

# **CONSULTATION OF STAKEHOLDERS AND CITIZENS**

## **Romania - Serbia Interreg IPA Programme**



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## 1. Executive Summary

As the European Commission is prioritizing stakeholder and citizen consultations to prepare for the future beyond 2027, particularly focusing on regions where cohesion policy is implemented, the Managing Authority for Romania - Serbia Programme launched in February 2024 a wide consultation process which lasted until the end of October 2024. The process of consulting stakeholders and citizens living in the Programme area was an open invitation for participants to share their ideas on the future of Interreg.

The consultation which was based on the collaborative governance principles, included a wide range of stakeholders and citizens and addressed both local and global challenges, when discussing the shaping the EU's future priorities.

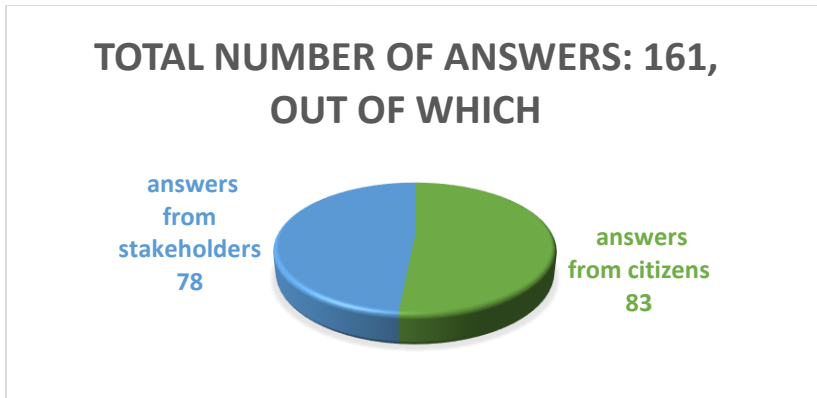
The consultation campaign was carried out under the slogan *Interreg LISTENS, Communities THRIVE!* inviting participants to share their ideas, in order to collectively address them by means of online and in-person meetings and a questionnaire adjusted for each category (10 questions for stakeholders and 5 questions for citizens).

The questionnaire, published on Romania Serbia IPA Programme website (<https://romania-serbia.net/shape-the-future-interreg-post-2027> ) is part of the Toolkit: Cooperation - the skill for our future, Guide for shaping together the future Interreg, presented by the European Commission in December 2023, when asking Interreg programmes to consult stakeholders and citizens in their programme areas and report back on the results by the end of 2024. The information about the consultation process, including the link to the Programme website and the questionnaire, has also been published on the websites of the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, of Romania, acting as Managing Authority and of the Ministry of European Integration as the National Authority of the Programme [MEI - Актуелности - Обликујмо будући Интеррег](#).

Besides being published on the programme website, the questionnaire was also provided during online & physical meetings (ex. Monitoring Committee meeting, IC Day, meeting with students & academia, etc.), alongside with a PowerPoint presentation on what is Interreg, what is the programme financing and the results from the impact evaluation of the 2014 - 2020 programme.

Moreover, the questionnaire was also sent by email (to new or existing contacts of beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries). Also, a strong campaign was organized on the social media channels of the Programme (Facebook, Instagram, X).

The consultation process, which ensured a wide and balanced participation of stakeholders, representing social, economic, educational, cultural or touristic areas, public, private and non-governmental organisations, gathered insights and expectations, compiled and summarized in the present report.

