

Non-technical summary of Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE 2021-27 (IP Version 1 from September 2020)

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE supports transnational cooperation projects that make regions and cities stronger and more resilient, without reinventing the wheel. It currently helps to build trust beyond borders and connect 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. Based on inputs collected from numerous experts and an involvement of stakeholders and relevant partners in a comprehensive consultation process, representatives from all nine programme countries agreed in September 2020 on a first draft version of the future Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme.

This key document defines the draft strategy and intervention logic of the new programme. It includes a set of preliminary programme priorities, specific objectives that are deemed most relevant for the future of transnational cooperation in central Europe in 2021-27. It also outlines potential transnational actions and beneficiaries as well as target audiences.

More information on the 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 Programme covers regions and cities from nine EU Member States: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The current programme area will be enlarged in 2021-27 by the region of Braunschweig in Germany.

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 that needs to be better valorised and protected.

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 connected.

Draft programme strategy and intervention logic

The draft programme priorities and specific objectives below form the backbone of the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE funding strategy in 2021-27. Related to the listed thematic fields, transnational cooperation actions are expected to address the development and implementation of strategies, action plans, tools, training and pilot actions. Actions will have to respect greening and sustainability aspects as a horizontal principle.

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 fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Green economy, bio-economy
- Industry 4.0, robotisation, digital technologies, key enabling technologies
- Smart specialisation strategies
- Cultural and creative industries
- Silver economy and social innovation
- Technology and innovation transfer to SMEs
- Interregional partnerships along value chains
- New schemes for financing innovation

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

The strong industrial base of central Europe and its dependence on adequate skills underlines the strategic relevance of this specific objective. SMEs have been identified as the main providers of employment in central Europe and it is important to foster locally available human skills, especially for the transition to Industry 4.0 and a green economy. 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 avoids social as well as digital exclusion.

Potential fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Skills for Industry 4.0, digitalisation, healthcare, and green-, bio-, and silver economy
- Capacity-building and institutional learning for smart specialisation
- Matching skills to labour market needs
- Competences for entrepreneurship
- Demographic change, ageing society, brain-drain, regional (urban-rural) disparities of human capital
- Counterbalancing job loss due to automation and digitisation
- Social entrepreneurship and social innovation leading to better social integration

Priority 2: A greener central Europe through cooperation

SO 2.1 Supporting the energy 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 exploited to reach a wider geographical coverage.

Potential fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Renewable energy production and usage
- Energy efficiency of buildings and public infrastructures
- Greenhouse gas emissions from industrial production processes
- Energy planning at local and regional levels
- Energy demand management and behavioural change
- Financing schemes for energy efficiency and renewable energy investments
- Smart integration of carbon-neutral 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 its significant environmental and socio-economic impacts. 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 fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Climate change resilience and adaptation measures
- Climate-proof landscape and urban planning
- Weather extremes and related hazards (rainfall events, floods, landslides, heat, draughts, water scarcity, wildfires, etc.)
- Risk prevention and management
- Socio-economic and health-related impacts of climate change

SO 2.3. Taking circular economy forward in central Europe

A climate-neutral, resource-efficient and competitive economy requires up-scaled circular approaches. This economic transformation has to pay attention to the fact that a circular economy will often require a 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 fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Waste prevention and management, recycling and recovery of resources and raw materials
- Repair and re-use

- Circular economy value chains
- Clean production processes and closed loop systems
- Sustainable product design (e.g. eco-design) and product development processes
- Behavioural changes of producers, consumers, public buyers etc.

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 fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Biodiversity conservation and recovery
- Protection of natural heritage, ecosystems and valuable areas incl. Natura 2000 sites
- Environmental pollution (air, water, soil, noise, light etc.) and human health impacts
- Integrated environmental management and sustainable use of natural resources
- Sustainable land management and landscape planning
- Ecosystem services (e.g. production of food and water, clean air, recreational benefits)
- Restoration of degraded ecosystems
- Sustainable tourism and the valorisation of natural heritage

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 November 2020.

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

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 fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Demand-responsive and flexible regional passenger transport
- Accessibility of rural and remote areas and their connectivity to main EU transport corridors
- Transport barriers and bottlenecks across borders and beyond
- Strategic regional transport and spatial planning
- Multi-modal freight transport and logistic chains in rural and peripheral areas

SO 3.2. 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 urban 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 fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Sustainable urban mobility planning
- Quality and efficiency of green, urban public transport services
- Smart traffic and mobility management, including commuting solutions
- Green connections between urban and peri-urban areas
- Sustainable multimodal urban freight and logistic solutions (including the “last mile”)
- Urban traffic congestions
- Greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions (air quality) from urban traffic
- Accessibility of urban public transport for elderly and disabled people

Priority 4: A better governance for cooperation in central Europe

SO 4.1 Strengthening governance for integrated territorial development in central Europe

Central Europe is highly heterogeneous both in territorial as well as in socio-economic terms. 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 and multi-sectoral governance processes that consider functional linkages at the territorial level. There is a need to improve capacities of public authorities on 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 fields to be addressed in transnational actions (non-exhaustive list):

- Reduction of administrative barriers, better policymaking and cooperation beyond borders
- Participatory decision-making processes (e.g. citizen involvement)
- Multi-level and multi-sector governance among areas with functional ties beyond borders
- Integrated territorial development strategies (e.g. on demographic change, public services including health)
- Digital governance