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EVALUATION OF EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE

Cooperation Programme INTERREG V-A Slovenia – Croatia 2014 - 2020

FINAL REPORT

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Audit Authority
CA	Certifying Authority
CB	Cross-border
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CP	Cooperation Programme
CW	Croatian Waters
EGTC	European grouping of territorial cooperation
eMS	Electronic monitoring system
EQ	Evaluation questions
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ETS	European Territorial Cooperation
EU	European Union
FLC	First Level Control
GODC	Government office of the Republic of Slovenia for Development and European Cohesion policy
IP	Investment priority
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
JS	Joint Secretariat
LP	Lead Partner
NA	National Authority
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
MS	Member states
MRDEF	Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds
NA	National Authority
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP	Operational Programme
PA	Priority axis
PP	Project partner
SO	Specific objective
SWA	Slovenian Water Agency
TO	Thematic objective
TA	Technical Assistance

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SUMMARY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to evaluate the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the results and effects of the projects, financed by the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia for the period 2014–2020 and the programme itself. The evaluation includes the following: evaluation of the performance of program structures and processes, analyses of reporting procedures, reimbursement of costs, roles of partners and effectiveness and efficiency in management of the projects. The evaluation also includes performance of programme structures in different processes. The two types of the projects (strategic projects; open call projects) need to be evaluated separately, considering their specifics. The implementation of the Communication strategy at the programme level is evaluated and the efficiency of technical assistance (TA) to the programme (management of the technical assistance funds).

The overall objective of the evaluation is to assess the functioning of the programme structures and the implementation of the programme/projects so as to identifying potential improvements in the preparation of the guidelines and procedures for the programming period 2021–2027 as well as for current programming period.

The evaluation was based on two online surveys, interviews with beneficiaries, interviews with programme structures (namely Managing Authority (MA), Joint Secretariat (JS), National Authority (Slovenian and Croatian NA), First Level Control (Slovenian and Croatian FLC), Certifying Authorities (CA)), data review (provided from JS and eMS), and documents review.

An outline of the programme

The aim of EU cross-border cooperation (CBC) is to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purpose of the overall harmonious development of the European Union.

CP Interreg V-A SI-HR comprises 17 NUTS-3 regions (statistical regions in Slovenia and counties (županije) in Croatia). The programme area covers almost 32,000 km², with more than 3 million habitants. The share of covered Slovenian territory is approximately 70 %, while in Croatia it is 30 %.

The overall programme budget comprises 55,7 M€ (with ERDF contribution of 46,1 M€). The vision of CP Interreg V-A SI-HR shall be achieved through **four priority axes** and five specific objectives (SO).

The Priority Axes 2 and 3 were implemented through open call. Under Priority Axis 1 strategic projects were awarded by direct approval of Monitoring Committee, as well as projects under priority axis 4 (technical assistance) .

Open call implementation

The CP Interreg V-A SI-HR applied the method of Open Call with three deadlines until funds were available. For PA2 and PA3 the funds available were allocated through one Open Call with three deadlines, a total of 34 projects was approved.

Despite the open call, applicants mainly applied to the call in the last days, and mainly didn't see the Open Call as a simplification of administrative procedures.

While the PA2 and PA3 were implemented through Open Call, strategic projects under PA1 and Technical assistance projects (PA4) were directly approved by MC. While projects under PA1, PA2 and PA3 were assessed before the approval, Technical assistance projects (PA4) do not go through assessment procedure. Under PA1 there were 4 strategic projects (FRISCO 1, FRISCO 2.1, FRISCO 2.2 and FRISCO 2.3) approved. Croatian project partners are leading 2 strategic projects (Hrvatske vode/Croatian Waters), 2 projects are led by Slovenian project partners (Direkcija RS za vode/Slovenian Water Agency). Six projects were approved under PA4. Of 34 approved projects there are 26 in PA2 and 8 in PA3.

The first deadline was the least successful one, as the share of approved applications was the lowest (5 %) and the share of applications that did not pass the AB check was the highest (72 %). By the third deadline the share of applications that did not pass the AB check dropped significantly (28 %), also the share of approved project was much higher compared to the first deadline (19 %). In all three deadlines there were 291 applications (213 with SI LP and 78 with HR LP), of those 12 % were successful (approved), 47 % did not pass the AB check, 30 % were rejected and 11 % were postponed.

Programme structures and procedures

The programme bodies operate effectively within the framework established for the programme implementation. The programme structures (MA, JS, NA (SI and HR), FLC (SI and HR) and CA), are sufficient at the moment, nevertheless there can arise a problem, if any of the personnel is absent for a longer period.

Number and nature of the tasks, especially for JS can be overwhelming, as they also act as contract managers, assessors, they are responsible for effective conduction of communication strategy, they have a lot of contacts with beneficiaries.

A full FTE for IT manager would be recommended, as the eMS requires more human resources as they are currently assigned.

Despite the fact that only some of the staff already worked in the previous programming period, the Slovenian programme structures have a lot of knowledge and competences, also Croatian programme structures have gained knowledge and experience therefore it is recommended not to make changes but to ensure the continuity for the next programming period.

The quality of cooperation between programme partners is perceived as good. As Slovenian programme structures have a lot of knowledge and competences, programme

structures from Croatia occasionally seek advice from Slovenian partners. There are regular face-to-face meetings or phone/skype/email communication, all problems are solved quickly and in constructive manner. In general, there are no main differences between the Slovenian and Croatian side in approaches and views to cooperation and expectations.

In Slovenia FLC is centralized for different ETS programmes and NOR/EGP financial mechanisms, due to overlap of reporting periods of different programmes, there can be a big work overload at those periods (10 programmes at the same time), which can cause a bottle neck at the first step of the reporting process. In Croatia FLC is responsible for all Cross-border cooperation programmes of Croatia.

It is recommended to plan the reporting periods in such way, there would be no or very little overlapping with other programmes and involvement of additional officers if necessary during the reporting period.

Application process

In the application process the applicants had the support in the form of workshops and individual face to face consultations with NA and JS. The workshops for applicants were well attended (the indicator, defined in Communication strategy, was surpassed (397 %)). According to the online survey the workshops as well as individual face to face consultations were useful or very useful (according to the survey 83 % successful applicants found the workshops useful or very useful and 100 % of surveyed beneficiaries found face to face consultations useful or very useful). At the workshops they found useful the following:

- General information (e.g. how to fill in the application, how to report)
- Specific information (answers to specific questions related to project)
- Tips and instructions; real examples
- Technical details
- Explanation of the programme, objectives of the programme

At the consultations the most useful were:

- Concrete information (e.g. about the topic, about partnership, checking project ideas, improvement of project application)
- Personalized approach
- Cooperation with JS
- Detailed instructions (about reporting process)
- Practical advice

The workshops and consultations were especially useful for applicants who already had their ideas developed and had their questions prepared beforehand. As programme bodies noticed, applicants had difficulties with developing intervention logic and understanding indicators.

Another tool used during the application (and implementation) phase was Implementation manual for beneficiaries. The vast majority of applicants (successful and unsuccessful) used it and majority found it useful or very useful (89 %). Among successful

applicants all (100 %) LPs used the manual. The manual is well structured into key contents/phases and offers sound guidance to applicants and beneficiaries which was also reflected in the online survey.

There are no bigger difficulties with the programme procedures, processes and forms. There were some difficulties at the application stage, the applicants had the most difficulties with applying in two languages, they would prefer just one. The application in both languages caused them difficulties also at the AB check, as due to poor translations/mistakes/missing translations they did not pass AB check. As this was registered by programme structures, there was a change in the third deadline in the application procedure which allowed five working days to correct the mistakes in cases where one field was missing the translation. In the third deadline the share of applicants not passing the AB check was the lowest (29 %).

Besides language difficulties applicants also said they had problems with completing financial plan, reviewing the application in the system, completing project description and completing the work plan.

Face to face meetings were organized with beneficiaries of approved projects and JS after sending out the decision letters. The purpose of the meetings was to clarify any open issue and to fulfill the conditions for signing the contract, a lot of attention was put to discuss and explain indicators, also eligibility of expenses and reporting. Besides LP also other PPs were invited to face to face meetings. Not only successful, but also unsuccessful applicants could come to consultations, to clarify the project weaknesses.

According to the online survey, beneficiaries were satisfied with the meetings, nevertheless according to JS, beneficiaries often sought explanations for the information that was already published on the website. Often such questions can represent an additional burden for the JS staff.

Reporting process

In the reporting process, all structure bodies are involved at different steps. The first body in the process is FLC, if there are delays, all other steps are slowed down. After FLC, JS checks the progress of the implementation, Contract Manager verifies the plausibility of documentation (if activities are in line with the application). After that MA verifies the Progress Report. The last step is verification of CA, who issues an electronic document, the CA confirmation. When the CA confirmation is generated in the eMS, the (reimbursement of ERDF contribution is initialized.

Less mistakes of beneficiaries in the report mean faster reimbursement of funds. To avoid mistakes and explain the rules of reporting several workshops on reporting were organized for beneficiaries, as well there are an Implementation manual for beneficiaries and instructions for reporting eligible expenditures for Slovenian and Croatian beneficiaries.

The bottlenecks noticed in reporting process are related to work overload of FLC (reporting periods of different programmes at the same time) also lack of human resources at other programme structures (JS and MA) can cause delays and bottlenecks.

To ease the administrative burden, several novelties were introduced – eMS, Open call with deadlines, the option to correct a mistake (third deadline), additional documentation (e.g. investment) is not needed.

eMS

Despite some difficulties with the eMS, it is seen as a simplification of administrative procedures as well in the view of beneficiaries as programme bodies.

The main difficulties the beneficiaries had with the eMS were: slowness of the system, the maximum allowed size of the attachments is too small, there was a constant risk of losing the text imputed, work in eMS is time consuming, the system is not optimized.

For programme bodies, eMS had on one hand, simplified the work, as everything is electronic, on the other hand, there are more functionalities and improvements needed. For CA for instance, it would be useful that eMs is integrated with other accounting systems.

The general satisfaction with the eMS is positive on both sides, beneficiaries and programme bodies, but there is still room for improvement. Mainly the optimization of the system is needed, the maximum size of the documents to upload should be bigger (currently 7MB), better stability of the system is necessary. In terms of human resources one person would be needed for eMS.

Administrative procedures

For beneficiaries, the most often mentioned difficulty regarding administrative procedures is reimbursement of ERDF contribution, which is in their eyes slow. Nevertheless, funding is related to reporting and verification of the report (financial and content), which can be delayed also due to errors of beneficiaries.

During the project implementation, the beneficiaries can contact their Contract Manager for explanations and clarifications. Beneficiaries are very satisfied with the communication with their Contract Managers, they find them helpful. As beneficiaries often seek information or explanation for issues, which are already explained on the website (or in the manual), such questions can represent burden for the Contract Managers, who already have many tasks.

Partnerships

According to beneficiaries, partnerships were not very difficult to form, the majority of project partners or project leaders knew at least some of the partners beforehand.

Among approved projects the legal status of the majority of the Lead partners are Municipalities / Counties (17 out of 34), followed by the research and development organizations (10) and 1 private company. Among PP the majority of applicants are Public institutions (72), followed by County/Municipality (38) and NGO (36). Among PP there are 17 institutions participating in more than one project – 14 institutions are participating in two projects, two in three projects and one institution in four projects. Among LP there are 20 institutions participating as LP in one project and PP in others.

Municipalities and counties are the legal forms of the institutions who participate in the most partnerships (of accepted projects). There are several possibilities for that – they have good networks, they have experience from participation in other programmes, they have experienced staff.

Among accepted projects the distribution of Croatian institutions is more equal across regions (županija), compared to distribution of beneficiaries in Slovenia, where in Ljubljana there is a high concentration of beneficiaries, also Obalno-Kraška region stands out, compared to other regions.

There are more LPs from Slovenia (23 out of 38; 60,5 %). In the case of strategic projects, the share of both countries is equal (50 % LP from Slovenia, 50 % LP from Croatia). In PA 2 Slovenian institutions are leading 15 projects (out of 26; 58 %), while in PA3 Slovenian institutions are leading 6 projects (out of 8; 75 %).

Communication activities

The achievement of the objectives of the Communication strategy is progressing well. The majority of indicators has been already achieved or highly surpassed (e.g. number of visits to the website (526 % achieved indicator); Number of participants at workshops (397 % achieved indicator). The communication activities are implemented in accordance with the communication phases, the communication of funding opportunities has finished, and promotion of results is getting more intensive. This is the opportunity to address the general public, as only 18 % has heard of the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR the indicator has achieved 30 % of target value).

The programme website is well structured, beneficiaries assess it as good in terms of the usefulness of information, transparency and general impression.

The programme is accepted very well by beneficiaries. Beneficiaries participating in the programme are despite minor difficulties satisfied with the programme and mainly plan to participate also in the next programming period. On the other hand, more needs to be done on communication with the general population. It is recommended to use social media, as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, which has to be regularly updated, to achieve the effect. Also appropriate channels to reach general public are local and national TV, papers and radio. For that reason, ½ FTE is recommended, the person could be responsible for all CBC programmes.

SUMMARY IN CROATIAN LANGUAGE

Svrha vrednovanja

Svrha ovog vrednovanja je ocijeniti relevantnost, učinkovitost, djelotvornost, održivost i utjecaj rezultata i učinak projekata financiranih iz Programa suradnje Interreg V-A Slovenija-Hrvatska za razdoblje 2014-2020 kao i samog programa. Vrednovanje obuhvaća: vrednovanje učinka programskih struktura i procesa, analiza postupaka izvješćivanja, nadoknade troškova, uloga partnera i djelotvornosti i učinkovitosti u upravljanju projektima. Vrednovanje također uključuje i učinak programskih struktura u različitim procesima. Dvije vrste projekata (strateški projekti, projekti putem otvorenog poziva) moraju biti vrednovani odvojeno, s obzirom na njihove specifičnosti. Vrednovati će se provedba Komunikacijske strategije na programskoj razini i efikasnost tehničke pomoći (TP) na program (upravljanje sredstvima tehničke pomoći).

Opći cilj vrednovanja je ocijeniti funkcioniranje programskih struktura i provedbu programa/projekata kako bi se utvrdila moguća poboljšanja u izradi smjernica i postupaka za programsko razdoblje 2021-2027., isto tako i za trenutno programsko razdoblje, .

Vrednovanje se temelji na dvije *on-line* ankete, intervjuima s korisnicima, intervjuima s slovenskim i hrvatskim programskim strukturama (Upravljačko tijelo (MA), Zajedničko tajništvo (JS), Nacionalna tijela (NA), Prvostupanjaska kontrola (FLC), Tijelo za ovjeravanje (CA)), pregledu podataka (dostavljeni od JS i eMS) i pregledu dokumenata.

Kratki pregled programa

Prekogranična suradnja (CBC) ima za cilj riješiti zajedničke izazove prepoznate u pograničnom području te iskoristiti neiskorišteni potencijal za rast u pograničnom području, u isto vrijeme poboljšavajući proces suradnje u svrhu usklađenog razvoja Europske unije.

Program prekogranične suradnje Slovenija-Hrvatska 2014.-2020. obuhvaća 17 NUTS-3 regija (statističke regije u Sloveniji i županije u Hrvatskoj).

Programsko područje obuhvaća gotovo 32.000 km², s više od 3 milijuna stanovnika. Udio obuhvaćenog slovenskog teritorija je oko 70 %, dok je u Hrvatskoj 30 %.

Cjelokupni proračun programa iznosi 55,7 mil. € (s ERDF doprinosom od 46,1 mil. €).

Vizija Programa prekogranične suradnje Interreg V-A SI-HR. će se postići kroz **četiri prioritetne osi** i pet specifičnih ciljeva (SC).

Prioritetne osi 2 i 3 su provedene putem otvorenih poziva. U sklopu Prioriteta 1, strateški projekti bili su dodijeljeni izravnim odobrenjem Odbora za praćenje, pa tako i projekti u okviru prioritetne osi 4 (tehnička pomoć).

Provedba otvorenog poziva

CP Interreg V-A SI-HR primjenjivao je metodu otvorenog poziva s tri roka do iskorištenja raspoloživih sredstava. Za PO2 i PO3 raspoloživa sredstava su dodijeljena kroz jedan otvoreni poziv s tri roka te je odobreno ukupno 34 projekata.

Unatoč otvorenom pozivu, podnositelji su se uglavnom prijavljivali na poziv u posljednjim danima prije otvaranja i uglavnom nisu vidjeli otvoreni poziv kao pojednostavljenje administrativnih postupaka.

Dok su PO2 i PO3 provedene putem otvorenog poziva, strateški projekti pod PO1 i projekti tehničke pomoći (PO4) izravno su odobreni od strane MC. Dok su projekti u okviru PO1, PO2 i PO3 ocijenjeni prije odobrenja, projekti tehničke pomoći ne prolaze kroz postupak procjene. Pod PO1 su bila odobrena četiri strateška projekta (FRISCO 1, FRISCO 2.1, FRISCO 2.2 i FRISCO 2.3). Hrvatski projektni partneri su vodili dva strateška projekta (Hrvatske vode), dva projekta su vodili slovenski projektni partneri (Direkcija RS za vode). Šest projekata odobreno je u okviru PO4. Od 34 odobrena projekta, 26 ih je u PO2 i 8 u PO3.

Prvi rok je bio najmanje uspješan jer je udio odobrenih prijava bio najniži (5 %), a udio prijava koje nisu prošle AB provjeru je bio najveći (72 %). Do trećeg roka udio prijava koje nisu prošle AB provjeru značajno se smanjio (28 %) te je udio odobrenih projekata bio znatno veći u odnosu na prvi rok (19 %). U sva tri roka bilo je 291 prijava (213 sa SI VP i 78 sa HR VP), od kojih je 12 % bilo uspješno (odobreni), 47 % nije prošlo AB provjeru, 30 % je odbijeno, a 11 % je odgođeno.

Programske strukture i procedure

Program tijela djeluju učinkovito u utvrđenom okviru za provedbu programa. Programske strukture (MA, JS, NA (SI i HR), FLC (SI i HR) i CA), dovoljni su u ovom trenutku, ipak, može nastati problem, ako bilo tko od osoblja nije prisutan na duži period.

Broj i vrsta zadataka, posebno za JS može biti preopsežan, s obzirom na to kako oni nastupaju kao voditelji ugovora, procjenitelji, odgovorni su za učinkovito provođenje komunikacijske strategije, imaju puno kontakata s korisnicima.

Preporuča se osoba zaposlena na puno radno vrijeme kao IT voditelj, jer eMS zahtijeva više ljudskih resursa nego što je trenutno dodijeljeno.

Unatoč činjenici da je samo dio osoblja već radio u prethodnom programskom razdoblju, slovenske programske strukture imaju puno znanja i kompetencija, pa i hrvatske programske strukture stekle su znanje i iskustva pa se preporuča ne vršiti bilo kakve promjene, već osigurati kontinuitet za sljedeće programsko razdoblje.

Kvaliteta suradnje između partnera u programu se percipira dobrom. Kako slovenske programske strukture imaju puno znanja i kompetencija, programske strukture iz Hrvatske su povremeno tražile savjet od slovenskih partnera. Postoje redoviti sastanci licem-u-lice ili komunikacija putem telefona/skype/e-maila te su svi problemi riješeni brzo i na konstruktivan način. Općenito, ne postoje značajne razlike između slovenske i hrvatske strane u pristupu i pogledom na suradnju i očekivanja.

U Sloveniji FLC je centraliziran za različite programe, zbog preklapanja izvještajnih razdoblja različitih programa, koji mogu dovesti do velikog preopterećenja poslom u tim razdobljima (10 programa u isto vrijeme), a što može dovesti do uskih grla u prvom koraku

procesa izvješćivanja. U Hrvatskoj FLC odgovara za sve programe prekogranične suradnje u Hrvatskoj.

Preporučuje se planiranje izvještajnih razdoblja na takav način, da ne bi bilo nikakvih ili sa vrlo malo preklapanja s drugim programima i uključivanjem dodatnih službenika ako je to potrebno tijekom izvještajnog razdoblja.

Proces prijave

U postupku prijave prijavitelji su imali podršku u obliku radionica i individualnih konzultacija licem u lice s NA i JS. Radionice za prijavitelje su bile dobro posjećene (pokazatelj je nadmašen (397 %)). Prema online anketi tako radionice, kao i pojedinačne konzultacije licem u lice vrlo korisni (prema anketi 83 % uspješni prijavitelja su smatrali radionice korisnim ili vrlo korisnim i 100 % ispitanih korisnika smatralo je konzultacije licem u lice korisnim ili vrlo korisnim). Na radionicama su smatrali korisnima sljedeće:

- Opće informacije (npr. Kako ispuniti prijavu, kako prijaviti)
- Specifične informacije (odgovori na specifična pitanja vezana uz projekt)
- Savjeti i upute; stvarni primjeri
- Tehnički detalji
- Objašnjenje programa, programskih ciljeva

Na konzultacijama prepoznalo se najkorisnije:

- Konkretna informacija (npr. o temi, o partnerstvu, provjeri projektnih ideja, poboljšanje prijave projekta)
- Osobni pristup
- Suradnja s voditeljem ugovora
- Detaljne upute (o postupku izvještavanja)
- Praktični savjeti

Radionice i konzultacije su posebno korisne za prijavitelje koji su već imali razvijene svoje ideje i imali su svoja pitanja unaprijed pripremljena. Kao što su programska tijela primijetila, prijavitelji su imali problema s razvojem intervencijskih logika i razumijevanje pokazatelja.

Još jedan alat koji se koristio za vrijeme faze prijave (i provedbe) je Priručnik o provedbi projekata za korisnike. Velika većina prijavitelja (uspješnih i neuspješnih) ga je koristila i većina ga smatra korisnim ili vrlo korisnim (89 %). Među uspješnim prijaviteljima svi (100 %) VP (vodeći partner) su koristili priručnik. Priručnik je dobro strukturiran u ključne sadržaje/faze i nudi jasne smjernice za prijavitelje i korisnike što je potvrđeno i u *on-line* anketi.

Nema većih poteškoća s programskim postupcima, procesima i obrascima. Bilo je nekih poteškoća u fazi prijave, podnositelji zahtjeva imali najviše problema s prijavom na dva jezika, oni bi radije samo jedan. Prijava u oba jezika izazvao im poteškoće i na AB provjeri, što zbog loših prijevoda/grešaka u prijevodima/nedostatka prijevoda nisu prošli AB provjeru. Kao što je to bio utvrđeno od strane programske strukture, došlo je do promjene u trećem roku u postupku prijave, što je omogućilo pet radnih dana da se isprave pogreške. U trećem roku udio prijavitelja koji nisu prošli AB provjeru bio je najniži (29 %).

Osim jezičnih poteškoća prijavitelji su također istaknuli kako su imali problema s dovršenjem financijskog plana, pregled prijave u sustavu, popunjavanju opisa projekta i izrade plana rada.

Sastanci licem u lice su bili organizirani s korisnicima odobrenih projekata i JS nakon slanja dopisa s odlukama. Svrha sastanaka je bila razjasniti bilo koja otvorena pitanja i ispuniti uvjete za potpisivanje ugovora, puno pažnje je posvećeno raspravljanju i objašnjavanju pokazatelja, također prihvatljivosti troškova i izvještavanju. Osim VP i drugi PP (projektni partner) bili su pozvani na sastanke licem u lice. Ne samo uspješni, nego i neuspješni prijavitelji su mogli doći na konzultacije, kako bi pojasnili slabosti projekta.

Prema *on-line* anketi korisnici su bili zadovoljni sa sastancima, ipak prema JS, korisnici su često tražili objašnjenja za informacijama koje su već objavljene na web stranici. Često takva pitanja mogu predstavljati dodatno opterećenje za osoblje JS-a.

Proces izvještavanja

U procesu izvještavanja sva tijela strukture su uključena u različite korake. Prvo tijelo u tom procesu je FLC, i ako tu postoje kašnjenja, svi ostali koraci su usporeni. Nakon FLC, JS provjerava, u tijeku provedbe, upravitelj ugovora provjerava izdatke, provjerava prihvatljivost izdataka, uvjerljivost dokumentacije. Nakon toga MA provjerava Izvješće o napretku. Posljednji korak je provjera CA-a, koji izdaje elektronički dokument, potvrdu CA-a. Kada se potvrda CA-a generira u eMS-u, (Provodi se isplata doprinosa iz EFRR-a) .

Manje grešaka korisnika u izvješću znači bržu refundaciju, povrat sredstava.

Kako bi izbjegli pogreške i objasnili pravila izvještavanja, nekoliko radionica o izvještavanju su bile organizirane za korisnike, a također tu je priručnik i upute za prijavljivanje prihvatljivih troškova za slovenske i hrvatske korisnike.

Uska grla uočena u procesu izvještavanja povezana su s preopterećenošću rada FLC-a (izvještajna razdoblja različitih programa istovremeno), a i nedostatak ljudskih resursa u drugim programskim strukturama (JS i MA) može uzrokovati kašnjenja i uska grla.

Kako bi se olakšao administrativni teret uvedeno je nekoliko novosti- eMS, otvoreni poziv s rokovima, mogućnost ispravke greške (treći rok), dodatna dokumentacija (npr. ulaganja) nije potrebna.

eMS

Unatoč nekim poteškoćama s eMS-om, ono se smatra kao pojednostavljenje administrativnih postupaka, kako od strane korisnika tako i programskih tijela.

Glavne poteškoće koje su korisnici imali sa eMS-om: sporost sustava, veličina pritiska je premala, postoji stalna opasnost od gubljenja unesenog teksta, rad u EMS je dugotrajan, sustav nije optimiziran.

Za programska tijela eMS je s jedne strane pojednostavio rad, jer sve je elektronički, s druge strane ima potrebe za više funkcionalnosti i poboljšanja. Za CA, na primjer, bilo bi korisno, da se eMS integrira s drugim računovodstvenim sustavima.

Opće zadovoljstvo eMS-om je pozitivno na obje strane, korisnika i programskih tijela, ali još uvijek ima prostora za poboljšanje. Uglavnom je potrebna optimizacija sustava, maksimalna dozvoljena veličina dokumenata za prilaganje trebala bi biti veća (trenutno 7MB), potrebna je bolja stabilnost sustava. U pogledu ljudskih resursa će biti potrebna jedna osoba za eMS.

Administrativni postupci

Za korisnike je najčešće spomenuta poteškoća u vezi administrativnih procedura je povrat ERDF doprinosa, što je u njihovim očima sporo. Ipak financiranje se odnosi na izvještavanje i potvrđivanje izvješća (financijskih i sadržajnih), koji može biti odgođen i zbog greške korisnika.

Tijekom provedbe projekta korisnici mogu kontaktirati svog voditelja ugovora za objašnjenja i pojašnjenja. Korisnici su vrlo zadovoljni komunikacijom sa svojim voditeljima ugovora, smatraju ih korisnima. Korisnici često traže informacije ili objašnjenja za probleme koji su već objašnjeni na web stranici (ili u priručniku), a takva pitanja mogu predstavljati teret za voditelje ugovora, koji već imaju mnoge zadatke.

Partnerstva

Prema korisnicima, partnerstva nije bilo jako teško formirati, većina projektnih partnera ili voditelja projekta znala je barem neke od partnera unaprijed.

Između prihvaćenih projekata, po pravnom statusu, većina vodećih partnera su općine / županije (17 od 34), nakon čega slijede organizacija za istraživanje i razvoj (10) i 1 privatna tvrtka. Među PP većina prijavitelja su Javne ustanove (72), nakon čega slijede županije / općine (38) i NVO (36). Među PP ima 17 institucija koje sudjeluju u više od jednog projekta - 14 institucija sudjeluje u dva projekta, dva u tri projektima i jedna institucija u četiri projekta. Među VP je 20 institucija koje sudjeluju kao LP u jednom projektu i PP u ostalim projektima.

Općine i županije su pravni oblici institucija koje sudjeluju u većini partnerstava (prihvaćenih projekata). Postoji nekoliko mogućnosti za to - one imaju dobre mreže, imaju iskustva iz sudjelovanja u drugim programima, imaju iskusno osoblje.

Između prihvaćenih projekata, raspodjela hrvatskih institucija je podjednaka po regijama (županija), u odnosu na raspodjelu korisnika u Sloveniji, gdje je u Ljubljani visoka koncentracija korisnika, a također se ističe Obalno-kraška regija, u usporedbi s drugim regijama.

Postoji više VP iz Slovenije (23 od 38, 60.5 %). U slučaju strateških projekata, udio obje zemlje je jednaka (50 % VP iz Slovenije, 50 % VP iz Hrvatske). U PO 2 slovenske institucije su vodeće u 15 projekata (od 26, 58 %), dok je u PO 3 slovenske institucije su vodeće u 6 projekata (od 8, 75 %).

Komunikacijske aktivnosti

Postizanje ciljeva Komunikacijske strategije dobro napreduje. Većina pokazatelja je već postignuta ili visoko premašena (npr. broj posjeta na web stranici (526 % ostvaren

pokazatelj); broj sudionika na radionicama (397 % ostvaren pokazatelj)). Komunikacijske aktivnosti se provode u skladu s komunikacijskim fazama, komunikacija mogućnosti financiranja je završila, a promocija rezultata počinje. To je prilika za obraćanje širokoj javnosti, jer je samo 18 % čulo za Programa suradnje Interreg V-A SI-HR. (pokazatelj je postigao 30 % ciljne vrijednosti).

Web stranica programa je dobro strukturirana, korisnici ocjenjuju je kao dobru u smislu korisnosti informacija, transparentnosti, te općeg dojma.

Program se prihvaća vrlo dobro od strane korisnika. Korisnici koji sudjeluju u programu su, unatoč manjim poteškoćama, zadovoljni programom i uglavnom planiraju sudjelovati i u sljedećem programskom razdoblju. S druge strane, više treba učiniti na komunikaciju s općom populacijom. Kako bi se postigao učinak, preporučuje se da koriste društveni mediji, kao što su Facebook, Instragram, Twitter, koji se trebaju redovito ažurirati. Također odgovarajući kanali su lokalne i nacionalne TV, novine i radio. Zbog toga se preporuča ½ FTE osoba, koja može biti odgovorna za sve programe prekogranične suradnje.

SUMMARY IN SLOVENE LANGUAGE

Namen vrednotenja

Namen vrednotenja je ovrednotiti ustreznost, učinkovitost, uspešnost, trajnost in vpliv rezultatov ter učinkov projektov, ki se financirajo iz Programa sodelovanja Interreg V-A Slovenija-Hrvaška za obdobje 2014–2020 ter samega programa. Vrednotenje vključuje: oceno uspešnosti programskih struktur in procesov, analizo postopkov poročanja, povračilo stroškov, vlogo in učinkovitost partnerjev ter učinkovitost pri upravljanju projektov. Vrednotenje vključuje tudi delovanje programskih struktur v izvajanju programskih procesov. Zaradi specifičnih razlik je potrebno dve vrsti projektov (strateški projekti, projekti odprtega poziva) vrednotiti ločeno. Prav tako se je vrednotilo izvajanje komunikacijske strategije na ravni programa in učinkovitost tehnične pomoči (TP) v okviru programa (upravljanje sredstev za tehnično pomoč).

Splošni cilj vrednotenja je oceniti delovanje programskih struktur in izvajanje programa / projektov, da bi ugotovili morebitne izboljšave pri pripravi smernic in postopkov za programsko obdobje 2021–2027, kot tudi za trenutno programsko obdobje.

