

Interreg AT-CZ 2021-2027

Interreg programme Austria-Czechia 2021-2027
Stakeholder Consultation

March 2021

1 General information

A total of 258 participants took part in the survey among stakeholders in the programme area - balanced on both sides of the border (129 AT and 129 CZ). The highest share of respondents was from the South Bohemia Region and on the Austrian side from Upper Austria. Participation can be assessed as relatively high, more precisely - 24% higher than the participation in a similar survey that took place during the preparation of the 2014-2020 programming period.

As expected, the most frequent respondents according to the focus of their activities were public administration entities (especially municipalities). On the Austrian side, however, those were the R&D institutions (36 entities, 28% of all AT respondents), but research institutions were also strongly represented on the Czech side. Entities from the field of education, as well as tourism, were also strongly represented.

In contrast, the participation of rescue organisations, entities related to sports and leisure activities, as well as health care entities was very low (on the CZ side only 1 entity participated). The participation of environmental entities was lower than expected.

It is positive to find, that in addition to applicants with experience from previous cooperation programs, the programme currently under preparation shows the potential to activate new applicants, without any experience in previous programmes. On the Austrian side there was significantly larger share of respondents new to the programme.

Specific objectives

The question evaluating the significance of individual Specific Objectives was important. Consensus, and high preference on both sides of the border was found in the field of science and research. Education, as well as environment and adaptation to climate change have a relatively high level of agreement and a high preference.

There is agreement, but a rather low preference, in the area of Cross-border Governance. This can be assessed as a slightly surprising because of the fact, that among the activities under this topic is also the Small Projects Fund, and that the public administration entities were the most frequent respondents in this survey.

Contrary, the biggest differences in terms of preference are the topic of culture and tourism. While this is the strongest topic for the Czech side, it is the second weakest in the Austrian regions.

Types of actions

In the next part of the survey, the respondents expressed their preferences for specific type of actions within the individual specific objectives proposed in the programme.

Research and innovation activities

The survey showed that research and innovation activities are the most important and should be supported by the programme. Of the specific activities in the field of science and research, the most preferred are the following: research and innovation cooperation in common thematic priorities, introduction of eco-innovations (perhaps contrary to expectations, there was a more significant preference for this topic in the Czech regions). R&I activities based on the demand of regional companies and activities connecting science and research with business entities, including improving the access of SMEs to the results of science and research, are also interesting for the respondents.

Contrary, there was relatively low interest (on both sides) in investments regarding the research infrastructure and equipment. This is a specific objective with clearly the largest share of entities that expect to participate in this topic under the new cooperation programme (55 %).

Adaptation to climate change

The following activities were most intensively reflected: joint regional or local measures for responding to challenges resulting from climate change, pilot measures in the areas of greening, reduction of land consumption, building refurbishment, water retention for a pleasant microclimate.

In contrast, the demand for cooperation in “strengthen cooperation to build up an integrated risk management system” was of less interest on both sides of the border (this largely corresponds to the relatively low participation of these subjects in the survey).

Another topic, which is also considered to be a relatively insignificant is “joint awareness raising actions - support population training and common civil protection awareness raising”. The share of respondents who are interested in this topic is relatively high (43%).

Ecological water management activities

There is a clear preference linked to the topic of ecological water management in the following activities: joint solutions for appropriate water resource management (e.g.: agricultural irrigation, water retention, ecological measures for natural water retention, securing the drinking water supply) and “cooperation for the better protection and management of water bodies (e.g.: springs and small watercourses, ground water, joint river basin management).

In contrast, the lowest interest was seen for the activity “joint development of tools for identification of risks and water management measures”. Nevertheless, this type of action shows the highest share (63%) of those who do not expect to participate in the programme under this topic (it is a narrowly defined topic for a limited group of applicants).

Nature protection and biodiversity

Slightly better, in terms of the expected participation in the program, is the topic related to the nature protection and biodiversity. The share of those, who do not anticipate their participation in this topic also clearly predominates, on the other hand though, 37% of respondents replied that they are interested in participation.

The most attractive and most important action is green infrastructure in urban areas. This topic is reflected not only by respondents from Vienna and other Austrian regions, but this action has even stronger support from CZ partners.

High preference is also expressed regarding the following topics: joint landscape management and cooperation of protected areas.

In contrast, perhaps a little surprisingly (regarding successful cooperation projects in the past), there is a lower interest in joint solutions actions to improve and protect biodiversity - re-settling of FFH species.

Education and training activities

In the field of education, there is a relatively high consensus on both sides of the border for the need to implement joint education methods and tools (incl. digitalized tools and methods

- learning environments, learning room concepts, didactic measures, learning to search online etc.).

