross-border cooperation, hence promoting cross-border tourism, complementarity, cooperation activities.	external	positive	PA3

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type	Direction	Most affected PA
Political reconciliation	Inter-state relationship between Hungary and Serbia has reached a unique level of understanding, partnership and mutual respect. The dialogue between the two countries is imbued with personal trust between the highest political leadership. Consequently, mutual trust assures stability, it contributes to the intensification of economic cooperation and it establishes appropriate frame for development and cooperation in all fields, like economy, energy, infrastructure, migration, minority rights and even historical reconciliation.	external	positive	all
Delayed performance	Delayed performance caused by late start of the Programme due to delayed approval of relevant EU legislation. The impact of the risk was estimated as medium.	external	negative	all
Delayed performance	Delayed performance caused by changes at the ministerial level in Hungary and Serbia; shortage in human capacities and long designation procedure. The impact of the risk was estimated as medium.	internal	negative	all
Delayed performance	Shortages of human capacities at the level of FLC (first level controllers) in Serbia primarily.	internal	negative	all
Programme implementation risks	Complexity of strategic projects: the impact of the risk was estimated as high mainly based on shortage in human capacities at the time of the evaluation and significant budget allocation for strategic projects (30% of the total budget of the programme).	external	negative	PA1, PA2
Construction works	Rapid and uncontrolled price increase in building and purchasing infrastructure due to inflation, lack of building materials, insufficient workforce.	external	negative	all
Construction works	It was necessary to change the technical content of construction projects as the price of building materials became more expensive. Technical content modification or repeated procurement procedures was needed, it was an ongoing problem.	external	negative	all
Lack of resources and capacities	Especially in relation to strategic projects which provide high cross-border impacts, lack of time and human resources hindered the implementation processes	internal	negative	PA1, PA2
Migration	Basic functioning of the local governments was hindered on the Serbian side in particular. Some bordering municipalities could not provide the basic services for their own citizens, because they had to handle the migrant crisis from their own budget without any state intervention.	external	negative	all

Short name of the influence factor	Short description of the influence factor	Type	Direction	Most affected PA
Russo-Ukrainian War	Although the war erupted just in the end of the evaluated programme period, but its effect is tangible and it will influence strongly the next programme period. Due to the production issues and supply chain, there are some shortages on the market which have had unfavourable impacts on the implementation of the projects.	external	negative	all
Programme implementation risks	The development of technical possibilities has been smooth. The implementation of the programme responded well and they were able to provide adequate response/assistance to the beneficiaries.	internal	positive	all
Lack of resources and capacities	Owing to the participation in the CBC programme the capacities of local governments and institutions are higher in the CBC region than in the inner part of the country since these local actors have human resources with sufficient skills to manage development projects, as well as good partnership across the border.	internal	positive	all
Procurement	Not having in-house professional staff in procurement but externally procuring them (lack of professionals).	internal	negative	all
Administrative burdens	Large administrative burdens for many of the beneficiaries occurred.	internal	negative	all

4.1.2 Influence factors based on the online survey

As expressed before, beside the expert analysis the method of online survey was also used reaching out to the beneficiaries to find influence factors. The survey included a question that asked about the factors that influenced implementation of the projects. In the followings, the results of the survey are presented. Based on the survey answers, the most frequently mentioned external obstacle the partners had to face during implementation was the COVID-19 pandemic and its related effects (lock-down, reinforced border control, travel restrictions, social distancing, suspension of the operation of certain personal services etc.). The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences were mentioned 22 times, which means almost every second obstacle (49% of answers that mentioned any obstacle) expressed was connected to the virus and the anti-virus measures. The other obstacles with relatively high number of mentions include:

- Slow procurement procedures causing delays in realisation and implementation;
- Rapid and uncontrolled price increase in the construction works, purchase of equipment (eg. mini bus);
- Complicated, bureaucratic legislation and connected processes in the field of construction especially. Time-consuming obtaining of permits required to start construction on the project took a long time, which significantly increased the planned construction costs. As a result, beneficiaries had to reduce the technical content of what originally was planned.

- Difficulties in communication and thus management and realisation of projects due to potential language barriers.

4.1.3 Importance of the guiding principles

The overall implementation of the programme also depended on the guiding principles formulated in the CP and on how well the projects were led by them towards the aims of the programme. In the followings therefore the guiding principles will be assessed from the point of the intervention logic of the programme considering especially the principles during the CfPs, the professional feedback of the assessors on the assessment process of projects, the feedback on the decision-making regarding the selection procedure (which projects to be selected and supported).

Table 62: The guiding principles for the selection of operations as they are listed in the CP

Priority area	Guiding principles for the selection of operations
PA1 Improving cross-border water management and risk prevention systems	<p>Most of the projects are selected through open calls for proposal.</p> <p>Most important selection criteria, inter alia, are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on economic activities, • Potential effects of the planned interventions in terms of decreasing environmental risks, damages • and improvement of quality of water bodies • The cross-border impact of the projects • Level of cooperation among project partners • Long run sustainability of joint developments and management, monitoring systems • Management and financial capacity of the beneficiary organizations • Contribution to horizontal principles (action specific selection criteria may be defined in the Call for • Proposals) • Preparedness of the infrastructural projects <p>Besides the open call system strategic approach will be applied through restricted calls for proposals, which limit the calls to a small number of potential beneficiaries, for the following key importance activities with tangible impact on a significant part of the programme area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconstruction activities (e.g. defences, floodplain, river basin, lakes) in relation to the relevant rivers and their connected canals and lakes in order to ensure more stable water management for the direct and adjacent areas. The potential beneficiaries are water management organisations with involvement of the relevant local, regional and/or national governments. • Implementation of interventions to minimize damages caused by hail in the entire border region. The potential beneficiaries are relevant national/regional level authorities, as well as their bodies and organisations. <p>The indicative allocation of the envisaged restricted call is 60% of the budget of PA1.</p>

Priority area	Guiding principles for the selection of operations
PA2 Decreasing the bottlenecks of cross-border traffic	<p>The Protocol of the 7th session of the Hungarian-Serbian Joint Commission on Economic Co-operation could serve as a basis to determine potential cross-border transport development projects to be jointly agreed and implemented under PA2.</p> <p>Most of the projects are selected through open calls for proposal. Most important selection criteria, inter alia, are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact on cross border traffic of the population and enterprises of the CBR • Relation to economic activities (e.g. agricultural, touristic, manufacturing) • Potential increase in traffic capacities at the border crossing points • Level of cooperation among project partners • Long run sustainability of joint developments • Management and financial capacity of the beneficiary organizations • Contribution to horizontal principles (action specific selection criteria may be defined in the CfPs) • Preparedness of infrastructural projects <p>Besides the open call system strategic approach will be applied through restricted calls for proposals, which limit the calls to a small number of potential beneficiaries, for the following key importance activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing development of cross-border railway lines (e.g. preparation of technical plans for permission, feasibility studies or small-scale investments for improving passenger services) jointly identified by the relevant ministries and authorities. The potential beneficiaries are national and regional level bodies and their organisations as well as railway management and development companies. • Development of small border crossing roads and/or border crossing points jointly identified by the relevant ministries and authorities. The potential beneficiaries are road management and development companies; local, county, regional and national level governments; border control and customs offices (if applicable). <p>The indicative allocation of the envisaged restricted call is 55% of the budget of PA2.</p>
PA3 Encouraging tourism and cultural heritage cooperation	<p>Most of the projects are selected via open calls for proposal.</p> <p>Most important selection criteria, inter alia, are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential contribution to the competitiveness of the tourism supply • Importance of the tourism destination in the CBR • The cross-border relevance of the project • Contribution of the project to longer stay of visitors in the CBR • Level of cooperation among project partners • Long run sustainability of developed projects (environmentally, financially, technically and institutionally) • Management and financial capacity of the beneficiary organizations • Contribution to horizontal principles (action specific selection criteria may be defined in the CfPs) • Preparedness of infrastructural projects <p>Besides the open call system strategic approach will be applied through restricted CfP, which limit the calls for a small number of potential beneficiaries, for the following key importance activity:</p>

Priority area	Guiding principles for the selection of operations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing permanent information about key cultural, social, economic news and events of the border region for the public, as well as establishing information and/or training facilities to promote cross-cultural exchange and dialogue – by means of capitalizing on existing information systems, institutional frames and infrastructure located in settlements frequented by tourists. <p>The indicative allocation of the envisaged restricted call is 27% of the budget of PA3.</p>
PA4 Enhancing SMEs' economic competitiveness through innovation driven development	<p>Projects are selected via open calls for proposal.</p> <p>Most important selection criteria, inter alia, are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential contribution to the competitiveness of the relevant sector or economically and socially challenged area • Cross border relevance of the project • Compliance with regional innovation strategies (e.g. S3 Strategy of South Great Plain and Vojvodina and the common innovation strategy of the border region) • Level of cooperation among project partners • Long run sustainability of the results of the projects • Management and financial capacity of the beneficiary organizations • Contribution to horizontal principles (action specific selection criteria may be defined in the CfPs) • Preparedness of the projects

According to **discussion with Programme Bodies** the identified guiding principles were in line with the intervention logic of the Cooperation Programme. The principles helped selecting those projects which were in harmony with the objectives of the programme. They encouraged potential beneficiaries to send their project proposals for the right calls. In this process, making the guiding principles important basis for the compilation and description of the CfPs played an important role. In addition to all this, the Programme Bodies helped the applicants through various information channels to meet the selection criteria as much as possible with their applications. The programme bodies considered it particularly useful and fortunate that the strategic calls were also declared among the guiding principles i.e. even in the CP to reach the goals and objectives of the programme certain guiding principles was applied in the form of restricted calls. According to the programme bodies it turned out to be a good decision to have guiding principles dedicated to strategic projects.

The **project assessors** played a prominent role in the implementation of the guiding principles, so it is important to review the main comments regarding the project selection, **assessment process** of the projects:

- Problems and lessons learnt include:
 - During the evaluation, the application forms do not always provide answers to the evaluation questions and aspects (In several projects the information provided in the application form did not give the answer to the given question, and the assessor was left to guess);
 - The criteria were sometimes not specific enough;
 - Some principles were not so clear regarding cross-border relevance, innovation character because of missing more comprehensive descriptions.

- Awarding points, the scoring system was unclear and a bit way too subjective based on the professional and personal character of an assessor;
- Areas for improvement include:
 - Regarding the application form:
 - Some alterations could be suggested to get a clearer picture on the resources and references of partners to be able to assess their capability to implement a cross-border project with a significant budget;
 - Financial sustainability is a key element of long-term success of a project, thus more attention could be paid to this;
 - More information and support for the assessors could be given on the assessment methodology (for further information on that topic please check the part of the evaluation document named "External assistance" in this chapter: *II. 4.4.3.3.2 Assessment of procedures of the project cycle*);
 - Maybe more attention should be given to principles related to social implications, cross-border effects and the innovative character of the activities;
 - The method of projects' rejection because of quality reasons should be revised.

To sum up, from the quality assessors' point of view, there are some guiding principles (i.e. regarding the cross-border effect or innovative character of the projects) which have not been specific enough. Moreover, the application form and the assessment criteria (questions) are not fully in line with the guiding principles which also lead to difficulties during the assessment procedure.

Overall, it can be concluded that no wrong principle has been defined, but at the same time, the principles are not specific and understandable enough to clearly lead neither the applicants, nor the quality assessors towards the programme goals. In addition, the application form and the assessment criteria (questions) are not fully in line with the guiding principles, as well as some elements of the assessment procedure have also not facilitated the selection process in this term. In order to handle these issues, the programme procedures and their methodology should be harmonised with the guiding principles.

4.2 Programme's communication

Through desk research, document analysis, interviews with the representatives of the programme bodies and online survey the programme's communication is evaluated in this chapter with special emphasis on the applied tools, the frequency of communication on the programme, the difficulties met during the communication activities from the Programme's side and the perceptions of the beneficiaries on the Programme's communication.

The framework of the programme's communication is set by the relevant rules and regulations written in the communication strategy and the visibility manual. These documents are created in order to ensure that the programme (and all the projects) have a standardised and high level of visibility. The communication strategy defines the successful programme communication as it follows "a strategic approach – clearly-defined communication objectives and the corresponding key messages, intended for target audiences and delivered to them via appropriate channels and tools." – attributes that are analysed below.

Following the lessons learnt from the previous programming period, the communication strategy contained several new features for the 2014-2020 period, such as:

- the Programme's website has a responsive format enabling the visitors to access it "on the go", via various mobile devices;
- the current Programme communication increased the usage of visual content, compared to the previous programme – photography and video content, and whenever possible included infographics to facilitate understanding of complex processes;
- increased use of the online media channels;
- boosting media relations, by tailoring the content according to the media needs and introducing preparations for occasions for interactions with journalists;
- increasing the usage of social media through regular posts, which provide the followers with added value and encourage interaction.

Furthermore, the programme communication is based on the following principles: transparency, accuracy, timeliness, clarity, focus on the projects, exchange of best practices between Interreg programmes, between the Programme and its projects, and between the projects within the Programme to help improving the results of the Programme. In addition to these principles, the Programme also regards the horizontal principles when planning and implementing information and communication measures, such as (1) sustainable development – practices which protect environment; (2) equal opportunities and non-discrimination – equal opportunities and non-discrimination of vulnerable groups (including ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, elderly people, children, women, unemployed, etc.); and (3) equality between men and women. Sustainable development is met by the use info material in electronic form as much as possible. In case such material would require printing, it would be produced from recycled paper and other environment-friendly material, whenever possible. Equal opportunities and non-discrimination are provided as each target group and communication tool should be used according to the related principle with no discrimination. Communication tool and information should be shared equally making opportunities for a wide audience to participate (e.g. by using social media) and to get the needed information. Visualisation of cooperation, joint work, depicting of both Serbs and Hungarians should

be encouraged. Equality should be respected e.g. when selecting photography or graphic images which are to be used within the communication tools and to be shared via Programme channels.

In this chapter both the internal (relating to the Programme operation between the Programme bodies, and between the Programme bodies and Beneficiaries of the contracted project) and external (revolving around external audiences, such as: potential Beneficiaries, media, habitants of the border region and the two-partner countries, etc.) communication are analysed on the Programme's and projects' level.

The evaluation of the communication strategy is based on various (result and output) communication indicators. The indicators identified in the Communication Strategy are categorised into three groups: yellow shows those indicators that are currently in the process of being reached, light green means those indicators that are already fulfilled and dark green stands for overachieved indicators.

Table 63: The short explanation of the categories applied regarding the communication indicators

yellow	in progress to achieve
light green	achieved
dark green	overachieved

2nd Phase Evaluation
of the INTERREG-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme **Hungary-Serbia**

Table 64: Evaluation of the Communication Strategy

Communication Objective	Activities	Output Indicator (OI)	OI Target Value	Result Indicator	RI Target Value	Baseline Year	Target Value Year
1. Generating interest in the Programme and facilitating the application process	Announcements of calls for proposals via: website articles, press releases, media ads, social media posts, and Newsletter	Total number of announcements	30	Number of attendees at Info Days	600	2016	2023
	Organizing Info Day seminars for Applicants	Number of organized events	8				2022
	Promoting the website and its features via all Programme channels	Including link to the website in all calls for proposals announcements	30	Number of website visitors	100 000	2016	2023
	Promoting the online tool Partner Search via Call for Proposal announcements	Total number of announcements	30	Number of registered organizations	100	2016	2022
2. Facilitating project implementation and raising awareness of the projects' positive impact on the border region	Organizing the LB seminars	Number of organized events	4	Minimum number of attendees	Number of contracted projects x 1	2017	2022
	Publishing articles about Projects on the Programme's website	Total number of articles	Number of implemented projects x 1	Raised awareness of the Projects	Votes: 3 or above– O-going evaluative: Mark: 1 – 5	2017	2022
	Publishing posts about Projects on the Programme 's social media pages	Number of posts	Number of implemented projects x 1			2017	2022
3. Ensuring transparency of the whole Programme implementation process	Promoting all key Programme announcements via Newsletter (also available on the website)	Number of distributed Newsletter issues	20	Number of opened Newsletters	Average of 20% of opened per issue	2017	2022
	Regular communication with Programme Bodies	Publishing all material intended for the Programme Bodies on the Back Office	Number of all Written Procedures x 1	Positive On- going evaluation of internal communication (mark 1- 5)	The votes: 3 and above	2016	2023
	Organizing internal Programme events	Number of JMC meetings	8	Positive On- going evaluation of internal communication (mark 1-5)	The votes: 3 and above	2016	2023

2nd Phase Evaluation
of the INTERREG-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme **Hungary-Serbia**

Communication Objective	Activities	Output Indicator (OI)	OI Target Value	Result Indicator	RI Target Value	Baseline Year	Target Value Year
4. Increasing awareness about Interreg and generating a positive image of the EU	Organizing Programme's visibility events	Annual EC Day events and/or press conferences	7	Total number of attendees/participants	3,000	2016	2023
	Applying the Programme Visual Identity	Minimum number of all promotional items produced	5,000	Minimum number of promotional items distributed	3,000	2016	2023
	Securing the Programme's presence in the media (online, print and electronic)	Number of distributed press releases	10	Minimum number of pieces of media coverage	70	2016	2023
	Securing the Programme's and projects' presence in the media (online, print and electronic)	Minimum one of media-related activity per project (e.g. visibility events, press releases, interviews, etc.)	Number of implemented projects x 1	Number of pieces of media coverage	Number of implemented projects x 1	2017	2023
	Projects' visibility events	Minimum number of organized events	Number of implemented projects x 1	Minimum number of attendees	Number of implemented projects x 20	2017	2023
	Producing a summary of implemented projects, the problems they tackled and their positive impact on the region – print and electronic version	Minimum number of publications	1	Minimum number of distributed copies	500	2017	2023

As the table (*Table 64*) shows, there are no red cells meaning that no communication related indicator is in delay compared to the plans. In the case of the first communication objective (“Generating interest in the Programme and facilitating the application process”) all the set targets have been either reached (57%) or even over-achieved (43%).

Somewhat similarly, in the case of the second communication objective (“Facilitating project implementation and raising awareness of the projects’ positive impact on the border region”) the vast majority of the indicators are already completed, only 20% is still ongoing with a planned 2023 deadline. Here the ratio of the overachieved indicators is even higher (60%).

The third communication objective (“Ensuring transparency of the whole programme implementation process”) stemming from its nature is the one being the most behind but only compared to the other objectives and not compared to the set schedule. 17% of the indicators are already over-achieved and the same ratio are achieved with 67% are being completed at the time of the assessment.

For the third communication objective (“Increasing awareness about Interreg and generating a positive image of the EU”) it was found again that way more indicators are over-achieved (58%) than just simply achieved (8%) and one third of the indicators are currently being completed with a deadline of 2023.

In conclusion, the communication activities of the Programme show the due diligence that it requires to achieve the set target indicators as well as a more than satisfactory level of interest from the side of the target groups as the two factors together resulted in this considerable amount of over-achieved indicators.

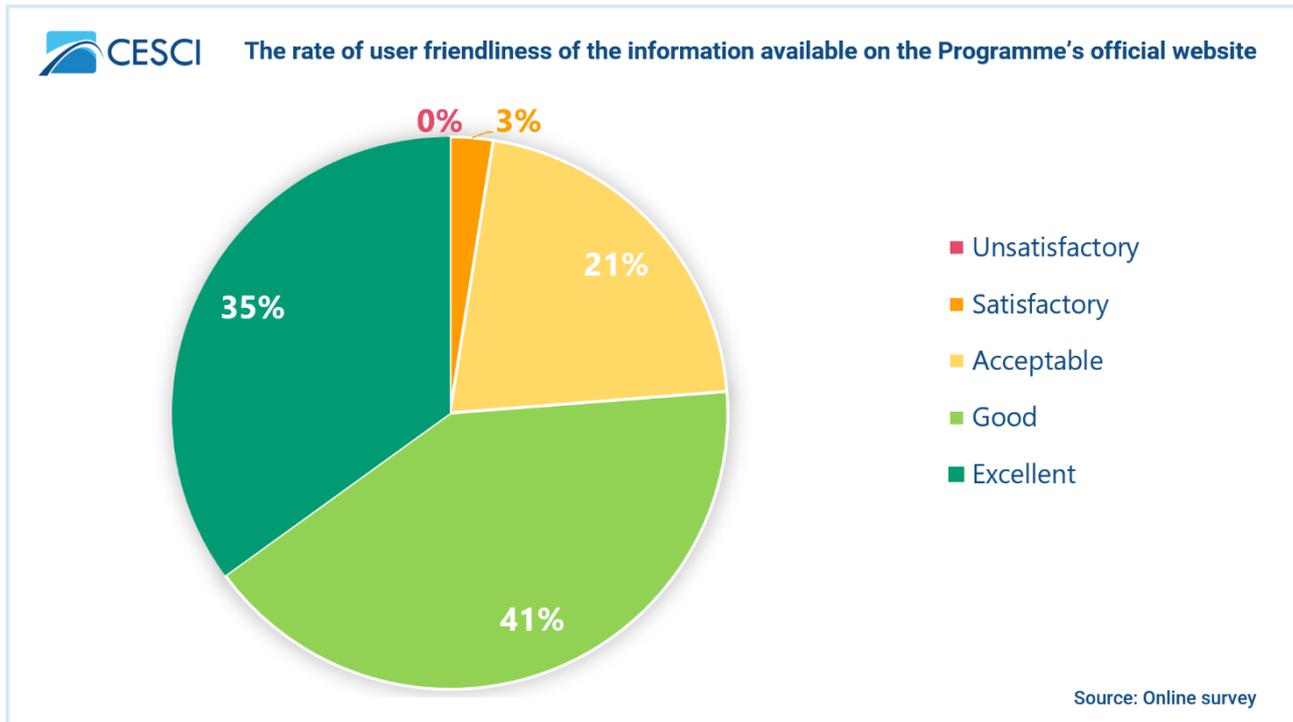
4.2.1 Applied communication tools

The programme’s communication strategy outlines the applied tools as follows: the website, social media pages, electronic newsletter, events, and media channels. The **programme website**, developed in the preparation phase and launched prior to the launch of the first CfP, is the main information hub, providing the information about the Programme, its priorities and areas of interventions and indicating the contact details. This is also the platform from where all the relevant documentation (such as the application packages for the CfP, various guidelines for project implementation, and all other Programme documents) can be consulted and downloaded. Another useful feature of the website is the page ‘News’, providing the announcements of the upcoming events and key milestones of the Programmes, ‘Latest News’ with news articles, ‘Photo Gallery’, and ‘Media’ section where the media coverage, as well as media-related information such as electronic press kits.

Additional features of the website are the Back office login for the Programme bodies, allowing them exclusive insight into the Programme documentation while being prepared and finalized; and the Lead Beneficiaries to access and deliver their project’s communication material. The other function is the ‘Partner Search’ section which is an online registration and search tool, aimed at helping organizations find suitable partners for developing projects.

The perception of the beneficiaries on the Programme's communication were assessed through the online survey. The majority of the respondents rated positively the user-friendliness of the information available on the Programme's official website: 35% rated it excellent, 41% rated it good, and only 21% rated it acceptable. None of the respondent picked the response of unsatisfactory, however, 3% said it is only satisfactory, so there is clearly room for improvement.

Figure 176: The rate of user-friendliness of the information available on the Programme's official website



The Programme used **social media networks** as communication platforms for direct interaction with target audiences, primarily the Beneficiaries and the end-beneficiaries (habitants of the border region), as well as the general public. Some of the social media networks were targeting broader scope of audiences, also including the key decision makers and social actors. Prior to the project implementation, the social media pages' content/posts were focused on informing about and promoting the Programme's funding opportunities, tools available to Potential Beneficiaries/Applicants, and the topic of a general significance for the region and the local community. Later on, once the implementation of the contracted projects started, the social media pages started actively informing about and promoting the projects' initiatives and their results.

Based on the visiting numbers, the Facebook page and its posts seems to be reaching the best and most efficient numbers (having 1 064 likes and 1 140 followers). The Facebook page reach goes up to 250-300 when a post is published, within a 24-hour span. In the same period, the Facebook page visits go up to 10, on average. Otherwise, it stays quite low. In the periods of paid campaigns, for example for the 2021 EC Day when InterACT paid for the campaign, daily close to 1000 reach was detected and more than 50 page visits per day were generated. This resulted in a 170.1% raise in page visits in 2021. The LinkedIn and Youtube channel still have some untapped potential. The Facebook page is used from March 2019 and exactly 100 posts have been published in this period. The Youtube channel contains only 11 videos, and the most recent is already 3 years old, and the LinkedIn has only 7 activities registered, all in the posts category, no documents or articles.

Periodical electronic newsletter was intended for a broad range of audiences, available to anyone who subscribes for it. Its main role was to inform about Programme developments and promote it. Being connected to the website content, the newsletter is likely to increase the number of website visits. The subscription is enabled via Programme website, and it is promoted via all communication channels of the Programme. In the programme period only 9 mailchimp newsletters were sent. The last one was the season greeting 2022. Probably the frequency of the newsletters could have been made more intensive. In terms of reach the last newsletter had 148 recipients, 127 got delivered, 26.8% opened meaning a total 83 recipients, and however, there was no forwards or further clicks.

Programme events were an important part of the communication strategy. The following are the events that were organized during the Programme lifecycle: opening event, info days, lead beneficiary workshops, European Cooperation Day, closing conference.

Info days were related fundamentally to the launching of the open CfPs. In November 2016, the JS and the JS Antenna organized Info Days, four full-day seminars for Applicants/Potential Beneficiaries within the 2nd CfP in Szeged and Kecskemét in Hungary, and in Novi Sad and Subotica in Serbia. The events provided the opportunity for attendees to ask questions after each session, as well as to network during the lunch and breaks. Three years later, the JS and the JS Antenna organised 4 Info Days seminars for potential beneficiaries of the 3rd CfP: in Hungary – in Kecskemét on 30 July (27 attendees) and Szeged on August 27, 2019 (56 attendees), and in Serbia – in Novi Sad on 14 August (111 attendees) and Subotica on 28 August 2019 (67 attendees).

Based on the AIRs, in 2020 the JS held one Assessors training for quality assessors of the 3rd CfP in Budapest on 12 February with the participation of 23 attendees. In 2020, JMC project selection also took place online on 8 June. In 2021 the JS organised 1 JMC meeting that took place online on November 30, 2021 that resulted in 7 JMC decisions. The European Cooperation Day, the annual programme's event was organised throughout the assessed period, however, in 2020 and 2021 in online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When it comes to the project events, in 2019 altogether 54 projects organised over 360 events that contributed to the projects' and the programme's visibility. According to the estimates provided in the projects' reports, the events hosted approximately 39 900 attendees. In 2020 altogether 64 projects organised over 122 events and in 2021 altogether 50 projects organised over 250 events that increased the visibility.

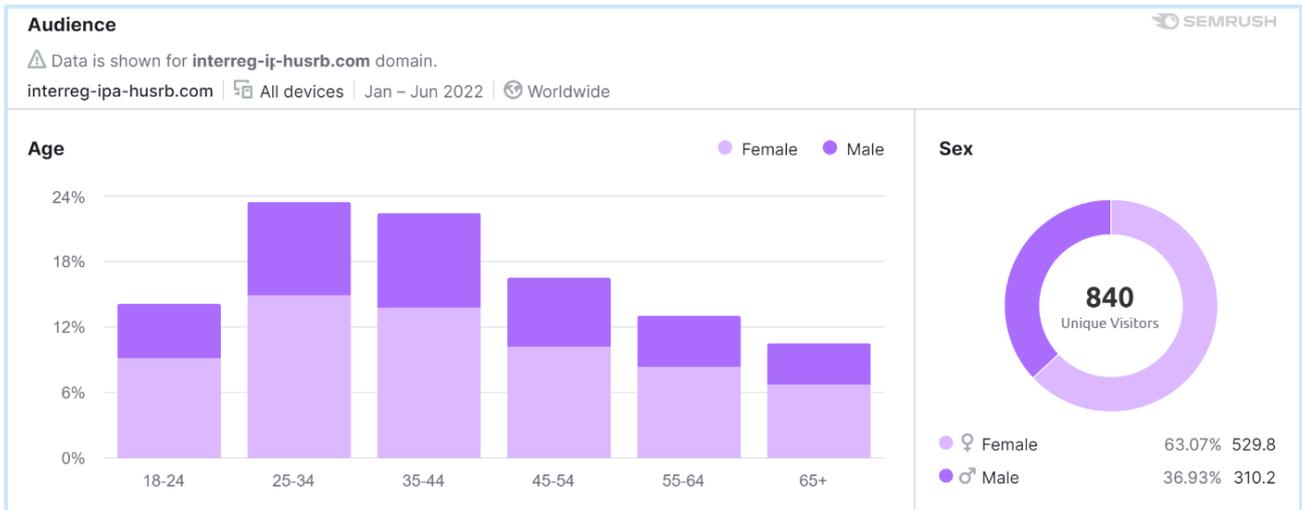
Furthermore, external service providers were involved in the production of the **promotional material**, such as branded promotional merchandise and info-material. Visual tools in line with the growing trend of visual content, the Programme increased its usage of visual tools, such as photography, video material, infographic and alike, compared to the previous programme.

4.2.2 Visiting tendencies of the on-line communication tools

The frequency of the programme's communication is primarily defined by the communication strategy and the visibility manual. During the extent of the analysed timeframe, the Programme's website (www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com) remained the main communication hub towards the general public, potential applicants, the beneficiaries and other stakeholders. Analysing the website's visitor

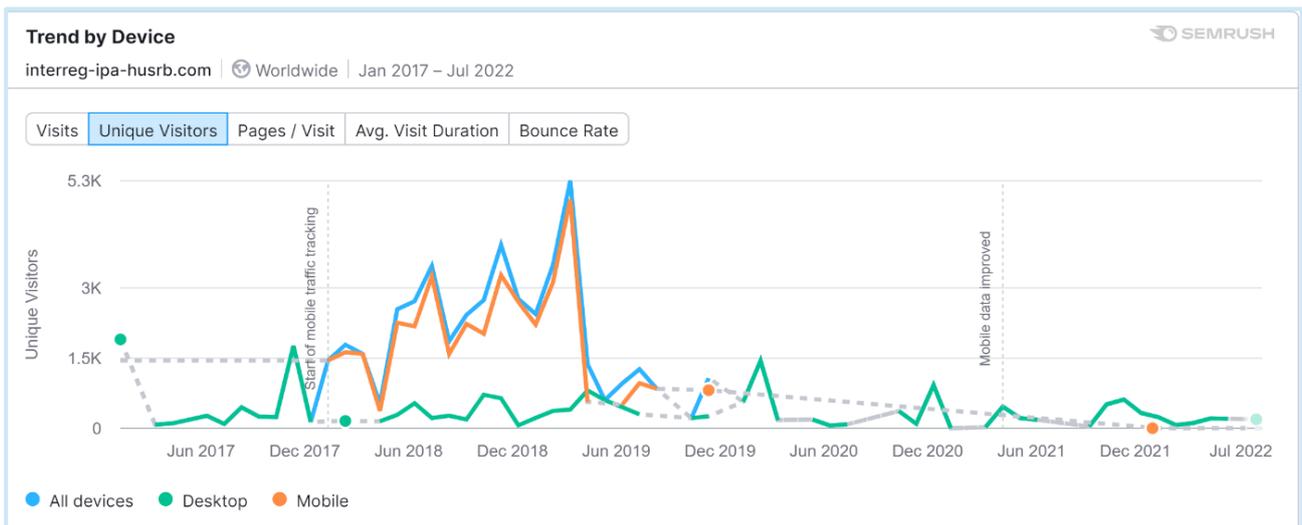
data in the last three years shows similar tendencies in terms of age and sex; mostly women (63% in 2022) between 25-44 years are visiting the website. In 2020 the website had 1,7K unique visitors, in 2021 this number went up to 2,4K, while so far in 2022 the website had 840 unique visitors which is mostly in line with the frequency in which new materials were published on the website.

Figure 177: Demographic data on the Programme's website's visitors



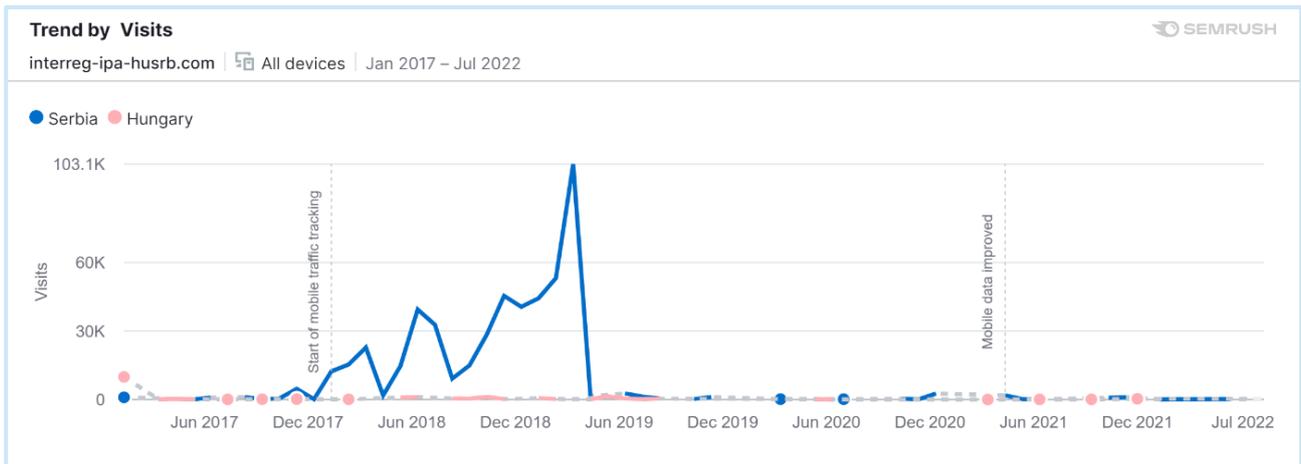
The search trends – shown below – also point to a certain cyclicity in the frequency of the website's visitors which is stemming from the nature of the programme. The interest peaked in the summer of 2019.

Figure 178: Visiting trends of the Programme's website



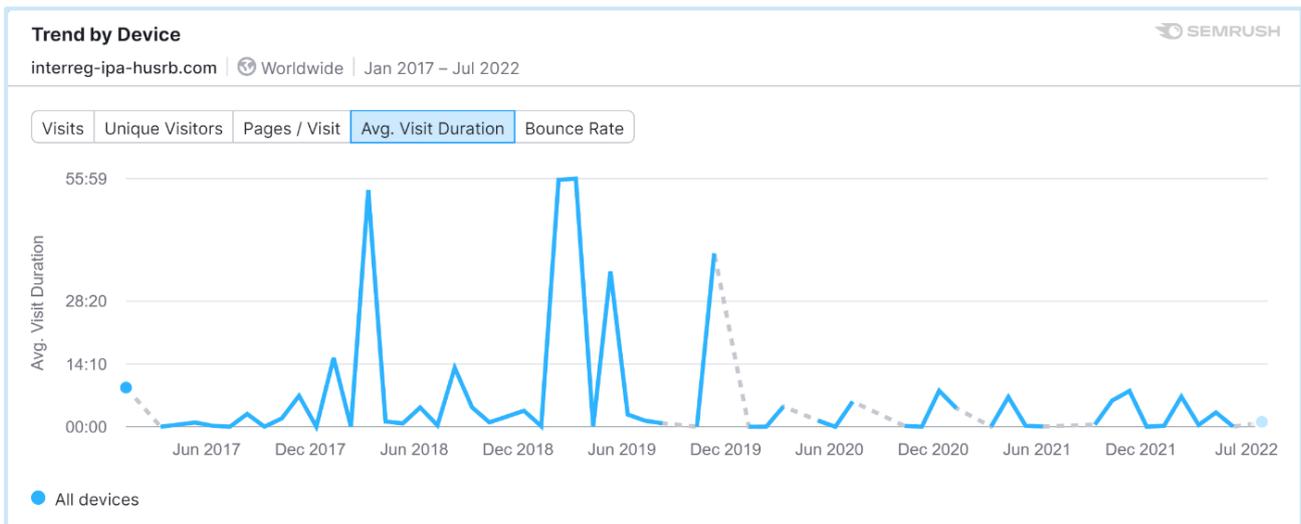
The website is most visited by users from Serbia and in a much less degree by users from Hungary, which could be an indication that Hungarian materials or information targeting the Hungarian audience could be strengthened on the website.

Figure 179: The website's visitors according to their country of residence



The time the visitors spend on the website can also be very informative about the quality and usefulness of the published materials. According to the data, the visitors spend anything between 5 to 55 minutes on the website, however, on average they tend to stay for about 15 minutes, except the peak-periods when they are looking for more in-depth information. Taking into consideration the modern surfing trends, this result can be considered acceptable.

Figure 180: Average visit duration on the Programme's website



The Facebook being the other most frequently used communicational channel of the Programme features 40-50 unique posts each year, which means on average one new post weekly which seems to satisfactorily engage the core audience.

4.2.3 Difficulties met during the communication activities from the Programme's side

One of the biggest difficulties met during the communication activities from the Programme's side is that on some of the platforms the special Hungarian and Serbian characters are not showing properly, which resulted in less communication and posts being published, or these being published only in English.

Another challenge is the low response rate to the newsletters, which might possibly happen because of the content, but also because of the email addresses in the database are sometimes not being used.

Also, a serious challenge was posed by the COVID-19 pandemic which put a break in the communication and also somewhat changed the types of activities that were possible. Furthermore, the person in charge for communication left the job which should have to be filled. A public call for this position was announced, interviews conducted, but at the end no new employee was hired to this position as the conditions and expectations did not meet.

As a solution for this challenging period, the Programme has dedicated the communication tasks first to JS project managers, but more recently to the specific project manager.