Vrednotenje je osnovano na dveh spletnih anketah, intervjujih z upravičenci, intervjujih s slovenskimi in hrvaškimi programskimi strukturami (tj. Organ upravljanja (OU), Skupni sekretariat (SS), Nacionalni organ (NA) na slovenski in hrvaški strani, Prvostopenjska kontrola (FLC) na slovenski in hrvaški strani, Organ za potrjevanje (OZP)), pregledu podatkov (predložen s strani SS in iz informacijskega sistema eMS) ter pregledu dokumentov.

Opis programa

Cilj čezmejnega sodelovanja EU (CBC) je reševanje skupnih izzivov v obmejnih regijah ter izkoriščanje neizkoriščenega potenciala rasti v obmejnih območjih, obenem pa tudi krepitev procesa sodelovanja za celovit in skladen razvoj Evropske unije.

Program sodelovanja Interreg V-A SI-HR obsega 17 regij NUTS-3 (statistične regije v Sloveniji in županije na Hrvaškem). Programsko območje pokriva skoraj 32.000 km², z več kot 3 milijoni prebivalcev. Delež vključenega slovenskega ozemlja je približno 70 %, na Hrvaškem pa 30 %.

Skupni proračun programa znaša 55,7 milijona EUR (s prispevkom ESRR v višini 46,1 milijona EUR). Vizija čezmejnega sodelovanja Interreg V-A Slovenija Hrvaška 2014–2020 bo dosežena s **štirimi prednostnimi osmi** in petimi specifičnimi cilji (SC).

Prednostni osi (PO) 2 in 3 sta bili izvedeni z odprtimi pozivi. V okviru prednostne osi 1 so bili strateški projekti podeljeni z neposredno potrditvijo nadzornega odbora, kakor tudi projekti v okviru 4. prednostne osi (tehnična pomoč).

Izvajanje odprtega poziva

V programu sodelovanja Interreg V-A SI-HR je bila uporabljena metoda odprtega poziva, s tremi odpiranji, do porabe razpoložljivih sredstev. Za PO2 in PO3 so bila razpoložljiva

sredstva dodeljena prek enega odprtega poziva s tremi odpiranji, pri čemer je bilo skupno odobrenih 34 projektov. Od tega jih je 26 v PO2 in 8 v PO3.

Kljub odprtemu pozivu so se prijavitelji večinoma prijavi v zadnjih dneh pred odpiranjem in večina jih ni prepoznala odprtega poziva kot poenostavitev administrativnih postopkov.

Medtem ko sta se PO2 in PO3 izvajali na podlagi odprtega poziva, je strateške projekte v okviru PO 1 in projekte tehnične pomoči (PO4) neposredno potrdil nadzorni odbor. Medtem ko so bili projekti v okviru PO1, PO2 in PO3 pred potrditvijo ocenjeni, projekti tehnične pomoči (PO4) niso šli skozi postopek ocenjevanja. V okviru PO1 so bili potrjeni 4 strateški projekti (FRISCO 1, FRISCO 2.1, FRISCO 2.2 in FRISCO 2.3). Hrvaški projektni partner (Hrvatske vode) vodi 2 strateška projekta, medtem ko dva strateška projekta vodi slovenski projektni partner (Direkcija RS za vode). V okviru PO4 je bilo potrjenih šest projektov. Od 34 odobrenih projektov jih 26 sodi v PO2 ter 8 v PO3.

Prvo odpiranje je bilo najmanj uspešno, saj je bil delež odobrenih prijav najnižji (5 %), delež prijav, ki niso prestali AB preverjanja, pa je bil najvišji (72 %). Do tretjega odpiranja se je delež prijav, ki niso opravile AB preverjanja, občutno zmanjšal (28 %), medtem ko je bil delež odobrenih projektov v primerjavi s prvim odpiranjem precej višji (19 %). V vseh treh odpiranjih je bilo obravnavanih 291 vlog (213 s SI VP in 78 s HR VP), od katerih je bilo 12 % uspešnih (odobrenih), 47 % jih ni opravilo AB preverjanja, 30 % je bilo zavrnjenih in 11 % odloženih.

Strukture in postopki programa

Organi programa delujejo učinkovito v okviru vzpostavljenem za izvajanje programa. Programske strukture (OU, SS, NA (SI in HR), FLC (SI in HR) ter OZP) so trenutno zadostne, vendar se lahko v primeru daljše odsotnosti ključnega osebja pojavi kadrovska manko.

Število in narava nalog, zlasti za SS, je lahko v določenih trenutkih preobsežna, saj delujejo kot skrbniki pogodb, ocenjevalci, odgovorni so za učinkovito izvajanje komunikacijske strategije, imajo veliko stikov z upravičenci.

Priporočen bi bil polni FTE za osebo oz. strokovnjaka s področja IT, saj eMS informacijski sistem zahteva več človeških virov, kot jih je trenutno dodeljenih.

Kljub dejstvu, da je v prejšnjem programskem obdobju delalo le nekaj sedaj zaposlenih, imajo slovenske programske strukture veliko znanja in kompetenc, prav tako so tudi hrvaške programske strukture pridobile precej znanja in izkušenj. Zato priporočamo, da se kadrovske programske struktur ne spreminja, ampak se zagotovi kontinuiteta v naslednjem programskem obdobju.

Kakovost sodelovanja med programskimi partnerji je ocenjena kot dobra. Ker imajo slovenski partnerji veliko znanja in kompetenc, ga pogosto delijo hrvaškimi programskimi strukturami. Programski partnerji redno uporabljajo osebna srečanja ali telefon / skype / elektronsko komunikacijo, vse težave se rešujejo hitro in konstruktivno. Na splošno ni opaziti večjih razlik med partnerji pri pristopih in pogledih na sodelovanje in pričakovanja.

V Sloveniji je FLC centraliziran za različne programe. Zaradi občasnega prekrivanja obdobj poročanja različnih programov, lahko v obdobju poročanja pride do velike preobremenitve (10 programov hkrati), kar lahko povzroči ozka grla na prvi stopnji kontrole. Na hrvaškem je FLC odgovoren za vse hrvaške programe čezmejnega sodelovanja.

Priporočeno je, da se (kolikor je mogoče) uskladijo obdobja poročanja oziroma v času največjih obremenitev vključi v kontrolo dodatne osebe.

Postopek prijave

V postopku prijave so imeli kandidati podporo v obliki delavnic in individualnih osebnih posvetovanj z NA in SS. Delavnice za prijavitelje so bile dobro obiskane (kazalnik je bil presežen (397 %)). Glede na rezultate spletne ankete so bile delavnice in individualna osebna posvetovanja zelo koristna (v raziskavi je 83 % uspešnih prijaviteljev dejalo, da so delavnice koristne ali zelo koristne, 100 % upravičencev je dejalo, da so bila individualna osebna posvetovanja koristna ali zelo koristna). Na delavnicah so prijavitelji opredelili kot koristno naslednje:

- Splošne informacije (npr. kako izpolniti prijavo, postopek prijave)
- Specifične informacije (odgovori na specifična vprašanja v zvezi s projektom)
- Nasveti in navodila; realni primeri
- Tehnični podatki
- Razlaga programa, cilji programa

Na individualnih svetovanjih so prijavitelji izpostavili kot najkoristnejše:

- Konkretno informacije (npr. o temi, o partnerstvu, preverjanju projektnih idej, izboljšanju prijave projekta)
- Prilagojen pristop
- Sodelovanje s skupnim sekretariatom
- Podrobna navodila (o postopku poročanja)
- Praktični nasveti

Delavnice in individualna svetovanja so bile še posebno koristne za prijavitelje, ki so imeli že razvite ideje in so imeli v naprej pripravljena vprašanja, sicer pa so imeli prijavitelji težave predvsem z razvojem intervencijske logike in razumevanjem kazalnikov.

Dodatno orodje, uporabljeno med fazo prijave (in izvajanja), je bil Priročnik o izvajanju projektov za upravičence. Velika večina prijaviteljev (uspešnih in neuspešnih) ga je uporabila in večina jih je mnenja, da je koristen oz. zelo koristen (89 %). Med uspešnimi prijavitelji so ga uporabljali vsi VP-ji (vodilni partnerji). Priročnik je sicer dobro strukturiran na ključne vsebine / faze ter prijaviteljem in upravičencem nudi dobra navodila, kar se je odrazilo tudi v spletni anketi.

S programskimi postopki, procesi in oblikami ni bilo zaznati večjih težav. V fazi prijave je bilo nekaj manjših težav. Prijavitelji so imeli največ težav pri uporabi v obeh jezikov, raje bi prijavljali samo v enem, maternem. Uporaba obeh jezikov je povzročila nekaj težav tudi pri AB preverjanju, saj zaradi slabih prevodov / napak pri prevodih/ manjkajočih prevodov niso prestali AB preverjanja. Po prepoznavi tega problema s strani programskih struktur,

je prišlo do sprememb v prijavnem postopku tretjega odpiranja, ki je po novem omogočil pet delovnih dni za odpravo napak. V tretjem odpiranju je bil delež prijaviteljev, ki niso prestali AB preverjanja, tudi zaradi tega ukrepa, najnižji (29 %).

Poleg zgoraj omenjenega, so prijavitelji izpostavili še težave z izpolnjevanjem finančnega načrta, pregledom vloge v samem eMS sistemu, dokončanjem opisa projekta in dokončanjem delovnega načrta.

Po pošiljanju sklepov o odobritvi projekta so bila organizirana tudi osebna srečanja z vodilnimi/projektnimi partnerji in SS. Namen svetovanj je bil razjasniti odprta vprašanja in izpolnitev pogojev za podpis pogodbe, pri čemer je bil poudarek na pojasnjevanju kazalnikov, upravičenosti izdatkov ter poročanju. Poleg VP-jev so bili povabljeni tudi drugi PP –ji (projektni partnerji). Ne le uspešni, temveč tudi neuspešni prijavitelji so se lahko udeležili svetovanj, kjer so bile pojsanjene slabosti projekta. Kot kaže spletna anketa, so bili upravičenci s svetovanji zadovoljni, čeprav so po mnenju SS-a upravičenci pogosto iskali pojasnila in informacije, ki so že objavljene in obrazložene na spletni strani. Tovrstna pojasnjevanja pogosto predstavljajo dodatno breme za osebe SS.

Postopek poročanja

V procesu poročanja so programske strukture vključene v različne korake. Prvi organ v postopku je FLC. V primeru zamud v tej fazi, se vsi drugi koraki upočasnijo oz. zamaknejo. Za FLC-jem, SS preveri napredek izvajanja, skrbnik pogodbe preveri izdatke, preveri upravičenost izdatkov, verodostojnost dokumentacije. Nato OU preveri poročilo o napredku. Zadnji korak je preverjanje OZP, ki izda elektronski dokument, potrdilo OZP. Ko je potrdilo OZP ustvarjeno v eMS, je možno povračilo ESRR prispevka.

Manj napak upravičencev v poročanju, pomeni hitrejše povračilo sredstev. V izogib napakam ter razjasnitvi pravil poročanja, je bilo za upravičence organiziranih več delavnic o poročanju. Poleg tega je izdelan priročnik in navodila za poročanje upravičenih izdatkov tako za slovenske kot hrvaške upravičence.

Ozka grla, zaznana v procesu poročanja, so povezana s preobremenjenostjo dela FLC (obdobja poročanja različnih programov so lahko hkratna), prav tako lahko povzroči ozka grla in zamude pomanjkanje človeških virov v drugih programskih strukturah (SS in OU).

Za zmanjšanje administrativne obremenjenosti je bilo uvedenih nekaj novosti - eMS, odprti poziv z odpiranji, možnost popravljanja napak (tretje odpiranje), dodatna dokumentacija (npr. investicije) ni potrebna.

eMS- informacijski sistem

Kljub nekaterim težavam v zvezi z eMS, le-ta predstavlja občutno poenostavitev upravnih postopkov tako za upravičence kot organe programa.

Glavne težave z eMS, ki so jih izpostavili upravičenci so bile: počasnost sistema, premajhna dovoljena velikost prilog oz. priponk, tveganje izgube vpisanega besedila, dolgotrajno delo v eMS, sistem po njihovem mnenju ni optimiziran.

Z vidika programskih struktur je eMS po eni strani poenostavil delo, saj vse poteka elektronsko, po drugi strani pa je potrebnih nekaj izboljšav funkcionalnosti. Za OZP bi bilo na primer uporabno, da bi se vrednosti iz poročil in zahtevkov lahko neposredno integrirale oz. prepisale v druge računovodske sisteme. Trenutno je namreč potrebna ročna obdelava oz. prenos podatkov med informacijskimi sistemi.

Splošno zadovoljstvo z eMS je pozitivno na obeh straneh, tako pri upravičencih kot programskih strukturah, vendar še vedno obstaja prostor za izboljšave. V glavnem je potrebna optimizacija sistema, največja dovoljena velikost pripetih dokumentov se mora povečati (trenutno 7MB), potrebna je večja stabilnost sistema. V smislu človeških virov, bi bila za eMS smiselna oz. potrebna ena oseba.

Upravni postopki

Za upravičence je najpogostejše izpostavljena težava v zvezi s postopki povračil prispevka ESRR, ki je v njihovih očeh pogosto prepočasno. Kljub temu je potrebno dodati, da je financiranje povezano s poročanjem in potrjevanjem poročila (finančno in vsebinsko), zamude pa so lahko tudi posledica napak upravičencev.

Med izvajanjem projekta imajo upravičenci možnost, da se za pojasnila in razjasnitve obrnejo na skrbnika pogodbe, kar tudi koristijo. Upravičenci so v splošnem zelo zadovoljni s komunikacijo s skrbniki pogodb in jih prepoznavajo kot veliko pomoč. Zaradi pogostega spraševanja po informacijah oz. pojasnilih o stvareh, ki so že razložene na spletni strani (ali v priročniku), lahko upravičenci s tovrstnim spraševanjem povzročijo dodatno breme za skrbnike pogodb, ki imajo že tako veliko nalog.

Partnerstva

Po mnenju upravičencev ni bilo težko oblikovati partnerstev, večina projektnih partnerjev ali vodilnih partnerjev se je poznala že od prej.

Med odobrenimi projekti so po pravnem statusu večina vodilnih partnerjev občine / županije (17 od 34), sledijo jim raziskovalne in razvojne organizacije (10) in 1 zasebno podjetje. Med PP-ji je večina prijaviteljev javnih zavodov (72), sledijo jim županija / občina (38) in nevladne organizacije (36). Med PP-ji je 17 institucij, ki sodelujejo v več kot enem projektu - 14 institucij sodeluje v dveh projektih, dva v treh projektih in ena institucija v štirih projektih. Med VP-ji sodeluje 20 institucij, ki sodelujejo kot VP v enem projektu in PP v ostalih.

Občine in županije so pravne oblike institucij, ki sodelujejo v večini partnerstev (odobrenih projektov). Za to je več razlogov - imajo dobre mreže, imajo izkušnje iz sodelovanja v drugih programih, imajo izkušeno osebje.

Med odobrenimi projekti je porazdelitev hrvaških institucij po regijah (županija) bolj enakomerna kot v Sloveniji, kjer je v Ljubljani visoka koncentracija upravičencev, v primerjavi z drugimi regijami izstopa tudi Obalno-kraška regija.

Več VP-jev je iz Slovenije (23 od 38; 60,5 %). Pri strateških projektih je delež obeh držav enak (50 % VP-jev iz Slovenije, 50 % VP-jev iz Hrvaške). V PO 2 slovenske institucije vodijo 15 projektov (od 26; 58 %), v PO 3 pa slovenske institucije vodijo 6 projektov (od 8; 75 %).

Komunikacijske dejavnosti

Doseganje ciljev komunikacijske strategije dobro napreduje. Večina kazalnikov je že dosežena ali celo presežena (npr. število obiskov na spletni strani (526 % doseženega kazalnika), število udeležencev na delavnicah (397 % doseženega kazalnika)) Aktivnosti komuniciranja se izvajajo v skladu s komunikacijskimi fazami, komuniciranje o možnostih financiranja se je zaključilo in začenja se promocija rezultatov, kar je priložnost za osveščanje splošne javnosti, saj je le 18 % slišalo za program sodelovanja Interreg V-A SI-HR (kazalnik je dosegel 30 % ciljne vrednosti)).

Spletna stran programa je dobro strukturirana, upravičenci jo ocenjujejo kot dobro, tako v smislu uporabnosti informacij in preglednosti ter splošnega vtisa.

Upravičenci sam program zelo dobro sprejemajo. Ti, ki sodelujejo v programu, so kljub manjšim težavam s programom zelo zadovoljni in večinoma načrtujejo sodelovanje tudi v naslednjem programskem obdobju. Po drugi strani, pa bi bilo smiselno narediti več na področju komuniciranja s splošno javnostjo. Za dosego učinka priporočamo vzpostavitev družbenih omrežij, kot so Facebook, Instragram, Twitter, ki jih je potrebno redno posodabljeni. Prav tako so ustrezni kanali informiranje lokalna in nacionalna TV, časopis ter radio. Za to se priporoča ½ FTE, oseba bi lahko bila odgovorna za vse programe čezmejnega sodelovanja.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale and background of the evaluation

The Slovenian Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (GODC) published a tender for the evaluation of the *Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia for the period 2014–2020*¹ on 6th November 2018. The results were published on 3rd January 2019 and on the 28th of January 2019 both parties signed the contract No. C1541-19P430001.

The tender is based on the articles 54, 56, and 114 of the European Parliament and Council Regulation 1303/2013 (17th December 2013), which require that “*during the programming period managing authorities should ensure that evaluations are carried out to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of a programme. The Monitoring committee (MC) and the European Commission (EC) should be informed about the results of evaluations to facilitate management decisions*” (art. 54). At the 3rd Session of the Monitoring Committee (MC)², the MC adopted the *Evaluation Plan of the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia for the period 2014-2020*. The Evaluation plan provides a two-stage evaluation. During the first stage, evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the *CBC Slovenia–Croatia 2014–2020* is planned, while the second stage focuses on the impact of the same programme. The second evaluation will be split in two sub-evaluations (Evaluation I and II), where the *Evaluation I* is going to present the basis for the new financial perspective, while the *Evaluation II* will present the final evaluation of the programme.

1.2 Legal basis and main documents relevant for the evaluation

The proposed evaluation considers the outcomes of previous evaluations and relevant analyses carried out by the programme in period 2007–2013 and during the programming process for the present period. The main reference document, which presents the basis for the evaluation, is the *Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia for the period 2014–2020*. The following documents and databases served as source documents (starting point) for the framework of the evaluation:

1. Open call for projects within the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia for the period 2014–2020 (2015, 2016, 2017).
2. Ongoing evaluation of the CBC Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia Croatia (Julia Marošek, 2017).
3. Annual Implementation Reports (2014/2015, 2016, 2017).
4. Ex-ante evaluation of the *CBC Slovenia–Croatia 2014–2020* (ZaVita et al., 2015).
5. Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Cooperation Programme Slovenia – Croatia 2014-2020 (Dvokut ECRO, ZaVita, Integra Consulting, 2015).
6. Implementation Manual for the Beneficiaries (ver. 1, 2015; v. 2, 2017).
7. Evaluation of the Operational Programme (OP) Cross-border Cooperation (CBC) Slovenia-Croatia 2007–2013 (MK Projekt, 2016).

¹ Further in text: CBC Slovenia–Croatia 2014–2020.

² http://www.si-hr.eu/en2/download/Minutes_of_the_3_MC_decisions.pdf

8. Data and information available on the web page <http://www.si-hr.eu>
9. Methodological document for indicators and performance framework.
10. Communication strategy for Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia
11. eMS information system
12. Statistical office of Slovenia
13. Croatian bureau of statistics
14. Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Directorate for waters and investments
15. Croatian Waters
16. Museum Documentation Center Croatia
17. The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation
18. State Institute for Nature Protection, Croatia

2 PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION, AIMS, METHODOLOGY and METHODS USED

2.1 Purpose and objectives of evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to evaluate the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the results and effects of the projects, financed by the *CP Interreg V-A SI-HR and the programme itself*. The evaluation includes the following: evaluation of the performance of program structures and processes, analyses of reporting procedures, reimbursement of costs, roles of partners and effectiveness and efficiency in management of the projects. The evaluation also includes performance of programme structures in different processes. The two types of the projects (strategic projects; open call projects) need to be evaluated separately, considering their specifics. The progress in the implementation of the thematic objectives (TO) and programme-specific indicators for 2018 will be assessed to feed into the preparation of the Annual Implementation Report 2018. The implementation of the Communication strategy at programme level will be evaluated and the impact of technical assistance (TA) to the programme (management of the technical assistance funds).

One of the purposes of evaluation is also to collect and assess data on result and output indicators (by priority axis and specific objective) as they are defined in the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR. We followed the methodology described in the *Methodological document of indicators and performance framework*. This means we collected the data from different Slovenian and Croatian sources (e.g. Statistical offices in Slovenia and Croatia, ministries and other relevant institutions, as listed in the Methodological document). To measure the result indicator “Level of cooperation quality in the field of health, social care, safety and mobility services within the programme area” we conducted a short survey among potential beneficiaries of PA 3/ SO 3.1 in both countries (municipalities, counties, RDAs, health services, social care services, protection and rescue services, Ministry relevant for transport). To collect output indicators mainly Monitoring System (eMS) was used and the information provided by relevant programme bodies (mainly by JS).

In the evaluation we addressed the following objectives:

Objective 1: Evaluation of efficiency of programme management structures and processes;

Objective 2: Assessment of the management of technical assistance (TA) funds;

Objective 3: Assessment of the (quality of) project reporting and reimbursement procedures;

Objective 4: Evaluation of the first thematic achievements;

Objective 5: Evaluation of partnerships (and their effectiveness);

Objective 6: Assessment of the performance of the framework milestones 2018;

Objective 7: Assessment of the Communication strategy.

The overall objective of the evaluation is to assess the functioning of the programme structures and the implementation of the programme/projects so as to identifying potential improvements in the preparation of the guidelines and procedures for the programming period 2021–2027.

2.2 Research questions framing the evaluation

With the evaluation we will try to answer the following evaluation questions (EQ):

EQ1: How efficient and effective are the programme structures? (measure: division of tasks, staff issues, scope of work etc.)?

EQ2: Can you assess the level of the quality of cooperation among programme partners?

EQ3: How efficient and effective are the programme procedures? Are there some identified *bottlenecks* and (if yes) how can they be controlled/overcome?

EQ4: In what way and to what extent the administrative procedures, regarding to the previous programming period, were simplified and coordinated/harmonized?

EQ5: How user-friendly are the programme procedures/processes and forms? Any need for their improvements?

EQ6: Are support tools (the information system, the programme website etc.) in terms of management and target groups efficient? What is the progress of the programme in achieving specific objectives?

EQ7: How effective and efficient is the project implementation (thematic and geographical coverage, distribution of projects regarding the intervention codes, cost efficiency, sustainability of projects, direct effects of projects and their results, the achievement of set indicators etc.) also in the context of programme 2021–2027?

EQ8: Which are the characteristics of the partnership (partners by type of institution, the most and least involved partners in both countries, the reasons for the absence of different types of partners, the quality of cooperation between partners)? Does the partnership meet the expectations of the programme?

EQ9: What is the progress in implementing the Communication Strategy and achieving its objectives?

EQ10: How was the programme adopted by the target groups, especially by the interested actors and by the general public?

2.3 Methodology and methods used

The methodological framework is defined by the *CBC Slovenia–Croatia 2014–2020* as well as by the standards and the norms recommended by the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). These are used by the European Union (EU), and will be further complemented by the Guidance document on monitoring and evaluation (European Commission, 2006). In its *Guidelines for project and programme evaluation* (EC, 2006: 27) the European Commission:

1. defines **efficiency** as “the extent to which the outputs and/or desired effects have been achieved with the lowest possible use of resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, administrative costs etc.)”. This means that efficiency is perceived as a cost-benefit analysis of procedures (cost-off of inhibitors, barriers etc.).
2. On the other hand, **effectiveness** deals with expected objectives/outputs or outcomes. As such effectiveness of a projects presents the “extent to which the development intervention’s objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance”.

These Guidelines will be followed by the Evaluation team in the overall assessment of the *CBC Slovenia–Croatia 2014–2020*, as well as when seeking the answers to the Evaluation questions (EQ).

Applied assessment framework combines employment of different methods. In the first phase of analysis, different methods were used. The triangulation of methods was used, meaning that more than one method was used to collect data on the same topic. The evaluation is based on the combination of quantitative and qualitative research and was divided into three phases:

- Phase 1: desk research (analysis of existing documents and available data);
- Phase 2: In-field qualitative (interviews, focus groups) and quantitative research (survey);
- Phase 3: Composition of results and their presentation (evaluation report)

2.3.1 Phase 1

- collecting data on indicators from different sources (ministries, national institutions, statistical offices, eMS...)
- analyzing facts, applying standard methodological tools,
- development of a systemic approach to the assessment of the inputs, outputs and outcomes in view of the next programming period.

2.3.2 Phase 2

Several activities were conducted in Phase 2:

1. Short on-line survey among potential beneficiaries of PA 3/ SO 3.1
 2. Online survey among successful and unsuccessful applicants
 3. Interviews with lead partners
 4. Semi structured interviews with programme structures
- (1) **Short on-line survey** among potential beneficiaries of PA 3/ SO 3.1 in both countries with the purpose to collect data for result indicator “Level of cooperation quality in the field of health, social care, safety and mobility services within the programme area”. It is a composite indicator measured with the following three questions (variables):
 - How would you describe today’s cooperation quality with the partner(s) from the other side of the border in the field of health and social services, safety and sustainable mobility? (answers: 1) inexistent 2) weak 3) acceptable 4) good 5) very good)
 - Are you familiar and in contact with any partner organization from the other side of the border in above listed topics related to your field of interest? (answers: 1) not any 2) one 3) two 4) three 5) more)
 - Did you get in touch with some of these organization(s) from the other side of the border in the last year? (answers: 1) not at all 2) once 3) twice 4) three times 5) more)

Target institutions were the following: municipalities, counties, RDAs, health services, social care services, protection and rescue services, Ministry relevant for transport.

- (2) **A survey among all applicants** who submitted projects within PA2 and PA3: based on the data on project partners (PP) obtained from JS, a web-survey was implemented. There were two surveys for two target groups – successful applicants and unsuccessful applicants. The questionnaires were the same to certain extent (questions about previous experiences, partnership, application, communication) but differed in the part about implementation of the project and experience on reporting (only successful applicants were asked about that). The purpose of the survey was to collect as many opinions as possible on the processes of application, find the evidence on how efficient and effective are the programme procedures, how user-friendly are the forms and the information system, are support tools in terms of target groups efficient etc. Also, by special questions to those who have already experience in CBC, the assessment of changes in the implementation of the current programme with regard to the earlier ones.

The survey was conducted online, in the surveying tool 1ka (www.1ka.si) in Slovenian and Croatian language. The survey started 19.04.2019 and lasted until 30.04.2019 (12 days).

Before launching the survey, JS informed all applicants about the evaluation, so they expected the survey, which often helps in better response rates. There was one reminder sent to the applicants, also JS contacted lead partners and encouraged them to participate in the survey.

The questionnaire for successful applicants took approximately 9 minutes to respond and the questionnaire for unsuccessful applicants took around 6 minutes.

2.3.2.1 Structure of survey respondents

Survey for successful applicants

The survey was sent out to 224 unique email addresses provided by GODC. Emails were sent to contact persons, if one person was a contact person for two or more projects, he/she received just one email with the invitation to the survey. The institutions participating in two or more projects received as many emails as the number of contact persons. Of 224 unique email addresses, 30 addresses were not valid, we have also received notifications, that some of the persons are not employed anymore. We have received 86 responses from Lead partners (LP) and Project Partners (PP). This represents 44 % response rate, which is in on-line surveying perceived as a good response rate.

There were 49 % respondents coming from Slovenia and 51 % from Croatia. Table 1 and Table 2 present the number and the share of respondents according to the region. As the respondents could skip some of the questions, the sum of answers can differ between questions. To the question about the region 85 respondents answered. In Slovenia the highest number of respondents (LP and PP) come from Osrednjeslovenska region (25 %), followed by Podravska region (20 %) and Primorsko-notranjska region (18 %). In Croatia the most respondents come from Mesto Zagreb (35 %) followed by Primorsko-goranska županija (17 %) and Istarska županija (15 %)

Among respondents there were 21 LP who have answered the questionnaire, which represents 61 % of all LPs. The majority of successful applicants participating in the survey participates in one project - 71 %, 18 % in two and 11 % in three projects or more. Among successful applicants 44 % were involved in previous (2007-2013) cross border programme of cooperation.

Table 1 and 2 show number and share of LP and PP who have answered the survey in Slovenia and Croatia according to the region.

Table 1: Number and share of respondents (LP and PP) to the survey according to the region (SI)

Region	n	%
1 Pomurska region	1	2%
2 Podravska region	9	20%
3 Savinjska region	4	9%
4 Zasavska region	1	2%
5 Posavska region	1	2%
6 Jugovzhodna Slovenija	3	7%
7 Osrednjeslovenska region	11	25%
8 Primorsko-notranjska region	8	18%
9 Obalno-kraška region	6	14%
Total	44	100

Source: Online survey

Table 2: Number and share of respondents (LP and PP) to the survey according to the region (HR)

Region	n	%
1 Primorsko-goranska županija	7	17%
2 Istarska županija	6	15%
3 Grad Zagreb	14	34%
4 Zagrebačka županija	4	10%
5 Krapinsko-zagorska županija	1	2%
6 Varaždinska županija	2	5%
7 Međimurska županija	4	10%
8 Karlovačka županija	3	7%
Total	41	100

Source: Online survey

Survey for unsuccessful applicants

The survey was sent to 817 email addresses, of those 95 were not valid anymore. We have received 85 responses, which represents 12 % response rate, which is low but still acceptable response rate. We need to take into consideration, that unsuccessful

applicants were not so motivated to answer the survey as successful ones. Also several of them thought that they have received survey by mistake (despite the explanation in the email and in the introduction in the survey, where it was explained that the survey targets unsuccessful applicants, they thought it is only for successful ones).

There were 52 % respondents coming from Slovenia and 48 % from Croatia. Among respondents there were 38 % of those who participated as LP. Among unsuccessful applicants 40 % applied to one project, 30 % to two and 30 % to two or more. Among unsuccessful applicants 48 % were involved in previous (2007-2013) cross border programme of cooperation.

- (3) Interviews with lead partners (LP): in-depth semi-structured interviews among the lead partners (LP) were conducted. The interviews were conducted among lead partners of strategic projects (PA1) and open call projects (PA2 and PA3).

The objective of the interviews was to learn in detail from the LP of the approved projects about the processes from the preparation of the application to the implementation of the project: reporting, dealing with the partners, communicating about the project etc.

For PA1 two projects were selected, one project that was led by Croatian LP and one project that was led by Slovenian LP. In the case of PA2 and PA3, we followed the territorial principle in the selection of the potential interviewees. Since our task was to learn about the processes during the implementation of the projects, the **semi-structured in-depth interviews**³ were carried out among the lead partners of the projects, approved within 1st and 2nd deadline⁴. Also, the projects in different priority axis (PA) and country were selected.

The total number of interviews in the PA2 and PA3 is 10, 5 in each country or 30 % of total number of approved projects. In the PA1 there were two interviews conducted – one with Croatian LP and one with Slovenian LP. This represents 50 % of strategic projects. A detailed structure of conducted interviews is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Structure of interviews of lead partners (LP) regarding call/lead partner

		Slovenian lead partner	Croatian lead partner
1 ST deadline	PA2	1	1
	PA3	2	No projects
	TOTAL	3	1
2 ND deadline	PA2	2	1
	PA3	No projects	3
	TOTAL	2	4
TOTAL PA2+PA3		5	5

³ A semi-structured in-depth interview is a qualitative method of data collection, where the evaluator prepares (in advance) a set of (open) questions, which can be changed or adapted during the interviews. The adaptability of questions allows the researcher to receive more detailed answers from the interviewee.

