

ANNEX

TEMPLATE FOR INTERREG PROGRAMMES

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1. Joint programme strategy: main development challenges and policy responses

1.1 Programme area (not required for Interreg C programmes)

The eligible area of the Interreg Next Programme Romania-Ukraine 2021-2027 (Interreg NEXT RO-UA Programme) encompasses a total area of 100,860 km², out of which 32,760 km² represent the Romanian territory (divided between the 5 counties: Suceava 8,553 km², Botoşani 4,986 km², Satu-Mare 4,418 km², Maramureş 6,304 km², Tulcea 8,499 km²), and 68,100 km² represent the Ukrainian territory (divided between the 4 oblasts: Zakarpattia 12800 km², Ivano-Frankivsk 13,900 km², Odesa 33,300 km², Chernivtsi 8,100 km²). In terms of proportionality, the Ukrainian territory is more than double in size compared to the Romanian territory.

The border shared by the two countries represents part of the current border of the European Union, as the Romanian regions of North-West, North-East, and South-East are the outermost border regions of the EU in the region.

The eligible area is determined based on NUTS level 3 regions (or equivalent in the partner country) lying directly on the borders:

COUNTRY	ELIGIBLE REGIONS
UKRAINE	Odesa
	Zakarpattia
	Ivano-Frankivsk
	Chernivtsi
ROMANIA	Maramures
	Satu Mare
	Botosani
	Suceava
	Tulcea

1.2. Joint programme strategy:

1.2.1 Summary of main joint challenges

In the framework of the programming process a Territorial Analysis was developed in order to identify the main needs and constraints of the eligible area that could be addressed by a Cross Border Programme. In order to have a good picture of the issues a SWOT analysis was elaborated for each of the policy objectives analysed within the Territorial Analysis. In the next sections a summary of the main findings related to the general characteristics of the area, environmental issues, issues related to education, health, culture, governance and border safety will be presented.

General Characteristics of the Programme Area

A statistical overview of the Romania-Ukraine programme eligible area in terms of territory and population is provided in the table below:

COUNTRY	ELIGIBLE REGIONS	TERRITORY (km ²)	POPULATION (thousands)	URBAN (%)	RURAL (%)	DENSITY (people/km ²)
UKRAINE ¹	Odesa	33,300	2,377	67%	33%	71
	Zakarpattia	12,800	1,253	37%	63%	97
	Ivano-Frankivsk	13,900	1,368	44%	56%	98
	Chernivtsi	8,100	901	43%	57%	111
ROMANIA	Maramures	6,304	458	57%	43 %	72
	Satu Mare	4,418	331	44.5%	55.5%	75
	Botosani	4,986	376	41%	59%	75
	Suceava	8,533	623	41%	59%	73
	Tulcea	8,499	193	47%	53%	23
TOTAL		100,840	7,880			

Table no. 1 - Overview of the eligible areas²

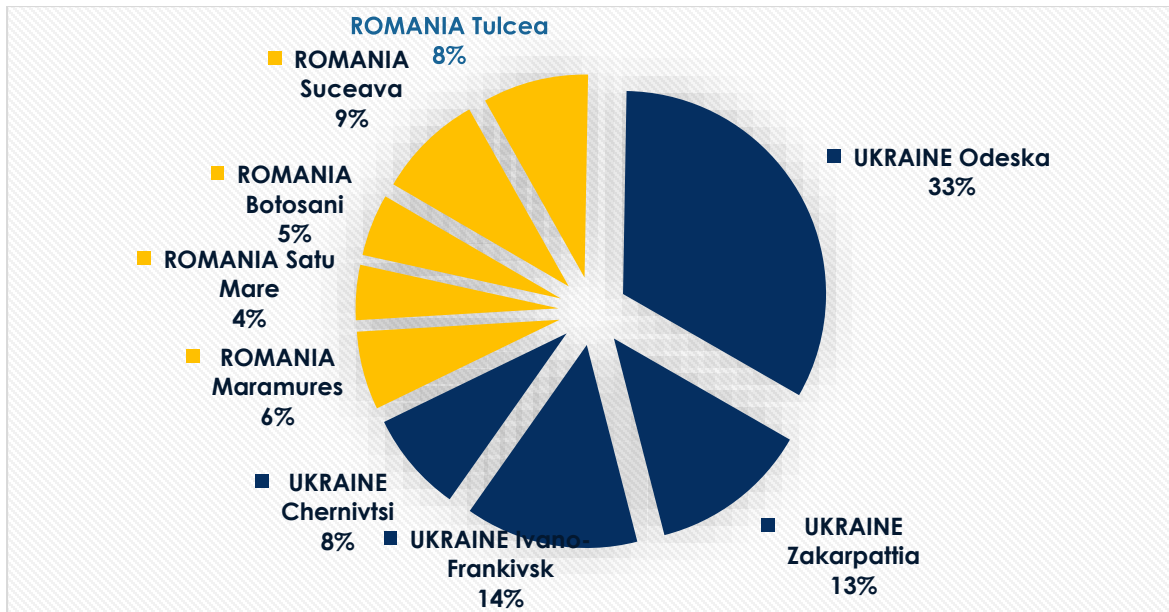
¹ Source for date related to Ukraine http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/regions/reg_zakar/, https://ukrstat.org/en/operativ/operativ2021/ds/kn/arh_kn2021_e.html

²Source for the territory data: Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020. National Institute of Statistics, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table> - for Romania; State Statistical Service - for Ukraine

Territory & Demography

The Romania-Ukraine Programme eligible area occupies a territory of 100,840 sq. km. and includes a population of 7.9 million people.

Figure no.1 - Share of the eligible territory (%) by county/oblast of total programme area



As presented in the figure above, the Ukrainian territory is more than double in size than the Romanian territory, proportionate to the population for each country.

The population density in the eligible area is of approximately 78 people/ km², while the EU average population density is of 109 people/ km². The average population density for Ukraine at the level of 2013 was of 75 people/ km² and the estimated population density for 2020 is of approximately 69 people/ km². As for the Romanian national population density, the estimated level for 2020 is of 81 people/ km². The population density in the programme eligible area is, therefore, below the national level for Romania and the EU and above the average for Ukraine.

Additionally, there are disparities between regions, with Tulcea and Odesa having the lowest population density and Chernivtsi the highest. These significant density differences can be assigned to multiple factors. The most relevant are the geographic and topological similarities that can inhibit the development of urban and rural localities (Tulcea-Odesa - plains and delta; Zakarpattia-Ivano-Frankivsk-Satu-Mare-Maramureş-Suceava - predominantly mountainous) and the social and cultural similarities of these areas.

The overall growth in the eligible area population reveals similar trends for the eligible area and also at national level, with Ukraine having a more accelerated decrease in population, both

at regional and national level. Out of the whole eligible area, the only region with a positive trend remains Suceava county, both in 2013 and 2019 (see figure no. 3 below).

