

# Draft programme strategy

Support of the programming of the  
cooperation programme INTERREG  
Austria – Czech Republic 2021-2027

3rd DRAFT version - short, 18 December 2020

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## Abbreviations

CP	Cooperation programme
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ISO	Interreg Specific Objective
MS	Member State
PG	Programming group
PO	Policy objective
R&D&I	Research, Development, Innovation
SCO	Simplified Cost Option
SO	Specific objective
SPF	Small Project Fund

# 1 Introduction

The draft of the Interreg cross-border cooperation programme Austria – Czech Republic for the programming period 2021-2027 is the result of an intensive discussion among stakeholders and programme management bodies since early 2019 taking into account analytical findings from preparatory studies. The Interreg AT-CZ programme 2021-2027 builds on the achievements and cooperation established during 2014 and 2020 and previous programming periods.

## 1.1 Programme area

The programme area covers the following NUTS 3-regions:

**Table 1: AT-CZ border regions 2021-2027**

Country	NUTS 3	Belongs to NUTS 2
Austria	Waldviertel (AT124)	Niederösterreich (AT12)
	Weinviertel (AT125)	
	Mostviertel-Eisenwurzen (AT121)	
	St. Pölten (AT123)	
	Wiener Umland – Nordteil (AT126)	
	Wien (AT130)	Wien (AT13)
	Mühlviertel (AT313)	Oberösterreich (AT31)
	Innviertel (AT311)	
	Linz-Wels (AT312)	
Czech Republic	Jihočeský kraj (CZ031)	Jihozápad (CZ03)
	Kraj Vysočina (CZ063)	Jihovýchod (CZ06)
	Jihomoravský kraj (CZ064)	

Source: Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung (2019); oral communication from the EC

**Figure 1: Draft programme area Interreg VI-A Austria – Czech Republic 2021-2027**



Source: <https://www.at-cz.eu/at/programm/programmgebiet>

## 1.2 Regulative framework

The main aim of the programme is to strengthen cooperation among Czech and Austrian stakeholders to reduce the mental and legal barriers across the border and to better cope with joint challenges such as climate change, demographical change, economic disparities and territorial imbalances.

### Financial framework

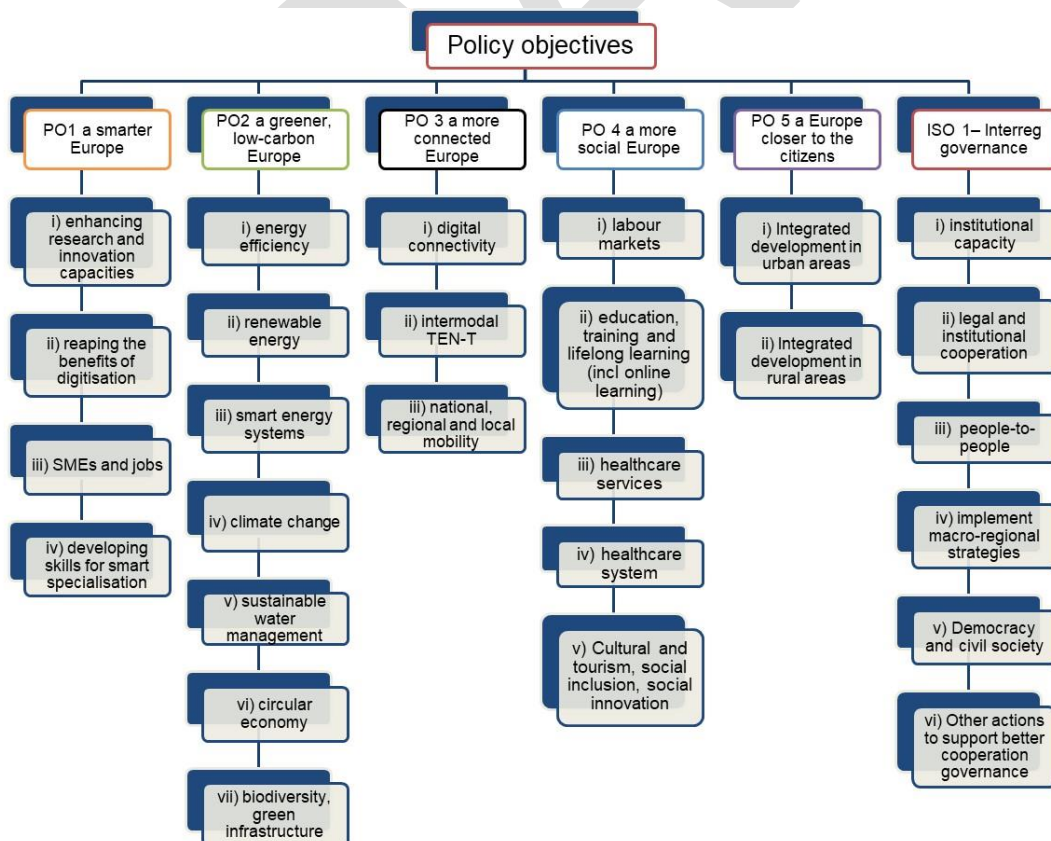
The most significant changes compared to the previous programming period is the reduction of the ERDF budget which is currently still not decided but to be expected.