⁴ 3rd deadline projects have only started with their implementation and thus these lead partners have little experience with reporting and management of the project within this specific programme.

Strategic	1	1
All together	6	6

Source: Own elaboration

The interviews were conducted between 18.04.2019 and 29.04.2019.

➤ (4) Semi structured interviews with programme structures.

The application of the triangular method requires the implementation of the interviews also with representatives of the programme structures from both countries, namely MA, JS, NA, CA and FLC.

The main purpose of the interviews was to answer EQ1, EQ3, EQ4, EQ5, EQ6 and EQ9, from the perspective of the representatives of programme structures. Each of the authorities/bodies has a specific role and tasks in implementing the CP, therefore only some of the questions can be the same/similar, but some of the questions were specific according to the role.

The questions focused on efficiency and effectiveness of the single body/authority (division of tasks, staff issues, scope of work etc.), administrative burden, assessment and selection procedure of projects, possible bottlenecks, use of e-MS, communication strategy and achieving the indicators set.

The interviews with programme structures were conducted between 18.04.2019 and 29.04.2019.

2.3.3 Phase 3

Phase 3 comprises the composition of results and their presentation through method of induction. This means that the Evaluation team extracted the results which were obtained during the first and the second phase to provide the answers to the presented Evaluation questions (EQ). Special attention in the analysis was paid to provide an input for the programme structures for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of similar projects in the future and for the preparation of the new financial perspective 2021–2027.

2.4 Timeline

Table 4: Timeline of the evaluation

Phase	Task	Final date
1	1 st meeting with JS/NA/MA and evaluation team	25.1.2019
2	Preparation of an inception report on the evaluation of the <i>Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia for the period 2014–2020</i> , which contains a proposal of the methodology, questionnaires, surveys etc.	28.2.2019
3	Desk research	February-March 2019
4	Comments on the inception report	13.3.2019

5	Re-submission of the inception report	25.3.2019
6	Comments on the inception report (second)	29.3.2019
7	Comments on the inception report (third)	1.4.2019
8	Re-submission of the inception report	16.4.2019
9	On-line survey	19.4.2019 - 30.4.2019
10	Semi-structured interviews LP	18.4. - 30.4.2019
11	Semi-structured interviews programme structures	18.4.- 30.4.2019
12	Draft of the final evaluation report	6.5.2019
13	Comments of the contracting authority	9.5.2019
14	Final version of the evaluation report	15.5.2019
15	Presentation of the Report at the Monitoring Committee (MC) meeting	4.6.2019

2.5 Limitations of the evaluation

Although the time frame to conduct all the activities was very short, the evaluation team with the organizational help of GODC managed to conduct all the planned interviews.

The biggest problem represented the period between 22.04.2019 to 26.04.2019 which were school holidays in Croatia, 22.04. 2019 was Easter Monday which is a holiday in both countries and between 29.04. 2019 and 3.05. 2019 which were school holidays in Slovenia, as well there was a public holiday on 1.05. (Slovenia and Croatia) and 2.05.2019 (Slovenia). The holidays didn't affect the conduction of interviews, but most likely had some effect on the survey response (the survey was conducted between 19.04 2019 and 30.04. 2019).

Another difficulty was collecting the result programme indicators, as some of the indicators are not collected in the year 2018, also a survey for indicator "Level of cooperation quality in the field of health, social care, safety and mobility services within the programme area" (11RI), had very low response rate, so the results should be taken with precaution.

3 AN OUTLINE OF THE PROGRAMME AND PROJECTS

3.1 The structure of the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia 2014–2020 (PAs, SOs)

The aim of EU cross-border cooperation (CBC) is to tackle common challenges identified jointly in the border regions and to exploit the untapped growth potential in border areas, while enhancing the cooperation process for the purpose of the overall harmonious development of the European Union. In 2007–2013 financial perspective, the initiative covered 60 programmes (available 6 billion €), for the current financial perspective again 60 programmes were confirmed and the amount available for all programmes is 6.6 billion €. The CP Interreg V-A SI-HR was approved by the European Commission on 30th September 2015.

The programme comprises 17 NUTS-3 regions (statistical regions in Slovenia and counties (županije) in Croatia). The programme area covers almost 32,000 km², with more than 3 million habitants. The share of covered Slovenian territory is approximately 70 %, while in Croatia it is 30 %.

Table 5: Relevant NUTS-3 regions

SLOVENIA (statistical region)	CROATIA (county)
Jugovzhodna Slovenija	Istarska županija
Obalno-kraška regija	Karlovačka županija
Osrednjeslovenska regija	Krapinsko-zagorska županija
Podravska regija	Međimurska županija
Pomurska regija	Primorsko-goranska županija
Posavska regija	Varaždinska županija
Primorsko-notranjska regija	Grad Zagreb
Savinjska regija	Zagrebačka županija
Zasavska* regija	

*Zasavska region in Slovenia was included in order to increase the territorial coherence of the cross-border (CB) area and to better seize CBC potentials.

Source: Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia 2014–2020 (2015: 7)

The CP Interreg V-A SI-HR highlights the overall direction to sustainable development. Primary focus is on seizing its natural and cultural values to deliver innovative, smart and effective solutions that help preserve and improve the quality of environment and its diverse identity on one hand, and activate its socio-economic potentials on the other. Ensuring safe and vibrant area is of utmost importance for the people and shall be addressed by increasing the capacities for institutional cooperation at all levels. The vision shall be achieved through **four priority axes** and five specific objectives (SO).

Table 6: Priority axes

Priority axis (PA)	Thematic objective (TO)	Specific objective (SO)
PA 1 Integrated flood risk management in transboundary river basins	TO 5, Investment Priority 5b: Promoting investment to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems	SO 1.1: Flood risk reduction in the transboundary Dragonja, Kolpa/Kupa, Sotla/Sutla, Drava, Mura and Bregana river basins
PA 2: Preservation and sustainable use of natural and cultural resources	TO 6, Investment Priority 6c: Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing natural and cultural heritage	SO 2.1: Active heritage preservation through sustainable tourism
	TO 6, Investment Priority 6d: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil and promoting ecosystem services, including through Natura 2000, and green infrastructure	SO 2.2: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and promoting ecosystem services
PA 3: Healthy, safe and accessible border areas	TO 11, Investment Priority 11: Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by promoting legal and administrative cooperation and cooperation between citizens and institutions.	SO 3.1: Building partnerships among public authorities and stakeholders for healthy, safe and accessible border areas
PA 4: Technical Assistance		SO 4.1: Provide the efficient and frictionless enforcement of the CP

Source: <http://si-hr.eu/si2/>

The overall programme budget comprises of 55,690,913 €, with ERDF contribution of 46,114,193 €. The projects can be co-funded up to a maximum rate of 85% of eligible costs by the programme.

The planned ERDF allocation of funds are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: The allocation of funds (ERDF)

Indicative breakdown of the national counterpart							
Priority axis (PA)	FUND	Union support (a)	National counterpart (b)= (c)+(d)	National public funding (c)	National private funding (d)*	Total funding (e)=(a)+(b)	Cofinancing rate (f)=(a)/(e)
PA1	ERDF	10,026,557	1,769,393	1,769,393		11,795,950	85%
PA2	ERDF	28,074,358	4,954,299	3,468,009	1,486,290	33,028,657	85%
PA3	ERDF	5,013,278	884,697	796,227	88,470	5,897,975	85%
PA4	ERDF	3,000,000	1,968,331	1,968,331		4,968,331	60,4%
TOTAL		46,114,193	9,576,720	8,001,960	1,574,760	55,690,913	82,8%

* 30% of private co-funding is expected within Priority Axis 2 and 10% within Priority Axis 3.

Source: CP INTERREG V-A SI-HR (2015)

Open call implementation

The CP Interreg V-A SI-HR applied the method of *Open Call* with deadlines until funds were available. This means, that one Open Call was published (15.01.2016) with three deadlines. Open call system enables applicants to submit project applications continuously after the call is launched until the programme funds are available. The deadlines are defined by the MC. In three deadlines of the open call, the MC disbursed the amounts available by the programme. For PA2 and PA3 the funds available were allocated through one public call with three deadlines, as of today, 20th May 2019, total of 34 projects were approved (www.si-hr.eu).

While the PA2 and PA3 were implemented through open call, strategic projects under PA1 and Technical assistance projects (PA4) were directly approved by MC. Technical assistance projects serve to ensure a proficient operation of all bodies which are needed for CP's frictionless enforcement, smooth transition to the period 2014 - 2020, institutional stability and necessary adjustments to the functions and tasks stated in the ESI funds regulations 2014 – 2020. They do not go through the assessment procedure (while projects under PA1 are assessed, before approved by MC). The PA4 projects (6) were approved at the second meeting of MC (11. 4. 2016).

Under PA1 there were 4 strategic projects (FRISCO, FRISCO 2.1, FRISCO 2.2 and FRISCO 2.3) approved. Croatian project partners are leading 2 strategic projects (Hrvatske vode), 2 projects are led by Slovenian project partners (Direkcija RS za vode).

The MC decides on the ERDF co-financing of projects. Project proposals could be approved, rejected, postponed or put on a reserve list for the ERDF co-financing.

3.1.1 Programme authorities and structures

The joint implementation structure is built on the following **programme authorities**: a single Managing Authority (MA), a single Certifying Authority (CA) and a single Audit Authority (AA). The **programme authorities** are three bodies responsible for the conduction of the programme. MA bears the responsibility for the management and implementation of the *CP Interreg V-A SI-HR* towards the European Commission (EC). The designated MA of the Programme is the GODC, Slovenia. CA certifies declarations of expenditure and applications for payment before they are sent to the EC. The designated CA of the Programme is the Public Fund for Regional Development of the Republic of Slovenia. AA is responsible for verifying the effective functioning of the management and control system. It ensures that audits are carried out on the proper functioning of the management and control system of the CP and on an appropriate sample of operations on the basis of the declared expenditure.

Besides programme authorities there are also other programme structures designated for the management and control of the programme for the period 2014-2020. Namely those are: the *Monitoring Committee* (MC), the *Joint Secretariat* (JS), *National Authorities* (NA) and *First level control bodies* (FLC). MC supervises and monitors the programme implementation, JS serves as an adjutant to the MA and MC in carrying out their respective functions (CP Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia 2014-2020, 2015: p. 70). The MC is composed of 6 members with voting right and 8 members in advisory capacity without voting right from each country. The JS Slovenia-Croatia (with a seat in Slovenia and two branch offices in Croatia) has 6 members, 4 from Slovenia and 2 from Croatia. FLC is responsible for carrying out verifications described in Article 125(4) of the CPR (more about tasks of different authorities in the table below). FLC is set in Slovenia (at Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Development and European Cohesion Policy (GODC)) and Croatia (Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (MRDEUF)). NA in Slovenia is set at GODC and NA in Croatia is set at MRDEUF.

Table 8: Programme authorities

Authority	Name of authority and department or unit
Managing Authority (MA)	Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Development and European Cohesion Policy (GODC)
	European Territorial Cooperation and Financial Mechanism Office, Cross-border Programmes Management Division
Certifying Authority (CA)	Public Fund for Regional Development of the Republic of Slovenia
Audit Authority (AA)	Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Slovenia, Budget Supervision Office of the RS

Source: CP Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia 2014-2020 (2015)

Table 9: Tasks of single bodies in the *CP Interreg V-A SI-HR*

Tasks of single bodies in the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia 2014-2020	
Monitoring Committee (MC)	<p>steers over the Programme and ensures the quality and effectiveness of programme implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MC meets, alternatively in both countries, at least once a year and reviews the implementation of the Programme and progress towards achieving its objectives. It examines in detail all issues that affect the performance of the Programme and decides on any amendment of the Programme proposed by the MA or on MC's own proposal. • In the MC decisions are taken by consensus. MC is chaired by the MA.
Managing Authority (MA)	<p>is responsible for the co-operation programme in accordance with the principle of sound financial management.</p> <p>The main responsibilities of MA are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to prepare the Description of the Management and Control System; • to chair the MC meetings; • to sign the ERDF Subsidy contracts; • to react on the audit recommendations relevant to the management and implementation of the Programme; • to participate in the complaint procedure; • to facilitate the information exchange on the programme level among participating NAs, CA, AA and EC; • to submit Claims for Reimbursement to CA; • to draw up the management declaration; • to prepare changes of the CP.
Certifying Authority (CA)	is responsible for drawing up and submitting to the EC certified statements of expenditures and applications for payment.
Audit Authority (AA)	ensures that audits are carried out on the proper functioning of the management and control system of the Operational Programme (OP) and on an appropriate sample of operations on the basis of the declared expenditure. It also prepares the report and opinion on the compliance of the management and control systems.
Joint Secretariat (JS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assists the MA and the MC in carrying out their respective functions; • provides information to potential beneficiaries about funding opportunities under CPs necessary for project application; • facilitates coordination between similar or complementary projects; • performs administrative and eligibility check and quality assessment of the project applications; • assists beneficiaries in implementing their operations; • assists the Lead Partners in preparing payment claims;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepares the Annual Implementation Reports and submits it to the MA and the MC; • provides support for the preparation of meetings and events at the programme level; • collects financial, physical and statistical data that is needed for programme monitoring as well as for the interim and final implementation reports; • ensures the administrative management of (external) tasks and services; • ensures proper functioning and maintenance the Monitoring and Information System (e-MS); • ensures the coordination as well as the follow-up of information and publicity activities at programme level including maintaining the programme's website according to the communication strategy.
National Authority (NA)	<p>contributes to the programme by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting up the First level control system; • representing the Member States (MS) and as such participating in the MC.

Source: CP Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia 2014-2020 (2015: 70–73).

There are regular meetings of the bodies. MC meets twice a year in both countries. Until now, there were 8 MC meetings held.

3.2 Projects in figures (applications, rejected, accepted, postponed)

The following section relates to *Open Call projects*.

As already mentioned, there was one Open Call with three deadlines published. Deadlines were set by MC.

In the following tables the dynamic of received applications in three deadlines is shown. The first deadline was the least successful one, as the share of approved applications was the lowest (5 %) and the share of applications that did not pass the AB check was the highest (72 %). By the third deadline the share of applications that did not pass the AB check dropped significantly (28 %), also the share of approved project was much higher compared to the first deadline (19 %). The reasons for that change will be discussed later in chapter 4 (Evaluation of the processes and programme structures). In all three deadlines there were 291 applications, of those 12 % were successful (approved), 47 % did not pass the AB check, 30 % were rejected and 11 % were postponed.

Of 34 approved projects there are 26 in PA2 and 8 in PA3.

Table 10: Approved, postponed and rejected projects (PA2, PA3)

	1 st deadline	2 nd deadline	3 rd deadline	TOTAL
NOT PASSED AB CHECK	64	47	25	138
APPROVED	5	12	17	34
POSTPONED	9	17	7	33
REJECTED	12	36	39	87
TOTAL RECEIVED	(90 +1) 91*	112	88	291

Source: Minutes MC, 31. 8. 2016; Minutes MC, 10. 5. 2017; Minutes MC, 14. 6. 2018; eMS
In the first deadline 91 project applications were submitted (but 1 application was submitted twice and was therefore removed from the checks).

Table 11: Share of approved, postponed and rejected projects (PA2, PA3)

	1 st deadline	2 nd deadline	3 rd deadline	TOTAL
NOT PASSED AB CHECK	72%	42%	28%	47%
APPROVED	5%	11%	19%	12%
POSTPONED	10%	15%	8%	11%
REJECTED	13%	32%	44%	30%
TOTAL RECEIVED	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Own elaboration

There were more applications where the LP was from Slovenia (196) compared to number of applications with Croatian LP (78), but as seen in the Table 12, project applications where the LP was from Croatia were more successful – among Croatian applications 17 % were approved, while among Slovenian the success rate was 11 %. Also when LP was Croatian partner there were 23 % of applications rejected, while with Slovenian LP there were 35 % rejected. On the other hand, there were fewer ineligible applications when LP was from Slovenia (48 % vs. 56 %).

Table 12: Share of approved, postponed and rejected projects (PA2, PA3) according to the origin of LP

	LP-SI		LP-HR		TOTAL
APPROVED	21	11%	13	17%	34
POSTPONED	12	6%	3	4%	15*
REJECTED	69	35%	18	23%	87
INELIGIBLE (AB CHECK)	94	48%	44	56%	138
TOTAL	196	100%	78	100%	274*

Source: eMS (13.05. 2019), own calculation

* The data from table 10 and table 12 differs in the number of postponed projects and in total of received applications. Some projects, which were in the first and the second deadline postponed, were later approved, therefore they are not shown in the table 12 (the data for the table 12 derives from eMS on the date 13.05.2019).

Table 13: Approved projects in three deadlines (PA2 and PA3)

	1 st deadline	2 nd deadline	3 rd deadline	TOTAL
PA2	3	11	12	26
PA3	2	1	5	8
TOTAL	5	12	17	34

Source: Calculated on the basis of si-hr.eu data, 27. 1. 2019.

Among competitive projects, the funds were disbursed by the dynamics presented in table 14.

Table 14: The distribution of funds (PA2, PA3) in %

	1 st deadline	2 nd deadline	3 rd deadline	TOTAL
PA2	13 %	38 %	49 %	100 %
PA3	19 %	15 %	66 %	100 %

Source: Calculated on the basis of si-hr.eu data, 27. 1. 2019.

Postponed applications must be revised or further improved and may be resubmitted within the timeframe of any subsequent submission deadline of the Open Call. Applications rejected after the quality assessment, may not apply for CP Interreg SI-HR funds again with the same project idea and partnership.

Table 15: Timeline for processing applications

	1 st deadline	2 nd deadline	3 rd deadline
0. Publication of the Open call / announcement of the deadline	15/01/2016	24/05/2016 (website)	9.06.2017 (website)
1. Informative workshops for applicants	17/02/2016 (Rogaška Slatina, SI)	11/10/2016 (Črnomelj, SI)	13.06. 2017 (Postojna, SI)
	22/02/2016 (Opatija, HR)	10/10/2016 (Tuhelj, HR)	20.06. 2017 (Marija Bistrica, HR)
		17/10/2016 (Samobor, HR)	
2. Receipt of applications in eMS	11/03/2016 at 23:59:59	14/11/2016 at 12:00	27.09.2017 at 12.00
3. Administrative & eligibility check (AB Check)	14/03/2016 – 15/04/2016	14/11/2016 – 05/01/2017	27.9.2017- 22.12.2017
	(91 applications, 24 workdays)	(112 applications, 37 workdays)	(88 applications 59 workdays)
4. Quality check of applications	16/04/2016 – 01/07/2016	06/01/2017 – 07/04/2017	3.1.2018 – 24.4.2018
	(26 applications x 2 assessments, 55 days)	(67 applications x 2 assessments, 65 workdays)	63 applications x2 assessments, 79 workdays
5. State aid check/opinion for projects	06/07/2016 – 01/08/2016	10/04/2017 – 24/04/2017	24.4.2018 – 21.5.2018
6. MC meeting – decision on projects	30/08/2016 – 31/08/2016	09/05/2016 – 10/05/2017	13.06.2018- 14.06.2018

	(20 weeks from submission to MC decision)	(app. 25 weeks from submission to MC decision)	(app. 37 weeks from submission to MC decision)
7. Preparation and sending out decision letters	01/09/2016 – 09/09/2016	11/05/2017 – 26/05/2017	18.6.2018 – 26.6.2018
8. Face-to-face meetings with beneficiaries/ Preparation of ERDF contracts	19/09/2016 – 07/10/2016	29/05/2017 – 23/06/2017	3/7/2018 – 18/7/2018
9. Signing of ERDF contracts	14/10/2016	04/07/2017	19/7/2018 (first three contracts signed) – September 2018 (other contracts signed until September)
10. Duration from submission of application to signing of the Subsidy contracts	app. 7 months	app. 7,5 months	app. 11 months

Source: JS/programme website/ Ongoing evaluation of the Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia (2017)

As seen from the table in the third deadline the dynamic was somehow slower compared to the first and second deadline. One of the reasons for late signing of the contracts were summer holidays, as it was difficult to organize face-to-face meetings with beneficiaries and signing the contracts. As JS consists of a small team, in case of longer absence of one person the process can slow down, due to lack of personnel. As persons who conducted consultations to potential beneficiaries could not be nominated for assessment, it was difficult to replace assessor, if he/she was absent.

Strategic projects

Four strategic projects for PA1 did not have to apply in the Open call (still they have undergone the project application and the assessment phase) but were approved directly by MC. The MA prepared an invitation to submit proposals for strategic projects, the projects were assessed by two members of JS and external expert.

Dates of signed contracts for strategic projects:

	Signed contract
➤ FRISCO 1	20 th May 2016
➤ FRISCO 2.1	21 st December 2017
➤ FRISCO 2.2.	23 rd August 2018
➤ FRISCO 2.3	15 th February 2019

PA4 – Technical Assistance

The TA projects were directly approved in the frame of the 2nd MC meeting. For TA projects there is no assessment.

3.3 Structure of approved projects

All data in this chapter refers to **approved** projects.

The lead partners (LP) are predominantly coming from Slovenia (23 out of 38; 60,5 %). In the case of strategic projects, the share of both countries is equal (50 % Slovenian, 50 % Croatian). In PA 2 Slovenian applicants are leading 15 projects (out of 26; 58 %), while in PA3 Slovenians are leading 6 projects (out of 8; 75 %) (for more details see table 12).

Table 16: PA2 and PA3 distribution of lead partners (LP) between SLO and CRO

		SLOVENIAN LP	CROATIAN LP
1 ST DEADLINE	PA2	2	1
	PA3	2	0
	TOTAL	4	1
2 ND DEADLINE	PA2	8	3
	PA3	0	1
	TOTAL	8	4
3 RD DEADLINE	PA2	5	7
	PA3	4	1
	TOTAL	9	8
TOTAL PA2+PA3		21	13
Strategic		2	2
All together		23	15

Source: Own calculation based on the data available at si-hr.eu data, 27. 1. 2019.

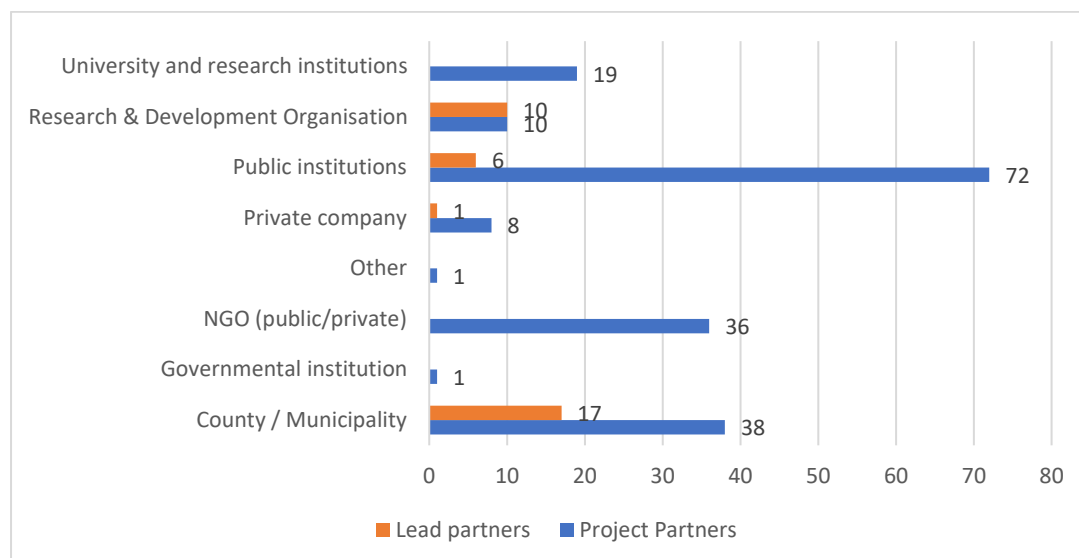
34 projects are implemented by 218 project partners (34 lead partners, 184 project partners). As shown in Picture 1 legal status of majority of the Lead partners are Municipalities / Counties (17 out of 34), followed by the research and development organizations (10) and 1 private company. Among PP the majority of applicants is Public institutions (72), followed by County/Municipality (38) and NGO (36).

Among PP there are 17 institutions participating in more than one project – 14 institutions are participating in two projects, two in three projects and one institution in four projects. Legal forms of the institution differ – they are public institutions, NGOs, Counties, municipalities, SMEs, research and development organizations.

Among LP there are 20 institutions participating as LP and PP.

Taking into consideration that institutions participated in more than one project, altogether there were 153 different institutions participating in the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR.

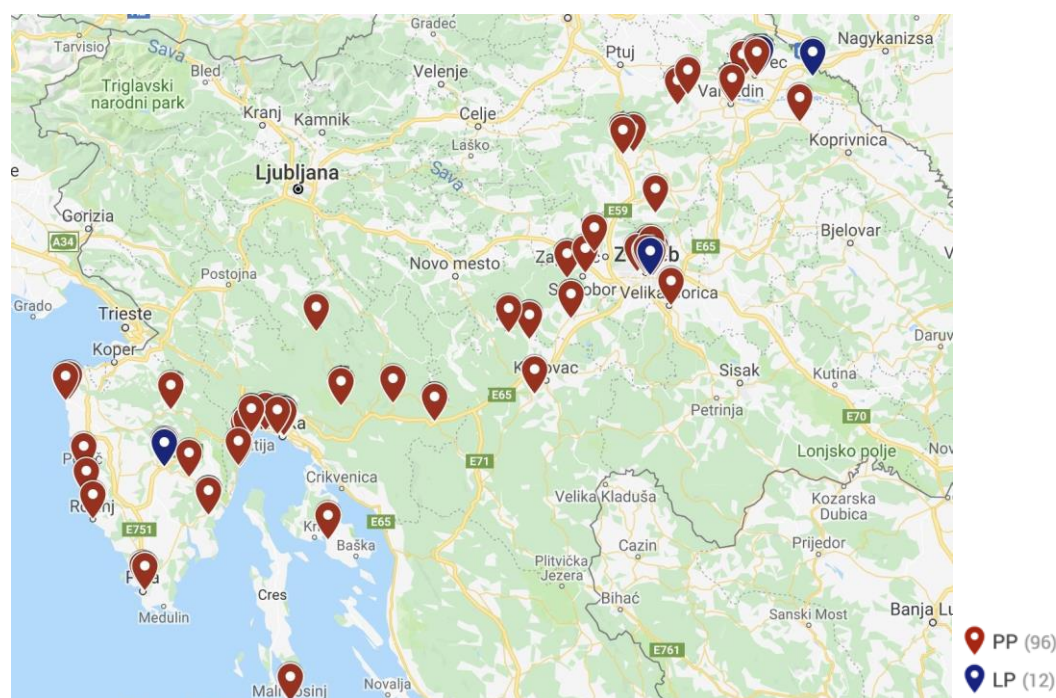
Picture 1: Legal status of LP and PP



Source: eMS

In Picture 1 the legal status of LP and PP is presented. The majority of institutions among PP are public institutions (72), counties/municipalities (38) and NGOs (36), among LP the majority of institutions are counties/municipalities (17). In Picture 2 and 3 distribution of Croatian and Slovenian LP and PP are shown. As it can be seen the distribution of Croatian institutions is well dispersed across counties (županija), still the most institutions come from grad Zagreb (the capital). In Slovenia there is high concentration of beneficiaries in Osrednje slovenska region (with the capital Ljubljana), also Obalno-Kraška region stands out.

Picture 2: Distribution of Croatian LP and PP (approved projects)



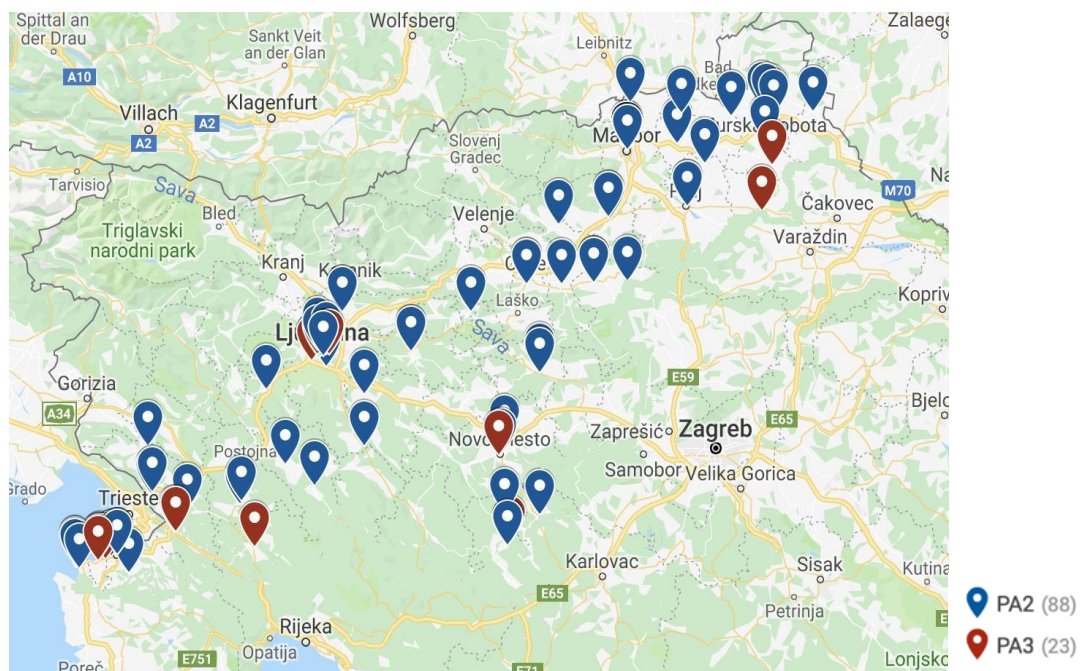
Source: eMS, own elaboration

Picture 3: Distribution of Slovenian LP and PP (approved projects)



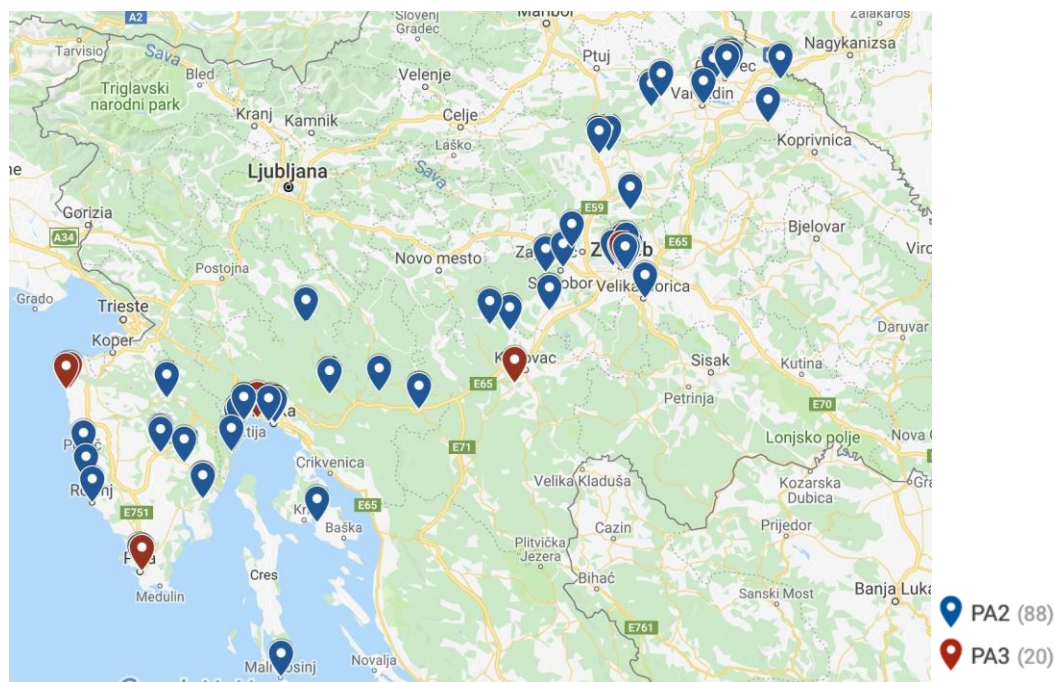
Source: eMS, own elaboration

Picture 4: Distribution of LP and PP according to PA (SI) (approved projects)



Source: eMS, own elaboration

Picture 5: Distribution of LP and PP according to PA (HR) (approved projects)

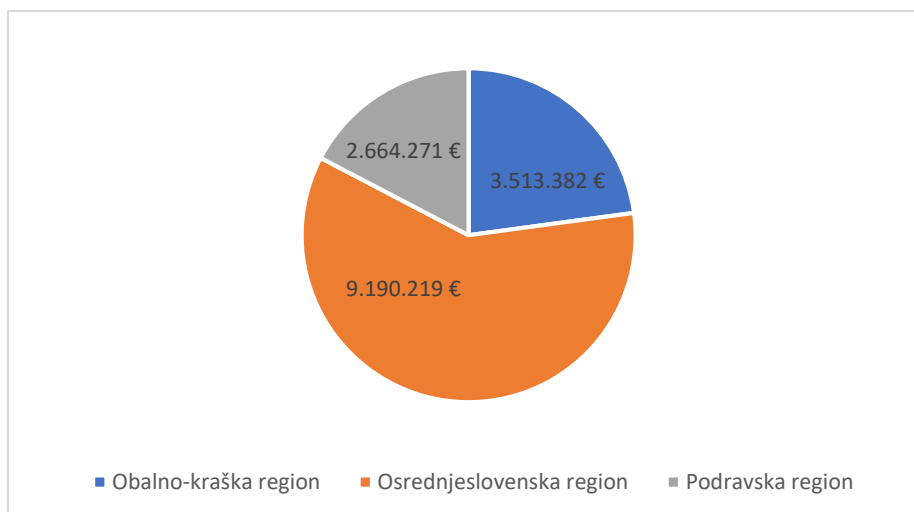


Source: eMS, own elaboration

The Pictures 4 and 5 show the distribution of institutions according to PA. As it can be seen, there are 23 institutions involved in PA3 in Slovenia and 20 institutions involved in PA3 in Croatia. In both countries the institutions are dispersed across countries.