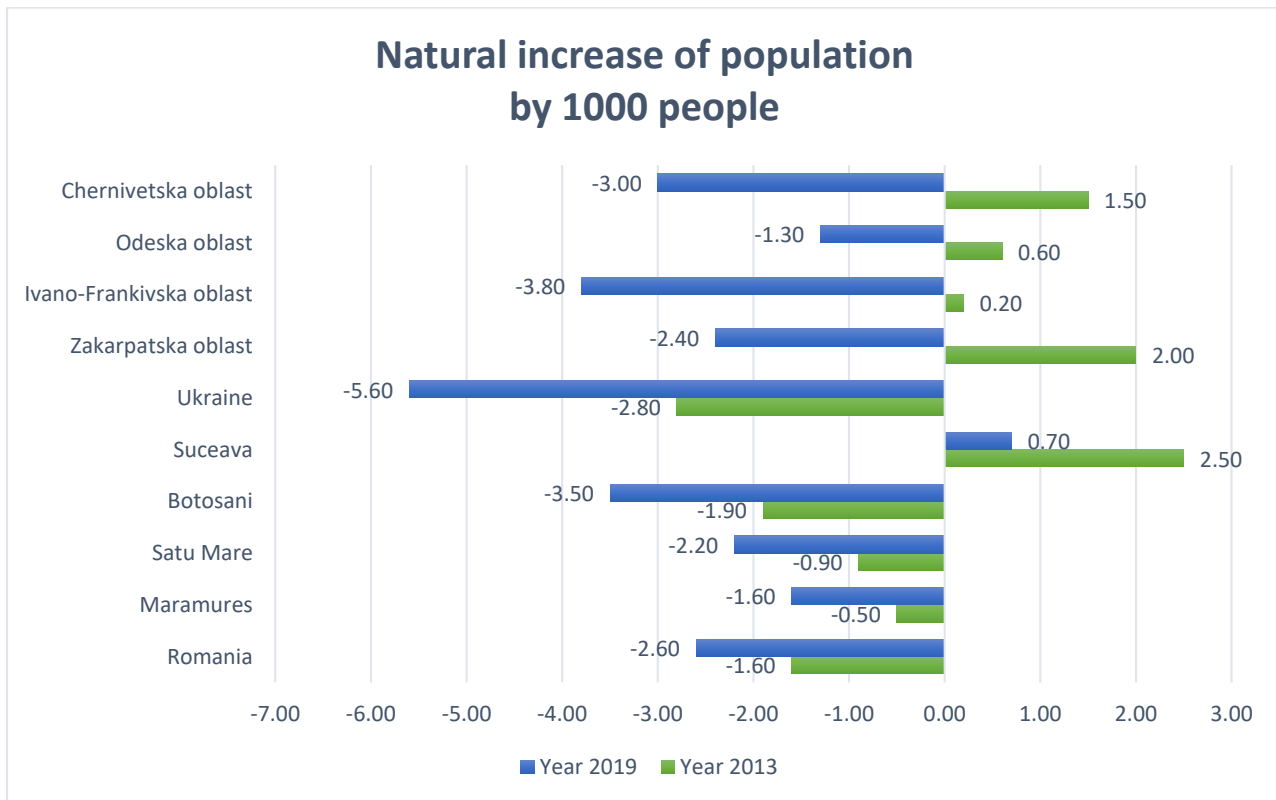


Figure no 2 - Natural increase of population by 1000 people eligible area and national level, 2013 compared to 2019 Romania and Ukraine.

Urban areas concentrate a large part of the population, especially in the Romanian counties and Odesa Oblast. Comparing the urban-rural composition of the population, the numbers show a slight difference: only 46.15% of the Romanian population is living in urban areas, compared to 52% of the Ukrainian population. Compared to national levels both of the sub-national territories have significantly smaller urban populations than at national level, as 54% of Romania’s population lives in urban areas, while in Ukraine the rate is 69%.

Demographic trends within the programme area reveal disparate dynamics in regard to the population age structure. A slight increase in the younger age cluster for the Ukrainian oblasts can be seen, following the general trends for Ukraine compared to the previous period. The demographic trend for Romania is quite different from Ukraine, with a tendency towards an ageing population, more accentuated than in the previous period.

Economy

During the last years the eligible area enjoyed a sustained growth, with the GDP per capita registering a constant increase over the last decade. However, although the general trend is towards economic growth there is a visible difference between Romania and Ukraine in terms

of GDP per capita, with an average for Romania (12,920) about three times higher than that in Ukraine (3,662) and a difference of about 3 times between Romania and the average EU GDP.

Regarding the economic structure of the two countries, there can be noted a larger share of the economy relying on agriculture and services in Ukraine than in Romania, while Romania is leading in the industry segment³.

As far as the inflation⁴ (consumer price index) is concerned, the rates fluctuate significantly for Ukraine during the last years, but although the inflation rate is double digit we can notice a descendant trend for both countries.

The disparities between the two countries are relevant and are being widened also by disparities compared to the neighbouring regions in terms of transportation and work force, which will be presented in the following sections.

Impact of COVID 19 crisis

Both Romania and Ukraine, together with the rest of the world, faced, during 2020 and 2021, the challenges posed by the COVID 19 pandemic, economic slowdown, overburden of the health system and radical shifts in society as a whole.

According to the World Health Organization, by June 2021 there have been more than 180 million COVID cases worldwide and more than 3.9 million deaths. In order to contain the pandemic most governments, including those of Romania and Ukraine, have imposed lockdowns and restrictions on travel, unseen before.

The lockdowns and the need to keep the number of sick people as low as possible have created a strong negative economic impact. Unemployment levels reached worrying figures and governments focused on measures of recovery directed to the most exposed ones. Romanian Government provided a fiscal stimulus of 4.4 percent of GDP in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 crisis. This consisted of financial help to small companies during the lockdown period, negotiated bank loan installment suspension for the population. Extra payments were made to the healthcare system and procurement of equipment was financed for hospitals and for schools as well, as the on-line schooling became the only solution since March 2020 to May 2021 to most categories of students.

The Spring 2021 Economic Forecast⁵ projects that the EU economy will expand by 4.2% in 2021 and by 4.4% in 2022. The euro area economy is forecasted to grow by 4.3% this year and 4.4% next year. Growth rates will continue to vary across the EU, but all Member States should see their economies return to pre-crisis levels by the end of 2022.

³ Source: For Ukraine the data is available for 2018 on <https://www.nordeatrade.com/fi/explore-new-market/ukraine/economical-context>

⁴ Source https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?end=2019&locations=UA-RO&most_recent_year_desc=false&start=2013&view=chart

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2351

Public investment, as a proportion of GDP, is set to reach its highest level in more than a decade in 2022. This will be driven by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the key instrument at the heart of Next Generation EU.

According to EC estimates⁶ for Romania, the GDP will increase by 5.1% in 2021, respectively by 4.9% in 2022. Regarding inflation, in the case of Romania, in 2021 there will be a slight increase to 2.9%, followed by a decrease to 2.7% in 2022.

Ukraine has had more than 2 million confirmed COVID cases and more than 50 000 deaths during the pandemic. “The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 had a drastic impact on the industrial sector of Ukraine. Measures taken to slow the spread of COVID-19 hit the country’s small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and the Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry reports that approximately 700,000 small businesses in the service sector have closed - leading to the loss of between 3.5 to 4 million jobs. This is a particularly concerning figure given that Ukraine’s SME sector includes a high proportion of women-led micro-enterprises and female employees”⁷.

In response to the economic impact of the COVID 19 pandemic Ukraine together with various international organization have sought to reduce the impact and to find new ways of doing business, such as online platforms for B2B clients, with some success.

In 2019, 45% of working age people enjoyed protection guarantees of their labour rights; the remaining 65% worked unprotected. The latter include the most vulnerable workers of Ukrainian society. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) generate 82 per cent of employment and 20 per cent of GDP; and 80 per cent of all MSMEs consist of self-employed individuals against a background where 75 per cent of women who participate in the labour force are self-employed. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented economic crisis in Ukraine as lockdown measures involved temporary closure of most businesses, particularly in the service sector, almost halting economic activity altogether except for the key sectors such as transport, food production and sale, agriculture, and pharmaceutical production and sale. The devastating disruption of global supply chains resulted in a sharp drop of business sales, household incomes and jobs. In agriculture, the most affected food supply chains are fruits and vegetables, milk and dairy, which experienced problems in transportation and storage, and retail. They also have difficulty in obtaining imported inputs⁸.

Projections for Ukrainian GDP growth changed from +3 per cent in January to -6 per cent in July 2020, taking in consideration the temporary closure of domestic sectors, with the manufacturing, retail trade and transportation sectors hit particularly hard, and a strong contraction of domestic demand, exports and remittances.