4.2.4 Evaluation of the communication of the projects

Based on the Guideline for Applicants on information and publicity measures, the following **communication tools are considered obligatory and recommended:**

Table 65: Requirements for the Beneficiaries to fulfil the information and publicity measures for receiving the funds

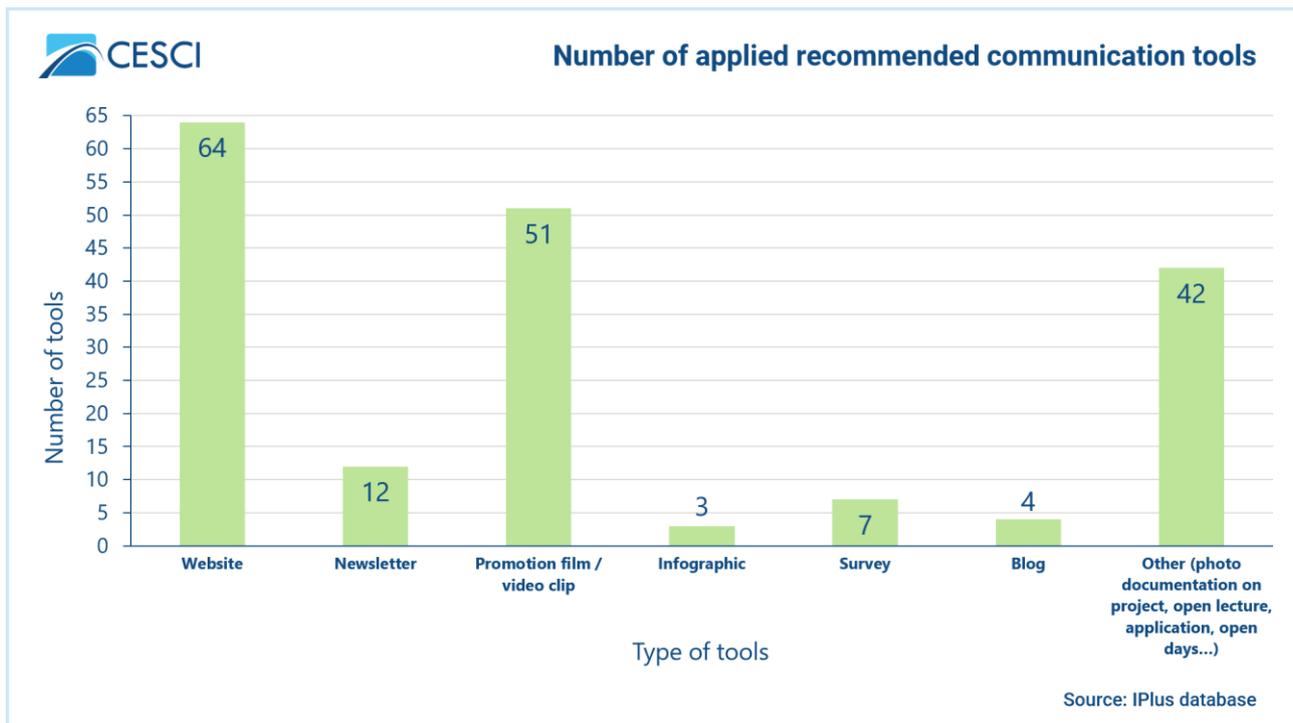
Obligatory elements	Recommended elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication elements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Logo ○ EU emblem + sentence mentioning the co funding ○ Disclaimer • Communication tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Poster ○ Promotional materials (leaflets, brochures, print publications, roll-up banner, accessories) ○ Visibility event (at least one per project) ○ Media coverage (at least one piece of media coverage promoting the project in print, electronic or online media: Specific events and activities, press releases, media interviews, PR articles) ○ Social media page ○ Project photography ○ Stickers* ○ Billboard / plaque** 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication elements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Description of the programme ○ Programme slogan ○ Reference to the programme website • Communication tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Website ○ Newsletter ○ Promotion film / video clip ○ Infographic ○ Survey ○ Blog

- * Specific obligatory requirement for purchase of equipment: every single piece of equipment purchased through this Programme should be **labelled with a sticker**. When more pieces of purchased equipment are permanently placed in one location, the room should also be marked with the larger sticker. In instances when labelling a piece of equipment may interfere with the functionality of equipment, the item should not be labelled.
- ** Specific obligatory requirements for the projects with the works component: projects which include infrastructure or construction works have specific obligatory requirements. If the total Community contribution of the operation exceeds EUR 500 000, the Beneficiaries implementing a project consisting of infrastructure or construction activities are obliged to ensure that a **temporary billboard** is put up on the site of the activity. Furthermore, Beneficiaries are obliged to put up a **permanent explanatory plaque or billboard** that is visible and is of significant size by the time of submission of the Final Progress Report at the latest in case the total Community contribution of the operation exceeds EUR 500 000 and the project has financed any infrastructure or construction-type activities.

It is worth underlying that that the same obligatory and recommended tools are required to be applied by both the strategic and traditional projects. However, projects containing infrastructure development or purchase of equipment must apply additional mandatory communication tools (plaque, billboard, sticker).

Considering the main tendencies in the **usage of recommended communication tools**, the most popular ones were the website followed closely by promotional films or video clips. Except for PA1 (45%) in the case of all Pas at least every second project used websites. The share reached even 57% considering PA4. The second most common tool was promotional films or video clips with a share range between 36 and 54%. Followed by the aforementioned two tools, other more popular tools included newsletters (PA2: 20%, PA4: 18%) and survey (PA1: 18%). Less frequently used tools are blogs, surveys and infographics (not used in the case of PA2 and PA4 projects) in particular. The share of projects using these tools did not exceed 10% per PA.

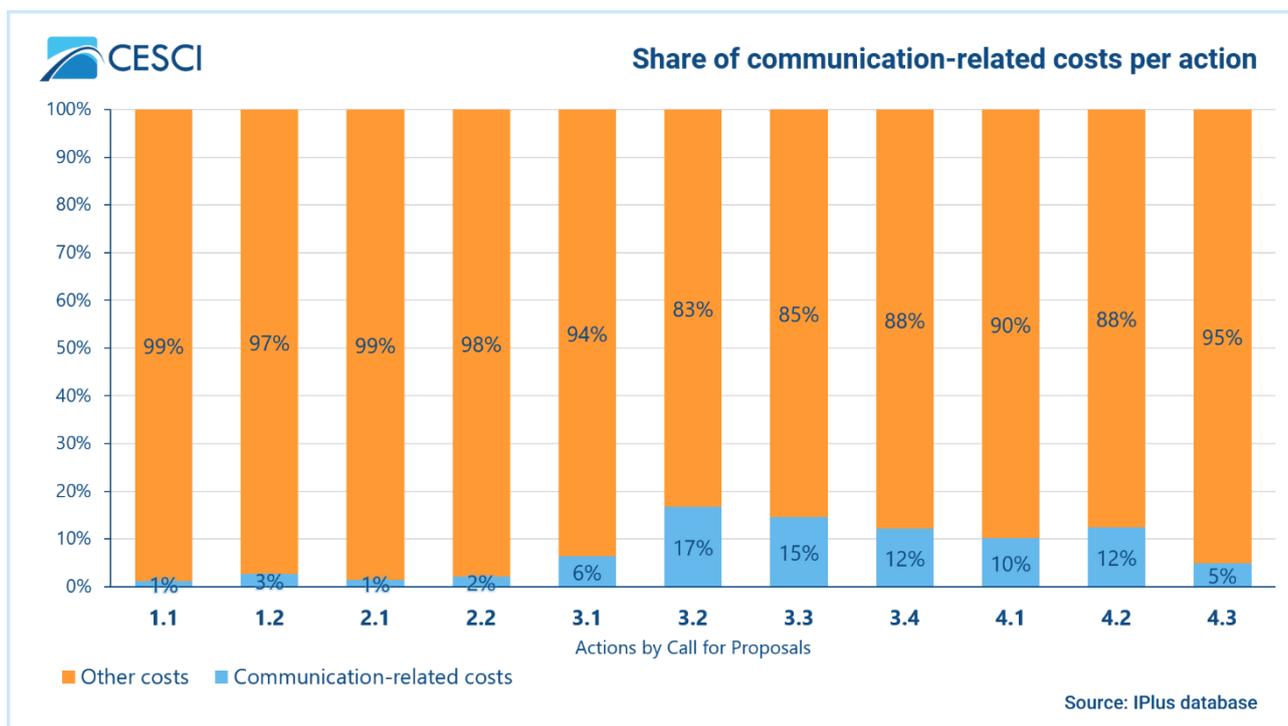
Figure 181: Number of applied recommended communication tools



Analysed per Actions, **main tendencies of applying non-obligatory and other communication tools** include that under Action 1.1 the use of media clipping, editing and printing studies and other documents and promotional videos, certain clips can be underlined. In Action 1.2 media-related activities and again printed documents can be highlighted. Under PA2 actions promotional cycling actions, children’s competition and organisation of workshops represent specific tools. Regarding Action 3.1 presentation of the tourist destinations and the values of the given region and partners (special leaflets, videos, brochures dedicated to the topic), media coverage (TV, radio) especially articles in newspapers, social media campaigns, use of accessories (e.g. hat, USB stick) could be mentioned. Considering Action 3.2-3.4 presentation of promotional events, various forms of media coverage could be listed. With regard to Action 4.1 organization of project stand, online and TV campaigns, marketing and PR activities and some economy-related printed materials, documents were outstanding. With regard to rest of the two actions web tools could be named as specific ones.

In order to show the **share of communication budget for each action**, the relevant elements of budget lines of ‘5.3 Conferences, seminars, project meetings’ and the total of ‘5.6 Costs related to publicity, promotion and communication’ were taken into consideration. The projects of the programme intended to spend 4.8% of the total budget on communication. The highest amount of allocated money was spent on communication measures with regard to PA3 actions (Action 3.2: 16.7%; Action 3.3: 14.6%; Action 3.4: 12.1%), which is fully reasonable given the character (goals, expected results) of the PA. Furthermore, Action 4.2 can also be listed among actions relying more heavily on communication spendings, which seems to be also reasonable considering the goals on involving students, potential employees or reaching the consumers. On the other hand, actions under PA1 and PA2 allocated relatively lower budget to communication tools (Action 1.1: 1.2%; Action 2.1: 1.5%).

Figure 182: Share of communication-related costs per action



Based on project descriptions, budget lines and also the interview with the communication manager of the programme the **main challenges and needs for improvement** will be addressed in the followings. According to past experiences the quality of the communication related parts of the application forms were heterogenous because of the complexity of the application forms and the also of the varying approach of the applicants according to the original goal of their projects. There is a tendency that those beneficiaries whose developments requires the involvement of different target groups into the projects in order to achieve the goals (cultural, tourism-, sales-related projects), put greater emphasis on marketing and publicity issues including also the obligatory and recommended communication tools. In order to simplify the current system, simplifications in the related parts of the form could be taken. Otherwise, beneficiaries tend to approach both obligatory and other communication from the perspective of administrative burden, rather than from that of improving the project visibility. In these cases, the focus is on verifying costs, rather than having high-quality communication tools implemented. Beside obligatory tools little attention is paid on recommended and other tools. At the same time, it should be mentioned that efficient and effective communication requires special skills which tend to be missing at the applicants, even at those which have poor operational and financial capacities (e.g. small local municipalities along the border, local NGOs, etc.) In light of all these, the JSA recommended to simplify the communication-related part of the application form, at the same time to clarify the programme requirements. Regarding the budgetary issues, programme bodies initiated to apply simplified cost options for obligatory communication elements. The verification of the already set-up concept (market research on the prices) is in progress.

4.3 Programme's impacts on cohesion and convergence

This subchapter, focus on those factors that have a high impact on the border region's cohesion and convergence, such as:

- Overall analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs;
- Overview of the partnerships;
- Overall territorial coverage;
- Overall durability of the projects;
- Overall cross-border relevance of the projects;
- Results on the field of the horizontal principles;
- Aggregated impacts on the target groups.

4.3.1 Overall analysis of the fulfilment of regional needs

In order to analyse the fulfilment of the described needs (see the intervention logic of the PAs': *Figure 19, Figure 56, Figure 93, Figure 133*) each and every project was assessed from the point of potential contribution to the tackling and management of the regional challenges described by the Programme. In addition, the results of the survey on the contribution to the fulfilment of regional needs will be introduced below.

In order to give an overall picture on the fulfilment of regional needs, what can be done methodologically is to analyse the projects descriptions and the goals and outputs of the supported projects in the frames of the Programme. An overall picture can be given on the number of projects which try to tackle the identified regional needs. The quantification of impact can solely be based on the number of such projects that reflect directly on the regional needs. The main aim is to give a comprehensive picture on the most frequently targeted needs of the Programme. This analysis is not assessing the quality (e.g. level of impacts, budget) of the given projects; such analysis can be found in chapters dealing with the individual PAs.

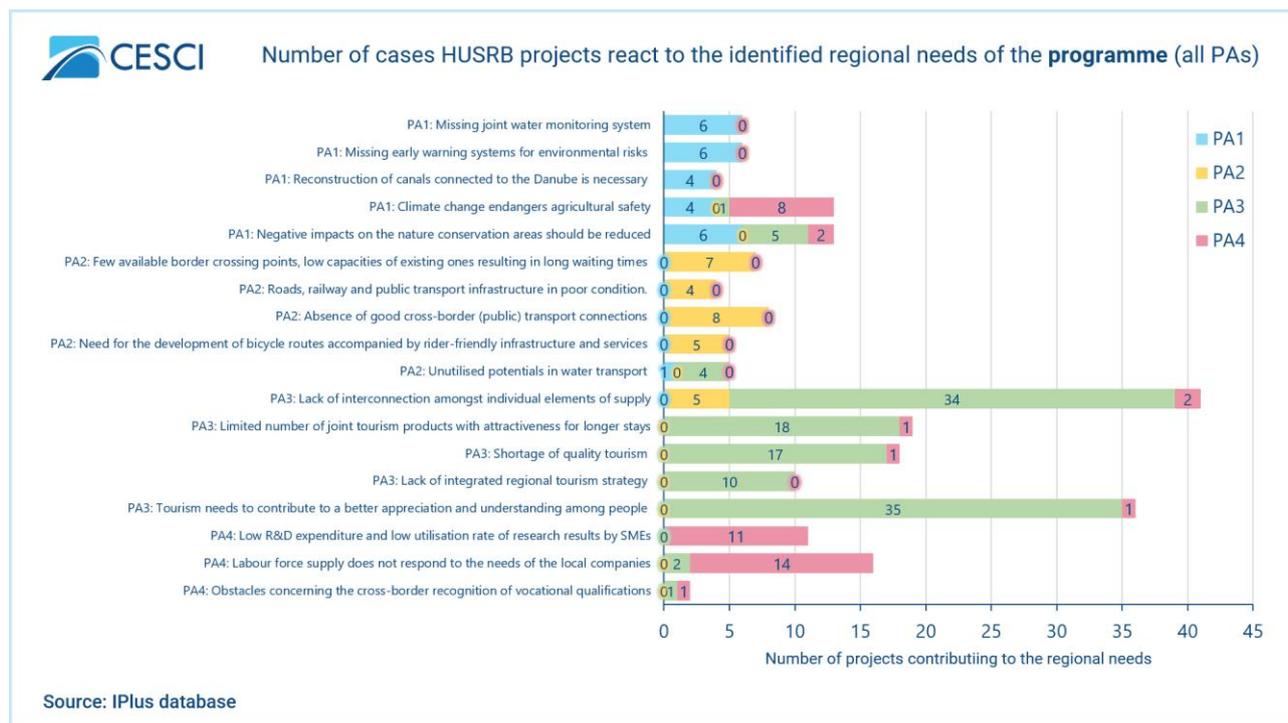
What is not included in the assessment below is the determination of the level of fulfilment (quality) of regional needs, which can vary from project to project and from regional need to regional need.

In accordance with the beforementioned methodological notes, based solely on the quantity, the highest number of projects which are reflecting the regional needs can be found under PA3. The most frequently addressed challenges of the Programme are the lack of interconnection among tourism supply (41 projects) and the need for better understanding between people (36 projects). Thus, it can be said that tourism and culture, their needs are well-addressed by the Programme. PA3 related challenges (party except for tourism strategy) are followed by certain PA1 and PA4 challenges, namely, in descending order: labour force supply (16 projects), climate change (13 projects), impacts on nature conservation areas (13 projects), and low R&D expenditure, low utilisation of research (11 projects). In contrary, low number of projects has impact on obstacles concerning recognition of vocational qualifications (2 projects), water transport (4), roads and other infrastructure in poor condition (4), and the reconstruction need for canals (4). However, it also has to be added that strategic projects in PA1 and PA2 having great impacts but limited number of projects modify the

general picture. Therefore, despite of low number of projects regarding needs in relation to reconstruction of canals and few border crossings impact of great significance was reached.

It is important to note that there are challenges where large number/share of projects are impacted by projects from a single PA. However, sometimes there are regional needs which are reflected by more projects from a different PA than where the given need was originally formulated. Climate change and water transport are challenges at which not the related PA projects contribute to the fulfilment of the given challenge by the highest number and share.

Figure 183: Number of cases HUSRB projects react to the identified regional needs of the programme (all PAs)



The online survey asked **to what extent the beneficiaries agreed that the Programme's calls reflect the regional needs**. Beneficiaries from PA2 gave strongly agreeing answers with the highest share. The Programme's calls reflect on the regional needs the most as every second respondent chose the highest value. The other half of PA2 beneficiaries also agrees that the calls reflect on regional needs. On the other hand, based on the responses, PA4 beneficiaries felt that the calls of the Programme were the least in line with the regional needs identified. Beneficiaries under this PA were the only ones who expressed disagreement as 20% of the respondents disagreed that the statement of reflecting regional needs is valid. The share of those who agreed accounts for 33.3%, which is the lowest of all PA beneficiaries. The answers of PA3 beneficiaries are the second most favourable after PA2 given that 51.5% of the respondents who have implemented / are implementing PA1-related projects chose the third option, "agree", and the rest of the respondents of 48.6% strongly agree with the statement that the Programme's calls reflect the regional needs. Regarding PA1 beneficiaries 66.7% of respondents agreed that the Programme's calls reflect the regional needs, and 33.3% strongly agreed with that statement.

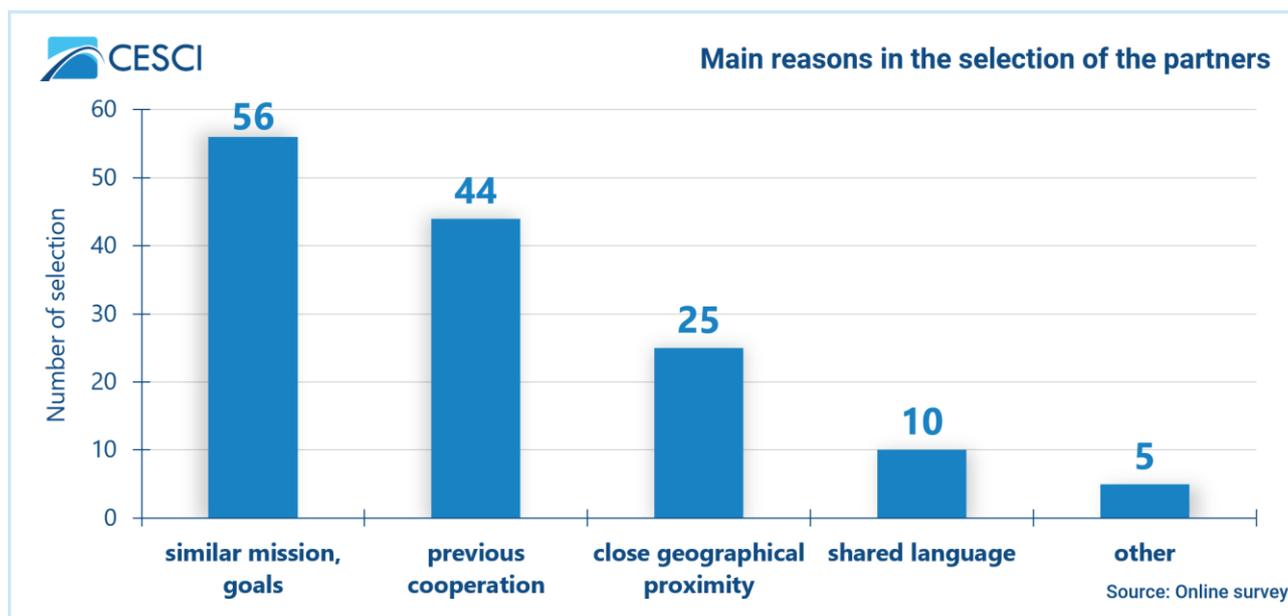
The survey was complemented with another question which asked **the extent of connection between the respondent's project and the regional needs**. According to the relevant beneficiaries

of PA2, their projects reflect the regional needs the most and in line with the given PA. 80% of the respondents expressed strong agreement with the statement. The main synergies between the projects and the local-regional development needs can be detected in relation to border crossing infrastructure, cycling infrastructure, and enhanced cross-border public transport services. In contrary, the outcome of lowest values of the survey can be shown with regard to PA1. The share of agreeing answers is relatively low, 66.7%. Water transport was not even mentioned. Based on survey results, the main synergies between the projects and the local-regional development needs can be detected in relation to water and climate change: hydrometeorological extremes, floods and droughts. Considering PA3 62.2% of the beneficiaries of PA3 express strong agreement in relation to the question. Overall, these regional needs are served the second best according to the survey. The main synergies between the projects and the local-regional development needs can be detected in relation to bringing people closer together, thus the various tourism and cultural developments resulted in a better appreciation and understanding among people. The young generations in particular were affected by the projects concerned. Apart from that, the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and development of (new) attractions played an important role as well. Out of the four PAs, PA4 got the second lowest scores and the second least favourable ratings by the respondents regarding the project's reflection on regional needs (agree: 46.7%, strongly agree: 53.3%). Based on survey results, the main synergies between the projects and the local-regional development needs can be detected in relation to competitiveness of SMEs. Innovation, R&D are also mentioned. The needs named "labour force supply does not respond to the needs of the local companies" and "obstacles concerning the cross-border recognition of vocational qualifications" were not addressed by many projects according to the respondents. The only exceptions were mentioned on skills development.

4.3.2 Overview of the partnerships

First it is worth analysing the main reasons in the selection of partners. Partnerships tend to be created based on similar mission and goals at the first place, but history i.e. previous cooperation also plays a major role in forming partnerships based on the online survey. The other reasons were not mentioned as frequent as the first two reasons. Geography does matter, but shared language or other factors play limited role in defining partnerships despite the methodology which allowed those who filled the survey to select multiple options.

Figure 184: Main reasons in the selection of the partners



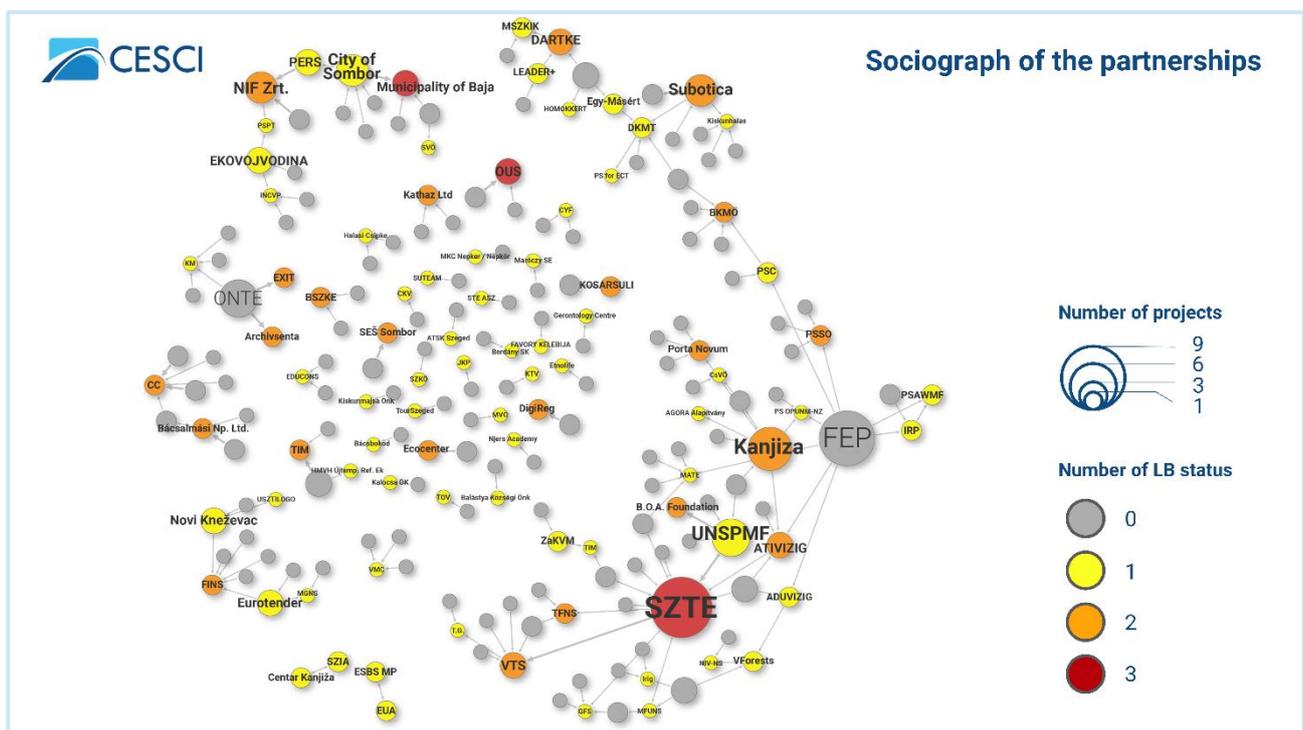
Considering the **legal status** of the beneficiaries, 25.4% of them (83 out of 327) were an organisation governed by private law. Regarding strategic projects, most of the beneficiaries are governed by public law, with the exception of the DKMT, which is involved in two projects and is governed by private law. The average number of projects partners in a project can be considered low with slightly less than three partners per project. In relation to the strategic CfP, the average number of partners is similar, almost three, and exactly three in case DKMT is measured only once.

In relation to partner **budgets** the share for the beneficiaries governed by private law is relatively low (7 294 710.91 EUR) with only reaching 10.3%. Taking into account strategic projects the budget is significantly higher (28 472 127.09 EUR total cost), and 97.6% of the budget was allocated to public partners. The allocated total cost for public stakeholders amounts 63 615 565.1 EUR, while in the case of strategic projects it is 27 797 497.99 EUR despite of low number of partners. The average partner budget for partners governed by private law was 87 888.08 EUR and 337 314.55 EUR for strategic projects, while for public it reached 260 719.53 EUR in a project with regard to total costs, and was as much as 1 985 535.57 EUR for strategic public project partners. This value can be considered very high amount of support for beneficiaries. 216 851 EUR was the average budget per beneficiary in general, and much higher, 1 779 507.94 EUR in strategic projects. Taking into account the total costs of projects the largest amount of budget to any Lead Beneficiary was allocated to those of the strategic projects, to NIF (5 625 205.72 EUR), ADUVIZIG (5 430 762.48 EUR), ATIVIZIG (5 238 538.96 EUR), Public Water Management Company "Vode Vojvodine" Novi Sad (VODE VOJVODINE) (3 306 353.3 EUR) and Provincial Secretariat for energy, infrastructure and traffic of the Republic of Serbia (3 255 968 EUR). No beneficiary reached such support from PA3 and PA4 given that the largest infrastructural projects are realised in the frames of PA1 and PA2. Considering beneficiaries who did not implement strategic projects, the picture differs from the overall picture. SZTE (with 649 788 EUR total cost) leads the chart, followed by the Municipality of Baja (626 510.48 EUR), Municipality of Novi Bečej (311 952 EUR), Public Enterprise "Vojvodinašume" PETROVARADIN (PETROVARADIN) (235 458.9 EUR) and UNSPMF (232 682.28 EUR).

Based on the **number** of projects SZTE (9 projects), Ópusztaszeri National Historical Memorial Park (ONTE) (5), UNSPMF (4), Municipality of Kanjiža (4), NIF (4), City of Subotica (4), City of Sombor (4) and FEP (4) were involved in the greatest number of projects as beneficiaries. According to the number of LB status, SZTE, Municipality of Baja and Open University Subotica have outstanding role in creating partnerships with three times of fulfilling LB responsibilities. Considering strategic projects DKMT was the only organisation that was partner in two projects (LB in ColourCoop and B in Dream Railway).

Looking at the **sociogram** a fragmented network can be seen where the majority of connections are limited to very few partners. As it is apparent on the sociogram there are “islands” of different groups of beneficiaries. These groups are characterised by LBs of SZTE; Kanjiža; Municipalities of Baja and Sombor; Subotica-DARTKE-BKMÖ; NIF and Provincial Secretariat for Urban Planning and Environmental Protection (EKOVOJVODINA), CC; FINS and some other beneficiaries. The beneficiaries with the greatest number of partner connections include Kanjiža (9), FEP (8), FINS (6), VTS (6), CC (5), BKMÖ (5), MATE (5), ATIVIZIG (5) lead by the Hungarian university of SZTE (12 connections). Considering strategic project connections, DKMT has an outstanding role by cooperating with 5 other project partners in total.

Figure 185: Sociograph of the partnerships (all pAs)



Out of the 231 cases when partners were beneficiaries, 176 times beneficiaries participated only in a single PA. Municipalities of Sombor, Subotica and Novi Kneževac from Serbia and the University of Szeged from Hungary participate in project partnerships under three different PAs.

To sum up, it can be said that the most decisive engines and centrepieces of the partnership networks are usually governmental bodies, municipalities and related organisations (such as Subotica, Sombor, Baja, Vojvodina or Bács-Kiskun County), educational institutions, mainly universities (SZTE from Szeged, Novi Sad, Subotica universities), while companies governed by private law or cultural

associations have much less significant role in the networking. Strategic projects had a huge impact on the overall partnerships as well with limited number of partners and relations but with great budgets per beneficiary. In strategic projects public partners dominated, however it was the more private organisation of DKMT which was involved in more than one project, and had the most widespread project partner network.

4.3.3 Overall territorial coverage

In the beginning of this subchapter the territorial coverage of EU contributions and beneficiaries were analysed by the following two figures (*Figure 186, Figure 187*). Both of them indicate the values by countries: the first one in relative values, the second one in absolute value. According to the EU contribution, besides the introduction of the result of all CfPs, the open and strategic CfPs were also represented separately in order to handle the distorting effects of the latter ones.

Figure 186: Overall territorial balance of the beneficiaries – Relative values

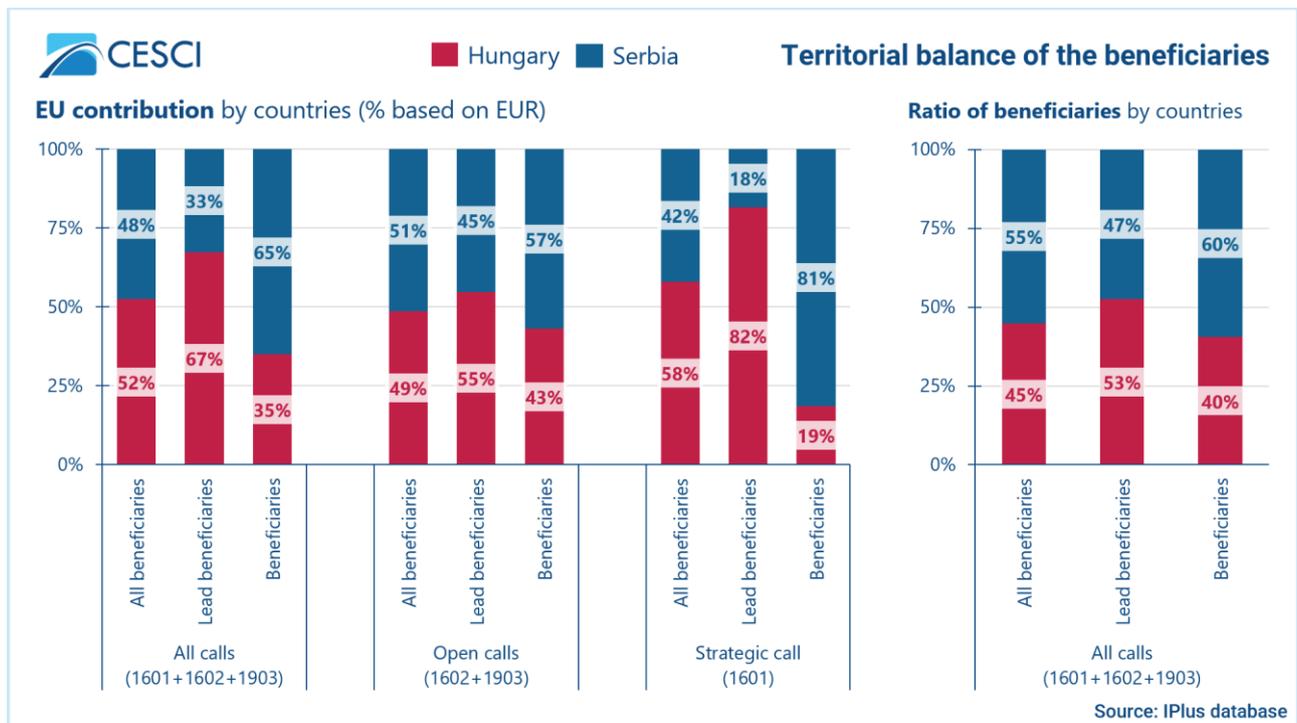
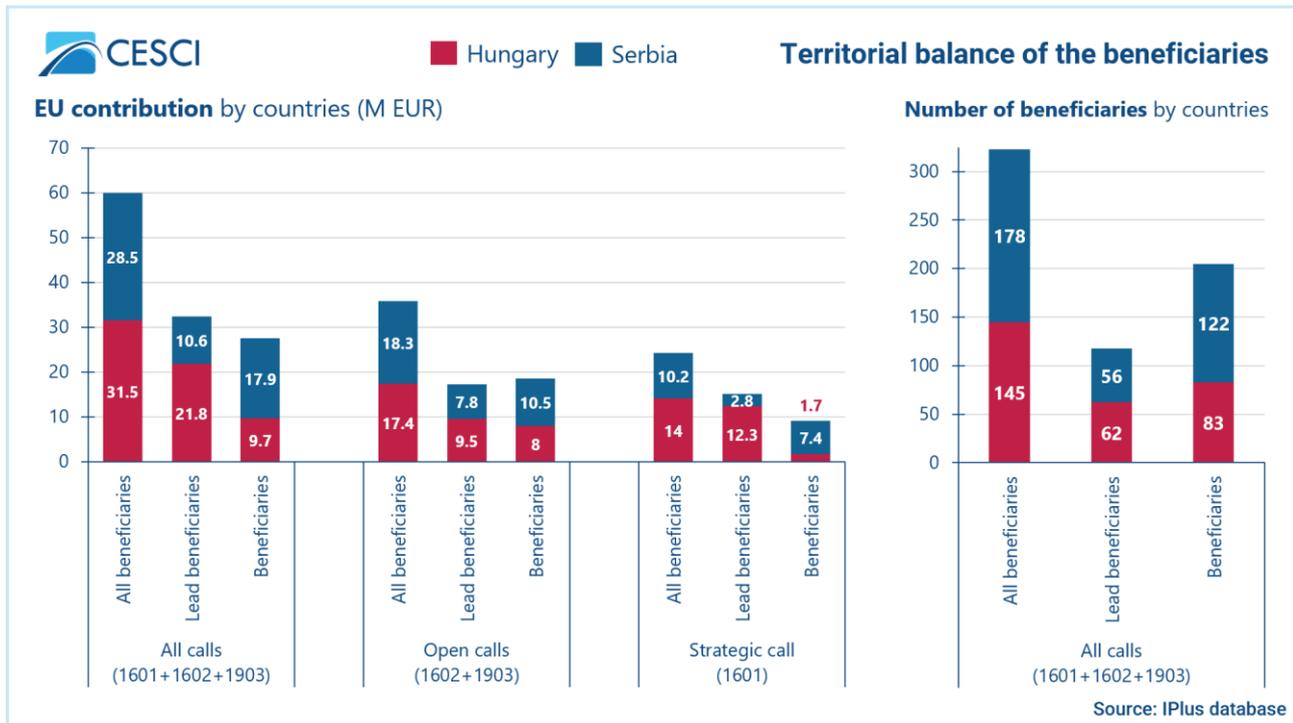


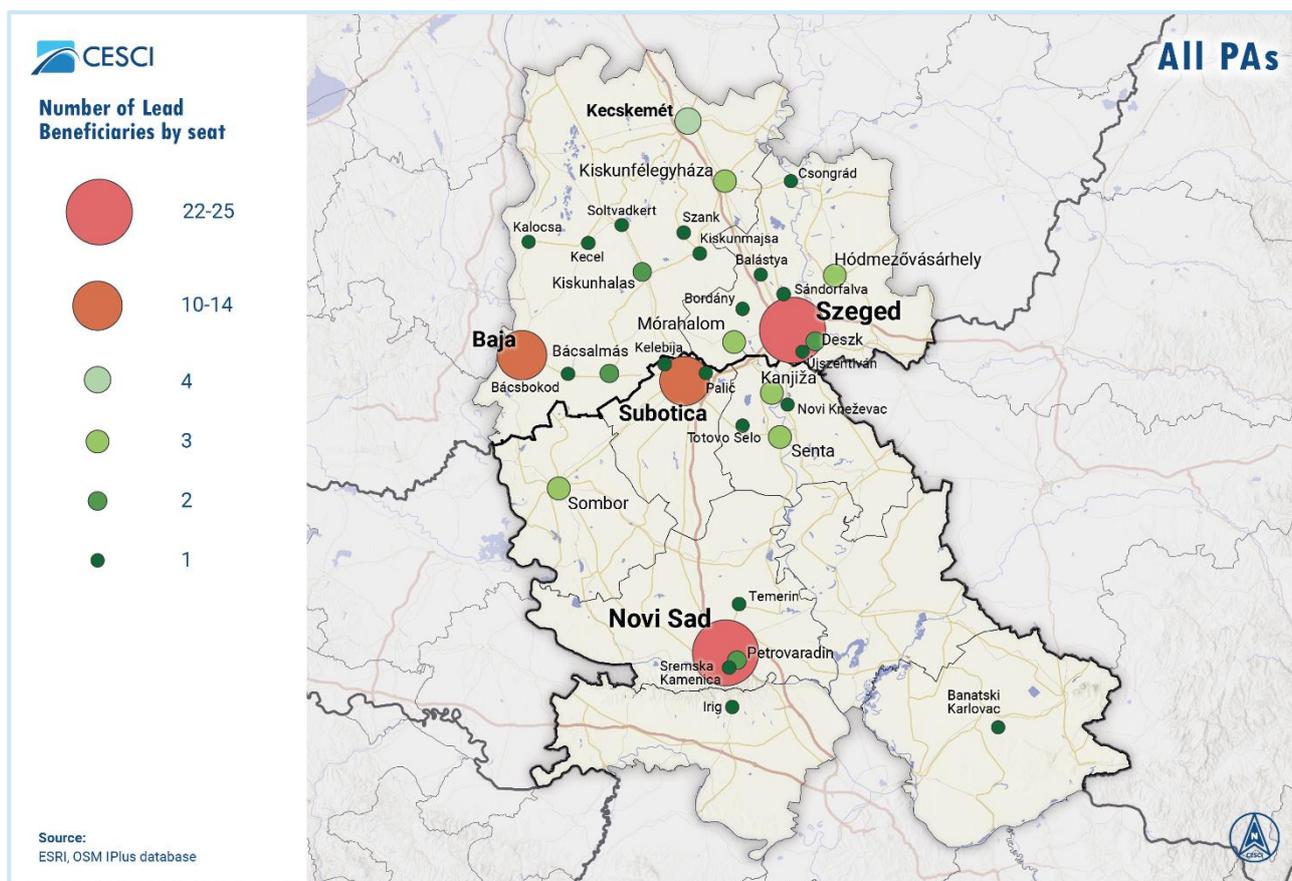
Figure 187: Overall territorial balance of the beneficiaries – Absolute values



Overall, the **territorial distribution** of the EU funds is mostly balanced, Hungarian citizens got slightly more support than the ones from the Republic of Serbia. Nevertheless, there were slightly more Serbian partners, which indicates that a Hungarian partners tended to receive comparatively higher support (15% in case of the traditional projects). Significant differences can be observed between the share of EU contributions dedicated to the lead and the partner beneficiaries on the two sides of the border. This disparity is rooted in the fact that both strategic projects were led by Hungarians. Due to the fact that the distribution of the EU contribution between the two countries was almost inversely proportional between the lead, and the partner beneficiaries within the strategic projects, the overall share of the EU contribution between the two countries became more balanced. Regarding the open CfPs, the majority of the LBs is Hungarian but the Serbians give the bigger ratio among the partner beneficiaries, which is observable in the distribution of EU contribution too. The Serbian partners received more than half of EU contributions under open CfPs.

