

Interreg
CENTRAL EUROPE



Co-funded by
the European Union



A YEAR IN REVIEW

TAKING
COOPERATION
FORWARD

2023

Foreword from our Head of Secretariat

In this report, we reflect on our programme journey in 2023. When looking back, I am proud to see that we have made great progress in taking central European regions and cities forward in challenging times. Today, we are already funding 100 transnational cooperation projects that are developing innovative solutions to make central Europe a better place.



A major milestone in 2023 was the successful contracting and kick-off of 53 first call projects. These projects are now in the midst of making central Europe smarter, greener, better connected, and more integrated. Soon, they will be complemented by 47 second call projects, whose applications we supported and assessed throughout 2023. We are excited to see all their innovative ideas coming to life. Thanks to transitioning from periodic reporting to continuously accompanying projects during their implementation, we are now much closer to what they do and can support them even better.

With already 85% of our funding allocated to projects, we were also challenged to be creative when developing future calls. We intensely worked on ideas for a call for small-scale projects in 2024 and for capitalisation in coordination with cross-border programmes in 2025. We believe it is important to stay innovative in what we do, especially in view of the discussion on the future of Interreg and cohesion policy that started in 2023. This debate but also synergies among our projects and with other instruments was a key focus of another highlight last year, our programme conference in Vienna in March.

Last but not least, let me point out the impact evaluation of our previous programme. The experts concluded that our funding helps central European regions and cities to improve the lives of citizens in many ways. This is the success of everyone who has worked on programme implementation in recent years and a great motivation for our work in 2024.

Luca Ferrarese
Head of Joint Secretariat

April 2024

Highlights 2023



Application and Contracting

Call 1

In the beginning of 2023, we contracted **53 first call projects**, which the monitoring committee had selected in December 2022 in Bratislava. They cover all specific objectives and involve more than **550 organisations** to make central Europe a better place to live in. **53% of these project partners are new** to our programme.



Call 2

In 2023, we also opened our **second call for proposals**. The call was launched at our programme conference in March and **closed in May 2023**. In the application phase, we actively supported applicants through **many support measures**. These included detailed guidance on the website, individual consultations, a Q&A webinar, and our applicant community platform. The community platform provided a new way for organisations from across central Europe to facilitate bilateral exchanges. It allowed an innovative way of networking while cutting the carbon footprint.

Support Measures:



Our Applicant Community:





In the second call, we received **over 200 project applications** to make central Europe smarter, greener, better connected, and more integrated. More than half of the projects passed an initial relevance filter and were fully assessed, both internally by the joint secretariat and by external experts. After the quality assessment, 47 project proposals were recommended for funding and finally approved by the monitoring committee in January 2024.



Applications in numbers:
(January 2024)



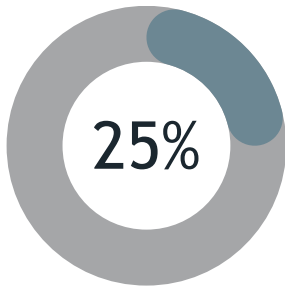
Future Calls



In 2023, the monitoring committee intensely discussed **strategic options for future calls**. It was agreed to continue with a **call for small-scale projects** to address neglected, peripheral places that will be launched in 2024.

Implementation and Monitoring

Project Progress



First call project progress

Most of the **first call projects** launched in March and April 2023. They successfully kicked off their cooperation, including the definition of monitoring plans, and quickly started implementing their planned activities. By the end of the year, initial milestones could already be reached and most of the projects had already submitted a first joint finance report.

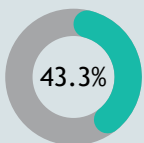
Second call projects will launch in spring 2024.

Indicator Progress

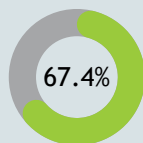
Organisations cooperating across borders (RCO 87)

Compared with the IP target for 2029

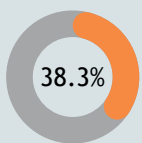
P1: Smarter



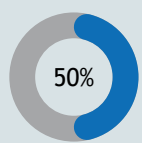
P2: Greener



P3: Better connected



P4: More integrated



Outputs planned by the first call projects contribute strongly to reaching the overall programme indicator targets. Strategies and action plans to be developed by the projects will even slightly exceed the indicator targets that the programme set for 2029 in the [Interreg Programme \(IP\) document](#).



