

Interreg VI-A IPA Hungary-Serbia

Environmental Statement

July 2022



Introduction

In accordance with *Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment*, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was conducted for the Interreg VI-A IPA Hungary-Serbia Programme to assess the likely significant effects of the programme on the environment.

The present environmental statement provides an overview of the SEA process and results, including a summary of:

- the Interreg VI-A IPA Hungary-Serbia Programme,
- the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) methodology,
- the consultation process and how feedback from the environmental authorities and the public was incorporated into the SEA and the Interreg Programme,
- the main results and a summary of how the environmental considerations and recommendations of the environmental report were taken into account.

As laid down in Article 9 of the SEA Directive, following the adoption of the programme the final environmental statement will be made available to inform the environmental authorities and the public. This statement should be read together with the Interreg Programme (HU-SRB 2021-2027) and the environmental report.

Interreg VI-A IPA Hungary-Serbia

The EU's earmarked contribution for this programme is **EUR 63 550 000** and the total programme budget (including national contributions) is **EUR 74 764 708**.

The programme aims to tackle common challenges identified in the cross-border region and to strengthen cooperation in selected priorities that are linked to the EU objectives.

In compliance with these EU objectives, the programme focuses on the following priorities:

- **Priority 1 (PO2): A greener Europe** – 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 (28% of the programme budget)
- **Priority 2 (PO4): More Social Europe** – A more social and inclusive Europe implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights by enhancing human values (52% of the programme budget)
- **Priority 3 (ISO1 and ISO2): Better cooperation governance** by an integrated border region by supporting capacity building and strengthening cross-border governance to address future challenge; **A safer and more secure Europe** by eliminating bottlenecks of crossing the border between Hungary and Serbia, the external border of the EU, by making the operation of the border controls checks more effective (20% of the programme budget)

Overview, methodology of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process

The strategic environmental assessment aimed to provide effective support for development process of the Interreg VI-A IPA Hungary-Serbia Programme. To achieve it, the SEA schedule was aligned with the programming schedule, which allowed for effective communication and coordination between expert teams responsible for development of the Programme and the SEA and supported the integration of environmental considerations into Programme.

The strategic environmental assessment is an integral part of the programming process, but for reasons of transparency, the outcomes of the SEA are published in a consolidated Environmental Report. However, although the Environmental Report is the main outcome of the environmental assessment, its most important goal is the continuous support of the process of Programme development.

The draft environmental report as outcome of the SEA process was launched for public consultation parallel with the Programme. This enabled the interpretation of proposals set in the environmental report, as well as the incorporation of proposed amendments made to environmental report into the text of the Programme. Through the iterative improvement of the programme the improved and latest version of the programme document represents the best possible alternative.

Finally, the environmental report has been approved as an integrated part of the Programme by the Programming Committee and by the Governments of both Participating Countries, i.e. Hungary and the Republic of Serbia.

The main objectives of the strategic environmental assessment were as follows:

- to identify the existing environmental problems relevant to Interreg IPA III CBC Programme Hungary-Serbia 2021-2027 (hereinafter: Programme or HUSRB CBC Programme),
- to examine the coherence of Programme with environmental and sustainable development policies on EU, national and regional level,
- assessing the potential environmental effects of the Programme, by giving an overview of the possible favourable and unfavourable environmental impacts,
- formulate recommendations to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the Programme,
- to enhance the contribution of the Programme to sustainable development.