The Government adopted a supplementary budget and created funds dedicated to offsetting the consequences of the pandemic and managing the health emergency. It also adopted tax measures and, through the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU), monetary and macro-financial

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/romania/news/20210512_previziuni_economice_primavara_romania_ro

⁷ <https://www.unido.org/stories/after-covid-19-shock-how-boost-ukraines-economic-recovery>

⁸ <https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/UN%20SEIA%20Report%202020%20%281%29.pdf>

policies that support maintaining the liquidity of the Ukrainian economy. Liquidity is also supported with a number of large loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which will help the country wade the pandemic and continue its reform process⁹.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union (EU) has demonstrated its solidarity with partners worldwide. In December 2020, the EU offered €600 million to Ukraine under its COVID-19 macro-financial assistance (MFA) programme.

Ukraine is the seventh country to receive a disbursement from the €3 billion emergency MFA package. The assistance aims to help 10 enlargement and neighbourhood partners to limit the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. This disbursement package for Ukraine will help to ensure the country's macro-financial stability, while allowing it to allocate resources towards mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic.

Environmental issues

The importance of the environmental issues in the EU context has become even more apparent in recent years, with the EU facing critical challenges in terms of environmental protection and sustainable development. The EU citizens benefit now of one of the best environmental legislations in the area but the achievement of the EU goals in this area widely depends on the engagement of the partner states. Cooperation and environment support are some of the most important dimensions of the relations between the EU and its neighbours.

Water Quality

The eligible area has a wide variety of water resources but also issues regarding water quality and pollution, as well as connectivity of inhabitants to safe drinking water. The main sources of drinkable water are surface and groundwater and the main pollutants on the Romanian side are: ammonium, iron, manganese and arsenic¹⁰.

Leakages and losses due to ineffective sewage systems, treatment facilities working below potential capabilities and the lack of general waste management systems - especially in the rural area - all participate to the pollution of the soil and underground water systems.

In 2017, proportion of population served with piped water for Ukraine was 66.1 %, this proportion fell gradually from 76.9 % in 2003 to 66.1 % in 2017. Also, in 2017, the proportion of population served with at least basic water for Ukraine was 93.8 %. A decline in the proportion of population receiving at least basic water also fell between 2003 and 2017 declining at a moderating rate to shrink from 98.2 % in 2003 to 93.6 % in 2017¹¹. In Romania the proportion of the population using at least basic water in 2019 is of 100%, constant from 2003¹².

⁹ <https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/UN%20SEIA%20Report%202020%20%281%29.pdf>

¹⁰ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346114145_MARAMURES_COUNTY_DRINKING_WATER_QUALITY

¹¹ <https://knoema.com/atlas/Ukraine/topics/Water/Water-Supply-Total-Population/Proportion-of-population-served-with-at-least-basic-water>

¹² <https://knoema.com/WBWDI2019Jan/world-development-indicators-wdi?tsId=3210720>

When analysing the data for the **rate of connection of inhabitants to safe drinking water** there isn't a clear growth trend, with many areas having variations year on year. There is a need for increasing the proportion of people using safe drinking water throughout the eligible area, and most visibly in Zakarpattya, Botosani and Suceava. An increasing trend can be noted but still the level of connection to safe drinking water is very low.

Pollution

Pollution, either of the air or water, is an important issue for the eligible area. Regarding CO₂ emissions, Ukraine has almost double of the CO₂ emissions compared to Romania, according to official data received. Both countries have stagnating values over a three-year period. In the eligible area of the Romania-Ukraine Programme we have 14 air monitoring systems installed on the Ukrainian side and 15 on the Romanian side. Out of the 9 counties/oblasts included in the eligible area, only Ivano-Frankivsk has reported no air monitoring system installed.

Climate change

Climate change is the issue of the 21st century and has an especially important role in establishing the financing priorities of future EU programmes.¹³ In terms of energy consumption, the trend is a decreasing one for Ukraine and increasing for Romania for 2016, 2017 data¹⁴. The share of renewable energy consumption is grossly different between the two countries, with Romania having more than 5 times more renewable energy consumption in 2018 than Ukraine. Additionally, the trend for Ukraine is ascending with a higher percent of renewable energy each year, compared to Romania, which has a decreasing trend. This also correlates with the ascending trend for energy consumption per capita, so it can be assumed that energy consumption is growing but the growth is not relying on renewable resources. The area's economies are still largely reliant on fossil fuels with Romania and Ukraine fitting in this framework. In terms of waste generation, there is an increasing trend in the eligible area between 2016 and 2019. There are significant gaps related to energy efficiency and waste management in the eligible area that pose threats to climate change and need to be properly addressed also in a cross-border manner. The main challenges for both sides of the border are linked to waste management, including increasing recycling and preventing pollution linked to waste generation.

Environmental risks

Environmental risks are related to negative effects on the quality of the environment, either terrestrial, water ecosystems or air and to effects on the ecological balance. As with all types of risks, environmental risks can be anticipated or can be totally unexpected events, and irrespective of their nature there is a need for proper risk management tools. The risks are mainly related to issues that are addressed in different sections, like floods, fires, draught, man-made or not related to climate change, such as earthquakes.

¹³ EC-EEAS (2020), Joint Paper on Interreg NEXT Strategic Programming 2021-2027

¹⁴ Data available from IEA/EUROSTAT

Biodiversity and resources

The Romania-Ukraine Programme eligible area has a rich network of protected areas and resources. The number of protected areas is very high in Ukraine compared to Romania, but the situation is reversed when it comes to surfaces of these areas.¹⁵ A high discrepancy between number and surface can be noted. For example, Ivano-Frankivsk has the highest number of protected areas (474) but the lowest surface.

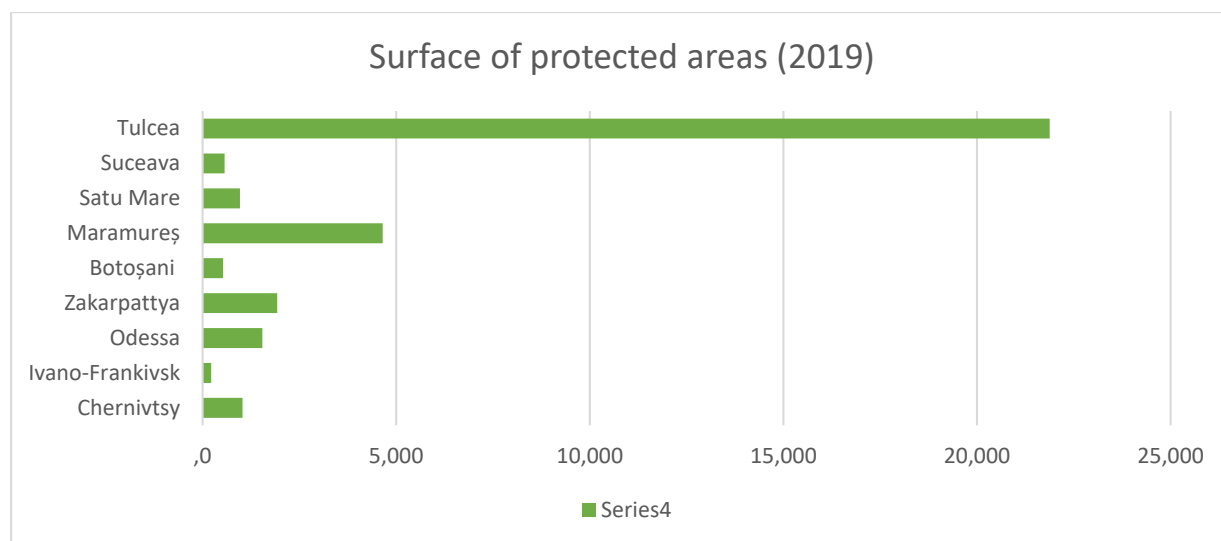


Figure no.3. Number of protected areas, land and aquatic, sq km

Despite the disparities between the number and the surface of the protected areas, there is a significantly higher interest for these areas in the last 20 years. According to the European Environment Agency, between 2000 and 2019 the number of protected areas in Ukraine increased by 75%¹⁶. Considering the importance of the Danube for the region and the vast area of protected areas, this is one of the most important issues for the eligible area.