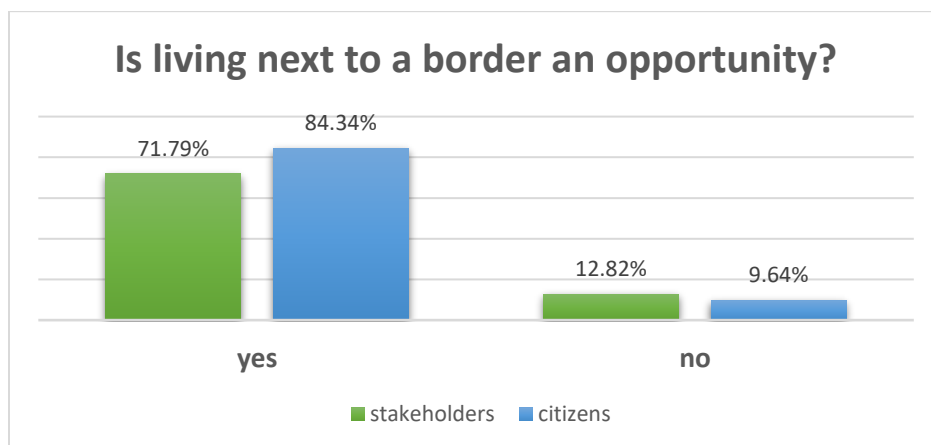


**Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?**

The major advantages of living in a border area, as identified by the citizens, are: trade opportunities, availability of jobs in border industries (transport, customs, retail), easier access to travel between countries, access to diverse cultures and traditions. In addition, the stakeholders also highlight that in the border area the residents can benefit from various support systems and emergency services across border and that authorities have multiple possibilities to cooperate, share expertise, knowledge and resources:

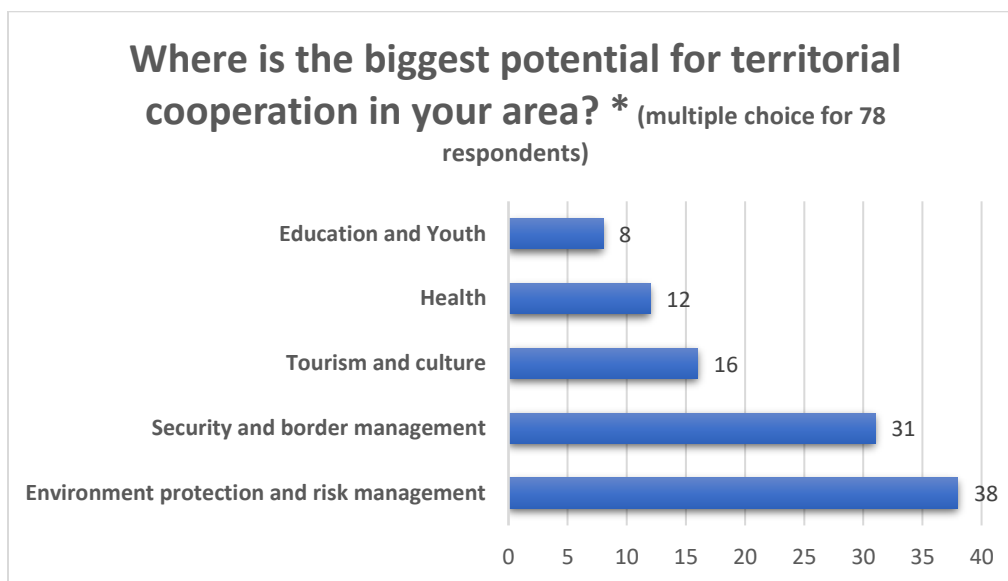
“Living next to the border must be seen as an advantage as it offers a two-way platform for all kind exchanges, especially in cases when one of the countries is not an EU MS. The exchange takes place not only at cultural level, but it also implies areas as public administration, education, law enforcement, financial and labour markets.”

The disadvantages identified by the citizens often refer to aspects which have a direct impact on the daily lives of the people who live there, like unstable GSM coverage between the two countries or lengthy border crossing checks. It can be noted that there is also a real concern at the level of both citizens and stakeholders regarding the potential threats living in a cross-border area brings: border disputes or conflicts, smuggling or illegal activities or possible cultural clashes or misunderstandings between neighbouring communities.