### Legal framework

The proposed CPR, ERDF and ETC regulation although aiming for a continuation of the current programming period do foresee some changes in the new programming period for the cross-border cooperation between EU MS which strongly effects the thematic orientation of the cooperation programmes.

- Thematic concentration on 5 policy objectives (CPR proposal Article 4);
- The Interreg regulation proposal Article 14 lists additional Interreg relevant specific objectives und ISO1;
- PO2 and presumably PO4 are obligatory;
- 60% of the ERDF allocated under priorities other than for technical assistance to each Interreg programme shall be allocated to a maximum of three of the policy objectives set out in Article 4 of the CPR proposal;
- Up to 20% may be allocated to "Better Cross-border Governance" (ISO1) (under negotiation).

**Figure 2: Draft policy objectives and specific objectives for ERDF and ETC**



Source: ERDF and ETC trilogue consensus October 2020

### 1.3 Purpose of this document

The purpose of the programme draft in hand is to present the **programming status** as a basis for the stakeholder consultation. Table 2 shows the current structure of the programme draft. In line with the thematic concentration requirement.

**Table 2: Draft AT-CZ cooperation programme structure**

Priority	Specific objective	Type of action
Priority 1 / PO1 (short title: "Research and innovation")	SO i) (short title "Research and innovation")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Research and innovation in common thematic priorities</li> </ul>
Priority 2 / PO2 (short title "Climate & Environment")	SO iv) (short title "Climate change adaptation")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1 Cooperation in adaptation to climate change, risk prevention and disaster resilience</li> </ul>
	SO vii) (short title "Nature protection and biodiversity")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.2 Joint ecological water management &amp; flood protection</li> <li>2.3 Joint biodiversity management</li> </ul>
Priority 3 / PO4 (short title "Education, culture & tourism")	SO ii) (short title "Education and training")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1 improvement of the cross-border education offers of primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools</li> </ul>
	SO v) (short title "Culture and tourism")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.2 Upgrading of the common tourism region</li> <li>3.3 Preservation, maintenance and communication of the cultural heritage</li> </ul>
Priority 4 / ISO1 (short title "Cross-border Governance")	ISO ii) (short title "Legal and institutional cooperation")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.1 Increased governance capacity to optimize services to citizens and remove cross-border obstacles in the long run</li> </ul>
	ISO iii) (short title "People-to-people action for increased trust")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4.2 Small scale projects to improve cultural, social and economic relations in the border area</li> </ul>

Source: drafting team

## 2 Overall programme strategy

### 2.1 Priority 1 - Research & Innovation

#### 2.1.1 Specific objective

##### *Innovation and research*

The border region is generally well-equipped with research and development facilities. Nevertheless, cross-border cooperation is an opportunity to create and strengthen R&D&I platforms in order to unlock the full potential of R&D in the region's economic development. This is not limited to sharing good practice in technology transfer and related fields; cooperation could also increase market availability for local R&D institutions and give them the opportunity to engage in global networks.

An important challenge for the cross-border innovation environment is also mobility and exchange of experts and research staff. Furthermore, SMEs play a crucial role in innovation policy, as they are likely to face barriers when innovating or commercialising their innovations.

Thus the cooperation programme considers **SO i** (Research and innovation) as significant SO with high needs and potential for joint approaches.