Functional areas

Between the two countries there is a functional cooperation under the following initiatives:

- Upper Prut Euroregion, consisting of entities from both Romania and Ukraine. In the programme area, Romania is represented by Botoşani and Suceava counties, while Ukraine is represented by two Oblasts: Chernivtsi and Ivano Frankivsk. The green cooperation covers mainly the joint management of the middle part of Prut river, protection of the air quality and reduction of the waste impact on environment.
- Lower Danube Euroregion, consisting of entities from Romania, Ukraine and Republic of Moldova. In the program area, Romania is represented by Tulcea county, while Ukraine

¹⁵ Source: Data provided by participating countries during the programming period, based on national statistics, at national and regional level. Only regions for which data was available are presented in the graphs

¹⁶Source: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/emerald-network-in-the-eastern>

is represented by Odesa oblast. The green cooperation was conducted around the pollution sources in the Lower Danube region.

- Euroregion Carpatica includes territories from 5 countries. From Romania the territories included are Maramures, Satu Mare and Botosani, and from Ukraine Chernivtsi, Ivano Frankivsk and Zakarpattia.

Both interactions and dynamics were enhanced during EU funded projects, while the constant rhythm of cooperation between the 2 countries is led by the main public institutions in the environment field.

Mobility and connectivity

Transport infrastructure in the eligible area includes water, rail, air and road. Navigation is at the moment one of the most feasible transport modes, especially for freight transport; however, it remains at a large scale, both in Romania and Ukraine, under-developed and under-utilized to its full potential.

The eligible area is served by eight main international airports: Suceava, Satu-Mare, Baia-Mare, and Tulcea in Romania and Odesa, Chernivtsi, Ivano-Frankivsk and Uzhhorod in Ukraine. All of the airports operate passenger flights, except Chernivtsi which is technically closed. The traffic is reduced in the area, although some airports operate also international flights.

The area's connectivity is very limited in terms of air links, making it a difficult to reach destination for both freight and passengers, because of the required interim stops for connecting flights. The two most used airports (Satu-Mare and Odesa) are positioned at the extremities of the core eligible area, leaving a large gap of connectivity in between. Tulcea County area suffers from limited connectivity by air, especially considering the important role of the area in the Danube-Black Sea link.

The area benefits of an important network of roads. At global level Romania and Ukraine share the same score in terms of road quality, which is 3 out of 7, raking 118 and 119 respectively¹⁷. The poor road quality is one of the major issues in the two countries, as well as the low number of fast routes and highways, making travelling between regions difficult and time consuming

Rail transport, which represents along with naval transport one of the eco-friendliest and efficient modes of transport is underdeveloped. The old infrastructure drastically limits the movement speeds across the network, and the lack of modernisation projects inhibits the introduction of high-speed trains. In addition, the network is underused, especially in the case of Romania, where at national level the majority of the rail traffic uses less than 50% of the rail network.

A particular technical problem of the Romanian-Ukrainian border region is the gauge difference. The Romanian rail network functions on European standard gauge, while the Ukrainian rail network functions in its majority on large gauge. This technical difference makes the transfer

¹⁷ https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/roads_quality/

from one type of network to the other a compulsory one; the result being the increase of waiting times at rail border crossing points.¹⁸

The eligible area holds significant problems in terms of transport infrastructure development and also significant issues in addressing them. Both rail, road, naval and air infrastructure are areas of national importance that are regularly included and addressed through national strategies. One major problem in addressing transport infrastructure issues at regional level stems from the fact that the administrators of above-mentioned infrastructure are at national and not regional level, which make it difficult to finance relevant projects addressing these problems at regional, cross border level. This aspect of dealing with transport infrastructure was seen also in the 2014-2020 programming exercise, when the financing request for this area was significantly lower than for other areas financed by the programme.

The costs associated with these types of investments, as well as difficulties related to the eligibility of potential beneficiaries make the cooperation under PO3 not recommended for the future 2021-2027 Interreg Next Programme.

Social Issues

Education

There are a number of issues related to education that are relevant for the eligible area, infrastructure, youth unemployment, vocational education, enrollment and drop out issues. To all of these the Impact of the COVID 19 pandemics adds additional pressure. The percentage of young people that are neither in education, employment or training remains high but the trend is a slightly decreasing one. Additionally, the enrollment in technical and vocational education has a decreasing trend. Alongside data on employment these indicators point towards a need for technical and vocational training and adjusting skills to the needs of the labor market. The area is also facing enrollment and drop out issues as well as endowment of the educational institutions. Infrastructure is also a major concern, especially for primary and secondary education, with schools facing issues regarding the safety of the locations, basic endowment and connectivity to water and waste water systems.

One of the major impacts of the Covid 19 crisis has been on the education system, with major disruptions, closures of school and even training and vocational classes having to be performed online. The most vulnerable of the social groups have been most significantly affected, with school lacking the technical tools to conduct online classes and children not having the necessary equipment for attending them.

The need to mitigate this impact is of outmost importance for the education system in the eligible area. There is a need to consider the fact that education is not only a fundamental human right but also an enabling one, granting the possibility to work and live with dignity and not to enter the poverty cycle.

¹⁸ Romania- Ukraine Joint Operational Programme 2014-2020

Health

The healthcare sector is facing multiple problems both in Romania and Ukraine. Among the most important issues to mention: the state and endowment of healthcare facilities, number of beds per capita, emigration of doctors and healthcare professionals, a decrease in the number of hospitals (for Ukraine), life expectancy below the EU average. There is also a strong need for prevention and screening programmes.

In the context of the Covid 19 pandemic the importance of a strong health system, capable to deal with emergencies has proven to be important for the population and the economy in general. It has also stressed out the importance of investments in infrastructure and health coverage.

Culture and tourism

Culture and tourism are central to the economy of the programme area and a strong cross border cooperation in this area is essential for the development of the border communities. The eligible area has a significant number of heritage sites (14 500 in total) but only half are open to the public and only very few (20 in Romania while for Ukraine there is no data) are digitalized. Activities aiming to rehabilitate, modernize and promote cultural heritage sites can contribute significantly to the cultural and economic development of the area and to the valorization of the joint traditions and heritage of the area.

The COVID 19 situation has posed significant pressure on the culture and tourism sectors as usual visitations were not possible, nor events during the pandemic and the pressure was significant towards finding new ways of giving people access to cultural sites and events. This has brought into attention the importance of digitalization of the museums, libraries and event halls, which would allow them to navigate the uncertain times of the pandemic but also, on the longer run, to reach more visitors, also across borders.

Employment and social issues

Employment and education are the most relevant aspects related to the economic development of a country. The employment and unemployment rates in the area follow the regional trends for both member state and partner state, remaining at high levels. Ukraine has a much higher unemployment rate (9.6%) than Romania (2.9%) but for both countries, and for the eligible area, there was a positive trend between 2016 and 2019. A stringent issue in the area is that of youth unemployment, as the unemployment rate for this segment is quite high in both countries.

The trend for the youth unemployment is generally more intense than the general unemployment, i.e. it decreased (or increased) in a higher degree. For Romania, for 2018-2019 the youth unemployment trend follows a different trend than the general population. While the general unemployment rate was slightly decreasing at national level the youth unemployment increased.

The share of youth not in education, employment or training offers an indication on young people most at risk of being marginalized from the labor market. The issues of unemployment and youth unemployment can be addressed through various education measures, such as adjusting the curricula to the skills required by the labor market, professional reconversion, cooperation between education institutions and employers, etc.

Governance & civil society

Governance in a cross-border transnational context stands for a framework that enables diverse public and private stakeholders to cooperate across borders¹⁹.