Joint education in topics relevant for the cross-border region is also attractive in areas relevant to cross-border areas (e.g. environmental education, health and nursing, digital skills and technical education).

In contrast, interest in any form of harmonisation is low. These are probably concepts that have proved to be not fully feasible or attractive, both in terms of harmonizing education and qualifications (especially secondary and tertiary education) and harmonizing the vocational education system in relation to the joint labour market.

Overall this topic is among those, for which the highest proportion of respondents are interested in participating in the new program.

Tourism

Tourism is positively perceived as an integrative element (economic activity) using other areas such as ecology, climate protection, cultural heritage or education and innovation. The highest interest lies in tourism as a kind of experiential activity in the form of experiencing nature, exercising, culinary delights (healthy eating), cellar alleys etc..

Especially on the Czech side, there is a significant interest in investments in tourist infrastructure, while Austrian respondents have a lower interest in this subject.

The following topics are considered to be the least important in the field of tourism: "implementation of joint training measures for tourism stakeholders" or "joint procedures for systematic visitor monitoring to implement joint management plans in a targeted manner".

A kind of "medium priority" is given to systemic activities such as "cooperation of destination managements (on the CZ side, however, it is an extraordinarily strong topic), as well as the development of joint strategies in tourism or joint tourism marketing measures, incl. digitization.

Tourism is the topic with the most balanced share of those who are likely to participate (46%) and those who are more likely to not participate (51%).

Cultural heritage

The most frequently supported key topics in the field of cultural heritage were contemporary art; language, folk culture (architecture), culinary heritage; religious heritage, literature, visual, music and bilingual museums.

In contrast, measures to strengthen resilience of the cultural sector, for example through training and employment support and transition to sustainable business models did not find much interest.

Only about a third of respondents plan to participate in the topic of cultural heritage, while almost two thirds do not.

Cross-border Governance

Within this type of action, the most attractive topic seems to be joint strategy development in different areas, institutional cooperation to reduce administrative and legal obstacles and joint actions of SMEs supporting organisations in the region.

Surprisingly low was the assessment of the importance and cross-border relevance of joint activities of public actors in relevant thematic fields, such as civil protection and disaster,

health care, early childhood education, public services including the field of waste and recycling management) etc.

Final question regarding the participation in the new cross-border program:

In the final question whether the respondents expect to participate in the new programme, the vast majority expressed a positive opinion – 85% expect to participate. 7% had not yet decided. Only 8% of respondents who took part in the survey will not actively participate in the new program.

Open questions:

Important for the next stages of the programme preparation were also the reactions and recommendations of respondents in open questions:

- Small Projects Fund - large number of ideas and recommendations was gathered and will be used by the working groups for the SPF;
- General recommendations, general comments and comments regarding the programme and cooperation as such – many remarks/topics that will be useful in programming - in the thematic focus of the program, as well as in administrative procedures and others important topics.

Annex 1: Overview of main results and findings

Responses by region

Region	AT-CZ	
	Responses	Share
Vienna	44	17%
Lower Austria	37	14%
Upper Austria	43	17%
South Moravia Region	34	13%
Vysočina Region	37	14%
South Bohemia Region	60	23%
TOTAL	258	

Specific objectives

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Research & Innovation	- Culture and Tourism
+ Climate & Environment	- Cross-border Governance
+ Education and training	

Types of actions

Research and innovation

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Research and innovation cooperation in common thematic priorities	- Investments in new jointly used/shared R&I facilities, based on relevant research strategies and with high thematic focus to the programme area
+ Introduction of eco-innovations	- Extension and modernisation of technology facilities and research capacities of cross-border interest
+ Research and innovation driven by demand from local businesses with specific focus on sectors of relevance in the border area	
+ Better linking research institutions with SMEs and increase access of SMEs to R&I results	

Adaptation to climate change

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Joint regional or local measures for responding to challenges resulting from climate change	- Strengthen cooperation to build up an integrated risk management system (on basis of existing cooperation agreements)
+ Pilot measures in the areas of greening, reduction of land consumption, building refurbishment, water retention for a pleasant microclimate	- Joint awareness raising actions - support population training and common civil protection awareness raising

Ecological water management

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Joint solutions for appropriate water resource management (e.g.: agricultural irrigation, water retention, ecological measures for natural water retention, securing the drinking water supply);	- Joint development of tools for identification of risks and water management measures
+ Cooperation for the better protection and management of water bodies (e.g.: springs and small watercourses, ground water, joint river basin management)	

Nature protection and biodiversity

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Cooperation of protected areas in order to develop joint management plans	- Joint actions to improve and protect biodiversity - re-settling of FFH species
+ Joint actions to improve and protect biodiversity - joint landscape management	
+ Joint approaches to restore green infrastructures in urban areas	

