

# NEWSLETTER

## INTERREG IPA ROMANIA-SERBIA PROGRAMME



Interreg Cooperation Day in Fetislam Fortress, Kladovo, Serbia.

Photo from the IC Day Event

### We celebrated Interreg Cooperation Day together [page 2](#)

On Tuesday, October 1st, 2024, the authorities of the Interreg IPA Romania-Serbia Programme, together with over 100 distinguished guests from Serbia and Romania, celebrated Interreg Cooperation Day 2024, at the historic Fetislam Fortress in Kladovo.

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Decorative photo.

# We celebrated Interreg Cooperation Day in Kladovo, Serbia

On **Tuesday, October 1st, 2024**, the authorities of the Interreg IPA Romania–Serbia Programme, together with over 100 distinguished guests from Serbia and Romania, celebrated **Interreg Cooperation Day 2024** at the historic **Fetislam Fortress in Kladovo, Republic of Serbia**.

The event highlighted the spirit of Interreg cooperation by presenting the **results of the Romanian–Serbian projects** funded under the European Union’s cross-border cooperation programmes. One of these tangible results was the restoration of the Fetislam Fortress, carried out with the support of European funds, providing a symbolic setting for this celebration.



Facebook post-event photos.

The **key moments** of the event included:

- A **Guided Tour of Fetislam Fortress**: guests enjoyed a guided tour of the fortress, exploring its rich history.
- **Cross-border Projects Fair**, held at the Visitor Centre, where informative materials were presented on innovative projects funded in the border area.
- **Citizen Consultation**: a public consultation on the future of cross-border cooperation post-2027, where 50 citizens completed surveys and shared their ideas and vision for the region.
- **Cultural Performances**: in celebration of the strong cultural ties between Romanians and Serbians, youth from both sides of the border performed traditional dances, the Danubius and Polet dance ensembles.
- **Live Concert**: the day ended with a concert by the band Pretty Loud.

Interreg Cooperation Day is celebrated annually around September 21st as part of a pan-European campaign, facilitated by Interact and implemented by Interreg Programmes and their partners. The campaign aims to bring cross-border cooperation closer to the public, highlighting the benefits it brings to local communities.

This year’s theme, **“European Union Values Overcoming Borders”** invites us to reflect on the impact of borders and the strides made to remove barriers to travel, study or work freely across Europe.

# Debate on the future of Interreg Programmes for the post-2027 period

Timisoara, 11 October 2024

In the context of **consultations** regarding the **future** of **Interreg Programmes**, the **Managing Authority of the Interreg IPA Romania – Serbia Programme** and the **Managing Authority of the Interreg VI-A Romania – Hungary Programme** organised, on **11 October 2024**, in Timișoara, a **public debate** with the academic community.

This public debate, conducted at the level of each Interreg programme within the European Union and due to be **completed by the end of 2024**, will form the **basis** for the **post-2027 regulation proposals**, which **will be presented** by the **European Commission in mid-2025**.



Photos from the event.

Given the need to pay special attention to **young people** and **academic institutions** during these consultations, the Managing Authorities of both programmes within the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration (MDPWA) supported the **active involvement** of **students** and **university staff** in **defining the future cross-border cooperation** programmes between Romania-Serbia and Romania-Hungary, which should reflect their **real aspirations and needs**.

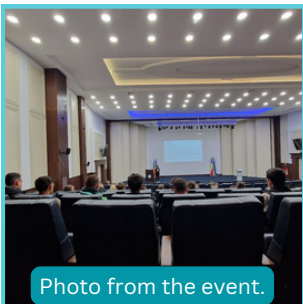


Photo from the event.

The **dialogue** between the **Interreg Programme representatives** from MDPWA and the university **staff**, as well as the **students** from the King Michael I University of Life Sciences in Timișoara, also aimed to support the academic community in presenting **valuable perspectives** and **innovative ideas** that can significantly contribute to **shaping an effective strategy for future Interreg programmes**.



Decorative photo: young people holding dialogue clouds (source: Canva)

# Interreg IPA: Together for Better Programmes – Kick-off Meeting

Bucharest, 15–16 October 2024



Decorative photo representing puzzle pieces.

The Interreg IPA programme authorities, including Managing Authorities, Joint Secretariats, National Authorities, met for the first time in Bucharest, Romania. The meeting was organized by the Managing Authority of the Romania–Serbia Interreg IPA Programme and Interact.