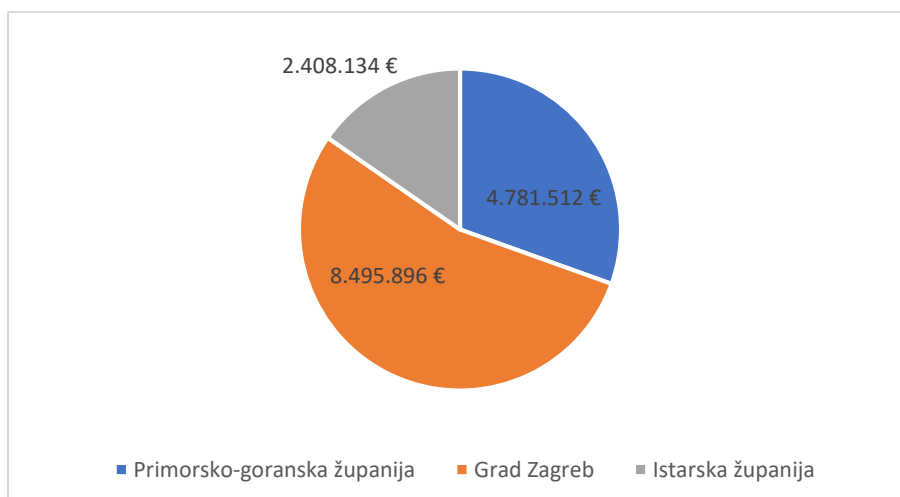
Within the PA 1, PA 2 and PA 3 the most represented Slovenian project partners are from Osrednjeslovenska region (35 project partners, 9.190.219), followed by Obalno-kraška region (24 project partners) 3.513.382 € ERDF contracted), and Podravska region (18 project partners, 2.664.271 € ERDF contracted) (Picture 6). The most represented project partners from Croatia are from Grad Zagreb (21 project partners, 8.495.896 € ERDF contracted), Primorsko-goranska županija (34 project partners, 4.781.512 € ERDF contracted), Istarska županija (18 project partners, 2.408.134 € ERDF contracted) (Picture 7).

Picture 6: ERDF distribution under PA1, PA2 and PA3 by the most represented Slovenian NUTS3 regions



Source: JS

Picture 7: ERDF distribution under PA1, PA2, PA3 by the most represented Croatian NUTS3 regions



Source: JS

Only three Slovenian regions (Obalno-kraška, Osrednjeslovenska and Podravska) were represented with accepted projects within the 1st deadline, while in Croatia the partners and ERDF distribution were more diversified among seven participating regions. During the 2nd deadline already six Slovenian regions were represented, and in the last 3rd deadline all nine regions. The least represented partners are from Spodnjeposavska, Pomurska and Zasavska region. All Croatian regions participated in the 2nd and 3rd deadline, the least represented are partners from Varaždinska, Karlovačka and Krapinsko-Zagorska županija.

Table 17: ERDF distribution (for PA 1, PA2, PA 3) by the NUTS3 regions, project partners and projects*

NUTS 3 Region		1st deadline			2nd deadline			3rd deadline			Total		
Slovenia		PP	Projects	ERDF (in €)	PP	Projects	ERDF (in €)	PP	Projects	ERDF (in €)	PP	Projects	ERDF (in €)
Pomurska	SI011				6	3	675.282	2	2	375.133	8	5	1.050.415
Podravska	SI012	6	2	875.762	5	4	932.357	7	6	925.605	18	12	2.733.724
Savinjska	SI014							8	6	1.421.145	8	6	1.421.145
Zasavska	SI015							3	2	799.255	3	2	799.255
Posavska	SI016							2	2	182.679	2	2	182.679
Jugovzhodna Slovenija	SI017				5	3	1.105.319	4	2	851.749	9	5	1.957.068
Primorsko-notranjska	SI018				1	1	67.443	5	2	1.224.075	6	3	1.291.518
Osrednjeslovenska	SI021	5	5	5.263.852	15	6	2.428.307	15	10	2.538.674	35	21	10.230.833
Obalno-kraška	SI024	8	3	1.199.474	7	3	972.147	9	3	1.346.502	24	9	3.518.124
Total Slovenia				6.463.326			4.573.216			9.664.817			23.184.761
Croatia													
Primorsko-goranska županija	HR031	5	2	1.219.846	15	6	2.060.285	14	6	1.501.379	34	14	4.781.509
Varaždinska županija	HR044	3	1	262.374	2	1	214.481	3	3	331.831	8	5	808.685
Međimurska županija	HR046				4	2	736.012	5	3	655.560	9	5	1.391.572
Grad Zagreb	HR041	2	3	5.064.059	8	6	912.562	11	8	1.478.662	21	17	7.455.283
Zagrebačka županija	HR042	1	1	112.671	2	2	116.374	5	4	1.004.983	8	7	1.234.028
Istarska županija	HR036	4	3	385.310	5	3	630.332	9	4	1.379.173	18	10	2.394.815
Karlovačka županija	HR040	1	1	125.589	2	1	459.281	2	1	329.916	5	3	914.786
Krapinsko-zagorska županija	HR043	1	1	123.847	1	1	174.845	4	3	603.906	6	5	902.598
Total Croatia				7.293.696			5.304.172			7.285.409			19.883.277
TOTAL				13.757.023			9.877.388			16.950.226			43.068.038

Source: JS, own calculation

*all four FRISCO projects are in this table included in 1st deadline

The Table 17 shows the amount of ERDF contracted by regions. As it can be seen the most successful are Osrednjeslovenska region (10.230.833 €), followed by Grad Zagreb (7.455.283 €). It needs to be mentioned, that partners participating in all four FRISCO projects come from those two regions, which also contributes to high amounts of ERDF funds in those regions.

Regions benefiting the least from the programme are Posavska region (182.679 €), Zasavska region (799.255 €), Varaždinska županija (808.685 €), Krapinsko-zagorska županija (902.598 €) and Karlovačka županija (914.786 €).

The programme has allocated ERDF funds to four Priority Axes (PA 1- 22 %, PA 2-61 %, PA 3 – 11 % and PA 4- 6 %). In the first deadline of the open call, 13 % allocated ERDF was approved to the PA 2 and 19 % allocated ERDF to the PA 3. For the strategic projects, 49 % allocated ERDF was approved to the PA 1 until the 21st December 2017 (signed two contracts). The programme has so far certified 35 % ERDF expenditure under the PA 1, 55 % ERDF expenditure under the PA 2 and 81 % under the PA 3 in relation to the approved amount and reported by the project partners. (Table 18 and 19)

Table 18: Status of the financial implementation by Priority axis (PA1 and PA4)

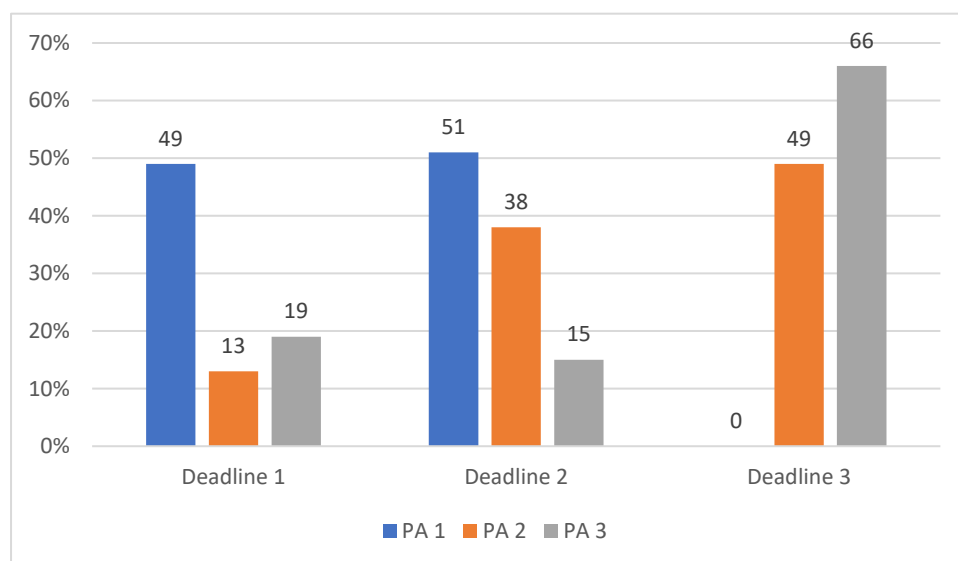
PA	ERDF (€) allocated (Financing Plan in the CP)	ERDF allocated in %	ERDF (€) approved	Approved ERDF in % allocated	Total Expenditure (€)	Total Expenditure in % of allocated	Total expenditure in % of approved
PA 1	10.026.557	21,74%	10.026.555	100%	1.693.780	17%	17%
PA 4	3.000.000	6,51%	3.000.000	100%	827.905	28%	28%

Table 19: Status of the financial implementation by the Calls and Priority axis (PA2 and PA3)

PA	ERDF (€) allocated (Financing Plan in the	ERDF allocated in %	ERDF (€) approved 1st Call for Proposals	Approved ERDF in % allocated	ERDF Expenditure (€)	ERDF Expenditure in % of allocated	ERDF expenditure in % of approved	ERDF (€) approved 2nd Call of Proposals	Approved ERDF in % allocated	ERDF Expenditure (€)	ERDF Expenditure in % of allocated	ERDF expenditure in % of approved	ERDF (€) approved 3rd Call of Proposals	Approved ERDF in % allocated	ERDF Expenditure (€)	ERDF Expenditure in % of approved	ERDF expenditure in % of approved
PA 2	28.074.358	60,88%	3.650.280	13%	1.990.152	7%	55%	10.766.717	38%	3.645.467	13%	34%	13.642.149	49%	0	0%	0%
PA 3	5.013.278	10,87%	955.949	19%	777.719	16%	81%	731.629	15%	237.707	5%	32%	3.308.077	66%	0	0%	0%
TOTAL ALL 4 PAs	46.114.193	71,75%	4.606.230	10%	2.767.871	6%	60%	11.498.346	25%	3.883.174	8%	34%	16.950.226	37%	0	0%	0%

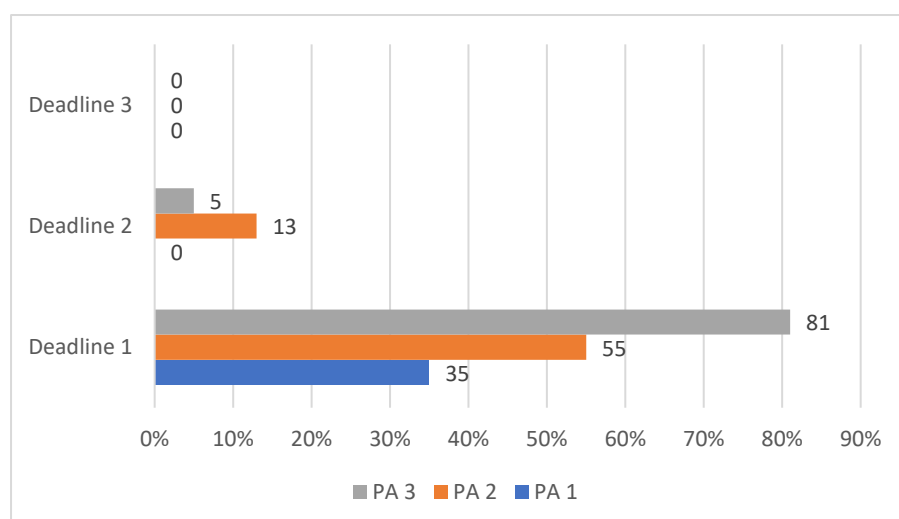
Picture 8 shows the distribution of the ERDF related to the allocated PA in the second deadline was 38 % to the PA 2 (of those 34 % already certified ERDF expenditure) and 15 % to the PA3 (of those 32 % certified ERDF expenditure). For the strategic projects, 51 % allocated ERDF was approved to the PA 1 until the 15th February 2019 (signed two contracts). In the third deadline more ERDF was approved to the PA 3 – 66 % and 49 % to the PA 2. Picture 9 shows ERDF certified expenditure in % of approved by the Priority Axes and three deadlines.

Picture 8: Approved ERDF in % allocated by the Priority Axes and three deadlines



Source: JS, own calculation

Picture 9: ERDF certified expenditure in % of approved by the Priority Axes and three deadlines (as of May 10, 2019)



Source: JS, own calculation

3.4 Project partnerships

To be eligible for financing, the project partnership had to consist of at least 2 partners, one from Slovenia and one from Croatia, one Lead partner (LP) and one Project partner (PP). The minimum requirement was to have at least one project partner from Slovenia and one from Croatia or an EGTC registered in one of the participating countries consisting of members from both Member States. LP must be located in the Programme Area; Projects Partners should be located in the Programme Area; if PP is located outside the programme area a justification must be provided in the Application Form.

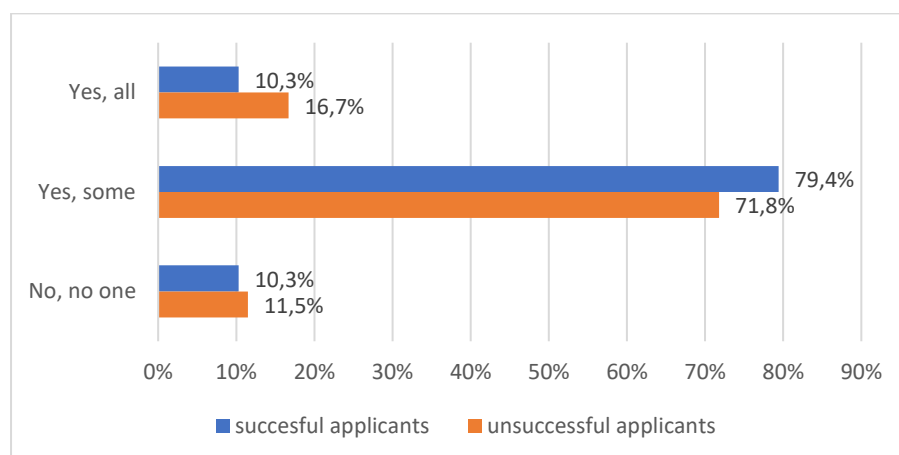
Regarding the partners in projects, the overall number of all partners in accepted projects is 184 PP and 34 LP, which constitutes an average of 6 partners per project.

Results of the online survey

According to the on-line survey the majority of applicants knew at least some of the partners before the application.

Among successful applicants, there were 10 % of those, who didn't know any of the partners before the application. Among unsuccessful applicants, there were 12 % of those who didn't know any of the partners.

Picture 10: Partnership before the application



Source: Online survey

Table 20: How did you meet your partners

	Successful applicants	Unsuccessful
We participated in other European Cross Border Cooperation programs.	20 %	31,8%
We participated in other programs co-financed by European funds.	16,7%	18,2%
Other	76,7%	60,6%

Source: Online survey

The majority of applicants (successful and unsuccessful) met their partners through other occasions than previous participation in EU co-funded projects. In programmes co-financed by European funds (e.g. Erasmus, Horizon 2020, Life, 7th framework program) cooperated 16,7 % of successful applicants and 18,2 % of unsuccessful. As seen among successful applicants, there are 20 % of those, who have participated with their partners in other European Cross-border Cooperation programs, while among unsuccessful applicants there are even 31,8 % of those who have participated with their partners in other European Cross-border Cooperation programs.

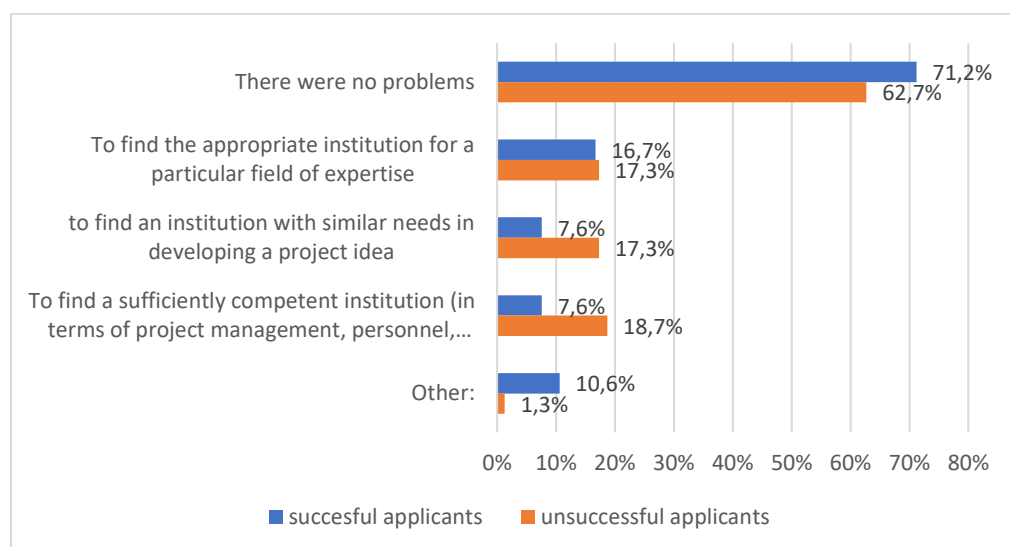
Other occasions where partners met were mainly the following:

- professional networks,
- personal networks,
- other activities not financed from EU funds,
- conferences,
- national programmes

Those who didn't know their partners met them mainly through other business partners.

Among successful applicants there were 71 % who said they had no problems in forming partnerships, while among unsuccessful applicant the share of those was a bit lower – 63 % (Picture 11). On general we can say that unsuccessful applicants had more difficulties in forming partnership, for them it was more difficult to find a sufficiently competent institution (in terms of project management, personnel, financial capability) (19 %), and also to find the institution with similar needs in developing a project idea (17 %).

Picture 11: Difficulties in forming the partnership (successful/ unsuccessful)

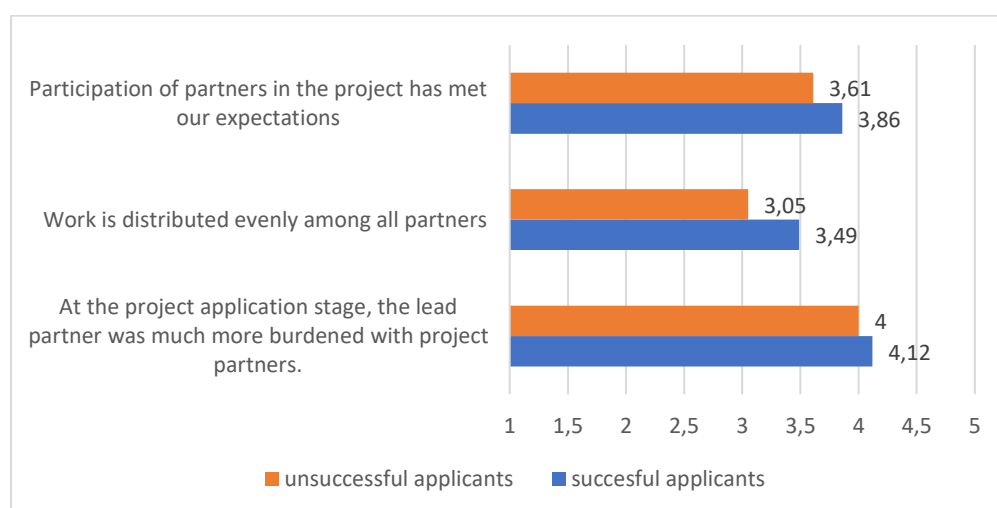


Source: Online survey

The difficulties in forming the partnerships that successful applicants listed, related mainly to difficulties with including public institutions (co-financing is difficult, no systemized working positions for project work) into the partnership.

The cooperation between partners was better among the group of successful applicants, although the successful applicants agree more (compared to unsuccessful) that during project application phase the lead partner is more burdened compared to other project partners. Nevertheless, the majority of successful applicants agree, that the participation of partners has met their expectations (mean value 3,9 (on the scale from 1 to 5) (Picture 12).

Picture 12: Cooperation between partners



Source: Online survey

Experience of LPs

The institutions in the partnerships are quite diverse (in sampled projects that meant: municipalities, public and private institutions in the field of sustainable tourism, protection of cultural and natural heritage at national, regional and local level). Collaboration between partners is considered excellent. In most cases, these are partnerships that existed before the project and will continue after the project is completed, either on the same or other topics. In all cases, partnerships reflected the program's expectations.

Participation of SMEs

In previous programming period SMEs were not eligible as direct beneficiaries, in this programming period SMEs could apply in PA2, SO 2.1 (Active heritage preservation through sustainable tourism). Direct involvement of SMEs in tourism sector is considered to better seize potentials for job creation in tourism and related services. There is a need to better collaboration between heritage sites, museums, protected areas and small businesses initiatives.

As stated in CP "Heritage and traditions shall be promoted as inspiration for innovation in visitor packages, local cuisine, product design, crafts, arts, etc. There is an obvious need for increasing awareness and a knowledge base among the local SMEs and populations regarding challenges offered by heritage."

In the programme there are 7 SMEs participating, two of them answered the survey. For them perceived benefits of participation are networking and sharing the knowledge across border. Challenges for SMEs are similar to challenges of other institutions - administrative procedures and long waiting time for reimbursement.

Despite the possibility for participating in the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR, the number of participating SMEs seems low. The reasons for that can be that they were not aware of the possibility to apply, they had problems with financial capability (for small enterprises it can be difficult to wait for funds) or did not have other capacities (in terms of project management, personnel).

Among unsuccessful applicants there were 76 SMEs (the data derives from eMS, where we selected all institutions which had d.o.o. or sp. in their full name, which indicates, that the institution is SME⁵. Of those 37 were from Croatia and 39 from Slovenia. 23 SMEs applied as LP, of those 4 were from Croatia in 19 from Slovenia.

3.5 Achieved indicators

3.5.1 Progress towards achieving the objectives of the programme

The progress in the achievement of the programme objectives is assessed on the basis of reported outcomes of the projects, which were approved until 31 December 2018, and their expected contributions to the programme output indicators and specific

⁵ All development agencies were excluded from that list

objectives. The calculation of result indicators for priority axes is planned for 2019. In Table 21 result indicators are shown.

Table 21: Result indicators (by priority axis and specific objective)

<i>Automatic from SFC</i>						ANNUAL VALUE		
ID	Indicator	Measure- ment Unit	Baseline Value	Baseline Year	Target Value (2023)	2016	2018	Observations (if necessary)
5bRI	Share of targeted transboundary river basins area under flood risk	%	6,47%	2014	5%	6,47%	6,47 %	Data provided by MOP
6cRI	Visitors to cultural and natural heritage sites in the programme area	Number	4,911,583	2013	5,750,000	4,911,583	5.919.310 (SI: 3,161,866; HR: 2,757,444)	No data for Slovenia is available for 2018. The data used for SI is from 2017.
6dRI1	Average degree of conservation status of habitat types and species of Natura 2000 sites in programme area-species	Number	Species CS:	2014	Species CS:	2,05	2,05	No new data available
			2,05		2,052			
6dRI2	Average degree of conservation status of habitat types and species of Natura 2000 sites in programme area-habitat	Number	Habitat CS:	2014	Habitat CS:	2,07	2,07	No new data available
			2,07		2,072			
11RI	Level of cooperation quality in the field of health, social care, safety and mobility services within the programme area	Average score from 0 to 5	2,22	2015	3,33	2,22	2,6	Data collected with online survey, Indicator computed according to the methodology

Indicators assessment includes outputs of approved projects under the first, second and third deadline of the open call for all four priority axes.

Priority axis 1

Projects under the Priority axis 1 are still in progress, and no indicators have been reported yet. Contracted values corresponded to the targeted.

FRISCO 1 had initially several risks in terms of achieving the objectives (the pre-ambitious content of the project, communication problems due to the excessive number of partners and, consequently, participants in working meetings ...), now as the project is almost finished, it is clear that the objectives will be achieved.

FRISCO 2.1, 2.2. and 2.3 are implementation projects. However, the timetable for the application of the project on the Slovenian side was not appropriate – the application of the projects was done before the study was completed within FRISCO 1. During the implementation of FRISCO 2.1 VONARJE it turned out that the joint implementation (construction) at the border is not possible. At the border line, only balanced implementation on each side of the border is possible, which is very difficult in the management of shared rivers. There is also a major problem with financial control, the project has to be technically artificially divided.

However, the initial problems have been resolved and there is no doubt the projects will be implemented and will achieve the objectives.

Table 22: Output indicators of PA 1 for projects approved under the Strategic call CP Interreg V-A SI-HR

Indicator	Call for strategic projects			
	Target value (2023)	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted
Measurement unit	Persons			
CO20- Population benefiting from flood protection measures	1.500	1.609	0	0%
Measurement unit	Number			
5b-1- Transboundary river basins with joint tools, models and maps for flood risk	6	6	0	0%
Measurement unit	Number			
5b-2- Transboundary river basins with pilot structural flood risk reduction measures implemented	4	4	0	0%
Measurement unit	Number			
5b-3- People with increased professional capacity due to their participation in cross-border activities in transboundary flood risk and river basin management	20	20	0	0%

Source: JS, own calculation

Table 23: Performance framework: Project's contribution 2018 by the indicators of PA 1

Output Indicator			
	Target value (2023)	Achieved	Total achieved in % of targeted
Measurement unit	Number		
Output 5b-2- Transboundary river basins with pilot structural	4	0	0%
Measurement unit	Number		
Key implementation step 5bKI - Transboundary river basins where works have started	1	2	200%

Source: JS, own calculation

PA1 (5b) - Specific objective 1.1: Flood risk reduction in the transboundary Dragonja, Kolpa/Kupa, Sotla/Sutla, Drava, Mura and Bregana river basins

100 % of ERDF funds allocated to PA1 were contracted for four strategic projects prepared by the Croatian and Slovenian water authorities that will contribute to coordinated flood risk management and to reduce flood risks through the implementation of non-structural measures (joint models, maps and tools) in 6 targeted river basins. Projects under the Priority axis 1 are still in progress, and no indicators have been reported yet. Key implementation step 5bKI is achieved by the two transboundary river basins, where works have started. Contracted values correspond to the targeted.

Expected contribution of approved projects to the programme output indicators:

The approved projects are expected to contribute 100 % to the achievement of the target value of output indicators 5b-1, 5b-2 and 5b-3 and CO020. Strategic project FRISCO 1 contributes to the 5b-1 (Transboundary river basins with joint tools, models and maps for flood risk management) and 5b-3 (People with increased professional capacity due to their participation in cross-border activities in transboundary flood risk and river basin management). While the contribution to output indicator CO20 (Population benefiting from flood protection measures) is addressed to all four projects (FRISCO 1, FRISCO 2.1., FRISCO 2.2., FRISCO 2.3.) the indicator 5b-2 (Transboundary river basins with pilot structural flood risk reduction measures implemented) is addressed by three strategic projects (FRISCO 2.1., FRISCO 2.2., FRISCO 2.3.). The activities on the implementation of strategic projects are closely monitored by the Monitoring Committee.

Priority axis 2

Under the Priority axis 2 indicators have been reported partly and in accordance with the project life cycle. Values of two indicators - indicator CO09 "Increase in the expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attraction" and, 6c-3 "Persons participating in capacity-building activities", have far

exceeded the targeted values. The targeted values, in accordance with the contracted and achieved values, might be underestimated for both indicators. Unless in the comparison of total achieved in the percentage of contracted the numbers remains low. The poorest indicator results are in the 6c-2 *“New or improved cross-border sustainable tourism products or destinations integrating natural or cultural heritage”* due to unfinished project implementation.