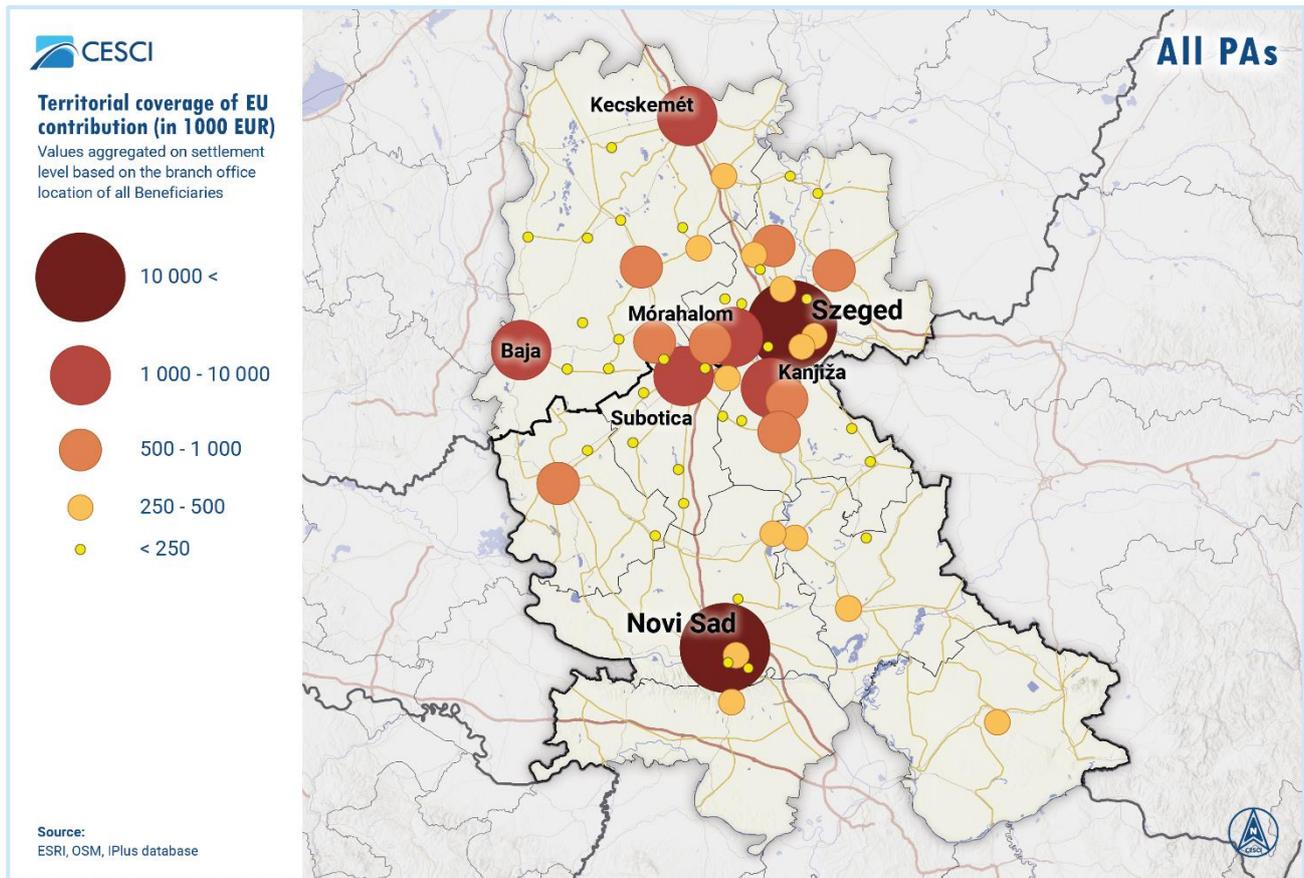
The **territorial pattern** of all LBs shows a significant unbalance between the two countries. In Hungary both of the evaluated counties' territories are covered nearly equally with LBs, in Vojvodina the number of LBs does not exceed one unit in the eastern and southern districts. It indicates the fact that from the Serbian side just the northern part and the vicinity of Novi Sad have taken relevant part in the Programme. As the following map illustrates, 59.2% of the LBs is located in four cities, of which Novi Sad (25) and Szeged (22) incorporate more than 20 LBs, while Subotica (14) and Baja (10) possess at least 10 LBs. These settlements highlight their counties and districts, thus the number of LBs is around 30 in Csongrád-Csanád (35, 29.2% of all LBs), in Južnobačka (29, 24.2%) and in Bács-Kiskun (27, 22.5%), but Severnobačka (16, 13.3%) is just slightly below 20 LBs. In relation to the Hungarian districts, district of Szeged (26) and Baja (10) encompass the most LBs which are followed by the districts of Kecskemét and Mórahalom with 4 units and the districts of Bácsalmás and Hódmezővásárhely with 3 units.

Figure 188: Number of Lead Beneficiaries by seat (all PAs)



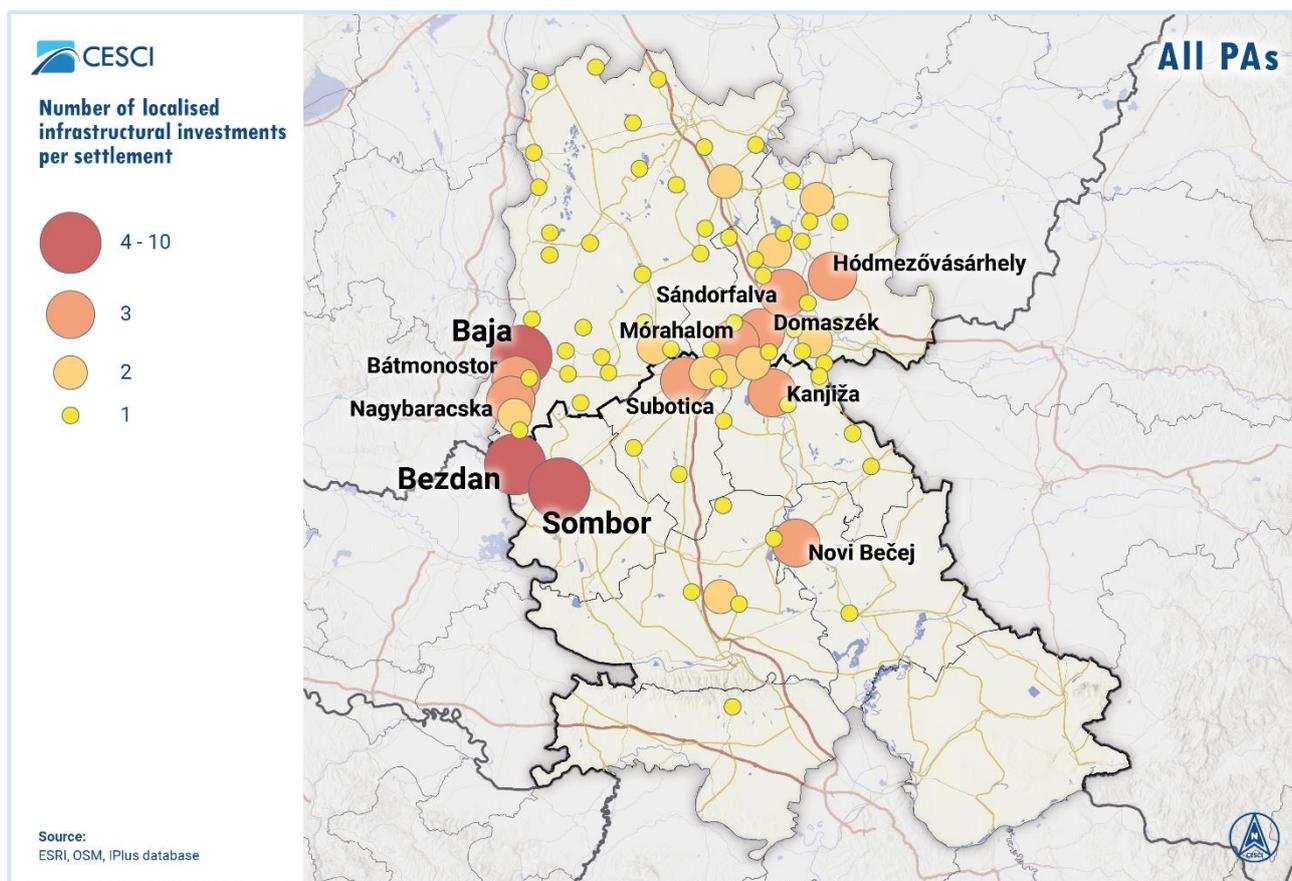
The overall **territorial coverage of the EU contributions** is quite uneven. There are only 13 settlements with higher than 1% of share, which concentrate 84.8% of the total contribution. Novi Sad (15 328 180 EUR, 25.4%) and Szeged (14 212 732 EUR, 23.6%) are responsible for receiving almost half of the financial support. In general, middle-sized and large cities tend to receive high amount of money; this is the case taking into consideration Novi Sad, Szeged, Baja (6 795 983 EUR, 11.3%), Subotica (4 317 182 EUR, 7.2%) and Kecskemét (1 450 254 EUR, 2.4%) in particular. Some settlements of branch offices got support are smaller ones, or even villages such as Mórahalom (2 046 290 EUR, 3.4%), Ásotthalom (949 063 EUR, 1.6%) or Tompa (783 278 EUR, 1.3%). 61.4% of the contribution was allocated to settlements situated within the 30 km zone to the shared state border. There are large areas which seems to be almost left out of the Programme: the southern areas of Vojvodina meaning Sremska (0.2%) and Južnobanatska districts (0.5%) from Serbia received little support, and districts of Kunszentmiklós, Tiszakécske and Makó from Hungary got no EU contribution at all.

Figure 189: Territorial coverage of EU contribution (in 1000 EUR) – all pAs



Based on the overall picture of the **project locations**, it can be seen that most of the elements can be localized in the Districts of Szeged and Baja from Hungary, and in Zapadnobačka and Severnobačka from Serbia. Two distinct concentration of project locations can be found; one is along the Danube between Baja and Sombor, and another one consists of the settlement group in the vicinity (40-50 km) of the border from Tompa to Deszk, from Subotica to Rabe. The settlement with the highest number (at least three) of locations are as follows: Baja (10 locations), Bezdán (4), Sombor (4), Bátmonostor (3), Domaszék (3), Hódmezővásárhely (3), Mórahalom (3), Nagybaracska (3), Sándorfalva (3), Kanjiža (3), Novi Bečej (3) and Subotica (3). These together make up 45 locations. The highest share of project infrastructure elements was realized within the border zone between Hódmezővásárhely on the North and Sombor on the South. These projects form the majority creating high density of realized infrastructure in the border zone. In addition, the respective settlements of realizations tend to concentrate more locations compared to the municipalities further away from the border strip. While the distribution is more balanced on the Hungarian side, it is not true in the case of Vojvodina; there are very low number of projects South of Novi Bečej. There are no locations in Južnobačanska and only a single (in Irig) can be found in Sremska.

Figure 190: Number of localised infrastructural investments per settlement (all pAs)



4.3.4 Overall durability of the projects

The durability of the projects' results has been assessed based on the history of the partnerships, the patterns of the project life cycle, as well as regarding their embeddedness into the regional framework. Moreover, evaluators made an attempt to identify the solutions of institutional and financial sustainability applied by the project owners.

When analysing the history of the partnerships, it became clear that there are strong and long-lasting relationships between the partners. This especially characterizes PA1 and PA2, where the circle of the potential applicants is limited to the professionally competent bodies and the territorially relevant municipalities, by the national public administration systems. In addition, stable partnerships could be identified not just under PA3, but also PA4, in spite of being a new thematic field in a cross-border relation. In the case of these two pAs, informal connections or IPA projects partly in other fields characterize the already existing partnerships. Long-lasting partnerships obviously has a positive impact on the durability of the project results and outcomes, but could also mean that it is not easy to involve newcomers to the programme implementation.

Taking into consideration the history of the projects and their (inter)connections to previously implemented or on-going developments within the framework of either the IPA or other programmes, it can be stated that projects under PA1 and PA2 tend to form part of long-term, regional development initiatives (e.g. regional network of improved water management infrastructure or bicycle paths), which have been implemented step-by-step (project-by-project)

during more programming periods. These projects territorially and/or thematically complement some others in a synergic manner, which enhance the durability of the results. In the case of PA3 and PA4, softer, often ad-hoc developments have been initiated by much more different actors compared to PA1 and PA2. The sustainability of some cultural and touristic developments under PA3 seems to be increased by regional or sectoral integration, which may contribute to avoid the overlaps and strengthen the synergies to attract more visitors. At the same time, people-to-people projects (PA3) or social initiatives (PA4) could fulfil their role at a local level even separately.

The solutions for ensuring institutional and financial sustainability were analysed based on the relevant parts of the application forms and the survey.

Table 66: Application of solutions for providing institutional sustainability

Sustainability measures	PA1	PA2	PA3	PA4
Maintenance of cooperation of the project partners	x	x	x	x
Cooperation based on a certain document (such as agreements, contracts, strategies, etc.) or tool (e.g. joint brand, platform, etc.)	x	x	x	x
Inclusion of the responsibilities in one of the project partner's daily tasks		x		
Separate organizational structure (e.g. cluster, social enterprise, network)				x

Both in terms of institutional and financial sustainability, there are general, highly-applied solutions such as maintaining the cooperation based some documents; or financing the maintenance costs from the partner(s) own budget. At the same time, there are sector or PA-specific solutions: during the analysis a market-oriented approach characterized the projects of PA4 and some others within PA3 (e.g. revenue generation by touristic or business services and products), while in case of people-to-people projects the expectations towards future external, project-based financing were often.

Table 67: Application of solutions for providing institutional sustainability

Sustainability measures	PA1	PA2	PA3	PA4
Funding from own budget	x	x	x	x
No need for future funding (e.g. low level or no maintenance cost)	x		x	
Revenues generated by the project outcomes			x	x
Involvement of other external funds			x	x
Outsourcing the financial burdens to a third institution		x	x	

Based on both the analysed databases and the results of the interviews, it seems that applicants and beneficiaries are able to better plan the sustainability measures in case of tangible, infrastructure-related developments, where the ownership and the responsibilities can be determined in a more exact way. When speaking about soft projects, there are less one-size fits all solutions, which would require a different mindset with specific skills from the applicants and beneficiaries in order to generate viable sustainability solutions. Taking into consideration, that the owners of these soft projects are frequently small, peripheral organizations or institutions without the appropriate capacities and skills, meeting of these requirements can be hardly expected from them.

From a methodological point of view, it can be also stated that assessment of the durability of the project results and outcomes is a difficult task both in the application and the evaluation/follow-up phases. The durability-related descriptions of the application forms written by the partners are quite heterogeneous in terms of their quality: there are empty phrases without any real content, but some exemplary approaches with exact solutions could be also detected mainly within PA4. As a result, the evaluation and comparison of the projects by quality assessors based on the variable quality information is not easy. On the other hand, the impact evaluation of the projects and the programme is too close in time to the implementation, even more some of the projects are still in progress. In this way, real ex-post, evidence-based evaluation is not fully possible.

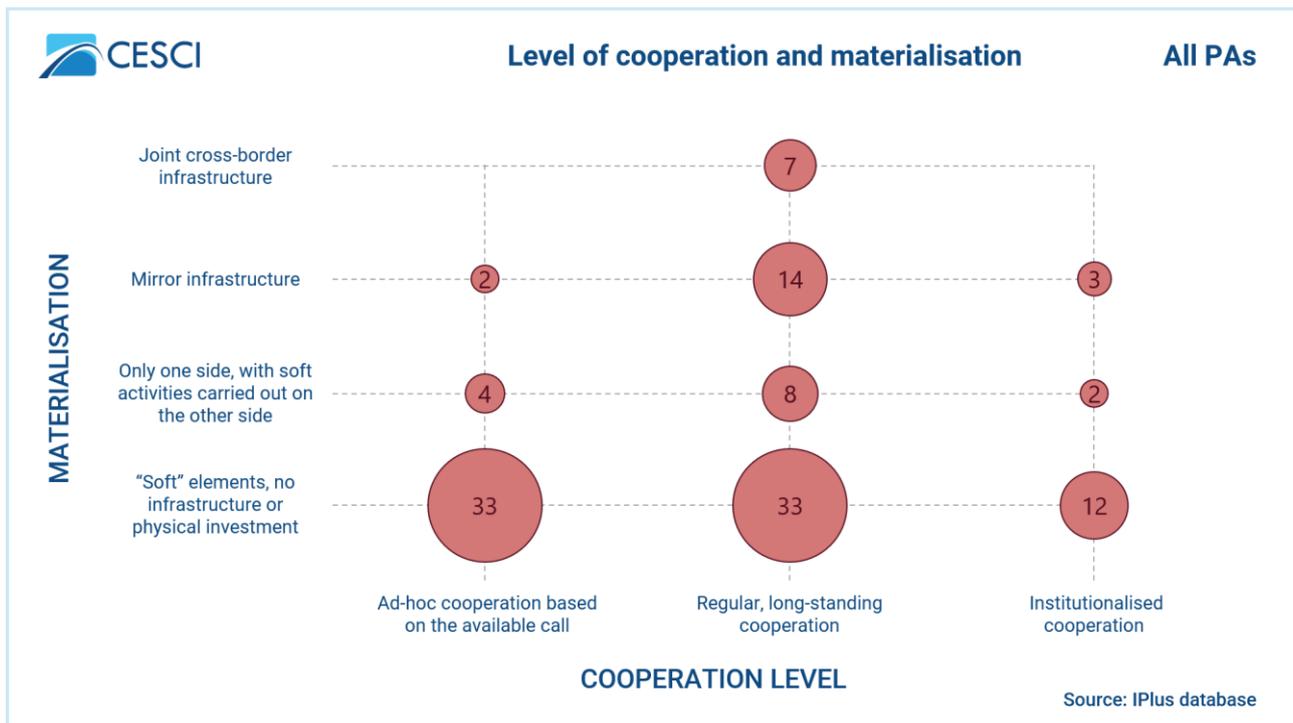
As a conclusion, in light of all these it would be worth considering to fine-tune the requirements of presenting the sustainability aspects by the applicants, at the same time to raise the capacities of the potential applicants.

4.3.5 Overall cross-border relevance of the projects

The main purpose of the analysis is to identify the level at which the programme can be considered cross-border. We will analyse in this subchapter the projects' level of cooperation and materialisation in a cross-border sense. (The applied methodology is presented in the same chapter at the PA1.)

Considering **the level of cooperation**, no regular, formalized relationship between the projects' partners can be detected in the case of a total number of 39 projects (Category 1). These ad-hoc partnerships represent one-third of all projects. The second category with higher cooperation level makes up the majority of projects with a total number of 62 projects. This Category 2 of regular, long-lasting cooperation is a sign of cross-border relevance of the Programme. The Programme and its beneficiaries managed to call for and implement projects with improved relevance compared to Category 1 with a relatively high share (53%). The long-term, institutionalised level of cooperation (Category 3) can be applied for the least number of projects (17 projects). Consequently, even though the number of them are relatively low, projects categorised into this type has a considerable share (14%).

Figure 191: Level of cooperation and materialisation (all pAs)



Considering the **materialisation** of the projects altogether, the highest number of projects can be classified as projects where mainly "soft" elements are or were realised with no infrastructure or any relevant physical investment (Category 1, 78 projects). This category makes up two-thirds of all projects (67%) signifying that the absolute majority of projects has low level of materialisation. Moving in the direction of infrastructure, where development was one-sided regarding infrastructural and soft elements (Category 2), as few as 14 projects (12%) can be classified as a project with infrastructure on one side and soft activities on the other side. Projects with mirror infrastructure (Category 3, 19 projects) represent 16% of all projects supported in the Programme. The most advanced materialisation (Category 4) characterises the lowest number of projects (7 projects) contributing to 6% of them.

The highest number of projects are categorised as either soft in terms of materialisation and ad-hoc in terms of cooperation level; and soft by materialisation terms and regular, long-lasting by level of cooperation. Both mixed categories consist of 33 projects individually contributing to almost 56% of all projects assessed. The second the greatest number of projects fell into the categories of mirror infrastructure regarding materialisation and regular, long-lasting regarding level of cooperation (14 projects, 12%). The third position is reached by projects with soft elements in term of materialisation and institutional cooperation in terms of level of cooperation (12 projects, 10%). Only low number of projects managed to reach high levels of materialisation and cooperation. The projects with the highest cross-border relevance are 7, all aiming at creating a common cross-border infrastructure while building up a regular, long-lasting cooperation.

4.3.6 Horizontal principles

Horizontal principles need to be assessed separately on the programme level as in the context of any EU funded work these are priorities and objectives that cut across and have relevance to all areas of the different projects. In theory, the solutions for certain issues are achievable by careful, well-targeted, patient and persistent measures and activities of many actors, organizations and individuals from all spheres of social life and in accordance with their capacity, mandate and outreach. For that reason, horizontal principles are to be integrated across the programmes and observed in all projects. In the case of the Serbian-Hungarian Programme in accordance with the Articles 7 and 8 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 three horizontal principles need to be taken into account, these being sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women.

In the Guidelines for Applicants issued for each CfP a detailed description is provided regarding the expectations on how to fill with real content the horizontal principles section. These did not change throughout the different CfPs and can be summarised according to the different horizontal principles as follows:

Table 68: Expectations formulated in the Call for Proposals' Guidelines for Applicants regarding the horizontal principle of Sustainable development

Sustainable development			
PA1	PA2	PA3	PA4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preserving quality of water (following the Water Framework Directive) • preventing risks and damages caused by climate change • preserving natural habitats and ecosystems • promoting renewable energy where it is applicable in a sustainable way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harmonising transport development plans in order to decrease CO2 emissions, ensure inter-connectivity, enable easier and cheaper access to markets • improving quality of service and safety for passengers, especially in case of public transport • improving railway transport in the border region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All activities under this PA will pay special attention to promoting sustainable utilisation and development of natural and cultural heritage, while protecting and maintaining the functionality of the ecological network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of clean and green technologies, technologies that decrease industrial pollution, chemical pollution, thus contribute to the improvement of air quality etc. • education, training and support services in the context of environment protection and sustainable development.

Table 69: Expectations formulated in the Call for Proposals' Guidelines for Applicants regarding the horizontal principle of Equal opportunities and non-discrimination

Equal opportunities and non-discrimination			
PA1	PA2	PA3	PA4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting social inclusion of vulnerable groups that might be affected by climate change or any type of environmental risk (pollution, flood, draught, etc.) • affecting underprivileged territories with a larger share of population belonging to vulnerable groups • providing access for disabled persons to nature protection sites • ensuring access to information and education to vulnerable groups regarding pollution, risk prevention, nature protection etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing citizens in remote areas with easier and shorter transport modalities • taking into account special needs of specific target groups (e.g. bus or railway stations or communication forms for people with disabilities) • affecting underprivileged territories with a larger share of population belonging to vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fostering cultural cooperation with minority groups • presenting and promoting the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities • enabling access to information and education for vulnerable groups • enabling access for disabled persons to cultural sites and events • fostering activities for children and youth in order to promote and educate social integration and cooperation • affecting underprivileged territories with a larger share of population belonging to vulnerable groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including innovative actions which help the daily life of vulnerable groups or provide them with special services • promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment of vulnerable groups (especially youth and women) • contributing to the creation of employment opportunities to vulnerable groups

Table 70: Expectations formulated in the Call for Proposals' Guidelines for Applicants regarding the horizontal principle of Equality between men and women

Equality between men and women			
PA1	PA2	PA3	PA4
All projects are obliged to avoid discrimination of any kind, and to ensure that their activities comply with the principles of equality between men and women.			

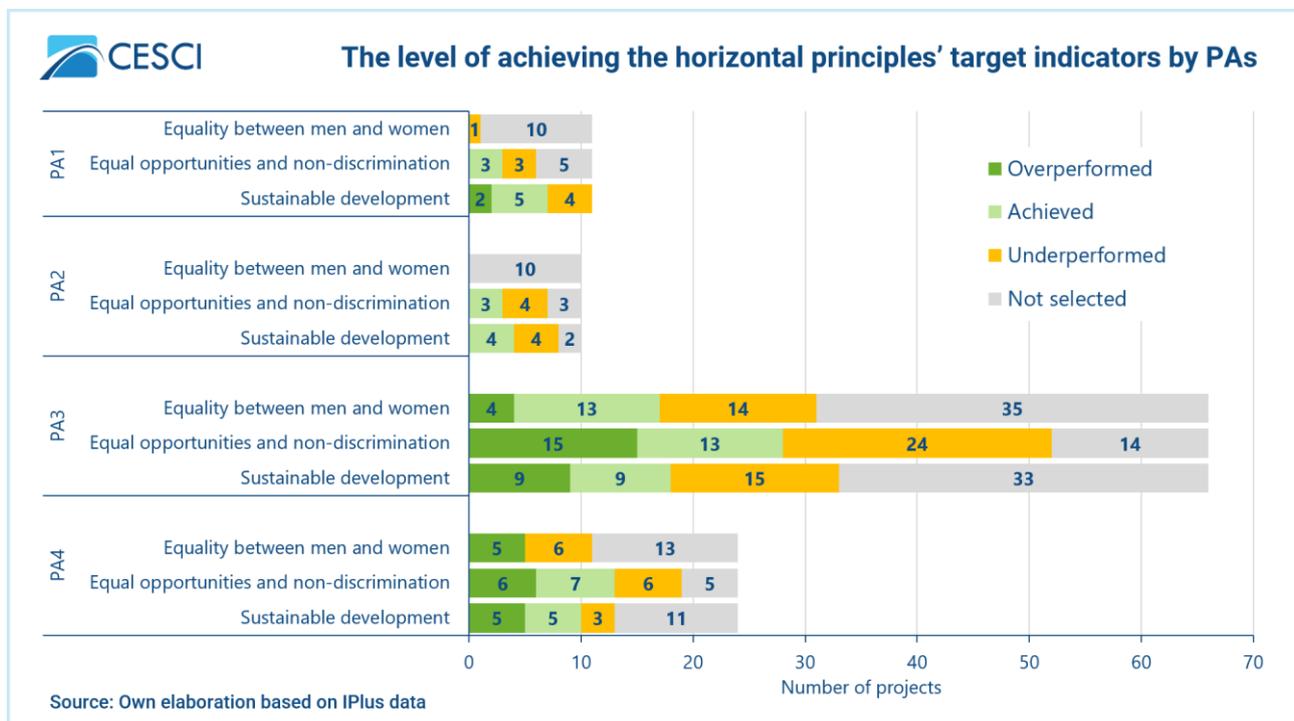
Whereas most of the projects regarded the inclusion of horizontal issues as a forced requirement, a box that had to be ticked, which was somewhat visible from the textual descriptions, there is also a tangible tendency in the willingness from the applicants to fill these aspects with content. This could be mostly seen from the great variety of the indicators that the projects named. All in all, there were 96 different types of indicators used (such as vulnerable area protected against climate change and

flood risk, accessible multilingual web portal, free online tools and exhibitions etc.) measured in 59 different types of units (for example activities, events, hectare, licence, building etc.) verified through more than 100 different types of sources (for instance attendance sheets, photos, building documentations, websites etc.)

The chart below (*Figure 192*) enlists the horizontal principles by pAs and the number of selected projects. According to the colouring, light green signifies if the target indicator was achieved; the dark green means it was even over performed; the yellow means if it was under performed (i.e. not achieved); while the grey means that the given project did not deal with that particular horizontal principle. Taking into account the whole projects, more than half of them (61%) was not assigned to the “equality between men and women” horizontal principle, while this ratio (not selected) was more favourable regarding to “equal opportunities and non-discrimination” (24%) and “sustainable development” (41%) principles.

To summarise how the projects performed from the point of view of the horizontal principles it can be said that the projects preferred the “equal opportunities and non-discrimination” principle the most as 84 projects set a target in this aspect compared to the 65 which chose the “sustainable development” and 43 selecting the “equality between men and women”. There are only minor differences in these preferences according to the different pAs as summarised in the figure (*Figure 192*). However, the specificity of the pAs is important in the case of “equality between men and women” principle, which was hard to link with the PA1 and PA2, since these pAs dealt with mostly hard infrastructural works. That is why only one projects chose this horizontal principle under these two pAs.

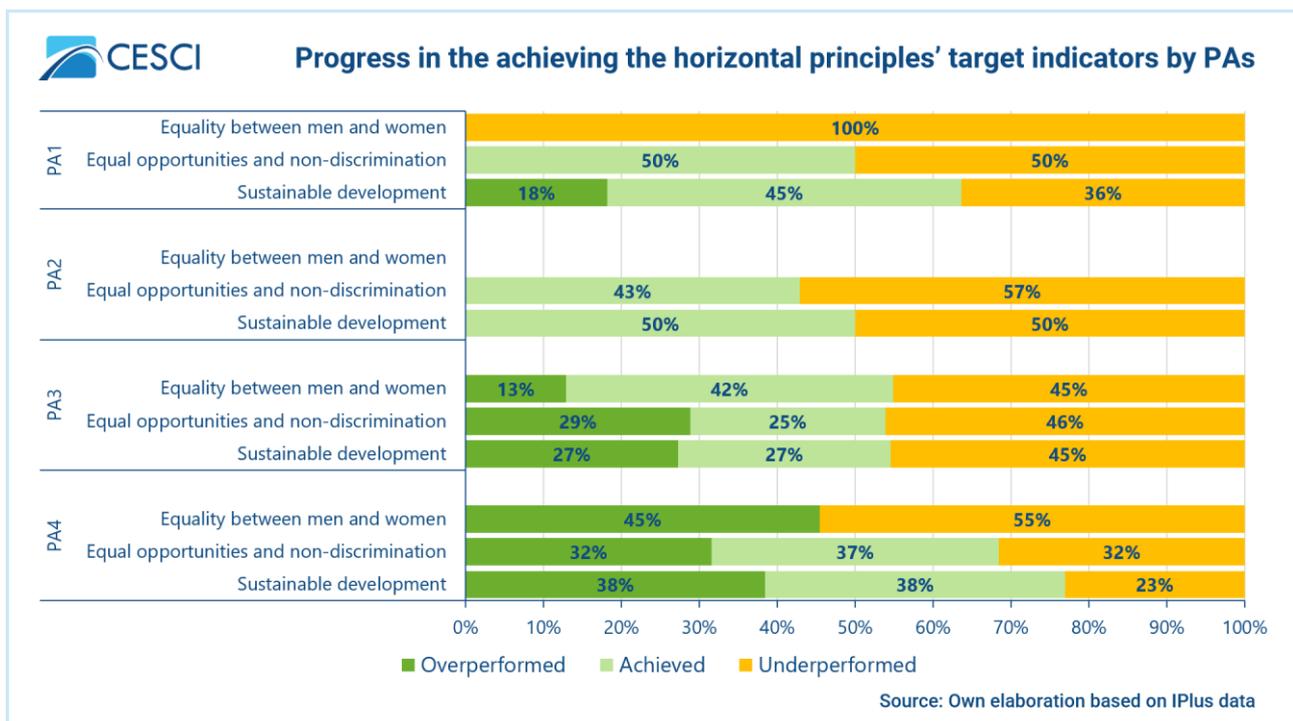
Figure 192: The level of achieving the horizontal principles' target indicators by pAs



Focusing on the achievements, the following chart (*Figure 193*) introduces the selected projects and their rates with their level of achievement in reaching their target indicators. The set targets were not

achieved in a similar level according to the different horizontal principles. It seems that when controlled to the numerical differences, between 51-60% of the projects achieved or overperformed their target indicators. A somewhat difference is also visible for the underperforming indicators which tend to be more among those that target the equality between men and women (49%) compared to 40% in the case of sustainable development and 44% in equal opportunities and non-discrimination. The equality between men and women proved to be more difficult to achieve also in terms of overperformance, only 21% of the projects managed to excel the expectations, compared to 25% for the other two categories. On PA level, this tendency is also observable, since the joint ratio of overperformed and achieved projects was the highest in the case of "sustainable development" related projects under all pAs (PA1 64%; PA2 50%; PA3 55%; PA4 77%). On the other hand, the ratio of underperformed projects is not so uniform, since under PA1 (100%) and PA4 (55%) the "equality between men and women" principle had the highest ratio, while under PA2 (57%) and PA3 (46%) the "equal opportunities and non-discrimination" principle gave the largest value. It has to be concluded, that most of the underperformed targets (almost 80%) belong to the projects of the third CfP, and it means, the goals can be met by the end of the program.

Figure 193: Progress in the achieving the horizontal principles' target indicators by pAs



From the interviews it became evident that the horizontal principles are serving a very important role by putting key issues in the focus that otherwise might not get enough attention. It was observed that during IPA I programme there were huge problems with the horizontal principles as many beneficiaries did not understand them, however, by now they are more accustomed to it. Nevertheless, there were voices pushing for separate information days dedicated to the horizontal principles in order to further improve their use.

There were also experts calling for putting more emphasis on the horizontal principles by assigning more points for them as even though it is very difficult to assess their impact, from the indicators

above and the experiences of the local experts it seems that certain disadvantaged groups started to be more involved in the projects thanks to this requirement.

However, sometimes the special characteristic of the pAs and projects made it difficult to find a well-embedded and fitting horizontal principle. For instance, it was difficult for pAs with significant infrastructural works to find matching points with horizontal principles such as “equality between men and women”. By contrast the horizontal principles were easily adapted in the case of small scale people-to-people projects, where the equality of the participants was the core of the projects’ targets.

Regarding the **“equality between the men and women”** horizontal principle, the beneficiaries usually determined the indicators by the number of participating females. This horizontal principle worked well in the case of projects with social events, seminars and entrepreneurial developments, since the number of involved women was easily accountable. This horizontal principle was reasonable in these cases, as the gender equality was ensured in the criteria of events’ organization. It means that mostly PA3 and PA4 could adapt this principle well, because the majority of the soft measures belonged to these pAs, however the projects under PA1 and PA2 could not combine this principle’s target with their projects’ goal. Preferable indicators were the number of craftswomen, women from vulnerable groups, girl athletes or female entrepreneurship. Although, in some cases the reasonability and synergy of the indicators were not ensured, or the expecting impact was minor with good measurability. For example, the number of documents developed by involving the expertise of the relevant gender equality bodies or the number of women in the project management team did not have great impact on the gender equality status of the locals. There was another strange indicator, where a webportal ensures the gender equality by the equally accessibility of the portal.

The **“equal opportunities and non-discrimination”** horizontal principle show great similarity with the aforementioned one, since these principles were realized most easily under PA3 and PA4, since these pAs’ projects included cultural and awareness-raising events and activities with social inclusion and integration. The projects which were concerned with the involvement of ethnic minorities, elderly people, Roma people, disabled persons or other vulnerable people could highly contribute to horizontal principles, and the targets were realistic and achievable. According to the SMEs, the projects devoted particular attention to the creation of employment opportunities and social entrepreneurship which enhanced the support of disabled persons, people from rural areas and other members of vulnerable groups. However, regarding the PA1 and PA2, this horizontal principle could be guaranteed too in a more difficult way with less connection points. For example, under these pAs, the projects could organise specific events for the vulnerable groups too which complemented the main construction works (such as road-building). In spite of this, the combining of this horizontal principle with the projects’ goal under PA1 and PA2 was sometimes forced, the horizontal target was only indirectly addressed, the real contribution remained moderate and the commitments were rather general (such as “same right for all”). The equality is questionable when the horizontal principle was taken into account only on one side of the border or when the equality was justified by the fact that the project was implemented in underprivileged territory and the information and activities were available for everyone (online public early warning system). Furthermore, the length of newly build bicycle paths could not enhance the equality in itself.