The goal of the working group, involving those engaged in implementing IPA programmes was to create a space where participants can exchange ideas, develop new strategies, and enhance the efficiency and impact of these programmes. Also, this group will serve as a platform for sharing experiences, addressing challenges, finding joint solutions, spreading success stories, and promoting best practices.

The special objective of the kick-off meeting was to attempt to contribute to the post-27 preparatory activities, by collecting the key positions from the perspective of Interreg IPA programmes, with focused view on the specificities of the external EU borders and issue a **Report “A vision for the post 2027 – Interreg IPA Programmes”**.

The group will also provide mutual technical support, tools, and consultancy to improve programme management and implementation. It will also function as a sort of a think-tank, analysing and promoting project outcomes, and advocating for the importance of external cooperation and EU enlargement.

By fostering collaboration across programmes, the group can encourage joint initiatives and management solutions. It may create an environment for informed decision-making on projects and continuous improvement in implementation quality. This will help strengthen the EU’s role along its external borders and in enlargement countries.

Additionally, in its future meetings the group will identify capacity-building needs, either through mutual exchange or with support from the Interact programme. By exploring new technologies and methodologies and sharing knowledge, the group will act as a support platform and a springboard for promoting the sustainability and evolution of EU programmes to meet changing needs in an evolving geopolitical context.



Decorative photo representing puzzle pieces.

# Equal Opportunities in Cross-Border Projects: A Narrative Journey

In the heart of Europe's ambitious journey towards **integration** and **shared prosperity**, cross-border **projects** stand as **beacons of collaboration and innovation**. They symbolize the unity and collective efforts of nations to build a brighter future for all. However, these projects are not just about economic growth or infrastructure development; they are about ensuring that **every individual, regardless of background, gender, or ability, can participate in and benefit from these initiatives**. This is where the principle of **equal opportunities** comes into play—a core value embedded deeply in the fabric of European Union (EU) policies and regulations.



Decorative photo: collaboration.

This narrative explores the importance of equal opportunities within cross-border projects, weaving together the European Commission's guidelines with real-life examples of how these principles come to life across borders. Let us embark on this journey through the lens of inclusion, equality, and shared opportunity.

## The Foundation of Equal Opportunities

Imagine a bustling European city where people from different countries, cultures, and walks of life come together to work on a shared project. Perhaps it's a new transport network connecting two countries or a cultural exchange programme that bridges communities. While these projects are essential for regional development, they also have the potential to shape societies and lives in profound ways. But to truly succeed, they must be inclusive, offering everyone an equal chance to contribute and benefit.

The European Commission, recognizing the importance of fairness and equality, has woven the principle of equal opportunities into the very fabric of all its initiatives. This principle is not just a guideline; it is a mandate that ensures projects funded by the EU are accessible to all, irrespective of gender, race, age, disability, or any other characteristic that could lead to discrimination.

Equal opportunities are a cornerstone of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the Interreg programmes, both of which emphasize the need to address inequalities and ensure that no one is left behind. These regulations ensure that cross-border projects do more than just connect regions—they connect people in meaningful, equitable ways.

# Equal Opportunities in Cross-Border Projects: A Narrative Journey

## Bringing Equal Opportunities to Life

How do these principles move from paper to practice? How do they transform from abstract regulations into tangible actions that change lives? The journey from policy to impact begins with understanding the unique needs and barriers that different groups face. This process is more than a technical assessment; it is about listening to voices that are often unheard and addressing challenges that are often overlooked.

### 1. Listening to Communities: The Needs Assessment

Picture a small border town where two nations meet. In this town, a new project is about to launch—a joint initiative to improve local infrastructure and boost economic opportunities. But before the first brick is laid or the first contract is signed, the project team embarks on a journey of discovery. They walk the streets, talk to residents, and meet with community leaders. They learn that while the new infrastructure is welcomed, there are concerns that women, the elderly, and people with disabilities may not benefit equally.

This is where the needs assessment comes into play. It's about more than collecting data—it's about understanding lived experiences. The project team discovers that women in the town, for example, are disproportionately employed in lower-paying jobs with limited access to transport. They also find that elderly residents and those with disabilities often struggle with existing infrastructure that doesn't cater to their needs.

Armed with this knowledge, the project takes shape—not just as an infrastructure project, but as an inclusive endeavour that aims to lift everyone.