215

Strategies & Action Plans



188

Pilot Actions

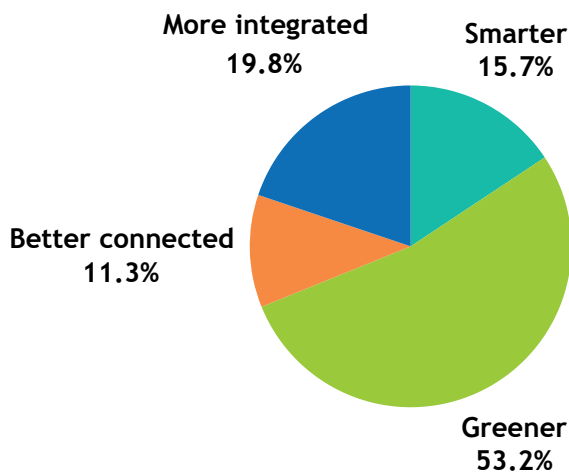


203

Solutions

Financial Progress

In 2023, the programme paid out 3.76 million Euros from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) budget to first call projects. This amount reimbursed their preparatory cost through lump sums as well as their first expenditure incurred after their start.



Already Allocated ERDF

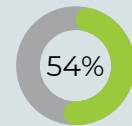
Compared with the IP target for 2027

P1: Smarter



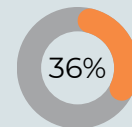
25m of 62,4m€

P2: Greener



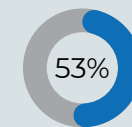
56m to 104m€

P3: Better connected



7,48m to 20,8m€

P4: More integrated



11,1 m to 20,8m€

Total: 48%

Project Highlights



REGIOSTARS: Dynaxibility4CE wins award

In November 2023, the project Dynaxibility4CE (funded by our previous programme) was selected as the best European-funded project in the category ‘A connected Europe’. The REGIOSTARS Awards by the European Commission is Europe’s label of excellence for EU-funded projects. Dynaxibility4CE won the award for boosting eco-friendly transportation in central Europe. Concretely, it helped public transport authorities to better handle emerging mobility trends. It offered them strategies and tools for adaptable urban mobility planning.



Transforming care facilities for the elderly



DigiCare4CE

Society is aging fast and taking care of the elderly is becoming a challenge. Digital solutions offer support to nursing staff but the potential of digitisation is still underused. The DigiCare4CE project promotes innovative solutions that improve care quality and develops a transnational strategy for the digital transformation of care facilities. The partnership tests the deployment of new technologies in pilot actions and elaborates action plans for their broader implementation.



Pilot Action Example

The aim of the pilot action is to implement and test an intelligent decubitus mattress with different sensors that measure different parameters. The sensors in the "smart bed" help the nursing staff to take the best possible care of the client in the nursing home.

<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/digicare4ce/>

Increasing circularity in electronics production

CIRCOTRONIC



The environmental impact of electronics manufacturing is not just limited to waste creation but also raises concerns about air pollution, water and soil contamination in production processes. To overcome this, the CIRCOTRONIC project brings together scientists, entrepreneurs, and policy makers from nine manufacturing regions in a transnational network of regional circular labs. Together, they develop solutions for more circular value chains and design a policy framework for circular production.

Learn more about the project in our #InterregTalks episode at <https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/circotronic/>

“Electrical products are nothing that is created by just one company. It is value chain that is made up by a lot of stakeholders. So it does not make sense that only Austria, only one company is working on this - but it needs cooperation.”

*- Michaela Streicher
(Business Upper Austria)*



<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/leca/>

Improving life with large carnivores



LECA

The Carpathians are home to large populations of lynx, wolves and bears. In recent years, conflicts between large carnivores and humans have increased, but no one knows if this is due to growing populations because data are not collected in a harmonised way across borders. The LECA project introduces a consistent and efficient monitoring approach, which involves local stakeholders. It will result in up-to-date population information, coupled with effective conflict prevention measures.