### Where is the biggest potential for territorial cooperation in your area?

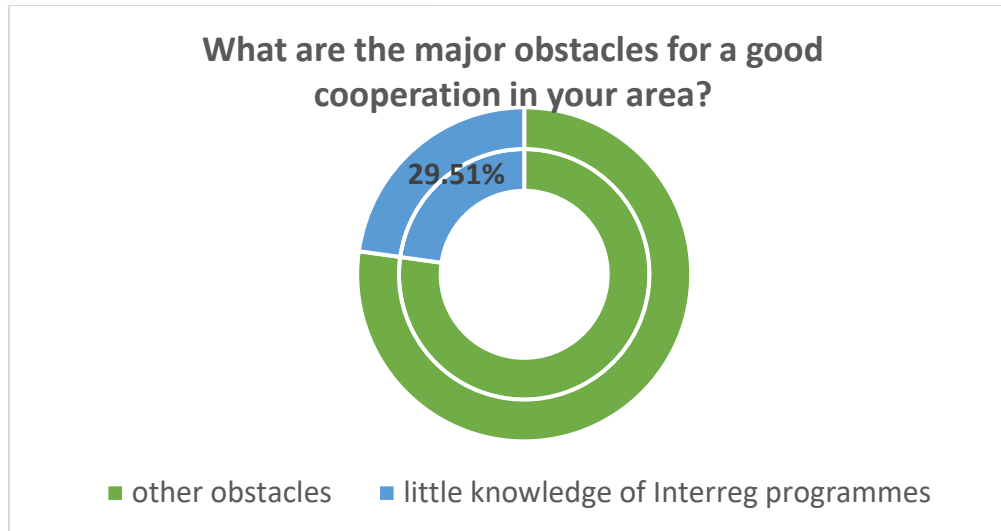
The answer to the question regarding the potential for territorial cooperation offers valuable information regarding the potential fields of interest for the future programme. Although the main topics have remained similar as for the 2021-2027 period, the respondents identified that more support should be granted to “security and border management” and “environment protection and risk management.”



### What are the major obstacles for a good cooperation in your area?

This question generated a wide area of answers, many of them which were also given to them as examples: distance from big cities, incompatible levels of competences at regional or local level, different languages, different levels of salary to political tensions and insufficient communication channels. However, even if the respondents had at their disposal the given example “little willingness to cooperate”, only 2 respondents out of 61 mentioned this as an obstacle.

However, 18 respondents out of 61 mentioned as obstacle the “little knowledge of Interreg programmes”, thus suggesting that the promotion of these programmes should be enhanced even more.



The results which are also worth mentioning stem from the questionnaires applied physically to the stakeholders. Without having any possible examples at their disposal, the answers regarding the major obstacles identified by the respondents can be seen as relevant and most salient for our target group.

So, out of 19 respondents, 8 did not identify any major obstacles and 4 of them mentioned aspects related to border crossings: high bureaucracy, heavy traffic and large distance between them. Other obstacles mentioned were legislation related differences, language barrier and lack of will from relevant actors.

## 2. Consultation of stakeholders

When initiating the consultations with the stakeholders, both alignment with local needs and priorities and building ownership and commitment on the future interventions on the ground were considered.

Thus, the consultation process with the stakeholders, especially those at local and regional levels, possessing in-depth knowledge of the area's unique needs, challenges, and opportunities was considered a priority thorough all the programming periods. By consulting them, the programme was better tailored to address real, pressing issues rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

At a higher level, as this consultation process will feed into the European Commission draft Regulations governing the post-2027 programming period, stakeholders' insights can help shape strategic priorities, ensuring that projects and resources are allocated to areas with the highest potential for positive impact.

Lastly, not only that the consultation of stakeholders helps demonstrate transparency in Cohesion Policy overall design and Interreg design more specifically, showing a commitment to collaborative governance, but it also builds a sense of ownership and accountability, making the stakeholders more likely to actively support and promote the goals of the future Policy.