### 2. Crafting Inclusive Solutions: Project Design

With the needs assessment complete, the project team now faces a challenge: How do they ensure that their solutions are not only effective but also equitable? The answer lies in designing the project with inclusion at its core.

The team decides to go beyond the basic requirements. They ensure that the new transport routes are accessible to people with disabilities, providing ramps, audio signals, and easy-to-read signage. They create a mentorship program for women in the town, offering them training and support to move into higher-paying roles connected to the project. They also establish partnerships with local businesses to encourage diverse hiring practices, ensuring that the economic benefits of the project reach all segments of the community.

In this way, the **project** becomes a **vehicle for social change**, not just economic development. It's a story of how thoughtful design can transform a simple infrastructure project into a **catalyst for equality**.

# Equal Opportunities in Cross-Border Projects: A Narrative Journey

## 3. Walking the Talk: Implementation and Monitoring

The project is now underway, and the town is buzzing with activity. Workers are laying down new roads, businesses are preparing for increased traffic, and local organizations are engaging with the community. But ensuring equal opportunities doesn't stop at the design phase—it must be woven into every step of the project's implementation.

Throughout the project's lifespan, the team remains vigilant. They monitor who is participating in the project and who is benefiting from it. They collect data on employment rates, pay equity, and access to services, ensuring that their targets for inclusion are being met. When they notice that certain groups are underrepresented in the workforce, they respond by adjusting their outreach efforts and providing additional support.

It's a continuous process of reflection and adaptation—a journey that requires commitment, but one that leads to meaningful change.

## Overcoming Challenges: The Roadblocks to Equality

Of course, the path to equal opportunities is not without obstacles. The journey is often fraught with challenges, from cultural differences to legal complexities.

**Cultural Differences:** Picture a meeting room filled with partners from different countries, each bringing their unique perspectives and experiences to the table. These differences can enrich a project, but they can also create tensions—especially when it comes to attitudes toward gender equality or inclusion of marginalized groups. Bridging these gaps requires more than just diplomacy; it requires a deep understanding of cultural contexts and a willingness to learn from one another.

**Legal and Administrative Barriers:** Imagine trying to implement a cross-border project where each country involved has different laws on employment discrimination or disability access. Navigating these legal landscapes can be a daunting task, often requiring creative solutions and strong partnerships with local authorities.

**Resource Constraints:** Ensuring equal opportunities often comes with additional costs—whether it's funding for accessibility improvements, outreach programs, or specialized training. For smaller projects or those in less-developed regions, these costs can be a significant hurdle.

Yet, despite these challenges, the rewards of promoting equal opportunities are immense. **Cross-border projects that embrace inclusivity** are not just successful—they are transformative. **They build bridges not only between regions but also between people, fostering a sense of shared purpose and mutual respect.**

# Equal Opportunities in Cross-Border Projects: A Narrative Journey

## Stories of Success: Case Studies of Equal Opportunities in Action

To truly understand the impact of equal opportunities in cross-border projects, we can turn to the stories of those who have experienced it firsthand.

### 1. The FEMINA Project: Empowering Women in Technology

In the vibrant landscapes of Italy, Sweden, Spain, and Greece, the FEMINA project was born. Its mission was clear: to break down the barriers women face in the technology sector—a field where they are often underrepresented.

The FEMINA project is more than a policy initiative; it's a movement that empowers women to step into roles that have traditionally been out of reach. Through targeted mentoring programs, networking opportunities, and policy development, FEMINA is changing the narrative. Women who once saw technology as an inaccessible field are now becoming leaders and innovators, supported by a network that spans borders and cultures.

The project's success lies in its commitment to understanding the unique challenges women face and providing tailored solutions that address these challenges head-on.

### 2. The PALIM Project: Integrating Migrants into the Labor Market

In the sun-soaked Mediterranean, the PALIM project set out to tackle one of the most pressing issues of our time: migrant integration. Migrants often arrive with hopes for a better life, but they face formidable barriers—language obstacles, discrimination, and difficulty in having their qualifications recognized.

PALIM turned these challenges into opportunities. By providing specialized training, job placement services, and engaging with employers, the project created pathways for migrants to enter the labor market and contribute to their new communities. It also worked closely with local residents, fostering dialogue and understanding between migrants and their host societies.

The story of PALIM is a story of resilience and adaptation, showing how equal opportunities can transform lives and communities.