Documenting Wolf Signs:

- Wolf signs in the field (tracks, dung, urine)
- Tracking wolves on sufficient snow cover
- Collection of samples for genetic analysis
- Monitoring with camera traps
- Summer simulated howling sessions
- GPS telemetry

Safeguarding urban water supplies

MAURICE



The impact of climate change is increasingly important for the design, construction, and maintenance of water infrastructure. Scarcity of water resources due to extreme weather events and falling groundwater levels threaten our cities and regions. The MAURICE project introduces new water management solutions for cities. The partnership helps to integrate these into broader concepts on regional climate change adaptation and encourages the uptake of urban water management tools and measures.

“The more funding cooperation gets, the better answers on how to solve common issues, like climate change, we will have.”

- Grzegorz Gzyl, Central Mining Institute



<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/maurice/>



Improving mobility in border regions



SUSTANCE

Leaving the car at home remains challenging for people in sparsely populated areas close to borders. Too often, there are simply no satisfying public transport offers available. The SUSTANCE project involves a wide range of transport stakeholders to co-design innovative mobility services and governance schemes that will help public authorities to change this. In this process, the partners deploy amongst others customised intervention action plans in pilot regions.



Achievement

A new international rail service between Italy and Croatia, via Slovenia

<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/sustance/>

Engaging citizens to improve policies

GetCoheSive 

Citizens across central Europe increasingly want to get more involved in local and regional policy-making. The GEtCoheSive project develops and tests inclusive governance practices to improve public authorities' capacities to engage with citizens from vulnerable backgrounds, especially in view of environmental policies and access to care services. The partnership develops a transnational strategy and local action plans for four cities to make their societies more cohesive.



Pilot Action Example



Caritas conducts a pilot that focuses on enabling the inclusion of homeless people in sustainable planning of public spaces in Vienna.

<https://www.interreg-central.eu/projects/getcohesive>

Capitalisation and Synergies



Bringing projects together in synergy roundtables

In September 2023, we hosted a communications and synergies seminar in Vienna for key beneficiaries of the 53 transnational projects funded after our first call for proposals. Presentations, group training, and peer-to-peer exchanges helped around 100 participants from across central Europe to further build their capacities on project communications and to identify concrete synergies - for increased impacts of our cooperation outputs and results.



Strengthening the Interreg community

The Interreg Annual Event took place in Santiago de Compostela in October 2023 and attracted over 300 participants from across Europe. Together with Commissioner Ferreira and other high-level policy makers they discussed the current state of programme implementation and the future of cohesion policy. Following two days of intense and inspiring discussions, the event closed with a unique community-building experience: A large group of Interreg representatives withstood the rainy weather and walked together the final stretch of the St. James' Way.



Our Outreach

In 2023, the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE programme conducted numerous activities to make our projects and the added value of transnational cooperation for central Europe visible. One of the highlights in 2023 was our programme conference.

Programme Conference

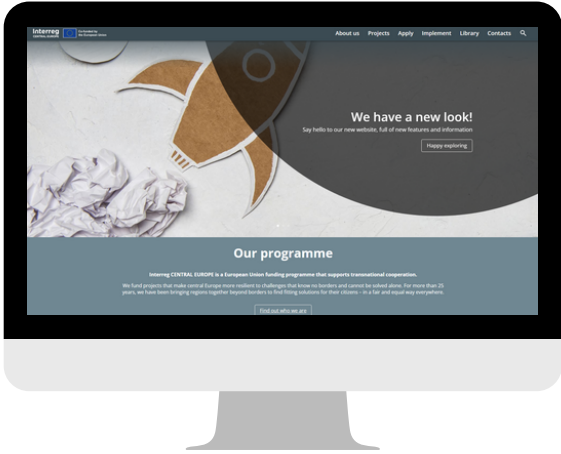
On 22 March 2023, Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE brought together policymakers, experts, and practitioners from all governance levels to discuss the future of European Cohesion Policy and especially the role of transnational cooperation. Cohesion Expert Kai Böhme emphasized that *“Cooperation is a must, not a luxury”*. And Sime Erlic, Croatia’s minister for Regional Development highlighted that *“Territorial cooperation will be crucial not just for Croatia but for all of Europe to navigate the challenges ahead”*.

Next to these interesting debates, we also launched our second call for project applications during the programme conference. And our first call projects had the opportunity to meet each other for the first time.



