Evaluation of the
COOPERATION PROGRAMME INTERREG V-A SLOVENIA-AUSTRIA

Final report, July 2017

Nov'na razvoj d.o.o.

Programme: Cooperation Programme Interreg V-A Slovenia-Austria

Contracting authority: Government office for development and European cohesion policy

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Abbreviations

AT	Austria
BWG	Bilateral Working Group
CBC	Cross-border Cooperation
CP	Cooperation Programme
eMS	electronic Monitoring System
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
FLC	First Level Control
JS	Joint Secretariat
LP	Lead Partner
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Monitoring Committee
NA	National Authority
PA	Priority Axis
PP	Project partner
RA	Regional Authority
SI	Slovenia
SO	Specific Objective

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme implementation with the main focus on the processing of the 1st and 2nd deadline of the open call for proposals.

Indicative evaluation questions:

- How efficient and effective are the programme structures?
- How efficient and effective are the programme procedures?
- In how far was simplification and harmonisation achieved?
- What is the progress of the programme towards achieving targets of specific objectives?
- What is the progress in implementation of communication strategy and achievement of the set objectives?

1.2. Methodological steps

The Joint Secretariat (JS) started with the data analysis in 2016.

The main methodological steps of the evaluation comprise:

Step	Timeline
1. Meetings with JS to clarify the tasks	April 2017
2. Design of the questionnaire for LPs in cooperation with the JS	April 2017
3. Analysis of secondary sources	April - May 2017
4. Processing of online survey for LPs	May 2017
5. Interviews with programme bodies	June 2017
6. Observation, judgment, evaluation	June 2017
7. Draft and final report	July 2017

The analysis was based on monitoring data provided by the Joint Secretariat, data from Application Forms, and data available at the programme website. The cut-off date was 30 March 2017. Monitoring data on the implementation of the Communication strategy relate to 30 December 2016. Where appropriate, recent developments and information were integrated into analysis and assessment.

A survey was carried out with Lead Partners (LP) who applied to the 1st and 2nd deadline of the open call. The survey was open from 19 April to 11 May 2017. A link to an online questionnaire was sent to 92 LPs (some LPs applied with several projects). 41 responses were collected (44,6 %), of which 21 from Austrian and 20 from Slovenian LP organizations. 21 respondents were with approved projects and 20 with none approved.

Data were collected from interviews with selected programme bodies (Managing Authority (MA), JS, National/Regional Authorities (NA/RAs) and First Level Control (FLC)).

Project partners (PPs) cooperating in projects approved in the 1st deadline have reported for the first time. The scope of analysis was extended to collect the feedback from FLCs.

The assessment of the progress towards achievement of the programme specific objectives was made on the basis of expected contributions of the approved projects since the implementation is still in the kicking-off phase.

Where appropriate, recent developments after the cut-off date were observed and included in the analysis.

Due to a smaller scope of the assignment, the depth of analysis was limited and the assessment focused on a selected number of aspects.

2. Collection of data and analysis

2.1. About the programme and main milestones

The Cooperation Programme (CP) Interreg V-A Slovenia-Austria was approved by the European Commission on 16 September 2015. It comprises 4 Priority Axes (PA) and 8 Specific Objectives (SO).

Table 1: Structure of the Cooperation Programme

Priority axis 1: Strengthening cross- border Competitiveness, Research and Innovation	Priority axis 2: Protecting the Environment and Promoting Resource Efficiency	Priority axis 3: Enhancing Institutional Capacity and an Efficient Public Administration
Specific objective 1.1: Strengthening R&I in technological and economic fields of strength through CB cooperation of relevant stakeholders	Specific objective 2.1: Achieving sustainable development of natural and cultural heritage	Specific objective 3.1: Improving cooperation in the fields of risk management, energy, health and social cohesion
Specific objective 1.2: Broadening the basis of innovating enterprises in the programme area	Specific objective 2.2: Innovation in sustainable management and utilization of water resources	Specific objective 3.2: Improving interactions among municipalities and citizens within the CB region
Specific objective 1.3: Increasing the level of internationalization of enterprises, especially SMEs in the programme area		
Priority axis 4: Technical assistance		
Specific objective: Providing the efficient and smooth implementation of the cooperation programme		

Source: CP

The programme area comprises 17 NUTS 3 regions, 9 in Austria and 8 in Slovenia. Compared to the programme 2007-2013, the programme area on the Slovene side was extended with the NUTS 3 regions Goriška and Zasavska.

All key programme and project implementation procedures are supported by electronic Monitoring System (eMS), which was developed by the Interact programme and is used in several European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes. eMS became operational in September 2015.

The Monitoring Committee (MC) was set up on 27 November 2015. At the same MC meeting the documentation for the open call for proposals, assessment and selection criteria and programme rules on eligibility of expenditures were approved.

The programme kick-off event was organized on 2 December 2015.

The open call for proposals was published on 18 December 2015.

By 30 March 2017, applications received to two deadlines have been processed and projects were selected by MC. 13 projects from the 1st deadline were in implementation, and 10 projects selected under the 2nd deadline were about to sign a subsidy contract.

2.2. Implementation of the Open call

The programme introduced an Open call system, which enables the applicants to submit project applications continuously after the call is launched until the programme funds are available. The MC defines the deadlines to which applications need to be submitted in order to be included in the project selection procedure at the following meeting of the MC. The MA foresees to set a deadline approximately every 6 months.

### 2.2.1. Support to applicants in the application phase

The MA/JS in cooperation with NA/RAs offer support to potential applicants in project development. The type of support is common to other cross border programmes and comprises:

- The CP and guidance documents available at the programme website: open call, application pack, frequently asked questions, other relevant information;
- Informative workshops for applicants organised by the MA/JS and in cooperation with the NA/RBs; for each deadline, a workshop was organised at one location on the Austrian and one on the Slovenian side; workshop materials were also published on the programme website;
- Information support and advice provided by the JS (e-mail, phone, face to face meetings)
- Information support and advice provided by the NA/RAs (e-mail, phone, face to face meetings)
- IT support concerning technical questions related to the eMS
- A Partner search tool, which is available on the programme website.

Usefulness of programme documents and guidelines

All programme documents and guidelines needed for the preparation of the application are available on the programme website in English, Slovene and German. Any amendments of the documents are marked.

The majority of the LP-survey respondents found the CP, Implementation manual for beneficiaries and Frequently asked questions (FAQs) very useful or useful for preparation of applications. The Implementation manual was very useful to 41,5 %, FAQs to 30,8 % and CP to 19,5 % respondents. For about 10-15 % of respondents, these documents did not bring the expected value and were not considered useful.
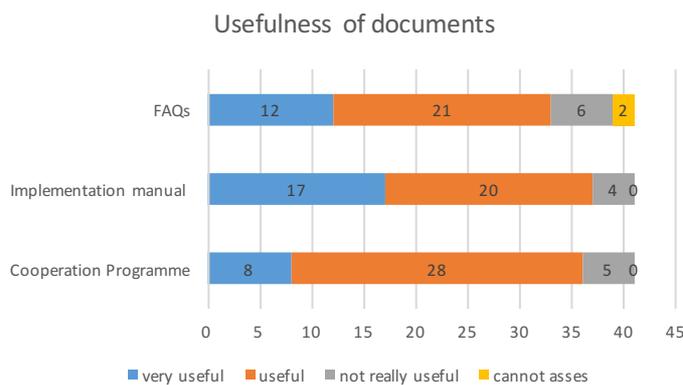
Respondents commented that it was useful to contact programme bodies by phone or personally to clarify any open questions concerning these documents. Some noticed differences in interpretation by different programme bodies and some found the German translation of the manual unclear in certain parts.

Chart 1: Assessment of supporting documents
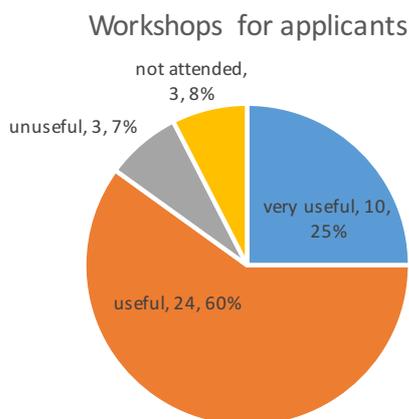
Workshops for applicants were organised after deadlines for submission of applications were announced. One workshop was organised on each side of the border, four in total. Informative workshops were well attended.

60 % of the LP-survey respondents assessed the workshops useful and for 25 % they were very useful. Though, some questions remained unanswered (not specified which ones).

Chart 2: Assessment of workshops

Proposals for future implementation:

- More detailed explanation of the eligibility of costs, in particular the personnel costs, link them with FLC requirements;
- Provide more examples from practice, good and bad ones;
- Provide concrete answers to concrete questions;
- Allocate more time to present eMS and use a concrete example;
- Organise several smaller size events.

Development of project proposals

The LP-survey respondents assessed different aspects of project development. Forming a partnership was very easy for 15 % and easy for 45 % of the respondents, while 37 % found it difficult. Consolidation of partner interests was demanding or very demanding for half of the respondents (51 %). 68 % found it difficult to align the project with the CP requirements and 76 % had difficulties in understanding State Aid. Ensuring co-financing was easy for 12 %, very easy for 39 %, demanding for 27 % and very demanding for 22 % of the survey respondents.

Respondents commented that Austrian partners seem to be more hesitant to cooperate in Cross-border Cooperation (CBC) projects due to negative experience in the previous period (financing, delays) and that establishing an effective partnership requires efforts and time. Ensuring financing was also seen problematic as by estimation at least 9 months were needed to get reimbursed. State-Aid provisions were also not sufficiently clear, e.g. what would be the required co-financing. This was mentioned especially for the Slovene side where State-Aid schemes had not yet been approved when projects to be submitted to the 1st deadline were being prepared.