In terms of the “**sustainable development**”, it was the most covered horizontal principle, since all pAs could easily connect to this target. PA1 was in line with this principle because its projects concentrated on the environment protection, the PA2 focused on the development of transport with low or none emission, the PA3 enhanced the local and sustainable solutions, while the PA4 increased the local based jobs and the entrepreneurial spirit of the locals with strong sustainable aspect. The majority of the projects highlighted the actions which promoted the environment and sustainable development, but others defined goals such as improving energy efficiency, creating analyses and studies about water quality, decreasing of CO₂ emission, intensifying the usage of eco-friendly production, developing environmental monitoring system, increasing the usage of alternative transport modes, supporting the local supply chain and increasing the number of awareness-raising events and the number of educated students on the topic of sustainable development. However, in some cases it is hard to find the matching points of the project target and the horizontal goals (such as the number of visitors of protected areas), but the interpretation of precipitation and pluvial flood data is also hard. Sometimes the horizontal indicator was not consistent with the principle (for example the number of representatives of stakeholders at conferences), but the usage of recycled paper and the simple saplings planning raise the concern of low connectivity of the principles and project targets.

To summarize the above-described synergies between the projects and the horizontal principles, it is clear that the most successful and well-embedded principle was the sustainable development. Even if the gender equality is also an important principle, but its relevance can be strongly justified only in the small-scale people-to-people projects. It might be useful to complement the already existing principles with another, more embedded one.

4.3.7 Aggregated impacts on the borderscape⁸³

This subchapter's aim is to give an estimation about the success of the programme in the sense of the fundamental objectives of the cross-border programmes, such as:

- reduction of the borders' barrier effect, and
- valorisation the border regions territorial capital.⁸⁴

To estimate the programme's success in this sense, we will use the fine-tuned version of CESCO's cross-border territorial impact assessment method.

CESCO's cross-border territorial impact assessment identifies the relevant indicators regarding three relevant aspects. In the following, we've listed these aspects and the factors:

- Aspect 1: Cross-border flows:
 - INFRASTRUCTURAL CONDITIONS OF CROSS-BORDER FLOWS
 - CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY
 - CROSS-BORDER BUSINESS ACTIVITY
 - CROSS-BORDER SERVICES
- Aspect 2: Cross-border cooperation:
 - ADMINISTRATIVE CONDITIONS OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION
 - CROSS-BORDER INSTITUTIONS
 - CROSS-BORDER PROJECTS
 - SOCIAL CONNECTIVITY
- Aspect 3: People⁸⁵:
 - PERCEPTIONS ON DISTANCE
 - PERCEPTIONS OF OTHERNESS
 - OWNERSHIP OF THE SHARED TERRITORY

The summary table of the results of the analysis can be found in "*Table 7: The programme's impact on the cross-border flows*" in the chapter "*1.5 The Programme's impact on cross-border flows*".

⁸³ Borderscapes foster a new multi-sited organisation of border knowledge, which is able to overcome binary oppositions through specific attention that is paid to the multiplicity of symbolic and material interactions at/in/across borders. This would help discover alternative spatiotemporal topologies to binary oppositions (inside/outside, centre/periphery, and so on) that modern Western thought has privileged, affirming a territorialist geopolitical imaginary that conceives the border as a line separating exclusive differences. (Brambilla C (2017) *Navigating the Euro/African border and migration nexus through the borderscape lens: insights from the LampedusaInFestival*. In: Brambilla C, Laine J, Scott JW, Bocchi G (eds) *Borderscaping: imaginations and practices of border making*. Routledge, London/New York, pp 111–121)

⁸⁴ As understood in Medeiros E (2014) *Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA). Concept, Methods and Techniques*. Centro de Estudos Geográficos da Universidade de Lisboa (CEG) – Instituto de Geografia e Ordenamento do Território (IGOT). Lisbon University, Lisbon, p 11.

⁸⁵ These factors are very hard to evaluate within the framework of the current assignment.

4.3.7.1 Aspect 1: Cross-border flows

In the frames of aspect 1 the cross-border flows are assessed from the point of factors as follows: infrastructural conditions; mobility; business activity and cross-border services.

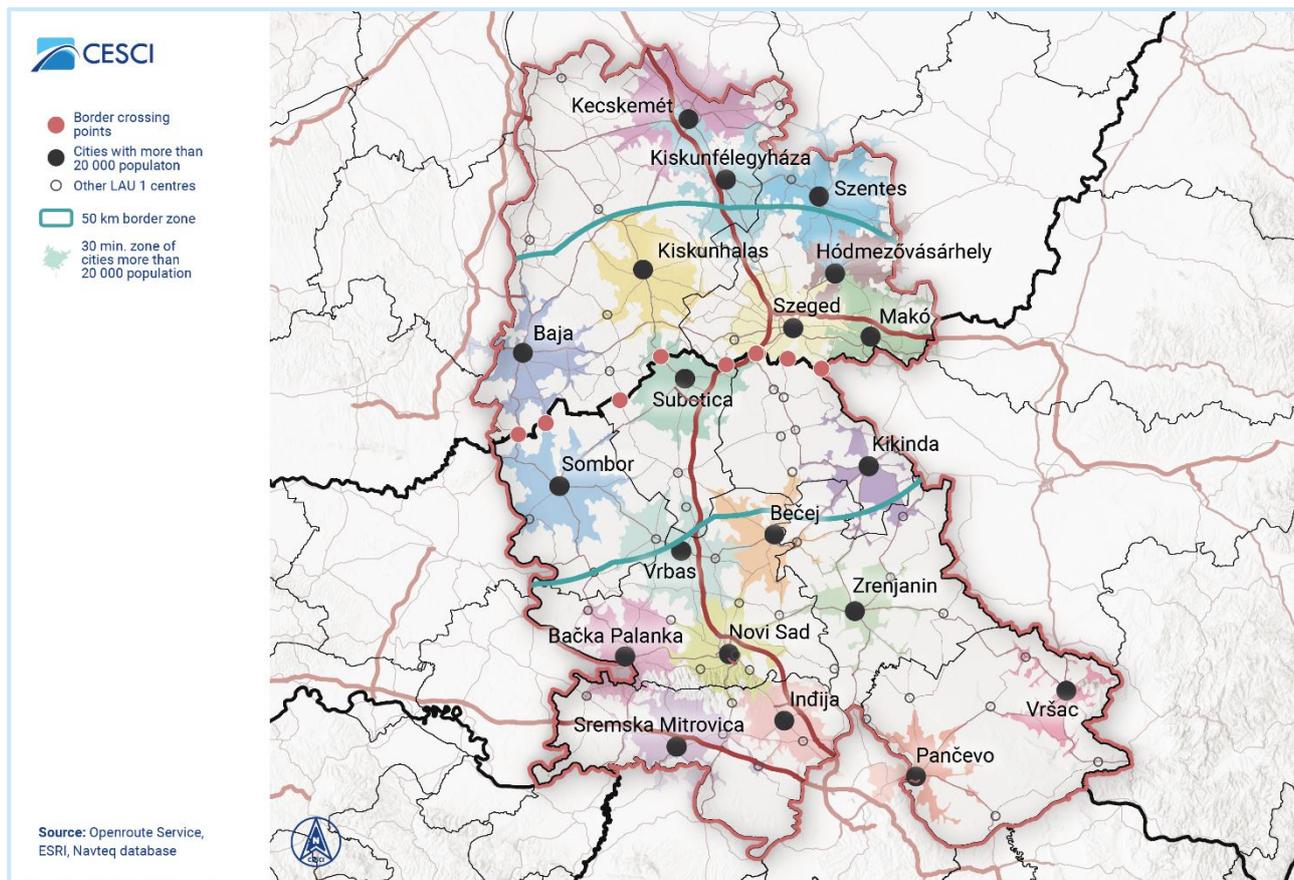
Infrastructural conditions of cross-border flows

Under this factor these four indicators were used: average distance of border crossing points; average distance between the major regional centres of the border region (travelling time and geographic distance); volume of cross-border traffic within the programme region; number of cross-border transport lines. These heavily influence the permeability of border thus the potential intensity of cross-border flows of people in general and workforce.

The **average distance between border crossing points** was 25.2 km in 2014, which fell to 16.7 km by 2022. This decrease can be dedicated largely to the Programme as the new Kübekháza-Rabe road crossing was supported by these funds.

The **average distance between the major regional centres of the border region** (by travelling time and geographic distance) is another factor which plays an important role in intensifying cross-border flows. Regardless the closeness of Baja, Sombor, Subotica, Kiskunhalas, Szeged, Hódmezővásárhely, Makó and Kikinda to each other, the travelling times are still can be considered long. As it can be seen on the map, only in the case of Subotica a transboundary 30 min zone can be detected. The 30 min zones are reaching each other in the case of Baja and Sombor, Kiskunhalas, Subotica and Szeged meaning that there is a great potential in increasing accessibility of these populous border cities to radically increase cross-border flows of people. The Programme improved the road quality between Baja and Sombor, but in relation to road traffic little improvement took place in the vicinity of the border.

Figure 194: Accessibility of the main centres in the Programme area



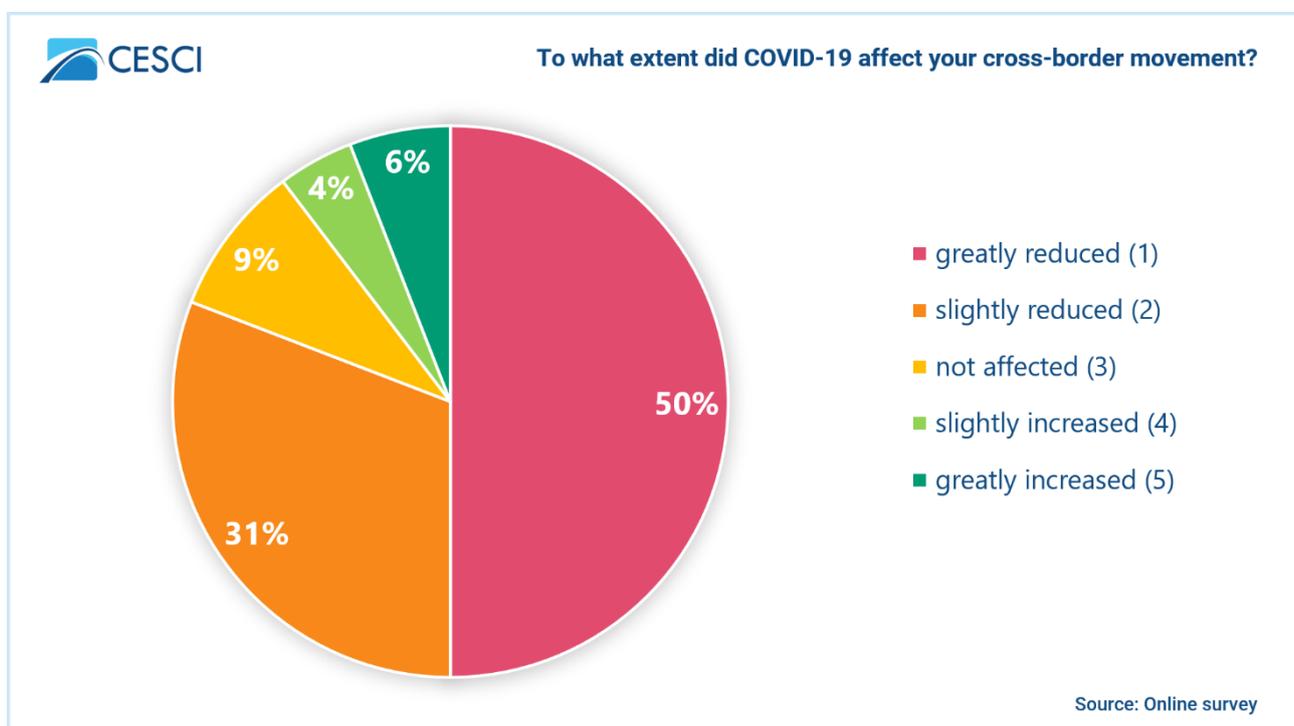
Volume of cross-border traffic within the programme region has steadily increased from 2 658 thousand passengers of 2012. In 2019 the total volume of passengers was 4143 thousand, 23.2% more than the data of 2014 (3 365 thousand). The positive change i.e., the increase by 88% between 2010 and 2019, is particularly notable compared to the lower traffic period of 2008-2010 as a consequence of the global economic crisis. Despite the border barrier built in 2015 as a response to the European migration crisis and the temporal suspension of cross-border public transport services, no decrease in official statistics was observed in cross-border flows of people across the shared border section. This is owing to that the construction of the border barrier did not in any way affect the possibilities of regular (legal) border crossings, it only made it more difficult for illegal flows along the green border at non-crossing points, which are already prohibited at the external EU and Schengen borders across Europe.

Taking into account the number of vehicles per year despite of some years with decreasing traffic due to the migration crisis and later on to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, a growth trend can be detected. Based on the traffic volume of 2010 (2 654 634 vehicles of all types in total) significant increase (took place by 2019 (4 183 793 vehicles, +57.6%) but even by 2021 (3 622 539 vehicles, +36.5%), a year still suffering from recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Even in case of comparing 2014 and 2021 there is a notable positive change (+14.6%). Comparing year 2010 and year 2019, the last year undisturbed by the spread of Coronavirus, growth in traffic was registered in the case of all types of transport except for railway vehicles (from 168 816 to 119 408, decrease of 29.3%): in inland waterway vehicles (from 130 to 918, +89.9%), trucks (from 369 747 to 482 818, +51.1%) and in road passenger transport vehicles (from 2 115 941 to 3 580 649, +11%). The share of trucks (from 13.9 to

17%), road passenger transport vehicles (from 79.7 to 80.7%) and inland waterway vehicles increased, while the share of railway vehicles decreased (from 6.4 to 3.4%) in total volume from 2010 to 2021.

It has to be added that the drop-back in 2020 because of control measures and restrictions for persons entering to the countries pushed the level of traffic back close to the level of 2002 after an all-time record year of 2018 and 2019. Based on the survey results, COVID-19 pandemic has affected the cross-border movement (of the fillers of the survey). Half of the respondents reported that their movement greatly reduced. Together with the slightly reduced category (30.9%) almost 81% of the those who answered experienced reduction in cross-border movement. Only 8.8% expressed that Coronavirus had no effect on transboundary movement. Assuming a relatively quick recovery by the lifting of most if not all the travel and other restrictions setting back the willingness of travel and actual flows of people and goods, figures could potentially rise above the pre-COVID-19 pandemic times in a short term.

Figure 195: Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cross-border movements



The **number of cross-border transport lines** which have stops on both sides of the programme area have a very complex and varying situation worth explaining. Compared especially to the pre-2010 but also to the pre-2014 situation the cross-border transport lines have been increased in numbers. Relatively new services include the fast train between Budapest and Novi Sad with stops in Kunszentmiklós-Tass, Kiskőrös, Kiskunhalas, Kelebia, Subotica, Bačka Topola, Vrbas and Novi Sad. This service along with the Subotica-Szeged railway service is suspended due to reconstruction works. The eight hours travel will be cut back to three hours between the two capital cities by 2025 which will significantly affect the cross-border flows.

The Szeged-Subotica railway service was provided with two train per direction per day, but since the suspension of the line for passenger traffic due to the migration crisis of 2015 plus the ongoing reconstruction works, it is not operating until the building is not done. On the Hungarian side

between Szeged and Röszke, state border the construction started in October 2021, while in Serbia the contract was signed in 2021 June. The works are based on the licensing and technical plans elaborated by the past programme by 2014.

The Subotica-Baja railway connection is still not re-established, however important steps have been taken with the help of the second phase of the Dream Railway project under the current CBC programme. Consequently, due to suspended services it is not the number operating lines which can be mentioned as railway improvements but the on-going infrastructural upgrades and the financed studies and plans prerequisite for (re)construction works. With regard to bus lines, the number of them have increased in general, however the Szeged-Bečej connection was suspended in 2021. A total of 4 connections have emerged in the latest years, three operate between Szeged and Subotica (two with stops in Szeged, Hajdukovo, Palić and Subotica, one with stops only at the final stops of Szeged and Subotica), of which the Szeged-Hajdukovo-Palić-Subotica line 605 is the newest option. In overall, the programme contributed to this indicator but mostly by supporting the elaboration of documentation needed given the limited financial possibilities of an INTERREG A (CBC) programme. The financial support was, however, crucial to initiate concrete developments, thus important prerequisites for realisation were financed by the programme.

Cross-border mobility

Apart from the infrastructural conditions it is equally important to analyse the changes regarding the level of cross-border mobility. Thus, forms of migration such as student migration, which is one of the most relevant when it comes to cross-border movements, is assessed here. To get to know more on the flows, indicators include the number of commuting students across the border; and the number of registered residents originating from the other side of the border.

When it comes to student migration and **the number of cross-border commuters**⁸⁶ between Serbia and Hungary, the Preferential Naturalization Act of 2010 should be mentioned as a booster since the Hungarian legislation largely facilitated movement between Hungary and Serbia, increased border interoperability and made border crossing easier for the ones acquiring dual (Hungarian and Serbian) citizenship. For (future) secondary school students other main pull factors include the role of geographical proximity in relation to travel time and cost so students can commute even on a daily basis and visit their families every week if needed, as well as previous knowledge of the given city (e.g. Szeged), attractiveness of the quality of life and urban living of the given city, and previous primary school studies in the same settlement. Personal factors such as family, relatives, friends, acquaintances, personal motivation, personal experience (e. g. participation in an open day) are also decisive. The Hungarian speaking students from Vojvodina attend secondary schools in Hungary favour Hungarian education as many ethnic Hungarian, who form the vast majority of migrants, speak less Serbian, and it is easier for them to use their native language. The pull factors for students from tertiary education are similar to the ones from secondary education. Nevertheless, the economic factors have become more important over time in relation to choosing university: future career perspectives are considered to be better in Hungary, and Hungarian universities issue diplomas

⁸⁶ To the following part of the analysis two contractual partners of CESCI, namely Boglárka Kincses and Irén Gábrity-Molnár were also contributed by providing valuable professional knowledge and information.

useful for employment within the labour market of the European Union. The push factors include limited opportunities provided for studying in Hungarian in Serbia.

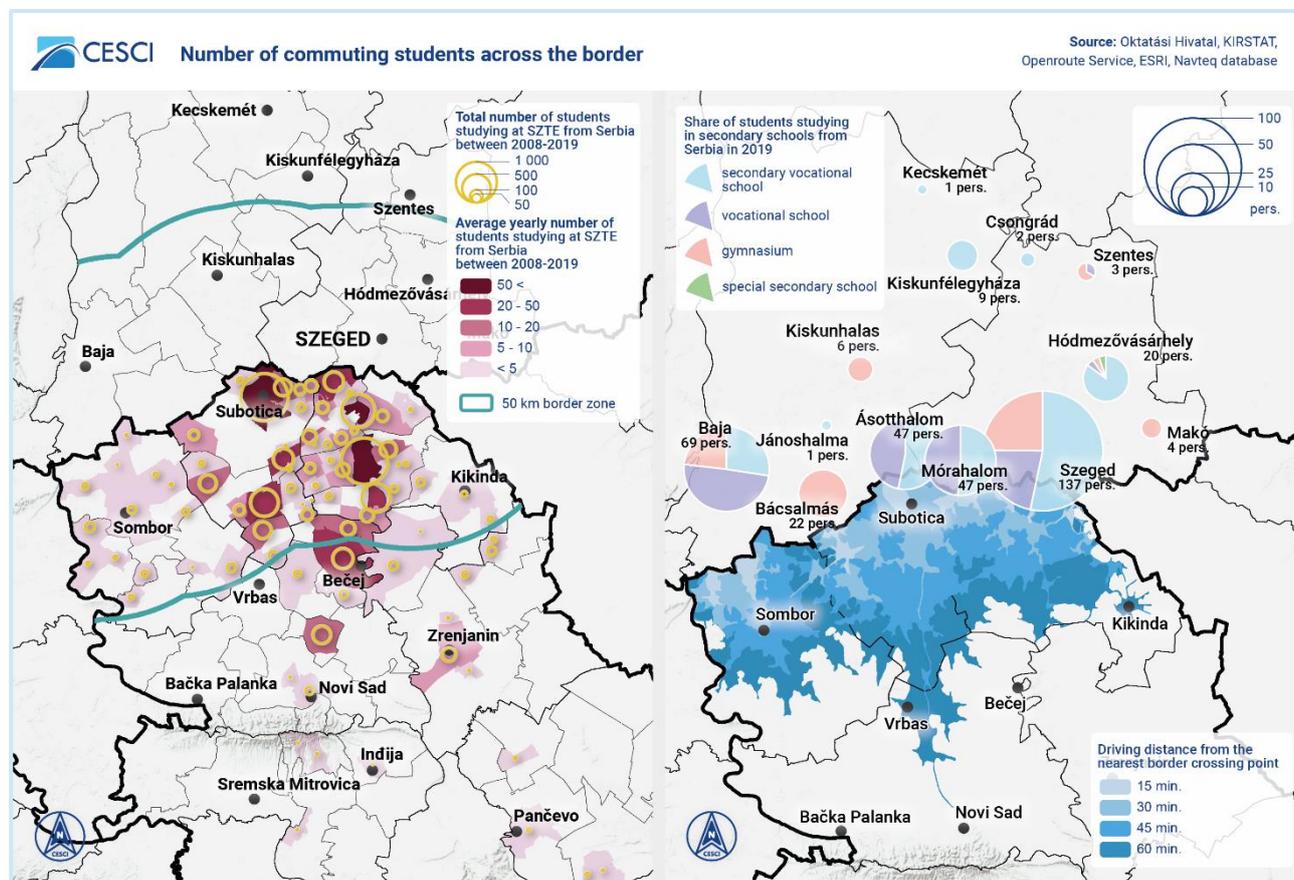
The number of registered students at Hungary-based higher educational institutions have risen at a high amplitude. According to the Hungarian statistical office the largest community from Serbia studies in Szeged (2014: 734, 2019: 1184.5 students) followed by Kecskemét (2014: 9, 2019: 49.5), Hódmezővásárhely (2014: 6, 2019: 12.5) and Baja (2014: 2, 2019: 3.5). The total number of students originating from Serbia was 1250 in 2019, while it had been 751 back in the year of 2014. The increase was significant in the case of all university towns. In decreasing order, the number of Serbian students increased by 450% in Hódmezővásárhely, 108% in Hódmezővásárhely, 75% in Baja and 61% in Szeged where the number of students was already notable.

The share of university students from Serbia as country of origin slightly increased from the value of 29.4% to 31.6% between 2014 and 2019. Except for Hódmezővásárhely (drop from 54.1% to 18.1%) the shares got higher in relation to all cities (Szeged: 30.2% to 31.5%, Baja: 6.3% to 17.9%), with the biggest growth in Kecskemét from 10.8% to 43.8%. The share of students from Serbia has got significant in Bács-Kiskun, where the low share of 9.6% of 2014 increased to 40% in only 5 years. Consequently, it is not solely Szeged where Serbians form a significant mobility group among foreign students but in Kecskemét too.

University of Szeged should be further assessed given its role as a main attraction for students arriving from Serbia. It is by far the main destination and attraction force for students from Serbia who intend to study on the Hungarian side. In the 2018/2019 academic year, 54% of all Serbian students studying in Hungary studied at the university, while in 2008 it was only 31%, so the weight of Szeged students with Serbian citizenship increased in 8 years. Between 2008 and 2019, the number of students from Serbia studying at SZTE increased almost 2.5 times. During the same period, the increase in the number of Serbian citizens studying in Hungarian higher education nationwide was almost one and a half times. The number of students with Serbian citizenship reached the all-time highest volume in 2018/2019 by 1 267 students. A slight decrease to 1 176 by 2020/2021 has taken place due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and the various initiatives by the Hungarian National Council in Vojvodina to encourage studies in the homeland for ethnic Hungarians (scholarship to stay in Vojvodina, or the "Európa Kollégium" student dormitory for students of the University of Novi Sad). The university attracts students from as many as 85 settlements from Vojvodina, Serbia, which is 18% of all settlements in Vojvodina. The gravitational zone of the institution covers mostly the border area within the 50-60 km radius but there have been students from distant settlements too, including the non-bordering regions of Sremska (from e.g. Inđija) and Južnobańska (e.g. from Pančevo). The largest number arrives from Severnobačka and Severnobańska. Based on the statistics on the number of students from Serbia between 2008 and 2019, the biggest ten sources of students were Subotica (1380 students, an average of 125.5 per year), Senta (1 317 and 119.7), Kanjiža (670 and 60.9), Ada (501, 45.5), Bačka Topola (456 and 41.5), Bečej (261 and 23.7), Čantavir (260 and 23.6), Horgoš (222 and 20.2), Temerin (186 and 16.9) and Mali Idoš (171 and 15.5). Subotica and Senta are by far having the largest student contingent studying in Szeged with 2697 students from the period between 2014 and 2019 out of the 8 127 total number. 53% of students arrive from Subotica, Senta, Kanjiža, Ada and Bačka Topola. The strongest migration links have been established including Subotica agglomeration and the right bank of the Tisza between the border and Bečej. This

source area is largely overlapping with the settlements inhabited by populous communities and/or large share of ethnic Hungarian minorities of Serbia.

Figure 196: Number of commuting students across the border

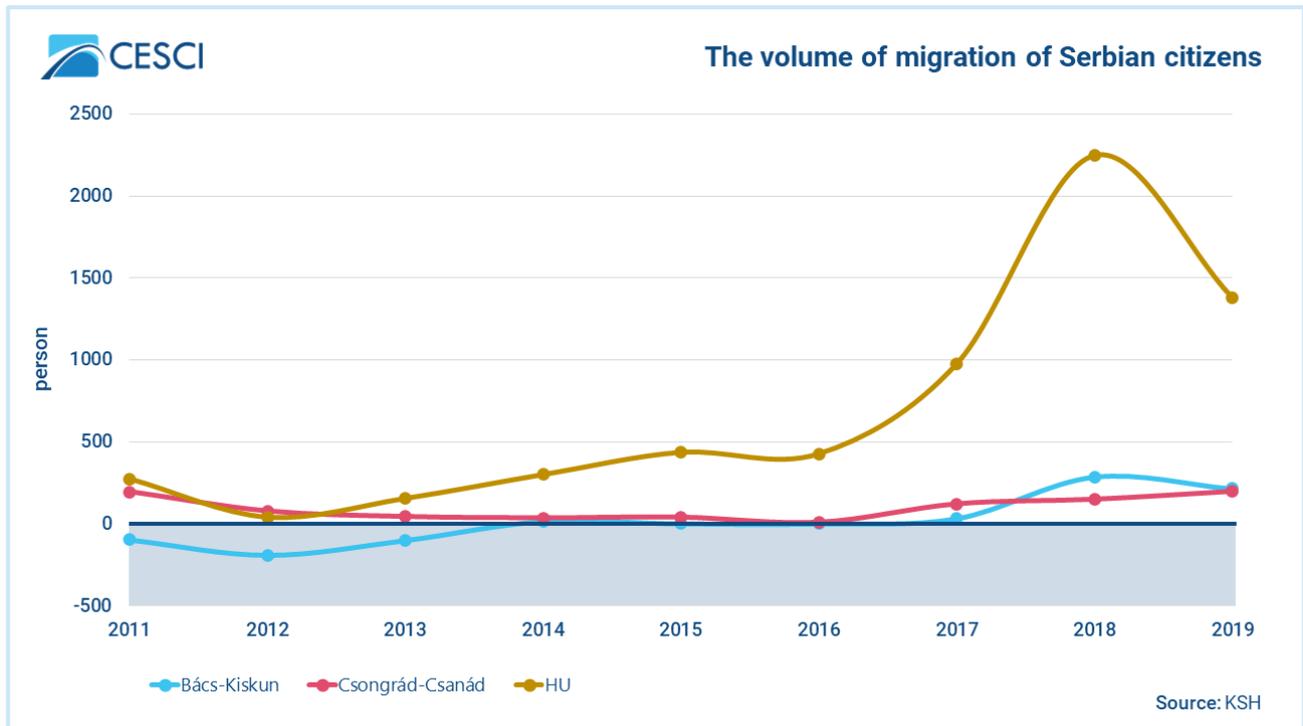


Apart from university level, significant number of students in **secondary education** too study in Hungary from Vojvodina, Serbia. Their numbers across Hungary increased from 184 in 2009 to 300 in 2014, then further increase took place which meant the size of the commuter community more than doubled, to 614. The large majority of those who chose a school in Hungary went to one of the institutions of either Csongrád-Csanád or Bács-Kiskun. The attraction of the two counties is reflected in the high shares of students of Serbian origin among secondary school pupils: their share was 60% among all students commuting to any secondary school in Hungary, which is a significant raise from the previous rate of 39% from 2014. The number of pupils studying on the Hungarian side of the programme area from Serbia increased more than three times, from 117 to 368. The most attractive institutions are located in Szeged (37% of the programme area's commuters from Serbia, 137 pupils registered in 2019), Baja (69 pupils), Mórahalom (47), Ásotthalom (47), Bácsalmás (22) and Hódmezővásárhely (20). Other settlements which are destinations are Kiskunfélegyháza (9), Kiskunhalas (6), Makó (4), Szentes (3), Csongrád (2) Kecskemét (1) and Jánoshalma (1). There is a significant increase compared to year 2014 as the numbers increased in Szeged (+88 students by 2019 compared to 2014), Baja (+61), Mórahalom (from zero, +47) Ásotthalom (+39), Bácsalmás (from zero, +22), Kiskunfélegyháza (from zero, +9), Kiskunhalas (+2), Csongrád (+1), Szentes (+1) and Jánoshalma (+1). In parallel with the outstanding increases of most settlements, decrease took place only in the case of Szentes (-8 pupils), Makó (-7), and minimal change occurred in Hódmezővásárhely

(-2) and Kecskemét (-2). Except Kiskunfélegyháza all the most major target areas of student migration are situated within the 40 km travel distance from the state border and along the main or secondary roads such as road 5, 51, 47 and 55 in the vicinity of the border. Types of institutions with the highest number of students originating from Serbia are the ones as follows: gymnasiums of Szeged (34) and Baja (22), secondary vocation schools of Szeged (73), Ásotthalom (25), Mórahalom (24), and vocation schools of Baja (34), Szeged (30), Ásotthalom (22), Mórahalom (23).

It is important to discuss **the number of registered residents originating from the other side of the border**. Here it is worth mentioning the naturalization law which came into force in 2011, and made possible to be entitled to acquire dual nationality for Serbian citizens with Hungarian family roots. Number of Hungarian citizens born abroad in Serbia increased in both Hungarian counties comparing the data of 2011 and 2019; from 209 to 300 in Bács-Kiskun (+44%) and from 381 to 657 (+72%). In 2019 the share of these people represented the majority (53.2%) of all the residents born in Serbia but living in Hungary. Logically, almost identical data describe the number of Hungarian citizens born in Serbia and immigrated to the land of Hungary as most such citizens migrate directly from Vojvodina, Serbia to the territory of Hungary. When it comes to the stock type of quantitative information, the largest community of Serbia-born Hungarian citizens are now living in Csongrád-Csanád (from 1,295 to 12,025 people) and Bács-Kiskun (from 824 to 6,000) as Csongrád-Csanád have taken the lead from Budapest, and Bács-Kiskun closely follows the Hungarian capital. The change between 2011 and 2019 is very significant, and even bigger than the national average (increase by more than 6 times); in Csongrád-Csanád the migrant stock multiplied by almost 9.3 times, and by almost 7.3 times in Bács-Kiskun. The number of immigrants to Hungary with Serbian citizenship (including the ones with dual nationality) increased in Bács-Kiskun significantly (from 43 to 254); while a slight decrease was observed in Csongrád-Csanád (from 297 to 239). Bács-Kiskun became an important destination for immigrants as the numbers multiplied by almost 6 times compared to the national increase of 2.9 times. Immigration is more numerous than emigration. While the two regions are responsible for 19.7% of the incoming people, they represent only 7.2% of the emigrating groups according to data from 2019.

Figure 197: The volume of migration of Serbian citizens



The pull factors are so strong thus the number of people with Hungarian citizenship born in Hungary and taking part in return migration to Serbia is very limited (Bács-Kiskun: 1, Csongrád-Csanád: 2 persons in 2019). Emigrating Hungarian citizens to the receiving country of Serbia are very few; 9 persons in Bács-Kiskun and 24 persons from Csongrád-Csanád were registered in 2019. Emigrating Hungarian citizens born in Serbia are also not populous. 28 people were registered in Bács-Kiskun and 56 in Csongrád-Csanád in 2019. Emigration of Serbian citizens to Serbia has decreased from 101 to 42 persons, and from 101 to 42 persons taking into account the numbers of 2011 and 2019. The migration balance is positive for Hungary in the relation between Hungary and Serbia. In 2011 the balance was negative for Bács-Kiskun meaning that there were 95 more emigrants than those who arrived. Bács-Kiskun has become a new destination for Serbians as by 2014 the balance turned positive (+17), and continued to increase the population gain by 2019 (+216). The balance for Csongrád-Csanád was already positive (196), and the county managed to sustain its important role in attracting inhabitants from Serbia (2019: surplus of 197).

Profound changes occurred in the past period, especially when it comes to student mobility. The migration intensified partly owing to the programme, however other push and pull factors played a much larger role. Apart from that, new forms of mobility appeared; the most apparent is the circular movement of people. A wider range of people appeared who have double connections and who have family and work-related connections of both sides of the border. The direction of cross-border migration has become more complex, but remained Hungary-centred.

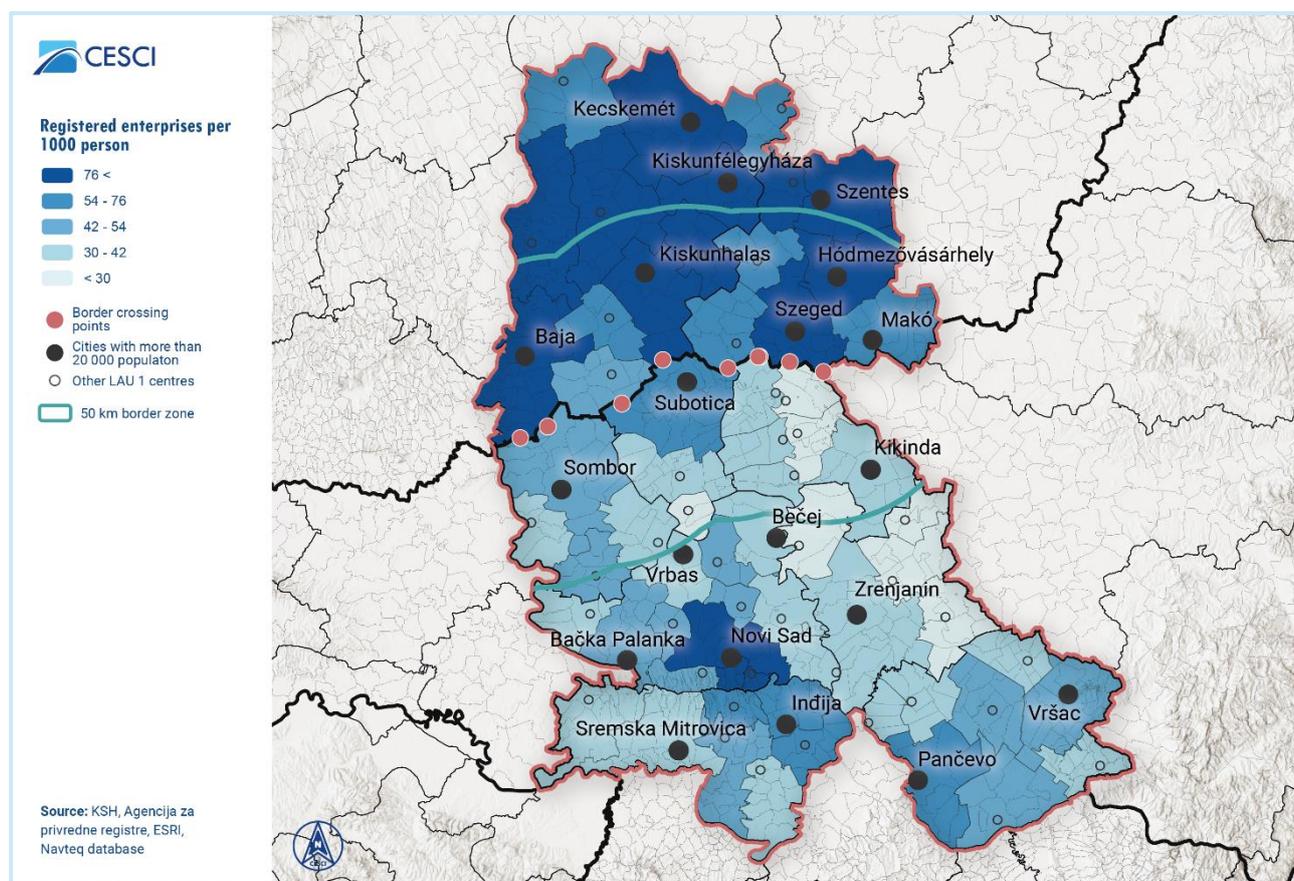
Cross-border business activity

The factor of cross-border business activity is addressed by registered number of enterprises per 1000 persons and differences in real estate prices according to the physical distance from the border.

Business activities also generate cross-border flows directly and indirectly as well, differences and inequalities in particular.

Based on the **registered number of enterprises per 1000 persons** the share of microregions with lower economic activity is higher within the border zone. The districts, municipalities tend to have below average enterprise densities in the vicinity of the border excluding some economic hubs such as Szeged and Subotica. This is especially valid for the Serbian side (Čoka: 22.8, Novi Kneževac: 24.4, Novi Bečej: 26.8, Mali Idoš: 29.6) but most of the worst performing districts of Hungary can be found close to the border as well (District of Bácsalmás: 53, Jánoshalma: 61.3, Makó: 63.1, Mórahalom: 71.3, Kistelek: 72.7). The density is the lowest in the area surrounded by Sombor, Novi Sad, Vršac and the trinational border of Serbia, Hungary and Romania. The enterprises are more concentrated to certain economic centres on the Serbian side. Partly regardless the distance from border, Szeged (114.9), Kecskemét (110.5) from Hungary, while Novi Sad (82) and the neighbouring Petrovaradin (82) stands out. The number of enterprises is higher in Szeged and Kiskunhalas as well as in Subotica (see the TNCs in the industrial areas and the Free Zone) partly thanks to the various SMEs and international companies interested in foreign trade and cross-border value chains. The settlements around Szeged and Subotica have developed important logistics and manufacturing sectors based on the “gateway to the Balkans” location and transport axis between Budapest and Belgrade and beyond.