**Table 3: Overview of types of action under the respective priority and specific objective**

Priority	Specific objective	Type of action
Priority 1 / PO1 (short title: "Research and innovation")	SO i) (short title "Research and innovation")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Research and innovation in common thematic priorities</li> </ul>

### 2.1.2 Related types of action

The following **considerations** are made:

- Digital transformation is considered as a horizontal topic;
- Better coordination of ETC support with other funding instruments for research and innovation is necessary (ERDF mainstream, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Creative Europe etc.) e.g. by including respective bodies in project selection;
- The RIS3-strategies of the programme regions serve as a common strategic ground;
- The proposed types of action should not only strengthen sector-specific economic cooperation and networks but rather promote interdisciplinary activities, i.e. cooperation between multiple sectors in line with smart specialisation strategies.

#### **Type of action 1.1 Research and innovation cooperation in common thematic priorities**

Expected contribution to specific objective includes:

- Utilization of the R&I potential of the programme area, concentrated mainly in urban areas (agglomerations) on both sides of the border, but also decentralized in other parts of the territory;
- Development of specific areas of research common to both sides of the border;
- Increase the competitiveness of SMEs through improved access to R&I results and advanced technologies;
- Diffusion of innovations, where the peripheral parts of the programme area also benefit from the joint results implemented in areas with a concentration of research and innovation activities;
- Acceleration of the transfer of research and innovation results into practice (to the market of goods or services, incl. public services);
- Increasing the efficiency of the use of existing or new research and innovation capacities;
- Sharing and transfer of know-how of research institutions.



## Indicative actions

- Research and innovation in the fields of common interest like:
  - circular economy,
  - bioeconomy
  - biotechnology
  - ICT and digital transformation,
  - environmental branches,
  - life sciences,
  - creative industries
  - medicine (Medical Engineering/Medical Materials/Digital Health)
  - building and construction materials.
- Introduction of eco-innovations;
- Research and innovation driven by demand from local businesses with specific focus on sectors of relevance in the border area;
- Application of research and innovation results in public sector, NGOs, and also SMEs with the aim to reach the market;
- Better linking research institutions with SMEs and increase access of SMEs to R&I results;
- Adding services to core offerings of industries by “servitization” to make industries more innovative and competitive;
- Investments in new jointly used/shared R&I facilities, based on relevant research strategies and with high thematic focus to the programme area;
- Extension and modernisation of technology facilities and research capacities of cross-border interest;
- Sharing of high-quality R&I facilities;
- Supporting the cross-border mobility of researchers
- Science communication (informing, educating, raising awareness of science-related topics)

## 2.2 Priority 2 - Climate & Environment

### 2.2.1 Specific objective

#### *Climate change*

Climate change is an identified challenge for the AT-CZ border region. It is expected that regions on both sides of the border will be affected in similar ways by climate change, including an increase in warm temperature extremes, decrease in summer precipitation, increase in water temperature, increase in the risk of forest fires and decrease in the economic value of forests.

Cross-border cooperation in this field is already well advanced and can therefore be identified as a reasonable means to effectively address issues arising from climate change, such as disaster risk assessment and management, or flood protection etc.

## Environment

With regard to the conservation of biological diversity, the strength of the border area lies in the large number of protected areas of different classifications in the Austrian and Czech regions. Protected areas and their interlinked biotope systems represent the most important starting point for conserving biodiversity and adapting to climate change. Cooperation between these areas, both in terms of protected status and across national borders, is therefore an important topic for the Interreg programme.

Thus, the cooperation programme considers **SO iv** (climate change adaptation) and **SO vii** (Nature protection and biodiversity) as significant SOs with high needs and potential for joint approaches.

**Table 4: Overview of types of action under the respective priority and specific objective**

Priority	Specific objective	Type of action
Priority 2 / PO2 (short title "Climate & Environment")	SO iv) (short title "Climate change adaptation")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2.1 Cooperation in adaptation to climate change, risk prevention and disaster resilience</li></ul>
	SO vii) (short title "Nature protection and biodiversity")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 2.2 Joint ecological water management</li><li>• 2.3 Joint biodiversity management</li></ul>

### 2.2.2 Related types of action

#### **Type of action 2.1 Cooperation in adaptation to climate change and risk prevention**

The cooperation programme will contribute to climate change adaptation by supporting joint action in:

- Adaption in exposed sectors: joint adaptation actions in sectors particularly affected by climate change, e.g. production, environmental protection, civil society, agriculture and forestry in addition to national measures taken under the EAFRD;
- Resource efficiency and energy as climate adaption measures;
- Climate fit communities & cities: climate protection and adaptation to climate change in communities and cities as an integrative cross-cutting theme.