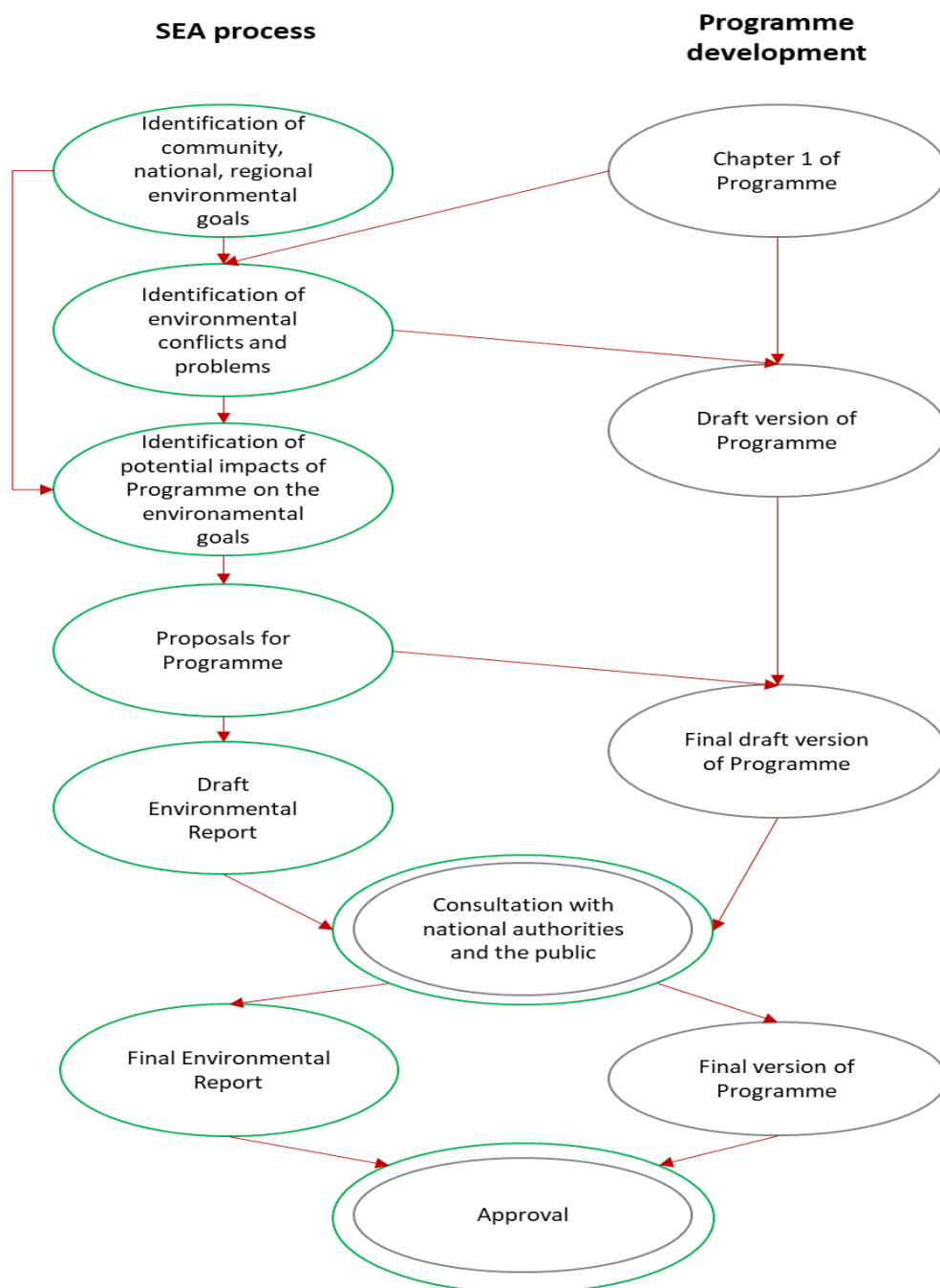
Consultation process

The environmental assessment was carried out in parallel with the preparation of the Programme, thus providing an opportunity to monitor the environmental aspects of different versions of the Programme and to comment on the impact of the amendments. Additionally, this enables the interpretation of proposals set in the environmental report, as well as the incorporation of proposed amendments made to environmental report into the text of the Programme.