Figure 198: Enterprise density of the programme area based on the number of enterprises per 1000 persons



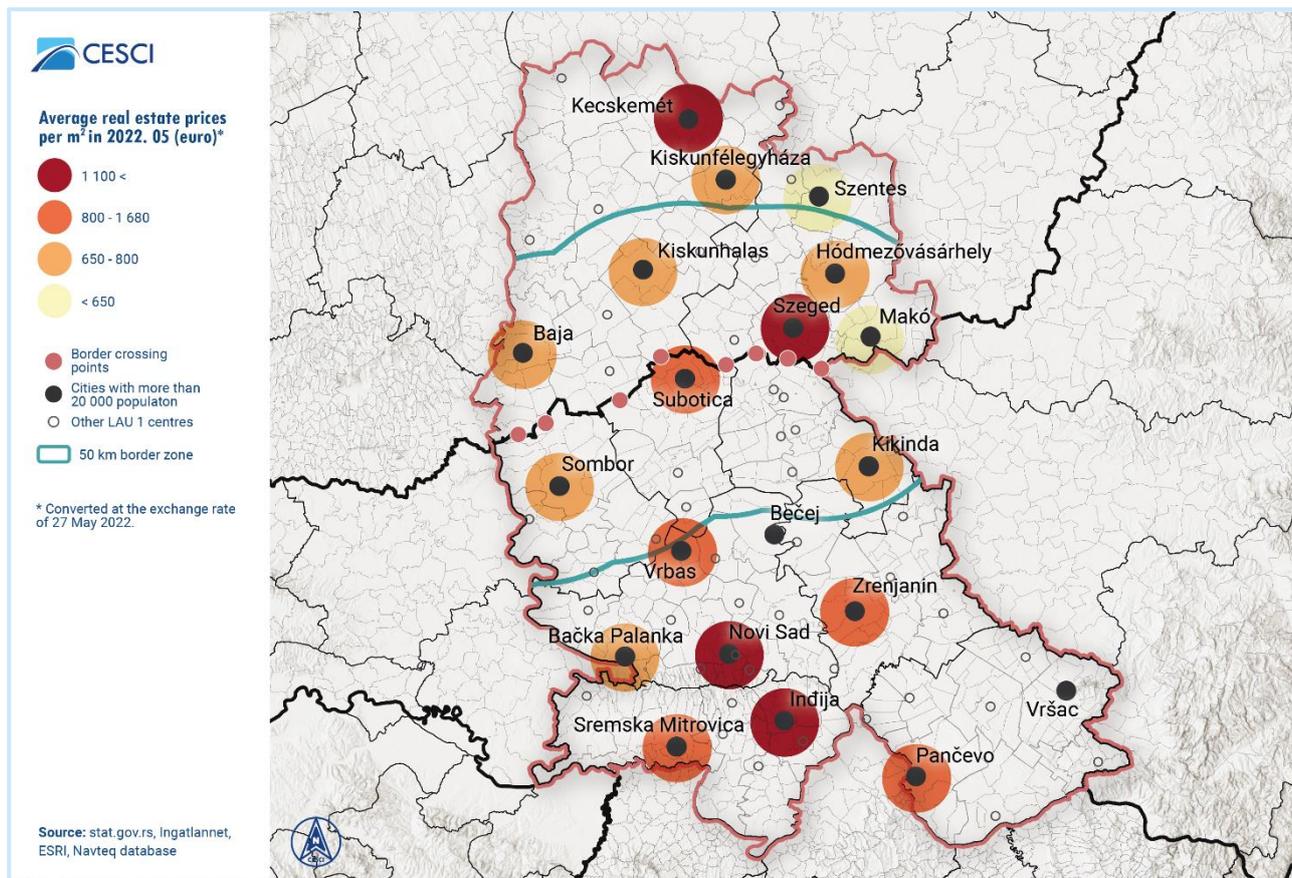
There are significant **differences in real estate prices according to the physical distance from the border**. The average price per square metres in 2022 was 935 EUR in the programme area. The prices in the major cities and regional seats are the highest (Novi Sad: 1 680 EUR per m², Szeged: 1 509

EUR, Kecskemét: 1 298 EUR, Subotica: 1 003 EUR) along with some southern cities in the vicinity of the Belgrade agglomeration zone (Indija: 1 135 EUR, Sremska Mitrovica: 1 095, Pančevo: 990 EUR). Apart from Szeged and Subotica the settlements closest to the shared border have below average price levels including Baja, Sombor, Kikinda, Baja, Kiskunhalas, Hódmezővásárhely, Szentes (623) and Makó (515 EUR/m² only) in particular. The prices in cities outside of the 50 km border zone (1049 EUR per m²) are higher in general than the ones within the border zone (821 EUR per m²). Taking into account the change in real estate prices between 2014 and 2022⁸⁷, the highest pace in increase in the given country took place in the largest cities on both sides (Szeged: +230%, Kecskemét: +145%, Novi Sad: +78%, Subotica: +59%). The lowest increase was registered in the case of Zrenjanin (+32%), Pančevo (+26%), Sombor (+17%) and Bačka Palanka (+2%).

The increase between 2014 and 2022 was more significant on the Hungarian side. In general, the territorial differences in real estate prices have increased: the gap got larger because of fast-paced growth in urban centres offering wide range of public and private services, vivid labour market with multiple employment opportunities, higher quality of life and attractive working and living environment for young and skilled people. Two distinct types can be named: 1. border cities with regional importance acting as main attraction forces, destinations and urban, employment and service (educational, health care, cultural) centres where the prices had been high and have further increased at a high rate; and 2. border towns as part of an outer periphery, suffering from negative border effects, with often low basis values and limited potentials for real estate growth.

⁸⁷ Data is missing in relation to Indija, Vrbas and Kikinda for 2014 thus they are left out from the comparison.

Figure 199: Average real estate prices per m² in May, 2022



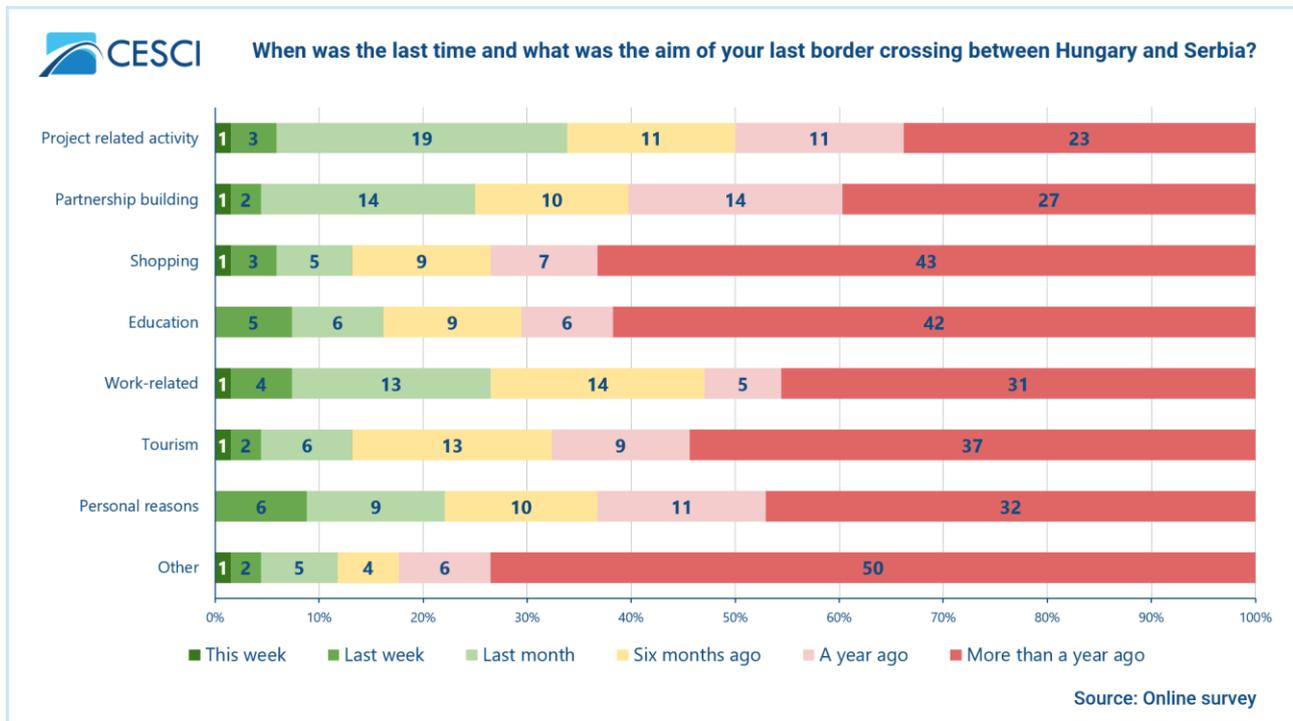
In recent years the differences analysed have remained and got more significant in some cases. Changes have encouraged cross-border flows. The programme contributed to SME-related developments. PA4 directly supported SMEs but PA3 also supported tourism-related companies and entrepreneurs. The market processes heavily influenced this factor therefore the programme has minor role in influencing the overall often global or Europe-wide changes.

Cross-border services

In the absence of a comprehensive database on cross-border services, regarding this factor, the analysis is based on indirect information. Based on the online survey conducted among the C's beneficiaries, the following figure (Figure 200) shows, **what kind of services and how often generated border crossings**. The frequency of border crossings of those who filled in the survey is the highest related to project activity, work and partnership building when the share of last crossings in a month are taken into account. The result is also due to the nature of applicants and beneficiaries; in case of no restrictions and social distancing due to COVID-19 pandemic, the movement of the related people are connected to cross-border cooperation. Shopping, tourism and other movements are less frequent. Taking into consideration only the category of this week and last week together, personal reasons and work-related reasons are the most common reasons of crossings. Taking into account the category of more than a year ago, other, shopping and educational reasons are decisive making that a less important reason for cross-border movements for the respondents. To sum up, it is clear from the survey as well that shopping has lost its previously highlighted role, while movement related to people-to-people interactions such as project activities, partnership building and personal

reasons have gained more importance and form the engine of cross-border cooperation and movements.

Figure 200: When was the last time and what was the aim of your last border crossing between Hungary and Serbia



4.3.7.2 Aspect 2: Cross-border cooperation

In the frames of aspect 2 cross-border cooperation is assessed from the point of factors as follows: Administrative conditions of cross-border cooperation; Cross-border institutions; Cross-border projects and Social connectivity.

Administrative conditions of cross-border cooperation

The factor of administrative conditions of CBC is addressed by the number of interstate agreements and the number of town-twinning agreements. These are two important levels of cooperation which build soft spaces and new geographies across borders creating also transboundary network relations. These are relevant more official, administrative forms of cross-border cooperation worth assessing.

The number of interstate agreements between the Republic of Serbia and Hungary accounts for 61 in total. One of these conventions has not been promulgated, it is in force, while the latest signed in September 2021 (Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on Friendly Relations and Strategic Partnership Cooperation) is not yet in force. Between 1988 and 2000 only two agreements were signed, showing low intensity and less favourable conditions for cross-border cooperation. Owing to the tightening interstate cooperation from 2001-2003, the number of agreements increased year by year. The number of agreements signed since 2007 is 19. Since 2014 as 10 agreements have been signed since 2014.

Table 71: List of the interstate agreements between the Republic of Serbia and Hungary since 2014

Title of the agreement⁸⁸	Place	Date
Convention between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on rapid notification in the event of a radiological emergency	Belgrade	July 1, 2014
Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on the International Carriage of Passengers and Goods by Road	Belgrade	July 1, 2014
Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on navigation on the Tisza	Niš	November 21, 2016
Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation in the Field of Infrastructure Projects between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia	Budapest	February 9, 2018
Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia amending and supplementing the Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on the control of border traffic by road, rail and water	Budapest	February 9, 2018
Convention between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on the Reciprocal Recognition of State-Recognized Certificates and Diplomas and of Diplomas Issued in Hungary and the Republic of Serbia	Subotica	April 15, 2019
Environmental Cooperation Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia	Subotica	April 15, 2019
Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on co-operation in the field of sustainable water management in transboundary waters and river basins of common interest	Subotica	April 15, 2019
Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on Co-operation in the Construction, Operation, Maintenance, Reconstruction and Troubleshooting of the Transboundary Gas Transmission Line	Subotica	April 15, 2019
Agreement between the Government of Hungary and the Government of the Republic of Serbia on Friendly Relations and Strategic Partnership Cooperation	Budapest	September 8, 2021

The favourable interstate relations have encouraged the cross-border integration and cohesion of the programme area in many fields including transport or education. These relations actively contributed to all pAs identified in the programme. The agreements helped breaking down administrative barriers and simplified various cooperation fields.

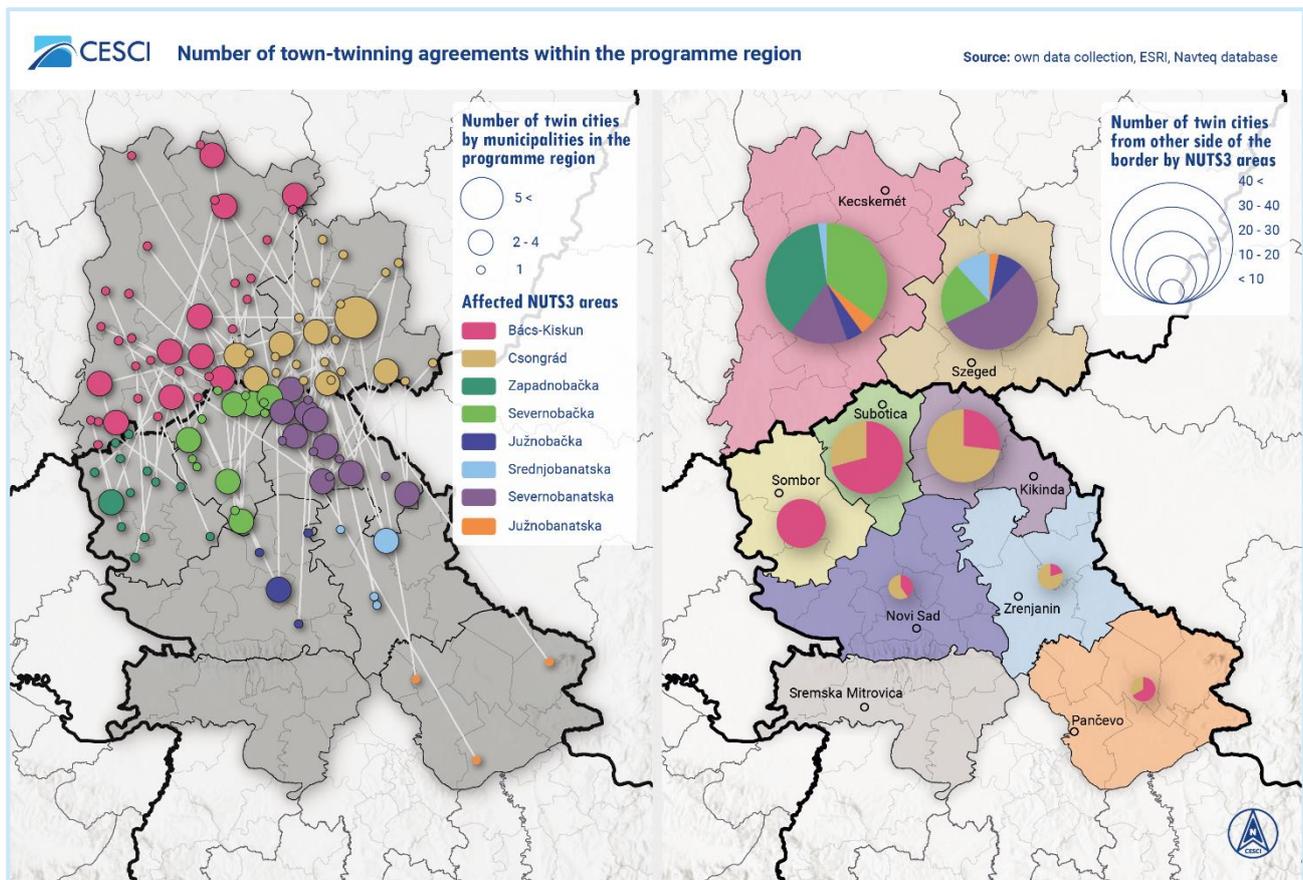
The **number of town-twinning agreements** within the programme region accounts for 82 of which 79 have been established across the border (with the participation of Hungarian and Serbian

⁸⁸ Special thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary who provided the source for the table.

municipalities). Settlements with the greatest number of contacts are Hódmezővásárhely (4 in agreements in total, 2 contacts from Serbia), Tiszasziget (4 from Serbia), Gara (3 from Serbia), Jánoshalma (3 from Serbia), Kiskunhalas (3, 2 from Serbia) from Hungary, while Subotica (3 from Hungary), Ada (3), Bačka Topola (3), Palić (3) and Horgoš (3) from Serbia. The strongest connections can be detected between Severnobańska and Csongrád (19 agreements in total), Severnobačka and Bács-Kiskun (17), Zapadnobačka and Bács-Kiskun (16). There is a rather clear difference between the eastern and the western part of the programme area, especially on the Serbian regions bordering Hungarian counties: Severnobačka has twin cities exclusively from the neighbouring Bács-Kiskun, but going East the share of Bács-Kiskun drops. In the case of Severnobańska the majority of twinning agreements have been created with settlements from Csongrád-Csanád, and the share of settlements from Bács-Kiskun is similar to the rate for Csongrád-Csanád in Severnobačka. The further the settlements the less the probability is to have cross-border twinning with the other side with some exception on the Hungarian side (see Kecskemét or Lakitelek). The density of settlements involved in twinning connections is high in the vicinity of the border, especially in the 50 km and 60 min distance from the state border. This is true in Serbia in particular; there are very few settlements south of Novi Sad. High cooperation density can be seen on the related map involving the agglomerations of Szeged and Subotica, and axes such as Szeged-Bečej or Kiskunhalas-Noví Sad. In general, in the bordering regions the distance of twinning is usually short, while settlements deeper in the national territory tend to have higher share of connections with similarly non-border towns. While in norther parts of Vojvodina many settlements across the territory take part in twinning, on the southern parts less settlements do the same, of which some act as dot-like centres of such intermunicipal cooperation (e.g. Novi Sad, Zrenjanin). Areas of low cooperation intensity include Sremska, Južnobańska, most parts of Južnobačka and Srednjobańska from Vojvodina, and Districts of Kunszentmiklós, Kiskőrös, Kiskunfélegyháza and Csongrád from Hungary.

To sum up, it can be said that town-twinning is one of the bases of CBC projects, while it is also true that especially PA3 projects could serve as the basis for future twinning relations. Consequently, the programme contributed to the development and establishment of such forms of cooperation indirectly.

Figure 201: Number of town-twinning agreements within the programme region



Cross-border institutions

The factor of cross-border institutions is addressed by the indicators of **cross-border structures**, their annual incomes as well as personnel, plus by the number and total value of the projects implemented by them. Furthermore, the number of cross-border clusters and their related projects is also assessed, cross-border institutions, organisations as groups of various actors play an important role in the elaboration and implementation processes of CBC projects. They can also be crucial stakeholders by taking the role of the Lead Beneficiary or a project partner. European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs)⁸⁹ and Euroregions are important actors in facilitating and realising projects of high cross-border relevance and they tend to better secure good partnerships and sustainability too.

Despite the barriers, the region is home for several cross-border cooperation structures, despite the fact that the role of the Serbian actors is somewhat limited because of the physical (e.g. narrow

⁸⁹ EGTC is an independent legal entity ensuring the most developed institutional framework for the cross-border cooperation activities of European local and regional authorities. According to the EU Regulation, Member States, regional and local authorities, bodies governed by public law under the effect of the Directive on public procurement and undertakings entrusted with operation of services of general economic interest as well as the associations of the above may establish an EGTC subject to that the partners have their seats in two EU member countries or one member state and a third country. <https://egtcmmonitor.cesci-net.eu/en/egtc-the-tool/about-egtc/>

capacity of border crossings) and administrative barriers (e.g. the restrained possibility of participation in some special cross-border cooperation structures such as EGTC). Still, several cross-border structures facilitate cooperation and the weakening of border obstacles. Regarding the more institutionalised forms of cross-border cooperation, currently one Euroregion, the DKMT Euroregion and one EGTC, the Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC (BTC EGTC) are operating within the programme area. In case of the latter one, Serbian local authorities have observer status because of the missing national legal background.

The members of the BTC EGTC include Ambrózfalva, Apátfalva, Ásotthalom, Bácsborsód, Bordány, Csanádalberti, Csanádpalota, Csengele, Csíkéria, Domaszék, Ferencszállás, Forráskút, Földeak, Gara, Kelebia, Királyhelyes, Kistelek, Kiszombor, Klárafalva, Kövegy, Kunbaja, Madaras, Magyarcsanád, Makó, Maroslele, Mórahalom, Nagyér, Nagylak, Óföldeák, Öttömös, Pitvaros, Pusztamérges, Rőszke, Ruzsa, Tompa. The seat of the grouping, which has a cooperation area of 8 374 km² covering almost 445 thousand people, is in the city of Mórahalom, Hungary, and the partner municipalities in Hungary are all situated within the programme area of Bács-Kiskun and Csongrád-Csanád Counties. From Romania the members are from Timiș County. It is important to note that besides the full members of 39 municipalities from Hungary the 8 Serbian ones from Vojvodina are granted with observer status only. As of today, Serbian settlements cannot join because of the missing legislative framework in Serbia. From the perspective of the implementation of the planned integrated interventions, the joining of the Serbian members would be an important step and it could give a new impetus to the EGTC and to its activities. The necessary legal basis for implementation of EGTC Regulation shall be prepared by 2023 with the aim to establish necessary conditions for participation of Serbian legal entities in this cooperation approach. In the meanwhile, institutions from Serbia shall consider the various forms of cooperation that domestic legislation and international agreements both allow.

Another important cross-border organisation is the DKMT Euroregion, which links the bordering regions between Hungary, Romania and Serbia covering around 60 thousand km² and gathering 4.5 million inhabitants. Cooperation was officially established on 21st November 1997 when its founding document was signed in Szeged by the representatives of 4 Hungarian and Romanian counties each and, further, by the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The Euroregion gathers six regional self-governments covering the whole programme area: Bács-Kiskun and Csongrád-Csanád Counties from Hungary, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina from Serbia, furthermore Arad, Caraș-Severin, and Timiș Counties from Romania.

Taking into account the average annual turnover BTC EGTC has a relatively stable level of turnover with exceptional years of 2011 (lowest value), 2013 (highest value) and 2018 (second highest). The turnover of 2014 is higher than of 2019, however the annual figure depends heavily on programming and project cycles and the cash flow of successful projects. The data mostly fluctuated between 13 and 27 million Hungarian Forint (HUF) in the period of 2013-2019, while the average was almost 16.5 million. The data for 2011-2019 are as follows: 2011: 2 837 000; 2012: 18 756 000; 2013: 27 109 000; 2014: 18 072 000; 2015: 14 917 000; 2016: 13 008 569; 2017: 17 029 192; 2018: 20 387 000; 2019: 15 548 000 HUF.

Taking into account **the number of employees** of BTC EGTC the two employees were supplemented by a new one in 2015. In the last years the personnel have not changed regarding its size, thus it

accounted for three colleagues. DKMT has in the past few years three colleagues of which two employees possess a contractual relationship with the agency of the Euroregion.

Regarding **the number and total value of the projects implemented by the cross-border governance entities**: based on the interviews, it has to be emphasized that one of the biggest challenges of the border region is to manage different border regimes and different levels of permeability. Accordingly, several initiatives taken by the management of the DKMT-Euroregion target better cross-border transport connections. The project titled "Across the Tis" developed new border crossing points on the river Tisza/Tisa (both for passenger and freight traffic) and made preparatory activities to declare the Tisza/Tisa as an international waterway. The Euroregion is the protagonist of the Szeged-Röszke-Horgos-Subotica-Baja railway line. In the framework of the strategic project "Dream Railwa", the technical documentation of the railway line has been successfully elaborated. Danube-Kris-Mures-Tisa Euroregional Development Agency has participated in three HUSRB projects in the frames of the currently evaluated programme for the period 2014-2020:

1. in ColourCoop⁹⁰ (HUSRB/1601/31/0005) with 345 579.70 PP total cost and 293 742,74 EUR national contribution as Lead Beneficiary;
2. in Dream Railway⁹¹ (HUSRB/1601/22/0002) with 329 049.40 EUR PP total cost and 279 691,99 EUR national contribution as a Beneficiary; and
3. EduWine⁹² (HUSRB/1903/43/0073) ammounting 114 586.80 EUR total cost and 97 398.78 EUR national contribution as a Beneficiary.

BTC EGTC participated in the following cross-border projects (with different partner statuses including that without budget) before 2014:

1. "Organization of Cross-border Expo and Training Sessions for the benefit of empowering SME's" (ExpoTrain SME)⁹³ with a total budget of EUR 87 771.00 EUR and a European Union

⁹⁰ The objective of the project is the following: developing a comprehensive cultural strategy for the entire Hungarian-Serbian border region; launching an online information and news centre in Hungarian and Serbian languages; setting up Serbian and Hungarian cultural centres in Mórahalom and in Palić, respectively; integrating Novi Sad, the future European Capital of Culture, and its surrounding region into the cultural and touristic life of the Hungarian-Serbian border region.

⁹¹ The objective of this project is to develop the design documentation necessary for the construction of the Subotica-Bácsalmás-Baja section of the Szeged-Subotica-Bácsalmás-Baja railway line, relying on the existing feasibility study which had been elaborated with the help of the previous joint programme.

⁹² The objective in the frames of the „Development of CB Wine Learning Area” is to strengthen the economy based on enhancing competitiveness and employment potential of individual producers, young professionals and SMEs, through the development and adaptation of new technologies, processes, products and services in the wine producing sector of cross-border region.

⁹³ The overall aim of this project was to facilitate the development of a harmonious and cooperative region with a sustainable and safe environment. The project reached out to the small- and medium-sized enterprises in the area, encouraging them to cooperate and providing them with an opportunity to exchange their experiences. The professional expos organised within the project helped the SMEs in the target area to present themselves and to expand and deepen the existing ties among them.

- funding of 74 605.35 EUR in the frames of the Programme 2007-2013 Hungary-Serbia as a Lead Partner;
2. "Updating of the Development Strategies of Local Municipalities and Elaboration of Cross-Border Common Sectorial Development Operational Programmes and Projects" (CBD Strategies) with a budget of 99 800 EUR in the frames of the Programme 2007-2013 Hungary-Serbia;
 3. "Dance and Music without borders" (Dance and Music)⁹⁴ with a total budget/expenditure of 69 743 EUR of which the European Union funding is 59 281.55 EUR in the frames of the Programme 2007-2013 Hungary-Romania;
 4. "Strengthening co-operation and network resources in favor for achieving economic growth" (COOP-BANAT)⁹⁵ with a total budget/expenditure was 75 770.21 EUR, while the EU funding accounted for 64 404.67 EUR in the frames of the Programme 2007-2013 Hungary-Romania as a Lead Partner.

To sum up, these organisations, have developed to be important stakeholders. DKMT especially is now having a long history of initiating and sustaining cross-border cooperation among stakeholders of several kinds. DKMT has become one of the most successful beneficiaries in developing and managing CBC projects in the programme area. In transport connections DKMT has done an extraordinary facilitating job across programme periods, and by time it has grown to be a relevant stakeholder in tourism, culture and agriculture as well.

At last, but not least, the **number of cross-border institutions, networks and clusters and the relevant projects** should be mentioned under this factor. There is some clustering process, but it is still in its infancy in the border region. Only a few of this kind have been created in recent years. In addition to the known already existing CB structures, there are no cluster organizations with legal personality that appear as applicants or direct beneficiaries. Mainly within PA4, with the help of the programme, there were activities that attempt to create organizations that cross different sectoral boundaries (robotics network, IT community platform), in such a way that these are desired within the framework of current projects, but not as "main activities" to create. There was a total of 9 projects within the programme that tried to achieve this goal, but those that had an actual CBC output can

⁹⁴ The project aims at strengthening the co-operation in the field of culture between the communities of Makó Local Government (HU), Jimbolia Local Government (RO) and Sannicolau Mare Local Government (RO). The overall objective of the project is to enhance cultural co-operation among the communities of the three participating settlements.

⁹⁵ The aim of the project is to strengthen the co-operation and the possible advantages of networking for enhancing economic growth in the Southern Great Plain Region of Hungary and in the Western Region of Romania. The cross-border co-operation helps the local governments, firms and stakeholders to draw up a common conception to evolve the strategic line about the success of the regions.

be considered a minimal number⁹⁶. Therefore, the program supports this type of economic networking and partnership building, but the effectiveness is still at a lower level of development than it could be.

Cross-border projects

The factor of cross-border projects is analysed about the number, scope and value of projects implemented jointly, sustainability of the project results, partnerships and the integrated approach applied in projects and CfPs for tender.

The **number, geographic scope and value of projects implemented jointly across the border** should be taken into account first. The INTERREG programme had a great role in initiating any kind of project-type cooperation across the border. There is still room for improvement to have projects with higher cross-border relevance. Regarding cross-border relevance two-thirds of all projects has low level of materialisation. In relation to the level of cooperation the programme has managed to improve the joint implementation as the emergence and widespread character of regular, long-lasting cooperation is a sign of development. The Programme and its beneficiaries managed to implement projects with improved relevance with a relatively high share (53%). Without the programme much fewer joint projects would have been carried out. Especially in the case of projects with localised infrastructural investments the programme had an outstanding role in implementing projects and realisation of different physical elements such as border infrastructure or canals. The role of the programme was eminent in the border zone of 50 km particularly with regard to PA2. 61.4% of the contribution was allocated to settlements situated within the 30 km zone to the shared state border. The programme was able to support projects and contribute to project elements in the vicinity of the border, around Szeged and Subotica, Baja and Sombor, where the cross-border interactions are more relevant and worth encouraging.

Sustainability of the project results

This document contains an in-depth analysis regarding the durability of the projects. For more information see the following chapters: *II. 3.1.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA1); II. 3.2.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA2); II. 3.3.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA3); II. 3.4.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA4); II. 4.3.4 Overall durability of the projects*

Sustainability of project partnerships

This document contains an in-depth analysis regarding the durability of the partnerships. For more information see the following chapters: *II. 3.1.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA1); II. 3.2.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA2); II. 3.3.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA3); II. 3.4.3.5 Durability of the projects (PA4); II. 4.3.4 Overall durability of the projects*

⁹⁶ These mentioning are as follows: Checkpoint IT Community (ccoperation platform); New institutional framework in the metal industry for the CB region; Knowledge and Technology Transfer Platform; functional network between the multi companies in the CB region and young SMEs, young researchers, students; CBC association in the field of agriculture; establishing the QUAD Social Enterprise; Serbian Lavender growing cluster (SLGC); setting the foundations of a Local Tastes-Local Values socioeconomic network; the knowledge center and the network to be created New Values.

Assessment of integrated approach applied in projects and CfPs for tender

This document contains an in-depth analysis regarding the applied mechanisms and tools. For more information see the following chapters: *II. 3.1.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA1)*; *II. 3.2.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA2)*; *II. 3.3.2.2 Introduction of the applied mechanisms and tools (PA3)*; *II. 4.4.1 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools in terms of the results*.

However, the programme did not contain the tools of CLLD and ITI, in addition there were no actions forming part of an ITI project financed by other Operative Programmes, strategic projects had the features to potentially enlarge the timely and territorial horizon of the cross-border projects leading to a greater impact on the region.

Social connectivity

The factor of social connectivity is analysed with the help of indicators as number of citizens participating in cross-border activities and projects; and joint cultural events.

The **number of citizens participating in cross-border activities and projects** can be analysed from two aspects and sources. Due to limited available data the number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions can be used. Thanks to successful event organisation, cultural and touristic attraction force, the original goal of 30 thousand had to be modified two times, first to 40 thousand, then to 100 thousand. According to the data in INTERREG+ the figure exceeded even 230 thousand visitors. Second, information can be gained from interviews. According to them the programme successfully contributed to several various activities and people-to-people projects. P2P projects were outstandingly relevant, many positive comments were received from beneficiaries and organisers of such activities and projects. Civic organisations and municipalities have created vivid connections including participation of many forms (guest artists, joint appearance at fairs, joint workshops, host of events etc.) with the help of projects and vice versa. The cultural life across border has developed significantly since 2014. Many artists and event organisers of all types now know each other. However, in order to further increase the cross-border integration the information provision should be better organised. A much wider audience would be reachable and developed for events organised in the frames of the CBC programme. Visibility, bilingual communication and marketing further away from the narrowly interpreted border zone could have been sustained to reach bigger impact on more border people living in the programme area.

There are very few **joint cultural events based on the performers' citizenship**. The number of events which are frequently visited from the other side, which attract large number or share of Serbians/Hungarians from the neighbouring country, based on a desk research and interviews with stakeholders, is around a dozen. The following main events can be regarded important with this respect: the city festival of Szeged Napja Ünnepségsorozat (the Szeged Day Celebration Series, one participant as artists or artistic groups from Serbia), the music and art festival of Szegedi Ifjúsági Napok (Szeged Youth Days, zero participant as artists or artistic groups from Serbia), the Christmas event series of Szegedi Karácsonyi Hetek (Szeged Christmas Weeks, zero participant), the theatrical festival of Szegedi Szabadtéri Játékok (Outdoor Plays of Szeged, zero participant), the gastronomy festival of Bajai Halfőző Fesztivál (Fish Cooking Festival, zero participant) from Hungary, the Mórahalom-based festival of Homokháti Sokadalom (zero participant), the Öttömös-based

gastronomy festival of Asparagus Festival (one participant), the Ásotthalom-based Rózsa Sándor Fesztivál (no data), and the Interetno Festival aiming at introducing the distinct cultures and heritage of the ethnic groups living around the city of Subotica with dance-music productions, a landing fair and gastronomic programs (seven participants from Hungary as artists or artistic groups). Furthermore, there are the International European Film Festival in Palić (6 participants), the music festival of EXIT Festival in Petrovaradin (2 artists/performers from Hungary), the gastronomy event of the Palić Harvest Days (zero participant), the world music festival of Etnofest Palić, the Woodstock Festival in Ópusztaszer and the Tamburica Fest in Novi Sad (no data on the participants/ or performers). Additionally, the Hungarian Cultural Centre in Novi Sad, the Serbian Cultural Centre in Mórahalom and the Novosadsko pozorište/Theatre of Novi Sad (Hungarian theatre) are currently the most important cross-border cultural and artistic platforms in the region. In recent years the frequency and number of joint or jointly visited or organised events and performances have increased, and the approximate number of guests and participants have grown larger. There are now festivals and other events which are well-known and acknowledged by the other side's cultural and civic sphere. The programme supported a large number of projects especially in the frames of PA3 which were based on joint organisation, performance and institutional cooperation (e.g. theatres, films, folk ensembles).

4.3.7.3 Aspect 3: People

In the frames of aspect 3 people-related factors that are on social and societal changes and behaviours will be assessed from the point of factors as follows: Perceptions on distance; Perceptions of otherness; Ownership of the shared territory.

Perceptions on distance

Perceptions on distance between people can be showed by analysing the level of mutual trust. **Level of mutual trust** is a principal feature of cooperation between the countries and for establishing cross-border cooperation. Mutual trust needs to be built from below and from the top too. In case of the latter, it is important to underline the positive development of perception of each other. This means that there is a positive developing path between Hungary and Serbia and in their mutual perception. The development of positive perception is influenced by excellent interstate relations, namely frequent and always friendly meetings between the prime ministers. Hungary strongly supports the accession of Serbia to the EU and this is regularly articulated at international meetings. Moreover, Olivér Várhelyi from Hungary is the EU commissioner for neighbourhood and enlargement; subsequently, a Hungarian politician is the person who presents the European Union towards the Serbian public and it might also strengthen the perception of Hungary in the pro-accession process of Serbia.

It is worth to mention the results of Central European Perspectives, a European research institute. The results of the current research articulate that the Serbs have good opinion about the Hungarians (60% in 2020, 68% in 2021). The research underlines that this positive result is influenced by good inter-state relations on the one hand, and by the fact that Hungary has recently become one of the most important EU investors in the country (next to the Netherlands and Italy). As a result, more and more Serbians may feel that development of their livelihood is significantly positively influenced by

Hungarian capital. According to the research, a positive image of Serbs is emerging among Hungarians as well (it is around 40 percent which was the same as in the previous year of 2020); although..

10% increase was achieved about the positive image of Serbia in Hungary during five years in Hungary by 2021. It can be stated that the flourishing interstate relationship resonates in the public opinion of both countries. In other words, the tendency is positive. It has the capacity to strongly increase the mutual trust and to remove the existing barriers. Building of positive perceptions between Hungary and Serbia can be a success story in Central Europe. This positive attitude resonates at the regular Serbian-Hungarian Government Summits which are held regularly on increasing the permeability of the border in topics such as job opportunities, difficult border crossings, the railway line between Subotica and Szeged, or the potential Budapest-Belgrade passenger ship traffic.

Finally, the building of mutual trust from below should be mentioned. Hungarians in Serbia are among the most open nationalities in the country; hence they are not a segregate community in Serbia. Consequently, the elements of interactions, contacts and linkages are profoundly present between the nationalities. For example, one of the principal links is the marriage. More than a third of marriages of the Hungarians in Serbia have mixed feature. This proportion far outweighs the proportions of other nationalities in the country. This mixed marriage feature was high during the socialist period. Nevertheless, the process was disrupted by the Yugoslav Wars. The rate of mixed marriages rapidly decreased then. After 2012, a new era of mixed marriages has been re-launched and this rate is currently the highest. In other words, the high proportion of mixed marriages mirrors the positive tendency between the two nations and their close cultural mentality which opens the space for mixed families. Moreover, mixed marriages generate significant interactions, linkages in a bottom-up, grassroots way between the members of different nationalities, thus the process establishes appropriate environment for further mutual trust, understanding of each other and it may help to resolve historical grievances, too. National minorities living on both sides have acted as engines in building cultural bridges across the two countries.