A better quality governance is important for the development of peripheral regions, to the inclusion of local authorities in the policy making process and better quality policies for the communities. The level of autonomy of local authorities in the eligible area is not high, many of the main policy areas being highly centralized. In order to achieve the successful implementation of local initiatives, administration capacity is very important. Digitalization of the public services is another important issue of the area, as the e-government index for both countries is low. Considering the impact of the COVID 19 crisis and the pressure for digitalization that it has instilled in both public and private sectors it is expected that in the next years the digitalisation to increase considerably and for the governments to provide more services online.

Civil society is the backbone of a mature democracy as it acts like a catalyst for sustainable development and resilience. Together with institutional capacity, support for civil society is of utmost importance for a strong democracy. In young democracies building networks of NGOs can prove to be crucial for development, accessing foreign funding and directing investments where they are needed. Partnerships with public organizations for attracting funds is also common practice and useful in achieving the development of the area. Capacity building for public and private non for profit sectors need to be considered and addressed in the financing strategy horizontally.

Border crossing management and mobility

The total length of the border between Romania and Ukraine is of 649.4 km. The border is varied in terms of type and is formed out of: land - 273.8 km, river - 343.9 km, sea - 31.7 km. Across the border the two countries share road and rail crossing points, part of which are not functional or in upgrading.

The available data for cross border traffic is limited. According to data received from the Romanian Customs Service there is an ascending trend for cross border traffic, especially for people. The values for autos and trucks are oscillating but overall there is an increase in recent years.

Border management at the outermost borders of the EU implies that these borders are efficient, ensuring that migration is legal and that trade is legitimate and also secure, by preventing

¹⁹Source: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/resources/topics-of-cooperation/themes/theme/show/cross-border-governance/>

illegal migration and trade. Although these issues are mainly related to the centralized management of the borders, they can be also addressed, at a smaller scale, by local, cross border initiatives aimed at modernizing existing crossing points in terms of infrastructure or equipment or experience exchange between relevant structures. According to the data received from the relevant institutions in Romania, there are currently 4 crossing points not operational, either for modernization reasons or, in one case, because the crossing point was just recently established. The opening of these crossing points, with modern equipment, could help improve border crossing efficiency. Moreover, supporting functional crossing points in upgrading and modernization processes for both countries, as well as investing in joint procedures and trainings could contribute to the optimization of processes.

1.2.2 Lessons learnt

The cooperation between Romania and Ukraine has a strong tradition. The two countries cooperated under the PHARE/TACIS Programmes and later under the Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova and under the Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020. Both the trilateral and the Ro-Ua programmes offered financing for issues like education, culture, tourism, health, infrastructure, border management and safety.

In the past programming periods the strategies of ENPI Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova 2007-2013 (implementation period ended 31 December 2019) and ENI Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 (in implementation) programmes aimed to improve the economic and social development of the area, as well as to enhance the protection of the environment and prevention and management of the emergency situations by joint actions. The needs that generated the programme strategy for the 2014-2020 programme are still present in the eligible area, and additional issues arise from the COVID 19 pandemic.

The issues targeted by the Policy Objective 2 were addressed both programmes. The ENPI program dedicated a Priority to development of long term solutions to the environmental problems faced by the border areas, particularly those associated with water and sewerage management systems, as well as environmental emergencies, where a co-ordinated approach is essential, while the ENI programme only focuses on issues related to prevention and intervention in case of natural and man-made disasters and management of emergency situations. The ENI Romania-Ukraine programme financed two large infrastructure projects addressing the need for enhancing the population safety and security level in the cross-border area by improving the management of the emergency situations, as well as actions with the aim to the ecological preservation of the Danube River basin by exclusion of pollution with effluents. Both projects have a high potential of capitalization in the future programme.

Although still significant in terms of needs of the eligible area, actions that could improve the mobility in the area will no longer be addressed, as they gave raise in the previous programmes to multiple issues linked to the ownership/administration of the infrastructure, high costs associated with the investment, long implementing periods and low level of interest of the relevant stakeholders in submitting and implementing projects.

Also, dealing with the significant common challenges in the field of health, education, culture and sustainable tourism have been part of the strategies of the previous ENPI and ENI programmes covering this area. The interest for these fields in the ENI programme was significant, as the requested amounts in the projects submitted following the calls launched were three time higher than the available allocation. With very small differences in score, 70 projects hard and soft have been selected (contracted and on the reserve list), which demonstrate a good quality of projects submitted. The conclusions drawn following the various levels of consultations of stakeholders held during the programming process, showed that addressing these fields remains of interest for improving the socio-economic environment and the quality of life for communities from the programme area.

The projects involved a wide array of partners like local and regional authorities, vocational, technology and sanitary schools, universities, local, municipal and regional hospitals, and NGOs. The partnerships built to implement these projects proved to be creative, and even innovative for the cross border area, resourceful and committed.

Although external circumstances like the sanitary reform in Ukraine, the rapid and significant fluctuations of the exchange rate, the increase of cost of materials and equipment, or the restrictions imposed by the pandemic brought additional challenges to the projects and the program itself, the opportunity given by the EU financing to solve part of the needs existing in the respective fields boosted the beneficiaries to overcome them and achieve the results they committed to at grant contracts' signature.

Border management issues and linked infrastructure were also addressed during the 2014-2020 programming period. The projects contracted during the 2014-2020 financing exercise went beyond the program targets as regards the number of participants involved in joint capacity building activities (exchanges of experience, study visits, trainings etc.), and the facilities of police, border police and custom services from the eligible area modernized with program support. The field attracted participation of central, regional and local level law enforcement authorities, in partnership with local administrations in some cases, cooperating to find strategies, plans, instruments and adequate means to prevent and fight against the cross border criminality.

The former ENPI programme and the ENI programme implemented in this cross border area have significantly contributed to the improvement of the quality of life of communities in the area. However, the new Interreg programme may build on the existing knowledge and cooperation experience gained in the previous exercises, and use the positive results of the former projects, in order to generate future developments, as the needs identified by the analysis are still relevant for the area.

In what regards the implementation aspects, the ENI Romania-Ukraine 2014-2020 programme provided adequate support to its potential applicants in the project's generation phase, using various channels and tools. Face-to-face information and training events throughout the program area were by far the highly valued. However, since the restrictions have forced the programs to seek for hybrid approaches without diminishing content quality, the online environment is worth being creatively explored. Renewed or upgraded tools and modalities to develop the capacities of potential applicants and further, of program beneficiaries, need to be considered in this changing environment. Examples can range from e.g. tutorials, web-based partner search facility, online webinars/workshops, to online learning or helpdesk platforms. Project's generation could also be supported by a web-library of results following the 2014-2020 exercise, aiming to inform and inspire the interested applicants, providing them hints and ideas about how to replicate, multiply or continue past achievements, while avoiding mere duplication.

Programme terminology, updated in accordance with the new regulations, must be adequately explained in the Guidelines and during the calls for proposals. The new approach to the intervention logic at programme and project level, must be highlighted to ensure that the proposals being received, assessed and selected, are consistent with EU concepts and directions.

Particular attention needs to be paid to applicants intending to execute infrastructure components requiring, as part of the application package, technical documentations to prove project maturity and preparedness for implementation. Since significant differences exist, in this respect, between legal provisions in Romania and Ukraine, the Guidelines should, with the support of national actors, make clear the specificities in order to limit the number of clarifications during the assessment process. Similarly, it is important that any national particularity impacting the content of the application package be considered beforehand and made explicit in the Guidelines for applicants.

The administrative burden at projects' submission can be further reduced by limiting the number of documents required in the application package to only those necessary and relevant for the purpose of evaluation and selection, using the informatics system and fully switching submission and evaluation to paper-free mode.

The application form will follow the template developed by INTERACT, possibly adjusted according to the results of the consultations and the decisions of the Monitoring Committee.