Table 24: Output Indicators of PA 2 for projects approved under the 1st, 2nd and 3rd deadline of the open call CP Interreg V-A SI-HR

Indicator	1st deadline				2nd deadline			3rd deadline			Total achieved in % of contracted			Total achieved in % of targeted
	Target value (2023)	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted	
Measurement unit	Visits/year													
C009- Increase in expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural pr natural heritage and attractions	50.000	62.680	123.544	197%	140.500	3.156	2%	86.552	0	0%	289.732	126.700	44%	253%
Measurement unit	Number													
6c-1- Small-scale investments in visitor infrastructure and preservation of cultural and natural heritage	15	17	8	47%	28	8	29%	24	0	0%	69	16	23%	107%
Measurement unit	Number													
6c-2- New or improved cross-border sustainable tourism products or destinations integrating natural or cultural heritage	20	13	0	0%	27	1	4%	22	0	0%	62	1	2%	5%
Measurement unit	Number													
6c-3- Persons participating in capacity-building activities	500	600	139	23%	4.939	1.557	32%	2.458	0	0%	7.997	1.696	21%	339%
Measurement unit	Enterprises													
C001- Number of enterprises receiving support	7	0	0	0	4	0	0%	3	0	0%	7	0	0%	0%
Measurement unit	Enterprises													
C002- Number of enterprises receiving grants	7	0	0	0	4	0	0%	3	0	0%	7	0	0%	0%
Measurement unit	Hectares (ha)													
C023- Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	31.000	0	0	0	221,82	152,55	69%	32.211,15	0	0%	32.432,97	152,55	0,5%	0,5%
Measurement unit	Number													
6d-1 Implemented practical demonstrations of measures in nature in support of biodiversity	10	0	0	0	10	2	20%	19	0	0%	29	2	6,9%	20%
Measurement unit	Number													
6d-2 Joint studies and tools for assessing and promoting ecosystem services developed	3	0	0	0	12	0	0%	1	0	0%	13	0	0%	0%
Measurement unit	Number													
6d-3 Persons with improved practical skills and competences fori mplementation of biodiversity protection measures and valorisation of ecosystem services	250	0	0	0	290	45	16%	360	0	0%	650	45	6,9%	18%

Source: JS, own calculation

Table 25: Performance framework: Project's contribution 2018 by the indicators of PA2

Output Indicator			
	Target value (2023)	Achieved	Total achieved in % of targeted
Measurement unit	Number		
Output 6c-1- Small-scale investments in visitor infrastructure and preservation of cultural and natural heritage	15	16	107%
Measurement unit	Number		
Key implementation step 6cKI - Restoration or construction works at heritage sites or supporting visitor infrastructure started	15	32	213%
Measurement unit	Hectares		
Output CO23 - Surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status	31.000	152,55	0%
Measurement unit	Area covered (ha)		
Key implementation step 6dKI - Surface area of habitats planned to be supported based on selected projects in order to attain a better conservation status	31.000	32.433	105%

Source: MS/JS, own calculation

PA2 (6c, d) - Specific objective 2.1: Active heritage preservation through sustainable tourism

The highest interest of potential beneficiaries measured in a number of received applications under all three deadlines of the open call for PA2 and PA3 was for the investment priority 6c. Tourism remains one of the strongest areas of cross border cooperation between Slovenia and Croatia, which was also recognized in the previous programme period.

Twenty-six approved projects, which account for 61 % of ERDF funds allocated to PA2, are expected to contribute to the programme specific objective through the development of new or upgrading of existing sustainable tourist products. These are based on the valorization of the cultural and natural heritage of the programme area. As regards selected themes, the protection and valorization of maritime heritage in the coastal areas, ethnological heritage of rural areas in Podravska and Varaždinska regions, historical parks, network of museums and castles, ethnobotanics, and development of different tourist packages (with culinary, active holidays, traditional customs) integrating dispersed cultural heritage in six programme eligible regions were supported. The programme area is expected to benefit from new maritime heritage interpretation centers, tourist info centers, visitor centers and new packages and programme for selected target groups, including solutions for monitoring of visits. Much emphasis is given to capacity building activities and promotion of the new tourism products. Modern technologies are planned to be used in product development (virtual museums, virtual reality applications, 3D experience ethno house...).

Expected contribution of approved projects to the programme output indicators (Table 25)

Under the Priority axis 2 indicators have been reported partly and in accordance with the project life cycle. Values of two indicators, firstly indicator CO09 *Increase in the expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attraction* and, 6c-3 *Persons participating in capacity-building activities*, have far exceeded the targeted values. CO09 has contracted the number of 289.732 visits per year (targeted 50.000), of those achieved so far 126.700 (44 %), and 253 % of targeted. Indicator 6c-3 has contracted the number of 7.997 persons (targeted 500), of those achieved so far 1.696 (21 %), and 339 % of targeted.

The targeted values, in accordance with the contracted and achieved values, might be underestimated for both indicators.

Table 25 shows indicator 6c-1 contracted 69 small-scale investments in visitor infrastructure and preservation of cultural and natural heritage (targeted 15), of those achieved so far are 16 (23 %) and 107 % of targeted.

Indicator 6c-2 *New or improved cross-border sustainable tourism products or destinations integrating natural or cultural heritage* - 62 are contracted (targeted 20), of those achieved so far are 3 (5 %) and 15 % of targeted. Poor performance is shown due to unfinished projects implementation.

Indicators CO01 *Number of enterprises receiving support* (targeted 7) and Indicator CO02 *Number of enterprises receiving grants* have contracted the target value of 7.

- The number of achieved visits per year to supported sites of cultural or natural heritage (CO09) has exceeded the programme targets by 253 % (126,700 achieved compared to 50,000 targeted).
- Small scale-investment in visitor infrastructure and preservation of cultural and natural heritage (6c-1) in approved projects is exceeded by 107 % (69 contacted, 16 achieved, 15 targeted).
- The projects include contacted 62 new or improved sustainable CB-tourist products (for example new cross-border routes with heritage attractions and services), so far achieved 3 (15 % achieved compared to 20 targeted) of the programme output indicator 6c-2.
- The approved projects intend to involve 7.997 persons in capacity building activities (1.696 achieved, 339 % above the set target for indicator 6c-3 (500 persons)).

Specific objective 2.2: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and promoting ecosystem services

Four projects were approved under the specific objective 2.1., two in the 2nd and two in the 3rd deadline. The projects are ensuring the durability of the conservation and restoration of target species in Natura 2000 areas of the rivers Sotla and Kolpa, Risnjak National Park, the Radensko polje area, and the Kamarčnik canyon. Furthermore, project activities will support the maintenance of a stable population of terns on gravel habitats along the Sava and Drava rivers and improve its conservation status in Natura

2000 sites and improve conservation status of large carnivores (lynx, wolf and bear) in the Natura 2000 areas Javorniki-Snežnik, Notranjski trikotnik and Gorski kotar and Lika.

Expected contribution of approved projects to the programme output indicators:

Under the Specific objective 2.2, indicators have been reported partly, for two projects awarded under the 2nd deadline and achieved performance indicators are low due to projects in progress. Contracted values exceed the targeted values in all output indicators.

- The surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status (CO23) has achieved so far 0,5 % (152 ha) of the targeted value (31.000 ha). The contracted number is 32.433 ha.
- Implemented practical demonstrations of measures in nature in support of biodiversity (6d-1) has achieved 20 % (2 demonstrations) of the targeted value (10). The contracted number is 29.
- Projects reported 45 persons with improved practical skills and competencies for implementation of biodiversity protection measures and valorization of ecosystem services (6d-3), achieved 18 % of the targeted values (250 persons). The contacted number of 650 persons are expected to be reported in the next two years.
- None of the joint studies and tools for assessing and promoting ecosystem services was developed so far (6d-2). The contracted number (13) has surpassed the targeted value (3) and it is foreseen that the indicator will be achieved in the next two years.

Priority axis 3

Table 26: Output Indicators of PA 3 for projects approved under the 1st, 2nd and 3rd deadline of the open call CP Interreg V-A SI-HR

Indicator	1st deadline					2nd deadline		3rd deadline			Total achieved in % of contracted			Total achieved in % of targeted
	Target value (2023)	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted	Contracted	Achieved	Total achieved in % of contracted	
Measurement unit	Number													
11-1- Institutions participating in cross-border structures	45	20	24	120%	33	11	33%	51	0	0%	104	35	34%	78%
Measurement unit	Number													
11-2-Persons representing institutions and stakeholders from the programme area with improved skills and competences in CB	300	566	519	92%	290	30	10%	868	0	0%	1.724	549	32%	183%

Source: MS/JS, own calculation

The progress of both indicators under the Priority axis 3 (Table 26) is steady and in the line, reaching the targeted values. The targeted number of indicator 11-2 Persons representing institutions and stakeholders from the programme area with improved skills and competences in CB might be underestimated in comparison to the achieved values.

Table 27: Performance framework: Project's contribution 2018 by the indicators of PA 3

Output Indicator			
	Target value (2023)	Achieved	Total achieved in % of targeted
Measurement unit	Number		
Output 11-1- Institutions participating in cross-border structures	45	35	78%

Source: MS/JS, own calculation

Eight approved projects, which account for 11 % of ERDF funds allocated to PA3, are addressing the institutional cooperation in the field of social and health care and are focused on the provision of services for citizens, elderly persons, persons with dementia, etc.

The projects will facilitate the increased exchange of good practices between cooperating institutions, identification of solutions for optimisation of services for people with dementia, a joint programme for deinstitutionalized long-term care for the elderly, day care center. Joint cross-border protection and rescues operation team is established for elementary natural disasters (floods, earthquakes). A sustainable network of key medical institutions in the area of emergency medical service in the cross-border region is established. All projects will contribute to capacity building targets of the programme by training of persons providing home care services, persons working with people with dementia, social workers, citizens etc.

The expected contribution of the approved projects to programme output objectives:

- 104 institutions will be participating in CBC structures, achieved so far: 35 institutions, which contributes to 78 % of the set target value for indicator 11-1 (45 institutions).
- it is expected that 1.724 persons representing institutions and stakeholders in the programme area will improve skills and competencies, achieved so far: 549 persons which is already 83 % above the set target value of the indicator 11-2 (300 persons).

Table 28: Framework performance by the PA 1, PA 2 and PA 3 (as of April 16, 2019)

	PA 1			PA 2			PA 3		
	PLAN (CP)	PLAN (AF)	ACHIEVEMENT	PLAN (CP)	PLAN (AF)	ACHIEVEMENT	PLAN (CP)	PLAN (AF)	ACHIEVEMENT
Financial	1.720.000,00	2.450.409,56	1.693.780,01	3.963.439,00	4.988.932,44	6.630.139,75	707.757,00	1.214.753,12	1.194.619,26
Key implementation step 5bKI (Transboundary river basins with pilot structural flood risk reduction measures implemented)	1	1	2						
Key implementation step 6cKI (Restoration or construction works at heritage sites or supporting visitor infrastructure started)				5	44	32			
Key implementation step 6dKI (Surface area of habitats planned to be supported based on selected projects in order to attain a better conservation status)				10000	32.432,97	32.432,97			
Institutions participating in cross-border structures							3	53	35
TOTAL ACHIEVED (in %)	98,48%			167,28%			168,79%		

Source: MS/JS

Overall assessment of the achievement of the programme objectives

On the basis of the expected contribution of approved projects to the programme output indicators, the programme is about to progress well towards the achievement of specific objectives 1.1, 2.1, 2.2. and 3.1.

Contracted values under the PA 1 correspond to the targeted.

Under the PA 2 indicators have been reported partly and in accordance with the project life cycle. Values of two indicators, firstly indicator CO09 *Increase in the expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attraction* and secondly, 6c-3 *Persons participating in capacity-building activities*, have far exceeded the targeted values. The targeted values, in accordance with the contracted and achieved values, might be underestimated for both indicators. Unless in the comparison of total achieved in the percentage of contracted the numbers remains low. The poorest indicator results lay in the 6c-2 *New or improved cross-border sustainable tourism products or destinations integrating natural or cultural heritage* due to unfinished project implementation.

The progress of both indicators under the PA 3 is steady and in the line reaching the targeted values. The targeted number of indicator 11-2 *Persons representing institutions and stakeholders from the programme area with improved skills and competencies in CB* might be underestimated in comparison to the achieved values.

3.5.2 *Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*

The CP is expected to contribute the most to the sustainable growth objectives, followed by smart and inclusive growth.

- Sustainable growth - Promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy
- Smart growth - Developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation
- Inclusive growth - Fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial Cohesion

The CP Interreg V-A SI-HR aims at promoting sustainable, safe and vibrant border area by fostering smart approaches to preservation, mobilization and management of natural and cultural resources for the benefit of the people living and working in or visiting the area. The programme contributes to the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth mainly through PA 1, PA 2 and PA 3.

PA 2 - Preservation and sustainable use of natural and cultural resources mainly contribute to the two pillars, Sustainable growth- competitiveness and Smart growth – innovation and digital society with the specific objective 2.1: Active heritage preservation through sustainable tourism. The contribution is assessed through the indicators as stated below:

- an increase in the number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attraction by 290.000 visits per year at the programme area (CO09),
- 62 new or improved cross-border sustainable tourism products or destinations integrating natural or cultural heritage (6c-2),
- 13 new joint studies and tools for assessing and promoting ecosystem services developed (6d-2),
- 6 transboundary river basins with joint tools, models and maps for flood risk management developed (under PA 1, 5b-1).

Projects implemented under the PA 2 and PA 1 contributed to the development of the business environment and improved the framework conditions for innovation to strengthen the innovation chain and boost levels of investment.

PA 1- Integrated flood risk management in transboundary river basins and PA 3 - Healthy, safe and accessible border areas contribute to the pillar Inclusive growth – employment and skills and Sustainable growth – climate, energy and mobility flagship with the specific objective 3.1: Building partnerships among public authorities and stakeholders for healthy, safe and accessible border areas. The contribution is assessed through the indicators as stated below:

- 104 institutions participating in cross-border structures (11-1),
- 1.724 persons representing institutions and stakeholders from the programme area with improved skills and competences in CB (11-2),
- 20 people with increased professional capacity due to their participation in cross-border activities in transboundary flood risk and river basin management (5b-3).

Projects implemented under the PA 1 and PA 2 contributed to the development of skills and capacities.

3.5.3 Horizontal principles

The principles set out in the Article 7 of the Regulation (EU) no. 1303/2013 (equality between men and women and to promote non-discrimination) and the principles set out in Article 8 of the Regulation (EU) no 1303/2013 (Sustainable development) were considered in the programme implementation.

The horizontal principles and their explanation were included in the Implementation manual for beneficiaries – Part 1 (about the programme). Applicants had to self-assess contribution of the project to horizontal principles as positive, neutral or negative in the application forms and justify the assessment with concrete activities undertaken in the project.

The MC adopted the quality assessment criteria for the projects to be supported under PA2 and PA3. Under assessment of the set of strategic criteria the contributions of the projects to the promotion of equality between men and women and non-discrimination was observed by the assessors. The projects demonstrating positive contributions were assessed with 1 point for each of the two principles. The maximum score of points under strategic set of criteria is 39 for projects submitted. Horizontal principles were also observed in the assessment of the strategic project approved under PA1.

The need for respecting the horizontal principles was promoted on informative workshops for potential applicants to open call (34 projects). All projects have to respect horizontal principles. In application forms, all projects approved under PA2 and PA3 assessed contributions to the promotion of equality between men and women and non-discrimination as positive in the application forms.

There are no indicators to measure achievement of horizontal principles.

3.5.3.1 Equality between men and women, non-discrimination

Under PA1 (4 projects) the measures aiming at flood risk protection will contribute to equal opportunities for the development of the areas exposed to the risk of floods. The Project FRISCO 1 will contribute to the horizontal principles of equal opportunities and non-discrimination because flood risk prevention measures will create development opportunities for the population in areas threatened by flood risks. This should be achieved with the joint activities within the project area that will assure this area with new solutions and knowledge about the risk of floods and also prevent flooding. With these activities, the project area will gain more opportunities for the development which did not exist before.

Also, FRISCO 2., FRISCO 2.2 and FRISCO 2.3 plan activities in accordance with the principles of equal opportunities and will not generate discrimination of any kind (gender, race, religion, age). At all public events and other activities for the general public, special attention will be paid to accessibility of the venue. All project related activities (of all 4 projects) aimed at the flood risk reduction will contribute equally to men and women in the target area.

All 34 projects under PA2 and PA3 observe the two horizontal principles, while specific contributions are expected in particular through ensuring open access to participation in the project activities for men and women equally and with respect of non-discrimination.

In projects, equal opportunities and non-discrimination for all target groups are ensured. The use of project outputs for people with disabilities, older people, different religious beliefs and regardless of sexual orientation are ensured.

Projects will further allow free access to project results and knowledge. The tourist infrastructure, where relevant, will be constructed/renovated in a way to allow access to persons with disabilities.

Specific attention in ensuring equal opportunities is devoted to the elderly and persons with dementia. Contribution to quality of life expected by improved institutional capacities to provide better services and promote social inclusion.

In projects, a balanced number of men and women participating in project activities are ensured. Project activities will promote equal participation of both genders. The end users of services are the population in the program area without any gender differences.

Mainly all projects partners use gender-sensitive language and visual aids in their communication and dissemination material. Some partners are especially vigilant not to use any stereotypes and to use inclusive language.

3.5.4 *Sustainable development*

Under PA1 non-structural measures will contribute to coordinated flood risk management.

Actions proposed in the project aim at mitigating climate change effects and natural disasters due to increased risk of flooding and will address improvement of common knowledge base and capacities, joint planning and coordination. The planning aspects of the project will formulate concrete structural measures in flood prevention that will be preferentially based on environmentally sustainable and ecosystem-based solutions.

In terms of expected contributions, the projects under PA2 (SO 2.1) address sustainable tourism development and include actions to increase awareness of the

visitors and local population on the importance of preservation of the natural and cultural heritage and its valorization. The projects are about to observe in implementation efficient use of resources, use of communication technologies instead of travels, and similar.

Projects under PA2 SO2.2 (Protecting and restoring biodiversity and promoting ecosystem services) directly relate to sustainability in the view of the environment. For instance: the project "VEZI NARAVE" directly improves the status of meadows and aquatic species and habitats and contributes to the lasting ability ecosystems for the provision of ecosystem services. In addition to favorable conditions in nature, the project directly contributes to the preservation of natural resources, the development of niche and sustainable forms of economic activity.

Another example is project "LIKE" - the project contributes positively to the ecological, economic and social dimension of sustainable development. The project will reduce the negative impacts on nature, ensure the preservation of natural resources, and protect the biodiversity of the karst edge. The economic dimension will be stimulated by opening up new opportunities for ecotourism and organic farming.

3.5.5 Contribution to macro-regional and sea basin strategies

The programme pays due attention to the European Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) during implementation. Various priority areas of EUSDR and EUSAIR are reflected in the thematic objectives of the programme, as laid down in the CP.

Within the application, the contribution to the relevant macro-regional strategies has to be described by the project partners. 22 projects approved within all three deadlines of the Open Call of the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR are contributing to the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). The approved projects are contributing to the following pillars and priority areas of macro-regional strategies:

Priority areas of macro-regional strategies:

a) EUSDR (Slovenia, Croatia):

Main pillars: Connect the region, Protecting the environment, Strengthening the region, Building prosperity

- PA 03 – Culture and tourism:

<i>1st deadline</i>	<i>2nd deadline</i>	<i>3rd deadline</i>
ENJOY HERITAGE	Riviera4Seasons2	RIDE&BIKE II
DETOX	CLAUSTRA+	INSPIRACIJA
Mala barka 2	ECool-Tour	MITSKI PARK
	Prebujanje	/ kulTura
	Buđenje	Prehistory
	ZELENO ŽELIMO	Adventure
	ŽIVA COPRNIJA	NATURE&WILDLIFE

MISTERION	MINE TOUR
KRASn'KRŠ	In cultura veritas
Uživam tradicijo	LIVING CASTLES
	Kaštelir

- PA 05 – Environmental risks (FRISCO 1, FRISCO 2.1, FRISCO 2.2, FRISCO 2.3)

b) EUSAIR (Slovenia, Croatia);

Main pillars: 1. Blue growth, 2. Connecting the region, 3. Environmental quality, 4. Sustainable tourism

- Topic 4.1 Diversified tourism offers (the same projects as EUSDR PA03 (Culture and tourism))

An example of a project contributing to the EUSDR are all four FRISCO projects. The first project (FRISCO 1) which started in April 2016 and objective is to improve coordinated flood risk management and reduce flood risks. The main outputs will be sets of joint models, maps and tools for each of the six targeted transboundary river basins (Kupa/Kolpa, Sutla/Sotla, Drava, Mura, Dragonja and Bregana) with the associated design documentation for optimal structural measures, improved physical alert systems, and the outputs of awareness rising/capacity building activities. The ultimate beneficiary of the project is the affected population in the border area between Slovenia and Croatia. The Project's objectives can only be achieved through cross-border cooperation because, in line with the Floods Directive, the flood risk management planning should be done following the river basin approach in order to determine the optimal measures. The Project is original because of its comprehensiveness, both in terms of the spatial coverage (all transboundary river basins) and in terms of the scope of the measures (all key non-structural measures covering preparedness, prevention and response).

FRISCO 2.1, FRISCO 2.2, FRISCO 2.3 are investment projects, where cross border cooperation is of vital importance as any flood risk reduction measure on a transboundary river needs to be bilaterally coordinated to avoid one-sided approaches that could endanger the other side.

FRISCO 2.1 : The objective of the project is the implementation of a structural flood risk reduction measure – the modernization and upgrading of the Vonarje Dam, which is a key structural flood risk reduction element in the Sotla river basin.

FRISCO 2.2: The objective is to improve environmental conditions and to adapt to climate change by the construction / reconstruction of the high-water embankments to protect the Benica and Sveti Martin na Muri settlements and its inhabitants from flood risk.

FRISCO 2.3: The objective of the project is to put up protective walls for reduction of damage in the critical locations – in Hrvatsko area in Croatia and in Kuželj area in Slovenia.

3.5.6 Sustainability of projects

The aspect of the sustainability of the approved projects was evaluated according to the specific objectives of the program.

From the detailed analysis of the approved projects under **SO 2.1** it was detected that in 63 % of the approved projects the aspect of sustainability is more or less based on the commitment of the partners to implement and finance the project activities upon project completion. The implementation of this aspect might have some risks, as it is based on intentions of applicants, without clear planning. Some of the approved projects, for this purpose, made some pre-contracts (in form of the letter of intent). The fulfilment is somewhat more likely in projects where the roles (tasks and financing) of individual partners are clearly defined after the project is completed.

37 % of the approved projects defined the aspect of sustainability as a combination of the commitments of the project partners after the project completion (tasks and financing), the market assurance of sustainability (marketable products) and the connection of new products to existing products or programs or expanded existing programs with new content (from approved projects).

Such an aspect of sustainability contains significantly less risk and is more likely to be met. Projects that will develop actual market-relevant tourist products are much more suitable for dissemination and upgrading. Especially those touristic products that can be linked to the existing tourist offer or program in individual destinations (museums, galleries, historic and natural sights, festivals, sports, recreational and educational activities).

Good example of a project on a specific objective: Living Castles

Sustainability will be ensured by all PPs through the formalization of cooperation, the introduction of unified standards and methodologies in the formulation of offers and their market orientation, and by combining existing offers into a whole. For an integrated integral tourist product it is planned the appropriate technological, promotional and marketing support based on a sustainable (long-term) vision, which will be achieved by integrating into their own and newly formed market offers, in field of maintaining and managing of the existing infrastructure.

Project will be disseminated to other thematic areas of cultural and natural heritage and to other border areas.

The review of the approved projects under **SO 2.2** shows the aspect of sustainability will be maximized by the allocation of concrete activities to existing project partners, partly by market activities (admission) and the adding of new protocols to existing (scientific, educational...) programs. The greatest sustainable value and the possibility of dissemination have activities and products that will upgrade certain existing scientific programs by adding new protocols (project results).

Good example of a project on a specific objective: ČIGRA

The sustainability of the created nesting places will be achieved by actively involving key stakeholders who will take care of them after the end of the project. The monitoring protocol and the cross-border action plan will be transferred to the legal institutions in Croatia and Slovenia so that they can integrate it into national monitoring programs and their action plans.

The cross-border action plan for the conservation will be handed over to the competent ministries and agencies in both countries so that the proposed measures can also be implemented outside the project area.

From analyses of the approved projects under **SO 3.1**, it was detected that a sustainability aspect will be met by establishing certain formal networks, competence centers and by the inclusion of additional institutional and associated partners. However, sustainability in the future is conditional upon the signature of various agreements, protocols and system solutions, which represents certain risks, as it does not fully depend on the project partners. As far as dissemination is concerned, we see the least problems with the transfer of demo solutions and standards. In the case when sustainability is conditioned by various protocols and system solutions, dissemination is somewhat more difficult at an early stage, but later it is more likely to be universally applicable (on different fields and areas).

Good example of a project on a specific objective: +HEALTH

The sustainability will be met by implementation of a new cross-border cooperation structure, where all institutions involved will sign an agreement and establish a competence center, implementation of a "Strategy of the cross-border health destination" for the period of 15 years, which together with the action plan will represent a strategic framework for the implementation of the activities even after the completion of the project and also by implementation of quality standards for the health destination and the certification of process, which can be expanded substantively and territorially.

3.5.7 Cost effectiveness of the programme

Cost-effectiveness analysis compares the costs and impacts of the intervention in order to assess the extent to which it can be considered cost-effective. We propose the following methodology for cost effectiveness analyses: the investments are considered cost-effective if: (i) they are successful (project is successful if the outputs set are achieved (achieved key indicators and output indicators)); and (ii) there is no evidence that these investments could be carried out at a lower cost. If these investments could be carried out at a lower cost, their cost-effectiveness is reduced, as this means that the same objectives and / or results could be attained at a lower cost.

At this stage of implementation of the program, when the projects are not finished yet and the program does not yet show measurable results, it is not yet possible to evaluate the cost effectiveness of the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR. However, the cost

effectiveness analyses should be done in the second and third phase of the evaluation of the programme (impact evaluation I and II), when the projects will be finished.

Based on the two finished projects we propose the following methodology to estimate cost effectiveness of the projects (based on the cost effectiveness of the projects cost effectiveness of the programme will be conducted at a later stage).

Table 29: Cost effectiveness

output indicators/ID	Institutions participating in cross-border structures/11-1			project succes	stakeholders from the programme area with improved skills and competences in CB/11-2			project success	TOTAL ELIGIBLE	ACHIEVED ELIGIBLE	project success all indicators	cost effectiveness	cost effectiveness
	Planned	Achieved	% achieved (A)		Planned	Achieved	% achieved (B)					INDEX of total eligible	INDEX of achieved eligible
Indicator													
Measurement unit	Number	Number	%		Number	Number	%		EUR	EUR			
DEMENCA ACROSSLO	10	13	130	(+)	360	380	106	(+)	411.707,37	400.049,09	(++)	1,18	1,21
STAR	10	11	110	(+)	206	255	124	(+)	712.938,99	690.075,79	(++)	1,17	1,21

Cost effectiveness is based on achieved output indicators and achieved eligible expenditure and is presented as an index. The value of index should be 1 or above for project to be cost effective.

Formula for calculating the index of cost effectiveness:

$$\frac{\% \text{ achieved output indicator } (A + B)/2}{\text{expenditure } (\%)}$$

As seen in the Table 29, both projects achieved index above 1, which shows the projects were cost effective. E.g. project DEMENCA ACROSSLO achieved indicator 11-1 130 % and indicator 11-2 106 %, based on achieved indicators we can say the project was successful. Total eligible costs and achieved eligible costs are also presented in the table.

Index of total eligible expenditure is calculated from % of achieved output indicators and total eligible expenditure (100 %). In case of project Demenca index of total eligible expenditure is 1,18, which means the project was cost effective with total eligible expenditure. Index of achieved eligible expenditure is calculated based on achieved eligible expenditure (in %). Both projects achieved output indicators above planned and the achieved eligible expenditure was lower than total eligible expenditure (to understand, why there is a difference, we would need to review the projects more in detail, which is above the scope of this evaluation), therefore both indexes of cost effectiveness are above 1. Based on achieved eligible expenditure, we can say for both projects they were cost effective.

3.6 Technical Assistance (TA)

An efficient implementation of the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR demands technical management in order to ensure a realization of the programme objectives, and thus, the achievement of the desirable results. (CP, 56).

The TA funds aim for proficient implementation of the programme namely for staffing of JS, for implementation of e-MS, financing the communication actions, events for awareness raising among general population...meetings, workshops, monitoring, evaluations.

There are many actions to be supported by TA funds, namely the following (CP, 58):

- Simplification of the application, reporting procedures to reduce bureaucracy/administrative barriers by using the INTERACT Harmonized Programme Implementation Tools (HIT) and e-Monitoring System (e-MS);
- Trainings for the beneficiaries, programme Authorities and Bodies on the use of the e-MS and HIT; Development, maintenance and the adaptation of the e-MS to the needs of programme;
- Setting-up of the Joint Secretariat with the appropriate categorization and competences of the staff considering demanding JS tasks to be performed and working in the international environment ;
- Improvements of JS management including annual planning with set targets, team work and multi-tasking, optimization of internal organization and shortening communication flows, introduction of risk management
- Setting up effective and proportionate anti-fraud and anti-corruption measures in relation to the implementation of the programme considering the risks identified;
- Organization of the Monitoring Committee meetings;
Organization of bilateral technical meetings to contribute to effective and qualitative programme implementation (e.g. to improve immediate response on the challenges in the programme...);
- Exchange of information and good practices between the other relevant cross-border programmes in the regions (e.g. SI/AT, SI/HU, AT/HU, HU/CRO);
- Reinforcement of capacities of project applicants and beneficiaries to submit project proposals that have high potential to contribute to the programme objectives;
- Preparation of annual reports also with the aim of better visibility of the programme and its results;
- Introduction and use of E-Cohesion;
- Establishment and developing cooperation with the National Coordinators/National Contact Points for Macro-region strategies;
- Specific activities of first level control;
- Audit activities and activities of the Certifying Authority;
- Communication activities (Communication with beneficiaries (on-time information, use of social media.), Programme level communication events and actions);

- Elaboration of the Evaluation Plan of the programme – Article 114.1 CPR Regulation;
- Preparation of the future Cooperation Programme, activities related to the closure of the previous programme

Table 30: Indicators of PA 4

	Indicator (name of indicator)	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Contracted	Achieved 2018	%
						achieved
TA-1	Joint CB projects implemented and concluded	Number	57	44	1	2%
TA-2	Joint CB informational and publicity events	Number	10	NA	11	110%
TA-3	Employees whose salaries are co-financed by the technical assistance	FTE (Full Time Equivalent)	12	NA	13,99	117%
TA-4	e-Monitoring System established	Number	1	NA	1	100%
TA-5	First level controllers established	Number	2	NA	2	100%
TA-6	Programme evaluation plan prepared and approved by Monitoring Committee (MC)	Number	1	NA	1	100%
TA-7	Programme communication plan prepared and approved by MC	Number	1	NA	1	100%
TA-8	Guiding document addressed to applicants and beneficiaries	Number	1	NA	2	200%
TA-9	Information, consultation and training measures for applicants and beneficiaries	Number	8	NA	11	137%

Source: JS, own calculation

The expected contribution of the approved projects to programme output objectives Achievement of the annual targets is progressing well and without significant difficulties.

Majority of the indicators' targeted values under the Priority Axis 4 are well contracted and achieved. The indicators are mainly 100 % achieved or surpassed. The only indicator which will not be achieved 100 % is the number of joint CB projects implemented and concluded. The target value was 57 projects, there are 44 contracted, which means that by 2023 the indicator will be 77 % achieved. The target value was based on the previous experiences and estimation of previous programming period.