Development of project proposals
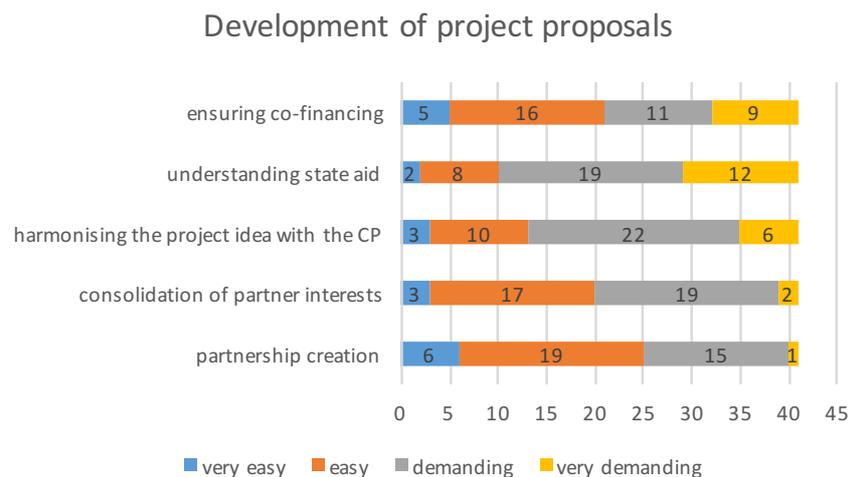
Chart 3: Assessment of specific elements of the project development

Experience of the JS in project development support

The JS observed that many project partnerships contacted them in the application phase. App. 90 % of applicants who submitted proposals to the 1st deadline contacted the JS for information or advice, in some cases several partners called for the same project. Queries related mainly to checking the project idea against the programme indicators, clarification of methodologies behind the CP indicators, and other technical questions. Experience and lessons learned from the 1st deadline were shared in the 2nd deadline.

In general, the JS does not provide content related advice. This is seen as a primarily task of the National/Regional Authorities. The applicants under the 2nd deadline were also informed on the type of projects that are looked for in terms of achieving the programme objectives and targets. Partnerships of the projects postponed in the 1st deadline, usually came back for advice on how to improve applications based on the assessments and comments raised by the MC.

The importance of clear communication between the applicant and the JS to develop mutual understanding was highlighted. In some cases, the projects discussed in the early phase of development, were significantly transformed in the final phase, others found it difficult to follow the recommendations in own local contexts.

Experience of the NA/RAs in project development support

The National Authority in Slovenia and the Regional Authorities in Austria highlighted several aspects of the project development support:

- PPs from Südburgenland are used to present and consult their project ideas with the RA and no major challenges were identified as most PPs are already experienced in CBC. It was also noted that PPs in the region do not take the LP role in this programme. The pool of organisations with sufficient capacities and experience for cooperation in SI-AT projects is limited, partly due to involvement in other cross-border or regional programmes.

- Potential applicants contacted the RA-Styria mainly in the early phase of project scoping. A discussion usually helped the PPs in deciding whether to go ahead with the application or not. Most frequently addressed contents comprised the explanation of programme objectives and its intervention logic, specifics regarding public or private PPs, or basic guidance regarding the project development. In later stages, when projects were more elaborated, only a few used the opportunity to consult with the RA. Compared to the previous period, the RA now has less overview over project initiatives in the region. The possibility to get professional advice from the RA and its departments, which could help in recognising and addressing regional needs and contribute to better quality of projects, has in the view of the RA not been sufficiently seized. Motivating potential partners to enter cooperation has also become more challenging due to stricter administrative conditions.

- In the view of the RA-Carinthia, the cooperation in the Priority Axis PA1 is challenging for Austrian SMEs that find it difficult to secure pre-financing (no pre-financing mechanism exists, as this is the case in Slovenia). The administrative burden in implementation is also high and potential PPs are made aware of these circumstances. The cooperation is easier for R&D institutions and universities as they have better human resources, financial and management capacities. Higher motivation for cooperation in the programme was noted on the side of Slovenian PPs. By observation, most projects related to the PA1 were initiated by Slovenian LPs. Some were not developed in a true cross border manner, but were rather looking for an Austrian partner for an already defined project. The RA has already taken steps towards promoting the programme with Carinthian stakeholders (a workshop was organised; the programme was presented to the university). It seems that institutions across the border still do not know each other well enough, how they operate and this hinders the activation of cooperation potentials.

- The RA-Carinthia also highlighted a challenge which arises from differences in the views of NA/RAs on the development of specific project ideas, which at the end are difficult for the applicants to integrate into a good cross border project. Differences in views, priorities and interpretations are to a certain extent linked with organisational systems and the legal framework in which the NA/RAs operate. Finding a common understanding between the programme bodies and to accommodate these differences in clear messages when advising the applicants and not confusing ones is a recognised need.

- In the view of the NA-Slovenia, applicants' main challenges were linked to the development of an appropriate project intervention logic that would be consistent with the result oriented approach of the programme. Project ideas were often weak in their cross border dimension. Problematic were also projects addressing agriculture related topics as these hardly fit to the current programme. When needed, the NA consults with competent ministries on specific project ideas. The approach of the NA is not to offer consultations shortly before the deadline for submission as not much can be changed or improved in this late stage of preparation.

The NA/RAs also assessed that the quality of the proposed projects has not improved compared to the previous period. Similar to the results of the LP-survey, in the view of the NA/RAs, applicants found it difficult to align own interests with the objectives and expected results of the programme. In many cases, the project development starts from particular local interests that lack a real cross border connection and which could be more appropriately addressed regionally/nationally.

Preparing applications in the eMS

Respondents to the LP-survey were polarised in the assessment of the use of the eMS: 44 % found the system easy and 5 % very easy, while 36 % found it difficult and 15 % very difficult.

Main difficulties faced during entering the projects in the eMS:

- Failures in saving the work done or loss of already entered data lead to numerous repetitions;
- Weak overview during entering (budget entries, whether all fields are filled in, translations made) what easily lead to formal mistakes;
- Character limits: respected character limits in word did not match with eMS, more flexibility should be allowed;
- PDFs are not user friendly (long, poor overview, not all entries printed out);
- Occasional slow-down in the system operation.

After using the eMS for a while, also positive aspects could be recognised.

With regard to technical questions of the preparation and submission of the application in eMS, the applicants were supported by the JS. Many queries were received just a few days before submission.

The application form comprised several parts, of which a Project budget was most difficult to prepare for 80 % and a Work plan for 50 % of the respondents, a Project budget overview was also difficult to prepare for 23 % of the respondents.

Summarised comments regarding the preparation:

- Clearer definitions of outputs, deliverables, activities, and indicators are necessary;
- Project budget planning is too detailed – should be linked to work packages only;
- Insufficiently defined menus in the eMS application resulted in failures regarding data completion;
- The nature of attachments was less clearly defined (e.g. LP/PP statements).
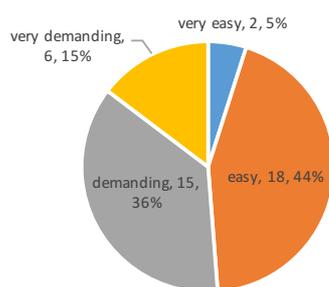
Chart 4 - 5: Use of the eMS in the project application phase

Assessment of the support provided by programme bodies

In general, the majority of respondents to the LP-survey found the support of the JS very good, and of the NA/RAs good. Respondents appreciated the support offered, good contacts were established at personal level.

Some observed differences in the interpretation of rules between programme bodies (different messages received from Slovenia and Austria), while the other would prefer content related comments from all bodies, not only administrative or technical ones, and quicker decision-making.
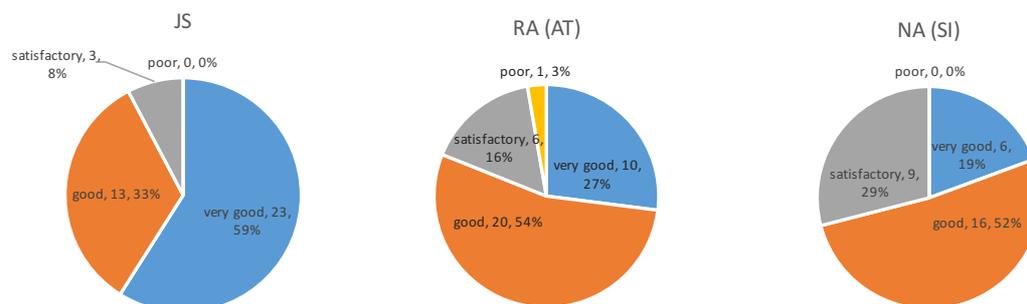
Chart 6: Assessment of the support provided by the programme bodies

2.2.2. Receipt of applications, assessment and selection procedure

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

Overview of received and approved projects

125 applications were submitted to both deadlines. 53 % of all received proposals addressed PA1, 26 % addressed PA2 – investment priority 6c, 18 % addressed PA3 and only 2 % addressed PA2 – investment priority 6f. The number of received applications submitted under the 2nd deadline has increased by 40 % compared to the 1st deadline. 23 projects are approved, which in total is 18,4 % of all received applications. Whereas 25 % of all received applications were approved under the 1st deadline, the share dropped down to 14 % in the 2nd deadline.

Table 2: Received and approved projects under the 1st and 2nd deadline for submission per PA and investment priority

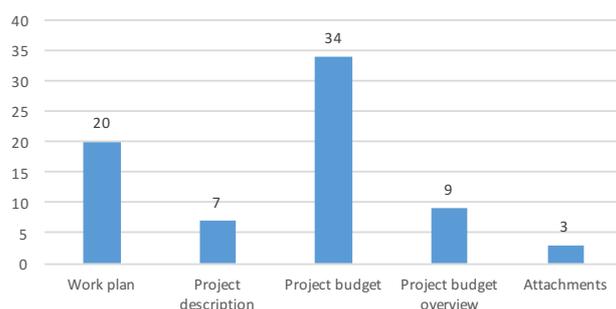| Applications 1st deadline	PA1 - 1b	PA2 - 6c	PA2 - 6f	PA3- 11	Total
Submitted applications, % of received to all PAs under 1st deadline	28 (54 %)	14 (27 %)	1 (2 %)	9 (17 %)	52 (100 %)
Administratively compliant &eligible applications, % of received under IP	16 (57 %)	8 (57 %)	1 (100 %)	5 (55 %)	30 (58 %)
Approved & signed contracts, % of all submitted under IP	5 (18 %)	4 (29 %)	1 (100 %)	3 (33 %)	13 (25 %)
Applications 2nd deadline	PA1 - 1b	PA2 - 6c	PA2 - 6f	PA3- 11	Total
Submitted applications, % of received to all PAs under 2nd deadline	38 (52 %)	19 (26 %)	2 (3 %)	14 (19 %)	73 (100 %)
Administratively compliant &eligible applications, % of received under IP	28 (74 %)	12 (63 %)	0 (0 %)	9 (64 %)	49 (67 %)
Approved & signed contracts, % of all submitted under IP	6 (16 %)	1 (5 %)	0 (0 %)	3 (21 %)	10 (14 %)

Source: JS/MA, programme website

Administrative and eligibility check (AB check)

The AB check is done according to a checklist published in the Implementation manual for beneficiaries. A 100 % compliance at the submission stage is required to pass. In case of inconsistencies or any missing elements, the application was rejected without prior request for clarifications or supplements (this is valid for the 1st and 2nd deadline only).