## 2.1 Main stakeholders consulted

The consultation of the stakeholders covered a wide range of organisations, involved in all aspects of public interests, such as regional development, healthcare, environmental protection, sustainability, social inclusion, innovation and community development.

Key stakeholders included in the consultation process were the members and observers in the Monitoring Committee, local and regional authorities, projects beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries in future projects, non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society and academia.

## 2.2 Methods of consultation

To conduct the consultations with stakeholders, the programme organized a series of meetings both online and in person, making sure we could reach a broad and diverse group. Our aim was to create an open, accessible, and inclusive environment where everyone felt comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns.

For the online consultations, we used an easy-to-access platform on the Programme website that stakeholders were already familiar with, allowing participants from various locations to join without the need to travel. We held sessions in plain language, using the national languages to ensure clarity and accessibility for everyone. Additionally, we provided some background information to help participants gain more knowledge about Interreg and feel confident when contributing to discussions.

The in-person consultations took place in convenient locations and we made a special effort to create a welcoming atmosphere for young people and academia by encouraging them to share insights with an informal setup to make discussions feel more comfortable and collaborative.

We used similar strategies, with a focus on plain, straightforward language to keep discussions inclusive and made sure that all voices were heard, including those of younger participants and academic representatives who often brought forward innovative ideas and unique perspectives.

Throughout both online and in-person formats, we encouraged open communication and feedback to ensure that the consultation was a meaningful experience for all stakeholders involved. By integrating input from different groups, we created a well-rounded view of the community's needs and priorities, which will play a vital role in shaping Interreg's future.

Moreover, for both stakeholders and citizens a participatory workshop was organised in the margins of IC Day, a well-established and known event among our stakeholders, which this year included a free guided tour of Fetislam Fortress and a free live concert and other cultural performances, in celebration of the strong cultural ties between Romanians and Serbians.

Thus, 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.

A key moment of IC Day this year was represented by the citizen consultation on the future of Interreg, where general information about Interreg history and achievements was presented and the participants had the opportunity to share their ideas and vision for the region.

## **2.3 Summary of the input on the key questions**

The survey for the stakeholders included 10 questions, as follows:

### **1. Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?**

For the majority of the respondents living near a border can offer opportunities, such as greater job options, the potential to benefit from the economic markets of two countries, and cultural exchange that enriches community life.

However, some of the respondents highlighted the disadvantages of living in a border area, such as long waiting time in border crossing points, complications in accessing cross-border public transportation, differences in legal or administrative proceedings, etc.

### **2. Where is the biggest potential for territorial cooperation in your area?**

The majority of the respondents, highlighted that the biggest potential for territorial cooperation often lies in environmental protection, like pollution control of shared rivers.

Another favored topic as having a big potential for territorial cooperation in the Romanian-Serbia area was identified as more support should be granted to “security and border management”.

Also, respondents highlighted as the biggest potential enhancing cross-border public infrastructure and transport, which could enable developing joint tourism initiatives that promote local attractions on both sides of the border and more economic development on both sides of the border.

### **3. What currently works well in this cooperation and should be either preserved or reinforced?**

Effective aspects of cross-border cooperation in the Romania - Serbia Interreg IPA Programme include established robust networks for sharing best practices, effective networks, joint action plans, and successful economic partnerships.

The answers also suggest continuity and strengthening of existing successful projects, underlining the importance of building on effective practices as a foundation for sustainable cooperation.

### **4. What currently does not work well in this cooperation and should be improved?**

Challenges in cross-border projects were often highlighted in the form of bureaucratic hurdles, cultural and language differences, legal and regulatory disparities, different practices in environmental topics and inadequate funding. Additionally, logistical issues, such as transportation and infrastructure mismatches, and varying levels of technological development were underlined as the challenges which can complicate cooperation efforts.



Also, upgrading infrastructure, improving overall safety and security in the border area and integrating modern technologies in more economic sectors could be the gaps needed to be addressed in order to enhance effective cooperation could foster more efficient, unified regional development.

