



**Interreg** 

**Austria-Hungary 2014-2020**

European Union – European Regional Development Fund

## **CITIZEN'S SUMMARY**

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**of the Annual Implementation Report 2021**



This document gives an overview to the broader public about the implementation of the EU-funded Interreg V-A Austria-Hungary Programme that supports cross-border co-operations since the end of 2015 in four thematic priorities.

You'll find more information on our digital channels, primarily the [interreg-athu.eu](https://interreg-athu.eu) webpage, our self-maintained Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/interregathu/>) and once every month the regular weekly newsletter (<https://www.szpi.hu/hirlevel>) of the Joint Secretariat's (JS) hosting organisation, Széchenyi Programme Office Nonprofit LLC (SZPO), and of course the programme's own newsletter (<https://interreg-athu.eu/en/newsletter>). As the pandemic played quite a significant role in 2021, we used this year to strengthen our online presence, intensify engagement, enhance visibility and commitment to the ATHU programme.

The programme homepage is continuously updated with relevant programme and project-related news. As a part of the preparations for the new programme, a new menu was introduced recently where the news related to the preparation of the 2021-2027 period are available. Projects achievements are visible partly under the programme's own homepage at the dedicated micro-sites of the projects (see <https://interreg-athu.eu/en/current-projects/>) and partly at the projects' various own communication platforms. As a support to the webpage we introduced our Facebook page in 2020. It acts as an additional, complementary information source besides the official ATHU website, where currently 2-3 project and programme news are shared every week, adding up to 120+ posts in a year, to a slowly but steadily growing audience – we are expecting to be able to invite even more followers and likes with the new programme kick-off. Each month one of our projects is featured in the SZPO company newsletter in front of a wider audience. The ATHU programme itself also sends regular, quarterly newsletters to its subscribers: altogether 4+1 newsletters were sent in 2021 (<https://interreg-athu.eu/en/newsletter/>).

We believe working closely with our neighbouring programmes is beneficial for all of us. Therefore we joined forces in April 2021 again for a joint Facebook contest with Interreg SIHU for kids with the topic "Future is Green". We received 36 drawings from kids from both sides of the border. In the lack of possibilities to make physical activities around EC Day and EUinmyRegion events, the programme decided to advertise projects' events in our region through the idea of an "Experience Guidebook", an online event calendar for autumnal activities.

Our programme has had a continuous call since the end of 2015; until 2021 altogether 126 applications have been submitted in 9 rounds, of which the majority (111) has passed the formal assessment and was discussed by the Monitoring Committee (MC). 22 projects have received a new chance, were revised and resubmitted, in almost all cases successfully. Thus the MC has discussed altogether 89 individual projects, of which 61 were contracted.

As a result all available sources of the European Development Fund for our Interreg Programme are dedicated to Austrian-Hungarian initiatives, which is more than 74 million euros! Since all funds are committed, the programme does not accept new applications any more, but concentrates on supporting the successful implementation and finalization of selected projects. At the same time, the programme management has been actively preparing the programme document for the new cycle.





Projects of a very broad range contribute to growing-together in the Austrian-Hungarian border region:

- Related to competitiveness, supported projects provide services enhancing the involvement of women in technical activities and in female entrepreneurship. SME networking, specific support to the Roma entrepreneurs, wood industry initiatives, start-up networks, digitalization, support to the local products, wine experience region, and new cross border value chains are some other topics in the broad field of enterprise development that receive funding in the programme.
- In the circle of sustainability actions are supported to protect the region's natural and cultural heritage, including the improvement of the region's tourism potential. We care for the ecological stability and resilience of landscape and ecosystems and also provide support to the management and protection of water bodies. Our natural and cultural heritage projects include hiking, cycling, nature and eco-tourism, utilisation of traditional wine cellars for the regional tourism, and even exploration of the region's shared archaeological and historical treasures. Nature protection themes embrace keywords like bird watching and monitoring, harmonisation measures between protected and cultivated areas, protection of habitats and endangered species, sustainability of native woods and forests, and waste protection. Water protection and management includes sediment research, flood protection by modelling and early warning or by small scale infrastructure, as well as various scientific and practical measures to protect or improve the water quality.
- Sustainable mobility has been in the focus of Austro-Hungarian cooperation for several programme periods. In this programme transport service providers and solutions were connected in a cross-border platform, solutions to facilitate smart mobility and intermodal cycling measures were supported, cross-border railway planning and infrastructure activities were carried out. Shifting from individual to public transport multimodality, transport safety, and awareness raising for soft mobility are the key expressions. In addition a few small road infrastructure projects have contributed to the better access to important transport nodes and to the restoration of missing connections.
- The networking priority is built around good governance and education. Institutional cooperation measures include topics such as health care, ragweed control, world heritage protection, but also thematic co-operations that are partially overlapping with other priorities, such as climate and digitalization. Educational co-operations have a span from kindergarten through vocational education to university, from early language training to specific topics such as energetics, digitalization/robotics/artificial intelligence, traditional crafts or poultry.

The programme is proud to support projects that have several direct and indirect links to the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). Almost all priority axes across the four pillars of the EUSDR (Connecting the Danube region; Protecting the environment in the Danube region; Building prosperity in the Danube region; Strengthening the Danube region) are reflected in our projects, but four of our projects, SEDDON II, Raab Flood 4cast, Platform and AquaPinka were specifically supported with a letter of recommendation by the Steering Group of their respective EUSDR Priority Area.

This great variety of initiatives is connected by one thing: Austrians and Hungarians in the border region act together to conquer common challenges.





The Interreg Programme Austria-Hungary approaches the end of implementation. About half of supported projects have already finished, beneficiaries and programme institutions work on their administrative closure. Until the end of last year beneficiaries have declared total expenditures of almost 63,9 million euros and ERDF payments have reached about 44 million euros.

A pressing task for 2022 is the timely closure of all projects at latest until the end of the eligibility period on 31.12.2022, and then do the related final reporting. Despite the continued coronavirus crisis in 2021 the fact that many meetings and events had to be moved to the online space and several activities, investments suffered some delay, the selected projects are on the right track in terms of their contribution to achieving the programme's objectives and the related indicator targets.

The start of the new period is already within sight. Representatives of the two member states and actors of the current programme have had frequent Programming Group (PG) meetings and technical discussions, in the summer of 2021 a successful public consultation process was conducted and their comments and observations were incorporated into the draft Interreg Programme (IP). In October 2021 the PG agreed about the submission version of the draft IP that was then approved by the representatives of the Member States, opening the gate before the official submission to the European Commission. The new programme that was submitted to the EC in January 2022 will have its thematic focus on the following policy objectives: a green and resilient border region (PO2), a competent border region (PO4), an integrated border region (ISO1), and a better-connected border region (PO3). The approval of the programme by the EC is expected in mid-2022, and the first call for project applications is realistic in the second half of this year.