The intention of the MA/JS was to increase the efficiency of the assessment and selection procedure and to secure the announcement of two deadlines for submission of applications annually. Experience from the previous programme period shows that significant share of applicants had to be asked for clarifications or supplement, what had prolonged the procedure.

During the AB check the investment documentation is not examined anymore. PPs declare and confirm compliance with the programme rules and requirements by signing a PP statement. In case the statement is at later stages found false, PPs can face prosecution by the penal code.

The AB check in the 1st deadline resulted in 42 % of rejected applications. The main reason for rejection were formal mistakes: empty fields, missing translations, inconsistencies between different parts of the application, data not completed, budget not presented bilingually, etc. Many were generated through the use of the eMS, which was not well equipped with control mechanisms.

The JS treated all applications equally and followed the checklist strictly. Applications that could despite formal mistakes provide relevant information for further assessment (e.g. text was given in one language but not translated) were rejected. The share of applications that failed the AB check due to incompliance with the eligibility conditions was minor. The JS analysed the most common mistakes which occurred under the 1st deadline and published them on the programme website.

In the 2nd deadline the eMS was partly improved with some additional control mechanisms that could to a certain extent help in checking the completeness of the application form. It can be assumed that applicants were also more alert after experiencing rejections in the 1st deadline. The share of administratively compliant and eligible applications has improved to 67 %.

In the view of the RA Styria, the AB check should be oriented towards establishing whether further assessment can be made or not. E.g. in case of differences between languages, the language version of the LP should prevail as discussed during the programming phase.

The MC reacted to the situation on its meeting in May 2017. The MC members agreed to change the procedure that applications with up to 4 formal mistakes linked with translations will be accepted and it will be asked for supplements within 5 days.

Quality assessment

The quality assessment of applications is carried out by the JS staff. In the view of the MA/JS, this approach turned out better compared to the engagement of external assessors in the previous programme period: the JS personnel is the same as in the period 2007-2013 and was involved in the programming process and has good knowledge of the programme objectives, contents, expected results; they know certain PPs from previous cooperation. Assessors take part in the MC meeting where projects are presented and additional questions can be answered. A disadvantage was recognised in the fact that for some highly specific topics (e.g. within R&D) assessors would not have sufficient content related knowledge. The JS has a possibility to engage and consult with experts, so far this option has not been used. In the view of the assessors, the NA/RAs have better insight in national/regional priorities. Though initially proposed, the final decision of the programme was that the assessment is done by the JS only, whereas the NA/RAs are engaged in the project development phase and giving an opinion of the State Aid. Having only Slovene assessors is not seen as an ideal situation by one RA.

The **criteria for quality assessment** were designed on the basis of the Interact Harmonised Implementation Tools (HIT tools). The programme has in accordance with an increased result oriented approach attributed the highest importance to the strategic aspects of project assessment. The strategic criteria represent 46 % of the total project score and combined with the Specific guiding principles per priority the share is 61 %. The highest importance in the strategic assessment is given to the contribution of the project to the programme specific objectives and results (27 of 45 points). The operational assessment criteria on the other hand represent 21 % of the total score, with the highest importance given to the work plan (12 of 21 points).

It is interesting that innovation is considered as a specific guiding principle for projects under the investment priority 6f and not as a horizontal element for all PAs.

Table 3: Quality assessment criteria and their importance in the total score

Set of criteria	Sub-criteria and max. points	Maximum points	% of total score
Strategic assessment	Importance and strategy (C1- C2), max. 9 points Contributions of the project to the expected results and outputs (C3-C8), max. 27 points Horizontal principles (C9), max. 9 points (3 for each principle)	45	45,9 %
Specific guiding principles for PA	3 principles for each intervention area, each with max. 15 points (C10-C12, C13-C15, C16-C18, C19-C21)	15	15,3 %
Cooperation criteria	Readiness for cooperation and partnership approach (C22-C25), max. 17 points	17	17,4 %
Operational assessment	Management (C26), max. 3 points Work plan (C27-C29), max. 12 points Financial plan (C39), max. 6 points	21	21,4 %
Total		98	100 %

Source: Implementation manual for beneficiaries, Part 3.

The quality assessment was performed in total by 3 assessors who are independent from the project development support.

Each administratively compliant and eligible application is assessed independently by two assessors. The final score is calculated as an average of the two assessments and comments are summarised in a grid, which is accessible to the MC members.

Table 4: Quality assessment of applications

	PA1	PA2		PA3	Total, % of all assessments
Applications 1st deadline	1b	6c	6f	11	
Number of applications scored less than 60 % of total points	1	0	0	0	1 (3,4 %)
Number of applications scored between 61 %-74 %	2	1	0	1	4 (13,8 %)
Number of applications scored 75 % and more	13	7	1	3	24 (82,8 %)
Applications 2nd deadline	1b	6c	6f	11	
Number of applications scored less than 60 % of total points	4	3	0	2	9 (18,4 %)
Number of applications scored between 61 %-74 %	8	3	0	4	15 (30,6 %)
Number of applications scored 75 % and more	16	6	0	3	25 (51,0 %)

Source: JS

The share of projects with the status recommended (scored with 75 % of max. score or more) was very high (83 %) in the 1st deadline and decreased to 51 % in the 2nd one. The share of applications with the status recommended under conditions (i.e. scored between 61 %-74 % of max. score) and those proposed for rejection (bellow 61 % of max. score) subsequently increased in the 2nd deadline.

The LP-survey respondents self-assessed to what extent they were familiar with the project assessment and selection procedure:

- 59 % of respondents were fully and 37 % partly acquainted with the assessment and selection procedure;
- 73 % checked the quality criteria while preparing the application, 22 % got familiar with it and 5 % not.

MC decisions on projects proposals

The MC discusses projects assessed by the JS. Projects are clustered in 3 groups (recommended for approval, recommended with conditions and proposed for rejection). MC members give opinion or

provide additional information, including specific national or regional aspects, which may not have been taken into consideration during the quality assessment.

By observation of the interviewed programme bodies, the differences in the approaches of the two countries are reflected at the MC meetings. While the Slovenian side is in favour of following the assessors' ranking list, the Austrian side prefers having more flexibility in deciding from the clusters of projects and more in-depth discussion about each one. Informal bilateral pre-meetings as organised in the previous period were considered beneficial by the RAs to discuss the positions of both countries. In the opinion of some RAs, the actual role of the MC should be strengthened.

The MC has a possibility to postpone projects to be improved and apply to one of the following deadlines. The PPs can work on the same application in the eMS. When submitted to one of the next deadlines, the application is assessed again in the frame of the AB and quality check.

12 of 13 projects postponed in the 1st deadline were assessed for quality in the 2nd deadline. The MC approved 5 of 9 projects under PA1, and none of the 3 under PA2. Postponed projects that were not approved, cannot be submitted for the 3rd time. In the 2nd deadline, the MC postponed 10 more projects.

In the view of one RA, postponement also has weaknesses – PPs have to spend additional resources for changing the projects whereas on the other side they will be facing a growing competition in the following deadlines. It is a burden also for the programme bodies to work several times on one project.

Face to face meetings with applicants

Face to face meetings are organised between the contract managers (JS) and LPs of approved projects in order to clarify any open issues, such as project indicators, budget, or any conditions set by the MC.

Applicants, whose projects were rejected or postponed, have the possibility to clarify the project weaknesses with the head of the JS or the NA/RAs. 44 % of respondents to the LP-survey contacted the JS or NA/RAs to find out about the reasons of rejection/postponement/approval of the project.

In the comments to the assessment and selection procedure, the LP-survey respondents highlighted that:

- Small formal mistakes should not be a reason for rejection of applications, applicants should be contacted for clarifications;
- Not enough focus is given to project contents, too much on administrative compliance;
- The transparency of selection procedures was questioned by some respondents (arbitrary decisions made by the 'jury', projects proposed for approval were rejected by the MC, the reasons for rejection are in some cases unclear);
- The assessment and selection procedure should be shortened.

2.2.3. Timeline for processing of the Open Call

The overall time needed to process 52 applications received in the 1st deadline from the date of submission to the signing of the subsidy contracts was 32 weeks; in the 2nd deadline the time extended to app. 36 weeks with the number of applications increased to 73.

The AB check was completed in a relatively short time in the 1st deadline. At a later stage, 3 more applications were found non-compliant and an additional written procedure was necessary. In the 2nd deadline the procedure took longer, as the team was not operating in full capacity due to summer holidays. The JS assessors estimated that app. 12-14 hours are needed for one application to be assessed against the quality criteria. As assessors also have other regular tasks to accomplish, the overall period of assessment takes longer.

56 % of the LP-survey respondents found the assessment and selection procedure longer than expected, for 39 % it was as expected and for 5 % shorter than expected.

Table 5: Key steps in processing of received applications for 1st and 2nd deadline

Steps	1st deadline Start date - end date	2nd deadline Start date - end date
0. Publication of the Open call / announcement of the deadline	18/12/2015 -	24/05/2016 (website)
1. Informative workshops for applicants	12/01/2016 (Brdo, SI)	09/06/2016 (Radenci, SI)
	14/01/2016 (Seggau, AT)	13/06/2016 (Klagenfurt, AT)
2. Receipt of applications in eMS	12/02/2016 at 23:59	27/07/2016 at 23:59
3. Administrative & eligibility check (AB Check)	15/02/2016 – 04/03/2016 (52 applications, 15 work days)	01/08/2016 – 16/09/2016 (73 applications, 34 work days)
4. MC written procedure (preparation, MC decision – 10 days, sending out rejection letters to projects that failed AB Check)	05/03/2016 – 08/04/216; 08/04/2016 – 21/04/2016; 09/05/2016 – 27/05/2016	19/09/2016 – 10/10/2016
5. Quality check of applications	11/03/2016 – 26/04/2016 (30 applications x 2 assessments, 29 work days)	03/10/2016 – 09/12/2016 (49 applications x 2 assessments, 53 work days)
6. State aid check/opinion for projects	28/04/2016 – 11/05/2016	09/12/2016 – 11/01/2017
7. Preparation of materials for MC and sending out invitation to MS meeting	29/04/2016 – 18/05/2016	12/12/2016 – 17/01/2017
8. MC meeting – decision of project	02/06/2016 – 03/06/2016	01/02/2017 – 02/07/2017
9. Minutes of MC (preparation, time for commenting is 15 days)	06/06/2016 -	03/02/2017 -
10. Preparation and sending out decision letters	06/06/2016 – 22/06/2016	
11. Face-to-face meetings with beneficiaries	27/06/2016 – 15/07/2016	23/02/2017 – 15/03/2017
12. Preparation of ERDF Subsidy contracts	11/07/2016 – 20/07/2016 (13 contracts)	16/03/2017 – 24/03/2017 (10 contracts)
12. Signing of ERDF Subsidy contracts	28/07/2016 (event)	05/04/2017 (8 contracts)
14. Duration from submission of application to signing of the Subsidy contracts	app. 32 weeks	36 weeks
15. Workshop on reporting for beneficiaries	14/11/2016 (Ptuj, SI)	June 2017

Source: JS, own calculation

2.3. Overview of projects approved in the 1st and 2nd deadline

2.3.1. List of approved projects

Below is the overview of projects by Specific objectives and main themes or topics addressed.