Education and training

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Joint education methods and tools (incl. digitalized tools and methods - learning environments, learning room concepts, didactic measures, learning to search online etc.);	- Harmonisation of education and qualifications (esp. secondary schools, tertiary education, vocational schools)
+ Joint education in topics relevant for cross-border area, (e.g. environmental education, health and nursing, digital skills and technical education)	- Harmonisation of the vocational education system for meeting the needs of the joint labour market;
	- Harmonisation of education and qualifications (esp. secondary schools, tertiary education, vocational schools)

Tourism

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Joint development of key themes for tourism development: experiencing nature (eco-tourism), slowing down, exercise (long-distance hiking trails, spiritual paths, cycling, mountain biking), supporting the hospitality sector with specific focus on culinary delights (healthy eating), cellar alleys	- Implementation of joint procedures for systematic visitor monitoring in order to implement joint management plans in a targeted manner
+ Tourism should be treated as an integrative issue and can, for example, be linked to the themes of ecology (nature tourism, sustainable products), climate protection (sustainable mobility), cultural heritage (contemporary art), regional agricultural product chains (local cuisine), inter-cultural exchange (language, history), education (digital skills) and innovation (new teaching concepts)	- Implementation of joint training measures for tourism stakeholders
+ Investments in sustainable cross-border tourism infrastructure - cycle tracks/paths including their	

marketing and promotion (aimed at interconnection, closing interconnection gaps, joint promotion and labeling)	
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Cultural heritage

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Joint development of the key themes in cultural heritage: contemporary art; language, folk culture (architecture), culinary heritage; religious heritage (e.g. monasteries in the border region), literature, visual arts (e.g. Czech design artists of the interwar period trained in Austria), music (e.g. reviving music collections through regional orchestras), bilingual museums	- Joint actions to reinforce the resilience of the cultural sector - e.g. for instance through training and employment support and transition to sustainable business models.
+ Digitisation of cultural heritage for dissemination to different target groups	- Combine the expertise and competencies of large national museums (e.g. in Wien, Linz) with the expertise of regional actors

Cross-border Governance

Positive responses	Negative responses
+ Joint strategy development in different areas such as research & technology & innovation (R&T&I), water management, transport and mobility, tourism and culture, healthy lifestyle, demographic change, health care, regional development, business support services, rescue services ("blue light organisations");	- Joint activities of public actors in relevant thematic fields, such as civil protection and disaster control (e.g. cooperation of fire brigades, rescue services), health care, early childhood education, public services including the field of waste and recycling management, environmentally friendly transport concepts
+ Institutional cooperation to reduce administrative and legal obstacles	
+ Joint actions of SMEs supporting organisations (Chambers of Commerce etc.), including networking, pilot projects, support to cluster initiatives, coordination activities and others	

How are is the stakeholder consultation input covered by the programme

Specific objective	Type of action	Suggestions from the stakeholder consultation
(i) Enhancing research and innovation capacities and the uptake of advanced technologies ++	Type of action 1.1 cross border research and know how exchange ++	All indicative actions are preferred (consensus on both sides): - <i>Cooperation in research and innovation in fields of common interest</i> - Introduction of eco-innovations - Research and innovation driven by demand from local businesses with specific focus on sectors of relevance in the border area
	Type of action 1.2 joint pilot actions and joint solutions in shared research facilities and research application 0	Actions related to the activities of SMEs or NGOs are preferred by both partner states <i>(Better linking research institutions with SMEs and increase access of SMEs to R&I results; Application of research and innovation results in public sector, NGOs, and also SMEs with the aim to reach the market)</i> In contrast, activities aimed at acquiring / sharing / upgrading R&I infrastructure were not preferred by either partner sides.
	Type of action 1.3 communication and mobility of researchers 0	Modest support to both indicative actions, similarly from both sides of the border.
(iv) Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and disaster resilience +	Type of action 2.1 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to improve the preparedness towards climate change impacts 0	Modest support to the indicative action (stronger support on AT side)
	Type of action 2.2 joint pilot actions and joint solutions in climate change adaptation ++	Strongly preferred actions (<i>Cooperation in climate change adaptation actions, Joint solutions for environmental measures on agri-land and in forests complementary to EAFRD interventions; Joint pilot measures in the areas of greening, reduction of land consumption, building refurbishment, water retention for a pleasant microclimate, increase of resilience in the soil;)</i> But also one action (<i>Cooperation in risk management</i>) with very weak support on both sides.