As since the beginning of the planning process the Programme included a number of development areas resulting in the resolution of environmental conflicts (e.g. biodiversity protection, climate change adaptation), while not supporting polluting activities, the suggestions made by the SEA expert team were

typically minor modifications (e.g. clarifications, extension of the scope of beneficiaries). The recommendations focused improving the quantitative and qualitative protection of environmental elements and systems, mostly relevant to the implementation phase of the Programme.

The figure below shows the relationship between the SEA and programme development processes:



As part of the strategic environmental assessment the national authorities responsible for environmental protection of both Participating Countries, and the public concerned was also involved.

The environmental authorities had the opportunity to be actively involved in the strategic assessment process on two occasions. On the first occasion, between 20 June 2021 and 20 July 2021, they could

comment on the Scoping Report of the strategic environmental assessment in written form, following a direct request.

Opinions and recommendations received from environmental authorities and the reasons and ways for taking them into account in the preparation of the environmental assessment was summarised. The draft version of the SEA report and all public documents related to the procedure, including the draft programme document were also published on the official website of Interreg-IPA CBC Hungary-Serbia (<http://www.interreg-ipa-husrb.com>) for public consultation. The deadline for comments and suggestions for amendments was 30 days from the date of publication. However, no comments relevant for the SEA were received.

The Final Environmental Report has been compiled by taking into consideration all comments and feedbacks provided by environmental authorities throughout the above-described consultation process of the Draft Environmental Report.

An additional specific assessment on the 'do no significant harm' principle (DNSH assessment) was also conducted and added to the environmental report, in accordance with the EU Taxonomy Regulation (EU) 2020/852, and following the requirements stated in the Commission explanatory note on the application of the principle under Cohesion Policy which was issued on 27 September 2021.

Proposals for programme implementation, main results of SEA assessment

The environmental assessment was carried out in parallel with the preparation of the Programme, thus providing an opportunity to monitor the environmental aspects of different versions of the Programme and to comment on the impact of the amendments. Since the beginning of the planning process the Programme has been designed in a way that it puts high emphasis on interventions that result in the resolution of environmental conflicts (e.g. biodiversity protection, climate change adaptation), while not supporting polluting activities. Therefore suggestions made by the SEA expert team during the programming process have typically been for minor modifications (e.g. clarifications, extension of the scope of beneficiaries).

Despite this, the good "environmental performance" of the Programme could be further improved. The SEA Expert Group therefore has formulated a set of recommendations for improving the quantitative and qualitative protection of environmental elements and systems during the implementation phase of the Programme, as follows:

1.1 Climate change adaptation, risk prevention

- In case of surface water retention projects, occasional or permanent flooding of soils of poor quality is recommended in order to protect arable land. It is essential that the use of arable land for water management should be prepared by a comparative assessment of the local economic value loss and the economic value gain or other public benefit gain in the environment and should only be implemented where there is a clear overall value gain.
- It is recommended that during Programme implementation a priority should be given to those solutions that, in addition to climate change adaptation contribution, also result in the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions (e.g. agricultural practices that increase the organic matter content of soils).

- It is important that climate adaptation related developments within all affected sectors should fit to the traditional landscape conditions, and strive for their preservation and possible revitalization (e.g. maintenance and establishment of agroforestry systems in agricultural adaptation).

1.2 Biodiversity and reduced pollution

- In addition to the reduction of microplastics in natural waters, it is also appropriate to carry out pollutant assessment in case of drinking water supply. If necessary, supporting technical interventions is recommended as well.
- One-off decontamination interventions are not sufficient to ensure lasting impact. Once the contamination sources have been identified, it is necessary to prevent further contamination.
- Priority has to be given for revitalization and establishment of habitats and plant associations (coastal strips, wetlands, shelter belts, etc.) related to surface waters and agricultural areas should be given priority. Development of these habitats also serves the purposes of other interventions.
- Besides focusing on native species in the programme implementation, it is also advised to support the protection and introduction of those from neighbouring geographical regions which are able to adapt to climatic conditions expected in the future and which have been identified by scientific risk analysis as unsuitable for aggressive invasive spread.