Table 6: List of approved projects per PAs and specific objectives

Project acronym	Themes/topics addressed
PA1	Specific objective 1.1. Strengthening R&I in technological and economic fields of strength through CB cooperation of relevant stakeholders
MMO3D	cooperation of R&D and SMEs in development of a robot cell for 3D printing with composite materials
ABS Network	energy efficiency, renewable energy sources: development of a solar thermally activated facade panel (STAF-panel) for the effective use of solar energy in order to reduce the energy demand of a building
CapaCon	energy conversion and management: linking of the existing knowledge, skills and R&I capacity of businesses (Industry and SMEs), research institutions and stakeholders in this field (mapping, innovative examples, events)
RETINA	advanced material engineering for industrial applications: building a network of established laboratories with complementary skills in material science and providing research centres and SMEs and large enterprises with a "single entry point" access to the network.
PA1	Specific objective 1.2. Broadening the basis of innovating enterprises in the programme area

Project acronym	Themes/topics addressed
E-SME	e-mobility: know-how- and network transfer, development of services and demonstration in the field of e-mobility (e-mobility know-how transfer, sector overview, SME pilot models/services, electric rally,..)
SMART PRODUCTION	territorial competitiveness of manufacturing industry: database enlargement of innovation-oriented production SMEs in the programme area, in particular in the area of "smart factories", technological and non-technological Innovation in at least 50 cross-border SMEs
Start-up AA	Start-up destination: increasing the quality and range of services and resources for talents and start-ups in cross border region by developing a unique cross border globally recognizable support to the talents and start-ups in seed phase and growth phase.
PA1	**Specific objective 1.3. Increasing the level of internationalization of enterprises, especially SMEs in the programme area**
regioWIN	internationalisation for women entrepreneurs in peripheral areas (networking, know-how exchange, marketing, new business models, exploring development potentials)
IRIC	internationalisation for SMEs (coaching system for SMEs, new models, training system, 20 export plans, coaching teams, pilot testing, internationalisation manual,…)
EXPEDIRE	internationalisation for SMEs (10 partnerships, entry to third markets, service portfolio, networking events, support services and qualification measures for the export- export academy,..)
Passport to Export	product development and internationalisation of technology based SMEs (Italy, Switzerland) - structures for cooperation with target markets, export Academy, capacity building for SME and support in internationalisation, new product/service development, networking events
PA2	**Specific objective 2.1. Achieving sustainable development of natural and cultural heritage**
321 go	cultural tourism destination connecting 3 castles, activation of artists' potentials
AS-IT-IC	intelligent information centres for tourists (improved tourist services, virtual assistants, promotion of e-heritage, networking among tourist workers)
Flagship Products	tourism development based on flagship regional products (thermal &mineral water, apples, pumpkin seeds) integrated in value chains and new tourist experience, capacity building for tourist workers, thematic routes
PaleoDiversiStyria	sustainable tourism - historical food supply (from the identification of the original plant and animal species in archaeological contexts to the revitalization and utilization of indigenous crop species and their inclusion in tourism)
Alpe Adria Park	sustainable tourism in Western Karavanks (hiking, biking, winter adventures - common strategy, marketing, common strategy, standards, investments, booking centre, information points/ biking centres,…)
PA2	**Specific objective 2.2. Innovation in sustainable management and utilization of water resources**
SI-MUR-AT	ground water protection: cooperation in order to sustainably safeguard and improve the quality of the lower Mur River and the connected bodies of groundwater to achieve a long-lasting good qualitative state of groundwater - measurement, modelling, avoidance strategy
PA3	**Specific objective 3.1. Improving cooperation in the fields of risk management, energy, health and social cohesion**
L2P-2020 Plus	employment for young in border area: institutional cooperation for creation of career prospects for young people in the industrial area close to the border.
REGIO HELP	social and help cooperation, data management: establishing of a self-learning regional knowledge management system for those seeking help at face-to-face information centres, at all regional authorities, by telephone or via Internet.
NEKTEO	energy efficiency, renewable energy sources: development of cross-border tools for increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable forms of energy, awareness raising and capacity building for municipalities.
URBAN DIVERSITY	migrant entrepreneurs: connecting of migrant entrepreneurs and their families in Ljubljana and Graz to enhance and promote diversity through creativity (strategy development, comparative analysis, competence building for municipal staff, diversity workshops, pilot activities & projects)
PA3	**Specific objective 3.2. Improving interactions among municipalities and citizens within the CB region**
EUfutuR	Geopark: establishment of EGTC, strengthening of bilateral identity and international promotion and positioning of Geopark.
City Cooperation II	cooperation of cities, positioning, digitalisation: positioning of the individual network partners as perceptible lighthouses of the region, joint development and implementation of innovative and site-related purchasing power systems

Source: website, project applications

2.3.2. Geographical distribution of approved projects

23 projects will be implemented by 129 PPs. So far, the most successful were PPs from the NUTS 3 regions Podravska, Pomurska, Graz, Osrednjeslovenska and Klagenfurt-Villach. It can be assumed that the concentration of institutions with capacities for CBC is strongest in these regions, especially in urban centres. Zasavska region, which is new to the programme, is not cooperating in any of the approved projects. The programme is to a lesser extent represented also in the remaining regions of the programme. 4 PPs from Nordburgenland (outside programme area) are regional institutions that cover also Südburgenland.

Table 7: Distribution of projects and committed ERDF funds per NUTS 3 regions

NUTS 3 region	1st deadline			2nd deadline			Total		
	ERDF	PPs	Projects	ERDF	PPs	Projects	ERDF	PPs	Projects
Pomurska	1.763.922,12	14	9	632.881,10	3	2	2.396.803,22	17	11
Podravska	1.798.217,12	12	8	1.509.292,10	7	5	3.307.509,22	18	13
Koroška	271.203,80	3	3	0,00	0	0	271.203,80	3	3
Savinjska	179.979,00	1	1	135.635,90	2	1	315.614,90	3	2
Zasavska	0,00	0	0	0,00	0	0	0,00	0	0
Osrednje-slovenska	1.171.473,52	8	7	1.321.427,59	7	5	2.492.901,11	15	12
Gorenjska	0,00	0	0	1.015.161,24	6	2	1.015.161,24	6	2
Goriška	0,00	0	0	923.832,70	4	2	923.832,70	4	2
Slovenia	5.184.795,56	38	-	5.538.230,63	29		10.723.026,19	66	-
Nordburgenland	357.733,72	2	2	380.069,00	2	2	737.802,72	4	4
Südburgenland	503.138,12	1	1	0,00	0	0	503.138,12	1	1
Klagenfurt-Villach	104.830,50	1	1	2.752.835,21	13	6	2.857.665,71	14	7
Oberkärnten	453.021,44	2	2	0,00	0	0	453.021,44	2	2
Unterkärnten	664.886,37	3	2	0,00	0	0	664.886,37	3	2
Graz	2.100.346,98	10	6	1.631.412,02	7	5	3.731.759,00	17	11
Östliche Obersteiermark	0,00	0	0	344.250,00	2	1	344.250,00	2	1
Oststeiermark	1.885.501,61	10	4	848.214,15	1	1	2.733.715,76	11	5
West- und Südsteiermark	1.034.454,25	6	4	0,00	0	0	1.034.454,25	6	4
Westliche Obersteiermark	323.406,25	2	1	0,00	0		323.406,26	2	1
Austria	7.427.319,25	37	-	5.956.780,38	25		13.384.099,63	62	-
Total	12.612.114,81	75		11.495.011,01	54		24.107.125,82	129	

Source: JS, June 2017

2.4. Expected contribution of approved projects to the CP objectives and indicators

53,6 % of the ERDF funds available for the implementation of projects under PA 1 – 3 were committed to approved projects after two deadlines for submission were processed.

Table 8: Committed ERDF funds per Priority Axes

	1st deadline	2nd deadline	1st + 2nd deadline	Programme funds	Share of ERDF funds committed in %		
	ERDF	ERDF	ERDF	ERDF	1st deadl.	2nd deadl.	1st + 2nd
PA1 (1b)	4.624.644,38	5.859.081,56	10.483.725,93	15.023.809,00	30,8 %	39,0 %	69,8 %
PA2 (6c)	4.175.793,44	2.095.171,92	6.270.965,37	17.564.263,00	32,4 %	11,9 %	44,4 %
PA2 (6f)	1.522.484,38	0,00	1.522.484,38				
PA3 (11)	2.289.192,61	3.540.757,53	5.829.950,14	12.400.283,00	18,5 %	28,6 %	47,0 %

	1st deadline	2nd deadline	1st + 2nd deadline	Programme funds	Share of ERDF funds committed in %		
	ERDF	ERDF	ERDF	ERDF	1st deadl.	2nd deadl.	1st + 2nd
Subtotal	12.612.114,81	11.495.011,01	24.107.125,82	44.988.355,00	28,0 %	25,06 %	53,6 %
TA	2.999.999,98		2.999.999,98	3.000.000,00	100,0 %		
Total	15.612.114,79		27.107.125,80	47.988.355,00	32,5 %		56,5 %

Source: JS and own calculation

So far, the highest share of funds has been committed to projects under PA1 (70 %), followed by PA3 (47 %) and PA2 (44 %). All funds for technical assistance projects were committed at the beginning of the programme implementation.

2.5. Financial aspects of project implementation

In this part, only the basic data was analysed. As mentioned in the introduction, the projects are still in the early phase of implementation and no reimbursements from the programme funds have been made yet.

