

Summary of Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-27 Draft Programme Strategy (June 2020)

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE has supported transnational cooperation in central Europe for more than 20 years.

The programme funds regions and cities to become stronger and more resilient without reinventing the wheel. It helps building trust beyond borders and connects people in the fields of innovation, low carbon, natural and cultural heritage as well as transport and mobility.

Now the time has come to take this successful cooperation forward together with experts on the ground.

Based on data and inputs collected from a broad variety of experts in a territorial analysis, representatives from all Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE countries agreed in May 2020 on a set of preliminary programme priorities and specific objectives that are deemed most relevant for the future of transnational cooperation in central Europe in 2021-27.

In June 2020, Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE invites stakeholders to participate in a transnational survey and national online meetings to provide feedback and inputs on the draft programme strategy.

More information on possible involvements in the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-27 programming process is available at www.interreg-central.eu/CE21-27.

The programme area

Central Europe is a core area of the European Union. The Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE (CE) Programme covers regions and cities from nine EU Member States: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

With an area of more than one million square km, the programme affects the lives of about 146 million people, which share a common history and cultural identity. At the same time, the territory is characterised by structural differences between regions with growing urban and industrialised areas (e.g. capital city agglomerations like Warsaw, Prague, Berlin, Vienna, or Budapest) and rural or peripheral areas often characterised by lower competitiveness and shrinking populations.

Central Europe covers different landscapes ranging from high and low mountain ranges to wide plains, large river basins and lake districts. It is home to remarkable heritage sites, including post-industrial sites, and pristine nature. It also crosses climate zones. Wide open spaces in rural areas, fragile mountainous areas and natural landscapes such as the Green Belt are inhabited by a wide variety of valuable and protected plants and animals. This rich natural and cultural heritage represents an important location factor.

The programme territory runs along large parts of the former Iron Curtain covering regions with significant differences in their socioeconomic history. The area is an important cross-junction for European north-south and east-west connections beyond its own borders. As a historical consequence, many trade and transport routes cross the area on transnational rivers, streets and railroads. This makes central Europe a hub for socio-economically relevant corridors to which many regions are physically or socio-economically connected.

Draft programme strategy

The funding priorities and specific objectives below form the backbone of the draft programme strategy. In the survey, stakeholders in a given field can rate the importance of potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions and thus help to further sharpen the focus of the future programme. They can also provide inputs and ideas for additional topics as well as future transnational actions and target groups.

Priority 1: A smarter central Europe through cooperation

SO 1.1 Strengthening innovation capacities in central Europe

Strong innovation capacities bear enormous relevance for central Europe considering its strong industrial base and the importance of other sectors such as agriculture and food or tourism. Capacities for innovation need to be strengthened especially in regions that are struggling with the transition to a more globalised, digitalised and green economy. Knowledge and technology transfer, especially for SMEs, is a critical need.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Interregional partnerships along value chains
- Smart specialisation strategies
- Industry 4.0, robotisation, mechatronics, digital technologies (including IoT, AI)
- Key Enabling Technologies
- Technology transfer to SMEs and improved access to transnational networks
- Cross-sector cooperation
- New schemes to finance innovation
- Close to market solutions
- Green economy
- Silver economy
- Cultural and creative industries

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

The strong industrial base of central Europe underlines the strategic relevance of this specific objective. SMEs have been identified as the main providers of employment in in central Europe and it is important to foster locally available human skills, especially for the transition to Industry 4.0. Place-based improvements of the local employment situation are also crucial for reducing urban-rural disparities. Overall, there is the need for a just transition process that is socially responsible and avoiding social as well as digital exclusion.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Capacity-building and institutional learning (including vocational training, lifelong learning etc.) for smart specialisation

- Skills development and adaptation to Industry 4.0 and digitalisation
- Skills for green economy
- Matching skills to labour market needs
- Skills development for entrepreneurship
- Creative economy and entrepreneurship
- Counterbalancing job loss due to automation and digitisation
- Capacities for social innovation and social enterprises, silver economy and healthcare
- Demographic change, brain-drain, ageing society, regional (urban-rural) disparities of human capital
- Migration and social integration
- Capacity building for sustainable tourism

Priority 2: A greener central Europe through cooperation

SO 2.1 Supporting the transition to a climate neutral central Europe

Central Europe needs to speed up its performance related both to energy efficiency as well as the production and use of renewable energy to meet EU targets and climate objectives of the European Green Deal. Significant regional disparities between central European regions have to be tackled. Energy efficiency and renewable energy need to be promoted and disseminated to reach a wider geographical coverage.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Improved energy efficiency of buildings and public infrastructures
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from industrial production processes
- Renewable energy production and usage
- Financing schemes for energy efficiency and renewable energy investments
- Alleviating energy poverty
- Climate neutral energy planning at local/regional level
- Improved energy and demand side management and behavioural change
- Smart integration of low-carbon solutions across sectors

