

EVALUATION OF EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE INTERREG PROGRAMME SLOVENIA–HUNGARY 2021–2027

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS OF SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Commission approved the Interreg Programme Slovenia–Hungary 2021–2027 (hereinafter: the Programme) on 14 November 2022. The Managing Authority of the Programme is the Ministry of Local Self-Government, Cohesion Policy and Regional Development of Slovenia.

The Programme's vision is to contribute to an active and cooperative programme area that is aware of its environmental, natural and cultural values by promoting sustainable use, protection and exploitation for tourism purposes, and by establishing a recognizable and attractive green tourism destination. The Programme supports improvements in biodiversity, green and blue infrastructure, and the reduction of various forms of pollution, thereby contributing to sustainable development goals.

The programme area covers four eligible NUTS 3 regions in Slovenia and Hungary:

- in Slovenia: Pomurje and Podravje regions
- in Hungary: Vas and Zala counties

Several potentials, needs, and challenges have been identified in the programme area between Slovenia and Hungary. These were expressed by stakeholders in the programme area and indicate that the territory is facing important changes that can be addressed jointly. The Programme focuses on a limited number of thematic areas and will pool resources to promote change and exploit opportunities for increased cooperation capacity, new development, and joint solutions to identified challenges.

The common challenges and needs are addressed through three priorities and four specific objectives of the Programme, with a total allocation of EUR 17.6 million (EUR 14.1 million from the European Regional Development Fund, out of this 11.7 million for cofinancing projects).

PRIORITY 1: GREEN BORDER REGION

Specific objective:

- Specific Objective 1.1: Strengthening nature protection and biodiversity, green infrastructure including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution (RSO 2.7)

PRIORITY 2: INCLUSIVE BORDER REGION BASED ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Specific objective:

- Specific Objective 2.1: Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation (RSO 4.6)

PRIORITY 3: COOPERATIVE BORDER REGION

Specific objectives:

- Specific Objective 3.1: Better cooperation governance (ISO 6.2)
- Specific Objective 3.2: Building mutual trust, especially through people-to-people actions (ISO 6.3)

More information is available on the Programme website. [Interreg VI-A Slovenia-Hungary – Where cooperation matters](#)

At the time of publication of the call, 24 standard projects have been co-financed (7 under Priority 1, 12 under Priority 2, and 5 under Priority 3 – Specific Objective 3.1). In addition, 16 small-scale projects have been supported under Priority 3, Specific Objective 3.2. More information is available on website: [Projekti – Interreg VI-A Slovenia-Hungary](#)

2. CONTENT FRAMEWORK

2.1 Legal basis

In accordance with Article 35 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, the Member State or Managing Authority shall carry out evaluations of programmes based on one or more of the following criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value, in order to improve the quality of programme design and implementation. By 30 June 2029, an evaluation assessing the Programme's impact must also be carried out. By then the final report on the impact evaluation of the programme must be available to the European Commission.

The Managing Authority ensures that evaluations, including those assessing effectiveness, efficiency, and impact, are conducted based on the Evaluation Plan approved by the Monitoring Committee. At least once during the programming period, an evaluation shall assess how support contributes to the objectives of each priority.

The Evaluation Plan for the Interreg Programme Slovenia–Hungary 2021–2027 was adopted on 12 September 2023.

The document is available on the website: <http://www.si-hu.eu/2127/sl/programski-dokumenti/>

All evaluations must be published and submitted to the European Commission.

2.2 Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The purpose is to assess relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of Programme results financed by the ERDF, as well as to evaluate implementation experience.

Objectives:

The overall objective of the evaluation is to assess Programme structures and implementation, identify what works and what does not, propose improvements, and provide recommendations for 2028– in addition to highlight examples of good practices in individual thematic areas at the project level.

Efficiency and effectiveness evaluation:

- assess efficiency of Programme implementation
- assess effectiveness of Programme/projects

Impact evaluation:

- assess achieved results and impacts and their sustainability
- assess communication effects
- assess Programme/project impact on the programme area and target groups

3. SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

The subjects of the public procurement is the evaluation of the Interreg programme Slovenia-Hungary 2021-2027. The adopted Evaluation Plan envisages the evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme and the evaluation of the impact of the programme. The implementation of the evaluation will take several years, as it depends on the implementation and completion of the projects 2021-2027 and will affect the programming of the new programme period 2028-2034. For this reason, the impact evaluation is divided into two parts-the evaluation of the impact of the programme I and the evaluation of the impact of the programme II. To ensure methodological consistency, comparability and quality of results and comprehensive interpretation of findings,

it is essential that the evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness and the evaluation of impact within one Interreg programme are carried out by the same contractor. Since the evaluation process of the Interreg programme Slovenia-Hungary 2021-2027 involves cooperation with programme/project partners of the programme area in Slovenia and Hungary, the presence of at least one member from Slovenia and one member from Hungary must be ensured in the team of experts of the tenderer, which is also one of the conditions for the implementation of the public contract. The staffing conditions will be defined in more detail in the documentation related to the award of the public contract.

I. Evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness

Within the evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness, the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme procedures and activities are assessed with the aim of improving the quality of programme implementation.

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme management system and programme implementation. Efficiency refers to the use of financial and administrative resources in relation to outputs and results. Effectiveness refers to the degree of achievement of the set general and specific objectives.

The evaluation focuses on:

- programme management and implementation,
- project application and selection procedures,
- communication strategy,
- management of technical assistance funds,
- project reporting and reimbursement procedures,
- initial experience with small-scale projects, including the analysis of partnerships for small-scale projects,
- achievement of the performance framework for all indicators under individual specific objectives

II. Impact evaluation of the programme I

Within the impact assessment, it is examined how the funds of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) contribute to the achievement of the objectives of each of the priorities. The evaluation focuses on assessing the impact of the programme on the programme area, and in the case of small-scale projects, it focuses on the border area, separately from other trends and developments in the region. The evaluation covers the impacts of the programme as a whole and its effectiveness in relation to individual objectives, including in relation to overarching objectives and strategies such as macro-regional strategies.

In 2027, the start of the impact evaluation I is foreseen, which will focus on small-scale projects and the first completed standard projects. By the end of the programming period (2027), the report of impact evaluation I will be prepared and submitted.

Impact evaluation I will focus on:

- assessment of the impact of priorities 1–3,
- values of output indicators and result indicators in connection with the specific objectives of the programme, taking into account the targets of output and result indicators achieved by the cut-off date agreed with the contracting authority,
- review of the intervention logic,
- target groups, indicative activities and types of beneficiaries,
- horizontal principles,
- communication strategy.

III. Impact evaluation of the programme II

By 2028, most of the project results will already be available, which is when the impact evaluation II will begin. It will be intended for the preparation of comprehensive data and findings, which must be available to the European Commission by 30 June 2029, and the evaluator must therefore carry out the first impact evaluation report of Impact evaluation II and submit it to the contracting Authority, including the contracting authority's comments, no later than 31 May 2029, i.e. one month before the deadline set by Regulation (EU) 2021/1059.

Impact evaluation II will focus on:

- assessment of the impact of priorities 1–3,
- values of all output indicators and result indicators in connection with the specific objectives of the programme, taking into account the targets of output and result indicators achieved by 2029,
- review of the intervention logic,
- target groups, indicative activities and types of beneficiaries,
- horizontal principles,
- communication strategy.

3.1 Examples of general and specific questions

I. Examples of general guiding questions:

Evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of the programme

- How efficient is the functioning of programme structures?
- How efficient and effective are the programme procedures?
- To what extent are programme procedures and forms user-friendly?
- To what extent has simplification and harmonisation of procedures been achieved?
- Are improvements needed in programme procedures?
- Have any bottlenecks in programme procedures been identified and how could they be eliminated?
- What is the progress of the programme in achieving the target values of the specific objectives?
- What are the most important achievements of projects under implementation?
- What are the characteristics of partnerships? Do they reflect the expectations of the programme?
- Has the programme attracted new applicants and beneficiaries through the introduction of small-scale projects and in what way?
- How has the programme achieved a certain level of recognition in the local environment through the introduction of small-scale projects?
- What is the progress in the implementation of the communication strategy and in achieving the set objectives?
- How is the programme perceived by target groups, especially relevant stakeholders and the general public?
- How effectively have small-scale projects contributed to 'building mutual trust' (ISO 6.3) in the border area? Has the programme succeeded in involving 'newcomers' (organisations that have not participated in Interreg before)?

Impact evaluation of the programme

- How well are the objectives, impacts and results of projects (standard and small-scale projects) aligned with the expectations of the programme, as defined in the Interreg programme (intervention logic)?
- What is the progress of the programme in achieving the target values of the specific objectives in relation to expected results, activities, target groups, types of beneficiaries and indicators?
- What changes have been achieved in the programme area (or in the border area in the case of small-scale projects) in relation to addressing the needs and challenges of the programme area defined in the Interreg programme?
- Identification of gaps between achieved and unmet/new needs of the area at the time of evaluation.
- To what extent has the integrated approach to territorial development been taken into account?