Average size of project budgets

Looking at the estimation of total project costs, the average project budget was the highest under PA2-6f. Average project costs under PA1 and PA3 are similar. On the other hand, the average project budget per partner is the highest in the PA3 and close to PA2-6f, and the lowest under PA1 and PA-6c.

The conditions of the open call limited the minimum project budget with 50,000 Euro ERDF funds (representing max. 85 % of the total project value) and recommended that projects should not exceed 3 million Euro ERDF funds.

Table 9: Project budget overview

Priority Axis	No. of projects	No. of PPs	Total project costs in Euro	Average budget per project in Euro	Average budget per PP in Euro
PA 1 – 1b	11	61	12.415.846,31	1.128.713,30	203.538,46
PA 2 – 6c	5	35	7.377.606,32	1.475.521,26	210.788,75
PA 2 – 6f	1	7	1.791.158,08	1.791.158,08	255.879,73
PA3 – 11	6	26	6.858.764,89	1.143.127,48	263.798,65
Total	23	129			

Source: JS, own calculations

The programme introduced measures to reduce the administrative burden on beneficiaries:

- A flat rate for staff costs of 20 % of direct costs other than staff costs, where the beneficiary does not need to document that the expenditure has been incurred and paid out;
- 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 is required.

An overview of the main cost categories shows that staff costs represent a relatively high share in the overall project budgets; the flat rate option is thus a less possible alternative chosen, though differences at PP level can exist.

'Staff costs' is the main cost category for 16 out of 23 approved projects. In 63 % of cases, staff costs represent between 50 % and up to 75 % of the total budget. External costs represent the main cost category for 6 out of 23 projects (26 %), of which half with a share below 50 %. Equipment is the main costs category for one project only and represents less than half of the total project budget.

Table 10: Main cost categories in the approved projects

Cost category	No. of projects			
	Less than 49,99%	50% - 74,99%	75% and above	Total
Staff costs	3	10	3	16

External costs	3	2	1	6
Equipment	1			1

Source: application forms

2.6 Implementation and financial controls

Self-assessment of the implementation progress

21 LPs with approved projects self-assessed their own progress in implementation: 38 % implement according to plan, 24 % faced minor delays, and 38 % were in the kicking-off phase. They observed the following:

- Good cooperation with the JS/NA/RAs;
- High level of bureaucracy;
- Some delays due to late contract signature;
- Some delays noted by FLC (AT).

Feedback on FLC checks

75 PPs who are engaged in the implementation of projects approved under the 1st deadline, prepared 1st PP progress reports in the eMS. PPs have to respect the programme guidelines for eligibility, some FLCs developed national/regional guidelines.

In Slovenia, the FLC is organised centrally for all ETC programmes. National rules on eligibility of expenditure were developed. FLC procedures were changed to address efficiently the challenges faced in the 2007-2013 period: 10,000 progress and final reports were checked and 77 % had to be complemented by PPs and checked at least one more time, what caused delays. Key measures:

- If part of the expenditure cannot be certified due to missing evidence/documentation, the PPs are not asked for supplements during the same check. The beneficiary is notified about the situation and the non certified expenditure can be claimed again in the following report. The LP can now receive certificates from Slovenian PPs quicker than in the former period. The measure, however, leaves room for the improvement of the quality of reports and thus a higher % of certified expenditure already during the first check.
- PP progress reports with expenditure below 10,000 Euro in a reporting period are not checked; the expenditure is to be claimed together with the next progress report. However, so far submitted reports were briefly pre-checked and basic findings communicated to the PPs via the eMS in order to consider them before submission of the next report.

FLC checks have so far been done with no delays and completed within 1-2 weeks from receipt. On 2 June 2017, of the 37 PP reports, 7 were below 10,000 Euro, 3 were being checked, the rest completed. 50 % of the claimed expenditure was certified to the date of interview.

It was observed that many PPs already had experience from the previous period, however, unnecessary mistakes were still made. Only a few Slovenian PPs claim staff costs on the basis of flat rates. As learned, simplified cost options are not used also because of internal procedures of the PP organisations, which require more detailed reporting. The checking of staff costs is usually time consuming, especially for specific organisations, such as educational institutions, where the systems for the calculation of salaries are rather complex.

In Burgenland, the beneficiaries use only programme guidelines for the eligibility of expenditure. 3 PP progress reports were checked. Beneficiaries asked for many clarifications; partly because the PPs reported for the first time in the eMS and were not completely sure about how to handle the supporting documents. Content wise, clarifications related to the calculation of staff costs. Open issues were effectively resolved and only a minor share of costs were found ineligible. If requested, the FLC controller provides general information with regard to reporting or eligibility of expenditure.

The FLC in Styria issued own guidelines for beneficiaries, which are published at their website. FLC controllers were overwhelmed with questions from beneficiaries during the preparation of reports. Many questions concerned the use of the eMS. Calculation and reporting of staff costs, especially for

partners who cooperate in different programmes and have to use different cost methods, was a main challenge. One of the challenges faced by the FLC was the different interpretation of the visibility rules, which stem from the same regulation, however, in practice are handled differently from programme to programme.

The FLC invested much time and resources to support beneficiaries with information on general issues to build capacities for reporting. The FLC tries to clarify any open issues in the course of the current check. Applicants have 10 working days to upload the required supplements in the eMS. In exceptional cases, the controller would postpone a part of the expenditure to the next period (e.g. if all other partners' expenditure was already certified, if there was no response in the agreed time).

The checking of reports was still in progress at the time of the interview on 19 June 2017: 15 reports were finalised or in progress and 13 on the waiting list. Delays occur as one controller left and replacement has not yet been ensured and is planned by September 2017.

The FLC in Carinthia uses additional guidelines only in case that national/regional co-financing of the project is given. FLC checks for 3 PPs were completed and the main challenges related to the use of the eMS and the calculation of staff costs. The expenditure was approved to over 90 %. Some PPs decided to use the flat rate which is considered a good approach for avoiding complex calculation methods and reducing the administrative burden. The usual practice is that a new PP is invited for a meeting where the project is discussed in detail and open questions are clarified. The structure of the Application Form gives a good overview of the expected project outcomes. In some cases, the description of tasks is quite general what gives space for interpretation and further clarifications are needed with the JS.

Planned reporting of project expenditure per reporting periods

Applicants were requested to forecast project expenditure across reporting periods. An overview of the reporting periods shows that most projects will have 6 reporting periods, 2 projects planned 5 and 1 project planned 4 reporting periods. The recommended project duration by the programme was 36 months. Reporting is in general to be done every 6 months.

All FLC bodies are expected to check in total 756 PP progress reports for the 23 projects being currently in implementation. The overview of the planned PP expenditure per reporting period shows, that 686 PPs reports (90,7 %) are expected to exceed 10,000 Euro. From the remaining 70 PP progress reports only one is 0.00 Euro, other amounts vary from 60 to almost 10,000 Euro. Very low shares, ranging between 60 and 300 Euros are characteristic for 2 projects with a total of app. 10 reports.

One has to take in account that forecasts were made by PPs with more or less precision.

Table 11: Planned expenditure per reporting period

Priority Axis	No. of PPs	No. of PP reports to be checked by FLC	AT - no. of PP reports with expenditure per reporting period bellow 10,000 Euro	SI- no. of PP reports with expenditure per reporting period bellow 10,000 Euro
PA 1 – 1b	61	348	16	11
PA 2 – 6c	35	210	10	26
PA 2 – 6f	7	42	0	1
PA3 – 11	26	156	5	1
Total	129	756	31	39

Source: application forms, own analysis

2.7 Use of the eMS

Experience of applicants

Please see Chapter 2.2.1 on the application phase.

The experience of the JS is very positive. The eMS allows direct insight in the application, contract managers can have an immediate information about the progress in reporting by each PP, etc. The system allows exporting of some basic data without the need to engage an IT expert.

Experience of the NA/RAs

For many users, the eMS was complicated at the beginning, however, with increased use it is easier, though not all possibilities were explored yet. Overall, the eMS is supposed to become a good platform, with quick online access to data. Work on further fine-tuning is necessary.

Weaknesses of the system and further needs:

- Analytical tools were not accessible and the RAs depended on own analyses;
- Several versions of application forms are saved in the system and it is difficult to find the actual one;
- The access to applications during the assessment phase is too limited. Applications are accessible for the State Aid check and then opened again when materials for the MC become available. In there are many projects to be discussed at the MC meeting, the time for preparation is not sufficient (NA).
- Pdf format is not useable (poor layout, sometimes data in the system does not appear on pdf);
- Improvements could be made with the structure, printing formats and alert systems.

FLC checks

The PPs prepare progress reports directly in the eMS and have to upload all supporting documents. The financial controllers needed some time to get familiar with the new system. They highlighted the following weaknesses:

- Notification functions are missing: The controller is not notified about the submitted PP report. This requires active checks of the system. Also, when a PP uploads requested supplements, the controller is not notified about the change. Uploaded documents are not marked as new ones and thus it is difficult to spot them in the long list of uploaded documents;
- The layout of the certificate of expenditure is lengthy and not well designed; the amounts of eligible expenditure appears in two lines and is poorly readable;
- Working directly in the system requires a high level of concentration, despite the use of two monitors simultaneously still much clicking and scrolling up and down is necessary, what is time consuming;
- Some German translations are poor and the user does not know what is actually being ticked,
- Slow operation of the system, which is linked to the specifics of the information system used by the government (FLC Slovenia)
- Problems with the saving function caused repetition of work done. It was thus not uncommon that controllers used printouts and did checks on paper, took notes, ... (Slovenia)
- Exported data into excel files are not edited and difficult to use;
- Pdf formats of the application forms are not user friendly;
- Access to documents: the subsidy contract and its amendments could not be seen by FLC controller
- When a revert function is used, the beneficiary has the possibility to exchange documents what can affects the audit trail.

2.8 Cooperation between programme bodies

The MC meets approximately twice a year. As already mentioned in Section 2.2.2, it was observed by the interviewed programme bodies, that the expectations with regard to how these meetings should be conducted, differ between the Slovenian and Austrian side. In view of one RA, the role and responsibility of the MC in taking decisions should be strengthened.

The Bilateral Working Group (BWG) is considered an important and useful platform for coordination about the programme implementation, monitoring of the workflows, exchange of practices and solving of any open issues. Two meetings were organised in 2016. In the previous programme period, approximately 5-6 meetings were held annually.