Specific objective	Type of action	Suggestions from the stakeholder consultation
	Type of action 2.3 awareness raising and training on climate change adaptation -	All indicative action in the field of awareness rising, information campaign and behaviour change were reflected rather weakly (similarly on both sides).
(vii) Enhancing biodiversity, green infrastructure in the urban environment, and reducing pollution 0	Type of action 2.4 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to improve water management ++	Strong support on both sides
	Type of action 2.5 joint pilot actions and investments in joint ecological water management solutions 0	Mix of very strongly supported action (<i>Joint solutions for appropriate water resource management</i>) and weakly preferred actions (<i>Joint development of tools for identification of risks and water management measures; Joint water body restoration</i>)
	Type of action 2.6 joint knowledge base - stocktaking and data exchange to enhance biodiversity 0	Rather modest support, lower on CZ side
	Type of action 2.7 joint pilot actions and joint solutions to improve and protect biodiversity +	Very broad type of action including indicative activities from those with very strong support from both sides (<i>Joint approaches to restore green and blue infrastructures in urban areas; Joint landscape management</i>) to activities with weak potential and interest (<i>Joint actions to improve and protect biodiversity - control of neophytes and bark beetles; Joint actions to improve and protect biodiversity - re-settling of FFH species</i>); in both mentioned cases esp. on AT side
	Type of action 2.8 awareness raising activities and training for enhanced biodiversity -	Mix of moderately supported actions (<i>Increase the awareness of the population on biodiversity issues by environmental awareness raising activities</i>) and actions (<i>Biodiversity projects with training activities, e.g. training of rangers</i>) with a weak support on both sides
	Types of action 3.1	

Specific objective	Type of action	Suggestions from the stakeholder consultation
ESF iv) improving the quality, inclusiveness, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems including through validation of non-formal and informal learning, to support acquisition of key competences including entrepreneurial and digital skills, and by promoting the introduction of dual-training systems and apprenticeships; +	Cross border cooperation to improve the cross-border education offers of kindergartens, primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools +	Significantly supported actions, (<i>esp. Joint education schemes</i>), with very equal support from both member states
	Type of action 3.2 join pilot action and investments to improve the cross-border education offers of primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools +	Mix of supported actions (OR even strongly supported actions – like “ <i>Joint education actions in topics relevant for cross-border area, esp. environmental education, health and nursing, digital skills and technical education</i> ”) and actions (<i>harmonisation activities</i>) with a weak support from both sides.
(iv) ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family- and community-based care; NA	Types of action 3.3 cross border know how and data exchange to improve the cross border health care system NR	No specific questions targeted on healthcare in the survey (topic of health mentioned by some stakeholders in the open questions)
	Types of action 3.4 joint pilot actions and joint solutions to improve the health sector NR	No specific questions targeted on healthcare in the survey (topic of health mentioned by some stakeholders in the open questions)
v) enhancing the role of culture and tourism in economic development, ++	Type of action 3.5 cross border know how and data exchange to foster resilience of the tourism / culture sector ++	Strong support to all indicative actions under this type of action from both sides of the border, except one (<i>Combine the expertise and competencies of large national museums with the expertise of regional actors</i>)

Specific objective	Type of action	Suggestions from the stakeholder consultation
social inclusion and social innovation <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	Type of action 3.6 joint pilot actions and investments to foster resilience of the tourism / culture sector <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	Broadly designed type action with a mix of activities with very high potential and support (<i>Joint expansion and adaptation or maintenance of the tourist infrastructure; Joint investment in the key themes in cultural heritage</i>) And activities with modest support (<i>mostly actions of systematic character, like tourism marketing, cooperation of destination managements</i>) OR even very weak support (<i>joint training measures for tourism and culture stakeholders OR joint procedures for systematic visitor monitoring</i>)
(ii) enhance efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and institutions, in particular, with a view to resolving legal and other obstacles in border regions; <p style="text-align: center;">0/-</p>	Type of action 4.1 joint strategy development and know how exchange <p style="text-align: center;">0</p>	Mix of strongly supported actions (<i>Joint strategy development in different areas</i>), BUT also activities with very low potential (<i>Collection and processing of contextual information in the policy areas addressed by the cooperation programme to support strategy development</i>). In both cases with significantly higher interest on CZ side.
	Type of action 4.2 joint pilot actions to approach the removal of border obstacles <p style="text-align: center;">-</p>	Very low interest on both sides of the border in the indicative action " <i>Joint activities of public actors in relevant thematic fields</i> "
	Type of action 4.3 networking and cluster activities <p style="text-align: center;">+</p>	All three indicative actions within the Type of action with significant reflection (interest) on both sides (esp. on CZ side)
(iii) build up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging people-to-people actions <p style="text-align: center;">NR</p>	Type of action 4.4 small scale projects to improve cultural, social and economic relations in the border area <p style="text-align: center;">NR</p>	No specific questions (with multiple choice) targeted on SPF BUT – a lot of ideas brought in the open question on SFP – i.e. indication of strong support and preference of this tool.