- To what extent has territorial balance been respected?
- Which activities would be needed or recommended for the period after 2027 in terms of thematic focus in order to increase impact and ensure the sustainability of financial support?
- To what extent have the programme procedures and project selection criteria ensured compliance with the horizontal principles, and how effectively has this been monitored during implementation?
- Identify results with high potential that have not yet been fully exploited. What were the specific success mechanisms (what worked for whom, where, and why), and how can these be transferred or scaled up in the future programming periods?
- To what extent has the programme enabled achievements or cooperation that would not have been possible through national or regional funding alone?

During the implementation of the evaluation, additional questions may be formulated that should be addressed within the framework of individual evaluations.

Within each specific objective/thematic area, examples of good practice projects must also be identified.

Each evaluation question must be analysed and recommendations must be provided, which are not a reflection of individual opinions but are based on verifiable facts obtained from available and relevant sources of information. The listed set of questions is not limited upwards and may be extended as necessary by agreement with the contracting authority upon proposal of the contractor or the contracting authority.

Findings as results deriving from the answers to the evaluation questions must describe the following aspects:

- effects of cross-border cooperation in the programme area,
- sustainability of cooperation,
- added value of cooperation,
- usability,
- possibility of capitalisation of project results,
- synergy.

3.2 Users of evaluations

Users of the results will be all programme structures and the European Commission. The conducted evaluations will represent a basis for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of programme implementation and various reports on programme implementation. The results of the evaluations will also be useful in the preparation of the new programming period 2028–2034.

4. METHOD OF WORK

4.1 Preparation of reports

The contractor prepares the reports that must include at least the following information:

Inception report

- review of the legal bases for the implementation of the programme and projects and other relevant documents on programme and project implementation;
- preparation of the inception report, which is approved by the contracting authority and contains the proposed methodology, questionnaires and surveys and the work plan for further work.

Draft evaluation report

- conducting interviews with key stakeholders of programme implementation and LP/PP projects (the contractor will submit to the contracting authority a list of institutions with contact details of individuals with whom interviews were conducted), conducting an online survey among LP/PP, data analysis;
- preparation of the draft evaluation report, on which the contracting authority provides comments.

Final evaluation report

- the proofread report in English must include a summary in Slovenian, Hungarian and English, an introduction describing the subject of the evaluation and the purpose and objectives of the evaluation, the evaluation methodology, key evaluation findings with answers to the questions from the tender documentation, recommendations, sources, annexes (diagrams, maps, survey sheets, questionnaires, etc.);
- the report clearly includes the objectives of each evaluation – evaluation method – summary of findings – proposal of recommendations;
- the report should consist of the main body and additional material forming annexes.

The contractor prepares an inception report, a draft evaluation report and a final report for the evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness. For impact evaluation I and II, the contractor prepares a joint inception report, a draft interim report and a final report for impact evaluation I, and a draft final report and a final report for impact evaluation II.

Upon submission of each evaluation report, the contractor must submit to the contracting authority all documentation (reports, graphs, tables, images, etc.) in electronic form (documents in Word docx format, tables in xlsx Excel format, collected data structured for example in xlsx Excel format, graphical elements for example in svg format, geographical data for example in kmz or jpg format) and in printed form.

Final reports for each evaluation must include at least the following points:

- Summary of evaluation findings presented using tables, graphs and maps or other visual materials.
- Explanation of the methodology used, including a list of references and studies where appropriate.
- Chapters that take into account and are based on the defined and agreed evaluation questions for all evaluations. Each chapter should include key highlights that will form the basis for conclusions.
- Presentation of findings, conclusions and clear links between conclusions and recommendations.
- Answers to evaluation questions clearly supported by findings and carefully developed recommendations.
- A table presenting results achieved at project level and at programme level (outputs and results). Relevant for impact evaluation.

The contracting authority (the managing authority with the assistance of the joint secretariat of the programme) is responsible for quality control of externally performed evaluation activities. The Monitoring Committee of the programme will be regularly informed about the progress of evaluation activities and their results. After approval of the final report, the contracting authority submits it to the European Commission and publishes it on the programme website.

When preparing the report, the evaluation contractor must take into account the communication and visibility guidelines of the Interreg Programme Slovenia–Hungary 2021–2027 ([6.-del-KOMUNICIRANJE-IN-PREPOZNAVNOST-NOVO-maj-2025.pdf](#))

The content of the reports is presented by the evaluation contractor at the meeting of the Monitoring Committee.