It has been noted that although the programme framework had been set up in cooperation of programme bodies, differences in expectations and interpretation of certain procedures still exist. One of the possible reasons lie in differences in the functioning (national, regional level) and way how these bodies operate. Some partners would prefer more discussion at these meetings or more frequent meetings; more efforts could be invested in finding optimal solutions for both sides. In the view of interviewed partners, there is room for improvement of relations.

2.9 Communication activities

The MC adopted the Communication strategy of the programme, which defines communication objectives, target groups, communication phases, tools and activities.

The focus of activities related to the current programme is on the funding opportunities and information for potential applicants to prepare project proposals.

53 % of the LP-survey respondents found the information about funding on the programme website, 39 % learned about it at the kick-off event and the same share was notified by other support institutions or networks, 31 % learned about them through the e-newsletter.

Finding out about the call for proposals
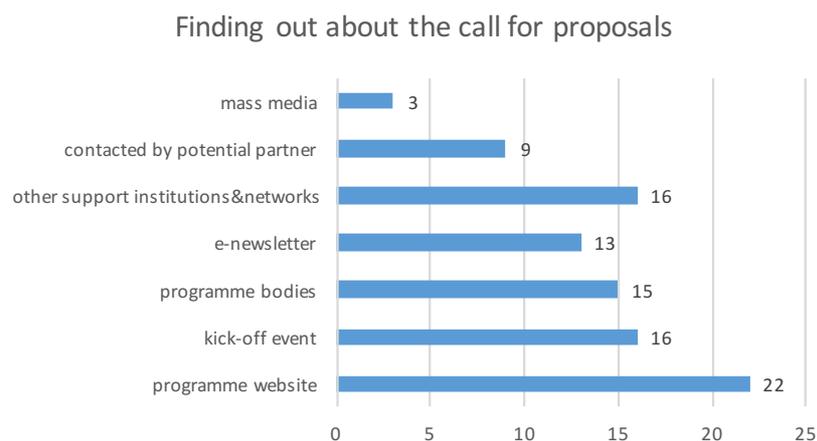
Chart 7: Most common communication channels used by LPs

The key communication tool of the programme is the website www.si-at.eu. It is followed by 92,5 % of the LP-survey respondents. 78 % of the respondent found the availability of information at the website very good or good and 22 % satisfactory. Similar is the assessment of the usefulness of the information. 50 % of the respondents assessed the update of information with good and 39 % as very good.

Programme website

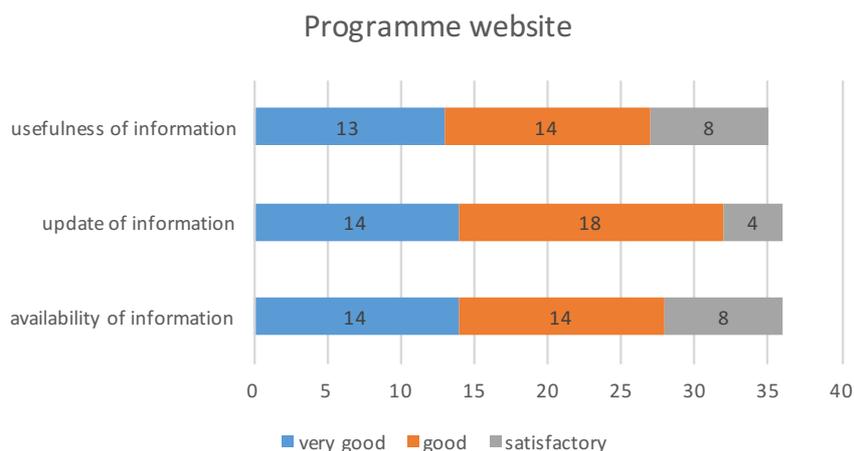|	very good	good	satisfactory
usefulness of information	13	14	8
update of information	14	18	4
availability of information	14	14	8

Chart 8: Assessment of the programme website

79.5 % of respondents receive the e-newsletter. 50 % of those who responded, read every issue, 47 % most of the issues. Facebook is followed regularly by 15 % and occasionally by 25 % of the respondents, while 60 % of the respondents do not follow it.

In 2016, 136.521 visits to the website by 18.166 single users were made. 65 % of sessions were done by Slovenian and 20 % by Austrian users. The website was most visited by users from Ljubljana (33.4 %), followed by Maribor (12.1 %), Graz (7.7 %), Vienna (4.2 %), Klagenfurt (3.8 %).

Potential applicants were invited to 4 events organised in the application phase to the 1st and 2nd deadline. These were visited by over 600 participants. Over 160 participants attended the workshop on reporting, which was organised for beneficiaries under the 1st deadline.

2.10 LP's views on the cross-border cooperation beyond 2020

Respondents to the LP-survey were also asked to make proposals regarding the preparation and implementation of the cooperation programme beyond 2020.

Their comments were structured around the following topics:

- **Cross-border cooperation strategy and contents:**
  - Provide clear and understandable objectives and contents, limited themes so that smaller amount of applications will be submitted;
  - Few large strategic projects, one joint project for people to people activities;
- **Programme planning:**
  - Start early enough with necessary activities to enable swift transition from one period to another, implementation of new project should be possible from 2021;
  - Involve regional levels to a greater exent (bottom-up);
- **Implementation:**
  - Ensure actual simplification, reduce bureaucracy and give more competence back to the project owners
  - Focus on the achivement of objectives;
  - Provide clearer and harmonised cooperation guidance and their interpretation, guidelines should be ready at the start of the programme implementation;
  - Better adaptability to changed cirucmstances;
  - Faster and more transparent assessment and selection procedure;
  - Simplified application procedure (eMS should be simpler), allow for correction of formal mistakes;
  - Ensure national co-financing.

3. Evaluation

- ## Evaluation question: How efficient and effective are the programme structures?

The assessment focused on programme bodies involved primarily in the processing of the open call. The following judgement criteria were used:

- The programme body has sufficient human resources to implement the requested tasks;
- Procedures and work processes are established and followed;
- The programme bodies cooperate in effective way.

In general, the programme structures are fairly effective with room for improvement of cooperation at the programme level.

Personnel within all analysed programme bodies is appointed and has sound knowledge and competence enriched with experience from previous programme periods and also from operation of other CBC programmes.

Rules and procedures concerning the work of programme bodies in the assessment and selection process are established and followed.

Bottlenecks at present exist within the FLC Styria due to a lack of personnel. IT support regarding the eMS does not seem sufficient. In the future, with more projects in implementation and almost identical deadlines for submission of the PP progress reports in other ETC programmes, bottlenecks could emerge (example FLC Slovenia).

At programme level, differences between the Austrian and Slovenian side exist in approaches and views to cooperation and expectations. The different views have so far not been sufficiently addressed. This can reduce the overall effectiveness of cooperation at the programme level and affect negatively the quality of support provided to the project level.

The efficiency of the programme structures is connected with the established delivery systems and is therefore addressed in more detail in the next evaluation question.

- ## Evaluation question: How efficient and effective are the programme procedures?

In the assessment, the following judgement criteria were used:

- The programme bodies (MA/JS, NA/RAs) provide quality support to project applicants in the application phase
- The programme procedures regarding the application and implementation are user friendly for applicants or beneficiaries
- The programme allows for selection of programme relevant and feasible projects
- The procedures related to processing of the open call are carried out efficiently
- The FLC controls are carried out efficiently and effectively
- The eMS contributes to effective and efficient implementation and management of the programme.

Application, assessment and selection process

The established programme procedures allowed for processing of the open call in a fairly effective and efficient manner. Outcomes of certain procedures directly affect the processing of the following deadlines and therefore the overall efficiency of the programme is still early to assess.

Overall support of the JS, NA/RAs to applicants in the project development phase was well organised and accessible and also appreciated according to the LP-survey. The criteria for assessment of the project quality are relevant and can support the MC in taking informed decisions. The exception are regional/national specifics, which are not assessed and are discussed at MC meetings. Considering substantial resources (human, competence, time) needed for the preparation of qualitative

applications, effective consultation with the NA/RAs already in the project development phase seems of key importance. The project assessment was done quite efficiently considering the limited human resources of the JS assessors; however, the overall procedure is relatively long. There does not seem to be much room for shortening the procedure due to a fixed number of staff involved in it.

The programme delivery mechanisms aiming at simplification, harmonisation and increased efficiency of implementation have reduced user friendliness for the applicants/beneficiaries, mainly due to strict AB check.

In the following sub-sections individual procedures and processes are assessed:

Project development tools and support

Available tools (application pack, partner search) combined with the support of the programme bodies allow applicants a sound basis to design and apply a cross-border project, however further needs were also identified.

The application pack published on the website comprises the necessary information to develop a project proposal. The Implementation manual for beneficiaries is substantial in volume, however well structured into key contents ranging from programme features to project generation, application, eligibility of expenditure, reporting and communication. Considering feedback of the LP-survey respondents, the parts explaining the programme and project intervention logic and their inter-linkages were not sufficiently elaborated, including methodologies for the programme output indicators. The application form is very detailed concerning the budget data and requires much time and resources, however provides a good basis for further implementation and controls.

Workshops for applicants were well visited and found useful by most of the surveyed applicants. The approach of the MA/JS to analyse the processes and include lessons learned in the next informative events and consultations is a good practice that could be extended.

Discussing the content related aspects of the project with the NA/RAs seems essential, although applicants were sometimes confronted with differences in opinions that were difficult to handle effectively. Mutual coordination of programme bodies (NA/RAs) in such situation has so far not been a regular practice.

Project assessment procedure

Although the open call allows for continuous submission of applications, in reality this was not the case. The JS has thus no possibility to distribute resources for assessment over time, but has to carry out the tasks in a smaller time-slot and with the fixed number of human resources.

The **AB check** procedure is completed quicker than in the previous programme period, however, coupled with deficiencies in the operation of the eMS system, it became less user friendly and demotivating for applicants. The high level of rejections due to formal reasons on the other hand limited the range of projects that could have been assessed for their quality and discussed by the MC. This was in particular notable under SOs, where only a few applications were received. An example is PA2-6f, where so far the only project applied and approved in the 1st deadline is in implementation, whereas both applied in the 2nd deadline did not pass the AB check. The overall workload increases with repeated application for both the applicant that has to insert the project once more in the system and for the JS that has to repeat the entire assessment procedure once more.

The quality check was done by three assessors, who could align better in understanding and applying the specific criteria than in a larger group, whereas the time needed to complete the procedures extends with the increase in the number of applications.