4 EVALUATION OF THE PROCESSES AND PROGRAMME STRUCTURES

4.1 Project application

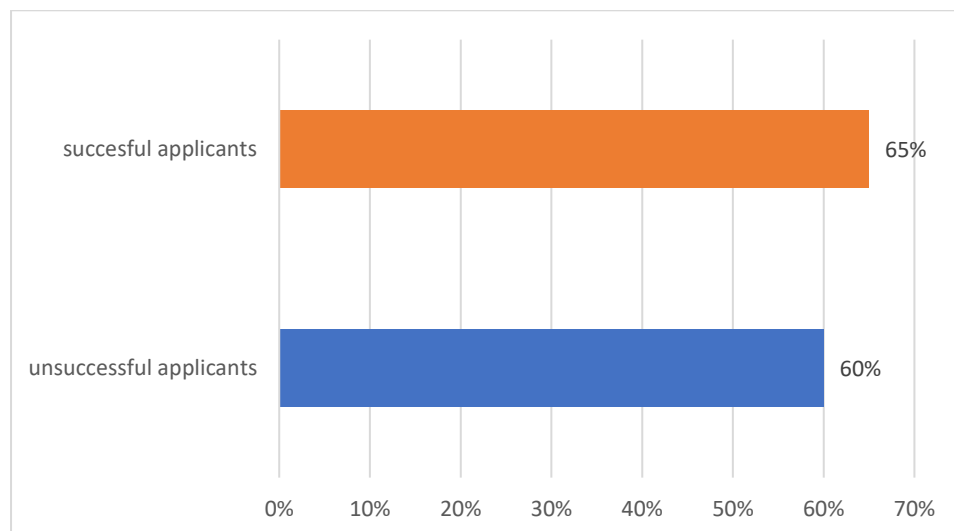
The project applications had to be submitted by the applicants by filling in the electronic application form in the e-MS. Applications submitted until the given deadline which has been published on the programme website, were registered for the respective deadline. Applications submitted after a certain deadline were registered for the following deadline for the submission of project proposals.

4.1.1 Workshops for applicants

When Open Call and the deadlines were published, JS organized workshops for the potential applicants with the purpose to present the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR, to provide information on the Open Call, present the rules on eligibility of expenditures, to present the electronic monitoring system (eMS) and to give instructions on how to prepare a good project. Also at workshops of 2nd and 3rd deadline the most common mistakes in project applications were presented.

Of all applicants (successful and unsuccessful) who participated in the survey, the majority attended the workshops for applicants.

Picture 13: Attendance to workshops for applicants



Source: Online survey

As seen in the Picture 13 more than 60 % of successful and unsuccessful applicants attended workshops, when additional analyses are conducted we see, that in group of successful applicants 87 % of LP attended the workshops and in the group of unsuccessful applicants there were 83 % of LP who attended the workshops. In both groups PPs attended the workshops to a lesser extent (55 % successful applicants/45 % unsuccessful applicants).

On general, the applicants who attended the workshops found them useful or very useful. Only one respondent among unsuccessful applicants (2 %) said, that the workshops were not useful, but didn't provide an explanation why.

Table 31: Usefulness of the workshops

	Successful applicants	Unsuccessful applicants
Totally useless	0%	0%
Useless	0%	2%
Nor useful neither useless	17%	22%
Useful	63%	61%
Very useful	20%	15%

Source: Online survey

When asked what was the most useful at the workshops respondents gave the answers, which we grouped into several categories:

- General information (e.g. how to fill in the application, how to report)
- Specific information (answers to specific questions related to project)
- Tips and tricks; real examples
- Technical details
- Explanation of the programme, objectives of the programme

As in first deadline there were very few quality applications under Investment priority 6d, Croatian and Slovenian NA organized a thematic workshop dedicated to potential applicants under Investment priority 6d for the second deadline (17.10.2016 Samobor, HR). In the second and third deadline there were two projects accepted under this priority (four projects in total).

4.1.2 Individual consultations at GODC /MRDEUF

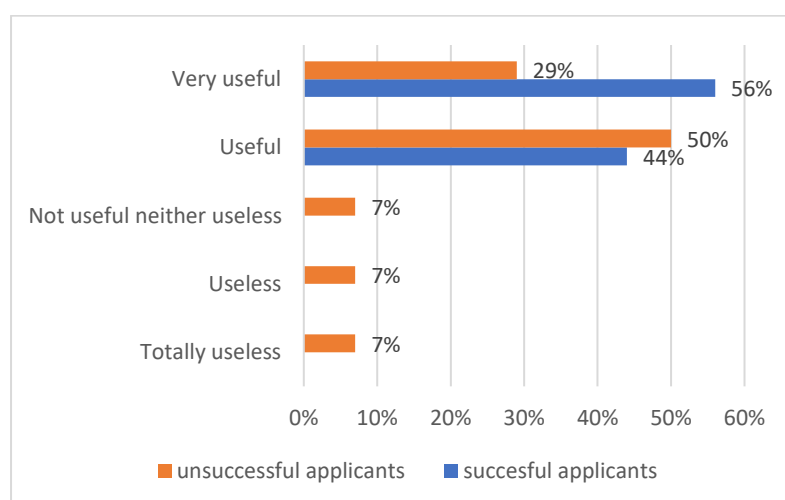
Another possibility and help in preparing the application were also individual consultations at GODC and MRDEF. Compared to workshops fewer potential beneficiaries used this tool during preparation of the project application. Members of JS and NA (3 persons in Slovenia and 2 in Croatia) offered consultation. Before coming to the consultations applicants had to send an email, with the short project description (max two pages with the following information: who are the project partners, how the project contributes to the program specific objective, main activities, outputs, budget and open issues.) There was no standardized form for project description. Also in Croatia there were face to face consultations, but at the smaller scope, more consultations were done via e-mail or telephone. If needed, applicants from Croatia could also go to consultations in Slovenia. Altogether there were 110 consultations (face-to-face, via e-mail or by phone) conducted by Slovenian NA/JS.

Staff who offered face to face consultations could not be nominated for assessment of applications.

Among successful applicants 28 % used this possibility (75 % in Slovenia and 25 % in Croatia). Among unsuccessful applicants 18 % used individual consultations.

For successful applicants the consultations were very useful (56 %) or useful (44 %) (Picture 14) while among unsuccessful applicants there were two applicants, who were not satisfied. For one applicant the consultations were totally useless and for another one they were useless. In the opinion of unsatisfied applicants, the consultations were too general, they didn't get the specific information they wanted. According to programme bodies, some applicants came to consultations unprepared, with undeveloped project ideas, so the consultants could not give them very concrete advice and guidelines.

Picture 14: Usefulness of individual consultations



Source: Online survey

Applicants pointed out the following benefits of the consultations:

- Concrete information (e.g. about the topic, about partnership, checking project ideas, improvement of project application)
- Personalized approach
- Cooperation with JS
- Detailed instructions (about reporting process)
- Practical advice

The recommendation from beneficiaries regarding the consultations is to have more consultations, not just one.

At the third deadline, when the number of approved applications was the highest, 75 % of successful applicants used that possibility (out of 17 approved projects 13 partnership representatives attended the consultations). They attended the consultations at least once (source: internal records of GODC). By the third deadline the consultations gained the recognizability, and also partnership representatives who were not successful at first or second deadline attended the consultations.

The view of the programme structures performing individual consultations (JS, NA)

As already said, the consultations were offered by staff from JS and NA in both countries.

Also in their view the consultations were useful for applicants, they helped them in several ways – technical questions such as understanding indicators and methodology of calculating indicators, was answered by JS, while questions related to content, developing ideas were answered by NA. When needed, NA also consulted relevant Ministries.

One of more difficult issues for applicants was the development of intervention logic, this was also the part where they were also losing points in the assessment of applications.

During the period of open project applications, the programme structures performing individual consultations agree that consultations can represent a workload. Additional burden is that applicants often ask for information, which is already available on the project web page, they also come to the consultations unprepared). If the number of consultations increase, certain solutions will be needed, such as additional staff, longer period for consultations.

4.1.3 Guidelines – Implementation manual for beneficiaries

Another tool that could be used during the application phase was **Implementation manual for beneficiaries**.

The manual consists of 7 parts, it is a complete guideline from beginning to the end of the project - covering topics from developing projects; application and assessment; eligibility of expenditure; reporting on a project progress; information and communication and archiving and closure.

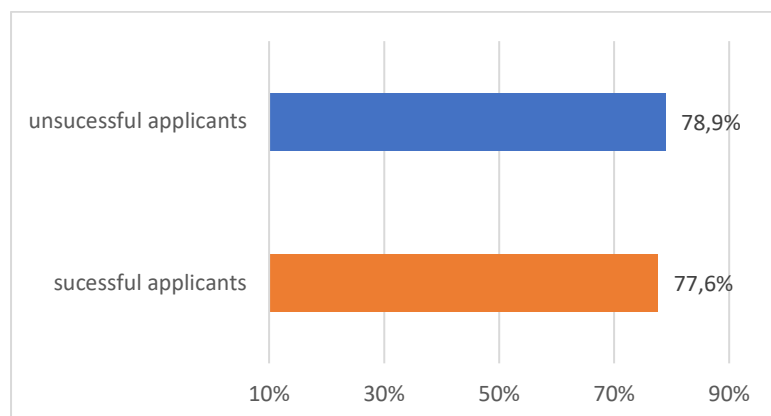
For successful implementation of a project use of guidelines seems a necessity.

The vast majority of applicants (successful and unsuccessful) used it and majority found it useful or very useful. No one said, that the manual is not useful.

Results from online survey

Both successful and unsuccessful applicants used the manual in the process of applying for a project. The manual was used by 79 % of unsuccessful applicants and 78 % successful applicants (Picture 15).

Picture 15: Use of online manual



Source: Online survey

Among successful applicants all (100 %) LPs used the manual and among unsuccessful 90 % of LPs used the manual.

The majority of applicants (successful and unsuccessful) considered the manual useful, no one said it was not useful.

Table 32: Usefulness of manual

	Successful applicants	Unsuccessful applicants
Totally useless	0%	0%
Useless	0%	0%
Nor useful neither useless	12%	12%
Useful	75%	75%
Very useful	14%	14%

Source: Online survey

When asked what was the most useful of the manual, the applicants (successful and unsuccessful) listed several benefits which we categorized in the following groups of answers:

- information on eligible costs
- description of use of eMS
- rules
- reporting method
- transparency of manual
- detailed description of application process
- clear, precise instructions
- well explained process
- easy to use, well arranged

As seen from the survey the manual was well accepted and used, according to the applicants, the manual was well structured and clear, the instructions were precise, it

had all the necessary information, and the information was practical. There were no recommendations for change.

Experience of JS in the process application phase

The purpose of the open call is to allow applicants continuous submission of applications, nevertheless the majority of applications were submitted in the last days before the closure of the respective deadline.

It is difficult to say why applicants applied at the last moment, one of the reasons can be that they are more used to apply on deadlines, deadlines are in (our) minds important milestones, when a task has to be finished.

Individual consultations were helpful for applicants, they had the biggest difficulties in developing intervention logic and setting output and results indicators.

JS was in both countries available to applicants either face-to-face, via e-mail or phone.

4.2 Assessment procedure

In the frame of the Open Call for Proposals, the MA appoints the Committee for the assessment for the project applications submitted in the frame of the Open Call. The assessors are members of the JS. In total there are 3 assessors for Open Call projects. One assessor is responsible for AB check and two for quality assessment.

The assessment of received applications consists of several steps following a standardized procedure safeguarding the principles of equal treatment and transparency.

4.2.1 Administrative and eligibility check

Open Call projects

First step in the assessment of applications is **administrative and eligibility check (AB check)**.

The administrative and eligibility check tests whether the applications comply with the requirements set in the Open Call. Within this check there are 5 administrative and 8 eligibility criteria. These criteria had to be assessed with 'YES', 'NOT APPLICABLE' to pass the AB check. One person from JS conducted the AB check.

Only project applications that fully comply with the administrative and eligibility criteria were subject to quality assessment. In the first and second deadline there was no possibility to supplement the application, but in third deadline there was a change and a possibility to supplement the application in case of missing or unsuitable translation in one field of the Application Form (in the administrative criteria A4). In such case the LP was requested for supplement the application within 5 calendar days. Project applications that did not pass the AB check had the possibility to submit the revised application again in next deadlines.

Table 33: Share of applications not passed AB check

1 st deadline	2 nd deadline	3 rd deadline
71,7%	42,0%	28,4%

Source: Own calculation

In the first deadline there were 72 % of applications, that didn't pass the AB check while in the second and third deadline the share was much lower, in the third deadline, there were 28 % of those who did not pass the AB check (Table 32).

As explained by JS, the reason for high share of ineligible project applications in the first deadline was most likely different procedure from previous programme period also beneficiaries did not pay enough attention to rules and instructions.

To avoid mistakes JS published a list of most common mistakes where detailed description is given. Often mistakes are such as lack of translations, wrong translations, and not all required fields in the application form were filled in and such.

Majority of those who did not pass the AB check in the first deadline applied again in the following deadlines.

Strategic projects

The AB check of strategic projects is similar to AB check of Open Call projects, the difference is that the check is done by one member of the JS and external expert and the beneficiaries had 14 days to supplement the application in case of mistakes (in the administrative criteria A4).

Applications, which didn't pass the AB check were not assessed for the quality of content.

4.2.2 Quality assessment

Open call projects

Each application that was formally accepted as administratively compliant and eligible was further assessed for its quality.

- ➔ The quality assessment of each application was done by two assessors of the JS on the basis of four criteria:
 - Strategic assessment criteria (9 sub-categories),
 - Specific guiding principles for the priority/axis (7 or 6 sub-categories, depending on the PAs),
 - Cooperation assessment criteria (4 sub-categories), and
 - Operational assessment criteria (5 sub-categories).

There were four assessors, two members of Slovenian JS and two members of Croatian JS. The difference from the previous programme is that quality assessment was not done by external assessors, which proved to be positive, as internal assessors have better knowledge of the programme and are more confident in assessment.

Table 9: Assessment points for PA2 and PA3

	PA2	PA3
Strategic Assessment	39	39
Specific guiding principles for IP	12	18
Cooperation Assessment	17	17
Operational Assessment	21	21
Total points	89	95

Source: Implementation Manual (2016: 92).

Each project had to receive at least 70 % of all points to pass, in the case of PA2 that was 63 points, in the case of PA3, 67 points. Projects that did not pass the threshold were automatically rejected, projects between 70–80 % were discussed by the MC whether to be postponed or rejected, and projects reaching more than 80 % of all points were discussed by the MC for approval, postponement or rejection or to be put on the reserve list. There were no projects put on a reserve list in any of the deadlines. Finally, there are also some additional criteria, marked as C13, C14, C20, C21 and C22⁶ (*Description of the assessment and selection procedure*, 2017), which are treated as exclusion (kick-out) criteria. This means if the project is assessed by 0 points in any of these criteria (the scale is from 0 to 3), it is automatically rejected. Projects that are rejected are not anymore eligible for application with the same project idea or partnership within the Open Call.

As already mentioned and important with regard to comparison with the previous financial perspective, is the introduction of the new category - the **postponed application**. The **postponed application** is the application that needs a revision or a further development in one or more aspects. In such cases, the LP is informed about the MC decision and asked to submit the revised application (without the mentioned deficiencies or with a better clarification) within the next date for submission under the Open Call. After the improved application is submitted, it is not automatically accepted, but it is checked and assessed again.

On the other hand, the projects on the **reserve list** are not evaluated again.

Strategic projects

After the MA prepares an invitation to submit proposals for strategic projects the MA appoints a committee for verifying the administrative compliance and eligibility of applications as for assessing their quality. The committee should be composed of members from the JS and external experts.

⁶ C13: The project follows the principles of sustainable tourism;

C14: The project implements practical demonstration actions in nature aiming at improving conditions and protection of different habitat types and species;

C20: The project clearly aims at developing a sustainable cross-border cooperation (CBC) structure;

C21: Cross-border cooperation (CBC) structures enhance either (i) provision of cross-border (CB) service or (ii) provision of service targeted to peripheral/rural areas;

C22: Any service, structure or model developed shall be accompanied by a demonstration action, which allows transfer of best practices and/or testing of new solutions in real life context.

The evaluation procedure goes through two steps: the *administrative and eligibility check* and the *project quality assessment*. The administrative and eligibility check tests whether the applications comply with the requirements set by the MC. Within this check there are 5 administrative and 8 eligibility criteria. These criteria have to be assessed with 'YES', 'NO' or 'NOT APPLICABLE'. If one field is answered by 'NO' the leading partner has the opportunity to supplement the application in 14 days. After the supplements are added the process of selection resumes/continues. Only after the proposal passes this phase it goes into the phase of quality assessment.

The quality assessment is done by three persons, 2 from the JS and one external expert. Projects are assessed based on two assessment criteria: (1) **Strategic assessment** and (2) **Operational assessment**. The logic of the **Strategic assessment** criteria is to "determine the extent of the project's contribution to the achievement of the programme objectives. A strong focus is given to the result orientation of a project with the demand for visible outputs and concrete results". On the other hand, the **Operational assessment** reviews "the viability and feasibility of the proposed projects, as well as its value for money in terms of resources used versus results delivered" (Description of assessment procedure for strategic projects, 2016: 10). The two categories are then split into four assessment subcategories, being: *Strategic assessment criteria* (9 sub-categories), *Specific guiding principles for the priority/axis* (6 sub-categories), *Cooperation assessment criteria* (4 sub-categories), and *Operational assessment criteria* (5 sub-categories). In all these categories the assessment is nominal (and not numerical), divided in three categories: "meeting the criteria" (YES), "not meeting the criteria" (NO), "partly meeting the criteria" (PARTLY). Whether the evaluation groups would recommend the project to the MC all sub-categories should be assessed as "YES". However, if a project will have only one case of "NO" or "PARTLY" the applicants can supplement the application in 14 days. After the revised submission there are three possibilities:

- a) Suggestion for approval, if no supplements needed
- b) Suggestion for conditional approval, if a minor supplement is required
- c) Suggestion for rejection of the application, if an important issue remains unresolved.

If the proposal is rejected the applicant has the possibility to (re)submit the improved proposal. Before the resubmission there is a face-to-face meeting the applicant in order to resolve any pending issues regarding the application.

4.2.3 Face to face meetings

After sending out the decision letters face to face meetings with approved projects took place with JS.

The purpose of the meetings was to clarify any open issue, a lot of attention was put to discuss and explain indicators, also eligibility of expenses and reporting. Besides LP also other PPs were invited to face to face meetings, as it is important that all partners are familiar with the procedures.

Beneficiaries were satisfied with the meetings, nevertheless according to JS, beneficiaries often sought explanations for the information that was already published on the website.

Often such questions represented additional burden for the JS staff.

Especially in the third deadline, organizing face to face meetings was difficult, due to summer time and holidays. This also caused some delays in signing the contracts in the third deadline.

During the project implementation the beneficiaries can contact their Contract Manager for explanations and clarifications. As already said, beneficiaries often seek information or explanation for issues that are already explained on the website (or in the manual), sometimes they seek help regarding the e-MS. As pointed out by JS and Contract Managers, they are happy to help, nevertheless such questions represent burden for the team.

4.3 Eligibility of expenditure

The following cost are eligible in the programme:

- Staff costs
- Office and administrative expenditure
- Travel and accommodation costs
- External expertise and services costs
- Equipment expenditure
- Infrastructure and works expenditure

The beneficiaries have two options regarding staff costs and office and administrative expenditure:

- a) Real costs
 - i. Real costs, where the beneficiary must document that expenditure has been incurred and paid out
- b) Flat rate
 - i. Flat rate of 20 % of direct costs other than staff costs/ 10 % for projects including infrastructure and works
 - ii. Office and administrative expenditure shall be reimbursed by the programme according to a flat rate of 15 % of eligible direct staff costs (budget line staff costs), no documenting required.

Simplified cost options were introduced to reduce administrative burden for beneficiaries. The aim of the simplified cost options is to reduce the amount of needed

paperwork and to speed up the reporting, verification and control procedures, as beneficiaries do not need to provide documents for the control.

Each beneficiary must choose a reimbursement option already in the Application Form. The same reimbursement option will apply to all staff members of the partner institution working on the project and it will be set for the entire project duration (Implementation manual).

Despite the fact, that using flat rate is of less burden for beneficiaries as well as for FLC, majority of beneficiaries still use the real costs. Many beneficiaries use real costs, because they are used to this form from other or previous programmes also for some institutions this method is not the optimal one, as less costs are reimbursed. Flat rates can be inconvenient especially for public institutions, as they do not cover real costs of personnel (in case of using flat rates, less costs are reimbursed).

Eligibility of expenditure was also presented at workshops for applicants/beneficiaries where FLC participated with presentation.

Table 34: Workshops for applicants

Date	Location
17/02/2016	Rogaška Slatina, SI
22/02/2016	Opatija, HR
11/10/2016	Črnomelj, SI
10/10/2016	Tuhelj, HR
13.06. 2017	Postojna, SI
20.06. 2017	Marija Bistrica, HR

Source: www.si-hr.eu

As well the expenditure and reporting were explained at workshops about reporting for beneficiaries. (More in the chapter 4.4. Reporting process)

Besides Programme guidelines (Implementation Manual for beneficiaries – Part 4: Eligibility of Expenditure) also national guidelines were published: Navodila za poročanje o upravičenih izdatkih za slovenske upravičence (Guidelines for reporting on eligible expenditures for Slovenian beneficiaries in the period 2014-2020 for cooperation programs)⁷ and Smjernice o prihvatljivosti troškova za hrvatske projektne partnere (Guidelines on Eligibility for Costs for Croatian Project Partners)⁸. Also there are other guidelines and instructions published on the web page regarding expenditures (e.g. timesheets, instructions how to fill in the timesheets etc.).

⁷ http://www.si-hr.eu/si2/download/Navodila-za-porocanje_verzija-2.pdf

⁸ http://www.si-hr.eu/hr2/download/Smjernice-o-prihvatljivosti-troskova-za-hrvatske-projektne-partnere_2018....pdf

FLC experience

FLC in Slovenia is in charge of several programmes, not just the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR 2014-2020, so the main difficulty they are facing are the reporting periods, which often coincide with reporting periods of other programmes, meaning, there can be a big work overload at those periods (10 programmes at the same time).

The solution would be planning the reporting periods in such way, there would be no or very little overlapping. In reality this is very difficult to achieve, as there are many factors, influencing the reporting periods (EC schedules for publishing tenders, national schedules for publishing tenders, possible delays in publishing, possible delays in assessment...).

Also, beneficiaries make mistakes in reporting the expenditure, often because they do not follow the guidelines and instructions. When uploading the expenditure documents into the eMS system, it often happens, that instead of uploading documents in the system separately (separate document for each expenditure), and they merge all documents together into one (PDF) document, which makes it very difficult to review.

The suggestion of FLC to lessen the burden of controllers is to do the checks only on the sample of projects. The method is already being tested with SI FLC for three transnational projects.

Experience from beneficiaries

The biggest problem for the beneficiaries regarding the costs is the time period between the request for payment and the actual payment. The time taken for the control is too long. For many beneficiaries it is difficult to commit financial resources, some of the beneficiaries due to their legal form cannot get the bank credit.

Experience of strategic projects

Funding for the project from the integral budget and returning the funds from EU back to the integral budget is not adapted to the project work, such administrative procedures cause delays in the project implementation.

4.4 Reporting process

As a general rule, every six months, a Project Progress Report has to be prepared in the eMS by the LP and submitted to the JS. Prior to the submission of the Project Progress Report, each Project Partner has to prepare a Partner Progress Report in the eMS and submit it to the designated First Level Control/National Control (FLC) (Implementation manual – part 5).

Partner progress report consists of activity and financial part.

There were several workshops regarding reporting, namely:

- 1st workshop on reporting, 13. 02. 2017, Šmarješke Toplice, SI
- 2nd workshop, 26.10. 2017, Karlovac, HR

→ 3rd workshop on reporting 28.11. 2018, Ljubljana, SI

At the workshops the following topics were presented: (a) instructions on information and communication, (b) instructions on reporting, (c) practical presentation of reporting in the electronic monitoring system (eMS), focusing on the most common mistakes that occur in the reporting process. In the second part of all three workshops, representatives of the Croatian FLC presented the Croatian rules for reporting to the Croatian beneficiaries, Slovenian FLC prepared workshops for Slovenian beneficiaries.

There are several steps in reporting process. In the process of reporting all structure bodies are involved at different steps. The first body in the process is FLC, and if there are delays all other steps are slowed down. Due to work overload (checks on different programmes at the same time), the first step can represent at bottleneck in the process.

Picture 16: Steps in the reporting process



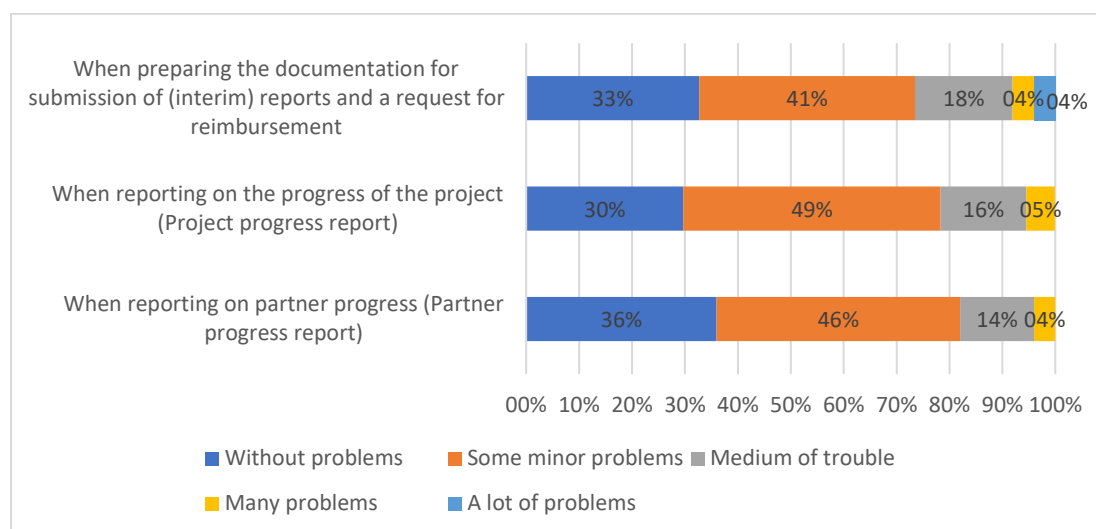
Source: Own elaboration

Online survey

According to the survey the majority of beneficiaries said, they had some minor problems when reporting (Preparing the documentation for submission of interim reports and a request for reimbursement, reporting on the progress of the project (Project progress report), reporting on partner progress (Partner progress report). Regarding reporting beneficiaries said, there were too many duplications, they had problems with eMS.

According to the survey around one third of the beneficiaries had no problems when reporting (Picture 17).

Picture 17: Problems when reporting



Source: Online survey

FLC

There have been administrative simplifications in reporting, as well as for beneficiaries as for FLC in performing controls. Compared to previous programme period the beneficiaries can use Simplified cost options (flat rates), which means simplification in reporting, which is positive for both - FLC, as they have less controlling and beneficiaries, as they need to provide less documents. Regarding reporting the staff costs, flat rates mean, that beneficiaries do not have to provide timesheets. Where beneficiaries use flat rates, there are less supplements and corrections of reports.

Mistakes that beneficiaries make are quite diverse, the most common are the mistakes where real staff costs are reported and documents of proof of certain activities are missing, and need to be supplemented. Beneficiaries who have experiences from the previous programme make less mistakes.

Despite the possibility to use flat rates, the majority of beneficiaries use real costs, the beneficiaries should be further encouraged to use flat rates for staff costs.

Experience of LPs

Interviews with LPs showed that identified bottlenecks are in the process of checking reports. As stated, controllers have different criteria, which should be solved on the level of FLC and JS/MA. If controllers change during the project implementation, greater coordination is needed. It can happen that the new controller requires documentation and explanations for the procedures already approved by the previous controller. Also there is too much bureaucracy, too many data have to be entered several times, too many proofs of credibility. LPs also notice, there is not enough confidence (trust) in LPs from JS/MA and FLC. Sometimes LPs feel the attitude of controllers can be "underestimating".

Experience of LPs of strategic projects

In the view of the LP of strategic project the interim reporting for the LP is very time consuming.

In the case of Slovenian water agency (Direkcija RS za vode) as a state authority, the system of control of INTERREG projects by the GODC is in some views unnecessary and ineffective.

According to the interviews conducted, the reporting on the salaries of DVRS employees who are also employed on the project is too detailed. This reporting is time consuming and unnecessary as it means duplication. The Slovenian water agency, as a state body, is subject to a very transparent system of reporting on wages - it is already reported to the system of the Ministry of Finance. Nevertheless, this data is not automatically in the eMS where all the checks are done, and still has to be imputed.

4.5 Support tools (eMS)

Electronic Monitoring System (eMS) was developed for programme and project implementation procedures. The eMS became operational in September 2015. eMS is also used by CP INTERREG V-A Slovenia-Austria, CP INTERREG V-A Slovenia-Hungary and several other Interreg programmes.

Beneficiaries submit the application in eMS, and later all reporting is done in eMS. Programme bodies monitor the implementation of projects through eMS, depending on their role they have different accessibility in the system.

Despite the fact that eMS has simplified some of the administrative procedures, it also presents a challenge and beneficiaries as well as programme bodies face some difficulties in using it.

Experience of Beneficiaries

On general we can say that the satisfaction with the eMS is positive, but there is still room for improvement. As survey showed (Table 34) there are beneficiaries, who are dissatisfied with the system (11,5 %), also there are beneficiaries who were not satisfied with completing the application in the eMS system (16,6 %). The main reasons for dissatisfaction with the system were constant risk of losing the text imputed, work in eMS is time consuming, and the system is not optimized.

Also the interviews with the LPs showed, that the application process was not very easy in eMS.

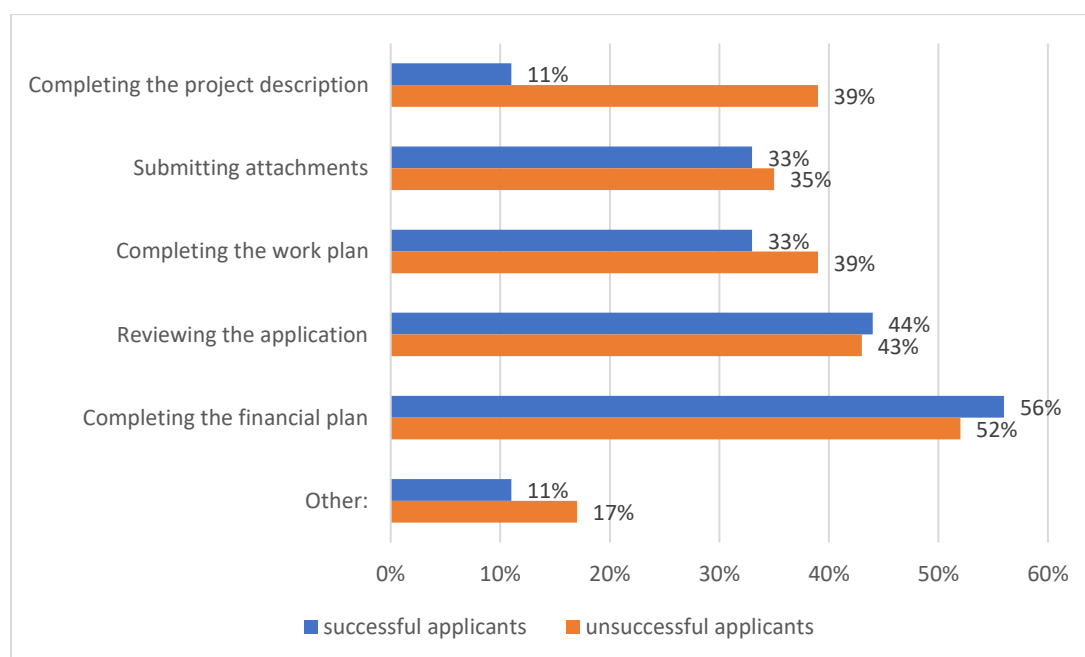
Table 35: Satisfaction with eMS

	Not satisfied at all	Not satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Mean value
Simplicity of completing the application in eMS	0,0%	16,4%	32,7%	36,4%	14,5%	3,6
eMS information system	6,6%	4,9%	26,2%	49,2%	13,1%	3,5

Source: Online survey

Picture 18 shows where successful and unsuccessful applicants had major problems in using eMS. During submitting the application, the successful applicants had the biggest problems with completing financial plan (56 %) and reviewing the application (44 %). For unsuccessful applicants the biggest challenge was completing financial plan (52 %), reviewing the application (43 %), also more than one third of them had problems with completing the project description (39 %) and completing the work plan (39 %).