2.2 Culture and tourism

- Significant pressures on soils can be prevented by controlling pedestrian and car traffic of visitors.
- When developing tourism infrastructure, efforts should be made to fully implement energy efficiency aspects, to increase the use of renewable energy, to give preference to low-emission modes of transport (e.g. enabling public transport access, to encourage cycling between attractions).
- Development of coastal infrastructural elements of water tourism should be avoided at protected or sensitive natural areas.
- Events should be organized in accordance with noise protection aspects, efforts should be made not to schedule louder events for the night, to choose locations farther from residential areas, and to previously consult with affected community members.
- It is recommended that tourism development should not be accompanied by an increase in built-up areas.

3.2 Border crossing management

- Should a new border crossing point be established or an existing one be extended, the related decision should be made on the basis of current and future modelled traffic data for the road sections concerned, in order to avoid an increase in road traffic and thus GHG emissions from transport in the overall area.

Summary of environmental impacts

Based on the results of the environmental assessment performed, it can be concluded that **the Programme does not contain any action, the implementation of which would result in a significant adverse effect on the status of any environmental elements or systems with high probability.** On the

contrary, a significant part of the interventions implemented in the frame of the Programme actions specifically aim at, directly or indirectly, to reduce the exploitation of and pressure on environmental elements and systems, as well to improve the quality of human life, harmonized with environmental interests. Actions with a positive environmental impact are mainly associated with the specific objectives “Biodiversity and Pollution Prevention” and “Adaptation to Climate Change, Risk Prevention”.

Actions	Soil	Air	Noise, vibration	Water	Natural values	Climate	Built env., landscape	Human health	Env. consciousness
1.1.1. Joint development, coordination and improvement of the cross-border risk prevention and disaster management systems	0	0	0	0	0	+2	+3	+1	0
1.1.2. Joint actions aimed to reduce the impact of climate change, addressing natural phenomena occurring as a consequence of climate change	+3	0	0	+3	+3	+3	+3	+1	+1
1.1.3. Joint awareness raising and educational activities on causes and consequences of climate change	+2	0	0	+2	+2	+2	+1	+2	+3
1.2.1. Joint activities which identify and contribute to the elimination of the cross-border pollution sources	+3	+3	0	+3	+2	+1	0	+1	+1
1.2.2. Joint initiatives for ensuring the sustainable development of natural areas	+2	+1	0	+2	+3	+2	0	+2	+2
1.2.3. Joint awareness raising and educational activities on environmental and nature protection topics in the border region	+1	+2	0	+1	+2	+1	+1	+1	+3
2.1.1. Lifelong learning for social inclusion, social cohesion and environmentally sustainable and healthy digitalization	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+2	0
2.1.2. Joint development of training, mentoring and outreach programs to combat and reverse early school leaving	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+2	0
2.1.3. Joint development of vocational training	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+2	0
2.2.1. Development of joint tourism products with joint marketing management of these products	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	+2	+1	+1
2.2.2. Cultural cooperation	0	0	-1				+2	+1	+1
2.2.3. Joint management of information for tourism and cultural purposes	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	+2	+1	+1
3.1.1. Building up mutual trust, in particular by encouraging ‘people to people’ (P2P) actions	0	+2	0	0	0	+2	+2	+1	+1
3.1.2. Actions supporting better cooperation governance	0	0	0	0	0	+2	0	+2	+1
3.2.1. Capacity development of border crossing management and mobility	0	+1	0	0	0	?	0	0	0

Legend

- +3 positive environmental impact with a high probability
- +2 positive environmental impact with a medium probability
- +1 positive environmental impact with a low probability
- 0 no identifiable environmental impact
- 1 negative environmental impact with a low probability
- 2 negative environmental impact with a medium probability
- 3 negative environmental impact with a high probability
- ? direction of the environmental impact depending on the Programme implementation

Monitoring system

The primary goal of the Programme's monitoring system is to record the scope of jointly implemented activities, regardless of the actual location of activities. In view of this, indicators defined in the Programme objectives are not suitable for measuring the impact of implemented actions on the environment or sustainability, neither for monitoring other significant horizontal objectives (e.g. gender equality).