Overall, the mutual trust is on a much higher level compared to the situation of even seven to ten years ago not to mention the 1990s. Beneficiaries or statesman share similar views on the extraordinary and excellent relations between the two countries and their local population. The Programme contributed to trust-building through PA3-related actions in particular such as by supporting joint tourism products and shared cultural heritage, people-to-people type of activities. The programme supported many projects which included personal and professional connections, between various stakeholders and communities, whose main impact was often more than simply helping the organisation of concrete events or the publication of communication materials. The programme provided sector-neutral opportunity to build partnerships and thus mutual trust across the border.

Perceptions of otherness

Perceptions of otherness are connected to the 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. Therefore, in the followings the **mediascapes of the neighbouring countries** will be

summarised. In Serbia, there is a long tradition of broadcasting in minority languages. According to research in 2018, only in Vojvodina there are about 114 different media that at least partially produced content in 11 minority languages. The rights of national minorities in the field of information are guaranteed by the Constitution, media laws. Specifically, the media group operating in the most “cross-border way” in the programme’s area is the Subotica-centred Pannon RTV, which includes TV and radio broadcasts in Hungarian, the Hungarian Radio in Subotica and news outlets in both Hungarian and Serbian. This is operated by a civil organization called Pannonia Foundation (founded in 2005). One of the important missions of Pannon RTV is to promote the Hungarian-Serbian dialogue and to present the European Union to the communities of Vojvodina. They are broadcasting the major news in Serbian online, some of their broadcasts are subtitled in Serbian, and the Serbian broadcasts are subtitled in Hungarian.

On the **Hungarian side**, the larger minorities, who used to have editorial offices (the German, Serbian, Croatian, Slovak, Romanian and Roma minorities), are provided with appearances in national radio and television programmes. This means a two-hour-long radio appearance on the medium waveband daily, and a 25-minute-long television appearance in the national public television weekly. All other distinguished minorities in Hungary have a 30-minute-long programme daily in a rotation system. From 2007, every minority programme is broadcasted by a minority radio station, operating as the 4th channel of The Hungarian Radio Corporation.

Not public, but commercial and local, and sometimes regional TV channels and radio stations appeared in both study areas along the border from the 1990s. Mainly the local-municipal, the urban district and the smaller regional radio and TV stations have focused on producing programmes highlighting local identity and the life of the local society. On the Hungarian side, there are 33 television channels and 10 radio stations that operate in the study area. 3 television channels are located in Szeged and 3 in Baja, while the other TV channels are dispersed in the area. TV channels which are located closest to the border are in Baja (3), Szeged (3), Tompa, Makó, Mórahalom, Rém, Algyó and Hódmezővásárhely. Regarding the radio stations, 9 radio stations are identified in the study area, third of the radio stations are located in Szeged. The closest stations to the border are located in Baja, Szeged (3) and Hódmezővásárhely, while the farthest radio station of the study area is in Kecskemét.

On the **Serbian side**, there are 16 television channels and 39 radio stations that operate in the study area. 2 television channels are located in Subotica, 2 in Kikinda and 4 in Novi Sad, while the other TV channels are dispersed in the area. The TV stations in Kikinda and Subotica are the ones which are located closest to the border with Hungary, while the farthest TV station is located in Beograd. Regarding radio stations, 8 radio stations are located in Novi Sad, 3 in Subotica, 2 in Ruma and 2 in Apatin, while the others are dispersed in the area. The closest stations to the border are located in Subotica (3), Sombor, Senta, Bačka Topola, Ada and Kikinda.

Apart from newspapers, radios and other media contents, the www.visithusrb.com can be introduced as a relevant media content. The Lead Beneficiary DKMT Euroregional Development Agency in cooperation with the Provincial Secretariat for Regional Development, Interregional Cooperation and Local Self-Government, Egy-Másért Community Development Association of Youth, City of Subotica and City of Novi Sad - the City Administration for Culture developed that bilingual website specifically tailored to the Hungarian-Serbian border region. The site contains valuable and

frequently updated, up-to-date information on various events (event calendar), has a comprehensive system of subpages on various news and regional articles on the cross-border region and its tourism, culture, economy and science. The page <https://www.visithusrb.com/hu/hirek> has produced regular news reports about the region and its events.

Based on the publicly available web traffic analytics of the site, it can be concluded that in the last two years, the site traffic was higher than that of the programme website. However, currently it cannot compete with the most popular regional and city news portals (millions of visits per two years) as the scale is naturally completely different (tens of thousands during two years of operation). Despite this, the most significant feature of the site compared to other regional portals is that the www.visithusrb.com is visited from both Hungary and Serbia. According to statistics, the majority of visitors are from Hungary, and visitors from Serbia and Romania visit the site in roughly the same proportion. It reveals that the distribution is more mixed than in the case of typical inland, national portals, where one country dominates. To break down statistics into smaller time slots, although there is regular news on the site to check, a strong fluctuation can be observed in the visits of the page. Furthermore, a significant proportion of the visitors either visited the page directly or via Google; the redirection of szegedtourism.hu is also significant, and people from Facebook also got involved in visiting the site.

To sum up, in recent years the mediascape was able to sustain its positions, thanks to the programme as well (through aired joint productions, short films etc.). The Programme was able to contribute to media materials by supporting short films on cultural heritage and tourist attractions. Promotional campaigns were held on TV and in social media. At last, but not least the biggest direct impact of the programme in changing the perceptions was the strategic project of Colourful Cooperation. Lead by DKMT, Colourful Cooperation has had a great impact on the mediascape of the border area by creating a joint platform for sharing information. It had a novelty of common media activities since it aimed at combining and pooling parallel media contents of various stakeholders as well.

Ownership of the shared territory

Ownership of the shared territory is analysed with the help of taking into account the main reasons and motivations for crossing the state border. When people feel home even abroad, they start thinking of a joint, united territory where borders play less significant hindering factor. The sign of a truly shared territory is the rising number of different border crossings, and that the other side of the border is not simply seen one-sided (e.g. only as a shopping destination or a workplace) but as a shared place of living, working, doing business, recreation and so on as well. Taking into account the volumes of 2014 and 2019 to show the main **reasons and motivations for crossing the border**, in the case of all purposes of travel increase was observed excluding other non-tourist purposes (from 27 thousand to 15 thousand, decrease of 44.4%). The highest growth in traffic was experienced in relation to shopping (from 316 thousand to 507 thousand, increase of 60.4%), followed by tourist purposes (from 493 thousand to 610 thousand, +23%) and working and doing business (from 246 thousand to 296 thousand, +20.3%). Compared to 2010 working and doing business became much more significant by 2019 showing the emerging cross-border labour mobility and commuting (from 97 thousand, +205.2%), and transit traffic increased the second most (from 915 thousand, by 190.6%). The purpose of learning experienced the third largest growth (from 22 thousand, by 150%) indicating

the intensification of cross-border student migration and commuting. Parallel to these phenomena shopping has lost its high importance (drop from 617, by 17.8%) but remained a relevant reason for crossing the border. On the long term it can be summarized that the purpose of working and learning have intensified while transit traffic (2010: 39.3% of all passengers, 2019: 64.2%) remained by far the most relevant motivation followed by tourism (2010: 28.6% of all passengers, 2019: 14.7%) and shopping (2010: 26.5%, 2019: 12.2%) reasons. Disregarding transit traffic, since 2010 the change in shares in travel purposes affected working and doing business outstandingly (+13.1%-points by 2019) and shopping (-9.5%-points).

The main reasons for emigration from Serbia and the subsequent border crossings towards Hungary are the following ones: unemployment, insecurity, dissatisfaction with the financial/wage situation, and slow reforms. The most important motivation for emigration and border crossing from Serbia/Vojvodina is the economic motivation. This motivation was deeply influenced by factors like, higher paid wage for work, bankrupted state enterprises in Serbia, high unemployment rate (speaking Hungarian language is an advantage in the process of searching of an employment in Hungary), possibility for seasonal works in agriculture, construction or tourism. Moreover, the inappropriate business environment in Serbia appears also as an important factor, specifically some businessmen and entrepreneurs relocate their enterprise activities to Hungary. In other words, economic motivation of border crossing was the predominant one during the last two decades.

Another kind of motivation should also be mentioned, namely learning and education which appear as important further reason and motivation of border crossing. The following reasons and motivations of border crossings can be identified regarding the student community: positive perception of the quality of education in Hungary; better career opportunities and future diploma perspectives (accession of Hungary to the EU has had effect that the Hungarian diploma has become more valuable due to its better marketability at the European Union labour market vs. Serbia is not a member in the EU, hence the Serbian diploma is less competitive at the EU labour market); geographical proximity (short travelling time between the place of permanent residence in Serbia and the university in Hungary, which provides an opportunity for more frequent home visits); finally, the lack of an adequate level of knowledge of the Serbian language which is a qualitative requirement at the Serbian education system, hence the border crossing Serbian students can continue their education in their mother tongue in Hungary. Usually, the Serbian students learn at the universities which are located in Szeged, Budapest or Pécs.

Furthermore, positive perception of each other is on the rise in Hungary and in Serbia, too. This means that mutual hostility has been substituted by mutual recognition. Subsequently, there are more and more mutual friendships and human relationships. This positive development profoundly influences tourism between the two countries which is already visible in the rising number of touristic visits.

What is more, easier border crossing emerges as a further important reason and motivation. This has been influenced by several significant border decisions. These include the following ones, the abolishment of visa requirement for the Serbian citizens, possibility of crossing the border with ID card and installation of new border crossings (e.g. Rösztke 2, Ásotthalom - Bački Vinogradi, Kübekháza - Rabe). While the perspective of future border crossing is influenced by construction of a railway

line (Budapest-Belgrade, Szeged-Subotica) and possibility of declaring the Tisza as an international route, building international ship stations and development of public water transport.

The area frequently visited by the population of other side is an important indicator from the point of territorial behaviour of border people. The territorial pattern, most of all the spatial extension of the space visited tells a lot about the ownership of the territory concerned. Focusing on **geographic scope of cross-border mobility**, within Vojvodina, the most intensive emigration region is South Banat and North Bačka. The location of the Serbian arrivals in Hungary mirrors a certain concentration. The economic centres are important destinations, while geographic proximity also plays major role in the decision. On the basis of estimations, 80% of Serbian citizens who moved to Hungary mainly arrive from regions which are close to the border (e.g. Subotica, Senta), but also from Zrenjanin, Ada, Bečej, Novi Sad. They find their residence in Budapest and in its agglomeration, as well as along the transport routes between Szeged and Budapest (e.g. Kecskemét). It is worth to note that recently, the weight of the Southern Great Plain and Szeged is in decline, while the role of the central region (Budapest) is in constant increase among the arrivals from Serbia.

The number of weekly commuters across the border is estimated around ten thousand people (in case of commuters, the main sending settlements are Kanjiža, Horgoš or Bačka Topola). The distance of the daily commuters is around 60 km from Vojvodina to Hungary. The commuters often park their cars on the Serbian side, they cross the borders on foot and they get into another car in Hungary (this strategy speeds up the border crossing). The popular destinations among the commuters are border regions (Szeged, Kiskunhalas, Jánoshalma), Budapest and central parts of Hungary (every second Serbian citizen lives here who relocated him/herself). In the case of relocation from Serbia, the territorial concentration can be observed in the districts which are close to the Serbian and Croatian borders (Szeged, Pécs, Baja). Although, labour migration to the border zone of Hungary has slightly decreased in the recent years, but it is still impressive (many Serbians rather move to Western part of Europe, like Austria or England).

Bilateral agreements exist between the two countries on social security and mutual recognition of working years. Subsequently, the practice of hiring labour power from Serbia to Hungary is also an important element of cross-border mobility. Since 2018, Hungarian employers no longer expect only Hungarian-speaking workers from Serbia. The labour power rental company arranges the work permit, all the necessary documents, provide accommodation and a monthly trip home and often the arrange bus transport, too. This labour power is mainly employed in the automobile industry in Kecskemét, Budapest and Győr. Nevertheless, some Hungarian companies think about exposing their factory structure to Vojvodina, thus reducing the hindering effect of borders and border crossing barriers.

Furthermore, numerous citizens arrive from Vojvodina to work in the slaughterhouse in Mélykút, in the industrial park in Bácsalmás and in other Hungarian cities and many of them work in in trade, car repair and manufacturing.

With regard to the topic of tourism, tourist flows from Serbia has been growing in the region of Baja and many tourists come from Vojvodina. For example, Serbian tourists arrive to Baja even from distance like 50-60 km. The development of cross-border tourism was significantly triggered after 2010 with the abolishment of visa requirement. Tourists from Serbia are already interested in urban tourism (e.g. Baja, Szeged, Pécs), cultural tourism and spa tourism (Kiskunmajsa, Szeged, Algyő and

50-60% spa tourists of Mórahalom are from Serbia). On the other side, Hungarian tourists are also present in Serbia, e.g. urban tourism (Subotica), cultural tourism (visiting the theatre in Novi Sad) and spa tourism (Palić). Moreover, downtown hotels of Szeged also indicate that they have more Serbian guests (e.g. Serbian guests visit events, like Christmas market, wine festivals, Szeged International Airshow, Fish soup festival, wellness, etc.). The touristic demand emerges (also) from the younger generations. Many tourists come from the region of Novi Sad and also even from Belgrade (four to five-star hotels report that wealthy Serbian citizens regularly visit them). It can be expressed that the diversified tourist radius where both nationalities from the border region tend to have cross-border tours reaches Novi Sad in Serbia, and Szeged, Kiskunhalas, Baja and Kalocsa in Hungary. Shopping tourism needs to be mentioned, too. Serbian citizens from smaller villages, directly from the border area, exploit this option. However, as it mentioned before, shopping is in decreasing tendency in comparison with the previous decade. The total tourists' arrivals to Serbia from Hungary in 2019 was 48 008, significantly higher than of 2016 (30 978). The increase is recorded regarding the overnight stays as they were 63 271 before they reached 88 933 by the end of 2019. Large proportion of tourists visit Vojvodina, especially Subotica and Palič, while ski and mountain resorts outside of Vojvodina only started to gain popularity in the very recent years. In Subotica Hungarians represent the highest number of tourists coming from abroad, and their number increased before and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The geographic scope through the increase in travel times has grown. Cross-border tourist movement has been significantly supported by the fact that border crossing is allowed with ID card, thus easing the border crossing and strengthening cross-border elements, e.g. with Subotica. Moreover, the cycle routes help the process, as well as the installation of new border crossings (e.g. Rösztke 2, Ásotthalom - Bački Vinogradi). In the autumn of 2019, the Kübekháza – Rabe (Novi Kneževac) border crossing was also opened on the Hungarian and Serbian border section. This new border crossing option contributes to easier interoperability between the two countries. Border crossing will be supported further projects, namely preparation of the planning documentation which is required for the development of the Subotica-Csikéria-Bácsalmás-Baja railway line, which will hopefully be rebuilt in the future; tram-train development between Hódmezővásárhely-Szeged-Subotica. The perspectives of future cross-border contacts can be further strengthened by construction of a railway line. One would be the Budapest-Belgrade line and Szeged-Subotica. In case of the latter one, the Serbian part is already finished, while the Hungarian part was started to build two months ago. It would profoundly help the commuting between the two countries and the commuting time would be around 40 between the two cities (currently, people have to wait extreme time periods at the border crossing during the tourist season which is around 2-3 or even 4-5 hours). Furthermore, another development would be to declare the Tisza as an international route, to build international ship stations and to develop public water transport (fast ships between Szeged - Senta, Apatin – Baja).

Considering student mobility, the geographic scope on the Hungarian side reached Budapest. The main target in the vicinity of the border is Szeged, followed by Pécs outside of the programme area. The scope of mobility of the students from the Serbian side is signed by settlements with large number of students studying in Szeged, the main target for border students. These southernmost sending settlements with largest number of Serbian students to Hungary are Ada and Bačka Topola. From settlements situated south of these are generally outside of the main scope. The scope of

primary and secondary school students studying in Hungary is the area bordered by Hódmezővásárhely and Baja (excluding Budapest).

In the recent years both the motivation and the distance of travelling to the other side of the border have changed significantly. The area covered by cross-border movements have become larger. The zone of strong interconnections is now wider, and is not concentrated to only few relations (e.g. Szeged-Subotica). The motivation of movements is more complex now. The programme supported these processes by transport developments, tourism-related and culture-related, people-to-people projects and programmes.

4.4 Efficiency at programme level

The efficiency analysis at the programme level is divided into three subchapters:

- Assessment of the applied mechanisms and tools
- Aggregated cost efficiency assessment of the projects;
- Assessment of the assistance provided by the programme bodies (besides the support provided by the programme bodies, the TA Priority axis will also be evaluated).

4.4.1 Relevance of the applied mechanisms and tools in terms of the results

In line with the identified impacts, the main aim of this subchapter is to identify how effectively the strategic projects served the achievement of the programme's objectives. Based on the results of the interviews, the online survey, the territorial analysis and examination of the documentation (descriptions and reports) of the strategic projects available in the Interreg+, evaluators detected the following common characteristics of the five projects:

- they compensate the weak cross-border integration of the region;
- they contribute to the development of the border infrastructure;
- they required joint preparation and, consequently
- they have a long-term perspective both in terms of strategic dimensions and sustainability of the partnership, as well as the project results.

At the same time, however the direct impacts of the five projects to the cohesion of the border region is higher than those of the traditional projects, some differences can be observed between the strategic projects. As it was detailed in the PA-specific chapters, the BABECA project has the strongest cross-border character which is partly weakened by the external border regime, while the cohesive impacts of the WASIDCA project is weaker because of the unbalanced partnership and activities on the two sides of the border. However, it cannot be questioned that the core project activities implemented in Hungary have an effect on the Serbian side. The Kübekháza-Rabe project has solved a missing link problem by the establishment of a new border-crossing, leading to an obvious territorial integrating feature on the local level, while the cross-border impact of the Dream Railway project depends on its continuation: whether the re-construction of the railway line will be realised or not in the future. the potential realisation. Finally, the cross-border character of ColourCoop project is also unquestionable, but its impact on the mutual trust between the two sides of the border strongly depends on the way of operation of the constructed cultural centres and the effectiveness of the cultural integrating role of the organizational background.

The following table (*Table 72*) represents the contribution of the strategic projects to the fulfilment of output indicators. Five output indicators have been selected by projects with strategic relevance, out of which two (*OI/2.2 Newly built roads* and *OI/2.5 Railway line directly affected by development plans*) were supported only by strategic projects. The ratio of strategic projects' target values compared to the total target value of the programme indicates clearly the importance of the strategic projects. Regarding the *OI/2.2 Newly built roads* and *OI/2.5 Railway line directly affected by development plans*, the role of strategic

projects is more than 100% due to the aforementioned reason and the overperformance of the target goals. The BABECA ensures the quarter of the total target values of *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system*, while the Kübekháza-Rabe (*OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points*) and ColourCoop (*OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events*) projects provide 15% of the total targets. The smallest contribution is granted by the WASIDCA (*OI/1.2 New or improved water management system*) with nearly 5%. Since the *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system* is supported by two strategic projects (BABECA and WASIDCA), the aggregated target value is 52 496 metres, which gives nearly 30% of the total target value.

Table 72: The strategic projects contribution to the fulfilment of output indicators' target value

Priority axis	Indicators	Target value by strategic projects (IPlus Indicators)	Ratio of strategic projects' target values	Total target value defined by the CP	Achieved value by the strategic projects	Ratio of strategic projects' achieved values	Total achieved value defined by AIR 2021
PA1	OI/1.2 Length of new or improved water management system	52 496	29.16%	180 000	44 800	25.91%	172 912
PA2	OI/2.1 Number of improved or newly built border crossing points	1	14.29%	7	1	50%	2
PA2	OI/2.2 Total length of newly built roads	4.53	113.23%	4	4.53	100%	4.53
PA2	OI/2.5 Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans	58	108.55%	53.43	58	100%	58

Priority axis	Indicators	Target value by strategic projects (IPlus Indicators)	Ratio of strategic projects' target values	Total target value defined by the CP	Achieved value by the strategic projects	Ratio of strategic projects' achieved values	Total achieved value defined by AIR 2021
PA3	OI/3.2 Number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised	139	15.44%	900	140	18.11%	773

Taking into consideration the current achieved values, some differences can be observed. Since the WASIDCA project has not been closed yet, the submitted achieved value is zero. Despite all that the achieved value of strategic projects under *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system* gives the quarter of the total achieved value as the BABECA projects has already completed its target goal under this indicator. Furthermore, the progress of the *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* indicator's fulfilment has not advanced significantly, that is why the ratio of Kübekháza-Rabe is 50% under this indicator. Slight difference is noticeable in the case of *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events*, where the ratio of ColourCoop is 18%. Although, these values are not the final, since many regular projects and the WASIDCA have not ended yet, and these projects will provide further increase. Owing to this, the contribution of the strategic projects to the total achieved values will change under the *OI/1.2 New or improved water management system*, *OI/2.1 Improved or newly built border crossing points* and *OI/3.2 Joint cultural, recreational and other community events*, however the results of *OI/2.2 Newly built roads* and *OI/2.5 Railway line directly affected by development plans* are final.

Beyond the concrete relevance of the selected projects, the tool of strategic projects could have an additional role from the point of view of integrated cross-border developments. However, the programme did not contain the tools of CLLD and ITI, in addition there were no actions forming part of an ITI project financed by other Operative Programmes, strategic projects had the features to potentially enlarge the timely and territorial horizon of the cross-border projects leading to a greater impact on the region. Despite of this potential, only two out of the five projects, the ColourCoop has a moderate, while BABECA a stronger impact on the integrated approach by having implemented several different activities strengthening and complementing each other in a synergic way. In addition, it also foresees further activities continuing the activities to be started. The other four projects remained standalone, instead of creating a higher degree of complexity in terms of activities

and involved partners. At the same time, when evaluating this aspect, it must be taken into account, that the border represents the external frontiers of the EU, where interactions are largely hindered by several legal and administrative obstacles. This leads to a complex environment for the integrated interventions, that is the reason why such measures are mostly known from the highly integrated internal EU borders.

Besides the integrated approach, the tool of strategic project also affects the programme's role in citizens' involvement, which is an important factor when evaluating its real cross-border character and impact. The ability to involve people from the border region to the implementation of the programme basically determines the quality of cooperation and the internal cohesion of a border region. According to the experiences, citizens' involvement can be reached the most effectively through smaller initiatives. In this term, strategic projects have a negative counter-effect, since they absorbed a remarkable ratio, 40% of the available resources, which takes the value of 76 average-sized traditional projects. In addition, PA1 and PA2 included activities favouring the professional cooperation of larger institutions while PA4 has a limited scope concentrating on SME support. Therefore, small-scale projects initiated by less experienced beneficiaries, such as municipalities, NGOs and other stakeholders had to compete for the resources of the PA3 which represented less than 25% of the total budget decreased further by the amount dedicated to strategic project. In order to compensate this inequality, programme bodies called for such small initiatives within PA3 during the second and third calls for proposals. Altogether 4.9 million EUR were planned to allocate to cultural, sport, leisure and community events, as well as to minor nature protection initiatives with a value of 40 000-200 000 EUR per project. Altogether 44 such projects were selected and contracted with an average value of 161 000 EUR.

As a conclusion, it seems that strategic projects provide financial framework essential large investments, hereby they significantly improve to the cross-border impact of the programme. At the same time, they distract a remarkable amount from small initiatives serving the active participation of local stakeholders and citizens in cross-border interactions. Therefore, a more balanced distribution between the strategic and small-scale initiatives are advised for the next programming periods, even taking into consideration the set-up of a so-called small project fund.

4.4.2 Summary of the cost efficiency assessments

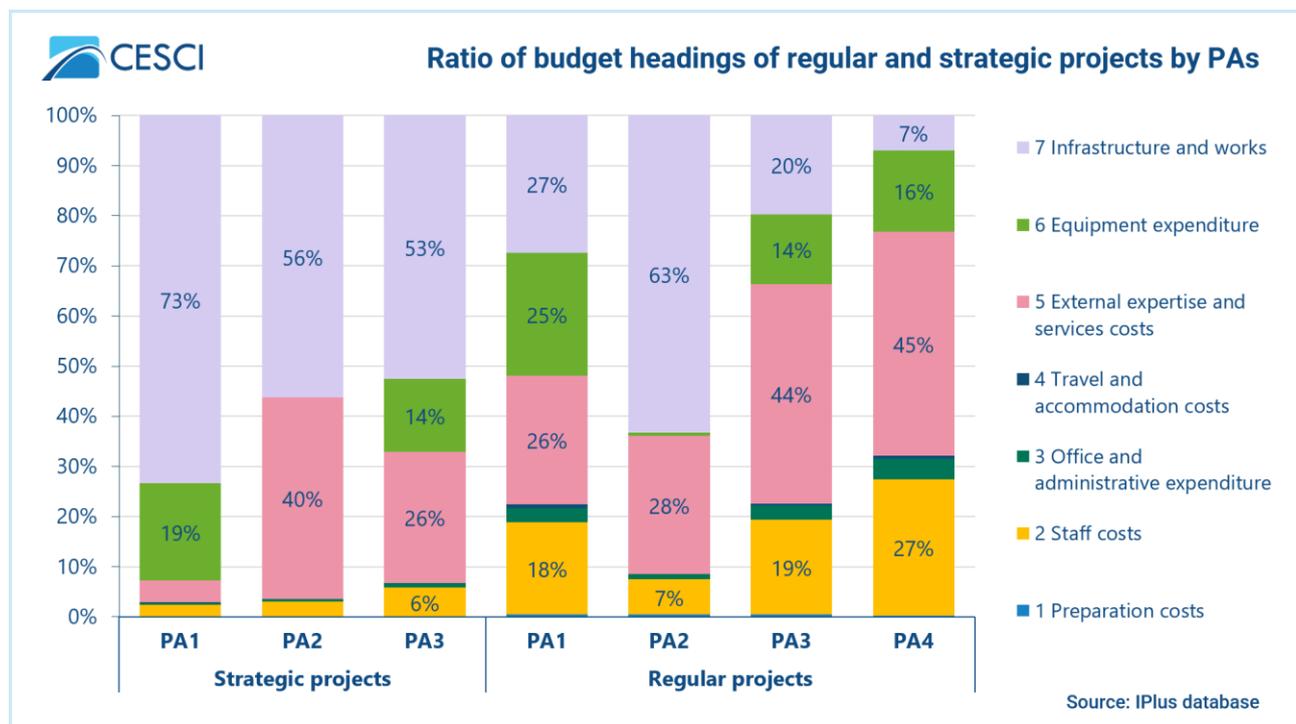
Cost efficiency assessment of the projects was carried out for each PA, which intended to point out the most important PA-specific features of the topic. In this chapter, evaluators conclude the most important lessons learnt of these examinations, as well as point out some cross-cutting and programme-level issues.

The average size of the projects from a financial point of view for the examined programming period is 5 324 099.36 EUR in the case of the strategic projects, and 349 999.04 EUR for the regular ones. Compared to the 281 535.88 EUR value of the previous programming period, even the regular projects represent a remarkably higher value, but it is not surprising taking into consideration the total number of contracted projects in the two periods (204 projects between 2007-2013 and 121 in the examined period).

The achievement of the indicators' target values from the available programme budget went smoothly, even more in several cases overachievement have been performed (see at the PA-specific chapters). The cost-efficiency of this performance was intended to be assessed through the calculation of specific indicator values reflecting on the expenses related to the achievement of a certain indicator unit, which shall be compared to the results of similar assessments from other border regions. In addition, further assessment was carried out based on the detailed analysis of the projects' financial allocations.

Regarding the share of budget headings, it can be said that in case of the strategic projects, hard elements (infrastructure and works and equipment expenditures) plays the major role under each PA, but the procurement of external services has also a significant share in case of the PA2 and 3. For PA2 it is reasoned by the high share of technical planning activities related to transport infrastructure, which obviously cannot be performed by the project partners. Of course, this statement is also valid for the regular projects within the PA.

Figure 202: Ratio of budget headings of regular and strategic projects by PAs

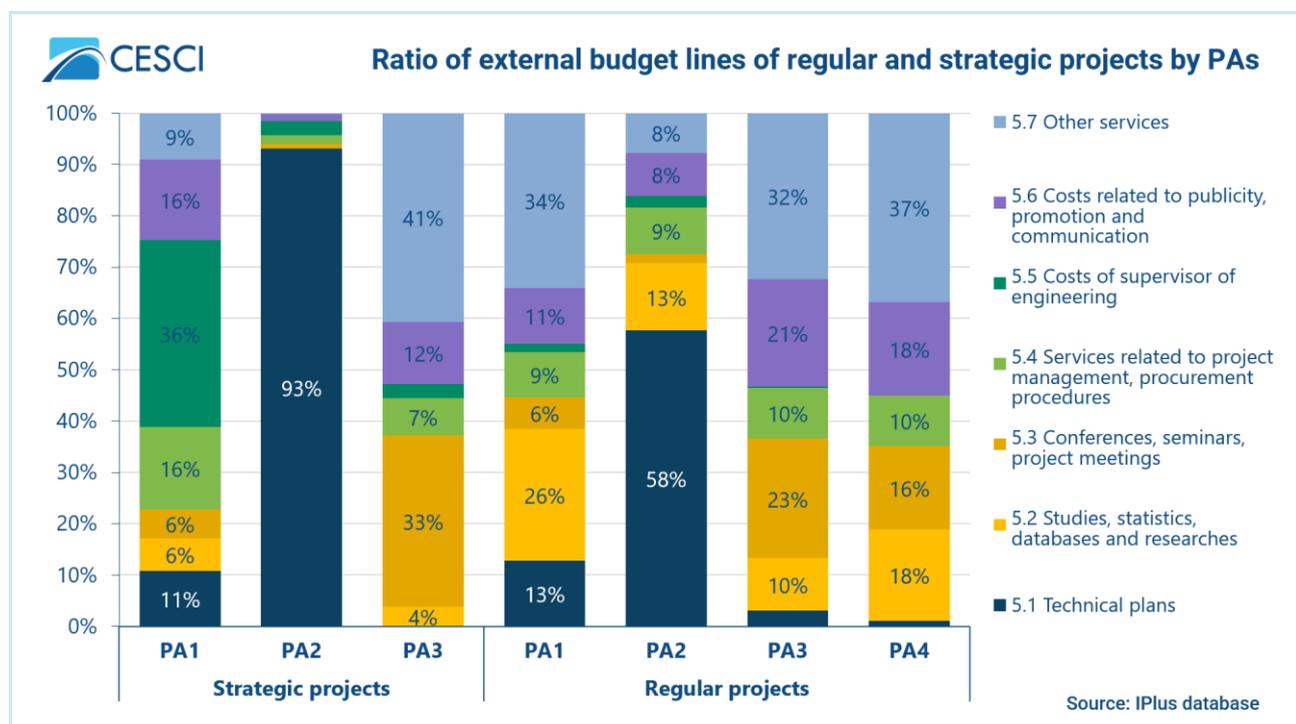


Focusing on the external services and expertise budget line both for the strategic and regular projects PA3 and PA4 shows many similarities. The relatively high share of this budget heading can be partly reasoned by the projects' major focus on the organization of different kind of events (cultural, sport, leisure events, trainings, workshops, etc.) and the strong need for the involvement of the target groups (tourists, local residents for PA3 and SMEs, social entrepreneurs for PA4). The cost items related to these activities are mainly covered through budget lines 5.3 (services concerning event organisation such as hall rent, catering, etc.) and 5.6 (PR and marketing services, fee of ads, etc.) as external elements.

On the other hand, together also with PA1, cost allocation to procured studies, researches, as well as other services has a significant share. Among other services, translation and interpretation services and IT developments and related services tend to appear in several cases within each of the 3 PAs.

The procurement of translation and/or interpretation services was included in the beneficiaries' budget as a separate cost item in case of 68 projects out of the 118, amounting 339 617.69 EUR altogether. In addition, such expenses have been also allocated by the beneficiaries in other ways, like as part of (bi- or tri-lingual) document writings or development of such marketing and IT products, therefore the total amount dedicated to translation and interpretation is expected to be higher than the mentioned one. As a conclusion, costs could be reduced if the language barriers would be reduced.

Figure 203: Ratio of external budget lines of regular and strategic projects by PAs



Regarding the IT measures, a great number of tools, like digital event calendars, tourist guide mobile application, digital exhibition spaces, open-source early-warning system as well as e-commerce platforms have been developed. On the one hand, based on the available information it is not easy to determine whether they represent a good value for money from a technical point of view; but it is also questionable to which extent will these tools be able to perform their functions. In order to reach the target group and make them use the different platforms, significant community development, marketing and PR actions are needed not just in the starting, but in later phases too. These obviously require human resources with adequate skills and dedicated time on the tasks or financial resources to sub-contract these activities. In case of the tourism- or culture-related applications and tools, it is also a question whether tourists and visitors have the willingness to download or use (even some of) the many separate platforms (for instance, many event calendars have been developed, each with different thematic focus, or many applications for thematic tours in the region). According to the evaluators, these aspects raise some durability questions, which also

concerns the cost efficiency aspect, since even the beneficiaries reach great tools from proportionate financial resources, the potential under-use by the consumers could make these unsustainable.

Reasonability and sustainability concerns raise also in case of the sub-contracted studies, surveys and researches in some cases. Within PA1, the questions rather targets whether the outsourcing of some activities was reasonable or not taking into consideration the professional capacities of the beneficiaries, while in the case of PA3 and PA4 quality and sustainability concerns have been formulated. For instance, many thematic action plans, strategies or market researches were performed, the quality of which can be hardly assessed by the evaluators. In addition, the exploitation of the content of these documents by the beneficiaries in the short and long-run is also questionable. (Again, documents made for the drawers are not cost-efficient.)

One question could be whether the beneficiaries have the appropriate skills to utilize both the IT tools and the procured documents, as well as any further project outcome. One way of reflecting on this topic could be the analysis of internal staff cost allocations. Evaluators found, that 1 project did not allocated any amount to internal project management (budget line 2.1, in addition 41 projects (out of the 118) did to the same in case of internal professional staff cost (budget line 2.2), 28 of which is belonging to the PA3, while another 6 for PA4 and 5 for PA2. In theory, the latter one means that all the professional activities have been outsourced during the project implementation. In case of PA3 it should be noted that the division of professional and management types of activities for event organization is not as obvious as it is in case of the other PAs. There are no such projects in the programme which did not allocated money for internal staff cost at all. In general, the share of internal staff cost compared to the external expertise both in terms of professional and management activities is around 70%.

As a conclusion of this aspect of cost efficiency, in the evaluation phase, it is not easy to assess the reasonability, the quality and the long-term sustainability of the externalised core or professional activities. In addition, this issue was mentioned among the feedbacks of the quality assessors together with a proposal on that the application form should give more emphasis on the justification of the particular budget items. In the evaluators point of view, this could contribute to the work of both the quality assessors and evaluators.

As last aspect of the external expertise and services budget heading, allocations to project management and procurement services (budget line 5.4) was analysed. As the figure (*Figure 203*) shows, the share of this category is in the 7-16% range, except for the strategic projects of the PA2. Majority of the belonging cost items covers services related to the PraG public procurement framework, which have been identified as a problematic point of the programme implementation by both the programme bodies and the beneficiaries. 105 projects out of the 118 directly procured external services to handle tendering activities, but others referring to project management services in their budget might also sub-contracted these activities. The budget items covering the externalised public procurement expertise amount 1 102 559.43 EUR, which is more than 3 times higher than the value of an average project. This obviously leads to the conclusion, that in order to improve cost efficiency, programme bodies should consider the provision of such expertise inside the programme management structure.

Last, but not least, it is worth mentioning that travel and accommodation cost allocations have been significantly cut by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which lead to cost-efficiency to

some extent thanks to the on-line meeting opportunities. The positive impact of the improvement in the digitalisation and the changes in the mindset of the beneficiaries (willingness to communicate on-line) should be preserved on the long-run, but the importance of face-to-face, on the spot interactions in a cross-border framework should also be kept in mind.

4.4.3 Assessment of the technical assistance

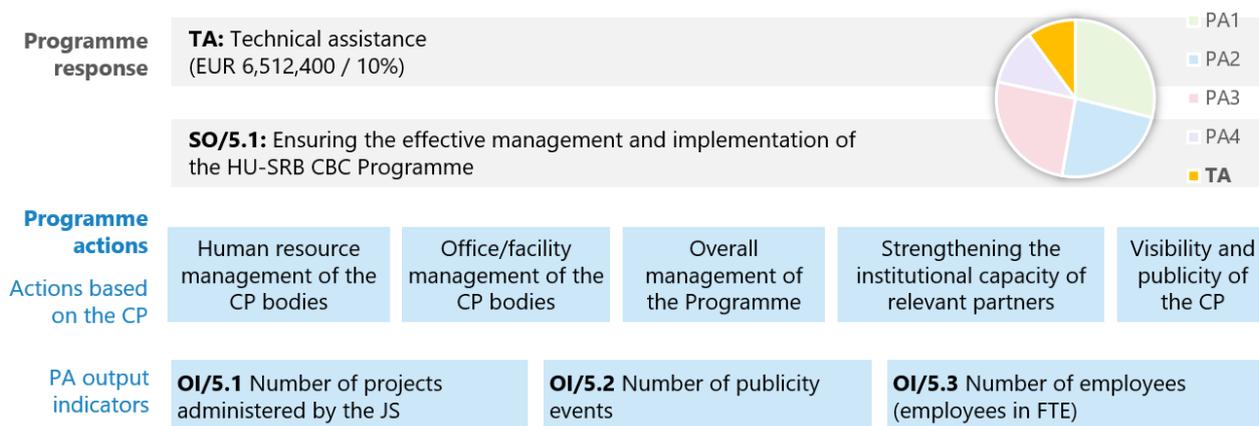
4.4.3.1 Short introduction of the TA Priority axis

In this short subchapter the intervention logic of PA5 (TA) is presented in order to show at the very beginning of the evaluation what was the aim of the programme with the given PA. The programme allocated an amount of 6 512 400 EUR to this PA, which gave 10% of the total budget. The biggest part of this sum was allocated to preparation, implementation, monitoring and inspection (5 209 920 EUR), while 651 240 EUR was provided to evaluation and studies, and the same amount of contribution was allocated to information and communication. The main specific objective of the technical assistance is to ensure the effective management and implementation of the HUSRB CBC Programme, thereby the PA5 provided the support of the programme’s management.