Picture 18: Problems with eMS during application



Source: Online survey

Among other things beneficiaries reported, that the system was slow, they had problems with attachments – the size of the attached file is limited (that is especially problematic for strategic projects, where they have very big attachments).

Despite some difficulties with the system, beneficiaries who are familiar with other systems prefer eMS, and want to keep it in the future.

Experience of LP and strategic projects

The majority of LPs exposed the problem of very slow working of eMS. When entering data, the eMS system is too slow. Data must be saved constantly and each time it takes more than a minute for saving. For extensive projects the input to eMS requires a very long time.

FRISCO 2.1 and 2.2. are construction projects, which means there is a lot of project documentation. Because of the size of this documentation, it cannot be uploaded to eMS.

General problem (which is not necessary) related to eMS is application in two languages, as it happened that applicants did not pass AB checks due to poor/missing translations. That was in the third deadline solved with the possibility to correct the mistake.

Also the problem LPs mentioned was the limitation in number of characters.

Experience of FLC

eMS has on one hand simplified their work, as everything is electronic, there is no double work. Using eMS also means there is audit trail, which is positive. Nevertheless, there are also possible improvements of the system, e.g. more functionalities within the system (for instance more statistics in one click, collecting data on the programme level.) The system is not possible to use if you do not use two computer monitors.

Experience of NA

They use eMS as members of MC. The main problem they have with the system is that the export to PDF is not working well, in the export the data is wrong, so the data can't be used.

From the view of monitoring the eMS represents a simplification and is useful.

Experience of JS

Also for JS use of eMS means simplification of work, as when assessing the projects everything is electronic. On general JS does not have big problems with eMS. The JS has so far been mainly involved in solving deficiencies in operation of the eMS for applicants. They need to be very familiar with the system, nevertheless they cannot solve technical problems or bugs of the system. The capacities of the IT manager assigned to the programme (1/6 of FTE) are not sufficient. It would be recommended to have a whole FTE for IT manager for eMS.

Experience of CA

Compared to previous system eMS system represents a step forward in ensuring process efficiency, simplification of the procedures and shortening the process steps and activities. Nevertheless there have been detected some problems in compatibility between eMS information system and other accounting information systems. The data must be manually imputed from eMS to other accounting information systems in order to implement funding to beneficiaries, which could be sometimes time-consuming and can cause mistakes during manual data input.

The recommendation is to synchronize eMS information system and other accounting information systems in order speed up the process of funding and avoid possible mistakes.

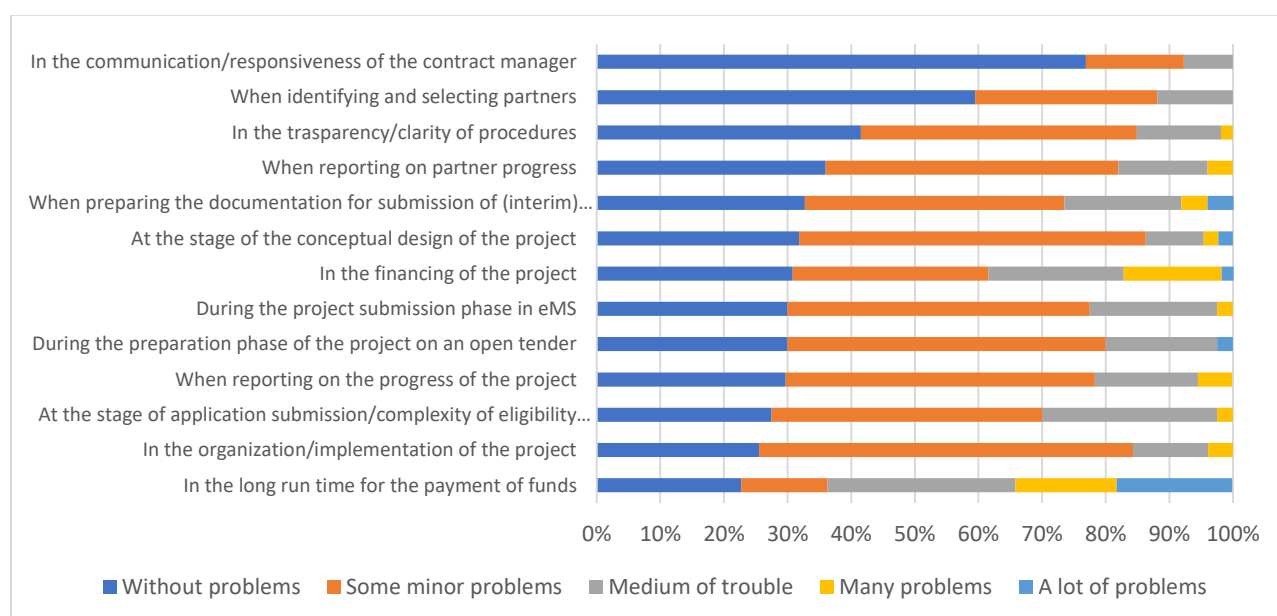
4.6 Administrative procedures – findings from the survey

Picture 19 and Table 35 show, where the beneficiaries have the biggest and the smallest problems with administrative procedures.

Beneficiaries had the least problems with the communication with the contract manager (77 % had no problems, 15 % some minor problems and 8 % medium problems), also selection of partners was not very problematic.

The biggest difficulties beneficiaries face with long waiting time for the payment (34 % had many or a lot of problems, 30 % medium problems, 14 % some minor problems). Also the financing the project was difficult for some of the beneficiaries – 17 % had many or a lot of problems, 21 % medium of trouble, 31 % some minor problems and 31 % had no problems.

Picture 19: Problems at different stages of project implementation (successful applicant)



Source: Online survey

Beneficiaries had the most problems at the following stages of project implementation (Table 35):

- Long time for the payment of funds (77 %)
- Organization/implementation of the project (75 %)
- Application stage (73 %)

The least problems they had:

- When identifying and selecting partners (41 %)
- In the communication/responsiveness of the contract manager (23 %)

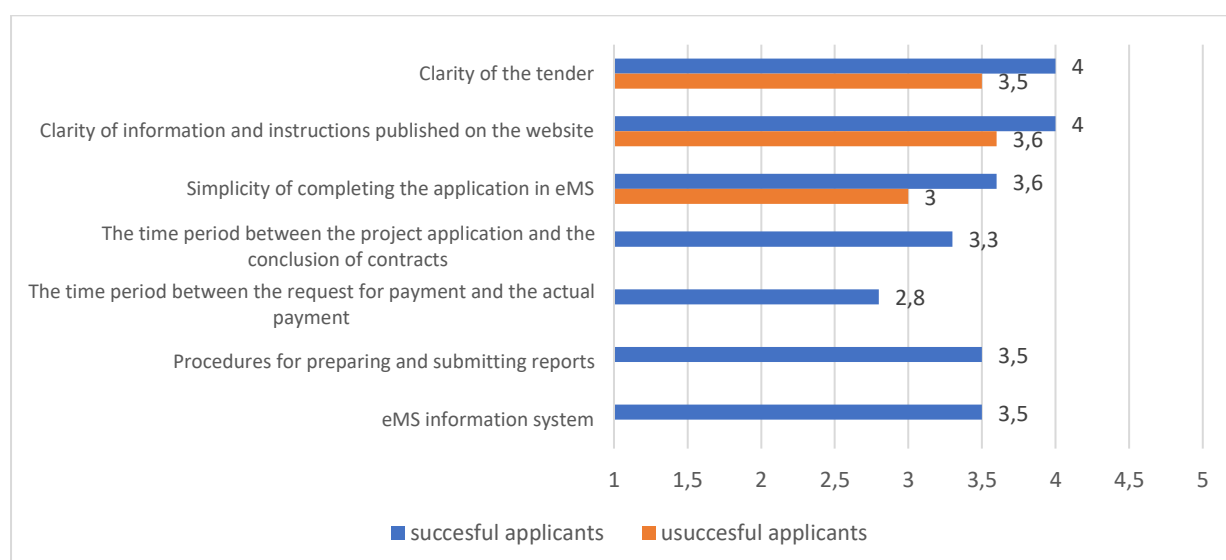
Table 36: Problems at different stages of project implementation (successful applicants)

	At least some problems (%)
In the long time for the payment of funds	77
In the organization/implementation of the project	75
At the stage of application submission/complexity of	73
When reporting on the progress of the project	70
During the preparation phase of the project on an open	70
During the project submission phase in eMS	70
In the financing of the project	69
At the stage of the conceptual design of the project	68
When preparing the documentation for submission of	67
When reporting on partner progress	64
In the transparency/clarity of procedures	59
When identifying and selecting partners	41
In the communication/responsiveness of the contract	23

Source: Online survey

Picture 20 shows average values for satisfaction with factors of administrative procedures of successful and unsuccessful applicants. As seen successful applicants are slightly more satisfied with the factors – clarity of the tender was rated with the average value 4 as well as clarity of information and instructions published on the website (4). Unsuccessful applicants rated those factors with 3,5 and 3,6. Successful applicants were the least satisfied with the time period between the request for payment and payment (2,8).

Picture 20: Satisfaction with factors of administrative procedures – mean values



Source: Online survey

We have grouped answers about difficulties in several categories. Mainly in open ended question respondents listed the following answers (grouped in several categories):

- too long time for payment
- problems with eMS
- double input/attachments in the system, too many attachments that prove the same
- long period of project assessment

As seen from several sources (survey, interviews) the beneficiaries have the biggest problem waiting for funds. Beneficiaries themselves can also contribute to shorter period of waiting for funds – mainly with submitting the reports with no mistakes and needs for explanations and supplements, using flat rate options, which means less checking from FLC and not creating bottle necks. Also all project partners need to submit the report so the checking can start, which means that there needs to be a certain administrative discipline among project partners.

The period between project application and the assessment results has compared to previous programming period shortened. In the first deadline it took 20 weeks from submission to MC decision, in the second deadline 25 weeks and in the third 37 weeks, but we need to take into consideration that in the second and third deadline there were less projects which didn't pass the AB check and more projects to review. Compared to some other EU projects the time period from submitting the project to a decision can be quite longer in some cases even one year. Average time for decision in all three deadlines was 27 weeks or approximately 6 months.

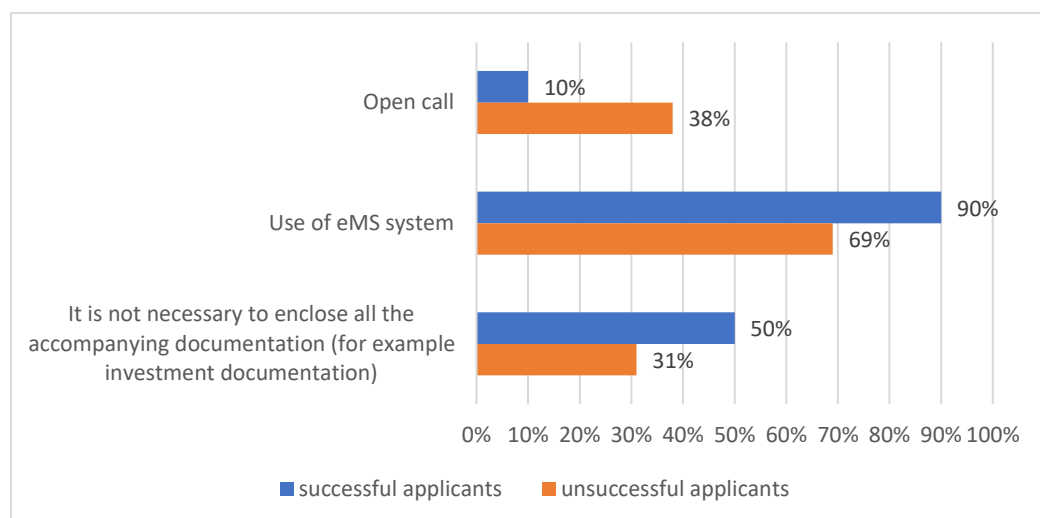
Reducing the administrative burden for beneficiaries

Among successful applicants who participated in the previous programme about one third (32 %) think the administrative procedures have simplified, another 35 % think there is no change and 32 % does not know. It is similar in the group of unsuccessful applicants – 34 % think administrative procedures have simplified, another 32 % think there is no change and 34 % does not know.

The changes that contributed the most to simplify administrative burden successful applicants stress the use of eMS (90 %) and less accompanying documentation (for example investment documentation) (50 %). Just 10 % think that open call contributed to simplification of administrative procedures. If we know that applicants mainly applied on the last days of deadlines this answer is not too surprising.

Opinion of unsuccessful applicants differ to a certain extent, which is understandable, as they went only through the application phase.

Picture 21: Factors that contributed the most to simplification of administrative process



Source: Online survey

Among successful applicants 61 % would suggest simplification of administrative procedures and among unsuccessful applicants 49 % would suggest simplification.

Applicants suggested the following changes/simplifications:

- All cross-border projects should be unified with one application (Monitoring System). So understanding, completing, solving of problems would be much easier and faster.
- The same documents have to be uploaded to eMS several times in different sections, it would be recommended to upload one document only once
- in the eMS system, in the "Attachments" section, it should be possible to remove already uploaded attachments (sometimes it is necessary to replace the document with another, supplemented, and the old document cannot be removed, which creates confusion in control).
- the procurement represents a burden in their work – this refers to providing three offers for goods and services, the forms are too detailed.
- The timesheets should not be so detailed
- To many “proofs” need to be collected – presence lists, photos of attendants (which can be in some cases inappropriate e.g. workshops for vulnerable target groups) – suggestion is if there is an activity, which takes several meetings with the same people, the signature of presence list could be supplemented with the written statement that the person attended workshops/activities, photographing is not necessary at every event).
- More emphasis on the content of projects

4.7 Communication activities

The general objective of communication is to enhance the public awareness of the EU support for projects in the area of CBC through the effective use of communication

instruments, especially by communicating the existence of the European Funds and added value that the cohesion policy represents for the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR through the wide array of instruments.

The Communication Strategy defines four fundamental types of target audiences:

- general public
- media
- programme partners and expert public
- (potential) beneficiaries.

We distinguish between target audience at the programme level and target audience at the project level.

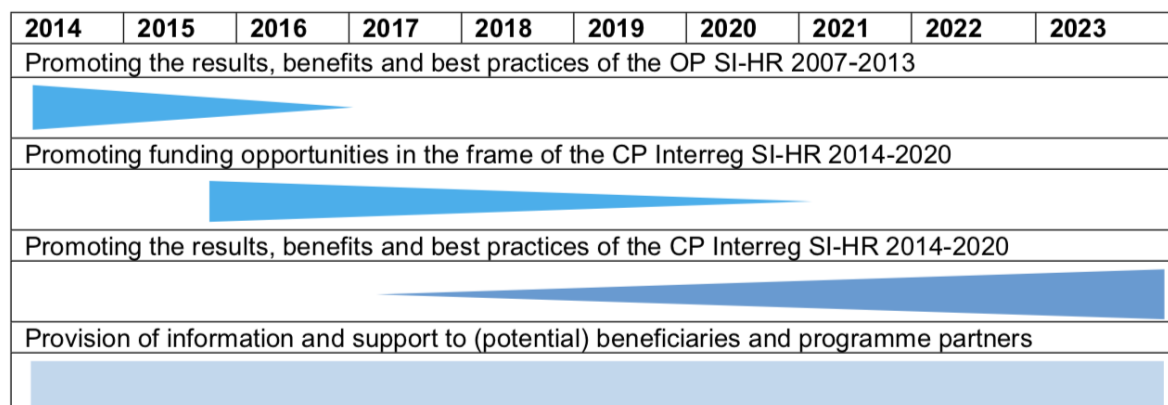
Table 37: Target audiences and specific objectives

	Programme level	Project level
Target audience	programme partners and expert public (political public) as well as potential and subsequently actual beneficiaries	general public; (potential) beneficiaries
Specific programme/project level objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ensure well-functioning internal communication between the programme bodies to make the programme function effectively, ➤ provide information on all programme related issues (programme documents, eligible area, available funds, etc.), ➤ strongly promote the funding opportunity to activate the potential beneficiaries, ➤ support beneficiaries in all phases of project implementation to guarantee the best possible outcome of the projects, ➤ actively cooperate with other Interreg programmes to share information and best practices and learn from one another, ➤ general public information on co-financed projects, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ inform beneficiaries of the duties attached to the funding, ➤ support and encourage beneficiaries in communication activities, ➤ underline the benefits of CBC for the general public in the programme area

	→ promote the benefits of CBC in the programme area	
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Source: Communication Strategy For Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia (2015)

Picture 22: Communication phases



Source: Communication Strategy For Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Croatia (2015)

At the moment the communication activities on promoting the funding opportunities are finished, as the programme is going towards the phase of the promoting results, benefits and best practices.

Table 38: Communication indicators

Communication objective		Indicator	Unit of Measurement	Initial value	Target value at the end of programme period	2019	Achieved indicators %
General objective	Enhancing the public awareness of the EU support for projects in the area of CBC	Recognizability of the CP Interreg SI- HR	%	0%	60%	18%*	30%
		Knowledge of the programme website	%	81%	90%	93,5 %**	104%
		Number of visits to the website	Visits	0	10.000	52.642	526%
Specific objective	Motivate (potential) beneficiaries / communicate the	Number of workshops performed	Workshops	0	12	11 (1 (Na) 10 (JS))	92%
		Number of participants at workshops	Participants	0	250	993	397%

	possibilities to use the EU Funds	Number of mailing members of list	Addresses	0	500	610** (27.07.2018) 299 (25.4.2019)	122% (27.07.2018) 60% (25.4.2019)
Specific objective	Inform target audiences of the practical benefits of the projects implemented and their impact on day-to-day life of the citizens in the cross-border area	Number of created information materials (e.g. printed brochures, leaflets, etc.)	Issues	0	1.000	900	90%
		Number of events performed	Events	0	8	6	75%
		Number of participants at events	Participants	0	800	847	106%

Source: JS

*Derived from the panel survey with general population (n=615, age group 15-65 years). Question: Have you heard of Cross border Interreg programme Slovenia Croatia 2014-2020? (10.05. 2019-12.05.2019)

**Derived from the online survey. Question: Have you already visited web page www.si-hr.eu

***The number of mailing list dropped after 27.07.2018, as due to GDPR all already subscribed to the mailing list had to subscribe again

The majority of indicators were already achieved or even surpassed, regarding the fact that the programming period is not finished yet we can say that all indicators will be surpassed.

Although until 25.04.2019 there were slightly less workshops and events than initially planned, the number of participants was, especially to the workshops, highly surpassed (397 % achievement of indicator). As already shown, the workshops were not just well attended but also of great use to potential beneficiaries.

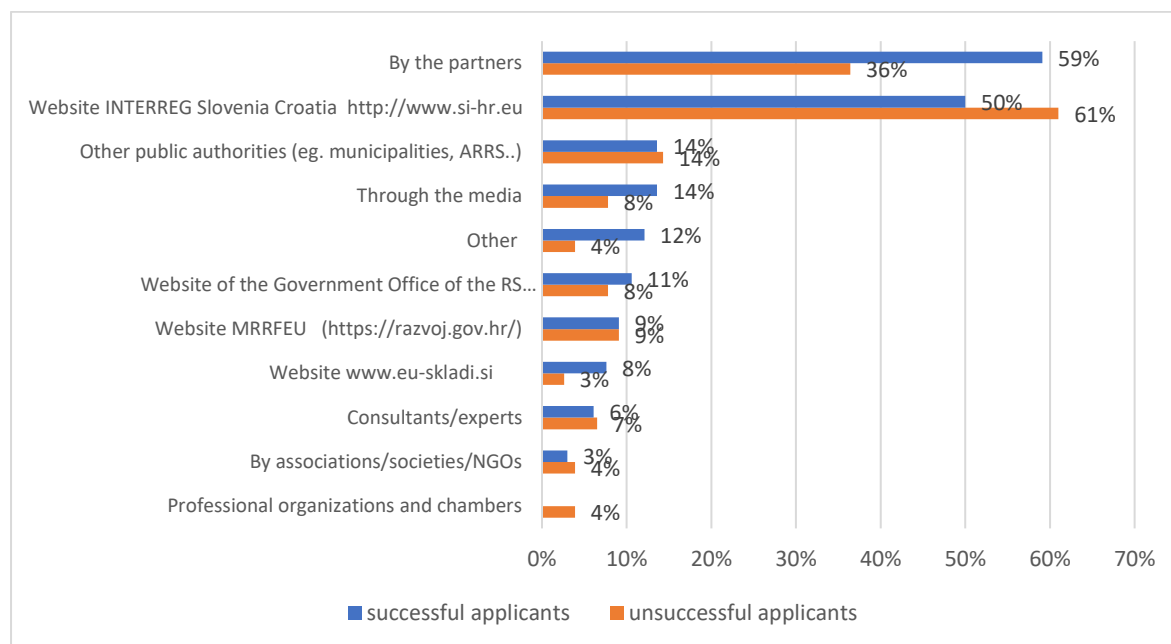
Reaching target audience, especially general public on the programme level demands enough financial and human resources. As seen with regular Eurobarometer⁹ surveys, the highest reach of the citizens on EU Regional Policy is through national TV and local or regional newspaper, also Internet is a medium with good reach.

⁹

http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/F_LASH/surveyKy/2145

(Citizens' awareness and perceptions of EU Regional Policy)

Picture 23: Where did you hear about the open call?



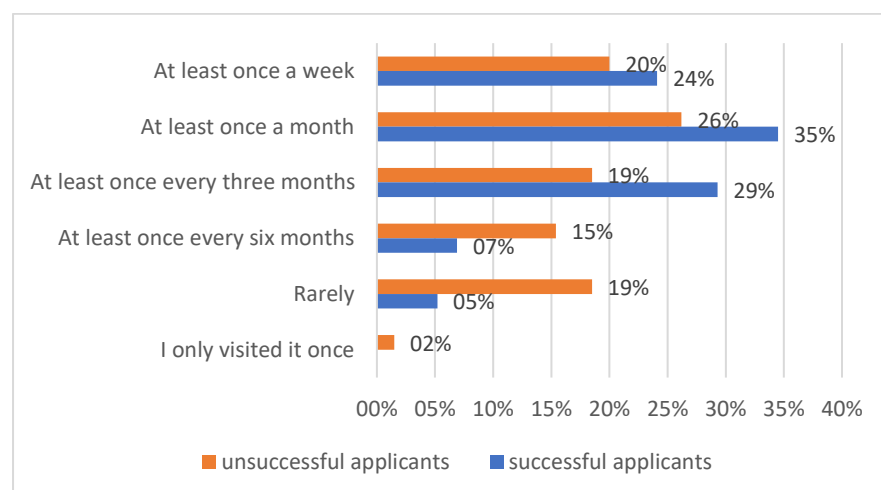
Source: Online survey

The majority of applicants (successful and unsuccessful) learned about the Open call via web site (www.si-hr.eu) and through project partners. There are some differences between successful and unsuccessful applicants, the biggest difference is in informing by partners – one possibility to explain this difference is, that in the group of successful applicants the partners who informed the applicants already had the idea or even prepared the project and then searched/invited other partners to the project.

Among successful applicants there are 97 % who have already visited web page <http://www.si-hr.eu> and among unsuccessful the share is a little bit lower – 90 %.

Successful applicants mainly visit the web page monthly (35 %), 24 % visit it weekly and 29 % at least once every three months. Unsuccessful applicants visit it less often, which is expected.

Picture 24: Frequency of visiting web page



Source: Online survey

Successful applicants the most often search for instructions/guidelines (83 %) and programme news (41 %), while unsuccessful applicants search for public calls (71 %) and programme news (50 %).

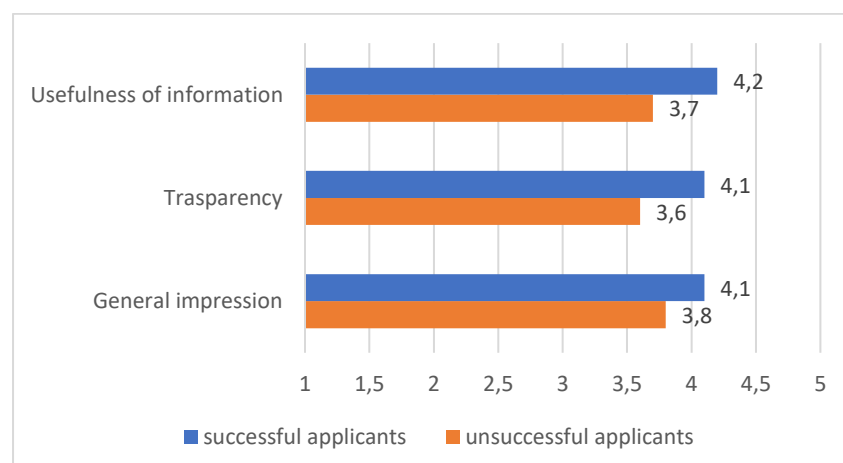
There are 41 % successful applicants subscribed to e-newsletter and 37 % unsuccessful. This percentage should be higher, nevertheless as shown in the table with the achieved indicators, the percentage was higher before GDPR.

Table 39: Information searched for on the web site

	Successful applicants	Unsuccessful applicants
Tenders	29%	71%
Instructions	83%	49%
Program news	38%	50%
Project news	41%	42%
Contacts	19%	18%
Other:	7%	2%
Subscribed to e-newsletter	41 %	37%

Source: Online survey

Picture 25: Assessment of the factors of the web page

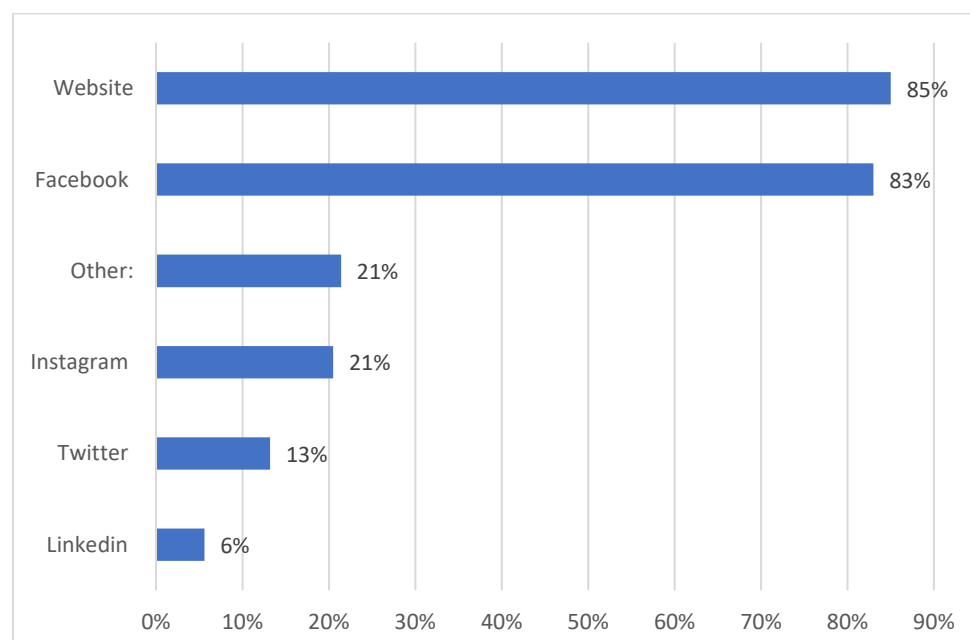


Source: Online survey

Successful applicants tend to assess the web page better compared to unsuccessful ones (Picture 25). The assessment was on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very bad and 5 is very good. Overall mean assessment value of the web page of successful applicants is 4,1 and of unsuccessful 3,7.

Majority of projects has established the web page (85 %) or Facebook page. Other means of communication are not so strong.

Picture 26: Communication channels



Source: Online survey

Experience of LPs

When implementing communication strategy, the beneficiaries used the manual for instructions. They are well informed about the activities, but sometimes they have

problems with visual proofing – sometimes beneficiaries have difficulties presenting the programme logo, when they do the fieldwork.

LPs reported different communication activities in the interviews to reach target groups. Beneficiaries used the following tools: conferences, workshops, media campaigns (radio, TV, social networks), leaflets.

On general they think the target groups were reached as planned.

4.8 Cooperation between programme structures

The programme structure offices are placed in Slovenia and in Croatia.

JS is placed in Ljubljana (SI) with branch offices in Krapina (HR) and Buzet (HR). NA of Slovenia is placed in Ljubljana and NA of Croatia is placed in Zagreb. FLC in Slovenia is organized centrally for all Cross-border, transnational, and interregional programmes in Croatia FLC is centralized for all Interreg programmes. FLC in Croatia was until 31.12.2018 organized within the Agency for regional development and since 1.1. 2019 it is within MRDEF for all programmes.

FLC in Slovenia and Croatia cooperate with the exchange of good practices, they regularly cooperate with controllers of other cross border programmes. They have yearly meetings, also regular communication via skype/telephone/email.

For FLC there are also training activities organized by Interact, where FLCs from different countries participate and can exchange experience and practices. There are 1-2 such events per year. Also, other bodies have regular meetings (e.g. MC meets twice a year, once the meeting is in Croatia, and once in Slovenia) and training activities. There are exchanges of experience with representatives of other Cross Border Cooperation Programmes.

Long checks of the partner reports (FLC) represents the bottleneck for JS, which reviews and confirms the reports at the LP level after FLC. Sometimes the communication between FLC and JS could be improved.

In Slovenia JS, MA, NA and FLC are placed in the same location, which means the exchange of information and communication can be face to face and very fast. In Croatia also, NA and FLC are placed in Zagreb, JS are placed in Buzet and Krapina.

For exchange of information or meetings between Slovenian and Croatian bodies (MA/JS) often Skype/Zoom is used, which is very effective, as it enables participation to the meetings of several people from different locations.

On general the interviewed programme structures agree the programme is running smoothly, they agree they have a lot of work as the teams are small and one person has several different roles and tasks. The problem arises mainly when a person (or more than one) is absent for a longer period, this can also represent a problem or a risk for delays.

5 CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

The general impression is, that the programme runs smoothly and there are no major difficulties. Nevertheless, there is always some space for improvement and fine tuning.

5.1 Beyond 2020

Beneficiaries and programme structures who had experience with the previous programme (2007-2013) agree there have been certain simplifications and the burden for beneficiaries as well as for programme structures has lessened.

Human factor, competences and experience is of big importance in successful running of the programme. From surveys and interviews with LPs and programme structures it is obvious that the personnel working on the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR has a knowledge, experience and competences needed to run the programme. For successful implementation of the programme in the next programming period it is important to keep the continuity of personnel, apart from additional employment which would be recommended for IT manager, activity manager responsible for communication activities and irregularity officer.

The Open Call with deadlines is seen as good, as well in the view of beneficiaries as well as in the view of programme structures, nevertheless the beneficiaries need encouragement not to submit the projects at the last moment. Face to face consultations before submitting the application have proven to be very effective, but if more applicants requested consultations, some changes would be needed – either more consultants, or longer period for providing consultations.