Over
800
Attendees
online and in
Vienna

In January 2023 we **relaunched our website** with comprehensive information about our transnational funding. New tools and features like an online programme manual and a step-by-step guide for applicants were developed to help applicants and beneficiaries to work with us. Between January and December 2023 we had more than **134 000 unique visits** on the website with more than **356 000 page views**.



Social Media

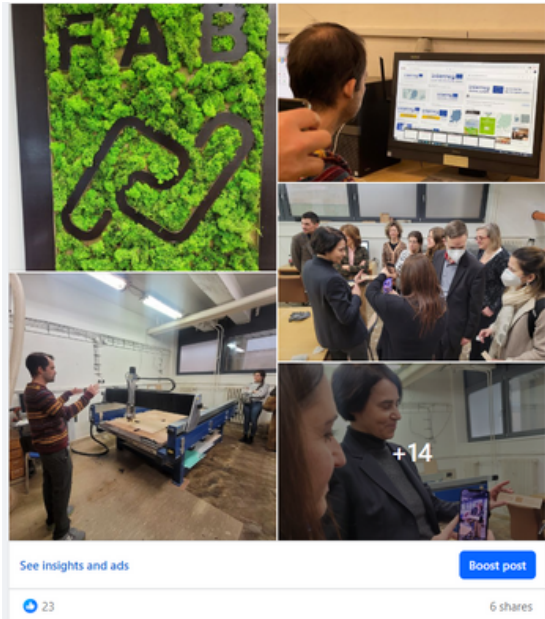
On our social media channels Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, we informed our stakeholders about the achievements of our programme and projects and supported the Interreg community. Especially our weekly format of “Project Thursdays” was successful, in which we presented our first call projects.



Facebook
27K+ people reached



LinkedIn
139K+ impressions of posts



See insights and ads

Boost post

23

6 shares



Newsletter

Moreover, we **updated 17 700 of our stakeholders** on news from our programme and Cohesion policy in general with **6 digital newsletters**.

Our Outreach



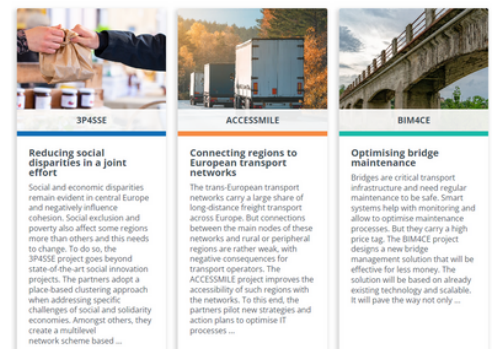
We also started a new #InterregTalks series where we interviewed 15 experts, policymakers, and other stakeholders, who are involved in transnational cooperation. In the videos they shared their thoughts on cooperation and why Interreg is central for what they do.

Support To Project Outreach

However, we did not only communicate about our programme, we also developed and maintained communication tools to support the outreach of our projects.

Putting our projects online

All of our first call projects have received their own sub-pages in the [project gateway of our website](#). These project pages include standard information coming directly from Jems as well as news, events, a project road map and other information placed by the projects themselves. In September 2023 all projects received access to their pages and an on-site Communication Seminar in Vienna was facilitated to help our beneficiaries how to edit the sub-pages.



Our Impact



Evaluation

In August 2023, the final impact evaluation report on the previous Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme 2014-2020 was published, including four thematic papers. Over a period of three years, external experts have looked at the long-term effects of our cooperation funding and found concrete evidence of positive impacts. They concluded that our programme plays an important role in helping to bridge socio-economic gaps and reduce differences in the competitiveness of more and less developed cities and regions.

Key Findings

- ✓ Positive developments were observed across all thematic priorities.
- ✓ The programme significantly enhanced stakeholder capacity and delivered innovative solutions.
- ✓ Transnational cooperation effectively addressed regional challenges.
- ✓ Projects fostered cooperation and trust among stakeholders, with successful transfer of outputs.
- ✓ Success factors included bottom-up approaches, diverse partnerships, and adaptation to external factors.



Thank you for being a part of our year 2023!



For more information visit our website and social media channels or contact us directly!



<https://www.interreg-central.eu>



+43 (0) 1 8908 088 - 2403

InterregCE



info@interreg-central.eu



Kirchberggasse 33-35/11
A-1070 Vienna

Interreg
CENTRAL EUROPE



Co-funded by
the European Union