Evaluation has taken too long in the 2014-2020 programme therefore, for the purpose of a rapid, equitable and good quality evaluation, aiming to also avoid the risk of de-commitment, the 2021-2027 programme must seek to simplify the entire process and the mechanisms supporting it. To this end, all programme structures must join efforts for an optimal use of programme resources with a keen eye on the desired results – good quality projects selected and financed. A first step would be to better focus the assessment efforts in the search of projects that have strong cross border character and clear cross-border relevance, and also good operational features supporting smooth implementation in case they are selected.

Balanced distribution of EU funding between the participating countries at the end of 2014-2020 projects' selection has stimulated teamwork, and enhanced further the mutual efforts towards the absorption of EU financing.

Overall, 2014-2020 Romania–Ukraine exceeded the initial expectations as regards the results (to be) achieved on the ground. Although unexpected circumstances delayed and created repeated bottlenecks during implementation, the programme remained attractive for the beneficiaries, while the trust capital in programme structures and EU funding remained positive, thus facilitating a smooth and collaborative working environment. Direct cooperation between regional or local stakeholders, and the programme to unblock certain specific implementation bottlenecks and keep projects on the track has proved to be necessary and efficient. Given the partnership principle, ensuring local ownership over the results, whether positive or negative, is a practice worth to be continued, or even formalized in the NEXT programme procedures.

Having in view 2014-2020 experiences and the orientation towards simplification given by the new regulations, the programme mission will be to review and adjust its internal monitoring procedures, making the most and the best from the risks assessment approach in respect to management verifications, with a keen eye on the use of resources and programme timeline.

Attention should also be paid to accelerate, through specific mechanisms at programme level, the public spending and payments towards the beneficiaries, while orientation towards timely results at project level must be strong and clear.

Paper-free monitoring is a long pursued goal and the programme's intention is to make extensive use of JEMS to ensure, to the extent possible, a real time monitoring through the facilities provided by the e-system. Access will be open to all the actors from both participating countries while the administrative burden on beneficiaries and programme structures will thus be reduced.

During 2014-2020, the branch offices in Ukraine mainly supported the information and communication activities of the programme, contributed with experts to the evaluation process in the administrative and eligibility verification, supported the activity of the national structures represented in the programme, and participated at the current programming. According to regulations and in line with the aim to extend their responsibilities, some monitoring activities could be carried out by the local offices in Ukraine.

The programme must join other programmes and initiatives, and look up for diversification of tools, means, and modalities to communicate on the results, and also for relevant information reaching the European contributors about the cooperation area and efforts undergoing at the external EU borders.

The practice installed during 2014-2020 to require projects to allocate at least 2% from their total direct costs, excluding infrastructure, to visibility, communication and information proved to have positive results and should be maintained as a way to secure sufficient budget for impactful activities, along with an inventory of actions to be mandatorily performed by projects. Building on 2014-2020 data, this type of expenditure, together with administrative costs and staff costs, can be taken into account as a simplified cost option at project level (flat rate).

1.2.3 Complementarities and synergies with other forms of support

Both Romania and Ukraine will benefit from financing from other sources during the reference period. Complementarities are very important and will ensure the efficient use of the programme budget. The coherence of the programme strategy with other forms of financing was addressed during the consultation process but also through discussions between the two countries.

Complementarities and Synergies PO2

For Romania the main synergies and complementarities are with the National Programme for Sustainable Development and the Regional Operational Programmes.

The Ro-Ua Programme and NPSD overlap in the three areas financed by the programme in the environmental area:

- iv) Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches
- v) Promoting access to water and sustainable water management
- vii) Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

While NPSD aims to address these issues at national level or at NUTS 2 level, the Romania-Ukraine Programme is addressing common issues between the two countries, covering border areas and joint strategies and solutions. As the problems related to biodiversity cover large areas and tackling them in one country is not enough, actions financed in common between the two partner countries will provide an integrated approach. In the risk prevention area, the programme is aiming at addressing risk situations jointly between the two countries, complementing the national programmes by addressing issues such as fires, floods, and man-made disasters. The Regional Operational Programmes tackle issues related to biodiversity, but mostly in the area of green and blue infrastructure, the Romania-Ukraine Programme ensure therefore a complementarity in this area.

Complementarities and Synergies PO4

Within the Romania-Ukraine Interreg Next Programme, investments under PO4 will concentrate on:

(ii) Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training

(v) Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family-based and community-based care

(vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

In Romania the Programme will ensure complementarities with the National Health programme and the National Education Programme, as well as the National Plan for Reconstruction and Resilience.

In the area of **education**, the National Education Programme tackles education and occupation problems. Main issues addressed refer to decrease in school dropout rates, early childcare, improvement in the quality of the education process and supporting new and innovative teaching methods. On the Romanian side the specific objective relating to education is also addressed by the Regional Operational Programmes. The Romania-Ukraine Programme will complement the activities financed at a National and Regional level by tackling education issues from a cross border perspective, helping communities from both sides of the border to cooperate in addressing problems in this field.

On the Ukrainian side, the Programme will ensure complementarities and synergies with the State Strategy of Regional Development for 2021-2027 as well as with the regional strategies. At national level the strategy is aiming at:

-providing the education access for people with special educational needs, namely the development of an inclusive and safe educational environment, universal design and smart placements in educational institutions;

- education development in rural areas, namely the computerisation of schools and digital literacy training for teachers.

The Regional Strategies are addressing different issues such as ensuring equal access to quality pre-school and secondary education and competitiveness of vocational education, development of conditions for the integration of the Ukrainian university system into the European educational space, support for international exchanges of students, postgraduates, academics, provision of equal access to quality education for people with special educational needs, creation of an inclusive educational environment. The Programme directly creates synergies with some of these objectives, such as the integration of the Ukrainian university system into the European educational space and complementarities by addressing specific issues of the border communities.

Regarding health issues, the Programme ensures complementarities both with Romanian and Ukrainian strategies and Programmes. Both countries are planning to address healthcare problems in the next decade, with the pandemic making more obvious the areas where there is a need for improvement. While Romania is receiving significant funding in this area the cross border character of the Programme creates an added value, targeting the most remote of the communities.

Tourism and culture are financed through Regional and National Programmes in the 2021-2027 programming period, in both countries. The added value of the actions financed by the Romania-Ukraine Programme resides in its potential to develop the local cultural and touristic potential of the area and to address also issues like digitalization of the cultural heritage.

Complementarities and Synergies ISO 2

Investments under ISO 2 will concentrate on investments related to border management, respectively endowments, rehabilitation and upgrading of infrastructure, joint trainings and plan and procedures. The Programme creates complementarities with the Instrument for Border Management and Visas from Romania and with the State Strategy of Regional Development for 2021-2027 from Ukraine, as well as regional strategies in Ukraine. National programmes aim at financing infrastructure related projects while the Ro-Ua Programme can create complementarities through joint design and implementation of projects meant to bring together the actions financed by the two states separately.

The Programme will create complementarities also with other CBC programmes such as Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine Interreg Next, Romania-Republic of Moldova or Black Sea Basin.

1.2.4 Synergies with macro-regional strategies

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) provides an integrated framework for strengthening cooperation between nations of 14 countries including Romania, as a member state, and Ukraine as a non-EU country. It represents a priority of the EU and is very important for cooperation between states, both member and partner. The Danube Region Strategy addresses a wide range of issues, divided among **4 pillars** and **12 priority areas**. The synergy analysis with the Romania-Ukraine Interreg Next Programme overview is listed in the table below.

Strong synergies can be noted between the specific objectives selected for Policy Objective 2 “A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility” and Priority Areas 4, 5 and 6 with a big overlap of actions between the two. With reference to water issues addressed under Priority Area 4 by EUSDR, the Ro-Ua Programme aims to ensure financing to water management and water resource conservation (including river basin management, specific climate change adaptation measures, reuse, leakage reduction) measures in the Danube area, ranging from infrastructure projects to awareness campaigns.

Under Priority Area 5, “environmental risks”, the programme contributes to the Danube Strategy by addressing issues related to (not exhaustive list):

- the development and execution of risk management plans for different hazards,
- developing rapid response procedures,
- enhancing the capacities through endowments and training programmes,
- strengthening disaster prevention and preparedness through investments in infrastructure, endowment and institutional capacity building.