4.2 Data

The following documents will be used as data sources, most of which are available on the website: <http://www.si-hu.eu/2127/sl/programski-dokumenti/>

Programme documents:

- Interreg Programme Slovenia–Hungary 2021–2027
- Methodological document on indicators
- Strategic environmental assessment of the Interreg Programme Slovenia–Hungary 2021–2027

- Description of the management and control system
- Evaluation Plan of the Interreg Programme Slovenia–Hungary 2021–2027
- Tender documentation – Beneficiary Manual
- Description of the project assessment and selection system
- Communication Strategy of the Interreg Programme Slovenia–Hungary 2021–2027
- National and European legislation (in particular Regulations (EU) No 2021/1060, 2021/1059 and 2021/1058)
- Proposal of the EC legislative package for the financial period 2028–2034

Project documents:

- Project documentation (application form with accompanying documentation, reports, etc.), available in the electronic monitoring system (Jems)

Data sources:

- Jems,
- public data registers,
- surveys,
- interviews,
- as defined in the Methodological document on indicators,
- project effects and achievements,
- programme documents,
- other relevant source of data.

Data collected by the managing authority and the joint secretariat within regular monitoring of project progress (including information on project achievements, output indicators, performance framework and financial data) and documented in the programme monitoring system will serve as relevant data for the evaluation.

4.3 Methods of work¹

The evaluation will be carried out using at least the following methods:

- data collection and analysis: review of legal bases and relevant documents, SWOT analysis of the programme,
- theoretical research,
- interviews: interviews with key programme stakeholders and LP/PP project partners, and other institutions if necessary,
- surveys: telephone and online surveys (target groups, LP/PP),
- questionnaires for collecting feedback

A theory-based approach will be used for impact assessment, as defined in the European Commission guidelines. This approach follows each step of the intervention logic, identifying causal links and mechanisms of change and answering the question why and how the intervention works.

The contractor is encouraged to supplement surveys with qualitative methods such as focus groups or participatory workshops involving key stakeholders. These should aim to validate 'good practices' and identify barriers to cooperation that quantitative data may not capture.

Additional methods proposed by the selected contractor may also be used, subject to prior agreement with the contracting authority.

The working language of the evaluation is English, and evaluation reports are prepared in English.

The final methodology will be agreed upon with the contracting authority; it will be outlined by the selected evaluation contractor in the evaluation design report and approved by the contracting authority.

5. TIMETABLE

No.	Activities	Responsibility	Timeline* (no. of working days)
1	Kick-off meeting,	contractor (MA/JS)	In 8 working days from signing the subsidy contract
2	Preparation of a draft initial report on the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the program, containing a proposal for methodology, questionnaires, surveys, etc..	External expert	12 working days
3	Conducting evaluations of program performance and effectiveness, surveys, interviews, fieldwork, etc. in accordance with the agreed methodology	External expert	30 working days
4	Preparation of a draft final report on the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme	External expert	10 working days
5	Preparation of a final report evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of the program, with proposed findings and recommendations based on the contractor's comments received, and presentation of the findings	External expert	13 working days
6	Coordination meeting	MA/JS, external expert	1 working days
7	Preparation of a draft initial impact evaluation of Programme I and II, containing a proposal for methodology, questionnaires, surveys, etc.	External expert	6 working days
8	Conducting the evaluation of the impact of the Programme I, surveys, interviews, fieldwork, data analysis and processing, etc. in accordance with the agreed methodology	External expert	38 working days
9	Preparation of the draft final impact evaluation report I	External expert	19 working days
10	Preparation of the final report on the impact evaluation of Program I, with proposed findings and recommendations based on the comments received from the client and presentation of the findings	External expert	13 working days
11	Conducting impact evaluation II, surveys, interviews, fieldwork, data analysis and processing, etc. in accordance with the agreed methodology	External expert	14 working days
12	Preparation of the draft final impact evaluation report II	External expert	10 working days
13	Preparation of the final report on the evaluation of the impact of the program, I with proposed findings and recommendations based on the comments received from the client and presentation of the findings**	External expert	9 working days

** The timeline will be adjusted accordingly based on the signing of the contract with the evaluation contractor.*

*** In accordance with the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2021/1059, the final report of the impact evaluation II must be available to the European Commission by 30 June 2029, therefore the evaluator must carry out the final report of the impact evaluation of the Programme II and submit it to the contracting authority, including the contracting authority's comments, no later than 31 May 2029, i.e. one month before the deadline set by the Regulation.*

The execution of the evaluation will last until May 31, 2029 at the latest, which is expected to be 32 months from the signing of the contract between the client and the contractor.