The projects in this programming period are more content oriented, indicators need to be realistic and meaningful, which is perceived as good, although applicants had some problems with developing intervention logic in their applications. In the application phase they had difficulties in distinguishing between the terms “overall objectives” and the “specific objectives” of the project, the "outputs" and the "indicators" at the level of the project proposal. Although the terms were explained, if the applicants asked for explanation (e.g. at consultations) and the terms are also explained in the manual. As understanding of the terms is important for developing intervention logic it is recommended to make a glossary of often used and important terms and publish it on the website (not just in the manual). Also, some examples for clarification could be provided. As workshops were well attended and perceived as a good tool for informing applicants, workshops where potential beneficiaries could learn more about intervention logic, should be organized.

eMS is a new monitoring system, which is perceived positive from both, programme structures as well as beneficiaries, but still some improvements are needed to make it more useful and user friendly. For beneficiaries it would be important to have a system that doesn't require duplication of work (e.g. uploading the same attachments in different sections), make the system more stable and faster. Programme structures have different needs – according to their field of work. For instance, for FLC additional

functionalities would be needed, while CA would need a system, which is compatible with accounting systems.

Beneficiaries who participate in several cross-border cooperation programmes also suggest using just one electronic monitoring system. Decision on which monitoring system is used is in hands of MA. In Cross-border Cooperation programmes where Slovenia acts as MA eMS is used, where other countries act as MA it is their decision which system is used.

Respondents to online survey and to face to face interviews had the biggest difficulties with long reimbursement period.

As it can be seen the problem is twofold – on one hand the beneficiaries are not using the simplified cost options (e.g. flat rates for salaries), which can speed up the checking process at the FLC, also they make mistakes which require corrections and supplements. On the other hand FLC is centralized, which means, they are also responsible for other programmes, which means that in the peaks they work on 10 different programmes at the same time, which slows down the process. The solution is not de-centralizing (as centralized system also brings benefits), but careful planning of reporting period of all programmes and avoiding overlapping whenever possible (we are well aware that some overlapping is not possible to avoid) and involvement of additional officers, if necessary during the peaks of reporting periods.

Interviews with the programme structures showed that they do not create, possess and follow any log book of problems/difficulties and inconsistencies regarding the implementation process at all stages. We suggest to create a Problem/solution log book for problems and inconsistencies regarding the implementation process at all stages and to collect the suggestions from all programme structures, of constant quality improvements of the process at all stages, similar to those according to standard ISO 9001.

5.2 Answers to evaluation questions

EQ1: How efficient and effective are the programme structures? (Measure: division of tasks, staff issues, scope of work etc.)?

The programme structures (MA, JS, NA (SI and HR), FLC (SI and HR), CA) are sufficient at the moment, nevertheless there can arise a problem, if any of the personnel is absent for a longer period.

In Slovenia as well in Croatia FLC is centralized for different programmes, due to overlap of reporting periods of different programmes, there can be a big work overload at those periods, which can cause a bottle neck at the first step of the reporting process.

Number of tasks especially for JS can be overwhelming, as they act as contract managers, assessors, they are responsible for effective conduction of communication strategy, they have a lot of contacts with beneficiaries. For effective implementation

of communication strategy, it would be important to have a person, who could work on it on a daily basis, in order to raise awareness among general population. Currently one of contract managers is acting also as activity manager, but with number of tasks, daily activities for implementing the communication strategy cannot be performed.

There have been noticed some delays during the process of recording of irregularities and slower response of the Irregularity Officer at Managing Authority (MA) to the officer within CA, which can sometimes be the consequence of a bottle neck in field of human resources. There is only one Irregularity officer for three Interreg programs.

Despite the fact that only some of the staff already worked in the previous programming period, the programme structures have a lot of knowledge and competences, therefore it is recommended not to make any changes and keep the same staff for the next programming period.

Short term recommendation:

Not to make any changes in the current staff working on the programme.

A full FTE for eMS (IT manager) would be recommended.

To develop a protocol for a communication between programme structures, where the time frame for delivering a task/answering a request is fixed.

We recommend the establishing common procedure that includes exact responding time frames and exact measures in case of human resource problems or officer replacements to ensure the efficiency of the process.

Long term recommendation:

Regarding the staffing it would be recommended to have an Activity Manager, who would be responsible for effective implementation of the communication strategy. The person could be responsible for all Cross-border Cooperation Programs.

It is recommended to employ another person for the tasks of Irregularity Officer.

As well a full FTE for eMS (IT manager) would be recommended.

To avoid bottleneck at FLC – (when possible) to plan the reporting periods in such way, there would be no or very little overlapping with other programmes and involvement of additional officers if necessary during the reporting period.

EQ2: Can you asses the level of the quality of cooperation among programme partners?

On general the quality of cooperation between programme partners is perceived as good.

Programme structures have good communication and strive for fast exchange of information. In Slovenia JS, MA, NA and FLC are placed in the same location, which means the exchange of information and communication can be face to face and very

fast. In Croatia also, NA and FLC are placed in Zagreb, JS are placed in Buzet and Krapina.

There are also some weak points – the biggest bottlenecks can be observed due to long checks of the partner reports (FLC) which represents the bottleneck for JS, which reviews and confirms the reports at the LP level, after FLC.

As Slovenian programme structures have a lot of knowledge and competences, programme structures from Croatia also occasionally seek advice from Slovenian ones. There are regular face-to-face meetings or phone/skype/email communication, all problems are solved quickly and in constructive manner. In general, there are no main differences in approaches and views to cooperation and expectations between programme structures.

Short- and long-term recommendation:

To continue the good practice of good cooperation.

Do not make any changes in the current staff as the experience and competences are important for successful implementation of the programme.

EQ3: How efficient and effective are the programme procedures? Are there some identified *bottlenecks* and (if yes) how can they be controlled/overcome?

The programme procedures are well established, there are some novelties – Open call, eMs system, which supports majority of the programme procedures. The system is used by all programme bodies, applicants and beneficiaries.

The period from submitting the application to publishing results has shortened in comparison with previous programming period. For beneficiaries AB check seems more rigorous, compared to previous programming period, but on the other hand it is faster, as there is no review of accompanying documentation. Due to high rate of applications that did not pass the AB check in the third deadline there was a possibility to correct a mistake on missing translation in 5 working days, the rate of applications not passing AB check has dropped significantly. The success rate in passing the AB check in the third deadline is also the consequence of gained experience and awareness of a strong competition.

The FLC checks can represent a bottleneck in the reporting process. The FLC checks are according to beneficiaries slow, which can be due to several reasons.

- a) Overlapping of reporting periods of other programmes
- b) Mistakes of beneficiaries, which prolongs the checks
- c) Beneficiaries not using simplified cost options, which can speed up the checking

For beneficiaries the payments are perceived as slow, they have solvency problems, as there is no pre-funding.

According to beneficiaries, funding also represents a problem for strategic projects, when project leader/partner is a state institution, which is financed from the state

budget and in this way (through the state budget) also implements EU projects. Funding for the project from the integral budget and returning the funds from EU back to the integral budget is not adapted to the project work, such administrative procedures cause delays in the project implementation.

With strategic projects there was also a problem as objects on the rivers are shared (e.g. dams), which caused a difficulty in determining which country is responsible for the control.

EQ4: In what way and to what extent were the administrative procedures, regarding to the previous programming period simplified and coordinated/harmonized?

The changes that contributed the most to simplify administrative burden for beneficiaries is the use of eMS and less accompanying documentation (for example investment documentation).

Programming bodies who had worked (or work) with other information systems agree that eMS has simplified their work.

Mainly beneficiaries don't think that open call contributed to simplification of administrative procedures. (If we know that applicants mainly applied on the last days of deadlines this answer is not too surprising).

Simplified cost options were introduced to reduce administrative burden for beneficiaries. The aim of the simplified cost options is to reduce the amount of needed paperwork and to speed up the reporting, verification and control procedures, as beneficiaries do not need to provide documents for the control.

Despite the option to use simplified costs (especially personnel costs) this option is used to a lesser extent, many of beneficiaries use real costs, because they are used to this form from other or previous programmes, also for some institutions flat rates are not optimal, as less costs are reimbursed. Flat rates can be inconvenient especially for public institutions, as they do not cover real costs of personnel.

AB check was also simplified compared to previous programming period, but beneficiaries found it rigorous and had several difficulties passing this check, which was especially obvious in the first deadline.

Long term recommendations:

Encourage beneficiaries or at least promote to use of simplified cost options – show good examples, ask beneficiaries who use simplified cost options to present their practice to other (potential) beneficiaries. This can be done at workshops, on the internet (in form of short movies).

While translations do not benefit to the goals and indicators of the programme we recommend their exclusion from AB check or at least keeping the same correction possibilities from the third deadline.

We recommend the establishing of common procedure that includes exact responding dates and exact measures in case of human resource problems or officer replacements to ensure the efficiency of the process of recording of irregularities.

EQ5: How user-friendly are the programme procedures/processes and forms? Any need for their improvements?

There are no bigger difficulties with the programme procedures, processes and forms.

Procedures are mostly shortened as much and possible (AB check, assessment), the process can be still long for checking reports.

As the surveys and interviews with successful and unsuccessful beneficiaries showed, there were some difficulties at the application stage, the applicants had the most difficulties with applying in two languages, they would prefer just one. While the translations do not benefit to the goals and indicators of the programme, they should not be the case of rejection of good projects. The application in both languages caused difficulties also at the AB check, as due to mistakes in translations/ missing of the translations they did not pass AB check. As this was registered by programme structures in the third deadline, there was a change in the application procedure which allowed five working days to correct the mistakes. Also, the beneficiaries reported about scanning and uploading signed documents, which can be avoided with digital signature.

In the reporting process the beneficiaries see the problem, as they need to upload the same documents several times.

Long-term recommendations:

Instead of physical signature of the application the digital signature could be introduced.

Several EC programmes already use digital signatures in application phase. That way the printing, scanning and uploading the same document could be avoided.

Introduce the electronic system where documents are uploaded only once.

Allow the submission of the application in just one language. If one language is used it is recommended to use English language as it is necessary that partners from both countries understand the content of application.

EQ6: Are support tools (the information system, the programme website etc.) in terms of management and target groups efficient? What is the progress of the programme in achieving specific objectives?

The information system (eMS) is a new system based on HIT tools, which is used by applicants, beneficiaries and programme bodies.

Despite the fact that eMS simplified some of the administrative procedures, it also presents a challenge and beneficiaries as well as programme bodies have some difficulties in using it.

As the interviews with the LPs showed, the application process was not very easy in eMS. There was a constant risk of losing the text inputted, work in eMS is time consuming as the system is very slow. Also, there is a problem with attachments, as the size of the attached file is limited.

Despite some difficulties, beneficiaries report that when they got used to the system, it is not difficult to use, the experience is positive, but there is still room for improvement. Beneficiaries who are familiar with other information systems prefer eMS and would like to use it also in the next programming period.

For the programme bodies (MA, JS, FLC, NA, CA) the system is helpful but they also have some difficulties. FLC would recommend more functionalities within the system – for instance: more statistics in one click, collecting data on the programme level. NA use eMS as members of MC. The main problem they have with the system is that export to PDF is not working well, in the export the data is wrong, so it is useless. JS did not report explicit difficulties they would have, but they support applicants and beneficiaries when they have difficulties.

There are still bugs in the system and they face technical difficulties, which can be solved only by IT manager. At the moment, the IT manager assigned to the programme has only 1/6 FTE.

Web site www.si-hr.eu is well recognized and used by beneficiaries. They mainly use it at least monthly or weekly for searching instructions and project news. Beneficiaries find it transparent, information on the web page is useful, also general impression is good.

The web page is in three languages – Slovene, Croatian and English. It has all the information the applicants and beneficiaries need for application and implementation of the project. The web page is well organized; the information is easy to find.

On the web page the Implementation Manual for Beneficiaries and other guidelines are published. Implementation manual is a very good guideline which starts with the application process description and covers all phases and necessary activities in the implementation of the project. Beneficiaries find it very useful, transparent, with good information.

The applicants and beneficiaries had the support in the form of workshops and individual face to face consultations. The workshops were well attended and evaluated by successful and unsuccessful applicants as useful or very useful.

The workshops and consultations were especially useful for applicants who already had their ideas developed and had their questions prepared beforehand. As programme bodies noticed, applicants had difficulties with developing intervention logic and understanding indicators.

Specific objectives regarding support tools are mainly surpassed:

Specific objective	Indicator achieved (%)
Knowledge of the programme website	104%
Number of visits to the website	526%
Number of workshops performed	92%
Number of participants at workshops	397%

Source: JS

Long term recommendations:

As bugs and new functionalities can be solved only by developers, it would be recommended to communicate and work closer with the developers at Interact. As several programmes are using eMS, who probably have similar difficulties, it would be suggested to developers to organize a common meeting/workshop, where usability testing should be done (not just the explanations of new versions of the system). Faster solving of the bugs in the application is recommended.

The eMS should be upgraded to be more stable.

The maximum limit of the size of the documents which are uploaded to the eMS should be bigger than current.

In eMS the beneficiaries should have possibility to delete/replace documents (which they upload).

Keep the eMS in the next programming period.

For the programme 1/6 FTE for IT manager is not enough. Ideally there should be 1 FTE or at least ½ FTE for IT manager.

As workshops are a good tool for informing applicants, it is recommended to organize a workshop about developing intervention logic, as applicants had a lot of difficulties with understanding the concept of intervention logic.

Short term recommendations:

As beneficiaries often call/contact programme bodies (FLC, NA, JS) with the same or similar questions, which are also very often already published, it would make sense to create FAQ for some topics e.g. Expenditures, Reporting (Now FAQ exists for mistakes

in application process, it is not very visible on the web page). It should be as a separate content on the web page.

The FAQ should be promoted and beneficiaries encouraged to search for information on the internet, before they contact programme bodies.

EQ7: How effective and efficient is the project implementation (thematic and geographical coverage, distribution of projects regarding the intervention codes, cost effectiveness, sustainability of projects, direct effects of projects and their results, the achievement of set indicators etc.) also in the context of programme 2021–2027?

Overall, the programme is likely to progress relatively well in all priority axes.

Within the PA 1, PA 2 and PA 3 the most represented Slovenian project partners are from Osrednjeslovenska region (35 project partners, 9.190.219 € ERDF contracted), followed by Obalno-kraška region (24 project partners 3.513.382 € ERDF contracted), and Podravska region (18 project partners, 2.664.271 € ERDF contracted). The most represented project partners from Croatia are from Grad Zagreb (21 project partners, 8.495.896 € ERDF contracted), Primorsko-goranska županija (34 project partners, 4.781.512 € ERDF contracted), Istarska županija (18 project partners, 2.408.134 € ERDF contracted).

The geographical distribution of approved projects under PA2 and PA3 by the location of project partners shows that only three (out of nine eligible) Slovenian regions (Obalno-kraška, Osrednjeslovenska and Podravska) have been represented within the 1st deadline, while in Croatia the partners and ERDF distribution were more diversified among seven participated regions. During the 2nd deadline already six Slovenian regions were represented, and in the last 3rd deadline all nine regions. The least represented partners are from Spodnjeposavska, Pomurska and Zasavska region. All Croatian regions participated at the 2nd and 3rd deadline, and the least represented are partners from Varaždinska, Karlovačka and Krapinsko-Zagorska županija.

The highest interest of potential beneficiaries measured in a number of received applications under all three deadlines of the open call for PA2 and PA3 was for the investment priority 6c. Tourism remains one of the strongest areas of cross border cooperation between Slovenia and Croatia, which was also recognized in the previous programme period.

Distribution of projects regarding the intervention codes:

<p>PA1 (5b) - Specific objective 1.1: Flood risk reduction in the transboundary Dragonja, Kolpa/Kupa, Sotla/Sutla, Drava, Mura and Bregana river basins</p>	<p>ERDF funds allocated to PA1 were contracted for four strategic projects prepared by the Croatian and Slovenia water authorities that are going to contribute to coordinated flood risk management and to reduce flood risks through the implementation of non-structural measures (joint models, maps and tools) in 6 targeted river basins.</p>	<p>2 LP from SI, 2 LP from HR</p>
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PA2 (6c, d) - Specific objective 2.1: Active heritage preservation through sustainable tourism	22 approved projects were allocated to PA2 (SO 2.1), are expected to contribute to the programme specific objective through the development of new or upgrading of existing sustainable tourist products. These are based on the valorization of the cultural and natural heritage of the programme area.	14 LP from SI, 8 LP from HR
Specific objective 2.2: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and promoting ecosystem service	Four projects were approved under the specific objective 2.2., two in 2 nd and two in 3 rd deadline. The projects are ensuring the durability of the conservation and restoration of target species in Natura 2000 areas of the rivers Sotla and Kolpa, Risnjak National Park, the Radensko polje area, and the Kamačnik canyon. Furthermore, project activities will support the maintenance of a stable population of terns on gravel habitats along the Sava and Drava rivers and improve its conservation status in Natura 2000 sites and improve conservation status of large carnivores (lynx, wolf, and bear) in the Natura 2000 areas Javorniki-Snežnik, Notranjski trikotnik and Gorski kotar and Lika.	2 LP from SI, 2 LP from HR
PA3 (11) - Specific objective 3.1: Building partnerships among public authorities and stakeholders for healthy, safe and accessible border areas	Eight approved projects, which account for 11% of ERDF funds allocated to PA3, are addressing the institutional cooperation in the field of social and health care and are focused on the provision of services for citizens, elderly persons, persons with dementia, etc.	6 LP from SI, 2 LP from HR

Achievement of the indicators:

- ✓ PA1 (5b) - Specific objective 1.1: Flood risk reduction in the transboundary Dragonja, Kolpa/Kupa, Sotla/Sutla, Drava, Mura and Bregana river basins

Projects under the Priority axis 1 are in progress. The approved projects are expected to contribute 100 % to the achievement of the target value of output indicators 5b-1, 5b-2 and 5b-3 and CO020. Strategic project FRISCO 1 contributes to the 5b-1 (Transboundary river basins with joint tools, models and maps for flood risk management) and 5b-3 (People with increased professional capacity due to their participation in cross-border activities in transboundary flood risk and river basin management). While the contribution to output indicator CO20 (Population benefiting from flood protection measures) is addressed to all four projects (FRISCO 1, FRISCO 2.1., FRISCO 2.2., FRISCO 2.3. The indicator 5b-2 (Transboundary river basins with pilot structural flood risk reduction measures implemented) is addressed by three strategic projects (FRISCO 2.1., FRISCO 2.2., FRISCO 2.3.).

- ✓ PA2 (6c, d) - Specific objective 2.1: Active heritage preservation through sustainable tourism

Under the Priority axis 2 indicators have been reported partly and in accordance with the project life cycle. Values of two indicators, firstly indicator CO09 increase in the expected number of visits to supported sites of cultural and natural heritage and attraction and secondly, 6c-3 Persons participating in capacity-building activities, have far exceeded the targeted values. CO09 has contracted the number of 289.732 visits per year (targeted 50.000), of those achieved so far 126.700 (44 %), and 253 % of

targeted. Indicator 6c-3 has contracted the number of 7.997 persons (targeted 500), of those achieved so far 1.696 (21 %), and 339 % of targeted.

The targeted values, in accordance with the contracted and achieved values, might be underestimated for both indicators.

Indicator 6c-1: small-scale investments in visitor infrastructure and preservation of cultural and natural heritage - contracted 69 (targeted 15), of those achieved so far 16 (23 %) and 107 % of targeted.

Indicator 6c-2 New or improved cross-border sustainable tourism products or destinations integrating natural or cultural heritage has contracted 62 (targeted 20), of those achieved so far 3 (5 %) and 15 % of targeted. Poor performance is shown due to unfinished projects implementation.

Indicators CO01 Number of enterprises receiving support (targeted 7) and Indicator CO02 Number of enterprises receiving grants have contracted the target value of 7.

- ✓ Specific objective 2.2: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and promoting ecosystem services

Under the Specific objective 2.2, indicators have been reported partly, for two projects approved under the 2nd deadline and achieved performance indicators are low due to projects in progress. Contracted values exceeded the targeted values in all output indicators.

- The surface area of habitats supported to attain a better conservation status (CO23) has achieved so far 0,5 % (152 ha) of the targeted value (31.000 ha). The contracted number is 32.433 ha.
 - Implemented practical demonstrations of measures in nature in support of biodiversity (6d-1) has achieved 20 % (2 demonstrations) of the targeted value (10). (Contracted 29.)
 - Projects reported 45 persons with improved practical skills and competencies for implementation of biodiversity protection measures and valorization of ecosystem services (6d-3), achieved 18 % of the targeted values (250 persons). The contacted number of 650 persons are expected to be reported in the next two years.
 - None of the joint studies and tools for assessing and promoting ecosystem services was developed so far (6d-2). The contracted number (13) has surpassed the targeted value (3) and it is foreseen that the indicator will be achieved in the next two years.
- ✓ PA3 (11) - Specific objective 3.1: Building partnerships among public authorities and stakeholders for healthy, safe and accessible border areas
- 104 institutions will be participating in CB structures, achieved so far 35 institutions, which contributes to 78 % of the set target value for indicator 11-1 (45 institutions).
 - it is expected that 1.724 persons representing institutions and stakeholders in the programme area will improve skills and competencies, achieved so far 549

persons which is already 83 % above the set target value of the indicator 11-2 (300 persons).

Result indicators are mainly difficult to collect, for several reasons. Some of the indicators are not regularly measured (or data is not collected every year) - the biggest problem are indicators 6dRI1 (Average degree of conservation status of habitat types and species of Natura 2000 sites in programme area-species) and 6dRI2 (Average degree of conservation status of habitat types and species of Natura 2000 sites in programme area-habitat).

Indicator 11RI (Level of cooperation quality in the field of health, social care, safety and mobility services within the programme area) is a very soft indicator, the method of collecting data for this indicator is somehow problematic from several points of view: The data for the indicator is collected with online survey, which targets different institutions. As this are not just institutions (beneficiaries) who participate in the programme the survey is sent to general email addresses that are publicly available (also because of GDPR), which means, that is it very possible, that the survey will not reach the targeted respondent. This mainly causes low response rates. Another problem is more methodological – the questions asked are vague and difficult to answer.

For instance:

- 1) How would you describe today's cooperation quality with the partner(s) from the other side of the border in the field of health and social services, safety and sustainable mobility?

There are several problems in this question:

- a) »cooperation quality« is a term, which is not well defined, it is not clear what is meant by cooperation quality.
 - b) Several fields are listed (health and social services, safety and sustainable mobility), which can confuse respondents as fields are very different.
 - c) Also, partnerships are not defined
- 2) Are you **familiar** and in **contact** with any partner organization from the other side of the border in above listed topics related to your field of interest?
 - a. the question asks two questions – if a person is familiar and if he/she is in contact.
 - 3) The term »from the other side of the border« is vague. Both countries have several borders. It is true that in the introduction it is explained that the survey refers to Slovenia-Croatia, but nevertheless, respondents tend to forget instructions quickly (if they even read them).

So even if the survey is short with the purpose not to burden the respondents, the results we get with such a survey are very questionable.

Sustainability of projects

Among the approved projects under SO 2.1, the aspect of sustainability will be maximized by the combination of allocation of concrete activities to existing project partners and connection of new market-relevant products to existing products or programs or expanded existing programs with new content. Such projects are much more suitable for dissemination and upgrading.

Among the approved projects under SO 2.2, the aspect of sustainability will be maximized by the allocation of concrete activities to existing project partners, partly by market activities (admission) and the adding of new protocols to existing (scientific, educational...) programs. Such projects are much more suitable for dissemination and upgrading.

Among the approved projects under SO 3.1, a sustainability aspect will be more likely met by establishing certain formal networks, competence centers, and standards and by the inclusion of additional institutional and associated partners. Such projects are much more suitable for dissemination and upgrading.

Cost effectiveness

At this stage of the implementation of the program the projects are not finished yet and the program does not yet show measurable results, it is not yet possible to evaluate the cost effectiveness of the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR. However, the cost effectiveness analyses should be done in the second and third phase of the evaluation of the programme (impact evaluation I and II), when the projects will be finished.

As an example a cost effectiveness analysis was conducted for two already finished projects, and the analyses showed that both were cost effective (index of cost effectiveness for both projects was above 1) – achieved outcome indicators were higher than planned and the achieved expenditure was slightly lower than total eligible for both of the projects.

Programming period 2021-2027

Tourism is one of the strongest areas of cross border cooperation between Slovenia and Croatia and it is recommended, to include it also in the next programming period, for several reasons – with good planning these projects are sustainable in nature even when the funding stops, in tourism there are good possibilities for job creation, as the projects are mainly successful, there is a high possibility that they are also cost effective.

Protecting and restoring biodiversity and promoting ecosystem services: Natura 2000 areas cover 39,6% of the programme area with the highest shares in Primorskogoranska, Obalno-kraška, and Primorsko-notranjska. Projects addressing this specific objective are of high importance due to highly positive effects on the nature and biotic diversity. Nevertheless, due to restrictions, regulations, protection

regimes and preservation guidelines, Natura 2000 is often considered as development obstacle rather than an advantage for local population. It is important to keep this PA and also support projects which are seeking synergy with the protection and interpretation of cultural heritage. There is relatively small pool of institutions which can apply for projects in this PA and the same institutions apply for similar projects in other programmes. It is recommended to seek for synergies and complementarity (but avoid double financing).

In the light of programming period 2012-2027 we can say that some of the challenges applicants faced in this programming period were also of legislative nature (e.g. in PA3 projects from the field of mobility were also expected, but due to some specifics in legislation they were not possible).

It is important that the outputs foreseen are realistic, and not in contrast with legislation.

It is important for PP to take into account possible risks in the preparation of project and consider them when implementing the project. Indicators have to be realistic (neither too low nor too high).

Long-term recommendation:

It is recommended to check the methodology of data collection for indicator 11RI and update it.

To ensure sustainability of projects it is recommended to rank higher the applications with clear sustainability plans – give additional points. (Depending on the outcomes of the projects, the sustainability plans differ). The plan should include the funding plan for the future (either for the maintenance or continuation of the project) which would include: described plans for continued financial support, description of the partnership work beyond programme funds, involvement of key stakeholders, capacity building, developed communication plan and others.

EQ8: Which are the characteristics of the partnership (partners by type of institution, the most and least involved partners in both countries, the reasons for the absence of different types of partners, the quality of cooperation between partners)? Does the partnership meet the expectations of the programme?

According to beneficiaries (of approved projects), partnerships were not very difficult to form, majority of project partners or project leaders knew at least some of the partners beforehand. By the legal status, majority of the Lead partners are Municipalities / Counties (17 out of 34), followed by the research and development organizations (10) and 1 private company. Among PP the majority of applicants is Public institutions (72), followed by County/Municipality (38) and NGO (36). Among PP there are 17 institutions participating in more than one project – 14 institutions are participating in two projects, two in three projects and one institution in four projects. 44 % of beneficiaries have already participated in the previous programming period.

The distribution of Croatian institutions is more equal across regions ("županija"), compared to distribution of beneficiaries in Slovenia, where in Ljubljana there is high concentration of beneficiaries, also Obalno-Kraška region stands out, compared to other regions.

There are 7 SMEs participating in the programme.

Among unsuccessful applicants there were 76 SMEs, of those 37 were from Croatia and 39 from Slovenia. 23 SMEs applied as LP, of those 4 were from Croatia in 19 from Slovenia.

There is an obvious need for increasing awareness and a knowledge base among the local SMEs and populations regarding challenges offered by heritage.

Challenges for SMEs are similar to challenges of other institutions - administrative procedures and long waiting time for payments.

Despite the possibility for participating in the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR, the number of participating SMEs seems low. The reasons for that can be that they were not aware of the possibility to apply, they had problems with financial capability (for small enterprises it can be difficult to wait for funds, which is also a problem for smaller public institutions, municipalities and associations) or did not have other capacities (in terms of project management, personnel).

Recommendation:

If more SMEs are required in the programme, the programme among SMEs could be promoted through chambers and responsible ministries.

EQ9: What is the progress in implementing the Communication Strategy and achieving its objectives?

The achievement of objectives of the Communication strategy is progressing well. The majority of indicators has been already achieved or highly surpassed (e.g. number of visits to the website (526 % achieved indicator); Number of participants at workshops (397 % achieved indicator). The communication activities are implemented in accordance with the communication phases, the communication of funding opportunities has finished, and promotion of results is starting. This is the opportunity to address the general public, as only 18 %¹⁰ have heard of the CP Interreg V-A SI-HR (the indicator has so far achieved 30 % of target value).

Recommendations:

Assign ½ FTE for communication activities, that person could be responsible for all Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes.

¹⁰ The result of the survey conducted by Valicon d.o.o 10.05-12.05. 2019

Set a common Facebook page for all Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes where Slovenia and Croatia participate and regularly update it.

EQ10: How was the programme adopted by the target groups, especially by the interested actors and by the general public?

General public is more difficult to reach than (potential) beneficiaries and programme partners and expert public (political public). One of the activities to reach general public is the European Cooperation Day (ECDay, which takes place since 2012), since 2012 the following activities were organised:

2012: Project Market Maribor (for all 3 programs)

2013: View projects in the field (joint introductory greeting for all 3 programs in MB)

2014: View of the project in the field and a small project market (Jastrebarsko)

2015: Open Day

2016: Cross-border Conference

2017: Hike in Maribor Pohorje

2018: Enjoyment of cultural heritage (Portorož and Piran)

Events are among participating public perceived as good, but there should be more activities, which would reach wider public. As Eurobarometer research shows, for general public, the most appropriate channels of communication are national and local TV and newspapers. Also other (digital) channels can be used – social networks as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. To maintain the visibility social network channels need constant updates and a developed strategy. To continuously work on communication activities one person would be needed. As 1 FTE just for one programme is too much, it could be one person responsible also for other cross border cooperation programmes.

The number of audiences reached (programme level) is higher than planned with all the conducted workshops, web page is perceived as good, but it is true, it has more value for beneficiaries than general public.

6 SOURCES

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- SURS: <https://pxweb.stat.si/pxweb/Dialog/Saveshow.asp>
- Muzejski dokumentacijski centar:

http://www.mdc.hr/files/file/muzeji/statistika/2018_posjecenost.pdf

ANNEX

LIST of interviews with MA/NA/FLC/JS		
Date	Name	Body
18.4.2019	Maja Martinšek	SI FLC - GODC
18.4.2019	Vesna Silič Urška Trojar	SI NA - GODC
23.4.2019	Tadej Baškovič Barbara Krašovec Željka Kitić Tereza Černigoj Mateja Toplovec Malarić	JS
23.4.2019	Vesna Resinovič	MA - GODC
29.4.2019	Perica Gabrić Alen Malnar	HR NA - MRDEF
29.4.2019	Neven Vajnaht Ana Staniša	HR FLC - MRDEF
14.05.2019	Benjamin Vrankar Matija Arko	CA

LIST of interviews with LPs		
Date	Project name	Name
19.4.2019	+ eHealth	Alfred Franković
19.4.2019	Mala barka 2	Melita Ravkar Danijela Perković
19.4.2019	Like	Bruno Kostelić
26.4.2019	Prebujanje	Leonarda Tarandek
29.4.2019	Čigra	Jelena Kralj
16. 4. 2019	Riviera4Seasons2	Ljubo Bertok in Alenka Popič
18. 4. 2019	Uživam tradicijo	Tjaša Vidrih
23. 4. 2019	Detox	Darja Ornik
23. 4. 2019	Enjoy Heritage	Martina Zanjkovič
30.04. 2019	STAR	Kristina Furlan
18.4. 2019	FRISCO 2.1 FRISCO 2.2	Stanka Koren, SWA
29.4. 2019	FRISCO 1 FRISCO 2.3	Sanda Kolarić Buconjić, CW