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

Resilience to climate change represents an important need for central Europe, especially in view of the significant environmental and socio-economic impacts that climate change. A specific territorial aspect is the need for integrated and cross-sectoral approaches to best adapt to climate change. In order to build up

climate resilience, general approaches need to be locally adapted towards workable and manageable, integrated solutions which can be proliferated across the entire central Europe area.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Risk awareness, risk prevention and risk management
- Climate change adaptation measures
- Natural hazards and disaster prevention and resilience
- Draughts and water scarcity, wildfires
- Extreme rainfall events and floods, landslides
- Weather (including heat) extremes and health implications
- Climate-proof landscape and urban planning
- Socio-economic impacts of climate change

SO 2.3. Taking circular economy forward in central Europe

A climate-neutral, resource-efficient and competitive economy requires a scaling up of circular approaches. This economic transformation has to pay attention to the fact that a circular economy often will often require the re-arrangement of value chains, changes of interdependencies and the creation of new profit options. It is important that this socio-economic transformation happens across the entire territory of central Europe and does not concentrate on only a few regions.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Circular economy value chains
- Clean production processes and closed loop systems (energy, materials, water)
- Water-energy-food nexus
- Sustainable products and eco-design
- Repair and re-use
- Waste management and recycling, recovery of raw materials, zero-waste approaches
- Urban mining
- Water reuse

SO 2.4. Safeguarding the environment in central Europe

The economic and environmental significance of natural assets and landscapes in central Europe calls for a co-ordinated valorisation and protection of biodiversity and ecosystems. There is a strong need to counteract negative effects of human action through integrated environmental management approaches.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Natural heritage, protected areas and habitats, Natura 2000 areas
- Loss of biodiversity

- Green and blue infrastructures
- Variety of landscapes and multi-national initiatives (e.g. European Green Belt, Carpathian Convention)
- Ecosystem services (including forests)
- Sustainable land management and landscape planning
- Urban sprawl, soil sealing
- Air, water, soil and noise pollution
- Integrated water management
- Brownfield rehabilitation
- Sustainable tourism and use of natural resources

SO 2.5. Greening urban mobility in central Europe

A reduction of transport emissions is one of the key targets of the European Green Deal. Smart and greener mobility will need an integrated response. Many functional urban areas in central Europe face similar challenges when greening their mobility. The specific territorial need lies in the vast diversity of topics (e.g. pollution and congestion) that need to be addressed in an integrated approach. Furthermore, the topic does not only include different ways of mobility, but also urban as well as urban-rural logistics.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Sustainable urban mobility planning
- Smart mobility and commuting solutions
- Multimodal mobility in functional urban areas
- Improved connections between urban and peri-urban areas
- Smart traffic and mobility management
- Smart and sustainable urban freight and logistic solutions
- Greening of last mile
- Quality and efficiency of public transport services
- Accessibility for elderly and disabled people
- Reducing traffic congestion as well as greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions in functional urban areas

Priority 3: A more connected Europe through cooperation

Please note: A final decision has not yet been taken on including this priority and specific objective, it is expected to be taken by the programming working group in autumn 2020.

SO 3.1. Connecting central European regions to EU transport corridors

The programme area is a relevant junction in Europe. This can strategically facilitate the participation in trade and increase competitiveness. Accessibility to larger transport corridors is, however, comparatively weak. There is a need to link especially peripheral regions to the nodes of the TEN-T core network corridors (CNC), to remove bottlenecks and to bridge missing transport links in order to ensure good accessibility across central Europe. Furthermore, there is the need to reduce transport emissions by 90% by 2050, which calls for smart and sustainable approaches to cross-border mobility, intermodality and the introduction of IT-supported solutions for mobility management.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Connecting peripheral regions to TEN-T network
- Accessibility of remote and rural regions
- Regional multi-modal, demand responsive sustainable transport
- Integrated regional mobility approaches
- Strategic transport planning and investment preparation
- Coordination of transport stakeholders and spatial planning
- Cross-border transport barriers and links
- Transnational logistic chains
- Improved digital accessibility for remote and rural areas

Priority 4: A better governance for cooperation in central Europe

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

Central Europe is highly heterogeneous both in territorial as well as in socio-economic terms. At the same time, a multitude of challenges and barriers hinders the economic, social and territorial development in central Europe, which are not necessarily bound to specific administrative units. They rather relate to areas with functional ties that are characterised by economic, social, and environmental linkages. Addressing these territorial development challenges calls for integrated multi-level governance processes that consider functional linkages at the territorial level. There is a need to improve capacities of public authorities at all territorial levels for setting up and implementing integrated territorial development strategies. Cooperation should be encouraged within and between territories that are sharing functional ties.

Potential topics to be addressed through transnational actions:

- Multi-level governance structures and solutions beyond administrative borders

- Multi-sector governance processes and cooperation among areas with functional ties
- Capacity building of governance stakeholders
- Integrated territorial development strategies addressing demographic change challenges
- Integrated territorial development strategies building on tourism and cultural assets
- Integrated strategies for public services of general interest (e.g. health, education, social services)
- Digital governance including smart cities, smart territories approaches
- Reduction of administrative barriers and better policy making and cooperation beyond administrative borders
- Participatory decision making processes and citizen involvement