**5. What are the major obstacles for a good cooperation in your area?**

Major obstacles identified by the stakeholders include economic disparities between regions, different language and cultural barriers, and limited funding to address all the challenges their region is facing. Additionally, inconsistent administrative capacities at regional levels can impede efforts to align projects and goals.

**6. Are there things you would like to do under Interreg but cannot? Why?**

The limited number of calls for proposals and limited financial allocations are hindering more cooperation on the most pressing challenges, such as environmental protection, pollution, infrastructure and security.

Also, the limited number of specific objectives which could be addressed by projects in comparison to the unlimited number of challenges the border area is facing was highlighted as an impediment and limitation in realizing more ambitious projects.

Moreover, initiatives requiring rapid and targeted interventions in areas such as law enforcement or cross-border security may not be eligible for funding or may not be adequately covered by the current programme.

**7. What is the most important novelty that you would like to see in the future Interreg?**

The majority of stakeholders highlighted the need for more simplification and flexibility in the project implementation process. Simplifying the application process (e.g. newly introduced topics such as climate proofing and DNSH complicated the process compared to 2014-2020 period) and the reporting process was often mentioned by the respondents. Additionally, increased opportunities for project partners to cooperate on topics directly related to enlargement/ accession process/ negotiation chapters and security related aspects could be relevant in the context of particular specificities of the external border programme.

**8. Is there a need for some infrastructure projects? Please give some examples.**

Infrastructure projects have been identified as crucial for the border area covered by the Romania-Serbia Interreg IPA programme and also crucial in bridging the gap between this region and other regions in Europe. Improving road infrastructure, cross-border points infrastructure, the navigability of cross-border rivers, and climate adaptation infrastructure were highlighted as essential examples that need to be supported in the future by Interreg.

**9. What should be done to facilitate the work with your counterparts in another country (governance)?**

The creation of more networks and task forces on different fields of intervention was stressed as a possibility to streamline planning and improve accountability, making it easier to execute joint initiatives effectively.

Moreover, increasing coordination with the national governments on both sides of the border could enable a faster, better-coordinated decision-making process and enable effective responses to the challenges and emergency situations.

**10. What would be the cooperation project of your dreams?**

The majority of stakeholders focused on topics addressed during the 2021-2027 programming period. However, more support was identified by some stakeholders to topics currently unaddressed but needed and desirable in the future, such as “enlargement” and “security” projects, which could integrate even further the border region and close the gaps with other regions across Europe.

Other outstanding project ideas were presented in the field of digital connectivity of the remote areas in the border region in the fields of education and healthcare.

## 2.4 Interesting quotes

Among the most relevant quotes and messages from the stakeholders are the following:

*“Creating a cross-border healthcare centre providing specialized medical services to both communities.”*

*“Establishing a cross-border security initiative across the entire region to address disinformation and misinformation campaigns.”*

*“Establishing a cross-border youth exchange program to promote intercultural dialogue.”*

*“Developing a shared education curriculum promoting multiculturalism and language learning.”*

*“Functional and sustainable tourism infrastructure that would provide sufficient income for workers in that area and help local community to be driven as world top tourism destinations. In connection with agriculture and modern technology in order to serve nature protection and keep our cross-border area clean, safe and sufficient for all needs of all generations.”*

*“Implementing a joint waste management and recycling program to promote sustainability.”*

*“Creating a cultural heritage preservation program to safeguard historical sites and traditions.”*

*“Developing a cross-border technology transfer initiative to support small businesses.”*

## 3. Consultation of citizens

For the consultation of the citizens, more information was provided under the section “**NEW TO INTERREG? LET’S BREAK DOWN SOME FACTS AND FIGURES!**” previously published on the programme website, where Interreg in general was explained and more information on the Romania-Serbia Interreg IPA Programme was provided to the citizens with the scope of improving the general knowledge on the EU financial assistance but also on the benefits of Interreg in the way the citizens are experiencing EU in their daily lives.