# Equal Opportunities in Cross-Border Projects: A Narrative Journey

## 3. The SEEREN Project: Inclusive Energy Solutions in the Danube Region

The SEEREN project in the Danube region started with a focus on sustainable energy but quickly became a story of inclusion. As the project developed energy solutions for the region, it realized that equal opportunities had to be part of the equation. How could they ensure that all communities, including those in remote and disadvantaged areas, benefited from these advancements?

SEEREN responded by making energy solutions accessible to low-income households, involving women in decision-making processes, and creating green jobs for disadvantaged groups. The project didn't just provide energy—it provided hope and opportunity for all.

### Conclusion: A Shared Journey Towards Equality

As we reflect on these stories and the principles that guide cross-border projects, it becomes clear that equal opportunities are not just a regulatory requirement—they are a moral imperative. They remind us that true progress is measured not only by economic growth but by the extent to which it lifts everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Cross-border projects have the power to change lives, but only if they are built on the foundation of inclusion and equality. As the European Union continues to evolve, these principles will remain at the heart of its vision for a united and prosperous Europe.

This journey is far from over. As project developers, policymakers, and community members, we have a responsibility to continue pushing for equal opportunities in all that we do. By committing to these values, we can create projects that are not only successful but transformative—projects that truly reflect the diversity and strength of Europe.

### Call to Action: Join the Movement

The journey towards equal opportunities is one that requires all hands on deck. Whether you are a project planner, a policymaker, or a concerned citizen, you have a role to play.



## Horizontal principles: *Climate Proofing and Do No Significant Harm principle*

Throughout their life cycle, projects financed under European funds have to respect **horizontal principles** such as **sustainable development** and have to describe their specific contributions in this regard in the **application form**.

**Sustainable development** – meeting the present needs while thinking of those of the future generations – should be regarded from the ecologic, economic and social point of view. In designing and implementing the project, the applicants should aim at a balanced use of resources, appropriate choice of logistics and raising public awareness on sustainable development issues (e.g. by inserting messages on printed materials or in the e-mails).

The biggest challenges are related to environmental and biodiversity protection, sustainable use of natural resources and addressing of climate change, environmental risks management and emergency preparedness. These challenges relate to the protection of the environment as an intrinsic value of the region and as a prerequisite for sustainable tourism.

When designing and implementing a project, one can act in many ways to reduce impact on the environment and reduce the carbon footprint. Therefore, there is strong encouragement to apply energy efficient and sustainable principles to the project activities. In fact, measures reducing the impact on the environment cannot only add value to the project in terms of credibility, but it can also result in lower costs.

**Translating environmental goals from programmes into projects is effectively done, but not limited to, by ensuring compliance with:**

- **Climate proofing**
- **Do No Significant Harm principle**



Decorative photos: Sustainable development, natural resources, carbon footprint. (source: Canva).

## Horizontal principles: *Climate Proofing and Do No Significant Harm principle*

### Climate proofing

Adequate mechanisms are needed in order to ensure the **climate proofing** of supported investment in infrastructure should be an integral part of programming and implementation of the Funds (CPR). Climate proofing integrates climate change mitigation and adaptation measures into infrastructure projects, through a two phases approach: first a **screening** and then a **detailed analysis** (subject to the outcome of the screening phase).

Projects have to prepare and document the climate-proofing process covering mitigation and adaptation, including assessing and specifying the project context, and project boundaries and interactions. Moreover, in selecting operations, the managing authority shall *i.a.*, ensure the climate-proofing of investments in infrastructure which have an expected lifespan of at least 5 years, as an impact of climate change on any of the project activities or components may undermine the success of the project and the viability of the infrastructure. **During the lifespan of a project, significant changes in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events due to climate change should be taken into account.**

Preparing for climate proofing means selecting the assessment methodology, including key parameters for the vulnerability and risk assessment of the overall impact of the essential climate variables and hazards and identifying who should be involved and allocating resources, time and budget.

**Projects** should make a **risk analysis** and **map those climate change risks** affecting their region, as well as the **correlated measures** to be deployed in order to **ensure the resilience to current and future climate changes**. Also, projects should **foresee and implement the adaptation measures in the construction works**, regularly **review the hazards** and **update the risk analysis** and **monitor climate hazards** and potential effects.

Decorative photos: Climate proofing, climate change (source: Canva).



## Horizontal principles: *Climate Proofing and Do No Significant Harm principle*

### Do no significant harm principle – legal requirements

The European Funds should support only activities that respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the Union and would **do no significant harm to environmental objectives** [Common Provision Regulations].