The **criteria for quality assessment** in general address relevant aspects of the application apart from compliance with wider strategies. The possibility to choose between 4 different scores in the assessment of a specific criterion (except horizontal principles) gives sufficient space to assessors to make distinctions in quality between applications.

Some observations:

- Relative importance of operational criteria is supressed against the strategic and IP specific ones. Relatively small importance is given to financial aspects of the application, especially when compared with the level of details requested in the Application Form.
- Innovation is assessed under guiding principles for projects addressing 6f, however, there is no explanation (in the CP and Implementation manual) of what is considered innovative.
- For certain parts of the application form (C1.2, C2.2, C2.4), the link to assessment criteria is missing in tables explaining the quality criteria in Part 2 of the Implementation Manual.

MC decisions on the projects

The MC has additional importance in providing specific regional/national insight, which could not be observed through the quality check and which can also be decisive for final decisions. As this is only done at the very final stage, the importance of consulting the projects with the NA/RAs in the development stage seems critical. Postponement of a project is positive as it gives the possibility to the applicant to improve and re-apply with the same project. The success rate of those projects is too early to assess.

The overall timeline from the project submission to signing of the subsidy contract depends mainly on the number of received applications. Within the existing system where the resources of the JS are fixed (and linked to other tasks at the same time), there is less manoeuvre for any significant shortage. The intension to announce two deadlines per year will be difficult to follow in case the number of submitted applications is high. In addition, the overall management of the open call showed a time-lag between the decision on the selection of projects in the 2nd deadline and the decision on the announcement of the 3rd deadline.

FLC checks

The FLC checks so far are to a great extent progressing well with the exception of the FLC in Styria, where delays are occurring due to lack of personnel. The applied approaches between the Slovenian and Austrian FLCs differ mainly in how the PPs are treated in case the expenditure cannot be certified due to missing supplements or clarifications. Whereas the Austrian FLCs in general avoid the creation of 'sitting ducks' and tend to solve open issues within current checks, the Slovenian FLC has, in the view of speeding up the control procedures, decided to always exclude such expenditure from the certificate and give the PP a possibility to claim it in the following report. Measures introduced by the FLC in Slovenia to increase efficiency of checks has reduced the user-friendliness for Slovenian PPs compared to Austrian counterparts.

The overall efficiency and effectiveness of the FLC system in Slovenia will thus depend on the quality of the received PP progress reports and by the capacities of FLCs to process the reports within the required period. The appropriateness of the chosen approach is too early to assess. According to initial feedback, the share of first certified expenditure compared to claimed is expected to be much higher in Austria; PPs received support through access to general information during the preparation of progress reports and had the possibility to upload supplements to reports.

Differences in the approaches make also differences in the user friendliness of procedures for PPs. For Slovenian PPs that do not succeed in preparing a quality report, the time for reimbursement will extend, similar for those with expenditure below 10,000. Further risks can be associated with ensuring financial capacities for implementation in case substantial amounts are being postponed to next FLC check. At programme level, however, it will be equally important that all FLCs manage to carry out the checks in the foreseen time.

eMS system

The eMS is one of the harmonisation tools that has a potential to become an effective and efficient solution for the overall programme management. The current performance of the system has not achieved its optimal level yet. As the system was relatively new to users, it is expected that the benefits of the systems will be recognised by more users as currently. There is much potential to improve the

system so that it can contribute to greater efficiency of work for different users. Available IT support seems unsufficient to address deficiencies in a short time.

- Evaluation question: In how far was simplification and harmonisation achieved?

The following judgement criteria were used for the assessment:

- the use of HIT tools contributes to the harmonisation between the programmes
- the use of simplified cost options contributes to simplification of the implementation for the beneficiaries and FLCs.

The programme uses the eMS and HIT tools and has potential to harmonise the implementation with other CBC programmes, however, the extent of harmonisation is not possible to assess within the current assignment. There seems to be a high level of harmonisation between the CBC programmes implemented by the MA in Slovenia.

The envisaged use of simplified cost options is likely to be partially achieved: the flat rate for office and administrative costs contributes the most to the simplification. Considering the relatively high share of staff costs in the overall project budgets, the actual possibilities for the use of flat rates for staff costs are moderate.

- Evaluation question: What is the progress of the programme towards achieving targets of specific objectives?

The implementation of projects is in the early phase and the actual progress cannot be assessed yet. The assessment was therefore based on the likely contribution of approved projects to the targets of the programme output indicators in each PA.

Overall, the programme is likely to progress relatively well in all PAs, however, with some exceptions in specific areas or sectors of interventions. These include: cooperation between the research institutions and enterprises, cross-border R&D projects and internationalisation projects under PA1, projects addressing geodiversity and biodiversity in PA2 - 6c, projects dealing with flood determination, protection and control measures in PA2 - 6f and projects addressing public services for citizens and cooperation in risk management under PA3.

Expected contributions show that some targets are likely to be exceeded by several times and could have been underestimated during programming.

The programme is so far less successful in terms of geographical distribution of implementation. The concentration of PPs is the highest in Podravska, Osrednjeslovenska, Pomurska and Graz. Other regions were successful to a lesser extent with Zasavska region not yet participating in the programme.

PA1: Strengthening cross- border Competitiveness, Research and Innovation

SO1.1 Strengthening R&I in technological and economic fields of strength through CB cooperation of relevant stakeholders
The expected results under this objective relate to reaching a critical mass by institutional cooperation, as this will also have a positive impact on companies in the programme area.
SO1.2 Broadening the basis of innovating enterprises in the programme area
Expected results under this objective include better understanding of R&D and innovation capacities in the programme area, access to infrastructures and services for especially SMEs to implement RTI activities and get support in the development and improvement of products (with a focus on the development of new and joint products) and CB services.
SO1.3 Increasing the level of internationalization of enterprises, especially SMEs in the programme area
Measures oriented to the market growth (networking, clusters) and internationalisation, creating efficient and stable business environment to allow companies to grow sustainably will be at the focus of this specific objective.

11 projects, which are currently in implementation, are well distributed in terms of specific objectives they address.

The expected contributions to the achievement of the programme output indicators are well above the targets set for the indicator CO04 - number of enterprises receiving support. SMEs are expected to benefit through capacity building, pilot model solutions, access to new markets, and similar.

The expected contribution is the lowest for the indicator CO26 (35 %) counting the cooperation between enterprises and research institutions. Projects addressing Cross- border R&D and internationalisation are still missing.

It is expected that over 780 enterprises will receive non-financial support (capacity building, networking, partnership building, new business models) – this seems very high compared to 30 planned. It would be interesting to observe the range, intensity and quality of support provided and how they will actually benefit.

Table 12: PA 1 - Expected contribution of approved projects to the programme output indicators

ID	PA 1 - Output Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Expected contribution from approved projects					
				1st	% of target	2nd	% of target	1st + 2nd	% of target
CO01	Number of enterprises receiving support (CI)	enterprises	15	6	40	5	33	11	73 %
CO02	Number of enterprises receiving grants (CI)	enterprises	15	6	40	5	33	11	73 %
CO04	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support (CI)	enterprises	30	184	613	597	1990	781	2603 %
CO26	Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions (CI)	enterprises	20	3	15	4	20	7	35 %
CO29	Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products (CI)	enterprises	5	4	80	2	40	6	120 %
1b.1	Number of joint CB R&D projects	number	8	1	13	3	38	4	50 %
1b.3	Number of joint CB internationalization projects involving SMEs	number	7	2	29	2	29	4	57 %

Source: JS and own calculation

The proposed result indicators for the PA1 are linked to various studies and data sources at national levels and will provide the programme with gross values, whereas net contributions of the programme will have to be assessed in addition. Qualitative aspects of results are not addressed.

PA2: Protecting the Environment and Promoting Resource Efficiency

SO2.1 Achieving sustainable development of natural and cultural heritage

The expected result is a sustainable and competitive tourist destination achieved by new/improved sustainable tourist products/services, investment in nature interpretation infrastructure, capacity building and networking. Contribution to economic growth is expected, awareness raising and overnight stays.

SO2.2 Innovation in sustainable management and utilization of water resources

Aimed results are infrastructure, joint studies and research work, innovative measures for improving the quality of the status of CB rivers, increase of the knowledge base for the decision-making in water policy.

Under PA2, five projects address SO 2.1 and only one SO 2.2. Expected contributions of these projects to programme indicator targets are quite promising, most of them are likely to be exceeded.

So far, none of the approved projects under SO 2.1 addressed geodiversity or biodiversity.

Under SO 2.2., one approved project alone met and exceeded target values of indicators 6f.1 and 6f.2, while the indicator 6f.3 has not been addressed yet.

The system of indicators has room for improvement to better measure the programme achievements.

Programme output indicators 6c.1 and 6c3 are not sufficiently defined: The CP defines a formulation of a tourist product, which is well described in terms of sustainability and rather open in terms of what is actually understood as a CB- tourist product. Similarly, the term sustainable tourism related services is rather vague and not defined in more detail in the CP.

The CP foresees only one result indicator – overnight stays, which is not likely to capture all envisaged programme results as indicated above.

Table 13: PA 2 - Expected contribution of approved projects to the programme output indicators

ID	PA 2 - Output Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Expected contribution from approved projects					
				1st	% of target	2nd	% of target	1st + 2nd	% of target
6c.1	Number of newly developed and/or improved joint CB tourist products	number	16	15	94	3	19	18	113 %
6c.2	Number of projects targeting geodiversity or biodiversity	number	3	0	0	0	0	0	0 %
6c.3	Number of sustainable tourism related services	number	6	9	150	1	17	10	167 %
CO42	Research institutions participating in CB research projects (common indicator)	organisations	4	3	75	0	0	3	75 %
6f.1	Number of jointly developed water management strategies	number	1	1	100	0	0	1	100 %
6f.2	Number of joint modelling, monitoring and forecasting studies and research works	number	1	7	700	0	0	7	700 %
6f.3	Number of joint CB flood determination, protection and control measures	number	1	0	0	0	0	0	0 %

Source: JS and own calculation

PA3: Enhancing Institutional Capacity and an Efficient Public Administration

SO3.1 Improving cooperation in the fields of risk management, energy, health and social cohesion

Possible results are strong networks at local/regional level aiming at building joint capacities, transfer and exchange of know-how, skills, knowledge and practices, including small scale investments.

SO3.2 Improving interactions among municipalities and citizens within the CB region

The expected result is an improved environment for cooperation among municipalities and citizens within the programme area through supporting strong networks on local/regional level, joint strategies, processes and services, exchange of know-how, skills, knowledge and practices, etc.