There is also a strong synergy between PA11 and ISO2, both addressing security issues. The programme aims to contribute to the promotion of strategic long-term cooperation between law enforcement actors and to contribute to the improvement of the systems of border control and border management in general.

Additionally, for PO4, specific objectives addressing culture and education have a connection with certain actions from PA 3 and PA 9. The programme aims at supporting cultural heritage in the Danube Region by financing activities related to the promotion of culture and sustainable tourism, promoting and encouraging the development of the cultural activities and creative sectors, joint valorization of cultural and historical monuments and objects, support for specific and traditional craftsman activities, important for preserving local culture and identity. Construction, modernization of visiting centers of protected natural areas and development of eco-friendly tourist routes will also contribute to the touristic potential of the Danube area.

Regarding issues covered by PA 10 there is a cross connection with ISO 1, which the programme is not aiming at addressing through a dedicated Priority but to integrate horizontally within other specific objectives.

<p>Proposed PO and Sos → EUSDR PAs</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>PO2 (iv) Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience...</p>	<p>PO2 v)Promoting access to water and sustainable water management</p>	<p>PO2 vii)Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure...</p>	<p>PO4 (ii) Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure...</p>	<p>PO4 (v) Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care...</p>	<p>PO4(vi) Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism ...</p>	<p>ISO 2 A safer and more secure Europe</p>
PA 1a Water Mobility							
PA 1b Rail-Road-Air Mobility							
PA 2 Sustainable Energy							
PA 3 Culture and Tourism, People to People							
PA 4 Water quality							
PA 5 Environmental risks							
PA 6 Biodiversity and landscapes, quality of air and soils							
PA 7 Knowledge Society							
PA 8 Competitiveness of enterprises							
PA 9 People and skills							
PA 10 Institutional Capacity and Cooperation							

1.3 Justification for the selection of policy objectives and the Interreg-specific objectives, corresponding priorities, specific objectives and the forms of support, addressing, where appropriate, missing links in cross-border infrastructure

Table 1

Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>A greener, low carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility.</p>	<p>Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account ecosystem based approach.</p>	<p>Environmental focus across borders</p>	<p>The eligible area is exposed to significant climate change related issues, to a higher degree than our regions of the EU. Both Romania and Ukraine have high CO2 emissions and are energy intensive economies. Recent climate changes triggered by the pollution and global warming are posing new issues and threats: vegetation fires, floods, extreme temperatures need adequate measures, and integrated efforts from both sides of the border.</p> <p>Prevention and mitigation of natural and manmade disasters is an area of continuous challenges and changes.</p> <p>The main needs of the programme area identified are: protection of small rivers, cooperation on risk prevention (joint efforts for better reaction and early recovery), the prevention of forest fires, droughts, and floods and better response to the emergency situations arising from natural and</p>

		<p>man-made disasters as well as raising awareness among the people regarding the long term impact of destructive actions against the environment and on the eco-system as a whole.</p> <p>This specific objective was selected in order to minimize the risk affecting the area, and to promote climate change adaptation in order to minimize the impact of climate change on the economy, environment and overall society. The overall objective is to increase the intervention capacity in case of fires, floods and other natural and man-made disasters, in order to increase the resilience of the region.</p> <p>Together with the information gathered from statistical data, which indicated strong needs for financing in this area, both the preliminary consultations and the lessons learnt show a strong interest of the potential applicants towards implementing projects as well as strong capabilities in drafting quality applications.</p> <p>The activities under this specific objective are expected to contribute to the improvement of the monitoring, warning and response systems, to the elaboration of measures and strategies that would help prevent and protect against wildfires and other climate change related disasters, as well as not climate. The future interventions are also expected to raise awareness on the climate change consequences.</p>
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Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>A greener, low carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility.</p>	<p>Enhancing protection and preservation of nature, biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution</p>	<p>Environmental focus across borders</p>	<p>The programme area has a rich network of protected areas and resources and over the last decade the interest for these areas has significantly increased in both countries. The most significant protected area is that of the Danube Delta, one of the most important at national and also EU level and the largest remaining natural wetland in Europe with its 6000 km².</p> <p>The area is also facing multiple threats generated by human intervention. Intensive land use, mass tourism, pollution, industrial activity, climate change have a negative impact on the environment and on the biodiversity in the border area creating undesirable changes in the eco systems.</p> <p>Building on the large surface of the protected areas and on their huge potential the programme can alleviate the problems that these areas are facing, related to wildlife protection, pollution and mitigation of climate change.</p> <p>This specific objective was selected due to the large number of protected areas in the eligible area and on their large surface and due to the multiple challenges</p>

			<p>they are facing, as listed above, that can be better addressed in a joint manner.</p> <p>The programme is expected to bring positive results related to preservation and restoration of protected areas, reducing and monitoring of pollution sources, support for the sustainable use of resources, enhancing a sustainable economic development of the area.</p>
Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (PO 4)	Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training	Social development across borders	<p>Education is of cornerstone importance to any society as it generates the workforce that keeps the economy thriving and the support services so necessary for a robust society. Both countries face challenges in terms of education system. Ukraine allocates a very high percentage of GDP to education, but the spending is concentrated in keeping small, distanced classes and schools and is not efficient in providing students with desirable skills for the job market. Romania on the other hand has a lower allocation on education, keeps bigger classes and different curricula but is also inefficient and seems to fail in providing young people with the necessary skills to integrate in the job market, generating high youth unemployment.</p> <p>Some of the main issues highlighted by the territorial analysis are related to the quality of infrastructure in schools, high percentage of youth neither in employment, education or training, decreasing trend</p>

			<p>of enrollment in technological or vocational education. Additionally, one of the major impacts of the Covid 19 crisis has been on the education system, with major disruptions, closures of school and even training and vocational classes having to be performed online. The need to perform classes online has brought digitalization in the forefront as financing priority.</p> <p>This specific objective was selected due to its importance for the long term development of the eligible area and its strategic role in addressing key issues like poverty, employment, social integration.</p> <p>The programme is expected to generate positive results related to infrastructure for primary, secondary and vocational education, support for the development of digital skills, support for developing joint strategies for education and training.</p>
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Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (PO 4)	Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family-based and community- based care	Social development across borders	Health services and infrastructure are very important for the society as a whole. The level of spending on healthcare goods and services as a percentage of GDP is much lower in Romania and Ukraine than the EU average, estimated at 9.9% of GDP in 2017 ²⁰ . The spending on health as a % of GDP in on average of 3.6% in Ukraine over 2016-2018 and of 4.13 for Romania. This puts the two states below 50% spending as compared to the average EU, generating multiple

²⁰ Source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4187653/10321591/Healthcare_expenditure_2017-02_2.jpg/832870fe-8345-3de6-01e8-be2807c52076?t=1585550206734