To guarantee the smooth management of the programme, five actions have been formulated, out of which the first one targeted the support of human resource management of the CP bodies (selection and training of employees, internal and external staff training, mobility management etc.); the second one related to office/facility management of the CP bodies (procurement of small, daily use office items, higher-cost office equipment and IT systems, etc.); the third one ensured the overall management of the programme (technical support of working group meetings, procurement of expert services and studies, costs of first level control, etc.); the fourth one strengthened the institutional capacity of relevant partners (workshops, training sessions, coordination and networking, etc.); whereas the last one provided the visibility and publicity of the CP (development and implementation of the programme’s communication plan, etc.).

Besides, three output indicators were named under this PA, which indicates the number of administrated projects (OI/5.1), the number of publicity events (OI/5.2) and the number of employees in FTE (OI/5.3).

Figure 204: Intervention logic of TA



4.4.3.2 Quantitative analysis of the TA

In general, the PA aims to support the implementation, monitoring and audit of the Cooperation Programme, to ensure its visibility and to strengthen the capacity of the involved partners from the border regions. Both in the previous and current programming periods, the Technical Assistance Priority Axis was implemented according to a project-based approach. It means, that the programme management activities, funded by the TA, were structured in “TA project proposals” which were approved by the Joint Monitoring Committee. As the following table (*Table 73*) illustrates, the TA projects covers the operation of all programme management bodies:

Table 73: Detailed information about the TA projects

Project ID	Name of the project	Beneficiary	Start date	End date	Total budget (EUR)	EU contribution (85%) (EUR)
HUSR TA/01	Core activities of the Interreg-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Hungary-Serbia (JS)	Széchenyi Programme Office Consulting and Service Nonprofit Limited Liability Company (HU)	January 1, 2016	December 31, 2023	5 077 527.00	4 315 897.95
HUSR TA/03	Operation of Certifying Authority (CA) in Budapest	Hungarian State Treasury (HU)	January 1, 2016	December 31, 2023	100 000.00	85 000.00
HUSR TA/04	Audit activities of the Audit Authority (AA)	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds (HU)	January 1, 2016	December 31, 2023	337 000.00	286 450.00
HUSR TA/05	Establishment and operation of JS Antenna	Ministry of European Integration (SRB)	January 1, 2016	December 31, 2023	466 500.00	396 525.00
HUSR TA/06	Establishment and operation of the control system and other national activities in Hungary (FLC)	Széchenyi Programme Office Consulting and Service Nonprofit Limited Liability Company (HU)	January 1, 2015	December 31, 2023	1 231 320.00	1 046 622.00
HUSR TA/07	Establishment and operation of the control system in Serbia (FLC)	Ministry of Finance, Government of the Republic of Serbia Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (SRB)	January 1, 2016	December 31, 2023	292 800.00	248 880.00
HUSR TA/08	External expertise and services provided for the National Authority of Hungary and operational costs	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (HU)	January 1, 2016	December 31, 2023	90 000.00	76 500.00
HUSR TA/09	External expertise and services provided for the National Authority (NA) of Serbia	Ministry of European Integration (SRB)	January 1, 2016	December 31, 2023	66 500.00	56 525.00
Total					7 661 647.00	6 512 399.95

In line with Article 94 of the IPA Implementing Regulation 718/2007⁹⁷ 10% of the Cooperation Programme budget was allocated to Technical Assistance which was fully contracted within the framework of the TA projects (100% allocation rate).

Table 74: Allocation and absorption rates of TA projects

Total CP target value (EUR)	Total TA target value (EUR)	Contracted TA budget (EUR)	Allocation rate	Amount of validated TA costs (EUR)	Absorption rate
76 616 470	7 661 647.00	7 661 647.00	100%	3 959 879	52%

However, the implementation of the Programme, as well as the TA projects are going smoothly, the absorption rate of the PA is only 52%. It means that only slightly more than half of the amount contracted to TA projects were reported and approved by the JMC by the end of the first quarter of 2022. According to the new on-line reporting tool, the INTERREG+, in case of some TA projects there is a delay in the reporting progress, but it still seems that programme bodies have difficulties with the allocation of the projects' budget. These difficulties are mainly reasoned by the protracted COVID-19 pandemic through and concerns the travel and accommodation and the external service costs of the programme bodies.

Table 75: Absorption rate and the date of the last approved and submitted reports by TA projects

Project acronym	Absorption rate	End date of the last approved report	End date of the last submitted report
HUSRB TA/01 CORE TA	53.39%	September 30, 2021	September 30, 2021
HUSRB TA/03 TA CA	54.14%	December 31, 2020	December 31, 2020
HUSRB TA/04 TA AA	36.83%	March 31, 2021	June 30, 2021
HUSRB TA/05 TA JSA	60.92%	December 31, 2021	December 31, 2021
HUSRB TA/06 TA HU FLC	49.46%	September 30, 2021	September 30, 2021
HUSRB TA/07 TA SRB FLC	57.68%	December 31, 2021	December 31, 2021
HUSRB TA/08 TA HU NA	0%	December 31, 2020	December 31, 2020
HUSRB TA/09 TA SRB NA	12.78%	December 31, 2021	December 31, 2021

According to the interviews with the representatives of the programme bodies, there is no major problems with the reporting and the absorption of the funds, they evaluate the implementation of the TA projects sound. Only the Serbian NA indicated a slight delay in the reporting compared to their plans, but it does not decisively affect the implementation of their TA project. In addition, the budget remaining from the cancelled travels and procurements is planned to partly be spent by the end of the 2014-2022 programming period (e.g. procurement of equipment), in addition there is the opportunity take over the remaining part to the next period ('silent transition'). This was also confirmed in the interviews, as based on the MA's preliminary estimates and resource planning, an

⁹⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02007R0718-20151121>

expected 92% of spending is foreseen. However, considering the common goal to relieve the significantly reduced costs of the next period as many programme preparatory tasks as possible should be carried out at the expense of the 2014-2020 TA, it is more than likely that the entire fund will be spent.

In spite of the delay in the financial progress, the achievement of the TA output indicators' target values have been already outperformed by the cut-off date according to the approved project reports. Since the implementation of the TA projects are going to last until the end of 2023, in addition the reporting progress is in a delay, the actual values of the output indicators may change.

Regarding the number of projects administered, the contracting procedures of the selected projects is still in progress in the time of the elaboration of this evaluation, but it is expected that 121 projects will be funded from the programme in total. Since the third CfP was the last one in the programming period, further publicity events are not expected. The number of employees may change in the remaining time until the end of the programming period, but at the moment, according to the stakeholders, the capacities of the JS and the JSA are at an appropriate level.

Table 76: Baseline, target and actual values by output indicators under TA

ID	Indicator name	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Target value	Actual value
OI/5.1	Number of projects administered	Number of projects	0	100	109
OI/5.2	Number of publicity events	Number of events	0	5	12
OI/5.3	Number of employees	Full-Time Equivalent	0	8	10.04

The efficiency of the programme bodies' operation can be assessed through the analysis of the costs of the Technical Assistance PA of the current and previous programmes. 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 programme level administration of 1 (thematic) project.

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 is 4 836 343.18 EUR, which represents 63.12% of the total TA and 6.31% of the total Programme budget. Because of the lack of data, the evaluators were not able to calculate the indicator for the previous programming period. However, comparing the values to those of the Slovakia – Hungary Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2014-2020 (67% and 4% 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 with that of the Hungary – Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013.

Table 77: Costs of the TA Priority axis of the current and previous programmes

	2007-2016⁹⁸ (n+3)	Expected values for the 2014-2023 period (n+3)	Actual values for 2014-2021
TA budget (EUR)	5 895 580.00	7 661 648.00	3 959 879
Number of closed and on-going projects	204 + 7 TA projects	118 ⁹⁹ + 8 TA projects	118 ¹⁰⁰ + 8 TA projects
Specific administrative cost ratio (EUR/project)	27 941.14	60 806.73	31 427.61

As a result, the validated TA cost per project (31 427.61) is quite similar to the value calculated for the last 2007-2013 programming period (27 941.14), but in case we consider the low absorption rate of the PA and apply the expected values for both the number of projects and the total TA budget for the n+3 period, the specific administrative cost ratio for the 2014-2020 period (60 806.73) is more than double as much as it was in the previous period. Obviously, this is reasoned by the fact that the total budget of the programme increased by 30% from one programming period to the other, while the number of projects is significantly lower. At the same time, the strategic projects, as well as the increased value and complexity of the regular projects in the analysed period leads to higher assistance needs from the programme bodies which may reasons the higher administrative cost ratio on the one hand.

4.4.3.3 Qualitative analysis of the TA

4.4.3.3.1 *Capacity and lead time assessment*

The management structure of the programme has not changed since the elaboration of the 1st Phase Evaluation. The list of authorities and bodies taking part in the implementation of the Cooperation Programme and their role can be read in Annex 1.

Nevertheless, there were some changes in the membership of Joint Monitoring Committee, which is responsible for the supervision and monitoring of the Programme implementation, and the selection of the projects. It still consists of national and regional (county or province) level public actors from both sides of the border, as well as an association of towns and municipalities from the Serbian side as voting members. Among the observer members, besides some programme bodies, the European level, NGOs and the economic sector is represented.

⁹⁸ Final Evaluation Report for the On-going Programme Evaluation of the Hungary – Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013

⁹⁹ expected number of funded projects

¹⁰⁰ actual number of funded projects based on the INTERREG+

Table 78: Members of the Joint Monitoring Committee

Type of membership	Hungarian members	Serbian members	EU members
Voting members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NA), • Bács-Kiskun County, • Csongrád County, • Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, • Ministry of Finance, • Ministry of Agriculture, • Ministry of Interior, • Ministry of National Development, Department for Transport Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of European Integration, Government of the Republic of Serbia (NA), • Government of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, • Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, • Ministry of Internal Affairs, • Ministry of Foreign Affairs, • Ministry of Environmental Protection, • Ministry of Economy, • Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, • Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, • Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management 	
Observers without voting right	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSEMETE Nature and Environment Protection Association, • Social Cooperation for Bácsalmás, • Secretariat of the Danube Region Strategy Ministerial Commissioner, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, • Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Budapest Danube Contact Point, • Hungarian State Treasury (CA), • Directorate General for Audit of European Funds (AA) • Széchenyi Programme Office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, • The Office for Cooperation with Civil Society, • Ministry of European Integration Republic of Serbia, • Ministry of Human and minority rights and Social dialogue, • Governmental Audit Office of EU Funds of the Republic of Serbia, • Joint Secretariat Antenna 	EU Commission

Regarding one of the main factors of efficiency, the design and use of capacities were analysed, also in light of the findings in the first phase. The capacity assessment has two dimensions: one is about the description of the available capacities and their needs in terms of skills, professional experiences and development needs; while the other focuses on the way these capacities are utilised. Besides the capacities, the efficiency of the procedures applied and the model of their timing was also assessed

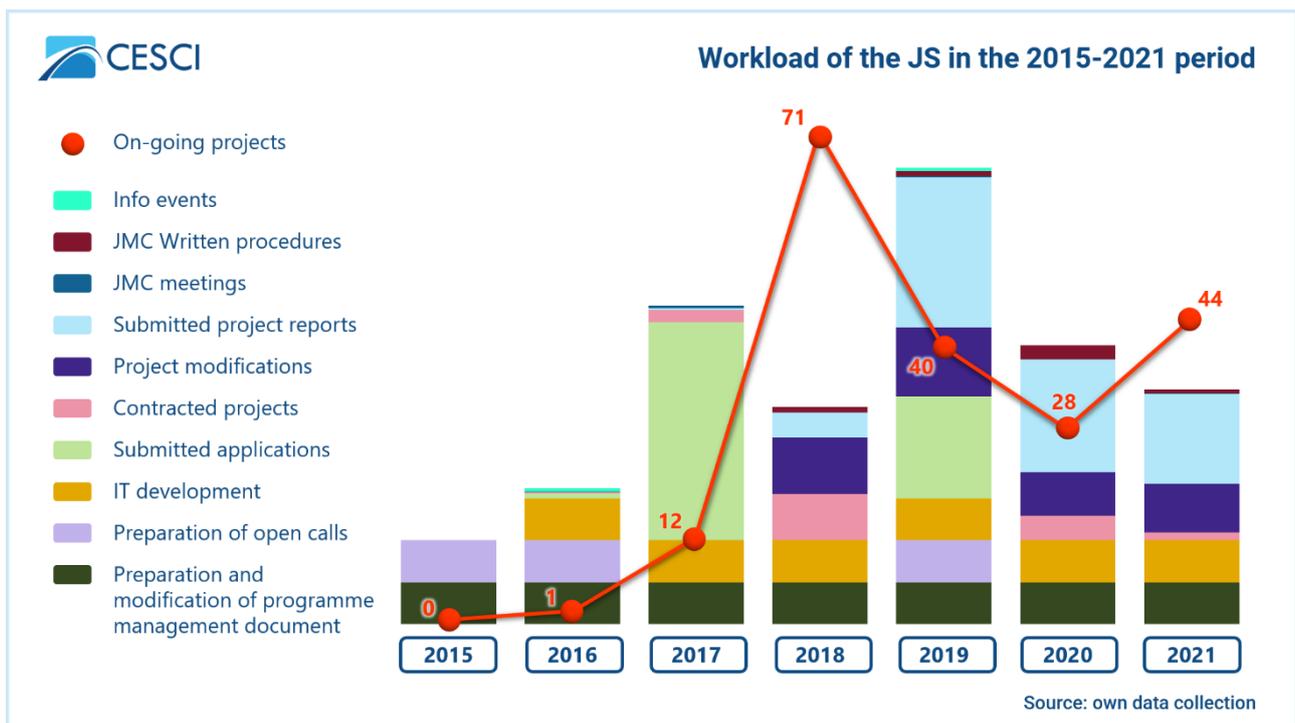
(lead time assessment) through examining the operation of the particular bodies and the relevant consequences of their cooperation.

In the period covered by the 1st Phase Evaluation, some programme bodies including the MA, the JS and the Serbian FLC faced with more and less serious capacity and skill shortages. Since then, efforts have been made to handle the problems, and improvements have been reached in most of the cases according to the recent interviews.

At the Managing Authority, in spite of the personal changes at the department, the available capacities are much closer to the optimal as it was in 2018. Instead of 5, only one more staff member would be necessary for better dealing with data management, monitoring and reporting issues. The workload during the examined period seemed to be manageable, however there have been clearly a peak period since the planning for the next CP started and run parallel with the implementation and accounting of the present Programme. The National Authority confirmed that it has the right capacity for the efficient programme management. Its workload is in correspondence with that of the MA.

The Joint Secretariat reported on an appropriate number of staff members having the necessary skills. At the moment, the JS operates with eight employees: the head and the deputy head of the JS, four programme managers, one programme and financial manager and one office manager. There were also personal changes in the staff since the previous evaluation, but it has not caused any difficulties in the efficient operation and implementation of the programme. During the programming period, the communication tasks were fully delegated to the JS Antenna, where one communication manager and a programme manager are employed.

Figure 205: Workload of the JS in the 2015-2021 period



Regarding the workload of the Joint Secretariat and the JSA, higher load can be detected at the time of the project contracting phases, as well as the reporting and modification procedures during the project implementation led to peak periods, especially when these tasks are overlapped. As the figure (Figure 205) illustrates, the JS's workload was the highest in 2019 when the reporting of the 1st (longer strategic projects) and 2nd calls for proposals intensified, at the same time the preparation, open and close of the 3rd CfP was realised. During that year, the JS has approved 179 project reports (6 times more than in 2018) with the value of 12 403 131.41 EUR (9 times more than in the previous year (1 361 839.60 EUR), in addition assisted in the submission of 121 applications through the on-line monitoring system. 2020 and 2021 was the year heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, however, it did not lack in activities and spending. 29 out of the 40 selected projects in the 3 CfP signed the subsidy contracts in 2020, as well as the JS has approved 134 project reports in the value of 24 921 328.19 EUR. In 2021 7 subsidy contracts were signed, and the JS approved 107 project reports (PRs) in the value of 15 359 345.92 EUR. In spite of the peak periods, the colleagues of the JS found the period since the 1st Phase Evaluation manageable in terms of the available capacities.

The European Commission encourages the involvement of intermediary bodies, but according to the JS and the MA, it would make the processes more difficult, and would mean a higher workload for the Secretariat.

On the first control level, there were huge difficulties in terms of human capacities on the Serbian side. According to the interviewees, FLC meant a real bottleneck in the implementation of the projects in Serbia. On the one hand, there was a lack of capacity because of the limitation of the dedicated TA budget: only 3 first-level controllers were employed within the framework of the TA and responsible for the present CP, which was less than half of the necessary capacity. In order to manage the tasks, they needed to involve further 4-5 civil servants from the Ministry of Finance, who tended to work on several EU programmes, hereby they had no specific knowledge and experiences on the CP. Even so, 1-3 months delays in the project reporting periods used to happen mainly during the implementation of the projects selected in the 1st and 2nd calls for proposals because of the relatively high number of Serbian beneficiaries. In addition, the relatively high delays in the controlling procedures can be also reasoned by the mistakes made by the beneficiaries: lack of or incomplete mandatory documents, their submission after the deadlines. On the other hand, fluctuation also hardened the efficient work of the FLC body, which was caused mainly by the low level of salaries and the temporary contracts which significantly decreased the motivation of the controllers, as well as meant a disadvantage during the recruitments. These factors, together with the essential requirements regarding the skills (financial management, accounting, public procurement (PraG) and national legislation on the employment rules for public servants, travel and construction laws, etc.) made it difficult to find appropriate staff members for the long run. As a result, the continuity of control was hurt in the case of several projects, it was not unprecedented that 3-4 different controllers worked on one single project during its lifetime because of the fluctuation. Consequently, there was an obvious need for structural reorganisation which have started according to the interviewees. The Hungarian FLC did not reported on any deficiency concerning its capacities and workload.

In terms of the cooperation between the programme bodies, the joint work can be assessed sound and efficient based on the interviews. The management bodies are basically satisfied with the level

and form of cooperation also taken into consideration the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviewees mentioned that the communication within the bodies and management units works properly, thanks to the tight formal and informal connections. However, there are still a couple of issues, which leave room for improvement.

One of them is the involvement of the National Authority in the risk management of the programme implementation. According to the interviewee, it would be beneficial to consult the content of the risk management plan with the NA in order to have a wider perspective when determining the aspects of risk management (besides financial issues, political, sustainability and ad-hoc externalities should be considered).

The second point is the definition of the JS Antenna's role in the management framework. JSA is contracted to the Serbian National Authority, but shares tasks with the Joint Secretariat, which lead to asymmetries in the expectations that might create possibilities in the future for a more clear division of tasks.

The third point of cooperation between the management bodies to be improved concerns the Hungarian and Serbian FLC bodies. The national actors are not in direct contact with each other, it is the Joint Secretariat who mediate between them if it is necessary. As a result, there is a significant asymmetry in the first level control procedures on the two sides of the border, which directly affects the beneficiaries and the efficiency of the projects' implementation. The details of this asymmetry will be analysed in the next chapter.

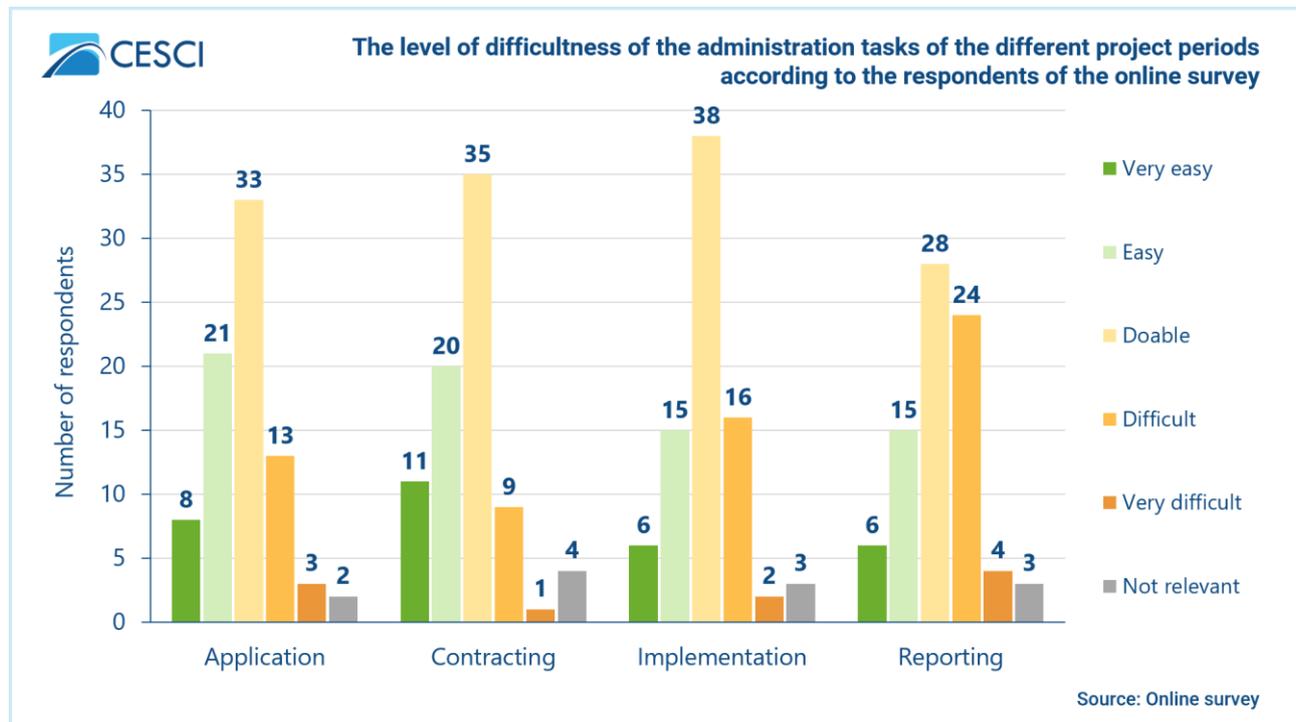
4.4.3.3.2 Assessment of procedures of the project cycle

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
- Developing the proposal (Potential Beneficiaries)
- Submission of project proposals (Potential Lead Beneficiary)
- Formal Assessment of the projects (JS)
- Quality Assessment of the projects (External Assessment Experts)
- Decision-making (JMC)
- Contracting process (MA, JS, FLC, Lead Beneficiary and Beneficiaries)
- Project implementation (Lead Beneficiary, Beneficiaries, JS, FLC)
 - Reporting via Progress Reports 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 expenditure (FLC)
- Presenting the results (Lead Beneficiary, Beneficiaries, JS)

From the answers to the online survey, it seems that the level of difficultness of the administrative tasks of the different project periods very mostly judged to be doable by the respondents. By far the reporting seemed to be the most difficult followed by the implementation itself, while the contracting posed the least number of problems for those applicants who filled out the survey.

Figure 206: The level of difficultness of the administration tasks of the different project periods according to the respondents of the online survey



Regarding the programme procedure-related difficulties respondents faced with during the project lifespan, the high level of bureaucracy both in the application and implementation phases (mainly concerning the reporting and contract modification procedures), as well as the lengthiness of these procedures were mentioned by 11 respondents. Most of the times, the beneficiaries criticise the huge amount of paperwork and the difficult filling of administrative documents. In addition, the time gap between the application and implementation phase were problematic because of the significant increase in the prices, while the long waiting times during the controlling and reporting caused liquidity problems for many beneficiaries. Furthermore, one of the respondents proposed to have 6-months long reporting periods (instead of 4), which might be equally effective and it would lower the bureaucratic burden for both the beneficiaries and the programme bodies.

Regarding the first level controlling, more beneficiaries and also the programme authorities expressed their experiences on the asymmetries of the procedures on the two sides of the border. On the one hand, there are significant delays in the Serbian side which are rooted in the capacity shortages mentioned in the previous chapter, but differences in the controlling procedure on the two sides also negatively affect the Serbian beneficiaries. Namely, in Hungary the FLC body consults with the beneficiaries during preparation of the reports in order to assist them in the completion of the programme requirements, thus making the approval of the reports more time-efficient. In contrary, the Serbian authority deals with the documentation only after the formal submission. This latter approach result in mistakes in the financial reports, the correction of which takes time because

of the formal procedure. At the end of the day, these differences in time at the Hungarian and Serbian beneficiaries cause problems in the timely implementation of the projects, as well as make the beneficiaries waiting longer period for the transfer of the related grant amount.

In general, it was also added by the interviewees that the number of on-the-spot checks by the controllers seems to be higher than necessary. Decreasing the number of visits would expectedly shorten the procedure, at the same time positively affected the workload of the FLC bodies.

In terms of the assessment procedure, programme management bodies also formulated some criticisms and proposals. According to the JS Antenna, the quality assessors are overburdened in some cases and do not have the capacity to deeply understand the projects or some aspects of them (e.g. sustainability). In addition, one of the JMC Members highlighted that the quality assessment tend to prioritise the technically well-prepared project proposals (quality of the documentation), instead of the quality of the ideas giving the core of the proposals. In order to handle these issues, it was proposed to involve the Joint Secretariat and the JS Antenna to the quality assessment procedure as advisory actors, since they have great experiences with the beneficiaries and projects. Furthermore, another member of the JMC suggested to provide some room for the JMC to assess the quality of the projects, e.g. by having the right to score the project proposals.

Taking into consideration the feedback of the quality assessors on the procedure, it was suggested to rethink the criteria of projects' rejections, and it would be also preferable to hold discussions among the assessors (with the involvement of the JS) about the strategy of the project assessment to clarify what kind of project should be preferred. One of the assessors highlighted that not all application forms could be assessed based on the questionnaire and in many cases the application form did not give answer to the given question. There was a finding to complement the project proposal with a LogFrame Matrix as a separate file in order to provide better overview of the intervention logic, which would ease not just the assessors' work, but it might improve the overview of the project from the applicants' side as well. Furthermore, assessors regard the budget plan as one of the most relevant information sources when understanding the project structure. In line with that, the appropriate justification of the cost items would be crucial from the applicants' side, which tend to lack in several cases.

The assessors had a clear point about the questions and scoring system: the evaluation was difficult because the 0-2 and 0-3 scoring scales could not provide chance to highlight the differences between the projects. The other mentioned issue was the huge number of questions which overlapped each other. All in all, the majority of the assessors suggested to have less questions with more points. With regard to the finalization of the assessment, the assessors' different point of view – which based on different methodological approach – caused the biggest challenge, since the given scores did not match in all cases. Owing to the communication and the mutual understanding of the evaluators, this problem was tackled in every case, but many of the assessors proposed closer cooperation and consultation before making their own final decisions to compare all aspects of the scoring in time.

Regarding the selection procedure, one of the JMC members welcomed the practice of presenting the project ideas at the meetings before the decision-making on selection, as well as the balanced selection procedure (having 1 vote for each member of the JMC). It was also proposed to involve the JMC only into contract modifications with substantial changes in the content. Otherwise, it should be the competency of the JS to decide on smaller modification requests. On behalf of the applicants,

one respondent of the survey mentioned that the reasoning of the rejection of the project proposal was unsatisfying.

4.4.3.3.3 Results of the simplification

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

- how the recommendations on simplification of the previous programme period 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 content of the previous examination, 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 online survey.

The following table (*Table 79*) lists the relevant recommendations drafted by the Final Evaluation Report of Hungary – Serbia IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 and identifies the responses given by the current programme by the time of the First and the Second Phase Evaluation. 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 79: List of the relevant recommendations and the identified responses

Recommendations	Response	
	1 st Phase Evaluation	2 nd Phase Evaluation
Online, electronic submission system	The IMIS 2014-2020 as online application and reporting tool was launched in line with the publication of the 2 nd CfP on 3 rd October 2016.	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.
Less/easier submission of supporting documents	The list of mandatory supporting documents is the same as it was in the last programming period. However, thanks to the IMIS 2014-2020, only scanned version must be uploaded during the application phase, instead of sending hard copies.	In the contracting phase, the electronic submission of the letters of commitment instead of hard copies was temporarily introduced for the third CfP because of the pandemic.

Recommendations	Response	
	1 st Phase Evaluation	2 nd Phase Evaluation
Shorter period for administration	After closing the particular project period, there are 90 calendar days for submitting the project partner report, then 45 calendar days for the first level control. Subsequently, the LB has 90 calendar days for submitting the project report, which must be approved within max. 60 calendar days. This means max. 240 calendar days between the end of the project period and the cost reimbursement.	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 the contracting phase, the electronic submission of the letter of commitments significantly shortened the length of contracting procedures.
Automatic project selection procedure for P2P projects	There are no automatic procedures.	No change.
Advance payment for beneficiaries	Projects automatically receive an advance payment in an amount of 15% of the total IPA support. In addition, Hungarian Beneficiaries also receive the amount of national co-financing in advance.	However, the rate of co-financing by the EC to the programmes have been temporarily modified to the 100% due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which in practice meant a pre-financing of the EU funds to the programme bodies, that did not affect the advance payments of the beneficiaries.
Simpler cost justification	Flat-rate opportunity in case of staff cost: 10% or 20% of direct costs other than staff cost. There is no need for documentation.	No change, but the share of beneficiaries applying the flat-rate option has gradually increased from one Cfp to the others.
	Mandatory flat-rate in case of administrative cost budget line: 15% of staff cost. There is no need for documentation.	No change.
Involving SMEs	SMEs are not eligible for direct support.	No change.

However, most of the challenges of the previous programming period were partly or fully addressed by the time of the First Phase Evaluation, and some further simplification measures have been introduced since then, there are still a lot to do both according to the programme bodies, as well as the beneficiaries.

Online, electronic submission system

At the time of the First Phase Evaluation, the experiences concerning the functioning of the IMIS 2014-2020 from both the programme management and the beneficiaries' sides were limited and negative because of the significant delay in its development and launch. It was seen as an overcomplicated system, which showed problems with its operation time to time. Then, after a longer error management period, its functionality could not be consolidated, the number of software errors was still higher than expected, especially in case of the implementation modules. 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 order to avoid the malfunctioning, as well as to cover the missing functions. In 2020, the so called INTERREG+ system started to gradually replace the IMIS 2014-2020. The newly selected projects of the third CfP were registered to the new system, therefore the Joint Secretariat and the two First Level Control Bodies started to test it. At the same time, each party also used the previous, IMIS 2014-2020 system for monitoring of the still running projects of the first and second calls for proposals. Later on, the data of all projects of the 2014-2020 programming period were at least partly migrated to the INTERREG+. The pace of installation and data migration affected the implementation of the projects, since many projects started in the old system and finished in the INTERREG+ and there was a gap period when the reporting was not possible due to the structural change of monitoring systems. The system has still not been completed yet, there are missing modules which were not necessary for this programming period (the third CfP was the last one in the programming period). Since it is planned to keep the system for the 2021-2027 period, the IT development will continue in the near future.

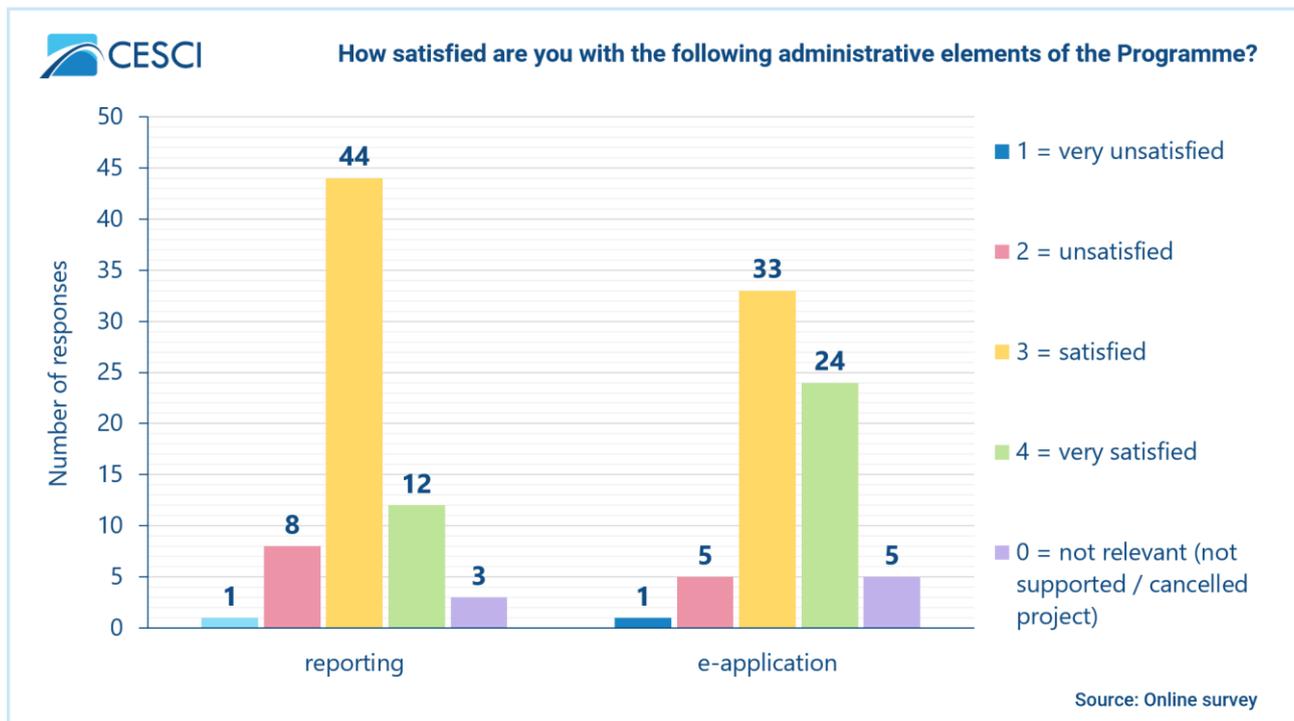
In the opinions of the programme managers and all the representatives of the programme authorities, the introduction of the new e-application and monitoring system has positively affected the programme implementation, since it eased the work of both the beneficiaries and the programme bodies by offering the missing functions which had needed many extra administrations previously (data gathering in many separate excel tables) on the side of all parties.

In the survey only one respondent experienced any malfunction of the INTERREG+, and two other comments were made concerning partly the online system. One of them refers to the complicated requirements of naming the uploaded documents when reporting staff cost, while another respondent indicated that the on-line reporting form and the uploading of related documents were ambiguous. In addition, the Serbian FLC colleagues formed practical remarks on the functioning of the system concerning the lack of 'download all' button for the documents of the beneficiary reports and of direct notification via e-mail to the controllers in case of the upload of any new content by the beneficiaries. Furthermore, programme impact evaluators faced problems concerning the database exported from the INTERREG+, because the system does not automatically generate some basic information (i.e. whether the report is a final one or not), instead it is the beneficiaries tasks' to do. The beneficiaries' contribution is monitored neither the INTERREG+ system, nor the JS, which occasionally lead some mistakes.

Shortening the administrative procedures

During the programming period, some attempts were made to simplify and shorten the administrative procedures, mainly by allowing of the electronic submission of the documents in all phases of the project life-cycle. In the survey, evaluators asked the beneficiaries to evaluate the application and reporting procedure. In terms of the e-application, 90% of the respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with the procedure, while the value is 86% in terms of the reporting procedure.

Figure 207: Satisfaction with the administrative procedures

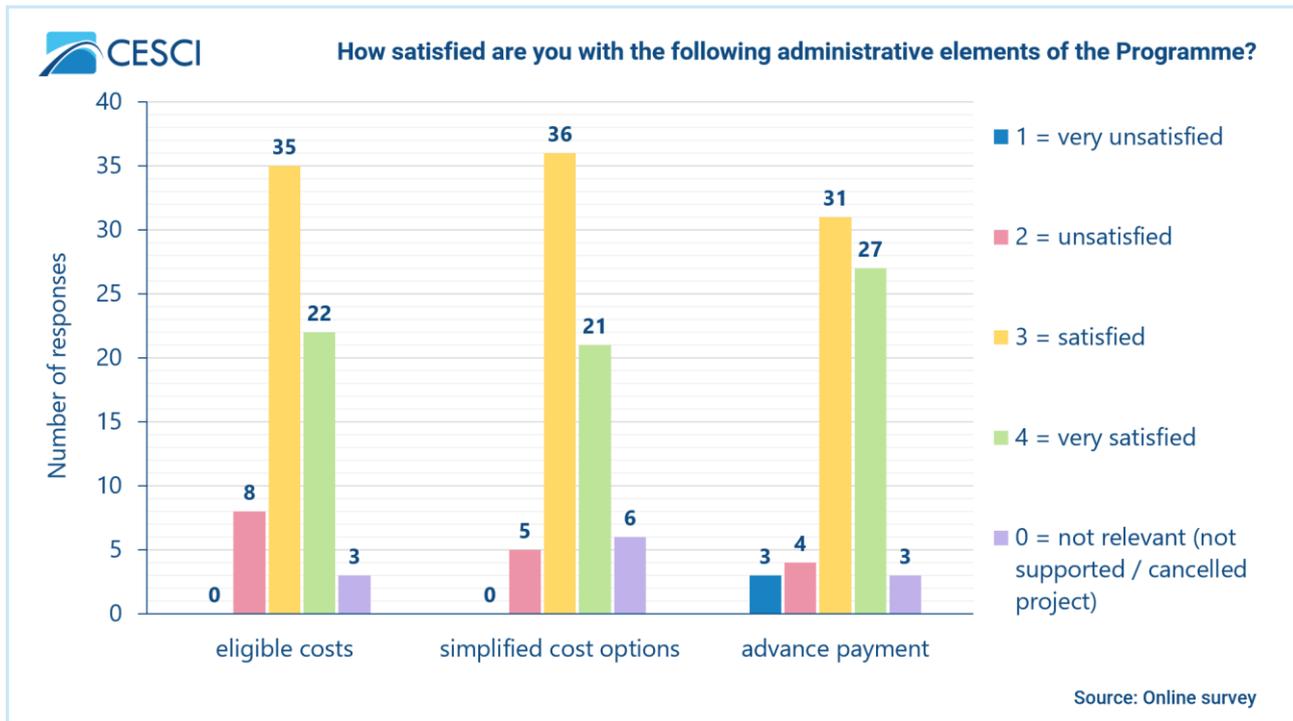


Looking into the answers of the unsatisfied beneficiaries, 4 respondents made a comment on the long time between the submission of the project proposals and the start date of the implementation, and one of them highlighted the delay in the contracting procedure. Regarding the reporting phase, the procedure itself have been found too bureaucratic by some of the respondents and the length of the controlling and the approval procedure caused liquidity problems because of the lack of pre-financing, mainly on the Serbian side. The Managing Authority also confirmed on the long reporting procedure based on the beneficiaries feedbacks towards them. The JS welcomed the electronic version of the letter of commitment from the Managing Authority. Previously it caused really long waiting times and hindered the contracting, but the digital version simplified and eased this process.