#### **Indicative actions**

- Strengthen cooperation to build up an integrated risk management system (on basis of existing cooperation agreements);
- Support population training, common civil protection awareness raising;
- Regional or local measures for responding to challenges resulting from climate change
- Exploring the impacts of climate change in the programme area and specific regions including economic risks created by climate change;
- Joint solutions for environmental measures on agri-land and in forests complementary to EAFRD interventions;
- Making the issue of climate protection visible to the population in the communities;
- Raising awareness on climate change, e.g. among community leaders;
- Pilot measures in the areas of greening, reduction of land consumption, building refurbishment, water retention for a pleasant microclimate.

### **Type of action 2.2 Joint ecological water management**

The cooperation programme will contribute to nature protection and biodiversity by supporting joint action in:

- Joint improvement of water management concepts and practice to better adapt to climate change
- Ecological measures to improve the natural status and water quality of surface waters/streams in the border region

#### **Indicative actions**

- Joint solutions for appropriate water management (agricultural irrigation, water retention, ecological measures for natural water retention, securing the drinking water supply);
- Cooperation for the better protection of water resources (springs and small watercourses, ground water), incl. joint river basin management;
- Joint development of tools for identification of risks and management of measures in water management;
- Re-naturalization of rivers and riverbanks;
- Floodplain restoration;
- Linking water management and nature conservation.

### **Type of action 2.3 Joint biodiversity management**

The cooperation programme will contribute to nature protection and biodiversity by supporting joint ecological actions to preserve and restore biodiversity in sensitive areas including better control of invasive species and relevant pests. The sustainable use of natural resources can also be supported by eco-tourism projects in an integrated way. An important concern is to increase the awareness of the population on biodiversity issues by environmental education.

#### **Indicative actions**

- Cooperation of protected areas in order to develop joint management plans;
- Improvement of the data situation and monitoring approaches;
- Development of biotope networks and wildlife migration corridors;
- Joint landscape management;
- Control of neophytes and bark beetles;
- Re-settling of FFH species;
- Environmental awareness raising activities (environmental education is supported under priority 3);
- Biodiversity projects with training activities (e.g. training of rangers);
- Biodiversity projects with touristic elements (no pure tourism projects);
- Joint approaches to restore green infrastructures in urban areas.

## 2.3 Priority 3 - Education, culture & tourism

### 2.3.1 Specific objective

#### *Education and training*

In general, there is a high level of education in the programme area. The border region is well-equipped with educational facilities. Nevertheless, higher vocational education is concentrated mostly in the large cities. In the Czech Republic there is a mismatch between the qualifications available and the requirements of national and regional labour markets. The rate of adult participation in further education is still low and the figures fall further with advancing employee age. Additionally, a lower share of working-age population characterizes rural areas and the smallest municipalities. The countryside suffers from migration due to lack of employment opportunities. Language barriers and discrepancies between qualifications remain a challenge for cross-border cooperation.

Education is an essential tool to connect the two sides of the border region. Cooperation in the education sector is still broadly institutionalised. More educational networks would therefore be needed, as they are an investment in future cooperation. It is essential to develop a common educational and training infrastructure and invest in education, training and vocational training for skills, which is already partly addressed in the current cooperation programme.

#### *Culture and tourism*

Tourism is an important economic factor in the programme region. Both Austria and the Czech Republic share a common historical and cultural heritage, both having for centuries been part of the former Austrian empire and Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. They have large numbers of protected historic monuments, objects of cultural property and UNESCO cultural heritage sites. In total, the programme region includes nearly 30,000 protected historic monuments, 51 objects of cultural property (Hague Convention 1954) and 12 UNESCO cultural heritage sites that offer potential for tourist exploitation and intangible cultural heritage. Their cross-border added value can be supported accordingly.