A strong emphasis was placed on the focus to Interreg Programmes and their added-value in promoting cross-border partnerships which enhance economic, social and environmental well-being. Also, concrete examples of supported initiatives in the field of infrastructure, climate change adaptation, innovation and healthcare were presented as evidence to Interreg achievements towards mitigating disparities between different regions.

Moreover, citizens were presented with the information of Programme area covered by Romania-Serbia Interreg IPA Programme, the financial allocation and the priorities supported by the Programme.

### **3.1 Main citizens consulted**

Similarly to the stakeholder's consultation, the programme aimed to engage a diverse range of citizens involved across all areas of society, with a strong focus on youth and academia.

### **3.2 Methods of consultation**

To conduct the consultations with the citizens, the programme organized a series of meetings both online and in person, creating an inclusive environment and using national languages to ensure clarity and accessibility for everyone. The information was presented in plain language in order to make it more accessible for the citizens and for them to feel confident when sharing their insights and ideas.

For the online consultations, we used the Programme social media channels, providing a link to the Programme website, where information on the current programming period is available, alongside with the citizens' summary of the programme implementation reports for the 2014-2020 programming period.

As the citizens consultations had a strong focus on youth and academia, a public debate with the academic community took place in Timișoara, a strong university centre, on 11 October 2024. The event was organized jointly by the Managing Authority of the Interreg IPA Romania - Serbia Programme and the Managing Authority of the Interreg VI-A Romania - Hungary Programme and special efforts were made to create a welcoming atmosphere for young people by encouraging them to share insights with an informal setup to make discussions feel more comfortable and collaborative.

The dialogue between the Interreg Programmes representatives and the university staff, as well as the students, also aimed to support the academic community in presenting their aspirations and needs, valuable perspectives and innovative ideas that can significantly contribute to shaping an effective strategy for future Interreg programmes.

Moreover, a participatory workshop was organised in the margins of IC Day, a well-established and known event among our stakeholders, which this year included a free guided tour of Fetislam Fortress and a free live concert and other cultural performances, in celebration of the strong cultural ties between Romanians and Serbians, as presented above, in section 2.2.

### **3.3 Summary of the input on the key questions**

The survey for the stakeholders included 5 questions, as follows:

1. Is living next to a border an opportunity or a disadvantage?
2. In the place where you live, what are the main topics where cooperation is needed?
3. Can you name an Interreg project that you find useful in the place where you live?
4. In your daily life, what are the biggest difficulties for cross-border cooperation?
5. What would be the cooperation project of your dreams?

The main/synthetic outcomes of the citizens' consultation process can be resumed as follows:

- The majority of the respondents consider that **living next to a border** is an **opportunity** or an **advantage** (in particular for reasons such as: more job opportunities, cross-border cooperation that can bring a multitude of benefits, tourism, fairly easy to understand and enjoy different cultures, easier access to more resources, faster travel, unique cross-border trade and business possibilities, experiencing different cuisines and traditions, cultural exchange and building international friendships, access to cheaper goods and services from neighboring countries, learning multiple languages and understanding different customs, fostering cross-border collaborations in areas like art, culture, and science.
  - ✓ The ones that considered it as a **disadvantage** mentioned arguments related to potential for cultural clashes or misunderstandings between neighboring communities, potential economic disparities between neighboring regions, the risk of being affected by smuggling or illegal activities, possibility of being caught up in border disputes or conflicts, the potential for increased security measures and border checks, potential political tensions or conflicts that may arise, border regulations that can be restrictive, causing delays and complications in daily life.
- **Main topics where cooperation is needed:** tourism (infrastructure and services); reducing pollution (air/river); preservation of natural habitats and biodiversity; carbon neutrality; energy efficiency and renewable energy; cross-border healthcare; emergency situations and risk management; public transport and shared transportation initiatives, common cultural events; enhancing language education and linguistic exchanges; trade facilitation; research and innovation; security infrastructure, etc.
- **Examples of Interreg projects useful:** both existing (The Water Guardians, 7 Wonders of Mehedinti and Borski, Screening program for cancer, etc.) or potential (a bus link, ferry, cycle path RO-Serbia - connecting Timișoara to Zrenjanin, a project dedicated to cleaning a river, projects dedicated to improving border crossings).
- **Daily life biggest difficulties for cross-border cooperation:** language barriers hindering effective communication between border communities; non-Schengen borders; differences in legal systems and regulations complicating the implementation of cross-border initiatives; economic disparities; socioeconomic challenges such as poverty and unemployment; small potential for cooperation due to demographic decline; cultural differences; security concerns.
- **Dream cooperation project:** developing a joint hospital; implementing common cultural projects; combatting illegal activities; a joint renewable energy initiative; a shared education curriculum promoting multiculturalism and language learning; implementing a joint waste management and recycling program; developing a recreational area along the border for outdoor activities and community events; cross-border technology transfer initiative; cross-border youth exchange program; cross-border innovation hub.