Eligible expenditures

In terms of the eligibility of expenditures, it seems that the beneficiaries are mostly satisfied with the current system. Only 11% of the respondents of the survey are unsatisfied with the eligible budget lines, in addition none of them drafted any exact critique or proposal on the topic.

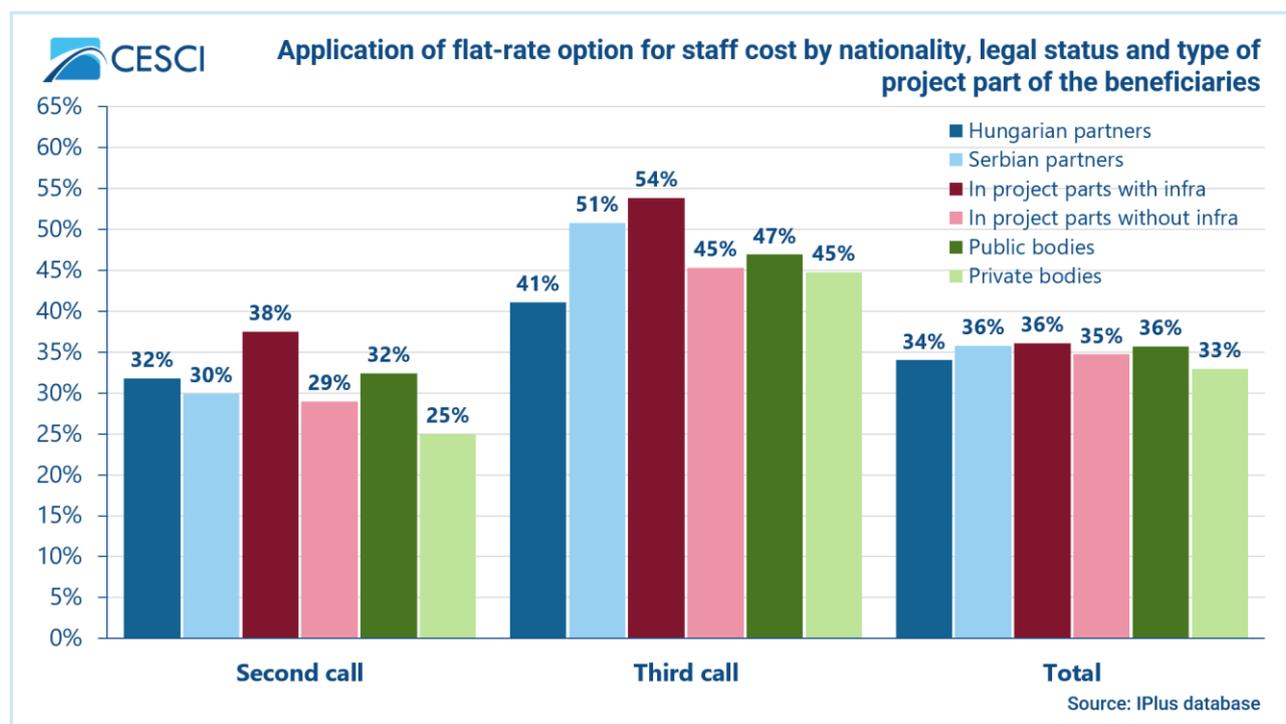
Figure 208: Satisfaction with the eligible expenditures



Simplified cost options

Because of the positive experiences from the programming period, the programme management bodies welcome the application of simplified cost options (flat-rate means simplification not just in the reporting, but monitoring processes, as well). The optional flat-rate for staff cost was barely applied in the first two calls for proposals, but in the last one almost half of the beneficiaries selected this simplified option. Regarding the whole programming period, there are no significant differences between the beneficiaries selecting flat-rate in terms of their nationality, legal status or the feature of their project parts (whether it contains infrastructure development or not).

Figure 209: Application of flat-rate option for staff cost by nationality, legal status and type of project part of the beneficiaries



According to the programme managers, those beneficiaries who have selected the flat-rate option were satisfied with the features of this simplification measure, while some of those who selected the real cost option expressed their regret to missing the simplified approach. The results of the survey also confirm the positive experiences: out of the 62 respondents concerned with SCOs, only 5 indicated their dissatisfaction, and more than half of them were satisfied and one-third of the respondents were very satisfied with the simplified cost options. In parallel, three further respondents of the survey indicated that the reporting of staff cost on a real cost basis has been time-intensive and complicated, while one other beneficiary expressed their wish to offer simplified reporting option for travel and accommodation expenses.

In line with the positive experiences on behalf of both the programme bodies and the beneficiaries, it is expected to keep the SCOs already applied in the actual programming period, as well as the JS works on the introduction of further simplified cost options for the next period.

Advance payments

The results of the interviews with the Serbian National Authority, the JMC members and some beneficiaries confirmed the findings drafted in the previous evaluation, according to which the lack of advance payment of national contribution on the Serbian side and the low rate (15%) of IPA pre-financing cause serious problems during the project implementation not just for the NGOs (since the NGOs did not get easily loan from the bank), but some smaller public bodies too. On the contrary, according to the questionnaire, this aspect has been found much less problematic by the beneficiaries. Besides, some remarks were formed by the respondents, which are partly or fully connected to the advance payments. These remarks mainly refer to the liquidity problems in the periods between the submission of the beneficiary reports and the transfer of funding.

Public procurement rules

The public procurement procedures within the framework of the programme must (still) follow the so-called PraG rules. During the implementation period, as a reaction to the beneficiaries' feedbacks the Joint Secretariat has translated the frequently applied documentation of the so called 'Single tender procurement' (below 25 000 EUR) which definitely ease the beneficiaries' burdens in this term. Nevertheless, they still have difficulties with the application of the rules.

In the survey, 12 respondents out of the 68 indicated their dissatisfaction concerning the public procurement rules, and 8 of them highlighted their opinion in the forms of additional comments. Proposals were made on the increase of the financial ceiling for the 'Single tender procedure' partly because of the inflation. In addition, it was added by some respondents of the survey and interviewees that contractors offer higher bids in case of IPA projects than in other cases, because of the fact of EU contribution.

State aid rules

Since the SMEs are not eligible for direct funding, state aid rules are relatively rarely applied. In these cases, it seems that the general and project-specific guidance of the management bodies are enough for the adequate application and implementation.

Involvement of SMEs

Majority of the stakeholders think that there is no need and room for involving SMEs directly to the programme implementation, because of the legal uncertainty rooted in the IPA status of Serbia on the one hand, as well as the bureaucratic and strict framework of the programme on the other, which would not be advantageous for the enterprises. Besides, some actors expressed their opinion that small-scale involvement of SMEs could be advantageous from the viewpoint of the programme impact, since SMEs tend to be more proactive and efficient than other beneficiaries.

The application of automatic selection procedure, even for smaller people to people projects does not seem to be feasible at the moment.

On behalf of the programme bodies, the following proposals have been formulated for the 2021-2027 programming period:

- To simplify the application form concerning the budget which should include only budget headings and lines without the budget items; as well as concerning the chapter on information and publicity.
- To further simplify the assessment procedure by establishing a more user-friendly application and assessment module for the Interreg+.
- To introduce further simplified cost option including obligatory flat-rate for staff cost (with off-the shelves exceptions for labour intensive projects) and flat rate for the travel and accommodation, as well as for communication costs.

- To (partly) introduce a sample-based approach on the level of first control instead of full document-check and on-site visit in case of all projects, in order to shorten the administrative procedure and ease the administrative burdens of the authorities and the beneficiaries.

4.4.3.3.4 *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 AIRs, and the databases provided by the JS and the interviews.

The Joint Secretariat and the JS Antenna assists the applicants and the project beneficiaries during the whole project cycle. This assistance includes the elaboration of calls for proposals, guidelines, handbooks and further information materials, their publication via the programmes' communication channels, as well as their presentation during the information events. The Programme's website remained the main communication hub of the programme towards the general public, potential applicants, the beneficiaries and other programme's stakeholders, but all information are also posted on the programme's Facebook page. Furthermore, the JS and the JSA organized four communication events concerning the 3rd CfP, 2 in Hungary and 2 in Serbia.

In addition, the programme managers at the JS and JS Antenna are available to applicants in the application phase and are in continuous contact with the beneficiaries from the contracting until the projects' closure. In case of the formal procedures, such as the contracting or reporting, the Interreg+ system is the official communication channel, but applicants and beneficiaries may contact them via phone, e-mail or in person in case of their ad-hoc and/or informal questions and requests.

According to the JS and JSA, the main assistance need of the beneficiaries have concerned the reporting procedure and the administration of the project changes. These direct consultations in person, via phone, e-mail or the Interreg+ tend to be time consuming, because the programme managers offer not only technical, but professional assistance before the submission of the official documentations by the beneficiaries. In this manner, not only the administrative mistakes can be avoided, but the optimal solutions can be applied which lead to higher project quality and more time- and resource-efficient project implementation.

Table 80: Performance indicators of the JS and JS Antenna

	2019	2020	2021
Number of project subsidy contracts	0	29	9
Number of approved addenda	12	14	7
Number of analysed and approved project changes	70	38	51
Number of approved project reports	179	134	107
Number of communication events	0	4	0

Furthermore, in the application phase, there would be a need for training and/or informing the applicants in order make them better understand and meet some aspects of the application criteria, hereby also increase the projects' quality. The National Authority find the topic of horizontal

principles, while the JSA does the sustainability issues problematic in this term. Besides organizing extra information events dedicated to these topics, the possible modification of the application form should be taken into consideration in order to change the approach of the applicants: the aim should be making them able to offer real solutions/options to these issues instead of repeating the well-known sentences without real meaning. In addition, the organization of info events for beneficiaries in order to encourage them for applying the available simplified cost options would be also welcomed.

The colleagues of the JS, the JS Antenna and the First Level Control authorities all expressed their impression that public procurement procedure mean a great burden to the beneficiaries, as well as the programme bodies as a consequence. According to the Annual Implementation Reports prepared by the JS, significant proportion of the projects asked for the prolongation of time to implement their activities were reasoned by the delays due to the failed or incorrect public procurement for crucial activities. In addition, the FLC bodies and some JMC members reported that problems of the public procurement procedures played a great role in financial irregularities. Beneficiaries tend to ask for PraG advisory for each of the mentioned bodies, but none of them has the competency and the capacity to officially fulfil this role. In spite of this, in Hungary the FLC body, while in Serbia the JSA support the beneficiaries as much as their resources and competency allow to do it. Furthermore, 87% of the projects dedicated altogether more than 1.1 million EUR to public procurement experts during the programming period. Nevertheless, the Serbian NA added that some of the external experts frequently commissioned by the beneficiaries, do not own the appropriate knowledge and experiences for the advisory, which lead to serious problems during the implementation. In the light of all these facts, it is worth considering to internalise this PRaG advisory service to one or some of the programme bodies.

The performance of the JS in terms of assistance can be assessed along the indicators listed in the following tables (*Table 81, Table 82*).

Table 81: Features of the duration of the contracting procedure between 2018 and 2021

	Overall number of calendar days	Corrected number of calendar days	Duration set in the Manuals (calendar days)
Average	60	22	33
Median	49	10	
Minimum	2	2	
Maximum	153	111	

The Joint Secretariat assists the contracting procedure in two phases: (1) as far as the Lead Beneficiary officially proves that all necessary conditions are met by the project, the JS prepares the Declaration of Commitment. This document must be signed and sent back by the LB. (2) Then the JS prepares the subsidy contract and send it for signature to the MA and the LB. The total number of calendar days for the delivery of the 2 tasks by the JS is 33, not counting of those days for which the JS is not accountable. As the table (*Table 81*) shows, the average duration of the contracting procedure was 60 days, out of which 22 needed for the JS to deliver its tasks. It should be noted that in 2018, there was a large delay in the contracting due to structural change of MA, which formed part of the

correction in the table below (*Table 82*). On the contrary, the ad-hoc errors with the IMIS system did not. Taking into account this aspect, the corrected average duration would decrease by further 20% in 2018.

Table 82: Features of the duration of the reporting procedure between 2018 and 2021

	Overall number of calendar days	Corrected number of calendar days	Duration set in the Manuals (calendar days)
Average	37	22	60 (30+30)
Median	31	20	
Minimum	0	0	
Maximum	234	87	

Regarding the project reporting procedure, the JS checks the Application for Reimbursement and Project Reports within maximum 30+30 calendar days after the arrival of the documents: all submitted reports will be checked within 30 days and the missing documents must arrive within maximum 30 days. The average corrected length of the reporting procedures is far within the duration set in the manuals, and only 3% of the reporting procedures exceed the 60-days ceiling, mainly because of external reasons such as the unexpected restrictions concerning the COVID-19 pandemic or the malfunction of the IMIS.

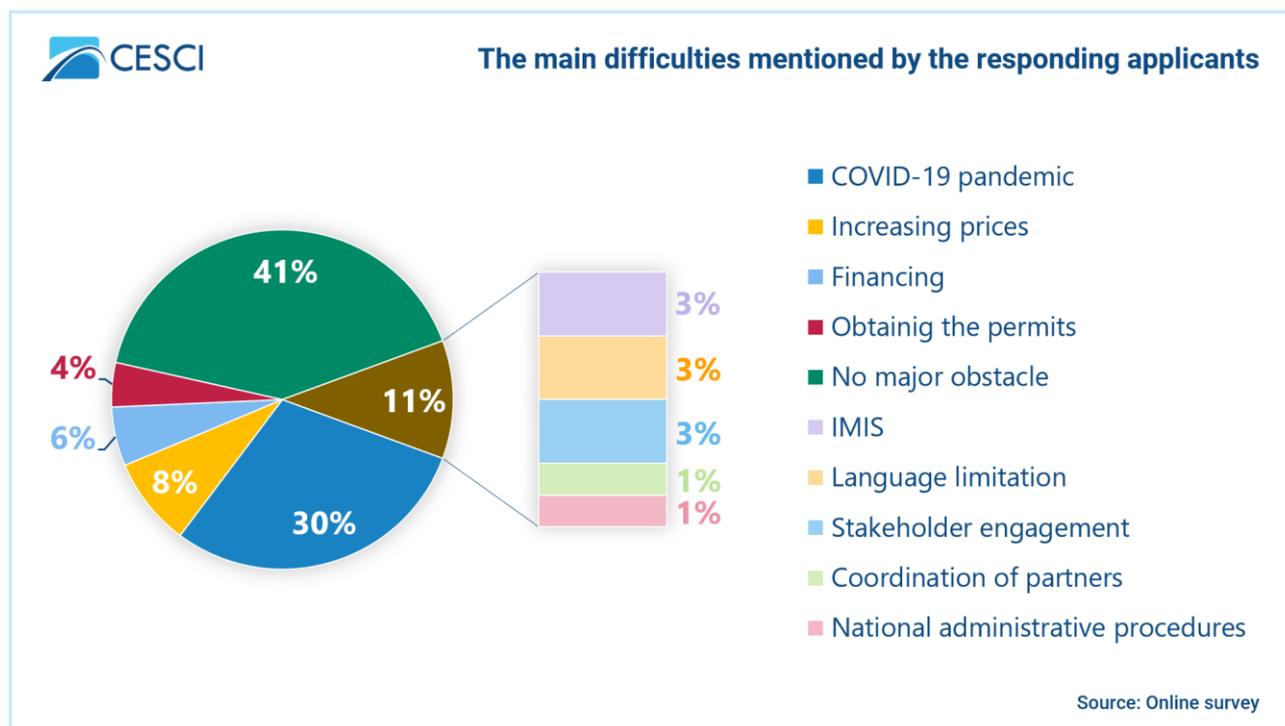
All, in all, these performance indicators show a strong commitment from the side of the programme bodies to ensure the smooth and most efficient implementation of the programme.

4.4.3.3.5 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 three main relevant topics were explored: (1) the administrative and other difficulties and obstacles experiences during the project cycle, (2) the quality of assistance by the programme bodies during the project cycle and (3) the availability, clarity and user-friendliness of the available information.

Regarding the administrative and other difficulties and obstacles during the project cycle (from the development until the implementation) it can be said that almost half of the respondents (41%) stated that they faced no major difficulties during the project cycle which showcases a considerable level of satisfaction. At the same time there were external factors – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – that negatively affected the projects either because the project meetings, events and travels had to be re-scheduled or cancelled, or because the administrative tasks were hardened by the restrictions (e.g. limited opening time of public institutions). According to the interviewees both the programme bodies and the beneficiaries quickly adapted to the changed situation, which resulted in some temporary changes in the procedure, such as beneficiaries' documentation for the contracting have been allowed to be submitted in electronic version or the FLC on-site checks took place on-line and were complemented in person after ceasing the restrictions.

Figure 210: The main difficulties mentioned by the responding applicants



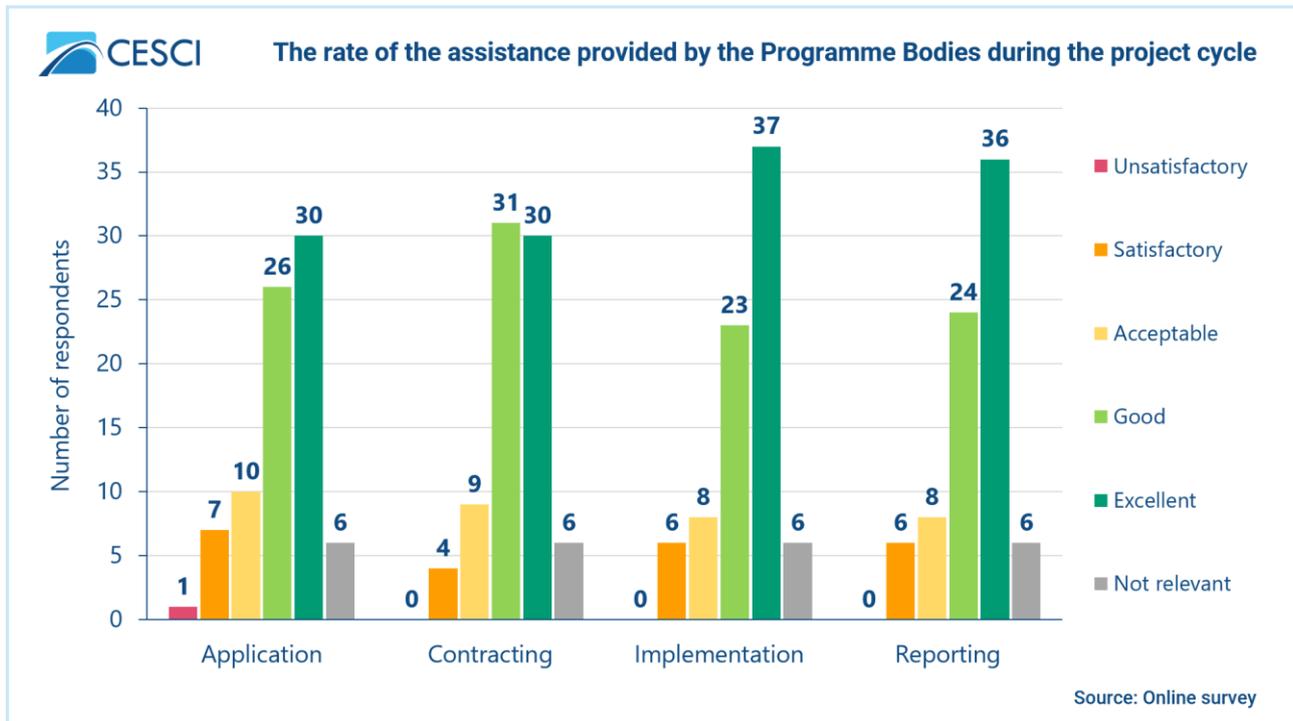
Similarly, the increasing prices partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic posed unforeseeable difficulties. According to the interviewees the programme was not flexible enough to react on this issue, e.g. by offering extra support from the still available IPA amount on the programme level, instead the content of the projects must be narrowed down, which caused serious extra administrative burdens during the procurement procedures. Interviewees proposed to have some amount reserved to potentially manage these situations in the future programming period.

Besides the aforementioned obstacles, the respondents also reported on challenges concerning the time-consuming harmonisation process of the feasibility study with the local regulations, the stakeholder and partner engagement, the changing exchange rates, the communication with the partners and the programme bodies (use of English for the Serbian partners cause difficulties), the complex public procurement rules, and the limitation of the IMIS system.

When asked about how satisfied the applicants were with the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies to overcome the difficulties the respondents testified an outstanding level of contentedness with 72% answering they were very satisfied, 24% satisfied and only 4% were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied. Taking into account the given answers in connection with the assistance provided by the programme bodies, the majority of the respondents praised their work, since the programme bodies were available, helpful and provided quick and efficient answers, whereas the only objection was that the given answers did not happen in written form.

It is also important to see how would they rate the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies during the project cycle. Based on their answers it seems that the assistance they received from the Programme Bodies were mostly excellent or good, the highest points were awarded relating to the implementation and reporting periods which is in line with where the beneficiaries claimed to have faced the most difficulties. At the same time the application and the contracting periods are those where the support might be strengthened as there were some unsatisfied voices in this regard.

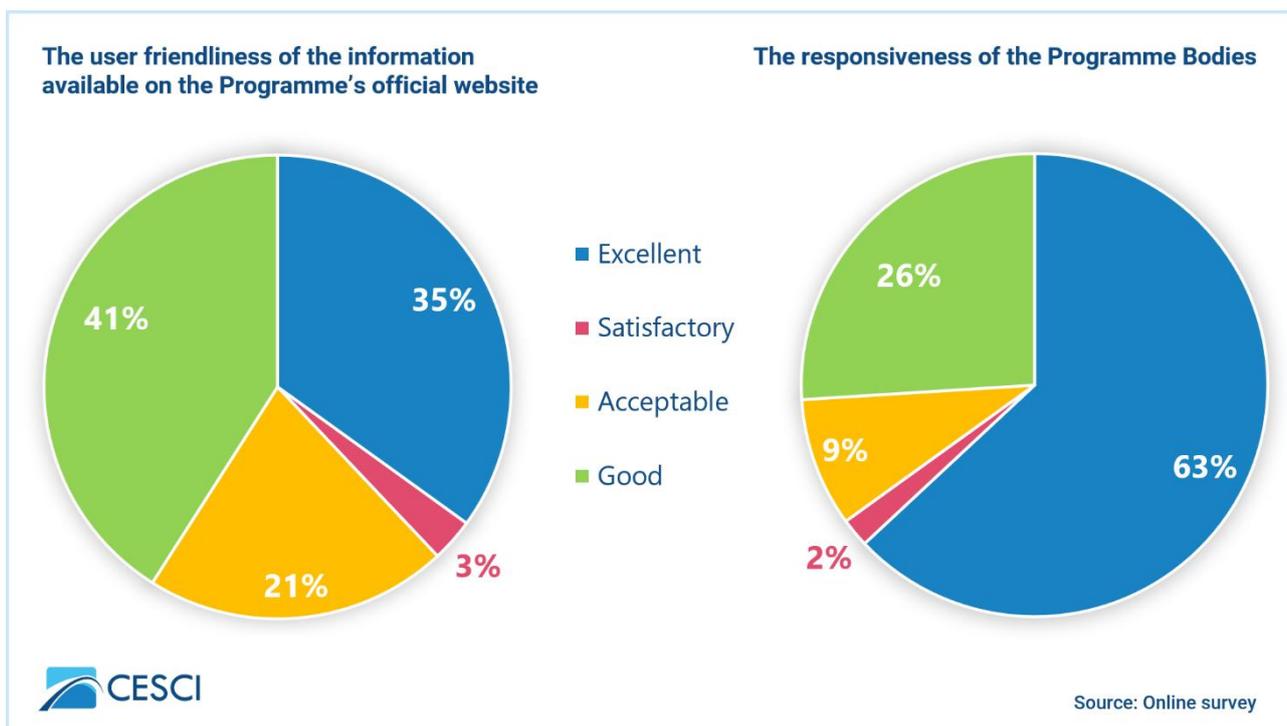
Figure 211: The rate of the assistance provided by the Programme Bodies during the project cycle



The respondents were also encouraged to mention those aspects where the Programme could have done to help the applicants to overcome the above identified obstacles or limitations. Several respondents mentioned that through hiring more employees would allow to speed up the otherwise excellent quality of service and also would make it possible to organise more frequent online and offline opportunities to communicate and ask for advice which in turn would ease the process for the applicants. Others mentioned that the modification process along with the reporting process could be simplified. From the financial side, ensuring short-term liquidity and a higher advancement at the beginning of the project could have been beneficial.

Regarding the user friendliness of the information available on the Programme’s official website, the majority of the respondents had a positive opinion: 35% rating it to be excellent, 41% to be good and only 3% claiming it to be no better than satisfactory.

Figure 212: Evaluation of the programme bodies communication toward the beneficiaries



Similarly, the responsiveness of the Programme Bodies were rated generally positively, 65% claiming it to be excellent, an additional 26% rating it to be good and only 2% saying it is satisfactory; nobody voted on the option unsatisfactory.

4.4.3.3.6 Assessment of ownership, involvement of relevant partners

The ownership of the programme is assessed in light of the European Commission effort of making the cross-border programmes not only the tools of integration and cohesion across borders but also those of democratisation. In parallel, although, the direct target group of the programming and decision-making are the relevant ministries and NUTS III level municipalities, there is a tendency of inviting different stakeholders (local municipalities, regional development agents, professional bodies, CSOs, etc.) to participate in the programming procedure. It was the case with the 2014-2020, and even more with the 2021-2027 HUSRB IPA programmes.

At the same time, when speaking about programme implementation, the situation is different. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, some chambers and NGOs are present at the JMC meetings with an observer status (even more, the Monitoring Committee (MC) meetings can be attended by any stakeholder of the programming region) but the voting rights are exercised by the traditional members, i.e. national authorities, the county representatives, ministries and the national level representatives of the municipalities.

However, most of the programme management bodies are more or less satisfied with the status quo, according to some interviewees (JMC members and beneficiaries), the involvement of local level actors is a preferred option, in order to strengthen the bottom-up approach during the programme implementation. Interviewees proposed to better present the local interests in the JMC by involving relevant members at least with an advisory role in order to prevent the conflicts of interest. At the

same time, it was also suggested to invite the relevant sectoral actors (e.g. railway company in case of a railway development proposal) in an ad-hoc manner in order to consult the concerned project proposals. According to another respondent, it would have been also a great step toward the widening of the partners' involvement, if the programme bodies had offered opportunities to potential applicants to take part in the preparation of the CfPs in order to better meet their needs which may change during the particular programming period.

To sum up, it would be worth considering to enhance the ownership of the programme not only in the programming, but also in the implementation phase by involving more local and regional actors.

III. Annex

1 Programme authorities and bodies

Table 83: The identified programme authorities and bodies

Authority/body		Name of authority/body	This authority/body is responsible, among others for...
Managing authority	MA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade/ Budapest, Hungary Department for Cross-border Cooperation Programmes ¹⁰¹	... the management and implementation of the Programme towards the European Commission. Certain tasks were delegated to the JS.
National Authority	NA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy State Secretariat for International Affairs in Hungary	... setting up the control system in order to validate the expenditures at national level, and for ensuring national state co-financing. Moreover, the National Authorities are responsible for handling of irregularities.
		Department for cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes and cooperation with local and regional authorities and organisations for more efficient use of funds, Ministry of European Integration (MEI) of the Government of the Republic of Serbia	
Certifying authority	CA	Directorate of EU Assistance of the Hungarian State Treasury	... drawing up certified statements of expenditure and applications for payment, and submitting them to the European Commission.
Audit authority	AA	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds (EUTAF) in Hungary	... verifying the effective functioning of the management and control system. The work of the AA is assisted by the Group of Auditors.
Control Bodies (First Level Control)	FLC SRB	Division for First Level Control of Projects Financed under IPA Component Cross-border and Transnational Cooperation Programmes, Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes (CFCU), Ministry of Finance Government of the Republic of Serbia	... controlling the invoices or accounting documents submitted by the Beneficiaries on the territory of the controller.

¹⁰¹ In 2018 this department transferred from the Prime Minister's Office to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Authority/body		Name of authority/body	This authority/body is responsible, among others for...
	FLC HU	Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit Limited Liability Company	
Joint secretariat	JS	Széchenyi Programme Office Non-profit Limited Liability Company	... assisting the Programme bodies – MA, CA, AA, JMC and NAs – in carrying out their respective duties. The JS provides assistance to potential applicants, and by keeping the regular contact with Lead Beneficiaries of contracted projects, it supports efficient project implementation on both sides of the border.
Joint Secretariat Antenna	JS Antenna	JS Antenna – Subotica	... contributing to the implementation of tasks delegated to the JS. JS Antenna provides information and support for beneficiaries in the Serbian border area.
Joint Monitoring Committee	JMC	List of JMC members see at the end of the chapter	... supervising and monitoring the Programme implementation, and selecting of the projects.

2 List of abbreviations

The **blue letters** indicate the abbreviations of the beneficiaries.

The **red letters** indicate the project abbreviations.

Abbreviation	Meaning
AA	Audit Authority
ADUVIZIG	Lower Danube Valley Water Directorate
AF	Application Form
AIR	Annual Implementation Report
ATIVIZIG	Lower-Tisza-District Water Directorate
BABECA	The complex water management development of the area of the Baja-Bezdan Canal
BASKET	Cross-border basket games
BKMÖ	Bács-Kiskun County Council
BSZKE	"Banat" Serbian Cultural Association
BTC	Banat-Triplex Confinium EGTC
C-AGRO-Dev	Cross-border Agrobusiness Development Program
CA	Certifying Authority
CB	Control Bodies
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
CBD Strategies	Updating of the Development Strategies of Local Municipalities and Elaboration of Cross-Border Common Sectorial Development Operational Programmes and Projects (Programme 2007 - 2013 Hungary - Serbia IPA CBC)
CC	Association Cinema City
CESCI	Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives
CET	Common efforts for tourism
CFCU	Department for Contracting and Financing of EU Funded Programmes, Ministry of Finance Government of the Republic of Serbia
CfP	Call for Proposals
CHECK-IT	Establishing innovation-technology platform "Checkpoint IT the Community" in cooperation of Szeged-Subotica-Novi Sad
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
COOP-BANAT	Strengthening co-operation and network resources in favor for achieving economic growth (Programme 2007 - 2013 Hungary - Romania)
CP	Cooperation Programme
CROSSBOX	Sport-improvement of box in cross border region

Abbreviation	Meaning
CULTOUR	Development of tourism based on local cultural and natural values
DARTKE	Southern Great Plans Region Social Research Association
DKMT Euroregion	Danube–Criş–Mureş–Tisa Euroregion
EC	European Commission
ECOWAM	Ecofriendly water management against extreme weather conditions in the cross-border area
EFOP	Hungarian Human Resource Development Operational Programme
EGTC	European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation
EKOVOJVODINA	Provincial Secretariat for Urban Planning and Environmental Protection
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
EUTAF	Directorate General for Audit of European Funds (in Hungary)
ExpoTrain SME	Organization of Cross-border Expo and Training Sessions for the benefit of empowering SME's (Programme 2007 - 2013 Hungary - Serbia IPA CBC)
FAB	Football across border
FEP	European Affairs Fund of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina
FINS	Institute of Food Technology in Novi Sad, University of Novi Sad
FLC	First Level Control
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
GINOP	Hungarian Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme
GIS	Geographic Information System
GVA	Gross Value Added
HCSO	Hungarian Central Statistical Office
HEALTH-TOUR	Health Tourism – Good Tourism: Joint Development of Medical and Health Tourism in the HU-SRB Cross-Border Region
HU	Hungary/Hungarian
HUF	Hungarian Forint
HUSRB	INTERREG-IPA Cross-border Cooperation Programme Hungary-Serbia
ID	Identification
IDENTIS	Integrated Development of Natural and Cultural Tourism in Tisa River Region
IIB	State road category in Serbia (IIB)

Abbreviation	Meaning
IKOP	Hungarian Integrated Transport Development Operational Programme
INPUTRANS	Improvement of the public transport services in the CBC region through the integration of public transport modes, development of railway infrastructure, and harmonization of transport procedures
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IRP	Institute of field and Vegetable Crops
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITC	Innovation and Technology Center for Metal Industry
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JMC	Joint Monitoring Committee
JS	Joint Secretariat
JSA	Joint Secretariat Antenna
KEHOP	Hungarian Environmental and Energy Efficiency Operational Programme
KM	Kiskun Museum (Kiskunfélegyháza)
KNESZECYC	Szeged (Szőreg) - Novi Knezevac Bicycle Road Construction (Phase 4)
KÖFOP	Hungarian Public Administration and Public Service Development Operational Programme
LB	Lead Beneficiary
MA	Managing Authority
MAHOP	Hungarian Fisheries Operational Programme
MATE	Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Science
MÁV	Hungarian State Railways
MC	Monitoring Committee
MEI	Ministry of European Integration
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions
NA	National Authority
NACE	Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIF	Hungarian National Infrastructure Development Corporation
NKA	National Cultural Fund
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OI	Output Indicator
ONTE	Ópusztaszeri National Historical Memorial Park
OPTI-BIKE	Optimising traffic in the border zone, planning and construction of bicycle paths
PA	Priority Axis

Abbreviation	Meaning
PANNONSTEPPE	Conservation of key animal species of Pannonian Steppes in a border region between Hungary and Serbia
PERS	Public Enterprise "Roads of Serbia" Belgrade (Zvezdara)
PETROVARADIN	Public Enterprise "Vojvodinašume" PETROVARADIN
PLANTSVITA	Development of Soil Type Adapted Microbiological Products Promoting Ecological Pest Management
PM	Project manager
POPEYE	Program Of Physical Education and healthY Eating
PP	Project partner
PR	Public Relations
PraG	Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions
PREVENT!FLOOD SUSTAINABLY	Increasing the efficiency of municipal flood protection through smart metering
PROTECT	Protect Wild Birds = Protect Habitats = Protect Humans
PSAWMF	Provincial Secretariat for Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry
PSSO	Provincial Secretariat for Sports and Youth
RDI	Research Development and Innovation
RI	Result Indicator
RO-HU	Interreg programme of Romania-Hungary
RS-HR	Interreg IPA Cooperation Programme Croatia-Serbia
SCHOLAR	Increasing the Economic Competitiveness and Innovative Development of SMEs through Young People's Scholarships in the Mórahalom-Zrenjanin Program
SCO	Simplified Cost Options
SENTREM	Development of inovative social entrepreneurship model for vouldnerable groups in border region
SEŠ	Secondary Economic School in Sombor
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time bound
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SO	Specific Objective
SRB	Serbia/Serbian
SRB-BIH	Cross-border Cooperation Programme Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina
SWeM-PAL	Sustainable wetland management of the transboundary Palic-Ludas catchment area
SZTE	University of Szeged
TA	Technical Assistance
TÁMOP	Hungarian Social Renewal Operative Programme
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network

Abbreviation	Meaning
TFNS	University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Technology
THEATRO	Theatre art as a regional hub for children's socialization
TOP	Hungarian Territorial and Settlement Developme Operative Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNSPMF	University of Novi Sad Faculty of Sciences
URBAN-PREX	Monitoring, forecasting and development of online public early warning system for extreme precipitations and pluvial floods in urban areas in the Hungarian-Serbian cross-border region
VMC	Vojvodina Metal Cluster
VODE VOJVODINE	Public Water Management Company „Vode Vojvodine“ Novi Sad
VP	Hungarian Rural Development Programme
VTS	Subotica Tech - College of Applied Sciences
WASIDCA	Water supply and water-infrastructure development in the boundary catchment areas
WATERTOUR	Development of water tourism on waterways connecting Hungary and Serbia
WOMEN-TO-SAVE	Social entrepreneurship for women in rural areas

3 List of the shortened name of the indicators

ID	PA	Name of the indicators	Shortened name	Measurement unit
OI/1.1	1	Population benefiting from flood protection measures	Population benefiting from flood protection measures	persons
OI/1.2	1	Length of new or improved water management system	New or improved water management system	metres
OI/1.3	1	Surface area of habitats supported in order to attain a better conservation status	Supported area of habitats	hectares
OI/2.1	2	Number of improved or newly built border crossing points	Improved or newly built border crossing points	border crossing points
OI/2.2	2	Total length of newly built roads	Newly built roads	kilometres
OI/2.3	2	Total length of reconstructed or upgraded roads	Reconstructed or upgraded roads	kilometres
OI/2.4	2	Total length of newly built bicycle paths	New bicycle paths	kilometres
OI/2.5	2	Total length of the railway line directly affected by development plans	Railway line directly affected by development plans	kilometres
OI/2.6	2	Number of improved public transport services	Public transport services	services
OI/3.1	3	Number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attractions	Visits of supported sites	visits/year
OI/3.2	3	Number of joint cultural, recreational and other types of community events and actions organised	Joint cultural, recreational and other community events	events
OI/3.3	3	Average monthly user entries to online communication tools developed	Entries to online communication tools	user entries
OI/4.1	4	Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions	Cooperating enterprises with research institutions	enterprises
OI/4.2	4	Number of organisations actively participating in the work of the "knowledge platforms"	Organisations in knowledge platforms	organisations
OI/4.3	4	Number of months spent in the institutions and companies on the other side of the border through scholarships	Months spent on scholarships	months

ID	PA	Name of the indicators	Shortened name	Measurement unit
OI/4.4	4	Rate of persons from vulnerable groups involved in supported actions	Persons from vulnerable groups	%
deleted		Area benefiting from modern hail protection measures	Area with hail protection	hectares
RI/1.1		Water quality (good ecological status) of cross-border surface water bodies (rivers and water flows) in the eligible area	Water quality	
RI/2.1		Share of border-crossing traffic at smaller border-crossing points within all bordercrossing traffic	Border-crossing traffic	
RI/3.1		Number of overnight stays	Overnight stays	
RI/3.2		Level of cross-border cooperation intensity of the public and non-profit organisations dealing with cultural, leisure sport and nature protection issues	CBC intensity of public and non-profit organisations	
RI/4.1		Rate of innovative SMEs in the cross-border region	Innovative SMEs	

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