The programme territory is endowed with a rich cultural heritage (i.e. protected historic monuments) that stems from its common history and should be exploited thoroughly through joint tourism development across the border. The development of a cross-border scenic route connecting important historic monuments could also offer potential for future development. The programme territory is endowed with rich natural resources that could be used as a basis for the development of joint products across the border.

Thus, the cooperation programme considers SO ii) (short title “Education and training”) and SO v) (short title “Culture and tourism”) as significant SOs with high needs and potential for joint approaches.

**Table 5: Overview of types of action under the respective priority and specific objective**

Priority	Specific objective	Type of action
Priority 3 / PO4 (short title “Education, culture & tourism”)	SO ii) (short title “Education and training”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3.1 improvement of the cross-border education offers of primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools</li></ul>
	SO v) (short title “Culture and tourism”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3.2 Upgrading of the common tourism region</li><li>• 3.3 Preservation, maintenance and communication of the cultural heritage</li></ul>

### 2.3.2 Related types of actions

The following **considerations** are made:

- Cooperation between labour market actors (public employment services, trade unions, employers) is covered under Priority 4 / ISO1 (mainly soft type of action);
- Enhancing cross-border access to health care and long-term care is covered under Priority 4 / ISO1 (mainly soft type of action);
- Projects with a focus on cultural and natural heritage and tourism are covered in Priority 3 / PO4.

#### **Type of action 3.1 improvement of the cross-border education offers of primary, secondary, tertiary education and vocational schools**

The cooperation programme will contribute to increase the quality of the education sector across borders and its interaction with the needs of the labour market and business sector. Educational initiatives should also contribute to better understanding across borders. Cooperation projects should help to ensure that initiatives are also adopted in the structural education landscape.

Interreg, however, provides only limited support for physical infrastructures and most activities are of soft nature.

#### **Indicative actions**

- Joint education schemes (incl. digitalized tools and methods - learning environments, learning room concepts, didactic measures, learning to search online etc.);
- Joint education in topics relevant for cross-border area, esp. environmental education, health and nursing, digital skills and technical education.
- Development of cross-border augmented/virtual reality and (social) entrepreneurship as future topics;
- Actions supporting job orientation of young people;
- Harmonisation of the vocational education system for meeting the needs of the joint labour market;
- Development of joint/bilingual school concepts;
- Harmonisation of education and qualifications (esp. secondary schools, tertiary education, vocational schools).

#### **Type of action 3.2 Recovering and upgrading of the common tourism region**

The programme will invest in pooling and enhancing the touristic potential of the programme area, particularly strengthening economic development, job creation, education and social inclusion in the region. The main purpose is to boost the resilience and adaptivity of the common tourism region.

#### **Indicative actions**

- Joint efforts in recovery, further expansion and adaptation (e.g. in terms of barrier-free access) or maintenance of the tourist infrastructure, with focus on quality development and promotion of joint offers;
- Key themes for tourism development: experiencing nature (eco-tourism), slowing down, exercise (long-distance hiking trails, spiritual paths, cycling, mountain biking), culinary delights (healthy eating), health, cellar alleys;
- Tourism should be treated as an integrative issue and can, for example, be linked to the themes of ecology (nature tourism, sustainable products), climate protection (sustainable mobility), cultural heritage (contemporary art), regional agricultural

product chains (local cuisine), inter-cultural exchange (language, history), education (digital skills) and innovation (new teaching concepts);

- Promotion of joint long-term and high-quality tourism marketing which takes into account the requirements of the digital transformation;
- Improve cooperation of destination managements and create joint (cross-border) destinations under one label;
- Development of joint strategies, structures and communication platforms for the exchange of experience and know-how in tourism;
- Implementation of joint procedures for systematic visitor monitoring in order to implement joint management plans in a targeted manner;
- Implementation of joint training measures for tourism stakeholders;
- Investments in cross-border cycle tracks/paths incl. their marketing and promotion (focus of cycle paths is establishing linkages, closing of gaps, common promotion and signing).

### **Type of action 3.3 Preservation, maintenance and communication of the cultural heritage**

#### **Expected contribution to specific objective**

Since the programme area is very rich in cultural assets of distinct cross-border value, the programme supports joint efforts for rendering the cultural sector more resilient and adaptive in a long-term perspective. This aims at fostering entrepreneurship, increasing employment and securing appropriate working conditions, in particular small companies.