Assessment and evaluation of the changes in environmental status induced by the Programme is possible by collecting data from country-level monitoring systems operated by various national bodies in both participating countries. Spatial breakdown of the data recorded in these does not always allow a precise identification of the impacts attributable to the Programme. At the same time, their indisputable advantage is that they collect and register data on the basis of professionally sound, uniform methodology.

In order to be able to attribute the data recorded in these databases to the developments carried out in the framework of the Programme, it is essential to establish a register of the main characteristics of environmentally relevant developments. Indicators recommended to be collected and recorded are:

- exact location and extent of areas affected by a development, in ha or m² depending on the project,
- land use classification of areas affected by a development, identification of potentially affected protected natural areas and Natura2000 areas,
- extent urban green spaces established, in ha, if relevant),
- area of the paved surfaces, in m², if relevant),
- number of implemented cultural or tourist events, day / year, if relevant.

The collection of the above indicators is required for projects with a potentially significant environmental impact, namely under the "Climate change adaptation, risk prevention", "Biodiversity and reduced pollution" and "Culture and tourism" objectives. It is recommended that all comprehensive evaluations of the Programme include a detailed assessment of the environmental, sustainability aspects and identification of the impact of the implemented developments on environmental elements.

Comments received to the draft version of the environmental report

Organisation	Comment	Response
Government Office of Bács-Kiskun County Department of Environment Protection, Nature Protection and Waste Management	Our authority has no objections to the draft Environmental Assessment Report of the Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2021-2027 Hungary-Serbia from the point of view of landscape and nature protection, environmental protection and waste management.	No response required
Government Office Csongrád-Csanád County Department of Agriculture Plant and Soil Protection Unit	The Soil Protection Authority does not raise any objections to the document entitled Draft Environmental Assessment Report for the Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Cross-border Cooperation Organisation Programme between Hungary and Serbia for the programming period 2021-2027, prepared by GrantsEurope Consulting Ltd. on 21 July 2021, and accepts the Environmental Assessment Report.	No response required
Government Office Csongrád-Csanád County Department of Environmental Protection, Nature Conservation and Waste Management Environmental Protection and Nature Conservation Unit	The Authority has no suggestions or comments on the submitted documentation.	No response required
Government Office Csongrád-Csanád County Department of Public Health	The Department of Public Health of the Csongrád-Csanád County Government Office, having examined the draft environmental assessment report on the Hungary-Serbia Cross-border Cooperation Programme for the programming period 2021-2027 submitted for comments, concluded that the draft meets the public health criteria, and therefore the Public Health Authority has no objections or comments.	No response required
Government Office of Bács-Kiskun County Department of Agriculture Forestry Unit	Plans and visions for the creation of forests, green spaces, tree-lined areas, etc., are supported by the forestry authority. However, proposals for changes that would reduce the area of existing forest stands are generally not acceptable to the authority.	The comment is consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Environmental Report.
Directorate for Disaster Management of Bács-Kiskun County Deputy Director's Organisation	We do not have any comments, additions, or suggestions to the consultation version of the "Draft Environmental Assessment Report" prepared by Grants Europe Consulting Ltd. for the HUSRB CBC Programme, we accept it.	No response required
	In the Strategic Environmental Assessment, I propose to include Act CXXVIII of 2011 on Disaster Management and the Amendment of Certain Related Acts and Government Decree 219/2011 (X. 20.) on the Control of Major Accidents involving Hazardous Substances, as well as Directive 2012/18/EU on the management of major-accident hazards involving	The Environmental Report does not include a list of specific legislation and the need to enforce the rules required by it, as it treats it as evidence.