No measure should lead to significant harm to any of the six environmental objectives, within the meaning of Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation [<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32020R0852>], which defines what constitutes significant harm to each of the six environmental objectives. Thus, an activity is considered to do significant harm:

- to **climate change mitigation** if it leads to significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;
- to **climate change adaptation** if it leads to an increased adverse impact of the current climate and the expected future climate, on the activity itself or on people, nature or assets;
- to **the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources** if it is detrimental to the good status or the good ecological potential of bodies of water, including surface water and groundwater, or to the good environmental status of marine waters;
- to **the circular economy, including waste prevention and recycling**, if it leads to significant inefficiencies in the use of materials or in the direct or indirect use of natural resources, or if it significantly increases the generation, incineration or disposal of waste, or if the long-term disposal of waste may cause significant and long-term environmental harm;
- to **pollution prevention and control** if it leads to a significant increase in emissions of pollutants into air, water or land;
- to **the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems** if it is significantly detrimental to the good condition and resilience of ecosystems, or detrimental to the conservation status of habitats and species, including those of Union interest.

Member States are responsible for the implementation of this principle throughout the programming period & DNSH assessment needs to consider the entire life cycle of the activities resulting from the financed actions.

The results of the SEA (integrating the DNSH assessment) need to be reflected in the criteria for selection of operations. Therefore, all selected operations have to fall within the scope of the type of action defined in the programme and the managing authorities should define specific criteria for selecting operations that ensure compliance with the DNSH principle. **If an operation does not fall under the scope of the types of actions defined in the programme, it cannot be selected for funding.**

Compliance with EU & national environmental law at the level of each operation is an explicit & separate requirement and it does not waive the need for a DNSH assessment.

# Projects in focus

## Project RORS-373: Ecosystems Rehabilitation and Preservation of Natural Values in Jimbolia and Kikinda



1. The desired ultimate status would involve a harmonious blend of local engagement, national support, and European collaboration, leading to improved environmental protection, sustainable development, and ecological awareness across all levels of governance within the EU.

2. **Resilience and adaptation** – by investing in rehabilitation projects and raising ecological awareness, communities can become more resilient to environmental threats, ensuring long-term sustainability and ability to thrive in the face of adversity.

**Community well-being and quality of life** – by providing cleaner and healthier natural spaces for recreation, relaxation and enjoyment.

3. Improved environmental conditions, leading to better health outcomes and overall well-being. Knowledge and skills to actively participate in environmental stewardship.

Communities become more resilient to natural disasters and environmental disruptions, safeguarding lives, property, and livelihoods.

4. Safeguarding the environment is essential for the well-being of citizens, as it directly impacts air and water quality, public health, and overall quality of life. By investing in rehabilitation projects like ECOLAKES, the EU aims to preserve natural habitats, mitigate pollution, and enhance ecosystem resilience, thus ensuring a healthier environment for all Europeans to enjoy. Additionally, environmental initiatives contribute to the EU's broader goals of sustainable development and climate action, aligning with international commitments such as the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, investing in environmental protection fosters innovation and job creation in green industries, driving economic growth and competitiveness across the European Union.

### HERE ARE THE ANSWERED QUESTIONS:

**1. EU Vision – what will be the desired ultimate status? At local/national/European level.**

**2. What is the value of this priority to be communicated in our messages?**

**3. What is the benefit of this priority in the lead target group?**

**4. Why is the EU investing in this area/how will each European benefit?**



Collage of project results.

# INTERREG IPA ROMANIA–SERBIA PROGRAMME

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Photo of the Danube between Romania and Serbia.

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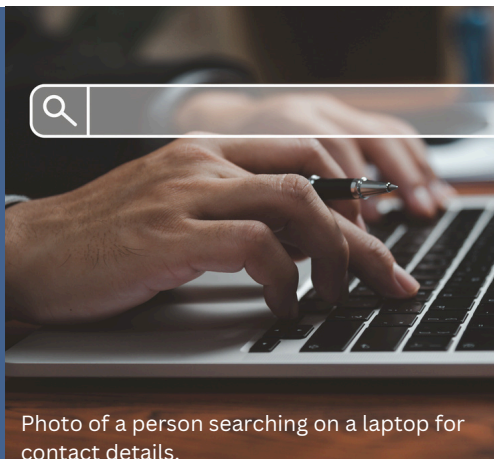


Photo of a person searching on a laptop for contact details.

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