### 3.4 Interesting quotes

Among the most interesting statements collected from the citizen during the consultation process are the following:

*"We need simpler processes so more people and local businesses can actually access the benefits of this programme and the EU money."*

*"Creating and improving the cross-border public transport links would open so many opportunities, from easier commuting to boosting local tourism."*

*"Joint projects in environmental protection are essential—our rivers and forests don't recognize borders, so neither should our conservation efforts."*

*"The programme should focus more on young people; they're the ones who will shape the future of this region."*

*"A unified approach to health services, like a joint bilingual hospital, could improve access to quality care for both Romanian and Serbian communities."*

## 4. Recommendations for post-2027

Building upon the successes and addressing the challenges identified in the 2021-2027 programming period, and during the previous programming periods, Romania-Serbia Interreg post-2027 Programme should prioritize a range of topics crucial for fostering sustainable and inclusive development in border regions. While continuing to support existing areas, the programme should expand its scope to encompass emerging challenges and capitalize on new opportunities.

### Topics to be covered

*Enlargement and Security:* Recognizing the unique context of external border programmes like Romania-Serbia, Interreg should incorporate new initiatives focusing on enlargement and security. These initiatives could address challenges related to accession processes, border management, and cooperation in law enforcement and security aspects. Interreg projects could facilitate knowledge transfer, capacity building, and joint actions to enhance security and promote integration.

*Digital Connectivity:* Acknowledging the importance of digitalization for regional development, Interreg should prioritize digital connectivity projects, particularly in the benefit of remote border areas. These projects could focus on expanding broadband access, developing digital skills, and supporting the digital transformation of key sectors such as education and access to healthcare.

*Cross-border Public Transportation:* To enhance connectivity and facilitate cross-border mobility, Interreg projects should support the development of cross-border public transportation networks. This could involve establishing new bus links, ferry routes, and cycle

paths connecting towns and cities across borders. These initiatives would not only improve access to employment, education, and healthcare but also promote sustainable tourism and reduce environmental impact.

*Bilingual Healthcare Services:* Addressing the specific needs of border communities, Interreg projects should encourage the development of cross-border healthcare initiatives, including the establishment of bilingual hospitals or healthcare centres. This would ensure equitable access to quality healthcare for residents on both sides of the border, overcoming language barriers and facilitating the exchange of medical expertise.

*Combating Disinformation:* In an era marked by the proliferation of misinformation, Interreg projects should support projects aimed at combating disinformation and promoting media literacy in border regions. These projects could involve cross-border collaborations between media organizations, educational institutions, and civil society groups to develop fact-checking mechanisms, raise awareness about disinformation tactics, and empower citizens to critically evaluate information.

In addition to these new areas, Interreg projects should continue to support and strengthen existing priority areas, such as:

*Environmental protection:* Given the shared nature of environmental challenges, Interreg should further prioritize cross-border environmental protection projects. This includes initiatives focused on pollution control, climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and promoting sustainable waste management practices.