#### **Indicative actions**

- Measures for reinforcing the resilience of the cultural sector, for instance through training and employment support and transition to sustainable business models.
- Key themes in cultural heritage: contemporary art; language, folk culture (architecture), culinary heritage, religious heritage (e.g. monasteries in the border region), literature, visual arts (e.g. Czech design artists of the interwar period trained in Austria), music (e.g. reviving music collections through regional orchestras), bilingual museums;
- Combine the expertise and competencies of large national museums (e.g. in Wien, Linz) with the expertise of regional actors;
- Digitisation of cultural heritage for dissemination to different target groups;
- Promoting contemporary art and socio-culture that deal with issues of the border region and encourage creative discourse.

## **2.4 Priority 4 - Cross-border Governance**

### **2.4.1 Specific objective**

#### ***Governance***

Cooperation between state, municipal and other public institutions in the Austrian and Czech parts of the programme area is already taking place at all levels.

However, there is still a considerable need for a further qualitative development and deepening of institutional cooperation, also against the background of societal developments such as more efficient provision of administrative services, securing services of general interest in rural areas.

The greatest challenge are the different structures and responsibilities on both sides of the border. This concerns, among other things, the relationship between federal administration and municipalities in Austria and between ministries and districts in the Czech Republic.

The further development and strengthening of cooperation between the authorities and in the administration despite different structures is an ongoing challenge to which the cooperation programme can contribute, as far as the legal competence situation allows (cooperation in the programme area has no influence on national and European legislation).

Institutional cooperation is a (horizontal) tool to better deliver results across all Priorities of the cooperation programme through increased institutional capacity. Institutional actors are bodies that are publicly funded and/or act in the public interest (e.g. this definition covers also relevant NGOs).

In addition, small-scale projects are a specific tool that can help to lower the threshold for cooperation in order to foster the involvement of the local civil societies.

**Table 6: Overview of types of action under the respective priority and specific objective**

Priority	Specific objective	Type of action
Priority 4 / ISO1 (short title "Cross-border Governance")	ISO ii) (short title "Legal and institutional cooperation")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.1 Increased institutional capacity to optimize services to citizens and remove cross-border obstacles in the long run</li> </ul>
	ISO iii) (short title "People-to-people action for increased trust")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4.2 Small scale projects to improve cultural, social and economic relations in the border area</li> </ul>

## 2.4.2 Related types of action

### **Type of action 4.1 Increased institutional capacity to optimize services to citizens and remove cross-border obstacles in the long run**

The cooperation programme will contribute to strengthened institutional cooperation and better coordinated strategy development of regional/local bodies for the efficient provision of services of general interest and in order to remove obstacles for cross-border development in the longer-term (beyond the programming period).

#### **Indicative actions**

- Joint strategy development in different areas such as research & technology & innovation (RTI), water management, transport and mobility, tourism and culture, healthy lifestyle, demographic change, health care, regional development, business support services, rescue services ("blue light organisations");
- Collection and processing of contextual information in the policy areas addressed by the cooperation programme to support strategy development;
- Institutional cooperation to reduce administrative and legal obstacles;
- Joint actions of SMEs supporting organisations (Chambers of Commerce etc.), including networking, pilot projects, support to cluster initiatives, coordination activities and others;
- Joint activities of public actors in relevant thematic fields, e.g.
  - civil protection and disaster control (e.g. cooperation of fire brigades, rescue services),
  - health care,
  - early childhood education,
  - public services including the field of waste and recycling management,
  - environmentally friendly transport concepts,

- Cooperation between administrative bodies to optimise services to citizens and businesses and to meet the requirements of an open and modern administration.

**Type of action 4.2 Small scale projects to improve cultural, social and economic relations in the border area**

Small-scale projects mainly focus on people-to-people activities and are intended to contribute to increased intercultural understanding in the border regions, diminishing cross-border (mental) barriers on many levels, and reach as many citizens as possible in the border regions. They may also serve as pilots for larger projects.

**Indicative actions**

- People to people activities for improving cultural, social and economic relations in the border area with a clear cross border focus, particularly for supporting building of trust and capacity building.
- Only small-scale physical investments are possible, if duly justified.