Organisation	Comment	Response
	<p>dangerous substances and amending and subsequently repealing Council Directive 96/82/EC. In addition, it is proposed to include the consideration of the duties related to the control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances in the case of planned developments in the designated hazard zone around establishments dealing with dangerous substances.</p>	
<p>Directorate for Disaster Management Csongrád-Csanád County Department of Disaster Management Authority</p>	<p>The expected positive environmental impacts and synergies between the measures under the Programme will contribute to the achievement of the environmental objectives and to the improvement of living conditions and quality of life.</p> <p>The Programme also includes water management actions that can improve the status of surface and groundwater. Minor negative impacts can be predicted only for actions related to water tourism, but their magnitude is negligible and manageable.</p> <p>For the measures presented in the Programme, an improvement in the quantitative status of surface water is expected within the area concerned, but a transboundary impact is unlikely, given that no significant increase in abstraction from the river is expected, nor will there be any significant change in the increase in discharge to the river.</p> <p>We also propose to include the promotion of water-saving agricultural practices in the Programme.</p> <p>With regard to surface water and groundwater, the Programme has adequately identified drought and negative spatial water balance as a problem to be addressed and has also prioritised the problem among the measures.</p>	<p>The comment is consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Environmental Report.</p>
<p>Government Office Csongrád-Csanád County Chief Architect's Office</p>	<p>I agree with the proposals on traditional landscape management in Chapter 5, in particular the proposals to preserve the farm settlement structure and landscape character.</p> <hr/> <p>2.2 Culture and tourism proposals should emphasise the need to avoid increasing new built areas.</p> <hr/> <p>I raise no objections to the other findings of the environmental assessment.</p>	<p>No response required</p> <hr/> <p>The recommendation mentioned in the comment has been amended as requested.</p> <hr/> <p>No response required</p>

Organisation	Comment	Response
Kiskunság National Park Directorate	<p>In the opinion of the Kiskunság National Park Directorate, the first point of the recommended measures in point 1.1 of the table in Chapter 5 of the Environmental Assessment Report ("only temporary or permanent flooding of low-quality soils should be allowed in order to protect the soil") deserves further clarification.</p> <p>Instead of using "only" low-quality soils, it is proposed that the proposal should be formulated in such a way that the use of arable land for water resource management should be prepared by a comparative assessment of the local economic value loss and the economic value added or other public benefit in the environment, and should be implemented in the case of a clear overall value increase.</p>	<p>The recommendations mentioned in the comment has been amended as requested.</p>
	<p>The Kiskunság National Park Directorate agrees with the fourth proposal discussed in Table 1.2, with to the following two important restrictive conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In particular, support will be given to the planting of species (e.g. woody tree species) from neighbouring geographical regions that have favourable environmental requirements for adaptation to climate change, can potentially reach the target areas by natural dispersal, but are not able to spread in the cultivated area due to human constraints. - The introduction of non-native species should be preceded by a detailed preliminary analysis of their potential invasive properties, and only those species that have been identified by a scientifically rigorous risk analysis as unsuitable for aggressive invasive spread should be supported. The risk of introducing new invasive species that spread aggressively should not be taken either from an economic point of view (they may become dangerous agricultural weeds or pests) or from a biodiversity conservation point of view, and EU legislation on invasive species also places considerable emphasis on prevention. 	<p>The recommendation mentioned in the comment has been amended as requested.</p>
	<p>It is recommended that the issue of light pollution should also be addressed in the Report, as for example, illuminated waterfront plazas, street lighting, etc. cause heavy light pollution and affect wildlife.</p>	<p>At the level of mention, the importance of light pollution has been added to the Environmental Report. However, it should be noted that it is not possible to justify support for investments involving light pollution under the Programme.</p>