		<p>health related issues and explaining the impact of the pandemics on the two health systems.</p> <p>The main problems identified by the Territorial Analysis in relation to health are: lower life expectancy than the EU average, high infant mortality rate, high adolescent fertility rate, universal health coverage below the EU average, low number of prevention programmes, decreasing number of beds and hospitals in Ukraine, emigration of healthcare professionals, endowment, high energy consumption. Considering the importance of healthcare for the balanced development of the community, financing of healthcare related activities has resulted as key for the eligible area, both from data analysis and preliminary consultations.</p> <p>This specific objective was selected in order to improve the cross border cooperation in the healthcare area, by creating opportunities for joint strategies and mobility actions, as well as infrastructure investments aimed at generating positive impact for the local communities.</p> <p>Some of the main areas where the programme can generate positive results are: infrastructure related investments, endowments, digitalization of hospitals and healthcare facilities, critical equipment and supplies for emergency situations, joint strategies for tackling health emergencies, transfer of knowledge and capacity building.</p>
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Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
<p>A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights (PO 4)</p>	<p>Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation</p>	<p>Social development across borders</p>	<p>The eligible area benefits from a strong network of heritage sites as well as nature and protected areas that play an important role in the economic and cultural life of the area. Additionally, the area has an excellent geographical position for tourism and the way of life in the rural areas has potential for attracting tourists in seek of eco-tourism, agro-tourism and traditional experiences. The key being the preservation of the traditions and the traditional way of life of the local communities. The potential for cultural and touristic development is very high and can benefit from a cross border approach.</p> <p>Despite the large number of sites with touristic potential, the territorial analysis found that only few of them are open to the public and even fewer are digitalized. The development of the area from a cultural and touristic point of few has to take into consideration sustainability issues, reduction of pollution and conservation of biodiversity as well as securing the economic security of the community.</p> <p>Considering the importance of these aspects for the eligible area, financing of activities related to culture and tourism has been a priority in all the programmes involving the two states. The economic development of the area is very much related to touristic and cultural activities and has suffered a very significant impact during the COVID 19 crisis, also due to the lack of digitalization and endowments that could have alleviated the consequences of the revenue loss</p>

			<p>generated by the lockdowns. Both the statistical data analysis and the preliminary consultations indicated this sector as being of key importance for the resilience and economic wellbeing of the local communities while stressing also the importance of developing sustainable activities and reducing the impact of tourism on the environment, especially in the case of the protected areas.</p> <p>Some of the main areas where the programme can generate positive results are: investments in the rehabilitation/upgrading/modernization/endowment of cultural sites, encouraging sustainable tourism, promotion of cultural and natural sites, promotion of local traditions and crafts.</p>
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Selected policy objective or selected Interreg-specific objective	Selected specific objective	Priority	Justification for selection
A safer and more secure Europe and its neighborhood	Border crossing management Other actions for a safer and more secure Europe	Border cooperation	<p>Border management is of key importance for the proper implementation and development of all the issues related to cross border programmes. Border management in this context relates to the efficiency of the borders in ensuring legal transit of people and goods in a timely and efficient manner.</p> <p>Although most border related problems are treated at central level, the joint, cross border approach has proved very useful during the previous programming periods and accounted for valuable projects with a significant positive impact for the border</p>

		<p>communities. The territorial analysis highlighted various aspects linked to border management such as: the need to improve border clearance efficiency, to address new challenges in fighting smuggling across borders, helping tourism by ensuring better border clearance.</p> <p>Some of the main areas where the programme can generate positive results are: small infrastructure investments aimed at improving the efficiency, endowments of the border crossing points, endowments of the training centers of the customs, police and gendarmerie, addressing common challenges through joint actions and developing strategies, etc.</p>
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Chapter 2. Priorities

2.1. Title of the priority: Environmental focus across borders

2.1.1 Specific objective

Promoting climate change adaptation and disaster risk prevention and resilience, taking into account eco-system based approaches

2.1.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

- **Infrastructure (including green and blue infrastructure):** Construction / rehabilitation / modernization of infrastructure related to systems/structures dealing with fires, floods, strengthening the banks of rivers, canals, the condition of dams, afforestation of river banks, preservation, revitalization and re-naturalization of water bodies and ecosystems, preservation and restoration of small rivers
- **Equipment:** endowment with necessary equipment to address emergency situations (firefighting equipment, floods, etc), hardware, software, vehicles, etc.
- **Common strategies and tools** for hazard management and risk prevention including joint action plans, technical and operational measures meant to ensure real-time coordinated actions, risk plans, intervention procedures, exercises, public awareness campaigns, elaborating of updated joint operational plans and procedural framework for efficient management and deployment of joint interventions, hydrological monitoring of rivers, water temperature, precipitation measurements, ice regime
- **Trainings:** joint training programmes, networking, exchanging experience and knowledge, including raising awareness in the field of efficient risk prevention and management in the cross-border area;

2.1.2 Specific objective

Enhancing protection and preservation of nature biodiversity and green infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reducing all forms of pollution

2.1.2.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

- Joint projects for the creation/extension of natural reserves in a transboundary context;
- Endowment: improving human and technical capacity and modernizing monitoring equipment of protected areas;
- Development of studies, research, common protocols for coordinated implementation on European conventions, joint strategies and plans, trainings and awareness campaigns;
- Assessment, protection and improvement of existing ecosystems (research activities, inventory of resources, protection of endangered species, eradication of invasive species, afforestation etc.);
- Urban green infrastructure.

2.2. Title of the priority: Social Development Across Borders

2.2.1 Specific objective

Improving equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training

2.2.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

- Investments in rehabilitation/modernization/ extension/ equipment procurement for the educational infrastructure to provide the necessary material preconditions of a quality educational process and increase the participation in the educational processes, with a strong focus on accessibility for disabled people;
- Investments in hardware and software necessary for the development of digital skills;
- Development of joint educational and learning plans and strategies, training and mentorship programmes;
- Development of partnerships between training and education institutions in order to support joint learning and good practice exchange between teachers'/education professionals from both side of the border;
- Development of joint initiatives that support adult education and training, including mobility programs;

2.2.2 Specific objective

Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the transition from institutional to family-based and community- based care

2.2.2.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

- Joint activities meant to enhance the access to health in the border area through construction / rehabilitation / modernization of infrastructure of public health services;
- Developing labs and mobile labs for screening / clinical monitoring of diseases and prevention of cross border epidemics;
- Equipping specific public medical service infrastructure (outpatient, emergency room facilities, medical centres, integrated social intervention, etc.);
- Mobile health status screening caravans for monitoring health status (blood, diabetes, etc investigations) as well as dental care assistance providing to population in rural areas;
- Equipping specific public medical emergency service infrastructure;
- Joint training programs and exchange of experience, networking for supporting the functioning of the specific public medical services, telemedicine;

- Exchange of experience, joint activities in order to ensure compatibility of the treatment guidelines, joint diagnosis programmes;
- Awareness campaigns concerning public education on health, diseases and prevention of epidemics;
- Specific equipment for digitalization in healthcare.

2.2.3 Specific objective

Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation

2.2.3.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

- Restoration, conservation, consolidation, protection, security of cultural and historical monuments, archaeological sites (including the corresponding access roads), museums, objects and art collections and their joint promotion based on relevant cross-border strategies/concepts;
- Preservation, security, and joint valorization of cultural and historical monuments and objects;
- Support for specific and traditional craftsman activities, important for preserving local culture and identity.
- Promotion of specific and traditional activities in the eligible area (including cross border cultural events);
- Construction, modernization of visiting centers of protected natural areas; development of eco-friendly tourist routes
- Investments in hardware and software necessary for digitalization of cultural sites and events. Rehabilitation/modernisation and endowment of cultural heritage;
- Promoting digital platforms for tourism;
- Promoting cultural heritage sites and including them in cross border tourism networks and chains;
- Joint campaigns, publications, studies, strategies to improve cross border tourism potential;
- Establishment of common networks in the field of tourism and culture.

2.3. Title of the priority: Border Cooperation

2.3.1 Specific objective: Interreg Specific Objective 2 - A safer and more secure Europe

2.3.1.1 Related types of action, and their expected contribution to those specific objectives and to macro-regional strategies and sea-basis strategies, where appropriate

- **Investments in endowment with specific equipment** for the activity of the police/customs/border police/gendarmerie (transport vehicles for the K9 units, video recording equipment, drones, search equipment, hardware and software, training equipment, equipment for forensic and explosives experts, etc)
- **Joint trainings** of police, customs, border police, gendarmerie, other structures involved in border management, exchange of best practices on specific areas of activity (analysis, criminal investigation, organized crime, etc)

- **Investments in modernization, rehabilitation, renovation, upgrading** of police and border crossing infrastructure and related buildings
- **Investments in common policies, strategies, common intervention plans and strategies,** awareness campaigns related to human trafficking and other issues related to border management and border crossing, etc