*Tourism development:* Building on existing successes, Interreg should continue to support joint tourism initiatives, leveraging the unique cultural and natural heritage of border regions. Projects could focus on developing sustainable tourism infrastructure, promoting cross-border tourism routes, and fostering cultural exchange through joint events and festivals.

*Economic cooperation:* To enhance economic development and reduce disparities, Interreg projects could facilitate cross-border business partnerships and support the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This could involve creating cross-border business networks, providing financial support for joint ventures, and promoting innovation and technology transfer across borders.

### **Geography of Programmes**

Interreg post-2027 should adopt a more flexible and tailored approach to programme geography, moving beyond traditional administrative boundaries to encompass functional areas defined by shared challenges and opportunities.

*Functional cross-border areas:* Instead of solely focusing on regions, Interreg projects should address challenges and opportunities within functional cross-border areas. These areas could encompass regions linked by shared economic activities, environmental concerns, or cultural ties, even if they are not geographically contiguous. This approach would facilitate the development of more effective and impactful projects by bringing together relevant stakeholders and resources.

*Multi-country cooperation:* Recognizing the interconnectedness of challenges in a globalized world, Interreg should encourage and facilitate multi-country cooperation within and beyond the EU and with international organizations such as OECD. This could involve supporting projects involving partners from elsewhere in the world, regions with shared interests, or even across continents. Such collaborations would enable the exchange of best practices, foster innovation, and leverage the collective expertise and resources of diverse partners.

*Urban-rural linkages:* Interreg should prioritize projects that strengthen urban-rural linkages within cross-border regions. This could involve initiatives that connect urban centres with surrounding rural areas, promoting sustainable development and reducing disparities in access to services and opportunities. Examples include projects supporting rural tourism, facilitating access to urban markets for rural businesses, and promoting knowledge transfer between urban and rural communities.

### **Implementation of Programmes/ Projects**

To ensure the effectiveness and impact of Interreg post-2027, the implementation of programmes and projects should be streamlined, simplified, and focused on fostering citizen engagement and ownership.

*Simplified application and reporting processes:* Recognizing the burden of bureaucracy on project beneficiaries, Interreg should prioritize simplifying application and reporting procedures. This could involve reducing the number of required documents, streamlining approval processes, and utilizing digital tools for online submission and monitoring. Simplifying procedures would save time and resources for project partners, allowing them to focus on delivering impactful results.

*Flexibility in project implementation:* Interreg should introduce greater flexibility in project implementation to accommodate unforeseen challenges and emerging opportunities. This could involve allowing project partners to adapt their activities and budgets within certain parameters, ensuring that projects remain relevant and responsive to evolving needs.

*Enhanced citizen engagement:* Recognizing the importance of citizen participation for successful cross-border cooperation, Interreg should prioritize enhancing citizen engagement throughout the project lifecycle. This could involve organizing public consultations during the project design phase, establishing citizen advisory boards to provide input, and creating platforms for ongoing dialogue and feedback. Actively involving citizens would ensure that projects address their needs and priorities, fostering a sense of ownership and contributing to the long-term sustainability of initiatives.

*Capacity building and knowledge sharing:* Interreg should invest in capacity building and knowledge sharing initiatives to empower project partners and ensure the transfer of best practices. This could involve organizing training programs, workshops, and study visits focused on project management, cross-border cooperation, and specific thematic areas.

*Strengthened communication and outreach:* To raise awareness about Interreg's achievements and opportunities, the programmes should strengthen its communication and outreach efforts. This could involve utilizing diverse communication channels, including social media, online

platforms, and traditional media, to reach a wider audience. Communicating success stories and highlighting the benefits of cross-border cooperation would encourage greater participation and support for the programmes.

By embracing these recommendations, Interreg post-2027 can play a transformative role in fostering inclusive, sustainable, and innovative development in border regions across Europe and beyond.