Six projects approved in the 1st and 2nd deadline are expected to exceed targets for 3 out of 4 indicators. The likely contribution of projects to targets of indicator 11.4 is very low, whereby 48 % of funds have already been committed. In terms of sectors covered, none of the projects has addressed risk management yet.

Table 14: PA 3 - Expected contribution of approved projects to the programme output indicators

ID	PA 3 - Output Indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Expected contribution from approved projects					
				1st	% of target	2nd	% of target	1st + 2nd	% of target
11.1	Number of institutions and/or organizations participating in joint CB initiatives	number	100	35	35	106	106	141	141 %
11.2	Number of people participating in joint training schemes and programmes	number	200	222	111	750	375	972	486 %

| 11.3 | Number of joint CB pilot and demonstration projects | number | 5 | 7 | 140 | 19 | 380 | 26 | **520 %** |
| 11.4 | Population covered by improved public services | number | 200000 | 0 | 0 | 900 | 0,5 | 900 | **0,5 %** |

Source: JS and own calculation

PA4: Providing the efficient and smooth implementation of the cooperation programme

Achievement of targets for the TA projects is progressing well.

The staff and teams have been set up and operating, although not yet to full extent (FLC in Styria).

Information actions and support to applicants and beneficiaries are implemented according to plan. The website has already attracted almost twice the number of expected visitors.

Table 15: TA – Interim achievement of TA projects to the programme output indicators

ID	TA – Output indicator	Measurement unit	Target value (2023)	Achieved in period 2014 - 2016				% of target
				2014*	2015*	2016*	Total*	
TH.1	Number of joint CB projects successfully implemented and concluded	Number	4	0	0	0	0	**0 %**
TH.2	Number of joint CB informational and publicity events	Number	10	1	2	3	3	30 %
TH.3	Number of employees (FTEs) whose salaries are co-financed by the Technical Assistance	Number	10	0	7,7	11,1	11,1	77 %
TH.4	Information, consultation and training measures for applicants and beneficiaries on the project generation	Number	8	0	0	4	4	**50 %**
TH.5	Number of trainings for the beneficiaries, programme structures	Number	10	0	0	2	2	20 %
TH.6	The number of visitors of the programme website	Number	10000		2160	19621	19621	**196 %**

Source: JS and own calculation / * cumulative values

- Evaluation question: What is the progress in implementation of communication strategy and achievement of the set objectives?

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 SI-AT in the period 2014-2020 through the wide array of instruments.

Programme level specific objectives:	Specific-project level objective is to:
- 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,	- 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.

- actively cooperate with other Interreg programmes to share information and best practices and learn from one another, - general public information on co-financed projects, - promote the benefits of CBC in the programme area.	

Source: Communication strategy of the CP Interreg V-A Slovenia-Austria 2014-2020, version 1, approved in November 2015.

Progress towards achievement of the programme and project level communication objectives is very good.

The programme website, which is the key communication tool, has in line with the communication phases so far focused on informing and supporting the applicants and beneficiaries. This has been achieved and is also reflected in the high percentage of users according to LP-survey. Targets regarding the website visits have been underestimated. The challenge is how to promote the website to be used by more users from Austria.

The offline activities supporting the applicants and beneficiaries are following the implementation processes. Although the general public has so far not been addressed to much extent, this is expected in the coming period when the first project activities and outputs become visible.

Table 16: Achievement of communication strategy targets

Indicator	Measurement unit	Baseline value	Target value 2023	Achieved by end of 2016	% achieved
Recognisability of the CP Interreg SI-AT	Percentage	0 %	60 %	(survey 2018, 2020)	-
Knowledge of the programme website	Percentage	81 %	90 %	(survey 2018, 2020)	-
Number of visits to the website	Visits	0	10.000	19.621	**196 %**
Number of submitted electronic messages with informative contents	messages	0	40	41	**102 %**
Number of workshops performed	workshops	0	12	5	42 %
Number of participants at workshops	participants	0	250	660	**264 %**
Number of mailing list members	addressee	0	500	530	**106 %**
Number of created information materials	issues	0	1.000	4300*	**430%**
Number of events performed	events	0	8	2	25 %
Number of participants at events	participants	0	800	400	50 %

Source: JS / * The value includes: 1600 brochures with the PC Summary (bilingual and English version), 200 PCs in English language, 2500 flyers with information about the programmes in the period 2007-2013 and 2014-2020)

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions	Recommendations
Conclusion 1: The cooperation between the programme bodies has room for improvement. Unaddressed differences in the views and expectations from specific processes and procedures can affect and reduce the overall quality of cooperation.	**Recommendation 1:** The MA/JS should organise a workshop for key programme bodies (in particular the RAs, NAs should attend) to exchange views about existing challenges of cooperation within the current delivery framework and to discuss and find common solutions for improvement of the cooperation at the programme level. The workshop should be facilitated by an external moderator.
Conclusion 2: Bilateral Working Group is a useful platform for coordination of the programme implementation, which has so far been used to a lesser extent.	**Recommendation 2:** The MA/JS should organise BWGs more often in accordance with the recognised needs to efficiently and effectively address identified issues in the programme implementation.
Conclusion 3: Applicants who faced challenges in aligning projects with the CP intervention logic should be further supported in strengthening capacities for cross border project development.	**Recommendation 3:** The JS should complement the Implementation manual for beneficiaries: - with examples of project intervention logic and their link to the programme intervention logic; - description of what is assessed in criterion C18 - innovation (6f); - links to sections of the Application Form in the quality assessment grid (C1.2, C2.2, C2.4). **Recommendation 4:** The JS should upgrade the workshop for applicants with lessons learned from the quality assessments of applications using practical examples – good and not so good practices.
Conclusion 4: Consultations with the JS and NA/RAs in the project development phase are not obligatory and yet very helpful for applicants. Eventual differences in interpretations however pose challenges to effective project design. MC meetings are a very late stage when opinions are finally confronted. Considering the resources and time needed for preparation (or eventual postponement) of a project, more intensive coordination in the preparatory phase is necessary.	**Recommendation 5:** The NA and RAs in cooperation with the JS should coordinate themselves in cases where diverging views about projects are noted by PPs. Positions and views of involved parties should be discussed and applicants supported with a harmonised opinion. Involved bodies should decide by themselves about most suitable forms of coordination (telephone, occasional meetings to discuss several projects, etc.).
Conclusion 5: Technical deficiencies of the eMS in the starting phase affected the efficiency and effectiveness of use in particular for applicants and FLC controllers.	**Recommendation 6:** The JS should analyse the needs and in cooperation with Interact where applicable, introduce improvements, which are feasible to implement. If needed, temporarily,

Access to data in the eMS is not yet fully aligned with the needs of programme bodies.	additional IT capacities should be assigned to the programme.
	Key needs comprise: instalment of alert systems for FLCs (new files uploaded, new reports submitted), layout of the certificate of expenditure, layout of the pdf of the application form, layouts of the exported data from the eMS. German translations for the needs of FLC checks should be improved.
	The MA/JS should screen the needs of programme bodies and arrange relevant access to data (e.g. access to subsidy contract for FLCs).
Conclusion 6: Experience with FLC checks showed that PPs needed much information to prepare and/or complement first progress reports. PPs in Slovenia are faced with increased needs for financial resources due to prolongation of reimbursement periods for parts of expenditure not certified in current reporting period. With an increased quality of the progress reports, an increase in the overall efficiency can be expected.	**Recommendation 7:** The Slovenian FLC should give the PPs a possibility to complement the progress report when the report is submitted for the 1st time in a project. This should serve as a learning process helping the PPs to build capacities for quality reporting in the following phases. **Recommendation 8:** The Slovenian PPs should have the possibility to claim expenditure in every reporting period regardless of the amount. The FLC in Slovenia should consider the effects for PPs and check reports below 10,000 Euro. **Recommendation 9:** The FLC in Slovenia should monitor the effects of the new measures and when appropriate, decide for more flexible approach to complementing of progress reports.
Conclusion 7: FLCs that check expenditure for several other ETC programmes are likely to face bottlenecks due to similar reporting periods.	**Recommendation 10:** The MA/JS should consider the possibilities to adjust reporting periods in agreement with the LPs of approved projects to avoid overlapping with other programmes. **Recommendation 11:** The MA/JS and FLCs should regularly coordinate to identify and mitigate any challenges that can affect delays in certification of expenditure.

Effectiveness

Conclusions	Recommendations
Conclusion 8: Specific sectors or intervention areas under all three PAs have so far not been sufficiently addressed by applicants (see Chapter 3).	**Recommendation 12:** The JS, MC and NA/RAs should intensify project generation in the areas/sectors not yet covered sufficiently by approved projects.

The achievement of the related programme specific objectives and targets of the output indicators is thus likely to progress slower.	The JS should use workshops for applicants to encourage participant to explore possibilities of project development in the areas where gaps were identified.
	The JS, NA/RAs and MC members should contribute to the animation of potential partners. E.g. direct communication with potential stakeholders, promoting the programme opportunities at various thematic events, etc.
Conclusion 9: The current system of result indicators is not sufficiently developed to capture intended programme results.	**Recommendation 13:** The MA/JS should review the programme intervention logic and complement the existing system of indicators with additional ones and include them in monitoring activities.

Communication:

Conclusions	Recommendations
Conclusion 10: Establishing effective partnerships is still perceived challenging for a parts of potential applicants.	**Recommendation 14:** The JS should in cooperation with the MA, NA and RAs explore possibilities to support partner search and project generation in specific sectors where gaps were identified. E.g. specific thematic events, round tables, or focus group could be organised.

5. Annexes

5.1 List of interviews

Date	Name	Programme body
26 May 2017	Mojca Muršec	Joint secretariat
26 May 2017	Natalie Majcenovič	Joint secretariat
26 May 2017	Tadej Novak	Joint secretariat
1 June 2017	Špela Dragar	FLC Slovenia
2 June 2017	Sabina Cimerman	RA Styria
6 June 2017	Urška Trojar	National Authority Slovenia
6 June 2017	Dimitrij Pur	Managing Authority
14 June 2017	Lisa Zardi	FLC Burgenland
19 June 2017	Sylvia Trattner Jakob	FLC Styria
22 June 2017	Eva Maria Wutte-Kirchgatterer	RA Carinthia
26 June 2017	Harald Ladich	RA Burgenland
27 June 2017	Werner Piendl	FLC Carinthia
3 July 2017	Thomas Schicho	RA Carinthia